The Limits of Atlantic Revolution: Indigenous Power, Spectres of Saint-Domingue, and the Maracaibo Conspiracy of 1799

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Abstract: In the Maracaibo of 1799, Spanish authorities claimed to have uncovered a revolutionary plot to overthrow the Spanish monarchy and install a republic modeled on Saint-Domingue. In existing historical accounts, Spanish officials, free colored (*pardo*) militiamen in Maracaibo, and an Atlantic crew of sailors coming from Port-au-Prince play the leading roles. Although Spanish officials also claimed Guajiro Indians were coordinating and cooperating, they appear as peripheral actors. As Guajiros and their allies were more numerous and powerful than any non-Indian group in the area, and controlled the territory and waterways on which part of the trade with New Granada depended, we signal the centrality of indigenous patterns of trade, warfare, politics, and diplomacy to explain events in this corner of the revolutionary Atlantic. Thus, and in order to specify the limits of the Atlantic revolution, we argue for the need to study micro-histories of particular Guajiro leaders and their kinship-territorial networks, as well as Spanish officials and captains and crews of particular ships from European colonies.

Keywords: Haitian Revolution; Atlantic world; Indigenous sovereignty; Colonial Venezuela/ New Granada; *Pardo* militias.

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Figure 1: Sinamaica and surrounding area, General map of the *Provincia de el Hacha* (1776)

Source: AGI, Mapas y Planos (MP), Panamá, Santafé y Quito, 190 bis.

Introduction

On May 6, 1799, two French corsairs from Port-au-Prince, Brutus and the Republican Patrol, arrived in Maracaibo. Owned and captained by two free men of color from Port-au-Prince, brothers Jean Baptiste and Auguste Gaspard Boze, the two corsairs brought with them a British ship they had seized, the Harlequin. With permission from the Governor of Maracaibo, they came to port to fix the mizzenmast on one of the ships.[1]

Once anchored, thirty-five-year-old Francisco Javier Pirela – a tailor, father of six, and second lieutenant in the company of the free colored (*pardo*) militia Pirela's father commanded – boarded the ships and met the brothers Gaspard Boze. He also met ensign José Román, a twenty-year old mulatto polyglot from St. Thomas who had been educated in Europe, and oversaw The Harlequin. Most likely, Román knew about republican anti-slavery debates as well as revolutionary ideas and movements; in St. Thomas, where he was headed to see

1 Archivo General de la Nación de Venezuela (AGNV), *La Colonia, Diversos* LXXIV, f. 242-251, apud MANZANILLA, Ángel. **La sublevación de Francisco Javier Pirela, Maracaibo, 1799-1800**: Una nueva perspectiva histórica e historiográfica. Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 2012, p. 256-61.

family, he moved in revolutionary circles.[2] Allegedly, between May 6 and May 19, Pirela, Román, and the Gaspard Boze brothers began plotting to overthrow the Spanish monarchy, and introduce a republican system, with Pirela as the new Governor of Maracaibo who would empower free people of color. 200 *pardo* militiamen under Pirela's command would use arson to create panic, seize the armory and the gunpowder storehouse, and murder fleeing Spanish clergy and nobles. The secret password for the conspiracy would be "Antillen".[3]

The alleged conspirators lacked allies among free people of color in Maracaibo.[4] According to Pirela's brother Román showed up at the Pirela household at 8 PM to see Francisco Javier, and wrote something down on paper for him.[5] At 9 PM, Pirela told a subordinate, first captain Tomás Ochoa, about the plot, hoping to persuade him to join. But Ochoa had served Spain faithfully in Santo Domingo, and by 10 PM, had tipped off Governor Juan de Ignacio Armada.[6] When the call to arms sounded at 3 AM, six hundred of Maracaibo's free colored and white militiamen seized the crew of the two French corsairs and the British frigate, most of whom were asleep aboard the Harlequin. The Gaspard Boze brothers convinced the seventy-six members of the multinational, multi-ethnic crew to surrender.[7] By 5 AM, they were under arrest.[8] Crew members of Brutus came from fifteen different places, including Guinea, Veracruz, Portugal, Galicia, Martinique, Puerto Cabello, Leogane, Les Cayes, Jeremias, and especially Port-au-Prince. Crew members aboard the other ships included free men of color from New York, Charleston, Guadeloupe, Santo Domingo, and St. Thomas, as well as men from Sweden, England, and Wales. Each had at least one member from Curaçao.

On May 20, all were immediately put on trial against the backdrop of Guajiro attacks on Sinamaica, the lone remaining fortified Spanish garrison settlement in the Guajira peninsula, northwest of Maracaibo.[9] According to Governors Armada and his successor, Fernando Miyares, the conspiracy had been planned with Guajiro Indian cooperation, extended the conspiracy in Cartagena in April 1799, and had arms, munitions, and men waiting in Curaçao and Saint-Domingue.[10] This became the official version of events and, ironically, of nationalist historiography, but evidence for it is thin.[11]

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2 AGNV, *La Colonia, Gobernación y Capitanía General de Venezuela* LXXX, f. 76-76v; LXXXI, f. 306-307v, apud ibidem, p. 384-385, 411-412.
3 AGNV, *La Colonia, Diversos* LXXIV, f. 1-11, apud ibidem, p. 263-276.
4 AGNV, *Criminales* (*C)*, Letra M, Segunda Pieza (SP), f. 237-238v, apud BRICEÑO, Fabio. **Antillen**: La sublevación de Maracaibo de 1799. Thesis (MA) – Universidad Católica Andrés Bello Caracas, 2012, p. 282.
5 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, Primera Pieza (PP), f. 95-95v, apud ibidem, p. 254
6 Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Estado (*E*) 71, n. 3, f. 1-2. See also MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 153.
7 For the composition of the ships' crews, see ibidem, p. 166-170.
8 See ibidem, p. 172-173.
9 AGNV, *La Colonia*, *Gobernación y Capitanía General de Venezuela* LXVIII, f. 15, apud ibidem, p. 296. A note on ethnic terminology: Like the terms Aymara and Quechua in Bolivia, the word Wayuu comes from nineteenth-century ethnology, and has been used for the purposes of self-identification since the 1970s. Following the most common colonial usage, we refer to Guajiros, while acknowledging that Spanish colonial officials imposed the term on people who would not have used it to identify themselves. Neither term is fully adequate to the realities of the late eighteenth century.
10 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP, f. 71-73v, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 251-52.
11 Ibidem, p. 20-21.

This paper puts Guajiro power, politics, and sovereignty at the center of the story of the Maracaibo conspiracy. It explains how Guajiro structures of law, property rights, and kinship shaped patterns of conflict with Spanish authorities, as well as alliance and trade with non-Spanish ships' captains and crews. It also describes trade relations between Guajiro leaders and ships' captains and crews from Saint-Domingue, specifying the limits of revolutionary ideas and actors. There may well have been discussion of abolishing monarchy through insurrection among a handful of the crew and Pirela, yet nothing so cohesive as a conspiracy with Guajiro Indians materialized.

For reasons this essay explores, the political soil in and around Maracaibo was not fertile for revolutionary republicanism. Scholars have debated the importance of the Haitian revolution for slaves, slave owners, and free people of color throughout the Americas, including New Granada and Venezuela, but we know much less about its impact on places where indigenous peoples were predominant.[12] What did the Maracaibo conspiracy of 1799, and the presence of ships from Saint-Domingue, signify for the unconquered, stateless Guajiro Indians who comprised the majority of the Guajira peninsula's inhabitants, and controlled its territory, including the roads and rivers through which trade goods moved? How can we explain encounters Guajiros had with captains and crews of ships from revolutionary Saint-Domingue in Chimare, the indigenous people the Spanish called the Paraujanos, and Spanish settlers at the Sinamaica garrison, north of Maracaibo?

Scholars have long understood the Maracaibo conspiracy teleologically, as one of a series of antecedents to Venezuelan independence.[13] Ángel Manzanilla Celis has convincingly argued that the conspiracy lacked support among *pardos* (or anyone else) in Maracaibo. He chronicles events that followed the arrest and imprisonment of the alleged conspirators. However, Manzanilla also hews closely to the vision of Spanish governors. Fabio Briceño argues for the need for critical distance from colonial sources, contending that local Spanish officials framed innocent men: their version of events was ratified by the Audiencia of Caracas, the colony's highest court, and the Council of the Indies in Seville. Most recently, Cristina

12 DURANGO, Miguel. **Contagiando la insurrección**: Los indios guajiros y los revolucionarios franceses, 1769-1804, Thesis (M.A.) – Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, 2013; FERRER, Ada. **Freedom's Mirror**: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; GEGGUS, David (org.). **The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World**. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001; LASSO, Marixa. **Myths of Harmony**: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia 1795-1831. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007; MÚNERA, Alfonso. **El fracaso de la nación**: Región, clase, y raza en el Caribe colombiano, 1717-1821. Bogotá: Planeta, 2008[1998]; PÉREZ MORALES, Edgardo. **El gran diablo hecho barco**: Corsarios, esclavos, y revolución en Cartagena y el Gran Caribe, 1791-1817. Bucaramanga: UIS, 2012; PÉREZ MORALES, Edgardo. **No Limits to Their Sway**: Cartagena's Privateers and the Masterless Caribbean in the Age of Revolutions. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018; RUETTE-ORIJUELA Krisna and SORIANO, Cristina. Remembering the Slave Rebellion of Coro: Historical Memory and Politics in Venezuela. **Ethnohistory** v. 63, n. 2, p. 327-350, 2016.

13 BESSON, Juan. **Historia del estado Zulia**. V. 1. Maracaibo: Editorial Hermanos Belloso Rossell, 1943, p. 9-11, 298-303; MAGALLANES, Manuel Vicente. **Luchas e insurrecciones en la Venezuela colonial**. Caracas: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo s.a., 1972, p. 7-10, 140-143; SALCEDO-BASTARDO, J.L. **Historia fundamental de Venezuela**. Universidad Central de Venezuela, Ediciones de la Biblioteca Caracas 1972, p. 184, 193-197, 210; BRITO FIGUEROA, Federico. **El problema de tierra y esclavos en la historia de Venezuela**. 2nd ed. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Ediciones de la biblioteca, 1985, p. 205, 234-236.

Soriano demonstrates that many *pardos* in Maracaibo owned slaves, and would therefore have opposed abolition, but in her view, sailors accused of plotting had larger revolutionary political goals, rather than plunder, as their motive. Aline Helg notes that political cooperation between Guajiros and the captains and crews of the three ships was a figment of an overheated Spanish imagination. Clément Thibaud mentions such contacts as evidence of how the Haitian Revolution affected actors whose goals differed from abolition.[14]

As is generally the case with indigenous peoples in Atlantic history, the presence of Guajiros in the Maracaibo conspiracy has been a marginal note.[15] It seems that scholars have not yet looked at Maracaibo through the lens of Guajiro power and politics. Our essay foregrounds Guajiro agency in the making of a revolutionary Atlantic, although we ultimately question the efficacy of abstract ethno-racial categories, and caution against viewing the Guajiros as a unitary subject. While radical new ideas about freedom, abolition, and racial equality did indeed circulate along with ships, sailors, and commodities, their impact depended on prior configurations of social power into which they were inserted.[16]

No one alleged that slaves from Maracaibo played a part in the conspiracy. Further, a political gulf separated free black monarchist militiamen in Maracaibo, who numbered in the hundreds, and free republicans of color from Saint-Domingue and the non-Spanish Caribbean, who numbered several dozen. These political-juridical terms would not have made sense in the kin-based, matrilineal social formation in which the unconquered Guajiro Indians produced and reproduced themselves, in part by incorporating African captives into family networks, re-exporting others to the Caribbean or the Andean interior, and exporting indigenous captives.

The first section describes the Guajira homeland – a peninsula at the northernmost tip of South America, of which Maracaibo forms the southeastern corner – details conflicts between Guajiros and settler colonists near Maracaibo, as well as economic cooperation between Guajiros and the captains and crews of ships from Saint-Domingue in the 1790s. The second section narrates the Maracaibo conspiracy in Atlantic context, analyzing political-ideological differences among free people of color from different parts of the Caribbean and beyond. By

14 SORIANO, Cristina. **Tides of Revolution**: Information, Insurgencies, and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018, p. 186-195; HELG, Aline. A Fragmented Majority: Indians and Slaves in the Colombian Caribbean during the Haitian Revolution. *In*: GEGGUS, David (org.). **The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World**. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, p. 157-175; THIBAUD, Clément. **Libérer le Nouveau Monde**. La fondation des premières républiques hispaniques (Colombie et Venezuela, 1780-1820). Bécherel, Les Perséides, Le monde Atlantique, 2015, p. 124-126.

15 MCDONNELL, Michael. Introduction: Rethinking the Age of Revolution. **Atlantic Studies** v. 13, n. 3, p. 301-14, 2016; BAHAR, Matthew R. People of the Dawn, People of the Door: Indian Pirates and the Violent Theft of an Atlantic World. **Journal of American History,** v. 101, n. 2, p. 401-426, 2014; BUSHNELL, Amy Turner. Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493–1825. *In*: GREENE, Jack and MORGAN, Phillip (org.). **Atlantic History:** A Critical Appraisal. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 191-222; COHEN, Paul. Was There an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the limits of a historiographical concept. **History of European Ideas** v. 34, n. 4, p. 388-410, 2008.

16 By specifying the limits of Atlantic revolutionary currents of thought and action, we intend to complement and extend the path-breaking work of Julius Scott, Marcus Rediker, and Peter Linebaugh. REDIKER, Marcus and LINEBAUGH, Peter. **The Many-Headed Hydra:** Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000; SCOTT, Julius. **The Common Wind:** Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution. New York: Verso, 2020.

revisiting the itineraries of the ships and people involved in the conspiracy, the third section offers an account of the conspiracy that questions the official version of events. The conclusion signals theoretical and methodological implications of the paper's findings.

Guajiro Country

Guajiro Indians were the wealthiest, most militarily powerful, and numerous human group in the region around Maracaibo, numbering perhaps 40,000, with at least 7,000 warriors armed with rifles and bows and arrows.[17] Like the Kuna in the Darién or the Mosquito in Nicaragua, the Guajiros did not exist as a separate ethnic group prior to contact with Europeans, and, following the impact of epidemics, fused multiple ethnicities and runaway slaves into one people at the moment of their emergence in the mid-sixteenth century. Thus the Guajiros appear to have been born out of a shatter zone similar to the one that gave rise to the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek, groups which also absorbed runaway slaves at the moment of their emergence, following epidemics in Spanish Florida, Louisiana, and New Spain.[18]

Like the Comanche and the Apache in New Spain, the Guaycuru in the Chaco, or the Mapuche in Patagonia, in the eighteenth century, the most powerful Guajiro merchant-warriors were equestrian pastoralists.[19] Their economy included exports of neighboring Cocina slaves, salt, pearls, lumber, mules, horses, and especially cattle, and imports of arms, munitions, gunpowder, textiles, liquor, tobacco, foodstuffs, and African slaves.[20] Though Spanish officials frequently referred to the Guajiro nation, and tried to create it, Guajiros lived in a decentralized society situated in a semi-arid environment. *Eiirru'kú*, or matrilineal clans (the translation is inexact), were composed of smaller extended families called *apü'shis*, which practiced transhumance, and disputed micro-territories and micro-sovereignties, as well as control of micro-climates with access to fresh water. This pattern of social life helped them maintain autonomy from European powers: in the absence of centralized leadership, no divide and rule strategy would work. Yet it also meant that Guajiro social, political, and economic life was characterized by endemic factionalism, competition, and feuding over property rights in herds, pastures, and ports, regulated by Guajiro legal stipulations on reparation of damages.[21]

17 For Guajiro population figures, see BARRERA MONROY, Eduardo. **Mestizaje, comercio y resistencia**: La Guajira durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII. Bogotá: ICANH, 2001, p. 235-37, based on sources from Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia (AGNC), Colonia, *Milicias y Marina (MM)* 119, f. 375-378; *MM* 124, f. 532-585; *MM* 138, f. 860; NARVÁEZ DE LA TORRE, Antonio. **Escritos de dos economistas coloniales**: don Antonio de Narváez y La Torre y don José Ignacio de Pombo. Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1965, p. 35-36; SILVESTRE, Francisco. **Descripción del reino de Santa Fe de Bogotá 1789**. Bogotá: Biblioteca Popular de Cultura Colombiana, 1950, p. 83.

18 WEBER, David. **Bárbaros**: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 249. SCHWARTZ, Stuart; SALOMON, Frank. New Peoples and New Kinds of People: Adaptation, Readjustment, and Ethnogenesis in South American Indigenous Societies. *In*: SCHWARTZ, Stuart; SALOMON, Frank (org.). **Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas**, v. III, part 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p. 443-501.

19 WEBER, op. cit., p. 71-75, 86.

20 BARRERA MONROY, op. cit., p. 38-45.

21 For a Spanish understanding of Guajiro law in the eighteenth century, see ROSA, José Nicolas de la. **Floresta**

Power was determined by the size of herds, the breadth and territorial reach of kinship networks, and especially fresh water, pastures, and ports that an extended family (*apü'shi*) or clan (*eiirru'kú*) could use and market. To block trade with British, French, and Dutch ships on the eastern side of the Guajira peninsula, where the Spanish coast guard was absent, in 1774 Spanish officials founded Sinamaica as a frontier garrison settlement, with 63 families and 216 people. The goal was to protect Maracaibo from Guajiro invasion and guarantee colonial property rights in cattle and land in *haciendas*. Though Sinamaica was conceived as the bulwark of Spanish colonial settlement, most settlers were mixed-race *zambos* and *mulatos* with non-Guajiro mothers, rather than Spaniards or *criollos*, of which there were few outside of Riohacha and Maracaibo.

The area of the Guajira coast near Sinamaica was one of the most heavily trafficked with non-Spanish ships. Spanish strategy led to the construction of a series of frontier garrisons in the 1770s, none of which proved viable, as the Guajiros laid siege to them, driving settlers out.[22] Riohacha was threatened with Guajiro invasion in 1789, and in 1790 the Spanish abandoned Pedraza, a settlement on the road between Riohacha and Maracaibo. Between 1790 and 1792, Spain transferred jurisdiction of Sinamaica to the Captaincy General of Venezuela, headquartered in Caracas and administered from Maracaibo, which lay due south of Sinamaica. Thus by 1799, Sinamaica was Spain's only fortified settlement left in the Guajira peninsula (a territory the size of contemporary Alagoas).[23]

Guajiro attacks on Sinamaica in 1799 stemmed from Spanish violations of Guajiro law, which stipulated that the extended family of an attacker had to pay damages – in the form of livestock and other commodities (pearls, textiles, and jewelry especially) – to the victims' family, or else vengeance ensued. Specifically, in 1797, a Spanish official at Sinamaica shot and killed a man known as "El Negro", who allegedly tried to steal the Spaniard's weapon.[24] By the terms of Guajiro law, all Spanish officials and settlers were responsible, rather than the individual Spanish official. "El Negro" was the brother of Yaurepara and Parieme, the two most important Guajiro leaders in the area around Sinamaica. Most likely, "El Negro" was a *zambo*: the offspring of a Guajiro mother and father of African descent. His mother's line made him

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de la Santa Iglesia de catedral de la ciudad y provincia de Santa Marta. Barranquilla: Publicaciones de la Biblioteca Departamental del Atlántico, 1945[1741], p. 280-281. For the best anthropological treatment of Guajiro law, see GUERRA, Weildler. **La disputa y la palabra**: La ley en la sociedad wayuu. Bogotá: Ministerio de la Cultura, 2002. See also, BARRERA MONROY, op. cit., p. 45-50; BOLINDER, Gustaf. **Indians on Horseback**. London: Dennis Dobson, 1957, p. 91-102; CAMACHO, Alvaro; SEGURA, Nora. La institución jurídica. *In:* GUHL, Ernesto (org.). **Indios y blancos en la Guajira**. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1963. p. 89-114; GOULET, Jean. **Guajiro Social Organization and Religion**. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1978; WESTON, Julian A. **The Cactus Eaters**. London: H.F.&G. Witherby, 1937, p. 159-169.

22 BARRERA MONROY, op. cit., p. 197-210; HYLTON, Forrest. 'The Sole Owners of the Land': Empire, War, and Authority in the Guajira Peninsula, 1761-1779. **Atlantic Studies,** v. 13, n. 6, p. 315-344, 2016; KUETHE, Alan. The Pacification Campaign on the Riohacha Frontier, 1772-1779. **Hispanic American Historical Review,** v. 50, n. 3, p. 467-481, 1970; KUETHE, Alan. **Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773-1808**. Gainsville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1978, p. 130-137; POLO ACUÑA, José. **Indígenas, poderes y mediaciones en la guajira en la transición de la colonia a la república**. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2012, p. 183-230.

23 POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 170-172, 235, 276.

24 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 81, f. 675.

Guajiro, and put him in conflict with settler colonists, some of which were *zambos* with non-Guajiro mothers.[25] This contrast indicates the complexity of racial-ethnic identities and political solidarities in the Guajira in the Age of Revolution, or perhaps their simplicity: in a matrilineal society, loyalty was defined by kinship through the mother's line, and authority wielded by the mother's brothers.

Zambo leadership was an important feature of Guajiro country near Sinamaica, and one of the distinctive characteristics of the sub-region. Though little is known about "El Negro" other than his kinship relations, he may have been like Martín Rodríguez, a *zambo* ally of Yaurepara and Parieme, whose father was from Riohacha and whose mother was Guajiro from Cojoro – one of the Guajira's most important ports for trade with British, Dutch, and French ships, north of Sinamaica. Rodríguez sold cattle in Riohacha and cloth and liquor in Cojoro, and one of his wives lived in Sinamaica. He was fluent in English and Dutch and/or Papiamento, had been to Jamaica, and most likely Curaçao.[26]

Guajiro authorities like Martín Rodríguez, Yaurepara, and Parieme considered themselves sovereign. In 1798, Guajiro leaders traveled to Les Cayes for trade and festivities, and returned dressed in the latest French styles.[27] That same year, Yaurepara was received with honors in Riohacha and Maracaibo, as Spanish authorities were forced to accept Guajiro law. As the Governor of Maracaibo wrote to his counterpart in Riohacha:

> I have Yaurepara here in this city with a large delegation… ratifying the agreed upon conditions… with both sides paying equally according to the offenses received as defined by their laws and customs, namely: on their part, 30 mules, 10 horses, 15 head of cattle: on our part, everything they asked for before… and other things … but in this city no one knows how to make golden eagles… and Yaurepara expects to receive the two he has asked for.[28]

It is worth highlighting the fact that payment for damages was calculated according to Guajiro, not Spanish law. Golden eagles symbolized and sealed peace pacts to end conflict; few objects were assigned higher value in Guajiro culture. Thus the above quotation illustrates how dramatically skewed power relations were in favor of Yaurepara, Parieme, and their Guajiro kin, as well as how clearly some Spanish officials understood Guajiro law in relation to property rights and the loss of human life.

As the Governor of Riohacha, José Medina Galindo, knew from experience, respect for Guajiro law was the key to peace and prosperity for everyone without Guajiro mothers – Spaniards, *criollos*, *negros*, *zambos*, and *mulatos* – as well as Guajiros themselves. Medina Galindo described Guajiros as follows:

> The moment that [our] troops set foot on land, they will find 8,000-10,000 men armed with weapons; they are robust, sober, tough, and warlike, fierce enemies

25 POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 83.
26 AGNV, *Gobierno y Capitanía General* LXXX, f. 78-78v, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 386-387; Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), *Secretaría de Estado y del Despacho de Guerra* (*SGU*) 7186, n. 27, f. 10-14.
27 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 59, f. 913-914.
28 AGNC, Colonia, *Consulados* (*C*) 3, f. 588-589.

> of ours, who will find shelter, an abundance of meat, some refreshment, and very few troops, militiamen, or people willing to oppose them.[29]

Medina acknowledged Guajiro military superiority.

In 1799, Martín Rodríguez, Yaurepara, and Parieme signed a treaty with the Spanish based on the payment of damages for the loss of human life. Guajiros agreed not to come to Sinamaica armed, and to let the Spanish travel through Guajiro territory without paying tribute and tolls. Yet soon after the pact was signed, the Spanish killed two important Guajiro leaders without paying damages, so Guajiros killed four settlers and appropriated 2,000 head of cattle.[30] Spanish officials then kidnapped one of Yaurepara's relatives, a woman. Fully aware of potential consequences of escalating conflict by violating Guajiro laws of war, which mandated that women and children were exempt, the Governor of Riohacha urged the Governor of Maracaibo to let her go – to no avail.[31]

Even as Guajiro attacks on Sinamaica escalated between May 1 and May 20, 1799, Spanish officials did not initially tie them to the alleged conspiracy in Maracaibo on May 19.[32] Rather, the Governor of Riohacha blamed the Governor of Maracaibo for the outbreaks of Guajiro rustling and violence, and considered them a consequence of violating the peace agreements. Lacking experience trading, fighting, and negotiating with Guajiros, the Governor of Maracaibo urged the Crown to repeat the policy of frontal assault advocated in the mid-1770s.[33] Cooler heads in Riohacha knew how destructive such an approach would be. The issue of Spanish sovereignty was thus about jurisdiction, not only between colonial authorities and Guajiro leaders, but among colonial authorities themselves.

Revolutionary Times

In these years of widespread warfare in the Caribbean, French, Dutch, and Danish ships came to Maracaibo as allies; until April 1799, U.S. ships came as neutral. After the British captured Trinidad in 1797, British corsairs threatened the Spanish coast from Venezuela to the Guianas. The Gulf of Maracaibo was no exception. Given the French-inspired conspiracies among slaves uncovered in Cuba and Santo Domingo in 1795, however, as well as the slave risings in Coro, Curaçao, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Dominica that same year, Spanish authorities were concerned about the prospect of revolutionary contagion, especially after they discovered a republican conspiracy in La Guaira and Caracas in 1797; another in Cartagena, planned to coincide with Easter in April 1799, in which former slaves from Saint-Domingue played the leading role; and two more, in Santiago de Cuba and Surinam, in April and August 1799.[34]

29 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 39, f. 1040; *Miscelánea* (*M*) 31, f. 642-648.
30 AGS, *SGU* 7186, n. 27, f. 9, image (img.) 18.
31 POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 175-179.
32 MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 119-125.
33 AGS, *SGU* 7247, n. 22, f. 9-15, img. 17-30.
34 MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 76-113.

Yet Maracaibo was substantially different from Cartagena, Caracas, and Santiago, all of which had large populations of urban slaves. While there were 10,000 slaves in the greater Maracaibo region, compared to 40,000 in the region centered on Caracas, the majority lived on the southern shore of the lake, far from the city, while the small number of slaves who lived in Maracaibo worked as domestics and artisans.[35] Free people of color worked as artisans, as evidenced in part by those who offered their services aboard Brutus and the Republican Patrol: shoemakers, tailors, seamstresses, fruit vendors, painters, laundrymen, barbers, petty traders, and import merchants.[36] They also worked as joiners, carpenters, masons, and smiths.[37]

Where it existed, cooperation between Guajiros and ship captains from Saint-Domingue was economic rather than political. The British advanced on Martinica, St. Lucia, and Guadeloupe, and implemented a naval blockade of Saint-Domingue from 1792-96, so trade between Saint-Domingue and the Guajira increased, especially out of Les Cayes. In 1796, for example, the year that André Rigaud requested help from the Governor of Riohacha to provision his 10,000 troops in southern Saint-Domingue, the Spanish coast guard captured La Hermana, a ship from Les Cayes. Its crew made it to shore and took up arms with the Guajiros, with whom they traded cattle for guns, powder, flint, and liquor. With Guajiro help, the crew of La Hermana then continued north on foot to Bahía Honda, where they hoped to meet up with ships from Les Cayes.[38]

For Spanish authorities, by mid-1799, there were "irrefutable clues" about a major conspiracy with allies in Caracas, Cartagena, Curaçao, Saint-Domingue.[39] Two years before, Spaniards discovered a republican conspiracy in Caracas and La Guaira.[40] Another was discovered in Cartagena in April 1799, led by the enslaved. Manuel Yturen, a black militia sergeant, reported a plot planned by people from Saint Domingue, who counted on support from the local population. Allegedly, rebels wanted to murder the whites and plunder the royal treasury.[41] There were rumors that conspirators in Maracaibo had requested people and supplies from Curaçao.[42] Sailors fraternized with one group of Guajiro Indians, although not the group that attacked Sinamaica. Additionally, the French provided firearms, ammunition, and two "pieces of artillery" to overthrow Sinamaica.[43] The British were also involved, working through the *zambo* leader Martín Rodríguez, as well as Yaurepaura, supplying them with weapons at Cojoro.[44]

35 BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 85.
36 Ibidem, p. 146.
37 PONS, François Raymond Joseph de. **Travels in Parts of South America** 1801, 1802, 1803 & 1804; Containing a Description of the Captain Generalship of Caracas, with an Account of the Laws, Commerce, and Natural Productions of that Country; As Also a View of the Customs and Manners of the Spaniards and Native Indians. London: R. Phillips, 1806, v. 2, p. 278-280.
38 DURANGO, op. cit., p. 50-62.
39 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 15, f. 164.
40 Archivo General de Indias (AGI), *E* 58, n. 30; *E* 67, n. 67.
41 AGI, *E* 52, n. 76; *E* 52, n. 81; *E* 58, N. 29; *E* 71, n. 3; AGS, *SGU* 7247, n. 26. See also: HELG, op. cit., p. 157-175.
42 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 15, f. 164-165.
43 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 15, f. 164-165; AGNV, La Colonia, *Gobernación y Capitanía General* LXXIX, f. 6, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 368.
44 AGS, *SGU* 7186, n. 27, f. 16, img. 31.

The Governor of Cartagena insisted on knowing the names of those who had served as translators and intermediaries seducing the Indians. He was also concerned about the number of *parcialidades* that had planned to attack Sinamaica.[45] Witnesses said that sailors exchanged goods with the Indians on the coasts. No one mentioned plans of insurrection.

The relationship was economic rather than political, involving immediate social reproduction rather than revolutionary plots. According to several testimonies, the vessel suffered a technical failure after being hunted by an English ship near the Guajira. Lacking food, the corsairs sailed to the Guajiro coast to raid or purchase cattle.[46] Like previous exchanges between sailors and Guajiros, the latter provided the former with beef and water so that they could continue on their maritime route.[47]

Silvestre Castro, the guide from Curaçao, declared that after the mizzenmast of the Republican Patrol broke down, they sailed to Cabo de la Vela and then to the windward ports. Ashore, Castro continued, they observed some cattle. They purchased two.[48] The sources do not shed light on what they talked about with the Guajiros. However, the declarations mention the exact point of encounter, Chimare, an important Guajiro port, far from Sinamaica. Castro declared, "being in Chimare […] they used me as an interpreter for trading with the Indians, who gave them cows for gunpowder, bullets, and rifles". Captains Jean Baptiste and Auguste Gaspard Boze, French coffee merchant Francois Nouel, Master of Arms Ramón Camaret, and Jacob Gómez, the second captain from Curaçao, went horseback riding ashore with the Indians. Auguste Gaspard Boze gave his straw hat from Havana to the Indians, along with a handkerchief, some shirts, and cane liquor, and received several goats and a steer in the bargain. This appears to have been a classic gift exchange.[49] One testimony from previous years mentioned that the livestock in Chimare was so vast it was "impossible to count".[50]

Chimare was a nodal point of Guajiro people, power, and prosperity, and leaders may have already known about planned attacks against Sinamaica. To avoid further conflicts, Guajiro leaders usually communicated news and rumors of impending attacks to their relatives to evacuate women. Hence, occasional Spanish attacks were usually unsurprising for those with kinship ties that extended far and wide, and rumors from Sinamaica could have reached Chimare. Yet at more than four days' travel to Sinamaica, Chimare would have been too far away for leaders to participate even if they had known of the planned attacks.[51] Although communication among the different *parcialidades* was possible, indeed likely, the Governor of Riohacha pointed out that Guajiros from Chimare and Sinamaica were not part of the same *parcialidad*.[52]

45 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 15, f. 586-587; *MM* 19, f. 1056-1061; *M* 136, f. 136.
46 AGNV, Gobierno y Capitanía General, *C*, f. 42-43, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 245-246.
47 DURANGO, op. cit.
48 AGNV, Gobierno y Capitanía General, *C*, f. 64, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 247.
49 AGNV, Gobierno y Capitanía General, *C*, f. 42-43*, apud BRICEÑO*, op. cit., p. 245-246.
50 AGNC, Colonia, *Historia Civil* (*HC*) 20, f. 521.
51 AGI, *E* 61, n. 47, img. 24.
52 POLO ACUÑA, op. cit.*,* p. 80-83.

Sinamaica and its surrounding area had their own leaders and representatives: Yaurepara and Parieme. As the authorities in New Granada underscored, the Guajiros were diverse, and there were multiple tensions among them. They rarely, if ever, acted as a single group, such that the category of the "Guajira nation" reflected the settler colonial imaginary of certain Spanish officials, rather than political reality.[53] Governor Medina Galindo argued that the Indians in Chimare and other parts of the Riohacha Province did not participate in the confrontation in Sinamaica. There was no incentive for them to do so: they abolished the last Spanish garrison settlements in their territory, and gifts from Riohacha to prominent Guajiro leaders kept flowing, thereby maintaining diplomatic and commercial ties of co-operation rather than conflict throughout most of the peninsula.

Spanish authorities in Maracaibo, however, maintained the idea of a conspiracy by arguing that the simultaneity of the plot in the city and the attacks led by Guajiro Indians in Sinamaica revealed co-ordination. By the time Pirela revealed the plot, Spanish regulars had already moved west to protect the Spanish settlement, and were scattered about the rest of the colony. Hence Maracaibo had reduced the number of soldiers and officers protecting the city. Due to the lack of armed men, the governor used militias made up of some 800 *vecinos*, 400 of them *pardos*. Thus the idea that the city was almost defenseless, and the timing of events in Sinamaica and Maracaibo, led Spanish authorities to argue that Guajiros and French captains and sailors from around the Atlantic were working together to make revolution, as in Saint-Domingue.[54]

Though Maracaibo grew rapidly along with much of the Venezuelan littoral during the late 18th century, it was a merchant capitalist island of perhaps 22,000 people surrounded by a non-capitalist sea (Caracas, in contrast, lay at the heart of the cacao export plantation belt, based on slave labor). Maracaibo's immediate hinterland was composed of cattle ranches, which quickly gave way to the Maracaibo savannah, territory to the north and west controlled by Guajiros.[55] Thus Maracaibo was an enclave and a junction point, linking the Spanish empire to the larger Atlantic economy. In 1799, some seventy-seven ships came from or went to Havana, Veracruz, Cartagena, San Juan, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Thomas, and Jacmel in Saint-Domingue, as well as Baltimore and Philadelphia.[56]

Yet we cannot understand Maracaibo without also situating it in relation to the Guajiro peninsula and the hydrographic systems of other indigenous groups living outside the city. Unlike Riohacha, a Spanish port city of 4,000 northwest of Maracaibo, which depended heavily upon contraband, Maracaibo was a center of licit trade with the Andean interior of New Granada – in coffee, cacao, sugar, tallow and hides, hardwoods, salt, indigo, and coconut oil – and with other Spanish ports in Venezuela, such as La Guaira and Puerto Cabello. Yet without Native

53 AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 19, f. 1058-1059.
54 AGI, *E* 7, No. 3, f. 23-24, img. 9; AGNC, Colonia, *MM* 19, f. 1056-1061.
55 PONS, op. cit., p. 279.
56 BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 31-32, 317-318; MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 62.

consent, these goods did not reach Maracaibo, since indigenous kinship patterns regulated access to labor as well as the movement of commodities. To reach the port city, agricultural commodities had first to pass a complex network of roads, lakes, and rivers that ran through the southeastern edge of Guajiro territory, controlled by less numerous and less powerful groups: Aliles, Toas, and Zaparas.

Unlike local merchants and crown officials in Riohacha, whose tradition of trading, fighting, and negotiating with Guajiro leaders went back centuries, their counterparts in the Captaincy General of Venezuela had little experience.[57] For Spaniards in Riohacha, there were different nations among Guajiros. Antonio Arévalo, who traveled throughout the peninsula on diplomatic missions in 1776, encompassed different groups in the umbrella term Guajiro, which he opposed to the term Cocina. He also characterized *parcialidades* as political-territorial links of micro-sovereignty more than ethnic or cultural divisions. In his description of the people living nearby Maracaibo, he highlighted their leaders and place names.[58] Authorities in Riohacha recognized that the term Guajiro encompassed a diverse group of people: their emphasis was on political links, frictions, and kinship ties among leaders.

Officials in Maracaibo, in contrast, living closer to the outer limit of Guajiro territory, where it shaded into the territory of various smaller indigenous groups, underscored proto-ethnic differences.[59] Sometimes, missionaries and Spanish authorities in Maracaibo referred to the people living nearby the Sucuy river and the lakes as Aliles and Sinamaicas (see figure 1). For instance, in his description of the gentiles (*naciones gentiles*) across the province of Maracaibo, Fray Andrés de los Arcos, head of the Capuchin missions in Maracaibo, mentioned the presence of Sinamicas "on the fertile plain along the Sucuy river to the north of the city of Maracaibo," the Aliles "on the land on the bank of the small lagoon formed by the river mentioned above", while the Cocinas had come to "the margins of the great lake of Maracaibo".[60] In this account from the second half of the eighteenth century, the presence of Cocinas is understood as recent compared to the Aliles and Sinamaicas. This could indicate that they were being pushed south by Guajiro advance into their "traditional" homeland between the Montes de Oca and Parauje, a port on the coast.

The term Paraujano is one of the most confusing in the Spanish ethnic nomenclature, usually associated with the Añú, an indigenous group in Venezuela with linguistic similarities with the contemporary Wayuu people (whom the Spanish called "Guajiros"). In *wayuunaiki*

57 POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 178-179.

58 ARÉVALO, Antonio. **La pacificación de la provincia del Río del Hacha [1770-1776]**. Bogotá, El Áncora 2004[1770-1776], p. 265-270.

59 AGS, *SGU* 7072, n. 10, f. 60-61, img. 216-218. AGNV, La Colonia, *Gobernación y Capitanía General* LXXVIII, f. 7v, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 286.

60 BLANCO, José Félix. **Documentos para la historia de la vida pública del Libertador de Colombia, Perú y Bolivia**. Caracas: Impr. de "La Opinión Nacional," 1875, p. 459. See also: "Operaciones misiones capuchinas en Navarra y Cantabria," August 6, 1774, AGNC, *M* 141, f. 522, 527. See also: CARROCERA, Buenaventura de (OFMCap.). **Lingüística indígena venezolana y los misioneros capuchinos**. Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Instituto de Investigaciones históricas, Centro de Lenguas Indígenas, 1981; AZCONA, Tarcisio. (OFMCap.). La antigua misión de Maracaibo confiada a los capuchinos de Navarra y Cantabria (1749-1820). **Príncipe de Viana**, n. 267, p. 79-126, 2017.

(the Wayuu language), Paraujano means fishermen or people who live close to the sea.[61] It was also a derogatory term used to refer to poor people who ate fish in a society where cattle held the keys to wealth and political-military power. Some scholars connect the modern-day Añú with the term Paraujano used by the Spanish authorities during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, it appears Spanish officials in Riohacha and Maracaibo used this term to talk about the people who lived in Parauje. Thus what we often think of as "ethnic" designations were territorial-political units.[62]

For authorities in Riohacha, the Indians from Parauje were a part of Guajiro society, and did not constitute an ethnic group. Thus, the name Paraujano might not have been applied to those considered today as Añú. Yaurepara and Parieme, leaders of the assault against Sinamaica, were called "Guajiros from Cojoro", "Guajiros from Parauje", and "Paraujanos".[63] One of the Spanish officials stated that the Paraujanos were "a part of that whole that we regularly understand as Guajiros."[64] Hence, this term referred to those living in Parauje, understood as part of the "Guajiro nation."[65]

Even if most of the groups that Spanish officials designated recognized themselves as part of different "peoples", diversity did not mean isolation or autarky.[66] To the contrary, we find interconnections and mutual influences, which went beyond the idea of distinct, unique, and static "ethnic" entities with their "own" languages, practices, and territories. It seems that the ethnic panorama was instead full of gradations, where the distinction between Cocina and Guajiro was crucial, but even there, kinship ties between some Guajiro leaders and some Cocina leaders blurred such distinctions.[67] We can perhaps speak about an ethnic Guajiro continuum, and possibly connections with other southern communities, going beyond contemporary ethnic boundaries.[68]

More than the ethnic divisions, we argue on the need to focus on specific Guajiro leaders and their kinship, trade, and diplomatic networks.[69] Yaurepara and Parieme, whom the Spanish were forced to recognize as sovereign, had their areas of influence in the region around Cojoro and the royal road between Riohacha and Maracaibo. They were also close to indigenous leaders controlling the rivers Limón and Paijana. To attack Sinamaica, the

61 *Paraa* or *palaa* means sea, and *janu* refers to people. POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 113.
62 JUSAYÚ, Miguel Ángel; ZUBIRI, Jesús Olsa. **Diccionario sistemático de la lengua guajira**. Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 1988, p. 261.
63 AGS, *SGU* 7186, n. 27.
64 AGS, *SGU* 7247, n. 22, f. 11, img. 21. See also: AGS, *SGU* 7072, n. 10, bloque 2, f. 60-61, img. 216-218; AGNC, Colonia, *Caciques e Indios* (*CI*) 4, f. 662. It seems that the authorities in Maracaibo and Caracas also considered them in this way. See for instance: AGS, 7247, n. 22; AGNV, La Colonia, *Gobernación y Capitanía General* LXXVIII, f. 152, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 328-329.
65 AGS, *SGU* 7072, n.10, bloque 2, f. 60-61, img. 216-218. AGNV, La Colonia, *Gobernación y Capitanía General* LXXVIII, f. 7v, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 286. As Miguel Ángel Jusayú and Jesús Olsa Zubiri suggest, the use of the term Paraujano to refer to the Añú people might well be more recent. JUSAYÚ and ZUBIRI, op. cit., p. 161.
66 See similar arguments in POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 115. We differ over the idea that the term *Paraujano* referred to an ethnic category current at the time.
67 About linguistic differences and similarities, see JUSAYÚ and ZUBIRI, op. cit., p. vi-xii, 261.
68 AGNC, Colonia, *CI* 36, f. 448, 468.
69 HYLTON, op. cit., p. 317, 319, 333.

Guajiros had to move across areas controlled by other *parcialidades* or even ethnically diverse territories.[70] Thus the Guajiro attack represented a complex system of alliances based on Guajiro law, territory, and kinship. As Spanish officials recognized, the Maracaibo conspiracy of May 1799 acquired its fullest meaning against the backdrop of Guajiro attacks on Sinamaica in May 1799.[71] While Spanish officials justifiably feared the impact of the Haitian Revolution, throughout the Greater Caribbean they feared growing indigenous power and sovereignty as well.

Itineraries Revisited

How did the French corsairs, property of the Gaspard Boze brothers, arrive in Maracaibo from Saint-Domingue, with a British man-of-war in tow? What does the trajectory of the voyage tell us about the plausibility of a conspiracy?

The first thing to note is that, authorized by Toussaint L'Ouverture and the French Directory, merchant marine vessels followed planned routes and ports of call unless they ran into heavy weather or battle. The Brutus and the Republican Patrol suffered both. Though they represented a fusion of trade and warfare, the two corsairs did not seek out military engagement. Yet despite multiple delays along the coast of southern Saint-Domingue meant to avoid harassment from British ships, near the mouth of the Gulf of Maracaibo, they bested their rivals for supremacy in the revolutionary Caribbean, taking over the Harlequin, a 96-ton ship from Kingston, headed to Aruba. The British operated out of both Jamaica and Trinidad (captured in 1797), and traded with the Danish in St. Thomas and the Dutch in Aruba and Curaçao, allowing for something like pincer movements against the Spanish in the Lesser Antilles and on Tierra Firme. This explains why the ships took a full sixty days to get from Port-au-Prince to the Captaincy General of Venezuela.

Due to Atlantic winds and currents, the Gaspard Boze brothers and their crew, together with the Harlequin and its crew – under the command of José Roman, the young ensign from St. Thomas – came to Maracaibo because their guide said the city offered the best hope of fixing the ships quickly. Erstwhile enemies from 1793-95, Spain and France were temporarily aligned against the British. Nevertheless, Spanish authorities had to grant special permission for the corsairs to pass through the mouth of the sandbar at La Barra and into the port (see figure 1). Before doing so, they made a full inventory of the goods on board, and checked the shipping papers, as was customary. Customs officials (working for a private firm) knew that the owner of the cargo, consisting of coffee, was Francois Noeul, and that the cargo was destined for St. Thomas. (From there, U.S. ships' captains were to take it to Philadelphia.) The coffee, along with

70 POLO ACUÑA, op. cit., p. 68, 84.
71 AGNV, *La Colonia*, *Gobernación y Capitanía General de Venezuela* LXXVIII, f. 6-13, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 284-294.

prized cotton linens aboard the Harlequin, were unloaded and held at the customs depot.[72]

The Gaspard Boze brothers may have chosen Maracaibo out of a combination of chance and necessity with regard to the maintenance of ships and their crews, but they had to explain themselves to Spanish officials and show proper documentation in order to gain entry on May 6. Thus their arrival was no surprise, but rather announced by cannon fire and officially approved. With the ships docked in Maracaibo, several dozens of the port's working men and women, along with Spanish military men and several Frenchmen resident in the city went on board, the latter to discuss developments in Martinique. Others, like Pirela and Francisco José Suárez, an enslaved shoemaker and tailor who belonged to the local ecclesiastical authority, went to sew and mend clothes. Others washed clothes, ironed clothes, cut hair, or sold fruit. One man, who may have been Guajiro judging by his surname (Puche), went to buy feathers.[73]

Of those who went on board the three ships, three were key: Francisco Javier Pirela; Juan Sualbach, a German officer in the Spanish Army who spoke French, Spanish, and Dutch, sent by the governor of Maracaibo to observe the goings-on; and Suárez, who had been to Spanish Santo Domingo, and may have witnessed the massacre of whites at Bayajá; Suárez went because a sailor owed him money. Pirela named Sualbach and Suárez, along with ensign José Román, captain of the captured Harlequin, as the authors of the plot. When questioned, Suárez testified that he heard someone say something about massacres and beheadings on board, but could not specify who said what to whom. Sualbach said he heard a mulatto (Román?) talking about British-occupied Martinique and freedom.[74] Neither named the Gaspard Boze brothers in connection with the conspiracy, and only Pirela testified to its existence.

On May 14-15, Auguste, the eldest of the Gaspard Boze brothers, wrote letters to his mother and son: bad weather had taken them off their planned course, but their boats would soon be repaired so that they could continue their voyage.[75] In Curaçao, St. Thomas, or Port-au-Prince, the brothers would sell the heavy artillery aboard the Harlequin – eight cannons with shot, plus muskets and ammunition – along with a wide variety of textiles, and the ship itself, realizing a larger than anticipated profit. They were seen skipping and holding hands in the city streets as repairs wrapped up.[76]

None of the pieces that local Spanish officials used to make the case for conspiracy adds up. Governor Miyares told Captain General of Venezuela, Manuel Guevara Vasconcelos, that José Román was "cultivated and persuasive," and his brother-in-law and tutor, who came to seek his release in late October 1799, offering to pay 25,000 pesos, told Miyares that he had

72 AGNV, *La Colonia*, *Gobernación y Capitanía General de Venezuela* LXVIII, f. 15, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 256-61.
73 BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 146.
74 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP, f. 5v-6v, 43, apud ibidem, p. 241-5.
75 AGNV, *La Colonia, Gobernación y Capitanía General de Venezuela* LXXVIII, f. 226-227v, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 351-54.
76 BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 196.

met the revolutionaries Manuel Gual, José María España, and Juan Bautista Piccornell in St. Thomas. Thus Román's brother-in-law may have heard first-hand accounts of the republican conspiracy in La Guaira and Caracas in 1797, and almost certainly knew of it.[77] Román may or may not have met the two revolutionaries, but it is likely he, too, knew of their attempt to overthrow the Spanish monarchy. However, given his youth, whatever ideological sophistication and knowledge of events he may have possessed, his experience with revolutionary strategy and tactics was necessarily limited.

According to Román, after meeting Pirela on the docks, he brought him on board the Brutus and told him about the French Republican Constitution as well as the Rights of Man and Citizen, and Pirela complained that even though he was an official in the *pardo* militia, he suffered constant disrespect. Román translated for Auguste Gaspard Boze, and when Pirela asked for the latter's help in installing a French system in Maracaibo, Gaspard Boze, perhaps in jest, asked Pirela why he did not organize the uprising himself. Then Pirela explained he could easily do so, as he had 120 men at his command (in fact, his father's command), and only eight to ten soldiers guarded the armory, while the powder storehouse was only guarded by three men, if at all.[78] Pirela was boasting.

He suggested May 19 as the date for an uprising, following the procession of the Virgin of Chiquinquira, patron saint of the city, which José Román is said to have mocked publicly, thereby generating antipathy, not least among the city's *pardo* artisan class.[79] In Maracaibo, the Catholic Church was popular, racially-ethnically inclusive, and revered. Why did Pirela choose May 19, of all dates, to overthrow the monarchy, and, by extension, the Catholic religion that sanctioned it? To maximize the potential for popular backlash, including among *pardos*?

Román and Pirela talked most days, as Pirela frequently came aboard the Brutus in uniform to eat with Román and Auguste Gaspard Boze, and Román and Pirela fished together.[80] According to Francisco José Suárez, the enslaved shoemaker-tailor, Gaspard Boze complained of the air of superiority white Spanish officials exuded, and said that rather than distinguishing between blacks and mulattos, they (the ships' captains and crews) were all one; they did not pay taxes to any king, but governed themselves.[81] According to two sailors, on the evening of May 19, on shore, at Tomasa Morante's restaurant, Román told a small group among the crew to prepare for the coming uprising later that night. When asked for a reason or explanation, he said it would have to wait until later, when answers and detailed instructions would be given, and left for Pirela's house, where he arrived around 8 PM.[82] Once crew members were back

77 AGNV, La Colonia, Gobernación y Capitanía General de Venezuela LXXX, f. 76-77v; LXXXI, f. 306-7v, apud MANZANILLA, p. 384-85, 411-12.
78 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, SP, f. 278v-281, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 288-89.
79 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP, f. 29-29v., 170, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 75-76, 243-44. For the history of the Virgin of Chiquinquira, see PONS, op. cit., p. 283-85.
80 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP, f. 107, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 256.
81 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP, f. 6, apud ibidem, p. 241.
82 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP and SP, f. 95, 174-76v, 202-207, apud ibidem, p. 254, 270-76.

on board, between 8:30-9:00 PM, Román and Cocó, a twenty-two year-old from Nantes who lived in Jeremias, repeated the earlier pitch, and when crew members asked if Román was under orders from Gaspard Boze, Román stormed off. One asked if Román had spoken to Jean Baptiste Gaspard Boze, and Román admitted he had not. On board the Harlequin, Cocó, the second captain of the Republican Patrol, told the crew to load the cannons, but everyone was asleep.[83]

Two sailors testified that Auguste Gaspard Boze was part of the plot and instructed them what to do on board the Harlequin: Joe Harrison from Charleston, and Azor, alias 'The Devil,' from Guinea. Harrison even testified that in jail, everyone had sworn to keep the truth secret even if it meant beheading, and that he was in trouble with fellow tars for revealing it. While Román claimed he never committed to Pirela's plot, he also complained he was bamboozled by Pirela, who was fifteen years his senior.[84] Had a proper conspiracy been planned and organized, it is doubtful that rebels would have advertised a "secret password" – *Peuple Antillen* – in the window of Cosme Nobo's pool hall, in plain view of passersby, including a leading Spanish military officer; or that they would have slept through the uprising.[85]

It appears to have been a conspiracy of three or perhaps four, only one of whom was from Maracaibo (Pirela), and only one of whom (Auguste Gaspard Boze) had any real authority. But why would the elder Gaspard Boze brother have risked the lives, property, all but guaranteed super-profits of his and his brother's, and the wrath of the French Directory? No one except Pirela named Jean Baptiste Gaspard Boze as a co-conspirator; most witnesses did not mention him. If Auguste Gaspard Boze had been plotting, why did he write to their mother stating that they would be leaving as soon as repairs were finished?

Like their counterparts in Havana, Cartagena, and Caracas, in the late eighteenth century *pardo* artisans in Maracaibo carved out a legitimate position in colonial society for themselves through service in the militia.[86] Had any *pardo* soldiers or officers had known of the plot–it seems only Pirela did–it is difficult to imagine that they would have risked that hard-won position to support it, especially in light of incentives given by Crown decree in 1778 and 1795, which allowed *pardos* to purchase the rank of officer. Although in some areas of New Granada and Venezuela, *pardo* soldiers and officers would become a revolutionary republican vanguard

83 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, SP, f. 207-209v, apud ibidem, p. 277-78.
84 AGNV, *C*, Letra M, SP, f. 167-169v, 278v-281, apud ibidem, p. 267-68, 288-89.
85 "Primera pieza del expediente (declaraciones) formado por el gobernador e intendente de la provincia de Maracaibo…" AGNV, La Colonia, f. 1-11, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 268; AGNV, *C*, Letra M, PP, f. 28-29v, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 243-44.
86 Between 35 to 40 percent of militia recruits were *pardos* or mulattos in Mexico and Venezuela, while in Colombia and Cuba the figure was over 50 percent. ANDREWS, George Reid. **Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000.** New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004, p. 46. See also: ANDREWS, George Reid. **The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900.** Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980, p. 113-38. KUETHE, Allan J. The Status of the Free Pardo in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada. **The Journal of Negro History**, v. 56, n. 2, p. 105-117, 1971; MCFARLANE, Anthony; SANTOVEÑA, Marianela. Los Ejércitos Coloniales y La Crisis Del Imperio Español, 1808-1810. **Historia Mexicana**, v. 58, n. 1, p. 247-252, 2008; MILLER, Gary M. Status and Loyalty of Regular Army Officers in Late Colonial Venezuela. **The Hispanic American Historical Review**, v. 66, n. 4, p. 667-696, 1986; VINSON, Ben. **Bearing Arms for His Majesty**: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001.

in the 1810s, in the 1790s, we have not been able to find a case of *pardo* officers revolting against the monarchy in support of abolition or independence.

In Maracaibo, *pardo* soldiers and officers heeded the governor's call to arms to defend the Spanish Crown with alacrity on May 19, 1799. Pirela's father José Vicente was the respected commanding officer of a *pardo* militia company of 100 soldiers in which he had served for fifteen years. Under his command, his company swung into action against the ships' crews. Francisco was a troubled individual with a clouded past, and his grievances against the Spanish Crown may have been personal rather than political.[87] At no point did he try to organize Maracaibo's *pardos*, or win them to the republican cause.

José Román testified that Pirela took the initiative by offering Román 120 *pardo* militia troops to storm the city by force, using the weapons on board the captured British vessel to arm the crews of the ships before taking the armory. Román said Pirela kept circling back to the idea. Under arrest and on trial, a handful of witnesses from the ships' crews testified that Pirela and Román were plotting along the lines that Spanish authorities suggested, and it appears they were.[88]

No evidence suggests that a full-blown republican conspiracy was afoot. The Gaspard Boze brothers were prosperous businessmen about to become more so. They were responsible to the French government, the French merchant who contracted them, and, in turn, hired their crews according to fixed contracts and wages. Why would one of them defy both the merchant who hired them and his own revolutionary government, and why would both hand over their crews to Spanish authorities without a fight, if indeed an uprising had been planned? If he was plotting, why would Auguste Gaspard Boze keep the plot secret from the very actors – the ships' crews – who were supposed to lead the revolution? Unlike Román, Gaspard Boze was an experienced veteran of forty; could he, too, have been taken in by Pirela's braggadocio? It seems unlikely.

As noted above, the version given in official Spanish sources has clouded and colored historical interpretation until recently. It was grounded in unfolding anti-colonial, abolitionist realities, especially the Gual y España plot of 1797, in which there was a clear republican ideology, program, and plan of action in the heart of cacao country; and the rumor of a conspiracy of enslaved people from Saint Domingue in Cartagena in April 1799. The paranoia of local officials only partially determined the sentence handed down by the Real Audiencia de Caracas on August 31, 1800, which argued that Román did not deserve the death penalty because Pirela had deceived and encouraged him, and that Pirela did not deserve it because he informed on Román. The sentence condemned the Gaspard Boze brothers and five crew members to long terms in prison or service on public works, namely fortifications against the British in Cartagena, Panamá, and Puerto Rico. Pirela

87 BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 165-167.
88 Ibidem, p. 38, 218.

received a sentence of ten years, to be served in Cuba, while Román was sent to Veracruz, New Spain. Of the seventy-eight arrested and detained for more than a year, only eleven received sentences. The rest were turned over to the French consul in Curaçao: even Spanish judicial authorities admitted their innocence.[89]

Together with Juan Sualbach and José Francisco Suárez, both of whom were framed, the Gaspard Boze brothers were freed in 1800. L'Ouverture's army marched into Spanish Santo Domingo – where, incredibly, all four had ended up by bureaucratic mistake – and freed all prisoners. The two brothers then went to France to lodge a formal complaint, and in 1802-3, the French government sued Spain for damages they suffered, and for breaking the treaty between the two nations, alleging that Spanish officials in Maracaibo had concocted the plot in order to plunder goods worth an estimated 200,000 francs before the French ships could leave. The Spanish kept everything except the coffee to pay for the costs of guarding prisoners and augment royal coffers.[90]

After 1799, fears of contagion from Saint-Domingue lived on in the minds of Spanish officials. In 1802, the Captain General of Venezuela prohibited the sale of 250 free people captured and enslaved in the course of counter-revolution in Guadeloupe and Martinique. He worried that such people would spread revolutionary ideas, as did the Governor of Riohacha, who wrote to the Viceroy in 1803, asking for advice about how to handle over 200 slaves who turned up in Chimare, where, as we saw above, French sailors of color from Saint-Domingue had taken refuge briefly in the mid-1790s, and where they had landed in 1799, seeking food and water. Though the governor recovered several of them through his contacts in Riohacha, he feared that new ideas of freedom and equality could set the Guajiros against the Spanish. When the Spanish coast guard set out to recover the slaves, the Guajiros at Chimare insisted on payment for the exchange. Since none was forthcoming, Guajiros re-sold some of the slaves to the Dutch, circulated others among powerful leaders, and incorporated the rest as kin, where they worked alongside poor Guajiros as stevedores and farmers growing corn.[91]

Along with equestrian pastoralism, the purchase, capture, sale, and incorporation of captives as dependents (*achepchia* and *piunna*) constituted an important line of trade and source of political power that linked Guajiro leaders to owners and captains of the non-Spanish ships that arrived continually from Curaçao, Kingston, Saint-Domingue, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Thomas. As was the case throughout the indigenous Americas, Guajiros incorporated captives into the lowest rung of their kinship networks.[92] For a powerful Guajiro

89 AGI, Audiencia de Caracas (*AC*) 97, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 191-93; MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 471-75.
90 MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 148-49, 185.
91 AGI, *E* 52, n. 137; *E* 60, n. 29; *E* 61, n. 47. DURANGO, Miguel. Rastreando la flota del Berceau: Metáforas orgánicas, epidemia y revolución en el Caribe transimperial de inicios del siglo XIX. **Fronteras de la Historia**, v. 27, n. 2, p. 41-60, 2022.
92 BROOKS, James F. **Captives and Cousins**: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002; GALLAY, Allan. **The Indian Slave Trade**: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002;

leader, the difference between the labor of captives and the labor of kin was one of degree, rather than kind: his exploitation of women and younger men of his own clan would have overlapped with his exploitation of captives, who would eventually become kin.

In 1813, as the Napoleonic Wars crested, Francisco Javier Pirela, who was released from jail in Havana in 1810, was granted license to travel to Madrid, where he petitioned the King of Spain to receive a pension for his service. With Spanish American independence in full swing in 1821, Pirela continued his quest. Others were less fortunate.[93] In the Castillo de Ulúa in Veracruz, New Spain, José Román was confined, probably because he was able to express radical new ideas of freedom in several tongues.[94] A promising revolutionary career was thus aborted. Being young, and having caught the spirit of the times, he may have given little thought as to potential consequences of his actions. If he was plotting to take over Maracaibo – and he may well have been – tactics and strategy were not his strong suit. (Román's lawyer, José García Olivo, did such a good job defending his client that he was threatened with disbarment. Equality before the law was anathema – especially for foreign free men of color with revolutionary leanings.)[95]

Conclusion

In the Maracaibo conspiracy of 1799, Spanish authorities claimed to have uncovered a revolutionary plot to overthrow the Spanish monarchy and install a pro-French, anti-slavery republican city-state. In existing accounts, Guajiro Indians appear as peripheral actors, with free colored (*pardo*) artisans in Maracaibo, free colored captains of ships, and/or an Atlantic crew of sailors coming from Port-au-Prince playing leading roles. In this essay, we have put indigenous power, politics, and people at the center of events. Guajiro Indians and their allies were more numerous and powerful than any non-Indian group.

The principal division in the alleged Maracaibo conspiracy was not between blacks and whites, nor free and slave, much less between indigenous and non-indigenous people, but between a handful of free black republicans from the greater Caribbean, some of whom were framed, and hundreds of free black monarchists from Maracaibo who mobilized against them militarily.

RESÉNDEZ, Andrés. **The Other Slavery:** The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America. New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2016; RUSHFORTH, Brett. **Bonds of Alliance**: Indigenous & Atlantic Slaveries in New France. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012; SNYDER, Christina. **Slavery in Indian Country**: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. For the incorporation of people of African descent into Guajiro society, see: POLO ACUÑA, José; CARMONA, Diana. El mestizaje en una frontera del Caribe: El caso del pueblo de Boronata en La Guajira, 1696-1776. **Investigación & Desarrollo**, v. 21, n.1, p. 130-155, 2013; MANCUSSO, Alessandro. The Place of Livestock in Human-Non-Human Relationship among the Wayuu. *In:* HALBAMAYER, Ernst (org.). **Amerindian Socio-Cosmologies Between the Andes, Amazonia and Mesoamerica**: Toward an Anthropological Understanding of the Isthmo-Colombian Area. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2020. p. 303-329.

93 AGI, *AC* 387, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 485-491.

94 AGI, *AC* 97, apud MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 471-475; BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 181, 291-293.

95 AGN, *C*, Letra M, f. 632, 637, apud BRICEÑO, op. cit., p. 176; MANZANILLA, op. cit., p. 182.

In addition to the lack of political unity among free people of color, the lack of political articulation, as opposed to economic co-operation, between Guajiro leaders and revolutionary republicans, would have doomed the conspiracy to failure. Guajiro grievances against the Spanish were localized around Sinamaica, and in keeping with the decentralized nature of Guajiro kinship structures, did not trigger conflicts elsewhere in the peninsula. Nor were Guajiro attacks on Sinamaica tied to the conspiracy in Maracaibo. Yet no conspiracy in the city could have succeeded for long without Guajiro approval, since the complex system of inter-ethnic alliances the Guajiros forged to attack Sinamaica also regulated access to the inland roads and waterways on which Maracaibo depended for part of its subsistence as well as much of its profit.

Thus if a conspiracy had existed, free black republicans would still have needed to cement alliances with Guajiro leaders like Martín Rodríguez. Only then would a plot to take Maracaibo have been viable. However, where they existed, ties between Guajiro Indians and free colored republicans from San Domingue and the greater Caribbean were socio-economic rather than political, involving trade, diplomacy, and gift exchange far from Maracaibo or the lone Spanish garrison settlement (Sinamaica). Such contacts and co-operation ensured the immediate social reproduction of the ships' crews. Hence, we argue for the need to study micro-histories of particular Guajiro leaders and their networks of trade, kinship, and diplomacy, as well as captains and crews of particular ships from European colonies, as opposed to race-nation-ethnicity in the abstract, to explain historical outcomes in this corner of the Caribbean during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions.

In terms of theory and method, this paper reverses conventional optics on colonialism, capitalism, and revolution in the Atlantic world by placing indigenous leaders, and their alliances, diplomacy, and actions, at the center of the Maracaibo conspiracy of 1799. Historians have demonstrated conclusively that along with goods and people, ideas circulated widely, including revolutionary ideas of freedom and liberty, and this is what Spanish authorities increasingly feared after 1793, as conspiracies and slave uprisings spread throughout the Spanish Caribbean. Yet we also need to understand the uneven appeal and spread of such ideas, as there were evidently times and places in which they had little traction, if any.

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