

---

# Dodging Rebellion: Politics and Gender in the Berbice Slave Uprising of 1763

---

MARJOLEINE KARS

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1763, SLAVES IN the Dutch colony of Berbice on the Caribbean coast of South America launched a massive rebellion. Viewed from a distance, the uprising appears to fit the normal pattern of New World slave revolts, though it stretched over an unusually long period of time. The number of insurgents expanded rapidly as rebels set fire to plantations. They killed several dozen Europeans and sent the rest fleeing. In no time, the rebellion encompassed practically all of the 4,000 to 5,000 slaves in Berbice, an apparently united force. The insurgents controlled the colony until the arrival of an army from the Netherlands. As the rebels ran out of food, weapons, and ammunition, the attacking regulars and their Amerindian allies killed scores and captured hundreds. As the Dutch regained their colony, they executed 125 men and 3 women in gruesome ways.<sup>1</sup> Such stories are familiar—rebels against colonizers, freedom-seekers against oppressors, in a battle for home rule.

But the experiences of one enslaved Berbician woman named Charmante indicate that the 1763 rebellion is not so easy to define as one might think. Charmante lived and worked on a large plantation called Helvetia. The day before the rebellion started, Helvetia's overseer, Johannes Meijer, accused her and another woman, an

I would like to thank the hosts and participants of the Atlantic World Workshop at New York University, the Early Modern Global History Seminar at Georgetown University, and "Black Resistance in the Age of Revolution: A Symposium Commemorating the Bicentennial of the 1811 Louisiana Slave Revolt" at Tulane University for their insightful comments on earlier drafts. I also gratefully acknowledge financial assistance from the American Philosophical Society, and fellowships from NEH, the John Carter Brown Library, and the Dresher Center for the Humanities at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Critical readings by Jessica Berman, Natalie Zemon Davis, Lee Gould, Woody Holton, Karen Lubieniecki, and Michael McDonnell improved earlier versions, as did the insightful comments of the members of my department's writing group: Kate Brown, Christy Chapin, Amy Froide, Susan McDonough, Andrew Nolan, Meredith Oyen, and Dan Ritschel. I am particularly grateful to Woody Holton and Kate Brown, who deserve sainthood for all they did to improve the piece. Peter H. Wood kindly cast his keen editorial eye over the near-final version, as did the *AHR*'s magnificent Jane Lyle. Last but not least, I wish to thank the editors of the *AHR*, Konstantin Dierks, Sarah Knott, and Robert A. Schneider, as well as the journal's (many) anonymous readers, for their encouragement and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> The Berbice Rebellion has been little studied. There are only two published accounts, both in Dutch, from 1770 and 1888, respectively: Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wilde Kust in Zuid America . . .*, 2 vols. (1770; repr., Amsterdam, 1974); and P. M. Netscher, *Geschiedenis van de koloniën Essequibo, Demerara en Berbice, van de vestiging der Nederlanders aldaar tot op onzen tijd* (The Hague, 1888). See also Ineke Velzing, "De Berbice Slavenopstand, 1763" (M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1979); and Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680–1791*, ed. Maria J. L. van Yperen (Assen, Netherlands, 1985), which made limited use of archival materials.

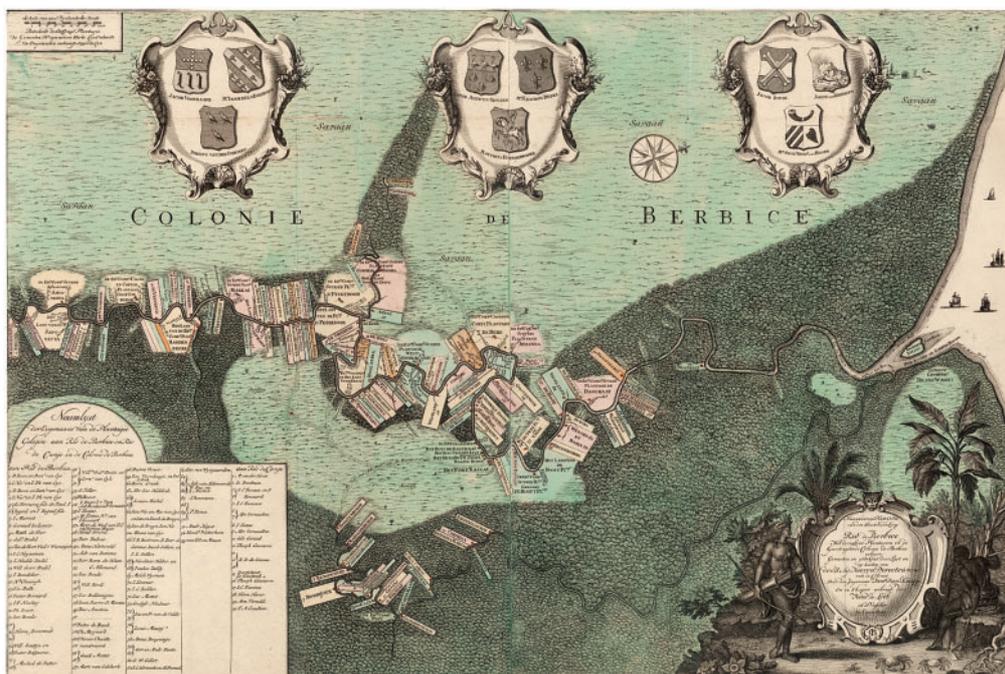


FIGURE 1: “Naaekeurige Plattegrond van den Staat en den Loop van Rio de Berbice. Met derzelver Plantagien in de Geotreyerde colonie de Berbice gelegen Gemeenten en getekent door Last en op kosten van de Ed: Ag: Heeren Directeuren van de Colonie Door den Ingenieur Jan Dan:l Knapp En in t' koper gebracht door Hend: de Leth in de Visscher te Amsterdam.” This map shows the plantations along the Berbice and Canje Rivers as they existed in 1742. Company plantations are clearly marked “D’Ed. Comp. Suyker Pl.’ge.” The map also shows the dense vegetation, as well the many creeks and savannahs. NG-477, Rijksmuseum.

Amerindian whose name was not recorded, of trying to poison him with a dish of bad liver. Meijer ordered his *bomba* (driver) Prins and two other enslaved men, Boeseroen and Coridon, to string up the women and beat them. Well into the flogging, Charmante warned that her fellow sufferer was near death, and Meijer ordered the beating halted—too late, however, to save the Indian woman, who died that night. The next day, colonial officials arrived to investigate, and they submitted a report to the governor stating that Meijer had violated an unwritten rule against beating slaves around the head and neck. The governor probably never had a chance to read the report because the Berbice Slave Rebellion broke out later that very day, February 27.<sup>2</sup>

The gender inequalities that had Prins lashing Charmante on the eve of the rebellion placed weapons in his hands a few days later to fight the Dutch. He and his fellow disciplinarian Boeseroen became leaders of the revolt, deploying their violence against their masters rather than their fellow enslaved. Charmante chose a different tack, surviving the long rebellion through a combination of wits and sheer luck. Just as she had managed to withstand the beating, she ducked the violence of the rebellion by quietly living on her plantation and hiding out in the bush when necessary before returning voluntarily to the Dutch, choosing re-enslavement over a

<sup>2</sup> Getuigenis [testimony] van E. F. Harkenoth, fiscaal, en Adriaan Gelissen, 2/27/1763, Sociëteit van Berbice, nummer toegang 1.05.05, inventarisnummer 363, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, hereafter SvB and inventory number. All translations from archival sources are mine.

life-threatening freedom. Under questioning, she supplied the Dutch with names of rebels, but was careful to finger only people who had already been executed.<sup>3</sup>

Most scholarship on slave rebellions has emphasized the actions of martial leaders such as Prins rather than Berbicians like Charmante, whose primary approach to the rebellion was to try to keep out of its way. Such strategic acts of dodging—pleas for mercy, backyard maronage, surrender, and limited cooperation—are not what historians usually emphasize when they write about insurrection. Scholars have written about slave insurgency largely as united attempts at self-liberation through armed struggle. But seeking freedom through violence is just a small part of the story of the Berbice Rebellion, and it defines the activities of only some men and many fewer women. The experiences of the colony's non-combatants, most of whom, but not all, were women, can move us beyond the agency of whips and guns, and provide a sense of how the majority of people stayed alive and exercised a modicum of autonomy and choice in a volatile and unpredictable situation.

To focus on women is to notice that women overlapped with, though they were not contiguous with, another group that seldom receives much attention in scholarship on slave revolts. As the unusually rich and little-known Berbice records suggest, many enslaved people in that colony were neither purposeful rebels nor committed collaborators or loyalists. Eager to remain both masterless and alive, Berbice slaves such as Charmante struggled to dodge *all* combatants, whether the Dutch and their Amerindian allies or the rebels. Dodging took different forms: people lived quietly on their plantations, hiding out in the bush whenever rebels or Dutch soldiers appeared; they migrated from plantation to plantation looking for food and safety; they labored for the Dutch or the rebels when that was inevitable or seemed the best option; they turned themselves in when necessary, and provided carefully calibrated testimony about their experiences. Examining such survival strategies exposes the lived experience of women, and men, in rebellion. Foregrounding the experiences of women moves us from privileging the military conflicts between Europeans and rebels, the anticolonial struggle over home rule, to focusing on the internal politics of enslaved people as they struggled over who should rule at home.<sup>4</sup>

Studying the lived experience of people in rebellion is one way in which we can respond to recent calls to supplement agency as a framing device in the study of slavery and resistance.<sup>5</sup> Anthropologists and historians alike have pointed out that the utility of “agency,” which is infinitely expandable and too easily equated with liberal notions of individual choice, “asserting one’s humanity,” and resistance, has run its course. We know that all people have agency—the question is, as James Grossman

<sup>3</sup> [Examination] No. 60, Charmante van Helvetia, 5/7/1764, SvB 135. All references below that start with a number followed by a name, plantation, and date are records of judicial examinations of enslaved people carried out by the Dutch. These examinations can be found in SvB 135. Please note that neither the names of people nor those of plantations are spelled consistently. While I standardize spelling in the text, in the notes I use the spelling as used in the particular record cited.

<sup>4</sup> The formulation of “home rule” vs. “who should rule at home,” now widely used in discussions of the American Revolution, was coined by Carl L. Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison, Wis., 1909), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 113–124. See also Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173–193.

recently put it, what they do with it.<sup>6</sup> So what can we learn from the experiences of enslaved people, especially women, in the midst of a messy, dangerous, and tenuous process of self-emancipation?<sup>7</sup> And what do those experiences have to tell us about the gender politics involved? The question, in other words, is not the role of women in rebellion, but rather the role of rebellion in the lives of women.

For all that we have learned about enslaved women in the Atlantic world in the past two decades, we know surprisingly little about their experiences in collective resistance.<sup>8</sup> Most studies of collective resistance examine conspiracies, which were much more prevalent than actual revolts.<sup>9</sup> Historians of actual rebellion have not found a lot to say about non-combatants or women, in part because even “major” rebellions were usually crushed quickly, leaving little evidence about how members of the larger enslaved community were engaged or affected.<sup>10</sup> Even more extensive and

<sup>6</sup> James Grossman, “Natalie Zemon Davis, the FBI, and the Work of Historians,” August 7, 2013, AHA Today, *News, Community, and Historical Thinking* (blog), <http://blog.historians.org/2013/08/natalie-davis-the-fbi-and-the-work-of-historians/>.

<sup>7</sup> See also a recent call to study a “politics of survival”: Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1231–1249.

<sup>8</sup> I am distinguishing between women’s participation in armed slave revolts and slave women’s day-to-day resistance, which has in fact been a topic of considerable interest. See the essays in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004), chap. 6; and the essays on enslaved women in *Women in Western Systems of Slavery*, Special Issue, *Slavery and Abolition* 26, no. 2 (August 2005).

<sup>9</sup> While we may learn much from conspiracy records, they obviously cannot tell us anything about how the rebellion would have played out. Because the plans were never tested, the records of conspiracies tend to stress unity and singularity of purpose over division and disagreement. Such records are also silent about what happened to those who refused to participate or were not part of the planning. Moreover, scholars sometimes appraise conspiracies less as foiled rebellions than as evidence of planters’ fears, and as such shaped by European perceptions, including those of gender, rendering women more invisible. See, for instance, Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 58, no. 4 (October 2001): 915–976, as well as the responses to his article, “Forum: The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, Part 2,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 135–202; and Jason T. Sharples, “The Flames of Insurrection: Fearing Slave Conspiracy in Early America, 1670–1780” (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> The oft-cited Demerara Rebellion of 1823, for instance, lasted a mere two days, and so far has yielded little specific information about women. See Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York, 1994), 192, 179, 183. The so-called Aponte Rebellion in Cuba consisted of a series of conspiracies and twenty-four-hour revolts over the course of just two months in 1812. See Matt D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), 2, 135, 56, 161, 190. The 1816 Drivers’ or Bussa Rebellion in Barbados lasted three days, but the only woman about whom we know anything is Nanny Grigg, a literate domestic-turned-ideologue who formulated powerful reasons why slaves had to fight for their emancipation. See Craton, *Testing the Chains*, chap. 20; and Hilary McD. Beckles, “The Slave-Drivers’ War: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion,” in Glenford D. Howe and Don D. Marshall, eds., *The Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2001), 1–33. The celebrated 1835 Bahia Rebellion in Brazil lasted just three hours. See João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Baltimore, 1993; original Portuguese ed. 1986). Most revolts in North America proved short-lived (though reprisals could last for weeks or months). The 1739 Stono Rebellion in South Carolina lasted one day, the 1811 Louisiana Rebellion lasted two, and the 1831 Nat Turner Rebellion in Virginia was over in less than forty-eight hours; all are similarly silent about women’s participation. For Stono, see Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (New York, 2010). For Louisiana, see Nathan A. Buman, “To Kill Whites: The 1811 Louisiana Slave Insurrection” (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 2008); and Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America’s Largest Slave Revolt* (New York, 2011). For Nat Turner, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York,

longer-lasting insurrections yield little specific information about women.<sup>11</sup> For instance, women remain largely invisible in Tacky's Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760–1761, a series of conspiracies and actual revolts involving well over a thousand slaves during a period of more than a year.<sup>12</sup> One would expect that the massive and long-lasting slave uprisings in the French Caribbean at the end of the eighteenth century would have the most to tell us about women, and yet the yield has proven meager. We know more about women's activities during the struggle to preserve emancipation after Napoleon decided to re-impose slavery than we do about women's experiences in the slave revolts that started the decade.<sup>13</sup> And despite the length and size of these uprisings, David Geggus summarized what we know about women in Haiti in less than a page.<sup>14</sup> In sum, in the literature on slave rebellions, discussion of women has generally occupied a few paragraphs at best, and the focus tends to be on women's possible participation as leaders.<sup>15</sup>

Why do we know so little about women? First, there is the nature and availability of evidence. Most rebellions were small or were suppressed within days or hours, leaving few traces of their organization or how people shaped emancipation. Since women were rarely conspicuous among those bearing arms, they usually remain anonymous in the records, which denies them subjectivity and complicates historical research into female activities.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the ideological blinders of colonists in-

---

2003), which also contains a highly speculative essay about women in that rebellion by Mary Kemp Davis, "What Happened in This Place? In Search of the Female Slave in the Nat Turner Slave Insurrection," 162–178.

<sup>11</sup> For the 1733 rebellion on St. John, which lasted several months, see Sandra E. Greene, "From Whence They Came: A Note on the Influence of West African Ethnic and Gender Relations on the Organizational Character of the 1733 St. John Slave Rebellion," in George F. Tyson and Arnold R. Highfield, eds., *The Danish West Indian Slave Trade: Virgin Islands Perspectives* (St. Croix, 1994), 47–67; and Ray A. Kea, "'When I die, I shall return to my own land': An 'Amina' Slave Rebellion in the Danish West Indies, 1733–1734," in John Hunwick and Nancy Lawler, eds., *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society, Ghanaian and Islamic, in Honor of Ivor Wilks* (Evanston, Ill., 1996), 159–193.

<sup>12</sup> Some have pointed to Cubah, an enslaved woman elevated to what may have been the role of the queen mother of the Ashanti in a conspiracy in Kingston during this time. Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 132. Vincent Brown mentions four women who were exported for their involvement in an actual rebellion; Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the Worlds of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 152–153. There is no book-length treatment of Tacky's Revolt. For accounts, see Craton, *Testing the Chains*, chap. 11; Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750–86* (London, 1989), chap. 5; and Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 170–174. Most recently, Maria Alessandra Bollettino, "Slavery, War, and Britain's Atlantic Empire: Black Soldiers, Sailors, and Rebels in the Seven Years' War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2009), has argued that historians have wrongly followed contemporaries in seeing Tacky's Revolt as a single event.

<sup>13</sup> See Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635–1848* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001), 126–132.

<sup>14</sup> David P. Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," in Gaspar and Hine, *More than Chattel*, 259–278, here 272.

<sup>15</sup> Some scholars include women by writing about "men and women" or "slaves" in an inclusive way; such universalizing usage unfortunately renders women less, rather than more, visible. There is more evidence about women once slavery was abolished. See Judith Kafka, "Action, Reaction and Interaction: Slave Women in Resistance in the South of Saint Domingue, 1793–94," *Slavery and Abolition* 18, no. 2 (1997): 48–72. While Kafka uses the words "slave women" in her title, her article makes clear that she is in fact writing about female laborers after slavery was abolished in Saint Domingue on October 31, 1793, when the French established a highly coercive labor regime.

<sup>16</sup> For an exploration of the methodological difficulties of researching nameless subaltern women, see Durba Ghosh, "Decoding the Nameless: Gender, Subjectivity, and Historical Methodologies in

vestigating rebellions have shielded women from suspected involvement, extensive questioning, prosecution, and punishment. Planters could neither imagine nor tolerate the idea of women's deep involvement in collective resistance.<sup>17</sup> Finally, historians of rebellion have tended to see men's experiences as normative.<sup>18</sup> They have trained their lenses on leaders, rather than on the mass of the enslaved. They have privileged soldiering as the ultimate expression of collective rebelliousness, and they have assumed that there are similarities in male and female non-combatants' experiences. Women's invisibility has thus been exacerbated by most scholars' emphasis on slave rebels' political and military confrontations with planters and soldiers, a trend that privileges conflicts between rebels and slaveholders over relations among the enslaved in rebellion. Thanks to the rich records pertaining to the long-lasting Berbice insurrection, the internal dynamics and politics of rebellion and the role that gender played in the struggle for autonomy and emancipation become manifest. Placing women front and center tells us a great deal. It highlights the ways in which rebel leaders subjugated their fellow slaves, enslaving some in the process. It calls into question the liberating nature of the slave rebellion itself. And it demonstrates the gendered nature of both resistance and emancipation. Controlling women, and their productive and reproductive capacities, became an integral part of political power among male rebels.

CLOSE TO 5,000 ENSLAVED PEOPLE of African descent, 300 native slaves, and 350 Europeans, many of them not Dutch, inhabited the riparian colony of Berbice on the eve of the rebellion. Water dominated life, as people used the Berbice River and its many creeks for drinking, laundry, bathing, fishing, trading, and visiting, moving about in dugouts and small tent boats.<sup>19</sup> Indian trading paths fanned out to neighboring colonies and native towns deep in the continent, where few Europeans dared venture. There were no plantations near the coast, where tides necessitated expensive flood control. Instead, starting some thirty miles inland, plantations were strung out along the languid river like beads on a string. The small hamlet of New Amsterdam had grown up around Fort Nassau some fifty-five miles upriver from the ocean. Beyond the sliver of riverside plantations stretched vast savannahs and rainforests, uncharted by Europeans and inhabited by Amerindians, with whom the Dutch maintained close ties. Ara-

---

Reading the Archives of Colonial India," in Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2004), 297–316. For an exploration of the ways in which archives obscure women's voices, and can be made to reveal them, see Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Urbana, Ill., 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. David Barry Gaspar, "From 'the Sense of Their Slavery': Slave Women and Resistance in Antigua, 1632–1763," in Gaspar and Hine, *More than Chattel*, 218–238, here 233.

<sup>18</sup> Claire Robertson and Marsha Robinson, "Re-Modeling Slavery as If Women Mattered," in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanna Miers, and Joseph C. Miller eds., *Women and Slavery*, vol. 2: *The Modern Atlantic* (Athens, Ohio, 2008), 253–283; and Aisha Finch, "'What Looks Like a Revolution': Enslaved Women and the Gendered Terrain of Slave Insurgencies in Cuba, 1843–1844," *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 112–134. Finch's fascinating new book, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841–1844* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2015), which came to hand after my article was essentially completed, pays considerable attention to gender (and non-elite men).

<sup>19</sup> For Berbice today, see Marjoleine Kars, "Adventures in Research: Chasing the Past in Guyana," *Uncommon Sense* 124 (Fall 2007), <http://oieahc.wm.edu/uncommon/124/guyana.cfm>.

wak (today Lokono) and Waraos, known to the Dutch as “our Indians,” lived close to Dutch plantations, while Carib (Kali’na) and Akawaios lived deeper into the interior and maintained greater independence, though treaties bound them to assist the Dutch in case of insurrection or invasion. In Berbice, the Carib prevented the development of Maroon communities, so prevalent in neighboring Suriname, and indigenous allies were crucial as well in the suppression of the 1763 rebellion.<sup>20</sup>

On the eve of the uprising, the Society of Berbice, the owner of the colony, employed some 1,400 slaves.<sup>21</sup> More than a thousand of these “Company slaves” worked and lived on the Society’s eleven sugar plantations. The others served as artisans and service personnel in tiny New Amsterdam, the seat of government, and at various military and trading posts.<sup>22</sup> The remaining 3,500 or so slaves grew not sugar, but coffee, cacao, and cotton on eighty to ninety private (i.e., not Company-owned) plantations on the Berbice and on another thirty or forty estates on its tributary, the Canje River. Plantations in Berbice were not large by Caribbean standards. While most Company plantations and a few private ones housed more than a hundred enslaved people each, most estates counted fewer than fifty.<sup>23</sup> Since few inventories of private plantations have been preserved, we are in the dark about even basic demographic details such as sex ratios, numbers of children, ethnicity, and mortality rates. It is likely that, as in most of the Caribbean and neighboring Suriname, Africans outnumbered those born in the colonies, and men outstripped women. On Company plantations, some of which dated back to the seventeenth century, and for which inventories do exist, women outnumbered men, and it is likely that a majority of people were creoles. Most plantations also held a few indigenous slaves, as household slaves and hunters.<sup>24</sup>

After several years of widespread epidemics that weakened the colonial regime and acute hunger among the enslaved due to disruptions caused by the Seven Years’ War, the rebellion broke out on a few plantations in the heart of the colony on Sunday, February 27, 1763. The two main leaders, the self-titled Governor Coffij and his second in command, Captain Accarra, explained in a series of letters (allegedly written by Prins van Helvetia) that their masters’ bad treatment and “not getting their due”—so often the immediate impetus for resistance—had forced them to revolt.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For the history of Dutch-native relations on the Wild Coast, as well as the role of natives in the suppression of the 1763 revolt, see Marjoleine Kars, “‘Cleansing the Land’: Dutch-Amerindian Cooperation in the Suppression of the 1763 Slave Rebellion in Dutch Guiana,” in Wayne E. Lee, ed., *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2011), 251–276.

<sup>21</sup> The Society of Berbice, a joint-stock company chartered by the Estates General, appointed the governors of Berbice, who in turn appointed local planters to the Council of Policy and Criminal Justice, which policed public order, issued ordinances, and sat as a court in civil and criminal cases.

<sup>22</sup> The roughly 1,100 people on the Company plantations broke down in 1762 as follows: 402 women, 334 men, 53 girls, and 78 boys, plus 216 younger children and 23 Indians. Inventories of Company plantations, dated June, September, and October 1762, SvB 133.

<sup>23</sup> Klaas Kramer, “Hoe Berbice niet ‘naar de Besbiesjes ging’: Economische Ontwikkeling van Particuliere Plantagies in Berbice, 1753–1779. Export en slavenopstand” (M.A. thesis, University of Nijmegen, 1986), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Treaties forbade the enslavement of “friendly Indians.” Instead, indigenous slaves sold in Berbice, as in neighboring Suriname, came mostly from the interior.

<sup>25</sup> Most of these letters have been published in Ursy M. Lichtveld and Jan Voorhoeve, eds., *Suriname: Spiegel der vaderlandse kooplieden: Een historisch leesboek* (Zwolle, 1958), 71–89. The originals are in the Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

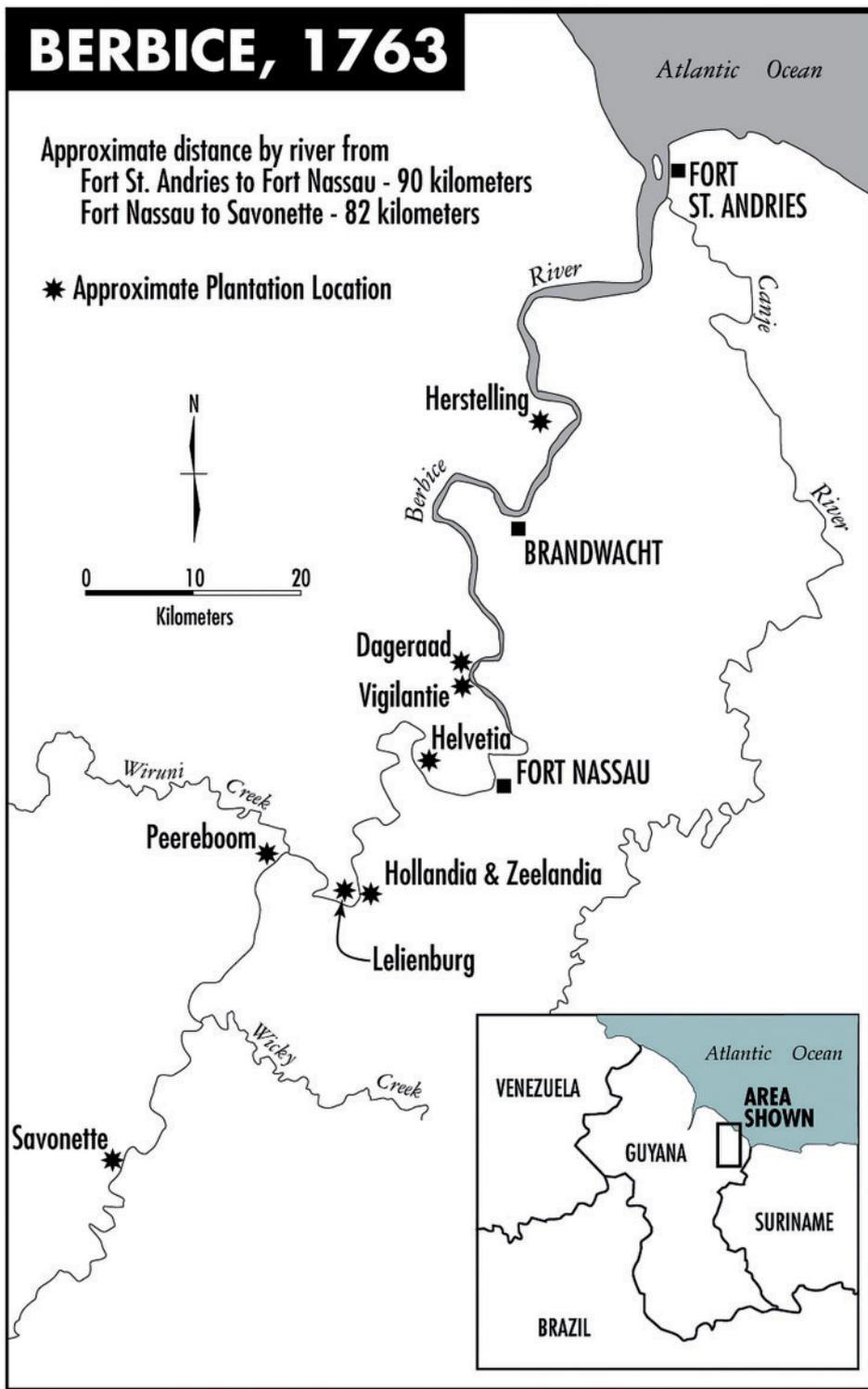


FIGURE 2: Berbice, 1763. Map designed and produced by the UMBC Cartographic Services.

The insurgency spread rapidly, aided by the utter collapse of Dutch authority. Well aware that they were vastly outnumbered, colonists panicked. Militia officers, government officials, and private planters abandoned their stations and plantations en masse, ignoring the governor's calls to make a stand. After the rebels killed some forty European men, women, and children in a massacre at week's end on the Peereboom plantation, the Dutch abandoned Fort Nassau and New Amsterdam, crowded onto several ships, and hurried toward the coast, where, after several weeks, most left for safer shores. At the end of March, the few who remained were determined to return and fight back. Led by Berbice governor Simon van Hoogenheim and reinforced with a hundred European soldiers from Suriname, they sailed back upriver. The Europeans dug themselves in on the Company plantation Dageraad, where they would spend the next fifteen months.

While details of the rebellion's planning are obscured in the sources, it is clear that people organized first on their individual plantations, and next across them through membership in "nations," especially the "Amina." Though people of many different nations as well as creoles participated, Amina slaves from the Gold Coast of West Africa predominated among the senior leadership from the beginning, as they did in many New World slave revolts.<sup>26</sup> Male leaders and their growing forces moved from plantation to plantation to assess support, defuse opposition, and conscript new soldiers. They raided plantations, consolidating plunder at their headquarters, and they torched crops and buildings, impeding the return of the Europeans. To prevent resistant slaves from staying on their plantations, or to punish them for refusing to join the insurrection, they burned their huts and gardens as well. The rebels re-enslaved some resisters. They pressed women along as wives and workers and men as soldiers. They moved quickly to organize themselves politically, appointing men to civil and military offices, and they imposed an iron discipline. On Company

<sup>26</sup> Nations were fluid communities of people who came from the same general geographic area in West Africa and who could communicate because they shared a language. In Dutch colonies, "Amina" or "Elmina" referred to Akan and Ga speakers from the Gold Coast and its hinterland; in Africa these people would not have regarded themselves as one group, as they would have belonged to different ethnicities and political polities. Thus, nations did not reflect particular ethnic identities in Africa; rather, they were diasporic institutions forged in the Americas for social and religious fellowship. The same people were known as "Mina" among the Spanish and Portuguese, and as "Coromantee" among the English. See John K. Thornton, "War, the State, and Religious Norms in 'Coromantee' Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation," in Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), 181–200; and Robin Law, "Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of Mina (Again)," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247–267. For a useful review of debates about "nation," see Alexander X. Byrd, "Eboe, Country, Nation, and Gustavus Vassa's *Interesting Narrative*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 63, no. 1 (January 2006): 123–148; and John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1998), 321–334. For a thorough discussion of the historiography of who constituted the "Akan," see Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, N.Y., 2011), 17–21. On the Gold Coast, the powerful and militaristic Amina were known to be deeply involved in slaving and, according to West African informants on the Danish island of St. Jan in the 1760s, little inclined to work. See Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan, insbesondere der dasigen Neger und der Mission der evangelischen Brüder unter denselben: Kommentierte Ausgabe des vollständigen Manuskriptes aus dem Archiv der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität Herrnhut*, Erster Teil, ed. Gudrun Meier, Stephan Palmié, Peter Stein, and Horst Ulbricht (Berlin, 2000), 365–456. The Amina were behind many rebellions in the New World, such as on St. Jan in 1733 and in British Jamaica in 1760. In both cases, they intended to create a West African state with themselves on top.

plantations, where open resistance to the rebellion was greatest, they installed new bosses. Using Dutch language terms, they called these men *heren* (literally “gentlemen,” but also used for masters or officials) and charged them with overseeing the production of sugar and rum.

Over the spring and summer, rebels and Europeans (the latter reinforced by 200 more sailors and soldiers from St. Eustatius) warily eyed each other, with both sides vying for time. The Dutch lacked sufficient forces to retake the colony swiftly. Instead, they were urging native allies to move into position when an offensive finally came. The rebels, meanwhile, had carried out two large but unsuccessful attacks on Dageraad, where Dutch artillery gave the Europeans a decided advantage. Unable to kick the Dutch out altogether, the rebels could not themselves flee the colony. It took time and effort to start the gardens deep in the jungle that would be needed to sustain large numbers of people outside the plantation zone. Apparently aware that Maroons in neighboring Suriname had recently reached a deal with the colonial government for their independence, Governor Coffij engaged the Dutch in written negotiations.<sup>27</sup> He boldly suggested that the rebels and their former masters divide the colony in half.<sup>28</sup> Coffij’s unsuccessful negotiations caused significant internal strife, as many of his officers and soldiers had more faith in guns than words.<sup>29</sup> The Dutch, for their part, participated only to gain time until reinforcements from Europe arrived.

By fall, whatever coalition the Amina had thus far put together fragmented, as competing political visions sharpened ethnic divisions. Coffij, a highly creolized, or assimilated, African, was replaced in a coup, after which he committed suicide; Atta, a recently arrived Amina, assumed leadership. The rebellion now became even more clearly a contest for power among different African factions. Meanwhile, in November 1763, with the arrival of the first few hundred reinforcements from the Dutch Republic, colonial forces began a counteroffensive. Sailing upriver in heavily armed ships, they drove rebels and dodgers alike from the plantations and their provision grounds. As planned, Caribs and Arawaks allied with the Dutch prevented the insurgents from establishing villages and gardens in the colony’s hinterland, so refugees hid in creeks and behind plantations, unable to escape the colony’s immediate environs. Early in 1764, the rebels, plagued by hunger and illness and divided by competing political visions, became increasingly mired in a civil war. Amina, Kanga, and Louango moved

<sup>27</sup> The term “Maroons” refers to people who escaped slavery to create independent groups and communities on the outskirts of slave societies. Maroons were particularly prevalent in Suriname. For an introduction to the vast literature, see Marjoleine Kars, “Maroons and Marronage,” in Trevor Burnard, ed., *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Atlantic History* (New York, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> These extraordinary letters provide a rare cache of communications by enslaved people that are examined in my forthcoming book about the Berbice Rebellion. For an examination of the negotiations of Maroons with colonial authorities in neighboring Suriname, which also took place through letters, see Frank Dragtenstein, *Alles voor de vrede: De brieven van Boston Band tussen 1757 en 1763* (Amsterdam, 2009). For evidence that the Berbice rebels considered a pact with the Suriname Maroons, see Dagregister [Daybook] van Gouverneur W. S. van Hoogenheim, 11/23/1763, SvB 226 [hereafter DH and date].

<sup>29</sup> For greater detail about the events of that summer, including a mutiny of European soldiers who ended up joining the rebelling slaves, see Marjoleine Kars, “Policing and Transgressing Borders: Soldiers, Slave Rebels, and the Early Modern Atlantic,” *New West Indian Guide* 83, no. 3/4 (2009): 187–213.

about the colony battling each other as much as the Dutch and Amerindians.<sup>30</sup> Hungry, sick, and “thin as rails,” men and women turned themselves in to the Dutch in increasing numbers.

At the start of 1764, the main body of 600 more reinforcements from the Dutch Republic finally arrived, but they could do little besides relieve the exhausted soldiers stationed at the various posts. Given that the rebels were now scattered inland and were moving around the colony in ever-smaller bands at war with one another, the Dutch found it nearly impossible to mount a large expedition against them. Moreover, they did not want to discourage people from returning on their own accord to the Dutch, as increasing numbers were now doing daily. The colonial authorities were reduced to sending out small reaction patrols whenever native and black scouts spotted rebels, but these patrols did not always arrive in time to find their quarry.<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that it took the Dutch another six months to subdue the last holdouts and regain control of their battered colony.<sup>32</sup>

Located in the heart of the uprising, Helvetia, the site of the fatal beating, burned and bled during the rebellion. With at least sixty enslaved workers, it was one of Berbice's larger plantations. The experiences of Helvetia's people over the course of the insurgency varied, reflecting not only the complexities of the rebellion itself, but also prior, ongoing, and gendered plantation politics and hierarchies. The disciplinarians Prins and Boeseroen became important rebels. Before the plantation manager and his overseer fled, they armed Prins and several other elite slave men to defend the estate. Instead of protecting their master's property, however, the men caught the man-

<sup>30</sup> I have here identified as “Kanga” people whom the Dutch called “Gangoe,” “Cango,” or “Guango.” For the Kanga, an elusive designation, see Oldendorp, *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan*, 378–381. Oldendorp's informants mention that the Amina and the Kanga were traditional enemies, and that the Mandingo were their neighbors. See 378 n. 57 for an identification of the Kanga as Kru speakers, possibly from southern Liberia. See also DH, 3/29/1764, where Van Hoogenheim refers to the forces of Accabiré (the leader of the “Guango”) as “Kangas.” Wilhelms S. M. Hoogbergen, “De Boni-Oorlogen, 1757–1860: Marronage en Guerilla in Oost-Suriname” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Utrecht, 1985), identifies the “Gangu” or “Gango” as Mandingo from an area that encompasses what is now Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast. For an exhaustive investigation of the Kangá in Cuba, which concludes that they came from Sierra Leone, see Joseph C. Dorsey, “‘It Hurt Very Much at the Time’: Patriarchy, Rape Culture, and the Slave Body-Semiotic,” in Linden Lewis, ed., *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville, Fla., 2003), 294–322, here 319–320 n. 25. In Cuba, these people were also referred to as Gangás. Manuel Barcia, *The Great African Slave Revolt of 1825: Cuba and the Fight for Freedom in Matanzas* (Baton Rouge, La., 2012), 14–15, locates them in coastal Upper Guinea (which included Liberia) and also distinguishes them from Mandingas. The three main warring groups in Berbice correspond to the main slave provenance streams into the Dutch Wild Coast: West Central Africa, the Gold Coast, and the Windward Coast. See Rik van Welie, “Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire: A Global Comparison,” *New West Indian Guide* 82, no. 1/2 (2008): 47–96, here 66.

<sup>31</sup> DH, 1/23/1764 to 1/26/1764 and 2/17/1764; Verbalen [there are seven “official reports”] van colonel Jan Marcus de Salve betreffende zijn expeditie naar de kolonie Berbice in verband met een opstand van de negers aldaar, 1763 november 6–1764 juni 11. Met rapport en missiven van de kapitein-generaal van de Unie Lodewijk Ernst hertog van Brunswijk-Wolffenbüttel betreffende de expeditie van colonel De Salve naar de kolonie Berbice, 1764–1765, Archief Staten-Generaal, 1550–1796, nummer toegang 1.01.02, inventarisnummer 9219, Nationaal Archief, The Hague [hereafter ASG and inventory number], Vierde verbael, 2/13/1764 to 2/17/1764. John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, ed. Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1988), provides multiple examples of the ineffectiveness of European soldiers in the bush.

<sup>32</sup> Of the 11 Society plantations, 5 were largely destroyed. More than a third of the 140 private plantations were abandoned, and many others had to be rebuilt from the ground up. The Dutch Estates General spent close to 800,000 guilders to help regain and rebuild the colony—money that was never recouped from the Society of Berbice.

ager on a neighboring plantation, decapitated him, and took his head to the rebels as a sign of their loyalty.<sup>33</sup> Overseer Meijer escaped.<sup>34</sup> Five people from Helvetia, four men and one woman, were among the people the Dutch executed more than a year later on the rack and the pyre for participation in the rebellion. Indeed, while Prins died on the battlefield, his parents were fingered by some of their fellow slaves for setting fire to the plantation and “Christian murder,” and were executed. A Helvetia man named Fortuin became one of the rebellion’s most prominent leaders; he was roasted over a slow fire. But other inhabitants of Helvetia made different choices. Unwilling to join the rebellion, many became Maroons in their own backyards. They hid in the woods behind the plantation for months, evading both the rebels and the Dutch, until, in response to a massive Dutch counteroffensive in the fall of 1763, the rebels forced them upriver, turning them all into refugees. As they wandered about, several were caught by the rebels and put to work. One Helvetia woman, a mother of three, was sacrificed at a rebel leader’s funeral. One man ended up in Amerindian captivity. Those who could manage the journey eventually made their way back to the Dutch in the spring of 1764, a full year after the rebellion had started.<sup>35</sup>

IN MARCH 1764, THE DUTCH BEGAN the process of investigating the culpability of the many slaves in their custody. This process occupied them intermittently during the rest of the year, while the soldiers continued to pursue rebels still at large. Close to a quarter of the enslaved population present in Berbice at the start of the rebellion was missing at its end. This included the 125 men and 3 women who were executed for their participation in the insurgency.<sup>36</sup> Over the course of their investigations, several members of the Governor’s Council, which doubled as the criminal court, questioned close to 900 people, or perhaps as many as half of the remaining adults, either

<sup>33</sup> Jacob Pool to [?], 3/26/1763, Collectie Bentinck, G2-54 I, Koninklijk Huisarchief, The Hague [hereafter CB]; No. 23 Benjamin van Maria Agnes, 3/5/1764; No. 32 Don Quischo van Helvetia, 3/5/1764. Both Prins and Boeseroen, the second disciplinarian, died in the course of the rebellion. The third, Coridon, survived both the insurgency and subsequent investigations by the Dutch. No. 53 Coridon van d’Helvetia, 5/7/1764.

<sup>34</sup> As late as March 1764, the Council noted that the rebellion had prevented Johannes Meijer’s case from being brought to justice. They added that since his actions had gone “too far,” they would pursue his case “on a future and better occasion” in order to make an example of him. Minutes Court, 3/2/1764, SvB 135.

<sup>35</sup> No. 36 Sureman van de Eendragt, 3/6/1764; No. 118 Jan Broek van de Goede Hoop, 3/22/1764; No. 466 Fortuijn [Fortuin] van Helvetia, 6/9/1764; No. 31 Welkom van Helvetia, 3/5/1764, for further details of what happened on that plantation; No. 87 Thomas van Helvetia, 3/13/1764; No. 74 Fortuijn van Maria Agnes, 3/8/1764; No. 54 Antonie van d’Helvetia, 5/7/1764; No. 32 Don Quischo van Helvetia, 3/5/1764; No. 301 Petro van Helvetia, 5/14/1764; No. 61 Lutijn van Helvetia, Criool, 5/7/1764; No. 420 Accarra van de Savonette, 6/7/1764. Prins of Helvetia allegedly wrote the notes that rebel leaders Coffij and Accarra sent the Dutch at the start of the uprising; DH, 5/4/1763. There is no way to know whether the beating of the two women had any relationship to the start of the rebellion. For Boeseroen’s death, see examination of No. 33 Marquis van Helvetia, 3/5/1764; see also No. 53 Coridon van d’Helvetia, 5/7/1764.

<sup>36</sup> At the end of 1764, a mere 3,370 slaves and 116 colonists remained in the colony, a serious reduction from the approximately 5,000 slaves and 350 Europeans in early 1763. Most of the missing slaves had been killed in battles with Amerindians, Dutch soldiers, and each other, or had died of illness, hunger, and exposure. Some 128 had been executed, on four separate occasions in March, April, June, and December 1764. Rebels had killed almost 50 colonists, and a few others may have died in battle. The great majority of Europeans had fled, some with their slaves, to other colonies and the Dutch Republic.

as suspects or as witnesses, generating some 500 manuscript pages of “examinations.”<sup>37</sup> More than a third of those questioned were women.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the depositions of women are short—much shorter than those of men. In part this brevity reflects Dutch gender norms, which led commissioners to doubt that women knew much about insurgency. They asked women few questions and rarely pressed when they were given evasive answers. Women thus experienced less pressure than men to ingratiate themselves with the authorities by fingering people or to feign cooperation by providing information. Women most likely did in fact know less than men about the narrow issues in which the colonial authorities were interested: since men frequently tried to keep women and children out of harm’s way, and women were not officially part of the military and governing structure, women may have missed much of the action. Women’s knowledge of murder or arson, the chief interests of the Dutch examiners, may more often have consisted of hearsay, which counted little in Dutch judicial practice. People could be condemned to death only with a confession or with trustworthy eyewitnesses. Turiba from the plantation Geertruid, for instance, was not even questioned: “as she is blind, we can learn nothing from her,” the examiners noted.<sup>39</sup> However, women clearly knew much more than they divulged; nonetheless, these brief examinations remain an important evidentiary base when they are read attentively and collectively.<sup>40</sup>

In response to specific, and often leading, questions, the enslaved gave careful and strategic answers, mediated by the European clerk, who translated Creole into Dutch, summarized answers, and wrote in the third rather than the first person. The Dutch were not interested in the genesis of the rebellion, nor in the subsequent civil war. They cared about leadership, destruction of property, and, most importantly, “Christian murder.” Thus, re-enslaved people largely spoke about what interested

<sup>37</sup> The Dutch seldom discussed the judicial procedures used to carry out these “examinations,” which were part of the inquisitorial process common in the United Provinces. The examinations list the people’s individual names, the questions they were asked, and their answers. When they were confronted with witnesses or accusers (all themselves slaves), those questions and answers are listed as well. The examinations took place on Dageraad, the plantation where the Dutch governor was stationed, and at the various military posts where captives and returned slaves were held. Those men captured with guns or other incriminating evidence, or those accused by others of having been “big wrongdoers,” were kept confined; the others were not. Those deemed guilty were executed; the others were sent back to their plantations if possible or put to work on Dageraad and at other posts. It is unclear to what extent torture was used. For useful discussions of Dutch judicial rules and procedures with respect to slaves elsewhere, see Natalie Zemon Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners: Slaves’ Experience of Criminal Justice in Colonial Suriname,” *Law, Slavery, and Justice*, Special Issue, *Law and History Review* 29 (November 2011): 925–984, here 958–962; Han Jordaan, “Free Blacks and Coloreds and the Administration of Justice in Eighteenth-Century Curaçao,” *New West Indian Guide* 84, no. 1/2 (2010): 63–86; and Eric Jones, “Courts and Courtship: An Examination of Legal Practice in Dutch Asia,” *Leidschrift: Historisch Tijdschrift* 21, no. 2 (2006): 31–50, especially 46–48. In the investigations into the 1795 slave uprising in Curaçao, torture was, very explicitly, used repeatedly, particularly to force rebels who had already confessed their own actions to name accomplices. Nevertheless, the prosecutor claimed that he hated torture, “which is considered detestable not only in our own republic, but abolished in all civilized nations.” A. F. Paula, ed., *1795: De slavenopstand op Curaçao: een bronnenuitgave van de originele overheidsdocumenten* (Curaçao, 1974), especially 175–177, quote from 176 (translation mine).

<sup>38</sup> Out of 897 people examined, 546 were men, 326 were women, and for the remaining 25 no gender can be positively determined, though most were probably women.

<sup>39</sup> No. 49 Turiba van d’Geertruij, 3/20/1764.

<sup>40</sup> Aisha Finch has found that women gave the same kinds of evasive answers, “portraying themselves as distant or uninvolved parties” in the 1844 Escalera conspiracy. Finch, “What Looks Like a Revolution,” 116; and Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba*, chap. 5. Her interpretation of such answers both supports and diverges from mine.

the Dutch, rather than about what was most relevant to them. Moreover, since their own and others' lives were on the line, they had every reason to distort, omit, and lie. While some witnesses clearly spoke more or less honestly, others no doubt were motivated by self-interest or revenge, or they may have misremembered. Most examiners and witnesses were vague about chronology, making it difficult to understand exactly which events they were describing. And it is often hard to know how to read people's words, as written testimony robs us of emotional clues expressed in affect, silences, and hesitations. By comparing testimonies, however, as well as correlating them with reports from Amerindians, slave spies, and European observers, and by reading examinations against the grain, it is possible to begin to piece together a deeper picture of the rebellion, one from the inside out, or the bottom up, and one that pays particular attention to women.<sup>41</sup> Inevitably, given how these records were produced, many questions have to remain unanswered, and any interpretations and conclusions must be, even more so than in most histories, tentative.<sup>42</sup>

Despite such important caveats, good precedent exists for using such flawed sources. Historians of popular culture have used hostile court records with great success, starting with the work of Natalie Zemon Davis, E. P. Thompson, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. Books such as Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, in using the records of the Inquisition to get at the mentalité of the voiceless, have pointed the way. Historians of slave rebellion all use testimony to great effect while emphasizing how unreliable it is. "But even such contrived and distorted legal records," Emilia Viotti da Costa asserted, "can be made to cast much light on what really occurred during the rebellion if read closely and carefully enough."<sup>43</sup> Historians of U.S. slavery have used with great profitability the interviews with ex-slaves recorded by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. While one historian asserted that "the questions were leading and sometimes insulting, the answers routine or compliant, and the insensitivity of the interrogator and the evasiveness of the interrogated were flagrantly displayed," he nevertheless maintained that the WPA interviews were not so different from the great majority of records that historians use—all of which require caution, care, and skepticism.<sup>44</sup> Such views have recently been echoed in reference to the Denmark Vesey conspiracy records.

<sup>41</sup> For discussions of the methodological issues involved, see, for instance, Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago, 2000); and the many references in Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, N.J., 2009), especially chap. 2. For a discussion on reading documents against the grain with respect to women, see "History Practice: Finding Women in the Archive," introduction by Antoinette Burton, *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 149–216.

<sup>42</sup> For a lovely statement about history's "messiness," see Wendy Anne Warren, "The Cause of Her Grief: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 1031–1049, here 1049.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of slave trial testimony in the 1823 Demerara Rebellion, which presents a lot of the same issues as that in Berbice, see da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 170–171, 234–242, quote from 238. For other examples, see Barcia, *The Great African Slave Revolt of 1825*, 19–22, 120. For a discussion of slaves as witnesses in the eighteenth-century Leeward Islands, see Natalie Zacek, "Voices and Silences: The Problem of Slave Testimony in the English West Indian Law Court," *Slavery and Abolition* 24, no. 3 (2003): 24–39; Gunvor Simonsen, "Slave Stories: Gender, Representation, and the Court in the Danish West Indies, 1780s–1820s" (Ph.D. diss., European University Institute, 2007), 19–24; and Finch, "What Looks Like a Revolution."

<sup>44</sup> C. Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources," Review Article, *American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (April 1974): 470–481, quote from 473.

AS IN OTHER SLAVE REBELLIONS, the leadership in the Berbice insurgency was overwhelmingly male. Coffij and his second in command, Accarra, organized parallel command structures, one civil and one martial. Coffij, who styled himself *gouverneur* (the rebels used Dutch language terms), picked *raadsheren* (councilmen), a *fiscael* (prosecutor), a *beul* (executioner), and *heren* to run plantations.<sup>45</sup> On the military side, Captain Accarra appointed captains and lieutenants to train and lead military units.<sup>46</sup> Men filled all these official positions. Among them were many artisans, *bombas*, and priest-diviners, members of the plantation elite who had provided leadership for their communities before the rebellion as well. Especially among the officers, many may well have had military experience in Africa. But what about women? In a recent discussion of neighboring Suriname, Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that elite slave women such as cooks, senior house servants, and midwives played a role in clandestine plantation slave “courts.”<sup>47</sup> Did such female leadership extend to armed rebellion? We know little about plantation life in Berbice before the rebellion. But testimony points to a few women who played key political and judicial roles early on in the uprising, albeit without the official titles that men carried. Three of them were executed by the Dutch for their roles.

Amelia from the plantation Hollandia and Zeelandia explained to the examiners that they had wrongly been told that she was Coffij’s sister. Rather, she explained, she had “come into the country with him,” a kin-like bond forged in the crucible of the middle passage rather than by blood. She had “been his cook,” she claimed, but she had never urged him to rebel. Her enslaved accusers pointed to a much more pivotal role. She had advised Coffij about people’s loyalty to the rebellion; at her word, heads rolled. Witnesses claimed that she had walked around armed with a “broad sword like a man.” Perhaps it was with this sword that, as fellow bondpeople charged, she had had a hand in the killing of several European children in order to sprinkle their blood on Coffij’s grave when he was buried. While the accusation may sound dramatic, this was an African custom at the burials of important leaders—as Titus, an old African, informed the Dutch, and as modern historians confirm. Amelia claimed that she had not been present at Coffij’s funeral, though she did witness “that he shot himself.” She was executed as a “Christian and *neger* murderer” with “small fire,” a slow and even more excruciating variant of being burned at the stake.<sup>48</sup>

Like Amelia, Barbara from the plantation Lelienburg—one of the wives of Captain Accarra—allegedly played a role in the judgment of fellow slaves. A woman

<sup>45</sup> For names of the councilors, see, for instance, No. 38 Apria van de Colonie, 3/6/1764. For “beul,” see No. 185 Frans van Antonia, 4/11/1764; No. 229 Piekenieni van Hollandia en Zeelandia, 4/14/1764; DH, 2/12/1764. In Berbice, as in Suriname, the executioners employed by the Dutch were all enslaved men.

<sup>46</sup> For an example of Accarra picking lieutenants, see No. 13 Frans van Elisabeth & Alexandria, 12/10/1764. See also No. 181 Brutos off Accabire van Stevensburg, 4/11/1764, for *grote heren* calling their officers together.

<sup>47</sup> Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners,” 958.

<sup>48</sup> No. 82 Aboi van Nieuw Caraques, 3/10/1764; No. 80 Amelia van Hollandia, 3/10/1764; and the examination of Poko, who was brought in as Amelia was being examined. Many witnesses talked about the funerals of prominent rebel leaders and the sacrificial killings of both blacks and whites. For similar practices in West Africa, see the testimony of Titus van de Goede Hoop, DH, 12/21/1763; as well as Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden*, 38–43, and Oldendorp, *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan*, 89–90.



FIGURE 3: "A Coromantyn Free Negro, or Banger, armed. Fourgeoud-Mariniers (Regiment no. 21), in Suriname van 1772 tot 1777." Colonel Louis Henry Fourgeoud fought with the Dutch troops in Berbice in 1764. Upon their return to the Netherlands, these troops were turned into the first Dutch marine corps. In the 1770s, under Fourgeoud's leadership, they fought against Maroons in Suriname. Enslaved and free Africans assisted in these operations. Here a depiction of a Coromantyn (also known as Amina among the Dutch) man. General Research Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

from the same plantation, Veronica, related that as the rebels were murdering her husband, a *bomba* who refused to join them, Barbara had urged them on and watched approvingly, smoking a long pipe. Afterward, Veronica charged, Barbara, “always hung with gold,” had enslaved her.<sup>49</sup> Veronica and another of Barbara’s servants got their revenge when they testified that Barbara had repeatedly slapped a female European captive before male rebels killed her. Barbara denied having urged her husband to kill any Christian woman, claiming that “he was too good” for that, though she added, unbidden, that “Coffij wasn’t.”<sup>50</sup> The testimony of her former servants, as well as that of other witnesses, sent Barbara to the wheel for “abusing Christian women and being an accessory to Christian murder.” According to witnesses, she survived the breaking of her bones for a grueling two hours.<sup>51</sup>

Pallas, from the plantation Antonia, was similarly known for having the ear of an important male leader—in her case Atta, who may have been her brother. He was a prominent rebel from the beginning and took over as governor after the coup against Coffij. “What she said, Atta had to believe,” one witness claimed. Others related that she had a stick with which she “commanded the Dutch women.” The Dutch accused her of “having incited the rebels through pretend magic,” a reference to obeah, the channeling of special spiritual powers to cure ills or to correct social wrongs, which provided a particular path to power for women in West Africa, where female diviners played important roles in criminal justice.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the Caribbean, obeah played a special role in slave resistance. It appeared clearly in Tacky’s Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760, yet few mentions of women’s spiritual powers survive for the Berbice Rebellion three years later. Besides Pallas, only one woman is mentioned in connection with *toveren* (performing magic), and she was allegedly sacrificed at a rebel funeral. Pallas, meanwhile, denied any involvement in obeah, claiming that she had merely “smeared her tongue with chalk for three days after her husband died.” Perhaps she was referring to an Akan purification ritual involving white clay, *hyire*. She was burned at the stake.<sup>53</sup>

The women put to death so gruesomely by the Dutch were not the only female leaders. Martha, who like Barbara hailed from the plantation Lelienburg, was ac-

<sup>49</sup> No. 71 Veronica van Lelienburg, 3/8/1764; No. 254 Claartje van Lelienburgh, 4/16/1764. About another servant, Lucia, who was another of Accarra’s wives, see Informatie van den Neger Joseph behoorende aan de kerk, 4/27/1764.

<sup>50</sup> No. 213 Barbara van Lelienburg, 4/12/1764.

<sup>51</sup> No. 61 Cariba van Altenklingen, 3/7/1764; No. 254 Claartje van Lelienburg, 4/16/1764; No. 71 Veronica van Lelienburg, 3/8/1764; No. 213 Barbara van Lelienburg, 4/12/1764; “In de exam. no 213, confrontatie van Barbera met Veronica & Claartje alle drie van Lelienburg,” 4/19/1764, SvB 135; Informatie van den Neger Joseph behoorende aan de kerk, 4/27/1764, SvB 135; Eijs: Sententien, 4/27/1764, SvB 135. Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana*, 505.

<sup>52</sup> Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners.”

<sup>53</sup> Christaen en Pieter contra Pallas van Antonia, 3/12/1764, SvB 135; Sententien, Hof van Politie en Crimineele Justitie, 3/16/1764, SvB 135; No. 70 Pallas Negerin van Antonia, 3/8/1764. Pallas’s African name may have been Boge; see No. 61 Cariba van Altenklingen, 3/7/1764. For obeah, see Juanita de Barros, “‘Setting Things Right’: Medicine and Magic in British Guiana, 1803–38,” *Slavery and Abolition* 25, no. 1 (2004): 28–50; Randy M. Browne, “The ‘Bad Business’ of Obeah: Power, Authority, and the Politics of Slave Culture in the British Caribbean,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 68, no. 3 (2011): 451–480; and Kenneth M. Bilby and Jerome S. Handler, “Obeah: Healing and Protection in West Indian Slave Life,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 38, no. 2 (2004): 153–183. For the significance of white clay, see Emmanuel Akycampong, “Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast, c. 1650–1950,” *Past and Present* 156 (August 1997): 144–173, here 153–154.

cused by fellow slaves of “much evil,” including aiding Barbara in the punishment of Christian women. Martha died in custody before she could be examined. Because she was “presumed to be an accomplice in the rebellion,” the Dutch posthumously cut off her head and displayed it on a pike just as they did the heads of male insurgents.<sup>54</sup> Witnesses mention other women instigators and leaders, some by name and others only as anonymous wives, but no further details about these women emerged.<sup>55</sup>

These women’s stories reveal the gendered nature of rebel leadership. Amelia, Barbara, and Pallas were not executed merely for having been close to rebel leaders. The Dutch did not punish rebel leaders’ wives or sisters against whom no witnesses came forward. These three women were executed because they themselves played active political roles, especially in terms of punishing European women. Yet unlike men, women did not carry official titles, but rather functioned as informal advisors to elite male leaders with whom they had familial connections. Such advisory roles likely drew on African memories and prior plantation politics. Among the Akan, female counselors functioned as social critics who guarded the body politic by punishing or reintegrating “social deviants.”<sup>56</sup> Among other West African peoples, female family members, often mothers and sisters, traditionally acted as confidantes and advisors to high-level male politicians, though at the village level women were less prominent.<sup>57</sup> Yet while women’s positions in the rebellion were more informal than those of men, these women displayed their power and authority as ostentatiously as did male leaders. Like the men, they controlled servants and retainers, a sign of high status. And like the men, they adorned themselves in fine imported clothing and gold jewelry looted from European chests and wardrobes. In fact, wearing “Christian clothing” was to the Dutch as much a sign of a woman’s high-level involvement in the rebellion as carrying a gun was a mark for a man.<sup>58</sup>

Probably not coincidentally, all prominent women involved in the first stages of the rebellion hailed from private plantations on the Berbice River. No witnesses identified women leaders from the Canje River, from Company plantations, or from later on in the insurgency. It is possible that the names of women leaders surface only in relation to the start of the rebellion because the colonial authorities focused their questions on that period: most Europeans were killed early on, so the Dutch were most interested in that stage. More likely, as conflict among the rebels intensi-

<sup>54</sup> DH, 6/6/1764. One witness claimed that she had seen Martha abuse white females. See No. 254 Claartje van Lelienburg, 4/16/1764.

<sup>55</sup> No. 298 Elsje van ’t Fort, 5/12/1764; No. 13 Pieter van Hollandia & Zeelandia, 3/3/1764; No. 61 Cariba van Altenklingen, 3/7/1764; No. 23 Benjamin van Maria Agnes, 3/5/1764; No. 86 Cupido van de Prosperiteit, 3/13/1764; No. 81 Benjamin van Oostermeer, 3/10/1764; No. 173 Cesar van Castres, 4/10/1764.

<sup>56</sup> Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashington Obeng, “Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 481–508, here 491, 501.

<sup>57</sup> For two important explorations, see John K. Thornton, “Elite Women in the Kingdom of Kongo: Historical Perspectives on Women’s Political Power,” *Journal of African History* 47, no. 3 (2006): 437–460; and Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, ed., *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender* (New York, 1997). See also Gaspar, “From ‘the Sense of Their Slavery,’” 231–232. For claims about the village level, see Sandra E. Greene, “A Perspective from African Women’s History: Comment on ‘Confronting Continuity,’” *Journal of Women’s History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 95–104, here 99; and Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners,” 958, especially n. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. No. 298 Elsje van ’t Fort, 5/12/1764; No. 297 Beefje van ’t Fort, 5/12/1764.

fied and the Dutch carried out their campaigns in the fall, the rebels focused less on governing and more on warfare. In those chaotic and violent conditions, even fewer women had a chance to occupy leadership positions. The civil war put a premium on martial skills and elevated male strategists, making the rebellion less and less inclusive as it progressed, disenfranchising women.

UNLIKE THE WOMEN EXECUTED FOR their leadership, the majority of women were handmaidens of a different order. They sustained the rebellion, willingly or not, through their productive and reproductive labor. They looked after children, the sick and wounded, and the elderly. They planted and tended gardens near their plantations, or they worked in the rebels' food gardens upriver. They turned whatever they grew or foraged in the woods and savannahs into meals for their kin and colleagues. Some labored in the fields to produce sugar under rebel management or fed the cane into the mills to turn it into rum. And they sustained the soldiers with domestic services, including sex. Some of this labor was coerced, some of it not. David Geggus has suggested about women of color during the Haitian Revolution that "there was considerable continuity in women's roles with the colonial past."<sup>59</sup> This was true for women in the Berbice Rebellion as well, but women's roles as workers, wives, and mothers took on new meaning in the political economy of war. After all, as family historians have repeatedly pointed out, households and political structures are deeply intertwined.<sup>60</sup>

Since many men would have served as soldiers, most likely the majority of agricultural laborers in rebel fields were women, just as women may have been the majority of field workers before the rebellion. Women spoke of being taken from their plantations by insurgents to rebel camps to work in food gardens. Even some young girls claimed that rebels moved them about to work, though they did not provide specifics.<sup>61</sup> Others, especially women from Company plantations familiar with sugar production, were forced to grow cane and feed the mills, as they had done before the uprising. Lucretia from the Company plantation Hardenbroek, for instance, related that the "old carpenter *Neger* Prins with a *Neger* Antonij van Landskroon appointed by Atta, ruled them, to mill sugar and make *Soopties* [rum]."<sup>62</sup> Indian spies confirmed that Company slaves, initially highly resistant to the rebellion, were brought to compliance with force.<sup>63</sup>

Some women did not work in the fields for the larger community, but provided household and sexual services for prominent rebels as "wives," consorts, slaves, or servants. A number of women testified about laundering, cleaning, or cooking for

<sup>59</sup> Geggus, "Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue," 272.

<sup>60</sup> For a recent stellar example of such connections, see Sarah M. S. Pearsall, "'Having Many Wives' in Two American Rebellions: The Politics of Households and the Radically Conservative," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (October 2013): 1001–1028.

<sup>61</sup> No. 172 Caatje, Marietje & Griet van Castres, kinderen, 4/10/1764.

<sup>62</sup> No. 98 Lucretia van Hardenbroek, 3/21/1764. See also No. 136 Juno van West Souburg, 3/22/1764; No. 26 Driehoek van Wessouburg, 3/19/1764; No. 30 Cornelia van Wessouburg, 3/19/1764; No. 264 Susette van Steevensburg, 4/17/1764.

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, DH, 5/14/1763, 6/19/1763, 6/29/1763, 8/12/1763.

rebel leaders as personal servants. Alida, for example, related how she and several other women had to “scrub and scour” for the rebels at her plantation-turned-rebel camp Hollandia and Zeelandia.<sup>64</sup> Several women mentioned their personal service to female leaders. Some of these women were spoils of war.<sup>65</sup> Angoes from the Canje plantation Steevensburg, for instance, charged Asselij, an Amina from the same plantation, with having rounded up “young wenches” for Atta, the rebel leader who succeeded Coffij.<sup>66</sup> Others made similar charges. Acca from the plantation Geertruid related that when Coffij and Accarra and their troops reached his estate, they took “all the beautiful women with them.”<sup>67</sup> America from the plantation Sublieslust claimed that the driver of her plantation had given away her two daughters, “already grown girls,” to the rebels as a way to bolster his own standing with them.<sup>68</sup> Diro of the plantation Goede Hoop had been brought to the Company plantation Savonette “to make gardens,” and once there had become “Quipaij’s wife, who had been put in charge there.”<sup>69</sup> One man complained that the Amina had taken his wife.<sup>70</sup> Leaders such as Coffij and Atta kept some of these women and distributed others to their lieutenants, perhaps in a New World adaptation of West African customs whereby elders procured wives for young men.<sup>71</sup>

Prominent rebel leaders displayed and legitimated their new status not only by distributing women among their followers, but by taking on multiple wives themselves.<sup>72</sup> Before the rebellion, only a few elite men such as *bombas* or religious specialists had more than one wife. Unequal sex ratios and truncated plantation hierarchies made widespread polygyny, so common in West Africa, impossible.<sup>73</sup> The rebellion provided men who might previously have longed to marry more than one wife, and to display the increased masculine status and authority that polygyny conferred, with the opportunity to do so. We know that Maroon leaders in Suriname engaged in polygamy on a larger scale than had been possible on the plantations, even requesting on several occasions that the Dutch buy them enslaved women.<sup>74</sup> Having

<sup>64</sup> No. 129 Diana van Markeij, 3/22/1764; No. 250 Catharina van Mercier, 4/16/1764; No. 2 Alida van Hollandia en Zeelandia, 3/19/1764. See also the testimony by No. 4 Pieterneel van Hollandia & Zeelandia, 3/19/1764, who does not mention this.

<sup>65</sup> Missionary C. G. A. Oldendorp, who interviewed many Africans on the Danish Caribbean islands in the 1760s, wrote that Amina leaders had many wives, and that among captives, the most beautiful women belonged to the king or the governor. Oldendorp, *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan*, 391. Oldendorp’s interviews are suffused with references to polygyny.

<sup>66</sup> No. 431 Assalij van Steevensburgh, 6/7/1764.

<sup>67</sup> No. 99 Acca van Geertrui, 3/15/1764.

<sup>68</sup> No. 38 America van Sublieslust, 3/20/1764.

<sup>69</sup> No. 205 Diro van de Goede Hoop, 4/12/1764.

<sup>70</sup> No. 218 Coffij van Doornhof van de Weduwe Moses van Doorn, 4/13/1764.

<sup>71</sup> Akyeampong, “Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast,” 149–150.

<sup>72</sup> Governor Coffij is the only rebel who had a European captive as his “wife,” the twenty-something daughter of a government official. Among his wives were several women of African descent and at least one free native woman.

<sup>73</sup> Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners,” 955.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Price, *Alabi’s World* (Baltimore, 1990), 169. Price estimates that some 20 percent of Maroon men had multiple wives (383). For an argument that this created tensions among Maroon men, see Bonno Thoden van Velzen, “De wijze raadslieden en de kapotmakers: Een probleem met mondelinge overleveringen,” in Peter Meel and Hans Ramsøedh, eds., *Ik ben een haan met een kroon op mijn hoofd: Pacificatie en verzet in koloniaal en postkoloniaal Suriname* (Amsterdam, 2007), 75–91, here 80, 89. For similar practices among Maroons elsewhere, see Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Societies in the Americas* (New York, 1973), 18–19.

multiple wives allowed leaders to advertise their new positions and gave them the elevated status reserved in West Africa for older and wealthier men.

It is not clear what such marriages meant to women in the midst of rebellion. Few women talked about their marital experiences among the rebels. One exception was Lisette from Helvetia, the plantation where the two women were beaten on the eve of the uprising. As noted by the clerk who mediated the examinations, Lisette told the Dutch that she had been Fortuin's wife before the rebellion, during what she called "her master's time." Once Fortuin rose in the ranks to become an important leader, he "left her and took three others," two of them African and one a free native woman. When "he later lost them," as she put it, she was called back to "carry his food after him and serve as his slave." Despite such treatment, she refused to serve as a witness against him. Asked whether she knew "how many people he had killed," she claimed to have witnessed nothing; "nor did she go everywhere with him because she had sore feet."<sup>75</sup> They had been captured together in June 1764, but Fortuin had escaped. Eventually retaken, he was questioned and executed. After her examination, Lisette was sent to her plantation.

Lisette's story reminds us that wives were important to men not only for status and companionship, but also because they carried supplies and grew, gathered, and prepared food. While women had prepared food for their families before the rebellion, now, with many plantation gardens destroyed, and without Dutch food supplements, women's food production was more important than ever. Given their need for the life-sustaining economic and reproductive services women performed, men who may have been passed over by their superiors in the distribution of women helped themselves to wives.<sup>76</sup> Several people, for instance, testified that Damon from the Company plantation West Souburg had killed a man named Gibel in order to take Gibel's wife, Ariaantje, for himself. When Ariaantje refused to go along with this arrangement, Damon threatened "to destroy" her, too, at which point, she told the examiners, she had no choice but to submit.<sup>77</sup> Others talked about women and girls, and some men, being sold among rebels. Similar reports would surface in the Haitian Revolution thirty years later.<sup>78</sup>

We do not know how women and girls experienced being taken by rebels as sexual partners and wives. As under slavery, sexual exploitation could indicate an ab-

<sup>75</sup> No. 461 Lisette van Helvetia, 6/14/1764. The testimony of one of the new wives corroborates Lisette's claim, as do Dutch records. One new wife called herself Fortuin's "cook" and claimed that she always stayed home on the plantation Steevensburg, Fortuin's command center on the Canje River, while Fortuin traveled around. See No. 59 Lonkje van Petite Bretagne, 3/20/1764. Governor van Hoogenheim noted that Fortuin had many concubines, including two on the plantation Steevensburg, who may have helped him escape from Dutch captivity. See DH, 6/4/1764.

<sup>76</sup> For an examination of the roles of enslaved wives in Africa, see Susan Herlin Broadhead, "Slave Wives, Free Sisters: Bakongo Women and Slavery, c. 1700–1850," in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1983), 160–181, especially 172. On the gendered division of labor in West Africa, see Claire Robertson, "Africa into the Americas? Slavery and Women, the Family, and the Gender Division of Labor," in Gaspar and Hine, *More than Chattel*, 3–40, especially 20–24. See also Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast," especially 149–151.

<sup>77</sup> Christiaen, Piter and Piramus contra Damon van Wessouburg, 4/25/1764, SvB 135; Nader Confrontatie van den Neger Damon van Wessouburg tegens de negerin Ariaantje van de Hooftplantagie, 4/26/1764, SvB 135.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 159.

sence of choice or limited self-assertion.<sup>79</sup> No doubt their experiences fell along a continuum. Some women may have experienced such relations as rape, while others may have felt honored to be connected to a prominent man. Such alliances may have offered the promise, or realization, of protection, access to scarce resources, and prestige. Some women may have claimed that they were forced in order to deny culpability in the rebellion, but given that the Dutch did not punish people merely for joining the rebellion, that scenario seems less likely. What is clear, however, is that control over women, and over women's productive and reproductive capacities, became a central component of political power among the rebels.<sup>80</sup>

FOR MOST WOMEN, AS FOR many men, the rebellion represented an experience of serial disruption and displacement. This was true whether they supported the rebels, tried to stay autonomous on their own plantations, or were forced to flee with their owners. For some the conflict proved fatal, but most experienced the uprising mainly as refugees of one sort or another. Some were brought along by their panicked masters and mistresses as they fled at the start of the rebellion. Others were dislodged from their homes early on when the insurgents burned the plantations and the provisioning grounds of those who did not want to join the revolt. They were taken along to rebel camps and employed wherever they were needed. Others remained on their plantations, their owners gone, working quietly under their own direction until the fall of 1763. Wary of everyone, whether the Dutch, the rebels, or Amerindians, they hid in the woods at the approach of danger, moving back when the coast was clear, intent on preserving their independence. In the fall, however, when, in response to the Dutch counteroffensive, the rebels forced everyone to retreat with them upriver, these dodgers became refugees of a different kind. And as the rebellion disintegrated into civil war, rebels, too, moved about the colony in ever-smaller bands, hiding and fighting, essentially refugees themselves.

Such refugees, with death at their backs, moved from place to place in search of food and safety. Had it not been for the Arawaks and Caribs, who, along with Dutch reinforcements, were crisscrossing the savannahs and jungle looking for runaway slaves, some refugees might have succeeded in joining together to build villages and cultivate fields. Had this happened, they could well have become as formidable as the Maroons in Suriname. Instead, however, few Maroon settlements were created, and the Dutch and their Indian allies discovered and destroyed most. The great majority of people who took to the woods trekked around in small groups, never able to

<sup>79</sup> For this argument, see Jenny Sharple, *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (Minneapolis, 2003); and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1997).

<sup>80</sup> Something similar happened among the Ashante in West Africa as they expanded and consolidated their power in the eighteenth century. See Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 496; and Emmanuel Akyeampong and Hippolyte Fofack, "The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications, Part I: The Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods," World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 6051, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, Gender and Development Unit, April 2012, 8, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/6056/WPS6051.pdf>.

settle down for long.<sup>81</sup> It would have been difficult to find food, particularly during the rainy seasons, when the landscape became a swampy morass.<sup>82</sup> Especially for women, who had been so much less likely than men to become runaways or Maroons before the rebellion, this experience of constant movement was anything but liberating. They were “free,” there was no master, but they were yoked to a tenuous survival.<sup>83</sup>

Such women regularly got caught up in the cross-fire between different warring parties. The journey of Trui from the plantation Frederiksburg on the Canje River highlights the stamina, courage, and ingenuity required for survival. When the rebels led by Fortuin came to Frederiksburg, the *bomba* reportedly resisted valiantly but was overpowered and taken upriver with his wife and children. Some of Frederiksburg’s men eagerly joined the rebels, while others escaped. Many of the Frederiksburg people, including Trui, were taken to the Berbice River and put to work. Trui ended up at Fort Nassau, Coffij’s headquarters. Upon Coffij’s death, she was “sent up river,” probably to work on provisioning grounds near the Savonette, the furthest plantation up the Berbice, and another rebel stronghold. “When the Christians came,” Trui related, a reference to the Dutch military expeditions of late 1763, the rebels fought a bruising battle against them at the end of December and then deserted the Savonette. Trui took the opportunity to escape from the rebels and made her way down the Berbice to Wikky Creek, where she hid. From there she reached Berenstein, a plantation a few miles north of Wikky Creek, where she may have had family. Eventually, she did not specify how, she got back to the Dutch.<sup>84</sup> Roosje from the plantation Vigilantie was similarly taken upriver by the Amina rebels, and later captured by the Kanga, who, she claimed, “killed many people and ate them.”<sup>85</sup> She was not alone in accusing the Kanga of cannibalism.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Roosje survived.

In their forced migrations, many women traveled with children. Childcare added to women’s burdens, and to their sorrows. Malnourished children were easy targets for disease. They presented serious logistical and security problems for hard-up rebels or people hiding out: they consumed scarce resources, they were more likely to contract fevers and other diseases, their crying could expose hiding places, and they slowed down retreating forces. The rebels apparently tried hard to keep women and

<sup>81</sup> The cooperation of Amerindians prevented maronage in Berbice throughout the colony’s history. See, for instance, *Rapport aan Zijne Doorluchtigste Hoogheid, den Heere Prince van Orange en Nassau &c. &c. overgegeven van wegen Hoogst deszelfs Commissarissen naar de Colonien van den Staat in de West Indien* [1790], John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

<sup>82</sup> There were two rainy seasons, from December to early February and from late April to mid-August.

<sup>83</sup> For a thorough exploration of the impossible choices Suriname slaves faced when contemplating maronage, see Alex van Stipriaan, “Het dilemma van plantageslaven: Weglopen of blijven,” *OSO: Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde, cultuur en geschiedenis* 11, no. 2 (1992): 122–140. Van Stipriaan emphasizes how few women chose maronage.

<sup>84</sup> No. 261 Truij van Fredriksburg, 4/17/1764; Rapport van Lt. G. Knollard aan Capt. W. W. Hattinga, 4/1/1763, SvB 135; No. 69 Kingston van Fredriksburg, 3/8/1764.

<sup>85</sup> No. 238 Roosje van de Vigilantie, 4/16/1764.

<sup>86</sup> Many witnesses charged the Kanga with cannibalism. The Dutch also reported finding pots with human flesh; see, for instance, Capt. Fischer to Col. De Salve, 4/30/1764, in *Zevende Verbael gehouden bij den Collonel Desalve van den 26. April 1764 tot den 11. Junij 1764*, ASG 9219. Oldendorp’s informants mentioned war-related cannibalism among the Kanga; *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan*, 380–381.



FIGURE 4: “March through a Swamp in Pursuit of Runaway Slaves.” Based on an engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi in John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1790). This image shows how difficult it was for European soldiers, and for rebellious slaves, to traverse the woods and savannahs during the rainy seasons on the Wild Coast.

children out of harm's way, by sending them ahead or by installing them on plantations not used as military camps.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, many women suffered the loss of their children. Some witnesses related that insurgents killed children to punish adults for a lack of cooperation. Alida from Hollandia and Zeelandia claimed that rebels took crying children away from their mothers and murdered them by "bashing them on the ground."<sup>88</sup> Of course, Alida may have exaggerated in her description, perhaps to distance herself from the insurgents, although she did not finger anyone who was still alive in her examination, nor mention anything else of importance to the Dutch. Several women testified that rebels had killed their children, including Rosa from Alida's plantation. These women did not name the guilty men, and the Dutch would not have cared because they were not interested in punishing enslaved people for killing each other. So there is no reason for these women to have mentioned their murdered children other than out of anguish and grief.<sup>89</sup> Moses of Markeij, released by the Dutch after his interrogation, confessed that he had drowned a child whose incessant crying from hunger—the mother's milk had dried up—threatened to expose the hiding place of his group to nearby Amerindians.<sup>90</sup> To this day, the descendants of eighteenth-century Jamaican and Suriname Maroons tell heartbreaking stories of babies and toddlers killed by desperate people on the run. The ghosts of such slain infants, they claim, regularly return looking for retribution.<sup>91</sup>

Other women related how they were separated from their children in the chaos of rebellion. Sophia van Schirmeister, for instance, testified that when "t lompe volk" (the bad or rough people, a commonly used term) first caught up with her, "her children were dispersed." Rebels took her and her two remaining children from her home to a rebel camp. After four months she fled, but she was caught. As punishment, she claimed, Atta sold her with her two children to the rebel leader Woenje. Her son Willem was subsequently passed on to another rebel leader as a body servant, and her daughter Condie was killed by Amerindians as they were hiding out in the savannah. Sophie herself sought refuge on the Company plantation Vlissingen.<sup>92</sup> While men, too, must have taken care of children and experienced the agony of their loss, none chose to talk about it to the Dutch.

<sup>87</sup> One Dutch mutineer who lived among the rebels at their headquarters stated during the investigation preceding his court-martial that he had been taken to a "plantation where all the wives and children lived." Interrogation Jacques Montagnon, 4/5/1764, *Sociëteit van Suriname, 1682–1795, nummer toegang 1.05.03, inventarisnummer 324, Nationaal Archief, The Hague*.

<sup>88</sup> No. 2 Alida van Hollandia & Zeelandia, 3/17/1764; see also No. 359 Prins van de Heer Abbensets, 5/20/1764; and R. Douglas to Mr. de Bentinck de Rhooen, 2/12/1764 and 2/26/1764, CB.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. No. 16 Simba van Sophiasburg nieuwe negerin, 3/9/1764; No. 5 Rosa van Hollandia & Zeelandia, 3/19/1764; No. 43 Trijntje van de Heer Schirmeister, 3/20/1764; No. 52 Diana van den Arend, 3/20/1764; No. 64 Africa van Peetersburg, 3/21/1764; No. 22 Trijntje van d'Geertruijd, 5/5/1764; No. 456 Lucia van de Kerk Slavin indianin, 6/9/1764; No. 83 Elsje behoorende aan de Kerk, 5/7/1764; No. 438 Anna van Guitardenburgh, 6/7/1764; No. 46 Jannetje van de Heer Schirmeister, 3/20/1764; No. 173 Cesar van Castres, 4/10/1764. See also Douglas to Brunswijk, 2/26/1764, CB.

<sup>90</sup> No. 96 Moses van Markeij, 3/15/1764, and others' testimony in his case. The mother of the child, who is never named, evidently "complained" about Moses's actions. Nursing mothers are, of course, particularly vulnerable to malnutrition and dehydration.

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth M. Bilby, "Oral Traditions in Two Maroon Societies: The Windward Maroons of Jamaica and the Aluku Maroons of French Guiana and Suriname," in Wim Hoogbergen, ed., *Born out of Resistance: On Caribbean Cultural Creativity* (Utrecht, 1995), 169–180, especially 171–173.

<sup>92</sup> No. 42 Sophia van de Heer Schirmeister, 3/20/1764.

IN THE FIRST FEW MONTHS OF 1764, driven by hunger, devastating losses, and the incessant downpours of the rainy season, refugees flocked back to the Dutch in rapidly increasing numbers, choosing their original oppressors over “freedom,” violence, and starvation. Some arrived wounded, as rebels had tried to prevent them from returning to the Dutch.<sup>93</sup> Others lost family members in flight. Two women who reached a Dutch patrol by swimming across the Berbice River had to watch as their children, who were coming behind them, drowned.<sup>94</sup> By the end of February, more than 1,300 were encamped at the plantation Dageraad, Governor Van Hoogenheim’s headquarters, and another 600 were with the Dutch troops stationed at Fort Nassau. A month later, the total number of returned slaves was close to 2,600. The colonial authorities had trouble feeding, housing, and providing medical services to such large numbers. Many of the refugees were sickly, and by the end of April, dysentery broke out. “Seldom a day passes,” Van Hoogenheim reported, “when we do not put three or four in the ground.”<sup>95</sup>

Here again, enslaved women were put to work, maintaining the returned and re-enslaved as well as the civil servants and European planters living on the Dageraad and elsewhere. They carried out the provisioning, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and maid and nursing services required to keep the Dutch going. Some had done such work before the rebellion. “Dikke [Fat] Marietje,” for instance, had cooked in the governor’s *combuijs* (kitchen) at Fort Nassau since at least 1754. She kept on cooking right through the uprising, even when the rebels took over the seat of colonial government at the fort. When the rebellion was over, she was still in the kitchen, cooking for the Dutch governor again.<sup>96</sup> The events of the rebellion little changed this woman’s daily toil.

Several hundred women were forced to carry out similar functions for the Dutch army. The thousand-man expeditionary force sent from the Netherlands to put down the rebellion had come without the usual camp followers. Consequently, the troops were in need not only of pioneers, scouts, and construction workers, but also of women to cook, bake, clean, launder, sew, nurse, serve at the officers’ tables, and grow food in the provisioning gardens. Subject to constant illness in the unfamiliar climate, ailing and dying soldiers must have kept large numbers of women busy.<sup>97</sup> While there is no evidence of enslaved women performing sex work for the soldiers—no commissioner asked about sex work—it seems likely that at least some of these women would have been subjected to sexual harassment, force, and violence,

<sup>93</sup> DH, 12/25/1763.

<sup>94</sup> R. Douglas to [Willem] Bentinck van Rhoon, 2/12/1764, CB.

<sup>95</sup> Van Hoogenheim to Directors, 2/26/1764, 3/29/1764, SvB 135; DH, 4/24/1764.

<sup>96</sup> No. 149 Simon van de Prosperiteit, 3/24/1764; “Lijst van Monstering van de Ambagts Tuin & Forts Negers & Negrinnen den 5 January 1754 in presentie van den WedEd. Gest. Heer Gouverneur J. F. Collier & den Heer Luitenant P. H. Cugny,” SvB 118; “Lijste der Monstering van alle de Ambagts tuijnen Gediende Slaven en Slavinnen alle behoorende aan de WelEd. Agt. Heeren Directeuren dezer Colonie welke aan ’t Fort Nassau dependeeren . . .,” 11/12/1764, SvB 135.

<sup>97</sup> As early as January 14, 1764, just weeks after the troops’ arrival, Van Hoogenheim sent Barbara and Lucretia “to cook for the sick.” Van Hoogenheim to DeSalve, 1/14/1764, in “Derde Verbael gehouden bij den Collonel Desalve van den 13. Januarij tot den 11. Februarij 1764,” ASG 9219. See also DH, 5/12/1764. In West Africa, too, women and teenage girls worked as camp followers; see Kwame Arhin, “The Political and Military Roles of Akan Women,” in Christine Oppong, ed., *Female and Male in West Africa* (London, 1983), 91–98, here 96.

while others may have benefited, for a short while, at least, from a liaison with a European soldier with regular rations.<sup>98</sup>

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES DURING THE REBELLION were shaped not only by their actions, but also by their subsequent testimony. While women on the whole divulged much less than men, many knew more than they claimed. Sibilla from the plantation Prosperiteit, for instance, related that "the Amina" had plundered her plantation, "and tied her up and carried the women and a group of men along." She herself was taken by Atta to the plantation Altenklingen, and from there she "roamed the woods until she was finally brought back" by a former rebel now working for the Dutch. Asked to name those from her plantation who had participated in the rebellion, she responded, "Not a one, and she knows nothing about anything." Given that several men from her plantation were rebel leaders and that the Dutch would eventually execute a total of eight men from Prosperiteit, her claims to ignorance seem strategic.<sup>99</sup>

Clearly, women took advantage of Dutch gender norms to divulge little by claiming to be unaware of anything of interest to the Dutch. Many, like Sibilla, simply stated that they "knew nothing" because they had been "in the woods." The Dutch rarely pressed further. Even women such as Lucretia, from the Company plantation West Souburg, whose father, Mathabi, a driver, was killed by the rebels for his refusal to join, named no names.<sup>100</sup> Her mother, Claartje, Mathabi's wife, did face David, one of her husband's murderers, and testified against him. David was broken on the wheel.<sup>101</sup> Other women recounted their personal wanderings during the rebellion, but cagily denied any knowledge of arson, robbery, or murder. While in some cases they may indeed have been ignorant of such deeds, many women must have kept mum because they did not want to condemn their community members to gruesome deaths at the hands of the Dutch. Bravery and solidarity, plus fear of retribution or community ostracism, likely all played roles in their decisions not to talk about what they knew. Moreover, by choosing to remain silent, such women defied the judicial agenda of the Dutch, and through such dodging they once again created a modicum of autonomy.<sup>102</sup>

Some women did talk, but with caution. A few female witnesses, too angry and hurt to remain silent, used the examinations as a forum to narrate the murders of their own family members, especially their children, knowing full well that the Dutch

<sup>98</sup> Col. Fourgeoud, "Lijste der Monstering . . .," "Lijst der Slaven van de Colonie die in S Lands dienst werken," and "Lijst der vrijlieden Slaven, die in S Lands dienst werken," 11/12/1764, SvB 135.

<sup>99</sup> No. 54 Sibilla van de Prosperiteit, 3/20/1764. Prosperiteit was a large plantation. Its owners paid taxes in 1762 over 11 "red" and 83 "black" slaves, though an inventory taken that same year lists 11 native and 113 enslaved Africans (47 men, 31 women, 17 boys, and 18 girls), living in 19 separate "negro houses," making it one of the largest plantations in Berbice. Inventory Prosperiteit, Zion and Rusthof, October 31, 1762, Colonial Office and predecessors: British Guiana, formerly Berbice, Demerara and Essiquibo [*sic*], Miscellanea including Papers of the Dutch West India Company, CO 116/99 (Register of Legal Instruments), No. 260, National Archives, Kew, UK.

<sup>100</sup> No. 25 Lucretia van WesSouburgh, 3/19/1764.

<sup>101</sup> Confrontatie van David van WesSouburgh met Claartje van d'o plantagie en Calvin & Pieramus van de Colonie, 6/15/1764.

<sup>102</sup> For a valuable discussion of women as judicial witnesses, and the relationship between silence and autonomy, see Susan Alice McDonough, *Witnesses, Neighbors, and Community in Late Medieval Marseille* (New York, 2013), chap. 2.

would not act on such information. They usually did not provide the names of perpetrators; nor did the commissioners ask. Anna from Guitardenburg, for instance, claimed that Amerindians had killed her children. Trijntje from Mr. Schirmeister related that the Aminas had “hacked her two children to pieces,” and Simba from Sophiasburg showed a scar on her breast where she said that Aminas had killed her son Jantje while she was holding him.<sup>103</sup> Others incriminated men who had already been executed by the Dutch. A relatively small number of women provided the Dutch with information about people yet to be sentenced. In such cases, Dutch law forced the women to accuse the prisoners *in facie* (face to face). Claartje and Veronica from Lelienburg, who testified against the female leader Barbara, also testified against Favoriet, a male slave of the widow Jansen, whom they accused of murdering his mistress. Confronted with these two women, Favoriet confessed and was condemned to be broken on the wheel.<sup>104</sup>

Much like Charmante in the investigation of the flogging at Helvetia just before the uprising, women exercised a measure of control in the judicial process, even as the Dutch re-enslaved them. As potential witnesses whose testimony could sentence men to the wheel, the stake, or the noose, they used this control sparingly. Despite deep and bitter tensions within the enslaved community, women, along with many men, displayed solidarity in the face of Dutch punishments. No matter how people felt about each other, they did not want to participate in Dutch retribution. By choosing to remain silent, they thwarted colonial designs of “justice.” Of course, the colonial authorities’ narrow questions and low expectations of women’s usefulness, combined with women’s defiance or reluctance to bear witness, foil as well the historian’s attempt to reconstruct women’s experience in greater depth.

IT IS CLEAR THAT IN SUCH A COMPLEX and lengthy rebellion, women’s experiences varied considerably, both among individuals and over time. A wide range of women, and experiences, pass into view, from leaders to supporters, from backyard Maroons to refugees, from victims to collaborators, all scrambling to stay alive. Amelia, Coffij’s shipboard sister, saw fit to temporarily take on a male role; Alida scrubbed for the rebels; Diro performed sex work for them. Ariaantje saw her husband killed by a rebel who desired her as his wife, and Simba had her child murdered in her arms. Numerous women like Trui spent much of the rebellion tracking the woods searching for food, shelter, and safety. There were those whose situations were seemingly little affected by the uprising, like Dikke Marietje, who appeared to simply keep on cooking no matter who was in charge.

Of course, we are prisoners of our evidence. Powerfully shaped by the Dutch and obtained under duress at the end of a painful, long, and ultimately disappointing insurgency, the testimony focuses on what went wrong, on what did not work out. It tells us more about losses than about gains, more about resignation than about hope. It tells us little about perception and almost nothing about motivation. Nevertheless,

<sup>103</sup> No. 16 Simba van Sophiasburg nieuwe negerin, 3/9/1764; No. 43 Trijntje van de Heer Schirmeister, 3/20/1764; and No. 22 Trijntje van d’Geertruijd, 5/5/1764.

<sup>104</sup> IJdem [Confrontatie] van Favoriet van de wed’ Jansen met Claartje en Veronica van Lelienburgh, 6/15/1764, SvB 135.

the available evidence does suggest that while men and women shared much in the rebellion, their experiences also powerfully diverged. As a prolonged military conflict, the uprising confronted male fighters with heightened dangers, but it also offered opportunities to men for increased status and new identities as soldiers and leaders, from which women were on the whole excluded.<sup>105</sup> Women had fewer opportunities for political and military participation than men. Women were more likely to be re-enslaved by the rebels in the fields and gardens. As refugees, encumbered by the young and the old, they were less mobile and thus more easily caught by various parties. Warfare turned women into spoils of war in men's competition for prestige and status. As an emancipatory process, armed insurgency was profoundly gendered and fostered the subordination of women to men. For women, rebellion proved much less liberating than we have assumed.<sup>106</sup>

The rebellion altered the balance of power in favor of rebel soldiers over the rest of the enslaved, even as it temporarily altered power relations between masters and slaves.<sup>107</sup> Gendered definitions of labor, rebel leaders' demand for, and competition over, women's domestic labor (including sex work), and men's desire for wives put women at odds not only with the Dutch and their Amerindian allies, but with male rebels. Even as European slavery was, temporarily, overthrown, bondwomen's subordination to bondmen was amplified. Focusing on women brings into sharp relief what rebellion meant to the great majority of enslaved people: not freedom served up by sword and bullet, but a scramble for life that necessitated imperfect choices. Many enslaved men and women did not fight, but, seeking autonomy, hid, sought refuge, worked for new master-rebels, and surrendered to ensure their survival. For many Berbicians, agency in rebellion largely consisted of accommodation and self-preservation—making insurgency, especially for women, oddly similar to the slavery they wished to escape.

Some forty years ago, Eugene Genovese argued that before the Haitian Revolution, slave rebellions were “restorationist” rather than “revolutionary”; that is, people sought “freedom” for themselves rather than, inspired by “bourgeois-democratic” thought, “the abolition of slavery as a social system.” His highly abstract schema has

<sup>105</sup> Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue,” writes that women and children preceded rebel fighters in the early battles of the Saint Domingue uprising, when African styles of fighting predominated. He also mentions that a few women fought as soldiers. I have seen no references to such practices in Berbice.

<sup>106</sup> Such subordination foreshadows processes of emancipation in the nineteenth century, when gender inequalities similarly limited women's experiences of autonomy and independence, and the end of slavery benefited men more than women. Then, too, powerful connections between military service and definitions of citizenship were forged in anticolonial struggles, creating new political roles and national identities for men, but not women. See, for instance, Pamela Scully and Diana Paton, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, N.C., 2005). Historians are also increasingly studying the experiences of women in the uneven process of emancipation represented by the American Civil War. See Thavolia Glymph, “Rose's War and the Gendered Politics of a Slave Insurgency in the Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 4 (2013): 501–532.

<sup>107</sup> There is a growing literature about the advantages of military services for enslaved men. See Christopher Leslie Brown, “The Arming of Slaves in Comparative Perspective,” in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), 330–353; Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 246–247; and John D. Garrigus, “Redrawing the Colour Line: Gender and the Social Construction of Race in Pre-Revolutionary Haiti,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 30, no. 1/2 (1996): 28–50.

been a theme in the literature on slave insurgency ever since, even as much more nuanced pictures of individual slave revolts have emerged.<sup>108</sup> The Berbice Slave Rebellion seemingly supports Genovese's sweeping claim. At least under Coffij, rebels in Berbice sought to live autonomously, alongside Atlantic slavery, much as Maroons did in Suriname, Jamaica, and elsewhere. Whether this accommodation was the result of their desire to "restore an African past," as Genovese claimed, or a shrewd acceptance of historical circumstances, or, more likely, a combination of the two, remains an open question.<sup>109</sup> But Genovese and subsequent scholars have looked at only half the equation, the struggle over home rule. When we shift our gaze to the internal politics of rebellion, the struggle over who will rule at home, it becomes apparent that Berbice rebels were willing not just to live alongside slavery, but to practice it themselves.

The events in Berbice suggest that historians need to push beyond explanatory schematics that focus primarily on rebel leaders fighting masters. We need to look harder at the internal politics of rebellion and at actual conditions on the ground. Much of the literature on slave insurgency, Genovese's work included, has assumed that the aspirations of leaders and the rank and file were the same.<sup>110</sup> In Berbice, there was no unity of purpose. Communities were fractured along lines of status, gender, ethnicity, and origin (creole vs. African). Men who had held elite positions under the Dutch remained in charge after the Dutch were gone. Some people, mostly men, were wholehearted rebels; others stuck with the Dutch; and many, especially women, wished to stay out of the fray. Moreover, people did not pick a position and stick with it. Rather, as one would expect in a lengthy, dangerous, and ever-changing insurgency, they moved along the political spectrum, vacillating, changing positions and loyalties (sometimes multiple times) when survival demanded it. Not outright rebellion, but limited resistance, strategic accommodation, and reluctant cooperation, vis-à-vis the Dutch and the new rebel-masters, characterized the actions of many. No doubt such people had solid ideas about what a better world looked like—but they also had a pragmatic understanding of their options, and both influenced their actions.

<sup>108</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World* (New York, 1981), xiv, xiii, xx. Scholars have disagreed with Genovese's claims repeatedly, yet his schematic division, which corresponds so nicely to a cherished attachment to the Age of Revolutions, continues to occupy the literature. See, for instance, Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, eds., *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795–1800* (Leiden, 2011); Barcia, *The Great African Slave Revolt of 1825*, 11–14; and Wim Klooster, "Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and a Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolutions," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 71, no. 3 (July 2014): 401–424. For a recent view that, like Genovese, sees the Haitian Revolution as a watershed from "particularistic" to revolutionary insurgency, see Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London, 2011).

<sup>109</sup> Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 36. A term recently coined by Sarah Pearsall in the context of Native American rebellion, "radically conservative," or "the new use of an older form for novel purposes," might be more useful than the term "restorationist" to understand how people used what they knew to deal with conditions in the New World. Pearsall, "'Having Many Wives' in Two American Rebellions," 1005–1006, quote from 1006.

<sup>110</sup> The literature on the Haitian Revolution, similarly a very long insurgency, has spawned several works that have begun to show how the desires of the mass of enslaved people in Saint Domingue differed from those of their leaders. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995); Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1990); and Philippe R. Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoléon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801–1804* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 2011).

Attention to the internal politics of rebellion brings dodgers and women out of the shadows, complicates any facile equation of agency with resistance, and reveals that collective slave resistance was not necessarily anti-slavery. Just as importantly, the Berbice Rebellion, so much lengthier and better documented than most, exposes the tensions, fissures, and inequalities that were present in eighteenth-century slave communities, and shows how profoundly these characteristics shaped insurgency.

---

**Marjoleine Kars** is an Associate Professor and Chair of the History Department at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She is the author of *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002). She is currently finishing a book on the Berbice Rebellion tentatively titled *Freedom Marooned: An Atlantic Slave Rebellion in the Early Modern Dutch Caribbean*.