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Slave Wars and the Prerevolutionary Landscape

On Vincent Brown's book *Tacky's Revolt. The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA—London 2020.

Review of Vincent Brown's book *Tacky's Revolt. The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (2020).

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Markus Rediker concludes his story of a modern slave ship—a medium of Western slavery—by recounting a 1791 court case brought against captain James D’Wolf in Newport (Rediker 2008, 343–347). He had just sailed back on the two-masted *Polly*, having completed one of the variants of the triangular trade: he purchased and loaded 142 persons aboard at the Gold Coast (part of the Gulf of Guinea, today’s Ghana), 121 of whom he delivered to Havana alive (in Cuba people were traded directly and indirectly for sugar), before traveling back to his home in Rhode Island. The fifteen percent loss of human “cargo”—more than the average at the time¹—could have meant that D’Wolf, who not only commanded the ship, but also co-financed the operation, ended up making less than intended. It is also known, however, that he insured himself against losses above twenty percent—he may have thus remained within the range of expected profit.

Meanwhile, in the United States, he was charged with murder. The court case of course did not deal with the deaths of slaves resulting from disease, anxiety, malnutrition, suicides, or disastrous conditions on the ship. It was rather concerned with just one of the twenty one victims. Sailors from *Polly* testified that the captain had ordered them to isolate a female slave (whose name is not known) suffering from smallpox, tie her to a chair and leave her out on deck for several days, before he personally lowered her overboard (the crew declined) on the chair (allegedly, he declared that he was only sorry to lose the chair). D’Wolf’s line of defense (as reconstructed by the author of *The Slave Ship. A Human History*) was as follows: “The woman posed a danger because, had a number of the crew sickened and died, they would have been unable to control their large and unruly cargo of Coromantee captives, as they were ‘a Nation famed for Insurrection’” (Rediker 2008, 345).

The estimated profit and loss statement—regardless of its plausibility²

1 In the last decade of the eighteenth century, there were 867,992 slaves loaded on slave ships in African ports, 767,823 of whom arrived at their final destinations alive, bringing the death rate to twelve percent. Over the course of that decade, 109,441 slaves boarded ships at the Gold Coast alone, and 98,123 left the ships alive (a ten percent death rate). The slave trade data was sourced from Slave Voyages (slavevoyages.org, accessed March 5, 2020). In the eighteenth century, the ratio of women to men among slaves was approximately 2:1, about a third of the slaves were children (there were regional differences in demand for the age and gender of slaves, depending on the nature of work in a given colony).

2 Smallpox onboard didn’t necessarily lead to loss. Rediker brings up a report of a sailor testifying in captain D’Wolf’s trial who claimed that the crew wished to contract the disease in order to develop immunity to it. (Rediker 2008, 345). Meanwhile, Vincent Brown writes in *The Reaper’s Garden. Death and Power in the*

—was strikingly similar to that of Liverpool’s sail ship *Zong*, which had carried 440 slaves one decade earlier. Both *Polly* and *Zong* were overloaded with people (in the case of *Zong*, the total count was double the ship’s designated limit), while being short on crew (including saving on the ship’s doctor) and supplies. Both “cargos” were insured, and *Zong*, like many similar endeavors, sailed on credit. Faced with uncertain circumstances (diseases, shortage of potable water, and navigation errors), its captain, Luke Collingwood (who died three days after reaching Jamaica with merely 208 slaves in tow), ordered 122 male and female slaves to be dumped over the course of several days between November and December of 1781. In light of these events, ten more people committed suicide by jumping off the ship. On behalf of the shareholders, captain Collingwood counted on an insurance payout—issued only if a slave died at sea. Calculus of probability and modern risk management went hand in hand with transforming black slaves into abstract, expendable, “typical” trade units—as Ian Baucom writes in his *Spectres of the Atlantic. Finance Capital, Slavery, and Philosophy of History* (Baucom 2005). And so, the subsequent court trials associated with *Zong*’s journey from Accra, a port on the same coast from which D’Wolf would purchase his slaves ten years later, were focused on the payouts for lost cargo as opposed to homicide.

Although the tragedy on *Polly* may strike one as an ideal addendum to the story of the *Zong* ship, and could act as a supplement to Baucom’s study devoted to the Atlantic economic calculations—after all, just like the entire slave trade, murder committed in its name was based on multiple layers of speculation, perfectly reflected in the repeated conditional: “had a number of the crew sickened and [as a result of the sickness—Ł.Z.] died”—this is not the reason I bring it up. I do so because D’Wolf’s case took place exactly three decades after one of the biggest modern slave rebellions, which went down in history as Tacky’s Revolt. It was sparked in 1760, in British-occupied Jamaica, by no other than the Coromantee, the “nation famed for insurrection.” The legend of the strong, combative, and ever conspiring Coromantees must have thus been well and alive in the 1790s. The alleged threat they posed was supposed to persuade the court that the captain’s predictions were highly probable and thus his conduct rational (D’Wolf, thanks to his wealthy

World of Atlantic Slavery (Brown 2008, 50): “The market had another way of taking the dangers of smallpox into account. Slaves who had survived the pox—or the deadly yaws—and had scars to prove their immunity drew higher prices.” This was referred to as “seasoning” the slaves—usually a year-long period of developing immunity to the diseases and local climate of the colonies.

family's influence, was eventually acquitted several years later). In fact, the Coromantee myth predated the 1760 and 1761 insurrections in Jamaica—the group was supposed to have been responsible for a series of mutinies on ships and in the West Indies at least since the early eighteenth century. As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker describe them in *The Many-Headed Hydra*:

The leading cell was made up of Africans from the Gold Coast of West Africa, the Akan-speaking people who were known by the name of the slave-trading fort from which they were shipped: Coromantee (or, in Fante, Kromantse). Many a “Coromantee” had been an okofokum, a common soldier trained in firearms and hand-to-hand combat in one of the mass armies of West Africa's militarized, expansionist states (Akwamu, Denkyira, Asante, Fante), before being captured and shipped to America (Linebaugh and Rediker 2012, 184-185).

In reality, “Coromantee” is therefore one of the colonial categories systematizing the Atlantic world, one of the stereotypes enabling the conversion of African communities of diverse geographical, class, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds into a homogenous mass of black captives, and thus into slave ship cargo. Already in the late seventeenth century, they had featured as the protagonists of a sensational novel about Oroonoko, a prince who was insidiously kidnapped and sold into slavery, and by somewhat adopting his traits, all of the Coromantees in Atlantic popular culture came to represent a form of gentry among various slave groups (Brown 2020, 103). The legend of the rebellious peoples, layered with captains' stories, port gossip, and the constant fear of the white plantation owners, grew along with the participation (actual and alleged) of the Gold Coast slaves in subsequent insurrections and conspiracies, including those in New York in the 1710s, or in St. John and Antigua in the 1730s.

Both the fear and the admiration of the Coromantees originated in the same idea, namely, that some intrinsic cultural essence defined Africans from the Gold Coast, and that this essence might distinguish something fundamental about black people in general [...]. Noted for martial masculinity, haughty pride, and relentless daring, the Coromantees in the eighteenth century defined a type that has thrilled and frightened whites—and parodied and beckoned to black men—ever since (Brown 2020, 233).

Meanwhile, the Coromantee didn't even always share a language. But perhaps most of all, this category, founded on colonial territorial demarcation, contained diverse African communities, often at odds and

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waging wars against each other, or forming volatile alliances (in the course of these battles and invasions, the defeated ones would often be sent into slavery and sold in the Gold Coast ports; recent war enemies from Africa could therefore later find themselves on the same plantations, or even same ships). At the same time, this notion included an additional implication that inadvertently transcended the European racist projections. First of all, it directly and unintentionally indicates that a certain set of competences—in this case, various warfare skills—did not vanish upon boarding a slave ship, nor as a result of the supervisory methods on a plantation complex. Secondly, there's a grain of truth to the externally assigned new identification: entering a ship meant a radically new situation, requiring modifying alliances and building new relationships (such as *shipmates*; see Rediker 2008, 263–307), new communities and hierarchies in these novel conditions. However, these processes would take place based on skill sets (a common language or the multilingualism of many slaves acquired back within their African communities), connections, experiences (past and present), rituals, values, and beliefs (the community-building role of religious and spiritual practitioners, not just during rebellions). They occurred not as a reformulation, but also an extension of African life. It also ought to be stressed that there was no way of returning to previous life, and stories of eighteenth-century slaves who would make it back home years after they had left could be—quite literally—counted on one hand, compared to the 12.5 million who never came back.³ Third, the Coromantee legend reveals a surplus of fear held by the whites, undermining the popular image of slavery as a stable relationship involving the submission and passivity of the enslaved, only sporadically interrupted by brief and inconsequential mutinies (the Haitian Revolution is cited as an exception proving the rule). Let's return to D'Wolf's argumentation then. After all, it indicates that already on the slave ship, each day (and, as we know, even previously—in the cordon transporting slaves from inland to the ports) was filled with a tense power struggle between the captives sold into slavery and the sailors minding them; that captives attempted to use even the smallest opportunities for an escape or a fight (and also for suicide, which would count both as a loss for the investors and as a final act of autonomy and agency for the Africans); that “most slaves engaged in a fluid struggle that compelled them to make unbearable decisions

3 In 1501–1866, there were 12,521,332 persons loaded onto ships in Africa, of whom 10,702,655 left them alive. Slave Voyages (slavevoyages.org, accessed March 5, 2020).

about when to yield, how to protect themselves and others from harm, whom to align with, and when and how to fight back, if at all” (Brown 2020, 74)

In his book *Tacky's Revolt. The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*, published this year, Vincent Brown, cited above, thus returns to one of the most popular definitions of slavery, describing it as a perpetual state of war between the conqueror and the captive. This characterization is not, however, based on the writings of John Locke, who on one hand advocated for liberty as a natural human right, and on the other, invested in the royal company responsible for the slave trade. *Tacky's Revolt* instead pursues a later iteration of the slogan: one that represents a radically different slave trade experience, expressed in the slave memoir of Olaudah Equiano (who, incidentally, had a hand in spreading the word about the tragedy on the *Zong* ship in the 1780s). Equiano's account exposes the “practical, daily war that defined any society afflicted by slavery” (Brown 2020, 4). At the same time, it serves merely as a starting point for historicizing, elaborating on, and drawing conclusions from the perception of slavery as war.

When Tacky's Revolt broke out in 1760, Jamaica was Great Britain's most lucrative and productive colony in America (sugar was the island's principal export material, followed by coffee and cotton). The most powerful colonial estate owners, rarely or never stepping foot on the island, were either members of the British parliament or otherwise high military and administrative representatives within the Empire. Their assets were on average thirty six times larger than those of British settlers in the nearby mainland America (Brown 2008, 16). However, Jamaica “was also a death trap. Death was at the center of social experience for everyone on the island during the eighteenth century. [...] Death and wealth and power were inextricably entangled” (Brown 2008, 13). In his earlier book, tellingly titled book *Reaper's Garden*, Brown described various methods of dealing with death and the mechanisms of managing its widespread and common occurrence in Jamaica. During the challenging climate of the eighteenth century, tropical diseases were responsible for the deaths of ten percent of the island's white inhabitants—plantation owners and their families, managers, guards, state officials, estate and factory employees, sailors, and vagabonds—per year, whereas the death rate of black residents, the majority of whom were subjected to an arduous regime of labor and discipline, wasn't much smaller (Brown 2008, 13). Moreover, unlike in the nearby North American colonies, there were almost ten times more slaves than whites in Jamaica. During the 1770s alone, when the “slave war” took place, eighty five thousand

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slaves would be transported there (to paint a full picture, it should be added that twenty five thousand of them came from the Gold Coast and could therefore have been referred to as Coromantee) (Brown 2020, 266–267). The authorities would make (futile) efforts to regulate the proportions of whites to slaves on plantations, financially penalizing estates failing to follow the mandate of one white person per ten slaves—which was eventually changed even to a 1:30 ratio.

“The slaveholders were paranoid, and their slaves really were out to get them” (Brown 2020, 162)—Brown emphasizes one of the many paradoxical entanglements in this relationship. Fear must have accompanied whites in Jamaica daily—and yet fear was also the fundamental method for keeping slaves in check. Whenever the colonial army or mercenary militia won a skirmish with the rebels, whenever plantation superintendents became aware (or suspicious) of slaves conspiring, they would seek the most cruel, public, and spectacular forms of torture and execution. Dead, decimated bodies—often heads alone—exhibited on poles across the island were supposed to represent as a warning to others against turning thought into action. Such is the first meaning of slavery as a military conflict: daily violence and torture, but also a mutual feeling of physical threat. As we already know, slaves, such as the “Coromantee,” for instance, were often experienced soldiers. Opposite them, occupying managerial and supervisory positions, were also military veterans, former British Army soldiers—“viewing Africans essentially as enemies,” applying military oversight to a relationship that was (intended as) civilian (Brown 2020, 57). On the other hand, it was also a racial war: of whites against blacks, against a small, diverse group of free blacks and *mulattoes* (some of them partially free), who were (sometimes correctly⁴) suspected of supporting the slaves, or sometimes—as C.L.R. James wrote back in the 1930s in *The Black Jacobins*, which deals with a similar period in Saint Domingue (James 1989, 39 *passim*)⁵—of protecting their own

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4 A particularly interesting story in this context is that of Denmark Vesey, a free black who in 1820 organized a slave rebellion in South Carolina. It was recently revived in the context of disputes over the memory of the American South by Ethan J. Kyle and Blain Roberts in *Denmark Vasey's Garden. Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of Confederacy* (Kyle and Roberts, 2018).

5 James, who is sensitive to the diversity of actors in the Atlantic world, devotes a lot of attention to *mulattoes*—such as the bastard children of white owners and slave women, as well as courtesans and lovers—who in the mid-eighteenth century attained a strong position in San Domingo, purchased estates, sent their children to schools in France, and even carried themselves in the European style. In light of the rising importance of this population, whites gradually introduced promotion restrictions and limitations aimed at this group.

interests, which contradicted those of the white population, while not necessarily aligning with the interests of slaves.⁶

Another fundamental reading of slavery as warfare put forward by Brown (now in macro scale) is based on the a very straightforward decolonized reading of the map of the Atlantic world. Brown leaves no doubt that the colonial trade ports of the Guinea Gulf were merely small islands of Europe's meagre control over the colossal territory of West and Central Africa, where fierce, complex political and military conflicts were playing out among mighty armies and highly organized countries (for example, the Asante nation, whose name derives from *osa nit*—"because of war," had an army of eighty thousand soldiers, half of whom were equipped with fire arms (Rediker 2008, 87). Europeans fueled those clashes (by supplying weapons and generating demand for slaves), but by no means did they control them; meanwhile, the colonial economic endeavors were directly dependent on the policies of the African countries and maintaining proper relations with them. Therefore, to some extent, the eighteenth-century insurrections breaking out in West Indies were extensions of African conflicts: African soldiers training in the latter, sent into slavery as a result of war (fueled by the slave trade, although not exclusively), would then, in a geographically distant location, strive to liberate themselves from that captivity. However, the numerous slave revolts, engaging European armies involved in regular military operations against the rebels in West Indies, could also be perceived as continuations of the great wars—which, despite their locations and range of actors, were recognized as exclusively "Western." From this point of view, the 1760-61 events in Jamaica become nothing other than "one of most arduous and complex" fronts of the Seven Years' War, fought by the British forces against various rivals between 1756 and 1763 (Brown 2020, 209).

Finally, according to the author, the Jamaican "slave revolt" itself is best described in categories of war. It is an enduring sequence of partisan invasions, open battles, sieges, multiple declarations of states of emergency, search missions, alliances, and conflicts—spread over the course of nearly two years, both on the rebels' and British sides.⁷ The latter included, at varying times and proportions, the British army tro-

6 The situation in Jamaica was somewhat different from San Domingo. In 1774, it had twenty-three thousand people identified as *mulattoes*, but only four thousand of them were free (Brown 2008, 111).

7 The course of the battles is visualized in the interactive map developed by Vincent Brown: Slave Revolt in Jamaica 1760-1761 (<http://revolt.axismaps.com/map>, accessed March 1, 2020)

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ops, transported by navy ships, a militia consisting of plantation owners (unwilling to fight on their own), plantation workers and mercenaries (including free blacks), and trusted slaves, as well as the community of fugitives, who in 1740 became officially recognized by the Brits, having earned the right to occupy a section of the island as a result of the military conflicts of the 1730s. One of the conditions in their agreement with the British government was their active support of the colonial forces in any military conflicts. And it was the Jamaican *Maroons*—former slaves and slave descendants—who were most effective in tracking down and capturing insurgents, two decades after abandoning their insurgent status.

Viewing Tacky's Revolt as a war helps to recognize the actual nature of that struggle, but also access the perspective of the side whose vision of events may have entered the collective memory indirectly, if at all—through gossip, songs (shanties), and legends traveling via the grassroots, underground (under-the-deck?) Atlantic communication network, outlined by Julis S. Scott, one of Brown's teachers. The written history—unlike the whispered or the sung one—was created by those who have a sense of victory. Even the name, Tacky's Revolt, or Rebellion—solidified in colonial historical writings of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—exemplifies a selective and wishful interpretation of events that represents colonial interests. It enables a reduction of long-term clashes (of whose end no one could be certain and which, due to their essence, could never have ended) to a single point in time and space. It also allows the cause of the insurrection against the owners to be attributed to the influence of its leader—whose name indicates a noble heritage and subscribes to the aforementioned myth of the African gentry who rejected slavery as inappropriate for them—an influence over the supposedly submissive (faithful, and sometimes even grateful), or at the very least, passive slave community. Meanwhile, Tacky (reportedly a military leader back in Africa) most likely died on the seventh day of the eighteen-month long slave war in Jamaica. He might have even been personally responsible for the failure of the initial phase of the conflict (and for his own death). Based on some accounts, we may presume that the battle was to start simultaneously on numerous plantations across both ends of the island. It was scheduled for one of the holidays, but Tacky allegedly got drunk and launched the military offensive prematurely, or the group led by him may have also simply confused European holidays, as suggested by the fact that there were new fronts of the slave war breaking out several weeks later.

It is not a coincidence that there is not a single mention of the word

“revolution” in Brown’s book, not even as a descriptive concept. Its use could imply a certain universalism—not so much an affiliation with universal history, discussed by Susan Buck-Morss in reference to the Haitian Revolution (Buck-Morss 2009), but rather a universal character of the fight against slavery. Tacky, Jamaica, Wager (Apongo), Simon, Akua (Cubah)—the “Queen of Kingston,” the leaders and members of subsequent fronts of the Jamaican slave war, or, as Brown refers to it, the “Coromantee war,” did not fight for the abolition of slavery, and most definitely not for universal freedom. To call them revolutionaries, in the sense that this word (popularized in the English language since at least late seventeenth century) acquired after the events in the United States, Paris, and Haiti, after the declarations of rights and the first constitutions, would not only be anachronistic, but would also risk repeating the gesture of colonial projections (even if well intended). They fought a war—a partisan war against Imperial armies, uncomfortable for the European troops; a war against the white owners, managers, guards, and mercenaries; a war against slaves who refused to support them and against those were sent to fight against them by the whites; a war with “the savages,” *Maroons*, former fugitives who aligned with the British Empire to protect their own position.

How, then, does Brown write the history of the Jamaican slave war from below, without access to accounts from its participants?

One of the methodological points of reference for *Tacky’s Revolt* is clearly Julius S. Scott’s doctoral thesis, defended in 1986, entitled *The Common Wind. Afro-American Currents in the Age of Haitian Revolution* and published in 2018 by Verso (Scott 2018). Scott’s doctoral thesis, for over three decades known through excerpts and copies circulating in the unofficial academic circuit, describes the transatlantic, grassroots information network, a collective intelligence of the outcasts of the Euro-Afro-American world. Rediker wrote in his foreword to the legendary study, published upon his initiative: “Intelligence is precisely the right word, for the knowledge that circulated on ‘the common wind’ was strategic in its applications, linking news of English abolitionism, Spanish reformism, and French revolutionism to local struggles across the Caribbean” (Rediker 2018). It was an information network of “masterless” people: pirates, fugitives, deserters, vagabonds, those who “studied the horizon for what the future might bring” (Linebaugh 2018)—inevitably subversive people. This network, devoid of a center, nationality, or a single language had its nodes in ports; its carriers in ships, boats, and kayaks; its fuel in wind and changing currents, in all the meanings of the word. Within it, information carried a lot of

weight—it could cause unrest or even revolts: if there was news of another rebellion breaking out hundreds or even thousands of kilometers away, in response to some gossip about abolition or the alleviation of slavery by the authorities in a metropolis, as a result of reports about the diminished forces of one Empire or another due to the wars fought, and so on. Scott reconstructs this information network from the official and unofficial state correspondence (which demonstrated that the authorities were aware of the existence and effectiveness of the “common winds”), legal documents and acts, the press from Jamaica, Havana, and Port-Au-Prince, court testimonies and reports, ship logs, and slaves’ memoirs. Unlike the economic strain of modern slavery research (usually traced to Eric Williams’s 1944 study *Capitalism & Slavery*, describing the role of industry based on slave labor and the industry of the slave trade itself in the transformation of British capitalism [Williams 1944]), which reconstructs the network of capital flow winding around the Atlantic, Scott (as well as Brown) is interested in the tactical, not the systemic network. Therefore, the history of the insubordinates presented in *The Common Wind* is a history of a semi-public circulation of the semi-legal figures and unofficial information. It is also a transnational, “non-terracentric” (Bloch-Lainé 2017) history, written from the perspective of the seas.

Meanwhile, Vincent Brown diligently traces and reconstructs each day and each step (that can be recreated) of the war clashes in Jamaica—as if he wanted to trace them down to a square meter, grounding them as precisely as possible. Indeed, it is Scott to whom he owes the ability to recognize the significance and power of the information traveling the seas—nonetheless, he primarily focuses on the influence it had on the slaveowners, who foresaw, reinforced, and justified their fear of the “black majority” on the islands with the legend of the Coromantees as a “nation famed for insurrection.” When it comes to the grassroots information network, capable of engineering a conspiracy across vast territories, separated by mountains and dozens of kilometers, he finds it on the island itself—it was the communication following the treks of slaves as they went from one plantation to another (upon the managers’ approval), and of the free blacks, or *Maroons* trading at markets and on plantations, as well as fugitives suddenly appearing during slave holidays and rituals, to then vanish into the mountains. Following in the footsteps of C.L.R. James, but also of Peter H. Wood—Scott’s advisor and author of the 1974 book *Black Majority. Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through The Stono Rebellion*—Brown recognizes the wealth and diversity of black life, the variety of tactics of resistance and of

negotiating positions in a world built around the institution of slavery (Wood 1974). If *Tacky's Revolt* also attempts to reconstruct the Atlantic network, it is a network maintaining the continuity of African culture within the Atlantic triangle.

Contrary to Hegel's quip which situated Africa outside of history, it can be concluded that the African countries have become important actors in the history of the modern world, while their inhabitants have reclaimed the continuity of their biographies. *Tacky's Revolt* opens with a story of Wager—one of the main leaders of the slave war, who in May 1760, a few weeks after Tacky's death, initiated military operations on the other end of the island. In the 1740s, Apongo (Wager's African name) was an important military leader on the Gold Coast, who conducted market transactions and maintained relations with leaders of the British coastal fort. It is presumed that, having lost a battle in an African war, he was sent into slavery and sold to work on a Jamaican plantation, where, on another estate, he encountered a former high official from a British slave port, known to him from years before. The latter reportedly treated him with respect and vowed to soon buy him out of slavery. That promise was not kept. Wager led a group of slaves who, a few weeks after Tacky's death in May, reignited the war. He was captured in early June, condemned to hang in chains for three days, to then be burned alive (he died before the first three days passed). We learn of his story from the terrifying journals of the superintendent Thomas Thistlewood. He described its episodes, intertwined with summaries of the torture and physical penalties he imposed on slaves, descriptions of the intimidation methods he employed, and lists of his rapes of female slaves, to be counted in the dozens. Not having access to accounts from the other side, Brown of course needs to read the oppressor's testimonies against the author's intentions and, whenever possible, cross-check in the archives of the colonial company (how does one find Apongo when Europeans wrote down African names by sound, and hastily so?). However, he also needs to find a language in which Apongo can give his own account of the events. How does he achieve that?

In his first book, his goal was to reconstruct the framework of understanding and experiencing the world in light of omnipresent death, by outlining how it was conceptualized and processed. In his newest book, when formulating the history of the Jamaican slave war from the perspective of Africans, he focused on reconstructing their abilities and methods of forming resistance. That is why, in the story told by *Tacky's Revolt*, the basis of the biographical continuity in the Atlantic world, of building autonomy and reclaiming agency, lies in the slaves' bodies and

competences. It is the movement of bodies and military skills that become a language for recounting history from the rebels' perspective. The meticulously reconstructed map of army clashes and movements, which Brown developed and made available a few years ago, is where we can learn about their version of events. Over the course of the eighteen-month long war, which would kill half thousand slaves and sixty whites, which would destroy goods and crops then worth thousands of pounds, the fugitive slaves proved their excellence in geographical orientation and their ability to relocate quickly, climb, cover long distances on foot, and find shelter in the mountains as well as camouflage and disappear into the woods. They earned those competences in wars in Africa and, more broadly, in their pre-slavery lives. The precise map and calendar show us how efficient they were in reacting to the movements of their enemies and how—as we may speculate—they tried to anticipate them. The foundation of resistance and the foundation of autonomy thus lie in a body grounded in an environment, which is the body Brown strives to reclaim for the history of slavery. It is neither an animal body (threatening because of its strength and sexuality), feared by the white plantation owners, nor is it the tortured, weary body, presented to the world by the abolitionists. “[T]he Coromantee War was more than an expression of African heritage; it was the outcome of black military intellect in Jamaica” (Brown 2020, 205). It was about the intellect indeed, as in the uneven battle rebels applied their military competences to earn an advantage in combat against the better armed whites—competences that enabled long-term resistance operations, proved uncomfortable for the adversary, that were partisan and thus subversive towards the methods employed by a classic Western army (unaccustomed, for instance, to being stoned by an invisible enemy).

Tacky's Revolt initiated a new phase of slave resistance. Major plots and revolts subsequently erupted in Bermuda and Nevis (1761), Suriname (1762, 1763, 1768-72), Jamaica (1765, 1766, 1776), British Honduras (1765, 1768, 1773), Grenada (1765), Montserrat (1768), St. Vincent (1769-73), Tobago (1770, 1771, 1774), St. Croix and St. Thomas (1770 and after), and St. Kitts (1778) (Linebaugh and Rediker 2012, 224). These Atlantic “slave wars” were driven not only by the “common wind” of news about Tacky, Wager, the “Queen of Kingston,” and their brothers and sisters in arms, but also the transatlantic “military intellect” and physical competences of the African soldiers. Some of them were in fact directly powered by experiences earned in the war in Jamaica in 1760-1761. Linebaugh and Rediker continue: “Veterans of Tacky's Revolt took part in a rising in British Honduras (to which five

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hundred rebels had been banished) as well as three other revolts on Jamaica in 1765 and 1766” (Linebaugh and Rediker 2012, 224). From Brown’s point of view, these are simply subsequent fronts of the slave war fought in the Atlantic in the 1760s and 70s.

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