

Between *Exclusif* and smuggling: maritime trade in the Lesser Antilles (late 17th - early 19th century)

« The processionary boats tirelessly sew or sew together the various pieces of the sea without the great history always seeing them. »

Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen ...*, [1949] 1979, T.1 p. 98.

Historiography devoted to trade in the West Indies has long insisted on the creation of closed economic spaces in imperial logic that one tends to summarize under the name of *Exclusif*, without considering that the control mechanisms were evolutionary, and especially far from being absolute in their will to exclude foreign nations¹. Similarly, our vision of colonial trade in the West Indies is the result of a European historiography focused on the aspects and impacts of trade on the European port economy, mainly derived from the serial and administrative history of the 1970s². Useful for understanding the rise of this trade as its impact on European societies, it leaves aside interisland trade, border trade, or maritime traffic within the American space³.

Today, we are witnessing a renewal of research that tends to bring out these flows. One could cite but not limited to the works of Peggy Liss, Marcus Rediker, or Shannon Lee Dawdy, or around the neutral islands those of Wim Klooster or Eric Schnakenbourg. These contributions provide the idea that the *Exclusif* system was officially bypassed, in a growing proportion, demonstrating the impossibility of regulating trade in the West Indies. From the *Exclusif* to the *Exclusif mitigé*, from the establishment of free ports to the opening to free trade in 1829, the idea that smuggling and illegal trade are a consequence of the *Exclusif* is nuanced. On the contrary smuggling⁴, and illegal trade⁵, or more broadly trade on a regional scale, may

¹ See Richard Pares' definition, "Merchants and Planters", *The Economic History Review Supplements*, 4, 1960, p. 1 : it is the exclusion of foreign merchants and the obligation to export to the metropolis for each colony.

² Jean Meyer, *L'armement nantais*, 1969 ; Paul Butel, *Les négociants bordelais l'Europe et les îles au XVIIIe siècle*, 1974, Charles Carrère, 1974 ; Jean Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France d'Ancien Régime*, 1972.

³ P. Liss et F. Knight (dir.), *Atlantic port cities : Economy, culture, and society in the Atlantic world, 1650-1850*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1991

⁴ Anne Pérotin Dumon, « Cabotage, contraband, and corsairs : The port cities of Guadeloupe and their inhabitants, 1650-1800 », in P. Liss et F. Knight, *Atlantic port cities...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-86). Jorge Miguel Viana Pedreira, « Contraband, crisis, and the collapse of the old colonial system », *The Hispanic American historical Review*, 81,3-4,2001, pp. 739-744; Ernst Pijng, « A new interpretation of contraband trade », *The Hispanic American historical Review*, 81,3-4,2001, pp. 733-738; et Nuala Zahedieh, « The merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish contraband trade, 1655-1692 », *William and Mary Quarterly*, 43, 4,1986, pp. 570-593.

⁵ André Lespagnol, « Les Malouins dans l'espace caraïbe au début du XVIIIe siècle. La tentation de l'interlope », Paul Butel (dir.), *Commerce et plantation dans la Caraïbe*, Bordeaux, Maison des Pays Ibériques, 1992.

also be due to the existence of navigation logics specific to the area in question, at least different from the strict transatlantic flows, or even a regional economic system, as archaeology suggests⁶.

In the perspective of a seminar devoted to Caribbean navigation, we propose to adopt this same change of scale within the Atlantic world and to concentrate on the Caribbean navigation area. Approaches can be multiple. First of all, around the actors, by taking an interest in local traders, or the trading communities, and their networks, which can lead to work on the supply of goods or on the redistribution in this space, in order to bring a first sketch to a redefinition of the commercial geography of the zone. As a corollary, the products exchanged and the commercial techniques used (barter, bills of exchange, cash...) are also worthy of interest. The dialectical relationship between legal and illegal trade, with their avatars of interloping and smuggling, appear to be fruitful avenues to explore, trying to better understand the logic at work in many situations, forming a "grey zone" in which sailors were evolving. Finally, a last approach would be that of navigation techniques; by this we want to evoke both the empirical or learned knowledge of seafarers as to the characteristics of the Caribbean area (geographical, sanitary...) but also, perhaps, on the particular innovations which have appeared there both with regard to shipbuilding and port infrastructures.

These suggested approaches, which are far from exhaustive, are simple indications that do not exhaust the questioning that we wish to develop around a theme that is both vast and renewed, around commercial navigation in the West Indies (late seventeenth century-early nineteenth century), during a seminar organized at the University of the West Indies (Schoelcher campus). Interested researchers should apply before 30 August 2018 to the following address by sending a draft paper (title, abstract and affiliation) to: jean-sebastien.guibert@univ-antilles.fr

Replies will be sent to contributors no later than 10 September 2018.

Papers will be published in a volume.

Expected dates: 24-26 October 2018

Location: Schœlcher Campus (Martinique)

Organization: Colette Médouze, Boris Lesueur and Jean-Sébastien Guibert



⁶ See Catherine Losier, *Approvisionner Cayenne sous l'Ancien Régime. Archéologie et histoire des réseaux commerciaux*, Leiden, Sidetone Press, 2016.