Policing and Transgressing Borders: Soldiers, Slave Rebels, and the Early Modern Atlantic

Soldiers Johan Karel Mangmeister and Jean Renaud were lucky. They escaped the gruesome punishment of their black co-conspirators in the Berbice slave rebellion of 1763-1764. Rather than being slowly roasted to death while having pieces of their flesh pulled out with pinchers, Mangmeister and Renaud were merely beaten to death. First, the executioner cut off Mangmeister’s right hand, slapped him in the face with it, and tied him to the rack. Then taking careful aim with his iron bar, he struck the condemned man’s body with blows designed to break the bones but not the skin. Renaud received the same treatment. Just before the first blow, Renaud allegedly comforted Mangmeister “bidding him to keep a good heart; that the voyage of Life would soon be over” (Stedman 1988:77).

Such was the price these men paid for protesting their poor labor conditions and the “bad housekeeping,” as the colonial authorities would later put it, of their officers struggling to maintain control on the far margins of the Dutch empire. For Renaud’s and Mangmeister’s punishment was the end point of a series of events that pointed to the dangerous liaisons between colonized and colonizers that occurred in borderlands where the distinctions between slaves, Indians, and soldiers clouded over in the mist that rose over the wild, uncharted tropic beyond the last plantation.

The executions took place in July 1764 in Paramaribo, Suriname. They constituted the conclusion of the court-martial of six soldiers for mutiny. Besides Renaud and Mangmeister, one more soldier was hanged; the remaining three received corporal punishment and saw their military service extended. The men had mutinied in neighboring Dutch Berbice a year

1. I would like especially to thank Peter H. Wood, Kate Brown, and Lee Gould. My thanks also go out to audiences at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Texas at Austin, and at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.
2. Krijgsraed Gehouden alhier Aen Paramaribo Donderdag de 19e Julij 1764, July 19 and 20, 1764, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1682-1795 (hereafter SvS), 1.05.04.04, 323,

earlier. They had been members of a regiment of some seventy mercenary soldiers sent from Suriname to Berbice to help subdue a large slave rebellion that had broken out in February 1763. But, fed up with their treatment in Berbice, two-thirds of the men had mutinied in July 1763 and deserted their post. Then they joined the very slaves they had been sent to defeat. This slippage of loyalties alludes to the liquid qualities of borders, both geographical and cultural, throughout the New World in the age of empire. The Dutch mercenary soldiers were not only the instruments of colonial power, but also its objects. Their own sense of oppression caused the soldiers to kindle what turned out to be a dangerous sympathy and common cause with the enslaved rebels of Berbice.

Colonial historians have usually studied professional soldiers in their capacity of border enforcers, men sent overseas to maintain the cultural and legal divisions upon which colonial authority rested. Yet, in fact, soldiers regularly became key figures of connection as they straddled and crossed the very boundaries (literal and metaphorical) the authorities intended for them to maintain. Generally stationed on contested middle ground on the edges of empire, soldiers forged individual connections with indigenous peoples and slaves. Some of these contacts were considered routine and were accepted by the authorities. Others, however, struck hard at the very foundations of colonialism, challenging and violating European ideological premises with potentially explosive results. The mutiny in Berbice, carried out in the midst of a huge slave rebellion, represents one such threat.

This paper reconstructs the mutiny from Dutch records and uses it to look at the role of soldiers as border-crossers in the Atlantic world. In reconceptualizing the roles and experiences of soldiers, I aim to rescue them from their exclusive confinement to military history. Soldiers not only patrolled the boundaries of empire, they also worked to take them down. Such a reconceptualization, I suggest, helps historians of empire to better understand why the fluid and at times mutually sympathetic relationships on the margins called for ever stronger boundaries to be built – ones erected on race and assumptions of cultural superiority.

**The Slave Rebellion**

In order to understand the soldiers’ mutiny, I must first back-track to describe the slave rebellion that prompted it. The rebellion and the mutiny occurred in a small corner of the colonial world. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch established a number of colonies between the Amazon and the

National Archives (hereafter NA), The Hague.
Orinoco Rivers, an area known as “the wild coast,” or Guiana, in northeastern South America. Moving from east to west, Dutch Guiana consisted of four colonies each named after the main river of settlement: Suriname, Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo. For the first one hundred years of its existence, Berbice was a patroonship in private hands. In the early eighteenth century, it was sold to a group of private investors, who founded the Company of Berbice and obtained a charter from the Dutch Estates General in 1732. The colony grew but slowly. By the time the enslaved revolted in 1763, 4,500 to 5,000 enslaved Africans and creoles, another 300 native slaves, and some 350 Europeans lived in the colony. Close to 1,500 enslaved workers produced sugar on eleven large plantations owned by the Company on the Berbice River. Twice that number of bond people grew coffee and cacao on some 140 privately owned plantations on the Berbice and its tributary, the Canje River. Beyond the sliver of riverside plantations stretched the rest of the country, a thick wall of uncharted rainforest and vast savannas inhabited by Amerindians who traded with the Dutch. By treaty the Amerindians had agreed to fight for the Dutch in case of foreign attack or slave rebellion. Their presence discouraged marronage, and their help in suppressing the 1763-1764 uprising proved indispensable. Neither the Company nor the planters were keen to spend much money on the defense of the colony, and at the time of the slave rebellion, there were a mere eight healthy soldiers in Berbice.

3. In 1791 the States General, the Dutch general decision-making body in which each of the seven provinces (or “states”) had one vote, took over all four Guiana colonies. Early in the nineteenth century, Berbice, along with Demerara and Essequibo, passed into British hands and the area became known as British Guiana. Independent since 1966, it is now the Republic of Guyana. Suriname remained Dutch until 1975 when it became an independent republic. Almost nothing is known about Berbice before 1720 since no family archives exist for the Van Pere family, which ran the colony. Nor is there much secondary literature on eighteenth-century Berbice, or, for that matter, the 1763-64 slave rebellion. There are only two books on the rebellion, both in Dutch, written in 1770 and 1888, respectively: Hartsinck 1974 and Netscher 1888. See also Goslinga 1985 who relied extensively on Hartsinck. For an excellent unpublished study, see Velzing 1979.

4. Missieve van de Directeuren der Geoctroijeerde Colonie de Berbice, Amsterdam, August 17, 1763, Sociëteit van Berbice (hereafter SvB), 1.05.05, 149, NA. Compare the small size of the Berbice slave population with that of neighboring Suriname, which reached 50,000 in 1770. There is no way to know the proportions of creoles and Africans in the enslaved population, nor do we have a clear picture of origins. According to David Eltis (2001:39), “in the Guianas, two-thirds of all arrivals before 1750 came from the adjacent Gold Coast and Bight of Benin. A switch to West Central Africa in the third quarter was followed by a Cuban-style provenance pattern after 1775.”

The rebellion broke out at the end of February 1763, organized by a coalition of Africans and creoles in which the “Amina,” or Akan, prominent in collective resistance throughout the Atlantic, predominated. The first leader of the Berbice rebellion, Coffij, who took the title of “governor,” had allegedly come into Berbice as a small boy. The immediate cause of the rebellion was, according to letters the rebels sent to the Dutch, abusive treatment. The rebellion expanded rapidly as rebels moved from plantation to plantation, urging and forcing people to join. The Dutch, panicked and badly outnumbered, fled downriver to a small fort on the coast. The rebels set up command posts on various plantations while the former hamlet of New Amsterdam, located some 75 miles inland, served as Coffij’s headquarters. In late March, just as they were about to abandon the colony, the Dutch were reinforced by almost a hundred men from Suriname. These reinforcements encouraged the governor to leave the fort and sail upriver to the sugar plantation Dageraad, where the Dutch would be pinned down for the next year and a half.

Until the late fall of 1763, the two camps occasionally skirmished but for the most part, warily watched each other. For the first six months of the rebellion, Coffij tried to keep his men from attacking the Dutch as he negotiated with Governor van Hoogenheim about dividing the colony. Distrustful of these negotiations, in which the Dutch engaged only to win time, and increasingly impatient, a faction of Africans staged a coup against Coffij and took over, but by then they lacked the strength and weapons to drive the Dutch out. The Dutch, despite reinforcements from Suriname and St. Eustatius, felt equally incapable of overtaking the rebels. Over the summer, more than a third of the newly arrived sailors and soldiers had died, and another third was sick.

The Europeans began a counteroffensive in November, 1763, when at last the first 150 of a total of 1,000 troops from the Republic arrived. Pressed by these soldiers and their Amerindian allies and suffering critical shortages of weapons and food, the rebels began to lose ground. As they did so, they increasingly fought among themselves (Kars forthcoming).

Over the course of the winter, the anticolonial rebellion against the Dutch dissolved into a bloody African civil war. Rebel leaders, each with their own followers in bands which subdivided into smaller groups as time went on, moved about the colony hiding from the Dutch and fighting with each other.

7. For the letters the rebels sent to the Dutch governor, see Lichtveld & Voorhoeve 1958:81-89.
The main antagonists were the Amina forces and a large group of Congo.\(^8\) There was also conflict with the Louango as well as between Africans and creoles. As each band ran out of weapons and ammunition, and all increasingly suffered from hunger, leaders saw their followers melt away. They deserted for other leaders or the Dutch. By February, increasing numbers of former slaves began to turn themselves in to the Europeans every day; the number quickly mounting to several thousand. Indian allies prevented the others from settling beyond the reach of the Dutch. This Indian cordon forced people back to their plantations, where they lived in the bush hoping to scavenge in the fields, and where they could more easily be captured by the Dutch. All of these factors led to the demise of the rebellion. It nevertheless took the Dutch troops another six months, until the end of summer of 1764, to subdue the last determined fighters.\(^9\)

Eager to divest themselves of the large numbers of returned slaves, the Dutch in March began the process of investigating the culpability of the many slaves in their custody, a process that intermittently occupied them the rest of the year. Over the course of 1764 they executed 140 men and four women for their participation in the insurgency on the stake, the gallows, and the wheel. Including these unfortunate people, about a quarter of the enslaved did not survive the rebellion.

The uprising had been costly in terms of lives and material goods. At the end of 1764, a mere 3,370 slaves and 116 whites remained in the colony, a serious reduction from the 4,000 to 5,000 slaves and 350 Europeans at the start of the rebellion. Most of the missing slaves had been killed in battles with Amerindians, Dutch soldiers, or each other, or had died of illness, hunger, and exposure. While most Europeans had fled, some had been killed by the slaves and others had died in battle. Of the eleven Society plantations, five were largely destroyed. More than a third of the private plantations were abandoned after the revolt and many others had to be rebuilt from the ground. Despite considerable losses, the Dutch had nevertheless restored both their authority and the institution of slavery.\(^10\)

\(^8\) These Congo are usually referred to as “Gangoe,” less often as “Cango” or “Guango.”

\(^9\) Douglas to Bentinck, February 12 and 26, 1764, Collectie Bentinck, G2-54 IB, Koninklijk Huisarchief (hereafter KHA), The Hague; Dagregister [Daybook] van Gouverneur Generaal W. S. van Hoogenheim (hereafter DH), February 28, 1763-December 31, 1764, SvB 226, esp. January 24 and February 4, 1764; Van Hoogenheim aan de Directeuren, March 29, 1764, SvB 135; Verbaelen gehouden bij den Collonel Desalve, Archief Staten Generaal (hereafter ASG), 1.01.05, 9219, NA.

DISCONTENTED SOLDIERS

Slaves were not the only discontented workers in Berbice. During much of 1763, the sailors and soldiers sent from St. Eustatius and Suriname to help fight the rebels were dissatisfied with conditions in the colony. The men had hired on for duty in Berbice hoping to see action and increase their pay with bounty money.11 After a major battle with the rebels in May of 1763, they had forced the Berbice governor to establish premiums for killing and maiming rebels. Subsequently, however, the men saw little action until the counteroffensive with the state troops started in November.

Rather than adding to meager wages by fighting rebels, the men battled disease in the humid tropical climate. Berbice had been in the grip of a fever and dysentery epidemic for several years before the rebellion. Newly arrived sailors and soldiers were particularly susceptible, falling ill and dying in alarming numbers. It was not long before the remaining healthy sailors stopped working and announced that they wanted to go home. Only threats could get them back to work.12 Even those who did not fall victim to serious illness suffered from a host of minor annoyances, from insects and vampire bats that sucked their blood at night to chiggers that burrowed into their feet till they could barely walk. Incessant downpours in the year’s two rainy seasons followed by parching heat during the two dry seasons added to the men’s misery and ill health.

To add insult to injury, the men did not get enough to eat and what they got was frequently not to their liking. Many gardens and provision grounds had been destroyed in the rebellion and supplies from Europe and other colonies arrived irregularly and often spoiled. A shortage of ovens in which to cook the men regularly had to eat moldy ship’s biscuits. Such deprivations have traditionally caused unrest and recalcitrance among sailors and soldiers in the early modern world and this proved true for the men sent from St. Eustatius and Suriname (Bruijn 1982, Rediker 1987, Way 2000). They repeatedly protested

11. May 13, 1763, DH; Notulen van Resolutien genomen bij den Ed. Hove van Politie en Crimineele Justitie (hereafter Notulen), May 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 14, 1763, SvB 134. The men also wanted to be paid in case they lost limbs themselves “as is customary in the islands.” It seems likely that the soldiers from St. Eustatius were WIC soldiers, while those from Suriname had been hired by the Society of Suriname.
short or inedible rations. Others complained about irregular payments, as their wages frequently arrived late from their home colonies. By the end of the summer of 1763 the officers of the regiment sent from Suriname declared to the governor and his council that they could “no longer trust their men and suspected a conspiracy among them.” Nor, incredibly, could they rely on the loyalty of their men should it come to a fight with the rebels. As if to prove the validity of their officers’ suspicions, later that month, two soldiers deserted to the rebels, taking with them not only their weapons and shot, but valuable intelligence about the desperate state of the Dutch. A distressed Van Hoogenheim worried that their desertion might be the spearhead of a larger mutiny.

Such fears were amplified when sailors resorted to collective work stoppages, drawing on a long tradition among early modern European workers (Dekker 1992, Way 2000:782). When the men from St. Eustatius did not receive their allotment of bread one day, for instance, they lifted anchor and left their position protecting the Dageraad. When Van Hoogenheim threatened to punish the ringleaders and promised that they would have their bread, they agreed to sail their ship back to its former position, upon which, as the governor noted, “the entire safety of this plantation depends.” Work stoppages by workers whose tools were weapons were dangerous in more ways than one, as the Dutch well understood. Van Hoogenheim regularly complained to the home authorities that he had more to worry about than merely “Swarte” (Blacks). “We have to be as much prepared at all times,” he impressed upon the Society directors in Amsterdam, “for bad faith and treason from within, as for attacks from without.” Clearly, shared New World enemies at the gate did not mute Old World labor conflicts inside.

It was in this climate of pervasive discontent with challenging working conditions and poor treatment that the soldiers later executed inParamaribo engaged in mutiny. The men were part of a regiment sent to Berbice by Suriname’s Governor Wigbold van Crommelin to prevent rebels from crossing the Corentyne River into Suriname. The men arrived at Post Auriari on

15. September 19, 1763, DH. See also August 31, 1763 for the case of a surgeon who declared he would rather “join the slave rebels than serve the colony any longer.”
16. October 15 and 16, 1763, DH.
17. Gouverneur en Raad aan de Directeuren, September 29, 1763, SvB 134; for other instances of conflict, see July 27, September 19, September 27 and November 11, 1763, DH; Notulen, September 29, 1763.
the Corentyne River, some eight hours by canoe, already aggrieved. A number of them had served “over their time.” This meant that their customary four-year contracts had expired, but they had not been given their “passport,” a written discharge from service. Without their passports, the men could not leave the service and repatriate. Finding it difficult to entice new recruits from Europe, the societies of Suriname and Berbice, who were responsible for hiring the soldiers customarily stationed in those colonies, withheld soldiers’ passports until they had settled their debts, many forced upon the men at the time of enlistment, and their replacements had arrived. Such policies kept soldiers in a state of bondage; at any time, almost a quarter of the men were serving beyond their four years (Lohnstein 1987). Under such circumstances, how the men were treated and whether or not they received what they considered their customary due in what we might call a military moral economy took on added importance. It was precisely such customary rights and privileges that set soldiers apart from slaves. It is not surprising, then, to learn that even before the soldiers got to Berbice, there had been talk that if they were not treated well, they would try to make off for the Spanish.

Once at Post Aurierie, the soldiers found themselves overworked, subjected to harsh discipline, and treated disrespectfully by their own officers. With enslaved workers gone, they wore themselves out in the sticky heat doing the work of slaves: clearing brush, cutting wood, and building their own huts. The men were driven hard, and neither harsh words nor the whip were spared. The men’s pronouncements at the time of the mutiny that “we are no Negroes; we don’t want to work or be treated like them,” suggest the depth of their resentments over working conditions and the blurring of lines between bond and free labor. Their commanders could have pressed the

18. The men were stationed near Ephraim, a Moravian mission deserted by the Brethren at the start of the rebellion. Ephraim had since become an Indian station. The Dutch had long maintained such posts on the borders of Guiana where so-called posthouders (literally post-holders), usually military men, traded with local Indians and maintained diplomatic relations. The local Indians had fled at the start of the rebellion but had since returned, and the new post was intended to encourage them to stay allied with the Dutch (Albert Heuer aan Van Hoogenheim, April 2, 1763, SvB 134, NA). For the Moravians in Berbice, see Staehelin 1997. Post Aurierie may be the same post visited by the explorer Robert Schomburgk in 1836, then called Orealla, next to an Arawak village of that name. There were also several Warao settlements in the area. Schomburgk notes that Arawak captain Matthias had in his youth been baptized by the Moravians, a further indication that Aurierie and Orealla are the same place. See Riviere 2006:122, 135-36, 137-38.

19. For an insightful discussion of how the moral economy of customary rights and privileges set semi-bonded soldiers apart from permanently bonded labor, see Neimeyer 1996:132-33.

20. Informatie Gedaan en Genomen over den WelEdele Heer Captijn Baron von Canitz, Post Ephraim, August 12, 1763; SvS 320; De Blanke Rebellen aan Crommelin, August 2,
local Indians into service, but the governor had expressly ordered the regiment’s officer not to involve the native peoples for fear of alienating these valuable military allies.21 And so the soldiers felt doubly insulted: they deeply resented being treated like slaves, particularly in the presence of Indians who were exempted from harsh usage.

Anxieties about status and identity were not confined to comparisons with Africans and Amerindians; they played within the European community as well. Many of the soldiers were foreigners.22 The Frenchmen among the Suriname soldiers deeply resented what they perceived as a pervasive anti-French climate. Everything that went wrong, they complained, was blamed on the French. Some of the officers were quite brazen about their anti-French sentiments. Particularly galling had been the comment of one of the officers that he “thought the French as bad as the Jews and would rejoice to see both nations hanged.”23

Affronts to soldiers’ dignity and anger about perceived injustices increased in the weeks leading up to the mutiny. On June 13, 1763, at the height of the rainy season, forty of the soldiers, along with some seventy Native American

1763, SvS 319. See also Informatie gehouden op de plantagie Amsterdam in Rio Demerarrij den 15e December 1763 over twee Deserteurs uit de Correntijn die alhier opgebracht zijn, SvB 135; Rapport van J.W. Kaeks, Paramaribo, July 28, 1763, SvS 319; Informatie ten Overstaen van den WelEdele Heer Majoor van Ewijk over den Heer Lieutenant Marchal, August 13, 1763, SvS 320. The court later accepted the soldiers’ view of the officers’ behavior, see Krijgsraed Gehouden alhier Aen Paramaribo Donderdag de 19e Julij 1764, SvS 323; and August 21, 1763, DH.


22. While throughout Europe armies employed foreign nationals, their proportion in the Dutch army was higher because of Holland’s small population and the large number of Dutch men swallowed up by the insatiable maws of the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch merchant marine. No precise figures are available but as many as a quarter of the officers and half of the Dutch army’s soldiers were probably foreigners. Such percentages were even higher among the forces hired by the Societies of Suriname and Berbice, which consisted, besides Dutchmen, of Germans, Swiss, Frenchmen, as well as a smattering of other nations (Zwitser 1991:43-54).

23. For quote, see Informatie ten Overstaen van den WelEdele Heer Majoor van Ewijk over den Heer Lieutenant Marchal, August 8, 1763, SvS 320. The authorities were generally suspicious of the Frenchmen among the soldiers. Van Hoogenheim considered them “most all libertines with little or no discipline,” July 31, 1763, DH. Gov. Crommelin claimed that Frenchmen had been involved in every mutiny in Suriname. He requested that no more French soldiers be sent to the colony, explaining that they were “meest van de Contrebandoiees van mandereijn en van de Struijkroovers van Fischer,” Crommelin aan de Sociéiteit van Suriname, July 30, 1763, SvS 319 and Crommelin aan Van Hoogenheim, August 1, 1763, SvS 319. Jews were not welcome in Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo, in contrast to Suriname, where they made up a large part of the white population (see Netscher 1888:131).
allies, went on a week-long river expedition trying to locate slave rebels suspected of hiding in a nearby creek. Horrendous thunderstorms soaked the miserable contingent to the bone as the men paddled up the Corentyne only to find several small deserted rebel villages, the houses ruined by flash-floods. At last, the Indians located a group of insurgents. The troops left their canoes at the river’s edge and slogged all night in single file, “one holding the other,” through the blackened rainforest. At dawn, they crossed a creek, those who could by swimming, the others dragged under the arms by the Indians. Once across, they surprised the rebels. In the fighting that followed over the course of the week, six men and sixteen women and children were killed, most of them beaten to death by the Indians as they tried to escape by swimming across the creek. One young woman was taken alive. Only one Dutchman lost his life.24

Now a series of ill-advised actions on the part of the expedition’s commander, Captain Frederik Willem Baron von Canitz, brought the soldiers to the breaking point. When apprised of the Dutchman’s death, Von Canitz proclaimed that he would rather see a European soldier than an Indian killed, a remark that infuriated his men. During the return journey, ignoring the claims of the men, Von Canitz added insult to injury. He confiscated the contraband that had been taken from the rebels. Almost 300 guilders had been discovered, along with trade goods seized in an earlier attack on one of the Dutch posts. The native allies had immediately claimed the merchandise as their payment. The soldiers expected to get the cash. At the start of the expedition, Von Canitz had promised that “whatever they would seize, would be for them.” Now, ignoring his earlier promise, he took the money, explaining it would have to be shared with the Indians at a later date. Instead, the men each got two shillings for drinks, which, according to custom, they should have gotten for free as a reward for their dangerous mission. The young female captive, whom some of the soldiers coveted for themselves, was likewise taken away by the officers. The men “cursed and murmured” among themselves “that they got none of the spoils for which they had risked their lives,” one of the mutineers later testified. No one dared complain openly for fear of reprisal, but when the expedition returned to camp on June 19 and the time seemed ripe, the soldiers translated their mounting anger into action.25

The Mutiny

The mutiny started on July 3, 1763, two hours before sunrise. Those not in on the rebellion recalled being startled awake in their hammocks, hearts pounding, fearing the commotion signaled a rebel attack. Instead, they found their officers, still in their nightshirts, pleading with the mutineers for their lives and promising that if the soldiers returned to their duties, all would be forgotten. Such negotiations were common: angry men threatened mutiny, chastened officers made concessions, and through such negotiations relations of authority were restored. But in this case the mutineers were not so easily appeased. Some even threatened to kill the officers. Others defended specific men under whom they had served. The soldiers rehearsed their grievances, emphasizing slave work and physical abuse, prejudice toward the French, and the confiscation of the plunder.26

The mutineers, in fact, nursed many of the same grievances as the rebellious slaves. And just as the slave rebels, who in their letters to Governor van Hoogenheim at the start of the rebellion, had singled out particular owners by name as the worst offenders, the mutineers pointed out their commander and Captain von Canitz as the two officers whose conduct they felt had been most reprehensible. Some mutineers proposed to kill these men, and one even took aim, but his gun misfired.27 The leaders of the mutiny, Frenchman Jean Renaud among them, managed to prevent rash actions and the gentlemen got off with a mere beating. Thereafter the commander fled to Ephraim, still in his nightclothes. Some of the soldiers tried to persuade the two junior officers to lead them on a march to inform Governor van Hoogenheim in person about their maltreatment. The officers refused and tried to talk the troops out of deserting. Just as some of the soldiers began to waver, surgeon Mangmeister broke up the discussion with the reminder that the officers could not be trusted to keep their word and that the soldiers “had much to do.”28

Having rejected negotiation and compromise, the men reached the point of no return. Much like the rebelling slaves who appropriated their masters’ possessions, the mutineers helped themselves to the officers’ liquor, fancy clothes, and weapons. Next they escorted the remaining three officers to the river’s edge where they allowed them to board a canoe with what was left of their belongings. When Von Canitz requested a few Indians to man the boat, the soldiers responded that they had learned to row; surely he could too. Surgeon

26. The mutineers rehearsed their grievances in a letter to Gov. Crommelin, see Missieve van de Gerebelleerde Soldaten in de Corentijn, no date, SvS 324.
27. Informatie of scherper examen van Matthias Dijmens, July 18 and 19, 1764, SvS 324.
28. Informatie ten Overstaen van den WelEdele Heer Majoor van Ewijk over den Heer Lieutenant Marchal, August 13, 1763, SvS 324.
Mangmeister, cutlass drawn, prevented Von Canitz’s personal servant, a free mulatto named Steven, from boarding the canoe. “You have been free a long time,” Mangmeister allegedly told Steven, “but now you’ll be my slave.”

With the officers gone, the mutineers had difficult decisions to make about their options, none of them ideal. Some wanted to make their way west to the Orinoco River to hire themselves out as mercenaries to the Spanish in Venezuela. Surgeon Mangmeister told the men, wrongly it turned out as the distance was over 400 miles, that this was only a three-day march once they would get to the “breede (broad) water,” a large lake between the Corentyne and Canje Rivers. Unfortunately, no one knew exactly how to get to the Orinoco, though several people (including the black female prisoner whom Jean Renaud had set free in order to take her along) claimed to know the route. Others wanted to make common cause with the slave rebels. A third group suggested that they should attack the rebels as a sign of their loyalty to the Dutch. Then, they reasoned, the governor of Berbice would realize they had not really deserted, but had merely left their post to acquaint him with the bad behavior of their officers.

In the end, the men decided to make for the Spanish settlements. Before they set out on what would turn out to be a long, and for many fatal, odyssey, they destroyed everything of value they could not carry, and tossed extra guns and powder in the water. Next they bundled their belongings in their hammocks, chose Sergeant Adam Niese as their leader, took an oath to stick together, and vowed to shoot the first man who changed his mind. Then they set off, the ringleaders decked out in the officers’ colorful finery, and the “swarte meyd” (black wench) with Jean Renaud at the head. The soldiers also took along, possibly by force, several Indians knowledgeable about the terrain, one of whom, unlike most of the mutineers, spoke Dutch well. Twenty-two soldiers stayed behind, having hid in the bush when the mutiny first started.

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29. Informatie ten Overstaen van den WelEdele Heer Majoar van Ewijk over den Heer Lieutenant Marchal, August 13, 1763, SvS 324; Informatie Gedaan en Genoomen over den WelEdele Heer Captijn Baron von Canitz, Post Ephraim, August 12, 1763, SvS 324; Rapport J.W. Kaeks, “intrims militaire Fiscaal,” Paramaribo, July 28, 1763, SvS 319; Informatie ... op ende jegens de persoon Steven Andries vrije mulat, April 5, 1764, SvB 324; Confrontatie Mangmeister met Steven, April 5, 1764, SvB 321.

30. In 1746, nine soldiers had deserted their post on the Berbice River and taken off for the Orinoco, where they allegedly joined a ship from Trinidad engaged in disrupting Dutch trade in Essequibo. Commander Essequibo to the WIC, December 7, 1746, at http://www.guyana.org/Western/. It seems likely that what the Dutch called de breede water is now called Ikuruwa Lake at N 5° 33’ 0” W 57° 27’ 0”.

31. Notulen [of the commission to investigate the mutiny], July 4, 1764, SvS 324.

32. Rapport J.W. Kaeks, July 28, 1763, SvS 319. See also Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9, 1764, SvS 324; Informatien gehouden 12e August 1763 over de Soldaten Pieter Bormans, van Majoar Reijnet Compagnie, Frederik Claesen van de Comp. van den
The exact events of the following days are sketchy. By their own account, some of the men celebrated their new freedom with the officers’ liquor. This may account for the murder of an Indian boy before the mutineers left camp, as a soldier later claimed to have been told by an Amerindian. The mutineers spent their first night in an Indian village “on the road to Berbice.” There, the same soldier reported, they killed three more Indians and abducted nine women, turning potential allies into resentful enemies.33

The next morning, the mutineers lost some of their members. Eight of the soldiers volunteered to return to the post to look for stragglers. Once back, however, the three subaltern officers and five soldiers (among them Mattheus Dijmens, who would be severely punished in Paramaribo a year later), perhaps scared or repentant after the initial excitement, or, as the court-martial later alleged, too drunk to keep walking, decided to abandon their comrades and turned themselves in the next day. The remaining forty-two mutineers, guided by the slave woman and the Indians, continued west toward the Orinoco River.34

The authorities could not pursue the mutineers; the Indians were not willing and their own soldiers not capable. Completely mistrustful of their remaining men, however, the Dutch commanded the Indians living near the Post Ephraim to keep any intelligence about the whereabouts of either rebels or mutineers secret from the soldiers stationed there. They also asked the natives to return any soldiers who were found beyond the view of the sentries, and, inverting the usual social order, they authorized them to use force if necessary.35

Capitein Texier, Henrik Charton van de Compagnie van de Lt. Collonel Meijer, Albert Jansen, van de Comp. van de Majoor Ewijk, August 12, 1763, SvB 320; For a complete list of all the men involved in the mutiny see Lijste der manschappen van ’t Detachement onder den Majoor Rijnet in rio Correntijn dewelke op den 3 Julij 1763 hebben gerebelleert en zijn gedeserteert, SvS 319.

33. For the killing of natives, see Reijnet aan Crommelin, July 8, 1763, Post Ephraim, SvS 319 and Crommelin aan de Societéit van Suriname, July 27, 1763, SvS 319. Curiously, neither the killing of Indians, nor the abduction of the women, was brought up in any of the interrogations of captured mutineers. Renaud does mention spending the night in the Indian village but, perhaps not surprisingly, does not mention either killing anyone or taking any women. Interrogatoire Renaud, April 25 and 26, 1764, SvS 324. For the fact that some men got drunk, see Confrontatie en Informatie Mattheus Dijmens, Jan Renaudt, Jacques Montagnon, Jan Carolus Mangmeister en Michiel Fredrik Schott, May 16, 1764, Paramaribo, SvS 324. Note that not all clerks spelled names in the same way.

34. Informatie of scherper examen van Matthias Dijmens, July 18 and 19, 1764, SvS 324; Sententie Mangmeister, July 20, 1764, SvS 324.

35. Reijnet aan Crommelin, July 8, 1763, SvS 319; Journaal van Van Ewijk, August 5-17, 1763, SvS 320.
As in all rebellions, meanwhile, the greatest challenge for the mutineers did not lie in the initial act of emancipation, but in the subsequent process of trying to hold on to that freedom. The start of the rainy season made travel difficult. Torrential downpours accompanied by thunder forced the men to wade through flooded savanna and boggy forests pestered by swarms of insects. The mutineers were divided by nationality and language. And they did not trust one another. Some men required coercion to keep going, and guards were sent along when anyone went into the bush to relieve himself. The soldiers had little sense of the region’s geography. Before the mutiny the surgeon apparently had claimed to possess a map of the area, a valuable and rare treasure, but it turned out he did not even bring part of a map.36

Without a map, the men were dependent on the local knowledge of their indigenous guides and that of the African woman. Two of the Indians, perhaps forced to go against their will, did not remain with the soldiers long. One Indian ran off after drinking a bottle of wine and hitting the drummer on the head with the empty bottle; another was shot in the head in retaliation.37 Yet, despite this setback, the soldiers finally found a path. Ironically, it may have been the one the Indians called “the slave path,” as it was used by Indian slave traders to lead captive natives for sale to the Dutch (Bos 1998:62-63).

After several days the men reached the “breede water” where it took forty-eight hours to build rafts to cross it. They may have tricked an Indian into guiding them across, under the pretext that they were a commando looking for slave rebels. After another two days traversing soggy savanna they reached and crossed the Canje River. Then, a week into their journey, they “lost the path to Spain” and ran out of food. The rebel woman led them to an abandoned plantation but they failed to find the provisions she had promised.38 At this point, the men decided to change plans, a decision which would prove fatal to the majority of them.

JOINING THE REBELS

During their interrogations, the recaptured mutineers blamed the change of plans on hunger, the unexpected distance to the Orinoco, and the persuasive words of the slave woman. She apparently suggested that the men nego-

36. Interrogatoire Matth. Fiderer, Notulen, July 4, 1764, SvS 324; Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9, 1764, SvS 324; Informatie Tomas Keller, Serg’t, July 2, 1764, SvS 324.
37. On the running away of one “bok” and the killing of the other, see Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9 and 10, 1764, SvS 324.
38. Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9 and 10, 1764, SvS 324; J. Reijnet aan Crommelin, August 2, 1763, SvS 319.
tiate with the slave rebels for permission to travel through the colony of Berbice rather than being forced to take the long way around. Or perhaps the men themselves decided to join the rebels, given their desperate situation and few other options. Either way, on July 11, a small delegation of soldiers led by Mangmeister, Renaud, and the captive woman herself went to the plantation Stevensburg, one of three rebel camps on the Canje River, to negotiate. Quasie, Stevensburg’s commander, was understandably mistrustful. He inquired about the mutineers’ numbers, ordered them to hand over their weapons as a gesture of goodwill, and promised to send messengers to slave rebel leader Governor Coffy, headquartered at the Dutch Fort Nassau in the former settlement of New Amsterdam on the Berbice River, for instructions.39

When the rest of the mutineers arrived on Stevensburg plantation, they were disarmed and all were undressed. Quasie, anxious to protect his outpost, did not wait for Coffy’s answer. He had the testimony of the captured woman that these were the same soldiers who had killed so many rebels the previous month, and he moved quickly, out of decisiveness or fear, to thin their ranks. Making his own estimation of each soldier’s usefulness, Quasie selected twenty-eight mutineers who were taken naked to the cacao fields and shot. When the Dutch authorities were informed of these events later on, they smugly characterized it as “a miraculous instance of divine providence” that the mutineers had been executed by “those they had chosen as their deliverers.”40 The remaining thirteen mutineers, including several of their leaders, were taken to Governor Coffy’s headquarters at Fort Nassau the next day where they were clothed and put to work.41

As could be expected, relations between the black and white mutineers were tenuous and ambiguous. Most of the testimony comes from the courts-martial of the surviving mutineers who portrayed themselves as having been betrayed and coerced by the rebels. It is not surprising they claimed to have been victims. With their lives on the line for having mutinied at time of war, these men would have wanted to avoid the impression that they had compounded their offense with treason by voluntarily joining the enemy, and a “heathen” enemy at that. This would only have increased their chances of

39. Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9 and 10, 1764, SvS 324; Interrogatoire Renaud, April 25 and 26, 1764, SvS 324.
40. Sententie Mangmeister, July 20, 1764, SvS 324.
41. Interrogatoire Renaud, April 25 and 26, 1764, SvS 324; Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 10, 1763, SvS 324; Examinatie Adou (aka Boas) from Plantation Prosperiteit & Zion, March 3, 1764, SvB 135. Adoe was sent by Coffij to bring the mutineers from Stevensburg plantation to Fort Nassau.
receiving the death penalty. For their part, the rebels had every reason to treat the soldiers, so deeply implicated in the maintenance of slavery, as prisoners.

Yet, driven by fear, need, and a shared interest in defeating the Dutch, the mutineers and the rebels built bridges across the racial divide that normally separated them. Coffy and his lieutenants disapproved of Quasie’s decision to execute the soldiers on Stevensburg. They realized full well that the soldiers’ presence among the rebels dealt a powerful psychological blow to the colonial authorities, who were indeed greatly alarmed at reports that the “Christian Rebels and Rebel Negroes” lived in “close harmony.” Dutch officials were convinced that the soldiers were instructing the former slaves in the handling of weapons and the “maneuvers of the Suriname runaways,” a reference to the fears that Berbice, like Suriname, might henceforth have to deal with large numbers of maroons. And so Coffy kept the remaining Europeans alive and set them to work. Over time, some became more or less trusted allies and advisors. Others remained little more than slaves. Several eventually ran away, some were murdered, while others ended up fighting the Dutch on the rebel side. Trying to make the most of a situation in which they had few good options, the mutineers became absorbed in the slave rebellion in much the same way as many of the slaves – as the result of contingency, force, and compromise.

The mutineers who stayed with the rebels, fewer than a dozen in all, were incorporated into the rebel hierarchy. Ironically, it rekindled among the soldiers many of the resentments that had led them to mutiny in the first place. The rebel leaders accorded the leaders of the mutineers preferential treatment compared to the common soldiers, and gave them jobs of greater importance. Sergeant Adam Niesse assisted Governor Coffy by exercising troops, serving as clerk in Coffy’s written negotiations with the Dutch, and ordering the other mutineers about. To their chagrin, he had his own men paint Coffy’s quarters. For his service, Niesse was rewarded with fancy clothes, good food,
and a comfortable hammock. Johannes Mangmeister, the surgeon, ministered to the rebels’ health and received an African slave boy to minister to him as a mark of his status. Jean Renaud, who had saved himself from execution on Stevensburg by claiming to know how to make gunpowder, busily tried to hide his ignorance with sand and water only to be unmasked when the surgeon provided him with the saltpeter he had claimed he had lacked. To save the Frenchman from beheading, rebel leader Fortuijn, who had taken a liking to him, took the soldier with him when he left Coffy’s camp to take command of the rebels on the Canje River.

The common soldiers fared less well than their leaders. They were set to work as tailors and carpenters, occupations they had no doubt carried out before they mustered. They also cleaned and repaired guns, stood guard, and a few even accompanied the rebels on raids against the Dutch. Most of them were eventually sent away from Fort Nassau to other rebel posts to serve alongside black slaves as “footboys” to deserving rebel leaders, once again overturning customary colonial hierarchies. The men who had resented working like slaves now ended up working for them.45

**DEFEAT**

Coffy’s death in the early fall changed not only the course of the slave rebellion but the circumstances of the mutineers. It appears that Niesse, so deeply implicated in Coffy’s controversial negotiations with the Dutch, was executed.46 Surgeon Mangmeister was taken to Hooftplantage, headquarters of the new leader Atta, who put him to work distilling liquor. Many of the others were dispersed among different rebel camps, some on the Berbice, others on the Canje River. As the men were scattered, they fade from view. From then until the end of the year, we only learn that in mid-November, a rebel band attacked the plantation of James Abercrombie near the mouth of the Canje River and abducted a number of slaves living there. This band was commanded by one of the mutineers and two of Abercrombie’s former slaves.47

The Dutch expeditions up the Canje and Berbice Rivers at the end of 1763 spelled the death or capture of the surviving mutineers. Mangmeister was taken in a dugout canoe on the Berbice River toward the end of November.

45. Crommelin aan Van Hoogenheim, January 14, 1764, SvS 321; Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9 and 10, 1764 and Renaud, April 25 and 26, 1764, SvB 324; Interrogatoire Schuijlen, July 3, 1764, SvB 324; Interrogatoire Fiderer, July 4, 1764, SvB 324.
46. Examinatie van no 82. Aboi van Nieuw Caraques, SvB 135.
47. Notulen November 19, 1763, SvB 134; Interrogatoire Mangmeister, April 9 and 10, 1764, SvS 324.
1763. According to the soldier who arrested him, Mangmeister hastily threw a bag in the water, which could not be retrieved from the river’s bottom. The bag may have contained the valuables the rebels had given him in exchange for his services. He was imprisoned on the warship *St. Maartensdijk* until he could be returned to Paramaribo. He related to the Dutch much about the “housekeeping” of the rebels, claiming that the “Delminas” had killed many “Angolans” and enslaved those of other nations as well as the creoles.48

Two soldiers, both French and part of rebel leader Atta’s inner circle, were also returned alive. The first, Jean Renaud, was taken, sword in hand, around Christmas 1763 during the major battle on the plantation Savonette where, according to both European and indigenous witnesses, he had been a leader.49 The second, Jacques Montagnon, had also been present at the Savonette battle. Armed merely with a stick, he was either taken or turned himself in to the Dutch advanced guard on December 24, 1763.50 The body of a third Frenchman, Jean Pierre, a deserter from the Dageraad plantation who had joined the rebels two months earlier, was spotted floating in the Berbice several days later among the many Blacks killed in the battle.51 By then, three more mutineers had been arrested in neighboring Demerara. One died after his arrest. The remaining two, Matthias Fiderer and Leonard Schuijler, claimed that they had absconded from the rebels by a ruse. They had talked the rebels into letting them go to Demerara to buy powder and lead, a purchase their white skin would presumably have facilitated. It is not clear whether they were captured in Demerara or had turned themselves in.52

And so, five of the thirteen mutineers ended back in Dutch custody; the others had died of illness, in gun battles, or been murdered by the rebels. These five, along with Matthias Dijmens who had been a leader of the plot but had turned himself in on the second day of the mutiny, were transported to Suriname where they were questioned. Governor Crommelin was eager to make an example of men who had not only mutinied against their officers but had joined their erstwhile enemies to fight against their own kind.53 The

49. December 27 and 29, 1763, DH, SvB 226.
50. Memorie door de [illegible]Raden Van Politie en Crimeenele Justitie ... aan Gouverneur Crommelin, Paramaribo, [?] March 1764, SvS 321; Sententie Mangmeister, July 20, 1764, SvS 324.
51. December 29, 1764, DH, SvB 226.
53. Crommelin wrote that he was particularly interested in Renaud “die een van dat volkje van de Mandereijns is, die in Vrankrijk soo veel Leven heeft gemaakt, sijnde van dat gespuis dat Capabel is alles te onderneemen,” [who is one of those people called
members of the council agreed and they petitioned the governor that they, and not a court-martial, should be allowed to try the men, as the mutineers were accessories to the murder, rape, and arson committed by the slave rebels. Evidently the issue was resolved in favor of a military court. This court met in Paramaribo in July and charged the men with high treason and lese majesty, desertion, robbery of state property, and mutiny. Three were condemned to die and another three received corporal punishment and saw their service extended. The court also decided to reprimand two of the regiment’s officers, including Captain von Canitz who was found guilty of “bad management, ill-treatment, and prejudice toward the French nation.” His handling of the booty seized from the rebels had been unauthorized.

In their condemnation of the officers, the military judges agreed with Governor Van Hoogenheim’s judgment that *quade huishouding*, (literally “bad housekeeping,” i.e. ill management) had been the cause of the mutiny, which he referred to in this context as “this horrifying revolution.” Of course, the Dutch similarly attributed the slave rebellion to the “*quade huishouding*” of particular slave masters. Seeing rebellions as caused merely by poor treatment on the part of masters allowed the Dutch to remove agency from both enslaved and semi-bonded workers like soldiers, whose joint housekeeping had so deeply disturbed them.

So ended a mutiny that was still talked about with wonder in Suriname ten years later, when the Scottish maroon-fighter John Gabriel Stedman, who had seen and heard a few odd things in his life, described it in his journal as “the most peculiar in its kind, that ever existed” (Stedman 1988:76).

**SOLDIERS AS BORDER CROSSERS**

What are we to make of this “peculiar” story? It is surely a tale of exploitation, conflict, and violence. It is also a story of protest, rebellion, and uneasy solidarity. It is a quintessential colonial story in its cultural diversity, its preoccupation with race and slavery, its *Heart of Darkness* opacity. It is also a story of a topsy-turvy world in which customary relationships are reversed

“Mandareijns” who have made so much trouble in France, being the kind of rabble capable of undertaking anything]. I have not yet been able to find out what “rabble” he is talking about. Crommelin aan Sociëteit van Suriname, February 6, 1764, SvS 321.


55. Krijgsraad Gehouden alhier Aen Paramaribo Donderdag de 19e Julij 1764, SvS 323.

56. August 21, 1763, DH.

57. August 21, 1763, DH. For the point on agency, see Johnson 2003:113-24.
and the usual categories historians employ to understand the colonial world do not fit well. And it is a story about people often taken for granted. The records spawned by the mutiny allow an intimate and valuable glimpse of soldiers’ working conditions, their attempts at improving their lives, and their relationships with their superiors, natives, and slaves. But was the joining of the mutineers with the rebels slaves really so “peculiar”? What do we know about the contacts of soldiers with subject peoples?

Despite their immense importance as “the living tools of empire,” professional soldiers have been largely ignored by all but military historians. Most histories of the early modern Atlantic world, for instance, do not even contain an entry for “soldier” in the index, although soldiers lurk in the text. Historians have studied missionaries, mixed race people, traders, and women as “go-betweens,” yet no one has paid much attention to soldiers who straddled and crossed colonial boundaries. And while the “new” military historians have focused increasingly on the experience of war and the effects of warfare on society, they have as yet paid little sustained attention to soldiers’ complex relations with subaltern people (Citino 2007, Lee 2001).

European soldiers in the Atlantic world protected empires from competing European claims, from native attack, and from internal uprisings, especially slave revolts. Stationed either in forts near the coasts or, more often, on contested ground further inland, troops came in close contact with both natives and people of African descent. Many of those conflicts were violent and exploitative, as soldiers were sent overseas to keep subordinate peoples in their places. However, while soldiers were instruments of state power, they were also themselves subject to that power. Located near the bottom of the colonial hierarchy, soldiers were notoriously ill-fed and ill-treated. To ameliorate their circumstances, and even, on occasion, to evade military service all together, soldiers regularly made common cause with Indians and slaves. Thus, servicemen did not just enforce geographical and cultural borders, they frequently crossed them, engaging subaltern people in trade, sex, and insubordination, thus subverting the state power they had been sent to enforce and preserve. A few examples from the eighteenth-century Atlantic, drawn disproportionately from my area of specialty, North America, should

58. I would argue that it makes little difference whether soldiers were in the employ of nation states or of private colonizing companies, such as the societies of Berbice and Suriname.
59. For a convenient collection of essays on go-betweens in North America, see Cayton and Teute 1998. Even a book concerned with the crosscultural cooperation of early modern Atlantic rebels, Linebaugh & Rediker 2000, does not contain an entry for soldiers in the index.
60. For an exception, see Way 1999. I am making a distinction here between regulars and provincials, i.e., professional soldiers brought over from Europe and local men serving in local militias.
suffice to demonstrate that soldiers, not just as enforcers of borders, but as border crossing, deserve sustained attention.

While Indians, slaves, and soldiers battled each other viciously in the New World, they also cooperated as military allies which brought them into intimate and personal contact. Indians and Europeans fought together in the Berbice slave rebellion which led to such scenes as Indians swimming soldiers across swollen creeks and saving them from getting lost in the jungle. In Suriname, enslaved Africans and mercenaries together battled maroons. Mercenary John Gabriel Stedman’s commando, for instance, consisted of 42 Europeans and 23 Africans, who lived in the bush together for months on end in the early 1770s (Stedman 1988:119, 226). The English, French, and Spanish all used Native Americans to aid them in their imperial expansion. As a result of fighting together, European soldiers in the New World learned about surviving in the wilderness, military tactics, and different cultural sensibilities from native and African allies.

Soldiers not only fought with and alongside natives and Africans; they also routinely engaged in intimate contact with subaltern women. The nature of these engagements differed from time to time and place to place, shaped by circumstances, customs, and motivations on both sides. Some encounters were consensual and mutually beneficial, while others were exploitative and violent. On the Dutch Wild Coast, both casual sex and lasting connections were common. Soldiers routinely had black and Indian sexual partners and many took local wives. John Gabriel Stedman’s love affair with the enslaved Joanna is but one famous example of what was known in the area as a “Surinamese marriage.” In the Lower Mississippi Valley, one historian has written, “soldiers were the most visible of European men who engaged frequently in both sexual abuse against and cohabitation with Indian and Negro women” (Usner 1992:234). In eighteenth-century Louisiana, unmarried soldiers owned female Indian slaves who performed wifely duties, a practice that continued, according to a recent assessment, well beyond the Seven Years’ War (Duval 2007:275, Hall 1997). In the Western Great Lakes area, or the Pays d’en Haut, not only fur traders but soldiers, too, intermarried with Indians living around forts (Sleeper-Smith 2001:54-57).

If sex drew soldiers and subaltern people together, so did commerce. In the Lower Mississippi Valley, slaves, Indians, and lower-class Europeans, especially soldiers, engaged in extensive face-to-face marketing and created what one historian has called “a frontier exchange economy” (Usner 1992). In South Carolina, Cherokee country, native women supplied soldiers with local produce. One fort in Cherokee country, its commander complained in 1766, took on “the Appearance of a Market” as native women sold “eatables” to the troops (Hatley 1993:97). In the years between the Seven Years’ War and the outbreak of the American Revolution, nations such as the Delaware, Shawnees, and Iroquois traded extensively with the British army and with
individual soldiers stationed in the Ohio Country (McConnell 2004:107). In the Pays d’en Haut, many French forts were more important as trading communities than as military strongholds. To soldiers, such trade was crucial in supplementing meager rations.

Soldiers regularly parlayed the contacts they had made with subaltern people through joint warfare, trade, and sex, into crucial aid in resistance and subordination. Soldiers fed up with military service relied on slaves and Indians to escape. At times they escaped together, forging close bonds in the process. A group of soldiers and slaves who fled Louisiana jointly in 1739, for instance, were still living together in Havana, Cuba, a decade later (Hall 1992:146-47). For others, native villages exerted a powerful draw. As early as 1712, French soldiers living in destitution in Louisiana were deserting to the Indians. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Quapaw Indians in the Arkansas River Valley provided sanctuary to soldiers and refused to give them up to French authorities. Occasionally, they sheltered runaway slaves (Duval 2006:79-82). In the 1740s and 1750s, French soldiers in the Lower Mississippi Valley ran away to the Indians in large numbers. While Indians often returned such men, native leaders felt compelled to complain about the brutal punishments such soldiers received (Hall 1992: 131; Usner 1992). In one case, the deserters had to be pardoned before the Choctaw retreated from their threat that if the soldiers were punished, they would start helping them escape. French officials explained that had they not given in to the Indians, they “would no longer be able to retain one soldier” (Hall, 1992:23). When the French and their native allies captured Fort William Henry in 1757 in upstate New York, some forty British regulars chose to remain with their Indian captors rather than return to army service. In fact, British desertion to the Indians during the Seven Years War reached such proportions that when recaptured soldiers claimed they had been abducted by Indians against their will, their superiors rarely believed them and they were forthwith court-martialed (Colley 2002:181, 195-96). More than a year after the end of the Seven Years’ War, the British were still trying to discover the whereabouts of soldiers who had gone native.

Despite the frequency with which European soldiers sought the aid of subaltern people in resistance and flight, we have as yet but little evidence of soldiers actually joining slave rebels. A quick search revealed only one other example of soldiers collectively joining maroons or rebelling slaves in the Atlantic world. In 1803, a unit of Polish soldiers in Haiti defected from the French, who treated them in derogatory fashion, and some thirty men joined Dessalines’ rebel forces (Dubois 2004:294-95). In this respect, then, perhaps the Berbice mutineers were unusual though research may well turn up other cases. We know, for instance, that soldiers in Suriname were punished in 1764 for plotting their escape from service after declaring that
they would be better off living with maroons or *boschnegers*. In colonial Brazil, army deserters ran off to maroon communities known as quilombos (Flory 1979:123). Individual soldiers were implicated in the 1741 New York slave conspiracy as well as in the Pointe Coupee plot in Spanish Louisiana in 1795 where the Spanish authorities were convinced that the French soldiers involved in the plot were planning to coordinate the rebellion with a French invasion of the colony (Hall 1992: 369, 373, 374; Zabin 2004:121, 131-32). In the 1790s, the authorities of Spanish Florida worried that soldiers might make common cause with maroons and discontented slaves and, in the words of one of its governors, “turn the province into a theater of horrors” (Landers 1999:205).

These examples of transgressive cross-cultural cooperation are not meant to deny the growing racism and elaborations of European whiteness and superiority vis-à-vis natives and Africans over the course of the eighteenth century. Rather these instances of common cause may suggest why racism became so essential. No doubt, colonial authorities throughout the New World condoned and sometimes even encouraged crosscultural contact. But when such alliances threatened carefully constructed social hierarchies, they reacted with alarm at the figurative and actual crossfertilization of the border lands. They responded to such threats with conscious attempts to widen racial divides. They discouraged camaraderie among soldiers, Blacks, and Indians, prohibiting them from talking or drinking together, and they frequently, though not always, forbade intermarriage. Whenever they could, they bound Indians by treaty to hunt and return military deserters. When such deserters were punished, they employed slaves and Indians to carry out the sentences. Soldiers were offered bounties for maiming and killing slave rebels and enemy Indians, which encouraged brutality and increased animosity and hatred. In many colonies, if Blacks were allowed to serve as soldiers, they served in segregated units. Authorities experimented with replacing regiments every few years to sever soldiers’ local connections.

And they were often successful. Despite the many cases of cooperation that can be dug up, the adventures of the Suriname mutineers are “peculiar” and they show that alliances between mutineers and African rebels did not come about easily. I am thus not suggesting that where soldiers and subaltern people combined forces, notions of race and ethnicity played no part. But I am suggesting that on the frontiers of empire where European authority was tenuous and contested, those who were the enforcers of empire, and those who were its objects, could, and did, cross divides of color. The slippery, malleable relations between soldiers and the people they were charged

61. SvS 323.
with overseeing meant that soldiers at times saw themselves in a new place – as oppressed as the slaves, as having common cause with them. In those moments when class trumped race, the borders of empire became potentially explosive for imperial leaders. The 1763 mutiny provides an unusually close look at one such moment.

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