Chapter

19. Dutch Brazil from 1630 to 1654

Erik Odegard

From 1630 to 1654, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) conquered part of the existing Portuguese colony in northeastern Brazil. This colony comprised (parts of) the coastal areas of what are now Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Alagoas, Ceará, Piaui, and Maranhão states, and was the first slave society ruled by the Dutch in the Atlantic world. Dutch Brazil was the cradle of systematic Dutch complicity in the trading of people and keeping Africans in slavery in the New World. The Gold Coast forts in present-day Ghana, headquartered in Elmina, are the only physical remains of the short-lived South Atlantic empire that the WIC managed to build in the period 1630–1645 and then lost in the subsequent decade. In addition to the colony in Brazil and the forts in Ghana, the other parts of this empire were the island of São Tomé and parts of Angola.

Ambitious Plans in the South Atlantic

As early as the 1590s, there had been plans in the Dutch Republic to establish an Atlantic company, but it was not until June 1621 that the States General granted the WIC a charter. From the outset, it was more than just a trading company. The Dutch government expected the WIC to attack Spanish and Portuguese colonies and ships in the Atlantic and thus gave the Company wide powers to do so. The WIC was allowed to establish forts, recruit troops, and arm warships. It was also given jurisdiction over the colonies that it would establish or conquer.

A wide range of Dutch merchant groups had long been active in various markets in the Atlantic world. Clustering their diverse interests and activ-

ities in a single company was no easy task. Once the Company was founded and a share capital of 7.7 million guilders was issued, it was time to decide on the best strategy. How should this enormous share capital be invested? The Company set its sights on conquering the Portuguese colony in Brazil.

Sugar and Slavery in Brazil

The directors' decision to conquer Brazil automatically implied a decision to engage in slavery. The Dutch were well aware of the fact that Brazilian sugar cane was planted and harvested by slave labor. Before the creation of the WIC, Northern Netherlandic propagandists had pointed to the enslavement of both Africans and Indigenous American peoples in places like Brazil as proof of "Spanish" tyranny. Still, the directors chose to take Brazil, which entailed participating in slavery. To be sure, the Republic itself no longer had clean hands at that point; the earliest record of a Dutch ship's involvement in the trade of humans between Angola and Brazil dates from the late sixteenth century.

Conquering part of Brazil required an enormous military operation. It took years of fighting before there was a viable colony under Dutch control. Only by 1635 was the area under WIC control safe enough to resume sugar production. Burnt-down and ransacked sugar mills were restored to working order and put into operation.

During the war, the Company had confiscated abandoned mills. These were auctioned off to the highest-bidding private investors, at prices that could be quite steep. Isaac de Rasière bought the Gargaou mill in Paraíba in June 1637 for 110,000 guilders—roughly equivalent to 1.4 million euros today.[1] Some of the investors were inhabitants of the colony or WIC personnel, but often those who bought the mills lived in the Dutch Republic. A number of Portuguese planters had sworn allegiance to the Company and the Republic and thus were allowed to keep their property. It is often difficult to determine what motivated investors to sink their capital into sugar production. In some cases, it appears that the mills were seen as speculative investments; they were bought and then quickly resold. In those cases, the mills were often purchased back by the very Portuguese from whom they had been taken.

In the past, it has been suggested that WIC officials only resorted to participating in slavery and human trafficking after finding themselves confronted with a labor shortage in Brazil.[2] The reality was quite different, however. The Dutch knew full well how sugar was produced and processed in Brazil and had no intention of changing these methods once they had conquered the area. As early as 1624, after the successful conquest of Bahia, a squadron led by Piet Hein was sent to capture Luanda, Angola. Historian Kees Ratelband argued that the expedition was primarily intended to deny the Portuguese access to the slave trade, but his claim seems hardly realistic.[3] The WIC tried to conquer Brazil in order to gain control of sugar production so they could determine the price of this commodity in Europe. They wanted to seize Portugal's South Atlantic empire in as intact a condition as possible, which meant that they needed to gain control of Luanda. It was not until 1637 that the Dutch managed to capture the first important Portuguese foothold in Africa, when Elmina fell to the WIC. Four years later, the Company took Luanda. During the Dutch period in Brazil, some 31,000 people would be trafficked from Africa to the colony.

This does not mean that slavery and human trafficking were uncontroversial. The appeal for slavery to be seen "in the context of its time" actually compels us to look critically at the significant shift that took place between roughly 1600 and 1640. Before this period, slavery was still described as an excess of the typically Iberian, "papist" tyranny that the Netherlands had also fallen victim to. In this view, both enslaved Africans and the Indigenous population of the Americas were seen as natural allies of the Dutch Republic. By 1640, however, slavery and human trafficking had become an integral part of the WIC's corporate policy.

Yet, there were still people who opposed slavery. Willem Usselincx, who for years had lobbied for the establishment of a West India Company, forcefully denounced slavery in a letter to the States General in 1644.[4] However, this sort of criticism was not heard in Brazil itself, where the colonial administrators claimed that enslaved Africans were crucial to the colony's economic success. At the same time, the same administrators, including Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (governor-general from 1637 to 1644), received diplomats of the slave-exporting states of Kongo and Ndongo-Matamba with a great show of respect.

The enslaved in Dutch Brazil were, with just a few exceptions, Africans. But this did not mean that the Dutch saw all Africans as slaves. Particularly in this period, colonial administrators on either side of the Atlantic met

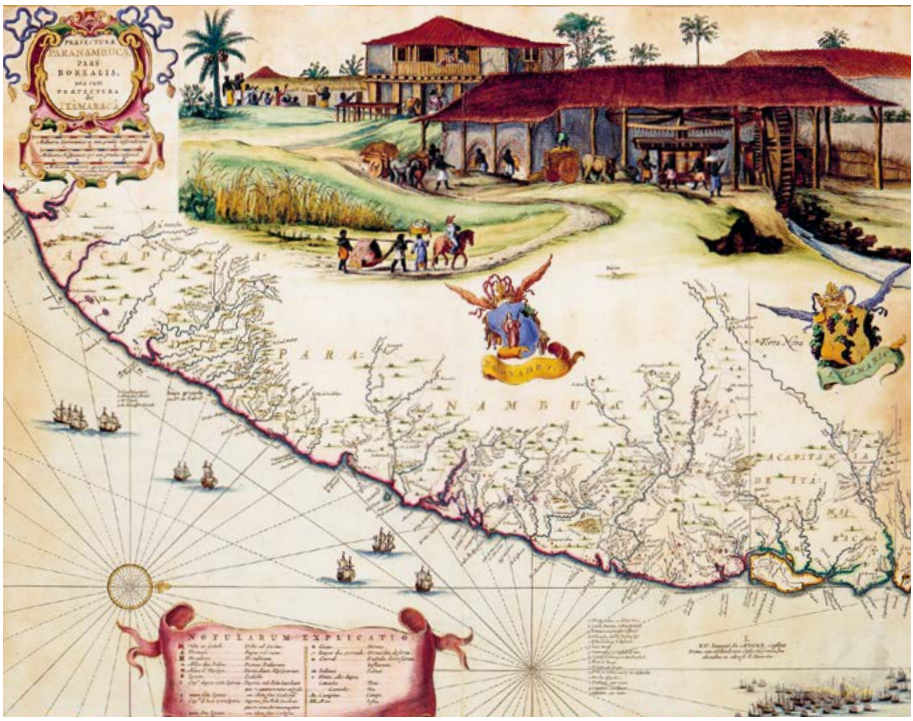
with African diplomats, trade partners, and allies. In this period, justifications for enslaving Africans were mainly based on the feeling that they were an economic necessity and the idea that Africans were better suited to hard work in the tropics. Religious and racial justifications were not yet part of the debate on slavery at this time.

Attitudes toward slavery changed in the Netherlands, too. In 1621, the city government of Hoorn asked the States General for instructions on what to do with a group of enslaved people who were on board a captured Portuguese ship. By 1650, the Admiralty of Amsterdam had no compunctions about ordering a group of "Moorish" prisoners—in this case North Africans—to be sent to Spain and sold. Halfway through the 1630s, the States General asked the WIC leadership whether the Company would be interested in putting captured "Barbary" corsairs to work in Brazil as slaves. The WIC eventually declined the offer because they felt that Muslim corsairs would constitute a danger to the colony. Thus, it was not only the WIC leaders, but also the States General and the Admiralties who were making decisions about slavery.

Brasilianen and Tapuyas: the WIC and the Indigenous Population

Under Portuguese rule (before the Dutch conquest in 1630), it was common practice to enslave groups of people from the local population. This happened mainly in areas where ships from Luanda called less regularly, such as the southern and northern parts of the colony. But in Pernambuco, too, local populations were kept in slavery. Portuguese policy was to christen the locals whenever possible and to house them in missionary villages run by Jesuits. There, people (usually) ran no risk of being enslaved, but they were not really free to do as they pleased either.

The Dutch invasion offered the local population an opportunity to rise up against the Portuguese, align themselves with the Dutch and ingratiate themselves with the new colonial government. The WIC saw Indigenous populations as a key source of military support, so maintaining good ties with them was considered very important. As early as 1625, diplomats representing the Potiguar, an Indigenous community who had sworn allegiance to the Dutch, traveled to the Netherlands. They were to help prepare the 1630 invasion and would subsequently assist the WIC in establishing lasting ties with the Potiguar.



Pernambuco was the heart of the Dutch colony in Brazil.

The WIC's relations with local populations varied greatly from group to group. The Dutch made distinctions between Indigenous peoples based on the languages they spoke. Groups that spoke Tupi languages, such as the Potiguar and Tupinamba, were called *Brasilianen*. These were the very people who were housed in the *aldeias*, or missionary villages, under Portuguese rule. Living farther inland in Pernambuco, and to the northwest, were other nomadic and seminomadic groups whom the Dutch described as Tapuyas.

The distinction between these groups was of real importance to the Dutch. The *Brasilianen* were seen as more civilized and it was therefore forbidden to enslave them. The Dutch regarded the Tapuyas as savage cannibals and, after the conquest of Maranhão, sought justifications for allowing colonists to keep these people in slavery.

Once the Dutch had conquered Pernambuco and the other northeastern *Capitanías* (captaincies; administrative divisions) in 1630, the WIC banned the enslavement of Indigenous people. This was an important pre-

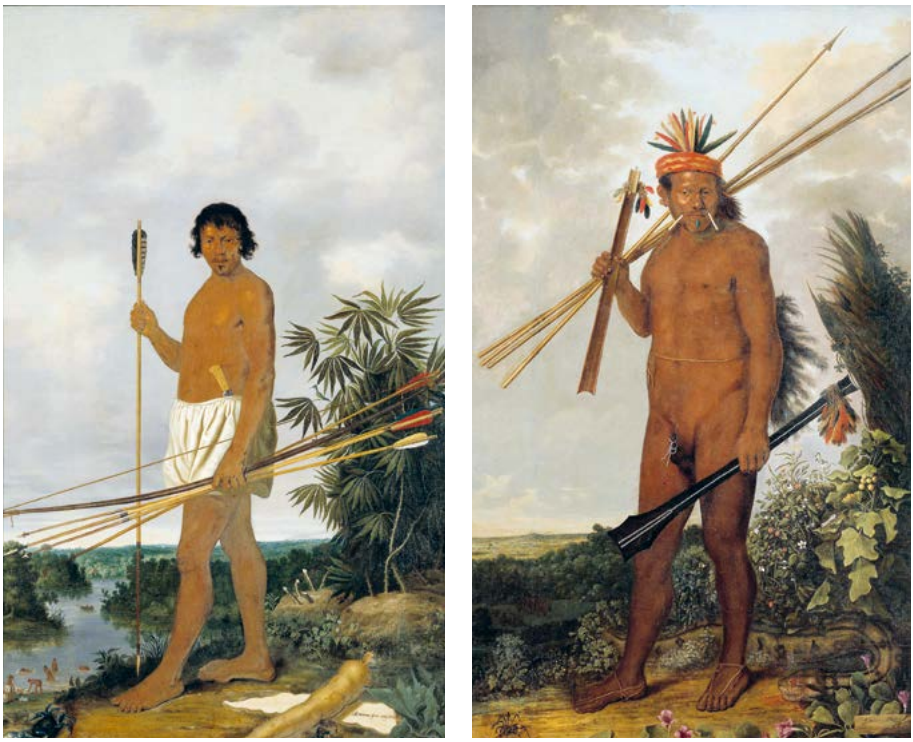
condition for preserving the locals' loyalty, not that relations with the Indigenous people were always smooth. In 1641, Company officials decided to start educating Potiguar children. They set up a kind of boarding school in a monastery in Paraiba, but notified neither the village elders nor the parents. Unsurprisingly, the parents were not exactly eager to have their children brought up and educated by strangers, and the plan was abandoned.

The WIC's use of Indigenous people as military allies also proved contentious. A contingent of Indigenous troops was part of the expedition to Luanda and Sao Tomé in 1641. But when the mortality among Indigenous soldiers rose even higher than the already alarming number of European casualties, *De Heren XIX* (the WIC executive board), called on the Company leadership in Brazil to stop deploying Indigenous allies outside of Brazil.[5]

In Maranhão, which was conquered in 1641, Indigenous people were enslaved more often than elsewhere in Brazil because slave ships from Africa rarely called there. The Portuguese colony was sparsely populated and unprofitable for the WIC, which was already struggling financially. Various groups in Maranhão practiced ritual cannibalism, and it was this custom that was used to justify the enslavement of Indians in Maranhão. The argument went as follows: if people were put up for sale, but not bought by the Dutch, they would be eaten. Was it not better to save their lives by buying them? In all likelihood, this rationale was no more than an excuse for allowing Indigenous slavery in Maranhão, despite the ban on this practice in Dutch Brazil. Similar arguments were used in the Spanish colonies after it was forbidden in 1512 to enslave the native population. However, by enslaving Indigenous people, the Dutch also angered local allies in Maranhão. These allies would eventually go so far as to switch sides and align themselves with the Portuguese. Their support was decisive in the success of a Portuguese rebellion in the area in 1642–1643.

Elsewhere, relations were far friendlier in this period. The local allies of the Dutch in Pernambuco saw their rights vis-à-vis the Dutch colonial administration put down in writing. The *Brasilianen* were granted the right to keep their own leaders and laws and would be treated as equals to the Dutch. This formal recognition of the Indigenous population's rights came in 1644, before the start of the Portuguese rebellion in 1645 that would eventually put an end to the Dutch colony. It strengthened ties with the allies and guaranteed the WIC strong support from them for the last ten years of its rule.

For the Indigenous people of Brazil, the conflict between the Portuguese and the Dutch became a civil war in which some groups sided with the Dutch, and others were loyal to the Portuguese.[6] After the eventual defeat of the Dutch, there was an exodus of their former allies to the northwest of Brazil. Some fled the country altogether; documentation from the 1660s lists a few *Brasilianen* among the inhabitants of a Dutch colony in Tobago.



The two paintings by Albert Eckhoudt show how differently the Dutch viewed various local population groups. Left: a portrait of a "civilized" *Brasiliaan*. Right: a "less civilized" Tapuya.

A Slave Society

Dutch Brazil marks the beginning of the systematic Dutch complicity in the trade in humans. The colony was the first slave society under the Dutch flag in the Atlantic world. A slave society is a society in which all social and economic relations are determined by the practice of slavery. Social

relations such as those between husband and wife, parent and child, and employer and employee were perceived in terms of master and slave. Free labor had to compete with slavery, and if it was too expensive, it would be replaced by slave labor. We know that the WIC specifically tried to train the enslaved as shipbuilders and gun carriage makers with the aim of replacing such specialized and costly labor.

In the Dutch period, more than 31,000 Africans were enslaved and sent to Brazil. More than 26,000 of them survived the voyage.[7] They were sold at auctions in Recife to the highest bidders. These were often sugar mill owners, but the enslaved were also forced to work in homes.

Among the colonial elite, status was in large measure determined by the possession of enslaved people. The same held true for people in the highest echelons of the WIC, such as Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen. In diplomatic contacts with various African kingdoms such as Kongo and Ndongo-Matamba, humans were exchanged as gifts. In one such instance, the Kongolese king gave 200 people to Johan Maurits who promptly sold them on to the WIC.

Yet, there are some differences between Brazil and the later Dutch slave societies like Suriname. This is because the Dutch, with no previous slavery experience of their own, had only the Portuguese example to model their slave society after. There were no comparable English or French colonies that could serve as a template. And yet, the Dutch did not follow the Portuguese model in all respects. Unlike the Portuguese, they hardly bothered to convert the enslaved to Christianity. This meant that the Dutch had to solve some problems in Brazil that were inherent to slave societies and for which they had no ready-made solutions.

One of the weightiest issues slave societies faced was the legal position of the enslaved. Could enslaved people testify against those who held them in slavery? Later experiences in the Caribbean and North America showed that this was utterly impossible. If enslaved people could testify against their masters, social control would become unmanageable. By the eighteenth century, the idea that the enslaved were not real human beings was voiced more frequently, which was merely a justification for denying them their legal rights.

This was different in Brazil. Not much systematic archival material from the courts and notaries has survived, but there are a few documents that shed light on slavery and the law as it was practiced and perceived. A good example is the 1652 adultery case of Maria Wens and Caspar Henricus Tor-

quinius. The case hinged on the question whether two women, Wens and Torquinius's "house slaves," should be allowed to testify. The public prosecutor, Jacob le Maire, argued that this was permissible. The legal system of the Republic was based on Roman law, in which there were numerous precedents for testimony by the enslaved, particularly in cases of adultery. The fall of Dutch Brazil meant that the ruling did not become a precedent in Dutch colonial law. This legal question would be treated quite differently in the later Dutch slave society of Suriname.[8]

Looking for a New Brazil

In 1645, Portuguese planters rose up against the WIC. The writing was on the wall; rumors of a rebellion had begun circulating two years earlier, and even the captain of Johan Maurits's guard had been imprisoned for treason. In the course of 1645, the Portuguese seized control of the inland areas, leaving the Company with only a few forts on the coast. Attempts to recapture lost territory from the rebels ended in even greater defeat. However, the Republic still maintained naval superiority and only when both privateers and Admiralty warships were withdrawn from the coast during the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654) did Recife fall into Portuguese hands. The Portuguese allowed the inhabitants of the colony to leave. Documents from subsequent years show that former colonists from Dutch Brazil left for the Dutch, English, and French colonies in the Caribbean and North America. Their role in promoting sugar cultivation in these colonies deserves more attention in future research.

One of the groups from Brazil that had to seek refuge after 1654 was the Sephardic Jewish community. During the Dutch period, they had been able to build a synagogue in Recife, and Jews enjoyed even greater freedoms in Brazil than in Amsterdam. The Jewish communities that sprung up after 1654 in places such as New Amsterdam, Barbados, Curaçao, Cayenne, Suriname, and Jamaica all had links to Brazil (see Chapter 26 by Jeanne Henriquez).

In the Netherlands, former inhabitants of the Dutch colony in Brazil, and people who had invested in it, called on several occasions for the conquest of new plantation colonies. Suriname, too, was seen as a "new Brazil." Historians still debate the extent to which the Dutch colony in Brazil influenced the spread of sugar cane cultivation and slavery.

Research into the former inhabitants of the Dutch colony can shed more light on their role in financing slavery in the Caribbean after 1654. In this context, Amsterdam's position as the center of sugar refinery is key. Moreover, research into the Dutch sugar cane planters in Brazil could also shed light on how and why people in the Netherlands decided in the 1630s to invest in sugar and slavery.

The fall of Brazil in 1654 effectively meant the bankruptcy of the first WIC. Despite its short existence, the colony's importance for the later development of the Dutch Atlantic world can hardly be overstated.

Notes

1 NA, Archives of the Oude WestIndische Compagnie, 1.05.01.01, Inv. no. 68, scan 533. The current value was calculated using the following website: https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

2 In 2019, for instance, this claim was made in an old film produced by the Mauritshuis about Johan Maurits and Brazil, which was screened at an exhibition on cartographer Cornelis Golijath in Middelburg, the Netherlands.

3 K. Ratelband, *De Westafrikaanse reis van Piet Heyn, 1624–1625* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2006), XXI-XXVII.

4 NA, Archives of the States General, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 5757, scan 113, Usselincx to the States General, October 15, 1644.

5 D. L. Noorlander, "Reformers in the Land of the Holy Cross: The Calvinist Mission in Dutch Brazil and the Portuguese Uprising of 1645," *Journal of Early American History* 6, no. 2 (2016): 180–181. For more on the relations with the local population, see also Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2012).

6 For more on the formal recognition of rights, see NA, Archives of the States General, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 5757, scans 561–63. For more on the conflict between the allies of the Dutch and the Portuguese, see Carolina Monteiro, "'Verlos ons van deze verdorven mensen,' schreven de oorspronkelijke inwoners van Brazilië," *de Volkskrant,* August 15, 2022, https://www.volkskrant.nl/kijkverder/2022/onskolonialeverleden/verlosonsvandezeverdorvenmensen-schrevendeoorspronkelijkebewonersvan-brazilie~v546010/.

7 Erik Odegard, *Graaf en Gouverneur: Nederlands-Brazilië onder het bewind van Johan-Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, 1636–1644* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2022), 132–33.

8 Erik Odegard, "1652: Het overspel van Henricus Torquinius en Maria Wens," *Nog meer wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos, 2022).

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva

The Dutch in Atlantic Africa Prior to 1800: Past, Present, and Future

To date, most scholarship on the Dutch in Atlantic Africa has focused mainly on the West India Company (WIC) and the Middelburg Commercial Company (MCC). The bulk of our knowledge concerns the headquarters of the WIC on the Gold Coast (Elmina, Ghana), and the engagement of this company as well as the MCC in the transatlantic slave trade. However, the Dutch presence in Africa did not start with the WIC, commerce in enslaved Africans was not the only core business of the Dutch in Africa, and Elmina was not the only important outpost of the Dutch Republic.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the 300-year anniversary of the WIC led to an upsurge in the studies on Dutch maritime expansion and the Dutch presence in the Atlantic and Africa. But it was only after the 1950s and in the context of African decolonization and the development of Area Studies, that the study of Dutch maritime expansion truly started to gain momentum both in the Netherlands and abroad. African Studies, in particular its concern with assessing the impact of the slave trade on African societies and their contribution to the rise of the West, played a significant role in the advancement of academic knowledge about the Dutch in Atlantic Africa. These studies focused on the Dutch trading companies' trade in commodities and their involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. By the turn of the twenty-first century, scholarship on the Dutch in Africa came under the influence of Atlantic and Global History. This fostered a new wave of studies. Once again the trade in commodities and in enslaved Africans took center stage. But there were also studies that examined new questions, new actors, and new regions, such as the role of private merchants and their business practices in various African regions like Senegambia, Dutch Angola (1640s), the Loango Coast, and the region north of Angola.

This last wave of publications showed that the first contacts between the Dutch Republic and Atlantic Africa date back to the 1590s, when private

merchants of different ethnogeographic and religious backgrounds based in the main port cities (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) started to trade with this region. Both single-handedly and in small partnerships, these merchants traded in various commodities including gold, ivory, hides, beeswax, and African pepper. This commerce was conducted in various ports located in Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the Grain, Gold, and Slave Coasts. Back then, merchants were already involved in the slave trade, but this trade was very small in scale, limited to the Angolan Coast, and catered to the demand for labor in Spanish colonies in the Americas.

To develop commerce with Atlantic Africa, the Republic's merchants relied solely on long-distance voyages and on prefabricated sloops that they transported on board and used for coastal and riverine trade. Over time, these merchants sought a more permanent presence. Initially, they opted to leave commercial agents in small lodges on shore, or aboard lighter vessels along the coast. However, in specific regions such as the Gold Coast and Gulf of Guinea, Portuguese commercial competition and military opposition were strong. Merchants operating there petitioned the Dutch authorities to take measures. They requested military expeditions to conquer territory held by the Portuguese, and the authorities responded with actions such as the attack on São Tomé in 1599. When the merchants asked for the construction of a stronghold on the Gold Coast, Fort Nassau was built at Mouri in 1612. The merchants also wanted a commercial company established, and this led to the creation of the WIC in 1621. In all these responses, the States General, the Admiralty of Amsterdam, and the city of Amsterdam played a key role.

In 1624, the beginning of the WIC operations brought about important changes. Private merchants were no longer allowed to trade. The Company took over Portuguese possessions, including the Gold Coast forts (Elmina, Axim, and Shama), as well as Fort Arguin (Mauritania), Fort Gorée (Senegal), São Tomé, and Luanda (Angola). In connection with the conquest of Dutch Brazil, the WIC also began to engage in slave trading. In the 1640s, Luanda became the main port for Dutch slave trade, but from the 1650s until the late eighteenth century, Ardra (Bight of Benin), Loango, and ports north of the River Congo fulfilled that role.

Yet, few studies have delved deeply into the Dutch activities in these regions and the role of Africans in this history. More research is needed on the Dutch relationship with African authorities, economic elites, and local populations living around Dutch strongholds and posts, the impact of Dutch activities on local societies, and Dutch slave ownership on the African coasts.

Martin Bossenbroek

Black Hollanders

The British government was suspicious when it discovered, in 1836, that the Dutch general Jan Verveer had traveled to West Africa to recruit men for the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). He went to Kumasi of all places, the capital of the Ashanti kingdom, which was infamous for its slave hunting and human sacrifice. It was unthinkable that the recruits were volunteers, concluded Lord Palmerston, the British minister of foreign affairs. This had to be slave trade. London protested the Dutch mission in no uncertain terms.

The British had both the right to speak and the power to do so. Ever since they had abolished the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1834) in their overseas empire, they had used gunboat diplomacy to put increasing pressure on other countries to follow their humanitarian example. The Netherlands had already agreed to cease trading in enslaved Africans. Was The Hague now trying to sneakily go back on its own promise?

King William I hastily tried to ease British suspicions. After the Dutch victory in the Java War (1825–1830), he had set his sights on expanding the empire's authority in Sumatra. His right-hand man, Johannes van den Bosch, had a plan: reinforce the KNIL with companies of Swiss and African soldiers. But even though this merchant king was now also a conqueror, William knew that he could not afford a conflict with powerful Great Britain.

So, the Dutch foreign minister, Verstolk van Soelen, pulled out all the stops on the king's behalf, sending a flurry of communiqués to reassure Palmerston. Time and again, he stressed that General Verveer had been sent to Africa with clear instructions. The recruitment was indeed aimed at enslaved Africans with origins in Ashanti's neighboring countries, but these potential recruits were given a free choice. If they wished to sign on with the Dutch colonial army, they would first be bought free for eighty to one hundred guilders each. They would then pay back that amount in installments during their fifteen years of military service.

After their first contract expired, they could again decide for themselves whether to sign up for another tour of duty in the Dutch East Indies or to return to the Gold Coast. In short, Verstolk van Soelen argued, this was not slave trade but contract labor, and actually even philanthropic in nature. Thanks to the KNIL, the African recruits would escape a miserable existence as slaves followed by a certain death by sacrifice.

Palmerston was not truly convinced, but he decided to give the Netherlands the benefit of the doubt, and by 1841, two thousand Africans had been enlisted in the Dutch colonial army. The British continued to regularly sound the alarm, however. When in that same year, African units in Sumatra staged a mutiny, William I's son and successor, William II, decided to abandon the experiment.

Recruitment was resumed in 1860. Over the next eleven years, another thousand Africans joined the KNIL. The recruitment ended for good in 1872, when the Dutch ceded the Gold Coast to Great Britain. This was much to the chagrin of the army command in the East Indies, because, with the exception of that one mutiny, the *Belanda Hitam*, or Black Hollanders, had built up an outstanding reputation. They had proven themselves to be suitable colonial troops; they were able to handle the climate and the exhausting day marches, they were fearless in battle, and they did not fraternize with the Indonesian population, with the exception of local women, that is, with whom some of them started families.

About six hundred Africans settled permanently in Java after their service in the KNIL. They became the progenitors of the tight-knit Indo-African communities that supplied generations of enlisted men to the KNIL. After decolonization, most of their descendants sought refuge in the Netherlands. Some stayed there, while others moved on, to live in the United States, Canada, Suriname, or Brazil.[1]

Notes

1 Martin Bossenbroek, *Volk voor Indië: De werving van Europese militairen voor de Nederlandse koloniale dienst 1814–1909* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren, 1992); Ineke van Kessel, *Zwarte Hollanders: Afrikaanse soldaten in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005); Griselda Molemans and Armando Ello, *Zwarte huid, Oranje hart: Afrikaanse KNIL-nazaten in de diaspora* (Amsterdam: Quasar Books & Multimedia, 2010).

Martin Bossenbroek

Tipping Point: 1873

The tipping point was a package deal with far-reaching consequences on three continents. In 1873, when the Netherlands started the Aceh War in north Sumatra, Great Britain launched a punitive expedition against the Ashanti kingdom on the African Gold Coast, and the first Hindustani contract laborers from British India arrived in Suriname. At first glance, these events seemed to be unrelated, but they were in fact the coordinated parts of a diplomatic master plan.

The plan was devised by Dutch Minister of Colonies Engelbertus de Waal. During his short term in office (1868–1870), he set in motion a radical change of course in Dutch colonial policy. His agrarian law and sugar law put a stop to the Cultivation System, the colonial government's monopoly on growing and trading tropical produce, especially coffee, sugar, tea, and indigo. From that point on, private companies were free to enter the market and could also introduce new crops such as tobacco and rubber.

Just as important as these legislative changes was De Waal's diplomatic contribution. There had been talks for some time with Great Britain about three separate issues. Of those three, the Aceh question was the most urgent for the Netherlands. In 1824, The Hague had committed to protecting the shipping route through the Strait of Malacca from piracy without infringing on the independence of the Sultanate of Johor, which ruled over the region encompassing the Strait. That had always been a difficult task, but the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the resulting intensification of shipping along the Acehnese coast had made it next to impossible. In its ambition to prove itself as a true colonial power, the Netherlands now urged Britain to give it free rein in suppressing the "den of thieves" that was Aceh.

That was not De Waal's only worrisome dossier. After the abolition of slavery in Suriname and the Antilles on July 1, 1863, a ten-year period of state supervision was imposed. As that period approached its conclusion in July 1873, fears grew in The Hague that there would be an exodus from Suriname's plantations. The Netherlands sought a replacement for the anticipated loss of workers and hoped to draw new ones from the large pool of potential labor in British India. But that, too, would require London's permission.

Despite strong objections in military and mercantile circles, De Waal saw the Dutch forts on the Gold Coast as a bargaining chip. He considered the colonial interests in Southeast Asia and Latin America more important than West Africa. The British were interested in an exchange that could strengthen their position on the Gold Coast, so they accepted The Hague's proposal. Both the Dutch and British parliaments objected, but in the end, the deal was cemented in 1871 in the Anglo-Dutch Treaties on Sumatra, the Gold Coast, and the recruitment of British-Indian contract workers for Suriname.

The inhabitants of the regions affected quickly learned what the two colonial powers had cooked up. On April 8, 1873, a Dutch expeditionary force landed on the coast of Aceh. The quick victory that the Dutch expected did not materialize. This "disciplinary" operation descended into a protracted war that cost both sides tens of thousands of lives. The "pacification" of Aceh was not completed until 1914. According to the Acehnese, the war did not end until 1942, when the Japanese occupied the Dutch East Indies.

For the Gold Coast, too, the plan had violent consequences. There, it was the Ashanti who bore the brunt of it. A British military unit landed on September 27, 1873, to make the 250-kilometer trek to the capital, Kumasi, passable for the main force. The operation succeeded. Kumasi was razed to the ground, and the Ashanti were presented with a bill for the costs of the expedition, to the amount of 1,500 kilograms of gold. They were also forbidden to do any further slave hunting among neighboring populations or to ritually sacrifice their enslaved victims—measures that served as the humanitarian justification for the British operation.

The outcome for Suriname was less violent, but just as consequential. On June 5, 1873, the *Lalla Rookh* docked at Paramaribo with the first 399 migrant workers on board from British India. From that moment until 1916, more than 34,000 Hindustanis arrived in Suriname to work on the

plantations. Most of their descendants settled in Suriname, and later many left for the Netherlands. While today's descendants of the enslaved in both Suriname and the Netherlands mark the end of slavery with the July 1 commemoration called *Keti Koti* (broken chains), the Hindustani Surinamese community, which is now fourteen times bigger than it originally was, commemorates June 5, a day which they call *Prawas Din* (The Day of Immigration).[1]

Notes

1 Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme: Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870–1902* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche leeuw, 1985); Paul van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1980); J. Woltring, *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland 1848–1919. Tweede periode, eerste deel, 1871–1874* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962).

Abstract

Slavery and colonialism have left a lasting impact in South Africa. From the 1650s on, approximately 63,000 enslaved people from around the Indian Ocean were shipped to the Cape of Good Hope, where their descendants were born into slavery. They worked alongside Khoisan forced laborers who were dispossessed by colonial expansion. The enslaved at the Cape resisted from the outset. Khoikhoi and San peoples fought against expansion in a series of violent conflicts; the enslaved resisted the conditions of slavery in many ways, including by fleeing. Colonization and slavery impacted the environment as land was carved up for private ownership and used to cultivate foreign crops. The voices of the enslaved resonate today as research unearths this painful past.

Keywords: slavery; coercion; environment; resistance; silence; settler colonialism