Beyond Slavery:
Historical Studies on Bonded Labour
in the South Asian and Indian Ocean Regions

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Reviewed works

Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf et al., eds. 2016. *Bonded labour: global and comparative perspectives (18th-21st Century)*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 232 pp., ISBN: 978-3-8394-3733-9, pdf €0,00.

Alessandro Stanziani. 2018. *Labor on the fringes of empire*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 334 pp., ISBN: 978-3-319-70391-6, eBook €67,40.

Gwyn Campbell, ed. 2018. *Bondage and the environment in the Indian Ocean World*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 304 pp., ISBN: 978-3-319-70028-1, eBook €85,59.

Elena Samonova. 2019. *Modern slavery and bonded labour in South Asia: a Human Rights-based approach*. London: Routledge, 178 pp., ISBN: 978-0367150921, hardcover €139,79.

Gwyn Campbell & Alessandro Stanziani, eds. 2019. *The Palgrave Handbook of bondage and Human Rights in Africa and Asia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 433 pp., ISBN: 978-1-349-95957-0, eBook €106,99.

Introduction

In 2013 I contributed a review essay to the *South Asia Chronicle* dealing with bonded labour and the latest publications at that time on bonded labour relations in South Asia. I focused on the question of the implementation of the abolition of slavery and bonded labour (Molfenter 2013). This contribution again relates to bonded labour and the most recent publications that are concerned with this and related forms of labour exploitation. Since 1985, the number of relevant publications going beyond chattel slavery has increased (Mann 2012: 20f.; cf. Campbell 2005; Alpers et al. 2007). The 'focus on the much-neglected class of laborers at the bottom of the agrarian hierarchy' (Bose 1988: 914) has markedly sharpened: the increasing interest in slavery and bonded labour in the South Asian region and the Indian Ocean region[1] has begun to fill these gaps and offered new perspectives on the global history of slavery and labour exploitation.

The focus on labour exploitation beyond chattel slavery highlights, among other aspects, the continuity of labour exploitations that share features with, or are utterly similar to, slavery; and, as several of the contributions show, still cast their shadow today (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 25f.; Guérin et al. 2020; Joseph 2020). Only recently do scholarly publications carry titles which include the term "bonded labour" (cf.: Campbell & Stanziani 2013; Damir-Geilsdorf et al. 2016). These works indicate an increasing interest in research on coerced labour relations beyond chattel slavery in the South Asian region and diverge from the dichotomous approach of slavery and free labour (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 20). Authors who contribute to this area challenge and redefine the concept and definition of slavery and offer new perspectives on coerced labour relations.

In this review essay, I discuss insights of recent publications on bonded labour and other forms of labour exploitation in the South Asian region with a focus on three questions. The first of my discussions concerns the definitional question. The second question revolves around the issue of violence exercised and experienced by the colonised population, or "the natives". Intimately intertwined with the first issue, violence, is the third question: how does gender play out in slave labour, bonded labour, forced labour and indentured labour in the South Asian and Indian Ocean regions? After briefly discussing the books, I move to the definitional question and discuss how these volumes contribute to this matter. In the last part, I interrogate the authors' insights in conjunction with the questions regarding violence and gender. Taking into account the *South Asia Chronicle*'s regional focus on the geographic

expansion of the region of South Asia, which comprises the contemporary states of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, not all contributions of the editions, for instance on China or Africa, receive full attention here.

Among the five contributions are two monographs and three editions. While most of the contributions are somewhat descriptive, laying out forms of exploitation and interrogating historical sources for traces of labour exploitation, two set their narratives on a larger comparative and analytical stage: Stanziani compares British and French colonial labour exploitation intending to explain, among others, the variation of welfare state developments in the British metropole and India (Chapter 3), the rights and working realities of indentured labourers on British Mauritius Island and contractarianism (Chapter 4), the relationship between French metropole labour legislation and the abolition of slavery in Réunion (Chapter 5), and the evolution of labour institutions in France and French Equatorial Africa in conjunction with each other (Chapter 6). The contributions to the edition *Bondage and the environment in the Indian Ocean world* take into account environmental factors to explain patterns—decline or rise—in the enslavement of people (Campbell 2018a: 13).

Stanziani's contribution consists of four rather separate case discussions of India, Mauritius, French Congo and French Equatorial Africa in five chapters, each so rich that they could constitute a book by themselves. Stanziani aims to explain why even after the abolition of slavery, exploitation and violence continued in such a way that the difference from slavery was hardly visible (Stanziani 2018a: 3). He discusses the French and British colonial involvement in slavery and indentured labour, as well as debates or practices related to abolition, citizenship, and resistance of labourers. He highlights how, on the one hand, both colonial powers justified their domination over foreign people by the civilising mission/*mission civilatrice* (ibid.: 6, 35, 258). On the other hand, the debates and practices of the two powers were divided along issues such as granting citizenship and offering welfare provisions to the colonial subjects and former slaves.

Regarding the British colonial power, Stanziani highlights the exchange of ideas and discourses on slavery in India that also informed labour and policy-making in Britain, and he takes a closer look at utilitarianism and liberalism. Thinkers such as Smith, Maine, and Mill paved the rationale for the abolition of slavery (ibid.: 6f.). Stanziani looks closely at the theoretical underpinnings of utilitarianism and suggests that elements of this school of thought contributed to the 'failure to provide freedom and welfare to Indian laboring people' (ibid.:

7), mainly due to the idea of the contract and its application under indentured labour. In the example of the Mascarene Islands, Stanziani demonstrates the inherent contradictions which not only revealed themselves in practice but already existed in the theoretical foundations (ibid.: 7). While suggesting an overarching comparative approach, Stanziani falls short in bringing the five different review studies on slavery on the different regions together into a coherent narrative. For instance: Chapter 3 is concerned with utilitarianism and the abolition of slavery in India, yet, he invites the reader to read of the French case of slavery and abolition somewhere else (ibid.: 177).

Stanziani's studies make use of an impressive number of secondary sources. He rightfully observes that 'the relationship between abolition-ism in Africa, on the one hand, and the evolution of labour law and the emergence of the welfare state in Europe on the other' is 'usually neglected by historians' (ibid.: 10). But his discussion of the develop-ment of the welfare state in Great Britain and France is insufficiently informed by the literature on the development of the welfare state. The material foundation of his argument that the development of the welfare state in France and Britain was intertwined with the colonial experience and the exploitation of colonised people and 'adopted a protectionist stance against foreign and colonial workers' (ibid.: 10, 251-6) is not convincing, but he opens a topic for future research.

The contributions in *Bondage and the environment in the Indian Ocean world*[2] range from studies on China, Madagascar, the Philippine region, Cape Colony in Southern Africa, Île Bourbon/Île de la Réunion, Egypt, Eastern Bengal, the Horn of Africa and Africa's Red Sea World. The distant places and scholarly contributions are united by the edition's argument that environmental phenomena, such as climate and its changes, volcanic eruptions, and cyclones, but also topographic or marine properties of a geographical area, influence patterns of enslave-ment and slavery (Campbell 2018b: 1, 4, 13). Most contributions focus on the period between the 1750s and the 1920s. One essay is on the period from 800-850s (Kydd 2018). The idea to link environmental factors with the political economy and social developments is not new (cf. Davis 2001), but the authors' contributions in *Bondage and the environment in the Indian Ocean world* are original in thinking about and explaining patterns of enslavement and the environment.

They convincingly establish the connection between environmental changes and conditions on slavery and enslavement. The adverse effects of natural disasters which are followed by food-shortages and famines are first and primarily felt by the enslaved community: Stanziani and Peabody discuss the case of Réunion, which recurrently experienced

cyclones that destroyed staple crops. In the shadow of these disasters, the first members of the island's population denied access to the scarce food was the enslaved population (Peabody 2018: 133, 136, 142; Stanziani 2018b: 149). Among the survival strategies, but also a consequence of political arrangements, such as taxation policies, for instance, were debt bondage or self-enslavement (Kydd 2018: 34; cf. Campbell 2018b: 28).

The contributions to *Bondage and the environment* do not focus solely on debt bonded labourers, as one might deduce from the introduction. Suzuki and Warren discuss the role of a group that scholarly contributions largely ignored: slave traders in the Western Indian Ocean after British abolition of the slave trade (Suzuki 2018: 187f.). Suzuki demonstrates how the British anti-slave trafficking campaigns on the seas failed due to the slave traders' superior knowledge of the environment of coastlines, winds, and the seas' currents. In this advantageous position, the slave traders could effectively hide or evade British searches and continue their trade (ibid.: 187-9, 196-203). Warren's contribution shows how the destruction of earlier means of survival turned the slave trade into a strategy of income generation for a group of people who lost their agricultural livelihood in the shadow of a volcanic eruption (Warren 2018). This was also the case for slave raiding patterns in Darfur, then a part of Egypt under the Ottoman Empire (La Rue 2018: 169).

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The only contribution in *Bondage and the environment* on India, Bengal, analyses the effects of a cyclone on 30 and 31 October 1876 in Eastern Bengal and its aftermath (Biswas & Basu 2018: 112, 206). The resulting cholera epidemic was exacerbated by colonial policies that had contributed to impoverish people by taxation and the destruction of their land (ibid.: 206, 208f.). Biswas and Basu argue that the combination of colonial policies and environmental disasters created 'mass indebtedness among the Indian peasantry that further amplified disaster-induced labour migration' (ibid.: 209). Embedded in the capitalist ideology of markets that would appropriately respond to food demands and the extraction of land revenue (ibid.: 208, 211), the colonial governmental response to the cyclone was short and inadequate to save lives. With increases in prices of rice and a large population unable to afford it, the British continued to export rice and abstained from providing foodstuffs to the communities affected by the cyclone and cholera (ibid.: 209, 216-8). The context and title of Biswas and Basu's contribution indicate that the practice of debt bondage increased in the aftermath of natural and human-made disasters in Bengal. Yet, their demonstration and description of local and colonial ruling classes exposing migrant labourers and small peasants to extraordinary tax burdens (ibid.: 209, 224-6), does

not convincingly show how debt bondage increased beyond the general hardships of life during this period.

Bonded labour: global and comparative perspectives, the result of a conference[3], as well as *The Palgrave Handbook of bondage and Human Rights in Africa and Asia*, are editions that take a global perspective and broad approach regarding the time frames considered. In eight and eighteen chapters, respectively, the contributions address issues related to slavery and bondage ranging from the Eastern African Coast and Islands, Egypt and Sudan, French Equatorial Africa, the Ivory Coast, Zambia, the Ottoman Empire, the Arabian Peninsula, South Asia, parts of South East Asia and China. The contributions discuss the trade and transportation of indentured labourers from India and China, also referred to as coolies (Lindner 2016: 66), domestic labour, as well as the abolition of slavery, and labour migration from the Indian Ocean, labour exploitation by the state for public works and private run enterprises, as well as the role of intermediaries. Regarding the latter, one contribution examines the role of intermediaries and systems of recruitment of indentured labour in India: Jaiswal discusses the *kangany* system in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), first supported then banned by the British in colonial India (Jaiswal 2020: 167, 182-5).

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Time frames stretch from the twelfth century though today's labour exploitation of bonded labourers and female sex-slaves. Some contributions go beyond outlining systems of labour exploitation or related issues, such as abolition, to showcase other linked themes: One contribution analyses artistic engagements with the coolie experience and heritage (Müller & Abel 2016), while another author approaches photographic images as a source to interpret coolie life in the Caribbean (Gómez-Popescu 2016). A third theme, environmental factors and the contribution of natural disasters on coercive labour relations (Arroyo-Mora & Kalacska 2020), overlaps with the edition *Bondage and the environment in the Indian Ocean world*.

Samonova's *Modern slavery and bonded labour in South Asia*[4] is on contemporary India and Nepal and therefore overlaps with some of the contributions in the *Palgrave Handbook* (cf. Guérin et al. 2020; Joseph 2020; Premchander et al. 2020). Her published dissertation is based on fieldwork with the Sahariya (India) and Tharu (Nepal) people, among whom she conducted interviews with bonded labourers and former bonded labourers (Samonova 2019: 3-6). Her research focuses on the causes of bonded labour as well as post-liberation practices (ibid.: 2). She argues that laws adopted in the 1970s cannot become effective as long as structural conditions, such as caste discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion, are not also addressed (ibid.: 23). Stanziani and Guérin

also observes this phenomenon in historical cases of bonded labourers and slaves: liberated workers often became re-enslaved or submitted to another bonded labour relationship, because the conditions that forced labourers into bondage had not changed (Stanziani 2018b; Guérin et al. 2020: 359). In the case of Nepal, Samonova explains that liberated bonded labourers resorted to selling their daughters as *kamalaris* to make ends meet after their formal liberation (Samonova 2019: 150f.).

Following up on the rehabilitation projects, by interviewing stake-holders involved, namely (former) bonded labourers and staff of NGOs, she aims to identify which measures proved successful in providing long-lasting liberations, as compared to liberations after which bonded labourers returned into bondage (ibid.: 2f.). Along with her discussion, the reader learns of the incentives and rationalisations of labourers to become bonded. She provides insight into the world of those affected by bondage. Historical work, based on archival sources, faces the challenge that the enslaved and bonded are mainly silent as they have not left paper trails of their own which historians can interrogate to get a fuller picture of their lives and thoughts of the world they inhabited.[5] The work of Samonova gives direct voice to the exploited, who give testimony to their lives, motivations, and perspective on the matter of their bondage.

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Her work rests on two theoretical foundations: the first one is based on theorising on power relations, the other is normative using a human rights approach. According to her deliberation on power relations, unequal distribution of power contributes to the structural and social exclusion of low caste members which provide the structures that contribute to the continued exploitation of people as bonded labourers. The power relations also prevent bonded labourers from overcoming their exploitation. The human rights-based approach serves as a tool for political actors to challenge these power relations (ibid.: 86-92, 104). She correctly detects the inherent problem that hierarchical power structures pose: the excluded members of society have difficulties to change exploitative social and economic structures from within (ibid.: 92, 99, 107, 112f., 117).

Samonova's theoretical approach does not offer a bridge that explains how a human-rights based approach can overcome exploitative structures. Stanziani, however, is confronted with a similar problem in his search for options of exploited labourers to offer resistance by voice (Stanziani 2018a: 280). Samonova discusses the roles of NGOs in disseminating human rights knowledge among the bonded labourers and advocacy in the name of their cause. But the critical trigger, which Samonova identifies, to giving effect to human rights has its roots in fundamental political change in the shadow of violent conflict and regime

change, as it happened in Nepal. Only with the new liberties gained were NGOs able to begin their work with a rights-based approach (Samonova 2019: 124-7).

Samonova explains that the oppressed need a 'development of inner power within and power with to start questioning the current situation' (ibid.: 113) to be able to actively participate in the political decision-making process and give effect to their human rights. To a certain extent, her assertion ignores the other side of the problem: she points out that profiteers of labour exploitation use tradition, custom, and religion as arguments to continue the practice of bonded labour. But she only addressees the exploiters' contribution towards change by 'questioning the current situation' (ibid.: 115) in the final pages of her work (ibid.: 162). She ultimately leaves out the efforts of the ILO (International Labour Organisation) and the INHRC (Indian National Human Rights Commission). Both organisations conduct workshops for employers and governmental agencies on bonded labour.[6]

The overarching topic of the five books relates to the question of labour exploitation in the form of coerced labour, namely slavery, bonded labour, indenture, coolie labour and so forth. Scholars pay increasing attention to the history of a particular form of labour exploitation that some scholars and policymakers described as slavery, while others denied it: bonded labour. Recent and older contributions on labour exploitation in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region highlight the quite nuanced patterns of labour exploitation in which labourers lose, give up, or gain degrees of freedom during their lifetime. Thereby, authors are diverging from a focus on chattel slavery and the Americas. The fluidity of debt bondage and other forms of coerced labour, the idea that labourers voluntarily enter the relation to their master and the potential of this relationship to end, historically served as the pretext to ignore this form of labour exploitation within the context of slavery and also influenced scholarly treatments of this phenomenon (Major 2012: 18f.).

Definition

While some of the contributions rather abstain from offering a solution to this debate, one of the recurring discussions in the three editions and two monographs is on the definition of slavery. Altogether the contributions do not offer new ground on the definitional question. Campbell's edition refers to 'bondage' in its title, and he explains:

> Systems of unfree labour existed throughout the IOW but varied greatly according to time and place. The term "bondage" is used here in preference to "slavery" because of the close association of

the latter term to systems of servile labour in the ancient Mediterranean and early modern Atlantic worlds where "slavery" had a clear meaning. […] Moreover, in such slave societies the term "slave" was also clear. It referred essentially to a chattel, owned by a master, which could be bought and sold like other commodities. (Campbell 2018b: 2)

Referring to other sources, Campbell argues that only five examples of such slave societies existed in the past: classical Athens and Rome, Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Southern States of North America (ibid.: 2). With only a few exceptional cases in the Indian Ocean World (IOW), labour exploitation manifested itself in a variety of ways and 'chattel slavery represented one extreme of a wide spectrum of systems of unfree labour' (ibid.: 3; he uses a similar description in Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 3). In the IOW region, Campbell specifies the varieties of bondage, writing that

> slaves […], as in some agrestic societies in India, could be sold only with the land they lived on, and sometimes, as in the case of concubines in Muslim societies who had borne their master a child, could not be sold. In contrast to the Atlantic system, black Africans formed a minority of slaves in the IOW, constituting a majority only in Africa and, at certain periods, in other lands littoral to the western Indian Ocean. Slaves in the IOW comprised people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the majority of those enslaved and trafficked were women and children, not men as in the transatlantic trade. Most of those subject to IOW bondage systems were accorded rights; some rose to positions of influence and wealth superior to that of nominally free peasants, a few became sovereigns and founded dynasties. (Campbell 2018b: 3)

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Campbell argues that even though slavery and debt bondage may share some features, they constitute a different form of enslavement (ibid.: 16).

Tappe and Lindner explain in their introduction, somewhat contrary to Campbell's argument, that indentured labour arrangements were quite similar to 'the slavery that they allegedly replaced. With the signing of the contract, colonial coolies […] gave up basic rights and physical integrity' (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 10). In light of the violence that workers experienced even after slavery's abolition, as well as other mechanisms that annihilated their freedom, Tappe and Lindner assert that the dichotomic approach to indentured labour does not hold (ibid.: 10; cf. Campbell & Stanziani 2020b: 2). Adding to this deliberation, Campbell and Stanziani explain in their subchapter on definitions that the definitional question remains unsolved today since scholars of different fields have taken various aspects of human life and interaction into consideration to determine what slavery and freedom are. In

addition, international organisations contribute to the definitional question with their own methods of measurement and definitions (Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 3-5).

While she cannot decide which social institution is older—slavery or bonded labour (cf. Samonova 2019: 11, 23)—Samonova discusses the consequences of narrow and broad definitions. She contextualises her topic within the academic and international organisations' (League of Nations, United Nations, and International Labour Organisation) debates on defining bonded labour, forced labour and slavery (ibid.: 11-25). Yet her historical discussion of the treatment of bonded labour at the inter-national level is not entirely accurate. It is correct that 'the first legal definition of slavery developed by the League of Nations was closely connected with the ideas of ownership' (ibid.: 16). In my dissertation, I show that the League intended to cover bonded labour by the *Slavery Convention* of 1926 and monitored states' efforts to abolish debt bondage despite the absence of explicitly mentioning bonded labour in the articles 1 and 2 of the convention. As a consequence, the colonial government over India reported on bonded labour to the League (Molfenter 2020: 156-64).

For her work, Samonova opts to use slavery as an umbrella term under which bonded labour also falls. She argues from the perspective of the victim—the victims' loss of control, and dependency upon a master (Samonova 2019: 15, 17). Moreover, she supports her argument with a discussion of the issue of free will. Historically, and also legally, the presumption of labourers entering bonded labour relations under the guidance of free will and not external force as presumed in chattel slavery, allowed policymakers of national and international conventions, as well as judges and scholars[7], to remove bonded labour or debt bondage from the definition of slavery (Samonova 2019: 26-8; Molfenter 2020: 1, 32, 109f., 165). Taking into account social and economic factors, Samonova argues that free will is an illusion, and therefore bonded labour also constitutes one form of slavery (Samonova 2019: 28).

Stanziani adds to Samonova's discussion in his deliberation on utilitarianism, and its underlying assumptions regarding contracts and automatic belief of the contract to be an expression of a person's free will. The presumption of economic agents to enter a contract presup-poses a free will—s/he could also refrain from entering a contract. Yet, beyond the theoretical ideals of free will, economic as well as extra-economic factors play an essential role for workers to enter contracts

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that ultimately deprive them of several rights and, for instance, legitimise punishment under breach of contract legislation (Stanziani 2018a: 8, 38, 50, 75, 143).

With one exception (Damir-Geilsdorf et al. 2016), all of these contributions focus on Africa and Asia and intentionally leave out the American South or the Americas (cf. Campbell 2018b: 2f.; Stanziani 2018a: 3f.; Samonova 2019: 11; Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 2, 4f.). Within surveying and testing new grounds on research of labour exploitation in the form of bonded labour or indenture and other coercive labour relations, authors recurrently refer to and distance their work from the American case of labour exploitation in the form of chattel slavery. Suggesting to overcome the Euro-centred perspective on the abolition of slavery, Stanziani, for instance, wants to diverge from the narrative of progress and modernity. He focuses on India (Assam), the Indian Ocean (Mascarene Islands) and Africa (French Congo), in which different forms of employment, wage labour, and dependent labour existed side by side (Stanziani 2018a: 3f.). Because of historians' earlier neglect of this region regarding the study of slavery and forms of labour exploittation similar to slavery, this focus has its merit and justification. With an additional note on the American case though, Stanziani inadvertently invites the reader to wonder whether this rejection to use the American case for comparison is justified:

> [W]e should not focus solely on these differences; it is also important to keep in mind the connections and similarities between the Atlantic and the areas under investigation here. Chattel slavery was not the only form of labor coercion in the Atlantic; indentured labor coexisted with it. Moreover, long after slavery was officially abolished, coercive forms of labor persisted in Brazil, Latin America and to some extent in the American South. (Stanziani 2018a: 4-8)

In their discussion on the definition of freedom and slavery, Campbell and Stanziani concede as well that modern ideas of freedom with individuals endowed with rights, marked by equality and the right to own property, and where supply and demand govern the market, 'was inconceivable to the nineteenth century even in the West' (Stanziani 2018a: 38; Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 5, 2020b: 5). Similarly, in China, the idea of freedom did not apply historically, since people were enmeshed in social relationships and dependencies in conflict with this Western idea of freedom (Kydd 2018: 40). Also, Lindner and Tappe refer to the case of 'European indentured labourers to the Americas' (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 14) and Zeuske enumerates the American South to constitute one of the destinations of labourers of the 'Second Slavery' (Zeuske 2016: 36) which refers to bonded labour after the formal abolition of slavery. Bringing the Americas back in—including North

America—could contribute to a truly global and comparative approach to the phenomenon of extreme forms of labour exploitation. Leaving the Americas out also means buying in to the narrative of modernity and the trajectory of (Western) history to move from slavery to free labour (Stanziani 2018a: 3). But as discussed above, the authors already indicate that this history is not as clear cut.

Violence

Violence is a recurring theme and defining element of coerced labour. Its presence merits a closer interrogation in its manifold expressions. The acceptance of violence as a means to coerce people to work constitutes one of the foundations that, if not addressed and stopped, allows for the continuation of labour coercion and places the labour relation in the vicinity of slavery on the free labour/slavery continuum (Molfenter 2020: 34). Contributions on violence, such as Kolsky's (Kolsky 2010) on colonial India, for instance, concentrate on the role of violence exercised by the British on Indian subjects—so-called 'white violence' (Kolsky 2010)[8]—and its constitutive role in colonialism. Focussing on violence highlights an aspect of the making of the colonial state and its attempt but also reluctance to interfere with the subject population. Researchers mainly focus on 'white violence' or on colonial institutions that symbolise colonialism: tea plantations, coolie transportation, and indentured labour.

Violence and exploitation exercised by the colonised people among each other—'brown on brown violence'—appears to be a different matter. This observation is underscored in Stanziani's publication: the colonial powers did not necessarily introduce new forms of slavery into the colonised societies. The colonisers instead tapped into and reshaped already existing forms of labour exploitation to their avail (cf. van Rossum 2016; Stanziani 2018a: 6; Hasnu 2020: 137f.). Jaiswal's chapter adds to this endeavour by focussing on the role of native inter-mediaries to recruit and supervise indentured labourers from India. His aim is to shed light on the 'presence and contribution of non-European entities in regulating migrants, migration, and materiality, and to underline the interconnectedness of European and non-European contributions' (Jaiswal 2020: 186).

Scholarly attention focused on the colonisers interfering with the colonised people in exceptional cases: Sati, the (self)immolation of a widow by fire (Mani 1987; Cassels 2010), child rape (Pande 2013), or the castration of men (Cassels 2010). Scholars pay less attention to those instances of violence that also formed part of the colonisers'

culture and did not so easily serve the construction of 'colonial differ-ence' (Chatterjee 1993: 18). The control of labour among the colonised population and violence used against labourers were familiar pheno-mena for the colonisers. On the one hand, the extraction of slave labour among the native population served as an argument for the civilising mission that justified colonialism. On the other hand, the colonisers were familiar with violence and accepted coercive measures to make wives, children and subordinates do as they were told. This allowed the colonisers to depict the violence they observed as 'mild' and, therefore, acceptable (Major 2012: 146). Regarding certain acts of 'brown on brown violence,' the position of the colonial power appears somewhat ambivalent.

A recent article published in *Asia Ethnicity* addresses the research gap on violence in labour relations among the colonised population. Still, the author Bharadwaj inadvertently contributes to the neglect of this topic. Bharadwaj 'asserts that the coolies were prone to violence of the "plantation kind" even if they were totally out of the plantation production system' (Bharadwaj 2019: 5). He aims to shed light on the exercise and experience of violence by the native population beyond the plantation system (ibid.: 4f.). Yet, with the selection of the three court cases, he discusses acts of violence that were perpetrated at a tea plantation or by a white planter, in one case the offender was an Anglo-Indian, thereby doing disservice to the aim of his article (ibid.: 4).[9]

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Violence is one of the elements that define bonded labour and slavery (Campbell & Stanziani 2020b: 4) and is part of the dominating behaviour of the master or intermediaries used to control the labour force. Several authors of the contributions discussed here enumerate violence or use descriptions of violence to outline similarities between slavery and bonded labour (Lindner 2016: 63; Lindner & Tappe 2016: 9f.; Zeuske 2016: 48, 50; Stanziani 2018a: 3). Stanziani observes that violence and coercion were the usual experiences of labourers. He wonders why vio-lence continued to be a means of controlling labour despite the abolition of slavery (Stanziani 2018a: 10). His response to the question contains two elements: one is that the contractarian approach towards making a cheap labour force available in tandem with the capitalist market conditions even aggravated the violence workers experienced. The other element is the absence of the labourers' voice. The absence of voice is the causal link he invokes, although not entirely convincing, as well as the civilising mission discourse, which denied welfare provisions to the colonised people. These two element's and the colonisers' intention to develop the subject population contributed to the continued use of violence (ibid.: 264, 317, 320f.).

Indicating another reason for the unbroken recourse to violence even after abolition, he explains earlier in his book: 'Contingency and structural dynamics converged in a world made of violence, exploitation, and inequality. Violent colonialism responded […] to the way the French managed labor and their empire' (ibid.: 221). Therefore, one reason Stanziani indicates, but which he does not elaborate in more detail, is that the colonial power did not question violence; it constituted a part of the social interaction, and the debates on the treatment of labour did not challenge the use of violence.

Most significantly, violence understood as the physical application of force resulting in the physical harm of the body is not the only form of violence to which authors refer. To determine 'whether indentured labor was free labor or disguised slavery,' Stanziani suggests, 'to look at labor and living conditions, health, the return trip, abuses, violence and the defence of wages' (ibid.: 8). In alignment with this approach, Lindner and Tappe suggest several elements that they describe as 'forms of coercion' (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 12). Next to a coolie's testimony, who refers to weapons—whips, guns, and clubs which overseers used to force and punish, causing broken bones and often death—humiliation (stripping labourers naked upon pre-entry examination) is part of the coolie's descriptions. Another form of coercion was the withholding of wages (Stanziani 2018a: 153f., 198).

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Lindner and Tappe suggest extra-economic factors as coercive mechanisms: poverty, debt, and prison sentences. Tappe specifies how withholding of wages contributed to labourers taking up further debts and, as a consequence, they became unable to leave their work and had to continue their contracts over a long period (Tappe 2016: 123; cf. Joseph 2020: 273). Samonova adds to these forms of violence by arguing that poverty has a political dimension, as it is a condition that can be tackled (Samonova 2019: 105). Tappe brings this point even further in his study on colonial and pre-colonial South East Asia. By taxing the population and offering debt bondage as an alternative option, the state was able to recruit and, because of the indebtedness of the labourers, maintain a cheap labour force (Tappe 2016: 121-3; cf. Stanziani 2018a: 150; Jaiswal 2020: 173f.). Bonded labourers were and are treated as chattels and, via contract in the past and by debt agreements today, workers give up 'basic rights and their physical integrity' (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 10; Samonova 2019: 15). In Lindner and Tappe's reasoning, these economic, as well as extra-economic forces, blur the lines regarding notions of coerced or voluntary entry into exploitative labour relationships (Lindner & Tappe 2016: 11f.). And this point is crucial, as already highlighted regarding the definitional question and the issue of free will: taking these factors into account allows us to

question the voluntary element of bonded labour and to move these labour relations into the realm of coerced labour and slavery.

The publications discussed here describe forms of violence that suggest that a broader concept of violence beyond sheer physical harm of labourers is useful. It allows for a more nuanced understanding of the experience of the labourers and of the world they lived in. Furthermore, as some contributions highlight, it is also the environment that constitutes part of the violent structures. It embodies an integral part of the violent structure within which slaves and bonded labourers worked. Workers responded to violence with forms of resistance that, at times, amounted to the perpetration of violence against themselves. Worden suggests that strategies of resistance, namely flight into desert terrain or mountainous regions unknown to the run-away slave, could mean their death (Worden 2018: 111).

Worden shows how social structures, as well as the surrounding environment, formed structures of coercion that played out to the masters' advantage. Deducing from exit-strategies, scholars interpreted this behaviour of slaves, bonded labourers, servants, etc. as a form of resistance. Stanziani refutes this interpretation and asks if exit or voice could also be complementary strategies. Somehow confusingly, he points out, though, that labourers often chose exit because they had no voice in the French and British colonies during the period of the seventeenth through the early twentieth century. But even the resistance of labourers became productively exploited: the colonial state was able to tap run-away labourers as a source for a forced labour force by criminalising vagrancy (Zeuske 2016: 49; Stanziani 2018a: 41f., 203, 274).

But the environment was also a victim of the violent structures that emerged with the extraction of coerced labour (Gómez-Popescu 2016: 205). Particularly the contributions in *Bondage and the environment* address the violence perpetrated against nature with devastating consequences for humans affected by the interventions colonisers applied to create the plantation system: Biswas and Basu, for instance, refer to observations of colonial officers in the 1860s of the destruction of the Sundarbans, the mangrove area of Bengal (Biswas & Basu 2018: 211f.). The destruction of the Sundarbans continues today, and it is increasingly becoming an uninhabitable place for humans as well as for animals.[10] And Gomez-Popescu discusses photographs from the Caribbean to demonstrate how visual images of the plantation suggest a peaceful image of taming a wild land which goes hand in hand with the destructtion of rainforests (Gómez-Popescu 2016: 197f.).

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Related to the environment are exercises of violence that seem somewhat unintended: several contributions highlight that in the shadow of natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions or cyclones that were followed by famines, the first community affected by starvation and shortage of food were slaves and indentured labourers (La Rue 2018: 166; Serels 2018: 230; Stanziani 2018a: 211, 217, 2018b: 143, 149, 151f.). Conducting a micro-study using census reports, Peabody interrogates how a particular slave-holding family, the Routiers, coped with environmental disasters (Peabody 2018: 124). Along with the recurring of disaster, the patterns of enslavement also changed: slaves were the first group of islanders not being fed during famines, resulting in the slaves' resistance, escapes, or death by starvation. Correspondingly, the number of slaves the Routiers owned fluctuated, depending on the environmental conditions and their capability to maintain their slaves (Peabody 2018: 133, 136, 142).

An element that is discussed less frequently is the violence exercised by inducing guilt. Guilt comes into play in labour relations that are established on a debt (Jaiswal 2020: 171)—a constellation of a social relation that liberal ideas and utilitarianism fettered ideologically. The moral loss on the side of the worker constituted the moral gain not only of the individual planter who granted an advance to the worker, but also of the colonial power, who offered 'exit options' from poverty or caste discrimination (Jaiswal 2020: 158). They could style themselves as the benevolent benefactor (Stanziani 2018a: 9; Guérin et al. 2020: 354; Jaiswal 2020: 163). The civilising mission plays out this compelling claim to serve for the betterment of another nation and the individual worker (Stanziani 2018a: 276f.). This claim also applies in contemporary labour exploitation. Samonova highlights in her work how employers of bonded labourers argue that the relationship 'is beneficial for all sides' (Samonova 2019: 99), while the bonded labourers do not support this claim. Similarly, Hutson discusses a particular form of control in her contribution on the masters' naming practices of slaves. Giving slaves new names in Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, served to control slaves socially. On the other hand, the chosen names, for instance *Sa'ad*, meaning *Good Luck*, reflected the slaveholder's self-image as rescuers or benefactors of their slaves (Hutson 2016: 137-9, 143).

Why is it essential to take into account different dimensions of violence? As a constitutive element of slavery and bonded labour, the presence of different forms of violence can help explain the persistence of coerced labour relations. Interestingly, Bailkin observed in the case of colonial violence that scholars take the presence of violence for granted, but abstain from interrogating underlying notions on violence (Bailkin 2006: 466f.). Violence also has a political dimension that, at the micro

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and the macro level, offers room for conflict and resistance (Samonova 2019: 91). Violence is one of the domains—the monopoly of violence—claimed by the state (Peters & Pierre 2006).

Several of the contributions reviewed here discuss the struggle between the state and slaveholding communities to gain access to the state's subjects, as well as the state's complicity in making cheap labour available (Campbell 2020: 87-9; Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 14; Hasnu 2020: 137, 146f.). Hasnu, for instance, studies the case of public works, namely the construction of the Cachar-Manipur road, in colonial India. The colonial state attempted to remove local forms of coerced tributary labour and to introduce wage labour to mobilise and create a stable work force (Hasnu 2020: 138).

Before the removal of coerced labour, the colonial state resorted to recruiting tributary labour, as well as convict labour but came into conflict with the local rules over the recruitment of the local population (ibid.: 139f., 147-54). This struggle over the monopoly of power is not only visible as part of the history of modern states and the abolition of chattel slavery but, as Kydd also demonstrates, along with the slavery abolition efforts of the Tang Emperor Wu Zong in the 800s (Kydd 2018). Among different measures, such as the destruction of monasteries and the confiscation of land previously owned by monasteries, 150.000 slaves were liberated, given land, and therefore turned into tax-paying subjects in 845 (ibid.: 44-6).

Regarding my initial deliberation on the question of 'brown on brown violence', the majority of the here discussed historical contributions are silent. This silence is mainly owed to their focus on colonial labour exploitation. For instance, Stanziani focuses on French and British colonial policies. The edition *Bonded labour* is mostly concerned with coolie labour and indentured labour.[11] Because of the large number of bonded labourers in the past—Campbell suggests that from a long-term perspective, the largest number of people entrapped in bondage were bound by a debt (Campbell 2018b: 14). To focus on one of its variants, indentured labour, allows us to highlight particular colonial practices. Yet, for instance, in the case of indentured Chinese labourers, approximately four percent were recruited for the needs of colonial powers, the vast majority served native masters (ibid.: 30). Tappe similarly explains that the majority of enslaved people in Vietnam, for example, were bound by debt and integrated into the domestic labour market (Tappe 2016: 105). There is still a vast opportunity to research bonded labour from many different angles. The same applies to the last question regarding gender to which I turn in the following pages.

Gender

Earlier (Chatterjee 1999), but also more recent, contributions offer perspectives on the gendered nature of labour exploitation and the power hierarchies that result. The use of the term "gender" indicates that the respective research endeavours not only focus on the question of the female (slave or bonded) labourer experience[12] but on the very gendered nature of labour exploitation, the exercise of control and violence along with notions of masculinity and femininity. Taking into account notions of masculinity and femininity entails highlighting how conceptions of gender influenced colonial labour policy making and enforcement.

Part and parcel of the experience of violence and its gendered nature include the analysis of work assignments, payment, recruitment strategies, forms of punishment, including sexual abuse, and the exercise of power, not only over women (Wright 2020: 5) but also over men. Two publications leading the way on these issues are Foster's "The sexual abuse of Black men under American slavery"—in which he claims to be the first to explicitly address the sexual exploitation of male slaves by female as well as male masters and overseers (Foster 2018: 125) and Ludwig's "Bodies in pain: violence and sexually 'Deviant' male and transgender bodies in colonial India, 1862-1922" (Ludwig 2019). Their insights formulate guiding questions regarding gender that should also be asked in the cases of labour exploitation in the Indian Ocean and South Asia region.

Hutson explains for the case of slaves in Saudi Arabia that 'gender, nationality, and age profoundly affected how individual slaves experienced slavery and mapped out their choices about freedom' (Hutson 2016: 158). This was probably the case for bonded labourers in South Asia and indentured labourers in Thailand, Malaya, Mauritius, the Caribbean, Surinam and Jamaica (Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 15). According to Campbell, women in Asia and Africa often became trapped in bondage due to their male relatives: men became enslaved by debt but their female dependents were recruited to carry the burden as well. Campbell asserts that as a result of this, the majority of bonded labourers were women and girls (Campbell 2018b: 15-7; Campbell & Stanziani 2020a: 7). Samonova notes for contemporary Nepal and India, that the enslavement of women until today often occurs through their husbands. In addition, they receive less remuneration for their work and in the case of state sponsored rehabilitation programmes, women cannot register as bonded labourers (Samonova 2019: 75, 77, 82; Premchander et al. 2020: 396).

In cases where children were sold, families preferably gave up their female children. One of the labours girls and women were employed for was sex work. Demanded as concubines or dancing girls, they also had to serve as sex slaves for armies in British colonies, Japan or China (Campbell 2018b: 31; cf. Samonova 2019: 76f.). Complementary to the "female" employment patterns of bonded labourers, the Ottoman Empire used male bonded labourers as soldiers (La Rue 2018: 172). And indentured labourers, for instance Chinese coolies, were primarily men (Zeuske 2016: 48f.), as in the slave trade across the Atlantic. Yet, the most significant numbers of those bonded and trafficked in the IOW were female labourers (Campbell 2018b: 3).

The monographs and editions which I discuss in this review essay do not explicitly address the gender question, but rather share insights that can inspire future research. Earlier research, such as Chatterjee and Eaton's 2006 edition, focuses on the history of slavery in South Asia between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (Eaton 2006: 1f.). They draw attention to the issue of gender and the division of labour in the household, namely productive and unproductive labour. They show how the focus on productive labour moved most forms of female and child labour out of the purview of the state and contributed to a highly gendered approach to labour and slavery (Chatterjee 1999: 207). Yet, taking gender into consideration means not only looking at the female experience of labour exploitation, but also considering labour relations that constitute a social space in which gendered expressions of domination and notions of gender come into play. There is considerable potential for future studies on gender and bonded labour in the South Asian region and beyond.

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Endnotes

[1] Campbell's edition refers to the Indian Ocean World (IOW) that stretches from the Coast line of the Cape of South Africa and Egypt and comprises the maritime regions of the Far East, Campbell (2018b: 1).

[2] This edition is the result of an international conference held in 2011: *Enslavement, bondage and the environment in the Indian Ocean World*. April 28-30, 2011, Indian Ocean World Centre, McGill University, Montreal: Canada.

[3] International Conference: *Forms of bonded labour: conceptual approaches towards a new comparative research framework*. June 23-24, 2014, Global South Studies Center Cologne, Department of Middle Eastern and South East Asian Studies, University of Cologne, Germany.

[4] As a side note: I was involved in the initial open peer review process and already remarked that there are errors in quotations and references. Unfortunately, several errors have remained undetected before publication. See for instance at the bottom of page 87, a word is missing in the quotation from Lukes (2005). The original author of the quote, Garland, is referred to on the same page but the quote is assigned to Lukes; Garland does not appear in the reference list. In addition, there are references to publications without indication of page numbers, (cf. reference to Fraser

at page 87). There are also several errors in the referenced book titles in the reference lists, for instance, p. 55, Kara's book, or the references to Sharma's contribution in Guru, p. 56.

[5] Recent contributions such as the two volumes on *Servant's past*, read archival material against the grain to describe the lives of the working people, Sinha et al. 2019; Sinha & Varma 2019.

[6] The NHRC publishes its yearly report in which respective workshops are also listed, refer to the NHRC website:
https://nhrc.nic.in/publications/annual-reports [retrieved 04.08.20].
The ILO's *Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour* (SAP-FL) was operative between 2002 and 2014 (https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/flagships/ipec-plus/lang--en/index.htm [retrieved 04.08.20]) and merged with the *International Programme on the Eliminaition of Child Labour (IPEC)* in 2016 into the *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour* (IPEC+), International Labour Organisation [ILO]. 2016. *ILO IPEC+ Flagship Flyer*,
https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/WCMS_528940/lang--en/index.htm [retrieved 04.08.20].

[7] Samonova refers to Leach, (Samonova 2019: 26; Leach 1967).

[8] Kolsky does not define the term 'white violence.' She uses it to describe violence exercised by British nationals—whites—against Indian subjects. Bailkin refers to white violence the same way: 'British violence toward indigenes' (Bailkin 2006: 462). In the context of (contemporary) American history authors use the term in a similar way, (cf. Kantrowith 2000: 76; Ortiz 2005: 18).

[9] One case he discusses is *Madan Mohan Biswas v. Queen Empress* (ILR 19 Calc. 572). Among the details given in the case, it is not altogether clear whether the premises of defendant Biswas, accused of violating the IPC anti-slavery sections, were a plantation or a "farm", as Bharadwaj suggests, (Bharadwaj 2019: 5). But the reference of the existence of "coolie-lines" Calcutta High Court (1892: 578) on the premises, the residential quarters of coolies, and Biswas likely was one of the few native planters of Assam who started their business in the late nineteenth century, (cf. Varma 2011: 191-3; Molfenter 2020: 125). Bharadwaj's second case is the murder of a former tea-coolie by a Eurasian individual and the third case is the murder of a coolie by a British planter, (Bharadwaj 2019: 10f.).

[10] Peter Schwartzstein. 2019. This vanishing forest protects the coasts—and lives—of two countries. National Geographic, July,
https://coastalcare.org/2011/06/one-million-bangladesh-homes-on-solar-power/sea-level-rise-sundarbans-greenpeace-2 [retrieved 04.08.20].

[11] Lindner defines indentured labour as regulated labour migration from Asia between the colonial powers, (Lindner 2016: 61). Van Rossum challenges this definition of coolie labour in his essay (van Rossum 2016: 83).

[12] Several contributions for this perspective are Sen (1999); Wright (2020).

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