

## **International Workshop**

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### ***Navigating Worlds of Coerced Labour:***

#### ***Procurement, mobility, exploitation and resistance of Enslaved, Indentured and Contracted workers in the Atlantic, and the Asia-Pacific region***

**Venue:** International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands

**Dates:** 16-17 October 2025

**Organisers:** Britt van Duijvenvoorden, Karin Hofmeester, Pascal Konings, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, Matthias van Rossum

### **Call for Papers**

Coerced labour in its various forms is a persisting problem in today's global economy, being found both in the North and the Global South, often labelled as Modern Forms of Slavery. The historical roots of these modern forms of coerced labour relations can be traced back to the development of capitalism and the emergence of a first global economy roughly 500 years ago. The rise of the first supply-chains of global commodities led to an increase in the procurement of labourers, the development of aggressive forms of "recruitment", the emergence of new patterns of displacement, and the introduction and adaptation of various coercive forms of labour extraction, from slavery to systems of indentured work to coercive contracted migrant labour.

Their existence and persistence have led to the development of significant durable inequalities among workers brought into those global supply-chains and caught into their systems of labour exploitation. While simultaneously they also led to the rise of forms of resistance among those exploited. Over time the demands of the global colonial economy forced those leading the European empire building processes and capitalist development to simultaneously and/or alternately tap into different streams and reservoirs of labour. In some chronologies and spaces these transformations led to the coexistence of various streams of coerced labour relations, forms of recruitment and procurement, displacement and labour exploitation, while in other chronologies and regions colonial and capitalist transformations triggered shifts in the use of different forms of coerced labour relations.

These different forms of coerced labour relations have received a lot of attention from scholars over the past decades. It is unquestionable that there is a significant number of studies on European indentured labour to North America, and on Asia indentured labour to the Americas as well as elsewhere with Enslaved labour and commerce in enslaved Africans particular in the Atlantic receiving the lion share of academic attention.

These bodies of literature tend, however, to be self-contained, with limited dialogue across the various streams of scholarship. These different lines of research and scholarly work also appear to have been influenced by distinct debates and trends in academia and the society at large. While scholarship on slave trade and slavery has been deeply transformed over the past decades under the guise of the Global and the Digital Turns, and the demands and expectations of communities of descendent of enslaved Africans, the study of systems of indentured labour relations and of coerced contracted migrant workers only more recently started developing in similar directions.

The core aim of this **International Workshop *Navigating Worlds of Coerced Labour*** is therefore three-fold:

- Foster collaboration between scholars conducting research on different forms of coerced labour relations
- Stimulate dialogue between the different bodies of literature on enslaved labour, systems of indentured and coerced contract labour, and migrant labour
- Promote the development of a shared research agenda that will allow scholars examining forms of coerced labour relations that will allow to identify major similarities and differences, as well as shifts and continuities overtime.

With these three aims in mind, we would like to invite participants in this International Workshop to explore a set of four core themes: i) Procurement and Recruitment; 2) Mobilities; 3) Exploitation, and Resistance.

We are especially interested in addressing a number of core questions that can be posed to across different lines of research on labour coercion.

### **Coercion, Procurement, Recruitment and Resistance**

**Procurement and Recruitment** was the key moment when workers entered a supply-chain of coerced labour, being it under the condition of enslaved, indentured or forcefully contracted. To compare processes of procurement, the experience of procurers of coerced labour as well as the experience of coerced workers, it is in our view paramount to reflect on the following questions:

1. Did different types of coerced workers ended up being recruited in the same or neighboring regions?
2. Was there an overlap of regions of procurement and recruitment overtime and in situations of transition between different types of coerced labour procurement and recruitment?
3. Who was involved in the process of procurement and recruitment? (Europeans, settlers, local authorities, etc.)? How and Why?
4. What were the factors that influenced procurement and recruitment from both the view point of workers as well as of those gathering the workers? (demand, price, nature disasters, armed conflicts, etc.)
5. How did coerced workers resist procurement and recruitment?

6. Were there major differences/similarities in the forms of resistance against procurement and recruitment, and the strategies employed by enslaved people, indentured workers (both Asia and Europeans), or contracted migrant workers?

### **Coercive mobilities and Resistance**

More often than not, procurement was followed by **Coerced displacement or mobility**, because labour was in demand in other regions where global commodities were being produced and /or processed, and colonial infra-structures were being developed. To better identify and explain patterns of displacement and mobility and to reconstruct the organization of coerced labour transportation, we would like to invite participants in this workshop to reflect on some of these questions:

1. Can we identify patterns of displacement and mobility among coerced workers, that show major similarities and/or differences between mobility of enslaved peoples, indentured workers and contracted labourers between different regions in the Atlantic and the Asian-Pacific region?
2. What factors helped shaping the main patterns of displacement and mobility of coerced workers?
3. How was displacement, commercialization and transportation organized? Can we identify major similarities and/or differences in the logics of the different streams of coercive mobilities?
4. Who was involved in the displacement, “commercialization”, and transportation of coerced workers? (Europeans, settlers, local authorities, etc.)? How and Why?
5. How did coerced workers resist displacement and mobility?
6. Were there major differences/similarities in the forms of resistance and the strategies employed by enslaved peoples, indentured workers (of both Asian and European background), or contracted migrant workers?

### **Exploitation and Resistance**

After being coercively displaced enslaved peoples, indentured workers, and contracted migrant labourers were often subjected to oppressive regimes of labour exploitation. To better identify, analyse and compare these regimes of labour exploitation imposed on different types of coerced workers we would like to invite participants in this workshop to reflect on some of the following questions:

1. Were there significant differences between the Atlantic and Asia, and across the vast Asia-Pacific region when it comes to regimes of labour exploitation of coerced workers?
2. Did regimes of labour exploitation vary among different types of coerced workers, across time and space?
3. What kind of strategies were developed and employed by “organisers” and overseers to rationalize and maximize exploitation of coerced workers?
4. Were there significant differences or similarities in the strategies deployed to exploit enslaved peoples, indentured workers and contracted migrant workers?

5. How did coerced workers resist labour extraction and exploitation?
6. Were there major difference and/or similarities in the forms of resistance and the strategies employed by enslaved peoples, indentured workers (both Asians and Europeans), or contracted migrant workers?

We would like to invite colleagues interested in joining this event to send us an extended abstract (c. 1000-2500 words) of their papers by **30th June 2025**). Speakers will be expected to submit a full-length paper two weeks prior the event for pre-circulation among the participants with the intend of fostering discussion during the Workshop. Any queries about the submission of the extended summaries and the organization of the event can be directed to Britt van Duijvenvoorde ([britt.van.duijvenvoorde@iisg.nl](mailto:britt.van.duijvenvoorde@iisg.nl)), Pascal Konings ([pascal.konings@iisg.nl](mailto:pascal.konings@iisg.nl)), and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva ([filipa.ribeirodasilva@iisg.nl](mailto:filipa.ribeirodasilva@iisg.nl)).

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<sup>i</sup> In present-day economy, Labour Procurement is commonly defined as the process of sourcing, managing, and optimising a workforce hired to meet a specific project needs or to provide specialised skills and expertise, often for a defined period. In historical sources and scholarship, procurement is often used to refer to the ways in which individuals were enslaved and brought into the chains of the trade in people, being it in the Atlantic or in Asia. As way of example, see for instance: Fyfe C. The Manner in which Slaves are procured. In: *Anna Maria Falconbridge: Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone during the Years 1791-1792-1793*. Liverpool University Press; 2000:212-216. *Remarks on the methods of procuring slaves with a short account of their treatment in the West-Indies, &c*, London 1793. Gragg, Larry (1995). 'To procure Negroes': The English slave trade to Barbados, 1627–60. *Slavery & Abolition*, 16(1), 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399508575149>