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**A dreadful routine: African resistance during the captaincies of Jan Menkenveld, David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder 1754 - 1767**

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# A DREADFUL ROUTINE

African resistance during the captaincies of Jan Menkenveld,  
David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder  
1754 - 1767

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## Introduction

The transatlantic slave trade is the most prominent form of forced migration in human history, altering the lives of more than twelve million Africans during the ages of sail and growing intercontinental trade. The Atlantic crossing or ‘middle passage’ is the part of the trade in which African men, women and children were shipped from the African shores to the colonised regions of the Americas. The middle passage, as opposed to the period of coastal trade, is affiliated with the largest loss of life, as the ship relied on favourable winds and a sufficient food and water supply.<sup>1</sup> Being turned into nothing more than commodities, stuffed into cramped spaces within the ships, shackled, and undoubtedly terrified, some Africans found the courage within themselves or in each other to resist their enslavement. On some occasions, they would seize the available opportunities onboard to rise to their captors so that they might return home.

Since the abolition of slavery, countless historians have proceeded to unravel the history of the slave trade. In the twentieth century, the occurrences on the slave ship and the middle passage were neglected themes within the historiography of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>2</sup> Then, historians focussed on quantitative research, whilst the overarching theme of slavery concentrated on the plantations of the Americas. However, quantitative data from scholars from various nations throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties of the twentieth century were used to create datasets in which thousands of slave voyages were registered. In the nineties, these efforts were combined and led to the creation of the Transatlantic Slave Voyages Database (TSTD). With the database, scholars could presume the significance of resistance aboard slave vessels, although their presumptions often contradicted.

For example, historian David Richardson, co-founder of the TSTD, made an educated guess that slave insurrections occurred on approximately 10% of all slave voyages.<sup>3</sup> Calculated with the newly available data, this would amount to approximately 3600 voyages that experienced insurrection. In his book *If We Must Die*, Eric Robert Taylor unveiled almost five hundred cases of shipboard rebellion on slave ships from various flags in the eighteenth century. However, he expects the actual number to be significantly higher. Assuming a shipboard rebellion took place every month during the eighteenth century, about 1200 insurrections must have occurred.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Taylor considers numerous reasons and possibilities for African resistance, giving numerous historical examples from nations concerned with the transatlantic slave trade.

However, the works of Richardson and Taylor primarily focus on vessels sailing under the British flag. Historian Johannes Postma significantly impacted the historiography of the Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> Postma, Johannes, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge 1990) 248 – 249.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London 2008) 10.

<sup>3</sup> David Richardson, ‘Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade’. *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, nr. 1 (2001) 69-92, 72.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Robert Taylor, *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge 2006) 3.

Atlantic slave trade and contributed to the TSTD. As one of several elements in his book *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815*, he analysed fifty-eight triangular voyages of the Middelburgse Commerce Company (MCC) and discovered eleven dealt with slave uprisings, approximately one in every five voyages. When calculated over the Dutch slave trade, there must have been as many as 300 revolts on Dutch ships alone.<sup>5</sup>

Since the end of the twentieth century, qualitative research has steadily taken over quantitative research. Instead of focussing on the sheer size of the slave trade, historians started looking into the complex social and cultural dynamics inherent to slavery and the slave trade. Stephanie E. Smallwood and Marcus Rediker were among the first scholars to create a new discipline within the theme of the transatlantic slave trade, which Sowande' M. Mustakeem later referred to as 'Middle Passage Studies'. In her study, she described the middle passage as a horrific voyage that created a unique social and cultural status in the Americas. In the screaming hulls of the ships, humans were gradually formed into commodities.<sup>6</sup> She analyses the 'more hidden, internal transcripts' of the slave ship.<sup>7</sup> These transcripts consist of correspondence, voyage journals and other texts produced by the slave traders. By carefully analysing and interplaying all these remaining stories, she means to 'excavate something of the slaves' experience of the traffic in human beings and of life aboard the slave ship'.<sup>8</sup> In line with Smallwood, Marcus Rediker focuses on the slave ship as a mechanism of forced migration and the social interaction between its principal actors: captains, crews, the enslaved, African merchants and rulers and abolitionists. He follows a similar approach as Smallwood, often taking a vantage point from the decks of the slave ships.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, Mustakeem further explored the middle passage from the point of capture until the new world societies, during which African captives were manufactured into commodities. He substantiates how economic greed led to centuries of tragedies by focusing on the actors that lived aboard the slave ship and witnessed and partook in its horrors: sailors, captives and surgeons.<sup>10</sup> Their views are extracted from newspapers and numerous testimonies. His methods are similar to those of Smallwood and Rediker, yet Mustakeem acknowledges the risks in this approach. As historians are bound to the primary sources left by the very individuals who participated in its trade, they can only access the bondage suffered by the enslaved by the characteristics the slave traders recorded.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, a careful analysis is due, where reading between the lines and interplaying the different circumstances surrounding the slave ship is vital. Nevertheless, the efforts of these historians have led to a better understanding of the circumstances onboard slave ships. However, their contributions

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<sup>5</sup> Postma, *The Dutch*, 165 - 167.

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Sowande' M. Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Urbana 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 13 - 14.

mainly focus on the Anglo-American world, neglecting the histories of other significant contributors to the transatlantic slave trade.

The Dutch, for one, were significant contributors to the transatlantic slave trade, responsible for transporting around 600.000 Africans to the Americas.<sup>12</sup> The Dutch West India Company (WIC) was responsible for more than half of these voyages, primarily due to their long-time monopoly on the slave trade. When this monopoly was abandoned in 1738, concurrent with the growing demand for African captives in the Americas, the Dutch slave trade experienced a substantial boost. Within the next fifty years, approximately 200.000 Africans were transported to the other side of the Atlantic, of whom 70% were transported by traders based in the Dutch province of Zeeland.<sup>13</sup> The majority of these vessels sailed for the MCC, operating from Middelburg. Due to outstanding care, the complete archive of the MCC remains preserved, making it an excellent corpus for studying the circumstances aboard slave vessels.

Be that as it may, the slave ship, middle passage and African resistance remain an understudied theme within Dutch historiography of the slave trade, although some historians have contributed to its development.<sup>14</sup> Leo Balai wrote an extensive account of the slave ship *Leusden* and the history of the WIC, focussing on numerous components of life onboard, including African resistance. The devastating journey of the *Leusden* ended with the loss of almost seven hundred African lives before the Surinam coast. Ruud Paesie focused on the slave ship *Neptunes*, which exploded due to the consequences of a slave insurrection and is seen as one of the most dramatic rebellions on a Dutch slave ship.<sup>15</sup> A recent article by G.J. de Kok unravelled the voyage and rebellion on the *Middelburgs Welvaren* in 1750, in which 200 Africans lost their lives.<sup>16</sup> The most recent addition to historiography and the TSTD is the 2022 book *De Grootste Slavenhandelaren van Amsterdam: Over Jochem Matthijs en Coenraad Smitt* by Ramona Negrón and Jessica den Oudsten. This book uncovered the history of 't *Gezegend Suikerriet*, an Amsterdam slave vessel that made several triangular voyages.<sup>17</sup> Not only is this book a much-needed addition to understanding life aboard Dutch slave ships, but its extensive research is also a welcome addition to the TSTD. However, African resistance remains a neglected theme. In part, this could be attributed to the insubstantial accounts of shipboard insurrections, as is demonstrated by the TSTD, suggesting that revolt was not so common after all.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Henk den Heijer, *Nederlands Slavernijverleden. Historische Inzichten en het Debat Nu* (Zutphen 2021) 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 67 - 68.

<sup>14</sup> Leo Balai, *Het Slavenschip 'Leusden'. Slavenschepen en de West Indische Compagnie, 1720-1738* (Zutphen 2011) 80 - 81.

<sup>15</sup> Ruud Paesie, *Slavenopstand op de Neptunus. Kroniek van een Wanhoopsdaad* (Zutphen 2016).

<sup>16</sup> G.J. de Kok, 'Gruwelijke gebeurtenissen op het slavenschip *Middelburgs Welvaren*', *Zeeland. Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen* 29 (2020) 92 - 97.

<sup>17</sup> Jessica den Oudsten en Ramona Negrón, *De Grootste Slavenhandelaren van Amsterdam. Over Jochem Matthijs en Coenraad Smitt* (Zutphen 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Balai, *Het Slavenship*, 80 - 83.

In the definition of Taylor, insurrection occurred when at least two captives combined their efforts and took active and aggressive steps to change the balance of power on a slave ship to reclaim their freedom. This definition excludes suicide and escape, which were not aimed at overthrowing the system but pursued individual salvation.<sup>19</sup> However, this thesis includes suicide and escape as a means of insurrection, seeing that opportunities for resistance were scarce and their occurrences can give lots of information about the situation onboard.

When particularly searching the TSTD for occurrences on the slave ship itself: ‘Slave insurrection’, ‘Insurrection planned but thwarted’ and ‘Three or more slaves jumping overboard, missing or escaped’, fifty-three of in total 1,251 entries of ships sailing under the Dutch flag match the criteria, circa 4%.<sup>20</sup> These are by no means large numbers. Judging by a frequently updated and ever-growing database, we must conclude the insignificance of insurrections on Dutch slave ships, although more accounts might surface in the future. Emeritus Professor Henk den Heijer agrees with this line of thought. In his inaugural lecture, he suggested that insurrections hardly ever transpired.<sup>21</sup> Contradictory, however, is that when the previously mentioned criteria are used, a pattern becomes visible, in which various ships of the MCC seem to have dealt with slave resistance on numerous voyages.

For example, the slave ships *Haast U Langzaam* and *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* both account for three recorded cases of insurrection, whereas the *Middelburgs Welvaren* and the *Philadelphia* both account for four. Remarkably, these vessels share a common thread, to be found in the crewmembers. Jan Menkenveld would sail as captain for the MCC on seven transatlantic voyages. During this time, he would sail with David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder, who would serve as high-ranking officers on the *Philadelphia* before becoming captains on their own ships. Interestingly, these captains would experience numerous slave insurrections themselves. Comparing the average percentage of slave insurrections on Dutch slave ships with these frequently stricken ships raises questions. What ties these captains together? Moreover, how can these captains have experienced so much African resistance while others seemed to experience none?

This thesis seeks to answer to what extent the captaincies of Jan Menkenveld, David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder kindled insurrections on their triangular voyages between 1754 and 1767 in hopes of better understanding the origins of African resistance on MCC slave vessels. It does so by following the methodological footsteps of Smallwood, Rediker and Mustakeem, interplaying the extensive handwritten material that these captains and their crew left behind, including ship logs, muster rolls and correspondence to the company. However, it must be acknowledged that the source material remains one-sided. It was written by the men profiting from the

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<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> [Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database \(slavevoyages.org\)](https://slavevoyages.org/) (January 24, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Henk den Heijer, *Het Slavenschip. Oratie Uitgesproken Door Prof. Dr. Henk den Heijer* (Leiden 2011) 10 - 12.

slave trade. The voices of the enslaved remain unheard, but for the voice the captors gave them. The captor's behaviour was predominantly based on economic opportunity, and the captain and officers likely tried to avoid stains on their integrity. However, by carefully comparing and interplaying the available data from these voyages, this thesis hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the circumstances that kindled insurrections aboard MCC slave vessels.

The first chapter investigates the connections between the captains, their crews and bombas by closely examining the MCC's muster rolls and encounters documented in the ship logs. As it turns out, many crewmembers embarked on multiple triangular voyages, climbed the ship's hierarchy and showed mobility, proving the interconnectedness between MCC slave ships. The second chapter focuses on the trading routine of the captains and the circumstances aboard their vessels that led to individual acts of insurrection, which will show the similar circumstances occurring on every voyage. The final chapter focuses on the more significant acts of resistance, their circumstances and probable causes, revealing new details that contributed to insurrections aboard these vessels.

## Chapter I Climbing the ladder of slave ship hierarchy

Between 1750 and 1767, a handful of MCC captains dominated its business. A key figure in this period is captain Jan Menkenveld. As he worked his way through the hierarchy aboard MCC vessels, several sailors accompanied him on his voyages, gaining experience whilst being educated in the slave trade. Several of these sailors eventually became captains of their own, dominating the TSTD statistics on shipboard insurrections. In this chapter, the connections of these captains, their crews and the use of bombas are studied by closely examining the MCC's muster rolls and encounters documented in the ship logs. Further focus will be on the sailors' origins and their opportunity to climb the ladder of ship hierarchy.

### The 'Menkenveld Clan'

When one reads the muster rolls of the *Philadelphia*, the captain's name sounds as Dutch as any other. However, Jan Menkenveld was born in the German harbour city Glückstadt on the Elbe river, growing up close to the Wadden Sea and the North Sea.<sup>22</sup> On April 21, 1747, 'Jan Mink' appeared on the crew list of the MCC frigate *Africase Galeij*, a vessel that would make eleven voyages in the Mediterranean trade, African trade and the transatlantic slave trade. However, when Menkenveld mustered as the second mate, the vessel was hired in service of the Admiralty, presumably to serve in the Austrian War of Succession (1740-1748). Instead of cargo, the ship was filled with soldiers. On the muster roll, the names 'Mink' and 'Menkveld' are used by the captain of the *Africase Galeij*. Menkenveld can be identified as 'Jan Mink' due to the signature he would use for the rest of his life: 'Jan Menkenveld'.<sup>23</sup> He likely climbed up the ladder of ship hierarchy on other merchant or slave vessels before joining the MCC. On completing the voyage, he would renew his contract to serve as first mate on the *Africase Galeij* in 1748.<sup>24</sup>

It was in 1750 that Menkenveld first became familiar with the *Philadelphia*, a ship freshly launched at the MCC shipyard. He would familiarise himself with this frigate from the position of first mate under the rule of captain Cornelis Maarschalk. The vessel was instructed to sail to the coast of Guinee, where it would predominantly trade in gold, ivory, redwood, and enslaved Africans. The enslaved were to be bought with consent from the WIC, whereafter they were sold to either English, Portuguese or French traders near the coast of 'Fida', in the Bight of Benin.<sup>25</sup>

During this voyage of two years, Menkenveld further learned the tricks of the trade, as he had

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<sup>22</sup> Willem van Rooij, Slavenhaler bij de Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC), [Jan Menkenveld - Brabants Erfgoed](http://www.brabantserfgoed.nl), [www.brabantserfgoed.nl](http://www.brabantserfgoed.nl) (December 14, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Zeeuws Archief Middelburg (ZA), Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC), 1720-1789, Toegangsnr. 20, inv.nr. 199, Monsterrol van het schip *Africase Galeij* 1747 - 1748, 4.

<sup>24</sup> ZA, MCC, inv.nr. 202, Monsterrol van het schip *Africase Galeij* 1748 - 1749, 4.

<sup>25</sup> ZA, MCC, inv.nr. 888.1, Instructies, inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende de *Philadelphia* 1750-1755, 25.

to negotiate, update the ship's bookkeeping and comprehend how to sail and navigate in the unfortunate case the captain passed away. Besides, he would acquaint himself with several crewmembers that would soon sail under his captaincy: the second mate David Mulders and the sailor and ship's boy Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder.<sup>26</sup> During this voyage, Menkenveld witnessed the dishonourable discharge of captain Maarschalk, who delivered insufficient reasons why his voyage had taken so long and came with heavy financial losses. Furthermore, the cargo load of his private trade was two and a half times the amount permitted by the MCC. When harboured in Vlissingen, he smuggled an 8 kg gold profit to shore. As a result, Maarschalk had to give back more than three-quarters of his profit to the company and was never hired again.<sup>27</sup> The discharge of his former tutor must have been a revelation for Menkenveld to never act against the company. However, with the departure of Maarschalk, an opportunity arose for the first mate. The open vacancy, together with Menkenveld's rank and experience, resulted in his commission as captain of the *Philadelphia* in November 1752.<sup>28</sup>

Judging by the TSTD and the MCC muster rolls, Menkenveld would sail for the MCC on ten occasions, of which seven were triangular voyages under his captaincy. Johannes Postma showed that it was unique for captains of the second WIC to embark on multiple triangular slaving voyages. Of the 186 slave captains Postma studied, 122 undertook a single voyage. Thirty-seven embarked on a second voyage, sixteen on a third voyage, five captains embarked on a fourth voyage and only four captains on a fifth voyage.<sup>29</sup> This data shows that most WIC captains did not embark on multiple voyages in the slave trade. In contrast, of the forty-six captains that made 113 transatlantic voyages for the MCC, more than half made two or more voyages.<sup>30</sup>

Daniel Pruijmelaar would accompany captain Menkenveld on five of his ten voyages, where he would work himself up to the top of the hierarchy.<sup>31</sup> He made one voyage as a regular sailor, two as third mate and two as first mate before making two voyages as captain. Willem de Molder experienced a similar climb in the hierarchy. He also joined Menkenveld on five voyages, once as a ship's boy, once as *oplooper* or light sailor, once as third mate and twice as second mate, before commanding three ships as captain. David Mulders sailed with Menkenveld on at least two voyages as a Chief Merchant before commanding six slave voyages as the captain himself. He likely undertook even more journeys to learn the sailor's trade before joining Menkenveld as the chief merchant.

These men marked a notable change in the careers of slave ship captaincies compared to the second WIC. Taking up command on multiple occasions demonstrates the dedication of these men to

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<sup>26</sup> ZA, MCC, inv.nr. 894, Monsterrol van het schip *Philadelphia* 1750 - 1752, 6, 13, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Corrie Reinders Folmer-van Prooijen, *Van Goederenhandel naar Slavenhandel. De Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie 1720-1755* (Leiden 2000) 121.

<sup>28</sup> Ruud Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC. Opkomst, Bloei en Ondergang* (Zutphen 2014) 64.

<sup>29</sup> Postma, *The Dutch*, 156 Table 7.3.

<sup>30</sup> Heijer, *Het Slavenschip*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

sail in the transatlantic slave trade. What persuaded them to venture to the African coast to buy, transport and sell African men, women and children on the other side of the Atlantic? Moreover, what led them to do this time and again?

Compared to the slave voyages of the WIC, the officers and captains of the MCC had more profitable contracts. Captains and officers received two bonuses next to their agreed upon monthly wages, *slavengeld* and *recognitiegeld*. *Slavengeld*, or ‘slave money’, was a cash bonus the captain and officers received for every enslaved African they delivered and sold in the colonies across the Atlantic. The captain received the highest fee per sold captive. The officers each got paid smaller portions according to their ranks.<sup>32</sup>

The WIC handled their contracts differently. Leo Balai stated that the captains could earn bonuses besides their monthly income. From 1707 onwards, captains received a bonus for half of the enslaved Africans delivered to the colonies, minus all those who did not survive the terrible voyage.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, Balai did not describe the rewards for officers, if there were any at all. Den Heijer states that the wages of the WIC did not change between 1674 and 1740.<sup>34</sup> Although this might have changed during the following decades, it suggests that the more favourable agreements of the MCC might have contributed to the willingness of officers and captains to renew their contracts, for if the voyages were lucrative, they would all share in the profit.

### **Connection beyond the deck**

The connection between former captains and crewmembers goes beyond the decks of their slave ships. For example, when Willem de Molder’s vessel, the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, experienced trouble in the North Sea in 1764, he anchored in the ‘Dorsche Kill’ near the city of Dordrecht to make necessary repairs on the ship. Whilst there, he was aided by captain Jan Menkenveld and captain Bourleegh in unloading the ship’s cargo to make the vessel lighter. The captains guarded the ship as Willem de Molder and his officers resolved to go to Dordrecht, hiring new crewmembers as some had deserted.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps, Menkenveld’s assistance originated from something else as well. It is suggested in notarial deeds that Jan Menkenveld and Willem de Molder were related, for Menkenveld was married to a woman named ‘Cornelia de Molder’.<sup>36</sup>

When the crew was mustered and the cargo loaded, the MCC ships departed from Rammekens in the Westerschelde. When armed conflict broke out between European maritime powers, vessels sometimes chose to sail in convoy.<sup>37</sup> However, most captains departed on their terms and departed

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<sup>32</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 64 - 65.

<sup>33</sup> Balai, *Het Slavenschip*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> Henk den Heijer, *Goud, Ivoor en Slaven. Scheepvaart en Handel van de Tweede Westindische Compagnie op Afrika, 1674-1740* (Zutphen 1997) 105, 421 bijlage 5.

<sup>35</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, Journaal van het schip *Vrouw Johanna Cores*, 1763 - 1765, 19 - 20.

<sup>36</sup> West-Brabants Archief, Notaris Wilhelmus Lucas Faber, inv.nr 0898, 30 oktober 1773, aktenummer 21.

<sup>37</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 93.

solely. Although a vessel sailed alone, they were aware of the departures of other company vessels and were always interested in the whereabouts of their colleagues. For example, on the fourth journey of the *Philadelphia* in 1756, captain Menkenveld received word of an English Ship on the coast of ‘Setter Croe’ that captain David Mulders was anchored at ‘Rio Junkij’ with forty enslaved people in the ship.<sup>38</sup>

It was common for captains to exchange information whilst anchored on the African coasts. They discussed trade, exchanged cargo or aided captains by lending out a carpenter. For example, on June 3, 1764, Willem de Molder anchored at Cape Lahoe on the Ivory Coast when he saw captain Pruijmelaar already anchored with the ship *Eenigheid*. In the two months that followed, they would discuss negotiations and the prices of enslaved Africans.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, captain Menkenveld visited captain Cluijters on Cape Lahoe during his second voyage on the *Philadelphia* to discuss trade, as he had only bought nineteen captives in two months and seven days.<sup>40</sup>

### **Sailors: the slave ship’s backbone**

Although captains and officers had the most reason to partake in the slave trade, they were not the only crewmembers sailing on multiple occasions. During the eighteenth century, the MCC vessels mustered about 150 people yearly.<sup>41</sup> The largest group of those men only sailed once. Of the slave voyages studied in this thesis, twenty-eight sailors have been identified to have sailed on two or more voyages, six on three or more voyages and two on four or more voyages. Considering there were other MCC vessels at the time, their names might also be discovered on the muster rolls of other vessels not included in this thesis. Of those twenty-eight sailors, fifteen were officers or artisans standing above the regular sailors. Most sailors who extended their contracts at the MCC were men living in Middelburg, Vlissingen, or cities nearby, like Goes. Only a few individuals that mustered on multiple occasions originated from cities such as Emden in Germany or Brugge in Belgium.

When a crew was mustered, the ship’s captain was always intimately involved with recruiting the sailors. According to historian Emma Christopher, only needy or imprudent men would enlist on slave ships in a junior position. Boys ending up in the slave trade often got there because of trickery or other misfortunes.<sup>42</sup> The motives of these MCC sailors remain unknown. However, it seems unlikely that twenty-eight sailors happened to fare in the slave trade because of misfortunes. Several of those young sailors and ship’s boys would at least climb the hierarchy to some extent, learning a trade or becoming an officer, forming the backbone of the MCC slave ships.

For example, Isaac de Grie from Vlissingen joined Menkenveld’s third voyage on the

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<sup>38</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 910, Journaal van het schip *Philadelphia*, 1756 - 1757, 22.

<sup>39</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, 48, 54, 57.

<sup>40</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 900, Kopieboek van verzonden brieven van het schip *Philadelphia*, 1752 - 1754, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 63.

<sup>42</sup> Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (Cambridge 2006) 29.

*Philadelphia* as a light sailor with Willem de Molder in 1754. Almost ten years later, in 1763, that same sailor can be seen on the muster rolls of the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, joining as the second mate under the command of Willem de Molder. De Grie likely joined other MCC vessels in between those years before joining his former companion. Sailor Adriaan de Puyt from Goes sailed under captain Menkenveld on the *Philadelphia* in 1758. Several years later, he re-joined Menkenveld in 1761, this time on the *Eenigheid* as the third mate, next to Daniel Pruijmelaar as the first mate. In 1763 he would serve as the second mate under Daniel Pruijmelaar on the *Eenigheid*, and in 1766 he would serve as the first mate under Willem de Molder, also on the *Eenigheid*. In contrast, David Mulders would have the same officers serving as his first mate, second mate and second surgeon on his first and second voyage on the *Middelburgs Welvaren*.

Several of the ship's boys, the youngest participants on the voyage, would join multiple expeditions under these captains. For example, Herman Laars from Vlissingen would join captain Menkenveld on three voyages as ship's boy and light sailor, whereas Adriaan Cooiwijk from Middelburg would sail three times as light sailor and regular sailor with captains David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder. These examples portray sailors' willingness or necessity to join slave voyages on multiple occasions. Presumably, the captains or directors of the MCC kept in touch with these sailors as an investment for future voyages.

The recruitment of the sailors was always done locally at first. However, when there were no sufficient sailors, the directors hired sailors via their correspondents in Amsterdam or Rotterdam.<sup>43</sup> This happened on the fifth voyage of the *Middelburgs Welvaren* when David Mulders hired almost all sailors from Amsterdam.<sup>44</sup> Willem de Molder had to search for new sailors in Rotterdam after several sailors had deserted when their ship, the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, almost sank in the North Sea.<sup>45</sup>

Not much is known about the background of sailors on Dutch vessels. British contemporaries labelled their sailors as the scum of the nation, escapees from prison and 'white slaves'. Balai guesses that the sailors on Dutch ships would have had a similar social status.<sup>46</sup> Drawing on the short end of the straw in society, the slave ship offered a step up the social ladder. Lowborn and misfitted amongst their fellow citizens, a racial construct gave European sailors a certain status along the African coasts and the New World Colonies. The white complexion of their skin was the only difference between sailors and their captive cargo. According to Christopher, this sudden change in social status kept thousands of sailors in the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 61 - 62.

<sup>44</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 805, Monsterrol van het schip *Middelburgs Welvaren*, 1761 - 1762.

<sup>45</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, 20.

<sup>46</sup> Balai, *Het Slavenschip*, 68.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors*, 228.

## The importance of a ship's crew

However uneducated and lowborn they might be, sailors were tasked with essential duties involving crew and captives. It was essential to hire a capable crew, as there was hardly any opportunity to replace crewmembers during the voyage and death was almost guaranteed to set in along the African coast. Rediker describes the tasks of the slave ship sailor as that of a trained individual who knew how to set the sails, knot and slice the lines and steer the ship. However, the most crucial task of a slave ship sailor was that of a guardsman. With hundreds of captives on board, the enslaved needed supervising and guarding.<sup>48</sup> The watchful eyes of the sailors partially ensured the safety of the crew. Besides guard duty, sailors were also tasked with cleaning the ship. A cleaner ship led to the better health of the enslaved and, therefore, a more profitable voyage once the human cargo was sold in the colonies. Even though the tasks of a sailor were of grave import to a triangular slave voyage, it did not always mean that the best sailors were hired for the tasks. The companies had to make do with the available men, some of whom had little or no experience on the seas.<sup>49</sup>

In extreme cases, sailors and officers could be deemed too much of a troublemaker, liability or generally unfit to perform their duty. If this were the case, the captain and his council could decide to release this man from service, which often meant being dropped on the nearest shore. On the voyages considered in this research, this occurred on multiple occasions. For example, in 1761, captain David Mulders of the *Middelburgs Welvaren* realised the first carpenter was useless. Tasked with the physical health of the ship, the carpenter was a 'specialist in the wooden world'.<sup>50</sup> The first carpenter would transform the ship into a slave vessel as he constructed the beddings for the captives and often built a barricade on deck to protect against rebellious African prisoners. However, Pieter Struij was incompetent in performing these tasks, as he had already ruined several pieces of wood and nails. Although granted a last opportunity, Struij failed to perform and ceased working. The crew now relied on the second carpenter to build the *zonnetent*, a wooden sunroof, on the quarter-deck.<sup>51</sup> Captain Mulders and his officers held a council, deciding Struij would be demoted to the sailor rank, which he refused. For the next two weeks, he would curse, rant, threaten, and distress everyone on the ship.<sup>52</sup> Over the next month, these problems continued. Eventually, Pieter Struij packed his belongings in his chest and brought them to the coast in the ship's boat. The captain was not displeased by this, as he mentioned on April 26, 1761:

'And so we brought him to the shore, as he only brought quarrel on the ship.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 60 - 61.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>51</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 800, Journaal van het schip *Middelburgs Welvaren*, 1761 - 1762, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 14, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 21: '...en wij lieten hem ook ten eersten aan de wals etten alsoo wij tog anders niet dan ruijse door hem in het schip hadden...?'

On the first voyage of the *Haast U Langzaam* in 1764, Jan Menkenveld had trouble finding a suitable cook. The cook had a vital task on a slaving vessel, as he had to make hot food for more than hundreds of people twice a day.<sup>54</sup> In the first two months of sailing to the African coast, the cook dropped the 'vleeschketel' overboard, a large pan in which meat was cooked. Two months later, the cook was discharged and replaced with a sailor, Jan Godloep Strop. However, after hardly completing one month as the cook, Strop was replaced as he did not keep the cooking gear clean. In his place came the sailor Willem Wagenaar.<sup>55</sup>

When Willem de Molder was captain of the *Eenigheid* in 1766, he discharged his boatswain Arij Raaijmakers for unacceptable behaviour and dereliction of duty. Whilst anchored along the coast of Malembo in Angola, Raaijmakers repeatedly neglected his guard duties, sleeping on the job. The captain complained that he had never seen such a thing before. Since there were captives onboard, inattentiveness could have dire consequences. The boatswain neglected other duties, after which the first mate became physical with him. Soon after, the boatswain threatened the captain to leave the *Eenigheid* to join another crew. Captain De Molder did not take this lightly and became physical with the boatswain too. After a council with the officers, Raaijmakers was demoted to the rank of sailor, after which two other sailors were promoted to boatswain since the boatswain's mate had also recently passed away.<sup>56</sup>

Hiring troublemakers and inexperienced crewmembers could be extremely dangerous on a vessel filled with captives. Men could become liabilities. Failure in construction could lead to an easier outbreak of slave resistance, undercooked or insufficient food could accelerate diseases onboard and sleep during guard duties created opportunities for insurrections. As it turns out, the *Philadelphia*, *Middelburgs Welvaren*, *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, *Eenigheid* and *Haast U Langzaam* all had their troublemakers onboard. In an attempt to compensate the liabilities of the crew, other men were often present onboard the slave ship.

### **Bombas on board**

A unique feature of Dutch slave vessels is the use of 'bombas' during the middle passage. Bombas were African overseers hired by Dutch captains to keep an eye out amongst rebelling captives and could act as mediators between the enslaved and their captors, which was not uncommon on Dutch slave vessels.<sup>57</sup> The bombas were not considered part of the crew and are hardly found on the muster rolls. However, they enjoyed a unique status onboard Dutch slave ships, as they did not sleep in the slave quarters and could eat with the crew.<sup>58</sup> The use of bombas must have been more widespread

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<sup>54</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 60.

<sup>55</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 511, Journaal van het schip *Haast U Langzaam*, 1764 - 1766, 10, 19, 22.

<sup>56</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 375.5, Stukken betreffende diverse reizen van de *Eenigheid*, 1759-1767, 88 - 89; ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 398, Journaal van het schip *Eenigheid*, 1766 - 1767, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 77.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

since the ship's journals mention the use of bombas in a way as if it is obvious they are present. It is discovered that several of the captains studied in this thesis made use of bombas on their triangular voyages.

On the fourth voyage of the *Philadelphia* on December 26, 1756, the captain and crew became aware that resistance among the ninety captives was unfolding. Belowdecks, six captives had been conspiring a plan to free themselves from the slave ship. Even in the cramped spaces of the slave quarters, there was some sense of mobility, and like-minded Africans could find each other to begin scheming a plan. The larger the group, the more effective their insurrection could become. Yet, too large a group would heighten the risk of potential snitches among their ranks.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, some Africans who were unsympathetic to their cause also inhabited the slave ship. Upon discovering their plan, the bombas quickly informed the crewmembers that six enslaved men desired to escape the ship, killing the bombas and the white men in the process.<sup>60</sup> The bondsmen managed to free themselves from their shackles but were discovered before they could make any moves. Menkenveld punished them, presumably by chastising them, before putting their hands and feet in double shackles.<sup>61</sup>

During the fifth voyage of the *Middelburgs Welvaren* in 1761, it became apparent that bombas were used. Their presence only becomes apparent when analysing the first mate's journal, often not present in the collections of other vessels. During this voyage, numerous women jumped overboard on the coast of Malembo on August 11. As the women were collected from the water and brought back onto the slave ship, the bombas concerned themselves with the participants that had not managed to jump. They told the crew that more women had participated than the crew had now shackled, yet it was not so easily discovered who those women were.<sup>62</sup>

On January 18, 1765, several captives planned to rebel against the crew of the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* during the middle passage. Although the African captives had already lost twenty-eight of their own during an insurrection on the coast, they mustered their courage to make another attempt to break free. By then, the vessel had started its middle passage and had left behind other vessels that might have come to its aid. Besides, the captives had found a new insurgent. The vessel's bomba was the operator of the group of rebels. The reason for his change of heart remains unclear. Due to sickness, several bondsmen had been unshackled on the surgeon's advice. As the bomba convinced the bondsmen to revolt, the women aboard warned the crew, who then discovered the plans on time. It was revealed that the bondsmen only pretended to be sick, so their shackles might be detached. The crew quickly ended any thoughts and possibilities of rebelling by putting the captives and the bomba in shackles.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the women had had enough of the hopeless bloodshed and saw only possibility

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<sup>59</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 292.

<sup>60</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 910, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> MCC Inv.nr. 801, Journaal gehouden door de eerste stuurman van het ship *Middelburgs Welvaren*, 1761 - 1762, 39.

<sup>63</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 1239, 87.

in perseverance. The faith of the bomba remains unknown, for he was not mentioned again. It is plausible that captain De Molder sold this man 'out of hand' in Surinam, keeping the profit for himself.

Although several captains gladly used bombas during the middle passage, their presence proved no guarantee for a safe passage. Although their service is not always mentioned, it is tangible that these African overseers were present on numerous Dutch slave vessels and aided the crew in their guard duties.<sup>64</sup> The mentioning of bombas in the ship's log only seems to occur on occasions that required their service, like when (plans for) rebellions were uncovered. However, that does not mean they were absent on other vessels. Furthermore, it shows that the MCC captains were very serious regarding the safety of their ship, crew, and cargo.

### **Conclusion**

The captains Menkenveld, Mulders, Pruijmelaar, De Molder and their crew were by no means strangers to each other. These men bonded through years of sailing the Atlantic and trading human cargo. The sailors who climbed up the ship's hierarchy became part of the web of slave ship acquaintances. A close examination of the muster rolls of the MCC between 1747 - 1767 shows the willingness of several sailors to make numerous transatlantic voyages. Most sailors who extended their contracts at the MCC were men living in Middelburg, Vlissingen, or cities nearby, like Goes. Frequently, these men were educated in a craft or would soon learn one. Months of sailing and inhabiting a wooden world meant discipline was often hard to find. Undisciplined and unqualified sailors sometimes caused harsh confrontations between captain and crew and created opportunities for insurrection. In addition to European crewmembers, bombas were hired to improve the guarding of the captives. As became apparent, captains shared knowledge, crewmembers and experience on multiple occasions. Is their connection a presage for insurrections, and are similarities to be found in the circumstances surrounding these slave insurrections?

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<sup>64</sup> Heijer, *Het Slavenschip*, 9 - 10.

## Chapter II Opportunities for insurrection along the African shores and middle passage

Throughout the numerous transatlantic voyages of the ‘Menkenveld Clan’, the MCC’s instructions hardly changed. Sailing along the African coast became a routine for captains and crew, hardly changing between 1754 and 1767, except for the voyages of captain Mulders, whose trade would take place in Angola rather than Guinea. When analysing the many voyages of these captains, it becomes clear that similar circumstances surrounded these vessels in which opportunity for insurrection arose.

Although a full-scale rebellion was not a frequent event on any slave ship, there were other ways in which enslaved Africans attempted to resist. The slave ship was a small floating prison on which opportunities for resistance were scarce compared to the vast hinterlands surrounding plantations in the Americas. Although Taylor recognises that the only means of resistance for the African captives boiled down to either revolt or suicide, he did not include the latter in his research. However, this thesis acknowledges those cases as insurrection when more than three occurred on a single voyage. This margin is chosen, for it marks a boundary after which (alleged) suicide is no longer an incidental occurrence by a single individual.

It needs to be said, however, that it is nearly impossible to understand the intentions of the African captives, even when a crewmember explicitly wrote it down. For example, a woman might have jumped overboard intending to escape rather than drown, although the outcome made it seem like her purpose was the latter. When these people succeeded in their intent to escape or commit suicide, it meant a financial loss for the company, captain and officers alike. Although jumping overboard does not seem to have occurred in large quantities, it was a familiar phenomenon on slave ships. Captive Africans jumped overboard on nine of the ten voyages studied in this thesis. Only the voyage of the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* did not report similar cases.

This chapter discusses the normal circumstances surrounding the MCC vessels by using the third voyage of the *Philadelphia* as an example of an ‘average’ voyage. This voyage is chosen since all four captains partook in its journey under the command of Menkenveld and because of the resemblance this particular voyage shared with those that were yet to come. Furthermore, this chapter strives to unravel the motives, intentions and opportunities of those cases in which African captives jumped overboard, leading to their escape, recapture or death.

### **The routine of trade**

On September 20, 1754, fifteen sailors recruited in Amsterdam finally arrived aboard the *Philadelphia*, raising the crew to thirty-eight. Upon their arrival, captain Menkenveld made the last preparations to ensure departure at the first opportunity.<sup>65</sup> Menkenveld had arrived from his previous voyage only three months earlier, as would often be the case with MCC captains that kept working in

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<sup>65</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, Scheepsjournaal van het schip *Philadelphia*, 1754 - 1755, 3.

the trade. As with his previous voyage, he was accompanied by chief merchant David Mulders, third mate Daniel Pruijmelaar, boatswain's mate Cornelis Barbe, and ship's boy Willem de Molder.<sup>66</sup>

The instructions for this voyage commanded Menkenveld to sail to the 'Upper Coast'. There, he was to trade for African captives from 'Rio de Cherlioens', present-day Sierra-Leone, until Cape Palmas on the south-eastern tip of present-day Liberia, marking the end of the Upper Coast. If Menkenveld felt that there was no more opportunity for trade, he was to sail towards the Grain Coast until 'Cabo Lahoe', now Grand-Lahou, on the Ivory Coast. From there, he was to continue to Cape 'Trespuntes' on the Southern tip of present-day Ghana. After that, he was encouraged to lay anchor at any place where trade might be resumed.<sup>67</sup> Almost all voyages would lay their first anchor at Cape Mount or Cape Mesurado in present-day Liberia. More often than not, the first captives were traded there. The captains whose instructions directed them to Angola would sometimes stop at Cape Mesurado when there was a need to refill the supply of fresh water and firewood like captain Mulders would on the *Middelburgs Welvaren* in 1758.<sup>68</sup>

When the *Philadelphia* neared Guinee, it had profited from solid winds and reached the coast in little over a month. Although the bacon had to be rationed due to spoilage, no further setbacks occurred.<sup>69</sup> As Menkenveld and his crew were nearing the African coast, various sails could be spotted in the distance. The presence of compatriots became apparent when a Snow ship flaunted its colourful 'prinsenvlag'.<sup>70</sup> On December 11, 1754, the *Philadelphia* anchored at Cape Mount. Several canoes paddled towards the ship, after which the African merchants spoke of possible negotiations. One day later, Menkenveld bought his first bondsmen, a man and a boy.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst anchored along the numerous trade locations, the captains sometimes hired skilled free African canoe men to retrieve water, firewood or other supplies. The waves could be treacherous, and even experienced sailors might capsize the boat when rowing towards the shoreline. However, when the sea was calm, small groups of sailors might embark on the sloop to retrieve supplies. Along the area surrounding Cape Mount, known as the Grain Coast, the trade with African merchants often occurred when canoes responded to the blank canon fire of a ship. The loud detonation summoned the African merchants with their supply of human cargo directly to the vessel. Additionally, the captains would send the first or second mate with some crewmembers out on the sloop to trade along the shore. In Angola, it was more common for the crew to settle on the coast entirely, building or hiring a lodge where the enslaved were kept before embarkation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 899, Monsterrol van het schip *Philadelphia* 1752 - 1754, 5, 8, 19; ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 907, Monsterrol van het schip *Philadelphia* 1754 - 1755, 5, 7, 19.

<sup>67</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 888.1, Instructies, inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende het schip *Philadelphia* 1750 - 1765, 166.

<sup>68</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 793, Journaal van het schip *Middelburgs Welvaren*, 1758 - 1760, 15.

<sup>69</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 97.

However, besides captain Mulders, the Menkenveld Clan traded their human cargo on various destinations along the African coasts. In contrast to hiring a single lodge in Angola, captains would be reasonably assured of the cultural differences of their captives as they varied from different parts of the African continent. In addition to pragmatism due to fluctuating supply, the slavers hoped to acquire a melting pot of African cultures and languages. This way, it would be harder for the captives to communicate with one another and stage a rebellion.<sup>73</sup>

Frequently, the captured Africans sold along the coast came from afar. During the eighteenth century, the Ashanti became the central African power along the Gold Coast, and their power stretched far into the hinterlands. Many enslaved Africans in this period originated from the North of present-day Ghana.<sup>74</sup> Mungo Park, a Scottish doctor travelling with a slave caravan in 1797, stated that the enslaved were often sold and resold and came from afar on purpose so that all their hope of returning to their place of birth was lost, making them less eager to escape.<sup>75</sup>

On December 15, the canoe trade had resolved the purchase of fourteen captives for the *Philadelphia* within three days of trade. The following day, the crew was ordered to build the slave galley on the deck.<sup>76</sup> Here, the vessel's cook would prepare the meagre meals of groats and horse beans for hundreds of captives twice a day in the forthcoming months. The building of the slave galley often took a few days and was constructed with stones, chalk and sand brought from the homeport.<sup>77</sup> Almost continuously, whilst close to shore, part of the crew would negotiate for enslaved Africans while some were tasked with resupplying fresh water and firewood. Other sailors were working on the ship, creating space for the new supplies, making repairs, and cleaning the deck.<sup>78</sup> All the while, the slave quarters would get fuller and fuller. Finally, on December 30, the vessel was filled with forty captives.<sup>79</sup>

On the night of January 1, 1755, an incident occurred regarding the boatswain's mate. He had been drinking strong liquor, after which he was cussing out anyone who would try to calm him down. Several similar cases have been recorded in the ship's log, although it is probable that many more instances remained unrecorded. As the MCC prohibited drunkenness, harsh punishment could be expected from the captain. The day after the incident, Menkenveld held a council among his officers, deciding what to do with his uncontrollable crewman. The boatswain's mate apologised to the crew and captain, promising never to drink strong liquor again. However, captain Menkenveld decided that if it ever happened again, he would be disciplined accordingly.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> Marcel van Engelen, *Het Kasteel van Elmina. In het Spoor van de Nederlandse Slavenhandel in Afrika* (Amsterdam 2013) 211.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 219 - 221.

<sup>76</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 97.

<sup>77</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 909.1, Equipage van het schip *Philadelphia* 1754 -1755, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 45.

<sup>79</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 18 & 19.

<sup>80</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 20.

A possible consequence of sailors' (violent) drunkenness was the mistreatment of other crewmen or enslaved Africans. Besides general punishment, the mistreatment of African captives is hardly ever recorded. That does not mean, however, that a crewmen's aggression was not occasionally directed at the African captives. The MCC had strict rules that forbade the mistreatment of the enslaved by sailors and officers alike. Anyone violating this instruction was to be punished, his crime documented and his wage cut.<sup>81</sup> However, as Postma so strongly substantiates, the mere existence of regulations against violence and sexual abuse suggests their frequent occurrence.<sup>82</sup>

On January 10, 1755, some crewmen sailed to the coast for trade with the Africans when heavy winds capsized their sloop. Two sailors fell into the water while some cargo destined for trade slowly sank to the ocean floor. The crew members were saved, but several muskets, a pistol, and bottles of Jenever liquor were missing.<sup>83</sup> Setbacks like this, often accompanied by storms, heavy winds, and high tides, created opportunities for the enslaved. More setbacks would occur, as would on every voyage: a ship's boy fell overboard and broke his leg, part of the big yard broke down, and the slave galley was leaking.<sup>84</sup> As these examples suggest, many setbacks occurred in which the crew was preoccupied and looking after their own, the ship's cargo or the ship itself. Consequently, matters could quickly turn into a life-and-death situation onboard the slave ship.<sup>85</sup> Luckily for the crew of the *Philadelphia*, this incident led to no resistance.

On January 13, Menkenveld ordered the construction of the wooden *schutsel* in front of the halfdeck.<sup>86</sup> This barricade would serve as a defensive barrier behind which the crew could seek refuge with their muskets and pistols during an uprising.<sup>87</sup> The barricade was a common phenomenon on slave ships of other nations as well. A barricade would be constructed on every voyage included in this thesis. Remarkably, every vessel would only start the construction of this *schutsel* or *schodt* when twenty to forty captives were already inhabiting the ship. On this third voyage of the *Philadelphia*, Menkenveld seems to be exceptionally late, as he orders the construction of the barricade when as many as seventy-eight Africans already inhabited his vessel. A few days later, he would also order his carpenter to build barriers between decks surrounding the big hatch of the ship, presumably so that it complicated possible attempts for escape.<sup>88</sup>

On February 2, the *Philadelphia* parted from a deceased sailor, leaving a crew of thirty-six. On average, slave ships of the MCC carried a crew of thirty-six.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, the crew was often outnumbered by the enslaved ten to one. Moreover, with an average mortality percentage of 12,5% on

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<sup>81</sup> Heijer, *Het Slavenschip*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Postma, *The Dutch*, 243.

<sup>83</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 21.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 27, 40, 45.

<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 49.

<sup>86</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 22.

<sup>87</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 70.

<sup>88</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Oudsten e.a., *De Grootste Slavenhandelaren*, 66.

MCC slave vessels, the number of crew members often decreased as the number of captives increased.<sup>90</sup> Reduced crew strength was an essential factor in shipboard insurrections.<sup>91</sup>

Following the seaman's short funeral, several canoes came sailing towards the *Philadelphia* with a seemingly violent intent towards the vessel or the free African merchants that had just departed. Menkenveld ordered his crew to fire eight life rounds toward them. It remains unclear what intentions the canoe men had and if they got wounded by the cannon fire. Perhaps the canoe men strived to assault the *Philadelphia*, for it was not exceptional for free Africans to try and cut off a slave ship anchored at the coast.<sup>92</sup> No further mention of this incident was made in the ship's journal, nor was it written down in the letter to the directors of the MCC. Perhaps Menkenveld judged it unworthy of mentioning, suggesting that such incidents were not uncommon. That same day, the crew lifted the ship's anchor, raised the sails, and continued to Cape Palmas.<sup>93</sup>

On February 7, near Cape Palmas, 112 captives inhabited the ship. The carpenter was ordered to construct a final safety measure and build a grid over the big hatch, blocking the way up towards the deck entirely.<sup>94</sup> The *Philadelphia* continued sailing along the African coasts for three months, filling the ship with human cargo at various destinations. The voyage would continue to Cabo Lahoe, Axim and finally to Elmina on April 30, where Menkenveld and his crew arrived with 204 captives onboard.<sup>95</sup> It was not unusual to purchase the final captives in larger quantities from forts like Elmina. This trade often happened when the 'floating trade' along the coast proved inadequate. Although purchasing captives from WIC castles simplified trade, it was frequently avoided due to high trading fees.<sup>96</sup> At Elmina, Menkenveld agreed with the castle's general to purchase forty-eight African captives and to take twelve additional captives as part of the Generals' private trade.<sup>97</sup>

When the *Philadelphia* had ultimately finished trade, it would carry 264 enslaved Africans onto the Atlantic, some of whom would never see the other side.<sup>98</sup> In Surinam, their existence as European commodities would continue on another dreadful path. The crew of the *Philadelphia* experienced no hardships during the six weeks of the middle passage and arrived in the colony on July 12, 1755.<sup>99</sup> After delivering the ten remaining Africans owned by Elmina's general, 243 captives were sold on the Surinam slave market, making a profit of 6,5% on the MCC's investment.<sup>100</sup> Besides a threat coming from shore, captain Menkenveld experienced no insurrections on the third voyage of the

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<sup>90</sup> Oudsten e.a., *De Grootste Slavenhandelaren*, 64.

<sup>91</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 44 - 45.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>93</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 24.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>96</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 97.

<sup>97</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 903, 38, 40

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*. 40.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>100</sup> Postma, *The Dutch*, 409.

*Philadelphia*, even though this is mentioned in the TSTD. It shows that not all information gathered within the TSTD is correct.

### **Death over slavery**

As it becomes apparent that the Menkenveld Clan followed a trading routine, it also becomes visible that every voyage came with similar opportunities for the enslaved. No voyage was ever out of ‘harm’s way’ when it came to an insurrection, as opportunities for insurrection created themselves on every vessel. The slave trade was too unreliable for it not to happen. Harsh weather conditions, spoiled and unhealthy food and water, sickness, irresponsible crew and unpredictable African captives made that so. The opportunities created during the trading routine led to numerous African men and women jumping overboard to either freedom, recapture or death.

On October 2, 1758, captain David Mulders commanded the *Middelburgs Welvaren*, a ship whose keel had already witnessed thousands of barnacles coming and going on three previous transatlantic voyages. It was the second time he commanded the ship, yet his voyage did not remain without difficulties. After almost three months of sailing, the vessel arrived in Malembo on January 28, 1759. As Mulders got permission from the free Africans to engage in trade, the first four captives were bought on February 1. The trade soon proved to be prosperous. Between February 14 and 28, the number of captives grew from 80 to 190, more than doubling the number within two weeks.<sup>101</sup> Simultaneously, the ship’s crew had shrunken to thirty-one as five sailors lay sick onboard the vessel on February 25.<sup>102</sup> Reduced crew strength was an essential factor in shipboard insurrections, and in the case of the *Middelburgs Welvaren*, several captives had discovered this too.

On February 27, whilst the captain came aboard escorting ten Africans, a woman jumped overboard. Whether she tried to escape by swimming to the coast or attempted to drown herself is unknown, for she was soon fetched out of the water by the ship’s crew. The following day, the woman was thrown in shackles as her intention of jumping overboard had only grown fiercer. Her bold attempt must have also encouraged other captives, as four more Africans were put in chains for having similar thoughts. Several days later, it was noted in the ship’s log that the captain was forced to hire four African canoe men to occupy the boats as seven men, including the ship’s surgeon, lay sick aboard the *Middelburgs Welvaren*.<sup>103</sup>

The following months seemed to be as miserable as the previous. Sickness spread amongst the crew, and an insurrection followed, which will be discussed in the following chapter. However, trade remained prosperous, even though several sailors were sick and another was deceased, weakening the crew’s strength and creating opportunity. On April 9, captain Mulders departed from Malembo with 425 African captives on board. Halfway through the middle passage, a woman jumped overboard on

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<sup>101</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 793, 26 - 27.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 27.

April 30. The story of this bondswomen will forever remain a mystery. Was this the same woman who had attempted to jump overboard two months prior? The margin of the ship's log noted that a baby had passed away that day. Could this woman have been the mother? Attempts were made to launch the sloop into the water, yet before the crew was well organised, the woman had already vanished beneath the dark blue waves.<sup>104</sup>

The vessel's first mate was Jacob Husson, who had sailed with Mulders once before under Jan Menkenveld.<sup>105</sup> In 1763, he became captain of the *Middelburgs Welvaren*, during which he notoriously was locked up drunk in his cabin by his crew after viciously flogging the African women on his ship.<sup>106</sup> Judging by this occurrence, Husson was no stranger to physical violence. It is not unthinkable that the women on his other voyages experienced similar treatment from Husson, spreading fear and terror amongst the enslaved.

Perhaps, the motivation of the bondswomen lay elsewhere. Some Africans believed the white Europeans to be cannibalistic or serve the lord of death. The meat and red wine they consumed were believed to be the flesh and blood of African brothers and sisters.<sup>107</sup> Another common belief was that upon death, even when it was self-inflicted, one's spirit would live on in another realm free of the sorrows and hardships of captivity.<sup>108</sup> These beliefs may have contributed to captives jumping overboard towards freedom or death.

Only nine months after arriving home, captain Mulders embarked on another triangular voyage with the *Middelburg Welvaren*, departing on January 8, 1761. The instructions for this voyage remained the same; to buy the most profitable African men, women and children on the coast of Angola, after which they were to be sold in the colony of Curacao.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately for captain Mulders, the *Middelburgs Welvaren* seemed to be plagued by misfortune. As the vessel departed from the coast, it got stuck on the seafloor for some time.<sup>110</sup> Also, within a month after departing, the carpenter was deemed unfit for his tasks. Furthermore, the water supply appeared insufficient to reach Angola, after which it was decided to resupply at Cape Mesurado.<sup>111</sup>

After three months of sailing, the *Middelburgs Welvaren* reached Malembo on April 7, 1761. The second carpenter was brought ashore to prepare the lodge, and trade began on April 14 as the first four captives were brought in. In the following weeks, the barricade was built as more Africans were brought upon the ship. Soon after, captain Mulders and several crew members fell ill during their stay in the lodge. On May 11, with thirty-eight captives onboard, the crew discovered the first African with

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<sup>104</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 793, 34.

<sup>105</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 797, Monsterrol van het schip *Middelburgs Welvaren*, 1758 - 1760, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Heijer, *Het Slavenschip*, 11.

<sup>107</sup> Engelen, *Het Kasteel van Elmina*, 211.

<sup>108</sup> Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, 117.

<sup>109</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr 773.5, Instructies, facturen en overige stukken betreffende het schip *Middelburgs Welvaren* 1761-1762, 61 - 62.

<sup>110</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 800, 4.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 9 - 10.

the *rode loop*, or dysentery.<sup>112</sup>

Following this, the ship's surgeon fell ill and had to leave the lodge as well. As the surgeon did not improve within the next two weeks, captain Mulders got an English surgeon to look at his ill-fated crew, of whom now three had dysentery. The African captives, however, were off far worse. The highly infectious disease spread like wildfire in the cramped, airless slave quarters. On June 5, an African girl was the first victim to succumb to the disease.<sup>113</sup>

As dysentery took over the ship, more sailors and captives fell ill and died. The captain ordered yams to be bought for the sick Africans to save his dying cargo, yet it would not suffice. By July 13, twenty-four Africans had already lost their lives. By July 17, several captives were discovered having an 'illness in the chest', a symptom that also reigned on the African coasts.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, despite the raging illnesses onboard, trade continued as it always did, and the number of captives onboard the *Middelburgs Welvaren* kept growing.

Due to respect or pragmatism, departed crewmates were buried on shore. Coastal burial was often done so the enslaved would be less aware of the shrinking number of crewmates on the slave ship.<sup>115</sup> On July 30, captain Mulders hired several free Africans to aid in the cooking for the enslaved. The men also attempted to cure the dysentery of the enslaved by holding their buttocks over a steaming pot of cotton water.<sup>116</sup> According to captain Mulders, this treatment seemed to work. On August 8, a carpenter from another Dutch vessel came to make a roster between decks, for the captain deemed the airless space to be smothering for the captives. At this point, forty-eight Africans had perished.<sup>117</sup>

On August 10, nine people perished in a single day due to sickness. Among the dead were the second surgeon, four African women, two boys and two girls. The next day, whilst the ship was in disarray, multiple women conspired to free themselves from the diseased floating prison. At the beginning of noon, they set their plan in motion as several women started rioting. As those who rioted created a distraction, three women jumped overboard, with as many as twelve others eagerly waiting to follow in their footsteps. However, the crew discovered this plot on time and stopped the remaining group. The rest of the crew took the boat and recaptured the three women before they drowned or reached the shore.<sup>118</sup>

After the attempted escape, the escapees were placed in shackles, further limiting their freedom. No exception was made for the rioters who did not manage to jump in time.<sup>119</sup> No further escape plans were executed, and sickness spread through the vessel. By October 19, the ship had

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<sup>112</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 800, 22.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>115</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 48.

<sup>116</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 800, 31.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 32

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

finally reached the island of Curacao. Two hundred-three of the 460 Africans who entered the ship had died during the Middle passage.<sup>120</sup> In the case of the fifth voyage of the *Middelburgs Welvaren*, it seems plausible that one of the motivations for jumping overboard lay within the raging sickness on the vessel. Within that chaos, some bondswomen found opportunity.

On the sixth voyage of the *Philadelphia* in 1760, Menkenveld was confronted with similar acts of African resistance. The vessel departed on February 22 and followed its regular route to Guinee. After that, they anchored at several capes on the Gold and Slave Coasts before eventually making their way to Elmina. The first weeks along the African coasts were marked by heavy winds, rain and strong currents. The poor weather conditions made trading with the African merchants difficult, yet captain Menkenveld made steady progress after he purchased the first two bondswomen on May 8.<sup>121</sup>

By the time the ship arrived at Cape Lahoe on August 4, three crewmembers had passed away, leaving a crew of thirty-six. Among the dead was the ship's smith, who formerly attended to the shackles. The second carpenter was granted a raise as he would now have to attend to the captives' shackles in addition to his regular duties.<sup>122</sup> On August 16, the vessel arrived in Grand-Bassam, in the present-day Ivory Coast. The sea was rising high, and the current was strong. For these reasons, refilling their freshwater was impossible. Eventually, Menkenveld ordered the second mate ashore to try and provide fresh water. As several crewmates had left for shore, numerous Africans managed to jump overboard during the first watch in the evening on August 19.<sup>123</sup>

In the slave trade, it was not unusual to have netting alongside the ship to prevent captives from performing such acts of desperation.<sup>124</sup> Like the other vessels, the *Philadelphia* had not taken such preventive measures. Menkenveld recalled hearing the screams of the captives that jumped overboard. Captains often sent boats out to 'rescue' their escaping or drowning commodities.<sup>125</sup> However, the crew made no effort to fetch the Africans out of the water, for there was no opportunity to get the sloop in their direction on time. The following day it was discovered that the people jumping overboard were one man and two women, choosing death over enslaved life.<sup>126</sup>

As part of the crew was off to the shore, the Africans managed to jump while a restless sea supported their cause. Remarkably, the boatswain was stripped of his rank and function four days later, for he had been drunk on multiple occasions and had presumably neglected his duties. Perhaps, the boatswain had been too drunk to keep a watchful eye. However, the writer of the ship's log does not support any connection. The notion of the departed smith is interesting as well. Perhaps, the

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<sup>120</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 800, 44; ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 801, 41.

<sup>121</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 922, Scheepsjournaal van het schip *Philadelphia* 1760 - 1761, 19.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>124</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 288.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 922, 31.

second carpenter was unskilled in managing the shackles. Since men were mainly kept in chains, the male insurrectionist likely managed to free himself before he jumped.<sup>127</sup> Like the boy-slave Equiano described in Rediker's *The Slave Ship*, many Africans in the *Philadelphia* must have envied the man and women who jumped overboard. At last, they were free from the inhumane conditions of the slave ship.<sup>128</sup>

When the *Philadelphia* returned in July 1761, Menkenveld would prepare to embark on another voyage. He would sail out on the Snow *Eenigheid* on October 1 of that same year. It took about two months to reach Cape Mesurado, where the first captive was bought on December 9. In the following months, Menkenveld resumed his trade routine as the rest of the crew prepared the safety measures and performed their usual task on deck and coast. When the *Eenigheid* eventually reached Elmina on April 12, 1762, 304 Africans inhabited the vessel.<sup>129</sup>

On April 22, two men jumped overboard and drowned as the boats rowed off and onshore for new fresh water and firewood supplies. A day later, another man followed, yet it was explicitly noted that he fell.<sup>130</sup> Two months prior, it was also mentioned that a bondsman had fallen overboard during the night.<sup>131</sup> Surprisingly, no mentions were made in the ship's log of attempts to retrieve these men. It is more believable that they had all intended to jump, or were thrown, as it would seem unlikely that someone would suddenly happen to fall overboard.

The circumstances surrounding this insurrection remain unclear. The vessel was close to shore, and over three hundred captives inhabited the ship, possibly making the escape of an individual somewhat more accessible. Did they know that Elmina was the final stop before the middle passage, or did other factors contribute to this action? The source material of this voyage left historians with an additional source: the surgeon's journal. The journal consists of details that further uncover the inhumane conditions aboard the slave ship that might have motivated the actions of the bondsmen. For example, on April 6, the surgeon described the wounds of the first African to pass away:

‘... Found no speech or consciousness with him, [I] understood he had been kicked. [I] Also found that he felt pain when I touched his neck, for he then started screaming...’.<sup>132</sup>

Several weeks later, the surgeon makes a statement about a female whose health had deteriorated, leading to her death:

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<sup>127</sup> Paesie, *Geschiedenis van de MCC*, 97.

<sup>128</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 120.

<sup>129</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 383, Journaal van het schip *Eenigheid*, 1761 - 1763, 36.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>132</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 390, Journaal van de oppermeester van het schip *Eenigheid*, 1761 - 1763, 12: ‘...bevond geen spraak, of verstand bij hem, verstond dat hij geschopt was, bevond ook wanneer ik aan de hals voelde, dat hij daar pijn hadde, dewijl hij dan begon te kermen...’.

‘...a woman slave had passed. She got beaten a week or four ago, so that blood started streaming out of her ear...’.<sup>133</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no way of telling how this man and woman had gotten these injuries, for there is no mention of it in the ship’s logs. Without the surgeon’s journal, we remain somewhat blind to the violence that befell the captives on these vessels. It is known, however, that the sailors aboard slave ships had immense power over the African captives, able to swing the whip with every demonstration of disobedience, trying to prevent thoughts of insurrection.<sup>134</sup> Although crewmembers more than likely assaulted these captives, it is not ruled out that these injuries came from other enslaved people. Captives were forced into near-impossible positions, exposing them to their neighbouring captives’ urine, vomit, blood, and faecal matter.<sup>135</sup> These horrid conditions often were causes of violence amongst the enslaved below decks.<sup>136</sup>

Daniel Pruijmelaar sailed out as captain of the *Eenigheid* on August 14, 1763, arriving at Cape Mesurado on November 18. By May 18, 1764, it had taken half a year to gather 111 African captives. During this period, the *Eenigheid* suffered a significant insurrection as well. By the time Pruijmelaar had reached Elmina in October, he had managed to fill the ship with 193 Africans. Several enslaved people had fallen ill with either dysentery or typhus in the previous weeks, and forty-eight captives had already passed away.<sup>137</sup>

On October 3, moments after eating on the deck, it was written that a woman jumped overboard intending to drown herself. Several sailors rushed to the boat and got the woman out of the water. As they got the woman back on board, the sailors chained her, ensuring no further attempts could be made. The crew seemed to have no idea why this woman was suicidal. Had she lost a loved one during her horrific journey? Was she sexually or physically abused, or had she fallen ill? Unfortunately, no account exists that enlightens us about this enslaved woman’s motives, and we only remain with her solution.<sup>138</sup>

As an illustration of this woman’s motives, one might turn to the surgeon’s book from the previous voyage of the *Eenigheid*. The journal describes cases that might connect to the individual histories on board another ship. The surgeon noted that:

‘...[She] appeared to grief, sat very still, spoke little, ate and drank, and was healthy, yet when we left the coast, she deteriorated and emaciated... I believe that her melancholy

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<sup>133</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 390, 14: ‘... Den 13 dito, een vrou slaaf overleden, deselve was een week of vier voor haar overliden geslagen, soo dat het bloed haar sterk was uit t oor gelopen...’.

<sup>134</sup> Balai, *Het Slavenschip*, 68 - 69.

<sup>135</sup> Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, 160.

<sup>136</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 270 - 271.

<sup>137</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 391, Journaal van het schip *Eenigheid*, 1763 - 1765, 42.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

originated in the fact that she would have had a child and that the [free] negroes would have kept it...'.<sup>139</sup>

Although the history of the suicidal bondswoman is unknown, this surgeon's anecdotes might help imagine the hardships that all men and women suffered during the long and harmful journey of the middle passage. Stuck by grief due to the loss of her child, condemned to unbearable conditions, a woman might have sought a way out by any means possible.

Menkenveld's final voyage would be on the frigate *Haast U Langzaam*, on which he departed for the coast of Guinee on July 9, 1764. During the ship's stay along the African coast and the middle passage, five African men attempted to leave the slave ship and jump overboard. Whilst anchored at Cape Lahoe with forty captives, two men were the first to jump overboard during the first watch on December 31. The boat was set out to retrieve them, yet only one man was caught.<sup>140</sup> The situation on board must have been tense, as there was no capable cook on board, and several crew members had quarrelled since the beginning of the voyage. Perhaps, sailors had secretly gotten drunk celebrating the new year, like the boatswain's mate on the *Philadelphia* in 1755.

On May 6, 1765, the *Haast U Langzaam* was anchored near Anomabo in Ghana, between Fort Amsterdam and Elmina. As the bondsmen were directed to the main deck, it was discovered that one captive was missing. In the men's quarters, the crew discovered a bondsman proceeding to hang himself. Hastily, the sailors managed to untie him and put him in chains as a preventive measure. Due to a leg injury, of which the origins were not mentioned, the man had not been shackled. In the afternoon, when the captives got their meagre meals, the same man managed to jump overboard, leading to his death.<sup>141</sup>

At the time of this event, three sailors had passed, and several sailors were off to negotiate on shore. Two weeks later, the boatswain was deemed unfit for his tasks. The first mate found him guilty of neglecting his duties and being inattentive to the captives, after which the boatswain was put in chains for the upcoming days.<sup>142</sup> His inattentiveness might have given the bondsman a window of opportunity, resulting in his suicide. According to Taylor, crew negligence and disunity were two main reasons for slave insurrection, as they created opportunities for the enslaved.<sup>143</sup>

The final cases of individual insurrection occurred during the middle passage, in which two bondsmen managed to jump overboard, leading to their death.<sup>144</sup> Except for another deceased crewmember, no particular circumstances are noticeable in the ship's log during these events.

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<sup>139</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 390, 13: '...Scheen altoos te treuren, sat seer stil, sprak weinig, at en dronk altoos wel, dewijl se gesont was, maar wanneer de kust verlieten, soo verviel van dag tot dag, en vermagerde sterk... ik geloof dat haar melancolij sal hebben ontstaan, dat sij een kint sal hebben gehad, en dat de negers t zelve sullen hebben gehouden...'.  
<sup>140</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 511, 27.  
<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 46 - 47.  
<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 48.  
<sup>143</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 51 - 54.  
<sup>144</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 511, 60, 63.

However, as the next chapter will prove, the circumstances aboard the *Haast U Langzaam* were seemingly extraordinary.

## Conclusion

The third voyage of the *Philadelphia* is the last voyage in which Menkenveld, Mulders, Pruijmelaar and De Molder sailed together. Its transatlantic journey would be characteristic of the numerous voyages that followed, hardly converting the trading routine. Similar precautions were ensured on every voyage, yet similar incidents and circumstances also occurred. Although numerous ingredients were present in which insurrection seemed opportune, no acts of resistance were recorded on the third voyage of the *Philadelphia*. Although the TSTD is undisputed in gathering information on transatlantic slaving voyages and facilitates easy access to anyone interested in this gruesome history, the data does not always provide facts. For example, the TSTD labelled Jan Menkenveld's third voyage on the *Philadelphia* as one on which slave insurrection occurred. However, the attack from shore can be placed under a different label in the database: 'Vessel attacked from shore'.<sup>145</sup>

Nevertheless, as the dreadful trade routine continued, numerous men and women on the *Philadelphia*, *Eenigheid*, *Middelburgs Welvaren* and *Haast U Langzaam* grasped those moments where insurrection was opportune and jumped overboard. Although it remains impossible to understand the true intention of those captives, this chapter shines a light on their possible motivations. The surgeon's journal proves that violence towards the captives was not uncommon on a slave ship, even though such occurrences remain unrecorded in the ship's log. Children could be separated from their mothers, leaving empty shells of humans onboard that lost the will to live. Drunken ill-tempered sailors might kindle the desire to resist on the one hand, whilst, on the other hand, the disarray they caused created momentum for the captives. Reduction in crew strength and negligence appears to have been the most contributing factors in creating opportunity for the enslaved. Most captives jumped overboard along the coasts when the possibility of reaching shore did not seem impossible.

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<sup>145</sup> [Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database \(slavevoyages.org\)](https://slavevoyages.org) (January 20, 2023).

### Chapter III African resistance: a slaver's worst fear

Whereas the courageous and rebellious nature of individuals often resulted in jumping overboard, collective efforts could create rebellions capable of overthrowing entire vessels. Although the insurrections occurring on these vessels were reported in ship logs and letters in varying degrees of detail, their origins often remain unclear. Therefore, this chapter focuses on those acts of collective resistance during the voyages of the Menkenveld Clan in hopes of better understanding their circumstances, opportunities, motives and outcomes.

#### *Philadelphia*

On September 7, 1756, the *Philadelphia* chose sea for its fourth voyage under captain Menkenveld. As the vessel sailed into the North Sea, the smoke plumes of five saluting canons slowly blew away before the Dutch city of Vlissingen.<sup>146</sup> On October 26, whilst the ship was still en route to Guinee, there was an incident with the boatswain. A sailor came on deck moaning and wailing as he had been viciously attacked by the boatswain Albert Coeckuit. The sailor was covered with large bruises and felt severe pain on his side.<sup>147</sup> Even though the captain was charged with keeping order and discipline on his ship, no punishment was recorded in the ship log.

However, on November 11, the captain and officers held a council regarding Coeckuit. In addition to showing rude behaviour, he was deemed incapable of fulfilling his duties aboard the vessel. The role of a boatswain was not without import, for he meant to be a foreman onboard the ship, directing the sailors and being their first representative towards the captain. As the previous chapters showed, an untrustworthy boatswain could instigate problems onboard. The council's verdict meant a demotion for Coeckuit to the rank of boatswain's mate.<sup>148</sup>

On November 15, along 'Rio Serbara' on the Grain Coast, the *Philadelphia* purchased its first two captives, a male and a female.<sup>149</sup> Meanwhile, Coeckuit created more disturbances onboard the vessel. He was accused of thievery when it was discovered that he had stolen alcohol from a deserted sailor and tried to hide this fact by filling the bottle with salt water. Besides, they accused him of stealing apples and other alcoholic beverages from the ship's supplies and having extorted sailors for their portions of soup with threats and beatings. Additionally, he also stole linen, a pipe and bread. Finally, Menkenveld decided to act and cuffed him.<sup>150</sup>

On November 20, whilst the ship was slowly growing with captives, the officers of the *Philadelphia* held another council. They decided it was best to send Coeckuit to shore. Two days later,

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<sup>146</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 910, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 11 - 12.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

he was picked up by an English ship on which he mustered as a regular sailor.<sup>151</sup> Sending away a sailor was unfortunate, especially one whose rank was of some import. Moreover, it would further thin an already small crew against a growing number of captives and disturb the division of power aboard the vessel. However, the officers were content with his departure, as they had feared he might have caused disturbances as significant as mutiny.<sup>152</sup> With a troublemaker like Coeckuit onboard, crewmembers might have gotten distracted, leading to carelessness during crucial tasks like closing doors and keeping careful watch.<sup>153</sup>

On Monday, December 20, eighty-five enslaved Africans inhabited the vessel.<sup>154</sup> The purchase of enslaved people went considerably faster than before the Seven Years' War (1756 - 1763), when English and French slavers were simultaneously trading along the African coasts. Menkenveld traded 200 captives in six weeks, whereas it took four months to do the same on the previous voyage. A minor setback occurred when the Africans prohibited trade on the river, as an Englishman had taken seven free Africans as captives.<sup>155</sup>

As the number of captives exceeded two hundred at the beginning of February, hygiene became increasingly important on the vessel. From February 12 onwards, it is mentioned in the ship's log that the vessel would get a thorough sweep, clearing the decks of its misery nearly every week. When the *Philadelphia* arrived at Elmina on March 7, the last preparations and purchases were made to start the middle passage. Ballast was loaded, freshwater and firewood were collected, and the last captives came onboard. However, as the ship lay anchored near the fortress, a group of bondsmen began to rebel on March 12.

Daniel Pruijmelaar, the first mate during this voyage, discovered a group of eighteen bondsmen preparing an insurrection in hopes of escaping the ship. It is unclear if the enslaved Africans had already managed to break their shackles. Sometimes the chains were too loose, and the enslaved could, with some effort, squeeze their arms or legs out. If that did not work, nails, wood, or other objects could have been used to break the chains.<sup>156</sup> Although the ship's log does not go into detail, it appears the insurrection was quickly put down. The bondsmen were put in double shackles and awaited further punishment from the captain. Menkenveld had been on shore, presumably with one or two crewmembers, to arrange matters for the middle passage. When he eventually came aboard, the rebelling captives were chastised, 'though not deadly wounded', he informed the directors of the MCC.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 910, 16.

<sup>152</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 915.3, 't Huiskomende onkosten en retouren van het schip *Philadelphia*, 1756 - 1757, 37.

<sup>153</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 53 - 54.

<sup>154</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 910, 20.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>156</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 296.

<sup>157</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 910, 70.

Afterwards, they were chained on the steerage. The ship log shows Menkenveld's thoughts on the cause of the insurrection. He noted that part of his crew was working onshore and in the ship's hold whilst others were sick, meaning there were not enough sailors to guard the captives. He resolved with the officers to hire guards, or *tapoejers*, from Elmina. The next day, on March 12, eight guards from Elmina joined the ship's ranks to make further insurrections impossible.<sup>158</sup> Three more weeks of trade would follow before the vessel was filled with firewood, fresh water and captives. Finally, on April 4, the *tapoejers* were sent back to shore, and the *Philadelphia* set sail towards the Americas.

Menkenveld departed with a total of 300 Africans on board. Eight had not survived their enslavement along the African coasts. No more insurrections were recorded in the ship's log during the middle passage. Perhaps morale was low after the insurrectionists were chastised and constrained, or the bombas made conspiring near impossible. Finally, on June 19, the vessel reached the river Surinam. Two hundred eighty-six Africans survived the middle passage and would be sold, deprived of all humanity, on the selling blocks of Surinam and Berbice.<sup>159</sup>

### ***Middelburgs Welvaren***

On March 1, 1759, the *Middelburgs Welvaren* was anchored on the coast of Malembo. The crew of David Mulders was thinned out due to the spreading sickness onboard. Two days ago, the crew had barely managed to retrieve a captive who had just jumped overboard. Due to the lack of workforce, Mulders was forced to hire four free Africans to row the boat to the coast so that fresh water and firewood might still be brought in, for seven crewmembers had now fallen ill.<sup>160</sup> We learn another reason for hiring the canoe men from the correspondence with the MCC. The shark-infested waters had only recently taken the life of a free African oarsman, and several sailors were afraid to take the boat.<sup>161</sup> However, the letter from captain Mulders to the company stays silent about what happened next.

On March 9, fourteen captives entered the vessel, in addition to several barrels of fresh water. The next day, another fourteen captives were brought to the ship. As the decimated crew was busy ensuring a safe boarding of the captives, the boat was loaded with cargo and sent back to shore.<sup>162</sup> With seven crewmembers sick in the cage and several healthy sailors gone to shore, opportunities arose for the 283 captives onboard the vessel.

During the first watch, between eight o'clock and midnight, numerous captives revolted in an attempt to escape the ship.<sup>163</sup> The weather was calm, with no brutal winds or powerful currents to keep the crew occupied. The ship's log does not mention the number of Africans participating in the

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<sup>158</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 910, 32.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 43, 55.

<sup>160</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 793, 27.

<sup>161</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 774, Fregat *Middelburgs Welvaren* [2], Brieven van gezagvoerders aan Directeuren, 1752-1763, 96 - 97.

<sup>162</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 793, 28.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

insurrection, nor if they were men or women and if harm was inflicted on the crew or captives. A nearby slave vessel commanded by captain Johannes Castelijn was soon alerted. A sloop of his men arrived to aid the sick and small crew of captain Mulders. With the sailors' aid, they managed to overthrow the captives, and as soon as the insurrection was put down, Castelijn's men departed.<sup>164</sup> Unfortunately, Mulder's report of this insurrection comes without extensive details. Perhaps, Mulders wanted the insurrection to seem insignificant on purpose, not wanting to appear incompetent towards the MCC.

As noted in the previous chapter, the first mate on this voyage was Jacob Husson.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps his aggressive tendencies led not only to the insurrection of individual women but also contributed to collective insurrection. Also, it is not unthinkable that he already demonstrated this behaviour to Mulders and Menkenveld on his previous voyages, spreading fear and terror during those voyages as well.

When the insurrection was put down, the crew ran a security check. They discovered that none of the shackles for the enslaved was of the right size and was too large for the captives' wrists. This fact implies that most of the insurrectionists had been men. Due to this lacking equipment, they freed themselves from their most restricting disadvantage. Immediately after the insurrection, captain Mulders commanded the smith to create new shackles from iron bands.<sup>166</sup>

Additionally, a grid was made between the big and front hatch so the captives would get some fresh air. This might have been another motive for rebelling, as the diseased air had become unbearable. As a final measure, the captain put two pieces of ordnance through the wooden barricade so the crew could fire upon the deck.<sup>167</sup> Although even more sailors got sick, no further rebellion occurred. The *Middelburgs Welvaren* managed to sail to Curacao, where it arrived on May 31, 1759, with 420 African captives.<sup>168</sup>

### ***Eenigheid***

In 1763, Daniel Pruijmelaar took up his first command as captain of the ship *Eenigheid*. He had gotten accustomed to the vessel for the past year and a half, as it had been his home during its voyage under captain Menkenveld. Tasked with the mustering of a strong crew, he approached some of his former companions. Adriaan de Puyt would join him as second mate. Johannes Cooiwijk would join him as the third mate, a promotion since the last voyage, where he had been a regular sailor.<sup>169</sup> The *Eenigheid* left for the coast of Guinee with a crew of thirty-six on August 14.

Due to unfortunate winds, the voyage to the African coast took several months. On November

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<sup>164</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 793, 28.

<sup>165</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 797, 4.

<sup>166</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 793, 28

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>169</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 388, Monsterrol van het schip *Eenigheid*, 1761 - 1763, 18; ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 396, Monsterrol van het schip *Eenigheid*, 1763 - 1765, 5.

16, the vessel anchored near Cape Mount, where an English snow and a French frigate had already positioned themselves. The captain ordered the boat to fetch water and firewood whilst preparations were made to build the kitchen. Because no canoes initiated the trade, a boat was sent up the river of Cape Mesurado. On November 29, the first two captives, a man and a girl, entered the vessel.<sup>170</sup> Almost two months later, only eighteen captives were inhabiting the ship. Due to English ships raiding the coasts and abducting free Africans, trade hit rock bottom. The African merchants were too hesitant to come aboard the European ships.<sup>171</sup> During this period along the coast, two of the sailors had passed away, and another had deserted, leaving a crew of thirty-three.<sup>172</sup>

On the way to Cape Palmas during the new year 1764, the *Eenigheid* anchored at several coastal trading villages. African merchants at 'Baddoe' referred Pruijmelaar to 'Pikenine Setter', where his chance for buying captives was considerable. The *Eenigheid* had to leave either way, as the ruler of this area did not want to provide fresh water or captives. On March 2, it was noted that three sailors, the second mate and the boatswain, had fallen ill.<sup>173</sup> In the following weeks, trade started slowly taking off. By May 12, the number of captives had risen to 115. A few days before, Pruijmelaar had sent the boat back to 'St Andries' on May 9 to negotiate for captives. As part of the crew had departed, the bondsmen on the *Eenigheid* rebelled on May 13.<sup>174</sup>

With the sloop off to the shore, two dead sailors and one deserter, about twenty-eight sailors must have been onboard. Several of those men might have been sick or feeble. Meanwhile, the lower decks were filled with forty-seven men and sixty-eight women and children. The weather was of no significance, with hardly any wind at all. In the afternoon, several bondsmen surprised the sailor guarding the barricade, depriving him of his sabre and enforcing the door. Having breached the door, the bondsmen charged towards the aft deck, where Pruijmelaar stood underneath the sunroof with his first and third mate. Quickly, Pruijmelaar and his officers turned to the armoury at the back of the cabin, where they supplied themselves with sabres and muskets. The carpenter was stuck beneath the sunroof, as rebels were now swarming the deck, attacking the captain and officers. The bondsmen were swinging with the guardsman's sabre and two knives they managed to collect.<sup>175</sup>

Several African women had also been on deck, for it was recorded that the surgeon was bandaging some of them. It is not reported how the women got their wounds. Captain Pruijmelaar commanded them to return to the women's quarters. While some obeyed his command, some found opportunity amidst this chaos, jumping overboard. The sailors started firing their muskets at the captives and attacked with their sabres. Being better equipped, the ship's crew managed to get the

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<sup>170</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 391, 17 - 18.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 21, 24 - 25

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>175</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 391, 32; ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 376, Fregat *Eenigheid*, Brieven van de gezagvoerder aan Directeuren, 1759-1767, 49 - 50.

upper hand. The rebelling men and several women soon realised their cause was lost and decided to jump overboard whilst still in shackles. Some reached the sloop, tied to the ship's stern. After helping each other onboard, they rowed towards the shore under the unmistakable sound of cannon fire.<sup>176</sup>

Seeing the captives row for shore, the crew had signalled with a canon shot to alert the other ships anchored at the coast. In response, several sloops carrying armed sailors came rushing towards the escapees. The six captives on the boat were ultimately overwhelmed and brought back to the ship, together with nine women who had jumped overboard. On the *Eenigheid*, three more male insurrectionists were caught. As the captain put them all below decks, he saw numerous crew members hiding in the ship's front mast. After bandaging the wounded, the captives were gathered on deck for a counting. It was discovered that eight bondsmen were missing, either drowned or escaped.<sup>177</sup> The next day, the insurrectionists were catechised with the *boermesingel*, a weighted piece of rope, for all captives to see.<sup>178</sup> The bondsmen were paired and chained crosswise on hands and feet, locked away in the miserable slave quarters. Among the crewmembers, three sailors got wounded: one on his head and the other two on their hands and fingers. The next day, a wounded bondswoman, the first captive affiliated with the rebellion, passed away.<sup>179</sup>

Captain Pruijmelaar ended his detailed letter to the MCC with the tidings of another insurrection on the Windward Coast, perhaps to make the insurrection on the *Eenigheid* seem trivial. The Amsterdam vessel *Pinck* had suffered an insurrection, killing everyone on board but two sailors. More than sixty of the rebelling captives were missing.<sup>180</sup> The ship's journal from the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* provides additional information, as it happened to pick up crew members of the *Pinck* who were stranded on the coast. When the 'king' of Mesurado came to visit the vessel, the captain tried to take him captive. Failing to do so, the king angrily returned to shore, where the four trading crew members of the *Pinck* were forbidden to return to their vessel. The vessel raised the anchor and sailed to open water, leaving the sailors on shore.<sup>181</sup> The fragments of information found in different ship logs can sometimes significantly contribute to the TSTD. It shows that essential tidings reached the decks of other vessels. Therefore, it might be worthwhile for any scholar to scan the ship logs and letters of other vessels at the same time and area as one's subject.

Although the odds of the African captives on the *Eenigheid* were always against them, they managed to rebel. The ship's crew was slightly decimated due to sickness, desertion, and duty on another coast. The fact that the African men managed to reach the barricade and disarm the guardsman suggests that he was inattentive in his duties. Although a barricade was present, it did nothing to hold the captives back as soon as the sailor was overwhelmed. If it had not been for the aid of the other

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<sup>176</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 391, 32; ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 376, 49-50.

<sup>177</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 376, 49-50.

<sup>178</sup> Balai, *Het Slavenschip*, 68.

<sup>179</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 376.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, 38.

vessels on shore, the insurrection might have grown to even more significant proportions. No specific events seem to have triggered the uprising on the *Eenigheid*. However, as Taylor describes, enslavement remained the true motivation for revolt, as it occurred along the entire African coast.<sup>182</sup>

### *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*

When Willem de Molder sailed into the English Canal in December 1763, misfortune struck to the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*. Seven crewmembers had fallen ill within two weeks, and the ship leaked so heavily that the captain and officers resolved to return to the Republic. The ship barely managed to reach the 'Dorthsche Kill' with the guidance of a fisherman, where it was repaired and replenished. Whilst there, several sailors had deserted, forcing the captain to hire new sailors in Dordrecht. Finally, three and a half months later than planned, the ship departed for the African coasts.<sup>183</sup>

On April 21, the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* arrived in African waters with a crew of thirty-eight. The captain agreed to take the four stranded sailors from the *Pinck* aboard, extending the crew's numbers to forty-two. They told the captain that they had traded on the African coasts for nine and a half months, during which trade was frugal.<sup>184</sup> During the following weeks, trade along Corro and Rio Sester had not proven worthwhile, so the captain and officers resolved to sail directly to Cape Palmas. However, before they departed, the carpenter of the *Pinck* was handed over to work on an English vessel.<sup>185</sup>

The following months proved to be just as unfortunate as the previous. By the end of June, the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* arrived in Cape Lahoe with twenty-five African captives on board. In the meantime, a sailor had succumbed to his sickness. On June 24, the second mate Isaac de Grie arrived from St. Andries without African captives. The sailors on this trip complained that the second mate had harshly mistreated them onboard the sloop. De Grie had been a ship's boy with captain De Molder on the third voyage of the *Philadelphia*.<sup>186</sup> One of the sailors bared the marks of about seventeen wounds on his body. The captain stated he could not discover the meaning of this mistreatment, seemingly leaving the matter unattended.<sup>187</sup> This injustice almost certainly fuelled mistrust amongst the crew. Furthermore, it shows the violence of which De Grie was capable. He might have often directed this fury to the African captives.

On June 28, the cooper of the *Pinck* passed away. By August 8, the remaining crewmembers of the *Pinck* also departed the vessel as they joined an English ship to sail further down the coast. Now, the crew of the *Vrouw Johanne Cortes* had reduced to thirty-seven, whilst thirty-one captives inhabited the ship. The next day, the carpenter constructed the barricade before the *zonnetent* as a

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<sup>182</sup> Taylor, *If We Must Die*, 66.

<sup>183</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1243, 4 - 26.

<sup>184</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, 38.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>186</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 907, 19.

<sup>187</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, 45 & 51.

preventive measure.<sup>188</sup>

On August 20, after nearly three months of trading, the ship had been filled with ninety-six captives, of whom thirty-eight were adult men. The weather was fortunate, with a slight breeze from the coast under a clear sun. The boat had been filled with cargo and was sent to another shore two days earlier. While the cargo for purchased captives was being brought to captain Bourleegh of the *Sang Godin*, the bondsmen in the vessel started rebelling around half past three in the afternoon.

In an instant, a large group of African captives attacked the cook, boatswain and second cooper from below, after which the remaining bondsmen threw themselves upon the barricade. There, they were held back by several crewmembers swinging at them with firewood. The rebels, however, would not let some pieces of wood silence their resistance. Therefore, the crew saw themselves forced to use their pistols.<sup>189</sup>

When confronted with gunfire, the Africans retreated to the 'cage', the lower centre of the deck. As the bondsmen retreated, the cook was left severely wounded. During the skirmish, the first mate got wounded on his right hand. The skirmish continued as the African men refused to surrender. The cook remained unconscious and appeared to be lifeless. In their attack, the bondsmen used a blowpipe, the deck scraper, a baking pan, firewood and several knives confiscated from the crewmembers.<sup>190</sup> These blunt improvised weapons helped the captives defend themselves, making it impossible for the crew to come near them.

The captives that did not join the rebellion were also attacked by the insurrectionist, severely wounding them. As the captives were slowly driven back, they scattered between decks and freed themselves from their shackles. Upon seeing that, the crew resolved to use the muskets and pistols, as the situation had taken another dangerous turn. Confronted with muskets and additional sailors sent by the *Abraham* and *D'Europa*, the remaining captives surrendered around half past four. The skirmish had taken over an hour, resulting in two dead bondmen and fifteen severely wounded.<sup>191</sup>

The ship's log does not record how the sailors fared after this collision with the African bondsmen. The cook was severely wounded, and many others might have also gotten injured. In the ship's log is written that because of the inattentiveness of the crew, a loaded musket had accidentally fired, hitting the cooper from the *Abraham* in his stomach, after which it pierced the arm of a sailor and two fingers of the third mate from the *D'Europa*.<sup>192</sup>

When the dust had settled, the surgeons of the *Sanggodin*, *Abraham* and *D'Europa* arrived to attend to the wounded bondsmen to ensure the minimal loss of profit in the Americas. Willem de Molder traded eight 'soldier weapons' from captain Meijer of the *Abraham* for some of his. He deemed

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<sup>188</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1239, 53.

<sup>189</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1200.2, Fregat *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1751 - 1772, 167.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 168.

this trade necessary as his weaponry had proven insufficient to defend the ship.<sup>193</sup> In the following days, two bondsmen succumbed to their wounds. On August 23, the bondsmen were shackled to the same chain after they revealed their desire to murder their captors remained. The following day, captain Bourleegh brought five handcuffs to the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, most certainly as extra security for the bondsmen. In the following weeks, three more rebels passed away from their wounds.<sup>194</sup>

Remarkably, upon arrival in Surinam, the third mate Hermanus Vogel refused to stay on the ship any longer. He claimed to be unable to work with the second mate Isaac de Grie, as he was assaulted by him during the voyage and had continuously quarrelled with him.<sup>195</sup> This statement further argues for Isaac De Grie's violent nature, as he had already attacked a sailor months before this incident. Perhaps De Grie was one of the main instigators initiating insurrection aboard the *Vrouw Johanna Cortes* after demonstrating his violent outburst to the African captives, whose pleas would not have been taken seriously or noted in the ship's log.

### **The *Haast U Langzaam* and the end for Jan Menkenveld**

After spending almost two decades sailing the Atlantic, Jan Menkenveld's career ended with his captaincy of the *Haast U Langzaam*. He had been a prosperous captain for the MCC, making profits on six of the seven triangular voyages.<sup>196</sup> Interestingly, his last voyage was also the first without his trusted officers. His previous voyage on the *Eenigheid* had been his last sailing with Daniel Pruijmelaar and other familiar sailors. On the *Haast U Langzaam*, his first mate was Cornelis van Kerkhoven, a man that had never before sailed under his captaincy.<sup>197</sup> Only the first surgeon Petrus Couperus and the sailor Adriaan de Visser had sailed with him before. During this voyage, Menkenveld had several collisions with the first mate. Their quarrel encouraged several sailors to formulate sharp accusations against captain Menkenveld and Cornelis van Kerkhoven. The first surgeon Couperus included the following in his letter to the MCC:

‘... With my kind request, I ask you honourable gentleman to look carefully upon the occurrences on this voyage, of which I have the honour to share with you honourable gentlemen, for they did not dare put this in the journals.’<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 1243, 60.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 60 - 61, 75.

<sup>195</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr.1201, Fregat *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*, Brieven van gezagvoerders aan Directeuren, 1760-1771, 80.

<sup>196</sup> Aan boord van de *Eenigheid*, Trajecten van de Reis, Epiloog MCC Slavenreis *d'Eenigheid* 1761-1763, <https://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/slavenreis/nl> (January 7, 2023).

<sup>197</sup> ZA, MCC, Inv.nr. 516, Monsterrol van het schip *Haast U Langzaam*, 1764 - 1766, 5.

<sup>198</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 509.1, Facturen, inventarissen en overige stukken betreffende de *Haast u Langzaam*, 1764 - 1766, 214: ‘...Dierhalven is mijn vriendelijke bede, dat UE. Welgest. met een naukeurig oog eens geliefde gate te slaan, de voorvallen soo van t een als t ander, op de reijs voorgevallen, bij mij aangetekent dat met t mijne t geen ik de eer sal hebben UWelEd. Gest int vervolg te melden, alschon men sulks in geen journaalen heeft durven plaatsen...’.

The statement of Couperus is revealing, as it suggests that keepers of the log would not dare to write down all that transpired in and around the ship. Menkenveld and Kerkhoven had large fights aboard the vessel, in which Menkenveld became physical, harming the first mate. In return, Van Kerkhoven threatened to kill Menkenveld, stating he was not a young man like Pruijmelaar, whom he could easily influence.<sup>199</sup> Interestingly enough, Van Kerkhoven had never sailed with either Menkenveld or Pruijmelaar. Apparently, he was well aware of the connection they shared. Couperus states that captain Menkenveld was drunk several times and frequently left the vessel to stay on land for lengthy periods, probably avoiding the situation onboard. In turn, Van Kerkhoven repeatedly got drunk, violating the captives with the *boermesingel*.<sup>200</sup>

Captain Menkenveld would draw up a statement of his own, signed by the crew, to prove the misbehaviour of the first mate. They claim that Van Kerkhoven threatened to murder the surgeon Couperus, set up the crew against the captain, left the ship unsupervised by an officer with over two hundred captives onboard, kept women for his own, and threatened to blow up a French ship anchored close to the *Haast U Langzaam*.<sup>201</sup> Van Kerkhoven had even asked captain Menkenveld to give every sailor an African woman, which according to him, was very common with the captains of other vessels.<sup>202</sup> After investigating these allegations, Van Kerkhoven was dismissed from his service. The same faith would befall Menkenveld, as Adriaan de Visser accused him of exceeding the legal amount of private trade, smuggling and acting against the companies interest, focusing on his personal wealth and preceding to trade in gold rather than captives.<sup>203</sup> These accusations led to an investigation, during which several sailors were questioned. Unfortunately for Menkenveld, this investigation led to his demise.

The surgeon Couperus gave an interesting remark at the end of his letter to the company, in which he accuses not only the officers but, in a way, also the company itself:

‘This piece is drawn up to show how desperate situations aboard your ships sometimes become. No reports are made because such captains tell us that they will be the ones that are trusted; the sailors do not even dare to speak, for the captains have made it so that they will not even be heard’.<sup>204</sup>

The statement of Couperus suggests that the fearful and violent circumstances aboard the *Haast U Langzaam* were no exception and that the regular sailors were only standing at the mercy of their

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<sup>199</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 509.1, 215.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 210 - 213.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 192 - 194.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 218: ‘...Dit kleine staaltie is allenig om aan UweEd: gest: aan te tonen hoe desperaat t somtijds op UE. Schepen toe gaat, daar men geen berigt van bekooft, de waare oorsaak is dese, dat jullie Capt. Altoos seggen, wij werden geloof, en gij lieden durft niet spreken want wij hebben t reedts soo verre gebragt dat gij niet verhoort wert...’.

captains and officers. Couperus was no stranger to Menkenveld's command, as he had sailed with him on the *Philadelphia* and the *Eenigheid*. The circumstances onboard the *Haast U Langzaam* could have been similar throughout the many voyages of Jan Menkenveld, though out of fear, it remained unrecorded. Additionally, it suggests that the abuse of African captives was far more common than the ship's logs portrait. These unrecorded circumstances may be the underlying events that sparked insurrection aboard these vessels. Although the MCC gave clear instructions to their captains in which drunkenness and violence were condemned, months and years of sailing created societies where the captains and crew would be governed by their own rules and laws of order.<sup>205</sup>

For the first time, Menkenveld had sailed without his trusted officers. It is hard to believe that this was Menkenveld's first time smuggling. Only this time, he had no loyal officers to help him cover it up. Van Kerkhoven had even told Menkenveld to:

'...Father dear, I will keep my hand above [your head], while the others want to betray you, whereafter the captain told him to go to his cage, 'that all things would work out'.<sup>206</sup>

This passage seems to hint at the smuggling of the captain. Considering what Van Kerkhoven has said and done, it would seem unlikely that he would have kept Menkenveld's secret. In the end, Jan Menkenveld followed the footsteps of his mentor, Cornelis Maarschalk, and was discarded from the company, never to sail again. Unbeknownst to him, his position of veteran captain would soon be taken over by Cornelis van Kakom, who served as third mate on the *Haast U Langzaam* and would eventually be captain on seven triangular voyages for the MCC.<sup>207</sup> It raises the question of how Van Kakom's experiences aboard this vessel influenced his voyage as captain and the circumstances on his vessel as the baton was passed to his hands.

## Conclusion

This chapter evaluated the larger insurrections aboard the *Philadelphia*, *Eenigheid*, *Middelburgs Welvaren* and *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*. The vessels showed similar circumstances in the moments of insurrection. In almost all cases, the vessel was close to shore while trading. The captives carefully chose the moments to strike, as they almost always initiated an insurrection when part of the crew was either sick or had business on shore. Weather conditions did not seem to affect the moments of insurrection on these vessels. In some cases, violence might have led to insurrection, as some crewmembers tended to be drunk and violent towards their crew and the African captives. Inexperienced and incompetent sailors further seemed to contribute to insurrections. Unable to

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<sup>205</sup> Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, 24.

<sup>206</sup> ZA, MCC Inv.nr. 509.1, 212: ... "vaderlief, u sal ik d'handt bove en de andere soeke u te verraden," maar de capteijn sprak niets tegen hem als dat hij maar na sijn cooij soudt gaan, dat alle dinge sig wel soude schikken...'.  
<sup>207</sup> Heijer, *Het Slavenschip*, 8.

perform essential tasks, they became liabilities on the slave ship, creating possibilities for the enslaved.

## Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to uncover to what extent the captaincies of Jan Menkenveld, David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder kindled insurrections on their triangular voyages between 1754 and 1767. Together, these captains made eighteen transatlantic voyages, ten of which have been investigated in this thesis and of which nine indeed experienced the criteria for insurrection as described in the introduction: ‘Slave insurrection’, ‘Insurrection planned but thwarted’ and ‘Three or more slaves jumping overboard, missing or escaped’. Throughout their careers as captains for the MCC, the fate of more than five thousand African men, women and children were sealed, condemning them to either death aboard the slave ship or a life of slavery in the colonies Surinam, Berbice and Curacao.

In the first chapter, the initial relations between the captains are uncovered, showing how captain Menkenveld served not only as captain but also as an educator for officers, sailors and ship boys. Inevitably, their shared experiences of sailing in the slave trade formed a bond over the years. The muster rolls display mobility in the hierarchy of a vessel, as young sailors were educated to become artisans or high-ranking officers, after which a captaincy would be within reach. The mobility between the vessels also becomes apparent, as slave ship sailors are seen on numerous muster rolls. Therefore, the slave ships of the MCC should not entirely be seen as an individual entity. Instead, it should be viewed from a broader perspective, operating in a vast web where crewmembers were interchangeable, shared information and came to each other’s aid in the Dutch Republic and African coasts. By setting up wide-range research on the hundreds of sailors recorded in the archive, their careers will become more apparent, which can result in mini-biographies that help unravel circumstances within the MCC slave trade.

The second chapter discussed the normal circumstances surrounding the MCC vessels and unravelled the motives, intentions and opportunities of those cases in which African captives jumped overboard, leading to their escape, recapture or death. Similar precautions on all vessels were made to deprive the African captives of opportunities to rebel, like building a wooden barricade. However, favourable circumstances for insurrection were present during all voyages. Crew negligence and disunity amongst the crew were significant components initiating insurrections. Sickness, incompetence, crisis on and around the ship and numerical advantages were other vital components that troubled the voyages of these captains. As these circumstances kept arising on the ships of even the most veteran of captains, it suggests that opportunity for insurrection must have been present on almost every ship sailing in the slave trade, perhaps not in the least with inexperienced captains.

However, the mere presence of opportunity alone seems insufficient evidence of why these captains experienced so many individual acts of insurrections. The true intention for jumping overboard remains obscure for every individual. However, the logbook of the ship’s surgeon of the

*Eenigheid* provides some details that describe potential motives. Mistreatment, abuse, sickness and grief reveal the unforgivable cruelty that might have created a motive for captives to jump overboard. In most cases, only one or two individuals managed to jump overboard simultaneously, of whom most were women. Different to the men onboard, the women were not shackled. When on deck, these individuals were one soul between many, making it more likely to escape observant eyes. The enslaved seemed to be aware of the weak moments occurring on the vessels, for they often chose their moment when the crew's strength was reduced or crucial guarding tasks neglected.

The third chapter evaluated the larger insurrections on the *Philadelphia*, *Middelburgs Welvaren*, *Eenigheid* and *Vrouw Johanna Cortes*. Throughout these voyages, it became apparent that similar circumstances created opportunities for insurrection. The captives used those weaker moments when the crew was absent, sick or unwatchful. It has shown that captives were, at times, entirely at the mercy of drunk and violent crewmembers. Some officers have been identified that were known to show violent behaviour, mustering on multiple voyages. Evidence supports the idea that officers aided one another, keeping each other's excesses secret, like Willem de Molder ignoring the violent behaviour of Isaac de Grie. A man like Jan Menkenveld, who educated boys to become high-ranking officers on the slave vessels of the MCC, might have been reasonably assured of their loyalty. Mistakes onboard or violent outbursts would remain unreported in the ship's logs, and in return, the illegal private trade from the captain would remain unmentioned to the company, as would have almost been the case on the *Haast U Langzaam*. The opportunity created by crew negligence, disunity, sickness and incompetence, fuelled by violent behaviour from crewmembers, is what kindled insurrections on the voyages of Jan Menkenveld, David Mulders, Daniel Pruijmelaar and Willem de Molder between 1754 and 1767.

Furthermore, the statement of the surgeon Petrus Couperus radically changes how scholars should look at the MCC archives. The discussion about the quantity of slave ship resistance asks to be reignited, as the accusation of Couperus confirms that the circumstances aboard the slave ship, as described in the available sources, are deficient. It suggests that the lack of evidence of the violent circumstances aboard the MCC slave ships and the African resistance it might have sparked are infrequent on purpose. The inadequacy in ship logs and letters is due to captains and officers concealing the violent outbursts and mistreatment of the African captives, using their authority to discourage or even frighten sailors into taking matters to the MCC. This concealment suggests that the actual events on slave vessels could strongly differ from what was reported. Therefore, the true number of insurrections aboard slave ships is and always will be unbeknownst to history.

Following this, the question arises why captains would even report insurrections in the first place. In the more prominent cases of insurrection, when other vessels had to come to assistance, the event itself became undeniable. On the one hand, reporting insurrections that were quickly put down might have demonstrated the competence of a captain, whereas, on the other hand, most excesses occurring on a voyage would not reach the ship logs, perhaps not to seem incompetent in the eyes of

the company directors.

Although the historical method of analysing ship logs and letters to confirm slave ship resistance is a solid base to start one's research, it seems unsatisfactory when dealing with the MCC archive. The extensive archives contain an overwhelming corpus of handwritten text, most of which have been categorised under logical titles. However, some sources, like interrogations, additional reports or extensive letters, are to be found in joined bundles, containing hundreds of pages of handwritten bills, calculations, inventories and 'other pieces'. This complicates research and undoubtedly leads to overlooking essential data that could immensely contribute to the scholarly field of the Dutch slave trade.

Additionally, when reminded of the interconnection between slave vessels and viewing them from a broader perspective, further information may come to light. Although the vessels were thousands of kilometres from homeport, information travelled amongst the African coasts. During an insurrection, the ship logs of vessels in the same area might provide additional details about specific events as vessels aided, traded and exchanged information.

Although this thesis uncovered new details concerning insurrections aboard the slave ship, some matters have been left unchecked or deserve additional research. When reviewing the TSTD, not only the names of the captains and vessels stand out, but also the period in which insurrections occurred. The reason for the regular flow of captives to the African shores is often found in the small states and kingdoms in the hinterlands. Not much is known of wars fought by the Dahomey or Ashanti kingdoms around the 1750s. Further research on these subjects might provide more background on the captives themselves.

Based on the evidence provided in this thesis, insurrections seem more common than the vessels documented in the TSTD cared to report, as it might have put them in a bad light to company directors. When it was reported, however, the directors of the MCC did not seem to care, as these captains would continue to make triangular voyages even though insurrections were reported. As long as the voyages remained profitable for the MCC, the dreadful routine of the slave ship and their captain would only continue.

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