



# A Swiss Village in the Dutch Tropics

The Limitations of Empire-Centred Approaches to the Early  
Modern Atlantic World<sup>1</sup>

31

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This article considers what the migration circuits to and from Suriname can tell us about Dutch early modern colonisation in the Atlantic world. Did the Dutch have an Atlantic empire that can be studied by treating it as an integrated space, as suggested by New Imperial Historians, or did colonisation rely on circuits outside Dutch control, stretching beyond its imperial space? An empire-centred approach has dominated the study of Suriname's history and has largely glossed over the routes taken by European migrants to and from the colony. When the empire-centred perspective is transcended it becomes possible to see that colonists arrived in Suriname from a range of different places around the Atlantic and the European hinterland. The article takes an Atlantic or global perspective to demonstrate the choices available to colonists and the networks through which they moved.

The histories of the Europeans moving to and from Suriname in the eighteenth century clearly illustrate the limitations of an empire-centred approach to the history of the Dutch in the Atlantic. By borrowing insights from the field of Atlantic history, this article advocates transcending national imperial approaches and seeing Suriname within its Atlantic-wide network of interconnections. This change in perspective uncovers the movement of people, goods and ideas in the Atlantic world left unrevealed in empire-centred studies. The recruitment of European settlers for Suriname demonstrates the relevance of an Atlantic approach on two levels, firstly by outlining the networks through which Europeans were recruited for the

colony and secondly by demonstrating the choices available to settlers to move on to other colonies not under Dutch sovereignty.

### Suriname and the Atlantic

Although we cannot be certain, it seems very likely that the Piedmontese physician Louis De Bussy ended his life as a one-legged beggar on the streets of New York in the early 1750s. His leg was amputated after the ship *Rebecca*, on which he sailed from Suriname to North America, had been wrecked.<sup>2</sup> Before his disastrous voyage he had been the head of the hospital in Paramaribo, and in that capacity had tried to found a *hortus medicus*. He had also had the ambition to start a Swiss village in the colony, and for which he received a commission from the Suriname Company in November 1747. To recruit families for his settlement he had gone to Basel and, under false pretences, had managed to convince several of these families. His unfortunate voyage from Suriname to New York came after his project to establish the Swiss village in the colony had failed and he was banished from the colony.<sup>3</sup> The connection between Switzerland, Suriname and British North America in this tragic life might seem arbitrary, but in fact it aptly illustrates the structure of the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century. The Atlantic connections of Suriname stretched deep into the European hinterland, Africa, the Caribbean and North America.

Using several cases of settler recruitment and passenger movement, this article questions the usability of empire-centred approaches to the colony and places Suriname in the Atlantic world. The cases that will be discussed are the arrival of Huguenots in the 1680s, the Palatine Germans of the 1730s and Swiss settlers of the late 1740s. Figures of inward and outward movements from Suriname are used to quantify inter-colonial connections in the second half of the eighteenth century. Both the quantitative and qualitative parts of this study concentrate on the movement of settlers. This means that several circuits of migration are excluded, most notably the captive Africans arriving

1 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, guest editors and editors of the *BMGN-LCHR* for their many insightful comments, as well as my colleagues in Leiden for providing a fruitful working environment.

2 John H. de Bye, *Database van passagiers van en naar Suriname* (Paramaribo 2003); H. Pijttersen, *Europeesche kolonisatie in Suriname, een geschiedkundige schets* (The Hague 1896) 25-30.

3 Nationaal Archief (National Archives of the Netherlands) (NL-HaNA), The Hague, Sociëteit van Suriname (SvS), Resoluties van de directeuren 1746-1747, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 37; Stukken betreffende de zaak van de Zwitserse families, inv. nr. 414; Missieven, rekeningen en brieven, inv.nr. 283.

through the trans-Atlantic and regional slave trade, the soldiers and higher military personnel and lastly the sailors who settled in the colony.

The great variation in the origins of the colony's Europeans has been one of the clichés of Suriname's history. Nevertheless an empire-centred view of the colony has prevented historians from considering the implications of this wider web of connections that the migrants brought with them, and what these connections suggest about the Dutch colonisation of Suriname. The Dutch debate about the movement of people to the Atlantic has been concerned mostly with the estimation of the numbers of migrants leaving Europe through the Dutch Republic.<sup>4</sup> Movements within the Atlantic have not been considered. When tracing the circuits through which Europeans arrived and left Suriname in the seventeenth and eighteenth century it becomes apparent that the colony was part of a wider Atlantic world of interconnections. The historiography of Suriname mentions these connections in passing but the colony is seen primarily in terms of the Dutch and their overseas activities, glossing over many other relations. European 'foreigners' in the colony were regarded only as handmaidens of the Dutch colonisation of Suriname.<sup>5</sup>

The genealogy of the empire-centred historiography of Suriname can be traced to the nineteenth century. The renewed societal interest in the question of abolition in the late 1840s (and connected to this the concerns about the question of the Christianisation of enslaved inhabitants of the colony) inspired history writing about Suriname. The main book on Suriname from this period is Julius Wolbers' *Geschiedenis van Suriname*. Wolbers' stated motive for his work was to popularise the history of Suriname so as to raise interest in the suffering slaves. He also stressed that the Netherlands owned Suriname, which morally obliged the Dutch to know about it. The emphasis on this 'Dutchness' could also be related to the Dutch abolitionist movement in general, which used this emphasis strategically to win people to their

4 Emmer, Klooster and Enthoven discussed estimates of migration figures into the Atlantic, but all the estimates seem to have been either deflated or inflated. Pieter Emmer and Wim Klooster, 'The Dutch Atlantic, 1600-1800: Expansion without Empire', *Itinerario* 23:2 (1999) 48-69; Victor Enthoven, 'Dutch Crossings: Migration between the Netherlands and the New World, 1600-1800', *Atlantic Studies* 2:2 (2005) 153-176. An evaluation of the discussion is found in Gijs Kruijtzter, 'European Migration in the Dutch Sphere', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.),

*Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden 2008) 109. His main conclusion is that a serious estimate is needed.

5 Examples of studies in which the colonising nationalities are studied, but in which the networks of these people extending into Europe remain unmentioned are J. Wolbers, *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (Reprint of the 1861 edition; Amsterdam 1970) 171; Pijtersen, *Europeesche kolonisatie*; F. Oudeschans Dentz, 'De Kolonisatie van Guyana', *West-Indische Gids* 25 (1943) 248-254.

cause.<sup>6</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century on, books on the colony were written increasingly in Dutch, by Dutch authors conceptualising the colony as a Dutch responsibility. In contrast, the books written on the colony during the rule of the Suriname Company (1683-1795) were often written in German, French or English, and most of those written in Dutch were translated into those languages. In the two centuries of writing on the colony that preceded the shift to a Dutch-centred view the Europeans who played a central part in the colonisation of Suriname left their mark in libraries and book collections. In the eighteenth century English, French and German physicians took a substantial share of the publications, translations and reprints, making the colony a topic for a European public. The later historiography retroactively made Suriname's seventeenth and eighteenth century more Dutch than the colony had been at the time, ignoring the Atlantic network of the directors of the Suriname Company, plantation owners, the captains lying at anchor in the Suriname River, or the 'subaltern telegraph' of enslaved Afro-Americans.

Thinking in terms of empire, especially when it comes to cultural, economic and migratory connections in the early modern Atlantic world, seems ill-fitted for this particular colony and the history of colonisation in general. Calling imperial history 'new' has not solved the problem of retroactively attributing to the (British) nation an agency and reach that it simply did not possess. While it has been a helpful contribution by New Imperial Historians to go beyond a core-periphery model and integrating colony and motherland, the reinforcing of imperial boundaries has (unintentionally) revitalised colonial myth-making about the unity of empire.<sup>7</sup> In recent decades, Atlantic history as a field has provided several tools to rethink the European colonisation of the Atlantic rim in the early modern period. Atlanticists have stressed that their findings demand from researchers that they transcend national imperial orientations when studying Atlantic integration, and recognise the multiple origins of globalisation processes. This focuses attention on the interconnection of the Atlantic regions and linking the dynamic of integration to hinterland developments.<sup>8</sup> At the moment research into Atlantic history is beginning to include more global inter-connections and comparisons.<sup>9</sup> This is not to deny the main connection

6 Maartje Janse, *De Afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland, 1840-1880* (Groningen 2007) 295.

7 Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge 2004).

8 Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass. 2005); Jack D. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic*

*History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York 2009); Bernard Bailyn and Patricia Denault, *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830* (Cambridge, Mass. 2009).

9 Peter A. Coclanis, 'Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63:4, Third Series (October 2006) 725-742; Peter A. Coclanis, 'Beyond Atlantic History', in: Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History*, 337-356.

between European cities and their colonies, but encourages incorporating the entire system of interconnections crossing the imperial limits laid down by states and companies.<sup>10</sup>

The switch to Atlantic approaches that include the inter-colonial connections of early modern colonies has yielded interesting results in the case of Suriname. Johannes Postma went beyond the imperial view and investigated the Atlantic interconnectedness of Suriname by mapping out the many regional and Atlantic ‘life lines’ of the colony. He concluded that in the eighteenth century more than half of the ships sailing to Paramaribo were non-Dutch and arrived from regional ports.<sup>11</sup>

Following Postma’s findings the research on Suriname should begin to include these kinds of inter-colonial movements more actively. Taking a cisatlantic rather than an imperial approach, this article emphasises both the multiple connections to the European hinterland, as well as inter-colonial connections as fundamental constituent of how the Suriname Company and its colony functioned.<sup>12</sup>

### Countermeasures against the maroons

Between 1683 and 1795 the colony of Suriname was owned by a private company, the *Geotroyeerde Sociëteit van Suriname* (Suriname Company, sc). The sc was made up of three parties – the Dutch West India Company, the City of Amsterdam and the family Aerssen van Sommelsdijck. The three were represented on the board of directors of the sc who managed the colony in compliance with the charter granted by the States-General.<sup>13</sup> The sc profited from managing the colony by levying taxes as well as from minor plantation

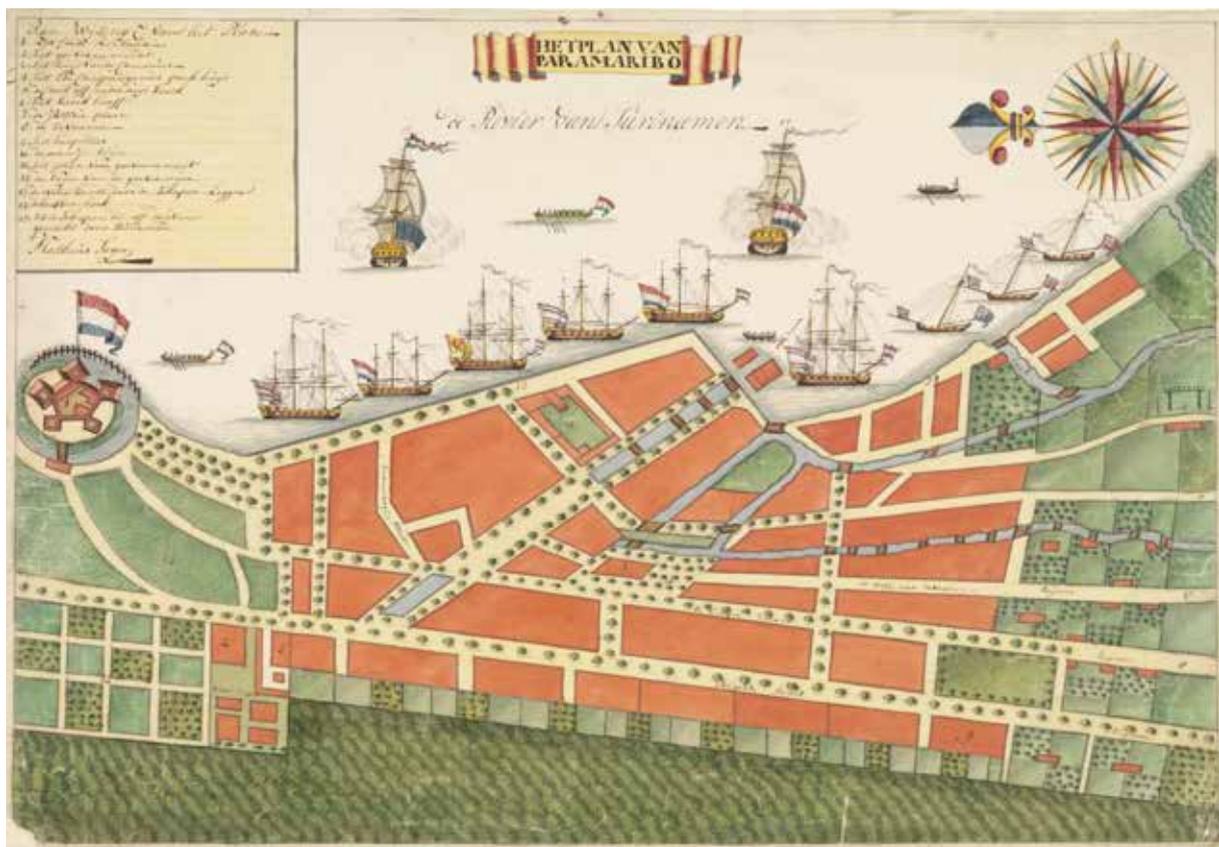
10 The edited volume *Atlantic Port Cities* is entirely dedicated to studying these ports and the relation to their respective American hinterlands. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* (Knoxville 1991). Bailyn tried to explain the massive German migration to the Americas from the socio-political tensions in Germany at the time: Bailyn, *Contours*, 36-37.

11 Johannes Postma, ‘Breaching the Mercantile Barriers of the Dutch Colonial Empire: North American Trade with Surinam during the Eighteenth Century’, in: Olaf Uwe Janzen (ed.), *Merchant Organization and Maritime Trade in the North Atlantic, 1660-1815: Research in Maritime*

*History*, volume 15 (St. John’s, New Foundland 1998) 107-131; Johannes Postma, ‘Suriname and its Atlantic Connections, 1667-1795’, in: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*, volume 1, *The Atlantic World* (Leiden, Boston 2003) 287-322.

12 David Armitage, ‘Three Concepts of Atlantic History’, in: David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York 2002) 11-30.

13 J.J. Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wildekust in Zuid-America* (Amsterdam 1770) II, 616-645.



▲ This hand-drawn map of Paramaribo was made around 1750 by the mate Mattheus Sager. The ships anchored in front of the *Waterkant* accord with the decreed location for the vessels: on the left are the Dutch trans-oceanic freighters, on the right the British ships of the regional traders. In the lower right corner we can find the hospital where De Bussy worked. Maritime Museum Rotterdam collection.

activities. Accumulated profits were paid out in equal shares between the three parties.<sup>14</sup> The individual participants also had their particular interests in the colony. For example, the WIC sold slaves to the colony and several Mayors of Amsterdam had invested large sums in the colony's plantations.<sup>15</sup> The charter gave anyone from the Dutch Republic the freedom to start a plantation or ship goods to and from the colony.<sup>16</sup> Over the course of the eighteenth century shipping and plantation production increased tremendously when compared to most other sectors of the Dutch economy.<sup>17</sup> When in 1795 the Patriot movement came to power in the Dutch Republic they dissolved the SC as well as the other private companies that were managing overseas colonies.<sup>18</sup> Suriname became part of the Dutch state proper (except for short periods of English occupation) until independence in 1975.

The formidable growth of sugar and especially coffee production was made possible by the forced migration of roughly 250,000 slaves from Africa. In the colony the enslaved Africans made up the great majority of its inhabitants; the ratio of them to the free Europeans could be as high as twenty to one.<sup>19</sup> The forced migration of slaves to Suriname was vital for the colony's survival in the eighteenth century. Colonisation attempts on the Wild Coast by Europeans without the use of slaves in the early modern period all failed miserably. However there was no agreement on the use of slaves. Doubts were not only raised from a moral position, but the colonisation with only Europeans sounded appealing compared to the troublesome process of the slave trade and the associated high death rates and mass desertions. In the early eighteenth century some argued that migrants from Europe should replace the use of slaves in Suriname entirely.<sup>20</sup> The use of slave labour was seen as causing moral degradation and the colonisation of Suriname using only whites remained a recurring theme.<sup>21</sup>

Two attacks on the colony by the French at the end of the War of Spanish Succession (1703-1714) had given the opportunity for slaves to flee, increasing the number of maroons. The stabilisation of the slave trade in that same period caused an influx of Africans who were more likely to escape than their conditioned and creolised fellow slaves. The decades after the Peace of

14 G.W. van der Meiden, *Betwist Bestuur. Een eeuw strijd om de macht in Suriname, 1651-1753* (First edition 1987; Amsterdam 2008).

15 J.P. van der Voort, *De Westindische plantages van 1720 tot 1795. Financiën en handel* (Eindhoven 1973).

16 Hartsinck, *Beschrijving II*, 630.

17 J. de Vries and A.M. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge 1997) 481-490.

18 SvS, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 85.

19 Ruud Beeldsnijder, 'Om werk van jullie te hebben'. *Plantage slaven in Suriname, 1730-1750*, volume 16, *Bronnen voor de studie van Afro-Suriname* (Utrecht 1994) appendix 4, 264-266.

20 Beeldsnijder, 'Om werk van jullie te hebben', 33-34.

21 SvS, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 508-511.



▲ The *Korps Zwarte Jagers* (Black Rangers) was formed in 1772 as a military unit to fight the maroons. The rangers were enslaved Africans who were promised their freedom at the end of their service. Their

nickname *redi musu* (red caps) refers to their outfit and means traitor in present-day Sranan Tongo.

J.G. Stedman, *Viaggio al Surinam* Vol. I (Milan 1818). Special Collections, University Library, Amsterdam University, UBM: NOK 95-155, pl. 2 t.o.p. 99.

Utrecht in 1713 therefore saw increased concerns of the sc directors with fighting the maroons. The many enslaved Africans who managed to break free from plantation discipline fled into the Suriname jungle where they settled in small villages.<sup>22</sup> Even when they did not organise attacks on nearby plantations the very existence of these free communities posed a threat to the power of the European colonisers. Governor Mauricius called them a 'Hydra' that had to be slain. The sc directors employed several methods to deal with the marooned slaves and the potential threat posed to the colonists by those still enslaved. The sc encouraged planters to raise the number of white overseers on the plantations, they organised punitive expeditions against the maroons and publically executed the ones they caught; they created a system of outposts defending the outer borders of the plantation area, attempted to settle a buffer-zone of European villages and settled several peace treaties with the different maroon groups. Many of the methods employed to maintain social and territorial control over the colony required white Europeans to move to Suriname.

The numbers of white Europeans moving to the colony might not look very spectacular (see table at page 43); these people however did constitute an important asset for the directors of the colony. Despite the favourable circumstances offered by the sc to new arrivals, those in charge of the colonisation had quite a number of difficulties in finding native Dutch to move overseas. Those who were willing to go to the colony came from all over Europe as well as other colonies, making the small group of whites religiously diverse and often personally and economically connected to other parts of the Atlantic, crossing imperial boundaries.

### Inter-imperial movements

Although the quantitative data is limited, it is possible to reconstruct the movement of people beyond the direct connection between the Dutch Republic and Suriname. Together with a reconstruction of the figures the question arises why people moved between colonies of the various empires. The strong trade relations between colonies of different empires might explain how they moved. Looking more closely at the various histories of these migrations the strong competition between the empires for settlers seems to provide at least part of the answer to why they migrated on to colonies of other

22 Henk den Heijer, 'To ransack a Colony: Cassard's Raid on Surinam in 1712 and its Effect on Marronage' (Paper presented at Paramaribo conference of the Association for Caribbean History, 2008).

empires. De Bussy not only went into the Swiss hinterland to find settlers, when difficult times befell him he left the colony for another colonial Atlantic destination. He was far from the only one to leave through inter-imperial and inter-colonial circuits, rather a clear pattern is visible revealing that inter-imperial and inter-colonial movement of people and goods was a constitutive aspect of the colony. De Bussy's dreams of starting a medicinal botanic garden and becoming the head of a Swiss settlement in the tropics were shattered.<sup>23</sup> He had been working in the hospital of Paramaribo before he travelled to Amsterdam where the directors of the Suriname Company gave him a contract to recruit Basel families to people a settlement in the Suriname interior. After a mutiny against De Bussy by the settlers from Basel and the simultaneous discovery of his deception of his wife Louis De Bussy left the colony for North America.<sup>24</sup>

Moving onward to the British Atlantic colonies was not a surprising destination for Europeans who encountered hardship in Suriname. The same was done by the English planters who left for Jamaica and Barbados between 1668 and 1672<sup>25</sup>, the Palatines leaving for North American Georgia<sup>26</sup>, as well as the Jews leaving for regional destinations when their business in the colony took a turn for the worse.<sup>27</sup> Such moves were aided by the abundance of ships sailing between Suriname and British North America.<sup>28</sup> To those who moved to the Atlantic world, this world was seen as a single space in which they switched easily between destinations. The inter-colonial movement of settlers was aided by the high demand for them. Various types of diseases caused very high death rates amongst those arriving in American colonies directly from Europe compared to those who had survived the first years in the tropics. People arriving from Europe or Africa had a difficult time surviving their first year. To give just one example of a history littered with disease and suffering, of the settlers who arrived in Suriname with the ship *Aerdenburg* only 10 per

- 23 He applied for land and materials to start a botanic garden in Paramaribo. Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Sociëteit van Suriname, Resoluties, 1746-1747, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 36-37.
- 24 J. Postma, *Suriname North-America Data Collection, 1680-1795* (2009). The ship of Captain Richard Smith had arrived from Boston and on departure gave as its stated destination Madeira which was a trick to avoid English taxation on the trade between Suriname and New England. See Karwan Fatah-Black, 'Paramaribo as Dutch and Atlantic Nodal Point, 1680-1740' (Paper presented at Dutch Atlantic Connections Conference, Leiden 2012).

- 25 Hartsinck, *Beschryving* II, 587.
- 26 R. Bijlsma, 'Immigratie van Duitschers in Suriname, 1733-1740', *West-Indische Gids* 1 (1919) 413-417.
- 27 Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Suriname in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden 1991) 34.
- 28 For the data on regional shipping see Postma, 'Suriname and its Atlantic Connections, 1667-1795', in: Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 287-322.

cent were still in the colony three years later, the others seem to have died or moved out again.<sup>29</sup> Experienced colonists were a major asset for any colony, and once one attempt at colonisation failed, other colonies were eager to take them in. Their inter-colonial movement often crossed imperial boundaries.

The importance of inter-colonial movement is clearly illustrated by the initial colonisation of Suriname (before Dutch occupation). The arrival of the first Frenchmen and Englishmen in Suriname was similar to many privately organised colonisation attempts in the Caribbean. A company from Rouen organised a colonisation operation in 1643. The colonists settled on the Suriname River, later supplemented by French refugees from Cayenne.<sup>30</sup> A new influx of French from other colonial destinations is said to have taken place around the revocation of the edict of Nantes when refugees from the French Antilles came to Suriname. The English arrived mainly from Barbados through the colonisation attempt under the leadership of Lord Willoughby of Parham in 1650-1651.<sup>31</sup> The English expedition settled upstream of the Suriname River where they founded a village named Torarica and attracted Jews from various other colonies to settle nearby.<sup>32</sup> After the Dutch had been forced to leave Brazil, Jews who had settled there were granted the right to move to Cayenne, whence they moved to English Suriname.<sup>33</sup> The inter-colonial peopling of the colony ground to a halt with the occupation of Suriname by the Zeelanders (1667-1682). Many of the erstwhile colonists moved from Suriname to English Caribbean colonies such as Jamaica, starting what has called the 'fifteen years of Dutch misery on the Wild Coast'.<sup>34</sup> The success of the river's colonisation was closely related to its ability to attract experienced colonists from across imperial borders.

For the settlers moving to the Atlantic from deeper inside Europe, their choice for either Dutch or English colonies was also fairly open. In the

29 Nettie Swartz, 'Emigranten of passanten? Met het fluitschip Aardenburg in 1671 naar het "aerts paradijs" Suriname' (Paper presented at Inter-imperial encounters in the Dutch Caribbean, Amsterdam 2011).

30 S. Kalf, 'Franschen in Suriname', *West-Indische Gids* 11:1 (1930) 316-334.

31 Sarah Barber, 'Power in the English Caribbean: The Proprietorship of Lord Willoughby of Parham', in: L.H. Roper and Bertrand van Ruymbeke (eds.), *Constructing Early Modern Empires* (Leiden, Boston 2007) 189-212.

32 Nelly E. van Eyck-Benjamins, 'Suriname van 1651 tot 1668. Een hoofdstuk uit James A. Williamson, English Colonies in Guiana and on the Amazon (1604-1668)', *West-Indische Gids* 8:1 (1927) 1-36; John H. de Bye, *Historische schetsen uit het Surinaamse jodendom* (Schoorl 2002) 349.

33 L.L.E. Rens, 'Analyses of Annals Relating to Early Jewish Settlement in Surinam', in: Robert Cohen (ed.), *The Jewish Nation in Surinam: Historical Essays* (Amsterdam 1982) 20-28.

34 Victor Enthoven, 'Suriname and Zeeland Fifteen Years of Dutch Misery on the Wild Coast, 1667-1682' (Paper presented at the International Conference on Shipping, Factories and Colonization, Brussels 1996).

1730s the sc commissioner for migration, Philip Hack, was not the first to suggest migration from the Palatinate. A similar plan had been suggested in 1696 when the directors had heard of people from Pfalz who had a plan 'to go to America and start a new colony there, or join one that was already populated'. For those Palatines, Suriname was just one of their options.<sup>35</sup> Hack also received August Gottlieb Spangenberg from Silesia to discuss the migration of Germans. Spangenberg was on his way to England where he was to meet the commissioners for the colony of Georgia to discuss with them 'the possible migration of several persons being protestant, although from a very peculiar faith' staying in Heerenhud. Spangenberg had received a commission from Count Nicolaus Ludwig from Zinzendorf to make agreements on the migration of his subjects to America. Spangenberg was an agent of the Moravian church and came to debate the terms and conditions on which their missionaries could migrate and managed to strike a good deal.<sup>36</sup> Not much later the first of these Moravian brothers moved to Suriname.

The choices open to the Palatines were very similar. The Palatinate saw migrants go to Rotterdam whence they departed for the English American colonies. The migrants were on their way to the Atlantic, rather than specifically the Dutch domains. Director Philip Hack personally went to Rotterdam to speak to migrants who were moving to an English colony.<sup>37</sup> These people were going there at their own expenses and said that people of 'their nation' would surely be willing to move to Suriname. This opened possibilities for the sc directors to offer more attractive conditions to the Palatines. A plan was made to allow them start up small coffee plantations and provide them with various provisions to ease their settlement. Soon several groups of Palatines started to migrate to Suriname. The last group was made up of nineteen families, a few whom moved on to Georgia once they arrived in Suriname, but the majority went inland to settle. After the failure of their settlement some of them asked for permission to leave for New England. The Palatines argued that they wanted to move to the British colonies because they were used to the kind of farming practiced in temperate climates rather than the Suriname tropics.<sup>38</sup>

35 'Om naar Amerika te gaan, ende aldaar of een nieuwen Colonie aan te leggen, off wel op de een ofte andere Colonie al bereijit bevolkt hun verblijf te kiezen', SvS, Resoluties, 1696, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 21.

36 SvS, Resoluties 1733-1735, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 29.

37 SvS, Resoluties, 23 January 1727, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 27.

38 R. Bijlsma, 'Immigratie van Duitschers in Suriname, 1733-1740', *West-Indische Gids* 1:2 (1919) 413-417; De Bye, *Database*.

**Table 1. Annual averages of civilian passengers moving to and from Suriname**

Yearly averages	From Dutch Republic to Suriname	Percentage non-white	From Suriname to Dutch Republic	Percentage non-white	From region to Suriname	From Suriname to region	Net immigration Suriname
	1729-1734	115.2	3.30%	59.4	13.47%	3.8	8.6
1750s	157.3	8.52%	89.8	13.70%	3.4	10.1	60.8
1760s	178.3	10.43%	117.7	18.61%	8.1	15.6	53.1
1770s	197.1	9.08%	135.5	17.64%	7.4	36.2	32.8

Source: Passenger-data in the Governor’s logbook, digitalised by John De Bye. Soldiers and higher military personnel are not included in these figures, nor are their families. The Europeans have been distinguished (in so far as this was noted by the Governor) from the non-whites, regardless of their status. Non-whites in this case are everyone who received this categorisation by the Governor, whether it was as Amerindian, mulatto, maroon, black, or slave. Where it said ‘servant’ without an indication of colour or obvious slave name, they were counted as European.

These circuits were not only used by the group migrations from the Rhine lands, they fitted the general movement of people in and out of Suriname. Besides the slave trade and the movement of military personnel, the net movement of people in the early 1730s to Suriname was about 51 per year, a figure that rose to 61 annually in the 1750s. After the 1750s the net migration to the colony dropped, mostly due to an increase of people leaving the colony for regional destinations. This regional emigration from Suriname decreased by half the positive migration figure from the Republic down to 33 a year in the 1770s.

The change that took place from the 1730s to the 1770s is that initially there were more people moving to the colony to settle, while later on, when production was booming, planters or administrators travelled back and forth. These people did not just go back to Europe when they had made their fortunes, but also left Europe again for Suriname taking their personnel with them. After the decline of plantation production in the late 1770s there was a shift towards more inter-colonial emigration away from Suriname.<sup>39</sup> This is well illustrated by the figure of Jewish migration. Between 1771 and 1795 322 Jews arrived in Suriname and 311 departed. Half of those who left Suriname went directly to Amsterdam. The others left for the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustatius, and North American destinations such as Rhode Island and Boston. The influx of Jews was 85.2% from Amsterdam and 14.8% from the

39 See table 1.

Caribbean and North America. Leaving the colony it was 50.5% going to Amsterdam and the rest to the Caribbean and North America.<sup>40</sup> The origins of these travellers are not easily established. For the military it is somewhat easier to reconstruct figures. Between 20% and 30% of soldiers who served in Suriname during the first half of the eighteenth century was Dutch.<sup>41</sup> The movements of the Palatines or the story of De Bussy was far from incidental. Moving into one Atlantic colony and from there onwards to other Atlantic destinations was actually fairly common. These same circuits were also used to move goods and acquire information, suggesting that within this Atlantic world the national borders or imperial spaces on their own are insufficient as starting point for cultural, social and economic historical investigations.

### European recruitment

Let us return to the story of De Bussy. His banishment from Suriname came when a Swiss soldier prevented him marrying a young woman with whom De Bussy had had a child out of wedlock. The soldier claimed that he knew De Bussy in Switzerland and had seen his wife alive and well in Basel two years earlier. This testimony made any new marriage by De Bussy illegal. The woman De Bussy had wanted to marry was also from Basel, part of a group of people from there who had been recruited by De Bussy to move to Suriname. Their affair had started while sailing from Europe to Suriname. It was not simply coincidence that De Bussy encountered a soldier from that same town, who also knew his wife, when he decided to marry the young woman. Many soldiers in Dutch service were recruited from Switzerland and through the military many Swiss ended up in the Dutch West Indies.<sup>42</sup> Not only lower military personnel but also preachers, officers, planters, merchants and governors from Switzerland were active in the Dutch West Indies. The recruitment of settler families could overlap the recruitment of soldiers, but was mostly separate

40 Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 27-34.

41 Between 1696 and 1765 6835 soldiers were recruited for Suriname, for the period 1696 to 1754 their origins are known. Of the 3557 recruits in that period at least 732 came from the Republic, of 605 their origin is unknown; the others came mostly from Germany. In 1787 only 10 out of 54 officers came from the Dutch Republic, and almost half the officers were from Germany. M.J. Lohnstein, *De Militie van de Sociëteit c.q. Directie van Suriname in de achttiende eeuw* (Velp 1984) 86-88, 94-96.

42 The most famous Swiss officer is undoubtedly Fourgeoud, who led the main war of the colonists against the maroons, see John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the Year 1772 to 1777* (London 1796). The two principal Swiss Governors both ruled Curaçao, Isaac Faesch and later Johann Rudolph Lauffer. At the time of Louis de Bussy there was also a Swiss minister in Surinam. SvS, Letter from Governor Mauricius to the directors of the sc, inv.nr. 283.

from it. The involvement of people from Basel in Suriname stretches back to the family Tissot in the late seventeenth century, and through inheritance their plantation assets remained in Swiss hands after Tissot's death.<sup>43</sup> A more prominent family of *Schweizer Tropenkaufleute* was the Faesch, members of which served throughout the Dutch army in the first half of the eighteenth century, one even becoming Governor of Curaçao. Most of them retired to Basel after their careers in the West Indies. The wealthiest plantation owner of the family was J.J. Faesch who in 1795 owned

shares of the plantation Mariënborg, bonds for the plantations Waterland, Palmeniribo and Surmombo in Suriname, in addition to shares in the plantations Beeke Horst, Egmont and Rhijnbeek, bonds on the plantation Montresor and bonds for plantations in Essequibo and Demerara, on the plantation Vriendschap on Tobago as well as the Danish isles.<sup>44</sup>

The number of soldiers who switched careers to settle as planters in the colony however was very limited.<sup>45</sup>

J. Wolbers writes in his history of Suriname that 'many Germans, who saw Holland as an Eldorado, took up their walking stick, left their mountains and valleys to try their luck there'.<sup>46</sup> This ignores (as many historians have) that 'the vast majority' of migrants leaving the Rhine lands 'relocated to eastern Europe'.<sup>47</sup> The idyllic picture painted by Wolbers is also far removed from the troubles the directors had with recruiting Europeans as settlers for their colony. When the West India Company acquired Suriname in 1682, their charter contained numerous regulations to motivate settlers to come to Suriname. There were lenient rules about the payment of taxes and all newcomers were exempted from paying taxes and other duties for a period of ten years. Duties for the weighing of goods and for the size of ships were not included in this exemption, but these most likely fell to the captains of the ships arriving instead of the colonists. The only payments to be made by the colonisers would be sanctioned by the Governor and Council. The charter reasoned that since it was the planters themselves who formed the council,

43 SvS, Resoluties directeuren, 1696-1701, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 21.

44 Walter Bodmer, 'Schweizer Tropenkaufleute und Plantagenbesitzer in Niederländisch-Westindien im 18. und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Acta tropica. Zeitschrift für biomedizinische Wissenschaften* (1946) cites State Archives Basel-Stadt, Private Archive 513, III.

45 Only 12 of the 249 soldiers in 1727 who were followed by Beeldsnijder owned slaves in 1736. Beeldsnijder, 'Om werk van jullie te hebben', 32-33.

46 'Vele Duitschers, die Holland als een Eldorado beschouwden, namen den wandelstaf op, verlieten hunne bergen en dalen, om aldaar hun geluk te beproeven', Wolbers, *Geschiedenis*, 171.

47 Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginning of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park, Pennsylvania 1999) 8.



▲ This image is a composite of several elements common to the illustrations in Stedman's *Narrative*. It shows the plantation Alkmaar on the Commewijne River in the background. On the river there are enslaved Africans rowing tent boats. The male figure in front is a planter in morning dress. The female figure is described as a 'quadroon slave', referencing the woman's status based on her combined European and African ancestry.

M.Chr. Schulz (ed.), *J.G. Stedman's Reisen in Surinam für die Jugend bearbeitet* (Berlin 1799).

Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

they would not object to these costs. The entire charter was geared towards convincing the colonists that they would not be unfairly treated and that Suriname was a good place to start a business. Colonists who could not afford the slaves that they bought were protected by allowing them to spread their payment across three terms of a year. The charter further promised to send enough slaves to the colony. It also stated explicitly that the company would bring enough whites to the colony and that ships were obliged (in case the company requested) to take up to twelve passengers for a low price.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the favourable regulations, the number of settlers arriving remained low. Many of those who moved to the colony had (in part) religious motives. In the seventeenth century it was a conscious policy of the directors to have a welcoming attitude towards migrants from various religious backgrounds. This changed somewhat in the eighteenth century when being protestant seems to have become more important to the directors of the colony. Around the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes there were several Huguenots on the board of directors of the Suriname Company, facilitating the movement of their co-religionists to the colony. The director of the Suriname Company and former Mayor of Amsterdam Gilles Sautijn oversaw sending Huguenots to Suriname. He was commissioned by the Mayors of Amsterdam to deal with questions relating to the French refugees in that city, naturally using his position to accommodate his overseas activities.<sup>49</sup> With the Huguenot migration to Suriname, the Suriname Company did not just tap into a migration current, but there were Huguenots in the board of directors of the company who actively steered the decision-making regarding these migrants. The bringing in of settlers was one of the main concerns of the Governor Van Sommelsdijck, who wrote letters urging the Suriname Company directors to send skilled carpenters and artisans. Van Sommelsdijck himself had facilitated an influx of French ‘artisans, masons, blacksmiths, carpenters and farmers’ in the 1680s.<sup>50</sup>

Attracting religious refugees and tolerating non-Calvinist religious groups was born out of a great need for European settlers, although this did not always go down well with the directors in the Republic. Governor Van Sommelsdijck found a group of Labadists (one of them his sister) willing to settle in Suriname and start a community on the plantation *La Providence*.<sup>51</sup> Sommelsdijck also continued the welcoming policy in respect of the Jews, praising their contribution to the colony. His cajoling of the Catholics in Suriname resulted in a conflict with the zealously Calvinist States of Zeeland when he allowed Roman Catholic priests to come to the colony. In the eighteenth century the directors grew more explicit about recruiting protestant European families. During the negotiations with Parnassim of the

48 Hartsinck, *Beschryving II*, 626.

49 Kalff, ‘Franschen in Suriname’, 316-334.

50 Wolbers, *Geschiedenis*, 65-66.

51 Knappert, ‘De Labadisten in Suriname’, 193-218.

Jewish community in Amsterdam in the 1730s the directors simultaneously also geared up their efforts to attract Protestants to the colony to keep a balance. Their advertisement in Dutch newspapers that they were looking for protestant families to settle in Suriname attracted mostly Germans.<sup>52</sup>

The German migrants from the Palatinate were a regular sight in the port of Rotterdam and most of them adhered to a form of Protestantism. This made them ideal settlers in the eyes of the directors of the Suriname Company. At times the number of them waiting for a ship to the Atlantic was regarded as a great burden by the municipality of Rotterdam, which complained about migrants who arrived ill-prepared or lacking any formal arrangements to leave for the British North American colonies<sup>53</sup>, but these trans-migrants were practically all heading to colonies outside the Dutch sphere. The actual recruitment of colonists for Dutch territories required the conscious intervention of company directors using their networks and money to persuade groups to come to the colony. With the increasing number of attacks from the maroons after 1712 and the growing enthusiasm about the cultivation of coffee after 1725, the SC directors saw the need to increase the number of settlers. The over-all meagre response to these attempts resulted in 1727 in the appointment of a commission to investigate which Europeans, 'Paltise off Saxise', could be motivated to settle in Suriname.<sup>54</sup> Commissioner Philip Hack, himself from Cologne, suggested tapping into existing German migration from the impoverished Palatinate, upstream from his birthplace. The families left the Republic mostly 'in March or April' and could be enticed if given '300 akkers' (the size of a small plantation) along the river.<sup>55</sup> What followed after this first assessment by the directors was the spread of information about the migratory plans among the target population by printing pamphlets and hiring agents.<sup>56</sup>

By 1733 the first families started to arrive from Altwied along the Wied, some miles before it joins the Rhine. The son of the leading preacher arrived in 1734 with a second group of recruits from nearby Neuwied. Preacher Jan Martin Klein, who had left Suriname after religious conflicts, was recruited by the Suriname Company to move to his former residence of Neuwied to recruit more families. Klein's brother became correspondent for the Suriname Company in Neuwied in matters of migration. The Company produced a leaflet in German to convince the people from Neuwied to move to Suriname, and it was soon reported that 'the people of the village think favourably

52 SvS, Resoluties, 23 January 1731, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 28.

53 Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*, 62.

54 SvS, Brieven van de SvS aan de Gouverneur, 1727, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 95.

55 SvS, Brieven van de SvS aan de Gouverneur, 1729, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 95.

56 Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*, 18-20.

of Suriname'.<sup>57</sup> The last group of these Palatines arrived in Suriname in 1739. This was a group nineteen families totalling 96 settlers. Within a year of settling in the Surinamese countryside, all but one family returned to Paramaribo after their venture had failed and conflicts had broken out amongst them. They settled in Paramaribo and refused to return to work.<sup>58</sup>

The last attempt at recruiting settlers in the European hinterland was the one led by De Bussy. Underlining the importance attached to the project of De Bussy by the Suriname Company is their financial investment in it. De Bussy received fl 2,200 just to cover travel expenses for bringing in the Swiss families.<sup>59</sup> The families were lodged in Amsterdam until their departure and received free transport to Suriname. After their travel to the colony they were assisted by Governor Mauricius in getting land, barges for transport, cattle, some slaves and soldiers for protection.<sup>60</sup> Once they moved into the Surinamese hinterland two problems arose: there was a big difference between the conditions that the families had agreed upon with De Bussy and the conditions the sc had actually offered when instructing De Bussy. The second problem seems to have been De Bussy's domineering character that did not go down well with the disappointed colonists. Governor Mauricius wrote that De Bussy

is a man who is rather full of himself. He has overblown ideas about his commission, and imagines himself to be more than an Ambassador. He also thinks that the reward for his effort cannot be overpriced. He demands everything, based on his position, and if anyone opposes him, he evokes the lords in Basel as a threat.<sup>61</sup>

It did not take long for the situation to spiral out of control and a mutiny of the Swiss against De Bussy was the result. In December 1748 one of the colonists wrote to the Basel government telling of famine and hardships and asking them to appeal to the authorities in Amsterdam. Besides the hardship the letter emphasised a sense of religious betrayal: 'we have never seen a priest,

57 SvS, Resoluties, 1733-1738, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 29-30.

58 Pijttersen, *Europeesche kolonisatie*, 19.

59 SvS, Resoluties, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 37.

60 SvS, Brief van Gouverneur Mauricius, 1747, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 283.

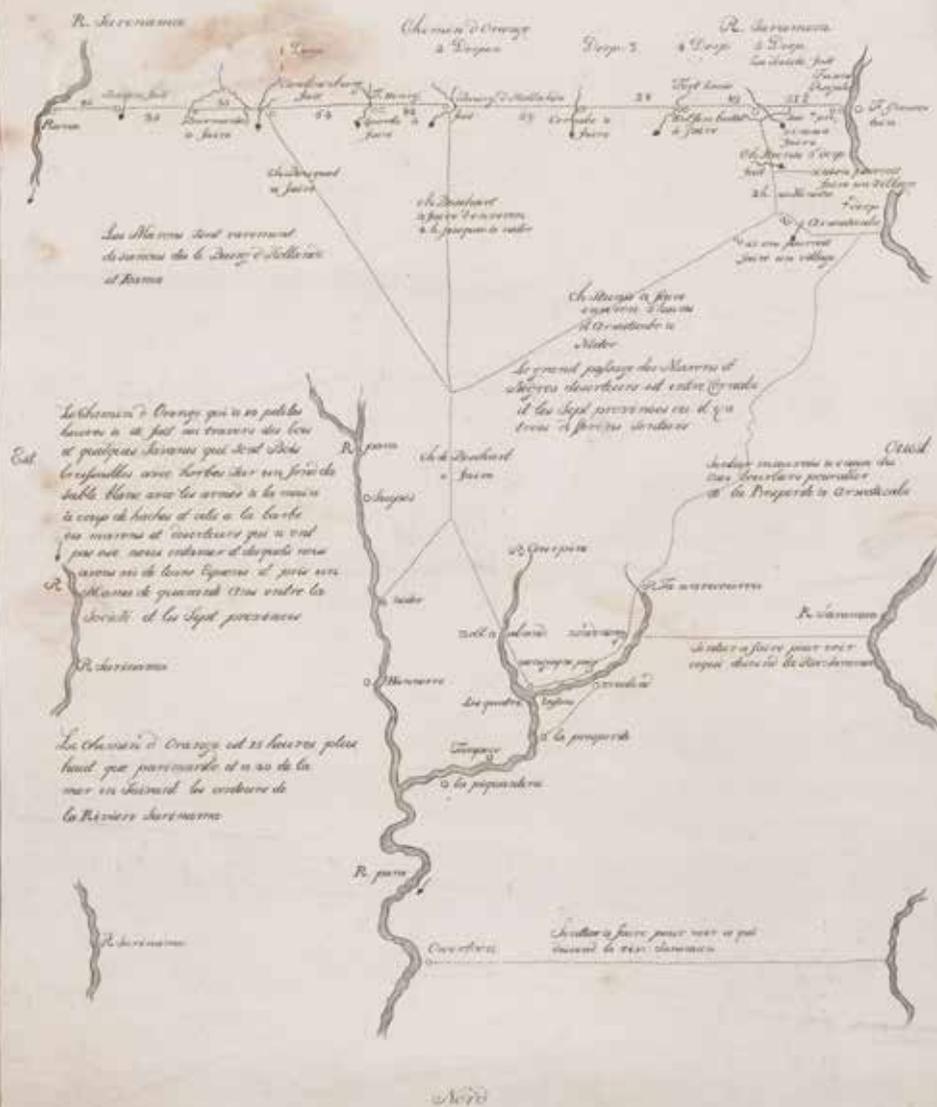
61 'De Bussy is een man, die veel noten op zijn sang heeft. Hij heeft so groten opinie van t aanzien en gezag zijner Commissie, dat hij sich verbeeldt, iets meer dan een Ambassadeur te zijn. Hij verbeeld sich ook, dat zijn moeite en beleid niet duur genoeg betaald kan worden. Hij eischt alles als magt hebbende, en als men hem de minste difficulteite maakt, dreigt hij met de Heeren van Basel', SvS, Brief van Gouverneur Mauricius, 8 February 1747, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 283.

A

Lud

Plan Ideal ou Chemin d'Orange dans la province  
de Nassau et principauté de Sierstarna au Royaume  
de Guyana et des postes des Rivières de para Courpene  
et Tarsariacouru fait à la Société le 5. Mars 1732

Bernard Le Cell. Dessinateur et Commançant.



cannot send our children to school and Sundays are not honoured'.<sup>62</sup> While initially the insubordinate Swiss faced incarceration and forced labour, the ultimate result of this conflict was that De Bussy had to leave the colony to defuse the situation. The trigger for his departure came when he was accused of infidelity because he tried to marry a woman while allegedly he was already married in Basel.

In the years that followed his departure the Swiss village on the Para creek faltered and was overrun by maroons in 1753.<sup>63</sup> After the settlement failed, those left of the Germans and the Swiss were forced – under threat of imprisonment – to found a new village called Carolinenburg. The German Baron Johann Ernst von Bülow received the position of Mayor of Carolinenburg, but sickness and attacks by the maroons also undermined this outpost.<sup>64</sup> When Von Bülow was asked to qualify the inhabitants when taking a census, eleven heads of households were described positively as 'good workmen', nine were classified as incompetent, old, drunk or simply *schlegt* (bad) and another eleven received either a neutral or no description.<sup>65</sup> This curious census is the last known record of the village; subsequent reports only mention it as a ruined and empty place. With the fall of Carolinenburg the last attempt by the Suriname Company at settling villages by recruiting settlers ended.

## Atlantic Suriname

Plantation colonies not only demanded directors and enslaved labourers but also overseers, artisans and farmers settling overseas. By exploring the stories of the Huguenots, Germans and Swiss, it is possible to recognise a pattern in the arrival of groups of European settlers in the colony. There were both inter-colonial arrivals as well as the arrival of people directly from Europe for whom multiple Atlantic destinations were open. This open space for the colonists provided a chance to haggle about the terms and conditions offered



One of the strategies to deal with the incursions by maroon communities was to make a path connecting the outlying plantations on the various rivers and creeks. The map shows one of the versions of this plan. Strategically placed outposts and European villages were intended to prevent maroon attacks on the colony. This plan for inland defences is one of the few maps that mention Carolinenburg. Plan ideal du chemin d'Orange, 1752. Library Rotterdam.

62 Staatsarchiv Basel, Auswanderung, A 3/140, Heinrich Dägen an den Bürgemeister Merian, 29 December 1748 cited in Thomas David, Bouda Etemad, Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, *La Suisse et l'esclavage des noirs* (Lausanne 2005) 72-73.

63 Pijttersen, *Europeesche kolonisatie*, 30.

64 *Ibid.*, 30-32.

65 SvS, Generale Lijst der personen 1763, toegang 1.05.03, inv.nr. 318.

between the different colonial companies in Europe. These people were not primarily Dutch, as has been noted in much of the literature on Suriname. They came from all over Europe, making the native Dutch a minority even amongst the Europeans in Suriname. The level of integration of the Atlantic world made the Dutch Atlantic territories one of many between which migrants could move. When Suriname fell on hard times, people moved to regional destinations, not necessarily within the Dutch sphere. When seeing Suriname only as a Dutch colony, rather than a node in the Atlantic, a world of inter-imperial connections and the networks that stretched into the European hinterland are missed. Suriname was part of an interconnected Atlantic world and depended on circuits stretching deep into Africa, America and Europe. While the story of the settlers illustrates the importance of wider Atlantic connections in the colonisation of Suriname, research into how these inter-imperial connections impacted on trade, science and culture of the colony is still in its infancy. Taking the colonisation of the area around the Suriname River as a case within an Atlantic-wide or even global development should not be confined to students of the Dutch empire: rather it might provide an opportunity for researchers on the four continents bordering the Atlantic to interconnect their endeavours. Treating history as if it belongs to separate empires by awarding primacy to the interconnection between colony and metropolis, glosses over important processes of historical interaction beyond empires as well as the multiple origins of Atlantic and Global exchange and integration.

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