The Fight over the Colonies: The debate on citizenship for free people of colour and the construction of revolutionary narratives in France, 1790-1792

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ABSTRACT[1]

This thesis studies the way in which colonists and revolutionaries defined the value of the French Revolution and its relation to the colonies. It does so by looking at the issue of citizenship for free people of colour in Saint-Domingue. This question was central to the colonial debate between the colonist lobby, the *Club d'hôtel Massiac*, and the revolutionaries of the *Société des Amis des Noirs*. Both these pressure groups used the press to influence the public. A look at some of the relevant newspapers shows how revolutionary discourse developed throughout 1790 and 1792 and how colonial events were shaped in the narratives of the Revolution. By reconstructing this colonial debate in the press, this thesis argues that the colonial question became an essential part of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideologies throughout the years 1790-92. In these two years, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries appropriated the colonial issue in their developing political identities. Questions of colonial reform changed from pragmatic considerations in 1790 to an ideological struggle between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries in 1792. The integration of the colonial question in revolutionary narratives was stimulated by domestic developments and by the complex connection between metropole and colony. The discourse in the press showed how much the colonies affected the development of ideologies and narratives in the French Revolution and how the colonial issues were appropriated in pre-existing discourses in France. Despite recent attention to the impact of the Haitian Revolution, little is known about the French reaction to the events on France's most important colony. However, as this thesis argues, the colonial debate was essential to the experience of Revolution.

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Content

Introduction

Amidst the blue seas of the Caribbean lay the pearl of the French crown. Saint-Domingue was the wealthiest colony of the French empire, generating half of the world's sugar and coffee. Referred to as the 'Paris of the Caribbean' was the buzzing commercial city of Cap Français along the northern coast of the tropical island. The city was renowned for its architecture, culture and as a centre of science. Fame and fortune waited for the many Europeans who sought to make their fortune overseas, for enormous amounts of money were to be made in this colonial trading hub. But if a Frenchman in the 1770s reached the shores of the colony and entered Cap Français, he would have soon noticed a major difference with France. Apart from the tropical climate, the street view of Cap Français was quite different from that of Paris. Next to the white and rich commercial traders on the market square, people of a distinct colour exchanged their goods and wares on the market. So called *gens de couleur libres* walked the streets of the colonial city and constituted a substantial portion of the population. This diverse group consisted of descendants of interracial relations, called *mulâtres*, and of formerly enslaved people. Free people of colour did not have the same rights as the free white subjects of the king, but still had to pay their taxes to the French crown. Within the city, urban slaves managed the households of their masters, and our French arrival would have noticed these black slaves accompanying their white masters to the market. However, their presence in the city gave a distorted view of their importance to the colonial economy. Compared to the vast number of people forced to work on the many plantations of the island, the urban slaves constituted only a small part of this enslaved population. With almost half a million enslaved people at work on Saint-Domingue, the French colony was the prime example of a society based on slavery. Their life consisted of cruelties on the plantation; driven to the utmost end of their labour, many died along the field of sugar canes and coffee plants. A constant flow of new slaves brought in from

Africa provided for the increasing workforce of a fast-growing colonial economy. In just half a century, the Caribbean colony became essential for the French economy, but many of the rich white planters felt they were not rewarded with enough gratitude for their work.[2] Dissatisfaction with the power of the metropole was the main complaint of white colonial representatives at the Estates-General of 1789. Events in France took an unexpected turn when the French Revolution broke out in the summer of 1789. Colonial representatives were faced with a metropolitan perspective on the colonies. Several revolutionaries took a stance against slave trade and slave labour. *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of August 1789 posed a direct threat to the racial hierarchy the colonial society was built upon. White colonists felt threatened when free people of colour seized this opportunity to gain civil rights. The cause of the free people of colour was taken up by the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, a political lobby of anti-slavery revolutionaries. In response, white planters and colonists in Paris organised themselves in the so-called *Club d'hôtel Massiac*. Both these societies hotly debated the issue of slavery, citizenship and the future of the French colonies. Their arguments reached their climax between 1790 and 1792, when the National Assembly debated the issue of citizenship for free people of colour.[3] In the midst of these debates, the Revolution took its own turn in Saint-Domingue in October 1790, with the revolt of Vincent Ogé (1755-1791), a free man of colour preaching equal rights between whites and free coloured citizens, and with the first insurrection of the enslaved population in August 1791. These events were used by both the *Amis des Noirs* and the *Club Massiac* in their lobby against or in favour of the colonial order.[4]

[2] For more information on (pre-)revolutionary Saint-Domingue, see J. Popkin, *You are all free. The Haitian Revolution and the abolition of slavery* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.26-34. D. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Indiana, 2002), pp.5-33.
[3] A short overview of these debates is discussed in J. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas. An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton, 2014), pp.396-419.
[4] For more information on the revolt of Vincent Ogé, see for example J. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution. Eyewitness accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago, 2007), pp.43-46.

This thesis analyses the question of citizenship for the free coloured population of Saint-Domingue. This question was a hot topic in French metropolitan politics, as it was the most direct challenge to revolutionary ideology and colonial interest. Between 1790 and 1792 this issue led to fierce debates in the National Assembly and in the press. On 8 March 1790, the National Assembly decreed that the metropolitan government would not take any decisions regarding the status of persons in the colonies, without special request by the colonies themselves. However, fierce debates in the National Assembly led to a political compromise in May 1791, granting equal rights to free people of colour of which both parents had been free. Events in the colony and in France led to a changing political constellation. In 1792, the growing political power of the radical Girondins cleared the way for further colonial reforms. The threat of a looming European war raised the temperatures in the National Assembly and on 4 April 1792 full equal citizenship was granted to all free people of colour. These three years of political turmoil are the focus of this thesis. By looking at the way that the colonial and the anti-slavery lobby reported on these issues and events, this research reconstructs the development of colonial ideology and discourse in the early French Revolution. This thesis looks at how the *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs* talked about each other, colonial events and revolutionary principles. It studies the way in which colonists and revolutionaries defined the value of the Revolution in relation to the colonial question.

Both lobbies had their own networks and means to spread their message. The *Société des Amis des Noirs* was found in 1788 and its members consisted of various famous revolutionaries and politicians, such as Jacques-Pierre Brissot (1754-1793). Brissot was also one of the leading figures of the Girondin faction in the National Assembly and the chief editor of the widely read newspaper, *Le Patriote François*, in which both he and many of his comrades shared their vision on the colonies. Their humanitarian critique of slavery and their idealistic view of colonial reform and gradual abolition of slavery was inspired by enlightened

philosophers and British abolitionist societies.[5] The *Club Massiac* was comprised of merchants, planters and colonists in France with property overseas. They defended their shared interests in the colonies and the maintenance of the status quo, both commercial, political and racial.[6] The main threat against this status quo came from the egalitarian principles of the Revolution, mostly propagated by the *Amis des Noirs*. Thus, the members of the *Club Massiac* sought support from the more moderate and counterrevolutionary forces to defend their interests. The *Club Massiac* had many connections and networks within the commercial hubs of France and focussed their efforts on influencing the opinion of French representatives in favour of their arguments. The *Club Massiac* used existing moderate and counterrevolutionary newspapers to spread their stories.[7] The colonial lobby was one of the most influential private interest groups in the press and the events in the colonies allowed for the most widespread attacks on the Revolution and its ideals.[8] Most counterrevolutionary journals supported the colonial cause, but the most renowned was the reactionary *La Gazette de Paris*, edited by Barnabé Farmian Durosoy (1745-1792).[9] Therefore, *La Gazette de Paris* is the second newspaper that is researched in this thesis.

The colonial debate was essential to the revolutionary narrative but has long been ignored by historians, especially in France itself. While the rise of Robespierre in 1793-1794 pushed the French Revolution into Terror, the insurrections of enslaved people on Saint-Domingue launched the Haitian Revolution, making the former colony follow its own path in history. Threats of British and Spanish invasion, civil war between whites, free people of colour, and blacks, and the breakdown of colonial society eventually prompted the authorities

[5] D. Resnick, 'The Société des Amis des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery', *French Historical Studies* (7:4) (1972), pp.558-69, there pp.564-69.
[6] D. Liébart, 'Un groupe de pression contre-révolutionnaire le club Massiac sous la constituante', *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française* n. 354 (2008), pp.29-50, there p.50.
[7] G. Debien, *Les colons de Saint-Domingue et la Revolution. Essai sur le Club Massiac, Août 1789- Août 1792* (Paris, 1953), pp.120-22.
[8] W. Murray, *The right-wing press in the French Revolution, 1789-92* (Exeter, 1986), pp.236, 272.
[9] Ibidem. p.26.

in Saint-Domingue to decree the emancipation of slaves in 1793 and the National Convention to reinforce this decree in February 1794. The rise of the former enslaved Toussaint l'Ouverture (1743-1803) as the leader of the black and free coloured population stabilised the situation of the de facto independent colony of Saint-Domingue. However, the Napoleonic regime was determined to bring the colony back into the direct control of the metropole with a military expeditionary force that failed in 1802, leading to the declaration of independence of Haiti in 1804. The disastrous military campaign of Napoleon's brother-in-law, Charles Leclerc (1772-1802), and the ultimate loss of France's wealthiest colony made it a difficult topic to research for French historians in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The international isolation of the world's first black nation-state also contributed to a historical lack of knowledge and interest in the Haitian Revolution.[10]

Compared to their French colleagues, historians in the Anglophone world were earlier in studying the Haitian Revolution. The famous work by C.L.R James on the *Black Jacobins* (1938) first approached the Haitian Revolution as a unique historical development, limiting the direct influence of the French Revolution on its course.[11] His Marxist approach on the development of capitalism, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and class struggle, later inspired historians such as Eugene Genovese, Carolyn Flick and David Brion Davis. Genovese defined the breakdown of the colonial order in the revolutionary era because of the transition from a seigneurial economy to a capitalist economy, with the emergence of the new social class of the bourgeoisie as a result, which in the colonial case consisted of the free coloured population.[12] However, the Haitian Revolution cannot be explained from a solely economic perspective,

[10] M.-R., Trouillot, 'Silencing the Past. Layers of Meaning in the Haitian Revolution', in: G. Sider & G. Smith (eds.), *Between History and Histories. The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto, 1997), pp.31-61, there 54. A.G. Sepinwall, 'The spectre of Saint-Domingue. American and French reactions to the Haitian Revolution' in: Geggus, D. & Fiering N. eds., *The world of the Haitian Revolution* (Indiana, 2009), pp.317-30.
[11] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint l'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1963).
[12] E. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*. *Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Louisiana, 1981), pp. xiii-xxiv.

because these events had many cultural and social dimensions. Fick approached the Haitian Revolution from a social perspective, reconstructing it from the bottom up. Therefore, she researched the popular participation of the enslaved black population in the insurrections of 1791.[13] In the past two decades, more attention has been paid to the international and cultural dimension of the Haitian Revolution within the frame of the Atlantic Revolutions.[14] Historians, such as David Geggus, Laurent Dubois and Jeremy Popkin debated the complex relation between colony and metropole and the interplay of revolutionary ideology in a racially organised colonial society.[15] These authors stress the transformation of revolutionary ideology into a colonial context and the influence that colonial events had on French revolutionary politics. Other historians, such as Alexander Dun and René Koekkoek, analysed these influences of the Haitian Revolution on the revolutionary era. Koekkoek argued that events on Saint-Domingue determined the way the French, Dutch and Americans reviewed their own revolutionary principles, such as freedom, equality, and citizenship, leading to an Atlantic reactionary movement which Koekkoek defined as the 'Atlantic Thermidor'.[16] In a comparable way, Dun has researched the American responses to the Revolution on Saint-Domingue by analysing Philadelphian newspapers. Just as Koekkoek, Dun argued that the events that took place on Saint Domingue influenced the way in which revolutionary ideas were perceived in different contexts.[17]

Despite recent attention to the impact of the Haitian Revolution, little is known about the French reaction to the events on its most important colony. Two of the few French historians

[13] C. Fick, *The Making of Haiti. The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, 1990), pp.1-10.
[14] J. Popkin, 'The Haitian Revolution comes of age: ten years of new research', *Slavery & abolition* 42:2 (2021), pp.382-401, there pp.397. M. Covo, 'Race, slavery, and colonies in the French Revolution' in: D. Andress ed., *The Oxford handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015).
[15] See for example L. Dubois, *A colony of citizens. Revolution & salve emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Williamsburg, 2004). Popkin, *You are all free.* D. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Indiana, 2002).
[16] R. Koekkoek, *The Citizenship experiment. Contesting the Limits of Civic Equality and Participation in the Age of Revolutions* (Leiden; Boston, 2020), pp.1-4, 80-92, 247.
[17] J.A. Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors. Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2016), pp.3-17, 24-25.

who have researched the Haitian Revolution are Yves Bénot and Gabriel Debien. Both their works contributed to the modern understanding of French colonial history, but they are outdated. Bénot's most famous work, *La Révolution Française et le fin des colonies* (1969), focussed especially on the colonial history from the political perspective of the French metropole. However, his approach was limited to a classical history of policy-making.[18] Gabriel Debien was one of the first historians to investigate the *Club Massiac*. His research is still of major importance to all present studies on the colonial lobby, even though his research dates from the 1950s. Debien's conclusions remained descriptive, because he did not analyse how the colonial lobby constructed its narrative of events on Saint-Domingue and how this compared to the lobby of the *Amis des Noirs,* who had its own network of journals as well.[19]

Historians point to nineteenth-century modern imperialism as the breaking point in colonial history, but a closer view on earlier colonial discourse at the end of the eighteenth century can shed light on this underexposed period. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued that the Haitian Revolution was an unthinkable event for white Europeans and Americans when it happened. The Haitian Revolution presented a fact that undermined the ontological belief of most Europeans and Americans at the time.[20] It questioned the very reality of eighteenth-century Europeans and Americans and fed increasing fear and anxiety at a time of great uncertainty. Indeed, a look into the late eighteenth-century discourse proves that the Haitian Revolution was already silenced when it began. By recognising this early silencing of the Haitian Revolution, historians can look further into history to understand the origins of nineteenth-century imperialism and colonialism.

[18] Y. Bénot, *La Révolution Française et la fin des colonies* (Paris, 1988), pp.7-9.
[19] Debien, *Club Massiac*, pp.119-39.
[20] M.-R. Trouillot, 'An unthinkable history. The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event' in: A.G. Sepinwall (ed.), *Haitian History: New perspectives* (New York, 2013), pp.33-54, there pp. 34-6.

Other recent postcolonial trends in the historiography help to uncover the unstudied history of the colonial dimension of the French Revolution. The history of feminism is an area of multidisciplinary research where such connections between the colonies and the French Revolution are found. Recent studies show the many similarities between the early feminist and early abolitionist movements in the French Revolution. The closeness of these movements is proved by the shared intellectual background and political goals. The linguistic characteristics in the debate on civil rights are very similar in the feminist and abolitionist discourse. Indeed, even the advocates of rights for free people of colour often supported the movement for women's rights as well. 'Slavery was an analogy for all kinds of suppression', and the submission of women and coloured people was very close aligned.[21] This reveals the relevance of the colonial question in the construction of revolutionary ideals and the importance of the colonies to the understanding of the French Revolution itself.

Newspapers can tell us more about the public debate in the revolutionary era. They were an important mediator in the public debate and therefore give a broad perspective of political opinions.[22] Newspapers also played a significant role in the development of contemporary narratives of the Revolution. Events that became news were placed in different contexts, which gave a deeper meaning to these events in a broader narrative. Because of the constructive power of newspapers, they are a valuable source in reconstructing the reaction of the French metropole to colonial developments and the emergence of ideology. *Le Patriote François* and *La Gazette de Paris* are both fine examples of such political newspapers and are therefore the main primary source in this research. However, there are several methodological problems when researching French newspapers in the revolutionary era. First, there is the dazzling number of different

[21] D. Z. Davidson, 'Feminism and abolitionism. Transatlantic trajectories' in: S. Desan, L. Hunt & W. Nelson (eds.) *The French Revolution in a Global Perspective* (Ithaca, 2013), pp. 101-14, there p.102.
[22] J. Popkin, *Revolutionary news. The press in France, 1789-1799* (London, 1990), pp.4-5, 11.

newspapers available.[23] The French revolutionary press knew an unprecedented working pace, with a large variety of newspapers published every day. Because it is impossible to analyse all newspapers and journals, a selection of newspapers is made for this research. These chosen newspapers will give more insight into the topics discussed and provide a basis for further research. Because this research is focused on a process, the selection of newspapers is based upon the availability of a series of issues. Only by investigating a series of following issues, a consistent narrative can be reconstructed. In general, only the most read and most published newspapers survived in few numbers. This too contributes to a possible distorted view on the subjects discussed. A final problem is constituted by the growing pressure of press censorship in the prelude to the Terror. Many counterrevolutionary or moderate newspapers were closed and political figureheads of the opposition were guillotined. In comparison to the earlier years of the Revolution, the public sphere became increasingly restricted for different opinions, which makes it harder to clearly distinguish opposition.[24] This is one of the reasons why the scope of this research is limited to the years 1790-92. Newspapers were long ignored as a source of historical research because they were not considered as objective sources. It is only in the past decades that historians have researched newspapers because of their subjectivity. The different perspectives of the press reflect the complexity within and interactions with the public sphere. This is especially the case for the revolutionary era. The unprecedented freedom of the press between 1789 and 1792 gave way to a growing importance of journalism. Journalists saw themselves as necessary intermediaries between the politicians and the people. At the same time, the press itself became a place of debate between ideological groups.[25] Because of these

[23] Popkin, *Revolutionary news*, p.10.
[24] H. Gough, *The Newspaper press in the French Revolution* (London, 1988), pp.86-87.
[25] H. Gough, 'The French revolutionary press' in: H. Barker & S. Burrows, *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 2002), pp.182-96.

reasons, a look into the colonial debate in the press reveals much about role of the colonies in the construction of revolutionary narratives in France.

The process in revolutionary narrative and discourse is better explained in chronological order. This research starts in 1790 and ends in 1792. Each chapter is centred around a series of events that shaped the colonial debate. There will be attention to developments in France, but only to illustrate the connections between domestic and colonial events. In 1790, the revolutionary discourse concentrated around pragmatic issues. Ideology played a less important role for the revolutionaries. 1791 is the turning point in the colonial debate. Influenced by a revolt of free people of colour in Saint-Domingue and the increasing obduracy of counterrevolutionaries, the discourse became more racialised and the colonies became more integrated into the revolutionary narratives. After the tumultuous summer of 1791 and the election of a new Legislative Assembly in the autumn of 1791, the Revolution in France spiralled out of control in 1792. The colonies became part of revolutionary and reactionary ideologies. This appropriation of the colonial question into the narratives of the French Revolution formed the basis on which later historiography was written and in which the Haitian Revolution was considered as an extension of the French Revolution.

Chapter I. The Emergence of Conflict: Idealism and Pragmatism

In a response to the French Revolution of 1789, colonists in Saint-Domingue began to work on their own political reforms. In general, these colonists wanted more economic and political autonomy from France, but there were differences among the colonists. Therefore, the gathering of local assemblies created unrest on the colony. The National Assembly in Paris decided at the beginning of March 1790 to create a Colonial Committee to deal with the problem of colonial dissatisfaction. The committee's spokesperson was Antoine Barnave (1761-1793), a revolutionary with many connections to the planter and commercial class in France and sympathetic to the colonists' cause.[26] Shortly after its creation, the Colonial Committee presented a series of decrees. On 8 March 1790, the National Assembly voted for these decrees and officially excluded the French colonies from the metropolitan constitution. Political power was given to the provincial assemblies, elected by local citizens. In practice, this meant a political monopoly for the white population.[27] This news was not received well in the colonies, especially by the free coloured population, who of course had hoped for political emancipation.[28] The vagueness of this decree was the origin of a continuing debate throughout 1790-92. During the debates of 1790, the arguments consisted of primarily pragmatic motives for both the *Amis des Noirs* and the *Club Massiac*. They both prioritised the national interest of France in the colonial debate and they expressed these interests in economic terms. Compared to later years, there was little room for ideals about freedom and equality. Nevertheless, the way in which the debate was discussed in the press already paved the way for a more ideological

[26] L. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World. The story of the Haitian Revolution* (Harvard, 2004), p.84.
[27] Ibidem., pp.84-85.
[28] D. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca; London 1975), p.140.

dispute later, because both papers were starting to construct a narrative of events that would later dominate the colonial debate.

For the *Amis des Noirs* as for the *Club Massiac*, the preservation of the colonies was the main priority. None of these groups wanted to lose one of the few remaining and most profitable colonies of the French empire. The main difference between the two groups was how these colonies were best preserved. A look into their arguments in the press gives insight into these different approaches to the national interest. On the side of the *Club Massiac*, *La Gazette de Paris* wrote that the colonies were better off with more economic and political autonomy. The newspaper reported about the honest struggle of the colonists and criticised the metropolitan response. According to *La Gazette*, politicians in Paris had no idea of how the colonies functioned. Therefore, it was best to let the colonists sort out their political disagreements themselves.[29] On 5 March, the journal published a letter by a 'respectable' citizen. The author defended the colonial racial hierarchy by arguing in favour of a natural order among different people. It was ridiculous, according to the anonymous writer, to argue against nature and extend the rights of man to all the people on earth. The anonymous author repeated earlier arguments of the colonial lobby against colonial reforms. Therefore, it seems likely that the 'respectable' citizen was in fact a member of the colonial elite in Paris, or perhaps even a member of the *Club Massiac*.[30] For *La Gazette*, citizenship for free people of colour was out of question. It would mean a crack in the colour wall of the colonies, with a potential for slave revolt and chaos. *La Gazette* rarely mentioned the issue of citizenship for free people explicitly, but often criticised the universalism of *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*.

The *Amis des Noirs*, on the contrary, found it essential to extend citizenship to free people of colour to preserve the colonies. Throughout March 1790, *Le Patriote François*

[29] *La Gazette de Paris* (21 Feb. 1790), p.1-2.
[30] Ibidem., (5 Mar. 1790), p.2.

frequently brought up the issue of citizenship for free people of colour through the illustration of letters or with fierce editorials on the injustice of the colonial regime:

> All patriots wish with him for a regime of liberty be established in the colonies, so that our brothers in the islands will enjoy all our rights. But was it necessary to distinguish among our brothers? Should the principles of the French constitution be sacrificed to the interest of a few men? Was it necessary, in order to please them, to use a subterfuge that would tarnish the candour and loyalty of the French? It is ignorance or terror [...] How in this report did he [Barnave] forget the interest of the men of colour, of these men so numerous, so precious to France, so attached to her interests? How could he fail to see that the way to preserve peace in the colonies was to remove the rivalries, the jealousies between the free men who live there?[31]

The *Amis des Noirs* were against more colonial autonomy. Contrary to the *Club Massiac*, it argued against the exception of the colonies from the French constitution. The *Amis des Noirs* regarded the colonies as an integral part of the French nation and therefore the colonies had to adhere to the French constitution. Their idealistic universalism was not purely without any self-interest, because *Le Patriote* often referred to the shared interests between the free people of colour and France. It was necessary to grant citizenship to free people of colour to preserve the peace in Saint-Domingue and to forge an alliance between the two wealthiest classes on the island. Such an alliance would ensure the continuing prosperity of the colonial economy and safeguard against civil war and insurrections of the enslaved population.

The national interest that both the *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs* envisioned was economically motivated. The eighteenth century brought France both limitless profits and immense losses. While financially drained by the many wars, the colonial commerce and the slave trade were thriving as never before on the eve of the Revolution. Due to many concessions to Britain, France only maintained few of its former colonies in the Atlantic. However, Saint-

[31] 'Tous les patriotes feront avec lui des vœux pour qu'un régime de liberté s'établisse dans les colonies, pour que nos frères des îles jouissant de tous nos droits. Mais fallait-il distinguer parmi nos frères ? Fallait-il sacrifier à l'intérêt de quelques hommes les principes de la constitution Françoise ? Fallait-il, pour leur plaire, user d'un subterfuge qui ternît la candeur et la loyauté Françoise ? C'est ignorance ou terreur [...] Comment dans ce rapport a-t-il oublié l'intérêt des hommes de couleur, de ces hommes si nombreux, si précieux pour la France, si t-attachés à ses intérêts ? Comment n'a-t-il pas vu que le moyen de conserver la paix dans les colonies, était d'ôter les rivalités, les jalousies entre les hommes libres qui l'habitent.' *Le Patriote François* (10 Mar. 1790), p.3.
All citations are translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.

Domingue was France's most precious and valuable colony. The European market relied heavily on the import of colonial produce from Saint-Domingue, so the stakes were high when the uncertainty of Revolution brought new challenges to the island. Saint-Domingue's success was mainly due to its cruel plantation system, supplied with hundreds of thousands enslaved men, women and children.[32] A growing and successful group of free people of colour had gained increasingly more wealth and influence in the colony in the second half of the eighteenth century, challenging the white socio-economic supremacy.[33] The French Revolution of 1789 exacerbated the racial tensions that already existed in the colony. Many free people of colour who argued for civil rights were successful planters or merchants themselves and were sceptical about a potential abolition of slave trade or emancipation of the enslaved. Therefore, the reforms of the *Amis des Noirs* must not be seen as anticolonial, for it too recognised the importance of colonial commerce for France, especially in the turmoil of the Revolution.[34]

The content of the debate was pragmatic, but the language used in the press was more idealistic. Although the *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs* shared the wish of preserving the colonies in the national interest, they differed on how this had to be achieved. This difference between including or excluding the colonies from the French constitution and with it the question of granting citizenship to free people of colour projected the developing ideologies of the revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. The debate about civil rights was not limited to the free people of colour. The meaning of citizenship was discussed in a broader context throughout the Revolution. Many minorities in France sought the rights that were promised by the revolutionary ideals of freedom and equality. However, after *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* in 1789, the National Assembly limited the franchise, drawing a

[32] A. Forrest, *Death of the French Atlantic Trade, War, and Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford, 2020) pp.3-21.
[33] See S. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig. Free People of Color in Pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens, 2001).
[34] Forrest, *Death of the French Atlantic*, p.119.

difference between active and passive citizenship. This was a distinction based on wealth and social status through which the National Assembly excluded the largest part of the population from active citizenship.[35] The quest for citizenship became a fight for political emancipation and participation for many minority groups. In the colonial dimension, this issue was centred around free people of colour and enslaved people, but women and the lower classes in France fought for the same access to civil rights. Because of this common cause, women activists such as Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) supported the anti-slavery movement in France.[36] In fact, leading member of the *Amis des Noirs*, Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794), argued in favour of women's rights as he fought against slave trade. Even the discourse in which women's rights and slavery were discussed shared many linguistic similarities. For example, women were compared to the enslaved population in the colonies.[37] In short, when the debate about civil rights for free people of colour started, it found a place in an already existing discussion among many other minorities that initially used a comparable discourse and similar rhetoric to argue for their civic emancipation.

When discussing the colonial issue, *La Gazette de Paris* and *Le Patriote François* both constructed their own narrative on the topic. They made use of the same emotions to appeal to their public, but the stories they told were different. In the turbulent years of the French Revolution, these newspapers had to explain many complex topics to their readers. Through their texts, the newspapers reconstructed the revolutionary narratives along the events while they were happening. Both newspapers narrated the colonial question as a classic dialectic conflict between good and evil, the victim and the villain. On the side of the *Amis des Noirs*, *Le Patriote François* framed the colonists on Saint-Domingue as oppressors of the free people

[35] Koekkoek, *Citizenship experiment*, p.54-55.
[36] S, Raffaella. "From Slaves and Servants to Citizens? Regulating Dependency, Race, and Gender in Revolutionary France and the French West Indies" *International Review of Social History* (67:1) (2022), pp.65-95, there p.84.
[37] Ibidem., pp.77-78.

of colour. Published letters in the newspaper discussed how white colonists often mistreated free people of colour. On 1 March 1790, *Le Patriote* reported in a commentary of one of these letters:

> From the manifest hatred of whites against the people of colour, it follows that it would be infinitely dangerous to leave to them the task of forming a colonial code. This code must be made in France by the disinterested members of the assembly. Undoubtedly, the suffrage of whites and coloureds alike is necessary; but complete equality must be established between them: to abandon the latter to the others would be to ignite a relentless war between them in the colonies, and to lose them forever.[38]

By victimising the free people of colour, *Le Patriote* implied that the white colonists were unable to write a colonial code or colonial constitution themselves. *Le Patriote* used this narrative to promote its own idea of a French empire under one constitution. The image of free people of colour being mistreated by white colonists, reinforced the argument of the *Amis des Noirs* that the colonies had to be dependent of the French constitution.

It was obvious for the *Club Massiac* that the *Amis des Noirs* was the instigator of colonial unrest. Its supposed plans to abolish slavery were the cause of all misfortune, according to *La Gazette*:

> One word is sufficient in favor of the Colonists & against the wickedness of the friends of the Blacks. Since our Colonies have existed, we have seen for the first time our Negroes rise up, arm themselves against us, and go at the same time and with equal step, to the revolt and destruction of the Whites in all the Colonies at once. […] But there is one truth, Gentlemen, on which I cannot insist too much; it is that the colonists are ready to prove by their correspondence how sincere is their aversion to anything that might lead them to separate from the Metropolis.[39]

This narrative was used to influence the opinion of the readers towards supporting the colonists' cause by framing the *Amis des Noirs* as the villains and the good colonist as a victim of its

[38] 'De la haine manifeste des blancs contre les gens de couleur, il résulte qu'il seroit infiniment dangereux de leur abandonner le soin de former un code colonial. Ce code doit être fait en France par les membres désintéressés de l'assemblée. Sans doute il faut avoir le suffrage des blancs comme des gens de couleur ; mais il faut mettre une égalité complète entre eux : abandonner ces derniers aux autres, seroit vouloir allumer dans les colonies une guerre implacable entre eux, et les perdre à jamais.' *Patriote François* (1 Mar. 1790), p.4.

[39] 'Un seul mot suffit en faveur des Colons & contre la méchanceté des amis des Noirs. Depuis que nos Colonies existent, nous voyons pour la première fois nos Negres se soulever, s'armer contre nous, & aller au même instant & d'un pas égal, à la révolte & à la destruction des Blancs dans toutes Colonies à la fois. […] Mais il est, Messieurs, une vérité sur laquelle je ne puis trop appuyer ; c'est que les Colons sont prêts à prouver par leur correspondance, combien est sincère leur aversion pour tout ce qui pourroit les conduire à se séparer de la Métropole.' *Gazette de Paris* (2 Mar. 1790), p.1.

dangerous ideals and slander. Fearful foreshadowing was central to the narrative that the *Club Massiac* wanted to portray in the press.

Emotional appeals played an important role in the rhetoric of *La Gazette de Paris* and *Le Patriote François.* Both newspapers used the threat of a looming slave revolt in the colonies as a frequent topic. The large slave insurrection in 1791 justified the earlier fears of the *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs,* but before the first insurrection occurred in 1791, references to a possible slave revolt in the press had a rhetorical function. The *Club Massiac* was most explicit about this potential insurrection and it blamed the *Amis des Noirs* for secretly plotting such a rebellion. [40] *La Gazette* often wrote alarmingly about the colonial question. Fear appeared to be a successful emotion to influence the public and the National Assembly. During the turbulent first months and years of the Revolution, anxiety and uncertainty had a huge impact on the mentality and decisions of the representatives. Events and experiences shaped the opinions of representatives on many topics. The colonial question was such a complex topic in which representatives were careful to take major steps in reforms.[41] The already anxious representatives of the National Assembly were thus more susceptible to the fearful predictions illustrated in *La Gazette.* On the side of the *Amis des Noirs*, *Le Patriote François* was also aware of a possible slave revolt. However, it explained this threat in a different way than *La Gazette*. The presence of half a million enslaved people in Saint-Domingue was one of the main reasons why the *Amis des Noirs* pleaded for an alliance between the free people in the colony, both white and coloured. It referred to the free people of colour as an important but disenfranchised group with a shared interest in the colonies. An alliance between all the free people on the colony would make a slave revolt less likely. However, according to *Le Patriote,*

[40] *Gazette de Paris* (21 Feb. 1790), pp.1-2.
[41] T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*. *The deputies of the French National Assembly and the emergence of a revolutionary culture, 1789-1790* (Princeton 1996), pp.302-12. Ibidem, 'Interpreting the Terror', *French Historical Studies* (24:4) (2001), pp.569-577.

white colonists and the indecisiveness of the National Assembly were to blame if such an insurrection occurred; because the colonists did not work together with the free people of colour, they sealed their own fate.

The pragmatic shift of the *Amis des Noirs* concerning slavery is significant. Before the debates of March 1790, *Le Patriote François* reported almost daily on the issue of slavery. It pleaded for more humanity and pity for 'the unfortunate blacks'.[42] It even invited other anti-slavery advocates from outside France to publish in their paper. The British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) was one of them. In February 1790, *Le Patriote* published several attacks of Clarkson against the slave trade. These editorials are emblematic of eighteenth-century abolitionism in the sense that they argued for the enlightening of the enslaved population to free them from their chains. The *Amis des Noirs* condemned slavery and slave trade to be both morally deprived and bad for commerce. When the issue of citizenship for free people of colour became the key question of the colonial debate, the image of the enslaved population changed. Both the free people of colour and the black enslaved population were described with paternalistic compassion and empathy, but the enslaved population was also regarded as a potential threat to the colonial system. Citizenship for free people of colour became the most important issue for the *Amis des Noirs* and therefore its idealistic approach to slavery and the slave trade disappeared in the background of the colonial debate. The uncertainty and the unease of the National Assembly regarding the issue of slavery was another reason for this shift. The representatives of the National Assembly did not know much about the colonies and the reality overseas. They were successfully scared off by the colonial lobby that warned of slave revolts and economic crisis because of potential reforms in the slave trade.[43] For this reason, reforms on other levels had the potential to be more successful for the *Amis des Noirs*.

[42] *Patriote François*, (10 Feb. 1790), p.3.
[43] J. Tarrade, 'Les colonies et les principes de 1789. Les assemblées révolutionnaires face au problème de l'esclavage' in : ibidem. (Ed.), *La Révolution française et les colonies* (Paris, 1989), pp.9-34, there pp.18-20.

Emotional appeals to the public were often combined with personal attacks on opponents. These attacks occurred more frequently shortly before and after the promulgation of the 8 March decree. *La Gazette de Paris* framed the *Amis des Noirs* as hypocritical philanthropists, evil sophists and as radical philosophers with the intention of destroying the colonies to achieve their ideals. It was thanks to 'enlightened & wise men who had the courage to fight the systematic, eloquent, but ill-intentioned Sophists who had sworn the destruction of the Colonies,' that the 8 March decree passed, according to *La Gazette*.[44] In turn, *Le Patriote François* heavily criticised the Colonial Committee and in particular its president Antoine Barnave. *Le Patriote* questioned Barnave's integrity on the matter and suggested multiple times that he was sold to other interests. Brissot personally blamed Barnave for upholding the framework of the *Amis des Noirs* as troublemakers:

> Has M. Barnave ignored all the calumnies spread against the *Amis des Noirs*? Was he unaware that they were accused of having stirred up the blacks by their writing? Did he have these writings in mind when he wrote this article? If he didn't have it in view, why didn't he shield the black friends from interpretation? How did he leave them under the knife of slander, which can now cut the throats of the most respectable supporters of freedom and humanity?[45]

Personal attacks went back and forth and there was a clear interaction between the two groups accusing each other of calumny and slander. They responded to the accusations of the other, but often with new allegations. However, this was only the beginning. These personal attacks only grew stronger and more intense with the unfolding of the Revolution. They became a part of revolutionary discourse and of conspiracy theories, eventually leading to accusations of treason and execution by guillotine.

[44] 'Les hommes éclairés & sages qui ont eu le courage de combattre des Sophistes systématiques, éloquents, mais mal intentionnés, qui avoient juré la perte des Colonies.' *Gazette de Paris* (18 Mar. 1790), p.2.
[45] 'M. Barnave a-t-il ignoré toutes les calomnies répandues contre les amis des noirs? A-t-il ignoré qu'on les accusoit d'avoir soulevé les noirs par leurs écrit ? Les avoit-il en vue ces écrits, lorsqu'il a fait cet article ? S'il ne l'a pas eu en vue, pourquoi n'a-t-il pas mis les amis des noirs à couvert de l'interprétation ? Comment les a-t-il laissés sous le couteau de la calomnie, qui peut maintenant égorger les plus respectables partisans de la liberté et de l'humanité.' *Patriote François* (10 Mar. 1790), p.3.

The debate of March 1790 was characterized by interesting contradictions. On the one hand, there were the economic motives for the preservation of the colonies. Both colonists and revolutionaries considered such preservation essential for national interests. On the other hand, there was the different language used by revolutionaries and colonists. While sharing the same intention to keep the colonies as part of the French empire, they differed on how this relation looked like. The *Amis des Noirs* envisioned an empire in which the colony and the metropole shared the same constitution, while the *Club Massiac* argued for more colonial autonomy within the empire. The debate shared many similarities with later struggles between unitarists and federalists.[46] Both sides of the debate used these rhetorical means to convince their public of their desired relation between colony and metropole. The fundamental different thought on the future relations between colony and metropole also determined the position of the *Amis des Noirs* and the *Club Massiac* on the issue of citizenship for free people of colour. While the *Amis des Noirs* thought of free people of colour as valuable partners in preserving the colonies, they were also considered to be rightful citizens according to the French constitution. On the other hand, the *Club Massiac* did not consider the French constitution valid in the colonies and regarded a possible emancipation of the free people of colour as dangerous for the colonial order.

Ideology and conviction were less important compared to real economic and political challenges in restoring law and order in the French empire. Many representatives knew little about the colonies and were confronted with their incapability on the matter. This made them more susceptible to the fear of potentially losing the colonies by taking rushed decisions on the matter. The majority of the National Assembly was moderate on the colonial issue and was more inclined to listen to the *Club Massiac*, which best instrumentalised fear in convincing the

[46] M. Covo, 'One and Indivisible? Federation, Federalism, and Colonialism in the Early French and Haitian Revolutions', *French Historical Studies* (44:3) (2021), pp.399-427.

representatives. This combination of factors explained why the National Assembly passed the 8 March decree and later revised and reconsidered it multiple times. If the *Club Massiac* kept warning of the disastrous effects of colonial reforms, it successfully held its strong position in French politics. However, the exploitation of fear had dire consequences in a later stage of the Revolution. Developments in France and in Saint-Domingue reshaped the colonial debate and brought it into a dangerous spiral towards violence and terror.

Chapter II. The Turning Point: Radicalisation and Racialisation

Following the decree of March 1790, Vincent Ogé, a wealthy representative of the free coloured colonial population in Paris, returned to Saint-Domingue. In October 1790, he launched a revolt against the white colonial assemblies on the island, trying to force through political equality for the free coloured population. His revolt failed and Ogé and his companions were tortured and executed. This made Ogé a martyr for the cause of the free coloured population and the barbarous way in which he was killed created outrage in the metropole. Ogé's revolt was a turning point in the colonial debate in France. His revolt was a reason for the National Assembly to reassess its earlier decree of March 1790 on citizenship for the free people of colour. In May 1791, the National Assembly passed a decree that gave active citizenship to all free men of colour born of free parents. This turn was caused primarily by colonial events and enforced by the domestic context in revolutionary France. The colonial debate became less of a pragmatic problem and more of an ideological dispute between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. This is illustrated through the racialisation of discourse and the appropriation of colonial events in the narrative constructed by the press.

The discourse in the press racialised more explicitly after news of Ogé's revolt reached Paris in January 1791. Racial adjectives were added in the texts and specific groups were increasingly racially classified. Such a racial classification occurred most explicit in the counterrevolutionary *La Gazette de Paris*. After the debates of May 1791, it wrote:

> However, this project has been described as horrible & scandalous by M. l'Abbé Grégoire, that Apostate Philanthropist, who, at first an Apostle of the Jews, is today an Apostle of the men of colour, that is to say, of individuals born, for the most part, of illegitimate love, and of unions that are immoral enough for anyone other than a Priest to take up the cause. … [Supporters of the *Amis des Noirs* in the National Assembly, e.g. Robespierre] do not feel how ridiculous it is, that Whites should be attacked by individuals of their own colour, should be left to the fury of men of another Caste, and who, until now, content with their fate,

> enjoying their destiny in peace, have only conceived the project of a new insurrection, according to those Philosophers, who treat Kings as they say that the Whites once treated their Negroes.[47]

The explicit racial description of free people of colour was exceptional, because neither *La Gazette* nor *Le Patriote* used to discuss this racial classification so explicitly. In an extensive study on the transatlantic print culture of the Haitian Revolution, Marlene Daut researched the racial categories in which events in the colonies were explained by Europeans and Americans. According to Daut, 'the disdain and disgust for racial "miscegenation"' paved the way for a narrative in which free people of colour were seen as dangerous. Such a narrative was based on biological assumptions on the mixture of "whiteness" and "blackness", which created a kind of "monstrous hybrid" that aimed to avenge itself against its creators. According to Daut, this supposed desire for vengeance by the free people of colour, was the primary explanation of the colonial revolts in early writings about the Haitian Revolution. Daut distinguished another narrative of events, focussing on the desire for liberty and equality as connected to the Enlightenment. According to Daut, the narrative of Enlightenment was subordinate to the narrative of vengeance. However, the narrative of Enlightenment was very present in the discourse of *Le Patriote*. In its arguments in favour of civil rights for free people of colour, *Le Patriote* relied heavily on the Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality.[48]

On the contrary, *La Gazette* seemed to embrace the racist explanation by concentrating on the biological origin of the free people of colour. Its judgement on 'illegitimate love' and 'immoral unions' also signalled a social norm against which this biological categorisation was

[47] 'Cependant ce projet a été qualifié d'horrible & de scandaleux par M. l'Abbé Grégoire, ce Philanthrope Apostat, qui, d'abord Apôtre des Juifs, l'est aujourd'hui des hommes de couleur, c'est-à-dire d'individus nés, la plupart, d'amour illégitimes, & d'unions assez immorales, pour que tout autre qu'un Prêtre se chargeât au moins d'en défendre la cause.' … ' [Supporters of the Amis des Noirs in the National Assembly, e.g. Robespierre] ne sentent pas combien il est ridicule, que les Blancs soient attaqués par des individus de leur couleur, soient livrés aux fureurs d'hommes d'une autre Caste, & qui, jusqu'à présent, contents de leur sort, jouissant en paix de leur destinée, n'ont conçu le projet d'une insurrection nouvelle, que d'après ces Philosophes, qui traitent les Rois, comme on dit que jadis les Blancs traitoient leurs Négres.' *Gazette de Paris* (15 May 1791), p.1.
[48] M. Daut, *Tropics of Haiti. Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789-1865* (Liverpool, 2015), pp.1-6.

measured. Daut criticises the approach to race as a social category and sees it in opposition to the eighteenth-century belief of race as biologically produced.[49] However, these two approaches to race coexisted and strengthened each other. *La Gazette* explicitly combined the biological categorisation to a social class. It was ridiculous, according to the colonists, that white men opposed their own racial class in favour of another. On the side of the *Amis des Noirs*, *Le Patriote François* also wrote in a racial framework when reporting the colonial news and coverage of the debates. Just as *La Gazette* focussed on social reclassification, so did *Le Patriote* reframe the social class of the colonists. The journal began referring to the colonists as *l'aristocratie de couleur* or *l'aristocratie blanche* and *les nobles blancs*. Their regime was referred to as *despotisme des blancs*.[50] *Le Patriote* was more implicit regarding the free people of colour: 'The whites themselves have lit the torch of freedom there: do they want to gouge out the eyes of the mulattoes, to prevent them from being enlightened by it?'[51] *Le Patriote* also framed colonists as *blancs*, who had 'lit the torch of freedom' and prevented people of colour to be 'enlightened' by it. However, unlike *La Gazette*, *Le Patriote* did not biologically define whites or free people of colour. Its racial classification was primarily a social category. Even if it implied a biological category, it was very allusive.

The *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs* were following the same colonial discourse of an unequal relationship between object and subject, between coloniser and colonised, between France and Saint-Domingue.[52] While on the side of the *Club Massiac*, the press adopted a more explicit racial discourse, focussing on a biological definition of classes, the *Amis des Noirs* was more implicit in its references in the press. Nevertheless, both their writings were highly embedded in a 'neo-colonial' thought of civilised and uncivilised societies. This

[49] Daut, *Tropics of Haiti*, p.12.
[50] *Patriote François* (e.g., 1, 13-15 May 1791).
[51]) 'Les blancs y ont eux-mêmes allumé le flambeau de la liberté: veulent-ils donc crever les yeux des mulâtres, pour les empêcher d'en être éclairés?' Ibidem., (5 Jan. 1791), p.18.
[52] M. Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières* (Paris, 1971), p.17.

shared view of the colonies reflected an eighteenth-century perspective, heavily influenced by racist thought. However, the Enlightenment changed the way in which these thoughts were expressed.[53] On the one hand, 'the idea of progress […] suggested that men were perfectible. Therefore, subhumans could be, theoretically at least, perfectible,' as Trouillot argued.[54] On the other hand, the Enlightenment also paved the way for racial theories in explaining societal differences around the world. So, although the *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs* started from the same point of view and used the same racial discourse, their interpretations of Enlightenment and race differed.

The *Amis des Noirs* and the *Club Massiac* opposed each other in their definition of Enlightenment. Where the *Amis des Noirs* thought that all humans had the potential to reason, develop and progress, the *Club Massiac* held on firm to a stratified racial order of the world, where supremacy lay with the European white society. The idea of progress formed the basis of the revolutionary thought of the *Amis des Noirs*. *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* is the best example to show this universal approach to humanity. The *Amis des Noirs* used this universal claim to advocate for civil rights for free people of colour. However, it had no intention of immediately emancipating the enslaved population, because the *Amis des Noirs* did not regard the enslaved population as equal. Although the *Amis des Noirs* believed in abolition in the long term, it felt that the enslaved population had not progressed far enough yet. Such thinking of social progress was also reflected in writings about the free people of colour and even in the discussion about women's rights. A term often used by revolutionaries was 'regeneration', which stood for 'making people anew'. This term expressed the idea that all humans could recreate itself and thus change and progress. In fact, it was the same Grégoire, so despised by the counterrevolutionary *La Gazette*, who was a fervent advocate of

[53] Trouillot, 'An unthinkable history', p.36.
[54] Ibidem.

'regenerating' the people.[55] The *Club Massiac* rejected such universal claims of the *Amis des Noirs* by arguing for a natural hierarchy of races. This too was a product of Enlightenment rationalism, in which the supposed social progress of humans was denied to some based on their 'race'. Especially in a colony with such a rigid racial hierarchy as Saint-Domingue, theories about races thrived among the white upper-class. These theories based themselves on ideas of climatology or polygenesis, stressing the uniqueness of the European, white 'race'.[56]

Racial distinctions were essential to late eighteenth-century society in Saint-Domingue and the French Revolution politicised this further. However, the revolts and unrest in the colonies brought the issue of race to France as well.[57] The coverage in these newspapers show that racial discourse developed in public debate and shaped the way in which the colonies were discussed. This discussion fits in well with the debate on women's rights. Within this debate, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries were divided on the same grounds as they fought each other on the colonial question. While the revolutionaries believed that the women's ability to reason could be developed, the opposition thought it to be 'unnatural' for women to take part in politics and 'against the general order of society.'[58] Whether it concerned the rights of women or people of colour, its denial seemed to be motivated by self-interest. Men who profited from the subservience of women did not want them to emancipate and white colonists who profited from racial inequality did not want to lose their source of wealth and power.

The racial discourse must be placed in a developing revolutionary narrative, which became increasingly ideological. Before 1791, language was primarily an instrument to convince the public of certain arguments. After 1791, the content of the arguments became an

[55] A.G. Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution. The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley, 2005), p.7.
[56] D. Carey & S. Trakulhun, ''Universalism, Diversity, and the Postcolonial Enlightenment' in: D. Carey & L.M., Fest (eds.), *The Postcolonial Enlightenment. Eighteenth- Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory* (Oxford, 2015), pp.241-80, there pp.247-54.
[57] Forrest, *The Death of the French Atlantic*, pp.151-67.
[58] Davidson, 'Feminism and abolitionism', p.106.

accessory to language. The narrative that was used to explain events became increasingly essential for revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. Colonial events took a place in these narratives. The revolt of Ogé was especially important for the narrative of the revolutionaries who appropriated this story as part of the universal struggle for freedom and equality. The impact of Ogé's revolt on revolutionary narratives is well reflected in the debates of May 1791. As soon as the news of Ogé's revolt reached Paris, the *Amis des Noirs* and *Le Patriote François* took up his defence. Freedom, they argued, was a universal value applicable to all men. It was perfectly legitimate to revolt against an authority that denied such liberty, according to *Le Patriote*, which wrote that 'insurrection is the holiest of duties.'[59] Free people of colour had no choice but to fight for their rights, because the whites of Saint-Domingue did not concede to their rightful claims. While the French governor was speaking of a criminal insurrection against authority, *Le Patriote* wrote that 'the crime of which M. Ogé is accused is an act of virtue, is a duty, a holy duty. The victors of the Bastille are heroes, and for the same act of heroism, M. Ogé will be condemned to torture!'[60] For the *Amis des Noirs* and *Le Patriote*, the struggle of Ogé was very familiar to their own struggle for freedom in France. Therefore, they placed these events in their own referential frame and made colonial events more accessible for its readers. The advocates of citizenship for free people of colour used the martyrdom of Ogé in their own narrative. In the reports of the assemblies of 11-15 May, *Le Patriote* quoted the speeches of members of the *Amis des Noirs* and representatives in the Assembly. On 13 May *Le Patriote* reported on a speech made by the Abbé Grégoire, in which Grégoire referred to Ogé as a martyr of liberty and stated that 'if Ogé is guilty, [...] we all are, and if the one who claims for freedom perishes on the scaffold, we must also bring up all the good Frenchmen.'[61] The appropriation

[59] *Patriote François* (5 Jan. 1791), p.2.
[60] 'Le crime reproché à M. Ogé est un acte de vertu, est un devoir, un saint devoir. Les vainqueurs de la Bastille sont des héros, et, pour le même acte d'héroïsme, M. Ogé sera condamné au supplice !' Ibidem., (15 Jan. 1791), p.2.
[61] 'Si Ogé est coupable, […], nous le sommes tous, et si celui qui réclame pour la liberté périt sur l'échafaud, il faut y faire monter aussi tous les bons François.' Ibidem., (13 May 1791), p.1.

of Ogé's martyrdom directly identified the French revolutionary struggle with the struggle of the free people of colour on the colonies.

On behalf of the *Club Massiac, La Gazette de Paris* also used the colonial debate in their narrative of the Revolution. It related the colonial question to their wider reaction against the Revolution and its universal claims. For example, in a report on the assembly of 11 May, *La Gazette* reported: 'we cannot hide from ourselves that the most fatal Declaration of the Rights of Man was for us Pandora's box…' It blamed the National Assembly for its sorrows: 'One World to disturb was not enough for it: the New had to be tortured by it like the Old.'[62] The newspaper ended its report with a call to all good Frenchmen 'to communicate their particular observations to me. Perhaps they will no more save our Colonies than they saved the Altar & the Throne; but at least we must leave to Posterity irrefutable proof of what we do for the defence of the most sacred foundations of the Monarchy.'[63] *La Gazette* related the colonial question directly to their counterrevolutionary narrative, which was centred around traditional authorities, such as the monarchy and the church.[64]

This integration of the colonial events in the counterrevolutionary ideology was influenced by the domestic developments in France. In late 1790 and at the beginning of 1791, French politics was occupied with the question of the oath to the civil constitution by the clergy. This issue dominated the French press and influenced the political debate in France by polarising the political disagreements in society and the National Assembly.[65] *La Gazette de Paris* resisted the obligation for the clergy to swear the oath. The newspaper wrote daily on this

[62] 'On ne peut se dissimuler que la trop funeste déclaration des droits de l'Homme fut pour nous la boîte de Pandore', 'Un Monde à troubler ne lui suffisoit pas: il a fallu que la Nouveau fût torturé par elle comme l'Ancien.' *Gazette de Paris* (13 May 1791), pp.3-4.
[63] 'J'invite tous les Orateurs, & même tous les bons Français, à me communiquer leurs observations particulières. Peut-être ils ne sauveront pas plus nos Colonies, qu'ils n'ont sauvé l'Autel & le Trône ; mais au moins faut- il laisser à la Postérité des preuves irrécusables ce que l'on fait pour défense des bases, les plus sacrées de la Monarchie.' Ibidem, p.4.
[64] L. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkely, 2004) pp.29-31.
[65] T. Tackett, *Religion, revolution, and regional culture in eighteenth-century France. The ecclesiastical oath of 1791* (Princeton 1986), pp. 3-6.

issue, to the point that it never mentioned the revolt of Ogé. However, its attempts to influence public opinion were in vain because the civil constitution was rolled out over France in the first months of 1791. It is then no surprise that the moderate right felt increasingly marginalised by the revolutionary left when colonial issues resurfaced in this period as well. *La Gazette* constructed a fatalistic narrative on the destructive nature of the Revolution, which contributed to a radicalisation of counterrevolutionary ideology.

This radicalisation intensified the personal attacks in the debate. *La Gazette de Paris* started to accuse the *Amis des Noirs* of being agents for the British government, hired to cause upheaval and to destroy the colonies. It called out the *Amis des Noirs* to be guilty of *patricide* or treason against France by undermining the colonial order to British advantage.[66] While defending himself against such 'calumny', Brissot accused representatives of intrigue and factionalism. Barnave was Brissot's main target.[67] It was a logical consequence, according to Brissot, that the present unrest resulted from the 8 March decree, as he had warned Barnave before. However, it must be noted that the debate was not yet completely out of control. Brissot offered the colonial lobby a way to reconcile them with the free people of colour, in the interest of the colonies and of France. He invited the colonial lobby to denounce the injustice done to the free people of colour and to right this wrong:

> I call upon those settlers residing in the Isles, who have a real interest in their prosperity, to regard the mulattoes as their best supporters, as their friends, their brothers. […] What interest can we have in preaching civil war between them? We who would like to see all men happy, the merchant rich, the planter embellishing his plantation, the negro cherishing his master and his fate, and all of them forever attached to our constitution. Heaven is my witness; this is the ardent desire that puts the pen in my hand.[68]

[66] *Gazette de Paris* (17 May 1791), p.3.
[67] *Patriote François* (14 May 1791), p.2.
[68] 'Je conjure ces colons résidants aux Isles, qui ont véritable intérêt à leur prospérité, de regarder les mulâtres comme leurs meilleurs soutiens, comme leurs amis, leurs frères. […] Quel intérêt pouvons-nous avoir à prêcher la guerre civile entre eux ? Nous qui on voudrions voir tous les hommes heureux, le négociant s'enrichir, le planteur embellir sa plantation, le nègre chérir son maître et son sort, et tous s'attacher à jamais à notre constitution. Le Ciel m'en est témoin, voilà le désir ardent qui me met la plume à la main.' Ibidem., (5 Jan. 1791), p.3.

There remained a notion of shared interest in the colonies. Brissot still believed that it was in the interest of France to preserve the colonies. For him, this could only be done by granting free people of colour civil rights. However, the counterrevolutionaries were digging their heels in the sand. For them, this fight over the colonies represented a larger battle against the principles of the Revolution. They had no intention of giving in any more to the revolutionaries.

The appropriation of racial discourse and colonial events in the narratives of the Revolution shows the influence of colonial thought in the French Revolution. The colonial influence in revolutionary discourse and narrative is barely mentioned in the current historiography on the Revolution. Lynn Hunt's classic work on revolutionary culture is the last major work on revolutionary language, but she does not mention the influence of colonial discourse at all. Classic linguistic theories on revolutionary rhetoric see language as an expression of ideology or power. Language can also have a cultural and integrative function, expressing a need for social solidarity. All these elements return in the colonial debate but adds a racial dimension to these theories.[69]

The rise and fall of Ogé's revolt in Saint-Domingue inaugurated a new stage in the French colonial debate. Colonial events pushed the National Assembly to take new measures on the issue of citizenship for the free people of colour. The *Amis des Noirs* was the most fervent advocate of these reforms. In accordance with the overall political development in revolutionary France, the more moderate and counterrevolutionary politicians became a minority. This paved the way for new colonial reforms. Moderates lost their position to more radical revolutionaries, as they had to concede to religious and political reforms in France. The push for colonial changes pressed these counterrevolutionaries even further. This resulted in the radicalisation of the right and the development of a reactionary ideology, expressed in a counterrevolutionary narrative. In this narrative, the colonies became an essential part of counterrevolutionary

[69] Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, pp.21-25.

ideology. On the other side of the debate, the revolutionaries were continuing to construct their revolutionary narrative as well. With the revolt of Ogé, revolutionaries in Paris were given a hero, a martyr to incorporate in their narrative of universal struggle for freedom and against despotism. The appropriation of the colonies in the French narratives of Revolution resulted in an interesting interplay between revolutionary discourse and racial classification. These narratives became increasingly essential to revolutionary politics in France and were partly shaped by colonial events and the domestic context. Ideology became more important for revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries than in the year before. However, back in May 1791 few would have expected to see events escalate so quickly in the following months. The attempted escape of the royal family heavily influenced the shape of revolutionary politics and the growing threat of foreign and civil war fuelled fear and conspiracy theories in the year to follow. When a slave revolt erupted in Saint-Domingue in August 1791, this once again contributed to domestic turmoil. The colonial question was fully absorbed in the narratives and ideologies of the Revolution and used to discredit any opponent.

Chapter III. Radical Revolution: Conspiracies and Ideology

The colonial issue grew to be a full part of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary narrative in 1792. Ideology developed into the most important political factor to which pragmatic considerations were second-string. This radical revolution was expressed through a revolutionary discourse, which became more intertwined with conspiracy theories. Shortly before the Constitutive Assembly resigned, its members passed a decree in September 1791 revoking the decisions of May earlier that year. This meant that all civil rights of free people of colour were withdrawn. The decree of September 1791 was an answer to the civil unrest that broke out in the colonies after the decree of May 1791.[70] It was also the last attempt of a losing colonial lobby to force their agenda through the Assembly. When the new Legislative Assembly was elected in October 1791, the colonial lobby lost most of its influence. The election of 1791 paved the way for a radical revolution because most of its new representatives were fervent revolutionaries. Brissot himself was one of the new members and the leader of the revolutionary Girondins. This electoral gain was a result of several events in France. The attempted escape of the royal family was one of the many events in 1791 that dramatically influenced French politics. The increasing threat of war with Great Britain and the continuing colonial turmoil fuelled this radical discourse of revolution, full of angst for conspiracies and plots. In such a context the Legislative Assembly finally decreed equal and full civil rights for all free men of colour in April 1792.[71]

The fear of conspiracies became more important in the revolutionary narratives after 1791. The French 'obsession' with conspiracy profoundly changed the nature of the

[70] V. Quinney, 'The Problem of Civil Rights for Free Men of Color in the Early French Revolution', *French Historical Studies* (7:4) (1972), pp.544-57, there p.556.
[71] Dubois, *Avengers*, pp.130-31.

revolutionary narratives and became the 'central organizing principle of French revolutionary rhetoric.'[72] Fear of conspiracies had a long tradition in France but, on the eve of the Revolution, such 'paranoid style of writing' was practically absent with the national representatives. However, after the fall of the Bastille, suspicious plots began to appear inconsistently within revolutionary politics. For Timothy Tackett, the real turning point came with the attempted escape of the royal family in June 1791, which he described as 'the single most important event in intensifying convictions of conspiracy.'[73] According to Tackett, primarily the radical left promoted plots and conspiracy theories in French politics. The rise of the radical left in 1792 thus showed an increase in the mentions of such conspiracies in the Legislative Assembly.[74] However, just as Hunt does not mention the influence of the colonial debate on revolutionary rhetoric, so Tackett does not mention the role of colonial events in influencing conspiracy theories in the revolutionary narrative. He rightfully stresses the influence of the flight to Varennes but does not mention that in that same summer a slave revolt set Saint-Domingue on fire. In fact, the colonies were an important factor contributing to the spread of conspiracy theories in French revolutionary politics.

The news of this colonial breakdown heavily influenced the already existing anxiety in French politics. The colonial issue became part of conspiracy theories in 1792 and was thus fully absorbed in the narrative of revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. In previous years, *La Gazette de Paris* and *Le Patriote François* already made the opposition suspicious by implying that it promoted other interests. However, these allegations were often implicit. This changed in 1792, when accusations became more clear-cut and severe. The *Club Massiac* and the *Amis des Noirs* both accused each other of working for the British. The reports of the slave

[72] Hunt, *Politics, Class, and Culture*, pp.38-40.
[73] T. Tackett, 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution. French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789-1792' *The American Historical Review*, (105:3) (2000) pp. 691-713, there p. 706.
[74] Ibidem., pp.704-7.

revolt in 1791 are a good example of these charges. In August 1791, the enslaved population of Saint-Domingue revolted against its white planter class. This sent a shockwave through the French colony, the Caribbean and Europe. The white inhabitants of Saint-Domingue found it difficult to conceive what was happening, for their world was falling apart right where they stood. If that was true for those directly faced with the insurrection, it was even more true for the French living on the other side of the ocean. The first rumours of this revolt reached Paris in November 1791, shortly after the election of the Legislative Assembly. Gruesome, fearful and exaggerated horrors were told of the cruelties committed.[75] The scepticism with which this news was received is illustrative for the distrust and uncertainty of the time. Trouillot argued that Europeans sought other causes for the slave revolt to make sense of what was happening.[76] Indeed, *Le Patriote François* was very careful to report on the issue, just as it was when reporting the revolt of Ogé a year earlier.[77] It headed the first report with: 'On the alleged revolt of the blacks in the colonies,' and continued: 'It seems that the news which has been written so suddenly has for secret cause a speculation made by rich capitalists, merchants and others, among whom there are some who belong to the old national assembly.'[78] *Le Patriote* clearly did not trust the news that had reached the capital and which was so conveniently used by the colonial lobby to discredit the *Amis des Noirs*. *Le Patriote* used recent letters from the colony to prove that there was no such rebellion. However, these letters all dated from before the revolt really broke out and several days later *le Patriote* had to admit that the slave revolt was real.[79] Still, it had some serious doubts about the origins of these news reports and on the causes of a possible rebellion:

[75] Dubois, *Avengers*, pp.110-12.
[76] Trouillot, 'An unthinkable history', p. 42.
[77] *Patriote François* (e.g., 2, 4 Nov. 1791).
[78] 'Sur la prétendue révolte des noirs aux colonies … Il paroît que les nouvelles qui se sont rédigées si subitement ont pour cause secrète une spéculation faite par des capitalistes riches, négocians et autres, parmi lesquels il en est qui appartiennent à l'ancienne, assemblée nationale.' Ibidem., (1 Nov. 1791), p.2.
[79] Ibidem., (e.g., 7, 8 Nov. 1791).

> We observe that sixteen members of the famous assembly of eighty-five are now in London; That the English government has given the order to send two regiments to Jamaica; Finally, that we learned that the colonists no longer wanted to wear French fabrics. These facts, which coincide, do they not naturally recall the project with which France has been threatened for so long, the project of making the islands independent, or of passing them under the yoke of England? Observe finally that the news of this conspiracy arrives at the moment when one counted on a new escape of the king, on the refusal of the constitution, on the entry of the princes, on the troubles caused by the refractory priests…[80]

For *Le Patriote* it was clear that the white colonists themselves had purposefully caused a slave revolt on the colonies. Their mentioning of the assembly of eighty-five is a reference to the so-called *Léopardins* who came to Paris in 1791 to plea for a de facto independence of Saint-Domingue.[81] By tying different rumours together, *Le Patriote* reconstructed a possible plot of the colonists to get the support of Great Britain to restore white supremacy to the colony. But above that, *Le Patriote* connected these rumours with a 'grand conspiracy' against the Revolution and its values. *Le Patriote* related colonial trouble to the threat of foreign war, which it placed on the same level of a potential second escape of the king. Such a comparison reveals the importance of the colonial issue for revolutionary ideology and the impact of colonial news on the fears and anxiety of the revolutionaries. Compared to the flight of the king in June 1791, the slave revolt of August 1791 was something difficult to imagine for people living at the other side of the world. It was more difficult to comprehend a slave revolt in the colonies than to understand a king on the run.

As an outlet for the *Club Massiac, La Gazette de Paris* was also keen to use the new rumours of revolt to frame the *Amis des Noirs* as traitors again:

> Yet this is the obligation we owe to their so-called friends who preached to them *the holiest of duties*, less out of interest for them, as out of a desire to arm a new horde of assassins and rebels against the faithful Subjects of the Kings & against the Kings themselves. This air of death *ça ira*, which an atrocious man said

[80] 'On observe que seize membres de la fameuse assemblée des quatre-vingt-cinq sont maintenant à Londres; Que le gouvernement anglois a donné l'ordre d'expédier deux régimens pour la Jamaïque; Enfin, qu'on a appris que les colons ne vouloient plus porter des étoffes francoises. Ces faits, qui coïncident, ne rappellent-ils pas naturellement le projet dont la France est depuis si longtemps menacée, le projet de rendre les îles indépendantes, ou de les faire passer sous le joug de l'Angleterre [?] Observez enfin que la nouvelle de cette conspiration arrive au moment où l'on comptoit sur une nouvelle évasion du roi, sur le refus de la constitution, sur l'entrée des princes, sur les troubles occasionnés par les prêtres réfractaires…' *Patriote François* (8 Nov. 1791), p.3.

[81] J. Popkin, 'The French Revolution's Royal Governor: General Blanchelande and Saint Domingue, 1790–92', *The William and Mary Quarterly* (71:2) (2014), pp. 203-28, there p. 207.

should go around the world, has even passed to the French Colonies, and the Blacks mingle in their refrains the names of *Condorcet & Brissot...*'[82]

This narrative of events completed the process of integrating the colonial issue in the radical discourse of the Revolution. First, *La Gazette* identified itself with the 'faithful subjects of the kings' and distanced itself from the 'horde of assassins and rebels'. This opposition mirrored the conflict between reactionaries and revolutionaries. Second, the journal combined the revolutionary song *Ça ira* with the insurrection of the enslaved black population, linking it directly to the popular revolutionary movements in France. Finally, the paper explicitly named Brissot and Condorcet as the instigators, the 'so-called friends [of the blacks]' who preached and plotted this revolt from the beginning. A week later, *La Gazette* published a colonial address to the king:

Our properties are ravaged; some of our brothers have had their throats cut; the others are reduced to defending their lives against men to whom seduction has put swords in their hands, and whom the intoxication of blood has made furious [...] In vain we multiply our efforts to escape the pitfalls: a Society that foreigners and perverse men have created for our ruin and for the humiliation of France…[83]

The author accused the members of the *Amis des Noirs* of being foreign agents, determined on destroying the French empire. The letter continued stressing the importance of the colonies for France and relating the fate of the colonies to the future of the monarchy. They author blamed the *Amis des Noirs* as the cause of all trouble, while it praised the *Club Massiac* for its defence of colonial and French interest.[84] The close links between colonial events and the metropolitan experience of Revolution, proves once more how much the colonies meant for the

[82] 'Voilà pourtant quelles obligations nous avons à leurs prétendus amis qui leur ont prêché *le plus saint des devoirs*, moins par intérêt pour eux, que par le désir d'armer contre les Sujets fidèles des Rois & contre les Rois eux-mêmes, une nouvelle horde d'assassins & de rebêles. Cet air de mort *ça ira*, qu'un homme atroce a dit devoir faire le tour du Monde, a passé jusques dans les Colonies Françaises, & les Noirs mêlent à leurs refrains les noms de *Condorcet & de Brissot...*' *Gazette de Paris* (2 Nov. 1791), p.1, original italics.
[83] 'Nos propriétés sont ravagées; une partie de nos frères sont égorgés; les autres sont réduits a défendre leurs jours contre des hommes auxquels la séduction a mis le fer à la main, & que l'ivresse du sang a rendu furieux [...] En vain nous multiplions de nos efforts pour échapper aux embuches: une Société que des étrangers & des hommes pervers ont créée pour notre ruine & pour l'humiliation de la France…' Ibidem., (8 Nov. 1791), p.1.
[84] Ibidem, p.4.

counterrevolutionaries. They explicitly tied the fate of the colonies to the future of France and the monarchy, and thus to their own.

Both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries integrated the colonial issue in their greater narratives of the Revolution, which became increasingly intertwined with conspiracy theories. It was impossible for the people in Paris to understand that the enslaved population revolted on its own initiative. The possibility of a well-organised and coordinated rebellion by the enslaved population did not fit in their world view, which was highly influenced by racial stereotypes. Therefore, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries sought other ways to explain the course of events. Their narratives of the insurrection denied agency to the enslaved population and reflected metropolitan politics more than it did in reality.[85] Both newspapers made specific use of accusing the opposition of treason and framing them as foreign agents. *La Gazette* blamed the *Amis des Noirs* for inspiring and stimulating the enslaved population to revolt in the colonies. It allegedly did this to bring about the downfall of the colonial empire and France itself. Such a thing could of course only benefit France's biggest enemy, Great Britain. However, *Le Patriote* used the same framework against the colonial lobby, which it accused of working with the British to secede Saint-Domingue from France. These imagined threats from outside fit with the picture of Tackett's description of the French 'paranoid mind' in politics after 1791 and towards the start of the revolutionary wars in 1792. However, these examples also show the importance of the colonial issue in the French revolutionary narrative and in the increasing paranoid mind of the revolutionaries.

Through integrating the colonial issue in the revolutionary narrative, the colonies became part of the ideologies of revolutionaries and reactionaries. The debates of March 1792 illustrate this integration as well. In a response to the colonial unrest, the new Legislative

[85] Dubois, *Avengers*, pp.110-12.

Assembly discussed the appropriate measures to take. Brissot argued that the cause of all present problems originated in the denial of civil rights to free people of colour. Therefore, it was essential to finally grant these rights to them and restore colonial order in this way: 'it is impossible to save the colonies without being completely fair to the citizens of colour, because these citizens have wisely and patriotically conducted themselves.'[86] In a report on the assembly of 23 March, *Le Patriote* wrote about the defence of Élie Guadet (1755-1794), member of the *Amis des Noirs* and of the Girondin faction:

> He has avenged the memory of the unfortunate Ogé, outraged by his executioners and their apologists. He was deeply moved when he replied to those who wanted to entrust the fate of the mulattoes to the intentions of the whites, listing all the excesses, all the perjuries, all the crimes of the latter.[87]

It was clear that the Revolution could not proceed any further without purging the colonies of counterrevolutionary sentiments:

> A free people cannot have a double standard; it cannot destroy the nobility for its own sake and allow it to survive in the colonies. The sword is drawn; blood is shed because of this prejudice; it must therefore be abolished; we must resolve to see blood flow for a long time.[88]

Despite the violent use of revolutionary language, there was still had a pragmatic approach to solve to the colonial question. Brissot still believed in the same principle as two years before, namely that the key to a peaceful colony was equal citizenship for all free people, regardless of their colour. However, these practical considerations were lost in the radical discourse of the Revolution, calling out the nobility, threatening with bloodshed and revenging the racial injustice in Saint-Domingue.

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[86] 'C'est impossible de sauver les colonies sans être complètement justes envers les citoyens de couleur, c'est que ces citoyens se sont sagement et patriotiquement conduits...' *Patriote François* (14 Mar. 1792), p.4.
[87] 'Il a vengé la mémoire du malheureux Ogé, outragé par ses bourreaux et leurs apologistes. Il a vivement ému en répondant à ceux qui veulent confier le sort des mulâtres aux intentions des blancs, en énumérant tous les excès, tous les parjures, tous les crimes de ces derniers.' Ibidem., (24 Mar. 1792), pp.1-2.
[88] 'Un peuple libre ne peut avoir deux poids et deux mesures; il ne peut détruire la noblesse pour son compte et la laisser subsister pour les colonies. Le glaive est tiré ; le sang se verse à cause de ce préjugé ; il faut donc l'abolir, on se résoudre à voir couler le sang encore pendant longtemps.' Ibidem.

The debates of March 1792 also reveal one more time how the colonial lobby tried to halt reforms. *La Gazette* still believed that the *Amis des Noirs* themselves were responsible for arming 'this Caste, to whom the virtues of simple Nature gave a need to love their masters.'[89] However, after these reports on the slave revolt, *La Gazette* stopped writing frequently on the colonial issue. The dissolution of the colonial lobby is a reason for this silence. After the slave revolt of 1791, the *Club Massiac* had lost its central role in the colonial debate. White refugees from Saint-Domingue organised themselves in different societies, opposing the *Club Massiac*. This broke the fragile alliance between planters, colonists and merchants and fractured the colonial lobby.[90] The voice of the colonists was severely weakened after the collapse of the *Club Massiac*. It was not until the end of March that *La Gazette* reported on the colonial question. Despite the collapse of the colonial lobby, the few reports in *La Gazette* show the full appropriation of the colonial issue in the counterrevolutionary narrative. *La Gazette* described the colonies as a place that was free from the ideas of the revolutionaries, a haven for the outcasts of the new regime:

> The perfidious, who have caused us to lose this nurturing part of the wealth of France, know well that the new Decrees & a thousand other similar ones will not give us back this second mine, & of which they have annihilated every vein (...) drowned in the torrents of European blood. But still occupied with their Republican system & their plan to destroy all Monarchy, the Monsters did not want there to exist, even in another World, an asylum against their future […] The traitors, enemies of the Whites, seemed freaked out by this idea & feared to see it realized; our Colonies have been stricken with the impure breath of their agents…[91]

[89]'... comme si ces hommes, infiniment plus heureux dans leur Patrie adoptive, que dans la Contrée qui les a vu naitre, eussent formé une conjuration contre le Gouvernement & contre les Européens, si les Novateurs criminels, qui veulent être quelque chose, malgré leur nullité réelle, n'avoient pas eux-mêmes armé de poignards cette Caste, à qui les vertus de la simple Nature fesoient un besoin d'aimer leurs maîtres, un plaisir de reconnoitre, combien, depuis vingt ans surtout, leur sort étoit encore amélioré.' *Gazette de Paris* (8 Nov. 1791), p.3.

[90] L. Leclerc, 'La politique et l'influence du club de l'Hôtel Massiac', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (1937), pp.342-63, there pp. 358-9.

[91] 'Les perfides, qui nous ont fait perdre cette partie nourricière des richesses de la France, savent bien que les nouveaux Décrets & mille autres semblables ne nous rendront pas cette mine si seconde, & dont ils ont anéanti chaque filon (...) noyaut dans les torrens du sang Européen. Mais toujours occupés de leur système Républicain & de leur plan de destructeur de toute Monarchie, les Monstres n'ont pas voulu, qu'il pût exister, même dans un autre Monde, un asyle contre leur futeur [...] Les traitrés, ennemis des Blancs, ont paru frénoir à cette idée & craindre de la voir réalisée ; nos Colonies ont été sonnaillées du souffle impur de leurs agens...' *Gazette de Paris* (31 Mar. 1792), p.1.

In both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary narratives, the colonies were an important point of reference. In fact, they shared the same image of the colonies as a place of conflict between revolution and counterrevolution. It was essential for metropolitan revolutionaries to enforce the French constitution and the ideas of freedom and equality on the colonies, for otherwise the Revolution in France would not be complete. For the counterrevolutionaries, the colonies were the last place where the wealth and glory of the *ancien régime* was still preserved. Their fight over the colonies was essential for their survival. The narratives of the French Revolution were also important to the construction of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary political identities because they explicitly identified themselves to the fate of the colonies. Identity is an ambiguous and controversial term in modern scholarship but can be used in reference to the development of the political identities in the French Revolution.[92] In a time when old certainties disappeared and when a new reality was reshaped, people sought different ways to understand themselves and to explain the world. This recreation of self-understanding in a revolutionary world was influenced by external factors and was shaped by new sorts of discourse and language. The impressive colonial events of this time certainly left their mark on contemporaries. The colonies became a battleground of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideals in France. Questions about citizenship and colonial reforms must be placed in this broader context of ideological struggle. Pragmatic considerations were now subordinate to revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideology, expressed in a language that had fully appropriated the colonial issue.

[92] R. Brubaker & F. Cooper, 'Beyond Identity', *Theory and Society* (29:1) (2000), pp.1-47.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued for the importance of the colonies in narratives of the French Revolution. The colonial question became an essential part of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideologies throughout the years 1790-92. The colonies were politicised over the issue of citizenship for the free people of colour. This issue became the centre of a debate between the colonial lobby of the *Club Massiac* and the revolutionaries of the *Amis des Noirs*. Both groups used the press to push their own narratives of events. Between 1790 and 1792, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries appropriated the colonial issue in their developing ideologies. Questions of colonial reform changed from pragmatic considerations in 1790 to an ideological struggle between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries in 1792. This integration of the colonial question in the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary narratives was stimulated by domestic developments and the close connections between metropole and colony.

The revolt of Vincent Ogé in October 1790 was a turning point in the French colonial debate. It was the reason why the National Assembly granted active citizenship to many free people of colour in May 1791. French revolutionaries saw their own struggle for freedom mirrored in the fight of free people of colour. Counterrevolutionaries felt increasingly under attack by revolutionary forces. That is why the colonies became one of the battlegrounds on which revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries fought their developing ideological conflict. The interaction between metropole and colony influenced the discourse of the debate. The revolutionary discourse radicalised and racialised in 1791. This racialisation of colonial events in the French revolutionary narrative influenced later historiographies of the Haitian Revolution and views on French colonial history. The language that revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries used show the development of their ideology. In 1790, the debate in the press was dominated by discussions over France's interest. Both the *Club Massiac* and the *Amis*

des Noirs wanted to preserve the colonies. Their economic importance was too great for France. However, the two groups differed in their opinion about whether to grant active citizenship to free people of colour was essential for this preservation. After Ogé's revolt, the colonial events were increasingly related to the metropolitan experiences of Revolution, thus making the discourse more ideological.

By 1792, the colonial issue was completely absorbed in revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideologies. Both sides identified themselves with the colonies. For revolutionaries, their Revolution was not complete without destroying the 'white aristocracy' in the colonies. For counterrevolutionaries, the colonies were an ideal refuge for the *ancien régime*, free from radicalism. The radicalisation of the French Revolution influenced the colonial debate, but colonial events also influenced the revolutionary experiences in France. The flight of the royal family in June 1791 had a huge impact on the course of the Revolution in France. Fear of foreign war, conspiracies and betrayal grew within French politics. However, until now historians ignored the influence of colonial events on the developing discourse in revolutionary France. The slave revolt in Saint-Domingue in August 1791 profoundly affected the existing anxieties and concerns in France. This event was hard to understand for people who thought that the enslaved population was incapable of rebelling on their own initiative. Revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries sought alternative explanations by blaming each other of treason and conspiring against France. The agency of the enslaved population was completely ignored in the metropolitan view of events that profoundly shaped our historiography in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

By studying the way in which colonial events and topics were discussed in the press, this thesis has argued for the deep connection between colonial and metropolitan events in 1790-92. The discourse in the press showed how much the colonies affected the development of revolutionary ideologies and narratives. At the same time, this study has argued that colonial

events were integrated into pre-existing discourses, for example in the debate about civil rights in France. Colonial issues were absorbed into the revolutionary narrative to explain events on the other side of the ocean, but also to help construct revolutionary and counterrevolutionary ideologies. The relationship between metropole and colony was one of complex and reciprocal communication, but it shaped both the French and the Haitian Revolutions. By ignoring this close connection between colonialism and revolutionary ideology, historians take the risk of appropriating the metropolitan narrative of events, without taking notice of its complex origins or critically assessing the colonial dimension of revolutionary discourse. With the start of the revolutionary wars, France was ultimately thrown into the reign of Terror between 1793 and 1794. This thesis has studied the prelude of the Terror and has concluded that the years 1790-92 were crucial in understanding these later events, not only in a domestic context, but also in relation to the colonial dimension. A better sense of revolutionary language in the context of its colonial relations, is essential for a more inclusive, accurate and honest representation of historical reality and will ultimately lead to a better understanding of the present. Future research can focus on the broader appropriation of the colonial dimension in the French Revolution. Attention to its influence beyond Paris and among the lower classes of society can reveal more about the importance of the colonies to the experience of the Revolution.

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