

Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie (eds)

Curacao

in the Age of Revolutions,
1795-1800



Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795–1800

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Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795–1800

Edited by

Wim Klooster
Gert Oostindie



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Preface

This is a book about five years that rocked Curaçao. From 1795 through 1800, a combination of internal and external factors produced a series of revolts in which free and enslaved islanders participated with a range of objectives. The opening salvo for these tumultuous five years was provided by a major slave revolt that broke out in August 1795. While this revolt is a well-known episode in Curaçaoan history, its wider Caribbean and Atlantic context is much less known. Nor have past historians sketched a clear picture of the turbulent five years that followed. It is in these dark corners that this volume aims to shed light.

The events fall squarely within the Age of Revolutions, the period that began with the onset of the American Revolution in 1775, was punctuated by the demise of the *ancien régime* in France, saw the establishment of a black republic in Haiti, and witnessed the collapse of Spanish rule in mainland America. Some consider this age to have ceased with the defeat of the Spanish armies in Peru (1824); others see 1848 as a bookend. Nor were revolutionary changes confined to the Atlantic world. A growing number of historians portray the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a transition that was global in scale. This ‘World Crisis’ was not just political and ideological in nature, but also economic and cultural (Armitage and Subrahmanyam 2010; Bayly 1989).

Gert Oostindie’s introduction establishes the parameters for the essays that follow, synthesizing the salient elements of eighteenth-century Curaçao’s social and political history. Oostindie argues that Curaçao’s commercial character left its imprint on both the resident and the floating population. The port of Willemstad offered free and enslaved workers access to news and ideas from afar and enabled sailors direct contacts with numerous parts of the Caribbean and coastal North and South America. It was therefore no surprise that the Age of Revolutions also touched on Curaçao. But while the Age of Revolutions was a major watershed elsewhere in the Atlantic world, the long-term impact of Curaçao’s riotous *fin de siècle* was modest – even if unlike previous slave revolts, the 1795 insurrection had a clear ideological dimension.

These previous slave rebellions had been much smaller in scope and scale. In his contribution, David Geggus focuses on both the 1795 revolt and the events that transpired in 1800, when many Curaçaoan slaves sided with French invaders from Guadeloupe. What set these two rebellions apart from most slave revolts in the Americas, Geggus contends, was the large number of participants. Having assembled information on as many as 180 revolts, Geggus is on solid ground with his assertion that black Curaçaoans staged two of the eight largest revolts during the Age of Revolutions.

Based on his database, Geggus reveals to what extent slaves throughout the Americas were influenced by the three great uprisings that occurred in the last quarter of the century. If the American, French, and Haitian revolutions all left their traces, the French may have had the largest impact, and not only because of its libertarian message. It also enabled slaves in many parts of the Americas to rebel by weakening colonial power structures that created divisions among the free populations. Geggus notes that the Haitian Revolution may have been a source of inspiration, but practical aid from the Haitians was hard to come by. Its divided leadership shied away from exporting the revolution.

Apart from the shockwaves that these revolutions sent, Geggus stresses another factor that explains slave revolts during the Age of Revolutions. Many reflected an awareness of the antislavery movement in Britain and of reformism in various imperial centres. Wim Klooster takes up this point in his essay, arguing that slaves appropriated texts and ideas emanating from Europe, in particular as they interpreted news about colonial reforms as confirmation of a 'monarchist' rumor. According to this rumor, the king had set them free, but local slave owners and authorities refused to honor the royal decree. Klooster maintains that the revolutions also had a more direct influence in the Greater Caribbean on free people of color than on enslaved blacks. In many places, free blacks and mulattoes openly embraced the message of the Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by the French National Assembly in 1789, a seminal manifesto defining fundamental human rights.

Linda Rupert zooms in on the close historical relations between Curaçao and Tierra Firme. She notes that Curaçao remained in Tierra Firme's religious realm after the Dutch conquest, with Spanish Catholic priests administering to the spiritual needs of Curaçao's population, especially its black majority. At the same time, Curaçaoans made Tierra Firme into their economic hinterland by establishing intensive and often illegal commercial ties with the mainland. As these ties expanded and were consolidated, runaway slaves increasingly availed themselves of the smuggling routes to

seek freedom in Tierra Firme. Their preferred destination was Coro, where, as in Curaçao, a large slave revolt took place in 1795.

One of Coro's rebel leaders, Ramón Aizpurua tells us, was a former slave from Curaçao who had earlier obtained his freedom by fleeing to the Spanish Main. Aizpurua investigates the political links between the two areas in the period 1795-1799, when two major republican conspiracies were set up in Venezuela, featuring motley crews indeed. White officials, merchants, and soldiers, as well as mulatto militiamen, were involved in the 1797 conspiracy, while alongside privateers from Guadeloupe, sailors from Curaçao took part in the 1799 Venezuelan plot.

While these conspiracies fizzled, a genuine coup d'état was carried out on Curaçao in late 1796. Karwan Fatah-Black shows that the Military Committee behind this coup could count on popular support. In the previous months, Curaçaoans had begun to recruit leaders and catalog demands without consulting the authorities across the Atlantic. Once the take-over had succeeded, the new leaders issued a declaration that started, tellingly, with the words 'Freedom, Equality, Fraternity'. The coup prompted a naval retaliation from the so-called Batavian Republic, the Dutch metropolis that ironically was a de facto vassal state of France.

The final essay in this volume, by Han Jordaán, analyzes the impact of international politics on Curaçao in the final three years of the century. In these years, France and the United States fought an undeclared maritime war (the 'Quasi-War'). As leaders of a colony of the Batavian Republic, Curaçao's authorities had little room for manoeuvre in their relationship with the French. From their headquarters in Guadeloupe, the French engaged in a privateering war against U.S. ships, for which they used Curaçao as a base. Jordaán shows that the Curaçaoan government was caught in the middle, trying to remain on good terms with North American traders while not alienating the French. In 1800, the French took their war to the shores of Curaçao, as soldiers disembarked from a fleet of five ships to pre-empt an attack on the island by their other enemy, the British. After a British frigate broke the French blockade, Curaçao ended up in British hands. Not until the end of the Napoleonic period did the island return to Dutch rule. Jordaán argues that conventional geopolitical strife rather than ideology made the day.

This volume is the result of a two-day seminar held at the KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden, June 2010. The seminar was organized as part of the research programme 'Dutch Atlantic Connections: The Cir-

culation of People, Goods and Ideas, 1670-1800', sponsored by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and conducted by historians of the VU University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, and KITLV. This particular seminar was financed by KITLV.

We thank the various participants in the seminar for their contributions as presenters of papers or as discussants. In the process of re-writing the papers, the authors were very forthcoming and patient with the editors. We should also acknowledge our heartfelt appreciation to the once anonymous outside reviewers for KITLV Press, who turned out to be Pieter Emmer and James Walvin – both their support for this publication and their careful suggestions for improvements are well-appreciated. Finally, we thank the staff at KITLV Press for seeing this book to the press and to the Internet, open access that is.

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Slave resistance, colour lines, and the impact of the French and Haitian revolutions in Curaçao

Gert Oostindie

On 17 August 1795 a slave revolt erupted in Curaçao. Inspired by the Haitian Revolution, the uprising on the Dutch Caribbean island would be brutally suppressed within a few weeks. As had happened on previous occasions, colonial authorities called upon the local militias recruited among the free coloured and black population as well as upon loyal slaves to fight and arrest the rebels. The leaders of the revolt were brutally executed, a horrendous warning to slave rebels, let alone aspiring revolutionaries. Today, the 1795 slave revolt is commemorated as a seminal event in the island's history, a courageous if doomed rejection of slavery and colonial rule. Curaçaoans prefer 17 August as the day to remember slavery and slave resistance over 1 July, Emancipation Day as proclaimed in 1863 from the metropolis. In 1984, 17 August was officially designated 'Dia di lucha pa libertat', the annual day to commemorate the struggle for freedom. The revolt's main leader Tula was proclaimed a national hero in 2009.¹

The background, process, and outcome of the 1795 revolt are fairly well-known, although much of the literature consists of rehashing the descriptions and conclusions of a few older texts based on limited archival sources. At its height the revolt comprised 2,000 slaves out of a total slave population of some 12,000. The sheer number of insurgents and their proportion of the total population make this revolt of significance in the wider historiography of slave revolts inspired by the French and particularly Haitian revolutions. So far, however, the Curaçao revolt has been brushed over in most of the pertinent historiography, even if its

1 Allen 1996:7. Fundashon Rehabilitashon Tula, <http://tulalives.org/>.

scale was remarkable by regional standards.² It is time, therefore, to set the record straight.

But there is more. The 1795 revolt was not the first one in Curaçaoan history. We now know of minor ones in 1716, 1750, and 1774, and further research might disclose other upheavals. More interestingly, there is hard evidence of continued unrest among both the slave population and free coloured and black population in the years after the crushing of the 1795 revolt. In 1796, a coup d'état involved the participation of free coloureds. The influence of the Haitian Revolution and ideas of racial equality and antislavery were to surface again in another little-known series of upheavals in 1799-1800. Dutch Patriots, mainly black troops from French Guadeloupe, and hundreds of local blacks, both enslaved and free, were part of this turmoil. In the end, British and American military intervention restored order, secured that slavery would persist, and paradoxically guaranteed the long-term survival of the Dutch colonial order by returning the island to the Dutch after the Napoleonic Wars.

There are several ways to explain slave resistance and general unrest in *fin de siècle* Curaçao. We may focus on the island's social structure and demography. We should take into account the peculiar political situation of a colony whose metropolis was occupied by one European competitor (revolutionary France) while its local elite were heavily divided over issues of loyalty to the old or the new order and over their preferences for competing European states. Finally, we need to be aware of the island's embedding in wider regional networks. The contributions to the present volume indeed identify both local and international factors underlying the remarkable turbulence of late-eighteenth-century Curaçao. This introductory chapter aims to review some salient characteristics of society and politics, slavery and slave resistance in Curaçao, as well as the place of the island in a wider regional and Atlantic framework.

A FREE TRADE ZONE

After the loss of Dutch Brazil (1630-1654) to the Portuguese and of New Netherland (1624-1664) to the English, the Dutch Atlan-

2 Geggus (1997:7, 11-5, 46, 48) briefly includes the 1795 and 1800 Curaçao revolts in his discussion of slave revolts between 1789 and 1815. Curaçao is not discussed in the recent reader *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Geggus and Fiering 2007). See, however, the contribution of Geggus to the present volume.

tic empire would shrink to Elmina and a few minor trading posts in West Africa, four plantation colonies in the Guianas – Berbice, Demerara, Essequibo, and the most important one, Suriname – and six tiny islands in the Caribbean sea. Similar to the Dutch island of St. Eustatius in the north-eastern Caribbean, Curaçao functioned as a hub for people (Europeans of many nationalities and enslaved Africans), goods (seldom produced on the island itself), and ideas. The quest for deepening our understanding of the turmoil between 1795 and 1800 is at the same time an attempt to establish more fully the truly global character of this tiny island off the coast of Tierra Firme, where people of many nationalities and political convictions, whites, blacks, and ‘coloureds’, free and enslaved, confronted one another on a daily basis, often remarkably peacefully, sometimes in heated disputes, and on rare occasions in bloody confrontations.

Curaçao had been a Dutch colony since 1634. As no precious metals were found, the Spanish had categorized Curaçao and the neighbouring islands Aruba and Bonaire as *islas inútiles*. Neither did plantation agriculture seem rewarding, as the ecology did not match the requisites. The Dutch West India Company had colonized Curaçao for strategic reasons – its location and the exceptionally good natural harbour. Over the next centuries, the island’s development was mainly based on trade, both legal and illegal, with the Spanish Main, North America, and the rest of the Caribbean. The manifold maritime connections soon gave the island an economic significance well beyond its size.

Trade was in commodities as well as enslaved Africans. The great majority of the slaves disembarked on the island were subsequently re-exported to the Spanish Main or to plantation colonies in the Eastern Caribbean. The minority retained on the island was employed on *hacienda*-style plantations catering mainly to local consumption or in and around the port. The proportion of urban slaves was relatively high. So was the number of manumissions and, as a result, the proportion of free coloureds and blacks, some of them slave owners themselves, in the total population. As early as the 1730s, there were separate local armed units of free coloureds and blacks in addition to the white militia dating from the seventeenth century.

Clearly then, non-whites had more room for upward social mobility in Curaçao than in typical Caribbean plantation colonies. This need not reflect a humanitarian regime. Some contemporaries suggested that the high rate of manumission was inspired by cold calculation: in times of economic hardship,

drought and hence food crisis, setting unproductive slaves free to fend for themselves was a better deal for the owners than having to feed and shelter them. Yet most likely a good proportion of those manumitted were slaves who had managed to make money of their own in the urban labour market to buy their own freedom.

The island's white citizenry, presided over by the West India Company's governor, was divided by religion and class. A 1789 census subdivided the 4,420 whites into 2,469 Protestants, 1,095 Sephardic Jews, and 846 servants of unspecified religion (table 1). The free population of (part) African origins was mainly Catholic and segmented by colour and class. The slave population creolized as the eighteenth century progressed. The total of slave imports in Curaçao during the Dutch period was roughly 100,000, mainly arriving between 1667 and 1730; the last imports of enslaved Africans date from the 1770s (Jordaan 2003:219-20; Van Welie 2008:179). It is therefore likely that long before the end of the century the majority of slaves was born locally.

The first reliable population figures date from 1789, when the total population was calculated at nearly 21,000 (table 1). Shortly after the Napoleonic Wars, this figure was down to 14,000. Since the first census, the number and proportion of slaves declined. The share of the free population of (partly) African origins in contrast increased considerably right up to Emancipation in 1863, when the total population was just over 19,000.

By the early nineteenth century, then, slave labour in Curaçao was of decreasing importance and certainly not of the same significance as elsewhere in the Caribbean, including in the Dutch colony of Suriname. In the debates preceding the (late) abolition of slavery in the Dutch West Indies in 1863, the main concern regarding Suriname was an immediate shortage of labour for the plantations, as land was freely available in abundance; a solution was sought in a ten-year period of apprenticeship. The major apprehension for Curaçao, in contrast, was the rise of the number of unemployed who were at risk of becoming vagabonds. There was stark hypocrisy here, as the problem of land shortage was augmented by the monopolisation of agrarian land and wells by the former slaveholders. On the eve of Emancipation, local experts and Dutch politicians discussed emigration as the best way to solve the alleged problem of landlessness and oversupply of labour (Renkema 1981a:144-59; Oostindie 1996:167).

Table 1. Population figures, Curaçao 1789-1863

	1789	1816	1840	1863
Whites	4,410	2,780	2,734	*
Free citizens 'of colour'	3,714	4,549	6,432	*
Slaves	12,864	6,741	5,750	5,498
Total	20,988	14,070	14,916	19,127

*In 1863, the number of free inhabitants was 13,629 in total; colour distinctions have not been listed since 1841.

Sources: Klooster 1994:331 (1789), Renkema 1981a:336-7 (1816, 1840, 1863).

Its small scale, the absence of a plantation sector producing tropical export staples, its function as a free trade zone, and its large non-white free population combined to make Curaçao an atypical Caribbean colony. Contemporaries often observed what they thought to be one of the pernicious features of this colony: the 'insolence' of the slaves and free non-white population. While the maintenance of slave labour as such might have been less of a priority here than in genuine plantation colonies, the concern for public order was equally strong. Overt slave resistance therefore was repressed on Curaçao no less brutally than elsewhere in plantation America, and white concerns about the free coloureds were hardly less acute.³

The island's commercial character made for a remarkably open society. This applies not only to its resident population, but also to the fact that a significant proportion of the urban male population consisted of sailors with direct access to the neighbouring colonies and of free and enslaved townsmen working in the harbour and therefore having regular contacts with sailors from foreign places. By definition the openness also extended to the many sailors disembarking in the Willemstad port. Curaçao was a vital hub in transatlantic, but even more so in regional trade carried out with both the Spanish Main and the islands to the North.

Figures for trade connections in the late eighteenth century underline the island's regional connectedness in no uncertain terms. Roughly half of all ships entering or clearing the port at Willemstad were Spanish, followed by ships from a wide variety of other nations. After 1795, contacts with the British Isles were temporarily cut off because the French occupation of the Netherlands

3 For example, just a few years before the 1795 revolt, the Dutch commissioners Grovestins and Boey (1791, reprint 1998). Cf. Jordaan 2010, Klooster 1994.

had automatically turned the British into enemies. The share of French ships was modest, yet the few dozen ships visiting Curaçao annually originated predominantly from Les Cayes and Jacmel in southern Saint-Domingue and therefore their crews must have carried the news from the emerging Haitian Revolution with them.⁴ Seen from this perspective, the frequent allusions of the leaders of the 1795 slave revolt to ‘French liberty’ come as no surprise.

SLAVE REVOLTS UP TO 1795

Dutch slavery in the Caribbean, and particularly in Suriname, has often been depicted as exceptionally harsh. The historical validity of the reputation of exceptionality is dubious, at least in a comparative perspective – it is difficult to think of slavery, wherever in the Atlantic, as anything but dehumanising and cruel (Oostindie 1993). But certainly we have many indications of slave resistance in the Dutch colonies. Faced with continuous marronage and the creation of powerful maroon communities, colonial authorities in Suriname had no choice but to conclude peace treaties. Berbice had a major slave revolt in 1763. No doubt less conspicuous acts of resistance took place with great frequency throughout the Dutch Caribbean. Curaçao was no exception to this rule. While much of the early history of slavery of the island remains to be written, we may well assume that slave resistance ran the usual gamut from covert to full-fledged armed rebellion. As for the latter, revolts have

4 Identified ships entering and clearing Willemstad, Curaçao, 20 September 1796-16 May 1798

Flag	entered	%	cleared	%
Spanish	265	45.6	292	49.0
Danish*	122	21.0	128	21.5
French	31	5.3	26	4.4
American	129	22.2	117	19.6
Curaçaoan	24	4.1	26	4.4
Swedish	3	0.5	7	1.2
British	7	1.2	–	–
Total	581	100	596	100

Source: Nationaal Archief, West-Indisch Comité 1795-1800, Curaçao, 141. Figures compiled by Pham Van Thuy.

*The Danish ships were officially from St. Thomas, a free harbor like Curaçao. Most likely, the majority of these ‘Danish’ ships were Dutch and used the Danish flag only because Denmark had remained neutral in the war.

been recorded for 1716, 1750, and 1774, culminating in the 1795 uprising and its aftermath up to 1800.⁵ While the type and significance of slavery may have been atypical by regional standards, slave resistance was as engrained in Curaçaoan slavery as it was elsewhere.

Both the 1716 and 1750 revolts were led by first-generation enslaved Africans, most likely recent arrivals. The one in 1716 involved only a dozen insurgents. As far as the documents suggest, there was no master plan, no encompassing strategy, but certainly a longing for freedom. In the subsequent interrogations, one of the slaves who had revolted spoke explicitly of a link to Elmina where reportedly the Africans had set the good example of killing all whites in and around the Dutch fort, while another had urged the killing of all the whites in Curaçao and next moving on to another land 'where we will be happier'.⁶

In 1750 one hundred slaves revolted. The insurgency was crushed the same day after the rebels killed 59 slaves of the West India Company's plantation; only one white was killed. Some of the rebels committed suicide; of the 52 captured, 13 were sold off the island and no less than 39 executed. Contemporaries blamed newly arrived Africans for the bloody revolt, which seemed directed more against other (seasoned or creole?) slaves than against the whites.⁷

Presumably, since the earliest years of the colony, enslaved Africans attempted to escape the system of slavery. While maroons in the major Dutch Caribbean colony of Suriname escaped to freedom in the tropical rain forest in the interior, internal marronage was virtually impossible on the small and mainly arid island. Most runaway slaves therefore opted to canoe or sail to Tierra Firme, a risky but navigable forty miles away. Archives mention the presence of marooned Africans from Curaçao in Coro, present-day Venezuela, at least by the end of the seventeenth century. Reliable figures are hard to come by, but between 1759 and 1766 alone, 380 slaves were recorded as having escaped to the Spanish Main.⁸ Wim Klooster, in this book, mentions 140 slaves escaping to the Spanish Main in 1774 alone, a year in which Curaçao faced a severe food crisis. And in her contribution, Linda Rupert demonstrates how this migratory tradition drew the Coro region and Curaçao close to each other throughout the eighteenth century.

5 Klooster 1999:507 mentions three aborted conspiracies in the 1760s. There was also a minor slave revolt in January 1795 (De Rego and Janga 2009:43).

6 See Jordaen 1999:490-8 on the 1716 revolt; citation from p. 493.

7 On the 1750 revolt, see Hartog 1973:20-57, De Hoog 1983:38-44, 61-3, Goslinga 1985:546.

8 Goslinga 1985:248. Another source has a number of 585 marooned slaves for the entire period 1729-74, but this is most likely an underestimate as this list was drawn up in retrospect in 1775 (Rupert 2006:43-5, 2009).

The third recorded revolt, in 1774, indeed started as a mass marronage. All 72 slaves of plantation De Fuijk attempted to board a large canoe heading for Coro. The escape failed and only five slaves managed to cross in a smaller canoe. The others withdrew in the *kunuku* (countryside), but eventually surrendered or were captured by free blacks. This time, there were no mass executions, but the plantation's owner sold off some twenty-five slaves to Saint-Domingue. Commercial connections with this booming French colony were intense. Two decades later, it transpired that these connections were not only about the transfer of peoples and goods, but equally of revolutionary ideas (Dalhuisen et al. 2009:60).

The 1795 revolt started on 17 August as some fifty slaves of plantation De Knip, in apparent protest against a specific infringement on the usual daily routines, refused to work and marched off to neighbouring plantations.⁹ This strike soon became an attempt to launch an island-wide revolution inspired by the ideals and example of the Haitian revolt. Perhaps the fact that a treaty between the Dutch and Spanish had effectively sealed off the opportunity for slaves to take refuge in the Coro area added to a general ferment among the island's slave population.¹⁰ Perhaps the island experienced another period of drought and food shortage. We simply cannot be sure. Neither do the available archival sources allow us to establish whether the eventual slave revolt resulted from a revolutionary conspiracy from the start or developed in a more spontaneous manner.

Either way, within two days some 2,000 of the island's 12,000 slaves were in revolt. The slaves won the first fights against the white, coloured, and black militias, but then the tide started to turn. Negotiations in late August failed, one of the leaders, aptly named Toussaint, affirming in French, 'We are here to win or die'.¹¹ The next day the colonial troops prevailed and dozens of slaves were executed on the spot. Thereafter the majority of the rebellious slaves capitulated, discouraged by military defeat and the spectre of more mass executions and lured by the promise that they would not be punished. In the next week the remaining rebels

9 First documented, without references to archival or other sources, by Senior and Schinck 1795, and Poel in 1825 (reproduced in Rutgers 2001:111-25), next Bosch 1829, I:321-34. First publications of relevant archival sources in Paula 1974. Hartog 1973 is the first monograph, Goslinga 1990:1-20 and De Rego and Janga 2009 provide useful summaries in English. There are many subsequent publications in Dutch on the 1795 revolt that do not use new sources and therefore have little to offer but repetitions based on the Dutch-language archival sources published in extenso by Paula almost four decades ago.

10 The treaty was concluded in 1790; see the chapter by Rupert in this volume.

11 'Nous sommes ici pour vaincre ou mourir'.

and their leadership were caught, both by the militia and by fellow slaves. Some thirty slaves were executed, the leaders in an extraordinarily cruel manner.

Contemporary accounts of the revolt have left dramatic testimonies of the revolt's foremost leader, a slave called Tula, who may have been born outside of Curaçao and most likely had spent time in the French Caribbean; he was also known as 'Rigaud'. In conversations with the Catholic priest Jacobus Schinck, who had been commissioned to convince the slaves to capitulate, Tula reportedly made several statements demonstrating his knowledge of the French and Haitian revolutions. 'We have been badly treated for too long, we do not want to do anybody harm, but we seek our freedom, the French [Caribbean] blacks have been given their freedom, Holland has been taken over by the French, hence we too must be free'. Drawing on Christian rhetoric as well, Tula told the priest that all people share the same parents, Adam and Eve. Talking about the abuse intrinsic to slavery, Tula added that animals were treated better than slaves – hence the right to revolt.

The 1795 revolt was inspired not simply by the abstract ideals of the Haitian Revolution, but most likely by individuals with an intimate acquaintance with developments both in Europe and in the Caribbean. In the French Caribbean, the metropolitan revolution had fueled hopes for change of the status quo and had exacerbated social tensions, eventually leading to the start of the revolution in Saint-Domingue in 1791. Other French Caribbean colonies seemed on the verge of following this example – between 1789 and 1794, there was a series of revolts in Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, and Dominica. From 1795 onwards, the circle widened with revolts and conspiracies in the Spanish Caribbean and Tierra Firme, in particular the Coro region, as well as in the British colonies and in Dutch Demerara and, indeed, Curaçao (Geggus 1997:46-50). In Europe, revolutionary France had proclaimed a law for the Emancipation of slavery in 1794. Moreover, in 1795 French troops had invaded the Republic of the United Provinces and turned it into a vassal state, the Batavian Republic. This news was officially published in Curaçao in May 1795. There was no mention of a French takeover, but rather of the signing of a pact of friendship and alliance between France and the new Batavian Republic (Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1978:508).

As the chapter by Wim Klooster attests, revolutionary ideas circulated widely in the Caribbean, no matter what measures authorities took to stop the flow of information and rumours. In his contribution Han Jordaan indeed demonstrates that the Curaçao government was worried about slaves from Saint-

Domingue being sold on the island under the pretence that they were directly imported from Africa. Certainly because of these direct links with Saint-Domingue and the island's intensive connections to nearby colonies, the Curaçaoan insurgents were well aware of what was going on in the French Caribbean. Priest Schinck heard them singing French revolutionary songs, and one of Tula's main men, a slave named Mercier, had chosen the nickname Toussaint. The insurgents repeatedly claimed that support from revolutionary Saint-Domingue would be forthcoming – either a strategic boasting or a tragic miscalculation (Do Rego and Janga 2009:66).

By late September, the 1795 revolt was brutally suppressed. At the end of the day, two whites had been killed, as opposed to 100 slaves. The proceedings of the hearings and the subsequent executions of the revolt's leaders testify to nauseatingly cruel retributions, in stark contrast to the courteous way Tula and his fellow insurgents treated men such as the priest Jacobus Schinck. The 'exemplary' brutal punishments tell us much about the agony of the colonial elites in these revolutionary times. The public prosecutor's justifications are well worth quoting. After having proclaimed himself 'an enemy, yes, a mortal enemy of the horrendous monstrosity called the rack', an instrument of torture 'abolished in all civilised states' including the Netherlands, and professing himself 'opposed to anything akin to cruelty [and] maiming', he proceeded by advocating precisely such uncivilized punishments to the leaders of the revolt.¹² And indeed the rebellious slaves were broken on the rack, burnt in the face, dismembered, and so on, in an unprecedented orgy of state violence, which failed to provoke any subsequent protest in the metropolis – the news possibly reached only a few there in the first place.

THE 1796-1800 TURBULENCE

One may well wonder whether the outrageous public executions in 1795 really served to pacify the slave population, and even more if the justice meted out convinced the free population of the legitimacy of colonial rule. The following years were certainly not characterized by an absence of attempts to subvert the extant order. The picture, however, becomes blurred with many objectives and

¹² Prosecutor Pieter van Teylingen quoted in Paula 1974:175 (my translation); see Paula 1974:166-7 for the verdicts.

rivalries surfacing at the same time beyond the issue of slavery – Dutch colonial Orangists against the local pro-French Patriot party, increasing tensions within this Patriot party, the strategic interests of both France, Britain, and the United States in Curaçao, perhaps a Haitian drive to export revolution, and Venezuelan revolutionaries taking refuge in Curaçao. The way all these elements converged in Curaçao only underlines how much the island was embedded in a wider Atlantic network, precisely because of its long-standing status as a free trade zone and the ties its inhabitants had developed around the region.

Metropolitan developments mattered too, as they had in Saint-Domingue before. The Netherlands, a republic since its inception in sixteenth century, had oscillated between periods of genuine republicanism and periods in which Stadholders of the House of Orange enjoyed near-royal powers. In the 1780s, liberal protest against Stadholder Willem V ushered in deep conflicts between Orangists and liberal ‘Patriots’. When a liberal revolution was aborted in 1787, several protagonists were forced to go into exile to France and other countries. The smouldering divisions came to the fore again after the French Revolution and particularly the French occupation of the Netherlands and the establishment of the Batavian Republic in 1795, making the tides turn in favour of the Patriots. In colonial affairs, the Patriots did not demonstrate much revolutionary fervour. In the debates on colonial matters in 1796-1797, the National Convention discussed the legitimacy of the slave trade and slavery, but the assembly did not support the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, and the ending of slavery as such was explicitly rejected.¹³

Between 1795 and the British take-over in 1800, therefore, Curaçao was governed by a Dutch governor representing a French puppet state, a Batavian Republic with no revolutionary intentions in the Caribbean. Its local representative since 1796, Governor Johann Rudolf Lauffer, had even fewer such inclinations. The local elites were divided among themselves as to their loyalty towards France or the exiled House of Orange. This was the case in 1795 and even more so in the following years, a division which continuously undermined colonial rule. Indeed, the absence of harsh retribution to Patriots after the 1800 British take-over might reflect an awareness that more internal rivalry within elite circles might elicit another round of unrest among the free coloureds and slaves. Possibly the ranks simply closed again to establish order and guarantee

13 Schutte 1974:147-9. Schutte mentions that the specter of the Haitian Revolution was invoked, but makes no reference to the revolt in Curaçao.

the continued existence of slavery. One of the leading Patriots in the 1795-1800 years, the Dutch naval officer Albert Kikkert – who would be appointed the first governor of Curaçao after Dutch rule was reinstated in 1816 – now found himself serving Willem I, the first Dutch monarch of the newly-established Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The turbulence of 1796-1800 was therefore more complicated than the slave revolt of 1795. At first, there was the 1796 coup d'état analysed by Karwan Fatah-Black in this volume. News of the French take-over of the Dutch Republic and the creation of the Batavian Republic had been part of the arguments used by Tula and his fellow insurgents. First *ancien regime* Governor Johannes de Veer retreated and was replaced by a politically non-descript local bureaucrat, Jan Jacob Beaujon, who was substituted by a seemingly more outspoken pro-French, 'Patriot' governor, Johann Rudolf Lauffer – all in the same year of 1796. As Karwan Fatah-Black argues in this volume, Lauffer's appointment reflected complex dynamics within the white elites, not just between Orangists and Patriots, but equally within Patriot circles, over issues that ultimately centred on trade and economic interest.

It is evident that sectors of the free coloured population had their own stakes in the 1796 power games, mainly with a view to improving their own representation in local politics. Both Jordaan and Fatah-Black provide ample evidence of white concern that political instability would lead to another round of social unrest and ultimately revolutionary upheaval and, therefore, anxiety about free black and coloured agency. As it turned out, free coloureds did indeed engage in manifestations of open and sometimes violent protest. But there is no indication whatsoever of organized cross-class and cross-colour activity in 1796 aiming at radical political change, let alone the abolition of slavery. Free coloured and black militias had not demonstrated any revolutionary zeal to this end during the 1795 slave revolt, helping to crush the revolt instead. One year later, antislavery was not an issue.

So what about the turbulence in 1799-1800?¹⁴ In December 1799, three Frenchmen were ousted from the colony, suspected of a revolutionary conspiracy directed from Saint-Domingue and aimed at starting a massive revolt that would eradicate slavery throughout the Caribbean, beginning with Curaçao. The story does not end here. From July through September 1800, Curaçao

14 First documented, without references to archival or other sources, by Bosch 1829, I:334-53, next by others including Palacios 1983 and Goslinga 1990:21-32.

was first visited then partly occupied by predominantly black troops from revolutionary France's colony Guadeloupe. There was apparently widespread local support among the slaves, but not from the free black and coloured population. The participation of several French, Haitian, and Guadeloupean military leaders, including the revolutionary French commander Bresseau and future Haitian President Alexandre Pétion, is well-documented. So is the participation of members of the local *criollo* elite, including the future admiral serving under Simón Bolívar, Luis Brión. At the height of the affair, early September 1800, some 1,200 French Caribbean troops were beleaguering Willemstad, while apparently many rural slaves had joined the cause, having been promised *liberté* and *égalité*. In Willemstad the slaves refused to work, adding to the panic of the governor and his entourage.

Governor Lauffer desperately tried to keep the self-proclaimed protectors out, in particular the majority of black troops. Unable to defeat his adversaries, Lauffer decided to request British assistance, a request readily honoured by the nearby frigate *Nereide*. A few days later, two North American frigates joined the British, for the same cause. On 23 September the colonial French troops evacuated hastily, leaving many prisoners behind. It remains a puzzle why the French 'revolutionaries' backed down so easily against what was not an overwhelming British majority. In any case, most foreigners were quickly banished from the island, local white participants were forgiven, and there was apparently no strong repression of either the black and coloured free population or of the slave population. In stark contrast to the aftermath of the 1795 revolt, there were few executions and not the type of exemplary state terrorism displayed five years earlier.

The British would continue to occupy Curaçao throughout most of the Napoleonic Wars (1800-1803, 1807-1816), returning the island to the Dutch only in 1816. Trade with the turbulent French colonies came to an immediate halt.¹⁵ In the subsequent period Curaçao experienced no more slave revolts or international conspiracies linked to either the Haitian Revolution or to the independence wars of Spanish America. Slavery was only abolished in 1863, by metropolitan legislation.

The 1799-1800 events have been glorified as a worthy sequel of both the Haitian Revolution and the 1795 revolt on Curaçao,

15 From November 1800 to mid-August 1802, 669 ships entered and 708 cleared the Curaçao harbour. This included only one ship under French flag and no Dutch ships at all. Over half were Spanish ships, over a quarter British, and some fifteen per cent American (Hughes 1998:145).

as an inspiring story of local cross-class and cross-colour solidarity supported by the revolutionary zeal of Jacobin France and Saint-Domingue. Thus, Venezuelan historian Roberto Palacios honoured the alleged protagonist in Curaçao, Frenchman Jean Baptiste Tierce Cadet, for his Jacobin ideals and his firm belief in the ultimate consequences of the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity: the instalment of a 'genuine revolutionary government' in Curaçao, which would legislate 'absolute racial equality' and the abolition of slavery (Palacios 1983:22).

Archival research does not support this heroic reading of the *fin de siècle* turmoil. Earlier on, David Geggus and Anne Pérotin-Dumon had questioned the idea that Toussaint Louverture was seriously working on a pan-Caribbean revolution: even if he had the will and the means to do so, it would have run against his own domestic interests and priorities and his strategy to appease the British (Geggus 1987:287-8; Pérotin-Dumon 1988). On the basis of fresh archival research, Jordaan in this volume demonstrates that the very idea of a region-wide revolutionary conspiracy starting in Curaçao was most likely fabricated by Curaçaoan Governor Lauffer for reasons of personal and political interest.

This is not to say that there was no revolutionary conspiracy at all. Tierce Cadet, a representative of the French government who had lived on the island since 1784, had indeed been at the centre of a revolutionary circle on Curaçao, entertaining direct contacts with Venezuelan revolutionaries as well as French agitators. And indeed attempts may have been made to attract Governor Lauffer to this camp. Lauffer, however, had no interest whatsoever in either becoming involved in Haitian rivalries or in jeopardising his relations with Britain – much less was he interested in slave emancipation. His pro-French leanings, which had helped him stage a coup against his Orangist predecessor in 1796, had clearly withered after his appointment (Schutte 1974:207-9).

The central issue, however, is that whatever hopes the free blacks and coloureds and, even more, the slaves in Curaçao may have nurtured in this period, there was no real concerted French and/or Haitian effort to bring about a social revolution on the island. As Jordaan concludes, France was the significant player, not Haiti. And revolutionary France was still primarily a colonial power interested in maximising its regional role. Hence, the 1800 invasion was not so much a question of spreading the ideals of the revolution, but rather simple (and, as it would turn out, failing) geopolitics: a pre-emptive take-over of the island before the British or even the Americans would attempt to do so.

IMPERFECT SOLIDARITY

If 1796 was not much more than a coup d'état, and if the debunking of the 1799-1800 turbulence is indeed justified, then we are back to the 1795 slave revolt as the most dramatic landmark of slave agency on Curaçao. This uprising seems a textbook example of the thesis forwarded by Eugene D. Genovese in his classic *From rebellion to revolution* (1979). The French and hence Haitian revolutions, Genovese affirmed, were turning points in the history of slavery and slave revolts in the Americas. Before, mainly first-generation African slaves rebelled, without a clear political strategy in mind; afterwards, there was an increasing number of slave revolts dominated by Creole slaves throughout the Americas, all aiming at ending slavery and using the rhetoric of universal human rights.

In various publications and again in this volume, David Geggus has convincingly questioned the validity of Genovese's thesis. Ironically it seems that precisely Curaçao, not mentioned at all in *From rebellion to revolution*, would have provided a strong supporting argument for an otherwise untenable thesis.¹⁶ First-generation Africans revolted in 1716 and 1750 with, it appears, no determined strategy or links to revolts elsewhere. Most likely Creole slaves formed a majority in the aborted massive slave marronage in 1774, but again there is no evidence of explicit ideological underpinnings.

The context of the series of conspiracies and revolts in the period 1795-1800 is dramatically different. The most likely mainly Creole leadership of the 1795 revolt was explicitly inspired by the ideals of the French and Haitian revolutions, and within days a wider enslaved constituency was built up to this end. There are some indications that support was not entirely limited to the slave population. On the other hand, the suppression of the revolt was partly the work of the black and coloured militias and even slaves – though of course the great majority of the island's slaves were no party at all in either the revolt or its repression.

The 1799-1800 events involved a remarkable ensemble of 'revolutionary' actors: enslaved and free residents of the island; whites, blacks and coloureds; French and French Caribbean agents, some members of the local *criollo* elites, a few Dutch military men. Inspiration may have come not only from Haiti and Guadeloupe, but equally from Tierra Firme, where similar revolts had occurred or were in the making as Ramón Aizpurua demon-

16 The influence of the preceding American Revolution may have been considerable for the Americas as such, but had no direct impact on Curaçao (Klooster 2009:11-44).

strates in his contribution to this book – and to some extent it may also have worked the other way around, with ideas being transmitted from Curaçao to Coro on the Spanish Main to neighbouring Aruba. This was a world of strong interconnections indeed. There is ample archival evidence for revolutionary interaction between Coro and Curaçao in the late eighteenth century, and of slave leaders who had spent time in Coro, Curaçao, and even Haiti.¹⁷ One objective, however, never surfaced in Curaçao, not during the times of the Haitian and subsequent Spanish American independence wars nor, for that matter, in the following two centuries: a struggle for sovereignty. The island was, and is, simply too small and without (post)colonial tutelage too much at the mercy of Venezuela to nurture such ambitions (Oostindie and Klinkers 2003:57-63, 217-33).

The evidence of any long-term impact of the 1795-1800 revolutionary upheaval is mixed. We may assume that the spirit of 1795 continued to live among the enslaved population and possibly sections of the free coloured citizens for the next five years, particularly into the 1799-1800 rising. But at the same time we should account for the absence of any slave revolts in the nineteenth century. There are some possible explanations. Shortly after the 1795 revolt, colonial authorities proclaimed the first encompassing set of decrees stipulating ‘reasonable’ treatment of slaves (Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1978:514-6). This was not enough to keep slaves from again demanding full freedom a few years later. But perhaps the absence of a new round of extraordinarily cruel retribution in 1800 as well as these new laws may have kept the enslaved from fighting their bondage once more.

Other factors may have served to pacify the enslaved Curaçaoans. While the hope for freedom raised in 1799-1800 may not have waned, the cold truth was that the revolutionary auxiliaries from Haiti and Guadeloupe did not stand up to fight the British, but hastily evacuated the island. Under the British occupation, links with Haiti and the remaining French colonies were probably severed. We have no indications of any new outside interest in igniting slave resistance in Curaçao. Moreover, as Geggus indicates, throughout the region revolutionary fervour faded as Napoleonic France re-instated slavery in its remaining colonies, while Haiti became increasingly isolated.

17 Paula 1976, Rupert 2007:46-7, Phaf-Rheinberger 2008. In May 1795, Aruba witnessed a small and aborted Indian revolt. There was no indication of Haitian inspiration here, but later that year another small revolt of thirty slaves was defended in words reminiscent of Tula’s (Alofs 2009:44 and Alofs 1996:38).

Next, the number of slaves on Curaçao itself shrank by almost fifty per cent between 1789 and 1816, making the enslaved population a minority of the insular population for the first time since early colonisation. Perhaps large numbers of slaves were sold off in the region. This, too, may have limited the slaves' confidence to succeed in any type of revolt.¹⁸ Afterwards, there was the sale of over 4,000 slaves to other Caribbean colonies in the 1819-1847 period. There is a correlation between years of poor harvests and high numbers of slaves sold, and this must have been the most important factor. Yet one may speculate that owners were particularly interested in selling off precisely those slaves they suspected of rebelliousness. Indeed, prior to 1819, only the export of 'bad, stubborn, thievish and for the Colony extremely dangerous slaves' had been admitted by the local authorities and was indeed practiced.¹⁹

As for colonial rule, the relatively low frequency of slave resistance after 1816 both in Suriname and in the Dutch Caribbean islands may have helped the king and his entourage and, after the establishment of an elite liberal democracy in 1848, Dutch Parliament to continue to neglect Caribbean slavery. Tula's revolt and its aftermath, in spite of its eloquently expressed humanitarian claims, most likely passed virtually unnoticed in the metropolis.²⁰ Pieter Emmer (2010:107-8) suggests that the Curaçao revolt, or whatever other slave resistance in the Dutch Caribbean, did not contribute to the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean at all. On the contrary, the absence of dramatic slave revolts seemed to suggest that there was no urgency in abolishing slavery at all. One may argue with this bold thesis. But certainly there is no indication of after-the-fact glorification of the 1795 revolt encouraging the Dutch to think of the Caribbean slaves as humans worthy of freedom, much less of being treated as equals. Perhaps the link with the abhorred Haitian Revolution (would) even (have) had an adverse effect. It would take until 1863 before the Dutch abolished slavery, and another century before Tula's revolt became the central topos in Curaçaoan nationalist discourse.

18 Manumission does not provide a satisfactory explanation here, as the number of manumissions actually went down after 1804 (Van der Lee 1998:14). Slave mortality and emigration may have been of more significance.

19 Renkema 1981b:189-91, 202 (citation from 191); most slaves were sold to Puerto Rico. Cf. Dalhuisen 2009:60.

20 I came across one mention of the revolt, in the *Leeuwarder Courant*, 25-11-1795: an article based on a letter written by an eye witness dated 13-9-1795, including this observation ascribed to the priest Schinck: 'The Negroes remained stubborn and demanded their liberty or otherwise Death'.

The contemporary canonical version of 1795 tends to underline the rightfulness of the slave revolt, the crucial influence of the Haitian Revolution, and the brutality of colonial suppression.²¹ The 1796-1800 sequels seem largely unknown. Hence, the prevailing idea of the *fin de siècle* revolts provides a simple picture of enslaved but revolutionary blacks against repressive *ancien régime* whites. This rendering not only brushes aside the support of at least some free blacks and coloureds and even slaves in the crushing of the slave revolt, but equally the vital, though in the end fruitless, role of whites and free blacks and coloureds in the events of 1799-1800. The reality was one of imperfect solidarity within the slave population as well as within the various 'colour communities'. Far more nuance is appropriate – and need not deconstruct the 1795 revolt as a central topos in Curaçaoan nationalism.

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21 For example, Domacassé 1975, do Rego 1983, De Palm 1995, do Rego and Janga 2009, and Cain 2010, published by the Dutch national slavery institute (NiNsee).

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Slave rebellion during the Age of Revolution

David Geggus

Violent rebellion punctuated the history of African American slavery from its beginnings, but it was apparently never more prevalent than during the Age of Revolution. Although no one to my knowledge has attempted a complete census of slave revolts and conspiracies in the New World, it would seem that the decades from the 1770s to the 1840s witnessed the largest, the best known, and most frequent, both in Brazil and North America, as well as in the Caribbean heartland of American slavery. Within this timeframe, the 1790s stand out as a period of peak intensity, and the single year 1795 may be unique for its number of separate incidents in different societies. The slave insurrection in western Curaçao in the summer of that year, and its unusual sequel of five years later,¹ thus occurred in the midst of a broad wave of rebellion that challenged the institution of slavery in an unprecedented manner. Its significance, aims, and ultimate impact remain controversial.

DEFINITIONS AND DATA

It is not obvious at what point a collective act of violence merits the label 'slave rebellion'. In his pioneering study of United States rebellions, Herbert Aptheker applied a minimum criterion of ten participants. I have not done so here, as such information often lacks historical sources. The listing offered in the appendix to this chapter is therefore somewhat imprecise as well as undoubtedly deficient in coverage. As the case of Curaçao illustrates, African American rebellion took several forms in this period. The most massive and lengthy conflicts tended to be those in which emancipated slaves resisted attempts to reenslave them – as in St. Lucia,

1 See the chapters by Oostindie and Jordaan in this volume.

1795-97, in Saint-Domingue after 1793, and Guadeloupe in 1802 – or multi-class rebellions like those on Grenada and St. Vincent in 1795, which involved slaves but were dominated respectively by free men of colour and Black Caribs. For analytical purposes, I think it is important to distinguish such events that made use of organization, experience, and weaponry available only outside the state of slavery from revolts and conspiracies in which enslaved persons were the most important participants, on which I focus in this chapter.

The upheaval of summer 1800 in Curaçao (that involved French Caribbean troops and a variety of local actors) is one instance among several that pose problems of definition. Since slaves neither initiated nor directed the events, it could be termed a multi-class rebellion. Yet, as Han Jordaan shows in this volume, participation by the local free population was very limited. I have hesitantly classed it as a slave rebellion because most participants were slaves and it seems to have involved the autonomous participation of most of the slave population (Jordaan 2011; Palacios 1983:20-7). The fact that the French were not trying to free the slaves only underlines the autonomy of the slaves' actions.² Borderline cases that I would exclude from the category of slave rebellion are the 1802 and 1808 mutinies on Dominica and Jamaica of African soldiers serving in the 2nd West India regiment; the successful campaign of the *Cobrereros* community in eastern Cuba to be recognized as free (that took a violent turn in the banner year 1795), and attacks on or by established maroon communities, which were quite common in Brazil and in the early United States. The revolt of Jamaica's Trelawny Maroons in 1795 clearly should not be confused with a slave rebellion since all the insurgents were born free.³

As for slave conspiracies that did not progress to the stage of rebellion, the main problem for historians remains that of the slaves' contemporaries: were the plots real or imaginary? If Robert Paquette's study of Cuba's 'Escalera' conspiracy of 1843 has largely removed former doubts about its authenticity, Michael Johnson's research suggests that Denmark Vesey's much-studied conspiracy in Charleston, South Carolina, may well have been a fantasy manufactured by Vesey's white interrogators (Paquette 1988; Johnson 2001:915-76). Herbert Aptheker's pioneering survey of U.S. slave resistance has been much criticized for using flimsy sources; I have relied on it and Guillermo Baralt's book on Puerto Rico selectively (Aptheker 1943; Genovese 1986:24-25).

2 The French invaders informed the Dutch administration they would not interfere with slavery (Goslinga 1990:30).

3 The wars fought by the maroons of Dominica in 1809-1814 or by the *Boni* in Suriname (1789-1793) were different but not sufficiently so to qualify as slave rebellions.

A limited sampling of limited sources, the listing of roughly 180 incidents presented in the appendix should be understood as no more than a minimum tally. It no doubt underrepresents Brazil and Cuba.⁴ The fact that revolts are slightly more numerous than conspiracies in the historical record may reflect the vagaries of news dissemination and record-keeping rather than slaves' behavior, and the rough parity between Brazil (27 incidents) and the United States (25 incidents) assuredly is due to the latter's greater supply of local newspapers. The prominence of Caribbean societies is nonetheless as expected. Although only half of American slaves lived in the Caribbean in 1790 and less than a third by 1830, the region's pronounced imbalance between slave and free and its focus on sugar cultivation both facilitated and provoked a higher level of violent resistance than elsewhere.

This regional discrepancy is magnified when we take into account the size of the rebellions. Although the Bahian insurrections commonly mobilized hundreds of slaves, and the details of the Venezuelan conflict of 1811-1813 remain unclear, no mainland rebellion appears to have involved more than 1,000 slaves. In North America, only the 1811 revolt in the Louisiana territory mobilized more than 100 slaves. Yet, in the West Indies and Guianas there were, even if we count Saint-Domingue 1791-1793 as one case, no fewer than eight or nine rebellions that involved at least 1,000 slaves. It is extraordinary that tiny Curaçao accounts for two of these eight or nine cases.

To be sure, such numbers are very approximate, and in the largest cases historians tend to shift from counting armed men to estimating the total number of slaves living in areas controlled by rebels. Even within the Caribbean group of slave rebellions, clearly we are dealing with a very disparate array of events. Even if Jamaica's Christmas Rebellion of 1831 mobilized 18,000 slaves (as per Anthony Synnott) rather than 60,000 (as per Michael Craton), it would have included half of all the slaves who ever rebelled in the British Caribbean.⁵ As for Saint-Domingue, not only did the Northern Plain uprising of 1791-1793 dwarf all others in magnitude, duration, and outcome, but it stimulated five or six other revolts in different parts of the colony that each involved probably thousands of insurgents.⁶

4 Yacou (1984:48), claims Cuban revolts numbered 'une soixantaine' between 1833 and 1843, but gives no details. Bahia has been studied more than other Brazilian provinces.

5 Synnott 1976:270; Craton 1982:291. This excludes the 4 < 6,000 slaves who joined the 1795 multi-class rebellion on Grenada.

6 Léogane/Jacmel (early 1792); Cul de Sac plain (early 1792, early 1793); Anse-à-Veau 1792; Cayes plain 1792; and perhaps the Artibonite plain (1792-93).

This much greater incidence of large-scale rebellions in the Caribbean may be attributed partly to the demographic imbalance mentioned above and the region's larger average plantation size, which facilitated mobilization, and partly to the destabilizing political influences that marked the Age of Revolution and were particularly severe in the region.

DEMOGRAPHY

Before considering those political influences, let us note the obvious fact that one reason that rebellions and conspiracies were numerous and large between 1776 and 1848 was because there were more people in the Americas living in slavery than ever before or there would be again. At 3 million, the American slave population in 1790 was roughly twice what it had been fifty years before, and it would almost double again during the next half-century, despite the ending of slavery in Haiti and the British colonies (Engerman and Higman 1997, III:45-104). This explanation, however, only goes so far. The incidence of slave rebellion seems to drop off considerably after 1848, while the slave population did not do so until the 1860s.

More to the point perhaps, these were the peak years of the Atlantic slave trade. There is a strong correlation between mass arrivals of enslaved Africans and the incidence of rebellion in Bahia (1800-1830), Central Brazil (1835-1850), and Cuba after 1795. The same can be said of Louisiana during the decade before the large 1811 uprising, and of Saint-Domingue on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, when the colony was breaking all previous records for the Atlantic slave trade. The white proportion of the Cuban and Brazilian populations shrank in the early nineteenth century, and the enslaved proportion of the Caribbean population probably reached its greatest extent (70 percent) in 1790.

Two caveats should be noted. For the British colonies, there is no obvious relationship between the slave trade and slave rebellion in these years, and the three 'late' rebellions there, on creolized Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823), and Jamaica (1831), seriously undermine any attempt to correlate slave rebellion with an African presence. Similarly, while the vertiginous growth of Saint-Domingue's slave trade in 1785-90 almost makes the 1791 uprising look like a product of demographic determinism, the revolt in fact broke out in the most creolized part of the colony and was led largely by locally born slaves; the most African parts of Saint-Domingue were the slowest to join the Haitian Revolution. Hence

we should not be surprised if the two major rebellions in Curaçao's history took place when its slave population was already highly creolized.

SLAVE REBELLION AND THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

The central question raised by this clustering of rebellions and conspiracies by black slaves is what connection they might have with the white Atlantic's Age of Revolution. In his grand survey of slave resistance in the United States, Herbert Aptheker remarked that the spread of progressive ideas in the Western world, including abolitionism, and news of foreign rebellions were among the background influences on American slave revolts around the turn of the nineteenth century, but the causal factors he stressed most were recurrent economic depression and the rapid growth of the slave population. Michael Craton, a historian of the British Caribbean, thought a new type of rebellion emerged in these years, but he attributed it to the creolization of the slave population, positing 'African' and 'Creole' types of rebellion (Craton 1979:99-125, 1980:1-20).

Eugene Genovese put forward a different type of schema, hemispheric in scope, that made libertarian ideology the active agent. Seeking to write American slaves into the making of modernity, Genovese maintained that, whereas early slave insurgents sought seclusion and accepted the enslavement of others, the French Revolution gave rise to a new revolutionary type of slave uprising that sought liberty for all and engagement with the wider world (Genovese 1979:xviii-xxii, 82-125). The main weakness of this thesis is that Genovese failed to provide any plausible examples of the new type of insurrection apart from the Haitian Revolution and the Coro rebellion (Geggus 1989:122, 2002:66-7). Instead of straining to include Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, and using inaccurate descriptions of events on Trinidad and Jamaica, he could have strengthened his case with mention of the 1795 rebellion on Curaçao.

More recently, historians have shown greater interest in exploring the impact of the Haitian Revolution in its own right. Separating the two intertwined revolutions, French and Haitian, is somewhat arbitrary: the metropolitan revolution initiated the colonial one and, in turn, the conflict in Saint-Domingue forced antiracism and antislavery on to the agenda of the revolution in France. However, if the French Revolution proclaimed the ideals of liberty and equality, the Haitian Revolution demonstrated to colonized peoples that

they could be won by force of arms. Plantation societies built on bondage, prejudice, and inequality were peculiarly vulnerable to the ideology of revolutionary France, but the dramatic example of self-liberation offered by Saint-Domingue's transformation into Haiti brought the message much closer to home. On the other hand, once the French Republic had adopted slave emancipation, it took a more active approach to exporting this policy than did black revolutionaries in Saint-Domingue.

Finally, we need to consider the influence on slave insurgents of the antislavery movement that became a political force in the years between the American and French revolutions and by 1848 had freed many more slaves than did the Haitian Revolution. Although abolitionism became incorporated into the French and Haitian revolutions, it was an autonomous movement that pre-dated and outlasted them, and it was more directly relevant to slaves than libertarian ideology. It was far more influential in the Anglophone world than elsewhere, but even where it was least successful, in the Spanish empire, it had an influence on slave resistance.

Unlike the social changes singled out by Michael Craton, or the local traditions of resistance that Haitian historians often emphasize as the main cause of their revolution, the focus on abolitionism or foreign revolutions as a major influence on slave resistance elevates external over internal causes and shifts attention to the circulation of people, news, and ideas that is central to the growing popularity of the Atlantic approach.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Of all the Atlantic revolutions, the American Revolution evidently had the least impact on slavery, although many thousands of slaves were able to take advantage of the conflict to escape their bondage, and its aftermath brought about the abolition of slavery in states where it was of marginal importance, like Massachusetts and Pennsylvania (Quarles 1961; Schama 2005). After the revolution, many slaves and freedmen were transplanted to the Caribbean from North America. Thomas Benjamin has suggested that they or other African American soldiers who fought in the war may have played a role in the wave of slave rebellion that swept the West Indies in the 1790s, but there is no evidence of this.⁷ However, there are several other possible linkages about which we can speculate. First, it is

7 Benjamin 2009:587. The author confuses slaves with free men of colour.

worth pondering how Caribbean slaves received the news of the northeastern emancipation acts, which, after all, mark the beginning of the end of slavery in the Americas. Given the strong maritime links between Philadelphia and New England and the West Indies, and the prominence of black sailors in that trade, it would be surprising if news of this first legislative assault on slavery did not reach the ears of Caribbean slaves and help shape what Julius Scott has termed a ‘culture of expectation’ (Scott 1986:122, 158). Second, there is the example set by Governor Dunmore of Virginia, who in 1775 recruited slaves with offers of freedom to fight for the crown against their Patriot masters. Did the Saint-Domingue insurgents of 1791 have this model in mind when they claimed to be fighting for the king? When Dunmore was a dinner guest of Plaine du Nord planters in 1789, his wartime experiences were assuredly a topic of dinnertime conversation (Geggus 1997b:9, 36 n43). Lastly, the surprising fact that Afro-Cuban revolutionary José Antonio Aponte possessed a portfolio of pictures that included George Washington, as well as Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Toussaint Louverture, and that the U.S. slave leader Gabriel also supposedly invoked Washington’s example, suggests that the American Revolution served as an object lesson for slaves as well as others that power could be successfully contested (Childs 2006:3, 28; Sidbury 1997:261).

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The ways in which the French Revolution encouraged slaves to contest their enslavement are varied. Apart from the libertarian ideology that enflamed aspirations and exacerbated the sense of injustice, the revolution directly weakened colonial power structures by dividing their free populations into hostile factions, creating military mutinies, and undermining traditional authority, thus creating opportunities that slaves could seize. Chiefly affected in this manner were the French colonies, which dominate the record of slave resistance during the period 1789-93. When the French Republic finally abolished slavery in February 1794, a new, more international phase began in which slave emancipation became, for a few years, a weapon of war aimed primarily at Britain’s colonies. More specific ramifications of the Republic’s foreign policy also encouraged slaves to rebel when it seemed likely that the formerly French colonies of Louisiana and Tobago might be retroceded to France (in 1795 and 1801 respectively), and when the French occupied the United Provinces, so providing one of the justifications for Tula’s rebellion in Curaçao.

The impact of libertarian ideology is the most difficult connection to prove. At first sight, it may seem the most obvious, but slave insurgents in the French Caribbean rarely deployed a language of rights. They usually claimed that they had already been freed – by the king, in Martinique and Saint-Domingue, or by the National Assembly, in Guadeloupe. The slave leaders in northern Saint-Domingue, including Toussaint Louverture, combined an ostentatiously royalist rhetoric with rather flexible demands as to how many slaves should be freed, until the radical (and abolitionist) French commissar Sonthonax ended slavery there in August 1793. The evidence that slaves used the term ‘rights of man’ is actually quite limited, and in large measure derives from a document that is almost certainly a forgery (Geggus 2006:297-314, 2001:109-16).

Far easier to show is the way the French Revolution materially weakened slaveholding regimes. The moment chosen for their uprising by the northern plain insurgents of 1791 coincided with the onset of a civil war between whites and free coloureds and followed shortly after the deportation of half of the colonial garrison. The insurgents astutely exploited divisions between white radicals and conservatives, as did their counterparts in Guadeloupe in 1793. In Dutch Demerara, much as in Curaçao, the slaves rebelled in 1795, taking advantage of conflict between pro- and anti-French factions in the ruling class, and fighting against both.⁸

The Republic’s abrupt adoption of abolition in February 1794 belatedly fused libertarian politics and antislavery, and united the movement for black self-liberation with the resources of a major power. The chief result of France’s decision to use this policy against its enemies was the series of multi-class risings in the British Windward Isles supported by Victor Hugues in Guadeloupe and *Commissaire* Goyrand in St. Lucia. The Coro rebellion, the same year, would seem to be another example, in view of the shadowy presence of French privateers off the Venezuelan coast, and the insurgents’ apparent call for a republic and ‘la ley de los franceses’ (Brito Figueroa 1961:60-79, 103-4). This interpretation has been challenged, however, by historians who imply that local Spanish officials emphasized a French connection in order to cover up their oppressive behavior that was the real cause of the insurrection (Aizpurua 1988:705-723; Rivas, Dovale Prado and Bello 1996:103-25). Certainly, the sudden wave of rebellion that affected the Spanish empire in 1795, from Buenos Aires to Louisiana, suggests that

8 Craton 1982:272. However, the events in Demerara might better be described as slave cooperation with maroon attacks than an actual revolt.

internal factors like the *gracias al sacar* law passed that February, increases in sales tax, and the withdrawal of a new slave code at the end of 1794 were important in mobilizing resistance independent of any foreign influence.

The blacksmith Gabriel's ambitious conspiracy in Richmond, Virginia, in 1800 appears very much a response to the abolitionism of the French Republic. France was then unofficially at war with the United States, and local Frenchmen reputedly played a role in the plot. Historians often link the conspiracy to the Haitian Revolution, but contemporary sources show no trace of the conspirators' discussing Saint-Domingue, and evidence of the black revolution's impact on Virginian slaves is in fact remarkably slight.⁹ The attempt launched from Saint-Domingue in 1799 to foment a slave insurrection in Jamaica was similarly a French rather than a 'Haitian' venture. The initiative came from Paris, and it was organized by the local French official Philippe Roume, not the black governor Toussaint Louverture. Toussaint, indeed, secretly revealed the plan to the British, and the French emissaries were captured (Debien and Pluchon 1978:3-72). This ironic clash between the French and Haitian revolutions was due to Toussaint's need to avoid a maritime blockade by the British, which meant he could not afford a policy of exporting slave insurrection.

THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

This decision to settle for 'a revolution in one country' and to avoid foreign entanglement became the policy of independent Haiti and was announced in its declaration of independence in 1804. The Haitian Revolution's contribution to slave rebellion elsewhere was therefore very rarely a matter of direct assistance. One example is provided by the south coast privateers, part-French, part-Dominican, who attempted to launch a rebellion in Maracaibo in 1799, and who may have played the same role in Coro four years before (Helg 2001:159-60). As they were acting against their French officers' wishes, they represent another divergence of the Haitian from the French revolution, this time in favor of propagating slave rebel-

9 See, for example, Sidbury 1997:42-3, where the author claims as 'clear evidence' of the Haitian Revolution's influence a letter supposedly written by a black conspirator; although he notes the letter does not mention Saint-Domingue, that a white contemporary who linked it to the Caribbean did so without apparent justification, and that the conspiracy may not have existed. The letter, found dropped in the street in 1793, was probably a hoax. Even less evidence is offered in Douglas Egerton 1993

lion.¹⁰ A similar case was Alexandre Pétion's somewhat accidental participation in the 1800 landing on Curaçao along with other refugees who had been driven from southern Saint-Domingue by Toussaint Louverture.¹¹

If we juxtapose these events, both launched from the southern region of Saint-Domingue that was dominated by the free man of colour André Rigaud, with Alexandre Pétion's later assistance to Francisco Miranda in 1806 and to Simón Bolívar in 1816 (Verna 1969:87-298), it appears that attitudes to the propagation of revolution overseas varied among Haitian revolutionaries between the ex-slave leaders based in the north province and the *anciens libres* of the Bande du Sud. It was the freeborn men of mixed racial descent who sought to internationalize the revolution, not the former slaves.

More common were those revolts and conspiracies where we can show that insurgents drew inspiration rather than material help from the revolution in Saint-Domingue or from later events like the coronation of King Christophe in 1811. Surely the most remarkable case is the conspiracy, begun soon after the coronation, in Havana by the black carpenter José Antonio Aponte, who drew pictures of revolutionary leaders as a consciousness-raising exercise (Fischer 2004:41-56). Five years earlier, slaves on plantations around Havana, led by two creoles, had plotted to seize the city's forts so they could become free 'like those in Saint-Domingue' and 'absolute masters' of the land (García 2003:349). In 1796, African slaves planning a rebellion on a plantation in Spanish Santo Domingo sought advice from some Saint-Domingue insurgents who had settled nearby. Three years before, another conspirator in Santo Domingo, this time a creole, told his companions they were 'ass-holes' for doing nothing while blacks were killing whites in Saint-Domingue (Geggus 1997a:131). In 1816, on Barbados, the elderly Nanny Grigg advised conspirators to 'set fire the way they did in St. Domingo' (Craton 1982:261).

In several instances, we find insurgent slaves expecting 'Haitian' help, sometimes because manipulative leaders had assured them it would be forthcoming. Apparently a confidence-boosting device, it shows up in the Curaçao rebellion of 1795; in the Vesey plot in Charleston; in Puerto Rico in 1841; in Havana, in the 1843 Ladder conspiracy and the 1811 Aponte conspiracy, and also in Santo Domingo in 1811, in the multiracial conspiracy of Manuel

10 French policy distinguished between the colonies of its enemy, Britain, and those of its allies, Spain and the Batavian Republic.

11 This followed the War of the South (1799-1800), in which Toussaint defeated André Rigaud and took over southern Saint-Domingue. Pétion later became Haiti's first president.

del Monte. In Curaçao, the slave leader Tula not only claimed to be in contact with the Dominguan revolutionary André Rigaud, whom the French Republic had promoted to general a few months before, but he also adopted his name. In the Aponte conspiracy a free black actually pretended to be the Dominguan slave leader Jean-François.¹²

Another category of rebellions and conspiracies consists of those that involved Francophone slaves or men of colour, known or presumed to have come from Saint-Domingue or Haiti, and therefore to have been witnesses of the revolution there. Tula's rebellion on Curaçao is a striking example, one of its participants declaring 'Nous sommes ici pour vaincre ou mourir'; so is the 1811 insurrection in Louisiana led by the slave driver Charles Deslondes, which was the largest in North American history (Hartog 1961, 1:327; Paquette 1997:218-20). Less well known is the aborted revolt at St. Pierre, Martinique, the same year, whose leader had served in the Haitian army and had links to Haitian expatriates on Curaçao (Geggus 1996: 127-30). Cuba provides many other examples, from 1795 down to the Ladder conspiracy in 1843; Louisiana, another example in 1795; the Bahamas and Jamaica, two cases each; and Puerto Rico, Cartagena, and Marie Galante one case each (Geggus 1997b:14, 40 n79, 2003:43-7). Both the Coro rebellion's main leaders, Chirinos and González, were said to have visited Saint-Domingue.¹³

Some historians have claimed a Haitian influence on rebellions where evidence seems to be lacking.¹⁴ And contemporaries also disagreed sometimes. When Bahian planters, after a large rebellion in 1814, claimed that local slaves were discussing the Haitian Revolution, the local governor claimed that the planters were making this up in order to force him to adopt more draconian measures of control (Reis and Gomes 2009:289). In Jamaica, unfounded rumors regarding French and French Caribbean agents abounded at the time of the Second Maroon War (Geggus 1987:280-3). However, there is a methodological or epistemological issue here. Some may feel it beyond question that the unprecedented success of Saint-Domingue's black rebels inevitably played a major role in motivat-

12 Oostindie this volume; Geggus 2003:43-7. By a strange coincidence, Rigaud's brother Joseph later participated in the 1800 invasion of Curaçao, where he was executed: Pauléus Sannon 1920, II:199.

13 According to Brito Figueroa 1985:225, Chirinos travelled 'constantly' to Saint-Domingue. However, only one visit (with his white employer) is reported in *Documentos* 186.

14 For example, the claims, found in 1997:85 and Langley 1996:141 that, respectively, Jamaica's Christmas Rebellion and the Malé Revolt in Bahia were Haitian-inspired. On Virginia, see above, note 9.

ing subsequent resistance, and where written evidence is lacking, it must be due to the arbitrariness of colonial document-making.

There is little doubt that news of the Haitian Revolution traveled wide and fast from its opening moments. By September 1791, Jamaican slaves were singing songs about it, and blacks in Havana were believed to be sacrificing pigs in honor of the insurgents. When Toussaint Louverture occupied Santo Domingo in early 1801, slaves in the hills above Coro, in western Venezuela, were singing his praises within weeks (Geggus 2003:40-42; (pigs) Ferrer 2008:28). The year after Haiti achieved independence, supposed conspirators in Trinidad are recorded as parodying the Catholic mass, 'The bread we eat is white man's flesh. Remember St. Domingo!'¹⁵ The apparent propensity for Curaçao blacks to sing French revolutionary songs, both at home and abroad (as in La Guaira) seems more unusual (Hartog 1961, I:327; Edsel 1989:61-8).

News, however, did not travel as far and fast as some have suggested. Although Kenneth Maxwell quotes a visitor to Rio de Janeiro in 1792 as writing 'the secret spell that caused the Negro to tremble at the presence of the white man [had been] in a great degree dissolved' by the spectacle of 'black power', the quotation in fact dates from 1806 and applied to the whole of the Americas (Maxwell 1973:218; Barrow 1806:117-8). Free black and mulatto militiamen in Bahia were found to be wearing medallion portraits of Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1805, a few months after he had been crowned emperor of Haiti.¹⁶ It is significant, however, that these were freemen, not slaves. Stuart Schwartz comments that there is nothing to link the long cycle of Bahian slave revolts in the period 1807-35 to either the Haitian or French revolutions, and that such external influences were much more visible in the case of free men (as in the 1798 Tailors' conspiracy) than of slaves (Schwartz 1986:468-88). The same can be said of the mainly African slave uprisings of nineteenth-century Cuba, and in the Caribbean more widely (Geggus 1989:109; Tardieu 2003:101-11).

THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT AND REFORMISM

In the British colonies, autonomous slave rebellion reached something of a low point during the period of the French and Haitian

15 Brereton 2006:128-9. Brereton points out, however, that the sole source for this story dates from more than eighty years after the event.

16 Luiz Mott 1982:5. They are inadvertently described as slaves in Reis 1993:48.

revolutions, but then rebounded. During the fifteen years following the Napoleonic War the British Caribbean produced three of the largest slave revolts in New World history: in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823) and Jamaica (1831) (Craon 1982:254-321). The timing of each was quite clearly connected with successive developments in the antislavery movement in Britain. In each case, the insurgents demanded enforcement of an abolition law that they claimed (wrongly) had been passed by the imperial government but was being covered up by local authorities. From 1789 to the early 1830s, there were more than twenty such rebellions and conspiracies in which slaves argued that they had already been freed by law (or that their workload had been reduced to three days a week). Such rumours also surfaced in several places without provoking resistance (Geggus 1997b:7-11).

The phenomenon was not confined to slave societies, and it was probably rooted in wishful thinking, a desire to believe in the beneficent intentions of the powerful, which on some occasions was clearly manipulated by astute leaders. Earlier examples can be found in the Americas, especially in the 1770s (Geggus 1997b:35 n33; Schwartz 1986:478). However, beginning with an aborted rising on Martinique in August 1789, the syndrome appeared in a swift succession of revolts and conspiracies that were apparently linked to the emergence of antislavery movements in England and France and to recent government efforts there and in Spain to reform slavery or the slave trade. Such reform efforts and the slaveholders' hostile reaction to them were easily misinterpreted. Rumours of an official liberation that was being covertly sabotaged suggested to slaves that they had potential allies and obviously exacerbated the sense of injustice that Barrington Moore isolated as a crucial stimulant to rebellion (Moore 1978). Such rumours perhaps resonated more strongly with the enslaved than the concept of abstract rights emanating from revolutionary France, where abolitionism made little progress until 1793. Even Tula on Curaçao in 1795 seems to have justified his rebellion with reference to the French abolition decree (and a Christian egalitarianism) rather than to libertarian ideology (Goslinga 1990:10).

The first spate of these rumour-inspired revolts and conspiracies numbered nearly a dozen in the period 1789-93. They affected British, French, and Spanish colonies, and included the great uprising in northern Saint-Domingue. Another, smaller spate occurred in 1795 in the Spanish empire, where the withdrawal of the controversial *Código Negro* in late 1794, and reforms regarding free people of color contributed to a wave of resistance that stretched from Louisiana to Buenos Aires. After an isolated conspiracy involv-

ing Brazilian slaves in the lowlands of Upper Peru (Bolivia) in 1809, more cases appeared in each of the Spanish Antilles and in Martinique in the period 1811-1812. This time the impulse seems to have derived from the Cortes of Cádiz, where a deputy proposed in 1811 to end slavery in Spain's colonies. In one district of Puerto Rico, however, the emancipation rumour became confused with news from Haiti, and Henry Christophe was perceived as the liberating monarch (Geggus 1997b:8, 10-11; Baralt 1985:27).

A similarly hybridized rumour sparked a slave conspiracy in Maranhão, north-east Brazil in 1827. On this occasion, it was said that British liberators would invade the region on behalf of the King of Congo (Röhrig Assunção 1999:23). In 1841, in Ponce on Puerto Rico's south coast, plotters expected help from both Haiti and from abolitionists, as did many of the Escalera conspirators two years later in Cuba (Baralt 1982:93; Paquette 1988:238, 242, 254). Finally, some historians believe that the Missouri debates of 1820 on limiting slavery's expansion in the United States and an attempt to end slavery in Kentucky in 1829 were among the stimuli that set in motion the Vesey plot of 1822 and the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831 (Aptheker 1943:270, 292).

OTHER THEMES

(1) Changing Tactics. According to Michael Craton, rebellions dominated by locally born creole slaves tended to be less violent than earlier ones led by Africans. Although they usually led to violence, it seems their leaders intended them to begin as work strikes in which the slaves could bargain from a position of strength (Craton 1979:99-125, 1980:1-20, 1982:291). Craton had in mind the last decades of British Caribbean slavery, but earlier examples can be found: in Martinique (1789), Dominica (1791), Guadeloupe (1793), Buenos Aires (1795), and Curaçao (1795), as well as later ones, in Martinique and St. Croix in 1848. These changing tactics obviously reflected changing expectations among the enslaved and the belief that governments were already willing to end slavery.

(2) Troop Levels. For American slave societies, much of the Age of Revolution was a period of warfare. War does not appear to have facilitated slave rebellion unless a belligerent party specifically encouraged it, as in Venezuela in 1811-1813, or Bahia in December 1822. In fact, wars probably made rebellions less likely. Sometimes they provided a safety valve by making it easier for slaves to run away, as in the American Revolutionary War, or they freed restless

young males through the recruitment of slaves as soldiers, as in the long Spanish American conflict. Above all, they often they made rebellion more difficult because of their mobilization of large numbers of armed men. João Reis made this argument about the lack of major slave revolts in Brazil during its separation from Portugal (1821-1823), and the dearth of autonomous slave rebellions in the British Caribbean during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars can be attributed to the islands' exceptionally large garrisons during those years (Reis 1988:122; Geggus 1987:292-8). The incidence of slave resistance in Cuba in the same period also seems to have been influenced by war but in a reverse manner. Garrisons dwindled during periods of maritime war that made it difficult for Spain to reinforce them, and rebellion increased. Rebellion tended to diminish when the garrison was reinforced, as in 1799-1803, and 1813-1824 (Geggus 1997b:7 n31).

Apart from these general patterns, many individual rebellions or conspiracies occurred following a recent decline in the strength of the local garrison. This is true of the three large British Caribbean revolts of 1816, 1823 and 1831, and of the Saint-Domingue uprising of 1791. The Aponte conspiracy in Cuba also was launched when island troop levels were at a low point. Jamaica, Tobago, Santo Domingo, and Venezuela provide other examples (Geggus 1987:294-7, 2009:8). And one of the reasons the Virginia blacksmith Gabriel organized his conspiracy in 1800 was the opportunity provided by a reduction in the number of Federal troops as the Quasi-War with France came to an end (Aptheker 1943:225). Curaçao's garrison was always small and, given the difficulty of sending out new recruits during the 1790s, it would not be surprising if it, too, was unusually weak in 1795 and 1800.¹⁷

(3) Free Coloured Involvement. A final way in which to compare acts of slave rebellion in this period is according their degree of free coloured participation, which was widespread but varied. Denmark Vesey was the only free man involved in the 1822 conspiracy he supposedly organized, but free men of African descent made up two-fifths of the planners of Venezuela's Coro rebellion, and Indians a tenth (Dominguez 1980:56). According to Jean-François, leader of the Saint-Domingue slave uprising, some two percent of his insurgent army consisted of free blacks and mulattoes (Geggus 2002:179). The rapid growth of free populations of colour around the turn of the nineteenth century probably explains why so many of these revolts and conspiracies involved free non-whites.

17 In 1801 the garrison numbered just 230, mainly German mercenaries described as 'unmotivated and unreliable' (Hartog 1961, I:495).

Usually, as in Curaçao, where a couple of free blacks administered oaths to slave insurgents (Hartog 1961, I:325-6),¹⁸ free participants were neither numerous nor played prominent roles. Even so, several of the most salient events had free black leaders, like the carpenters José Antonio Aponte in Havana and Denmark Vesey in Charleston, or the sharecropper José Chirinos in Coro. Manuel Barcia, in fact, argues that both the Aponte and Escalera conspiracies were so dominated by freemen they were not slave conspiracies at all (Barcia 2008:46). In Saint-Domingue, the black freedman Toussaint Louverture emerged as a prominent leader in the 1791-93 insurrection and may have been one of its organizers. Less well known are the Maracaibo militia lieutenant Francisco Pirela; manservant Alexis Casimir, who played a shadowy role in the Martinique rebellion in 1789; and the black artillery sergeant who provided weapons for the Cartagena conspiracy of 1799.

Such figures generally lived close to the slave population and had enslaved family members. They tended to be black rather than of mixed descent, and to have little stake in slaveholding.¹⁹ In Brazil and Cuba, African ethnicity seems to have been an important variable, with freedmen and slaves from the same parts of Africa combining in rebellion. In contrast, the free men of colour who dominated or participated in multi-class rebellions, or who revolted in their own interest, tended to be slaveholders of mixed racial descent, as in the Grenada, St. Vincent, and Dominica uprisings of 1795, Francisco Morales's conspiracy of the same year in Cuba, and the 1798 Tailors' rebellion in Brazil (Geggus 1989:109-11). Free black and mulatto artisans played the most prominent roles in Cuba's Ladder conspiracy but, as a group, the former were regarded as the more radical and committed (Paquette 1988:241-2, 251-7). Slave rebellions and conspiracies influenced by the French and Haitian revolutions and, to a lesser degree, those influenced by abolitionist rumours tended to be associated with the presence of free people of colour. They no doubt had a wider awareness of external events than did the enslaved because of their much greater literacy and mobility.

Notwithstanding this widespread participation of free coloured individuals in slave resistance, free men of colour almost every-

18 Free men of colour played a similar role in Cuba's 1843 conspiracy (Paquette 1988:237-8, 242-3).

19 However, see Geggus 1997b:41 n96. Pirela was a *pardo*, of mixed racial descent, although wrongly identified as black in Dominguez 1980:159. Vesey's identity is also unclear (Morgan 2002:161-2). Chirinos was born free to an Indian mother, but his father, wife, and children were slaves. So were Toussaint Louverture's (Geggus 2007). Vesey's children were also slaves.

where played an even more prominent role in the suppression of slave rebellions as part of local militia forces. In some instances, such as the Maracaibo, Cartagena, and Aponte conspiracies, pardo militiamen were responsible for their betrayal.

CONCLUSION: REBELLION AND EMANCIPATION

Despite the uniquely rapid growth of the U.S. slave population, slavery was a declining institution in the Americas by the end of the Age of Revolution in 1848. It had been abolished in the colonies of Britain, France, and Denmark, and the Atlantic slave trade was everywhere illegal, surviving only in Brazil and Cuba. How far, if at all, this decline was due to the wave of slave resistance discussed above remains a controversial topic (Drescher and Emmer 2010).

The massive Saint-Domingue slave revolt of 1791 was clearly the main factor in ending slavery in Saint-Domingue in 1793, and (until Bonaparte restored it in 1802) in Guadeloupe and Guyane in 1794. Even there, however, the outbreak of the European war in 1793 and the fortuitous presence of the abolitionist *Commissaire* Sonthonax were vital parts of the process. Rather less certain is whether the Haitian Revolution contributed to the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 and to slave emancipation in Britain's colonies in 1833. If fear of future rebellions has been exaggerated as a causative factor, the revolution was surely important in allowing British politicians to vote their consciences by destroying France as a commercial rival (Geggus 2010). Similarly, Simón Bolívar's efforts to end slavery in Venezuela were in some measure a response to his military difficulties and his Enlightenment sensibility, but they could scarcely have been made without the Haitian assistance that revived his military campaign in 1816 (Verna 1969:87-298).

The British antislavery campaign that climaxed in 1833 evidently followed a metropolitan timetable, but many historians have argued that the major uprisings in Jamaica (1831) and Demerara (1823) catalysed its development. Whereas in the past they tended to stress metropolitan dread of continuing rebellions or repulsion at the planter class's brutal reaction to them, more recently they have emphasized the way the insurgents' discipline and restraint increased sympathy for their cause.²⁰ Historians of Brazil still sharply disagree whether slave resistance in the late 1840s contributed to the closure of that country's slave trade (Needell 2001, 2006:377).

20 See Drescher and Emmer 2010 (contributions of Beckles, Blackburn, Davis, and Drescher).

The Age of Revolution ended with two clear-cut cases, in Martinique and St. Croix, where slave rebellions made a definite contribution to the emancipation process. The rebellions were not, strictly speaking, causal factors since the decision to abolish slavery already had been taken and was the cause of the insurrections, but they did determine its timing. The mass invasion of the town of St. Pierre in May 1848 and the fighting it gave rise to in northern Martinique caused the governor to immediately declare slavery abolished. This brought forward by some three months the emancipation decreed in Paris by the new revolutionary government (Butel 2002:291-4). The declaration had immediate repercussions not only in the other French colonies but also those of Denmark. The Danish government had announced the previous year it would end slavery in 1859, but a massive rising of slaves on St. Croix in July 1848 shortened the process by eleven years (Hall 1992:208-11).

Several themes that characterize slave resistance in the Age of Revolution can be found in the two rebellions on Curaçao which, remarkably, were among the largest of this turbulent period. They were among the most closely associated with both the French and Haitian revolutions and they demonstrate the inspirational effect that foreign antislavery measures had on enslaved populations. They further provide evidence of the adoption of new, non-violent tactics. However, the Curaçao rebellions cannot be included in the small group that hastened the end of slavery, for which any surviving participants had to wait more than sixty years.

APPENDIX. SLAVE REBELLIONS AND CONSPIRACIES, 1776-1848

Conspiracy/Revolt

1776

July, Jamaica executed	C	Hanover parish. 30 slaves
July, North Carolina 1778	C?	Beaufort and other counties
Easter, St. Kitts 1779	C	African and creole slaves
November, Peru 1784	R	1 plantation, 1 soldier killed
Jamaica	C	St. Mary's. Led by slave driver

Jamaica	R	St. George's. 1 plantation, newly arrived Africans.
1789		
June, Brazil	R	Bahia. 50 slaves, 1 plantation, 1 white killed
August, Martinique	R	St. Pierre district. 3-400 slaves
Demerara	R	1 plantation. Widespread conspiracy
1790		
January, Cuba	R	1 plantation
April, Guadeloupe	R?	Petit Bourg, etc. 100+ punished
Spring? Venezuela	R	1 plantation, 1 overseer killed
May, Tortola	R	1 plantation, 2 slaves executed
Oct.-Dec., Martinique	R	West coast. Pillage and killing
1791		
January, St. Lucia	C	Soufrière. 1 plantation
January, Dominica	R	Work stoppage/desertion/confrontation
Mid-Jan., Dominica	R	Free coloured leader. 1 white killed
January, St. Domingue	C	Port Salut. 200 slaves
May, Guadeloupe	C?	Ste. Anne. Led by mulatto slave
June/July, St. Domingue	R	Separate revolts on 3 estates, Cul de Sac
July, Louisiana	C	Pointe Coupée. 17 slaves arrested
August, Marie Galante	C	Saint-Domingue. Free coloured hanged
Aug./Nov., St. Domingue	R	North Province. 100,000+ involved
Nov./Dec. Jamaica	C?	North coast
1792		
Saint-Domingue	R	Revolt spreads beyond North. 1,000s
1793		
March, Sto. Domingo	C	Hinche. 19 arrested. No executions
April, Guadeloupe	R	Trois Rivières. 200. 20 whites killed

April, Guadeloupe	C	Baillif. 5 death sentences
April, Guadeloupe	C	Basse-Terre region. 14 punished
August, Guadeloupe	R	Ste. Anne. 1,000? slaves and freemen
St. Lucia	R	
1794		
February, Martinique	R	Ste. Luce. During British invasion
1795		
January, Curaçao	R	Santa Katarina. 1 plantation
early, Santo Domingo	C	Samaná. 7 blacks, 3 French whites
April, Louisiana	C	Pointe Coupée. 23 slaves executed
May, Bahamas	C	Nassau. Francophone slaves
May, Venezuela	R	Coro. 300 slaves and free blacks
July, Cuba	R	Puerto Principe. 15 slaves
July? Puerto Rico	R?	Aguadilla. A few slaves
August, Curaçao	R	2,000 slaves? 29 slaves executed
Demerara	R	Cooperation with maroon attacks
Aruba	R	30 slaves, apparent Haitian inspiration
Argentina	R?	Buenos Aires. 3-day strike
Trinidad	C?	2 conspiracies in south and north
Cuba	C	Bayamo
1796		
Feb.-April, Louisiana	C	Pointe Coupée, German Coast. 3 plots?
May, Cuba	C	Puerto Príncipe. 5 'French' slaves
Oct., Santo Domingo	R	Boca Nigua. 100 slaves 7 executed
1797		
August, Bahamas	C	Nassau. 'French' slaves. 5 executed

1798			
January, Venezuela	C		Carúpano/Cumaná. African slaves
June, Cuba	R		Puerto Principe. 20 slaves punished
July, Cuba	C		Trinidad. 2 slaves hanged; 8 deported
October, Cuba	R		Guines. 23 slaves on 1 estate
Cuba	C		Mariel
Cuba	C		Santa Cruz
1799			
April, New Granada	C		Cartagena. 'French' slaves, freemen
May, Venezuela	C		Maracaibo. French and local freemen
1800			
August, Virginia	C		Richmond. 25 executed
September, Curaçao	R		Large multi-class rising
1801			
December, Tobago	C		7 or 16 estates. 7 slaves executed
1802			
Jan.-April, Virginia	C		Norfolk, etc. 25 slaves executed
May, North Carolina	C?		11 slaves executed in a dozen counties
June, Cuba	C		Managua
1803			
February, Cuba	C		Río Hondo
June, Jamaica	C		Kingston. 2 executed
1804			
Demerara	C?		Igbo and Akan friendly societies
South Carolina	C		St. Peter's. 10 or 12 slaves executed
1805			
Cuba	C		Bayamo. English-speaking slaves
April, North Carolina	C		Wayne County, etc., 20 arrested, 5 executed
December, Trinidad	C?		4 slaves executed

1806		
Cuba	C	plantations near Havana
Jamaica	C	St. George's. 1 slave executed
Puerto Rico	R	Humacao. Slaves attack guard house
1807		
May, Brazil	C	Salvador/Reconcavo. Hausa leaders
September, Jamaica	R	St. George
December, Demerara	C	20 slaves arrested. 9 executed
1808		
December, Brazil	R	Bahia. Several 100s
1809		
Cuba	C	Puerto Príncipe
January, Brazil	R	Salvador/Reconcavo. 400 Africans
March, Jamaica	C	Kingston. 2 executed
Upper Peru	C	Santa Cruz. Slaves and Indians
1810		
February, Brazil	R	Salvador
1811		
January, Louisiana	R	German Coast. 400 < 500 slaves. About 90 killed
Sept., Martinique	R	St. Pierre, 15 executed
1811-13, Venezuela	R	Central region. Widespread, encouraged by royalists
1812		
Cuba	C	Centered on Havana. Widespread
January, Puerto Rico	C?	Widespread. 16 punished
January, Cuba	R	Puerto Principe. 8 hanged; 73 whipped
February, Cuba	C	Bayamo. 5 slaves jailed
March, Cuba	C?	Holguín. 1 slave executed
March, Cuba	R	Guanabo. 1 estate
August, Louisiana	C	New Orleans. 1 white executed
August, St. Domingo	R	Eastern region. 3 executed
1814		
February, Brazil	R	Salvador/Itapoam. 13 whites and 56 slaves killed

March, Brazil 1815	R	Bahia
December, Jamaica	C	St. Elizabeth. 250 Africans. 1 hanged
December, Brazil 1816	C	Alagoas
Jan.-July, S. Carolina	C	Camden, church-based. 6 slaves executed
February, Brazil,	R	Bahia, Santo Amaro etc. Lasted 4 days
February, Virginia	C	Spotsylvania County. White leader, 6 slaves executed
April, Barbados	R	+4,000, 120 slaves killed, 144 executed
1817		
Cuba	R	1 coffee plantation
1819		
May, Georgia	C	Augusta
1820		
March, Florida	R	Jamaican slaves newly arrived
June, Cuba	R	Montalvo and Armonía plan- tations
August, Cuba	R	La Esperanza and La Concep- ción plantations
Belize	R	New River. +100 slaves
1821		
July, Puerto Rico	C	Bayamón. 2 slaves executed
1822		
February, Brazil	R	Bahia, São Mateus. Small revolt
May, Cuba	R	Mariel
June, Brazil	R	Itaparicá. Small revolt
Sept., Puerto Rico	C	Naguabo. 2 slaves executed
December, Brazil	R	Bahia. +50 slaves killed. Portu- guese instigated
South Carolina	C?	Charleston. Denmark Vesey, 35 executed
October, Martinique	R	Carbet. 2 plantations, several whites killed

1823		
Tortola	R	1 plantation
August, Demerara	R	< 12,000 slaves, c220 slaves killed, 33 executed
December, Jamaica	C	Hanover, etc. 12 slaves executed
1824		
February, Jamaica	C	St. George. 6 slaves hanged
1825		
June-Aug., Cuba	R	Matanzas. Revolts on 20 estates, 500 slaves
1826		
Cuba	R	Western region. 1 plantation
May? Maryland	R	29 slaves on ship, killed 2 whites
July, Puerto Rico	C	Ponce. 20 slaves executed
August, Brazil	R	Cachoeira
September, Ohio R.	R	77 slaves in transit, killed 5 whites
December, Brazil	C	Salvador/Reconcavo, centered on Yoruba quilombo
1827		
January, Cuba	R	Tentativa coffee plantation. 57 slaves
February, Brazil	C	Maranhão. Emancipation rumor, half-dozen estates
March, Brazil	R	Cachoeira. 3 plantations, 30 slaves arrested
September, Brazil	R	Sergipe. 10 plantations, mainly Yoruba. < 18 slaves killed
1828		
Cuba	R	Western region. 1 plantation
March, Brazil	R	Pirajá, Yoruba. 20 slaves killed
April, Brazil	R	Cachoeira. 2 revolts
June, Brazil	R	Ilheus
Dec., Puerto Rico	C	Guayama. Small, no executions
December, Brazil	R	Santo Amaro
1829		
March, Louisiana	R	2 slaves executed
April, South Carolina	C	Georgetown

August, Kentucky	R	90 slaves in transit, 6 executed, 2 whites killed
October, Brazil 1830	R	Reconcavo. 3 plantations, 3 killed
April, New Orleans	C	2 slaves executed
April, Brazil	R	Salvador. +120 slaves
April, Tortola	R	1 plantation
June, Bahamas	R	Exuma
July, Cuba	R	Guamacaro. 1 plantation
October, Louisiana	C	Plaquemines. 100 slaves
Brazil	R	Salvador. +100 slaves; Yoruba. +50 killed
1831		
Cuba	R	Western region. 1 plantation
Martinique	C	St. Pierre
August, Virginia	R	Southampton Co. 77 slaves, 57 whites killed
September, Tortola	C	widespread
December, Tennessee	C	Fayetteville
December, Jamaica	R	18 < 60,000 slaves, 540 slaves killed/executed
1832		
May, Puerto Rico	R	Vega Baja. 1 plantation
1833		
Jan., Puerto Rico	C	Ponce. 1 plantation
August, Cuba	R	Cafetal Salvador, Guanajay. 300 slaves, 53 slaves killed
1835		
January, Brazil,	R	Salvador. 300 slaves/freedmen, 50 killed, 5 executed
June, Cuba	R	Matanzas. 3 plantations, 130 slaves
July, Cuba	R	Aguacate. 1 estate, 3 whites killed, 11 rebels commit suicide
1836		
Suriname	C	Coronie. 1 plantation, shaman leader
1837		
June, Cuba	R	La Sonora sugar estate. No whites killed, 3 slaves executed

August? Cuba	C	Guantánamo region
October, Louisiana	C	Rapides parish. 50 < 60 slaves, 9 slaves, 3 freemen executed
1838		
Cuba, January	R	Trinidad region. 52 Gangá slaves, 12 shot
Cuba, April	R	Trinidad region. 1 white killed, 5 slaves executed
November, Brazil	R	Vassouras. 300 slaves
1839		
March, Cuba	R	Matanzas. 1 plantation, Yoruba slaves
Cuba	R	Matanzas. Revolts on several other plantations
1840		
June, Cuba	R	Güines, Delgado estate. 3 slaves killed
July, Cuba	R	Empresa plantation. +40 Yoruba slaves, 2 whites killed
Sept./Oct., Louisiana	C	7 parishes. 100s, dozens executed
Sept., Puerto Rico	C	Guayanilla. 32 punished, no executions
October, Maryland	R	1 plantation, 1 white wounded
1840s		
Brazil	C	Vassouras. 'Repeated abortive uprisings'
1841		
February, Georgia	C	Augusta. 1 execution
Oct/Dec., Puerto Rico	C	Ponce. 7 slaves executed
1842		
July, Cuba	R	La Arratúa sugar estate. 42 slaves, 5 executed
1843		
March, Puerto Rico	R	Toa Baja. 5 soldiers killed, 8 slaves executed
March, Cuba	R	Matanzas. 465 slaves, 128 killed, lasted 2 days
May, Cuba	R	Sabanilla. 2 sugar estates

June, Cuba	R	Sabanilla and Guamacaro. +300 slaves
November, Cuba	R	Matanzas. 66 insurgents killed/ executed
December, Cuba	C	Matanzas. 17 slaves executed
December, Cuba	C	Multi-class, widespread, +1,800 punished
1845		
July, Maryland	R	75 armed slaves, attempted escape, battle, 1 executed
1848		
May, Martinique	R	St. Pierre, Prêcheur. 1,000s, 58 deaths, some arson
July, St. Croix	R	8,000 slaves, some property damage, no deaths
July, Puerto Rico	C	Ponce. 21 slaves punished, 3 executed
August, Puerto Rico	C	Vega Baja. 3 slaves punished, 1 executed
July-Aug., Brazil	C	Paraíba. 50 slaves
August, Kentucky	R	75 armed slaves, attempted escape, battle, 3 executed

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The rising expectations of free and enslaved blacks in the Greater Caribbean

Wim Klooster

As David Geggus has shown, scores of slave conspiracies and revolts occurred during the Age of Revolutions. In the Greater Caribbean, slave uprisings were especially frequent in the 1790s. One year stood out: 1795. While in a number of colonies revolts were planned in that year but failed to materialize, and in other colonies small numbers of slaves took up arms, large-scale rebellions involving slaves did occur in Coro and Curaçao. The seeds for such rebellious behaviour had been sown in 1789 with the destruction of the *ancien régime* in France, the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and the promulgation in Spain of a new slave code by King Charles IV. The overthrow or reform of time-honoured structures had an impact not only on slave populations, but also on underprivileged free people of colour. Abolitionism and the immediate French termination of slavery added fuel to the flames.

I will argue here that the French revolutionary message had a more direct impact on free people of colour in the Caribbean than on slaves. Aiming to achieve full legal equality, free blacks and mulattoes echoed the message of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Although some enslaved blacks in Saint-Domingue also adopted the Rights of Man as their mantra, slaves generally were more often inspired by the notion of a royal decree that emancipated them, but that was withheld by local authorities and slaveholders. As we will see, rumours spreading this false idea existed long before the 1790s and would still circulate long afterwards, but they were particularly potent in the aftermath of the French and Haitian revolutions.

Although such rumours seem to have bypassed Curaçao, the island had multiple ties to the revolutionary Caribbean around the time of the unprecedented revolt of 1795. A lively commercial

entrepôt, Curaçao was intimately connected to the French, Spanish, British, and Danish colonies. These close ties were replicated on an individual level, as evinced by the involvement of Curaçaoan blacks in a maroon community in Santo Domingo, slave conspiracies in Louisiana and Cuba in the 1790s, and the Coro revolt of 1795.

FREE COLOURED, SLAVES, AND EQUALITY

The tumultuous Caribbean decade of the 1790s had its roots in the European events of 1789, although the outbreak of the French Revolution did not in itself spark rebellious behaviour of free and enslaved blacks in the colonies. More important among free people of colour than the demise of the *ancien régime* was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and, by extension, the notion of equality as emanating from France. Free people of African birth or descent embraced the document's message as it stressed an attractive alternative to their plight. Genuine equality was still a remote prospect for them prior to the Revolution. In Spanish America, free blacks and mulattoes were not allowed to live on their own, could not become clergymen, scribes, or notaries, and were forbidden to have Indian servants. In Venezuela, females were forbidden to wear gold, silk, or pearls, and males did not have the right to walk side by side with whites in the streets, nor were they to be given a chair in white houses (Ponce 1994:38-9; Pellicer 1996:42, 116-7). In the wealthiest French colony, Saint-Domingue, the separate legal status of free blacks and mulattoes was not stressed until the 1760s and 1770s. Starting in those decades, they were forbidden to ride in coaches, to be surgeons or midwives, to have certain types of household furniture, and to adopt the dress or hairstyles of whites. They were to be rigorously punished for hitting a white person, even if they had been injured first.¹

In order to properly understand the notion of equality held by Caribbean free blacks, it may be helpful to contrast their public and private opinions and actions in pre-revolutionary with those in revolutionary times. Before the 1790s, free nonwhites, even those who ended up joining white-led revolts and revolutions, usually did not aspire to the creation of a slaveless society; if they did, no public record has survived. Instead, they aimed at obtaining and

1 Raymond 1790; Raymond 1791:8; Debien 1956:75; Debbash 1967:38-9, 53-4, 74-5; King 2001:168; Garrigus 2006:95. See for legal discrimination in the British Caribbean: Cox 1984:92-6.

enforcing privileges for themselves, individually or collectively, resorting to the available channels to achieve their ends. The free *pardos* (mixed-bloods of African origin) in the province of Caracas, for example, used the courts to be individually admitted to offices legally reserved for whites. Some already *de facto* enjoyed traditionally white privileges, but aspired to legal recognition, while others sought to obtain privileges never before granted to a nonwhite. Their petitions show that they had mastered the vocabulary of successful petitioners, which revolved around the concept of honour. They stressed their 'cleanliness of blood', Catholicism, lineage, worthy occupation, and devotion to duty.²

Such strategies did not disappear overnight in times of revolt. There are numerous examples of free mulattoes eager to climb the social ladder fighting against rebels and revolutionaries. At the same time, the outbreak of an anticolonial revolt could invite radical responses. One source of inspiration may have been the text of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, although it is impossible to ascertain for every case whether this document – in whatever form it came to the nonwhites – only made manifest what was in the hidden transcript or if it actually changed their outlook. The widespread fear of so-called French mulattoes among officials across the Caribbean and in ports along the eastern seaboard of the United States in the 1790s was not unfounded. Many of them adhered to the principles of the French Revolution (Morales 1986:36). Nor were authorities in Venezuela delusional when they labelled some mulattoes subversive. By 1795, *pardo* males were addressing each other with the title 'Don' and asserted that there had not been both a white Adam and a mulatto Adam. Some mulattoes began to complain openly about the inequality between whites and *pardos*. Venezuela's War Council singled out one of them, a musician named Juan Bautista Olivares, who had requested the bishop to be admitted to the priesthood. The bishop noted that Olivares' petition was filled with arrogance and pride, revealing the author's spirit, which was 'capable of animating his class to throw off the yoke of obedience and subjection'. What also alarmed the War Council was that he had read and explained to another mulatto a sermon attributed to a Parisian constitutional priest. The text contained references to liberty and equality. Olivares was also accused of having given a fellow musician a book that contained a subversive message. Citing as additional evidence against him the fact that he possessed a large library and that he had spread

2 Pellicer 1996:132, 135. In other parts of Spanish America, free blacks as well as slaves availed themselves of the legal system to assert their rights: Bennett 2003:Chapter 5; Johnson 2007.

the 'Rights of Man', the Council arrested Olivares and sent him to Spain, where the king freed him and sent him back to Caracas (Briceño-Iragorry 1947:58-9; Pellicer 1996:85, 102).

As far as is known, Olivares did not go on to take part in any revolt. A lieutenant in the free *pardo* militia of New Orleans named Pedro Bailly went one step further, according to contemporary accusations. In 1793, he was found guilty of having professed ideas suggestive of revolution. Besides, he stood trial twice in the same decade for criticizing the Spanish government and following 'the maxims of the French rebels'. He was acquitted in 1791, but condemned in March 1794 to serve a jail sentence in Havana. One testimony was perhaps decisive: that of Luis Declouet, second lieutenant of the Louisiana regiment. When Declouet had called the French a foe to all humanity, Bailly had replied, 'Humanity! Humanity! I am going to speak frankly to you, sure that you are a man of honor. Sir, I do not see that any acts of inhumanity have been committed. It is true that they have done wrong by murdering their king, but sir, the French are just; they have conceded men their rights'. Declouet asked Bailly to elaborate. To what rights did he refer? Bailly answered: 'A universal equality among men, us, people of color. We have on the Island of Saint-Domingue and other French islands the title *ciudadano activo* [active, participatory citizen]; we can speak openly, like any white persons and hold the same rank as they. Under our [Louisiana] rule do we have this? No, sir, and that is unjust. All of us being men, there should be no difference. Only their method of thinking – not color – should differentiate men' (Hanger 1997:152-3, 156).

The Declaration of the Rights of Man was a new ideological weapon for people of colour. In its absence, would they have lacked an effective argument to bolster their fight for equal rights? The answer, I think, is no. Consider the writings of blacks and mulattoes in the Thirteen Colonies during the American Revolution. A dozen years before the French Revolution, these authors assailed the inconsistency of the independence movement for criticizing slavery metaphorically without pleading for its actual downfall. They availed themselves of the prevalent natural rights philosophy, according to which being human sufficed to have natural rights (Im Hof 1994:183-4). Having imbibed the same sources as the authors of the Declaration, they shared the conclusions of many black activists elsewhere in the Americas. One of these Americans was Lemuel Haynes, son of an African father and a white mother. Originally an indentured servant, he went on to become a clergyman-in-training who joined the patriots in Massachusetts as a minuteman. In his manuscript antislavery tract *Liberty Further Extended*, Haynes wrote

that liberty was 'an innate principle [...] unmoveably placed in the human Species' and 'Coeval with Existence'. Depriving men of their liberty meant to counteract 'the very Laws of nature'. 'Liberty', Haynes added, 'is Equally as pre[c]ious to a Black man, as to a white one, and Bondage Equally as intollerable to the one as it is to the other', since, Haynes reasoned, 'it Effects the Laws of nature Equally as much in one as it Does in the other'.³ Here was a vocabulary akin to that of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

So far, I have avoided discussing reactions of *enslaved* Americans to the messages emanating from revolutionary France. Obviously, they were not immune to the principles of the Revolution. Nor did they live entirely in a world of their own, tied as they were in many ways to the free coloureds, who formed a significant section of the colonial populations and who often had reasons of their own to take part in 'slave revolts'. In Saint-Domingue, the large revolt of 1791 that started as a fight against slavery and became a struggle for independence was, as might be expected, influenced by the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In Cap Français, the colony's largest city, slaves demanded 'the Rights of Man' as soon as they heard the news about the start of the revolt in the neighbouring countryside.⁴ The issue of slavery resurfaced in 1793, after conservative white forces had captured Cap Français. In their desperation, the two French commissioners, Sonthonax and Polverel, approached insurgent and town slaves with the offer that all blacks fighting for the French republic would be given their freedom and enjoy the rights of other French citizens. This bold step they took without consulting the metropolis (Stein 1985:75; Fick 1990:159). In hindsight, this decision meant that the commissioners embarked on a course that was bound to result in general emancipation. Two months later, in August 1793, slaves as well as free men in Cap Français made known their wish for slavery to end. A petition signed by 842 free men

3 Bogin 1983. Like Lemuel, various groups of black petitioners addressing Massachusetts authorities condemned slavery as incompatible with the rights of man: Davis 1989.

4 'Le début' 1993:774-6. In addition, according to a journal that appeared in the U.S. press, some rural slaves, interrogated about the meetings they had attended prior to the revolt, answered that 'they wanted to enjoy the liberty they are entitled to by the Rights of Man' (Dubois 2004:105). It is no longer possible to portray a letter, supposedly penned by Jean-François, Georges Biassou, and Gabriel Bellair to the Colonial Assembly and the French commissioners on the island, as having been inspired by the Declaration. In the letter, cited by Dubois 2004:141, the authors argue that the Declaration stated that 'men are born free and equal in rights' and that their 'natural rights were liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression'. Although, they went on, the French had sworn to follow the Declaration, officials had crossed the ocean to fight the insurgent slaves. The rebels then offered to lay down their arms if all slaves were freed and an amnesty was declared 'for the past'. David Geggus (2006) has exposed the letter as fake, produced by counterrevolutionaries.

demanded that the rights of man be extended to the slaves, in the name of whom they spoke. The petitioners were accompanied by a crowd of 10,000 slaves to the house of Sonthonax, who told them he would yield to their demand. By the end of October, general liberty had been introduced throughout the colony.⁵

White elites realized the power of the Rights of Man. A few days into a massive revolt of free people of colour on the tiny island of Grenada (1795), there was a festive atmosphere among the rebels. Men played fiddles in front of the prison door, and white prisoners noted the prominent part played by a black man who ‘from his hideous figure and ludicrous dress, we supposed personated their guillotine-man, or the avenger of the rights of man’ (Hay 1823:47). Nor did the Declaration’s impact in the colonies catch officials in France by surprise. They had warned from the beginning against keeping news about the French Revolution from the overseas provinces. Slaves arriving in France from Saint-Domingue were sent back before they were able to hear about the revolution, and captains of ships leaving France in the opposite direction had to leave the letter bags behind. Especially the Declaration of the Rights of Man was seen as a dangerous document (Laborie 1789:4-5n; *Observations* 1789:11-2).

A MONARCHIST RUMOUR

Outside Saint-Domingue, it is hard to detect the impact of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, in part because it cannot easily be separated from the very influence of the Haitian Revolution. This is particularly true for the aftermath of the French abolition of slavery in February 1794. New World slave revolts in the 1790s were often blamed on French revolutionary concepts, but it would be too simplistic to assume that the Declaration propelled slaves into action.⁶ For all the influence that the enlightened notion of freedom had in slave societies, its impact was often invisible. Historian Manuel Barcia has argued that the overwhelming majority of slave revolts in Cuba during the Age of Revolution ‘were not induced or provoked by external factors. Rather, they grew out of personal experiences

5 Stein 1985:79, 88-9; *Journal des Révolutions de la partie française de St.-Domingue* [Philadelphia], 7-10-1793; Dubois 2004:162-5.

6 See for a critique: Aizpurua 1988:715. More generally, Eugene Genovese’s argument that the French Revolution and its egalitarian message inspired slaves everywhere to relinquish traditional modes of revolt and aim for an equal place in dominant society can no longer be considered valid: Genovese 1979:xix-xx.

– cultural, military, religious, and so forth – rather than revolutionary ideas imported to Cuba from elsewhere’ (Barcia 2008:46). Similarly, Michael Craton has written that the reasons for most slave revolts during this period ‘were essentially internal, intrinsic, and traditional’ (Craton 1982:272).

However, denying any impact of European ideas and policies is not prudent either. Although numerous slaves may have had only mundane reasons to revolt, others consumed texts and ideas arriving from adjacent colonies or distant shores, which they appropriated and adapted to their cultures, and in the process reshaping those cultures. Slave cultures were often monarchical. Hidden forms of resistance were cloaked in royalist language, and fantasies about a better world involved the intervention of a good king. In order to grasp the impact of the notion of equality on enslaved Americans, we first have to understand their monarchist affinities. The monarchism of New World Africans was not solely African in orientation but extended to an affiliation with the imperial ruler in Europe. Brendan McConville has recently suggested that slave sub-cultures in colonial British America drew on inspiration from the British king, a distant, but powerful ally (McConville 2006:175-9). This same phenomenon can be discerned in other empires.

Africans in the Americas unmistakably derived inspiration from ‘monarchist’ rumours. Rumours can serve an important function. In a classic study, two psychologists have argued that rumours ‘sometimes provide a broader interpretation of various puzzling features of the environment, and so play a prominent part in the intellectual drive to render the surrounding world intelligible’ (Allport and Postman 1947:38). A historian of colonial India has added that ‘rumour is both a *universal* and *necessary* carrier of insurgency in any pre-industrial, pre-literate society’ (Guha 1983:251). Any student of premodern or early modern revolts will therefore detect the workings of rumours. In American slave revolts, one remarkably common element was the rumour that a European monarch had decreed slave emancipation, but that local authorities or slaveowners withheld the freedom.⁷ The longevity of this type of rumour is striking. I have found evidence of this ‘monarchist’ rumour as early as 1669 (Bermuda) and as late as 1848 (St. Croix) (Bernhard 1999:137-8; Holsoe 1996:164). The rumour was invoked particularly frequently in the period 1789-1832: David Geggus has counted over twenty actual or attempted slave revolts in these years, including the largest slave rebellions in the history of the New World (Geggus 1997:7-8).

7 Such benevolence was not always attributed solely to a monarch. See, for instance, Viotti da Costa 1994:177-84. For a more in-depth discussion of this rumor, see Klooster 2011.

Such rumours could spread across imperial borders. This may have been the case with a revolt in 1790 in Tortola, one of the British Leeward Islands. The slave rebels, who argued that the white inhabitants were suppressing an act of Britain's government to abolish slavery (Goveia 1965:95), were likely influenced by the rising expectations among people of colour in nearby French colonies. What may also have carried weight was a rumour circulating in the Spanish colonies about Spain's king. What prompted this rumour was a slave code with far-reaching implications issued by King Charles IV in 1789. It regulated the treatment slaves were to receive from their masters, stipulating that owners should exempt their slaves from before sunrise, past sunset or on Catholic holidays. They had to allow slaves to interrupt their work to spend two hours each day on their own provision grounds. Masters had to encourage their slaves to marry, and they were to take responsibility for old and sick slaves. Authorities in Havana and Caracas did everything they could to keep this slave code a secret, but to no avail (Scott 1986:153).

The news about the code had a powerful effect, and not so much because of its actual content. In Venezuela, the slave code may have resuscitated the 'monarchist' rumour that had been dormant for decades that the king had issued a decree that implied immediate freedom for all slaves. The first recorded instance of this rumour occurred during a widespread slave revolt in the province of Caracas in 1749. One man, the sergeant of the free blacks, stated that another black from Cádiz, Spain, had told him that the bishop who was expected to arrive from Spain would bring the emancipation decree with him. He would also be accompanied by four black crusaders on horseback. A slave who was later interrogated declared that ever since a former member of the municipal council had died, his spirit wandered around on a white horse – a clear reference to the Second Coming of Christ. The horse had brought him to Spain, from where he had returned with the liberty decree.⁸

In May 1790, one year after the promulgation of the slave code, a manifesto authored by blacks appeared in the streets of Caracas, once again stressing the imagined royal decree favouring the slaves (García 1991:187-8). Six years later, the rumour of a royally-sanctioned emancipation decree reared its head again, even though the slave code had been repealed two years before. An inquiry ordered by the province's Captain-General yielded that slaves in the valleys of Caucagua, Capaya, and Curiepe believed that an edict had been

8 García Chuecos 1950:71. See for other manifestations of this rumour in Venezuela in 1749: Castillo Lara 1983:280; Ramos Guédez 2001:459.

issued in those valleys in the previous years. The edict had supposedly announced the king's decree setting the slaves free (Castillo Lara 1981:281). The rumour may have hibernated in the years after 1790 (or even 1749), but it may also have been introduced by way of Coro, where the famous uprising had occurred the previous year.

The monarchist rumour did indeed surface in Coro, even though the insurrection of May 1795 was not exclusively a slave revolt. Slaves were joined by free people of colour and tributary Indians, who had tried in vain to address their own grievances through legal channels in the previous years. The participation of these groups was reflected in the revolt's stated aims, which also included the abolition of Indian tribute and exemption from payment of the hated sales tax (*alcabala*). Slaves, nonetheless, played an important role. The road to their revolt had been prepared by a healer without any formal occupation called Cocofío, who had roamed around the area for many years. Once news of Charles IV's slave code made it to the area, Cocofío's message that the slaveholders had suppressed the royal emancipation decree found fertile ground. After Cocofío's death in 1792 or 1793, his successor further disseminated the belief in the thwarted decree, which eventually inspired at least one section of the rebelling slaves in 1795.⁹ All over the Greater Caribbean, reformism, abolitionism, and French revolutionary ideology contributed at best indirectly to slave uprisings. These factors seem to have confirmed time-honoured notions among enslaved populations of the legitimacy of black freedom, thereby increasing rebelliousness.

What added another dimension to the turbulent Caribbean of the 1790s was the *actual* emancipation of all slaves in French-held colonies, as decreed by the French Convention on 4 February 1794, as well as the war afloat and ashore waged by France in the Caribbean. The war leader and administrator of Guadeloupe, Victor Hugues, targeted the British islands with the threat of liberating their enslaved populations if the French were to win, scaring planters everywhere, in the hope of rallying slaves to his side. In reality, the French would not have ended slavery in the British islands, but their propaganda was effective (Pérotin-Dumon 1988:293). Hugues's campaign, begun in late 1794, seems to have had an effect on slave populations. It is no coincidence that perhaps no year saw more (attempted) slave revolts than 1795.¹⁰ The slaves who conspired at Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, in that year, debated the pos-

9 Testimony of Manuel de Carrera, Valle de Curimagua, 2-6-1795, in *Documentos* 1994:44-5.

10 David Geggus lists conspiracies in four or five and revolts in five to seven colonies. See the appendix to his essay in this volume.

sibility of a French invasion, in which case they would side with the French for the sake of liberty (Hall 1992:369; Din 1997). Similarly, one account of the Coro revolt mentions the leaders' envisaged collaboration with the French. Their plan was to conquer the entire area from Maracaibo to Puerto Cabello, for which French aid was said to be forthcoming. The rebels presumably maintained contact with the French by means of a shuttling vessel.¹¹ While probably non-existent, the discussion of such contacts may have convinced some slaves to join the revolt.

THE CURAÇAO CONNECTION

It is not clear whether Curaçao's insurgents contemplated collaborating with French forces in 1795, but the power of the French did impress them. Propaganda diffused by colonial Frenchmen on their island must have influenced them. Since late 1792, French refugees from Saint-Domingue went around exaggerating the success of French armies on the European battlefields, which prompted Governor De Veer to order those spreading unrest to be removed from the island.¹² Hyperbole was no longer needed in 1795, when the French overran the Dutch Republic and set the stage for the establishment of the Batavian Republic. In his meeting with Father Jacobus Schinck, rebel leader Tula connected his revolt to that invasion, reasoning that since French blacks had been emancipated and the Netherlands was now under French control, 'hence we too must be free'.¹³

Curaçaoans of African birth or descent did not have to rely only on news arriving on foreign vessels or ships from the Dutch metropolis to inform them about the revolt in Saint-Domingue. As sailors, many free coloureds had spent time in French colonial ports. Since the Seven Years' War (1756-63), Curaçao had conducted a brisk trade with the French Antilles, supplying provisions and Venezuelan mules in exchange for cash crops. The links with the southern parts of Saint-Domingue were especially close, in particular after the outbreak of an Anglo-French war in 1779, when French

11 Testimony of Manuel de Carrera, in *Documentos* 1994:51.

12 Nationaal Archief, The Hague (NA), Raad van Koloniën 77, Journal of Governor De Veer. Curaçao was certainly not alone in introducing such a measure. In 1794, the authorities in English Antigua ordered as many French refugees as possible to be removed from the island and all blacks hailing from French colonies to be imprisoned. The next year, many whites and blacks from the French islands were expelled from St. Kitts (Goveia 1965:254).

13 Account of Father Jacobus Schinck, 7-9-1795, in Paula 1974:268.

authorities invited foreign merchants to do business there. By the mid-1780s, sixty-eight vessels arrived annually in Willemstad from Saint-Domingue.¹⁴ Heavy traffic continued well after the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution. When a disappointing number of free coloureds reported for militia inspection on Curaçao on the first day of 1793, their captains explained the many absentees by reference to the trade with the French colonies, in which they were employed.¹⁵

The trading partners of Curaçaoan merchants included free coloured residents of Saint-Domingue born in Curaçao – the small town of Aquin offers an interesting example (Garrigus 2006:75, 76, 193, 217). Free Curaçaoans of colour were conspicuously mobile, sojourning and settling in a variety of foreign colonies. In 1803, a total of 156 Curaçao-born blacks and mulattoes lived on the Danish island of St. Thomas, representing the largest contingent of free coloureds not native to that island.¹⁶ A number of Afro-Curaçaoans are known to have taken part in seditious activities outside their native island. A few were part of the floating population of a runaway logwood community in Santo Domingo in 1790, described by contemporaries as exclusively male and living ‘without God, law or King’ (Lienhard 2008:97-8). Five years later in Louisiana, the Pointe Coupée conspiracy featured a creole slave from Curaçao who went around telling the story that ‘they [the authorities] are awaiting at the Capital an Order of the King which declares all the slaves free [...]’.¹⁷ The investigation of another abortive slave revolt, prepared in the sugar-rich area of Trinidad, Cuba, in 1798, yielded that the ten-men leadership of a planned uprising included natives of Curaçao, Jamaica, and others described as Mandinga, Mina, and Canga slaves. The impending start of the revolt came to light after a slave called José María Curazao told his overseer about the events bound to transpire the following night (González-Ripoll et al. 2004:280).

Given the close commercial and personal ties linking the Dutch island and Coro – carefully analyzed by Linda Rupert in this vol-

14 Klooster 1998:96-7. Garrigus 2006:52, 70, 172, 175, 183-4. NA, Nieuwe West-Indische Compagnie [NWIC] 609, fol. 556, Governor Jean Rodier and Council to the WIC, Curaçao, 14-3-1774. NA NWIC 612, C.A. Roelans and Michiel Römer to the WIC, Curaçao, 4-4-1783. NA NWIC 1174, daily registers, 1-7-1785 to 30-6-1786. In the year 1785-86, twenty-five vessels sailed from Martinique and seven from Guadeloupe. One firm maintaining close connections with Les Cayes and Jacmel was that of Pierre Brion, the father of the later revolutionary Luis Brion: Häberlein and Schmölz-Häberlein 1995:91, 102.

15 NA, Raad van Koloniën 77, Journal of Governor De Veer.

16 Three-quarters of them were freeborn and one-quarter had received their freedom in the course of their lifetime: Knight and de T. Prime 1999.

17 This was, indeed, yet another version of the emancipation rumour. Hall 1992:352.

ume – it is no surprise that Afro-Curaçaoans also took part in the revolt that shook the Venezuelan town in 1795. The route to nearby Coro was not only crossed by numerous merchant vessels,¹⁸ but traversed informally by slaves stealing boats and rowing their way until they hit land.¹⁹ In the year 1774 alone, with Curaçao facing a severe food crisis, 140 slaves succeeded in escaping from the island to Coro. Five of them staged a great escape along with sixty-seven other slaves from the same plantation in an attempt to flee to Coro. When they departed in a large canoe, they were spotted and captured. Only those five eventually reached the Coro coast.²⁰

Provided they converted to Catholicism, Curaçaoan slaves received their freedom upon arrival – a prospect that had been a major incentive for slaves to turn maritime maroons throughout the century (Rupert 2006:43-45; Rupert 2009). By the 1790s, as many as 400 former Curaçaoans lived in the southern part of the town of Coro. Not all refugees, however, settled here, scores of them surviving on their own in various parts of Coro's mountainous surroundings (the *serranía*) or moving to runaway communities (Castillo Lara 1981:61, 285). One such community, located near Coro, founded by Curaçaoans, and predominantly inhabited by males, was Santa María de la Chapa. Ramón Aizpurua has suggested that a feud that tore this town apart in the early 1770s, with creole blacks pitted against natives of Africa, may have originated in Curaçao.²¹

Some Curaçaoan refugees were apparently lured by José Caridad González, a long-time free resident of Coro and spouse of a slave. González had been born in the African kingdom of Loango, was shipped to Curaçao as a slave, but fled from the Dutch island to Coro in his youth. Since then, he was known to have traveled to Saint-Domingue (*Documentos* 1994:44-48; Rupert 2006:46-47). He was the man who took over from the recently deceased Cocofío, spreading the latter's notion of a hidden emancipation decree, and even claiming he had seen the document with his own eyes – a claim that appeared truthful in the light of a voyage he had

18 During a twelve-month period in 1785-86, the number was 117. NA, NWIC 1174, daily registers 1-7-1785 to 30-6-1786.

19 NA, NWIC 1166, fol. 124, list of runaways slaves, compiled in 1775. No actual slave trade between Curaçao and Coro has been recorded in the 1780s and 1790s, nor did any slave ship arrive from Africa after the 1770s. Nonetheless, although ignored by its historians, Curaçao remained a re-exporter of enslaved Africans to Tierra Firme in the late eighteenth century: Scott 1986:78; Andrade González, 1995:52; Romero Jaramillo 1997:72.

20 NA, NWIC 1166, fol. 17, Governor Jean Rodier to the WIC, Chamber of Amsterdam, 10-1-1775.

21 Aizpurua 2004:127-8. See also Acosta Saignes 1978:193, 196; Gil Rivas et al. 1996:71-5.

undertaken to Spain. González also assured his Curaçaoan (or 'Luango') followers²² that the French, with whom he pretended to maintain a regular correspondence, would offer the rebels protection. Whether he was actually a leader of the 1795 revolt as some historians have portrayed him is hard to establish. Nor is it possible to determine if his attempts to obtain the rank of captain in the battalion he had founded occupied him more than the ideas he professed (Aizpurua 1988:720-721; Jordán 1994:24). What is clear is that González bridged the divide between freedom and slavery, connected Coro with Curaçao and Saint-Domingue, spread a false emancipation rumour, and feigned close ties with the revolutionary French. He personifies the Greater Caribbean circa 1795: a closely connected, mutinous world, driven by a well-oiled rumour mill.

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22 In eighteenth-century Venezuela, the term 'Loango black' was often used coterminously with that of 'Curaçao black'. Loango ethnicity was the distinguishing mark of runaways from Curaçao who were among the founders of the town of Curiepe in the northeast of the province of Caracas in 1721. By the 1750s, these Loangos/Curaçaoans were still identifiable as a separate social group with different interests than the town's creole blacks: Castillo Lara 1981:23, 26, 30, 49, 51, 57, 61, 159ff, 176, 290.

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Inter-colonial networks and revolutionary ferment in eighteenth-century Curaçao and Tierra Firme

Linda M. Rupert

Whether or not the slave uprisings that occurred within three months of each other in Curaçao and Coro in 1795 were part of a coherent conspiracy remains open to debate, and it may never be resolved with irrefutable evidence. There is no doubt, however, that the revolts were connected at a much deeper level: people of African descent were part of well-established communications and exchange circuits that had linked the two areas for over one hundred years. In fact, ties between Curaçao and Tierra Firme, most especially the area around Coro, had a much longer history, one which predated the Dutch and even the Spanish presence in the Caribbean, and which was integrally tied to the area's geography.¹ Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, once the island and the nearby mainland became part of separate colonial spheres (the Dutch and the Spanish, respectively) denizens from across the socio-economic spectrum forged their own inter-colonial networks, especially via contraband trade (Rupert 2006:35-54). The links that people of African descent developed between Curaçao and Tierra Firme were embedded in these wider trans-colonial connections and went much deeper than any possible slave conspiracy.

OVERLAPPING JURISDICTIONS

Markedly different degrees and styles of imperial management shaped the character of the inter-colonial ties that developed between the two areas. For the Dutch in Curaçao, territorial hegemony was almost incidental to the development of empire. Control over this small Caribbean nodal point, with its strategic location and excellent deep-water harbour, was sufficient for opening the broader commer-

1 Havisser 1987:11, 51-4; 73-9, 140-9; Watlington 2003:31-2; Whitehead 1995: Introduction.

cial networks that were necessary to develop and sustain their vigorous Caribbean and Atlantic trade.² The small, arid island of Curaçao was tightly and continuously governed by the Amsterdam Chamber of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), which had a full complex at Fort Amsterdam, perched at the entrance to the capacious harbour on St. Anna Bay. The establishment of a regional trade centre at Curaçao was a logical extension of WIC activities throughout the Atlantic and Caribbean (Den Heijer 2003). Because Curaçao lacked the climate and soil for agricultural production, the compact port of Willemstad, adjacent to the fort, soon became the motor of the island economy. The WIC's decision to open Curaçao to free trade in 1675, an unusual move for the times, stimulated the island's role in inter-colonial commerce, most of it illicit from the point of view of other imperial powers. Even while the Dutch successfully maintained tight and continuous political jurisdiction over Curaçao their primary focus was the lucrative economic gain provided by much more extensive and amorphous inter-colonial trade circuits.

Spanish imperial control over Tierra Firme, in contrast, was both more tenuous and more concerned with territorial domination. Initially under the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of Santo Domingo, located on the island of Hispaniola hundreds of miles to the north, Tierra Firme was transferred to the newly-created Viceroyalty of New Granada in 1717 in an effort to improve contact with representatives of the Spanish Crown and also to discourage the growing contraband trade. However, effective overland communication within this vast and varied continental jurisdiction proved even more unreliable than the maritime connections with Hispaniola, and so throughout the eighteenth century Tierra Firme repeatedly was transferred between the viceroyalties of Santo Domingo and New Granada (Briceño 1965:41-51). Due to this fluctuating authority and to the difficult, unreliable communications with either colonial seat of power, governance of much of Tierra Firme was chaotic throughout the eighteenth century. Lines of colonial authority often were unclear over the sparsely inhabited coast (Castillo 1981:113; Ferry 1989:114-7). Such administrative confusion, along with overall Spanish neglect of the region, spurred the development of a thriving contraband trade by a variety of people across the socio-economic spectrum. This included local authorities who often were uncertain about the precise imperial chain of command and their own authority and position in the hierarchy, but were

2 For different perspectives on the relative roles of commercial maritime networks and territorial control in the development of the Dutch imperial project see Schmidt 2009:163-87; Enthoven 2003:17-47; Seed 1995:154-60. More generally, Lauren Benton has argued that territorial control often was an 'incidental aim of imperial expansion' in the age of European empires (Benton 2010:2).

eager to placate their local constituents and to seize lucrative opportunities to improve their own lot. Thus, Spain's inability to exercise territorial hegemony was also reflected in its lack of control over the region's economy and commercial circuits.

Tierra Firme, easily accessible because of favourable winds and currents and just seventy kilometres away, was a particularly attractive market for Curaçaoan merchants. It was filled with eager trade partners who provided a variety of coveted commodities, especially cacao and tobacco, to be traded on the regional and Atlantic markets.³ Tierra Firme functioned de facto as the vast economic hinterland for Curaçao's port of Willemstad. The area around Coro, at the base of the Paraguaná Peninsula, developed particularly close ties to the island.⁴ Trade with Tierra Firme made up fully half of Curaçao's total shipping throughout the second half of the eighteenth century (Klooster 1998:175). By the mid-eighteenth century entire areas of Tierra Firme were much more closely tied to Curaçao than to Spain (Aizpurua 1993:293). Inhabitants of both areas depended on the inter-colonial trade for their livelihood. Smuggling became the economic foundation of broader ties that developed between the two areas. It played out differently for the two European powers, representing success for the Dutch in developing and controlling the lucrative commercial circuits that formed the basis of their dominion, and failure for the Spanish in protecting both the territorial integrity and the mercantile exclusivity of their colonial possession.

If Tierra Firme functioned as Curaçao's economic hinterland, the roles were somewhat reversed and more complicated in the religious realm. This, too, was not so much due to carefully devised imperial policies as to colonial realities. Colonialism often led to messy situations on the ground, ones which did not always fit into the neat categories devised by authorities in distant Europe. Religious jurisdiction cut across lines of political authority. Curaçao had been under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church in Tierra Firme during the 135 years that the Spanish ruled the island (1499-1634). Even after the Dutch seized the island in 1634 the Roman Catholic Church considered Curaçao to remain under the control of Tierra Firme, an arrangement that was accepted at least tacitly by the Dutch West India Company. The so-called 'ABC islands' (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) fell under the administration of

3 The complexity and particularities of the contraband trade between Curaçao and Tierra Firme have been well documented. See especially Klooster 1998; Aizpurua 1993; Arauz 1984.

4 Socio-cultural, economic, religious, and political ties between Curaçao and Coro had deep historical roots, which also dated from pre-Colombian times and were strengthened during Spanish rule. For example, see Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Patronato 18 R3.

the Bishopric of Coro until 1637 when, due to internal reorganization within the Roman Catholic Church, they were transferred to the Bishopric of Caracas (Brada 1953). Curaçao's Roman Catholic inhabitants retained close religious ties to Coro even after the transfer. Although the Church did not officially authorize any priests to visit the island for over four decades after the Dutch takeover there were some reports of unofficial, semi-clandestine visits by itinerant priests.⁵ While apparently turning a blind eye to these occasional visits the Dutch made some effort to limit more formal clerical contact and to exercise some level of at least nominal jurisdiction in the religious sphere. In 1661 the Dutch States General required that any Catholic priest who wished to settle on the island obtain a permit from the company (Brada 1956:40).⁶ This had the result of further encouraging the visits of itinerant priests, many of whom regularly arrived en route to and from other destinations around the Atlantic since Curaçao offered by far the most frequent, varied, and reliable transportation connections in the southern Caribbean.⁷

The Spanish formalized the role of visiting priests to the island in 1677, just two years after Curaçao became a free port. As part of an extensive pastoral letter encouraging evangelization on the island the Bishop of Caracas authorized any priests who arrived there to celebrate mass, perform sacraments, and generally attend to the spiritual needs of local Catholics, without needing prior or formal approval from the Church hierarchy (Felice 1982:394). This proved to be a highly effective way for the Roman Catholic Church to maintain an ongoing influence over Curaçao's population (especially slaves) and to minister to their spiritual needs without engaging in any political entanglements, and without having to obtain authorization of the Dutch States General or the WIC. Between 1680 and 1707 over fifty Roman Catholic priests visited Curaçao; thereafter virtually all of the island's denizens of African descent, enslaved and free, were baptized Catholics (Felice 1982:393-6). Throughout the eighteenth century a steady stream of priests from Spanish America continued to visit Curaçao, some secular, others members of religious orders (Lampe 2001b:108-9). Many were in transit; others stayed for extended periods of time.

In effect, the regular visit of Roman Catholic priests allowed the Spanish to have extensive influence over Curaçao's inhabitants, especially the majority of African descent, by proxy, accomplish-

5 Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987:103; Gonzalez 1990:41; Felice 1982:391-2.

6 Apparently they reissued it in 1705, perhaps indicating that it largely had been ignored in the interim (Schunk 1990:129).

7 Felice 1982:393; Schunk 1990:129; Lampe 2001a:131.

ing one of the major expressed aims of the empire – the propagation of the Roman Catholic faith – in the colonial territory of a rival Protestant power.⁸ The Spanish thus maintained a degree of non-official religious control over Curaçao via the Roman Catholic Church, just as the Dutch had economic power over Tierra Firme via inter-colonial trade. Like smuggling, the regular visit of Roman Catholic priests to Curaçao provided an opportunity for inter-colonial exchanges that directly engaged the needs and aspirations of colonial inhabitants. At the same time these inter-colonial networks allowed each power to exercise a certain degree of control in its preferred sphere of influence, well beyond the boundaries of official imperial demarcations. In the case of Curaçao and Tierra Firme, religious and economic spheres of influence did not correspond neatly to political demarcations. Nor were they entirely separate; many priests were involved in smuggling.⁹

SMUGGLING SLAVES

By the mid-eighteenth century illicit inter-colonial commerce had become the bedrock of a complex, multi-faceted exchange network that bound Curaçao and Tierra Firme across the imperial divide. Smuggling not only dominated economic ties between the two areas, it also shaped socio-cultural interactions and even the emerging contours of the colonial legal system in Tierra Firme. People of African descent, enslaved and free, played a central role in these inter-colonial trade networks. Enslaved Africans were an important early commodity that was shipped from Curaçao to Tierra Firme through the contraband trade and often opened the way for other forms of smuggling. Alongside the official trade that took place via the *asiento de negros* in the last quarter of the seventeenth century Curaçao also developed a thriving clandestine commerce in human cargo (Postma 1990:29-36). In years when supply from Africa greatly outstripped the abilities of the official trade channels to distribute the chattel legally, this illegal commerce was an important safety valve for the entire system, allowing it, in practice, to operate along the lines of a free market. It was clear to the Spanish Crown, and to everyone else involved, that the *asiento* often

8 The degree to which the Dutch cared about Christianization of their colonial subjects has been the subject of historiographic debate (Oostindie 1996).

9 Schabel, 'Dagboek' (Nationaal Archief Nederlandse Antillen, Willemstad, Curaçao); Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987:103; Felice 1982:392 fn 9; Gonzalez 1990:36, 41; Schunk 1997:96, 100.

was used as a front for a far more extensive, more lucrative trade in a wide variety of contraband goods to Spain's neglected American colonies. For example, the license that the Spanish Crown issued to Juan Barroso del Pozo in February 1680 noted how the Dutch 'furtively introduce' a variety of products, including 'clothing, fruit, and, merchandize, which results in grave damages', and it specifically prohibited the introduction of any such goods alongside the human commodities.¹⁰ This prohibition blatantly was ignored. The clandestine trade also opened multiple opportunities for cultural and economic exchanges between Curaçao and Tierra Firme.

The contraband trade in slaves to Tierra Firme raised difficult issues for the Spanish Crown, which was acutely aware of the labour shortage on the isolated mainland coast, but loathe to sanction smuggling to its colonies in any form, and especially leery of the developing relationship between Curaçao and Tierra Firme. By the end of the seventeenth century the illicit import of enslaved Africans to the Spanish mainland was so prevalent that it caused the Crown a legal headache: what to do with the existence of large numbers of enslaved workers whose labour was vitally needed in the under-populated areas, but whose very presence testified to the brazenly successful and highly illegal trade that inhabitants conducted with the nearby Dutch island? Perhaps surprisingly, the Crown's solution was to offer freedom to these slaves. Between 1685 and 1705 the Spanish Crown issued three strongly worded Royal Decrees aimed at addressing the problem of these so-called 'blacks of bad entry' (*negros de mala entrada*), threatening to grant freedom to any slave on the mainland whose owner did not have a legitimate bill of purchase via the *asiento*.¹¹ In 1685 the Crown granted freedom to all slaves in Tierra Firme whose owners could not produce such a document, and further required the owner to pay the *asiento* for the full value of the slave. In early 1689 the Governor of Mérida petitioned the Crown to allow local slaveholders to keep without reprisals the many bondsmen they had illegally purchased via Curaçao, citing the ease with which foreigners trafficked on the vast, open coast. But the king held fast. In 1690 the Crown issued another decree, specifically mentioning the widespread fraud committed by the Coymans *asiento*, based on Curaçao, which, it claimed, had 'introduced over 400 heads of bad entry, of which no more than sixteen have been captured'.¹² In 1692, in specific

10 'Licencia para comprar esclavos negros en Curazao' 10-02-1680 in Marley 1985: Document II: no pagination.

11 Marley 1985: Documents III and V: no pagination.

12 *Real cédula* 30-01-1690 in Marley 1985: Document V: no pagination.

response to the governor's petition, Charles once again ordered all such slaves to be freed, citing the full text of the previous Royal Decrees of 1685 and 1690.¹³ A Royal Decree issued in 1705 again echoed the Crown's earlier concern, fined owners in Tierra Firme two hundred pesos for each illicitly obtained slave, and granted freedom to the slaves.¹⁴

It is unclear to what extent these decrees or the fines were enforced, and how many enslaved Africans, if any, actually obtained their freedom in this way. The very fact that four such similar decrees were issued in twenty years is powerful evidence not only of the trade itself, but of the Crown's ineffectiveness in combating it. Similarly, the failure of these and other official efforts to curb the clandestine trade indicates its appeal not only for Curaçaoan traders but also many different denizens of Tierra Firme. The Spanish Crown knew that the illicit slave trade was used as a cover for the broader contraband trade in other commodities. Colonial officials in Tierra Firme, for their part, were aware of smuggling's importance for the local economy. No doubt they felt conflicting loyalties. The Crown appears to have valued its protectionist policies above the rights of slave holders to own chattel, which had been obtained outside of approved distribution networks.¹⁵ The smuggled slaves entered Tierra Firme as valuable contraband commodities and, once they were there, often continued to participate in illicit inter-colonial commerce as both labourers and traders.

While some slaves were being smuggled from Curaçao to Tierra Firme to continue in bondage, others smuggled themselves along the same route in pursuit of freedom. The documented number of runaways who escaped from the island to the mainland rose dramatically in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, spurred by the expansion and consolidation of illicit inter-colonial commercial networks (including, perhaps ironically, the slave trade). The dozens of small sea-craft that sailed regularly between the two areas provided ample opportunity for enslaved Afro-Curaçaoans to flee. Coro was a particularly favourite destination for Afro-Curaçaoans who sought to escape enslavement, just as it was a magnet for illicit inter-colonial commerce. This was not a coincidence. Like traders, fugitives took advantage of the favourable geography: ocean currents and trade winds moved towards the southwest, pushing

13 'Bando sobre negros "de mala entrada"' 24-03-1692 in Marley 1985: Document V: no pagination.

14 *Real cédula* 25-10-1705 in Troconis 1969:240-3.

15 The opinions of the slaves in question are not recorded, although one can assume that they would have welcomed opportunities to obtain freedom.

vessels that departed from Curaçao's shores directly to the base of the Paraguaná Peninsula. As a smuggling centre already established by the 1650s, frequented by small-scale merchants and seafarers, Coro offered ample opportunities for runaways to work in the contraband trade and to become part of local networks (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987:104; Aizpurua 2001:69-102). Authorities in Coro apprehended at least forty-four runaway slaves from the island between 1690 and 1702.¹⁶ By 1704 there were so many fugitive Afro-Curaçaoans living in the area around Coro that the local government considered rounding them up and centralizing them in a special, newly-created town (Gonzalez 1987:120-1).

It was in this context of rampant smuggling of people and goods, and continued marronage from Curaçao, that the Spanish Crown issued two *reales cédulas* in 1704 and 1711, which offered freedom and land to enslaved Afro-Curaçaoans who arrived in Tierra Firme.¹⁷ The process was not automatic; new arrivals had to petition in colonial courts separately for freedom and land, and they had to provide documents and often testimony of third parties proving that they had converted to Catholicism and had been baptized after arriving in Spanish territory.¹⁸ The conversion requirement was a bit of a ruse since Spanish authorities at every level had ample evidence that virtually the island's entire enslaved population already was Roman Catholic. After all, they had been overseeing evangelization efforts there for decades.¹⁹ Here again, people of African descent had a major impact on the development of Spanish colonial legal frameworks.

These Royal Decrees provided one way for Spain to populate Tierra Firme with potentially loyal subjects. Slaves from Curaçao would metamorphose from being lucrative commodities in a trade that challenged Spanish imperial interests – or fugitives who were slated to live furtively on the margins of society – into devoted subjects of the Crown, who, presumably, were grateful for the opportunities for their new lives as fully vested citizens. Similarly, in this view, the Curaçaoan merchants who participated in contraband

16 Archivo General de la Nación Caracas, Venezuela (AGN) Diversos (D) I folio 408–14; Castillo 1981:343, 345–6.

17 AGN Reales Cédulas (RC) Sección 1a Vol X; Torres 1997:49–55; Castillo 1981:350, 600; Ferry 1989:110–3. For discussion of the wider context of these decrees see Rupert 2009:362-7.

18 For example, see Archivo de la Academia Nacional de la Historia (AANH) Sección Civiles, Esclavos (SC-E) T 1742 CGPRSUZ Exp. #9.

19 The wording of the decrees, including the provision for conversion, is virtually identical to that of other such *reales cédulas* that were issued for other parts of the circum-Caribbean, indicating that the provision may have been a standard one that did not account for the particular realities of the area encompassing Curaçao and Tierra Firme.

trade, most of whom were slave-owners, would now be seen as enemies bent on re-enslaving their former chattel rather than as attractive trade partners. Attracting fugitive slaves also drained labour from rival European powers. In practice, the fugitives were quite capable of using the system to their own ends. Like so many others who were affiliated with illicit inter-colonial trade they seemed perfectly content to maintain dual loyalties, nominally professing their new allegiance to the Crown while keenly looking out for their own interests.

In the decades after these decrees were issued, marronage from Curaçao to Tierra Firme skyrocketed, spurred by the close ties between the areas created by contraband trade, as well as by the framework that the *reales cédulas* provided.²⁰ Coro was a particularly popular destination due to its proximity and accessibility, but records indicate that enslaved Curaçaoans travelled to a variety of different destinations along hundreds of miles of Tierra Firme's Caribbean littoral. The coast of Barlovento, especially the area around Curipe, was another attractive destination.²¹ Runaway slaves put into place a sophisticated trans-colonial network to navigate the process of emigrating from slavery on the small Dutch island to freedom in Spanish America. Some slaves left the island openly by forging documents or posing as freemen and women; others surreptitiously stowed away on sea-craft (Klooster 1998:68–9). Many seafarers simply jumped ship once they reached a mainland port.

After finding sympathetic ship captains and crew members in Willemstad and safely crossing the waters to Tierra Firme without being captured, the new arrivals faced a variety of tasks in their new homeland. They had to identify, arrive at, and settle into mainland communities that would welcome (or at least not be hostile to) them; learn a new language and culture; negotiate the complexities of an unfamiliar legal system; and find the necessary support system in Tierra Firme – including lawyers to argue their cases, witnesses to testify on their behalf in court, and priests to baptize them (Castillo 1981:603).²² We do not know how many fugitives pursued their cases in Venezuelan courts or what percentage of those who did successfully obtained their legal freedom. Many who sought

20 For a detailed list of 585 slaves who fled from Curaçao to Tierra Firme between 1729 and 1775 see Nationaal Archief Nederland (NAN) Nieuwe West Indische Compagnie (NWIC) 1166:124 (07-08-1775).

21 See, for example, among others, AGN, Archivo del Registro del Distrito Federal, Tierras 1767-M #1; NAN Oud Archief Curaçao (OAC) 1548:60 (14-01-1739); AGI Santo Domingo (SD) 782, 1732–33; AGN D VXIII #10, 1736.

22 For a detailed description of the process and mechanisms of marronage, see Gonzalez 1987:127–130 (01-02-1752).

freedom across the imperial divide never bothered to legalize their status.²³ Many maintained close ties with Curaçao and participated actively in smuggling even after they moved to Tierra Firme. Spanish intentions notwithstanding, the fugitives seem to have had no compunction about trading with Curaçaoan merchants and engaging in contraband.²⁴

Dozens of cases in the archives attest to the tenacity and creativity of those who litigated to obtain their freedom, and the many locals who assisted them in their endeavours. Successful suits required someone who was well versed in the relevant Spanish legal codes, strategies, and precedents. Many cases show a clear understanding of the subtleties required to game the system, with fugitives and their advocates employing a range of tactics to win the ultimate prizes of manumission and land. For example, three men who arrived in Coro from Curaçao in 1740 took six years of legal manoeuvring to gain their freedom, and they changed their story several times along the way to enhance their case. After initially testifying that they already were Catholic and remaining in jail for several years, all three subsequently claimed that they had come to the mainland to escape from 'heretical owners' and that they sought 'the sacred waters of baptism', to be accepted into 'the one true faith'.²⁵ They then enlisted a local priest to (re)baptize them, and soon thereafter won their freedom, both from jail and from slavery.

An elaborate dance played out within the Spanish colonial legal system, one which often involved years of complicated proceedings and multiple court cases, in which colonial authorities, fugitives, court personnel, Roman Catholic clergy, and witnesses duly certified the conversions and baptisms of people who already were Catholic. A host of other middle sectors, including lawyers, scribes, and clerks, as well as general character witnesses drawn from the wider community, were also involved in the fugitives' quest for legal freedom.²⁶ In some cases freedom was granted and then revoked multiple times, sometimes on a technicality, other times on more substantive issues. Such cases could drag on for years, or even decades.²⁷ The voluminous paperwork left by these cases

23 For example, NAN OAC 318, Jean Rodier et al. (14-04-1766).

24 See, for example, AGN D VXIII #10 (1736).

25 Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Spain (ANH) Vol. 1740 G #283 Arch. 1. Similar wording appears in many such cases.

26 See the following in Gonzalez 1987:122-3, 125-6, 132; Torres 1997: 'Autos seguidos por María Francisca de Nieto', July 1738-Oct. 1743 (1743-BSWS, Exp. 3:85); 'Autos formados por Juan Joseph', Jan.-July 1753 (1753-JP, Exp. 1:92).

27 See, for example, AANH Archivo del Registro del Distrito Federal, Cajas Negras (ARDF-CN) 1787-A1.

often involved suits and counter-suits, testimony for and against the fugitive by a cross section of the local population, and a variety of sophisticated legal manoeuvres and arguments. Fugitives marshalled extensive local resources to bolster their claims, as did those who fought them in court.

INTER-COLONIAL CONNECTIONS

Upon arriving in Tierra Firme many Afro-Curaçaoans established links with existing communities of Afro-Venezuelans, including rural maroon settlements, groups of urban freemen and women, and enslaved agricultural labourers, many of whom were involved in smuggling.²⁸ These relations were complex and multi-faceted. Venezuelan archives are filled with legal proceedings that pitted Afro-Curaçaoans and locally-born blacks against each other.²⁹ Afro-Venezuelans were often hostile to the special privileges that the runaways from Curaçao received, especially their access to manumission and land through conversion, options which were closed to them. Local slaves sometimes testified that an immigrant's conversion was bogus, an accusation that probably was true more times than not, but was frequently ignored by the courts. On occasion fugitive Curaçaoans and locally-born blacks fought intensely over property rights.³⁰ Sometimes local slaves could receive their freedom by denouncing smugglers; fugitive Afro-Curaçaoans were an easy target.³¹

The number of fugitive slaves from Curaçao had a major social, cultural, and economic impact on entire areas of Tierra Firme. Curaçaoans made up at least thirty per cent of the original inhabitants of Curiepe, a town of free blacks that mainland authorities had established on the north-eastern coast as a buffer against enemy attack in 1721, and where dozens of fugitive Afro-Curaçaoans acquired land and planted small cacao groves in the early to mid-eighteenth century (Castillo 1981:375-83). The thriving neighbourhood of Guinea, located on the southern outskirts of the town of Coro, was a magnet for fugitive slaves from Curaçao, and the only part of the town that saw steady demographic increase in the eigh-

28 NAN OAC 806: #622-624 (22-06-1737); Castillo 1981:342, 381; Gonzalez 1987:124.

29 For example, 'Capitan Juan Marcos Marin, Moreno Libre Contra Jose Miguel de Soto, Moreno Libre': Castillo 1981:312-5.

30 Castillo 1981:376-7 and Chapter XVIII.

31 AGN D XLII #12.

teenth century (Gonzalez 1990:96). Curaçaoans were such a large percentage of Coro's black population that some Venezuelan historians consider them to have made a significant contribution to the area's ethnic composition (Gonzalez 1987:23). By the end of the eighteenth century over 400 Afro-Curaçaoans had settled in the hills around Coro.³² Many of them lived in Santa María de la Chapa, a maroon community that was established in the surrounding mountains at mid-century (Gonzalez 1990:50, 52). The last names of many residents were some variation of the name Curaçao.³³ Place names are also revealing; church records identified the town as Sta. María de los Negros de Curazao – 'Santa María of the blacks of Curaçao' (Gonzalez 1990:5).

Many fugitives and their descendants became small-scale independent farmers, producing crops such as cacao for the thriving contraband trade. Many retained close ties to Curaçao.³⁴ Some were enlisted to help Spanish colonial authorities defend the isolated coast from the incursions of rival European powers and individual freebooters, either by being conscripted into free black militias, or by becoming founding members of new towns of free blacks, or both. In 1745 Curiepe's free blacks were commissioned to fight against smugglers in spite of – or perhaps because of – the town's close ties to the island.³⁵ But the very circuits that brought freedom to some people of African descent were also used to snatch it from others (González 1987:81-82, 126). The number and influence of the enslaved Curaçaoan runaways deeply concerned colonial authorities in Tierra Firme, occasionally provoking serious diplomatic tensions, and generating an extensive paper trail of official efforts to return to Curaçao those fugitives who had not legalized their status, and counter-efforts to prevent this, in cases that could drag on for years.³⁶ If a Curaçaoan owner petitioned in a mainland court for the return of a fugitive before the slave had legally filed for freedom, Spanish colonial authorities would proceed with the extradition. For people of African descent, then, the trans-colonial exchange circuit could be an extension of enslavement as well as a path to freedom.

32 AGN D XVIII: 1773 #4; AGN D XLI: 1771: #3, #6; Castillo 1981:605.

33 For example, Francisco Curasao is co-petitioner on documents dealing with the loss of a sloop in Coro, 3-12-02-1730 (Gonzalez 1987:123); three men with the last name Curazao appear on the list of people implicated in the 1795 slave uprising in Coro, Rafael Diego Mérida report, 25-06-1795 (Troconis 1969:311); there are sixteen people with the last name Curazado or Curazado in the onomastic index of Castillo 1981.

34 NAN OAC 1548:60 (14-01-1739); AGI Santo Domingo (SD) 782 (1732-3).

35 Castillo 1981:508. For the role of Curiepe's inhabitants in contraband trade: AGN D VXIII #10, 1736.

36 Gonzalez 1987:22-124,140-1; NAN OAC 820:17-30 (11-01-1749).

Religious ties between Curaçao and Tierra Firme strengthened throughout the eighteenth century, spurred by the sustained, direct contact between the majority populations of African descent, as well as by the institutional framework of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic clergy who spent time on the island maintained communication with supervisors, fellow clergy, and parishes in Tierra Firme, as well as with their respective hierarchies and with clerical networks fanning across the Americas and beyond. These connections were sanctioned fully by Spanish authorities, and they were at least tolerated by WIC officials. Priests developed and maintained an important network between the two areas; their high degree of mobility allowed them to parlay religious links into economic and socio-cultural contact. Roman Catholic clergy, who were allowed to travel relatively freely across the imperial divide and enjoyed widespread respect among large sectors of the population on both sides, were particularly well-positioned to make contacts and engage in illicit commerce, as well as to promote socio-cultural and religious contact.³⁷ The inherently transatlantic, inter-imperial character of Catholic clerical networks, including the fact that many felt their primary alliance to the Holy See in Rome and/or to their respective religious orders rather than to secular authorities in Madrid or Caracas, facilitated economic exchanges outside official circuits. Within this framework people of African descent developed their own trans-colonial religious networks. In the 1760s and '70s, for example, several religious brotherhoods (*cofradías*) in Coro had direct ties to similar societies in Curaçao, and some even had members who lived on the island. The *Cofradía del Carmen* in Coro sent a delegation to the island, which remained there for six months (Gonzalez 1990:38). At least some members of the brotherhood in Coro likely were fugitives from Curaçao and their descendants.

Beginning in the 1760s, religious and secular authorities in the Dutch and Spanish realms engaged in a decade-long power struggle to control the Roman Catholic Church structure on the island and thus manage the religious life of the black Catholic majority (Felice 1982:405-11). Spanish authorities formally petitioned the WIC to allow the Bishop of Caracas to appoint priests to the island, or at least to require that the island governor not accept any priest who had not first presented his credentials to the Bishop of Caracas. Although this had been the *de facto* *modus operandi* for decades it was an extraordinary request to make officially, considering that the Dutch had held undisputed

37 Gonzalez 1987:63, 78; 1990:36; Goslinga 1985:259; Arauz 1984:100, 135-9.

sovereignty over the island since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Not surprisingly, company officials demurred, and they further insisted that thereafter only Dutch priests be sent to the island. The Spanish Council of the Indies countered that the Bishop of Caracas retained the exclusive right to designate priests for Curaçao, citing both the extensive historical precedent and, perhaps rather oddly, selected passages in the treaties of Westphalia and Utrecht that guaranteed the free practice of religion to denizens of colonial areas that changed imperial domain (Felice 1982:410).³⁸ Continued diplomatic wrangling produced an extensive paper trail but no clear diplomatic resolution. In 1773 Bishop Martí brazenly proclaimed that ‘the islands of Curazao, Aruba and Bonayre belong to this parish of Coro and to the Bishopric of Caracas’ (Gonzalez 1990:39). Three years later a group of eight Dutch Franciscans arrived to take charge of the Roman Catholic Church on the island, which their order controlled continuously until 1820 (Felice 1982:410; Lampe 2001a:131). Individual Roman Catholic priests regularly continued to visit from Tierra Firme, however.

CONTRABAND AND COLLUSION

As the century progressed, increased repression of contraband trade shaped patterns of popular resistance in Tierra Firme. The formation of the Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas (or Caracas Company) in 1728 was a catalyst for resistance. This Basque-owned company was one of Spain’s most ambitious and comprehensive attempts to limit illicit trade and channel its wealth directly to the royal treasury.³⁹ The Caracas Company established a coast guard that was authorized to intercept and repress suspected smugglers and confiscate their vessels along hundreds of miles of the Caribbean littoral.⁴⁰ This met with immediate resistance from the many different people who were involved in illicit inter-colonial trade. There were at least six major rebellions in cacao-producing areas during the fifty-six years of the company’s existence.⁴¹ These disturbances provide clear evidence of the close relations that developed

38 The cited passages in the treaties dealt with allowing freedom of religion among colonial inhabitants rather than with establishing religious jurisdiction or chain of command.

39 Hussey 1934; Aresti 1963; Vivas 1998.

40 NAN NWIC 1154:62 (07-09-1726); NAN NWIC 1154:67 (12-03-1727); NAN NWIC 1154:74 (01-09-1727).

41 Felice 1977:39-92; Brito 1985:209-36, 1961; Morales 1955; Ferry 1989: Chapter 5.

between the different participants in the contraband trade. Smuggling sometimes proved to be a unifying force, trumping race, ethnicity, social class, and colonial affiliation. Smugglers often parlayed their inter-colonial contact into collusion against those who would limit the trade.

The first of the revolts broke out in 1730, soon after the Caracas Company began patrolling the Caribbean coast of Tierra Firme. It was led by Andrés López del Rosario, alias Andresote, a mixed-race Venezuelan of African and indigenous descent who had close ties to the trade with Curaçao.⁴² This uprising of slaves, free blacks, mulattos, and native people was directed against the Caracas Company and the colonial authorities who were trying to curtail smuggling. It had the full support of local whites, including elite landholders. At its height participants took over several towns and blockaded roads in the Yaracuy Valley, a major contraband area and site of the thriving smuggling settlement of Tucacas. Most of the Yaracuy Valley's inhabitants, including local officials, enslaved plantation workers, indigenous people, and maroons, as well as white farmers, rightly felt that their entire livelihood was jeopardized by the Caracas Company's crackdown on smuggling. Curaçaoan traders, who also felt threatened by the Caracas Company's activities, provided critical support to the rebels, trading arms and alcohol to them in exchange for cacao (Brito 1985:209). When officials sent in several thousand troops to intensify repression of the uprising, Curaçaoan smugglers whisked the rebel leader Andresote off to the nearby island where he remained at least until 1739.⁴³ In the subsequent trials several residents of Tierra Firme testified that they had taken Andresote to Curaçao several times to purchase goods prior to the revolt.⁴⁴

The uprisings in Tierra Firme were also connected to deeper currents that swept through the Atlantic world during the second half of the eighteenth century. As early as the 1740s, stories began to circulate among Tierra Firme's blacks that the Spanish Crown had issued an order to free all slaves throughout the empire, but

42 The Venezuelan historiography is divided on Andresote's status. Brito claims he was born a slave but had joined maroon communities years before the uprising; others say he was free, either by birth or manumission. His status at birth would have depended on that of his mother. Brito 1985:209, 1961:47-9; Felice 1952; 1977:33-8; Hussey 1934:66-9.

43 NAN OAC 1548:60 (14-01-1739); AGI Santo Domingo 782, 'Rebelión del zambo Andrés Bota' (1732-33).

44 The trial transcripts are in AGI Santo Domingo 270, 781, 782. Also see Troconis 1969:246-50. One must read such testimonies with a healthy dose of scepticism, however, since the witnesses would have had little to lose by fabricating or exaggerating such ties, and stood to improve their own situation if they fed authorities the information the latter hoped to hear.

that local authorities were refusing to comply (Felice 1977:72). Given the Crown's history of issuing several *reales cédulas* that granted freedom to fugitive slaves from Curaçao (and elsewhere) and to slaves who were smuggled into Tierra Firme, a more general emancipation was not outside the realm of imagined possibilities. These rumours intensified later in the century.⁴⁵ Between the 1770s and 1790s an enslaved healer named Cocofío often absented himself from his master, travelling around the mainland countryside insistently proclaiming that a Spanish Royal Decree had freed the slaves but was being suppressed by local authorities. After Cocofío's death the rumours persisted, allegedly fanned by fugitive slaves from Curaçao, who brought more reliable news from the port of Willemstad of the French and Haitian revolutions, including repeated reports from black seafarers that slaves had been freed elsewhere in the Caribbean (Brito 1961:219).⁴⁶ This social unrest was intensified by a changing economic situation. By the end of the eighteenth century it became increasingly difficult for people of African descent, including fugitives from Curaçao, to obtain land in Tierra Firme. In response to the exploding Atlantic market for chocolate, Tierra Firme's lucrative cacao plantations were increasingly concentrated into larger holdings that were held by fewer families and worked by larger numbers of slaves (Brito 1961:60, 63).

By the last decades of the century the geopolitical usefulness of fugitive slaves in Tierra Firme was also shifting. Increasingly the Spanish Crown and local authorities saw them as a threat rather than as a needed infusion of labour. In 1771 the commander of the Caracas battalion warned of 'the suspicion and fear which is being caused by the continued flight of black slaves from Curaçao' (Gonzalez 1990:52). In 1789 Spain allowed free trade in enslaved Africans to some of its American colonies, including Venezuela.⁴⁷ This eliminated, at least in theory, the need both for the *asiento* and for the parallel contraband trade in slaves (although it is not entirely clear how this played out, especially in the short term, and whether, in fact, it immediately led to the cessation of the illicit trade in enslaved labour). Spain's offer of freedom to enslaved fugitives from rival Protestant powers had outlived its usefulness.

45 For more about the role of these rumours see Klooster's article in this volume.

46 For analysis of the role of maritime communications networks in the Caribbean during the Haitian Revolution see Scott 1986.

47 'Real Cédula de su Magestad Concediendo Libertad para el Comercio de Negros con las Islas de Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, y Provincia de Caracas', 28-02-1789 (reproduced in Marley 1985 Document X: no pagination).

In 1790 Venezuelan authorities denounced slaves born in Curaçao as ‘detrimental to these provinces’, articulating a sharp break with previous policies that had welcomed them over eight decades (Acosta 1961:39).

By the early 1790s, increasingly concerned about the widespread travels of people of African descent around the Caribbean and the potential impact of news of the developing French and Haitian revolutions, the Spanish Crown rescinded all the Royal Decrees that had granted freedom to runaway slaves throughout the Americas. The new law applicable to the Dutch sphere, promulgated in 1791, specifically noted the close relationship between marronage and contraband trade in the area between Curaçao and Coro (Torres 1997:50). That same year Spain and the Dutch Republic also signed an agreement for ‘the reciprocal restitution of fugitives’ (De Granda 1973:6-7). Foreign fugitives were now seen as a threat to Spanish colonial interests rather than as useful geopolitical pawns or as a way to increase the number of loyal subjects.

It is in this context of well-established, overlapping inter-colonial networks – networks in which people of African descent played a central role – that one must situate the slave uprisings that occurred in Curaçao and Coro in the summer of 1795, just three months apart. In May 1795 Venezuela’s largest slave revolt of the colonial era broke out in the hills around Coro, an area that was home to hundreds of fugitive Afro-Curaçaoans and their descendants.⁴⁸ Leaders of the uprising had close ties to Curaçao, which saw its own largest slave revolt just three months later. Local authorities in both places claimed that the two rebellions were linked, a charge that has sparked spirited debate in the Venezuelan historiography, with some focusing on the influence of outside agitators, especially those with links to Haiti, and others prioritizing local and regional factors (Rivas et al. 1996; Arcaya 1949). One of the leaders of the Coro rebellion, José Caridad González, was himself an inter-colonial fugitive. Born in West Central Africa (records identify him as Loango, although it is not clear what this term actually meant⁴⁹), he was taken to Curaçao by Dutch slavers sometime at mid-century, then escaped to Venezuela, where he subsequently helped other Afro-Curaçaoans flee to freedom along a well-estab-

48 AGN D LXIX #7.

49 Spanish colonial documents in Tierra Firme frequently used the term ‘Loango’ to refer to any slave who came through Curaçao; the phrase ‘los loangos de Curaçao’, for example, is frequently used in reference to the inhabitants of Santa María de la Chapa. It is unlikely that this term was a precise indication of either ethnicity or African provenance.

lished route travelled by hundreds of Afro-Curaçaoans. In Tierra Firme, González also worked to defend the lands of free blacks (including some Curaçaoans) from the incursions of white landholders; on at least one occasion he travelled to Spain to procure a Royal Decree supporting the small-scale landowners. The other leader of the revolt, José Leonardo Chirinos, was a freeman who worked on cacao plantations and had direct links to the contraband trade with Curaçao (Brito 1985:225-226; Castillo 1981:603). There is evidence that Chirinos travelled regularly to Curaçao and also to Saint-Domingue in the early 1790s (*Documentos* 1997:186; Brito 1985:225-6).⁵⁰ Whether or not there was a direct conspiracy, it is clear from the participation of people like González, Chirinos, and others that the mainland uprising involved people who had close, ongoing ties to Curaçao. Thus, one may reasonably surmise that the two revolts were connected at some level. Enslaved people who travelled between the two areas certainly would have carried news about rising discontent and perhaps even plans to organize resistance in both places. Given the well-established communication circuits between Curaçao and Coro, word of the Coro uprising and the subsequent repression likely reached Curaçao before the island's August revolt.

While we probably will never know with certainty the exact degree and type of collaboration that existed between the rebels in Curaçao and Coro, perhaps we are missing the point if we focus too narrowly on the intriguing possibility of a slave conspiracy. By 1795 people of African descent in both areas had been part of extensive, over-lapping, inter-colonial networks for well over a hundred years. Through these networks they forged deep, multi-faceted, on-going ties that included economic, religious, and socio-cultural dimensions. The largest slave uprisings in the southern Caribbean occurred in close succession in two places, which, although they belonged to separate imperial spheres, were closely linked through smuggling, migration, and various other forms of exchange. As Lauren Benton has noted, early modern empires often were 'encased in irregular, porous, and sometimes undefined borders' (Benton 2010:2). The irregular, porous, and often undefined imperial boundaries between Curaçao and Tierra Firme created opportunities for people of African descent to develop extra-official inter-colonial economic, political, legal, and religious networks. By participating in these networks they, in turn, shaped the contours of each developing colonial society.

50 For Chirinos's testimony following the uprising, which includes information about ties to Curaçao and to the contraband trade: AANH A16-C54-D11182.

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Revolution and politics in Venezuela and Curaçao, 1795-1800

Ramón Aizpurua

Economic and social relations between Venezuela and Curaçao in the late eighteenth century were dense, complex, and varied in content.¹ From the time the Dutch settled on the small island in 1634 and particularly after their authority was recognized in 1650, Curaçaoans and Venezuelans enjoyed regular commercial relations. Once the island became a free port in 1674, this relationship attained such importance that at times it might have been thought that Venezuela's ties to the Dutch Republic were tighter than those with Spain. This developed into a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship, particularly throughout the eighteenth century. Venezuelan products and produce were daily fare at Curaçaoan tables. A large portion of the harvest from Tierra Firme found its way onto the foreign market through Curaçaoan traders, who set sail daily in their vessels to ply the waters of the Caribbean, finding in what was then known as the coast of Caracas, and especially the coast of Coro, their principal trading partner (Aizpurua 1993, 2004a; Klooster 1998). This dense trade relationship was accompanied by continuous, commonplace interactions among the people who gave it life. It was not unusual to find Curaçaoan merchants and mariners in Venezuelan waters, nor unusual to find Venezuelan mariners and merchants in Curaçao. Slaves who fled the island throughout the eighteenth century found a relative but real land of liberty in Venezuela, especially in Coro, where probably more than a thousand slaves landed, fleeing slavery and the abuse of their island masters (Aizpurua 2002, 2004b, 2008; Rupert 2006, 2008).

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However, these relations, both commercial and human, were not free of tension, especially in a time as politically conflictive as the eighteenth century, during which Spain and the Dutch Republic found themselves, actively or passively, mixed up in the dispute between England and France to rule the colonial world, at the end with a new contender in the ring, the United States of America. The Dutch Republic and Spain, and particularly Venezuela and Curaçao, went from being irreconcilable opponents to being brothers of fortune and misfortune, or at least it appeared that way in high political spheres (Aizpurua 1993, Arauz 1984, Klooster 1998). Often, political events in Curaçao would have immediate repercussions in Venezuela, and, likewise, political turmoil in Venezuela had immediate consequences in Curaçao.

When the Caribbean started boiling over from the events set in motion in the European colonies by the French and Haitian revolutions, the course of political relations between Curaçao and Venezuela took an unclear and unpredictable turn. Three major social and political conflicts occurred in Venezuela during the period from 1795 to 1800, events that had ramifications on the island, and in turn appear to have had connections or ties to other events and individuals from Curaçao. Moreover, on the island, for its part, two social and political conflicts transpired that appear to have been related to events and individuals from Venezuela. Contrary to what might be expected, while all of this turmoil was related to the revolutionary changes in the Caribbean, institutions rather than individuals played a vital role.

This contribution does not offer a detailed study of the political and social conflicts of both colonies, but rather attempts to discover the often hidden connections between the two colonies, and to disentangle what role either France or England, or both, had in them.

THE CORO SLAVE REVOLT, 1795²

On Sunday night, 10 May 1795, an uprising of slaves and free blacks began at El Socorro plantation, in the mountains of Coro, which soon spread to other plantations in the area, around a small town called Curimagua. All that night and the following day, the upris-

2 Venezuelan historiography has been generous in studies regarding 'Chirinos' Insurrection', as it is called, but this generosity has not been accompanied by serious analysis up until quite recently, apart from the pioneering but elementary work of Pedro Manuel Arcaya (Arcaya 1910). Aizpurua 1985 contains a general and critical overview.

ing grew as more local people joined in, mostly people of colour as well as some Indians from the region. Several plantations and houses were looted and burned, and their owners and whoever else was found there were killed or wounded. The morning of 12 May, a large party of rebels approached the town of Coro, down the mountains, where, following several skirmishes, they were defeated by troops mustered by the town's authorities and inhabitants. In the pursuit of the rebels, many were summarily 'executed' after statements were hurriedly taken from them, if taken at all. Those who managed to escape the official repression were pursued for some time, especially the leader, José Leonardo Chirinos, who gave his name to the uprising and who was finally caught in mid-August and executed a few days later.

The number of dead, whether among the white highland landowners, their families or sharecroppers, or among the slaves and people of colour who joined the insurrection, was not only larger than in the few previous cases of slave revolts known up until that time, but also showed an unusual level of violence. The deaths and brutality of the uprising, the maxims quoted by the rebels, and the interpretation that the local people and the town's authorities soon gave to the event, led it to be identified with the events in Saint-Domingue, as soon as news of the uprising started reaching Coro, throughout the day on 11 May. The authorities immediately thought that the rebels were invoking the Haitian Revolution and therefore sought a connection between the humble highland slaves and the French ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Such a connection was soon found and, with it, another leader of the revolt, José Caridad González.

José Leonardo Chirinos (JLCh) was a *zambo* from the mountains, son of a slave and an Indian woman, and therefore free, married to a slave, and therefore, the father of slaves. Rumour had it that he enjoyed the admiration of his wife's owner, José Tellería. On his plantation, Macanillas, he worked a small plot of land, known in Venezuela and Curaçao as a *conuco*. Apparently esteemed and trusted by Tellería, he had accompanied him on several business trips, probably to Curaçao, and especially to Saint-Domingue. It is said that during these trips, and inspired by conversations with Tellería or those that he would overhear between him and other whites, JLCh adopted the ideas of the French Republic and the Haitian Revolution, which he subsequently shared with his peers, most of them mountain slaves.

José Caridad González (JCG) had a distinctly different beginning; he was a runaway slave from Curaçao who had obtained his freedom after fleeing the island and making it to Coro, as had a great number of marooned slaves before him. Most of these run-

aways, probably over a thousand during the eighteenth century, ended up settling on lands granted them by the Crown, on the northern slopes of the Coro mountains, overlooking the town of Coro, in a village known as Santa María de la Chapa. Following several lengthy lawsuits with local landholders, the village was moved to Macuquita, a few kilometres to the east along the same side of the mountains. However, a good number of the runaway slaves from Curaçao had settled in the town of Coro, forming a neighbourhood that at the time was called Guinea, now known as Curazaíto. This community of runaway slaves, now freedmen, had several leaders, and it appears that JCG was the last to join the struggle for pre-eminence and prestige among these leaders, who enjoyed, in addition, the highest ranks in the militia of free blacks of Coro, composed of both free Creole blacks and free blacks from Curaçao, commonly known as *luangos*.

In the years leading up to the May 1795 insurrection, JCG had sued twice, once over ownership of the mountain lands, another time for the formation of a militia of blacks, but now exclusively of *luangos*, to be commanded by himself, which it appears he did not fully achieve. Thus he clashed with two totally distinct social classes – landowners who were well connected to the Coro town government, and black *luangos* who, up until then, had been leaders of their community. His ties to Curaçao, a failed trip to the Court in Madrid demanding ownership of the land in the mountains (Chapa-Macuquita), and a trip to Caracas to defend his militia proposal to the Caracas authorities, have led to speculation about his enlightened ideas and about how his failure to accomplish much had fanned his frustration. What is certain is that while JCG and his people reported to the Coro authorities at the first call to arms upon learning the news of the uprising in the mountains, the town's authorities and 'chieftains' were suspicious of their offer of aid as militiamen. Instead of giving them the arms they were requesting to defend the town, they were arrested and locked up in the home of the governor's lieutenant, Manuel Ramírez de Valderráin. Several days later, while being transferred to jail, three of them, JCG and two of his comrades, were 'killed while attempting to escape'.

The rest of the *luango* community was drawn into the affair in rather confusing ways. At the time, a fortification on the coast was under construction a few kilometres to the northeast of the port of Coro in a small settlement called Vela de Coro. *Luangos* worked here in two weekly crews – the mountain *luangos* and the town *luangos*. When the connection between JCG and JLCh was 'established', the workers were surreptitiously and deceitfully called into town, where they were detained, though not charged, pending fur-

ther investigation. In time, some sixty of them were sent to Puerto Cabello, to serve on the ships of the Spanish Armada that were in the harbour. Curiously, the former luango community leaders, José Domingo Rojas and Domingo Rojas (no family relation), were not among those arrested.

Following protracted inquiries, the colonial authorities ruled out any connection between the luango community and the insurrection in the mountains, although some of them may have participated in it and had been executed in the first days of the revolt. Likewise, JCG and his comrades were exonerated, leading in the end, and following several years of 'banishment' on the Armada's ships, to the luangos return to Coro and the mountains.³

A few months later the slave revolt of Curaçao erupted. This made the Coro authorities wonder and perhaps worry about connections, but a possible relationship between the two events was never proved.⁴

THE REPUBLICAN CONSPIRACY OF LA GUAIRA AND CARACAS, 1797⁵

In July 1797, a conspiracy was uncovered in Caracas, which had its roots in the port of La Guaira in a variegated circle of white bureaucrats, whites involved in maritime trade, soldiers from the regular troops, and mulatto militiamen, primarily from the port itself. The plan had been devised by a retired colonel from the regular troops, Manuel Gual, who lived on a small plantation in the interior of the province of Venezuela, and a Spanish prisoner, Juan Bautista Picornell, at that time imprisoned in the forts at La Guaira while awaiting dispatch to his final destination, Veracruz. Picornell had been sentenced to life imprisonment for his republican conspiracy in Madrid, known as the San Blas conspiracy, discovered in May 1795,

3 For everything related to this insurrection, I have used the official file of decrees drawn up by the Royal Audiencia of Caracas, in the Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Caracas 426, of the *Documentos de la Insurrección* 1994-97, as well as Archivo Libertador (Caracas), copied at the Bolívarium Archive, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Caracas, legajos 74, 145, 164, and 165.

4 Governor Carbonell received news from Curaçao by September 1795. In fact, a commissioner who had gone to the island in search of stores and provisions for the royal fleet, Antonio Hernández de Orta, would suggest a ban on the traffic of trade ships to the island, which Carbonell decreed in due course. As the governor did not think that this measure was sufficient, he also prohibited the entry of blacks, even those who were truly recently arrived slaves. See Archivo General de Indias [AGI], Estado 65, No. 19, folios 1-1v.

5 As in the preceding case, much has been written but little analysed on the matter, except in the equally pioneering case of Casto Fulgencio López (López 1955). For a detailed treatment, see Aizpurua 2007.

and with him in the jails of La Guaira were several of his closest collaborators, in particular Juan Cortés de Campomanes.

Thanks to the lax state of the ruling colonial authority in La Guaira, the principal port of the Venezuelan colony, the detainees who had arrived in Venezuela between late 1796 and early 1797 were able to mingle with their jailers and the local people as soon as they arrived. The cells where they were confined soon became salons that drew people from all social strata of La Guaira, especially second-tier whites, merchants and treasury authorities, and front-line military men and soldiers, mulatto militiamen and artisans. Little by little, they hatched a plan for an uprising that, inspired by the speeches and written proclamations of Picornell, sought to do away with the monarchy and establish a multiracial republic.

As the detainees attempted to bring more local discontents into the conspiracy, the colonial authorities caught wind of the plan and swiftly and efficiently eradicated the movement. They conducted a sweeping investigation that brought to light both the conspiracy and the social fabric out of which it was being stitched; a feeble fabric that limited the chances of success, in particular due to the mistrust between the whites and mulattoes. Curiously, the clearest and most resolute among the accused were the Creole mulatto militiamen and artisans as well as the low-ranking soldiers, all Spaniards. The white conspirators, radical when planning the conspiracy and the republic, were reticent about their participation once they were exposed as conspirators. One part of the white group was peninsular bureaucrats and traders living in La Guaira, who quickly dissociated themselves from the mulatto militiamen and Creole 'troublemakers'. The other part was comprised of mid-ranking active and retired military men, meeting in La Guaira to make modifications in the port's fortification system, although there were also some who came from a kind of local Creole white middle class. Two of the latter group lent their names to the conspiracy – Manuel Gual and José María España. They, for different reasons, not only backed down when the plan was discovered but also escaped from the province, and were the only two who, initially, dodged colonial justice.

The conspiracy for a republic included taking full control of the province of Venezuela, getting people from other cities in the region involved in it, and governing it by the motto of the French Revolution – liberty, equality, and fraternity. In the ideas set down in the written plans, obtained by the colonial authorities, equality of the 'races' was confusingly formulated, and among the conspirators' ideas was that of making contact with Caribbean experiments along these lines, especially that of Guadeloupe, where Victor

Hugues was said to have peacefully incorporated ‘people of colour’ into the new republic.

The entire plan fell apart, and, just as Picornell and Campomanes had done before in late June 1797, Gual and España escaped to Curaçao one month later, in late July, where they made contact with local residents and French agents on the island, perhaps with the idea of amplifying their original plan with any aid that the Curaçaoans and French might provide. Once on the island, they soon reported to the governor of the island, Johann Rudolf Lauffer. They lodged in the house or inn of Felipe Piar,⁶ son of a mulatto Curaçaoan woman and a Canarian captain who travelled to the island. His brother was Manuel Piar, who was to have an important role in the first years of the so-called Venezuelan War of Independence, but ended up executed in 1817 at the orders of Simón Bolívar himself, following a murky trial in which racial problems may have been lurking.

When a commissioner, José Rafael Oberto, arrived along with a privateer, Captain Pedro Castillo, with the mission of transporting them back to La Guaira under arrest, it seems that Gual and España sought protection with the French merchant Jean Baptiste Tierce. Lauffer attempted to find and arrest them in order to turn them over to Commissioner Oberto – that at least is what he told the Caracas government. The fugitives moved into Tierce’s house, where they even met with Castillo. Soon after, Castillo, Oberto and José Obediente, the person commissioned by Lauffer to help Oberto apprehend Gual and España, were chased and harassed by mobs of people who followed them everywhere, insulting them with ‘...there goes the aristocrat who comes to take away the revolutionaries, and the traitor who helps them...’⁷

Aided by Tierce, Gual and España had begun to recruit volunteers for the expedition they were planning with the aim of first taking La Guaira and next assaulting Caracas to overthrow the Spanish authorities. From among the varied population of Curaçao – locals,

6 Isabel Gómez, mother of the Piar brothers and a midwife by profession, was living in La Guaira when she was deported to Curaçao after it was detected that the fugitives were staying in the house of one of her children. See Archivo de la Academia Nacional de la Historia de Venezuela, Civiles:12-4750-4.

7 These were the words of Pedro Castillo, as reported to the Caracas authorities. The event was such common knowledge that even Tierce himself informed Governor Carbonell of it on 30-8-1797: AGI, Audiencia de Caracas 432, pieza 79, folios 70v-71v. In the Spanish documentation, his name always appears as Tierce de Cadet, or simply Cadet, and he was considered to be a consul or representative of the French government of Saint-Domingue in Curaçao, but it appears that he was never recognized as such by the Curaçaoan authorities or by the French Directory; he worked as a maritime agent.

Frenchmen, and Spaniards – many of whom were probably crew members on Curaçaoan ships or French corsairs, they managed to ‘enlist’ a large number, some 400 people, among whom 100 pesos were distributed daily to keep them committed to the project; some informants spoke of local Jewish support. Some of these conspirators, for example, the Frenchman Boissere, went along with the refugees from La Guaira, supposedly to learn the expedition’s intent. In a long letter to Governor Pedro Carbonell disclosing the conspiracy, Boissere maintained that the French were the true captains of the project, and that its ultimate aim was to seize the riches of the Royal Treasury in Caracas, which they thought might hold over 20,000 pesos.⁸

However, as the ‘persecution’ intensified, in November 1797 Gual and España decide to travel to Jacmel in Saint-Domingue in search of more help, men and money for their invasion plan. The very day they were to leave for Jacmel, Picornell arrived from Guadeloupe with a letter of introduction from the commissioner Victor Hugues, sent to make contact with Tierce to enlist his help to mount an expedition that was to invade La Guaira. Tierce received Picornell at his home and an invasion plan was hatched, for which España travelled to Guadeloupe to confirm the aid that, apparently, Victor Hugues had offered. The trip was unfruitful because the French commissioner was convinced that the pretensions of Picornell, whom he had met with in July of that year, as well as those of Gual and España, were based on fantasy – Picornell believed that as soon as they arrived in La Guaira, the people would rise up with them. España returned to Curaçao with empty hands, now accompanied by Cortés de Campomanes, who had initially remained on the French island. On the return voyage, they stopped at the Swedish colony of St. Barthélemy, where España won the support of several of the island’s merchants, from whom he obtained an offer of aid, something he claimed to have obtained also in Guadeloupe, directly from merchants on the French island.⁹

Upon their arrival in Curaçao late in 1798, Cortés de Campomanes went ashore, but España did not because he learned that Lauffer had issued a warrant for his arrest. He decided to leave for Saint-Domingue, via Aruba, travelling on the ship of Juan Pedro Maduro,

8 AGI, Audiencia de Caracas 435, documentos sueltos, folios 1-16. This also appears in a letter sent to Governor Pedro Carbonell by Monsieur Boissiere, AGI, Caracas 432, pieza 81, folios 1-15v. This case serves to show the diverse references to the affair. José María España called him Laboyere in his statements (see following note).

9 All this information comes from AGI, Caracas 433, pieza 91, folios 70v-82, second statement from José María España, 3-5-1799.

a free coloured merchant and mariner, and friend of Tierce. While Maduro was busy buying mules to take back to the French island, Gual arrived in Aruba too on a ship belonging to Pedro Brión, for whom Tierce had worked and whom the Frenchman considered a close friend. They finally left for Jacmel, where they stayed for several days. There, Gual decided to speak with the English authorities of Martinique, travelled there, and subsequently went to Trinidad (recently conquered by the English), where he tried to sell his idea of invading Venezuela and making it a republic.¹⁰

España stayed in Jacmel, working with several French merchants, but was uncertain about his future. He travelled first to the Danish colony of St. Thomas and then to St. Barthélemy, seeking the help of his brother-in-law Kiruan, with whom he stayed for a time on the first island and with whom he moved to the second, helping him manage several plantations. When everything seemed to indicate that this would be the end of the adventure, he decided to go to La Guaira to look for his family. He travelled there via Trinidad, where he tried to connect with Gual. However, he did not like how the island's governor, Thomas Picton, handled the situation and in early 1799 decided to sail on to La Guaira. There, España hid in his own house until his presence was exposed by one of his ex-slaves, who had been sold in La Guaira after all of España's property had been seized in 1797. Arrested in late April 1799, long statements were taken from him, after which he was sentenced to death and executed immediately, on 6 May 1799.¹¹

Gual's fate was no better, despite having made contact with Francisco de Miranda, who at the time was attempting in London to mount an expedition to invade Venezuela with support from the English government. He was trailed by several spies and died in Trinidad, apparently poisoned, in late 1800.

In hindsight, Gual, España, Picornell, and Cortés seem to have attempted to sell their plan for revolution to both the French, in Guadeloupe to Commissioner Victor Hugues and in Curaçao to Tierce, and to the English, in Martinique to Admiral Ralph Abercromby and in Trinidad to Governor Picton, but without much success. Perhaps indeed they would have obtained economic support from merchants in Guadeloupe, St. Thomas, St. Barthélemy, and even Curaçao, who would have viewed this aid as a sort of 'investment' in the future, expecting profits in the event the rich Spanish colony became an independent republic with their friends at the helm. For their part, the French and English governments were

10 Great Britain occupied Martinique from 1794 to 1802.

11 AGI, Caracas 433, pieza 91, folios 70v-82.

involved in their own conflict and probably saw in these ‘imaginative’ Venezuelan revolutionaries possible allies for their own plans, whether to capture Curaçao, still an island of economic importance in the thick of the privateering business, or with a view to the economic and logistical importance and potential that Venezuela had, particularly after the Saint-Domingue insurrection.

It also appears that these men were ‘pawns’ in the intrigues on the island itself, where economic and personal interests most likely were clashing behind political and ideological loyalties. Otherwise it is hard to understand the odd behaviour of Tierce and Lauffer toward the Venezuelan fugitives, first inciting the expedition but leaving them on their own, or of hiding them from the Caracas authorities yet pursuing them. Lauffer, as well as Tierce and General Urbain Devaux, in their various letters to Carbonell and his successor Guevara y Vasconcelos, presented themselves as devoted, selfless allies of the Spanish Crown, requesting their aid for the trying times on the island in 1799, but keeping their distance from each other – Lauffer in one corner, and Tierce and Devaux in another. However, José María España declared before the Caracas authorities that he thought Tierce was following orders from Lauffer in supporting the plan for the naval expedition to La Guaira.

THE CONSPIRACY OF FRENCH CORSAIRS AND CREOLE MULATTOES IN MARACAIBO, 1799

Two years after the conspiracy of La Guaira, an even more tangled case of socio-political conflict occurred in Venezuela, this time in another important port, Maracaibo, in the colony’s west. Once again, people of colour, French corsairs, and Curaçaoan seamen and logistics joined forces in a failed attempt at establishing a republic on Venezuelan soil.¹² Of the three cases presented here, this is the most obscure because it is still not clear who the instigator of the plan was. Instead, it appears to be one of those situations in which the sum of the circumstances obscures the essence of the affair and the fragility of the venture.

12 I have not included individual references in my synopsis, which I have prepared using the documentation about the conspiracy in six *piezas de autos* issued by the Royal Audiencia of Caracas, and in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Diversos LXXIV, folios 242-354v, in the AGN, Caracas, reproduced in their entirety in the CD *La sublevación intentada por los corsarios franceses de Puerto Príncipe, 1799-1800* (documentary compilation), annexed to the Master’s thesis in history submitted by Ángel Manzanillo, in Caracas, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2000 (CDSMbo).

On the night of 6 May 1799, three ships reached port in Maracaibo, two corsairs from Saint-Domingue, the *Bruto* and the *Patrulla*, and their British prize, the *Arlequín*. The first two belonged to the Gaspar brothers, natives of Port-au-Prince, with one, Jean-Baptiste, at the helm of the first, and the other, Auguste, commanding the other. They had left Port-au-Prince bound for St. Thomas, but a storm blew them to the coast of Guaranao, where they seized the English ship, which they soon boarded and added to their group. Due to the poor shape they were all in, and their lack of victuals, they decided to seek refuge and aid in Maracaibo, and to legalize their prize.

Once in port, the boats were visited by the Maracaibo authorities, and with the circumstances and cargo explained, the *Arlequín* was declared good prize. For some twelve days, the crews of the privateer ships lived the routine port life, disembarking to eat and drink, or receiving local curiosity seekers on board. Meanwhile, the authorities had designated several individuals to mediate and monitor their stay.

Nevertheless, something out of the ordinary must have happened. Soon, the two Gaspar brothers, aided by one of their subordinates, José Romano, second captain of the *Bruto*, a native and resident of the island of St. Thomas, began talking with Francisco Javier Pirela, second lieutenant of the First Company of Disciplined Mulatto Militias of Maracaibo, a 35-year-old widower from the town, and a tailor by profession. Though it is difficult to know who took the initiative, their conversations soon came around to the idea of taking the town for the purpose of declaring a republic. Some offered their men, arms, and cannon, along with money, another offered the militia or those he could assemble, and they decided to rise up on the night of 19 May, a Sunday.

However, as on other occasions, the uprising did not break out. One of the first men whom Pirela attempted to win over, Tomás de Ochoa, first corporal of the First Veteran Company of Maracaibo, informed the governor, Fernando Miyares y Gonzáles, who that night organized an assault on the three ships, taking their crews prisoner, including the *Arlequín's* sailors, whose cannon had been loaded for an attack on the city.

The investigation did not take long and, even though those who gave statements claimed their innocence and blamed others, saying that it was 'the rest of them' who were trying to incite the uprising, some clear ideas can be extracted. The first is that once more fantasy was fanning the flames of the insurrectional plans, especially when in the heat of argument and alcohol allies came along offering assistance that was hard to guarantee. Additionally, it is probable that Pirela and Romano, who acted as interpreter between Pirela and the corsair captains, fell under the spell and imagined

the formation of a republic in the city as a *fait accompli*, which would soon be linked to an uprising in the city of Cartagena. As in the previous case, the plan included arresting the authorities and murdering them, taking over the city, subjugating the population, especially those who did not identify with the insurrection, seizing the funds in the Royal Treasury, which they thought amounted to 20,000 pesos, and appointing authorities from among the people of colour.

The conspirators also thought of turning to Curaçao in search of more people and armaments, according to Pirela, who said that Romano had told him that 'he would send to Curaçao for more people, armaments and munitions of war to sustain and establish themselves in this country'.¹³ Some of the privateers were Curaçaoans, as were some of the crewmembers of the English prize.¹⁴ Although it seemed clear that there was a plan for an uprising, and the Gaspar brothers, Romano, Pirela, and several other locals and sailors were found guilty, there is no more information available. However, the case of Maracaibo does seem to demonstrate a pattern in the behaviour of Saint-Domingue privateers and of Guadeloupean and French republican officials in European colonies with coloured populations, as will be seen below.

VENEZUELAN AUTHORITIES AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN CURAÇAO, 1799-1800¹⁵

Meanwhile in Curaçao, other events were taking place that were related to the French and Haitian revolutions and to the strug-

13 CDSMbo, Pieza 5, folios 544-545 (folio 545), statement from Francisco Javier Pirela, 28-6-1799.

14 Most prominent were Jacob Gómez, native and resident of the island of Curaçao, second captain of the *Bruto*, who stated he was hired by the corsairs to take them to the island; Juan Jeres, boatswain of the *Bruto*; and Silvestre Castro, native of Curaçao, aged 44 years, and pilot for the French corsairs, who had taken the position in Port-au-Prince, who in their declarations presented themselves as having been forced by circumstances to participate in the uprising plan, but never as leaders; for their part, from the prize were the Curaçaoans Diego Cristiano, a black sailor of 20 years, Julián Francisco, mulatto, sailor of some 17 years, who spoke good Spanish, and Juan González de Castro, a sailor of colour, aged 44 years, who stated having been excluded from the uprising plan and having been kept as prisoners by the corsairs until the day of the planned uprising, although the second one, Julián Francisco, clarified that one of the Gaspar brothers had offered money 'so that he would not reveal him nor declare anything that would be to his detriment in the anticipated uprising'. ECMbo, Pieza 4, folios 427v-430 (folio 429v), declaration of Julián Francisco, sailor, mulatto, native and resident of Curaçao. Maracaibo, 1-6-1799.

15 On the case studied here, see also Felice 1973:415-443, who used similar sources, but from other document collections.

gles of groups of colour throughout the Caribbean. By November 1796, following the conflict that pitted Orangists against Patriots in Curaçao and led to the replacement of the island's governor Johannes de Veer by Jacob Beaujon, Dutch officials and sailors who were not supporters of the Batavian Republic began to arrive in Venezuela. This happened, for example, to Frederik Harrias, drum major of the troops, and Abraham de Pon, a sailor on one of the frigates of war of the new republic, forced to abandon the island by its governor.¹⁶

The authorities of Caracas closely followed the conflict that had broken out on the island and informed the authorities in Spain, who, in turn, instructed their ambassador in the Batavian Republic, José de Anduaga, to attempt to detain Tierce for the purpose of finishing the investigation regarding the plans of Gual and España.¹⁷ The governor of Caracas had already informed the Spanish authorities about this event, including a report from the lieutenant of Coro, Emilio Boggiero, who said that the advocates of the planned uprising had been Devaux and Tierce, and that they had their principal ally in naval officer Albert Kikkert, but that Lauffer had concealed the alliance. Also on the island at the time was a Jew named Isaac Sasportas,¹⁸ sent by Toussaint Louverture, although Boggiero indicated that he had not taken part in this particular conspiracy. The plan had been uncovered by the new French consul on the island, Joubert, who rejected the offer made by Devaux to join the plot, informing Lauffer of the matter instead.

A few days later, on 11 September 1799, an emissary of the military leader of the Haitian mulattoes, André Rigaud, arrived on the island, bringing the news that both Devaux and Sasportas had been sent by his rival Toussaint to incite the island. In addition, the Brigade Commander and Major General of Jacmel, named Bobbay (according to Boggiero's report) arrived, fleeing from Toussaint; he was attempting to sail for Paris to inform the Directory of the outrageous situation in Saint-Domingue. Boggiero also said that an old acquaintance from La Guaira had arrived on the island, the French physician Pierre Canibens, brother-in-law of José María España, and whose detention by Lauffer and later escape appears

16 AGI, Estado 65, No. 57, 'Información de llegada de Curazao de militares leales al príncipe holandés', 11-10-1796. The case is studied in this volume by Karwan Fatah Black.

17 AGI, Estado 71, No. 4.

18 At that time, nephew of José Obediente, lieutenant of the National Guard of Curaçao, interpreter and confidant of the governor of Caracas, first Pedro Carbonell and later Manuel Guevara y Vasconcelos.

to have been behind the allegations made by Devaux and Tierce of 'insults' made in Curaçao to French citizens.¹⁹

Boggiero warned the Spanish authorities of the instability of Curaçao:

This revolutionary endeavour, which is the fourth that has been discovered since the current tribulations of the French colonies, has been, it appears, calmed down, but as the inclination of that population is known, composed almost entirely of mulattoes and blacks, freedmen and slaves, who aspire so to equality and liberty, there is no doubt that it will have a hidden ferment that some day will come to realize its intent.²⁰

Besides the report from lieutenant Boggiero, who received fresh news in Coro from the island thanks to the daily contacts with Curaçao, the governor had an extensive epistolary relationship with the island's authorities, among whom figured Lauffer, a governor temporarily allied with the Spaniards. He also corresponded with Devaux, the local agent on the island of a nation allied with the Spanish Crown. This meant that the Caracas governor constantly kept a suspicious eye on the conflicts that had arisen on Curaçao. This was a dispute between allies, which for its part entailed possible greater conflicts among the perennial British enemy with its thirst to conquer Tierra Firme, revolutionary France and the emerging new republic in Hispaniola.

Devaux sent at least four letters to the governors of Caracas, first Pedro Carbonell and later Manuel Guevara y Vasconcelos. He acted as an agent in Curaçao for handling the prizes that French corsairs, or those from Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe, took in the Caribbean, which they would bring to the island where they would rapidly deal with the legal cases resulting from the seizures. As such, he had complained to the governor about conflicts between Venezuelan authorities and French corsairs, being particularly interested in the case of the Gaspar brothers, who had been detained in Maracaibo some months earlier, accused of seditious plans. On 30 July, Devaux wrote to the governor of Caracas in defence of the Gaspar

19 AGI, Estado 71 4 (1a), folios 1-2v. Pierre Canibens, brother-in-law of José María España by marriage to his sister Joaquina, had arrived in Curaçao from Bermuda, where he had ended up after the ship which was being sent under detention to Spain was taken as a prize by English privateers. Together with him, it seems, was the other brother-in-law of España through his wife, Domingo Sánchez, who worked as an amanuensis on the island. See AGI, Caracas 433, pieza 91, folios 1v-10v, statement from José María España, 30-4-1799.

20 AGI, Caracas 433, pieza 91, folio 2v.

brothers,²¹ highlighting what would be the version of the corsairs. He explained that after the letters of marque that they had enjoyed had been taken away from them, they devoted themselves to trade, but kept their ships armed ‘to defend themselves in the event of being attacked’.²² About this affair, he pressured governor Guevara in a letter sent on 2 August 1799 by telling him that ‘several villains and Pirates have abused the French flag, but the French Republic is not involved at all in the vile deeds that are committed in its name; it only knows goodness and noble deeds, such are its principles and its intentions: It is also good and loyal and forthright, as it is a terrible enemy, etc.’²³

In another letter, Devaux mentioned the affair of the jailing of Pierre Canibens, pointing out that he did not previously know the French physician, but that Canibens had been detained in a manner hardly consistent with international law and was going to be turned over to the Caracas authorities ‘to be sacrificed, as a result of a denunciation from his brother-in-law [José María] España’, which is why Devaux had contributed to his escape.²⁴

However, Devaux had matters of more pressing concern than trying to mediate between the Gaspar brothers, or Tierce, and the Caracas authorities. Trade, both legal and illicit, between Englishmen and North Americans (who acted as their middlemen) and the Spanish colonies did appear to cause the French agent to lose sleep, and for this reason he wrote to Governor Guevara in Caracas several times telling him how and in what waters the English were smuggling. He sent copies of some new instructions that the British king had given to his commanders for the purpose of permitting a sort of ‘free trade’ by enemy or allied merchants with his Caribbean colonies (dated 8 March 1798, revoking and expanding those of 27 June 1797). These favoured, in particular, Spanish traders, by permitting them to land at what they called English free ports in the Caribbean: Kingston, Savannah, Montego Bay, St. Lucia, and Port Antonio on the island of Jamaica; St. George’s on Granada; Roseau on Dominica; Nassau on the island of New Providence (Bahamas); and the port of St. John’s in Antigua.²⁵ However, he intelligently added another royal decree that, complaining of the procedures of the Spanish in violent and unjustified seizures of their ships,

21 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1h), folios 1-1v (folio 1), Devaux to Guevara, Curaçao 30-7-1799.

22 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1h), folio 1.

23 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1g), folios 1-6v (folios 2-2v), Devaux to Guevara, Curaçao of 2-8-1799.

24 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1j), folios 1-2, Devaux to Guevara, undated.

25 AGI Estado 67, No. 73 (1l), ‘Instrucciones adicionales a los comandantes ingleses’, 28-3-1798.

ordered reprisals be taken against Spanish ships whose crews, once seized, were to be judged by the admiralty court.²⁶

By doing this, Devaux pretended to draw Guevara's attention to the risk entailed by the Spanish engaging in smuggling with English enemies, but it appears that deep down his interest ran in a different direction. From the very first letter that Devaux sent Guevara, on 22 June 1799, the Frenchman communicated his need to go to Caracas to take information that he could only convey in person since it involved a secret mission. Devaux said he wanted to visit the province of Venezuela accompanied by an officer, an interpreter, and an aid,²⁷ which Guevara refused.²⁸ In response to another request along the same lines, Guevara asked him to communicate the objective of his secret mission on Tierra Firme and the objective of his intended visit since, thought Guevara, each 'step that general Devaux took with me, led me involuntarily to the opinion that he was not being sincere with me, and that his entry into these provinces could be detrimental'.²⁹

There is no further correspondence between Devaux and Guevara since around that time the plan for insurrection against Lauffer was uncovered. However, a letter from José Obediente helps us imagine what Devaux's secret mission was. This lieutenant of the Curaçaoan National Guard said that Devaux's intentions were to visit Venezuela to ask the governor to allow him to arm an English prize, the *Hermione*, and to launch an attack on Trinidad with the objective of recovering it with the support of Venezuelan privateers and a force of over 200 men. Obediente added that Tierce convinced Devaux that they did not have enough money to complete this secret mission, but that if they managed to incite the island to rebellion, they could do away with Lauffer. Tierce supposedly added that

we will put the Marine Commander in his place, we will form a Directory, we will get one hundred thousand pesos out of the Jews for you, we will send one hundred fifty robust men out of the country, who are just some aristocrats, we will confiscate all the Americans who we find here, and their boats, we will cut Obediente's throat, because he is a swine and protector of the tyrant Spanish government, we will cut the throats of the crown attorney and nephew of the governor, because they are very villainous and depraved men,

26 AGI Estado 67, No. 73 (1m), 'Otro tanto', Bermuda, 24-6-1799.

27 AGI Estado 67, No. 73 (1), folios 1-10v (2v).

28 AGI Estado 67, No. 73 (1), folio 3v.

29 AGI Estado 67, No. 73 (1), folio 7.

we will put people of our liking in the jobs, I have some of the National Guard up my sleeve, I will return to my position as artilleryman to win over the locals, I will take the castle, and you will take the Castle of the Republic, which is the one that rules over the whole island. After this is done, you will be able to continue on to Trinidad with greater satisfaction since there you will find all the American ships, French corsairs, and riches at your disposal.³⁰

And here Governor Lauffer in Curaçao comes into play. On 11 September 1799, he wrote Guevara describing the planned uprising by Tierce and his allies, adding that were these plans to triumph, 'not only would this colony be completely destroyed, but the security of your government and the public peace of the western coast will also be exposed to the most appalling dangers'.³¹ Lauffer told governor Guevara that in the event the two sides clashed he would be in need of aid because of the superiority of the French forces. He calculated that only with 500 disciplined men added to his troops would he be able to counter the French. Hence, Lauffer asked Guevara to let him know if he would be willing to aid him with 500 men from his troops, explaining, 'In the event that Your Excellency is willing to grant me this entreaty, I beg of you to have them soon at my disposition in the port of La Guaira or of Cabello. In case of necessity, I will send for them with an express messenger, or if circumstances force me to go to extremes, I myself will come for them. [...] Perhaps this is the only way to save [...] this colony, the last possession of the Batavian Republic in this hemisphere, from its complete destruction, as well as to protect your government, and the Spanish possessions of the neighbouring coasts, from the danger that threatens them'.³²

Guevara responded eleven days later, lamenting not being able to make indiscriminate use of his troops without the express orders of his superiors on the peninsula and asking Lauffer for details on the project of Tierce and Devaux, especially with regard to the 'number that they have within the island, and their quality, especially from the military class on land or sea'.³³ Guevara was already

30 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1u), folios 1-3 (folio 1v), José Obediente to Governor Carbonell, Curaçao, 15-9-1799. By then, the governor was no longer Pedro Carbonell but rather Manuel Guevara y Vasconcelos. Probably, in giving this information, Obediente was following instructions from Lauffer himself on the matter.

31 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1r), folios 1-2 (folio 1), Governor Johann Rudolf Lauffer to Governor Guevara, Curaçao, 11-9-1799.

32 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1r), folio 1v and 2.

33 AGI, Estado 67, No. 73 (1s), folios 1-2, Governor Guevara to Governor Lauffer of Curaçao, Caracas, 22-9-1799.

aware of the expulsion of Devaux and the jailing of Tierce, which is why he was more concerned about the issue of the political and social unrest on the island and its repercussions on Tierra Firme.

Guevara also had information gathered by Spanish informants on the island commissioned by the Caracas authorities. Thus, Manuel Farfán de los Godos, who had gone there for that purpose at the request of the Regent of the Royal Audiencia, the highest legal authority of Venezuela, had already sent a report of the events on the island.³⁴ He detailed how he had managed to infiltrate Devaux's party, finding out that Devaux had made a list of the wealthiest men on the island and of how he had gotten Commander Kikkert to join his faction, and that he had won over all the French on the island, with the approval of Tierce, to later use the jailing of Pierre Canibens as an excuse to inflame spirits over Lauffer's alleged anti-French posture. According to Farfán's telling,

once this was achieved, they would make the aforesaid Marine Commander [Kikkert] into the interim governor, using as a motive for this entire action and its incidents that said governor [Lauffer] wanted to surrender this island to the English, and that exposed by these people, they had killed him and his confederates because of that, and then, with the course of action produced by said general and his party, he himself [Kikkert] would go to Holland to report on the happenings, gain merit, and achieve ownership of this government for the aforementioned Marine Commander, as he had contributed with the arms at his command to the felicity that the surrender of this island to the English did not take place.³⁵

With the governor dead, along with those the French conspirators called aristocrats, and in possession of their property and money, they would divide it among the revolutionaries. Farfán reported that after learning the nature and strategy of the plan of insurrection, he spoke with Lauffer, telling him everything.³⁶

It is impossible to ascertain whether the information provided by Farfán is reliable or if he is reproducing the comments of Lauffer or of his assistant Obediente. If it is reliable indeed, quite possibly the plan of Tierce and Devaux was not a consequence of the orders that Devaux supposedly brought with him to the island, but rather

34 AGI, Estado 67 73 (1t), folios 1-2v, Manuel Farfán de los Godos to Regent López Quintana, Curaçao, 6-9-1799.

35 AGI, Estado 67 73 (1t), folio Iv.

36 It seems curious that several people claim to have informed Governor Lauffer of the French plan: Obediente, Farfán, and the new French consul on the island, Jaubert.

represented a reaction to the turn of events on the island, which Lauffer then interpreted to his benefit to make way for his reaction.

Guevara also received a letter sent from Puerto Cabello on 18 September, with the latest news that had come in from the island on several ships, emphasizing that among the documents seized from the conspirators a sheet of paper was found that said that Obediente's head must roll because he was a protector of the Catholics and persecutor of the French. The letter revealed that the governor of Suriname had surrendered his colony to the English after some French corsairs had arrived in port and managed to get the colony's slaves to join their camp.³⁷

Thus, in addition, if there is truth to a conspiracy carried out by French corsairs and agents, the events in Maracaibo in May of that same year would have to be seen as part of a more general plan, however informal it may have been – not just a consequence of circumstances or happenstance – to connect the interests and proclamations of the French and Haitian corsairs in the Caribbean with the worries of the communities of various non-French colonies in the Caribbean, whether Spanish, English, or Dutch. A similar case appears to be the conspiracy that occurred in Cartagena in April 1799. Some contemporaries linked this conspiracy to the Maracaibo affair, but the Spanish authorities did not lend great weight to this interpretation. An uprising was planned for 2 April of that year, comprised of the black slaves of French officials and recently arrived black slaves who were prisoners, apparently backed by a gunnery sergeant of the black militia named Jorge Guzmán. Eight of the black men were arrested and gave confusing statements. The alleged complot was revealed by a first corporal of the mulatto volunteers, Manuel Iturén, who learned of it from a black Creole slave. The conspirators were apparently thinking of killing the whites and looting public and private property.³⁸

As a result of this affair, the correspondence between Lauffer and Guevara increased once again, but on this occasion the issues were even more serious. Guevara learned of a new conflict on the island from the commander of Puerto Cabello, Manuel Marmi6n, who wrote him on 8 September 1800 saying that a schooner coming from Curaçao had just reached port and had left the island two days earlier together with twelve or thirteen Spanish ships with permission from Lauffer after he had received information from a negotiator that the French would return as enemies 'to bring

37 AGI, Estado 67 No. 73(1v), folios 1-1v (1v), Miguel Mart6nnez to Governor Guevara, Puerto Cabello, 18-9-1799.

38 AGI, Estado 53, No. 77. The plan to capture a port city, kill the whites, and steal public and private property seems to have been the norm in these attempted rebellions.

everything down in fire and blood'.³⁹ Guevara also had news of the arrival on the island of a brother of Rigaud, who was fleeing Saint-Domingue and might have offered his packet boat and people to the French. He also reported that the island was 'in the greatest confusion due to distrust of the slaves, and that the French might be successful in their intent to incite them'.⁴⁰

Additionally, the lieutenant from Coro, the abovementioned Emilio Boggiero, sent a similar letter to Guevara on the same 8 September, informing him of the arrival in the port of Coro of a canoe that had returned from Curaçao, where it had gone with a letter for Lauffer. He added to what Marmi3n said with news of the arrival of two boats loaded with people coming from the island – women, children, and some old people – as well as the news that other Spanish ships were doing the same, leaving Curaçao bound for Puerto Cabello and La Guaira, after Lauffer had given his permission for this on 6 September. From the explanation the canoe's captain gave to Lieutenant Boggiero, it could be deduced that the French had put together ten ships from among those that had left the port and those that had arrived from Guadeloupe, and had taken the castle of Sint Michiel by deception, and that the black slaves of the estates in the area had been liberated by the French, who had taken them into their ranks. He added that such a thing frightened him since 'with all the people they have in Curaçao, those that are fleeing from Guadeloupe, and those who would come from Les Cayes [in Saint-Domingue], they are in condition to work quickly and take firm hold on these coasts, from whence perhaps they shall not again leave'.⁴¹

The following day, the administrator of the Royal Treasury of Río de Tocuyo, a small coastal town between Coro and Puerto Cabello, informed Marmi3n that several individuals from the island had arrived in Hueque, another coastal town, saying that part of the island had been taken over by the French and that by then the island was probably in their power. With this news, Marmi3n informed Guevara of the affair, adding that it would be wise not to ship to the island the provisions and refreshments that he had prepared, including cattle, which he had not done for fear that such aid might fall 'into the hands of the French and English who were crisscrossing the island'.⁴²

39 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folios 3v-5v (folio 4), Manuel Marmi3n to Governor Guevara, Puerto Cabello, 08-09-1800.

40 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folio 5. This must be Joseph Rigaud, in custody.

41 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87 (1a), folios 6a-10v (folio 7b), Andr3s Boggiero to Governor Guevara, Coro, 08-09-1800.

42 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87 (1a), folios 11v-14v (folio 13b), Manuel Marmi3n to Governor Guevara, Puerto Cabello, 14-09-1800.

In addition, in another letter that same day, Marmi3n informed Governor Guevara that several ships had just arrived in Puerto Cabello with a considerable number of 3migr3s, some ninety, including several of the island's Jewish merchant families and some free mulatto women, and that he had parcelled them out among his trading acquaintances. Most belonged to the Enrriquez and Del Valle clans, with several of their slaves. The widow and daughter of an old acquaintance of the Venezuelan authorities, the merchant David Morales, had also arrived.⁴³

On an uncertain date, though it must have been close in time, news also arrived from Paraguan3, the coastal region of Venezuela nearest to Curaçao and Aruba. Several Curaçaoan families and some Frenchmen who were aboard an English schooner were not welcomed in Aruba, so the English thought of leaving them on Tierra Firme. It was known that a boat had arrived 'with nine blacks and three whites, one from San Sebasti3n, another from San Juan de Cruz, and one American, the latter ones armed, and according to the inquiry, they were found to be with the French'.⁴⁴ All were detained except four of the blacks and they were referred to the Coro authorities. To the consternation of the city's authorities, it appears that the four fugitives, after being found and their participation in the band of Frenchmen confirmed, were walking freely about the city.⁴⁵

This situation entailed an additional problem for the Venezuelan authorities: Christian charity called on them to receive the 3migr3s with open arms, most of them being known to the merchants of Puerto Cabello and La Guaira. However, the fact that they were Jews expelled from Spain and its empire required additional care to be taken beyond what the law required for all foreigners without naturalization papers, apart from the fact that, once more, the factions that were fighting among themselves on the island were, at the time, allies of Spain.

The affair was studied by the Royal Audiencia which, surreptitiously, decreed that the 3migr3s ran no additional risk on the island and therefore should be returned forthwith to Curaçao, and that no more 3migr3s should be accepted, who 'will have to suffer [...] the

43 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folios 17v-20v.

44 AGI, Caracas 486, 'Papeleta de noticias acompa1ando a carta del Intendente Interino de Ej3rcito de Caracas', Caracas, 7-10-1800. On 1-9-1800 news had been sent to Coro from the town of Santa Ana, on the Paraguan3 peninsula, about the arrival of 54 persons, probably comprised of French families from Curaçao, who were sent to Coro and were distributed 'among the houses of honourable citizens who would watch over and observe their conduct' as their designs were unknown (Gonz3lez 1997:145).

45 AGI, Caracas 486, Manuel Carrera to Francisco de Sojo, Coro, 27-9-1800.

usual discomforts and losses of comparable cases, but no explicit persecution against the lives and properties of the citizens. They shall obey whoever shall ultimately be declared Ruler of the island and shall remain in their houses and possessions, as they were before, since it is not credible that a movement of this nature have as its objective robbery, pillage, and the destruction of private citizens'.⁴⁶ The Venezuelan authorities were to 'protect the inhabitants of these provinces from the infection that could spread throughout the religious and political order'.⁴⁷ Guevara immediately sent a communication with the resolution of the Royal Audiencia to the highest authorities of Coro and Puerto Cabello, so that they would act accordingly.⁴⁸

A trader from Puerto Cabello, José Antonio Martel, gave a detailed description of the conflict that lasted from the 3rd to the 14th of September to Francisco de Sojo, treasurer of the Royal Treasury in Puerto Cabello. Martel had been on a Spanish boat that could not come into port in Willemstad, but did make port in Caracasbaai on 17 September. Martel told Sojo that they had lived through eight days of combat, with neither side showing an advantage. If the governor had given permission to leave the island, it would already have been empty of 'families', but he did not because many hidden men went along with the women and children. Martel said that he had lost his house and over 2,000 pesos, and that on the island more than one million pesos had been lost.⁴⁹

Martel states in his account that on 4 September, after the French had left, 'the citizens and traders spent the entire day in revelry, feasting and rejoicing, for the sake of seeing that they were free of them, without attending to any other thing except to this entertainment'. One of those who deceived the guards of the Fort Sint Michiel was a son of Pedro Brión.⁵⁰ The French schooners that remained watching over the coast of Curaçao seized several ships from the coast that were coming with provisions or to engage in business. Those that could avoid the French, in general loaded with maize and bananas, disembarked in Caracasbaai, where they sold their cargo and returned to the coast. On 8 September, Lauffer sent several officials in a boat from Coro, with news of the incidents on the English frigate *Nereida*. On the 9th, an American schooner arrived carrying provisions.⁵¹ Mar-

46 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folios 21v-24v (folios 22v-23), decree of the Royal Audiencia, Caracas, 20-9-1800.

47 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folio 22v.

48 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folio 24v, circular of Governor Guevara, Caracas, 20-9-1800.

49 AGI, Caracas 486, José Antonio Martel to Francisco Sojo, Curaçao, 14-9-1800, folio 1.

50 This quite probably was Luis Brión, later Admiral of the Venezuelan navy, during the war of independence. At the time, he was working as a translator for the French.

51 AGI, Caracas 486, folios 1-4v.

tel provided details not only of the daily skirmishes, but also of the actions of the English, about whom, in another letter that continues with the account of the incidents, he says

English vessels are expected all the time, and troops of the same; therefore, I believe, and ensure, that this, when it remains for the English, they will pay them much money which is why they aid in her defence; the English frigate does not forsake us and the officers come to shore as guards every day to the fort. They have taken account of all the ships that there are in port, and the governor [Laufer] does not let any Spanish boat leave despite all insistence, nor gives license to any person, no matter how much they protest. This is how we all are, most on their ships and others outside the city, awaiting the end of this.

Even though this place is very strong, and that it is impossible that these four Frenchmen could take it, if it were not for the English commander [of the frigate *Nereida*], it appears to me that they would have already surrendered, but the Englishman does not consent to it and the governor is working feverishly.⁵²

When a negotiator sent to the island by Guevara to talk to Laufer returned from the island, the news he brought is that no one recognized the governor's authority anymore since the captain of the English frigate did not allow it, 'repeating that [Curaçao] is a possession of Great Britain'.⁵³ To some extent, the concern of the Venezuelan authorities was already drifting away from the after-effects of the social and regional revolts, and was focusing on the English, who, according to the interim intendant and regent of the Royal Audiencia of Caracas, would inundate the Venezuelan coastline with contraband products and seditious papers, to 'deceive and delude the vassals of Your Majesty, as they have done since the beginning of this war, and in particular since they occupied the island of Trinidad. This, disregarding the effect that could come from the threats by said captain to invade Tierra Firme with a great armed force.'⁵⁴

52 AGI, Caracas 486, folios 1-1v, José Antonio Martel to Francisco de Sojo, Curaçao, 19-9-1800, in which Martel brings the information up to date regarding the five days from the 15th to the 19th of that month, although without the diligence of the previous report.

53 AGI, Caracas 486, folios 1-1v, 'El Intendente Interino de Ejército de Caracas Remite copias de las últimas noticias que ha tenido de los sucesos de la isla de Curazao, e indica los perjuicios que pueden causar más fácilmente los enemigos que la ocupan', Caracas, 27-10-1800. The bearer of the news was Telésforo de Orea, negotiator sent to Curaçao by Governor Guevara.

54 AGI, Caracas 486, folio 1v.

CONCLUSION

With the information that the Venezuelan authorities and, therefore, the Spanish authorities had at their disposal, the events occurring between June 1797 and September 1800 in Curaçao are difficult to understand and interpret. Tierce and Devaux are presented as two perfidious and dangerous rebels who wanted to use Venezuelan fugitives and revolutionaries for their own personal objectives of throwing Venezuela into confusion and gaining access to the colony's wealth. The history of the insurrections and conspiracies of prior years led the colonial authorities to think this way, from the dangerous Coro insurrection in 1795, to the conspiracy of La Guaira in 1797, to the fruitless projects to subvert the order in Maracaibo and Cartagena in 1799. They thought that the French, from their own possessions or from their new stronghold in Curaçao, were behind such conflicts, with the purpose of helping to spread the 'pernicious' republican and egalitarian ideas in the Spanish colonies in the Americas, and/or to support local, often non-white revolutionaries. But the authorities in Caracas also feared that the French, in the end, would seize Curaçao and, despite being allied at the moment in their common war against the English, would set foot on Tierra Firme or at least spread their revolutionary ideas, causing social and political chaos in the Spanish colonies of the Americas.

The Spanish authorities – colonial or central – had a very uncomfortable ally in the French, as much or more so than their eternal enemy Great Britain, which they distrusted not only for having taken over in 1797 the promising island of Trinidad, off of eastern Venezuela, but also for British expansionism elsewhere in the Caribbean, including now towards Curaçao, the threshold to Venezuela. The words of the commander of Puerto Cabello cannot better describe what the Venezuelan authorities were thinking when he wrote about 'the deplorable state of that colony [Curaçao], destined to be victim of the greed and ambition of the French, or to pass perhaps under the English yoke, each extreme worse than the other'.⁵⁵

Seen from this perspective, the least dangerous of Spain's 'adversaries' were, in the end, the Dutch, including the Dutch regime in Curaçao. The former intimate enemy became a bit more of a friend who, even if mistrusted, was always there, sharing the present and the future. To some extent, both Governor Lauffer and Governor

55 AGI, Estado 67, No. 87, folios 13v-14v (folios 13v-14), Puerto Cabello, 14-9-1800.

Guevara were explicit on this. But both English and French aggression upset the situation.

It is not evident that a coordinated plan existed to subvert peoples subject to the colonial connection, in political-economic and in social terms, a scheme having its origin in Haiti or in the French colonies of the Caribbean. And yet it is tempting to ‘see’ in the very complex conflicts sketched above a certain ‘teleology’, in tune with the ‘nature’ of the times. But questions abound. Thus the documents and information of the period, from different sources and with different perspectives, may make it difficult to accept that Tierce and Devaux were indeed seeking to bring about a ‘coup d’état’ in Curaçao in September 1799, privileging the manoeuvring of Governor Lauffer as decisive instead. But there is no hard evidence to corroborate either interpretation. It does seem clear though that, aside from whatever conspiracies and orders, little was needed in those days and places to ignite revolts among the ‘people of colour’. After all, revolutions often do not present themselves as such immediately, but are the often unanticipated outcome of a process. And indeed, there was no inevitable outcome of the confusing objectives and actions of Tierce, Devaux, and Lauffer, to name only three of the important protagonists: not necessarily a social revolution or the surrender of the colony to an ally or enemy.

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The Patriot coup d'état in Curaçao, 1796

Karwan Fatah-Black

INTRODUCTION¹

Slavery and race were not the only contentious issues shaking up Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions. Violent confrontations between the military and the urban free whites and coloureds of Willemstad had preceded the 1795 slave revolt. In the years following the revolt, urban oppositional movements had a profound impact on island politics. These conflicts highlight the depth of the political instability on Curaçao in an uncertain geopolitical context. By sketching the broader political turmoil of the time, this article aims to contextualize the slave revolt as part of a series of struggles aiming at social and political change.

In December 1796 a coalition of Curaçaoans carried out a coup d'état. With substantial popular support, the Military Committee replaced the acting representative of the Batavian Republic Jan Jacob Beaujon with Johan Rudolph Lauffer. Beaujon had been appointed as acting governor in August of that year. This came after Governor Johannes de Veer had stepped down, refusing to swear loyalty to the Batavian Republic. The quick succession of governors in 1796, due to political conflict, was uncommon on Curaçao. The island had long been ruled by the same governor, who directly represented the Dutch West India Company (WIC). Even after the company's charter was not renewed in 1791 and the Dutch state assumed the administration of the WIC's domains, the organizational structure had been left unaltered and personnel had stayed in place (Van Goor 1994:173). With the French occupation of the Netherlands in 1795, the Dutch Patriot movement came to power and founded the Batavian Republic.

¹ Research for this paper was done as part of a Master's thesis in social history at the University of Amsterdam in 2008 with Dr. Marjolein 't Hart. Special thanks go out to all those who participated so generously in the seminar on Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions.

The Dutch Patriots did not plan to change anything about the governance of their colony (Schutte 1974:15). Only very few politicians in the metropolis had the idea that something needed to change in how the island was governed. On Curaçao, however, a popular movement pushed for a change in the colony's government and policies. The result of this was the coup d'état carried out by the Military Committee and Johann Rudolph Lauffer in December 1796.

In the months before the great slave revolt of 1795 there was a rapid increase in civil unrest on the island. Fights broke out between the garrison and the free whites and mulattoes in the city (Hamelberg 1897:25). While the slave revolt temporarily pushed the urban citizenry back into the fold, the conflicts escalated again in 1796. The National Assembly of the Batavian Republic was warned of the situation and sent Vice-Admiral Braak to the West Indies to ensure the colonies would not change sides and join the former stadholder William V and the English. In August 1796 the governor and council of Curaçao were asked to take an oath of allegiance to the newly formed Republic.² Because Governor Johannes de Veer and two other dignitaries refused this, the state apparatus entered a crisis. A substantial number of people in the military did not approve of the officials' resignation. They saw it as a surrender of the Orangists to the Patriots. Soldiers and officers openly contested the new power holders. It seemed uncertain if the governor and council would be able to hold on to their positions. The unstable state of affairs existed for four months from 10 August 1796 until 1 December 1796. During this period a substantial section the Curaçaoan population developed a set of demands and political leadership independent of the metropolis. This movement, labelled here as that of 'the Curaçao Patriots', headed a coalition that ousted the official representative of the Republic in December 1796.

The political power struggle of 1796 was very much a local affair. In this sense it was strikingly similar to the contemporaneous struggles in Dutch cities, where engaged and quite radical movements also proliferated (Prak 1991; Jourdan 2006). However, the context of slavery, racism and intense imperial competition in the region did give the Patriot movement a very specific form on the island.

Historians have reduced the political conflict on the island at the time to a brawl between Patriots and Orangists or pro-French and pro-

² The Dutch Republic was defeated during the Coalition Wars against revolutionary France. Aided by a French invasion the Dutch Patriot movement took power and founded the Batavian Republic. The former stadholder fled to England, from where he unsuccessfully tried to mount a resistance by, among other things, sending a letter to the colonies asking them to surrender to the English.

English forces (Hamelberg 1897; Hartog 1961; Goslinga 1990). The division between Orangists and Patriots was copied from the major political conflict that existed in the Dutch Republic between 1780 and 1787. Dutch Patriot agitation had focused on the need for economic, political and cultural nationalism. Those who did not believe in revolutionary change rallied behind stadholder William V, member of the House of Orange, and were subsequently called Orangists. The Patriot movement managed to control several city councils and mounted a considerable threat to the status quo. On behalf of the Orangists, the Prussian army invaded to restore order. This forced many Patriots into exile. Anticipating renewed support in Dutch cities and with the help from the invading French revolutionary army, they returned to the country and came to power in January 1795. Under the slogan 'Vrijheid, Gelijkheid en Broederschap' (freedom, equality and fraternity) they founded the French-leaning Batavian Republic. The Batavian Republic was politically divided between the Moderates, Unitarians (radicals), and Federalists (conservatives). These factions clashed regularly in the National Assembly on many issues, but on the colonies, the Patriots had very little to say. They certainly did not nurture many revolutionary plans. Meanwhile, popular support for the Batavian Republic and its French patrons waned as the French occupation became an ever bigger burden on the population in the form of taxation and conscription.

On Curaçao the anti-Orangist opposition had substantial local roots. The urban citizenry participated actively in the events of 1796 and the years that followed. Their actions in the militia, combined with the political demands they voiced in petitions helped the Curaçao Patriots come to power. The moderates wanted better defences for the harbour and a neutral position in international relations so as not to scare away ships from any particular nation. The radicals (both coloured and white) pushed for a more fundamental transformation supported by a French invasion. This article focuses on the political divisions on the island, and the coming to power of the Curaçao Patriots. It examines the political content of the conflicts on the island and frames these in their Atlantic context.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE REPUBLIC

After the bankruptcy of the Dutch West India Company in 1791, the Dutch States General took over the company and its domains (Den Heijer 1994:187). Curaçao became the direct responsibility of the States General through the directly subordinate institution of the

Council for Colonies in America and the Possessions of the State in Africa (Hartog 1961:322). With the transfer of power, nothing changed in the formal structure of the colony and the personnel working for the local state apparatus. The governor ruled the island together with the Political Council, which decided on policy matters as well as on criminal cases. The council was made up of the governor, the commanders of the navy frigates, the commander of the garrison, the commissioner for the slave trade and the militia captain. While Curaçao's ruling council had initially been an entirely military body, by the end of the eighteenth century, islanders could be co-opted into the council by the governor. The West India Company would then ratify the decision (Goslinga 1990:337). Nevertheless, the military remained a dominant element in the council.

Johannes de Veer was governor of Curaçao at the time the West India Company ceased to exist. De Veer had been part of the island's bureaucracy since the late 1750s (Krafft 1951:250). He worked as the accountant of the garrison³ and later as secretary of the island's political council.⁴ He became governor in 1782. The commanders of the two frigates *Medea* and *Ceres* played an important role in local politics. They participated in the meetings of the Political Council, the main governing body of the colony. F.S. Wierts was commander of the frigate *Medea* of 36 cannons and 800 tons. Albert Kikkert was colonel and captain at sea of the frigate *Ceres* of 40 cannons and 860 tons. The crews of both ships were in a bad state. Many had died or were in hospital, and the rest were hungry and poor. Wierts had left the Republic in July 1793. During his stay in Willemstad the state of the navy vessels deteriorated (Milo 1936:326). Kikkert was one of the military commanders who kept his position after the Batavian Republic was founded. As leader of an important part of the military, he played a major role during the disturbances in the 1790s. He would also prove to be very capable of surviving political ruptures. After the founding of Kingdom Holland under Louis Napoleon, Kikkert received a high ranking position in the navy. Under King William I, he returned to Curaçao as governor.

Military power on the island was exercised by the garrison, the navy ships, and the civil militia. The ships played a significant role, as they were armed with a substantial number of canons, and were supposed to be able to deflect threats to the city of Willemstad. During domestic disturbances, the cannons on the *Ceres* were

3 Instructions for Johannes de Veer Abrahamszoon, installed as accountant of the garrison on the island of Curaçao (Schiltkamp & De Smidt 1978, I:333).

4 Instructions for a new captain-lieutenant of the Artillery (Schiltkamp & De Smidt 1978, I:343-351).

often loaded and aimed not at sea but at the city. Kikkert mentions that he loaded them with shrapnel when news of the slave revolt arrived. He also threatened to bombard the garrison during a conflict in 1796 (Milo 1936). The commanders of both ships were not transients in the city but an integral part of the ruling elite on the island. Kikkert and Wierts were supposed to work together, but there are many reports of them falling out with each other and having considerable arguments about political decisions. In July 1796 Kikkert took temporary command of both ships while Wierts recovered from an attack by an armed group of men 'wearing French national cockades'. During this incident captain Robert Minors died and Wierts was severely wounded (Hamelberg 1897:28).

POLITICAL RADICALISM AND THE BROADER OPPOSITION MOVEMENT

It was quite common for conflicts in the wider Atlantic World to be imported to the island. When the American War of Independence (1775-1783) broke out, the Curaçaoan government had to take measures to prevent citizens of the warring nations from provoking and violently clashing with each other in the city. Enthusiasm for the ideology of the French Revolution was countered in a similar way in 1789 (Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1978:381). An ordinance was issued that forbade the singing of French revolutionary songs and the wearing of decorations with French revolutionary slogans (Hartog 1961:322; Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1978:389). That same year a commission from the States General visited Curaçao to investigate what had caused animosity between the local government and the colony's inhabitants (De Gaay Fortman 1919:442). By 1793 the revolutionary undercurrent was led by Jan Hendrik Hansz and Cornelis Berch. Their speeches prompted a ban on public speaking against the House of Orange on 21 May of that year. Attending these speeches was forbidden, and those who did and failed to inform public prosecutor Van Teijlingen were to be punished.

The Revolutionaries were accused of playing a key role at the start of the slave revolt of 1795. The governor sent letters to the Netherlands complaining about the behaviour of the radicals. Hartog writes that clashes between the soldiers and citizenry intensified after the news arrived that the Netherlands had been liberated (or occupied, according to one's point of view) by the French. On 4 August 1795 an ordinance was issued forbidding freemen and 'Negroes' to walk with sticks and clubs. Soldiers below the rank of officer were banned from wearing their weapons when not on

call, and sailors, except those from the frigates, were summoned to gather in the harbour after nine p.m. At that hour the pubs and dance halls had to close as well (Hartog 1961:324).

Hansz played an important role in focusing the attention of the National Assembly on the disloyal attitude of the rulers of Curaçao. A letter from Hansz was read in which he complained about the ban on wearing the alliance cockade (Wagenaar 1806:306-9).⁵ The National Assembly was unhappy about the ban on wearing revolutionary cockades. From the floor of the assembly it was said that Jan Hendrik Hansz was known to the Patriots as being a good man, and the Curaçao government was ordered to protect him.⁶

While vocal opposition was largely restricted to the Revolutionaries in the years preceding the slave revolt, thereafter and particularly during 1796 an opposition movement grew amongst the island's middle class. Uniting behind the leadership of Johann Rudolph Lauffer, these Curaçaoan Patriots handed in several petitions demanding from the government both a change in policy as well as a change of personnel. One of these petitions stated that 'this island's sole source of wealth is trade'. The petitioners complained that Jewish brokers monopolised contacts with captains who arrived from abroad, which allegedly hurt the trade of the gentle merchants on the island, preventing them from making deals with foreign captains. The petitioners also wanted to ban foreign competitors by levying a five per cent tax on trade not conducted by inhabitants of the island. This was supposed to increase trade and ban the 'deception by foreign merchants'. The final request was to install a port pilot to promote the safety of the harbour.⁷

Johann Rudolf Lauffer was one of the central figures in a movement that might be seen as the Curaçaoan version of the Patriot movement. Together with fellow islanders he handed in numerous requests defending the position of specific merchants or more general requests like the one cited above. Lauffer had arrived as a common soldier in 1776 on the island. What we know about the period before his arrival on Curaçao is based on his own account, in which he depicts himself as an idealistic young man from Switzerland, who was inspired by 'Voltaire, Rousseau, d'Alembert, Diderot, and the other encyclopaedists'. How much of this is true we do not know, but it is at least telling of the kind of man Lauffer aspired to be (Van Meeteren 1944:13).

5 Dagverhaal der Nationale Vergadering, session 20-5-1796, nr. 67, and session 23 May 1796, nr. 533.

6 Dagverhaal der Nationale Vergadering, session 4-7-1795, nr. 110.

7 OAC 138, 'Request for improvements of trade and the harbour', first half 1796.

During the slave revolt Lauffer did not play any notable role. In the period following the revolt he became a respected person amongst the Willemstad citizenry. After the changing of the oath on 10 August 1796, the white civil militia demanded that they elect a new Captain to replace the disliked Orangist Bernardus Anthony Cancrijn, who had stepped down in the meeting where the oath to the Batavian Republic had to be taken. The militia elected Lauffer to be their Captain.⁸ He immediately started to collect weapons from the inhabitants to increase the militia's strength. Lauffer's choices suggest a grand plan to make Willemstad regain its reputation as a neutral port to do business. In order to accomplish this, reliable armed forces were needed, as well as strong defences, and discipline among slaves and the white lower classes in the city. The Orangist elements in the local government seemed an obstacle to accomplish this, and had to be removed from office. While this could have been done quite easily if the French were invited to land and disarm the Orangists, the Curaçao Patriots were not interested in a French take-over.

Within the council there was a heated debate about whether or not the French should be allowed more influence on the island. Illustrative was the discussion about flying the French flag next to the Dutch one from the fortress in Willemstad. Should the French flag be there permanently or only if ships from other nations were approaching? In this debate, the Curaçao Patriots only wanted to use the threat of French military power to scare away others by raising the French flag on strategic moments. However, they did not want it to interfere with the island's autonomy.⁹

In petitions to the council in support of Lauffer there was a significant shift in the identity of signatories. The people who signed the petitions proposed a tax on goods taken from prize ships, which could be used by Lauffer to aid the construction of better defence works.¹⁰ In the first petition (157 signers) the radicals Hansz and Berch are found at the top. Their political allies Jean Baptiste Tierce Cadet – a remarkable figure discussed at length in Han Jordaan's contribution to this volume – and P. Duyckinck were not far behind them.¹¹ On the second petition (132 signers), Berch is still leading the list, but a large group of Jews had been added to their ranks.

8 OAC 106, 'Minutes', 15-8-1796.

9 OAC 106, 'Combined Council', nr:8 on 12-9-1796.

10 OAC 138, 'Petition for the improvement of the defense under the command of Lauffer', nr.104 between 28-10 and 4-11-1796. The building of the fortress 'Republic', seen by historians as the only success of the period, was attributed to the leadership of Lauffer.

11 OAC 138, 'Petition in support of Lauffer 24-9-1796', nr.105 24-9-1796.

A considerable section of the island's Jews became interested in the ideas of the French Revolution.¹² The island was traditionally home to a Jewish community heavily engaged in both trade and shipping. The Jewish community in the Republic was strongly divided between Orangists and Patriots. Impoverished Jews in Curaçao showed an interest in the ideals of equality, fraternity, and freedom of the French Revolution. The Jews who congregated in the Neve Shalom synagogue tried to break with the metropolitan community in Amsterdam and were generally more sympathetic to the revolution. Among them were Moses Frois (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970:286) and the French agent Isaac Sasportas.

There were hardly any plantation owners amongst those who signed, although many of those on the list would obtain a plantation in the years after the revolution.¹³ The content of the petitions did not differ very much, except that the second one was more radical in its demands, requesting for all military responsibility to be taken away from Beaujon and handed to Lauffer and Kikkert.¹⁴

REVOLT IN THE ARMED FORCES

In 1796, the newly formed Batavian Republic sent Vice-Admiral Adriaan Braak to the West Indies to assert the power of the new Republic over its West Indian domains. Braak was granted the mission to dismiss all colonial officials from their oath to the stadholder – who had sent a letter from Kew asking the colonies to follow him and join the English against the French and against the Batavian Republic – and have them swear loyalty to the Batavian Republic. Braak's intervention was not supposed to upset the power structure or replace any officials. The Dutch Patriots were not interested in changing the economic and social structures or in purging Orangist elements in the colonies, but the situation on Curaçao proved to have a dynamic they could not control.

Governor De Veer refused to go to the council's extraordinary meeting where loyalty to the Batavian Republic had to be declared. He said he felt ill and wanted to use this opportunity to resign. De

12 The Jews on the island, who had strong ties to the Amsterdam community, were only emancipated as late as 1825. *Publicatie en provisioneel Regelement Van Zijne Hoogheid den Heere Prince van Oranje Nassau, etc.* (Den Haag 1750) 7; cited in Kaplan 1982:203, 207.

13 The names on the petition have been checked against the list of plantation owners in Van der Lee 1989. The family of Cornelis Berch did own some land, but the signers who were able to acquire land at some stage in their lives did so after the events of 1796.

14 OAC 138, 'Petition in support of Lauffer 4-11-1796', nr. 104.

Veer had been part of the local bureaucracy since the 1750s and had notified the council before about his wish to step down. It was decided that power would be handed to a provisional governor who could later be approved by the States General. During that same meeting where the governor was absent, secretary Petrus Bernardus van Starckenborgh and captain of the civil militia Bernardus Anthony Cancrijn stepped down.¹⁵ This opened the floodgates of revolt. All of a sudden a group of senior officials arose, openly contesting the sovereignty of the Batavian Republic on the island. Following the example of the defectors in government, several army officers also started to refuse the new oath, and with them parts of the garrison as well (Wagenaar 1806:306). The Patriots sought to make good use of this walkout by electing Patriots to the now vacant positions. The new – provisional – governor was not elected. A sealed letter received from Holland named Beaujon as De Veer's provisional successor. The Patriots initially trusted him because he had received approval from the Batavian Republic's Committee for Colonial Affairs.

During this same council session a revolt was brewing in Fort Amsterdam, the island's main fort. The officer who received the orders to organize the ceremony whereby the provisional governor would have to present himself to the citizens strongly advised against arming the garrison for the event. He had sensed the atmosphere amongst the troops well. When Beaujon showed himself on the balcony of the fortress, the soldiers and several officers shouted 'Orange on top', and riots occurred. On the frigate *Ceres* cannons were loaded to fire at the rioters (Milo 1936:329). Parading the new governor through the streets was quickly cancelled.¹⁶ Resigned of the oath to the stadholder, but armed and decorated with orange ribbons, the soldiers roamed through the streets and fortress. What started out as a quick advance for the Patriots soon turned into a crisis during which the Patriots were holding office, but their auxiliaries were outside of their control.

Multiple contenders were claiming to be in charge of the island while they only controlled part of the state apparatus. The militia was in Patriot hands, while the allegiance of the garrison and the crews on board the navy vessels was uncertain, but they were possibly Orangists.¹⁷ The council and governor feared for their safety

15 OAC 106, 'Extraordinaire politie raad', 11-8-1796.

16 OAC 106, 'Extraordinaire politie raad', 11-8-1796.

17 Later it became clear that Patriot officers were also in the army, but due to the isolation of the Patriot voice in the armed forces, they kept silent. After the protests by the Orangists in the garrison, Lieutenant Colonel Huische was asked to help restore order amongst the troops. He said that was impossible as long as the officers had not sworn loyalty to the Batavian Republic. OAC 223, *Plakaten, Publicaties, edictale citaties, vrijbrieven, paspoorten, zeebrieven, commissies, instructies en eden van ambtenaren, 1722-1803*, nr. 450-550.

and fled to the *Ceres*. While the crew accepted them on board, they used the opportunity to demand their pay, arguing that they needed their wages earned under the old oath, before they could accept a new one. The crew on the other navy vessel, the *Medea*, also disobeyed orders, demanding their wages and threatening to mutiny (Milo 1936:330). The Patriots had no choice but to respond to the rebellion in the armed forces. The Orangists had a very real possibility to return to power through a counter-revolutionary coup with the support of the mobilized armed forces. To buy off the impending mutiny, the Patriots increased the army's rations.¹⁸ This defused the immediate threat of mutiny of the armed forces. The officers who refused to re-enter the service boarded a U.S. brig and left the island.¹⁹

Undoubtedly with the recent slave revolt in mind, one of the first actions of the new council was to invite the captains of the Free Negro Corps and the Free Mulatto Corps to make sure that they would keep quiet during the regime change.²⁰ Ensuring this was important since their loyalty had been questioned during the black revolt in 1795, when they had only mobilized a few men (Paula 1974:299). After the initial chaos in early August the council got some room to breathe. Not that order was restored, but the direct threat to their position seemed to have passed. There were still many disturbances in the city, and curfews were issued for slaves, soldiers, and sailors. Inns were closed, and the selling of drink was restricted.²¹

The French 'allies' now tried to assert their control over the island from Guadeloupe. This followed logically from the strategy of the revolutionary governor of Guadeloupe, Victor Hugues. Hugues had been appointed by the Jacobins to bring the decree of slave emancipation to Guadeloupe and capture the island from the English. Besides his great influence on race relations on the island, Hugues also turned Guadeloupe into a French military stronghold against the English in the Caribbean (Dubois 1999). The Curaçao Patriots – despite their trouble holding on to power – were not eager to allow French meddling. They thought they could fend for themselves and did not need interference, let alone occupation.²² Only the French suggestion to restructure the militia was followed, as it overlapped with the plans of the Curaçao Patriots to strengthen the island's defences.

18 OAC 106, 15-8-1796.

19 OAC 106, nr.2, 11-8-1796.

20 OAC 106, 'Extraordinary meeting of the political council', nr. 2, 11-8-1796.

21 OAC 106, 'Minutes', 20-8-1796.

22 They complied with some suggestions: OAC 106, 'Minutes', 17-8-1796.

THE BREESTRAAT MEETING

The organized response from the Orangists in the military against the advance of the Curaçao Patriots and Revolutionaries came in late August 1796. A number of high ranking officers were angry about the way they had been excluded from the decisions made by the council in the period around the change of power. In a letter they threatened the council that peace could only be maintained if the Orangist officials De Veer, Cancrijn and Van Starckenborgh were returned to office.²³ If that did not happen 'the undersigned would take no responsibility for what would follow'.²⁴ This threat came at a time when the atmosphere in the council was tense due to a conflict over the appointment of a new secretary.

The intended appointment of J.M. Brunnings as secretary to the council caused a first moment of polarisation between provisional Governor Beaujon and the Curaçao Patriots and Revolutionaries. Lauffer, as captain of the Civil Militia, used the threats of disturbances from the armed citizenry to put pressure on Beaujon and the council.²⁵ Beaujon was stringent in his defence of the appointment. He said 'that there is no popular vote here, if the council wished to listen to the voice of the people, his lordship [Beaujon himself] will resign from office'. Beaujon went on the offensive because 'his lordship had found a willing commander to escort [the new secretary] during the presentation through the city'. Protesting at the presentation of newly appointed officials was a recurring element of oppositional movements. For the governor and council these moments were important to affirm their position. It looked as if Beaujon was planning to use the parading of the new secretary as a test of the relative strength of the Orangist army and the opposing citizenry. And he apparently had found part of the army willing to enter in this confrontation. Lauffer and the other Patriots did not like this idea at all and managed to postpone the event. The parade of Brunnings could proceed only after Lauffer had convinced the wider opposition movement not to resist the appointment. He then notified the council that 'the largest and best part of the Citizens supported the presentation'.²⁶ Lauffer had thus removed the fuse from the powder keg by pacifying the citizens and therewith had ensured that Beaujon did not get the confrontation that he was

23 At around the same time, Van Starckenborgh was accused of being pro-English. He denied this, emphasizing that he resigned because he did not agree with the new constitution.

24 OAC 106, between 20-8-1796 and 31-8-1796.

25 OAC 106, 23-8-1796.

26 OAC 106, 23-8-1796 and 24-8-1796.

looking for. That way Lauffer reaffirmed his position as a central figure within local politics.

While Beaujon was mustering his forces in the army, the armed and more radical part of the anti-Orangist movement – excluding Lauffer – came to the fore. They had been leading the petition movement, but were looking for stronger measures as well. They met after a meeting of the militia where they had voiced their opposition to Beaujon. Their plan was to elect commissioners to take control over the defences of the island (Hamelberg 1897:30). Beaujon, on the other hand, was starting to show his true colours. He was ready to unleash the Orangist army on the subversive meeting, and this time not under the pretension of safeguarding the parading of the new secretary, but to directly break up the meeting representing the radical side of the opposition movement.²⁷

Captain Kikkert and Captain Lieutenant Heshusius²⁸ urged Beaujon not to let the ‘armed forces march against the citizenry’. They undoubtedly thought that once the military had been released, they would not stop at smashing the rebellious citizens, but would also attack the council and restore the Orangists to power. Wierts threatened to fire the cannons of his frigate *Ceres* on the garrison if they would march out to the meeting in the Breestraat (Hamelberg 1897:30). Again Lauffer prevented a confrontation with the garrison. He succeeded in convincing Beaujon not to march the troops against the armed civilians. The next day a publication was issued by the governor and council in response to the events of that day. The *oprokken van het gemeen* (agitating the commoners) was denounced in strong language. The authorities especially condemned that civilians ‘used weapons that were handed to the good citizens and inhabitants solely for maintaining peace and order, and for the defence against an enemy that seeks to attack this land from outside’.²⁹

The ‘extraordinary and serious publication’ also prohibited ‘Clubs’.³⁰ The reason for this addition to the public announcement is somewhat mysterious. Clubs formed a central element of the Patriot movement in the Netherlands and had been of more significance to the Batavian revolt than the mythical cold winter of 1794-1795. Whether there were revolutionary clubs on Curaçao is not certain, and maybe they were only imagined by the government trying to vilify the movement or explain the salience of the street protest.

27 OAC 106, ‘Extraordinary meeting of the Council of Policy’, nr. 11, 27-9-1796.

28 He had sailed with Braak to the West Indies, and was sent by Braak to Curacao to secure the island.

29 OAC 223, ‘Regulations for maintaining order and peace’, nr. 24, 2-9-1796.

30 OAC 106, 31-8-1796.

According to Lauffer this publication was ill received by the citizenry.³¹ Counterrevolution had been evaded, but neither the Orangists nor the Revolutionaries had gained victory. The confrontation was a success for the Curaçao Patriots and especially Lauffer. He had shown Beaujon that he could control the radicals, and to the citizens he had illustrated that he could control Beaujon. To accommodate the citizens after the incident of 30 August, a sixth division of the militia was formed. Kikkert and Heshusius told Beaujon that their ships would not attack the city, and surely not the citizens.

The conflict of 30 August had ended as a victory for the moderate Curaçao Patriots. The Revolutionaries lost their rights to have clubs and meetings and were reprimanded for their agitation. The civil militia was expanded with an extra division, and Beaujon was put on the defensive. Kikkert and Heshusius justified their refusal to leave the ships on the basis that the 'persons of Colour' who would see the whites in open confrontation with each other might 'try to strengthen the rebellious movements' and could easily capture the frigate *Medea*.³² It is possible that Kikkert and Heshusius really feared that this might happen. Normally they were not the ones scaremongering in the council. The atmosphere of fear was mostly created by Lauffer, who warned the council about the unrest amongst the populace, and used it as a lever to push through reforms in the military and the general defence of the island.³³

TAKING POWER

As the Curaçao Patriots and Revolutionaries moved closer to power, the fundamental split within their broad opposition movement became clear. The split was between those who tried to make the island neutral, and those who sought to import the French Revolution through an invasion by the French if necessary. After French support had been declined by sending a letter to their commanders, the French kept insisting on 'helping' the islanders. The Curaçao Patriots kept arguing that the 'assistance' by the French should be refused. Those who still sympathized with the Orangists agreed with them on that point. The revolutionary captain of the artillery, Johannes Hendrik Gravenhorst, used the discussion about the raising of the flags to affirm that French assistance should not have been

31 OAC 106, 'Minutes', 27-9-1796.

32 OAC 106, 'Letter from the frigate *Medea*', 31-8-1796.

33 OAC 106, 'Extraordinary meeting of the Political Council', nr. 11, 27-9-1796.

declined in the first place. He wanted to keep a French ship in the harbour on a permanent basis.³⁴ Gravenhorst was a member of the council but also operated in various other circles. Since the council had refused the assistance from the French, he, Berch, Hansz, and some others asked the French Colonel Thomas to land and remove the council (including the Curaçao Patriots) from office (Hartog 1961:469). In late September a group of mulattoes also sent a delegation to French navy vessels in the harbour, requesting them to intervene on the island. Not much later they sent a similar request to them in writing. The letter and the French response were read in the council, but their contents seem to have been lost.³⁵

On 20 October Commander M. Valteau of the French national frigate *La Pensée* co-authored a plan for the general defence of the island.³⁶ He was sent from Guadeloupe and arrived on Curaçao in early October to make new overtures by requesting the formation of a Military Committee (MC).³⁷ This special committee was to deal with all military matters. That same day, citizens of Willemstad handed in a similar proposition to that of the council. Beaujon was furious. When he was unable to prevent a decision on this issue from being made during a council session, he tried to become president of the committee. However, both Beaujon and Wierts were kept out of the committee because they were not allowed to leave their posts. The letter of the French contained a list of suitable Patriot candidates for the MC.³⁸

The Patriots controlled the MC and started to work on the city's defences. They organized the National Guard, and built a fortress appropriately named Fortress Republic. The infantry was expanded and a four-division-strong cavalry was founded. The artillery was put in the hands of Gravenhorst. With all military matters in anti-Orangist hands, the takeover of the island was almost complete. The navy, garrison, and National Guard were now under the command of the Military Committee.³⁹ It was only a small step to remove Beaujon. The anti-Orangist coalition had succeeded in gaining military control after they had initially met with resistance in August. The corps of free blacks and free mulattoes was already under Lauffer's command.⁴⁰

34 OAC 106, 12-9-1796.

35 OAC 106, 'Extraordinary meeting of the Political Council', 5-10-1796.

36 OAC 106, 'Meeting of the Combined Councils held in Fortress Amsterdam', 20-10-1796.

37 OAC 223, 20-10-1796.

38 OAC 223, 'Letter from the French with directions how to form a Military Committee', 20-10-1796.

39 OAC 106, 'Meeting of the Combined Councils held in Fortress Amsterdam', 20-10-1796. Kikkert announced this, and the other councilors agreed.

40 OAC 106, 'Extraordinary meeting of the Council held after the meeting of the Combined Council', 12-9-1796.

The Military Committee was the institution that would complete the coup d'état. After its installation it started working on discrediting Beaujon. The members of the committee had access to the official papers of the previous governor and started to collect accusations against Beaujon. He was painted as a corrupt Orangist who had conspired with the English and the former stadholder, and had failed to inform the islanders of the founding of the Batavian Republic when he arrived on the island in 1795. He was also said to have convinced his brother, the governor of Demerara, to surrender to the English. Furthermore, he had bought orange decorations with public funds.⁴¹

His defence before the Military Committee was fruitless. On 1 December, Lauffer took power with the support of moderate Patriots, the pro-French Revolutionaries, the revolutionary Jews, the armed forces, and the French from Guadeloupe. Lauffer replaced Beaujon as provisional governor and also held on to his military functions (Hartog 1961:467).⁴² On 6 December, the news was made public with a declaration that opened with the slogan 'Freedom, Equality, Fraternity'.⁴³

CONCLUSION

The metropolitan authorities of the Dutch West India Company, the States General, and the National Assembly of the Batavian Republic had a static view of colonial government. None of them wanted to see any substantial change, neither in the organisational structure nor in the personnel on the ground. Even though great changes were demanded and enforced by the Batavian Republic in the Netherlands itself, the Dutch Patriots did not think the colonies should have a part in these transformations. Influential islanders, on the other hand, did look to implement specific policies mainly to restore the position of Willemstad as a successful nodal point in regional inter-imperial trade.

Robin Blackburn has made a distinction between the power of the metropolis over the colonies and the power of the colonists over their colony. He notes that the first turned out to be fragile at the end of the eighteenth century, while the second was growing stronger (Blackburn 1988:3-4). In the case of Curaçao, this mani-

41 OAC 106, 'Accusations against Beaujon', late November 1796.

42 OAC 106, 1-12-1796.

43 OAC 223, nr.44, 6-12-1796.

fested itself as a conflict between three main positions. The Curaçao Patriots wanted autonomy of the island's governing council. The Revolutionaries (both white and coloured) tried to import the French Revolution. And the Orangists remained loyal to the House of Orange and the former stadholder, who had called on the colonies to surrender to the English. This division was quite similar to rifts in other parts of the colonial Americas.

John Adams – second president of the United States and signer of the Declaration of Independence – had a keen eye for spotting political differences in the North American colonies in the period of the revolutionary upheavals. He wrote that many of those in politics were quite new to 'public business' and often opposed the revolution 'at least in the beginning'. Assessing the division between the various currents in the United States, he said there were three more or less equal groups. One third was in favour of the French, one third sided with England, and the 'middle third, composed principally of the yeomanry, the soundest part of the nation, and always averse to war, were rather lukewarm both to England and France' (Adams 1856:110-1). This division was also seen in Spanish America. The imperial powers France and England tried to rally supporters there, but a substantial section of the colonial populations seems to have been unconvinced they needed either of them (Adelman 2010:71). Instead of being split between Patriots and Orangists, the Curaçaoans seem to have been divided along very similar lines.

People's allegiance and political strategies could change rapidly in the tumultuous years at the end of the eighteenth century. However, some clear trends can be distinguished. The Orangists or pro-English on the island were mostly the old power holders who had ruled the island in the period when it was still governed by the West India Company. They seem to have wanted a quiet return to the status quo ante and were generally opposed to any of the revolutionary quirks. Another group in favour of stability was one section of the high-ranking military, who were loyal to the stadholder. The Curaçaoan Patriots and the supporters of Lauffer were local citizens looking for ways to deal with military and economic changes in the wider Atlantic at the time. The pro-French Revolutionaries integrated fully into Lauffer's movement during the period of the coup d'état. Only when the coup was over did the Revolutionaries mount independent opposition. In view of the disintegrating Dutch mercantile and military power, the Curaçao Patriots tried to keep the island neutral between the other powers and wanted local control over the island's defences in the form of a National Guard and a Military Committee. And as the history of the coup shows, they were willing to oust official metropolitan representatives to achieve their objectives.

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Patriots, privateers and international politics: The myth of the conspiracy of Jean Baptiste Tierce Cadet

Han Jordaan

In September 1799, two French agents from Saint-Domingue, Urbain Devaux and Isaac Sasportas, together with a resident French merchant, Jean Baptiste Tierce Cadet, were arrested in Curaçao for conspiring to overthrow the island's government and to liberate the slaves. They were deported without trial. Allegedly this conspiracy, of which Tierce Cadet was accused of being the local ringleader, was part of a much wider scheme initiated in Saint-Domingue: the liberation of the slaves in all the colonies of the Caribbean Basin. A year later an expeditionary force from Guadeloupe tried to take over Curaçao militarily, supported by most of the island's slaves and other segments of the local population.

Roberto Palacios sees a connection between the slave revolt that erupted in Curaçao in 1795 and the events of 1799-1800 (Palacios 1983). From mainly primary sources he construes a revolutionary movement of Jacobin signature, centred around Tierce and actively supported by forces from the French colonies. David Geggus and Anne Pérotin-Dumon, in contrast, both have doubted the existence of any proselytizing efforts to establish a region-wide liberation of the slaves during this period, instigated from either Saint-Domingue or Guadeloupe (Geggus 1987; Pérotin-Dumon 1988). Who is right? To understand the (alleged) conspiracy of 1799 and the Guadeloupean expedition of 1800, these events should be understood against the background of international political developments, especially the undeclared Quasi-War between the United States and France (1798-1800), and the commercial and military interests of the respective actors.

In this paper the focus will be on the development of Franco-Curaçaoan relations and the complicated situation that emerged when French privateers started to seize American ships on a large scale, using the port of Curaçao as an operational base and provoking an American naval response. The Curaçao government was

caught between conflicting international political and commercial interests, between heavy American diplomatic pressure and the fears of the French ally of losing the island as a privateering base. It will be argued that the existence of a conspiracy, initiated in either Saint-Domingue or Guadeloupe, to liberate the slaves in Curaçao is not very likely, let alone the existence of a plan for the liberation of the slaves in the whole region, as acting Curaçao Governor Johann Rudolf Lauffer later asserted. Nor is there any solid documentary proof for the occurrence of a multi-class rising with similar objectives in the wake of, and purposely supported by, the Guadeloupean expedition in 1800.

At the same time Governor Lauffer might have had good reasons to capitalize on the fear entertained both in Curaçao and in the mother country, of a violent local attempt to follow the example of the French Caribbean colonies of freeing and emancipating the non-white masses. Clearly he had an interest in destroying any ambitions for emancipation among the island's free non-white population. But Lauffer may also have had a more personal interest, that is, diverting the attention of his metropolitan superiors from serious American accusations regarding the involvement of Curaçao's government in privateering against American shipping.

THE EVENTS OF 1799 AND 1800

On 8 September 1799, Acting Governor Lauffer of Curaçao summoned an extraordinary session of the island's council in which he disclosed the existence of a conspiracy. The French agent, General Devaux, sent to Curaçao from Saint-Domingue as *receveur* of the proceeds from the sale of prizes brought into the Curaçao harbour by French privateers, was accused by Lauffer of being the leader of a group that plotted to bring down the island's government and to instigate a general revolt among the slaves. With the consent of the council Devaux was invited to join the meeting and apprehended as soon as he passed the gates of Fort Amsterdam. Later that day another French agent from Saint-Domingue, a civilian called Isaac Sasportas, was also arrested (Hamelberg 1985:53-7).

It was reported to Lauffer that on his arrest Sasportas behaved suspiciously and that he tried to hide a document. Lauffer demanded to see this document to which Sasportas reluctantly conceded, and only under the condition that the governor alone would take note of its contents. Lauffer received the document in a sealed envelope and retreated into another room to read it. After

returning into the meeting room he informed the council that he could not disclose the exact contents of the document, but that it contained instructions for a secret expedition to be carried out by Devaux and Sasportas, a mission, according to Lauffer, which could have dangerous consequences for Curaçao. In another council meeting Lauffer declared that after he had given the affair more thought, he had decided that it was no longer justified to leave the council in the dark about the contents of the document. The governor was now convinced of the huge danger that the mission posed not only for Curaçao but for all of the Caribbean. After the councillors had promised strict secrecy the governor showed a copy of the instruction that he had made himself. Together with the council the governor concluded that the document contained ‘insoluble contradictions’ and that the (geographical) names mentioned must be feigned: the expedition was, it was concluded, directly targeted against no other place than Curaçao, and it was clearly the intention of the agents from Saint-Domingue to spread the spirit of general freedom across the entire Gulf of Mexico and to have all of the Caribbean follow the path of Saint-Domingue. Meanwhile, Lauffer had identified Jean Baptiste Tierce as the local ringleader and had him arrested. Governor and councillors went to Tierce’s house to look for evidence, but none was found (Hamelberg 1985:58-60).

Lauffer, however, managed to produce a number of statements to incriminate all three Frenchmen. In a written statement, José Obediente, an officer in the National Guard and confidant of Lauffer,¹ together with Abraham Rodriguez Pimentel disclosed that Devaux had planned to kill Lauffer. Sasportas, after his arrest, stated that he knew that naval Captain Albert Kikkert and a Curaçaoan citizen named Jan Schotborgh were dissatisfied with the colony’s government. A Frenchman called Renaud stated that he had overheard a conversation between Tierce and Devaux in which the first mentioned details regarding his plans for a take-over of the government. Tierce also disclosed the beheading of Lauffer, Obediente, and several others and argued that Kikkert was to take Lauffer’s place as governor.² The plan to overthrow the government included the ransoming of the Jews and the confiscation of American ships and other property. In yet another statement it was said that Devaux had advised Schotborgh to sell his plantation and all his slaves and that he had boasted that he had 400 Frenchmen at his disposal (Emmanuel 1970:285; Hamelberg 1985:58).

1 For José Obediente Jr., see the chapter by Ramón Aizpurua.

2 Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (NA), access no. 2.01.28.01, West-Indisch Comité 1795-1800 (WICom), inv. no. 137, no. 22, copy of a statement by Renaud dated 10-9-1799.

Tierce, according to Lauffer, had not only involved himself in the secret expedition of Devaux and Sasportas, but he also had been the leader and instigator of the plan that was only to be executed after the Curaçao government had been toppled by igniting a general revolt. The governor judged it too dangerous to start official criminal judicial procedures against the alleged conspirators because these would include public inquiries that he feared would be perilous to the order and security of the colony. He asked the council to formulate a political resolution. The three men were deported without a trial (Hamelberg 1985:60-2).

The following year, on the morning of 23 July, five ships under French flag and carrying a large number of mainly black soldiers suddenly arrived at Curaçao. The expedition was sent from Guadeloupe, its leader Maurice-Henri Bresseau explained, to help defend the island against the common enemy: according to intelligence received by the Guadeloupe agency, the British were preparing an expedition against Curaçao. Lauffer told them that he did not need any reinforcements and that he was very capable of defending the island with the troops he had at his disposal. The governor was suspicious from the start about the real intentions of this French force and only reluctantly allowed the troops to disembark.

Soon it became clear that the French also had a list of complaints against Curaçao's government, including the arrest and the extradition of Tierce, and the accusation of siding with the Americans regarding the seizure of American prizes by French privateers. A very tense period, which lasted for weeks, followed. The Curaçao defences were kept in a permanent state of alert, with the guns in Fort Amsterdam trimmed at the Guadeloupean ships and troops. Finally, on 3 September, and only after receiving ample supplies and a large sum of money, the Guadeloupeans left.

The next day, however, it was reported that the French ships had anchored in St. Michiel's Bay, just a few miles to the west of Willemstad, and that the troops had landed and taken possession of the local fort. Lauffer prepared for battle, but when the French attacked, his defence collapsed almost immediately; his troops fled in blind panic at the sight of the approaching enemy. Lauffer was forced to hastily retreat across St. Anna Bay, and the French started a siege. The French troops were joined by most of the colony's slaves and soon controlled a large part of the island, while privateers blockaded the harbour. After a week a British frigate appeared before the harbour and broke the French blockade. Being short of supplies governor and council saw no alternative but to ask the British enemy for protection against the French ally. After the arrival of two American warships on 22 September, the

French gave up their siege and evacuated the island during the night; Curaçao came under British rule (Hamelberg 1985:72-86).

CURAÇAO AS A CENTRE OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY?

In his article 'Ansia de libertad', Roberto Palacios paints a heroic and romantic picture of a Curaçaoan revolutionary movement in the late 1790s and the struggle of the slaves and free non-whites for emancipation and equality, connecting the events of 1799 and 1800, and depicting Tierce as a revolutionary hero with Jacobin convictions:

...[H]e believed firmly in the ideals of the French Revolution and its logical extension of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity among all, without distinction according to race. [...] [H]e cherished the ideal to advance the establishment of a truly revolutionary government in Curacao which would decree the most absolute racial equality and freedom and liberate the slaves. (Palacios 1983:22, my translation).

Palacios also attempts to prove Tierce's political conviction by pointing out that he actively supported the seizure of power in the colony by the Patriots in August 1796 and that he offered protection and housing to the leaders of an abortive Republican rebellion in Venezuela in 1797 who had fled to Curaçao: Manuel Gual, José María Españã, and their inspirator Juan Bautista Picornell.³

The attempt in the summer of 1800 of the French expeditionary force to take over the government of the island militarily was actively supported by Curaçaoan slaves and, according to Palacios, the partisans of Tierce: free blacks and coloureds and young white Jacobins among whom was Luis Brion, Simón Bolívar's future admiral and comrade in arms. Palacios states:

Despite the arrest and expulsion of Jean Baptiste Tierce Cadet from Curacao in December 1799 for plotting the abolishment of slavery among other objectives, his partisans did not leave it at revolutionary intentions, and in September of the following year fomented

3 See the chapter by Ramón Aizpurua. Palacios bases his arguments almost completely on primary sources kept in the national archives of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Palacios 1983).

the insurrection of the Curaçaoan blacks with the support of over a thousand black soldiers from Guadeloupe and Haiti, under command of black and some white officers, urged by the Curaçaoan revolutionary followers of Tierce Cadet. (Palacios 1984:23; my translation).

The interpretation of Palacios that ideological motives must have been at the root of the 1799-1800 events is doubted by both David Geggus and Anne Pérotin-Dumon (Geggus 1987; Pérotin-Dumon 1988). Geggus argues that Toussaint Louverture in 1799 certainly had no intention to export the Haitian Revolution. A plan to invade Jamaica actually did exist, but this was initiated by the French government, not by Toussaint. Commissioner Philippe Roume in November 1799 sent spies to Jamaica to prepare the operation, but they were soon arrested by the British: secretly betrayed by Toussaint himself. Toussaint, at this time entangled in an armed struggle with the mulatto leader André Rigaud over the command of the southern part of Saint-Domingue, and depending on Britain and the U.S. for supplying his army, had no interest in a military adventure against Jamaica and opposed the plan (Geggus 1987:287-8).

Together with the British General Thomas Maitland and the U.S. Consul Edward Stevens, Toussaint worked out a three-way treaty in July 1799. Both the British and the Americans were interested in trade with Saint-Domingue, and Toussaint was willing to give them access to the ports in the part of the colony that he controlled. At the same time he demanded that the ports occupied by Rigaud would be excluded; Toussaint would have access to supplies while blockading his opponent. The United States, however, had an additional interest: in 1798 hostilities between the French and the Americans had started that became known as the undeclared Quasi-War (1798-1800), which was fought almost entirely at sea, largely in the Caribbean. Irritation regarding American approaches to their British enemy, culminating in the signing of the Jay Treaty in 1794, which was viewed as a violation of the 1778 Treaty of Alliance between France and the American colonists, prompted the French to allow their navy and privateers to seize American ships trading with British ports. As part of the deal with Toussaint, the Americans demanded protection against attack by privateers in Saint-Domingue's waters.⁴

4 Fick 2004:201-2; see for more detailed information regarding the process of the negotiations between Toussaint and the Americans and the British: 'Letters of Toussaint Louverture', 1910: 64-101.

Toussaint had absolutely nothing to do with the French expedition in 1800, which was initiated from Guadeloupe. The undertaking was organized by the agents Bresseau and Nicolas Georges Jeannet-Oudin who afterwards had to account for their actions to their superiors.⁵ According to Anne Pérotin-Dumon, the aims seem to have been primarily military and commercial. No evidence has been found in French sources to support any complicity from Guadeloupe in the execution of a mission to liberate the slaves. During the Quasi-War, Guadeloupean privateers experienced prosperous times hunting and seizing American vessels, and it was important that they could count on all the operational bases at their disposal, including Curaçao. At the same time the Batavian Republic had no dispute with the Americans, and Curaçao always attracted large numbers of American carriers; in fact, it depended largely on supplies brought in by the Americans. The principal objective of the Guadeloupean expedition was, according to Pérotin-Dumon (1988:300-1), to ascertain the loyalty of the Curaçao government and to secure the island's port as a French privateering base. So much for Jacobin ideals.

Furthermore, after 1798 the ideals of general freedom and equality introduced by Victor Hugues were waning. Hugues arrived in Guadeloupe in 1794, leading an expedition to recapture the island from the British and bringing the news that the metropolis had officially abolished slavery in the colonies. But in 1798, Hugues was replaced by Etienne Desfourneaux, who set himself to the task of forcing the ex-slaves back to work on the plantations. Desfourneaux was deposed within a year by a group of insurgents and sent back to France. But at that time three new administrators, sent by the metropolis, were already on their way to the colony. In May 1800, the commissioners, Étienne Lavaux, René-Gaston Baco, and Nicolas Georges Jeannet-Oudin arrived in Guadeloupe with clear orders from Bonaparte to get the plantations operating again and make them generate income. Laurent Dubois makes clear that around 1800, the ex-slaves in Guadeloupe were not optimistic about their future; there was justifiable fear that the days of freedom were numbered (Dubois 2004:327-48). In sum, neither Saint-Domingue nor Guadeloupe was a likely candidate for organizing a revolution in Curaçao.

But what about the idealism of Tierce Cadet? Pérotin-Dumon cites Tierce as stating that it was irrational to think that rich colo-

5 Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France (FR ANOM), 2400 COL127/3, Mémoire de Bresseau et Jeannet en réponse au courrier du ministre de la Marine et des colonies leur demandant des explications sur leur expédition (18-2-1801). See the online inventory: http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ir?c=FRANOM_00092,1.5.6.2.2.3.

nists like Kikkert and himself had knowingly sacrificed their fortunes and their families, and risked terrible odds by causing a revolt of blacks.⁶ Like most well-to-do Curaçaoans, Tierce was a slave-owner himself; only a few months before his arrest he had bought a mulatto boy from the councillor Gerardus Duijckinck.⁷ Besides, four years earlier Tierce had actively taken part in the crushing of the slave revolt (Homan 1976:2). Luis Brion, writing from Curaçao to a business partner of his late father's in Amsterdam about Tierce's arrest and expulsion, appeared puzzled: there had been no reason whatsoever to put Tierce, who had been not only his late father's best friend but who was also a cornerstone of the island's community, in criminal detention. Governor Lauffer and the council had designated Tierce as a dangerous man, but he himself was never interrogated. Brion wrote:

He [Tierce] is accused by some people that he would have wanted to liberate the blacks, but this is not true, for in the year 94 [sic], when the negroes rose, he was the man who himself helped to quell the revolt. But time will learn us who is guilty. The man [Tierce] even wanted to litigate, but this was not permitted to him for reason, it was said, that the time and the circumstances as well as the laws of the island did not allow it. And so this man was banned from the island without being able to speak to anyone.⁸

Eight months after being deported from Curaçao, Tierce, en route to France, arrived in the Batavian Republic. He was travelling with an officer of the Batavian navy, Jan Hendrik Quast, who served under Kikkert in Curaçao. Both men were arrested and questioned. The Batavian authorities intended to put Tierce on trial for trying to overthrow the Curaçao government and plotting to liberate the slaves, but it appeared very difficult to produce the necessary evidence against him. All the papers found in the possession of both Tierce and Quast were confiscated and studied, but these contained

6 Pérotin-Dumon 1988:301. Unfortunately Pérotin-Dumon does not mention the source of this citation. See for Tierce's protests against Lauffer: FR ANOM, 2400 COL127/3, Documents produits devant la commission, parmi lesquels une correspondance du capitaine de vaisseau Valteau en faveur du délégué des agents français à Curaçao, Jean-Baptiste Tierce, et les réclamations de celui-ci contre le gouverneur hollandais Lauffer (1800-1801). See online inventory: http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ir?c=FRANOM_00092,1.5.6.2.2.3.

7 NA, 1.05.12.01, Curaçao to 1828 (OAC), protocol of notarial deeds, inv. no. 1001, no. 249, deed of conveyance of a slave dated 12-6-1799.

8 NA, 2.01.28.02, Raad der Amerikaanse Bezittingen, 1795-1806 (RAB), inv. no. 189, Documents regarding the case of J.B. Tierce Cadet in Curaçao, 1796-1804, fol. 62vo., extract of a letter from T.L. Brion in Curaçao to Messrs. Tonella and Comp. in Amsterdam.

no information that could be used against them. Although the attorney-general pointed to the fact that from his confiscated correspondence it had become clear that as maritime agent Tierce had been in contact with well known people like Victor Hugues, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, Philippe Roume, and Toussaint, who had played a ‘dubious role’ in the French colonies, the Court of Holland judged that there was absolutely no evidence for the accusations against him and that both Tierce and Quast were to be released from criminal arrest. This happened, but on the orders of the Executive Directory (Uitvoerend Bewind), Tierce was now placed under civil arrest.⁹

Thus, there was only Lauffer’s story without any substantial supporting documentary proof. Lauffer had reported extensively to the authorities in the Batavian Republic about the conspiracy, and although he stated that he was in the possession of irrefutable evidence, his superiors for the time being had to believe him on his word. For, according to the governor, the nature of the document in his possession was such that it was too dangerous to send it over. If it would fall into the hands of the British, they would most certainly have a reason to attack Curaçao. Still, the West Indian Committee (West-Indisch Comité), the governmental body for the administration of the Caribbean colonies and possessions in Africa established by the States-General in 1795, urgently requested him to send authorized copies of all the documentary proof in his possession as soon as possible. But this request, dated 1 August 1800, probably never reached Lauffer, for two months later Curaçao was occupied by the British and communications were severed.¹⁰

In the end Lauffer’s most important evidence, the instructions for Devaux and Sasportas drawn up by Roume, did fall into British hands. Lauffer probably handed it to them after the capitulation of Curaçao. A copy is kept in The National Archives in Kew.¹¹ In these instructions, however, no mention is made about starting a

9 NA, 3.03.01.01, Hof van Holland 1428-1811 (HvH); inv. no. 360, minutes of the Court of Holland, 15, 24, 29 and 31-7-1800; inv. no. 5608, Criminal papers, process files of criminal cases, file no. 34, marked M, 1800. Among Tierce’s papers, copies can be found of his correspondence with officials in Saint-Domingue, including Philippe Roume, General Thomas Hédouville, and Julien Raimond. These were made and officially authenticated by Kikkert after Tierce’s arrest and sent to him in Saint-Domingue during his stay there. Copies of these documents can also be found in NA, access no. 2.01.28.02, RAB, inv. no 189, file regarding the case J.B. Tierce Cadet.

10 NA, 2.01.28.02, RAB, inv. no. 189, West-Indische Comité to governor and councillors of Curaçao, 1-8-1800, fol. 84.

11 The National Archives, Kew (TNA), War Office (WO), 1/98, Correspondence from Curaçao, 126r-127v, ‘Instruction donné par l’Agent du Directoire Exécutif à St. Domingue aux Citoijens Sasportas, negociant du Cap, et Devaux, adjudant général dans les armées françaises, actuellement à l’isle de Curaçao’. A contemporary English translation can be found in fols. 123-124vo.

region-wide slave revolt and using Curaçao as an operational base for this purpose. After a long and bombastic introduction that boils down to a flood of abuse against the British and their ‘imbécile monarque’, the agents are instructed, according to the contemporary English translation of their commission, to ‘lett [sic] your ideas fall entirely on Jamaica’, to ‘Electrify the heads & enflame the hearts of the Africans with the [...] fire of liberty’ and to ‘Promise them in the name of the agent of [the] directory in St. Domingo, that as soon as they have compleated [sic] the insurrection the liberty of our new brethren the Jamaicans is to be proclaimed in the name of the French people’.¹²

Toussaint Louverture would then, it was promised, come to their assistance. Sasportas was to go to Jamaica as soon as possible; Devaux was to stay in Curaçao to make preparations to support the insurrection in Jamaica. He was to join Sasportas the moment that he heard of the ‘explosion’, that is, the Jamaican slave revolt.¹³

The chance for the operation to succeed was apparently considered great. For it was also stated that when during future peace negotiations it would be decided that Jamaica was to be returned to Great Britain, it would only be under the condition that general liberty was to be guaranteed. Devaux and Sasportas were held responsible for any unnecessary harm caused by their orders, but at the same time they were entrusted with power to take any measures they thought necessary.¹⁴

Lauffer never showed the original commission that he received from Sasportas but only a copy that he had fabricated himself. No copy of this document, however, has been found in the Curaçao governmental archives. It is striking that when in 1803, shortly after the British returned the colony to the Batavian Republic, the French commissioner Duny was sent to Curaçao to investigate the events of 1799-1800, and the council could not answer his questions regarding the alleged conspiracy led by Tierce; they had to refer to Lauffer because he was the only one who had the information.¹⁵

12 Ibid, fol. 123vo. The transcription of the same passage in the original French document (fol. 126vo) reads in full: ‘Occupez vous uniquement de la Jamaïque, car chacune des isles du vent offrirait autant de difficulté à vaincre et vous n’y trouveriez pas les [moyens] d’attacque et de defenses qu’offre la Jamaïque. Electrisez toutes les têtes, enflammez tous les cœurs africaines du feu de la liberté, promettez au nom de l’agence du Directoire à St Domingue qui, qu’elle apprendre l’insurrection, elle fera proclamée au nom du Peuple français la liberté de nos nouveaux frères les jamaïcains...’. Part from the same fragment is also cited in a Spanish translation by Palacios; see Palacios 1983:23

13 TNA, WO 1/98, fol. 126vo-127r.

14 Ibid. 127r-127v.

15 NA, 2.01.28.02, RAB, inv. no 189, 247r-247v., copy of a letter by the Commissioners C. Berch and A de Veer to former governor Lauffer, 15-8-1803.

Lauffer at that time no longer held any public office. He left for the metropolis in May 1804 to appear before a Batavian court martial to account for the capitulation of the colony to the British, but was acquitted of all the charges brought against him (Van Meeteren 1944:14).

Of course, during his interrogations Tierce Cadet denied any involvement in a conspiracy to bring down the government and to liberate the slaves.¹⁶ He was kept in custody in The Hague for several months, causing a lot of diplomatic activity. The French ambassador claimed that Tierce, as a French citizen who also had been employed in an official Republican function at Curaçao, was entitled to French protection. But this was contested by the Batavian government with the argument that Tierce by his long residence in Curaçao (1784-1799) and his service as an officer in the island's National Guard had become a Dutch citizen, while his official functions of *receveur* and consul were never recognized. The Spanish ambassador pleaded for prolongation of Tierce's detention until Spanish authorities could question him on his possible complicity with the Gual and España conspiracy.¹⁷

In October 1800, Tierce 'escaped' while being transferred from one prison to another. According to G.H. Homan the escape was very probably staged; Tierce had become more and more of an embarrassment to the Batavian authorities. He went to Paris where he circulated a printed pamphlet in December 1800, titled 'Au gouvernement batave', in which he vindicated himself and asked permission to return to Curaçao in order to attend to his trading and shipping business. The Batavian government refused. One year later Tierce Cadet returned to the Batavian Republic, possibly in another attempt to obtain permission to return to Curaçao. He was arrested again, however, and immediately deported. He returned to his native France and never saw Curaçao again (Homan 1976:8-9). These efforts of Tierce to restore his reputation and the risks he took by going to the Batavian Republic suggest that he was innocent.

It is therefore unlikely that Tierce was the Jacobin zealot convinced of the ideal of slave liberation and realizing full racial equality, as depicted by Palacios. But he might still have been involved with a group of people who, discontented with Lauffer's administration, were planning to bring him down. During his interrogations he stated that many people in Curaçao were unhappy with

16 NA, 2.01.12, Binnenlandse Zaken (BZ), inv. no. 222, interrogations J.B. Tierce, 22 and 29-5-1800, pp. 100-8 and 122-33.

17 See the chapter by Ramón Aizpurua.

Lauffer's regime, which they labelled despotic.¹⁸ During the 1790s there was almost continuous social unrest in the colony, surfacing in the form of riots, fights between adherents of opposing political factions, and mutinous behaviour within the defence forces. Most of the unrest was concentrated in and around the port of Willemstad. Was there a group that can be identified as Tierce's partisans? Palacios mentions a number of young whites, among whom was Luis Brion. But this was apparently only a small group compared to the roughly 300 prisoners who were taken after the Guadeloupeans gave up their siege and left (Palacios 1983:26). If there was such a large group of followers of Tierce, they were most likely to be found among the free coloureds.

THE PORT, THE FREE COLOURED, AND THE 'FRENCH CONNECTION'

At the end of the eighteenth century, Curaçao had a relatively large free non-white community. In 1789 over 20,000 people lived on the island, including nearly 13,000 slaves, about 3,600 whites, and approximately 3,700 free blacks and coloureds. A little over half of the population lived in Willemstad and its immediate surroundings: 40 % of the slaves, 95 % of the whites, and 95 % of the free non-whites. Many, if not most of those living in Willemstad and its suburbs, were directly or indirectly involved in the commercial and maritime branches of the colony's economy (Klooster 1994:286, 289).

Similar to the American colonies of other European powers, Curaçao's free blacks and coloureds were regarded by whites with a mixture of suspicion and fear and subject to repressive and discriminatory treatment. The general idea among the white population was that the free blacks and coloureds had to be kept in strict control. This resulted in a series of locally issued laws, mainly for the purpose of maintaining law and order, in which the free non-whites were usually bracketed together with the slaves. Officially, according to the laws declared applicable in the colony by the States-General, the free non-whites, unlike the slaves, did not form a distinct legal category. But in daily practice free non-whites were treated like they were. For instance, testimony of a free non-white against a white was not accepted in court. On the other hand, unlike many of the neighbouring colonies, there were almost no legal impediments to their economic development (Jordaán 2010).

18 NA, 2.01.12, BZ, inv. no. 222, interrogations J.B. Tierce, 22 and 29-5-1800, pp. 100-8 and 122-33.

Apart from a symbiotic relationship with the Spanish colonies on the nearby mainland, Curaçao also had long established close ties with the French colonies in the northern and north-eastern Caribbean, especially with the southern part of Saint-Domingue. With their coloured and black crews of freedmen and slaves, Curaçaoan vessels regularly attended ports like Aquin, Les Cayes, and St. Louis. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Curaçaoan merchants were the most important suppliers of provisions. A commodity from Saint-Domingue that was much in demand by Curaçao merchants was indigo. Especially well suited for the cultivation of this crop was the southern part of Saint-Domingue, where many free coloureds became successful indigo planters. Among them was Julien Raimond, political pamphletist and prominent advocate in the fight for racial reform during the 1780s and early 1790s, who, as an indigo planter, had extensive commercial relations with Curaçao. Business contacts were strengthened by the forging of family networks, locally and inter-colonial: there was intermarriage between the well-to-do coloured families of both colonies (Garrigus 1993:244-5, 246, 250, 253-4; Garrigus 2007:4)

Also residing in Curaçao, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, was a sizable French colonial community consisting of both whites and free coloureds. Around 1790 the number of Frenchmen was estimated to be 400 (Homan 1976:1). Many if not most of the French were Roman Catholics, as was the majority of the Curaçao non-white population. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church, unlike the almost exclusively white Protestant Church, was racially mixed. This must have played a role in bringing French and Curaçaoans, whites and coloureds, into close contact. Tierce Cadet, as a well-to-do and prominent member of society, was a church warden of the Catholic church, and he was also living with a mulatto woman called Dorothea, with whom he had children.¹⁹

Close ties with the French colonies are also noticeable through the relatively high incidence of manumissions by French slave-owners registered in Curaçao. There was a peak of French manumissions during the 1790s, which should be attributed to the many refugees from Saint-Domingue that came to Curaçao after 1791, often together with their slaves.²⁰

After the outbreak of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, the continuing relations with that colony and the growing number of refugees arriving from there apparently did not immediately alarm the Curaçao government. The fiscal (public prosecutor) P.Th. van

19 NA, 2.01.28.02, RAB, inv. No. 189, Lauffer to Duny, 9-11-1803, 237v.

20 See for an overview of manumissions in Curaçao: Van der Lee 1998.

Teijlingen seemed to be the only official who was worried about the growing number of people coming from Saint-Domingue, and he repeatedly asked the council for clear orders on how to deal with them. Van Teijlingen feared that their numbers would rise significantly as soon as one of the contesting parties in Saint-Domingue would gain the upper hand. He expected that especially free non-whites would come to Curaçao since these would not be admitted in the British or any of the other of the neighbouring colonies.²¹ After the news arrived in 1793 that war had broken out between France and the United Provinces, the only measure that was taken was to order the French on the island to report to the fiscal within four days to be registered. An earlier decision to order all the French to leave Curaçao within three weeks was reversed by the governor.²²

In 1795 the French Republic and the newly proclaimed Batavian Republic signed a pact of friendship and alliance, and in early July of that year the first French privateer appeared in the Willemstad harbour, soon to be followed by more.²³ Earlier, in January 1793, the French National Convention had passed a decree in which citizens were invited to arm privateers. In France as well as in its colonial ports ships were fitted out and commissioned with letters of marque. Victor Hugues started to arm corsairs not long after his re-conquest of Guadeloupe in 1794. The number of Guadeloupean privateers grew from 21 at the end of 1795 to 121 at the end of Hugues' regime in 1798. To illustrate the importance of privateering for this colony: during this four year period 1,800 ships were either seized or destroyed by Guadeloupean privateers (Dubois 2004:241-2).

The crews of the corsairs consisted predominately of non-white sailors, many of them ex-slaves. The multiracial crews of these privateers, according to Laurent Dubois, became 'a symbol as clear as the Republican tricolor'. Many captains were also men of African descent, drawn from the free coloured class. Privateers were armed by the Republican administration as well as by private individuals. Between 1794 and 1796 the latter were still a minority, but in 1798 there were 114 privately owned corsairs against only seven directly fitted out by the Republican authorities. Most of the ship owners and investors were whites. Hugues himself invested in privateers. It was lucrative business for both ship owners and crews

21 NA, 2.05.12.01, OAC 233, 'Representatie ... aan Gouverneur en Raden gedaan ... 19 januari 1792', pp. 4; no. 14, copy of a note of Van Teijlingen, 28-2-1792; no. 30, Van Teijlingen to the council, 5-6-1792.

22 J.A. Schiltkamp and J.Th. De Smidt 1978., no. 414, pp. 491, no. 2, publication 5/8-4-1793; No. 415, publication 12-4-1793.

23 NA, 2.01.29.03, Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, Aanhangsel II (DvM II), inv. no. 73, Journal of the frigate *Ceres*, kept by A. Kikkert, 1795-1799, 8-7-1795; 23-3, 1-7-1795.

and it became an important branch of the Guadeloupean economy (Dubois 2004:242-6).

In Curaçao the presence of the privateers and their black and coloured crews had an enormous effect on the island's non-white population. In early August 1795, only two weeks before the outbreak of the slave revolt, naval captain Albert Kikkert, commanding the frigate *Ceres* anchored in the harbour, noted in his journal: '[Since] the negroes here, because of the presence of the many French free negroes or citoijens, now also are committing mischief, we loaded our guns with balls and grapeshot and erected two small batteries...'.²⁴ 'Negroes and mulattoes' reportedly held gatherings in Otrobanda and sang provocative songs. There was recurrent fighting between the French sailors and the garrison's Orangist soldiers.²⁵

After the crushing of the slave revolt and the execution of its leaders, social unrest remained and the government became increasingly unhappy with the French privateers who were now calling on a regular basis. In December there was fear for a new slave revolt.²⁶ As a consequence, crews of the privateers were ordered not to have contact with the island's blacks.²⁷ But this had hardly any effect. A day before Christmas, sailors of the French privateers provocatively paraded through the streets with banners and drawn sabres, and with hundreds of Curaçaoan blacks in their wake.²⁸

THE 1796 COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH

The change of power in the metropolis did not immediately lead to changes in the local colonial administration and military command; the civil and military personnel commissioned under the old regime remained in function. At the same time political strife between the stadholder's supporters and the pro-French Patriots intensified immediately after the crushing of the slave revolt and plunged Curaçao into a state of near chaos. Not only the population and the members of the colonial administration were divided, also within the defence force, formed by the navy, the militia, and the garrison, there were political controversies. This regularly led to severe clashes and riots involving the local population, sailors, soldiers, and the crews of the French privateers.

24 NA, 2.01.29.03, DvM II, inv. no. 731, 6-8-1795.

25 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, 139, Governor's journal, 4, 5 en 1/2-8-1795, 3-8-1795.

26 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, 139, Governor's journal, 4, 5 en 1/2-8-1795, 9-12-1795.

27 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, 139, Governor's journal, 4, 5 en 1/2-8-1795, 12-12-1795.

28 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, 139, Governor's journal, 4, 5 en 1/2-8-1795, 24-12-1795.

Only in early August 1796 was word received that all civil and military personnel were relieved from the allegiance to the stadholder and order was given that a new oath had to be taken. Some of the civil servants, the captain of the militia, and most of the officers of the garrison refused, while Governor De Veer requested his resignation because of his bad health. He was succeeded by book-keeper-general Jan Jacob Beaujon as acting governor. To cope with the unrest among the soldiers the garrison was dismissed, while the militia under the newly-elected Captain Johann Rudolph Lauffer took possession of Fort Amsterdam. After mediation by Jean Baptiste Tierce the crews of the Dutch warships were reinforced with men from the French privateers. The Orangist officers left the island the following day.²⁹ The transition from a colonial government of the old regime to a Batavian government was realized without any bloodshed, but the situation was far from stable.

French naval presence would further contribute to the consolidation of the new regime. Since Guadeloupe as well as Saint-Domingue had an interest in securing Curaçao as a naval base, warships were sent from both colonies (Pérotin-Dumon 1988:295-296). Victor Hugues, informed that Curaçao was still in danger of surrendering to the British, sent a letter in which he offered military assistance and at the same time threatened with armed intervention in case the governor and councillors would not behave like 'good patriots'. A few days after the receipt of this letter the French warships arrived (Hamelberg 1985:31-2).

At the same time Hugues had given explicit instructions that it should be communicated to the governor and councillors that the French did not have any intent whatsoever to interfere with the existing social order. Still, Acting Governor Beaujon remained deeply suspicious. While the French warships were moored in the harbour, the fifth anniversary of the French constitution of 1791 was celebrated. On this occasion the commanding officer from Saint-Domingue, much to the horror of Beaujon, drank, sang, and danced with free coloureds, and even embraced some of them. But what worried the Curaçao authorities most was that he appeared to be sympathetic to a petition from a delegation of free coloureds, in which they asked for his support in gaining equality to the whites in all regards.³⁰

29 Hamelberg 1985: 28-29; NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 136, no. 12, Beaujon to West Indisch Comité, 9-9-1796, f 93r-94r ; inv. no. 141A, undated anonymous document titled 'Relatie'; DvM II, inv. no. 73, Journal Kikkert, 15-8-1796; WIPC, II, no. 448.

30 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 136, nr. 13, 113-115, Beaujon to West-Indisch Comité, 17-10-1796; Pérotin-Dumon 1988: 296-7.

Rumours regarding French attempts to change the social order in Curaçao surfaced again in August 1797, when a former military commander of Curaçao, Abraham Perret Gentil, who was now engaged as an officer in Saint-Domingue, returned to the island. Soon a story circulated that Perret had written a letter to Saint-Domingue asking for troops to help liberate the slaves in Curaçao.³¹

Lauffer, who had succeeded Beaujon in December 1796 as acting governor, seemed to have followed a deliberate policy aimed to control the free blacks and coloureds by incorporating them into the restructured defence forces. He maintained the two existing segregated companies of free blacks and free mulattoes, respectively 260 and 157 men strong, which were directly under his command. The former white militia was renamed the National Guard and greatly extended, now comprising about 1,100 officers and men, organized in six companies of infantry, three companies of cavalry, and four companies of artillery.³² The latter largely consisted of free blacks and coloureds. Under pressure of time and the need to man the cannons in the forts with experienced gunners, Lauffer decided to recruit men among the coloured and black seafaring population of the island. Sailors were usually familiar with the handling of the canons aboard the ships. In order to stimulate the Curaçao mariners to join the National Guard, ship's captains, who were often light coloured 'mustees', were given officer's ranks. It was hoped that these men would stimulate their crews to join the National Guard.³³ According to Lauffer, by dispersing a large number of free non-whites over various units, he had effectively reduced the influence and the power of the respective captains of the 'free negroes' and the 'free mulattoes'.³⁴

Lauffer reported these changes to his superiors and asked for their approval. At the same time he warned the authorities in the metropolis to be extremely cautious when issuing laws or regulations with any reference to general freedom and equality. The introduction of general equality to the free coloured people or the granting of political influence to them was extremely dangerous and could ultimately lead to the total destruction of the colony. Lauffer at that time – late August 1797 – was already convinced of the existence of a 'cabale' consisting of people who, 'hiding behind the mask of patriotism', were only out to overthrow the existing

31 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 139, 19-8-1797.

32 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 136, Lauffer to West Indisch Comité, 15-9-1797, enclosure no. 29.

33 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 136, Lauffer to West Indisch Comité, 21-8-1797, nr. 27, 168-169.

34 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 136, 171-172.

order and play one population group against another in order to attain their own goals.³⁵

Only a few weeks later Lauffer had to report on a potentially dangerous situation when a large number of free coloured militiamen from the artillery companies of the National Guard, during a formal parade, suddenly drew their sabres and, cursing and shouting wildly, stormed forward in an apparent attempt to provoke a reaction from the infantry units. Thanks to the fact that the militia men in the infantry were too astonished to react, the event did not end in a bloodbath. The immediate cause was the reading of a court martial sentence against a captain of the infantry for disobedience.³⁶

Lauffer was vague about the causes of this near mutiny. He stated, however, that the free coloureds should not be blamed. They had been misled by false rumours; they should be seen rather as victims that were used as an instrument by malicious elements to cause unrest. Still, the coloured officers held responsible for the incident were dishonourably discharged. One was banished from the colony; he immediately departed for Les Cayes.³⁷ The real cause may have had to do with the presence in Curaçao of Gual and España, the leaders of the failed revolt in Caracas.³⁸

Although after this incident no further serious disturbances occurred, this did not mean that there was no discontent. Just a few months before Lauffer had accused Tierce, Devaux, and Sasportas, a placard was issued against the circulation of pamphlets that criticized the government.³⁹ But at the same time Lauffer seemed to

35 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 136, 172-174.

36 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 13., 30-9-1797; inv. no. 136, no 32, fol. 190-197, Lauffer to West-Indisch Comité, 22-10-1797; no. 33, fol. 229, Lauffer to West-Indisch Comité, 30-11-1797.

37 NA, 2.01.28.01, WICom, inv. no. 139, Governor's journal, 30-9-1797; *ibid.*, inv. no. 136, no. 32, fol. 190-197, Lauffer to West-Indisch Comité, 22-10-1797; *ibid.*, no. 33, fol. 229, Lauffer to West-Indisch Comité, 30-11-1797.

38 See for the Gual and España conspiracy the chapter by Ramón Aizpurua. The Spanish authorities knew that Gual and España were in Curaçao. They even knew in what house they were staying. Apparently part of the Curaçao population felt sympathy for the Spanish revolutionaries. The arrival of a representative from the Spanish colonial authorities who demanded their arrest and extradition caused much unrest among the population; there were even stones and dirt thrown at him. See for a report on these events: NA, 3.03.01.01, HvH, inv. no. 5608, copy of a statement in Spanish by Don Raphael Diego Merida, 30-9-1799, with Dutch translation of 30-4-1800. The officer of the National Guard who was convicted for disobedience, Anthony Leopold Lange, later reproached Lauffer for deliberately not complying with the Spanish demands and the risk of a breach in the relations with Venezuela that he thereby took. See *Archivo General de Indias, Estado 71 4 (17b)*, translation from a letter in Dutch by A.L. Lange and J.P. Amalry to the Spanish ambassador in The Hague, dated 16-4-1798 (I am grateful to Ramón Aizpurua for supplying me with this information).

39 NA, 1.05.12.01, OAC, inv. no. 110, minutes of the meetings of the council, 30-5-1799, pp. 274-8.

be totally confident that he was in control and clearly did not fear the free blacks and coloureds. Only weeks before the arrest of the alleged conspirators, Lauffer had allowed a drill with the artillery in Fort Amsterdam by principally black and coloured troops, while only a handful of white soldiers from the garrison were present: an ideal opportunity for the non-whites, it was feared by Kikkert and others who witnessed this, to take command of the fortress. When criticized for this by some of his officers, Lauffer replied that he knew these people and that he trusted them, adding that the officers were ignorant and that the situation in Curaçao could not be compared to that in Saint-Domingue (Milo 1936:488).

CURAÇAO AND THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE QUASI-WAR

From 1797 onwards, French privateers started to hunt and seize American ships on an increasing scale. Of the 29 prizes brought into Curaçao's port during that year, 19 were American ships. The Americans of course complained, and fewer American ships started calling at Curaçao. At the same time the number of French privateers arriving steadily rose. Captain Kikkert recorded in his journal the arrival of six French privateers in 1796, 11 in 1797, 23 in 1798, and 30 in 1800 (Milo 1936:336, 484).

Curaçao's government found itself in a difficult situation. On the one hand, the island benefitted from the privateering business, as did of course the French ally, officially represented by the maritime agent and *receveur* Tierce Cadet. On the other hand, the Americans were long-time and valued customers – in fact the island depended considerably on the supply of provisions from North America – while there was no conflict between the Batavian Republic and the United States. From early 1799 onwards, more and more incidents occurred regarding American ships seized by privateers in the direct vicinity of Curaçao. This forced the government to undertake action. At the end of January 1799, an American schooner was seized by a French privateer under the reach of the canons of the fort at Fuikbaai. The latter had left the harbour of Curaçao a day earlier for Guadeloupe, but stayed in the neighbourhood to prey on American ships. The seizure was considered to be against the treaty of friendship between the United States and the Batavian Republic, so an armed vessel was sent by the governor with orders to recapture the American ship, which succeeded. The council decided to file a complaint with the Guadeloupean authorities, and the privateer was ordered to sail to Guadeloupe without any

further delay.⁴⁰ In February 1799, a provisional regulation regarding the sale of ships seized by French and Batavian privateers was issued, which supplemented a regulation dating from August 1798, enacted by the Intermediary Executive Authority (Intermediair Uitvoerend Bewind) of the Batavian Republic. It mainly contained instructions for procedures that were to be followed after a prize was brought into port.⁴¹

Early July, the American ship *Nautilus* was seized after a battle in the vicinity of Bonaire by the French privateer *Trois Amis*, and taken to Curaçao, a seizure that would have serious repercussions. Despite suspicion that irregularities had been committed by the privateer, the council decided that the seizure could not be disputed; it was impossible, it was stated, to determine whether or not the *Nautilus* was attacked within the colony's jurisdictional limits, for it was impossible to say how far off the coast of Bonaire the incident had taken place.⁴²

In August 1799, U.S. Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, informed the Batavian diplomatic representative in the United States, R.G. van Polanen, 'There is ground to suspect that the Administration at Curaçao is interested in the privateers fitted out there with French commissions; and hence the countenance & protection yielded to the pirates'.⁴³ The privateer *Trois Amis*, responsible for the seizure of the schooner *Nautilus*, according to the Americans, was fitted out in Curaçao. The incident was taken very seriously because on the occasion of the seizure the American captain and four of his crew had been murdered. The privateer was, according to the secretary of state, protected by the island's government. It was said to have sailed under a pirate's flag with skull and crossbones painted on a dark background, 'and what is most extraordinary, with this piratical, murderous ensign hoisted, was saluted by the Dutch frigate *Ceres*, Captain Albert Kickert!'⁴⁴ The American consul in Curaçao, B.H. Philips, had already addressed himself in a letter of 21 June to the governor and council of Curaçao, but never received any answer.⁴⁵

40 NA, 2.05.12.01, OAC, inv. no. 110, nos. 1-2, minutes of the meetings of the council, 30 and 31-1-1799.

41 WIPC, II, no. 485, pp. 573-7 publication 28-2-1799, articles 24-25.

42 WIPC, II, no. 485, minutes 10-7-1799, pp. 311-6; see also Van Meeteren 1944: 39-40.

43 Claude A. Swanson and Dudley W. Knox, 1935-1938, (further referred to as ND), Operations August-December 1799, 83, Secretary of State Timothy Pickering to Minister Resident from the Batavian Republic Van Polanen, 16-8-1799.

44 ND, Operations August-December 1799, 83, Secretary of State Timothy Pickering to Minister Resident from the Batavian Republic Van Polanen, 16-8-1799.

45 ND, Operations August-December 1799, 83, Secretary of State Timothy Pickering to Minister Resident from the Batavian Republic Van Polanen, 16-8-1799.

Van Polanen answered Pickering that ‘as early as the beginning of the year 1797, I had received sufficient proof that the government of that Island was in improper hands, the Governor being a low bred and illiterate German as also are the majority of the Council’.⁴⁶ He immediately also wrote a letter to Lauffer in which he bluntly stated that the conduct of Curaçao’s administration during the war, and especially during the past two years with regard to the arming of privateers, the seizing and condemning of American ships, and the condoning of illegal practices by privateers gave ample ground to suspect that the government officials themselves were directly interested. And if there were any doubts, these had certainly been removed after the receipt of ‘certain reports’ from Curaçao and after the affair with the *Nautilus*. Curaçao’s government would be held responsible, and the governor could be certain that complaints would be filed with the Batavian government. Consequently, an official inquiry was to be expected, and those officials who would be found guilty of neglecting their duties for personal gain could at the least expect to be liable to pay extensive damages. Van Polanen asserted that he was in the possession of documents sent by informants in Curaçao, and that he was certain that there would still be ‘decent people’ on the island who would be willing to testify.⁴⁷ Van Polanen also informed the authorities in the Batavian Republic about the matter.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that not a single reference regarding these serious American claims and accusations is to be found in the minutes of the council. That the Americans were taking the incidents very seriously is underlined by the fact that President John Adams informed the secretary of state that ‘if any legal evidence can be produced to prove that Governor and Council are, more or less, concerned in the privateers, it would be a ground for Serious representations to their Superiors’.⁴⁹

Little is known about the involvement of Curaçao’s seafaring population and local investors in French privateers. It is certain that privateers were locally armed and that they sailed with both French and Batavian letters of marque, but it is not clear on what scale (Milo1936:487; Van Meeteren 1944:29, 36-37). Already in 1797 and 1798 there were reports of direct Curaçaoan involvement in the seizure of the American ships.⁵⁰

46 NA, 2.01.08, Buitenlandse Zaken, 1795-1813 (BuZa), inv. no. 358, Van Polanen to Pickering, 16-8-1799.

47 NA, 2.01.08, BuZa, inv. no. 358, Van Polanen to Lauffer, 17-8-1799.

48 NA, 2.01.08, BuZa, inv. no. 358, Van Polanen to the Agent for Foreign Affairs (Agent tot de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen), 18-8-1799.

49 ND, Operations August-December 1799, 121, John Adams to secretary of state, 24-8-1799.

50 ND, Operations February 1797-October 1798, 22, Consular letters by B.H. Philips, 21-6- and 3-8-1797; 241, Declaration of Thomas Smith, master of Schooner Lemmon, 24-9-1798.

Since a large part of the population, especially the free non-white segment, was directly or indirectly involved in the maritime branch of the island's economy, and since privateering could be a very profitable business, it may be expected that many tried to benefit from it. In the beginning of 1797 Captain Kikkert appeared to have invested money in two privateers (Milo1936:332). Historian Van Meeteren mentions the issuing of a Dutch letter of marque on 28 June 1799 to the captain of the privateer *Drie Vrienden*, which, he suggests, is possibly the same ship as the *Trois Amis* (Van Meeteren 1944:36). It is not unlikely that the privateer sailed with both a French and a Batavian commission. The name of the ship suggests that there were three ship-owners or investors. One could be retrieved from the notarial archives of Curaçao: it was Tierce.⁵¹

The American accusations with regard to the incident with the *Nautilus* must have made Lauffer feel very uncomfortable. And at the same time the authorities in Saint-Domingue were also putting pressure on the Curaçao government but regarding a different matter. In the minutes of 5 September 1799, the receipt of a letter from Commissioner Roume is mentioned, with a request to prohibit the trade between Curaçao and the ports controlled by André Rigaud. Devaux, who had just arrived, and soon afterwards requested the council to issue a ban on the export of provisions to the southern part of Saint-Domingue. The council decided not to become involved in the dispute between Toussaint and Rigaud. Devaux also asked for the payment of 12.5 % duties on the sale of the American prize *Cleopatra*. He informed the council that he needed the money for the execution of an operation, but the council was not willing to honour this request.⁵² Then Devaux asked the council for a loan of 5,000 pesos, which request was also declined since there were insufficient funds.⁵³ The next day, Lauffer informed the council of the existence of a conspiracy, followed by the arrests of Devaux and Sasportas.⁵⁴

On 17 September 1799, just a few days after the arrest of Tierce, the American consul again addressed himself to governor Lauffer regarding the capture of the *Nautilus*:

I am now under the necessity to enlarge, & in the name of the United States of America to call on you as Commander in chief & Governor of this Island & its dependencies & for the reasons which

51 NA, 1.05.12.01, OAC, inv. no. 1001, protocol of notarial deeds, no. 259, fol. 777r-778r, guarantee for the sum of 10,000 guilders by Pierre Martin in favor of Jean Baptiste Tierce, owner of the privateer *Drie Vrienden*, 26-6-1799.

52 NA, 1.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 110, minutes council meeting 5-9-1799, pp. 356; 356-7; 357-60.

53 NA, 1.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 110, minutes 6-9-1799, pp. 370-1; 372; 374-5.

54 NA, 1.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 110, minutes 8-9-1799, pp. 376-378; 391-392.

I will state to you to demand *immediate* restitution & indemnification for the property so illegally siezed [sic] & taken, & competent satisfaction on the Persons of the Officers & Crew who committed the Murders of Captain Dixon, his mate, Boatswain & Two of his Sailors and also for maiming, stabling [sic] & plundering Four others of his Sailors.⁵⁵

Once again it was made clear that the complaints against Curaçao's government were very serious: the *Trois Amis* had sailed from Curaçao flying a flag that not only was 'indicative to its bloody intentions' but was not allowed to be carried by the laws of any nation. The seized *Nautilus* had been taken to Curaçao, and the privateer had on its return officially been saluted by the Dutch man-of-war moored in the port. The seizure was a violation of the treaty between the United States and the Dutch. The cargo of the *Nautilus* had been sold before a prize court pronounced a sentence. Philips added that he had received orders 'to make the demand [...] not *Only* for the *Nautilus*, the property & Lives lost, but for redress of *every injury* wh. has been permitted under the direction of your Government'. The United States Government was to be respected and required that the rights of its citizens would not again be violated.⁵⁶ Again, nothing regarding this letter is recorded in the minutes. But a day later Lauffer communicated to the Council in an extraordinary meeting that he was convinced of the existence of a plan to make Curaçao the centre of a region-wide attempt to free all the slaves.⁵⁷

Shortly after the arrest of Devaux, the U.S. consul urgently requested two American warships. This was necessary, he explained, to protect the lives and property of U.S. citizens in Curaçao. The secretary of the navy thereupon ordered two warships be sent to Curaçao, not only to secure the safety of American citizens, but also with orders to apprehend the captain and crew of the *Trois Amis* and take them to the United States to be tried for piracy. The secretary of state informed the American consul of this. He expected that, since the discovery of the conspiracy, Lauffer might be more willing to hand over the captain and crew of the *Trois Amis*. If the island's government wished, Pickering wrote, the American warships were allowed to assist to counter the machinations of the French, provided it would not be too inconvenient or hazardous to the immediate object of sending them there. The ships arrived at

55 ND, Operations August-September 1799, B.H. Philips to J.R. Lauffer, 17-9-1799, 199-200.

56 ND, Operations August-September 1799, B.H. Philips to J.R. Lauffer, 17-9-1799, 200.

57 NA, 1.05.12.01, OAC, inv. no. 110, minutes council meeting 18-9-1799, 410-5.

Curaçao in November 1799 and stayed until they were recalled in April 1800.⁵⁸

A few months later, soon after the arrival of the expeditionary force from Guadeloupe, a letter was received from the Batavian Republic communicating the American complaints regarding Curaçao. The Batavian government ordered a complete ban on the admitting privateers to the port of Willemstad. The reaction of council, as recorded in the minutes, was that the American complaints were based on 'false and mendacious reports' regarding 'certain events', supplied by 'hot headed' persons. The complaints would be disproved as soon as possible. Banning privateers from the harbour was not feasible because of the presence of the expedition from Guadeloupe.⁵⁹

On 6 September, immediately after the French landed at St. Michiel's Bay, Philips sent out an emergency call for U.S. naval assistance. It was feared that the Americans and their property were in great danger: 'I am well assured that in case of success on the part of the Guadeloupe Adventurers, that our persons & property *will be sacrificed*. I conceive a frigate and a Ship of 20 Guns or two frigates wou'd relieve us in 14 days & might make many prizes, but they must come speedily *or we are lost*.'⁶⁰

From their station at St. Kitts the American warships *Merrimack* and *Patapsco* were sent, which arrived at Curaçao on 22 September. On their arrival the Americans found the British frigate *Nereide* anchored just outside the harbour, and they learned that the island's government had already capitulated to the British. The situation on the island was still precarious. Many of the Americans staying at Curaçao had volunteered to man the fortresses to help defend the colony against a French take-over. Since the British had landed only twenty marines and refused to undertake any further action until reinforcements arrived, it was decided that the *Patapsco* would sail into port in an attempt to break the French siege. The action succeeded, and seventy American troops were landed. It was expected that the French would try to undertake an assault during the night, but instead they evacuated the island. After hearing the news of the French

58 ND, Operations August-December 1799, 187, B.H. Hammel to Secretary of State, 14-9-1799; 287, Navy Department to Captain Richard V. Morris, Commanding officer on the Guadeloupe Station, 15-10-1799; 288, Secretary of State to B.H. Philips, 15-10-1799; 403, B.H. Philips to the Secretary of State, 15-11-1799; Operations January-May 1800, 379, Secretary of the Navy to Captain Stephen Decatur, 3-4-1800.

59 NA, 2.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 111, minutes extra ordinary meeting of the council on 14-8-1800, 437-438. The letter from the Batavian Republic was dated 18-3-1800.

60 ND, Operations June-November 1800, 322-323, B.H. Philips to the Commander in Chief of the U.S. squadron on the Guadeloupe station, or to ship commanders, 6-9-1800.

departure, the British captain Watkins sailed into port and took possession of the island.⁶¹

After the French departure, a few hundred prisoners were taken. The majority were considered prisoners of war and handed over to the British. Curaçaoan citizens suspected of treason and collaborating with the French were interrogated. The problem was that in most cases it was hard to prove that a person had actually sided with the French. Because of the fast collapse of Lauffer's defence and the hasty retreat on Willemstad, many people suddenly found themselves in the French-controlled part of the island without any possibility of reaching the other side of the St. Anna Bay. Most of the people interrogated appeared to have had convincing arguments why they remained on the French side, while it could not be proven that they had actually taken up arms. The original accusations appeared to have been founded largely on hearsay. Nowhere in the judicial records can any proof be found for the existence of a massive pro-French movement of Jacobin persuasion coming to the assistance of the Guadeloupeans. All those suspected of siding with the French were released except for one person: a French mulatto by the name of Joseph Rigaud, who was found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was carried out immediately after it was pronounced.⁶²

In the Curaçaoan archives, no references were found to the identity of Joseph Rigaud and whether he was related to André Rigaud, but from other sources it can be gleaned that he most likely was one of André's brothers. Two of André Rigaud's brothers were even on Curaçao in September 1800. The other one, François, was also arrested, but considered a prisoner of war.⁶³ Although the judi-

61 ND, Operations June-November 1800, 337-341, William D. Robinson to Secretary of State, 10-9-1800; 341-342, Letter to a merchant in New York concerning surrender of Curaçao to Great Britain, 18-10-1800; Extract from a letter from an officer on board U.S. Sloop Patapsco, to his friend in Philadelphia, 23-9-1800, published in the Connecticut Journal, 26-11-1800; 423-424, Captain Thomas Truxtun to Secretary of the Navy, 2-10-1800; 451-452, B.H. Philips to the commander of the U.S. Squadron, Guadeloupe, dated 10-10-1800; 481-482, B.H. Philips to the Secretary of State, 18-10-1800; 508-509, Captain Thomas Truxtun to William Patterson, merchant in Baltimore, Md., 28-10-1800.

62 NA, 01.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 111, minutes extra ordinary meeting 21-11-1800, 603-5; extra ordinary meeting 9-12-1800, 645-6; inv. no. 127, resolution no. 36 and attachments, fols. 277-283; attachment La A, undated document from fiscal Spencer, fol. 284v; Spencer to Van Starckenborg, 9-11-1800, fols. 189-90v.

63 Joseph Rigaud was probably already on the island in August 1800. In a deed of conveyance of a ship, dated 25-8-1800, a Joseph Rigaud from Les Cayes is mentioned as the selling party. See: NA, 01.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 1004, no. 45, fo. 110r-110v. See also: Alejandro Enrique Gómez Pernía, *Le Syndrome de Saint-Domingue. Perceptions et représentations de la Révolution haïtienne dans le Monde Atlantique, 1790-1886*, unpublished doctoral thesis, 2010, *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Ecole Doctorale d'Histoire et Civilisations*, pp. 302; AGI, Caracas 486, no. 4, 'Diario de lo acaecido en Curazao...' (Diary regarding what happened in Curaçao...); AGI, Caracas 486, attachment to a document No. 1, 'Noticia comunicada de Paraguaná' (News from Paraguana). I am grateful to Ramón Aizpurua for supplying me with this information.

cial papers regarding all the other suspects have been preserved, almost no documents pertaining to Rigaud's trial were found. It was recorded only that he had served in a French cavalry unit. He was left behind when the Guadeloupeans evacuated the island, but together with two companions he managed to flee to Aruba where he was apprehended.⁶⁴

The British, for intelligence purposes, had all the letters that were sent from Curaçao to Europe in early October 1800 opened, copied, and translated. Of the 31 letters investigated only five contained information regarding people who allegedly joined the French, information that again was mainly based on rumours and that was also contradictory. While according to one letter all the blacks and the greatest part of the people of colour defected to the side of the Guadeloupean invaders, another letter mentions that the free blacks and free coloureds sided with the inhabitants and fought well. Only Luis Brion and a Jan Smit are explicitly mentioned as having joined the French, allegedly as interpreters. One of the letters states somewhat vaguely that 'many of the inhabitants' sided with the French. The letters confirm that most of the slaves did support the French, and some of the slaves were said to still be armed and hiding in the countryside. Finally, mention is made of the hanging of 'a mulatto named Joseph Rigo'.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

It is unlikely that the alleged 1799 conspiracy and the Guadeloupean expedition in 1800 are related to any region-wide scheme to liberate the slaves and establish racial equality. A plan did exist in 1799 to invade Jamaica and ignite a slave revolt in that colony in preparation for a French attack, and indeed the French agents Devaux and Sasportas were commissioned to carry it out. But this plan was not supported by Toussaint Louverture, who at that time had just concluded a treaty with the British and the Americans and was fighting André Rigaud; it was initiated in France. Neither is there indication that Tierce had any radical Jacobin ideas regard-

64 NA, 01.05.12.01, OAC inv. no. 167, minutes of the meetings of the councillors commissioned to facilitate judicial procedures (*raden-commissarissen tot het houden der dingtalen*), 6-10-1800, 337-8.

65 TNA, Records of the Admiralty, Adm 1/250, Letters from senior officers, Jamaica, 1800.

ing liberty and equality, nor that the Guadeloupean expedition in 1800 was sent with the purpose of freeing the slaves.

Tierce was a rich slave owner, who was actively involved in the crushing of the 1795 revolt, and who after his extradition tried to have his good reputation and his fortune restored. Curaçao became an object of international politics. The Guadeloupeans were interested in securing Curaçao as an important privateering base and were no doubt alarmed by signs that by late 1799 the attitude of the Curaçao government towards French privateering seemed to be changing in favour of the Americans. Lauffer was under enormous pressure from the United States. The American accusations after the incident with the *Nautilus* that the island government had a direct interest in the arming of privateers cannot be proven, but it is likely that there was at least some truth in the allegations. By creating the myth of the Tierce Cadet conspiracy, Lauffer at once could divert the attention of his superiors away from this embarrassing matter, pacify the Americans, and get rid of the French and especially of Tierce as one of the owners of the privateer *Trois Amis/Drie Vrienden*. The general atmosphere of fear for revolt and subversion, both in Curaçao and in the mother country, as related by the spectre of the events in Saint-Domingue made Lauffer's accusations convincing. This in turn provoked the reaction from Guadeloupe a year later, an intervention with a geopolitical rather than an idealistic agenda. The Guadeloupeans were actively supported by Curaçaoan slaves who may well have hoped for liberation, but there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of a radical revolutionary movement among the slave population, nor among free blacks and coloureds, nor among the whites.

The Curaçaoan free non-whites, however, must have welcomed the principles of the French Revolution. There is proof that they actively sought French support for their emancipatory ambitions, but in the end they remained loyal to the island's government, even if the latter was not inclined to give in to any ideas regarding full equality. But then again, a slave revolt and the chaos that would almost certainly result from it were not in the interest of free population either. The Curaçaoan free blacks and coloureds, due to the close relations many of them had with the southern part of Saint-Domingue, probably felt more affiliation with André Rigaud than with Toussaint Louverture. The hanging of the 'free mulatto' Joseph Rigaud in the aftermath of the events of 1800 might have served, whether or not intentionally, as a governmental warning to them not to indulge in subversive ideas.

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