

# Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast: The *Meermin* (1766) and *De Zon* (1775)

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**Editor's note:** The following article is an edited and amended version of the third chapter of Andrew Alexander's Masters thesis in Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, submitted in 2005.<sup>1</sup> The thesis is entitled 'Commercial Diplomacy, Cultural Encounter and Slave Resistance: Episodes from Three VOC Slave Trading Voyages from the Cape to Madagascar, 1760-1780'. Until his tragic and untimely death earlier this year, Andrew Alexander was continuing his work under the supervision of Professor Nigel Worden. Slave uprisings on board slaving vessels were a particular interest of his, as can be witnessed in this article and his B.A. (Honours) thesis 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*'. The second chapter of his MA is published in *Itinerario* 31(3), December 2007.

## Introduction

This article challenges the notion that slaves purchased and transported on slaving vessels were a quiet and subservient lot, fatalistically accepting their destiny and docile in the face of the constant brutality they were forced to endure. My own interpretation has been shaped by the journals of merchants on board slaving ships. Johan Godfried Krause and Petrus Truter (the latter will loom large in the following narrative) for all their glaringly obvious character differences, held this in common: they were, above all else, merchants, and their records are thus centred primarily on their mercantile obligations. All their opinions, their foibles, successes and personal idiosyncrasies are ultimately revealed in their relation to the VOC's commercial enterprise. Neither man was interested in adventure or excitement. Their focus was merely on trade. It is this commercial fixation, so dear to the hearts of Company directors and officials, that recurs with the greatest frequency in the writings of these two men, as much out of professional obligation as out of personal inclination.

It should not be surprising, within this context, that slaves appear mute, their voices shrouded within a slew of negotiations, lists, transactions and purchases. Slaves were considered, if one is to rely for convenience on a crude descriptive term, as goods. In a sense one could extend this observation to common members of the crew who, while undoubtedly occupying a rung in the social hierarchy of the Company that was superior to that of the slaves, also remain largely invisible

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Tanya Barben for extensive assistance in this editorial work.

in many of these accounts. Because they were confined by their status as material cargo, the slaves' presence is restricted even further. Almost the only opportunities for the historian to perceive slave mentality are provided by those rare incidents when slaves engaged in violent resistance against their subjugation. Not considered worthy of even the scantiest attention in their own right, apart from the commercial indicators of price, age and, occasionally, physical description, only the most heinous infraction on their part could rouse the ship's officers to a more pronounced awareness towards their human cargo. On those few occasions when this did happen the narrative tone undergoes a rapid shift, from cultivated disinterest to moral outrage.

Such an outrage occurred on *De Zon* on 29 August 1775<sup>2</sup> which was under the captaincy of Cornelis Andriessen. While slave uprisings were by no means a regular occurrence, this was not the first time that slaves violently attacked the crew of a vessel on which they were being held. Although rare, violent slave rebellions had occurred on a number of occasions on VOC vessels, including those trading for slaves in Madagascar. For example, James Ravell refers to a mutiny on the *Drie Heuvelen* in 1753, which took place while the ship was heading back for the Cape after having traded in Madagascar for 110 slaves.<sup>3</sup> The revolt was instigated by two of the slaves, one of whom was killed during the uprising.<sup>4</sup> In another recorded incident a number of male slaves on *De Brak* in 1742 managed to free themselves and jump overboard. Six of them were recovered from the water, while seven either escaped, or, as is more likely, drowned while attempting to reach shore.<sup>5</sup> Maurice Boucher, who records the incident in his narrative of the voyage, claims that two ringleaders were severely punished, although he does not explain exactly how.<sup>6</sup> The most notable of these slave rebellions, however, took place in 1766 on the *Meermin* on which *Commies* Krause was senior merchant. During the return voyage to the Cape a large body of slaves seized control of the ship, murdered a good number of the crew (including Krause) and threatened the remainder with death if they did not turn the ship around immediately and sail back to the Madagascan coast from whence they had come. Only a remarkable series of events determined by a fortuitous (for the Dutch) blend of deviousness and luck prevented this ambitious plan from being realized.<sup>7</sup>

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2 The records relating to this slave uprising are to be found in the entries for 29 August and 30 August, and in a Resolution drawn up from a meeting of the *scheeps-raad* on 30 August and inserted at the end of the journal. The references are as follows: 29 August, CA C 2255, ff. 43-48; 30 August, CA C 2255, ff. 48-50; Resolution, CA C 2255, 84-87. I have relied predominantly on the Resolution.

3 I use the word 'mutiny', in a general sense, as a violent uprising that occurs on a ship. There are, of course, significant differences between such maritime uprisings as they are staged by sailors and by slaves respectively. While I have attempted to make some of these differences clearer in the course of this chapter, I still use the term to encompass both forms of shipboard revolt.

4 J. Ravell, 'The VOC Slave Trade between Cape Town and Madagascar, 1652-1759' (Unpublished paper, 1979), 15. The *Drie Heuvelen* and the *Meermin* are the only examples of slave revolts that Ravell mentions. However, he subsequently provides a brief reference to *De Zon*, but makes no mention of the slave revolt on it. There may, of course, be other examples of slave mutinies on this route of which we are currently unaware.

5 M. Boucher, 'The Voyage of a Cape Slaver in 1742', *Historia*, vol. 24(1), 54.

6 *Ibid.*

7 For a complete narrative and historical interpretation of this mutiny, see A. Alexander, 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*' (Unpublished BA Honours thesis, Historical Studies Department, University of Cape Town, 2004).

I will be referring quite extensively to the initial stages of the *Meermin*'s slave revolt within this discussion, and so will not dwell at this stage on its fascinating details. Suffice to say that this and other less extravagant, but equally heartfelt, violent uprisings were a definite feature of VOC slaving experience, and so this was not entirely unknown to Company seafarers. When the slaves of *De Zon* rose that day in August, they were by no means the first to so violently give voice to their grievances. They were, in fact, following what one might almost call a tradition of maritime slave rebellion. The features that defined and shaped it bear much in common with the similar efforts of other Malagasy slaves who had preceded them.

It is, of course, entirely unlikely that the slaves who rose on *De Zon* knew anything at all about these earlier efforts of Malagasy slaves to effect their freedom, and this makes the commonalities in experience all the more fascinating and worthy of reflection. It is particularly worthwhile to compare what happened on *De Zon* in August 1775 with the actions of the slaves on the *Meermin* in February and March of 1766. Although the circumstances that gave rise to these respective rebellions are in many ways entirely dissimilar, the articulated intentions of the mutineers bear so much in common as to be almost identical. I do not here suggest that Malagasy slave mutineers were capable only of static responses to their enforced condition of servitude. These two incidents rather illustrate the discrepancies as much as the commonalities embedded within such experiences. They both demonstrate the full extent to which personal agency and social organization determined both the intent of the rebellion and the manner and level of brutality with which it was enacted. There exists, however, a transcendent impulse behind what might initially appear to be spontaneous and localized eruptions of rage: it was the carefully planned and predetermined channeling of this impulse that enabled the mutineers to take their revolts as devastatingly far as they did.

### **The context**

On 29 August 1775 *De Zon* was anchored at Sambouwa, having arrived there on 23 August. It was the fourth stop on its expedition along the west coast. After leaving Morondave on 5 August the vessel had skirted the Manenboela River after finding no convenient place to drop anchor. The merchants intended to make swift progress in respect of trade at Sambouwa and from there to investigate prospects at the Maningare River. They therefore wasted no time in searching for a more convenient anchorage. As they drifted up the coast towards Sambouwa, they saw signs of habitation on the shore and, on meeting with the locals, discovered that they were in Mangariek, a community with which, according to Petrus Truter, the upper-merchant who oversaw the commercial operations on board the vessel, the Dutch had not yet established any contact. They had arrived on 9 August and had spent a number of days trading with disappointingly few results. It is likely, in fact, that Truter had come to regret this largely profitless interlude. On their initial arrival at Mangariek they were approached by inhabitants of Sambouwa in canoes. They promised the merchants a fruitful trade and urged them to make for their territory as soon as they were able. When *De Zon* did finally put into Sambouwa on

23 August the merchants were probably hoping that they would meet with a greater level of success, one that could compensate for the poor returns they had received for much of the past month.<sup>8</sup> At this stage *De Zon* had a total of 62 slaves on board, namely 45 males, 16 females and one described as being a young child. Four males and six females had been purchased at Toulhier, 28 males and two females at Morondave and 13 males, eight females and the child at Mangariék.

By 29 August their prospects were looking even bleaker than they had been at Mangariék.<sup>9</sup> The merchants had met the Saszape six days earlier. The position of *Rijksbestierder* was occupied by a senior local official closely associated with the king. He played an integral role in the negotiations between the Dutch merchants and his monarch.<sup>10</sup> He promised to inform King Malalilo of their arrival and to obtain permission for them to begin the trade. He had assured them that they would hear from the king within six days. This must have come as a blow to Truter as he could now expect an even longer wait than the one he had been forced to endure at Moronadave. No messenger had appeared between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup>. The crew's foul humour would have been further aggravated by a spell of bad weather on the 26<sup>th</sup>, which forced them to lift their anchor for a short period. Truter and his associates' mounting frustration came to a head on the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> when the messenger finally arrived. He had brought no slaves with him and his promises of trade must have appeared noncommittal. Truter, in fact, went on to explain to Saszape in no uncertain terms that if no slaves were brought by the following day, they would follow established practice and withdraw to another location. Saszape, who had been rowed out to the ship to receive this information, went back to shore and the officers and crew were left to spend the remainder of the day in idle frustration.

A reflection on the events that were to follow makes it possible to see how emotions that so easily foster violence could have been brewing for some time. The crew of *De Zon* had already been on the coast of Madagascar for close to three months. While they had met with a certain success at their first two stops, even there their efforts had not been free of trial. Their fortunes, after all, had taken a decided turn for the worse after they had left Morondave, and their stopover at Mangariék had yielded little. The ship had sailed on to Sambouwa after having received a personal invitation from a number of its inhabitants who had taken the startling initiative - unique in the records of these two voyages - to travel into the territory of a neighbouring monarchy in order to ensure a more worthwhile trade within theirs. Truter must by then have been, if not quite close to despair, then at least severely discomfited in the face of their collective adversities.

As *De Zon* drifted along the coast it became clear to Truter and Krause that they had been wasting their efforts at Mangariék. It is likely, however, that the

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8 The period from 5 August to 23 August 1775 is narrated in C 2255, ff. 32-42.

9 The period from 23 August to 29 August 1775 is narrated in C 2255, ff. 42-43.

10 Editorial note: This information is drawn from Andrew Alexander Andrew, 'Commercial Diplomacy, Cultural Encounter and Slave Resistance: Episodes from Three VOC Slave Trading Voyages from the Cape to Madagascar, 1760-1780', 11 note 25.

words of Sambouwa's emissaries instilled a sense of hope and promise that now, at last, they could finally settle down to a rewarding trade free of the difficulties and the constant demands of terrain and cultural translation that had marred their experiences over the previous month. Of course, they should have prepared themselves for the probability that obstacles would once again come their way. It is, however, not unreasonable to suggest that Truter, Paddenburg (the junior merchant and Truter's subordinate), Andriessen and, indeed, all the officers and crew had reached the stage where they would have been prone to embrace any promise of a turn in fortune without their usual caution. After all, they had endured an exhausting time of wrangling, threatening and cajoling, with little material gain to show for the energy they had expended. If this is correct, then the personal emissaries of Sambouwa would have provided them with just such a promise of longed for success.

It is not surprising, then, that six days of incessant waiting would have caused a mounting and greatly intensified frustration to coalesce with an equally dangerous complacency. In his journal entries Truter is unable to camouflage his disappointment and indignation, despite his characteristic restraint. His threat to leave within one day if the trade had not begun is evidence of the severe, perhaps even personal, manner in which he responded to this obstruction. It is possible that he considered the local conduct here to have overstepped all bounds of propriety and honesty. Perhaps he was experiencing internal doubts as to his own capabilities and that he was becoming fearful that his future with the Company would be jeopardized by the record of his performance. He was doubtless also becoming increasingly uneasy with the officers' and crew's disgruntlement - they would have been no less frustrated with the constant delays and the empty promises than he was and might have been inclined to place the blame for these at his door.

Moreover, and perhaps of even greater significance, the officers and crew had for six consecutive days been doing nothing but waiting idly, their duties reduced to minimal maintenance of the vessel while it lay at anchor. In the light of what followed, one can begin to appreciate the complex reasoning behind Truter's ever-imperative desire, to begin building a factory and to trade as quickly as possible. Not only would he have wanted to use his time most profitably, but he would have wished to keep his crew busy and in constant activity, be it assisting local Malagasy with the construction of the factory or providing assistance in facilitating the trade. Maritime lore is full of the misadventures of common sailors who had little to occupy their time when in foreign and often attractive localities. Truter had already lost three sailors to desertion, and some weeks later he was to lose one more. Dutch ignorance of the difficult and alien terrain, as well as what Truter felt was the open collusion of the local monarchies in abetting these deserters, made the prospect of desertion a constant worry for the officers. In a situation such as this, where for day after day the sailors were compelled to do little but wait, the attendant dangers were greatly intensified. Moreover, even those sailors not so prone to desert could find plenty of opportunity to get up to all kinds of other mischief. There would have been the additional worry that the sailors might, whether wittingly or unwittingly, cause grave offence to the locals in some way.

It is not too far-fetched to suggest that Truter's head could have been filled with fears and trepidations as he awaited the messenger's return. Concerns as to whether the merchants would meet with any success here or whether, as became increasingly likely, it would prove to be their most abortive attempt yet, would have been coupled with a growing trepidation as to the growing restlessness of the crew: after six long, sultry days they would have been in grievous danger of collapsing. It could be even that Truter was beginning to doubt the continued loyalty of his officers and crew, and that he was progressively more nervous about the prospect of a mutiny. It is certainly not surprising, therefore, that after the messenger's return Truter's apprehension turned to decisive action. He began to make plans to remove the vessel from what was becoming an increasingly perilous environment.

His suspicions about a possible mutiny were, however, misdirected. It was the cargo, not the crew, that presented the most serious threat. Truter would probably have considered that the vessel would be safe from the kind of tragedy that had taken place on the *Meermin*. On that ship the slave mutiny had been enabled by the gross negligence of the officers: the man who must bear the brunt of the blame was the merchant, Krause.<sup>11</sup> Overall discipline and shipboard authority on board the *Meermin* had become so lax that a large party of slaves had been allowed on deck to assist the crew in their duties. The ultimate consequence of this, however, was that this company of understandably disgruntled captives was given free and open access to almost the whole of the upper decks. Such a gesture was unheard of, and certainly against all regulations. The actual event that finally precipitated the mutiny, however, must in the final analysis be attributed to Krause. In 1766 he took up a further position of merchant on a slaving expedition to Madagascar.<sup>12</sup> This was something that the VOC would certainly come to regret, although by the time news reached the Cape of the disastrous mutiny the man most deserving of the Company's ire had long since died. The officer most responsible for creating the conditions that enabled this victorious slave mutiny ironically remained free of earthly punishment, while the captain and one of the mates were to receive the full brunt of the Company's wrath.

Krause's ill-considered indiscretion was what ultimately played into the hands of the slaves, granting them a totally unanticipated opportunity to mutineer. Interestingly, he had managed to purchase approximately 140 slaves on this voyage, a vast improvement on his previous attempt. With the ship rapidly approaching the Cape, one would have thought that the *Meermin* and her crew would have been out of any significant danger. Krause's blunder here stemmed not only from his unthinking impetuosity (although only a man who had long succumbed to the reckless impulses of his character could have enacted such a notion), but equally from an evident lack of imagination.<sup>13</sup> It can only be assumed, in the light of what

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11 The summary below is drawn from Alexander, 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*', 9-16.

12 This might seem to be an immensely generous gesture on the part of the Company, as he had been guilty of an earlier indiscretion in 1760, on *De Neptunus*. However, it is unlikely that there were many other merchants with his experience of Madagascar, and so his selection may have been a matter of necessity. The Company could very well have ascribed his earlier failure to the unpredictable trading environment of Madagascar with which they were, of course, well familiar.

13 Alexander, 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*', 13.

inevitably followed, that Krause had no appreciation whatsoever for the condition of the slaves, and for what they might try and do if even the most desperate of opportunities to gain their freedom was presented to them.

The opportunity that Krause was to present to the *Meermin* slaves was far from desperate. He had decided that a number of the Malagasy weapons (assegais) they had acquired on the island needed cleaning and maintenance, and considered it to be a not outrageous prospect that the slaves, who had been above decks for some time now, be the ones to perform this necessary chore. The slaves cleaned the weapons without any recorded protest. Perhaps they, too, did not view the prospect as outrageous. It was only after they had finished their errand that the magnitude of Krause's bungle became evident, with devastating consequences. The slaves were ordered to return the weapons and, in a move that seems to have been as astonishing to the ship's crew as reasonable to us, refused to comply. Instead, they began to conduct themselves in a quite 'outrageous' fashion by proceeding to massacre the crew. Krause had, quite literally, placed the very objects necessary to regain their freedom into the slaves' hands.

It was in the ensuing battle that Krause was murdered, stabbed to death by a Malagasy assegai. His foolhardiness and lack of forethought had finally cost him not only the control of his ship but his very life. It goes without saying that had he somehow survived this mutiny his service for the Company would have been permanently terminated, and he would likely have found himself exiled for life from the Cape Colony.

A number of the crew, including the captain, one of his mates and a few other senior officers, did survive. They managed to secrete themselves in the *Constapelskamer* thereby securing themselves from the rage of the Malagasy slaves who promptly murdered all those Europeans unfortunate enough to have been left on the decks. It was these men, and in particular a level-headed officer, the *Assistent* Olof Leij, who through an entirely improbable synthesis of cunning and simple good fortune, were to eventually turn events in their favour.<sup>14</sup> I will be returning to the *Meermin* at a later stage, but for the moment let us redirect our attention to *De Zon*.

*De Zon* did not have a Krause on board. On the contrary her officers, as far as one can accurately decipher from the records, were on the whole completely professional and capable in the performance of their duties. Under Truter's authority there would certainly have been no casual handing over of weapons to the slaves. In fact, the slaves would never have even been allowed on to the upper decks. Moreover, *De Zon* was still anchored off the coast of Madagascar and, despite the tensions and the complacency that had been brewing over the previous six days, the officers and crew were still reflecting on their commercial engagements on the island. Whatever laxity may have been taking root, subsequent events indicate that it had not yet encompassed the majority of officers and crew, as seems to have been

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14 Because the ensuing events on the *Meermin* do not directly pertain to the comparison and discussion that is to follow I have refrained from recounting the entire narrative here.

the case on the *Meermin*. If my supposition is correct, that it was Truter's concern about any complacency that was effecting his decision to leave Sambouwa, then it would appear that the merchant, at least, was still in complete control of his faculties and was maintaining as strict a vigilance over his crew as was possible under the circumstances.

If the slaves on *De Zon* were to mutiny they would be hampered immediately by a handicap that those on the *Meermin*, through Krause's recklessness, had been able to circumvent. They would have to fight their way up from the lower decks where they were enchained in order to take control of the vessel. They would of course, have to break free from their chains in the first place. This would, in the face of an armed crew, be an almost impossible feat. It would require both an absolute ferocity on the part of the mutinous slaves and a dose of good fortune, such that would enable the slaves to assemble on the upper decks, the only place where they could effectively engage the European crew in open combat. As for the ingredient of ferocity, these slaves, like those of the *Meermin*, would prove to have in ample amount. The need to free themselves of their chains and assemble on the upper decks would be the greatest hindrance to the successful execution of their plan. Certainly the officers and crew, who believed the slaves to be securely chained below decks, would have considered themselves to be well out of danger. Even if they were familiar with the tale of the *Meermin* - which a good percentage of them probably were - they would have felt secure, for on that vessel all reasonable expectations had been scrapped, while on *De Zon* all regulations had, to the best of their knowledge, been scrupulously observed.

### **The mutiny**

By 10:00 am the *Rijksbestierder* Saszape had left the Dutch to look forward to what promised to be another dull, uneventful and profitless day. When the first report of an outbreak of violence reached the upper decks the crew were either going about their basic chores or listlessly idling away their time. At first it must have seemed to be not much more than a single act of violence, an assault serious enough in its own right but not necessarily a signal for a larger uprising or mutiny. A member of the watch, *Stuurman* Jacob Tromp, had rushed up to report to Truter and Andriessen that a sailor, Hendrik Barreveld, had been wounded by a group of slaves. Barreveld was now safe, said Tromp, for he had been assisted by his fellow crew members who had been on hand when the assault took place. It had happened at the *luijk*, the hatchway that led down to the lower decks where the slaves, together with certain provisions and supplies, were secured. The crew members had rescued Barreveld and fled to the upper decks, where they considered themselves to be safe from further violence.

The officers would definitely have registered significant concern at this news for it meant that a number of slaves had freed themselves and were possibly intent on forcing their way through the *luijk* to attack the crew on the upper decks. Their concern would have rapidly transformed into panic when they heard the second part of Tromp's message. He went on to report that Barreveld was by no means the only casualty, but that an even greater tragedy had afflicted one of the junior



officers. The *Tolk* (or interpreter) Cornelis,<sup>15</sup> a Malagasy slave, who had been in the slaves' hold when the violence broke out, had been murdered. Although Tromp could give no further details, and although the continuing violence had prevented the crew from recovering his body, he was certain that Cornelis was dead, and that he had been killed by the mutinous slaves who were continuing to cause an uproar below decks. Tromp, then, must have been a witness to both the assault on Barreveld and the murder of Cornelis, and the fact that Barreveld had been assisted to safety meant that a sizeable party of sailors must either have been in the vicinity of the *luijk* or below decks with the slaves when the revolt broke out. From this information one can picture to a limited degree what is likely to have happened, as sketchy as it is.

The sailors were responsible for maintenance and related chores both in the area where the slaves were secured and on the decks immediately above and surrounding them. They were probably not anticipating an attack such as this. Indeed the shock which registers throughout the relevant journal entries strongly suggests that the officers and crew, although maintaining a respectable discipline and vigilance, were not mentally prepared for such a large and violent slave uprising. The sailors would likely have congregated in groups for purely practical reason: to carry out their duties and because space within the lower decks was so severely restricted. What seems most likely to have occurred is this: *Tolk* Cornelis had descended into the slaves' quarters to perform some kind of maintenance (as will be shown later), perhaps accompanied by Barreveld. Even if Barreveld had not completely descended with Cornelis into this room, he must either have been standing on the steps that lowered through the *luijk* on to this deck or he must have been so close to the *luijk* that he could easily be reached by someone below. One of the first two possibilities seems to be likely, for if he were severely wounded then he must have been near the slaves. The fact that he was not killed but rescued suggests, however, that he was close enough to the *luijk* for his crewmates to pull him up and out of harm's way. It is also possible that there were one or two other crew members below the hatch, and that it was they who assisted Barreveld to the upper decks. If this were so, there could only have been a few of them, for otherwise their mobility would have been severely hampered. All, including Barreveld, must have been standing far enough from the *Tolk* to be unable to assist him or recover his body after the murder. It would seem, then, that Cornelis had ventured some way into the hold when he was fatally attacked by a large group of slaves. Barreveld, on the other hand, although evidently close enough to the fracas to suffer some injury, was sufficiently far away to be assisted to safety.

The news that had reached the officers' attention appears, initially, to have been extremely sketchy. Of course Truter only composed his narrative after the rebellion had been quelled: he was, therefore, to a certain extent summarizing all

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15 The word *Tolk* denotes the interpreter, usually a Malagasy slave, who accompanied slave-trading expeditions to assist with communication. This individual was, not surprisingly, hated by the slaves. With good reason they perceived him to be an accomplice to those responsible for their misfortune. It can therefore be expected that the Malagasy slaves would violently assault and even murder such a man if they were given the chance. Furthermore, the loss of a *tolk*, who in many ways facilitated the smooth functioning of the trade, could be disastrous for an expedition of this kind. For more on interpreters, see Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the Slave Trade', *Omalý Sy Anio*, vols. 17-20, 232-233.

that happened that day. His narrative also seems to correspond to the way in which these events unfolded as the violence of that terrible day progressed. He did not reveal at the beginning of his narrative exactly how the uprising was conceived and developed, but chose rather to faithfully represent the sequence of what happened as each new piece of information was brought to him, and as he devised a strategy to quell the uprising in consultation with the other officers. The sketchy and somewhat garbled reports that began filtering to the upper decks reflect the confusion that was gripping the crew members who had witnessed the violence. No one at this stage knew how the slaves had freed themselves, how they had killed Cornelis, or even how many of them were actively perpetrating the violence. All that was known was that one of them had been brutally murdered and another had been injured. The violence would have occurred so quickly, and would have so stunned the crew members who had witnessed it, that they would have been capable of nothing more than the instinctive reaction of grabbing their wounded colleague and rushing for safety. Indeed, the very fact that they had rescued Barreveld is proof of a certain degree of fellow-feeling among this group of sailors. The tone and structure of Truter's narrative, whether purposefully or not, allows one to follow the events and their psychological repercussions from the immediate perspective of the crew involved as they slowly emerged from ignorance and bewilderment to a more lucid conception of what was taking place. What followed, of course, was their decisive response to the violence.

After hearing of the murder of Cornelis, the officers must have become aware that a violent and desperate slave mutiny was in progress. Any doubts as to the seriousness of the situation would certainly have been dispelled by Tromp informing them that some of the slaves had freed themselves from their chains, while the others, some already partially free, were steadily chopping themselves loose. Those that were now able to move freely were enthusiastically engaged in breaking the *stutten*, the wooden supports that separated their deck from the rest of the ship. Even as Tromp was speaking the slaves were engaging in an aggressive vandalism. The officers were becoming appraised of the exact nature of what was happening and the reality of the situation, if it had not done so earlier, was now luridly revealed. This was no common assault by a couple of slaves who had quite fortuitously been able to free themselves and had then chosen to take out their frustration on a hapless crew member. Neither was it a riot in the conventional sense of the term, where one might have expected a number of disgruntled slaves to wreak havoc on their deck for a while, to assault and possibly murder any crew member unlucky enough to fall into their grasp, and then to finally subside once their rage was spent. What was happening here was a full-scale mutiny.

The gravity of the situation would now have impressed itself ever more resolutely on the officers who, on considering the bits and pieces that had been related to them, would have grown steadily convinced that this uprising was not purely spontaneous but must to a certain extent have been premeditated. This realization would by now have dawned on Truter and his compatriots, who were still largely in the dark as to number of mutineers and the extent to which they were armed. Their vision of the unfolding events was still based on the scattered comments of startled, perhaps terrified, men who were fleeing for their lives. Did the stories of

the *Meermin* now flash through the mind of Truter and Andriessen as they began to envision the prospect of the entire ship falling into the hands of the mutineers? If the mutineers were successful, then the fact that they were still in Madagascar would prevent them from being able to pull a clever ploy such as the sailors on the *Meermin* had done. In fact, their immediate proximity to the land from which their slaves hailed would mean that they would most likely simply be murdered. Truter and Andriessen must have realized that if they were to save not only their ship but their lives, they would need to act swiftly and decisively.

Barreveld and Cornelis were not the only crew members to be caught up in the violence. One of the other officers, *Bosschieter* Jan Walburg, also entered the fray, and up to the point that Barreveld was whisked to safety, he was the only European to respond to the slaves' aggression with a reciprocal fury. He had been on watch, as had Tromp, so it is likely that he had also been witness to the murder of Cornelis and the assault on Barreveld. Fortunately for Walburg, he was armed when the insurrection broke out, although not with any conventional weapon. Rather, for some purpose that is not made entirely clear, he was in possession of a hammer. Perhaps he had been performing some kind of maintenance to assist the *Tolk*, although it was as a protective instrument that the tool would prove to be most beneficial. Walburg is described as having been standing by the *luijk* when the fighting began, and it is clear from what happened next that he must have been standing above it, for he was witness to the murder of Cornelis in the hold below him. In the ensuing chaos and panic one of the slaves grabbed his legs from below obviously intending to pull him down so as to murder him. The narrative explicitly states that the slave wanted to get hold of the hammer, and so this must have been Walburg's impression of what had been happening to him. In what was probably an intuitive, entirely defensive reaction, Walburg swung at the slave with his hammer, delivering a blow so vicious that his attacker let go of his legs.

One would have thought that at this point Walburg would have been satisfied with his escape, and would have made as rapidly as possible for safety. Perhaps he wanted to get a clearer picture of what the situation was like in the slaves' quarters, to ascertain how many slaves were involved in the uprising, and by what means they had managed to free themselves. In a certain sense, then, Walburg can perhaps be said to have been a good deal more level-headed than his fellows, and certainly a lot braver - although one could argue with equal force that he was simply foolhardy and lacking in common sense, as was borne out by what actually transpired. He decided to peer below the trapdoor to get a better view of what was happening, receiving for his pains a vigorous blow from a *hand-of-voet-bout* (a bolt of some kind) which split his upper lip. His curiosity now apparently satisfied, Walburg followed the example of his colleagues and fled the scene. His unfortunate escapade did, however, allow him further insight into what was happening below the decks.

One other officer had also been hoisted to safety. This was another *Bosschieter*, Pieter Dickse Aaij. He too had been on watch, although not above the *luijk* but rather in a more precarious location between decks. Apart from the *Tolk*, he is the one person who can be positively placed on the same deck as the slaves when the mutineers began their assault. He was, interestingly, also unarmed. Had it not been for an initiative on the part of his fellows similar to the rescue of Barreveld, it

is likely that he too would have been killed. It is unclear as to why he was unarmed - or why Walburg had been armed with the hammer. Perhaps by including such details in the journal, Truter wished to convince the Company that the mutiny had not been put down at its inception because of the foolishness and negligence of those on watch.

When the slaves began to assault Cornelis (and perhaps Barreveld), Aaij fled towards the trapdoor. Truter's narrative suggests that he did this to warn the crew above, although it is likely that his motives were guided at least as much by a natural instinct for self-preservation. Before he could get to the deck, however, the door was somehow brought down on him - possibly leaving him injured or at least stunned. How this happened is unclear, but it was probably just one of those unfortunate accidents that inevitably occur in times of mass panic and chaos. It looked as though he would be left at the mercy of the enraged slaves, and would probably not have been able to extricate himself by his own efforts. The fact that he was half-way up the stairs was to his advantage, for he was now close enough to the crew above for them to see his terrible predicament. They must have re-opened the trapdoor, for the narrative states that they pulled Aaij through the *luijk* to the deck above. A second person, then, had been saved by a mix of good fortune and the gallantry of the crew.

What had ultimately saved Barreveld and Aaij, and conversely condemned Cornelis to a brutal end, seems to have been to be a matter of chance and circumstance. It is unlikely that the crew had reacted out of particular sympathy towards Barreveld and Aaij while callously leaving Cornelis to his fate. Their concern for their own safety, and, no doubt, their lack of appropriate arms, meant that they had stopped short of attacking the mutineers outright in an attempt to save the *Tolk*. Instead, it was the fact that Barreveld and Aaij, unlike Cornelis, were so close to the *luijk* that their fellows were able to reach them and so pull them to safety. Cornelis, unluckily for him, must have been the man furthest from the *luijk* and closest to the attacking slaves. For those familiar with the comments of a number of historians as to the lack of fellow-feeling among VOC sailors, it may come as a surprise to read here that some, at least, were willing to give assistance to their fellows in a time of crisis and danger, and did not choose to simply look out for themselves.

## Quelling the mutiny

As the records for the slave uprising are not very detailed, one is forced to infer much of the detail that lies behind the events that are described. This scarcity of detail pertains equally to the question of who assumed direct authority in attempting to quell the rebellion. That decisive action was taken is certainly clear. It is tempting to conclude that it was Truter who was responsible for organizing the rapid, violent retributive action that followed the initial news of the mutiny, but Truter's character as it is represented in his journal is a self-creation and must therefore be received with the appropriate degree of skepticism. It is likely that a potential disaster of this magnitude would have been sufficient cause for a more collaborative response on the part of the ship's officers and that Truter, Andriessen, Paddenberg, and one or two other senior officers collectively devised a plan of action. If Truter

was in fact as capable as has been represented, it is more likely that he sought some measure of advice from his compatriots than that he relied purely on his own judgment. It was quite clear from his earlier responses to situations (not described here) that he was certainly not beyond reacting instantly to a perceived injustice. It is equally possible that here, in the face of a potentially devastating threat, he acted purely on impulse. However, on examining the careful and disciplined manner in which the efforts to put down the mutiny were undertaken, it seems most probable that Truter considered the matter briefly with Andriessen and his fellow officers in order to devise the most rapid, decisive and yet calculated means of crushing the rebellion and disarming the mutineers.

The officers would have realized that it was imperative that they end the mutiny before the rebellious slaves were able free themselves in larger numbers and lift themselves to the upper decks. There was no guarantee that a scattered, ill-prepared and unarmed crew would be able to quell the rebellion. The Europeans possessed a definite strategic advantage while the slaves were still confined to their quarters below decks. If the crew could blockade the *luijk* and attack the rebels from a superior vantage point, they would be able to contain the mutineers. The crew still had the advantage of firearms which, if aimed at a high point towards a roomful of rebels, could wreak considerable damage. It was thus imperative that the mutiny be contained and prevented from erupting on to the upper decks, where it would rapidly escalate into a desperate and dispersed skirmish in which the crew would have to engage the mutineers in one-on-one combat throughout the ship.

It was therefore decided to dispatch some armed crew members to the *luijk* to “persuade” the mutineers that their cause was hopeless and that they should immediately surrender. The description in the account that follows might appear absurd to us: it was almost farcical in its effects. However, in the light of what has just been laid out, it would seem to have been a sensible route, after all, and to bear the characteristics of what was, perhaps, though hasty, a well thought out and deliberate scheme.

A group of armed sailors went to the *voorluijk*, which must have been a vantage position from where they could see directly through the *luijk* to the slaves’ hold beneath. They then raised their muskets and fired on the slaves with “*ervten en zout*”, which translates literally as “peas and salt”. Excepting for the remote possibility that this phrase is some kind of eighteenth century Dutch jargon, it must be assumed that the sailors, as incredible as it may seem, did in fact fire on the mutinous slaves with salt and peas. Such an odd choice of ammunition can only make sense under two particular circumstances. Firstly, the slaves could not yet have been in the position where many were free and ready to storm up through the *luijk* - for then surely, the sailors would have selected a rather more lethal form of ammunition. Secondly, it must have been decided at this stage, with the rebels still confined below decks, that it was imperative to protect the lives of these slaves, who still could still be threatened into submission without the infliction of serious physical injury. A two-pronged strategy was, therefore, at play: the officers recognized that this mutiny posed a serious, potentially devastating, threat to both their commercial enterprises and their lives. Yet they still judged that it might be

possible to threaten the mutineers into submission and to salvage the property of the Company without engaging in outright violence. In short, the European crew would respond with violence only if violence were offered to them and only if the mutineers persisted in their revolt.

As it happened, their attempt to quell the rebellion in a less aggressive manner failed utterly. In fact, it would seem that the mutinous slaves considered the attempt to be ludicrous. According to the account, the slaves reacted by laughing uproariously at the armed sailors whom they probably thought incredibly naïve to believe that their road to victory would be paved with salt and peas. The hilarity – or perhaps it was a laughter of contempt – did not last for long. After a few moments, the slaves thrust themselves forward to continue their assault with a renewed vigour attempting to break free from their chains. While this depiction of the mutineers' reaction is obviously the product of the bias of the writer of the narrative, who has an interest in representing the slaves as an enraged, uninhibited mob full of murderous intent, it is fair to assume that by now the slaves were in a tremendous uproar, and that this almost insulting attempt by the crew to bring them to heel served only to incite them still further.

The crew members had come to a belated realization that salt and peas were not going to do much more than enrage the mutineers. They would need to employ more decisive means, even if such measures were to result in a loss of human property. The sailors now fired again, this time with live shot from their muskets. This second volley naturally wreaked a greater degree of devastation, killing three of the mutineers and wounding a further ten. Those killed were later identified as Mannontoea, Tsihangie and Mahatimpahe, this being the only passage in the entire journal where slave names are actually mentioned. It would seem that only by such violent confrontation could the slaves make their European masters conscious of their own individuality. Although they had committed themselves to a violent action, the sailors appear to have been under instructions to act with a certain restraint. Were this not the case they would certainly have been able to wreak further death and injury if they had so wished. One can thus see this offensive as a second attempt to persuade the slaves to surrender.

The mutineers' fury did not abate, however. Apparently the slaves continued with their vigorous assault on the woodwork of their deck, for they are described as attacking the *schotwerk* with planks. It is, of course, difficult to ascertain the psychology of the mutineers who are collectively configured in the narrative as hopelessly depraved, enraged beyond all reason, and capable only of vandalism. Such a description is no doubt a reflection of the officers' worldview, one that was not ideologically equipped to perceive a slave rebellion as anything else but mindless barbarism. What was really going on in the slaves' minds cannot, of course, be ascertained. Whether the slaves were as enraged and destructive (and the sailors as composed) as Truter described, one cannot say for sure. That there was a unity of purpose and determination among the mutineers, a determination that perhaps blinded them to the hopelessness of their position does seem clear, and would help to explain the slaves' decision to continue their violent resistance. The mutiny had, at this stage anyway, taken on a certain rationality, even if it was a tragic rationality that could never have realized its ambitions.

It becomes clear at this point to the modern reader of this account what the outcome of this conflict would be and which of the two forces held the upper hand. The slaves, however, seem to have been unaware of the balance of power that was so definitively weighted against them. It would take the killing of more of their number to convince them to desist. The European sailors held all the advantages: in firepower and in their spatial position. It would have taken a further fusillade on their part to inflict an even bloodier chaos on the slaves below. This time, however, the sailors, no doubt on the orders of whichever commander was present, elected to lower their muskets and to lob a hand grenade into the mass of bodies crowded around the woodwork. It goes without saying that hand grenades in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were noticeably less powerful than those of today, and would cause damage only in a fairly small radius around the point of impact. It was, perhaps, for this very reason that a hand grenade was chosen over the muskets as these had already caused considerable death and injury to the Company's human property.

The hand grenade did cause less physical injury than the musket volley. It also succeeded in finally achieving what was desired of the entire operation. Two slaves, Tandilie and Tsimitaniek, were killed, and none are recorded as having been injured. Evidently, the range of the hand grenade was limited and intense. If one can point to a marker that indicates at which point the initiative shifted definitively to the Europeans, then this was it. It was now, after witnessing the deaths of two more of their comrades, that the prospect of surrender rather than further violent resistance became more attractive to the majority of the slaves. This was no doubt brought on by a further verbal threat from the Europeans, issued immediately after the hand grenade had exploded. The Europeans effectively gave the slaves an ultimatum: either they could surrender now and thus save their lives, or they would all die where they were, in a small hold below decks on a foreign vessel.

Even now the surrender was not immediate and all-encompassing. By Truter's account, the slaves gradually handed themselves over individually and in small groups. They were then hoisted up through the *luijk* and bound with cords. Even after the majority had surrendered, seven remained below and continued defiance. They stood surrounded by the corpses of their former companions, until *Stuurman* Tromp, who may well have considered himself to be exacting revenge for the murder and assaults he had witnessed earlier, sprang upon them with a party of armed sailors. It is unclear whether *Stuurman* Tromp had actually been delegated to do this. Once this final band of rebels, who were probably the ring leaders, had been forced into submission, the violence was over. *Stuurman* Tromp and his men now inspected the room below deck. Apart from the body of *Tolk* Cornelis, they found four different kinds of knives scattered about the room, as well as a file and a hammer (*spijker-hamer*). Tromp would now have taken the body and these weapons to the upper decks for display before the officers.

The officers now had a more complete picture of what had transpired. They concluded that Cornelis had descended into the slaves' hold with a chest of tools and sharp implements, presumably in order to carry out some kind of routine maintenance job: the tools found near his body were identical to those stored within the chest that Cornelis used when performing such work. It is likely that while engrossed in his work, Cornelis had left the chest open - close to where he was

working but out of his range of vision. The slaves would have quietly removed the implements from the chest and then, with the *Tolk* being oblivious to his impending fate, rushed at him and killed him with his very own tools. Cornelis' dedication to his duties must have been of such a single-minded intensity that he did not take even the most basic precautions.

The conclusions that the officers had reached were confirmed when they interrogated the mutineers themselves. No information is provided as to how many slaves were questioned and by what means the interrogation was carried out, but it is probable that they first questioned those slaves who had surrendered last. These, as suggested above, by virtue of their stubbornness in battle, were likely to have been the instigators of the rebellion. The interrogation provided remarkably illuminating, perhaps because by then the ringleaders would have calmed down sufficiently to realize their best chances for future clemency relied on their confession. They indicated that there had been four identifiable leaders of the mutiny: Rijpie, Tsimant, Rijzoemak and Mannontoea, the last of these men having been shot dead when the sailors had opened fire with their muskets. It would seem that these four murdered Cornelis and, by so doing, had incited the other slaves to rebel. Rijzoemak had been the first to attack the *Tolk*, striking him in the face with his fist. The others had then rushed to Cornelis and surrounded him, beating him to death with the tools they had stolen from his chest. These tools were then handed out to a large number of slaves, including the ringleaders, who began using them to strike at their chains. By this means two pairs of slaves had freed their hands and feet, and four pairs had freed their hands. Twelve slaves were thus at least partially free and able to participate in the violence.

### **Comparing the slave mutinies**

The intentions of the mutineers might have been premeditated, but they were simple. It was discovered that the impetus for the mutiny had come from the slaves who had been purchased at Morondave, among whom the desire to take control of the vessel and sail it back to their home had been fermenting since they had been brought on board. The key features, however, are worthy of note. Firstly, the slaves had wanted to kill the *Tolk* and all the Europeans. This indicates that they saw the Europeans as a whole as responsible for their state of enslavement, and thus deserving of a violent death. Further, they believed themselves capable of manning the ship without the assistance of the European crew. The mutineers on the *Meermin* had shared similar sentiments. They, too, had set about murdering all the crew members that had fallen into their hands, and only those that reached the safety of the barricaded *Constapelskamer* had escaped a brutal death. Likewise they had considered themselves capable of sailing the vessel without assistance. It was only after a few days, when it had become clear to them that their navigational skills were lacking, that they agreed to the compromise with the crew that would ultimately set in motion the events that led to their downfall. Both of these apparent coincidences can be traced to a commonality in the collective impulse behind both mutinies.

The second impulse that lay behind the mutiny on *De Zon* appears at first glance to be equally straight-forward. The ringleaders, and probably most of the



mutineers themselves, were slaves who had been brought on board at Morondave. It had been their intention, once they had overrun the ship and put all the Europeans to death, to sail the vessel back to shore. It is telling that the place where they had embarked on this foreign vessel as slaves is the very place to which they intended to return once they had gained their freedom. This once again raises the question of where these slaves had come from, as well as why they would have selected Morondave as their destination once they had regained their freedom. It was there, after all, where they must have spent some time in captivity prior to their purchase by the VOC. It is impossible to gauge exactly what the place of origin was of the slaves purchased on these voyages. What is more pertinent to this discussion, however, is the similarity in intent between this rebellion, and that which happened on the *Meermin* in 1766. For those slaves, after slaughtering a large number of the crew, made an agreement with the surviving Europeans in which they demanded that, in return for their lives and protection, the European crew sail their vessel back to Madagascar, and return the slaves to the localities from which they had been brought on board.

Clearly, then, there is a similarity both in purpose and intent, as well as organization, strategy and means, between the mutinies on the *Meermin* in 1766 and that on *De Zon* in 1775. Firstly, both mutinies were organized by particular leaders, and as such were not entirely spontaneous eruptions of unorganized violence. On *De Zon* four leaders were clearly identified as being behind the uprising. It is possible in the case of the *Meermin* to identify three such leaders. In the latter case the man acknowledged by the slaves as the overall ringleader was shot dead on the beach when he came ashore in one of the vessel's boats, while the other two, Massavana and Koesaaij, were sent to Robben Island for observation once they had arrived with the other mutinous slaves at the Cape.<sup>16</sup> The fact that such leaders could be identified so rapidly and definitively would strongly suggest that both mutinies were organized centrally, albeit loosely, upon a hierarchy of sorts, and that they were, to a varying extent, premeditated. In both cases, the slaves had been quick to take advantage of circumstances that had been presented to them, and it is testimony to the respect for, and authority of, both leaderships that they proved so effective in doing this. Certainly a disparate group of individual slaves, with little social cohesion or centralized organization, would not have been able to make such rapid and effective use of circumstances, no matter how advantageous, or to inflict such heavy blows on their captors and, in the one case, to actually succeed in assuming authority over the ship and the European crew.

This leadership was clearly supported by the mass of the slaves who agreed with the purpose of the rebellion and fought under their leaders for a common goal. It may initially be difficult to see this principle at work, given the apparently random violence of the mutineers when at the height of their fury. It is probably true that in the midst of both uprisings many of the mutineers did not consciously associate the overarching intentions of the rebellion with the violence of their ac-

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16 Alexander, 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*', 38, 49-50.

tions. The fact that on the *Meermin* the slaves attempted to kill the entire crew, and that on *De Zon* they attacked not only the sailors below decks but the wooden fixtures and supports that were in their deck, indicates that both groups were bent on destroying any symbols of their servitude that they could lay their hands on.<sup>17</sup> Yet it does seem that in both cases the mutinous intentions of the leaders were shared by the larger body of mutineers. On *De Zon*, when the leaders were interviewed after the rebellion had been quashed, the *scheeps-raad* arrived at the conclusion that the vast majority of the slaves had supported the uprising and were implicated in some way with the murder of *Tolk Cornelis*. Moreover, a plan to take over the ship and sail it back to Morondave had been hatched at some point after a substantial number of slaves purchased there had been put below decks. There was on the *Meermin* a similar unity of purpose among the mutineers. The way in which they coalesced into a cohesive force so rapidly after the initial murders had taken place, indicates that those mutineers were also organized voluntarily under a centralized authority, and possessed of a singleness of purpose. Furthermore, after what was probably a period of collective reflection, they made a clear and coherent overture to the European sailors to take them back to Madagascar.

The execution of the plan for the mutiny on *De Zon* was facilitated by the fact that a large number of slaves, purchased from a particular location, had been quartered in a single large hold. There they would have been able to converse with little interruption. Similar conditions had existed on the *Meermin* and it would have been under these circumstances that the respective leaders could come to the fore. The possibilities of enacting a mutiny was discussed among the slaves and a unity of purpose achieved. The *scheeps-raad* that was held on *De Zon* after the mutiny arrived at this very conclusion, one that is certainly not unreasonable in its assertions. The mutineers on *De Zon* were well prepared for violent action: they just needed the circumstances to be right before they could act. The premeditation of this mutiny is emphasized by the swiftness with which the leaders, supported by what seems to be the majority of their fellows, rose almost as one to kill the *Tolk* when the slightest opportunity presented itself, as is the rapidity with which they then galvanized their fellow slaves into a full-scale revolt. If anything, it was their impatience that got the better of them; for while they may have found themselves suddenly in the position to kill the hated translator, the other circumstances that governed their predicament were simply not conducive to the success of a slave rebellion, no matter how large or well-organized.

The ways in which the leaders of both mutinies were treated by the Dutch after their respective surrenders reflect something of the confusion experienced by the VOC officials in the face of these violent uprisings. I have mentioned that Massavana and Koesaaij were sent to Robben Island for observation in the hope, it appears, that further light would be shed on the mutiny and how it had occurred.<sup>18</sup> In a similar fashion, the *scheeps-raad* on *De Zon* elected to have the three surviving leaders of the rebellion chained in isolation in different sections of the ship

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17 As was alluded to previously, by murdering the *Tolk* they were savaging one of the most potent symbols of, not only their enslavement, but the perceived treachery that had been necessary to effect it.

18 Alexander, 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*', 49-50.

(two in the prow and one under the forecandle), while the only slaves to actually receive any severe punishment were not the leaders themselves, but two other male slaves, Mankenna and Arondohobohaij, who were found to have defended the ringleaders. They were whipped, and then put back below decks with the other slaves. In both cases the VOC officials had been able to identify the ringleaders, but were uncertain as to what exactly to do with them. The relative leniency shown towards these leaders, given the extensive human and material damage that had been wrought, remains something of a mystery. In fact, the treatment of the mutineers here stands in stark contrast to what occurred on the *Drie Heuvelen*, where the punishment meted out to both the ringleaders and the larger body of complicit slaves was a good deal harsher. Ravell claims that each of the slaves was sentenced to a flogging, while the ringleader who had survived (the other having been killed in the revolt) was broken on the wheel by a fellow slave and then given the *coup de grace*.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the fact that the larger slave bodies of the *Meermin* and *De Zon* were not punished, despite their obvious complicity, is an indication of how the labour shortage that the Company was constantly struggling against at the Cape could restrain the retributive inclinations of VOC officials. By overlooking the behaviour of these slaves the officials were able to meet the objectives for which both voyages had been dispatched in the first place.

In essence then, there is a definite similarity of purpose, intent and execution between the slave mutiny on the *Meermin* and that on *De Zon*. Both were to a certain extent premeditated, both took immediate advantage of particular circumstances to enact a violent resistance, both were organized under an identifiable leadership, both sought to murder all the Europeans on board and, finally, both had as their intention a return back to the slaves' port of origin. However, the one met initially with immediate success, and was only to be defeated at a later stage by a most remarkable set of circumstances, while the other never succeeded in even allowing the mutineers to escape their place of captivity. The reasons for this divergence in outcome can be traced, largely, to the differences in shipboard discipline and authority that existed on the two ships, as well as to the material nature of the circumstances that shaped the choices adopted by the respective groups of mutineers.

I went into considerable detail in my earlier work on the *Meermin* on the discipline and authority that pertained on the vessel at the time of the mutiny. I suggested that this lack of discipline was one of the primary reasons both for the mutiny's occurrence and for its success.<sup>20</sup> One can attribute a decrease in discipline on board the *Meermin* to the performance of the two senior officers, Krause, the merchant, and the captain, Gerrit Christoffel Muller. Here the slaves were allowed up on deck after sickness had broken out. They were left unchained and granted complete freedom of movement around the vessel. Finally, of course, there was the disastrous decision by Krause to delegate the task of cleaning Malagasy assegais to these slaves. On top of all this, Captain Muller had been sick and was confined

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19 Ravell, 'The VOC Slave Trade between Cape Town and Madagascar, 1652-1795', 38.

20 Alexander, 'The Mutiny on the *Meermin*', 58-69.

to his cabin. His presence on board was thus severely compromised. According to the records a number of the earlier decisions were taken by Krause and Muller in concert with one another, or even by Muller alone.

Muller's complicity in creating these conditions was recognized by the Council of Justice on 30 October 1766 for, together with one of his mates, Daniel Carel Gulik, he was sentenced to be demoted and banished from the Cape. Both parties were found to have been negligent in the proper execution of their duties, and had Krause survived the mutiny, it would be safe to say that he, too, would have received at least a similar sentence, if not one even more severe. It is unnecessary to go into much further detail. The import of the sentence, and indeed of the testimonies that were compiled from officers and crew during the trial, is that the senior officers of the *Meermin* were collectively guilty of gross negligence. They had allowed their hold on authority and adherence to good practice to deteriorate to the point where the slaves were not only free to roam the ship at will, but were provided with lethal weapons, the use of which they were highly familiar with, on the orders of no less a personage than the merchant himself. The apparent absurdity of these actions which led up to the mutiny, which at times seem to be rather the creation of a comic or a satirist than an actual historical event, may even partly blind one to the disorder and disarray that was afflicting the crew. This final absurd decision was, moreover, its most extreme symptom. The evident lack of a strong and cohesive sense of authority on board the *Meermin* clearly created conditions that were more than ripe for ensuring the success of a violent slave uprising. It was this laxity, more than any other single factor, that enabled the mutineers to consolidate themselves so effectively and then to act with such triumphant resolution.

All of this might appear as a rather convoluted attempt to describe what is not only patently obvious, but is more than anything else entirely practical: namely, that the slaves of the *Meermin* were able to move freely on the ship and had access to weapons. These factors ultimately allowed them to surprise the crew and take over the ship. The slaves on *De Zon* were clearly not able to do this. The reasons for their incapacity revolve around questions of shipboard discipline. From a reading of the journal of *De Zon* there emerges a portrait of the social temper on this ship that is very different from that of the *Meermin*. The contrast between the characters of Truter and Krause as shown in their reaction to the mutinies is highly pertinent here. Truter was a man who, even in moments of stress, exudes a sense of control and decisiveness, exemplified partly by the control he exerts over his own written narratives. When the mutiny broke out on *De Zon* the response was rapid and resolute, and (on the part of the officers and crew) necessarily violent. Had the reaction been less immediate and decisive, it is not impossible that the slaves would have fought their way to the upper decks - and then the outcome might have been very different.

As a result of the superior on-board discipline on *De Zon*, the mutineers on it were severely inhibited by their circumstances. They had not been allowed on to the upper decks, or to move freely about the ship. Most significantly, they had not been granted an easy access to dangerous weapons. Their rebellion, although premeditated in its intent, was crippled by inauspicious circumstances for, after murdering the *Tolk* there was little the mutineers could then do to effect their free-

dom in the face of such a violent and disciplined reaction on the part of the ship's company. The tools that they acquired from the *Tolk's* chest would never have been enough to wage battle against an armed crew and the material conditions that continued to give form to their predicament. Furthermore, the narrow steps and trap-door that was their only route out of their prison to the rest of the ship above them prevented such a large number of slaves from gaining the strategic momentum and physical armaments necessary to defeat the VOC crew. Caged below decks, most of them still in chains, they were, as the events recounted in the journal so dramatically reveals, easy targets for the VOC gunmen situated above them. These factors raise the possibility that this mutiny, despite the preconceived intentions of its participants, was in fact little more than an impulsive affray, ignited by the perhaps spontaneous murder of the *Tolk*. Conditions were ripe for the murder of the translator and the injury of a number of crewmen, but not for any further victories. On the contrary, the evident discipline of the officers and crew and the physical restrictions suffered by the slaves effectively prevented these mutineers to free themselves from the very deck where they were imprisoned.

### Locating the mutinies in a wider maritime context

A slave uprising raises a number of interesting questions of its own. These include the diversity of experiences, inter-personal and inter-group dynamics and material and social conditions that inform this multifaceted and sometimes contradictory historical phenomenon. In recent decades significant original, thought-provoking research has been conducted on mutinies and other forms of maritime resistance, with a particular emphasis on the Atlantic seaboard during the eighteenth century. Scholarship in the world of the VOC Indian Ocean is rather more limited, although some recent efforts have shed light on a fascinating area just as replete with violence and insurrection as its more popularly famous Atlantic counterpart. Of particular interest is the work of English historian Mike Dash who has completed an account of the planned mutiny and subsequent shipwreck of the *Batavia* in 1628. Although intended for a popular readership, is both academically credible and highly worthwhile.<sup>21</sup> However, much of the effort by historians working in this field has been devoted to sailor mutinies, and the comparative attention that has been granted to those staged by slaves is rather limited. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that mutinies by sailors are rather more common than those by slaves. However, the work conducted by these historians is still useful in illuminating, firstly, both the commonalities and the disjunctures between the two forms of mutiny, and, secondly, in shedding some light on the variety of attitudes and perceptions that shaped relationships between seamen and slaves during the eighteenth century and how these perceptions would become manifest in violent action during such mutinies.

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21 M. Dash, *Batavia's Graveyard: The True Story of the Mad Heretic who led History's Bloodiest Mutiny* (London: Phoenix, 2002), particularly 73-131. These two chapters include Dash's narrative of a planned mutiny on the *Batavia* by the skipper, Ariaen Jacobsz, and the under-merchant, Jeronimus Cornelisz, who attempted to organise a revolt against the upper-merchant, Francisco Pelsaert.

Perhaps it is best to start with the work of two historians who, working both individually and in tandem, have opened up a wealth of insights and conjectures about the Atlantic maritime world of the eighteenth century: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker. Their work has been largely concerned with uncovering the roots of revolutionary movements in the present-day United States and Britain found in the underclass that developed in the emerging modern maritime economy of the eighteenth century. They have associated the mainsprings of these revolutionary movements largely with sailors, slaves and other workers within this maritime world who, they claim, developed from their common experiences of oppression an anti-authoritarian, collectivist consciousness.<sup>22</sup> The eminence of these historians' scholarship has not saved them from criticism. In fact it is, in part my intention here to provide a moderate critique, from the perspective of the VOC in the western Indian Ocean during the same era, of any attempt to universalize the assertions and implications located within their studies. Nevertheless, their central thesis remains the most provident starting point for this discussion, which is itself a prime indicator of the rich wealth of ideas and detail embedded within their scholarship.

In his book, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, Rediker describes how confrontations over 'power, authority, work and discipline' on board merchant vessels in the first half of the eighteenth century, which he labels as a class confrontation, created an 'oppositional culture' among common seamen, a consciousness that was antagonistic towards established authority.<sup>23</sup> Such an oppositional culture was framed within the material confines of the ship, where a sailor's 'incarceration' within a confined space was coupled with his subjection to a harsh, often brutal disciplinary authority from above.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the collective consciousness of men aboard such ships was largely fractured along lines of class, rank and authority. It was from the ranks of the common seamen that a particularly strong anti-authoritarian tendency emerged.

Linebaugh and Rediker extend this line of argument in their collective effort, *The Many-headed Hydra*. Of particular interest is their discussion of sailor resistance to the maritime state. Most specifically, they highlight mutinies and piracy as the two most extreme, outward forms of such resistance. Further, they go on to explore the latter in extensive detail.<sup>25</sup> Their intention is to demonstrate the range, depth and particular manifestations of the resistance of the sailor underclass to the established authorities of the developing capitalist maritime order, and they do so with an often invigorating sensibility.

That there was, in differing measures, a revolutionary consciousness among sailors that grew and became more explicit over the course of the eighteenth century is now, due to the efforts of historians such as Linebaugh and Rediker, a historical hypothesis that has been met with increasing approval. When one examines a particular mutiny in close detail, however, it is often the case that the range of

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22 P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press), 154.

23 M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 154-155.

24 *Ibid.*, 159.

25 Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 156-160.

motive and initiative that conditions the rebellion defies any neat, static inscription. For example, the mutiny that was planned on the *Batavia* in 1628 before it ran aground on an island off the coast of western Australia was hatched by the captain and the under-merchant, both of whom resented the manner and person of the upper-merchant.<sup>26</sup> Tensions among the senior officer *corps* on some ships could therefore be as much the cause of mutinous intent as could disgruntlement on the part of the oppressed seamen. The fact that these officers were able to mobilize a portion of the crew to join their cause is testimony to how a mutiny could be instigated by one senior officer against another with the complicity of members of the sailor 'underclass'. However, in terms of the mutinies aboard the *Meermin* and *De Zon*, the problems move beyond the fractures in social cohesion among the officers and crew. One is forced to ask how slave mutinies would influence the relations among European officers and their crews, and what this then reveals about the relative consciousnesses of sailors and slaves, as well as the extent to which a common revolutionary impetus among such underclasses can, in fact, be established.

The crews in both of the mutinies that I have explored were most definitely united in their efforts to put down the rebellions. This, of course, was no doubt largely a reaction to the intent of the mutineers to murder every single one of them. While this may appear obvious and not worthy of historical comment, it does reveal how the threat of extreme violence could unite a seaborne community that, in the absence of such a danger, was probably riddled with dissonances within its social constitution. It is unlikely that either of these two crews were without the internal tensions and conflicts that historians such as Linebaugh and Rediker have described; and while the journal of *De Zon* does not detail any concrete examples of such discord, the fact that three sailors had deserted in Madagascar, a forbidding and still largely unknown environment, suggests that the lower orders of the ship's company were not without their dissatisfactions. Of first and most obvious importance, then, was the fact that the internal ruptures and divisions among a VOC crew could be temporarily effaced when confronted with such a directly violent and murderous threat, a threat, moreover, emanating from another faction of this so-called 'underclass', the slaves.

Uniting together to combat a common enemy is, of course, entirely what one would expect from any community, no matter how internally fragile; and the capability with which the crew of *De Zon* did so is testimony to the strength of her on-board authority, the evident respect for such authority among the various strata of her company and a greater degree of genuine social cohesion among her crew than that pertaining on certain other ships. However, both mutinies reveal the substantial disjunctures in collective consciousness between sailors and slaves on these two vessels; and this, perhaps, is partly indicative of the conditions that distinguish the Cape-Madagascan slave trade from that of the Atlantic. One can find nothing approaching a common revolutionary, anti-authoritarian and anti-maritime establishment ideal in either of these two mutinies. Rather, it is the very absence

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26 Dash, *Batavia's Graveyard*, 73-131.

of the feature's described by Linebaugh and Rediker that is so striking. Both revolts shows a submission to a Malagasy authoritative structures (in the form of the ringleaders) that very probably the slaves would have been familiar with on the island. More importantly, the mutinies do not reveal a direct revolutionary confrontation with the institutions of a capitalist, mercantilist empire. On the contrary, they reflect an intent that appears, to be rather prosaic: a return to Madagascar and a freedom from this particular form of enslavement. No direct challenges to any social, political or economic institutions, or against any generalized social order, were anticipated. Speaking simplistically, the slaves wanted to get off the ship and go home.

To a certain extent, the conditions of the Madagascan trade are revealed within the dynamics of the slave mutinies. The sailors and slaves on these voyages would have had little cause or capacity to develop anything resembling a common revolutionary consciousness. These were recently acquired slaves, no doubt disoriented by their imprisonment within this alienating environment and with little conception of the unique authoritative and disciplinary mechanisms that were maintained on European vessels. There would have been little opportunity for conversation, and the opportunities for inter-class and inter-communal contact that were perhaps more pronounced in the Atlantic were severely restricted. Perhaps the most definitive factor, however, is the fact that slaves and sailors did not work side by side on these vessels. The development of a common revolutionary consciousness would have required an extended period of contact between sailors and slaves, enabling a commonality in experience to germinate. From such commonality - which did not exist on these vessels - an integrated, class-based resistance to oppression could have been shaped. Sailors and slaves would have needed to interpret their harsh reality in inclusive terms, enabling them cognitively to make collective cause against the maritime authorities.<sup>27</sup> The conditions necessary for the evolution of such a collective sense of grievance were lacking in the Cape-Madagascan trade.

This being said, the extent to which a generalized model of an internationalized cooperative revolutionary consciousness comprising sailors and slaves can be predicated for the Atlantic has itself been criticized in a number of quarters. Philip D. Morgan, for example, believes it is important to modify the picture that Linebaugh and Rediker have painted.<sup>28</sup> He asserts that some of the features that Linebaugh and Rediker claim as representative of this consciousness were certainly present in the Atlantic (and the events and incidents employed by Linebaugh and Rediker do much to illustrate the definite presence of such features), and that there was a greater degree of interracial harmony and even cooperation among European sailors and African sailors and slaves than there was among their landward contemporaries.<sup>29</sup> However, he also demonstrates how the institution of slavery

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27 Linebaugh and Rediker describe, for example, how sailors and slaves of various ethnicities, through their contact in the Caribbean during the late 1700s, were able to exchange stories and ideas on insurrection and were thus able to forge something of an integrated revolutionary worldview. See Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 241.

28 Morgan, *Empire and Others*, 62.

29 *Ibid*, 59-60, 62.



itself was almost never directly questioned by European sailors, and that racial prejudice and animosity was by no means absent from naval and merchant ships in the eighteenth century Atlantic.<sup>30</sup>

This certainly qualifies the implications of Linebaugh and Rediker's vision, and goes some way to explain the ambiguities evident in the mutinies on the *Meermin* and *De Zon*. No direct common cause among sailors and slaves can be located. It was, after all, the sailors who the slave mutineers wanted to kill. These two mutinies demonstrate, above all, the disjuncture between the world of the VOC seamen and that of the newly acquired Malagasy slaves. As such, they can perhaps be viewed as counter-examples to those employed by Linebaugh and Rediker, illustrative of a divergent sphere of mental process, collective intent and actions of resistance. The lack of even an emergent common revolutionary consciousness, the sharply drawn antagonisms between the two sides, and the brutal violence meted out, at different intervals, by both communities, does much to question the validity of a romanticized, revolutionary perspective on the world of VOC slavery in Madagascar. Furthermore, the conjectures that have been offered in place of this perspective, can perhaps be extended to include reference to the larger Indian Ocean world, and perhaps that of the Atlantic as well.

The intense rage and violence that accompanied both mutinies, and the direction in which this violence was directed, provides a further frame with which to analyse this form of slave resistance. I have mentioned on more than one occasion that the mutineers, one they had gained, or partly gained, their freedom of movement, almost instantaneously set about attempting to murder all the Europeans in their midst. In the case of *De Zon* they also applied themselves to demolishing wooden supports and structures on their deck in a manner that may appear as irrational or even absurd. It may seem as such to us, for as much as we may attempt to empathize with the predicament of these slaves, such an attempt will always remain an act of historical imagination. It proves continuously difficult, no matter how familiar one may become with the conditions of slave capture and enforced servitude, to truly grasp the depth and extent of the anger of the enslaved. However, reflection will enable one to understand such actions more fully than one might initially suppose. In both cases, I would argue, a very real and heartfelt expression of rage was united with a deeply symbolic action, fusing in such a way that it is not a simple matter to neatly distinguish the one from the other. To speak of the Malagasy slaves as being 'consumed with rage' is not necessarily to patronize or homogenize; for as we have seen, neither rebellion was a mob affair with random acts of self-gratifying violence but rather both were carefully organized, coordinated and premeditated. An emphasis on the anger of the slaves bring us close, in fact, to their historical condition; for if one is really to get to grips with these mutinies, and with others that occurred on VOC vessels and on the ships of other slaving nations, then one has to account for the violent rage that almost invariably accompanies them. Of course it is difficult to analyze it or to take note of its presence. One may acknowledge the psychological trau-

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30 *Ibid.*, 60.

mas that not only undergird historical events such as these, also give them their form. As both these cases so clearly demonstrate, the brutalities of the slave trade and the marine crossing could breed reactions that were no less brutal. It was in events such as these that those engaged in the traffic of human beings were confronted with a horrific vision of the terrifying ambiguities of their vocation.

That aspect of the violence that is open to analysis, the symbolic action that was manifest within its performance, is no less important than the scale of the rage that prompted it; for it is in this that one can detect a method in what initially appears to be a chaotic madness. In the case of *De Zon* it should come as no surprise that the slaves seized the first opportunity that came their way to murder the *Tolk*, even if, as it turned out, other circumstances were not conducive to the success of the ensuing mass revolt. The *Tolk* was the VOC interpreter, the official hated most intensely by the slaves who recognized in him the primary responsibility for their impending enslavement in a foreign land. Of course, on historical reflection, it is problematic for the scholar to invest in the *Tolk* this level of overall responsibility; but it is for this very reason that one may inscribe this accusatory responsibility as largely symbolic. While it is clear that the slaves eagerly desired to murder the entire crew, it seems that this man, in particular, was doubly perceived as a symbol of their enslavement and thus more than worthy of death. The murder of the *Tolk*, then, as much as it marked the inception of the rebellion, was a symbolic action that one can explore in terms internal to its execution. Whether by this time the slaves had mutually agreed that they were sufficiently organized to mount their mutiny and were merely awaiting an opportune moment, or whether no such concord had been reached but that the opportunity to kill the *Tolk* was simply too difficult to resist, is probably impossible to say with any certainty; but it cannot be ascribed to pure coincidence that it was the *Tolk*, murdered in such an apparently callous fashion, that was the mainspring for the larger mutiny that followed. The murder of the *Tolk* was a symbolic blow against the commercial apparatus of *De Zon* as a VOC slaving vessel. This mutiny was thus founded on the murder of a symbol, so to speak; in striking this blow the mutineers instigated a wholesale attempt to dismantle, quite literally, the edifice of *De Zon* as a VOC slave trading enterprise.

In this light the slaves' attack on the fixtures and supports of the ship seems less remarkable and may, in fact, be compared with the slaves on the *Meermin* in their massacre of many of the ship's crew. One may ask why it was that the slaves would seek to destroy the very vessel on which they were confined, which would be their vehicle back to their homeland or to murder those who were equipped to navigate it. On this level their action is indeed not rational. However, bearing in mind that the Malagasy slaves were largely unacquainted with either the vessels of European traders or the means of sailing them, one can see the attack on the ship and its sailors as of equally symbolic significance to the murder of the *Tolk*. For these slaves, imprisoned in a claustrophobic and stuffy place below decks, with extremely limited freedom to move, the ship itself must have come to represent their state of enslavement with all its attendant brutalities and discomforts. This might explain the attack on wooden fixtures and supports within the deck itself. It may in one sense have been an expression of rage. In another it was a symbolic attack,

an attempt to physically dismember that which, both literally and figuratively, was a space of confinement and captivity. While the attack on the *Meermin*'s sailors (and, of course, that on the sailors of *De Zon* who were below decks) is obviously of a different kind, there are similar undertones that undergird the violence. The sailors, as a body, would also have possessed a symbolic import in the eyes of the mutineers, one which, particularly in the case of *De Zon*, was reflected upon during the mutiny's premeditation.

As has already been mentioned, it was the intention of the mutineers to murder the entire crew (once again undercutting any notion that the revolt was a blind act of uncontrolled rage), a sentiment that to a certain extent was probably shared on a conscious level by the mutineers on the *Meermin*. The slaves were acting according to a preconceived course of action when they began the violence, a course of action that was far more symbolic than it was practical. While the *Tolk* may have been particularly hated, the rest of the crew would also have been viewed as representatives of enslavement, an enslavement, moreover, that had removed them from all that was familiar and had placed them in a constrained space on a journey the destination of which they almost certainly knew nothing. The sailors, so closely associated with the ship and hence with the trauma of their condition, would have likewise assumed symbolic status as representatives of the brutal privations of captivity; and so the rapid, coordinated attempt by the mutineers to murder the sailors, while perhaps not rational on a practical level, is certainly understandable, as an act of consciousness, a violent vengeance directed at the representatives of the institutionalized violence and brutality that was the slave trade itself.

Bearing all this in mind it is possible to consider this uprising as much an attack on the slaving institutions of Madagascar as on those of the Europeans. While from a present day perspective one naturally views the European merchants, officers and crew as separate entities from the local Malagasy, connected through participation in a contractual relationship, there is nothing to suggest that the Malagasy slaves saw things in the same light. It is very possible that the slaves perceived the Dutch to be as much an integral part of the local institutions of servitude that had subjected them as they did they their local kings and officials. Their being transported to the ship was merely the next stage in this subjugation. It is, of course, unlikely that either the Europeans or the locals took the trouble to explain to them where it was that they were headed, and while these slaves would no doubt have been aware that others like them were on occasion sold beyond the bounds of familiar localities, it does not necessarily follow that they appreciated that such a process entailed a removal from one communal entity, with its attendant norms and legalities, to another. In this sense, the rebels were not necessarily distinguishing between two separate institutions of oppression when they rose up that day. The more intriguing possibility is that the murder of the *Tolk*, the attacks on the sailors and the attempts to dismember the material structure of their prison was an attack, perhaps spontaneous but yet coordinated in its execution, on the edifice of slavery as it was conceived within the consciousness of its protagonists, and that within this collective consciousness, the two parties in the trading relationship were not differentiated as such, but were treated as a single polity whose depredations demanded violent resistance.

The *Tolk* is thus situated as a central figure, one who effectively connects the Malagasy slavers with their European trading partners and is representative of both institutions within his person. As such, it is not surprising that he would have been so hated, and that the slaves took the first opportunity that came their way to murder him. The fact that the presence of one who, like them, was a Malagasy slave, could raise such intense hatred is testimony to both his practical and his symbolic function. Practically, he was the one perceived to enable the functioning of the slave trade, while symbolically he represented to the slaves the focal point upon which the practice of coercion, as it had been negotiated between the Malagasy officials and the Europeans, was established. Thus, while there were clearly two separate communities responsible for their enslavement, they were, in a sense, synthesized by virtue of the immediate presence of the *Tolk*. One could perhaps go so far to say that it was this very tangible presence of the *Tolk*, a figure familiar in speech and tongue and yet apparently responsible for a means, which enabled to effectively incorporate the Malagasy and the Europeans into a single cognitive entity, and that within the hostile, alien environment of the ship. Thus, the murder and the attacks on *De Zon* of 29 August were not so much directed against the Europeans as a distinct community as they were against the institutions of coercion that would more distinctly have been associated with the local court than with a political power from across the seas.

Much of what I have said above is speculative, although faithful to the sources. However, it is also crucial to keep in mind that the intentions of the mutineers were essentially to escape their prison. Additionally, any conception of a symbolic attack on the institutions of slavery must remain cognizant of this comparatively prosaic perspective. While entertaining such speculations may be fruitful to contemporary attempts at comprehending the workings of slave consciousness, one cannot overestimate the symbolic to the exclusion of the immediate and the practical. *De Zon* was anchored close to shore, a fact that would not have been lost on the slaves. Due to their lack of knowledge of contemporary European maritime technology, they would probably have been unaware of the material strength and bulk of the ship on which they were imprisoned. Their attempt to physically break free from this prison was thus doomed from the start. Ironically the slaves were, unwittingly, as much a victim of their own misconceptions and ignorance as they were of the brutalities of those who had subjected them, be they Malagasy or European.