

## Introduction

### *The Legacy of an Interlude*

Michiel van Groesen

Dutch Brazil is often regarded as an incongruity by historians of both the Atlantic world and Latin America. As a geographical and political entity, the colony existed only between 1624 (some would say 1630) and 1654, but the implications of this bold northern European infiltration into the Iberian sphere of influence were nevertheless profound: The establishment of Dutch Brazil undermined the notion of Habsburg supremacy in Latin America and worsened Luso-Spanish relations at home. It brought a hitherto unimaginable form of religious tolerance to the Atlantic and created a multicultural society in which Protestant soldiers, Catholic planters, African slaves, and Sephardic Jews all lived alongside the country's various native groups. Governor-General Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, who ruled from 1637 to 1644, financed prestigious scientific and artistic studies of the tropics and imported to Recife his European notions of cosmopolitan court culture. The possession of northeast Brazil enabled the West India Company to transform the sugar market, and after conquering Portugal's African strongholds on the Gold Coast and in Angola, it looked set to dominate the transatlantic slave trade as well. When the Dutch ruled Brazil, one historian recently argued, "a truly exemplary Atlantic world flourished."<sup>1</sup>

This book focuses on the multifaceted legacy of this remarkable colony. It traces the geopolitical and cultural impact of Dutch Brazil

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Schmidt, "The Dutch Atlantic: From Provincialism to Globalism," in: Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174.

on the Atlantic World and poses the question whether the way we think about this colonial episode today is the product of conventional historical wisdom or of a set of functional myths, constructed on both sides of the Atlantic during and after the period of Dutch rule. One obvious architect of a specific yet tenacious interpretation of Dutch Brazil in the Netherlands was Caspar Barlaeus, the eulogist of Count Johan Maurits' career as a benevolent, clear-eyed ruler of Recife whose reputation rested on pillars of modernity such as freedom of religious conscience and freedom of trade. In Brazil, the national consensus myth of the postcolonial period eagerly incorporated these liberal values; at the same time, paradoxically, the overthrow of the Dutch regime by a multiethnic Lusophone force evolved into the opening chapter of a nascent Brazilian identity, supported by the patriotic writings of contemporary authorities such as Father Manuel Calado and Father Rafael de Jesus. By separating historical fact from celebratory historiography and functional meta-narratives of the nation-state, this book helps us understand how the various constructions emerged and persisted, who stood to benefit from them, ideologically or otherwise, and how this process has determined the legacy of Dutch Brazil.

Through the prism of geopolitical and cultural consequences, memories, and mythologies, this book represents the first collective attempt to give a short-lived colony its place in a broader debate at the crossroads of Atlantic and Latin American studies. This is not an easy task. The Dutch Atlantic is widely seen as an anomaly among more familiar and more durable empires, while Brazil occupies a distinct place in the historiography of Latin America. This eccentric combination has led scholars to view Dutch Brazil as self-contained and disconnected from other developments in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>2</sup> It also helps explain why in spite of the meteoric rise of Atlantic studies at the end of the twentieth century – with its challenge to nationalist historiographies in favor of a transoceanic perspective and its emphasis on the movement of people, commodities, cultural practices, and values between the three continents along the Atlantic basin – the leading studies on Dutch Brazil to date are still Charles Boxer's *The Dutch in Brazil* (1957) and José

<sup>2</sup> In the most recent authoritative account of the Atlantic world, Dutch Brazil again is not mentioned outside the limits of its immediate political and geographical context; see Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World 1450–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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Antônio Gonsalves de Mello's *Tempo dos Flamengos* (1947), both of which deal with its history in relative isolation.<sup>3</sup>

Evaldo Cabral de Mello, the colony's leading Brazilian scholar, has since taken steps toward a more inclusive approach. In *Olinda Restaurada* (1975) he offers a traditional economic analysis of how falling sugar prices in Amsterdam and heavy taxation of the industry in Pernambuco contributed to the decline of Dutch Brazil, whereas his *O Negócio do Brasil* (1998) places the colony's demise in a wider European context, albeit primarily as a case study in early modern diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> All other (recent) scholarship has been devoted almost exclusively to Johan Maurits and his seven-year reign in Recife, most notably the collection of essays titled *A Humanist Prince in Europe and Brazil* that was edited in 1979 by Ernst van den Boogaart.<sup>5</sup> The present book proposes a radical shift in interpretation by broadening the scope, both geographically and

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1624–1654* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), last reprinted in 1973, and translated into Portuguese (*Os Holandeses no Brasil, 1624–1654*) and Dutch (*De Nederlanders in Brazilië, 1624–1654*); José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos: Influência da ocupação holandesa na vida e na cultura do norte do Brasil* (Recife: Governo do Estado de Pernambuco, 1947) never appeared in English and was not reprinted in Dutch until 2001 when it appeared as *Nederlanders in Brazilië (1624–1654): De invloed van de Hollandse bezetting op het leven en de cultuur in Noord-Brazilië* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2001). One recent review article that demonstrates that Dutch Brazil is still perceived as a relatively isolated phenomenon is Victor Enthoven and Martine J. van Ittersum, "The Mouse that Roars: Dutch Atlantic History," *Journal of Early Modern History* 10–3 (2006), 221–30.

<sup>4</sup> Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada: Guerra e Açúcar no Nordeste, 1630–1654* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Forense-Universitaria; São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1975); Idem, *O negócio do Brasil: Portugal, os Países Baixos e o Nordeste, 1641–1669* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Ernst van den Boogaart et al. (eds.), *Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, 1604–1679: A Humanist Prince in Europe and Brazil* (The Hague: Johan Maurits van Nassau Stichting, 1979). Other volumes and exhibition catalogs include Guido de Werd (ed.), *So weit der Erdkreis reicht: Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen, 1604–1679* (Kleve: Stadt Kleve, 1979); Ernst van den Boogaart and F. J. Duparc (eds.), *Zo wijdt de wereld strekt* (The Hague: Johan Maurits van Nassau Stichting, 1979); Gerhard Brunn (ed.), *Aufbruch in Neue Welten. Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen (1604–1679): der Brasilianer* (Siegen: Johann Moritz Gesellschaft, 2004); Irmgard Hantsche (ed.), *Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen (1604–1679) als Vermittler. Politik und Kultur am Niederrhein im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Waxmann, 2005); Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Nassau: Governador do Brasil Holandês* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006); and Gerhard Brunn and Cornelius Neutsch (eds.), *Sein Feld war die Welt: Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen (1604–1679): von Siegen über die Niederlande und Brasilien nach Brandenburg* (Münster: Waxmann, 2008). Dauril Alden's identification of Johan Maurits as the "Dutch Napoleon" nevertheless seems a little far-fetched; see "Obituary: Charles R. Boxer (1904–2000)," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80–4 (2000), 947.

chronologically, and arguing that developments in Dutch Brazil had an impact well beyond traditional colonial and national narratives.

To examine the colony in a wider Atlantic context makes sense for three reasons. First, scholars generally agree on distinguishing three “separate” Atlantics – a northern European Atlantic, a Spanish Atlantic, and a Portuguese Atlantic – each with its own parallel passageways flowing east to (south)west: from England and France to North America, from Seville to the Caribbean, and from Lisbon to Pernambuco and Bahia, respectively. Dutch ambitions in Brazil presented a challenge to this pattern with an uncompromising north–south orientation that was bound to result in sustained military conflict. According to John Elliott, “only in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did all three Atlantic systems begin seriously to merge, in a process of mutual interaction in which the African slave was an involuntary and all too prominent participant.”<sup>6</sup> The incursions of the West India Company into Habsburg America and Portuguese Africa predate this integration and justify posing this question: Did Dutch Brazil, in spite of its relatively short-lived existence, have an impact on the balance of power and the mental constraints of the Atlantic world in the second half of the seventeenth century and beyond? If we accept Elliott’s suggestion that something changed in the Atlantic basin to bring about a process of mutual interaction, it is conceivable that the brief flourishing of Dutch Brazil was an important turning point that contributed to this transformation.

Second, scholars of the Atlantic world have principally focused on latent structures and transoceanic connections, on chronological continuity, and, occasionally, on comparative coherence and contrast. But often this focus has been at the expense of the historical narrative of breaks and disruptions – yet another reason perhaps why Dutch Brazil, with its many distinctive features, has not received the attention it deserves. As Stuart Schwartz makes clear at the beginning of Chapter 2, the story of Brazil at the time of the Dutch conquest is characterized by numerous overlapping stories of geopolitical significance, without which the history of this particular Atlantic province cannot properly be understood but which at the same time make writing and contextualizing its history a delicate and complicated affair. This book reevaluates the impact of political and military events, cultural output, and rhetorical constructions and lasting

<sup>6</sup> John H. Elliott, “Afterword: Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation,” in: David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 234.

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mythologies on the Atlantic world through the lens of a single colony that incorporated all these aspects.

Third, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra in 2003 pointed out that, although the Atlantic perspective has been truly liberating for colonial North America, allowing historians to escape the traditional teleological narratives of the nation, there are good reasons to be skeptical about its virtues for South American history. He highlights “the unwillingness of North American historians [of the Atlantic world] to look in Latin America for fresh perspectives, methodological insights, and even comparative standards” and suggests that the ideological origins of Atlantic history are to blame for these narrow spatial constructions. Consequently, Atlantic narratives that include independent Latin America are much harder to imagine – a situation compounded by the “deep-seated prejudice that the ‘Atlantic’ is simply a synonym for the West, a concept that has excluded Latin America.”<sup>7</sup> More than a decade later, some of the points raised by Cañizares-Esguerra still hold true. Jack Greene, another advocate of a broader, “Pan-American” attitude, has since suggested that the fragmented Atlantic enterprise of the Dutch could be among the major beneficiaries of a more hemispheric approach.<sup>8</sup> In turn, a political and cultural incongruity such as Dutch Brazil can help unveil some of the connections between the northern and southern Atlantic spheres that historians have so far failed to construct.

Because the Dutch did not go on to experience the impressive expansion of other colonial empires and quickly lost their foothold both north and south of the equator, this book places its emphasis on the concept of legacy. Historians of Latin America have focused on colonial legacies for a long time, looking to disentangle what it means to have a past that continues to be a burden on the present. This “problem of persistence”

<sup>7</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Some Caveats about the ‘Atlantic’ Paradigm,” *History Compass* 1–1 (2003), 1–4. He refers to Bernard Bailyn, “The Idea of Atlantic History,” *Itinerario* 20–1 (1996), 19–44, later revised to become part of *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). See also the final chapter (“Towards a ‘Pan-American’ Atlantic”) in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 215–33. John Elliott has since masterfully demonstrated how at least the British and Spanish Atlantic worlds can be compared and integrated into a single historical analysis: John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Jack P. Greene, “Hemispheric History and Atlantic History,” in: Idem and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 303.

usually concentrates on understanding lasting patterns of domination *after* the arrival of independence, with its inherent problems of establishing political legitimacy, defining national identity, and addressing historical injustices.<sup>9</sup> Well before the early nineteenth century, however, the fluctuation of empires in the Atlantic world generated colonial legacies of a different kind, some of which survived until the revolutionary era and still add to our perception of the impact of the colonial enterprise. Evaldo Cabral de Mello, in arguably his most powerful book *Rubro veio: O imaginário da restauração pernambucana* (1986), describes how the “Brazilian” campaigns to dislodge the Dutch and “liberate” Pernambuco were transformed into a well-rehearsed nativist mythology that was crucial in the intellectual invention of Brazilian nationalism.<sup>10</sup> The legacies discussed in this book do not all tread a path that leads into the modern era, but rather trace the remains of an episode that was followed and, to some extent, mitigated and eradicated by that which had preceded it: Portuguese colonial rule. When Brazil achieved its political independence in 1822, the period of Dutch authority no longer featured in living memory, but its survival in the imagination indicates a persistence similar to that discussed by scholars of modern Latin America.

Just why Dutch Brazil persisted in the imagination and how its mythologies emerged are two of the key questions of this book. It is evident that the story of colonial Brazil and, by extension, the South Atlantic or even the Atlantic world as a whole became infinitely more complex after a “new” colonial competitor such as the Dutch West India Company appeared on the scene. The Dutch presence in northeast Brazil unleashed a wave of consequences that were often inadvertent and almost always unforeseen; yet they forced all Atlantic actors to rethink their

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Adelman, “Introduction,” in: Idem (ed.), *Colonial Legacies: The Problem of Persistence in Latin American History* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–13.

<sup>10</sup> Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Rubro veio: O imaginário da restauração pernambucana* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1986). See also Darlene J. Sadlier, *Brazil Imagined: 1500 to the Present* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), esp. pp. 83–92, where she focuses on nativist iconography in the wake of Dutch rule, and Eddy Stols, “‘No hay más Flandes’ en ‘o tempo dos flamengos’ in koloniaal Amerika,” *De zeventiende eeuw* 21–1 (2005), 3–28, who describes how the Dutch in later centuries simultaneously came to stand for good quality products and modern technology as well as for misbehavior and barbarous violence. Brazilian scholars such as Laura de Mello e Souza and Ronaldo Vainfas have pointed out that the concept of “colonial Brazil” itself is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century notion and that the only term used at the time was “Portuguese America.” See Stuart B. Schwartz, “Brazil: Ironies of the Colonial Past,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80–4 (2000), 683. In the epilogue to this volume, Joan-Pau Rubiés examines these mythologies in greater detail.

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geopolitical strategies in such a drastic way that the old status quo could not be revived when Portuguese colonial control was restored with the capitulation of Taborda. Although many European powers, including the United Provinces, went looking for a “New Brazil” in the succeeding decades, they never again considered such an undertaking *in* Brazil. By the time the States General, the federal government responsible for military and foreign affairs, had concluded a definitive peace with Lisbon, Dutch Brazil was already being transformed from an ephemeral social memory of a colony that perhaps could have persevered into a long-term collective memory that could be transmitted and enhanced from generation to generation.<sup>11</sup> The notion of *Verzuimd Brasil* (“Neglected Brazil”) long reverberated in Dutch recollections of the colony, whereas in Brazil the colony’s legacy animated an historical imagination with very explicit transcendental goals, which – as Joan-Pau Rubiés shows in the Epilogue – were absorbed in modern historiography, thus obscuring the boundary between colonial realities and postcolonial constructions.<sup>12</sup> To unpack these layers of interpretation, it is necessary to return to the political history of colonial formations and develop an understanding of gradually shifting implications (see Figure I.1).

When addressing the long-term impact of Dutch Brazil on the Atlantic world, we are essentially analyzing the legacy of an interlude – a brief three-decade window of northern European, Protestant aspirations amidst more than three centuries of Iberian authority. Nonetheless, Dutch Brazil experienced the full array of colonial junctures and sentiments typical for overseas ventures at the time. During the rise of the colony, the Dutch tasted both the joy that came with successful conquest not once but twice – first in Salvador in 1624, then in Olinda and Recife in 1630 – and the disappointment of defeat.<sup>13</sup> The consolidation of military victory, which was achieved on the second attempt, confirmed rhetorical (and to some extent moral) presumptions that a partnership could be forged with

<sup>11</sup> Here I paraphrase Aleida Assmann, “Memory, Individual and Collective,” in: Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216–17.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Adelman, “Preface,” in: Idem (ed.), *Colonial Legacies: The Problem of Persistence in Latin American History* (New York: Routledge, 1999), x. For a good discussion of *Verzuimd Brasil*, with further references to relevant scholarly literature, see Henk den Heijer’s authoritative *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (3rd rev. ed.; Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2002), pp. 49–54.

<sup>13</sup> Michiel van Groesen, “Lessons Learned: The Second Dutch Conquest of Brazil and the Memory of the First,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 20–2 (2011), 167–93. For the remainder of this paragraph, see Boxer, *Dutch in Brazil*.

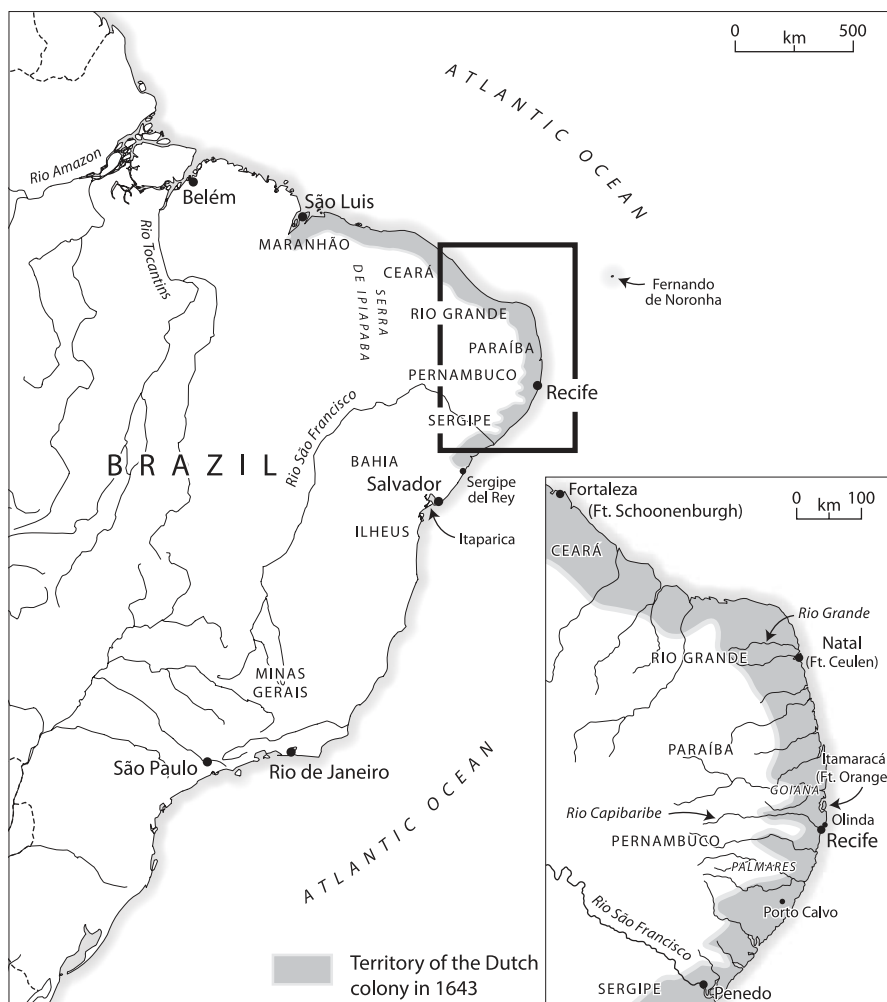


FIGURE 1.1. Dutch Brazil, c. 1643. *Source:* Map prepared by UvA-Kaartenmakers. Reprinted with permission.

indigenous groups based on a mutual dislike for a common enemy. A difficult five-year struggle for Pernambuco followed that was only concluded in June 1635 when Christoph Arcizewski, the Polish colonel in the service of the West India Company, defeated the Portuguese resistance led by Matias de Albuquerque. The end of guerrilla warfare paved the way for the arrival of Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen in January 1637. The Count extended Dutch power in Brazil and after five



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years ruled over seven of the fourteen captaincies into which Portuguese America was divided.

Sending out naval expeditions from Brazil, Johan Maurits expanded Dutch power to West Africa as well, removing the Portuguese from first Elmina (1637) and then Luanda and São Tomé (1641) and gaining access to the main markets for slave labor. Meanwhile he created a magnificent court in Recife that was unlike anything else the republican imagination in the United Provinces had produced. But one year after Johan Maurits' departure from Brazil in 1644, when the Portuguese revolt (or "War of Divine Liberation") began, the Dutch quickly discovered the pitfalls and dangers of colonial rule. In addition to the ever-present threat of a European rival, Dutch Brazil suffered from hunger, local uprisings, ethnic conflict, and runaway slaves; a strained relationship between colonial administrators and metropolitan governing bodies; and, in the end, a lack of support from the political elite at home that led to its downfall in 1654. The defeat brought to an end the only imperial moment in Dutch Atlantic history, as the West India Company and private investors then focused their attention on "expansion without empire," concentrating on commerce and trade.<sup>14</sup>

So if all these experiences were represented in Dutch Brazil, how and where should we begin to look for legacies? The German historian Jürgen Osterhammel, in a recent assessment of imperial historiography, advises scholars of colonialism not to seek out modern theories but rather to cast a wider net by inquiring into the mentalities and imaginary configurations that persisted throughout the colonial period and to do so by investigating a large palette of source material.<sup>15</sup> The present study heeds this call by tracing the colony's impact not only in the United Provinces, Brazil, West Africa, and on the Iberian peninsula but also in the Spanish Netherlands, France, Germany, the Caribbean, and British North America – regions that do not traditionally feature in Dutch Brazil's historiography. The authors come from a myriad of disciplinary backgrounds, including cultural, religious, and intellectual history; ethnohistory; and the history of science, as well as anthropology, literary studies, and art history.

<sup>14</sup> Pieter C. Emmer and Wim Klooster, "The Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800: Expansion without Empire," *Itinerario* 23–2 (1999), 48–69, which appeared in slightly revised form – without the section on art and scholarship and under the authorship of Emmer only – in *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 38 (2001), 31–47. The only exception to "expansion without empire" is Suriname, which came under Dutch rule in 1667.

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, transl. Shelley Frisch (3rd rev. ed.; Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2005), pp. 107–12.

The resulting matrix of geographical inflections and scholarly perspectives realizes the broad scope required. It has to be emphasized that, although some of the contributors have worked on Dutch Brazil before, others here write on the subject for the first time, ensuring a fresh approach to the theme.

The legacies of Dutch Brazil presented here range from the immediate to the potentially infinite. This is partly the effect of casting a wide net and aiming to reveal various types of legacies, and it enables a comparison among the different chronologies of persistence or, in the case of imaginary configurations, the different rhythms and emphases of the process of appropriation.<sup>16</sup> It is no surprise that the impact of Dutch Brazil on colonial policies and international relations faded around 1700, although some of the scientific discoveries and intellectual debates it generated were still considered relevant by later generations of scholars. The eighteenth century also witnessed increasing interest in episodes of the past that could be placed in nationalistic frameworks, cementing or sometimes reviving the reputations of some of the colony's protagonists – although some of these particular mythologies would not come to fruition until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like emerging nations, Atlantic diasporas also harbored traces of previous colonial activity. By the eighteenth century, the demographic effects of the colonial enterprise could already be felt in West Africa and the Caribbean, as well as in Brazil itself, although the detrimental effects of the slave trade would multiply considerably in the following centuries.<sup>17</sup> In stark contrast, Sephardic Jews in the Atlantic world reminisced openly about the relative freedom they enjoyed under the Dutch in Recife.<sup>18</sup> What these legacies all share, despite their variations, is that they already can be detected before the start of the nineteenth century, sometimes in embryonic form but often fully matured and ready

<sup>16</sup> See Joan-Pau Rubiés' epilogue in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> The best overall study of the Dutch slave trade is Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. ch. 1 & 2; For the early phase, see P. C. Emmer and Ernst van den Boogaart, "The Dutch Participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1596–1650," in: P. C. Emmer (ed.), *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580–1800: Trade, Slavery and Emancipation* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variation, 2008), 33–64. On Brazil, see Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna, *Slavery in Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and, for its legacy, Gilberto Freyre's classic book *Casa Grande e Senzala*, first published in 1933 and translated into English as *The Masters and the Slaves*, transl. Samuel Putnam (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970 [1946]).

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the Jewish Atlantic, see Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).