Chapter 11

Negotiating the Confessional Divide in Dutch Brazil and the Republic: The Case of Manoel de Morães

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In 1630, the Brazilian Jesuit Manoel de Morães (b. c.1596) led a group of indigenous soldiers on a counter-campaign against the mercenaries of the West India Company, who were in the process of conquering the Portuguese sugar-producing region of northeast Brazil. Yet, in the final days of December 1634, as Paraíba was falling to the Dutch, Morães unexpectedly switched affiliation, taking his indigenous soldiers with him. Manoel Dias de Carvalho, a Catholic priest in Dutch Brazil, reported to the Holy Office that “it was well known [...] that he [Morães] was an apostate and left our holy faith and became Calvinist publicly, and let his beard grow and changed clothes and summoned the Indians, and made them switch to the side of the enemy, and take up arms against us.” A gain for the Dutch West India Company was a devastating loss for the Society of Jesus and for the Portuguese troops and enterprise. However, even though Morães spent the next nine years in the Dutch Republic, he would not remain a Dutch supporter for the rest of his life. In 1643, he abandoned the Reformed religion and his family in the Dutch Republic to return to his Catholic faith and to Brazil. Two years later, he severed his ties to the West India Company and once again aided Luso-Brazilian forces in battle against the Dutch. What caused Morães to switch his imperial allegiance and religious conviction twice, and what do his reversals say about society at the time?

Historiographical trends espouse a view of relatively peaceful coexistence in Dutch Brazil, especially under Governor Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen

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1 Santo Ofício da Inquisição de Lisboa, “Processo de Manoel de Morães, sacerdote e theológo, natural da villa de S. Paulo, estado do Brasil, residente que foi nas partes do norte, preso nos carceres da Inquisição de Lisbôa (1647),” ed. Eduardo Prado, Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro 70 (1908): 1–165, here 16. Original in Arquivo Nacional Torre de Tombo: Estante 6, maço 27n4: “Que o dito Morães, perdido o arraial e campanha, apostatarâa e deixara nossa Santa Fé e se fizerá calvino publico, e deixara crescer a barba e mudara vestido e convocara os indios e os fizer pôr de parte do inimigo contro nós, e tomar as armas outosim contra nós [...]”
Scholarship on coexistence also centers on places in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where effectively enforced conversions and migrations divided communities or juxtaposed rival congregations. The age of the Reformations, however, also allowed for opportunists. The presence of multiple confessions and European powers in the colonial sphere provided a chance for some to get ahead through strategic conversions and alliances with the reigning European power. Historian Ronaldo Vainfas has already provided a helpful account of Morães's intriguing life; here, I aim to use Morães's case not to focus on how he was guilty of treason, as Vainfas has, but to uncover his motives to shed light on how confessional allegiances could play out in a world of shifting European powers. Morães provides an interesting case to study these dynamics as he straddled learned and popular culture, was intimately familiar with both European powers, lived in Brazil, the Dutch Republic, and Portugal, at various times professed both Catholicism and Calvinism, and thought and wrote about regime change.

Information on Morães comes from his Inquisition trials and his own writings. Though the Inquisition of Lisbon did not make official visits to colonial Brazil during the years of Portuguese–Dutch conflict, many inquisitorial investigations were carried out to learn more about wayward individuals such as Morães. Before the arrival of the Dutch governor Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, rumors of Catholic clergy collaborating with the Dutch in Paraíba were so widespread that the bishop of Salvador, Dom Pedro da Silva (1572–1649, in office 1633–49), ordered an investigation in 1635–37. Morães’s activities are documented in two trials. At the first, Morães, unaware he was being tried, was found guilty and burned in effigy in April 1642 at the main square in Lisbon, Terreiro do Paço. At the second, in 1646, Morães was present, defended...