I

THE ECONOMICS OF SURINAM SLAVERY

by

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1. Introduction

The explosive growth of the Caribbean slave colonies from the late seventeenth century onwards, their rise to economic importance out of all proportion to either their size or population, and the nineteenth-century collapse of most of these peripheral centers of production has long fascinated economic historians, and continues to do so. The region’s economic history, indeed, has much to thrill the historian inclined to comparative research. There is a series of rises and falls, linking the various colonies in a pattern vaguely reminiscent of a relay race. There are different variants of metropolitan economic policies, initially all inscribed in a mercantilistic framework which was increasingly disrupted, however, and finally abandoned altogether. There are many intriguing questions regarding the predominant type of labour. Why there was slavery may be relatively easily answered. But why, then, the slave trade and slavery itself were abolished is still a question. Others are whether the progressive dismantling of slavery was the cause of the economic decline, or its result, or whether both phenomena were perhaps only indirectly or marginally linked? Moreover, it may be questioned whether slavery and advanced capitalism were really as incompatible as political economists like Smith and Marx have suggested, or necessarily linked, as Wallerstein has it. Yet another field of research is whether slave plantations were really all that mattered in the colonial economies, and – to conclude this incomplete listing of research topics –, how the creeping emergence within slavery of features reminiscent of peasant production, as well as wage-like material incentives, affected the mechanisms of these ‘pure’ slave economies.

The post-war historiography of the Caribbean has addressed the above questions and raised many more. Scholarly research on the Anglophone Caribbean boasts the longest tradition, reflecting presumptions about its importance to the rise of
British industrial capitalism, the centrality of the British West Indies in the dismantling of ‘the peculiar institution’, and the cross-fertilization with century-long historiographical debates on North American slavery. The emergence of a significant historiography on other linguistic sub-regions is of later date. The last decades have witnessed a modest boom in innovative studies on Spanish Caribbean history. The study of the French, Danish and Dutch slave colonies still lags behind. Apart from their minor importance in comparison to the British and Spanish colonies, an additional explanation for their exclusion from the mainstream of Caribbean historiography is the apparent invincibility of the extant linguistic barriers.³

In this paper, I discuss the major findings, debates and blank spaces in the economic historiography of slavery in the foremost Dutch Caribbean colony, Surinam. I first discuss some long-canonicalized concepts of the Surinam slave economy.⁴ In subsequent paragraphs, I contrast these with recent research on production, trade, capital, and profitability, respectively. I next review some theoretical approaches to the economics of Surinam slave society. A short section on demographic research is then followed by an epilogue. This essay does not aim to be conclusive; elsewhere I have attempted to be more catholic.⁵ Moreover, as a participant in this – to use too broad a term – historiographical debate, I cannot claim to provide a fully impartial analysis.

2. The cliché of rise and fall

Any analysis of Surinam slave society should start with the seminal study by Rudolf van Lier, Samenleving in een grensgebied (1949), translated as Frontier society (1971).⁶ To put it somewhat bluntly, historians of the Surinam slave economy have long taken this axiom too seriously. For, whereas Van Lier’s analysis of the social fabric of Surinam slave society was original and if not flawless, certainly perceptive and forcefully argued, his economic paragraphs did not reach far beyond a summary of contemporary writings. Yet most colonial authors presented only partial accounts, some were simply wrong, and all left many questions open for additional scrutiny. Without further research into archival sources – which Van Lier used very little – one could not hope to broaden our understanding of the puzzling economic development of the Surinam slave economy.

Broadly speaking, contemporary authorship on the colony may be divided into two periods. Up to a fateful crisis in the early 1770s, the typical book or pamphlet on Surinam would eulogize the colony’s virtually unlimited natural resources, promising huge profits to be made from an ever-expanding production of tropical staples. Warren (1667) argued that Surinam sugar was of better quality than the produce of the foremost British stronghold, Barbados. Herlein (1718) likened the
colony to paradise. Pistorius (1763) promised new planters fame and riches, as did Hartsinck (1770), who again eulogized the exceptional fertility of the Guianas. Of course, there were drawbacks. In particular, some authors argued that the chronic menace of marronage disrupted the smooth functioning of the plantation economy and undermined the solvency of a colony dependent on metropolitan credit to finance its expansion. Yet such problems could be overcome. Meanwhile, the success in using the famous polder technology to transform swampy coastal regions into thriving plantations showed what Dutch ingenuity could forge in this part of the world.\(^7\)

Then came the 1772/73 crash of the British and, hence, Dutch stock exchanges, which translated into an abrupt suspension of credit loans to Surinam and a long series of bankruptcies of major plantations. Soon the former creditors in the Netherlands found out that they had extended far too high loans, based on inflated valuations of the actual worth of the plantations. Some had to cut their losses and, unwillingly, became owners of their mortgaged securities. Others opted for a continuation of the so-called negotiatties, a specific form of credit extension.\(^8\) In both cases, the holders of bonds in the mortgages lost much of their investment, and, as subsequent authorship had it, neither the vital credit link nor the colonial economy ever recovered.

Much of the literature from the second period, ranging from the initial crisis to the abolition of slavery in 1863, reflects this pessimistic mood. Certainly, planters' manuals were still produced, suggesting how to run a plantation properly and make a handsome profit. But such books had increasingly bitter overtones of criticism of the conservatism and backwardness of the Surinam planters.\(^9\) Publications meant for the general public were more outspoken, deploiring the decline of a once booming colony. Explanations for this reversal of fortunes were manifold, and usually overlapped. Many authors suggested two closely linked vicious circles: first, pre-crisis financial malpractices and overcrediting, and second, withdrawal of investments and recession. Moreover, chronic marronage had demanded a high financial toll and had undermined the colony’s solvency.

Allegedly, the situation further deteriorated with the departure of debt-ridden proprietors and the concomitant rise of absenteeism. A range of authors blamed hired overseers and attorneys for the subsequent mismanagement of a once thriving plantation economy. Some also suggested that, even prior to the 1770s, the former frugal and sober colonist had given way to a hedonistic type of planter. Finally, a few late eighteenth-century authors criticized inefficient local rule, the lack of metropolitan support to overcome the crisis and the absence of protectionism in favour of Surinam produce on the Dutch market.\(^10\)

Therefore, even with slavery largely undisputed, Surinam seemed to be in decline. The 1807 abolition of the slave trade - imposed during the British occupation – dramatically confirmed the difference metropolitan policy could make. With apparently none of the other problems solved, the Surinam plantation
economy now faced an abrupt termination of another life-line. As the slave population each year showed staggering rates of natural decrease, it apparently risked dwindling to insignificance within a few decades. Increasingly, and largely in vain, spokesmen for the plantation economy pleaded for metropolitan backing for their languishing industry. In their view, such support should include the continuation of slavery itself; yet by the mid-nineteenth century it was clear that the Dutch government was finally moving towards Emancipation. As for labour, new debates opened up in the 1840s on ways to transform the slave population into a self-reproducing work force and, subsequently, on the substitution of indentured labour for the former slave population.

Nineteenth-century authors disagreed on the issue of slavery. At the same time most parties characterized the Surinam plantation economy as backward and thought of absenteeism and the chronic shortage of capital – generally, not the mode of labour per se – as the major explanatory factors. Some of the best-informed writings of the first half of the century addressed the perceived technological stagnation in great detail, thereby creating an image of obsolescence which has lingered ever since. In this period, the association of absenteeism with corruption, incompetence, conservatism and, hence, decline became firmly entrenched. This pessimist view was finally canonized in the voluminous Geschiedenis van Suriname (1861), written by the Dutch abolitionist historian Wolbers. On the one hand, Wolbers took the polemical stance that slavery by definition could only produce economic failure and corruption, while on the other, on a more practical level, he blamed absenteeism for wasteful and corrupt management.

When Van Lier published his Samenleving some ninety years later, he took up the thread left by Wolbers. His analysis of the economy during slavery leaned heavily on contemporary authorship, and dovetails with Wolbers’ analysis. Van Lier marks the crisis of 1772-73 as the turning point from rise to decline. The crisis put an end to the previously lavish flows of credit which had resulted in corruption and incompetence rather than productive investments and stable economic growth. A decline of coffee prices and persistent rumours about new Maroon attacks signalled the definitive end of the capital flow. The crisis was soon translated into bankruptcies and absenteeism. Direct profits rather than a long-term perspective came to dominate plantation management, causing conservatism and technological stagnation in the nineteenth century. Van Lier rightly adds two important observations regarding the sugar industry. First, he reminds the reader of the nineteenth-century come-back of sugar, which for most of the eighteenth century had been bypassed by coffee. Also, he dates the subsequent decline of sugar not in the period of slavery, but immediately after, in a context of rising labour costs, crushing competition from both beet and cane sugar, and increasing Dutch investments in Java, which even in cane sugar production soon outtrivalled Surinam.\[14\]
It took several decades before any serious attempts were made to revise or even substantiate Van Lier’s analysis. The economic history by Panday (1959), while providing more systematic economic analysis, still remained fairly close to *Samenleving in een grensgebied*. Adhin (1961) kept suspiciously close to both Van Lier and Panday. Both authors shared a tendency to take decline for granted, and to explain the onset of this decline by the suspension of credit after the 1772-73 crisis. Neither analyzed the internal dynamics of Surinam plantation agriculture at any length. Only the last two decades have witnessed a modest emergence of quantitative research on the colony’s economic development. In discussing the results of these studies, I argue for some revisionism and a great deal of problematization in the interpretation of Surinam economic history as postulated by Van Lier.

3. Production

Contemporary authorship on Surinam provided bits and pieces of information on the colony’s exports. Reliable official statistics for the colony’s production were only provided from 1848 onwards, as part of the published *Koloniale Verslagen* (Colonial Reports). Most of the scattered and very incomplete figures of the previous period were based on export data and usually on elusive units of measure such as oxheads, which raise serious methodological problems. Even so, such data were uncritically accepted by many subsequent scholars.

Figures for the pre-1750 period are virtually unavailable, and so far no scholar has gone much beyond stating that the number of plantations and total plantation output increased dramatically. Recently Van Stipriaan, in *Surinaams contrast* (1993), has presented a first attempt to calculate Surinam plantation production for the period from the mid-eighteenth century up to Emancipation in 1863. The book is based on archival records pertaining to individual plantations, merchant houses’ records and government offices. Even if not the definitive study, *Surinaams contrast* deals at last with most of the dynamics of the plantation economy in a longitudinal framework. As Van Stipriaan utilized virtually all of the archival sources uncovered and available at this point, it seems that major revisions of his empirical data will only be done on the possible basis of hitherto ignored archival sources. Short of reproducing Van Stipriaan’s findings here, suffice it to summarize the major results regarding production.

First, *Surinaams contrast* documents the geography of plantation production throughout the coastal region, indicating a continuing expansion well beyond the crisis of the 1770s, with stagnation only evident after 1820. Next, Van Stipriaan’s information on total plantation produce signals the futility of thinking of Surinam as the typical Caribbean sugar colony. Between 1750 and 1820, the value of total coffee production generally exceeded that of sugar production, with sugar only
regaining its dominance in the 1820s as coffee production collapsed. Even if on a modest scale, the presence of cotton and cacao plantations further undermines the idea of a tropical one-crop economy. Finally, a sectoral breakdown of plantation production indicates that coffee boomed from the 1740s to the 1770s, and subsequently embarked on a downward slope to insignificance by the mid-nineteenth century. Sugar production, in contrast, experienced only a modest decline during the heyday of coffee, and experienced tremendous growth in the half century preceding Emancipation.

There is still the question of productivity. Van Stipriaan calculates for the typical coffee plantation a consistent increase of production per slave up to the 1790s, followed by a rapid decrease thereafter. From the early decades of the nineteenth century onwards, productivity of coffee trees also rapidly deteriorated, indicating serious soil exhaustion caused by deficient rotation. The nineteenth-century cotton sector, too, yielded deteriorating productivity per unit of labour from the mid-1820s. In contrast, the productivity of sugar increased almost consistently, with average production per slave easily doubling from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, and productivity per unit of land not lagging far behind. In Roosenburg en Mon Bijou, a monograph of the Surinam plantations of a Dutch family in the period 1720 to 1870, I reached similar conclusions both for sugar and coffee productivity.

These results, therefore, tend to undermine the general notion of a decline after the 1770s. Geographical expansion proceeded well beyond that periods, and even if coffee did, indeed, come to a grinding halt in the half-century following 1773, sugar certainly did not. Moreover, productivity in the latter sector showed seemingly spectacular growth.

On the other hand, figures on productivity per unit of labour, coffee tree, or cane hectare are relatively meaningless if the performance of competitors in the same market are left out of consideration. Again, the results of such comparisons do not support the notion of undifferentiated decline after the 1770s. Limiting the discussion to the two major products only, we may argue that the typical Surinam sugar plantation was an excellent match for most competitors up to the mid-nineteenth century. Only by that time, the combination of technological sophistication and the abundance of new land and relatively cheap slave labour had propelled productivity of the Cuban and Puerto Rican sugar plantation to unprecedented heights. The average sugar plantation in British Guiana also began to outshine its Surinam rival. Yet even at that point, Surinam productivity continued to compare favourably to that of the majority of Caribbean producers. The productivity record of the Surinam sugar plantation therefore is astonishing. It is reminiscent of the recurrent mention of the colony’s proverbial fertility, of an apocryphal project to import Surinam topsoil to give new strength to the exhausted Barbadian sugar plantations – and of that one critic of planter conservatism in the 1820s,
puzzled by the fact that in Surinam 'the fertility of its soils has for more than a century defied the concentrated efforts of man to destroy it'.

The productivity of the coffee sector does not compare as favourably, and here the notion of decline seems more appropriate. Much of this simply stems from the fact that with contemporary technology, coffee production simply could not be expected to hold on as long as its ecologically more amenable 'counterpoint', sugar. Even so, the late-eighteenth-century Surinam coffee plantation was probably in the same category as its rival in Saint-Domingue. Paradoxically, the long life span of some Surinam coffee plantations in the nineteenth century highlights not only the apparent incapacity to switch to other products, but also the astonishing capacity of the same coffee lands, and even the same trees, to continue producing well beyond what would have been considered their lifetimes elsewhere in the Caribbean or in Brazil.

4. Trade, capital, and profitability

From a metropolitan perspective, colonial production and exports were largely interchangeable. In practice, such a perspective was untenable since a small part of the cash crop production was consumed locally and, more importantly, since the reproduction of the slave population was largely the result of the slaves' own food production. Even so, on the export side, we can make a rather secure translation from total production to an only slightly lower export figure, particularly if we allow for local consumption of molasses and the cane-derived liquor, dram ('kill-devil'). Most of the exports were traded in consignment to the major Dutch merchant houses that had extended loans and mortgages under such conditions. Only molasses was bought by North American traders. On the import side, and again with the exception of specified items brought in by North Americans, Dutch suppliers had a near-monopoly. A large number of items were imported directly from the metropolis, others through metropolitan ventures. In the second category, the slave trade was paramount. Initially, the Dutch monopoly came with the prevalent mercantilism. The subsequent dismantling of mercantilism was only completed in the nineteenth century. Moreover, it had no major effect, particularly since after the crisis of the 1770s the Surinam plantation sector became completely subordinated to Dutch merchant-cum-finance houses.

Van Stipriaan calculated trade statistics for the four plantations crops. Their growth curves suggest similar curves for production. The volume of annual sugar exports declined from roughly 7,500 metric tonnes in the 1740s to 6,800 tonnes by 1790, but increased to 14-16,000 tonnes in the last three decades before slavery. Starting from scratch in the early 1720s, coffee exports rocketed to 8,000 tonnes in the late 1770s. The subsequent decline was dramatic, to less than 4,000 tonnes in the first decades of the nineteenth century and insignificance by the 1840s.
Cacao exports began in the 1730s, and reached a high 340 tonnes around 1780. Again, a similar collapse followed. Only in the 1850s did cacao exports resume growth, and in the last year before Emancipation they were back at the level of 1780. Cotton exports finally showed waver ing growth up to the all-time high of 1,100 tonnes in the first half of the 1820s. Yet downfall was the next stage, with exports below 200 tonnes in the last years of slavery.

Figures for the essential and most fateful item on the import side have been reconstructed by Postma. On the basis of his calculations, the total number of slaves introduced into Surinam between the first Dutch imports in 1668 and the last shipment in 1830 may be put at some 215,000. This is an appreciable correction on the hitherto accepted figure of 300,000 to 350,000.\textsuperscript{23} Statistics for other import items have not been uncovered, and neither do we have figures differentiating between the value of imports from the Netherlands as against the U.S, the one outside supplier of long standing that was tolerated. Similarly, the disruptive effects of the various eighteenth-century wars on Surinam have, as yet, been dealt with in general terms only.

The extension of credit loans, a crucial aspect of metropolitan-colonial commerce, has been studied by Van de Voort. His findings relate mostly to the second half of the eighteenth century and underpin much of the post-1773 decline version of Surinam history as proposed by contemporaries and subsequent scholars. According to Van de Voort’s calculations, of an estimated 40 million guilders extended in loans to Surinam plantations prior to the crisis, probably no more than a quarter part was recovered. The debacle marked the beginning of the end, for the solvency of Surinam was irrevocably ruined. Bankrupted planters repatriated to Europe, absentee owners had their estates run by the proxy of less reliable overseers – in short, the stage was set for decline.\textsuperscript{24} As indicated above, this scenario is too gloomy as far as production figures are concerned, and the analysis of the wider consequences of the 1770s crisis mainly echo Van Lier. Yet Van de Voort’s data on the collapse of the negotiaties indeed substantiate pessimistic interpretations of Surinam economic history, even if this fiasco did not mark the complete end of credit extension to the colony.\textsuperscript{25}

Still the puzzle remains, and so far no author has succeeded in unravelling the total picture. For even if the extension of credit may have been too hazardous, too generous, the question remains whether – and if so, why – the average Surinam plantation, with its relatively high productivity, would not have been able to operate at a profit and to become independent of external debt financing.\textsuperscript{26} I will first review the evidence regarding profitability. Calculations of slave plantation profitability are notoriously complicated, and reliable figures are still lacking for all of plantation America. Surinam is no exception to the rule. Instead, what is found is mostly derived evidence, taking variables such as the expansion of the plantation sector, slave imports, documented planters’ opulence, etc., as indicators of prosperity. Yet it is difficult to unconditionally conclude that there was
profitability across the line, if we know that, all over the region, plantation expansion was financed by continuous credit flows, and that often creditors lost out or, even more frequently, debtors succumbed under the crushing weight of mortgages.27

Ideally, to calculate profitability, net profits should be related to the total of capital invested in a particular slave plantation. An example based on my own research may suffice to illustrate the methodological puzzles involved. The case refers to a sugar plantation, Roosenburg, and a coffee plantation, Mon Bijou, both owned by a Dutch absentee family. Between 1760 and the late 1840s, the estates averaged positive returns, calculated as the difference between expenses and income derived from the selling of plantation produce. Yet such ‘profits’ were wildly inflated. Like most Surinam plantations, the two estates were burdened with huge mortgages. In much of the eighteenth century the proprietors were able to meet the costs involved in debt servicing. In the nineteenth century, debt servicing was far too heavy a burden to carry. Consequently, the combined burden of the mortgage, debt servicing and current account soared from some 110,000 Dutch guilders in 1760 to over 600,000 at Emancipation in 1863.

Nor is this the whole story. To properly establish profitability, we should also account for appreciation or depreciation of the invested capital, and for income received by the owners as weighed against alternative investments. One yardstick to calculate changes in the value of a slave plantation is to establish occasional appraisals made in certified inventories and documents. In this case, the result is a stunning depreciation from some 350,000 guilders around 1765 to only 55,000 (slaves included) by 1863. An alternative yardstick is to take the number of slaves as an indicator. Again, we see here a dramatic depreciation caused by the consistently negative reproduction rates of the slave populations. The owners did finally derive some income from their plantations up to the 1820s, as against an absence of any income afterwards. However, weighed against alternative investment outlets or even against simply putting the initial capital on a savings account, the actual rewards dwindle to insignificance.28

This case highlights some of the methodological complexities in calculating profitability. We may define profitability more precisely as the net income (after deductions for debt servicing and corrections for appreciation/depreciation) related to the total capital stock invested. In order to establish the rate of profit, we would need to have data for longer periods, and we would have to compare the profit rates to prevalent investment or savings opportunities in other sectors of the same economic system (metropolitan or colonial). The sobering fact is that few Surinam – and indeed, Caribbean – plantations have left any better trace of paper work than Roosenburg and Mon Bijou. Yet even in this case, the available data do not even remotely allow for the construction of accurate statistics on profitability.
The few authors attempting to reconstruct profitability for Surinam plantations have all encountered the same methodological pitfalls. Emmer and Van den Boogaart calculated profits of the government-owned sugar plantation Catharina Sophia in the last decades before Emancipation. They point to the discrepancy between profits booked on the positive side, hidden losses caused by depreciation, and the ignored costs of mortgage, debt servicing and government assistance on the negative. Even on this model plantation therefore, the net result was negative. Lamur does present a case of an apparently profitable enterprise, the sugar plantation Vossenburg. For most of the 1705-1863 period, he argues for lengthy periods of favourable profit rates; yet the methodology raises some serious doubts. In any case, Vossenburg is exceptional. Unlike the bulk of Surinam plantations, it was not burdened with a mortgage and therefore did not suffer from prohibitive debt servicing costs.

Again, Van Stipriaan provides the most comprehensive and sophisticated attempt to date to calculate profit rates on the aggregate level, allowing for sectoral and longitudinal comparison. Aware of the impossibility of reconstructing fully reliable ratios, he opts for constructing a measure of profitability by computing net results per slave, and using estimates of the average slave price to arrive at rates of profit. Before reviewing the conclusions based on his sample, we should reflect on a major caveat to his method, which is the choice of the average slave as a proxy to total capital invested. As Van Stipriaan indicates, slave prices fluctuated dramatically over time. This of course is incorporated into his calculations. But no level of sophistication in the computing of real slave values can overcome the broader conundrum, which remains hidden in the computation. Slaves as a major factor of production indeed accounted for 30% and up to 50% of the total value of the typical plantation. But even so, the rate of net profits per slave overstates the more realistic profit rate calculated over the total of invested capital by a factor of 2 to 3. Moreover, because of the inherent methodological obstacles Van Stipriaan explicitly refrains from incorporating appreciations – but more likely depreciations – of the total capital stock. Again, this leads in most cases to overly optimistic assessments of profitability. These observations do not diminish the value of Van Stipriaan’s calculations as indicators of trends per sector and in time. The implication is, however, as he rightly points out, that although the results are indicative of trends, they are much less so of real profits.

Even so, the trends are remarkable. Excluding the costs of debt servicing, for most of the 1760-1860 period the average slave on a sugar or coffee plantation usually produced a net benefit. Yet the more realistic calculation, including debt servicing, suggests negative or very low rates of return for coffee, and only slightly better rates for sugar. Allowing, moreover, for the corrections suggested by the above caveats, what remains is a very gloomy picture of the profitability of the Surinam slave plantation. All this dovetails nicely with Van de Voort’s analysis of the fiasco of the negotiatiestelsel. Ironically though, while Van Stipriaan indeed
suggests the lowest profitability for the last decades of the eighteenth century, he
does not reinforce the traditional image of a continuing decline on all accounts
since the 1770s. The sugar industry, for one, yielded better results after the 1820s
than ever before.32

5. The puzzle of perennial decline

The prime aim of any slave plantation was not to produce a tropical crop, but to
make a profit. Apparently, Surinam plantations were better producers than has
usually been thought, but they mostly failed miserably to achieve their foremost
objective. Most of the available figures, both on the negotiatiegestelsel and on
plantation profits, point to almost consistent fiasco. One question is why this
should have been the case, and how the continuation of plantation production in
a situation which seemed to be doomed to perennial deficits can be accounted for.

Contemporary observers advanced various explanations, but most frequently
the blame was put on absenteeism and its allegedly inherent legacy of inefficient,
conservative and corrupt management. This interpretation was taken up again by
Van Lier and several subsequent authors. Yet by now it has become clear that
explanations should go well beyond that. To begin with, in view of the apparent
resilience of the Surinam sugar sector, the case for general conservatism and
inflexibility of the planter class – whether absentee or resident – seems exagger-
ated. Van Stipriaan argues that their innovative performance matched their re-

gional competitors’ achievements.33 Also, reconstruction of productivity levels
points to a relatively good position.

But this does not explain the unfavourable financial results of the Surinam
plantation sector. Let us for a moment simply accept the prevailing opinion that
the Caribbean plantation was generally a highly profitable business – a premise
perhaps too easily conceded, but which seems to have some ground, at least in
comparison to the Surinam experience. The question should then be rephrased as
to why Surinam planters produced less profitably than their regional rivals. More
specifically, we may ask whether the production costs of the typical Surinam
plantation were perhaps higher than elsewhere or conversely, whether Surinam
products met with a comparatively unfavourable market. The first part of the
question still awaits further scrutiny. On the one hand, perhaps the abundance of
possibly unusually fertile land for both cash crop and food production and the
efficiency of the polder technology gave the Surinam plantation an edge over
many competitors. On the other hand, the labour demands of these ‘hydraulic’
plantations may well have been extreme, as was the environment of disease. Such
factors may have translated to higher morbidity and demographic losses, more
slave resistance and consequently higher labour costs. The possibility of even a
tentative conclusion seems remote, as the groundwork for such complex intrare-
gional comparisons is still lacking. An intercolonial comparison of output per slave would be an acceptable approximation here, adjusting for differential slave prices. Again, this exercise remains on the agenda for future research, but it seems not too far-fetched to suggest that the chronic shortage of new slaves carried by Dutch traders and the colony’s location off the main trade routes tended to inflate slave prices in Surinam.

One factor often overlooked in economic history is that slave resistance may also be taken as a possibly significant factor. To cite the most significant case, marronage was substantial, involving up to an astonishing 10% of the colony’s total population during slavery. Apart from this direct loss of labour, there were indirect consequences. Contemporaries blamed marronage for diminishing the solvency of Surinam, and they may well have been right. In addition, the taxes imposed on planters to fight Maroons affected the economics of the Surinam plantation negatively. But again, the significance of this factor may only be established by way of comparison.

The question whether Surinam plantation products met relatively unfavourable market conditions may be answered with more confidence and the answer is probably affirmative. As Van de Voort has indicated, Dutch mercantilism offered the colony the worst of two worlds. Surinam shared with the British West Indies the disadvantage of near complete consignment arrangements, tying the producers to overpowering merchant-cum-finance houses. These arrangements not only precluded bargaining for better prices, but also implied the mandatory ordering of plantation provisions with the same firms. But whereas a united West Indian lobby of British merchant houses and planters secured a protected home market with inflated prices, the Dutch market was unprotected and Surinam produce was sold at a consistently lower price. The French market, like the Dutch, was unprotected, but French West Indian producers usually sold their produce in loco to merchants, thus circumventing the costly consignment arrangements.

As long as capital was abundant and investors were searching for investment outlets, as they were in the Netherlands, particularly in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, Surinam apparently succeeded in attracting capital no matter what its comparative disadvantages. Myths regarding the incredible fertility of this tropical paradise created by contemporary authors may have helped to get money flowing. But as soon as crisis hit, the plantation colony lost its solvency. The association of Surinam with the 1770s debacle and the lingering solvency problems of those plantations not bankrupted straightaway may indeed have kept potential future Dutch investors from making a new start in the Guianas. Much of the nineteenth-century expansion in the western region was financed by British planters, as was the rapid development of the former Dutch colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo. By the 1820s, as the Surinam sugar sector seemed to prepare for a comeback, Java was for the first time being developed as a plantation venture for Dutch colonialism. Soon semi-bonded Netherlands Indian labour was
producing cane sugar in much larger quantities and at lower cost than the Surinam slave.\textsuperscript{36} From mid-century onwards, the Netherlands Indies were becoming the obvious target for potential Dutch investors in tropical agriculture.\textsuperscript{37}

Much has been made, both by contemporaries and by modern scholarship, of the alleged disastrous effects of absenteeism on plantation management.\textsuperscript{38} This argument should not be stretched too far, as absenteeism was also widespread in the French and, particularly, British West Indies. Again, quantitative comparisons are scarce. Even so, it is plausible that the combined effects of absenteeism and the intricacies of the negotiatiestelsel had a negative impact on the performance of the Surinam economy. In between the nominal plantation owners and buyers of bonds in the Netherlands and the salaried overseers in Surinam stood two groups of representatives: the metropolitan merchant houses, and the colonial administrators. The financial crisis hit some of the merchant houses hard, even causing some bankruptcies. Most, however, managed to transfer the bulk of their losses to the buyers of bonds, who saw the intrinsic value of these bonds diminish to a fraction of the original price. The main benefits of absenteeism and the negotiatiestelsel, however, seem to have accrued to the administrators in Surinam, who in return for their supervision of the work of the overseers and for handling trade and communication with the metropolis received a high 10\% share of all costs made in the colony and in the production made on the plantation. By this arrangement, as long as production continued, administrators made good money regardless of the financial results of the plantations. Recent research tends to confirm some of the harsh judgements of contemporary authors.\textsuperscript{39} There is room for further debate on the effects of this management by a covertly interested proxy, particularly as to its effects on long-term versus short-term perspectives and innovative management. Nevertheless it is evident that the direct financial costs were high.

The complexities of the negotiatiestelsel may finally go some way towards explaining the puzzle of continuing production at a loss.\textsuperscript{40} In many, perhaps even most cases, mounting debts were translated into a plunging fall in bond values. The brunt was born both by the original owners who often found themselves legally or de facto expropriated, and by the bond holders who were no less affected. As they grudgingly took their losses, they helped to prevent bankruptcies and to keep the merchant houses and administrators in the eventually unprofitably business of making tropical products and handsome incomes for the proxies only. Under different arrangements, the lack of profitability would have caused more bankruptcies. However, it might also have facilitated a new and unencumbered start for some plantations, leaving more money to spend on maintenance and investments, rather than on the hopeless haemorrhage of debt servicing.
6. Slavery and capitalism

In the vast literature on slavery and capitalism, Surinam is a quantité négligeable. The complex debate on the origins and success of British abolitionism and the contribution of the British West Indies to the metropolitan Industrial Revolution has no counterpart in the historiography on Surinam. Abolition of the slave trade was imposed by the British, and to an extent Emancipation itself was the result of international pressure. The limited importance of Surinam slavery to the metropolitan economy, and particularly its dubious profitability, might have set the stage for early abolitionism. That it failed to do so cannot be attributed to a strong Dutch-based proslavery lobby, but might more likely be related – somewhat tautologically - to sheer indifference and lethargy in Dutch politics and mentality. Yet from a planter perspective it was difficult to detect any positive economic logic in these abolitions, as is born out by the consistent planter opposition to abolishing the ‘peculiar institution’. The subsequent withdrawal of the freed slaves’ labour from the plantation sector corroborates the assessment that even if the economic resilience of the Surinam plantation was weak during slavery, it dramatically deteriorated after Emancipation.

The contribution of Surinam – and the West Indies enterprise in general – to the growth of the Dutch economy diminished over time. Systematic calculations of the West Indian contributions to Dutch Gross Domestic Product are not available. The significance of both the slave trade and, more specifically, the Surinam plantation economy to the Dutch economy stood at its apex in the century preceding the 1770s. Yet even in this period the Netherlands Indies were far more important in colonial trade, and colonial trade as such accounted for only a small proportion of total Gross Domestic Product. After the 1770s, the negative financial balance sheet of its plantation sector probably made Surinam a liability rather than an asset to the metropolis. The contrast with competing Caribbean colonies is evident, and we may safely conclude that the overall contribution of Surinam to Dutch economic growth was modest at the very best. Much less did Surinam slavery contribute to the Dutch Industrial Revolution. The latter breakthrough only occurred in the 1880s and 1890s, postdating the Emancipation of the Surinam slaves by decades. By then, even the industrialization of the Dutch sugar refineries was geared towards Java rather than Surinam cane supplies.

On a more theoretical level, studies by Willemsen and Heilbron have attempted to analyze the economic history of Surinam in a Wallersteinian framework. Wallerstein’s model of a world-system linking together different modes of labour in core, periphery and semi-periphery countries has, for good reasons, encountered mounting criticism. Even for the Caribbean, which seemed as close as one could get to the ideal type of metropolitan-made peripheral constructions, several authors have criticized certain mechanistic assumptions or even rejected Wallerstein’s theoretical framework altogether. Writing a decade or so ago, Willemsen
and Heilbron still took the wisdom of the world-system for granted. Apart from economist explanations for abolition, which to me seem unjustifiable ‘translations’ of Wallerstein’s analysis of British abolition, they advanced the notion of technological backwardness of the nineteenth-century Surinam sugar plantation, and explained this by reference to the mode of labour.\textsuperscript{48} Again, this appears not to be very convincing. The Surinam planter was not as badly conservative as was long thought, and particularly not so in the sugar sector. Van Stipriaan’s revisionism, which pairs a very negative assessment of management in the coffee sector to an optimistic view on innovation in the sugar sector, perhaps overstates both the contrasts between the two sectors and the level of innovation in the latter. Even so, it is clear that there is no firm ground for thinking of Surinam as particularly backward. Moreover, it is hard to construe any causal connection between the reliance on slave labour and the level of technological innovation, as several recent studies on the economics of slavery all through the region have suggested. Cuba in the mid-nineteenth century, with its highly innovative \textit{ingenious} and continuing use of slave labour, is a striking case in point.\textsuperscript{50}

Surinam does not figure in the ongoing debate on the relationship between capitalism and slavery as a mode of labour. There is no reason to suppose that its inclusion would change the parameters of these often rather scholastic debates. Yet in this context, some interesting topics have emerged which open potentially rewarding avenues for research on Surinam slavery. Many recent studies, following up on Sidney W. Mintz’s pioneering work, now portray Caribbean labour relations in the period of slavery as having been far more complex than originally assumed. Specific colonies in specific periods employed various labour arrangements, ranging from slave to semi-bonded to free, at the same time and not necessarily in a unilinear pattern.\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, slaves themselves participated not only as bonded labour in the formal economy, but concomitantly as ‘proto-peasants’ in a largely informal economy.\textsuperscript{51}

The first correction on overly schematic interpretations of Caribbean labour relations during slavery is of minor relevance for Surinam. Initially, some Amerindians were employed, and in the last decades of slavery some more use may have been made of free labour; yet none of this undermined the centrality of slavery. In contrast, there is ample evidence and as yet little research on slaves as proto-peasants. From the early colonization onwards, slaves produced part of their own food, ranging from various crops to livestock. In the early eighteenth century, slaves reportedly bartered and sold such products on the Paramaribo market, and this practice continued all through the slavery period of slavery. The marketing of these products remains largely undocumented.\textsuperscript{52} Perhaps further study of archival records regarding Paramaribo could provide new insights, both into the links between this informal economy and the formal, as well as into the wider question as to how increasing usage of money and the ‘peasant breach’ in the
system of slavery influenced the slaves' attitudes towards wage labour, entrepreneurialism, etc.

7. Demography

Surinam slavery had a particularly bad reputation, and even if some of that reputation was beside the point, the demographic performance of the Surinam slave population indeed testifies to the extreme conditions in the colony.\(^{53}\) In the eighteenth century, an annual natural decrease of 50 per thousand was deemed the norm. This figure improved slightly to 25-30 in the 1820s, but as late as the mid-fifties an annual decrease (of 10 per thousand) remained endemic.\(^{54}\) Small wonder that critics of Surinam slavery took these sad figures to underscore their position, just as planters had earlier used the same figures to underpin their pleas for an increase in African supplies.

From one perspective, demographic analysis seems to confirm the notion of decline after the 1770s. The slave population reached its highest figure in the early 1770s (ca. 60,000), gradually diminishing to 47,000 around 1835 and only 36,000 at Emancipation. However, the demography of this slave population shows a pattern of consistent, albeit incomplete improvement. As indicated above, the figure of 300,000 to 350,000 slaves imported into Surinam to account for an Afro-Surinam population of barely 50,000 at Emancipation in 1863 has been considerably lowered to 215,000.\(^{55}\) Both detailed figures for individual plantations and aggregate data show a gradual amelioration of demographic performance. Moreover, analysis by crop type confirm contemporary notions that sugar plantations demanded a higher demographic toll than coffee plantations.\(^{56}\) At the same time, comparison with other Caribbean colonies continues to keep Surinam at the unfavourable end of a continuum ranging from early self-reproducing colonies to those never attending that stage during slavery.

Future research may help to further substantiate the trends uncovered so far. Perhaps the ecological circumstances in the Guianas account for part of the comparatively poor demographic performance as compared to most of the Caribbean islands. Yet, as is evident from the differential growth rates by crop type, labour regime did make a difference. In this perspective, it may be useful to think of the polder technology of this hydraulic society as particularly consuming in terms of human life. The combination of both an adverse disease environment and extreme labour demands may have caused a vicious circle, in which the continuous entry of new Africans, necessary because of high negative growth rates, postponed creolization with its inherently better demographic performance.\(^{57}\)

Demographic, economic and social history meet in the study of the slave family and kinship. By the early nineteenth century, mainly in response to the abolition of the slave trade, planters had developed more active procreational policies.
Among their explanations for low fertility rates, the alleged lascivious and polygamous lifestyle of the slaves ranked high. In the 1840s Christianization, hitherto neglected altogether, became accepted as a means of imposing the norm of the nuclear family on the slave population, which in turn would contribute to higher fertility rates. At the same time, Christianization meant to help replacing the slaves’ unfortunate leisure preference for a work ethic fit for the projected post-Emancipation plantation dominance. Research on the imposition of this package deal of Christianity, family norms and work ethics is still in its infancy. Its significance for a better grasp of both the slavery period and the still mostly obscure transition period towards a free labour economy is evident.

8. Epilogue

As ongoing research enables us to put Surinam more clearly in a Caribbean perspective, we will continue to find similarities with the regional experience. Perhaps Surinam may be thought of as the hydraulic variant of plantation America, with polder technology allowing for high productivity levels and possibly helping to shape extreme demographic and labour ordeals. Conceivably it may also be possible to think of the vicissitudes of the negotiatietstelsel as a variant on more general patterns. However, in economic as in social history, it will be imperative to think of Surinam in terms of the Caribbean experience in toto.

In the various sections of this paper, I have remarked on research needs. I should acknowledge that my listing, to a degree, is partial and particularly neglects rewarding avenues for further research in social history. Suffice it to add two other promising fields of research, if only to demonstrate the incompleteness of the above suggestions. First, the study of the ecological history of Surinam may prove to be rewarding. From the information available so far, it is evident that much of the colony’s coastal region was reshaped in a relatively short period. However, more detailed research on this process and its long-term consequences is needed. Second, departing from the recent research findings on the dominant plantation sector, it may now be useful to focus on the significance of the non-plantation sectors to the national economy as well. The role of Paramaribo as a nerve center of both international and national trade is an obvious field of study. More specifically, the economic position of the urban free coloureds might be focused on. Also, it may be worthwhile to reassess the role of the hinterland Maroons and Amerindians, whose seclusion from the national economy may, in reality, have been less absolute than has commonly been thought.

Finally, I have suggested that inclusion of Surinam in the various discussions on the place of slavery within capitalism would not alter the parameters of this debate. Even so, if Dutch colonialism is thought of in the sense of capitalism using different forms of labour simultaneously, Surinam will continue to provide an
intriguing counterpoint to Java. Notions of open and closed resources and capitalist use of bonded labour resound from Nieboer’s seminal work through Domar’s model to present-day analyses of Caribbean slavery and bonded labour in Java. We may not find it surprising that without slavery, the Surinam plantation sector collapsed, nor that the Dutch managed to introduce the wildly successful Cultuurstelsel in Java only in the 1830s, and not earlier. Nevertheless, the last word remains to be said on the reasons why capitalism failed so badly in Surinam – not to exploit slave labor that is, but to do so for a clear gain.

NOTES

1 This paper was written during the Spring 1992 semester at The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md. I would like to thank the Fulbright Commission for awarding me a research fellowship, and also my colleagues in the Atlantic Program in History, Culture and Society of Johns Hopkins for their hospitality. In the United States, Sidney W. Mintz and Seymour Drescher commented on an earlier version of this paper, as did Alex van Stipriaan and the editors of Economic and Social History of the Netherlands. While thanking them all for their criticism, which I have tried to incorporate, I, of course, remain responsible for any remaining errors, omissions and misinterpretations.

2 The analogy does not stand close scrutiny. Of course, there is a sequence of sugar producers in the number one position: Santo Domingo first, followed by Barbados, Jamaica, Saint-Domingue and finally Cuba. Yet the analogy ends there. With the exception of Saint-Domingue/Haiti, all colonies remained in the race from the establishment of plantation production until the twentieth century – or surfaced again after initial collapse, as in the Spanish Caribbean.

3 Actually, the Dutch language was marginal in the Dutch Caribbean colonies. In colonial Surinam, Sranan (‘Negro-English’) was the lingua franca. In the Dutch Leeward Antilles off the Latin American coast, Papiamentu served as the vernacular, as against English in the Dutch Windward Antilles. Even so, the pertinent contemporary literature and archival sources are mainly in Dutch.

4 This essay centers mostly on the 1750-1863 period. Very little research has been done so far on the early economic history of Surinam. The only comprehensive study available, covering the period from the late sixteenth century through the 1940s is: C.C. Goslinga, The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast 1580-1680 (Assen 1971); The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas 1680-1791 (Assen 1985); The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam 1791/5-1942 (Assen 1990). Unfortunately, particularly in its chapters on the economic and social history of Surinam, this voluminous trilogy suffers from inconsistency and a lack of rigorous research.

plantages 1720-1870 (Dordrecht 1989), and A. van Stipriaan, Surinaams contrast. 
Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie (Leiden 1993) provide 
extensive bibliographical references for comparative purposes.

6 R.A.J. van Lier, Samenleving in een grensgebied. Een sociaal-historische studie van 
Suriname (The Hague 1949); R.A.J. van Lier, Frontier society. A social analysis of 
the history of Surinam (The Hague 1971).

7 On mythical fertility, see: G. Warren, An impartial description of Surinam upon the 
continent of Guiana in America (London 1667) 16; J.D. H[B]erlein, Beschryvinge van 
de volk-plantinge Zuirname (Leeuwarden 1718) ‘Voorberigt’ n.p.; Th. Pistorius, 
Korte en zakelijke beschryvinge van de Colonie van Zuirname (Amsterdam 1763) 
99; J.J. Hartsinek, Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wilde Kust, in Zuid-America 
(Amsterdam 1770) I: 3, II: 867, 931-932. On the threat posed by marronage, governor 
Mauricius in: Recueyl van egte stukken en bewyzen door Salamon du Plessis […] en 
doar andere; Tegens Mr. Jan Jacob Mauricius (s.l. 1754) IV: 86-89. Eulogies on 
Dutch polder technology in: G.F. Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des 
etablissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes (Amsterdam 
1774) IV: 336; G.F. Raynal, Suppléments a l’histoire philosophique et politique des 
etablissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes (The Hague 1781) 
III: 68. See also: Oostindie, Roosenburg en Mon Bijou, 17-26; Van Stipriaan, 
Surinaams contrast, 79-98.

8 The negotiatiestelsel was established in 1753 by the Amsterdam mayor Deutz in 
order to secure massive credit flow to the Suriname plantation sector. Under this 
system, a merchant house sold bonds in a negotiatie fund. Holders of bonds were 
entitled to annual payment of interest and, after a determined period, repayment of 
their initial investment, in some cases with an additional bonus. The merchant house, 
acting as director of the negotiatiestel, extended credits from this capital to 
plantation owners against a mortgage on their plantations. The latter were to take 
care of debt servicing costs according to a fixed schedule. The merchant house, being 
the sole provider of metropolitan goods to the plantations and receiving plantation 
produce for sale on the Dutch market, benefitted from consignment arrangements 
included in the negotiatie contract. In addition, it was entitled to a share in financial 
transactions. The most extensive study on the negativatiestelsel is: J.P. van de Voort, 
De Westindische plantages van 1720 tot 1795. Financiën en handel (Eindhoven 
1973). A summary may be found in: J.P. van de Voort, ‘Dutch capital in the West 
Indies during the eighteenth century’, Low Countries History Yearbook/Acta Historiae 
However, as the negotiatiestelsel crashed in the 1770s, the subsequent history of the 
system centred in large part on the distribution of losses rather than gains.

9 The best manuals are: A. Blom & F. Visscher Heshuysen, Verhandeling over den 
landbouw, in de Colonie Suriname, volgens eene negentien-jaarige ondervinding 
zamengesteld, door Anthony Blom; en met de noodige ophelderingen en be-
wijsredenen voorzien, door Floris Visscher Heshuysen (Haarlem 1786); A. Blom, 
Verhandeling van den landbouw in de Colonie Suriname (Amsterdam 1787); 
[Eensgezindheid], Verzameling van uitgezochte verhandelingen, betreffende den 
landbouw in de kolonie Suriname: Opgesteld door het Landbouwkundig Genoot-
schap: De Eensgezindheid, gevestigd in de deviste Matapikka, binnen dezelve 
Kolonië. (Amsterdam 1804); M.D. Teenstra, De landbouw in de kolonie Suriname 
voorafgegaan door eene geschied- en natuurkundige beschouwing dier kolonie.
(Groningen 1835); C.J. Hering, *De kultuur en bewerking van het suikerriet bevatende de meest volkome neen nauwkeurigste theoretische en praktische beschrijving van het suikerriet en deszelfs bewerking [...] ten gebruike der planters in al de Nederlandsche overzeesche bezittingen* (Rotterdam 1858). See also: W.H. Lans, *Proeve over de oorzaken van verval en de middelen tot herstel der Surinaamse plantaardigen* (The Hague/Amsterdam 1829); W.H. Lans, *Bijdrage tot de kennis der Kolonie Suriname* (The Hague 1842); A.F. Lammens, *Bijdragen tot de kennis van de Kolonie Suriname [...] tijdvak 1816 tot 1822* [G.A. de Brujine, ed.] (Amsterdam/Leiden 18221, 18462, 19823).


13 In addition, Wolbers suggested the secondary importance of other factors, particularly the material costs and solvency problems connected with the Maroon wars, the disruptions of production and trade caused by international warfare, and intricacies of the *negotiatie* system. Wolbers, *Geschiedenis*, passim.

14 Van Lier, *Samenleving*, 30, 50, 146-147. Around 1830, sugar production in Suriname and Java were roughly at a par. In 1850, exports from Java exceeded those from Suriname fivefold; in 1860, fourteenfold. J.J. Reesse, *De suikerhandel van Amsterdam van 1813 tot 1894* (Amsterdam 1911) xxxiii, xli.


18 It seems unlikely that substantial new collections will be uncovered in the Netherlands. Perhaps an occasional family or company archive may offer unexpected data, as I discovered while working on *Roosenburg*. Scattered collections in the United States may also provide some more information, as will a closer look at the collections in the Public Record Office dating back from the British occupation of Suriname (1799-1802, 1804-1816). Yet if anywhere, new insights may be gained from the at present largely untapped and inaccessible archival collections in Suriname.

19 Van Stipriaan does not provide figures for the small cacao sector.


21 E. Williams, *From Columbus to Castro. The history of the Caribbean 1492-1969* (London 1970) 124; Lammens, *Bijdragen*, 138. For most of the period, manuring was neglected. The major method for revitalization of the cane fields was alluvial irrigation.


24 Van de Voort, *De Westindische plantages*, in particular 153-203.


26 This problem is clearly exposed in: J.L. van Zanden, *Arbeid tijdens het handelskapitalisme: Opkomst en neergang van de Hollandse economie 1350-1850* (Bergen 1991), 95-110. This chapter is one of the few serious attempts to discuss the Suriname economy in the context of Dutch merchant capitalism.


30 Lamur does not include dividends paid to the shareholders among the expenses, which inflates the positive results. Moreover, his estimates on the total capital invested in the plantation essentially derives from no more than two hall-marks, namely estimates of the plantations’ value made in 1705 and 1835, respectively. Lamur utilizes sophisticated computation to reach estimates of the capital invested in each of the in-between years. Nevertheless, with so few even remotely ‘hard’ figures, the methodology by definition remains problematical. H.E. Lamur, The production of sugar and the reproduction of slaves at Vossenburg (Suriname) 1705-1863 (Amsterdam 1987) 54-59. The calculations include a second plantation subsequently merged with Vossenburg, Wayampibo.

31 Oostindie, Roosenburg en Mon Bijou, 19, 204; Van Stipriaan, Surinaams contrast, 125.

32 Van Stipriaan, Surinaams contrast, 266-275. His analysis includes figures on the profitability of the late-coming cotton sector, which after a relatively good decade in the 1830s produced at a loss in the 1840s and 1850s.


34 Van de Voort, De Westindische plantages, 84-90, 210. Compelling as it may be, this argumentation so far has not been substantiated by painstaking longitudinal comparison of price levels, taxes etc.

35 The late eighteenth century emergence of Cuba and the nineteenth century emergence of Puerto Rico proceeded in a framework which had some late ‘mercantilist’ features. Yet these were more than offset by pragmatic policies allowing for local sugarocracies to emerge and, from the 1820s to the 1860s, the consistent Spanish policy of not keeping in line with European abolitionism.


37 In the late 1840s, 24% of all Dutch imports originated from the Netherlands Indies. Suriname was nowhere near. R.T. Griffiths, Industrial retardation in the Netherlands 1830-1850 (The Hague 1979) 33.

38 See above and Oostindie, Roosenburg en Mon Bijou, 1-5, 396-401.

39 Oostindie, Roosenburg en Mon Bijou, 329-341; Van Stipriaan, Surinaams contrast, 304-309.

40 To start with, of course, we should be careful not to impose anachronistic criteria. At all times, it was difficult to establish the perspectives of plantation agriculture. Even if the results had been bad in one period, there was no reason why they should not improve in the next. It was to such reasoning that absentee owners and holders of bonds often responded, accepting optimistic calculations of their more experienced representatives (merchant houses, administrators). In due time, bitter disillu-
sion might well shatter the fragile relationship between the interested parties, resulting in distrust and managerial paralysis. Oostindie, *Roosenburg en Mon Bijou*, 371-382.


43 Adam Smith-like denouncements of slave labour as inherently inefficient and inferior to free labour were very rare indeed. See however: Van Heeckeren van Waliën, *Aanteekeningen*, 90-91.

44 Sugar output plunged from some 16 millions of metric tonnes on the eve of Emancipation to less than 10 million tonnes two decades later. Within a few decades after Emancipation, the contribution of the former slave population to the plantation work force was eclipsed by that of British Indian and subsequently also Javanese indentured labour.

45 The profitability of the Dutch slave trade was remarkably low, according to Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic slave trade*, 276-280. From the above it should be clear that the financial balance of the plantation sector itself was, at best, dubious, allowing for benefits for some but concomitant losses for other actors. On the place of Suriname in Dutch merchant capitalism, see: Van Zanden, *Arbeid tijdens het handelskapitalisme*, 93-110. On the nineteenth-century Dutch sugar industry, see: Griffiths, *Industrial retardation*, 88-92. On the Dutch Industrial Revolution, see: J.A. de Jonge, *De industrialisatie in Nederland tussen 1850 en 1914* (Amsterdam 1968). Drescher strongly argues against the relevance of distinguishing between mercantile and industrial capitalism as a clue to explain the emergence of abolitionism; Drescher, ‘Capitalism and antislavery’, and personal correspondence.


50 E.g., the use of Amerindians and African slaves in the early Spanish Caribbean, of indentured white labour and African slaves in the early British and French West Indies or, in mid-nineteenth century Cuba, of slaves, Chinese indentured labourers and free white and coloured labour. Nineteenth-century Cuba provides the spectacular example of a colony at once reviving African slavery and imposing semi-bonded labour on a previously free, both white and coloured population.

52 Herlein, Beschryvinge, 95. Also in: Hartsinck, Beschryving, II: 915-916; Blom & Heshuyse, Verhandeling, 383-384, [Eensgezindheid], Verzameling, 14-15; A. von Sack, Reize naer Surinamen, verblif aldaar, en terugtog over Noord-Amerika naar Europa (Haarlem 1821) 137-138; Lammens, Bijdragen, 113; Teenstra, Landbouw, II: 430-434; G. van Lennep Coster, Herinneringen mijner reizen naar onder‐


54 Blom, Verhandeling, 82; J.D. Kuhn, Beschouwing van den toestand der Surinaam‐
sche plantagie slaven (Amsterdam 1828) 23; J. van der Smissen, Over de eman‐

cipatie der slaven (Haarlem 1861) 171.

55 The dramatic decrease of the slave population between the 1830s and 1860s was, to some extent, reflected in a growth of the free coloured population.


57 Studies on virtually all slave societies demonstrate higher births rates and lower death rates for creole as opposed to African slaves. Research on Suriname confirms this rule.

58 See: M. Oomens, ‘Veelwijverij en andere losbandige praktijken: Bevolkingspolitiek tegenover Surinaamse plantageslavinnen in de 19e eeuw’, Jaarboek voor Vrouwen‐


59 To a degree, this variant was typical of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo as well. Unfortunately, the broad study of Caribbean plantation technologies by Watts ignores this Guiana innovation to the West Indian ‘Barbados model’; D. Watts, The West Indies. Patterns of development, culture and environmental change since 1492 (Cambridge 1987).

60 See, however: P. Boomgaard, ‘The tropical rain forests of Suriname: Exploitation and management 1600-1975’, New West Indian Guide 66 (1992) 207-235; Van Stipriaan, Surinaams contrast, 46-69. Of course, the resilience of the Guianas to plantation agriculture was far greater than it was in the Caribbean islands, where large territories were virtually deforested and remodelled with a thoroughness that not only spoiled much of the original beauty, but subsequently posed serious threats of erosion.

61 Useful groundwork is to be found in: G.A. de Bruijne, Paramaribo, stadsgeografi‐
sche studies van een ontwikkelingsland (Bussum 1976).

62 E.g., there is circumstantial evidence of Maroons supplying services and goods (wood) to plantations. Obviously, the other way around, they thought of the supply of certain goods from Paramaribo as crucial. On Maroon subsistence agriculture, see: R. Price, ‘Subsistence on the periphery: Crops, cookers, and labour among eighteenth‐


bean 1800-1960 (Basingstoke/London 1985) 31-45; Boomgaard, ‘Why work for wages?’