

**Marjoleine Kars. *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast*, The New Press, 2020, 362 pages. Hardback, \$21.09.**

Throughout the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, slaves engaged in varying acts of rebellion against their masters. Some poisoned livestock or their oppressors. Others ran away and some led small rebellions against systemic oppression whenever the opportunity on the plantation provided. Those who are familiar with the history of the Americas and slavery have likely heard of the Haitian Revolution led by Toussaint L'Overture. Yet another revolution, one that may be considered less known that occurred decades prior and along the Berbice River, altered the country of Guyana and steered a different course for the future of several former slaves.

Marjoleine Kars, Associate Professor of the University of Maryland Baltimore County, begins the story of the Guyanese rebellion with a few key maps to assist the reader in understanding important territories for ex-slaves' and colonial strategy. Kars discusses the dissatisfaction among slaves culminating in prior slave revolts and a significant uprising in 1763. However, African slaves would not initiate a full-scale rebellion until the following year. Slave masters' mistreatment of slaves provided ample concern for the Dutch who were outnumbered by those whom they oppressed. Throughout the text, the author summarizes discussions of colonial governors, testimony of former slaves and other eyewitness accounts to the brutality slaves endured on the plantation. The author details pivotal characters of the slave revolution primarily led by a Creole named Coffij. During this period of slavery and within this region, Amerindians mostly ally themselves with the Dutch, often engaging in raids to return escaped slaves or to seek revenge against African rebels for prior attacks.

The author continues to provide descriptions of characters' clothes, conversations and correspondence from among slave rebels and between them and

Governor Van Hoogenheim. This allows for the reader to draw the likely personality traits of these primary figures as well as understand the likely motives many had throughout the year-long insurrection. French émigré soldiers of Dutch military ranks became mutineers due to their poor treatment. Some sought to join the ranks of the Spanish, while others eventually ventured to African rebel encampments. After they sailed upriver, African rebels captured and made them servants or forced them to join their military ranks. Kars notes the irony that those who volunteered to fight against slaves, complained about their slave-like treatment at the hands of the Dutch, only to become servants of the very African rebels they accepted arms to combat. Kars carefully weaves details of insurrection and military strategy while providing geographic details throughout these military campaigns, including strategic points along the Berbice and Canje rivers which run parallel to one another. She then briefly examines the new hierarchy which forms among the rebels who adopt terms such as governor and captain to denote authority. As with the initiation of the slave trade, slavers and colonists considered Africans stronger than natives to endure forced labor. Their endurance also benefitted the Guyanese of African descent who were accustomed to harsh climates, various fevers and an influx of mosquitoes. This was an advantage throughout the rebellion that newly arriving Europeans and many Amerindians would not possess.

According to the author, the rebel leader Coffij began to fight a war on two fronts. Coffij, who attempted to negotiate multiple times with Governor Van Hoogenheim, loses significant support from the rebels. Coffij then died by suicide. The divide within the rebel ranks not only originated from Coffij's diplomatic tactics with the Europeans, but also his vision for their future. The rebel leader assumed an independent colony comprising of rebel ex-slaves which would peacefully coexist

with the original Dutch colony and replicate a form of slavery among them. On the other hand, Atta, an African and a dissenter of Coffij's strategy, envisioned a communal, but independent, state bereft of any socio-economic reminders of Dutch colonialism, including the institution of slavery. Atta then assumes a new leadership role amongst most of the rebels. Governor Van Hoogenheim enlists the help from the Dutch government abroad. States General of Netherlands responds to the governor's plea and issues military-maritime reinforcements to rescue its colony. Rebels from different plantations along the Canje River and areas leading to Fort Nassau, set afire to all stockpiles, gardens, rations and the land itself and flee further north to join other rebels. They repeat this tactic at other plantations.

As the Dutch maintained a stronghold, despite not garnering any spoils or captives, the Guyanese rebellion weakened with continued internal conflict. Dutch victory in the massacre of Savonette solidified colonists' prepotency against the rebels. Although the Dutch reinforcements caused many remaining rebels to scatter, neither side appeared victorious. Destroyed plantations, difficulty in accounting for any recovered spoils by the governor and the inability to reestablish the system of slavery appeared to be a detriment for both sides. However, those of African descent who remained with the rebels finally surrendered to the Dutch. These members of the rebel encampment had to choose between tortuous death with little food or shelter under the guise of freedom; or torment and possibly death under chattel slavery. Some rebel leaders became slave hunters, increasing the number of former slaves to return to their prior miserable condition by the hundreds.

The author does not explicitly assert that the rebellion was a failure. However, it appears so as the professor outlines certain facts as she transitions the discussion from the plight of the returnees, refugees, and captured to the punishment of rebels; as

well as to the initiation of court trials. Those who fought valiantly to free themselves from enslavement were once again in the hands of their former slave masters. The author recounts a factual tale of slave insurrection detailing several pivotal figures based on primary and secondary resources. This text is most appropriate for students of history, slavery and anthropology.

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