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Amerindians in the Eighteenth Century Plantation System of the Guianas

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Abstract

Dutch relations with Amerindian societies in their South American colonies began in the early seventeenth century. This contact increased during the eighteenth century, when Amerindians were slaves, slavers, and plantation enforcers for the Dutch. These roles transitioned over time and unevenly extended across the Amerindian societies within the Dutch colonies. The early configuration of the Dutch colonies relied upon Amerindians for trade. With the further development of the Dutch colonies, some societies were repeatedly the targets of slaving while other societies were allied with the Dutch and acted as slavers. Later, with the large-scale introduction of African slaves, some Amerindians became plantation enforcers. Amerindian enforcement of the plantation system was gradually institutionalized during the late eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, Amerindians had become the integral component in Dutch efforts to prevent uprisings by African-descent slaves, to pursue runaway slaves, to attack maroon camps, and to stabilize a plantation system at risk of open rebellion. With a primary emphasis on Essequibo and Demerara, this article will delineate the roles of Amerindians within the plantation system of the Guianas in the eighteenth century.

Amerindian Slavery in the Guianas: Historiographical Considerations

Amerindians have often been given insufficient attention in the historiography of Caribbean and New World plantation slavery. Early first-hand writings on the Caribbean plantation system, such as those of Edward Long (1774) and Bryan Edwards (1794-1806), were intended as defenses of African-descent slavery. Secondary literature on the Caribbean planters and plantation systems – for example, Dunn (1972) and Sheridan (1974) – has largely emphasized African-descent slavery and tends either to treat Amerindian slavery as a topic of minor relevance or to neglect it altogether.

In recent years, a general interest has emerged among historians concerning the roles of Amerindians within the plantation systems of the Atlantic World. Fisher (2014: 101) notes this renewed interest and writes that recent scholars have increased their estimates as to the extent of Amerindian slavery and the involvement of “Native middlemen”. However, Amerindian slavery in the Dutch colonial world, albeit of considerable magnitude, has received less attention than that within the English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish spheres. Consequently, the role of Amerindians within the plantation system of the Guianas, particularly Dutch Guiana, is not well-known.

To begin, it is necessary to define what is meant by Dutch Guiana. Surinam comes to mind for many people when they see a reference to Dutch Guiana. However, the history of Dutch colonization in the Guianas pre-dates Surinam and is centered (until the early nineteenth century) largely in the territory of modern-day Guyana, formerly British Guiana. In this article, Dutch Guiana refers collectively to the colonies¹ -Essequibo, Demerara, Berbice, and Surinam – that were founded and controlled by the Dutch in the Guianas during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – albeit with some occasional back-and-forth control by other European colonial powers – and that (with the exception of Surinam)

became British colonies in the early nineteenth century.

There is a small amount of literature (Benjamin 1992; Menezes 1973; Menezes 2011 [1977]; Whitehead 1988) that touches (directly or indirectly) upon Amerindian slavery in Dutch Guiana. Although some attention has been given to the different roles performed by Amerindians within the Dutch plantation system (Benjamin 1992: 1; Whitehead 1988: 185, 202, 215), this article will delineate these roles, explore how they emerged historically and were structured in Dutch Guiana, and contribute towards the goal of an eventual historiographical inclusion of Dutch Amerindian slavery into the emerging broader literature on Amerindian slavery in the Atlantic World.

Emergence of Amerindian Slavery in Seventeenth Century Dutch Guiana²

During the seventeenth century, Dutch-Amerindian relations in Dutch Guiana were largely centered around trade rather than slavery. Dutch trade consisted of a tense combination of Dutch West India Company (DWIC) traders and private enterprise. Prior to the 1680s, the Dutch tended to discourage or prohibit Amerindian slavery in order to avoid conflicts that might disrupt trade (Benjamin 1992: 9). Annatto³ (*Bixa orellana* L.) was a primary trade good and, along with letterwood (*Brosimum aubletii*), oil from *copaiba* (*Copaifera* spp.), and other natural materials and crafts, made up much of seventeenth century Dutch-Amerindian trade (BGB 1898b: 139; Benjamin 1992: 4-5; Whitehead 1988: 160-161).

Evidence of systematic Amerindian slavery in Dutch Guiana emerges in the 1680s, when a number of regulations were passed. These regulations were concerned with providing some measure of oversight to the Amerindian slave trade and preventing disruptions to Dutch-Amerindian trade. One of the earliest restrictions was given by the States-General of the United Netherlands to the DWIC in 1636 as a general prohibition, which was unsuccessful in actually preventing Amerindian enslavement, yet was referenced in cases into the nineteenth century in Berbice (Menezes 2011: 217). An attempt at curtailing Amerindian enslavement was also made in Essequibo in 1645 (Benjamin 1992: 8). However, in 1686, the Commandeur of Essequibo, Abraham Beekman, appears to have made the first attempt in Dutch Guiana at truly regulating, rather than prohibiting, the enslavement of Amerindians by passing an ordinance that stipulated the circumstances and conditions under which they could be purchased as slaves⁴ (Benjamin 1992: 9; Rodway 1896: 15; Whitehead 1988: 160; Williams 1936: 423). In 1686, Dutch subjects were prohibited from enslaving Amerindians and were limited in their procurement of such slaves to those owned by other Amerindians and subsequently obtained by the Dutch through trade (BGB 1898a: 85). Regulations on Amerindian enslavement were also passed in Surinam in 1686 and in Berbice in 1688 (Benjamin 1992: 9).

After 1680, with prodding from the DWIC, the Dutch made their trade with the Amerindians dependent upon the latter focusing their efforts on supplying annatto to the Dutch (Whitehead 1988: 161). The Commandeur of Essequibo writes to the DWIC in 1681 that the Amerindians were bringing "...annually a still greater quantity of annatto to market" (BGB 1898b: 184-185; BGB 1898g: 59). Additional labor was required for preparing annatto⁵; to obtain this labor, the Caribs and Akawaios increased their slaving and slave trading (Whitehead 1988: 161). Thus, Amerindian slaving increased alongside the intensification of annatto production. This increased slaving and competition over the dye trade led to conflicts between Amerindian societies that destabilized the interior (Whitehead 1966: 161). Thus, the growing Amerindian slave trade, which was conducted mostly by Amerindian slavers and private Dutch traders whose interests were not necessarily aligned with the DWIC, was disrupting⁶ the DWIC's trade with Amerindians by the late seventeenth century (Benjamin 1992: 4, 6).

Despite these disruptions, the Dutch-Amerindian trade in annatto and other materials continued and increased in the eighteenth century. In 1699, the Dutch Commandeur in Essequibo urged a group of visiting Caribs to continue supplying annatto dye "before all else" (BGB 1898h: 53). A Dutch diary from Essequibo, dated 1699-1701, shows that Amerindian enslavement, African-descent slavery on sugar plantations, and Dutch-Amerindian trade, particularly in annatto dye, coexisted at the time⁷ (BGB 1898h: 47-158). Whitehead (1988: 160-161) claims that the peak years for the Dutch-Amerindian annatto

trade in the Essequibo colony were from 1700 to 1742, during which time around 335 tons of annatto dye were exported to Holland from Essequibo. The DWIC maintained a monopoly on annatto and instructed the Commandeur of Essequibo in 1704 to prevent the Governor of Surinam, as well as private persons, from trading annatto in the DWIC charter territory⁸ (BGB 1898b: 227). However, with the growth of the plantation system, around which Dutch Guiana's economy was increasingly centered during the eighteenth century, the annatto trade declined inversely with the Amerindian slave trade (Benjamin 1992: 4; Whitehead 1988: 107, 153, 181).

Sugar plantations had emerged in Dutch Guiana by the 1650s and were increasing demand for the developing Amerindian slave trade⁹ (BGB 1898h: 31; Whitehead 1988: 95, 159). By the early 1660s, plantation sugar production is quite evident from primary sources (BGB 1898h: 33-34). Whitehead (1990: 163) notes that, with the rise of the Dutch plantations, "...a new market was created for the war-captives the Caribs were accustomed to using in the production of dye". The annatto trade declined and was eventually displaced by three interrelated factors: (1) the rise of the sugar plantations in the 1730s-1740s¹⁰, (2) the profitability of the Amerindian slave trade (which became more lucrative than the annatto trade), and (3) the destabilization caused in the interior by increases in Amerindian slaving¹¹.

Amerindians as Slaves in Dutch Guiana

The Dutch classified Amerindians in their Guiana colonies according to those who could and could not be legally enslaved. "Free nations¹²" were those under treaty with the Dutch and could not be legally enslaved, while those from other Amerindian societies could generally be enslaved (Benjamin 1992: 8-9; Menezes 2011: 59). By the 1650s, the Dutch were making such treaties¹³ (Menezes 1973: 66; Whitehead 1988: 159, 184). These treaties established Amerindian societies residing in Dutch colonial territory as free and not liable to enslavement (Whitehead 1988: 184). Benjamin (1992: 9) writes that "...it becomes apparent that the free nations in Essequibo, Berbice and, subsequently, Demerara, were the Arawaks, Caribs, Waraus and Akawaio". This varied somewhat in Surinam, where the Akawaio were not a free nation (Benjamin 1992: 9; Whitehead 1988: 167). Whitehead (1988: 184, 226) notes that the DWIC generally discouraged slaving inside Dutch colonial territory because of the risk of destabilization in Dutch-Amerindian relations and of disruption in Amerindian trade at the Dutch posts¹⁴. The designation of Amerindian societies as free or otherwise hinged on their proximity to the Dutch, their strategic alliances with the Dutch, their trade relations with the Dutch, and the potential threat that they might pose to the Dutch.

In the early eighteenth century, new regulations emerge that evince a growth in demand for Amerindian slaves. In 1712, the DWIC held a monopoly on the Amerindian slave trade in Essequibo¹⁵ (BGB 1898b: 236-237, 245). In 1717, in response to complaints from Essequibo colonists, the DWIC opened up the Amerindian slave trade (BGB 1898b: 246-248) and set a tax on the importation – an import tax had been suggested in 1708 (BGB 1898b: 232) – and ownership of Amerindian slaves; furthermore, the DWIC banned the export of such slaves and stipulated that they (up to a maximum of six slaves) must be purchased or traded from the Orinoco region¹⁶ (BGB 1898b: 248; Davis 1891: 348; Rodway 1896: 15). In 1735, the DWIC reiterated that exportation of Amerindian slaves from the Essequibo was prohibited (BGB 1898c: 20). In 1753, a regulation again stipulated how many Amerindian slaves could be owned by a colonist (Davis 1891: 348-349; Williams 1936: 423). These regulations were mostly attempts at avoiding potential hostilities and trade disruptions.

The Dutch procured Amerindian slaves primarily in the Orinoco region¹⁷ (BGB 1898g: 64-65), which was far enough away from the Dutch plantations to lessen the risk of reprisals. However, this was a source of recurrent tension with the Spanish. As early as 1719, the Spanish Commandant in Guayana wrote to the Commandeur of Essequibo to complain about Dutch persons coming to trade with the Amerindians in the Orinoco in violation of Spanish prohibitions (BGB 1898b: 250-251).

Dutch documents were taken during the 1758 Spanish raid on the Cuyuni Post¹⁸ that provide evidence for Dutch slave trading in the Orinoco (BGB 1898h: 201; Whitehead 1988: 186). From these documents, Whitehead (1988: 187-187) argues that the numbers of

Amerindian slaves traded to the Dutch were far below the 300 to 400 *per annum* that are represented in Spanish documents. However, although the exact frequency and magnitude of Amerindian slavery is unclear, the Dutch slave trade was considerable and is frequently mentioned by the Spanish. In 1763, Don José Diguja, Governor of Cumaná, notes the Dutch purchasing Amerindians from the Caribs in the Orinoco (BGB 1898d: 35). Fray Benito de la Garriga wrote to the King of Spain on July 6, 1769, and notes examples of Dutch and Carib slaving against Amerindians from the 1740s through the 1760s in the Spanish territories (BGB 1898e: 20-24). Garriga claims that the Carib allies¹⁹ of the Dutch in the Spanish territory are “fugitives” from the missions and Spanish villages and that they “...go furthest in on behalf of the foreigners among the other tribes for the purpose of enslaving Indians” (BGB 1898e: 23). He mentions various goods – guns, iron implements, clothes, etc. – traded by the Dutch for Amerindian slaves (BGB 1898e: 22). Dutch-Spanish enmity was deepened by slaving in Spanish territory.

Renewed concerns regarding Amerindian slave procurement emerged in the 1770s. In 1774, the Court of Policy in Demerara expressed concern to the DWIC regarding the “proof of slavery of many of the Indians” – that is, the proof that they were legally being held as slaves and not members of one of the free nations (BGB 1898e: 125). Also in 1774, permits²⁰ were reintroduced and were being issued “...to barter or trade in Indians outside the Post” (BGB 1898e: 123). A resolution of Essequibo and Demerara, issued in 1776, stated that, in order to avoid “trouble”:

...everyone in both the rivers who shall come to purchase or obtain by barter any so-called red or Indian slave or slaves, shall be bound within the period of fourteen days duly to give information thereof, and to present the same slaves to the Head and the Secretary of the river where he dwells, with a statement of what nation the slave or slaves are, and what names he has given the same, likewise from whom he has bought or bartered them, so that afterwards due inquiry shall be able to be made. (BGB 1898e: 141)

According to this resolution, if Amerindians from the free nations – listed here as Carib, Arawak, Warao, and Akawaio – were found to have been enslaved illegally, they were to be freed and the owner assessed a fine (BGB 1898e: 141). These continuing attempts at regulation reflect Dutch anxieties concerning the potential for hostilities and instability stemming from Amerindian enslavement.

Amerindians as Slavers in Dutch Guiana

The Dutch-Amerindian slave trade was mostly conducted through Amerindians as slavers. The Akawaios, Caribs, and Manos were the main three societies that functioned as slavers for the Dutch during the eighteenth century. Of these, the Caribs were primary and highly specialized in the Amerindian slave trade by the 1730s-1740s (Benjamin 1992: 10-12), although they were already involved in slaving in the seventeenth century (BGB 1898h: 56-57). In 1746, Storm van's Gravesande writes of the Caribs that the slave trade is the economic activity “...from which alone that nation derive [*sic*] their livelihood” (BGB 1898c: 46). Carib slaving provided much of the supply that met the demand of the eighteenth century Dutch Amerindian slave market.

The Caribs would conduct raids – largely organized as night attacks²¹ (Whitehead 1988: 185) – to capture other Amerindians from villages and Spanish missions to sell as slaves to the Dutch²² (BGB 1898h: 186; Williams 1936: 424). In the late 1730s, the Marquis de San Felipe y Santiago notes the Dutch slave-trading with the Caribs:

...by buying from them slaves of other Indian tribes whom the Caribs capture, both men and women; these the Dutch employ for the profit and increase of their sugar mills, and the coffee and cocoa plantations they are making, with which are united other branches of commerce they have held with the Caribs in balms those countries produce, such as *marana* or *copaiba*, *carapa*, anatto, cotton, hammocks, birds, wild animals, and a small number of horses. (BGB 1898h: 182)

He goes on to claim that the Dutch traded firearms, gunpowder, and ammunition to the Amerindians²³ (BGB 1898h: 186). These weapons facilitated slaving raids and Carib attacks on the Spanish²⁴

Bancroft (1769: 257-258) claims that the Caribs were corrupted by Dutch influence to raid the settlements of interior Amerindians for prisoners to sell; he notes that the Caribs conduct these attacks by surrounding a village, killing the men, and capturing the women and children (Williams 1936: 424-425). Benjamin (1992: 13) notes that women were the primary targets of slaving raids in the early eighteenth century and that they constituted the majority of Amerindian slaves on Dutch plantations, where they performed domestic labor and made cassava bread. This reflects the use of Amerindian slaves, prior to the large-scale development of the sugar plantations, for domestic and processing tasks.

In 1758, Fray Benito de la Garriga gives a partial list, which he acknowledges as incomplete, of Amerindian groups that were targeted by the Caribs for enslavement: Amarucotos, Anãos, Barinagotos, Guaiacas, Maos, Macos, and Paravinas (BGB 1898c: 147). Other Spanish documents include these and other Amerindian societies – such as the Camaracotos, Aruacos [Arawaks], and Guaiacas [Akawaios] – as targets for Carib slavers (Whitehead 1988: 188). Garriga claims that the slave trade was the means by which the Caribs acquired “...hardware, clothes, knives, glass beads, looking-glasses, fire-arms, and many other articles in use among them” (BGB 1898c: 146-147). Carib slavers and Dutch slave traders received a lucrative profit from the Dutch slave buyers, who purchased slaves with axes, glass beads, choppers hatchets, knives, and machetes, “gaudy ornaments”, and other items²⁵ (BGB 1898c: 14, 118; Edmundson 1904: 15; Whitehead 1988: 187).

The Akawaio were also involved in slaving (Edwards and Gibson 1979: 169; Gillin 1945: 850; Whitehead 1988: 188, 161), and trading slaves to the Dutch (Bancroft 1769: 269), despite early complications in Dutch-Akawaio relations due to the alleged poisoning of an African-descent trader in 1680 (BGB 1898b: 183-184; Benjamin 1992: 5; Whitehead 1988: 165-166). Bancroft (1769: 268) notes that the Akawaio “...frequently make incursions on their interior neighbors, like the Caribbees, for slaves; and the vicinity of their residence particularly exposes them to reprisals from those injured tribes”. In the early eighteenth century, the powerful Manoa society was also involved in the Dutch Amerindian slave trade (Harris and de Villiers 1911: 25). They were competitors and enemies of the Caribs (BGB 1898d: 157; Benjamin 1992: 11; Edmundson 1906: 232, 243; Harris and de Villiers 1911: 179; Whitehead 1988: 168). However, Dutch-Manoa relations unravelled in 1723 (Harris and de Villiers 1911: 188-189). There are also indications that the Arawak (Benjamin 1992: 9, 11; Edwards and Gibson 1979: 168; Menezes 2011: 43, 218-221; Whitehead 1988: 188, 161), despite the claims of Bancroft²⁶ (1769: 336), were involved in the slave trade with the Dutch.

The emergence of a Dutch market for Amerindian slaves²⁷ led to a transformation of Amerindian patterns of warfare. The Jesuit missionary Joseph Gumilla, who was present in the periphery of the Dutch territory during the 1730s and 1740s, claimed that, prior to Dutch colonization in the Guianas, “...the principle objects of the war among the native tribes was to capture the women and children...” (Edmundson 1904: 14-15). However, Gumilla notes that a transformation occurred, in relation to Dutch colonization, and that Amerindian warfare came to be waged for the capture of slaves for purchase by the Dutch (Edmundson 1904: 15). Fray Benito de la Garriga claimed in 1758 that the Amerindian slave trade “...has so completely changed the Caribs that their only occupation is constantly going to and returning from war, selling and killing the Indians of those nations already mentioned” (BGB 1898c: 148). Garriga claims that “...the Caribs sell yearly more than 300 children, leaving murdered in their houses more than 400 adults...”²⁸ – he suggests that the latter were seen by the Dutch as likely to escape (BGB 1898c: 146-147). The Governor of Cumaná, Don José Diguja, writes similarly in 1763 from the Orinoco that the Caribs “...capture the women and children to carry off to the Dutch, and exterminate as many of the adult males as they can” (BGB 1898d: 62, 64). The position of males captured, rather than killed, by the Caribs underwent a historical transformation from one of being *poitos*²⁹ – “sons-in-law” or “servants” – to one closer to the European concept of “slaves” (Whitehead 1988: 57). Carib raids for the acquisition of women and *poitos*, rather than for profit, had previously been a limited activity³⁰ (Whitehead 1988: 2; Whitehead 1990: 160-161).

However, with the development of the Dutch plantation system and concurrent increases in demand for Amerindian slaves, Carib raids came to be increasingly for the purpose of profitably trading slaves to the Dutch.

Amerindians as Enforcers in Dutch Guiana

As the Dutch plantation system grew and the slave population increased³¹ some Amerindians, particularly the Caribs³² and Akawaios, became enforcers against slave revolts and desertions³³ (Benjamin 1992: 7-8; Edwards and Gibson 1979: 168; Harris and de Villiers 1911: 176, 180-181). In addition to the Akawaio and the Caribs, who had a vested interest in preserving their slave markets (Benjamin 1992: 11), the Arawak (BGB 1898h: 256), particularly in Berbice, where they were the primary Amerindian allies of the Dutch (Benjamin 1992, 14), and the Warao (BGB 1898c: 226; BGB 1898f: 148), also sometimes took on the role of enforcers in the eighteenth century³⁴.

There are many recorded instances of Amerindian enforcement activities in the eighteenth century³⁵. The Caribs are reported to have captured runaway Amerindian slaves in 1735 (Benjamin 1992: 13). In 1743, Amerindians brought the Dutch the “barbecued right hands” of persons killed during enforcement attacks³⁶ (BGB 1898c: 40; Rodway 1896: 16). In 1744, the Caribs destroyed a maroon camp and in 1752, Akawaios pursued runaway slaves in Demerara (Benjamin 1992: 12). By this point, Dutch reliance on the Caribs (BGB 1898c: 70) and Akawaios (BGB 1898c: 76) for capturing runaway slaves was becoming routine (Rodway 1896: 15-16).

Dutch mobilization of Amerindian allies for plantation enforcement was particularly developed during the leadership of Storm van's Gravesande from 1743 to 1772 (Harris and de Villiers 1911; Menezes 1973: 66-67). Storm van's Gravesande recurrently mentioned and deployed the free Amerindians as enforcers. For example, such deployments occurred in 1744 (BGB 1898c: 42; BGB 1898g: 78-79), 1760 (BGB 1898c: 186, 197), 1763 (BGB 1898c: 224-226), 1767 (BGB 1898d: 154, 159, 162-163), and 1771 (BGB 1898e: 96). In 1769, Storm van's Gravesande writes that “...as long as we are fortunate enough to have them [the Amerindians] living around us we are quite safe inland, and have nothing to fear concerning the desertion of our slaves³⁷” (BGB 1898e: 5). He sought to cultivate the amity of the Amerindians and to shield them against Dutch maltreatment to an “expedient” extent (BGB 1898e: 5). His friendliness reflects the increasing Dutch need for Amerindian enforcers.

In 1763, the paroxysmal Berbice slave revolt resulted in the largest deployment of Amerindian enforcers in the history of Dutch Guiana³⁸ (Benjamin 1992: 15). The Dutch only regained control of the Berbice Colony with the help of the Amerindians, the British, and Dutch soldiers³⁹ (De Villiers 1911: 17; Menezes 1973: 66-67; Bancroft 1769: 354-357). Storm van's Gravesande provided the Caribs and Akawaios with firearms to squelch the revolt⁴⁰ (BGB 1898c: 227; BGB 1898d: 104, 105; Benjamin 1992: 15), although he had attempted to limit the distribution of firearms on previous occasions (De Villiers 1911: 14), such as in 1750 (BGB 1898c: 67) and 1752 (BGB 1898c: 76). In return for their efforts against the 1763 revolt, “...the Carib, Acawaio and Arawak Chieftains were presented with silver collars on which were engraved the monogram of the West India Company” (BGB 1898d: 126; Rodway 1896: 16). The DWIC also gave the Carib leaders a badge to recognize their efforts (Menezes 2011: 188). After the Berbice slave revolt, the Dutch increasingly relied upon the Caribs as enforcers (BGB 1898d: 126; BGB 1898e: 3; Benjamin 1992: 15; Whitehead 1988: 185, 202, 215, 218; Whitehead 1990: 149).

By the 1770s, the role of the Amerindians, particularly the Caribs, as enforcers expanded and became more formal and systematic⁴¹ (Benjamin 1992: 17; Harris and de Villiers 1911: 103; Rodway 1896: 17). At this time, the Dutch sought to improve their relations with the Amerindians in order to maintain colonial and plantation security. In 1770-1771, the frequency of slave desertions from the Dutch plantations was such that Storm van's Gravesande deployed fifty Caribs on one occasion (BGB 1898e: 79, 82; Benjamin 1992: 16). In 1772, a slave revolt was put down by Amerindian enforcers⁴² (BGB 1898e: 104-105; Menezes 1973: 67; Menezes 2011: 69; Rodway 1896: 17).

After the 1763 and 1772 slave revolts, present-giving became the primary strategy for ensuring continued Amerindian participation in plantation enforcement⁴³ (BGB 1898e: 185).

Presents were sent by the DWIC in 1773 to compensate the Amerindians who had assisted in suppressing the 1772 revolt (BGB 1898e: 108). These presents – "...silver ring-collars, salempouris, combs, beads, mouth drums, and mirrors" – were received by the Court of Policy in 1774, but the collars were returned the following year so that silver-knobbed canes could be made for the Amerindian Owls⁴⁴ (BGB 1898e: 136). The Court of Policy requested: "Twelve ordinary canes with knobs covered with thin silver and twelve common hats with broad sham silver brims or points d'Espagne" (BGB 1898e: 122). On 6 March 1778, the canes, hats, and other presents were distributed to a group of Akawaios, Arawaks, Caribs, and Waraos⁴⁵ (BGB 1898e: 187-188). These Amerindians promised to support the Dutch whenever requested, "...to keep their present abode where they shall be found..." (BGB 1898e: 187). On March 10, 1778, the Dutch gave presents to additional Amerindian Owls and stipulated that future appointments must be chosen from nominations made by the Dutch (BGB 1898e: 187-188). Later in 1778, this renewed alliance was put to use when sixty Amerindians were deployed to recapture runaway slaves (BGB 1898e: 192-193). In 1779, the Dutch again gave presents and presented commissions to additional Amerindian Owls and Captains (BGB 1898e: 207).

In the 1780s, the Dutch continued in their attempts to ensure Amerindian plantation enforcement. In 1784, the Director-General and another representative from Demerara informed the DWIC Assembly of Ten that, in case of revolts from African-descent slaves in the colony, the only sufficient and available countermeasure would be Amerindian enforcers (BGB 1898f: 25). They recommend that the Carib Owls be gathered and that, in order to keep them from moving away, they be given deeds to "...certain pieces of land in full and free ownership, there to dwell and do whatever they might choose, without being by any one driven from this their possession" (BGB 1898f: 25-26). In exchange for these deeds, they must annually visit the Dutch, for census and to renew their alliance, and agree to aid the Dutch against revolts (BGB 1898f: 26). They indicate that such agreements should be cemented by giving Amerindian leaders – "Chiefs or Owls" – presents, such as DWIC monogrammed silver-knob canes, DWIC monogrammed silver "ring-collars", and rum (BGB 1898f: 26). Annual presents are mentioned (BGB 1898f: 26). Also in 1784, plans for formal (and paid) Amerindian enforcement arrangements were devised for a new Dutch post at Moruka (BGB 1898f: 27-29). Viewed within the context of the increasingly unstable Dutch plantation system, which was under nearly constant threat of revolt from the growing population of African-descent slaves, these recommendations mark the beginning of a new policy⁴⁶ in Dutch-Amerindian relations that would eventually lead to the 1793 prohibition against Amerindian slavery.

In 1785, the Director-General indicates to the DWIC that slave desertions to Orinoco were ongoing and remained a serious problem⁴⁷ (BGB 1898f: 39). Realizing that the Dutch were dependent upon them, some Caribs took a firmer position with the Dutch. In 1785, a group of Caribs threatened to participate in future slave uprisings if they were not given presents (BGB 1898f: 36; Benjamin 1992: 18). In response, the Governor-General of Essequibo described the Amerindians as "...our only resource against the negroes..." and requested from the DWIC a yearly provision of presents for the Amerindians⁴⁸ (BGB 1898f: 36). Mention is made during the same year of "...the manifold presents which we must (give) to the Indians, without which they will not move a step..." (BGB 1898f: 38). However, later in 1785, the Dutch were again arming and deploying Caribs against maroon camps (BGB 1898f: 40-42). Although they sought to define the terms of their participation in the Dutch plantation system, the Caribs (and other "free" Amerindians) continued to enforce the system.

By 1790, maroon camps were proliferating and there were as many as 10,000 escaped slaves in Dutch Guiana (Whitehead 1988: 156). The Dutch were entirely dependent upon the Amerindians for colonial and plantation security⁴⁹. Although slave revolts and desertions were continual threats, maroon camps were only perceived as an immediate threat in Surinam. In 1790, a report to the Prince of Orange indicates that in Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice "...the runaways in the bush are as yet few in number and not yet to be dreaded..." (BGB 1898f: 80). This report notes the dire condition in Surinam, where a military force was unable to overcome the maroons⁵⁰ and suggests that the Amerindians are the only viable means of enforcing the plantation system (BGB 1898f: 80). It suggests that the Dutch should foster a racial form of governmentality in the Amerindians and that:

The service which can be expected of them must take its origin only in good will and inclination toward their neighbours, or even in the rudiments of pride; that is to say, in their considering themselves honoured by being able to render service to the whites. For this reason, it should not be looked upon as an act for which we pay them, but as a favor received from them, in return for which we make them a present... (BGB 1898f: 80-81)

The report especially urges that Dutch mistreatment of Amerindians be avoided (BGB 1898f: 80-81). Towards this end, the report recommends prohibiting the buying of Amerindians as slaves: "...this being a thing from which very many difficulties arise" (BGB 1898f: 81). In 1795, another slave uprising was suppressed by Amerindian enforcers (BGB 1898f: 162). Present-giving was subsequently further systematized (Menezes 2011: 99-100, 320; Rodway 1896: 18-22, 25). By this time, the only role left to the Amerindians was that of plantation enforcer (Benjamin 1992: 18).

Dutch Abolition of Amerindian Slavery

Amerindian slavery was formally abolished by the States-General in 1793⁵¹ (Benjamin 1992: 18; Menezes 2011: 215; Williams 1936: 424). However, although Menezes (2011: 215) claims that this abolition was later adhered to by the British, after their final takeover of Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice in 1803 (BGB 1898a: 62-63), its immediate effects in Dutch Guiana are unclear. It certainly did not prevent slavery in the more remote areas of Dutch Guiana, nor later British Guiana. Amerindian slavery still illicitly occurred under British rule (BGB 1898h: 264; Menezes 2011: 218-221). Like the Dutch, the British relied upon Amerindian enforcement of the plantation system (BGB 1898f: 173; Menezes 1973: 69-70; Menezes 2011: 59-60). However, in 1838, with the British abolition of involuntary indenturing, which continued as a form of quasi-slavery past formal abolition (Menezes 1973: 75, 82; Rodway 1896: 30), the colony's concern with Amerindians as plantation enforcers diminished and then mostly evaporated. While the prohibitions against Amerindian slavery and slaving nullified the roles of Amerindians as slaves and slavers, the abolition of African-descent slavery made the role of Amerindians as plantation enforcers redundant (Benjamin 1992: 18). Subsequently, the Amerindians were without a European-defined role in British Guiana during the remainder of the colonial period.

Conclusion

This article has delineated the roles performed by Amerindians – as slaves, slavers, and enforcers – within the plantation system of eighteenth century Dutch Guiana. It has shown how these roles emerged and how they were eventually made redundant with continuing developments in the plantation system. Amerindian slavery in Dutch Guiana emerged from the heightened demands for labor that began with the annatto trade and increased with the development of the Dutch plantation system; however, the Amerindians in Dutch Guiana were not static entities in a stable system. Rather, they are seen in an array of roles and positions that emerged within specific historical contexts and that changed over time. What arises into immediate view is a plantation system that underwent significant transformations and that recurrently reconfigured Amerindian bodies as integral units of its functioning. Reading through the gaps of this unstable plantation system, we encounter the Amerindians contesting their roles and positions and seeking to define the conditions of their participation and performance.

Notes

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¹For general history on the Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice colonies, see Dalton (1855), Netscher (1888 [1929]), and Rodway (1891-1894).

²The primary sources for this article come from documents prepared by the British Government in 1898 in relation to the British Guiana Boundary (BGB) dispute between Great Britain and the United States of Venezuela. The documents most used were those from Volumes I-V of the Appendices for the British Case and the Appendix to the British Counter-Case. These volumes contain translated extracts from Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and British documents. The British Argument, British Case, and British Counter-Case to the boundary dispute were also used. The separate documents prepared in relation to the later boundary arbitration between Great Britain and Brazil were not examined, nor were those prepared by Venezuela and the USA in the boundary arbitration between Great Britain and the United States of Venezuela.

³Annatto is repeatedly referred to in the primary sources as a dye. It was obtained by the Dutch in large balls through Amerindian trade and shipped to Holland, where it was probably primarily used for food colouring.

⁴Beekman had been given orders in 1678 not to offend the Amerindians (Williams 1936: 423).

⁵Amerindian slaves prepared annatto for trade and export to Holland. The preparation of annatto dye balls required the collection of seeds and subsequent processing; this was probably done by grinding the seeds or by extraction. Such labor requirements contributed to greater demand for Amerindian slaves (Whitehead 1988: 161).

⁶The DWIC reiterate to the Commandeur of Essequibo in 1703 that the Amerindian slave trade must be prohibited in Essequibo (BGB 1898b: 225). The Dutch wanted slaving raids to occur only outside of their territories in order to prevent reprisals and disruptions to Dutch-Amerindian trade.

⁷This diary shows that Amerindians were delivering letters and undertaking paid tasks for the Dutch at this time (BGB 1898h: 47-158).

⁸Traders and slavers from Surinam greatly disrupted the annatto trade. In 1737, the Commandeur of Essequibo informs the DWIC of the lagging annatto trade at a previously significant trading area and writes that the Amerindians "...derive more profit from the slave trade with the Surinamers..." (BGB 1898c: 25; BGB 1898g: 81).

⁹Amerindian slaves were not generally used on the plantations for hard labor (Benjamin 1992: 10; Whitehead 1988: 184). At the Poelwijk plantation, they were used "...for hunting and fishing, the women looking after the cassava for the daily consumption of the plantation" (BGB 1898c: 14). However, there were plantations in the seventeenth century that were set up with employed "free Indians" (BGB 1898b: 203).

¹⁰There was much growth in the sugar plantation system after 1746, when the Demerara river was opened for plantations (Whitehead 1988: 153). Benjamin (1992: 4) notes similar plantation growth in Berbice in 1733. However, the Dutch were still calling for increases in Amerindian annatto production in 1753 (BGB 1898c: 77).

¹¹Benjamin (1992: 4-5) also variously mentions plantation growth, Amerindian conflicts, and the rising profitability of the Amerindian slave trade as factors in the decline of the annatto trade in Dutch Guiana.

¹²The Dutch division of Amerindian societies into those who could and those could not be enslaved found its precursor in similar Spanish divisions. For example, the Spanish classified the Arawak as free and the Caribs, which was a flexible term of classification for the Spanish and bound up with ideas of cannibalism, as liable to enslavement (Whitehead 1988: 9-11, 18, 172-173). Although the Dutch outlawed the enslavement of Amerindian societies designated as free, and penalized colonists who forced them to provide labor (BGB 1898c: 9), there were sometimes incidents where free Amerindians were made to provide labor. For example, in 1750 (BGB 1898c: 64) and in 1760 (BGB 1898c: 182-183) there are cases of Dutchmen forcing Caribs to provide labor or otherwise mistreating them. Accusations

against Dutchmen regarding free Amerindians, particularly the Caribs, appear to have been taken seriously by the Dutch.

¹³The charter of the DWIC stated that the Company was permitted to enter into "...contracts, leagues, and alliances with the Princes and natives of the lands therein comprised..." (BGB 1898b: 45-46).

¹⁴Dutch-Amerindian relations centered around "posts" where a "post-holder" was stationed. Dutch postholders were involved in Dutch-Amerindian relations, Dutch-Amerindian trade, the Amerindian slave trade, and in mobilizing Amerindians against slave revolts and desertions (BGB 1898e: 140, 186; Whitehead 1988: 19, 151). Complaints regarding postholders were common (Menezes 2011: 98-132). Due to their considerable involvement in the Amerindian slave trade, the Dutch posts came close to being slave markets at times.

¹⁵In 1714, a private trader with ten Amerindian slaves from Orinoco for transport to Surinam was arrested in Essequibo and his shipment was seized (BGB 1898b: 238). In 1718, thirty-one Amerindian slaves were seized from another Surinamese trader, who had injured an Amerindian (BGB 1898b: 249). In 1749, slave traders from Surinam were still using Essequibo as a transit point (BGB 1898c: 61).

¹⁶As early as 1694, the Commandeur of Essequibo writes that: "Most of the red slaves come from the Rivers Barima and Orinoco, which lies under the dominion of the Spaniard[s]" (BGB 1898b: 213). The sourcing of Amerindian slaves from the Orinoco placed the potential instability arising from reprisals outside of the Dutch territory (Williams 1936: 424). However, there were cases of slaving in the Essequibo river. Traders from Berbice also traded for slaves in the Orinoco region (BGB 1898b: 229-230). In 1727, the Commandeur of Essequibo notes the existence of Amerindian slave trade on the Essequibo River (BGB 1898c: 7), and in 1730 on the Mazaruni and Cuyuni Rivers (BGB 1898c: 10). In 1731, the DWIC inquired into the potential quantity, value, and price of Amerindian slaves to be obtained in the Mazaruni and Cuyuni rivers (BGB 1898c: 13). In 1747, Storm van's Gravesande met with opposition due to the ongoing Amerindian slave trade when he attempted to close the Essequibo river (BGB 1898c: 52). He finally closed this river in 1755 due to continuing incidents (BGB 1898c: 105). Earlier, in 1750, he mentioned the potential for Amerindian reprisals in the Essequibo due to the activities of Dutch slavers, who were enslaving the "free" Amerindians (BGB 1898c: 64, 67).

¹⁷Dutch documents from the Court of Policy in Essequibo, dated 1726, indicate that earlier that year two men were sent to Orinoco "to buy red slaves" (BGB 1898c: 3-5). They were sent to procure these Amerindian slaves on behalf of the DWIC and were sent with a letter to the Governor of Orinoco (BGB 1898c: 4-5). One of the traders returned on 16 September 1726, with "two female slaves, and one child" (BGB 1898c: 6). The British boundary documents state that, in 1726, "...red slaves were obtained from the country above Santo Thomé, and trade therein, therefore, could not be well carried on without the consent or connivance of the Spaniards" (BGB 1898g: 64).

¹⁸In 1758, the Dutch Cuyuni Post was destroyed by a Spanish attack (BGB 1898c: 143; BGB 1898g: 81; BGB 1898h: 200-203; BGB 1898i: 19-20). The Spanish justification was that persons at the post, including the post-holder, were involved in "...the unjust traffic of slavery among the Indians..." (BGB 1898c: 169). This attack facilitated slave desertions to the Orinoco and drove off the Caribs (BGB 1898c: 212, 227; Whitehead 1988: 155-156, 163, 221-222). The Dutch were concerned during the eighteenth century that Spanish attacks (BGB 1898e: 101, 128) and Dutch abuse (BGB 1898e: 5) might drive away the Amerindians, who were blocking desertions and potential slave revolts.

¹⁹Carib groups were the primary allies of the Dutch in Demerara and Essequibo. Although most seem to have been allied with the Dutch, some Carib groups were allied with the Spanish (BGB 1898c: 146). The history of Dutch-Carib relations differs in Surinam (Whitehead 1990: 170) and Berbice (Benjamin 1992: 13-14). See Civrieux (1976) and Whitehead (1988) for histories of the Caribs.

²⁰For example, in 1778, two persons with passports from Surinam were given permission letters in Essequibo "to pass and repass the Post of Arinda" for purchasing and bartering Amerindians (BGB 1898e: 189-190). Licenses were also being given by the Dutch to persons going to the Orinoco in the 1770s; such that, those going there without a license were to be detained under some circumstances (BGB 1898h: 255). In 1763, Storm van's Gravesande indicates that the Arinda post was meant for the Dutch trade in Amerindian slaves and

annatto dye, as well as for enforcement against slave desertions (BGB 1898i: 42; BGB 1898c: 227).

²¹A Spanish document, circa 1750, states that "...when the Caribs go up to attack other tribes of Indians, they surround their villages by night, seize the boys (whom they called *Poitos*) and sell them for slaves in the [Dutch] colonies..." (BGB 1898h: 196).

²²Writing in 1763, Don José Diguja, Governor of Cumaná, recurrently mentions Carib attacks on the Spanish missions in the eighteenth century (BGB 1898d: 1-77). Dutch involvement in many of these cases is unclear. However, in 1769, Storm van's Gravesande notes that a post-holder had reported Caribs coming to his post having "...priestly garments and ornaments with them" (BGB 1898e: 41). The Spanish would also attack Amerindians in Dutch territory. For example, in 1748, Storm van's Gravesande notes being informed that the Spanish were attacking the Amerindians and "...carrying them off, with their wives and children, to send them to Florida..." (BGB 1898c: 58).

²³Although private traders supplied guns (Benjamin 1992: 10), supply from the Dutch colonial governments was generally hesitant. Due to anxiety over escalating conflicts, which might disrupt the plantation system, Storm van's Gravesande actually prohibited traders from distributing firearms to the Amerindians in 1750 (Whitehead 1988: 155, 165). He declined to provide firearms in 1769, when a Carib owl explicitly called for them in the context of continuing hostilities from the Spanish (BGB 1898e: 13). Storm van's Gravesande's reluctance to provide the Caribs with such weapons hampered, although it did not nullify, their ability to resist the Spanish (Whitehead 1988: 158-159). The Berbice colonial government was also hesitant to supply firearms (Benjamin 1992: 14).

²⁴There are many other Spanish documents that reference Carib slave-raiding and slave-trading to the Dutch. For example, there are such references for 1747 (BGB 1898c: 53), 1757 (BGB 1898c: 137), 1758 (BGB 1898c: 140), and 1770 (BGB 1898e: 74-75, 80).

²⁵Although there were fluctuations, Edmundson (1904: 15) notes the Dutch price of an Amerindian slave as approximately "... two axes, two choppers, some beads, or other similar trifles..." (Edmundson 1904: 15).

²⁶Whitehead (1988: 188) references Bancroft's (1769: 336) claims, regarding Arawakan non-involvement in Amerindian slave trading, to hypothesize that the Arawak ended their involvement in this trade due to declining population and power.

²⁷The Portuguese were also involved in slavery in this region. The Makushi were targets of such raids, from 1740 into the nineteenth century (BGB 1898a: 9; BGB 1898f: 181; Hillhouse 1825: 37; Williams 1932: 13-14). The Makushi later became involved in British plantation enforcement activities in the early nineteenth century (BGB 1898h: 269; Williams 1936: 425).

²⁸Whitehead (1988: 184-187) suggests that the overall numbers involved in Amerindian slavery in Dutch Guiana were actually smaller than those represented in the Spanish documents.

²⁹The Carib term *poito* refers to male Amerindians who were captured during raids. Whitehead (1988: 2) writes that "...Amerindians ultimately integrated their captives, as wives or *poitos* (son-in-law), into the kinship network, while the Europeans treated their slaves as commodities, exploiting and discarding them as their economic usefulness dictated".

³⁰Whitehead (1990: 160) claims that, prior to trade with the Dutch, "...infinite accumulation of the spoils of war (women and/or labor power of the *poito*) had no practical rationale" for the Caribs.

³¹During the eighteenth century, the African-descent slave population increased dramatically in Dutch Guiana (Benjamin 1992: 16). Attempts were made, in 1774 and 1784, to regulate the number of slaves that could be on a plantation relative to the number of whites (Davis 1891: 347). The Dutch became increasingly dependent upon Amerindians as plantation enforcers against "...the growing and often rebellious black slave population" (Whitehead 1988: 153).

³²Plantation enforcement influenced Carib culture and sociology in noticeable ways. Storm van's Gravesande observed Caribs with cloths covering their heads and faces; he was informed that "...these were men who have killed negroes; this is their custom, and they must go like that for a month" (BGB 1898d: 165). Whitehead (1990: 153) interprets this practice, like cannibalism, as "...a means by which the warrior could distance himself from the trauma of killing".

³³The Caribs were also the primary bulwark for the Dutch against Spanish advances (BGB

1898g: 85; Menezes 2011: 20; Whitehead 1988: 95, 104, 158-159). The deployment of Amerindians as enforcers or proxy forces was not unique to Dutch Guiana and also occurred during the Cabanagem civil war in nineteenth century Brazil (Harris 2010).

³⁴Amerindians were not always compliant in enforcing the plantation system (Benjamin 1992: 14-15). Whitehead (1988: 222) mentions "...instances of Caribs being warned against sheltering runaways and, even, occasionally being brought to Essequibo to answer charges for so doing".

³⁵Although it greatly increased in the eighteenth century, Amerindian plantation enforcement had its earliest instances in the seventeenth century. For example, in 1663, Amerindians were sent with soldiers to capture African-descent persons who were attacking the Dutch plantations (BGB 1898h: 37; Whitehead 1988: 163-164).

³⁶This practice of bringing back body parts as proof of enemies slain was frequent in the history of Dutch Guiana. In 1724, the Dutch instructed a post-holder "to kill or capture" a group of enemy Amerindians and stated that they would pay them for every head taken and every slave captured (BGB 1898c: 3). Storm van's Gravesande mentions being brought the hands, arms, and/or heads of slain slaves by the Caribs and Akawaios; for example, references to this exist for 1763 (BGB 1898c: 227), 1764 (BGB 1898d: 104), and 1768 (BGB 1898d: 166).

³⁷By the 1750s, the Spanish had devised a plan to inspire and aid maroons and other runaways in attacks against the Dutch (BGB 1898i: 19; BGB 1898c: 86-87). In addition to other indications, Storm van's Gravesande's claim in 1769 that the Spanish were arming runaway African-descent slaves to "attack and plunder us" suggests that Spanish agitation of maroons and other runaway slaves of the Dutch was ongoing (BGB 1898e: 13).

³⁸The population of Berbice in 1762, one year prior to the rebellion, consisted of "346 whites, 244 red slaves, and 3,833 black slaves" (Whitehead 1988: 156). Thus, the balance of power in favor of the Dutch was dependent upon Amerindian enforcers. The eighteenth century Berbice plantation system relied upon Amerindian enforcement efforts in the same basic way as that of Essequibo and Demerara (Benjamin 1992: 14-15).

³⁹The DWIC wrote to Storm van's Gravesande on July 7, 1763, to inform him that they were sending soldiers to buttress the efforts against the slave revolt (BGB 1898c: 225).

⁴⁰In 1762, Storm van's Gravesande writes that the Caribs "...cannot or will not fight without guns" (BGB 1898c: 216). Later in 1762, the DWIC sent the requested guns (BGB 1898c: 220).

⁴¹A large number of Caribs had migrated into Dutch Guiana by this time because of continued hostilities from the Spanish (Whitehead 1988: 129). The height of the wars between the Spanish and the Caribs was between the 1730s and the 1750s (Whitehead 1988: 119-130). Many Caribs subsequently migrated into the Dutch territory (Menezes 1973: 66; Menezes 2011: 99; Rodway 1889: 34-35; Whitehead 1988: 157-158).

⁴²In 1772, over two hundred Caribs (later growing to three hundred) were gathered when a group of slaves killed their owner and his spouse (BGB 1898e: 104-105). These Caribs and Akawaios were then deployed with Dutchmen to seek out and attack the rebel slaves (BGB 1898e: 105-106). Storm van's Gravesande claims that, prior to this, he had "...never seen any Acuways [Akawaios] come to our assistance with arms" (BGB 1898e: 105).

⁴³Sporadic present-giving had occurred since the seventeenth century. In general, Dutch post-holders were the primary conduit for the delivery of presents to the Amerindians (Menezes 2011: 70; Pinkard 1806: 438).

⁴⁴Owl and Captain were both titles used to designate Amerindian leaders by the Dutch. Owl was the higher title (BGB 1898f: 160). These leaders distributed Dutch presents (Benjamin 1992: 8) and from the late 1770s were given "...special staves of office" (Whitehead 1988: 169). Such titles were used by the Dutch in attempts to co-opt and control Amerindian leadership (Benjamin 1992: 8).

⁴⁵Benjamin (1992: 17), Menezes (1973: 67), Menezes (2011: 69), Rodway (1896: 17), and Whitehead (1988: 159-160) also discuss these events from the 1770s.

⁴⁶Menezes (1973: 67-68), Menezes (2011: 69-70), and Whitehead (1988: 160) also discuss the development of this policy.

⁴⁷By 1772, many slaves from the Dutch colonies had fled to the Orinoco region (BGB 1898e: 100). The Spanish effectively re-enslaved many of the former slaves from the Dutch colonies (BGB 1898f: 24-25).

⁴⁸The Governor-General of Essequibo suggests that this increased assertiveness was related, in part, to the turnovers in colonial government (BGB 1898f: 36) when the British and French temporarily held control, sequentially, in 1781 and 1782 (BGB 1898f: 1; Whitehead 1988: 170).

⁴⁹By the end of the eighteenth century, there were almost four hundred active plantations in Demerara alone (BGB 1898f: 170), and “massive imports of enslaved Africans” were being brought into Dutch Guiana (Oostindie 2012: 35).

⁵⁰See Stedman (1796)

⁵¹Despite this prohibition on Amerindian slavery, a discourse continued that differentiated “free” Amerindians. For example, in 1797, the Governor of Essequibo ordered the release of a “free Indian woman” who had been abducted (BGB 1898f: 169).

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