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The Public Sphere of the Haitian (Post-)Revolution: Conditioned Communication in Louis Dubroca and Baron de Vastey

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Abstract: In the last fifteen years, scholars from diverse fields, including early American studies, French studies, Latin American Studies, and post-colonial studies, have turned their attention to the complex history and literature of the Haitian revolution. What was once a “silenced” event in world history (Trouillot) has now become a center of attention for discussions of slavery, revolution, racism, and humanitarianism. In this essay, I combine close readings of proslavery and abolitionist pamphlets with an attention to geopolitical questions of diplomacy and international relations. I compare Louis Dubroca’s Napoleonic propaganda to the early nineteenth century radical anti-colonialism of the Haitian politician and intellectual Baron de Vastey. I argue that both authors, despite their enormous political differences, try to maneuver a rapidly shifting world of transatlantic interests and I show that part of their communicative ambition is to create a public sphere within which their ideas might be brought to life.

Keywords: The Haitian Revolution; International Relations; The nineteenth-century Atlantic; Louis Dubroca; Baron de Vastey; The public sphere; public opinion; racism; emancipation.

Bio: Jonas Ross Kjærgård is the author of Reimaging Society in Eighteenth-Century French Literature: Happiness and Human Rights (Routledge, 2018) and is currently working on a monograph centered on
It would be difficult to find two more different pamphlets from the Haitian revolution and post-revolutionary period than the two under consideration in this essay. Louis Dubroca’s *La vie de Toussaint-Louverture, chef des noirs insurgés de Saint-Domingue* (1802) is among the most racist and biased texts from the early nineteenth century transatlantic print culture of the Haitian revolution. Baron de Vastey’s *Le système colonial dévoilé* (1814), contrarily, is an uncompromising attempt to write back at precisely Dubroca’s kinds of stereotypical allegations. Dubroca penned Napoleonic propaganda and sought to awaken international acceptance of General Leclerc’s eventually unsuccessful military attempt to regain control of Saint-Domingue in 1801-1803. Writing under the reign of Roi Christophe, Vastey, inversely, tried not only to mobilize Haitians against new potential invasion attempts but also to build diplomatic relations with European abolitionists. Dubroca describes the revolutionary leader Toussaint L’Ouverture as brutal and treacherous and his co-revolutionaries as cannibals who have exposed their enemies to unexampled tortures, including burnings and the mutilation of all limbs.¹ Attacking this shrewd inversion of the victim-perpetrator roles, Vastey insists that the white planters were the real torturers and goes on to painstakingly document how named planters “revived every imaginable kind of torture, buried men up to the neck, threw them into the sugar-boiler along with the cane-trash, cut off the tongues, ears, or legs of [their] victims […].”²

One could expand the above list of oppositions indefinitely. In this essay, however, I explore two similarities between Dubroca and Vastey, both of which are examples of what I propose to call *conditioned communication.* By conditioned communication, I mean a communicative practice in which authors are not autonomous agents who freely voice their own opinions in order to qualify a common discussion on a topic of general interest. Instead, conditioned communication refers to a kind of authorial utterance that depends on a mix of multiple conditions such as the authors’ unequal access to print media, their reliance on standardized and racialized tropes, their allegiance to
a powerful person or interest group, their trust in outdated or fake information, and their economic or political interest in framing events in particular ways. The point is not to distinguish between conditioned and unconditioned writing, as if the latter even exists, but rather to investigate how two specific texts are conditioned and how this conditioning influences the presented arguments.

The fix points of my comparative analysis are authorial heteronomy and the importance of an imagined readership in Dubroca and Vastey. Chris Bongie has convincingly argued that the Baron de Vastey writes from an “interstitial” subject position that makes it impossible to determine whether the opinions presented in *The Colonial System Unveiled* are his alone or those of his king. I largely agree with Bongie’s interpretation and claim that readers are presented with a similar challenge of understanding authorial heteronomy in *The Life of Toussaint-Louverture* because Dubroca’s idiosyncratic opinions are entangled in the rapidly changing policies of the Napoleonic regime.

My second fix point is the imagined readership of Dubroca and Vastey. When diplomats or tradesmen intervened in the debate about Haiti’s future, they did so through letters or commercial agreements directed at specific interlocutors. Dubroca and Vastey, inversely, addressed an anonymous international readership about which they had limited knowledge. We know that both pamphlets reached large audiences in their original versions or in translation but what interests me here are the ways in which both authors tried to rhetorically package their arguments in ways that would appeal to the readers they imagined for their writings. I claim that both pamphlets are conditioned by the authors’ wish to communicate strategically with an imagined audience and I even believe part of the ambition of Dubroca and Vastey was to write a specific readership into being; a readership that would be responsive to their respective ideas and capable of acting upon them.

As should be clear from the above, my comparative reading does not suggest similarities in the political ideas or ethical worth of Dubroca and Vastey. By investigating how authorial heteronomy and imagined audiences conditioned the pamphlets of two writers as different as
Dubroca and Vastey, however, I hope to contribute to the larger task of rethinking the concept of a public sphere from a postcolonial perspective. Scholars of the European enlightenment (Habermas, Baker, Goodman, Chartier, etc.) have done most of the conceptual work on “public opinion” and “the public sphere” but it remains a challenge to adjust the acumens of their scholarship to the significantly different context of the Caribbean and Atlantic region. As German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued most forcefully, it was only when citizens participated in the public debate as free individuals, unconstrained by their professional obligations, that Europeans could contribute to the enlightened discussions of common concerns. I hope this analysis of authorial heteronomy and strategic communication in Dubroca and Vastey can help pinpoint some of the differences between the Atlantic region and the Europeanized conception of the public sphere.

In what follows, I take the rapidly shifting Haitian (post-)revolutionary public sphere as the point of departure for my reading of Dubroca and Vastey. The essay continues with a reading of one pamphlet at a time, both of them focused on the conditioned communication of the authors, and the essay concludes with a reflection on the international public sphere within which both authors wished their writings received.

The Public Sphere and the Haitian Revolution

In his classic study of the European Enlightenment public sphere, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit (1962), Jürgen Habermas describes the eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere as a space for private people to come together and discuss matters of public interest. At least in theory, the European public had had no access to matters of state in the early modern monarchies because state administration was the prerogative and responsibility of the sovereign ruler. “L’état, c’est moi,” as Louis XIV is supposed to have said. Even though Habermas has been criticized for underestimating
the degree to which political power was parceled out in practice in early modern France, there is agreement that the Enlightenment and its multitude of salons, academics, clubs, theaters, and journals created new possibilities for broader political participation and contestation of absolutist power. Concurrent with the general idea of Immanuel Kant, Habermas insists that it was “private people,” as opposed to professional public authorities, who frequented these institutions. In this role of privates, they changed the tone of public debate by investing it with private sphere values such as sentiment, cultivation, and “humanity.” An important consequence of this organization of the public sphere institutions, Habermas and others emphasize, was that it made it possible for women to acquire active roles in public discussions.

What came out of the public sphere in different developing modern European nation-states was “public opinion.” Public opinion should be seen not simply as the middle ground of the public sphere discussions but as a “political or ideological construct” in itself. With this formulation, Keith Michael Baker makes the constructivist argument that “public opinion” was not a viewpoint that belonged to a discernible sociological group but rather a new source of legitimacy, which different people would attempt to invoke in political debates. Hence, in their pursuit of different political agendas, agents and groups would struggle to position themselves rhetorically as the legitimate bearers of public opinion. In that process, they created a new space for political debate, which found its source of legitimacy in the public rather than in the figure of the monarch and it was within this space of opposing attempts to define and represent “public opinion,” Baker concludes, that the French revolution became “thinkable.”

Whether l’opinion publique is understood primarily as a set of political opinions emanating from the private people who visited the new public institutions or as a discursive construct relying on a new source of political legitimacy, there is agreement that the emerging Enlightenment public sphere was a prime mover of the dramatic French eighteenth century history that culminated in
1789. Things look different, however, when we turn from metropolitan France to colonial Saint-Domingue and those differences can help specify the layout of the public sphere within which the Haitian revolution unfolded and was discussed. Through the eighteenth century, white planters and colonial administrators had managed to develop a functioning public sphere in Saint-Domingue with learned societies, a theater, and a regularly appearing journal and the outbreak of the metropolitan revolution even inaugurated what Jeremy Popkin calls a “colonial media revolution.” While there was only one newspaper in Saint-Domingue in 1789, the officially licensed Affiches américaines, there were at least a dozen in 1793. The content of these newspapers varied greatly, depending upon the unpredictable arrival of news from France and upon the rapidly shifting power hierarchies of the colony, but they were an important outlet for discussions about colonial reform among the colony’s white population. David Geggus thus argues that the Saint-Domingue journals were crucial for that minor part of the Haitian revolution “that was largely internal to the colony’s white population.”

It was a common fear among conservative planters that French revolutionary ideals of equal rights and radical colonial reform would spread beyond the white readership and reach the largely illiterate population of enslaved laborers with the free people of color as inflammatory intermediaries. However, as Popkin emphasizes, even a radical newspaper in Saint-Domingue such as the Ami de l’égalité “carried advertisements for the sale of slaves,” a fact that made the ideologically different colonial newspapers “one of the technologies by which a small white minority was able to keep a much larger black population under its control.” Despite the radical content of some of the colonial newspapers, they were therefore more of an obstacle of than a vehicle for the revolution of the black insurgents. In a similar vein, the theater in Cap-Français did not shy away from staging a potentially inflammatory operatic version of Abbé Raynal’s Histoire philosophique et politique des deux indes but access to this theater was restricted to the white population and to the free people of color, with the second group being restricted to secondary loge-level seating. If the enslaved soon-to-be
revolutionaries participated in anything like a public sphere, it had the character not of an Enlightenment Republic of Letters but much more frequently of illegitimate gatherings, secret religious ceremonies, or occasional meetings. A public sphere where free, private people could discuss and develop “public opinions” was not something the Haitian revolutionaries could benefit from at the outset but something, as we will see in the case of Vastey, they would have to struggle for after emancipation.

The public sphere of the Haitian revolution, however, was no isolated domestic space. In Habermas’ description of the public spheres of European nation-states, he emphasizes the importance of a shared language because a shared language is the prerequisite for having a common discussion on a topic of general interest. Revolutionary and post-revolutionary Haiti was deeply entangled in an international web of economic, diplomatic, military, and intellectual interests and the consequence of those entanglements was that the discussion of the development and future of Haiti took place in an international and multilingual space quite unlike the spaces studied by Habermas. Individuals from the entire transatlantic region followed the Haitian revolution with enormous interest and pamphleteers, propagandists, politicians, and authors of fiction produced a highly heterogeneous body of literature on the topic. The U.S. and European discussions unfolded in a sphere of partial knowledge at best because the enormous geographical distance from the Caribbean made it impossible for U.S. and European observers to know if they responded to updated information. The significant economic interests in Saint-Domingue coupled with the racist and political bias of many European commentators further build upon the opacity of the Atlantic public sphere within which the Haitian revolution was debated. Different European agents and interest groups would take advantage of the general attraction to all news of the colonial revolt and manufacture horrifying eyewitness accounts or other enticing documents that would manipulate events and cast revolutionaries or planters in a favorable or unfavorable light.19 It further added to
the confusion that important Haitian revolutionary texts circulated in translations that were more or less true to the original versions. Dubroca’s slanderous pamphlet on Toussaint L’Ouverture, for example, appeared in French in 1802 and two different English language translations were published in the same year, one in London and another in Charleston, and in 1805, a partial German translation appeared in the journal *Minerva*.

While translations of some Haitian revolutionary writings were faithful to the original, others were substantially changed texts that aimed to affect a new audience while benefitting from the authority of the original author name.

In my readings of Dubroca and Vastey, I emphasize how contextual factors conditioned the arguments and rhetorical choices of the authors. In his work on the Baron de Vastey, Chris Bongey has developed a reading strategy that I find most inspiring in this regard. Vastey, he claims, stood in a “scribal relation to power” and he therefore “exemplifies the discomfiting, interstitial form of ‘literary life’ that flourished in post/revolutionary Haiti.” For Bongie, Vastey is not an autonomous writer who freely expressed his opinions on Haitian history. Instead, he had to develop a voice from the subject position he embodied as an employee of the king and the result is an “interstitial form of literary life,” that differs from the ideal of “‘autonomous’ cultural production” that began to flourish in Europe precisely in the early nineteenth century. This kind of heteronomous writing also differs from Habermas’ ideal of public sphere deliberations among private persons. I prefer to speak of conditioned communication, however, because multiple authors, including Dubroca, wrote from subject positions that were different from Vastey’s, yet none the less heteronomous. In addition, early nineteenth century writings on the Haitian revolution were conditioned, not only by the professional commitments of the authors, but also by their reliance on inaccurate information, a particularistic national outlook, limited access to print media, the inability to transgress the racialized discourse of the period, or of some blend of the above. Rather than being a fixed theoretical concept, however, I use conditioned communication as an analytical and heuristic point of departure.
and in my analyses of Dubroca and Vastey, I focus particularly on the rhetorical and political significance of the heteronomous authorial positions and the imagined readerships of both authors.

**England and Toussaint-the-Traitor**

Louis Dubroca has a peculiar position in Haitian revolutionary studies. Together with figures such as Pierre-Victor Malouet and Bryan Edwards, he is often mentioned as a pro-slavery and horrendously racist observer of the Haitian revolution. But while the biographies of Malouet and Edwards, who were both plantation owners, are relatively well-known, Dubroca remains, in Deborah Jenson’s words, “an astoundingly shadowy figure [of whom] it is difficult to pin down his real activities and affiliations.” Dubroca’s biographies of Toussaint L’Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines were widely read and were translated into English, German, and/or Spanish but many contemporary observers considered his work biased and incorrect. In *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805), Marcus Rainsford (1758-1817) thus termed Dubroca a “popular writer” whose memoir of Toussaint contained “some authentic facts” but was generally “distorted for the purposes of party.” James Stephen in his laudatory portrait of Toussaint L’Ouverture from 1803 called Dubroca one of Toussaint’s “bitterest defamers” and claimed that Dubroca was “employed by the French government to slander poor Toussaint […].”

Despite the lacunae in his biography, most scholars today describe Dubroca’s pamphlets as either racist, propagandistic, or both. Malick Ghachem thus claims that *La vie de Toussaint-L’ouverture* was “commissioned by Napoleon’s regime as part of a propaganda war against the slave revolution” and for Marlene Daut, Dubroca helped to “firmly establish the trope of ‘monstrous hybridity’ […],” one of the four racialized stock tropes she studies in the transatlantic print culture of the Haitian revolution. While Jenson questions whether Dubroca was really a Napoleonic propagandist for reasons I shall return to, I see no reasons to challenge neither Ghachem’s propaganda reading nor
Daut’s tropic reading but I think we can learn more from Dubroca’s pamphlet if we examine the way the author positioned his argument against what Rainsford calls the “fluctuating politics of Europe”. Phrased in the vocabulary of this essay, Dubroca’s slanderous pamphlet is conditioned. It is conditioned by his usage of racialized stock tropes, by his likely employment by Napoleon and by his ambition to affect opinion makers in the context of rapidly shifting French-British military relations. Understanding how he worked with those conditions allows us a better appreciation of the public sphere that Dubroca himself felt he needed to maneuver.

When Rainsford wrote of the “fluctuating politics of Europe,” it was to argue that shifting commercial, military, and political relations between European nations had a profound effect upon the fate of Saint-Domingue. He made this argument in a discussion of the agreement and eventual abrogation of the Treaty of Amiens, the treaty that lasted a year from 25 March 1802 to 25 March 1803 and put a momentary stop to the battles between England and France that had begun with the Revolutionary Wars and would last until the fall of Napoleon. In the late 1801, Napoleon Bonaparte had sent his brother-in-law, Charles Victoire Emmanuel Leclerc (1772-1802), on an expedition to Saint-Domingue and had ordered him to capture Toussaint L’Ouverture and reestablish French control of the colony. Leclerc was initially successful, in part, Rainsford suggests, because the British fleet abstained from interfering with his expedition due to the peace treaty. The recommencement of war between France and England in March 1803 caused the British ships to block the French vessels’ attempts to collect provisions and ammunition from nearby islands. Without thereby engaging directly in war with the French fleet, the British squadron rendered the troops of Dessalines an “incalculable service,” Rainsford concludes. La vie de Toussaint-Louverture intervened in the Haitian revolutionary public sphere at this exact moment, and the portrayal of Toussaint seems designed to make the English government approve of the expedition.
One of the reasons why Jenson doubts if Dubroca was a Napoleonic propagandist is that he began to voice anti-British opinions before Napoleon came to power, a chronology, she suggests, that speaks against him having modelled his political views on those of the Emperor. She acknowledges that “the *Life of J. J. Dessalines* loses few opportunities to berate the British where Saint Domingue was concerned” but continues to notice that “this particular vendetta was evident in a work published under the Dubroca name in 1798 […] before the start of the Consulate.”

The work she is referring to is *La politique du gouvernement Anglais devoilé* (1798), which, as the title suggests, is explicit in its anti-Britishness. The English government, Dubroca writes on the opening lines, is “treacherous” and an “[e]ternal rival of France,” and while it has always been “Machiavelic,” ever since the times of the French revolution, the English government has become “foremost horrible and appalling.”

Jenson is thus right to notice the consistency of Dubroca’s anti-Englishness but interestingly, this “vendetta” is put on pause in *La vie de Toussaint-Louverture*. While Jenson thus considers the persistent anti-Britishness an argument against the hypothesis of Dubroca’s affiliation with the Napoleonic regime, I think the temporary abandonment of this attitude increases the likelihood that Dubroca was indeed a Napoleonic propagandist who adjusted his opinions to the currents of French foreign policy. The crucial question, however, is how the authorial heteronomy of Dubroca in this moment of French-British relations influences his representation of the Haitian revolution and, more specifically, his depiction of Toussaint L'Ouverture.

The momentary change in attitude towards England is most noticeable in Dubroca’s discussion of General Maitland (1777-1854). Maitland led the English attempt to invade and colonize Saint-Domingue in 1798 and given Dubroca’s earlier critique of the English government, it would be natural to expect a sharp condemnation of the British invasion attempt. Instead of such a critique, however, Dubroca begins by citing from a piece in the *Morning Chronicle* that describes
Maitland’s success in negotiations with Toussaint and he continues, surprisingly, by defending Maitland’s conduct:

I have no intention, in citing this paragraph, to blame or misrepresent the English nation, which, at that time the enemy of France, had the incontestable right to sustain itself by such alliances as it could make; my design is to shew the profound dissimulation and perfidy of TOUSSAINT, who, while by his agents he lulled the French government into the most perfect security, treated with the enemies of the Republic to the sacrifice of its interests.³⁴

Here, Dubroca clearly respects the Treaty of Amiens and wishes to accommodate his English readership. Instead of continuing what Jenson called his “vendetta” against the English government, Dubroca defends Maitland’s actions, detrimental as they were to French interests. When he revisited this episode two years later in his biography of Dessalines, he did not make this reconciliatory effort.³⁵ The quoted passage, however, also manifests a link between Dubroca’s attunement to Napoleon’s foreign policy and his choice to portray Toussaint as a traitor. The pamphlet is clearly an attempt to “denigrate [Toussaint’s] character,” but the denigration is strategically designed not to offend British readers.³⁶ Interestingly, the French original text speaks of “la profonde perfidie de Toussaint-Louverture,” a phrase that has been rendered precisely in the American edition as “the profound perfidy of this chief” but which has become “the profound dissimulation and perfidy of Toussaint” [my italicization] in the otherwise largely accurate British translation.³⁷ The word “dissimulation” does not alter the meaning of the sentence but it strengthens the image of Toussaint-the-traitor. In order to appreciate the particularity of this portrayal of Toussaint, notice how
Dubroca selects a different rhetorical strategy in his description of Dessalines in 1804 when war with England had recommenced:

The English ministers have treated, not with a conqueror of the French in Saint-Domingue, but with their infamous assassin; not with the leader of a civilized society, but with the leader of a gang of robbers, against whom it would have been in the interest of all nations to unite, as one unites against a ferocious beast to prevent its murderous devastations.

Oh! How did these ministers, by thus sacrificing the honor of their nation to the momentary combinations of their hatred and interest, fail to see that they legitimized in advance the frightful catastrophe that threatens them in Jamaica?38

Unlike Toussaint, Dessalines is not a traitor in disguise. Instead, Dubroca develops a highly affective language of predatory inhumanity and uses it to liken Dessalines with a “ferocious beast.” This image is further developed throughout the pamphlet when Dessalines is termed a “monster” and compared to “the tigers that inhabit the climate where he was born.”39 Dessalines’ men, too, are depicted as “a troupe of crazed lions and tigers starving for blood” and as “a troupe of ferocious brigands, more comparable to unchained tigers than to humans.”40 This racist dehumanizing vocabulary serves to rhetorically place Dessalines and his men in an enemy category of non-humans and the only reasonable way to act, Dubroca contends, is for all civilized nations to unite and put down these predators.41 England, however, has made the crucial mistake of treating with Dessalines, foolishly mistaking him for a civilized human being, and this erroneous policy serves as an implicit legitimization of a catastrophe that will, Dubroca predicts, hit English planters in Jamaica. In 1804, a year after the cancellation of the Treaty of Amiens, Dubroca thus favors a strategy of denigration
that works to simultaneously vilify Dessalines and condemn England. It is important to note in this context that the Dessalines pamphlet was translated immediately, not into English like the Toussaint biography, but into Spanish, presumably because Spain in 1804 was France’s most important ally in the war against England.42

Returning to the 1802 pamphlet, Toussaint-the-traitor is Dubroca’s preferred choice of rhetorical figure. True, Dubroca does rhetorically exclude Toussaint from the community of human beings when he calls his actions examples of “that extreme barbarism for which the sacred laws of nature, consanguinity, and humanity, have no restraint” but he much more frequently returns to notions of “hypocrisy” and “calculation” when he describes Toussaint and his dangerous ability to engineer an image of himself as trustworthy.43 The theme of betrayal and feigned good intentions reaches a rhetorical culmination in the following description of Toussaint.

Toussaint Louverture is not sincerely attached to the liberation of the Negroes, and detests the dominion of Europeans. He loathes with a mortal hatred the Mulattoes, whose race in the colony he has almost rooted out. He despises his own brethren the negroes, whom he employs merely as instruments of his ambition, and whose death he coldly commands by thousands, when his power is in the least menaced.

He abused the confidence of his first benefactors. He betrayed his own faction, the Spanish, English, Mulattoes, White people, France under royal government, Republican France, his own blood, his country, and the religion he professes to respect.44

With this passage, Daut notes in her reading of it, Dubroca “helps to firmly establish the trope of ‘monstrous hybridity’” because all “ideologically conflicting, ‘racially’ confusing, and epistemologically confounding circumstances” are linked to a “demonic and genocidal” character,
which can again be explained ‘racially’.45 Toussaint is a hybrid character because he is able to align himself with all different interest groups in Saint-Domingue and he is monstrous because his allegiance becomes murderousness whenever he considers it opportune. This trope of monstrous hybridity and the racial ideas it builds upon were, Daut writes, “reproduced, copied, and repackaged over and over again to the extent that they not only became accepted as truths, but have become immune to criticism.”46

As we have seen, and despite Daut’s perceptive analysis, contemporary commentators such as Marcus Rainsford and James Stephen did in fact raise serious questions about the veracity of Dubroca’s text. What I find crucial about Daut’s analysis in this context, however, is the idea that early nineteenth century writers had a limited set of racialized tropes at their disposal when they intervened in the debate about the Haitian revolution. Dubroca, in my estimation, worked with the tropes that were available to him and made the strategic choice to represent Toussaint, not as a bloodthirsty predator, but as an ambitious traitor who abused the confidence of all benefactors, including British and French ones. This choice of trope was conditioned by his ambition to appeal to British readers and by his wish to legitimize the Leclerc expedition in their eyes. He demonized both Toussaint and Dessalines, but he did it in diverse ways and those rhetorical differences were the result, I claim, not simply of the dissimilarities between Toussaint and Dessalines, but of Dubroca’s careful maneuvering against what Rainsford called the fluctuations in European politics. The traitor narrative is well-suited to accommodate British readers and make them see the necessity of the Leclerc expedition while the monstrosity narrative favored in 1804 adds weight to the French and Spanish critique of British policy. His wish to intervene in an implicit discussion about French-British foreign relations thus conditions his choice of vocabulary and, by extension, his troubling contribution to the development of a pseudoscientific theory of racial differences.
Even though his political opinions were entirely different, Vastey too, as I will show before I conclude with a return to the public sphere question, needed to maneuver similarly complex geopolitical conditions.

**Baron de Vastey and the Haitian “We”**

The core of Vastey’s anticolonial pamphlet *Le système colonial dévoilé* (1814) is the documentation of the crimes of plantation slavery. Over fifteen pages, Vastey ruthlessly reports the transgressions of more than eighty named planters in sentences that are both sober and shocking: “Delmas, settler, resident of Cavaillon, chained his blacks to a stake that was exposed to all the elements, and he buried them alive. […] Rousseau Lagaudraie, owner of a coffee plantation at Ravine Blanche, Cavaillon, had his blacks put in chains and left them in this miserable state to be gorged on by his dogs.” His sentences describe horrible examples of torture and violence but as scholars have noted, his style is atypical among the writings about the Haitian revolution because he mostly abstains from the sentimental register favored by numerous authors and instead develops a descriptive, yet most stirring, tone. Even though it was challenging for early nineteenth century observers to label Vastey with the racial and stylistic categories they had available, his polemic, knowledgeable, and poignant writings succeeded to reach influential readers throughout the international public sphere of the Haitian revolution.

To this day, Jean Louis Vastey (1781-1820) remains a perplexing figure because he challenges widespread assumptions about the alleged necessity of an interconnection between political, social, intellectual, and ‘racial’ positions. He was born, Chris Bongie writes, into a position of “in-betweenness” with his father being a French colonist from Normandy and his mother a free woman of color from a wealthy Saint-Domingue plantation owning family. The fact that he seems to have
been “phenotypically white” in combination with his familial background made it difficult for contemporary commentators to “properly ‘race’ Vastey and his work.” In the years after Haitian emancipation, he worked for Dessalines and later rose to a position of secretary to Roi Christophe, effectively making him one of the most important advisors to and spokespersons of the king. Vastey’s authorial heteronomy, or what Bongie calls his “scribal relation” to Christophe, adds to Vastey’s complexity because it makes it untenable to understand his black emancipationist thought solely as the result of an autonomous intellectual at work.

One way of approaching, Vastey’s complex “mediatory, dominant-dominated” subject position is through his usage of a collective Haitian “we.” I consider this “we” both stylistically and politically complex and I argue that it is conditioned by multiple factors including his political wish to build a collective Haitian identity and his hope that the diplomatic situation of Haiti was improving in 1814 because of Napoleon Bonaparte’s forced abdication as Emperor of France. Vastey’s “we”, in other words, is testimony to his ambition of simultaneously targeting two imagined groups of readers in the Atlantic region: a domestic and an international one. Remembering Keith Michael Baker’s constructivist interpretation of the French revolutionary public sphere, his invocation of a Haitian “we” should also be regarded as an attempt to discursively position himself as spokesperson of a burgeoning collective Haitian identity.

Vastey’s “we” is a controversial rhetorical concept because he uses it to equalize the different experiences Haitians have had in the colonial past. Even though he had never been enslaved, he uses the collective “we” to describe the bodily punishments delivered by the white planters: “death hovered over our heads as over those of the lowliest animals; and when they wanted to deal it out to us, the only thing that gave them any pause was the question of which form of punishment to choose.” Here, the “we” or the “us” works to include the writer among the formerly enslaved and Vastey continues to parallel the sufferings of the enslaved with the group of the “so-called ‘free’
people” of color. This group of people, to whom Vastey and his mother had belonged, had, Vastey writes, “endured the same humiliations and the same disgraceful treatment as the slaves, and we will consider them as such.” From a distance of two hundred years, Vastey’s “we” might seem politically problematic because it evens out the very different experiences people had of colonial subjection. For Vastey, however, it was important to argue, domestically and internationally, that a collective Haitian subjectivity, a “we,” existed and it was crucial to insist that colonial slavery was never solely an individual fate defined by the relation between an enslaved laborer and a colonial master. Enslavement, rather, was a racial logic and a power structure that encapsulated the entire colonial system and manifested itself theoretically in proslavery writing and practically in both enslavement and racial segregation.

Vastey’s “we” was a politically motivated rhetorical invention but it was also something more. In preparing his pamphlet, he interviewed Haitians and asked them to share their experiences with plantation slavery. This collection of testimonial facts, Vastey writes, gives his work “the stamp of truth” and he continues: “I collected them from the survivors of families whose kinsfolk experienced the acts of torture I am going to try and sketch here, as well as from those unlucky enough to have lived through them. These witnesses are unimpeachable. […] Moreover, I am providing the names of the colonists who perpetrated these crimes […]” The central part of The Colonial System is the fifteen-page list of crimes committed by named planters and as is visible from Vastey’s legal court vocabulary (witnesses, crimes), and as has been emphasized by Daut, Vastey uses the collected testimonies to build a case against the French oppressors. The assembled testimonies from his co-citizens thus function as evidence in support of the allegation Vastey directs at the French and hopes to bring to the attention of “the Sovereigns of Europe […] at the Tribunal of Nations.” In addition to mounting an accusation, however, the voices of victims merge in Vastey’s writing and unite in his collective “we.” Or, as Vastey writes in a poetic passage that links Haiti’s
victimized voices to the geography of the nation: “These unavailing cries would melt into air, they would merge with the sound of the whip that echoed through our mountains.”

In the Haiti of 1814, Vastey’s collective “we” was controversial not only for equalizing different kinds of colonial experiences but also for trying to incorporate Pétion’s republican south in Christophe’s monarchical north. Since the assassination of Dessalines in 1806, Haiti was effectively haunted by a civil war and Vastey addresses these north/south divisions towards the end of The Colonial System.

The pleasure they [the colonists] get from our internal divisions. Their hope of perpetuating those divisions, and their efforts at doing so. […] Ah! My Haytian compatriots, my brothers, my friends, let us rally against our common enemies […] let us rally round the great Henry, this good father, whose every care and solicitude is for the happiness of the Haytian family, all of whom are his children.

In one sense, Bongie is right to claim that the quoted passage is the “solitary reference in Colonial System to the division of post-independence Haiti.” In another sense, however, this passage merely explicates an ambition that runs through the entire pamphlet, namely that of uniting Haiti in a collective “we” around the figure of Roi Christophe. In the introductory dedication to the king, Vastey thus claims that Christophe, “the only black Prince,” is “[d]estined by Divine Providence to bring the regeneration of the Haytian People to fruition” and that Christophe is “the one who has infused our souls with the energy and noble daring that spurs us onward.” This ambition of assembling Haiti around the king lies in continuation of the constitutional work that was initiated with the multiple early Haitian constitutions (1801, 1805, 1807, 1811). As the French revolutionaries knew very well, a constitution is not merely a list of fundamental laws but also, and
perhaps more importantly, a performative act that aims to constitute a new collective political subject. The collective “we” that Vastey uses throughout the pamphlet is such an attempt to bring a Haitian subject into being.

From the standpoint of political theory, the political subject of Vastey’s pamphlet is an unusual creation because it combines elements of royalist ideology with the natural rights philosophy that is usually associated with republicanism in this period. Besides being the divinely instituted sovereign and the paternal ruler of the Haitian “Brethren,” Christophe is also the “most ardent defender of the rights of man” and “among the first of the Haytian heroes to take an axe to the ancient Tree of Slavery and colonial Despotism.” In other words, he combines the paternal care of his subjects, necessary for assembling Haiti, with a forceful ability to use violence against foreign oppressors who disregard the rights of Haitian citizens. This blended ideology is not unprecedented in the Haitian context as Toussaint L’Ouverture in letters from 1793 at times exhorted “republican blacks to join him in the fight for liberty and equality” while he at others found it necessary to invoke a “very royalist tone”. On the level of political theory, however, this blend of republican and monarchical thought highlight yet another difference between the Haitian and the French public spheres. While we have seen that the latter is concurrent with a shift from absolutism to democratic republicanism, the Haitian public sphere, at least in the case of Vastey, seems capable of bridging ideological divides.

If the domestic ambition of Vastey is to regenerate a Haitian “we” around the royal figure of Christophe, he has an equally important international communicative ambition. It has long, in the words of Julia Gaffield, been a “scholarly consensus that Atlantic World states and empires collectively isolated Haiti after the Declaration of Independence.” And while it is true that foreign powers were incredibly slow to officially recognize Haiti as an independent state, Gaffield shows that there were rich commercial, diplomatic, and intellectual connections between Haiti and the
transatlantic world even in the years immediately following Dessalines’ 1804 proclamation. The closest Haiti came to a powerful political and military ally in these years was England but while commercial British actors were eager to trade with Haiti, British politicians searched for a compromise solution that would allow the prosperous commerce to increase without provoking neither the French Consulate nor colonial allies who feared a potential “spread” of the Haitian revolution. Their two-tongued solution to this dilemma was to allow some commerce and thus signal a “degree of diplomatic authority” to Haiti while simultaneously refuse to “overtly recognize Haiti as a sovereign nation.”

Vastey’s pamphlet was published in October 1814 six months after Napoleon was sent into exile on Elba with the Treaty of Fontainebleau. The Leclerc expedition of 1801-1803 had made Napoleon the number one enemy of Christophe’s Haiti and the fall of this “enemy of the world” naturally held the promise of a new start for Christophe and Vastey. In September 1814, these “favorable circumstances” prompted Christophe to publish a Manifeste du roi in which he appealed to “the Sovereigns of the world” and especially to the “brave and loyal British nation” and asked them to “abolish the infamous traffic of the blacks.” This manifest was co-written by his secretary of state, the Comte de Limonade (Julien Prévost), and the “only goal” of the king’s reign, he wrote, was for the free and independent Haiti to “occupy a place among the civilized people” of the world. Vastey follows up upon this diplomatic appeal in The Colonial System when he invokes the “Sovereigns of Europe” and the “Tribunal of Nations.” A Tribunal of Nations did not exist in 1814 but could be read as a reference to the Congress of Vienna, the high profile diplomatic summit scheduled for around the time of the publication of The Colonial System. As it were, the Congress of Vienna would disappoint the optimism of Christophe and Vastey but their publications reveal the Haitian Kingdom’s renewed hopes for official international recognition. They also prove that the writings on the Haitian revolution, including the ones coming from Haiti, were co-conditioned by
what Rainsford called the “fluctuating politics of Europe,”77 and with Vastey’s appeal to the imaginary “Tribunal of Nations,” these publications finally suggest a readiness to push for the creation of an international institution capable of consequential deliberation on Haiti’s past and future.

Read in the context of international diplomacy, Vastey follows Christophe in the ambition to win the support of England by shamelessly praising her virtues. England is thus the “great and magnanimous […] Nation” who has reached the “highest point of glory any people on earth has ever attained,” which, in light of the cautious policy pursued by England, is surely a strategic overstatement.78 Praising England, however, is only the first part of a diplomatic strategy that hinges on two additional elements: the proof of reason and the threat of violence. Christophe’s monarchy consciously pursued a strategy of demonstrating the civilization of Haitians by publishing a journal, La Gazette royale d’Hayti edited by Vastey (and by Juste Chanlatte before him), in addition to numerous officially licensed pamphlets that responded to the bulk of misinformation circulating in the transatlantic print culture of the Haitian revolution. Vastey headed this publication strategy and thereby worked to develop the material conditions for a post-independence Haitian public sphere.

In his writing, he underscores the importance of the “Haytian presses” because these are the prerequisites for unveiling “the crimes of the colonists and respond to even the most absurd lies invented by the prejudice and avarice of our oppressors.”79 In the same passage, he stresses the need to “write back” to Haiti’s “contemptible detractors” but his choice of phrase on this point (“unveil the crimes”) resonates with the title of his pamphlet and thus reveals a self-reflective layer in his text.80 He is equally metareflective in a passage on proslavery argumentation when he calls attention to the significance of his own act of writing:
Learned writers and clever anatomists have spent their lives arguing over facts that are as clear as daylight, while others have spent them dissecting the bodies of humans and animals in order to prove that I, who am now writing, belong to the race of Ourang-Outangs.81

As shown above, Dubroca, in his slanderous pamphlet on Dessalines, followed other observers in comparing the Haitian revolutionaries to wild animals. In an exhibition of intellectual esprit, Vastey here disproves such disingenuous allegations in the act of response itself. The ability to reason in writing becomes proof of civilization and writing is thus intimately linked to Christophe’s stated ambition of seeing Haiti “occupy a place among the civilized people” of the world.82 It is testimony to the ambivalences of Vastey’s political thought, however, that he himself compares the “residents of Lapland, New Zembla, Kamchatka, [and] Greenland” to uncivilized animals when he rhetorically asks: “Have you ever seen anything more savage than those ichthyophagous peoples, vegetating in a state approximating that of the brute beast, pell-mell, without manners or laws?”83

In addition to strategically praising semi-committed allies and to seeking to prove Haitian civilization through writing, Vastey, finally, uses the threat of violence in his attempt to carve out a space for Haiti in the world. In Christophe’s Manifeste this threat is present but only in an oddly inverted way. Whoever tries to invade Haiti, Christophe writes, will have to “march for a long time over ruins and corpses” and if they choose to pursue this strategy and loose the “flower of their troupes” along the way, all they will find is “lost treasures.”84 Christophe, in other words, insinuates that Haiti will use strategies of guerrilla warfare to fight back in the case of invasion and should the invading powers prove too strong, he will make sure that all fields and buildings are burned to the ground before the aggressors have the chance to benefit from them. Whether or not this is a
deliberate variation on Dessalines’ “Liberty or death”-slogan, it certainly shows the preference of self-annihilation over submission.

In comparison with Christophe’s *Manifeste*, Vastey is less self-annihilating and more direct in his threat of violence. After a description of how the Spanish conquistadores slaughtered the defenseless original inhabitants of Haiti, Vastey pauses to reflect upon the importance of weapons and self-defense. He urges the “sons of the mountain” and the “dwellers of the forest” to “cherish these weapons of yours, these precious tools for preserving your rights” and continues to ask them to “pass them on to your children along with the love of liberty and independence, and a hatred for tyrants.”85 The memory of the defenseless original population of Haiti, Vastey suggests, makes it crucial for Haitians to be armed in case of another invasion and the memory of the past is thus used to promote the important domestic task of building a strong citizenry capable of self-defense.

Typical of Vastey’s attunement to Haiti’s position in the world, however, he communicates simultaneously to different readerships, a domestic and an international one. Domestically, he is a nation-builder but in an international perspective, he wants to make sure that all interlocutors are fully aware of the readiness of Haitians to use violence in their quest for sovereignty and freedom. It is in this light, the final lines of his pamphlet should be read: “It is against [the shameful colonists and their partisans] that we are directing these writings of ours. And it is for them, and for those who support them, that we are sharpening the bayonets that are going to pierce their bellies!!”86

Conclusion

Dubroca and Vastey represent two opposite positions in the transatlantic print culture of the Haitian (post-)revolution. While Dubroca invokes different tropes and enemy categories – the traitor and the ferocious beast – in his blunt vilification of the Haitian revolutionaries, Vastey attempts to write back to such stereotypes in his unveiling of the colonial system. By inverting the victim-perpetrator
roles, Vastey pursues the twofold task of constituting a Haitian “we” and putting colonial ideologues and planters on trial. Dubroca, on the other hand, seeks to portray the Haitian revolutionary leaders in ways that are likely to appeal to first the English and later the Spanish allies of France. This comparative reading of Dubroca and Vastey makes it clear that both authors, despite their enormous political differences, felt a need to adjust their writing on the Haitian revolution to the fluctuations of the transatlantic political landscape. In other words, the specificity of the public sphere they tried to intervene in was important among the factors that conditioned their writings and that conditioning offers an occasion to revisit the Europeanized notions of the public sphere and l’opinion publique. By way of conclusion, I shall suggest that the temporality and the geopolitical entanglements of the Haitian revolution were crucial among the factors that defined the public sphere of the Haitian (post-)revolution and set it apart from the European contexts studied by Habermas, Baker, and others.

Both Baker and Habermas implicitly pick up the literally centuries old question of the relation between Enlightenment thought and the French revolution. While scholars disagree on the level of detail, they generally accept the idea of some relation between the liberal and egalitarian proposals of les philosophes and the events of 1789. As J. Michael Dash reminds us, however, the Haitian revolution displays a different temporal relation between word and deed.

In Haiti, it could be argued that in the beginning was not the word but the deed of independence. [...] The word followed the deed and writing could be seen as an attempt to reorder the world in the wake of the revolution.

With the relevant reservations, it remains plausible to understand large parts of the French revolution as an attempt to act on the words and ideas disseminated by the philosophes earlier in the
century. In the Haitian case, where the pre-revolutionary public sphere largely excluded the voices of the enslaved, the authors and politicians, inversely, seem to be struggling post factum to find the words to explain the actions of the revolutionaries. What happened? Was it heroic? Was it disastrous? Who is to blame? If early nineteenth century authors such as Dubroca and Vastey perpetually returned to such questions of the past, that return, however, did not imply a disregard for the present and future of Haiti. As their pamphlets illustrate, part of their political ambition was to define the Haitian past in ways that would favor the author’s specific hopes for the future. According to Baker, eighteenth century French pamphleteers attempted to position themselves and their ideas on the side of a sometimes ill-defined idea of public opinion because such a rhetorically won position would legitimize their different agendas.89 In the transatlantic public sphere of the Haitian revolution, the past was a similar discursive battleground because the geopolitical future of Haiti was seen to depend largely on how the revolution was defined and evaluated.

If the writings of Dubroca and Vastey were in part conditioned by an ambition to define the past, they were equally shaped by the geopolitical entanglements of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Haiti. As Trouillot and Gaffield have shown, foreign merchants and diplomats were aggressively pursuing business opportunities in Haiti immediately after emancipation and Haitian political leaders even invited them in as a mean towards keeping the vulnerable Haitian economy alive.90 Dubroca and Vastey display an acute awareness of the geopolitical power play that unfolded around Haiti and they both sought to package their rhetoric and arguments in ways that would appeal to potential allies in this space. To make effective claims, they sensed the need to position their arguments against the interests of third party bodies such as Pétion’s republican south or the British diplomatic elite. As such, the Haitian (post-)revolutionary public sphere is perhaps best understood as an opaque transatlantic assemblage whose lines of contact authors tried to make or break in their different attempts to portray Haiti in ways that would inspire targeted audiences to act
towards the young nation according to the political aspirations of the authors. Seen in that way, the public sphere in which Dubroca and Vastey intervened was not primarily made up of physical institutions or printed media. It was an imaginary social space they hoped to change in and through their writings. This wish to alter the framing of the international discussion about Haiti could be said to culminate in Vastey’s attempt to speak a Tribunal of Nations into being. Only such an international institution, his evocation suggests, can replace the opaque transatlantic public sphere that set the parameters for the discussion about Haiti and provide the juridical framework for a binding discussion about the past, present, and future of independent Haiti.

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1 “une guerre des cannibales” (10); “les tourmens et la mort” (10); “l’affreux tableau d’hommes sciés en deux, d’hommes mutilés” (11); “acte d’atrocité” (14), “massacre” (14) (Dubroca, *La vie de Toussaint-Louis-Louverture*).


4 For readings of diplomatic and commercial correspondence in the late revolutionary and early independence years, see Trouillot; Gaffield.

5 For the circulation of Vastey’s writings, see Daut, *Baron de Vastey*, 120-122.

6 Kant 55.

7 See e.g. Baker 171.

8 Habermas 27.

9 Habermas 55.

10 See in particular Goodman.

11 Baker 172.

12 Baker 199.


14 The *Affiches américaines*, however, appeared in two editions, one in Port-au-Prince and one in Cap-Français (Popkin, “A Colonial Media Revolution,” 3). There is some disagreement concerning the number of Saint-Domingue newspapers in the years 1789-1793. Menier and Debien count forty-nine new periodicals (Menier and Debien 474-475); Geggus claims there are “thirty or more new periodicals” (Geggus, “Print Culture,” 300), and Popkin, who speaks specifically of newspapers, argues that “more than a dozen newspapers appeared in Saint-Domingue” after 1789 (Popkin, “A Colonial Media Revolution,” 10).

15 Geggus, “Print Culture,” 300.


17 Popkin, “A Colonial Media Revolution” 6. I agree with Popkin in his evaluation of the potential for dominance of the newspapers and therefore believe Johnson overstates their egalitarian potential when she writes that the Saint-Domingue newspapers “opened up a public sphere for citizens of all colors and economic situations within the colony during the Haitian Revolution. Free citizens were able to express their opinions in an unrestricted form through the freedom of the press in Saint-Domingue. […] Despite the racial strife in the colony, the public sphere in Saint-Domingue managed somewhat to unify people of different colors against a common enemy, which varied over time, from counter-revolutionaries and slaves to the English and Spanish.” (Johnson 116).


19 Two famous examples of this are the probably false image of a white child impaled upon a stake during the 1791 Gallifet insurrections (Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 110-111) and the revolutionary letter allegedly written by revolutionary leaders Jean-François, Biassou, and Belair but probably planted by conservative observers to influence public opinion (Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 17-18n26).

20 Cf. Fink 74n22.

21 While Daut’s *Tropics of Haiti* shows that texts and tropes travelled much in the transatlantic region, we still need an in-depth study focused specifically on what happened when texts on the Haitian revolution were translated and addressed to new audiences.


24 Jenson 627.

25 Rainsford 8.


27 In her fascinating, but inconclusive attempt to track down Dubroca, Jenson writes that Dubroca had been a Barnabite priest before he settled as a bookseller and a writer. His bibliography seems to have been merged with that of another individual, possibly his brother, Jenson writes, if indeed he had one. He was probably born in the mid-1750s and died in 1831. Cf. Jenson 624-627.
enchaîner ses malheureux noirs; et dans cet état, il les faisait dévorer par ses chiens."

(Vastey, *Le système colonial*), les intempéries de l’air, les enterraient vivant […]. Rousseau Lagaudraie, caféyer à la Ravine Blanche de Cavaillon, faisait semblables à des tigres déchaînés qu’à des hommes" (Ibid., 124).

épouvantable dans ses résultats, depuis l’époque de notre révolution." (Dubroca, *La politique*).

dévoiler ses forfaits, de prouver que si sa politique fut toujours machiavelique, elle fut surtout horrible et épouvantable dans ses résultats, depuis l’époque de notre révolution." (Dubroca, *La politique*).

“Rivale éternelle de la France, il faut enfin arracher le masque à ton perfide gouvernement. / J’entreprends de dévoiler ses forfaits, de prouver que si sa politique fut toujours machiavelique, elle fut surtout horrible et épouvantable dans ses résultats, depuis l’époque de notre révolution.” (Dubroca, *La politique*, iii). Unless anything else is indicated, translations are mine.

On this chapter in the history of the Haitian revolution, see e.g. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 216-219.


In 1804, Dubroca is relatively neutral in his description of Maitland but his anti-Britishness does shine through in his praise of Toussaint, who helped “chase the English out of the colony [chaser les Anglais de la colonie]” in the year III, and in his condemnation of “some of the clauses of the singular treatise [negotiated by Maitland and Toussaint], dictated by England to a perfidious general in open revolt against his government [quelques clauses de ce singulier trait dicté par l’Angleterre, à un general perfide, en rébellion ouverte contre son gouvernement]” (Dubroca, *La vie de J. J. Dessalines*, 45n & 48n).

For a broad discussion of predatory metaphors and their relation to enemy categories in Enlightenment and French revolutionary natural jurisprudence, see Edelstein, esp. 26-45. For a discussion of human and non-humans in abolitionist and pro-slavery discourse, see Festa, esp. 153-205.

On the importance for Haiti of the anti-British “Spanish-French alliance” around 1804, see Gaffield 18-19.


Dubroca, *The Life of Toussaint*, London, 65. “Toussaint-Louverture, au surplus, ne veut ni de la liberté des noirs, ni de la domination des blancs; il déteste de mort les mulâtres, dont il a presque éteint la race; il méprise les siens, qu’il fait servir d’instrumens à ses vues ambitieuses, et dont il ordonne froidement le massacre, dès que son pouvoir se trouve un instant menacé. Il a abusé de la confiance de ses premiers bienfaiteurs, il a trahi son parti, il a trahi les espagnols, l’Angleterre, les mulâtres, les blancs, la France sous le gouvernement des rois, la France républicaine, le sang, sa patrie, et la religion qu’il feint de respecter […].” (Dubroca, *La vie de Toussaint-Louverture*, 51-52).


Daut, *Baron de Vastey*, 120-122.


59 Vastey, The Colonial System, 109. “les faits que je vais rapporter sont de la plus grand veracité; ils sont notoires, je les ai recueillis des familles encore existantes, dont les parens ont éprouvés les supplices que je vais essayer de crayonner, et des infortunés qui ont survécu à ces tortures; ces témoins sont irréfutables. […] d'ailleurs je cite nommément les colons réunis des familles encore existantes, dont les parens ont éprouvés les supplices que je vais essayer de crayonner, et des infortunés qui ont survécu à ces tortures; ces témoins sont irréfutables. […] d'ailleurs je cite nommément les colons auteurs de ces crimes.” (Vastey, Le système colonial, 40).

59 Daut, Baron de Vastey, 115.


61 Vastey, The Colonial System, 125. “ses cris superflus se perdaient dans les airs et se confondaient avec le bruit du fouet qui faisait retentir les échos de nos montagnes.” (Vastey, Le système colonial, 65)

62 Vastey, The Colonial System, 142-143. “nos divisions intestines qui les réjouissent, les yeux et les efforts qu'ils font pour la perpétuer […] Ah! mes compatriotes; haytiens, mes frères, mes amis, rallions-nous contre nos ennemis communs […] rallions-nous autour du grand Henry, de ce bon père, qui emploï toute sa sollicitude à faire le bonheur de la famille haytiennne, dont tous les membres sont ses enfants.” (Vastey, Le système colonial, 92).


64 Vastey, The Colonial System, 82. “le seul Prince noir” “Destiné, par la Divine Providence, à porter la dernière main à la régénération du Peuple haytienn” “qui a imprimé dans nos âmes cette énergie, cette noble audace qui nous animent” (Vastey, Le système colonial, iii-iv).

65 The two first documents are brought in English translation in Dubois & Garrigus. All the constitutions are assembled in Dubois, Gaffield, Acacia, and Schneider (eds.).

66 I have unfolded this argument in Kjærgård 22-52.

67 For a political history of republicanism and natural rights philosophy in this period, see Edelstein.


69 Geggus, Haitian Revolutionary Studies, 127.

70 Gaffield 2.

71 Gaffield 123.

72 “ennemi du monde” (Henry 14).

73 “les circonstances favorables” (Henry 2); “Souverains du monde” (15); “la brave et loyale nation britannique” (15); “l'abolition de l'infâme trafic des noirs” (15).

74 “Notre unique but […] ont toujours été de la faire occuper une place parmi les peuples civilisés” (Henry 1).

75 On the Congress of Vienna, see Dubois, Haiti, 76; Bongie in Vastey, The Colonial System, 147n4; Gaffield 189.

76 Rainsford 204.


78 Vastey, The Colonial System, 144. “des presses haytiennes”; “nous pouvons dévoiler les crimes des colons et répondre aux calomnies les plus absurdes” (Vastey, Le système colonial, 95).

80 Vastey, The Colonial System, 144. “pourquoi nous n’écrivions pas contre nos vils détracteurs?” (Vastey, Le système colonial, 95).

81 Vastey, The Colonial System, 103. “des docteurs écrivains et de savans anatomistes ont passé leurs vies les uns à discuter sur des faits qui sont clairs comme le jour, les autres à disséquer des corps humains et d’animaux, pour prouver que moi, qui écrit maintenant, je suis de la race de l’Orang-Outang.” (Vastey, Le système colonial, 31).

82 Henry 1. My italicization.


84 “marcher long-temps sur des ruines et des cadavres”; “la fleur de ses troupeaux”; “trésors perdus” (Henry 16).

“C’est contre eux que nous dirigeons ces écrits; c’est aussi pour eux et leurs adhérents, que nous aiguisons les bayonnettes qui doivent leur percer le flanc!!” (Vastey, *Le système*, 96).

For an introduction to this discussion, see e.g. Darnton, chap. 1 and Chartier, chap. 4.


Gaffield; Trouillot, esp. chap. 2.