

Hallucinating Colonialism

Spinoza and the Silence on Colonial Slavery in Early Modern Philosophy

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Early in the eighteenth century, Johannes Colerus, one of Spinoza's first biographers, noted that the philosopher's ink-and-charcoal drawings included a self-portrait in the pose and costume of Masaniello, the Neapolitan revolutionary.¹ The nine-month revolt which shook the port city of Naples in 1647 was among the first mass insurrections of the modern era that to a large extent was the work of the city's poor – market women and carters, sailors and fishermen, weavers and silk winders. In terms of its historical narrative, the revolt transversally combined economic, gender and colonial factors. Its immediate trigger was a decree issued by the Spanish viceroy – Naples had been under the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs since 1559 – imposing a fruit tax to co-finance the war against France. Within days, the fisherman Tommaso Aniello rose to become the main voice and organizer of the rebellion, which assumed a scale far greater than the tax revolts of the 1630s and 1640s. Mobilizing a popular armed militia numbering tens of thousands, including women, the insurrection heralded a short but radical rupture in power relations.² As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker put it: “Galley oarsmen became captains, students were given books, prisons were opened, and tax records were burned in the streets. Nobles were forbidden to wear expensive garments, while their palaces were marked for destruction [...]”³ The revolt of Naples continued for months after the killing of Masaniello and its news electrified London and Amsterdam, the novel centers of European seafaring. The course of the revolt raised new political questions, firstly, on the capacity of the masses for self-organization. As historian Peter Burke recalls: “the sacking of palaces was carried out in a relatively orderly manner [...p]rivate looting was punished [and] what was found [...] was either destroyed or given to the

¹ See John Colerus, *The Life of Benedict de Spinoza*, London: Benjamin Bragg, 1706.

² See Peter Burke, “The Virgin of the Carmine, and the Revolt of Masaniello”, in *Past and Present*, No. 99, May 1983 pp. 3–21. See additionally Rosario Villari, “Masaniello. Contemporary and Recent Interpretations”, in *Past and Present*, No. 108, August 1985, pp. 117–132.

³ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra – Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2000, p. 112.

poor.”⁴ Secondly, the revolt saw the integration of a variety of heterogeneous demands under a single popular slogan, namely “a root and branch suppression of all the new taxes”,⁵ as Rosario Villari put it. The novelty of these events inspired at least two theatrical plays in England and Holland which conflated the insurrectional role of women with the theme of domestic service and colonial slavery. Motifs of sailor rebellions were interwoven with those of the releases of African slaves from noble households and the fiction of a “blackamoor” daughter of Masaniello, who sang an ode to blackness.⁶

Given the lynching of Massaniello’s alleged murderers, the rebellion of Naples also conjured up the old conservative *topos* of the blind excesses of insurrectionary violence, a *topos*, which Spinoza repeatedly discussed by referring to Tacitus’ formula – “the *vulgus* is fearsome, if it is not itself afraid”.⁷ He needed his entire intellectual life to deconstruct, in a realist and critical manner, the theme of the fear of the multitude, with which he was particularly familiar through his reading of the Roman historians who determined the masses as negative principle capable of destroying even the most stable government. Emilia Giancotti has shown, how Spinoza came to detect, in the very feedback processes between the terrorization of the masses and the fright, they spread, the figure of the *potentia multitudinis*. Influenced by Machiavelli, he started to understand insurrection not as the opposite principle of political society but as extreme variant of its constitution. From here onward, we find in Spinoza, implicit and largely unspoken, a theory of political violence based on a vitalism that is including nihilism to the political society instead of excluding it, as Hobbes did. Negri explicated this theory of violence by converging the principles of love and destruction. Both the alternative ways, in which Spinoza conceptualised the production of *convenientia* – association or unity – are amalgamated in Negri in an idea of being “infinitely extended toward infinite perfection:” Love without hate in the sense of the third kind of knowledge was

⁴ Burke, “The Virgin of the Carmine”, p. 14.

⁵ Villari, “Masaniello”, p. 120.

⁶ See T. B., *The Rebellion of Naples, or the Tragedy of Massanello Commonly so called: But Rightly Tomaso Aniello di Malfa Generall of the Neopolitans. Written by a Gentleman who was an eye-witness where this was really acted upon that bloody Stage, the streets of Naples*, London: Printed for J.G. and G.B., 1649. See also Thomas Asselijn, *Op- en Ondergang van Mas Anjello of Napelse Beroerte (voorgevallen in 't jaar 1647)*. Treurspel. Gespeelt op d’Amsterdamsche Schouwburgh, Amsterdam: Jacob Lescaijle, 1668. See Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 127. See also the translation of Alessandro Giraffi’s prominent report, *La rivoluzione di Napoli* (Venezia: Filippo Alberto, 1648) by James Howell: id., *The Exact History of the late Revolutions in Naples, and of their Monstrous Successes, not to be Parallel’d by any Ancient or Modern History. Published by the Lord Alexander Giraffi in Italian; And (for the Rareness of the Subject) Rendred to English by J.H.*, London: Printed for R. Lowndes, 1650.

⁷ Baruch de Spinoza, *The Ethics Demonstrated in Geometric Order*, trans. Jonathan Bennett, E4p54s, in *Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Bennett, www.earlymoderntexts.com (20/5/2016). See additionally Baruch de Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, trans. A. H. Gosset, London: G. Bell & Son, 1883, TP VII, 27 <http://www.constitution.org/bs/poltrat.txt> (20/5/2016).

made coincide with the principle of creative destruction as stated in the axiom of the *Ethics*, part IV – “given any individual thing there is another more powerful thing that can destroy it.”⁸ Doubting the ideality of this convergence, and referring to a question on which Spinoza remained silent – colonial slavery – I think there is something more specific to say about the rebel portrait of the Dutch philosopher than Deleuze’s *dictum* that Negri “was the first to give full philosophical meaning to the anecdote that tells of how Spinoza drew himself as Masaniello”⁹ and Hannah Arendt’s remark that the psychic impact of the drawing corresponds to the sense of Spinoza’s emblem motto – *caute*, be careful – in thinking the production of the body politic.

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The revolt of Naples confronted seventeenth-century philosophy that generally sought to understand politics in terms of the relation between the state and the possessive individual with a new figure: It introduced to the masses’ ability to organize actions that are initially catalyzed by passion and violence and thus surpass Hobbesian or Lockean explanations of political unity in terms of contractarian or majoritarian logics. In the midst of modernity’s foundational crisis with its ocean-spanning contact zones of colonial-capitalist accumulation Spinoza registered, in his thought, this challenge in both ontological and political terms, without ever managing to entirely free himself from the theme of mass fear. His thinking had to cover substantial ground in order for his political discourse to move beyond esoteric wisdom, critique of liberalism, and pedagogy of obedience. It was a long way of intellectual engagement that brought him to the point of comprehending that the masses are capable of assembling their existential forces from below, without any a priori establishment of ends, departing from the conditions, in which they are contingently thrown, from the physical encounters they experience, and the imaginary and affective images they produce from these physical encounters. Affirming their capacities, through the conflicts they face, the masses are “elements of socialization in themselves”,¹⁰ and produce the commonwealth by means of an internal transformation of their capacities, which – although always only partially and temporarily – can turn from the imaginary to the intelligible, from external to internal necessity, and thus doing without any transfer of powers to a separate sovereign. From *On the*

⁸ E4ax. See Étienne Balibar, “Spinoza’s Three Gods and the Modes of Communication”, in *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2012, p. 42.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, “Preface to *The Savage Anomaly*”, in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975–1995*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2006, p. 193.

¹⁰ Deleuze, “Preface to *The Savage Anomaly*”, p. 191.

Improvement of the Understanding, via the first book of the *Ethics*, to parts of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Spinoza still made reference to ascetic and mathematical norms of truth, from which “ordinary people”¹¹ remain excluded, as in their world of imagination a fictive order of ends and purposes is combined with an inane moral order. But in the *Political Tractatus*, Spinoza had the courage to defend the “rabble” against those who despised it – philosophers and rulers – and to postulate the equality of all human beings: “all have one common nature.” Anyone denying “truth” or “judgment” to the masses simply overestimates their own “power and refinement,”¹² and fails to see that the incapacity of the masses, their rage and their confused opinions, are the result of their exclusion from politics. Spinoza’s obsessive engagement with the reflexive structure of the fear of the masses, which is always, “in the double sense of the genitive,”¹³ to be understood both as the fear that grips the masses and the fear that others have of them, helped Spinoza to develop a realistic, non-utopian “science of liberation.”¹⁴ Its foundational theme – the mutual reinforcement of power mechanisms and mass irrationality – prompted him to recognize the imagination of the multitude as a reality-producing force. He thus analyzes, how the theological-political apparatus constantly strives to anchor its mechanisms in the human tendency to fear. Fear is the means by which human beings respond to the natural and historical relations of contingency and violence, into which they are cast, without being able to intellectually master them in any immediate way. In the search for transcendent solutions of this fear legitimization figures – God, king, contract – are brought into play that are equipped with fictional freedom, and intensify the fear they are meant to contain. Thus a “causal chain” comes in motion, linking sovereign terror from above with “violent passions” from below, as Balibar put it, from which “hatred between classes, parties and religions”¹⁵ emerges escalating all the more strongly, the more the multitude is oppressed. This vicious circle of despotism and revolt, which leads people “to fight for their servitude as if for salvation”,¹⁶ brings Spinoza to the conclusion that all power relations based on transcendental illusions should be brought to an end. But for this operation, no transcendental guarantee is given any more and Spinoza does not offer any historico-philosophical substitution.

¹¹ E1app.

¹² TP VII, 27.

¹³ Étienne Balibar, “Spinoza, the Anti-Orwell: The Fear of the Masses”, in *Masses, Classes, Ideas. Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, New York and London: Routledge 1994, p. 5.

¹⁴ Antonio Negri, *Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p.

¹⁵ Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, London and New York: Verso 2008, p. 39.

¹⁶ Baruch de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett 1991, p. 3.

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In a philosophy which invented a new use of the term of the *potentia multitudinis*, the drawing of Massaniello covers an odd lacunae of symptomal quality. In keeping with the conventions of the seventeenth century, this philosophy turned away from its actual global-historical referents, thus leaving the place of the multitude vacant. Despite of this gap and the antinomies coexisting with it, Spinoza registered the problem of armed or violent politics from below which has continued to exist, in more wide-ranging terms, since the period of colonial-capitalistic accumulation. How can an insurrection born of horror, exploitation and the deprivation of rights lead to a form of transindividual self-governance which will not, within a very short time, be suspended by the effects of its own violent practices? Just as Pierre-Franklin Tavarès and Susan Buck-Morss returned the master-slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the context of the 1791 Haitian revolution, and Joan Dayan linked the praxis of the black Jacobins to the performativity of vodou, I want to put Spinoza's concept of the *potentia multitudinis* into the context of *marronage* and the fugitive communities of escaped slaves in Dutch Brazil that were called *mocambos*,¹⁷ hideouts, or with reference to a Central African initiation institution, *quilombos*.¹⁸ To understand this operation I first will reconstruct in how far we find, underpinning Spinoza's politics of violence, a concept of natural law which Spinoza took from Hobbes in order then, step by step, argument by argument, to turn it against him and point ahead to a quasi-Nietzschean question: can hate and conflict be separated in such a way that a politics of destruction can be conceived which does not lead to the "imaginary dehumanisation" of the political opponent or oppressor and his or her "complete transformation into an enemy"?¹⁹

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In Hobbes, Spinoza finds a radical reconsideration of ancient traditions of natural law, as they had been gathered together in Cicero and then absorbed by Christian authors, principally by Thomas Aquinas. In the classical tradition of natural law, the rights of human beings were

¹⁷ *Mocambo* stems etymologically from *mukambo*, a Kimbunu word designating a hide-out.

¹⁸ See Pierre-Franklin Tavarès, "Hegel et Haiti ou le silence de Hegel sur Saint-Domingue", in *Chemins Critiques* 2/3, May 1992, pp. 113–131. See Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, Berkeley: University of California, 1995. See Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2000, pp. 821–865, and id., *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, pp. 14–17, 48–9, 114–33.

¹⁹ Balibar, "Spinoza's Three Gods and the Modes of Communication", p. 42.

identified with their essence, above all to be an *animal rationale* or thinking animal.²⁰ Since the individuals were called to obey the purpose of their nature, the classical tradition derives an end and an obligation from human essence, so that natural law corresponded to an *officium*, or necessary duty. For this reason, the nature of individuals is not regarded as pre-social; instead it directly corresponds to the good form of government. Political society was the legitimate means for the realization of humans' purposes. Thus humans were obligated to live in the *polis* and, thanks to their powers of reason, they were capable of understanding this duty. Thanks to their superior ability to understand the essence and modes of realization of things, in classical natural law, philosophers were regarded as privileged actors of political society. It is this long-standing sequence—essence : duty to society : privilege of higher authority—which Hobbes, and then Spinoza, destroy. They do not equate natural law with an essential purpose, but with the potentiality to act. If human beings are not obliged to any higher norm, if everything they have potential to do is in fact permitted to them, then the terrain of natural law is fundamentally altered. A rigorous egalitarianism of ability ensues. In this way, all are equal in their capacity to take action, to effect things, to command reality. The order of duties is supplanted by the order of capacities, the government of competencies by the equality of practices, however unequal the actual performance may be. The idiot, according to Spinoza, exerts himself within the framework of his capacities just as much as the wise.²¹ This is the anarchism of potentiality which links the two philosophers. Obligation is transformed into a secondary law, which limits rights rather than establishing them. Being human becomes, in the most fundamental sense, being able to do. This is the origin of the concept of the *conatus*, now so strange to our ears: striving or desiring to persevere in our being by affirming its excessivity. From now on, humans can do everything they are capable of, in the circumstances in which they find themselves.

From this egalitarianism of doing, Hobbes and Spinoza drew diametrically opposed conclusions. Hobbes understood natural law from a starting point in the individual's capacity to kill, Spinoza from the capacity of the many to create life. Hobbes identified desire as ego-logical drive of survival, Spinoza as a trans-individual affirmation of the power to act. Hobbes wants to sublimate social relations into sovereignty, Spinoza wants to ground the sovereign in

²⁰ See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Der Staat. De re publica*, Lateinisch–Deutsch, Düsseldorf: Patmos 2005. On the radical changes Hobbes and Spinoza introduced to the *ius naturale*-tradition see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, 1953. See additionally Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York: Zone Books, 1992, pp. 253–272. Alexandre Matheron, “Éthique et politique chez Spinoza”, in *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique*, Lyon: ENS Éditions 2011, pp. 197–98.

²¹ See for example Baruch de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, chapter XVI.

social relations. Thus was inscribed, deep in the origins of modern philosophy, around the concept of natural law, a fierce disagreement on questions of appropriation, guilt and sovereignty, reflecting the violence of early modern state foundation and economic globalization. From the starting point of “how easie a matter it is, even for the weakest man to kill the strongest,”²² Hobbes defines in *De Cive* human beings’ natural mode of sociality in terms of the universal capacity to kill. As Leo Strauss emphasizes, death represents in Hobbes the *summum malum*, the highest evil and the negative limit of existence, while there is no *summum bonum* to be found in Hobbes.²³ His transformation of the Christian community of guilt into an economic society of competition and fear leads to a natural un-community of enemies, in which everyone is in competition with everyone else. The fact that natural sociality is defined by the destructiveness of competition ultimately brings Hobbes to destroy this sociality itself, and unify humans in their dissociation. Thus the necessity of the state is a result of the egotistical nature of human beings. As the human nature is incapable of any intrinsic intensification of its own abilities, and can only repeat an indefinite wanting-more and having-more, the state must interrupt these drives. The strength of the state is not based on the relation of social forces, instead, it perpetuates their interruption. Neither, therefore, can the Hobbesian state put an end to the fear of death. From the indeterminate and incalculable fear in the state of nature, human beings pass over to determinate, calculable fears in the state of society. They know now, as Esposito put it, what they need to be afraid of: sovereign law.²⁴

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Alexandre Matheron has shown repeatedly how ethics and politics in Spinoza are connected by the deconstruction of the arche-theo-teleological. In this respect, the introduction to the *Political Tractatus* is paradigmatic: it directly polemicizes against the philosophical habit of basing theories of state on finalistic anthropologies. Spinoza stops assigning purposes to human nature, for whose realization political society would be the adequate instrument, whether in natural form as in Aristotle, or in the artificial form of the Hobbesian contract.²⁵ But how to explain an institution which emerges from the “general nature or position of

²² Thomas Hobbes, *De cive. Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*, London: R. Royste, DC I, 3, p. 165. See additionally Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XIII.

²³ See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Its Basis and its Genesis*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1963, p. 15.

²⁴ See Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2010, p. 29.

²⁵ See Matheron, “Éthique et politique chez Spinoza”, p.

mankind,”²⁶ without any intervention of external ends, as stated in the *Tractatus politicus*? Spinoza announces that this will be explained in the second chapter, but there is nothing of the kind to be found there. On this point, in *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Matheron refers to Spinoza’s doctrine of the imitation of affects, in which – unlike in Hobbes – the egological ambition for glory can be overcome.²⁷ Let’s briefly recall the cornerstones of this doctrine: The socializing function of affects is first discussed in the third book of the *Ethics* in terms of object choices (what one likes, what one does not like). With the 27th proposition, Spinoza moves on to mechanisms of imaginary identification, which are no longer based on things but on the behavior of things, and more specifically, on the image that is made of this behavior. Matheron emphasizes that these identification mechanisms are based on the ambivalent principle of the imitation of the similar: we are pleased by something we imagine an individual similar to us would be pleased by. We sorrow over things we presume they would likewise sorrow over. And if they like something that we reject, we vacillate.²⁸ In order to stabilize these projections and introjections, we insist that “that our own likes and dislikes should meet with universal approval.”²⁹ The demand that others should live according to our disposition (*ingenium*), Spinoza calls *ambitio*, which also includes the ambition “to do a thing or leave it undone, solely in order to please men.”³⁰ These imitations can mutually reinforce each other and give rise to social institutions which are “at once very powerful and highly unstable,”³¹ since they are based on imaginary stereotyping and thus on fear of difference.³² The imitation of affect thus threatens to shift between a “sociable” and an “unsociable” cycle, so that an external factor would need to intervene in order that its cyclically exploding conflicts be resolved.³³ In accordance with Deleuze and Gueroult, Matheron explains that the only resources given to men to mark a way out of this circle, are the positive passive affects, the basic form of which is joy. Each imitation of affect, however imaginary, includes a minimal cooperation of forces which causes an unstable and provisional increase of capacities that, under favorable conditions, can catalyze human beings’ capacity for thought and thus stabilize the framework of this cooperation. The difference between Spinoza and Hobbes manifests in the fact that here the individual identifies itself with the being in which it strives to persevere. It is the identification with the joy of the other – something suppressed in

²⁶ TP I, 7.

²⁷ See Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit 1969, p. 164.

²⁸ On the idea of *fluctuatio animi* see E3p31 and d.

²⁹ E3p31d and s.

³⁰ E3p29s.

³¹ Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, p. 111.

³² Ibid.

³³ See Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, pp. 287–354.

Hobbes but characterising the ambition for glory in Spinoza – that can lead out of the cycle of the imitations of affects, as long as favorable circumstances allow the increased forces of existence to induce a leap forward into the performativity of thought.

Twenty-five years later, in the mid-1990s, Matheron offers an alternative model of explanation. To do so, he situates himself on directly Hobbesian territory: a civil-war-like situation, in which people are divided against each other in enmity, conflict, abuse, and violence. He wants to show that for Spinoza, even in a maximally dystopian sociality of mutual hate and murder, minimally cohesive forces do exist, from which elementary institutional associations can come about. Matheron here takes aim at the lowest threshold of affective socialization: he uses the case of hate and lynch masses to emphasize the radicalism of Spinoza's inversion of the explanatory schema of juridical sovereignty theory, with its formulae – in Foucault's words – of the “subject who has to be subjectified, the unity of the power that has to be founded, and the legitimacy [of the law] that has to be respected.”³⁴ In this, Matheron sees de-constitution and re-constitution, revolution and the production of institutions as two analogous processes. As soon as tyranny spreads beyond a certain degree within a society, affects of hate begin to communicate with one another. More and more people recognize each other in their hate, sympathize with each other in the harm that has been caused to them, and mutually affirm each other in their capacity to annihilate the tyrant. Matheron presents this community of hateful solidarity as an elementary form of the *multitude that is “guided, as it were, by one mind”*³⁵: the figure at the center of the *Tractatus politicus*. According to Matheron, as soon as outrage has dissolved old institutions and, in the wake of the *tumultus*, conflicts have spread through all capillaries of society, this same outrage will “engendre l'État de la meme façon, exactement, qu'elle cause les révolutions.”³⁶ The more social factions attack each other, the more their outrage towards one another will grow. And thus a new wave of solidaristic feelings can be set in train, from which new institutions will emerge, through simple actions of adaptation and imitation.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 44.

³⁵ TP III, 2.

³⁶ Alexandre Matheron, “L'indignation et le conatus de l'État spinoziste”, in *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique*, p. 223.

Balibar has rightly pointed out that Matheron's defense of Spinoza's anarchist anti-finalism here becomes too mechanical, taking an almost Tocquevillean form.³⁷ If the capacity of the many for self-governance is reduced to a statistical majority effect, the genuine potential of Spinozan anarchy is lost. What Matheron outlines is precisely the emergence of a moral majority, constituted through mere numerical superiority. It alone accumulates acts of imitation and adaptation. But the argument should actually go the other way, since what is at question is the causality of minimally active forces from below, those "incompressible minima"³⁸ of dissident expression, by means of which institutionalization can occur in situations of maximal fright, maximal exploitation, or deprivation of rights, one that can intrinsically transform its own hate-induced mechanisms without owning a historico-philosophical ticket. Thus, Matheron's argument that the hate and lynch mass is an elementary form of the absolute democracy of which Spinoza speaks in the last and unfinished chapter of the *Tractatus political* (without being able to consistently start to sketch its sense) can be given a different articulation, which I would like to present by referring to the relations of colonial-capitalist accumulation, that Spinoza bears witness to without commenting them.

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Spinoza not only drew a portrait of himself as a Neapolitan revolutionary, he also left behind a letter in whose margin he suddenly, as part of some scattered observations on the imagination, reports a colonial dream image: the face of a "black and scabby Brazilian,"³⁹ which one morning unexpectedly appeared before his eyes.⁴⁰ The letter, dating to the summer of 1664, was addressed to Spinoza's friend Pieter Balling, a member of the radical wing of the Mennonites, a merchant with business connections in the Spanish colonies, and the author of *Het licht op den kandelaar*. Balling's spiritual idea of a divine world which could be immediately experienced had some influence on Spinoza's *Short Treatise*. In his letter, Spinoza mentions the dreamed face but makes no specific reference to colonial history. His

³⁷ See Étienne Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluti mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the body politic", in Steven H. Daniel (ed.), *Current Continental Theory and Modern Philosophy*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2005, p. 77. For an interesting critique of the Tocquevillean figure of the tyranny of the majority see Gabriel Tarde, *Die Gesetze der Nachahmung*, pp. 254–260.

³⁸ Balibar, "Spinoza, the Anti-Orwell", p. 33.

³⁹ Baruch de Spinoza, *Correspondence*, Letter 17 to Balling, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928.

⁴⁰ See Lewis S. Feuer, "The Dream of Benedict de Spinoza", in *American Imago. A Psychoanalytic Journal for the Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn 1957, pp. 225–242. See Willi Goetschel, "Spinoza's Dream", in *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, Vol. 3, Special Issue 01, 2016, pp. 39–54. See additionally Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, pp. 87–89, and Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, pp. 84–5.

aim here is to console his friend Balling, who had just lost his son and was accusing himself of having ignored early signs of the child's fatal condition: a phantom sobbing in the night, a sound which reappeared in reality at his child's death. As the Freudo-Marxist sociologist Lewis S. Feuer emphasizes, the distinction made by Spinoza – between intellectual premonitions, like the child's sobbing, and merely bodily hallucinations without premonitory force, like the “black and scabby Brazilian” – in fact contradicts his own body-mind parallelism. This inconsistency, he goes on to suggest, marks Spinoza's psychic resistance to giving existential and historical weight to the dream-image. Feuer was the first author to suggest an identification of Spinoza's hallucination with Henrique Dias, a mythopoetic figure of the Pernambucan Restoration. Dias was the commander of a mercenary army of former slaves, or *maroons*, who fought on the side of the Portuguese planters against the Dutch and helped win the war for the Portuguese crown in 1654.⁴¹ Dias's regiment was not only deployed against the Dutch, it also operated against huge settlements of former slaves – the *mocambos* or *quilombos* – in the hinterland of Pernambuco and Bahia. It also fought on the side of the Portuguese against the west and central African kingdoms in what is today Angola.⁴² These *black troops* for whose powerful command Dias was rewarded with several royal favors, including a knighthood in the Order of Christ, were a sign of the dynamic emergence of hierarchies of color in the Dutch-Portuguese Atlantic, at a time when modern conceptions of race had not yet stabilized. Well into the seventeenth century, to have race was equated with infected blood, something which had been ascribed to Jews and Moors since the time of the Reconquista.

Feuer explains Spinoza's dream of Henrique Dias in terms of a repressed identification with the Amsterdam Jews caught up in the siege of Recife in 1654, who were eventually starved, massacred or handed over to the Inquisition. If we follow Feuer's argument further than he himself developed it, the figure of Henrique Dias catastrophically collapses the masses' own fears with the ruler's fears of the masses, the reciprocal relation which was of such concern to Spinoza. Dias represents the fear of the slaves who fled over-exploitation and death to join the *maroon* armies. But he also represents the fears of Portuguese and Dutch colonists of the unrelenting attacks by runaway slaves and the imminent danger of their insurrection, which the black troops were supposed to keep at bay, but also suspected of supporting. Ultimately

⁴¹ See Hebe Mattos, “Black Troops and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World: The Case of Henrique Dias and His Black Regiment”, in *Luzo-Brazilian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2008, pp. 6–29.

⁴² See Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels. Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery*, University of Illinois Press, 1996, pp. 103–136.

Dias represents the fear inspired in the Amsterdam *sephardim* by the combat techniques of the *guerras pretas* and by the return of the Inquisition to northern Brazil. That Dias stood for a spectacular overlapping of practices of domination and persecution is, according to Feuer, evidenced by the fact that the Portuguese Overseas Council did not grant his request for a permanent institutionalization of the *maroon* troops. Instead, in recognition of the military performance of his units, he was given the Jewish synagogue and the land on which Recife's Jewish cemetery was built. In this context, it is not insignificant that Spinoza's excommunication took place two years after the Portuguese reconquest of Pernambuco and the hurried return of the Sephardic colonists to Amsterdam. The decree of Spinoza's excommunication was read by Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, the former rabbi of Recife, cabbalist and translator of Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Gate of Heaven*, who later became a follower of Sabbatai Zwi. Because of the participation of a considerable number of Amsterdam Jews in the West India Company, catalyzed by their mercantile experience and command of portuguese language, Spinoza was relatively well informed on the circumstances and events of Dutch colonialism. His father owned a warehouse holding primarily Brazilian goods. His brother Gabriel emigrated to Barbados where the first Synagogue *Nidhei Israel, The Dispersed of Israel*, was founded by Recife emigrants in Bridgetown.

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In spite of the economic setbacks suffered by the West India Company in its sugar business, the Dutch succeeded in stabilizing, through their two colonial trading companies, the centerpiece of capitalist accumulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the so-called triangular trade, begun by the Portuguese and Spanish, which linked together Europe, west Africa and the two Americas. Holland built an enormous, ocean-spanning framework of unequal relations of trade, capital and power. Produced by means of the slave trade, the plantation economy, mining and shipping, this system violently brought heterogeneous hemispheres, locations and times into contact, while setting off a historically unprecedented process of creolization. Through this trans-Atlantic structure of circulation, Dutch cities ensured their supplies of sugar, cotton, tobacco and precious metals, all of them produced or quarried by slaves who had been taken by the West India Company to Brazil and the Caribbean across the Atlantic from west African trading posts and ports like El Mina and Luanda. At the same time, the Netherlands used American silver to import spices and tea

from south and south-east Asia, where trading posts in Batavia and Makassar established European colonialism's second center of colonial accumulation.⁴³

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Spinoza's dream of Henrique Dias stands for more than simply the circulation of mass fear. Nor can it be reduced to identification with the commandant who drove Isaac Aboab out of Pernambuco, as proposed by Feuer. And Dias is also not a stand-in for the rebel slaves left unmentioned in Spinoza's philosophy, although they are, as Warren Montag has suggested, its "objective allies in a common struggle"⁴⁴ against the theological-political state apparatuses, so that it become hard to distinguish, whether "the mangy Brazilian [...] was an image in Spinoza's dream or whether Spinoza himself, his words and his works, was the dream of a rebel slave".⁴⁵ Much more specifically, the *maroon* commandant stands for the war the Portuguese and the Dutch waged against the fugitive communities of Pernambuco and Bahia which testified to the improbable but successful transformation of a west African institution of war and slavery into an anti-slavery institution of the Black Atlantic, and thus for an immanent transformation and self-organisation of mass capacities under conditions of extreme suppression and exploitation. This kind of transformation is of considerable significance for a philosophy in which the production of institutions is subject to no other law than the immanent laws of the potentiality of the multitude. Henrique Dias did not participate in this transformation, instead he founded a military force that was constantly directed against it. More than one of the many expeditions of the *guerras pretas* was led against the largest republic of escaped slaves in northern Brazil, which existed throughout the entire seventeenth century under the name Palmares, and which paradigmatically stands for the transformation of an African war and military institution into the basis of a fugitive community. The history of Palmares, the largest free slave republic of northern Brazil, paradigmatically exemplifies the intrinsic transformation of a multitude motivated by hate, lynching and war into a limitedly or partially emancipatory formation. The Pernambucan *quilombo of Palmares* had a population fluctuating between 10,000 and 15,000, and although the Dutch and Portuguese organized annual military expeditions against its settlements, this alliance of fugitive

⁴³ See Immanuel Wallerstein, *Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011, pp. S. 36–74. See also Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery. From the Baroque to the Modern*, London and New York: Verso 1997, pp. 185–217.

⁴⁴ Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, p. 88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

communities successfully fought off all attacks between 1605 and 1694. Recent historical research into the seventeenth century Black Atlantic has shown that the strength of the *guerras pretas* led by Henrique Dias can be traced back to the experience of African Imbangala fighters, who after their abduction and enslavement were integrated into formations of Portuguese mercenaries. But at the same time, the Dutch and Portuguese fear of the free slave republic and its attacks was also due to the same presence of west central African fighters.⁴⁶

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In this context, it is worth recalling that in the late sixteenth century the Portuguese penetrated into the coastal regions of west and west central Africa plunging the social territory, in particular the kingdoms of Kongo and Ndongo in the areas of today's Kongo and Angola into a spiral of social and political chaos. A period of military conflict ensued, intensified by the dissolution of the old Congolese kingdom, in which villages were destroyed, people driven from their homes and scattered across wide territories. At the same time, fighters – uprooted from their traditional matrilineal societies by the many conflicts – advanced into the coastal areas of what is now Angola, invading (Ndongo) and creating several mercantilist states (Matamba, Kasanje), which engaged in the regional slave trade. These fighters called themselves Imbangala. In the course of their advance southward, they integrated one particular institution into their social structure, which the Mbundu people called *ki-lombo*: “a male initiation society or circumcision camp where young men were prepared for adulthood and warrior status.”⁴⁷ The *ki-lombo* institution helped the Imbangala in building a military structure capable of unifying a large number of heterogeneous people, who had been expelled from their native territories by wars and the colonial-capitalist globalization of slavery. Relations of filiation and kinship were replaced by the rites of an initiation society, to which anyone could belong if they subjected themselves to its extreme combat practices. Robert Nelson Anderson explains: »In contrast to prior states in the area, which crystallised around a royal lineage of divine kings, the nascent Imbangala states gathered together diverse peoples in a lineageless community. Since these communities existed in conditions of military conflict

⁴⁶ See Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, 122–8. See additionally Robert Nelson Anderson, “The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil”, in *Journal of Latin America Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1996, pp. 545–566. A lot of recent research refers to R. K. Kent’s ground-breaking article “Palmares: An African State in Brazil” published in 1965 in the *Journal of African History* (Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 161–175), while correcting its interpretations in significant ways.

⁴⁷ Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, pp. 126–7.

and political upheaval they found in the institution of the kilombo a unifying structure suitable for a people under constant military alert.«⁴⁸ In addition, the *ki-lombo* institution helped alleviate the spiritual uncertainty of a community newly separated from matrilineal traditions and unable to maintain stable contact with its dead. In Palmares, *ki-lombo* practices and Imbangala institutions – previously engaged in the slave trade – now found a place within a heterogeneous community of refuge, set in opposition to colonial enslavement. The wretched of History, their social ties hacked away, their cultural and religious knowledge in ruins, created from these ruins an institution of war, remaking the organizational structure of slave traders into an organizational structure *against* slave traders. This transformation of the capacity to act is genuinely political, transcending the significance of origin, culture or religion. It moves Hegel's account of the ideal development of peoples, as presented in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, into the realm of political fairy tales, where indigenous societies simply exist, either with too less institutions (archaic) or with too much institutions (despotic). The core of this political transformation is not the slaves' readiness to wage a life and death struggle, but rather, within this struggle, to invent an, at least, minimally egalitarian coordination of slave practices and slave knowledges.

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As Benjamin in *The Critique of Violence*, Spinoza ceases to interpret the *potentia multitudinis* in the framework of purpose-means relation but poses the question of the mediality, the *Mittelbarkeit*, of the means itself, their immanent composition and recomposition. Emilia Giancotti showed that the development of this idea came with a change in terminology. In his later works Spinoza decided to include, in the term of the mind, affective and inadequate ideas. The notion *mens* described the entire differential passage of the affects in themselves, from the passivity of passions and imaginary stereotypes to the active performativity of truth, and vice versa.

Spinoza's philosophy announces a path to salvation and the joys of reason, on which one learns to take seriously the sad passions and obstacles to knowledge. Thus, the actual object of Spinoza's political thought is not the ascent to mass intellectuality, but the uncertainty of this ascent. The production of society from the capacities of the masses encompasses the

⁴⁸ Robert Nelson Anderson, »The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil«, in *Journal of Latin America Studies*, 28:3, 1996, p. 558.

construction of a free society from below, and the failure of this process in the becoming-reactionary of the multitude. It consists of the relation of these two processes of potentiality to each other demanding a differential and conflictual mode of reflection. Thus, centuries before Nietzsche and Foucault, Spinoza holds that the forces which traverse human beings can, at one and the same time, be the catalysts of emancipation and the anchorage points of power. This is why we find in Spinoza no idealization of life, no sacralization of the multitude, no teleologization of history. Spinoza's political thought is minimally confident, based, as it is, on the vitalist assumption that the forces of life are excessive and can thus partially change from the imaginary to the intelligible. At the same time, his thought is maximally realistic and critical, since it registers the extent to which the forces of life are invested in the political-theological apparatus. From this, Spinoza draws the conclusion that the right to resistance and revolution is a natural right that is necessarily given. But no politics of violence is immune to the effects of its own destructive actions. Thus the actual object of Spinoza's philosophy is a second-order politics. Here, what is at stake is the transindividual ability to interrupt the reactionary dynamics and sad passions within violent actions, but without these dis-identifications becoming, in turn, a new political *telos*.

In this second-order politics, the idea that politics is to liberate oneself of all forms of heteronomy is replaced by the idea that politics is an experiment in interrupting, in the very process of liberation, the reemergence of destructive and oppressive forces. In the current tendency, in continental philosophy, to re-ontologise the idea of politics, we observe the establishment of single philosophemes, under which the sense of politics is subsumed – I don't have to list them all –, fidelity to the event, disagreement, potentiality of the not etc. Though these philosophemes are all post-metaphysical ones – i. e., they ground in principles that do not recourse to fixed qualities or predicates, but are founded in their ungroundability –, they all seem to be conceptualised in a way that except them from critique and corruption. They might be rare, and they might exhaust, but they do not revert or differ in themselves. This is why, by considering the inner differentiation of practise, Spinoza's metaphysical anarchism is of a certain singular shape in that it produces a precise question to politics – to determine the specificity of the points of torsions where the dynamisms of practises change in character.

K. Diefenbach

Translated by Brian Hanrahan.