



The West Indian Web

Improvising colonial survival in Essequibo and
Demerara, 1750-1800

Bram Hoonhout

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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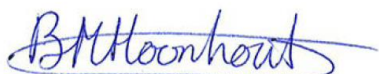
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I confirm that chapter 4 draws upon earlier articles I published as "Smuggling for Survival: Self-organized, Cross-imperial Colony Building in Essequibo and Demerara, 1746-1796" in: Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (eds) *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (Leiden/Boston: Brill), 212-235; and as "De noodzaak van smokkelhandel in Essequibo en Demerary, 1750-1800" ["The Necessity of Smuggling in Essequibo and Demerara, 1750-1800"], *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis* 32:2 (2013) 54-70.

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This thesis has been corrected for linguistic and stylistic errors. I certify that I have checked and approved all language corrections, and that these have not affected the content of this work.

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List of abbreviations

ACA	Amsterdam City Archive, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
BGBB	British Guiana Boundary Books
— BCC	— British Counter Case
— VCC	— Venezuelan Counter Case
BL	British Library, London, United Kingdom
BPL	Boston Public Library, Boston, United States
BT	Board of Trade
CO	Colonial Office
CUST	Boards of Customs, Excise, and Customs and Excise, and HM Revenue and Customs
IISH	International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
LRS	Liverpool Record Office, Liverpool, United Kingdom
MCC	<i>Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie</i> (Middleburgh Commercial Company)
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, United States
NAG	National Archives of Guyana, Georgetown, Guyana
NL-HaNA	Dutch National Archives, The Hague, the Netherlands
NRS	National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
NYHS	New York Historical Society, New York, United States
RAB	<i>Raad der Amerikaanse Bezittingen</i> (Council of American Possessions)
RdK	<i>Raad der Koloniën</i> (Council of the Colonies)
RMBL	Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University
S-G	<i>Staten-Generaal</i> (States-General)
TASTD	Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database
TNA	The British National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom
UA	Utrecht Archives, Utrecht, the Netherlands
VOC	<i>Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie</i> (Dutch East India Company)
VWIS	<i>Verspreide West-Indische Stukken</i> (Unsorted West Indian Papers)
WIC	Dutch West India Company
ZA	<i>Zeeuws Archief</i> , Zeeland Archives, Middleburgh, the Netherlands

Introduction

In the morning we had every prospect of seeing the troops on shore, the fort taken, and the whole affair decided before we slept; but, in the evening, chagrin and disappointment were our lot

George Pinckard, 1796¹

When, in 1796, the British invasion fleet approached the Demerara River, its commanders were in for an unpleasant surprise. The expedition, arriving from Barbados with some 1,300 men, aimed to take possession of the Dutch colonies of Essequibo and Demerara on the Guiana coast of South America. Theoretically the British came to offer “protection” to the colonies in the name of the Dutch Stadtholder, in practice they were also keen on taking these lucrative colonies for themselves. The Dutch colonies of Essequibo and especially Demerara already had a high percentage of British planters, and their fertile soils carried the promise of great riches. The coffee, sugar and cotton planters could fuel the unfolding Industrial Revolution in Britain with the raw material for its machines and the consumer goods for its workforce.

Yet the shallow mouth of the Demerara presented an unforeseen obstacle for the invaders. Even though the heavy warships deliberately kept their distance, the lighter landing vessels failed to reach the shore. The English surgeon George Pinckard was travelling with the fleet and described the unfortunate situation. The plan had been to go ashore with the earliest tide in the morning, but by five o'clock the entire advanced fleet was fast aground, quashing any plans for a quick invasion. The troops, neither able to attack nor retreat, became sitting ducks and were forced to await the next tide.²

However, the Dutch officials chose to avoid confrontation. In fact, they were happy to surrender, as long as personal property remained intact. Consequently, the British took control of the colonies peacefully during the following day.³ Thereafter, except for a short intermezzo in 1802-1803, the

¹ George Pinckard, *Notes on the West-Indies: Vol. 1* (London: Messrs. Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1816) 329.

² Ibid., vol. 1: 328-329.

³ Ibid., vol. 1: 330.

colonies would remain in British hands and were officially ceded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814.

The above event illustrates the two themes central to this thesis: improvisation and colonial survival. The invasion was a product of European politics and Caribbean logistics, but these plans overlooked the specific colonial context of Essequibo and Demerara.⁴ Thus, with insufficient geographical knowledge, the planned invasion plan fell through and the British were forced to improvise. Subsequently, the large ships blocked the river mouth and anchored within firing range of Demerara's fort. This way, they were prepared for a possible Dutch counterattack and managed to maintain control over the situation.⁵ In other words, they adapted inadequate top-down plans to suit local conditions. This process of improvisation was central to the colonial survival of Essequibo and Demerara; as the metropolis wielded little effective power in these remote places, the colonists were forced to devise their own solutions to the problems they encountered.

The colonial survival of Essequibo and Demerara should therefore not be cast in an imperial light, but rather viewed from the perspective of the colonists themselves. Stated differently, the colonies did not survive as parts of the Dutch empire, but as thriving plantation societies within the Atlantic world. By surrendering, the colonists secured the survival of their estates and their personal business networks, as they had done during previous occupations. In fact, being part of the British empire was beneficial for many planters as it gave them access to the British market and slave trade. Thus, this thesis will investigate colonial survival by focusing on the colonies and by looking beyond imperial borders.

The colonies of Essequibo and Demerara provide intriguing case studies, as their history combines elements of rapid expansion and of impending ruin. The colonists faced manifold challenges, as supplies from the Dutch Republic were often inadequate. Food and building materials were almost always in short supply, and the planters were perennially frustrated by the lack of enslaved Africans for sale. In addition, the administrators loathed the vulnerability of the colonies. Without sufficient troops and adequate fortifications, the colonists were helpless against external invaders as well

⁴ Gert Oostindie, "Dutch Atlantic Decline During "The Age of Revolutions"" in *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*, ed. Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 320; Pinckard, *Notes on the West-Indies*, vol. 1: 320-324.

⁵ Pinckard, *Notes on the West-Indies*, vol. 1: 329.

as internal insurgents. Yet, on the other hand, the plantation economy grew quickly. In 1745 Demerara was just a river running through impenetrable rainforest, yet within fifty years there were more than 40,000 enslaved Africans toiling on some 400 plantations. By this point, the Demerara colony had eclipsed Berbice, as well as Essequibo, its former overlord colony, and was rapidly catching up with Suriname, the jewel in the crown of the Dutch West Indian plantations.⁶ Indeed, in the nineteenth century, under British rule, the two colonies were the source of great riches for British planters and many of them received large compensation payments at the time of Emancipation.⁷

The main question in this research, then, is how and why did these colonies survive and even expand in the face of all their challenges. My argument is that local actors, in an improvised manner, established inter-imperial and cross-cultural networks to solve their local problems.⁸ These solutions are visible in all domains of the colonial society. With too few provision ships coming from Zealand, the colonists bought their fish and flour from traders from North America. Considering there were almost never more than 100 soldiers—with most of them sick or eager to desert—the colonists recruited the Amerindian population to their cause. When the Dutch slave traders did not arrive, the colonists were quick to breach the mercantilist rules and buy their enslaved labourers from foreign traders. And when illegal payment in plantation produce was the only way to settle such business, the planters were only happy to comply. These improvised interactions formed the backbone of colonial survival. Nevertheless, this

⁶ E.W. Van der Oest, "The Forgotten Colonies of Essequibo and Demerara, 1700-1814," in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*, ed. Victor Enthoven and Johannes Postma (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003) 329; Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie, 1750-1863* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993) 71.

⁷ Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 99-100; Nicholas Draper, "The Rise of a New Planter Class? Some Countercurrents from British Guiana and Trinidad, 1807-33," *Atlantic Studies*, no. 1 (2012). In 1833 the three colonies of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice were merged by the British into British Guiana, a colony that became independent in 1966 as the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

⁸ I use cross-cultural to refer to cooperation between Europeans on the one hand and Amerindians or Africans on the other. See also: Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi and Cátia Antunes, eds., *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Cross-imperial denotes exchanges across imperial borders, for instance between the Spanish in Venezuela and the Dutch in Essequibo, while for cooperation between different "nationalities" within the colony I just use British-Dutch cooperation, for example.

argument does not imply that the colonial domain is the only one worth studying.

In contrast, this study proposes that Essequibo and Demerara be viewed as part of a West-Indian web. Placing the two colonies in the middle, one observes a string of connections radiating outwards. So while the web is centred in the West Indies, with strong connections to other Caribbean colonies, it also includes connections to North America, Africa and Europe. North American provision traders, slavers who brought African captives and European settlers and financiers all played a part in sustaining the two colonies. Following these connections allows for the construction of a multi-layered history; when needed, I will therefore discuss the impact of developments within the metropolis, the borderland with Venezuela or international warfare.

Place within the field

From a more methodological perspective, this thesis combines approaches and theoretical frameworks that place individuals and trans-national networks at the centre. A clear connection exists with Alison Games' book *The Web of Empire*. There, Games demonstrates the importance of individuals for empire building, which she portrays as a decentralised process during the seventeenth century. As the English state was still relatively weak at the time and lacked resources, much of the overseas expansion necessarily fell to individuals. In this period of uncertainty, the weaving of the web of empire was a process of experimentation and improvisation. From the 1650s onwards, however, a break occurred as a stronger state became more involved in overseas ventures. The subsequent period, as well as the eighteenth century, therefore represented a different world.⁹

Nevertheless, this thesis will argue, the same seventeenth-century process of empire building was visible in eighteenth-century Essequibo and Demerara. The first reason is the weakness of the colonies' governing body, the West India Company (WIC). While the WIC had been an important factor in international politics during the seventeenth century, its power and

⁹ Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 11-14, 290-292, 298. For a similar argument, see: Christian J. Koot, "The Merchant, the Map, and Empire: Augustine Herrman's Chesapeake and Interimperial Trade, 1644-73," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 4 (2010).

financial capacities rapidly declined during the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Consequently, the process of empire building in Essequibo and Demerara was more akin to the seventeenth- than to the eighteenth-century English situation.

Another reason for the similarity is the timing of plantation expansion in the two colonies itself. While English plantation economies—especially in places like Barbados—developed rapidly during the seventeenth century, the “take-off” in Essequibo and Demerara only took place after 1750. The latter were therefore struggling with challenges that most emergent colonies faced, such as clearing grounds and establishing political and financial infrastructures. Essequibo and Demerara (like Tobago) were undergoing a different phase of Atlantic colonisation; while other colonies faced soil exhaustion in the eighteenth century, Essequibo and Demerara formed a new frontier of slavery and plantation exploitation.¹¹ In other words, rather than adhering to a specific time period for the process that Games described, this thesis assumes that the challenges of different developing plantation economies were similar, and can thus be analysed across time.

Aligned with Games’ focus on individuals is David Hancock’s concept of self-organisation. Derived from complexity theory, self-organisation explains that order in a system can arrive from the contacts between individual components rather being imposed from the outside. As the seemingly wanton route of starlings is self-organised, so was the behaviour of producers, traders and consumers around the Atlantic. They expressed preferences, negotiated and experimented, and through cross-border interactions they contributed to an Atlantic system that no one could have foreseen. Hancock used Madeira wine as an illustration, demonstrating how an originally cheap everyday drink became an American-wide luxury product. Furthermore, this process resulted in changes in land ownership,

¹⁰ Henk den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC: Opkomst, bloei en ondergang* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2013) 177, 179–181, 186–187.

¹¹ David Eltis, “The Traffic in Slaves between the British West Indian Colonies, 1807–1833,” *Economic History Review*, no. 1 (1972) 55; Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 200–202; Russell R. Menard, “Law, Credit, the Supply of Labour, and the Organization of Sugar Production in the Colonial Greater Caribbean: a Comparison of Brazil and Barbados in the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, ed. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a division in phases of the Dutch presence in the Atlantic, see: Jan de Vries, “Dutch Atlantic Economies,” in *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, ed. Peter A. Coclanis (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).

credit relations, product types, packing and shipping practices, retailing, business size and the etiquette of consumption. Additionally, it stimulated market differentiation and the growth of advertising, while bringing producers and consumers on two sides of the ocean in close contact with each other.¹² Thus, self-organisation is a powerful concept to analyse socio-economic developments, as is increasingly recognised.¹³ In the case of Essequibo and Demerara, the weak governmental structure in which they operated left ample room for self-organisation.

With regard to colonial governance, this thesis draws upon the work of Richard Drayton and Jeppe Mulich, who also emphasised the importance of interactions across political and cultural boundaries. Drayton viewed empires as “masked condominia”. A state might nominally control a colony, but in practice a European flag only masked constructions of power-sharing below. Europeans thus did not establish a dominium over a colony, but only held a con-dominium. Acknowledging that power was shared with other groups—both European and non-European—helps to understand the process of colonial survival. For instance, it explains why European takeovers during wars changed little in the day-to-day life of people—namely, because the underlying structure had not changed.¹⁴ For Essequibo and Demerara this power sharing was apparent in the role the Amerindians played in upholding the slavery regime. Additionally, the takeovers by the British in 1781, the French in 1782 and the British again in 1796 and 1803 did not alter or challenge the colonial structure in any fundamental ways.

Like Drayton, Jeppe Mulich challenged ideas about European colonial sovereignty, using the concept of the “inter-imperial microregion”. In his study of the Danish West Indies, Mulich analysed how open these colonies

¹² David Hancock, “Self-Organized Complexity and the Emergence of an Atlantic Market Economy, 1651-1815,” in Coclanis, *The Atlantic Economy*; Idem, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Idem, “Organizing Our Thoughts: Global Systems and the Challenge of Writing a More Complex History,” *Journal of The Historical Society*, no. 3 (2010); Idem, “The Triumphs of Mercury. Connection and Control in the Emerging Atlantic Economy,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Idem, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹³ See the essays in: Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia, *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016).

¹⁴ Richard Drayton, “Masked Condominia: Pan-European Collaboration in the History of Imperialism, c. 1500 to the Present” (Yale Transition to Modernity Seminar, 2012).

were to outsiders, due to their weak institutional structure, multiple foreign occupations and reliance on foreign trade. Combining the influence of geographic conditions, inter-imperial politics and trans-imperial networks, Mulich shows how fruitful it is to study these colonies from a perspective that privileges connections over borders.¹⁵ Again, the parallels with Essequibo and Demerara are clear in the occupations, the limited institutional reach, the diverse population and the importance of connections. Essequibo and Demerara can therefore also be seen as inter-imperial microregions, just like the Danish West Indies had their own version of a West Indian web.

A final common element in the work of Drayton and Mulich is the critique on artificial divisions (the “balkanisation”) of the Atlantic world into “national” or “linguistic Atlantics”—such as Spanish, French and British “Atlantics”.¹⁶ Such divisions, which grew common after a 2002 volume on the British Atlantic world, have the tendency to obscure the connections within other regions.¹⁷ Furthermore, they might lead historians to unjustly bestow a certain uniqueness on a particular “Atlantic”.¹⁸ Finally, historians can easily lose sight of the commonality and cooperation in European empire building; both Drayton and Mulich show that despite imperial rivalry, colonisers helped each other out in threatening situations like slave rebellions.¹⁹ As Chapter 6 will show, a similar situation occurred in Demerara in 1763, when troops from Barbados were required to prevent the spread of a major slave revolt. This thesis therefore seeks its contribution in transcending national divisions and studying the history of one colonial society and its wider connections—what David Armitage has termed a Cis-Atlantic study.²⁰

Such an approach is still needed. Although these days many historians would acknowledge the necessity of looking across borders, even the major

¹⁵ Jeppe Mulich, “Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations: The Case of the Danish West Indies, 1730–1830,” *Journal of Global History*, no. 1 (2013).

¹⁶ Richard Drayton, “The Collaboration of Labour: Slaves, Empires, and Globalizations in the Atlantic World, c.1600–1850,” in *Globalization in World History*, ed. A. G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002) 100; Mulich, “Microregionalism,” 79.

¹⁷ David Armitage and M. J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹⁸ Alison Games, “Conclusion: A Dutch Moment in Atlantic Historiography,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 358–359.

¹⁹ Mulich, “Microregionalism,” 83–85; Drayton, “Masked Condominia” 10–11.

²⁰ David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and M. J. Braddick (Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

contributions in the field have confined themselves to linguistic Atlantics.²¹ While one has to delineate one's research in some way, if the defining element of the "Dutch Atlantic" was its lack of a unifying element, one can doubt whether such overarching labels do justice to the situation they aim to describe.²² Consequently, this study departs from Essequibo and Demerara's geography and place within the West Indian web, rather than from a particular Dutchness these colonies might exhibit.

Another area in which this thesis seeks to contribute is the role of institutions in determining the shape of empire. Compared to modern institutions, the early modern versions were undeniably weak. Nevertheless, by definition, these "humanly devised constraints"—as Douglass North defined institutions—still governed political, economic and social interactions.²³ The question then is how strong these constraints were, and to what extent early modern individuals could carve out their own path. Recent research, for example, has overturned the image of Spain as an absolutist predatory state. Furthermore, the Spanish empire turned out to be based less on extraction than previously thought and more on negotiation and bargaining.²⁴ To understand the leeway that individuals had within the institutional structure, we therefore have to look at the colonial level.

This thesis is thus less concerned with theoretical debates about the evolution of institutions or the role of institutions in fostering economic

²¹ Kenneth J. Andrien, "The Spanish Atlantic System," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "The Portuguese Atlantic, 1415-1808," in *ibid.*; Trevor Burnard, "The British Atlantic," in *ibid.*; Laurent Dubois, "The French Atlantic," in *ibid.*; Benjamin Schmidt, "The Dutch Atlantic: From Provincialism to Globalism," in *ibid.*; Ida Altman, "The Spanish Atlantic, 1650-1780," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World c. 1450-1850*, ed. Nicholas P. Canny and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); A.J.R Russell-Wood, "The Portuguese Atlantic, c.1650-1750," in *ibid.*; Joyce E. Chaplin, "The British Atlantic," in *ibid.*; Silvia Marzagalli, "The French Atlantic in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *ibid.*

²² Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, "Introduction," in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 7-10.

²³ Douglass North's definition reads: "Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction." Douglass C. North, "Institutions," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, no. 1 (1991) 97.

²⁴ Regina Grafe, *Distant Tyranny: Markets, Power, and Backwardness in Spain, 1650-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Alejandra Irigoin and Regina Grafe, "Bounded Leviathan: or Why North and Weingast are Only Right on the Right Half," *LSE Economic History Department Working Papers*, no. 12 (2012); Alejandra Irigoin and Regina Grafe, "Bargaining for Absolutism: A Spanish Path to Nation-State and Empire Building," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, no. 2 (2008); Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin, "A Stakeholder Empire: The Political Economy of Spanish Imperial Rule in America," *The Economic History Review*, no. 2 (2012).

growth.²⁵ Instead, it aims to contribute to discussions about the role of formal institutions (such as courts, or organisations like the WIC) in shaping colonial society, as opposed to informal institutions like networks based on religion or kin. Nevertheless, this work will refrain from drawing a clear distinction between the two. Instead, it follows Regina Grafe's approach which sees formal and informal institutions along a continuum, from "soft" personal networks to "hard" impersonal institutions. For instance, property rights could be protected by the court or the church, but also through familial networks; the two were complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Furthermore, early modern states ultimately relied on individuals and their networks to advance, formulate and carry out policy, further obfuscating any clear distinctions. Grafe therefore concluded that "[n]etworks were institutions and early modern institutions were at their foundations always informal networks."²⁶

This nuanced approach seems particularly suited to the study of Essequibo and Demerara, considering the frequent overlap between the formal and the informal domain: WIC officials were often planters and planters might serve as judges; the colonial prosecutor might facilitate smuggling and agents working for investment funds used their personal networks to decide their business strategies. It is exactly by investigating this overlap that historians can get a better grasp of how colonial societies actually functioned. Furthermore, it might be that something like smuggling actually supported—rather than undermined—the colonial institutional framework; indeed, it was a form of transaction costs that proved worthwhile

²⁵ For these kinds of debate, see for instance: Douglass C. North, "Institutions, Transaction Costs, and the Rise of Merchant Empires," in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Douglass C. North and Barry R. Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutional Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England," *The Journal of Economic History*, no. 4 (1989); Douglass C. North, John Joseph. Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Douglass C. North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Avner Greif, "Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society: A Historical and Theoretical Reflection on Collectivist and Individualist Societies," *Journal of Political Economy*, no. 5 (1994); Avner Greif, "The Maghribi Traders: A Reappraisal?," *Economic History Review*, no. 2 (2012); Oscar Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce: The Institutional Foundations of International Trade in the Low Countries, 1250-1650* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); J.L. van Zanden, *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution: The European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²⁶ Regina Grafe, "On the Spatial Nature of Institutions and the Institutional Nature of Personal Networks in the Spanish Atlantic," *Culture & History Digital Journal*, no. 1 (2014) 9.

because of the specific circumstances in the two colonies.²⁷ Framed differently, this thesis recognises that the metropolis was influential in structuring the Atlantic world, and yet proposes that colonial survival nevertheless depended on improvisation by actors within the colonies themselves.²⁸

This study also contributes to the historiography of the Dutch empire, which has tended to be relatively inward-looking. While historians of the Portuguese empire in Asia have long recognised the importance of improvisation for imperial survival, Dutch historiography had other focal points.²⁹ Detailed studies exist on the West India Company, the Dutch slave trade and, more recently, the contribution of the Atlantic world to the Dutch Republic.³⁰ Another strand within the historiography is the focus on the role of the Dutch as brokers and middlemen. This image fits comfortably with the historic image the Dutch had of their empire—an empire of trade rather than of conquest and exploitation.³¹ Focusing on trade, historians have conducted excellent research on the role of the inter-imperial smuggling facilitated by the Dutch at Curaçao and St. Eustatius, but less is known about smuggling within the Dutch empire’s own plantation colonies.³²

²⁷ Douglas W. Allen, *The Institutional Revolution: Measurement & the Economic Emergence of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 7–8, 19–21, 223–225.

²⁸ Oostindie and Roitman, “Introduction,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 2.

²⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500–1700* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); George Bryan Souza, *The Survival of Empire. Portuguese Trade and Society in China and the South China Sea, 1630–1757* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁰ Den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*; Victor Enthoven and Johannes Postma, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ruud Paesie, “Van monopolie naar vrijhandel. De illegale slavenhandel tijdens het octrooi van de Tweede West-Indische Compagnie, 1674–1730,” *Oso: Tijdschrift voor Surinamistiek en het Caraïbisch gebied*, no. 2 (2009); P. C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse slavenhandel 1500–1850* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2000); Karwan Fatah-Black and Matthias Van Rossum, “Beyond Profitability: The Dutch Transatlantic Slave Trade and its Economic Impact,” *Slavery & Abolition*, no. 1 (2014).

³¹ Arthur Weststeijn, “Republican Empire: Colonialism, Commerce and Corruption in the Dutch Golden Age,” *Renaissance Studies*, no. 4 (2012) 508–509; Arthur Weststeijn, “Dutch Brazil and the Making of Free Trade Ideology,” in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, ed. Michiel van Groesen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 197.

³² Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden: KITLV, 1998); Victor Enthoven, ““That Abominable Nest of Pirates”: St. Eustatius and the North Americans, 1680–1780,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, no. 2 (2012); Han Jordaan and Victor Wilson, “The Eighteenth-Century Danish, Dutch and Swedish Free Ports in the Northeastern Caribbean: Continuity and Change,” in Oostindie and Roitman,

Therefore, ample room remains to decentre the traditional narratives towards the colonial setting, and the recent volume *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800* proved to be a great step forward.³³ It includes worthwhile trans-national and comparative essays, although it is doubtful if we can really speak of a “pivotal, and indeed, exceptional role of the Dutch in the Atlantic”, for the typical Dutch middleman seems to be mostly a seventeenth- rather than eighteenth-century phenomenon.³⁴ By looking at Essequibo and Demerara from a different angle, this study aims to situate the historiography of the Dutch empire in the burgeoning literature involving cross-border perspectives.³⁵

Finally, this study also has a more straightforward aim of writing a modern history of two colonies that have been almost forgotten. Much of the history of Essequibo and Demerara remains to be written, largely due to the dual Dutch-British legacy, which has resulted in neglect by both British and

Dutch Atlantic Connections; Karwan Fatah-Black, *White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Metropolitan Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

³³ Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, eds., *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); see also: Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman, “Repositioning the Dutch in the Atlantic, 1680–1800,” *Itinerario*, no. 2 (2012).

³⁴ Quotation from the back cover. Important contributions include: Wim Klooster, “Curaçao as a Transit Center to the Spanish Main and the French West Indies,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connection*; Christian J. Koot, “Anglo-Dutch Trade in the Chesapeake and the British Caribbean, 1621-1733,” in *ibid.*; Henk den Heijer, “A Public and Private Dutch West India Interest,” in *ibid.*; Jordaen and Wilson, “Danish, Dutch and Swedish Free Ports,” in *ibid.*

³⁵ Major contributions include: John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, eds., *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Pearsall, Sarah M. S., *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *The American Historical Review*, no. 3 (2006); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman, eds., *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007); Peter A. Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 4 (2006); Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, “Introduction: Reflections on some Major Themes,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); P. C. Emmer, ed., *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880: Trade, Slavery and Emancipation* (Aldershot, Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998); Paul M. Pressly, *On the Rim of the Caribbean: Colonial Georgia and the British Atlantic World* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

Dutch historians. After the Dutch government ceded Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice to Britain in 1814, they more or less disappeared from the purview of Dutch historians. As most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents are in Dutch, British historians faced a language barrier that few have managed to overcome. The few British histories of Guyana that exist date from the nineteenth century and all paint an exaggerated picture of the British planters' dynamism versus Dutch incompetence.³⁶ Fortunately, in recent years, several historians have started to investigate the Guianas and have provided excellent nuanced narratives.³⁷ This thesis seeks to build on their work by outlining the multitude of relationships that also involved relations with the Spanish in Venezuela, the local Amerindians and enslaved Africans, French soldiers, Scottish financiers and North American businessmen.

The complexity of these interactions in Essequibo and Demerara are also the reason that this thesis does not cover the full extent of the Dutch Guianas. Instead, the relations with Berbice figure when relevant and Suriname serves as a case of comparison. While a full account of the Guianas would gain scope, it might lose as much in depth.³⁸ Another option would have been to include just Berbice, in order to provide a full history of what later became the country of Guyana, even though that might be reading history backwards. Besides time constraints, however, the reason to exclude Berbice was that it was a significantly different colony, which

³⁶ Notable exceptions are P. M. Netscher, *History of the Colonies Essequibo, Demerary & Berbice. From the Dutch Establishment to the Present Day* (Georgetown, Guyana: The Daily Chronicle, 1929 (originally 1888)); James Rodway, *History of British Guiana: From the Year 1668 to the Present Time. Volume 1: 1668-1781*. (Georgetown, Demerara: J. Thomson, 1891); Idem, *History of British Guiana: From the Year 1668 to the Present Time. Volume 2: 1782-1833* (Georgetown, Guyana: J. Thomson, 1893); Henry G. Dalton, *The History of British Guiana: Vol. 1* (London: Longman, Green, Brown, and Longmans, 1855). The only modern history, albeit based mainly on secondary sources, is Alvin O. Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana: 1580-1803* (Bridgetown: Carib Research & Publications Inc., 1987).

³⁷ Johan van Langen, "De Britse overname van de Nederlandse koloniën Demerary, Essequibo en Berbice (Guyana) Van economische overvleugeling naar politieke overheersing (1740-1814)" (MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2003); Van der Oest, "Forgotten Colonies," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*; Gert Oostindie, "'British Capital, Industry and Perseverance' versus Dutch 'Old School'? The Dutch Atlantic and the Takeover of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, 1750-1815," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, no. 4 (2012).

³⁸ See these more general works: Odeen Ishmael, *The Guyana Story from the Earliest Times to Independence* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2013); Joshua R. Hyles, *Guiana and the Shadows of Empire: Colonial and Cultural Negotiations at the Edge of the World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

deserves its own analysis.³⁹ Instead of being governed by the WIC, it was a private society run by investors, and neither did it adopt the conscious policy of attracting foreigners like administrators in Essequibo and Demerara did. Consequently, the colony followed a different, less dynamic, less economically successful and less Atlantic path. Therefore, including Berbice would have led to a less focused narrative, either jumping back and forth continuously or relying on more general statements, or becoming too long. While future scholars might take up the challenge of uniting these different narratives, this thesis chose to focus on the unique Atlantic context of the dual colony of Essequibo and Demerara.

To construct this history, this thesis combines sources from a variety of archives to incorporate the different perspectives. The core body of sources consists in the WIC archives, both those remaining in the Netherlands and those that ended up in the British Colonial Office (CO) archives after the takeover. Although part of the WIC archive in the Netherlands was sold to a rag dealer in the nineteenth century, sufficient duplicates remain available in London.⁴⁰ The National Archives of Guyana and a variety of reports and requests constituted an additional source, both for personal and judicial perspectives. The Amsterdam City Archives (ACA) revealed information about financial flows and the States-General (S-G) archive in the Netherlands provided insights about the highest echelons of administration. Additionally, this material is combined with other sources, such as trade statistics from the British Caribbean and an eclectic body of merchant correspondence, spread out across British and North American archives. While the Spanish archives would have yielded more information, time and language constraints meant this thesis relies on the translated Spanish sources available in the boundary dispute books (see Chapter 1). Together, this body of sources resulted in a multi-layered story of Essequibo and Demerara, for which I will sketch the institutional context below, and provide an outline of the chapters that follow.

Outline and context

The first chapter deals with geography and the borderland between Essequibo and the Spanish empire, later to become Venezuela. It

³⁹ See the forthcoming works by Marjoleine Kars and Randy Browne, which focus on Berbice exclusively.

⁴⁰ M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, "Archivalia betreffende de voormalige Nederlandse koloniën Essequibo, Demerary en Berbice in het Public Record Office te London," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, no. 1 (1961).

demonstrates how precarious the presence of both the Dutch and the Spanish colonists was in the early phases of colonisation. Dutch traders had originally arrived in the seventeenth century to trade with the Amerindian population, while the Spanish, especially in the eighteenth century, aimed to establish missionary villages. Amerindian resistance to this process led several groups to ally with the Dutch, although the Dutch also bought enslaved Amerindians. The latter typically came from the areas further away from the Dutch settlements, including areas claimed by Spain. The fact that Amerindians could not be enslaved under Spanish law resulted in tense relations. Furthermore, after 1750 the Spanish authorities promised freedom to those enslaved Africans who managed to escape from the Dutch side and convert to Catholicism. Nevertheless, the borderland dynamics were not only characterised by tension and animosity, for—especially prior to 1750—relations between Dutch and Spanish authorities were fairly good, resulting in a lively trade as well as exchanges of runaway slaves. After this chapter, providing the regional context, the thesis turns to the broader political domain, both at the colonial and at the metropolitan level of the WIC directors. Yet some context about the WIC might be helpful to put the rest of the chapter in perspective.

By the eighteenth century the WIC was a thoroughly different organisation than it had been during the previous century. The first WIC was established in 1621 and went bankrupt in 1674. It had mainly been an instrument in the Dutch War of Independence (1568-1648) against Spain. Additionally, it conquered the slave fortress of Elmina, temporarily occupied Brazil (1630-1654) and enjoyed some privateering successes. However, the second WIC had more modest ambitions, having abandoned any grand plans for territorial expansion of the Dutch empire. Still, it was not just a trading organisation, for it had interests in the Guyana plantation colonies as well. It possessed a one-third share in the Society of Suriname and was fully responsible for the colony of Essequibo where it developed its own plantations. In addition, it also governed the small islands of Curaçao and St. Eustatius. Initially the WIC held the monopoly on both the product and the slave trade from Africa to the Guianas, and was held by charter to deliver a “sufficient” number of Africans to these colonies. This task proved increasingly difficult, but illicit traders (*lorrendraaiers*) eagerly filled this gap. The Company lost its monopoly on the commodity trade at the 1730 charter renewal, and because it was not able to profit from the slave trade, it voluntarily gave away these monopoly rights too, in 1738. The slave trade was

now open to all Dutch private traders, upon payment of a “recognition fee” of 20 guilders per slave.⁴¹

From this point onwards the WIC thus ceased to be a trading organisation and became a purely administrative body. The WIC had itself stopped trading, but it tried to maintain control over the private trade to its plantation colonies, both in commodities and in Africans. It even operated three estates in Essequibo itself, Agterkerke, Luyxbergen and Duinenburg. While Curaçao and St. Eustatius became successful inter-imperial free ports, the Company kept its plantation colonies within a mercantilist straightjacket. In principle, most of the cash crops such as sugar, coffee and cotton had to be transported in Dutch ships by Dutch captains to the Dutch Republic. Foreigners were excluded from exporting such products, yet since they supplied indispensable provisions, exceptions were made for lower valued goods like wood, molasses and rum. The slave trade was reserved for Dutch traders as well, and most slave voyages departed from Zeeland, especially by the Middleburgh Commercial Company (*Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie*, MCC).⁴²

Zeeland had traditionally claimed the administration of Essequibo and “dependent rivers” as its prerogative, yet as the colonies grew, authority became a thorny issue within the Company. Zeeland first started the colonisation of the Essequibo River in the seventeenth century, and therefore claimed sole authority over it, especially the exclusive right to trade. Amsterdam maintained that the changes in the later charters had opened the trade to all Dutch citizens. Mirroring the power sharing within the Dutch Republic, authority within the Company rested with the various provincial Chambers. Being a joint-stock company, the board of each Chamber consisted of the main shareholders (*hoofdparticipanten*). These local Directors would send delegates to the Assembly of Ten (the “Gentlemen X” or “The Ten”) where general decisions were taken. The number of delegates was based on the financial contributions of each Chamber, resulting in Amsterdam being dominant with four of the ten directors, while Zeeland had two.⁴³ And since expenses were split over the entire Company,

⁴¹ Henk den Heijer, “The Dutch West India Company, 1621-1791,” in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*; Vries, “Dutch Atlantic Economies,” in Coclanis, *The Atlantic Economy*; Paesie, “Monopolie naar vrijhandel”.

⁴² Van der Oest, “Forgotten Colonies,” in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*.

⁴³ Other Chambers had one seat each while the Prince of Orange was awarded the final one. This system of checks-and-balances was further augmented by the rotating presidency of the Assembly, alternating between Amsterdam and Zeeland. For the first WIC (1621-1674) this was the *Heren XIX*, or the nineteen

Amsterdam paid for most of the frequently incurred losses for Essequibo and Demerara. Consequently, it wanted to have a say over policy, as well as the right to trade, which Zealand restricted to its own inhabitants. An uneasy situation resulted, in which the Zealand Chamber took care of most day-to-day matters, while more general decisions (such as the appointment of officials) were taken at the level of Assembly of Ten. Furthermore, Amsterdam and Zealand continued to fight over trade access for two decades, until strained compromises were reached in 1770 and 1772.⁴⁴

As this metropolitan infighting prevented effective governance, Essequibo and Demerara functioned in a sort of legislative limbo. No charter existed upon which the colonisation was based, and the laws in force were the same laws as in Holland, insofar as they were applicable. While several changes occurred throughout the eighteenth century, in principal two Councils were responsible for the administration: the Council of Policy and the Council of Justice. The former unified legislative and executive powers, the latter wielded the judicial power. In practice the division was not as clear cut, since the Fiscal (the prosecutor, or bailiff), had a say in both Councils. The Council of Policy was the most important body, and could issue proclamations and bylaws which had the force of law once they were approved by the Company directors in the metropolis. Additionally, in the same manner, it could decide on taxation. The main source of revenue was the poll tax or head tax, levied on all enslaved people within the colony. Generally, the rate was 2.50 guilders per slave over twelve years old. This money would go into the general WIC budget for the colonies. In addition, the Council of Policy could levy a "Colony Tax" (*Colonie Ongelden*), also based on the slave numbers. This revenue would go into the Colony Chest and could be spent locally, on infrastructure, defence repairs or unforeseen expenses.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, planters were very reluctant to pay any form of taxes, and revenue was typically so low that improvements were almost never carried out.

gentlemen. Its successor cut down on bureaucracy and reduced this to 10, commonly referred to as the *Heren X*, or Council of Ten. The others were the Chamber of the Maze (Rotterdam), the Northern quarter (Northern part of Holland) and "City and country" (Frisia and surroundings). The final seat was reserved for the prince of Orange, who typically sent a delegate. Den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 110-122.

⁴⁴ Den Heijer, "Dutch West India Interest," in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 172-173.

⁴⁵ A further source of income was the recognition fees that ships paid upon entering and clearing, but this went into the WIC coffers. The rates varied throughout the century, but were typically rather low in order not to discourage (foreign) traders from coming.

Chapter 2 discusses the power struggles at both the metropolitan and colonial level, to show that negotiation was at the heart of the political survival of the colonies. For the colonists, influence in the Council of Policy was a key issue: while Company officials were always numerically superior, the planters attached great value to their representation. So when the WIC tried to curb this influence, the colonists rose in protest. Several cross-“national” coalitions were formed to reclaim these rights, and it even seems that a coup was not out of the question. Indeed, the end of the century brought political polarisation: ideas about constitutional renewal clashed with notions of privilege, while opposing factions debated whether to seek support from Britain (a traditional ally) or from France, with its new revolutionary movement.

Chapter 3 looks at the survival of the plantation hierarchy, focusing on runaways and revolts. The former aimed to seek asylum in the Spanish areas, as noted above, but had to deal with Amerindians who acted as trackers and bounty hunters for the Dutch colonists. This improvised alliance between the colonists and indigenous groups (particularly the Caribs) was crucial for maintaining a hold over the large number of enslaved people. Furthermore, the flight of potential rebels alleviated the pressure on the slavery regime. Desertion thus contributed to stability. This option of running away, together with the role the Amerindians played, might explain the lack of maroon communities in Essequibo, for which neighbouring Suriname is so well known. In Demerara marronage was more common, as it was more difficult to get to the Spanish areas. Consequently, the few revolts that took place all occurred in Demerara. Again, the Amerindians proved crucial in upholding the slavery regime, as they were decisive in quashing these insurgences.

After this local perspective, Chapter 4 looks toward the Atlantic again to investigate the crucial trading connections. Essequibo and Demerara, due to the conflict between Amsterdam and Zealand, were typically ill-supplied with regard to almost everything. Food and other basic provisions like candles, planks and stones were imported from the intra-American network, while enslaved Africans were smuggled in on a large scale. The Dutch slave trade was declining by the end of the century, and most slave traders preferred to sell their captives in Suriname rather than in Essequibo or Demerara. While it remains unclear how this slave smuggling was financed, it is not unthinkable that they were paid for by plantation products. These cash crops could be marketed in Amsterdam, but an alternative illicit circuit

existed as well. Many of the intra-American ships carried small or medium cargoes of cotton, sugar or coffee, which probably found its way to Britain via Barbados or any of the other British islands. Nevertheless, the self-organised trade network proved vital for the two colonies to survive and integrated Essequibo and Demerara in the wider Atlantic trading systems.

The fifth chapter analyses more direct ties with the metropolis, namely regarding credit. The Dutch devised an intricate system of plantation mortgages that—although it proved a bubble—managed to stimulate expansion of the plantation sector. However, creditors encountered a host of difficulties when they tried to reclaim their money from the indebted planters. While those investing in Suriname also sustained large losses, there it proved possible to execute estates and restructure loans. In Essequibo and Demerara, due to the deficient legal framework and influence of key administrators, investors managed to postpone execution for a long time. Local officials had a good reason to do so. As planters were indebted to each other, executing one part of the chain would lead to a string of subsequent defaults. Furthermore, the preference order was so unclear in the colonies that virtually all possible claimants could claim their debts were preferential. As long as one believed that the money would return in the end, there was less need to push for execution. Together these two factors seemed to have provided the two colonies with an unintentional form of stability.

The final chapter aims to draw the various strands together by looking at case studies of individuals from different regional, intra-American and trans-Atlantic networks. Studying men like Gedney Clarke, Theodore Barrell and Thomas Cuming shows how they used family and kin networks to establish themselves in the colonies and increase their standing and possessions within the colonies. Additionally, by looking at individuals, this chapter further emphasises the importance of smuggling and the connectedness within colonial society: most of these actors were active in a multitude of branches, including provisioning, the slave trade and plantation ownership.

Entanglement at different levels thus forms a recurring theme. By looking at these different but linked domains of social, political and economic interactions, this thesis aims to show how the colonial society of Essequibo and Demerara functioned. By underlining the improvised nature of their colonial survival, it hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the way empires were constructed and maintained.

1 **The borderland**

Cooperation, conflict and entanglement

The history of the borderland between current-day Guyana and Venezuela is relevant to this very day. The large swathe of Guyana west of the Essequibo River, forming about two-thirds of the country, has historically been a zone of contention and interaction. When the borders solidified in the nineteenth century, British Guiana rather than Venezuela came to control most of this former borderland (see Map 1.1). Yet this division remained a source of political tension afterwards, and was recently fuelled by the discovery of oil reserves off the coast of the contested area, attaching a major economic element to the issue. The origins of this dispute can be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is what this chapter will examine.

More specifically, the main question is how this borderland between the Orinoco and Essequibo rivers connected the different European empires and the groups in between, and how these interactions shaped the Dutch colonial project. Therefore, this chapter will establish under which circumstances specific groups cooperated and when they came into conflict. Additionally, it investigates which groups dominated the borderland and how the balance changed over time. The borderland performed different functions for different groups. It was a gateway to freedom for African runaways, the site of growing antagonism between the Dutch and the Spanish, and a place where Amerindian groups struggled for survival. By looking at the borderland from multiple angles, this chapter will show the entangled nature of this multi-cultural region. At the same time, it highlights the improvised nature of these interactions and demonstrates how local agency shaped the colonial projects to a large extent.

The main sources for this chapter were produced by the border conflict itself, being the so-called British Guiana Boundary Books (BGBB). When the British took over from the Dutch in 1815, they also claimed rights over former Dutch territory. In 1825 they commissioned the German naturalist and explorer, Robert Hermann Schomburgk, to make a survey of the area west of the Essequibo, in order to stage specific British claims. Schomburgk

travelled extensively for four years and eventually came up with a demarcation line that allocated British Guiana most of the contested borderland. This “Schomburgk line” would form the basis of negotiations for the rest of the century.¹ Venezuela, on the other hand, advanced a different demarcation line: one that pushed Venezuela’s border as far east as the Essequibo, rejecting all British claims (see map 1). Diplomatic relations deteriorated further towards the end of the nineteenth century, and in 1895 they agreed to arbitration by the United States.

To substantiate their claims, the two countries reproduced several volumes of archival material, going back to the first phases of settlement. While these selections are not objective, they still offer vital information as Dutch-British and Spanish sources can be compared and contrasted. The Dutch-British material, with its multi-volume appendix, is particularly thorough, listing a host of small and large events relating to the borderland.

The opposing countries based their claims on their different imperial traditions. In a nutshell, the Venezuelan case relied on the Spanish claim of discovery, which—by the time the Dutch arrived in the late sixteenth century—had “ripened into Spanish title by occupation.”² The British case, in brief, sidestepped the settlement issue and made trade central to its argument: the Essequibo-based Dutch had been active as traders and smugglers well into the Orinoco. After these (multi-volume) opening arguments, both countries could reply to the other’s case, and put forward a counter-case. The final result was proclaimed in 1899 and largely followed the Schomburgk line, although Venezuela received sovereignty over the Orinoco mouth. Venezuela felt mistreated and opposed the treaty. In 1962 they brought the issue before the United Nations and in 1966 the UN established a “Mixed Commission” to settle the dispute. However, until today no agreement has been reached.³

Using this wealth of archival material, it becomes possible to reconstruct the complex web of borderland interactions. Firstly, however, this chapter

¹ Robert Hermann Schomburgk, *A Description of British Guiana, Geographical and Statistical: Exhibiting its Resources and Capabilities, Together with the Present and Future Condition and Prospects of the Colony* (London: A.M. Kelley, 1840 (reprint 1970)).

² United States of Venezuela, *The Counter-Case of the United States of Venezuela before the Tribunal of Arbitration: To Convene at Paris under the Provisions of the Treaty between the United States of Venezuela and Her Britannic Majesty Signed at Washington February 2, 1897* (New York: The Evening Post Job Printing House, 1898) quotation from 31.

³ Betty Jane Kissler, “Venezuela-Guyana Boundary Dispute: 1899-1966” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1971) 14-36.

will lay out the conceptual groundwork, discussing the concepts of frontier, borderland and middle ground. Secondly, it looks at the Spanish areas, where fragility during the seventeenth century gave way to strength in the eighteenth century. Missionary villages in which Amerindian populations were “reduced” were central, and allowed gradual expansion in the direction of the Dutch. Furthermore, Spanish relations with the Dutch deteriorated when, in 1750, the Spanish declared that runaway slaves escaping from the Dutch would receive freedom upon conversion to Catholicism. The third part, then, looks at the Dutch side and their changing relationship with the Spanish and the Amerindian population. Peaceful relations with the Spanish became less likely as time progressed. And while originally the Dutch came to trade with the indigenous groups, the turn to plantation agriculture meant that the Amerindians assumed a more important role as military allies and trackers of runaway slaves. The fourth segment zooms in on the various Amerindian groups, showing how their bargaining power decreased vis-à-vis the Spanish and increased vis-à-vis the Dutch. The last section shows how the British, after the takeover in 1796, went even further in their reliance on the Amerindians, until the abolition of slavery greatly diminished the role of the latter.

Frontiers, borderlands and entanglement

In the study of contact zones, the term “frontier” is probably the most well-known, although perhaps also the most diffuse and unhelpful one. For Frederick Jackson Turner, in his seminal essay of 1893, the frontier was the line between civilisation and savagery that was pushed westwards by American pioneers. In these primitive frontier conditions, settlers created new societies based on optimism, assimilation and democracy. According to Turner, these frontier ideals were of central importance to American history, which entered a new phase after the westward expansion was completed in the 1880s and the frontier was closed.⁴ However, to define the frontier in such positive and nationalistic terms is obviously problematic. Surely the Native Americans had a more negative view of the westward expansion.

⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *Where Cultures Meet: Frontiers in Latin American History*, ed. David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1994).

Furthermore, they would have considered themselves to be at the centre of civilisation rather than at an “empty” frontier.

Another problematic aspect of Turner’s concept is its close connection to the North American context. Latin American intellectuals, in contrast, have viewed the frontier in more negative terms, as a place of brutality, where the strong imposed their will on the weak through violent means, leading to despotism instead of democracy.⁵ Alida Metcalf, for example, has shown that in Paraíba, Brazil, elite families controlled the frontier dynamics, in which social and class divisions were perpetuated rather than broken down. Wealthy planters could expand their family fortune, which few frontier peasants could attain.⁶ Indeed, after Turner the view of the frontier was challenged and became darker, as new histories revealed the violence, ethnic divisions and class conflict of the American colonisers. A focus on place (how did indigenous and migrating groups interact?) rather than the process (what is the meaning of the frontier?) resulted in a more sophisticated historical understanding of these “zones of transculturation”.⁷

The term “frontier” has thus changed meaning, now diluted to denote something like “a zone, where two different social systems – nonstate societies, state societies, and even world-systems [-] come into more-or-less sustained contact.”⁸ Or, in another definition: “a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined.”⁹ In short, a frontier has come to denote a contact zone. As there seems to be no reason to keep using the triumphalist term of frontier if we actually mean a border zone, I will stick to the latter.

Additionally, Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel provide a well-known but crucial observation that the borderland contains a paradoxical element: from the metropolis a border seems like a line of separation, while from the view of the borderland it is a zone of contact and interaction. Hence, borderlands “simultaneously separate and unite”.¹⁰

⁵ David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch, “Introduction,” in Weber and Rausch, *Where Cultures Meet*, xvii-xviii.

⁶ Alida C. Metcalf, *Family and Frontier in Colonial Brazil: Santana de Parnaíba, 1580-1822* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) 200.

⁷ Weber and Rausch, “Introduction,” in Weber and Rausch, *Where Cultures Meet*, xiii, xxxii-xxxiii.

⁸ Thomas D. Hall, “Puzzles in the Comparative Study of Frontiers: Problems, Some Solutions, and Methodological Implications,” *Journal of World-Systems Research*, no. 1 (2009) 25.

⁹ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American history,” *American Historical Review*, no. 3 (1999) 815.

¹⁰ Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” *Journal of World History*, no. 2 (1997) quotation on 242.

Borderland interactions were not static and Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron conceptualised how, over time, borderlands could become “bordered lands”.¹¹ In early eighteenth-century North America, Native American groups had a vital role as military allies and trading partners, and hence could significantly influence the terms of exchange with the French and British colonisers. This balance of power, however, depended on the persistence of imperial rivalry. The Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) upset the balance, and from then onwards the British felt strong enough to choose conquest over alliance. This trend continued after the American Revolution, when the alliance system broke down. Instead of being able to play off the French and the British against each other, Native Americans were now on the defensive against expansion of the United States. Alliances with indigenous groups thus lost much of their value for the colonists. Furthermore, in the nineteenth-century world of international diplomacy between sovereign states there was little room for zones with ambiguous rule. Indeed, these borderlands were increasingly turned into bordered lands at the expense of the Native American groups.¹²

While the power of the indigenous population was severely curtailed in the nineteenth century, in the eighteenth century the Native Americans still shaped the interactions to a large extent, as elaborated by Richard White. He introduced the concept of the “middle ground”, a metaphorical place of accommodation between Europeans and Native Americans, where “new systems of meaning and exchange were created”, often because the two parties misunderstood each other’s cultural systems. The accommodation process is visible both in formal diplomacy and in informal encounters of sex and violence. The existence of the middle ground rested on two conditions: there had to be a lack of political strength on both sides (visible in the fragile European presence and the weak hierarchy among the Native American societies) and each side had to see the other as a cultural threat to its elites. As neither party could dominate the other, negotiation and improvisation were necessary on this middle ground, where European and indigenous cultural, political and judicial practices became mixed. Yet White also recognised that the middle ground was not stable: from the Seven Years’ War onwards the British were strong enough to start enforcing their will.

¹¹ Adelman and Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders”. The authors use a slightly different definition of “borderlands”, namely the “contested boundaries between colonial domains.” (Ibid., 816).

¹² Ibid., 816-823.

Subsequently, with the ascendancy of the United States, acculturation was abandoned as the US settlers “reinvented the Indian as other”. The middle ground was thus definitively deserted.¹³

A final helpful concept is that of “entanglement”. It comes in various guises and is perhaps still under-theorised, yet nonetheless useful as applied by Eliga H. Gould.¹⁴ He investigated a similar borderland, looking at another fringe part of the Spanish empire, in North America. Even though the Spanish empire was more populous than its English neighbours, it could not enforce its claims and was forced to recognise English rights to trade and settle as early as 1670. Neither party could establish full dominium, hence they had to accept the presence of others. The logwood traders in Honduras, who were beyond anyone’s control, were a prime example of this. But the entangled nature was also visible in the Spanish attitude towards other ethnic groups in the borderland. Establishing alliances with Native American groups and granting religious sanctuary for runaway slaves was a direct attempt to influence and undermine English colonisation. In the end, then, this zone of interaction resulting from Spanish and English empire building is best seen as a porous, open-ended and entangled history.¹⁵

As such, the concept of entanglement aligns with Richard Drayton’s one of “masked condominia”. Drayton also emphasised the inability of Europeans to establish full dominium and the sharing of power between groups, including maroons and indigenous communities. This lack of European dominance was particularly visible in areas like the Guiana borderland.¹⁶

¹³ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) xxvi, xxxi, 50-59.

¹⁴ Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *American Historical Review*, no. 3 (2007). For a more cultural, consumption-oriented approach, see: Holger Weiss, “The Danish Gold Coast as a Multinational and Entangled Space, c.1700-1850,” in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, ed. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin (New York: Springer, 2013).

¹⁵ Gould, “Entangled Histories”. For a more in-depth treatment of the multi-cultural interactions in Spanish Florida, see: Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Drayton, “Masked Condominia”. When talking about the early modern region, I will use the term “Guiana borderland”. The word Guyana is reserved for the independent Co-Operative Republic established in 1966.

This discussion begs the question of how these concepts apply to the specific borderland in question. Geographically, as seen in Map 1.1, the border zone stretched from the Orinoco River in the west (controlled by the Spanish) to the Essequibo River in the east (controlled by the Dutch). Three routes of contact existed: via the ocean, via the coastal stretch, and via the inland rivers, particularly the Cuyuni. Running from the Spanish areas towards the Dutch in Essequibo, the Cuyuni River proved to be a vital part of the borderland infrastructure, as we shall see. It facilitated exchanges between the European powers, allowed enslaved Africans to flee and seek refuge in the Spanish areas, but was also used by Caribs who transported captured Amerindians from the Orinoco to sell them as “red slaves” to the Dutch. The Cuyuni, then, was the physical “middle ground”, where the process of accommodation of the various powers was clearly visible.

The Caribs were the Amerindian group that inhabited most of the borderland, but the colonists interacted with other ethnic groups as well. The Dutch colonists discerned five principal groups: besides the Caribs, there were the Arawaks (or Lokono), living along the coast and river mouths; the Akawaio, residing more inland around the Demerara and Mazaruni rivers; the Warraos, on the seacoast between the Orinoco and the Pomeroon; and the Macushi, living on the savannah and mountainous areas in the interior. While the Caribs had the most warlike reputation, the Arawaks and Accawaio and—to a lesser extent—the Warraos were also involved as military allies, for both the Spanish and the Dutch.¹⁷ It is important to note, though, that more Amerindian groups lived further inland, and that the ethnic groups lived in separate groups, with their own leaders.

The transition from borderland to “bordered land” did not take place until well into the nineteenth century. Neither the Spanish nor the Dutch made any specific claims as to how far their territory extended. Both powers had a general idea, but could not enforce borders even if they wished. While in 1750 the Spanish king sent out the *Real Expedición de Limites*, this expedition was mainly concerned with enforcing Spanish control over the Orinoco region. In fact, the European powers hardly had an idea of what transpired in the interior or what it looked like, as testified by the continual attempts to find El Dorado up until the 1770s.¹⁸ Thus, when the British took

¹⁷ Dalton, *History of British Guiana*, 63-74; Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 5-9.

¹⁸ Account of the *Commandante General de Orinoco*, 20 December 1772, no. 513 in: Great Britain, *British Guiana Boundary. Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela: Appendix to the Case on Behalf of the Government of Her Britannic*

over from the Dutch formally in 1814, they had no idea how far their rule theoretically stretched. By that time the borderland had lost much of its former function as zone of interaction, as many of the Amerindians had been “reduced” to living in the missionary villages. Yet the attempt to establish “bordered lands” only came in 1825 with the commissioning of Robert Schomburgk and the attempt to delineate clear boundaries. Considering that current-day Guyana and Venezuela cannot agree on a border, we can say that this transition to “bordered lands” is still not complete.

Majesty. Volume IV. 1769-1781 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1898) (hereafter BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4) 106-107.



Map 1.1: The Orinoco-Essequibo borderland. The map is based on the current borders of Guyana and Venezuela, with the rivers, posts, and places mentioned in the text. Note that Stabroek was only established in the 1780s and is shown for reference purposes only.

The Spanish side

In a recent insightful contribution on Iberian empire formation, Tamar Herzog has argued that the establishment of boundaries was not a matter of defending strictly defined borders against outsiders, but centred on claim making. Instead of through warfare, claims could best be extended in peace time through gradual penetration. The issue then was whether such lands were “vacant” or not, and whether the Amerindian inhabitants made “proper” use of the land. Since Europeans defined “proper use” according to their own norms, they could legitimise the subsequent appropriation. Furthermore, this process was more similar across empires than is often assumed. Images of English colonists preoccupied with control over land and Spaniards with control over people are overstated, as both were concerned with legitimising their presence and securing their power over land and over indigenous peoples.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in Iberian claim making, conversion was a vital instrument, for baptised Amerindians could be portrayed as vassals of the crown and hence would extend the royal claims. Thus, religious orders like the Jesuits could present themselves as conquistadores: by forcibly converting indigenous peoples and relocating them to missionary villages, the orders turned Amerindian lands into European lands. This attitude changed in the second half of the eighteenth century, as Amerindians were seen as possessing a “natural freedom”. Therefore, their allegiance had to be secured through treaties rather than forced baptism. However, such negotiations, involving extensive improvisation and expensive gift-giving, were still fraught with problems and could result in violent interactions.²⁰ Indeed, the Spanish approach to the Guiana borderland contained all of these elements: a focus on “reduction”, through gifts or through force, while treaties were also concluded with some Amerindian groups, sometimes to solicit their help against others. While the Jesuits were present as well, the two orders most heavily involved were the Capuchins and the Franciscans.

However, the missionaries only managed to gain control over the Guiana borderland in the eighteenth century, for in the seventeenth century the

¹⁹ Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2015) 1-13, 117-130, 245-265.

²⁰ Ibid. 70-74, 95-98; Brian P. Owensby, “Between Justice and Economics: “Indians” and Reformism in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Imperial Thought,” in *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850*, ed. Lauren A. Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013).

Spanish colonial presence was very weak and fragile. In fact, the colonists were often attacked and beaten back, as the Guianas had been an area of imperial competition ever since Sir Walter Raleigh arrived in 1597 on his quest to find El Dorado. While the early European presence was small, the number of Amerindian groups was relatively large: an estimated 100,000 people.²¹ Consequently, after his return in 1618, Walter Raleigh could solicit the help of local Amerindians to destroy Santo Tomé, which was the centre of the Spanish colonisation in the Orinoco area. The settlement was rebuilt, but would suffer the same treatment three more times in the following decades. It is important to note that between 1568 and 1648 the Spanish and the Dutch were involved in a prolonged conflict over Dutch independence. This fighting carried over to the Americas: Santo Tomé was destroyed once again in 1629 by an English-Dutch alliance, and by a Dutch-Amerindian coalition in 1637 and 1639. The Peace of Münster in 1648 brought an end to Spanish-Dutch hostilities and recognised the Dutch presence in the region. For a decade there were even peaceful trade relations between the Spanish and the Dutch. Yet when in 1658 a new governor attempted to stop these (illicit) exchanges, the Dutch again raided Santo Tomé and Carib attacks resumed as well.²²

At this point the Spanish were not yet concerned with the borderland, as they focused on gaining control over the Guarapiche area, north of the Orinoco River. The French had been forming relationships with the local Caribs there as well, which curtailed the possibilities for Spanish expansion. While the Spanish succeeded in establishing three missionary villages in the 1660s, within several years they were either abandoned or destroyed by the French, the Caribs, or both. And when Jesuit missionaries attempted to establish control over Amerindian groups in the Orinoco region in 1679 and again in 1684, they were pushed back by combined Carib forces. Subsequently, the Jesuits' efforts subsided and they withdrew from the region in 1694, not to return for four decades.²³ Thus, the Amerindians were the dominant power in the Guianas during the seventeenth century and were able to dictate the terms on the middle ground.

²¹ Neil L. Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit: A History of the Caribs in Colonial Venezuela and Guyana, 1498-1820* (Dordrecht, Providence, RI: Foris Publications, 1988) 2, 36; Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic world, 1595-1674* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 106-108.

²² Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 87-91.

²³ *Ibid.*, 97-102.

Yet the balance of power changed profoundly in the eighteenth century. After the end of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713), the Spanish Bourbon monarchy started a new attempt to increase its control over Guayana. It took several years to entice the Jesuits and Capuchins to undertake a renewed attempt, but as the control over the northern Guarapiche region increased, confidence grew that expansion might be viable in the direction of the borderland with the Dutch. This attempt was supported by the monarchy through the sending of settlers and soldiers. For example, in 1725 thirty families, armed with tools and guns, were sent from the Canaries to Orinoco, accompanied by soldiers. Bolstered by this official support, raids against the Amerindians increased and in 1728 a thousand people were captured. After 1732 the number of missionary villages increased, stimulated by competition among the three religious orders involved: the Jesuits of Santa Fé, the Franciscans of Piritu and the Capuchins of Trinidad.²⁴

Gradually, especially after 1750, the Spanish moved further east from the Orinoco, penetrating the borderland and enlarging their presence at the expense of the Caribs. As the missionaries expanded, the Caribs found their room to manoeuvre increasingly restricted. For those opposing a new way of life in a missionary village, the choice narrowed down to violent resistance or moving away. Both roads were taken. In 1751 and 1752 several Spanish settlements were overrun by Caribs, who killed some of the resident priests.²⁵ Although the Spanish pushed onwards, they still faced fierce opposition. Indeed, in a later report the Commandant of Guayana wrote: "The Orinoco was nearly deserted, or rather dominated by the savage Caribs, up until about 1755, when the Royal Boundary Expedition arrived, which was commanded by Commodore Don Joseph de Iturriague. He tamed the pride of the Indians, and subdued and handed over many of them to the missionaries."²⁶ This subduing of the Amerindian population was one of the prime objectives of the Boundary Expedition, and it gave the Spanish a strong footing in the borderland.

²⁴ Ibid., 110; Report of Commandant of Guayana to the King, 11 November 1773, no. 517 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 109.

²⁵ Acting Commander of Essequibo to WIC, 6 March 1751, no. 263 in Great Britain, *British Guiana Boundary. Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela: Appendix to the Case on Behalf of the Government of Her Britannic Majesty. Volume II. 1724-1763* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1898) (hereafter BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2): 70; Director-General to WIC, 4 August 1752, no. 269 in *ibid.*: 75-6.

²⁶ Report of Commandant of Guayana to the King, 11 November 1773, no. 517 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 109.

The Amerindians that chose to relocate rather than fight were forced to move eastwards. As the three groups—Spanish, Amerindians and Dutch—now came closer together, tensions increased. In 1758 a Spanish raid destroyed the Dutch post on the Cuyuni River, which was the key to the borderland infrastructure thanks to its east-west orientation.²⁷ It was used by the Caribs to sell Amerindian captives from the Orinoco to the Dutch, as an escape route for Essequibo slaves to the Spanish areas (see below), and could be used by the Spanish to enter Dutch territory in case of conflict. The effect of the destruction was manifold. Firstly, the Dutch lost control over a vital borderland gateway: the trade in “red slaves” would decline, and African slaves now had better chances to flee. This process was aggravated by the migration of the Caribs living in the area. They had functioned as a buffer, both against the Spanish and against the desertion of slaves, so they left a void as they moved further southeast. Finally, the Spanish established two missions on the Cuyuni, increasing their control over this crucial river and making it unlikely the Caribs would return.²⁸

Consequently, the Dutch Director-General, Laurens Storm van ‘s Gravesande (1704-1775) was strongly aggrieved. He first sought redress from the Spanish governor, who, however, insisted that the Cuyuni was Spanish territory. Subsequently, Storm also sent copies of this discussion to the metropolis, urging the matter to be solved at the higher level of European politics. While this indeed inspired action—the Estates-General sent a “Great Remonstrance” to Madrid in 1759—it did not lead to a resolution of the problem, as the Spanish crown did not make any concessions.²⁹

In fact, as Spanish influence over the borderland increased, they were emboldened to attack the Dutch Moruka post as well, in 1769 and 1774. This post guarded the coastal connection between the two empires. This overland route was one of the three borderland connections, together with the Cuyuni route and the oceanic route. Therefore, the repeated destruction of the post hurt Dutch efforts to control the borderland traffic. As with the post of the Cuyuni, it opened the road for deserters from the Dutch areas

²⁷ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 192.

²⁸ Report of judicial proceedings instituted and drawn up in reference to the complaints made by the Dutch minister concerning the proceedings of Spaniards of the Orinoco against the Dutch colonies in Essequibo, 1769, no 482 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 47-50.

²⁹ A.R.F. Webber and Harry Perot Christiani, *Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana* (Georgetown, Guyana: "The Argosy" Company, 1931) 75. Another remonstrance was sent in 1769 but to no effect.

(see Chapter 3).³⁰ These small-scale raids on Dutch posts could have large effects, but at the same time showed that the Spanish were not strong enough to confront the Dutch directly, nor establish permanent control over the borderland.

Meanwhile, the conquest of the Amerindian lands continued. Under Manuel Centurion, appointed governor of Guayana in 1765, Spanish power was consolidated in the new capital of Angostura (at the narrow stretch of the Orinoco), while missionary work continued. The expulsion of Jesuits from the empire, in 1767, had little effect on this process, as the Capuchins were the main drivers. In 1771 they founded their last mission, having effectively conquered all of the Carib groups living in the Spanish areas. Often the missionaries employed a policy of divide-and-conquer, using previously “reduced” (i.e. relocated) Warao or independent Akawaio Amerindians to attack Carib communities, while later turning against those same groups.³¹ Consequently, the population in the missionary villages continued to grow. The historian Neil Whitehead lists 4,786 Caribs in Franciscan missions in 1782, and 4,459 Caribs living in Capuchin missions in 1788.³² By that latter year, the Capuchins had twenty-eight missionary villages under their control, including 14,012 Amerindians (see Appendix 1.1).³³

This continued expansion into Amerindian territory was partly a result of the general expansion in Venezuela, particularly in the province of Caracas. The region, which had long been a relatively insignificant part of the empire, thrived after 1777. Trade reforms now allowed the inhabitants to trade with foreigners, under certain conditions. Furthermore, Spain emerged as a large market for cacao, Venezuela’s main export during the eighteenth century. Consequently, Caracas became one of the most dynamic parts of the empire and its population grew from 333,000 in the late 1780s to 427,000 in the first decade of the nineteenth century. While in Caracas the Amerindian population was still subject to loss of land because of

³⁰ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 192.

³¹ Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 129.

³² Ibid., 194, 197.

³³ Table of the Missions of the Revered Father Capuchins of Catalonia of the Province of Guiana, 31 August 1788, no 627 in Great Britain, *British Guiana Boundary. Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela: Appendix to the Case on Behalf of the Government of Her Britannic Majesty. Volume 5, 1781-1814* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1898) (hereafter BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5) 69.

encroaching *haciendas*, the process of relocating Amerindians had passed. In the province of Guayana, however, it still continued.³⁴

Nevertheless, it seems that many Amerindian groups had effectively escaped the mission system and maintained their autonomy, as became apparent during the revolutionary times at the end of the century. The Spanish governors greatly feared an attack by the British and calculated that the indigenous groups in the borderland would side with the invaders. In 1790 the fear was voiced that Guayana could become the gateway to dismantling the entire Spanish empire, as the Orinoco and tributary rivers could carry the British to Cumaná and even to Santa Fé, and from there to Mexico and Peru.³⁵ However, this scenario would not come to pass. A British invasion indeed took place, but it was directed against the Dutch areas rather than the Spanish.³⁶

The Dutch side

From the Essequibo vantage point the borderland looked rather different. Rather than missionary control, the prime concerns of the Dutch were trade (in the seventeenth century) and preventing the escape of enslaved workers (during the eighteenth century). Consequently, in the nineteenth century the extent of the trade network would form the basis of the British claims to the borderland.

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch saw Guiana as a source of exotic products, particularly annatto, an orange-red food colourant and condiment. Foodstuffs and cotton hammocks were also traded in this early period, between 1630 and 1650. The Arawaks were major trading partners, but the Dutch also entered the Orinoco area themselves, to trade with Amerindian groups there.³⁷ The Dutch also had plantations for the

³⁴ Michael P. McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy, and Society 1777-1811* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 3-4, 10, 25, 29-30, 39-45. For a more pessimistic view of the cacao sector, see: Robert J. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite of Early Caracas: Formation & Crisis, 1567-1767* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989) 6-9.

³⁵ Fermín de Sincinenea to Count del Campo de Alange, 15 June 1790, no. 632 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 76-77.

³⁶ The British were invited by Prince William V of Orange, to “protect” the Dutch colonies against a French invasion. The latter was likely in the revolutionary time period, as the Republic itself was overrun by French soldiers. See Chapter 2 for more details.

³⁷ United States, *Venezuela-British Guiana Boundary Arbitration. Digest of Evidence Arranged According to Subjects: Prepared for the Private Use of the Venezuelan Council* (New York: The Evening Job Printing House, 1899) 51.

production of sugar, but between 1650 and 1680 Essequibo's main export was annatto rather than sugar.³⁸

Besides trading forest products, a defining trade of the borderland was the one in enslaved Amerindians, so-called "red slaves". Slavery was practised before the coming of the Europeans, although within Amerindian societies slavery was part of the social structure rather than of economic exploitation. For the Caribs, the word *pito* or *poito* is said to have carried a meaning that ranged from brother-in-law to client to slave, and the Arawak word *maco* had a similar connotation. In a raid the Caribs or Arawaks sometimes chose to take the women as wives and the men as *poitos* or *macos*, possibly also assimilating the children as slaves.³⁹ There was thus an existing system the Dutch could tap into and adapt to their needs. Enslaved Amerindians were not usually employed as plantation hands, but rather as domestic servants or for other tasks on the estates, such as hunting, fishing, and growing cassava, all to support the livelihood of the enslaved Africans.⁴⁰

In 1686 the WIC prohibited the enslavement of the four major ethnic groups living close to the Dutch settlement—the Caribs, Arawaks, Accawaioes and Warraos—to ensure peaceful relations.⁴¹ However, the directors were still content to acquire slaves from other groups living further inland, and these "red slaves" were still sought after by the colonists. The Company was actively involved in buying enslaved Amerindians, for we find that in 1699 that "Jotte, the old negro" was sent out from fort *Kijkoveral* into the Mazaruni, coming back with "four female slaves, two children, and a boy."⁴²

In their stance towards Amerindian slavery the Dutch diverged from the Spanish and other European powers. In 1542 the Spanish New Laws outlawed the enslaving of Amerindians, and Portugal did the same in 1574, although they retained an exception for "cannibals" and slaves taken in "just wars".⁴³ And while the missionary villages still demanded labour from the Amerindians, it was of a different kind than chattel slavery. The French were

³⁸ L.A.H.C. Hulsman, "Nederlands Amazonia: Handel met indianen tussen 1580 en 1680" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2009) 128, 137, 158.

³⁹ Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 181-182.

⁴⁰ Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 226; Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 179.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴² United States, *Digest of Evidence*, 70-71.

⁴³ Timothy J. Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery? The Spanish Crown's Choice of Labor Organization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish American," *Journal of Economic History*, no. 4 (1995) 845; Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 2.

somewhere in between. They also employed the “just war” rhetoric to legitimise taking indigenous slaves, even though after 1700 it was forbidden to enslave Amerindians in the French Caribbean. However, indigenous captives from French Canada were still sold into slavery in the Caribbean until the 1760s and indigenous slavery continued well into the 1790s in New France itself.⁴⁴

The difference between Spanish and Dutch views over Amerindian slavery proved to be a major influence on the borderland dynamics. Whereas the Spanish considered the Amerindians living in the Orinoco areas as free vassals of the king, the Dutch bought these people as “red slaves”. The slave traders in between were mainly Caribs although the Arawaks and the Akawaio were also involved.⁴⁵ Consequently, these specific Amerindian groups resisted Spanish efforts to close the slave trade and became natural allies of the Dutch. In fact, the Carib slave trade with the Dutch followed the same pattern as the regular trade, bringing enslaved Amerindians from the Orinoco region to Essequibo both via the Cuyuni and via the coastal route. This trade was part of the regular commercial network and slaves were sold, in addition to quantities of balsam, cotton, hammocks, copaiba, annatto, wild animals and horses.⁴⁶

The Company seemed to have made the slave trade its own prerogative around 1712 and in 1723 a post on the Arinda River (a tributary of the Essequibo) was established, deep into the interior, which had the slave trade as its main purpose.⁴⁷ Because the slave trade could have wide-ranging political effects, the WIC tried to control this trade itself, rather than leaving it in the hands of free-wandering adventurers who might provoke conflict. However, private traders ignored the prohibition and remained active afterwards. In 1730 the local authorities noted that several planters were sending their own slaves or “free Indians” into the Cuyuni and Mazaruni to acquire “red slaves”. These ventures violated the Company’s privileges and

⁴⁴ Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) 356-371.

⁴⁵ Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 188.

⁴⁶ Report of Marquis de San Felipe y Santiago to the King of Spain, (?1739), no. 34 in Great Britain, *British Guiana Boundary. Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela: Appendix to the Counter Case on Behalf of the Government of Her Britannic Majesty* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1898) (hereafter BGBB, BCC appendix), 182.

⁴⁷ C. A. Harris and J.A.J. de Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande. The Rise of British Guiana Compiled from his Despatches* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1911) vol. 2: 431.

offenders risked confiscation of all vessels, slaves and goods, plus a fine of 50 guilders (presumably per slave).⁴⁸

The early Cuyuni trade network

To get a better understanding of the complex borderland interactions during the seventeenth century, it is worthwhile to zoom in on the Cuyuni trade network. This heart of the borderland generated both cooperation and tension among the different groups. The Caribs and Dutch cooperated in the enslavement of Amerindians living in areas under the control of the Spanish, to the dismay of the latter two. In addition, the borderland dynamics were further complicated by warfare between different Amerindian groups, such as the Arawaks or Akawaio versus the Caribs. And finally, as a last element of complexity, the Dutch also sent some of their African slaves into the borderland to procure Amerindian slaves. All of these issues are illustrated by a quotation from 1683 by Essequibo's *Commandeur*. Because warfare had, for several years, disrupted trade in hammocks and foodstuffs, he reported that he had "sent a negro up in Cuyuni in order (...) to establish peace between the Akuways [Akawaio] and the Caribs, so as by this means to get hold of the wild-pig hunting there as formerly."⁴⁹

The borderland trade was indeed a thoroughly cross-cultural affair. At the turn of the century peace apparently returned, for we find a very lively trade from *Kijkoveral*, involving a wide array of goods. The day journals of the fort for 1699 mention "negro traders" that set out to procure horses; a boy named Jan Antheunissen who brought "fourteen or fifteen bundles of poison wood" from the nearby Mazaruni River; and Jotte, "the old negro," who went into the Upper Cuyuni in a canoe to fetch a supply of bread. During the following year "the old negro Big Jan" brought "10 quakes of oriane [annatto] dye, 30 quakes of bread, 8 quakes of pork, and 4 quakes of fish."⁵⁰ While bread, fish and dye were regular goods, the pork seems somewhat unusual in this summation, and might signify the wild pigs mentioned above. During the remainder of the year 1700 the Africans Big Jan, "his boy Sam", Jan Swart, "Handsome Claesje" and Lieven made several trips into the interior, carrying specific trading wares to procure foodstuffs

⁴⁸ Proclamation by the Commandeur of Essequibo, 2 April 1730, no. 182 in Great Britain, *British Guiana Boundary. Arbitration with the United States of Venezuela*, (hereafter BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2), 10.

⁴⁹ United States, *Digest of Evidence*, 53.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 54. The legal status of these black traders is not mentioned.

and annatto dye. Unfortunately, very little is known about these black intermediaries and their legal status. The same applies to the Amerindians, who sometimes functioned as peddlers travelling back and forth with the African traders, receiving payment for their services.⁵¹

Probably the most vital among the merchandise listed above were the horses and other draft animals that were necessary to run the sugar mills. These draft animals could only be procured from Spanish Guayana, which was a tremendously arduous journey. From the Dutch side, it involved six weeks of travelling from *Kijkoveral* to the Cuyuni savannah, where the horses were brought from the Upper Orinoco, deep into Spanish territory. Here, then, we find a middle ground in both a physical and metaphorical sense: the area was situated between the Spanish and Dutch settlements, while the exchange relied on African horse buyers, licensed white Company traders, and Amerindian transporters. The trade seemed to have commenced in 1693 and continued in the following years, although in 1702 a great scarcity in the number of horses was noted in Essequibo, resulting partly from disease and partly from a Spanish prohibition on this trade.⁵²

Indeed, the middle ground was no stable ground, and changes on either the Dutch or the Spanish side, like the installation of a new governor, could easily disrupt the trade relations. However, under the precarious circumstances in the borderland, such prohibitions generally did not last long, insofar as they were effective at all. The horse trade certainly did not disappear after the Spanish ban. At this point the WIC still organised trading ventures for both the planters and its own interest, as testified by an announcement from 1706 calling any planter who wanted to buy horses from the Cuyuni, to report to the fort with “men and trading wares”. Nevertheless, it appears that the Spanish were able to seal off this route from 1707 onwards, as no further horse trading voyages via the Cuyuni were reported. The alternative route to acquire Spanish horses was less dependable, consisting of a coastal voyage that involved sailing up the Orinoco and past the Spanish fortress, for which permission was needed.⁵³

However, in this borderless borderland metropolitan policies were easily circumvented. The gap left by the Spanish was quickly filled by English traders, using the coastal route. Apparently this trade was so effective that in 1731 the WIC urged the Essequibo inhabitants to trade with the Spanish

⁵¹ Ibid., 54-55.

⁵² Ibid., 59.

⁵³ Ibid., 59, 64-66.

again instead. The Company feared that the English traders would have much more merchandise on offer than could be procured in Orinoco. And while contraband trade with the Spanish was condoned, the WIC did not want to encourage it any further, fearing it would undermine Company authority.⁵⁴ In the preceding year the WIC had also prohibited private trade in the Cuyuni and Mazaruni regions, allowing only licensed Company traders. This move signified the transition from Essequibo as a trading colony to one where plantation agriculture dominated. The horses were vital as draft animals, but the free-roaming adventurers could become more of a liability than an asset. Their free agent behaviour might provoke conflict, while it became important to maintain favourable relations with the Spanish as well as the Amerindians.⁵⁵

The eighteenth-century connections

Although it is unlikely that the trade with the English entirely subsided, the connections with Orinoco were strengthened in the decades afterwards. The relations between the Dutch and Spanish governors seemed to be good in the 1730s, to mutual benefit. Here we see the Richard Drayton's "masked condominia" concept at work: both European powers were too weak to maintain a presence by themselves, so they were willing to help each other out.⁵⁶ For example, in 1734 two canoes were dispatched with thirty hogsheads of bread, four half-barrels of rum, and four barrels of molasses to exchange for horses, and when the Spanish governor in 1735 requested a quantity of bread, the Dutch complied and received three horses and six mules in return.⁵⁷ In 1746 a plan was made to facilitate the trade in mules and oxen by cutting a road through the forest from Essequibo.⁵⁸ The Capuchins, administering large ranches with many thousand heads of cattle, seemed in favour, but the Dutch were having second thoughts since a direct road would mean an easy flight route for runaway slaves.⁵⁹ In 1752

⁵⁴ Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 153.

⁵⁵ Great Britain, *Documents and Correspondence relating to the Question of Boundary between British Guiana and Venezuela* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1896) 9.

⁵⁶ Drayton, "Masked Condominia".

⁵⁷ United States, *Digest of Evidence*, 49-50; Commandeur of Essequibo to WIC, 8 June 1734, no. 195 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 17.

⁵⁸ J.A.J. de Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande: Zijn werk en zijn leven uit zijne brieven opgebouwd* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1920) 96.

⁵⁹ Acting Commandeur of Essequibo to WIC, 8 September 1750, no. 69 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 69.

the Company directors went a step further in reducing contact, and even prohibited the overland cattle trade.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, an elaborate exchange network was in place, involving not just foodstuffs, but also a diverse array of manufactured goods. An anonymous but well-acquainted source reports that in 1750 the Dutch brought:

white and blue cloths, Rouen linen, coarse britannias, white holland, striped stuffs for gowns, other common cotton goods and some hats; a large quantity of brandy, some white wine and implements, axes, picks, hatchet and cutlasses. And for the smugglers of the interior they convey spices, especially cinnamon and cloves in cases; fine new hats of good quality and first class white ones; velvets, silks, some lace, pieces of britannias and hollands, medium and fine; wax, flour, and wine. What the Dutch take back is money (usually in gold), tobacco from Barinas [Varinas], mules, a few heifers; and a small amount in hides, balsam of copaiba, hammocks, and other similar goods.⁶¹

The vessels employed were quite substantial, armed with swivel guns (*draaibassen*) and blunderbusses, “carrying twelve to sixteen men besides the Aruac [Arawak] Indians who act as rowers.”⁶²

However, as plantation agriculture became the prime focus of the colonists, the WIC became stricter about allowing foreign trade. In 1761 the Company engineered a change in the trade directions in 1761, aiming to end Dutch involvement in the Orinoco trade and allowing the Spanish to come to Essequibo instead, as they had been doing for several decades. No more Dutch vessels would be sent out, with the argument of transferring the risk to the Spanish. This explanation is not satisfactory, however. It is more likely that the Company was afraid that Dutch vessels would become embroiled in Spanish-English hostilities in the ongoing Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), which could drag the Dutch into the conflict. This scenario was not farfetched, since Dutch traders were still active as smugglers. Regardless of the motives, the policy was so successful that in 1794 the Dutch Director-General was unaware that the direction of trade had ever been otherwise.⁶³

⁶⁰ Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 50.

⁶¹ Short account of the great river Orinoco (...), ca. 1750, no. 38 in BGBB, BCC appendix, 195.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ United States, *Digest of Evidence*, 68-70.

This shift in trade patterns did not mean that the officials in Essequibo were passively awaiting what the Spanish would bring, even though the Company was now more dependent on the decisions of the Spanish governors. On 14 July 1772 the Director-General wrote back to the WIC directors:

It is related here that a new Governor has arrived in Orinoco. Should that be true, I hope that he will not be such a Turk as his predecessor. With the latter there was not the least chance of getting anything out of Orinoco, and he even forbade the usual salting in the mouth of the river, and set a strong watch to prevent it. If the present one shows a little more tractability, as the former ones did, I will soon take advantage of it; there must now be abundance of cattle there⁶⁴

The fishing and salting in the mouth of the Orinoco had been a vital activity for the Dutch, for the salted fish provided a welcome addition to the diet of the enslaved.⁶⁵ However, fishing ventures were often used as covers for smuggling in the Orinoco. Consequently, the Spanish seized several ships in the 1760s, leading to a grinding halt of the fishing trade. As a result, the colonists turned to imports of North American fish to satisfy their needs (see Chapter 4).⁶⁶

As the eighteenth century progressed, then, the trade connections became more complicated and of decreasing importance. The Spanish became stricter in their policies and less likely to connive as their reliance on the Dutch decreased. At the same time the Cuyuni trade was hampered by the establishment of Spanish missions and the withdrawal of the Caribs. Nevertheless, the Amerindians, and the Caribs in particular, continued to play a crucial role in the development of the colonies.

⁶⁴ Director-General of Essequibo to WIC, 14 July 1772, no. 509 in BGB, app. vol. 4: 103.

⁶⁵ Commander of Essequibo to WIC, 7 December 1746, no. 234 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 46-48.

⁶⁶ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 230-231; Judicial Report of the Attack made by the Spaniards upon the Dutch settled in Barima (1760), no. 351 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 194-195.

The Amerindian side

Already in the 1680s the Dutch solicited the help of Amerindian groups to retrieve runaway slaves, even though Essequibo was mostly a trading colony at this point.⁶⁷ Consequently, the number of “slave refugees” was comparatively small, which means that bounty hunting was not the dominant way of obtaining European goods.⁶⁸ During the seventeenth century the Amerindians could simply acquire such manufactures through trade. However, as we have seen, Essequibo’s transition from trading colony to plantation colony meant that the Amerindians had to find other ways to tie the Europeans to them.

The most important changes manifested themselves in the second half of the eighteenth century. Not only did the plantation sector expand rapidly thanks to generous mortgage credit (see Chapter 5), but in 1750 the Spanish monarchy implemented a major institutional change as well. It decided to grant freedom to all slaves from English or Dutch colonies seeking refuge in Spanish areas, as long as they embraced Catholicism and were baptised.⁶⁹ While marronage had been a familiar phenomenon before 1750, this declaration nevertheless had a major impact on the intercultural relations in the border zone. It offered the possibility of a life of freedom, as opposed to an uncertain existence as a maroon in the forests, as will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3. Understandably, this new rule motivated many Africans to flee.

The officials in Essequibo and Demerara were very well aware of the effect of the Orinoco escape route, and in 1769 they urged the States-General to establish a so-called “cartel” with the Spanish authorities, agreeing to return each other’s refugees.⁷⁰ Six years later nothing had come

⁶⁷ Marjoleine Kars, “‘Cleansing the Land’: Dutch-Amerindian Cooperation in the Suppression of the 1763 Slave Rebellion in Dutch Guiana,” in *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Earfare in the Early Modern World*, ed. Wayne E. Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2011) 265.

⁶⁸ Thanks to Damian Pargas for the term. “Slave refugee” places the focus on the person trying to seek freedom. The often-used term “fugitive”, in contrast, is centred on the colonists and the law breaking element of fleeing, whereas today we consider being free a basic human right. “Runaway” does not fully convey the idea that these people hoped to find “asylum” in Venezuela.

⁶⁹ Linda M. Rupert, “‘Seeking the Water of Baptism’: Fugitive Slaves and Imperial Jurisdiction in the Early Modern Caribbean,” in Benton and Ross, *Legal Pluralism*, 203.

⁷⁰ Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 75;

of it, as the Spanish court had not answered the plea of the States-General.⁷¹ However, since refugees were solely a problem for the Dutch, the Spanish monarchy had little reason to comply, as the Dutch ambassador recognised.⁷² Consequently, the colonial officials appealed to the metropolis for help. An often-repeated complaint was that the colony would fall to “total ruin” if the stream of runaways was not cut off. However, it proved difficult to devise effective counter measures. A plan was made in 1758 to send officers of the militia (*burgerofficieren*) into the woods to chase the refugees, but that did not seem to have worked; most planters were very reluctant to perform military service, complaining that they already paid taxes to this end. Moreover, they typically had little success in the woods in any case.⁷³

The WIC tried another approach in 1784: it would inform the enslaved population about the circumstances in Orinoco, after which potential refugees would think twice before running away. A Mr. Perpignan had gone to Orinoco and found a former slave of Mr. Ramaeckers there, who had informed him that refugees were indeed baptised and declared free; “but then they are starving, to prevent which they are given, on behalf of the King, their food and drink, or 5 stivers per day.”⁷⁴ Yet they also had to work on the fortifications or in the mines, a fate not much better than slavery, and indeed some had been re-enslaved. Thus, the Gentlemen X proposed to set up a fund of 10,000 guilders to buy back several Orinoco slaves, to be taken over by their former masters or otherwise by the Company itself. These unfortunate re-enslaved Africans would then spread the word about the dreadful Orinoco, after which the absconding would surely cease.⁷⁵ However, like all of the WIC’s grand plans, the idea was shelved and forgotten.

⁷¹ Court of Policy in Essequibo to WIC, 10 July 1774, no. 514 in BGBB, BCC appendix vol. 4: 108-109.

⁷² Ambassador of the Dutch Republic in Madrid to the States-General, 12 February 1784, no. 595 in BGBB, BCC appendix vol. 5: 22

⁷³ J.Th. de Smidt, Lee, T. van der and H.J.M. van Dapperen, *Plakaatboek Guyana (Guyana Ordinance Book), 1670-1816* (The Hague: Huygens Instituut for Netherlands History, 2014), Essequibo, 4 December 1758.

⁷⁴ Proceedings of the Ten, 30 September 1784, no. 601 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

Postholders and intermediaries

Preventing the absconding did not work and the Spanish in Orinoco were not eager to return refugees (see Chapter 3 for more details). Therefore, the authorities in Essequibo and Demerara adopted a two-pronged strategy: invoking the help of Amerindians as patrol groups and bounty hunters, and trying to control the flight routes by establishing outposts. Starting with the first, the groups that were most active in supporting the colonial regime were the Caribs, although the Arawaks and Akawaio also played an important role. These groups made different choices at different times as to whether to act as soldiers or bounty hunters, and had different motives, ranging from access to guns, preferential trading rights or material rewards. Moreover, they did not just do the bidding of the colonists and instead remained autonomous in deciding whether to help or not.⁷⁶ Acquiring European goods through trade became increasingly difficult for the Amerindians, but capturing refugees proved to be a viable alternative.⁷⁷ Additionally, indigenous soldiers played crucial roles in suppressing slave revolts, especially in the famous 1763 uprising in Berbice, but also in the 1772, 1789 and 1795 uprisings in Essequibo and Demerara (see Chapter 3).

The second element to prevent absconding were the posts. There were four posts, on major strategic points: the Mahaicony River in the east (separating Demerara and Berbice), the Arinda (leading into the interior), the Cuyuni (the interior route to the Orinoco region), and the Moruka (to guard the coastal route between the Essequibo and the Orinoco).⁷⁸ The posts doubled as nodes for the trade with the Amerindians. However, these outposts controlled little outside their immediate vicinity. Furthermore, as some WIC officials explained, the refugees often took off in one of the plantation's boats and with the right tide they could obtain a decisive head start.⁷⁹

The postholder (*posthouder*) both traded on behalf of the Company and on his own, and was indeed expected to augment his otherwise meagre

⁷⁶ Kars, "Cleansing the land," in Lee, *Empires and Indigenes* 253, 259, 265, 267.

⁷⁷ Chris Schult, "Een noodzakelijk bondgenootschap: De rol van de indianen in de kolonies Essequibo en Demerary, 1770-1800" (MA thesis, Leiden University, 2014) 31.

⁷⁸ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 430-431.

⁷⁹ M. Van den Heuvel to Amsterdam Chamber, Dutch National Archives at The Hague (hereafter NL-HaNA), Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (hereafter WIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 309, f. 455-461; Council of Policy in Essequibo to the WIC, 31 January 1773, no. 523 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 4: 123; Petition of colonists to States-General, 14 September 1784, no. 599 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 23.

salary with profits from his private trade. In addition, the postholder was also supposed to control movement into the interior, by detaining everyone who did not have the right passports. The *posthouders* were originally “respected soldiers”, who would man the post together with several *bijleggers* (assistants) and preferably several Amerindians.⁸⁰

These postholders were given very specific instructions to “further peace and friendship with the Indian nations”. However, this directive often seemed to contradict another part of their instruction regarding trade with the Amerindians: when Amerindians had debts to the Company, the postholder would “through gentle means try to demand payment”.⁸¹ In this light, it is telling that the WIC felt the need to issue a proclamation stating that postholders not beat or abuse, or obstruct the trade of the Amerindians.⁸² The latter could voice complaints with the Dutch authorities, which led to the replacement of postholder Hendrik Eeltjens in 1779. However, this change apparently only made matters worse: Eeltjens’ successor, Daniel Sternbergh, about whom many accusations were made, was murdered by Amerindians.⁸³

Slowly the Company realised it needed a different set of people for these functions, and in 1775 a “mulatto or native” named Schultz became postholder in Arinda, based on his years of travel experience in that region and his knowledge of the local languages.⁸⁴ Indeed, far more important than these postholders were the few cross-cultural brokers who knew the languages of the Amerindians and who were accepted among them.⁸⁵ There seemed to have been less than a handful of such people, and in this respect the father and sons Van der Heyden were of particular importance to the colonies. As we shall see in Chapter 3, these two men played vital roles in

⁸⁰ Director-General to WIC, 1 February 1774, no. 524 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 4: 123.

⁸¹ Original quotation: ‘door sachte middelen tot de betaling trachten te noodsaeken’. Smidt, Lee, T. van der and van Dapperen, *Guyana Ordinance Book*, Essequibo, 14 August 1764.

⁸² *Resoluties van de directeur-generaal en raden van Demerary*. 1787-1788, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033.

⁸³ *Rapport bestemd voor erfstadhouder Willem V opgesteld door zijn commissarissen naar West-Indië*, W.H. van Grovestins en W. Boeij. 1790 juli 17, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915.

⁸⁴ Director-General to the WIC, 27 May 1775, no. 537 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 4: 136.

⁸⁵ Simon Schaffer et al., “Introduction,” in *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820*, ed. Simon Schaffer et al. (Sagamore Beach, Mass: Science History Publications, 2009); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Some Afterthoughts,” in *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820*, ed. Simon Schaffer et al. (Sagamore Beach, Mass: Science History Publications, 2009).

securing the colony's survival, both in the revolt of 1772 and in the general panic of 1795.

Growing Amerindian power

Even though the Amerindians increasingly lost ground against the Spanish missionaries, their bargaining position with the Dutch only increased in strength as the century progressed. This development was visible in two elements, namely the dispensing of gifts and access to guns. A slave insurrection in August 1772 appeared to get out of hand after two plantations were pillaged. The local burgher-captain managed to hold his own against two attacks, but a successful counter-offensive could only be launched with the help of two hundred Caribs. As a result, the Carib captains (called Owls, *Uilen* in Dutch) received rewards in the form of silver jewellery, and the soldiers received smaller gifts such as cloth, trumpets and looking-glasses. These gifts were considered an improvement on previous rewards, consisting of silver half-moon collars of breast pieces engraved with the WIC emblem.⁸⁶ The silver collars had apparently become less useful at this point, because "the Spaniards have made these things so common amongst them, that they now have some in gold which cover their whole chest."⁸⁷

The Dutch thus needed to increase their investment in the Amerindian alliances to keep them viable, while, on the other hand, the Amerindians learned to make better use of this bond. In 1778 an Amerindian delegation (of unknown origin) came to the Fort in Essequibo and promised to provide military aid in times of need, while also enjoying the food and rum provided.⁸⁸ Indeed, the alliance was so crucial, that the 720 gallons of *kiltum* (rum) from the WIC's own plantations were allocated as presents for Amerindians coming to Essequibo. Yet the Director-General remarked that this amount was completely insufficient, noting that the Amerindians "are not received properly, if they do not leave drunk and take a pint or two of liquor (...), wine bread, and *bakkeljauw* with them."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 242-3; Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 88.

⁸⁷ Council of Policy in Essequibo to WIC, 31 January 1774, no. 522 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 4: 122.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 92-93.

⁸⁹ George Hendrik Trotz to Chamber Zeeland, 1 February 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.111. Original quotation: "die niet wel onthaald zijn, als sij niet dronken

When the Dutch regained Essequibo and Demerara after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), they needed to re-establish their authority so they attempted to renew and strengthen the ties with the Amerindians. The Gentlemen X proposed in 1784 that Mr. Van der Heyden, would offer the Caribs greater friendship and security. Ideally, the Amerindian leaders would also come to the fort each year to renew the military alliance. The familiar gifts of silver-knob canes, ring collars and rum were offered to support this proposition.⁹⁰

There was a real need to be forthcoming to the Caribs, as became apparent in 1785; Several Carib leaders threatened to abstain from helping the colonists and even sided with the Africans if they did not receive gifts immediately. After “several days” of drinking in the capital town of Stabroek they were apparently satisfied and left again.⁹¹ These situations did not occur just at the seat of government, for in the same year the postholder of the Arinda post was confronted with a group of 108 Amerindians, seeking to pledge allegiance to the Company in exchange for presents, “upon which the Commanders each obtained a silver metal collar, a half piece of salampore [sic] two flasks gunpowder, and the others each 5 ells of salempore, besides salt fish, soopye [rum], and bananas, wherewith they all departed very satisfied.”⁹² In other words, the Amerindians made effective use of their powerful position in relation to the Dutch.

The three war-time changes in power (from Dutch to English to French and back again to Dutch, see Chapter 2) had emboldened the Amerindians to increase their demands, prompting the Director-General to ask the WIC for advice on how to handle such situations. While noting the mounting expenses, he also wrote that “we must gratify these people in every respect, for they, on our side, are our only resource against the negroes.”⁹³ In fact, the number of gifts at this point was so large that the Company stores would no longer suffice. Consequently, the WIC had to buy goods from others at market prices. The Director-General complained how expensive sending out an Amerindian search party was, because of “the manifold presents which

vertrekken en nog een pul of twee drank ook wel 1/2 dz. wijn en brood en bakkeljauw meede nemen”.

⁹⁰ Proceedings of the Gentlemen X, 30 September 1784, no. 601 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 24-26

⁹¹ Diary of the Director-General, 30 July 1785, no. 610 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 35-36.

⁹² Extracts from the government journal, 24 September 1785, no. 615 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 40.

⁹³ Diary of the Director-General, 30 July 1785, no. 610 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 35-36.

we must (give) to the Indians, without which they will not move a step, and especially when we must here purchase goods therefore (as has happened on this occasion), but the entire welfare of the Colony depends thereon.”⁹⁴

The increased leverage of the Amerindians is also visible in the ease with which they could acquire guns from the Dutch. In 1750 there still was an official prohibition on selling arms to indigenous groups, no doubt born out of caution that these weapons might be used against the colonists themselves.⁹⁵ However, in 1785 this situation had totally changed. When a group of seventy-five Amerindians were hired for an expedition on the east bank of the Demerara, they received fifty muskets and a hundred shot cartridges, in addition to provisions for the search.⁹⁶ While at times a search party indeed returned with runaways, the Amerindians also received remuneration “for their effort” if they had pursued in vain. Moreover, the practice of borrowing weapons for an expedition must have been very convenient for the Amerindians; they could simply indicate they had found tracks of refugees, upon which weapons would be supplied for the duration of the pursuit.⁹⁷ However, it is not impossible that these guns were used in inter-Amerindian warfare and slave raiding too.

The British side

The role of the indigenous did not change with the British takeover, and the Amerindian bargaining position only grew stronger. Initially, however, the Amerindians retreated into the interior, seeing that a different power had taken over. This move resulted from the inexperience of the British, who were unaware of the value of the alliance and hence did not provide the customary presents.⁹⁸

This situation would change quickly enough: after the British took over for the second time in 1803, after a one-year intermezzo, they devised an elaborate Amerindian policy. Firstly, they retained the postholder system but revised it to address its weaknesses. An important step was to increase

⁹⁴ Director-General to WIC, 4 October 1785, no. 612 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 38.

⁹⁵ Storm van 's Gravesande to WIC, 22 June 1750, no. 66 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 2: 67.

⁹⁶ Extracts from the government journal, 30 December 1785, no. 615 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 40.

⁹⁷ Extracts from the government journal, 2 October 1785, 7 October 1785, 11 October 1785, 8 December 1785, no. 615 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 40.

⁹⁸ Anonymous memorial, (?1802), no. 686 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 176-177.

the postholders' salaries, as the British recognised that low-paid officials were more prone to abuse their position. While a postholder made 192 guilders per year under the Dutch, in the British period this increased to 1,200 guilders for a free coloured postholder and 2,200 guilders in the appointment of a Lieutenant Moore in 1803.⁹⁹ While the late eighteenth century saw considerable inflation, it would only explain a doubling or at best tripling of the salary, not an increase of 1,000 per cent.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, the instructions for postholders were augmented to improve the unstable situation under the Dutch. Firstly, postholders were to summon the Amerindians from time to time and dispense a few small gifts, to maintain the friendship.¹⁰¹ In addition, when a new postholder was appointed, he would be introduced to the Amerindians and the rules would be clearly laid out for all: the postholder could not demand unpaid labour from the Amerindians or confiscate the goods they carried from trading with the colonists. Several other stipulations highlighted some of the abuses that had taken place before. For example, article 12 stated: "He shall not take or appropriate to himself the property of the Indians, much less their wives and children, on pretence of their being indebted to him, even in case of an Indian having had goods from him on credit, and refusing to pay for the same. The loss arising there-from to be for the Postholder."

This article was a clear indication that the rights of the Amerindians needed to be protected against abuse, and indeed the British appointed several "Protectors of the Indians". The indigenous could voice any complaints they might have with their Protector, and the latter was to act as a mediator for any agreements postholders might make with the Amerindians. For example, if the postholder wanted to hire indigenous workers for wood cutting, fishing or paddling, the Protector would check whether this agreement was voluntary and if the Amerindians received proper payment. Furthermore, if the postholder wanted to marry an indigenous woman, the Protector had to confirm that she was not already

⁹⁹ Extract from Register of Meetings of the Ten, 26 March 1773, no. 514 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 4: 107-108; Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 31 October 1803, no. 682 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 183; Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 1 May 1804, no. 684 in *ibid.*: 185.

¹⁰⁰ The inflation calculator at www.measuringworth.com (accessed 24 May 2015) states that 192 pounds in 1773 (it does not convert guilders) was worth 419 pounds in 1804. The value of pounds to guilders was around 12 guilders during this entire period and thus cannot suffice as an explanation.

¹⁰¹ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 22 February 1803, no. 680 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 179-181.

engaged to another man, and had to obtain consent from her parents. If in doubt, the Protector could refuse their union.¹⁰²

While the Protectors (apparently two in Essequibo and two in Demerara) could not control everything that happened at the posts, they also had an important function in dispensing gifts. The list in Appendix 1.2 gives an idea of the variety of goods ordered for the Amerindians. Extending the Dutch tradition, the British engaged in an annual distribution of such presents, to continually renew their bond with the Amerindians. However, as the colonists discovered, there was a disadvantage to holding a specific gift-giving day, namely that some Amerindians might miss it and thus feel offended.¹⁰³

A bigger problem for the colonists was that the amount of money spent on gifts skyrocketed. In some years the Protectors advanced more than 15,000 guilders in presents.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the colonists deemed the practice worthwhile. When in 1812 a decision was made to limit the annual budget for Amerindian gifts to 20,000 guilders, one of the Financial Representatives found a loophole by stating that it was not decided *when* this limit should be attained. In an argument to the Court of Policy, he stated that the maximum of 20,000 guilders should be seen as a lofty goal for the future, rather than an actual limit.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, in the previous years, spending greatly exceeded that threshold. In 1811 a total of 82,250 guilders (or 6,904 pounds sterling) was accounted for, and in 1812 it was 61,348 (or 5,112 pounds sterling) even though further expenses were made afterwards.¹⁰⁶ The fact that these sums had spiralled out of control only underlines the importance of the Amerindians.

Yet relations were not always smooth, as the issue in 1810 with the Carib leader Manariwan (or Manerwan/Manerwa) illustrates. When the British took over in 1803, trade in “red slaves” was still allowed, as long as they came from groups the Amerindians considered slaves—that is to say, the

¹⁰² Instruction for the Postholders with the Indians in Essequibo and Demerary, 15 May 1803, inclosed in no. 717 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 216-17.

¹⁰³ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 29 May 1804, no. 685 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 185

¹⁰⁴ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 30 April 1805, no. 689 in *ibid.*, 187.

¹⁰⁵ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo and Financial Representatives, 20 November 1812, no. 713 *ibid.*, 202.

¹⁰⁶ Acting Governor Codd to Earl Bathurst, 26 September 1813, no. 717 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 216.

ones living in the interior.¹⁰⁷ However, the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 put a stop to this traffic. The prohibition was a concern for Manariwan, a “King, or Chief” of one of the Carib groups, who had taken many captives in a recent war. Initially Manariwan had sent an envoy to the British, hoping to acquire goods in exchange for not killing or selling his prisoners. Yet his envoy was sent away, as the British were not sure of the man’s status and did not take him seriously. Subsequently, Manariwan himself came to the capital with a group of followers including “a suite of musicians and other attendants”. After negotiations with the Court of Policy, it was agreed that Manariwan would keep his prisoners as domestic slaves, and receive “such articles as he had demanded.”¹⁰⁸

The British were unsure of their case, however, and sent out informants to assess “the real strength” of Manariwan and to see whether he was really as important as he claimed to be (and it was later established that he was).¹⁰⁹ The matter simmered on, for in 1812 Manariwan came back with three hundred men, demanding his annual tribute—indeed, tribute seems a better term than presents here. He brought several leaders of smaller Amerindian groups, to show that they were on friendly terms and no longer subject to enslavement. The new British governor, Hugh Lyle Carmichael, did not consider himself bound to honour an agreement made by his predecessor yet was willing to give in on this occasion. Problematically, there were not enough goods in the warehouse to dispense, so the governor scrambled together what he could, apparently resulting in a satisfactory solution for both parties. However, soon afterwards five Arawak leaders came down as well, demanding to be treated in the same way. Otherwise, they threatened, they would start a war and sell their prisoners. The governor was less forthcoming this time, dissuading them from waging war and promising presents in the future for “good behaviour”.¹¹⁰

The British Amerindian policy thus aimed at preserving friendly relations at almost all costs. Only the acting governor Codd seemed to have really disagreed, as he wrote in 1813: “It is, however, obvious that our Colonies are tributaries to the Indians; whilst the proper system of policy would be to

¹⁰⁷ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 22 February 1803, no. 680 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 179-181.

¹⁰⁸ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 29 October 1810, no. 701 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 194-95.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.; Questions and answers by acting governor Codd to D. van Sirtema, 30 August 1813, enclosed in no. 713 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 215.

¹¹⁰ Extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 2 July 1812, no. 712 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 199-200; Governor Carmichael to Earl Bathurst, 18 January 1813, no. 714 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 203.

make them allies, looking to us for protection; and whilst living within our territories, affording them such aid as we might conceive they deserve, the quantity of rum and sugar issued tending to render them almost useless; for my part, I think the whole present Indian system requires to be reconsidered.”¹¹¹

As an alternative, to lessen the financial burden, Codd proposed to adopt a system modelled on the Spanish. In his view, the Amerindians should be brought together in larger communities where they would learn to rear cattle, in order to sell it to the colonists. Furthermore, he deemed instruction in dress and social life necessary, especially to reduce the vice of drunkenness “to which they are much attached.”¹¹² However, his propositions were not heard, and the gift-giving system continued. Only in 1831 did the system change, shifting to triennial presents, while in 1838 it came to a complete stop. As slavery had been abolished in 1833, the necessity of maintaining an alliance had vanished. There was no longer any need for trackers or bounty hunters. The result was that the Amerindians retreated back into the interior, away from the plantation society.¹¹³

Conclusion

The Guiana borderland, ranging from the Orinoco to the Essequibo River, presents a clear case of imperial entanglement. This contact zone was not just a meeting place of two empires, but affected the lives of many people in between. Among them were the different Amerindian groups who saw their living space curtailed, and runaway African slaves who fled from the Dutch to the Spanish in the hope of attaining freedom.

Viewing the borderland from different angles reveals the divergent perspectives from the groups involved. For the Spanish, the borderland was primarily an unruly area that had to be brought under control, and the missionary system was the obvious way to accomplish this goal. During the seventeenth century the Spanish presence was precarious. Spanish Guayana was at the fringes of the empire without proper means of defence against an overwhelming number of potential enemies, including the Dutch,

¹¹¹ Acting governor Codd to Earl of Bathurst, 26 September 1813, no. 717 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 216.

¹¹² Acting governor Codd to Earl of Bathurst, 6 September 1813, no. 716 in BGBB, BC app. vol. 5: 214-15.

¹¹³ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 201.

the English, the French and the Caribs. While the peace treaty with the Dutch in 1648 brought some repose, the resistance of the Caribs and other indigenous groups against the missionary encroachment remained strong. Only during the eighteenth century—with the Bourbon increase in means and manpower—did the Spanish manage to gradually subdue the borderland.

However, the borderland was not just an area of potential trouble for the Spanish, it also offered opportunities. In fact, as Tamar Herzog has explained, the establishment of villages and control over its inhabitants was a way of empire building. Increasing the Spanish presence in the borderland could be a way of establishing claims to the territory, as indeed happened during the border dispute that would arise in the nineteenth century.

The Spanish approach to the borderland was broad: it included alliances with Amerindian groups, trade with the Dutch and harbouring slave refugees coming from the Dutch side. It is in the relations with the Dutch that we find the entanglement most evident. During most of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the two colonising powers were not strong enough to survive alone, but not weak enough to be pushed out by the other. Therefore, an uneasy balance was struck. The Spanish supplied draft animals to the Dutch and received provisions in return. At this point, Dutch runaway slaves were sometimes returned, a practice that changed in 1750 when runaways could receive freedom upon converting to Catholicism. To what extent this happened remained unclear, however. Furthermore, the African side is notably absent from the chapter, because it forms a substantial part of the discussion on slavery in Chapter 3.

The Dutch relied on the borderland for different reasons, initially seeing it more as an opportunity than a threat. Dutch traders originally came to trade with the Amerindians, and trade formed the backbone of the seventeenth-century colonisation. Dutch traders, Amerindians and Africans went deep into the borderland to exchange goods or procure “red slaves”. Especially the non-European intermediaries deserve further study, as they present a fascinating example of cross-cultural cooperation. At present, however, we only know that the borderland trade was gradually obstructed by the increasing Spanish presence and the decreasing focus on trade. Annatto dye was replaced as dominant export product by sugar, while the demand for indigenous slaves remained. The latter generally ended up as domestic slaves, concubines or worked in provisioning.

As the Dutch plantation economy developed after 1750, the borderland turned into a liability for the planters. The growing number of enslaved Africans meant a higher incidence of marronage, which was accelerated by the sanctuary the Spanish proclaimed in 1750. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the escape route of the borderland functioned as a safety valve for the Dutch slavery system. Because of the existence of a possible way out, the likelihood of violent resistance was reduced.

Indeed, after 1750 the entanglement of the borderland became more pronounced. As Amerindians, especially Carib groups, felt threatened by the Spanish missionaries, they moved closer to the Dutch, who eagerly sought their help. Soliciting the help of the Amerindians was the only viable way for the Dutch to try and control the access to the borderland. Furthermore, the Amerindian commandos made sure that maroon societies could not develop to the extent that they would become a threat to the plantation society, like in Suriname. Consequently, the bargaining power of the Amerindians increased with the growth of the slavery system. The other side of the coin, however, was that as soon as slavery was abolished by the British, the basis for the alliance with the Amerindians collapsed.

At that point, in the early nineteenth century, the borderland was also turned into a “bordered land”. The Dutch and Spanish had never really tried to establish clear boundaries; they had only formulated claims. These claims could overlap with regard to the borderland, but were never clearly articulated and subject to change over time as well. Therefore, claim making was only a tacit influence in the borderland, which came to the fore only when the British tried to draw clear borders after the Schomburgk expedition was sent out in 1825. Compared to North America, the transition to “bordered lands” came late in the Guiana region. The reason is most likely the relative absence of direct conflict and competition between the two colonial powers. While the Spanish occasionally raided Dutch posts, the eighteenth century did not witness open warfare. In contrast, on the North American mainland the Seven Years’ War (also called the French and Indian War) and the War of American Independence brought the British, the French, the Spanish and American revolutionaries into direct conflict. Consequently, the territorial changes were substantial, such as the repeated exchange of Florida between the British and the Spanish, the division of New France and the Louisiana Purchase – as well as the gradual appropriation of Native American lands.

The Guiana borderland, then, remained a zone of entanglement for centuries because none of the actors involved attained enough power to control the others. Therefore, the borderland fits the description of “masked condominia” neatly, for we can clearly observe the mechanisms of power sharing. Both the Spanish and the Dutch relied on Amerindian groups to support their colonisation projects, while the Amerindians relied on the Europeans as well. Some groups might have found protection in the Spanish villages against inter-Amerindian warfare, while others could look towards the Dutch as a source of status-enhancing goods and guns. For the Dutch, the Amerindians increasingly became the pillars of the survival of their colonial society.

The second central element of this thesis—improvisation—also occupies a vital place in the background. While metropolitan influence is not to be dismissed, many of the borderland interactions were the result of improvisation by local actors. Outside developments like the 1648 peace treaty between Spain and the Dutch Republic or the Bourbon reforms that reinvigorated Spanish empire building were clearly important. And the West India Company repeatedly advised colonists to foster friendships with the indigenous, but it did not get more elaborate than that. The directors had little knowledge about the intricacies of the borderland geography or about the delicate cross-cultural brokerage required to establish alliances with Carib, Arawak or Akawaio groups. Neither were attempts to solve problems at the level of European diplomacy effective, as testified by the “Great Remonstrances” of 1759 and 1769, which yielded nothing.

In the end, interactions like trade between the Spanish and the Dutch depended to a large extent on the interpretations of individual agents such as colonial administrators. They could either choose a hard line in strictly enforcing the rules against smuggling, or condone transactions that were mutually beneficial. Improvisation is also visible in the way the Dutch yielded to the demands of their Amerindian allies. Despite prohibitions on disseminating guns, the Amerindian soldiers successfully received them on multiple occasions. And expenses for gifts, perhaps even to be considered as “tribute”, continued to increase throughout the century. The means provided by the Company were insufficient, so the colonial administrators found other ways satisfy the Amerindian demands, for example by using local taxes to buy extra goods on the market and through the generous provision of rum from Company plantations.

Political control in this area, on the fringes of empire, was clearly a precarious issue and subject to continuous improvisation by individuals. The next chapter takes a closer look at such processes of negotiation within the Dutch colonial administration to show how authority was contested at all levels of politics: in the colonies themselves, in the Dutch Republic between the various WIC Chambers, and at the international level, leading to several foreign takeovers.

Appendix 1.1. Table of the missions of the Reverend Father Capuchins of Catalonia of the Province of Guiana, 1788

	<i>Pueblos</i>	<i>Naciones</i>	<i>Indios existentes</i>
1	Caroni	Guayanos y Guycas	764
2	Incita	Aruaca y Guacas	324
3	Sta Ana	Aruaca y Guarauno	457
4	Calvario	Salibas y Guaraunos	444
5	Marocure	Caribes	550
6	Caruani	Caribes	298
7	Sn Antonio	Guayanos	589
8	Guri	Caribes	235
9	Puétpa	Guayanos y Guaraunos	278
10	Sta. Clara	Guaycas	191
11	Sn. Seraphin	Guaycas	242
12	Bocas	Guaycas	618
13	Sta. Magdalena	Guaycas	138
14	Barceloneta	Barinagotas	254
15	Ayma	Guaycas	723
16	Arechica	Guaycas	177
17	Divina Pastora	Guayanos	431
18	Guaceypati	Caribes	706
19	Topoquen	Caribes	435
20	Angel Custodio	Guayanos	232
21	Cura	Guaycas	582
22	Canapo	Caribes	761
23	Miámo	Caribes	762
24	Cumamo	Caribes	712
25	Palmar	Caribes y Guayanos	589
26	Sta. Maria	Guayanos y Panacáyos	491
27	Cupapuy	Guayanos	715
28	Ipata	Espanoles	477
29	Alta Gracia	Guayanos	837
	<i>Total</i>		<i>14,012</i>

Source: Overview sent by Rev. Father Hermenegildo de Vich to Father Cervera, 31 August 1788, no. 627 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 69.

Appendix 1.2: List of goods ordered for 1,000 Amerindians (1803)

<i>Amount</i>	<i>Product</i>
18	Bucks' cotton (pieces) [Buck is another word for Amerindian]
18	checks (pieces)
18	hats with lace bands
18	sticks like those used by the drum-major in Europe
500	Guns
2,000	Razors
1,500	lbs powder
2,000	wooden flint boxes
2,000	guns caps
2,000	pairs scissors
2,000	Jews' harps
6,000	bush knives
2,000	looking glasses
12,000	assorted fish-hooks
12,000	ells salemporis
50,000	Needles
50,000	Pins
2,000	coarse combs
10,000	beads of all sorts and colours
12,000	Flints
4,000	lbs assorted shot
2,000	Bucks' axes
2,000	cutlasses with yellow handles
48	cassava plates
1,500	thimbles
1,000	round hats
36	chequered shirts
18	silver circular collars, engraved with the lion, bearing the inscription "Batavion Republic of Essequibo and Demerary" around and above it, with the necessary national ribbon
18	cases claret, of 18 bottles in each case
18	cases gin, of 6 flasks in each case
1,000	fish harpoons, from 4 to 5 inches long, as per annexed design
1,000	Ditto

Source: Minutes of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 22 February 1803, no. 679
in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 180.

2 The political arena

Strong words, weak institutions and the need for negotiation

“What would you do with your handful of people, against 40,000 negroes which we can bring here at all times, most of whom are already prepared and (...) who could then cut you and your 80 soldiers to [Syrup] in case of the least resistance, if you would deny us the access to the councillors?”¹ It was late in the evening in early September 1787 in Demerara and Lieutenant Carel Ernest von Lasberg was having a strange meeting indeed. His conversation partners were Maurits Balthasar Hartsinck and his brother Cornelis, two prominent Demerara planters, who had come to his house and apparently planned to overthrow the colony’s government.

The lieutenant found himself amidst a larger conflict between the colonists and the WIC over the division of power in the local Council of Policy. As the WIC directors in the metropolis had little idea of what was going on in the colonies, the Council of Policy was the place where the majority of colonial administration was formulated, typically in an ad-hoc and improvised fashion. Consequently, the division of seats between Company officials and planter representatives was a key issue for the colonists.

Throughout the eighteenth century the number of “civil councillors” increased to four, equal to the number of WIC officials. However, in 1784 the Company had tried to shift the balance in its favour. Civil councillors would henceforth be appointed from above, rather than be nominated from below, and their number would be reduced to three, making the Company dominant again. In the subsequent years the resentment against this decision increased, involving large-scale petitions and a refusal to pay colonial taxes. By 1787 tensions had reached boiling point. A group of planters considered the new Council, filled by top-down appointments, an

¹ TNA, CO 116/61, f.217-218. Original quotation: “[W]at wilt gij doen met uw handje vol volk, teegens 40000 Negers die wij alle oogenblikken gewapend kunnen hier brengen, zijnde meest alle reeds in gereedheid, en aan wiens hooft, wij ons met een aanzienelijk getal blanken zullen stellen, die dan u en uw 80 zoldaten bij de minsten tegenweer tot sir(...) kappen, indien gij ons de toegang tot de Raeden niet wilde openen”.

illegitimate form of government. To end this “tyranny”, they wanted to have the councillors replaced—peacefully if possible, through force if necessary.

Hence, lieutenant Lasberg found himself approached by the brothers Hartsinck, who were desperate to gain his support. First they had tried to convince him through reasoning, but when their attempts proved unsuccessful they had resorted to threats. And while they wildly exaggerated the number of enslaved Africans they could mobilise, the threat of armed resistance was not to be dismissed lightly: the military garrison was small, the slave population large, and the planters angry. The administration by the WIC had never been very effective, but by 1787 the opposition had become so great that the administrative system was on the brink of collapse.

When the two planters had come to the lieutenant’s house they had indeed been perfectly honest in their intentions. Claiming to speak for the majority of the planters, they explained their aim of overthrowing Demerara’s Council of Policy, by forcing the Councillors to step down or perhaps even take them prisoner. However, to do so, they wanted Lasberg’s help. The military would have to take sides, and the two planters claimed to have the support of Lasberg’s superior, although the lieutenant doubted this.² So the Hartsincks seemed to put the fate of the colony in the hands of the young lieutenant: would he order his soldiers to stand aside and allow the coup, or would he command them to intervene and shoot?

The lieutenant hesitated. Part of him sympathised with the revolutionary reasoning. Maurits Balthasar Hartsinck, one of the dissenters’ leaders, made a compelling case for the governor being a tyrant and the Council of Policy being plainly unconstitutional.³ Yet even though Lasberg was willing to concede that the Council was formed illegally, he had doubts about the actions that would follow from this conclusion. Since he had taken an oath to serve the WIC and a duty to protect civilians, Lasberg declared he would not allow any bloodshed. For Hartsinck this hesitation was an opening and he jumped on the opportunity: if the lieutenant did not have any *principal*

² This was captain Drebber, who died shortly after this event. There are no indications that he indeed would have supported the dissenting planters.

³ The leader was Bernhard Albinus (former Councillor), and together with three others, namely Willem August Sirtema, Baron van Grovestins (who would later become deputy and governor), Bartholomeus van den Santheuvel (who formerly ran a mortgage investment fund, see Chapter four) and Hermanus Jonas. Officially the title was “Director-General” instead of “governor”, yet in practice latter word was used frequently in the material concerning this event. TNA, CO 116/61, f.220-358, esp. reply to L’Espinasse, 19-9-1787, f.261-262.

objections to the coup, Hartsinck reasoned, they were now just negotiating practicalities.

Subsequently, several scenarios were presented to allow Lasberg to look away with a clean conscience. The revolutionaries could, for example, stage fake slave revolts in remote parts of the colony, drawing all the soldiers away from the government centre. Alternatively, if the officers would give their men double rations of rum, the revolutionaries would act when everyone was drunk. A third option was to kidnap the governor, put him on a ship and send him out of the colony, thereby removing the only legitimate authority left to issue military orders. In the subsequent state of anarchy the change of government could be easily accomplished. Yet all of this was too radical for the lieutenant. He finally made up his mind, and declared he would fulfil his military duty. Attempts to bribe him with a piece of land and slaves did not change his mind, and when Hartsinck resorted, as we just saw, to threats, Lasberg did not give in either. He replied by saying he would just order that the ringleaders be shot, after which the rest would probably back down quickly. So while he had flirted with the idea of supporting the dissenters, in the end Lasberg's sense of duty prevailed. The revolutionaries would have to manage without the military.⁴

We will never know what would have happened if Lasberg had chosen to defect, but the above story reveals that a violent overthrow of the colonial government was a real possibility in this divided colony.⁵ Rivalry occurred on multiple levels, not just within Demerara. Officials in Essequibo and Demerara sometimes came into conflict with each other, just as the Amsterdam and Zealand Chambers of the WIC argued over the administration of the two colonies. And the colonies also became involved in international rivalry, as they were occupied by both the British and the French during the Fourth-Anglo Dutch War (1780-1784) and again by the British in 1796-1802 and 1803, during the French and Napoleonic Wars. The end of the century in particular proved a hectic period in which the two colonies were divided between pro-French and pro-British factions, which was ultimately resolved by the British takeover. Indeed, after 1803 the

⁴ Declaration Lasberg, 5-1-1788, TNA, CO 116/61, f.216-219.

⁵ As will be discussed in more detail below, Essequibo and Demerara were officially just one colony, termed "Essequibo and dependent rivers". However, since Demerara developed and received its own Council in 1773, I prefer to speak of two colonies.

colonies would remain in British hands, and in 1814 they were officially ceded by the Netherlands to Great Britain.

Nevertheless, the political history of the two colonies involved more than just conflict, and in fact depended on continuous negotiation. WIC and civil councillors cooperated to improvise solutions to emerging problems, and violence was shunned. Indeed, the colonists typically chose other means to voice their protests and demands. This negotiation could take various forms, such as petitioning, defying Company regulations or refusing to pay taxes. In fact, in the end it was through bargaining rather than bloodshed that the colonists had their despised councillors replaced.

This chapter, then, looks at how rivalry and negotiation influenced the political domain at the different levels, from the local to the international. Arguing that a multi-level approach is needed to understand colonial governance, it shows that political control over the colonies was often an improvised affair. The chapter then proceeds chronologically in five parts, starting with a discussion of the concept of negotiated authorities. Subsequently, it analyses the process of negotiation and rivalry pertaining to the colonies' administration, both in the metropolis and Essequibo and Demerara themselves. Thirdly, it outlines the effect of the foreign takeovers on the colonies in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), before delving into the political issues that inspired the near-revolution described above. Finally, the transition to British rule in 1796 will be investigated in the light of revolutionary developments occurring at the time.

Negotiated authorities

Negotiation is a central concept to politics and despite the existence of labels like "absolutism", kings could not simply impose their wishes on their subjects and were forced to bargain with citizens, town councils and regional assemblies.⁶ The importance of negotiation is well-known by scholars of the Spanish monarchy, and in 1994 Jack Greene made an important contribution to the Anglophone literature with the articulation of the concept of "negotiated authorities", applying it to the colonial setting as well.⁷ He

⁶ Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁷ Irigoin and Grafe, "Bargaining for Absolutism," 177-182; Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, 13, 219; Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005 [1973]); Jack P. Greene,

argued that scholars have tended to “read history backwards” and project the power of the modern nation state onto the early modern colonial projects. Most states lacked the means to effectively instate top-down policies, so bargaining was the result. However, the traditional focus on the metropolis obscures these processes, so we need to look at the colonial level. Greene also remarks that in relations between masters and slaves, or colonisers and indigenous, power was never equal and authority was always negotiated.⁸

Indeed, bargaining was the logical outcome of the way in which colonies were established. Greene observed two phases in this colonisation process. First, since European states lacked the means to finance the early colonial projects, they farmed out colonial governance to private agents or chartered companies. The result was the creation of *patroonschappen*, *donarios*, *seigneuries* or proprietors. Yet this privatised colonisation process placed a large amount of power in the hands of local individuals and groups. In the second phase such groups tried to assert their political rights vis-à-vis the metropolis, seeking protection of private property, government by consent and protection in times of war. In this process a substantial amount of colonial autonomy was established. For the Spanish empire this autonomy was reflected in the famous phrase “*obedezco, pero no cumplo*”, translated as “I obey but do not comply”.⁹ In other words, an official could postpone implementation of royal directives if he considered it harmful to local conditions. This decentralised source of authority, instead of hindering effective administration, actually improved imperial governance. In fact, the Spanish empire is best seen as a “stakeholder empire” in which local elites and merchants were co-opted and who, for instance through monetary transfers between creditor and debtor regions, eased out many of the difficulties of running the empire.¹⁰

Yet processes of negotiation comprised more than just official communication and local interpretations of metropolitan rules, as was discussed in a 2002 volume on “negotiated empires”.¹¹ The various authors

Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994).

⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

⁹ Ibid., 12-18; Lauren A. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 24; Irigoin and Grafe, “Bargaining for Absolutism,” 179.

¹⁰ Grafe and Irigoin, “Stakeholder Empire”.

¹¹ Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820* (London: Routledge, 2002).

emphasised that colonists had a wide array of instruments at their disposal to voice their opinion about colonial policy. These means ranged from the informal to formal and from peaceful to violent. The examples include petitioning, tax evasion and evading trade restrictions, but also outright revolt.¹²

Unfortunately, the negotiation concept has often remained restricted to notions of centre and periphery. In this view, actors in a dependent periphery used negotiation to gain some independence from the metropolis.¹³ However, we should be careful not to place too much emphasis on the connection with the metropolis.

If we acknowledge that the most important decisions were often made at the colonial level, then we can hardly call it peripheral. Conniving at illegal trade, forming alliances with Amerindians and securing supplies from foreign powers, for example, all had a strong influence on the colonial development of Essequibo and Demerara. These actions were the result of improvisation by local actors, who thereby, at such times, placed themselves at the centre of colonial policy.

An alternative to narratives of centres and peripheries is to consider early modern states and empires as polycentric and full of overlapping jurisdictions. Rather than seeing the king as centre of authority, historians increasingly note the multiplicity of imperial centres and influence that other groups and institutions had on governance, including the church, the Inquisition, municipal and colonial councils, viceroys, governors, and judges. Francisco Bethencourt, discussing the make-up of the Portuguese empire, coined the term “nebula of power” to describe this “permanent yet unstable balance among local, regional, and central crown agencies, competing with each other but allowing royal tutelage of the system.”¹⁴ And

¹² A.J.R. Russell-Wood, “Center and Peripheries in the Luso-Brazilian World, 1500-1808,” in *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2002); J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 2006) 310-312.

¹³ Amy Turner Bushnell, “Gates, Patterns, and Peripheries. The Field of Frontier Latin America,” in Daniels and Kennedy, *Negotiated Empires*; Amy Turner Bushnell and Jack P. Greene, “Peripheries, Centers, and the Construction of Early Modern American Empires. An Introduction,” in *ibid.*; Jack P. Greene, “Transatlantic Colonization and the Redefinition of Empire in the Early Modern Era: The British-American Experience,” in *ibid.*; Lyman L. Johnson and Susan M. Socolow, “Colonial Centers, Colonial Peripheries, and the Economic Agency of the Spanish State,” in *ibid.*

¹⁴ Francisco Bethencourt, “Political Configurations and Local Powers,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 199.

while Bethencourt tailored his concept to the Portuguese empire, others have outlined the polycentric nature for the Spanish case as well.¹⁵ In fact, the juridical complexity of the Iberian empires undergirded their stability, as overlapping authorities—colonial and central, religious and secular—balanced each other out.¹⁶

Although the Dutch Atlantic empire was, after the loss of Brazil in 1654, perhaps too small to be called polycentric, it was also characterised by similar overlapping authorities. Whether we should speak of “legal pluralism” or overlapping legal pluralities is not of concern here, for Lauren Benton’s idea of overlapping “jurisdictions” suffices.¹⁷ She defined jurisdiction as the “power to regulate and administer sanctions over particular actions or people, including groups defined by personal status, territorial boundaries, and corporate membership”.¹⁸ In the Dutch case the most important tensions were between jurisdictions of the WIC and the States-General (where appeals of the colonial court were heard), between the councils in the two colonies, and between the colonial councils and the Company directors.¹⁹

Therefore, this chapter studies the political process as a two-way street, incorporating both European developments and local agency, to arrive at a more nuanced picture than the centre-periphery model would predict. The

¹⁵ Regina Grafe, “Polycentric States: The Spanish Reigns and the “Failures” of Mercantilism,” in *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and its Empire*, ed. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Pedro Cardim et al., “Polycentric Monarchies: How Did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?,” in *Polycentric Monarchies: How did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?*, ed. Pedro Cardim et al. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Lauren A. Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 33.

¹⁷ Some authors employ the term “legal pluralism”, while others have objections to it. For some of the discussions, see: Paul Halliday, “Laws’ Histories: Pluralisms, Pluralities, Diversity,” in Benton and Ross, *Legal Pluralism*, 262, 273; Richard J. Ross and Philip J. Stern, “Reconstructing Early Modern Notions of Legal Pluralism,” in *ibid.*; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, “Rules of Law, Politics of Empire,” in *ibid.*

¹⁸ Lauren A. Benton and Richard Jeffrey Ross, “Empires and Legal Pluralism: Jurisdiction, Sovereignty, and Political Imagination in the Early Modern World,” in Benton and Ross, *Legal Pluralism*.

¹⁹ For interesting views on companies as corporations, see: Philip J. Stern, ““Bundles of Hyphens”: Corporations as Legal Communities in the Early Modern British Empire,” in Benton and Ross, *Legal Pluralism*; Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); William A. Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and Local in Seventeenth-Century English History,” *Itinerario*, no. 3 (2015).

first place to investigate will be the metropolis, to show how conflicts within the WIC affected the colonies.

Internal institutional bickering (1750-1780)

The Dutch Republic's fragmented nature, with sovereignty ultimately residing in the individual provinces rather than with the States-General, had a strong influence on the WIC administration. Since the WIC was also divided into provincial chambers, the political bickering at the governmental level found its way into Company governance as well. Amsterdam and Zeeland, the two provinces most dependent on maritime trade, vied with each other for commercial success, to the detriment of the colonies. A continuous tension existed regarding the exclusive trading rights claimed by Zeeland, and Amsterdam, which bore the brunt of the financial expenses both within the Company and the Republic.²⁰

The first ventures to the Guiana coast had been made in the late sixteenth century by private traders, before the establishment of the WIC in 1621. Essequibo subsequently became a Company colony, but proved unprofitable. When in 1632 plans to abandon it were voiced, the Zeeland Chamber desired to keep the colony under its special care, provided it would have exclusive trading rights. This issue was not officially resolved, but in practice Zeeland became the dominant actor with regard to Essequibo. In 1658, when the financial burden became too great, the Zeeland Chamber transferred its authority to the three towns of Middleburgh, Veere and Flushing. This transfer was not successful either, so in 1670 Zeeland's WIC Chamber took responsibility again—which was based on the informal acquiescence of the other chambers, rather than a formal arrangement.²¹

The issue of colonial authority only became pressing when the plantation sector started to develop in the eighteenth century and shipping connections became both more profitable and more important for the colony's survival. Therefore, in 1750, the Assembly of Ten aimed to encourage private trade and urged all Chambers to stimulate their merchants to sail to Essequibo. The Zeeland Chamber, still claiming exclusive trading rights was heavily opposed to this move and immediately forbade the Commander in Essequibo

²⁰ Den Heijer, "Dutch West India Company," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 114; Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel, *Nederland 1780-1914: Staat, instituties en economische ontwikkeling* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2000) 52.

²¹ Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 14-16, 29; Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 8-25.

from allowing any ships that did not carry a special permit from the Zealand Chamber.²² This ban was the beginning of a dispute between Amsterdam and Zealand that dragged on for decades. Amsterdam, with its large mercantile fleet, wanted free trade for all Dutch citizens, while Zealand held on to its claim, for fear of being outcompeted.²³

Here we find a clash between the unwritten rights claimed by Zealand, and the formal-legalistic interpretation of Amsterdam. Zealand claimed its administration over Essequibo (and dependent rivers), after the demise of the first WIC in 1674, was transferred to the second WIC, because existing arrangements were kept intact. Amsterdam, on the other hand, noted that the Company had never formally granted the colony to Zealand and that the charter of the second WIC never mentioned any exclusive rights for Zealand.²⁴

In the 1750s the two parties engaged in long but fruitless negotiations and afterwards Amsterdam let the issue rest until 1765. By then the situation had changed dramatically and the region was no longer a money devouring backwater. The plantation sector was booming, made possible by the huge sums of credit that Amsterdam investors had lent to new planters (see Chapter 5). Moreover, much of this expansion had taken place in neighbouring Demerara, which was by then still a dependency of Essequibo. Amsterdam favoured splitting the two, which would likely make Demerara a colony open to all Dutch traders. Zealand, in contrast, remained strict in referring to “Essequibo and dependent rivers”, to keep Demerara within its self-proclaimed exclusive sphere. Yet no solution was found and only after extensive lobbying did both parties agree to arbitrage by the Prince of Orange.²⁵

On 25 October 1770 the Prince made his decision, which was a compromise: he denied any exclusive trading rights to the Zealand Chamber, but gave it the right to allocate the first sixteen permits to sail to the colonies each year. If fewer than sixteen ships were outfitted, as was usually the case, other merchants could apply. However, their ships would have to load and unload in Zealand, supporting the provincial economy, much to the dismay of Amsterdam. This solution did not satisfy anyone, so

²² Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1:144.

²³ Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de wilde kust in Zuid-America* (Amsterdam: Gerrit Tielenburg, 1770) 228-256.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 228-256.

²⁵ Den Heijer, “Dutch West India Interest,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 171-174.

the ruling was revised in 1772. Again, it was far from straightforward: only the Zealand Chamber was allowed to issue permits during the first half of the year, afterwards the other Chambers could do so as well, provided they loaded and unloaded in Zealand. Moreover, the first nine ships from Zealand would be allowed to load cargo in the colonies first, as long as they arrived there before November.²⁶

While the issue of shipping access was for the moment put to rest by this ruling, the rivalry between Amsterdam and Zealand continued to manifest itself in other areas, particularly the administrative structure. By the late 1760s the number of plantations in Demerara was more than double that of Essequibo (see Table 2.1). Yet as Essequibo was still institutionally dominant, some institutional changes were required. As said above, Amsterdam wanted to split the two colonies, while Zealand preferred to keep the overarching structure intact and only dig a canal for communication. Typical of this institutional deadlock, neither proposal was enacted. Essequibo remained the dominant colony, where the Director-General resided, the highest authority over the combined rivers. The highest authority in Demerara, the Commander, was subject to the Director-General. While lower court cases could be processed in Demerara, any appeals or cases involving more than 150 guilders were to be brought before the Council of Justice in Essequibo.²⁷ Thus, the old-fashioned institutional structure was retained because no agreement could be reached regarding a more appropriate structure.

²⁶ NL-HaNA, States-General (hereafter S-G), 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3827, at 40-42.

²⁷ Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 223.

Table 2.1: Number of plantations in Essequibo and Demerara, 1716-1803

<i>Year</i>	<i>Essequibo</i>	<i>Demerara</i>	<i>Total</i>
1716	20		20
1735	30		30
1762	68	93	161
1766	70	121	191
1767	69	141	210
1768	84	160	244
1769	92	206	298
1777	118		
1779	129		
1780	140	240	380
1788		287	
1795		284	
1798	111-153	320	431-473
1800			490

Source: see footnote.²⁸

This continued imbalance between Essequibo and Demerara was impractical, yet a more fundamental problem persisted: the government of the colonies was effectively still based upon a seventeenth century model of Company exploitation. Running Company plantations and trading with Amerindians were no longer the main activities in the colonies, yet the Council of Policy, ruling both rivers, still looked more like a body of pioneers than one of professional administrators. Besides the Director-General, Demerara's Commander and the Secretary, the Council consisted of Essequibo's military commandant and the managers of the three WIC plantations.²⁹ Especially the latter three had little to do with the general affairs of the colonies. While this structure made sense in the seventeenth

²⁸ Winston F. McGowan, "The French Revolutionary period in Demerara-Essequibo, 1793-1802," *History Gazette* (1993) 18; Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 258-60; Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 398-400; Van der Oest, "Forgotten Colonies," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 329; *Rekening en verantwoording van de kolonie-ongelden van Essequibo in de vorm van een grootboek; met achterin 3 losse lijsten van achterstallige ongelde, over het jaar 1777*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 189; "Generaale staat van de Rivier Demerary, en onderhoorige districten over het jaar 1788". *Overzicht van de plantages van Demerary, en onderhorige districten*, 1788, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 192B; "Generaal tableau van de Colonie Essequibo en onderhoorige districten van 1788". *Overzicht van de plantages van Essequibo en onderhorige districten*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.nr. 193A; *Memorie over de verbeteringen in Essequibo en Demerary ingevoerd ten aanzien van het rechtswezen en de cultures, over den gelimiteerden handel met de Noord-Amerikanen, het wezen van den smokkelhandel, de defensie, de vriendschappelijk betrekkingen met de Indiaansche inboorlingen en de middelen tot verhooging van de welvaart aldaar*, NL-HaNA, Raad der Amerikaanse Bezittingen (hereafter RAB), 2.01.28.02, inv. nr. 168M; TNA, CO 111/3, f. 214-5, 294, 295, 298; TNA, CO 116/36, f.205, 446. Both colonies also had plantations dedicated to producing timber, namely 41 in Essequibo in 1798, and 31 in Demerara in the same year. These are not added to the total figures here.

²⁹ Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana*, 278.

century, the eighteenth century had brought a new reality: Essequibo and Demerara had ceased to be trading ventures of the Company, and had become plantation economies where private interests prevailed. The WIC had to transform itself from a trading organisation to a management organisation overseeing a territorial empire. Therefore, the Company had to erect an effective administrative body, which would prove to be a slow and painful process.

Increasing the planter's voice

The first attempts at reform were made in 1767. The power of the WIC was diminished in favour of the planters, by granting seats to civilian (non-WIC) representatives. The longest-serving WIC plantation manager kept his seat while the other two were replaced by planter representatives. These civil councillors (*Burgerraden*) would be nominated by the officers of the burgher militia, to which all male planters belonged. Subsequently, the Director-General would choose from among the nominees. A similar change was made to the local judicial branch, the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice.³⁰ Still, the planter interest was in the minority.

In 1773 a major reorganisation took place that gave the planters an equal number of seats in the Council of Policy. Previously, the administration of both colonies had relied heavily on the Director-General Storm van 's Gravesande, who at times combined almost all relevant offices. In 1771 he wrote that, because many offices had been vacant for years, he was fulfilling the roles of secretary, bookkeeper, receiver and auction master in Essequibo, as well as the commandership of Demerara.³¹ It is likely that the WIC, after Storm retired in 1772, rethought their system of governance and took a step towards professionalisation of the administration. It was decided to split the administration of the two colonies and Demerara gained more autonomy, as it was granted its own Council of Policy. There, just like in Essequibo, the interests of the planters and the WIC would be balanced. In both colonies the new Council would consist of four WIC functionaries (the commandant, the auctioneer, the fiscal, and either the Director-General or

³⁰ The judicial Council thereafter consisted of the member of the Court of Policy, except for the plantation director, and included four citizens—two from each colony. The election procedure was rather complicated: the Court of Justice would nominate a College of Electors from the members of the Burgher Militia. In turn this College could put forward two candidates to fill the seats and the current councillors would then choose one of them. Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 223.

³¹ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 648.

Commander as president) plus four civil Councillors elected by the planters.³² The president would have the casting vote.

Even though the WIC officials in theory still dominated the voting process, in practice matters were more complicated. The president, like most of the other Company officials, was both a Company official and a planter himself and thus had double loyalties. With slow lines of communication and little intricate knowledge of the situation in the colonies, much of the decision-making in Essequibo and Demerara fell to the local Council. The councillors would improvise solutions to pressing issues, and ask for approval later. On the one hand, the WIC officials had to maintain a good reputation in the eyes of the directors if they wanted to make a career. On the other hand, there were so few people available for administrative posts that in practice officials were not easily dismissed. It is illustrative that Storm van 's Gravesande at times received strong criticism by the Company, yet was not discharged even though he wanted it himself: he pleaded for his discharge at least in 1746, 1763, and 1766 yet was only allowed to retire in 1772.³³ In short, it was far from certain that the loyalty of the president to the Company would trump the allegiance to his fellow planters.

While the reform of 1773 was a step towards a more professional and impersonal bureaucracy, it created considerable uncertainty because the rules remained vague about the relationship between the two colonies.³⁴ Both now had their own Council, but these were not completely autonomous. Twice a year a Combined Council would be convened, to address issues of mutual importance.³⁵ Here the overlapping jurisdictions came to the fore. For the new Director-General, George Hendrik Trotz, it was unclear how this divided government should work in practice and how far his powers reached: could he, as the highest authority over both rivers, intervene in matters of his neighbouring colony? And would Demerara's Commander be allowed to act independently or would he have to seek approval first?³⁶

³² The titles of Commandant and Commander are somewhat confusing: the former one was the head of the military, the latter one was the highest official in Demerara, answering to the Director-General in Essequibo.

³³ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 33, 46, 52.

³⁴ Again, just for clarification, the Zealand Chamber considered Essequibo and Demerara to be one colony.

³⁵ Three planters from each colony were delegated, but since the meeting was presided by the Director-General and took place in Essequibo, that colony retained the upper hand. Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 241.

³⁶ G.H. Trotz to WIC, 23-12-1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f.45-55.

An additional problem was that an entire new administrative apparatus had to be built in Demerara, which presented many practical difficulties. For instance, all the minute books of Essequibo had to be analysed to scan for rules and resolutions pertaining to Demerara, which then would need to be copied.³⁷ Secondly, housing had to be found for the new officials, and since even the Director-General was living in a “sad, bad lodging”, this task proved difficult.³⁸ In the unforgiving tropical climate the wooden houses deteriorated faster than new ones could be built.

The experience of Frederick Roetering, one of the new officials sent out from the metropolis, illustrates the problems of a colony in the process of development. Firstly, his job as Secretary was hindered by the Commander, who would not honour his rather basic requests for paper and ink. Additionally, while he had received the copied documents from Essequibo, they were in such a sorry state that he exclaimed: “had there never been a Secretariat I would have seen better chances to bring everything in order than I do now.” Furthermore, he ran out of money quickly because he had to rent his own lodgings, supply meals for the assistant scribes and make do without the customary food rations or enslaved African servants. Appealing to the Director-General did not help: Roetering had almost closed the Secretary for want of paper, and although he had received a barrel with meat and one with rye flour, he had to return the latter because it was infested with worms.³⁹ So despite the WIC’s intentions, the 1773 reforms did not establishing a satisfactory colonial administration.

In fact the reforms created new problems as they fostered competition over appointments, personal status, division of resources and income. Regarding appointments, the institutional conflict between Amsterdam and Zeeland was mirrored in the appointments of the new governors. Zeeland had appointed the new Director-General (Trotz), while Demerara’s new Commander (Paul van Schuylenburg) was chosen by Amsterdam. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two did not get along very well.⁴⁰ And in the small colonial world, where one man’s death meant another man’s promotion, many were preoccupied with their own position. Such rivalry was visible in

³⁷ J.L.C. van Baerle, report, 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.402-3.

³⁸ Trotz to WIC, 27-9-1773, TNA, CO, 116/39, f.11-12. Original quotation: “droevig, slegt logement”.

³⁹ Frederick Roetering to Zeeland Chamber, 13-12-1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f.76-78. Idem, 14-1-1774, TNA, CO 116/39 f.79-80; Idem, 1-3-1774, TNA, CO 116/39 f. 322-328. Original quotation, from folio 77: “was er nooyt geen Secretarye geweest ik sag beter kans om alles in zijn ordre te brengen dan nu.”

⁴⁰ Schuylenburg to WIC, 6-6-1776, TNA, CO 116/44; f. 212-213.

formal disputes about precedence of authority, but also in social settings, such as the personal order in funeral processions.⁴¹ Sometimes it even became violent, such as in the Council meeting of April 1778 when the military commandant spoke out against Trotz, who dealt him a blow. The commandant hit back, and purportedly the Council was so divided that the meeting “almost ended in a free fight”.⁴²

The rivalry within the administration transcended conflicts over social status, for the colonies faced genuine problems on how to divide scarce resources, and both colonies accused the other of holding on to European supplies for itself.⁴³ Similarly, the rations of *kiltum* (rum) produced on the WIC plantations in Essequibo did not always find their way to Demerara.⁴⁴ Another issue was the division of forced labour, for which the Company had two sources: the enslaved Africans on its own plantations, and the so-called “chain negroes” (“*kettingnegers*”). The latter were convicted slaves who had been sentenced to work for the Company, often for life. They lived at fort Zeelandia in Essequibo, under the supervision of the soldiers, but they were also set to work on infrastructural improvements such as constructing roads and repairing buildings. However, as seen in the lacking and leaking houses, this group of convicts could not perform all the desired work and consequently the two colonies often argued over who needed the labour the most.⁴⁵

Competition also took place over entitlements. Several official positions generated extra income and these “emoluments” were a welcome addition to the meagre Company salary. For example, when a ship entered the colony it did not only have to pay customs, but also faced many other WIC charges, payable to the head of government, the secretary and the surgeon. However, with the duplication of functions, several functionaries in Essequibo found their side earnings severely reduced. Since economic activity in Demerara was much greater, its officials received far higher sums in emoluments.

⁴¹ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 258; W.C. Boeij to WIC, 7-4-1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.184-185; Trotz to WIC, 5-7-1774, TNA, CO 116/36, f.427-430.

⁴² Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 257. The Commandant, J.C. Severijn, was fired afterwards, but the WIC directors ordered he be reinstated in his role.

⁴³ J.C. de Winter to WIC, 22-5-1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 308-310; Council of Policy to Zealand Chamber, 2-7-1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.406-407.

⁴⁴ Journal of Schuylenburg, 4-3-1780 to 9-4-1780, TNA, CO 116/44, f.49.

⁴⁵ W.C. Boeij to WIC, 23-6-1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.292-294; Councillors to G.H. Trotz, 30-4-1774, *ibid.*, f.400-401; G.H. Trotz to Zealand Chamber, 8-12-1776, TNA, CO 116/44, f.316-337.

Understandably, officials in Essequibo therefore argued for a system of pooling the revenues and splitting them equally, whereas those in Demerara strongly opposed this idea, arguing that they had rightfully earned their share.⁴⁶

All in all, the WIC did not succeed in establishing a well-functioning institutional structure, and even though it generally spent more on Essequibo and Demerara than it earned, the Company could not shoulder the protection costs. The fortress in Essequibo fell into disrepair, Demerara had no defence structure whatsoever, and the soldiers were often sick and without guns.⁴⁷ In essence the WIC remained a trading company, while administering an empire was a completely different enterprise—and one which the ailing WIC could not fulfil. The position of the Company only deteriorated during the eighteenth century, and it is therefore no surprise that Essequibo and Demerara were so easily conquered in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784).

War and occupation (1780-1784)

This war—provoked partly by the large amounts of munition that found their way to North American rebels via St. Eustatius—led to three years of foreign occupation, first by British (23 February 1781 to 1 February 1782), and later by French forces (1 February 1782 to 6 March 1784).⁴⁸ These occupations were fairly benign. Although thirty-one ships had been captured by the British forces, all the other private property was left in peace and the legal structure was left intact. For the colonists the occupation was probably even beneficial, because they were freed from Dutch mercantile restrictions and became part of the vast British empire. Suddenly they had official access to the huge British slave trading network, allowing them to acquire many more enslaved Africans than they previously could. This relatively positive attitude towards the British was not new in the Caribbean: during the Seven

⁴⁶ In 1762 in Essequibo it was 6 guilders for every English barque entering. In 1774 in Essequibo it was 7.50 guilders for the Director-General for a pass, 2.50 guilders for the Secretary, 5 guilders for the surgeon and 2.50 guilders for the Poor Fund. (Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 396-7; TNA, CO 116/39, f.427-430, Trotz to WIC, 5-7-1774; TNA, CO 116/55, f.76-78, D.H. Macaré to WIC, 6-7-1780.

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915, Rapport bestemd voor erfstadhouder Willem V opgesteld door zijn commissarissen naar West-Indië, W.H. van Grovestins en W. Boeij, 1790 juli 17.

⁴⁸ Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 122-123; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3842, 16 June 1784, at 510.

Years' War (1756-1763), French planters on Guadeloupe (in 1760) and Martinique (in 1762) had more or less welcomed the British because of the capital and slave trade that came with British colonists. Indeed, the French islands experienced rapid growth in their plantation sector, and in Cuba the British occupation set off the sugar boom that made the island one of the dominant sugar producers of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Similarly, the British occupation of Essequibo and Demerara was generally a smooth affair; the main problem for Dutch colonists was the oath of allegiance. They were required to swear loyalty to the British king, but feared this may compel them to take up arms against the Dutch Republic.⁵⁰ The colonists took great pains to convey how abhorrent the oath was, and although the British Lieutenant Governor Kingston doubted the sincerity of the protestors, he was willing to come to terms with them. The oath would be adapted, just as it had been after the occupation of Martinique. The colonists only had to take up arms against the Dutch if the colonies were to be officially ceded to Britain, which relieved their concerns. However, Kingston also reminded the colonists about the advantages the British empire could bring, as the French islands had previously witnessed.⁵¹

The British aim to develop the colonies also shows in the plans they made to erect a town in Demerara. However, they were driven out by French forces before they could realise this project. The French were allies of the Dutch at the time, so the planters were not amused that their ships (five men-of-war and thirteen merchant vessels) were once again subjected to confiscation. Yet afterwards, the same procedure repeated itself: the French replaced

⁴⁹ Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006) 42; Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* (New York: Walker & Co., 2011) 303-30; Altman, "The Spanish Atlantic," in Canny and Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook*; Jeremy Baskes, *Staying Afloat: Risk and Uncertainty in Spanish Atlantic World Trade, 1760-1820* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013) 70; Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 87; Allan J. Keuthe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century," in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel Kingston to General Vaughan, 26-10-1781, TNA, CO 111/1, f.41-45.

⁵¹ Proclamation by Kingston to the inhabitants of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice, TNA, CO 111/1, f.50-54.

several key officials, left property intact and gave everyone the same privileges as French citizens.⁵²

An important difference between Dutch and French rule was that the latter realised the potential of Essequibo and Demerara and immediately undertook major infrastructural developments. The first step was to build a capital, which the French considered a necessity:

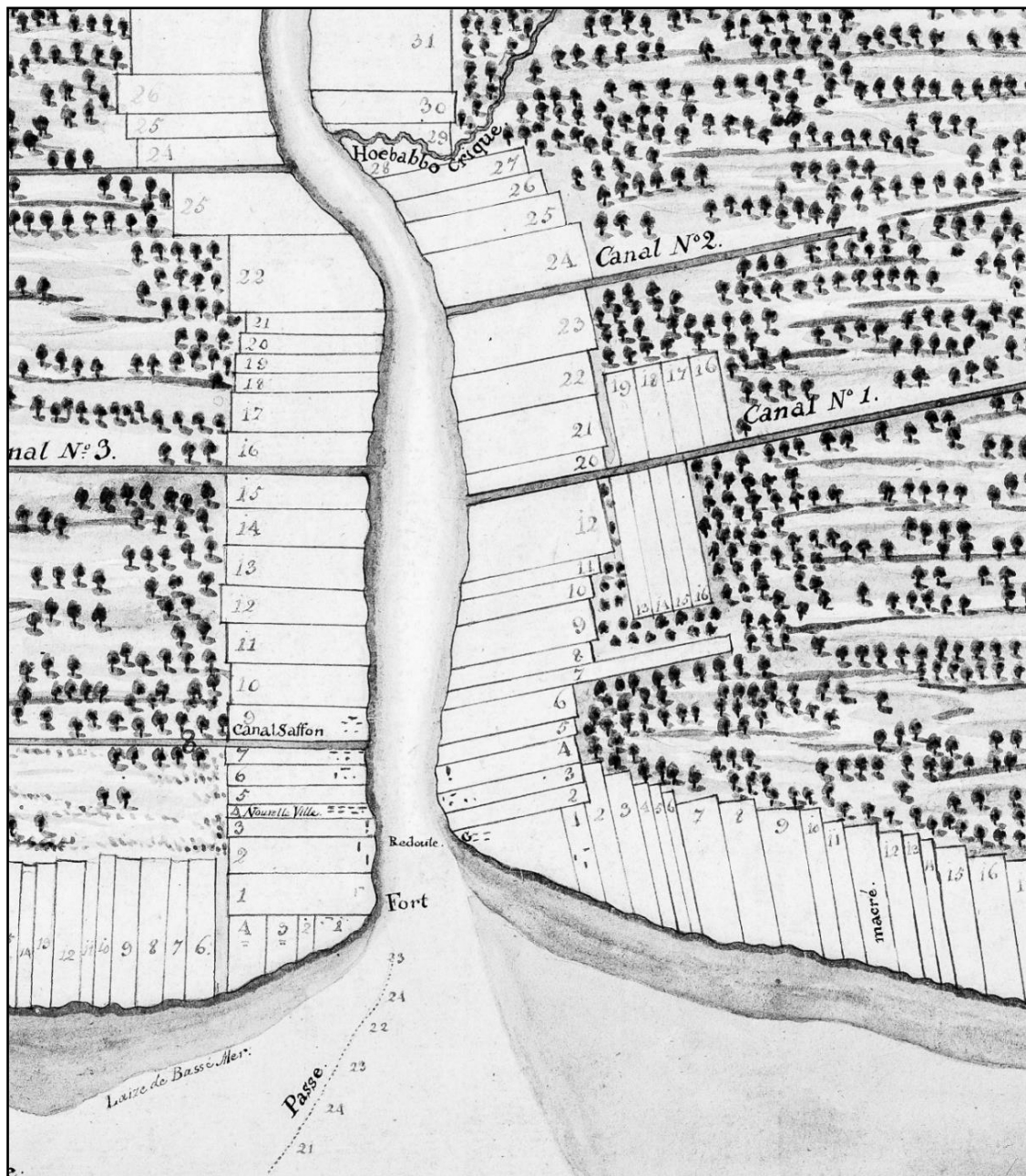
[I]t is considered necessary, from the great extent of this river and its banks, to have a Capital, which will become the business centre; where Religion will have a temple, Justice a palace, War its arsenals, Commerce its counting-houses, Industry its factories, and where the inhabitants may enjoy the advantages of social intercourse. This is perhaps the only instance of a European colony, among thousands throughout the world, which has arrived at some magnificence without the establishment of either town or village.⁵³

Previously, the social, religious and political life was spread out over the colonies. Essequibo had a church on Fort Island, while church services in Demerara took place in one of the administrative buildings on Borsselen Island, 30 miles upriver. Essequibo had an arsenal at Fort Zeelandia; in Demerara the few military supplies were deposited at the watch post (*brandwagt*) near the coast. And while the social life in colonies like Saint-Domingue or Suriname revolved around the major port city, in Essequibo and Demerara it was dispersed, taking place on individual plantations instead (see also Chapter 6). In order to merge these social, religious and administrative dimensions, the French set to work constructing a town, which would be called Longchamps. They levied several slaves from every plantation, and to the dismay of the planters, the “colony tax” (*Colonie Ongelden*) was also increased to pay for the infrastructural works. Much of this money was used for the two fortifications, La Reine on the West bank and Le Dauphin on the East bank of the river mouth, close to Longchamps (Map 2.1). These forts made it easier to monitor the incoming and outgoing ships, making smuggling at least somewhat more difficult.⁵⁴

⁵² Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 53; Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 1-8. Company plantations were taken for the king, and the auction master and tax receiver were replaced.

⁵³ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid, vol. 2: 20; Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 124; C.C. Kanne to Amsterdam Chamber, 12-2-1784, TNA, CO 116/55, f. 236-240.



Map 2.1: Detail from the mouth of the Demerara River, 1784, from: D. Pruijmelaaar, "Carte de la colonie de Demerari en 1784", NL-HaNA, collection P.A. Leupe, 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1498. Longchamps is labelled as "Nouvelle Ville" under no. 4, the fortress Le Dauphin under no. 1 on the left side (which is the eastern side, as the south is on top) and La Reine under "Redoute" on the right (thus western) coast.

The French also introduced other innovations, such as the fixing of exchange rates between guilders and foreign currencies in circulation (such as the "Portuguese Joe's"), the issuance of 150,000 guilders in paper money, and the institution of a postal service. In March 1784, six months after the

peace of Versailles, the French returned the colonies to the Dutch, who immediately sought to undo several of the reforms. Trade restrictions were reinstated, La Reine was abandoned and the postal service was abolished.⁵⁵ In addition, Longchamps was renamed Stabroek, and the fortress would thereafter be called Willem Fredrick.

In the meantime the WIC directors had drawn up a plan to remodel the administration of the two colonies. The main aim was to enhance the Company's grip on the local administration. One of the basic tenets was to increase salaries. It was decided that officials should have sufficient income to make them independent of other activities, and since there had been many complaints about the meagre remuneration before, the WIC was willing to pay. The Director-General would see his basic salary increase from 1,800 to 18,700 guilders, the captain-commandant of the forces would go from 900 to 4,000 guilders and even ordinary soldiers were to receive 300 instead of 96 guilders per year.⁵⁶ Although this seemed an ingenious idea in theory, in practice the WIC had absolutely no money to pay for it all. The extra annual expenses of the reforms would more than double the Company's expenses, and it already made huge losses. The Company therefore asked the Estates General for a loan of three million guilders but was granted only 800,000 guilders. As a result, the WIC had to let go of its grand ambitions and backtracked on the salary increases. While in the May 1783 edition of the plan the WIC had still budgeted to spend 250,000 guilders per year, this sum was later trimmed down to 187,550 and subsequently to 116,800 guilders per year.⁵⁷

The second set of reforms was constitutional. The economic dominance of Demerara was recognised by making it the administrative centre. Henceforth, Essequibo would be administered by a Commander, subordinate to the Director-General who would reside in Demerara, where the future Combined Council meetings would be held as well. Additionally, the idea was to professionalise the judicial system by appointing European lawyers or judges as the presidents of the Courts of Civil and Criminal

⁵⁵ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 34.

⁵⁶ The Director-General's salary was 12,000 guilders plus 2,000 as president of the Council, plus 2,000 as councillor, plus 1,500 as Commissary, plus 1,200 as Bookkeeper. This was next to an additional five per cent on receipts as Receiver. Previously he also had 1,200 guilders in "table money". (Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 66; Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 27).

⁵⁷ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven over het bestuur der colonien Essequibo en Demerary, gewisseld tusschen de Heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus nevens bylagen, tot deeze briefwisseling: Vol. 3* (Amsterdam, 1786) 12 vols., 75-76.

Justice. Considering that almost no one had any legal knowledge in the colonies, this plan would have been a great step forward. However, it proved too expensive. The sole source of legal knowledge would remain the Fiscal. He would continue in his double executive and judicial role, being both the public prosecutor (and hence a member of the Council of Policy) and the legal adviser to the Council of Justice.⁵⁸

A similar revision, but of much greater importance, would take place in the political domain: the influence of planters over the local administration would be reduced. Not unlike the British attitude described earlier, the WIC apparently desired more direct control over the colonies. The new Councils of Policy would consist of the head of government and the next four Company functionaries in rank, in addition to three civilian councillors.⁵⁹ So while previously the balance between planters and Company had been equal, the planters were now in the minority. Moreover, the planter representatives would no longer be nominated by their peers, but be directly appointed by the Director-General. It was this implementation that would stir the outrage in the planter society and lead to the revolutionary talk of the brothers Hartsinck that we have seen in the introduction.

The Dutch revolutionary moment (1784-1787)

The planters' discontent was partly an outgrowth of the political dissatisfaction that had arisen within the Dutch Republic itself, especially after the loss of the war against Britain. The Dutch Republic had effectively become a second rate power in Europe after the Spanish Succession War (1701-1713), yet it continued to enjoy a comfortable political and economic position, as its neutrality was protected by Britain. When this protection disappeared in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, the weaknesses of the Dutch were clearly exposed. Furthermore, the war had led to large economic losses due to confiscations of ships and merchandise. In addition, the WIC had been deprived of its income during the foreign occupations, pushing the Company further into debt. Finally, the Dutch slave trade had come to a virtual standstill and did not revive afterwards, hampering the prospects of

⁵⁸ The Director-General would choose six Protestant members to form the Court. These would be chosen out of eighteen nominees put forward by the Burgher Militia Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 24-28.

⁵⁹ Sources differ on who these were, either the president of the Court, the Fiscal, the receiver of taxes and the commissioner of supplies, or the fiscal, auctioneer, receiver of taxes and a fourth man.

the colonies.⁶⁰ Thus, the defeat in the war served as a wake-up call for those who had not realised the Dutch had lost their international prominence.

The outside-imposed problems were compounded by internal strife, as the Dutch Republic experienced increased polarisation between pro-British royalists on the one hand and pro-French reformists on the other. The former, the so-called Orangists, supported Stadtholder William V of Orange and had a support base in both the wealthy rentier class of regents and in the lower strata. The rival, pro-French, Patriot faction, coming from a more middle-class background, essentially wanted to end the hold the regents had on positions in the city councils. These Patriots desired a more bottom-up way of electing officials, as opposed to top-down appointments. While the Patriots drew inspiration from the American Revolution in their rhetoric, their democratic ideals did not stretch that far. Their aim was essentially to broaden the existing elite to include their own “enlightened elite”.⁶¹

Through their own popular press, the formation of their own militia and mass demonstrations the Patriots gained political prominence, jeopardising the stability of the Dutch Republic. By the summer of 1786 the Patriots had managed to take over the councils in many cities in the provinces of Utrecht, Holland and Overijssel and in May 1787 a battle was fought between Orangist and Patriot forces, resulting in eighty casualties. The Patriots movement was aborted after their militia arrested Princess Wilhelmina in June 1787: she called on her brother, Frederick William II of Prussia, for help. Soon afterwards, an army of 26,000 Prussian soldiers marched into the Dutch Republic and restored the Orangist order. The Patriot militia was disbanded, their clubs forbidden and many of them fled to seek refuge in France.⁶²

Preoccupied as the Patriots were with metropolitan politics, they never formulated an elaborate view of the position of the colonies. Nevertheless, in 1784 a specific magazine was founded, *De Oost- en West- Indische Post* (“The East and West Indian Post”), to comment on situations in the colonies. In this short-lived journal, several letters were published from Demerara

⁶⁰ Oostindie, “Dutch Atlantic Decline,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*; P. C. Emmer, “The Dutch and the Making of the Second Atlantic System,” in *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880: Trade, slavery and emancipation*, ed. P. C. Emmer (Aldershot, Brookfield, Vt: Ashgate, 1998) 29; Emmer, *Nederlandse slavenhandel*, 171.

⁶¹ Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 1098-1103.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1105-1114.

planters, wherein they voiced complaints about the WIC's administration of the colonies.⁶³

More importantly, a twelve-volume work espousing Patriot ideas appeared between 1785 and 1788, called *Brieven over the bestuur der colonien, gewisseld tussen de heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus* ("Letters regarding the administration of the colonies, exchanged by the gentlemen Aristodemus and Sincerus"). The author of this fictional exchange remained anonymous, but was clearly well-aware of the problems with the governance of Essequibo and Demerara. Using Patriot rhetoric, he criticised the WIC administration over a host of issues, including the slave trade, taxes and mortgages. The most relevant one for now, however, was the relationship between the colonies and the Dutch Republic.

The author of the *Brieven* compared the development of the two colonies to the breeding of horses: one had to invest first, before any results could be had. While trading colonies like Curacao could generate immediate profits, "agricultural colonies" like Essequibo and Demerara could not. Still, agricultural colonies also generated trade, so a financial loss to the Company did not have to mean a loss for the Dutch Republic as a whole. However, the burden had to be divided fairly. At present only the colonists contributed, the author argued, while the rest of the country reaped the benefits.⁶⁴ Therefore, the author argued that a monopolistic company like the WIC was not fit to rule the two colonies. The Company looked primarily after its own interests, while "the sovereign"—with which he alternately meant the States-General, the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic, "the people" or "the nation"—would look after the greater good. Hence, the colonies should fall under the sovereign, who would also take care of protection costs. If cities in the Republic did not have to pay for their protection against foreign armies, why should the colonies?⁶⁵

Delving deeper into financial matters, the author noted that the sovereign and the Company had divergent interests, as the WIC made an annual loss of 100,000 guilders on Essequibo and Demerara. The Company had an incentive to increase taxes, while the sovereign would keep taxes low

⁶³ G. J. Schutte, *De Nederlandse patriotten en de koloniën: Een onderzoek naar hun denkbelden en optreden, 1770-1800* (Groningen: H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 1974) 43, 55-56, 103.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 43, 58-69; Aristodemus and Sincerus [pseudonym], *Brieven over het bestuur der colonien Essequibo en Demerary, gewisseld tusschen de Heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus nevens bylagen, tot deeze briefwisseling, en eene voorreden van den Nederlandschen uitgeever: Volume 1* (1785) 41-83.

⁶⁵ Aristodemus and Sincerus *Brieven*, vol 1: Appendix A.

to foster development. In addition, the current taxes on enslaved people were not conducive to the colonies' development anyway, the author reasoned: the death of an enslaved person posed a great financial risk to a planter, so it would make more sense to tax the plantation's output instead of "input". A tax on the crop would ensure each planter paid to capacity, uninfluenced by droughts or bad harvests. And otherwise, if Essequibo and Demerara were really such a burden to the Company, why would they not hand them over to the States-General?⁶⁶

The *Brieven* contained more policy suggestions, such as the liberalisation of the slave trade. Dutch slave traders delivered too few captives, who therefore were expensive, so the author proposed several measures: to be allowed to buy from foreigners if the Dutch did not deliver a certain quota; or in case the price rose above a certain threshold; or just to allow the direct trade with West Africa. The latter would have the added benefit of providing an outlet for the rum produced on sugar estates. Consequently, it would improve the financial position of the planters, which would benefit the financiers in the Dutch Republic. Thus, liberation would be for the greater good. Even though planters might pay foreign slavers clandestinely with plantation products, it would be a small price to pay for the survival of the colonies.⁶⁷

All in all, the *Brieven* offered a comprehensive critique of Company rule rather than a coherent alternative theory of empire. In fact, the author's strongest convictions, and mostly likely the occasion for publishing the *Brieven*, involved the position of the colonial Council. The issue was the same as the one which led the Hartsinck brothers to plot a coup: the post-war change from an equal number of Company and civil councillors to a situation in which civil councillors were outnumbered and only appointed by the WIC.⁶⁸ To understand how the colonists reacted to this change, we have to turn our gaze back to the colonial level.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Appendix A and B; Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven over het bestuur der colonien Essequibo en Demerary, gewisseld tusschen de Heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus nevens bylagen, tot deeze briefwisseling: Volume 2* (Amsterdam, 1786) 101-109.

⁶⁷ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, vol. 3: 106-110; Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven over het bestuur der colonien Essequibo en Demerary, gewisseld tusschen de Heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus nevens bylagen, tot deeze briefwisseling* (Amsterdam, 1786) vol. 4: 104-105.

⁶⁸ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven over het bestuur*, vol. 5: 67-83; Idem and idem, *Brieven*, vol. 3: appendices L and N.

Demerara in 1785: no taxation without representation

When, after the war, the new Director-General, Jean L'Espinasse arrived in the colonies he immediately noticed the tense political climate. His first mission was to form a new Council, because according to WIC rules all officials were automatically dismissed once a foreign power took over. The pre-war civil councillors found this automatic dismissal hard to swallow, for they felt they had done the Company a valuable service by keeping the colonies running during the war. In fact, they were expecting a reward or promotion rather than dismissal. Moreover, the idea that the civil councillors would now also be appointed through the WIC was a great obstacle to the planter community. According to the planters, the new procedure was an infringement of their traditional rights and the sudden change was seen as an arbitrary and unjustified interference with the local order. The planters vehemently objected to the new way of governing, and closed ranks to prevent its implementation.

In practice this boycott meant that L'Espinasse had trouble finding volunteers to fill the seats, especially for the Demerara Council. He first asked three of the pre-war councillors to take up their positions again. Yet one died and the other two refused. Interestingly, two of the men who would later plot the coup were also nominated as councillors—not as civil councillors, but in the name of the Company. These were Hermanus Jonas and Maurits Balthasar Hartsinck. However, both refused to sit, considering the new way of forming a council to be illegitimate.⁶⁹ This process of refusal continued: one planter was persuaded to sit in as civil councillor for the first meeting, yet he later sent his letter of refusal, like two more had done before him.⁷⁰ Since the problem was getting more serious, the Fiscal proposed to go back to the previous method of selecting civil councillors, namely asking the officers of the Burgher Militia for nominees from which L'Espinasse would then choose. However, L'Espinasse insisted on asking more people. Yet the planter community seemed united in their resistance, for the next three people declined as well.⁷¹

Subsequently, the Director-General resorted to asking foreign planters. Their appointment would have been a breach of WIC rules, but David Breton

⁶⁹ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 34-35.

⁷⁰ The pre-war councillors were Cornelis Overbroek (who died), Joseph Bourda and Pieter van Helsdingen. The men that refused were, respectively, H. Riem, H. Jonas and H.H. Post. Ibid., vol. 2: 34-35.

⁷¹ These were C.J. Hecke, A. Lonck [Loncq?] and J. Bastiaanse. Rodway, *History*, vol. 2, 35.

(French) and J. Brotherson (Creole English) could not be persuaded anyway.⁷² Seemingly out of options, the next move was to make refusal an offence: persons who refused to sit in the Council without a lawful excuse were liable to be fined 3,000 guilders.⁷³ This measure might have helped, because Christopher Johan Hecke, together with Francois Changuion, were finally convinced to accept the position. Yet now the rest of the Demerara planter society rose to action.

Five of Demerara's prominent planters took the lead: Bernard Albinus, Bartholomeus van den Santheuvel, Louwe Idsert Douwe van Grovestins, Hermanus Jonas and the already familiar Maurits Balthasar Hartsinck. These were prominent men, who all performed or had performed functions as councillor, receiver, President of the Orphan and Estate Chamber, or Fiscal.⁷⁴ On 25 February 1785 they handed a petition to the Director-General (followed by a similar one on 18 March), which called for restoration of the "traditional" rights of representation.⁷⁵ It was signed by 159 planters, of whom 125 signed in Demerara.⁷⁶

This petition drew support from across "national" boundaries. A different document from 1785 supposedly listed the names of all the planters in Demerara, numbering 109 planters. Of those, only three did not sign the petition.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the origin of these 109 people is known. Combining these figures leads to Figure 2.1, which shows that the petition enjoyed support from all quarters, in what was a very diverse plantation society. Both the Dutch and the "British" (including those from the British Caribbean and the United States rallied behind the protest.⁷⁸ The "other" group listed a Russian, a Prussian, two Swiss people, two Flemish and one Italian. Clearly, the planter community was united enough to launch a major

⁷² Ibid., vol. 2: 35; "Nationalities" found in: *Naamlijst van de eigenaars van plantages in Demerary, Juli 1785*, NL-HaNA, Verspreide West-Indische Stukken (VWIS), inv. nr. 59.

⁷³ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 35.

⁷⁴ Albinus was appointed council member in Demerara in 1773, Jonas as President of the Orphan and Estate Chamber in 1784, Hartsinck was receiver and councillor in Demerara in 1785, Grovestins was President of the Orphan and Boedelkamer until 1776 captain of one of the civil militias and fiscal between 1776 and 1782. (NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv nr. 39; TNA, CO 116/44, f397; CO 116/39, f393, Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 309; Idem, *History*, vol. 2: 34).

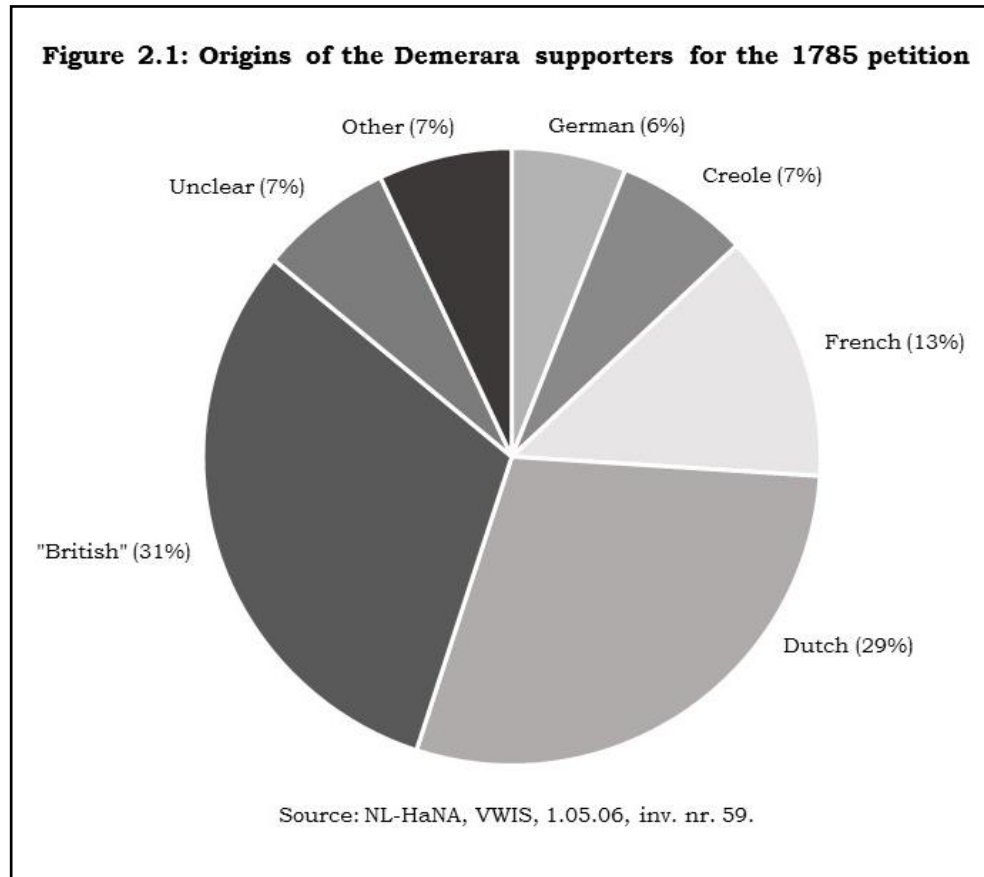
⁷⁵ TNA, CO 116/57, f.291-298, 313.

⁷⁶ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, vol. 3: 12th letter, appendix K.

⁷⁷ In fact, there were more planters in the colonies and around 60 of them did not sign the petition (see CO 116/61, f280-1).

⁷⁸ The document made no distinction between English, Scottish, Irish, people from "the islands" (the British Caribbean, mostly from Barbados) and North Americans, although my suspicion is that the latter group was rather small. NL-HaNA, Verspreide West-Indische Stukken (hereafter VWIS), 1.05.06, inv. nr. 59.

political protest against the WIC, and national origin presented no barrier to political cooperation.



The arguments in the petition varied in nature, from practical objections to theoretical reflections. Just as in other cases around the Atlantic, this protest had both a constitutional and a taxation element. The colonists argued that legislative and judicial powers should be kept separate, and that the Fiscal, as prosecutor and member of the Council of Policy, could not be an adviser in the Court of Justice. Another more practical point was that the WIC had always made a distinction between councillors on the one hand and employees on the other. And since the *burgerraden* were not employees, the Company simply had no right to dismiss them.

The planters' key issue, however, was the right to choose their own representatives. The petitioners referred to the reforms of 1773 and questioned the Company's right to change this "constitution" of 1773. Here the colonists encountered a fundamental problem: there was nothing like a constitution. Unlike for Suriname, there was no charter upon which the colonisation in Essequibo and Demerara was based other than the WIC, so

without such an overarching document the WIC could indeed unilaterally change the “rules of game”.⁷⁹

Rather than having a clear legal basis, colonisation in Essequibo and Demerara was an improvised affair based on a continuously expanding set of WIC rules, proclamations and bylaws. This ad hoc nature of decision making went so far that everything that was put to paper in Council meetings or official correspondence functioned as a form of jurisprudence. Such notes could then be used to stage later claims, which is exactly what the petitioners did. For example, during the war, on 28 October 1783, the WIC had written a letter to the “then functioning Council” in the colonies, encouraging the councillors to continue in their role. This phrasing implied that the Councillors were not automatically dismissed after the invasion. How then, the petitioners asked, could the Company claim this afterwards? The petitioners considered the pre-war council to be the only legal one and therefore urged the Director-General to allow Joseph Bourda, Anthony Pieter Swaen, Willebordus Ramaeckers and Pieter van Helsdingen to take up their seats again. However, the Director-General found their proposals too radical and he considered himself not authorised to judge. To give in would have been tantamount to letting the planters choose their own government hence L’Espinasse referred the planters to the Company directors.⁸⁰

Besides constitutional grievances, the colonists also simply protested against increased taxes. In the improvised web of regulations the taxation structure had always remained ambiguous. The main taxes were the poll taxes and the Colony tax, both based on the number of slaves a planter had. The poll tax went to the WIC headquarters in Europe, while the Colony tax could be spent locally, but it was not stipulated when the latter could be levied and how high it could be. To pay for their improvements, the French had instated a colony tax of 2.50 guilders per enslaved person over twelve years old. Combined with the existing 2.50 guilders poll tax the result was a tax of 5 guilders per enslaved worker per year. However, when they returned the colonies, the French repaid these sums. After the war, the colonists therefore expected the taxes to go down. Yet the expensive reform plans of the WIC meant that taxes actually went up, to a total of 6 guilders per slave.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, vol. 3: 47, appendix K.

⁸⁰ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, vol. 3: appendix M.

⁸¹ Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 124.

Lacking the formal political power to change this increase, the planters adopted another tactic of negotiation: defiance. In the petition the planters flatly refused to pay the new rate, offering to pay only the old poll tax of 2.50 guilders per slave instead. Since the WIC did not formulate a reply to their petitions, the issue remained unresolved. The result was that many planters decided to simply pay no poll taxes at all in the next three years.⁸² Here it becomes clear that it was also very *convenient* for the planter community to portray the Council as illegal and unconstitutional: if there was no legal government, they reasoned, there were no legal restrictions that could be broken. By subsequently declaring the colony to be in a state of anarchy (*regeringloosheid*), the colonists legitimised their own defiance. The convenience of this rhetoric would clearly show in a third part of the conflict, namely commerce.

Demerara in 1787: the comfortable state of anarchy

Officially, the colonists were held by WIC rules to ship all their produce to the Dutch Republic, in line with the prevailing mercantilist doctrine. Yet in the supposed state of anarchy, the planters claimed they were not breaking any rules if they sold their produce to foreigners or bought foreign enslaved Africans. And because the Dutch Republic was tied up in its own political problems (see below), no solution was forthcoming and this so-called state of anarchy could continue comfortably for several years. In fact, the colony enjoyed stability as long as this situation lasted and only when a renewed attempt was made to curb smuggling did the political fight continue in earnest. Since 1784 warships had been sent to the colonies to prevent illegal trade, but it was only in 1787 that a particularly zealous captain, called Frans Smeer, took serious steps to do something about it (see Chapter 4). He managed to convince L'Espinasse to issue a proclamation forbidding any ship to sail out of the river after sunset, with the idea of making illegal trade considerably more difficult.⁸³ This measure seemingly pushed the the planters over the edge: as long as "anarchy" meant freedom to smuggle they

⁸² Rapport Grovestins en Boeij, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915.

⁸³ *Stukken betreffende de onderzoekingen in opdracht van de Admiraliteit op de Maze door de luitenant ter zee Frans Smeer aangaande de sluikhandel in Essequibo, Demerary en Berbice, 1787*, NL-HaNA, Admiraliteitscolleges XXA Paulus-Olivier (hereafter Admiraliteitscolleges / Paulus-Olivier), 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44; *Resoluties van de directeur-generaal en raden van Demerary. 1787 jan. 15 - 1788 aug. 21*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033. See also Chapter 4.

were perfectly content with it, yet now they wanted to end it, and rose to action.

By September 1787 L'Espinasse had heard the rumours: he would receive a petition drafted by Albinus, Van den Santheuvel, Jonas and Hartsinck, carried by armed civilians to back up the demands. At first he dismissed the talk, considering the men incapable of organising any substantial resistance. Yet when he heard from lieutenant Lasberg about Hartsinck's effort to stage an armed uprising, L'Espinasse changed his mind.⁸⁴ He took his precautions, but had to be careful, for he had been told that the planters were looking for a provocation. If the planters could portray the Director-General as a military despot, they would later be able to claim they had no other choice than to dispose of him. So L'Espinasse was on guard, had extra artillery placed and posted sentinels in Stabroek to watch out for any armed civilians. On 12 September he informed the WIC: "[T]he people here are not used to anything other than anarchy and they do not want to be ruled". He reported that the situation was "utterly precarious" and that the directors "should not be surprised about anything, whatever happens".⁸⁵ L'Espinasse's concern is understandable, for it was not easy to draft a petition with such broad support in a decentralised colony like Demerara.

Indeed, the names of the petitioners reflected the social, economic and geographical structure of the colony. Geographically, canvassing a petition was complicated by the lack of an urban centre (Stabroek was still very small), and by spreading of the plantations along the various rivers and creeks. In other words, there was no central location where the resistance could be organised and a petition had to be carried from the first plantation to the last, which were several days sailing distance from each other. Consequently, there could be no deliberation over the text once it had been drafted: the choice was simply to sign or not to sign. The planters were thus unable to coordinate their decisions, which gave a key role to the person carrying the petition, who could persuade people directly.

Additionally, the names on a petition were also in part a reflection of the social network within the planter society: if the most prominent planters put their names down, the others were more likely to follow. This mechanism

⁸⁴ See the introduction of this chapter.

⁸⁵ Original quotations: "men is hier niet meer gewoon dan anarchie, & men wil niet geregeerd weeze"; "aller hachelijkst"; "[U] moet zich niet verwonderen, wat er ook gebeure". L'Espinasse to Zealand Chamber, 12-9-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f. 5-6.

applied not just to the Dutch planters, but also to the non-Dutch signers; the leader of the English faction appears to have been Thomas Cuming (see also Chapter 6), for the French this probably was J.P. Cuiche. Indeed, when the “revolutionary” petition was finally presented to L’Espinasse on 15 October 1787, we can distinguish an interesting coalition: among the 130 colonists we do not only find Dutch, but also many British, as well as the majority of the French planters. So while these foreign planters could have no representation in the WIC structure, they could still be politically active through petitioning.⁸⁶

The planter society was far from united though, for L’Espinasse soon received a counter-petition, from over sixty inhabitants, supporting him. These planters stated they were very content with the Director-General, and essentially wanted to have it noted that they had been on the loyal side, in case the crisis would blow over.⁸⁷

Besides the geographical and social dimension, there was an economic element to the petitioning too. The four leaders of the dissenting faction were at the same time agents of mortgage funds in the Dutch Republic. Because as agents they held the gateway to much-needed credit, the four men had a powerful leverage instrument since many planters were deeply indebted to the mortgage funds (see Chapter 5). The danger of being cut off from credit would surely have pressured planters into signing, even if they did not entirely agree with the political message.⁸⁸ It is therefore not unthinkable that true support for the petition was not as great as the 130 names would suggest.

Nevertheless, the coalition of protesting planters made stern demands, desiring an overhaul of the political structure. They either wanted to reinstate the pre-war council, or otherwise reform the administrative structure as was outlined in the WIC’s own Concept Plan of Redress. Indeed, it must be noted that the WIC had tried to resolve the problem. In 1786 a committee was formed, which presented a concept plan to the Estates General in March 1787. It contained many desirable elements for the planters, including the proposal to collect taxes for the previous years only at the old rate, a plan to dig a communication canal between the two colonies and the advice to establish a proper code of laws. Furthermore, several

⁸⁶ L’Espinasse to WIC, 7-10-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.40-41; *Ibid.*, f.244; L’Espinasse to WIC, 31-12-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.176.

⁸⁷ J. Bastiaanse and Eyre Butler to L’Espinasse, 26-10-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f. 264-265; *Idem et al.* to L’Espinasse, 31-10-1785, *ibid.*, f.278-281.

⁸⁸ L’Espinasse to WIC, 31-12-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.172, 189.

changes in the composition of the Councils of Policy and Council of Justice were proposed, the vital one being a return to nomination of councillors by the colonists themselves, through an Electors College. However, the Dutch Republic was tied up in its own Orangist-Patriot struggles and its overseas problems had a very low priority.⁸⁹ It was in this context, without an immediate solution in sight, that the petitioners pushed their agenda forward. No longer would they tolerate the governor's tyranny, nor would they "willingly lay down their free necks on the chopping block of arbitrary lust for power". In a thinly disguised threat the planters urged L'Espinasse to comply, so they would not be obliged to take "a stronger, to everyone more undesirable measure".⁹⁰ Interestingly, L'Espinasse believed that the tenth volume of the *Brieven* had been the inspiration for this "violent manifesto".⁹¹

This petition triggered a severe political crisis in Demerara. Upon reading the request, two councillors immediately resigned, feeling that their position had become untenable.⁹² Since three other seats had been vacant for a while, there was suddenly little of a Council left. L'Espinasse could only rely on the Receiver of Taxes (Jacques Andriessen) and the Fiscal (Anthony Meertens). However, the former was unavailable because he appeared to be terminally ill, while the latter quickly laid down his position and defected to the dissenters (even though he repented soon afterwards).⁹³ The whole institutional framework had thus fallen apart and the Director-General had to deal with the situation entirely on his own.

While later historians have looked unfavourably upon L'Espinasse, he actually handled the situation rather skilfully.⁹⁴ By immediately offering to give up his own position, he removed the fuse from the powder keg, depriving the planters of an excuse for violence. The dissenting planters seemed to

⁸⁹ To be more precise, the advice was to have only one Council of Policy in Demerara, consisting of the Director-General, the Commander of Essequibo, the fiscal from each colony, and two colonists from each river. In Essequibo a College of Electors (*Kiezers*) already existed, but was to be enlarged from 5 to 7, while Demerara would establish its own. Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 48-51.

⁹⁰ *Brief van de Kamer Amsterdam aan de Staten-Generaal betreffende de bewering door enige ingezetenen van Demerary uitgesproken, dat Essequibo en Demerary met geen mogelijkheid langer onder de behering der West-Indische Compagnie konden blijven, 22 januari 1788*, NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 128. Original quotations: "hunne vrije halsen gewillig neder leggen op 't blok van arbitraire heerszucht"; "starker, en voor een jeder onaangenams middel te gebruyken".

⁹¹ L'Espinasse to WIC, 31-12-1787, TNA, CO 116/61 f.209-210.

⁹² These were J.L.C. van Baerle and Francois Changuion (Extract from the minutes of the Council of Policy of Demerara, 15-10-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.225-233).

⁹³ A few weeks later Meertens would ask permission to take up his post again, saying it had not been his intention to desert the government (Meertens to L'Espinasse, 27-10-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.272-274).

⁹⁴ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 35-37.

have hoped for a provocation by the Director-General and hence were not satisfied with his move. For the moment they urged L'Espinasse to remain in his position, and with the danger of violence out of the way, the two parties came back to the negotiating table. In this situation, L'Espinasse understood his best bet was to accommodate the planter's wishes now and face the judgement of his superiors later. His improvised solution was that the planters nominate seven candidate representatives among themselves, within "twelve to fourteen" days. Continuing the previous tradition, he would then choose three civilian councillors from these nominees to form a new and legitimate Council.⁹⁵

This proposition was more or less accepted by the planters, although discussions ensued on the practical implementation. Who would be allowed to vote for the nominees, all colonists, or only planters with a certain number of slaves? L'Espinasse's proposal named "the Burghers" as the ones with the right to vote—yet, his opponents replied, there had never been an official explanation of who would qualify as a Burgher. Additionally, the period of twelve days was deemed too short to consult everyone and indeed no nominations were made in this period.

L'Espinasse therefore improvised again: considering that in the 1785 petition the majority of the colonists had asked for the reinstatement of the Bourda, Swaen, Ramaeckers and Van Helsdingen, the Director-General deemed this desire "the general will" of the colony and decided to ask them to take up their seats again again.⁹⁶ Since this move would mean a return to the older practice of having four instead of three civil councillors, the parity between WIC and colonists' votes would also be restored. After some more details had been hammered out between L'Espinasse and the four main dissenters, this solution was agreeable to all and put an end to the political crisis.⁹⁷ Without any interference, and even without any correspondence with the metropolis in these precarious weeks, the local actors had thus both created and solved a serious political crisis.

For the moment these changes were enough to quieten the political situation. Since the Orangist-Patriot crisis in the Dutch Republic was solved (for the moment), more attention could be paid to colonial matters. Indeed, it was now just waiting for the ratification and implementation of the Plan

⁹⁵ Publication by L'Espinasse, 17-10-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.256-260.

⁹⁶ Answer L'Espinasse to 31-10-1787 petition, 2-11-1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f. 294-95.

⁹⁷ TNA, CO 116/61, f.298-338.

of Redress, which followed in 1789. To implement this plan, two commissioners were appointed, named Willem Cornelis Boeij and Willem August Sirtema, Baron of Grovestins. In their report they neatly summarised the source of the problems: the WIC officials had wanted to “execute resolutions and orders with a blind zeal”, pitting the Director-General against the Fiscal and the Colonists, who “characteristic of Colony Councillors, favoured the system of planters over the government.” They concluded that this clash between metropolitan dogma and the desire for colonial autonomy, among other grievances, had brought the colony to a “complete state of anarchy (*regeeringloosheid*) and that except for the public order and safety, which fortunately remained intact, nobody reckoned himself obliged to comply with any of the established laws or orders, or to pay any dues.”⁹⁸

After arriving in Demerara on 26 May 1789 the two men formalised the changes in the administrative structure, by discharging the old Councillors and taking the oath for the new ones. The Councils of Policy of the two colonies were merged, and henceforth each colony would send its Fiscal and two chosen representatives to the General Council, with the Director-General acting as president. The councillors would be chosen by an Electors College (*Collegie van Kiezers*) comprising seven electors, who were also responsible for nominating the members of the Councils of Justice. The colonial apparatus was not merged entirely, for each colony retained its own judicial council – these would not be combined until 1812.⁹⁹ And while the members of the Council had to be Dutch, electors could also be of non-Dutch origin. Indeed, the names of the electors reveal a growing influence of French and British planters: in both colleges at least two out of seven electors were not Dutch. The entire situation was sealed when Grovestins and Boeij returned to the Dutch Republic in August 1789, together with

⁹⁸ Rapport Grovestins and Boeij, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915, f.5-7. (The archival entry contains two versions of the report, the original and the duplicate. For reasons of legibility I have consulted the duplicate, so the cited page numbers refer to the duplicate). Original quotations: “resolutien en beveelen, met een blinden ijver hadden willen ten uytvoer brengen”; “die zich als Colonie Raaden kenmerkende, het Sistema van de Planters tegen het gouvernement begunstigten”; “een volkoomen staat van regeeringloosheid was gebracgt, en dat uytgezonders de publieque rust en veyligheid, welke nog altijd gelijkkig bewaard is gebleeven, niemand zig verplicht rekende, aan eenige vastgestelde wetten of ordres te voldoen of eenige lasten op te brengen.”

⁹⁹ Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 132.

L'Espinasse, whom they had provisionally granted his requested resignation.¹⁰⁰

So the Plan of Redress put a definite end to the political turmoil and no further major changes were made afterwards, as in 1791 the WIC met its inexorable demise when its charter expired without being renewed. The result was that on 1 January 1792 the colonies passed into the hands of the Dutch state, which governed them through the newly created Council of Colonies (*Raad der Kolonien*). The new governor over the two colonies was already familiar: Willem August van Grovestins. Under his rule Essequibo and Demerara became part of the revolutionary turbulence spilling over from Europe.

The international revolutionary moment (1795-1803)

Indeed, while the political turmoil seemed to have finished in 1787, it had, in fact, only just begun. When the Patriots were ousted from the Dutch Republic in 1787, calm initially returned to the colonies too, but the Dutch were soon caught up in the international politics. In 1795 the French revolutionary army marched into the Dutch Republic, with many Patriots at their side. The French replaced the Dutch Republic with the new “Batavian Republic”, effectively a puppet state. Suddenly the simmering battle between the pro-British Orangists and pro-French Patriots was settled decisively in favour of the latter. Furthermore, these battle lines between opponents and supporters of the new regime were drawn even starker in the colonies.

In fact, the overthrown Stadtholder, William V of Orange, fled to Britain, where he asked King George III to take the Dutch colonies into “protection”. The British were all too eager to comply with these so-called Kew Letters, fearing that the French would otherwise annex the Dutch possessions, both in the East and the West Indies. The Stadtholder’s order to accept British “protection” caused considerable confusion in the colonies, for it seemed closer to military occupation—or at least that is what the governor of Dutch

¹⁰⁰ Previously Councillors were appointed for life, with the College comprising five members. This number was thus increased to seven, and every two years the most senior councillor had to retire. The Plan of Redress would remain in force as a basis for Guiana’s government until 1928. One of the electors was the Bostonian Gardiner Greene, while the Scot Thomas Cuming served as one of the temporary heads of government; both of them will be discussed in Chapter 6. Rapport Grovestins en Boeij, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915, f. 106, 108; *Journal*, *dagboek van het gouvernement in Demerary*, NL-HaNA, Raad der Koloniën (hereafter RdK), 1.05.02, inv. nr. 75, 27 May 1795, 31 May 1795.

Ceylon experienced. It took seven months for the local Dutch authorities to sign a capitulation treaty with the British, after the latter had captured a strategic harbour. The Dutch governor of Ceylon believed protection could consist of a British garrison, while the British fleet started from the idea of a temporary occupation.¹⁰¹

Even greater confusion arose in Essequibo and Demerara. The new governor Grovestins was an outspoken Orangist and his pro-British stance had brought stability to a colony where the majority of the planters were British. Indeed, after the start of the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802), Essequibo and Demerara had initially taken a pro-British stance. The colonies had refused to accept any French refugees and had shipped their produce in British convoys via Barbados.¹⁰² Yet this position became untenable with the establishment of the (pro-French) Batavian Republic, which immediately summoned Grovestins to break ties with British ports and seek French protection instead. Furthermore, the governor was warned about a possible British invasion. The local Council complied with these orders and on 27 April 1795 banned all armed ships except Dutch and French ones.¹⁰³

Yet soon afterwards Grovestins received the Kew Letters: on 3 May the British frigate the *Zebra* arrived with instructions from William V to seek *British* protection, against a possible *French* invasion. In addition, an accompanying British message offered six hundred British men to protect the colonial government. However, the local Council chose to follow the orders coming from the Dutch Republic, and rejected the British offer. This decision seems to have been too much for the Orangist in Grovestins: on 5 May he left the colony on board the *Zebra*, never to return. Since he had given no warning, nor taken any precautions for after his flight, Grovestins' hasty departure left the colonies in disarray. He wrote a letter to the Council explaining that he felt he had to leave and was going to Martinique (and possibly onwards to London). Interestingly, he gave a precise account of the cash and bills of exchange in the various colonial chests. Nevertheless, the sudden political vacuum in this tense period triggered a severe political

¹⁰¹ Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780-1815: Expansion and Reform* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007) 131-32.

¹⁰² McGowan, "The French Revolutionary Period in Demerara-Essequibo, 1793-1802," 1-4.

¹⁰³ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 72.

crisis.¹⁰⁴ The British force, unlike in Ceylon, left without taking the colonies by force—for the moment at least.

With unreliable communications in this crisis atmosphere, the colonists had to improvise again. No successor for Grovestins could be found immediately: Essequibo's Commandeur was abroad, while the acting Fiscal of Demerara refused, as did Demerara's Secretary, Anthony Beaujon. While Beaujon had been mentioned by Grovestins as a possible successor, he did not want to accept the responsibility in this difficult time. Yet developments moved quickly and on the following day, 6 May, the acting Commandeur of Essequibo, John Plettner, was persuaded to take command.¹⁰⁵

Yet this administrative band aid was only the start of further conflict, as French-British rivalry became intertwined with the struggle for the older Patriot ideals. Indeed, the local Patriot faction seized the opportunity to push for more democratic control of the colonies. On 8 May, an angry mob gathered outside the secretary building, rallying behind the cries of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. The group demanded access to the documents because a rumour was going around that Beaujon had secretly asked the British to intervene, and the Patriots wanted to see if the allegations were true.¹⁰⁶

Even though the mob was calmed, the Patriots continued to push for reform, but this time through petitions. They argued that after Grovestins' flight, authority fell back to the Council of Policy. Furthermore, they demanded that the position of president of the Council had to be filled by planter representatives. This position was to be shared between one planter from Essequibo and another from Demerara, and was to rotate every eight (sic) days. Additionally, it was decided that in the new Council the three vacant councillor seats were to be filled with planters as well, solidifying a planter majority in government. In fact, at this point there was little government left, and after the acting Fiscal resigned in protest, there was only John Plettner left to formally represent the metropolitan authority in

¹⁰⁴ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 74; *Bound Volume of Correspondence of Peter Fairbairn, Seaforth's Secretary*, National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS), Edinburgh, inv. nr. GD46/17/14, f.813, 817-821.

¹⁰⁵ The Commander of Essequibo was Albert Backer and the acting Fiscal of Demerara was Frans Wolff (the official Fiscal was probably away). McGowan, "The French Revolutionary Period," 5.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Beaujon's brother, Jan Jacob, was sent in 1796 by the Batavian Republic to Curacao, to become the new governor. There, Jan Jacob, although a Patriot himself, was accused of having convinced his brother to seek English support. Karwan Fatah-Black, "The Patriot Coup d'État in Curaçao, 1796," in *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795-1800*, ed. Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011) 137.

the new Council. While the period of this planter-dominated Council has been called the “Demerara Republic”, it is probably better to see it as an improvised and temporary form of crisis government.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, when the new Council received instructions on 27 June 1795 to install Antony Beaujon as the new governor, they did so without protest.¹⁰⁸

When the internal colonial disputes were settled, then, the colonists could worry again about international issues. Even the pro-French faction did not want the colonies to be taken over by French forces, especially not after the French abolition of slavery in 1794. So when Victor Hugues arrived in the Caribbean, the planters had reason to fear. In order to keep the enemies of France occupied, Hugues’ aim was to disturb their plantation societies, by encouraging slaves and free coloureds to revolt. This incitation inspired, among others, rebellions in Guadeloupe in 1793, St. Vincent and Grenada in 1795, and Jamaica in 1796, while creating unrest in many other places.¹⁰⁹

Consequently, when the colonists in Essequibo and Demerara heard rumours that Hugues had arrived in French Guiana, they were frightened. Not only did it signify a possible French invasion, but it also invoked fear of a slave revolt. These fears were not unfounded, for in the chaotic early weeks of May, a mulatto woman named Nancy Wood had apparently attempted to encourage the enslaved Africans to revolt, although without success. Regardless, in early June, a large-scale revolt broke out on Demerara’s west coast, although this uprising was probably unrelated to any French activity (see Chapter 3).¹¹⁰

In the end there would be no French takeover, however, because the British came first. Historians disagree over whether this British invasion in April 1796 was solicited by Antony Beaujon; nonetheless, it is clear that local initiatives played a major role. British planters had recognised the

¹⁰⁷ Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 114.

¹⁰⁸ The appointment of Beaujon comes across as rather strange, considering that a few weeks earlier he had been accused of selling out to the English. McGowan, “The French Revolutionary period in Demerara-Essequibo, 1793-1802,” 5-7.

¹⁰⁹ Edward L. Cox, “The British Caribbean in the Age of Revolution,” in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic world*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 276-279; Beverley A. Steele, *Grenada: A History of its People* (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003) 101; David Geggus, “Slave rebellion during the Age of Revolution,” in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 29-31; Ramón Aizpurua, “Revolution and Politics in Venezuela and Curaçao, 1795-1800,” in *ibid.*; 103-105; Fatah-Black, “Patriot Coup,” in *ibid.*, 132; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1982) 182-183, 211.

¹¹⁰ NL-HaNA, RdK, 1.05.02, inv. nr. 75, 19 May 1795.

opportunity for political change and had been making requests to the British Colonial Office to take Essequibo and Demerara for the British Crown. A French capture would be detrimental to their business interests, they argued, so it would be better to strike first. And this scenario was indeed what came to pass. After brief negotiations, the British force of 1,300 men ensured the quick surrender of the Dutch. The Council did not have a problem with capitulation, as long as property remained intact, the extant laws remained in force and no new laws would be made. An interesting detail here is that one of the councillors who signed the capitulation, Thomas Cuming, was British himself, and one of the foremost planters in the colony (see Chapter 6).¹¹¹ The British agreed to the Council's demand and retained Antony Beaujon in his post, although Lieutenant Hislop would be the supreme authority.¹¹² The situation was thus more or less a repetition of the takeover of 1781 and was similar to the "protection" that was offered to Ceylon.

The coming of British rule in fact brought many advantages to the colonists, as they gained (renewed) official access to British networks of finance and trade. Indeed the colonies entered a whole new phase under British rule. In the following years, large amounts of capital flowed into the colonies, while especially slave traders from Liverpool brought in thousands of African captives. Although the colonies became increasingly anglicised with the arrival of many British planters, financiers and traders, the official language of the Courts remained Dutch, although proclamations were now bilingual.¹¹³

The colonies were in a peculiar situation now: since no peace treaty had been signed, the Dutch Republic still had a claim to the colonies even though they were in the hands of the British "protectors". And since British interests far outnumbered Dutch ones by the turn of the century, the peace of Amiens in 1802 made little sense: the colonies were restored to the Dutch, who now essentially had to administer a rapidly expanding British colony, without the means to do so. It would not be long, therefore, before the British retook the colonies, and from 1803 they would remain in British hands. Although the official transfer of sovereignty occurred only in 1814, Essequibo and Demerara were effectively under British control from 1803.

¹¹¹ See the website of David Alston:
<http://www.spanglefish.com/slavesandhighlanders/index.asp?pageid=164658>
 (retrieved 19 June 2016).

¹¹² Dalton, *History of British Guiana*, 245-247.

¹¹³ McGowan, "The French Revolutionary Period," 11; Oostindie, "British Capital".

Conclusion

The survival of the political structure in Essequibo and Demerara is a remarkable phenomenon, considering the manifold challenges it endured. It sustained attacks on all fronts: at the colonial level, at the metropolitan level and at the international level. Nonetheless, despite the British takeover, the Dutch institutional structure (the Plan of Redress) remained the basis of governance until 1928.¹¹⁴ Somehow, then, for all its shortcomings, it proved effective enough.

Central to the understanding of this resilience is the concept of negotiation. In its many forms, ranging from petitioning to breaking Company rules and the threat of outright revolt, processes of negotiation prevented unwelcome WIC regulation from being implemented. In fact, negotiation was inherent to the political structure of the Republic and by extension in the WIC and the colonies. With authority divided over the provinces and provincial Chambers of the WIC, there was also a need for compromise. And if negotiations stalled or broke down, improvisation filled the void.

Administrative flexibility was fundamental to the colonial survival of Essequibo and Demerara. In the sparsely populated colonies with hardly a bureaucratic structure to speak of, the WIC could do little else than leave most of the decision-making in the hands of the colonists. Indeed, as will appear throughout this thesis, the local officials often gave their own interpretation of what was best for the colonies; they solicited help from Barbados to suppress a slave rebellion (see Chapter 6), condoned the pervasive smuggling (see Chapter 4) and blocked metropolitan creditors from executing indebted estates (see Chapter 5).

While all empires had to deal with the problems of distance and hence slow communications, these difficulties were particularly pronounced in the case of Essequibo and Demerara. The two colonies were on the fringes of the Dutch empire, with very infrequent connections to the metropolis. Furthermore, the division into chambers within the WIC precluded speedy communication. Since the interests of Amsterdam and Zeeland often clashed, it was hard to agree on decisive action in the general meetings of the Gentlemen X. Additionally, the diverging views of these two chambers meant that the provincial delegates generally had to consult with their own

¹¹⁴ Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 106.

chamber before they could commit to a decision. And often, the discussion started all over again during the next meeting. Consequently, it took more than twenty years, from 1750 to 1772, before a solution was found for the trade dispute between Amsterdam and Zeeland. Even then, the outcome was a complicated ruling that did not end the underlying rivalry.

In the meantime, two other issues remained unresolved: the increasingly transnational orientation of the two colonies, and the uncomfortable fact that a trading company administered an empire. Firstly, the conflict between Amsterdam and Zeeland, in hindsight, proved to be rear-guard struggle over institutional prevalence over colonies that were drifting away from the Dutch sphere of influence, insofar as they ever had been under it. To overcome the lack of metropolitan support, the local multi-national community weaved its own West-Indian web that took care of most of their immediate concerns of security and supplies: Amerindian allies, British smugglers and North American provision suppliers turned out to be the cornerstones of colonial survival, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

Secondly, the biggest institutional hurdle remained unchallenged, namely Company rule. As the Patriot author of the *Brieven* noted, the WIC was unfit as a territorial power. There had been a logic to having the WIC as a war machine against Spain, as guardian of the slave fortress Elmina, or as organiser of the smuggling trade at Curacao. Similarly, during the seventeenth century there was some sense in seeing the WIC as a facilitator of trade with the Amerindians (see Chapter 1). Yet there proved to be no logic in having the WIC as the administrator of rapidly expanding agricultural colonies. While the Dutch East India Company (VOC) also ruled over territorial possessions, it still had a monopoly on the trade from Asia.¹¹⁵ The WIC, on the other hand, had little left in the eighteenth century. It had given up trading and had resorted to profiting from private trade through taxation. However, this income was insufficient to cover even the minimal institutional expenses made for Essequibo and Demerara. Hence, there was no logic in investing more.

It is therefore not surprising that the colonies reached much more of their potential under the foreign occupations, as the French and British improved the infrastructure, services and market access. Considering there

¹¹⁵ Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the Period of its Decline (1740-1796)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012) chapter 4; Idem, *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles: The English and Dutch East India Companies (1700-1800)* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) chapter 1.

were also many non-Dutch planters, many had little incentive to defend Company rule. In fact, whereas the WIC represented mainly restrictions, the British empire embodied opportunities: access to the protected British home market, as well as the possibility to buy enslaved Africans in great numbers from British slavers. The French and the British occupations had the advantage of state backing. While the WIC had to internalise all protection costs, the French and British occupations were effectively paid for by their respective states, giving them far more financial breathing space. It is this uncomfortable tension between Company and state that came to the surface during the 1780s in the Patriot-inspired protests.

The protests in the colonies in 1785 and 1787 were essentially conservative in nature: the petitioners resented the new way of forming a Council of Policy and desired a return to the previous practice. Similarly, when the colonies were confronted with the revolutionary whirlwind of the 1790s, they upheld a conservative attitude. Many colonists, including a large share of the British ones, preferred British “protection” in the name of the Dutch Stadtholder to inclusion in the revolutionary French empire. When the Dutch Republic itself was overrun by French troops, the colonies had little choice but to submit to the new regime, yet the idea of abolishing slavery terrified the colonists. The most illustrative event of this period was the desertion by the pro-British governor Grovestins, and the subsequent rotating eight-day presidency that the colonists improvised instead.

In the end the institutional weakness of the colonies might have been its greatest strength. With ample room for local initiatives (including smuggling), the colonists had little reason to rise up against the Company and seek independence, like many of their Latin American neighbours would do. When the WIC tried to be strict in imposing its rules, such as in the 1780s, the colonists rose in protest. Otherwise, they acquiesced to the situation and made the best of their lives.

One area in which the institutional structure was particularly weak was defence. Foreign enemies could take over the colonies without firing a shot, but the colonists were more concerned with the “internal enemy”, namely the enslaved population. In case of an insurgency, the few Company soldiers could do little. Furthermore, many soldiers deserted to the Spanish, further weakening the garrison. Yet, as the next chapter will demonstrate, desertion was actually a key factor in explaining why the slavery regime survived in the two colonies, while also returning to the role of the Amerindian population.

3 **The slavery regime**

Slave refugees, deserters and insurgents

Maddelon was a young enslaved woman in Demerara who found herself caught up in a perilous situation. On 14 August 1772 a rebellion took place on her plantation on the west coast and she became embroiled in it against her will. Her sister's partner, the *bomba* (driver) Jacob, had been plotting a revolt, together with several of the other bombas. Apparently, Jacob had said "the new master treats us so badly, let us put a knife in his throat". A change of owner was always a moment where the existing negotiated balance was disrupted, and the new planter—Pieter Cornelis Hooft—had increased both the work load and the whippings. Yet Maddelon did not support the violent plans and reported them to her master's wife. Consequently, Jacob received a beating (*maling*), and Maddelon must have been viewed with suspicion afterwards. Therefore, when the revolt finally broke out, she felt trapped.¹

She wanted to leave, but the rebels threatened to kill her if she dared to go. Therefore, she witnessed the violent events that followed: how Hooft was called out from his house with news that a deserter had been caught, how he was subsequently attacked and beheaded by the bombas and how his house was raided for clothes, guns and ammunition. She saw or heard how Hooft's wife tried to escape, how she fell and was killed and how the rebels cut her belly open to use her blood for an obeah ritual, to find her unborn child inside. Yet somehow she managed to escape, making her way to the nearby plantation of J.B. Struys. However, while she was free from the violence of the rebels there, she soon was captured by the whites. Deemed a potential rebel, she was brought to the fort for questioning.²

¹ Interrogation of Maddelon, 18 August 1772, TNA, CO 116/38, f.287. Original quotation: "de nieuwe meester behandelt ons zo slegt, laat ons hem een mes in zijn keel steeken".

² Obeah being the religious practices and rituals that developed among West African slaves in the West Indies. The word she used was "Fetiché" (Diana Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 20 note 4); TNA, CO 116/38, f.285-87; Journal of the command post at plantation Zeelugt, TNA, CO 116/38, f.266-77.

In her testimony she made conscious choices about who to blame and who to absolve. She only incriminated the leaders of the revolt—the bombas Jacob, Daniel and Quamina—while also mentioning that the bomba Felix had defected after the whites were killed. In general, she mentioned the actions of others, not of herself. When she was questioned about a golden ring she might have stolen in the chaos, she denied the accusation; it had been a gift, and was nevertheless taken from her upon capture. Furthermore, she emphasised that the rebels were Hooft's people, not the ones of her previous master, Pieter Callaert, thereby protecting the people she knew. Additionally, she confirmed the interrogator's suspicions that Callaert had been behind the revolt: he had encouraged the bombas to take action against their cruel new master. Maddelon had little reason to protect her former master: Callaert had threatened to kill her if she revealed that he had delivered a weapon, powder and shot to Jacob. Furthermore, she confirmed that Callaert had raped her, stating that he “was with her and used her in his bedroom on a plank before they were sold.”³

In the end, Maddelon's account was apparently deemed reliable enough to prove that she had not actively participated in the uprising, and to convince the authorities that Callaert was guilty. Furthermore, most of the convicted rebels were indeed from Hooft (and other planters), not from Callaert.⁴

For the historian, accounts like Maddelon's provide unique insights in the lives of the enslaved, despite their interpretational problems. The enslaved only answered questions, which were clearly aimed at seeking confirmation rather than entertaining divergent perspectives. Hence, those being interrogated might follow these leads, in order not to draw any suspicion onto themselves. In addition, the testimonies of the enslaved were written down by a white clerk, who might introduce his own layer of interpretation, especially when translating from a creole language to the bureaucratic language. Furthermore, the enslaved had their own motives to bend the truth, such as protecting their loved ones or incriminating their enemies. For example, Maddelon was accused by others of having been the

³ TNA, CO 116/36, f.285-287 (quotation); Further interrogations of Callaert, 30 December 1773, TNA, CO 116/38, f.236-243. Original quotation: “dat Callaert bij haar is geweest en haar heeft gebruikt, in zijn slaapkamer op een plank voor dat zij verkogt waren,”.

⁴ Minutes of the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice of Essequibo, 16 October 1772, National Archives of Guyana (hereafter NAG), AB 3, inv. nr. 12, f.178-182; Minutes of the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice of Essequibo, 4 and 5 November 1772, NAG, AB 3, inv. nr. 13, f.1-5.

one that lured Hooft outside before he was killed. In the end, however, the authorities believed the larger number of accounts that pointed to another woman, called Clarissa, who was burned alive with particular cruelty.⁵ Nevertheless, with careful reading and cross-referencing, these statements have a lot to offer to the historian.⁶

Normally, testimonies by enslaved Africans and Amerindians against whites were not admitted in court, yet now the local Court made an exception. If the rebels had not been stopped, the Court reasoned, “nothing less than the ruin of this entire colony and the premature death of so many white Christians” would have been the result.⁷ Still, statements like Maddelon’s were not enough to convict Callaert. They only served as legitimation for his torture, in order to procure a confession. And while Callaert denied any involvement after the first session, just before the second day of his torture his memory suddenly returned to him and he confessed to having been the instigator of the revolt.⁸

While we will return to the revolt in more detail below, for now it is useful to note that Maddelon’s experiences capture crucial elements of the slavery regime in Essequibo and Demerara. A constant tension between accommodation and resistance, fight or flight, pervaded the lives of the enslaved. As Marjoleine Kars has recently and wonderfully demonstrated, most people tried to avoid violence from any side, and simply wished to “dodge” rebellions like this one. They might plead for mercy, surrender or try to carve out a living as a maroon nearby.⁹ This chapter will investigate the various ways in which the enslaved dealt with the slavery regime, including the flight to safe havens, forms of marronage and armed rebellion.

The question then is how the slavery regime could survive. If control by the West India Company was so weak, as argued in Chapter 2, why were the enslaved not able to overthrow the plantation hierarchy? And how did the possibility of acquiring freedom in the Spanish areas, as discussed in

⁵ She was tied to a pole, with a chain, so that she could walk around, putting her in a position of an animal. Subsequently, a fire was pushed closer and closer, to burn her alive. Proceedings of the Court of Justice, 15 December 1772, NAG, AB 3, inv. nr. 13, f.38.

⁶ Emilia Viotti Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 170-171.

⁷ Extract from Minutes of Court of Justice, 3 January 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.246-249. Original quotation: “niet minder dan de ruine van deze gansche Colonie en de verhaaste dood van zoo veele Blanken Christenen”.

⁸ TNA, CO 116/38, f.236-243; Confession of Callaert, 8 January 1774, CO 116/39, f.266-267.

⁹ Marjoleine Kars, “Dodging Rebellion: Politics and Gender in the Berbice Slave Uprising of 1763,” *The American Historical Review*, no. 1 (2016) 41.

Chapter 1, influence the slave society on the Dutch side? And what was the role of other groups, such as soldiers and Amerindians, in stabilising or destabilising the regime? This chapter focuses on the two main mechanisms used to undermine the plantation hierarchy, namely running away and staging revolts. First, however, I will sketch out the slavery regime in Essequibo and Demerara by putting it in a comparative context, especially with regard to Suriname and Venezuela.

Subsequently, I turn to the first main argument, namely that the existence of an “escape option” in the Orinoco region significantly increased the stability of the slave regime. Indeed, “desertion”—fleeing from an oppressive labour regime—proved key. The open border allowed the most daring to get away, who might otherwise have chosen violent resistance. Furthermore, WIC soldiers—neither completely bonded nor completely free—also fled to the Spanish areas and might otherwise have sided with the enslaved instead (as they sometimes did) or caused unrest by staging a mutiny. Lastly, the viability of running away was one of the reasons that few maroon societies were formed in the forest. While maroons in Suriname often attacked plantations, the relative absence of maroon communities in Essequibo and Demerara contributed to the stability of the slavery system.

The second pillar of the slavery regime was the support from the Amerindians. Rather than relying exclusively on European soldiers, the colonists formed alliances with indigenous groups. This assistance could take the form of commando groups that searched the forests for incipient maroon hideouts, but also of auxiliary troops to put down rebellions. This help was necessary because European soldiers were of little use in the jungle and were eager to defect to the Spanish. Because of the Amerindians, revolts barely had a chance to succeed.

Regimes of slavery compared

Early modern Atlantic slavery had so many different manifestations across time and space that generalisations are difficult and bound to be inaccurate. For example, an enslaved Amerindian miner in seventeenth-century Peru had little in common with an urban slave carpenter in eighteenth-century Havana, who in turn lived a different life from an enslaved girl picking cotton on a plantation in nineteenth-century Georgia. Nevertheless, some broad strokes might be useful to place the slavery regime in Essequibo and

Demerara in perspective. In short, full-scale plantation slavery arrived relatively late, resulting in the highly negative demographic regime characteristic of newly cultivated areas around the Caribbean. Consequently, the two colonies had a high number of Africans as opposed to creoles. Moreover, the lack of urban societies and free coloured communities meant that racial divides were strong and few opportunities existed to escape plantation slavery.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw the spreading of intensive plantation slavery to several new areas, typically because of British involvement. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the British had occupied (among others) Martinique, Guadeloupe and Cuba, and in all of these places a sudden openness to British slave traders had fuelled a rapid expansion of plantation exploitation. Similarly, the so-called Ceded Islands—Grenada, Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Tobago—saw a major influx of British capital after they were ceded to Britain by France and Spain in 1763.¹⁰ While Brazil and the United States' Deep South also experienced expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had a longer tradition of plantation slavery. In other colonies, such as Mexico and Peru, plantation slavery was less prominent and recurrent growth within the indigenous population meant that enslaved labour became less needed.¹¹ In yet another group the growth of slavery had halted as soil exhaustion had taken its toll, for example in Barbados and perhaps Suriname.¹² Similar to the other newly developed areas, Essequibo and Demerara's plantation sector expanded because of British influence, because of British planters as well as British slave traders (see Chapter 4).

These temporal differences in the arrival of large-scale plantation slavery had a profound effect on the demography of the enslaved. The death toll among the enslaved in Essequibo and Demerara was enormous. Clearing the environment was backbreaking work anywhere, yet it was worse on the Guiana coast. The cutting down of the dense rainforest was arduous in itself but the enslaved also had to dig an elaborate system of waterworks to make the plantation into a *polder*. An intricate system of dams, canals and sluices

¹⁰ Steele, *Grenada*, chapter 4; Laird W. Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 16-17; Banks, *Chasing Empire*, 42; Klein, *African Slavery*, 87.

¹¹ Klein, *African Slavery*, 83-88; Bergad, *Comparative Histories*, 23-63; Anthony R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese empire: From Beginnings to 1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) chapter 24.

¹² Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*.

was needed to control the water level on the plantation. The front dam protected against the tides, the back dam prevented excessive rainfall from the forest from overrunning the estate, while side dams completed the system. In between, trenches and canals had to be dug to allowing for adequate irrigation and transport of products in small punt boats.¹³

So labour demands were higher, but, in addition, slavery was also more deadly in new areas because of the low percentage of creolised slaves. The American-born enslaved had more resistance to local diseases, yet new areas could not be developed without a large influx of African captives (although in the United States the internal slave trade offered an alternative). In Suriname the demographic decline was 4.7 per cent per year in the period between 1750 and 1775, when it experienced a rapid expansion of both its plantation sector and its trade in enslaved Africans. Afterwards, the expansion halted and the slave trade dwindled, and the rate of demographic decline dropped to 2.4 per cent afterwards.¹⁴

It is well-known that the demography of (Caribbean) slavery became less negative in the nineteenth century, partly as a result of creolisation, partly because expansion had stopped, partly because of amelioration measures. Barbados and Antigua, for example, had experienced positive growth of the enslaved populations since the late eighteenth century. For Suriname a similar trend is visible. Yet Essequibo and Demerara remained at the forefront of expansion, at least until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and therefore still had the associated harsh working conditions and negative demographics.¹⁵

On a more general level, the demographic conditions in Essequibo and Demerara were consistent with the Caribbean model, with its negative growth, as opposed to the North American mainland model where positive growth was the norm. Caribbean colonies typically had higher death rates than births and thus continually imported new African captives to make up

¹³ Mohammed Shahabuddeen, *From Plantocracy to Nationalisation: A Profile of Sugar in Guyana* (Georgetown: University of Guyana, 1984) 16-17; Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan, "Slavery and Slave Cultures in a Hydraulic Society: Suriname," in *Slavery and Slave Cultures in the Americas*, ed. Stephan Palmié (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996) 80-81.

¹⁴ Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*, 318.

¹⁵ Gert Oostindie, "Voltaire, Stedman and Suriname Slavery," *Slavery & Abolition*, no. 2 (1993); Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*, 372-375. Barry Higman gives figures between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent negative growth in the period 1817-1832, and David Eltis also notes how the enslaved population declined after 1817 when the slave trade between British colonies was ended (B. W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) 310; Eltis, "Traffic in Slaves,").

for this demographic deficit. Historians have not yet fully explained this regional difference, although currently the onus seems to be on explaining low Caribbean fertility rates, rather than high death rates; the fertility of enslaved women on the North American mainland was 80 per cent higher than in the average Caribbean colony.¹⁶ In any case, a vicious cycle might have emerged: African-born slaves had lower chances of survival than American-born ones, as the former lacked disease resistance and were usually malnourished from the transatlantic crossing. Consequently, to make up for this loss, planters imported even more Africans, further inhibiting the process of creolisation.¹⁷

A final influence on demography was the type of crop produced, and here Essequibo and Demerara were in line with most of the Caribbean. Sugar was the worst crop for survival rates: whereas coffee plantations saw a demographic decline of three per cent, for sugar estates this was closer to five.¹⁸ Sugar cultivation entailed more intensive production: the large investments in mills, draft animals and boiling houses necessitated a large scale of operation. Furthermore, sugar cane spoiled rapidly and had to be processed as quickly as possible. As a result, the workload for the enslaved increased greatly during harvest time because the mill had to be kept running throughout the night. In addition, crushing cane in the mill was a dangerous job, for if a limb became caught in the cane crushers it would quickly be amputated by an overseer with a machete. The cultivation of coffee was less intensive as the berries did not need as much processing; cotton required even less labour.

In Essequibo and Demerara the crop that delivered the most value at the end of the century was cotton. Many planters decided to focus on this crop as its price was, although volatile, generally on the rise in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, partly because of the unfolding of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.¹⁹ Nevertheless, sugar and coffee remained in demand because of the collapse of the Saint-Domingue economy after the 1791 revolution there. As the island had been the biggest producer of coffee and

¹⁶ Philip D. Morgan, "The Black Experience in the British Empire, 1680-1810," in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 90-91.

¹⁷ Gert Oostindie, "The Economics of Slavery," *Economic and Social History in the Netherlands* (1993) 15.

¹⁸ Gert Oostindie, "Slavenleven," in *Ik ben eigendom van--: Slavenhandel en plantageleven*, ed. Bea Brommer (Wijk en Aalburg: Pictures Publishers, 1993) 101; Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*, 168-169.

¹⁹ Database "Global Commodities, Trade Exploration and Cultural Exchange", www.globalcommodities.amdigital.co.uk, accessed 5 July 2016.

sugar in the world, a sudden stop meant that world prices rose and other colonies saw opportunities to fill the gap. All around the Greater Caribbean, particularly in Brazil and Cuba, planters profited from this development. The enslaved in Essequibo and Demerara, then, produced a mixture of crops with a high percentages of estates cultivating cotton. Yet another outside developed altered this structure. After Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793, it suddenly became lucrative to grow cotton in the United States. A rapid expansion ensued and US planter would quickly outcompete other cotton producers, lowering prices and forcing planters in Essequibo and Demerara to revert back to sugar in the early nineteenth century.²⁰

So crop regimes mattered a great deal for the structure of the slavery regime and explain to a large extent the difference with neighbouring Venezuela, which focused on the cultivation of cocoa. In contrast to sugar, cocoa was less labour-intensive and could be produced on smaller plots. It had been cultivated in Venezuela since the sixteenth century, but only became a prominent crop in the eighteenth century, stimulated by the formation of the Caracas Company, which received a royal monopoly on trade with Venezuela in 1728. At the end of the century Venezuela had about 64,000 enslaved workers, of whom at least 60 per cent worked in cocoa cultivation.²¹

Slavery in Essequibo and Demerara differed from many other regimes in an additional aspect, namely the comparative lack of urban slavery. In most societies in the Americas, a large share of the enslaved population worked in urban settings rather than on the plantations. Both on the Caribbean islands and on the North and South American mainland, enslaved people could be found in jobs ranging from dockworker to cleaner and from road builder to sales woman.²² However, since an urban settlement did not even exist before 1784, urban slavery hardly played a role in Essequibo and Demerara. In the capital, Stabroek, there were 466 enslaved persons, 238

²⁰ Ibid.; Bergad, *Comparative Histories*, chapter 4; Riello, *Cotton*, chapter 9; Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 28.

²¹ Klein, *African Slavery*, 86; Angelina Pollak-Eltz, "La esclavitud en Venezuela," in *Influencias Africanas en las culturas tradicionales de los países andinos: Il encuentro para la promoción y difusión del patrimonio folclórico de los países andinos* (Santa Ana de Coro: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, 2001); Roland Dennis Hussey, *The Caracas Company 1728-1784: A Study in the History of Spanish Monopolistic Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

²² Bergad, *Comparative Histories*, 194; Morgan, "The Black Experience," in Morgan and Hawkins, *Black Experience*, 94; Gert Oostindie, "Slave Resistance, Colour Lines, and the Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions in Curaçao," in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 3; Karwan Fatah-Black, "Slaves and Sailors on Suriname's Rivers," *Itinerario*, no. 3 (2012).

whites and 76 free people of colour in 1786. Around 1800 these figures had increased to 1,500 whites, 200 free coloureds and 5,000 enslaved persons.²³

The comparative lack of urban environments reduced the options for enslaved people to escape from the plantations. Around the Americas, free people of colour lived in urban settings, where dark skin was not necessarily equated with slavery. Hence, runaways could try to pass as free to carve out a new living for themselves. In Essequibo and Demerara, much like in Suriname, this passing proved virtually impossible. In fact, in Suriname manumission rates were well below one per cent between 1760 and 1820 and the number of free coloured people was low. Only later in the nineteenth century did manumission and the share of free coloureds rise.²⁴ This situation was no different in Essequibo and Demerara: the British, after the takeover, explicitly aimed to limit manumission in order not to prevent the creation of a group of free coloureds that did not fit into the racially-based plantation hierarchy.²⁵

In Essequibo and Demerara, then, the ratio of black to white persons was highly skewed and the numbers of enslaved people continued to grow quickly (see Table 3.1). This imbalance meant that the plantation hierarchy was vulnerable, and administrators were well aware of it. For instance, in 1784 Essequibo's Council of Policy instated a rule that every planter should have one white person for every 50 slaves that he paid tax for. For every lacking white person a fine of 1,000 guilders would be given, however, since the number of whites was so small, a two-year grace period was granted.²⁶ In the end such measures had little effect, and on average a plantation had only three white persons.²⁷ Heavily outnumbered, many a planter engaged in cruel punishments to maintain discipline. The planter reigned supreme in meting out justice on the estate, and considering that many estates were several days sailing from the administrative centre, there was hardly any way for the enslaved to seek redress in case they were maltreated.

²³ Van Langen, "Britse overname," 91; Henry Bolingbroke, *A Voyage to Demerary, Containing a Statistical Account of the Settlement There, and of Those on the Essequibo, the Berbice, and Other Contiguous Rivers of Guyana* (London: M. Carey, 1807) 40. The British report in 1802 that 2,669 (so five per cent) of the 49,451 slaves were registered in Stabroek (CO 111/4 f.179).

²⁴ Oostindie, "Voltaire, Stedman and Suriname Slavery," 21.

²⁵ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 173.

²⁶ Ibid., vol. 2: 36-37; Van Langen, "Britse overname," 88.

²⁷ Thomas Pierronet, "Remarks Made During a Residence at Stabroek Rio Demerary (Lat. 6. 10. N.) in the Latter Part of the Year 1798," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society for the Year 1799*, ed. Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1799) 9.

Table 3.1: Enslaved Africans in Essequibo and Demerara, 1735-1832

<i>Year</i>	<i>Essequibo</i>	<i>Demerara</i>	<i>Total</i>
1735	2,600	--	260
1755		920	
1762	2,571	1,648	4,219
1763			
1764		2,212	
1765		2,359	
1766	2,978	2,569	5,547
1767	3,119	3,245	6,364
1768	3,284	4,145	7,429
1769	4,543	5,967	10,510
1777	8,289		
1776		More than 9,639	
1779		More than 12,620	
1782	8,700	12,559	21,259
1788	9,597	16,773	26,370
1795	10,612	27,865	38,477
1796	12,678	30,141	42,819
1797	13,579	33,992	47,571
1798	12,360/14,567	36,651/37,431	49,011/51,998
1802			49,451
1817		77,867	
1832		65,556	

Source: see footnote.²⁸

In fact, Dutch colonial law hardly offered the enslaved any protection: nothing like a Slave Code or *Code Noir* existed, neither in Batavia, the Cape of Good Hope nor the Guiana Coast. And while on the Cape in 1754 at least an attempt was made to standardise the various local decrees pertaining to slavery, nothing of the sort was done in Essequibo or Demerara.²⁹ There, in 1770, the Director-General described the depravity of the situation:

In the English islands no one may upon his own authority give a slave more than forty lashes and so, to keep on the safe side, no

²⁸ Most of these numbers are based on tax figures, and therefore represent a lower boundary: many planters underreported the number of enslaved workers in order to pay less taxes, and quite a few did not report any number at all. Eltis, "Traffic in Slaves," 60; Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 11; Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 93; Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 398-399; *Gedrukte extract-resolutiën van de Staten-Generaal en andere stukken (...)*, 1769-1776, NL-HaNA, Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel [levensjaren 1737-1800] (hereafter Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel), 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, H18, f.91-94; TNA, CO 116/36, f.205, f.446; *Overzicht inwoners en plantages Essequibo 1777, 1778*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 189; "Generaal tablea van de Colonie Essequibo" (...), 1789, *ibid.*, inv. nr. 192A; "Generaale staat van de Rivier Demerary" (...), 1789, *ibid.*, inv. nr. 192B; TNA, CO 111/3, f.97, 213, 214, 231; TNA, CO 111/4, f.8; TNA, CO 111/4, f.179.

²⁹ Nigel Worden and Gerald Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery: Selected Documents Concerning Slaves from the Criminal Records of the Council of Justice at the Cape of Good Hope, 1705-1794* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents, 2005) xxi, note 65.

one ever gives more than thirty-nine; it is true that this may be done two days running, but what is that compared with what goes on here ? We have no laws, concerning the matter (at least none is known to me) and when I remonstrate I am told that everyone is master of his own slaves and that as long as he does not kill them (i.e. if they but come from the stocks alive) it is no business of the Fiscal's.³⁰

During the remainder of the decade the lack of protection was noted by others as well and only in 1784 did the Company limit the number of lashes to twenty-five, to be delivered “without cruelty or passion.” Allegedly to prevent accidents, the enslaved had to be tied between four poles first, with his or her face on the ground. Fines for punishments deemed “too harsh” ranged from 30 to 900 guilders.³¹ However, there was no formal control, nor did the enslaved have any realistic opportunity of making their case before the Fiscal, hence all of these rulings failed to have any practical impact.

In short, Essequibo and Demerara were among the worst places to be as an enslaved African in the late eighteenth century. With high death rates, a population that was continuously in flux, little legal protection and the exhausting labour demands of a frontier colony, it is quite remarkable that the plantation hierarchy was able to survive. Desertion proved one of the main ways in which the pressure on the system was released.

The deserters

Other than everyday resistance in the form of destroying tools and slowing the work pace, running away was the most common way of opposing the slavery regime and could take three forms: *petit marronage*, *grand marronage* and “step-by-step” marronage. The first term is used for those who were only temporarily absent (called “truants” in the North American context), the second term denotes refugees who took the bigger step of leaving the plantation for good and settling in an area beyond the plantation society's control. The “step-by-step” form of marronage arose when someone absconded but stayed in the vicinity, living in the forest near or behind the plantations, such as abandoned provision plots. This way, the maroon could

³⁰ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 638.

³¹ L.I.D. Grovestins to WIC Chamber Maze, 2 May 1779, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 309; Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, vol. 2: 58-59; Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 103; Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 116.

stay in contact with the plantation to see loved ones and acquire provisions. Later he or she might take the step to grand marronage.³²

As we shall see below, the enslaved were not the only ones to flee their situation, for soldiers and to a lesser extent sailors did so too. It seems therefore useful to adopt the concept of “desertion” to capture all these forms and groups. Defining desertion as the “unpermitted absence from work”, we can see the similarities between these different forms of labour resistance.³³ Indeed, during the eighteenth century the line between free labour and slave labour was not a clear-cut one, and the two should be seen along a continuum. Soldiers and sailors were theoretically free to leave before and after their contract period (although press gangs and imposed debt burdens severely limited this freedom), yet *during* their contract these labourers were far from free.³⁴ For example, on Paramaribo’s waterfront and on Suriname’s rivers, sailors and slaves performed very similar tasks.³⁵

Desertion was not just aimed at rejection of the current working conditions, but also involved the aim of finding a better, alternative life elsewhere.³⁶ For the sake of conceptual clarity, however, I will distinguish between “maroons” who formed (either nearby or further removed) societies in the forests in search of “informal freedom” (*de facto* but not *de jure* freedom), and “slave refugees”, who tried to escape Dutch territory in order to reach the Orinoco, in the hope that the Spanish would grant them “formal freedom”— freedom under the law.³⁷

While desertion was a characteristic of any plantation society throughout the Americas, the specific manifestation could be said to depend on three types of geography, namely natural, social and political geography, as well as on the stance of the indigenous groups. The natural geography part is the most straightforward. For a viable maroon society to establish itself, there had to be a space beyond the reach of the colonial arm, where the maroons would not be discovered easily, where they could plant crops, and

³² Karwan Fatah-Black, “Desertion by Sailors, Slaves and Soldiers in the Dutch Atlantic, ca. 1600-1800,” in *Desertion in the Early Modern World: A Comparative History*, ed. Matthias Van Rossum and Jeanette Kamp (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2016) 105.

³³ Jeanette Kamp and Matthias Van Rossum, “Introduction: Leaving Work Across the World,” in Van Rossum and Kamp, *Desertion*, 5.

³⁴ Matthias Van Rossum, “Working for the Devil’: Desertion in the Eurasian empire of the VOC,” in Idem and Kamp, *Desertion*, 134.

³⁵ Fatah-Black, “Slaves and Sailors”.

³⁶ Kamp and Van Rossum, “Introduction,” in Van Rossum and Kamp, *Desertion*, 4-6.

³⁷ Damian Pargas, “Beacons of Freedom: Slave Refugees in North America, 1800-1860” (NWO VIDI grant proposal, 2015).

where they could hold their own through guerrilla warfare in case of an attack. This space could be the dense Amazon rainforest, or the mountains of Jamaica or St. Vincent.³⁸ As Wim Klooster stated, an island like Curaçao was simply too small to sustain maroon communities.³⁹

A second defining element was the extent and nature of the slaveholding settlements, or the social geography: the more widespread the white presence was, the fewer pockets of freedom existed and the greater the chance of discovery for the runaway. Consequently, in the developed colonial society of North America the enslaved in Virginia and North Carolina were forced to seek refuge in the “Great Dismal Swamp” on their border. In contrast, in the overwhelmingly black society of Suriname the opportunities for successful flight were much greater. However, since Paramaribo was the only urban community, which moreover lacked a sizeable free coloured group, there was little opportunity to disappear into the crowd and pass as free.⁴⁰ The urban society of the southern United States offered better chances in this respect: large free black communities arose in the nineteenth century which would harbour the majority of escapees from slavery.⁴¹

A third crucial characteristic was the political geography. Crossing a border into another empire might be a way to escape enslavement, especially if that other empire was Spanish. This border could also be an internal one (such as in the antebellum United States between free and slave states), but we tend to think of external borders (like between the US and Spanish Florida) or maritime ones (such as between the Danish Virgin Islands and Spanish Puerto Rico).⁴² As an example of a maritime border, a highly interesting connection existed between Dutch Curaçao and Spanish Tierra Firme (the part of present-day Venezuela). In the trade between these areas, slaves from Curaçao could work as sailors, sometimes with a “temporary manumission” for the duration of the journey, which gave them ample opportunity to desert once on Spanish ground. As explained in Chapter 1, from 1750 onwards runaway slaves from Protestant countries who

³⁸ Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 253.

³⁹ Klooster, “Curaçao as a Transit Center,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800* 46.

⁴⁰ Fatah-Black, “Desertion by Sailors, Slaves and Soldiers in the Dutch Atlantic, ca. 1600-1800,” in Van Rossum and Kamp, *Desertion in the Early Modern World: A Comparative History* 130.

⁴¹ Pargas, “Beacons of Freedom”.

⁴² Neville A.T. Hall, “Maritime Maroons: Grand Marronage,” in *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*, ed. B. W. Higman (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992)

converted to Catholicism could apply for freedom in these Spanish areas, and many did.⁴³ The Spanish had applied this method before. For example, in 1693 Florida had been made a religious sanctuary to draw enslaved labourers away from the British American colonies. This tactic proved rather effective and sizeable maroon communities developed in Florida. However, in the transition from borderland to bordered land, the US tried to close this route and forced Spain to rescind the policy in 1790.⁴⁴

The final component to consider is the nature of the relationship with indigenous groups, insofar as those (still) existed. While on Dominica the Caribs remained a separate group, on St. Vincent they merged with the maroons into the so-called "Black Caribs". By basically joining forces, the Black Caribs proved to be more than a match for the British colonists in the rebellion that broke out in 1795.⁴⁵ Similarly, groups like the Seminoles in North America absorbed black refugees to form powerful communities that could resist white incursion for a long time.⁴⁶ On the other end of the spectrum, we find situations in which the indigenous collaborated with the colonists to return runaways or divulge their hiding places. Much depended on who the indigenous considered the biggest threat to their livelihood: the runaway Africans or the white settlers. For example, in the Cape Colony in Southern Africa, the local Khoi and San groups were hostile to black runaways during the eighteenth century and sometimes worked as trackers. However, as they themselves became subject to the often oppressive labour regime of the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*), the Khoi changed their allegiance and cooperated with the enslaved in a major revolt in 1808. Hence we see that subaltern solidarity emerged against a common enemy.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the relationship between African and indigenous groups should not be seen as a clear-cut divide between cooperation and animosity, but rather as a continuum that transformed over time, depending on the changing social and political situations.

Taken together, these four elements explain why some areas produced more maroons and others more refugees. A border zone with Spanish areas

⁴³ Linda M. Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition*, no. 3 (2009); Rupert, "Seeking the Water of Baptism," in Benton and Ross, *Legal Pluralism*; Linda Marguerite Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2012) chapter 4.

⁴⁴ Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 4, 9, 11, 98-99.

⁴⁵ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 23, 190-194.

⁴⁶ Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 102-109.

⁴⁷ Kate Ekama, "Just Deserters. Runaway Slaves from the VOC Cape, c.1700-1800," in Van Rossum and Kamp, *Desertion*, 178.

where slaves could legally obtain freedom would lead people to favour seeking refuge rather than choosing marronage. Maroon communities, often short-lived, generally offered only informal freedom. Yet the societies that could resist the colonists might attain formal freedom by receiving recognition by the colonial authority in peace treaties. However, such agreements always included a clause that obliged the maroons to return future runaways, thereby closing the door of formal freedom for the still-enslaved.

Suriname provides a classic example, where marronage had been a familiar phenomenon since the seventeenth century and where maroon communities could hold their own against colonial forces. Indeed, from the 1740s onwards, the colonists increasingly began to doubt the usefulness of the expedition, considering their large costs and small effects. Peace negotiations were conducted, albeit unsuccessfully, so in 1754 and 1755 another attempt was made to subdue the maroons militarily. It also proved unsuccessful and in 1760 and 1762 peace treaties were concluded with the Ndyuka and the Saramaka, the most numerous groups.⁴⁸ Afterwards, however, the violence continued. The Boni Maroon Wars (after their leader Boni) would keep the Society of Suriname, the governing body, occupied and cash-strapped for over two decades. The main conflict lasted from 1765 until 1777, when the maroon fortress was overrun by slaves who were promised manumission, but Boni himself continued the struggle and was only killed in 1793.⁴⁹

This period of protracted guerrilla warfare demanded a heavy financial toll in Suriname. Planters were required to pay six per cent of their molasses and rum revenues to the *wegloperscassa* (runaway chest) but the Society of Suriname nevertheless had a debt of 1.4 million guilders by 1784.⁵⁰ Only in the nineteenth century would the number of runaways decline, and it is estimated that 6,196 enslaved people escaped the plantations between 1767

⁴⁸ Richard Price and Sally Price, *Les Marrons* (Châteauneuf-le-Rouge: Vents d'ailleurs, 2003) 15-21.

⁴⁹ Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment. Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 79-80; Oostindie, "Voltaire, Stedman and Suriname Slavery," 5.

⁵⁰ Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*, 259; Victor Enthoven, "As Assessment of Dutch Transatlantic Commerce, 1585-1817," in Idem and Postma, *Riches*, 428.

and 1802, usually alone or in pairs.⁵¹ According to Piet Emmer, ten per cent of the enslaved population was generally registered as absent.⁵²

It is remarkable that Suriname and the two colonies of Essequibo and Demerara were similar in many respects, but differed so strongly in the development of maroon communities. While Alvin Thompson mentions that three hundred maroons were living northwest of the Essequibo by 1744, and that Demerara had at least eight maroon settlements in 1795, these statements have not been verified as the evidence is thin. We do know, on the other hand, that the Aripaeño, a present-day group of maroon descendants in Venezuela, claims to descend from slave runaways that came from Essequibo in the eighteenth century.⁵³ Perhaps marronage in the Spanish areas was a more attractive option than in Dutch territory. Regardless, the Dutch authorities had no means of estimating the extent of maroon communities, other than by conquering them.⁵⁴ Indeed, the role of Amerindians in destroying such communities explain to a large extent the differences between Suriname and its neighbouring colonies. The second factor of explanation, however, was the presence of an open border with the Orinoco, to which I will now turn.

The Orinoco escape option

As Chapter 1 demonstrated, connections with the Spanish in Orinoco were fluctuating, sometimes yielding mutual trade benefits, at other times resulting in territorial conflict. Much depended on the stance of individual officials in Orinoco.⁵⁵ The problem, according to the Dutch Director-General—Laurens Storm van 's Gravesande (r.1743-1772)—was that Spanish commanders changed every three to five years. This quick turnover hampered long-term negotiations over sensitive topics like slave refugees,

⁵¹ Emmer, *Nederlandse slavenhandel*, 155; Fatah-Black, "Desertion by Sailors, Slaves and Soldiers in the Dutch Atlantic, ca. 1600-1800," in Van Rossum and Kamp, *Desertion*, 115-116.

⁵² Emmer, *Nederlandse slavenhandel*, 153.

⁵³ Berta E. Pérez, "The Journey to Freedom: Maroon Forebears in Southern Venezuela," *Ethnohistory*, 3-4 (2000).

⁵⁴ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 141; Idem, *Maroons of Guyana: Problems of Slave Desertion in Guyana, c.1750-1814* (Georgetown, Guyana: Free Press, 1999) 15.

⁵⁵ The titles of these men changed, depending on the place of the Guayana province within the Spanish empire. At first it fell under the Governor of Trinidad, later this became the Governor of Cumaná. The highest official in Orinoco is called "Commandant" in the sources, but Storm van 's Gravesande often used the term "governor".

and a new magistrate apparently often did not feel bound by any agreements made by his predecessor.⁵⁶

Already before the Spanish instated their religious sanctuary in 1750, deserters arrived from the Dutch side. Hoping to find informal freedom, many runaways must have abhorred that they could be sold back into slavery. The Dutch tried to claim the runaways, yet typically without success.⁵⁷ Therefore, the Dutch authorities placed their hope in the establishment of a “cartel”, a treaty that obliged both parties to return each other’s runaways. The Spanish ostensibly had little to gain from such an agreement, for they did not have any people deserting to the Dutch side. Nevertheless, because the Spanish still valued friendly connections with the Dutch at this point in time, the Orinoco governors were sometimes willing to accommodate the Dutch requests.

This cooperation, however, took the form of supplying financial compensation: when a runaway was sold back into slavery the Dutch sometimes received the proceeds of the sale. While a disaster for the runaway, it worked out well for both the Dutch and the Spanish, as Storm wrote in a letter in 1749: he stated that he connived with the Spanish traders coming to Essequibo, and that the governor of Cumaná would pay for two deserted slaves from a WIC plantation. At that point in time a cartel seemed possible too, although the Dutch insisted on the physical return of the runaways and the Spanish were only willing to offer monetary compensation.⁵⁸ In fact, the exchange agreement would not come to pass until 1791, but the practice of reimbursements continued during the 1750s. For example, in 1754 Storm wrote of three deserters for whom they would receive 400 guilders, minus expenses. One of those was from the Company plantation Agterkerke, sold for 150 pesos or 300 guilders, “which sum he would certainly not be worth here, being one of the greatest rascals that we had.”⁵⁹

Yet the situation changed after 1750, and the Spanish sanctuary policy characterised the change in relationship between the two European powers:

⁵⁶ Court of Policy to WIC, 4 July 1731, no. 187 in BGBB, BCC, app. vol. 2: 13-14; Director-General to WIC, 9 February 1769, addendum K1 to no. 469 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 34.

⁵⁷ Director-General to WIC, 6 January 1772, no. 505 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 100-101.

⁵⁸ Commandeur to Director’s Committee of Ten, 27 March 1749, no. 249 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 60-61.

⁵⁹ Storm to WIC, 19 February 1754, no. 292 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 91; Storm to WIC, 12 December 1759, no. 345 in *ibid.*: 182.

from mutual cooperation to sustain their incipient empires, to a more confrontational stance now that the Spanish presence had grown stronger. During the 1760s the Spanish stopped returning the proceeds of sold refugees, making the situation worse for the Dutch planters.⁶⁰ The refugees still arrived, but according to Storm the Spanish commandants simply kept the money for the auctioned runaways themselves.⁶¹ Unfortunately, at present it is unclear how many of the slave refugees received freedom and how many ended up in slavery or another form of forced labour. Several Capuchin fathers testified that some were sold, but that those looking to embrace Catholicism were all set free.⁶²

Furthermore, all the Amerindian slaves received freedom as well since they were legally free according to Spanish law, or in the words of a friar “[the Amerindians] being subjects of the King criminally enslaved by the Dutch, who maintain this inhuman traffic with the Caribs contrary to all law, we cannot and must not restore them to slavery when they have the good fortune to escape it.”⁶³ The question then arises why not all of the enslaved Amerindians on Dutch plantations chose to desert. After all, they were in a better position than many of the African runaways, being familiar with the terrain and surviving in the forest. Yet, besides a case in 1727 when twenty-three “red slaves” deserted, there seem to be few instances of enslaved Amerindians running away.⁶⁴ The reason might be that Amerindians on Dutch plantations enjoyed a relatively good status, and sometimes had freedom to visit their free relatives.⁶⁵ Their skills as hunters, fishermen and cassava growers were of vital importance for the plantation’s food supply, and their labour was not as easily replaced as that of the Africans since a plantation typically had only a very small number of enslaved Amerindians, if any. Furthermore, enslaved Amerindians were mostly from groups living further into the interior, meaning that fleeing would entail travelling through a region of possible enemies, such as the Caribs. Finally, and probably most importantly, it is likely that the image of

⁶⁰ Storm to WIC, 9 February 1762, no. 365 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 211-212.

⁶¹ Storm to WIC, 6 September 1767, no. 431 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 150-152.

⁶² Declaration of Benito de Garriga (and others who repeated his statement almost verbatim), no. 482 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 47-50.

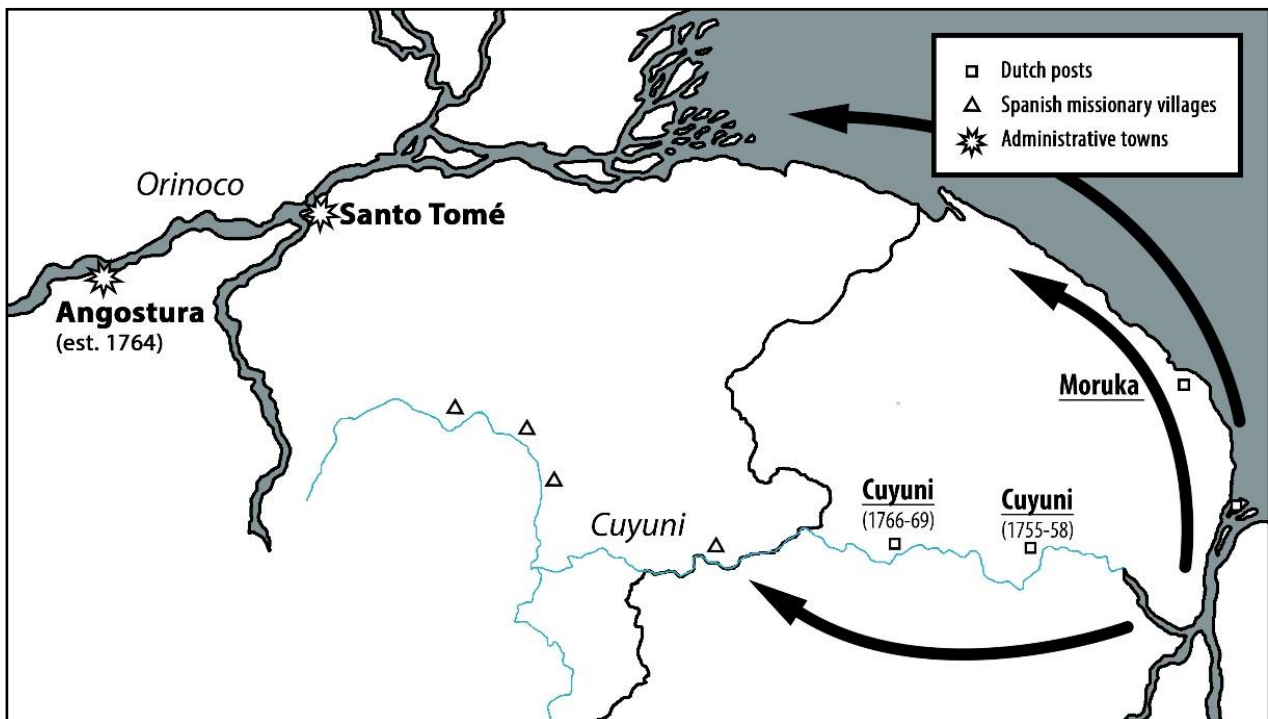
⁶³ Declaration of Benito de Garriga (and others who repeated his statement almost verbatim), no. 482 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 47-50.

⁶⁴ Court of Policy in Essequibo to WIC, 1 March 1727, no 177 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 6. The ships was attacked by a vessel flying the Spanish flag, and the Spanish (?) then took the merchandise on board, suggesting that it was (amongst others) a smuggling voyage.

⁶⁵ Resolutions of the Court of Policy of Demerara, 16 July 1786, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1032.

life on the Spanish side was not one of living as free vassals, but rather as forced converts in a missionary village.

The Spanish missionary activity, on the other hand, created opportunities for African runaways. The Caribs were vital allies of the Dutch, and were rewarded for returning runaways, so their presence in the borderland between the Spanish and the Dutch formed a major hurdle for slave refugees. Hence, as the Caribs were forced to retreat at the Spanish advances, more room opened up for African runaways.



Map 3.1: The three main desertion routes from Essequibo to Venezuela

The route via the Cuyuni River (Map 3.1) became open to slave refugees after the Spanish destroyed the Dutch post over there in 1758, and in the process uprooted the local Caribs, who migrated elsewhere. The post was not re-established until somewhere between 1765 and 1767, and because of the two Spanish missions founded further up the river, the Caribs did not return. Thus, both the Dutch and Carib guards had disappeared. Storm summarised the situation concisely in 1762: “no negroes can get away unless the Indians connive at their escape or *unless they go over to the Spaniards*, which, since the occurrence at Cuyuni, can scarcely be prevented.” Even the re-establishment of the post in 1769 would not provide any relief for the Dutch planters without the Caribs. Storm wrote: “the road

for the runaways is now quite open and free, it being impossible for the Post in Cuyuni to stop them, there being a number of inland paths; nor can we be warned in any way by the Indians, there being no more of these in that river.”⁶⁶

At this point, then, the Dutch still had some control over the coastal route via the Moruka post. In fact, when the above-mentioned desertion at Agterkerke took place, Storm warned the Caribs to guard the coast, to cut off the runaways from the Orinoco route.⁶⁷ However, in 1774, the Spanish also attacked the Moruka post, again causing the local Amerindians to flee. Consequently, the other road to Orinoco was now fully open too.⁶⁸ Perhaps partly as a result, the Director-General and Council of Policy became increasingly convinced that the only solution was a cartel with Spain, and they kept emphasising its importance to the WIC Directors.⁶⁹ It would also take another ten years before the Moruka post was re-established.⁷⁰ However, the post was hardly effective anyway. While during the 1780s a case existed where a deserting soldier and two slaves were caught by the Moruka postholder, on another occasion he declared he had to abandon his pursuit and that two runaways escaped in a stolen vessel.⁷¹ The Dutch still tried to convince the Spanish to return the slave refugees, but in vain. Even offers to buy back the runaways fell on deaf ears.⁷²

Thus, there was no control over the two routes to the Orinoco for a large part of the eighteenth century, and control was of limited use anyhow. Therefore, we should assume that a considerable number of soldiers and slaves found their way to the Spanish. Unfortunately, it is hard to be more specific than that. While individuals probably also ran away, most recorded

⁶⁶ Storm to WIC, 3 March 1769, no. 454 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 4-5 (my emphasis).

⁶⁷ Storm to WIC, 8 September 1760, no. 350 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 186.

⁶⁸ Trotz to WIC, 30 September 1774, no. 529 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 127-128.

⁶⁹ Courts of Policy and Justice of Essequibo to WIC, 31 January 1773, no. 523 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 122-23 ; Idem to WIC, 10 July 1775, no. 538 in *ibid.*, 137; Memorial of Burgher Officers to the Court of Policy in Essequibo, 2 January 1772, no. 531 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 129.

⁷⁰ Minutes of the Court of Policy of Essequibo, 5 November 1784, no. 602 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 27.

⁷¹ Director-General to WIC, 20 October 1786, no. 620 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 44-46; Declaration by J. Bertholy, 7 October 1788, no. 628 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 70.

⁷² *Memorie van de bewindhebbers van de West-Indische Compagnie Willem August Syrtema van Groevestins en Willem Cornelis Boey op het rapport van de commissarissen van prins Willem V naar de koloniën van de Staat in West-Indië inzake het veranderen van de regeringsvorm aldaar, 1790*, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3832, 8 April 1777, at 225-226; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. Nr. 9425, at 49-53.

instances mentioned desertions taking place in groups. While soldiers seemed to make off in groups of two or three, the enslaved sometimes absconded in groups of more than twenty persons. We know of the twenty-three “red slaves” that escaped in 1727; a group of ten that was captured in 1762; a plot of twenty slaves to run off from the Director-General’s plantation in 1767, a group of nine enslaved creoles and two house maids from J. van Roede in 1770; eleven men, four women and one child that escaped in boat in 1773, a group of twenty-eight or twenty-nine that were caught with a boat that was to take them to Trinidad; and a group of twenty-eight from the widow Noordhoek’s plantation in 1788.⁷³

These are just examples, and in fact many more must have made it to Orinoco. Storm, again, adequately described the situation in 1772: “The number of our slaves there [Orinoco] now is very large. There are about forty of Leary’s alone; there are likewise seven of the best creoles from your Lordship’s plantation of Aegtekerke [sic] and several more belonging to me. Those belonging to private colonists are innumerable. The numbers of runaways increasing daily, this matter will end in the total ruin of a great many plantations, unless efficacious remedies be adopted.”⁷⁴ His successor would echo these sentiments, stating that “no week passes” without desertions, which would soon lead to the “total ruin” of the colony.⁷⁵

In the 1780s the rate of desertion possibly declined. During the French occupation, a French envoy to Orinoco had apparently taken several enslaved persons on his trip, who witnessed the situation of the slave refugees there. Upon return, they could disprove any hopes of a free and leisurely life and this news spread throughout the colonies to deter further desertions. Additionally, the story that a recaptured runaway in Essequibo was sold to a merchant from Orinoco, seemingly also served to underline that Africans were slaves in the Spanish areas as well.⁷⁶ Without additional

⁷³ Court of Policy to WIC, 1 March 1727, no. 177 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 2: 6; Storm to WIC, 9 February 1762, no. 365 in *ibid.*, 211-212; Storm to WIC, 6 September 1767, no. 431 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 150-152; Storm to WIC, 15 June 1770, no. 484 in *ibid.*, 76; Trotz to WIC, 6 April 1773, no. 516 in *ibid.*, 100-101; Commander of Demerara to WIC’s Amsterdam Chamber, 3 April 1784, no. 596 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 22-23; Director-General ad interim to WIC, 12 May 1790, no. 630 in *ibid.*, 73-74.

⁷⁴ Storm to WIC, 6 January 1772, no. 505 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3:100-101.

⁷⁵ Trotz to WIC, 6 April 1773, no. 516 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 4: 108-9; Court of Policy to WIC, 31 January 1773, no. 523 in *ibid.*, 123; Trotz to WIC, 30 September 1774, no. 529 in *ibid.*, 127-28; Idem to WIC, 30 June 1784, no. 598 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 23.

⁷⁶ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, vol. 3: 82-83.

evidence, it is hard to judge the real effect of these stories, and as we saw above, desertions continued to take place afterwards.

Nevertheless, a significant difference existed in forms of desertion between Essequibo and Demerara, due to geographic circumstances. While the enslaved in Essequibo were close to the Orinoco area, those in Demerara had to travel much farther afield. Furthermore, they could not just steal a boat and sail up a river like the Cuyuni and Moruka. They either had to go via the ocean, which would be dangerous in an unseaworthy raft, or through the forests to Essequibo, with all the risks of getting lost or getting caught. Consequently, it seems that deserters in Demerara more often chose to become maroons as opposed to becoming slave refugees. An additional element that contributed to this development was that Demerara quickly became the dominant colony with the most enslaved labourers and hence more deserters.

Consequently, while the role of Amerindians in preventing desertion became less prominent in Essequibo, it only increased in significance in Demerara. As the Spanish gradually took over the borderland, fewer Caribs remained to act as bounty hunters. Various indigenous groups indeed continued to return deserters in exchange for goods like cottons and rum, yet it did not seem to occur often and they seemingly never brought back large groups.⁷⁷ A possible explanation is that it took time, usually several days, to warn and recruit the Amerindians, after which the deserters were way ahead.

While the defensive role of Amerindians diminished (patrolling), their offensive role remained vital to the colonists. In Demerara it seemed that “step-by-step” marronage was not uncommon, where individuals would try to carve out an existence within reach of their former plantation. This practice seemed to have grown during the 1780s, probably because of the war (1780-1784) and subsequent withdrawal of the Amerindians. To counteract this development, it became more common from 1785 onwards to actively recruit and send out Amerindian search parties to scout the forests for maroons. The Director-General reported that there were not many maroons, yet he also stated that their numbers were increasing because the colonists had neglected the problem.⁷⁸ These search parties would destroy

⁷⁷ Storm to WIC, 6 September 1767, no. 431 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 150-152; WIC's Chamber of Zeeland to Director-General, 18 July 1768, no. 446 in *ibid.*, 179-181.

⁷⁸ Director-General to WIC, 4 October 1785, no. 612 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5: 38.

any huts and provision grounds they encountered, but not seldom they returned empty-handed or with only a few of the runaways they were expected to catch.⁷⁹

An example of how such small maroon groups could continue to exist is provided by the case of the community living only 150 yards behind the Velselhoofd plantation. In 1789 two enslaved workers from Mr. B. Nugent reported to the Court of Policy that they had encountered two houses while they had been “lost in the forest”. There were ducks and fowls walking around and the two estimated that about a dozen people were living in the hideout. As they approached the houses they set off a bell alarm, after which they were confronted by the maroons and ran away. The fact that the houses were well-built and the ground raised to keep out the water suggested that these maroons had been living there for a quite a while and did not intend to make the step towards grand marronage further into the jungle. Yet now that the discovery was made they probably had to, for the Council decided to send an Amerindian commando “to capture or kill them”.⁸⁰

Thus, because of the Amerindians, maroon societies could exist in Demerara, but could not easily develop into long-standing and independent groups like in Suriname. Furthermore while marronage grew with the expansion of the plantation sector, maroon groups did not become a large threat to the plantation society, except during the general chaos of 1795, which I will address below. First, however, we have to see what influence the other enforcers of the slavery regime had, namely the military.

The other deserters: soldiers

While soldiers were expected to safeguard the boundaries of the slavery regime, they often undermined them. While the living conditions of soldiers were not as bad as those of the enslaved, they were still far removed from those of the planter class. Hence, desertion was rampant among the military recruits. Karwan Fatah-Black has put the annual percentage of slave desertion in the “Dutch Atlantic” at 0.5 per cent, compared to 5 per cent for soldiers in Suriname.⁸¹ Soldiers, bound by their contracts and the

⁷⁹ Schult, “Een noodzakelijk bondgenootschap,” 37.

⁸⁰ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 56-7.

⁸¹ Fatah-Black, “Desertion by Sailors, Slaves and Soldiers in the Dutch Atlantic, ca. 1600-1800,” in Van Rossum and Kamp, *Desertion*, 104-106.

accompanying debts, had the same motive as the enslaved—seeking freedom—but more opportunities to desert.

The precarious equilibrium in which partially unfree soldiers were supposed to keep totally unfree Africans in check could be abruptly destabilised, as became clear in the great uprising in Berbice. There, during an epidemic that severely weakened the white population, the enslaved rose in rebellion in early 1763. It spread quickly and within a month the insurgents, led by an Akan named Kofi (or Cuffee), had overrun most plantations and taken Fort Nassau. The retreating colonists had lost control over the colony and were trapped at an upriver plantation. With reinforcements from St. Eustatius, Suriname and the Dutch Republic only arriving slowly, the outlook for the colonists was bleak.⁸² On the 3rd of July, a mutiny among two-thirds of the soldiers broke out. Their grudges had been building up in the previous months, discontent as they were with the heat, the insects, the bad food and the low wages, while they could at any moment succumb to tropical diseases. The many French mercenaries felt intimidated by the anti-French atmosphere, and the situation was made worse for those stationed at the Auriarie post, who had been compelled to clear forests and cut wood. The soldiers considered this work to be slave labour. Yet their commanders had added insult to injury: the local Amerindians were not employed in these tasks, relegating the soldiers to a low spot on the social ladder. Captain Canitz declared that he would “rather see a European than an Indian killed.”⁸³

In this situation the mutinous soldiers decided to run off and tried to reach Orinoco. However, as it is a long and arduous journey from Berbice, they ran out of provisions and got lost, after which they decided to join the black insurgents. Understandably, the slave rebels were suspicious of the soldiers, and twenty-eight of them were immediately killed, while the remaining thirteen were brought to Kofi’s headquarters. Ironically, for several of them their capture meant they would be engaged in slave labour, the very reason for their desertion. In short, as Marjoleine Kars concluded, soldiers were not simply enforcers of colonial boundaries, they also challenged and crossed them.⁸⁴

⁸² Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, chapter 8.

⁸³ Marjoleine Kars, “Transgressing and Policing Borders: Soldiers, Slave Rebels, and the Early Modern Atlantic,” *New West Indian Guide*, 3/4 (2009). Quotation from 196.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 188, 207.

Indeed, desertion among soldiers in Essequibo and Demerara was a recurring source of concern, and it was one of the main reasons the garrison was always understaffed and functioning below standard. Many soldiers did not even make it to the colony, as the death rate on board could reach thirty per cent.⁸⁵ And when the recruits arrived, Director-General Trotz remarked, they were generally so indebted that they would have to work the first two years for nothing. This debt was the foremost reason for desertion, he thought. Trotz also advised the Company to send more boots and cloth for their outfits, since those were typically already damaged when the soldiers arrived and to get new ones the men had to acquire new debts, making them even more prone to desertion.⁸⁶

For soldiers, debt was inescapable. In 1790 the commissioners Grovestins and Boeij (see Chapter 2) stated that a soldier typically arrived in the colonies with a debt of 216 guilders, partly for clothing. Consequently, out of the eight guilders of a soldier's monthly salary, three guilders would be used for repayment. This arrangement not only meant that a soldier had to serve six years—two years longer than his normal contract—to clear his debt, it also left him with the paltry sum of five guilders a month to live on. In addition, the soldiers were not paid in cash but in *adsignatiën*, basically bills of exchange drawn on the Company. However, since these *adsignatiën* were issued for such small sums, and because the credit standing of the Company was comparatively low, these bills were only accepted within the colony at a discount. Moreover, local vendors knew the soldiers had no other options, and abused their position to squeeze the soldiers out further.⁸⁷

Thus, serving as a soldier was not far away from debt bondage, and the living conditions provided further reasons for desertion. In 1774 the military commandant J.C. de Winter strongly urged the WIC to take better care of the soldiers of Demerara, as the seventy men present were so miserable and demoralised that they could be defeated by twenty European soldiers. Their quarters, resembled a sheep's pen, he wrote, which leaked in the rain and was inundated at spring tide. There was no hospital, which meant that sick soldiers slept between healthy ones and spread diseases. Even simple things were lacking that could improve their lot, such as spades to put up walls against the water, or water tons to gather fresh water; at present the soldiers

⁸⁵ Anthony Brown to Amsterdam Chamber, 2 October 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 9-10; Trotz to WIC, 2 Augustus 1773, *ibid.*, f.11-12; Mr. Boeij to WIC, 7 April 1774, *ibid.*, f.184-185.

⁸⁶ Trotz to Chamber Zeeland, 1 February 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 90-96.

⁸⁷ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9425.

had to sail two hours to acquire water, typically in boat borrowed from planters because the Company did not provide one (although the latter problem was remedied two months later).⁸⁸

Soldiers were in fact so prone to deserting that Storm had great reservations about employing them in pursuit of slave deserters: “[W]e do not dare to send any one after them, not only on account of the smallness of our numbers, but because it is feared that those who are sent would join the runaways, especially if they have a good boat and provisions.”⁸⁹ The main problem Storm signalled was the high percentage of Catholic recruits, who would be tempted to join the Spanish forces on the Orinoco. Storm regularly urged the Directors to send Dutch or at least Protestant soldiers, but it proved in vain. In 1768 a group of twelve recruits arrived, none of whom was French according to the accompanying report. However, once disembarked, only three turned out to be non-French: “The others are all French deserters, so that I conclude that your Lordships have been scandalously deceived by the recruiting agents, who are infamous scoundrels.”⁹⁰

It even appeared that the Amerindians protested against Frenchmen, whom they would not accept as postholders. When Storm had finally found a suitable candidate, Pierre Martin, to occupy the renewed Cuyuni post, he refrained from appointing him because of Amerindian protests. He contemplated making Martin postholder in Mahaicony, although there the Warraos “came to the Post in great numbers and well-armed with the openly expressed intention of murdering a French Postholder had they found one there.”⁹¹

Storm was so fed up with getting French recruits that he told the Directors he would send all new French soldiers back home on the first departing ship. He also firmly agreed with his son, the Commander of Demerara, after another four French soldiers and a sailor deserted together. “The Commandeur of Demerary made a very good guess when he wrote to me on the arrival of the last transport, ‘[t]here are again some good recruits

⁸⁸ J.C. de Winter to WIC, 19 March 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 186-189; J.C. de Winter to WIC, 22 May 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 308-310.

⁸⁹ Storm to WIC, 1 June 1768, no. 444 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 176-178.

⁹⁰ Commander of Demerara to WIC, 18 February 1768, no. 440 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 162-63 (quotation); Storm to WIC, 8 December 1766, no. 420 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 138-140.

⁹¹ Storm to WIC, 9 April 1769, no. 442 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 163-166. Why exactly the Amerindians so resented French postholders is unclear, it seems unlikely they were much worse than the Dutch ones.

for Orinoco.’ In this way they will not require any recruits from Europe, if they are so well provided by us.” Moreover, in Spanish service these deserted soldiers could become a liability, as Storm observed in the same letter. He heard that some of them planned to attack the Moruka post and perhaps even the plantations below: “Certainly not to pay their respects to the owners.”⁹²

Sometimes soldiers and slaves joined forces to escape together, and there are even cases of postholders themselves deserting. In 1766 a plot was discovered of three or four soldiers who wanted to run away to the Spanish with a group of enslaved women and in 1768 the Moruka postholder, his assistant and two other whites sought refuge in Orinoco.⁹³ An interesting case of this subaltern cooperation came before the Court Martial of Demerara on 14 August 1786. Apparently, in July the soldier Flinck had, while drunk, left his rifle at his post and had gone to help two slaves steal a boat from the plantation Vlissingen. The boat was fully rigged, with sails and oars, and the plan was to make off together to Orinoco. However, Flinck had been caught—the fate of the two slave refugees is unknown. He tried to defend himself by saying that the enslaved had got him drunk, and that his desertion was the result of the harsh punishments he had received as a soldier. The case was a serious one, as mutinous soldiers directly threatened the stability of the colony. Consequently, desertion was punishable by death. However, while that seemed to have been the original sentence, it was altered to service for life at the fortress. Flinck was thus put on par with the “chain negroes” and was to subsist on a slave ration, although he would receive more clothing and would eat bread instead of bananas.⁹⁴

In short, desertion was a common phenomenon, particularly in Essequibo, and probably increased stability in the long run. By offering an escape route out of the plantation hierarchy, desertion reduced both the chance of a mutiny among the soldiers and of uprisings among the enslaved. However, desertion was less viable in Demerara: lacking a direct connection to the Orinoco region, marronage was the only option, yet the Amerindians prevented maroon societies from establishing a permanent presence. Hence, it is not surprising that resistance to the slavery regime took another form

⁹² Storm to WIC, 9 November 1768, no. 449 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 182-183.

⁹³ Storm to WIC, 8 December 1766, no. 420 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 138-140; Zeeland Chamber to Storm, 18 July 1768, no. 446 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 3: 179-181.

⁹⁴ Minutes of the court martial, 14 August 1786, TNA, CO 116/61, f.77-80.

in Demerara, namely insurgency. The three revolts, in 1772, 1789 and 1795, all took place in Demerara.

The rebels

Making sense of why, when and with which goals the enslaved rose up, remains a challenge for historians, due to the varied nature of uprisings. Eugene Genovese has argued that early slave revolts (before the Age of Revolution) were restorationist in character, rather than revolutionary. Rather than aiming to overthrow the system of slavery itself, the rebels sought to rectify a particular wrongdoing, such as an increase in work hours or infringement of “customary” rights. They might aim for personal freedom, but not universal freedom.⁹⁵ Michael Craton, rather than looking at politics, explained the change in revolts by pointing to the enslaved themselves. He noted that early revolts were dominated by Africans, especially Akan speaking people. Born in freedom, these men indeed strived for individual liberty and often aspired to establish an Akan-style autocratic leadership. Creolisation led to a different form of revolts, in which the enslaved voiced the revolutionary ideal of ending slavery itself. Yet this change had little to do with the Age of Revolutions, as revolutionary ideologies were often lost in political complexities, and traditional motives remained the main driver for uprisings. In fact, the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 was much more important, as it necessarily led to increased creolisation of the enslaved population, resulting in different ideas about resistance. In some places this trend was reinforced by the Christianisation of the enslaved and the alternative worldview it provided. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century did not witness a sudden increase in revolts, as it also became clear to the enslaved that rebellion often amounted to suicide. As the examples of brutal repression continued to grow, the enslaved might have grown more cautious.⁹⁶

While the famous Demerara insurrection of 1823 was indeed directed against slavery itself, the eighteenth-century revolts conformed to the more traditional, “restorationist” type of uprisings. The population, due to the high death rates, was mainly made up of Africans, rather than creoles. A

⁹⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) xiv-xxii, 3.

⁹⁶ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 99-101, 161-64, 241-49.

precarious equilibrium existed, and once the enslaved felt this negotiated balance was upset, violence was not far away, as the few surviving cases before Essequibo's Court of Justice attest.

For example, in October 1789 three enslaved Africans called Quamina, King and Tam were questioned by the fiscal for an alleged plot to kill their master, F.W. Sartorius. It is clear that a plan existed to poison Sartorius and his wife, although the accused pointed to each other as to whom provided the herbs, and whose idea it was. Apparently, they were discovered before the plan was executed, but it is unclear if they were convicted.⁹⁷

More elaborate information exists for a case from 1794, where Caesar, belonging to Enoch de Rapper, was suspected of armed resistance against the director of the *Witte Zwaan* (White Swan) plantation. On a Friday night in early December, a ceremony took place at the *Witte Zwaan*, where on the same evening a child had drowned and had been buried. Consequently, the atmosphere must have been loaded. Caesar and twelve others attended this event, but several of them got into an argument with the bomba of *Witte Zwaan*, named Carel, over who was to play the drum. A fight between slaves of the two different plantations ensued, upon which the director, Mr. Kraegelius, came out to try and calm the situation. The crowd was dispersed and the bomba took his opponent, named Cudjoe, back to the director's house. Now the situation became tense: none of the enslaved from Enoch de Rapper had the necessary pass to be on another plantation, and now that one of them was captured, they were likely to get in trouble. They decided to follow the director back and clamoured to release Cudjoe. All the doors and windows of the house were closed, but they threw tiles and flagstones at the windows, breaking at least one of them. It appears someone broke in and forced the door of the director's chamber. The turn of events afterwards is unclear, but the result was that Cudjoe was released.⁹⁸

The court proceedings took a while, but on 21 January 1795 the twelve persons that had visited *Witte Zwaan* without permission were convicted of public violence and house fallow with the intention of murder. According to Roman law, the Court reasoned, they should receive the death penalty. However, like in other cases, the Court decided not to take this extreme route, possibly because they understood that such a harsh punishment could trigger more violence. The alternative sentence read that the group

⁹⁷ Interrogations by the Court of Criminal Justice, 1787, 1789, 1796, NAG, AZ 1, inv. nr. 78.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

was to be bound to three poles to be severely flogged, after which they would work in chains at the fort.⁹⁹

A similar and remarkable case, in which the death penalty was overturned, took place in 1791. The young enslaved man Dick had accidentally shot and killed a nine- or ten-year-old white girl, the daughter of the widow Schultz, while injuring her brother. Coming to the kitchen to get some medicine, he had noticed an old and rusty flintlock (*snaphaan*). Finding no ramrod nearby, Dick presumed it to be unloaded. In a playful mood, he had pulled the trigger several times without effect. Yet, finally, the gun had gone off, hitting the unsuspecting children nearby. Dick had tried to save the girl, but panicked soon afterwards and fled. Nevertheless, he came back twenty hours later, pleading innocence.¹⁰⁰

The killing of a white person by an enslaved African, whether accidentally or intentionally, normally entailed the death penalty. Yet Dick received support from all quarters to consider the situation as a tragic accident and let him live. Firstly, two enslaved women who had been present stated that Dick had only been playing around without any bad intentions. Additionally, the director of the plantation, James Claxton, testified that he had planned to go hunting and therefore had loaded the gun. Yet it had been raining, so he had left the gun in the kitchen until later. Furthermore, he had used the ramrod as walking stick, so there had been no way for Dick to check whether or not the gun was loaded. Finally, five other planters vouched for Dick's goodhearted nature and appealed for his pardoning. While the local Court of Justice initially decided on the death penalty, it reconsidered the next day and decided to send the case to the States General for appeal.¹⁰¹ The States General, then, noting that both Dick's owner and the unanimous local Council were in favour, decided to pardon him.¹⁰²

The case is intriguing: besides possibly Mrs. Schultz, who was not heard, everyone rallied behind the defence of an enslaved man, who now got away with manslaughter, apparently receiving no punishment at all. This rare example should not serve to illustrate some sort of benevolent paternalism

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *Brief met bijlagen van commandeur en raden van Rio Demerary aan de Staten-Generaal naar aanleiding van het proces van mr. F.G. Ducker, fiscaal R.O. van deze kolonie, impetrant in cas crimineel contra de neger Dick, eigendom van Joseph Dowding, gearresteerde en gedaagde*, 1791, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9618.

¹⁰¹ These were Lincoln Rogers, Thomas Lonq, John Chandler, Henry Welch and Joseph Leuvens (NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9618).

¹⁰² NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02. inv. nr. 3856, 6 February 1792, at 86-87.

of the slaveholding elite—as some historians discern in the US South.¹⁰³ Rather, it serves as proof of the thin line that existed between *using* violence and *provoking* violence to keep the slavery regime intact. Deeming Dick not a threat to the plantation hierarchy, there was little to gain by executing an obviously popular person, whose death might provide an occasion for violent opposition. It is to such incidents that I will now turn, starting with the case of Callaert.

The Callaert crisis of 1772

From the accounts of Maddelon and others we already know that the immediate causes for the rebellion in 1772 were P.C. Hooft's cruel treatment and Pieter Callaert's incitement to rise up. A transition of ownership was always a potential source of unrest, as a new balance between the master and the enslaved had to be negotiated.¹⁰⁴ Hooft had undermined the existing situation by bringing in enslaved people of his own, and increasing the workload and the punishments. Callaert made use of the growing resentment, and when the bomba Jacob secretly complained to him about their treatment, he encouraged Jacob's feelings of hatred.¹⁰⁵

For Callaert, the resentment against Hooft had an economic origin. Callaert, a thirty-three-year-old Catholic man from Dendermonde in the Southern Netherlands, had only recently acquired the estate (*Anna Catharina*), yet had apparently overstated his credit facilities. A petition from 1771 suggests that his creditors took possession of the plantation, after which Hooft—the neighbour—apparently acquired it.¹⁰⁶ Previously, mortgage funds in the Dutch Republic had been liberal with granting credit, and dispossessions had been highly uncommon, although times were changing in the early 1770s (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, Callaert still hoped that he would be able to sort out his finances and obtain new credit

¹⁰³ Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 7-8.

¹⁰⁴ When the Company had plans to sell its own plantations in 1774, the local authorities advised against it, fearing that the enslaved might not accept a new director and rise up or turn to marronage (Director-General G.H. Trotz to WIC, 13 September 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f.23-26, Council of Policy to Gentlemen Ten, 31 January 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 168-171).

¹⁰⁵ Interrogation of Pierro, 18 August 1772, TNA, CO 116/38 f.288; Interrogations of Andries, *ibid.*, f.300; Interrogation of Sam, *ibid.*, f.306.

¹⁰⁶ Petition of Callaert to Court of Justice, 27 May 1771, NAG, AZ 1, inv. nr 68, f.157-159.

from the Republic. Hence, if Hooft could be removed, he might be able to get his estate back.

In the meantime, Callaert himself went to live on the estate where Mr. Pilleman/Belleman was director, together with his Amerindian wife Juno. He had taken a gun with him, likely the one he would later hide on the Company road for Jacob to pick up. In an alternative version, Callaert delivered several guns directly, as well as one or more barrels of powder and lead.¹⁰⁷ Regardless, the revolt broke out on 12 August 1772 and Hooft was killed and his weapons' storage plundered. Hooft had planned to sell the guns, yet now they found their way into the hands of the rebels, making them a serious threat to the safety of the colony, especially because the memory of the 1763 revolt in Berbice was still fresh.¹⁰⁸

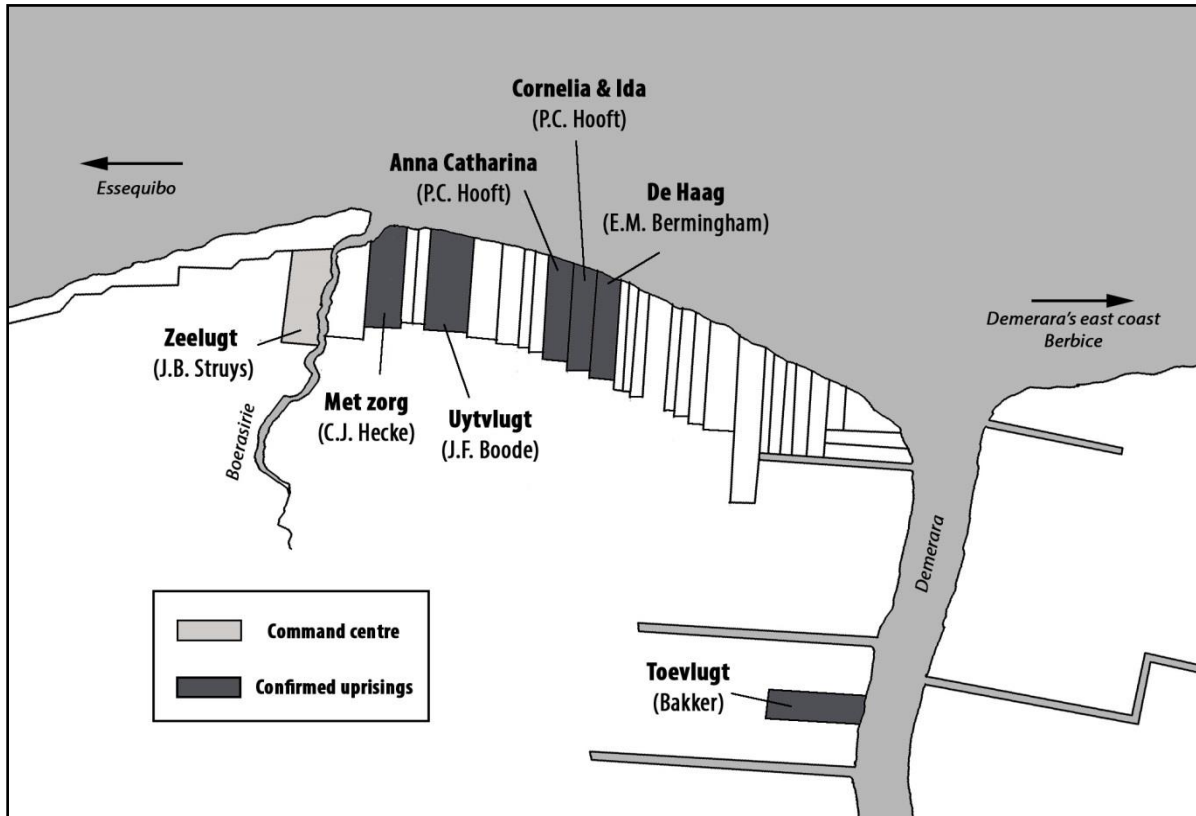
At this point the entire plantation was in chaos, and many of the enslaved now faced a terrible choice of choosing sides. Joining the revolt was a highly risky decision, and one that seemed to imply an inescapable and painful death, as the Berbice rebellion had shown a few years earlier. However, not joining was dangerous too: several of the enslaved testified that the ringleaders Quami and Jacob threatened to kill them if they did not cooperate or if they would run away. The enslaved woman Lea even mentioned Jacob saying "we are at war with the whites & from now on you will be our slaves", upon which she responded "we are not your slaves, we will stay with the whites."¹⁰⁹ The same thing had happened in the 1763 Berbice uprising, where revolutionaries sometimes re-enslaved people to continue production on the plantations. Similarly to the current case, many people tried to "dodge" the rebellion and, like Maddelon, Hester and Pierro, chose to flee to the nearby plantation of Struys (probably *Zeelugt*) which was not overrun. One "Angolan" man named Febus even stated that the loyalty to the whites was spread along ethnic lines, with the Angolan slaves "crying" when they heard of their master's death. In reaction, the enslaved from Amina (Akan from Elmina) threatened to kill them, upon which the Angolans

¹⁰⁷ TNA, CO 116/38, f.300; Confirmation of Callaert's confession, 8 January 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.266-267; Interrogation of Pieter Callaert by Fiscal Anthony Brown, 30 December 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f.236-243; Interrogation of Snel and Sam, 28 August 1772, TNA, CO 116/38, f.308; Interrogation of Febus, 1 September 1772, *ibid.*, f.315.

¹⁰⁸ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 666.

¹⁰⁹ Testimony of Lea, 20 August 1772, TNA, CO 116/38, f.298. Original quotations: "wij hebben tegen de Blanken oorlog & van nu af zult gij onzen Slaaven zijn"; "Wij zijn uw slaven niet, wij zullen bij de Blanken blijven".

ran off. However, this story is not consistent with other accounts that portray Angolans among the rebels.¹¹⁰



Map 3.2: Plantations and planters involved in the 1772 revolt in Demerara

After having pressed the enslaved population into this life-defining choice, the rebels went to Edward Martin Bermingham's plantation, *De Haag*. There, a firefight ensued with several whites. Callaert was present in the house, although his role in the defence was disputed: according to some he crawled on the floor refusing to shoot his gun, while Callaert claimed he shot someone. The insurgents urged Callaert and his wife to come out, assuring them they would not be harmed. However, Callaert urged them to go away. Some witnesses stated that Callaert gave his gun through a window to Jacob, which would explain why one of the guns of the Bermingham household was missing afterwards. Callaert denied the accusation, just as he denied encouraging the rebels to take a boat (*corjaar*) to sail to

¹¹⁰ Interrogations, TNA, CO 116/38, f.285-318. In the Dutch context, "Amina" or "Elmina" (Coromantee in the British context) was used for Akan and Ga speakers from the Gold Coast area (Kars, "Dodging Rebellion," 47).

Amerindian lands (*Bokkenland*, “Buck country”). Callaert seemed surprised by the turn of events, and had apparently hoped the rebels would act later, so he could get away together with his wife. Now he was caught in the crossfire, as he had not envisioned the magnitude of the forces that were set loose by his scheme.¹¹¹

Indeed, the genie was out of the bottle now and the colonists were frightened by the rapid spread of the revolt. The rebels attacked other plantations and much of Demerara’s west coast was in turmoil. The burgher militia had trouble organising itself: when two owners of nearby estates, Johann Boode and C.J. Hecke, tried to make a plan with six others to organise their defences, half of them ran off. Boode and Hecke got into an argument, as both want to entrench themselves on their own estate, rather than leaving it unattended. Soon afterwards, at least Boode’s estate, *Uitvlugt*, was attacked and burned.¹¹²

In the meantime, a command centre was set up at *Zeelugt*, where the burgher militia, “Company creoles” and Amerindian reinforcements were assembled. The “Company creoles”, presumably enslaved people from the WIC’s own long-standing plantations, provided an important service, but they were far outnumbered by the Amerindians. Storm van ‘s Gravesande noted that he immediately sent “a sergeant, a corporal, and fifteen men to the coast, together with fifteen armed creoles” and another fifteen men the next day. Indeed, a motley crew of soldiers, civilians and WIC creoles managed to reconquer Hooft’s plantation and kill fourteen insurgents. The rest had retreated into the woods, however, so Storm had sent out calls for help to various groups of his “good friends the Caribs”, and Storm said they responded swiftly with three hundred men, to fight under the command of councillor Stephanus Gerardus Van der Heyden, like several Akawaios.¹¹³

It seems unlikely that there were really so many indigenous soldiers, but the role of Van der Heyden is all the more intriguing. The Amerindians did not arrive simply because they were ordered to do so, but because they were recruited by cross-cultural brokers like Van der Heyden, who had to promise a form of payment in return. Van der Heyden himself had been a planter for decades and was well-acquainted with the local languages, most likely because he had an Amerindian wife. His efforts, together with a few other

¹¹¹ Interrogations, TNA, CO 116/38, f.285-318; Interrogation of Pieter Callaert by Fiscal Anthony Brown, 30 December 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f.236-243.

¹¹² Report by J.F. Boode to Director-General, 24 August 1772, TNA, CO 116/38, f.278-282.

¹¹³ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 665-666.

go-betweens, were instrumental in preserving the colony for the whites. For example, Jacob Pieterse arrived with thirty Amerindians at *Zeelugt* on 19 August 1772, and Jacob Meyer arrived with another eight people the following day. Van der Heyden also enticed several small groups of Carib soldiers to come, and was the coordinator of the repression. All these groups, such as the twelve boats of people rowing up the Boerasirie creek, or the five Caribs coming all the way from the Mazaruni district in the interior, were put under his command. On 30 August, the Amerindians had carried out a large attack and returned with the message that they had captured a woman and child, and killed all the rebels. During the following week several skirmishes still took place with the remaining insurgents, but on 6 September, three week after the start of the rebellion, it was over.¹¹⁴

This insurgency inspired others, for another revolt took place at Mr. Bakker's plantation around the same time. Nevertheless, the attempt was put down quickly, and five rebels were captured while the rest retreated into the forest, possibly to be captured by Amerindians later.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, in October the enslaved on the *Princenhof* estate in Essequibo also rose up and killed the owner, the widow Christiaanse. This time the authorities sent out request for help to the nearby colonies of Suriname and Berbice, but it seems the situation was brought under control again quickly. Nevertheless, several directors of plantation mortgage funds in the Republic voiced their concerns to the States General that it was paramount to finally put the colonies' defences in order.¹¹⁶

In the subsequent trials of the captured rebels, the colonists devised a range of cruel punishment to set an example, yet clearly differentiated between different roles within the insurgency. The harshest verdicts were for those who shot at whites or used obeah to incite others: Howard was to be beheaded, Cobina and Louis to be broken on the wheel and beheaded, while Neeltje and Gratia were to be strangled on a pole. Afterwards, their heads were to be put on stakes and their bodies burned. Others, who were not charged with active participation in violence, but had for example carried ammunition, at least made it out alive: Hendrik and Bienvenue were sentenced to lifelong work in chains for the colony, Spadille received a flogging in addition, and for Vulcanus a "serious" (*streng*) flogging and a

¹¹⁴ Journal of the post at plantation *Zeelugt*, 15 August-6 September 1772, TNA, CO 116/38, f.266-277.

¹¹⁵ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 667.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the Court of Justice, 20 October 1772, NAG, AB 3, inv. nr. 12, f.183; Resolution of the States-General, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3828, at 3-4.

branding were added to the same lifelong labour in chains. Similarly, Susanna, Claartje and Bella were also sentenced to chain labour and a flogging, as they had remained with the rebels until the final moment, and would not have returned if not captured. Prins and Cocqueray, who “several times” deserted from the whites to the rebels, would be auctioned off at the first possibility. Finally, the “English negro” Felix would have his ears cut off and would be sent—together with Caesar and Carel—to North America and banished for life; the authorities judged them likely to encourage further rebellions within the colonies and thus too dangerous.¹¹⁷ Perhaps most interestingly, when Callaert was finally convicted in 1774, he was ordered to be broken on the wheel, beheaded and burned. In other words, he received similar treatment as some of the slave rebels, so this might be the only time in the colony that white and black were treated equally.¹¹⁸

All in all, this was a peculiar revolt, but it speaks to broader themes such as the ease with which a revolutionary spark could be ignited and the importance of Amerindians, both in their role as shock troops far outnumbering the regular military, and in their role as scouts in retrieving the rebels that had retreated into the woods. Furthermore, most of the enslaved preferred to “dodge” the rebellion, trying to stay alive rather than face cruel punishment when the revolt, almost inevitably, was quelled.

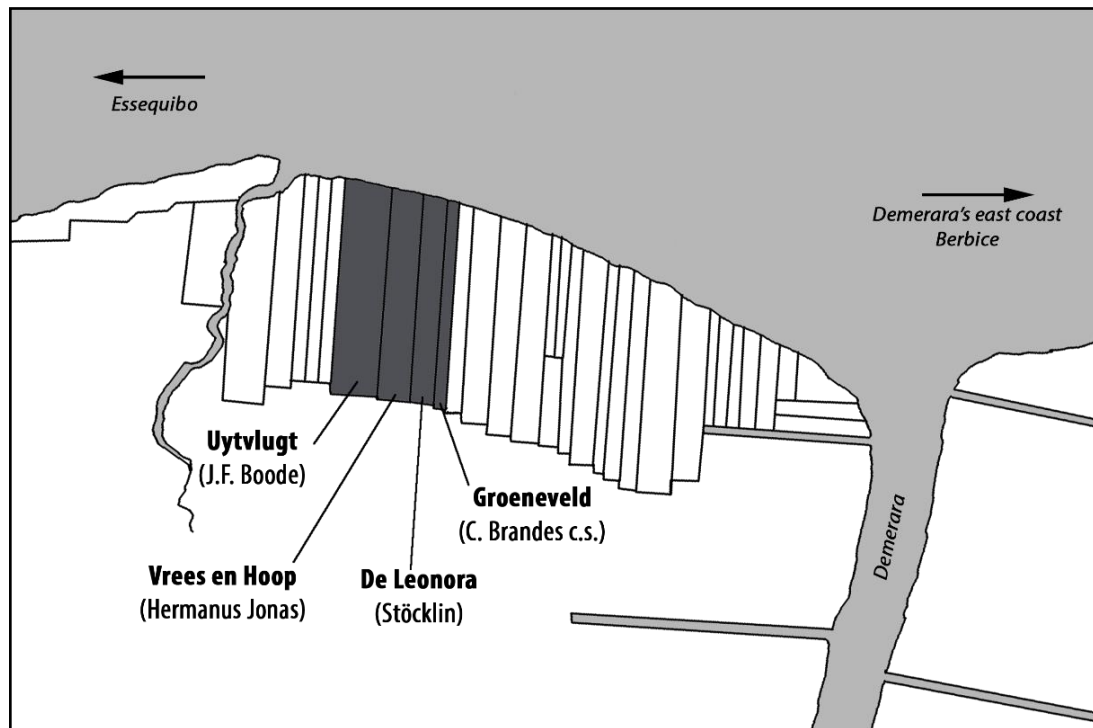
The bomba plot of 1789

Demerara’s west coast remained a hotbed for insurgencies, as a familiar plantation of Boode—*Uitvlugt*—was at the centre of a joint rebellion. It started on 23 September 1789 and was organised by seven bombas from four different plantations (including *Vrees en Hoop*, *Leonora*, and *Groeneveld*, see map 3.3). The motive seemed to have been the recent demotion of one of the bombas, who then concocted a plot for a larger rebellion against the whites. The leaders had apparently fomented their bonds by drinking from a calabash filled with blood, water and lemons.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Minutes of the Court of Justice of Essequibo, 16 and 20 October 1772, NAG, AB 3, inv. nr. 12, f. 178-183. The punishment of Louis was altered to a harsh flogging, burning and lifelong chain labour, because the councillors thought his testimonies would be too valuable to execute him.

¹¹⁸ Council of Policy to the Ten, 31 January 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.172-173.

¹¹⁹ *Duplicaat-missive van P.G. Duker te Stabroek aan de Kamer Amsterdam betreffende een opstand der neger-slaven in Demerary, 27 november 1789*, NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 130; *Ingekomen brieven met bijlagen uit Essequibo, 1787 juli 14 - 1791 aug. 25*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 534, f.1180-1194; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915.



Map 3.3: Plantations involved in the 1789 bomba insurgency

Around nine in the evening, thirty to forty insurgents from the three other plantations arrived at *Uytvlugt*, armed with cutlasses and machetes, and they proceeded to kill the white servants. Boode himself was having dinner with the plantation's director and was alarmed. The two men grabbed their pistols and managed to deter the rebels from coming upstairs. The insurgents briefly retreated and killed three of the slaves high up in the plantation hierarchy—the crop supervisor (*tuinbaas*), the scribe, and boiling supervisor (*stookbaas*). The second and third waves of attack on the house also proved unsuccessful. One of Boode's own bombas cunningly tried to acquire weapons, by asking his master for guns to defend the estate. His request was denied, however, and a stalemate ensued.¹²⁰

Again, the WIC structures could not cope with the revolt and the authorities cobbled together an improvised coalition of soldiers, burghers, sailors, “mulattoes” and Amerindians.¹²¹ Firstly, about thirty burgher militiamen came to guard the neighbouring estates in order to prevent the

¹²⁰ NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 130; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 534, f.1180-1194.

¹²¹ The sources mention “mulatto” but make no distinction between mulattoes (of white and black descent) and mestizos (of white and Amerindian descent). It is likely that in many cases these were in fact people of white-Amerindian descent.

revolt from spreading. The American ships had to anchor in front of the fortress and prepare for action, and the crew of the ship *Galathé* was already involved in tracking down the rebels. In the meantime Jacobus Pieterse and Daniel van der Heyden (the son of Stephanus Gerardus) were ordered to summon as many Amerindians as they could.¹²²

The familiar cross-cultural brokers were able to recruit Amerindians swiftly, and from all four “friendly” groups. Already on the 26th, three days after the revolt started, Van der Heyden returned with twenty Caribs and eighteen Arawaks, in addition to two “free mulattoes”. Two days later Pieterse reported back with thirteen Caribs, twelve Arawaks, and a “free mulatto”. These soldiers were sorely needed, as the burgher soldiers were fatigued while new ones were forsaking their duty. Moreover, another plot was discovered on the plantation of Mr. Sartorius, although the insurgents apparently hid themselves in the woods. In the subsequent weeks more Amerindian soldiers were recruited until they numbered at least seventy-nine in total. Besides the Caribs and Arawaks, four Accawaiois, and five Waraos participated.¹²³

Subsequently, the makeshift commando set out daily to hunt for rebels in the forest, and continually managed to capture or kill several of them, thinning out the ranks of the insurgents. After a week the colonists felt secure enough to send some of the soldiers back to Essequibo, convinced that only two or three rebels had escaped. One of the leaders, the bomba from *De Leonora*, Jack Nickols, had managed to get away, and a reward was put on his head—300 guilders alive, 150 for his head.¹²⁴

The rest of the insurgents were punished swiftly and harshly. Within four weeks all processes were finished and two days of executions took place at the end of October. Of the forty-four accused, six men were absolved, three women were flogged and returned to their masters, one man and two women were sentenced to a flogging and to lifelong work in chains for the Company. Of the remaining thirty-two, twelve were hanged and twenty broken on the wheel, after which their heads were put on stakes near the gallows, and their bodies desecrated. To set an example, “thousands” of enslaved workers had

¹²² NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 130; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 534, f.1180-1194.

¹²³ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 534, f.1180-1194. Seventy-nine is the number that received presents as a reward for their service in the revolt, which consisted of forty-one Caribs, thirty-three Arawaks, four Accawaiois, and five Warraos Schult, “Een noodzakelijk bondgenootschap,” appendix 2.

¹²⁴ Smidt, Lee, T. van der and van Dapperen, *Guyana Ordinance Book*, Demerara, 1789-10-8.

been sent to watch, while a hundred armed burghers watched out for the potential unrest that this gruesome scenario might enflame.¹²⁵

The tumultuous year of 1795

After the 1789 uprising it did not remain quiet for long in the colonies, as the entire Caribbean was soon swept up by the revolutionary fervour that came with the French and Haitian revolutions. The rebellions also became more diverse. The period between 1789 and 1815 saw fewer autonomous black rebellions than before or afterwards, while other revolts involving free coloureds, maroons, Black Caribs, or multi-class coalitions were numerous.¹²⁶ Some of the most notable rebellions were the Saint-Domingue revolution, the Black Carib uprising on St. Vincent in 1795, the revolt led by the free coloured man Julien Fédon on Grenada in the same year, and Jamaica's Second Maroon War in 1795-1796.¹²⁷

Closer to Essequibo and Demerara, two other large-scale revolts took place in 1795, in Coro in Venezuela and on Curaçao. In Venezuela enslaved Africans and free blacks rose up on 10 May on a plantation, and soon free people of colour and some Amerindians joined. Yet when they approached the town of Coro two days later, they were defeated and the rebellion crushed. Interestingly, one of the leaders was a slave refugee from Curaçao who had settled in the Coro Mountains after becoming free. Several months later a rebellion broke out on Curaçao, although connections have not been proven.¹²⁸ There, 2,000 of the island's 12,000 slaves rose up. It started as a protest against work routine infringements, but soon gained traction based on the Haitian example. Furthermore, the leader Tula, who might have been an outsider, was knowledgeable about French and Haitian revolutions and referred to them to support his struggle for freedom.¹²⁹

Indeed, the issues of connectedness between rebellions around the Caribbean and the possible influence of French egalitarian ideology still

¹²⁵ NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 130; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 534, f.1180-1194; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915.

¹²⁶ David Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Wider Caribbean, 1789-1815," in *A Turbulent time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, ed. David B. Gaspar and David P. Geggus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 11.

¹²⁷ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, chapters 15 and 17.

¹²⁸ Aizpurua, "Revolution and Politics," in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 99-101.

¹²⁹ Oostindie, "Slave Resistance," in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 8-9.

puzzles historians. While it seems logical to assume that a philosophy of rights was a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressed, the enslaved did not need anyone to tell them that freedom was better than slavery. Indeed, not the abstract language of change, but the rumours were crucial. The rumour that a king had granted freedom to the enslaved but that the local planters withheld it, was a recurring one. It could a powerful tool in the hands of conspirators, and proved the motivation behind several uprisings around the Greater Caribbean. Thus, while it seemed obvious to the planters that the revolutionaries were inspired by French ideology, its practice such ideas had at best an indirect effect.¹³⁰

The political and military effects of the French revolution and following the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) were probably more important in shaping resistance around the Caribbean. David Geggus argued that the revolutions and accompanying warfare did not lead to more revolts, as might have been expected, because of the increased military presence, and because the enslaved had more opportunities now: they could run away or join a black regiment with the promise of freedom afterwards. In addition, Haiti was not in the position to actively spread its revolution, as that would provoke a British naval blockade, which was something the fragile new republic could not afford.¹³¹

Essequibo and Demerara, however, did not experience any increased military presence—rather the lack thereof—and experienced other effects of the revolutionary times: for French revolutionaries it became a weapon of war to encourage slave uprisings in rival colonies. If British attention could be diverted to revolts in the colonies, it could not pay full attention to the European war theatre. This policy was forcefully implemented by Victor Hugues after he arrived in Guadeloupe in 1794 with the order to proclaim Emancipation and take the island from the British. Similarly, French agents were to stir up the Black Caribs on St. Vincent, as well as the free coloureds

¹³⁰ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 243-44; Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution," in Gaspar and Geggus, *A Turbulent time* 10; David Geggus, "The Caribbean in the Age of Revolution," in *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840*, ed. David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 97-99; Geggus, "Slave rebellion during the Age of Revolution," in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 35; Wim Klooster, "The Rising Expectations of Free and Enslaved Blacks in the Greater Caribbean," in *ibid.*, 60, 65; Alex Borucki, "Trans-imperial History in the Making of the Slave Trade to Venezuela, 1526-1811," *Itinerario*, no. 2 (2012) 43.

¹³¹ Geggus, "Slave rebellion during the Age of Revolution," in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 31, 37.

and slaves on Dominica and St. Kitts, and all four islands soon faced major uprisings.¹³²

Logically, then, the planters in Essequibo and Demerara were petrified by the news of Hugues' arrival in nearby French Guiana, as rumours travelled that the two colonies were subject to an impending attack. Meanwhile, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, the colonists were split along pro-French and pro-British lines, although neither of them favoured French occupation, let alone the slave emancipation that Hugues might bring. And since the governor himself had disappeared on 5 May 1795, chaos reigned within the colonial apparatus. Thus, while there was no direct French interference, the tense and chaotic situation suggested that the time was ripe for the enslaved to be rid of their bondage.

Indeed, in contrast to the revolts of 1772 and 1789 which had a clear immediate cause, the situation in 1795 developed gradually. The planters first noted that their enslaved workers increasingly deserted to the maroon communities living close-by in the forest. Likely before, the revolt took place in Demerara. There, marronage had increased because of the growth of the plantation sector, while the planters had failed to fit out enough Amerindian patrols to counter the development. Consequently, by 1795 sizeable maroon communities had established themselves behind the plantations ("step-by-step" marronage). According to the historian James Rodway, the maroons were sometimes even bold enough to trade their produce at the local market. Rumours about a possible insurrection on the west coast travelled around the colony. The planters received instructions to keep their enslaved workers away from the back dams, where they would be able to make contact with outsiders.¹³³

The colonists were in a state of alert. On 14 May 1795—nine days after the governor's desertion—the local courts decided to recruit seventy to eighty Amerindians and as many free black and "mulattoes" as possible, to send out a large expedition into the forest. The maroons were getting bolder, raiding estates during the night for cattle and other supplies. On 9 June, the idea arose to demand that all free coloureds report for duty, at Stabroek or their militia captain, under punishment of a 50-guilders fine. It took several days to organise this, as the authorities had no idea where these people lived, but in the end it apparently worked out. The Council of Policy

¹³² Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 183; Cox, "The British Caribbean in the Age of Revolution," in Gould and Onuf, *Empire and Nation* 276.

¹³³ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 77.

also wanted forty “trustworthy slaves”, which several prominent planters promised to provide.¹³⁴

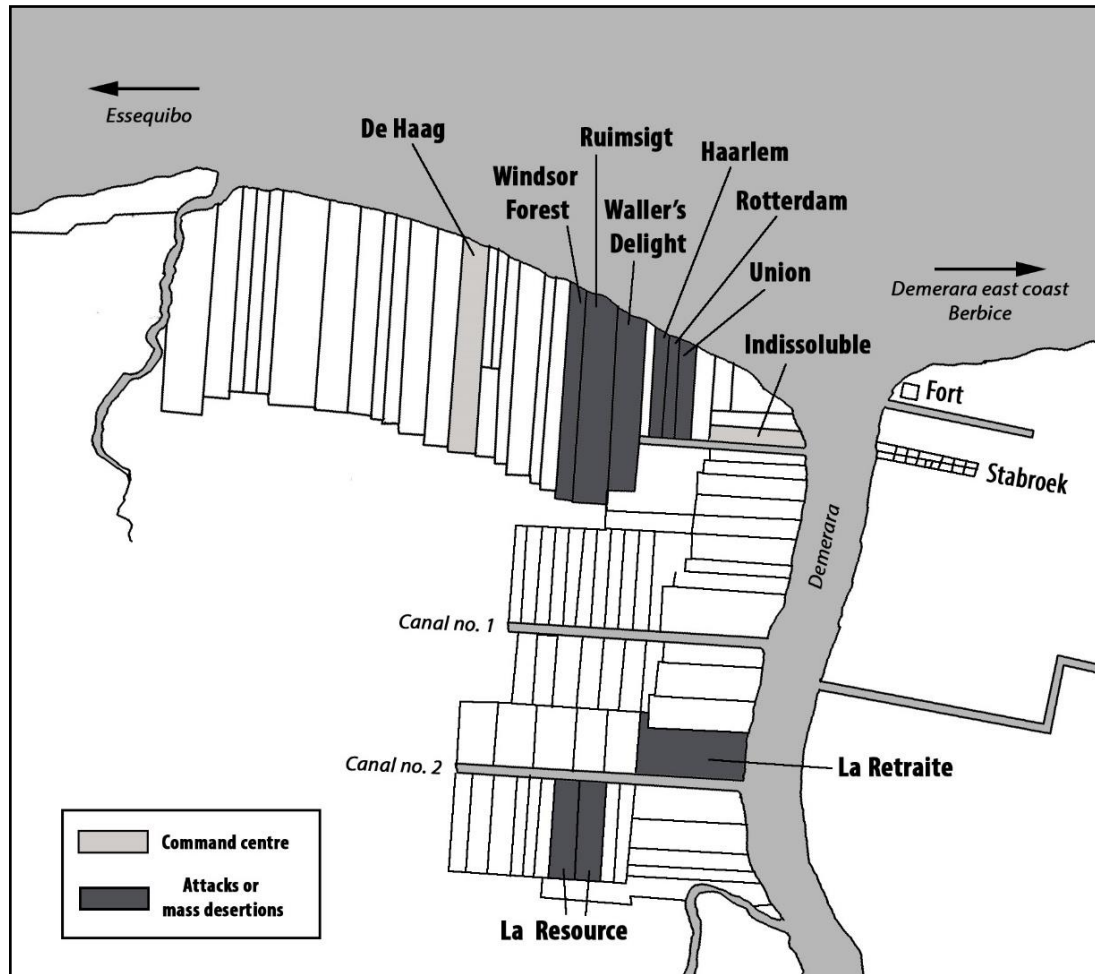
The initial attempts to subdue the maroons proved ineffective. On Saturday 13 June, the “free mulattoes” Cornelis Karel and Jan van Ersbeek came back with a group of Amerindians, who were lodged and treated to bananas, fish and rum from the colony’s warehouse. On Sunday a group of whites and free coloureds went into the woods, but they were driven back and returned wounded. Subsequently, the nearby ships were asked to supply crewmembers to guard the back dams of the plantations, and the Amerindian squad went into the forest, armed with guns. They returned in vain, stating it was impossible to undertake anything during the rain season. The colonists saw the need to wait, as wet ammunition was useless, meanwhile asking the postholders and several free blacks to recruit more Amerindians. The blacksmith was ordered to produce 200 to 300 arrows and repair the broken guns of the Amerindians.¹³⁵

The following week must have been one of growing anxiety for the planters. A large group of maroons emerged on the west coast, behind *Haarlem*, four armed maroons had tried to convince the guards on *La Resource* to let the enslaved there escape and on 28 May a rumour emerged that an attack was imminent on *La Retraite* and the plantations at Canal no.2 (see Map 3.4). Yet the attacks did not materialise and meanwhile the “free mulatto” Benjamin Pieterse (probably related to the Jacobus Pieterse who played a key role in the revolts of 1772 and 1789) arrived with twenty-five Amerindians, promising that seventy more would follow. The colonists struggled to supply all these people with guns, and the authorities bought second hand guns to have them repaired.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ “*Journal*”, *dagboek van het gouvernement in Demerary*, NL-HaNA, RdK, 1.05.02, inv. nr. 75, 14 May to 13 June 1795.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 June to 19 June 1795.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 June to 30 June 1795.



Map 3.4 Uprisings, desertion and maroon attacks in 1795

The enthusiasm for the expedition is explained by the large rewards that were offered: 400 guilders for a maroon taken alive and 200 for a severed right hand.¹³⁷ During the first two weeks of July, some volunteers brought back several maroons, as well as the severed hand of one that was killed. The forest commando under Major Louis De Mellet, including the “mulatto” Van Ersbeek and several indigenous soldiers, also brought back a hand and reported to have burned “3 or 4” maroon houses. How their reward was to be divided was not specified, to the later dismay of the Amerindians.¹³⁸

Despite this growing coalition against the maroons, the colonists could not yet get a grip on the situation. The maroons managed to raid *Windsor Forest* and kill the owner, Mr. Clark, and two bombas of *Ruimsigt* beheaded a soldier. In fact, the enslaved of *Ruimsigt*, *Haarlem* and *Waller's Delight*

¹³⁷ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 78.

¹³⁸ NL-HaNa, RdK, 1.05.02, inv. nr. 75, 1 to 11 July 1795.

decided to join the maroons, swelling their ranks. Major de Mellet found his troops so stretched (see the incidents on map 3.4) that the colonists decided to ask for help from Berbice and Suriname. They wanted a warship and three to four hundred men, but any number would do. In the meantime the burning of plantations continued, at the *Rotterdam* and the *Union*; on the former the enslaved joined the maroons, on the latter they apparently preferred to dodge the rebellion.¹³⁹

During the remainder of July the colonists regained some of the initiative. The capture of individual or small groups of maroons continued to the extent that the fort became too small, so some were kept in custody on a ship. Daniel van der Heyden, together with a group of Amerindians prevented a group of slaves from joining the maroons. Indeed, the number of Amerindian soldiers continued to increase, while the ship *de Zeemeeuw* arrived from Berbice to lend support. Sailors from other ships were already serving as volunteers and so the colonists assembled a diverse group to start a large-scale counter offensive.¹⁴⁰ A rule was instated that every planter had to sell one slave for every fifty he possessed, and those would be bought by the authorities to form a Black Corps. Similar to the other islands, freedom was promised to these men and thus finding volunteers proved easy enough.¹⁴¹

The aim was to encircle the maroons. Therefore, the colonists sent out two commando groups, each comprised of Amerindians, fifty soldiers of the Black Corps, and several burghers and white volunteers. The Amerindians proved essential as scouts, preventing the commandos from being ambushed, and discovering the multiple hideouts of the maroons. Most of the men were apparently shot, while women and children were taken prisoner. After this violent clash the groups returned and “seventy black arms were displayed on the points of their bayonets”. Afterwards, the resistance was broken and the trials began. Thirteen insurgents were broken on the wheel; the ringleader was burned at the stake while his flesh was pinched out with red hot tongs.¹⁴²

The commando troops were well rewarded, and the expedition is said to have cost 154,000 guilders.¹⁴³ The commando leader, Major de Mellet

¹³⁹ Ibid., 17 to 22 July; Smidt, Lee, T. van der and van Dapperen, *Guyana Ordinance Book*, Demerara 1795-7-1.

¹⁴⁰ NL-HaNa, RdK, 1.05.02, inv. nr. 75, 19 to 31 July.

¹⁴¹ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 78. The price for the enslaved soldiers of the black corps was not to exceed 1,000 guilders per person.

¹⁴² Ibid. vol. 2: 79-80, quotation at 79.

¹⁴³ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 150.

received a ten-year tax exemption, the captains Le Blanc and Van der Heyden each received 1,500 guilders. The Amerindians received 5,500 guilders worth of goods.¹⁴⁴ A total number of 357 Amerindians were eligible for rewards, which consisted of “rations” and one-half Portuguese Joe (worth eleven guilders) for the common soldiers, with higher pay-outs for their commanders. Yet the Amerindians were dissatisfied with their remuneration, since they claimed they had not received anything for their help in the previous uprising. Moreover, as the planters had been so desperate when calling for their help, the Amerindians were not expecting stinginess now. Consequently, promises were made to exchange the Amerindian’s heavy rifles (which they had probably received for the expedition) for smaller hunting rifles, and powder and shot.¹⁴⁵

The events of 1795 demonstrate the increasing difficulty the planters had to maintain the slavery regime, particularly in Demerara. Lacking Essequibo’s escape option, Demerara proved fertile ground for other forms of resistance. The reason the uprisings focused on the west coast is found in the crop regime: while the *east* coast was entirely focused on cotton production, the *west* coast was dominated by coffee plantation, which had a more arduous labour regime. Desertion, in the form of seeking informal freedom in marronage, rather than hoping for formal freedom in Venezuela, proved a way out. In 1795 it briefly seemed that life as a maroon was not as insecure as previously thought, as the maroons were able to show themselves openly and attack plantations, even though they often had to fall back again. This image of a viable life outside bondage likely contributed to the growing desertion on many plantations, more than any ideological rhetoric. In the end, however, the Amerindians yet again proved their value to the colonists in preserving the plantation hierarchy. The colonial apparatus was ill-equipped as always, and the slavery regime was only retained by an otherwise remarkable coalition of predominantly subaltern groups. Under the later British rule, the military apparatus was enlarged, but it was also confronted with an uprising that proved the power of rumours and ideology in the hands of the oppressed.

¹⁴⁴ Schult, “Een noodzakelijk bondgenootschap,” 40.

¹⁴⁵ Report to the Court of Policy in Demerara, 26 October 1795, no. 657 in BGBB, BCC app. vol. 5:159-161.

Epilogue: the great uprising of 1823

Indeed, the biggest, and most famous, revolt was still to come, in 1823, associated with the missionary John Smith. Here we find a notable contrast with Suriname, where during the nineteenth century violent protests became increasingly rare. There, the expansion of the slavery system had halted, resulting in more creolisation, since the Dutch slave trade had dwindled after the loss of Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784). Furthermore, the colonial authorities tried to reign in the excesses of the slave system, for example by prohibiting the application of the feared “Spanish buck”, where a slaved was whipped while being bent over a stick in the ground. Under these circumstances, the Surinamese creoles were less inclined to try and overthrow slavery itself, and more attuned to attaining the best possible living conditions. These struggles often took the form of strikes, which were remarkably effective.¹⁴⁶

The different trajectory in Demerara can be explained by the continued and accelerating growth of the plantation sector. After the British takeover in 1796, the number of enslaved labourers rapidly increased from some 28,000 to a peak of 77,867 in 1817. Even after the abolition of the African slave trade in 1808, more than 9,000 enslaved people were brought into Demerara, mainly from Berbice and to a lesser extent from the Bahamas and Dominica. It was an internal British circuit, in which it paid off to ship enslaved workers from exhausted colonies like Barbados and Dominica to new and promising acquisitions such as Demerara and Trinidad. While this trade could not reverse the demographic decline characteristic of a plantation frontier, it slowed it down. Still, the enslaved population declined to 65,556 in 1832.¹⁴⁷ As a result of the many slave imports in previous years, in 1817 fifty-five per cent of the population was of African descent, and it was still forty-five per cent in 1823, the year of the great rebellion.¹⁴⁸

The 1823 rebellion is the best-known one for Demerara and ranks among the major slave revolts in the Caribbean. The high percentage of Africans contributed to a climate in which an uprising could occur, as did the pressure from planters to squeeze as much labour out of a shrinking population. Another contributing factor was the switch from cotton to sugar. After the British takeover most plantations had concentrated on producing

¹⁴⁶ Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*, 372, 393, 400, 445-449.

¹⁴⁷ Van der Oest, “Forgotten Colonies,” in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce* 329; Eltis, “Traffic in Slaves”.

¹⁴⁸ Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 48.

cotton, which was a lucrative business as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum. However, the United States soon took over as the most important cotton producer and thus pushed cotton prices down. In contrast, sugar prices boomed just after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, enticing many planters to switch to sugar cane. Sugar cultivation required a greater capital input, resulting in larger plantations with more enslaved workers. In addition, exploitation increased on these sugar estates due to the larger scale and the more intensive labour required to harvest and process the sugar cane.¹⁴⁹

Rumours of freedom proved important too, as the 1823 reforms, aimed among others at reducing cruel punishments, were mistaken for full abolition. Nevertheless, in later historical accounts the key factor was deemed to be the missionary activity of Reverend John Smith, who arrived in Demerara in 1817. Religious instruction of the enslaved had been allowed in the British empire since 1754 and had spread quickly after 1783, but had no history in Essequibo and Demerara (only in Berbice). John Smith thus broke new ground by holding a regular Sunday mass for the enslaved on the *Success* plantation of John Gladstone (father of the later British prime minister). These meetings, which the enslaved of many plantations along the east coast attended, did not have a purely religious function. They also provided moments of social connection and opportunities to discuss politics such as the rumour that the King had abolished slavery and that the whites refused to accept it.¹⁵⁰

There, at the *Success* plantation, a plot was forged. At first the conspirators devised a peaceful plan, reluctant to use force as they had heard of the violent repression of the Barbados revolt in 1816. The initial goal of the rebels was to negotiate with Governor Murray in order to discuss the rumoured policy change. However, the plot was leaked before it could be executed. Murray and the cavalry went to inspect the reports of an uprising at *Success*, but they were stopped by a group of forty armed rebels who demanded “their right”. Murray then tried to explain that Emancipation had not yet taken place.¹⁵¹

Yet the genie was already out of the bottle and slaves all along the East Coast rose in rebellion. The governor declared martial law and assembled all the men he could muster. By that time, almost all of the 12,000 slaves on

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 47-48.

¹⁵⁰ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 243-246, 278; Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, xiii.

¹⁵¹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, chapter 21.

Demerara's East Coast had joined the rebellion. After several skirmishes, a standoff ensued on the *Bachelor's Adventure* plantation, where 2,000 rebels faced three hundred British redcoats. Apparently, the insurgents wanted land for themselves and four days off per week. However, during further negotiations they increased their demands to full freedom. They expressed their wish to present their demands to Murray, without the intention laying down their arms, and the British captain grew impatient. He gave the order to fire, and since the rebels hardly had any firearms themselves, the confrontation turned into a bloodbath. This confrontation broke the rebellion, and during the march back to Georgetown the remaining plantations were subdued. Nearly two hundred rebels were marched back in chains to be tried. In the end about 250 insurgents lost their lives, in contrast to three whites.¹⁵² So while it was a major uprising, involving many more enslaved people than any of the previous revolts, it lasted only very briefly. The enslaved would have to wait another decade for their freedom.

Conclusion

The slavery regime in Essequibo and Demerara, then, was an unstable, oppressive system that nevertheless managed to survive until Emancipation in 1833. Yet its survival depended on factors outside the colonial administration, namely desertion and Amerindian support.

Desertion pervaded all levels of the colonies. It is not surprising that the uprisings in 1795 took place just after the governor himself had deserted, refusing to follow the directions of the new pro-French regime. Yet more important were the desertions from below, by the enslaved and the soldiers. These two groups had opposing roles in the hierarchy of the plantation society, yet they both wished to escape their positions on the continuum between freedom and "unfreedom". Soldiers, while not commodified like the enslaved Africans, also faced restrictions during their time of service, especially through the institutionalised debt incursion. Therefore, both groups had an incentive to escape the Dutch society, and the nearby Spanish presence in Venezuela seemed an attractive option. The many French soldiers in Dutch service hoped to enlist in a Catholic army on the Spanish side, while the enslaved Africans hoped to attain "formal freedom" by converting to Catholicism. Between 1750 and 1791 the Spanish

¹⁵² Ibid.

monarchy promised such official freedom to slaves deserting from Protestant countries, yet it remains to be seen how often this was actually granted. This religious sanctuary might be the only way in which religion directly influenced the slavery regime. In contrast to Brazil, for example, the enslaved received no religious instruction. Perhaps more revolts would have erupted if it had been otherwise: the 1823 rebellion was at least partly influenced by the missionary work of John Smith.

The slavery regime in Essequibo and Demerara differed from other slave societies in terms of the prospects for the enslaved, which were bleak. Other than through desertion, enslaved people had little hope of improving their situation. Urban slavery, where one might try to pass as free, hardly existed and manumission was a rare phenomenon. Furthermore, while theoretically one could appeal to the Fiscal in case of wrongdoing, in practice the master reigned supreme on his estate and no legal protection was offered. Thus, the slavery regime was particularly hard and disheartening.

Desertion—although impossible to quantify—was the best way out of bondage while simultaneously reducing the pressure on the slavery regime. It functioned as a safety valve, allowing rebellious enslaved Africans and mutinous soldiers to resist the plantation society effectively, but by seeking refuge rather than through violence. The enslaved Amerindians in Essequibo and Demerara were perhaps somewhere in between these two groups on the freedom-unfreedom continuum. While enslaved, they apparently enjoyed more privileges and were not employed in the hard gang labour. For them, desertion was not necessarily an attractive prospect. Although Amerindians were legally free under Spanish law, the journey involved travelling through the territory of Caribs, who had likely caught and sold them in the first place. More importantly, life on the Spanish side was not one of full freedom either, as the Amerindians were increasingly concentrated in missionary villages.

However, the escape option was mainly important for Essequibo, where direct connections existed with Venezuela. For those in Demerara, formal freedom was literally further away and the “informal freedom” (*de facto* but not *de jure*) of marronage was the more likely option, besides outright revolt. Yet maroon societies faced formidable adversaries in the indigenous soldiers supporting the colonial regime. This situation diverged greatly from Suriname, where Amerindian groups only played a minor role and viable maroon communities had emerged, which have survived until today. In Suriname the colonists were forced to draw up peace treaties with the

maroons, as they could not subdue them, but in Essequibo and Demerara the opposite was the case. Temporary expeditions cleared out the forests and thereby prevented the build-up of possible threats to the plantation society. While the colonists were sometimes lax in sending out such expeditions, as they were expensive, they were keen on avoiding becoming “like Suriname”.

The role of the Amerindians is indeed best conceptualised as reactive. While they could return runaways for a reward, the Caribs were increasingly driven away by Spanish incursions from the major gateway areas to Venezuela. In fact, it seems as if the Amerindians were more often recruited for specific incidents: after a report of a maroon hideout came in, or after a large-scale desertion. Hence, when such expeditions had not taken place for a while, maroon communities could temporarily develop, as proved the case in 1795. The Caribs were the most frequent recruits, because they lived relatively close, and had the most warlike reputation. Nevertheless, the Arawaks, and to a lesser extent Akawaio and Warao, also played a role in upholding the slavery regime.

Of crucial importance were the people recruiting the Amerindians, the cross-cultural brokers. Often these were men of mixed descent—termed “mulatto” in the sources, but more likely “mestizo”, for Amerindian partners were not uncommon for planters. One family played a particularly significant role, in all the three major uprisings, namely Van der Heyden. Being able to speak indigenous languages, they formed the bridge between the planter and Amerindian societies. Stephanus Gerardus, father of Daniel, was instrumental in recruiting the Caribs that put down the 1772 revolt, and led the colonial defences. His son Daniel, of mixed descent, was similarly central to the quelling of the 1789 and 1795 uprisings.

The Company recognised the importance of both the brokers and Amerindians, but did not always express its gratitude in rewards. The Van der Heydens received small tokens of appreciation, but were not compensated for their own expenses during the revolt. Similarly, the colonists were typically generous with offering food, accommodation and rewards to Amerindians when the need was high, but returned to their parsimonious ways once the imminent danger had subsided.

The nature of the revolts during the eighteenth century was comparable to others in the Caribbean, and remained traditional. That is to say, the revolts in 1772 and 1789 arose from a clear problem at a particular plantation, rather than a more general protest against slavery per se. The

situation in 1795 was more complex. It appears the combination of political chaos and a temporary increase in marronage had created an environment in which desertion became more common.¹⁵³ As the maroons saw their numbers increase, and grew bolder as a result, a confrontation with the plantation society became more likely. Nevertheless, the motives and timing behind this conflict are best sought in the local circumstances rather than in the ideologies of the Age of Revolutions. In other words, the conflict in 1795 was probably more pro-marronage than anti-slavery.

The indirect effects of the revolutionary times, such as political uncertainty and divisions within the planter society, was more important for the unrest in the region. Uprisings in Coro and Curaçao were possibly more ideologically inspired, but were markedly different because they involved free coloureds. In Essequibo and Demerara the group of free coloureds hardly existed, and so the society remained more strictly divided along racial lines.

Characteristic of the revolts there was the fact that they all took place in Demerara, in particular on the west coast. This area lacked Essequibo's escape option, and had harsh working conditions because of the presence of coffee plantations—as opposed to the cotton estates on the east coast. Another element present in all three revolts was the large number of enslaved people who chose to “dodge” the rebellion. Faced with the terrible choice of choosing between continued enslavement and an almost certain death among the rebels, many just tried to make the best of the situation, often by hiding in the woods. The planters, in their way, recognised this dilemma and often decided not to punish those caught in the middle. Intention proved a key element in the post-revolt trials. Those who had just fled, perhaps to safety at another plantation, escaped conviction, while those that tried to remain in the woods and could only be retrieved by force, were punished as deserters.

In the end, then, desertion was a central concept in the minds of the enslaved, the soldiers as well as the planters. It was a major reason for the survival of the two colonies, as were the improvised alliances with the Amerindians. Metropolitan support did not play a significant role in keeping the slavery regime intact. Instead, it was determined by local factors and local actors. However, wider Atlantic networks also influenced the lives of

¹⁵³ The true effect of the 1791 cartel between the Dutch Republic and Spain remains elusive: the two countries promised to return each other's runaways, which might have made the escape option in Orinoco less attractive, and marronage more so. Yet, as stated above, Venezuela was likely too far away in any case for those in Demerara, so the effect might have been small.

the enslaved, namely in the provisions that often came from the intra-American network, with all the risks that it entailed. The next chapter will look into these and other trading networks, including the slave trade itself.

4 The commercial web

Mercantilism, cash crops and captives as contraband

Concerning [your plan] to place sentinels on incoming vessels to prevent fraud, which comes across to us as, to use that manner of speech [“to tie a blind horse”], as no clandestine imports of unpermitted products occurs here, nor is anything brought in that pays incoming duties, which has to remain this way, in order not to hamper the import of provisions which is their only cargo and in order not to subject us and our slaves to shortage, and even if such [clandestine import] takes place a sentinel even if he never slept would not be able to prevent it.¹

Essequibo, Council of Policy to WIC, 31 January 1774

In this single rather longwinded sentence Essequibo’s government accurately captured the trading situation in the colonies: the provision trade, conducted in foreign ships, was essential for the survival of the colonies and should be left alone, free from duties. While the Council knew these provision traders sometimes exported plantation products illicitly, it reassured the WIC not to worry. In Orwellian double-speak, the councillors denied that illegal trade took place, while also confirming it was impossible to prevent it.

The commercial web in which Essequibo and Demerara participated had a unique, inter-imperial shape. It was a local renegotiation of the inapt legislative framework that constituted a Dutch version of mercantilism, as I will argue below. Officially, like in most of the other European empires, the two colonies were bound to the Dutch Republic: supplies had to come from the metropolis in Dutch ships, while products would have to return via the

¹ Director-General and Council to Heren X in Amsterdam, 31 January 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.176. Original quotation: “Dat wat betreft, om op de aankomende vaartuijgen Schildwagten te plaatsen om fraude voor te komen, ons soude voorkomen, van die spreekwijse gebruik makende een blint paard vastbinden dewijl alhier geen Clandestine invoer van ongepermitteerde producten plaats heeft, nog iets werd in gebragt, dat inkomende regten betaald, dat ook soo diende te blijven, om den invoer van provisien het geen hun eenigste Carga is, niet te stremmen en ons en onse slaven aan gebrek bloot te stellen, en schoon zulks al geschiede soo soude een Schildwagt al sliep hij nimmer zulks niet in staat zijn te beletten.”

same route. Only Dutch citizens were allowed to bring enslaved Africans to the colonies. Yet in practice, these connections proved insufficient, particularly on the side of colonial imports. Therefore, in 1742, the WIC allowed foreign traders to bring building materials into Essequibo—an exception that quickly grew into standard practice of allowing foreign provisions as well.² In return they were only allowed to take bills of exchange and secondary products, such as wood, rum and molasses. Yet the primary products—the cash crops of sugar, coffee and cotton—were only allowed to go to the Dutch Republic. Similarly, the slave trade remained restricted to Dutch traders as well, despite their inability to meet the demand in the colonies. The official framework increasingly grew out of touch with the situation in the colonies, and illegal trade filled the gap. Even though most cash crops still ended up in the metropolis, the workings of the commercial web were greased by illegal exchanges.

This chapter investigates how the colonists reacted to the mercantilist trade regime and how their improvised interactions created a trade network that allowed the colonies to survive and expand despite the circumstances. Firstly, I will look at the institutional level in the metropolis, arguing that the Dutch were not principled free traders. Rather, they combined free trade and restrictions, to devise a system that made mercantilist sense. The Dutch were not anti-mercantilists, they were poor mercantilists: the structure of their state, their economy and their finances prevented them from playing the mercantilist game as well as the other powers. Subsequently, I return to the colonial level to analyse the three main branches of commerce: the imports of basic necessities, the exports of cash crops, and the slave trade.

Poor mercantilists

During the seventeenth century, the Dutch managed to establish a far more prominent place in the world economy than the size of their population would suggest. The role of the Dutch as carriers and middlemen emerged during the first half of the century. By then, Dutch traders were so successful in supplying the English colonies that the English felt the need to protect themselves against it. Furthermore, the entrepôt function of Amsterdam gave the Dutch a central position in European trade, which the English Navigation Act of 1651 was meant to undermine. This and

² Van der Oest, “Forgotten Colonies,” in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 357.

subsequent acts established the principle that English goods had to be transported by English ships without stopping in other ports along the way. In addition, captains had to be English, as did three-quarters of the crew. During the rest of the seventeenth century four more Navigation Acts and three Anglo-Dutch Wars effectively pushed the Dutch out of the English network.³

Nevertheless, the Dutch (after a short-lived occupation of Brazil) had found other outlets for their intermediary services at the islands of St. Eustatius and Curaçao. As free ports, they proved lucrative entrepôt locations where traders from all nations could buy and sell goods they could not legally exchange within their own empire. St. Eustatius fulfilled this role of illicit hub mainly for the nearby French and English possessions, while Curaçao looked mainly towards Spanish America, supplying tens of thousands of enslaved Africans. Wim Klooster summarised it neatly: “Dutch Caribbean transit trade was largely an illicit affair. Smuggling was so important to the Dutch Antilles that it was almost their *raison d’être*.”⁴ Indeed, for this period the image of the Dutch as successful inter-imperial brokers makes sense.

After the 1670s, however, the Dutch lost their pivotal position, as they were increasingly excluded from the other European empires. In the 1660s Jean-Baptiste Colbert established more direct state control over colonial trade and instated the *système d’exclusif* (exclusive system) to exclude foreigners.⁵ Portugal followed the same route and Spain—in theory at least—was also closed to those without the right licenses.⁶ As the Atlantic became

³ Koot, “Anglo-Dutch Trade,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*; Kenneth Morgan, “Anglo-Dutch Economic Relations in the Atlantic World, 1688-1783,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 122; Kenneth Morgan, “Mercantilism and the British Empire, 1688-1815,” in *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688-1914*, ed. Donald Winch and Patrick O’Brien (Oxford: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2002) 171; P. C. Emmer, “Jesus Christ was Good but Trade was Better: An Overview of the Transit trade of the Dutch Antilles, 1634-1795,” in Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy*, 107-109.

⁴ Klooster, *Illicit Riches*, 1 (quotation); Borucki, “Slave Trade to Venezuela,”; Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband*;; Jordaan and Wilson, “Danish, Dutch and Swedish Free Ports,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*; Enthoven, “Nest of Pirates,”; Wim Klooster, “Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600-1800,” in Bailyn and Denautl, *Soundings in Atlantic History*; Klooster, “Curaçao as a Transit Center,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*.

⁵ Silvia Marzagalli, “The French Atlantic and the Dutch, Late Seventeenth - Late Eighteenth Century,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*.

⁶ Disney, *Portuguese empire*, 246; Crespo Solana, “A Network-Based Merchant Empire: Dutch Trade in the Hispanic Atlantic (1680-1740),” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*.

divided into ostensibly closed systems, the broker role disappeared and only the smuggler role remained. Curaçao and St. Eustatius indeed continued to fulfil facilitative roles, while the Dutch after 1680 also focused on their own territorial empire, on the Guiana Coast.⁷ Yet the tide could not be turned and the Dutch would not return to their former glory. The transition to second-rate power was not immediately visible, as incomes in the Dutch Republic remained high. In fact, Atlantic commerce was a viable branch that even surpassed trade with Asia.⁸ Rather than undergoing a clear decline, then, the Dutch economy saw its share in the world economy decrease because it could not keep up with the growth of others, especially Britain.⁹

The point is then that the image of Dutch as inter-imperial brokers and free traders is confined in time and place and should not be essentialised. The image is valid for Curaçao and St. Eustatius and prior to 1650, but afterwards the situation became more complex. In fact, even the free trade at St. Eustatius was not completely free: trading with the Dutch Republic was only allowed in Dutch ships.¹⁰ In other words, rather than adhering to free trade in principle, the Dutch used it to achieve their own practical goals in a mercantilist world. It is therefore incorrect and unhelpful to speak of the Dutch as “the champions of free trade”.¹¹

In fact, the Dutch had fierce debates about the freedom of trade regarding their most important Atlantic colony: Brazil. In 1630, in the early phase of occupation, the WIC and the States-General agreed to a temporary lifting of the Company’s monopoly. Four years later this decision was renewed. Allowing private traders proved somewhat too successful, however, and some envious Company shareholders demanded the reinstatement of the monopoly. In 1636 the monopoly was indeed restored, although the debate continued. Zeeland wanted a monopoly to support a strong Company, while Amsterdam wanted free trade for its large fleet. Two years later, a compromise emerged: the trade was opened to all WIC shareholders,

⁷ De Vries, “Dutch Atlantic Economies,” in Coclanis, *The Atlantic Economy*.

⁸ Victor Enthoven and Johannes Postma, “Introduction,” in Idem and idem, *Riches*, 10; Enthoven, “Dutch Transatlantic Commerce,” in *ibid.*; Oostindie and Roitman, “Repositioning the Dutch,” 137.

⁹ David Ormrod, *The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in the Age of Mercantilism, 1650-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 307-309, 351.

¹⁰ Jordaan and Wilson, “Danish, Dutch and Swedish Free Ports,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 281.

¹¹ Victor Enthoven, “Neutrality: Atlantic Shipping in and after the Anglo-Dutch Wars,” in Stern and Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined*, 330; Pieter C. Emmer, “The Rise and Decline of the Dutch Atlantic, 1600-1800,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 353.

as well as to the Portuguese inhabitants, but the Company maintained certain privileges, particularly the slave trade.¹²

Free trade did not become an entrenched ideology. During the 1660s, 1670s and 1680s, when Brazil was already lost, the prominent thinkers Johan and Pieter de la Court argued strongly for a “republican empire of trade.” Opposing the monarchs of other states and their empires of territorial conquest, the brothers De la Court proposed a Dutch alternative. In this commercial empire, trade ought to be open to all. Hence, there was no place for the WIC. Yet despite its broad appeal, these ideas were not put into practice. After the first WIC went bankrupt in 1674, it was immediately restructured and resurrected. And while in England chartered companies were under sustained attack during the 1680s, no such debate emerged in the Dutch Republic. Furthermore, even though the WIC gave up parts of its monopoly later, there would be no serious ideological opposition to chartered companies until the late eighteenth century.¹³

We have already encountered this belated resistance in Chapter 2, in the *Brieven* written under the pseudonym of Aristomus and Sincerus. The author resented the high taxes, the regulations regarding the slave trade and the inadequate political representation.¹⁴ Yet even there, the opposition to the WIC was probably as much a reaction to the WIC’s inadequate support for the colonies as it was an ideological stance. And in ideological terms, the *Brieven* did not stand alone. They should be seen as part of the general political movement that strived for broader representation and political reform.

The institutional arrangement of the Dutch state, first a hallmark of effective decentralised government, later became a bane for successful economic policy.¹⁵ With sovereignty residing at the provincial and then at the city level, conflicts of interests abounded. The rivalry between Holland and Zeeland was a recurring phenomenon, but debates over whether to

¹² Weststeijn, “Dutch Brazil,” in van Groesen, *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* 188-193; Heijer, “Dutch West India Interest,” in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 167-168.

¹³ Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan & Pieter de la Court* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 282; Weststeijn, “Dutch Brazil,” in Van Groesen, *Dutch Brazil*, 198; Weststeijn, “Republican Empire,” 508-509; Stern, *The Company-State*, chapter 4; William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 2013) 4-7; Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism,”.

¹⁴ Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, 12 vols.

¹⁵ Oostindie and Roitman, “Repositioning the Dutch,” 134.

invest in the land army or the navy also divided maritime and non-maritime provinces. Without a strong central authority, institutional change was hard to initiate and this incapacity became manifest during the eighteenth century.¹⁶ The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) confirmed that the Dutch had lost their great-power status on land and soon the Dutch lost their naval prowess as well.

The inefficiencies of the taxation structure played a large role in this decline. The Admiralties could barely cover their running costs from the import and export duties they collected, so could not keep up with other European powers, particularly Britain. The five different Admiralties also competed with each other, thereby collecting only a fraction of the official tariffs. Financial reform proved ineffective and reliance on incidental subsidies proved inadequate.¹⁷ Additionally, Dutch taxes were already twice as high as in Britain by mid-century, leaving little room to increase expenditure, whereas Britain could rely on its national debt to finance its military endeavours. Overall, British tax revenue was much more flexible than the Dutch, being largely based on indirect taxes like customs and excises, in contrast to the direct taxes of the Dutch.¹⁸

Parliament played a central role in shaping British economic success and altering the terms of trade in Britain's favour. The Navigation Acts gradually undermined the Dutch entrepôt and middlemen functions and customs revenues made economic prioritisation possible. The income from tariffs was used for drawbacks and subsidies for re-exports, stimulating domestic manufacturing and refining, although at the cost of British consumers.¹⁹ The Dutch, in contrast, did not develop an interventionist policy and relied on an open home market to generate as much traffic as possible.²⁰ An unprotected market made sense for the many Dutch refineries, which could acquire the raw and semi-processed materials they needed, resulting in a lively re-export trade. Nevertheless, as Amsterdam gradually lost its staple function in the eighteenth century and the Dutch economy stagnated, the open market turned into a liability. Without the option to control foreign trade and without the revenues to intervene, the Dutch were at the mercy of

¹⁶ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland*, 19, 52-61.

¹⁷ Ibid., 52; J. R. Bruijn, *De admiraliteit van Amsterdam in rustige jaren, 1713-1751: Regenten en financiën, schepen en zeevarende* (Amsterdam/Haarlem: Schelteman & Holkema NV, 1970) 165-168.

¹⁸ Ormrod, *Commercial Empires*, 22-23.

¹⁹ Ibid., 184-186, 317, 333; P.H.H. Vries, *Escaping Poverty: The Origins of Modern Economic Growth* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2013) chapter 25.

²⁰ Nierstrasz, *Rivalry for Trade*, 37.

the world market. The failure to respond to the mercantilist challenges of others, then, caused the Dutch to lose their primacy.²¹

The classic historian of mercantilism, Eli Heckscher, even concluded that the Dutch were the “antithesis of mercantilism”.²² For him, mercantilism was a phase in history between the Middle Ages and the *laissez faire* of the nineteenth century. Mercantilism was “primarily an agent of unification”, a counterforce to the particularism of the medieval period. Its aim was to increase the power of the state, especially in relation to others, through economic policy. The decentralised Dutch state clearly represented the opposite. Additionally, the provincial chambers that governed the VOC and WIC led Heckscher to remark that the Dutch “oceanic trade had to make shift with the most awkward kind of association in existence of the time.”²³

Heckscher was criticised for portraying mercantilism as a monolithic, universal ideology, while scholars have noted a great variety among mercantilist thinkers.²⁴ For example, Steve Pincus, in a 2002 forum in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, proposed to see mercantilism as the continuously changing outcome of political battles in the metropolis, meaning that the system could change, depending on who was in power.²⁵ The other discussants largely agreed, but emphasised the need to look beyond London and towards the agency of colonial actors.²⁶ The recent book edited by Philip Stern and Carl Wennerlind also underlined the diversity in the meanings of mercantilism, emphasising the connections between economic thought and the political, moral and scientific debates at the time. While a laudable goal, this approach also diffuses the concept of mercantilism, and indeed no working definition is offered. The authors even

²¹ Patrick O'Brien, “Mercantilism and Imperialism in the Rise and Decline of the Dutch and British Economies, 1585-1815,” *De Economist*, no. 4 (2000)

²² Eli F. Heckscher, *Mercantilism: Volume One. Translated by Mendel Shapiro* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955) 353.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19-25, 373.

²⁴ Lars Magnusson, “Eli Heckscher and His Mercantilism Today,” in *Eli Heckscher, International Trade, and Economic History*, ed. Ronald Findlay et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

²⁵ Steve Pincus, “Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 1 (2012) 13-14.

²⁶ Cathy D. Matson, “Imperial Political Economy,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 1 (2012); Christian J. Koot, “Balancing Center and Periphery,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 1 (2012); Margaret Ellen Newell, “Putting the ‘Political’ Back in Political Economy (This Is Not Your Parents’ Mercantilism),” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 1 (2012).

noted that “there was no such thing as mercantilism, but nonetheless this is a book about it.”²⁷

Nevertheless, we should not throw the conceptual baby out with the bathwater. Historians still use the concept frequently, often without a clear definition. Yet for all its diversity, there was a shared set of ideas on which most mercantilists agreed, which furthermore developed over time.²⁸ Jonathan Barth convincingly showed how a coherent mercantilist justification for empire developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As crude bullionism (only gold and silver represent wealth) failed as a theory in light of the Spanish inflation, a consensus settled around the balance-of-trade doctrine, together with the specie objective. In other words, the goal was to increase export value beyond the value of imports, which would draw specie into the country. Additionally, trade, agriculture and shipping were deemed better than mines, providing a continuous rather than a temporary stimulus. However, while most writers agreed on the principle, they disagreed over the methods.²⁹

In Britain two camps emerged: monopoly mercantilists and industrial-capital mercantilists. The former saw re-exports as the key objective and favoured chartered companies to reduce internal competition. The latter focused less on trade and more on manufacturing. They opposed monopolies, but still saw a role for an activist state to limit dependence on foreign goods or promote domestic industries. The industrial-capital mercantilists eventually won, although the debate continued. In 1698 the Royal Africa Company opened its monopoly and after 1713 export duties largely disappeared and import duties had risen from a typical 5 per cent to often 20 to 25 per cent. After the mid-eighteenth century the mercantilist doctrine was challenged, most clearly by Adam Smith, who argued that money was neutral rather than a commodity with special value. Additionally, wealth was in goods, not in a positive trade balance. If an individual bought silk with silver, both parties received the goods they desired without doing harm to the national economy. Nevertheless,

²⁷ Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, “Introduction,” in Stern and Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined*, 4, 7, 8 (quotation).

²⁸ Lars Magnusson, “Is Mercantilism a Useful Concept Still?,” in *Merkantilismus: Wiederaufnahme einer Debatte*, ed. Moritz Isenmann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014)

²⁹ Jonathan Barth, “Reconstructing Mercantilism: Consensus and Conflict in British Imperial Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 2 (2016) 257-267.

mercantilism was not easily overturned. Power and plenty remained important state objectives, just without a specific role for money itself.³⁰

The Dutch did not seem to have had these intricate discussions on mercantilism, yet their policies can be analysed as an unfortunate mix of industrial-capital and monopoly mercantilism. Furthermore, mercantilism is best studied in a relational context: rather than looking at rules within individual empires, we should investigate how policy changes were a reaction to what others did. This approach also allows mercantilism to be viewed as a dynamic concept instead of static and locked in time.

Mercantilism in practice

The first WIC, founded in 1621, fits the monopoly mercantilist view: a strong Company that could take on the Portuguese and the Spanish, with whom the Dutch were still at war.³¹ And while the governance via provincial chambers did not please Heckscher, the WIC was actually as united as it would get in the Republic. Joining forces proved effective, seen in the profitable privateering and the occupation of Brazil (1628-1654). The monopoly mercantilism was articulated in the exclusive trading rights of the Company regarding the African trade in ivory, gold and enslaved Africans. However, after the peace treaty with Spain in 1648 the WIC lost much of its original legitimation. Furthermore, its debts mounted as it proved unable to perform as expected in its main branch, the slave trade.³² Here the Dutch were similar to the French and English: all chartered monopolistic companies for the African trade, yet the Royal Adventurers, the Gambia Adventurers, the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* and the Senegal Company all performed poorly.³³

After the first WIC's demise in 1674, the second WIC was quickly chartered as the States-General did not have the means to take on the

³⁰ Ibid., 273-288.

³¹ Weststeijn, "Republican Empire," 497.

³² Heijer, "Dutch West India Company," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 82-99.

³³ A. P. Thornton, "The Organization of the Slave Trade in the English West Indies, 1660-1685," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 3 (1955); Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979) 4-11; Emmer, "Second Atlantic System," in Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic economy, 1580-1880*, 22; North, "Institutions, Transaction Costs," in Tracy, *Merchant Empires*, 34-35; ; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 52

colonial burden, and chartered companies seemed the logical option.³⁴ On the one hand the second WIC followed domestic-industrial mercantilism, by making Curacao a free port in 1675. Attracting commodities like tobacco and sugar from other empires provided employment for the spinners and the refiners in the Dutch Republic.³⁵ On the other hand, monopoly mercantilism remained dominant with regards to the slave trade, despite its shortcomings: interlopers shipped around 60,000 enslaved Africans outside the Company's monopoly. These *lorrendraaiers* sold their captives on French, Danish and English islands, but also at the WIC's own St. Eustatius.³⁶

Interloping undermined strict monopoly mercantilism in the English, French and Dutch empires. The vital trade in enslaved Africans was increasingly farmed out to private merchants. From 1698 English traders could engage in the slave trade as long as they paid a 10 per cent recognition fee to the Royal African Company.³⁷ In 1713, having lost the *asiento* to the British, the French also started selling licenses, involving a fee of 10 livres per enslaved African.³⁸ In the risky and competitive slave trade, these measures were attempts to make mercantilism work. Companies now had to compete against private traders, who had the advantage of avoiding paying the protection costs of empire. Monopoly mercantilism became untenable in the slave trade. Yet the companies did not give up their monopoly rights, but "privatised" them, through the sale of licenses and recognition fees. The Dutch did the same. Unable to compete, the WIC had to accept private competitors in the Africa trade in 1730, yet retained the exclusive slave trade rights. However, in 1738 the WIC deemed the slave trade unviable and privatised this branch too, for a recognition fee of 20 guilders per enslaved African.³⁹ All these changes made mercantilist sense: they stimulated the slave trade in each country's colonies, while retaining the trade within the national framework and supporting the company structures at the same time.

³⁴ Den Heijer, "Dutch West India Interest," in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 163.

³⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 626.

³⁶ Paesie, "Monopolie naar vrijhandel,"

³⁷ Zahedieh, *Capital and the Colonies*, 52; Jacob M. Price, "Transaction Costs: A Note on Merchant Credit and the Organization of Private Trade," in Tracy, *Merchant Empires*, 278.

³⁸ Stein, *French Slave Trade*, 11-14.

³⁹ Den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 140-143; Idem, "Dutch West India Company," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 102-103.

The next round of mercantilist fine-tuning was the result of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Firstly, the British tried to eradicate neutral shipping by instating the "Rule of 1756". Previously, neutrals profited in wartime by conducting exchanges that were otherwise prohibited. Such wartime exchanges might even have been the element that allowed mercantilism to function in peacetime in the first place.⁴⁰ Yet in 1756 the British sought to prevent Dutch and Danish skippers from supplying their French enemies. However, the British and the Dutch had, in a treaty from 1674, agreed to the principle of "free ships make free goods". The "Rule of 1756" was meant to circumvent this agreement by stipulating that exchanges forbidden in peace time would not be allowed during wartime either. If the French did not allow Dutch vessels under normal circumstances, why would Britain assent to this practice during war?⁴¹ Still, smugglers thrived during the war, finding creative ways to supply the French and obtain valuable sugar, coffee and rum from them in the process.⁴²

After the war, both the French and the British showed a renewed commitment to mercantilism. Tighter regulations (such as the Sugar Acts of 1764) and stricter enforcement were matched by the establishment of free ports.⁴³ On 6 June 1766 the British' first Free Port Act opened several ports to foreigners on Jamaica and Dominica (later Antigua, the Bahamas and Grenada would follow). Jamaica was suitably placed to attract Spanish silver, and Dominica was perfectly positioned between the valuable French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, to procure French sugar. More importantly, both would serve as outlets for British manufactures.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Marzagalli, "The French Atlantic," in Canny and Morgan, *The Oxford Handbook*; Marzagalli, "The French Atlantic," in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*.

⁴¹ Silvia Marzagalli and Leos Müller, "In Apparent Disagreement with All Law of Nations in the World': Negotiating Neutrality for Shipping and Trade during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars," *International Journal of Maritime History*, no. 1 (2016) 113; Enthoven, "Neutrality," in Stern and Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined*; Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 64-5.

⁴² Much of this sugar was re-branded as Spanish sugar, to make the smuggling less blatant. (Truxes, *Defying Empire*., 74-75); Banks, *Chasing Empire*, 170.

⁴³ Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 19; Adrian J. Pearce, "British Trade with the Spanish Colonies, 1788-1795," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, no. 2 (2001) 243, 246, 253-4.

⁴⁴ Frances Armytage, *The Free Port System in the British West Indies: A Study in Commercial Policy, 1766-1822* (London: Pub. for the Royal Empire Society, by Longmans, Green, 1953) 35-51. The free ports established on Jamaica were Kingston, Savannah la Mar, Montego Bay, and Santa Lucea, on Dominica they were Prince Rupert's Bay and Roseau. Mercantilist interests were closely guarded. On Jamaica foreign imports of sugar, coffee, molasses, pimento and

Similarly, the French opened free ports on Saint Lucia, Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue in 1763 and 1767. These ports were aimed not so much at advancing exports or attracting bullion, but more at relieving the problems plantation colonies experienced. Foreigners could only bring a limited number of provisions. At first only North American horses, light wood and planks were allowed, but foodstuffs became permissible too, in 1767, after successful lobbying by the planters. They could pay with rum and molasses, not with cash crops, as all sugar was still destined to go directly to France.⁴⁵

The Dutch, having no part in the war, did not have the same incentive to change their system. They already had free ports, and already allowed foreign provisions under certain circumstances. Since 1704 North Americans were allowed to bring horses, foodstuffs and sundries like candles into Suriname, and after 1742 the import of foreign building materials was also allowed in Essequibo and Demerara as well. In addition, the export of coffee was free in Essequibo and Demerara until 1771, based on the idea that planters could use coffee to barter with foreign provision traders instead of illicitly paying with sugar, although coffee production was limited at this point.⁴⁶ Like in the French case, selling cash crops to foreigners was forbidden, while tonnage fees and import and export duties applied.⁴⁷ These measures are thus best seen as efforts to make mercantilism work, rather than as “breaching the mercantile barriers”.⁴⁸ In

ginger were not allowed, in order to protect the local plantation sector. Enslaved Africans could be sold to foreigners (subject to a duty), but only as long as they were brought by British ships. And cotton and other “enumerated goods” had to go directly to Britain, to prevent them from disappearing into the smuggling circuit. Nevertheless, illegal trade occurred on a large scale, especially imports of luxury goods (like soap, silk and wine) and French coffee.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 55; Nadine Hunt, “Contraband, Free Ports, and British Merchants in the Caribbean world, 1739-1772,” *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, no. 1 (2013); Klooster, “Inter-Imperial Smuggling,” in Bailyn and Denault, *Soundings in Atlantic History*, 173; Banks, *Chasing Empire*, 178; Joseph Horan, “The Colonial Famine Plot: Slavery, Free Trade, and Empire in the French Atlantic, 1763-1791,” *International Review of Social History*, Supplement S18 (2010) esp. 106-107. The literature is divided on the moment at which Saint Domingue is made a free port, either in 1762 or 1767.

⁴⁶ Van der Oest, “Forgotten Colonies,” in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 350, 356, 358.

⁴⁷ For Essequibo and Demerara, a 2 per cent import and export duty was generally in place for both Dutch and foreign vessels, while rum and molasses carried a 5 per cent export duty. Foreign ships paid 6 guilders per *last* in tonnage fees as well. In 1796 the British abolished the duties for British ships bound for England (Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 39; Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 259-261; TNA, CO 111/3, f.87; TNA, CO 111/1, f.29).

⁴⁸ Johannes Postma, “Breaching the Mercantile Barriers of the Dutch Colonial Empire: North American Trade with Surinam during the Eighteenth Century,” in *Merchant Organization and Maritime Trade in the North Atlantic, 1660-1815*, ed. Olaf U. Janzen (St. John's, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1998) 118.

fact, in 1763 the prominent planter Gedney Clarke Sr. (see Chapter 6) pointed to the benefit of opening up Essequibo and Demerara: “If the state will take it into its own hands, and send a government of some consequence with a regiment and make it a free port, it will very soon exceed every other Settlement they have in the West Indies.”⁴⁹ Yet the monopoly mercantilism proved too strong in the Republic. Furthermore, until 1772 Zealand and Amsterdam were still embroiled in their struggle over trade access to Essequibo and Demerara, a thoroughly mercantilist fight à la Heckscher to unify the system of trade access.

The mercantilist system started to crumble only after 1776: not so much because of Adam Smith, but because of the independence of the United States. The British saw their integrated system collapse. Previously, North American traders delivered provisions to the West Indies in exchange for molasses, but the British retained a strict mercantilism and excluded the Americans afterwards. The West Indian islands, depending on British protection too much to join the Revolution, found themselves in a difficult position.⁵⁰ For the other European powers, however, the independent North American traders proved a blessing—they did not have to exclude US traders anymore because they flew a British flag. Indeed, Essequibo and Demerara only grew more dependent on North American provision traders, while still having the option to sell their rum and molasses. For Suriname, the States-General even decided in 1789 to allow foreigners to sell African captives—for Essequibo and Demerara the option was discussed but refused.⁵¹ Similarly, North Americans had been allowed to take cash crops in payment in Suriname during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), and ship cash crops to the Dutch Republic. This wartime exception proved hard to reverse later, and North Americans increasingly took over shipping with Suriname. In other words, North American carriers became the agents of Atlantic integration, becoming “‘the Dutch’ of the late eighteenth century”.⁵²

The Dutch, dethroned as the principal Atlantic brokers, maintained their own branch of mercantilism: a form of monopoly mercantilism for their

⁴⁹ Gedney Clarke Sr. to Heer van Rhoon, 3 April 1763, British Library (hereafter BL), London, Egerton MS 1720, f.12.

⁵⁰ David Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 6-7, 16-18; Armitage, *Free Port System*, 53; Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

⁵¹ *Rapport van de gedeputeerden Hendrik van Wijn, Nicolaes Cornelis Crommelin en Hendrik Ludolf Lambrechtsen (...)*, 1787, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9424.

⁵² Fatah-Black, *White Lies*, 166, 186 (quotation), 187.

production colonies in Guiana, and domestic-industrial mercantilism for their transit colonies in the Antilles and the home market. Indeed, domestic-industrial mercantilism was dominant: all Atlantic policy was geared toward importing as much raw (or semi-finished) tropical commodities as possible, to feed the profitable refining and re-export business. Thus, cash crops from Guiana had to go directly to the Republic, while Curacao and St. Eustatius tried to attract tropical produce from other empires, as did the open home market.

Furthermore, the States-General was actively involved in protecting employment in the refining business. By mid-century, an increasing volume of *refined* sugar found its way to Amsterdam, to the dismay of domestic refiners. They lobbied successfully. In 1751, they obtained a two-year abolition of import duties on *raw* sugar, and in 1756 the States-General limited the import of refined Caribbean sugar. Similarly, in 1752, tobacco processors from Zeeland had obtained import duties on processed tobacco, to protect their industries. While merchants protested it, domestic employment was deemed more important than shipping interests.⁵³ Finally, in the five years following 1776, sugar refiners received export subsidies, like the British, as around two-thirds of the imported sugar was still destined for foreign markets. In 1786 and 1787, sugar refiners received another 1.6 million guilders in subsidies. Yet this amount proved three times as large as the States-General had budgeted, so it was quickly abolished.⁵⁴

Here we find the crux of the matter: the Dutch could not afford to play the mercantilist game. As rich as they were, they remained poor mercantilists. They could not raise tariff walls to protect their industries, but their empire was too small to supply all the necessary imports itself. Furthermore, the low customs revenue and high direct taxes gave little room to alter the terms of trade through subsidies. Finally, the decentralised state structure, with frequently opposed interests, prevented effective institutional renewal. Over the long run, then, the Dutch could not keep up with the British, where the Atlantic economy likely contributed to the Industrial Revolution.⁵⁵ If the Dutch had truly been the quintessential free

⁵³ Den Heijer, "Dutch West India Interest," in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, 178.

⁵⁴ Jan de Vries and Ad Van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy; 1500 - 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 327.

⁵⁵ J. E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*; Ormrod, *Commercial Empires*, 349-

traders, they would have opened trade to the Guianas as well. Yet they were not: they maintained their own form of mercantilism, which made sense for their export-oriented economy. Other than the large institutional overhaul, which finally occurred after 1795, it is hard to think of a way the Dutch could have responded better to the challenges of the mercantilist world.

Nevertheless, mercantilism proved unworkable for Essequibo and Demerara, which were constrained by a Dutch trading circuit that could no longer live up to its seventeenth-century fame. Therefore, the colonial actors established connections to the rest of the Greater Caribbean, forming a web that proved more effective in sustaining the colonies than relying on Dutch networks. Again, then, the outside networks were crucial for colonial survival.

Provisions by the barrel

Dutch bilateral trade was erratic, as Table 4.1 shows. Prior to 1772, Zealand's claim to exclusive shipping to Essequibo and Demerara clearly kept the number of possible transatlantic voyages down. After the compromise with Amsterdam, the incorporation of the latter's merchant fleet greatly increased the number of voyages to the two colonies. As we Chapter 5 will demonstrate, this expansion was also tied to increased investment from Amsterdam.

Except for the early eighteenth century, the intra-American connections with the West Indies and North America were always dominant, not only in numbers, but also in tonnage. With an average size of 230 tonnes, the Dutch transoceanic vessels were about four times larger than the intra-American ones (average 58 tonnes in 1792).⁵⁶ Yet these small sloops, snows, schooners and brigantines had other advantages: they were fast, cheap and spent less time in ports, allowing them to make multiple voyages a year, in contrast to a singular trans-Atlantic voyage. Furthermore, because they could sail sharper to windward (45 degrees as opposed to 60 degrees), these smaller

351; for a divergent view, see: Pieter Emmer, "The Myth of Early Modern Globalization: The Atlantic Economy, 1500–1800," *European Review*, no. 1 (2003).

⁵⁶ *Lijsten van de in Demerary binnengekomen en uitgelopen schepen, 1791 Augustus 25-1792 Maart 20, 1791-1792, Admiraliteitscolleges XIII Hinxt, 1763-1795 (hereafter Admiraliteiten / Hinxt), 1.01.47.09, inv. nr. 11.*

vessels could outmanoeuvre more bulky patrol ships, a useful ability when on a smuggling voyage.⁵⁷

Table 4.1: Vessels arriving in Essequibo and Demerara, 1700-1799 (annual average)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Dutch bilateral</i>	<i>Dutch slavers</i>	<i>Intra- American</i>	<i>% non- Dutch</i>	<i>Estimated Dutch tonnage</i>	<i>Estimated intra- Am. tonnage</i>
1700-1709	4.8	1.3	0.5	3.0	63	299	174
1710-1719	7.9	1.5	0.4	6.0	76	345	348
1720-1729	12.3	2.0	0.3	10.0	81	460	580
1730-1739	16.4	1.9	0.5	14.0	85	437	812
1740-1749	24.8	3.1	0.5	21.0	85	713	1,218
1750-1759	47.0	4.2	0.3	43.0	91	966	2,494
1760-1769	77.1	7.1	1.7	68.0	88	1,633	3,944
1770-1779	141.2	14.6	2.4	124.0	88	3,358	7,192
1780-1789	138.9	21.0	1.8	116.0	84	4,830	6,728
1790-1799	228.6	16.0	0.5	212.0	93	3,680	12,296
Average	69.9	7.3	0.9	61.7	83	1,679	3,579

Source: (Van der Oest 2003) 334.

The Dutch had devised an intricate system of plantation mortgages to tie the planters to the Republic (see Chapter 5). In keeping with the spirit of domestic-industrial mercantilism, planters were obliged to send all their exports to their fund director in the metropolis, and obtain all their imports via him. However, for many of the provisions the latter obligation hardly made sense, and many chose to rely on the cheaper intra-American supplies instead. The fund directors were not particularly strict in enforcing this clause. Many provisions were hard to obtain from the Republic, while regional imports also lowered exploitation costs, reducing the likelihood of default. The overview of 1779-1780 from an important mortgage fund illustrates this point: twenty of the thirty-one planters ordered goods worth less than 1,000 guilders, and seven of those would appear to get by with less than 100 guilders of goods for one year.⁵⁸ As these amounts were far from enough to run a plantation, let alone fund the luxurious life many planters

⁵⁷ Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic world, 1680-1783* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 120-129.

⁵⁸ Amsterdam City Archives, Amsterdam (hereafter ACA), Notaries, inv. nr. 5075, f.13917/253.

enjoyed, many of the provisions must indeed have come from the intra-American network.

Indeed, we can find an intricate web of intra-American suppliers. While the archival material pertaining to Essequibo and Demerara generally does not permit a comprehensive breakdown of the different origins, a small sample from the second half of 1775 offers a good indication.⁵⁹ It deals with forty-six intra-American carriers, as their cargo is listed in detail. (Other lists typically refer to the wares of the large transoceanic ships as “general merchandise”.)

Both building materials and provisions were imported often from the Greater Caribbean network. Starting with the former, lime and bricks were regularly brought to Demerara: during the sample period 835 barrels, 11 “small barrels”, 600 bushels and 404 hogsheads of lime, 607 hogsheads of limestone and 12,800 bricks were brought in.⁶⁰ While the colonists could obviously turn to the rainforest for wood, only a limited capacity existed to convert the logs into timber. As a result, Essequibo and Demerara exported mill timber and, to a lesser extent, planks for shipbuilding, while simultaneously importing planks and shingles.⁶¹ Some shingles (for roof coverage) were made locally, but the sample also shows that in the second half of 1775 no less than 324,000 shingles were imported, in addition to the large amount of 272,200 planks and 76,800 feet of planks.⁶² This processed wood was said to be two-thirds cheaper from the intra-American network than if it was acquired via the metropolis.⁶³ Imported wood and metal products were also vital to construct the sugar and coffee barrels in which the cash crops were transported, and during the sample period intra-American traders delivered 12,000 (pieces of) stave wood and 2,000 hoops. Finally, to put everything together nails were necessary as well. These probably came mainly from the metropolis, although in the sample we find 10 small barrels arriving via St. Eustatius.⁶⁴

Food and drink reveal a similar dependence on intra-American trade, as metropolitan supplies were unreliable. Storm van 's Gravesande already reported in 1744 that he did not have enough flour in store to feed the

⁵⁹ TNA, CO 116/42, f.234-243. Although I do realise that the unfolding American War of Independence probably had a disturbing effect on the sample, possibly reducing the number of British and North American vessels in fear of privateers.

⁶⁰ TNA, CO 116/42, f.234-243.

⁶¹ Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 216.

⁶² TNA, CO 116/42, f.234-243.

⁶³ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 915.

⁶⁴ TNA, CO 116/42, f.234-243.

military, and the year after he noted that without English provisions the entire colony would have been living on “a crust of dry bread”.⁶⁵ Storm frequently complained about the situation and asked for more reliable provisioning from Zealand, such as in October 1766 when he noted that it had been 25 months since the colony had last been supplied. Rhetorically, he asked: “Is it possible to live 25 months with what had been sent for a year? The plantations and slaves have suffered the most because of this.”⁶⁶ And in November 1769 he remarked that “if the English were not to come here, the Colony would be unfortunate indeed; this is very costly, too, both for the Company and the planters.”⁶⁷

Indeed, the enslaved were most vulnerable to food shortages, all the more because planters ignored the rules about allocating enough provision grounds (*kostgrondjes*) on their estates.⁶⁸ Consequently, securing supplies became critical to the colonies’ stability. Fish was a staple of the enslaved workers’ diet, so the fishing waters on the Orinoco mouth were of crucial importance. Yet the diplomatic difficulties outlined in Chapter 1 disrupted this fish supply at times. The Orinoco region also supplied oxen and cattle, an important source of meat, although subject to the same uncertainties.⁶⁹ Similar fluctuations affected the salted fish, *bakkeljauw*, herring and *stokvis* that North American traders brought, as their War of Independence made shipping more risky.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the sample illustrates the diversity of imported food and drink, including large cargoes of meat, fish, flour, butter and drink. To be precise, the imports consisted of 391 barrels of “meat”, 155 barrels of bacon, 600 pounds of ham, 19 live cows, 115 hogsheads of “fish”, 380 barrels of herring, 22 barrels of mackerel, 19 small barrels of salmon, 76 hogsheads of dried fish, 2 barrels and 39 hogsheads of *bakkeljauw* (cod, cf. *bacalao*), 710 barrels of flour (*bloem* and *meel*), 60 barrels of ship’s bread, 115 barrels of butter, 2 baskets and 1 case (*kas*) of cheese, 11 small cases (*kisjes*) of oil,

⁶⁵ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 209-210, 214 (quotation).

⁶⁶ Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, 279. Original quotation: “Is het mogelijk 25 maende toe te komen met het gene voor een jaer gesonden word? De plantagien en slaeven hebben daer het meest door geleden”.

⁶⁷ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol 2: 625.

⁶⁸ A planter had to provide one acre (0.43 hectare) for every five enslaved workers. In 1784 a fine of 90 guilders for each lacking acre was instated, indicating that previous rules had not been sufficient (Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 121; Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 43).

⁶⁹ Journal Commander Van Schuylenburg, 4 March 1780 to 9 April 1780, TNA, CO 116/ 55, f.45-50.

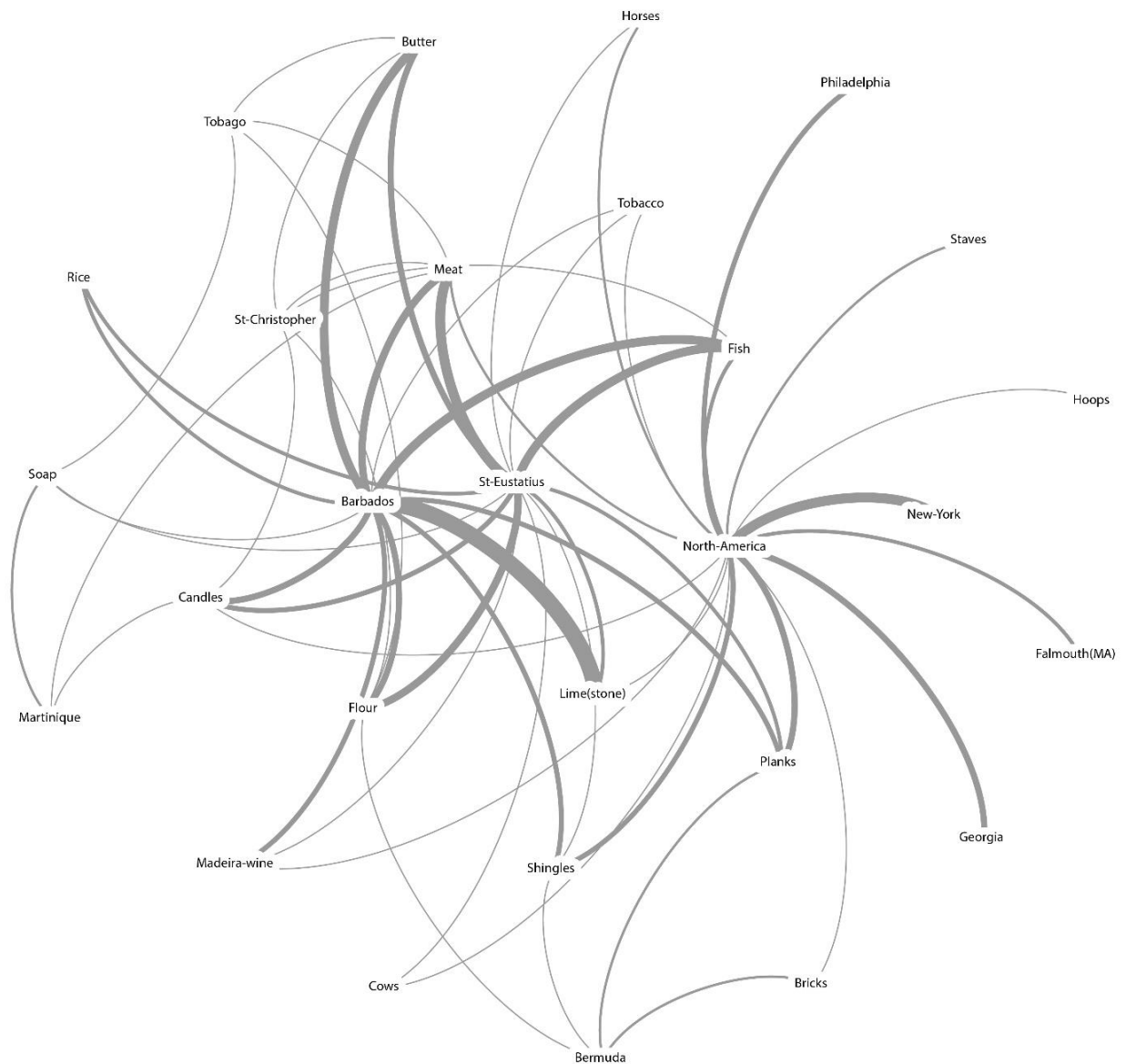
⁷⁰ J.C. Severijn to Heren X, 28-8-1778, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 309; Trotz to WIC's Zeeland Chamber, 8 December 1776, TNA, CO 116/44, f.316-337.

60 cases of soap, 260 boxes of candles, 40 *kelders* of gin (*jenever*), 38 tierces of rice, 500 bushels of salt, 10 hogsheads and 20 barrels of tobacco, 30 barrels of green peas, 10 boxes of “wine”, 23 barrels, 27 quarter casks, 11 hogsheads and 1 pipe of Madeira, and 31 barrels and 4 hogsheads of porter.⁷¹

Figure 4.1 visualises the provision trade, showing the variety in goods as well as origins. Barbados, St. Eustatius and North America stand out and within North America, New York was the most important supplier, followed by Philadelphia and “Georgia”. Limestone, meat, flour and butter were supplied mostly via Barbados and St. Eustatius, while North America was the dominant source of building materials. Several Caribbean islands were minor suppliers. It is important to note that the sources used here listed ships’ previous destination, not their original one. Hence Barbados and St. Eustatius occupied such strong positions in the network, while they were not major production centres of foodstuffs. Most likely, they were stops in between made by North Americans on tramping voyages throughout the Caribbean.

⁷¹ TNA, CO 116/42, f.234-243.

Figure 4.1: The intra-American supply network of Demerara in July-December 1775⁷²



⁷² TNA, CO 116/42, f.234-243. Products like herring, mackerel and salmon were grouped together under the label “fish”. An entry was made for each time a ship brought this type of good. The graph thus shows the *frequency* with which these products arrived, not the *quantity*. A Fruchterman Reingold analysis was ran through the programme Gephi to get the visualisation.

Clearing out cash crops

Exports statistics are difficult to compile for Essequibo and Demerara. No customs house existed, which meant that registration of the incoming and outgoing ships and cargoes was sketchy at best. Different officials recorded traffic in their own ways, sometimes in great detail, often just noting origins, vessel types, dates and a general description of the cargo. No running series or annual overview of trade statistics seems to have been compiled, nor were the Company directors particularly interested in doing so. This improvised way of dealing with trade is in stark contrast to the standardised practices of the British, where the same forms recorded traffic in the North American as in the Caribbean colonies.⁷³

The statistics of 1784 and 1785 offer an interesting example in this regard, giving insight into an export network that normally remained hidden. During the British and subsequent French occupations between 1781 and 1783, the colonists were able to use the respective foreign networks. After the French returned the colonies, they had to conform again to the Dutch mercantilist structure. Foreigners were thus no longer allowed to export cash crops. Nevertheless, the register still shows the opposite, probably reflecting the practice of the previous years. It seems the authorities gradually remembered the prohibition: after February 1785 we find fewer entries of foreigners exporting cash crops and after May 1785, the books only recorded legal exports (rum, molasses and wood). Undoubtedly, the export of cash crops continued, but now illegally. The brief period between March 1784 and February 1785 provides a unique insight in what was probably the prevailing trade pattern. For many ships the entries were left blank, and there were probably still smugglers who did not declare anything, yet the accounts (summarised in Table 4.2) should give a rough indication of trade destinations.⁷⁴

⁷³ Cf. TNA, Records of the Boards of Customs, Excise, and Customs and Excise, and HM Revenue and Customs (hereafter CUST), 16/1 (North America), CO 33/18 (Barbados), CO 76/4 (Dominica), CO 106/2 (Grenada), Board of Trade (hereafter BT) 6/188 (St. Vincent), CO 10/2 (Antigua) and CO 243/1 (St. Christopher).

⁷⁴ The exports to the Republic were listed in barrels (sugar), barrels and bales (coffee) and bales (cotton). I converted these to kilograms at the rate of 800 pounds per barrels, 350 pounds for coffee barrels, 120 pounds for coffee bales, and 300 pounds for cotton bales.

Table 4.2: Exports from Essequibo and Demerara, March 1784 - February 1785

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Sugar (kg)</i>	<i>Coffee (kg)</i>	<i>Cotton (kg)</i>	<i>Rum (barrels)</i>
Antigua		4,985	15,976	
Barbados	1,622	14,601	13,117	
Dominica	1,755		6,034	63
Guadeloupe		3,458	790	
Martinique	14,425	46,230	13,010	9
North America	71,505	63,324	8,178	992
St. Eustatius	3,236	15,975	27,424	95
St. Thomas	296	12,047	25,179	11
St. Vincent			16,126	10
Tobago	494	5,701	296	29
Tortola		296	3,829	3
Unknown intra-American	190,996	115,847	35,704	175
Amsterdam	386,901	1,424,573	191,178	9
Zeeland	812,334	774,051	110,261	
Total intra-American	284,329	282,464	165,663	1,387
Total Dutch Republic	1,199,234	2,198,624	301,439	9
Percentage intra-American	19	11	35	99

Source: NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nrs. 150 and 151.

The majority of the cash crops seemed to have found their way to the Dutch Republic, while almost all the rum was absorbed by the Greater Caribbean, particularly North America. There, the most frequent destinations were Boston, New London (Connecticut) and New York. Furthermore, the table shows that coffee was not very attractive to foreigners, whereas sugar and especially cotton were. Apparently one could get 25 per cent more for sugar in North America, while cotton might be shipped to industrialising Britain, where it would command a higher price than in the Dutch Republic.⁷⁵ This image matches later anecdotal descriptions of sugar and cotton as the goods that were most often exported illegally, as we will see below. And since the controls were almost non-existent prior to the war, smuggling during the 1760s and 1770s must have attained even higher percentages than displayed here.

Indeed, illegal trade proved to be a recurrent phenomenon in the two colonies, and the WIC could do little about it. Poor mercantilists as the Dutch were, neither the Company nor the States-General had the financial capacity to equip enough patrol ships to control the trade. The WIC

⁷⁵ NL-HaNA, Admiraliteitscolleges / Paulus-Olivier, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

considered convoys a responsibility of the navy. In 1748 Suriname was included in the existing convoy system, which nevertheless fell into disarray quickly afterwards.⁷⁶ Similarly, Essequibo and Demerara had to wait until 1784 before the Company sent four large *hoeker* patrol ships to keep an eye on illegal trade.⁷⁷ However, these only had a limited impact, since the small and swift snows, sloops and schooners easily outsmarted them. Indeed, Lieutenant Wiggerts, patrolling the Demerara coast with his vessel in March and April 1792, basically played a game of cat-and-mouse with the smugglers. On many occasions Wiggerts tried to hail a suspicious ship, only to discover that it quickly sailed away after which he chased it for hours, albeit always in vain. Usually such ships turned towards the open ocean where they could not be caught. On another occasion, a cotton smuggler sped towards the shore simply to offload the illegal cargo.⁷⁸

The smuggling network can be reconstructed using the surviving port books of Essequibo and Demerara's Caribbean contacts. For example, illicit exports of cotton would not show up in Demerara's books, yet it was apparently less of a problem for the same ship to declare these goods once arriving at Barbados. The entry and exit books of Antigua, Barbados, St. Christopher, Dominica, Grenada and St. Vincent, although incomplete, are a valuable source. The data is scattered, but seems relatively complete over the period between 1784 and 1789, with the best documented years being from 1786 to 1788.⁷⁹ Not nearly all smugglers would have declared their contraband cargo, so the actual amounts of illicit trade must have been far higher.

The traders in this network combined legal trade in provisions with illegal trade in cash crops, as well as in enslaved Africans. For instance, on 29 January 1785 William Cunningham left Antigua for Demerara with the sloop *Betsey*, with eighty African captives on board according to the books.⁸⁰ Cunningham was a regular smuggler, for we find him arriving in St. Christopher in April and July, coming from Demerara with an illicit cargo of

⁷⁶ Fatah-Black, *White Lies*, 188.

⁷⁷ Van der Oest, "Forgotten Colonies," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 359.

⁷⁸ *Journal van den luitenant, O. Wiggerts, door den kapitein D. E. Hinxt belast zijnde geweest met het bevel van een hulpkruiser, tot wering van den smokkelhandel langs de kust van Demerary en Berbice (1792 Maart 9-1792 Mei 28)*, NL-HaNA, Admiraliteitscolleges / Hinxt, 1.01.47.09, inv. nr. 8.

⁷⁹ Author's database, based on CO 33, inv. nr. 18, 19, 20 (Barbados), CO 76, inv. nr. 4, 5, 6 (Dominica), CO 106, inv. nr. 2, 3 (Grenada), Board of Trade (BT) 6, inv. nr. 188 (St. Vincent), CO 10, inv. nr. 2 (Antigua), CO 243, inv. nr. 1 (St. Christopher).

⁸⁰ TNA, CO 10/2, 29 January 1785.

respectively 12 and 65 bales of cotton.⁸¹ Up to 1789 a further eight illicit slave voyages by other skippers can be identified via the foreign exit books, carrying an additional 343 slaves. Two of these ships came from Antigua, two others from Dominica, and the remaining four from Barbados. They all carried 10 to 60 captives, except for Benjamin Wright in the *Margarita*. Coming from Dominica and flying a Dutch flag, he had 130 enslaved Africans on board.⁸² The most active smuggler was James Bisshop, who regularly traded between Demerara and Barbados. According to the entry books, he made seven voyages with the sloop *Good Intent* from Demerara to Barbados in 1786 and 1787 alone. On two occasions he included enslaved Africans among his inward cargo, which otherwise consisted of familiar items like porter, nails, beef and candles. And on each of these voyages he illicitly exported cotton, in addition to his cargoes of hard wood. The total was 306 bales, varying between 8 and 81 bales at a time.⁸³

If we look at the overall sample between 1784 and 1789, we can trace 67 ships departing from Demerara. Of these, only 19 did *not* declare they were carrying illicit cargo. The other two-thirds mainly carried cotton as their illicit cargo, on average 39 bales at a time (compared to an average of 96 bales for cotton-carrying vessels to the Dutch Republic).⁸⁴ Only one ship was active in the (legal) rum trade, while five smuggled small amounts of coffee out, to a total of 69 bags. In other words, the smuggling of cotton was much more pervasive than that of coffee. Considering that many of these small vessels visited the two colonies, the illicit network was impressive. Indeed, men like Cunningham, Wright and Bisshop were the ones who built the West-Indian web by pursuing their own interests in both the legal and illegal trade. Consequently, the local authorities had little incentive to put a stop to smuggling, as becomes clear from the ordeal of Frans Smeer.⁸⁵

⁸¹ TNA, CO 243/1, 28 April 1785 and 28 July 1785.

⁸² TNA, CO 76/5, 1 January 1788.

⁸³ TNA, CO 33/19. The weight of one cotton bale varied from between 240 and 300 pounds (TNA, CO 111/4 f.179).

⁸⁴ NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 151.

⁸⁵ The following section relies heavily on my chapter published as "Smuggling for Survival: Self-organized, Cross-imperial Colony Building in Essequibo and Demerara, 1746-1796" in Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (eds.), *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

The ordeal of Frans Smeer

As captain of *De Maasnymp*, Smeer was sent in 1787 to combat smuggling but quickly came into conflict with the Council of Policy, particularly the Fiscal, Anthony Meertens. It started with the issue of ceremony: Smeer was captain of his ship, but only had the rank of lieutenant, yet still felt he was entitled to the ceremony of an officer of the country.⁸⁶ Matters deteriorated when Smeer asked to have the alleged smuggler Nicolaas Glad prosecuted, a request the Fiscal flatly refused. Nicolaas Glad was a resident trader and had transported 17.5 casks of sugar, seventeen bales of coffee and seventeen bales of cotton from Essequibo to Demerara, on behalf of the American captain Peabody. In such transport via the open sea, it was easy to transfer the goods to a foreign skipper. For Smeer, then, it was clear that Glad was facilitating smuggling. However, the Council was of a different opinion.⁸⁷

The councillors interpreted the rules in favour of the accused smuggler. They explained to Smeer that nothing illegal had transpired, as Dutch ships were allowed to transport plantation products between the two colonies. Since the case did, indeed, seem suspicious, the Council members decided to ask Peabody to take an oath and demand proper paperwork upon his departure, on threat of the forfeit of his deposited bond. Subsequently, the products were transferred to the first Dutch ship that departed. Smeer was perplexed. He considered it an insult to himself and to the Council. Furthermore, he was irritated by the news that the Council had apparently been blackmailed, as Meertens had threatened to resign as Fiscal if Glad was prosecuted. Aware that this move portrayed him as an apologist for smuggling, Meertens made every effort to keep it out of the Council's minutes.⁸⁸

As the rules did not work for Smeer, he tried to change them. He proposed to the Council that all Dutch ships would require a pass, specifying their cargo, before travelling back and forth between Essequibo and Demerara. Furthermore, the Council should outfit some ships to cruise along the coast: the coast was dotted with cotton plantations that had a direct connection to the ocean, which made smuggling all too easy. Again Smeer was disappointed. The councillors reminded him they were not

⁸⁶ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3849, 13 Juli 1787, 749-750; NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

⁸⁷ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 19 February 1787.

⁸⁸ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 19, 20 and 23 February 1787; NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

allowed to make their own rules without the approval of the WIC. Tellingly, while the Council had been eager to draft provisional laws in all other policy areas, they declined to do so in this case. Indeed, Meertens himself recognised that smuggling was probably widespread and that the existing laws left him little room to do anything.⁸⁹

Consequently, Smeer began his own surveillance operation, without the Council's approval. He demanded that every ship passing *De Maasnymph* must declare its goods and destination, and he announced that he would shoot at anyone who did not comply. This proved no empty threat: at least two ships, claiming ignorance, found cannonballs flying in their direction. However, one of those balls landed on the estate of a planter, Maurits Balthasar Hartsinck, who was at that moment probably busy plotting the coup (see Chapter 2). Smeer became more careful afterwards, which also meant that some ships just sailed past as they were being shot. Finally, the councillors issued a proclamation that ships must indeed declare their cargo at *De Maasnymph*. However, they issued it in Smeer's name, not their own, indicating that they did not approve of it.⁹⁰

Regardless of the rules, it was very difficult to get caught. Smugglers could choose between two options, depending on when and where the forbidden goods were taken on board. Nicolas Glad apparently wanted to try the first option: ostensibly transporting products from the one river to the other—which could only go via the ocean—with the aim of transferring it to a foreign ship at sea. The ocean was out of sight of the authorities and out of reach even for Smeer's patrol ship. This lack of oversight was the reason that many American ships could declare they left Demerara only carrying ballast and why Smeer wanted every local ship to carry a passport with its cargo: that way he would be able check that no goods had disappeared *en route* between the two colonies.⁹¹

The second option was to buy the coffee, sugar and cotton directly from a plantation while lying in the river. Foreign ships were allowed to have cash crops on board, so they could trade them within the colonies for legal exports, such as rum and wood, or bills of exchange. Yet Smeer noticed a different habit: after having loaded, the ships would sail ten miles or more upriver, returning with molasses, rum and wood but without proof that the

⁸⁹ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033; NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

⁹⁰ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 15 March, 24 April and 30 April 1787.

⁹¹ NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Hinxt, 1.01.47.09, inv.nr. 11.

other goods were unloaded. Subsequently, Smeer declared, “they take a Westindian Oath, and with that they can sail out.”⁹²

Even though the smuggler still faced the danger of inspection, illicit goods were never found, as Meertens himself confirmed. While the Fiscal did not rule out the possibility of bribery—the inspectors received no share of the confiscated goods—it was also nearly impossible to discover hidden goods on a fully loaded ship. Furthermore, the Fiscal felt no desire to unload the goods at his own expense every time he suspected something. Rather, he preferred to rely on a captain’s word and honour when a foreign trader came to collect his clearance. Meertens would then ask the captain if he would be willing to declare under oath that the cargo manifest corresponded entirely with the actual cargo—Smeer’s “Westindian Oath”. Yet with some pride Meertens recalled several incidents where the captain changed his mind, and came back a few days later after having sold his illicit goods (at a loss) to a local planter. Just as in the case of Peabody, the captain would face no further consequences and was free to go.⁹³

Ultimately, Meerten’s colonial flexibility proved incompatible with the strict metropolitan views of Smeer. In fact, Smeer encountered opposition from all sides in the colony. He felt he was grossly overcharged for repairs on a ship anchor, and complained that news of his discussions in the Council reached the greatest smugglers within two hours.⁹⁴ Meertens, on the other hand, was most likely involved in illegal trade himself—not necessarily by shipping contraband personally, but rather by facilitating the exchanges for a bribe. For example, when a Bostonian brigantine arrived with provisions, its two merchants asked Meertens where they could pick up a return cargo. Meertens referred them to Mr. Grant, where they loaded 42 hogsheads of sugar. Allegedly, when the merchants enquired about the legality, Meertens assured them they would not be visited. Perhaps new to the trade, the merchants did not trust this and unloaded most of the sugar, but found deficient barrels. Subsequently, in a drunken rage, the captain became so angry that he attacked one of the cooper slaves, for which he was arrested. Afterwards, Meertens told this story to Smeer to prove he really

⁹² NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

⁹³ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 15 March 1787.

⁹⁴ L’Espinasse to Zeeland Chamber, 12 September 1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.4-7; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 22 August 1787; NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

was a man of the law, and had taken no bribes at all, even though no one had mentioned such a thing.⁹⁵

The local authorities thoroughly disliked Smeer's meddling. They complained to the Company about his temper, his expressions and his arbitrary methods.⁹⁶ Smeer felt the resentment, noting that: "Our country's officers (with a task like ours) are as welcome here as a pig in a Jewish kitchen".⁹⁷ In contrast, Meertens proved to be the right man for the job. Despite the States-General's alarm about the smuggling, Meertens was allowed to continue as Fiscal for several more years. Moreover, after the British occupation, he made his way to London in 1799 to await a peace treaty and in 1802 he returned as the new governor of the colonies for the brief period until the next British takeover.⁹⁸

Smeer, in the meantime, submitted his report to the Admiralty with several important policy recommendations, hoping to initiate change. For instance, he proposed that North Americans be allowed to export sugar, upon payment of a recognition fee of 6 or 7 guilders per hogshead. Similarly, the WIC could also allow foreigners to bring in African captives, upon payment of fee of 25 or 30 guilders. That way, the Company could improve its dire finances, while simultaneously reducing the rampant smuggling.⁹⁹ While Smeer's suggestions even made it to the States-General, they were not implemented, being too opposed to the existing mercantilist framework.¹⁰⁰ In the end, the most pressing issue, according to Smeer, was the slave trade. While the imports and exports might be regulated, the slave trade at present was plainly insufficient, as the Dutch slavers could not meet the demand. Changes were needed, because planters were importing captives on a grand scale, against the rules, as Smeer experienced.

⁹⁵ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 15 April 1787; NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

⁹⁶ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 15 April 1787; *Registers van resoluties*, 13 nov 1787, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 442, f.252-56; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3849, 5 December 1787, f.1277.

⁹⁷ NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44. Original quotation: "Slandts officieren (met zoo een last als de onse) zijn hier zoo welkom als een zwijn in een Joodse kuele [sic]".

⁹⁸ Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 283-284.

⁹⁹ NL-HaNA, Admiraliteiten / Van Paulus, 1.01.47.13, inv. nr. 44.

¹⁰⁰ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3849, 14 December 1787, f.1320.

Trading enslaved Africans

Sometimes the same traders smuggled both cash crops and African captives, as the incident with the *Betsey* illustrates. On 12 June 1787 Smeer received word that the *Betsey* was about to clear out and on ordering an inspection “six Negroes” were found on board. Meertens investigated the matter and found that they were slaves, two of them belonging to the plantation *Belvedere* and the other four to the captain, Henry Basden. For Meertens the matter was settled, but Smeer pointed out the slaves had not been registered when the ship had come in, while the *Betsey* had smuggled in 57 African captives to *Belvedere* just two weeks before. Possibly, these six captives were part of the previous group of 57. Yet when Smeer offered to supply the evidence, the Fiscal responded only with “Ha ha, is that so? Now I understand” and quickly departed, indicating he would investigate the matter further. However, that same afternoon the ship was allowed to depart.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, as we saw above, Basden was a frequent trader to Demerara and an incorrigible smuggler. Indeed, he was back again in Demerara by August, after which he went to Barbados, smuggling out 50 bales of cotton.¹⁰²

While Basden received a fine, Smeer believed he was the one who was punished the most. The fine, at 1,200 guilders, was rather low and was probably part of Basden’s normal operating costs. The division of the money proved more interesting: standard practice prescribed that one-third was for the Fiscal himself, one-third for the colony’s poor and orphanage fund, and one-third for the informer (*aanbrenger*), in this case Smeer. However, he heavily protested against this terminology. The *aanbrenger* was Jean Lavager, the captain of another vessel, for Smeer was only doing his duty. Therefore, he felt insulted.¹⁰³

Indeed, “informer” was a loaded term around the Greater Caribbean. While informers were generally promised a third of a prize, they rarely stepped forward, although not for a lack of smuggling. Mechanisms of social control often proved strong enough: informers were beaten, covered with tar and feathers and dragged through the streets. Or they were intimidated,

¹⁰¹ *Stukken betreffende de verrichtingen van de luitenant Frans Smees, kommandant van 's lands brigantijn De Maasnymph, tot wering van de sluikhandel in Demerary., 10 april 1787 - 18 december 1787*, NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 126; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 1033, 22 August 1787; TNA, CO 116/61, no date, f.86.

¹⁰² Shipping Returns, 1786-1806 (Barbados), TNA, CO 33/20.

¹⁰³ NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 126.

imprisoned, and ostracised. In Bermuda the word “informer” was even considered slander.¹⁰⁴ Being an informer signified a lack of loyalty to one’s own community; it meant selling out to metropolitan powers that tried to suppress vital local smuggling circuits. Smeer, then, could only acquire information from a foreign captain, and was left largely in the dark about other illicit dealings.

In Essequibo and Demerara officials had learned to be kind to slave smugglers, because the regular Dutch slave trade proved so unreliable. As the WIC abandoned the slave trade in 1738, private traders took over. The Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie (MCC), established in 1720 in Zeeland, became the most important actor. Between 1750 and 1795, more than 90 per cent of the registered slave voyages to Essequibo and Demerara started in Zeeland.¹⁰⁵ However, both the planters and the MCC were dissatisfied with the organisation of the trade. Indeed, the limited Dutch slave trade meant that Essequibo, Demerara and Suriname were in effect competing with each other. In this sellers’ market, the few slave ships that set sail each year could simply choose the destination that offered the best terms, as was the policy of the MCC.¹⁰⁶ Suriname appeared more attractive, as securing payment was easier.

In Essequibo and Demerara the problem was the obligation to sell at auction. The idea was to offer all buyers the same chance at acquiring enslaved labourers. Otherwise, the more well-connected planters might establish a “monopoly” by arranging slave imports via their contacts in the metropolis. While small planters now had a chance, the limited number of captives also resulted in counterbidding, pushing prices higher and making it more difficult for anyone to actually afford any of the African captives. Moreover, in the frantic bidding process, planters sometimes offered more than they could pay, decreasing the security for the slave trader. While it appears that in 1782 direct sales “out of hand” from captain to planter (*onderhands*, or *uit de hand*) became possible, the slave trade was already on the decline by then.¹⁰⁷ In Suriname, on the other hand, the slavers could

¹⁰⁴ Alan L. Karras, *Smuggling: Contraband and Corruption in World History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010) 11; Jarvis, *Eye of All Trade*, 176-177; Truxes, *Defying Empire*, prologue.

¹⁰⁵ The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (hereafter TASTD), www.slavevoyages.org, accessed 4 August 2016.

¹⁰⁶ J.P. van de Voort, *De Westindische plantages van 1720 tot 1795. Financiën en handel* (Eindhoven: Drukkerij de Witte, 1973) 53.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 62; Bernard Albinus to Heren X, 25-1-1774, TNA, CO 116 inv. nr. 39 f.313-321; *Rekest aan de Staten-Generaal de Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie gericht tegen een eerder rekest van planters en ingezetenen van Berbice*

choose between auctions, contracts, and “out of hand” sales. These latter two options allowed the captain to obtain more guarantees about the buyer’s creditworthiness. Contracts could be drawn up in the metropolis with richer planters, while for local direct sales the captain could rely on the firm’s correspondents in the colonies. Interestingly, Meertens was a correspondent for the MCC, while also allowing slave smuggling to occur.¹⁰⁸

Even very long credit lines could not solve the payment difficulties. While slavers gave up to 27 months credit, during the 1760s the MCC still had outstanding claims of several hundred thousand guilders. Some of those claims were for unpaid deliverances, the majority for protested bills of exchange. Consequently, the MCC became even more reluctant to set sail to the two colonies.¹⁰⁹ The payment problems were partly the result of the widespread plantation mortgages. Planters in a mortgage fund were obliged to send their cash crops to the director in the metropolis, who would market the goods. This clause often prevented slave traders from taking in cash crops as payment, as they could in other empires. Chapter 5 will discuss this issue in more detail, demonstrating the insecurity for the slavers and the web of debt that arose from planters drawing and redrawing bills for which they had insufficient funds.

The reaction in the colonies was familiar: petitioning, improvising and smuggling. In 1769 a group of English planters in Essequibo and Demerara sent their request to the Company, which, however, dismissed it immediately as it would not deal with a petition in a foreign language. The next year, a broader coalition was formed to present a petition in Dutch, with a supporting letter from Storm. The planters proposed to pay 10 guilders per slave in recognition fees to the WIC if they would be allowed to buy enslaved Africans from English traders. Foreign captives, they argued, were much cheaper than those brought by the Dutch. During the rest of the 1770s no more petitions are known, while during the subsequent wartime occupations it was unnecessary as non-Dutch ships were welcome. Yet afterwards, in 1786 and 1788, the planters again unsuccessfully asked to

verzoekende om vrije invoer van slaven door middel van buitenlandse schepen, 1788, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.nr. 1275C. In 1788 a bylaw stated the same permission to sell “out of hand”, so it is unclear when this measure really came into effect. Smidt, Lee, T. van der and van Dapperen, *Guyana Ordinance Book*, Demerara, 24 November 1789.

¹⁰⁸ Postma, *The Dutch*, 170, 268, 273-275; Karwan Fatah-Black, “Suriname and the Atlantic World, 1650-1800” (PhD Diss., Leiden University; KITLV, 2013) 171; Zeeuws Archief (hereafter ZA), MCC, 20, inv. nr. 1772.5.

¹⁰⁹ Postma, *The Dutch*, 219-220; Van der Oest, “Forgotten Colonies,” in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 338.

open up the trade to foreigners. And in the following year the committee of Grovestins and Boeij (see Chapter 2) made the same recommendation in their report to the Prince of Orange. In 1802, when the colonies were restored to the Dutch after the second British occupation, the same recommendation was put forward: it would be best if the trade was opened up, as long as the foreign slavers would pay recognition fees of 10 guilders per captive.¹¹⁰

The reason these petitions had no effect is found in the conflicted mercantilism of the Dutch. On the one hand, it made domestic-industrial sense to allow foreign slavers, if that would lead to more cash crops to refine and re-export. On the other hand, the WIC, especially the Zeeland Chamber, favoured a closed approach to protect its slaving sector, in line with monopoly mercantilism. Consequently, the Company struggled to remain consistent in its replies to the petitions. In its reaction to the 1770 petition the WIC first denied that slaves were too expensive, while it subsequently blamed the planters for bidding up the prices at the auctions. In the same fashion, the Company refuted the claim that too few slave ships arrived, yet it also mentioned that the long credit terms were the reason that hardly any slavers were interested to come. Clearly, while thus recognising that Zeeland's slave trade to the two colonies amounted to little, the WIC simultaneously maintained that opening up the trade would mean a great loss to the Dutch Republic in general and to Zeeland in particular.¹¹¹

Regardless, the colonists were not deterred and improvised their own solutions. For instance, in 1763, the colonial authorities attempted to reduce prices by instating a maximum price of 280 guilders per African. Yet this sum was far below the average price at the time of 430 guilders per person, thus antagonising the slave traders further. Proving ineffective, the measure was only used once. The following year, the British planter Samuel Carter cooperated with the skipper Joseph Bragg and outfitted an illicit direct voyage to Africa, where Bragg sold rum in exchange for captives: 110 gallons for a man and 90 to 95 gallons for a woman. Yet the Company discovered the voyage, and no evidence appears for subsequent voyages.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450; Van der Oest, "Forgotten Colonies," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 339; *Stukken betreffende de slavenhandel in Essequibo en Demerary*, 1767-1776, NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 48; NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915; NL-HaNA, RAB, 2.01.28.02, inv. nr. 168M.

¹¹¹ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450.

¹¹² NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, H1 Loco B; *Secrete resoluties*, 4 June 1764, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 765.

More effective was the flexible stance the Council adopted in dealing with immigrating planters bringing their “previously owned” slaves. In January 1766 Storm wrote he did not see how he could stop those in Demerara “from sending slaves to their own plantations; not only those from Barbados totally insist on it, but those from St. Eustatius [as well] (...) I had to allow it provisionally”.¹¹³ Storm, while committed to preventing smuggling, also sympathised with the planters, explaining to the WIC that foreign captives were markedly cheaper:

My exactitude in preventing the importation of several foreign slaves, caused a general murmuring in both rivers and an open dissatisfaction; (and, spoken in private, [I] find that the inhabitants indeed are not quite wrong), they say, in Barbados the slaves cost around 320 guilders, in St. Christopher one can buy, as many as one desires, for 250 to 280 guilders, and here one has to pay an exorbitant price, and one cannot obtain half of what one needs¹¹⁴

During the same year, 1766, the councillors therefore decided to get strict with foreign slavers, but to allow the transport of previously-owned slaves from St. Eustatius, although not from Curaçao. The Commander of St. Eustatius had already anticipated the ruling in 1765: he had sent 18 enslaved people, including two children, to his own plantation St. Jan, in Demerara, counting on Storm’s flexibility. As the Council put forward strict conditions, the Company assented to the practice. Planters had to gain prior consent from the WIC, provide proper paperwork citing names, ages, origin and destination of the enslaved. Additionally, they had to submit a declaration under oath that the enslaved were brought by Dutch vessels and would not be sold within two years.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, H4 Loco A. Original quotation: “egter zien ik niet wel Kans, om d’Eigearen in Demerary te beletten, Slaaven voor haar eige Plantagiën te zenden; niet allen die van Barbados staan daar volstrekt op, maar zelve van St. Eustatius (...) ik hebben moeten zulks provisioneel toelaaten”.

¹¹⁴ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, H5. Original quotation: “Myne Exactitude, in het Verhinderen van den invoer van eenige vreemde Slaaven, veroorzaakt een algemeene Murmureering in de beide Rivieren en een opentlyk Misnoegen; (en, in Gemoede gesproken, vinde d’Ingezeeten en juist geen groot Ongelyk hebben), zy zeggen, in Barbados kosten de Slaaven omtrend 320 Guldens, in St. Christoffel kan men zoo veel men wil, voor 250 à 280 Gulden bekomen, en hier moet men een exorbitante Prys betalen, en kan men de Helvt niet bekomen, die men noodig heeft”

¹¹⁵ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, D2, H4 Loco B.

The Council clearly had the initiative in regulating the slave trade, as became clear in the prohibition of 1768. Suddenly, without consulting the WIC, they forbid the trade from St. Eustatius. The reason given was that the paperwork was often deficient and the route was used as a smuggling loophole: planters on St. Eustatius would declare that they had brought slaves from their plantations on the free island of St. Croix and wanted to transfer them to Essequibo or Demerara. Considering that St. Croix was a free port, foreign slaves could be easily obtained if one had a contact at Saint Eustatius willing to cooperate in the scheme. However, the more pressing reason was probably that the councillors feared importing diseases: recently several captives had brought the “Lazarus disease” and the “children’s disease” with them, while the councillors also wanted to prevent the arrival of “mutiny infected” (*muit zieke*) captives from Montserrat.¹¹⁶

Interestingly, the Company later urged the Council to open the Eustatius trade again, as long as the rules were strictly obeyed. The WIC blamed Storm for the lax enforcement of the rules in the past, especially concerning the trade from the British islands. The directors had a point there, for that same year Storm had allowed two British planters to bring twenty-one enslaved Africans from Antigua. This incident had greatly embarrassed him and he defended himself on the ground that the slaves were only allowed to disembark because the death toll on board would otherwise soar. Interestingly, the WIC conceded and allowed the slaves to stay, as long as the paperwork was sound and the planters promised not to sell the slaves on within two years.¹¹⁷

However, the illicit trade continued unabated. In a reaction to a petition to open the trade to foreigners, the WIC made some calculations. According to the Company, between March 1763 and September 1769, Zealanders had delivered 2,619 enslaved African to the two colonies. In contrast, the enslaved population had increased from fewer than 5,000 to almost 10,000 slaves in this period, despite the terrible demographic conditions. Speaking rhetorically, the directors remarked that “either the Zealand ships have delivered a fitting number of slaves and rather greater than the petitioners specify, or the people have taken little notice of our sharp prohibition of

¹¹⁶ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, D3.

¹¹⁷ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450; *Repertorium op de resoluties*, 27-2-1769, NL-HaNA, WIC, inv. nr. 747.

import, and have imported, secretly or by connivance, as many English slaves as they could possibly obtain.”¹¹⁸

Despite these harsh words, little was done to counter the smuggling, nor could there be. The Dutch slave trade increased during the 1770s, but so did the illegal trade. In 1770 Storm remarked that he found that the inhabitants of Demerara were “openly & without the least restraint buying slaves from the English.” The year after he lamented: “The importation of foreign slaves does not end (...) when I notice it is too late or I lack the right sufficient proof.”¹¹⁹ In 1774 the WIC proposed to place sentinels on ships to monitor the traffic. However, as quoted in the introduction, the Council urged against it, stating that nothing illegal took place, nor could it be prevented from taking place. The colony was simply too open and lacked the means of proper surveillance. A month later, in April 1774, we hear of two slave ships that sailed straight past the firewatch (*brandwagt*) and lay anchored for several days without making their arrival known or undergoing the mandatory slave inspection. One of them even “got lost” as it sailed upriver. The Commandeur started a search, but only after several days was the ship discovered.¹²⁰ The Council had been right: if illicit trade existed, it was impossible to prevent. Furthermore, the Dutch slave trade was past its peak after the 1770s and could not keep up with the insatiable demand for enslaved labour in the colonies.¹²¹ And while foreign slave traders were allowed to sail to Suriname from 1789 onwards, Essequibo or Demerara remained excluded and relied on illegal trade instead.¹²²

To get an idea of the overall slave smuggling, we can follow the WIC’s example and compare imports with the growth of the enslaved population. Due to low birth rates and the high death rates in the harsh conditions, the slave population would decline by about 5 per cent a year if no new African captives arrived. Therefore, it is possible to estimate how many Africans would have been in the colonies if only registered imports had taken place

¹¹⁸ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450. Original quotation: “of de Zeeuwsche Schepen hebben een voegzaam Getal Slaaven aangebragt, en vry grooter als de Supplianten opgeeven, of men heeft zig aan ons scherp Verbod van Invoer weinig gekreund, en zoo veel Engelsche Slaaven, als men maar magtig konde worden, ter Sluik of wel bij Conniventie ingevoerd.”

¹¹⁹ Villiers, *Storm van ’s Gravesande*, 364, 374. Original quotations: “openbaerlyk & zonder de minsten achterhoudenthey de slaeven van d’ Engelsche koopen”; “Den invoer van vreemde slaeven houd niet op (...) wanneer ik het verneem is ’t te laet off de regte voldoende bewysen ontbreken my”.

¹²⁰ Demerara Council of Policy to WIC, 21 April 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.333-377.

¹²¹ Postma, *The Dutch*, 165, 284-285.

¹²² Fatah-Black, “Suriname and the Atlantic World,” 208.

(see the counterfactual lines in Figure 4.2).¹²³ I used two estimates, one of the presumed rate of demographic decline (4.7 per cent per year) and one “optimistic” scenario, with a much lower rate of decline (2.4 per cent). As the figure shows, not even in the “optimistic” scenario could registered imports explain the rise of the enslaved population. In Essequibo the population would have actually declined without illegally imported captives, as most slavers went to Demerara. There, the difference between the official figures and actual population is dramatic, leading to the conclusion that widespread smuggling accounted for most of the growth of the enslaved population.

The figure needs to be treated with care and provides an indication rather than hard numbers. For example, there may be slave voyages that have not been discovered, although the data used here, by Johannes Postma, already includes compensation to make up for this element. Another caveat is that the majority of the voyages in the dataset concern direct voyages from Africa, not their possible relocation to other empires afterwards. To illustrate, in Venezuela only 11,500 captives were registered from the direct trade, while more than 100,000 enslaved Africans arrived via the Caribbean, often smuggled from islands like Curaçao.¹²⁴ Similarly, slave captains sometimes sold part of their human cargo in Suriname, before continuing to Essequibo or Demerara. Fortunately, Postma adjusted his figures for these partial sales. The condoned trade via St. Eustatius to Demerara would fall in the same category, although Postma reckoned most of the registered captives from St. Eustatius were sold on nearby French islands, which probably represented a better market than the one in Essequibo or Demerara.¹²⁵ And as we have seen, the trade with St. Eustatius was often a cover for smuggling too rather than a large source of the legal slave trade. On the other hand, the official number of enslaved Africans in the two colonies is likely too low: planters paid taxes based on the number of their enslaved workers. Planters

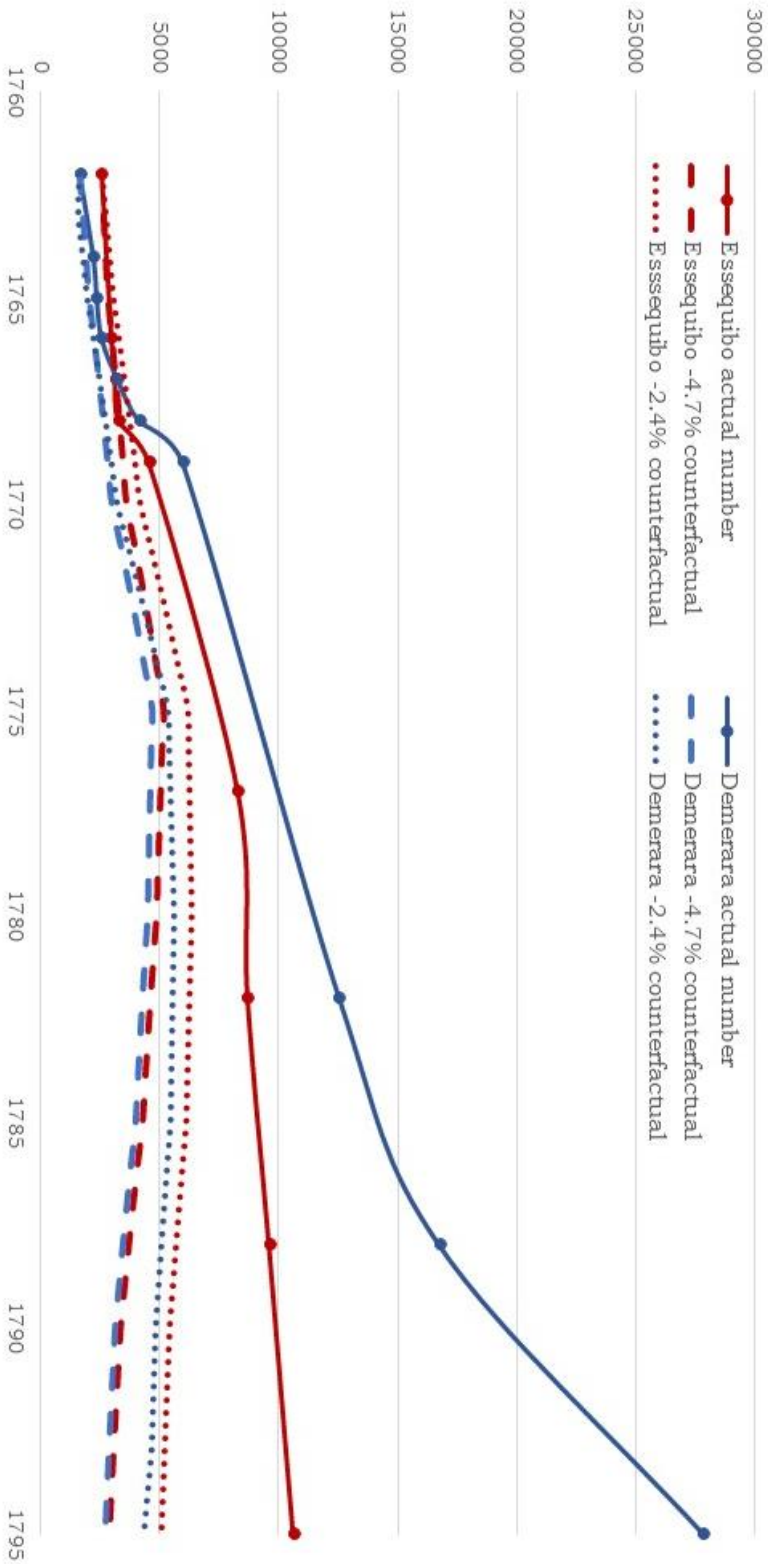
¹²³ The counterfactuals are based on the reported slave population in 1762 for Essequibo and 1764 for Demerara, for reasons of data availability. Subsequently, the average annual number of imported captives was used from Postma, *The Dutch*, 220-221, which includes adjustments for non-registered ships. Subsequently, I compiled two estimates, a high rate of demographic decline (4.7 per cent per year, as during Suriname’s expansion phase) and a low rate (2.4 per cent, as in Suriname’s consolidation phase). The actual slave population figures can be found in Table 3.1 in Chapter 3.

¹²⁴ Borucki, “Slave Trade to Venezuela”.

¹²⁵ Johannes Postma, “The Dispersal of African Slaves in the West by Dutch Slave Traders, 1630-1803,” in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, ed. Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) 294.

regularly underreported the size of their enslaved population, and the authorities did not have the means to check. So although the counterfactual number could be adjusted upwards in the future, in the light of new evidence, this might also have been the case for the actual population figure.

Figure 4.2: Population of enslaved Africans in Essequibo and Demerara,
actual numbers compared to counterfactual numbers based on registered slave imports, 1762-1795



Source: see footnote 123.

Conclusion

Smuggling was at the core of the colonial survival of Essequibo and Demerara; not intentionally, but nevertheless inevitably. The Dutch tried to find a place for themselves in the mercantilist world of the eighteenth century, but their plantation colonies did not fit within their own mixed mercantilist framework.

By the eighteenth century the Dutch were not the stereotypical intermediaries and free traders they had been previously. Domestic-industrial mercantilism, as the backbone of the Dutch mercantile system, favoured an open home market and free ports on the transit islands of the Antilles. Indeed, mercantilism encompassed far more than just protectionism and the Dutch had their own proven method of promoting a positive balance-of-trade. Rather than reducing imports, the Dutch system was geared towards encouraging (re-)exports. So it made sense to try and acquire as much foreign cash crops as possible: ideally, they would be refined in the Republic and sold back to other countries at a profit.

Yet free trade was not extended to the plantation colonies. While an open trade with foreigners would have been a great stimulus to the colonies' economic development, the remaining sentiments of monopoly mercantilism dictated otherwise. Furthermore, "free trade", like in the French and Spanish empires, originally meant freedom for all inhabitants to trade, as opposed to restricting it to specific companies, provinces or ports. For Essequibo and Demerara, this openness to all inhabitants of the Dutch Republic did not take place until 1772, and then still only under specific conditions. The Dutch were not unique in this respect. In France the right to trade in enslaved Africans was gradually extended to include virtually all ports, between 1716 and 1741.¹²⁶ Similarly, the Spanish *comercio libre* unfolded between 1765 and 1778, including more and more ports in both Spain and the Americas.¹²⁷ For the Dutch the discussions about free trade originated in the Amsterdam-Zealand conflict about Dutch Brazil in the seventeenth century. There, the WIC managed to maintain a strong influence over the regulation of trade, which would persist throughout the eighteenth century. Although it gave up slave trading and leased out part of

¹²⁶ Stein, *French Slave Trade*, 11-14.

¹²⁷ Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and their Overseas Networks* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2010) 173-174.

the monopoly to private traders through recognition fees, in essence the Company's monopoly remained intact. The Dutch favoured free trade only when it concerned cash crops of other countries, not when it concerned their own.

The Dutch structure made sense in the seventeenth century, but could not be adapted to fit the eighteenth century. While initially the Dutch plantation empire was insignificant, it became increasingly important after 1750. While planters in the British West Indies enjoyed artificially high prices for their products, as well as naval protection, the planters in the Dutch colonies had neither. The small home market and the commitment to re-exportation meant that erecting tariff walls was nonsensical for the Dutch. Yet the lack of customs revenue and the strained finances left little room for mercantilist intervention on behalf of the planters. Additionally, economic stagnation undermined the Dutch naval power, while the WIC also suffered from financial difficulties. Hence, hardly any protection or surveillance was available to monitor the trade at Essequibo and Demerara. There, the open connection to the sea was hard to control regardless, but without regular patrol ship, smugglers could roam freely. Although the problems were recognised, the institutional structure of the Republic inhibited reform. Divisions abounded, between Holland and Zeeland and between maritime and land-oriented provinces. The result was that change was slow or non-existent.

The initiative to ensure colonial survival rested squarely with the colonists. The Company directors, being far away, divided along provincial lines and, without first-hand knowledge, had little choice but to rely on local initiatives. They could approve provisional measures afterwards, such as when foreign provisions entered the colonies in 1742 or when the Council allowed foreign planters to bring their own enslaved workers in the 1760s. Although the WIC repeated time and again that smuggling was prohibited, the Company had little means of enforcement. Furthermore, several of its officials had a stronger sense of obligation to their fellow planters than to the Company.

Storm had a strong sense of duty and tried to convict smugglers—usually in vain—but even he sympathised with the planters. While disapproving of outright smuggling voyages, he saw fewer problems in allowing new planters to bring their previously-owned captives. Furthermore, Storm was on good terms with several of the prominent British planters, who were actively engaged in smuggling. Being all too familiar with the infrequent supplies

from the metropolis, Storm also recognised the need to accommodate when necessary. Yet he condoned only foreign *imports* (foodstuffs and enslaved Africans), deeming them necessary for colonial survival. Meertens, on the other hand, also facilitated the *export* of cash crops by foreigners. While blatantly illegal, these exports cemented the colonies' place in the West Indian web, making survival and expansion possible.

The combination of lax enforcement and rampant smuggling was the logical outgrowth of the mercantilism of the Dutch. The Republic and the Company were effectively too poor to seriously attempt to curb smuggling, and too weak to seriously consider reform. Inevitably, then, the colonists were left to their own devices and improved their own place in the Atlantic world.

Nevertheless, the colonies were also constrained by the system of plantation mortgages that developed after 1750. While this financial innovation facilitated the expansion of the plantation sector, it also hampered the slave trade and insisted on strict bilateral shipping. It is to their inner workings that I shall now turn.

5 The web of debt

Cheap money, expensive mortgages and financial entanglement

The previous chapters have discussed colonial survival in terms of geography, politics, the slave system and supplies, and this chapter completes this picture by explaining how Essequibo and Demerara could survive economically. In other words, how could these ill-supplied, ill-managed and indefensible colonies attract enough capital to expand economically? Why could these colonies continue to expand rather than collapse under the mountain of debt? And how can we square the image of Guyana as a land of great riches for British planters in the nineteenth century, with the eighteenth-century one of impending financial ruin?

This chapter proceeds in three steps. The first part provides a comparative contextual framework and introduces the Dutch system of plantation mortgages, called *negotiaties*. After this more metropolitan perspective, I analyse how this structure played out in practice in the colonies. The mortgage frenzy became a bubble yet no proper procedures existed to unwind the mountain of debt. However, I argue that the underdeveloped institutional structure proved yet again an element of strength. Different actors—local provision suppliers, the mortgage funds and the auctioneer on behalf of the slavers—believed their debts would be preferential in case of a default.

This insecurity was an unintended consequence of the institutional weakness yet hampered the execution of estates. As long as an actor believed that in the end he could get his money back, there was no need to push for execution. Furthermore, the messy and unpredictable process of execution likely deterred creditors from pursuing this route. For the investors the consequences were unfortunate, but the planters profited: as many colonists owed debts to each other, a single default could trigger a chain reaction. The Director-Generals, however, took pains to prevent that from happening. The web of debt that arose was thus allowed to persist and inadvertently provided some stability to the colonies. The final part of the chapter moves beyond debt and probes the question of profit, more

specifically why British planters were said to have attained enormous profits, while the Dutch were caught in this web of debt.

Financing plantation economies

By the mid-eighteenth century the plantation system was firmly established in the Americas. The combination of large estates, slave labour and the production of cash crops for export proved both profitable and capital-intensive.¹ The availability of capital determined to a large extent where the plantation system could expand quickly and where it lingered. For example, Barbados became the centre of plantation production during the seventeenth century because of the credit facilities of London financiers. This credit allowed Barbadian planters to quickly enlarge their enslaved labour force, whereas growth in Brazil was slower. There, planters typically financed slaves from current profits, which slowed expansion.²

Political developments also influenced the spread of the plantation system. Cuba's sugar revolution after 1762 was the result of the British occupation during the Seven Years' War and the great influx of British merchandise as well as enslaved Africans. The Spanish authorities later found it impossible to return to a closed trade circuit and gradually lifted the restrictions.³ In addition, as the British regained possession of the so-called Ceded Islands (St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Dominica and Tobago) after the war, they found eager new outlets for investment. Yet the enthusiasm was too great and led to the extension of mortgages that were only sustainable under the most favourable circumstances. Therefore, as soon as commodity prices declined, the debt became unserviceable.⁴

The profitability of loans to planters depended on the legal protection for creditors, which varied with the type of loan. Credit came in different forms, ranging from short-term commercial credit (to finance shipping and the sale of commodities) to long-term mortgage credit. Richard Pares saw these as different stages in an "ontology of debt". A planter might start with an

¹ Trevor G. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650 - 1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) 4-5.

² Menard, "Brazil and Barbados," in McCusker and Morgan, *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, 157-161.

³ Klein, *African Slavery*, 87; Bergad, *Comparative Histories*, 16-20; Baskes, *Staying Afloat*, 70.

⁴ Steele, *Grenada*, 70; S. D. Smith, *Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648-1834* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 133.

overdraft on his credit from a metropolitan merchant, a common and not necessarily problematic situation. Yet the debt could continue to grow, because of mismanagement, war, drought, or the collapse of prices. In the meantime, the metropolitan merchant could require more security, for example by demanding that the planter post a personal bond. The creditor's next step would be to bring the case to court to get a judgement against the planter, and the final step would be to place a mortgage on the estate.⁵

However, later historians have nuanced Pares' argument, stating that it applied mostly to the North American colonies, rather than to the West Indies. Revisionists have also pointed to the change over time: Pares might be right for the first part of the eighteenth century, but after the 1740s mortgages became a regular financial instrument in their own right. Yet the research regarding such mortgage investment is virtually non-existent, so it is difficult to draw any solid conclusions regarding the relative importance of mortgages.⁶

For the Dutch, a similar cross-over between commercial and mortgage credit was the main form of credit before the 1750s. While the precise financial structures need further study, it appears that merchant houses in Amsterdam extended credit to planters, on fixed but relatively short terms. Examples exist of loans running for less than ten years, in contrast to twenty years under the later *negotiatie* system. Furthermore, risk was deemed high, for the planters had to pay interest rates of around 8 per cent—compared to 5 or 6 per cent later.⁷ Furthermore, in contrast to the later funds that pooled mortgages, these early loans consisted of an individual debt relation between planter and merchant house.

In the Dutch Guianas, the need for more long-term credit arose because for the privatisation of the slave trade. Before 1738, slaving was the prerogative of the WIC and planters could spread out payment. Afterwards, private traders stepped in, who demanded cash, cash crops or good bills of exchange. As many captives were put to work clearing new land for new estates, it would take several years before cash crops would become

⁵ Richard Pares, *Merchants and Planters* (New York, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 49-50.

⁶ Jacob M. Price, "Credit in the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies," in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (Cambridge 1991) 324-327; Smith, *World of the Lascelles*, 140-142.

⁷ *Notarial Records*, ACA, Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam, 5075, inv. nr. 10741/208; Ibid., inv. 12677/88; Ibid., inv. nr. 12682/23; Ibid., inv. 8965/954.

available. Thus, planters needed credit, either with the slavers or with merchant-bankers in the Republic.⁸

Around the same time, the British slave trade also paved the way for longer-term credit. The mechanism was different, however. Prior to the 1732 Colonial Debt Act, slavers relied on personal bonds for planters, which proved unreliable. The Act increased security, by allowing creditors to lay claim to an indebted planter's estate and enslaved Africans. It shifted the burden of risk, from the slavers to factors. The latter had to assume legal responsibility for the value of the enslaved and were increasingly urged to provide immediate payment in the form of bills with a long maturity. The long terms of payment on these bills allowed the factor to collect goods or debts from the planter and remit them to the metropolis before the maturity date. If a planter still wanted to use a bond, he had to use a "bond with security", meaning that one or two others had to co-sign in order to secure the debt.⁹ In general, the added form of security that the Act provided contributed to the spread of mortgages in the British West Indies.

Indeed, Jacob Price saw a fundamental difference between the British "creditor defense model" and the "Latin model" of the Iberians. In the former, creditors could use the local courts to reclaim their money, while the latter protected the integrity of the plantation, and did not allow creditors to seize slaves, for example. While the Latin model seemingly benefitted the planters, in fact they were better off with the British system, because additional security for the creditors resulted in lower interest rates.¹⁰ However, these contrasts are likely overdrawn. For example, colonists in early Barbados still managed to impose an interest rate cap, promoted inflation through paper money and frustrated debt collection.¹¹ Similarly, when in 1774 British creditors tried to seize debtors' estates in Grenada, the local House of Assembly prevented or at least postponed it. Furthermore, Parliament upheld the decision, effectively siding with the indebted colonists.¹²

Security for creditors became more important as the price of plantations rose, mainly because enslaved Africans became more expensive. The large West Indian estates required more capital than tobacco or rice plantations

⁸ Fatah-Black, *White Lies*, 95.

⁹ Price, "Credit," in Solow, *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* 310-314; Smith, *World of the Lascelles*, 140-2, 166.

¹⁰ Price, "Credit," in Solow, *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* 296.

¹¹ Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations.: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006) 55-6, 97.

¹² Steele, *Grenada*, 70.

on the North American mainland. A rice plantation of 1,000 acres with 40 enslaved labourers cost around 2,000 pounds sterling in 1755. By the 1770s, a small rice estate of 200 acres with the same number of enslaved people cost 2,500 sterling. In contrast, a medium-sized sugar estate on Jamaica with about 150 enslaved Africans cost circa 17,000 sterling by 1775.¹³ Going by the exchange rate of 1:10 to 1:12, this sum was equivalent to 170,000 to 204,000 guilders for the Dutch context.¹⁴ In 1718 an estimate put the cost for a Suriname sugar plantation at 23,100 guilders, including 50 enslaved Africans. By 1787, a contemporary projected the cost for a sugar estate with 119 captives at 109,175 guilders, for a coffee plantation with 124 workers at 111,350.¹⁵ Lending such large sums to planters was an inherently risky business, considering the dangers of crop failure, war, and drought.

Interest rates did not necessarily reflect the risks of colonial lending. In Britain itself, usury legislation put the maximum interest rate at 5 per cent in 1714. Rates in the colonies could be higher, but in 1752 in Barbados the maximum rate was lowered from 8 to 6 per cent. The average West Indian loan, Simon Smith calculated, carried an interest rate of 6.98 per cent. This percentage was substantially higher than the average yields on bank stock (3.48 per cent), East India stock (4.29 per cent) or the government three per cent Consols, created in 1751. However, while taxation supported the national debt, planters could go bankrupt, so the difference was perhaps not large enough.¹⁶ Indeed, lenders engaged in credit rationing: if a banker could not ask the rate that would realistically compensate for the risk, he would deny the loan. On the other hand, if one had to ask an interest rate of 10 per cent to a planter, then the loan was probably too risky anyway. These interest-rate caps could thus contribute to economic stability by preventing risky loans.¹⁷ The Dutch case illustrates this point. In 1736 the rate was capped at 8 per cent in Suriname, but even at these high rates

¹³ Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 14-15.

¹⁴ Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 463.

¹⁵ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 83. The size of the sugar estate was 1,005 acres and 500 acres for the coffee estate, which were the most common plots.

¹⁶ Smith, *World of the Lascelles*, 142, 152-153, 159; Larry Neal, *The Rise of Financial Capitalism: International Capital Markets in the Age of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 14.

¹⁷ Peter Temin and Hans-Joachim Voth, "Credit Rationing and Crowding Out during the Industrial Revolution: Evidence from Hoare's Bank, 1702-1862," *Explorations in Economic History* (2005) 329; Peter Temin and Hans-Joachim Voth, "Hoare's Bank in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Birth of Modern Europe: Culture and Economy, 1400-1800. Essays in Honor of Jan de Vries*, ed. Laura Cruz and Joel Mokyr (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 86-87.

lending was limited, until the advent of the *negotiaties*, which carried a rate of 5 or 6 per cent.¹⁸ The question then arises of why lenders still extended credit to planters in these circumstances.

One of the reasons for investing were the limited opportunities at home. The rate on government bonds was low. Therefore, international conflict was a boon to British investors, who eagerly withdrew deposits to invest in government bonds during wartime.¹⁹ During the seventeenth century, rates were higher in Britain than in the Dutch Republic, which hovered around 3 per cent. However, as the two countries became financially integrated after 1720, the gap narrowed.²⁰ In other words, the opportunity costs of money were low. If an investor wanted to get a favourable rate of return on his capital, he had to seek out more risky outlets, such as colonial financing.

For many merchant-bankers there was another reason to invest, namely the commissions fees. These were much higher in the colonies than in trade within Europe.²¹ Many bankers insisted that a planter commissioned the cash crops to him, even though this clause was not legally enforceable. For the merchant-banker lucrative opportunities existed, such as the 2.5 per cent commission fee on marketing the sugar, 0.5 per cent for insurance and another 0.5 per cent for discounting bills.²² Getting hold of the commodity trade was also a major incentive for the Dutch *negotiatie* directors. Typically, a fund director charged 2 per cent commission for selling the cash crops, while some also charged 2 per cent for arranging the planter's imports. While another 0.5 per cent for insurance might be added, the main benefit resided in the brokerage fees. Some, but not all, directors charged 1 to 2.5 per cent of the mortgage sum to arrange the mortgage—a considerable reward on the large pools of money in the *negotiaties*.²³

¹⁸ Fatah-Black, *White Lies*, 165.

¹⁹ Temin and Voth, "Credit Rationing," 345.

²⁰ Marjolein 't Hart, "Mutual Advantages: State Bankers as Brokers Between the City of Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic," in *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic*, ed. Oscar Gelderblom (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 116; Ormrod, *Commercial Empires*, 322-323; Neal, *Rise of Financial Capitalism*, chapter 7.

²¹ Zahedieh, *Capital and the Colonies*, 101.

²² Smith, *World of the Lascelles*, 81, 163.

²³ Gert Oostindie, *Roosenburg en Mon Bijou. Twee Surinaamse plantages, 1720-1870* (Dordrecht, Providence: Foris Publications, 1989) 291; Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 84, 91-94; *Negotiatie ten behoeve van eenige planters in de colonie van Essequibo en Demerary*, International Institute of Social History (hereafter IISH), Collectie Effecten en loterijbriefjes (Bijzondere Collecties 266), inv. nr. ARCH03766, box 1, final folder, marked "was KA 68.1-I".

The structure of the negotiaties

The *negotiaties* ostensibly solved the most pressing issues of the Dutch economy: few profitable investment opportunities, a declining staple market share and a relatively small plantation empire. The *negotiatie* fund promised high returns to investors of 5 to 6 per cent, stimulated the expansion of the plantation sector and channelled the increased produce to the Republic (for possible re-exports). To acquire the capital, the fund director sold bonds, typically of 500 or 1,000 guilders each. A planter or prospective planter could then apply for a mortgage if he could prove he (nor his wife) had no other debts.²⁴ To spread the risk, a fund would extend mortgages to multiple plantations and only to “half, or ultimately 5/8” of the value of the estate. This value was determined by sworn appraisers (*priseurs*) and included the tools, buildings and the enslaved population, although sometimes an exception was made for items like furniture, as those did not contribute to the production.²⁵ To allow enough time to develop a profitable estate, during the first ten years of the loan the planter only had to pay interest. During the next ten years, he would also have to start repaying the principal, so that after twenty years everything should have been repaid and the mortgage could be terminated.²⁶

According to W.W. van der Meulen, the *negotiatie* system followed three phases. In the first, up to the credit crisis of 1772-1773, the dominant form consisted of “general” (*generale*) *negotiaties*. In the prospectus, the fund director did not mention specific planters or plantations, only the general colony. Investors thus made their decision based on the appeal of the plan and the trust they had in the fund director. In contrast, other *negotiaties* existed that explicitly mentioned the plantations that received the money, however, in terms of capital the general *negotiaties* were dominant. At least forty of them existed prior to 1772, often carrying generic names like L.^a.A., L.^a. B and L.^a.C (as in Littera A, sometimes called “Letter A”). After the credit crisis these types disappeared, as investors grew wearier and demanded more information. Supervision became stricter. After 1780 a final phase emerged, with mortgages almost exclusively granted to single estates and

²⁴ In case of marriage on equal terms, the wife was obliged go to the Secretary, declare that she had no other debt relations and that she would commit to repayment of the mortgage (*willige condemnatie*). Otherwise, if the plantation was shared, the husband might default on his part while his wife’s part would prevent execution of the estate.

²⁵ IISH, Collectie Effecten en loterijbriefjes, inv. nr. ARCH03766.

²⁶ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 109.

often of prominent people. The idea of spreading risk by bundling ten or twenty plantations together had collapsed after the crisis, but the *negotiatie* system apparently still proved attractive in this more restricted form.²⁷

In Essequibo and Demerara the three phases are clearly visible, while also displaying a clear shift from Zeeland to Amsterdam based creditors. The first major fund to extend mortgages to the two colonies was established in 1766 by Kornelis van den Helm Boddaert. This former mayor of Middleburgh and WIC director granted mortgages to at least 37 plantations, and by 1770 the capital involved was over a million guilders.²⁸ Other firms in this early phase were Tulleken de Vos & Comp, led by Mr. Ambrosius Tulleken (1728-1784), who was alderman in the Middleburgh City Council. This fund invested around 1.9 million at the outset, and perhaps more later. A final fund was the one by De Bruyn & De Smit, who were also active in the slave trade. They invested half a million guilders in 1766, of which the city of Middleburgh contributed 25,000.²⁹ Only one fund from Amsterdam can be found among the early investors, the one of Daniel Changuion, which started in 1768 or 1769.³⁰ Amsterdam became involved mainly after 1770, because previously only ships from Zeeland were allowed to sail to the two colonies (see Chapter 4).

Subsequently, in phase two many plantations went from an existing Zeeland fund to an Amsterdam (or Utrecht)-based one, summarised in Table 5.1. For the planters it was good news if they could transfer their mortgage to a new (and perhaps ignorant) fund director. Typically, they could use the new credit to pay off old debts, and take out more credit based on increased valuations. Furthermore, a new mortgage could mean that the planter entered a new “interest-only” period of ten years, thereby postponing the problems of having to repay the principle. This debt pyramid crumbled later,

²⁷ W. W. van der Meulen, “Beschrijving van eenige Westindische plantage leeningen. Bijdrage tot de kennis der geldbelegging in de achttiende eeuw,” *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* (1904)616-8.

²⁸ Van de Voort mentions 34 plantations, but CO 116/36 f.206 and f.480 lists the estates Jerusalem, Maria Johanna and Zuidbeeveld as well. The capital was probably close to that sum already in 1766, as the average over 18 plantations was already 27,354 guilders per plantation (CO 116/36, f.206 and f.480).

²⁹ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 269-323. For a fascinating account of how irregularities with mortgages harmed Tulleken’s finances, see: *Copie-brieven van Ambrosius Tulleken te Demerary aan de griffier der Staten-Generaal, Fagel*, NL-HaNA, VWIS, 1.05.06, inv. nr. 478.

³⁰ ACA, Notarissen, 5075, Notary Thierry D. de Marolles, 11474/177; *ibid.*, 11479/93; *Conditien van Negotiatie tot een Fonds waar uit, onder Directie van Daniel Changuion, aan eenige Planters in Rio Essequibo en Rio Demmerary, tot voortzetting en verbeetering hunner Plantagien een Somma van f400.000 voor 10 Jaaren zal werden gefourneerd, teegens den Intrest van 6 Pct. ’s jaars*, IISH, Collectie Effecten (tweede aanvulling), ARCH04145, inv. nr 1.

and phase three witnessed only a few loans to prominent people like the Director-General.

Table 5.1: Overview of major mortgage funds active in Essequibo and Demerara

<i>Name of director</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Capital invested in guilders (year known)</i>	<i>Estimated number of estates</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Kornelis van den Helm Boddaert	Middleburgh	More than 1 million (1770)	37	Many plantations later to Van den Santheuvel (and even later to Van Vloten)
De Bruyn & de Smit	Middleburgh	500,000 (1766)		At least one plantation later to Van den Santheuvel; the city of Middleburgh invested 25,000 guilders itself; also active in the slave trade
Tulleken de Vos & Comp.	Middleburgh	Ca. 1.9 Million	At least 17	Taken over by Jan van Rijneveld & Soonen in 1770 or 1771
Daniel Changuion	Amsterdam	Ca. 2 Million	At least 13	Several plantations were later transferred to Van Vloten & Van den Santheuvel; started in late 1760s
Bartholomeus van den Santheuvel & Zoonen	Amsterdam	1.4 million (at the start, 1772)	At least 22	Took several estates previously at De Bruyn & De Smit, Changuion and, mainly, Boddaert. Itself taken over by Heemskerk Jr. & Van Arp in 1777
Dirk Wernard van Vloten	Utrecht	More than 2.5 million (1770s)	At least 11	Active mainly from 1772 onwards, took over several estates from Changuion and Boddaert
Van de Perre & Meijners	Middleburgh	100,000 (at the start, 1773)	5	Active in phase 2
Jan van Rijneveld & Soonen	Amsterdam	2.2 million (1780)	36	Provided the mortgages for Pieter Callaert and P.C. Hooft
Daniel Steven Schorer	Middleburgh		2	Middelburgh itself invested for 15,000 guilders; established in 1774 and 1775
Spoors & Sprenger	Middleburgh	90,000 (at start, 1777)	1	Also an important trading firm
J. Heemskerk Jr. & J.W. van Arp	Amsterdam			Took over the fund of Van den Santheuvel in 1777
Turing & Comp.	Middleburgh	100,000 (at start, 1791)	3	Only active in phase 3
Sebastiaan van Nooten Jansz.	Amsterdam	Ca. 1.4 million (1786-1792)	8.5	Only active in third phase, lending to L'Espinasse and Cuming, among others. Takes over one estate from Van den Santheuvel, one from Van Vloten

Source: (Voort, J.P. van de 1973) 269-323; Bram Hoonhout, "Subprime Plantation Mortgages in Suriname, Essequibo and Demerara, 1750-1800", MA thesis (Leiden University, 2012) 27; ACA, Notarissen, 5075, Notary Kier van der Piet, 13917/25.

As soon as the optimistic financial climate deteriorated, as occurred in the 1772-1773 credit crisis, the *negotiatie* system collapsed. The financial markets of Amsterdam and London were well integrated by then, and vulnerable to each other's crises. In 1763 a crisis had erupted in Amsterdam that spread to London, but in 1772 the contagion went in the other direction. The Scottish Ayr bank collapsed, taking its London branch with it. The credit crunch now spread from Scotland to England and from there to Amsterdam. In the latter, credit dried up quickly after the fall of the firm of Clifford & Sons, thereby causing the colonial economy to come to a grinding halt.³¹ The Dutch literature often portrays the crisis as an autonomous event, triggered by planters who failed to honour their obligations.³² However, the precise timing only makes sense in relation to the British crisis. In fact, most plantation loans were issued after 1765, so repayment of the principal was not due before 1775. In addition, the credit stream did not dry up until 1776.³³ Additionally, the *negotiatie* boom was already past its peak. Prices of coffee, as well as those for enslaved Africans, peaked in 1769, and so did the amount of new mortgage credit. In the following years millions of guilders were still extended in credit, but those who foresaw the impending crash had already stepped out and sold their plantations. A drought and renewed conflict with the maroons in Suriname further undermined the system. The financial crisis and subsequent downfall of a major mortgage fund sealed the fate of the *negotiaties* as popular investment instrument.³⁴

Ultimately, while facilitating the rapid expansion of the plantation economy in the Guianas, the *negotiatie* system proved to be a bubble. The main problem was that the amount of credit was not connected to the production or the profitability of a plantation, but solely on a subjective valuation.³⁵ And since a higher valuation meant that the planter could take out more credit, a speculative trend ensued. Around the Caribbean prices of African captives rose, but the value of land really skyrocketed in Demerara. Storm remarked in 1769 that land prices stood at 30 to 36 guilders per acre, compared to 2 or 3 guilders ten years earlier, before the boom.³⁶ In 1771 a

³¹ Neal, *Rise of Financial Capitalism*, 168-171.

³² P. C. Emmer, "Capitalism Mistaken? The Economic Decline of Surinam and the Plantation Loans, 1773-1850; A Rehabilitation," *Itinerario*, no. 1 (1996).

³³ Alex van Stipriaan, "Debunking Debts. Image and Reality of a Colonial Crisis: Suriname at the End of the 18th Century," *Itinerario*, no. 1 (1995).

³⁴ Bram Hoonhout, "The Crisis of the Subprime Plantation Mortgages in the Dutch West Indies, 1750-1775," *Leidschrift*, no. 2 (2013).

³⁵ Another problem was that payments to investors were fixed, instead of related to the plantation's profits.

³⁶ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol 2: 624.

planter mentioned a price of 60 guilders per acre, which had risen from 4 guilders “several years” before.³⁷ The result was an upward cycle of debt which spiralled out of control. Most notably for Essequibo and Demerara, the fund of Bartholomeus van den Santheuvel went bankrupt in 1777. The director had injected over 60,000 guilders of his own capital into the fund yet to no avail. The mortgages nevertheless remained in force, now under the direction of Heemskerk Jr & Van Arp.³⁸

For investors, the plantation mortgages could yield anything between a financial catastrophe and a handsome return, depending on the timing. Early investors profited twice: they received a high rate of return, and even the value of the bond increased on the secondary market.³⁹ If an investor sold his bond before the crash, he would have made a substantial profit. After 1768, however, bond values slowly declined. Nevertheless, interest pay-outs remained high until the end of the 1770s, although fund directors often paid this interest out of their own pockets, to uphold the status of their fund.⁴⁰ After the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in 1780, funds lowered their interest payments. For example, the fund of Jan van Rijnveld & Soonen, a major investor in Essequibo and Demerara, paid 3 per cent in 1780, presumably nothing in the next three years, and 2 per cent in 1784, 1785 and 1786. While the rate was lowered to 1 per cent in 1787, afterwards it increased again, to a peak of 4 per cent in 1790 and 1792.⁴¹

While such rates were not bad, for most *negotiaties* repayment of the principal had become a very long-term goal. Many bonds were only fully paid off at some point in the nineteenth century, such as the *negotiatie* on the *De Herstellend* plantation, which was paid off in 1845.⁴² Van de Voort calculated that of the circa 80 million guilders in plantation loans, less than a quarter was paid back before 1800. For Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice he put that figure even lower, at 15 per cent.⁴³ For those who had not cashed out in time, then, the *negotiaties* were a disappointment. While this turn of events must have frustrated the investors, the planters had less trouble with

³⁷ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv.nr. 3826, 26 juli 1771, f.488-489.

³⁸ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 162.

³⁹ A bond of the original fund from Willem Gideon Deutz was worth 1065 guilders (nominal value 1000 guilders) in 1768, see my “Plantation mortgages”, 26.

⁴⁰ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 188-192; Hoonhout, “Subprime Plantation Mortgages”.

⁴¹ IISG, Collectie Effecten en loterijbriefjes, ARCH03766.

⁴² IISG, Collectie P.A. Brugmans, ARCH03525, inv. nr. 12 (but in folder labelled 13-14).

⁴³ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 195.

it. As long as their estates were not put up for execution, they gained from the situation.

Financial entanglement and preference problems

The aim of the *negotiatie* system to regulate the colonial economy was cut short by the institutional chaos within the two colonies. Although the *negotiatie* conditions were elaborate, they generally failed to specify how to deal with defaults. As an improvised form of financial innovation, drafted in a time of overconfidence, the prospectuses were not interested in possible negative scenarios. This gap in the rules, exacerbated by the improvised nature of the colonial institutions, meant that it proved difficult for creditors to get their money back. On the other hand, it provided ample room for planters to play the system.

While the *negotiatie* system was based in the metropolis, colonial actors performed vital functions as *agendaris* (agent) and *priseur* (appraiser). An agent would look for reliable planters to grant credit, as well as monitor their behaviour. Unfortunately, it is unclear how many agents were present in the colonies, nor how critically they examined the planters. However, what is known, is that some (besides a salary) received a fee for bringing in new planters into the fund. This fee would form a clear incentive for maximising the loans extended, without too close scrutiny of the underlying finances. Moreover, several prominent figures had a role as agent for a mortgage fund, giving them a clear stake in the continuation of the system. For example, Bernhard Albinus, councillor in the 1780s, was an agent for the fund of D.W. van Vloten in 1773. In the same year we can find the Director-General G.H. Trotz acting as agent for the fund for Kornelis van den Helm Boddaert.⁴⁴ Additionally, Francois Changuion Jr. was a councillor and a long-time agent for the fund of his brother, Daniel Changuion.⁴⁵

Even more important were the *priseurs*: their estimates of an estate's value determined how much money a planter could borrow. In other words, the *priseurs* had the power to either inflate or deflate the property bubble. It seems that *priseur* was not a specialised profession, but rather a function

⁴⁴ ACA, Archief van de Firma Ketwich & Voomberg en Wed. W. Borski (hereafter Ketwich), 600, inv. nr. 606; Ibid., inv. nr. 605.

⁴⁵ *Dossiers betreffende het proces voor de Staten-Generaal van Pieter Brotherson, eigenaar van de plantage 'Haynieroenie' in Rio Demerary, impetrant bij mandement van revisie contra François Changuion jr., gedaagde, 1786, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9602.*

performed on the side by prominent men. And indeed such figures appear in the notarial records in this role. Between 1773 and 1775 the fund of Dirk Wernard van Vloten issued eight mortgages, worth 490,271 guilders, using the same group of appraisers. Cornelis Overbroek and Thomas Cuming were responsible for most of the valuations, but Joseph Bourda and L.I.D. van Grovestins (brother of the later governor) were also involved.⁴⁶ All of these men were either councillors or would become councillors later in their career, testifying to their social status. Furthermore, most of these men had mortgages themselves. Bourda was with Van Vloten in 1774, Cuming (together with Thomas Grant) had his estate mortgaged to Daniel Changuion, and so did Grovestins.⁴⁷ In addition, the above-mentioned Francois Changuion Jr. was also a *priseur* in the colonies (besides being a Councillor and President of the Orphan Chamber).⁴⁸

Thus, a serious principal-agent problem arose. Rather than acting primarily on behalf of the mortgage funds, these men could further their own interest without immediate means of punishment. If an agent brought in a planter that proved risky, it would only come to light years later. The agents and *priseurs* had a vested interest in continuation of the credit bubble. Fostering the speculative trend, they could inflate the value of their own estates, while deflating the bubble could trigger social havoc. If an estate was executed, it might trigger further bankruptcies because of the

⁴⁶ ACA, Ketwich, 600, inv. nr. 607. In 1777 Cornelis Overbroek was a member of the Council of Justice (TNA, CO 116/48 f.59). Cuming was probably not a councillor yet (he was only known as such in 1796, see Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 276). Yet he was one of the most prominent British planters (see Chapter 2 and 6), while Joseph Bourda started as councillor of Justice in 1774, would become Commandeur ad interim in 1784 and became one of the wealthiest planters in the colony (TNA, CO 116/48; CO 116/39 f. 359; *ibid.*, f.393). Grovestins served as captain in the militia up to 1774, was Fiscal from 20 May 1776 to January 1782, and in 1776 was also the president of the *Wees- en Desolate Boedelkamer*. (NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 309, missives Grovestins 4 aug 1779: TNA, CO 116/48, f.87; Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 309; CO 116/44, f397).

⁴⁷ For Bourda, see ACA, Ketwich, 600, inv. nr. 607; for Cuming, see ACA, Notarissen, 5075, 15252/1218; for Grovestins see ACA, Notarissen, 5075, 15231/286 and 11474/177.

⁴⁸ Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 124; *Stukken betreffende de hypotheecatie van The Behive bij D.W.van Vloten voor - 112.000. 1776 januari 10-1777 december 6*, ACA, Ketwich, 600, inv. nr. 654; *Inventarissen van Le Repentir en een stuk land van 25 akkers. 1772 april 18, 1773 oktober 18, 1773 december 4 en 9. Metprisaties en bijlagen*, ACA, Ketwich, 600, inv. nr. 663; *Inventarissen van The Coventgarden, met prisaties. 1772 juli 1 en 1774 maart 29*, *ibid.*, inv. nr. 672; ACA, Notarissen, 5075, inv. nr. 15326/788; *Registratie - van hypotheekakte groot f 27.790,- gepasseerd door Thomas Grandt en Jenette van Baarle, echtelieden en Thomas Cuming ten behoeve van Daniel Changuion op 26-7-1770 in Rio Demerary*, Utrechts Archief (hereafter UA), 34-4, Notarissen in de Stad Utrecht 1560-1905, D.W. van Vloten, inv. nr. U247a010, akte 232, 21 December 1771.

financial entanglement. The ledger of the Weilburg estate in the late 1760s demonstrates that plantations had transactions with a large number of people, including each other. Hoes, rope, butter, beef, pork, paint, tiles, lamp oil, and many gallons of rum all changed hands, but usually without any transfer of cash. Thus, planters kept accounts of who owed what to whom, and since several of the British planters were also engaged in slave smuggling, the sums were substantial.⁴⁹

Storm also noted that smuggling further complicated the financial entanglement. In 1770 he heard that planters were paying for illegal captives with bills of exchange payable in the Dutch Republic. He asked the Company for proof of such bills, so he could prosecute those involved. With such proof, he “had the thread & the clew would likely follow, because these must bleed when the others collapse & the whole matter would come to light”⁵⁰ Furthermore, during the following year, he discovered why such bills by highly indebted planters did not come back in protest; the planters simply tried to cash the bill again, including the 25 per cent protest costs. While such an attempt might work if a planter’s credit had increased in the meantime, often matters only got worse. After three such attempts, Storm emphasised, the original sum had doubled. Obviously, the British smugglers shunned bills as soon as they discovered their riskiness. Consequently, in 1772, they insisted on payment in produce. In other words, one type of smuggling (in enslaved Africans) fostered more smuggling (in cash crops).⁵¹

Even if Storm had proof, he was still reluctant to execute estates, fearing a colony-wide financial collapse. As many planters possessed protested bills of someone else, executing one would start a chain reaction that would ruin many others. Furthermore, because the *negotiatie* bubble was past its peak by that point, few buyers were interested and prices at auction would be low. Consequently, execution would hurt a host of people: not just the planter and the workforce on his estate, but also the claimant (who probably would not receive the full amount) and all possible other creditors. Although

⁴⁹ *Codex Eng 52, Accounts and Ledger of Weilburg Plantation, Demerara, 1767-1770*, John Carter Brown Library, Providence, RI. See also: *Day book and ledger of Prospect Estate, 1791-1796*, National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS), inv. nr. CS96/4483.

⁵⁰ Villiers, *Storm van ’s Gravesande*, 368. Original quotation: “had (...) voldoende bewys in handen en konde die trekkers gerust aantasten; dan had ik den draad & ’t kluwen soude haest volgen, want deese moeten bloeden soo draa andere beklappen & zoude de geheele zaak voor den dag koomen.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 372, 386.

Storm condemned planters who bought illegal captives, he judged it too harsh to push them to financial ruin.⁵²

Storm's successor Trotz also saw the need to prevent executions. When he was confronted in 1774 with protested bills of the widow FitzPatrick, he had two choices: be patient and hope she would be able to pay later, or execute the estate to procure the money. He chose the former, as he considered execution of the estate "such a ruinous measure, that I am frightened when I count the multitude of our citizens that are nominated for that death sentence, because of the general discredit and weakening of prices of our products, which starts to generate a chaos of confusion here."⁵³ Interestingly, this reluctance to execute estates was paired with a belief that *if* it came to execution, the matter would be solved in an orderly manner. However, this faith turned out to be mistaken. "Orderly" was not a term that fit well with the interactions in the two colonies, but the process of establishing debt preference proved particularly problematic.

If all debts are preferential...

There were four groups that vied for preference of their claims: the Company, the mortgage holders, provision traders and those involved in the slave trade. The latter group consisted of the slave traders themselves, but also of the auctioneer in the colonies, who was supposed to stand in for planters' slave debts, as we shall see below.

The interests of the slave traders and of the fund directors were the most directly opposed. Although both groups had an interest in stimulating the plantation complex, they competed for the produce. The mortgage conditions obliged the planter to consign his cash crops to the fund director, while the slave traders preferred cash crops over bills as well, which involved more risks. As Chapter 4 explained, slavers had to accept that planters paid with very long bills. Slave traders tried in vain to obtain the right to take cash crops as payment. Neither did they succeed in getting the right to reclaim enslaved Africans in case bills proved unreliable. Furthermore, there was an element of provincial rivalry involved. In cases of financial distress, a

⁵² Ibid., 379-380.

⁵³ Trotz to Chamber Zealand, 24 April 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.200-201. Original quotation: "sulke ruineuse middelen sijn, dat is er van schrik als ik gaan optellen de menigte onser burgers der welke op dat doot vonnis genomineerd staan, door 't algemeen discredit en verslapping der prijzen onser producten 't geen hier thans een chaos van verwarring begint te geven."

mortgage fund from Holland might put the payment of a bill in favour of slavers from Zeeland last in line.⁵⁴

The WIC attempted to regulate the financial side of the slave trade through mandatory auctions. The idea was that all planters had the same chance of buying enslaved Africans, while in theory the auctioneer or salesmaster (*vendumeester*) stood as security for the planter's debts to the slave trader. Similar to the British system, the planters would assign their bills of exchange to the auctioneer, so the slave traders did not have to deal with all the individual, potentially unreliable planters. To compensate for this risk, the auctioneer received a fee. The sources differ on whether it was 2 or 5 per cent of the value, and how much was to go back to the WIC coffers is unclear. Nevertheless, it is telling that the office of *vendumeester* was generally considered to be one of the most rewarding in the colony, requiring little effort.⁵⁵ However, the auctioneer Adriaan Spoors seemingly refused to stand as security in at least 1763 and 1764, undermining the purpose. His refusal made the auction fees into an extra tax without providing any security to the slavers. They still had to deal with risky bills, or take their human cargo elsewhere, which is what many of them did.

According to Storm van 's Gravesande, the rules offered ample protection for both the auctioneer and the slave traders. Disagreeing with Spoor on many issues, he thought that Spoor should accept his responsibility, which entailed little risk. Storm noted that the auctioneer could order the immediate execution of an estate if debts were not paid and had the right of preference.⁵⁶ Although Storm became increasingly opposed to executions, as the web of debt grew tighter, he still had enough faith in the system to follow his own advice, when he himself fulfilled the role of auctioneer (ad interim) in the late 1760s, as we shall see below in the case of Callaert's estate.

Yet ideas about rights of preference proved fluid in the under-regulated colonies. From a Council meeting in 1771 we can gather that execution was far from a straightforward affair. In this meeting the Council had a heated discussion on the hierarchy of debts regarding the inventory of four deceased inhabitants. One of the estates belonged to the former auction

⁵⁴ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 205-213.

⁵⁵ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9424, f.107; NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr 450; Trotz to Zeeland Chamber, 1-1-1774, TNA, CO 116/39 f.113.

⁵⁶ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol 2: 449-450.

master Nicholas Rousselet de la Jarie, who had died on 24 June 1767.⁵⁷ The first proposal for a hierarchy of debt put the right of reclamation (*rei vindicato*) first, followed by “domestic debts (*inlandse schulden*), including mortgages. Third came taxes (*landspenningen*) and fourth was wages and maintenance for the plantation. The last in line were protested bills, followed by salaries of scribes and those in charge of sequestration. In other words, it seems that mortgage holders and slave traders would be first in line.⁵⁸

However, the Council decided to improvise its own order of preference, favouring the colonial interest. Duties to the colonial government came first; salaries, servants’ pay, and advances were second; third, mortgages; and fourth, protested bills of exchange. In other words, the Councillors made sure that all local interests were served first, before outside debtors would get anything. Two slaving firms had claims to the inventory of Rousselet de la Jarie, namely Snouck, Hurgonje & Louissen for 17,599 guilders, and De Bruyn & De Smit for 74,819 guilders—who were also mortgage fund directors. And these were only two of the 43 claims on a total sum of 187,918 guilders. Yet the available capital only comprised 81,418 guilders. With insufficient funds and with the protested bills last in line, the slavers were unlikely to get their money. They intended to take the matter to the States-General, but no resolution is known. In addition, even though mortgage creditors were in a better position, they did not have any guarantee that they could get their money back either.⁵⁹

In other situations different orders might be established, but that only underscores the insecurity within the system. In 1773, when Trotz was jointly in charge of the sequestration of the *Moerassie* plantation, he delivered provisions to the estate which ended up last in line. He had another claim that was awarded when the plantation was sold, but then the whole procedure started anew and Trotz’s claims were not even considered. Trotz suspected the new ordering had been arranged to avoid paying certain people. He contemplated bringing the case before the Court of Holland, but it is uncertain if this ever happened. Regardless, it shows the arbitrariness and improvisation that characterised the colonies.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid., vol. 2: 546. Rousselet de la Jarie had been appointed salesmaster after Adriaan Spoors became unable to fulfil his duties due to eye problems.

⁵⁸ Extract from the minutes of the Court of Justice, 3 June 1771, TNA, CO 116/39, f.206.

⁵⁹ Extract from the minutes of the Court of Justice, 3 June 1771, TNA, CO 116/39, f.206-210; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 748, 3 September 1773.

⁶⁰ Trotz to WIC, 13 September 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 23-26.

Finally, Trotz attributed part of the financial chaos to the local *Wees- en Onbeheerde Boedelkamer* (Insolvency Chamber). When the Court of Justice scrutinised their books, a host of irregularities turned up, ranging from deficient paperwork to sums that remained unpaid and apparently had gone into other pockets. Consequently, the president of the Chamber was made financially responsible himself to pay outstanding claims. Instead of arranging an orderly settlement, Trotz remarked, the Insolvency Chamber had become a Robbery Chamber. Unsurprisingly, the Chamber president could not pay for all debts and Trotz placed his estate under sequestration the following year.⁶¹

All of the above issues regarding mortgage claims, auctioneer's rights and unowned estates came together in the case of Pieter Callaert. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, Callaert's financial troubles were at the root of the large slave uprising in 1772. Callaert acquired the *Anna Catharina* estate, but his bills apparently came back protested. Storm, as auctioneer, was then left with 13,085 guilders in protested bills (around 5/8 of the 21,000 guilders Callaert paid for the estate). On 18 August 1772 Storm auctioned the estate and P.C. Hooft paid 48,600 guilders for it, using mortgage credit from the fund of Jan van Rijneveld & Soonen. Two other planters stood as guarantors for Hooft's debt. After Hooft's death in the revolt, however, the guarantors refused to pay anything. Thus, the mortgage fund was now left as owner of the indebted plantation. Trotz, as auctioneer, had taken over 22,614 guilders in repeatedly protested bills from Storm, apparently convinced he had a solid claim. In the meantime, it turned out that Hooft also had a current account with the mortgage fund of Tulleken de Vos & Comp. in Amsterdam, of almost 10,000 guilders. The other fund of Rijneveld & Soonen then proposed to ask the Insolvency Chamber to sell Hooft's *other* estate, *Cornelia & Ida*, to recoup the money. However, the financial entanglement proved so great that the matter ended up before the States-General, in 1776. The States-General had already provided an instruction on debt handling in 1774, but the new one explicitly dealt with insolvent estates and non-insolvent ones that were put up for auction.⁶²

⁶¹ Trotz to WIC, 13 September 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 23-26; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3831, 25 Juli 1776, f.453-454.

⁶² *Brief met bijlagen van directeur-generaal en raden van Rio Essequibo en Rio Demerary aan de Staten-Generaal betreffende de afdoening van de boedels van Pieter Callard en Pieter Christiaan Hooft, eigenaars van de plantages 'Cornelia' en 'Ida' alsmede Cornelia Cattiari, 1776*, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9552; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3831, 21 June 1776, f.381; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 1506.

The States-General's ruling of 4 October 1774 was based on a proposal by the WIC, which logically favoured its own interests. In the new ruling, debts by Company employees to the WIC were preferential. In general, poll taxes and other colonial duties became preferential to other debts (although these were small compared to mortgage debts). A claimant could bring his case before Court, after which the bailiff could lay claim to the movable property of the debtor. Real estate was excluded, and so were the enslaved. Execution of real estate involved a more elaborate affair. Only a year after the claim was made, and six months after the advertisements had been placed—three times—in the Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Middleburgh newspapers. Two curators, of which one had to be an agent of the mortgage fund, if applicable, would take care of the administration, for a fee of 10 per cent of the crops. Nevertheless, the States-General instructed the local officials to arrange settlements, to avoid lengthy procedures.⁶³

The ruling was a typical product of Company reasoning: it took good care of its own affairs, yet failed to address the underlying issue of the preference problems. In fact, the same ruling noted that the legal system in the colonies would be based on the rules and criminal procedures of Holland of 1570, 1580 and 1599.⁶⁴ Neither the WIC nor the States-General apparently felt the need to formulate a more solid legal framework, leaving matters into the unpredictable, improvising hands of colonial actors. Only the chaotic situation surrounding Hooft's plantation spurred the States-General to expand on the rules about preference.

Indeed, the "new way of proceeding" of 1776 was explicitly aimed at rectifying the irregularities and malpractices that resulted from the lack of "fixed and certain ordinances" (*vaste en bepaalde ordonnantie*). The new rules aimed to lay out the procedure for *Judicium Praeferentiae et Concurrentiae*. Two curators had to assemble all claims, also through advertisements in the metropolis, after which the creditors had to reach an agreement. In case of conflict, the opposers could make a counter claim within 14 days, after which another two weeks were available for reply, and again for the counterargument. Two months later the local Court of Justice would pass the sentence. Real estate would be sold in four instalments, and the buyer would only acquire full ownership after paying everything. Two guarantors had to commit themselves as well. First mortgages were

⁶³ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3829, 4 October 1774, f. 590-598.

⁶⁴ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3829, 4 October 1774, f. 590-598.

preferential over second mortgages, and after a settlement had been reached the case was closed.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, it still remained unclear how these rules would work in practice, if multiple people considered their claims preferential. It was a (presumed) Barbadian, Alleyne Culpeper, who in 1777 asked the States-General to clear up the matter and provide future guidance. Culpeper had extended a mortgage to *Mes Delices*, which was about to be sold. He believed his claim to be preferential, but was unsure and asked if the preference ordering could be established *before* the execution. That way, he could offer more at the auction and acquire the full estate. If most of his money would come back to him to settle his preferential claim, he could bid higher. Conversely, if others had preference, he would be more cautious. Earlier, he had tried to get an answer in the colonies, but in vain. The Council thought it a good idea if the bailiff would lay claim to all possessions of a debtor in case of a claim and settle the matter quickly, because prices could fluctuate greatly. Apparently, it also included a proposal to give preference to the first creditor pushing for execution. When this proposal reached the WIC, the directors shot it down. In this scenario, anyone with even a petty claim would have an incentive to file a claim quickly and demand execution. The result would be financial chaos. Therefore, the matter went higher up, to the States-General.⁶⁶

The debate showed that the different provinces had difficulty formulating a workable solution. Interestingly, the most thought-through reply did not come from Holland, as financial centre, but from the States of Utrecht. The States of Holland noted that executed estates drew much higher prices if the preference was established *before* the execution, rather than afterwards. Nevertheless, they did not want to establish a standard policy, preferring to let the mortgage funds decide in each specific case. Apparently, the option of favouring first claimants was still on the table, as Utrecht strongly argued against it. Rather, it was best to let creditors compete with each other after the deduction of preferential debts. Furthermore, the one demanding the auction should pay for the execution costs. That way, creditors would think

⁶⁵ In these new rules, advertisements also had to be placed in the Utrecht newspapers. NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02/1506. For examples of second and third mortgages that could become preferential, in Suriname, see: Oostindie, *Roosenburg en Mon Bijou*, 293.

⁶⁶ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3832, 28 August 1777, f.606-607.

twice before choosing this option and would also be deterred from making risky loans they could not easily collect.⁶⁷

The change from individualised to more standardised procedures reflected developments in the metropolis. In Amsterdam the Insolvency Chamber had existed since 1643, which received cases directed to it by the city's aldermen. However, a debtor often arranged a private settlement with his creditors, and also remained responsible for any payments to creditors. In 1777, after more than a century, the rules changed. The Insolvency Chamber now took over the responsibility to make a settlement and pay the creditors, as trustee on behalf of the debtor.⁶⁸

However, while the *procedure* in the colonies had become clearer, *preference* still remained a controversial subject. While Company debts were on top of the list, the rest of the order was less straightforward. While in Amsterdam one could register a debt with a notary, the colonial reality proved less orderly. The Secretary could prove unreliable, as in the case of Hooft, where the colonial books showed no sign of a mortgage, although the fund of Rijneveld & Soonen did have clear proof in its own administration.⁶⁹ Additionally, while mortgage funds believed their claims were preferential, other actors in the colonies thought differently.

The issue of plantation provisions proved particularly salient. Supplies were typically a local affair, which explains why the Council in 1771 put such debts high in the debt hierarchy. Furthermore, as the enslaved were hit hardest by financial crises, colonial legislators realised that the provision trade should not be disrupted. Bolstered by debates about amelioration, the British Caribbean saw an increasing number of laws giving preference to food and clothing for the enslaved. Within the British Caribbean, the Leeward Islands were probably the first, in 1798, but by the 1820s similar laws were in place on most British islands.⁷⁰ The Dutch States-General considered similar legislation in 1778. In a debate about the rights of reclamation by mortgage funds, the States of Holland proposed to make mortgage debt preferential—after WIC debts—but on condition that the

⁶⁷ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3833, 6 February 1788, f.77; Ibid., 13 May 1778, f.361-365.

⁶⁸ Christiaan van Bochove and Heleen Kole, "Uncovering Private Credit Markets: Amsterdam, 1660-1809," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, no. 3 (2014) 50.

⁶⁹ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9552; ACA, Notarissen, 5075, Notary Kier van der Piet, 13917/25.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Crawford, "In the Wreck of a Master's Fortune': Slave Provisioning and Planter Debt in the British Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition* 37 no. 2 (2016) 11-13.

directors kept the plantation intact. If they did not, they would be forced to honour bills from planters who supplied their estate themselves. This conditionality included food, clothing, medication, and even enslaved Africans. Acquisitions had to be made with consent of the agents of the mortgage fund. If they refused, a planter could ask the Court to intervene, which could approve the expenses for provisions, but not for enslaved Africans. If the bills came back in protest, they would be preferential to all other debts, excluding Company debts. While it is unclear if this proposal was adopted, the other provinces seemed in favour.⁷¹

Actors in the colonies at least believed that claims for provisions were preferential. When, in 1780, Johan Bremer tried to collect a debt for goods delivered by his principal, Captain Jan Rousman, a local councillor told him he was out of luck, unless his cargo had consisted of the typical slave provisions of plantains and *bakkeljauw* (cod).⁷² A similar situation unfolded in 1800 with the Bostonian businessman Theodore Barrell (see Chapter 6). He had delivered nearly 14,000 guilders in provisions to a recently deceased connection of his. Barrell feared there was not enough money in the estate to satisfy all claims, although he believed the executors would favour him. He likely only advanced such a large sum because he expected to be able to get it back: “as the chief of my demand is for plantation supplies I think in justice I ought to be among the first to be attended to.” Nevertheless, nine days later he was no longer so sure and expressed his desire to quit life as a merchant and choose a less risky career as commission agent.⁷³ In other words, colonial assumptions about debt settlements proved pivotal in creating the situation of financial entanglement, although they could crumble once they were put to the test.

The Changuion factor

A final example in which insecurity and false optimism came together is the protracted court case between Peter Brotherson, a British planter, and Francois Changuion Jr., councillor and agent for his brother Daniel’s

⁷¹ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3833, 16 July 1778, f.529-534; Ibid., 27 August 1778, f.621-624.

⁷² Johan Bremer to Jan Rousman, 28 February 1780, *Brieven als Buit*, <http://brievenalsbuit.inl.nl/zeebrieven/page/article?doc=87&query=>, accessed 26 August 2016.

⁷³ Theodore Barrell to Walter Barrell, 15 September 1800, New York Historical Society (hereafter NYHS), Theodore Barrell Letter Book, f.130 (quotation); Theodore Barrell to Samuel Sandbach, 24 September 1800, *ibid.*, f.132-133.

mortgage fund. In 1770, Brotherson bought the *Haynieroenie* plantation and wanted to enter Daniel Changuion's mortgage fund. Francois Changuion Jr. valued the estate at 78,700 guilders, and granted a mortgage of 5/8 of the value on behalf of his brother's fund. Brotherson then drew 48,000 guilders in bills, in favour of the auctioneer (J.C. van den Heuvel), to pay for the estate.⁷⁴

Yet in this moment of seemingly endless credit opportunities, the colonial actors had been too optimistic. Daniel Changuion had not confirmed the mortgage in the metropolis and Brotherson soon learned that Changuion was in fact protesting bills of several of his clients. Indeed, Brotherson's bills also came back in protest, leaving him with a large debt to the auctioneer. The local court ordered him to pay all of it, including the 25 per cent protest costs. Furthermore, two solid endorsers had to guarantee this new bill of exchange. Yet this last condition proved too difficult, so Brotherson negotiated to pay 5 per cent more, to do without endorsers. He sent an agent to the metropolis to procure a new mortgage. Van den Santheuvel proved willing to provide one, for a hefty 3 per cent commission, so now Brotherson could settle his previous debts. Brotherson then tried to get Francois Changuion Jr to pay for all the extra costs he had incurred, but the latter refused, referring him to his brother Daniel. Yet Daniel stated that Francois had overstepped his power of attorney: mortgages of 5/8 of the appraised value were only available for estates that already produced crops, not for new grounds like Brotherson's. Thus, it was Francois' problem he had promised too much.⁷⁵

Brotherson then sued Francois Changuion Jr. to get his money back. A first attempt in 1771 apparently did not provide a resolution, as Changuion himself was a member of the Council of Justice. Brotherson then wanted to take the matter to the Court of Holland, but as a foreigner he had to post a deposit which proved problematic. The colonial Court thus was the only solution, but Francois Changuion Jr. had returned to Holland. When he returned to the colonies in 1778, Brotherson seized his chance. Yet the Court tried to arrange a settlement and in the meantime the case dragged

⁷⁴ *Dossiers betreffende het proces voor de Staten-Generaal van Pieter Brotherson, eigenaar van de plantage 'Haynieroenie' in Rio Demerary, impetrant bij mandement van revisie contra François Changuion jr., gedaagde*, NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9602. The other *priseur*, together with Francois Changuion Jr., was Jacob Bogaart.

⁷⁵ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9602. The broker that secured the mortgage, John Tuite, also received a 3 per cent commission fee of the mortgage sum.

on for years. The point of contention was whether Francois Changuion Jr.'s instruction permitted him to arrange mortgages or not. In the end, it appeared that he was only allowed to *inspect* estates, after which the request for a mortgage had to be sent to the metropolis for confirmation. Hence, in 1783, twelve and a half years after Brotherson had bought the plantation, he was proven right. Francois Changuion Jr. had to pay all the extra costs Brotherson had made, plus interest, to a total of 31,266 guilders.⁷⁶

The Changuion brothers played a key role in creating the financial chaos in the two colonies. Daniel as fund director extended many mortgages in the spirit of "irrational exuberance", granting them in his personal name, instead of his fund's name.⁷⁷ It comes as no surprise then that his brother saw little wrong in promising mortgages without the proper paperwork. However, providing all too easy credit was not a viable long-term strategy, explaining why Daniel started to protest bills in the 1770s. His business operations remained obscure afterwards, as in 1791 a group of bondholders demanded the opening of his books, although by that time they should have been repaid.⁷⁸

Francois was also a remarkable character. While he served in all administrative bodies between the 1760s and 1780s, he also took care to serve his own interests. In 1771, prior to the Brotherson case, he had sold lands also in the Haynieroenie creek, but the buyer soon found out the surface area was 330 acres less than contracted. Francois was aware of it and seemed to offer compensation, but rising land prices still allowed him to profit from it.⁷⁹ And Trotz, writing that the Insolvency Chamber had turned into a Robbery Chamber, emphasised that its previous president, Francois Changuion Jr., had contributed greatly to this development.⁸⁰ Yet after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, Changuion Jr. was one of the new councillors supposed to bring order to the colonies.⁸¹

The Changuions were not the cause of the chaotic and insecure financial situation in Essequibo and Demerara, but they illustrate how the colonies worked. Without a clear and impartial legal framework to rely on, personal

⁷⁶ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9602. The interest charged was simple interest, totalling 13,400 guilders.

⁷⁷ ACA, Notarissen, 5075, inv. nr. 11479/94-96; Ibid., inv. nr. 5230/18; Ibid., inv. nr. 15234/195; Ibid., inv. nr. 15282/263; Ibid., inv. nr. 15229/176. For the concept, see: Robert Shiller, *Irrational Exuberance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ ACA, Notarissen 5075, inv. nr. 16739/115, f. 656.

⁷⁹ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3826, 26 Juli 1771, f.488-489.

⁸⁰ Trotz to WIC, 13 September 1773, TNA, CO 116/39, f. 23-26.

⁸¹ L'Espinasse to WIC, 31 December 1787, TNA, CO 116/61, f.170.

relations (to influence court rulings) became more important and dubious transactions gained currency. In this situation of insecurity, long-term strategies were hard to formulate, prompting colonial actors to improvise in the short term. Some thrived in this situation, others did not. In the historiography, however, there is a clear distinction between winners and losers.

Comparing Dutch and British approaches

On the one hand we have the financial disappointment of the Dutch *negotiaties*, while on the other hand Guiana was a place of “very rapid and splendid fortunes” for British planters.⁸² Indeed, many British owners of Guianese plantations received large compensations when slavery was abolished in 1834.⁸³ This difference between Dutch and British fortunes is not just a difference between eighteenth-century difficulties and nineteenth-century opulence.⁸⁴ Already under Dutch rule, foreign planters seemingly raked in large profits. For example, in 1761 Gedney Clarke Jr, who I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, claimed to have recouped the full sum of 12,000 pounds sterling (around 144,000 guilders) he had paid for his estate *Het Loo* in just one year. In subsequent year he apparently made a profit of 4,000 pounds (almost 50,000 guilders).⁸⁵ Clarke was an avid smuggler, which surely contributed to his fortune.⁸⁶

For later British writers the explanation was clear: the Dutch were just lousy planters. The British traveller Henry Bolingbroke wrote at the turn of the nineteenth century: “[The Dutch] aspire only to a competency not to a fortune; and they waste labor [sic], under an idea of having their estates look like gardens. The Englishman makes more of his property; but the

⁸² David Alston, “‘Very Rapid and Splendid fortunes’? Highland Scots in Berbice (Guyana) in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* (2006); Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 122–25.

⁸³ Draper, “New Planter Class”.

⁸⁴ This is not the place to take up the discussion on whether the plantation complex was still profitable after 1776 or if it was self-defeating. For some important contributions, see: Eric Williams, *Capitalism & slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994 [originally 1944]); Drescher, *Econocide*; Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*; Justin Roberts, “Uncertain Business: A Case Study of Barbadian Plantation Management, 1770–93,” *Slavery & Abolition*, no. 2 (2011); Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *British Capitalism and Caribbean slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*.

⁸⁵ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol 1: 390.

⁸⁶ See Chapter 6.

Dutchman leaves it a better inheritance.” Bolingbroke deemed the Dutch good accountants, but as long as they did not increase their estates, like the British, they would never become wealthy.⁸⁷ However, Bolingbroke’s simplistic dichotomy proves untenable if we look at the period before the British takeover. It nevertheless prompts the question of to what extent differences in credit practices can account for the divergent image in Dutch and British historiography.

To start with Bolingbroke’s point: size did not matter. During most of the century no significant difference existed in the number of enslaved Africans that planters of different “nationalities” employed. In the few surveys that were conducted, the most surprising element is the low number of enslaved workers per plantation. For example, the average number of enslaved Africans in 1788 was 40 in Essequibo and 60 in Demerara.⁸⁸ Several factors can account for this low number: many plantations were still developing; planters underreported their number of enslaved, as they had to pay taxes for them; and these overviews sometimes included private persons with a few enslaved servants but without a plantation. Nevertheless, one can hardly speak of the large-scale, intensive exploitation that would come to characterise Demerara during the nineteenth century. Indeed, as the British brought in a large number of Africans after the takeover, the average number of slaves per plantation rapidly increased to a more than 100 in 1798 (see Table 2.1 and 3.1). Furthermore, in Demerara 46 per cent of the plantations had between 100 and 200 enslaved workers, and another 40 per cent had between 200 and 300 slaves.⁸⁹ In other words, a transition to a more intensive, British-dominated system took place only at the end of the century. In the previous period difference in scale of production between “nationalities” was negligible, even though certain individuals like Gedney Clarke did engage in the large-scale exploitation of multiple estates. In general, however, if we want to find a difference between British and Dutch planters we have to look elsewhere.

A major advantage British planters had was a protected home market. If a planter succeeded in illicitly selling his produce in London, he would receive a much better price than on the open market of Amsterdam. This protected market resulted in higher prices, although the exact difference

⁸⁷ Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 37.

⁸⁸ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02 inv. nr. 192A and 193A; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 192B.

⁸⁹ Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 47.

with other countries remains unclear. One historian estimated that British sugars were priced between one-quarter and one-third higher than those in France. Another estimate put the price of London muscovado sugar at least 15 per cent higher than in Amsterdam, and probably around 23 per cent in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Coffee and cotton, on the other hand, are said to be around the same prices as on the European continent.⁹⁰ Smuggling sugar would thus pay off for British planters.

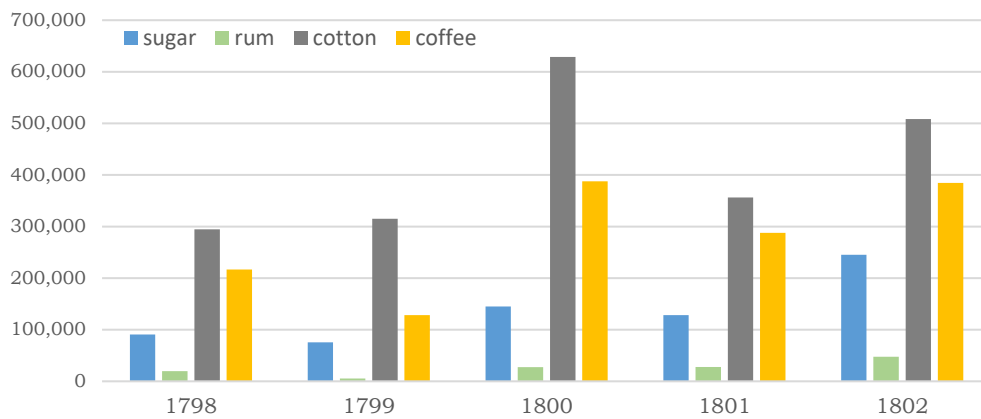
The British were perhaps also the more perceptive planters, recognising the potential for cotton cultivation on the coast. In the early eighteenth century, most plantations were laid out upriver, in order to be protected from privateers, foreign armies and the tide. Gradually, the soil of these estates became depleted and in 1740 it was discovered that land closer to the coast was much more fertile. Furthermore, Demerara was believed to be more fertile than Essequibo, and most British planters indeed settled in Demerara.⁹¹ And although the coast was deemed too saline for sugar, coffee or plantains, it proved suitable for cotton.⁹² The demand for cotton was likely higher in Britain than in the Dutch Republic, and most cotton planters were British. As Figure 5.1 shows, cotton was the crop that delivered the greatest value by the end of the century, after the British takeover. Cotton was a lighter crop and significantly more valuable per pound. Figure 5.2 shows that it was generally surpassed by sugar and coffee in volume. The same figure also shows that after the British occupation a sudden boom in cotton exports occurred. While this development is partly the result of the general expansion in the colonies, the major factor must have been the rampant smuggling in previous years. In fact, that observation is the only reliable inference one could make from the figure.

⁹⁰ Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 68; Nierstras, *Rivalry for Trade*, 37; O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, 58, 61-6, 73.

⁹¹ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 45.

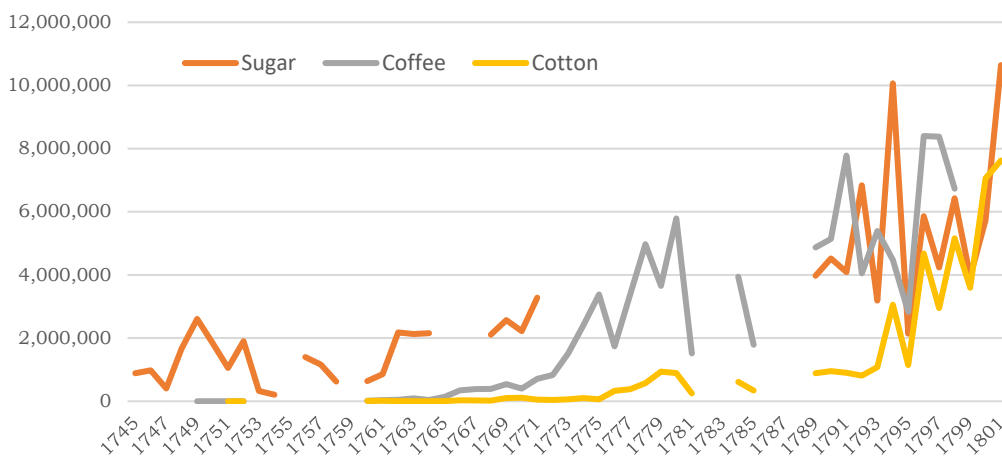
⁹² Dalton, *History of British Guiana*, 224; for a similar movement in Berbice, see: K. Kramer, "Plantation Development in Berbice from 1753 to 1779: The Shift from Interior to the Coast," *New West Indian Guide*, 1/2 (1991).

Figure 5.1: Registered exports from Essequibo and Demerara
1798-1802, in pounds sterling



Source: TNA, CO 111/4, f.179.

Figure 5.2: Registered exports from Essequibo and Demerara,
1745-1801, in lbs

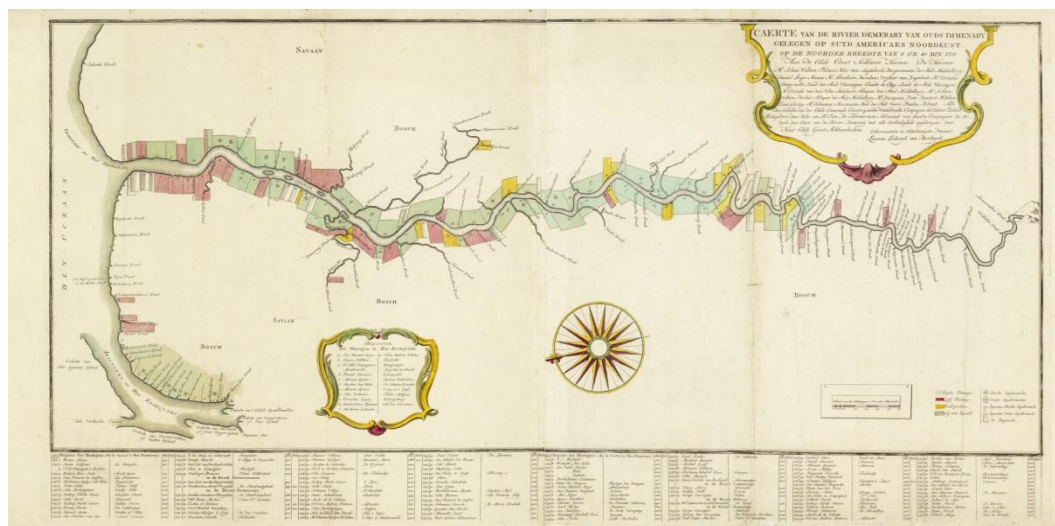


Source: Bolingbroke, *A Voyage*, 397; TNA, CO 111/3, f.209-213; TNA, CO 111/4, f.179.

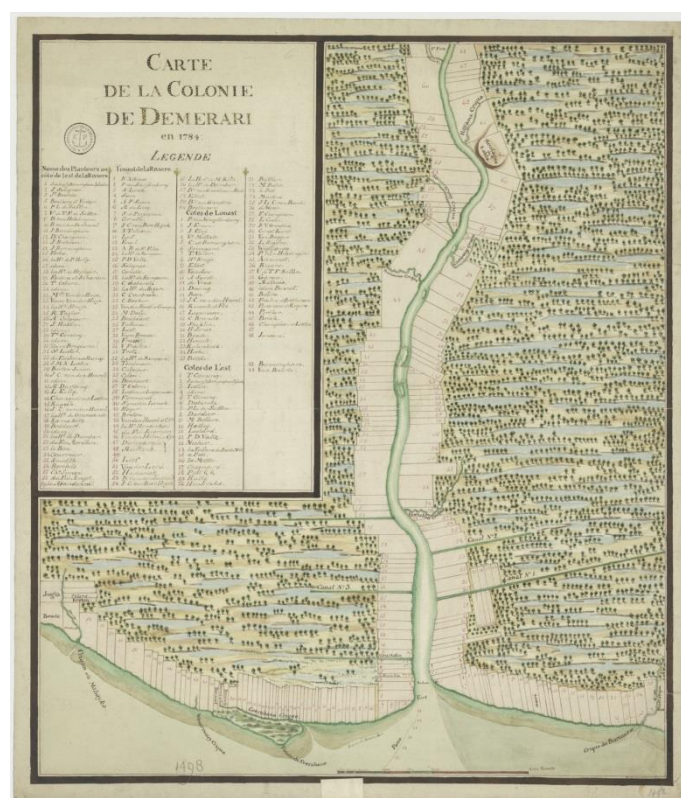
The three maps below clearly show the transition from the river banks to the coast. On Map 5.1, of Demerara in 1759 (oriented roughly east-west), it is clear that virtually all plantations are laid out along the river sides. The most upstream plantations were abandoned already, but only a handful plantations are visible on the coast. Furthermore, according to the legend there are only sugar, coffee and bread estates, no cotton. Map 5.2, made in 1784 during the French occupation, reveals that Demerara's coastline is dotted with plantations. While crops are not mentioned, it is likely that most of those sea cost estates produced cotton, as is revealed by Map 5.3, from

1798. There one can see that both Demerara and Essequibo's west coast also had sugar and cotton estates, but that the majority of the plantations produced cotton. Especially Demerara's east coast and the utmost western coast of Essequibo were fully covered in cotton estates. The small sea fronts allowed a large number of plantations to be laid out, making maximum use of the fertile soil. The colonial administration was so unorderedly that for a very large number of estates the owners are unknown, particularly in Essequibo. For Demerara's east coast, however, the data is better and the names suggest that a large majority of the owners were non-Dutch.⁹³

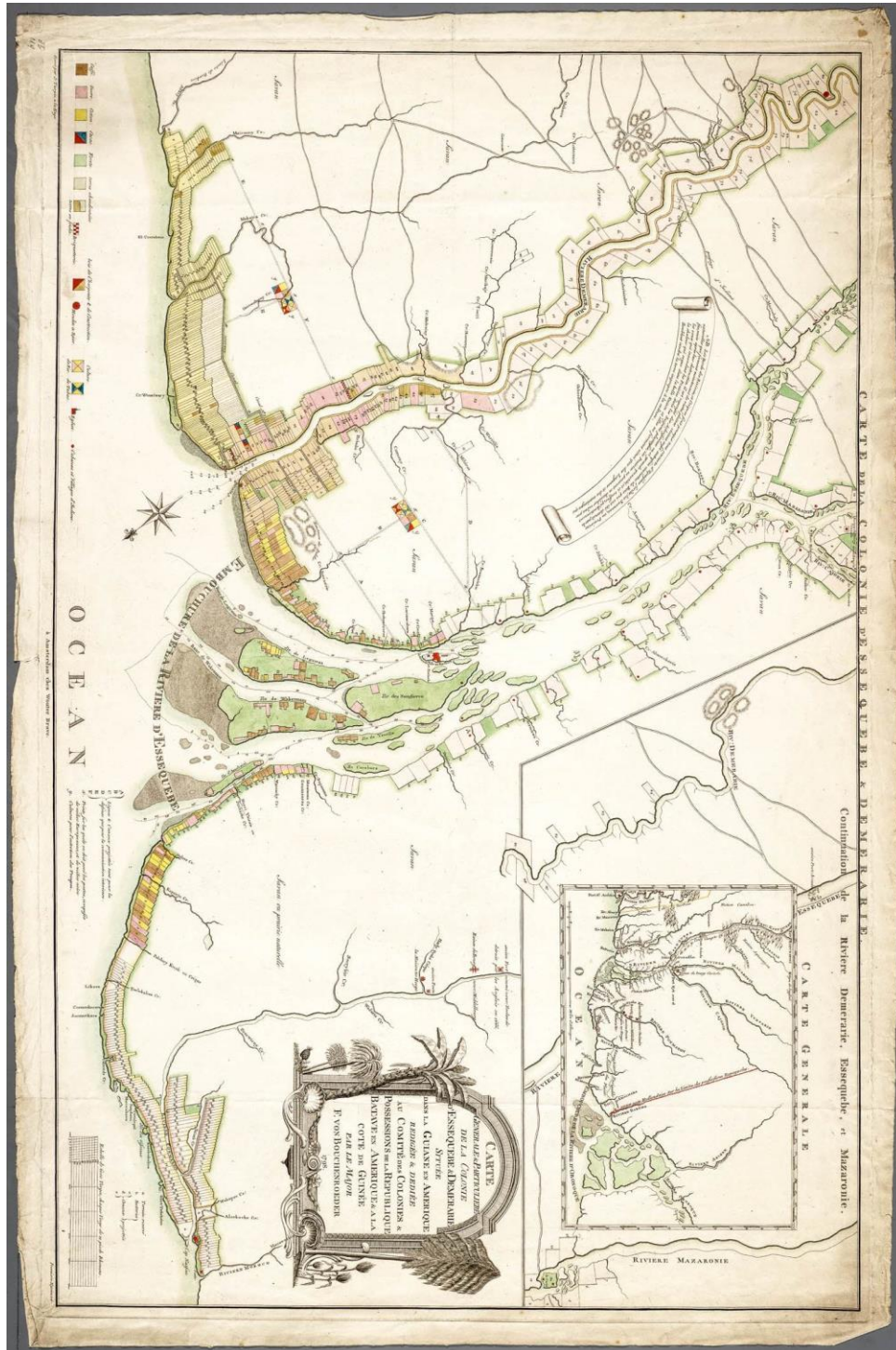
⁹³ See the list of names belonging to Map 5.3:
http://dpc.uba.uva.nl/cgi/i/image/image-idx?sid=227d1a6701d2d90bff84cf510d2057e3;q1=Friederich%20von%20Bouchenr%F6der;rgn1=surinamica_all;size=20;c=surinamica;lasttype=boolean;view=entry;lastview=thumbnail;subview=detail;cc=surinamica;entryid=x-627;viewid=SURI01_KAARTENZL-105-23-05-1.SID;start=1;resnum=2, accessed 27 August 2016 (part 1);
<http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/?/zoom/index/&language=nl&i=http%3A%2F%2Fresolver.kb.nl%2Fresolve%3Furn%3Durn%3Aagv%3ASURI01%3AKAARTENZL-105-23-05-2%26size%3Dlarge>, accessed 27 August 2016 (part 2).



Map 5.1: *Caerte van de rivier Demerary van Ouds Immenary, gelegen op Suyd Americaes Noordkust op de Noorder Breedte van 6 Gr. 40 Min*, Laurens Lodewyk van Berchyck, 1759, NL-HaNA, P.A. Leupe, 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1494.



Map 5.2: *Carte de la Colonie de Demerari en 1784*, unknown artist, 1784, NL-HaNA, P.A. Leupe, 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1498.



Map 5.3: *Generale en speciale kaart der Colonien van de republicq der Ver. Nederl., gelegen in Guyana, langs de Zeekust der rivieren Poumaron, Essequibo, Demerary; van de grensen van Berbice tot de rivier Morocco aan de grens in de Spaansche Bezitting Oronoco, Friederich von Bouchenröder, 1796, NL-HaNA, P.A. Leupe, 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1489.*

British (and other non-Dutch) planters had another advantage, namely the ability to use multiple credit systems. On the one hand, they could use personal credit networks, borrowing large sums of money from individual merchant-bankers (which is a topic I will discuss in the next chapter). On the other hand, a substantial number of British planters relied on the Dutch *negotiatie* to make their entry into the colonies. From Tulleken's original fourteen mortgages, five were granted to persons presumed to be British. For Boddaert, from his original 37 plantations presumably fourteen planters were of British and one of French origin. Considering that around one-third of the planters in the two colonies was British, they were overrepresented in the fund of Boddaert. Additionally, when Dutch planters switched funds in the second phase of investments, British and French planters did exactly the same. We find four British couples with Van den Santheuvel, another two French and two British planters with Van Vloten, and Rijnveld & Zonen welcomed at least five foreign-owned plantations into his fund, including the lonely Italian Octavio Sardi.⁹⁴ Even though the *negotiaties* reached more Dutch than British planters, the credit system still tied planters of different nationalities to the same mortgage houses in the Dutch Republic. As such, the bonds of debt fostered integration among the uniformly indebted planters, as they all had the same incentives to keep the credit flow alive.

Conclusion

In the financial domain, then, a trans-imperial view from the colonies gives a markedly different view of colonial survival than a metropolitan lens. These colonies were not just places where millions of guilders were squandered on unreliable planters. They were also sites where colonists adapted metropolitan conditions and ideas to the local circumstances. This adaptation and improvisation was not necessarily a conscious attempt to frustrate metropolitan objectives; it grew out of the myriad connections between colonial individuals, with all the rivalry, collaboration and arbitrariness that came with it.

⁹⁴ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 269-323; Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol.2: 399-400; TNA, CO 116/36, f.206, 480; *Ingekomen brieven met bijlagen van Essequibo*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 533, f.441-449; NL-HaNA, van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, H14, 1 juni 1769.

The arbitrary dimension is most clearly visible in the conduct of the Court of Justice. Few members had a background in law, and merely considered a councillor to be a “highly profitable *metier*” (*zeer voordelig metier*). According to commissioners Grovestins Boeij (see Chapter 2), the result was that many verdicts were close to worthless.⁹⁵ In the case above we also saw that verdicts could be inconclusive or overturned, to the apparent surprise of even the Director-General. With a legal system that was based on the laws of Holland from the sixteenth century, the councillors had little relevant legal guidance. Yet they did not succeed in establishing a body of jurisprudence that could function as a basis for future insolvency settlements. Instead, each case proved a new battleground, where reputation, personal grudges or the mood of the day could influence the outcome. While appeal to the States-General was possible, the long distances and protracted deliberation process of the States-General itself made this route a difficult one. Furthermore, access to the judicial system proved harder for those who did not speak Dutch—and this number of people only increased throughout the century. If an *ex post* debt settlement was hard to attain, it was also because so few rules existed *ex ante*.

Establishing a clear order of debt preference was a crucial issue yet remained unsolved by the actors involved. The WIC had expressed little interest in providing clear procedures and the States-General’s efforts proved too little, too late. Only after the *negotiatie* bubble had burst, did the States-General attempt to formulate an order of procedures in case of defaults. However, as the credit crunch plunged more and more planters into financial trouble, the rules remained opaque about who would get his money first. Both the mortgage conditions and the discussions in the States-General revealed that no one had thought through how a possible winding down of the *negotiatie* system could take place. Even though Amsterdam investors boasted a long mercantile tradition and had ample experience with defaults, the specifics of the *negotiatie* and the colonial context added a layer of complexity. For instance, an Amsterdam creditor could not easily walk over to a planter’s house to seize his assets. Even if he took the trouble of crossing the ocean, the local Court system was likely to conspire against him. Moreover, it proved only logical to give preference to supplies, especially

⁹⁵ Council of Policy of Demerara to WIC, 21 April 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.372; *Rapport bestemd voor erfstadhouder Willem V opgesteld door zijn commissarissen naar West-Indië*, W.H. van Grovestins en W. Boeij. 1790 juli 17, NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915.

for the enslaved, as without them the estate was worth but little. No wonder then that local provision traders believed their claims to be preferential. The trouble was that almost everyone did, and when all claims have preference, no one does.

Yet the improvised nature of debt handling also was a force of strength. As long as people *believed* they would get their money back, they were likely to continue doing business with each other. Someone like Theodore Barrell would not have advanced 14,000 guilders if he knew his claims stood no chance. The same confidence is visible in the behaviour of the Directors-General, Storm and Trotz, who accepted protested bills, thinking they would eventually be paid. And as both men explained, untangling the web of debt would have disastrous consequences for the entire colony, so it was better to accept the situation as it was.

Consequently, the unwinding of the *negotiatie* system seemed to have taken a different form than in Suriname. In the latter, most investors chose to set up a chartered society to take over the bankrupted estates, convert the bonds into shares, and manage the plantations directly. An administrator was appointed to oversee business, and dividends were only paid if actual profit was made. The popularity of this practice is testified by the fact that in 1796 two-thirds of the Suriname estates were in administrators' hands, a percentage that remained more or less the same until Emancipation.⁹⁶ In contrast, in the case of Essequibo and Demerara the construction of societies that bought the plantation on behalf of the investors seemed less common. The insecurity and financial chaos likely made this transition considerably more difficult than in Suriname. Consequently, many mortgages remained in the hands of the original fund directors or their heirs. In 1814 more than 500 plantations existed in Essequibo and Demerara, of which only 38 were still Dutch. However, 133 still carried a Dutch mortgage.⁹⁷ The *negotiaties* thus cast a long shadow over the plantation sector in the nineteenth century.

However, the *negotiaties* were not the full story of colonial finance in the two colonies. As the Dutch Republic was mired in the provincial struggle between Holland and Zeeland, the British influence in the Atlantic was

⁹⁶ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 160; Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*, 41, 199, 294; J. Marten W. Schalkwijk, *The Colonial State in the Caribbean: Structural Analysis and Changing Elite Networks in Suriname, 1650-1920* (The Hague: Amrit, 2011) 157, 191.

⁹⁷ Van Langen, "Britse overname," 123. The list of mortgages is in TNA, CO 111/28, and transcribed by Paul Koulen: <http://www.cbg.nl/upload/Berbice-Demerara-Essequibo.pdf>, accessed 26 August 2016.

growing.⁹⁸ Furthermore, with the independence of the United States, the Atlantic world became more and more integrated. The Dutch institutional framework failed to adapt to these transitions, but the colonists themselves did not. British planters used Dutch mortgages, but they also had their own networks of credit, and North American traders also expanded their business into plantation ownership. The next chapter elaborates on these developments, and shows how different groups of non-Dutch actors participated in constructing the West Indian web.

⁹⁸ Oostindie, "British Capital," 51; Oostindie, "Dutch Atlantic Decline," in Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*.

6 Inter-imperial individuals

Personal regional, intra-American and trans-Atlantic networks

As the previous chapters established, colonial survival hinged on improvisation by local actors. The interactions between colonists and enslaved, planters and traders, and Dutch and non-Dutch actors, all contributed to the shape of the West-Indian web in Essequibo and Demerara.

Yet some individuals stand out. Studying individuals, as Emma Rothschild recently remarked, can be valuable for three reasons: importance, illustration and representativeness. A particular person might have performed a pivotal function as administrator, creditor or commander of troops. Secondly, case studies can illustrate how larger events or debates unfolded in practice, such as the changing nature of colonial administration or the growing resistance to slavery. Finally, a case study can offer a mirror to show the similarities and differences with regard to other actors or cases.¹

My aim here is to show how individuals advanced the integration of Essequibo and Demerara in regional, intra-American and trans-Atlantic networks. Many colonists and most of the traders coming to Essequibo and Demerara were foreigners, and so were the individuals studied here. While the choice of people partly depends on the limited source material, the previous chapters have shown that non-Dutch actors were crucial in the colonial survival of the two colonies.² While these non-Dutch actors came from various backgrounds, they had several aspects in common: their family or kin networks were important in establishing their enterprises, virtually all of them engaged in illegal trade, and their love of gain superseded any

¹ Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 7. For other reasonably recent works connecting individuals and empire, see Ogborn, *Global Lives*; Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

² Evidently, the most important non-Dutch actors were the enslaved Africans, as without their labour the colonies had little to no value. In this chapter, however, I will focus on the white non-Dutch actors in their capacities as planters, merchants and agents in the Atlantic economy. So far I have not found a better term than “non-Dutch” to describe all the people of European descent, both creoles and European-born ones.

other social, political or religious fault lines. As such, they clearly illustrate the typical characteristics of life in Essequibo and Demerara.

Firstly, I will investigate why the profit motive, rather than other factors was the most unifying element in the colonies. Essequibo and Demerara's society was shaped by Dutch administrators, Amerindian soldiers, enslaved African workers, Spanish missionaries, French deserters, British slave smugglers, North American suppliers and a multitude of planters. Nevertheless, my argument is that these different origins mattered little, other than in times of war.

Afterwards, the chapter moves on to investigate the three cross-imperial networks that became important for the development of Essequibo and Demerara. The part about regional networks is focused on Barbados, most specifically Gedney Clarke Sr. and Jr. and William Croydon. All of them participated in the early expansion of the two colonies, owned multiple estates and facilitated smuggling. Furthermore, Gedney Clarke Sr. prevented the great Berbice slave uprising in 1763 from spreading to Demerara. The third section of the chapter broadens the scope to include North America, focusing on several Bostonians, called John Hubbard and Gardiner Greene (brothers-in-law) and the merchant Theodore Barrell. I demonstrate that North Americans were not just provision traders, but were also actively involved in plantation ownership. Finally, I analyse the trans-Atlantic networks, with a focus on Scottish ventures. The commercial empire of the firm of Robertson, Parker, McInroy and Sandbach illuminates how British merchants could acquire such great fortunes in Essequibo and Demerara, employing large sums of credit across imperial boundaries. The case of Thomas Cuming underlines these points, while also demonstrating the volatility of Atlantic fortunes.

A planter society?

The planters identified not as nationals of different and competing countries, but more as colleagues in the struggle to make it in the Atlantic economy. This process of identification merits study, for it begs the question of to what extent we can speak of an integrated colonial community. "Identification", as Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker have argued, is a better concept than "identity". The latter, in its strong sense, is static and universal, something an individual or a group has to discover and can even be wrong

about. The weak conceptualisation of “identity”, on the other hand, stipulates that identities are always malleable, constructed and negotiated, and thereby loses its analytical power. Identification is a viable alternative, giving agency to individuals and groups in the self-fashioning of their image, while still allowing for different images under different circumstances.³ This section, then, investigates to what extent planters identified as members of the same religious, social, political or economic community.

Religion, the most obvious candidate to establish a shared understanding among planters, was far from prominent in Essequibo or Demerara. The smaller neighbour of Berbice had its Moravian Brotherhood missionaries, but Essequibo and Demerara barely had a functioning church.⁴ In the 1740s a church building existed on the *Ampa* plantation, but it had fallen into disrepair by 1750. In 1754 the church reopened and Storm asked the Company for five or six dozen simple chairs because it was so crowded. However, there is no mention of a functioning church afterwards. Gedney Clarke Sr. (see below) wanted to establish one, to hold English services, and received permission from Storm to do so, as long as it was at his own cost. The construction was supposed to take place together with the building of a village, yet neither of the projects materialised.⁵

Yet religion was not totally absent from planters’ lives, as a minister performed marriages and baptisms on individual plantations when necessary. Furthermore, makeshift churches existed. In Essequibo services were held in the same building that housed the Secretariat and Council of Policy; in Demerara the lower floor of the Secretariat had a pulpit and a few benches. Apparently, it was good enough for the colonists. In theory Calvinism was the dominant religion, but in practice few people attended services, if only because the estates were widespread and could be days of rowing away. Regardless, the colonies had a reputation of being god-forsaken places. It even proved difficult to get reliable ministers: Rev. Hermanus Lingius was allowed to serve for fourteen years, starting in 1763, despite his shortcomings. The Council was aware of the minister’s “unedifying behaviour” and his drunkenness, and Gedney Clarke asked Storm to prosecute Lingius for shooting and injuring one of “his most

³ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 67-73.

⁴ Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 85; Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana*, 285-290.

⁵ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 271, 301, 308; *Ibid.*, vol. 2: 378.

civilised Creoles". Nevertheless, it took until 1777 before the Reverend was fired for misconduct.⁶

For the WIC, religion was no priority. In theory, the Company should have had ample money for church buildings or the salary of a reliable reverend, for it levied special taxes (*kerk- en armengelden*) for the so-called Church and Poor Fund. While the percentages seemed to have ranged from 0.5 to 2.5 per cent over time, typically 1.5 per cent of all public auctions was destined for this fund, as was one-third of all the fines. In addition, when a ship captain came to register for the necessary pass, he also had to pay an extra 2.50 guilders for the fund. The Church and Poor Fund thus benefitted from almost all financial transactions, so there ought to have been a substantial amount of money available. In fact, in 1795 it amounted to more than 21,177 guilders. However, the fund seemed to have been used mostly for other means. In 1775, for instance, the Council wanted to compensate planters for the slaves that had been executed after the 1772 Callaert rebellion (see Chapter 3). It wanted to pay 400 guilders per rebel, but did not have enough money at hand, and so decided to take it from the Church and Poor Fund, with the aim of replenishing it later. Others stated that the Company used the money for investment in the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, Dutch East India Company), and even the Council recognised that the obligatory contributions to the Fund were just an extra tax.⁷ In colonies that were already underfunded, investment in religion was clearly not a priority.

Religion, then, did not have the potential to act as social glue, and social life took place mostly on individual estates rather than in churches or taverns. Whether taverns existed is unclear—perhaps there was one in Stabroek in Demerara, and likely one on Fort Island in Essequibo. Several

⁶ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915; Council of Policy to WIC, 24 April 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.361; Secretary to Chamber Zealand, 1 March 1774, Ibid., f.186-189; TNA, CO 116/38, f.225; Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 258; L.J.D. Grovestins to WIC, 2 May 1779, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.nr. 309.

⁷ Extract from the Council of Ten, 15 May 1776, NAG, Letterbook 1776 (Feb-May), AG 1, inv. nr. 15, f.163; Council of Policy to WIC, 24 April 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.361; Director-General to WIC, 5 July 1774, Ibid., f.427-430; Van Schuylenburg to WIC, 17 January 1774, Ibid., f.66-67; Schuylenburg to Zealand Chamber, 16 December 1776, TNA CO 116/44, f.408; Extract of Council minutes, 21 June 1775, Ibid., f.418-420; Account of emoluments, TNA, CO 116/55, f.79; Smidt, Lee, T. van der and van Dapperen, *Guyana Ordinance Book*, 8 January 1746; Ibid., Essequibo, 1779-9-14; NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv.nr. 9424, f.107; *Publicatien van directeur-generaal en raden van Cíviele- en Criminele Justitie in Essequibo betreffende de levering van wapenen aan de slaven en de invoer van slaven uit naburige kolonien*, NL-HaNA, VWIS, inv. nr. 140, 6 July 1772; NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.nr. 1032, 19 May 1786; NRS, GD46/17/14, f.817-821.

unofficial drinking establishments existed, as demonstrated by the proclamations of the WIC against selling hard liquor to soldiers in such places.⁸ Nevertheless, for planters the drinking mainly took place at the plantation itself. Since the plantations were laid out along wide stretches of coastline and along rivers leading deep into the interior, distances within the two colonies were large. As a result, it was highly time consuming to travel, especially since one had to be attentive of the tide. Consequently, it was perfectly acceptable to stop over on a plantation to wait for the right tide or to spend the night there.⁹

Social cohesion was also limited by the lack of an urban centre. In Suriname, in contrast, many planters had an additional house in Paramaribo and spend part of the year there, creating a planter community. This urban environment was an important social space for gossip, forming networks or seeking marriage partners.¹⁰ Since Stabroek was only established in the early 1780s, this process of local integration did not have deep roots in Essequibo or Demerara. Furthermore, Stabroek remained a small town throughout the century. Rodway reported that it had 88 houses and 780 inhabitants in 1789, namely 238 whites, 76 free coloureds and 466 enslaved. The town continued to grow though: in 1795 there were 1,594 enslaved people in Stabroek, together with 433 whites and 166 free coloureds. By then, the entire colony of Demerara had 1,241 white inhabitants, and Essequibo 753.¹¹ In other words, almost a quarter of the white population lived in Stabroek by the end of the century. However, it is likely that many of them were not planters, but otherwise involved in the plantation economy, such as shopkeepers or commission agents. Theodore Barrell, one of the case studies, was one of them.

One peculiar element in the make-up of the colonial society was the exclusion of Jewish inhabitants. Whereas Jewish settlers played a prominent role in Suriname, they were shunned from Essequibo and

⁸ Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 37, 41; Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 161. Theodore Barrell to Abby Winslow, 8 February 1843, Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter Columbia RBML), Theodore Barrell Family Papers, MS 0087, box 3, folder 12, f.21; *Essequibo en Demerarische Courant*, no. 26, 27 April 1794, <http://www.vc.id.au/edg/17940427edc.html>, accessed 31 August 2016; Smidt, Lee, T. van der and van Dapperen, *Guyana Ordinance Book*, Essequibo, 5 July 1756; Ibid., Essequibo, 19 August 1768; Ibid., Essequibo, 30 May 1771; Ibid., Essequibo and Demerara, 30 July and 20 August 1793.

⁹ Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 37.

¹⁰ Rodway, *History*, vol. 2: 45-46; TNA, CO 111/3, f.213, 215.

¹¹ Fatah-Black, "Slaves and Sailors," 62.

Demerara.¹² Individual requests to get permission went as high as the States-General, but seemingly without success.¹³ This ban provides a sharp contrast to the supposedly typical Dutch tolerance that was visible, for instance, in New Netherland.¹⁴

For most planters, then, the main element uniting them was the pursuit of economic gain, either through legal or illegal means. This spirit was aptly captured by the British traveller Henry Bolingbroke, when he wrote: “All national enmity seems to be forgotten, while the pursuits of the motley group are directed unanimously to climbing the ladder of fortune.”¹⁵ Previous chapters demonstrated how quickly the “motley group” closed ranks when their illegal trade activities were threatened. Even though informers could theoretically earn substantial sums for denouncing smugglers, in practice that never occurred. As Chapter 2 showed, during the 1780s the colonists preferred a “state of anarchy” that allowed smuggling to one of order with strict rules. Indeed, the entire colony seemed to work against Frans Smeer, the captain who was sent to combat smuggling.

In the political domain, cooperation between planters of different origins was possible, although Dutch planters dominated the administrative apparatus. In 1770 Storm told the WIC directors that it might be good to bar English planters from entering the Council, yet in practice one could not always be so strict.¹⁶ However, the meetings were in Dutch, which not every foreign planter mastered, making direct participation more difficult. Nevertheless, non-Dutch planters could be in the Electoral College that nominated possible councillors and thereby exercise some influence over colonial politics.¹⁷

Patronage also strengthened the position of the Dutch, as the network of Storm van 's Gravesande demonstrates. Governing the colonies between 1743 and 1772, he managed to have his son, Jonathan, appointed as

¹² Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*; Jonathan I. Israel, “The Jews of Dutch America,” in *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450-1800*, ed. Paolo Barnardini and Norman Fiering (New York 2001); Jonathan I. Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jew and the World Maritime Empires (1540-1740)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 527; Council of Policy to WIC, 21 April 1774, TNA, CO 116/39, f.361; NAG, AG 1, inv. nr. 11, 20 October 1774.

¹³ NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3829, 13 October 1774, f.615; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3831, 24 April, 19 Juli and 6 Decemberr 1774, f.235, 437 and 777-778; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3852, 13 February 1789, f.118; NL-HaNA, S-G, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 3857, 4 December 1792, f.946.

¹⁴ Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch origins of American religious liberty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Bolingbroke, *Voyage to Demerary*, 50.

¹⁶ Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, 364.

¹⁷ NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 915.

Commander of Demerara in 1750. Subsequently, when Jonathan died prematurely in 1761, he was replaced by Laurens Lodewijk van Bercheyk, who was Storm's wife's nephew and Jonathan's brother-in-law. And when Van Bercheyk died in 1764, his successor the following year was Jan Cornelis van den Heuvel, Storm's son-in-law.¹⁸ In this closed system it was hard for anyone to get a foothold, let alone for non-Dutch planters.

Yet the lack of formal representation did not hamper political cooperation in the form petitioning. In 1769 William Croydon led an initiative of British planters asking to open the slave trade to foreigners, where other planters (including the colonial administration) rallied behind later. Furthermore, in the defining political issue of the 1780s—the division and election of councillors—the petition of 1785 showed the wide “cross-national” support (see Chapter 2). Clearly, the planter community was united enough to launch a major political protest against the WIC, and origin formed no barrier for political cooperation.

In fact, the only time when planters felt the need to dust off their “national identities” was in times of war, as occurred twice: during the British and French occupation between 1781 and 1784, and after 1796.¹⁹ After the first takeover, in 1781, the British demanded an oath of allegiance of (at least) the Dutch planters, before they would be allowed to access the British commercial network. This demand caused a stirring in the colonies, for it implied that the colonists would be obliged to take up arms against the Dutch Republic. The British tried to win support by stating that their only aim was to see the colonies prosper and by reminding the French planters how Martinique and Guadeloupe had prospered after the British replaced the French. In the end, a compromise was reached and the model of Martinique was followed: the colonists were not obliged to take up arms against “the States of Holland”, until the colonies were officially ceded to Great Britain.²⁰

The British colonists were understandably pleased with Great Britain's intervention. Edward Thompson, the naval officer initially in charge of the occupation, claimed that: “The Inhabitants have but one unanimous wish

¹⁸ Netscher, *History of the Colonies*, 63-64, appendix 1; Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 49, 56.

¹⁹ In 1802 the colonies were briefly returned to the Dutch as part of the Treaty of Amiens, but as soon as war resumed the British took Essequibo, Demerara as well as Berbice into their possession again.

²⁰ Correspondence of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Kingston, TNA, CO 111/1, f.4-5, 41-54, 57, 84-88, 92-93.

which is to be received under the Government of Britain, and never more to return to that of Holland.”²¹ In fact, British planters sent a petition to their King, asking him not to return the colonies to the Dutch. This petition was signed by 76 planters, and spearheaded by William Croydon, whom I will discuss more fully below.²² Many Dutch and other planters probably thought favourably of this idea, as the benefits of being part of the British commercial network were clear: high prices on the protected home market and easy access to the well-oiled machine of British slave trading. However, the French occupation in 1782 prevented this scenario from occurring.

The colonists were not just active in asking the British to stay, they allegedly also invited the British to invade in the first place. These rumours went around after both occupations, and were not necessarily internally consistent: in 1781 the new British governor noted animosity between Dutch and British planters, as Dutch planters apparently believed British planters had asked for the invasion. On the other hand, it was the Dutch Commander of Demerara, Paul van Schuylenburgh, who was forced to go back to the Dutch Republic in 1783 to defend himself against the same allegations if inviting the British. A similar situation occurred in 1796, when Anthony Beaujon, the governor at that point, was rumoured to have solicited a British intervention.²³

In short, it was only in matters of war and peace that solidarity between the various groups of planters broke down and processes of national identification came to the fore again. In other circumstances—even though factions might have existed—the colonists identified more as independent fortune seekers, developing their own initiatives but cooperating when needed. While the planter community cannot be labelled as truly united or integrated, it was united enough to defend common interests and economic opportunities.

However, cooperation through petitions is of a different nature than cooperation in business. The diverse group of colonists, in case they wanted to establish a formal business partnership, usually cooperated on the basis of bonds formed in their previous regions, rather than on the basis of relationships formed within the colonies themselves. Consequently, the next

²¹ Correspondence of Edward Thompson, 22 April 1781, TNA, CO 111/1, f.1-2.

²² *Ingekomen brieven met bijlagen van Essequibo*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 533, f.441-449.

²³ Thompson to George Germaine, 18 June 1781, TNA, CO 111/1, f.24-25; *ibid.* 101; Fatah-Black, “Patriot Coup,” in Klooster and Oostindie, *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions*, 137.

sections analyses the networks that were formed by individuals operating within different spheres, namely the nearby islands, within the Americas and across the Atlantic.

Regional connections

The diverse and loose-knit society of Essequibo and Demerara was not an ideal breeding ground for the trust required in long-distance trade. One needed to create a shared understanding that the one would not cheat the other and that obligations were honoured on both sides.²⁴ This trust could be based on familial ties (including the extended family), a shared religion (for instance the Sephardim), a common region of origin (such as the Basques or the Scots), or even across cultures.²⁵ Many of the individuals involved in creating the West Indian web relied both on their family networks and on partners from the same region of origin. Often they combined multiple branches of business, such as provisioning, slave trading and plantation ownership.

The earliest groups of foreigners that came to Essequibo and Demerara came from nearby British islands, particularly Barbados and Antigua. Within the British Caribbean and particularly on Barbados, soil erosion led to declining yields from a seventeenth-century peak.²⁶ Considering that sugar prices recovered from a low point in the 1730s, it became lucrative

²⁴ North, "Institutions, Transaction Costs," in Tracy, *Merchant Empires*; North and Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment,"; North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*; North, Wallis and Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders*; Greif, "Cultural Beliefs,"; Greif, "Reappraisal,"; Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*.

²⁵ Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea. Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust*; Cátia Antunes, "Cross-Cultural Business Cooperation in the Dutch Trading World, 1580-1776: A View from Amsterdam's Notarial Contracts," in *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*, ed. Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi and Cátia Antunes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Trivellato, Halevi and Antunes, *Religion and Trade*; Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Nuala Zahedieh, "Making Mercantilism Work: London Merchants and Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1999); Nuala Zahedieh, "Economy," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. David Armitage and M. J. Braddick (Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

²⁶ Parker, *Sugar Barons*, 314; Vincent K. Hubbard, *A History of St Kitts: The Sweet Trade* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2002) 80. Antigua's production continued to grow: Richard B. Sheridan, "The Rise of a Colonial Gentry: A Case Study of Antigua, 1730-1775," *The Economic History Review*, no. 3 (1961) 344.

again to go into sugar planting, and Essequibo and Demerara offered good prospects.²⁷ Demerara in particular, after being opened up for colonisation in 1746 would welcome a large number of non-Dutch settlers. This influx was the result of the policy of Storm van 's Gravesande, who offered prospective planters a ten year tax exemption and granted land concessions without cost.²⁸ Even though the numerical importance of early non-Dutch settlers is difficult to ascertain, it is clear that one family was particularly influential, namely the one of Gedney Clarke Sr. (1711-1764) and his son Gedney Clarke Jr. (1735-1777).²⁹ Simon Smith has written an excellent article about the Clarkes, which I will summarise briefly here before discussing their influence in a broader context.³⁰

Clarke Sr. built a diverse inter-imperial business portfolio in the West Indies. Coming from an established family in North America, he moved to Barbados to begin his commercial career. He started as a sugar and rum trader but soon engaged in backward integration of the commodity chain by buying the *Nieuw Walcheren* and *Pyra* plantations in Demerara in 1746. To supply these plantations, as well as those of others, Clarke became active in the slave trade as well, together with his bankers Lascelles and Maxwell.³¹

In building his commercial empire, Clarke Sr. was not afraid of illicit transactions. For example, he tried to brand Demerara sugar and rum as Barbadian to avoid the duties imposed by the Molasses Act. Additionally, Chapter 4 already demonstrated he was involved in a direct slave trading voyage between Demerara and Africa, to exchange rum for enslaved Africans.³² Clarke also supplied Demerara planters with illegally imported slaves, acted as customs collector on Barbados and later engaged in victualing and privateering during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). This broad range of activities initially paid off, and by the 1760s the Clarke family owned eleven plantations in Demerara. However, in the meantime debts had accumulated as well and in 1764 Clarke Sr. died a heavily indebted man.³³

²⁷ S. D. Smith, "Gedney Clarke of Salem and Barbados: Transatlantic Super-Merchant," *The New England Quarterly*, no. 4 (2003) 512.

²⁸ Van der Oest, "Forgotten Colonies," in Enthoven and Postma, *Riches*, 328.

²⁹ As historians have recognised, see: Matthew Mulcahy, *Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014) 176-177; Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 163; Oostindie, "British Capital," 38-39.

³⁰ Smith, "Gedney Clarke".

³¹ *Ibid.*, 508-511.

³² NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv. nr. 450, H1 Loco B; *Secrete resoluties*, 4 June 1764, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 765.

³³ Smith, "Gedney Clarke," 511-514.

Yet Clarke Sr. had thought ahead and tried to facilitate the career of his sons by shielding them from his own debts. For instance, he had transferred his Demerara property to his sons in 1755, and had sent one of his sons—Gedney Clarke Jr.—to the Dutch Republic to learn the language and naturalise. Naturalisation was useful for a businessman, as it would offer the same trading rights as Dutchmen, and Clarke Jr. indeed exercised these rights afterwards. Clarke Jr. sold all his Demerara property, yet remained in arrears. Mortgages on his new estates, declining sugar prices and the credit crisis of 1772 resulted in an increase in debt. Consequently, Clarke's banker foreclosed on the outstanding loans and took over his property.³⁴

The Clarkes relied on a combination of commerce, politics and military might. Both maintained a good relationship with Storm van 's Gravesande, who even asked Clarke Jr. to be the godfather of his children.³⁵ This connection proved instrumental in saving Essequibo and Demerara from the 1763 slave uprising in neighbouring Berbice. There, the enslaved had successfully taken over most of the colony, forcing the whites to abandon their plantations and retreat to a small fortress on the coast. The governor Van Hoogenheim engaged in negotiations with the insurgents' leader, Cuffy (or Kofi or Coffee), who at some point proposed to divide the colony between blacks and whites. Van Hoogenheim's aim was mainly to delay until the reinforcements arrived from Suriname, the Dutch Republic and St. Eustatius. Nevertheless, the deciding contribution came, as always, from the Amerindian soldiers. Storm van 's Gravesande had convinced Arawaks, Caribs and Akawaios to go to Berbice and fight.³⁶ Without their involvement the insurgents probably would have formed maroon communities in the forest and hostilities would have continued for long afterwards.³⁷

Gedney Clarke Sr., having been informed by Storm of the severity of the situation, took decisive action. Planters in Demerara were scared of the possible spread of this revolt and were unsure how to react. Yet Clarke Sr. arranged for four ships to be sent immediately from Barbados, followed by a fifth, carrying fifty militiamen as well as a hundred mariners and sailors lent to him from the British navy. Together with sailors from the merchant fleet, the total number of troops came to three hundred, scrambled together by "Threats, Arguments & the force of money". Simon Smith aptly captures

³⁴ Ibid., 533-535.

³⁵ Ibid., 522.

³⁶ Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 219.

³⁷ Kars, "Cleansing the land," in Lee, *Empires and indigenes*; Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, chapter 8.

this situation: "In July 1763, then, a small, privately financed task force of armed men in both public and private employ crossed national boundaries, without any official sanction, solely to protect the property of a leading Barbados merchant [i.e. Clarke]." ³⁸

For the Clarkes, however, this private intervention became a financial nightmare. Clarke Sr. was surprised and annoyed that Dutch governors (both in Essequibo and on St. Eustatius) were so reluctant to employ private means for what he conceived as the public good. He soon found out the reason. Clarke Sr. claimed to have spent 8,000 pounds sterling (equivalent to more than 90,000 guilders) on the colonies' protection, and tried to reclaim this sum from the WIC. Storm van 's Gravesande agreed that Clarke's contributions had been vital, yet financial compensation was in the hands of the WIC directors. And they were not very sympathetic to the claims. Three years later Clarke Jr. was still arguing for compensation of his father's expenses, and the WIC stated that the Company and the colonists would both pay half. It is unclear whether the WIC paid its share, but it is clear the colonists did not. An additional poll tax was instated to raise the money, but many planters flatly refused to pay. ³⁹

Dissatisfaction with the Company was likely a major reason for Clarke Jr. to quit Demerara in 1769. He decided to try his luck in other new developing areas, namely Grenada and Tobago. Simon Smith notes that factionalism within the British community, with Clarke Jr. on the one hand and Lachlan McClane on the other, was the reason behind Clarke's migration. ⁴⁰ Yet frustration with the WIC also played a role. On several occasions he criticised Company rule and proposed that the States-General take the colonies into their own hands. He was particularly annoyed with the trade restrictions the Company maintained: he voiced a strong desire to be allowed to ship produce to Amsterdam, rather than just to Zealand, and foresaw a great future if Demerara would be made a free port. ⁴¹ Another thorny issue was the small scale of the slave trade, which—as Clarke explained—resulted in planters buying their enslaved labourers illegally via St. Eustatius, Barbados, or elsewhere. ⁴²

³⁸ Smith, "Gedney Clarke," 519-520.

³⁹ BL, Egerton Ms. 1720, f.21, 43-44, 53-54, 75-76, 77; Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 1: 43, vol. 2: 599; Rodway, *History*, vol. 1: 228.

⁴⁰ Smith, "Gedney Clarke," 536.

⁴¹ BL, Egerton Ms 1720, f.4, 10-11, 13, 43-44, 72-73.

⁴² BL, Egerton Ms 1720, f.4.

When, in 1766, the Company wanted to prohibit foreigners from bringing their “own” enslaved workers, smugglers like Clarke were annoyed. Storm informed Clarke that the latter was not allowed to import slaves to his plantations, but also told the WIC that strict enforcement “would not be to the taste of Mr. Clarke, and many others”.⁴³ And seeing that this was indeed what transpired, closing the slaving loophole might have been the final straw for Gedney Clarke Jr, although some of his brothers remained.⁴⁴

Storm was both sad and relieved to see Clarke Jr. go. On the one hand, he noted the great contributions that Clarke had made to the growth of Demerara, while on the other, he knew that those contributions were based in smuggling. In June 1768 Storm wrote:

I should be very grieved if Mr Clarke were to leave the Colony; the reasons why he called in some of his outstanding monies are known to me and are very good ones. Mr Clarke in Demerara and W. Croydon in Essequibo are honest, upright men, of much profit and advantage to the Colony, the welfare of which they have at heart; but were we quit of all the other English and had Dutch or Germans instead the loss would not be great, but on the contrary, the Colony's progress and welfare would be much furthered and smuggling put an end to.⁴⁵

This slave smuggling was indeed crucial to the two colonies and William Croydon, mentioned together here with Clarke, played a substantial role in it. Like Clarke, he came from Barbados, and had established himself in Essequibo early on, but unlike Clarke, Croydon stayed. It is unclear when he arrived exactly, but Storm wrote that Croydon operated a timber plantation “with forty able-bodied slaves” already before 1750, placing him

⁴³ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol 2: 525; NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel 3.01.26, appendix D2, f.56 (quotation), H4A, f.70. Original quotation: “dat dit de Hr. Clarke, en veele andere weinig smaaken zal”.

⁴⁴ Some of the other Clarkes remained in the colonies. Chapter 3 already told how a J. Clarke was killed in the 1795 uprisings, and a map of 1795 mentions a P. Clarke (York estate), a William Clarke (*Richmond*) and a Gedney Clarke Sr. (*Blenheim*), although the latter probably reflects that Clarke Sr. used to own the estate before his death in 1764. (See the list of names belonging to Map 5.3: http://dpc.uba.uva.nl/cgi/i/image/image-idx?sid=227d1a6701d2d90bff84cf510d2057e3;q1=Friederich%20von%20Bouchenr%F6der;rgn1=surinamica_all;size=20;c=surinamica;lasttype=boolean;view=entry;lastview=thumbnail;subview=detail;cc=surinamica;entryid=x-627;viewid=SURI01_KAARTENZL-105-23-05-1.SID;start=1;resnum=2, accessed 27 August 2016).

⁴⁵ Harris and Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande*, vol. 2: 555, 582-583 (quotation).

among the earliest migrants. Storm was irritated that in almost ten years Croydon had not shipped any cash crops, and had indeed only produced timber.⁴⁶ However, Croydon had likely discovered he was better off smuggling enslaved Africans. During the 1760s, Croydon for example advised his bosom friend (*boezemvriend*) Mr. Ferguson on how to best transfer sixty enslaved Africans from Antigua to Essequibo, for Ferguson's newly bought plantation. Furthermore, a ship belonging to Croydon transported 21 of these people.⁴⁷

While Clarke was apparently put off by the WIC's renewed efforts to regulate the slave trade, Croydon sought the confrontation. In 1768 he drafted a petition asking for permission for foreigners to participate in the slave trade. In this petition, addressed to the Council of Essequibo, ten British planters described their difficult situation: the price of sugar in the Dutch Republic was low, while slave prices were high, which prevented planters from buying the necessary number of enslaved labourers. Furthermore, the slave supply was not even one-sixth of what was needed, with little prospect of improvement. The occasion for the petition was the recent ban on importing captives from non-Dutch areas in the Caribbean. The prohibition applied to both new and "seasoned" slaves, including the ones already in the planter's possession elsewhere, and those acquired "by Legaces [sic] from their Relations or Friends". In fact, the petitioners wrote that the new rule was "depriving us from the Liberty of supplying of our Plantations with slaves from the English Islands". They emphasised how important seasoned slaves were, and that the colony would benefit if new planters were allowed to bring their own enslaved Africans with them. The petitioners did not desire a full opening of the slave trade, just to stock their own plantations, and were willing to subject themselves to "forfeiture of any Penalty" in case slaves would be sold onwards.⁴⁸ While the petition had a

⁴⁶ Ibid., vol. 1: 352. Storm wrote in 1757 but stated that Croydon already owned his timber states before Storm went to Europe, which was in 1750-1752. However, Croydon does not appear on the 1748 map of Essequibo, nor does the estate *De Vriendschap* which he owned in 1769. (ibid. vol 2: 399; <http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~204055~3001779:Essequibo-by-Storm-Van-s-Gravesande>, accessed 6 November 2015).

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv.nr. 450, appendix H17, f.90-91.

⁴⁸ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv.nr. 450, appendix H14 Loco B, f.83-85. The signatories were William Croydon, Thomas Wiltshire, Cornelis Leary, William Matthews, Geo: Charter, Peter Cornelis Donovan, John Raper, Samuel Zeagers, William Mansfield and William Rowe. Of those, only Croydon, Leary and Rowe can be positively identified as planters in 1769 (ibid. vol. 2: 399-400).

small number of signers, all from Essequibo, it was later circulated in Demerara and translated, to be sent to the Directors in the Republic. At that time Storm remarked that the English version was already signed by many of the foremost planters, both Dutch and non-Dutch, including councillors.⁴⁹

Croydon, like Clarke, made his fortune through a combination of smuggling and plantation exploitation. In 1775 he acquired a second plantation in Essequibo—a sugar estate called *Schoonhoven*—for the sum of 60,000 guilders (see Map 6.1 further below).⁵⁰ Subsequently, Croydon continued to enlarge his business, both in number of estates and in the number of enslaved Africans that worked there. His will of 1799 shows he died a rich man. The *Schoonhoven* estate was valued at 118,573 guilders, including the 112 enslaved Africans. His main sugar plantation, *Friendship* was worth even more, namely 470,544 guilders, including the 331 slaves. Together with a third smaller estate (*Lunches*), Croydon's net worth came to 616,767 guilders or 51,580 pounds sterling.⁵¹

Croydon developed ties with Essequibo, but also remained strongly attached to his British and Barbadian networks. He apparently became a burgher of the colonies in 1786, probably because of trading privileges. Furthermore, he seemed to have had an Amerindian partner, Carolina Bedford Croydon, and had a son with her, John Croydon.⁵² His will illustrates both his local and his wider connections. For instance, he wanted Francis Pile, the carpenter of *Friendship*, to be freed and receive 2,000 guilders and two slaves; he donated money to the free coloured Belgrave

⁴⁹ NL-HaNA, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, 3.01.26, inv.nr. 450, appendix I, f. 95.

⁵⁰ Croyden [sic], William Ms.D.S. *Account for purchase of Schoonhoven plantation; Essequibo, 22 August 1775*, Boston Public Library (hereafter BPL), Boston, English (British) Civilization Collection, 1573-1970, Ms. Eng 249, inv. nr. 2; *Essequibo (Colony) Directeur Generaal en Raaden. Ms.D.S. (illegible); Essequibo, 05 March 1777 Certification of sale of Schoonhoven plantation to William Croyden* [sic], Ibid., inv. nr. 4.

⁵¹ Croyden [sic], William Ms.D.S. (Robert W. Hall; H. W. Knolman): *Valuation of Friendship estate and Schoonhoven plantation; Essequibo, 13 February 1800*, BPL, English (British) Civilization Collection, 1573-1970, Ms. Eng 249, inv. nr. 9. The enslaved on *Schoonhoven* consisted of 50 men, 38 women, 15 boys and 9 girls, on *Friendship* we find 120 men, 118 women, 54 boys, 14 girls and 24 “small girls”. In 1788 *Schoonhoven* reported to have 84 enslaved workers, *Friendship* 221 (NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 192A).

⁵² BPL, English (British) Civilization Collection, 1573-1970, Ms. Eng 249, inv. nr. 9; Extract of minutes of the Council of Policy, 3 May 1786, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nr. 533, f.437-438. This finding is consistent with the 1788 tax survey, where a “free mulattoe or negro woman”, a “free mulatto or negro” and a free Amerindian woman were registered (NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv. nrs. 192A and 193A).

family in Barbados; he allocated 10,000 guilders for his godson John Blair who was in Holland for his education; and he donated money to nephews and nieces in the City of London.⁵³

The cases of Croydon and the Clarkes serve all three reasons for studying individuals—importance, illustration and representativeness. They clearly fulfilled vital roles in the development of the two colonies, as smugglers and protectors. Additionally, they illustrate the growing influence of foreign—often Barbadian—planters, while also underlining the smuggling activities and the large commercial enterprises these foreigners established. While Croydon and the Clarkes were remarkable for the scale of their business operations, they were certainly not unique. In fact, they represented the three elements that characterised successful businessmen: operating across imperial borders (including smuggling), combining different activities (trading and cash crop production), and employing large amounts of capital (using hundreds of enslaved labourers, spread out over multiple estates). Subsequently, it becomes possible to compare the experiences of individuals from these regional networks to those from further away, namely North-America.

Intra-American networks

The two cases studied here illustrate alternative ways of fostering integration within the Atlantic world. First, the commercial venture of the brothers-in-law John Hubbard and Gardiner Greene shows how North Americans combined different business operations, much like Clarke and Croydon before them. They were not just active in the provisioning trade, but also engaged in smuggling cash crops and managing plantations. Secondly, the career of Thomas Barrell, a merchant in manufactured goods, demonstrates how various regional, intra-American and trans-Atlantic networks came together. Furthermore, both these cases illustrate the importance of family and regions of origin in fostering trust.

⁵³ *Croyden* [sic], *William A.L.S. to Alexander Tulloh; Essequibo, 17 April 1799*, BPL, English (British) Civilization Collection, 1573-1970, Ms. Eng 249, inv. nr. 5.

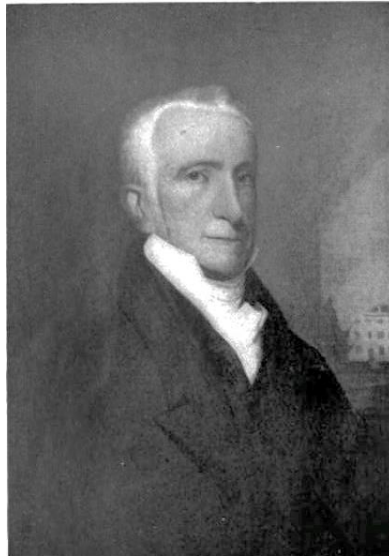


Figure. 6.1: Gardiner Greene, nineteenth century, artist unknown, Boston, Wikipedia public domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gardiner_Greene.png, accessed 3 September 2016).

The Bostonian Gardiner Greene (1753-1832) came to Demerara in 1774 where he would become a successful planter. In 1785 he owned the estate *Saratoga* in Essequibo, with forty-four enslaved Africans, but he likely also had possessions in Demerara, where he signed the 1785 petition against the WIC, like so many others.⁵⁴ In 1788 Greene married for the second time, to Elizabeth Hubbard (1760-1797). Subsequently, his brother-in-law John Hubbard (1765-1836) became an important business partner.⁵⁵ Initially, Greene resided in the colonies, while Hubbard remained in Boston to take care of trade. From around 1795 onwards, however, the roles were reversed and Greene assumed the position of absentee plantation owner. Hubbard looked after the growing number of plantations, while also acquiring several estates of his own.⁵⁶ While the two men cooperated in importing and exporting goods to and from the two colonies, it is unclear whether they also invested together in plantations, or if this remained the exclusive business

⁵⁴ *Lijst van de slaven in Essequibo in 1785*, NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.2, inv .nr. 188B; 3. Aristodemus and Sincerus, *Brieven*, Vol. 3: 12th letter, appendix K.

⁵⁵ Data about birthdates and places can be found for John Hubbard: <http://www.geni.com/people/John-Hubbard/308256371220003848>, for Gardiner Greene: <http://www.geni.com/people/Gardiner-Greene/5309362592380040381>, and for Elizabeth Greene: <http://www.geni.com/people/Elizabeth-Hubbard/5309344737510077451> (all accessed on 3 September 2016).

⁵⁶ Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter MHS), Boston, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312, folder 1.

of Greene. Unlike the Scottish firm we will encounter below, Hubbard and Greene apparently did not establish a formal partnership.

Regardless of the business arrangement, the two men were very successful in their—licit and illicit—exports of sugar, coffee and cotton. For example, in 1789 they shipped cotton from Demerara to Boston (which was illegal) and in 1793 they exported coffee to Amsterdam (which was legal).⁵⁷ By 1795 trade restrictions were loosened, on the initiative of the Council of Policy. To secure enough provisions, it decided that American traders were henceforth allowed to take in cash crops as return cargo, to the value of provisions they brought in. This opening would enable Hubbard and Greene to register their trades, although it is uncertain if they did: Hubbard mentioned in May 1795 that he shipped 32 bales of cotton to Barbados, but he did not discuss the legality of it.⁵⁸ The two men were probably aware of the rules though: another Boston agent in Demerara, William Cowell, mentioned in 1791 that he was friends with Hubbard and Greene, and that they had given him advice on shipping. Cowell wrote to his principals that he had loaded 50 hogsheads of rum, 30 hogsheads of sugar and some cotton and coffee in a sloop. However, on the invoice he declared only 14 hogsheads of rum, explaining that the rest of the cargo was illegal to export from the two colonies.⁵⁹ Hubbard and Greene thus were probably well aware how business was done in these colonies.

Hubbard and Greene also engaged in the provision trade, which contained risks of its own. They supplied fish and timber, which were in high demand. They considered these the most reliable articles in Essequibo and Demerara, which shows a keen eye for business.⁶⁰ Others, like Cowell, experienced first-hand how risky the trade in other articles could be. Horses, for example, were valuable draft animals but often did not survive the passage: Cowell reported having lost one while another was “nothing but a sack of bones.” Furthermore, flour could go off and fish, when packed in bad weather, would rot. Beef was popular, but rotten beef less so: Cowell wrote that some of his beef cargo smelled so awful he had to throw it overboard, a

⁵⁷ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 28 October 1789, MHS, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312; *Idem* to *idem*, 29 August 1793, *ibid*.

⁵⁸ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 20 May 1795, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ William Cowell to Stephan Gorham and William Smith, 21 February 1791, MHS, Smith-Carter Family Papers, Ms. N-2170.

⁶⁰ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 18 August 1795, MHS, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312.

sight that would give him a hard time convincing people he had quality products on offer.⁶¹

The letters of Jesse Breed, a correspondent for the firm of Lathrop & Luke, further illustrate why provisioning was risky. For example, the colonists wanted quality Dutch or Irish butter, not low quality American produce. And while beef sold well, pork was unpopular, he noted in 1789. Breed also received finer goods, but while he recorded that men's shoes would always sell, he could find no market for the coarse women's shoes. Furthermore, the appetites of colonists could change quickly: in 1789 linen clothing proved a lucrative product, but in the year afterwards Breed wrote to his principals that they should stop sending linen and send coarse jeans and fustians instead.⁶²

Rather than in provisioning, the biggest profits could be made in producing and exporting plantation products, at which Hubbard and Greene excelled. Even during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802), when shipping was difficult, their plantation business thrived. In 1795 Greene had at least three plantations, called *Greenfield*, *Saratoga* and *the Union* and in 1799 Hubbard reported that *the Union* yielded 80,000 lbs of gross cotton. It seems he had sold and acquired new estates, for he also wrote that a plantation called *Elizabeth Ann* had produced 30,000 pounds with the hope of another 10,000 lbs, and the estate *Mainstay* had yielded 17,000 pounds with a potential second crop coming. Hubbard also planned to sell an estate called "No. 28" while he bought, together with a Mr. Thomas, another plantation referred to as "*Brodus* [perhaps Bourda's] *Place*".⁶³

In creating their wide-ranging commercial enterprise, family ties proved important for Hubbard and Greene. Hubbard married the daughter of Mr. Parkinson, another major business partner of Greene, and Hubbard had no trouble naming Greene as guardian of his son, without consulting Greene first. In addition, the two men shipped part of their produce to Greene's uncle, of the firm Daniel Greene & Sons.⁶⁴

⁶¹ William Cowell to Stephen Gorham and William Smith, 4 January 1791, MHS, Smith-Carter Family Papers, Ms. N-2170; Idem to idem, 27 January 1791, *ibid*.

⁶² Letters of Jesse Breed to Simon Breed, 1788-1791, Fairfield Museum and History Center, Fairfield, CT, Breed and Mumford Family Papers/Susquehannah Company Papers 1754-1966, Ms B4.

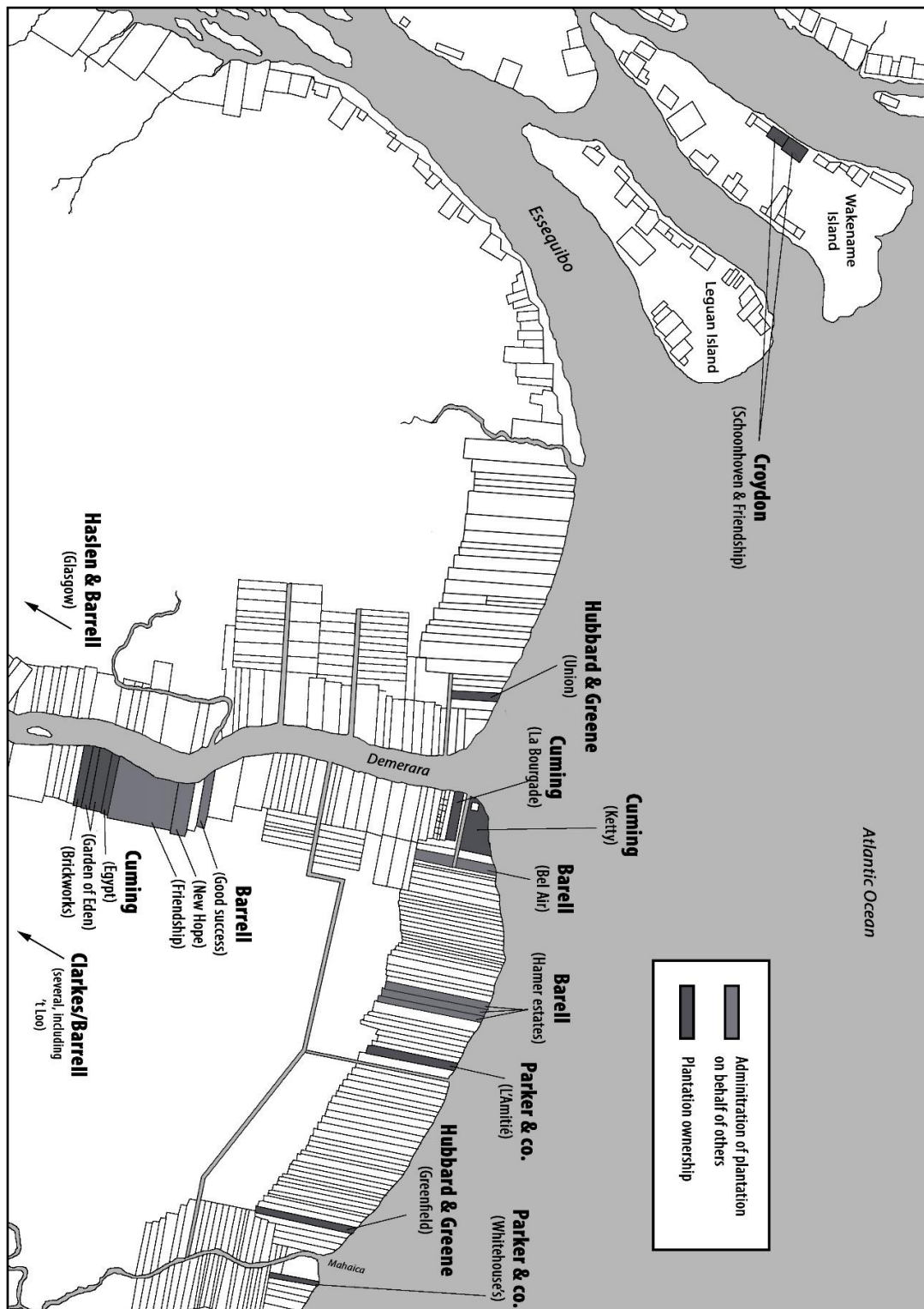
⁶³ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 20 May 1795, MHS, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312; Idem to idem, 18 August 1795, *ibid*.; Idem to idem, 7 February 1799, *ibid*.

⁶⁴ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 18 November 1802, MHS, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312; Idem to idem, 17 May 1804, *ibid*.

However, while the two men were generally on good terms, a sudden break seemed imminent in 1801. Hubbard, being in Demerara at the time, wrote to Greene with some serious accusations. He had found that his credit with a certain Mr. Robert and Mr. Pulsford in London was greatly diminished, apparently because of a letter that Greene had sent to them. Being forced to satisfy his creditors swiftly, Hubbard feared he had to accept a fire-sale price for his plantation *Mainstay*: “I shall now be under the necessity of sell’g [sic] it for half its value & am reduced to this necessity by the Man who call’d [sic] himself my Friend & Brother & the Man for whom at one time I would have sacrificed my life for if necessary.” Strong words, yet the matter ultimately did not lead to a lasting breakup. The year afterwards Hubbard wrote: “I hope you have destroyed the last letter I wrote you, I am sorry it was ever written! Forget that it ever was! 'tis my wish, should we ever meet again, to be on the same friendly footing we formerly were.”⁶⁵

Hubbard and Greene followed a diverse strategy, similar to Clarke and Croydon. They engaged in smuggling, traded both in provisions and cash crops and invested heavily in the acquisition of multiple large estates. In the process, they created a vertically integrated empire, in which they aspired to control food supplies, the product of cash crops and their shipping. They did not acquire the importance of the Clarkes, but their example seems illustrative of the way in which North Americans influenced the development of Essequibo and Demerara.

⁶⁵ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 12 May 1801, MHS, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312; Idem to idem, 18 November 1802, *ibid.*



Map 6.1: Estates of the individuals mentioned in the text

The merchant career of Theodore Barrell

North Americans also became involved in the two colonies in other ways, as the career of the Boston-based merchant Theodore Barrell (ca. 1770-after 1843) shows. Barrell followed a different path, coming to the colonies as an adventurer, becoming involved in plantation administration and later as a merchant in British manufactures.

Barrell started small. Arriving in Demerara in 1791, he first found employment as a clerk of Mr. Hamer, the owner of several large cotton estates. Barrell mentioned that he was always pompously introduced as “the Secretary of the Hamer estates”, but lamented that Mr. Hamer apparently did not trust him enough to grant him the position of attorney over these estates. Much later in life, Barrell confessed that this might have had something to do with his intimacy with one of the mestizo servants of the house, but he resigned in protest anyway.⁶⁶

Subsequently, Barrell partnered with a fellow American to move up in the colony. His partner, Tom Haslen/Haslin, was from North Carolina, but in a remote place like Demerara they found each other. In Barrell’s own words they shared the same region of origin, broadly conceived: “you know, should two individuals meet in Sirius, one from Mundus, the other Luna, they would be esteemed neighbors.” Haslen was married to the daughter of the first American President of Congress, and lived with his uncle at the *Friendship* plantation in Demerara (not to be confused with Croydon’s estate in Essequibo). Uncle Haslen had made a fortune as a planter in Barbados and bought estates in Demerara in 1773. Assisting the uncle, Haslen and Barrell earned enough to buy their own plantation, called *Glasgow*, with 150 enslaved Africans. With 20-year loans from Amsterdam they enlarged this work force to 200 people. However, dysentery and harsh treatment (“broken spirits”) cut this number in half within two years.⁶⁷

Barrell’s contacts with Haslen provided more benefits, in the form of an attorney position. The old Haslen delegated many duties of running his estates to Barrell, although Barrell considered this trust somewhat unjustified: “Because there was great paucity of young men of certain cultivation and capacity in Demerary with whom to compare me, he took me

⁶⁶ Theodore Barrell to Abby Winslow, 8 February 1843, Columbia RBML, Theodore Barrell Family Papers, MS 0087, box 3, folder 12, f.1-3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., f.3-4; Theodore Barrell to Joseph Barrell, 15 June 1798, New York Historical Society (hereafter NYHS), New York, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, 1798-1803, f.16-19.

for a much cleverer fellow than I knew myself to be.” When Haslen died there were no obvious heirs, as Tom and another nephew had died prematurely. Subsequently, Mrs. Haslen decided to make Barrell attorney of the estates, together with her brother Hamel, an officer in the Dutch navy. Barrell had little positive to say about the business experience of Hamel: “He was totally unfit for business or trust of any kind... [but Mrs Haslen wanted to keep him] so it became Van Hamel and Barrell: the latter to do the slavery, the former to carouse, get drunk, and enjoy himself.”⁶⁸

From being attorney Barrell was able to start a merchant career. Via Mrs. Haslen he had the opportunity to present his wares to many of the prominent planters in the colony. He settled in Stabroek and started with securing and distributing supplies to various plantations, and sending their produce to Europe. Additionally, he claimed to have found a profitable way to deal with American traders: “[I] was the first who ventured to purchase whole cargoes. Vessels which formerly wasted two or three months to retail, were in this way, not often detained beyond eight or ten days.”⁶⁹

Around the same time (1798 or before) Barrell’s business branched out to include the importation of British manufactures. He established regular trading connections with two London merchant-bankers, William and Samuel Jones, and established a profitable niche in luxury products. Many of those related to the scientific revolution, such as copies of Adam’s *Astronomical and Geographical Essays*, globes, telescopes, barometers, air pumps, pocket compasses, microscopes, camera obscuras, pantographers, goggles, concave and convex mirrors, “electrical machines”, and copies of the *New Encyclopedia Britannica*. In several cases he passed on special requests like engravings, to satisfy his customers’ desires, and he suggested that all scientific instruments be packed in mahogany boxes, to make even the cheap ones look appealing.⁷⁰

Barrell was conservative in his choices, importing small numbers of items and shunning projects that seemed too risky. When his uncle Colborn needed to get rid of several piano fortes, Barrell urged him to only go ahead

⁶⁸ Theodore Barrell to Abby Winslow, 8 February 1843, Columbia RBML, Theodore Barrell Family Papers, MS 0087, box 3, folder 12, f. 4-7 (quotations); Theodore Barrell to Walter Barrell, 21 April 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.9-11.

⁶⁹ Ibid., f. 21-22 (quotation).

⁷⁰ Theodore Barrell to William and Samuel Jones, 20 March 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.1-5; Idem to idem, 9 April 1798, *ibid.*, f.6-7; Idem to idem, 30 April 1798, *ibid.*, f.12; Idem to idem, 9 June 1798, *ibid.*, f14-16; Theodore Barrell to Colborn Barrell, 22 July, *ibid.*, f.24.

if the costs would remain below 50 pounds. Others had sold pianos for that price, so more expensive ones would not sell. This condition resulted from the British takeover in 1796; previously pianos had sold well, but afterwards the market became overstocked.⁷¹ Being too adventurous could backfire, as Barrell discovered later. In 1799 Barrell deemed himself too inexperienced to deal in “articles for lady’s”, but later he was persuaded to sell “fashionable hats for ladies, shoes, slippers, gloves, very fine stockings”. In 1802, however, he had to admit the ventures was a great financial loss, as he could not find a market for the goods.⁷²

In family matters, Barrell was a truly Atlantic figure. His father (who also took care of bills of exchange) and sisters lived in London and he lamented being away from them for so long. Therefore, he commissioned portraits of his sisters and sent them his own. Yet in 1798 it had been eleven years since they last saw each other, so he could not immediately recognise all of them.⁷³ Barrell regularly wrote to his sisters, sometimes in code language.⁷⁴ Besides his London connections, Barrell also had two uncles in Boston, Joseph and Colborn, with whom he did business.⁷⁵ Finally, his wife, some fifteen years his junior, came from Barbados. On 29 March 1800, Barrell married “the innocent unsophisticated Elizabeth Beckles Gall”, with whom he had two children in the next two years.⁷⁶

Despite his business in scientific instruments and curiosities, Barrell indeed had a preference for no-nonsense interactions. When his sister-in-law arrived from Barbados, he had little positive to say about her: “This phenomenon of elegance wonders how a sister of hers could condescend to marry a man of such a plain appearance as I have and so little solicitous to

⁷¹ Theodore Barrell to Joseph Barrell, 30 May 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.12-14; Theodore Barrell to Colborn Barrell, 5 July 1798, *ibid.*, f.20-24.

⁷² Theodore Barrell to Polly Barrell, 6 March 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.55-59; Idem to Francis Wilson, 9 October 1799, *ibid.*, f.100; Idem to Walter Barrell, 10 December 1801, *ibid.*, f. 155-157.

⁷³ Theodore Barrell to Charlotte Forbes, 25 November 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook f. 37-40; Idem to Sayward Barrell, 9 March 1799, *ibid.*, f. 54-55; Idem to Polly Barrell, 6 March 1799, *ibid.*, f.55-59.

⁷⁴ Theodore Barrell to Abigail Barrell, included in a letter to William and Samuel Jones, 13 April 1800, f.109-119.

⁷⁵ Theodore Barrell to Joseph Barrell., 15 June 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.16-19; Idem to idem, 19 November 1799, *ibid.*, f.105

⁷⁶ Theodore Barrell to Abby Winslow, 8 February 1843, Columbia RBML, Theodore Barrell Family Papers, MS 0087, box 3, folder 12, f.40 (quotation); Idem to Sarah Gall, 12 January 1801, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.149; Idem to John Alleyne Beckles, 31 August 1802, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.168.

shine in the Beau Monde.”⁷⁷ As she was used to a more luxurious lifestyle, she found life in Demerara rough and uncivilised: “She looks down with haughty disdain on the humble inhabitants of Guiana who have no such pretensions. I greatly suspect she will never meet her match in this country, and if she does not elsewhere, she must carry all her superexcellence with her, solitary to the grave.”⁷⁸ More than Hubbard and Greene, then, Barrell became settled in Demerara, although in the end he would return to the US.

Barrell and Hubbard and Greene also knew each other. For example, Barrell mentioned that Haslen and Greene went to Boston together and on another occasion Barrell relied on Hubbard to send a letter to Boston.⁷⁹ Furthermore, in 1816, Barrell was still doing business in Demerara and one of his partners, a Mr. Benjamin, had apparently defrauded him, Barrell had Benjamin arrested in Boston. The bail, set at 15,000 guilders, was posted by John Hubbard.⁸⁰ Barrell differed from Hubbard and Greene in his focus on acting on behalf of others, rather than amassing a large number of estates himself. Barrell thus remained active mostly in trade, rather than in plantation ownership, but he engaged in the specific trade of importing luxury goods. He was also less dependent on family relations for his trade; although his father took care of bills of exchange and his uncles sometimes sent some goods, his major partners were non-relatives in Barbados and London.

Barrell had more coincidental connections with the other individuals studied in this chapter. He administered the estate *‘t Loo*, which had previously belonged to Gedney Clarke Sr. Furthermore, a good friend of his, Samuel Sandbach, had housed him on his arrival in the colonies and also advised him in arranging his marriage.⁸¹ Furthermore, when Sandbach went to Britain, he seemingly visited Barrell’s family members to tell them about Barrell’s recent marriage.⁸² It turns out that Sandbach was involved in a

⁷⁷ Theodore Barrell to Abigail Barrell, 4 October 1800, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.135-137.

⁷⁸ Theodore Barrell to John Gill, 30 October 1800, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.144-145.

⁷⁹ Theodore Barrell to Joseph Barrell, 30 May 1798, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.12-14; Idem to Benjamin Joy, 21 July 1800, *ibid.*, f.120.

⁸⁰ New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL), New York, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, 1816-1817, MssCol 218, 13 December 1816.

⁸¹ Theodore Barrell to Abby Winslow, 8 February 1843, Columbia RBML, Theodore Barrell Family Papers, MS 0087, box 3, folder 12, f.7, 39-40.

⁸² Theodore Barrell to Polly Barrell, 17 August 1800, NYHS, Theodore Barrell Letterbook, f.121-124; Idem to Samuel Sandbach, 24 September 1800, *ibid.*, f.132-133.

major Scottish partnership, which forged a truly trans-Atlantic business empire. It is to these people that I shall now turn.

Trans-Atlantic ties

Scots played a large role in the British West Indies, particularly the Windward Islands, and in Demerara as well. The historian David Hamilton suggested the adaptation of older clan traditions accounted for Scottish commercial success in the Atlantic; by establishing an idea of relatedness based on kinship and shared local origins, the Scots had a powerful tool for establishing networks of trust. Although these networks remained open to outsiders, it provided an opening for insiders. Relatives or people from the same locality had a higher chance of entering a network or partnership, through recommendations of fellow Scots.⁸³ Perhaps more than other groups, Scots tended to think of the Americas as a place of temporary residence. Rather than a place of settlement, the ideal was to get rich as quickly as possible, and to return home with as much of it as possible.⁸⁴

The business empire of Robertson, Parker, McInroy and Sandbach

The most successful Scots were probably the four men that formed the co-partnership of Robertson, Parker, McInroy and Sandbach. They succeeded in establishing a business empire that connected all sides of the Atlantic: they had interests in Grenada and Demerara, sold enslaved persons from Africa, shipped provisions from Boston, exported cotton from Demerara to Britain, while receiving the necessary credit from their financiers in Scotland.⁸⁵

The firm started from small beginnings in both Demerara and Grenada. One of the partners, James McInroy, was apparently already settled in Demerara in 1782, although he left no archival trace as a plantation owner at any point in the century.⁸⁶ Most likely he was active as a trader only, which was how all his future partners started too. George Robertson might

⁸³ Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, 55-57.

⁸⁴ Alan L. Karras, *Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish Migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake, 1740-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) 3, 6.

⁸⁵ The Parker Family Papers in the Liverpool Archives have been central to reconstructing the firm's story, which means that it is rather Parker-centred.

⁸⁶ Broadsheet over Three Centuries, 1790-1952, Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRS), Liverpool, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR V 2/1.

have been active at the same time, conducting business on Grenada, as Charles Stewart Parker began his career there. Parker arrived in Grenada in 1789, with great expectations but limited opportunities. However, he could rely on his fellow Scotsmen to get a position in one of the established trading firms and he found a patron in James Campbell. Two of the main trading houses were already full of nephews and cousins, as Parker noted, but George Robertson was looking for a new partner who could bring in some capital. Parker took his chances and started as a clerk for Robertson. The firm focused on trade with the Spanish empire, probably Trinidad. Hence, it proved convenient that Parker had been sent to Spain by his father, to learn the language.⁸⁷

The Grenada and Demerara branches of the future partnership were joined in 1790, when Parker, Robertson and McInroy took in a fourth partner, named Daniel Gordon. They likely had a shared capital stock, yet decided to trade under separate names in Grenada and Demerara.⁸⁸ Gordon, however, soon turned out to be difficult to work with. In 1791 the partners planned that one of them would take residence in Demerara to oversee their estates, rather than leaving them to an overseer. Gordon was willing to take his turn, but refused to accept another partner for this matter or settle in Demerara permanently, “nor shall I ever turn Dutchman for such a small object as my share in the profits in our Demerary concern.”⁸⁹ In 1792 a more serious conflict arose between Gordon and the other the partners. Gordon’s behaviour remains unclear, but he went to Britain to explain himself to the creditors of the firm. Parker feared the scandal might ruin their credibility, but apparently only Gordon was blamed for his “underhand plots”.⁹⁰ The other three dissolved the partnership and formed a new one—without Gordon, but including Samuel Sandbach. The latter had been involved as a clerk since 1791, but now became a partner, although for a smaller share: Robertson, Parker and McInroy all contributed 4,000 pounds sterling, while Sandbach advanced 2,000 pounds. These were large sums—equivalent to about 168,000 guilders, or the value of a substantial plantation—indicating

⁸⁷ Charles Stewart Parker to Patrick Parker, 3 December 1789, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/46.

⁸⁸ The later firm had shared capital at least. In Grenada the name was Robertson, Parker & Co, while in Demerara it was McInroy & Gordon. George Robertson to George Rainy, 15 December 1790, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/50/1.

⁸⁹ Daniel Gordon to George Robertson, 24 November 1791, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/50/2.

⁹⁰ Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 12 June 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/50/10; *Idem* to *idem*, 19 July 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/11.

the scale of their business. The partnership had a duration of four years, although it could be dissolved after three, if desired.⁹¹

At that point in time, in 1792, the firm already had “a very respectable footing” in Demerara, partly resulting from the illicit export of cotton. The partners planned their shipments carefully, choosing between sending their cotton to England or to Scotland, or to convert it to bills of exchange, but at no point did they perceive its illicit nature as problematic, despite being clearly aware of it.⁹² It appears they did not get caught, and after the British takeover in 1796, the trade became legal.

The Demerara ventures proved immensely profitable. In 1792, Parker noted that the firm had 148,000 guilders invested in Demerara, and that had a positive balance of 1,118 pounds sterling with the firm himself. He planned to “be worth” 3,000 sterling at the end of the partnership. In 1795 earnings rose even further, as the firm recorded a profit of 14,512 pounds over a twelve month period, on an invested capital of 36,514 pounds.⁹³ This investment was comparable to a small *negotiatie* fund, with the difference that a large part of this sum was the partners’ own money. The profits, on the other hand, were enormous by any standard.

Despite this financial success, the firm experienced difficulties in preserving their line of credit from their Scottish financiers. This Glasgow partnership of Robertson, McKay and Spears was the supplier for Parker & Co’s Grenada and Demerara trade: they sent products to sell and extended credit to facilitate this trade. However, in 1793 the creditors were considering withdrawing from the West Indian business.⁹⁴ They offered to find new correspondents, but Parker was afraid of what might follow; changing correspondents meant that the balance would have to be settled, and Parker estimated his firm was 6,000 to 7,000 pounds sterling in debt.

⁹¹ Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 3 October 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/13.

⁹² Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 19 July 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/12; Idem to idem, 3 October 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/13 (quotation); Idem to idem, 27 January 1793, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/15; Idem to idem, 10 August 1793, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/20; Idem to idem, 15 January 1794, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/23.

⁹³ Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 29 December 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/14 (quotation); James McInroy to Robertson & Parker, 4 February 1795, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/50/4.

⁹⁴ Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 3 October 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/13. The creditors were Robertson, McKay and Spears. Mr Spears wanted to continue the correspondence, but as he was the junior partner of the three, with little money and few connections, Parker wrote him that he better find some monied men first.

This money was tied up in plantations or credit to planters and could therefore not easily be repaid. The Caribbean was torn apart by war, explaining the creditors' caution, but Parker thought it exaggerated:

[H]ow slender must their Credit be if they are distressed by [being?] out of 6 or £7000 Stg [Sterling] for a few months, which I believe is all they are in actual advance for us, especially people that used to write us in such an Imperious tone, we at present in consequence of their distressed state study as our main point to pay them off & have done with them.⁹⁵

The firm planned to take the initiative and make the first move, by reducing debts as much as possible and finding other financiers that would take on the correspondence. Parker urged his father, a wealthy man who was himself active in maritime insurance, to ask around for interested financiers. When the firm's debt would be below 5,000 pounds, the partners would draw on the new fund, and would then have to settle with the Glasgow creditors. The trick here was to use bills with long maturity dates, payable in twelve to eighteen months. The firm would send enough commodities in the meantime to cover the debt, meaning that the new financiers would be compensated before they would actually have to come up with the money. The original financiers quickly realised they had overplayed their hand and adopted a more conciliatory tone. Parker's partnership was a profitable one, and therefore an asset worth keeping. Yet the relationship was damaged, and apparently Robertson and Parker went back to Britain in 1794 to act as correspondents themselves, leaving the Demerara management in the hands of McInroy and Sandbach.⁹⁶

The firm continued to expand during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, increasing the number of estates in its portfolio. It is unclear when the first plantation was acquired but it is known that in 1792 McInroy spent 42,000 guilders (or 3,400 sterling) on a small cotton estate on Leguan Island in Essequibo. In addition, in 1795 the firm registered 50,000 pounds of cotton from two of their estates (probably in Demerara).

⁹⁵ Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 10 August 1793, LRS, Parker Family Paper, 920 PAR I/47/20.

⁹⁶ Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 19 July 1792, LRS, Parker Family Paper, 920 PAR I/47/12; Idem to idem, 10 August 1793, LRS, Parker Family Paper, 920 PAR I/47/20; Idem to idem, 7 September 1793, LRS, Parker Family Paper, 920 PAR I/47/21; Idem to idem, 13 November 1793, LRS, Parker Family Paper, 920 PAR I/47/22; LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR V 2/1.

One of these plantation was (likely) called *Woodlands*, and the partners tried to buy a new plantation close to it. In 1798 the firm bought “Whitehouses estate” for 217,500 guilders, including 70 enslaved workers. In 1800 they also acquired *L’Amitié* and somewhere before 1803 they also bought an estate called *Coffee Grove*.⁹⁷ Coincidentally, *L’Amitié* had previously belonged to John Haslen and was the site where the Dutch had signed the capitulation treaty with the French in 1782.⁹⁸

Gradually, Parker & Co.’s firm created an integrated business empire, ranging from plantation ownership to provisioning, and transporting cotton as well as slaves. In 1795, for example, McInroy bought 110 enslaved Africans from a fellow Scottish trading house, and (illicitly) shipped them to Demerara. The partners had been active in the business of selling enslaved Africans for a while in Grenada, but had abandoned it in 1793. However, it seems they reinvigorated it again for the Demerara market, for in 1803 a detailed account exists for 147 enslaved Africans sold to various persons. In addition to slave trading, the firm engaged in the trade in provisions, shipping fish, planks, beef, pork, candles and soap to Demerara from Boston. Furthermore, the partners also sent all sorts of manufactured goods and luxury articles from Britain, including playing cards, decanters, door hinges and frying pans, as well as various spices.⁹⁹ Finally, the firm also owned several ships to transport its goods, making sure it controlled all sections from production to sale.¹⁰⁰

Like in the cases discussed above, commercial and personal affairs were intertwined. In 1797 Parker married a niece of Robertson, called Margareth Rainy. The partners further strengthened their ties when Sandbach married a niece of Robertson. Within this network of relationships, it was logical that the firm acted as a springboard for other relatives; when George Robertson

⁹⁷ James McInroy to Robertson & Parker, 4 February 1795, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/50/4; Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 3 October 1792, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/13; Idem to idem, 10 March 1797, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/31; James McInroy to Samuel Sandbach, 6 March 1803, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR IV/1/1/1; Charles Stewart Parker to James McInroy, 8 June 1798, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR III/26/4.

⁹⁸ Webber and Christiani, *Handbook of British Guiana*, 97.

⁹⁹ James McInroy to Robertson and Parker, 4 February 1795, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/50/4; McInroy, Sandbach and McBean to James McInroy, 10 April 1803, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR IV 1/2/2; Charles Stewart Parker to James Parker, 10 April 1793, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/16; Idem to idem, 7 September 1793, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR I/47/21; McInroy, Sandbach, McBean & Co to Samuel Sandbach, , LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR IV 1/1/4 and 1/1/5.

¹⁰⁰ McInroy, Sandbach, McBean & Co to Samuel Sandbach, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 920 PAR IV 1/1/4; LRS, Parker Family Papers 920 PAR V 2/1.

died in 1799, his nephew Gilbert Robertson joined the firm and became a manager and investor in the Demerara estates.¹⁰¹

All in all, Robertson, Parker, McInroy and Sandbach succeeded in establishing a wide-ranging business empire that would expand further during the nineteenth century. In 1813 Liverpool became the headquarters of the firm, and Philip Frederick Tinne was taken in as partner. Tinne had worked for a long time as colonial secretary in Demerara, which likely made him a valuable contact. The firm would continue business under the name of Sandbach, Tinne and Company and remained active in the sugar trade in Demerara until the twentieth century.¹⁰²

Thomas Cuming: between prominence and default

Not all Scots were successful in Demerara, however, and there was a great amount of market volatility. As Parker's firm experienced, credit conditions were crucial. In a society where virtually everyone was a debtor, calling in loans posed a serious threat even to wealthy individuals. One of the foremost figures in Demerara was Thomas Cuming. He was a long-term resident, arriving in Demerara around 1760 and only returned definitively to Europe in 1810. He was active in the *negotiatie* system, acting as an appraiser, but also took out a mortgage from Changuion in 1770 and 1771, and another one from Van Nooten Jansz., in 1792.¹⁰³ In the 1787 constitutional crisis he was one of the protest leaders and his signature was said to be enough for other British planters to sign the petition for reform (see chapter 2). His possessions continued to grow, and in 1798 he owned at least four plantations: besides *The Ketty* and *The Garden of Eden*, he also had the sugar estate *Egypt* and the coffee plantation *La Bourgade*. The latter was adjacent to the capital, Stabroek, and in the late 1790s would become part of the capital under the name of Cummingsburg, which it still carries to this day (see Map 6.1).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ LRS, Parker Family Papers 920 PAR V 2/1; Charles Steward Parker to James Parker, LRS, Parker Family Papers, 17 June 1800, 920 PAR I/47/40.

¹⁰² LRS, Parker Family Papers 920 PAR V 2/1.

¹⁰³ Van de Voort, *Westindische plantages*, 306; UA, 34-4 Notarissen, D.W. van Vloten, inv. nr. U247a010, akte 232, 21 December 1771; *Procuratie - om plantage De Goede Intentie te Demerary uit verband te ontslaan ingevolge aflossing van schuld door door Cornelis van den Helm Boddaert te Middelburg voor rekening van Thomas Cuming en de erven Thomas Grand*, UA, 34-4 Notarissen, C. van Beest, inv. nr. U235a004, akte 97, 15 December 1771.

¹⁰⁴ David Alston, *Slaves and Highlanders*, <http://www.spanglefish.com/slavesandhighlanders/index.asp?pageid=164658>, accessed on 5 January 2016.



Figure 6.2: Portrait of Thomas Cuming by Henry Raeburn (unknown year)¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, Cuming's fortune was on the brink of collapse in 1799. By that time he was in Britain himself and had appointed Thomas Newburn as administrator. Cuming clearly needed crops from Demerara to cover his debts, writing to Newburn: "for G_ds sake make every exertion in sending me remittances." Not only had the agent of his mortgage fund come over to England, apparently pressing his daughter to get the finances in order, but Cuming had also borrowed the immense sum of 20,000 pounds sterling from a fellow Scotsman, George Baillie—a sum that was comparable to 200,000 to 240,000 guilders. In addition, he owed around 4,000 pounds to Mr. Tulloh, presumably his father-in-law, and was also indebted to a Mr. Campbell, another Scotsman. In other words, Cuming was indebted about as much to Dutch as to British creditors, using both the *negotiatie* structure and his personal network. It is unclear whether his different creditors were aware of Cuming's other debts, nor do we know if Cuming mortgaged his estates twice.

To reduce his debts, Cuming aimed to sell one of his plantations. He preferred to sell *The Garden of Eden*, but decided to put *The Ketty* up for sale as well to increase his chances.¹⁰⁶ The conditions for sale show the enormous sums involved. *The Garden of Eden* was offered for sale for 41,780 pounds. The first 20,000 pounds had to be paid immediately in bills at three months sight, the rest in four instalments, with interest. This remaining

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Cuming to Thomas Newburn, 11 September 1799, NRS, Letterbook of Thomas Cuming, inv. nr. GD23/6/364, f.1-4; Idem to idem, 14 October 1799, *ibid.*, f.4-8.

sum had to be secured by a mortgage, and Cuming and the buyer would jointly administer the plantation until it was paid in full. Included in the sale were 300 enslaved Africans, and with an average crop of 350,000 pounds of sugar the estate supposedly delivered 6,235 pounds in profit per year. According to Cuming's calculation, a buyer would have his investment back in just seven years. *The Ketty* was worth even more: the asking price was 70,000 pounds, the first 25,000 pounds payable immediately. Again, 300 enslaved workers were included in the price, even though Cuming employed 580, but many of them were transferred to another estate. The condition estimated a crop of 600,000 pounds of sugar which would generate an annual profit of 10,234 pounds sterling, after subtracting expenses. Thus, the prospective buyer would also have his money back after seven years.¹⁰⁷

These were enormous sums and perhaps not realistic, considering the times. With Europe and the Caribbean caught up in the French Revolutionary Wars, shipping was highly uncertain. Additionally, if the estates were indeed as profitable as the conditions sketched, Cuming would probably not have been as indebted as he was. Nevertheless, the conditions demonstrate the highly intensive production on Cuming's estate, employing a large number of enslaved people as well as an enormous financial investment.

Cuming likely did not succeed in selling his estate, for in 1804 he defaulted on his debt for *The Garden of Eden* to his Dutch creditors. In 1810 they took possession of the estate.¹⁰⁸ Despite this setback, Cuming was still among the most prominent planters in the colony. In 1812 the local newspaper published a list of 109 colonists in Demerara and another 50 from Berbice, who expressed their gratitude to Cuming. They offered him an inscribed plate worth 500 guineas and emphasised the protective role Cuming had played for newly arrived planters, as well as for widows and orphans.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Cuming to Thomas Newburn, 11 September 1799, NRS, Letterbook of Thomas Cuming, inv. nr. GD23/6/364, f.1-4; Idem to idem, 14 October 1799, *ibid.*, f.4-8; Conditions on which the Garden of Eden is offered for sale, *ibid.*, f.10; Conditions for sale of plantation Ketty, *ibid.*, f.11.

¹⁰⁸ History Associates Incorporated, "Predecessors of ABN AMRO Bank N.V. and Connections to African Slavery in the United States and the Americas" (2006) 7-8, http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/ABN/452437691x0x147069/6aad21e-e7e4-482c-9ced-13ce9dc70161/hai_report.pdf, accessed 13 September 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Essequibo and Demerary Royal Gazette, 18 April 1818, <http://www.vc.id.au/edg/18120418edrg.html> (accessed 13 September 2016).

Conclusion

The case of Thomas Cuming is illustrative of a larger process in which British planters took over the two colonies. At the end of the century, after the British takeover, Essequibo and Demerara became attractive places for British planters, who used large amounts of capital on large-scale estates to attain great wealth. The further development is beyond the scope of this work, yet the transition to more intensive exploitation is also visible in the trajectory of the firm of Robertson, Parker, McInroy and Sandbach. This firm gradually expanded their holdings in the colonies, employing enormous amounts of money by contemporary standards. And like Cuming, they relied on their Scottish networks for their finances and for agents in their network.

The case studies in this chapter have demonstrated that networks based on (extended) family or region of origin, rather than religion, often formed the basis for trade and investment in the two colonies. For the early wave of planters coming from the British Islands the networks are the least clear. Still, Gedney Clarke Sr. turned to Barbados to assemble the troops he needed to protect his plantations, and William Croydon gathered a group of fellow British planters to protest against regulating the slave trade. For Hubbard and Greene, the situation is clear as they became partners because they were brothers-in-law. Theodore Barrell could not rely on a family or origin-based network to get started in the colonies, but he forged a bond with his fellow American, Tom Haslen. Even though they were from different regions, in a remote place like Demerara region of origin could be interpreted broadly. Later on in his career, Barrell relied more on his own family network for financial services and for sending him goods, although his key suppliers were outsiders. Finally, in the trans-Atlantic networks of Cuming and Parker & Co., shared origins in Scotland played a vital role. For those starting their career, a place in a firm of fellow Scots offered an opening to an Atlantic career, while later in life they might rely on credit and emergency loans from other Scots.

These individuals were not necessarily representative of the entire population, but neither were they an oddity. Hubbard and Greene seem, given the available evidence, fairly representative for North Americans trying to gain a foothold in the Dutch Guianas. Furthermore, although Gedney Clarke Sr. was surely a remarkable character, he also embodied the broader trend of British planters who skilfully made their fortune in the two colonies.

Not everyone was able to acquire multiple plantations, but a substantial number could.

Besides representativeness, the individuals in this chapter also serve as an illustration of broader trends. Furthermore, they played important roles within the colonial society. The Clarkes, Croydon, Cuming and Sandbach (and his partners) were all prominent figures and the first three also yielded a degree of formal or informal political power: the Clarkes through their connections to Storm van 's Gravesande, Croydon as one of the leaders of the British planters and Cuming as a councillor. Additionally, the different individuals also illustrate the growing non-Dutch influence in the colonies, including the slave trade, the provision trade and the trade in manufactured goods, as well as in plantation ownership.

Moreover, they were indicative of what constituted a successful business in these colonial settings. Three elements come to the fore. First, the willingness to engage in smuggling. In the under-regulated colonies, illegal trade was both easy and lucrative and all of the characters studied—except for Barrell, possibly—profited from smuggling. Second, successful businessmen engaged in multiple, complementary branches of commerce, to reduce risks and increase control over the production process. Although one might start as a provision trader, the trade in cash crops would tempt, for which plantation ownership was a logical next step. Multiple estates allowed for differentiation in crops and thereby reduced price risks, while it might also have eased difficulties with food supplies or labour shortages. Finally, as a result of the above, successful businessmen employed large amounts of capital to acquire these advantages of scale. While further research is needed, it might be that non-Dutch planters had an advantage there, as they could combine Dutch and foreign credit.

All in all, these individuals presented a further insight into the workings of Essequibo and Demerara. The colonial survival of these colonies was the result of improvised decisions of countless individuals. Coming from different parts of the Atlantic, these individuals together contributed to the formation of the West Indian web on which the survival of Essequibo and Demerara depended.

Conclusion

The shape of empire

What can be gained, in the end, from studying two colonies that were so peripheral? What can the microregions of Essequibo and Demerara—comparatively small and sparsely populated—offer to scholars investigating socio-economic or colonial topics?

This study focused on Essequibo and Demerara's colonial survival to show that colonisation was ultimately based on improvisation. While the actions of metropolitan directors and diplomats were significant, in the end colonial survival depended on the interactions within the colonies themselves. With hardly any institutional guidance, local actors were the ones that determined the shape of empire, and this improvised shape was distinctly cross-cultural and inter-imperial. Looking at the colonies through a metropolitan lens filters out many of these interactions, but by placing the so-called periphery—Essequibo and Demerara—at the centre, these connections have become visible.

These regional, intra-American and trans-Atlantic connections formed a West-Indian web. With Essequibo and Demerara at the core, this web then radiated outwards, with dense connections to other parts of the West Indies and beyond, to include north-western Europe and the eastern seaboard of the United States. Investigating colonies within their respective webs provides an alternative to the artificial separation into “linguistic” (British, French, Spanish) Atlantics. Instead of looking at actors from a given “nation”, it draws outsiders in, ranging from Carib soldiers to Bostonian merchants. This broader view is valuable, as these non-Dutch actors proved fundamental to the process of colonial survival.

This research aligns with other histories that have recognised the negotiated, improvised and inter-imperial nature of other empires or regions.¹ It aimed to integrate the history of Essequibo and Demerara in debates about the Dutch presence in the Atlantic, and more generally, to discussions within the field of Atlantic history. Besides examining

¹ Notable examples include: Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*; Irigoien and Grafe, “Bargaining for Absolutism”; Mulich, “Microregionalism”; Klooster, *Illicit Riches*; Fatah-Black, *White Lies*.

connections, then, this study also offers points for future comparisons. Essequibo and Demerara might be remarkable in several aspects, such as their ramshackle institutional structure, their high degree of smuggling or their reliance on Amerindian support; nevertheless, they were not unique.

Similar to the Iberian empires, the limited institutional reach from the metropolis was Essequibo and Demerara's greatest strength. In the Iberian cases, the diffusion of power and need for constant negotiation prevented a single actor from appropriating too much power for personal gain.² In Essequibo and Demerara, however, the administrative structure was less a matter of balancing powers and more one of general institutional weakness. Within the metropolis, Amsterdam and Zeeland provided a counterweight to each other in the WIC and the States-General, but this situation led to indecisiveness rather than compromises. Within the colonies, a small group of people figured in both the legislative and judicial bodies; no counterforces existed in the form of *intendants*, religious orders, Inquisitors, viceroys or captain-*donatários*.³ However, this circle of administrators did not become an extractive elite as the personal interest of these people—minimising unrest and maximising trade—aligned with their fellow planters. Extractive rulers would not even have had a chance, as the planters were skilled in resisting taxation and other rules they deemed oppressive. Moreover, the minimal bureaucratic apparatus lacked sufficient means of coercion to properly enforce its wishes.

The political unrest of the 1780s clearly showed that colonial administrators could not overrule the planters' interests without provoking large-scale resistance. It started as a protest over the WIC's new way of appointing councillors after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), yet was connected to taxation and trading rights. New Company-councillors could overrule the decreased number of planter representatives and increased the poll tax. Even though the extra burden was relatively small, the planters rose in opposition, by petitioning and by withholding their taxes. The WIC had no means to amend the situation so a situation of

² Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, 13; Grafe and Irigoin, "Stakeholder Empire"; Bethencourt, "Political Configurations," in Bethencourt and Ramada Curto, *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, 197-200.

³ Bethencourt, "Political Configurations," in Bethencourt and Ramada Curto, *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion*, 237; William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 161-162; Andrien, "Spanish Atlantic System," in Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History*; Banks, *Chasing Empire*, chapter 7; Kenneth J. Banks, "Communications and 'Imperial Overstretch': Lessons from the Eighteenth-Century French Atlantic," *French Colonial History*, no. 1 (2005) 24.

“anarchy” followed. The planters were quite content with this anarchy, for they could comfortably engage in illegal trading, telling themselves there was no legitimate body to answer to for such behaviour. The political battle only flared up again when the stubborn captain Frans Smeer arrived, sent to eradicate smuggling. His measures provoked renewed resistance, up to the point that a coup became a serious possibility.

This situation therefore reflected three Orwellian characteristics of Essequibo and Demerara: (institutional) weakness as strength, anarchy as stability and smuggling as a right. The colonists in the two colonies were so dependent on illegal trade that they strongly resisted anyone who tried to put an end to it. Indeed, the majority of the enslaved Africans arrived in the colonies via smugglers and a substantial amount of cash crops ended up illicitly in Britain and the United States. Additionally, foreign traders from Barbados, North America and Britain discovered that Essequibo, and particularly Demerara, were attractive places to do business. As these actors contributed to colonial development via the trade in manufactures, provisions or captives, the authorities had an incentive to look the other way. Officials often condoned illicit exchanges or were complicit themselves. Furthermore, without sufficient fortifications and patrol ships there was little to be done in any case, especially considering that planters moved to the coast, where they had an open connection to the ocean.

Smuggling was thus of a different character than in other parts of the Dutch empire. In Suriname, North American captains also flouted the rules by exporting cash crops, and the governor facilitated the systematic evasion of the British Molasses Act.⁴ In addition, Curaçao and St. Eustatius were famous as contraband centres, to the extent that smuggling was their *raison d'être*.⁵ Illegal trade was more fundamental to Essequibo and Demerara than to Suriname, whereas the place of the two colonies in the mercantilist system set them apart from the Antilles. Smuggling at Curaçao was a mercantilist goal; it was certainly not in the case of Essequibo and Demerara. The two colonies did not exist to smuggle, yet they survived because smuggling existed.

Smuggling was but one example of entanglement within the Americas, the borderland interactions between the Essequibo and the Orinoco were another. There, the fates of Dutch, Spanish, Amerindian and Africans actors

⁴ Fatah-Black, *White Lies*, 60.

⁵ Klooster, *Illicit Riches*, 1.

were thoroughly intertwined. While the Dutch-Amerindian coalitions could threaten the Spanish presence in the region during the seventeenth century, the Spanish came to dominate the borderland in the eighteenth century. By then, the Amerindians had largely vacated the borderland to escape a life in missionary villages, and had fostered closer ties with the Dutch. The latter increasingly needed Amerindian help to subdue maroons in Demerara and prevent slave refugees from Essequibo from escaping to Venezuela, where they might be freed. This dynamic would make for a fruitful comparison with the borderland in Spanish Florida. There, a similar offer of freedom enticed enslaved people from the British settlements to flee. However, in Florida a more complex relationship emerged between maroons and indigenous people.⁶ In Essequibo and Demerara, on the other hand, the interests of Amerindians and enslaved Africans remained opposed.

The borderland greatly influenced the stability of the slavery regime, which was particularly harsh. As the Spanish gained control at the expense of the Caribs, the opportunities for slave refugees increased. Consequently, the escape of potential insurgents reduced the pressure on the constraining plantation hierarchy. Other societies throughout the Atlantic offered more legal protection (at least on paper, such as in the *Code Noir*), more opportunities for marronage (such as in Suriname) and more opportunities to pass as free in towns and cities (such as in the United States). Furthermore, the labour conditions were worse because the maintenance of the plantations' *polder* structures was incredibly demanding. In these conditions, slave uprisings were likely to occur, as was the case in Berbice in 1763. Yet the plantation structure endured in Essequibo and Demerara because of the recruitment of Amerindians. The latter played vital roles in temporary expeditions against maroons, and in expeditions in during the few actual slave uprisings. This finding offers food for further comparative research. Suriname is an obvious counterpoint, where large maroon societies were able to develop, but Central America, Brazil or islands like Dominica or Jamaica would also be suitable candidates for comparison.⁷

While Essequibo and Demerara were thus increasingly becoming part of an American world, a vital connection to the metropolis remained in the form of finance. The Company itself could do little to keep the two colonies tied to the Dutch Republic, but a multitude of investors tried, using the instrument

⁶ Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, chapter 1.

⁷ Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 9.

of the *negotiatie*. In a period of relative decline of the Dutch position on the world market, these plantation mortgages promised to boost the volume of trade. Even though they turned out to be a bubble, the *negotiaties* stimulated expansion of the plantation sector throughout the Guianas. Nevertheless, whereas in Suriname the unwinding of the debt circle took place relatively orderly, in Essequibo and Demerara the opposite occurred. Debt collection proved highly challenging and insecurity abounded because of the inadequate legislative framework, compounded by the self-interested behaviour of agents, planters and administrators. As long as the preference order remained opaque, creditors had an interest in maintaining the credit relationship. If a creditor believed that his debts were preferential, he had no need to order an execution; better to allow the struggling planter to improve his position, than to face immediate losses after a forced liquidation.

Consequently, the web of debt persisted, inadvertently providing more stability to the colonial society than most indebted planters realised. Perhaps there is a fourth Orwellian aspect to be found here: debt as an asset. Regardless, it sheds a different light on the shape of empire again: a shape that was determined as much by debtors as by creditors; as much by improvising officials as by calculating investors.

This thesis has thus forwarded a particular view on the shape of empire, one that takes the colonies as its vantage point. It thereby follows the historians of the Dutch empire who point to the trans-national connections that become apparent when transcending the metropolitan perspective.⁸ Yet this study has proposed to go one step further. To move beyond commercial connections, and bring other facets of colonial survival into consideration, including the dimensions of politics, labour regimes, finances and personal networks. Combining these perspectives only underscores the self-organised and trans-national character of Essequibo and Demerara. The businessmen who profited from the colonies hailed from a variety of origins, and so did the enslaved Africans who made this wealth possible. The Amerindian supporters proved indispensable, and so did the cross-cultural brokers that recruited these people. Even though much of the cash crops ended up in Europe, it is easy to overestimate the orderliness of these flows. A close look at the colonial level revealed that interactions were often based on

⁸ Oostindie and Roitman, "Repositioning the Dutch"; Oostindie and Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections*; Gert Oostindie, "Modernity and the Demise of the Dutch Atlantic, 1650-1914," in *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge, 1650-1914*, ed. Adrian Leonard and David Pretel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

improvisation. Lacking support from the metropolis, the colonial inhabitants tried to make the best of their situations in these remote corners of empire. Yet their cross-cultural, trans-national and inter-imperial connections proved essential to the shape of empire.

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