

Surreptitious Spaces: Cabarets and the French Contest for Empire in Martinique,

1680-1720

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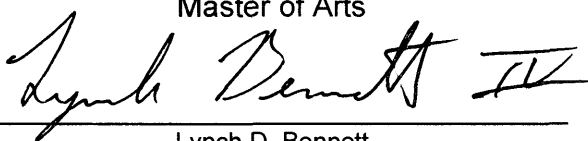
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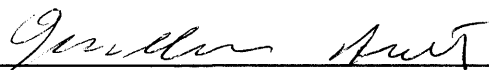


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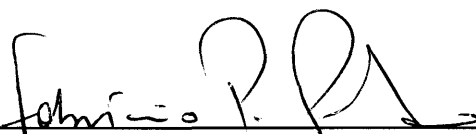
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ABSTRACT

Historians of the early modern Atlantic empires often conceptualize the balance of power between colonies and the metropole in absolute terms. This has contributed to the prevalence of the argument that the French Empire could hardly be considered an empire at all. Furthermore, historians of the French Caribbean tend to study plantations or ocean commerce, often neglecting the urban aspect colonial life. Records left from urban settlements such as St. Pierre, Martinique, challenge that narrative as they indicate that the struggle for power in the French Empire was by no means a zero-sum game. From colonial governors to enslaved peoples, the urban colonial society was complex, with people from all walks of life attempting to carve out their own dreams and ambitions in the urban landscape. At the heart of their struggles were cabarets. Cabarets, ubiquitous establishments dealing legally in food, drink, lodging, and often illegally in prostitution, gambling, smuggling, and slave maroonage, offer a unique vantage point from which to study this overlooked social sphere. Patrons of these establishments came from all levels of society, making them a true social melting pot. St. Pierre, Martinique, was the most heavily used port on France's preeminent island colony, making it the ideal city in which to study cabarets. While the French state intended cabarets to generate revenue through taxes and provide lodging to merchants and potential settlers, colonists used them in their own ways to accomplish their individual goals, often to the detriment of the state. Though most of the records of specific events that occurred within cabarets are lost, these institutions were the subject of numerous ordinances and prohibitions. Because laws are usually written in response to human action, those events can be ascertained through these laws. Colonial legislation reveals cabarets to be one of the most contested spaces in French Caribbean urban society as both state and settler struggled to shape their futures through St. Pierre's surreptitious cabarets.

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This thesis is dedicated to my loving, supportive, and brilliant wife, Monique Bennett.

In St. Pierre, Martinique in 1705, an enslaved woman, Babet Binture, sued for her freedom, claiming that she was free from birth. Binture lost her first trial before the Superior Council of Martinique, but she was later given hope of manumission when her sister, Catin, was granted freedom in 1708.¹ Catin worked at one of Martinique's many cabarets, which were establishments that dealt officially in dining, lodging, and drinking, and often less officially in gambling, fenced goods, and prostitution.² The sisters used the money earned from their business to seek legal counsel as well as audiences with the Intendant, Nicolas-Francois Arnoul de Vaucresson. After the sisters established a relationship with Vaucresson, he granted Binture her freedom.³ Sadly the governor of the Îles du Vent, Raymond Balthazar de Phélypeaux du Verger, acting on behalf of the Council of State in France to regulate the challenges posed to imperial authority in Martinique, influenced Vaucresson to reverse his decision, stripped the sisters of their cabaret, and likely had them returned to slavery.⁴ By using their cabaret to challenge legal rulings and social norms, the sisters' case became intertwined with the *ancien régime's*

¹ Arnoul de Vaucresson, August 25, 1708, "*Counselle du Roy en les Conseil Intendant de Justice police...*," Archives nationales d'outre-mer (henceforth ANOM) F3, vol. 250, 305.

² "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique, qui défend de souffrir que les Femmes montent dans les chambres hautes, chez les Marchands Magasiniers & Cabaretiers, hors la présence de leurs Maris," February 7, 1660 and "Ordonnance du Gouverneur du Cap, qui défend de vendre aucunes Marchandises dans la Campagne et hors du Bourg du Cap," October, 1 1699 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françaises de L'Amérique sous le Vent*, I, 84, 635; As discussed in Thomas Brennan's *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3, the word cabaret and tavern were interchangeable, though many legal statutes do mention both as the targets of their legislation. The 1701 *Dictionnaire Universel Contenant generalment tous le Mots François* maintains a less ambivalent meaning, defining cabarets as a [*Lieu où on vend du vin en detail. On confond aujourd'huy [sic] ce mot avec taverne: neanmoins ils sont fort differens, en ce que le cabaret est le lieu où on donne seulement du vin à pot par un trou pratiqué dans un troillis de bois qui y sert d'enseigne, sans qu'il soit permis d'asseoir, ni de mettre la nappe.*] in Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel, Conetnant gneralement tous les mots François, seconde edition*, Haye et Rotterdam: Arnoud et Reinier Leers, 1701.

³ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 81.

⁴ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 84; It should be noted that the final outcome of the sisters' case is not known for certain. Rather, the letter states that the sisters should be returned to slavery, and no final conclusion is known.

broader attempts to regulate slavery, limit piracy, and combat maroonage in Martinique. Phélypeaux believed that cabarets were one of the most effective venues through which settlers and travelers could circumvent and challenge French colonial law. He therefore ordered all cabarets along St. Pierre's coast torn down in the immediate aftermath of the Binture case, thus placing cabarets at the center of the French contest for imperial control.

An important social aspect of urban society in one of the French Empire's most important ports, the shrouded interiors of St. Pierre's cabarets were a contested space in which the state and settlers struggled to shape the colony to their respective ambitions. Binture's trial offers one example of these tensions as her sister's cabaret provided the funds with which Binture sued for freedom. Moreover, they served as a medium through which the sisters were able to gain extended audience with an important colonial official. Phélypeaux's letter suggests that Catin garnered favor with an influential family, the Begues, who, in turn, introduced the sisters to the intendant. Without that contact, Binture might never have had the chance to pursue manumission. Phélypeaux, in turn, attempted to regulate urban behavior through cabarets with an ordinance that was clearly motivated by Binture's case. He was also able to use the rumors of amorous rendezvous between Vaucresson and the sisters to manipulate Vaucresson into carrying out his own wishes as an intra-administrative power struggle took shape around both Binture's suit and St. Pierre's cabarets.⁵

Binture's case is but one of the many instances in which the state and colonial subjects used cabarets to challenge each other in their struggle to shape the colonial world. Through numerous ordinances and decrees, metropolitan and colonial authorities

⁵ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 80-85.

repeatedly tried to regulate the clientele and activities of these establishments in an attempt to more broadly regulate colonial society. Furthermore, the cabarets offered a place for people of all types to conduct business transactions and find shelter when traveling through the island. Perhaps most important to the state, the taxes gained from cabarets helped to support expensive colonial projects such as hospitals.⁶ At the same time, however, enslaved peoples, planters, pirates, maroons, and local officials also used cabarets to advance their own agendas. Enslaved and free people of color could earn an income and challenge planter hegemony. Pirates and maroons could conduct business along St. Pierre's coast. Intendants, such as Vaucresson, performed political favors in exchange for money and sex. While the royal administrators would likely have preferred that these activities not occur, the revenue and partial measure of control over urban society that came from concentrating them in cabarets made them valuable to the French state. That Phélypeaux only closed the taverns along the coast in one port, rather than all cabarets on the island further indicates that the state was not interested in completely ending the cabaret as a colonial institution. Ironically, then, the surreptitious space inside St. Pierre's cabarets sheds light on the contested nature of empire at the turn of the eighteenth century. Never a zero sum game, the French Atlantic was a site of constant struggle between settler and state, with many of those struggles played out in Martinique's cabarets.

Inside the Cabarets

Official regulations, administrative and personal correspondence, and memoirs offer insight into the functions of cabarets in Saint Pierre's social, economic, and political

⁶ Charles Besnard, "Rente due à l'hôpital du Fort-Royal," August 20, 1720, ANOM C8A vol. 27, 341.

landscape. At their most basic level, cabarets were places where food and drink could be purchased and weary travelers could rent a room on their journey. Some had stables where patrons could keep their mounts. They could have multiple rooms, as observed by Jeane-Baptiste Labat in an account from his memoirs of his time when he lived in the Caribbean.⁷ *Regratiers* (secondhand resellers) and merchants sold their goods in the taverns. Until a law in 1711 was passed to prohibit it, enslaved people could also sell their goods in cabarets, sometimes earning money to eventually buy their freedom.⁸ As reflected in one ordinance concerning women in the upper rooms of cabarets, these places could be large, with multiple floors on which illicit activities, such as prostitution, could be conducted.⁹ Because the walls of cabarets hid these sordid activities, the interiors of these establishments were therefore obviously a large source of consternation for the colonial government, particularly when its own members were allegedly engaged in these sordid deeds. Governor Phélypeaux wrote in 1713 that cabarets were responsible for much of the public disorder, home to prostitution, fencing of stolen goods, and the staging point for enslaved peoples to escape.¹⁰ Furthermore, cabarets offered customers an array of games including gambling and billiards tables, thus offering entertainment to the people of small Caribbean towns when there was little else to amuse them.¹¹ Patrons

⁷ Jeane-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveaux Voyages faits Aux Isles Françoises de l’Amerique*, I, (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1741), 11.

⁸ “Ordonnance des Administrateurs-Généraux des Isles, touchant les Affranchissemens,” August 15, 1711 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 272-273; Arnoul de Vaucresson, “Correspondance” in *Correspondance à arrive de la Martinique*, September 10, 1714, ANOM C8A vol. 20, 89.

⁹ “Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique, qui défend de souffrir que les Femmes montent dans les chambres hautes, chez les Marchands Magasiniers & Cabaretiers, hors la présence de leurs Maris,” February 7, 1660.

¹⁰ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, “*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d’Amerique de 1710 à 1713*,” ANOM C8A vol. 19, 84.

¹¹ “Arrêt du Conseil du Cap, qui 1st. Défend aux Cabaretiers de donner à boire et à jouer certains jours et heures, et aux memes, ainsi qu’aux Bouchers, de vendre de la Viande les Jours prohibés...” November 21, 1701, in in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions* I, 678.

no doubt drank as they played these games, becoming increasingly boisterous as time went by, adding to the perception that these were places were the cause of discord in the community. As commercial centers of recreation and dining, cabarets naturally became the object of imperial legal restrictions as the government grappled for control of its island settlements.

The cabarets drew all manner of people to their chambers, from Capuchin friars to pirates. During Jean-Baptiste Labat's voyage to Martinique, he mentions encountering fifteen Capuchin monks at a small cabaret in La Rochelle, France in 1693, noting that they mistook him for an abbot.¹² Other ordinances and letters from the period indicate that soldiers, sailors, pirates, merchants, maroons, enslaved people, *bouccaniers*, prostitutes, and farmers all frequented cabarets.¹³ This melting pot of humanity obviously drew the attention of colonial officials, though some individuals likely aroused more suspicion than others. A law passed in 1721 in Saint Domingue that was intended to limit the mobility of enslaved peoples required cabaret owners to report any unknown people, their names, and "qualities" to the local authorities if they stayed in the cabaret for more than three days. Disobedience warranted a month in prison and a fine of 1,000 livres.¹⁴ This ordinance suggests that the French state was suspicious that some patrons of cabarets were threats to French social and legal order. As other laws were directed at limiting the mobility of enslaved peoples through cabarets, it is reasonable to assume that colonial authorities had fugitive slaves, in addition to foreign threats, in mind as they

¹² Jeane-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveaux Voyages faits Aux Isles Françoises de l'Amerique*, I, (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1741), 11.

¹³ See Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions* I and II for numerous references to the patrons of cabarets; Boucannier is a term derived from the Carib word for roasting meat over a fire.

¹⁴ "Arret du Conseil de Leogane, concernant les Habitans et Cabaretiers qui recoivent et logent des gens Sans aveu," July 10, 1721 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, 760.

handed down these restrictions. The fact that this ordinance was given under pain of significant time in jail further suggests the seriousness of the law, as the majority of laws pertaining to cabarets came only with fines. Given the difficulty of ascertaining who was staying in the cabarets, the French government was likely justified in its assumptions that fugitives, escaped slaves, or enemies of France were hiding in these places.

As the number of cabarets grew, the prevalence of their perceived threat grew with them. Because they had the potential to generate substantial sums of wealth, cabaret ownership attracted enterprising people from all walks of life. In his account, Labat mentions that one town had multiple cabarets to serve a population that required only fifteen to twenty homes.¹⁵ So many cabarets were established in the French Isles, that the colonial government became concerned that the “market” for cabarets might become overcrowded and thus required regulation through annual fees.¹⁶ Demand for cabarets must have kept up with their growing number, however, as the colonial government estimated in 1715 that the cabarets were generating a significant amount of income per capita. So large was this profit, in fact, that the council decided to more than double the annual cabaret tax from 3,000 to 7,000 pounds of raw sugar. Merchants and tavern-keepers operating on a smaller scale would be subject to taxes on the quantities of items sold.¹⁷

Ruling a transatlantic empire in the eighteenth century was no small feat. The *ancien régime*'s Caribbean holdings were over two thousand miles from the metropolitan center, and communication could take weeks. Orders often traveled hundreds of miles

¹⁵ Labat, *Nouveaux Voyages*, I, 170.

¹⁶ “Arrêt du Conseil d’Etat, portant Imposition de trois milliers de Sucre brut par an sur chaque Cabaretier,” September 5, 1683 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, I, 380.

¹⁷ “Procès-Verbal de la Fixation de l’Octroi par les deux Conseils de Loegoane et du Cap,” January, 1715, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, II, 448-449.

over land to port, where, depending on urgency, the ordinance was held until a ship was ready to cross the Atlantic. Inclement weather, unfavorable ocean currents, and threats from rival empires' navies and privateers could extend that time to months, if messages arrived at all. In the case of St. Pierre, Kenneth Banks has found that the average ship completed the journey in four to seven weeks. Other colonies, such as New Orleans, could be twice that.¹⁸ As Banks has argued, communication was essential to establishing a successful French Atlantic. By the time a complaint could be written in the colonies, sent to France, processed, addressed, and a reply sent, large amounts of precious time likely transpired, thus making the effective projection of power across the Atlantic difficult.

To compensate for this time lapse, the French monarchy established a complicated hierarchical bureaucracy with overlapping jurisdictions to ensure affairs ran smoothly. At the apex of this network, theoretically controlling all matters of colonial administration, was the Council of the Marine. Below the Marine were various imperial councils, colonial councils, and magistrates.¹⁹ By default, these lower levels were granted authority to oversee the minutia of local affairs in lapses between ordinances handed down by the Marine. Vaucresson's freeing of Binture and Phélypeaux's subsequent overturning of that order, in addition to his closing of the cabarets, demonstrates that local authority. The fictive total power of the Marine and the monarch, however, has contributed to the false impression that rule over the French colonies was a zero-sum game between colony and metropole. In reality, the complexity of the French

¹⁸ To see Banks' data on transatlantic travel times and distances, see his table in Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, 71.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of the *ancien régime's* administrative hierarchy, see pages 185-216 in Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*.

bureaucracy ensured that neither the roles of the participants in the struggle, nor the stakes, were simple or straightforward, and that the contest for power rarely produced a “winner.” Local officials controlled the information on which the Marine acted, thus influencing larger decisions of state. Governors and intendants often acted of their own accord, though they ultimately remained accountable to metropolitan authorities. They nevertheless were permitted to act on their own, and were allowed the option of explaining their actions after the fact. often without the interference or approval of the monarchy. Settlers, both free and enslaved, postured and maneuvered within colonial legal systems to their own advantage as well. All of these struggles, however, resulted in compromise, leaving control of the colony in constant flux. Thus, the French contest for empire was never a one-sided affair.

Historiography

Taverns in the North American British colonies and various retail stores in the Spanish colonies have received attention that cabarets in the French colonies have not.²⁰ In *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*, Sharon V. Salinger sees taverns as a place of preservation for British-American culture. In Salinger’s view, these institutions were not simply the venue for challenges to authority or morality, but a melting pot of North American culture.²¹ Similarly, Peter Thompson’s *Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* also argues that taverns were a public

²⁰ Urban Spanish settlements had a variety of food and small good retail outlets. These could include larger retail establishments such as *comerciantes* and *mercaderes*, or smaller outlets such as *canastillas*, *bodegas*, *pulperias*, and *ranchos*. *Canastillas* could be found inside other, larger establishments, much as people could sell things inside of cabarets in a, perhaps, less official capacity. In many ways, the cabaret in the French colonies took on the functions that each of these establishments served in the Spanish colonies, much as the cabaret subsumed the culinary functions of an array of its own French metropolitan counterparts. For further discussion of businesses similar in form and function to France’s cabarets in the Spanish Empire, see Jay Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish-American City: Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 70-78.

²¹ Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking*, 6.

gathering place where Philadelphians could relax, socialize, and forge an American society and culture.²² Unlike Salinger and Thompson, David W. Conroy, in *In Public Houses: Drink & The Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* sees the taverns of New England as a highly politicized, contested site of change. Conroy argues that, like their early eighteenth-century counterparts in Martinique, the seventeenth-century Massachusetts's Puritan government similarly targeted taverns as a site of disorder and drunkenness.²³ When the colony's charter was revoked, however, and as England became the object of colonial discontent, taverns became the breeding ground of revolutionary outrage.²⁴ Instead of viewing taverns as place where colonists remade British culture in a colonial urban setting, Conroy sees them as the site of British cultural decay and a venue in which colonists overcame the British contest for imperial control. Perhaps in the context of a revolution, this struggle can be viewed in absolutes. In early eighteenth-century Martinique, however, the rivalry between colony and metropole was more ambiguous.

To date, the most extensive study of cabarets in the eighteenth century focuses on metropolitan Parisian cabarets. In *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, historian Thomas Brennan examines the various drinking establishments of the French capital. Deliberately examining the pre-revolutionary period in France to study French society under "normal" conditions, Brennan contends that taverns functioned as a public social space for the expression of lower class ideas and mores. Because they left behind fewer records than upper-class, educated French, Brennan uses

²² Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 15.

²³ Conroy, *In Public Houses*, 13.

²⁴ Conroy, *In Public Houses*, 186.

the records of these public spaces to try to ascertain what lower-class Parisians valued. These spaces allowed them to forge their own communities, create what he calls “social capital,” and, ultimately, lay the groundwork for the revolution at the end of the century.²⁵ Much like Parisians expressed common views and increased class unity in these establishments, so the settlers of Martinique expressed their own values and carried out their own agendas in colonial taverns.

The majority of scholarship on the French colonies largely ignores urban life, instead focusing on the colony as a whole or colonial sugar production. Still several scholars have included French colonial taverns in their work, though they do not focus on these establishments directly. Kenneth Banks discusses cabarets as the object of imperial distrust in colonial societies, focusing only on the ways in which the state feared them. In *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, he holds that enslaved peoples, pirates, and free people of color frequented cabarets, which garnered only distrust and anger from both local and metropolitan authorities.²⁶ Similarly, in his 1974 work, *Les Esclaves aux Antilles Françaises (XVII^e-XVIII^e Siècles)*, Gabriel Debien also notes how enslaved peoples frequented cabarets, and that they were likely a fundamental aspect of enslaved urban life.²⁷ Leo Elisabeth and Sue Peabody do mention cabarets as they discuss the broader racial and social ramifications of Binture’s suit, though they focus more on Binture’s ordeal than the cabaret.²⁸ Missing from these works, then, is the recognition of the

²⁵ Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture*, 313.

²⁶ Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, 146-147.

²⁷ Gabriel Debien, *Les Esclaves Aux Antilles Françaises (XVII^e-XVIII^e)* (Fort-de-France: Société d’Histoire de la Martinique, 1973), 453.

²⁸ For historians Leo Elisabeth’s and Sue Peabody’s discussions of cabarets in the context of Babet Binture’s trial in Leo Elisabeth, “French Antilles,” in *Neither Slave nor Free: the Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World*, eds., David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 135, and Sue Peabody, “Négresse, Mulâtresse, Citoyenne: Gender

complexity of the administrative and social struggles occurring in colonial taverns, as Banks and Debien suggest that cabarets were merely the seedy abodes of marginalized people. How these people, as well as planters, colonial officials, and the state, interact with and within Martinique's cabarets remain largely absent.

Additionally, cabarets show that control of the French Atlantic was not, and did not have to be, a zero sum contest for power. This has greater ramifications, then, as it implies that France had a transatlantic empire prior to the late eighteenth century, even if its power over those holdings was in flux. Historians Phillip Boucher and James Pritchard have argued that no real French Empire existed until the latter half of the eighteenth century, as they contend that the monarchy had no real control over its colonial holdings.²⁹ The colonies did as they pleased, in these scholars' view, meaning they were detached from the state. Kenneth Banks echoes this view, to an extent, in arguing that the French regime could not effectively communicate with and therefore control its colonies, implying that empire was elusive.³⁰ By looking at the contest for empire through the lens of the colonial cabaret, a more complex picture of the French colonial administration is shown as officials vied against each other for power, engaged in the very activities they

and Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1650-1848" in *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, eds. Pamela Scully and Diana Patton (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2005), 60.

²⁹ In *In Search of Empire*, 254, Pritchard contends that "The colonial environment undermined absolutism. It proved to be a very inadequate form of government for colonial conditions. It was unable to respond to the variety of demands made upon it. Widely differing local conditions...proved too much for the rigidity and control it sought but could not achieve"; In *France and the American Tropics*, 10, Philip P. Boucher argues that, "anyone wishing to know the limitations of French "absolutism" (a popular topic today among U.S. historians of France) should study the Caribbean colonists' attitudes to obedience to the king. This volume argues that the French state was less directive of colonial development in the French Caribbean than is usually portrayed."

³⁰ In his conclusion of *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, 221, Kenneth Banks states that, "The state used control over communications to divide as much as to unite; not surprisingly, the chase for empire left colonial societies stranded and as divided from the metropolis as they were from one another... These ghostly ties are another reminder of the complex, deep, and still troubled world of the French Atlantic."

were supposed to prosecute, and carried out the will of the monarchy according to their own vision and will.³¹

St. Pierre

By the end of the seventeenth century, the islands of the French Caribbean were developing a dominant sugar plantation economy with Martinique leading this trend.³² Martinique gradually changed from a distant frontier outpost, to a developing island with an agrarian society, to an agricultural production economy dependent almost entirely on the harvest and refinement of sugar.³³ Sugar was first brought to the Caribbean in 1505 and quickly became the most-produced crop in the region.³⁴ This change toward sugar is generally attributed to population increase, industrialization, commercialization and profitability of the sugar trade, and increase in land development coinciding with a displacement of the Caribs.³⁵ Perhaps the most significant factor in sugar's rise to preeminence was its valuation at fifteen times that of tobacco. With the taking of the Caribs' land and the clearing of forests for agriculture, Martinique was well on its way to

³¹ For an extensive discussion of the debate over whether the French Atlantic should be considered an Atlantic empire, see Christopher Hodson and Brett Rushforth, "Absolutely Atlantic: Colonialism and the Early Modern French State in Recent Historiography," *History Compass* 8 no. 1 (January, 2010): 101-117.

³² Philip D. Morgan, has argued in *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Low Country* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) that ecology shaped which crops could be grown in the North American Chesapeake and Low Country, thus affecting the cultures and societies that developed there. In the same way, the ecology, and thus the agriculture, of the Caribbean colonies likely shaped those settlements as well.

³³ Boucher, *France and the American Tropics*, 242-247.

³⁴ Shelby T. McCloy, *The Negro in the French West Indies* (Lexington, KY.: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 2.

³⁵ Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 229; James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10; By 1686, as James Pritchard has indicated, the Carib population seems to have been close to nonexistent, although they were likely simply absorbed into a generic category with other people of color. Léo Elisabeth suggests that up until the late eighteenth century, "the term "Negro" came to have all the ambiguity, or at least the nonspecificity, of the term 'colored man,'" which makes it difficult for historians to determine if the person in question is of African or Native American descent. See Léo Elisabeth, "The French Antilles," 135.

becoming France's leading sugar producing island with St. Pierre as its most important port.³⁶

Located at the heart of the French *Îles du Vent*, Martinique held an important position in the Atlantic and Caribbean wind and ocean currents.³⁷ It could be easily accessed from the North American mainland as well as from across the Atlantic. Its central location made it strategically and economically vital to France's valuable Caribbean sugar colonies.³⁸ Toward the southeast end of the island, on the Caribbean shore, the French established Fort Royal (modern day Fort-du-France).³⁹ Positioned inside the natural harbor of *Cul de Sac Royal* and surrounded by mountains that could block the strong winds of maritime storms, the French monarchy hoped that Fort Royal would become the island's commercial hub. With the further addition of Fort Royal, placed on a promontory that extended into the harbor, the Marine intended to monitor trade, arrivals, and departures with the close surveillance of the French navy.⁴⁰ Further north on the west coast, they established the town of St. Pierre, which was also well-suited to maritime trade.

Fort Royal did not become the unrivaled trade center that the French desired it to be. No doubt, it saw a great deal of commerce, though it competed with the more popular St. Pierre. St. Pierre did not have the sheltered harbor of Fort Royal, yet it offered

³⁶ Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 242-249.

³⁷ See Figure 1, Delahaye, Guillaume-Nicolas, *Partie de la Mer du Nord où se trouvent Les Grandes et Petites Isles Antilles et Les Isles Lucayes*, 1750, courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b8493495b, for Martinique's geographic location.

³⁸ See Figure 6, Thornton, John K., *Map 1. Atlantic Wind Currents in A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250-1820*, 10.

³⁹ See Figure 2, Bellin, Jacques-Nicolas, *Carte de L'Isle de La Martinique*, 1762, courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b53016942j, for Fort Royal's location as well as a picture of *Cul de Sac Royal*.

⁴⁰ See Figure 4, *Plan de la baye Du Cul de Saq Royal en L'isle a La Martinique*, 1700, courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b53016893p for a map of Fort Royal in 1700.

numerous other advantages to traders. The water off the coast was calm and deep. British depth soundings of the coast taken in 1763 indicated that the water was around fifteen fathoms (ninety feet) just off the shore. These depths quickly fell away to thirty to fifty fathoms (180 to 300 feet) before the cartographer ceased measurements at 160 fathoms (960 feet).⁴¹ Furthermore, the port's "coarse white sand" along much of its shoreline meant that small boats could easily slide up to the beach. Even today, fisherman are able to pilot small vessels onto the shore without the need of a dock. The thick, mountainous jungle was only a quarter of a mile from the surf, affording easy access to and from the land and water to those who wished to come and go in secret. The Riviere de St. Pierre and the Riviere des Peres also provided riverine access to the interior of the island. Consequently, St. Pierre became the natural port of choice for people who required clandestine access to the sea.

It may seem that Fort Royal became the official port of business while St. Pierre became the unauthorized, sordid port city of vandals, though this was not the case. This becomes evident in an analysis of the placement of the island's fortifications. The defense of the Caribbean islands was a priority for the French monarchy, and an important aspect of those defenses were forts built in strategic locations. Forts did more than shield colonies against naval assault, however; they also conveyed royal authority, both real and symbolic, to travelers and settlers. Along with a fort came military garrisons which would have increased the awareness of monarchical intervention in daily activities. Though the Marine intended the soldiers stationed at the forts to convey royal sovereignty, they did

⁴¹ See Figure 3, Stott, John, *Plan of the Bay, Town, Fortification, and Environs, in the Island of Martinique*, 1763 courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, [ark:/12148/btv1b53020838p](https://n.ark:/12148/btv1b53020838p), for the British depth soundings of St. Pierre's coastal waters. Unfortunately there is no scale on the map to measure precisely how far out these depths change, though contemporaries obviously believed the water to be sufficiently deep for weighing anchor off St. Pierre's coast.

not always do so. Soldiers could be as great a disciplinary problem as the subjects the Marine intended them to monitor. Desertion was a constant problem for the colonial authorities. Soldiers frequently engaged in drunken and disorderly activities, which elevated the state's struggle with its colonial military. Taverns and cabarets served as one of the main venues in which these soldiers could engage in drinking and gambling.⁴² Nevertheless, if pirates or smugglers were to come ashore, or enslaved peoples absconded from the island, the French regime clearly believed that a well-positioned fort would go some distance in deterring much of the sordid activity.

The Marine built three such fortifications along St. Pierre's short coastline by the eighteenth century as the monarchy attempted to project power to the port. One, Fort St. Pierre, was placed at the mouth of the Riviere du St. Pierre at the center of the town's coastline. Three stories tall and placed on elevated ground, the fort commanded a sweeping view of the harbor. Two towers were built on the inland side, one of which overlooked the river below and the other pointed at the northern half of the town. Smuggled cargo going up or down the central river would have passed literally under the eyes of French sentries.⁴³ At the north end of the settlement stood the *Batterie de St. Louys*, which overlooked the Riviere des Peres. Smaller than the central fort, this structure nonetheless provided a guard over the St. Pierre's second major river, and furthermore offered another vantage from which to view the northern coast of the harbor. Finally, located at the distant southern end of the city, stood the *Batterie de St. Charles*. Placed atop a hill, this small fortification included a wall running down the hillside and

⁴² For a full discussion of the state's distrust of soldiers, as well as their engagement in prohibited activities, see Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, 132-140.

⁴³ For an image of the fort, as well as the two other fortifications, see Figure 5, *Plan du fort Saint-Pierre de la Martinique et des ouvrages, 1693*, courtesy of *Archives nationales d'outre-mer*, 13DFC65B.

across the southern road into town, guarding access to the port from the south. While St. Pierre's topography made it an alluring port of call for smugglers despite the presence of the forts, three imperial fortifications along less than two miles of shore would have given sentries a view of a great deal of the port's comings and goings. Considering the persistence of smuggling, piracy, and slave maroonage, in conjunction with the fact that an important official such as Vaucresson carried on amorous activities with the owners of a St. Pierre tavern, it seems that colonial officials engaged in, rather than prosecuted, unsanctioned activities in St. Pierre. No doubt soldiers, who frequented taverns, were also aware of, and likely involved in, these activities. It is no surprise, then, that the taverns of St. Pierre became commercial and social centers of all kinds of urban activity, as colonial officials appear to also have had an interest in keeping the port's trade uninterrupted.

Cabarets

Situated at the western end of the transatlantic Canary Current, Martinique saw traders, settlers, and travelers from all areas of the Atlantic Ocean.⁴⁴ A busy trade hub, St. Pierre drew people of all walks of life. Many of these people were of African descent as Martinique had become a robust sugar colony, heavily dependent on enslaved labor by the early eighteenth century. Jesuit priests and Ursuline nuns established facilities at either end of the city. Planters and merchants frequented the port to exchange goods. Pirates and privateers came ashore seeking food and recreation. Maroons came down from the mountains to trade with people of the city and with pirates, and communicate with blacks who were still enslaved. Colonial officials, such as Vaucresson, made the

⁴⁴ Thornton, *A Cultural History*, 10.

thirteen mile journey from Fort Royal for both business and recreation.⁴⁵ At the heart of all of these interactions were the clandestine interiors of St. Pierre's cabarets.

Unfortunately, many of the people in cabarets engaged in activity that was, to them, at best unremarkable and at worst, illegal. At either end of that spectrum, then, the patrons of St. Pierre's cabarets and taverns seem to have at least not have thought to record their deeds therein, and in many cases deliberately wanted to leave behind no record at all. Even still, had many of the patrons wanted to leave a record of their activities, many of them were illiterate, rendering them incapable of doing so. With few exceptions, then, information about the early eighteenth-century French colonial cabaret comes primarily from outraged official correspondence, such as a 1713 letter from Phélypeaux to the Marine requesting support for his decision to close the coastal cabarets, numerous laws attempting to govern tavern behavior, metropolitan corollaries, and, on rare occasion, diaries.⁴⁶

Governments make laws in response to the behaviors of their subjects and citizens. They therefore reflect human behavior. The laws directed at governing cabarets were no exception. By reading these texts to see which behaviors were forbidden, it can be reasonably assumed that settlers in the colonies were carrying out those behaviors. If a statute is written banning the sale of food on the outskirts of town, it can be reasonably assumed that people are selling food on the outskirts of town. Examining legal

⁴⁵ Phélypeaux's letter implicates Vaucresson in associating with Catin and Babet. Though the letter indicates they met in his office, he would have had to meet them initially in St. Pierre.

⁴⁶ The eruption of Mt. Pelee in 1902 causes further difficulties in accessing archival material for St. Pierre the eruption of Mt. Pelee in 1902. The mountain, which towers over St. Pierre, erupted with little warning, burying St. Pierre and the surrounding areas in ash and magma. Buildings were destroyed and estimates at the time projected that around 25,000 people were killed. The archives at St. Pierre were destroyed in the tragic episode. See "25,000 People Buried in Lava?," *The Boston Journal* 69, no. 22510, 1.

prescriptions thus makes it possible to gain some idea of how people used the clandestine interior space of St. Pierre's cabarets.

Much as St. Pierre developed into a trade center naturally, so cabarets appeared on Martinique and throughout the French Caribbean colonies. As sugar became the French Isles' dominant crop at the end of the seventeenth century, the colonial population of free and enslaved peoples grew with it. To support the sugar economy with supplies, labor, and an outlet for trade exports, urban life necessarily developed simultaneously to meet those needs. Cabarets became a central aspect of colonial urban life as people came to the taverns to socialize, trade, relax, and conduct business.

Cabarets served many functions in urban society. In Paris, where a large and thriving social infrastructure had developed over a millennium and a half, cabarets filled a narrow niche. There they were used to serve alcohol and food, and people of all social levels could gather to discuss the business of the day.⁴⁷ In the colonies, however, there were fewer places to eat, lodge, socialize, and conduct business. Settlers sought these services in cabarets. Strictly speaking, the cabaret was only permitted to serve wine and food, though, as evidenced by the repeated ordinances targeting cabarets, these establishments were dealing in additional services. That some of the ordinances were repeated indicates that these rules were not sufficiently enforced and reflected the fact that people clearly felt comfortable carrying out unsanctioned acts in cabarets. Indeed, by the early eighteenth century these colonial taverns afforded their patrons a variety of drink, including rum, brandy, *liqueur de sucre*, recreation such as gambling and prostitution, food, trade goods, and a forum for discussing business. Moreover, enslaved,

⁴⁷ For a more extensive explanation of the role of cabarets in metropolitan France, see Brennan, *Public Drinking & Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris*.

free, and marooned people of color could congregate in these places where they were less likely to be discovered and brutally punished or killed.⁴⁸

By the end of the seventeenth century, these taverns were ubiquitous in the colonies. As seen in Labat's account, one small town could have many cabarets.⁴⁹ It is unlikely that a population requiring so few houses required the services of multiple taverns, indicating that the region's travelers and traders likely supplemented demand for those facilities. A 1715 ordinance indicates that cabarets were profitable enough to increase the tax on the establishments from 3,000 to 7,000 pounds of sugar.⁵⁰ That cabarets could grow in both number and profitability indicates that their clientele's demand for their services increased commensurately. Within this colonial urban landscape, cabarets served as social melting pots and important centers of commerce for the settlers of Martinique. As the number of cabarets and patrons increased, so too did the stakes of the contest for control over the French Empire.

The State's Interests in Cabarets

As their number grew throughout the end of the seventeenth century, the French monarchy recognized that cabarets could serve the state's interest. They could be a strong source of tax revenue, and so numerous ordinances were passed charging an annual fee to cabaretiers for the privilege of running one of these establishments. The protection and governance of overseas colonies were great expenses for all Atlantic empires, and France was no exception. They saw the tax revenues from taverns as a way to potentially defray

⁴⁸ Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, 147.

⁴⁹ Jeane-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveaux Voyages faits Aux Isles Françoises de l'Amerique*, I, (Paris: Guillaume Cavelier, 1741), 170.

⁵⁰ "Procès-Verbal de la Fixation de l'Octroi par les deux Conseils de Loegoane et du Cap," January, 1715, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, II, 448-449.

the costs of an expensive empire, particularly in a period of war.⁵¹ Moreover, taverns often had rooms for lodging. When business brought merchants and soldiers to the colonies, they could take advantage of the shelter offered by cabarets. The administration saw this as a valuable element of the island's infrastructure, as well as a way to help regulate who travelled through the French colonies. The 1721 edict requiring cabaretiers to report foreign patrons shows how the state attempted to regulate its colonial populations through cabarets.⁵²

At the same time, these laws imply that other people might be using cabarets against the wishes of the state. It is not unusual for an ordinance to be passed under penalty of fine, but the association of a prison sentence with that fine implies some elevated concern on the part of the state. Placed in the context of the tumultuous early eighteenth century, on the heels of The War of the Spanish Succession and in the midst of a period of strong growth for the enslaved population, the state was likely worried about spies, enslaved peoples, and maroons being in places they were not supposed to be. By allowing cabarets to exist, despite the known use of these places by peoples with subversive agendas of their own, the *ancien régime* attempted to limit those agendas by controlling the terrain on which they played out. The people using the cabarets, in turn, recognized that the state could not fully regulate taverns and so they, too, used them to their advantage.

By the early eighteenth century, Martinique's government no longer saw the cabarets simply as a source of income for the state and housing for travelers and

⁵¹ Charles Besnard, "Rente due à l'hôpital du Fort-Royal," August 20, 1720, ANOM C8A, 341.

⁵² "Arret du Conseil de Leogane, concernant les Habitans et Cabaretiers qui recoivent et logent des gens Sans aveu," July 10, 1721 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, 760.

residents. This was due in large part to the colonists' use of cabarets in their own ways. In the aftermath of Binture's legal ordeal, Phélypeaux indicted cabarets as centers of crime and discord, and ordered the cabarets along St. Pierre's coast torn down in 1713, though cabarets endured inland and were subject to a growing number of legislative orders.⁵³

The increased regulation of cabarets came about as a result of the French Caribbean colonies' development, as well as international rivalries occurring at the turn of the eighteenth century. As the War of the Spanish Succession drew to a close, the number of privateers required by the European governments declined, leaving these freelance ships to earn income in other ways, such as piracy. The increase in the number of pirates was compounded by an earthquake in 1692 at former pirate "capital," Port Royal, Jamaica, as well as a newly appointed governor, Sir Henry Morgan, who campaigned to end piracy there.⁵⁴ These pirates spread to other islands of the Caribbean, but predominantly went to Martinique, St. Thomas, and the Bahamas, thus increasing the number and density of buccaneers present in Martinique.⁵⁵ The population of enslaved and free people of color also grew rapidly during the same time period.⁵⁶ This population growth instilled fear of uprising in the proportionally shrinking planter class. Cabarets contributed to their worries, as they served as a place for enslaved peoples to sell goods, thereby helping them to raise enough money to purchase freedom. Furthermore, formerly enslaved and free people of color who owned cabarets, such as Babet Binture's sisters,

⁵³ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Amérique de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 85.

⁵⁴ Lindley S. Butler, *Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders of the Carolina Coast* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 11.

⁵⁵ Jenifer Marx, *Pirates and Privateers of the Caribbean* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1992), 198.

⁵⁶ Phillip Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 242.

could earn enough money to challenge the white planter aristocracy's dominance.⁵⁷ Cabarets were also implicated as places where maroons conferred or escaped, thus tying the establishments to the feared maroon communities in the isles.⁵⁸ Lastly, pirate crews, with a reputation for conferring equal rights to people of color and relatively democratic ship governance, offered an enticing, if dangerous, life of freedom and adventure for enslaved peoples.⁵⁹ The cabarets located on the edge of the sea offered an escape route for enslaved people to meet these pirates and abscond with them.⁶⁰ With one hand, the state allowed these places to remain open, both for its own benefit and to control the actions of its settlers, and with the other it sought to regulate their activities through edicts and laws.

The majority of the laws concerning cabarets dealt with the regulation of commerce. As cabarets were primarily places of lodging and dining, many statutes about cabarets concerned these types of transactions. Multiple ordinances dictated when and to whom certain food or drink items might be sold, while others regulate who could stay in cabarets and for what length of time. One ordinance in 1708 prohibited the sale of alcohol

⁵⁷ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 84; Sue Peabody, "Négresse, Mulâtresse, Citoyenne: Gender and Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1650-1848" in *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, eds. Pamela Scully and Diana Patton (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2005), 60.

⁵⁸ "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique, qui fixe le Prix de la Capture des Negres fugitifs, ét établit contre eux la peine d'avoir le jarret coqué," October 13, 1671, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, I, 248; Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 86.

⁵⁹ Butler, *Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders*, 9.

⁶⁰ "Arrêt du Conseil de Léogane, touchant l'état des Negres et Mulâtres venus de la Vera-Cruz," November 7, 1707, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, II, 112; This document concerns a woman brought by pirates to Petit-Goave. The ordinance does not speak to the specifics of how she arrived with the pirates, but we can see that despite providing documentation, her status as free was still in doubt. This doubt, in conjunction with what is known about enslaved people joining pirate crews, implies that pirates took enslaved people aboard often enough to merit an attempt to create an additional legal barrier between pirates and enslaved peoples by banning them from cabarets.

to enslaved people without the permission of the slaveholder.⁶¹ Another forbade the sale of meats without the express permission of the farmer who raised the animal in question.⁶² Additionally, these rulings frequently came with taxes or fines attached, ensuring the French state received its due share of the cabaratiér's profits. As centers of commercial exchange, cabarets became an important source of revenue in transatlantic markets for the gain of the French government. At the same time, local actors in Martinique sought to use cabarets for their own personal gain and advancement, exemplifying the social and economic struggle that occurred in cabarets between subject and state.

Still other edicts regulated social aspects of colonial life in cabarets. Many of those ordinances were issued in an attempt to control the actions of enslaved people and free people of color.⁶³ Toward the end of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, these laws impinged on the daily activities of people of color, attempting to curtail their ability to buy and sell food, goods, and liquor.⁶⁴ Other statutes limited the times at which people of color could be present in cabarets, eventually banning enslaved people of color from the establishments entirely.⁶⁵

⁶¹ "Arrêt du Conseil du Cap" May 9, 1708 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 117 ; "Arrêt du Conseil de Léogane, concernant les Habitans et Cabaretiers qui reçoivent det logent des gens sans aveu," July 10, 1721 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 271; "Arrêt du Conseil du Cap, sur la Police des Marchés," February 7, 1707 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 90.

⁶² "Ordonnance de M. l'Intendant, touchant les Boucheries," December 10, 1710 in in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 229.

⁶³ "Arrêt du Conseil de Léogane, concernant les Habitans et Cabaretiers qui reçoivent det logent des gens sans aveu," July 10, 1721 in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 271.

⁶⁴ "Arrêt du Conseil du Cap, qui défend de vendre aux Portes des Eglises pendant le Service Divin, ni de donner à boire aux Esclaves," March 5, 1721, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 721.

⁶⁵ In his correspondence Vaucresson summarizes a body of legislation pertaining to enslaved people and cabarets. One such rule he states prevents enslaved people from entering the cabaret but must remain outside and be served at the door. See Arnoul de Vaucresson, "Correspondance" in *Correspondance à arrive de la Martinique*, September 10, 1714, ANOM C8A vol. 20, 89.

The influence of the Roman Catholic Church can be seen in cabaret law as well. Ostensibly at the Church's behest, the colonial administration attempted to regulate church attendance through limiting access to cabarets. In response to reports of people attending cabarets instead of mass, the colonial government decided to close these establishments at certain times. One ordinance sent to Martinique in 1669 dictated that all cabarets should be closed on Sundays and holidays in an attempt to force people to attend mass by removing the temptations offered by the cabarets. If a cabaret was found in violation of this edict, a fine of two thousand pounds of raw sugar was to be paid, half by the cabaretier and half by the customers present at the time of the violation.⁶⁶ Another ordinance was concerned with the appearance of moral decency, stating that women were not allowed to go into the upper rooms of cabarets without their husbands. This law was also likely intended to prevent prostitution, another moral and legal concern of the empire.⁶⁷

By viewing the cabarets through the lens of law, the complexity of the social and political tensions that occurred in the establishments is revealed. The presence of these laws indicates that, clearly, the state was aware of the activities of Martinique's settlers. The laws further show that, at some level, the state wanted to restrain those activities, though the preservation of the cabarets as a whole implies that they were valuable enough to the state to remain open. With three forts in the small city and colonial officials associating with cabaret owners, it becomes clear that not all members of the colonial bureaucracy completely opposed the cabarets. Instead, as the people of St. Pierre went

⁶⁶ "Ordonnance de M. de Baas, touchant les Religioneux, les Juifs, les Cabaretiers et les Femmes de Mauvaise vie," August 1, 1669, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions* I, 180.

⁶⁷ ARRÊT du Conseil de la Martinique, qui défend de souffrir que les Femmes montent dans les chambres hautes, chez les Marchands, Magasiniers & Cabaretiers, hors la présence de leurs Maris. February 7, 1660, 84.

about their business selling goods, both stolen and legitimate, dining, drinking, and engaging in various forms of recreation, the state profited from, and in some ways engaged in, those activities.

The Case of Babet Binture

Enslaved people were progressively more involved in cabaret business at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Given the high labor demands of sugar production, it is no surprise that the increased sugar exports coincided with a growing enslaved population. This dependence on sugar production engendered significant changes in Martinique's demographics.⁶⁸ By 1700, Martinique contained 242 sugar plantations, each with large labor requirements.⁶⁹ Between 1670 and 1730, approximately 50,000 enslaved peoples were brought to Martinique. Over 43,000 of them arrived after 1700, with 6,000 people disembarking in the decade leading up to the 1713 letter in which Phélypeaux ordered the closing of St. Pierre's coastal taverns.⁷⁰ This acceleration in the last seventeen years of the period in question demonstrates the magnitude of the changes to the social makeup of the island's population at the start of the eighteenth century. Europeans, who were outnumbered by people of color by an estimated 3 to 1 by 1715, began to feel threatened by the growing population.⁷¹ Further adding to the demographic disparity, was

⁶⁸ Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 233.

⁶⁹ Boucher *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 242.

⁷⁰ These figures were gathered using the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database which can be found at www.slavevoyages.org. These results were determined using the "search the database" feature, limiting search results to 1670-1730, with "principal place of slave landing" at Martinique. For that period, exactly 49,496 people were thought to disembark. James Pritchard estimates a much higher number, approximately 91,260 enslaved people with 33,000 coming in the last half of the period. His tables can be found in Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 11.

⁷¹ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 57; In *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 242-249, 233, Philip Boucher suggests a slightly lower number of 2.25 to 1, though these numbers are difficult to firmly ascertain

a decline in European indentured servants, known in the French Empire as *engagés*.⁷² Once sugar production dependent on enslaved labor came to dominate Martinique's economy, the demand for indentured servants declined. Indentured servants still immigrated to the Caribbean isles to meet the decreasing demand, but their numbers paled in comparison to those of the enslaved Africans forcibly brought to the island.⁷³ With much of the arable land spoken for or planted, the number Europeans immigrating to Martinique, indentured or otherwise, declined, thus contributing further to the disparity in the island's demographics. This proportionately larger enslaved population combined with an increasing population of free people of color seemed to threaten the planters on both a social and economic level. In 1704 Acting Intendant Jean-Jacques Mithon de Senneville wrote to France claiming that there were too many free people of color living in Martinique.⁷⁴ Some historians see the legal changes in Martinique in the early eighteenth century as a fear-driven response to the growing population of enslaved and free people of color.⁷⁵ The restrictions on enslaved peoples' access to cabarets are no exception.

It was in this shifting society that Babet Binture sued her owner, the widow La Pallu, for her freedom. Binture's case came to trial in St. Pierre in 1705. She claimed that she was free from birth, meaning that her mistress, Madame La Pallu, could make no

⁷² Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 4.

⁷³ Boucher, *France in the American Tropics to 1700*, 247. Boucher argues that sugar production consumed the economy to such a degree that other occupations disappeared, thus leading to decreased demand for indentured servants. This does not explain how a developing economy, which would theoretically draw greater populations and thus require more infrastructure, could require less jobs. Other causes such as the War of the Spanish Succession decreasing the unemployed European population or labor competition from the expansion of the slave trade are more logical explanations for the decrease in the number of indentured servants. During the War of the Austrian succession in the 1740s, Philadelphia's colonial officials complained of indentured servants absconding to war. A similar atrocity could have occurred in Martinique during the War of the Spanish Succession.

⁷⁴ Elisabeth, "The French Antilles," 137.

⁷⁵ See Leo Elisabeth, "The French Antilles" and Sue Peabody "Nègresse, Mulâtresse."

claim on Binture. First, the Superior Council of Martinique found in favor of Madame La Pallu. According to Mithon, the Superior Council determined that Binture had not presented adequate evidence of her freedom, and furthermore claimed to have interviewed Binture's enslaved father, "Grand Jean" whose testimony bolstered La Pallu's claim.⁷⁶ The French legal system placed a great deal of importance of the motives of defendants and plaintiffs, Binture was therefore not only returned to slavery, but also sentenced to one month in jail for her "temerité."⁷⁷ Binture may have lost the case but was not defeated. Her sisters, Catin and Marie, were recognized as free three years later in 1708, ostensibly inspiring Binture to renew her pursuit of freedom. With funds obtained from the cabaret owned by Catin and Marie, the sisters were able to gain the assistance of legal counsel and befriend the new intendant, Vaucresson. According to Phélypeaux, Catin used the profits from her cabaret to gain the companionship of the wealthy and influential "Madame Begue" whose husband was a friend of Vaucresson. By enabling the sisters to spend a great deal of time with the Begue family, access legal counsel, and associate with a high ranking colonial magistrate, cabarets were entering directly into Binture's suit, and therefore into a larger social, economic, and political struggle.⁷⁸ Ostensibly as a result of these personal connections, then, Vaucresson overturned Mithon's decision on the grounds that Catin's status as free meant that Binture must also be free. Binture and her children were therefore granted freedom.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Jean -Jaques Mithon, April 8, 1705, "*Veux par nous... Conseiller du Roy Commissaire de la marine ordonnateur...*," ANOM, F3, vol. 250, 302.

⁷⁷ Jean -Jaques Mithon, April 8, 1705, "*Veux par nous... Conseiller du Roy Commissaire de la marine ordonnateur...*," ANOM, F3, vol. 250, 302.

⁷⁸ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 80-86.

⁷⁹ Arnoult de Vaucresson, August 25, 1708, "*Counselle du Roy en les Conseil Intendant de Justice police...*," ANOM F3, vol. 250, 305.

Binture's ordeal continued, however, and as it did it became entangled in a web of legal and social developments in the early eighteenth-century French colonies. La Pallu appealed Vaucresson's decision to the Council of State in France, garnering the support of the new governor, Jérôme Phélypeaux. The Council of State decided that Vaucresson had exceeded his authority in freeing Binture. Moreover, Phélypeaux implied that Vaucresson, Binture, and her sisters committed indecent acts behind the closed doors of Vaucresson's quarters in exchange for Binture's freedom, saying, "The Negresse [sic] Marie has been very successful, to the point that she and her two sisters named Catin and Babet make frequent and long visits to the Intendant, who gives them as many peaceful meetings as they wish one on one [implying sexual intercourse]."⁸⁰ The pressure placed on Vaucresson motivated him to reverse his decision and hand Binture back to La Pallu.⁸¹ Phélypeaux then used the incident as a launching point to campaign for reforming manumission laws as well as restricting people of color's access to cabarets, as he saw these institutions as places of illicit behavior and a source of income for a growing population of people of color.⁸² In fact, Phélypeaux went so far as to say that the sisters were "*putains*," or, whores, using their cabaret as a house of prostitution. In what is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the case, however, Marie Castelet, who

⁸⁰ [La negresse marie a tres bien rëussy [sic], au point qu'elle et ses deux Soeurs nomëes Catin et Babet rendent de fréquentes et longues visites a Mr. L'Intendant qui leur donne tant qu'elles veulent paisibles audiances et têt a têt] in Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de PhélypeauxDu Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 á 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 82. It is also possible that Phélypeaux means Catin had such a successful prostitution business that Vaucresson became a client, though this would also likely be indicative of the financial success at stake here.

⁸¹ It is not difficult to imagine that Phélypeaux engaged in some form of blackmail to force Vaucresson to change his mind, given how the sisters' "visits" must have appeared.

⁸² Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, *Administration de PhélypeauxDu Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 á 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 81-86.

was at one point declared free from birth and therefore was theoretically a full citizen, was stripped of her cabaret and threatened with a return to slavery.⁸³

Binture's case is a poignant example of cabarets as a site social and legal struggles between enslaved peoples and planters, colonial magistrates, and settler and state. Scholars Leo Elisabeth and Sue Peabody have conducted the majority of research into Binture's case to date. Elisabeth suggests that the Babet case is indicative of the French legal structure turning against free people of color, while Peabody sees the case an example of wealth allowing upward social mobility in a white planter-dominated system.⁸⁴ In both of these accounts, however, the broader ramifications of cabarets in the legal system as well as Martinique's society are ignored. As Peabody suggests, Catin's cabaret provided sufficient funding for the sisters to gain legal counsel and access to the upper echelons of Martinique's society, and did likely threaten Phélypeaux's ideal of a segregated colonial social order. The sexual implications of female cabaretiers spending hours behind locked doors with the Intendant no doubt added to Phélypeaux's zeal. The outcomes of Binture's case, including Castelet's reenslavement, however, were likely caused as much by broader social and political events occurring in the French Isles at the time as they were by internal merits of the case. That these issues were significant in the politics of cabarets made the sisters' cabaret an even more obvious target of Phélypeaux's prosecution.

⁸³ Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, *Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Amérique de 1710 à 1713*, ANOM C8A, vol. 19, 85; Guillaume Aubert, "The Blood of France": Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (July, 2004): 439-478.

⁸⁴ Leo Elisabeth, "French Antilles," in *Neither Slave nor Free: the freedmen of African descent in the slave societies of the New World*, eds., David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 135, 163; Peabody, "Négresse, Mulâtresse, Citoyenne," 60.

Cabarets offered Binture and other people of color the means to act both within and against Martinique's social and legal structure. In recruiting the intendant's assistance in her case, Binture entered into a world of eighteenth-century colonial power rivalries. This episode highlights the inner workings of the French government's use of multiple, overlapping jurisdictions. Governor Phélypeaux employed Binture's case to establish dominance over his rival magistrate, Vaucresson. Most importantly for Binture, however, was the struggle between the enslaved and the enslaver. In a world of violent subjugation, Binture was able to use what few resources were available to her to operate within the French colonial social and legal system to challenge her mistress's dominance. When Phélypeaux used the Binture trial to attack cabarets and reform manumission laws, the case became intertwined with an increasing social discomfort between Europeans and an expanding population of people of color.

During the same year that the sisters lost their cabaret, a royal ordinance was passed forbidding slave-owners from selling their slaves without the express permission of the colonial government. Prior to that ordinance, slaver-holders had been allowed to manumit their slaves as they saw fit, as stated in the *Code Noir*.⁸⁵ Like many slaveholding societies, French law permitted enslaved people to earn additional money and raise a personal savings called a peculium.⁸⁶ Though the slaveholder was technically already legally entitled to the slave's possessions, they could enter into an agreement to save money with which to purchase freedom. When an enslaved person raised the amount agreed upon with the slave-holder, they could be manumitted, but this ordinance was

⁸⁵ [Marquis de Seignelay], *The Code Noir*, Article 55 in Peabody and Grinberg *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law*, 35.

⁸⁶ [Marquis de Seignelay] *The Code Noir*, Article 29 in Peabody and Grinberg *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law*, 33-34.

intended to curtail the number of those manumissions. The ordinance prohibiting slaveholders from freeing their slaves was not always obeyed, as they would still unofficially free their slaves, thus forming a group of enslaved people who were free in practice but legally enslaved called the *soi-dissant libres*.⁸⁷ The enslaved person's stipend could be raised in a variety of ways, but what is relevant here are documents surrounding Binture's case which reveal that Binture raised money by selling goods in cabarets. Other legislation bolsters Phélypeaux's case that Binture probably raised money in this way such as one ordinance given in 1711 which shows the prominent role cabarets played in enslaved peoples earning funds for their freedom:

most of the disorders that happen in the French Isles among Slaves come from the ease with which the inhabitants have given them freedom for sums of money, these which they agreed with the said slaves, each leaving the service of their master to rob and steal from their same masters, through special trades under the pretext of working all day, making a small fee that they promise to their said master; leaving the others to all sorts of vices to make the agreed sum, conducting their assemblies and commerce in the homes of those who have already been freed, the majority owning cabarets.⁸⁸

Enslaved peoples, uncompensated for their work and with little means of raising money were able to take advantage of the latitude afforded by their masters to raise money through selling goods in cabarets. As this ordinance indicates, however, those goods were sometimes stolen. Even more revealing here is that slave-holders may have been complicit in these thefts. Worried that slave-holders were consorting with their slaves to

⁸⁷ Elisabeth, "French Antilles," 145.

⁸⁸[que la plus grande partie des désordres qui arrivent dans les Isles Françaises parmi les Esclaves provient de la facilité que les Habitans ont de leur accorder la liberté pour des sommes d'argent, desquelles ils conviennent avec lesdits Esclaves; les uns abandonnant le service de leurs Maîtres pour piller et voler leurs Maîtres memes, faisant des traffics particuliers, sous prétexte de travailler à la journée, moyennant une petite retribution qu'ils promettent à leursdits Maîtres; les autres s'abandonnant à toutes sortes de vices pour ammasser les sommes convenues, faisant leurs Assemblées et Commerce dans les maisons de ceux qui ont déjà été affranchis, la plupart tenant des Cabarets"] in "Ordonnance des Administrateurs-Généraux des Isles, touchant les Affranchissemens," August 15, 1711 in Mareau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, II, 272.

break the law, the French colonial government needed to rectify the situation in any way they could. In 1711 the French colonial government did this through altering the adjudication of law to directly affect enslaved people instead of slave-holders by preventing them from selling goods in cabarets, once again showing the struggle between the colonists and colonial administration.

Phélypeaux also likely worried that free people of color would combine resources with the large numbers of enslaved people against white planters. In 1704 an ordinance was passed dictating that free people of color harboring runaway slaves would be sold into slavery for the king's profit for their actions.⁸⁹ This indicates that planters feared free people of color as well as enslave people. Phélypeaux wrote of the sisters and their cabaret that they "cause extreme disorder in the policy of the government in the city of St. Pierre" and that, because of his relationship with the women, Vaucresson would not stop this rampant chaos.⁹⁰ This not only shows Phélypeaux's discomfort with the blurring of social lines through money and sex, but Phélypeaux's talk of rebellion demonstrates the fear of the potential broader ramifications of Binture's acts. Slave revolts, with their potential to disrupt the social status quo and cause harm to the planters were a constant concern.⁹¹ In advocating for the legislative reforms, Phélypeaux expressed a fear that free people of color might somehow combine power and influence with force of numbers of

⁸⁹ Peabody and Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World*, 36.

⁹⁰ [desordres extremes dans la pólíce et le gouvernement au bourg St. Pierre] in Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, *Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Amérique de 1710 á 1713*, ANOM C8A, vol. 19, 84.

⁹¹ Nicolas de Gabaret, "Gabaret (Nicolas de), gouverneur de la Martinique, gouverneur général des îles d'Amérique Correspondance," July 28, 1710, ANOM, C8A, vol. 17, 239. Though the focus of his study is Saint-Domingue later in the eighteenth century, Malick W. Ghachem discusses the planter class's constant fear of slave uprisings and how that fear shaped legal outcomes in "Prosecuting Torture: The Strategic Ethics of Slavery in Pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue (Haiti)," in Tanenhaus, David S., ed. "Law, Slavery, and Justice," *Law and History Review* 29, no. 4, (2011): 985-1030. Conceptually, his study is applicable to understanding Martinique planters' fears of uprising.

the enslaved people against the white planter elite. Cabarets could potentially serve as the venue in which this cabal might be planned. The colonial government's harsh treatment of the sisters was likely the result of broader fervent efforts to regulate the intermingling of social classes within Martinique's cabarets.

The cabarets also provided a venue in which enslaved people could threaten planters' finances by creating competition for their liquor sales. One of the cabarets' main attractions was the liquor that they sold such as rum – a byproduct of sugar production. Rum sales were a source of additional profit to plantations across the Caribbean. In the French Isles, however, planters were not allowed to export the liquor abroad because brandy producers in France successfully lobbied for the illegalization of this potential competition.⁹² This meant that rum could only be sold within the islands, and that French planters were not privy to the 40% boost in profit that the British planters in Jamaica earned from turning sugar molasses into rum.⁹³ When enslaved people took sugarcane and made it into liquor, they were creating competition with the planters' liquor, in addition to reducing the planter's crop. In a 1713 letter about taxes on cabarets, Vaucresson explicitly cites the sale of sugar cane liquor in his letter. He mentions *vin* (wine), *eau de vie* (brandy), and *tafia* (rum) as products sold in cabarets, in addition to *liqueur de canne*.⁹⁴ It is likely that Vaucresson is here referring to a form of liquor distilled from sugar cane, much as “moonshine” has been a homemade product distilled from corn in North America for centuries. This *liqueur de canne* posed an economic

⁹² Bertie Mandelblatt, “Atlantic Consumption of French Rum and Brandy and Economic Growth in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Caribbean” *French History* 25 no. 1 (2011), 9.

⁹³ Ryden, “Producing a Peculiar Commodity,” 66.

⁹⁴ Arnoult de Vaucresson, April 19, 1713, *Ordonnance de Vaucresson sur les droits de cabaret à la Martinique*, ANOM C8, vol 19, 322-324.

threat to planters on multiple fronts as it used their sugar and competed with their rum for cabaret sales.

Already enslaved people were forbidden from selling anything without their master's permission under the authority of Article 19 of the *Code Noir*, meaning that cabarets were likely one of the few venues in which they could sell their goods without their master's knowledge.⁹⁵ The battle over the sale of *liqueur de sucre* in cabarets is emblematic of multiple economic struggles in Martinique. As enslaved people strove for social mobility through economic opportunity, planters responded by attempting to close this venue. The colonial magistrates' struggle to collect revenue is also seen in these interactions, as the clandestine sales of the liquor went untaxed and undermined the state's fiscal authority. By barring enslaved peoples from cabarets they were, in part, attempting to prevent the sale *liqueur de sucre*, thus limiting the social mobility of enslaved peoples as well as an untaxable transaction. Cabarets could serve as both a tool with which the French could regulate the colonies, as well as a space in which the colonies could challenge the state.

Maroon Communities

Maroons were one faction that planters almost universally feared as they threatened the planters' ideal social order. In his letter, Phélypeaux mentions that cabarets were a place through which enslaved people could escape to maroon communities.⁹⁶ These settlements, scattered throughout Martinique's jungles, might seem, at first glance, relatively harmless. Their very existence, however, was a challenge to the French fictive

⁹⁵ [Marquis de Seignelay], *Code Noir*, Article 19 in Peabody and Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and Law*, 32.

⁹⁶ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A 19, F 75, Document page 162.

colonial ideal of a plantation colony built on the backs of the enslaved. The fear of maroons attacking plantations or stealing livestock and supplies was constant in the minds of Martinique's plantation owners. Consequently, they invested a great deal of time and effort attempting to track these communities.⁹⁷ Often located away in the inhospitable mountainous terrain of Martinique's interior, these settlements proved difficult to locate. The maroons cleared the land, built homes, and established communities in relative isolation.⁹⁸ Enslaved peoples could challenge planter dominance and regain their freedom by joining these communities which, with secrecy and strength of numbers, could form greater resistance to the planters than an enslaved person could alone.

Indeed, Martinique's government had a long history of combatting maroons as far back as 1665. At that time, according to a declaration from Martinique's council, the island had been "devastated by fugitive slaves."⁹⁹ This large band of maroons, led by an enslaved man named Francisque Fabulé, once the slave of a "sieur Fabulet," evidently caused enough damage and resistance to the point that the council decided not to pursue violent recourse against the group any longer, if they would surrender. By coordinating with one of the other plantation owner's slaves, they were able to work out an agreement with Fabulé's group. According to the terms of the treaty, Fabulé would be manumitted and no punishment would be dealt to his followers.¹⁰⁰ The council later enlisted Fabulé to

⁹⁷ "Ordonnance du Gouverneur-Général des Isles, touchant les Negres Marons," August 28, 1763, in, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, II, 268.

⁹⁸ "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique, qui fixe le Prix de la Capture des Negres fugitifs, ét établit contre eux la peine d'avoir le jarret coupé," October 13, 1671, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, I, 248.

⁹⁹ "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique touchant les Negres Marons," March 2, 1665 in Mareau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, I, 136.

¹⁰⁰ [L'Isle se trouvant dévastée par les Esclaves fugitifs, le Conseil arrêta qu'on traiteroit avec le nommé Francisque, Negre du sieur Fabulet, et Chef d'une grande bande; les conditions de ce Traite,

turn against and capture those who would not surrender, which he evidently did. Though he helped the colony's administration then, and later against the English, he was still arrested, charged by the Council of Martinique with conscripting maroons, and subsequently banished to the galleys in 1671.¹⁰¹

Maroon communities continued to challenge French authority throughout the latter part of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth. In 1671, citing "many disorders and violence" caused by maroons, the Council of Martinique decided to adopt a bounty system in an attempt to coopt public support for the suppression of maroons. A person who captured a maroon who had been gone for over a year received payment of 1,000 pounds of sugar. Maroons captured after shorter absences received smaller sums.¹⁰² Evidently this program was not sufficient as two years later the council commissioned a special military unit to seek out the maroon communities and capture them – a campaign that yielded inconsistent results.¹⁰³

Depleting enslaved labor was not the only threat the maroons posed to planters and the French government, as they did not retreat into the woods in total sequestration. Instead, maroons had interactions with enslaved peoples and carried on relationships with them. It was that communication on which the council relied in 1665 to end Fabulet's

projeté par l'entremis d'un Negre du sieur Renaudot, furent que Francisque auroit sa liberté et mille livres de petun, et qu'on n'infligerait aucun châtement à ceux de sa Troupe.] in "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique touchant les Negres Marons," March 2, 1665 in Mareau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, I, 136.

¹⁰¹ For a more detailed account of Fabulé's story, see Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 297.

¹⁰² [le Conseil ordonne que la prise des NEgres Marons sera payee; savoir, 1000 livres de Sucre pour celui qui seroit Maron depuis un an jusqu'à trois; 600 livres de Sucre pour celui qui auroit été Maron depuis et au-dessus de six mois jusqu'à un an; 300 l. depuis deux mois jusqu'à six, et 150 livres aussi depuis huit jours jusqu'à deux mois] in "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique, qui fixe le Prix de la Capture de Negres fugitifs, et établit contre eux la peine d'avoir le jarret coupé" October 13, 1671 in Mareau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, I, 248-249.

¹⁰³ "Ordonnance du Gouverneur-Général des Isles, touchant les Negres Marons," August 28, 1673 in Mareau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, I, 268-269.

campaign.¹⁰⁴ These relationships could work against the planter class as well, however, as was reflected in Phélypeaux's consternation. Maroons and enslaved peoples could work together to foment rebellion and plan revolts. In 1710, one such conspiracy was uncovered in Martinique that allegedly involved around 200 people. According to the former governor of Martinique, Gabriel Jean Nicolas de Gabaret, the conspirators planned to attack St. Pierre as well as the home of the intendant.¹⁰⁵ Such a large conspiratorial effort no doubt required a great deal of planning, and a personalized attack on a leading governing official likely struck fear in the colonial administration. Cabarets, with their unwatched interiors, would have offered an effective forum in which to plan such a conspiracy. No doubt maroon conspiracies were some of the "disorders" which prompted Phélypeaux to close St. Pierre's coastal taverns.¹⁰⁶

A narrow town, St. Pierre's cabarets along the coast and the jungle provided clandestine access to both wilderness and surf. The cabarets along the coast would have put the maroons in contact with the pirates and smugglers who frequented them. Maroons could have escaped with the pirates, had they wished to do so, or, more likely, carried on trade in goods and information with the buccaneers. In using the cabaret to trade with a group that threatened planter dominance as well as the social order intended by the colonial authorities, maroons and pirates used the cabarets to their own agendas. Those located along the inland side of the town could also serve as a way for maroons, urban slaves, and plantation slaves to pass in and out of the town less noticed. Any cabaret

¹⁰⁴ "Arrêt du Conseil de la Martinique touchant les Negres Marons," March 2, 1665 in Mareau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions*, I, 136

¹⁰⁵ Nicolas de Gabaret, July 28, 1710, ANOM, C8, vol. 17, 238.

¹⁰⁶ Jérôme Phélypeaux, April 6, 1713, "*Administration de Phélypeaux Du Verger, gouverneur général des isles d'Ameriqué de 1710 à 1713*," ANOM C8A vol. 19, 84; Kenneth Banks implicitly corroborates this theory in *Chasing Empire Across the Sea* page 147 as he points out that in 1763 in St. Pierre, even after enslaved peoples were banned from cabarets, they still frequented them and likely met with maroons.

juxtaposed to the forest would allow patrons to slip away unnoticed into the thick jungle, or pass into the city unseen. In this way, the passage to and from the city afforded to maroons and enslaved people served to further resistance to the state as these groups used cabarets to advance their own goals and challenge the status quo. It is no surprise, then, that Phélypeaux would inhibit enslaved people's access to cabarets and close down the establishments that he believed served as the doorway to escape to these communities.

Pirates and Privateers

Phélypeaux was also clearly concerned by a problem with piracy in St. Pierre. While the French government established the fortified harbor at Fort Royal, Martinique, in hopes that it would be a frequently-used and well-regulated port, the calm surf and flat beaches surrounding St. Pierre made for a more appealing berth. The need to avoid prying government eyes, the ease of access to the city, and the overland mountains and jungle between the two ports made St. Pierre a more favorable city than the guarded colonial capital to the south. The drinking, gambling, and prostitution offered by the cabarets dotting St. Pierre's coast made the city even more attractive to pirates.¹⁰⁷ These coastal cabarets, then, served to further frustrate the colonial government's attempts to regulate trade and make Fort Royal the preeminent anchorage in Martinique.

Europeans relied heavily on privateers to fight their wars during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, generating a high demand for free-lance ship captains. The French also participated in this tradition of employing privateers in their military service. An account from a captured English colonel held captive in Martinique in 1704 during the War of the Spanish Succession corroborates this reliance on pirates. According to the

¹⁰⁷ Alexandre-Olivier Oexemelin, *Histoire des Aventureiers Flibustiers*, (Lyon: Benoit & Joseph Duplain, 1774), 300-01. Oexemelin's work was first published in 1678 in Dutch (*De Amerikaanse Zeerovers*) and in 1686 in French

colonel, the French employed “about 30 privateers now belonging here, so that it’s almost impossible for a vessel to pass to or from the Islands without a good convoy, and then they take some from them.”¹⁰⁸ In 1707, a royal ordinance granted amnesty to any pirates who would fight on behalf of the French.¹⁰⁹ By the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1712, however, privateers were no longer needed. This led to out-of-work privateers turning to piracy, thus increasing the number of pirates in the Caribbean and the angst of colonial governments.¹¹⁰

When they were not gallivanting at sea, pirate crews went ashore. The numerous inlets and bays of the Caribbean isles provided ample refuge for the roughly 1,500 pirates patrolling the West Indies during the eighteenth century.¹¹¹ When they did come ashore, the weary pirates sought rest, leisure, and recreation at cabarets. One account written in the 1670s tells how pirates acted after taking a valuable prize, stating, “It is worth noting that when the Pirates have made what they call good loot, go rather to Jamaica or the island of St. Domingo or elsewhere, because they find in these places full freedom, and everything that can satisfy their debauchery.” The account continues to state that when they arrive in port they share their loot “above all with merchants and cabaretiers, women and gamers.” The pirates wasted no time in heading to said cabarets as they “first descend on the homes of the cabaretiers” eating and drinking as much as they could until their meal digressed into chaos, evidently causing damage to the cabarets.¹¹² Though this

¹⁰⁸ John Franklin Jameson, *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Document* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923), 277.

¹⁰⁹ Ordonnance du Roi, Portant Amnistie en faveur des Flibustiers et Déserteurs,” June 1, 1707, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, II, 98-99.

¹¹⁰ Marx, *Pirates and Privateers of the Caribbean*, 227.

¹¹¹ Jon Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 64.

¹¹² [Il est bon de remarquer que les Flibustiers qui on fait ce qu'ils appellant bon butin; c'est-à-dire, qui rapportent beaucoup d'argent de leurs courses, vont plutôt à la Jamaïque ou à l'isle de St.

account references Jamaica and Saint-Domingue, pirates, as non-state actors, likely behaved in the same general way in any port at which they made landfall. As difficult as piracy was to control, it seems Phélypeaux decided to limit their access to entertainment in attempt to decrease the appeal of docking in St. Pierre.

In addition to disrupting shipping and causing public disturbances in cabarets at port, pirates threatened the labor supply of the sugar plantation economy directly by meeting enslaved people in the taverns. They were likely drawn to the freedom of the seas which a life of privateering could offer. As scholars have shown, pirate vessels often operated under a democratic form of rule. Ship crews often elected their captain and quartermaster, and had the power to vote out a captain when they no longer trusted his leadership.¹¹³ Though pirates often sold large numbers of enslaved people taken from captured slavers for profit, individuals of African descent were allowed to join pirate crews. People of color were sometimes accepted into the pirate ranks with the full rights held by other crew members.¹¹⁴ This autonomy no doubt enticed enslaved people to seek the freedom and potential monetary rewards of a life of piracy.¹¹⁵ The case of one woman of color brought to Petit-Goave from Vera Cruz in 1706 by pirates suggests that pirates did abscond with enslaved people frequently enough to make the colonial government suspicious of her status. The woman evidently claimed to be free, even presenting paperwork proving her status as a free person, yet her condition was in doubt until her papers could be verified, with the clerk making special note that she was brought by

Dominique ay'ailleurs; parce qu'ils trouvent dans ces lieux une pleine liberté, & tout ce qui peut satisfaire leur débauche... sur-tout les marchands & les cabaretiers, les femmes & les joueurs... Ils sirent leur premiere descente chez les cabaretiers] in Alexandre-Olivier Oexemelin, *Histoire des Aventureiers Flibustiers*, (Lyon: Benoit & Joseph Duplain, 1774), 300-01.

¹¹³ Butler, *Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders*, 9.

¹¹⁴ Marx, *Pirates and Privateers of the Caribbean*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Marx, *Pirates and Privateers of the Caribbean*, 10.

pirates.¹¹⁶ He likely suspected that she had either been captured or voluntarily absconded with the crew. Either way indicating that piracy could disrupt the slave system by removing valuable human property. In closing coastal cabarets, Phélypeaux likely believed he could lessen St. Pierre's appeal to pirates, thus limiting their contact with enslaved peoples, and cutting off a means of escape.

Conclusion

At the end of the seventeenth century, Martinique became a booming sugar colony in the French Empire. As people migrated to the islands seeking wealth and opportunity, St. Pierre developed into an important trade center with a diverse urban population. Merchants, planters, soldiers, free people of color, pirates, maroons, and enslaved peoples moved throughout the city, engaging in trade, business, and recreation. As they did so, they sought to make the urban landscape of Martinique into one that supported their needs, hopes, and desires. At the same time, the French administration attempted to make Martinique a profitable, stable colony that followed certain moral and legal codes. In governing a colony so far from the crown, however, the monarchy needed to establish a complex bureaucracy to carry out its wishes, though the complexity of that system empowered the colonial magistrates with their own authority. Their goals, like those of the settlers, did not always align with those of the monarchy. As a byproduct of the flexible and necessary system of governance, then, control over the French Empire was in constant flux.

This contest for shaping the French Empire took place in the dens of St. Pierre's cabarets, as settlers and state officials constantly remade the colony to fit their needs.

¹¹⁶ "Arrêt du Conseil de Léogane, touchant l'état des Negres et Mulâtres venus de la Vera-Cruz," November 7, 1707, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, II, 112

Enslaved peoples used the cabarets to sell goods and raise a stipend with which to buy their freedom, or escape bondage with pirates or maroons. Free people of color who worked in or owned the taverns used their profits to advance their own social position in the colony. Maroons could use the clandestine space to trade for needed goods or recruit new members into their ranks. Pirates came ashore, took part in the gambling and recreation, and also participated in business transactions. All of this took place in St. Pierre under the watchful eyes of three French royal forts with the full knowledge of the island's intendant and governor. In some cases, officials engaged in the activities, as did Vaucresson with Binture and her sisters. At other times administrative officials used the laws and cabarets to advance their own political position such as Phélypeaux's defamation of Vaucresson's character which allowed him to establish dominance over a rival magistrate. When Babet Binture used funds from her sister's cabaret to sue for her freedom, she became part of the French contest for empire, one among many settlers and state officials who sought to accomplish their own goals in the surreptitious interiors of St. Pierre's cabarets.

Appendix

Figure 1: Delahaye, Guillaume-Nicolas, *Partie de la Mer du Nord où se trouvent Les Grandes et Petites Isles Antilles et Les Isles Lucayes*, 1750, courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b8493495b.

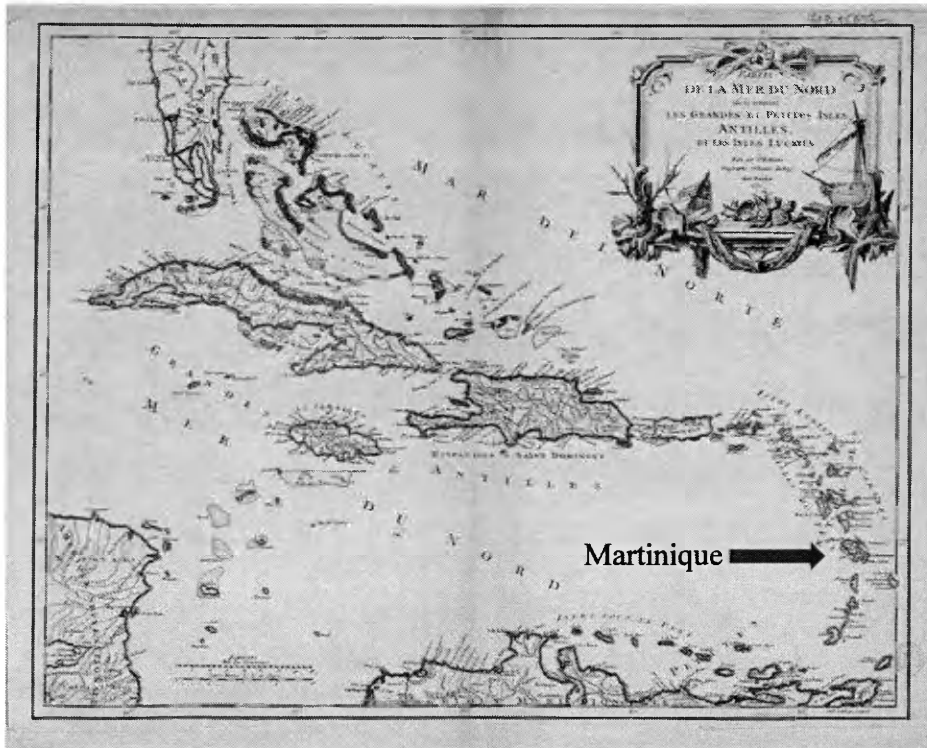


Figure 2: Bellin, Jacques-Nicolas, *Carte de L'Isle de La Martinique*, 1762, courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b53016942j.

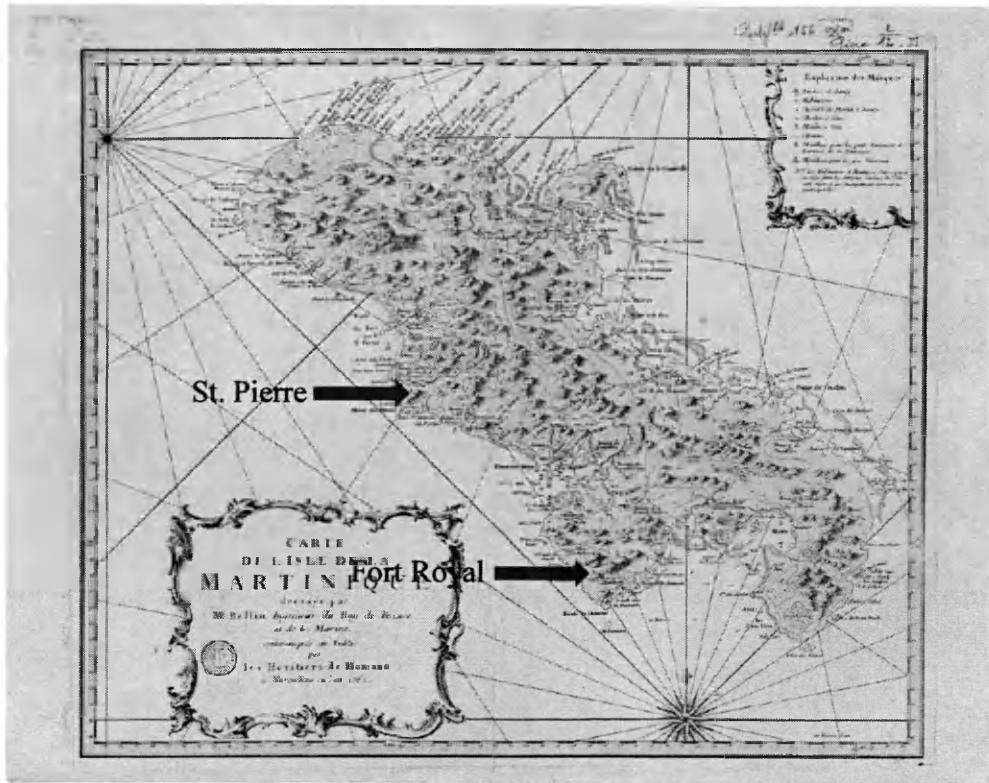


Figure 3: Stott, John, *Plan of the Bay, Town, Fortification, and Environs, in the Island of Martinique*, 1763 courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b53020838p.

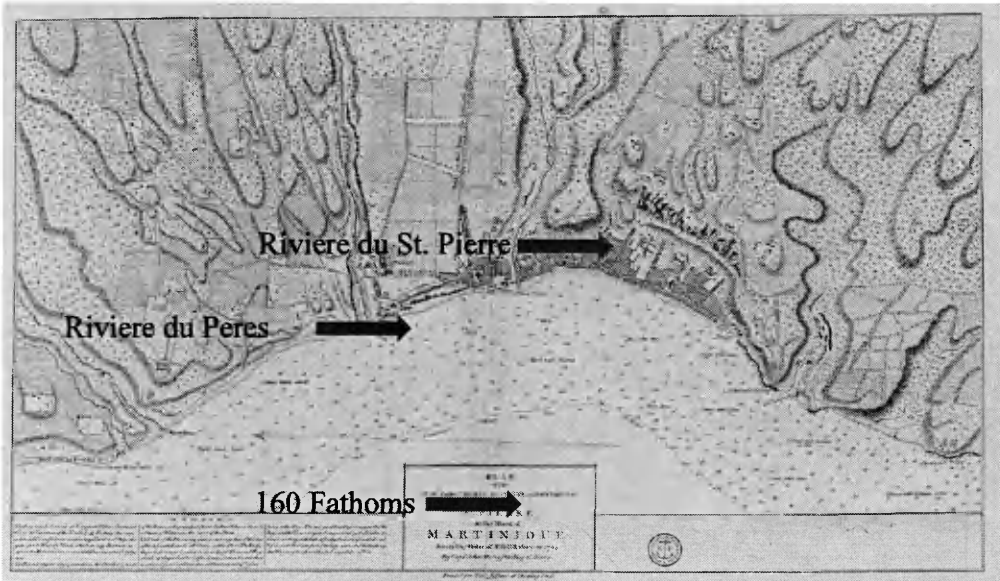


Figure 4: *Plan de la baye Du Cul de Saq Royal en L'isle a La Martinique*, 1700, courtesy of Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique, ark:/12148/btv1b53016893p.

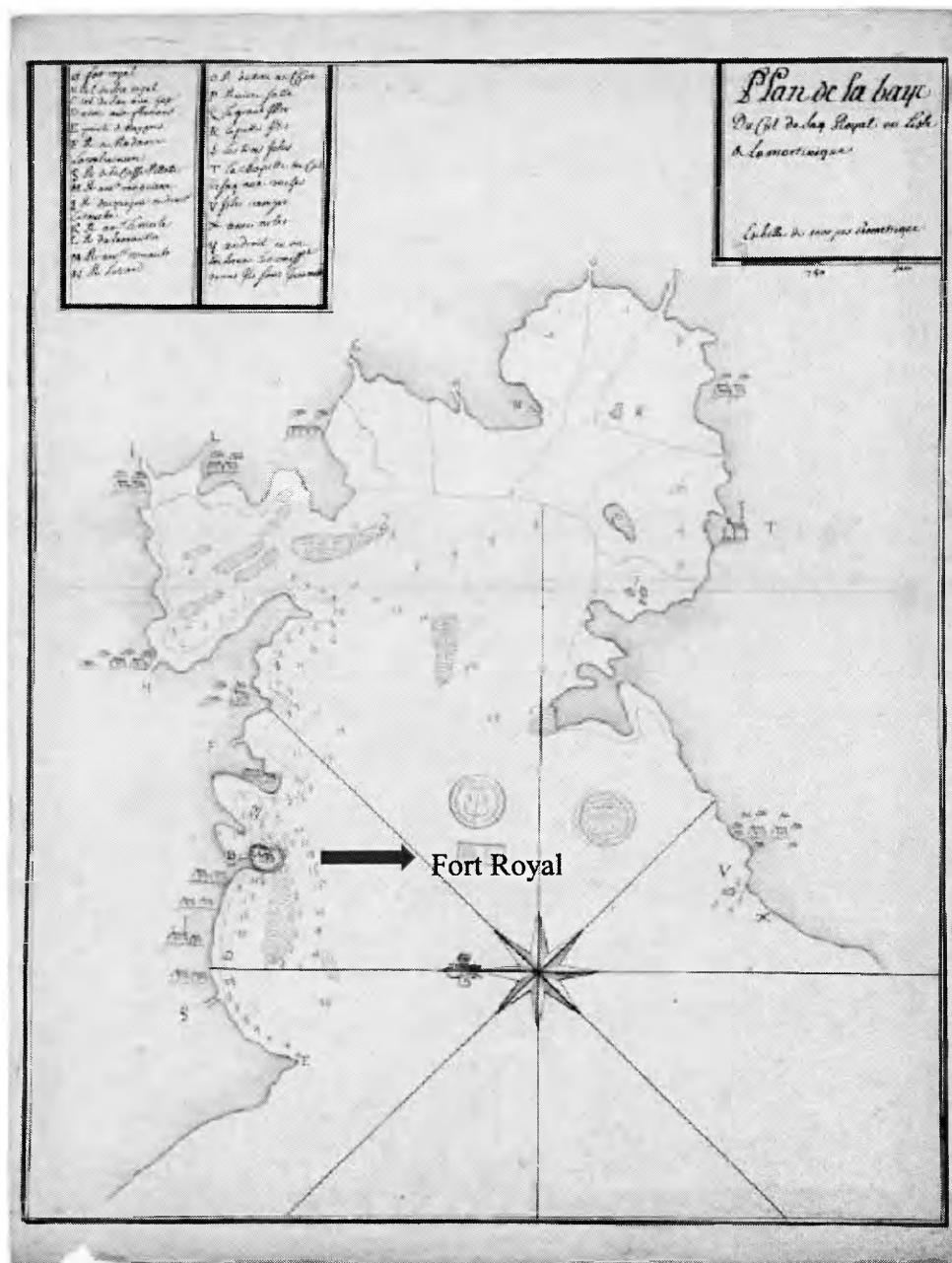


Figure 5. *Plan du fort Saint-Pierre de la Martinique et des ouvrages*, 1693, courtesy of Archives nationales d'outre-mer, 13DFC65B

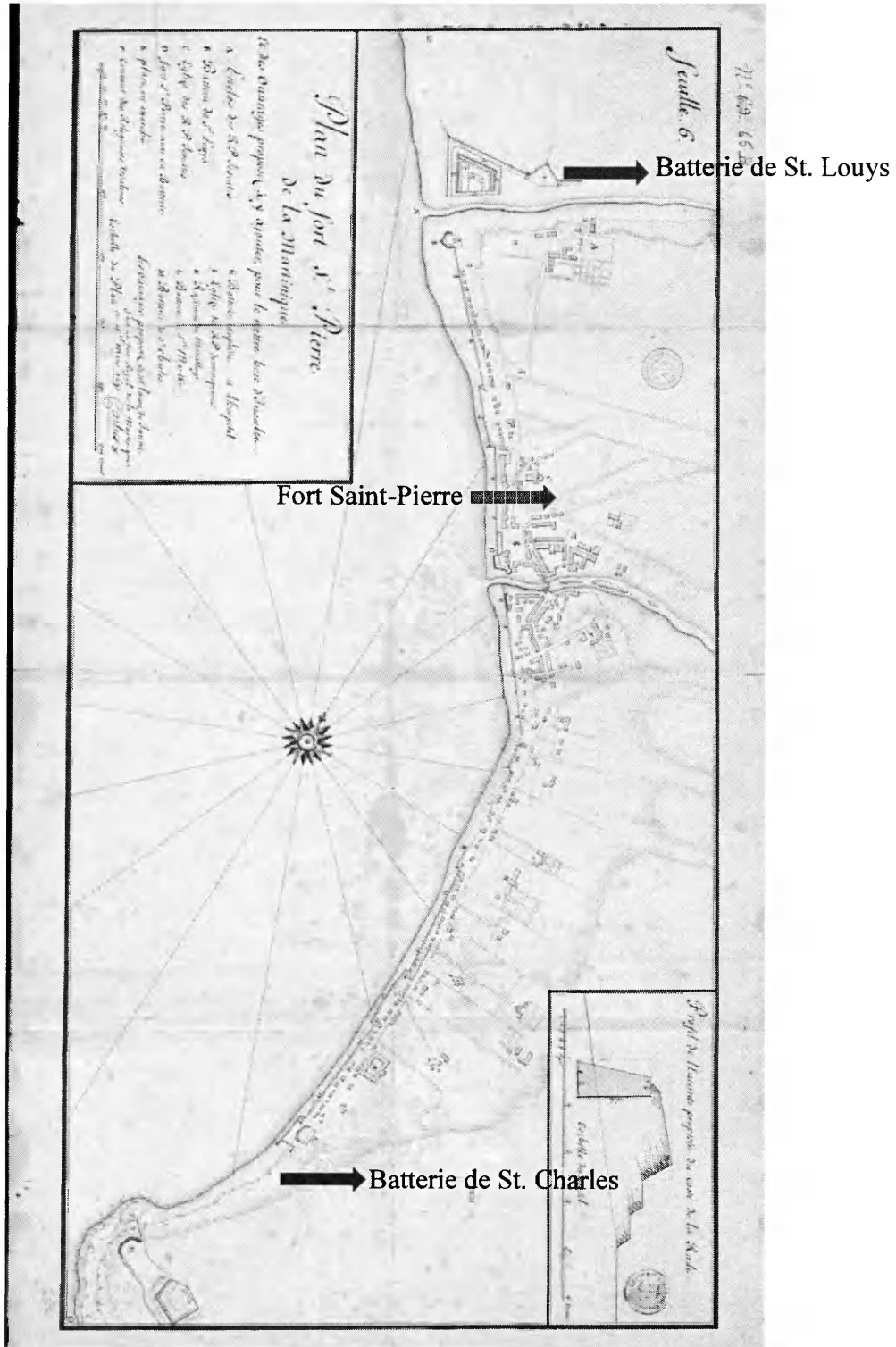
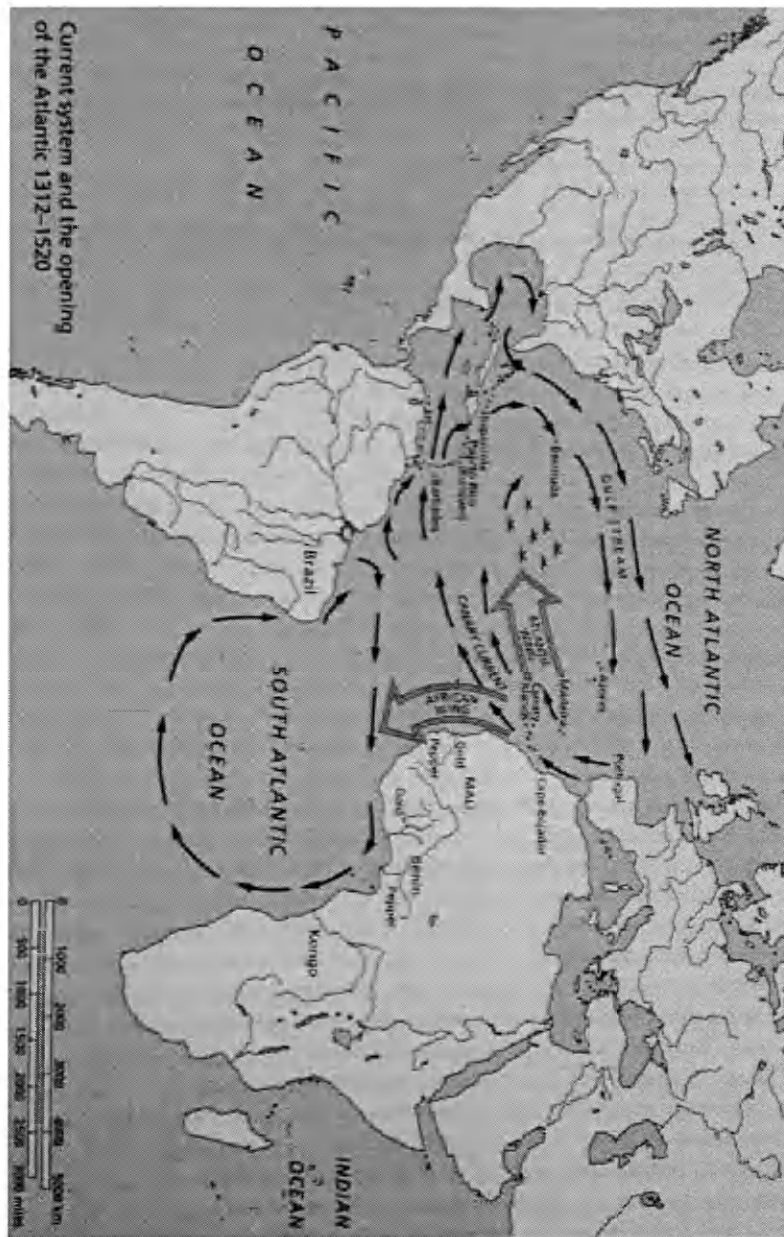


Figure 6. Thornton, John K., *Map 1. Atlantic Wind Currents in A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250-1820*, 10.



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