

2 The Legitimacy of Resistance in Dutch Abolitionist Theater

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Written in 1774, Nicolaas Simon van Winter's *Monzongo, of de koninglyke slaaf* was the most popular antislavery production staged across the Netherlands until well into the nineteenth century.¹ In a sentimental preface, van Winter attests that he created the tragedy in response to the nearly successful 1763 slave revolt in the Dutch colony of Berbice. He had been particularly shocked by the brutal ways in which the rebellion's leaders were hanged, burnt alive, or tortured on the rack once the revolt was quelled and by the indifferent news coverage of the events in the Dutch metropole. With *Monzongo*, van Winter hoped "to show [his compatriots] the brutalities of slavery; let them hear the voice of humanity and natural law, and elicit sympathy."² Despite its explicit and stirring preface, however, *Monzongo* is not set in Berbice and does not address the excesses of the transatlantic slavery system. Instead, it stages an insurrection plotted by the enslaved king of Veragua, Monzongo, against his Spanish oppressor in early sixteenth-century Mexico.

There were good reasons for van Winter to opt for a distant episode of colonialism in preference to staging a direct critique of the wrongs in the Dutch Atlantic. Van Winter himself was engaged in the slavery-based trade as a merchant and shareholder of the Amsterdam company Jacob Muhl & van Winter, which marketed Campeche wood and indigo from Honduras and Curaçao. He was by no means an exception, as Dutch enterprises and individuals were deeply entangled with the slavery-based trade. In 1770, no less than 40 percent of all the growth of Holland's economy was grounded in Atlantic slavery-based commodity chains.³ Besides shipbuilding and the manufacturing of materials and equipment for the plantation industry, the Holland economy was especially enmeshed in the processing and distribution of (raw) materials such as cotton, tobacco, coffee, and sugar to the German hinterland, the Baltic Sea area, and the Mediterranean. Although van Winter later transferred his share to his son, writing explicitly against slavery in the Dutch colonies might have put him into a rather awkward predicament. In addition, if van Winter *had* produced an antislavery

play about Berbice, Dutch theater managers would have been unlikely to allow it on stage. Not only was public opinion about abolition still too divided but also several of the Amsterdam Theater's managers were closely involved in Dutch colonial politics and economy. Jan Jacob Hartsinck, for one, who directed the Amsterdam Theater when *Monzongo* first took the stage, was the president of the West India Company delegates and the son of the Chartered Society of Surinam's distinguished director Carl Hartsinck. Another manager with close ties to the colonies was the Patriot politician Ambrosius Justus Zubli, who was born in Berbice as the son of a rich plantation owner and had lost several family members during the revolt of 1763. In other words, staging the heroics of an enslaved Amerindian king who avenged himself on his Spanish oppressors enabled van Winter to open the fraught question of slavery while dodging the explicit invocation of the Dutch empire.

Yet the absence of Dutch colonialism and slave-led resistance to it from van Winter's tragedy is also emblematic of a more fundamental mechanism of silencing the violence wreaked by enslaved Africans and their descendants. As Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot famously argued in relation to the famous Saint Domingue insurrection of 1791–1804, white contemporaries generally failed to understand Black resistance in itself because they lacked an appropriate frame of reference in which such protest could be possible, much less successful. Africans, Asians, and their descendants were held in non-negotiable subservient positions. For them to envision liberty was “unthinkable,” and nor could they determine the strategies for acquiring and maintaining such freedom.⁴

This essay turns to *Monzongo* as well as to the anonymously written *De verlossing der slaaven door de Franschen* (1794) and Johannes Kisselius' Dutch translation of Charles A.G. Pigault-Lebrun's *Le blanc et le noir, De blanke en de zwarte* (1798), to explore how Dutch theatrical culture grappled with slave-led resistance as a vehicle to achieve emancipation. It will examine the ideological assertions over nonwhite appeals for abolition that playwrights and audiences sublimated in the stage rebels in order for them to make sense of the white-dominated and Dutch ontologies of liberty. Indeed, all three plays were written and performed in an era rife with seething debates over resistance, freedom, and human rights. From the 1770s onward, feelings of patriotism incited Dutch revolutionaries to finally bring down the Stadtholderate and the House of Orange. After establishing the democratic “Batavian Republic” in 1795, with French military aid, they proclaimed their own Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and started debating the concrete architecture of their liberal constitution during the National Assembly.⁵ The ways in which these plays and their protagonists' rebellions were designed and received thus

undoubtedly connected to notions of revolution, liberty, citizenship, and rights in the Netherlands of 1800.

Monzongo and the Justified Revolt against Spanish Tyranny

When Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico in 1519, Monzongo was forced to work as a slave in the gold mines of Vera Cruz. He first enters the scene in slave garments with a lump of gold in his hands, testifying about how he had been separated from his first wife Melinde, crown princess of Zempoala, and subsequently partnered with the enslaved princes of Hispaniola, Semire, in whom he eventually found a “precious Solace” (“dierbre Troost”).⁶ Monzongo’s masters, Hernán Cortés and Catharina de Xuares, are unaware of his noble descent but treat him with much respect. However, Cortés’ decision to continue his expedition northward, to Tlaxcala, and to temporarily leave Vera Cruz in the hands of the cruel commander Pedro de Alvarado provokes Monzongo to orchestrate a rebellion together with his best friend Quantimoc. The latter proudly announces that more than 2000 Amerindians are willing to join the resistance with Monzongo, “whose courage they acknowledge” (“wiens moed hen bewust is”), as their chief. During a nocturnal preliminary meeting with the rebels, Monzongo unexpectedly finds himself reunited with his long-lost first wife Melinde, who is ready to join the combat. In the midst of the melee, however, Alvarado succeeds in capturing both Melinde and Monzongo. While Semire and Quantimoc continue the fight, Monzongo is sentenced by Cortés to the stake and is imprisoned pending his punishment. Cortés is deeply shocked to hear that his favorite slave initiated an anti-Spanish revolt. In an impassioned speech before Cortés, Monzongo subsequently lays bare his justification for launching a rebellion:

MONZONGO: Your interest alone brings you to this region.
Your avaricious eyes are set on the gleam of our gold.
[...] You plunder and destroy Land after Land,
And slaughter entire peoples, burn their Emperors alive:
If, for a moment, you cease from killing human kind,
You put people after people in chains, women and
children alike;
and force freeborn humans into horrible slavery.
With what right? Without right, it is plain tyranny;
It is public violence. Religion, nor reason,
Could ever legitimize these kinds of barbarities.⁷

Monzongo’s words bring to mind the European destruction of the southern American land and the desperation of its inhabitants, who are being

terrorized in the name of Christianization and exploited for Europeans' profit and their lust for gold, aptly described by Monzongo as the "glowing dregs of the earth" ("blinkend slyk").⁸

The speech is a powerful example of how *Monzongo* is imbued with passionate appeals to antislavery sentiment. In his preface, van Winter had clearly articulated his hopes to inspire Dutch readers and spectators with sympathetic feelings and an abolitionist spirit. More specifically, *Monzongo* was written in response to the shocking events in the Dutch colony of Berbice, where, in February 1763, more than 50 enslaved Africans avenged themselves on their white master for severe punishments and general misconduct. After torching the plantation house, they organized themselves into a military unit of more than 3000 insurgents, led by a house slave named Cuffy, and announced a goal of settling for nothing less than the abolition of slavery and independence. They were able to occupy the southern part of the colony for almost a year, but in the Spring of 1764 the revolt was brutally quelled by the Dutch military reinforcements and their Amerindian allies.⁹ More than a hundred prominent rebels were publicly executed, and the rebellion eventually brought swift retaliation by the Dutch planters, who reacted with a backlash of cruelty against their slaves. Van Winter was appalled by the aftermath of the rebellion and he remarked that his own efforts would be rewarded if his tragedy could "alleviate the pain of some, or even of a single wretch."¹⁰

By producing a tragedy particularly attuned to the Spanish reign of terror in Mexico, van Winter seems to have hoped that his audiences would view the struggle of the Amerindians as analogous to the topical resistance of Afro-diasporic people in the Atlantic. An Africanized identity was definitely a referent for Monzongo's character on Reinier Vinkeles' frontispiece (see [Figure 2.1](#)). It depicts van Winter's rebelling protagonist barefoot in a simple white waistcloth, whereas Amerindian characters usually wore much more colorful attire, and Monzongo's countenance, hair, white bandana, and golden earring strongly recall the so-called "black Moor's head" symbol, which had been used in Dutch heraldry since the thirteenth century. Literate audiences could have also easily linked Vinkeles' portrayal of Monzongo to the numerous Black rebels staged in novels, poems, and periodicals that came out in the decades after the Berbice revolt. Already in 1764, when the Berbice rebellion had just been repressed, the influential periodical *De Denker*, by means of a letter that was allegedly sent in by a manumitted man named Kakera Akotie, critiqued the criminalization of slave-led resistance and warned Europeans that Africans' revenge would soon be successful.¹¹ The most arresting evocation of such an Afro-diasporic rebel, however, appeared in Guillaume-Thomas Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* (1772), translated into Dutch as *Geschiedenis van de beide Indien*. One famous passage foreshadowed that a "Black Spartacus" would come to liberate his



Figure 2.1 Frontispiece for *Monzongo*, engraving by Reinier Vinckles (1774).

Source: Amsterdam City Archive.

enslaved fellows and lead them toward vengeful action. Raynal issued this prediction to his white European readers:

Your slaves do not need your Benevolence, nor your advice, to throw off the blasphemous yoke that suppresses them [...] The Blacks only lack a sufficiently courageous Chief to transport them to revenge and to carnage. Where does he live, this great man whom Nature

perhaps owes to the honor of humankind? Where is he, this new SPARTACUS, who will not be stopped by CRASSUS?¹²

Unlike the defeat of the famous Thracian gladiator of the first century B.C., the insurrection of the new Spartacus in the Caribbean basin would remove the unrighteous yoke of slavery forever. Monzongo certainly was a logical candidate to fulfill this prophecy. Because of his royalty, he was seen by the other rebels as a natural and courageous leader. Interestingly, Raynal's frequently cited passage made explicit references to the 1763 events in Berbice, where "[t]he seed of revolution was planted, and secretly ripen[ed]."¹³

But did audiences connect Monzongo's lamentations to the plight of enslaved Africans and past or future resistance in the Dutch overseas colonies? How did readers and theatergoers react generally? For sure, responses to *Monzongo* gushed with devotion and affect as soon as the play took the stage in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen, Middelburg, and still other cities, and it was the reunion of Monzongo and Melinde in particular that elicited emotional reactions. One spectator wrote in a letter to van Winter that, during this specific scene (II.7), "everyone who possessed feelings melted away in tears."¹⁴ In addition to their response to the play's sentimentally charged scenes, part of the audience's enthusiastic reaction can be attributed to *Monzongo*'s indictment of oppression and slavery. One reviewer printed several of Monzongo's antislavery speeches, including the above-cited appeal to Cortés, and applauded van Winter for defending "the rights of nature, which are so miserably raped by slavery."¹⁵ Theater critic Cornelis van Engelen, who was the man behind Kakara Akotie's letter in *De Denker*, categorized *Monzongo* as a tragedy that "broaches some social anomalies [...] which have managed to dodge [Dutch people's] criticism for too long."¹⁶ Another review stated that van Winter's play excelled in "showing the absurdity of enslaving freeborn humans."¹⁷

Contemporary critics largely agreed that slavery was, in principle, disgraceful and that *Monzongo* succeeded in conveying an antislavery ideology, perhaps for some reviewers even in the context of the current Atlantic world. None of them, however, connected the fundamental grievances of slavery to the specifically fraught realities in the Dutch colonies. In fact, not until 40 years later did reviewers mention van Winter's preface and its critical discussion of the Berbice revolt.¹⁸ This silence cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge about what happened in 1763–1764, because the revolt received unusually widespread coverage in the metropole. Already in the first months of the uprising, a detailed pamphlet titled *Kort dog waarachtig verhaal van de rebellie* (1763) was published, portraying the Dutch as innocent and fragile residents who were "killed with the whip" ("met sweepen dood geslaagen") or "butchered alive" ("leven gevilt") by the "disloyal Rebels" ("trouweloose

Rebellen”).¹⁹ The metropolitan press, as well as several other more elaborate publications, including the *Beschryving van Guiana* written in 1770 by the Amsterdam Theater manager Jan Jacob Hartsinck, pointed to the “horrible and rebellious nature” (“wreeden en muitzieken aart”) of Africans.²⁰ Long after 1763, critics still raised Cuffy’s and his fellows’ retributive violence as a specter. One Demerarian planter published a long pamphlet in 1795 to promote prolonging the institution of slavery, arguing that the events in Berbice had proved Black people’s incapacity for freedom.²¹ The metropole, in other words, framed the rebellion as illegitimate and inordinately violent, highlighting the sudden agony of the white colonial residents rather than the cruelty of the system that the enslaved had sought to resist.

With these unsympathetic opinions in mind, van Winter eventually produced a tragedy that avoided bringing the precarious issue of slavery in the Dutch Atlantic onto the stage. Yet the specific historical episode he selected to visualize his protest against slavery was no coincidence. While Monzongo’s impressive speech tore Spain’s structural imperiousness to shreds, audiences would have probably supported the rebellious actions of the Amerindians without hesitation. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Dutch had themselves been subjected to the Spanish-Habsburg regime of King Philip II and especially the Duke of Alva. Monzongo’s earlier argument that neither “[r]eligion, nor reason” justified barbarism may have reminded readers and spectators of Alva’s Council of Troubles, which was installed in 1567 to judge and execute the growing number of Dutch Protestant rebels, in the name of religious conversion. Spain’s general misconduct in the Netherlands caused bitter social unrest. It eventually led to the Dutch Revolt of 1568–1648 and the establishment of the independent Dutch Republic, in which sovereignty principally lay with provinces’ representatives but where institutional ties with the Stadtholderate and the House of Orange-Nassau were still retained.

During and long after the Dutch Revolt, Hispanophobia in the Netherlands was widespread and this is reflected in much of *Monzongo*’s reception as well.²² Alvarado seemed to remind spectators of the Duke of Alva, embodying fanaticism, intolerance, and the repression of basic rights. Their sympathetic responses to *Monzongo* were therefore at least partly grafted onto a shared Spanish enemy, whose yoke it was never unrighteous to resist and whose dramatic effigy confirmed the Dutch audiences’ hard-won freedom. This anti-Spanish sentiment culminates in the final act, as Alvarado is murdered by the troops led by Semire and Quantimoc. While the latter enters the stage to make Cortés a peace offer, Semire is carried on a stretcher by six fellow rebels. She appears to have been mortally wounded during her one-on-one fight with Alvarado. Semire’s central role in the resistance is quite exceptional: women were generally passed over in contemporary stories and reports on slave-led

opposition. Dutch actresses cherished Semire's bravery, including the celebrated actress Anna-Maria Snoek-Kamphuijzen.

Semire's death is a crucial moment of catharsis for Cortés, who, now aware of Monzongo's royal descent, acknowledges that the revolt must "have sprung from despair" ("uit wanhoop voortgesproten").²³ He manumits Monzongo, asking him to mount the throne of Zempoala with Melinde and to promote the Christian doctrine among his people. While this final act primarily proclaimed van Winter's antislavery aspirations through Monzongo's liberation, it also highlighted the tough but successful resistance to Spanish tyranny. The theme of the Dutch Revolt, as noted, permeated culture and historiography in the Netherlands long after 1648 and became central to the creation of a national identity in the following centuries. In the decades before 1800, the Dutch Revolt was recycled particularly to serve Patriot and revolutionary agendas. The Patriots held the Orange-minded authorities responsible for the Dutch Republic's overall depression and in their attempt to permanently curtail the *droit divin* of the Stadtholder and his patrician oligarchy, they were reminded of their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century compatriots who had tried to liberate themselves from the yoke of Spanish-Habsburg regime. Historical theater produced between 1770 and 1795 continuously revived the Dutch Revolt to imagine the new protest against the semi-monarchical position of Stadtholder Willem V.²⁴ Although van Winter and his much more famous wife, Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken, never actively participated in the Patriot resistance, they supported a moderate Patriot ideology inspired by a "suprapolitical patriotism" ("bovenpolitieke vaderlandsliefde").²⁵ Spain's misconduct and the Amerindian struggle for freedom must have surely prompted audiences, especially those who saw or read the tragedy in the revolutionary 1790s, to view *Monzongo* as analogous to their own sociopolitical unrest.

Semire, Monzongo, Melinde, and Quantimoc personify a group of people whose self-determination has been taken away, and who, by means of armed resistance and backed by natural law, aimed to obtain autonomy again. By championing the liberation of these Amerindian figures, van Winter hoped his audiences would interpret *Monzongo* as a topical reference to the Dutch colonial wrongs. And it would be unfair to completely doubt these intentions—if van Winter simply wanted to disseminate patriotic feelings through the portrayal of anti-Spanish sentiment, he could have easily followed his fellow playwrights, including van Merken, in staging one of the Dutch Revolt's many famous episodes.²⁶

Yet, whether or not audiences interpreted *Monzongo* as an indictment of slavery in the Dutch colonies remains ambiguous. Although some critics praised van Winter for staging the universal resistance to oppression and slavery, his historical and geographical detour ultimately enabled readers, spectators, and critics to minimize or ignore their own engagements in the transatlantic trade and their responsibility for actively



Figure 2.2 Cartoon depicting Monzongo as a figure of resistance, in response to the currency act of 1874.

Source: Published in *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, no. 10 (1874). The Hague: Royal Library.

opposing it. More than that, their reactions to *Monzongo* epitomize the ways in which the captive body could be easily appropriated for various purposes and illustrate that white sympathy often served onlookers' own affectional and political demands more than those of the enslaved themselves—a phenomenon Saidiya V. Hartman has influentially attributed to the “fungibility of the captive body.”²⁷

Exactly 100 years after the publication of van Winter's tragedy, *Monzongo* appears in a cartoon about the currency law of 1874, which was about to be voted on by the members of the Dutch Lower House. The lithograph, published in *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, depicts *Monzongo* as an Afrodiasporic man adorned with what was seen as Amerindian clothing and ample body decorations (see Figure 2.2). More

specifically, the cartoon argued against the introduction of the gold standard, which would determine the value of guilders in accordance with that of gold, and shows Monzongo as a fearless resistance fighter pointing to a large lump of gold, with a caption referring to the first lines of van Winter's 1774 tragedy:

MONZONGO (*carrying a lump of gold, which he places on the ground*):

Oh! glowing dregs of the earth.....
Vicious gold! lay here. How much suffering have you
brought!²⁸

Even a century after his first appearance in Dutch theatrical culture, the enslaved king of Veragua remained a vehicle for imagining resistance. The cartoon illustrates how the concrete interpretation of Monzongo's oppression and struggle for liberty was highly contingent on the context in which he appeared and how he could be variously understood as a rebelling Amerindian, as an ally in the Dutch Revolt, as a Patriot fighting against the unrighteous power of Orange, or as a figure who opposed the gold standard in the Netherlands—ironically, the introduction of the gold standard would be more beneficial to laborers in the Global South such as Monzongo, as national economies would become less volatile. The only way Monzongo was rarely construed by audiences was as an Afrodiasporic rebel who sought vengeance against his white Dutch colonizer.

A Black Spartacus in *De blanke en de zwarte*

If *Monzongo* played down the explicit presence of the Atlantic world, thus presumably ensuring the play's long-lasting popularity, this was somewhat different from dramas such as *De verlossing der slaaven* and *De blanke en de zwarte*, which reflected the ongoing and impressive insurrection of Saint Domingue that had started in August 1791. The Haitian Revolution would serve as an important point of reference in the Dutch antislavery debate of the years and decades to follow as it struck fear into both champions and ardent opponents of the slavery system. Not only did the uprising in Saint Domingue force the Dutch to discuss the increasingly challenged tenability of slavery in their own colonies but the revolt also directly threatened to impact the sugar economy of the metropole. In the decades prior to the revolt, sugar refineries across the Netherlands, and especially in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Dordrecht, had indeed processed millions of pounds coming from the French Caribbean to subsequently export refined sugar to the German hinterlands.

One Dutchman capitalizing on the slavery-based sugar industry was Johannes Kisselius, whose family had owned one of the booming

Dordrecht refineries since the mid-eighteenth century. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) his job at the refinery, Kisselius published in 1798 *De blanke en de zwarte*, a drama translated from Charles A.G. Pigault-Lebrun, in which enslaved Africans plot a large-scale insurrection on a sugar plantation in Saint Domingue. While the original French version had been repeatedly performed at the French Theater of Amsterdam, located on the Erwtenmarkt, Kisselius dedicated his Dutch translation to the actors of the Amsterdam Theater. But just as *Monzongo* would have never been staged had its linkage to contemporary colonial wrongs not been blurred, *De blanke en de zwarte* did not have a ghost of a chance to be presented at the Amsterdam Theater. It was nonetheless staged once, in The Hague, on July 26, 1798.

Just as Toussaint Louverture, who initially led the massive uprising in Saint Domingue, and more evidently than *Monzongo*, the drama's blackface protagonist Selim came to personify Raynal's by then famous prophecy that an African Spartacus would arise to save his fellow sufferers. The play opens with a striking dialogue between Beauval, a benevolent white planter's son who earned himself the epithet of "the guardian of the Blacks" ("de beschermer der zwarten"), and his father, called "the Colonist" throughout the play, thus representing the entire Caribbean planter class. Trying to convince the Colonist to reduce the brutal conduct on his sugar estate, Beauval delivers a lengthy speech:

BEAVAL: Shiver, when a hero, a great man, suddenly appears among his subjugated fellows, redresses them in just a minute, and shatters deceit and faint-heartedness with his brilliance and courageous disposition. Watch him, as he takes away your exclusive rights on horrendous atrocities, invincible like triumph and uncompromising like yourself, he will, in his turn, be bathed in human blood and inventing punishments that are so far unknown to you [...]: prevent this horrible confrontation while it is still possible.²⁹

Beauval's speech, uttered "*with zeal*" ("*met geestdrift*"), successfully dramatized Raynal's Spartacus prophecy, adopting some phrases literally and alerting white planters like the Colonist that Black resistance was a terrifying fate and something to factor into consideration should enslaved Africans and their descendants remain subjected to the European yoke for much longer. His concerns did not come out of the blue, and, when Beauval spoke of a Black avenger to his father, he may well have been thinking about his best friend Selim. Interestingly, Selim's character in Pigault-Lebrun's original play is called "Telemaque," thus readily connecting him to classical heroes such as Spartacus. It is unclear why Kisselius opted for "Selim" instead, a name which in some ways secularized and demystified the epic status of Pigault-Lebrun's character. Nonetheless, Selim is said to have "the strength of Hercules and

the beauty of Adonis” (“de sterkte van Hercules en de schoonheid van Adonis”), and thus he is still positioned within a clear Raynalian (and European) frame. Selim had expressed himself extremely vengefully when the Colonist mercilessly subjected his mistress Zama to the whip.³⁰ Even though Beauval strongly sympathized with his friend’s resentful passions, he advised Selim to “patiently await” (“geduldig afwachten”) his manumission, for which Beauval had been saving up for some time. When the Colonist decides to sell Zama to another planter, however, Selim calls for a large-scale insurrection.

At a clandestine, nocturnal meeting, he offers an impressive harangue, stretching over much of the third act, in front of his fellow insurgents:

SELIM: I am burning with vengefulness; which of you is not? [...] I will not attempt to encourage you, or move you, by outlining the brutal abuses again that haunt your minds every day. Neither will I speak of the scars that cover your bodies. [...] No, I will not revive the cruel memories that not even time will heal. [...] I will, however, expose the dangers you will have to endure. The plan [to revolt] is as dangerous as it is laudable. Whites are used to killing, while we have only suffered. They have turned warfare into a terrific sport, while we have no means but our brains, no weapons but our desperation [...]. Let us fight until our dying day, so that a glorious end will be our final wish.³¹

In Selim’s sweeping rhetoric, he evoked both personal and shared traumas and called for vengeance for historical injustices that the institution of slavery had inflicted.

Against a gloomy backdrop that set the scene for the fourth act, we learn that the first fights of the “tremendous combat” (“verschriklyke stryd”) met with successes on the side of the rebels. While the menace of the rebels is not shown on stage, presumably for reasons of decorum, Selim narrates that the “noble bravery” (“edele stoutheid”) of his fellows had resulted in numerous white casualties and had driven many whites from the region. Selim’s description would have troubled literate audiences in the Netherlands, as it would have sounded frighteningly familiar. The specter of Black violence kept haunting the Dutch metropole after the Berbice uprising, to which the playwright Pigault-Lebrun also explicitly refers in his preface, as well as the Boni Maroon Wars, which had started in the 1770s and had only recently come to an end. The Boni, or Aluku, under the command of various leaders including Jolicoeur, Baron, and Boni himself, staged countless attacks on plantations in Surinam’s Cottica region.³² Much like the attacks of the Berbice insurgents, their actions were portrayed by commentators in the metropolitan press as monstrous and causing, as John Gabriel Stedman wrote in his famous *Narrative*, “wicked injustices” (“snoodste verongelykingen”) to

the Dutch residents in Surinam.³³ In February 1793, when Boni, regularly called a “Tyrant” in metropolitan newspapers, was ruthlessly murdered by Dutch allies in his sleep, the Boni dropped off the radar, much to the relief of the Surinam planters and people in the Netherlands.³⁴

In *De blanke en de zwarte*, Selim’s revolt is both controlled and contained. When he is about to personally avenge himself on the Colonist, Selim’s violent passions are miraculously tempered by Zama, who had been hiding the Colonist in a cave as the rebellion escalated. She openly denounces what she regards as her lover’s rampant madness: “You talked about virtue, and yet you are to kill your friend’s father. [...] Rage, you wretch, plunder, destroy and murder; but don’t speak to me about love again.”³⁵ As Marlene L. Daut has argued in *Tropics of Haiti*, it was indeed the tension between personal vengeance and using armed resistance to achieve political emancipation that caused Pigault-Lebrun’s blackface rebel to realize that the violence he initiated in the name of freedom was antithetical to the humanity he solicited from his white counterparts.³⁶

When the Colonist sees that Selim is willing to call off the uprising, he finally calls for forgetting “past misfortunes” (“vorige ongelukken”) and proposes to erect a new plantation society built on mutual amnesty: “Let us forget that my plantation once housed masters and slaves. Come, my friends, come and build your fortune by helping to restore mine.”³⁷ Finally, the formerly unyielding personification of the Black Spartacus concludes the drama by encouraging his fellows to resume their labor:

SELIM: Brave companions, let us hurry to prove to our enemies that it was not idleness, robbery and injustice that have put weapons in our hands. Man is born to work. Let us return into the farmland, let us make the fields which we have damaged fertile again; and let us hope that Beauval’s example [...] will finally get the Colonists to secure their fortunes with justice and humanity!³⁸

Urging his companions to restore the land of Beauval’s father, Selim symbolically eliminates the possibility of redressing the colonial power (im)balance. Moreover, his words suggest that the fate of the enslaved ultimately lay in the hands of white abolitionists much more than those of Black vindicators and that armed resistance, even when justified in theory, was not an effective means to achieve emancipation. The voice of the colonized, in other words, was assimilated to that of the colonizer. Indeed, *De blanke en de zwarte* epitomized what Trouillot has called the “banalization” of Black resistance, or the trivialization of slave-led rebellions by metropolitans in order to make them consonant with the white-dominant order.³⁹ The violence wreaked by the enslaved was fanned by the harmful treatment of the Colonist. It

would have never taken place, it seems, on an estate with a benevolent master like Beauval, whose gentle conduct is represented as an acceptable alternative to harsh slavery, on the one hand, and violent, slave-led resistance to it, on the other. This confined portrait of insurrection allowed readers and spectators to minimize its political scope, weight, and resonance in ways less obvious than, but equally disturbing as, those exemplified in *Monzongo*.

Moreover, the implausible ending of the drama played down the role of women of color in slave resistance. Unlike Semire, Zama challenges the strategies used by her lover and his companions. She describes the revolt as a “cruel upheaval” (“wrede onrust”), arranges the safety of Beauval’s abusive father, and finally advises Selim to stop his retributive violence and opt for a milder path to emancipation instead. While enslaved men certainly figured more often in Atlantic rebellions, recent scholarship has demonstrated women’s crucial resistance to the colonial system. Resisting reproduction was the most gendered act of rebellion. But enslaved women were also indispensable in large-scale uprisings. They served as messengers, participated in fights, provided and transported essential food, supplies, and ammunition, cared for the wounded, and chanted revolutionary slogans to motivate their fellow (male) insurgents.⁴⁰ Zama’s absence and active opposition to the rebellion in *De blanke en de zwarte* thus bound her to the narrative template of the victim waiting to be saved—a mold in which Selim and his fellow rebels would eventually also be trapped.

For Anja Bandau (see also [Chapter 1](#)), Pigault-Lebrun’s *Le blanc et le noir* mirrors the political debates during the French Directory of 1795 to 1798, as the play not only questions all violent forms of resistance in the aftermath of the Terror but also mediates the most lucrative cohabitation of whites and (enslaved) people of color in Saint Domingue.⁴¹ Although set in a specifically French Caribbean context, a play such as *De blanke en de zwarte* could, in the newly established Batavian Republic, negotiate the legitimacy of revolt as well as open up the question of if, and how, notions of personal and political liberty could be extended to enslaved Africans. The play’s revolutionary tendency was indeed appreciated by the nation’s most authoritative literary journal of the time, *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen*. In it, the critics recommended *De blanke en de zwarte* not only to be staged but also to be carefully read because its abolitionist message applied to all slave-trading nations. Indeed, the review concludes that “every Republican government should seriously reflect on and go through with the amelioration of the fate of Black slaves.”⁴² In so doing, the journal alluded to the simmering debates over slavery, resistance, and liberty in the new Batavian Republic, and over the glaring inconsistency of establishing a new nation based on the principles of human rights while keeping hundreds of thousands of people in bondage.

“French Friends of Freedom” in *De verlossing der slaaven*

The Batavian nation’s paradoxical attitude towards enslavement was at the heart of the Dutch antislavery agitation and is encapsulated best in *De verlossing der slaaven door de Franschen*, published in 1794 under the proverb *Pro Virtute et Moribus*. The play opens with the sentimental reunion of Rosa, who was raised as an orphan in a maroon village and only recently fell into the hand of slavers, and Zamor, who appears to be his aged and long-lost father. As soon as their master Severe enters the stage, their happiness is interrupted and they face violent punishments for taking a break from work. Planning on flogging Rosa and the old Zamor to death, Severe orders his overseer to prepare a basket with lemons that will be used to rub into Zamor’s wounds. Charlotte, Severe’s wife, and Therese, their daughter, are disgusted to hear about Severe’s latest plans and, prompted by the lamentations of Rosa’s wife Zalmida, try to arrange a deal with their philanthropic neighbor and Therese’s lover L’Humain. The latter is willing to purchase Zamor and Rosa in order to prevent the punishments from happening. At this precise moment, however, tumultuous shouts resound in the distance. Severe is paralyzed in fear, anxiously crying that vengeful insurgents are probably coming to get him. But instead of Afrodiasporic rebels, a group of white officials and sailors enters the stage cheering, “Honor to liberty! Honor to the French!” (“Vivat de vrijheid! Vivat de Franschen!”). Captain Boncoeur, who just arrived in the Caribbean, explains:

BONCOEUR: The French, themselves being free, cannot tolerate slavery in their empire. (*pointing at the Blacks.*) These unfortunate victims of tyranny are humans!—they are our brothers! I embrace them in the name of the entire Nation!—and I speak to them as their friend!—as their fellow human!—as their Brother!—yes!—as their savior.⁴³

The French nation, it seems, considered the emancipation of Africans in the colonies as a paramount implementation of the French revolutionary creeds. Putting the language of humanity into practice, Boncoeur embraces a random enslaved man and asks his sailors to do the same. He goes on to explain that the French National Assembly had unanimously agreed to abolish slavery, and he hands over a copy of the decree to Severe, who had been watching the scene of liberation with much disbelief and disapproval.

De verlossing der slaaven, as the anonymous author clarified in the preface to the drama, indeed seized on the “humanitarian decree” (“*menschlievend decreet*”) issued on February 4, 1794, by the French National Assembly, proclaiming the abolition of slavery in all its Atlantic colonies. And like the author of *De verlossing der slaaven*,

several Dutch politicians, activists, and artists with antislavery convictions lauded the French act of extending metropolitan liberty to the abolition of colonial slavery. What these authors did not specify, however, is the fraught context in which the French National Assembly had been forced to make its decision: the ongoing slave insurrection on Saint Domingue. Against the background of increasing tensions between the island's white planter class and free people of color and the threatening invasions of Spanish and British troops, the French promised the insurgents liberation and citizenship if they chose to ally with France and helped restore the colony afterward.⁴⁴ Much more than an act of idealism, the February decree was a formalization of the general liberty that the enslaved themselves had exacted coupled with a desperate measure to preserve the French empire and stave off Great Britain, Austria, and Prussia.

Although Dutch newspapers had reported about Saint Domingue prior to February 1794 and continued to do so when the insurgents, now under the command of ex-slave Jean-Jacques Dessalines, successfully established the independent Haitian Republic in 1804, the chronology and complexities of the revolutionary events were lost on many people in the Dutch metropole.⁴⁵ In line with what was generally assumed—or with what white Europeans wanted to believe—*De verlossing der slaaven* depicted the French abolition of slavery as an incentive for the enslaved to avenge themselves on their former masters instead of recognizing the revolt as the foremost reason for the French to temporarily abolish their slavery system. Soon after Boncoeur utters his words of redemption, confused yelling indeed resounds from behind the scenes again. This time, it really is a group of insurgents, going straight for Severe and shouting, “Vivat Liberty! Death to tyranny!” (“Vivat de Vrijheid! Den dood aan de dwinglandij!”). Before they reach their former master, however, Zamor intervenes: “My brothers!— no sooner are you liberated than you splurge on improper debauchery?”⁴⁶ He reminds them that attacking their white fellow humans “like wild animals” (“als de wilde dieren”) would dishonor the very principles that had ensured their own emancipation. The insurgents eventually heed Zamor's appeal for solidarity, drop their weapons, and embrace their former master.

The actors thus do not enact retributive violence on stage, but the threat of revolt is manifest throughout the play. Characters repeatedly allude to how Severe's brutal actions may instigate vengeful feelings among the enslaved. Moreover, the specter of rebellion is directly echoed through the name of Rosa's maroon guardian, Zimeo, who had taken care of him after Zamor was enslaved as a young father. For the portrayal of this “grand protector” (“edelmoedig berschermer”), the author of *De verlossing der slaaven* was probably inspired by Jean-François Saint-Lambert's “Zimeo” (1769). This tale was translated into Dutch in

1772 for the radical Enlightenment journal *De Rhapsodist* and again in 1784 by Gerrit Brender à Brandis.⁴⁷ The “Zimeo” story recounted the structural violence of slavery in Jamaica and armed rebellion against it, led by the eponymous character whose troops ravaged countless plantations and slaughtered whites, yet saved Zimeo’s benevolent Quaker master Paul Wilmouth.

Even if the author of *De verlossing der slaaven* was unaware of how her/his play silenced the revolution on Saint Domingue as the vital catalyst of the French abolition decree, her/his view on slave-led resistance was clear. First, the author criminalized the violence of the enslaved who aimed to avenge themselves on Severe, emphasizing its bestial dimensions by equating the insurgents with “wild animals.” The supposed truculence and brutal nature of Black captives, also emerging in the reactions following the Berbice revolt, was popularized first by Carl Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae* (1735), in which he claimed that Africans were always “governed by caprice,” whereas whites were “governed by fixed laws” and Amerindians were “regulated by custom.”⁴⁸ Saint-Lambert’s Zimeo, too, explains that the African “turns into a Tiger or a Leopard, once he is forced to hate.”⁴⁹ Zamor must tame and censure the retaliating slaves in *De verlossing der slaaven* to model the moral codes by which they wish to be treated themselves.

After being controlled from within, the rebellion is minimized altogether and managed as an isolated event in an otherwise gentle system of slavery. After their manumission, Zamor, Rosa, and Zalmide decide to offer their services to L’Humain, whom they consider to be a benevolent father. Falling on their knees before him, they ask: “Do you want to keep us? We give ourselves to you!”⁵⁰ As L’Humain wants to offer them a fixed wage, they insist that they work in exchange for housing only. Because, as Trouillot put it, “to acknowledge resistance as a mass phenomenon is to acknowledge the possibility that something is wrong with the system.”⁵¹

What *De verlossing der slaaven* seems to teach us in the end, much in line with *De blanke en de zwarte*, is that individual grievance must always give way to the greater good and that, for Africans and their descendants, armed resistance to the white-dominant order is not an effective means to achieve freedom or equality. This, of course, was in sharp contrast to the ways in which armed resistance had been glorified by the Dutch Patriots. Civic militias (“schutterijen”) had been a key institution in Dutch community life for centuries. During the Batavian Revolution, the Patriot’s installation of the “Free Corpses” was a violent strategy to vest governmental control in burgher representatives and defend republican principles of liberty and autonomy—resulting in many casualties on both sides.⁵²

After the tribulations of the possible revolt, *De verlossing der slaaven* eventually celebrated the high mark of its “revolutionary” clamor in the

final act, when a song of liberation is performed by an ensemble of Black characters, to the ever-popular tune of the Marseillaise:

A GROUP OF BLACKS: Righteous French Friends of Freedom!
 Who watched us with a sympathetic eye,
 Who came to remove our shackles,
 Who dislodged the tyrants from this place!—*bis*.
 Allow the Blacks, liberated from chains,
 To pay you homage.
 You dampened their sorrows.
 Accept this garland from their hands.
 These laurels adorn your head!
 And the entire [French] nation!
 Which came, which came
 To throw away our yoke, and the tyrant's poniard.
All Blacks.
 Which came, which came
 To throw away our yoke, and the tyrant's poniard.⁵³

The gratitude toward the French, who are praised as heroes and adorned with epic laurels, seems enormous and is repeated in the final moments of the play, when the blackface characters invite their white counterparts to dance a grand closing ballet grounded in the precept of the natural rights to liberty and equality. This *ballet noir* is emblematic of how Black (enslaved) bodies were consistently imagined in terms of both terror and delight. Many antislavery plays staged in the Dutch metropole included minstrelizing airs that emphasized the Black singers' and dancers' alleged natural aptitude for rhythm, as well as their carefree minds and short-term memory. The closing scene of *De verlossing der slaaven* verged on the mode of an idyllic pastoral that depicted relationships of domination as enchanting bonds of paternalistic dependency and affection.⁵⁴ Interestingly, singing to the tune of the Marseillaise, the enslaved characters here also come to embody the voice of the revolution while simultaneously being denied the right to revolutionary resistance to slavery. The friction between the hymn's lyrics and its revolutionary melody thus painfully underlines that, in the play, Blacks were not allowed to organize their own deliverance.

During the single performance of *De verlossing der slaaven*, in the Rotterdam Theater on April 25, 1795, spectators would surely have hummed along with the Marseillaise with much enthusiasm. Barely a few months earlier, in January 1795, the Dutch Patriots had been "liberated" by the "French Friends of Freedom" themselves and took the Marseillaise as the national anthem of their newly established Batavian Republic.⁵⁵ In many respects, *De verlossing der slaaven* can be construed as shameless pro-French and pro-Patriot propaganda. One of the first

plays to be presented when the Rotterdam Theater reopened—during the revolution, the Dutch Stadtholderate had closed playhouses across the country in February 1793—*De verlossing der slaaven* seamlessly suited the pattern of the theater's deeply republican repertoire. The play harmonized with a series of productions that glorified the revolutionary emancipation of the Batavian Republic, including *De overtocht over de Waal* and *De wederkomst van den Hollandschen Patriot*.⁵⁶

Both reading and theatergoing audiences would have readily associated the personal emancipation of the enslaved characters in *De verlossing der slaaven* with the successful political liberation of the Dutch, which was also procured by the French. Patriot discourse often echoed themes of slavery and tyrannical oppression. Statesman Abraham Vereul, for one, who was appointed president of the Committee Concerning the Colonies and Possessions on the coasts of Guinea and in America in 1795, referred to the Dutch Republic under Orange as “a nation of Slavery” (“een land van Slaverny”).⁵⁷ In 1798, the completion of the Batavian constitution was thus announced by the president of the National Assembly: “The chains of despotism, forged by superstition and riveted together by a pernicious Stadholderly or a monstrous federal government, have been completely broken. The sweet sounds of liberty replace the fearful voices of slavery.”⁵⁸

Despite the obvious Patriot overtones of *De verlossing der slaaven*, in which the emancipation of the enslaved was likely a metaphor for the French-organized liberation of the Dutch people, the anonymous author of the drama also sought to mediate the position of the enslaved and their possible rights and liberties in the colonial body politic. In fact, in the preface to the play, s/he explicitly called on readers and spectators not only to brand the *De verlossing der slaaven* as Francophile propaganda but also to focus on its abolitionist cause. Throughout the drama, colonial slavery is extensively debated in legal, religious, and moral terms by sympathetic white characters who oppose Severe's inhumane conduct. Charlotte feels estranged from her husband and, inspired by a distinctly abolitionist lexicon, she urges Severe to remember that Africans are humans—“their skin is black, yet their soul much whiter than ours.”⁵⁹ Therese claims that her father's cruelty makes her heart bleed, and L'Humain, too, suffers from seeing his fellow humans in chains. In a spirited soliloquy, L'Humain further propagates feelings of philanthropy and invokes Heaven to “send [its] thunderstorms to squash all tyranny” (“zend [uwe] donders en verplet over al de dwinglandy”).⁶⁰

De verlossing der slaaven, like *Monzongo* and *De blanke en de zwarte*, joined a growing body of political culture that questioned to whom exactly human rights belonged. The deeply divided Patriots were torn between the assertion that liberty and autonomy were universal rights and the equally persistent belief that the Dutch metropole depended on slavery to maintain its national wealth and prosperity.

The previously mentioned Demerarian planter, for one, in his pamphlet of 1795, warned that abolishing slavery would not only throttle “the artery” (“den hartader”) of the Batavian economy, but also endanger the maturation of the newly established republic: the tree of liberty had only recently been planted in the Netherlands, “now let her roots first settle here fully before she spreads her branches to the Blacks in the Colonies.”⁶¹ Moreover, a large majority of the members of the Batavian National Assembly referred to the situation in Saint Domingue as a strong “cautionary tale” (“waarschuwend voorbeeld”) for the Dutch to not “rashly and recklessly apply” (“onbezonnen en roekeloos toe[-passen]”) the natural rights of Man to Blacks, whom they generally considered unfit to lay claim to the rights assigned to the citizens of the Batavian Republic.⁶²

The White Ontology of Liberty

For the enslaved on the island of Curaçao, however, the establishment of the Batavian Republic was the perfect reason to rise up in arms. On August 17, 1795, 50 enslaved people on the plantation De Knip walked out and within two days, they organized themselves into a military unit of some 2000 people. The rebellion’s foremost leader, a man named Tula, was directly inspired by the global revolutionary events: “We have been treated badly for too long, we do not want to harm anyone, but we seek our Liberty, the French Blacks [in Saint Domingue] have been given their freedom, Holland has been taken over by the French, hence we too must be free.”⁶³ Learning about the French abolition decree and the establishment of the Batavian Republic with French military aid, Tula rationally claimed the same natural rights to liberty and humanity. Barely a month later, however, the revolt was savagely stamped out and Tula as well as other leading rebels, including Bastiaan Carpata and Pedro Wacao, were burnt in the face, broken on the rack, and dismembered in an unprecedented carnival of state violence.⁶⁴

As Trouillot has argued, white Europeans in the colonial orbit worked hard to “unthink” the actuality of slave-led rebellion. While, of course, in reality, managers and authorities could not fully deny resistance as it happened, they made sure to brutally curb its manifestations and subsequently drain them of all political and theoretical essence.⁶⁵ In Curaçao, after the nauseating backlash to Tula’s insurrection, Dutch colonial authorities met some of the insurgents’ demands by releasing the enslaved from work on Sundays and by promoting milder treatment. As such, they denied the profoundly ideological backbone of Tula’s rebellion, which was an intelligent application of the revolutionary principles used in the French, Haitian, and Batavian Revolutions and battled for nothing less than complete liberty.

In Dutch antislavery theater, racist and capitalist beliefs minimized and withheld the political potential of Black rebels both on and off the theatrical stage. While Monzongo, Selim, and the captives in *De verlossing der slaaven* could voice and negotiate the specific demands articulated by their real-life counterparts, they were not entitled to uphold and sublimate those claims in the end. This being so, van Winter's story of the Berbice rebels was cloaked in the insurrection of Amerindians, whose superiority over Sub-Saharan Africans was amply theorized, and whose rebellion could simultaneously revitalize the memory of the Dutch Revolt in the light of the burgeoning resistance to the Stadtholderate. In *De blanke en de zwarte*, Selim's revolt is initially justified through intellectual arguments drawn from Raynal, but it is ultimately critiqued as unnecessarily violent and ineffective. The anonymous author of *De verlossing der slaaven* then, silenced Toussaint Louverture's impressive antislavery rebellion preceding the 1794 French abolition decree and staged vengeful insurgents who eventually realized they had to model the ethical codes by which they wanted to be treated themselves. The oscillations over slave-led rebellion in these productions reflect how retributive violence wreaked by enslaved Africans struck fear not only into slavery lobbyists but also into ardent abolitionist authors and activists. While *Monzongo*, written before the real intensification of the Patriot fervor, may have dodged concrete ideological discussions about sociopolitical change, *De blanke en de zwarte* and *De verlossing der slaaven* promoted gentle mastery and gradual emancipation over radical armed resistance. It was a form of deliverance that stood in sharp contrast with the militarized and revolutionary liberation of the Batavians, and it was a form of abolition that could be organized according to the agendas that maintained the power relations sustained by colonial capitalism and white supremacy.

Around 1800, white cultural producers and metropolitan politicians criminalized, banalized, and contained slave-led resistance, both fictive and real-life. These strategies of representation still dominate the ways in which Black resistance is shaped by the media today. Watching and reading the news in June 2020, during the worldwide protests against institutionalized racism after the murder of George P. Floyd, for instance, or every year in November and December, when the racist Black Pete caricature is both contested and defended by Dutch and Belgian media, we are reminded of the persistence of the processes Trouillot described and this essay has discussed.

I want to draw three striking parallels. First, media and cultural representations still have a powerful role to play in shaping the public's perception and definitions of what is violence, subversion, and protest. Demonstrations against Black Pete have long been and often still are framed as attacks on the existing order, and media today help legitimize the political repression and caricaturing of those protesting symbolic

violations of human rights. Second, Black people's demand for justice is still instrumentalized for other emancipatory goals and struggles. A production like *Monzongo*, imagining universal resistance to oppression, was readily construed by Dutch audiences as a tribute to the Eighty Years' War, as a metaphor for Patriot resistance to the Stadtholderate, or protest against the introduction of the gold standard in 1874. The Black Lives Matter's demand for justice, too, was utilized to remonstrate that *all* lives mattered. This analogy brings to mind Hartman's warnings about drastic forms of "white sympathy" that threaten to reduce the suffering of Black people to a disembodied sentiment that is all too easily transferred from one context to another.⁶⁶ And third, white policymakers are often the ones receiving credit after sloganizing the demands of Black protesters and arranging them in accordance with their own agendas. After years of actively defending Black Pete, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte confessed in a speech before the Dutch Lower House in June 2020 that his view about Black Pete had changed. He had learned that "a number of" Black people were offended by the figure and this is the opposite of what the Sinterklaas should achieve. The Prime Minister's statement is a significant milestone in the Dutch history of blackface brutalities—regrettably, the Belgian government has not come close to condemning Black Pete—but its purview minimizes the problems that are really at stake. Indeed, Rutte determined that the termination of Black Pete should take place *gradually* and not through law enforcement because still too many people adore the figure. And, by publicly recalling how he personally changed his mind after talking to some offended people of color, he not only neglects how action groups have tirelessly taken to the streets to criticize Black Pete since at least the 1960s but also trivializes the ideological and theoretical grounds on which Sinterklaas' blackface servant is contested.

Notes

- 1 For a full list of performances, see Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, Appendix 2. This essay is an intensively shortened and revised version of Chapter 4 of my book, which has been published with Amsterdam University Press in 2022.
- 2 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, *2. Original quote: "myne Landgenooten de onbetaamlykheid der slavernye onder het oog te brengen, hen de stem der menschlykheid, en het recht der eenvoudige natuur te doen hooren, en hun medelyden op te wekken." Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.
- 3 Brandon and Bosma, "De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij," 44.
- 4 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 83.
- 5 The "Batavian Republic" was named after the Germanic Batavi tribe, which lived near the Dutch Rhine delta and courageously revolted against its Roman oppressor in 69 AD. During and after the much glorified revolt against the Spanish oppressor (1566–1648), the Dutch started using the

name of the Batavi to represent the ancient Dutch struggle for liberty in their nationalistic lore. The Dutch colonial capital in Indonesia, today's Jakarta, too, was named "Batavia" when it was conquered by Jan Pieterszoon Coen in 1619.

- 6 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, I.1, 5.
- 7 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, V.1, 69–70. Original quote: "Uw belang dryft u naar dit gewest. / Uw roofziek oog is op den glans van 't goud gevest, / [...] Gy plondert en verwoest op 't schriklykst Land by Land, / Daar gy de volken slagt, de Koningen verbrand: / Of staakt de woede een wyl het menschdom uit te roeijen, / Dan slaat ze volk by volk, met vrouw en kroost, in boeijen; / doemt vrygeboornen tot een wreede slaverny. / Wat recht hebt gy hiertoe? Geen recht, 't is dwinglandy: / 't is openbaar geweld. De Godsdienst, noch de reden, / Verleende ooit schyn van recht tot deeze onmenschelykheden." Note that the original rhyme scheme of van Winter's tragedy text is lost in my translations.
- 8 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, I.1, 1.
- 9 The first monograph entirely devoted to the 1763 Berbice revolt is Kars' recently published *Blood on the River*.
- 10 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, *2. Original quote: "[het zal my troost genoeg zyn, indien myn dichtterlyke arbeid gelegenheid mogt geven om] het lot van eenige, of zelfs van één ongelukkigen te verzachten."
- 11 *De Denker* 2, no. 82–83, 233–248.
- 12 Raynal, *Geschiedenis der beide Indien* 4.11, 238–239. Original quote: "Uwe slaaven hebben uwe Edelmoedigheid, noch uwen raad noodig, om het heilighendend juk, dat hen knelt, af te schudden. [...] Het mangelt den Negeren slegts aan een Opperhoofd, dat moeds genoeg bezit, om hen ter wraakoeffeninge en slagtinge aan te voeren. Waar leeft deeze groote man, dien de Natuur misschien, verschuldigd is aan de eere van 't menschlyk geslagt? Waar onthoudt zich deeze nieuwe SPARTACUS, die geen CRASSUS zal vinden?"
- 13 Raynal, *Geschiedenis der beide Indien*, 4.12, 370–371. Original quote: "Het zaad der omwenteling broeit, en wordt heimelyk ryp."
- 14 My translation from a transcription by Cor de Vries, who was so generous to share it with me. Original quote from Johannes Lublink's letter: "al wat gevoel had in traanen [deed] wegsmelten."
- 15 *Hedendaagsche Vaderlandsche Letter-Oefeningen*-, 37. Original quote: "de regten der natuur, die door de slaaverny zo jammerlyk verkragt worden."
- 16 Van Engelen, *Spectatoriaale Schouwburg* I, 66. Original quote: "tast eene menigte ongeregeldheden aan, die in de samenleving plaats hebben, [...] die uwer berisping te lang ontdoken zyn."
- 17 Lublink and Meijer, *Algemeene Oefenschoole*, 365. Original quote: "te toonen hoe onredelyk het zy vrygeboren menschen tot slaaven te maaken."
- 18 For instance, van Winter's preface is mentioned and partly cited in the theater magazine *De Tooneelkijker* 1, no. 8.
- 19 *Kort dog waarachtig verhaal*, 7.
- 20 Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana*, chap. 23, 371. For a detailed overview of the Dutch newspaper coverage of the Berbice revolt, see Baakman, "Their power has been broken."
- 21 *Vrymoedige gedachten*, esp. 104–105.
- 22 Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 168–169.
- 23 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, V.12, 82.
- 24 Van Deinsen and Jensen, "Het theater van de herinnering," 205.
- 25 Van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland*, 86.

- 26 Van Winter's joint publication with van Merken, *Tooneelpoëzy* (1774), contained a number of tragedies that imagined different phases of the Eighty Years' War, including van Merken's celebrated *Jacob Simonszoon de Rijk* about the heroic liberation of a Sea Beggar who had been captured by the Spanish troops.
- 27 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19.
- 28 Van Winter, *Monzongo*, I.1, 1. Original quote: "MONZONGO (*dragende een pak goud, hetwelk hij nederlegt*): 'O blinkend slijk..... Verachtelijk goud! lig daar. Wat leed hebt ge ons verwekt!'"
- 29 Pigault-Lebrun, *De blanke en de zwarte*, I.7, 32. Original quote: "BEAUVAL: Beef, wanneer een held, een groot man, plotslings onder zyne verdrukte landgenoten verschynende, hen in één oogenblik herstelt, en het bedrog en de lafhartigheid door zyn vernuft en zyne dapperheid verbryzelt. Zie hem, onöverwinlyk gelyk de zegepraal, onverzoenlyk gelyk gy, zich op zyn beurt in het stromend menschenbloed baden, strafuigen uitvinden, die u tot nog toe onbekend zyn [...]: voorkom deze verschriklyke ontwak- ing, terwyl er nog tyd is."
- 30 Pigault-Lebrun, *De blanke en de zwarte*, II.7, 58.
- 31 Pigault-Lebrun, *De blanke en de zwarte*, III.3, 75–79. Original quote: "SELIM: Ik brand om mij de wreken; wie van jullie wenscht ook zulks niet? [...] Ik zal niet trachten uwen moed aantesporen, noch uw gevoel te ont- steken, door u op nieuw de boze aanslagen afteschilderen die altoos aan uwe gedachtenis tegenwoordig moeten zyn. Ook zal ik u niet spreken van de lidtékenen waarmede gy overdekt zyt. Neen, ik zal u geen wrede herin- neringen vernieuwen, die zelfs de tyd nooit uitwischt. [...] Nogthans wil ik u niet ontveinzen de gevaren die gy zult moeten ondergaan. De onderne- ming is zo gevaarlyk als loflyk. De blanken zyn den moord gewoon, en wy kunnen slechts lyden. Zy hebben van den oorlog een verschriklyke kunst gemaakt, en [wy] zonder middelen in ons verstand, zonder wapenen dan die der wanhoop. [...] Verdedigen wy ons dan tot den laatste snipen: dat een roemryke dood, ten minste, het doel onzer laatste begeerten zy."
- 32 Although Jolicoeur and Baron are Boni's best-known fellow warriors, all three of the leaders had different backgrounds and motivations to enter combat with the Dutch. See Hoogbergen, *The Boni Maroon Wars*.
- 33 Stedman, *Reize naar Surinamen*, 4.
- 34 Boni was killed by an Aukan chief named Bambi, who became, under great pressure from Lieutenant Stoelman, the commander of the so-called Redi Musu (the large corps of Black Rangers who fought on the side of the Dutch in exchange for future manumission). See Hoogbergen, *The Boni Maroon Wars*, 77, 157–183.
- 35 Pigault-Lebrun, *De blanke en de zwarte*, IV.8, 111. Original quote: "Gy spraakt van deugd, en gy gaat den vader van uwen vriend vermoorden. [...] Woed, ongelukkige, roof, verdelg en slagt; maar spreekt my niet meer van liefde."
- 36 Daut, *Tropics of Haiti*, 160.
- 37 Pigault-Lebrun, *De blanke en de zwarte*, IV.9, 114. Original quote: "Ver- geten wy dat 'er op myne plantaadje een meester was en slaven waren. Komt, vrienden, komt uw geluk behartigen, door het myne te helpen hers- tellen." See also Bandau, "Enlightenment Tropes," 73–74.
- 38 Pigault-Lebrun, *De blanke en de zwarte*, IV.9, 114. Original quote: "Brave metgezellen, haasten wy ons om onze vyanden te tonen dat lui- heid, roofzucht en ongerechtigheid ons de wapenen niet in de hand gaven. De mensch is voor den arbeid geboren. Keren wy weder in de vlakke, laten

wy de velden die wy verwoest hebben weder vrugtbaar maken; en mogt het voorbeeld van Beauval den Kolonisten [...] eindelyk overhalen om hunne welvaart door gerechtigheid en menschelykheid te staven!”

- 39 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 95–96.
- 40 Moitt, “Slave Women and Resistance,” 242.
- 41 See also Bandau, “Enlightenment Tropes,” 74.
- 42 *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* 34, no. 4, 191–192. Original quote: “[dat] ieder Republikeinsch bestuur over de verbetering van het lot der Negerslaven ernstig denke en handele [...]”
- 43 Pro Virtute et Moribus, *De verlossing der slaaven*, II.6, 49. Original quote: “De Franschen, zelf vrij zijnde, kunnen geen slaavernij op hun gebied dulden (*op de Negers wijzende*.) Deze ongelukkige slachtoffers der dwinglandij, zijn menschen!—onze broeders! ik omhels hen in den naam der gantsche Natie!—en spreek tot hen als hun vriend!—als hun medemensch!—als hun Broeder!—ja!—als hun verlosser.”
- 44 Popkin, *A Concise History*, 65–89.
- 45 Koekkoek, “Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State,” 144. Reports about the Haitian Revolution are less abundant than those on, for instance, the Berbice revolt of 1763, but the news definitely reached the Netherlands. See also Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, Chap. 4.
- 46 Pro Virtute et Moribus, *De verlossing der slaaven*, IV.6, 93. Original quote: “Hoe broeders!—naauwelijks vrij zijnde spat gij uit in ongeoorloofde losbandigheid?”
- 47 It was published under the title “Ziméo. Door George Filmer, een Kwaaker van afkomst” in *De Rhapsodist* no. 2 (1772); Saint-Lambert, “Simeo. Eene waare geschiedenis.”
- 48 Cited in Jackson and Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science*, 16.
- 49 Saint-Lambert, “Simeo,” 45. Original quote: “[De tot liefde gebooren Neger] word, wanneer hij eens gedwongen wordt te haaten, tot een Tijger of Luipaard.”
- 50 Pro Virtute et Moribus, *De verlossing der slaaven*, III.2, 57. Original quote: “wilt gij ons nog hebben? wij geeven u ons!”
- 51 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 84.
- 52 Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 121–122, 1101–1102. For a thorough discussion of burgher arming and military thought in Patriot ideologies of the 1780s, see Klein, *Patriots Republicanisme*, 167–194.
- 53 Pro Virtute et Moribus, *De verlossing der slaaven*, V.7, 110. Original song: “Rechtaarte Fransche Vrijheids Vrinden! / Die ’t oog van meêlij op ons sloeg, / Die onze banden kwaamt ontbinden, / Die dwinglandij van hier verjoeg! — *bis*. / Gunt dat de Negers, vrij van banden, / U hunne hulde biên. / Gij deedt hun smerten vliên: / Ontvangt deze eerkrans uit hun handen. / Deez Lauwer siere uw hoofd! / In u zelv’t heele volk! / Dat ons, dat ons / Het juk ontnam, en dwinglandij den dolk. *Alle de Negers*. Dat ons, dat ons / Het juk ontnam, en dwinglandij den dolk!”
- 54 For more about the ways in which Dutch abolitionist criticism allied with racist ideologies and minstrel fare, see Adams, “Blackface Burlesques.”
- 55 Frijhoff, “Metamorfosen van de Marseillaise,” 129.
- 56 In the Batavian and French periods, managers of the Rotterdam Theater, often appointed by the government, synchronized the repertoire with national political ideals and interests, with police officers supervising during performances to ensure that thespians stuck to the republican-minded scripts.
- 57 Cited in Velema, “Republikeinse democratie,” 61.
- 58 Cited and translated in Velema, *Republicans*, 179.

- 59 Pro Virtute et Moribus, *De verlossing der slaaven*, I.5, 22. Original quote: “hunne couleur is zwart, maar hunne ziel is veeltijds blanker dan de onze!”
- 60 Pro Virtute et Moribus, *De verlossing der slaaven*, II.2, 34.
- 61 *Vrymoedige gedachten*, 95. Original quote: “laat haare wortelen eerst by u vastgegroeid zyn, alvoorens zy haare takken over de Negers in de Coloniën uitbreid.”
- 62 *Dagverhaal* vol. 5, 429, 730. See also Koekkoek, “Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State,” 138.
- 63 Tula said this in a conversation with Father Jacobus Schinck, a Catholic priest who had been commissioned to bargain with the insurgents. Cited in Schutte, *De Nederlandse patriotten*, 205–206. Original text: “Wij zijn al te zeer mishandelt. Wij zoeken niemand kwaad te doen, maar zoeken onze Vrijheid; de fransche negers hebben hun vrijdom bekoomen, Holland is ingenomen door de franschen, vervolgens moeten wij ook hier vrij zijn.”
- 64 Oostindie, “Slave resistance,” 10.
- 65 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 83.
- 66 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 18–19.

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