Várzea Talk. War and Communication in Dutch Brazil, 1645-1654

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People attending mass in the ruins of the cathedral in Olinda.
(Frans Post, Gezicht op Olinda, 1662, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)

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Introduction

In August 1645, violence spread across Pernambuco like wildfire. After months of disquiet, the Portuguese sugar planters of Northeast Brazil had taken up arms and set about driving the Dutch off their lands for good. Frantically, the Dutch residents of Pernambuco scrambled to reach the safety of the walls of Recife, the capital of Dutch Brazil. In the face of the approaching rebel militias, whole garrisons left their crumbling forts and took flight. In the south of the colony, Portuguese troops from Bahia took the Dutch coastal bastions in their stride. In the north, local militias made short work of the resident officials. Soon, the Dutch West India Company's hold over Northeast Brazil had dwindled down to the walls of Recife, Fort Orange on the island of Itamaracá, and two isolated coastal forts further up the coast.[1]

This outbreak of violence had been some time in the making. For years, rumors of sedition had haunted Pernambuco. The Dutch had tried to get to the bottom of these rumors, but found it exceedingly difficult to determine their true extent and even harder to figure out the right response. For a long time, the Dutch looked on in hesitation as opposition to their rule gained traction, pushed across the colony by a determined group of insurgents. Rumors, promises, persuasion and intimidation worked together to sway and frighten people into joining the rebels' cause. Talk eroded Dutch rule over Pernambuco long before weapons put an end to it.

For the next nine years, Pernambuco was mired in a war of attrition between the beleaguered Dutch and the besieging Portuguese. The outbreak of war altered the conditions of communication in the colony, but it took away none of its explosiveness. The rebels tried to silence people and control what they said, where they said it and to whom, yet this proved impossible to achieve. People continued to talk incessantly, craving news, and developing a fine sensorium for rumors that rang true and rumors devised to mislead them. Often enough, what they heard led them to seek refuge in the forests of Pernambuco, in Bahia, or worse, with the Dutch. Talk continued to cross the frontline and challenge the insurgents' hold over Brazil as much as it had undermined the regime of the Dutch.

This study traces the impact of talk – an amalgam of news, rumors, personal impressions and speculations – on the revolt that ended Dutch rule over Northeast Brazil. How did talk

[1] Charles Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1957), ch. v; the northern forts were Fort Margarita at the estuary of Rio Paraíba and Fort Ceulen on the coast of Rio Grande do Norte.

inform the way people navigated this conflict, how did it ultimately inform the course of the war itself?

The history of the war in Pernambuco from 1645 to 1654 has been written in many ways, from its own time onwards. Even during the revolt itself, Amsterdam's savvy newspapermen, publishers and opinion-makers began to turn the slow, violent demise of Dutch Brazil into a story that was mostly about the Republic itself. If the Portuguese settlers of Pernambuco had betrayed the Dutch, then that was only because the Dutch had been cruel and incapable rulers. If the Dutch at Recife and in the metropole had been unable to suppress the rebellion, then that was only because they were divided among themselves. In the end, the revolt in Dutch Brazil became a story of how the Republic betrayed its own ambitions, a mirror in which the Dutch could inspect their own blemishes.[2]

In a way, it was the same for the victorious rebels, though they of course liked what they saw. The Portuguese sugar planters of Pernambuco would go on to find their victory against the *flamencos* most helpful in asserting their position within Brazil's social hierarchy and against interferences from Lisbon. Over time, the story of the heroic struggle of all of Pernambuco against the Dutch came to pave the way for a myth of Brazilian unity across the country's deep ethnic and social divisions that belied how the war had only worsened these very divisions.[3] Out of these developments emerged a historiography that either relegated the revolt to an afterthought to the glory days of Dutch Brazil under governor-general Johan Maurits, or cast it as a foundational episode in the national history of an independent Brazil, with all the accent on great men and great deeds that comes with such sorts of history-writing.[4] Until today, the war in Brazil continues to provide a backdrop for all sorts of historiographic endeavors, from studies that focus on its repercussions on public debate in

[2] Michiel van Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic. Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil* (Pennsylvania UP, Philadelphia 2017), ch. 5.
[3] Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Rubro Veio. O Imaginário da Restauração Pernambucana* (Ed. Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro 1986).
[4] See Ernst Pijning, "Paradise Regained. Historiography on the Dutch Occupation of Northeastern Brazil, 1630-1654", *Itinerario* 26:2 2002, 120-126, and Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Epilogue. Mythologies of Dutch Brazil", in Michiel van Groesen (ed.), *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* (Cambridge UP, New York 2014), 284-317.

the Dutch Republic, on its impact on the dynamics of 17th-century Dutch-Portuguese diplomacy or on its contribution to the awakening of Brazilian patriotism in a much later age.[5] But on its own, it seems, the revolt has little to tell us.

This is a perplexing situation. After all, as Wim Klooster reminds us, "the war in Brazil was the largest inter-imperial conflict of the seventeenth-century Atlantic."[6] Not just in size and duration, but also in its participants, this war was unique in its time. Here was a conflict in which Portuguese, Dutch, Angolans, Italians, Tupis, Germans, Spaniards and Tapuyas fought alongside and against each other in a massive, almost decade-long conflict, a war in which practices and institutions of warfare forged in the Old World met the unique social and geographic conditions of Northeast Brazil, and where the desolation of siege warfare joined forces with the terrors of guerrilla warfare. What did a war like this do to Pernambuco's multiethnic, multicultural society? How deeply did it reshape the lives of people experiencing the war at the frontlines, how did it intrude into the lives of those living behind the frontlines?

We know very little about these aspects of life and war in Brazil, or in fact in the early modern Atlantic world on the whole, mostly because few historians have cared to explore them.[7] Yet, these are questions worth asking. Grand strategies might have decided battles, but wars were decided by much smaller, incremental decisions – decisions made by common soldiers as well as by those generally seen as no more than passive victims of warfare. In Dutch Brazil, Klooster argues, this dynamic can be seen clearly. The negligence of the colony by the metropole might have provoked the defeat of the Dutch in Brazil, Klooster

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[5] Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*; Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *O Negócio do Brasil. Portugal, os Países Baixos e o Nordeste, 1641-1669*, 3rd ed. (Topbooks, Rio de Janeiro 2003); idem, *Rubro Veio*. There is, of course, likewise by Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada. Guerra e Açúcar no Nordeste, 1630-1654* (Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo 1975), which devotes significant attention to both the Dutch invasion in the 1630s and the revolt, but is interested mainly in military strategy and the economic system that financed the war.

[6] Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment. War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World (*Cornell UP, Ithaca 2016), 3. With this he means both the Dutch conquest of Pernambuco in the 1630s and the revolt.

[7] See Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?", *California Italian Studies* 2:1 2011; Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World", *Journal of Social History* 39:3 2006, 615-630, with mostly examples from a later era of Atlantic history. For 16th and 17th-century examples of microhistory within Atlantic history, see e.g. Miles Osborn, *Global Lives. Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2008); Jeffrey Fortin/Mark Meuwese (eds.), *Atlantic Biographies. Individuals and Peoples in the Atlantic World* (Brill, Leiden 2014); Scott Cave, "Madalena. The Entangled History of One Indigenous Floridian Woman in the Atlantic World", *The Americas* 74:2 2017, 171-200; Alejandra Dubcovsky, "The Testimony of Thomás de la Torre, a Spanish Slave", *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70:3 2013, 559-580.

states, but in the end, it was the beleaguered sailors, soldiers and residents of Recife who decided to abandon the whole venture. "Battered and bruised, starved and wearied by years of empty promises, [those who had defended Dutch Brazil] gave up on the pivotal colony of the Dutch Atlantic," he concludes.[8] On the side of the enemy, this present study argues, the situation was not much less desperate and grim, and as much as the rebels fought the Dutch, their war effort was directed inwards, towards intimidating and controlling, cajoling and galvanizing the people under their rule to remain and fight on their side. What people made of this war and how they chose to act individually and collectively mattered in its time and it matters in the historical assessment of this episode.

The sources used in this study provide a rare opportunity to approach these issues. These were documents created by Dutch administrators to chart the progression of the insurgency, based on information given to them by people who had joined their side – some with the express intent of giving an account of the revolt, some because they sought refuge in Recife, others again because they had fallen captive to Dutch raiders and fleets. What we find here are individual accounts by people recounting the war from vastly different perspectives, but there was a binding thread between these individual testimonies: the small stories of highly uncertain veracity that people recounted. Rumors travelling through this war-torn society linked people from various walks of life together as they picked them up, refashioned and retold them to make some sense of what they saw happening around them. Highly personal and at the same time a collaborative endeavor, the rumors we find in the sources at hand allow us to move between the individual and the whole, to tell the story of the revolt in Pernambuco from the stories told by the people living through it.

[8] Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 145.

Figure 1. Northeast Brazil[9]

1. Recife
2. Cabo de Santo Agostinho
3. Ilha de Itamaracá/Fort Orange
4. Fort Margarita
5. Fort Ceulen
6. Porto Calvo
7. Rio São Francisco
8. Salvador de Bahia

a. Itamaracá
b. Paraíba
c. Rio Grande do Norte
d. Alagoas

[9] Joan Blaeu, *Nova et accurata Brasilae totius Tabula*, Amsterdam 1625.

Sources

This research is based on a corpus of intelligence documents housed in the archive of the (First) West India Company in the Dutch National Archive in Den Haag.[10] In its first half, this study explores the pathways of rumor in the early stages of the insurgency. The first oral and written reports of growing unrest reached the Dutch in the early 1640s, well before the revolt materialized, turning into a steady trickle of around thirty informants from late 1644 until the outbreak of the rebellion. The sources for this phase are incomplete. The letters and minutes of the High and Secret Council at Recife contain references to reports that were not included in the correspondence with the metropole, and in some of the reports sent to the fatherland, the councillors chose to erase the names of their informants. The councillors knew that once in the Low Countries and copied and dispersed among the WIC chambers, their minutes and letters could get into the hands of all sorts of people and even make it back to the very men the Council suspected of working against them in Pernambuco.[11] But the available sources do allow to say what the Dutch knew at what point and (mostly) where this information came from. Five court cases against suspected insurgents from late July and early August 1645 add further insight into events, as do reports of Dutch agents all the way from Rio São Francisco to Rio Grande do Norte. The minutes of the High and Secret Council, the colony's governing boards in civil and military matters, as well as

[10] A large part of this archive has been digitized and is freely accessible on the website of the Nationaal Archief, http://gahetna.nl (25.4.18), under the inventory number 1.05.01.01, or at http://proxy.handle.net/10648/16490bf5-fda9-4b5e-af99-df66d07a564a (25.4.18). References in the following study refer to pages in the digital copies of documents within this archive, with the first, bold number referring to the inventory number of a document and the following regular number referring to the number of the scan, so e.g. OWIC **60**, 284 refers to the first page of the *Journaal gehouden door kapitein Johan Blaer van zijn reis naar de Palmares, van 26 februari tot 2 april 1645*.

[11] OWIC **60**, 388; over time, the High Council at Recife would become so frustrated with their superiors' inability for secrecy that they implored them to keep their correspondence to themselves, "having come to know that many things we have reported to you are not only publicly known in the fatherland, but even copies of our letters are sent back here," see OWIC **66.2**, 302. See also Alexander Bick, *Governing the Free Sea. The Dutch West India Company and Commercial Politics, 1618-1645* (Diss. Princeton 2012), p. 53f.

correspondence between the colonial administration and the metropole enable us to reconstruct how the Dutch assessed such reports and acted on them.[12]

The second half of this study continues to probe the impact of rumors in the nine years of war following the outbreak of the revolt. This study is partly based on correspondence between Pernambuco and Lisbon, which the Dutch occasionally managed to get hold of on captured Portuguese ships. The larger part of it, though, is based on testimonies of deserters and captives.[13] Between August 1645 and the Dutch surrender in January 1654, roughly three-hundred people went over from the Portuguese side to the Dutch side, some by their own will, some by force. Once in Recife, Fort Orange or the Dutch outposts in Paraíba and Rio Grande, these people's ordinary observations from beyond the walls of the Dutch forts turned into valuable intelligence, and the Dutch interrogated them extensively.[14] In total, interrogations of 295 persons have survived until today. Each was preceded by a section in which the interrogator noted some basic identifying markers of the interrogated person: name, ethnicity, geographic origin and occupation, though in the case of enslaved persons, ownership became a constant marker, while occupation was mentioned more rarely.

[12] These sources are used in most of the literature on Dutch Brazil, going as far back as to the 'contemporary' works of Pierre Moreau, *Klare en Waarachtige Beschryving van de leste Beroerten en Afval der Portugezen in Brasil*, Amsterdam 1652, and Johan Nieuhof, *Gedenkweerdige Brasiliaense Zee- en Lant-Reize,* Amsterdam 1682, and continuing to Robert Southey, *History of Brazil*, vol. 2 (Longman etc., London 1817; digital version Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2012), ch. xix; Hermann Wätjen, *Das holländische Kolonialreich in Brasilien* (Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1921), ch. 4; José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos. Influência da Ocupação Holandesa na Vida e na Cultura do Norte do Brasil*, 4th ed. (Topbooks, Rio de Janeiro 2001), ch. 2; Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, ch. v, which is why I treat them with less detail here than the sources of the second part of this study, which do not figure at all in the existing scholarship. However, this present study is the first addressing these sources on the emergence of the rebellion in detail, and the first that views the problem the Dutch government faced in 1644/1645 as a one of intelligence-gathering and assessment of rumor.

[13] For an overview of the issue of desertion in the Dutch Atlantic, see Karwan Fatah-Black, "Desertion by Sailors, Slaves and Solders in the Dutch Atlantic c. 1600-1800", in Matthias van Rossum/Jeanette Kamp (eds.), *Desertion in the Early Modern World. A Comparative History* (Bloomsbury, New York 2016), 97-124. On marronage in 17th-century Brazil, see João José Reis/ Flávio dos Santos Gomes (eds.), *Freedom by a Thread. The History of Quilombos in Brazil* (Diasporic Africa Press, New York 2016) and João José Reis/Eduardo Silva, *Negociação e Conflito: A Resistência Negra no Brasil Escravista* (Companhia das Letras, São Paulo 1989).

[14] The documents now form part of the collection "Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren van Brazilië" within the archive of the Kamer Zeeland, one of the five chambers of the WIC, and the chamber of which the most complete record survives. The WIC archive at the Nationaal Archief Den Haag has greatly suffered from willful neglect in the early 19th century, when large parts of the collection were disposed of. One can suppose that originally the other four chambers were supplied with the same set of documents.

Over the whole time period, 148 interrogated people were free people, and 147 enslaved people.[15] Slightly more than forty percent of all slaves and an even higher number of free people fled or were caught in groups. When this happened, arrivals were usually interrogated together, or their separate interrogations were fused into one document. The number of actual interrogation documents is thus significantly lower than the number of interrogated people. For the free contingent, of which the greater part arrived in Recife as prisoners of war, more interrogations can be found in years with a strong Dutch naval presence in the South Atlantic, and throughout the whole period, most captives of free civilians and soldiers were made at sea. The influx of slaves follows no discernible pattern. Slaves and *negro* soldiers, in general, came over when their immediate circumstances prompted them to. Only twenty-eight of them were captured during raids or campaigns; more than two-thirds came over by their own will.

By the time of the outbreak of the revolt, the sugar economy of Northeast Brazil was already thoroughly based on the mass importation of enslaved West Africans.[16] More than eighty percent of all interrogated enslaved persons in the sources at hand were classified as *negros* – first generation arrivals from Africa, or children of African parents. Two to three *mulattos*, *criolos*, *brasilianen* each can be found, eight without ethnic identification, and even

[15] Both the Dutch and the rebels promised freedom to all slaves who joined their forces, but also impressed slaves into their military. Whether we can assign 'slave' status to these people during the rebellion is debatable, see Hebe Mattos, "'Black Troops' and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World. The Case of Henrique Dias and His Black Regiment", *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45:1 2008, 11, and Hendrik Kraay, "Arming Slaves in Brazil from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century", in Christopher Brown/Philip Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves. From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (Yale UP, New Haven/London 2006), 146-179. The Dutch administrators at Recife listed the owners of all *negros* (unless *vrij*) arriving in Recife, even if these had served in the rebel forces before coming over. In the following study, all informants classified as *negros* (if they were no *vrij negros*) in the sources are either referred to as *negro* soldier if it is clear that the person served in the rebel forces, or as slave if they were civilians. Amerindians are not counted as slaves if the sources do not suggest so.

[16] Herbert Klein/Francisco Luna, *Slavery in Brazil* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2010), 28f.; Pedro Puntoni, *A Mísera Sorte. A Escravidão Africana no Brasil Holandês e as Guerras do Tráfico no Atlântico Sul, 1621-1648* (Ed. Hucitec, São Paulo 1999), 87-102, 150-162.

two Turkish slaves.[17] Enslavement in early modern Brazil, these figures remind us, was not confined to strict ethnic or geographic boundaries.

Of the free contingent, seven informants were Amerindian, one African and the rest European; most of the Europeans were Portuguese, though Germans, Dutch, English, Italians, Spaniards and Turks make appearances in small numbers. The gender ratio among both enslaved and free people leans heavily towards men, which make up hundred percent of the free, and almost ninety percent of the enslaved runaways and captives.

Geographically, by far the most informants from inland Pernambuco said they lived in close vicinity to Recife before coming over – in the Várzea, at Muribeca and Cabo Agostinho as well as in Igarassu and Itamaracá. There are significantly fewer informants from both the southern districts of Pernambuco, Sirinhaém and Alagoas, as well as from Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte to the north.[18] Many of the informants at hand thus witnessed the war from up close, as soldiers and in supporting functions to the rebel forces, or as civilians living in immediate vicinity to the frontline. The geographic spread of informants and the appearance of even just a few from outlying regions is remarkable, however. Between Recife and Cabo Agostinho as well as between Recife or Fort Orange and inland Itamaracá lay several days of travel, perhaps weeks during the rainy season and under the conditions of war. That there were still many people from these regions who saw fleeing to Recife as a possible course of action or were captured during guerrilla raids shows that the war made itself felt as a presence and a threat deep into the land.

These sources bear several advantages for the kind of study envisioned here. Due to their uniformity and rigidity across the whole time period, we can trace with certainty who gave

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[17] In general, *mulatto* referred to persons of mixed African and European origin; *creole* to people of African background born in Brazil; *brasilian* to Amerindians living within the colonial order, see Klein/Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*, xi, and Stuart Schwartz/Hal Langfur, "Tapanhuns, Negros da Terra and Curibocas. Common Cause and Confrontation between Blacks and Natives in Colonial Brazil", in Matthew Restall (ed.), *Beyond Black and Red. African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (New Mexico UP, Albuquerque 2005), 83f. For the issue of ethnicity and racism in the 17th century, see Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Were Early Modern Europeans Racist?", in Morris-Reich/Rupnow (eds.), *Ideas of 'Race' in the History of the Humanities* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2017), 33-87.

[18] The sources at hand spell the names of regions, villages, cities, rivers etc. in endless variations and oftentimes in hybrid forms of Portuguese, Dutch and Tupi, e.g. "Vergea" instead of "Várzea" or "Moerbeeck" instead of "Muribeca". I have decided to uniformly adopt modern-day spelling of places which still exist, and otherwise retained those featured in the sources. Note that in this study, following frequent language use in the 17th-century Dutch Republic, "Pernambuco" is not confined to the modern-day state, nor to the fluid captaincy borders featured on 17th-century maps and in textual sources, but entails the entirety of Dutch Brazil.

which information at what point in time. We can generally establish the identity of the informants within the main categories of the social order of early modern Brazil and determine their geographic origin. The formulaic procedure of the interrogations allows us to compare statements about certain recurring topics across a broad time span and across wide social distinctions. Finally, the large corpus of interrogations of enslaved people presents a unique opportunity to gain insight into the experiences of a population group that is all but silent in the colonial record.

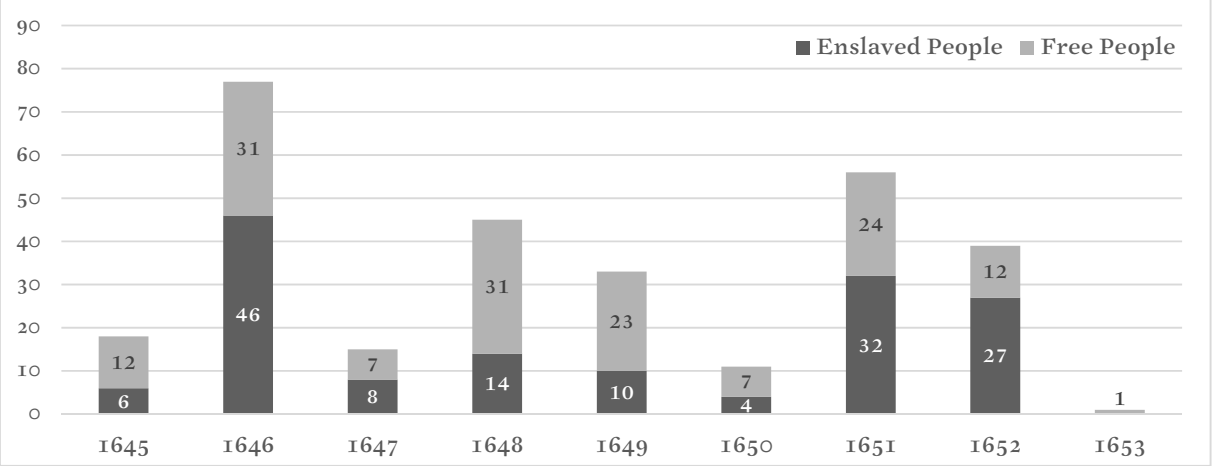

Figure 2. Deserters, Captives, Runaways per annum[19]

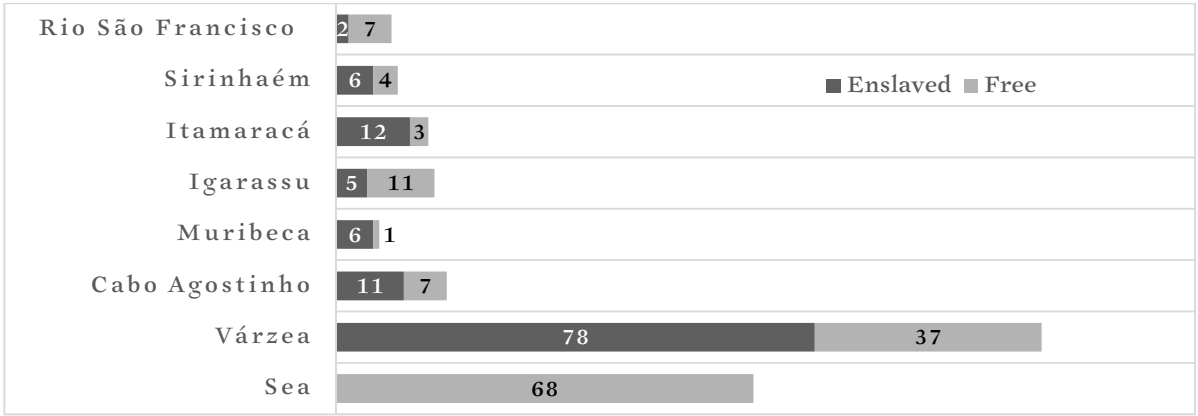

Figure 3. Deserters, Captives, Runaways per region[20]

[19] These figures do not reflect the total of deserters, captives and runaways joining the Dutch in these years, but only those of whom there are testimonies in OWIC **60** to **67**. Occasional statements of the High and Secret Council between 1645 and 1654 indicate that there were in fact even more informants, but either these were not questioned in the same way or the protocols of these interrogations were not sent to the metropole.
[20] "Sea" refers to captives made during maritime raids.

Method

This study seeks to recover the volatile realm of communication as it mattered to both ordinary Pernambucans and to the two rival groups who fought for dominance over colonial Northeast Brazil. To do so, it is crucial to consider the circumstances of the production of the sources at hand. Rarely do we know with certainty who conducted these interrogations, as few interrogations of free people and almost no interrogation of enslaved people name the interrogator or feature a signature. In 1645 and 1646, the signature of *assessor* Johannes van Walbeeck, a seasoned servant of the colonial government, particularly in matters of intelligence, appears under several interrogations. In later years, the signatures of *advocaat-fiscaal* Jacob le Maire and Gijsbert de With, head of the Judicial Council, appear most frequently.[21] This personal connection to judicial procedures is evident in all of the interrogations at hand, both signed and unsigned. Like court hearings, interrogations of deserters, runaways and captives at Recife followed a steady structure and were recorded in a consistent fashion. A string of questions on a set range of topics – position, strength and provisioning of enemy troops, morale among soldiers and civilians, and the latest news and rumors – built the basis of most interrogations, adjusted to the specific background of the interrogated. Informants were expected to paint as broad a picture of the conditions in inland Pernambuco as their personal knowledge and experience allowed them. In this regard, as in their general impetus, these interrogations differed from court procedures with their focus on specific deeds and their progression towards an eventual conviction. Torture, an essential component of early modern criminal justice both in the Low Countries and Dutch Brazil, was not applied.[22] Interrogations of deserters and captives were decidedly not trials, but they still were *interrogations*, and as such marked by the fact that one side held sway over the fate of the other and dictated the terms of the conversation. The impression we get as a result is one imposed by the narrow interest of the Dutch intelligence apparatus.

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[21] The *assessor's* responsibility was to manage the in- and outgoing correspondence of the government at Recife and to keep the minutes of the meetings of the High and Secret Council. The office of the *advocaat-fiscaal* is comparable to that of an attorney general. On the administrative setup of the Dutch colonial government at Recife, see Wätjen, *Das holländische Kolonialreich in Brasilien*, 179-192.

[22] John Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof* (Chicago UP, Chicago 1977), 50; The only documented case in which a subject was threatened with torture concerned a man suspected of spying, see OWIC **61**, 50. One should not forget, though, that the Dutch killed several of those prisoners of war who had initially been in the employ of the WIC, but deserted to the Portuguese side or wound up there somehow during the campaign, see Moreau, *Klare en Waarachtige Beschryving*, 72.

Moreover, while the intentions of the Dutch interrogators are transparent in these sources, the stances of their counterparts remain elusive. Certainly, they had more reasons than we can even begin to imagine to lie and deceive or even just twist the truth slightly.

But these points should also not be stretched too far. There is no indication that intimidation was a regular part of the interrogation procedure. The Dutch interrogators questioned some people extensively and over several sessions, probed them when they felt that they were holding back things, and urged them to say more, but still, "I do not know" was a recurrent and accepted answer. Generally, people who entered the interrogation as slaves would leave it as slaves, those who entered it as prisoners of war would leave it as such. What was discussed was but a tiny fragment of the whole picture, yet substantial enough to make some inferences as to how communication on the whole occurred in mid-17th century Pernambuco. Still, an approach is needed that allows for credible statements about practices of communication spanning the whole of Pernambuco from documents drawn up within the confines of the chambers of the Secret Council, the *assessor* or the *advocaat-fiscaal* at Recife.

Guidance on this point can be found in some unlikely places: Venice at the turn of the 17th century, 18th-century Paris, colonial North America, 19th-century India. Studying the field of political communication in early modern Venice, Filippo de Vivo suggests that "communication was not just a means of governance; it was one of the practical limits of the state's authority, an object of negotiation rather than a top-down imposition."[23] These practical limits concerned, for one, the ability of political actors to get their messages across in public. "If texts were acts of communication meant to prompt precise effects," De Vivo notes, "the effects produced by all communication always escaped the control of those who originate it. In early modern Venice, as elsewhere, political statements multiplied and changed innumerable times in the processes of reception and further circulation, and in-

[23] Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford UP, Oxford 2007), 8; De Vivo defines political communication as the "circulation of information and ideas concerning political institutions and events," p. 2; a close, but broader definition of the term 'history of communication' is given by Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society. News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris", *American Historical Review (AHR)* 105:1 2000, 1, who defines it as "the problem of how societies made sense of events and transmitted information about them," though he approaches this first and foremost with an eye for political information.

variably transcended the intentions of the political actors who first made those statements."[24] To get a sense of how different actors were able to engage in the realm of political communication, we must situate their messages within the overall discursive field of written and oral utterances that surround them. Perhaps the most feasible way of reconstructing this field is to follow the paper trail that early modern governments themselves left behind in their attempt to surveil what politically charged messages people were circulating among another. In this manner, Robert Darnton argues in his work on political communication in late *ancien régime* Paris, one can recover the practices of communication by which people were able to inform themselves and formed webs of communication, perhaps even a public, "because the acts of transmitting and receiving information built up a common consciousness of involvement in public affairs."[25]

The fact that the New World of Brazil had been colonized by Old World people using Old World institutions and ideas means that we can transfer these approaches to early modern European political communication across the Atlantic and that they sometimes even produce results that resemble the situation in Europe closely. Yet there were also some crucial differences. In his work on British political intelligence in colonial India, Christopher Bayly argues that colonial states experienced the task of controlling communication as particularly challenging. Colonial states needed to recruit a cadre of intermediaries and devise strategies to make strange forms of communication intelligible.[26] Force was decisive in this venture, though in the long run, fostering economic, social and cultural entanglement between colonizer and colonized was the more important task. In a colony such as Dutch Brazil, a Babylonic confluence of people from three continents, promoting such links was all the more challenging. Simply finding out who is talking to whom under these circumstances already tells us a lot about the way this colonial society functioned.

The impact of colonialism not only made itself felt in the formal procedures of communication. It also affected what people were talking about. An immense amount of repression

[24] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 10.
[25] Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police. Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Harvard UP, Cambridge/London 2010), 145.
[26] Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information. Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1996).

and violence was necessary to maintain the vast social, cultural and ethnic divides of colonial orders. As Tom Arne Midtrød, Gregory Evans Dowd and Katherine Grandjean have shown in their studies of early modern British America, wide-spread distrust and a propensity for outbreaks of panic resulted from this ever-lingering potential for violence.[27] In this climate, a specific kind of 'news' reigned supreme: rumor. As in perpetually nervous British America, information in wartime Pernambuco was notoriously unreliable and unstable. Historians have harnessed such doubtfulness by turning to the sociocultural conditions that made certain rumors take hold and to the communicative networks that allowed them to spread. "Rumor needs a bruiting ground, a human group, a collection of minds at work," Dowd states, "rumor is never […] entirely the work of one person, or the result of one error; it is the child of the rumorers en masse."[28] Following the mutations of rumor as they appear in the documents at hand, it is possible to get a sense of the preoccupations and anxieties that permeated Pernambuco, and to uncover oral communication networks at the edges of the colonial record. Far from being an obstacle, rumors are a key element in the endeavor of reconstructing the experience of life in a tropical slave society at war from a couple of interrogations in beleaguered Recife.

[27] Tom Arne Midtrød, "Strange and Disturbing News: Rumor and Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley", *Ethnohistory* 58:1 2011, 91-112; Gregory Evans Dowd, "The Panic of 1751. The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina- Cherokee Frontier", *William and Mary Quarterly* 53:3 1996, 527-560; Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage. The Communication Frontier in Early New England* (Harvard UP, Cambridge 2015), ch. 3; Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Great New York Conspiracy of 1741. Slavery, Crime, and Colonial Law* (Kansas UP, Lawrence 2003). Gregory Evans Dowd, *Groundless. Rumors, Legends, and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore 2015), 8, points out the difficulties of defining the concept "rumor" positively, but offers some general characteristics: rumor is the product of a collective communication process, defined by weakness of evidence, an element of instability and a feeling of urgency. Historiography on rumors is greatly influenced by Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News. A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis 1966) and the seminal works of Marc Bloch, "Reflections of a Historian on the False News of the War", transl. by James Holoka, Michigan War Studies Review 51 2013, 1-11, and Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789. Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (Princeton UP, Princeton 1973); for a sociological study of the relation between violence and rumor with methodical implications, see Glen Perice, "Rumors and Politics in Haiti", *Anthropological Quarterly* 70:1 1997, 1-10.

[28] Dowd, *Groundless*, 3.

Historiography

This study argues that in mid-17th-century Pernambuco, talk moved fast, cut through rigid social distinctions and covered vast distances. Talk constituted a challenge to colonial rule despite all efforts to silence, channel and dominate it. Through the lens of communication, the revolt that ended Dutch rule over Pernambuco appears not as a clear-cut military contest between the Portuguese and the Dutch or as a popular uprising of Pernambucans against Dutch rule. Against the resilient unruliness of ordinary talk, both the command of the Dutch over Pernambuco and the insurgents' revolt against it appear frail and held together by little else than ruthless violence. In exploring this dynamic, this study seeks to add a perspective to the history of Dutch Brazil, contribute to our understanding of colonial Brazil, and provide a case study on communication in the early modern Atlantic World.

The history of Dutch Brazil is one of high expectations turning into endless frustrations. In 1621, after the expiry of the Twelve Years' Truce, the United Provinces established the *Geoctroyeerde Westindische Compagnie* (WIC) to extend the conflict with Habsburg Spain into the Iberian Atlantic. For the next five decades, the WIC's operations spanned all the way from Northern America to the Caribbean into the South Atlantic and along the African Coast, but first and foremost, the WIC targeted what it perceived as the Iberians' weakest, and most readily exploitable possession – Brazil.[29] A first, unsuccessful occupation of Salvador de Bahia in 1624 was followed by a second invasion of Pernambuco in 1630, which the Dutch arduously fought out over the following decade. For some time, it seemed like the hopes of the Company could come true. Between 1637 and 1645, Pernambuco experienced a period of relative peace, and the colony's sugar industry regained some of its former economic strength. Yet, the combination of a colonial administration with a republican, Protestant background and a staunchly Catholic colonial planter elite created constant friction, only to be exacerbated by the planters' steadily rising debt burden to Dutch slave

[29] On the European context of the Dutch expansion into the Atlantic, see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic in the Hispanic World* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1986). On Dutch intrusions into the Spanish "mare clausum" of the Caribbean, see Victor Enthoven/Henk den Heijer/Han Jordaan, "De Nederlandse Atlantische Wereld in Militaire Context, 1585-1800", in: idem (eds.), *Geweld in de West* (Brill, Leiden 2013), 15-42. On the Dutch in the Atlantic, see Johannes Postma/Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce. Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817* (Brill, Leiden 2003); Henk den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Walburg Pers, Zutphen 2002); Benjamin Schmidt, "The Dutch Atlantic. From Provincialism to Globalism", in Philip Morgan/Jack Greene (eds.), *Atlantic History. A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford UP, Oxford 2008), 163-190, and, most recently, Klooster, *The Dutch Moment.*

traders. Historians have tended to see the eventual outbreak of the revolt in 1645 as an inevitable outcome of these frictions, compounded by the obliviousness and incompetence of the Dutch colonial administration.[30] The first chapter of this study presents a different picture. The insurgency rested on much shakier foundations than commonly assumed. To a large degree, Pernambuco had to be coerced into rebellion. As for the Dutch, their sustained inactivity in the face of rising warnings of rebellion has to be contextualized within the fraught political climate of the colony, where rumors of treason and sedition had been a constant background noise for years.

By the early 17th-century, when the Dutch appeared on the scene, colonial Brazil already was an inextricable tangle of ethnic and social groups strenuously held together by the hierarchies and rhythms of the sugar industry – a most bewildering tropical society, exhibiting a steadily increasing level of complexity while perpetuating a resolutely inflexible social order.[31] A rural society at heart, life in mid-17th-century Northeast Brazil revolved around the *engenho*, the sugar mill, which formed the colony's economic keystone. "Every mill is a Commonwealth within [it]self and the lord of the mill Justicer and Judge within himself," a 17th-century visitor to Brazil judged, and indeed, somehow the *engenho* managed to give order to a most heterogeneous society of extreme tensions.[32] "The plantation regime did not create the [social] rankings," Stuart Schwartz writes, "but its internal structure with ownership by Europeans, coerced labor provided by Indians and then African or black slaves, and artisan or managerial roles filled by poorer whites, freed blacks, and persons of

[30] On Dutch Brazil, see the classic works of Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*; Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos*, Dutch translation: *Nederlanders in Brazilië* (Walburg Pers, Zutphen 2001); Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*. For newer scholarship on Dutch Brazil with a distinctly 'Atlantic' outlook, see the essays in Michiel van Groesen (ed.), *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2014) and Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*.
[31] The founding works of Brazilian social history are the noticeably dated, but still highly influential Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, 2nd ed. (California UP, Berkeley 1986), and João Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History, 1500-1800* (Oxford UP, New York 1998). Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos*, is a seminal work in Brazilian historiography and specifically focuses on the social history of Dutch Brazil. Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1985) is still the best English-language social history of colonial Brazil.
[32] Cuthbert Pudsey, *Journal of a Residence in Brazil*, ed. by Nelson Papavero/Dante Teixeira (Ed. Index, Petrópolis 2000), 25f.

color, reinforced the social hierarchy and reaffirmed the gradations in a practical and demonstrable way. The *engenho* was both mirror and metaphor of Brazilian society."[33] However large social divides might have been in colonial Brazil, people lived their lives in close proximity and constant interaction, which could prove to be both a problem and a blessing for the functioning of this society. Communication across social and ethnic divides always had the potential to end in violence and the archives of the Inquisition at Salvador de Bahia are full of cases of people who were not supposed to have much in common coming together, conspiring and organizing resistance to the colonial order.[34] Yet, in bridging divides that were insurmountable in other ways, communication could also act as a unifier, a common denominator creating some degree of cohesion.[35] The sources used in this study underscore this ambivalent function of communication. On the one hand, one can see a vivid realm of talk that easily transcended the social and ethnic distinctions of Brazilian society. On the other hand, it is undeniable that Pernambuco's communicative order reinforced its social stratifications – some people simply found it much easier than others to get the information they needed and to examine and corroborate it. Communication in mid-17th-century Brazil was incredibly dynamic and unyieldingly hierarchical at the same time.

In the attempt to incorporate Northeast Brazil into its grand expansion scheme, the Dutch West India Company was not wasting its efforts on just any colony. Brazil was an integral part of the 17th-century Atlantic World, an ever-growing transoceanic realm created by the movement of people, commodities, cultural practices, and ideas between Europe, Africa

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[33] Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*, 251. On Brazilian Amerindian history: John Hemming, *Red Gold. The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians* (Harvard UP, Cambridge 1978); Alida Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil* (Texas UP, Austin 2005); Robin Wright, "Destruction, Resistance, and Transformation – Southern, Coastal and Northern Brazil (1580-1890)," in Frank Salomon/Stuart Schwartz (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2008), 287-381. On slavery in Brazil: Klein/Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*; Carl Degler, *Neither Black Nor White. Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (Macmillan, New York 1971). On slavery in Dutch Brazil specifically: Puntoni, *A Mísera Sorte*.

[34] Laura de Mello e Souza, *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross. Witchcraft, Slavery, and Popular Religion in Colonial Brazil* (Texas UP, Austin 2004); Ronaldo Vainfas, *A Heresia dos Indios: Catolicismo e Rebeldia no Brasil Colonial* (Companhia das Letras, São Paulo 1995); Alida Metcalf, "Millenarian Slaves? The Santidade de Jaguaripe and Slave Resistance in the Americas", *AHR* 104:5 1999, 1531-1559.

[35] The debate on cultural exchanges among the different ethnicities of colonial Brazil has focused in particular on Afro-European syncretism and the survival of African cultures under the conditions of slavery, see James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (North Carolina UP, Chapel Hill 2003); Linda Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge UP, New York 2002); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1992).

and the Americas.[36] Communication held together this expansion movement both as a whole and in its parts. "Communication networks," Alejandra Dubcovsky argues, "were crucial to the creation, development and growth of colonial spaces and the conflicts that emerged within them."[37] Across the Atlantic seaboard, a common desire for information forced a diverse set of actors to form communicative ties across wide distances. As much as economic and social connections, such communicative ties informed the lived social relations of colonial societies. Building on an established canon of literature concerned with oceanic communication between the different sites of the Atlantic World, Dubcovsky and other scholars have recently shown the value of taking communication as a reference for re-evaluating the internal social make-up of early modern colonial societies along the Atlantic.[38] A focus on communication, Katherine Grandjean argues, allows to see the "human geography" of early modern colonies, "a geography of letters, travelers, rumors, and movement."[39] Two main concerns of this scholarship remain valid for the study at hand: a focus on speech as the prime mover of information and on the interethnic make-up of commu-

[36] Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2005), ch. 6; Stuart Schwartz, "A Commonwealth Within Itself. The Early Brazilian Sugar Industry, 1550-1670", in idem (ed.), *Tropical Babylons* (North Carolina UP, Chapel Hill 2004), 158-200. For the position of Brazil in the Portuguese Atlantic, see Anthony Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire. From Beginnings to 1807*, vol. 2 (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2009), ch. 22-24, and Francisco Bethencourt/Diogo Curto (eds.), *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2007). On 'Atlantic History' as a strand in the historiography of early modern colonialism, see John Elliott, "Atlantic History. A Circumnavigation," in David Armitage/Michael Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2002), 233-249; Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *AHR* 111:3 2006, 741-757; Philip Morgan/Jack Greene, "Introduction. The Present State of Atlantic History," in idem (eds.), *Atlantic History. A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford UP, Oxford 2009). Perhaps the best complete synopsis is John Thornton, *Cultural History of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge UP, New York 2012).

[37] Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Informed Power* (Harvard UP, Cambridge 2016), 4.

[38] Carla Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Harvard UP, Cambridge 2004); Ian Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740. An Exploration of Communication and Community (*Oxford UP, New York 1986). Research on letters and print in early modern colonial societies is almost exclusively focused on the English Atlantic, see Hugh Amory/David Hall (eds.), *A History of the Book in America, vol. 1. The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (North Carolina UP, Chapel Hill 2007); Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power. Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Pennsylvania UP, Philadelphia 2009); April Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Pennsylvania UP, Philadelphia 2004). Oral communication figures more prominently in Grandjean, *American Passage*; James Merrell, *Into the American Woods. Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (W.W. Norton & Co., New York 1999); Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections. Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America* (North Carolina UP, Chapel Hill 2014) and, for late colonial America, Richard Brown, *Knowledge is Power. The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (Oxford UP, New York 1989).

[39] Grandjean, *American Passage*, 6.

nication channels. But there is no way around the fact that current scholarship on communication in the 17th-century Atlantic almost exclusively covers Northern America, and here, mostly British America. Our knowledge of this sphere is thus merely a tiny fragment of the whole picture.[40]

In the following case study, we can see some of the building blocks of communication in Northern America reappear down south in Pernambuco: the remarkable reach of oral communication networks, the reliance on indigenous actors as transmitters of information over great distances (although overall, slaves seemed to have played the more important role here), the widespread sentiment of people hungering for information and the creation of a distinct topology of information which segmented colonial spaces into information hubs and disconnected backwaters. This study also offers a corrective to some common notions on the role of reading and writing in colonial Brazil. Unlike for example New England, colonial Brazil has the reputation of a society that cared little for reading and writing, even among those who were proficient in both. "If wills and inventories are any measure, the planters spent little time with books," Stuart Schwartz surmises, "the *senhores de engenho* concerned themselves not with philosophical abstractions, literature, or civil or divine law but with the practical matters of family rank, property, and power."[41] This study does not contradict this conclusion, but it offers a picture in which writing played an important role in Brazilian society in other ways. The *senhores de engenho* of 17th-century Pernambuco might not have been the most lettered men, but they certainly had an eye and an ear for forceful rhetoric, a distinct desire for information and wide-spanning letter networks. Writing played a central role in the formation of the revolt, and continued to do so in the following

[40] In English-language literature especially so, of course, but the theme of communication has really yet to reach beyond the field of Anglo-American colonial history. Kenneth Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea. Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (McGill-Queen's UP, Montreal 2002) covers communication in the 18th-century French Atlantic. Rebecca Earle, "Information and Disinformation in Late Colonial New Granada," *The Americas* 54:2 1997, 167-184; Clarence Munford/Michael Zeuske, "Black Slavery, Class Struggle, Fear and Revolution in St. Domingue and Cuba, 1785–1795", *Journal of Negro History* 73:1/4 1988, 12-32; Julius Scott, *The Common Wind. Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution* (Diss. Durham 1986) and Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror. Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge UP, New York 2014) deal with the Iberian and French Atlantic, but at a much later stage than this current study. A few remarks on print in colonial Brazil are provided by Stuart Schwartz, "The Formation of a Colonial Identity in Brazil," in Nicholas Canny/Anthony Pagden (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton UP, Princeton 1987), 38.

[41] Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*, 287f.

war years – remarkably, for both literate and illiterate Pernambucans. In the realm of communication, then, wartime Pernambuco exhibits surprising similarities to seemingly very different areas of the early modern Atlantic.

Structure

The first half of this study focuses on the role of rumor at the onset of the revolt between late 1644 and mid-1645. For a long time, the threat of a revolt announced itself to the Dutch in the form of most uncertain and sometimes contradictory intelligence. Which information about the insurgency did the Dutch possess when, and how did they react to it? Who was rumoring and to what end? This chapter charts how the Dutch were continuously struggling with assessing rumors reaching them from outside of Recife, and how their limited ability to do so eventually restricted their ability to successfully challenge the emerging insurgency.

The second half of this study follows the trail of rumor during the nine years of war after the outbreak of the revolt. Rumors continued to circulate wildly among the population of Portuguese-held Pernambuco and had a major impact on how people perceived the war and related to it. This chapter first delineates the spread of rumor across Pernambuco and presents some of the challenges people faced in hearing and acting upon rumor. The second part of this chapter traces the central role of rumor in the process of desertion from the Portuguese to the Dutch side. Rumor spurred and sometimes curbed desertion, but it also acquired new significance as a coveted sort of information provided by deserters. Such talk posed a clear threat to the side that was left behind, but an uncertain gain to the recipient side.

Figure 4. Pernambuco[1]

1. Recife	a. Goiana
2. Olinda	b. Itamaracá
3. Fort Orange	c. Igarassu
4. Engenho St. Bras	d. Várzea
5. Camaragibe	e. Curcuranas
6. São Lourenço da Mata	f. Cabo de Santo Agostinho
7. Muribeca	
8. Pontal	
9. Ipojuca	
10. Maracaipe	
11. Sirinhaém	
12. Rio Formoso	
13. Tamandaré	

[1] Georg Marcgraf, *Brasilia qua parte paret Belgis. Brasilia geographica & hydrographica tabula nova, continens praefecturas de Ciriji, cum Itapuama de Paranambuca Itamaraca Paraiba, & Potiji, vel Rio Grande*, Amsterdam 1659.

Figure 5. Itamaracá & Goiana[2]

1. Fort Orange	3. Trespaos
2. Tapupirí	4. Tacoara

[2] Marcgraf, *Brasilia qua parte paret Belgis.*

Figure 6. Recife & Eastern Várzea[3]

1. Recife	**4. Fort Prins Willem**
2. Mauritsstad	**5. Arraial**
3. Barette	**6. Olinda**

[3] Cornelis Golijath, *Perfecte Caerte der Gelegentheyt van Olinda de Pharnambuco, Maurits-Stadt ende t'Reciffo*, Amsterdam 1648.

1. Chasing Rumors

"The Portuguese in this country," the High Council at Recife wrote to their superiors in July 1644, "cannot be trusted at all, all the more so in these current times when the price for sugar is so low and their expenses so burdensome that they see no end to their debts and are threatened every day with foreclosure and imprisonment. With the current weakness of our forces and lack of all sorts of basic necessities they might well decide for an uprising against this government, but only if they can count on assistance from Bahia."[4] The Portuguese planters of Pernambuco had good reasons to revolt, and the Dutch were well aware of it. Why did they still let it happen?

Most of the histories of the revolt that shook Pernambuco in 1645 are little concerned with this point. The revolt, these histories seem to suggest, dealt the death blow to what was a misconceived venture, and in the end no more than a "curious colonial episode" in the history of Brazil anyway.[5] Statements like the one from July 1644 serve to reinforce such an impression. Even the Dutch themselves, it seems, saw what was coming but did not have the means or the will to stop it.

From up close, things look much less clear-cut, of course. The Dutch recognized the potential for revolt from early on, but for a long time they were confident it would not materialize. Perhaps this was a little naïve, but it certainly was not unfounded. The councillors were well aware that discontent with their rule was growing and that a determined group of planters was pushing the idea of rebellion across Pernambuco. But the councillors also heard of the continued setbacks these plotters experienced. As long as they knew what was going on the Dutch thought that they would remain in control, and realized too late that they had lost track somewhere along the way. What emerges from this is a story that casts light on the limits of early modern colonial governance, on the possibilities of social organization in a highly diverse and still relatively young colonial society, and on the pitfalls of rumor in early modern Pernambuco.

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[4] OWIC **59**, 316.

[5] "Curious colonial episode" is a rather unfortunate moniker by Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, vii, who otherwise insists on the point that things could have easily ended much differently, see ibid., 253. Certainly some of the foundational authors on the history of colonial Brazil, such as Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History*, 90, and Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, 41, 189, see the Dutch period as merely an interlude in Portuguese-Catholic colonial Brazil. Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos*, is much more nuanced, but his account also works toward an inevitable breakdown of the WIC's rule over Pernambuco.

Whispers

Suspicion first arose in late 1642. "Rumors of treasonous schemes and attacks of the Portuguese spread among the common man," as chronicler Johan Nieuhof noted retrospectively of the summer months of that year.[6] Back in Amsterdam, in May 1642, someone had informed the WIC directors that the Pernambucan settler João Fernandes Vieira and his father-in-law had initiated contact with Lisbon with the intent to overthrow the Dutch government in Pernambuco. Promptly, the Heren XIX relayed this news to Recife. The charges were serious, all the more so because they implicated one of the major backers of Dutch rule over Northeast Brazil. By 1642, Vieira, a simple butcher boy at the time of the Dutch invasion of Pernambuco, had become one of the biggest beneficiaries of the WIC's rule over Brazil, as well as one of the closest confidantes of the colonial government. As the proprietor of five *engenhos* (all bought on Dutch credit), recipient of several lucrative tax collecting licenses, and alderman (*schepen*) in Mauritsstad, Vieira was regarded with respect by the Portuguese settlers and the Dutch government alike.[7] This position granted Vieira both the benefit of the doubt in the face of such allegations and easy access to the highest ranks of the colony's government circles to offer his own spin on the affair. On December 13, Vieira testified to the High Council that he had indeed sent his brother-in-law to Lisbon, but merely to get him a position at court and to send the king his compliments for the restitution of the kingdom.[8] Yet, Vieira admitted that there was unrest among the Portuguese in the colony, and recommended the Council to disarm all settlers, including himself.

A couple of days after Vieira's intervention, the government put his recommendations to disarm the local population into practice.[9] A crisis had been averted in time, it seemed, but a feeling of suspicion remained. In February 1643, governor-general Johan Maurits revealed to the High Council that an unnamed source had confided to him that a secret agent from Bahia was passing through the southern districts of Dutch Brazil, spying and stirring

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[6] Nieuhof, *Gedenkweerdige Brasiliaense Zee- en Lant-Reize*, 54.
[7] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 274; Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 78; see also José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *João Fernandes Vieira. Mestre-de-Campo do Terco de Infantaria de Pernambuco* (CEHA, Lisbon 2000), and Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*; Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History*, 85f.
[8] OWIC **69**, 1305f.; the copy of the letter that Vieira handed over to the High Council (OWIC **58**, 1251) confirmed his account, of course.
[9] OWIC **69**, 1311.

up the local population.[10] The High Council ordered all commanders of the Dutch forts in the South to make further inquiries, and a few days later, Martin van Els, the commander of the Dutch fort at Sirinhaém, responded. Van Els could confirm the arrival of a Portuguese captain named Agostinho Cardoso, who had landed at Cabo Agostinho, bringing letters from Bahia addressed to "certain people living in close vicinity to Recife", and then trekked southwards.[11] Animosity towards the Dutch was widespread in these southern districts of the colony, Van Els judged. "In a very short time," his contacts had cautioned him, "Pernambuco shall be surrendered and taken, without spilling Portuguese or Dutch blood, through a great act of treason among the principal [settlers]."[12]

When the Secret Council – the board tasked with all military matters in the colony – convened on March 16, governor-general Johan Maurits deduced that all evidence pointed towards a plot among "several noble Portuguese" to take the Dutch positions by surprise, with "the main people involved in this living in the Várzea" and "known to us."[13] But the councillors were reluctant to act. Just recently, they had grudgingly complied with the order of the Heren XIX to significantly reduce the number of soldiers stationed in the colony. Everywhere, Dutch troops had been withdrawn from the countryside, and now, Dutch military presence in Pernambuco was limited to but a few places on the coast.[14] For the moment, the government at Recife considered its network of spies and informants its best weapon. They would wait and see until the existence of such a plot was established beyond doubt, the council concluded, and anyway, "the clear intelligence that [Johan Maurits] knows to attain should suffice to forestall any such attack."[15]

For another year, it seemed like things would calm down again. There was little talk of rebellion, and the Heren XIX pressed for an even further reduction of armed forces in the colony.[16] But the peace did not last long. From October 1644 onwards, reports of a conspiracy against the Dutch government began to reach the councillors again on a steady basis. The first to notify the Dutch of such a plot were the heads of the Jewish community of

[10] OWIC **69**, 1394; Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 162.
[11] OWIC **58**, 1305, 1527f.
[12] OWIC **58**, 1305.
[13] OWIC **58**, 1306.
[14] Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 160.
[15] OWIC **58**, 1306.
[16] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 156.

Pernambuco. "The elders of the Jewish Nation," the Secret Council recorded on October 13, 1644, "announce to the gathering that they have been notified by several of their people in the countryside that the Portuguese are seeking to do something against this state."[17] Under the reign of the Dutch, Jewish life had blossomed in Northeast Brazil like nowhere else in colonial America. A policy of tacit toleration allowed Jewish residents of Pernambuco to openly practice their faith and join in congregations. Such toleration could hardly be expected under a reinstated Catholic-Portuguese regime. On the contrary, as the rebels would go on to prove from the very beginning of their revolt, being a Jew in Portuguese Pernambuco could easily turn into a death sentence.[18] It was out of this sense of dread for a return of Portuguese rule that Jewish residents of Pernambuco alerted the Dutch government of the growing threat. "João Fernandes Vieira has sent all his jewels and his silverware to Bahia," two Jewish residents of the Várzea reported to the Council on October 14, "and sells all his slaves and his cattle for cash and is not doing any work on his *engenho*," adding that the conspirators are busily investigating the Dutch forts, counting cannons and crews, gathering forces and keeping in close contact with Bahia.[19]

The origins of this renewed outburst of clandestine activity lay in the arrival of a prominent visitor. In September 1644, André Vidal de Negreiros, the commander of the European regiments of Portuguese Brazil at Bahia, had come to Pernambuco under the pretense of visiting his terminally ill father, a resident of Paraíba.[20] The High Council did not fail to see that in visiting Pernambuco, Vidal had more than just family matters on his mind, but their suspicions were still somewhat off. "We were told in secret that [Vidal] has come here only to find out whether we are gathering forces, since some runaway soldiers have reported to Bahia that we are arming ourselves to attack Rio de Janeiro or some other places down south," the councillors notified their superiors in a letter from the 1st of October.[21]

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[17] OWIC **76**, 51.
[18] On this point see in particular José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *Gente da Nação. Cristãos-Novos e Judeus em Pernambuco, 1542-1654* (Ed. Massangana, Recife 1996), ch. 4; Bruno Feitler, "Jews and New Christians in Dutch Brazil, 1630-1654," in Richard Kagan/Philip Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas. Jews, Conversos and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800* (Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore 2009), 123-151; James Williams, "An Atlantic Perspective on the Jewish Struggle for Rights and Opportunities in Brazil, New Netherland and New York," in Paolo Bernardini/Norman Fiering (eds.), *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450-1800* (Berghahn, New York 2001), 369-393.
[19] OWIC **59**, 229; **76**, 51.
[20] Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 162.
[21] OWIC **59**, 87.

The true purpose of Vidal's visit became clear to the Dutch after Vidal had departed again. On October 30, a "Jew living in the countryside (*platten lande*)" reported to Recife that in a meeting at the home of João Fernandes Vieira, "Vidal gave order to Vieira to arrange everything [for the revolt] and appointed [Vieira] as its leader."[22] With Vidal's help, the informant said, the conspirators asked several resident veteran commanders of the last war against the Dutch in the 1630s to join their cause.[23] Several informants related to the Dutch that Vieira had also sought the help of a couple of *boslopers*, the notorious bands of deserters and maroons that scoured the Pernambucan woods and plundered and terrorized the rural population.[24] With their expertise in guerilla warfare and their excellent knowledge of the terrain, these *boslopers* could be valuable allies, but they could also bring the whole undertaking into disrepute. "The young men who have joined the revolt asked their captain what guarantee of a *secours* from Bahia they could get, since they do not want to be seen as *boslopers*, but perform their duties as soldiers," the unnamed author of a letter that reached the Dutch authorities on November 11 recounted.[25] Only with the support of Bahia, and in the name of the crown, Pernambucans would take up their weapons against the Dutch. Finding out whether such support was actually forthcoming thus became all the more crucial. In January 1645, the High Council dispatched two envoys to Bahia on a reconnaissance mission disguised as a diplomatic visit. The envoys looked hard for any signs of preparation for war in the capital of Portuguese Brazil, but returned empty-handed.[26]

While down in Bahia everything seemed to go its usual way, warnings of treacherous schemes continued to pour into Recife. On January 6, 1645, an unnamed source reported to the Council that "more than before, the Portuguese go into huddles to moan about the government, and imagine themselves to be its slaves."[27] An atmosphere of distrust had seized Pernambuco, the informant noted, where the Portuguese "do not let on or say much to those they distrust" and "one cannot really get at the truth of things, since all this is done

[22] OWIC **59**, 232.
[23] OWIC **59**, 231f.
[24] OWIC **59**, 231, 234f., 245; **60**, 346. For the *boslopers* as the scourge of rural Pernambuco, see Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 142.
[25] OWIC **59**, 235.
[26] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 165.
[27] OWIC **59**, 243.

in such secrecy."[28] Still, the informant judged from his daily encounters that "those that know them well and see where they want to go […] are sure that the Portuguese have a revolt in mind."[29]

Pernambuco was abuzz with rumors, and those with the right contacts found the task of gaining insight into the rebels' schemes not hard at all. On the 23rd of December 1644, a Portuguese colonist entered the gathering of the High Council seeking to inform the committee of recent talk that had come to his attention. A friend of his wife, his nephew and even Vidal himself had let him in on the schemes of the men around Vieira. A few days after Vidal's visit, the informant added, he had heard that Vidal's dying father had expressed to his confessor the wish to live "a month or two more, if it pleases God, and that a good thing is to be expected for the Portuguese to all together come under their king of Portugal again."[30] By word of mouth, such rumors wound their way across the colony, eventually arriving at the chambers of the Secret Council. Slowly, the number of people implicated in the plot rose beyond Vieira to include other high-ranking settlers of the Várzea.[31] Some suspected the insurgents would strike at the next slave market in Recife, when the city was easy to access and filled with people, while others claimed that they would pretend to go on a large hunt, but month after month, several such occasions passed without any incident.[32]

The Dutch councillors followed every lead in determining the true scale of the threat. In February 1645, two lumberjacks in service of João Fernandes Vieira found themselves summoned before the Secret Council for questioning. During a drinking bout in a rural inn in the Várzea, one of the men had said some suspicious things, and someone had reported him to the authorities. Had he not drunkenly revealed, the councillors now asked him, that Abraham – a famous *bosloper* – and more than a dozen deserters had recently set up camp close to Vieira's *engenho*? The man insisted that he had said nothing of that sort. He, an Englishman, had spoken "in his manner" to the Walloon innkeeper, and probably there had been a misunderstanding in the process, for he knew nothing of this Abraham. After a

[28] OWIC **59**, 244.
[29] OWIC **59**, 244.
[30] OWIC **59**, 237.
[31] OWIC **59**, 229, 235, 237, 240.
[32] OWIC **59**, 230, 235, 240. Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 162-164.

round of rigorous questioning, the Council let the two men off the hook, sending them away with a stern reminder to report any suspicious activities.[33]

The Dutch at Recife, then, were by no means oblivious to the storm that was brewing in their colony, but they still shied away from using force. After all, an atmosphere of treason had held sway over the colony for years, but time and time again, it had led nowhere. "Do not rely on the common man too easily in [matters of treason]," governor-general Johan Maurits had advised the High Council upon his departure from the colony in May 1644, "for he is not consistent in his judgement or truthful. His opinions are mostly based on preconceived notions, and he rashly and impulsively mixes truth with falsehood and dubious information according to the mood of the moment. He has no possessions and therefore envies those who do […], he will take hearsay for definite information, and because he exaggerates everything, he deceives the people who believed in him."[34] The governor-general had recommended to "expect truthful and genuine information from people of high rank," but how could you know who was on your side, if, as Johan Maurits had conceded, "to gain the necessary trust [among the Portuguese], they would have to pretend that they hate us and love their own people."[35] There was an awful lot of talk roaming around the colony, but no tangible evidence. Back in November, one informant had claimed that people were making large knives to be used in the upcoming insurgency. The Council asked him to procure one of those knives, but he never did, and neither did any other informant.[36] "We have not found enough evidence to carry out arrests or disarm people once more," the Council notified the Heren XIX on the 3rd of February 1645, "all the more so since we are informed with certainty that once we arrest anyone, or seek to enforce disarmament, a general uprising will follow inevitably."[37] It is not clear who had given this

[33] OWIC **59**, 245f.
[34] Caspar Baerle, *The History of Brazil under the Governorship of Count Johan Maurits of Nassau, 1636-1644*, transl. by Blanche Berckel-Ebeling Koning (Florida UP, Gainesville 2012), 280, which is an embellished version of the original remarks in OWIC **59**, 647. Johan Maurits did not say what specific experiences motivated his distrust of the 'common man', but perhaps the many instances of treason and desertion in the guerilla warfare of the late 1630s played their part, see Johannes de Laet, *Iaerlyck Verhael van de Verrichtingen der Geoctroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie, 1624-1636*, ed. by Honoré Naber/Warnsinck, vol. 4 (Martinus Nijhoff, 's-Gravenhage 1937), 127, 128, 131, 161, 226.
[35] Baerle, *The History of Brazil*, 280f. See also Michiel van Groesen, "Officers of the West India Company, their Networks, and their Personal Memories of Dutch Brazil," in Siegfried Huigen/Jan de Jong/Elmer Kolfin (eds.), *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks* (Brill, Leiden 2010), 45.
[36] OWIC **59**, 235.
[37] OWIC **60**, 111.

advice to the councillors – perhaps it had even been launched by the plotters themselves.[38] But such considerations revealed succinctly the precariousness of Dutch rule over Pernambuco. The relationship between the Portuguese planters and the Dutch government had never been one of boundless trust, and was especially strained now that the Dutch had become increasingly adamant about collecting the vast outstanding debts the planters had incurred.[39] But it was a relationship that made sense, for both sides. The Portuguese planters had the know-how of the sugar industry, and the Dutch had the capital and the ships to keep the trade going. The *safra*, the annual harvest and processing of sugar cane between August and May, was well underway, and people said it would be a record-setting one.[40] Why would the planters wager such secure profits against the uncertain prospects of an uprising?

For now, economic concessions seemed the safer approach. The government sent out troops to catch the most troublesome *bosloper* gangs, extended loans to the most heavily indebted Portuguese planters and dialed back the aggressive debt collection measures of the previous months.[41] At the turn of the year, the revolt had still not proceeded beyond whispers of clandestine visits, deathbed wishes and unfortunate misunderstandings, and the councillors at Recife congratulated the Heren XIX in a letter in mid-February that "for as long as [Pernambuco] has been under your rule, it has never been more in peace and governed to the satisfaction of the inhabitants."[42] Historians have mocked the councillors endlessly for this gross misjudgment, but at the time of the writing of this letter, Dutch Brazil had successfully overcome more than a decade of violence and war.[43] What were some petty rumors against that?

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[38] The fear that arrests would trigger a rebellion had already been a factor in the councillors' decision to do nothing in March 1643, see OWIC **58**, 1306, and it would come up again in May 1645, see OWIC **60**, 348.
[39] For the Dutch slave trade to Brazil, see Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge UP, New York 1992), 19-22; Jelmer Vos/David Eltis/David Richardson, "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic", in David Eltis/David Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers. Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Database* (Yale UP, New Haven 2008), 228-249 and Daniel da Silva/David Eltis, "The Slave Trade to Pernambuco", ibid., 95-129. On sugar exports, see Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 156.
[40] Wätjen, *Das holländische Kolonialreich in Brasilien*, 134f.; Boxer, The Dutch in Brazil, 173. See also Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos*, ch. 2. For the procedure of the *safra*, see Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*, ch. 5.
[41] OWIC **59**, 84; **60**, 284. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 173.
[42] OWIC **60**, 63.
[43] Wätjen, *Das holländische Kolonialreich in Brasilien*, 133, offers the harshest critique of the Dutch colonial government.

Skirmishes

Soon it became clear that the measures of the government had failed to defuse the situation. On May 31, the Secret Council at Recife called for an emergency session. Every day now, the members of the Council noted, they would receive warnings of an upcoming rebellion. A letter delivered to the Council the day before was particularly alarming. "We are quite bewildered how Your Honors can be so unconcerned," the three anonymous authors of the letter – two of which were to be revealed over the next couple of weeks – had begun, citing a whole host of reasons why the councillors should be most worried about the state of their colony: The forests to the north of Recife were full of soldiers from Bahia, where a fleet is being equipped to send support once the revolt breaks out; João Fernandes Vieira, the chief architect of the insurgency, had his own recruits hidden somewhere, and all the way from Porto Calvo to Paraíba, the Portuguese settlers were waiting for the sign to strike.[44]

This time, the Secret Council did not hesitate. "To all sides, spies shall be sent out deep into the woods" to search for enemy regiments, all forts should be stocked with food for two months and the Amerindian auxiliary troops supplied with weapons. The company officials at Rio São Francisco and Alagoas were contacted to inquire among the local population about any suspicious activities or sightings of troops. Vieira and his accomplices Francisco Berenguer and Bernardino Carvalho, the Council judged, should be lured to Recife under the pretense of discussing business with them, heeding once again the advice repeated in the anonymous letter that an open arrest of the conspirators would trigger an immediate outbreak of the revolt.[45]

Vieira wisely decided to decline the invitation, and played the part of the indignant. He knew why the Council really wanted him in Recife and bemoaned the "great lies told about me, that I would run away again, and that I would rise up together with the people (*gemeente*), […] but how would I rise up without any knowledge of the people, and what king, prince or mighty man would I be to rise up alone, seeing that I can barely defend myself from my enemies," wishing nothing but to be allowed to continue his quiet life on his estate.[46] But this time, the councillors did not buy it. The councillors had received conclusive

[44] OWIC **60**, 347-350. Again, Jewish communication networks were instrumental in carrying this information to the Dutch, see Gonsalves de Mello, *Gente da Nação,* 297.
[45] OWIC **76**, 46f.
[46] OWIC **60**, 362.

evidence from their officers at Alagoas that the Bahian captains Henrique Dias and António Filipe Camarão with their African and Amerindian regiments had crossed Rio São Francisco and were marching straight northwards. On June 12, the Secret Council drew up a list of eighteen people from Sirinhaém to Rio Grande to be arrested immediately, with Vieira at the very top.[47] Only two of these suspects, Sebastião de Carvalho and Antônio de Bulhões, both *senhores de engenho* in the Várzea, could be seized the following day.[48] Bulhões feigned complete ignorance, but Carvalho, who convincingly revealed himself to be one of the authors of the warning letter from May 30, could shed some light on the state of affairs.[49] A pledge in form of a letter, Carvalho stated, stood at the center of the rebels' schemes. Every signatory of this pledge vowed to take up their weapons against the Dutch government as soon as a fleet from Bahia landed in Pernambuco. He himself, Carvalho insisted, had refused to sign it initially and agreed together with Fernando de Vale, the Jewish proprietor of an *engenho* close to Muribeca, to send a warning to the High Council. But as he was told some time afterwards that Vieira would not shy away from murdering those who dared not to sign the pledge, Carvalho had met up with Vieira during mass at the grand church in the Várzea and put his name on the pledge.[50]

Carvalho had only spotted a couple of signatories unknown to him on his copy of the pledge, but other witnesses suggested that the letter had gone through many hands already. On June 13, an unnamed priest who repeatedly provided the colonial government with intelligence from the Várzea reported that the pledge "was by now signed by a lot of people, most of them by force, as they would be in danger if they did not sign, and many of them complained bitterly, as they could well see how [signing the pledge] or a war would ruin

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[47] OWIC **76**, 55f. On Henrique Dias, see Mattos, "'Black Troops' and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World", 7-9; José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *Henrique Dias. Governador dos Pretos, Crioulos e Mulatos do Estado do Brasil* (Univ. Recife, Recife 1954). On Camarão, see José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *D. Antônio Filipe Camarão. Capitão-Mor dos Índios da Costa do Nordeste do Brasil* (Univ. Recife, Recife 1954); Hemming, *Red Gold*, 294-309; Mark Meuwese, "Indigenous Leaders and the Atlantic World. The Parallel Lives of Dom Antônio Filipe Camarão and Pieter Poty, 1600-1650," in idem/Jeffrey Fortin (eds.), *Atlantic Biographies. Individuals and Peoples in the Atlantic World* (Brill, Leiden 2014), 213-234.

[48] OWIC **76**, 62. Sebastião Carvalho owned Engenho San Paulo in the Várzea (OWIC **70**, 1461), Bulhões was a former alderman at Olinda, see Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos*, 69. For the (failed) arrests, see Nieuhof, *Gedenkwaerdige Zee- und Lantreize*, 70.

[49] OWIC **76**, 60-62.

[50] OWIC **60**, 439-442; On De Vale, see "Sommier Discours Over den Staet van de Noorderdelen van Brazil"[1638], in *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van Het Historisch Genootschap* 2 1879, 267, and Gonsalves de Mello, *Gente da Nação*, 297.

them."[51] Antônio d'Oliveira, a *senhor de engenho* from the Várzea who heeded the government's call to come to Recife for questioning on June 21, claimed that he himself had "rather cut off his own hand" than sign the pledge which was presented to him earlier that month, but had later found out that around a hundred people had signed it.[52]

The core group of conspirators, as they would later reveal themselves, were all residents of the Várzea and could mobilize their local networks for protection and support.[53] The question that occupied the Dutch between June and August 1645 was whether they could stop the rebellion from spreading northwards. In this, the clandestine activities of one Portuguese colonist, Gonsalvo Cabral de Caldes, were key. "The surest way to get behind the schemes of João Fernandes Vieira and the way he has planned this attack," the Portuguese planter Jorge Homem Pinto remarked on June 25, "is to get hold of Gonsalvo Cabral."[54] Pinto, a wealthy planter at Paraíba, had fled to Goiana, a district in the interior of Itamaracá, upon hearing that Dutch soldiers were heading towards his *engenho* to arrest him. Here, friends had told Pinto about Cabral, whom he eventually decided to report to the authorities at Recife.

The Dutch took Pinto by his word, and for a month, they followed the tracks of Cabral until they caught the man himself. Cabral, a resident of Goiana and member of the local political elite as the municipal overseer of the estates of orphans (*weesmeester*), had first gotten in contact with Vieira and two other conspirators in a visit to the Várzea in early June. According to Cabral's confession from July 31, the three "mentioned the conspiracy and said that he, with his many friends in Goiana, could accomplish a lot for it."[55] After the conspirators assured him that they had the backing of the governor of Bahia, Cabral had signed up and volunteered to recruit further combatants in Goiana. In this he was quite unlucky. "He found nobody in this captaincy who wanted to assist him in such a revolt, everyone saying that they were quite content with the current government," Jorge Homem

[51] OWIC **60**, 388.
[52] OWIC **76**, 76.
[53] OWIC **60**, 621. Except for Vieira, literature on Dutch Brazil has little to say about the conspirators of 1645. Some stray remarks can be found in Southey, *History of Brazil*, vol. 2, 68, 81. On Vieira, see Gonsalves de Mello, *João Fernandes Vieira*.
[54] OWIC **60**, 567.
[55] OWIC **60**, 436.

Pinto told the Council.[56] Cabral's solicitations had caused a rift among the locals, Pinto remarked. First, Francisco Pinto, a *lavrador* on the estate of a Dutch settler, had declined Cabral's offer of a military office in the upcoming rebellion and threatened to blow his cover. The next candidate had burned Cabral's letter, and finally, an alderman at Tacoara had blurted out Cabral's offer to his fellow magistrates, upon which Cabral had aborted his mission and gone into hiding.[57] In his interrogation on July 31, Cabral himself was quick to point out his own ineptitude. Yes, he had agreed to recruit combatants for the rebellion, but then gotten in contact with just a few people, and only to advise them against joining the insurgents.[58] It did not save him. The following day, Cabral was sentenced to be beheaded, his head put on a stake and his body displayed on a wheel.[59]

At this point, the south of Pernambuco was already all ablaze, but Goiana and the other districts to the north of Recife remained in a state of tense peace. "The Portuguese here are keeping still," the Dutch *senhor de engenho* and former member of the colonial government Servatius Carpentier reported from Trespaos on July 11, "but they cannot give me any true tidings of the enemy, only a bunch of lies, from which one can sense their attitude. They slander each other, and name those that have brought about this mutiny, but do not agree on this, and everybody names someone else, so that I have made a list of all the names. But in this district Gonsalvo Cabral was the messenger of the letter everybody was supposed to sign, though many have refused to do so."[60] Both the Dutch and the rebels soon gave up their efforts to win over the residents of Goiana by persuasion and resorted to terror. A week after Carpentier's report, a refugee from Goiana testified to the councillors at Recife that the rebels "hang on the spot those that do not take up their weapons or that betray

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[56] OWIC **60**, 567.

[57] OWIC **60**, 567; OWIC **60**, 631. The last bit stemmed from a second informant named Pedro Morera, a *lavrador* working for Servatius Carpentier in Goiana, who contacted the government in Recife on July 18; see also the confession of Cabral on July 31, OWIC **60**, 436.

[58] OWIC **60**, 663.

[59] OWIC **60**, 668; **70**, 1451. A week earlier, the same fate had befallen Thomas Pais, a Portuguese who had tried to raise a company at Teijipió, just outside Recife, see OWIC **60**, 686. The punishments, as the interrogations and the judicial torture that preceded the conviction were well within the usual judicial procedures of early modern European governance, see Julius Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2001), 93f.

[60] OWIC **60**, 425. For a short biography of Carpentier, one of the leading figures of the Dutch colonial government in the 1630s, who retired to his engenho at Goiana in 1639, see Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 107f.

any secrets, to which end they are erecting gallows all over the place."[61] The Dutch, on the other hand, harnessed the notoriety of their Amerindian allies. Far to the north of Goiana, in the village in Rio Grande do Norte, a group of Tapuya Amerindians had slaughtered thirty-five Portuguese settlers during mass on July 16 at the instigation of local WIC agents. News of the massacre sent waves of horror across Pernambuco.[62] Residents from Goiana implored the government at Recife to suspend its policy of disarming civilians, fearing "that once they were disarmed, the same would happen to them."[63] The councillors responded with a thinly veiled threat. "We can assure you that if you remain faithful to this state, you have nothing to fear from the *tapoijers*," they replied and ordered Carpentier to continue with the disarmaments.[64] The threat worked, and for another month, Goiana and the other northern districts of the colony did not rise up in rebellion. It took the victory of the rebel forces in the open field and the expulsion of all Dutch forces from the colony's interior in mid-August before the north of Pernambuco fell to the rebels for good.[65]

Down south, the situation had gotten bad for the Dutch much earlier. Heavy rains had slowed the advance of the regiments of Dias and Camarão, but on June 12, the commander of the Dutch fort at Alagoas could hear the sound of their drums echo through the forest.[66] In the Várzea, the rebel leaders tried to deflect and delay a Dutch military response for as long as they could. In a letter to the High Council from June 15, Antonio Cavalcanti, one of the main conspirators, still dismissed the warnings of troop movements in the south as "nothing but ordinary tidings of *boslopers*, who are used to roam around here to plague the locals."[67] A general pardon issued by the High Council on June 17 offering amnesty to everyone who came to Recife within five days was rebutted by Vieira and his accomplices. The

[61] OWIC **60**, 631.
[62] For the wide-ranging implications of this massacre, see Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade. Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595-1674* (Brill, Leiden 2012), 172f.; idem, "The Murder of Jacob Rabe. Contesting Dutch Colonial Authority in the Borderlands of Northeastern Brazil", in John Smolenski/Thomas Humphrey, *New World Orders. Violence, Sanction, and Authority in the Colonial Americas* (Penn UP, Philadelphia 2005), 133-156; Ernst van den Boogaart, "Infernal Allies. The Dutch West India Company and the Tarairiu, 1630-1654", in idem et al. (eds.), *Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, 1604-1679* (Johan Maurits van Nassau Stichting, Den Haag 1979), 529.
[63] OWIC **70**, 1439.
[64] OWIC **70**, 1439.
[65] Carpentier fled to Fort Orange on Itamaracá around the 27th of August, see OWIC **70**, 1519f. and shortly thereafter died in Recife, see Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 88.
[66] OWIC **60**, 416.
[67] OWIC **60**, 380.

Dutch government was plotting against the Portuguese settlers, Vieira argued, not the other way round, and they should be given more time to respond, for the pardon "is on such short notice and some have already fled so far out of fear that there is hardly enough time to circulate it so that everybody can return in due time."[68]

Such diversionary rhetoric, oscillating between servility and brazen defiance, was clearly meant to confuse the counterparty. The rebels needed to play for time, until the reinforcements from Bahia had arrived and the insurgents could enforce their authority among the local population. After years of war and disorder, many residents of Pernambuco did not at all share the rebels' enthusiasm for another violent confrontation. In a protest letter to the bishop and priests of Bahia, a group of clerics and *senhores de engenho* who had sought refuge in Recife vehemently objected to the intrusion of Dias and Camarão. The Bahian captains were about to assist a bunch of "vagabonds and criminals," they complained, and "this whole captaincy will be ravaged, with unbearable miseries, and the blood of many innocent spilled."[69] All across Pernambuco, ordinary colonists approached the Dutch government to assist in forestalling the insurgents' schemes, sometimes at enormous personal risk. "For Christ's sake," one Portuguese settler begged his Dutch contacts at Rio São Francisco to remain silent about what he had confided to them, for "if anyone hears of it, I am a dead man."[70] A deep-seated longing for peace and order drove these people to the side of the Dutch. "Why do you come here to tell us all this?," the Secret Council asked the priest who had told them about the rebel pledge in mid-June. "People live in peace, and are not oppressed in their religion," the priest replied, "and that he was born in this country, and his sisters and brothers and all his friends live here, who are all well-off and these pending troubles will impoverish them."[71]

Yet the same priest added that most people believed that the Dutch were out to kill them all. Misinformation, persuasion and open violence combined to lure and intimidate the colonists of Pernambuco into changing sides. Calling their insurrection nothing less than a "war of divine liberty," the rebels spread inflated rumors about the evil intentions of the

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[68] OWIC **60**, 619.
[69] OWIC **60**, 625; The letter had sixteen signatories, of which three were clerics, and at least six *senhores de engenho*, all the way from Alagoa del Norte to Paraíba.
[70] OWIC **60**, 352.
[71] OWIC **60**, 388. Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 77.

Dutch enemy, about the size of their own forces and the reinforcements they could expect by land and sea.[72] A rebel proclamation pinned to churches and public places all across southern Pernambuco on June 29 promised double wages or safe conduct to all Dutch soldiers, amnesty to all Amerindians, freedom to all slaves and debt relief to all settlers willing to join the insurgency. Yet anyone who "shows favor to the Dutch […] will be treated as a traitor, punished with death and their goods confiscated for the cause of this war."[73] This was no idle talk. From Alagoas to Cabo Agostinho, the rebels had begun to arrest and kill Dutch settlers, forcibly conscript young men and hang those that refused to join their troops.[74] All efforts at secrecy had now been abandoned.

The Dutch at Recife were divided on how to address this situation. "On and on" the Secret Council discussed the insurgents' spurious plea for more time to adhere to the pardon on June 23. Some contended that war had to be prevented at all costs given the lack of troops and provisions, arguing for a general pardon without any exception. Others refused to grant anything to the insurgents. The matter was postponed until the council would hear about the outcome of Colonel Haus' attack on Ipojuca, the hotbed of the revolt, which succeeded a couple of days later.[75] "The enemy has been driven from his hiding place, his troops scattered and Ipojuca seized," councillor Balthasar van der Voorde rejoiced in a letter to the Heren XIX on June 26, judging that "everything has been put in order just in time."[76] This was a premature conclusion, as it soon turned out, but it was hard to see which side was winning and which was losing in these weeks. In fact, it was hard to see whether there would be any war at all. A scouting party sent out to scour one of Vieira's *engenhos* and other hotspots for rebel forces on June 24 found the area completely deserted. Nothing but a few chickens and some goats had been left behind, and no enemy was to be seen anywhere.[77]

[72] OWIC **60**, 436, 693. Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 78.
[73] OWIC **60**, 623.
[74] OWIC **60**, 391, 424; **70**, 1354.
[75] OWIC **76**, 79.
[76] OWIC **60**, 473.
[77] OWIC **76**, 79.

War

For some, a break in communications was the first sign of the outbreak of the revolt. "Amador de Araújo has once again conquered Ipojuca and occupied the pass of Penderama, so that we cannot get any letters through," Caspar van der Leij, one of the commanders of the Dutch fort at Cabo Agostinho wrote to Recife on July 8.[78] After occupying the place for little more than a week, the Dutch soldiers at Ipojuca had to retreat and barricade themselves in a monastery against the oncoming rebel forces. At Cabo Agostinho, Van der Leij came to know this because rebel captain De Araújo had sent his letters to the Dutch regiment at Ipojuca back, unopened.

Winning control of Pernambuco's pathways was a major concern for the warring parties in the opening weeks of the conflict. Both sides preyed on couriers and enemy soldiers in search for information, but any traveller on the roads of Pernambuco could get caught up in the conflict.[79] As the most experienced guerilla fighter in Dutch employ, Johan Blaer had been chosen to lead the Company's own reconnaissance efforts.[80] On June 29, in response to the call to arms circulated by the rebels that day, the Secret Council sent him out with a hundred Amerindian soldiers to "set up ambushes at the most frequented paths, make some captives and get to know where João Fernandes Vieira and his accomplices, the troops from Bahia and the rebel regiments lie."[81] After a week of searching, Blaer found Vieira at São Lourenço da Mata, a one day march inland from Recife. The High Council sent the bulk of the Dutch forces after him to help strike and disperse the rebels, which they thought would end the insurgency for good, but for another month, the rebels managed to evade any major confrontation.[82]

The Council at Recife was gearing up for war, but for the time being, this was more the kind of game of cat-and-mouse the colony had witnessed in the second half of the 1630s, when Dutch and Portuguese forces had chased each other across southern Pernambuco

[78] OWIC **60**, 423.
[79] OWIC **60**, 390; **76**, 72.
[80] Today, Blaer is perhaps best remembered for his attack on the *quilombo* of Palmares in early 1645, see Robert Anderson, "The Quilombo of Palmares. A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil," *Journal Of Latin American Studies* 28 1996, 49, but he led several attacks on such large groups of runaway slaves and *boslopers*, see e.g. WIC **59**, 84.
[81] OWIC **76**, 87.
[82] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 168; Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History*, 87.

plundering and pillaging.[83] The major difference was that back then, the Dutch had a lot more soldiers at their disposal and could expect even more to come, whereas now support from the United Provinces was not forthcoming any time soon.[84] By calling for their much-feared Tapuya allies from the North, the Dutch could certainly expect to strike fear into the hearts of the insurgents, but such a proposition came with its own risks. The Council feared that on their way to Recife, the Tapuyas would cut a path of devastation through the northern districts and incite the still peaceful local population against the Company.[85] For now, the Dutch hoped to rein in the insurgency in a less violent manner – by proclamations.

Proclamations were an established tool of public communication in early modern European governance. Posted at specific places, and often read out aloud ceremonially, proclamations communicated laws and decrees to a broad audience and acted as a visible marker of authority.[86] The Dutch in Brazil were keenly aware of the symbolic importance of proclamations, particularly in such times of unrest. The mere presence of rebel proclamations posed a challenge to Dutch rule. When Johan Blaer and his troops arrived in Igarassu on July 1 seeking "with all diligence and rigor to keep the locals in peace and order," their first act was to "immediately remove the proclamation that João Vieira had put up at the *engenho* of Gonsalvo Novo de Lira."[87] With both sides unable to score a military victory, for the whole of July 1645, the rebels and the Dutch fought by posting mutual threats and defamations. On July 5, the High Council issued a proclamation offering two thousand guilders to anyone who caught and delivered Vieira, Antônio Cavalcanti or Amador de Araújo to the High Council, and a thousand guilders to the person who killed any of them. Anyone who hid

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[83] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 63f.; Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*, 181.

[84] Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 115; Bruno Miranda, *Gente de Guerra. Origem, Cotidiano e Resistência dos Soldados do Exército da Companhia das Índias Ocidentais no Brasil, 1630-1654* (Diss. Leiden 2011), 34-38 estimates the number of troops at about 2000 in 1645 versus around 3000 in 1637. The greater difference was though that in 1637, the number of Dutch troops shipped to Pernambuco was still growing, while on the Portuguese side it was not, whereas in 1645, appeals of the Dutch at Recife for reinforcements fell on deaf ears for a long time.

[85] OWIC **70**, 1371.

[86] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice* (Oxford UP, Oxford 2007), 128, 131, speaks of the "graphic occupation of early modern urban space" entailed in posting proclamations to spots charged with religious or secular imagery, and calls the performance of their official publication "the paradigm ritual enacted by the state." "Throughout Europe," De Vivo notes, "the publication of laws was a contested act".

[87] OWIC **70**, 1357. Again, De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice* (Oxford UP, Oxford 2007), 136: "Covered with the tangible traces of official and unofficial information, from proclamations to the traces left by those defying proclamations, buildings turned into a large palimpsest, where competing claims to authority coexisted and undermined each other". Dowd, *Groundless*, 182, 209, features proclamations in a similar role in Revolutionary Northern America, but does not go into detail.

rebels, promoted their cause or communicated was threatened with severe punishment.[88] These "disrupters of the peace, depredators of the good people, rebels against their lawful government," the proclamation said, have "taken up their perfidious weapons against this state, forcing the mostly faithful residents with violence to follow their seditious strife, not only threatening them with death, but also murdering some, and already having killed some people of the Dutch and the Brazilian nation." The rebels "have put up papers of harmful content for all inhabitants of this state," the councillors charged, "and abuse the divine majesty and providence with their specious title of 'governors of this war' (more like treacherous rebels)."

In a letter arriving at Recife on July 10, Vieira and combatants defended themselves against these attacks. "Being good Christians" suffering under the "tyranny inflicted on us by Your Honors' evil government" the insurgents claimed to have "published our proclamations until now to prevent the hardships that Your Honors are inflicting on us, and not the other way round, as we only act to our protection, until Your Honors will be reassured by our fairness to return us to our previous state of peace in our houses and fields."[89] The rebels did their utmost to render their insurgency in contemporary terms of just resistance to the state: the tyrant oppressor versus the victimized insurgent embarking on an almost providential path to freedom – a rhetoric the Dutch themselves were all to familiar with.[90] "Having come so far, we shall not spare our own lives to avenge such oppression," the rebels announced, "and Your Honors are well aware, that there are twenty thousand *blancos*, and

[88] OWIC **70**, 1370.
[89] OWIC **60**, 627f.
[90] The fact that Pernambucans "imagine themselves to be slaves [of the Dutch]," as noted above, distinctly reminds of the petition presented to Margaret of Parma in 1566 by some resentful Netherlandish nobles fearing that the planned introduction of the Inquisition to the Habsburg Low Countries "would make the citizens and inhabitants of these Countries eternal and miserable slaves," see Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555-1590* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1992), 111 and Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995), 146. For the rhetorical underpinnings of the Portuguese Restoration, where dynastic arguments played a greater role, see Joaquim Serrão, *História de Portugal*, vol. 5 (Ed. Verbo, Lisbon 1980), 24f. and António de Oliveira Marques, *History of Portugal*, vol. 1 (Columbia UP, New York 1972), 325-327. On the irony of the fact that the Portuguese insurgents were turning on its head the emancipatory rhetoric that had served to justify the advances of the WIC into the Habsburg Atlantic, see Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad. The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP 2006), 291: "By the second half of the seventeenth century, the New World, traditionally identified with the tyranny of Spain, had become affiliated with the sins of the Netherlands."

twenty to thirty thousand *negros* and *mulattos* in this captaincy, with whom we can accomplish this well."[91] In a public proclamation issued four days later, the rebels restated their offer to the inhabitants of Pernambuco, but this time in a much harsher tone. "And if someone does not want to accept these offerings," the rebels threatened, "they will bow to the force of our weapons."[92]

It was obvious at this point that no party could actually act on their threats, the Dutch the least. Rebel militias had taken over control all the way from Rio São Francisco to Cabo Agostinho, where the Dutch commanders of Fort Van der Dussen complained that the insurgents were "cooking and smoking right in front of our eyes, and we cannot do anything about it."[93] North of the Cape, the WIC nominally still held sway, but the situation looked little better. The Várzea had descended into chaos, with marauding bands roaming around plundering and harassing the locals. Blaer's wandering regiment dissolved further every day, his soldiers joining the marauders, and Blaer himself was accused of engaging in rape and plunder wherever he went.[94] In another proclamation, the High Council threatened any of their soldiers who harmed obedient locals or took their goods with capital punishment, but these were nothing but empty threats.[95] Neither the rebels nor their own soldiers could be called to order without an adequate force to back such claims up.[96] On the contrary, the insurgency only spread further every day. There was no other way now, the councillors judged, than calling on the Tapuyas. "Better to have a devastated land than a lost land," the Council concluded on July 10.[97]

The fact that the Dutch had little to no means of actually enforcing what they were announcing did not mean that their proclamations carried no weight at all. The outbreak of the revolt had thrust Pernambuco into a state of uncertainty in which a flimsy pretense to authority counted for as much as the actual thing, and people as well as the insurgents continued to acknowledge and respond to Dutch proclamations. On July 10, a group of

[91] OWIC **60**, 627.
[92] OWIC **60**, 629.
[93] OWIC **60**, 424.
[94] OWIC **70**, 1393; **60**, 628.
[95] OWIC **70**, 1397f.
[96] "Neither the general pardon nor the proclamations against the instigators of this insurrection […], nor the proclamation in which we deprived their women and children of protection have had much effect," the Secret Council groaned on July 10, OWIC **76**, 96.
[97] OWIC **76**, 97.

clerics and *senhores de engenho* from the Várzea entreated the High Council to suspend their decree regarding the insurgents' families, "at least until the rivers, which are flooding from all the rain, can be traversed and the paths can be used again."[98] The back and forth in public accusations and threats between the rebels and the Dutch itself continued until the complete expulsion of the Dutch from the Várzea in late August. By then, André Vidal had returned to Pernambuco once again, this time with a force of around 2000 armed men. Within a few days, Vidal swept across southern Pernambuco, took the Dutch fort at Cabo Agostinho, and marched upon Recife, all the while feigning to have come to subdue the rebellion.[99] A proclamation issued on August 8 by Vidal and his fellow officer Martim Soares Moreno called on all residents of Pernambuco to cease hostilities and lay down their weapons within eight days. But such rhetoric was evidently designed so that their backers in Bahia and Lisbon could keep up the charade that they wanted nothing to do with the revolt.[100]

It took two whole weeks for the Dutch to learn about Vidal's return to Pernambuco, but when they finally did they fully realized what it meant. "Such a large fleet cannot be taken as anything other than a hostile act," the Secret Council at Recife concluded, and in a last-ditch effort to publicize their view on the matter, spread a proclamation on August 16 supposed to "refute and invalidate" Vidal's proclamation, "so that for our most important people (*principaelen*) it shall be obvious that the points raised in their writings impute us unjustly."[101] But by then it was already over. The sight of the fleet from Bahia that the rebels had promised for so long drove many more people into the arms of the insurgents. On August 17, the few Dutch forces left in the Várzea were cornered by the united rebel forces and forced to surrender.[102] The Tapuyas never came, and slowly, the rebels moved to lay siege to Recife and the remaining Dutch forts up the coast.[103]

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[98] OWIC **70**, 1380.
[99] For the treasonous machinations behind the surrender of Fort Van der Dussen, see Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 167, 170.
[100] OWIC **60**, 1099f.
[101] OWIC **70**, 1483.
[102] OWIC **76**, 105; Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 171.
[103] OWIC **70**, 1497, 1537. Tapuyas: OWIC **70**, 1529.

2. Overlopers

Clearing the Dutch out of the Pernambucan countryside turned out to be the easiest exercise for the rebels. Making sure they stayed out required some more tenacity. When rebel troops entered Recife after the Dutch surrender in January 1654, the Dutch marveled at the disciplined manner in which they conducted themselves after almost nine years of ruinous siege warfare. "They did not harm nor harass any of the *burgers* in any way," a bystander noted, something he found "highly astonishing, all the more so since they were made up of so many different kinds of people – *blancos*, *moulaten*, *brasilianen*, *negers* and *tapoyers* – and all so naked and destitute as if they had just dropped from the gallows."[1] But this final show of discipline on the side of the rebels hardly reflected the nine previous years of siege warfare, and some inhabitants of Recife were well aware of that. The hundreds of deserters and captives interrogated by Dutch administrators throughout the war had told a much different story – a story in which the rebellion not only had to stand its ground against the Dutch, but also assert itself over and over against the very people it claimed to liberate.

Consider the case of Antonio. On the 12th of November 1646, a slave by the name of Antonio stood in the chambers of the *assessor* waiting for his interrogation to begin. Before the war, Antonio had served a Dutch shoe maker at Recife, but he had been captured by the rebels in the early months of the revolt. His misfortunes led Antonio to the Arraial, the headquarters of the rebellion a few miles inland from Recife, where he was put to serve one of the captains from Bahia. Antonio kept his eyes and ears open, and he made some friends, all of which gave him plenty to pass on once he made it back to Recife and into the chambers of the *assessor*. The bulk of the rebels' troops, Antonio now reported, still lay at the Arraial; their leadership had had a disagreement about the best response to a Dutch fleet cruising the coast; a Dutch man and two women had tried to flee to Recife on horseback just a couple of days ago, but the man was killed and the women taken away; all women and children had fled into the forest, and soldiers and civilians alike were starving, but the *safra* was well on its way and there was a lot of sugar in the forms already. At the end of the interrogation, Antonio reached for his pouch and drew out twenty little wooden sticks. One

[1] *Cort, bondigh ende Waerachtigh Verhael van't Schandelijck Over-Geven ende Verlaten van de Voorname Conquesten van Brasil*, Middelburgh 1655, 77. In his diary, councillor Hendric Haecxs records a similar impression of the disciplined conduct of the rebel troops during the takeover of Recife, see "Dagboek van Hendric Haecxs", in *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 46 1925, 201. See also Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 242.

for each soldier who wanted to come over, Antonio said, and as soon as they are assured they will be treated well, many more will come.[2]

The things Antonio said and did in the assessor's chamber that day reveal a lot about the way the insurgency had reconfigured Pernambuco and about the way people navigated this new environment. The outbreak of war had thrust Antonio right into the center of the revolt, with Recife, his former home, almost within sight, but a deadly frontline in between. There were still remnants of the old order – in many places the sugar industry had kept on going, and for many Pernambucans, in particular for plantation slaves, the war was a distant, if vaguely threatening affair. Not so for people like Antonio though. In his new environment, Antonio had gotten a sense of the main problem facing the rebel leadership – the dominance of the Dutch at sea – and the far-reaching effects this problem had on the conduct of the war. He had heard that terrible things awaited people who dared to challenge this new order, but this had not deterred him from doing so himself, not only in fleeing back to Recife, but in conspiring with others to do the same. Each of the sticks Antonio carried attested to the persistence of subversive communication in the very midst of the rebellion. In the end, some wooden sticks were perhaps the best symbol for the ongoing vitality and unruliness of communication in wartime Pernambuco.

The first half of this chapter traces the spread of talk across Pernambuco and the impact of communication on the way people experienced the war. This is done on the basis of a topic that occupied people throughout the conflict – news and rumor from and about Bahia and Europe. The second half of this chapter shows how the particular spatial and social order of communication during the conflict posed a problem to the rebels' conduct of the war. Talk generally circulated best among those groups most prone to deserting to the Dutch. This dynamic is explored in detail by focusing on the case of one particular deserter and the way both the Portuguese and the Dutch side reacted to his act of treason.

[2] OWIC **62**, 404f.

Pathways

In wartime Pernambuco, all eyes were fixed on the Atlantic Ocean. Keeping the link to Bahia and Lisbon open was crucial to the rebel war effort, to export sugar and to receive shipments of weapons and provisions.[3] But people expected more than provisions from the other side of the Atlantic. They were craving news. "The troops from Bahia are utterly disheartened, as they suffer greatest poverty, and receive neither money nor clothing, and no other food than *farinha* and meat either," a defector told *assessor* Van Walbeeck in December 1645, "and at times they do not even have meat. The only thing that holds them back from deserting is the hope that before long there will be news from the States General saying that the king's ambassador in Holland has convinced them to restore these *conquesten* to Portugal. In this they believe dearly."[4] A pervasive sense of anticipation had taken hold of Pernambuco, exacerbated by the long silences in trans-Atlantic communication.[5]

Cabo Agostinho was the key juncture in this dissemination process. With the harbor of Recife out of the picture, Cabo Agostinho had become the central port for rebel-held Pernambuco. A transfer site for goods and people with a large local military presence, at Cabo Agostinho, talk effortlessly made the passage between sea and land. Whenever a ship lay anchor at the Cape, dockworkers, soldiers and residents of the harbor towns eagerly pressed the arriving sailors for news from Bahia and Europe.[6] The testimony of Antonio Paeij from June 1646 gives an impression of this scene. A soldier in the WIC's *negro* battalion, Antonio Paeij had been stationed at a redoubt outside of Recife at the outset of the revolt, where rebel forces ambushed and captured him in March 1646. Six weeks he spent shackled to the stocks at the Arraial, to then be sold and sent off to Cabo Agostinho, shipped to Alagoas and back to the Cape, from where he finally made his escape to Recife. Once back on the Dutch side, Paeij gave his interlocutors account of a short conversation he had had with some sailors at Cabo Agostinho a couple of days before his escape. The sailors told him that they had spotted and pursued a fleet of twenty-three Dutch ships at the island of St. Vincent sailing towards Brazil, but lost sight of it at night. Back in Lisbon,

[3] See Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 230; Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*, 146-158, 206-212.
[4] OWIC **61**, 27.
[5] Such a "culture of anticipation" was by no means exclusive to the news landscape of wartime Brazil, but a defining feature of the whole early modern Atlantic World, both in the colonies as in the metropoles, see Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, p. 191.
[6] OWIC **60**, 732; **61**, 16; **62**, 374, 383; **66.2**, 374.

they had also heard of another Dutch fleet of twenty-six ships heading towards Brazil, but this second fleet was said to have been completely eradicated by Dunkirk pirates.[7]

Such auguries on the arrival of fleets always made ready news, both at Cabo Agostinho and Recife. Hunger for tidings from Europe and Bahia was rampant in all of Pernambuco, and once at the Cape, Atlantic news travelled all across the Várzea, Igarassu and Itamaracá within a few days.[8] In November 1645, Gaspar Gonsalves, a 47-year-old Portuguese tailor living far away from the Cape at Tapupirí in inland Itamaracá with his wife and seven children was captured by one of the WIC's Amerindian raiding parties while getting *farinha* for his family. The following day, at Fort Orange, Gonsalves testified that "a caravel has arrived in the bay of Tamandaré, which brought tidings that nine-hundred man are stationed at Bahia to come here together with the governor."[9] There were, however, both spatial and social limits to the spread of news. Word of mouth would carry information only so far, and social barriers kept certain people from hearing it. Pernambuco exhibited a distinct social geography of communication, in which people like Gaspar Gonsalves enjoyed a kind of access to information that was unattainable for others.

In times of peace, the *engenho* had provided the space and the opportunities for rumors and news to spread, bringing people from a wide distance and diverse social standing into contact. Religious festivals provided regular opportunities to convene, as had market days.[10] In many ways, the war turned this communicative order on its head. In the eastern half of the Várzea, as in the coastal areas of Igarassu, Itamaracá and Paraíba, the sugar industry ground to a halt.[11] The level of destruction that the war wreaked was enormous, even in areas far removed from the frontlines. In September 1646, Hans Breuckelaer, a settler who together with his family had trekked all the way south to Fort Orange from his home in

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[7] OWIC **62**, 381. The observation at St. Vincent was spot-on, but there never had been a second fleet for the Dunkirkers to beat, see Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 176.
[8] OWIC **65**, 826; for Igarassu and Itamaracá, see OWIC **61**, 16, 548; **62**, 359f.; **67**, 229.
[9] OWIC **61**, 16.
[10] Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 87; Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*, 99, 105f.; Luiz Mott, "Cotidiano e Vivência Religiosa", in Fernando Novais/Laura de Mello e Souza (eds.), *História da Vida Privada No Brasil, vol. 1. Cotidiano e Vida Privada na América Portuguesa*, 4th ed. (Companhia Das Letras, São Paulo 1998), 168f.
[11] OWIC **61**, 547; **62**, 361, 386f.; **66.2**, 368. Even in those regions where sugar production did continue, it did not do so without impediment, given the interrupted transport lines, the scarcity of food and the general increase of marronage combined with the collapse of the slave trade. For the last point, see Silva/Eltis, "The Slave Trade to Pernambuco, 1561–1851", 98. Towards the end of the war, though, slave transports from Angola to Cabo Agostinho seem to have resumed, see OWIC **67**, 223; **76**, 115.

Paraíba told the High Council in Recife of the troubling sights he had encountered on the way. Almost every *engenho* the group had passed had been burned down together with the surrounding houses, fields and orchards. All villages along the way had been abandoned by their residents, with "nothing left behind but an ox, a cow and a calf" at one scorched *engenho*.[12] Everywhere, chapels were converted into ammunition storages, runaway slaves sought shelter in abandoned *engenhos* and gangs of maroons, deserters and raiders roamed the country in search of food and loot.[13]

In this atmosphere of terror, many people sought refuge in the isolation of the woods of the colony, but this self-imposed exile came at a price.[14] In July 1651, a group of eight slaves entered Recife. The group, as their leader João Dias testified, had fled to the forests at the outbreak of the war, surviving by hunting small forest pigs in the early months and later by growing their own *farinha*. "They have left the bushes and come to us because they are tired of such a life, and wish to serve us as soldiers," their interrogator noted.[15] Material hardships certainly were the main factor for the group to come out of the forests, but being cut off from all communication bred its own kind of anxieties: "They cannot say anything about the state of affairs," the interrogation of the group concluded.[16] In the face of these uncertainties of life off the colonial grid, many people chose a middle way, spending the days in the open or the undergrowth at the edge of the forests and retreating deeper into the woods at night.[17]

If maroons and other forest-dwellers stood far outside of Pernambuco's communication streams, plantation slaves stood at their very edges. Away from the battlefield, in the inland areas of the Várzea, at Cabo Agostinho and further south, the insurgents had been eager

[12] OWIC **71**, 608f.; see also Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*, 78f. and Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 184.
[13] OWIC **61**, 773; **62**, 400.; **66.2**,174, 191, 356, 361, 376; **67**, 248.
[14] OWIC **60**, 737; **61**, 540, 566, 569, 577, 712, 714; **62**, 358, 362, 364, 405, 447, 603; **64**, 86; **65**, 1012; **66.2**, 167, 174, 196, 356.
[15] OWIC **66.2**, 196.
[16] OWIC **66.2**, 196. One should not assume, however, that a retreat to the forests always automatically led into total isolation. Flavio dos Santos Gomes, "A 'Safe Haven'. Runaway Slaves, Mocambos, and Borders in Colonial Amazonia, Brazil", *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82:3 2002, 490, clarifies that even geographically remote and isolated *mocambo* settlements could often successfully establish links to other such communities and become part of indigenous trade and communication networks.
[17] OWIC **61**, 540, 712. The war also increased the adoption of plunder and robbery as a way of survival practiced by *mocambo* communities throughout Brazilian colonial history, see Stuart Schwartz, "The *Mocambo*. Slave Resistance in Colonial Bahia", in Richard Price (ed.), *Maroon Societies. Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City 1973), 211.

to get the sugar industry going again quickly to finance their rebellion.[18] To the slaves working the fields and processing sugar at these remaining *engenhos*, the war was a distant affair and yet a potential threat. On October 27, 1651, a Dutch official at Recife interrogated a group of plantation and domestic slaves from the Curcuranas, an area some way south of the city, who had fallen prey to Dutch raiders the night before. "Asked about other circumstances they say that they do not know anything because they are slaves and not very familiar with the ways of the whites", the secretary noted.[19] Perhaps the violent circumstances of their coming to Recife played a part in the slaves' ostensible ignorance, though they professed to be "quite willing to serve [the Dutch], having heard that one is treated well over here".[20] Certainly though, their response was in line with that of other slaves stemming from similar circumstances. "Asked about the enemy's doings, they have nothing to say, since they are working slaves (*wercknegros*) who have toiled in the fields," said the protocol of an interrogation of six runaway slaves from Masureppe, a small village outside of São Lourenço da Mata, well behind the frontline.[21] "They do not have anything to say except that there are many soldiers in the forests making the roads very unsafe," the interrogation protocol of two runaway slaves from the vicinity of *engenho* St. Bras, west of the Várzea, briefly noted in June 1651.[22] These slaves had only little information to offer about the state of the war, and what they knew seemed to have stemmed to a large degree from what their masters had told them. Two domestic runaway slaves reported to Gijsbert de With in August 1649 how three weeks earlier they had heard their *senhora* gloat about the death of João Fernandes Vieira, though "whether he is truly dead or not they cannot say."[23] While the two apparently (and rightfully) doubted their *senhora*'s claim, they did not have access to alternative sources to disprove it and "in summa," De With noted, "they cannot speak of anything with authority (*met kennisse of seeckerheijt*)."[24]

Slaves close to theater of war at Cabo Agostinho and at the Arraial found it immensely easier to tap into communication streams. Before the outbreak of war, the Arraial had been

[18] Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*, 74-87.
[19] OWIC **66.2**, 367.
[20] OWIC **66.2**, 367.
[21] OWIC **67**, 236.
[22] OWIC **66.2**, 174.
[23] OWIC **65**, 807.
[24] OWIC **65**, 807.

a sleepy hamlet – a few houses centered around an *engenho*, an hour or two away from Recife on foot.[25] Now it stood at the center of events. In the early months of the revolt, the rebels had raised a small fort here and set up several field camps around it.[26] A jumble of people from different backgrounds – local settler militias, African and Amerindian soldiers, European mercenaries and a host of supporting workers, carriers and suppliers – turned the place into a bustling site.[27] From the Arraial, pathways radiated southwards that led to smaller rebel encampments all across the colony. Like knots on a string, military camps were strewn across Pernambuco, clustering around the few remaining Dutch holdouts, and connected by troop movement and provisioning lines. News and rumors travelled these paths together with the men and women walking on them.[28]

The leaders of the insurgency, well aware of the rapid spread of talk in the colony, kept a close eye on what information people got to hear and what remained secret. "Last Monday a barque arrived at Cabo from Bahia with letters to the *maestro de campo general*," a defector called Domingo told the *fiscaal* in August 1651, "but I do not know what they contained since this was kept secret, but immediately, all the war commanders convened."[29] Domingo, a *vrij molaet* working as a tailor at the Cape, was close friends with a group of soldiers, until he killed one of them in a brawl over a tobacco pipe and fled to Recife. His contacts had kept Domingo well informed about the latest gossip among soldiers, and shortly after the arrival of said secret letter he had heard "a murmur (*mompelinge*) that the Dutch would take to the field."[30] This was a common phenomenon. A message would arrive, and its contents remain undisclosed, but of course, people would start rumoring and guessing.[31]

Formally, talking about the war was strictly prohibited. "At the beat of the drum they announced that it is forbidden for anybody to talk among each other about their forces or conquests (*macht ofte exploijten*) to not give anything away," one slave told his interrogator in Recife in December 1645, and particularly after battles, the rebels tried to shush any talk

[25] 'Arraial' means both 'camp' and 'hamlet' in Portuguese. Cf. Claes Visscher, *Perfecte Caerte der gelegentheyt van Olinda de Pharnambuco, Maurits-Stadt ende t'Reciffo. Mitsgaders hare Landeryen, Dorpen, Rivière, Hoeven, Forten, ende Suyckermolens […]*, Amsterdam 1648.
[26] Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada*, 243.
[27] OWIC **61**, 22, 25, 30, 60; **62**, 362; **63**, 296.
[28] OWIC **61**, 46; **62**, 358, 369; **65**, 1013; **66.1**, 193.
[29] OWIC **66.2**, 249.
[30] OWIC **66.2**, 250.
[31] OWIC **61**, 710; **62**, 365, 398

of casualties.[32] But such efforts were largely in vain. Among common soldiers, slaves and sailors, an indefatigable culture of news-exchange and rumoring prevailed. Other than in rural Pernambuco, where the development of personal contacts beyond one's immediate environment was the privilege of only few people, in the colony's population and communication hubs, talk traveled easily and common soldiers and slaves were able to make connections that allowed them to tap into far-reaching communication networks.[33]

Nonbelievers

Even in those areas where talk circulated freely, news from Europe and Bahia spread under difficult conditions: such news was rare, and it was unreliable. The dominance of the Dutch in the waters around Pernambuco impeded communication between the rebels, Bahia and Europe for most of the war, and sometimes cut it off altogether.[34] In March 1649, two disheveled, fully naked deserters, Estavo Martin and Antonio Pinto de Massiavo, stumbled into Recife. At the time, Admiral Witte de With's fleet had been scouring the South Atlantic for Portuguese ships for almost a year already, with devastating consequences for the insurgents' supply of provisions and tidings.[35] Suffering from "hunger and sorrow, stripped of all our clothes and at the end of our wits, with no hope for betterment," Martin and Massiavo had decided to leave their posts, as did plenty of others during these months.[36]

The dearth of news that prevailed during such blockades clearly put people's endurance to the test. The outbreak of war had turned Pernambuco into a much lonelier place, where the months-long silences common to trans-Atlantic communication dragged on without an end in sight. Under these conditions, the very arrival of tidings in the warzone became newsworthy in itself. Word spread rapidly whenever couriers from Europe or Bahia set foot in Pernambuco, even when the information they carried remained unknown. In February 1646, a slave from Olinda called Ventura escaped his mistress and sought refuge in Recife. In his interrogation, Ventura declared that he knew very little about the revolt, "for he was

[32] OWIC **65**, 1062.
[33] See examples in: OWIC **61**, 543; **62**, 407, 412; **64**, 678, 685; **65**, 1009; **66.1**, 273.
[34] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 194, 223, 232f.
[35] Willem van Hoboken, *Witte de With in Brazilië, 1648-1649* (Diss. Amsterdam 1955).
[36] OWIC **65**, 243; for further evidence of increased desertion in 1648 and 1649, see OWIC **64**, 674, 686.

never allowed to listen to any talk about the war or anything else, and was always under close watch."[37] Still, he had come to know that the day before "a couple of letters from Portugal arrived in the Várzea, though he does not know the contents. They were brought by ship, but he has no idea which vessel had carried them nor from where it came."[38] João Fernandes Ramalho and Manoel Alveres, two Portuguese soldiers who stumbled into an ambush by Dutch raiders in October 1651 told a similar story. "Around eight days ago they heard rumors that two caravels have arrived at Rio Formoso, and one at Camaragibe, but they do not know what news they brought," adding that, "around three days ago a courier from Bahia arrived in the Várzea, but the news that he brought has not been disclosed to them."[39] The arrival of letters in the rebel camps caused ample speculation, but more importantly, the notion that they did arrive at all reaffirmed the continuity of the link to Bahia and Lisbon and promised potential movement in the proceedings of the war. The simple message that a letter had arrived was remarkable enough to pass from one person to another.

Any news was better than no news in wartime Pernambuco. Still, people discerned and called out false news to the best of their abilities. All too obvious acts of propaganda only exacerbated people's frustration with the revolt. In the evening of October 30, 1649, gun shots rang all throughout the Várzea. The rebel leaders, a deserter from Camarão's Amerindian contingent called Philippo told the *fiscaal* the next day, had ordered celebratory gunfire after couriers from Bahia had brought news that within a day, the Portuguese armada would come to drop reinforcements at the Cape and then go on to attack Recife.[40] But no ship arrived the day after, and Philippo remarked that "the rebels' soldiers are so utterly disheartened, that this did not bring about peace among them, and they […] wonder if the salvos merely occurred in pretense to encourage and mollify them."[41] The Portuguese armada, it turned out, had not even left Lisbon at this point, and the celebrations were so obviously an act of desperation that they were not repeated when the fleet finally did appear in the waters of Pernambuco a couple of months later.[42]

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[37] OWIC **61**, 540.
[38] OWIC **61**, 540.
[39] OWIC **66.2**, 365, see also OWIC **62**, 370, 374.
[40] OWIC **65**, 1013.
[41] OWIC **65**, 825. See also OWIC **65**, 1012.
[42] Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 226.

Barely ever was it this easy to call out a lie. In these trans-Atlantic word-of-mouth information flows, observations, rumors, assumptions, wishful thinking and plenty of make-believe often fused in indistinguishable ways. With every ship anchoring at Cabo Agostinho, a new set of rumors from the streets and docks of Lisbon washed over Pernambuco, contradicting the one which had arrived before. In November 1647, Gaspar Pacheco, a Lisboan merchant, wrote to his father Abel in Pernambuco that people in Lisbon "are in good hopes that the Brazilian affair will be settled with the Hollanders, and that there is no other disagreement than about the securities (*borgen*)."[43] Around the same time, another resident of Lisbon by the name of João Soares Lima expressed even more confidence in these matters in a letter sent to a friend living at Cabo Agostinho: "According to the news that we got, everything has been settled already and we expect good tidings to come with the first ship from Holland, and Your Honor has no reason to doubt this at all."[44] None of these letters made it to their recipients, as Dutch raiders intercepted them somewhere in the South Atlantic. But similar rumors about a speedy diplomatic resolution circulated in Pernambuco from time to time as well. Domingos Martinis and Manoel Rodriges, two deserters from Olinda, told the *fiscaal* at Recife in June 1651 that "a caravel has come to the Cape, carrying tidings that peace between Portugal and Holland was almost agreed on, and that Holland will accept the king's offer, which is to withdraw from Brazil for good and pay damages of five million to boot. If the Dutch do not accept this offer, a fleet of sixty to seventy sails lying ready to sail in the river of Lisbon will head for this coast. Also it is said in Portugal that the Dutch, if they do not find an agreement with the king, will send an army of fourteen thousand men to Bahia."[45] Some of this, as the comparison to the letters from Gaspar Pacheco and João Soares Lima suggests, simply picked up on whatever rumor did the rounds in Lisbon, but still, it is hard to imagine the Lisbon merchant Gaspar Pacheco thinking that the Dutch would not only vacate Brazil, but pay the king for the

[43] OWIC **64**, 14f. On the Pacheco family, see Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in Western Africa. Empires, Merchants and the Atlantic System, 1580-1674* (Brill, Leiden 2011), 291.
[44] OWIC **64**, 14.
[45] OWIC **66.2**, 167.

privilege.[46] What the two deserters Martinis and Rodriges were saying was absolute nonsense, but at this moment in time, it was widely rumored nonsense, in multiple variations.[47]

War-time Pernambuco, it turned out, was a most fertile breeding ground for hyperbole, but people were well aware that they needed to take anything they heard with a grain of salt. Rumors often arose out of nowhere, disassociated from any source or messenger, as pure hearsay, chatter, talk – *gemeene seggen*, *hooren seggen*, *spraeck*: "Word (*spraecke*) among the common people is that the king of France will send some ships over here on Portugal's request to liberate this land from the German nation," a Flemish refugee from Rio São Francisco told his interlocutor in November 1646; "the latest talk (*jongste seggen*) among the Portuguese is that they are waiting for an armada from Portugal to storm Recife and the Dutch forts," a runaway slave testified earlier that year; "talk (*discoursen*) is being disseminated (*uijtgestroijt*) among the rebels that the king of France is negotiating peace with Spain, but that France will not accept it if the king of Spain does not set Portugal free and accept it as an ally," an Italian deserter from Igarassu told the *fiscaal* in November 1652.[48]

Such phrasings were not accidental, but expressed the distrust people harbored towards news they had no means to scrutinize. Deserters to the Dutch side frequently suspected that the tidings doing the rounds in Pernambuco were nothing but make-believe, purposefully spread by the rebel leadership to deceive people.[49] In this environment, completely conflicting news could arise and take hold next to each other at the same time. "Tidings in the Várzea differ wildly," a deserter called Francisco Rodrigues told councillor Michiel van Goch in September 1651, "with some putting their faith in the peace negotiations with the

[46] Instead, for most of the latter half of the war, Portugal and the United Provinces were rather waiting for the other to get tired of fighting than actively seeking to gain a victory. In the United Provinces, support for Dutch Brazil waned after two massive military expeditions in 1648 and 1649 failed to defeat the insurgents, and internal strife among the WIC's sponsors prevented any further concerted action. The Portuguese crown, in return, was reluctant to fully embrace the opportunity the insurgency had given it in fear of Dutch retribution in Europe, and only after the Dutch became embroiled with the English in 1652, Lisbon found the courage to deal the death blow to the forlorn defenders of Recife. See Klooster, *The Dutch Moment*, 86-88; Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, ch. 5; Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *De Braziliaanse Affaire. Portugal, de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en Noord-Oost Brazilië* (Walburg Pers, Zutphen 2005) gives and in-depth account of the negotiations over Dutch Brazil.

[47] OWIC **66.2**, 190, 198, 210, 211, 356, 361, 363, 365, 369, 374; **67**, 77.

[48] OWIC **62**, 418; **61**, 55; **67**, 247. Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, 54, recounts a similar environment of "generalized public talk" in Cuba during the Haitian Revolution, describing it as "a world replete with possibilities of sharing information, interpretations, and vague but powerful sentiments of fear – or hope, depending on who was doing the circulating".

[49] OWIC **60**, 733; **61**, 21, 366; **62**, 366, 447; **67**, 77

Dutch, others quoting the news that came with the two most recent ships at Tamandaré two or three months ago, that a great many ships, around forty, shall provide relief for the Portuguese, though they do not know how many troops they shall bring."[50] Rodrigues, a 26-year-old Portuguese from Fortaleza, had served in the rebel forces for five years before defecting to the Dutch side, naming "the poverty that people suffer and the fact that they are supplied with nothing" as the reason for his changing of sides.[51] He himself had decided to put his faith in the rumors favoring the Dutch side, but as any deserter and runaway, Rodrigues faced the challenge of making grave decisions based on pure hearsay. Pernambuco's webs of talk and rumor were most unreliable guides to navigate this conflict, but people had little choice but to follow wherever they were led.

Fugitives

Atlantic talk, evidently, occupied center stage in Pernambuco's web of communications. Europe might have been a faraway place, even more so since the outbreak of war, but it figured closely in the minds of Pernambuco's soldiers, slaves and colonists. News from Europe guided people's decisions, and their potential to cause trouble for the rebellion was apparent at all times. Asked if the Bahian soldiers did not consider returning to their homes, one deserter remarked to his Dutch interrogators in early 1646 that "they only stay here in hopes that there will be no *secours* for [the Dutch], and as soon as such arrives they shall retreat immediately," with another deserter opining in late 1651 that "if the [rebel] soldiers hear any good tidings to the advantage of the Dutch, they will come over at once."[52] This was a common notion, throughout the war. In February 1646, a runaway slave from Olinda remarked that "the locals are filled with fear, and see no way out, and talk among them is that as soon as they notice that the Dutch *secours* arrives from the fatherland, some will flee, and others will seek quarter."[53] News of the arrival of enemy fleets had the potential to significantly spur desertion. "How far in advance did the locals at Rio São Francisco become aware of the coming of our fleet?" an administrator at Recife asked Jan, a slave who

[50] OWIC **66.2**, 362f.
[51] OWIC **66.2**, 361.
[52] OWIC **62**, 364; **66.2**, 358, an information that some Dutch administrator found important enough to underline.
[53] OWIC **61**, 540.

had joined the Dutch forces during their attack on the rebel outpost at Rio São Francisco in late 1646. "They were informed three days in advance," Jan described the scene, "and in the meantime all the residents and soldiers went running for the bushes, and a fight broke out between the captain from Bahia and the local captain (*cap van landt*). The captain from Bahia said: 'You have caused this war, now you go fight against the *flamencos*,' to which the local captain replied that he deemed himself too weak for this. In the end, both of them ran away with their men, their wives and their children."[54]

In the long run, though, good news might have had an even more pernicious effect than bad news. As time and time again the most exaggerated rumors drifted across the colony, with barely any coming true, despair and resignation settled in. "Having eaten with the Dutch, Vieira could now just as well fight them on his own," one informant reported people fleeing to the woods saying.[55] "The locals fret and moan every day about the governor of Bahia and the other leaders who have started all this," Alibehamel de Salij and Hameeli Solina de Salij, two Turkish runaway slaves from the Várzea reported to Recife in March 1646, "as they have recognized that this war is going to be the ruin of all of them, and a great many of them withdraw to the forests."[56]

Atlantic talk played a part in this drawn-out exodus, for all its potential to excite and alarm people, but even more for its potential to disappoint. "People say that the king does not know of the war and all of it is the work of João Fernandes Vieira, whom everybody hates because of this, and they call him *Joao Mulecque* or *Jan Jongeneger* all the time," a defector from the Arraial told the *assessor* at Recife in April 1646.[57] Suspicion and disbelief – about the involvement of the king, the intentions of the rebels, the prospect of the war – was epidemic from the very beginning of the war, and all talk of fleets and negotiations only added to it. The steady trickle of deserters and refugees to the forests, to Bahia and to the Dutch side showed how, over time, many people came to stop believing in any resolution to the conflict at all.

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[54] OWIC **62**, 406. See also Moreau, *Klare en Waarachtige Beschrijving*, 62; Nieuhof, *Gedenkweerdige Brasiliaense Zee- en Lant-Reize*, 183.
[55] OWIC **61**, 714.
[56] OWIC **61**, 569.
[57] OWIC **62**, 365, see also OWIC **61**, 714; 62, 428; **66.1**, 221. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 273f., explains the origins of these slurs.

Loyalty to the cause of the war was low among common soldiers anyway, on both sides of the conflict. They had been "tricked into leaving our own country to serve a strange people and to conquer a land two thousand miles away from our home," a group of French soldiers in services of the WIC who had deserted to the insurgents in 1647 wailed after they had been re-captured by the Dutch and sentenced to death.[58] The Dutch had "treated them like beasts," the convicted soldiers lamented, forced them to serve beyond their terms without getting proper rations or their promised pay in a war where they "faced death so often, overcame endless dangers, shed their blood, burdened their body with wounds, and wasted their best years in fighting the enemy, the miseries of war, the foulness of the air and the calamities of this time."[59]

Deserters from the rebel camp to the Dutch side expressed similar concerns. "The soldiers on the other side are most weary," a Portuguese deserter opined in late 1651, "as they have received neither money nor clothing for two years they and have to get by on their meager ration – a bowl of *farinha* a day, and every second day a pound of fresh meat. To make do in this state of poverty they are forced to go to the countryside to work."[60] Attrition warfare took its toll, on the besiegers as much as on the besieged. The dearth of food and clothing gnawed at the soldiers' resolve, all the more so during the rainy season, when they were "strewn with lice and vermin, suffer great cold and there is no clothing to be expected for them."[61] European soldiers, many of them mercenaries with few stakes in the outcome of the insurgency, were particularly notorious for deserting to Bahia or to the Dutch side in such times of misery.[62] "Only the *negros* of Henrique Dias still fight with bravery, and the *blancken* have little courage left," two runaway slaves from the Arraial testified in December 1648.[63] Those slaves who had joined the rebellion on the promise of freedom certainly had a strong incentive to remain and fight, but this was only a fraction of the *negro* battalions.[64]

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[58] Moreau, *Klare en Waarachtige Beschrijvinge*, 72f.
[59] Moreau, *Klare en Waarachtige Beschrijvinge*, 72. See also Miranda, *Gente de Guerra*, ch. 6. For Northeast Brazil's disease environment and its implications for the war, see John McNeill, *Mosquito Empires. Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (Cambridge UP, New York 2010), 95-97.
[60] OWIC **66.2**, 362.
[61] OWIC **65**, 1063f.
[62] OWIC **61**, 21, 27; OWIC **62**, 423; **66.2**, 174, 191, 356f.
[63] OWIC **64**, 686, see also OWIC **62**, 423.
[64] Mattos, "'Black Troops' and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World", 11; Kraay, "Arming Slaves in Brazil from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century", 155.

Many slaves serving in the rebel forces had been recruited forcefully at the outbreak of the revolt or were captured by the insurgents at some point and had little to gain from a victory of the insurgents. In this hopeless situation, the smallest rumor could be a catalyst for desertion, giving people the final push to run away to the forests, to Bahia or Recife.[65]

Any kind of desertion was corrosive to the rebellion, but desertion to the enemy was particularly hurtful. Deserters knew well that information was the one thing they could offer to the Dutch, and all attempts to keep the enemy in the dark about one's troop numbers and schemes could be easily thwarted even by common soldiers and carriers. Whatever talk did the rounds in the camps around the city sooner or later ended up in the chambers of the Dutch government. The number of soldiers that had showed up at the last roll call, the amount of rations handed out and the latest talk of the land – all such information became hard currency in the effort to win the good will of the Dutch administrators. Their intimate familiarity with the land and excellent knowledge of the terrain, of rebel positions and hidden paths made runaways valuable allies in a military force mostly made up of newcomers from Europe.

There were few means to stop people once they were set on deserting to the Dutch side. One counter-measure was spreading defamatory rumors. They had been told that the Dutch kill all deserters, a couple of rebel soldiers captured by Dutch raiders stated, and that many more would come over once it became known that this was not true. But such gruesome tales either did not make it very far or failed to scare people.[66] In the end, the threat of violence was perhaps the most efficient measure. The frontline of field camps and outposts that the rebels had set up around Recife served as much the purpose of keeping people from running away to Recife as of keeping the Dutch locked inside the city. "In the Salinas as everywhere around the city they have positioned small squads," one deserter testified in early 1646, "where they keep such close watch that he has seen no chance to escape,

[65] OWIC **61**, 32; **64**, 86; **65**, 804, 1062; **67**, 229, 237.
[66] OWIC **61**, 45; see also **62**, 400; **66.2**, 365. A scare tactic allegedly employed by the Dutch as well. A group of *Mina negros* escaped Recife, Frei Calado reported, stating that "many of their relatives were ready to come to us [the rebels], […] even though some were reluctant, because the Dutch had put the idea in their head that the Portuguese delivered all the *negros* that came to them to the savage *tapuias*, and to the *brasilianos* serving under Camarão, so they would eat them broiled and boiled; but if they knew that among us they would be treated well, and [that] we would not kill them, they would come little by little," see Calado, *O Valoroso Lucideno e o Triunfo da Liberdade*, vol. 2:iv (Ed. Univ. São Paulo, Belo Horizonte 1987), 142. See also Mattos, "'Black Troops' and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World", 14.

and otherwise he would have come over earlier, as many other *negros* who cannot come over and would well want to if they saw a chance."[67] It took bravery, luck, knowledge of hidden paths through the forests, and intimate familiarity with the sights, sounds and smells of war to make it through this borderland. "Around an hour away from the city," a slave from Muribeca fleeing together with his wife testified after coming over in December 1645, "he encountered a large battalion of blancos and mulaten keeping watch. He smelled the fuses and crawled quietly through the bushes, and a quarter of an hour away from Recife he found many negros on lookout, making it difficult to come over."[68] The siege cordon around Recife certainly had a part in reducing desertion to the Dutch side to a trickle, and in all likelihood, war-weary soldiers and civilians absconded to the *sertão* – the uncolonized hinterland – and Bahia in far greater numbers.[69] Of all these groups, though, soldiers seemed to face the fewest obstacles in crossing over to Recife. The most problematic group of people in terms of how much and what kind of information they could betray to the enemy thus had the fewest problems getting there. In any case, against the tenacity, determination and resourcefulness of the slaves, soldiers and common people of Pernambuco, all measures of the rebels to stop people from reaching the enemy stood little chance.

Swindlers

Deserters' talk was an open threat to the rebellion, but a problematic gain for the Dutch. As common talk crossed from rebel-held Pernambuco to Recife carried by runaways and deserters, it turned into a potential weapon against the insurgents, but there were numerous uncertainties entailed in the process, for all parties involved. In one case, these dynamics became most visible – the case of Pascoal Dias.

On December 8, 1650, three men and a woman came over to Recife by boat. The leader of the group introduced himself to the gathering of the Secret Council as Duarte Laurenco Henriques and handed two letters to the convention. "I should hope that Your Honors receive this in good health," the first letter said, "concerning myself, I am healthy enough to serve Your Honors anytime, though I am forced to live in this *campanha* against my will,

[67] OWIC **61**, 54.
[68] OWIC **61**, 31; see also OWIC **62**, 385.
[69] OWIC **61**, 18; **62**, 358, 362, 364, 577, 603; **66.2**, 357.

and I write these few lines so that Your Honors may know how much we desire to see ourselves under the protection of Your Honors in this country and in this great plight."[70] The other letter continued in a similar vein. Both were unsigned, but in the margin of the first, it said "Figeiroa *mestre de campo* on 2.12.1650." Henriques, the carrier, explained: They were from colonel Francisco de Figueiroa, the commander of a regiment of the rebel forces at Cabo Agostinho. "The colonel's plan is to come over to Recife on Christmas Eve with his lieutenant and with the captain of the Neapolitan regiment and his entire company, their wives, children and slaves," Henriques said.[71]

The councillors were intrigued, and started questioning the messenger. Henriques said that he was the son of two Portuguese settlers from Bahia, that he was 25 to 27 years old, a former soldier with the Portuguese, but that for the last two years he had been earning his living as a tailor at Pontal, close to the fort at Cabo Agostinho. He had once served under Figueiroa, and now Figueiroa's lieutenant Anaijoza had dispatched him to carry these letters to lieutenant-general Von Schoppe. Some days earlier, Henriques claimed, Figueiroa and Anaijoza had been in a fight with the leader of the Portuguese troops, *mestre de campo general* Francisco Barreto. Barreto, Henriques said, had made himself unpopular among a lot of people for taking their goods, oxen and horses, and "the colonel, his lieutenant and this Neapolitan captain are all very offended and greatly enraged at the *mestre de campo*."[72] Generally, Henriques suggested, things were not looking good on the Portuguese side. Just a couple of days earlier, bad news from Bahia had reached the Várzea – previous tidings that the Portuguese fleet at Bahia would come to Pernambuco had turned out to be "no more than a hoax (*alleen een falsch uijtstroijen*)".[73] Instead, the fleet would sail straight back to Europe. Henrique Dias' *negro* battalion, Henriques said, was in open revolt, killing civilians in droves, and every day, many soldiers were running off to Bahia.[74]

The council was intrigued, but skeptical. The following day, *secretaris* Cornelissen subjected Henriques to another interrogation. "Once this work is accomplished, and he is here

[70] OWIC **76**, 690.
[71] OWIC **76**, 693.
[72] OWIC **76**, 695.
[73] OWIC **76**, 695.
[74] OWIC **76**, 697-699.

in person, he says he could be of great service to the Company," Cornelissen noted.[75] Henrique offered to lead an expedition to Alagoas, gave advice on the best way to terrorize the rebel companies outside Recife, said that the rebels are preparing an expedition to Paraíba and proposed to have a fort built at Sirinháem, "which would lead to great fear among the Portuguese, as it is in the heart of their southern territory."[76]

Councillor Michiel van Goch took on the people who had come over with Henriques. The first was Francisco, a 16-year-old *mulato*, who said his mother had been a slave and his father her Portuguese owner who had set him free. Francisco further claimed that he was the brother of Henriques, whose real name was Pascoal Dias. Together with Gonsalo, the other man in their company, they had lived as vagabonds at Maracaipe, close to the Cape. The woman accompanying them was Isabel, his brother's wife. Francisco continued that he did not know much more than that his brother had recently come to his hiding place in the forests with Figueiroa's letter, and that Figueiroa wanted to come over, "but that he actually did not know why, just that Figueiroa did not get along with the *mestre de campo general*."[77] The second companion, Gonsalo, confirmed much of what Francisco had said. He said that he was a *criolo* from Bahia who was enslaved and sold to a *senhor de engenho* during the Dutch invasion. Upon the outbreak of the revolt he had been drafted into the rebel forces until he unsuccessfully tried to flee to Bahia early 1650. Hiding in the forests, he had become friends with Pascoal Dias, who frequented Cabo Agostinho oftentimes and knew Figueiroa well. Gonsalo thought that Figueiroa wanted to sell Cabo Agostinho to the Dutch, but he himself had come over to Recife in hopes to join the Dutch forces.[78] The third in company was a woman who called herself Lucia and testified that she had been a slave of Pascoal Dias' father and been released from slavery upon marrying Dias. She said she had come to Recife because she wanted to follow her husband. "Asked about other affairs, she referred to what her husband said, and declared to have no further insight into these things."[79]

To the Dutch, these testimonies sounded coherent enough to agree to what Pascoal Dias alias Duarte Henriques proposed further: Send a boat to drop him off south of Cabo

[75] OWIC **76**, 699.
[76] OWIC **76**, 700.
[77] OWIC **76**, 702.
[78] OWIC **76**, 703f.
[79] OWIC **76**, 705.

Agostinho with a letter to Figueiroa, so that he will be back with further instructions before Christmas to get everything ready for the great escape. In recognition of his services, the council provided Dias with a rapier, an ounce of saffron, one pound of pepper, half a pound of fine yarn, an ell of thread and ten ell *croonras* – a wollen yarn – "for a dress for his wife."[80] And even though they did not hear from him again all December, on Christmas Eve, the councillors sent out a squad to the *Barette* and told all guardposts in Recife "to stay on their feet all night and await the success of this affair."[81] But no one showed up.

On January 13, Pascoal Dias returned, with another companion and another letter. "The carrier of this letter," the message said, "shall disclose to you in what state I am, and what great inclination I have to serve Your Honors. Whatever favor Your Honors shall bestow on him I will accept as if it were to myself. It should please Your Honors to assist him with all necessities, since as soon as God grants an opportunity, I shall compensate it all. From now on everything shall be done in a different way than before. Your Honors' friend and slave."[82] Upon his return, Dias told the council, Francisco Barreto had detained him and interrogated him about the other runaways, but let him go after two weeks. Immediately, he had met up with Figueiroa, who gave him another letter and sent one of his servants along. Right now, Dias said, there was no way for Figueiroa to come over, since the rebels were laying ambushes everywhere to trap Dutch raiding parties, but once the rebel troops have departed for their expedition to Paraíba, Figueiroa would be willing to hand over the fort at Cabo Agostinho to the Dutch.[83]

This was bit too outlandish for the councillors' taste. "A couple of hints and clues during the questioning" led the council to wonder "whether his proposal may not be mere fraud, and nothing more than a pretext to cheat us out of some cloth and goods, seeing that he insists quite strongly on such presents and he even drew up a list with all that he would like to take along to colonel Figueiroa."[84] The councillors noted that "they could not believe how a person of such low means (*persoon van soodanigen geringe gelegentheit*) would be entrusted with a matter of such importance, and how a person of the Portuguese nation would

[80] OWIC **76**, 689.
[81] OWIC **74**, 982.
[82] OWIC **76**, 706f.
[83] OWIC **76**, 706-713.
[84] OWIC **76**, 713f.

undertake such a thing without making considerable demands beforehand."[85] But the council gave Dias the benefit of the doubt. They decided to interrogate Dias again, as well as the servant accompanying him, Miguel Mendes. Mendes, a 15-year-old boy from Muribeca with a *mulatto* mother and a Portuguese father, said that he indeed was a domestic servant of Figueiroa ordered to accompany Dias to Recife, and confirmed Dias' statements in all other points as well.[86] Then, the councillors interrogated once more the co-refugees from Dias' last visit to Recife. Francisco insisted against Dias' own claims that he was no slave, but his brother, and that Dias had hid with him and Gonsalo in the forest because there was a bounty on their heads. He also stated that before all this Dias had indeed been Figueiroa's tailor and that he still visited him at night. Gonsalo confirmed that Francisco was Dias' brother and that they all had been forced to hide in the bushes because Dias had killed and maimed some of his fellow soldiers, and also insisted on Dias' nightly connections to Figueiroa. The woman, now referred to as Anna, confirmed the story of the bounty on Dias' head, but could not say whether he had anything to do with Figueiroa.[87] The council now decided that since they could not prove with certainty that Dias was leading them on, they would give him a rapier and a dagger, a musket and some colored cloth, silk and gauze, drop him off somewhere on the coast and see what would come of it.[88]

A month later, Dias was back again. Figueiroa had been dismayed that he had brought him no letter from Recife this time, Dias said, and that he did not believe that he had even been there. But Dias had been able to calm him down and convince him to stick to the plan, though now Figueiroa would merely want to come over with his wife, children and slaves.[89] Dias knew that this was awfully little to show for his efforts, and began to run through a whole catalogue of intelligence the Dutch could be interested in: weakly defended places in the South, ways to plunder the *engenhos* of some of the original conspirators, attack plans of the rebels and clandestine contacts of the rebels to persons in Recife. This strategy worked. On the one hand, the council concluded that "he never ever followed up on what he said he came over to Recife for, but only cared for and urged us to give him

[85] OWIC **76**, 714.
[86] OWIC **76**, 715.
[87] OWIC **74**, 1014f.
[88] OWIC **76**, 717.
[89] OWIC **76**, 721.

presents of cloth and other things."[90] One the other hand, though, "he does give us intelligence of many things that are quite important for this state. It is also possible that we do not give him what he demands, but just some little things, the costs of which are easily compensated by the *negros* and *moulaten* that he brings along."[91] Once more, the councillors gave Dias some of the goods he desired and sent him off, with a short, formal note to Figueiroa. Both sides, at this point, knew what game they were playing.

This was the last time that the councillors saw Pascoal Dias in person, though not the last time they heard of him. "The *mestre de campo general* has arrested all the *senhores de engenho* living around Cabo Agostinho," a group of runaway slaves reported to Recife in June 1651, "out of suspicion that they are guilty in the affair of Pascoal Dias, who, they say, has been quartered two weeks ago."[92] Pascoal Dias and three rebel captains were arrested and killed, other defectors alleged, "for trying to sell the Cape to the Dutch, they say."[93] Figueiroa, however, survived the affair unscathed – "Figueiroa was not arrested but still commands at the Cape, having been acquitted of all that the *mameluck* accused him of, and is not under suspicion," two deserters relayed to Recife on June 12.[94]

The case of Pascoal Dias was certainly exceptional. No other deserter in this war switched sides this often, no other deserter pursued defection with such fervor. No one else between 1645 and 1654 made treason his business the way Pascoal Dias did, and no other person turned giving intelligence into a trade-off the way he did. But this case does bring to the fore components that were implicitly present in all these procedures. All deserters that voluntarily came to Recife did so with the expectation of gaining some form of advantage. What they had to offer were things that were quite common knowledge in inland Pernambuco. Pascoal Dias' purported connections to the rebel command were certainly tantalizing to the Dutch at first, but in the long run they continued entertaining him because of the information he delivered. With his proposals of how his information could be used against the rebels, Dias was more candid than other deserters, but what he related to the councillors was fundamentally just like any other intelligence the Dutch gathered from others like

[90] OWIC **76**, 726.
[91] OWIC **76**, 726.
[92] OWIC **66.2**, 165.
[93] OWIC **66.2**, 163; OWIC **66.2**, 166, 193f.
[94] OWIC **66.2**, 167.

him. People took close notice of any trace of change in the progress of the war and soldiers in particular witnessed developments in the war up close and heard about them from their fellows. The smallest things – the commencement of works on a new fort, or even just a new redoubt, the making of ladders, possibly to be used in an attack, the movement of a regiment from one place to another and the arrival of letters in the rebel headquarters – were all registered acutely and circulated widely. The most resourceful soldiers would even count along during roll call or glean the number of soldiers in the rebel forces from provisioning documents and thus be able to give the Dutch an impression of the strength of the enemy.[95] Once in Recife, these ordinary observations turned into something quite valuable, but how valuable exactly was a much more difficult question. The Dutch had very limited means to assess people's credibility and intentions. Most of all, they had very few means of knowing who their informants were in the first place. It was clear that concerns of status and ethnicity still played a part in how trustworthy the Dutch considered a person to be. Pascoal Dias was, by what he said himself and what others said about him, a cross section of the kind of people that deserted to Recife during the war. A *mulatto* born to a slave mother and married to a freed slave by the account of some, a *mameluco* by the account of others, a runaway soldier, even a murderer, as some alleged, and a traitor for sure, Dias presented himself as a mere Portuguese tailor, but convinced nobody with this. As a man of many names and identities he must have appeared most dubious to the Dutch, with their distrust for people of such *geringe gelegentheit*, all the more for the fundamental uncertainty about what he really wanted. Nevertheless, the councillors were eager to hear what he had to say. However disreputable the Dutch found their informants and their intelligence, they could only gain from them. One person could turn out to be misinformed or a liar, but information could always be corroborated and there were enough deserters at almost any time in the war for the Dutch to do so. Truth, rumor and fiction fused in almost inextricable ways in the stories people like Pascoal Dias told, but the Dutch had a procedure with which they could untangle some of these threads. Asking the same questions over and over to the deserters trickling into Recife, they could get a sense of what was valid and what was not. In this particular case, Francisco Barreto really was unpopular among his fellow commanders at the time. In

[95] OWIC **62**, 448; **66.2**, 190.

letters to the king, Vieira, Vidal and Henrique Dias each complained about the *mestre de campo general*, and Figueiroa himself requested to be allowed to retire in 1651.[96] Other deserters coming to Recife around the same time reported that people were indeed increasingly incensed about the confiscation of slaves and goods by the rebels, as well as about the fact that Barreto purportedly sold provisions instead of handing them out, and the problem of marooning soldiers indeed seemed to have reached a new intensity in early 1651.[97]

The war, the Dutch could learn from such informants, was far from over. The rebels apparently suffered dearly under the Dutch naval blockade and faced an increasingly mutinous population. At the edges of the war theater, communities of runaway slaves and deserters had grown that evaded the control of the rebels, and now even sought to make business with the enemy. A certain element of panic can be gleaned from the arrests and public executions around the Pascoal Dias affair in June 1651. The rebels, it turned out, encountered the same atmosphere of treason and suspicion that had prevailed under the reign of the Dutch. Most threateningly, they faced people like Pascoal Dias, who used this environment to their own ends, adapting to and navigating this conflict in confident and independent ways, hearing, spreading, mastering and exploiting rumor.

[96] José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *Francisco de Figueiroa. Mestre de Campo do Têrço das Ilhas em Pernambuco* (Univ. Recife, Recife 1954), 27f.
[97] OWIC **66.2**, 167, 174, 191, 356f.

Conclusion

This study has presented talk as a pervasive element of social interaction in colonial Brazil. In war as in peace, Pernambucans feverishly exchanged news, rumors, speculations and personal observations across divisions of status, ethnicity and space.

Communication in Pernambuco did not occur in isolation. The connection to Europe figured constantly as a source and a subject of news and rumors. The trans-Atlantic dimension of the revolt in Dutch Brazil made itself felt directly in the violence and deprivation people suffered, and figured prominently in their daily conversations. A longing for news from Europe was a widespread sentiment in Pernambuco, exacerbated by the miseries of attrition warfare and paired with an acute awareness of European power structures, diplomatic entanglements, and the challenges of trans-Atlantic shipping. The fact that interrogations of slaves of African descent in Northeast Brazil contain references to Dunkirk pirates, Dutch-Portuguese peace negotiations in Amsterdam and military campaigns in Angola suggests a horizon of experience that far surpasses prevalent notions of the insularity of life in 17th-century Pernambuco.[1]

Talk did not travel from shore to shore unchanged. Distance and time left their mark on the messages transported across the Atlantic. This study has focused on the passage of talk from Europe to Pernambuco, but this was a process that worked in both directions. One of the rumors that surfaced during the outbreak of the rebellion said that Vieira had originally planned to trick the members of the High and Secret Council into attending the wedding of his daughter-in-law and murder them there.[2] When the Dutch at Recife first took (written) notice of this plot at the end of July 1645, the time for the realization of such a scheme had obviously passed long ago. Still, word of this ruse travelled to Amsterdam and, on September 2, 1645, appeared in Broer Jansz' popular newspaper *Tijdingen uyt verscheyde Quartieren*.[3] Now, though, the story had changed – the Dutch government, Broer Jansz reported, had discovered the devious plan in time and stayed away from the wedding, a few people had been killed on both sides, but the situation in the colony was under control.

[1] OWIC **62**, 381, 443; **66.2**, 369.
[2] OWIC **60**, 673.
[3] Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, 46, 128f.

The rumor of the murderous wedding had successfully made the passage across the Atlantic, but along the way it had turned into a completely different story. The passage of time between the dispatch and the arrival of messages in trans-Atlantic communication as well as the sometimes seemingly endless pause between news from the other side of the ocean left plenty room for rumors to mutate, metastasize, or arise spontaneously out of nowhere. But time and distance only set the frame for a process that was deeply social at its core. No single rumor was quite like the other, but they expressed shared concerns, fears and hopes. As communication occurred exclusively by oral means for most Pernambucans, the spread of talk was directly contingent upon personal contact. News and rumor moved on foot, and whether one would hear them depended much on where one stood in geographic as well as in social terms. A significant gap in communication separated rural Pernambuco from the war camps around Recife, most dramatically for plantation and domestic slaves, who still received sporadic notice of the war, but found it much harder than their owners to establish enduring and far-ranging communicative ties on their own.

This conclusion stands in stark contrast to the image Julius Scott paints of the spread of news in Jamaica at the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution. Here, the proprietor of a far outlying plantation became aware one day that his slaves "learned of recent developments on the coast before he did […] 'through some unknown mode of conveying intelligence amongst Negroes'," and were "particularly informed of every circumstance in less than twenty-four hours after these circumstances had taken place."[4] It is also a distinctly different impression to Alejandra Dubcovsky's account of the Stono Rebellion in 1739 South Carolina – a rebellion sparked by a Spanish edict promising freedom to any runaway slave "issued by a foreign government located almost 300 miles away [which] had passed through many hands (and ears) before reaching the rebels," a group of slaves living close to Charles Town.[5] Late 18th-century Jamaica and 1730s South Carolina were, of course, places very different to mid-17th-century Pernambuco in many respects, but after all, they likewise were predominantly rural slave societies lacking regular mail systems and printing presses, where information passed by word of mouth and thus by the movement of people. Perhaps the

[4] Scott, *The Common Wind*, 19f.
[5] Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Connected Worlds. Communication Networks in the Colonial Southeast, 1513-1740* (Diss. Berkeley 2011), 187f.

fact that Pernambuco was a colony at war made all the difference here. The warring parties targeted the colony's lines of communication from the very beginning of the conflict, and were soon joined in this by marauding runaways and deserters. Moreover, the Dutch presence at Recife, Itamaracá and estuaries further north shut off riverine pathways that had been key to intra-colonial communication before the war. Certainly, the outbreak of the revolt made travel in the colony much more arduous and dangerous. Occasions for the exchange of news and rumor were reduced, and those most isolated and constrained in their own movement were the first to feel the effects of this.

But the state of war does not account fully for the difference between the case presented here and the ones presented by Scott and Dubcovsky. In wartime Pernambuco, as in Jamaica, South Carolina, or in fact, late 18th-century Cuba or 17th-century New England, information could still travel tremendous distances, but we have to look very closely at which distances it could cover and why.[6] News could cross the Atlantic from Lisbon to Bahia and then get carried all the way north to the Arraial by couriers without any problems, if no Dutch fleet stood in the way. Here, as well as at Cabo Agostinho, such news could also easily seep through to local soldiers and slaves. In these parts, Pernambuco did exhibit the "interconnectedness, inclusiveness, and dependency" that constitute the interethnic communication networks of Dubcovsky's account.[7] These features, though, as Dubcovsky herself notes, were to a large degree incidental or even undesired processes. Inclusiveness was not a feature of colonial communication systems, but a defect, and whereas these systems were indeed highly porous in some places, they were still – with the help of geography – quite effective in shutting out large parts of the population. In wartime Pernambuco, it was most difficult to regulate and suppress communication at population hubs such as the Arraial, but it became all the easier the farther one moved to the colonial periphery. Colonial elites and authorities could and did wield their imposing power to silence and exclude, however imperfectly.

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[6] "In Cuba, news, people, and papers from revolutionary Saint-Domingue arrived quickly and vividly," Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, 44, states, though, tellingly, her conclusion of an "overflow of information" that was "impossible to contain" (53f.) refers exclusively to the situation in the island's port cities. The interethnic communication networks of 17th-century New England that Grandjean, *American Passage*, ch. 2, describes certainly had a remarkable reach, but Grandjean points out how these letter networks excluded one key participant – the Amerindian letter carriers.

[7] Dubcovsky, *Connected Worlds*, 190.

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of how this messy and sprawling communication process could still systematically exclude even very powerful people can be observed in the buildup of the rebellion in 1644 and 1645. The influx of hints and leads between 1644 and 1645 reveals distinctly the entanglement of the Dutch government with the population of their colony. One pillar of Dutch rule was the Jewish population of Pernambuco, whose connections among each other and to other settlers produced valuable intelligence from early on. The other pillar was Dutch settlement itself. It is no coincidence that we possess a relatively clear picture from several informants of the emergence of the rebellion in Goiana, whereas we have little more than the viewpoint of the local commander in the district of Alagoas. The presence of Dutch *senhores de engenho* and *lavradores*, their entanglements with the local population and their loyalty to the Dutch government made all the difference in that respect. To tap into the streams of rumors and talk in which the rebellion announced itself, one needed the informal connections these people possessed, and in the end, the Dutch simply had too few such people in too few places. The Dutch were never delusional about the threat of revolt, but they wanted clear, unambiguous evidence before they would act – evidence that, because of the lack of people that trusted them and that the Dutch councillors themselves trusted only came about when the insurgents escalated their operations in May 1645.

Establishing trust was a unceasing problem in this society of rumors. Distrust was rampant in colonial Pernambuco, not just between population and government, but everywhere. Envy would cause people to denounce others, Johan Maurits had warned, a line of argument João Fernandes Vieira shielded himself with until the very end. Distrust was certainly flagrant, perhaps as much among the Portuguese colonists as between the Portuguese and the Dutch. Any colonial plantation society bred such an atmosphere, among enslaved and free people, *senhores de engenho* and *lavradores*, planters and merchants, creditors and debtors.[8] Suspicion was not exceptional, but ingrained into the system and it brought about a situation in which it was both fundamentally important and exceedingly difficult to tell

[8] See Hoffer, *The Great New York Conspiracy of 1741*; Munford/Zeuske, "Black Slavery, Class Struggle, Fear and Revolution in St. Domingue and Cuba, 1785–1795"; J. William Harris, *The Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah. A Free Black Man's Encounter with Liberty* (Yale UP, New Haven 2009); John Savage, "'Black Magic' and White Terror. Slave Poisoning and Colonial Society in Early 19th-Century Martinique", *Journal of Social History* 40:3 2007, 635–662.

apart unsubstantiated rumor from real threats. The Dutch government was well aware of this and responded by exhibiting a relatively high tolerance in these matters. Under different circumstances, this might have been a smart choice, but in 1645, it meant that the Dutch stayed on the cautious side of this wager for too long.

The outbreak of the revolt in Dutch Brazil makes clear how the rumor-laden nature of communication in colonial societies posed a considerable problem to the governance of these societies. "Rumor was a highly ambiguous discursive field: it controlled some people, terrorized others; it was damning and enabling, shoring up colonial rule and subverting it at the same time," Ann Laura Stoler observes in another case of rumored rebellion two-hundred years later and halfway around the world, and suggests that the virulence of rumors expresses "how limited colonial authorities may have been in putting their policies into practice, how vulnerable and nonhegemonic that authority was."[9] Both the Dutch and the rebel leaders learned from this conflict that rumors were not only hard to control and assess, but that they gained traction much faster and covered more ground than their own messages. People rarely put much faith in official proclamations, all the more so since these proclamations themselves reeked of slander and half-truths. Often enough, oral rumors offered the more convincing story.

Rumor offered a means of oppositional expression in a violently repressive society – a function that scholarship on rumor has come to emphasize more and more. Tamotsu Shibutani states that rumors express people's "independent judgment" and their "unwillingness" to blindly subscribe to the version of events as told by the state and other authorities.[10] Jean-Noël Kapferer suggests that by "divulging secrets, suggesting hypotheses, [rumor] constrains authorities to talk while contesting their status as the sole source authorized to speak," and Glen Perice calls telling rumors "a rhetorical practice of everyday life […], generating terrifying stories, but also allowing spaces where speakers and listeners can maneuver around the dissimulations of power, circulate stories, and struggle to carve out social knowledge of 'the way things are' through oppositional discourse."[11] Historians have

[9] Ann Laura Stoler, "In Cold Blood. Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives", *Representations* 37 1992, 182.
[10] Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 212.
[11] Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rumors. Uses, Interpretations and Images* (Transaction, New Brunswick 1990), 19; Perice, "Rumors and Politics in Haiti", 9.

taken up these interpretations and produced accounts of rumor-telling as subaltern, subversive political communication, and indeed, the insurgency in Dutch Brazil delivers plenty more material for such an understanding of rumor.[12] The colonists, soldiers and slaves of Pernambuco were enthralled by rumor, but not fooled. Sharp-witted, perceptive and endlessly skeptical, they talked a lot but believed little. Some of them, such as Pascoal Dias, even sought to exploit the chronic uncertainty that ruled the colony in these war years to the fullest. But what often gets lost in this turn towards the creative, cooperative and emancipatory aspects of telling rumors is a sense of the severe costs such a discursive environment imposed on people. In a society in which the truthfulness of all information was constantly in doubt, the value of communication itself was severely undermined. Rumor-telling was no endeavor that instilled much solidarity or satisfaction in people, but instead, weariness was the dominant sentiment. It is true that, as Gregory Evans Dowd states in the tradition of Bloch and Shibutani, "rumor depends less on an initial perceptual flaw than on the rumoring group's sense of ambiguity and its determination to establish a reliable understanding of a dangerous world," or that, as Kapferer phrases it, "rumors do not *take off* from the truth but rather *seek out* the truth."[13] Yet, it still remains that rumoring was a terribly inadequate practice for seeking out the truth, and that everyone involved knew this. As much as the contents of rumors sometimes inspired fear and despair, and hope at other times, the uncertain status of any of these messages inflicted its own kind of terrors on the population of wartime Pernambuco. Talk, as much as it helped people navigate this war, was one more source of misery.

[12] In Atlantic history, this goes particularly for the British Empire in its relation to indigenous peoples, see e.g. Joshua Piker, "Lying Together: The Imperial Implications of Cross-Cultural Untruths", *AHR* 116:4 2011, 969: "We have long known that early America's people routinely created interwoven stories. It is time now to recognize this familiar process for what it was: the lived experience of empire characteristic of an early modern world in which the fragility of power enabled local narratives to shape international affairs. At their core, the lies told about Acorn Whistler show us Indians and Europeans mutually constructing empire—not just imperial reality on the ground (who could live where, under whose control and in what circumstances), but also the more intimate narratives and quotidian understandings that allowed local life to move forward but could render imperial agendas untenable." See also B. Scott Crawford, "A Frontier of Fear. Terrorism and Social Tension along Virginia's Western Waters, 1742-1775", *West Virginia History* 2:2 2008, 1-29; Midtrød, "Strange and Disturbing News: Rumor and Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley" and Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground. Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Pennsylvania UP, Philadelphia 2006).
[13] Dowd, *Groundless*, 6; Kapferer, *Rumors. Uses, Interpretations and Images,* 7.

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