

# **Human Enslavement: Indonesians' Encounter During Dutch Colonization**

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Accepted: 15 February 2022 | Published: 1 March 2022

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2022.4.1.6

Abstract: This qualitative paper aims to explore slavery and genocide in Indonesia during the Netherlands colonial times from the standpoints of life and human dignity. The slave labour scheme (Rodi) was a violent slave labour system established by the Dutch against local indigenous Indonesians, leading to the deaths of vast numbers of the indigenous population (Pribumi) because of slavery and the Forced Cultivation strategy, all for the benefit of the Dutch economy. A further tactic would be to forcefully transport indigenous Indonesians from one area to another and then from Indonesia to overseas countries, including Suriname, as enslaved people for the Dutch. Many Indonesians died needlessly during such a period. Second, they forced Indonesian natives to work for the Dutch economy, inspired by Meillassoux's concept of slavery as a trading relationship. Third, they forcibly removed Indonesians from the community where they had grown up. As per this article, practiced slavery during the Dutch colonial era resulted in the loss of identity for many Indonesians and the perpetuation of rampant corruption. More research into Dutch slavery, the slave trade, and broader coercive labour and colonial regimes in Indonesia is required to elucidate the interplay and links of domestic and international structures.

**Keywords:** Dutch slavery, forced cultivation, loose of identity

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate Dutch colonialism and its legacy in Indonesia. By referring to the colonial system, the author hopes to explore some patterns of Dutch colonialism and an analysis of the colonial system and its legacy of slavery to Indonesians. The legacy of colonialism against Indonesians includes slavery and human trafficking, both internally and externally.

Although historical facts prove that the Dutch colonized Indonesia, the history of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia is often forgotten. There are several arguments, both from the Dutch and from the Indonesian side, saying that the Dutch did not colonize the archipelago, but only found lordly land. Or Indonesia was not colonized by the state but by a company, the Dutch East India Company (Wibisono, 2020). However, according to Tasevski (2020):

"the Dutch government gained control over Indonesia, which was then referred to as the Netherlands East Indies. The colonization of Indonesia, which was motivated by Dutch economic interests, was portrayed as a "civilizing mission," that is, the



notion that Indonesians were primitive and backwards and that the Dutch, as Europeans, would civilize and modernize them".

The Dutch established two trading companies in the late 16th century: The West *Indische Compagnie* (WIC) in America and the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) in Asia. The Dutch established the VOC in Batavia (Jakarta) in 1600 to combat the enemies of the Nederlansch Oost-Indie (Indonesia) and to prevent other European nations from entering the East India trade (Ramerini, 1998). However, VOC was a trading company and a slave trading company that traded both internally and externally (Minansny, 2020). While slavery in Dutch colonies in America is a well-known historical fact, few people know that for 350 years, up to a million people were bought, sold, and forced to endure slavery in Holland's most significant possession: Nederlancsh Oost Indie (Baay, 2017). Apart from being a commodity for Dutch traders (VOC), Batavia Digital (2020) explains why slaves became so important:

"The number of slaves owned by a VOC official was used to determine his rank and wealth. Slavery, particularly in Batavia, became a source of procrastination after that. This wealth display, for example, can be seen on Sundays from the long and short row of slaves who accompanied the Dutch master and lady to church."

Moreover, the VOC brought global power and wealth to the Dutch while exploiting the local population, establishing colonies, and trading people (Lalor, 2021). Dutch traders in Indonesia (*Nederlansch Oost Indie*) traded and drained Indonesia's wealth, then transported to the Netherlands. They are involved in slavery and human trafficking. Digital Batavia (2020) is the story of Dutch traders who traded not only commodities but also people:

"Apart from carrying traditional merchandise (spices, sandalwood, horses, etc.), every ship docked in Batavia was also loaded with this unique commodity. The boats with a capacity of 100-200 tons owned by the Company could carry around 200 slaves—for a journey from eastern Indonesia to Batavia, which took at least two weeks. Dagh-register December 8, 1657, noted, a director of the trade office in Batavia, Karel Harstinck, bought 80 female and male slaves from Solor Island, from a total of about 90 people who came by ship from there (written: als mede 80 a 90 stuckx schapen van daer gekomen). Pay attention to the word stuckx, a nominal word for counting the number of slaves, which is equated with an inanimate object. Another note states that the Kabeljauw ship at the end of its expedition had brought 19 healthy and stocky slaves. Their bodies have been branded "VOC" (... met leer lomnaeyt met Compagnie merck getjapt)."

To better understand the tensions inherent in Indonesia's Dutch slavery system. It offers a fresh look at Dutch slavery in Indonesia, from resource exploitation to human trafficking. Many Indonesians lost their identities, and slavery was repulsive and upsetting. This paper provides a significant contribution to readers, particularly in the inheritance of Colonialization for coming generations of Indonesians, ensuring that forms of colonization and defrauding must not happen again in the future.

The goal of the problem formulation is to express the main idea clearly and systematically. The main issues in this study are: How did the Dutch practice slavery and forced cultivation in Indonesia during the colonial period? What is the current impact of Dutch colonialism on the Indonesian people?



This study defines human slavery and explains how slavery is practiced in Indonesia and other countries to answer this issue. Second, this paper describes how slaves are used as labourers in forced cultivation. Third, this study expands on historical research centered on the slavery perspective, allowing for a more practical understanding of slavery in Indonesia during Dutch colonialism. Finally, this study uses these findings to examine the conditions that led to human slavery in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period and in the future.

Researchers gathered information from books, journals, legal reports, and online sources using a library data collection method. This research focuses on slavery and human trafficking in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period, from 1595 to 1945, including internal and external human trafficking and the effects on Indonesians. This study assembles more data and provides a more detailed account of human slavery and forced cultivation in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period. The author conducted a study on colonization information using various documentary sources of information and documents. Slavery, cultivation, and the concept of slavery are all used by the author to dissect these issues. This article provides valuable insights into the analysis of knowledge enslavement and its effects on the next generation in terms of theory and scientific contributions. This study excludes human slavery and slavery before this time. Another constraint is the type of qualitative research we use. The quantitative analysis results are like this research outside of this study.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars have conducted many studies on slavery from various perspectives. Masters not only suppose slaves as property or objects not deny their human status (the basis of their value to their masters), but also define them solely in terms of individual, one-to-one property relationships, rather than concerning society at large (Meillassoux in Ahmed, 1991; Sio, 1965; Lewis, 2016). According to Patterson (2018), they depict slavery as a parasitic relationship between master and slave, always involving violent domination of people born alienated or socially dead. According to Williams (2011), separation was always a threat because family members could be sold or shipped based on the slave owner's needs and desires. Miers & Kopytoff (1977):

"Slavery as a commodity, to be bought and sold and inherited. He is a chattel, totally in the possession of another person who uses him for private ends. He has no control over his destiny, no choice of occupation or employer, no rights to property or marriage, and no control over the fate of his children. He can be inherited, moved or sold without regard to his feelings, and may be ill-treated, sometimes even killed, with impunity".

According to Burnard (2021), slavery was viewed as a business, and enslaved people were exploited by their owners in order to maximize profit, with their obedience enforced through force. Other perspectives on the legacy of colonization, such as the need for restorative justice (Agozino, 2021), unjust and hierarchical power relations (Tamma & Duile, 2020), cultural material issues (Scott, 2017), a hierarchical structure between these gender categories (Prianti, 2019), patrimonial rulers, and corruption (Fathimah, 2018), justice will remain remote and unattainable for the common people (Burns, 2004), and diminishing Indigenous law (Fahmi, 2020), are still prevalent in Indonesia. However, there aren't many positive effects of Dutch colonization on Indonesian cultures, such as cuisine (Handoyo et al., 2017).



However, there is a disconnect between Dutch colonialism and positive and negative values as a legacy of colonialism in all previous research. This paper focuses on filling the gap between the legacy of colonialism, the mentality of corruption, and slavery that has not ended.

In Indonesia, the colonial slave trade occurred, mainly on Dutch plantations in North Sumatra. Around 150 years ago, the Dutch were involved in human trafficking for plantation workers under the guise of contract labourers in this area (Minasny, 2020).

Table 1: Slaves during Dutch colonialism in Indonesia

Year	Number of slaves	Country of origin
1888-1930	200.000	China
1930	230.000	Java
1930	100.000	India

Source: National Geographic Indonesia 2020

Table 1 shows that during Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, both indigenous people and people from other countries were subjected to slavery.

#### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

During the colonial period, up to 230,000 native Indonesians were sold as slaves, and women were used as gratifications and housekeepers for the Dutch. If they disobey, the punishment is severe, especially for women who are thought to have caused the schism in someone's household (Batavia Digital, 2020: VOI, 2021).

Slaves, or 'babu,' tended to work for individuals, families, or specific groups. It forced them to work as manual laborers at the whim of their owners until some of them could be traded in accordance with the prevailing trends of the time. The Dutch colonial government delegated slaves or babu, which continues in Indonesia today (VOI, 2021).

#### **Forced Cultivation**

The Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel*) became a Dutch government program in the Dutch East Indies that began during the reign of Johannes van Den Bosch. In 1830-1834, the last name served as Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. Van den Bosch put in place the Cultivation System after receiving a mandate from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to extract wealth from the East Indies (Indonesia). Under this system, they have pushed the native people to grow cultivation products in demand on the global market, such as tea, coffee, and others. Afterward, they exported the plantation products to various countries. The Cultivation System enriched its implementers, both Dutch, and Indonesians who owned the land but not the workers. They denied cultivation workers the right to work continuously.

Forced planting or Cultivation System is a regulation that obliges each village to set aside a portion of its land (20%) for planting export commodities, especially coffee, sugar cane, and tarum (tilapia). They later sold the export crops at a price set by the colonial government, and landless people had to work for 75 days a year on government-owned gardens. The system of forced cultivation was known to be tougher than during the VOC monopoly because there was a target that had to be met for the revenue of the colonial government, which was badly needed. The principal regulations in the State Gazette (Staatsblad) of 1834 No.22 are:

1) Agreements will be made with the residents to provide part of their land for the cultivation of commercial crops that can be sold on the European market.



- 2) The share of agricultural land provided by residents for this purpose may not exceed one-fifth of the farmland owned by residents in the village.
- 3) The work required to grow commercial crops should not exceed the work necessary to grow rice.
- 4) The portion of land provided for growing commercial crops is exempt from paying land tax.
- 5) The crops production must be handed over to the Dutch East Indies government. If the estimated value of the crops grown exceeds the land tax that the people must pay, profits difference must be handed over to the people.
- 6) The government must bear the failed crop harvests, at least if a lack of diligence or perseverance does not cause this failure by the people.
- 7) The villagers worked their lands under the supervision of their chiefs. The European officials limited themselves to monitoring whether the crops' plowing, harvesting, and transporting went well and on time.

The income was then used to pay Dutch debts because the Dutch government treasury collapsed after the Java War in 1830. Nevertheless, the system was successful, and the Dutch government reaped huge profits (Tifada, 2021). Involuntary Agriculture faced criticism in 1848 because of debates in the Dutch parliament and writings openly criticizing this inhumane practice. After forty years of cultivation, the Netherlands made a profit of 823 million guilders in 1870. These profits were used to rehabilitate crippled trade and shipping, rehabilitate stalled industries, and enrich factory owners.

After several years of experimentation, Nienhuys developed Deli tobacco as a high-quality cigar wrapper that attracted European and American smokers. Deli is gold and heaven for the capitalist class, but it is only a land of sweat and tears, a land of death and hell for the coolies (National Geographic Indonesia, 2020). The coolies toil from early morning until night, get enough wages for fillers and back cover, live in the ward like a goat in a cage, from time to time beaten and cursed by Dutch; they can lose their wives and daughters that the master wants (Minasny, 2020). The total Deli tobacco sales accomplished by colonial planters from 1864 to 1938 reached 2.77 billion Guilders (Minasny, 2020). Indonesia took over Dutch debt amount of 4.5 billion Guilder (Soeters, van Zeijl & Meijerink, 2019). In 1967, Indonesia paid an amount of 600 million Guilders to compensate for the loss of the Dutch Company (Soeters, van Zeijl & Meijerink, 2019).

What is more important than forced cultivation is that the people suffer and bear a heavy burden because of having to give up a portion of their land and crops, take part in forced labor, and pay taxes. Another consequence is the emergence of various disease outbreaks and prolonged hunger because of unattainable welfare and insufficient income, resulting in widespread poverty—the farmers who were forced to plant realized different future export crops and growing techniques.

#### **Human Slavery and Lost of Identity**

Slavery is practiced in almost every country worldwide, not just the United States. In the 14th century, the Portuguese brought hundreds of African slaves to Europe to work as domestic servants or on plantations in Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Dutch traders traded slaves from Indonesia to other countries during the Dutch colonial era. Nearly 33,000 Javanese were brought to Suriname between 1890 and 1939 (Hoofte, 2008). Slaves brought to Suriname from Java had their real names changed by the Dutch, making it difficult to find their families, and they did not return to Indonesia (Welianto, 2020). The VOC also bought slaves especially from



India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesian islands such as Bali, Sulawesi, Sumatra, including in the East African slave market (Baay, 2017). Slaves who were taken against their will to another country were forced to change their identity, away from their family and homeland, and were forced to give up their nationality. However, Javanese cultural traditions have proven to be strong, even though changes and adaptations in Suriname (Allen, 2011).

Although Dutch colonialism had ended in Indonesia, the practice of slavery persisted. In Indonesia, something currently packaged slavery as modern slavery (Basan, 2021). According to Walk Free's 2018 Global Slavery Index, Indonesia is one of the ten countries with the highest estimated number of people in modern slavery. Slavery in the modern era includes the transportation of migrant workers to other countries (Tampubolon, 2020; Nuraeny, 2015). But the most common are human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage/bonded labor, descent-based slavery, slavery of children, and forced and early marriage (Anti-Slavery, updated, 2021). This type of slavery is a never-ending process of imperialist oppression (Baay, 2017).

## **Dutch Colonial Legacy to Indonesians**

According to Baay (2017), Dutch colonialism left several legacies in Indonesia's former colony. First, this path of profound education absence is hampered by a lack of financial commitment, significant gaps in education budget allocations, and a general aversion to supporting private education investment initiatives (Historism, 2021; Finkelstein, 1951; Fankema, 2013). Second, the legacy of some of the worst Dutch character traits (Bayuni, 2018); The Dutch destroyed the Indonesian people's peaceful way of life by bringing violence into the country. Third, Indonesia was saddled with massive debt, and its economy crumbled (Vivar, 2013). Fourth, Jan Peiteerszoon Coen's Genocide Against the Banda Islanders (Soeters, van Zeijl & Meijerink, 2019). During the colonial period, nearly 150,000 Indonesians were killed (Soeters, van Zeijl & Meijerink, 2019).

The Dutch colonial administrators left a combination of political, cultural, and government legacies in Indonesia in the post-independence era, which affects the state and contemporary Indonesian politics. As a result, postcolonial state rulers will run their country's government according to their wishes, as if the country is private property that can be controlled. It is because of the colonial state's colonial legacy. Post-colonialism is a never-ending cycle of imperialist oppression. Slavery, human trafficking, and racial, cultural, and gender oppression and discrimination All of this could be attributed to Dutch ancestry during Indonesia's colonial period.

Slavery and the slave trade were widespread in the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) empire in *Nederlansch Oost Indie* (Indonesia). They involved the VOC in both internal and external slave trades. Slave trades included commodified slavery and, in particular, the slave trade, which saw people as property to be sold, as well as a broader landscape of forced relocations to Suriname. Slavery provided wealth for the Dutch, while it robbed the *Nederlansch Oost-Indie* (Indonesian) of identity, culture, and nationality. All funds taken from *Nederlansch Oost-Indie*, including interest, must be returned. The country of *Nederlansch Oost Indie* must be free of debt. This rule should apply to all former colonies. Dutch colonialism in Indonesia left a legacy as a slave and corrupt mentality, which has continued, making Indonesia the world's most significant contributor to slaves and corruption. More research into Dutch slavery, the slave trade, and broader coercive labour and colonial regimes in the *Nederlandsch Oost Indie* are required to shed light on the dynamics and connections of local and global systems.



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