

### Karwan Fatah-Black

*White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Metropolitan Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650–1800.* Leiden: Brill, 2015. 226 pp. (Cloth US\$134.00)

If the Dutch realm remains somewhat underrepresented in the field of Atlantic World studies, this is through no fault of the editorial team at Brill, which has published a steady stream of relevant work in recent years. *White Lies and Black Markets*, the latest contribution, is a short, tight study of Suriname's shipping connections over the course of 150 years. Karwan Fatah-Black, a historian at Leiden University, carried out this research while a doctoral fellow affiliated with the university's multiyear Dutch Atlantic Connections project. He takes us from the colony's tenuous beginnings in the mid-seventeenth century as an English outpost through the end of the eighteenth century, when the emergence of the United States as an American power and the rise of large-scale oceanic freighting transformed regional trade. Most of the analysis centers on the period when the colony was under the control of the Dutch-chartered Suriname Company (*Sociëteit van Suriname*), 1683–1795.

True to the Dutch historiographic tradition, this volume is rich with economic data, if rather short on conceptual or theoretical analysis. Drawing primarily on shipping records, Fatah-Black traces the movement of vessels to and from Paramaribo as they crossed both regional waters and imperial domains. He argues that, rather than being subsumed to Dutch interests, Suriname's economy was tied to much wider economic networks in the Americas and beyond. Far from being on the fringe of empire, as it is usually depicted, Suriname was “integrated in globe-spanning networks of trade and migration” (p. 12), Fatah-Black argues. The “white lies” referred to in the title appear to be similar to the well-known Spanish colonial phenomenon of *obedezgo pero no cumpro* (“I obey but do not comply”) as integral to the functioning of the entire colonial enterprise. Fatah-Black suggests that the lies and deceit inherent in such duplicity, along with the “black markets” tied to illicit transimperial contraband trade, were central to the functioning of Suriname's shipping networks, and thus to the colony's entire economy. In that sense, Suriname did not, perhaps, stray as far from the Dutch colonization model as he seems to imply; there is a well-established and growing historiography that documents the Dutch penchant for pursuing profit across imperial boundaries; see, for example, Gert Oostindie & Jessica V. Roitman (eds.), *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800* (2014).

Empire remains at the heart of this study. Although Fatah-Black argues that it was “Atlantic networks beyond Dutch control” that propelled the colony's development (p. 205), we get little sense of how these networks actually func-

tioned, what these transimperial connections meant for local denizens, or how they played out in colonial power dynamics in the port city of Paramaribo. The treatment of colonial subjects is limited almost exclusively to Europeans from the upper classes: well-established merchants, governors and council members, and plantation owners. Chapter 4, "The Ascent of the Surinamers," is a thorough account of the rise of this local elite, which Fatah-Black tells us was a "contradictory process" (p. 61) due to their close ties to the metropolis.

In spite of the role they played in shaping the colony's economy and society, Suriname's Sephardic Jewish merchants and planters seem almost tangential. Although Fatah-Black discusses some important Jewish figures, most notably Samuel Cohen Nassy (the first Jewish notary public in the Americas), there is no exploration of their insertion into the extensive and well-documented Sephardic networks of the Atlantic and beyond, nor of the way these intersected with the transimperial networks that are the book's subject. Similarly, while Chapters 5 and 6 provide an overview of the development of the slave trade to Suriname, the narrow focus on the shipping aspects of this trade means that the study gives short shrift to the contribution Africans made to colonial society and culture. There is no discussion of ethnic origins, although shipping records surely would provide some clues. People of African descent, enslaved and free, scarcely appear as more than anonymous commodities and labor for the colony. One also wonders how the colony's particular economic configuration shaped the contours of its slave society.

With scant attention to the people involved, it is difficult to understand exactly how the process of "evading metropolitan authority" played out in Suriname, and how the colony compares with other Atlantic trade centers that thrived on transimperial trade. Although the book focuses more on commodities and products than on people and processes, it nevertheless makes a contribution to the English-language historiography of the Dutch realm, providing useful information about a colony that often gets short shrift.

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