Towards a Comparative Model for Regimes of Slavery:
Following up on the Lyon (and Kalmar and Amsterdam) Conferences on 'Slave Trade and Forced Relocation, Slavery and Bondage in Asia'

Matthias van Rossum, International Institute of Social History (mvr@iisg.nl)
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This reflection aims to develop the first steps towards an analytical model that can function as a tool for comparing regimes or practices of coercive asymmetrical dependencies (i.e. slavery and bondage), and calls for renewed comparisons in order to explore the many-faced and pervasive history of slavery, before, after and beyond the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Following up on the discussions of the slavery in Asia network in Lyon, Kalmar and Amsterdam, it aims to contribute to creating a grid that provides direction for further research and (comparative) analysis.

Slavery, serfdom and bondage – global explorations

Understanding simultaneously the commonalities and the distinguishing features of different forms of coerced labour has been an important challenge that has kept recurring in the study of different forms of labour. One approach in earlier scholarship has been to bring analyse the many variants of coerced labour in a single broad category of 'bondage'. Other approaches tend to juxtapose, and often study separately, forms of slavery to forms of serfdom, especially emphasizing the alienability of slaves versus the attachment to land or landlords of serfs. The contrasting comparison of serfdom and slavery could lead one to conclude that 'in the history of slavery, the 'true' slave societies were arguably confined to Ancient Rome and the Americas; in the history of serfdom, serf societies came into their own in early modern Central and Eastern Europe but perhaps at no other time.'[1] These contrasts were not always clear-cut, however, as forms of slavery on the one hand extended to variations of caste- and land-based slavery, which showed similarities to corvée and serfdom regimes, while serfdom regimes on the other hand could at times allow for hiring and selling subjects in ways comparable to slavery. The difficulties in creating a clear differentiating and at the same time unifying analytical model have led some scholars to conclude earlier that "no single definition has succeeded in comprehending the historical varieties of slavery or in clearly distinguishing the institution from other types of involuntary servitude."[2]

The renewed attention for the many faces of (labour) coercion of the past decades, urge us to reconsider the divisions and gaps that have developed in its study. In the Atlantic itself,

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[1] M.L. Bush, *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage* (New York 1996) introduction.
[2] D.B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 32-35.

attention has expanded from North-America and the Caribbean to the (more diverse) historical range of experiences of South-America and Africa. The perspective here shifted from slavery as an institution to slaving as an historical practice.[3] Scholarship focussing on the world outside the Atlantic, has brought into light the various forms of slavery, as well as the sometimes extensive slave trade, in the Mediterranean,[4] the Western Indian Ocean world,[5] South- and Southeast Asia,[6] and Central Asia.[7] Besides the widespread occurrence of commodified slavery, and the slave trade feeding into this, many new studies also underline the simultaneous existence and interaction with all kinds of non-commodified forms of bondage in many regions across the globe, most importantly corvée, caste- and debt-based slavery.

This makes it important to not only understand *why slavery occurred*, but to understand in a more comparative and contextualized way *why specific regimes* of coercion occurred, why specific regimes *did not occur or disappear* in specific contexts, and/or *why regimes occurred in specific combinations*.

Towards an inductive comparative agenda
The rising interest in forms of slavery, serfdom and wider regimes of labour coercion make this a new and fruitful moment for global comparisons on systems and practices – comparing different systems or regimes of slavery, bondage or coercive asymmetrical dependencies – as well as on connections and mobilities – exploring the circuits of coerced mobility and different links between local, regional and more global systems.[8] Building upon meetings in Amsterdam (2016) and Kalmar (2017), it was concluded in Lyon (2019) by a network of scholars on slave trade, slavery and bondage structures in Asia that the field should towards more systematic comparisons, based on the usage of more explicit frameworks for thick-descriptions or in-depth analysis of different slavery systems.[9]

Recent literature on coerced labour rightfully points out that we should aim to understand these different variants within the context of 'the whole praxis of coerced labor', not in order to bring them together in one broad category of bondage, but in order to 'identify clearly the differences and

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[3] J. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

[4] E.g. D. Bulach, and J. Schiel (eds.), *Europas sklaven*, special issue *WerkstattGeschichte* 66-67 (2015).

[5] E.g. R.B. Allen, European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015); Jane Hooper and David Eltis, "The Indian Ocean in Transatlantic Slavery", *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no. 3 (2013): 353-375; Allen; Hopper; M. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2015); Janet Ewald, "Slave Trade: The Indian Ocean, c1750-1880" in Peter Stearns, ed., *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[6] E.g. M. Vink, "'The World's Oldest Trade': Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of World History* 14:2 (2003): 131-177; R. Raben, "Cities and the slave trade in early modern Southeast Asia,", in: Peter Boomgaard, Dick Kooiman, Henk Schulte Nordholt (eds.), *Linking Destinies: Trade, Towns and Kin in Asian History* (Leiden, 2008); M. van Rossum, "'Vervloekte goudzugt'. De VOC, slavenhandel en slavernij in Azië," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis / Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 12:4 (2015): 29-57; Mbeki and Van Rossum, "Private slave trade". H. Sutherland, 'Slavery and slave trade in South Sulawesi, 1660s-1800s', in: Reid, *Slavery*, 263-285, 282-283; K. Ward, 'Slavery in Southeast Asia, 1420-1804', in: D. Eltis et al., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 3, AD 1420-AD 1804* (Cambridge 2011) 163-185; B. Kanumoyoso, *Beyond the city wall: Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia, 1684-1740* (PhD-Thesis: Leiden University, 2011).

[7] E.g. J. Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia* (Cambridge 2018).

[8] This is a reminder that it is necessary not only to distinguish between different forms of coerced (labour) relations, but also between the different possible Forms of coerced relocation.

[9] Amsterdam, Kalmar and Lyon Conferences; the point on the need for thick-descriptions for renewed conceptualization was also explicitly stressed by Siyen Fei at the Lyon Conference. See: https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/slave-trade-asia

similarities between various forms of exploitation and repression'.[10] Any attempt to renew our framework and understanding should therefore benefit from an *inclusive open* (or *broad*) investigation into the whole spectrum of coercive labour regimes (i) that takes an *inductive* approach (ii) aiming to detect characteristics, differences and commonalities through *systematic comparisons* (iii) based on observations from *in-depth analysis* (iv) of different coercive labour regimes (or asymmetrical dependencies). This should, of course, not only be a static comparative approach between different historical variations, but should account for the fact that different systems existed simultaneously, functioning not just side by side, but actually had links with and interactions between each other.

The development of such an inductive global-historical comparative agenda relies on the wealth of information that can be generated through in-depth case studies of different coercive labour regimes, their dynamics, developments and interactions. This requires the usage and formulation of a more or less explicit *framework* for interrogation of the multitude of historical cases to guide the thick-descriptions by providing thematic intersections or points of comparison between them.

This reflection aims to provide a first contribution for a (renewed) attempt to work towards a framework that tries to bring together the different forms of slavery and bondage into one analytical model, in order to increase our understanding of the different variations (i) of historically existing coercive labour regimes, as well as their dynamics (ii) and development (iii). It seeks its contribution especially in the aim to provide framework for interrogation by identifying the key elements for the thick-descriptions of regimes that will enable a systematic inductive comparative analysis.

Bases for comparisons
The vast and expanding historiography on different forms of coerced labour provides a wealth of possible ways to compare and analyse coercive labour regimes. Van der Linden recently emphasized the need to "go beyond" limiting "discussions about general, but inevitably contentious, terms such as 'slavery'", proposing to analyse "all forms of coerced labor" as relations characterized "by three 'moments': the entry into the labor relationship; the period during which the worker works; and the end of the labor relationship."[11] Accounting for the possible coercive relations in this way provides a refined insight into the many manifestations of coerced labour. This 'momentary' approach to coerced labour relations is thus a useful starting point for further analysis. At the same time, however, the shortcomings of a taxonomic approach is that it reveals less about the dynamics and functions of these different coercive labour relations as social regimes. Although taxonomies help to chart the different positions and relations between enslaved or subjected and master, it is also crucial to understand the

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[10] Marcel van der Linden, 'Dissecting coerced labor', 294, 322.
[11] Van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labour", pp. 291, 298.

regimes in which these are embedded with its (often) multiple claims and positions, assigned roles, norms and regulations.

Traditionally, one way to compare forms of slavery, especially by anthropologists and historians studying slavery and bondage in Africa and Southeast Asia, has developed around the distinction between "open" and "closed" systems. In this distinction, "open" systems of slavery are based on social ties, providing opportunities for slaves to become part of kinship structures of slave owners – in these systems the enslaved are "outsiders who are in the process of being incorporated as kinsmen".[12] Conversely, "closed" systems of hereditary slavery are rooted in institutionalized relations of possession that ensure the enslaved "remain outside the dominant kinship system", turning them into permanent outsiders.[13] The problem, however, is that the concepts of "closed" and "open" have, at least in Southeast Asia studies, used in two ways that are potentially conflicting. In the first, classical way of using the closed-open model, the dichotomy refers to the status and social mobility of the enslaved, in essence the distinction between systems in which the enslaved are *excluded* versus *potentially included* in the slave-owning social structures. In the second, it is used to refer to limitations on cross-societal mobility through the slave trade, in essence the distinction between systems in which the enslaved are *not alienable* and are confined to their specific slave-owning society versus systems allowing for, or even built around, the transferability of the enslaved through the slave trade, either as an export or an import.

One solution has been to confine the definition of slavery to slaves as 'property', being either a means of production (slave labour) or capital good (the slave as commodity). This can be done in a strict legal way, or in a more broad and historic way. Nieboer, for example, defined slavery as the situation in which a person "is the property or possession of another man", adding that this relation must be "beyond the limits of the family proper", marked by low societal status, and served the purpose of coerced labour.[14] Historically property claims and rights over other people and their actions have manifested themselves in highly diverse ways.[15] Although slavery is often defined in legal terms of ownership, the (historical) legal definitions of property itself are not always clear-cut, but rather consist of a set of multiple elements with regard to the rights and duties of ownership.[16] In a recent 'dissection' of coerced labour, it is pointed out that property could be defined as the situation in which *most* (although not necessarily all) of following elements are present: "(i) the right to possess, (ii) the right to use, (iii) the right to manage, (iv) the right to the income of the object, (v) the right to the capital, (vi) the right to security, (vii) the right of transmissibility, (viii) the right of absence of term, (ix) the duty to prevent harmful use, (x) liability

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[12] J.L. Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 6.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] H.J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnological Researches* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1900). See also M. van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labour", in *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, ed. M. van der Linden and M. Rodríguez García (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 291-322.
[15] O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 22. Reflecting on the "conception of absolute ownership", which he argued was introduced by Roman law, he defined "property" as "claims and powers vis-à-vis other persons with respect to a given thing, person, or action."
[16] Van der Linden, 'Dissecting coerced labour'.

to execution, and (xi) the incident of residuarity."[17] This leads to a range of types of properties which are connected through so-called family resemblance. Slavery can be defined as situations in which humans are owned by other humans or institutions according to (most) of these elements. Some of these elements lead to crucial differences between different forms slavery, for example the 'right of transmissibility' is one a key distinction between commodified or market slavery (in which slaves can be bought and sold) and non-commodified coercive regimes, such as debt slavery or serfdom.[18]

In contrast, it has been stressed that it is crucial to consider that systems of bondage and slavery are not only about the possession of people, but more general about the *availability* of people, or in essence their bodies, for different possible *purposes* (such as obligated labour, social status, kinship, etc). This might lead to other ways of identifying specific clusters of relations of dependency within the wider continuum of slavery, serfdom and bondage. In his recent global history of slavery, Michael Zeuske, for example, speaks of *slaveries* in the plural, emphasizing the different and changing manifestations of slavery that he defines not by *alienability* but by the core element of the partial or complete *availability* (*Verfugbarkeit*) of people's bodies.[19] The notion of availability, in turn, has inspired the development of a framework build around the *function* (or object) of the different coercive labour regimes that are categorized under bondage, corvée, and slavery based on a distinction between the way in which coercive regimes organized the availability of coerced labour by either *mobilizing* or *localizing* people.[20] In this distinction, the key commonality of the many and pluriform *localizing* or *immobilizing* regimes was that these were oriented towards maintaining local orders of obligations and unfreedom, and aimed at keeping bonded subjects *inside* these social or political orders, tying down people *socially and spatially* to their community, polity, ruler, or land (as in caste-, land- and debt-slavery; corvée; serfdom). This contrasted with *mobilizing* regimes, such as commodified or market slavery, but often also war- and captive slavery, in which the coercion and control of people was based on their movement across the boundaries of communities, on its *mobilizing* effect.[21]

Framework for interrogation

A framework for interrogation that aims to guide thick-descriptions of coercive labour regimes should use and combine the different elements underlying these different perspectives. The elements of existing comparative frameworks do not exclude each other, but rather overlap and

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[17] Van der Linden refers to Anthony M. Honoré, "Ownership", in: Anthony Gordon Guest (ed.), *Oxford Essays in Jurisprudence. A Collaborative Work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 107-147.
[18] This distinction is not absolute, however, as in specific case debt slaves or serfs could actually be transmitted or sold.
[19] M. Zeuske, *Sklaverei: Eine Menschheitsgeschichte von der Steinzeit bis heute* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2018), p. 11. Zeuske refers here to the concept of slaving as a historical process as set out by J. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Original: "die Verfugbarkeit der Körper von Menschen oder von Teilen der Körper von Menschen".
[20] This echoes in part the distinction made by Nieboer between extratribal slavery, in which "slaves are frequently acquired from without the community to which the slave's owner belongs", and intratribal slavery, in which "the slave remains within the same community to which he belonged before being enslaved". Nieboer, *Slavery*, p. 191.
[21] M. van Rossum, 'Connecting Global Slavery and Local Bondage – Rethinking Slavery in the Dutch Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds', presented at '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), to be published in *Journal of World History*.

relate. The threefold distinction between 'moment' of coercion – entry, work/relation and exit – relate directly to the two key elements (in their double meaning) of the open-closed dichotomy, namely the *alienability* of enslaved (entry and exit) and the *assimilability* of enslaved (during the relation). The perspective directed more at the function of a dependency regime, as distinguished by *mobilizing* or *localizing* regimes, aims to carve out the depth of the dynamics of coercive relations, and thus similar to the question of *assimilability* take as social-historical approach to the 'relation'- or 'work' moment of the coerced labour taxonomy. In short, for an inductive global-historical comparative agenda seems it seems relevant to bring these different elements together in a single framework for thick-description case study interrogation. The following list is a first attempt to bring structure these elements of questioning:

Entrance

1. Origins and entrances:
   What are the origins into specific regimes of bondage and enslavement?

   a. What are the criteria for bondage or enslavebility? Under what conditions are people (allowed to) be bonded or enslaved?

   b. And what are the real existing practices?

   c. Local origin or non-local origin? Where people bonded (or not) before?

   d. Type of entry into (host) society:
   How did people find their way into dependency? Was this hereditary; tribute; impoverishment; sale; punishment; abduction; war or slave raid? (Hereditary; commodified; political; criminal; war)

Relation

2. Method of binding:
   What is the method of binding; what is the mechanism or feature through which the subjected is tied to a master or ruler (or an enslaved bound to a master); on what basis? (legal property; land; debt; caste; status);

3. Function:
   What is the function or object of coercion and of the coerced (labour) relation? Is the object social reproduction, subsistence, public (non-market production), market-oriented (private of state)?

4. Alienability:
   How is the relation organized in terms of transferability? Is there formalization and regulation of (restriction of) transferability of subjected or bonded people?

   a. What are the criteria for transferability? Under what conditions can people be transferred, and on the basis of what?

   b. And what are the real existing practices?

   c. Does this involve commodified transfers (are people sold) or other kinds of transfer (such as tribute)?

5. Assimilability:
   How is the relation organized in terms of social mobility and integration into (host) society? Are there specific regulations with regard to assimilability and social mobility? What is the discourse or ideology, and what are the practices?

Exit

6. Exits:
   What are the exits of specific regimes of bondage and enslavement?

   a. Within the regime:
   Are there exits from the bondage or enslavement, such as emancipation, buying freedom, upward social mobility, escape, otherwise? What are the routes? Legal or illegal?

   b. Outside the regime:
   Are there exits from society? Into other regimes of bondage or enslavement (relates to point 4) or otherwise? Legal or illegal?