

Between Liberty and Slavery

Debates on republicanism and abolitionism in the Dutch Patriot and Batavian Revolutions, 1760-1800.



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Abstract

Although Dutch Patriot and Batavian republicans argued for political liberty and against political slavery in their revolutions, their usage of political servitude in their writings has been deemed 'rhetorical' and 'metaphorical' in historiography, as republican ideas were thought to have never been applied to chattel slavery. In the years leading up to the revolutions, however, a growing body of antislavery discourse was taking hold in Dutch public discourse. Most of the previous scholarship has primarily focused on explaining the absence of a Dutch Abolition Society, and has therefor missed an opportunity to investigate the symbiosis of the period's dominant political language and discourse of abolitionism.

This thesis therefore investigates how Dutch antislavery discourse combined with republican ideas and language in Dutch periodicals, intellectual treatises and speeches during the Patriot and Batavian periods (1760-1800). In 1760s and 1770s, a debate on the unvirtuous nature of wealth and luxury became prominent in both republican and antislavery discourse, even though the two strains of thought did not definitively combine in this period. Nonetheless, as international abolitionist publications were translated into Dutch in the 1790s, some authors – including prominent (future) Batavian revolutionary republicans – did seek to combine their antislavery ideas with the dominant political ideas of republicanism, not only through antiluxury, but also in highlighting the similarity between the master-slave and tyrant-subject relationship. This overlap between the fight of some Batavians against political and chattel slavery reached its peak in two debates in the Batavian National Assembly in 1797 on (gradual) abolition. There, representatives eventually chose to limit the scope of republican liberty, influenced by fears of societal collapse and pre-imperialist arguments.

Despite their eventual defeat, this thesis shows that a number of Dutch republicans, although at times halted by internal derogatory ideas on the African Other, did connect their ideas on political slavery to the colonies in the late 1790s. The observations in this thesis are therefor particularly interesting for further (international) comparative research, or investigations into the relationship between republicanism and abolitionism in the nineteenth century.

Introduction

On 22 April 1797, representative Petrus Franciscus Guljé rose to speak in the brand new Batavian National Assembly. The representative for the district of Veghel – together with his colleagues – had just listened to a fiery (gradual) abolition speech by Pieter Vreede. Vreede had been outraged that a parliamentary commission had not included the issue of slavery in its draft proposal for the future position of the colonies in the new Batavian constitution. Guljé, who probably knew Vreede as a fellow-representative for the newly franchised province of Bataafs-Brabant, came out in support of Vreede's speech. However, he did not necessarily do so from an abolitionist point of view. Instead, he uttered an unquestionable belief in the fundamental values of republicanism. Since the province Bataafs-Brabant had lived under direct rule of the States General for far too long, described by Guljé as slavery, he concluded that the Republic 'voor een en voor altyd ophoud zo in de Colonien als elders Slaaven te maaken, en daar over te heerschen.'¹ Now that Bataafs-Brabant had been liberated by the Batavian Revolution, enslaved Africans in Dutch colonies should receive a similar fate.

Guljé and Vreede were neither the first, nor the only one to raise their voice against the issue of slavery. Their remarks were the result of an expanding body of public discourse on abolition and antislavery that had been on the rise in the Dutch Republic for at least three decades at this point. Political theorists, ministers, novelists and periodical newspapers had all raised the issue starting in the 1760s. The question of slavery was debated within this context in the Dutch revolutionary movement, by republican revolutionaries in the Patriot movement and politicians in the Batavian Republic alike. After the parliamentary debates on the constitution, however, the first Dutch constitution – the so called *Staatsregeling* (1798), and subsequent alterations on the constitution, were silent on abolition.² Slavery would

¹ *Dagverhaal der handelingen van de Nationaale Vergadering representeerende het Volk van Nederland; van de tweede Nationale Nationale Vergadering; van de Nationaale en en Constituteerende Vergadering representeerende het Bataafsche Volk* 9 vols. (The Hague 1796-1798), vol. 5, no. 492, 27 April 1797 (session 22 April), 721-728, at 732-733 [Hereafter: *Dagverhaal*].

² René Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment: Contesting the Limits of Civic Equality and Participation in the Age of Revolutions* (Leiden 2019) 112.

be permitted in the Dutch colonial empire until 1863, even though the slave trade would be abolished under British pressure by William I in 1814.³ The rise of antislavery rhetoric and publications amongst Dutch revolutionary republicans in the Patriot movement and the Batavian Republic, the overlap between abolitionism and republicanism, and the ultimately failure of that combination to convince enough Batavian representatives to at least (constitutionally) abolish the slave trade, is the subject of this thesis.

Historiographical relevance

Specifically, I intend to answer the question how Dutch (gradual) abolitionist and antislavery (political) discourse combined with republican ideas and language in press and parliament slightly before and during the Patriot and Batavian periods (1760-1800).⁴ This is particularly relevant, since the relationship between republicanism and antislavery discourse touches upon the very core of republicanism, as described by Quintin Skinner. He views the dichotomy between the concepts of 'liberty' and 'slavery' not simply as metaphoric or rhetorical devices to add drama into a speech: he sees them as the ideological bedrock of the republican Neo-Roman (or early-modern) tradition.⁵ According to Wyger Velema, and as seen in the opening quotation by Guljé, members of the Dutch Patriot (or Batavian) revolutionary movement too felt little hesitation in using the dichotomy to combat the – to their minds – tyrannical and dysfunctional Stadholderate.⁶ The question

³ Sarah Adams, *Repetoires of Slavery. Dutch Theater Between Abolitionism and Colonial Subjection, 1770-1810* (Amsterdam 2023) 37-38.

⁴ The distinctions between 'abolitionism' 'gradual abolitionism' and 'antislavery' have an important history of their own. For our purposes, 'antislavery' is taken to mean attitudes that opposed slavery, although not actively argued for abolition, or only did so begrudgingly. Gradual abolitionism was abolitionism that only though abolition was possible after a number of years had passed, in which the enslaved could be slowly made accustomed to liberty. Lastly, full abolitionists, of which there were only a small amount in the Dutch case, wanted immediate abolition. David Brion Davis, 'Review: Antislavery or Abolition?', *Reviews in American History* 1 (1973) 1, 95-99.

⁵ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge 2012). Wyger R.E Velema and A.J. Vanderjagt ed., *Republicans: Essays on Eighteenth-Century Dutch Political Thought* (Leiden 2007). Rachel Hammersley, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France: Between the Ancients and the Moderns* (Manchester 2010). An article in which the particular properties of eighteenth century republicanism are highlighted in practice, is: Rachel Hammersley, 'Jean-Paul Marat's *The Chains of Slavery* in Britain and France: 1774-1833', *The Historical Journal* 48 (2005) 3, 641-660.

⁶ Velema, *Republicans*, 107 and 146-147.

remains how republican revolutionaries during both the Patriot Revolution and the Batavian Republic connected the concept of political liberty, and the 'abolition' of political slavery, to the abolition of chattel or colonial slavery.

Until recently, publications on Dutch abolitionism in the revolutionary period were nearly uniformly aimed at explaining the apparent failure of any general Dutch abolition movement – akin to the English *Abolition Society* or the French *Amis des Noirs* – to materialise. In his dissertation, G.J. Schutte is one of the first to provide such a reason for 'failure'. The Dutch revolutionaries did not want to give up the profits gained by colonialism and slavery, and instead returned to the ideal of the Dutch 'staple-market'. Furthermore Schutte believed Dutch revolutionaries simply received too little information on the colonies due to a lack of Dutch settler colonies, compared to French and British overseas possessions. Schutte concluded somewhat vaguely in a separate article that 'theoretische tegenstrijdigheden en praktische moeilijkheden' made sure enlightenment thought on slavery could not 'break through' into policy.⁷ A decade later, A.N. Paasman was able to bring an astonishing list of sources on the topic of slavery in the revolutionary era to light. His account, however, is aimed primarily at the analysis of one particular novel (*Reinhart* by Elisabeth Maria Post). The description of other sources on slavery is therefore mostly a summary, rather than a considered historical analysis.⁸ What Schutte's 'theoretische tegenstrijdigheden' consisted of precisely, remained undetermined.

Even though a large body of source material had been unearthed by Paasman, further debate in the 1990s again attempted to explain the lack of an abolitionist movement, rather than analyse the antislavery sources that did exist. It was theorised by authors such as Thomas L. Haskell and David Brion Davis that the abolitionist argument against forced-labour aided the emergence of (proto-)capitalism and industrialisation in Britain, France and America, due to the alleged greater efficiency of free-labour, and as Haskell believed, due to rising morals of

⁷ G.J. Schutte, *De Nederlandse patriotten en de koloniën. Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden, 1770-1800* (Groningen 1974). G.J. Schutte, 'Zedelijke verplichting en gezonde staatkunde. Denken en doen rondom de slavernij in Nederland en koloniën eind 18^e eeuw', in: *Documentatieblad werkgroep 18^e eeuw*, 41-42 (1979), 101-115.

⁸ A.N. Paasman, *Reinhart: Nederlandse literatuur en slavernij ten tijde van de Verlichting* (Leiden 1984).

tolerance alongside the idea of capitalism.⁹ The late development of Dutch industrialism suggests to Haskell that the Dutch proto-capitalist system, which was in economic crisis at time, could not have produced an antislavery movement.¹⁰

The first to dispute the relationship between capitalism and antislavery was Seymour Drescher. In his article 'The Long Goodbye', Drescher names the Atlantic antislavery movements as outliers, reiterating the slower 'continental' response to slavery. Rather than seeing the rise of capitalism in the Netherlands as synonymous with the development of human rights, Drescher, aided by Angelie Sens, was more inclined to see emerging capitalism as a hinderance and opponent to antislavery: the development of a successful sugar business did not need free labour in the perception of many eighteenth and nineteenth century Dutch entrepreneurs. It needed slaves. Abolitionism is more likely to have originated in the late eighteenth century due to 'new modes of social mobilisation', Drescher concludes.¹¹

Whereas Drescher fails to specify this rather vague alternative, Angelie Sens – in a bundle entirely dedicated to Drescher's article – adds to its definition. According to her, new modes of social mobilization 'refer (...) to the larger spectrum of eighteenth-century Dutch enlightened culture, which includes such fields as politics, religion, science, and literature.' Sens elaborated on this broad definition in her book on the Dutch view of the colonial Other at the end of the eighteenth century, in which many of especially Schutte's conclusions were partially done away with. She unearthed the genre of travel reports of Africa and the colonies, which were extremely popular at the time and provided the Dutch with plenty of material on the colonies to draw from to shape their arguments in the debates on slavery.¹²

⁹ Gert Oostindie ed., *Fifty Years Later. Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995), 6 and 7. Thomas L. Haskell, 'Convention and Hegemonic Interest in the Debate over Antislavery', in: Thomas Bender ed., *The Antislavery Debate; Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley 1992), 200-259. David Brion Davis, 'Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony', in: Thomas Bender ed., *The Antislavery Debate; Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley 1992), 161-179.

¹⁰ Haskell, 'Convention and Hegemonic Interest'. Oostindie, *Fifty Years Later*, 6 and 7.

¹¹ Seymour Drescher, 'The Long Goodbye: Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective', *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), 44-69. Angelie Sens, 'Dutch Antislavery Attitudes in a Decline-Ridden Society, 1750-1815', in: Gert Oostindie ed., *Fifty Years Later. Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995), 89-104. Angelie Sens, 'La révolution batave et l'esclavage. Les (im)possibilités de l'abolition de la traite des noirs et de l'esclavage (1780-1814)', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 326 (2001) 65-78, at 77-78.

¹² Angelie Sens, *Mensaap, heiden, slaaf. Nederlandse visies op de wereld rond 1800* (The Hague 2001) XII-XIII.

Similar to previous scholarship, however, Sens remained particularly interested in explaining why no Dutch abolition movement materialised. Through for example essay-contests and literary works, (partial-) abolitionists often only sought an end to the slave trade and violence on the plantations, but not necessarily the end of slavery itself.¹³ Black Africans were, in the eyes of many authors who made use of enlightenment civilisation theories, not civilised or even human enough to immediately receive freedom without (religious) education.¹⁴ Sens concludes that Patriots and Batavians were not automatically abolitionists, and that they failed to apply their principle of equality equally. Their usage of the concepts of political liberty and political slavery is described in a separate article as simply 'rhetorical', and even though the issue of slavery was dealt with in an expanding body of literature, 'the problem of relative indifference remained'.¹⁵

The fact that most of the authors before the 2010s attempted to explain an apparent failure of an abolitionism movement to materialise, limited their explanatory capability for the emergence of a rising body of antislavery source material in the revolutionary period found by Paasman. Simply because abolitionism in the Dutch case was not brought about by the revolutionary movement, does not mean antislavery sources in this period are irrelevant to societal debates or to debates on the political ideology at the time. Only in the last five years has this body of antislavery sources been taken up by a handful of historians, with a particular interest in their connection to political events and the political theory of republicanism.

In his book on citizenship, René Koekkoek briefly zooms in on the debates in the Batavian parliament on slavery. Koekkoek's description of the debates gives the idea that only a very small number of representatives expressed a pro-abolition stance there, of whom Pieter Vreede was the most vocal.¹⁶ After debates in constitutional commissions and in parliament, the issue of slavery was quietly left out of the 1798 constitution. Representatives feared plunging the colonial empire

¹³ Ibidem, 114-117 and 127-128.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 112 and 127-128.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 112-119 and 113. Angelie Sens, 'La révolution batave et l'esclavage', 77-78. Sens, 'Dutch Antislavery Attitudes', 96.

¹⁶ Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment*, 112.

into further chaos, as they recounted their colonial losses to Britain and the spectre of the slave revolution on Saint-Domingue.¹⁷

In a separate article, Koekkoek investigates ‘the spectre of political slavery’ within eighteenth-century republicanism, which was ‘brought into full confrontation with the reality of the institutional enslavement of people from African descent’ in the Atlantic revolutions.¹⁸ Although the republican distaste for luxury and colonial goods connected to the abolitionist cause, its defence of (slaves as) property greatly aided the proslavery position, Koekkoek claims. Because of these ‘ambiguities’, Koekkoek concludes that republicanism alone was not enough to make someone an abolitionist.¹⁹ His analysis, however, only covers a small portion of source material from the 1790s, as Koekkoek takes a more international approach. Although Freya Sierhuis in a recent article takes a *long durée* approach by analysing Dutch republican discourse and theatre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an in-depth analysis to determine the connections between antislavery discourse and republican sources in the Patriot period and the political application of those sources in the Batavian Republic – where the actual decision for delaying abolition indefinitely was taken – has not been investigated.²⁰ An evaluation of the debates and subsequent reasoning of the representatives behind the decision to delay, which are most likely to be found in the ‘medium durée’ period of the second half of the eighteenth century, is vital for understanding the conclusion of abolition debates in the Batavian Republic.

This is especially so, since Sierhuis adds that slavery ‘appears to have forced [republicans] to confront contradictions’ in their ideology.²¹ Although she hints at ‘a synergy between republican and abolitionist discourses’, the exact effect these two traditions had on one another ‘remains complex’ and unresolved.²² This thesis aims to clarify this complex debate and relationship, which emerged at a critical time for

¹⁷ Ibidem, 115.

¹⁸ René Koekkoek, ‘Liberty, Death, and Slavery in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, 1770s-1790s’, in: Hannah Dawson and Annelien de Dijn eds., *Rethinking Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge 2022) 134-154, at 134.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 152.

²⁰ Freya Sierhuis, ‘Republicanism and Slavery in Dutch Intellectual Culture, 1600-1800’, in: Jorris Oddens, Mart Rutjes and Arthur Westeijn eds., *Discourses of Decline: Essays on Republicanism in Honor of Wyger R.E. Velema* (Leiden 2022), 53-69.

²¹ Ibidem, 64-65.

²² Ibidem, 63-64 and 69.

republicanism. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the very limits of republicanism were up for debate, as supported for democratic republicanism sored and the political theory incorporated ever more ideas on natural or human rights and social contracts.²³ As we shall see, it was exactly this interplay, that resulted in an ever growing body of abolitionist sources incorporating languages of republicanism, whilst also forming a major limitation in the possibility of immediate abolition.

Most recently, Sarah Adams published her book *Repertoires of Slavery*, wherein she analyses sixteen plays, published and (most of them) performed between 1770 and 1810, all on the topic of slavery or the slave trade. Beyond simply proving that the debate on slavery in this period was very much present in contemporary Dutch culture, since drama was one of the most popular literature genres of the period, Adams makes an important connection to debates on Dutch identity and politics. Some of the foremost Patriots or Batavians were involved in either as heads in the theatre branch, or as spectators. Theatre also became more politicised in this period, taking on the role of a near-democratic arena, according to Adams, where thespians and spectators together shaped the interpretation and meaning of a play. In this process, Dutch actors and playwrights together formed three stereotypical views of the enslaved Other, against which they could shape their own (imagined) revolutionary, civilised, and white identity.²⁴ Especially in her analysis of plays on (legitimate) slave rebellion, republican ideas were actively used and showcased.²⁵

In my view, the argument made in this thesis complements Adams' cultural analysis perfectly, through my evaluation of the political (theory) side of the same coin.²⁶ Even so, I disagree with her one fundamental issue. Whereas she is convinced Dutch plays with republican undertones 'appropriated' the Black victim and acts of Black resistance into their literature, and used it as political tool for themselves

²³ Annelien de Dijn, 'Democratic Republicanism in the Early Modern Period', in: Hannah Dawson and Annelien de Dijn eds., *Rethinking Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge 2022), 100-118, at 108-110.

²⁴ Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery* 16.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 185-188.

²⁶ A month before the completion of this thesis, Adams published her new book. Because of this rather short window for reading and evaluating her work, I have not incorporated it fundamentally into my thesis. Nonetheless, I felt I had to engage with her work in some capacity, as I do in this introduction and later in my thesis as well. In my view, this thesis complements Adams' work by engaging with both written and 'spoken' source material through a more political lens.

rather than for the enslaved, I believe republicanism not only played a much larger part in antislavery political culture at the time. I will show particularly in chapter three that the fight against political slavery, for a number of (democratic) republicans, was synonymous with the struggle against chattel slavery. Although this can be construed as, and at times definitely was, an appropriation of Black resistance, I prefer to see the usage of republicanism – the dominant political language of the time – as a way to convince peers of the idea that slavery violated the core principles and the very values on which that same political language was based.

Adams also eludes to the point that republican rhetoric in antislavery sources somehow obscured or devalued the source to contemporaries. Rather than provide a ‘clear’ antislavery narrative, many playwrights chose to write on slavery only when it suited their (white) republican ‘agenda.’²⁷ A similar point is raised by Jeremy D. Popkin, who, in his article on Rousseau’s lesser known novel on Barbary slavery, writes contemporaries would have found Rousseau’s antislavery remarks, which were intertwined with societal criticisms on political or normative slavery (i.e. the lack of liberty for original thought), confusing.²⁸ As I will show, political authors of the time attempted to connect their antislavery remarks to the dominant political theories of the time, in order to stress the fundamental nature of the issue.²⁹

Approach

This thesis will adopt a somewhat ‘culturalist’ stance, even though it deals (mostly) with a political theory, a political debate and (future) politicians speaking or writing treatises. As Stollberg-Rillinger has (and many others have) attempted to

²⁷ Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 170, 173 and 193-194.

²⁸ Jeremy D. Popkin, ‘*Émile* in Chains: A New Perspective on Rousseau, Slavery, and Hegel’s *Phenomenology*’, in: Mario Klarer ed., *Mediterranean Slavery and World Literature. Captivity Genres from Cervantes to Rousseau* (New York 2020), 294-311, at 295.

²⁹ Unfortunately, this thesis will not include any debates on slavery in the Dutch colonies in Asia. Although some authors, such as Dirk van Hogendorp, included slavery in Dutch-Asia in their antislavery narratives, it never broke through to a larger audience. This does not mean, however, that I consider it as a ‘lesser’ research topic, or as less harmful than African (or West-Indian) slavery. It nonetheless seems to have been considered by contemporaries as somewhat less relevant for the engagement with the concept of republican liberty. Especially in some plays, more attention was given to Indonesian slavery, however. Sens, ‘*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*’, 110-112 and 121-123. Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 194-195.

showcase, the two concepts are not necessarily at odds with one another. What is defined as politics, or what is thought of as possible options for policy, is determined by practices, ideas, traditions and symbols. When political actors act unexpected to modern minds, '[t]here must have been reasons for this, a logic to it, which did not lie in the hands of the individual actors. This logic is what can be reconstructed from a culturalist perspective', she writes.³⁰ It is therefore my intent to reconstruct the logic behind the usage of republican language in abolitionist or antislavery sources of the period.

Stollberg-Rillinger adds to the theories first laid down by the Cambridge School on the history of ideas. Quentin Skinner, for example, is convinced that, extensively contextualising an author and understanding the *intent* behind their written or spoken words, is required for a proper understanding of philosophical (or political) ideas from the past. Skinner proposes using 'the ordinary techniques of historical enquiry to grasp [the authors'] concepts, to follow their distinctions, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to see things their way.'³¹ In this case the concept of 'intent' does not refer to the intended reception of a writer's work, nor is the historian required to read back into a source the future failure or success of that author's idea, as has been often claimed in the Dutch case: it refers to 'their exact intentions [...] in writing what they wrote', which in itself is considered a valuable tool for analysis.³² Skinner adds that the act of writing, or speaking, in itself was an act that should be considered as an unmistakable action in history, a theory that I will make use of particularly in my third chapter.³³ Without a contextual approach, Skinner believes historians will find it impossible to inquire why certain lines of arguments were not pursued, or why certain ideas were adopted when they were.³⁴

³⁰ Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger, 'State and Political History in a Culturalist Perspective', in: A. Flüchter and S. Richter eds., *Structures on the Move* (Berlin 2012) 49-54. For other combinations of analyses of politics and culture, especially concerning the French revolution, see: Lynn Hunt, *Politics, culture, and class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley 1984). Keith Michael Baker ed., *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture* vol. 1-4 (Oxford 1987-1994).

³¹ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1, Regarding Method* (Cambridge 2002) 5. Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969) 1, 3-53.

³² Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 99.

³³ *Ibidem*, 99 and 115.

³⁴ *Ibidem*. Jorris Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld. Het eerste parlement van Nederland 1796-1798* (Nijmegen 2012) 25-26 and 28-29.

Concerning my own research, rather than take the outcome of the Dutch debate for abolitionism as a sign that Dutch antislavery is irrelevant for the political ideas or theories of the time, I will attempt to take the author's intent as the starting point for my source analysis, in order to determine how and why republican arguments were appropriated in to antislavery rhetoric of the late eighteenth century Dutch Republic(s).³⁵

To achieve this, this thesis will evaluate the relationship between Dutch republicanism and antislavery discourse in three stages. I start in Chapter 1 by answering the question how Dutch antislavery first came into contact with Dutch republicanism in (the period leading up to) the Patriot movement. As Angelie Sens established, the early Dutch antislavery discourse in this period, similarly to republicanism, extensively engaged in the contemporary debate on wealth and luxury. By evaluating the usage of the concept of political slavery in the core revolutionary (and republican) publication *Aan het Volk van Nederland*, I will connect the republican tendency to argue against luxury stimulated by the monarch, deteriorating the virtue of the republic, to a rising body of antislavery discourse. This body of source material can mainly be found in the periodical papers of the time, a body of source material largely digitised and partially searchable in the *Delpher* digital archive.

Chapter 2 deals with the 1790s, as shortly after the defeat of the Patriot movement, a host of foreign abolitionist treatises were translated, published, commented upon and reused by a group of Dutch antislavery authors, some of whom would engage in parliamentary debates on slavery in the Batavian Republic as well. How did these revolutionaries, almost universally inspired by Dutch republicanism and the social contract theories of the period combine the liberty-slavery dichotomy in their public writings, again lifted from periodicals, treatises, responses to essay-contests and in speeches? In this chapter I also engage with some of the inherent limitations the connection between the political and the colonial in the slavery

³⁵ Since my approach is based on allowing authors or speakers to 'speak' for themselves, and to provide a window into their own arguments, I have decided, in accordance with my supervisor, not to translate quotations of the original Dutch into English. I feel this decision is particularly important for a Dutch audience: as a Dutch author, it has been a moving experience to read proslavery arguments made in my native language. It is my intent to highlight, in this manner, that only a little more than two hundred years ago many Dutchmen still considered slavery as being 'up for debate'.

placed on the republicans through their use of social contract theory inspired by the concept of the 'natural man'. This chapter is also somewhat larger than the other two, simply because the debate on slavery in this period was more extensive than in others.

Finally, Chapter 3 investigates how the debates in these decades connected to the political sphere. This connection between abolitionist discourse, political ideology and political practice has, surprisingly, been somewhat neglected in previous scholarship. Although the Batavians only engaged in two parliamentary debates on slavery, they provide a valuable case-study for the combination of antislavery and republican arguments in a practical political setting. I will show how the debate on a very practical matter, namely a charter for the Batavian colonies, erupted in a violent debate on the very fundamental ideology – i.e. republicanism – on which much of the Batavian's political system had been based. Since my entire approach is based on the concept of intent and contextualisation of the author's arguments, both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 will include arguments made by proslavery authors and speakers.³⁶

In my chapters, I will make (critical) use of Koekkoek's determined categories for (international) republican antislavery responses, which could (1) take the form an extension of fundamental natural or human rights to all humans – a response I will interpret as a universal understanding of republicanism -, (2) criticise the corruption of the body politic and its virtues due to luxury and profit from slave colonies, or (3) could highlight Black republican virtue and sacrifice, or legitimate rebellion. Although I will use Koekkoek's categories, I will critically apply them and evaluate them in my conclusion, whether they constituted sufficient categories on which to recognize republicanism in antislavery sources for the Dutch case.³⁷

³⁶ I feel it necessary to stress that this thesis will include, by its very nature, a lot of citations which unfortunately include derogatory language towards people of colour, including the use of the 'N-word'. To provide a full picture of the frame of mind and ideas of the authors, including those who argued against equal rights for all humans, I have chosen not to censor the source material, in the belief that an omission of these terms or ideas would not do justice to the image of the cultural or racial 'Other' held by both antislavery and proslavery authors. It is my hope that by showcasing their beliefs in their purest form, I will strengthen the reader's belief that such language should never be used again.

³⁷ Koekkoek, 'Liberty, Death, and Slavery', 139-146.

Chapter 1 – ‘Bloet en zweet van die ellendigen’

Republicanism, antislavery rhetoric and the debate on wealth in the Dutch Republic and Patriot revolution (1760-1787).

‘Het is waaragtig zeggen: dat de vryheid des volks de slaverny van den Vorst is [...]’³⁸

Joan-Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol - 1781

When Van der Capellen made this statement in his famous pamphlet *Aan het Volk van Nederland* in 1781, the Patriot leader was explaining clearly where his ideas on limiting the powers of the Stadholder, and defending the natural rights of the Dutch citizen, came from. Van der Capellen had long been a supporter of the American cause for independence, and had read or translated two English republican works in support of their revolution. The author nonetheless never directly appealed to the issue of slavery. In fact, in the years leading up to (and during) the Patriot Revolution, works from leading republicans on chattel slavery are non-existent.

Nonetheless, this chapter will investigate how Dutch Patriot leaders defined republicanism in their founding documents and publications, and how their republicanism related to the beginnings of the debate on slavery before and during the Patriot uprising (1760-1787). It was especially in the republican critique of luxury, corrupting the body politic, and similar claims made by antislavery periodical articles, that the two systems of thought met and engaged with one another on a limited scale. For understanding later engagements between the two traditions, explaining their earliest ideological similarities will provide much needed context for arguments made in Chapter 2 and 3.

Before I delve into the source material on civil slavery, and the debate on wealth, I will start with a brief context of (scholarship on) the Patriot Revolution, and discuss whether the antislavery publications of the period were merely ‘theoretical’, as slavery is thought by some historians to have been phased out in the late eighteenth century.

³⁸ Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol and H.L. Zwitter ed., *Aan het Volk van Nederland. Het patriottisch program uit 1781* (Amsterdam 1987) 54.

1.1 - The Patriot Revolution and Republicanism

In 1780, the leaking of a secret document in which the Dutch republic recognised the independence of the United States, had resulted in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784). As the war progressed, the dire strait of the Dutch navy became more and more apparent. After a skirmish in the Battle of Dogger Bank (1781), the Dutch fleet had retreated to the island of Texel and refused to engage the British fleet again. The Royal Navy was therefor able to maintain a blockade for the remainder of the war, crippling Dutch commerce and contact with its colonies. For many Dutch politicians the war served as a wake-up call: despite the aid of their new French ally, they simply no longer possessed the prominent position in international affairs they had occupied 150 years prior.³⁹

The person many Dutch politicians blamed the most, was the official Captain-General of the military and navy, namely the Stadholder Willem V. Willem, and especially foreign advisors like the Duke of Brunswick, were despised for their supposed corrupting influence. Whereas the critics of the Stadholder had first seen themselves solely as reformers, reminding the Orangists and the stadholder of the ancient rights and privileges of the people, they slowly started to consider themselves advocates for more radical ideas on popular sovereignty and constitutional reform.⁴⁰ Through publications like Joan van der Capellen tot den Poll's *Aan het volk van Nederland* (1781), and the anonymous *Grondwettige Herstellingen* (1784) and the *Leidsch Ontwerp* (1785), varying degrees of more fundamental reform, based partially on the American constitution, were proposed. Especially in the eastern provinces Patriot officials and politicians became increasingly vocal and demanded that ancient rights of appointment and government would be moved from the stadholder back to municipal *vroedschappen* and provincial *Staten*.⁴¹

Inspired by the American revolution, Patriots considered the arming of citizens a republican duty. Due to political tensions with Austrian emperor Joseph II (ruler of the Southern Netherland) over access to the river Schelde, the *Staten* in

³⁹ Joost Rosendaal, *De Nederlandse Revolutie. Vrijheid, volk en vaderland 1783-1799* (Nijmegen 2005) 19.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 20.

⁴¹ Ibidem, 21-25.

Holland decided to arm its citizens as part of a general mobilisation. Even though a treaty with Austria was quickly signed in 1785, many *exercitiegenootschappen* remained, which would begin to frequently skirmish with Orangists.⁴²

In September 1785, Willem decided to leave his palace in The Hague due to the tensions in the city. As tensions gave way to an actual armed conflict between Orangist soldiers and Patriot militia's in 1786, Willem's wife Wilhelmina van Pruisen decided to round up support for a counter-revolution near Nijmegen. When a Patriot militia briefly arrested the Queen-Consort at Goejanverwellesluis, she requested military aid from her brother. The King of Prussia invaded on the 13 September, mopping up the Patriot militias within a month. Most Patriots fled to either the Southern Netherlands, or to France, whilst some stayed to face the consequences of the Orange Restoration.⁴³

Republicanism in a declining Republic

In his *Liberty before Liberalism*, Quentin Skinner determines that the fundamental principle of early-modern, or, as he names it, neo-roman republicanism, was a fundamental dichotomy between political liberty and slavery. The republicans' concept of liberty and slavery stemmed, according to Skinner, from ancient classical (mostly Roman) sources, such as Livy's history of Rome – in which a description is given of how the people of Rome ousted their kings and founded a republic.⁴⁴ Although Skinner is mainly discussing the Anglo-Saxon early-modern republicans, who originated in the English Civil War and who at times described themselves as 'Real Whigs' or 'Commonwealthmen', Skinner would later add, supported by others, that he believes their ideas to be very much present in other republican traditions as well.⁴⁵ Although Dutch republicans professed affections and similarities with

⁴² Ibidem, 29-30.

⁴³ Ibidem, 48-51 and 55.

⁴⁴ Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 44-45.

⁴⁵ Quentin Skinner, 'Conclusion: On Neo-Roman Liberty: A Response and Reassessment', in: Hannah Dawson and Annelien de Dijn eds., *Rethinking Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge 2022) 233-267, at 251-254. For the influence of the English republicans on French revolutionaries: Rachel Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club* (Rochester, NY 2005). De Dijn, 'Democratic Republicanism in the Early Modern Period'. On the origins of the English republicans: Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen. Studies in the*

ancient republicanism, English Commonwealth republicanism and even Italian city-state republicanism, Wyger Velema concludes that the Dutch nonetheless saw that ‘their history and political arrangements were unique in Europe’.⁴⁶

During the eighteenth century, both the Orangists and the *Staatsgezinden* (those in favour of the sovereignty of the provincial *Staten*) defended the Republic as the ultimate form of government. Both sides simply believed in different republics: whereas the Orangists considered the Stadholder to be an essential component of a ‘mixed-government’, guaranteeing some form of authority in a scattered and locally organized political system, the *Staatsgezinden* considered the provincial *Staten* as sovereign and argued against the – to their minds – illegal rights of the Stadholder to appoint or recommend local officials (although some recognized the Stadholder’s usefulness as the Captain-General of the military).⁴⁷

Due to the American revolution (1765-1791) and the disastrous Fourth-Anglo Dutch war (1780-1784), these positions would radicalise. Whereas the *Staatsgezinden* Dutch republicans had previously been uniformly proud of their republican heritage, and had only questioned the corrupting influences of luxury and French *politesse* on the virtue of the state, the soon-to-be Patriots movement openly questioned whether the Dutch state could be considered a true republic at all, as a sense of decline took hold.⁴⁸ In essence, Dutch Patriot republicanism at the end of the eighteenth century consisted of three strains of thought: classical republican virtue, highly individualized Lockean natural rights, and a belief in popular enlightenment, which allowed especially the Patriots who adopted the language of republicanism to view the Dutch body politic as a changeable agent.⁴⁹

Dutch Patriots connected these three elements, precisely because they realised that ancient republicanism came from a different time and place: the ancient Greeks and Romans never formed into modern commercial republics, like

Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies (Harvard 1959).

⁴⁶ Wyger R.E. Velema, *Republicans. Essays on Eighteenth Century Dutch Political Thought* (Leiden 2007), 9-10.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 1-3.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 107-108 and 122-124.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 117.

the Dutch Republic had.⁵⁰ During the years of the revolution, these ideas would radicalise further: Patriots, like their fellow-republicans abroad, considered a division between ‘power and liberty’, and later between ‘liberty and slavery’, as the most fundamental dichotomy in their struggle against the stadholderate, and would incorporate these ideas into their new political systems and ideologies.⁵¹

The polity enslaved

The fact that the dichotomy between slavery and liberty was inherent to Dutch republicanism at the start of the Patriot movement, is made apparent by the activities of one of its leaders: Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol. Van der Capellen, a member of the Overijssel *Staten*, had become a prominent supporter of the American revolution and had published multiple critical works on the stadholderate and its powers in 1781. Notably, he had translated multiple works to Dutch republican discourse written by English republicans, or ‘Real Whigs’, such as Andrew Fletcher’s *A discourse of government* (1698 – translated in 1774), Richard Price’s *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776 – translated in 1776) and Joseph Priestley’s *Essay on the First Principles of government* (1768 – translated in 1783).⁵² Fletcher, Priestley and Price all believed that guarding the Republic’s (or Commonwealth’s) civil liberties against monarchical or religious slavery could only be done through a civil militia, limiting the corrupting influences of luxury, and guaranteeing the natural rights of citizens in a (new) constitution.⁵³ Others within the English tradition, such as Algernon Sidney defended regicide and the natural

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 56-63 and

⁵¹ Ibidem, 123-124. Wyger R.E. Velema, *Omstreden Oudheid. De Nederlandse achttiende eeuw en de klassieke politiek* (Amsterdam 2010) for the role of classical republicanism and the role of antiquity within Dutch republicanism.

⁵² Especially the translation of Price was very popular: Richard Price and Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol ed., *Aanmerkingen over den aart der burgerlyke vryheid, over de gronden der regeering, en over de regtveerdigheid en staatkunde van den oorlog met Amerika [...]* (Leiden 1777).

⁵³ M. Evers, ‘Angelsaksische inspiratiebronnen voor de patriottische denkbeelden van Joan Derk van der Capellen’, in: Th.S.M. van der Zee ed. (e.o.), *1787: De Nederlandse Revolutie?* (Amsterdam 1988), 206-218, at 206. Fletcher, Priestley and especially Price all considered themselves members of a long English republican tradition called the ‘Real Whigs’ or the ‘Commonwealthmen’, whose ideas originated in the English Civil War. All of them advocated for the natural rights of the people, the establishment of a citizen militia, for freedom of press and against the tyrannical consequences of the (almost) inherently unconstitutional and power-hungry institution of the monarchy. Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans*. Robbins, *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen*.

right of every citizen to rebel if the monarch failed to guarantee the citizen's natural rights.⁵⁴

Van der Capellen would utilise these and other republican ideas in his fiery republican pamphlet *Aan het Volk van Nederland*. The author begins with laying out the natural state of the Dutch (or Batavian) people, who had governed through 'algemeene Vergaderingen, daar het geheele Volk gewapend by een kwam en elk Batavier even veel te zeggen had.'⁵⁵ As history progressed, rulers had taken ever more artificial titles and powers for themselves, and had abused them. Especially Philip II of Spain is criticised, who had attempted '[om] in onze Nederlanden de slaverny in te voeren [...]'.⁵⁶ Men such as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Johan de Witt, *raadspensionarissen* who had resisted the every-growing tyrannical influence of the stadholderate and had been killed for their efforts, are glorified.⁵⁷ The House of Orange, together with the rest of Europe's monarchs, is described as 'Erfonderdrukkers der Bataafsche vryheid'.⁵⁸

The author's English inspiration for his work is mentioned on multiple occasions.⁵⁹ Again, civil slavery is brought in when Van der Capellen discusses the issue of standing armies, who are inherently loyal to the ruler, rather than to the state. Oliver Cromwell serves as a warning against the use of standing armies, since '[hij] het commando over het leger der natie had, en met dat leger de natie zelve tot zyne slaven maakte.'⁶⁰ The author provides us with a prime example of the liberty-slavery dichotomy in republicanism when he states: 'Er is geen vryheid in Europa meer geweest, van dien tyd af aan, dat de Vorsten begonnen hebben vaste troupes in dienst te houden.'⁶¹

Although Van der Capellen mentions all humans to share natural rights, and he considers all to be equal, he never speaks out against (or in support of) the slave trade. Nonetheless, the language of liberty against slavery would prove to be an

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 41-46.

⁵⁵ Van der Capellen, *Aan het Volk van Nederland*, 19.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 22.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 27 and 41-42.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 31.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 40.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 34.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 34.

infectious one, that would spread to many of the foremost revolutionaries of especially the Batavian period.

Exactly how other republicans in the seventeenth and eighteenth century connected civil slavery to the practice of chattel slavery, has been investigated recently by Freya Sierhuis. Perhaps the foremost authority within Dutch republicanism, Hugo de Groot (or Grotius), considered slavery to be acceptable and even virtuous: the ancient Greeks and Romans took on slaves through conflict: rather than killing prisoners of war, they enslaved them, which Grotius considered more virtuous. Criticisms of slavery slowly developed over the seventeenth and eighteenth century, as we shall see, especially connected to the arguments made against decline and the influence of luxury.⁶²

⁶² Sierhuis, 'Republicanism and Slavery', 53-69.

1.2 - Colonies and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in a fragile empire

Table 1 - Estimated number of slaves that embarked on voyages to Dutch-American colonies – 25 year brackets - Compared with other nations 1550-1825.⁶³

| | Spain / Uruguay | Portugal / Brazil | Great Britain | Netherlands | U.S.A. | France | Denmark / Baltic | Totals |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| 1551-1575 | 28,167 | 31,089 | 1,685 | 0 | 0 | 66 | 0 | 61,007 |
| 1576-1600 | 60,056 | 90,715 | 237 | 1,365 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 152,373 |
| 1601-1625 | 83,496 | 267,519 | 0 | 1,829 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 352,844 |
| 1626-1650 | 44,313 | 201,609 | 33,695 | 31,729 | 824 | 1,827 | 1,053 | 315,050 |
| 1651-1675 | 12,601 | 244,793 | 122,367 | 100,526 | 0 | 7,125 | 653 | 488,065 |
| 1676-1700 | 5,860 | 297,272 | 272,200 | 85,847 | 3,327 | 29,484 | 25,685 | 719,675 |
| 1701-1725 | 0 | 474,447 | 410,597 | 73,816 | 3,277 | 120,939 | 5,833 | 1,088,909 |
| 1726-1750 | 0 | 536,696 | 554,042 | 83,095 | 34,004 | 259,095 | 4,793 | 1,471,725 |
| 1751-1775 | 4,239 | 528,693 | 832,047 | 132,330 | 84,580 | 325,918 | 17,508 | 1,925,315 |
| 1776-1800 | 6,415 | 673,167 | 748,612 | 40,773 | 67,443 | 433,061 | 39,199 | 2,008,670 |
| 1801-1825 | 42,916 | 639,400 | 283,959 | 1,605 | 106,698 | 15,386 | 16,316 | 1,106,280 |
| Totals | 288,063 | 3,985,400 | 3,259,441 | 552,915 | 300,153 | 1,192,901 | 111,040 | 9,689,913 |

Table 2 – Estimated number of slaves that embarked on voyages to Dutch-American colonies – Five year brackets - Compared with other nations 1751-1815.⁶⁴

| | Spain / Uruguay | Portugal / Brazil | Great Britain | Netherlands | U.S.A. | France | Denmark / Baltic | Totals |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| 1751-1755 | 284 | 107,165 | 130,104 | 17,593 | 12,266 | 91,030 | 3,053 | 361,495 |
| 1756-1760 | 0 | 108,769 | 125,242 | 23,451 | 10,800 | 8,096 | 5,104 | 281,462 |
| 1761-1765 | 0 | 104,524 | 171,095 | 29,038 | 21,188 | 37,303 | 3,875 | 367,023 |
| 1766-1770 | 3,955 | 108,131 | 189,690 | 30,759 | 16,256 | 100,913 | 2,233 | 451,937 |
| 1771-1775 | 0 | 100,104 | 215,915 | 31,489 | 24,070 | 88,575 | 3,243 | 463,396 |
| 1776-1780 | 0 | 110,393 | 85,408 | 16,223 | 768 | 76,180 | 3,299 | 292,271 |
| 1781-1785 | 0 | 132,061 | 125,313 | 9,866 | 5,316 | 76,367 | 13,736 | 362,659 |
| 1786-1790 | 510 | 122,838 | 151,963 | 6,909 | 11,016 | 207,531 | 4,568 | 505,335 |
| 1791-1795 | 4,466 | 162,644 | 184,797 | 7,775 | 23,599 | 72,876 | 3,209 | 459,366 |
| 1796-1800 | 1,439 | 145,231 | 201,131 | 0 | 26,745 | 107 | 14,387 | 389,040 |
| 1801-1805 | 5,143 | 179,934 | 200,293 | 1,297 | 41,629 | 10,865 | 14,745 | 453,906 |
| 1806-1810 | 8,276 | 213,458 | 83,666 | 308 | 62,293 | 77 | 1,570 | 369,648 |
| 1811-1815 | 29,498 | 246,008 | 0 | 0 | 2,776 | 4,444 | 0 | 282,726 |
| Totals | 53,571 | 1,841,260 | 1,864,617 | 174,708 | 258,722 | 774,364 | 73,022 | 5,040,264 |

⁶³ The database of Slavevoyages.org is the most comprehensive slave voyage database, accessible to a large audience, built upon the work of an international team of historians. For more information, see: David Eltis, 'A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade', *SlaveVoyages* (version 2007) <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/essays#interpretation/overview-trans-atlantic-slave-trade/introduction/0/en/> (30 June 2023). For the actual data results, see: *SlaveVoyages*, 'Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Estimates', <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates> (30 June 2023).

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

Table 3 – Estimated number of slaves that embarked on voyages to Dutch-American colonies – Single year brackets.⁶⁵

| | Netherlands | Totals |
|--------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1775 | 4,662 | 4,662 |
| 1776 | 2,420 | 2,420 |
| 1777 | 3,841 | 3,841 |
| 1778 | 2,569 | 2,569 |
| 1779 | 3,361 | 3,361 |
| 1780 | 4,032 | 4,032 |
| 1781 | 2,340 | 2,340 |
| 1782 | 630 | 630 |
| 1783 | 790 | 790 |
| 1784 | 3,264 | 3,264 |
| 1785 | 2,842 | 2,842 |
| 1786 | 889 | 889 |
| 1787 | 1,667 | 1,667 |
| 1788 | 1,189 | 1,189 |
| 1789 | 1,219 | 1,219 |
| 1790 | 1,945 | 1,945 |
| 1791 | 2,234 | 2,234 |
| 1792 | 1,828 | 1,828 |
| 1793 | 2,925 | 2,925 |
| 1794 | 211 | 211 |
| 1795 | 577 | 577 |
| 1802 | 304 | 304 |
| 1803 | 993 | 993 |
| 1808 | 304 | 304 |
| 1809 | 4 | 4 |
| Totals | 47,040 | 47,040 |

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

In the historiography of the previous century, the debates on slavery at the end of the eighteenth century have been considered by many to be merely theoretical, or 'academic', as Sens described it.⁶⁶ The war with England was thought to have slowed colonial trade and contact to an all-time low, whilst many colonies were exchanged between Britain and the Dutch Republic(s). However, as Johannes Postma argues, and as is clearly visible in Table 1, even though the traffic declined in the 1780s, the Dutch slave trade had reached an all-time high in the previous decade. These enormously prosperous years of slave trading would not be forgotten by the Dutch merchants. Furthermore, despite the British blockade in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, nearly a dozen Dutch ships attempted to reach the slave colonies, although most were captured. Meanwhile, Dutch plantations continued to operate by purchasing small numbers of slaves from foreign vendors, including from their supposed British enemies, especially in the Batavian period.⁶⁷

Not only did the slave trade in Dutch colonies continue whilst Dutch ships remained in harbour. Many merchants and revolutionaries actively sought and imagined a revitalisation of the trade, and complained to the EIC for the lack of business.⁶⁸ During the 1780s, at least three treatises were published with detailed plans to revitalise and reform the trade.⁶⁹ Although after the end of hostilities in 1784, the slave trade saw a brief period of revitalisation (visible in Table 2 and 3), and even though the States General had already responded to the decline of the trade with measures expanding privatisation, such reforms were not radical enough for some. In a paper on the vital nature of the slave trade, the merchant Cornelis van der Oudermeulen 'stressed the need for consultation and cooperation' in the trade, according to Postma, and highlighted the esteem colonies transferred to their

⁶⁶ Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'The Dutch Case of Antislavery Late and Élitist Abolitionism', in: Gert Oostindie ed., *Fifty Years Later. Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995) 67-88, at 69. G.J. Schutte, *De Nederlandse Patriotten en de Koloniën*. Angelie Sens, 'Dutch Antislavery Attitudes in a Decline-Ridden Society, 1750-1815', in: Gert Oostindie ed., *Fifty Years Later. Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995) 89-104, at 93. Sens, 'La révolution batave et l'esclavage', 77-78.

⁶⁷ Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (Cambridge 1990) 288-289.

⁶⁸ Ibidem. René Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State in the Age of Revolutions', in: René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn eds., *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (Cambridge 2019) 135-157, at 139-140.

⁶⁹ Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 284-291.

metropolis.⁷⁰ The States General themselves had already argued in 1789 that the slave trade was inherently linked to the prosperity of Dutch colonies.⁷¹ Such proto-imperialist arguments would reappear, as we shall see, in the Batavian Republic.⁷²

The support for a colonial rebirth was born in the crucible of British rivalry and, ultimately, a complete Dutch defeat. Many Dutch publicists and merchants, sympathetic towards the American Revolution, began supplying the American rebels. In the war that followed, the British captured the plantation colony of St. Eustasius, all the West-African forts of the EIC except for Elmina, the west Guyana colonies, and several outposts were lost in southern India and Ceylon.⁷³ Even though West-Guyana would later be reconquered by the French, and nearly all of the conquered colonies would be returned to the Dutch in the Treaty of Paris in 1784, the temporary loss of so many Dutch colonies would be a rallying cry for colonial and state reform.⁷⁴

Another loss of colonies would follow, however, in the Batavian period. The geopolitical consequences of the Batavian Republic's alliance with France, and subsequent war with Britain, caused an immediate halt to the Dutch slave trade, and much of the Republic's contact with its colonies.⁷⁵ After Willem V made a declaration to all colonies to wait out the French revolutionary storm under the protection of the British Royal Navy, the colonies of Dutch Guyana (Berbice, Demerara, Essequibo), the Dutch Cape Colony and the Indian and East-Indian enclaves either answered Willem's call, or were conquered.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, the East-Indian colony of Java, and the New World slave colonies of Suriname and the Antilles, together with Fort Elmina in current-day Ghana remained in Batavian hands. The Antillean possessions were transferred to British and French possession in 1799-1800.⁷⁷ Although the Batavian empire was thus stretched very thin, (British supplied-)slavery, attempts

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 287.

⁷¹ Ibidem, 285.

⁷² Ibidem, 287.

⁷³ Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness, and fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford 1995) 1097.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, 1097. Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State' 139 and 154.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 138-140. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 285.

⁷⁶ Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State', 138-140.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, 139.

at slave voyages and attempted revivals of the trade made the debates on slavery a debate of the highest importance.⁷⁸

The Dutch press in the late eighteenth century

Before delving into the debates on wealth in the mid-eighteenth century, it is important to address the restricted liberties of the press in the Dutch Republic. Even though the Dutch Republic was (and still is) internationally viewed as a free-minded space in which many controversial books were published, many publishers and authors were prosecuted post-publishment: individual cities, the provincial *Staten* and the States General could all take any action they saw fit against authors or publishers. All publications, from formal political treatises to poems, were at risk of being banned. Publishers and authors who crossed the line – in the eyes of the authorities – were tortured, banished or had their printing materials and books confiscated. Censure increased slightly at the end of the eighteenth century under the authority of the stadholderate. Nonetheless, due to the federalised nature of the Dutch republic, maintaining a uniform national censure remained difficult.⁷⁹ Concerning day-to-day news, individual cities kept a close eye on local media: cities had the right to refuse any new newspaper the right to publish, which monopolized the city's official newspaper.⁸⁰ As we shall see, this encouraged many controversial authors to write their treatises and articles anonymously.

⁷⁸ Koekkoek highlights in a footnote, by quoting Gert Oostindie, that the Batavians did not look back in fear or look at their own society as having fallen in utter ruin or decline. They imagined how it could be remade into the glorious republic it once was. – The question now was, would that glorious future include slavery? Ibidem.

⁷⁹ J. van Eijnatten, 'Van godsdienstvrijheid naar mensenrecht. Meningsvorming over censuur en persvrijheid in de Republiek, 1579-1795. *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 118 (2003) 1, 1-21, at 1-2.

⁸⁰ Erik Jacobs, *Hartslag van een revolutie: pers en politiek in de Bataafse Republiek (1795-1802)* (Amsterdam 2020), 11.

1.3 – ‘Het Weeldedebat’: antislavery and republicanism before the Patriot Revolution

As the image of a declining republic slowly took hold during the 1760s and the 1770s, many Dutch periodical publications saw the wealth of the upper-class as the main reason the age of De Ruyter and De Witt was gone. Whilst thinkers like the Scotsman David Hume, and the Dutch Elie Luzac (1721-1796) and Isaac de Pinto (1717-1787) saw the growth in wealth as the defining characteristic of a society, and of progress, many also criticised the supposed greed of the elite. As Angelie Sens states, this debate on ‘weelde’ combined with the debate on slavery in the late eighteenth century.⁸¹ Did slaves contribute to the wealth of a society, or did they bring luxuries to the metropolis, corrupting it?

However, the debate on wealth did not just combine with the debate on slavery in the 1760s and 1770s. Arguments on corruption and luxury are omnipresent in this period of republican writings as well. Especially the English tradition of Commonwealth republicanism maintained that luxury corrupted the political body. French revolutionaries like Jean-Paul Marat would also use this argument to attack the institution of slavery.⁸² As mentioned previously, French *politesse* was one of the first items many republicans argued against: foreign politeness and court culture had poisoned the formerly virtuous Dutch republic.⁸³

As Freya Sierhuis has noted previously, Dutch republican discourse combined with antiluxury attitudes in theatre. In 1647, the humanist and scholar Caspar Barlaeus (1584-1648) – an ally of Hugo Grotius – had already raised the *Meractor sapiens* (the thinking merchant) as the ideal type of colonist and merchant. Taking the (somewhat precarious) example of the governor of the Dutch colony in Brazil Johan Maurits Nassau-Siegen, Barlaeus raises a re-alignment of commercial enterprise with Ciceronian (republican) virtue as the only solution to the corrupting influences of luxury on the Dutch Commonwealth.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Angelie Sens, ‘*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*’, 118.

⁸² Koekkoek, ‘Liberty, Death, and Slavery’. Hammersley, ‘Jean-Paul Marat’s *The Chains of Slavery*’.

⁸³ Velema, *Republicans*, 77 and 107.

⁸⁴ Sierhuis, ‘Republicanism and Slavery’, 57.

Antiluxury arguments like this resurfaced in the decline-ridden rhetoric of the 1770s. Plays like *Agon, Sultan of Bantam*, by Onno Zwier van Haren (1769) highlighted luxury as a corrupting influence on the virtue of the citizen and the state, infringing on the rights of indigenous peoples. The play critiques not only the general failings of the VOC, but also describes a lack of virtue in Dutch citizens, for virtue in the play is embodied not by a Dutchman, but by the fictional Indonesian ruler Sultan Agon. Agon's city is stormed in a political plot orchestrated by a VOC double agent. In the play, he dies a dignified death, leading his troops in battle.⁸⁵ According to Sierhuis, 'throughout the play, a stark contrast is created between the Dutch representatives of the VOC, characterized as domineering, avaricious, and scheming, and Agon, [and other Indonesian courtiers], who are dignified, honest, and brave'.⁸⁶ This example of what Koekkoek has described as the republican virtue of resistance to oppression, was based on the idea of the noble savage, to which I will return in chapter 2.⁸⁷

In spectatorial writings of this period, this connection between the debate on wealth and the debate on the slave trade and slavery become abundantly clear. In order to fully contextualise the source material for the 1770s, it is relevant to first examine the direct predecessors to this material (as will soon become apparent). One of the most popular spectatorials of the 1760s *De Denker* dedicated two issues to the topic of slavery in 1764. *De Denker* was a popular weekly eight-page periodical in Amsterdam, one of the main hubs of the Dutch slave trade at the time.⁸⁸ The articles, although written anonymously, contain similarities to previous articles written in *De Denker* by Cornelis van Engelen.⁸⁹ Van Engelen had written for both *De Denker's* and its predecessor *De Philanthrope*, advocating a return to a simpler agricultural life style. He argued viciously against everything associated with luxury

⁸⁵ Ibidem, 64.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, 64.

⁸⁷ Koekkoek, 'Liberty, Death, and Slavery'. For more on the noble savage: Paasman, *Reinhart*, 21. Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton 2003), 24.

⁸⁸ Inger Leemans, 'Denker (1763-1774)', *Encyclopedie Nederlanstalige Tijdschriften* <https://www.ent1815.nl/d/denker-1763-1774/> (30 June 2023). Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 284-289.

⁸⁹ Ton Jongenelen, 'Kakera Akotie, Cornelis van Engelen en Christiaan Hagerop. De hitorische context van een Afrikaanse brief uit 1764', *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman* 39 (2016) 1, 17-26, at 17.

and commerce, which he felt corrupted fundamental human virtues.⁹⁰ His arguments against the slave trade contained similar considerations.

In order to approach the delicate subject of slavery, Van Engelen thought it best to tell the story through the eyes of the enslaved. Although he proclaimed it to be real, he wrote a fictional letter from the former-slave Kakerá Akotie. Akotie, a slave who used to be a foremost citizen of the Fanti-people, writes a letter to his brother Atta 'op de Kust van Guinea'. His letter is claimed to have been found on Dutch soil, since Akotie had been transported back from a plantation to his people under pressure from local Fanti-resistance to his illegitimate enslavement.⁹¹ 'Eindelyk ben ik uit de Slaaverny der wreede Kristenen ontslagen [...]', he writes, due to the pressure exerted on 'het Opperhoofd der Hollanders aan Elmina' (a main Dutch fortress and trading outpost in the region).⁹² If Akotie's concern becomes reality, and he does not survive the journey to 'Guinea', this letter will be delivered to his brother.⁹³ A description of his enslavement and the middle passage follow. Akotie was abducted, enchained on a slave ship with three hundred of his 'Zwarte Landsgenooten', and treated not unlike 'eene kudde varkens'.⁹⁴

'Akotie' is very critical of the supposedly compassionate Christian religion. He refutes the claim that Cham's curse had doomed the Africans to eternal servitude, and expresses that the Dutch ministers had nearly convinced him '[...] om onze vaderlyke Goden te verlaaten, en hunnen Godsdienst te omhelzen; maar wanneer ik hunne daaden beschouwde [...], begreep ik, dat zy zelfs niet gelooven het geene zy leeren.'⁹⁵ The argument that Christians did not encourage conversion by enslaving Africans, would be repeated by many others in the debates to come. Still, Akotie is not concerned, 'doch ik denk [...] dat wy weinig voor hunne bedreigingen te vreezen hebben; want in het gewest, alwaar wy onze dood herleeven zullen, zullen zekerlyk

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 18.

⁹¹ *De Denker*, 'No. 82. Brief van Kakerá Akotie, een Fantynschen Neger aan zynen Broeder Atta op de Kust van Guinea; over de elende der Slaaven, die van daar naar Amerika gevoerd worden. Verdediging van het regt om de Afrikaansche Volkeren tot Slaaven te maaken, door den Heer Montesquiea' (1764) 233-240.

⁹² Ibidem, 234-235.

⁹³ Ibidem, 235.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 236.

⁹⁵ *De Denker*, 'No. 83. Brief van Kakerá Akotie, een Fantynschen Neger aan zynen Broeder Atta op de Kust van Guinea; over de elende der Slaaven, die van daar naar Amerika gevoerd worden. Verdediging van het regt om de Afrikaansche Volkeren tot Slaaven te maaken, door den Heer Montesquiea' (1764) 242-248, at 242 and 242-243.

geene Blanken gevonden worden, om ons te plaagen.’⁹⁶ White Europeans, in the eyes of ‘Akotie’, will not go to ‘heaven’.

Religious arguments aside, the article contains a surprising amount of references to more political and societal discussions. Not only is the debate on wealth mentioned. Debates followed on civilisation, republican virtue, natural rights and the right for rebellion, and other connections to republicanism that would be expanded upon by many (republican) antislavery authors and politicians in the future.

The reference to the debate on wealth becomes apparent when Akotie discusses the European plantations. To satisfy their lust for luxury, Europeans have murdered or removed the indigenous population of their American territories to make room for the production of the fruits that are formed into sugar, coffee and cacao.⁹⁷ ‘Maar welke vrugten? [...]’, Akotie wonders.⁹⁸

‘Geene anderen, myn waarde Broeder, dan die hun tot weelde en overdaad dienen; die zy geenzins tot hun bestaan noodig hebben, en welker gebruik voor hunne gezondheid in ‘t algemeen meer schadelijk dan voordeelig is.’⁹⁹

All this comes at the cost ‘van ons bloed en zweet’.¹⁰⁰ The European’s thirst for gold ‘gaat alle onze sterkste begeertens te boven’, and if Akotie were to walk around the Dutch homeland with a pot of gold, he would be able to peacefully enslave with it ‘een meenigte blanke slaaven’ to bring back to his own people.¹⁰¹ In short, the Dutch are slaves to their purses.

Akotie also attempts to reverse the idea that the Dutch are somehow more civilised than the Africans. He writes that ‘[d]e wilde dieren zyn meer gemaatigd in hen voldoen hunner driften, dan deeze ontaarde menschen, die voorgeeven meer beschaafd te zyn, dan wy. Maar hoe wreed zyn ook alle hunne daaden!’.¹⁰² The smallest crime committed by a slave is punished in the ‘allerwreedste wyze’.¹⁰³ They

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 243.

⁹⁷ *De Denker*, ‘No. 82. Brief van Kakerakotie’, 237-238.

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, 238 and 238-239.

¹⁰² Ibidem, 236.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, 239.

only consider the African as '[...] werkbeesten, enkel geschikt om met onzen arbeid onzen meesteren voordeel toe te brengen.'¹⁰⁴ A first reference (as far as this researcher could locate) in the Dutch debate to a slave's natural rights is what follows: '[...] 't komt zelfs nimmer in hunne gedagten op, dat Zwarten tot eenige voordeelen der menschelyke Natuur, zo wel als zy, geregtigd zouden zyn. [...].'¹⁰⁵ Later, Akotie questions why 'die Barbaaren' hold their children in servitude, since they are born with 'de vryheid, die allen menschen natuurlyk eigen is, [...].'¹⁰⁶

Perhaps the most noticeable element of the letter is an appeal to the inherent right for slave rebellions. 'Akotie' indicates this on a number of occasions. The slave trade is described as an attack on the homeland of the enslaved. 'Waarom verjaagen wy die wreedaards niet van onze kusten? [...]', he wonders.¹⁰⁷ Later in his letter, he expresses support for maroons in the Dutch colonies, who have executed armed raids against the plantations. He even goes so far as to express support for slave rebellions:

'Ja ik houde my verzekerd, dat de woede onzer geplaagde en vertrapte Landslieden noch eindelyk eens zo verre zal gaan, dat zy op eens alle hunne dwinglanden vermoorden, en zich van hunne bezittingen voor altoos meester zullen maken. En zullen deeze zich dan kunnen beklagen, wanneer men hun vergeld, het geen zy ons aandoen?'¹⁰⁸

Despite the various antislavery remarks, the second article ends with some thoughts on the necessity of slavery. Referencing Montesquieu, (probably) the editors of *De Denker* were determined to refute all the fallacies of Kakeru Akotie in the piece, lest 'weak minds' would be convinced of his antislavery rhetoric.¹⁰⁹ The editors indicate they do not doubt the planters' rights to property, but advise them to treat their

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ *De Denker*, 'No. 83. Brief van Kakeru Akotie', 243-244. At this stage, Montesquieu's argument against the slave trade, lifted from Hugo de Groot's *De iure belli ac pacis*, is criticised as well. Both thinkers believed the capture and enslavement of prisoners of war to be preferable to executing them, reflected in the following passage: 'Maar het is u bekend, *Atta*, dat het niet allen krygsgevangenen zyn, die aan [de Afrikanen] geleverd worden, en dat veelyds de sterkste den zwakkeren verkoopt, zonder eenig regt op hem te hebben. Ik weet ook niet, of het regt, om de geen, die wy in den kryg vangen, als slaaven aan anderen te verkoopen, met de menschelykheid bestaanbaar is.' Ibidem.

¹⁰⁷ *De Denker*, 'No. 82. Brief van Kakeru Akotie', 237-238.

¹⁰⁸ *De Denker*, 'No. 83. Brief van Kakeru Akotie', 245.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, 245-248.

slaves gently. The editors end the article with a summary of Montesquieu's proslavery arguments, raised in the popular *De l'esprit des lois*, since the editors cannot refute the evaluation of 'den Neger' any better than Montesquieu does.¹¹⁰ This section, however, almost feels like an after-thought. It is very probable that Van Engelen added it in order to balance his account – and used the letter from the former-slave simply as a thought-experiment – or that the more conservative editors at *De Denker* forced Van Engelen to add this section.¹¹¹

This is made even more likely by the fact that *De Denker* might very well have been banned, if it actively supported slave rebellions in 1764. A year earlier, a major slave rebellion had broken out in the Dutch slave colony of Berbice, to which the States General had sent thousands of troops from the Dutch mainland in order to reinforce the beleaguered and mostly overrun EIC-troops. Plans were even drawn up for the abandonment of the colony.¹¹² Although the slave revolt was eventually put down, reports of the situation were quickly distributed in the Dutch press, and even a personal eyewitness account of the uprising, as recounted by a soldier, appeared.¹¹³ Van Engelen's articles are thus not only a theoretical exercise, but an active attempt to criticise the Amsterdam elite for their support in putting down the slave revolt. Contemporaries might have very well called this treatise, if it were written by a fellow-Dutchmen, and without any counterarguments added, as treason.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, Ton Jongenelen believes the story of Akotie stems from a real abduction of a high-standing Ashanti (rather than Fanti). In 1746, Amsterdam slave captain Christiaan Hagerop abducted seven free men in modern-day Ghana, including someone named Kakerá Akotie, and sold the men as slaves in Suriname. The EIC could not afford any major conflict with the Ashanti, as they were their main

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, 247-248. The arguments quoted from Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) are as follows: sugar would become increasingly expensive were slavery to be abolished, it is nearly impossible to feel remorse for Black individuals with flat noses, how could God have endowed such creatures with a benevolent soul, the author wonders? Slaves, furthermore, value beads made out of glass over gold chains. And: 'Het is onmooglyk, dat wy deese luden zouden onderstellen menschen te zyn; om dat, indien wy hen onderstelden menschen te weezen, men zou beginnen te gelooven, dat wy zelfs geen Kristenen zyn.' Ibidem.

¹¹¹ Jongenelen, 'Kakerá Akotie', 20.

¹¹² Ibidem, 18-19. Paasman, *Reinhart*, 176-179.

¹¹³ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴ Jongenelen, 'Kakerá Akotie', 19.

supplier of slaves at the time. Their request for the return of the seven free men was granted by EIC-officials in Elmina. The six slaves that were found to still be alive were sent to Amsterdam in order to return to Ghana as soon as possible. Akotie, however, perished on the journey from Amsterdam to Ghana. Hagerop was prosecuted in a number of trials, but was eventually simply released at a reduced bail-rate. He would subsequently embark on one more slave journey after which he turned his attention to the lucrative VOC-trade.¹¹⁵ Although Kakerá Akotie's letter was thus a fiction, written by a Dutchman who wanted to argue against the slave trade, and who provided his readers with a unique cross-cultural and empathic perspective into Dutch colonial practices, this uniquely critical article was nonetheless based on real events and a real man.

De Vaderlander

In October of 1775, the spectatorial *De Vaderlander*, successor to *De Denker* (although the new spectatorial had found new authors and editors), released an eight page inquiry into the cause of slavery (*De Oorzaak der Slaaverny*). The anonymous article was probably written by one of the three main writers of the paper, using the pseudonyms *Gerrit Schurhanus*, *Batavus*, and *Letitia Vrolijk*, who in reality were Engelbertus Matthias Engelberts, Johannes Florentius Martinet and Ahasverus van den Berg. All were ministers with ties to the Dutch Oecumenical Branch (a patriot-leaning civil society), and were members of the literary societies *Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen* and *de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*. The paper provided readers with a weekly treatise of eight pages from 1775 until 1778, when it was discontinued.¹¹⁶

A month prior to the publication of the treatise on the cause of slavery, *De Vaderlander* published a treatise on 'De Koophandel van Holland'. In it, the author is concerned with a recent report of the *Hollandse Maatschappij der Wetenschappen* on the Republic's commercial interest. As tensions between Britain and the Dutch

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, 20-25.

¹¹⁶ Joeri Barth, 'Vaderlander (1775-1778)', in: Rietje van Vliet ed., *Encyclopedie Nederlandstalige Tijdschriften. Nederlandstalige periodieken tot de aanvang van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (tot 1815)*, <https://www.ent1815.nl/v/vaderlander-1775-1778/> (25 April 2023).

Republic escalated, a flurry of anti-British articles began.¹¹⁷ Although published in the years leading up to the Fourth-Anglo Dutch War, this article in *De Vaderlander* can certainly be seen as one of them. The sense of economic crisis and decline in the author's response to the report becomes immediately apparent. It remains to be seen whether the exorbitant prices on food and grains will drop to former levels, the author states. He continues:

'Voegt men hier ook by, dat, hoewel 'er veel schatten in den laatsten oorlog tusschen Frankryk en Engeland gewonnen zyn, deeze geldsommen geraakt zyn in de handen van andere Vorsten en Volken door hunne opgerichte Negotiatien, waardoor ze buiten 's Lands zyn gekomen, en van waar men ze mogelyk nooit terug zal krygen, terwyl zy met ons geld hunnen eigen Koophandel hebben in bloei gebragt, en den onzen geknakt.'¹¹⁸

In the author's zero-sum game approach to economics, Dutch wealth has been lost to foreign trading companies. His solution is simple: each citizen should wake 'de gestorven of stervende liefde voor het Vaderland in zyn hart op: [...].'¹¹⁹

'elk [be]hoede zich van den Vreemden te geeven, dat hy zyn eigen Burger kan laten verdienen, om hem aan brood te helpen: elk verbanne de weelde in zoo verre die ons schaadelyk is, en herroepe de oude eenvoudige zeden [...].'¹²⁰

Investments in the Dutch economy, rather than foreign ones, and a return to ancient simple virtues is the only way to begin to reshape the Dutch economy, according to the author, who thus provides us with a clear example of the 'virtue-argument' in the debate on wealth, not to unsimilar to Van Engelen's arguments against luxury.

An even clearer example is provided in *De Vaderlander* of 23 October. This article, titled *De Oorzaak der Slaaverny*, is – similarly to Van Engelen's earlier article – written as a letter, this time to the imaginary character Alintera – portrayed as a well-off woman. The author finds the main cause of slavery in the insatiable greed and excessive wealth of Alintera, and others like her. First, however, the wealth argument made a month earlier is repeated once more. Alintera is holding a cup of

¹¹⁷ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1097.

¹¹⁸ *De Vaderlander*, 'No. 39 – De Koophandel van Holland' (Amsterdam 1775), 309-317, at 309-310.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, 311.

coffee made of the most exquisite Saxon [i.e. English] Porcelain, to which the author responds:

‘Komt het dan nooit in u op, dat gy, en uwes gelyken, waarvan ‘er duizenden in ons Land zyn, de vreemden door uw geld ryk maaken, terwyl de arme Delfsche pottebakker zucht om werk, terwyl vrouw en kinderen huilen om brood? [...] Is dit liefde voor het Vaderland?’¹²¹

The author then wonders: ‘waarom zal men zich zo beyveren, [...] daar alles thans Engelsch of Saxisch moet zyn?’.¹²² But besides being unpatriotic, Alintera’s fondness of foreign luxuries creates an entirely different problem as well:

‘Dient dan koffy en zuiker tot bevordering van het geluk der waereld, tot de vermeerdering der glorie van Europa? – Verstandige Alintera! zyn niet twee Waerelddeelen door deeze twee geringen producten, die nu door de weelde groot gemaakt zyn, in eene jammerlyke ellende gestort?’¹²³

Both America and Africa are being depopulated in order to sustain this level of luxury: the former to make room for plantations, the latter by the slave trade. Slaves are ripped away from their Fatherland, ‘welk elk starveling door ‘s Scheppers ingedrukte zucht altos liefst’, and unnecessarily so.¹²⁴

‘[...] En waartoe? om tot hunnen dood te werken. – voor zich zelve? neen voor ons, om uit de ingewanden der aarde, door eenen afsloovenden arbeid van den vroegen morgen tot den laaten avond te doen voortkomen. – Dat wy noodwendig hebben moeten? neen, dat wy zeer wél kunnen missen en dan nog, zo hunne Bezitters niet volleerd zyn in de zagtmoedige lessen van het Evangelium, met onverdiende slagen voor die moeilyke diensten beloond te worden.’¹²⁵

A full stop to slavery is not the solution raised by the author. Instead, an easier regime, in the vain of Adam Smith’s arguments against slavery, is brought forth.

‘Ik zal [...] u maar herinneren, wat de Engelschen in hunne Colonien geleerd hebben, naamlyk, dat alle vrye Plantaadjn, waar men geen slaverny kent, sterk aanwassen;

¹²¹ *De Vaderlander*, ‘No. 43 – De Oorzaak der Slaaverny’ (Amsterdam 1775), 337-344, at 339.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, 340.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 340-341.

daarentegen dat allen, die door slaaven beheerd worden, afneemen; zo veel toch doet de vryheid en de zagte regering tot de voortplanting van het Menschdom.¹²⁶

If the author intends a 'soft regime' in an economic way (i.e. the Invisible Hand), or if he means lessening the difficult circumstances of the enslaved, is unclear. The article ends with a passionate call to Alintera to boycott the luxury goods produced by slaves.

"t Vogt, dat gy in uwen Koffy-kop hebt, is dan geen water meer maar traanen; ik zeg, 't is het bloet en zweet van die ellendigen, in welken eene blanker ziel woonde dan in de lighaamen hunner beulen. – Drink dat zweet myne Vrindin! Drink dat bloed, drink die traanen, en kunt gy dan noch heeten eene Vriendin van het menschelyk geslacht, [...]? – Drink zulk bloed, dat om wraak schreeuwt en noem u dan noch eene beschaafde Europeaane.¹²⁷

There are a number of interesting concepts being used in this quote. Firstly, the idea that slavery, like wealth, devalues and decivilizes the enslaver. This argument, as we shall see, is omnipresent in all antislavery writings of this period. Furthermore, it is made apparent here by the statement that enslaved Africans are 'whiter' (or 'paler') than the Europeans, that the author considers slaves more civilized than European enslavers.

Furthermore, what is particularly interesting and rather unique about this source, is that it does not locate the cause of the decline of the Dutch (colonial) commonwealth and economy in the limited exploitation or downfall of the colonies. Rather, the author is convinced that it is the decline of a virtuous society and an increase in the need for luxury that devalues the Dutch Republic and exposes it to further ruin. This is a decisively republican connection to the antislavery narrative. It is also a far-cry from many of the later antislavery arguments, which, as we shall see, put forward the argument that the immediate abolition of slavery would endanger rather than enrich the Dutch Commonwealth. Whether the article was written by Van Engelen is unsure. He was fired at *De Denker* in 1765, but might have continued to author a number of articles for *De Vaderlander*.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 343.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, 343.

¹²⁸ Jongenelen, 'Kakera Akotie', 19-21

The Debate on Wealth in republicanism

In the political publications of the Patriot movement, such as *Aan het Volk van Nederland*, the combination of the debate on wealth and republicanism also becomes apparent. When Van der Capellen discusses the seventeenth century stadholder Willem III, he holds the luxury of the 'monarch' and the corrupting effects this had on the virtuous Dutch state responsible.¹²⁹ In the Dutch state, as opposed to the new republic in North-America, it is not patriotism or through virtue that one gains a position in government.¹³⁰ It is through unvirtuous connections with the stadholder that one rises through the ranks in the Dutch political system. In fact, the stadholder would gladly enlist the aid of the wealthiest citizens:

'Ryke slaven zouden zy, even als andere Monarchen, die den koophandel hunner ingezetenen begunstigen, wel willen hebben. Den koophandel van Amsterdam, dien men nu te gronde wil helpen, zouden zy ook wel gaarne zien bloeien, wanneer die Stad maar eerst hare Poorten voor 's Prinsen Garnisoen geopend en de bestelling van hare Regeering aan hun had overgegeven[...].'¹³¹

Mighty and free citizens, making legitimate requests to the Prince are considered a nuisance by monarchs.¹³²

Van der Capellen thus provides us with a perfect example of the revolutionary combination of discussions on luxury and republicanism and its liberty-slavery dichotomy. Although the echoes of the debate on wealth are visible in Van der Capellen's suspicions of commerce, is not commerce itself that is regarded as an evil in itself: Van der Capellen only criticises commerce and luxury that grow the coffers of the stadholder and subsequently defends the right of the Amsterdam citizenry to maintain its wealth. In fact, the growth of the economy and the 'Koophandel' is a main theme in the pamphlet.¹³³

Although the inherent connection between debate on wealth, luxury, republicanism, and the liberty-slavery dichotomy is clearly visible, an important difference between the republican criticism of luxury, and the criticism of wealth in

¹²⁹ Van der Capellen, *Aan het Volk van Nederland*, 52.

¹³⁰ Ibidem, 37.

¹³¹ Ibidem, 53-54.

¹³² Ibidem, 54.

¹³³ Ibidem, 52 and 60.

general, should be highlighted. Van der Capellen does not wish to limit commerce itself. It is commerce that aids the monarch and grows his coffers every greater that he finds problematic. Especially during the war with Britain, an anticolonial and antislavery vision in the Dutch Patriot movement, and within Dutch republicanism, was somewhat out of the question: the state required colonies to regain its former international standing in the eyes of Van der Capellen and many others.

Conclusion – Chapter 1

This first chapter has attempted to investigate how Dutch Patriot leaders defined republicanism in their founding documents and publications, and how their republicanism related to the beginnings of the debate on slavery before and during the Patriot uprising (1760-1787). I have shown that the fight against political slavery was an inherent part of republicanism, and went beyond a simply rhetorical device. Through their many publications, including *Aan het Volk van Nederland* Dutch republicans incorporated the concept into their attempts to criticise and eventually overthrow the Stadholder.

Furthermore, the debate on slavery in this period, often described as ‘theoretical’, has been shown to be very much connected to current-events, and very ‘real’. Debate on the issue of chattel slavery, which had emerged in the 1760s – not coincidentally a period of intensive Dutch slave trading – in for example *De Denker* and *De Vaderlander* connected to the increasingly critical views on the wealth and luxury of the Dutch Republic and its elites. Through unique articles, which attempted to provide Dutch readers with the perspective of the enslaved, or which creatively criticised the luxury of the Dutch elite, a (small group of) thinker(s) attempted to criticise the institution.

It is questionable whether their efforts reached the Dutch republicans. Although men like Van der Capellen, inspired by the ancient and later early-modern republican tradition, used the dichotomy between liberty and slavery extensively, and despite the use of a narrative critical of luxury, especially concerning the Stadholder, it seems no direct connection between antislavery and republican discourse was established at this time.

Despite the debate on wealth, used by both republican and antislavery authors, offering a tantalising opportunity for the connection of the two systems of ideas, the leadership of the Patriot movement did not grasp it. In the chapters to come, however, this opportunity would be taken up by the (future) leaders of the Batavian Revolution. Inspired by foreign abolitionist publications, they would continue to use arguments against wealth, in conjunction with republican arguments, to combat the institution of slavery in a rich and diverse manner.

Chapter 2 – ‘Barbaarscher dan de wilden zelve’

Antislavery discourse and republicanism in the 1790s and early 1800s.

‘hoe meer men derhalven dezen ganschen handel [...] overweegt, hoe meer men zig zal verwonderen, [...] dat men niet voorlang getragt heeft, dezen naam, die het menschdom reeds zoo lang ontëerd heeft, [...] van de aarde te verdelgen, opdat de schande onzes tyds daarvan niet tot de volkeren van later’ en beter’ dagen moge overgaan; - en dezen ons, [...] niet voor nog barbaarscher, dan de wilden zelve mogen houden.’¹³⁴

- Pieter Paulus, 1793.

Pieter Paulus was one of the first, but certainly not the last prominent member of the Patriot movement to contribute to the growing body of antislavery discourse in the Dutch Republic in the 1790s. The decade, which started with the restoration of the Orange Stadholderate, saw both men and women sympathetic and critical towards the Patriot cause speak out on the topic of slavery. Some, like Bernardus Bosch, Pieter Paulus and Petronella Moens, were fierce Patriots and republicans, who had meddled in the Patriot uprising in the 1780s and would continue to serve either as politicians or publicists in the Batavian Republic. Others, like H.C. Cras entered the debate on a more academic level either through academic publications or through debates in the growing number of civil societies (*genootschappen*).¹³⁵ This chapter will investigate how antislavery discourse combined with republican ideas on political liberty and slavery during the Orange Restoration (1787-1795) and the Batavian Republic (1795-1805) in public discourse written by, or in close proximity to, these Patriot (or Batavian) republicans.¹³⁶

Despite a growing republican interest in the topic, the antislavery discourse of this period comes with a bitter aftertaste. Virtually none of the authors in question supported immediate abolition. As Paulus’ quote already highlights, most saw black

¹³⁴ Pieter Paulus, *Verhandeling over de vrage: in welken zin kunnen de menschen gezegd worden gelyk te zyn?* (Haarlem 1793).

¹³⁵ ‘They’ in this sentence refers to a number of individuals, not a coherent political activist group coordinating their effort. As we will see, however, one such group did exist.

¹³⁶ There is a small amount of overlap between the periodisations of chapter 2 and 3. I have chosen for this layout, as to not distract too much from the debates in parliament itself. Sources published in the Batavian period on slavery are scarce, however, and most can be found prior to the revolution.

Africans as a less-enlightened and uncivilised people, who could not (immediately) receive the ‘gift’ of liberty. Such ideas, omnipresent in nearly every antislavery pamphlet of the period, gave their opponents room to manoeuvre and actively limited the possibility, which many antislavery authors desperately sought, for the recognition of enslaved Africans as equal humans with equal rights. As we will see, the antislavery republican attempt to humanise the enslaved, instead dehumanised them to an extent.

International Abolitionism

Besides some discussion of the legality and moral righteousness of slavery in Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des lois* (1748), Dutch antislavery discourse was inspired by a new wave of French and British abolitionism in the 1790s. In his milestone publication, A.N. Paasman brought a broad and diverse body of pro- and antislavery source material to light, mostly inspired by these publications. In 1788, former-sailor on a British slave ship John Newton published his *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*, including a vivid description of the middle passage.¹³⁷ A year later, the former slave Olaudah Equiano would follow with his autobiography *The interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African*, in which Equiano describes his carefree younger years, his abduction and African slavery, and his experiences in European slavery.¹³⁸ Paasman indicates that both took a resolutely abolitionist stance, and were quickly translated into Dutch (in 1788 and 1790 respectively). Especially these first-hand accounts of slavery fascinated Patriots and non-Patriots alike, as they would be heavily quoted in Dutch abolitionist tracts.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Paasman, *Reinhart*, 111-113.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, 113.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*. Brandon, in his article on abolitionism in this period, briefly investigates an ad placed in a newspaper for Equiano’s autobiography. Publishers would attempt to resonate with their possible buyers through ads such as these. In this case, the publisher thought that the public would be particularly interested to hear that Equiano had become a good Christian and that his story was not a romantic poem of sorts. Especially the fact that the source was considered trustworthy because its black author had converted to Christianity, explains a lot of the ‘civilising’ narratives found in the sources under investigation in this and the next chapter. Pepijn Brandon, “Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk geluk”: Verlichte verdedigers van de slavernij’, *Nieuw Letterkundig Magazijn* 38 (2020) 2, 50-54, at 52.

French and American authors, such as B.J. Frossard's *La Cause des esclaves nègres et des habitans de la Guinée [...]* (1789, translated into Dutch in 1790, by poet Betje Wolff, also a critic of the slave trade) and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782, translated into Dutch in 1785), remained popular sources for Dutch abolitionists.¹⁴⁰ Frossard, a gradual abolitionist, would argue for Africa as a new free-market for Europeans to explore, whereas De Crèvecoeur's pro-abolition stance relied on his observations surrounding slavery near Charleston.¹⁴¹

The Social Contract and the 'Natural' State of Man

Of fundamental importance to the Dutch antislavery authors, however, was Guillaume-Thomas François Raynal's *L'Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (or simply *Histoire des deux Indes*), in which the French author and priest attempted to formulate a description and history of Europe's colonial expansion, with (at the time anonymous) contributions from well-known *philosophes* such as Denis Diderot. Especially Diderot's addition to the third (and considered final) edition of the book (translated into Dutch in 1771-1772 and 1783-1787) contained fierce antislavery and anticolonial arguments.¹⁴² Although the work's criticism on colonialism and slavery is not without its internal contradictions, due to its diverse authorship and somewhat eclectic use of contemporary treatises, it is nonetheless quoted often in the Dutch debate on slavery.¹⁴³

So, despite the availability of immediate abolition theories, the Dutch abolitionists would, similarly to many other intellectuals in Europe, favour gradual abolition or simply antislavery rhetoric. As Paasman describes it, many favoured abolishing the slave trade first, 'omdat die [afschaffing] (uit eigenbelang van de

¹⁴⁰ Paasman, *Reinhart*, 111, . Brandon, "Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk Geluk", 51-52.

¹⁴¹ Paasman, *Reinhart*, 110-111.

¹⁴² Diderot's quotation of a famous novel in the second edition – toned down in the third edition – in which a character calls for a Black Spartacus, who will not find a Crassus to stop him, became infamous amongst many learned communities in Europe. Paasman, *Reinhart*, 110-111. Ann Thompson, 'Colonialism, race and slavery in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*', *Global Intellectual History* 2 (2017) 3, 251-260, at 260.

¹⁴³ Ibidem. Paasman, *Reinhart*, 110-111.

planters) zou leiden tot een betere behandeling van de slaven.¹⁴⁴ Only then, perhaps through education or conversion, could the slow and future abolition of slavery as a whole succeed.¹⁴⁵

As we will see, however, gradual abolitionism was not adopted simply as a cautious first step. It remained integrally connected to the dominant political theory of the time, namely the social contract and the concept of the natural state of man. Many political thinkers imagined Africans as living in a state of nature. On the one hand, they were praised for this, whilst on the other hand it limited the ability for politicians and philosophers alike to imagine Africans as capable of receiving the gift of liberty. As Sankor Muthu has shown in *Enlightenment against Empire*, thinkers such as Rousseau connected their image of the natural state of man, the rights of which all governments should guarantee, to the concept of the 'noble savage'.¹⁴⁶ Travel reports from colonial citizens or 'explorers' were gobbled up by 'virtually all of the foremost social contract thinkers in the European tradition', Muthu writes, because it seemed to anthropologically confirm 'that all humans are naturally equal and that political power is thoroughly artificial and constructed', since many Africans and Amerindians were thought to use elementary (or no) political structures.¹⁴⁷

Many European thinkers on the one hand saw the noble savage as a natural human, worthy of praise, but on the other hand this complete Othering presented them as 'largely hard-wired automatons', only capable of living according to nature's strict guidelines.¹⁴⁸ One of the most enthusiastic adopters of the concept of the noble savage was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who viewed many Africans as humans in their natural state, and even wondered whether some species of orangutangs were also

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem, 121.

¹⁴⁵ Sens, *'Mensaaap, heiden, slaaf'*.

¹⁴⁶ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 14-15. Sens writes something similar on the image of the African Other: 'Het meest bepalende beeld was dat een slaaf zwart, heidens en onbeschaafd was, ja zelfs tot het dierlijke neigde. Zo beschouwd was slavernij volgens menig tijdgenoot niet "onnatuurlijk". Volgens een ander beeld kon echter een slaaf edele trekken hebben, elegant gekleed gaan en intelligent genoeg zijn om – westerse – kunsten en wetenschappen onder de knie te krijgen.' Sens, *'Mensaaap, heiden, slaaf'*, 112.

¹⁴⁷ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 17. Rousseau is not fully clear on this: sometimes he describes 'Hottentots' and Caribs as living in his first tier of civilisation, the most basic state of human kind, whilst at other moments he considers both them and Amerindians as being corrupted by their limited institutions, clearly allocating them to his second tier of civilisation. For more on this: Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 33-36 and 44. For some of Rousseau's (largely unpublished) thoughts on slavery: Popkin, *'Émile in chains'*.

¹⁴⁸ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 23.

approaching or living in a state of nature akin to the human's natural state.¹⁴⁹ Writings like this, according to Muthu, 'undercut whatever possibilities existed in their thinking for cultivating a genuine cross-cultured sympathy with historically real, flesh-and-blood aboriginals who at worst were being systematically enslaved or massacred.'¹⁵⁰ Rousseau's *Social Contract* would become a vital part of the new revolutionary combination of republicanism and the language of human rights.¹⁵¹ It is perhaps no surprise, that many Patriot gradual abolitionists, either implicitly or explicitly, incorporated the idea of the African as a 'natural man' into their ideas on slavery.

One of the only Enlightenment authors to attempt to break through this idea in the French tradition, was Diderot in his contribution to Raynal's *Histoire*. He opposed Rousseau's idea that the very existence of sociability and institution led to moral degradation. This was why Rousseau felt that a social contract, recapturing the initial state of nature, was required for beneficent political institutions. Diderot, however, argued that it was simply the character of those practices and institutions that could cause oppression and degradation, but that these were subject to change and therefor betterment. Humans were social agents, of whom Diderot wondered if they even had such a thing as a state of nature. Sociability and political institutions were inherent to the human experience, and could be altered for the better if a society decided to do so.¹⁵²

To this, Diderot added a universal approach to Rousseau's General Will. Whereas Rousseau decided on a particular (national) general will which political institutions should reflect, Diderot formulated a General Will of Humanity: a core ethical disposition that animates social and political institutions for all humans.¹⁵³ This universal approach to the General Will and Diderot's negation of Rousseau's state of nature would only be appropriated by a small number of Dutch (gradual) abolitionists, and by virtually no republicans.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem, 33-34, 40 and 42-43.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, 67-68.

¹⁵¹ De Dijn, 'Democratic Republicanism'.

¹⁵² Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 59-70.

¹⁵³ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* 77-85.

2.1 – The *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* and antislavery

Before delving into the connections made to Rousseau and Diderot, I first wish to return to the initial stages of debate on slavery in the 1790s, beginning in Dutch civil societies as a response to rising international abolitionism. In 1784, an Edammer preacher Jan Nieuwenhuyzen created a new civil society, not necessarily directed at the intellectual and financial elite, but for the betterment of the entirety of the Dutch population through the publication of cheaper literature. He laid out his ideas to his son, Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen, who quickly came up with a plan for further organisation. His efforts would eventually lead to a nationwide civil society with over 2400 members and several local departments (including one in Paramaribo, Suriname). The *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* would host essay-contests, provide the Batavian government with advice on educational reform and would become a major platform for discussions on the slave trade in the late eighteenth century.¹⁵⁴

The phenomenon of civil societies had been introduced (relatively late) in the Dutch republic in the 1750s. W.W. Mijnhardt considers the dramatic increase in the public interested in treatises on religion, politics and science as a major cause of the founding of, for example, de *Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen* in 1752. The main goal of these societies was to publish treatises authored by its members, and to issue essay-contests to a more general public. In the decades to come, more diverse and local societies, such as reading- and poetry groups, were established, following the establishment of the idea of natural sociability: the idea that joining an amicable group of people furthered one's wisdom, virtue and happiness.¹⁵⁵ In the 1780s, societies like the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* were formed, not necessarily to directly oppose the government. Rather, they focused on general political and cultural emancipation to reverse the perceived decline of the Dutch republic: the idea of 'volksverlichting'.¹⁵⁶ The Dutch enlightenment had resulted in a new concept of civilising, in which 'het welvaren van de staat deugd, goede zeden en

¹⁵⁴ W.W. Mijnhardt and A.J. Wichers eds., *Om het Algemeen Volksgeluk. Twee eeuwen Particulier Initiatief 1784-1984* (Edam 1984).

¹⁵⁵ W.W. Mijnhardt, 'Het Nut en de Genootschapsbeweging', in: W.W. Mijnhardt and A.J. Wichers eds., *Om het Algemeen Volksgeluk. Twee eeuwen Particulier Initiatief 1784-1984* (Edam 1984), 187-220, at 191.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

daarom een zekere mate van ontwikkeling voor alle burgers noodzakelijk [werden] geacht'.¹⁵⁷ Through knowledge and education, the public and the state could be enlightened. This concept of civilising would return time and again in almost all antislavery publications of the period.

As Jorris Oddens convincingly argues, the Dutch *genootschappen* tradition would become one of the main sources for political dissent in the Patriot uprising and leading up to the Batavian Revolution.¹⁵⁸ They were the meeting place for many future revolutionaries, representatives, and radical publicists. Even though the *Maatschappij* attempted to portray itself as a neutral society, it included many individuals like this, such as Petronella Moens, Bernardus Bosch, R.J. Schimmelpenninck, Jacob Hendrik Floh, J.F. Martinet, J. Konijnenburg, G.K. Van Hogendorp and J. Valckenaer.¹⁵⁹

Nieuwenhuyzen's De Mensch

Five years after the birth of the *Maatschappij*, Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen paid a visit to another influential civil society in Amsterdam: *Felix Meritis*. This was a society which, according to H.C. Cras a few years later, was awash with active merchants (possibly (former) slave merchants) and intellectuals: the Amsterdam elite. Nieuwenhuyzen was allowed to publicly sing a song on Man (*De Mensch*). The song was later published, together with a small introduction spoken by Nieuwenhuyzen. In it, we find the first evidence for antislavery ideas within the *Maatschappij*.

The minister's son from Edam starts his introduction with the observation, that he has on many occasion written treatises within the society on the 'natuurlijke Historie der Koopwaren', in which Man is always hailed as the 'verhevendste, de uitmuntendste' of species. An Ode to Man was now in order, according to

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem, 198.

¹⁵⁸ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 129-136.

¹⁵⁹ P.N. Helsloot, *Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen 1759-1793. Pionier van onderwijs en volksoontwikkeling* (Amsterdam 1993) 14. Mijnhardt, 'Het Nut', 203. As we will later see, these individuals (by and large) would disagree fundamentally in the debate on slavery to come. Oddens, and others like Vles, subscribe to the idea that, although many of the revolutionaries knew each other through their time at multiple civil societies, the fundamental ideological differences between them started here as minor disagreements. Interestingly, Jacob Floh won a number of first prizes for essay-contest at the society. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 129-136. E.J. Vles, *Pieter Paulus (1753-1796). Patriot en Staatsman* (Amsterdam 2004) 92-93.

Nieuwenhuyzen, '[...] daar helaas! ook dit verheeven schepsel een onderwerp des Koophandels is.'¹⁶⁰Nieuwenhuyzen realised this might throw off some individuals in the crowd, for he continued:

Schrikt niet, Mijne Heeren! – IK zal u het hart niet doen krimpen door de beschouwing van het hoogst mogelijk tafereel der menschelijke Ellende – ik zoude zeker u onëer aandoen, indien ik door eene omschrijving van den *Slavenhandel*, toonen zoude te gelooven, dat u deszelfs geschiedenis niet bekend waare, - daar dezelve zoo meenigmaal en overal omschreeven is.¹⁶¹

Rather than go into detail on the issue of the slave trade, Nieuwenhuyzen preferred to continue with an assessment of the '*Natuurlijke Historie*' of Man, namely an ode to the beautiful workings of the human body.¹⁶² The minister praised the cardiovascular and respiratory systems of each human, followed by the eyes, stomach and the 'galle en alvlesch-sap', and a praise of all the diversity of different humans, who despite their differences, remain human.¹⁶³

Apparently Nieuwenhuyzen found it too risky to engage in the debate on the slave trade directly. Instead, he indirectly tackles one of the main assumptions behind proslavery positions. The stereotype of the barbaric and 'almost animalistic' or nonhuman African had been reinforced by (Dutch) scientific debates in previous years.¹⁶⁴ The main question within the rising field of 'natural science' was that of the unity of mankind (monogenesisism or monogenism). Did mankind originate in one place, and did it consist of one species, or did humanity consist of separate (sub-)species, with for example different skin colour and even mental capacities?¹⁶⁵

For example, physicist and fellow-*Maatschappij* member Johannes Martinet wrote in 1777 that the dumbest African was not much different from the smartest great ape. After the revolution, the physician Jacobus Doornik wondered whether black Africans were human beings at all. Did they not constitute the intermediate step from the human species to the great ape? Cornelius de Pauw considered it

¹⁶⁰ M. Nieuwenhuijzen, 'De Mensch. Een gezang, uitgesproken in de Maatschappij. FELIX MERITIS [...]' (Amsterdam 1789) 4.

¹⁶¹ Ibidem, 5-6.

¹⁶² Ibidem.

¹⁶³ Ibidem. 7-16, at 16.

¹⁶⁴ Sens, '*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*', 112.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem, 43-62.

scientifically proven that Africans had black brains, blood and sperm, and that their brain capacity was smaller than that of Europeans.¹⁶⁶ Despite opposition from anatomical researchers like Petrus Camper, who concluded after dissecting Africans that the only difference between Europeans and Africans was the colour of the top layer of skin – and who also expressly opposed the idea of a disunited mankind - this kind of thinking remained present in the frame of reference of well-to-do citizens and especially proslavery thinkers.¹⁶⁷

These debates were reinforced by climatological explanations for race. Climate' included meteorological factors such as temperature, sunshine, landscape and geography, which could not only make a human's skin darker, according to some.¹⁶⁸ It would actual boil a person's 'humours' and 'passions', limiting their capacity for reason.¹⁶⁹ Removing a human from this climate could, according to theorists such as Blumenbach and De Pauw, return them to their 'natural' white skin colour.¹⁷⁰ Many political theorists, such as Montesquieu and Rousseau, would concur with many of these climatological explanations for difference.¹⁷¹ By expressing the unity and beauty of mankind through an ode to human anatomy, Nieuwenhuyzen aimed to disprove such thoughts.

Bernardus Bosch and Petronella Moens – 'Een handel die de menscheid onteert'

Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen was not the only one connected to the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* to oppose the slave trade. In 1792, fierce Patriot preacher Bernardus Bosch (1746-1803) dedicated three articles in his weekly 8 page

¹⁶⁶ Sens, '*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*', 50, 48-49 and 54-55.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 54. Rick Timmermans, 'Vrijheid en gelijkheid; maar niet voor slaven', *Historisch Nieuwsblad* (version 17 April 2023), <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/vrijheid-en-gelijkheid-maar-niet-voor-slaven/> (19 June 2023).

¹⁶⁸ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 37-38. Sens, '*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*', 61-62.

¹⁶⁹ Muthu, 37-38. Dutch anatomical researcher Petrus Camper also considered climatological factors as the cause of different skin colours. Nonetheless, he supported monogenesisism and refuted climatological explanations for cultural differences. Sens, '*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*', 54.

¹⁷⁰ Sens, '*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*', 53-54. There is some debate as to whether climatological explanations were based simply on latitude, or on environment, local climate and temperature. Did the West-Indies not also constitute a hot climate? Ibidem, 61-62. Paasman, *Reinhart*, 110.

¹⁷¹ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 37-40. Adams considers white-supremacy as being fundamentally established in Dutch (intellectual) culture of the late eighteenth century: Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 16-17.

periodical *De Leerzame Praat-Al* (The Learned Chatterbox) to a discussion on the slave trade.

Nieuwenhuyzen and Bosch knew each other well. Bosch had gained popularity in 1785 through his patriotic poem *Eigenbaat* – a critique of the nation’s and especially the stadholder’s complacency – and had been made a board member of the *Maatschappij*. Two years later, Bosch was forced to flee his congregation at Diemen during the downfall of the Patriots, and spent the next few years travelling from one town to another.¹⁷² Nonetheless, he founded and wrote for a number of periodicals in this period, such as the periodical *De Menschenvriend* in 1788 with Nieuwenhuyzen, each of the ‘Nutsmannen’ writing one article every other week.¹⁷³ In 1789, he started the periodical *De Godsdienstvriend* with IJsbrand van Hamelsveld, and in the same year he started his own periodical *De Leerzame Praat-al*. Two years later, Bosch was forced to flee to Bergen op Zoom, where he started a new department for the *Maatschappij*.¹⁷⁴ In 1796, he would become a representative in the first National Convention.¹⁷⁵

Before I delve into Bosch’ antislavery discourse, it is important to point out another important antislavery connection: the minister was well-connected to Patriot gradual abolitionist Petronella Moens (1762-1843). Moens, the blind daughter of a minister in Aardenburg, had been writing poetry from an early age, receiving a first price at 23 years of age from the *Amsteldamsch Dicht- en Letteroefenend Genootschap*, of which Bosch was the founder, in 1785. A year later, Moens would move to Bergen op Zoom where she possibly engaged in an affair with the mayor’s daughter Adriana van Overstraten. The two would publish *Dichterlijke Mengelingen* in 1791, which contained the poem *Gedachten bij den slaavenhandel*, which can be seen as reinvoking the traditional argument on wealth against slavery.

After the first ‘spark’ of life, Moens and van Overstraten write, liberty already appears to stir in every human’s heart.¹⁷⁶ ‘Waarom dan, eeuwing Menschenvriend!/'

¹⁷² Bernardus Bosch, *De Eigenbaat* (Amsterdam 1785).

¹⁷³ Helsloot, *Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Veltman-van den Bos, *Petronella Moens*, 49-50.

¹⁷⁵ Helsloot, *Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen*, 41-42.

¹⁷⁶ Petronella Moens and Adriana van Overstraten, ‘Dichterlijke gedagten bij den slaavenhandel’, *Dichterlijke mengelingen* (Utrecht 1791) 22-27, at 23.

Ziet gij uw beeld in kluisters kwijnen? / Toen ge eerst, ô zaalge Seraphijnen! / Een mensch geketend zaagt verschijnen, / Toen eerst had de aarde uw haat verdiend!¹⁷⁷

The author demands the reader to sweep aside slavery, because '[d]e winzucht wenkt den handelaar; [...]'.¹⁷⁸ Moens does not consider slavery as incompatible with colonialism: in fact, she sees it as an opportunity for conversion and civilising:

'Gods hand wenkt u, langs d'ocean, / Op 't wit gevleugeld vlot, te zweeven; / Gij durft langs rots en stranden streeven; / Ge ontdekt hier 't reedlijk denkend leven; / Ach! Hadt gij toen uw plicht voldaan, / Der glans verspreid / Der Christenheid, / De zwartste duisternis doen vlugten! / Dan zaagt ge uw naam gevreesd, bemind, / Het pinkend bijgeloof waar' blind, / En domheid, die geen troost meer vindt, / Zou nooit door helsche wanhoop zugten!¹⁷⁹

Although she describes all life as reasonable, Moens also indicates that the enlightening European education and the Christian faith have not yet pierced the 'blackest' darkness. This is a prime example of the dual message of antislavery rhetoric in this period: an attempt to humanise the enslaved comes with the assumption that the enslaved are not fully capable of becoming as human as the white European. Moens ends her poem with the woeful image of the 'rampzalige natuurgeloten, zie ik in d'ijzeren boei gesloten'.¹⁸⁰ Moens would later add to her image of the Africans in a state of nature in need of an education, in her book *Aardenburg* (1816), and through a later poem on the French abolition of the slave trade (1798).¹⁸¹

In the same year, Moens met Bosch in Bergen op Zoom, and even moved in with him for a short period, possibly maintaining an affair with the Patriot, to the

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem, 24-25.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem, 26.

¹⁸¹ Petronella Moens, 'Bij het afschaffen van den slaavenhandel door de Fransche Natie', in: Petronella Moens, *Vruchten der eenzaamheid* (Amsterdam 1798). Petronella Moens, *Aardenburg, of de onbekende volkplanting in Zuid-Amerika* (Haarlem 1816). Veltman-van den Bos, *Petronella Moens*, 300-316.

anger of her father.¹⁸² Bosch and Moens would continue to work together until 1796. Moens regularly wrote articles for *De Leerzame Praat-Al*, and would replace Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen after his death in 1793 at *De Menschenvriend*, taking over the entire periodical in 1796 after Bosch was elected to the National Convention. She maintained the periodical until 1798, when she rebranded it *De Vriendin van 't Vaderland*, although it was discontinued a year later.¹⁸³

In November of the same year, Bosch decided to publish his articles on *De Slaavenhandel* in *De Leerzame Praat-Al*, in which he wonders whether there is anything that dishonours humanity, reason and religion more than the slave trade. Immediately, Bosch points out that, in the slave trade, 'vertoon en zich beschaafden menschen wreeder dan barbaaren – en Christenen slegter dan Heidenen.'¹⁸⁴

Like *De Vaderlander* did so many years ago, and like most authors on the subject, Bosch claims that Christian enslavers become inherently less civilised than the 'uncivilised' people they are enslaving. Bosch also connects his earlier poem on *Eigenbaat* – the human urge for profit and enrichment – which is somehow 'able to drag everything towards it with an air of justice', as the cause of slavery.¹⁸⁵ But the profits cannot justify such a flagrant violation of human rights. After quoting a number of 60 million displaced Africans from Frossard, Bosch asks whether these numbers are justified for reasons of state. He answers:

'De vraag is op zichzelf kort te beantwoorden – men zal mij toch moeten toestemmen, dat men door ontrooving van iemand natuurlijke rechten en eigendommen zich nimmer mag verrijken, en hier uit vloeit voort, dat die slaavenhandel, al bragt ze onberekenbare voordeel aan, nog bij geen *natie*, althans bij geene beschaafde, bekend moeste zijn.'¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Edwina Hagen, 'Moens, Petronella', in: *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland* (version 13 January 2014), <https://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/PetronellaMoens> (26 april 2023).

¹⁸³ Veltman-van den Bos, *Petronella Moens*, 48-54.

¹⁸⁴ Bernardus Bosch, 'De Slaavenhandel', *De Leerzame Praat-Al* (1791) No.46-No.48, 361-384, at 361.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 363.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

Bosch ends his first article by quoting Newton: "[...] HET IS NIET GEOORLOOFD, DIT GELD IN DE SCHATKIST TE LEGGEN, DEWIJL HET EEN PRIJS DES BLOEDS IS."¹⁸⁷

Bosch second article uses Newton, as well as 'de heer J. Hector', to describe the way Africans are enslaved. African enslavers treat the enslaved like animals, and:

'Wanneer zij aan de Europesche schepen geleverd zijn, zou men natuurlijk verwachten meer menschlievendheid omtrend deze ongelukkigen. Doch ook deze Europeërs hebben alle menschlijk gevoel eensklaps verloren.'¹⁸⁸

Again, Bosch reminds us that he expects the 'enlightened' Europeans to act in a 'civilised' manner, but that they are equals to the 'uncivilised' Africans in their 'wildness', who are then shipped to the New World in cramped cargo ships. In the last article of the series, the graphic description, based on Newton, of the middle passage, continues. Slaves, according to Bosch, are more susceptible to sea-sickness. The sick are placed on deck every day, where they are required to lay on the bare planks, and they are 'dus door de beweging van het schip zo zeer gewreeven en gechaafd [...], dat op de uitstekende plaatzen het vel en vleesch 'er afgaat en het gebeente bloot ligt.'¹⁸⁹ The pain of the enslaved 'gaat [...] alle begrip te boven.'¹⁹⁰ Bosch is, like his English counterparts, using the model of imagined empathy to evoke an emotional response in the reader, and connect to the idea of universal human rights.¹⁹¹ This continues in his description of punishing or torture devices, such as thumbscrews, and the use of pepper and salt to rub into the backs of whipped slaves.¹⁹²

Like all humans, 'Negers' experience the noble feelings of mankind, 'en eene sterke verkleefdheid [...] aan hun geboorteland en tevens de waarde de edele Vrijheid gevoelen.'¹⁹³ Even though the enslaved thus come from 'uncivilised' places, they are not immune to freedom. Their freedom is limited even more so by the fact that they are at the mercy of their enslavers: '[het is aan] een onbarmhartig Opziener,

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem, 368.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem, 374.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, 377

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem. It should also be noted that in nearly the entirety of the text, the word 'neger' is used exclusively, and is thus assumed to be completely synonymous with 'enslaved'

¹⁹² Ibidem, 379.

¹⁹³ Ibidem, 380.

trotsch op de magt aan hem verleend, om te straffen wien, wanneer, en zo als het hem goeddunkt.¹⁹⁴ Besides the connection to human or natural rights, and the natural longing for liberty in every human, Bosch makes a final important connection to republicanism here: the slave master is a tyrant, who oppresses liberty seeking souls, and to whom a true republican should resist.

However, the passionate Patriot Bosch never advocates for the end of slavery, nor advocates for slave rebellion. Instead he concludes his mini-treatise with an appeal to the end of the slave trade, and another comparison between the ‘uncivilised’ Africans and the supposedly ‘civilised’ Europeans.

‘En wat toch geeft ons het recht op die volken? – Zijn het niet onze mede menschen? – Het onderscheid is alleen in kleur – onze meerdere beschaafdheid hebben wij alleen door de opvoeding, andersinds zouden we de zwarten in woestheid evenaaren – ja misschien in wreedheid overtreffen – Zo wij dan zo veel te beschaafder en verlichter dan zij zijn, moesten we zulke ongelukkigen eer met medelijden behandelen, trachten te verlichten, en op allerlei wijze hun geluk proberen te bevoorderen.’¹⁹⁵

It is important to note that Bosch, unlike *De Vaderlander*, never appeals to traditional virtue, instead viewing civilisation and an appeal to universal human rights as the proper answer to end the slave trade. Old virtues have been replaced here by the virtues of a new enlightened civilisation, based on universal human rights, indicating the before-mentioned shift in (Dutch) political theory and republicanism.

For many Dutchmen, abolitionism and colonialism were not mutually exclusive. They often complemented each other in the minds of many authors. Current historiography on abolitionism and imperialism assumes the two systems of thought first combined in a very practical manner: Robin Law argues that abolitionism was an inherently imperialist project, ‘since it involved a proposed alternative course for the development of Africa.’¹⁹⁶ Similarly, Seymour Drescher has argued that the British abolitionist program for the resettlement of freedmen in the colony of Sierra Leone ‘entailed “imperialist” methods by mixtures of coercion and

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem, 384.

¹⁹⁶ Robin Law, ‘Abolition and Imperialism. International Law and the British Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade’, in: Derek R. Peterson ed., *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens, OH 2010), 150-174, at 150-151.

intimidation, stretching and breaching international law'.¹⁹⁷ Although this direct form of imperialism can be found in some antislavery speeches in the upcoming chapter, it is, in my view, not the most important connection Dutch gradual abolitionism formed with the beginnings of imperialism. Dutch antislavery discourse did not necessarily include a complete imperial policy for Africa. Yet its ideas came with the assumption of inferiority, supported by the most fundamental ideas of Enlightened social contract theory, adopted into republicanism in this period. As we shall see, the abolitionist inclination to describe (enslaved) Africans as being in 'a state of nature', and therefore worthy of protection, limited the ability for the average Dutchmen to see them as truly human.

2.2 - Bijdragen tot het menselijk geluk - Publicly debating slavery

Not only did members of the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* engage in debates on slavery and the slave trade outside of their civil society. Inside the *Maatschappij* a fierce discussion on the topic was also developing, which would soon incorporate new connections to the political ideology of republicanism. In 1790, a year before the publications by Moens, Overstraten and Bosch, the paper of the society, named *Bijdragen tot het menselijk geluk*, published an article by Antonijn Barrau (1741-1799). The Amsterdam silk merchant took a firm proslavery position.

Because of this publication, historian Pepijn Brandon has argued in a recent article that the editors and organisation behind *Bijdragen tot het menselijk geluk* supported slavery, naming them 'defenders of slavery' in his title. Even though Brandon provides an interesting insight into the proslavery position of the time – which builds on the idea first put forward by Angelie Sens that proslavery rhetoric in the Patriot period adapted and defended itself by using revolutionary rhetoric and by arguing for better treatment of slaves – a title like this nonetheless constitutes a misrepresentation of the facts. As we have already seen, high-placed members of the organisation behind the publication had or would express antislavery thoughts in

¹⁹⁷ Seymour Drescher, 'Emperors of the World : British Abolitionism and Imperialism', in: Seymour Drescher, *Pathways from Slavery. British and Colonial Mobilizations in Global Perspective* (New York 2018) 191.

the years to come. Furthermore, Brandon claims in his article that only a few brief and negligible responses were published to Barrau's paper. As we shall see, the responses were somewhat more extensive.¹⁹⁸

Firstly, however, it is important to review Barrau's argument for maintaining the slave trade and slavery. His article, which was derived from a speech held at the Amsterdam department of the *Maatschappij*, starts with the mention of debate within the society. Because of this, a local department wanted to issue an investigation into the slave trade, but decided to wait on developments and investigations into the matter in particularly Britain, before it would order its own investigation.¹⁹⁹ Apparently, discussion on the matter within the *Maatschappij* was brewing. The fact that Barrau felt it necessary to hold a proslavery speech, indicates he believed the proslavery position was endangered. Barrau's position is immediately made apparent: unless slavery is permitted in republics or empires, their major holdings in the West-Indies, '[welke] in zeer weinig jaaren geruïneerd zouden zijn zonder den aanvoer van Slaaven.'²⁰⁰

Barrau insists on first-hand account rather than foreign second-hand treatises, clouding the antislavery 'evidence'. The silk merchant provides his reader with first-hand account from Dutch slave captains and colonists. They claim treatment of slaves in the Dutch colonies is exemplary.²⁰¹ Rather than abolish the slave trade, let alone slavery, plantation owners should be motivated to make 'het juk der slavernij aan hun, zo veel mogelijk, dragelijk te maken', even though the treatment of slaves in the Dutch colonies, according to Barrau, is 'uitmuntend'.²⁰²

But rather than immediately declaring Africans as completely uncivilised, or lower-tier humans, Barrau starts his speech by naming them 'onze Medenaturgenooten'. This is a clear example of what Brandon describes in his article: 'Tegenstanders van abolitionisme plaatsten zichzelf niet lijnrecht tegenover de verlichte waarden van de voorstanders, maar probeerden deze in

¹⁹⁸ Brandon, "Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk geluk", 50-54.

¹⁹⁹ A. Barrau, 'De waare Staat van den Slaaven-handel in onze Nederlandsche Colonien [...]'; *Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk Geluk* dl. 3 (Utrecht and Amsterdam 1790), 341-385, at 341-343.

²⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 343.

²⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰² *Ibidem*, 345.

overeenstemming te brengen met een pleidooi voor lostverbetering binnen de kaders van de slavernij [...].²⁰³

Barrau brings up biblical ‘evidence’ for Gods supposed approval of slavery, in which the ‘Curse of Cham’ is prominently featured. Furthermore, Barrau raises the point that it is not Europeans who enslaved Africans. They simply buy the slaves from the ‘true’ African enslavers, who breed humans like livestock.²⁰⁴ The slaves live as ‘blinden Heiden[en]’, and when released from this supposed hell, they reportedly hug the Dutch slave captains in gratitude.²⁰⁵ According to Barrau, the middle passage is nothing like the hellscape some foreign authors make it out to be, since it is in the slave captains’ own interest to treat their slaves well. Therefore everything on the ship is ‘spotless’.²⁰⁶ English ships, on the other hand, which English abolitionists mention, have a higher death toll due to the nature of the English slaves:

‘Deze *Gabonsche* Slaaven (wier geboorteland recht onder de linie [i.e. de evenaar] ligt, waardoor zij, natuurlijker wijze, aan meer ongemakken en ziekten zijnde blootgesteld, ook uit hunnen aard dezelve minder kunnen verdragen, dan de meeste andere Kustbewooners) zijn bovendien de allerwreveligsten, vadzigsten en luisten dezer Natiën, die, wanneer het hun maar eenigszins tegenloopt, in hun eigen land zowel, als in de West-Indiën, aarde, en aan boord der Schepen hunne eigen drek vreeten, om zich van kant te maken.’²⁰⁷

This not so subtle indication of what Barrau truly thinks of the enslaved is followed by a description of what happens on arrival. When the enslaved Africans reach the colonies, they receive proper treatment on the plantations. They are slowly made accustomed to hard work, their masters provide them with clothing and they regularly receive meat. Some plantations even supply their slaves with medicine through apothecaries.²⁰⁸ And, even though punishments for minor offences are harsh, Barrau attributes this to the harsh punishment Africans are used to in their homeland. Some even thank their masters for their ‘just’ punishment, and do not long for freedom whatsoever.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, would the audience be surprised to

²⁰³ Brandon, “Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk geluk”, 54.

²⁰⁴ Barrau, ‘De waare Staat van den Slaaven-handel’, 353.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem, 351 and 354.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem, 358 and 356.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem, 361-363.

²⁰⁸ Ibidem, 364.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, 366-367 and 385.

hear, Barrau asks, that ‘onzer arbeidslieden [...] in slechter en bedenklijker omstandigheden waren, dan de Slaaven op de plantagien? [en], als ik, in zommige gevallen, het lot van eenen Slaaf boven dat van zulk eenen vrijen verkoos?’²¹⁰ Since slaves have no financial worries and have food and shelter provided for them, European labourers are far worse off, in his view.²¹¹ Were the European powers to cut off the slave trade at an instant, slaves would immediately turn back to their old less civilised ‘habits’, Barrau argues. In the supposed interest of the slaves, he therefor wants to improve conditions on the plantations, so that slavery can be made bearable enough as to no longer appear to be slavery at all.²¹² Replacing black slaves with white paid-workers, is not a viable solution either: ‘dewijl geen blanke geschikt is, om in dat klimaat het werk van een’ *Veldneger* te doen; en het bovendien bijna onmogelijk zoude zijn, om zulk een aantal Blanken bij elkander te krijgen [...]’.²¹³

Antislavery responses to Barrau

The *Bijdragen*’s editors expected that the article would stir some fierce reactions, according to the final page of Barrau’s article.²¹⁴ We will concern ourselves with two of the responses. The first was published in 1790 and challenged Barrau’s assumption that the *Maatschappij* should wait for the English abolitionists to move first. According to this author, three *Maatschappij*-departments had already been instructed to form a committee to investigate the moral and financial consequences of the slave trade.²¹⁵

The author himself is content to provide Barrau with the ‘progress’ made in England, where ‘als ‘t ware, een *elektrieke vonk*’ had ignited the entire Kingdom in debate on the slave trade.²¹⁶ University professors at Cambridge had pleaded the

²¹⁰ Ibidem, 372. Brandon mentions in his article on Barrau, that there are remarkable similarities between proslavery arguments in the 1790s, such as these, and arguments put forward by opponents of formal reparations and apologies for European nations for their role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and slavery. Brandon, “Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk Geluk”, 54.

²¹¹ Barrau, ‘De waare Staat van den Slaaven-handel’, 372.

²¹² Ibidem, 385-386.

²¹³ Ibidem, 385.

²¹⁴ ‘Korte Opgave van hetgene, in Engeland, omtrend den Slaavenhandel is voorgevallen’, *Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk Geluk* dl. 3 (Utrecht and Amsterdam 1790) 560-572, at 560-561.

²¹⁵ Ibidem, 561.

²¹⁶ Ibidem.

abolitionist case to the Lower House, books and brochures were handed out to the people for free and ‘eenigen, uit een te ver gedreeven *enthusiasme* [...] [wilden] geen suiker [...] gebruiken.’²¹⁷ The issue was then debated in parliament, where prominent MP’s like William Pitt the Younger, Charles James Fox and Edmund Burke had argued against the slave trade.²¹⁸ Parliament eventually ordered an investigation into the conditions on slave ships: in Liverpool, one ship had held more than 520 slaves. A bill was then passed, providing premiums to slave traders who lost less than three slaves per journey.²¹⁹

The author of the article ends with a brief philosophical conclusion, arguing that free nations in general treat their slaves the worst. ‘In het oude *Griekenland*, waar de vrijheid op den thron zat, [...] was het lot der Slaaven gruwzaam. De *Heloten* der *Spartaanen*, vooral, werden als dieren behandeld.’²²⁰ Even Cato, ‘de verdediger der vrijheid en de geessel der tirannen’, was not kind to slaves.²²¹ In the present, it is evident that

‘[...] de *Engelschen* en *Hollanders* hunne Slaaven, in beide *Indiën*, harder behandelen, dan de *Franschen* en *Spanjaarden* de hunnen. Wanneer zal men eens deze zaak, niet uit het oogpunt van eigenbelang, en zucht tot rijkdom, maar uit dat van menschenliefde beschouden, en de rechten der mensheid beginnen te handhaaven!’²²²

The modern republican behind this treatise recognised ancient ‘whippers of tyrants’ (i.e. republicans) as barbaric. A modern civilisation should be better than the old Greeks, Romans, and the Dutch should not emulate them in this regard. The author clearly wished to see a similar ‘vonk’ spark debates on the slave trade in the Dutch Republic, and references the idea of ‘weelde’ and ‘eigenbelang’ once more.

Some months later, a much more elaborate response was published. Although anonymous again, the authors gives us a glimpse at their identity, by claiming to be

²¹⁷ Ibidem, 562.

²¹⁸ Ibidem, 563-564.

²¹⁹ Ibidem, 568.

²²⁰ Ibidem, 571.

²²¹ Ibidem.

²²² Ibidem, 571-572.

a 'Christenleeraar'.²²³ As we have seen previously, multiple members of the *Maatschappij* possessed antislavery ideas, including the ministers Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen and Bernardus Bosch. It is likely that one of them wrote the treatise.²²⁴ Another indication that the author might be someone high-up in the *Maatschappij*'s hierarchy is the formulation of the 'research question':

'Of het koopen, vervoeren en houden van *Negerslaaven* in onze buitenlandsche bezittingen, in den grond, als een geoorloofde zaak kan worden aangemerkt, dan of het als een zedenlijk kwaad, en als onbestaanbaar, met de voorschriften van den Godsdiens en de Rechtvaardigheid moest beschouwd worden?'²²⁵

Two years later, the *Maatschappij* would issue a question similarly worded as an essay contest.²²⁶ Unfortunately, I was unable to locate the winning treatise for the contest.

Nonetheless, the piece in the *Bijdragen* immediately starts with an appeal to natural and human rights, questioning whether 'zelfs de zagste behandeling van Menschlievende meesters en vrouwen [ooit] tot eene vergoeding [kan] verstrekken voor de moedwil, waarmede men de wetten van den Godsdienst en het heilig Natuur-recht vertreedt.'²²⁷ No-one who recognizes Africans as humans can deny, the author states, that the enslaved possess natural and human rights.²²⁸ No free human works in chains, no matter how many 'good masters' occasionally treat them with kindness. Barrau 'drijft den spot' with the slave's 'heiligste Natuuurrechten [...]'.²²⁹

In his passionate plea to personal liberty, the author professes a number of clear republican ideas and connections, referencing biblical tyrants, such as the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and the Egyptian 'Tijran' as being akin to 'onze planters'.²³⁰ Later, the author warns against both the 'willekeur van een' Nero, als

²²³ 'Proeve eener verhandeling over den Slaavenhandel en den aankleeve van dien', *Bijdragen tot het Menschelijk Geluk* dl. 4 (Utrecht and Amsterdam 1790) 58-88, at 76.

²²⁴ At the end of the treatise, the author makes a plea for 'een of ander kundig menschenvriend' to also write on the topic, possibly being a wink to the title of Bosch' and Nieuwenhuyzen's jointly written periodical *De Menschenvriend*, although this could be a coincidence. *Ibidem*, 86.

²²⁵ 'Proeve eener verhandeling', 50.

²²⁶ Koekkoek, *Citizenship Experiment*, 109.

²²⁷ 'Proeve eener verhandeling' 51.

²²⁸ *Ibidem*, 52-54.

²²⁹ *Ibidem*, 56 and 58.

²³⁰ *Ibidem*, 54 and 58.

een' Titus'.²³¹ He goes on to name 'Persoonlijke Vryheid' as 'een onvervreemdbaar goed [...], zo wel van onze Zwarte Medemenschen, als van ons zelve', which they cannot willingly reject nor be forced to abandon.²³² When their natural rights are threatened, slaves are not just allowed to rise up in rebellion against their tyrants; they have an obligation to do so, in order to prevent the moral degradation of man:

'[...] elk Slaaf dan verplicht is, om dien uitslag te herstellen, en volkomen recht heeft, om zijne verloren vrijheid te hernemen: Dat de opstanden van onze *Neger*-Slaaven, wanneer zij enkel poogingen zijn, om vrij te worden, door een' zamenloop van noodlottige omstandigheden wel zeer gevaarlijk zijn, maar door den onpartijdigen, niet als onwettig of strafwaardig, kunnen aangemerkt worden.'²³³

Furthermore, all of Europe, but particularly 'vrije Republieken' can no longer be allowed to contradict their own founding principles, the author states. They are obliged to *end* all forms of slavery 'zonder uitstel', not least to prevent 'gevangenissen en moordspelonken' at the hands of legitimate slave rebellions against Dutch colonists.²³⁴ Even though our author is partially motivated by fear for the loss of colonial property and lives, he nonetheless directly connects slave rebellions to the republican ideal of legitimate rebellion in the face of tyranny. He moves on by stating that 'belangzucht', 'weelde' and 'hoogmoed' are the real causes of a decline in virtue, again aligning himself with the dominant republican view at the time.²³⁵ Just as the Athenian society had to face its downfall, even though they considered themselves to be untouchable and at the height of civilisation, so could European society lose its cohesion, 'eerlang [het] door een ellendig overschot van Dweepers en deugnieten bewoond worde'.²³⁶

Solving this issue by maintaining the nation's wealth on the backs of enslaved Africans was not an option, to the author's mind:

'Uw Nationaal geluk, [...] is dan aan de eindelooze dienstbaarheid uwer Natuurgenooten vastgemaakt! Om zelve niet aan gebrek omtekommen; [...] om uw Vaderland te zien groeien en bloeien, moet gij het luid geschrei, 't welk de

²³¹ Ibidem, 67.

²³² Ibidem, 62.

²³³ Ibidem, 62.

²³⁴ Ibidem, 62-63.

²³⁵ Ibidem, 73.

²³⁶ Ibidem, 74.

menschelijkheid over de banden uwer Slaaven aanheft, niet hooren [...]. Weg dan geweten met uwe wroegingen [...]! Weg Natuur met uwe rechten! Honger en gebrek veroorloven ons derzelve schending!²³⁷

‘Een verzachting van het Slaavenlot is geen bewijs, dat *Neêrlands* Koop-belang, vrijelijk, op de slaavernij onzer Natuurgenooten gebouwd mag worden [...],’ the author continues.²³⁸ Barrau’s arguments are nothing less than ‘eene bedekking der misdaad, welke de Godheid hoont’.²³⁹

Despite the republican rhetoric in this antislavery treatise, it is nonetheless clear that the author is not solely motivated by republican virtues: his fear of the decline in the Dutch commonwealth combines with anxiety concerning slave rebellion and retribution, for European’s barbaric behaviour could inspire ‘diezelfde gevoelens van verachting en medelijden [...], welken wij thands omtrend hen zo dikwijls laten blijken’ in African minds.²⁴⁰

Remarks such as these, very similar to those in Bosch’ articles on slavery, explain the last sections of the treatise, where, despite earlier ideological remarks, the author explains practical considerations for a gradual abolition. He questions whether immediate abolition would benefit the ‘*Negers*’, and he prefers a different route to freedom:

‘De trap van vrijheid, welke men hun toestond, moest, zo veel mogelijk, evenreedig zijn aan de maate hunner verlichting en beschaaving: naarmaate zij zich leerzaam of onvernuftig, braaf of ondeugend vertoonden, moest het aandeel in de vrijheid en voorrechten van den *Nederlandschen* Burger, [...] groter of geringer zijn.’²⁴¹

‘Maar, waar is de Hemelsche volmagt, waardoor dit vreemd gezach van verlichten Natiën over doodonkundige en onbeschaafde Natuurgenoten gewettigd wordt?’, the author continues.²⁴² An argument made against slavery thus reveals that the author believes Africans to be incompetent and uncivilised.

²³⁷ Ibidem, 78-79.

²³⁸ Ibidem, 82.

²³⁹ Ibidem, 82

²⁴⁰ Ibidem, 74.

²⁴¹ Ibidem, 85-86.

²⁴² Ibidem, 59.

To ready the enslaved for their eventual liberty, they are to be slowly civilised. When plantations become 'kweekscholen in de noodzaaklijkste wetenschappen', '[d]an verkregen onze Colonien eene geheel andere gedaante. In stede van de slaavernij te vereeuwigen, dienden zij dan, om slaafsche zielen tot de vrijheid optevoeden'.²⁴³ This would be beneficial to the interests of the Fatherland, as well as to those of the enslaved. Even though the author believes this could even lead to self-government for former slaves, the idea that enslaved Africans are children in need of education and a proper upbringing ('optevoeden'), is omnipresent in the treatise.²⁴⁴

'Juist gelijk wij aan onze Kinders, naar maate zij in kennis en ondervinding toenemen, eene grooter maate van vrijheid toestaan; even zoo moet ook aan den *Neger*, die nog in een' kindschen staat verkeert, zijne vrijheid niet voor altijd onthouden worden; [...].'²⁴⁵

Transports from Africa would continue to ensure that 'geredde ellendigen' would get a chance to taste (European) liberty in the colonies. The child-like state the author imagines Africans to inhabit is not clearly defined here: the author never names it 'a state of nature'. Nonetheless he is a clear believer in the tiers of civilisation, and considers Africans to be in the most elementary of those tiers. Although not explicitly stated either, the author's intent to transport willing Africans off the continent could be derived from the concept of climatological explanations for race: if the Africans were transported away from their homeland, perhaps they would 'naturally' become more 'civilised'. Regardless, abolition should be preceded by education and 'voorzichtigheid'.²⁴⁶ Eight year later the exact same wording would be used by politicians aiming to prevent the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. Despite this the author clearly made use of republican arguments against tyranny in the article.

²⁴³ Ibidem, 85-86.

²⁴⁴ Ibidem, 85.

²⁴⁵ Ibidem, 87.

²⁴⁶ Ibidem, 87.

2.3 – Paulus and Cras - The social contract and gradual abolition

According to Jeremy Popkin: Rousseau in his *Social Contract* shifts ‘between an individual master and a slave [.] to others that explicitly refer to the relationship between a ruler and his subjects [...],’ which Popkin describes as ‘confusing’ to contemporary readers.²⁴⁷ Similar connections between social contract theory and antislavery rhetoric are formulated in the Dutch case, although, as I will soon explain, I do not believe contemporaries were deterred from the issue of slavery by republican or societal remarks.

The connection between social contract theory, formulated in a republican language and a view of Africans as natural humans would be exemplified by a treatise written by Patriot Pieter Paulus (1753-1796). In 1793, he wrote a response to an essay-contest issued by the prestigious *Teyler’s Godgeleerd Genootschap* to answer the question ‘In welken zin kunnen de menschen gezegd worden gelyk te zijn? En welke zijn de regten en pligten, die daaruit voortvloeien?’. Paulus’ response came nearly a year late and the society therefor granted Hendrik Constantijn Cras, an Amsterdam professor of natural law, with the golden medal for his treatise.²⁴⁸ Regardless of the society’s final judgement, Paulus published the treatise himself, and was subsequently rewarded with a silver medal.²⁴⁹ His treatise was reprinted four times.²⁵⁰

Before the Patriot Revolution, Paulus, the son of mayor in the little town of Axel in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, had slowly worked his way through the ranks in government, the Rotterdam admiralty and the Patriot movement. Throughout his career, he would progress from a moderate federalist to a unitarian democratic Batavian politician.²⁵¹ Paulus first became involved in the Patriot movement in 1783

²⁴⁷ Popkin, ‘*Émile in Chains*’, 295.

²⁴⁸ Vles, *Pieter Paulus*, 86.

²⁴⁹ Whilst it is possible Paulus was simply late in his submission, his biographer E.J. Vles proposes that a more secular approach to the proposed question, and a guarantee that his treatise would be published, did serve Paulus’ purpose well. Vles, *Pieter Paulus*, 86.

²⁵⁰ Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment*, 50.

²⁵¹ In 1772, Paulus (at 19 years of age) published his first treatise, on *Het nut der stadhouderlyke regering*. Paulus praised the stadholderate, but maintained some criticisms on its contemporary operation. Three years later, he wrote the first parts of his *Verklaring van de Unie van Utrecht*: did and should the Unie, the military alliance from 1579 in which the seven provinces agreed to jointly fight against their Spanish overlord, serve as the constitution of the Dutch Republic? Again, Paulus, unlike many Patriots, was convinced that the Unie could serve as a constitution, defending the

through a Patriot correspondence association. In 1787, Paulus would personally be involved in the mobilisation of the Rotterdam fleet against Orangist forces. After the defeat of the Patriots, Paulus chose to remain in the Dutch Republic, and was subsequently fired from his position in the Admiralty in 1788. He subsequently travelled to the revolutionaries in exile in the Austrian Netherlands and France the same year. In Paris, Paulus met with both Lafayette and Necker to discuss the possibility of French military aid to the Patriots.²⁵² Five years later, Paulus would, for the first time, make his ideological shift to the Patriot and Batavian ideas public, through his response to the *Teyler Genootschap*.

Paulus starts off his treatise on equality with a republican description on the powers of the nobility and rulers, using the liberty-slavery dichotomy on multiple occasions. This ruling class imagined itself to be of a more noble nature than most, and imagined itself to therefor have the innate right to rule over the lower classes, 'onafhangelijk van hunne eigene verkiezing'.²⁵³ This medieval nobility, and later their kings, still served as an inspiration to those in supposedly free republics 'voor de instandhouding hunner willekeurige regeringen', in order to bring 'onderdrukking en dienstbaarheid' to man.²⁵⁴ The resulting 'vooroordeelen, gewoonten [en] slaverny' have denied and obscured the true equal nature of man, in Paulus' view.²⁵⁵

He continues with an evaluation of man's state of nature, in which everyone is created equal. Even though there are variations between humans, 'geeft dit onderscheid aan den eenen boven den anderen van nature geen meerder *regten* [...]'.²⁵⁶ Furthermore,

'En deze gelykheid der menschen over den gantschen aardbodem, zonder onderscheid waar zy zig bevinden, of welk gedeelte van de weereld zy bevwonnen, en hetzelfde uit welke stammen, volken of natien zy geboren zyn, en van welke

(federal) sovereignty of individual Staten over the Staten-Generaal. In 1775, after studying law in Utrecht, he became an attorney for the provincial Court of Holland. Vles, *Pieter Paulus*, 39..

²⁵² Ibidem., 83-85.

²⁵³ Paulus, *Verhandeling over de vrage*, 3-4

²⁵⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵⁵ Ibidem, 5.

²⁵⁶ Ibidem, 20.

gedaante of koleur zy mogen wezen, schynt nog daarenboven [...] bevestigd te worden.²⁵⁷

When Paulus explains how complex modern societies should reflect this state of nature, he again returns to the slave-master relationship: '[De burgermaatschappy] kan den eenen niet tot *meester*, of tot *slaaf*, maken van den anderen. Zy verheft alzoo niemand boven zyne medeburgers: [...]'.²⁵⁸ Paulus then directly quotes Rousseau on multiple occasions: a society can subject free citizens to its laws through a Rousseauian social contract, agreed upon by every civilian.²⁵⁹ Without such a contract, a society becomes:

'de geweldadige regering van een gedeelte over een ander gedeelte, over menschen, die geen eigenlijke leden der maatschappy konden gezegd worden te wezen; maar die daaraan *door het regt van den sterksten* onderdanig gemaakt waren; en midsdien eene regering over slaven, dat is, over menschen, aan welken de regten, die hun toekomen, ontroofd, en door overmagt of geweld in bedwang of slavery gehouden worden.'²⁶⁰

In short, Paulus is explaining the basic republican idea of political slavery versus political liberty, and how a modern and enlightened state can guarantee natural rights – in this case equality – for its citizens. Later in his treatise, Paulus (in a similar fashion to Van der Capellen in 1781) cites from multiple ancient and modern republican sources, such as Cicero's *De Officiis*, Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*, and Joan van der Capellen tot den Pol's Dutch translation of Richard Price's *Observations on Civil Liberty*.²⁶¹ A clear combination is visible here between sweeping away the nobility's rights to government and the developing universalist idea of natural or human rights.

Paulus, like the anonymous author in the *Bijdragen*, directly links the political master-slave relationship to chattel slavery. Unlike the author in *De Bijdragen*, however, Paulus turns against an important part of seventeenth century Dutch republicanism: Grotius' defence of political and chattel slavery. Despite Grotius' third

²⁵⁷ Ibidem, 20.

²⁵⁸ Ibidem, 60.

²⁵⁹ Ibidem 60.

²⁶⁰ Ibidem.

²⁶¹ Ibidem, 58, 164, 166-168.

chapter of *Over het regt van Oorlog en Vrede*, in which he explains how a man, or even an entire society can freely subject itself to slavery,

[...] ontken [ik] ten sterksten, dat eenig mensch het regt hebben kan, om zig tot *slaaf* van een ander te maken, en gevolglyk ook, dat een geheel volk dit zoude kunnen doen. Afstand doen van zyne vryheid is indedaad afstand doen van zyne hoedanigheid van mensch, van de regten der menschlykheid, ja zelfs van de pligten, die daaraan verbonden zyn. Daar is toch geenerlei vergoeding mooglyk voor iemand, die alzoo *van alles* afstand doet.²⁶²

Paulus then connects republicanism and antislavery more directly by quoting gradual abolitionist Frossard (who he calls a 'waren menschenvriend'): "[...] de grootste onregtveerdigheid, die gy aan uwen medemensch plegen kunt, is, *hem de vryheid te ontrooven*: want de vryheid is de eenige staat, waarin de mensch waarlyk mensch zyn kan [...]".²⁶³ Paulus thus believes, like the author in *De Bijdragen*, that someone who willingly subjects himself to slavery, is not worthy of human rights. In fact, a people in slavery is obligated to rebel, 'om dat het verplicht is, naar Gods zedelyke wetten en de inspraak van zyn eigen wil en geweten te leven, en omdat de *regten der slaverny* volstrekt *geenen* zyn.'²⁶⁴ They are especially obliged to do so, since some freely subject themselves to a ruler, in admiration for their supposed right to rule. Paulus attributes the state of political slavery to their lame response.²⁶⁵

Paulus lays out the human or natural rights that a society ought to guarantee its citizens, except for those '[...] die [...] in zoodanigen staat van laagheid zyn, datze algemeen bekend staan voor geen eigen' wil te hebben'.²⁶⁶ A clear and free will is thus required to share in the gifts of liberty and equality, such as the right to a representative assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, the right to self-defence, and the right to property.²⁶⁷ During his years at the admiralty, Paulus must have gathered a sense of pride for the victorious past of De Ruyter, and the ever-

²⁶² Ibidem, 69. Paulus probably copied this from Rousseau, who refuted Grotius' consensual slavery in *Du Contract Social*. Popkin, 'Émile in Chains', 295. Montesquieu also refuted this reason for slavery in his *De l'esprit des lois*. Paasman, *Reinhart*, 109.

²⁶³ Paulus, *Verhandeling over de vrage*, 70.

²⁶⁴ Ibidem, 72.

²⁶⁵ Ibidem, 123-124.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem, 81.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem, 81-88.

expanding seventeenth century Dutch commerce and empire. This feeling shines through in his sixteenth right of every civilian, namely

[...] om het overtollige dier goederen, welken hy, of de maatschappy zelve, niet van nooden heeft, te brengen waarhenen hy wil; om die tegen anderen te verruilen, te verkoopen of te verhandelen, naar zyn welgevallen: met een woord: om overal eenen onbelemmerden handel te dryven[...], daar de liefderyke schepper van dat alles alhetzelve tot gebruik van alle zyne kinderen geschapen en gegeven heeft, en ieder byzonder mensch daarop anderszins een gelyk en onafneembaar regt heeft.²⁶⁸

All peoples, in fact, possess a right to free trade, as long as it does not limit another people's right to trade. Therefore, in his chapter on the consequences of natural equality on international relations and colonies, Paulus is quick to label the conduct of the Dutch in Africa, Asia, and America as far removed from the Good Will of the Creator.²⁶⁹ Nonetheless, similar arguments would be made to defend the slave trade and slavery from attacks in the Batavian National Assembly.

Paulus is convinced no nation can forcefully take property, life or liberty from another. When these national rights are trespassed upon, a nation or people has the right to defend itself.²⁷⁰ Paulus states:

'Veel min nog mag het één volk het ander overweldigen; het alzo in slaverny brengen, of hetzelve tot slaven van anderen maken. Niets kan strydiger zyn met de gelykheid der regten van alle menschen, ten opzigte van elkanderen, en derhalven ook met die van natien tot natien, dan dat de eene zig met geweld zoekt optewerpen tot beheerscher en meester van de andere.'²⁷¹

He describes the slave trade as the most unthinkable, violent and disgraceful practice to ever dishonour humanity, which has, since the discovery of the New World, been driven by a major desire for wealth.²⁷² Paulus hopes the reader's heart will be filled with affection for the victims of a violent and disgraceful trade, after

²⁶⁸ Ibidem, 88.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, 177.

²⁷⁰ Ibidem, 178 and 181.

²⁷¹ Ibidem, 184.

²⁷² Ibidem, 187.

which he frequently quotes Frossard once more, who declares the slave trade an encourager of '*despotismus*'.²⁷³

The excuse, as Paulus names it, that Dutch colonial power would crumble if abolition became reality, cannot pardon such a crime. Although Paulus considers Europeans unable to do the harsh work on the plantations, this can never absolve the crime of slavery.

'Wanneer ik niet in staat ben, om myn eigen werk zelf te doen, het zy door onkunde of zwakheid, heb ik dan even daardoor het regt, om myn' buurman of medemensch, die kundiger of sterker is, dan ik, met behulp van anderen, door geweld of list te dwingen, om myn' zaken te komen verrigten; hem aan zyne eigene haarstede en altaar te ontrooven, en eeuwigdurend ontroofd te houden, en hem met slagen en allerlei andere middelen van onderdrukking tot den arbeid dwingen?

Daar hierop nu door niemand, die van zyne zinnen niet beroofd is, zal geantwoord worden: *dat ik dit regt heb*: zoo vraag ik toch, waarom dit regt dan ten opzichte van *alle* menschen, zonder onderscheid van welke kleur of natie zy zyn, geen plaats hebben moet? Waarom de inwoners van *Afrika* daarvan uitgezonderd zouden moeten worden? Waarom aan dit gedeelte van het menschdom minder *regten* zouden toekomen, en hetzelfde daarom meer tot slaven van het ander gedeelte zoude geschapen zyn, dan dit laatste?'²⁷⁴

Paulus is convinced the colonies need not lose much profit, and, like *De Vaderlander* nearly eighteen years earlier, he calls for a boycott of goods produced and ripened with the 'zweet en bloed' of African slaves.²⁷⁵

Despite his antislavery rhetoric, Paulus primarily takes aim at the slave trade and 'altyddurende slaverny', rather than slavery as a whole or temporary slavery.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, when Paulus discusses the practical side of his argument, he, like Bosch, Moens and the author in the *Bijdragen*, cautions against acting too rashly: full abolition should be handled slowly and with '*weloverlegde voorzigtigheid*'.²⁷⁷ Suddenly granting slaves liberty, would expose them to 'het klaarblyklykst gevaar'.²⁷⁸

²⁷³ Ibidem, 187.

²⁷⁴ Ibidem, 202-204.

²⁷⁵ Ibidem, 205 and 204

²⁷⁶ Ibidem, 187 and 198.

²⁷⁷ Ibidem, 205.

²⁷⁸ Ibidem.

They would surely abuse liberty against themselves and their ‘medemenschen’, ‘alvorens zy ‘er de waarde van zouden hebben leeren kennen.’²⁷⁹ Just as no-one would simply hand a knife to a child, granting liberty to unknowing humans would not be a good or safe idea, Paulus states.²⁸⁰

This not so subtle reference to the situation in Haiti is highlighted later, when Paulus discusses the French example. Although he describes the actions of the French National Convention as ‘pryzenswaardig’, their decision to abolish the slave trade was also ‘te voorbarig and onvoorzigtig’, as its consequences have shown: murder, fires and a civil war have engulfed the French colony.²⁸¹ ‘Dit alles zou buiten twyfel niet gebeurd zyn, indien men de negers [...] *langzamerhand* aan het genot der vryheid gewend en den weg vooraf geweest had [...]’²⁸²

To substantiate his claim that Africans need to be made accustomed to the gift of liberty, Paulus decivilizes, and if we follow Muthu’s logic, dehumanises them. Before his discussion on the slave trade, the French social contract theorist Emer de Vattel is cited to highlight that the Africans are still in a state of nature. Although complex civilisations may form over time, civilians ‘[...]blyven niettemin altyd belast met hunne pligten omtrent het overage gedeelte des menschdoms’.²⁸³ Humans living in a state of nature cannot simply be enslaved by those living in a modern society. Africans also deteriorate into further ‘decivilisation’, when they are transported to America :

‘Indien zy door hun sterke gesteldheid alle deze gevaren [van de overtocht] doorworstelen [...], smaken zy geenerlei rust vóór dat hunne verstandige vermogens zoo zeer verminderd zyn, als hun stand zelve; voor dat hunne ziel door de kragt der snoodste behandelingen, zoo verre verhard raakt, dat de menscheid verloren is [...]’²⁸⁴

Despite his passionate antislavery treatise, and despite his own remarks on the contrary, Paulus refuses to denounce slavery out of fear for reprisals and colonial downfall. Furthermore, Paulus, like many others before him, sees the enslaved

²⁷⁹ Ibidem, 205.

²⁸⁰ Ibidem, 205.

²⁸¹ Ibidem, 206-207.

²⁸² Ibidem, 207.

²⁸³ Ibidem, 185.

²⁸⁴ Ibidem, 190-191.

Africans as living in a state of nature, and as children, in need of education and a civilised upbringing. He ends his chapter with the hope to have stirred some feelings in his readers, 'om het heilloos lot van deze menschen vroeg of laat te verzagten en te veranderen'.²⁸⁵ As it turned out, when faced with the question of 'sooner or later', press and parliament almost unilaterally decided on the latter option.

H.C. Cras – Humanising the enslaved

Paulus was not the only one to deliberate on the issue of slavery in 1793. His fellow essayist for the *Maatschappij* H.C. Cras, professor of law (natural law, *Volkenrecht* and *Staatsrecht*) at the Amsterdam *Athenaeum* (which would later become the University of Amsterdam) also wrote down his thoughts on the equality of man in the original winning essay for the contest.²⁸⁶ In 1793 however, Cras felt it necessary to elaborate on the topic of slavery in a speech delivered to the Amsterdam civil society *Felix Meritis* (published in 1822) on the issue of slavery. Cras himself observed the revolutionary movement in the Dutch Republic with deep suspicions. He had (and would continue to) remain critical of especially the unitarian branch of the Batavians, as Cras would later argue against forming a constitution after the formation of a parliament.²⁸⁷ Nonetheless, four years after Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen had made some passing references to the debate on slavery, the same civil society would now receive a full antislavery address from Cras.

In his speech, posthumously published, Cras questions whether slavery is consistent with virtue and religion.²⁸⁸ Similar to contemporary Dutch abolition discourse Cras is somewhat careful with advocating for immediate abolition, and frequently references authors like Clarkson, Newton, Olaudah and Frossard.²⁸⁹ Unlike his fellow-authors, Cras is one of the only authors to point out the influence

²⁸⁵ Ibidem, 214.

²⁸⁶ P.J. Blok and P.C. Molhuysen eds., 'Cras, Hendrik Constantyn', (version 1912) https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/molh003nieu02_01/molh003nieu02_01_0821.php *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* dl.2 (30 June 2023) 347-350.

²⁸⁷ Ibidem. Vles, *Pieter Paulus*.

²⁸⁸ Hendrik Cras, 'Over de Slavernij en Afrikanschen Slavenhandel', in: Hendrik Cras, *Nagelatene Verhandelingen* vol. 2 (Amsterdam 1822), 181-240, at 187.

²⁸⁹ Ibidem, 229-231 and 192-193, 200, 225.

decivilising remarks regarding Africans had on the perpetuation of the slave trade and slavery. For that reason, his speech is worth delving into further.

First of all according to Cras, all humans, no matter how uncivilised they are, still remain the most enlightened and elevated form of life, who have little in common with their animal cousins. Cras also highlights monogenesisism by ascribing all human life as 'bij genen minder beschaafd [...], nogtans in hare zaden en eerste beginselen aan alle Volkeren gemeen [...]'.²⁹⁰ Even though many claim a natural domination of 'Blanken over Negers', due to the Black's (presumed) 'zielsvermogen', 'kleur', and 'gedaante van het lichaam', this is nonsense according to Cras.²⁹¹ Many travel reports, including those from the famed James Cook, had disproven these 'valsche vooroordeelen'.²⁹² Regardless, Cras argued, 'hoe onderscheiden zij in trappen van beschaafdheid mogen zijn, alle hebben zij met ons dezelfde natuur,' which meant 'dat zij aan niemand willekeurige heerschappij tegen wil en dank onderworpen [worden]'.²⁹³ Whilst citing Newton, Cras lays out why he believes some Africans might behave somewhat uncivilised or hostile towards Europeans: '[het zijn] ook voornamelijk de trouweloosheden en bedriegerijen der Blanken [...], welke de Volkeren verbitteren, en in de noodzakelijkheid brengen, van ook, bij wijze van wedervergelding, zich min opregt tegen de Blanken te gedragen [...]'.²⁹⁴ In fact, Europeans that sailed to African shores created understandable hostility amongst the continent's inhabitants: 'dan moeten [de Europeanen] allen bij hen in een allerongunstigst licht staan, en veelal voor slechte en zedeloze wezens, ja dikwijls ook voor Monsters worden gehouden'.²⁹⁵

Furthermore, Africans were not as uncivilised as many made them out to be in Europe. Many Europeans were unaware that,

'in [Afrika] de gunstigste luchtgesteldheid heerscht, en de vruchtbaarste gronden bebouwd worden, alwaar de menschen met weinig vergenoegd leven, zonder vele voorwerpen, die in *Europa* gretig gezocht worden.'²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Ibidem, 189.

²⁹¹ Ibidem, 190-191.

²⁹² Ibidem, 191.

²⁹³ Ibidem, 194.

²⁹⁴ Ibidem, 192-193.

²⁹⁵ Ibidem.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem, 197-198.

Cras not only repeats the general apprehension towards wealth here, omnipresent in the 1790s, including in republicanism. The professor of natural law indirectly connects his speech to the debate on the matter between Rousseau and Diderot. Cras does believe that the Africans live in a state of nature. Like many antislavery authors, he is therefore 'guilty' of describing Africans as somewhat child-like, especially in his description of their supposed fear of European cannons and sailing ships.²⁹⁷ Nonetheless, Cras does not see the African as fundamentally uncivilised or animal-like, and also does not use the idea of the noble savage, nor describes them directly as children or natural human automatons (as Muthu describes Rousseau's description). He is convinced Africans have many virtuous institutions and laws. In Senegal and Angola, according to Cras, people live according to 'zekere gebruiken en onbeschrevene wetten.'²⁹⁸ They have '[o]verheden uit de oudste en aanzienlijkste des Volks, die den misdadigers bepaalde straffen opleggen, en de verongelijkingen worden meestal voor verëffening of wedervergelding geboet.'²⁹⁹ This is far removed from the child-like or uneducated descriptions of authors such as Paulus and Moens.

Cras then goes on to connect this tendency to describe Africans as uncivilised to their enslavement: 'Men stelle zich dan die Afrikanen zoo onkundig en ontwetende voor, als men gelieve; deze onkunde zelve schijnt dan hun geluk uit te maken; [...]'.³⁰⁰ In fact, it is their familiarity with corrupt and unvirtuous European (slave) traders and Christians which transforms many Africans into 'de ellendigste en deerniswaardigste schepselen.'³⁰¹ In short:

'Om eenen onmenschen handel zoo veel mogelijk te vernissen, hebben Europeërs wel veel tot bezwaar de Afrikaansche Volkeren uitgedacht, en hen afgeschetst als zoodanigen, die zoo wel in zeden en deugd, als in vernuft, naauwelijks menschen waren [...]'.³⁰²

Following a vivid description of the middle-passage, most likely lifted from Newton, Cras stops to wonder what the slave trade and slavery mean for the legal position of enslaved Blacks. Although he believes harsh punishment is sometimes required for

²⁹⁷ Ibidem, 206-207

²⁹⁸ Ibidem, 198.

²⁹⁹ Ibidem, 199.

³⁰⁰ Ibidem, 197-198.

³⁰¹ Ibidem, 197-198.

³⁰² Ibidem, 198.

runaway slaves, Cras highlights that slaves would not have fled their plantation if they were treated well.³⁰³ ‘Moeten dusdanige mishandelingen niet eenen eeuweigen haat tusschen Blanken en Zwarten ontsteken?’, since no slave is allowed to claim his natural rights.³⁰⁴

‘Zoo zeer wordt die soort van menschen veracht, dat hunne getuigenis niet alleen niets uitdoet voor de Regtbank, maar dat ook de verachtelijkste straffen van muilbanden, scheenschroeven, houtenkokers en dergelijke straffeloos omtrent hen uitgeoefend worden.’³⁰⁵

Cras is consequently not surprised that many slave owners see their slaves as stubborn or indifferent toward values such as honour and virtue. Their masters, which Cras compares to ‘tirannen en beulen’, would not fare any better:

‘[...]de onmenselijke wreedheden van vele meesters en opzigtters, zullen die in staat zijn, om in de vernederde en gedrukte gemoederen der arme slagtoffers van die ondeugden, de trouw, de eerlijkheid, de liefde tot de deugd, en de genegenheid voor hunne Meesters te ontvonken?’³⁰⁶

It is especially the torture and maltreatment that eliminates the possibility for any form of Black labour on slave colonies, because ‘[...] het zijn deze verdrukkingen, die de voortplanting van het geslacht dezer menschen belet [...]. Dus is gedurige toevoer noodig [...].’³⁰⁷

Although Cras does not actively argue for full or immediate abolition – which might have been a very radical thing for him to do as an active academy professor – he does imply the Dutch Republic should take a leaf out of England’s book, and, interestingly, Denmark’s. The former, with men like Pitt, had stood up ‘zoo moedig’ against the slave trade, whilst the latter had included a deadline of [11] years in its constitution for the abolition of the slave trade.³⁰⁸ In a footnote, a calculation for the cost of abolition, and subsequent restitution of slave owners, is provided, based on

³⁰³ Ibidem, 220.

³⁰⁴ Ibidem.

³⁰⁵ Ibidem.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem, 223 and 222-223.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem, 223.

³⁰⁸ Ibidem, 299-231.

slave-numbers lifted from Frossard.³⁰⁹ The idea that Britain and Denmark could serve as examples for the Dutch would be uttered again four years later on the floors of the Batavian National Convention.

Conclusion - Chapter 2

In the 1790s, the issue of slavery was put on the map and the public's agenda. Originating in international publications on (gradual) abolitionism, translated and extensively quoted in the Dutch intellectual community of civil societies, the issue of slavery would soon be taken up by some of the foremost and vocal Patriots of their time and published in multiple popular periodicals and treatises. Both British and French sources on abolition were taken up by Patriots such as Moens, Bosch, Paulus and the respondents to Barrau. All found room to include the debate on wealth, so prevalent in the antislavery debate of the previous decades, in their publications. Although it is true that no Abolition Society or *Amis de Noirs* organisation developed in the Dutch context, Nieuwenhuyzen, Moens, Bosch and the respondents to Barrau published their ideas in accordance with and awareness of one another, forming an observable group of antislavery and (gradual) abolitionism at this time.

Although Sens' and Brandon's observation that proslavery authors attempted to essentially 'highjack' the antislavery discourse's appeal to natural or human rights, by describing enslaved Africans as fellow-humans (or 'natuurgenoten'), this attempt proved a shallow one, openly criticised and responded to in full by respondents to Barrau's article.

Furthermore, the debate on slavery was not solely inspired by foreign authors, as was the assumption behind Schutte's work and some of the articles in Oostindie's bundle. The fact that the antislavery rhetoric of the period originated in the Dutch tradition of civil societies, which would bring forward many of the future Batavian revolutionaries, and that for example Nieuwenhuyzen responded to

³⁰⁹ Whether the publisher of Cras' speeches added the footnote, or whether the author of the speech himself included it, is unknown. The footnote does reference slavery in the French colonies, which makes it pre-1794, and includes Frossard, a popular author in the 1790s. Furthermore, the Quakers in Philadelphia are displayed as 'de eenigste beschermers der ongelukkige Negers', which is another argument made by some in the 1790s. Ibidem, 231-232

debates within that tradition of monogenesisism, highlights a self-aware Dutch response to the topic of slavery.

In fact, Dutch antislavery authors were influenced greatly by the Dutch tradition of republicanism. Some of the authors discussed were profound republicans themselves, whilst others adapted the language of republicanism to their cause, making use of the opportunity explained in Chapter 1 for antiluxury arguments to serve as the 'gateway' for combining republican and antislavery arguments. Interestingly, the adaptation of republican arguments into Dutch antislavery went beyond the three categories set out by Koekkoek, explained in the introduction. Not only did most authors accept the extension of natural or human rights, the corrupting influences of slavery on the virtue of the body politic, or (as some did) the importance of the innate right of every human to rise up in rebellion. We see a simpler, but nonetheless republican argument made against the master-slave relationship, which most authors compare to the relationship of a tyrant to his or her subjects. The fact that the respondents to Barrau, Paulus and Bosch all mention this tyrannical nature, means they believed their readers would not confuse their arguments with societal critiques, but that such arguments would reinforce one another. Especially Paulus' treatise – who decided to directly let his arguments against the tyrannical nature of the Stadholderate be followed by his antislavery chapter - suggests these authors believed societal critiques, formulated in the language and ideas of republicanism, and antislavery were inherently connected.

Whether it was wise to connect the two, is another matter. No antislavery author discussed in this chapter, using the republican language against slavery, escaped the dehumanising effects of either the theory on the tiers of civilisation, or the social contract theories built on 'anthropological' accounts of 'noble savage' Africans. Many of the antislavery authors, even if they did not explicitly speak of a state of nature, still expressed their belief that enslaved Africans were non-autonomous children, in need of education. As Muthu describes, this limited the possibilities for contemporaries to truly empathise with the enslaved, even though an attempt at empathy (for example through descriptions of the middle passage) is made all-throughout most of the antislavery rhetoric of the period.

Although arguments very similar to Diderot's in Raynal's *Histoire* were adopted into Dutch intellectual circles by H.C. Cras to dispel such thoughts, Cras himself never explicitly connected his argument to republicanism. He rarely used the republican language to oppose slavery, except his incorporation of natural rights theory and some references to the debate on wealth. It would be up to republicans in the years to come to discuss whether a universal understanding of liberty was exactly the same as a republican understanding of the concept.

Chapter 3 – Defining the limits of republicanism

Debates in the first Batavian National Assembly on constitutionally abolishing slavery (1795-1800).

‘Laat ons dan veel eer dugten, dat eenmaal het tydstip zal aanspoeijen, waar in wy zullen moeten boeten voor onze onregtvaardigheid!’³¹⁰ With those words, the Republican politician Pieter Vreede argued in the first Batavian National Assembly against slavery and the slave trade in April of 1797. Over the course of two debates, Dutch revolutionary politicians, utilising the language and ideas of republicanism, would deliberate on the question of abolishing slavery constitutionally. According to Vreede, and some of his supporters, a constitution that did not even mention slavery, would not suffice to fully free the Batavian nation. Even though Vreede, and other representatives like Jacob Hahn, proposed a limited term in the Batavian constitution for the abolition of slavery (similar to the term introduced by the Danish government a few year prior), their opponents would convince the National Assembly to limit the scope of republican liberty.

Despite the limited support for the abolition of slavery, in this debate, the arguments used by representatives – who all adhered to the dominant political philosophy of republicanism at the time – is nonetheless vital for understanding the republican relationship with the topic of slavery. In their attempts to analyse slavery, inconsistencies within the republican ideology on slavery emerged and were verbally fought over. Both sides in the debate used the rhetoric of republicanism to try to convince as many representatives as possible of their argument. This makes it the perfect case study to investigate the exact relationship and interplay between republicanism and antislavery at the end of the eighteenth century. Analysing which arguments were used, how they relate to antislavery literature and political publications in the previous years and decades, will also provide us with a clearer perspective on the *medium durée* of antislavery ideas in the late eighteenth century Dutch Republic(s).

³¹⁰ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May), 13.

Historiography on the parliamentary debates

Even though the arguments made in parliament provide an incredible insight into not only Dutch republican political culture at the time, but also into the actual reasons used for deciding against abolition, the *Dagverhaal* (the notary record) of the two debates has received little attention in the historiography. René Koekkoek has been the first scholar in many years to highlight the importance of the parliamentary debates on the topic. They serve as critical parts for illustrating his concept of *Atlantic Thermidor*: although all Atlantic Revolutions started off as inherently connected, aware of one another, and universalist, according to Koekkoek, it was especially the shock of the Haitian Revolution that broke the universalist understanding of the Atlantic revolutionary world. Since fear of a second Haitian Revolution within their own colonies convinced the Batavian representatives to push back the abolition of slavery indefinitely, Koekkoek convincingly argues that the debates in the Batavian National Assembly are a prime example of *Atlantic Thermidor*.³¹¹ Sarah Adams agrees that '[...] the Haitian revolutionaries confronted European powers with the untenability of the institution of slavery and forced them to think about alternatives, should a successful revolt occur in their own colony.'³¹²

Whereas Koekkoek mostly highlights the brief clash in the debate between the Moderates, led by Schimmelpenninck and the democratic Republican Vreede, this source can be used to showcase the differing republican arguments made against (and in support of) slavery by a great many more representatives who all considered republicanism a fundamental part of their political ideas. Jorris Oddens, for example, has already shown that the representatives of the first Dutch parliament, in the process of speaking and participating in debates, and conforming or not conforming to prevailing conventions and traditions, shaped the boundaries of political (and parliamentary) culture.³¹³ In my view, representatives did not only reshape their political arena through their (speech) acts. The debates on slavery clearly show, as others have also pointed out, that they could fundamentally debate

³¹¹ Koekkoek, *Citizenship experiment*, 118.

³¹² Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 42.

³¹³ Oddens, *Pioniers in Schaduwbeeld*, 23-25.

and redefine their political ideas and theories, such as republicanism, as well.³¹⁴ Contemporary republican representatives realised that the issue of slavery connected fundamentally to both the founding principles of the Batavian Republic and to their founding political theory of republicanism as a whole. The debates in parliament can therefore, in a way, be seen as debates on the republican ideology itself, and the role of the core issue of political and chattel slavery within it.

Before delving into the actual debates, it is important to contextualise these very first parliamentary debates in Dutch political history, and to highlight some elements of the geopolitical position of the Dutch Republic after the Batavian Revolution. After a brief investigation into some of the founding documents for the (mostly) vocal antislavery faction of the Republicans, a full in-depth account of the dual slavery debates in the National Assembly will be provided.

3.1 - Declaring human rights and establishing the first Dutch Parliament

In 1789, many exiled Patriots in Paris welcomed the French Revolution with open arms, and immediately began forming new revolutionary committees to lobby the new French government to invade the Dutch Republic and bring about a second revolution. During this time, an ideological shift was taking place within the Patriot movement, influenced by events in France. As Joris Oddens puts it:

‘[...] terwijl de meeste patriotten de ideale republiek nog zagen als een federale staat met democratische elementen op lokaal niveau en een minder machtige stadhouder aan het hoofd van het uitvoerende bewind, vatte tussen 1789 en 1793 definitief het ideaal post van een republiek met een gekozen nationale volksvertegenwoordiging, waarin voor de stadhouder in het geheel geen rol was weggelegd.’³¹⁵

Geopolitical events quickly aided the Patriot or Batavian (as some now called the movement) cause. In 1793, France officially declared war on England and the Dutch Republic. Although the French armies succeeded in besieging and taking a number of Dutch cities, general Dumouriez was heavily defeated at Neerwinden, after which

³¹⁴ Koekkoek states that ‘[t]he very foundations of a new political system were up for debate: the form of government, the structure of the state and the nature of the sovereignty of the people.’ Koekkoek, ‘Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State’, 141.

³¹⁵ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 128.

he famously went over to the Austrian forces. Young men like Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, Samuel Wiselius and Jacob Hahn began to gain prominence within the Batavian movement in the Dutch republic during the French terror.³¹⁶ After a failed coup in Amsterdam, orchestrated by Hahn, the Batavians finally succeeded in their revolution (or 'omwentelling') due to the French victory at Fleurus in 1794, and the subsequent invasion of the Dutch Republic a year later by a French army followed by a Batavian regiment.³¹⁷

On 18 June 1795, as the commander of the Batavian Regiment Herman Willem Daendels advanced on Amsterdam, Prince Willem V of Orange fled to Britain. Revolutionary committees all over the country took charge of municipal and provincial governments. In Amsterdam, Schimmelpenninck called a meeting of all the new municipal governments of Holland, to form the *Provisionele Representanten* for their province. Pieter Paulus, by now an experienced official, a well-connected Patriot and renowned political author, was elected as its chairman. Together with Schimmelpenninck, Paulus now began to formulate *De verklaring van de rechten van de mens en van de burger*.³¹⁸ In it, they officially proclaimed the end of the Stadholderate, and urged for a new parliament to form a constitution for the Batavian people.³¹⁹ The representatives declared '[d]at alle Menschen met gelyke rechten geborden worden, en dat deze natuurlyke rechten hun niet kunnen ontnomen worden', meaning the rights to equality, liberty, security, property and resistance to oppression.³²⁰ The concept of liberty required clarification according to the provisional representatives. Using a popular citation from the Gospel of Matthew, they claimed liberty was the ability,

³¹⁶ Especially Paulus travelled on a number of occasions to France to meet with both Dutch and French revolutionaries. E.J. Vles, *Pieter Paulus (1753-1796). Patriot en Staatsman* (Amsterdam 2004) 95-96. Pieter Vreede and M.W. van Boven ed. a.o., *Mijn Levensloop* (Hilversum 1994), 21-22.

³¹⁷ Rosendaal, *De Nederlandse Revolutie*, 97-100.

³¹⁸ F.H. van der Burg, H. Boels and J.P. Loof ed., *Tweehonderd jaar Rechten van de Mens in Nederland. De verklaring van de rechten van de mens en van de burger van 31 januari 1795 toegelicht en vergeleken met Franse en Amerikaanse voorgangers* (Leiden 1994) 17 and 21-32.

³¹⁹ Pieter Paulus, R.J. Schimmelpenninck, e.o., *De verklaring van de rechten van de mens en van de burger, geproclameerd door de provisionele representanten van het volk van Holland op 31 januari 1795*, in: H. van der Burg, H. Boels and J.P. Loof ed., *Tweehonderd jaar Rechten van de Mens in Nederland. De verklaring van de rechten van de mens en van de burger van 31 januari 1795 toegelicht en vergeleken met Franse en Amerikaanse voorgangers* (Leiden 1994) 3-6.

³²⁰ *Ibidem*, 3-4.

[...] welke ieder Mensch toekomt om te mogen doen al het geen anderen in hunne rechten niet stoort: dat dus hare natuurlyke bepaling bestaat in deze stelling: *Doe niet aan eenen anderen, het geen gy niet wilt dat U geschiede.*³²¹

The document, inspired by (amongst others) the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of Human Rights (1789), the French constitution (1793), but also by Paulus' treatise on equality, encouraged other provisional representatives to adopt the text.³²² Despite Paulus' fervent anti-slavery stance in his treatise two year prior, and the proclamation of equality, the issue of slavery was not included directly into the declaration. As had been declared in the French Declaration (1789), the right to property and the process of dispossession was carefully marked out in the Holland declaration. Only through the general will, or that of its representatives, could any property be dispossessed, but not without a predetermined compensation.³²³ When copying this line from the French declaration, the issue of slavery must have crossed the minds of the authors.

After the declaration, Paulus now began to lay the basis for the unitarian political faction: future representatives like Samuel Wiselius, Jacob Hahn and Pieter Leonard van de Kastele became his close political allies in his attempts to unify the Batavian Republic under one national and sovereign parliament.³²⁴ Paulus and those around him managed to negotiate an alliance between the Batavian and French republics, that would ensure Batavian independence. Still, the new republic was forced to join the war against the First Coalition, pay a large indemnity, cede the cities of Maastricht and Venlo to France, arrange quarters for French troops and would remain in colonial conflict with Britain (as indicated in Chapter 1).³²⁵

³²¹ Ibidem.

³²² The *gewesten* (provinces), like Gelderland, Zeeland, Friesland, Overijssel, Groningen (Stad en Lande) soon followed Holland's example, as well as the two *generaliteitslanden* (Drenthe and Brabant), parts of the Dutch Republic without provincial autonomous government. In some provinces, the provisional representatives simply consisted of the previous *Staten* government, whilst elsewhere revolutionaries formed representative councils on their own accord. Almost all of these local declarations of human rights were inspired by Holland's declaration (and mostly copied), with the exemption of a phrase on religious freedom. Van der Burg, Boels, Loof, *Twehonderd jaar Rechten van de Mens*, 17 and 21-32.

³²³ Ibidem, 4-5.

³²⁴ Vles, *Pieter Paulus*, 105 and 120.

³²⁵ Ibidem. Rosendaal, *De Nederlandse Revolutie*, 98. Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State' 139-140.

The National Assembly and the 'Dagverhaal'

After many months, and much deliberation, the many provisional representative bodies agreed on the *Regelement* for the National Assembly.³²⁶ The old States General were formally dissolved, and a new government was formed with a new executive branch and a parliament: the National Assembly. Every man above the age of 20, not under guardianship ('onder curatele') was allowed to vote in the Constituent Assemblies (*Grondvergaderingen*). In a similar fashion to the American Electoral College, these assemblies elected 3764 electors (30 per district), who would subsequently elevate one of their own as representative for their district, followed by two deputies. This meant the National Assembly consisted of 126 members, who now had full authority to speak on behalf of the nation themselves.³²⁷ Prominent individuals who had spoken out against the slave trade or even against slavery itself, such as Bernardus Bosch and Pieter Paulus, were now in power in the National Assembly.

The National Assembly was considered the highest and most sovereign body within the new political system.³²⁸ It directly represented the general will of the Batavian Nation, and was tasked with, amongst other duties, with forming two

³²⁶ One of the main reasons why the process to form a parliament took so long, was that many, like H.C. Cras, doubted whether the National Assembly should be tasked with formulating a constitution, or whether a constitution ought to be formed by a separate body beforehand. The election process was also a major point of debate: should this be done with provincial sovereignty in mind, or 'zonder ruggespraak' (without the representative needing to negotiate with his provincial government, a process which had always slowed down decision-making in the old States-General). Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 110-111. Vles, *Pieter Paulus*, 100-113 and 119.

³²⁷ This led to the awkward situation that some prominent revolutionaries, like Pieter Vreede, found that, despite their status within the revolutionary movement, they had not been elected (although Vreede managed to become a deputy for the Bergen op Zoom district), whilst others found they were elected against their wishes. Representatives had to completely abandon all other activities, such as their position in businesses or local elective office, and move to The Hague. Some saw this as too great a sacrifice, and protested heavily to the presumed first chairmen of the Assembly Pieter Paulus. Oddens claims that another cause for the absence of political ambition can be found in the classical republican disdain for political ambition, as shown in the main text below. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 101-111.

³²⁸ The Batavian Republic's Executive Branch at this time consisted of executive Committees (not to be confused with the parliamentary commissions): the *Comité tot de Zaken van de Marine*, the *Comité ter Lande*, the *West-Indische Comité* (the successor to the West-Indian trading Company), and later followed by the *Oost-Indisch Comité* (the successor to the nationalised VOC in 1796). Interestingly, these Committees seem to have taken matters into their own hands on multiple occasions, even when parliament had directly requested them to enact policy democratically determined. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 165.

commissions to shape the Batavian Constitution.³²⁹ Because of its prominence, Assembly's chairman – a position that was up for election every two weeks – held major powers. He was allowed to present representatives with a preliminary advice to the matter being discussed, he summarised the course of the debate, and decided what exactly to put to a vote.³³⁰

An inherent part of the new political system was the *Dagverhaal*. These commercially published parliamentary discourses were publicly available to every Batavian citizen for a small fee. A new issue, consisting of around eight pages, appeared every day describing the parliamentary discussion and decisions from a couple days prior. The authors of the account, seated on the public gallery in the National Assembly, would take notes on what was discussed. This was no easy task, since the chamber in which the representatives met, Willem V's former ballroom, was known for its horrible acoustics. Furthermore, representatives and the public present had a tendency to shout during debates, which made accurately reporting on the discussion a difficult undertaking. The publisher of the *Dagverhaal* therefore requested representatives to bring their written speeches to the authors in advance or after the debate.³³¹ Even though the *Dagverhaal* does not necessarily represent an accurate account of the exact words uttered by the representatives, it is an account of how the most prominent parliamentarians wanted their words to be represented to the Batavian people. Furthermore, since the previously mentioned circumstances in the chamber effected the official notaries of parliamentary edicts and votes as well, the *Dagverhaal* is the best source for analysing the political arguments made by the representatives, even if the exact wording of some speeches might have been different in parliament itself.³³²

The text of Paulus' inaugural speech on 1 March 1796 were duly reported on in the *Dagverhaal*. After the first session a parade in the swelling snow was planned through The Hague, led by Paulus. Proud of his tricolour sash, as first chairman of

³²⁹ For a complete description of the National Assembly's duties, see: Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 157-166.

³³⁰ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 172-184. For the exact voting procedure, see: Ibidem, 184-187.

³³¹ Fittingly, Oddens describes the publication of the *Dagverhaal* as 'een duizlingwekkende journalistieke onderneming' for the time. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 17.

³³² As we shall see, some representatives did not prepare speeches in advance, nor did they write them down afterwards. This meant the authors of the *Dagverhaal* had to paraphrase, which happens particularly often in the debates on slavery. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 17-20.

the Assembly, Paulus wanted the people of The Hague to see it clearly. He therefore refused to wear a coat. Three weeks later, Paulus died of a lung infection. The National Assembly had lost its first chairman, and a revolutionary respected by many.³³³ The fact that such a highly regarded representative, who had advocated for the 'careful' end of the slave trade in his *In welken zin*, had died so soon into the political experiment of the Batavian Republic, undoubtedly hampered the ability of the Republican faction in the debate to come to gather support for their stance on the topic. Nonetheless, the first chairman's stance on the issue would not be forgotten.

Republicans and Moderates

Before diving into the debates, I first wish to highlight the main political faction of the time, as especially the Republican faction would become an outspoken antislavery voice in the debates to come. Historians have always had difficulty with categorising the Batavians, especially because they were fundamentally divided over multiple issues. One of the most common divisions existed between federalists and unitarians.³³⁴ Mart Rutjes is convinced, however, that as contemporaries experienced ever-changing configurations of political factions per discussions on various topic, historians should categorise the Batavians according to their stance on the specific topic under deliberation. Representatives were encouraged to act independently which meant there was no single division, not ideological nor organisational, that holds true for every political issue. Similar to the French National Assembly, Batavian representatives despised party-formation: the National Assembly was thought to come to a decisions for the entirety of the nation, forming the general will.³³⁵

³³³ Vles, *Pieter Paulus*, 182.

³³⁴ In his account of the Batavian Revolution, Mart Rutjes lists a few ways in which the revolutionaries and representatives can be divided. He describes this mainly as a preference that differs for every historian: some like to divide the political landscape based on the preferred system of state (federal v. central), the preferred system of government (democratic v. moderate), or their preferred vision of the political future (federal, moderate, revolutionary republican, or 'moral' – indicating the wish for a joint program for governmental and societal reform.. Mart Rutjes, *Doorgelijkheid gegrepen: democratie, burgerschap en staat in Nederland 1795-1801. Academisch Proefschrift* (Amsterdam 2012), 5 and 23-24. Niek van Sas, *De Metamorfose van Nederland: van oude orde naar moderniteit* (Amsterdam 2004), 277-292. Rosendaal, *De Nederlandse Revolutie*, 102-107.

³³⁵ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 195-198.



The first session of the First National Assembly of the Batavian Republic in Willem V's former ballroom, with Paulus as chairman seated on the left, and the authors of the Dagverhaal present on the public gallery on the top left (George Kockers 1797).³³⁶

Nonetheless, at the time of the debates on slavery, two main political factions had formed, with a majority of independent representatives between them. Since the confrontations between these two groups slowly came to a boiling point in 1797, eventually resulting in two coups, and since the *de facto* leaders of these parties, namely Vreede and Schimmelpenninck, went head to head in the first debate on the matter, I will use the distinction between Moderates and (democratic) Republicans for my analysis. Simply because the Republican faction saw itself as representing the

³³⁶ Rijksmuseum, 'Eerste Nationale Vergadering in Den Haag, 1796, George Kockers, 1797', <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-OB-86.665> (version 30 June 2023).

true heritage of republicanism, does not mean the Moderates defined themselves as anti-republican. After the elimination of Orangist political forces, the pro-mixed government and constitutional monarchy voice had perished with them. The debates in the Batavian Republic were fought out between politicians universally in favour of political reform. They simply differed in their opinions on the nature and extent of that reform.³³⁷

The Republican 'party' was formed somewhere in 1796 by men like Vreede, Johan Valckenaer, but also Bernardus Bosch. After Valckenaer's departure to Madrid to serve as ambassador to Spain, Vreede became the undisputed leader of the party. The term 'party' is not used here to imply that the leadership of a party could impose party discipline on its members. Parties in this period constituted 'een los-vast verbond van parlamentsleden die zich op vrijwillige basis onderwierpen aan een zekere mate van organisatie' with a certain degree of ideological unity, as Oddens describes it.³³⁸ For the Republicans party, this was the idea that the revolution of 1795 had not been the end of the 'omwenteling', but only the beginning of further reform. Besides this general observation, the Republicans stood for an extension of the democratic power of the people, a unitary Republic and an equal judicial system for members of different religious groups. Vreede laid out these ideas in *Beoordeeling van het Ontwerp van Constitutie* (1797), seen as the founding document for the Republicans. Besides Vreede, it was signed by prominent revolutionaries, amongst which were Bernardus Bosch, Hendricus Quesnel, Michaël Witbols and Petrus van Zonsbeek.³³⁹

Whereas Bosch had already explicitly spoken out against the slave trade, and would remain critical of the practice in the Batavian period, notably through a positive review in 1801 of Dirk van Hogendorp's antislavery play *Kraskoepol*, Quesnel, Witbols and Van Zonsbeek had not.³⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it would be Bosch who refused to openly speak out in the debates to come, whereas the other 'founding fathers' of the Republican faction would support their leader Vreede in his plea for gradual abolition.

³³⁷ Rutjes, *Door gelijkheid gegrepen*, 23-24.

³³⁸ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 203.

³³⁹ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 199-204.

³⁴⁰ As visible in: Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 13.

Yet, their founding document – the *Beoordeeling van het ontwerp van Constitutie [...]* – only referenced the republican notion of political slavery: they could only accept a constitution that would not tie the Batavian people to ‘een ARISTOCRATISCH juk’.³⁴¹ Despite their continual invocation of republican ideas and language – comparing themselves to ancient Greeks and Romans, and naming the five officials who would be put in charge of foreign policy as ‘Vijf Koningen’ – the Republicans ended their program by underlining that all the Republic’s inhabitants should constitutionally be eligible to vote, except ‘die in rechten geen Persoon hebben’.³⁴² Slaves were one of the groups unmistakably belonging to this category.³⁴³

The Republican politician’s organisation into a semi-party immediately inspired others to organise against them. A group of independent representatives formed a group of their own to prevent any Republican from every wielding the powers of the Assembly’s chairman. In March 1797 some of these representatives founded the Moderate party, of which R.J. Schimmelpenninck and Jan Bernd Bicker were some of its most prominent members. The most important goal of the Moderates was maintaining the compromise achieved in the *Regelement* created in 1796 for the workings of the Assembly. Whilst some within the Moderates considered a federal governmental structure essential for a functioning republic, others like Schimmelpenninck held on to the belief of a unitarian system. The Moderates also preached tolerance against the (former) Orangist officials in government, and continued the ideal of ‘volksverlichting’ highlighted by the civil societies in the decades preceding the revolution.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Pieter Vreede (a.o.), *Beoordeeling van het ontwerp van Constitutie voor het Bataafsche Volk, door de Nationale Vergadering ten goed of afkeuring aan hetzelfde volk voorgedragen, door eenige burgers, zijnde repraesentanten van het Volk van Nederland* (Leiden 1797), 3. The image of the yoke is often used to highlight servitude in republican language as well. This does open up the question, whether someone actually connected the republican metaphor of the people as servant cattle to their ruler, to the abolitionist metaphor of slaves being treated like cattle. David Brion Davis includes in his book that Aristotle already described cattle as being enslaved, and that he would not be surprised if the techniques for incorporating domesticated animals into agriculture inspired techniques for the use of slaves. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford 2006), 5.

³⁴² Vreede, *Beoordeeling*, 7-8, 10 and 13.

³⁴³ Although their text only describes those convicted of a crime, or under (financial) guardianship as ineligible to vote. Vreede, *Beoordeeling*, 13.

³⁴⁴ Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 217-224.

3.2 - Debating slavery and republicanism: 22 April 1797

In early 1796, the National Assembly started its deliberations on the new constitution for the Batavian Republic. Before definitive deliberations on the exact place for the colonies and its inhabitants within the constitution could begin, parliamentary commissions tasked with governing the EAC's former territory drew up a conceptual charter for the colonies in Asia. Headed by Samuel Wiselius, a former ally of Pieter Paulus, the commission drew up plans for an equal relationship between the colonies and the metropole.³⁴⁵ All colonial inhabitants would receive the same rights guaranteed by the future constitution. In spring 1797, a commission was formed, headed by the independent representative Jacob Floh, to definitively find an exact constitutional role for the colonies. In April, the Floh-report was presented to the Assembly, and subsequently discussed.³⁴⁶ The report effectively annulled the conclusions made by the Wiselius-report: the colonies were defined as 'wingewesten', and Dutch colonial citizens would not be allowed to vote. The report contained many justifications for Dutch colonialism and plans for future imperialism, which is why Koekkoek labels it as the origin of nineteenth century imperial state-building projects.³⁴⁷ Debate quickly turned to the topic of slavery, however, as Pieter Vreede expressed his concerns on the issue. The arguments for and against (gradual) abolition will respectively be brought forward per debate in the section below.

After the report had been presented, Vreede was the first to rise in amazement, that the report on the colonies refused to speak on the use of slaves 'en de daarmee verbonden afschuwlyke slavenhandel'.³⁴⁸ However, Vreede was no supporter of immediate abolition of the slave trade or slavery: 'Neen zeker, het ongelukkig voorbeeld van onze Fransche Broeders, die met het beste oogmerk hier door in eenige hunner Colonien ontelbaare rampen in plaats van zegeningen hebben voortgebracht, moet ons tot een waarschuwend voorbeeld verstrekken.'³⁴⁹ When chairman De Mist requested Vreede take into account the gentle ripening of

³⁴⁵ Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State', 138. Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment*, 110-111.

³⁴⁶ Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment*, 110-111.

³⁴⁷ Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State', 138-139.

³⁴⁸ *Dagverhaal* 5, no. 492, 27 April 1797 (session 22 April) 727.

³⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

enlightenment among slaves, rather than take rash action, the representative spoke on the principles of liberty and slavery. The former ought to be guaranteed as a fundamental right to all:

‘De Bataafsche Natie kan niet juichen over hare Vryheid; terwyl zy duizenden van haare medemenschen in slaverny stort – zy kan niet blyde zyn by haaren voorspoed, die door zugten en tranen van duizende harer natuurgelovden, door haar op de barbaarsche wyze in ketens geklonken, verkregen word. Dit waare haar een eeuwige schande! [...]’³⁵⁰

Because of the ‘French example’, he wanted to unite justice with wisdom, and ‘menschlievenheid met voorzigtigheid’.³⁵¹ Nonetheless, the Republican leader was worried that, if the Floh-report was agreed upon, slavery would be constitutionally legitimised. He therefore proposed the Floh-commission should find a way to incorporate a term of a couple of years for the abolition of the slave trade and ‘het goodloos gebruik maaken van slaven’ (i.e. slavery).³⁵² If that were to be prevented, the National Assembly would act in the interest of the unfortunate victims of slavery, ‘wier rampzalig lot op dit oogenblik door ons beslist word [...]’.³⁵³

Vreedes rhetoric triggered immediate responses from independents and moderates alike. Herman Vitringa rose to say that Vreede’s concerns were his ‘in theorie’, but that chastening the state to a legal obligation ten years in the future was unwise in the ‘critique politicque situatie’ of the Batavian Republic, and ‘den actuelen staat van onze Colonien’.³⁵⁴ Vitringa highlights that the representatives existed in a state of ‘fatale onzekerheid’, in which it could not be known ‘wat wy [van de kolonies] nog van overig hebben, en wat wy ‘er van zullen behouden’.³⁵⁵ Vitringa’s fear for the loss of colonies was shared by many, as we shall see. Vitringa was also

³⁵⁰ Ibidem.

³⁵¹ Ibidem.

³⁵² Interestingly, Vreede appears to use a phrase, very similar to the quote inscribed on the famous English abolitionist pendant ‘Am I Not a Man and a Brother?’, naming slaves as ‘brothers’: ‘[...] waar door wy eenmaal zullen ophouden, om onze Natuurgelovden op een’ barbaarsche wyze te martelen; onze Natuurgelovden, die, het zy zy zwart of blank zyn, niet nalaten onzer medemenschen, onze Broeders te zyn.’ Ibidem.

³⁵³ Ibidem, 728.

³⁵⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵⁵ Ibidem.

the first to highlight the right to property for the colonists as a defence for maintaining slavery, for now.³⁵⁶

Then, Schimmelpenninck stood up. No-one would expect anyone to oppose the end of slavery here, according to the Moderate leader. That would be unworthy of 'den vryheid-minnenden Republikein'.³⁵⁷ Yet, the representatives should proceed with the utmost 'voorzigtigheid', for '[d]e naam van St. Domingo alleen moet u hier tot nadenken brengen'.³⁵⁸ Rather than jump the gun, as the French had done, Schimmelpenninck advocated a route 'welke u door de natuur zelve aangewezen wordt'.³⁵⁹ Since a system of liberty had only just started to take root in Europe, the representatives simply had to wait for nature's slow progress and liberty's spread to the colonies. Moderate supporter Jan Bicker wanted to meet Vreede half-way, by including a clause in the Floh-report 'om het lot deze Inwoonders der Colonien, van welk een soort ook, te verbeteren, en tot den hoogsten trap van geluk te brengen'.³⁶⁰ He proposed to first investigate by commission, not how, but if the abolition of the slave trade should be included in the constitution.³⁶¹

As Koekkoek has fittingly described it, concerning the Haitian Revolution 'the details and complexities, often concerning even the basic chronology of events, were lost on many Dutchmen'.³⁶² Most simply assumed the French abolition declaration had caused the colony to erupt into complete chaos, whilst in fact the declaration itself was chiefly issued to attempt to regain control over the colony due to its slave rebellion and foreign invasions. Even so, most Dutch antislavery authors would frame French abolition as an act inspired by humanitarianism, whilst also describing it (together with their opponents) as an argument against acting too rashly in abolishing slavery.³⁶³

³⁵⁶ Ibidem.

³⁵⁷ *Dagverhaal* 5, no. 493, 28 April 1797 (session 22 April) 729.

³⁵⁸ Ibidem.

³⁵⁹ Ibidem.

³⁶⁰ Ibidem, 730.

³⁶¹ Ibidem.

³⁶² Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation State', 143-144.

³⁶³ Ibidem. Adams adds that describing abolition as the 'gift' of liberty from white Europeans constituted an act of 'white sympathy', incorporated in many antislavery sources of the period, and considered by contemporaries as a worthy action to pursue. Something similar can be found in Petronella Moens' poem on the end of the slave trade. Adams, *Repertoires of slavery*, 181-197. Petronella Moens, 'Bij het afschaffen van den slaavenhandel door de Fransche Natie', in: Petronella Moens, *Vruchten der eenzaamheid* (Amsterdam 1798).

Hahn, an independent representative, and chair of the constitutional reform commission, who had previously supported Wiselius' proposal for equal rights for colonists, and a close friend to the late-Paulus, found merit in Vreede's proposal despite Schimmelpenninck's words. In his view, there was a disagreement in parliament between those who saw 'onze grondbeginselen' as sufficient to advise the Legislative Body (the parliament that was supposed to be established after a constitution was passed) to limit the slave trade in the future, and some who would like that fundamental belief explicitly coded into law.³⁶⁴ Hahn thus saw that this debate touched upon the very core of the Republic's principles. Slaves, he elaborated, were viewed as pack-animals by most. To bring these principles closer to the representatives, Hahn reminded them of his friend and first chairman:

'Hier bring ik my met vreugde te binnen, wat onze *Zalige Pieter Paulus*, op het einde van zyne schoone Verhandeling over de Gelykheid ten dezen aanzien, zo menschlievend als wysgerig en toch Staatskundig geschreven heeft [...].'³⁶⁵

Refusing to constitutionally speak out against the slave trade would leave 'eene onuitwischbaare Vlek' on the Batavian people and its constitution.³⁶⁶

Later, Hahn further exemplifies how fundamental he considers this debate to the shared political outlook of the Batavians, when he shows clear surprise, similar to that of Vreede's at the start of the debate, that the abolition of slavery is even a talking point for the supposed freedom-loving Republicans:

'Ik kan my niet verbeelden dat de Nationale Vergadering nog eerst wil onderzocht hebben, of wel de Menschen-handel moet afgeschaft worden. Enige twyfel daaromtrent zou dunkt my haar schande aanwryven, [...], wanneer een vry Volk in zyne Staats-regeling den Slavenhandel niet durfde afkeuren, [...].'³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ This turned out not to be true, but I will return to this later. Most opponents actively fought abolition of any kind. *Dagverhaal* 5, no. 493, 28 April 1797 (session 22 April) 730.

³⁶⁵ Ibidem, 730.

³⁶⁶ Ibidem.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem.

He goes on to reference the classical republican ideal of luxury and a lack of virtue, corrupting the entirety of a society. Slavery is an ‘afgryselijke manier van Landbouwen en geldwinnen’, corrupting the very heart of the Batavian Nation.³⁶⁸

Yet Hahn’s republican speech did not sway the Moderates in the Assembly: Teding van Berkhout would later remark that he had also read Paulus’ work, ‘maar ook daar in werd de omzigtigheid aangepreezen’, as paraphrased by the *Dagverhaal*’s authors.³⁶⁹

Fellow-Republican Petrus van Zonsbeek agreed with Vreede. His desire to discuss the issue of abolition by commission was proof of his awareness that this delicate matter should be handled with care. If the representatives were to ‘let nature run its course’, as many opponents proposed, Zonbeek was convinced that ‘het principe van Vryheid, door mangel van aanmoediging, dien voortgang niet hebben kan.’³⁷⁰ Liberty was a prerequisite for ‘civilisation’ and ‘natural development’, Van Zonsbeek argued.

Three more interventions in the first debate are worth going over. Firstly, the second time Schimmelpenninck decided to speak against abolition, with a weapon he was known for: his powerful rhetorical skills.

‘[...] ik [...] heb nooit een duim of vinger van een Slaaf in eigendom bezeten; nimmer heeft een Slaaf een droppol zweets voor my gezweet. Nooit heb ik een kluit gronds bezeten, welke door een Slaaf bearbeid is; en ik heb dus voor my zelve, in deezen, geen het minste belangen. – Maar als Mensch, als Representant, vraag ik: Wie is roekeloos genoeg om een zaak van dit gewigt te beslisschen, zonder eenigszins te kunnen berekenen *waar ons zodanig Decreet zoude heen leiden?*’³⁷¹

Should such an important matter, with ‘het vuur van opstand’ lurking in the background, be decide in ‘eene zo groote en woelige Vergadering als deeze’?³⁷² The representatives duly decided to hand the case back to the Commission, with the question *if* (rather than *how*) slavery should be mentioned in the constitution.

³⁶⁸ Ibidem, 732.

³⁶⁹ Ibidem.

³⁷⁰ Ibidem, 731.

³⁷¹ Ibidem, 732.

³⁷² Ibidem.

Before the conclusion of the debate, however, two representatives again tried to sway their colleagues with republican arguments. The Republican Hugo Gevers, as paraphrased by the *Dagverhaal*, questioned what would happen if Dutch slaves heard about the situation on Saint-Domingue, and ‘zy worden tevens onderrigt, dat by de Constitutie voor het Bataafsche Volk van hun lot in genen deele eenig gewag wordt gemaakt, [...]’³⁷³ Would their subsequent response not constitute a true danger for the Republic as well? Although it is not noted in the *Dagverhaal* record, it is very possible Gevers discussed the inherent right of every people to rebel against tyranny here.

We receive the most direct link to republicanism in the words of independent representative Petrus Guljé, already briefly mentioned in the introduction. As a representative from the previous ‘Generaliteitsland’ of Brabant – a southern province of the Dutch Republic which had not received a sovereign provincial government after the Eighty Years War with Spain, but remained under the direct supervision of the *Staten-Generaal* due to the large presence of Catholics in the region (seen as a major injustice by many Batavian – including Vreede – who fought for equal civil and religious rights for the southern population) – Guljé thought himself to be particularly qualified to speak on the matter.

‘Niemand in deeze Vergadering, Burger Representanten! Geloof ik, dat meerder gevoel heeft van het yselyke der Slaverny dan die van Bataafsch Braband; want deeze zyn, onder het voorig Bestuur, weinig minder Slaafsche behandeld, dan de Slaaven in de Colonien: ’t is hierom, dat ik, een Bataafsche Brabander zynde, allen schyn van slaverny met het levendigste gevoel van verachting dat iemand kan hebben die dezelve als het ware van naby gevoeld heeft, ten sterkste verfoey; en concludeer, dat de Bataafsche Republiek voor een en voor altyd ophoud, zo in de Colonien als elders Slaaven te maaken, en daar over te heerschen.’³⁷⁴

Although the comparison between the conditions of a somewhat oppressed region of a country to the horrors of chattel slavery may seem inappropriate to current observers, this quote nonetheless highlights that the representatives debating the question of slavery were fully aware of the republican connection to slavery, as their

³⁷³ Ibidem, 733.

³⁷⁴ Ibidem, 732-733.

colleagues reminded them of their founding principle by connecting political slavery to chattel slavery. Some representatives would continue to do so, in the debate on the follow-up report by Floh in May 1797.

3.3 Debating slavery and republicanism: 22 May 1797

***Floh's report on slavery*³⁷⁵**

About a month later, in the evening of the 22 May 1797, the Floh committee returned to the National Assembly with a new report. It is especially this debate that highlights the realisation representatives experienced, that they were engaged in a fundamental debate which touched upon the very core of their political ideology. All sides prepared elaborate speeches, later published in the *Dagverhaal*. As Vreede had perhaps already expected, the Commission's conclusion was devastating: constitutionally setting an exact date for either the abolition of the slave trade or slavery, would lead to the ruin of all colonies, and subsequently the demise of the young Batavian Republic. The Commission strongly advised against Vreede's proposal.

Whilst reading the report out loud to parliament, Jacob Floh made a series of persuasive arguments. Colonies depended on their plantations, he began. Since '[h]et getal der Blanken in de meeste Colonien [...] tot dat der Zwartten staande als een tot dertig', Europeans could not produce anything close to enslaved Africans.³⁷⁶ Furthermore, Europeans were not nearly physically strong enough 'om onder eenen veelal brandenden hemel, aan welken zy geenzins gewoon zyn, eenen zo zwaaren arbeid te kunnen uitöefenen'.³⁷⁷ Floh wanted the representatives to know that, as far as the Commission was concerned, they were deciding on nothing less than the fate of the Batavian Republic. They would either say goodbye

³⁷⁵ It is important to note that in the literature, referencing the 'Floh-report' is meant as Floh's report on the relationship with the colonies. When I discuss Floh's report, however, I usually intend the report that followed on slavery in the debate on 22 May 1797. Wherever possible, I have attempted to clarify this. It is also important to clarify that there seems to have been some confusion as to what exactly was being debated. Whereas Floh, for instance, is (mostly) talking about slave trade, Vreede is mainly discussing the abolition of slavery as whole. During the debates, the two terms seem to have been used interchangeably to some extent.

³⁷⁶ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 547, 1 June 1797 (session 22 May) 4.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

[aan] den eenigen steun van Neêrlands Staat en om deszelfs aanstaanden gewissen val te onderschryven, of geene al te strenge en ontydige toepassing te maaken van die wysgeerige en onwraakbare grondbeginzelen, welke voor het overige bovenallen tegenspraak verheven [...] zyn.’³⁷⁸

Floh was thus acutely aware of the ‘grondbeginzelen’ of human rights and republicanism this report violated. His fear for the fall of the Batavian Republic was driven by four main arguments: a deep colonial – almost imperial – conviction, the geopolitical fear of a mighty Britain, the terror felt by some representatives for the spread of the Haitian Revolution, and finally an appeal to the rights of white colonists. Colonial, since Floh mentions that the ‘bebouwing der Colonien’ was required,

‘om langs dien weg de markt van het Moederland staande te houden, den Koophandel van den Staat te bewaaren, de Zeevaart te doen bloeyen, de Fabrieken en Trafieken in stand te houden, [...] en eindelyk om den staat deszelfs grootheid en aanzien te doen behouden [...].’³⁷⁹

Economical prowess and overseas commerce, maintained through slavery, gave the Batavian Republic international prestige, Floh argues. This was in line with previous statements in Floh’s report on the constitutional position of the colonies: overseas possession raised the esteem of the metropolis.³⁸⁰ Such arguments are not too far removed from nineteenth century imperialist arguments.

This colonial argument is supplemented by the fear that abolition ‘tot niets meerder zou dienen, dan om het aanzien en vermogen van andere mededingende Natien, en vooral van onzen afgunstigsten vyand, het Britsche Ryk, naamlyk, in die zelve maate te doen toeneemen [...]’³⁸¹ Moreover, the ‘listige en trouweloos’ British ministry and British orators had argued against the slave trade, in order to illicit emotional responses in their enemies’ parliaments, according to Floh. These ideas had soon taken root in France, and had inspired them to prematurely abolish slavery in Saint-Domingue, to the detriment of the colony.³⁸² The Dutch should avoid their

³⁷⁸ Ibidem, 5.

³⁷⁹ Ibidem, 5

³⁸⁰ Koekkoek, ‘Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State’, 145.

³⁸¹ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 547, 1 June 1797 (session 22 May) 5.

³⁸² Ibidem, 6.

example at all cost, especially since some colonies were now, as advised by Willem V, under British rule. Were the Batavians to include abolition in their constitution, these colonies might chose to remain in the British Empire.³⁸³ With this appeal to geopolitical fears, Floh made any position that was remotely sympathetic to abolitionism seem like treason and akin to plunging the entire Dutch empire into complete chaos. As we will see, these arguments hit home for many Moderate and independent representatives.

Another important argument, with a somewhat republican connection, is the affirmation of the natural rights of the colonists to property and liberty. In the previous report from his Commission, which had been adopted by the Assembly, a (social) contract was defined between the colonies and the metropolis. If the representatives were to constitutionally and gradually abolish slavery or the slave trade, that contract ‘wordt als dan geheel den bodem ingeslagen, en van volkomene onwaarde gemaakt [...]’.³⁸⁴ Floh even brings up the Commission would be interested, but would not investigate at this time,

‘in hoe verre het aan de Natie vry zoude staan om, zonder eenige schadevergoeding, op deeze wyze over de aanzienlyke bezittingen, en het lot der planters, willekeurig, en zonder hen dienaangaande gehoord te hebben, te beschikken; [...]’³⁸⁵

His message was clear: the Assembly could not with one hand raise up the rights of its citizens, and with the other (to his mind) catastrophically bring them down again. Floh ended the report with a dramatic plea:

‘Het lot der Colonien, en dienvolgens ook van dezen Staat, hangt entwyffelbaar van de beslissing der Leden deze Vergadering in eene zaak van zoo veel aanbelang ten eenen maale af; het is [voor de Commissie] genoeg den rand des afgronds aangewezen te hebben, op welken ook de wysbegeerte eenen Staat kan brengen.’³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Ibidem, 8.

³⁸⁴ Ibidem, 5.

³⁸⁵ Ibidem, 8.

³⁸⁶ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 10.

Vreede and Hahn

Pieter Vreede's response was, as René Koekkoek describes it, 'perhaps the most powerful and passionate antislavery speech in the brief history of the Batavian Republic'.³⁸⁷ The fact that this debate was a momentous occasion, with wide ramifications for Dutch colonial subjects and slaves, was not lost on Vreede. To his mind, the moment had arrived, in which the fate of violated humanity would be decided.³⁸⁸ As in the previous debate, Vreede continued his plea for the constitutional certainty, 'dat 'er eens een tyd zal aanblikken, waarin [de Bataven] de regten der menschheid in alle warelddeelen zullen eerbiedingen, en [de Afrikanen] verlost zyn langer slagtoffers te blyven, van eenige schandvlekken der Bataafsche Natie'.³⁸⁹

In his passionate speech, Vreede again referenced multiple scientific and societal debates on the matter from previous decades, aligning himself with the antislavery rhetoric previously uttered in the Dutch Republic. Firstly, Vreede mentions the debate on the humanity of the African, described in chapter two with, amongst others, the anatomist Pieter Camper. 'Zyn [de Zwarte bewoners van Afrika] een soort van Wezens, dat door hunne gedaante, tusschen de *Ourang Outang* en de mensch in staat – zyn zy dus geen menschen?', Vreede wonders.³⁹⁰ However, if Africans are humans, as many unquestionably have determined, the representatives ought to lay their hands off of God's likeness.³⁹¹

Next, Vreede tackles another point of debate in the 1790s: the African's level of intelligence. He states that many, both within and outside of parliament, had smeared the African's image by describing them as (naturally) stupid, or unvirtuous, in order to justify slavery. This had made sure that 'alle liefde voor hun deed ophouden', and had made it seem like slavery had even been a blessing for many.³⁹² However, Vreede had received a report from a former sailor on a Dutch slave ship, which made clear that '[Afrikanen] de regtvaardigheid en billykheid beminnen'.³⁹³

³⁸⁷ Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State', 114.

³⁸⁸ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 10.

³⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 10-11.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 11.

³⁹² *Ibidem*, 12.

³⁹³ *Ibidem*, 12.

They had their own orderly – almost democratic or republican – form of government, led by

[...]Persoonen van bekwamen ouderdom, die het meest in agting zyn – en zoo zeer kennen [de Afrikanen] hunne eigen waarde, en de waarde der Vryheid, dat zy de zodanige hunner Bestuurders van het bewind verwyderen, die hun vertrouwen verloren hebben.³⁹⁴

This touches upon H.C. Cras' unique point in the 1790s, highlighting the dehumanising effect the lack of civilisation ascribed to black Africans had on them: they would be portrayed as inhuman and uncivilised as possible, in order to justify the crimes committed against them.³⁹⁵ Vreede also repeats the common antislavery *topos*, so prevalent in the Dutch antislavery discourse of the 1790s, describing the Dutch (or Europeans), rather than the Africans, as barbarians for maintaining slavery.³⁹⁶

Besides these connections to previous anti-slavery discourse, Vreede highlights, as in the previous parliamentary debate, the inherent link between abolition and the Batavian Republic's founding principles, and the political language and culture employed by many representatives: republicanism.

The first somewhat republican argument is, again, based on antiluxury attitudes. Vreede brings up this issue in a similar fashion to *de Vaderlander* nearly twenty years prior. Slaves are viewed with contempt by those who, 'ongevoelig voor hun noodlot, [zich] vetmensten met hun bloed en tranen'.³⁹⁷ Has virtue been annulled by the gathering of treasure, Vreede rhetorically asks.³⁹⁸

'Zoo wy beweeren dat goud en schatten, met vertrapping van alle beginzelen van eer en deugd mogen verkregen worden? zal Neêrland dan het moordhol zyn, waar de struikrover en huisdief, die ook hun belang boven hun pligt stellen, vry en ongestraft hunne euvel daden zullen uitoeffenen?'

³⁹⁴ Ibidem, 12.

³⁹⁵ Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*, 67-68.

³⁹⁶ 'Maar ziet daar ook den Nederlandschen Barbaar [...].'*Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 14.

³⁹⁷ Ibidem, 11.

³⁹⁸ Ibidem.

The issue of gathering gold with slavery out of greed to the detriment of (republican) virtue remains a prevalent theme throughout Vreede's speech.

His republican plea of communal virtue over luxury is supplemented by more references to the Batavian Republic's founding republican principles. He raises the right to rebellion on multiple occasions, not only by quoting Raynal's famous quote on slave rebellions, as used in the contemporary play *De blanke en de zwarte*: '[...] zeer te regt zegt de Abt Raynal: *die de Slaverny verdedigd, verdient van den Wysgeer eene diepe veragting, en van den Neger een steek met den dolk*.'³⁹⁹ Vreede is also convinced that slavery should not be allowed to persist, simply to protect Dutch white citizens:

'[...] om dat één geweldenaar gevaar kan lopen, dat een dubbel welverdienden wraak op zyn schuldig hoofd zoude kunnen nederkomen, moeten 30 rampzalige en wreed mishandelde menschen geen einde mogen zien, aan hunne el[le]nde. Is dat regtvaarig? [...] is dat menschelyk?'⁴⁰⁰

Vreede continued his republican plea by claiming the fear for slave rebellions is exactly the same as the alarm tyrants experience 'voor den billyken wraak der onderdrukten! Zoo word een *Nero* geteisterd voor zyne gruwelen en euvel daden!'⁴⁰¹ If the Batavian Nation decided it would prosper through murder, Vreede exclaimed:

'Ô dat ik dan nimmer Bataaf geboren waare! O dat ik dan veel liever een rampzalig deelgenoot geworden waare van [de slaven], om myne vervloekingen over de Bataven uit te spreken, om de vuisten myner Lotsgenoten te wapenen en wraak te neemen over een Volk, dat de Vryheid met den mond verheft, maar in hunne daden tirannen zouden zyn en menschen beulen.'⁴⁰²

Vreede thus believed political and chattel slavery were inherently linked, and the right for Batavians to rebel against their own 'Nero's' was no different from the right of slaves to rebel against their masters.⁴⁰³ The representative for Bergen op Zoom reaffirmed this belief at the very end of his speech, by rhetorically asking the Batavian people if they would accept slavery themselves:

³⁹⁹ Ibidem. Play by Pigault-Lebrun, as cited in: Adams, *Repertoires of slavery*, 180.

⁴⁰⁰ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 12-13.

⁴⁰¹ Ibidem, 12.

⁴⁰² Ibidem, 13.

⁴⁰³ Ibidem.

‘Bataven, Vryheidsvrienden! Zoudt gy gedogen, dat het onverzadigd zelfsbelang van eenigen, de orde geheel omkeere? zoudt gy gedogen, dat men op uwen vryen grond kan Slaaf geboren worden – dat men op uwen vryen grond een geheel leven kan Slaaf blyven?’⁴⁰⁴

Like Guljé in the previous debate, Vreede marked out, not simply a ‘humanitarian’, but chiefly a republican ideological line in the sand. Were the representatives to cross that line, parliament would have to justify to God, ‘*dat wy een ander behandeld hebben, zoo als wy wenschen behandeld te zyn*’.⁴⁰⁵ With his closing line, Vreede not only referenced the often quoted line from the Gospel of Matthew, as a popular quotation in antislavery discourse. He might have wanted to remind the representatives of the very declaration of human rights many of them had agreed to in the early stages of the Batavian Republic, again underlying the fundamental nature of the debate experienced by those present.

Despite representative Quesnel’s immediate support for Vreede’s words, his (at the very least) sympathetic attitude towards slave rebellions must have raised some eyebrows in parliament. Floh commented that, because of Vreede’s words, the Republic’s executive branch might be required to supply the colonies with thousands of extra troops to safeguard the lives of plantation owners.⁴⁰⁶

Such responses made it all the more difficult for others to speak out. As in the previous debate, however, Vreede found a sympathetic ear with representative Hahn. The latter seems to have been unaware, however, that the debate would take place on the evening of the 22th. He claims he was only partially able to hear Vreede’s speech, and expresses remorse that he was underprepared for the debate. The chairman at this time – the fervent opponent to (constitutional) abolition R.J. Schimmelpenninck – claimed he had sent a messenger specifically to inform the representative of the timetable.⁴⁰⁷ Whether Hahn was intentionally left in the dark about the Assembly’s exact schedule that evening, is impossible to determine.⁴⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the representative briefly shared that, according to him, the debate

⁴⁰⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibidem, 14.

⁴⁰⁶ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 549, 3 June 1797 (session 22 May) 18.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibidem, 21-22. *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 14.

⁴⁰⁸ The schedule for the Assembly’s meetings was openly published on a sign outside of parliament. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*. 172-194.

came down to ‘den stryd tusschen pligt en belang, tusschen de voortreffelyke waarde der beginselen en tusschen het voordeel der beurzen’.⁴⁰⁹ He continued by repeating his appeal to Paulus’ treatise, who had already described slavery as ‘[een] onterende schending der eerste rechten van de menschheid en een vuil offer aan schandelyke winzucht [...]’, as paraphrased by the *Dagverhaal*.⁴¹⁰ Gradual (or ‘trapsgewijs’) abolition should be constitutionally mentioned, Hahn argued.⁴¹¹

Setting the stage for postponement

Even though Vreede and Hahn would reference the antislavery discourse of the previous decades, so did their opponents. Professor of philosophy at the Harderwijk University Bernardus Nieuhoff – a convinced Moderate and federalist – described the many treatises he had read on the subject, including Raynal. ‘Dit onderwerp is in onze dagen zoo zeer bekend, en in zulke meesterlyke vertogen, verhandeld en beredeneerd, dat men ‘er bezwaarlyk veel zal kunnen byvoegen. – [...]’, the representative claimed.⁴¹² Because of these treatises, no-one would dare to describe black Africans as something other than their ‘natuurgenoot’, as a reasonable being and as endowed by their Creator with perfection.⁴¹³ And yet, abolition would be dangerous to ‘den Blanke’, and would ‘den dienstbaren Zwarten eer ten verderve, dan ten heil strekke’.⁴¹⁴ By appealing to Rousseau, Nieuhoff claimed liberty requires a strong stomach, which ‘t zwarte Menschenkind’ had not yet developed. The professor would, like Paulus, compare slaves ‘met onze Kinderen van 5 tot 6 jaren.’⁴¹⁵ Immediate abolition would degenerate into debauchery, and would be akin to ‘een scherp zwaard in de hand van ‘t kind, of den jongen’.⁴¹⁶

Some representatives nonetheless tried to work out a compromise. Whereas previously, representative Herman Vitranga had argued against immediate abolition solely out of concern for the colonies, he now did so with the conviction that only a

⁴⁰⁹ Beurzen is an old Dutch word for ‘wallet’. *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 14-15.

⁴¹⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹¹ Ibidem.

⁴¹² *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 549, 3 June 1797 (session 22 May) 18-19.

⁴¹³ Ibidem, 19.

⁴¹⁴ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁵ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁶ Ibidem.

simple improvement in the treatment of slaves ought to be included in the constitution. The Legislative Body (the representative body supposed to be elected after the affirmation of the constitution), would have to decide definitively on the matter.⁴¹⁷ Independent representative Johannes Lockhorst followed his colleague in determining that some mention of abolition, without a hard deadline, should constitutionally be determined. Setting a definitive term for abolition, however, would only be possible once slaves had been enlightened through 'menschlievend onderrigt'. Before that time, enslaved Africans were insusceptible to Liberty.⁴¹⁸

Independent representative De Leeuw, who in the previous debate had advocated for some constitutional mention of slavery - since he did not want to leave such an important task to chance - now appeared to have been won over by Floh.⁴¹⁹ He feared Vreede would miss his true goal, 'en integendeel zeer waarschynelyk duizende blanken [zou] ruineren, en aan mishandelingen en moord blootstellen, zonder daar door het lot zelfs niet van een gering aantal Slaven te verbeeteren.' Furthermore, slaves were all together 'te woest, en te dom, om op zich zelve te bestaan, zy zouden aan hun zelve overgelaaten, zich onderling tot Slaven maken [...]'. Shortages, poverty and 'ongeregeldheden' would soon follow in such a society.⁴²⁰ Still, he argued (like Lockhorst) that some statement of the intent to abolish slavery had to be made. This plea, which can only be read as an appeal to the fear for slave rebellion and the uncivilised nature of the enslaved, nonetheless ends with the call for a constitutional article of intent.⁴²¹

Such arguments are illustrative for the position held by many in parliament. Whilst nearly all representatives condemned the slave trade in some fashion, the fear for the loss of the colonies, and therefore the loss of the Republic itself, was enough to push most over the edge. Others were convinced with arguments based on the promise of future imperialism, or the possibility of reclaiming a glorious colonial

⁴¹⁷ Ibidem, 17-18.

⁴¹⁸ Ibidem, 19-20

⁴¹⁹ *Dagverhaal* 5, no. 493, 28 April 1797 (session 22 April) 732.

⁴²⁰ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 548, 2 June 1797 (session 22 May) 15.

⁴²¹ The fact that De Leeuw's arguments are so contradictory, might be explained by his unwillingness to admit (verbal) defeat. Oddens describes that representatives did not like to be seen as the party that had been convinced by opponents, and regarded it as a great dishonour. Therefore, De Leeuw might not have been comfortable with openly admitting his change of heart. Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 181,

past. Even a compromised position, argued for with what appear to be proslavery arguments, was impossible for most to swallow.⁴²² Even Vreede's Republican ally Michaël Hendrik Witbols concluded, shortly after describing his faction's leader as a masterly painter of words, that the representatives should prepare for the abolition of slavery 'allengskens' (or 'voorzichtig') and 'van trap tot trap'. Vreede's motion to include a fixed deadline in the constitution for the abolition of slavery was subsequently defeated.⁴²³

After the first proposal for the Batavian constitution was rejected by a referendum, the National Assembly again asked Wiselius to draw up a charter for the Dutch colonies. With the previous debate in mind, Wiselius observed, according to Koekkoek, '[...]that "attributing" the rights of man to black slaves did not automatically imply "effectuating" them as citizenship rights.'⁴²⁴ Whereas the rhetoric on antislavery in parliament would take multiple decades to return to Dutch political discourse, Floh's report on the relationship between colonies and the state, originally the subject of the first debate, would serve as the ideological and practical bedrock for the Dutch imperial nation-state of the nineteenth century.⁴²⁵

Sens raises a number of valid and interesting points on Vreede's passionate plea. When Vreede, after staging a successful coup together with other Republicans, forming the *Uitvoerend Bewind*, was in charge of the Batavian Republic for half a year in 1798, he never pressed the issue of the slave trade or slavery again. Furthermore, Vreede himself was not immune to the narrative of the tiers of civilisation and the idea that Africans occupied a state of nature. In 1814, he published a book *Reize door Afrika, voor jonge lieden* in which he describes the life of the European traveller and proponent of the idea of the noble savage François le Vaillant as admirable. Vreede's co-author described Africans as not too dissimilar from the ancient (somewhat noble, but still barbaric) Batavians, who occupied a similar (and thus simpler) state of civilisation or nature.⁴²⁶

⁴²² Unfortunately, the *Dagverhaal* does not provide us with a final tally of the votes.

⁴²³ *Dagverhaal* 6, no. 549, 3 June 1797 (session 22 May) 21.

⁴²⁴ Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment*, 114-115.

⁴²⁵ Koekkoek, 'Envisioning the Dutch Imperial Nation-State'.

⁴²⁶ Sens, '*Mensaap, heiden, slaaf*', 116 and 6-7.

Conclusion – Chapter 3

In 1814, the newly established Dutch monarchy, led by former Stadholder Willem V, now king Willem I, would abolish the slave trade under British pressure. Willem used the abolition of the slave trade as bargaining chip to gain territory in the former Austrian-Netherlands and to maintain as much of the colonies in Dutch possession prior to the Napoleonic Wars. The full abolition of slavery itself, however, would take another sixty years to come into effect.⁴²⁷

To an extent, the two parliamentary debates in the Batavian Republic can be seen as a continuation of the slavery discussion in treatises and periodicals from previous years. Especially Vreede's second speech referenced previous intellectual debates on monogenesisism, and adds to Diderot's and Cras' belief that Africans not necessarily occupied a state of nature. Both Hahn's and Vreede's speeches built on arguments based on the debate on wealth, even using similar phrasing to *De Denker and de Vaderlander* (for instance in Vreede's use of blood and tears of the enslaved). However, Vreede and Hahn were not the only ones to employ the language of previous treatises on slavery: Schimmelpenninck, for instance, did not hesitate to cover his proslavery arguments in the language of rights. In a similar fashion to Barrau a few year prior, he calls the enslaved 'Mensch[en]' and highlights that no freedom loving republican would ever argue in favour of the slave trade. The internal contradictions in Paulus' treatise, as pointed out in Chapter 2, were brought to light in the parliamentary debate, as both a proponents and an opponent of slavery cited it.

More importantly for this thesis, both debates provide us with a unique insight into the 'inconsistencies' or debates within Dutch republicanism on slavery. During the discussions, an air of progressively more confusion, disbelief and intensity becomes apparent when reading through the *Dagverhaal*. What is particularly interesting is that both sides agreed that this debate touched upon the fundamental beliefs of the Batavian Republic. Moderates, independents and

⁴²⁷ Sens, 'La révolution batave et l'esclavage', 23. Adams, *Repertoires of Slavery*, 37-38. Janse, *De afschaffers*.

Republicans all referenced fundamental (political) publications by for example Paulus and Raynal, and spoke of 'philosophy' as a subject that was up for debate.

For Vreede's proponents, such as Guljé, this debate was about nothing less than the very soul of the Batavian Revolution and Republic. In particular, Vreede himself 'ticks' all of the republican 'boxes' set out by Koekkoek. He used the liberty-slavery dichotomy on both political and chattel slavery, argued for an extension of equal human rights to enslaved Africans, and brought up arguments against luxury and wealth. Lastly, he highlighted the similarity of the tyrant-subject and master-slave relationship, and was the first revolutionary leader to openly support the republican right for the enslaved to revolt.

Despite Vreede's speech, and despite support from a number of representatives, major opposition to his proposal proved insurmountable. Although republican proslavery arguments played a clear role in, for example, Floh's explanation of the rights of colonial citizens, they do not constitute the main proslavery argument. The Floh-commission, strengthened by proslavery arguments from the 1790s repeated by individuals like Schimmelpenninck, convinced the representatives to let 'philosophy' (i.e the founding principles of the Batavian Republic) take a back seat in their practical execution, as the commission encouraged fears that abolition endangered the Republic's very existence. This cannot be understood, however, as merely a response to practical geopolitical events: as Koekkoek has shown, an active imperialist agenda was present in Floh's initial report. This carried over into Floh's report on the topic of slavery and subsequently into the representatives' decision on (gradual) abolition.

If representatives critical of antislavery, such as Bosch, had spoken out during the debate, or if Paulus himself, rather than only his treatise, would have been present in the former ballroom of Willem V to clarify his view on the matter, perhaps they too would have reminded the representatives that the fight against political slavery could be extended to combat actual slavery in the colonies. But as the final section of the chapter shows, even the most vocal (gradual) republican abolitionists, were greatly influenced by the introduction of social contract theory into the republican narrative, which brought with it the assumption that 'noble savage' Africans occupied a state of nature. As the debate shows, this meant antislavery

treatises could be adopted by opponents of abolition too. The state of nature assumption proved too much for many republicans to overcome, as they defined the limits of who was eligible to receive liberty and slavery.

Conclusion

Now that we have gone through the antislavery and republican discourses and debates in the second half of the eighteenth century with leaps and bounds, it is now time to answer the main research question of this thesis: how did Dutch (gradual) abolitionist and antislavery (political) discourse combine with republican ideas and language in press and parliament slightly before and during the Patriot and Batavian periods (1760-1800)?

In order to answer this question, in Chapter 1, I initially investigated how Dutch Patriot leaders defined republicanism in their founding documents and publications, and how their republicanism related to the beginnings of the debate on slavery before and during the Patriot uprising (1760-1787). As Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol's *Aan het Volk van Nederland* has shown, by the time of the Patriot Revolution, Dutch republicanism had adopted the dichotomy of political liberty and political slavery into its political theory, not only as a rhetorical device as described by Sens, but at a more fundamental level as well. In a somewhat similar fashion, the supposed limited extent of the Dutch involvement in the slave trade in the late eighteenth century has been taken up by Kuitenbrouwer and Sens to mean that debates that developed on the matter were 'theoretical' or 'academical' in its entirety.

As my own evaluation and Postma's research have shown, attempts at slave voyages, plans for revival of the trade and illicit British imports in Dutch colonies meant that the discussions on the trade, which only twenty years prior had reached its absolute peak, were very much in tune with real contemporary events. It is perhaps no surprise that this period sees some of the first creative ways of opposition to the trade in the form of periodical articles on the topic. Antislavery articles in *De Denker* and *De Vaderlander* were inherently connected to antiluxury and arguments against wealth. Although this provided a connection to Patriot republican criticisms of the ruler's luxury, it was not until the 1790s that this opportunity for symbiosis was seriously taken up by republican antislavery authors.

Chapter 2 attempted to answer the question how antislavery discourse combined with republican ideas on political liberty and slavery during the Orange Restoration (1787-1795) and the Batavian Republic (1795-1805) in public discourse written by, or in close proximity to, Patriot republicans. Bernadus Bosch, Petronella Moens and Martinus Nieuwenhuyzen all responded to international abolitionist rhetoric with their own publications or speeches on slavery. They did so in accordance with and awareness of one another, forming an observable antislavery group at this time. The respondents to Antonijn Barrau's proslavery stance in the *Bijdragen*, who very well could have been connected to (or part of) this group, also showed that a lively debate in Dutch intellectual community was taking shape in this period, that actively criticised slavery, with their arguments increasingly based on republican societal criticisms. Beyond republicanism's criticism of luxury, these authors included multiple references to republicanism's dislike of tyranny, its similarity to the slave master, and the inherent natural or human rights of enslaved Africans. The republican embrace of Rousseau's social contract theory, most visible in Paulus' treatise, and its acceptance of the assumption that many Africans lived as semi-automatons in a state of nature, limited the potential for cross-cultural understanding and universal republican liberty. Nonetheless, an alternative path for republicans in the years to come was provided by H.C. Cras, with a more universal understanding of liberty and a more 'civilised' image of Africans.

Finally, in Chapter 3, we see the debate on the limits of republican liberty, and many of the anti- and proslavery arguments made in Chapters 1 and 2, come to a head in the political sphere. In 1797, as representatives debated the very nature and boundaries of their polity, they also debated the origin and limits of their founding political theory and ideas. During the debates on constitutional abolition in the first Batavian National Assembly, representatives such as Pieter Vreede and Petrus Franciscus Guljé explicitly used the language and ideas of republicanism, including a clear use of the right to rebel to attempt to expand the concept of republican liberty. Especially Moderate counterattacks by men like R.J. Schimmelpenninck and Jacob Floh stopped a universal application of the concept of republican liberty in its tracks. Their use of republican arguments limited the scope of republican liberty to colonial citizens, and their near-imperialist arguments, supported by the fear of the Haitian Revolution and the Republic's downfall, won the day. As in the debates in previous

years, however, and as highlighted by the end of the chapter, even representatives arguing for (gradual) abolition did so with the image of an enslaved, 'natural', or 'less civilised' African Other.

Reflecting on the historiographical debate sketched out in my introduction, and my subsequent position in it, I am pleased to report that my methodological approach of 'seeing things their way', as theorised by Quentin Skinner, has provided me with valuable insights into the considerations of Dutch republicans on slavery, and the role of slavery in Dutch republicanism itself. I did not wish to summarise antislavery sources, in a similar fashion to A.N. Paasman, nor did I intend to take for granted that, simply because antislavery rhetoric was eventually not enough to abolish the slave trade, it therefore had no impact on political theory or practice, as Schutte, Sens, and much of the scholarship on the relationship between capitalism and abolitionism assumed. Instead, by carefully examining both pro- and anti-slavery arguments, I found that antislavery republican authors themselves were not simply engaged in 'rhetorical' or 'academic' discussions. They believed in the connection between republican liberty and slavery and their colonial or chattel counterparts.

Similarly, my approach derived from the Cambridge School has proven very useful in dispelling the influence of capitalist ideas in the Dutch antislavery discourse: barely any author ever mentioned economical, let alone capitalist free-labour motives for antislavery action. Instead, I can confirm Seymour Drescher's and Sens' suspicion that economical or proto-capitalist arguments were used in the defence of slavery, as seen in the Floh report on slavery, where colonial outlet markets are deemed essential for the existence of the state, similar to Barrau's argumentation a few years prior.

Drescher's theory that the Dutch case, although somewhat influenced by Atlantic debates, fundamentally diverged from them towards a more 'continental' and 'Dutch' response, has been useful in my assessment of the sources in Chapter Two: although a distinct antislavery group argued against the slave trade in the 1790s with foreign sources, they brought their own arguments to the table

stemming from the Dutch tradition of civil societies, and brought in arguments based on (Dutch) republicanism.

My approach in highlighting the intent of the author, has also resulted in a critical assessment of Jeremy Popkin's and Sarah Adams' argument that incorporating arguments based on societal critique and republican ideas, somehow confused contemporaries and obscured a 'true' representation of slavery and the slave trade. Incorporating republican or social theoretical critiques into antislavery arguments was, as I have shown, a very natural process for many authors or speakers. In Paulus' treatise on equality, for instance, the discussion of equality amongst individuals is followed quite fluently by a discussion on equality in modern societies and the international system, which is where he subsequently argues for careful and gradual abolition. As I have also shown in Chapter 3, especially the Dutch and later Batavian Republic's political elite – who were the target audience for much of the sources discussed in this thesis, and who would actually decide on the fate of the enslaved – would have found such arguments convincing. Aligning one's self with the dominant political culture, language and theory of the time was most likely considered a valuable tactic to put slavery on the political agenda.

In my attempt to highlight republican ideas and language in Dutch antislavery and (gradual) abolitionist discourse and debate, I have been greatly aided by the efforts of René Koekkoek, Freya Sierhuis and (to an extent) Sarah Adams. It was especially Koekkoek's categorisation that proved useful for precisely recognising republican ideas in antislavery discourse. His three categories of republican antiluxury, resistance and the language of natural or human rights, can, as indicated in the conclusion to my second chapter, be expanded upon with the observation that many antislavery authors, inspired by republicanism, considered slave masters akin to tyrants. Additionally, my 'medium durée' approach, has also proven useful. Whereas Sierhuis analysed the entire relationship of Dutch republicanism with abolitionism, and Koekkoek similarly did an international analysis, or an investigation into a small section of the debates on slavery, my 'medium durée' approach has proven useful in locating one of the fundamental shifts in republicanism of the period in the republican arguments used by antislavery authors.

As indicated by (amongst others) Wyger R.E. Velema, Jorris Oddens and Annelien de Dijn, Dutch republicanism underwent a fundamental change in the second half of the eighteenth century, as it slowly substituted the importance of virtues to uphold the republic, with a more central position for natural (and later human) rights guaranteed through a (democratic) constitution. Interestingly, this change is visible in the republican arguments used in the debates on slavery. Whereas Van der Capellen highlights the importance of virtue, as do the initial antislavery periodical sources of *De Vaderlander* and *De Denker* in their approach to the debate on wealth, the deterioration of virtue due to commerce is slowly supplemented and eventually overtaken by discourse on natural or human rights and social contract theory.

It is perhaps the shift of republicanism at the end of the eighteenth century that explains the limits placed on republican liberty in the Batavian parliamentary debates the most. As the social contract theory became inherently wedded to Dutch Republicanism in the 1790s, many republicans, and antislavery authors inspired by republicanism, chose to dismiss enslaved people as uncivilised, despite their own claims to the contrary and their aim to give the African 'victim' a human face. Despite the availability of antiluxury antislavery sources in the 1760s and 1770s, and the availability of Cras' speech on African 'civilisation', Dutch republicanism almost seems to have been one step behind such opportunities for fundamental and a broader symbiosis with antislavery discourse. In the 1790s, many still went along with the narrative of tiers of civilisation and incipient forms of imperialism, reinforced by often erroneous reports of the Haitian Revolution.

Nonetheless, as indicated previously, simply because an idea or an approach was not adopted by all republicans, does not disqualify it from a historical analysis. There were some republicans who truly believed republican liberty could not exist without eliminating colonial slavery. For future research, it would be interesting to investigate how this branch of republicanism developed in the nineteenth century, and how it responded to the new wave of abolitionism at that time. Furthermore, especially the analysis in the third chapter of this thesis could be supplemented by an analysis of the executive branch of government as well. In a dissertation published in 1947, Lubbertus Les provides us with an extensive appendix of secret

minutes from the Executive Committees of the Batavian Republic concerning deliberations on the colonies and slavery.⁴²⁸ Unfortunately, these sources felt slight beyond the scope of this thesis, but I wish to encourage anyone interested in the subject to investigate the goings-on around the debates I discussed. Another such subject is the topic of racism. In many of my sources, I encountered a great number of racial stereotypes. Especially after reading Sarah Adams' account of Dutch theatre of the period, and Koekkoek's argument that the Floh-report on the colonies became the basis of nineteenth century imperial nation-state building, I became convinced that a more thorough investigation of how race was introduced in political culture of the period could be helpful. Finally, my investigation into the Dutch republican response to slavery could be useful for a comparative analysis of international republican response to abolitionism.

As representative Guljé sat back down in his bench during his remarks in the first debate on the topic of slavery in the Batavian Parliament, one can only wonder what he was thinking. As his core political beliefs were being discussed, he and those who also supported Vreede must have realised that a limited form of republican liberty was now the dominant view held by most of the Batavians. Was he satisfied by simply advocating once in parliament against such a view? Or did he hope that such acts of resistance against the traffic in and possession of human beings would continue in the future? Would he have been satisfied by Willem I's abolition of the slave trade, who his movement had labelled a tyrant? It is my hope that my research has at least opened the gate for future research, especially into the connections between (Dutch) republicanism and (Dutch) abolitionism in the nineteenth century, to answer some of these questions.

What is certain, however, is that for all the enslaved in the Dutch colonies, philosophical debates in parliament meant little to them. They would have to wait at least another 66 years before receiving liberty.

⁴²⁸Lubbertus Les, *Van Indië onder de Compagnie tot Indië onder de staat: de koloniale titel in de staatsregeling van 1798* (Rotterdam 1947).

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