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The Dutch Atlantic world, 1585-1815: Recent themes and developments in the field

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Abstract: Scholarship on the Dutch Atlantic has grown and changed a lot in thirty years, with older themes like colonial weakness and insignificance giving way to a newly-discovered Dutch vitality. This essay demonstrates the change by summarizing the recent research and highlighting the military, economic, and cultural impact of the Dutch in West Africa and America, plus the possible impacts of both places on the Dutch in Europe. The essay also cautions writers against taking arguments about dynamism, diversity, tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and modernity too far.

Key Words: Dutch empire, Dutch Atlantic, West India Company, slave trade, Elmina, Brazil, New Netherland, Suriname, Curaçao

1. INTRODUCTION

We have seen in recent decades a flood of research on the Dutch Atlantic, and the result is remarkable: Where the story was once about insignificance and weakness, it has shifted toward dynamism and impact, both commercial and cultural, institutional impact. Where the terms "Dutch empire in the Atlantic world" and "Dutch Atlantic" were once dismissed, now they are

employed fairly regularly, even by former skeptics. Indeed, if Atlantic history, according to proponents, is about transnationalism and hybrid societies (Armitage, 2002)—if Atlantic history is about diversity and connectedness (Games, 2006)—the polyglot, creole peoples of the Dutch colonies and their willingness to ignore imperial boundaries might make them the perfect subjects for any new study. However small their numbers, they have gone from the people without a clear place in Atlantic history to the possible future of the field (Games, 2014, pp. 372-373; Klooster and Oostindie, 2018, intro.).

The purpose of this essay is to track these developments, providing a brief history of the Dutch Atlantic and an overview of recent scholarship. I will cite some older literature, but for the most part I depend on monographs and articles from the twenty-first century, when the aforementioned historiographic changes occurred. While I am supportive of the changes and hopeful about the direction of ongoing research, I will play the part of the conflicted, hesitant optimist, hinting at my concerns along the way, then addressing them directly at the end. The greatest challenge in writing about the Dutch is probably that very word, "Dutch," and what it meant in an empire without many people from the Netherlands. To make matters worse, the Dutch state and empire were the least centralized of all the European states that tried to plant themselves abroad, which exacerbated whatever tendency toward divergence and difference scattered societies already had. With so many date- and site-specific qualities to choose from, the danger for historians lies in calling anything "Dutch" because of what we want to see, because of modern political and cultural preferences. A different temptation might be to toss the rest out and simply identify *difference* or *diversity* as the one consistent Dutch quality. But if Atlantic studies have taught us anything, they have taught that diversity was widespread. And there is always the

possibility, even the likelihood, that we only favor it because it happens to be a twenty-first-century value, creating a second, related danger that we will not see its early modern meanings.

2. THE FIRST DUTCH ATLANTIC

The easiest way to think about chronology and periodization in Dutch Atlantic history is to divide the subject in two halves, with the first Dutch Atlantic stretching from the late sixteenth century until 1678 and the second Atlantic from 1678 until 1815. One could devise a more complicated timeline, and in this essay I will in fact break each half into smaller periods; but there was a clear enough difference between the early Dutch goals and tactics and the Dutch goals of the long eighteenth century—and there were enough critical changes in the years leading up to 1678—to justify that year as turning point for the Dutch Atlantic as a whole. Klooster (2016) and Klooster/Oostindie (2018) use roughly the same approach in their two-volume history, which will probably be the definitive overview of the subject for many years to come.[1]

The first Dutch Atlantic was made by war. From 1585 to 1621 the Dutch did not yet have their West India Company, which would eventually be the main vehicle for war, but conflict still influenced their interest and presence in Africa and America in the sense that they fought a long war of independence against Spain, and Spain's embargoes helped push Dutch merchants for the first time beyond Europe. As they began to explore new lands and locate new sources for the commodities they used to acquire in Spanish-controlled ports like Antwerp, they did not yet have many permanent outposts, and they certainly did not yet have any real colonies in this period. These years were still significant, though, for the growth of Dutch Atlantic commerce in general

[1] Other historians have used three (Schmidt, 2009), four (De Vries, 2005), or five periods (Haefeli, 2019). I am proposing two main periods and three minor periods within each: (1.1) 1585-1621; (1.2) 1621-1645; (1.3) 1645-1678; (2.1) 1678-1713; (2.2) 1713-1780; (2.3) 1780-1815.

(Ebert, 2008; Strum, 2013; Postma and Enthoven, 2003, chap. 2) and the influence of America in particular on the Dutch imagination: Benjamin Schmidt (2001) has explored Dutch pamphlet literature to show how writers used America to foster a sense of "nation-ness" (p. xxiii) as their state took shape. They juxtaposed Spaniards and Native Americans, characterizing the former as tyrants and enemies and the latter as innocent victims and natural Dutch allies.

The West India Company (WIC) was founded in 1621, and over the next quarter century it used conquest, commerce, and colonization to build for the Dutch Republic a considerable empire in the Atlantic world. The singular "company" can be deceptive, because, in keeping with the federalist political arrangements of the Republic, the WIC consisted of different chambers in different cities, and sometimes the chambers had different rights and areas of interest in Africa and America (Den Heijer, 1994 and 2005a). Theirs was not just a private corporation of merchants, but a publicly-supported confederation of parties, with policy also influenced by the city magistrates, nobles, and States General, which was an investor and partial owner in the company (Bick, 2012; Brandon and Fatah-Black, 2016; Jacobs, 2018). The WIC suffered under the rancorous disagreements among these interests about the company's trade monopolies, for example. Yet it was still strong enough to play a part in the Great Transformation, meaning that period in the first half of the seventeenth century when America transitioned from a place of Iberian imperial activity to a more diverse competition among Iberians, English, French, and Dutch. Under the influence of cash crops, imperial projects expanded from Ibero-America into the Lesser Antilles and North America (Klooster, 2016, pp. 1-7).

The violence that contributed to the Great Transformation and the Spanish crisis of these decades was partly an outgrowth of the Spanish-Dutch war in Europe and partly just a product of so much competition. In broad strokes, the WIC adopted a two-part military strategy: First, it

launched a lengthy campaign against Iberian outposts and colonies, and second, it engaged in privateering and the destruction or seizure of Iberian shipping, with a special focus on Spain's silver ships. Regarding the conquests on land, Brazil was the most coveted target, and after a failed attempt to take and hold the colony's capital in 1624, the WIC launched a new invasion in northeastern Brazil in 1630, expanding its control hundreds of miles along the coast in the next fifteen years (De Mello, 2001; van Groesen, 2017). As for the privateering, the Dutch captured hundreds of Spanish and Portuguese vessels. Piet Heyn's 1628 voyage was by far the most successful, though. Sailing at the head of a large WIC fleet, he trapped the Spanish silver ships in the Bay of Mantanzas in Cuba, winning tremendous wealth and instant fame (Lunsford, 2005).[2]

Although their original ideas and predictions about the indigenous inhabitants of Africa and America were somewhat self-serving and naïve, the Dutch did obtain indigenous allies for most of these campaigns. Meuwese (2012) has shown how dependent the Dutch were on native power for their early imperial success. Because of the quality, quantity, and low costs of Dutch trade goods—and because the Dutch served as a counterweight to Iberian power—some Africans and Native Americans formed genuine attachments with them, according to Meuwese (see also Hulsman, 2009). In Brazil the Dutch worked closely with Tupi Indians, for example, against the Portuguese. In West Africa they fought alongside Akan warriors from the kingdoms of Sabu and Komenda to take Elmina in 1637, and they fought with Queen Njinga against the Portuguese in Angola in the 1640s (Heywood, 2017). Through the fur trade the Dutch also furnished the guns with which the Iroquois expanded their own wars against their Native American enemies in the Northeastern Woodlands of North America (Parmenter, 2010).[3]

[2] In connection with warfare, see the recent literature on soldiers and fortifications in the Dutch Atlantic. For example: Jacobs (2009b); Kars (2009); Hefting (2010). On war in general, see also Enthoven et al. (2013).
[3] For Native-Dutch relations, see also Morris (2017). For the enslavement of Native Americans, see Arena (2017).

Dutch commerce helped change America as much as Dutch conquest in these years. Focusing only on the WIC might suggest otherwise, because company losses were usually greater than profits. But Dutch trade was much bigger than the WIC, especially as the company gave up its fur and sugar monopolies in the 1630s. At that point it became more of a simple administrator than a trader, strictly speaking. The willingness to look beyond the company and recognize private merchants and smaller firms, which began as early as 1986 with Oliver Rink's work on the merchants of Amsterdam, helps explain why the narrative about the Dutch shifted from weakness to strength—or from failure to "success," in Rink's formulation—and why, in trying to understand their place in the Atlantic world, transnational networks and interimperial trade have become rich areas of research.

In the first half of the seventeenth century the Dutch traded especially in English and French colonies. Menard and McCusker (2004) have shown that the Dutch were not responsible for the sugar boom on Barbados, as historians once believed, but they were still very active in the English Caribbean, extending credit and taking cash crops in exchange for horses, textiles, and other necessities (Schreuder, 2006; Koot, 2011; Enthoven, 2011; Klarenbeek, 2013). Operating sometimes from Dutch ports in Europe and sometimes from New Amsterdam, the Dutch did the same in the Chesapeake, where they also bought land and settled down, continuing to participate in Anglo-Dutch trade networks from their new homes in Maryland and Virginia (Hatfield, 2005; Schnurmann, 2009; Enthoven and Klooster, 2011). Research on Dutch-French trade in the Atlantic world is not as extensive (see, as an exception, Emmer et al., 2010), but the Dutch and French may have been even more entwined than the Dutch and English. Klooster has argued that Dutch merchants *were* responsible for the sugar economy of the French Caribbean, providing

early planters with the credit, horses, slaves, and "technical know-how" to get started (Klooster, 2016, pp. 172-173; Marzagalli, 2014).

Because of their labor needs in Brazil after 1630, their conquests in West Africa and the Caribbean in the 1630s and 1640s, and their commercial contacts in foreign ports, the Dutch dominated the Atlantic slave trade in the middle decades of the century. Their slaving also grew after 1648 because the Dutch Republic finally made peace with Spain, allowing them to carry slaves to Spanish American ports, too. Sometimes they did so directly from Africa, sometimes only after bringing the slaves first to Curaçao or St. Eustatius, which both began to earn reputations for smuggling and interimperial commerce. The slave voyages to Spanish and French America were a mix of legal and illegal, with Dutch merchant firms winning contracts and licenses, but also carrying slaves with forged licenses or without any paperwork at all, then bribing officials to look the other way. Using methods like these, the Dutch brought tens of thousands of slaves to Spanish and French America after 1648 (Postma, 1990, pp. 27-36; Da Silva, 2011, pp. 28-32, 2016, pp. 53-56; Klooster, 2014a, pp. 27-28, 2016, pp. 267-270).

The WIC utilized different colonization schemes over the years, directly recruiting and sponsoring some immigrants or, as a compromise between the company's trade and settlement factions, allowing private sponsorship under the patroonship system, which mostly operated in America but had limited West African applications (Jacobs, 2007; van Groesen, 2014b). Setting aside sailors and other maritime personnel, the total number of people in the first Dutch Atlantic was always small, largely because the Dutch Republic was a stable and prosperous place. The harsh, deadly climates of "the Wild Coast" (Guyana), where the Dutch made repeated settlement attempts in the seventeenth century, also had something to do with their colonizing struggles (Den Heijer, 2005b). Victor Enthoven (2005) has concluded that there were never more than

25,000 inhabitants of Dutch colonies, most of them living in Brazil and New Netherland. Not counting the Portuguese colonists, Brazil had about 12,500 people in 1645, and that included soldiers, African slaves, and Native Americans. Less than 3,000 of them were free men and women from the Netherlands (Loomerse, 2008). Excluding Native Americans, New Netherland had 7,000 or 8,000 people before the English conquest (Jacobs, 2009a, chap. 2).

Historians have inverted the relative importance of Brazil and New Netherland by favoring New Netherland, but they have not ignored Brazil altogether. For example, Michiel van Groesen (2017) has shown how tidings from Brazil became major news in the Republic, shaping print culture and creating a "public Atlantic" (p. 8) centered on Amsterdam. Other scholars have studied science, art, and the religious and ethnic groups of Brazil, especially the Jews, for it was partly through their experience and connections that the WIC chose to target the colony in the first place, and they were a sizeable part of the free population afterward (Klooster, 2006; Feitler, 2008; Gelfand, 2008). Although Jews and Catholics both enjoyed limited worship rights (Israel and Schwartz, 2007), those rights were largely the result of pragmatic necessity. The Reformed Church still dominated the public sphere, never granting rights to Lutherans or Mennonites, and Calvinists succeeded in reducing even the Catholic rights over time (Noorlander, 2016). Insofar as anyone could retard the Calvinist campaign, the man responsible was Governor Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, who also patronized most science and art. Among the many naturalists and painters of his tenure, Frans Post did the landscapes and Albert Eckhout the portraits of greatest historical value (Brienen, 2007 and 2014; Hochstrasser, 2014; Safier, 2014).[4]

Even though New Netherland eventually resembled the old Netherlands more than any other American colony, without the riches and enemies of the South Atlantic, it generated less

[4] For science and art in other times and places, see Cook (2008), Reitsma (2008), Oostindie (2013), Davids (2014).

interest in the Republic. A subtle and unexplored tension has arisen in the literature on New Netherland between historians who, on the one hand, stress Dutch successes in the realm of colonization, showing how they brought their culture and institutions to America, and those who favor diversity and difference. Regarding institutions, historians have studied religion and the Reformed Church (Frijhoff, 1995; Haefeli, 2012; Noorlander, 2019a), charity and the deaconries (Venema, 1999; Zwarts, 2015), government and politics (Jacobs, 2005 and 2018; Middleton, 2010), colonial courts (Shattuck, 1993; Sullivan, 1997; Rosenblatt, 2013), marriage and family (Fabend, 1999; Hamer, 2014; Romney, 2014), and the orphan chamber (van Zwieten, 1996). Research on the ethnic and religious makeup of the population has shown that it was, in fact, diverse (Cohen, 1981), but the diversity alone would not have made it different because we could say the same about Holland. Unique to New Netherland vis-à-vis most towns in Holland was the black population (Mosterman, 2011; Dewulf, 2016) and Native Americans, which created new challenges and opportunities with respect to trade, defense, diplomacy, sexual relations, and kin networks (Venema, 2003; Merwick, 2006; Otto, 2006; Romney, 2014).[5]

The period of disruption and decline in the first Dutch Atlantic overlapped with these commercial and cultural developments, and the disruptions lasted a long time, from about 1645 to 1678. In those years the Dutch faced Portuguese rebellions in São Tomé and Angola, the loss of their main possessions there (Ratelband, 2000), the restriction of trade in the English Navigation Acts, the loss of Brazil, war with Portugal, three wars with England, the loss of New Netherland (Cherry, 2010; Roper, 2014), the restriction of trade in French colonies, war with France, and the bankruptcy of the first WIC. The Dutch enjoyed some victories during the same

[5] On the question of Dutch institutions and diversity, see also Goodfriend (1999), Jacobs (2009a, intro.), Shorto (2004), and Maika et al. (2014). There were people of African descent in the Netherlands, too. See Hondius (2008 and 2011) and Ponte (2019). For more on gender, sex, families, and children, see van Zwieten (2009), Cantwell and Wall (2011), Romney (2016), and Noorlander (2019b).

period, including the conquest of New Sweden and conquest of Suriname. But their victories were overshadowed and, in the case of New Sweden, reversed by the loss of Brazil and New Netherland. When the Franco-Dutch War ended in 1678, the Dutch were no longer the power they had once been in the Atlantic world.

3. THE SECOND DUTCH ATLANTIC

If the first Dutch Atlantic was created and destroyed by war, the second Atlantic was built on the interimperial foundations of the previous period, and the strengths of the second Atlantic, such as they were, depended on a policy of neutrality in European wars. The other link between the two periods was the few outposts and colonies in Africa and America that were acquired in the seventeenth century but changed or grew in purpose and importance to form the main nodes of Dutch activity in the eighteenth century: Elmina, Curaçao, and Suriname. While the second WIC had a presence in all three, it had fewer, lesser powers than the original company. Sometimes trading, sometimes acting as administrator, it had to share these functions with other Dutch firms, and the Dutch Atlantic as a whole remained a very splintered place (Den Heijer, 1994; Klooster and Oostindie, 2018, chap. 2).

Elmina was not the only remaining Dutch possession in West Africa, nor was it the main source of slaves in the diminished but ongoing slave trade. In the face of English competition and growing warfare among Akan polities, even the gold trade suffered in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. But Elmina Castle was strong enough to serve as a stopping point and headquarters for the Dutch all along the African coast. As it had in the previous century, the castle had a small, mostly-male population of soldiers and merchants, and the garrison continued to depend on slaves and free Africans from the adjoining town for supplies, defense, trade, and

other basic services. If anything, the castle and town were more entwined than before, the town boasting a larger mixed-race population than during the first decades of Dutch activity in the region (Klooster and Oostindie, 2018, chap. 3; Everts, 2013). Most Akan adopted new crops and foods, including maize and cassava, and if they were wealthy enough, they adopted foreign china and silverware (DeCorse, 2001). Some traveled to the Netherlands, returning as merchants or, in the case of Jacobus Capitein, Calvinist ministers. The African and Euro-African merchants could grow quite powerful, establishing scattered kin networks and investing in plantations as far away as Suriname (Doortmont et al. 2000; Kessel, 2002).

Any vessel sailing from Europe or Africa to America was likely to stop at Curaçao, even if the cargo ended up in Suriname or another Dutch or foreign colony. St. Eustatius was also still a trade entrepot and free port for foreigners (Enthoven, 2012), but Curaçao was the more important of the two. Its commercial vitality came largely from the slave trade, especially in the last quarter of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, when Dutch merchants obtained asiento contracts to deliver slaves to Spanish colonies. When they lost the contracts to the British in 1713, they still brought slaves to the island for local labor needs or re-export to Guyana, but the numbers were less than before. And they continued to engage in a mix of legal and illegal trade with the Spanish, French, and British, exchanging manufactured goods from Europe for American cash crops (Klooster, 2003 and 2014a; Jordaan, 2013; Morgan, 2014). On the ground, Curaçao's population reflected its long-time connection with the slave trade, for by the eighteenth century, if not before, a majority of people there were black. By taking on extra work, a slave could purchase his or her freedom, and free and enslaved blacks both worked as sailors, for instance, or became traders in their own right. The island's diverse connections and

influences, both African and European, fostered a new creole language, Papiamentu, which was more Iberian and African than Dutch (Jacobs, B., 2009; Rupert, 2012).

The Dutch had other colonies on the Wild Coast before they seized Suriname from the English (Essequibo, Berbice, and Cayenne), but Suriname became their largest plantation colony, their "New Brazil" (Schwartz, 2014). More fitting than New Netherland's dominance in the literature on the first Dutch Atlantic, Suriname also happens to be the most studied colony of the second Atlantic. Ethnic diversity and creolization were the norm there, just as they were on Curaçao, and Suriname's English background and English inhabitants contributed to its unique cultural makeup. We cannot put too much weight on the English, however, because after a short experiment in "cohabitation," many of them chose to leave for Jamaica and Carolina, among other locations (Games, 2015). Just as critical as Anglo-Dutch activity in laying the colony's foundations were the interactions of Jews, Native Americans, and slaves (Zylstra, 2015). Once again, slaves became the majority—a *huge* majority in this case because they outnumbered the free population 3,226 to 652 by 1684 and 37,835 to 2,062 by 1752 (Lommerse, 2008, p. 325). Not surprisingly, black-white relations, slavery, maroonage, and Dutch-Maroon wars have all been common themes in the Suriname scholarship (Price, 1990; Dragtenstein, 2002; Vrij, 2002 and 2013; Davis, 2011; Fatah-Black, 2012; Hoogbergen, 2013).[6]

Adding to the diversity and creolization of Curaçao and Suriname were their Jewish inhabitants. They had originally come in significant numbers after the loss of Brazil, and Dutch rulers were eager enough for their expertise and connections to grant unusual worship rights. Those rights were "unusual" in the sense that the Dutch still did not extend the same freedoms to most Christian denominations. And they sometimes threatened and curtailed the Jewish

[6] For slavery and slave rebellion in Berbice, see Kars (2009 and 2016).

freedoms, too, depending on the whims of different rulers (Gelfand, 2014). The strong Jewish presence at Curaçao also helps explain the Iberian influence in the Papiamentu language. But nearby Spanish colonies—and ongoing contacts between the Dutch and Spanish—were just as influential, linguistically speaking. At Curaçao the Jews lived as merchants and bred livestock or raised crops like indigo and potatoes. None of the Dutch islands were large enough or had the right soil, however, for serious cash crop production. Only the Jews of the Wild Coast could live chiefly as planters, supervising slaves and expanding their commerce over time. As small as Suriname was in comparative terms, boasting only a few hundred plantations and a few thousand free inhabitants, many of whom were Christians, the settlement was still the largest Jewish agricultural settlement in the world (Israel, 2001; Klooster, 2001 and 2010-2011; Ben-Ur and Frankel, 2009-2012).

The year 1713 was a critical one in the Dutch Atlantic because of the loss of the asiento contracts and the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, after which the Dutch Republic tried especially hard to remain neutral in foreign affairs. Legally forbidden to trade in so many foreign colonies now, the Dutch maintained their international orientation through their free ports, their smuggling, the dispersed Jewish networks, and the old commercial links in English colonies like Barbados and New York (formerly New Netherland). But interimperial trade was sometimes a local, regional development, not imposed by authorities in the Netherlands. In fact, the body that oversaw Suriname in this period, the Suriname Company, tried at first to exclude all non-Dutch ships. Trading with the British and others, the Suriname colonists kept thwarting the company, and it finally had to allow supplies and horses from nearby foreign islands, as well as from New England and New York. Temporarily spurred by an influx of Dutch investment, Dutch ships did not surpass foreign ships in Suriname until the late 1750s (Postma, 1998 and 2003b; Emmer,

2002; Fatah-Black, 2014 and 2015). With Dutch merchants focused on manufactures and tropical products, not food and supplies, the other Wild Coast colonies experienced the same problem and found the same solution. Whatever their trade laws, or whatever control European authorities tried to exercise, they believed that the illegal regional trade of food and slaves was necessary for survival (Hoonhout, 2013 and 2020).

Total Dutch Atlantic trade in the eighteenth century was more significant than anyone imagined, at least before all the new research on smuggling and interimperial trade. The Dutch slave trade saw a small surge when the WIC lost this, its last monopoly, in 1730, because private merchants and firms like the Middelburg Commercial Company, many of whom had operated illegally in West Africa before, could now trade freely and openly, as long as they paid a fee (van Prooijen, 2000; Paesie, 2003 and 2014). But their sugar colonies and mercantilist policies gave the British and French huge advantages as slavers, and in the end, the Dutch carried less than five percent of the 12.5 million slaves who boarded European ships in Africa during the whole history of the Atlantic slave trade (Postma, 1990 and 2003a).[7]

Considering all sectors together, not just the slaving, Jonathan Israel (1989) and Wim Klooster (1998) were two of the first to argue that Dutch American trade was significant, but widespread attention to that question began in 2003 with the book *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, because Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven made even grander claims about commercial value and the impact of African and American trade on the Dutch economy. While there may still be disagreement about their methods and numbers, there is a general acceptance of the book's basic premise. Recent research has established that Dutch Atlantic trade grew from 4.7 million guilders per year in the early eighteenth century to 21.1 million in the 1770s, which

[7] The debate about the impact of the slave trade in the Republic is ongoing. See, for example, van Rossum and Fatah-Black (2012); Fatah-Black and van Rossum (2015); Eltis and Lewis (2016).

was less than French and British trade by a factor of at least three or four, but shows a pattern of steady growth. In addition, it is now clear that the value of Dutch Atlantic imports had surpassed the value Asian imports by the 1770s (Oostindie and Roitman, 2012, pp. 132-138; Klooster and Oostindie, 2018, pp. 95-96). And the Dutch claimed a separate economic function *within* Europe as middlemen and brokers, re-exporting colonial goods from cities like Bordeaux and London to other markets (Oostindie and Roitman, 2014).

Growth ended in 1780 because of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), which was fought in part over the trade between St. Eustatius and Britain's rebel colonies in North America (Enthoven, 2012). In the end, the whole Age of Revolutions and Napoleonic Wars were detrimental to Dutch interests in the Atlantic world. Besides the sacking of St. Eustatius by the British, the next years saw major unrest in the Netherlands, a French invasion, the collapse of the Dutch Republic, and its replacement in the Batavian Republic (1795-1806). And now that the Dutch were aligned with France, the British could continue seizing Dutch ships and colonies. Radical movements tended not have much life among free colonists, with the possible exception of Curaçao. Some islanders were sympathetic to the French Revolution, and there was conflict there in the 1790s. Probably inspired by the French and Haitian Revolutions, Curaçao's slaves revolted in 1795 (Klooster and Oostindie, 2011; Jordaan, 2013). The Dutch slave trade ended in the early nineteenth century, not necessarily because of the revolt, nor from any serious abolition movement among the Dutch. Rather, the British usually get credit for killing the trade (Oostindie, 1996; Emmer, 1998, chap. 6).[8]

When peace came in 1815, the British returned Suriname and all the Dutch islands, yet they retained Essequibo, Berbice, and Demerara (now British Guyana), as well as South Africa

[8] On slavery/freedom, see also Kars (2020), which wasn't available yet when this essay was ready for publication.

and certain Asian possessions. With the United States on the rise, Great Britain at the peak of its power, and Britain promoting free trade in so many corners of the globe, the new century was a century when the Dutch middleman was no longer needed. In the words of Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, "the last period in Atlantic history in which the Dutch played a major role" was finished (2018, pp. 2, 248-249).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Contemplating the same themes outlined in this essay, other historians have suggested a variety of terms and schemes for organizing and characterizing the Dutch Atlantic, some of which I borrowed above. With all their connections and their role as middlemen, the Dutch were the "lubricant" for the economic gears of the Atlantic world, according to Victor Enthoven and Henk den Heijer (2005, p. 153). To list the many other options, and at the risk of turning the essay into a thesaurus, the Dutch Atlantic was *international*, *multinational*, *supranational*, *interimperial*, *transimperial*, *hyperimperial*, *intercolonial*, *transcolonial*, and *pancolonial*. It was *integrated*, *entangled*, *intertwined*, *webbed*, *cosmopolitan*, *creole*, *multiethnic*, *diverse*, and even *un-Dutch* (De Vries, 2005; Schmidt, 2009; Oostindie and Roitman, 2012, Raben, 2013; Fatah-Black, 2013; Games, 2014; Klooster and Oostindie, 2018; Haefeli, 2019). The inventor of the awkward "un-Dutch," Benjamin Schmidt, is a skeptic of the very idea of a Dutch Atlantic, at least in the sense that its international character makes the word "Dutch" a rather problematic one (Schmidt, 2009 and 2014). Wrestling with the same concern, Oostindie and Roitman (2012) suggest the use of "entanglement" and "nodal points," where each location or node of the Dutch Atlantic had links with different places, some claimed by the Dutch Republic and some not.

Because there were always forts, ports, and colonies in Africa and America that flew the Dutch flag, I will probably never get worked up enough about the term "Dutch Atlantic" to stop using it, as long as we continue to recognize that Dutch colonial possessions were never terribly united and never strictly limited within the unit or system that such a term might imply. But I do have concerns about holding the reigns on the diversity, vitality, and interimperial narratives. No one could deny that Dutch colonies were diverse. Because of their immigration struggles and the modest number of ethnically Dutch inhabitants, they were more diverse than, say, Massachusetts or Virginia. However, with Native American and African influences, just to name two, even Massachusetts was no homogeneous place. Building on an argument from my other work, I have also suggested in this essay that with religious tolerance, a close cousin of diversity, the Dutch record was more messy than we typically remember. Anti-Catholicism was strong in the early Dutch Atlantic, and the Dutch tended to allow non-Calvinist worship only if it remained private. Tolerance of public activity was constricted, debated, and contingent on factors like the religio-political preferences of local rulers and the size and value of each minority population (Haefeli, 2012; Noorlander, 2019a).

To understand the concern about interimperialism, which contributes to a different but related narrative about Dutch modernity (De Vries, 2005, pp. 1-2), consider how much the Dutch vacillated and disagreed on borders and trade. After all, the WIC was created as a monopoly company, as was the Dutch East India Company. And even though the WIC had to relinquish its fur and sugar monopolies fairly quickly, it continued to monopolize the slave trade until the 1730s, decades after Dutch competitors allowed private trade in Africa (Postma, 1990, p. 138). Dutch trade was only truly free in two American ports. I have already described how Suriname was run by another monopoly company, the Suriname Company, and how the company tried to

prohibit non-Dutch shipping. Similarly, wherever they operated in the world, the Dutch pursued treaties with indigenous peoples for exclusive trade rights, then tried to enforce the treaties by violence (Borschberg, 1999; Meuwese, 2012, pp. 305-309). Even if they provided commercial and financial opportunities to foreigners in the mid-seventeenth century, and even if they continued smuggling in the next century, *their* colonies were just as likely to need the "lubricant" by that point, meaning that they often depended on British commerce and British investment, and Dutch authorities in the Netherlands were now the ones complaining about interlopers (O'Brien, 2000; Oostindie, 2012 and 2015; Klooster and Oostindie, 2018, pp. 244-246). Add to this list the things I wrote about tolerance and the weakness of abolition among free colonists, and the Dutch begin to seem less modern.

The inconsistency on subjects like tolerance, monopoly, and free trade was not just a reflection of the normal complexities and differences of human society. Perhaps the best explanation for Dutch vacillation on these matters comes from their fractured political, economic organization, with power distributed among so many cities and provinces at home and so many firms and territories overseas. Their federalism fostered a smorgasbord of outcomes, making it easy to point to one corner of the Dutch world—usually wealthy, powerful Holland and the city of Amsterdam, where free trade and tolerance did have more support—then to confuse those places for the whole of it, even if policy preferences and outcomes were different somewhere else. We cannot even generalize too much about Amsterdam, because in at least one instance—during the debate about liberalizing trade in West Africa—the city's merchant community broke from the usual pattern to argue for continued restrictions (Den Heijer, 2014, pp. 166-174). Where Dutch colonies developed tolerant traditions and cosmopolitan contacts without Amsterdam's

influence, they seem to have done so because of local needs and pragmatic considerations, not from any principled, widespread commitment to those things.

Exploring and clarifying the differences and connections of these many communities and locations in the Atlantic world will continue in the future. As much as the surviving sources allow, we must also encourage research on places that have enjoyed less attention than New Netherland, Suriname, and Curaçao. As commercial, economic studies have always been more common than social and ideological ones, the latter are more compelling and original, in my opinion. And the impact of all these places and all this history on the culture and economy of the Netherlands is still a fairly new question, with historians like Benjamin Schmidt (2001) and Michiel van Groesen (2017) showing the way. In terms of future possibilities, perhaps most tantalizing is Klooster's and Oostindie's assertion that the Dutch role in the Atlantic world effectively ended in 1815, making a third book in their survey, we assume, unnecessary. Such a bold claim will always serve less as a statement of fact and more as a challenge to the inevitable new generation of students who must search out ways to chide the last generation and find the neglected, understudied bits of history.

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