

Colonial Asian history under fire. New perspectives of postcolonialism in the former empires due to BLM protests and discussions on slavery

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Single panel

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A critical engagement with colonial history has been present in the Netherlands for decades, transferred from the first generation of postcolonial thinkers to the second and third generation. Since May 2020, this debate has been accelerated and strengthened by two contemporary developments. First the growing Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the US that very soon reached the shores of Europe. In the Netherlands decedents of postcolonial migrants became active in the movement adding their own demands concerning racism and the colonial to the support for the American protest. The second development is the intensifying debate on slavery history of the Netherlands, due to the BLM movement and research on this history in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Discussions related to the position of Afro-Americans and the transatlantic slave trade sharpened the debate about post coloniality and the Dutch colonial history in Asia. It sharpens the discussion for example by adding notions of slavery in Asia and structural racism originating in the colonial empire and still existing today. In this context perpetrators of colonial violence like VOC merchant JP Coen (responsible in 1621 for the murder of more than 10.000 inhabitants of the island of Banda in an attempt to settle a spice-trade monopoly) were rediscovered and made object of heavy societal debates. In other European countries we saw the same developments. In the UK for example statues of the slaveholder Edward Colson in Bristol; was taken down and replaced by a statue of a BLM protester, which later was also removed. The recent discussion are not only held in the closed settings of academia, but held in the public domain with a lot of performative actions. Making it a broad discussion with many stakeholders. In this panel we want to bring together scholars from European countries with Asian colonial pasts (France, the UK and the Netherlands) working on postcolonialism and the national colonial debates, to compare the recent accelerating discussions in these countries and try identify and explain differences and similarities.