"Better than we": landscapes and materialities of race, class, and gender in pre-emancipation colonial Saba, Dutch Caribbean

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English summary

This research strives to reveal how ideologies of race, class, and gender manifested in the material and social environments of pre-emancipation colonial Saba, Dutch Caribbean. Race, class, and gender are vectors for ideology, and by viewing them as processes, their capacity to express such through their social and material environments inextricably tied to their particular temporal and spatial contexts. Through comparisons of the social and material environments of multiple, contemporaneous social contexts within Saba, common social and material vectors of class, race, and gender can become apparent. This work diverges from similar, previous research in that it studies the dialectics involved between culturally-derived abstractions of class, race, and gender, and the materiality which resulted from these relationships. Dialectical studies emphasize an accountability to the totality of a given social environment. As a single researcher, tracing the processes of ideological abstractions such as class, race, and gender while accounting for the whole can be a daunting task. It is facilitated, however, by studying social environments that are bounded through geographical limitations with small populations, but with sufficient cultural similarities to the region to permit insightful contextualization of similar and divergent processes within their respective ideologies. Saba is a Caribbean island just 13 square kilometers in area, with a population that never exceeded 1,877 residents by the time of emancipation, saw very little immigration to the island after 1700, and remained a Dutch possession for most of its colonial era. Saba never developed into a full plantation economy, and therefore the population of white residents compared to enslaved Africans and free Sabans of African descent fluctuated mildly around fifty per cent respectively. The island of Saba is therefore an ideal environment to demonstrate the utility of dialectical archaeology towards these ends. Consequently, the social and material database derived from an archaeological study of a whole, small scale society embedded within permits insights into a range of issues of concern to historical archaeologists. In particular, this concerns:

- How tensions between the "incomplete hegemony" of colonial authorities and plantation agriculture with Saban residents resulted in a dialectic between local landscapes, materiality, and ideologies of race, class, and gender.
- Differentiating between slavery, free poverty, and low class in the archaeological record.
- The dialectic between scale, locality, and perspective in defining and situating class and poverty.

Studying social organization proceeds through the process of abstraction, where aspects of society are divided into manageable parts of a social and temporal framework, which are then analyzed together to see how they relate to and inform the whole. A dialectical approach studies

these components in terms of their relationships to each other, whereby it is the relationship between given components that defines them, and they cannot otherwise exist outside this relationship without becoming a new or different social abstraction. The discreet "structuring structures" which comprise the habitus of a given culture foster the potential for powered relations among its members. Those facets of habitus, the "ideas rooted in power" (Burke 2006:128) which encapsulate ideology, can manifest among multiple, overlapping social abstracts such as class, race, and gender.

As Orser (2004) describes in practice theory relative to race, the process of uncovering material landscapes and the social and material vectors of class, race, and gender on Saba through time begins by understanding the creation and maintenance of social institutions and the socio-spatial dialectic of a given region of study, together with the shared experiences among people considered as members of particular classes, races, and genders. Since documentary or archaeological expressions of ideology is the result of many factors, documents and sites were chosen that were able to best express and isolate particular ideological vectors within its material, social, spatial, and temporal context, that become apparent when compared to others where these vectors are identical, similar, irrelevant, or absent. However, the lived experience of Saban residents, despite their race, class, or gender, may not be directly reflected in material assemblages attributed to them by artifacts suggestive of wealth, as would what Chicone identifies as an object-centered approach, or other material anomalies that may show a deviation from socio-material norms, as would be in what she terms a representational approach (Chicone 2011a). Rather, the materiality of class, race, and gender of Saban residents is co-constitutive of their lived experience (Chicone 2011a). Therefore, the processes involved in constructing and maintaining these ideological constructs must be understood relative to the materiality present in the areas of concern within Saba's landscape. A failure to do so will risk reifying foreign ideologies upon these assemblages which may be otherwise irrelevant within Saban colonial social relations.

Searching for social and material vectors for class, race, and gender rooted in local realities harkens to Brandon's (2009:12) call for a "holistic cultural analysis… to analyzing competing categorical registers (i.e., class and race). If applied in a non-reifying manner, a cultural analysis may reveal the complex linkages between different, but often simultaneously manifested, identities". By understanding changes in the social organization of Saba throughout its colonial period, the dialectic between ideology and materiality changes as well. Therefore, it will be possible to identify the materiality of race, class, and gender in certain individual artifacts and assemblages on Saba relative to particular periods. Clearly, there are many avenues for applying dialectical analyses of class, race, and gender throughout the island's pre-emancipation colonial period. Louann Wurst correctly stated that "archaeologists cannot, as mere mortals, study the totality of any social context, but we must

recognize that we proceed with abstractions of the internal relations that form a totality" (Wurst 2006:201). Saba, being a small island with scant immigration throughout its colonial period, serves as an excellent example for demonstrating the efficacy and potential of dialectical approaches that stress accountability to totality in historical archaeology.

The research proceeded by identifying surviving collections of documents relating to Saba, and relevant archaeological sites across Saba from site survey and previous research. A wide variety of documentary sources were employed throughout this research in several collections worldwide. The most important sources for seventeenth and eighteenth colonial documents have been the Calendar of State Papers through the British National Archives, and the Dutch National Archives in The Hague. The National Archives of Curaçao holds two important collections of correspondence between Lt. Governor Edward Beaks, Jr. and the colonial governors in Curaçao during the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, there are few primary sources from the seventeenth century up to 1781 that directly pertain to Saba. Important documentary sources on Saba included notarized documents from the nineteenth century held by the Saba Planning Bureau, the Catholic baptism and marriage registers at St. Paul's Conversion church in Windwardside, the land registries and deeds housed at the Department of Public Works, and several important document collections in the possession of Will Johnson.

Oral history forms an important body of data for this research, which was collected both from interviews with Sabans, and the ethnographies of Julia G. Crane. Will Johnson is a decorated former politician of Saba and the former Netherlands Antilles, has been actively researching Saba's history for over forty years, and continues to be an important source of Saba's oral history. Crane's "Saba Silhouettes" is an ethnographic collection of oral history accounts recorded verbatim in the 1970's and 1980's from Sabans throughout the island. Countless conversations with Sabans by the author during nearly three years of living on the island have also been of invaluable use.

A series of plantation and non-plantation context sites were chosen across Saba for survey and excavation that would best express certain facets of ideology on Saba from particular time periods and groups. This included seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century Saba, from groups ranging from enslaved Africans, deserving and undeserving poor Sabans, low class Sabans, free white residents and those of African descent, and upper class residents. These included three small sugar and indigo plantations; a strategically-located early colonial homestead; a poor white village known as Palmetto Point; a predominantly free African descent village called Middle Island, an upper class privy pit in The Bottom, and various smaller sites across the island. The largest sites were mapped with a Trimble GeoXH Centimeter-edition differential GPS, and maps were generated from the survey data using QGIS, versions Chugiak, Valmeira, and Lyon. Most units were excavated by 10cm arbitrary

levels, but in certain cases of emergency excavations, such as the deep privy pit in The Bottom, they were excavated by 20cm arbitrary levels. Artifacts were sieved through a 5mm plastic mesh.

The results of the documentary research, collection of oral history, and the archaeological surveys and excavations have identified a series of temporally-relevant material and social vectors for projecting ideology on Saba throughout its pre-emancipation colonial period. Identifications of particular ideological vectors in the material record must be rooted in local, lived realities of the subject culture. The identifiable vectors included shifts from European national identity to a Saban identity in the late seventeenth century, titles, profession, religion, surname, first name, reputation, wealth and estates, debt and credit systems, purchasing practices, village of residence, race and legal status, race relations, laws pertaining to slavery and emancipation, burial practices, diet, housing and domestic architecture, and material culture. These ideological vectors ranged from those that could only be employed by specific segments of society, such as sea captains being limited to white males, to vectors that require further context to ensure their utility.

Class, race, and gender-based inferences of individuals and assemblages scaled in reliability corresponding to the number and quality of locally-derived vectors that can be ascribed. In certain cases, singular artifacts, architectural elements, and elements of social relations were the ideological domain of specific groups. Dry stone structures were used as housing exclusively by enslaved Africans in plantation contexts, two ceramic roof tiles at the Flat Point plantation indicated foreign ownership, shell jewelry was used only by African descent Sabans (Will Johnson, personal communication 2013), and dry stone grave markers increasingly indicated low class as they were increasingly replaced by gravestones during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Domestic architecture on Saba developed into a distinctive "Saban style" (Brugman 1995). Domestic architecture was the most important cultural vector among Sabans for projecting class; Sabans would "go without bread" if it meant keeping up repairs to their house (Crane 1971:237). Residents who lived in wattle houses, consequently, were strongly associated with low class. Class can be surmised in "Saba style" houses by the type of house foundations, being either dry stone or cut stone and mortar.

Class was visible through certain elements of material culture. Most Sabans valued form and function of ceramics over decoration, and the small size and economy of the island restricted imports, rendering price-scaling models ineffective. At least one household, however, made attempts to keep up to the latest European fashions during the eighteenth century, thereby pointing to upper class. Ownership of beds and bedsteads was uncommon, and during the late eighteenth century to well into the twentieth century, most Sabans slept upon banana leaf beds. Class was also reflected through furniture materials, mahogany and fustic being the most valued.

Race, class, and gender were often visible through use of the socio-spatial dialectic, especially on the carefully managed landscape of plantations. This allowed the association of artifact assemblages found in particular areas of plantations, notably domestic landscapes, to enslaved Africans. In one instance, a lockbox was recovered with contents harkening to West African cosmologies, among which was found five teeth from the same individual. Carbon, oxygen, and strontium isotope analysis of the teeth by Jason Laffoon determined that this individual was born in West African, and brought to the Caribbean during teenage years. The childhood migration history recounted by the isotope analysis matches that of millions of enslaved Africans that were captured and sent to the Americas as part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, comfortably demonstrating through this process that this individual was a first-generation *enslaved* African.

Class, race, and gender was also visible in the social relations and conventions within pre-emancipation colonial Saban society. First names among white Saban males and females were restricted to a small pool of less than a dozen names, with other names amounting to 8% and 12%, respectively. Among enslaved males, about two thirds of them bore the same names common to white males, with 33% bearing other names, while among enslaved women, just 44% bore the same names as white Sabans, with 56% bearing different ones. This demonstrates both acculturation on the part of enslaved Africans, and a willingness to break with the dominant white culture through naming conventions, perhaps as a means of resistance. Class was denoted through accorded titles such as "Captain" and "Esquire", while denying titles was a means of identifying others as having African ancestry. Class was implicitly acknowledged through liquor license sales, as most individuals accorded this privilege held "good reputations" and were counted among Saba's upper class or bore close relations to them. In nineteenth century government documentation, especially court records, African descent Sabans were addressed according to their perceived degree of African ancestry together with their gender as "the man" or "the woman" in place of Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Individual reputation was important, and carried weight in court, where one could me recorded as a liar to permanently mar their public character. Sentencing and punishments were asymmetrical between white Sabans and free African descent Sabans, particularly with regards to exile. Only African descent Sabans were subject to exile, and this occurred on several occasions during the first half of the nineteenth century. Laws regulating slavery, in some cases, translated to archaeologically visible elements. Unlike free Sabans, in those cases where enslaved Africans lived in a separate house from their owners, they were bound to observe certain laws relative to its construction. Floorboards and housing partitions were deemed illegal on Saba in 1823, and therefore enslaved African structures dating after this period can be expected to be single room structures with either marl, dirt, or cobblestone flooring. This was exemplified by House 3 at Middle Island.

Slavery and poverty represent two aspects of low class, but do not compose its totality. Identifying slavery, poverty, and low class begins by understanding their processes within a particular society; in this case, Saba. Slavery and deserving/undeserving poverty are a product of a legal process, while low class it not. Therefore, one entry point for the archaeology of slavery and poverty begins by understanding how a diachronically imposed legal status by a dominant culture is implicated in their materiality. This is most prominent through spaces that were designated for enslaved Africans (Armstrong & Kelly 2000), as material remains recovered from these contexts would be co-constitutive of slavery, but not necessarily reflective of slavery outright on their own accord without the benefit of spatial context. The socio-spatial dialectic demonstrated class and race divisions at both an island, plantation, and village level. The experience of plantation and non-plantation slavery on Saba, however, limited its utility to the former. Enslaved African villages were located at SB 001 and SB 007 following Armstrong & Kelly's (2000) model for plantation spatial organization. Unfortunately, coastal erosion at SB 004 probably claimed the Big House at the site, and the locations of enslaved African domestic areas along with it. According to both oral history and documentary records, nineteenth century enslaved Africans owned by Sabans often co-habited with their owners in the same house, and those engaged in field labour were also known to work side-by-side with their owners as well. Therefore, determining the materiality of non-plantation slavery in this co-habitation context is exceedingly difficult.

In pre-emancipation colonial Saba, low class was visible spatially, through race, and through class vectors such as diet, domestic architecture, domestic furnishing, enslaved African ownership, and a reliance upon subsistence agriculture. All free African descent Sabans would have been considered low class, and likely many considered poor. This created an inseparable link between class and race within the norms of the dominant white Saban society. Due to the homogenization of low class among free African descent Sabans, the material accoutrements would not have been an effective class vector within their communities if their material class vectors were identical to those of white Saban society. Indeed, even the diets between enslaved Africans at Flat Point and Spring Bay Flat were very similar to free, low class residents of Palmetto Point, Middle Island, and Behind-the-Ridge. The key exception, however, lies among those free African descent Sabans who identified more strongly with white Saban culture than those who rejected it. Unfortunately, this rejection was not clearly visible in the archaeological record; while Afro-Caribbean ware may have been associated more strongly with African descent Sabans than not, and therefore an excellent potential material vector of class and race, an effective means of distinguishing it from nearly identical Amerindian wares has to date not been determined. However, in the absence of spaces designated as poor, poverty and low class are materially indistinguishable on Saba. Low class has little interpretive and explanatory use

within the context of slavery, as it implies freedom, and although enslaved Africans generally occupied the lowest rung of colonial social hierarchy, they also maintained social hierarchies among themselves. Low class and slavery share a range of ideological vectors that were archaeologically indistinguishable from the other due to different processes that produced similar materiality, save for the notable exceptions of the socio spatial dialectic, and enslaved African plantation domestic architecture with dry stone houses. The intangible vectors, which are more readily visible in the documentary record, provide much clearer ideological differentiation between low class and enslavement beyond materiality.

Saba was known as an "island of poor people" among certain residents of St. Eustatius, despite internal class and race-based differentiations within Saban society. The whole island of Saba was designated as "poor" prior to the 1772 hurricane by the Island Secretary of St. Eustatius, which was probably a commonly-held assertion outside of Saba during this time, but which obscured the real complexities of contemporary Saban social organization (DNAr 1.05.01.02 #629:2/2/1773). External perceptions of Saban poverty would also have been fostered through the island's economy. A chronic lack of specie on Saba made the payment of debts through cash difficult, and by consequence encouraged a culture of lending and debt holding across the island. Often, debts were only payable upon the death of the debtor, whereupon his or her estate would be wholly or partially auctioned to repay then. Many Sabans reified this notion of a "poor island" abroad during the mid-nineteenth century in St. Thomas by employing barter rather than specie for trade, even acquiring goods there that could have otherwise been obtained on Saba itself. So, despite changes in the material possessions of Sabans, to residents of Golden-Rock era St. Eustatius, and nineteenth century St. Thomas, Saba was an island of poor people, and therefore their possessions became co-constituent with their poverty despite their possessions which may express otherwise according to Saban cultural standards, or their own. Locality, therefore, can bestow multiple dimensions of class and poverty upon material assemblages, and this must be taken into account by archaeologists.

Despite the external homogenization of poverty of Saba, the island maintained its own social organization and perspectives of poverty. This was most visible through class-based landscapes. The strong Saban identity with one's village isolated residents along with the topography, to the point where residents of Hell's Gate had never visited The Bottom; people from Windwardside generally did not marry people from The Bottom; and some women were born, lived full lives, and died in Hell's Gate without ever having left the community. Most upper class Sabans lived in The Bottom up to emancipation, while small, remote villages such as Hell's Gate, Middle Island and Palmetto Point were occupied almost exclusively by lower classes, to the point residents of Palmetto Point were considered socially "backwards" by other Sabans regardless of their own village. Middle Island experienced a

surge in African descent residents in the decade prior and after emancipation, to the point where they composed the majority of residents. Free Sabans of African descent were almost universally poor in terms of materiality. The immutability of race and gender significantly restricted their ability to improve their social and material dimensions of class relative to the whole of Saban society.

One of the few internal self-characterizations of poverty was evinced through Daniel Simmons. While he characterized himself as poor in his divorce petition to the Governor of Curaçao, he may not necessarily have figured among the deserving or even undeserving poor by Saba's Delegated Bench of Justice. The social and material criteria to qualify individuals and households as poor by the governing class were unfortunately not specified. This absolute measure of poverty, though, would have created two classes from among Saba's pre-existing lower class; those deserving of poverty, and those undeserving of the charity associated with it. Those considered deserving had poverty bestowed upon their space and possessions, regardless of these materials' capacities to serve as vectors for class that may suggest otherwise. Consequently, possessions of the deserving poor will then embody a second set of social relations as they become co-constituent of their poverty; they were once low class, and subsequently made poor. The same principle of "becoming" would apply to spaces considered impoverished. Domestic architecture at Palmetto Point certainly would have remained a class vector among residents within the village, for example, but outside it mattered less as Sabans considered the inhabitants to be poor and socially backwards because they lived at Palmetto Point. Therefore, identifying poverty based upon materiality and other ideological vectors is inherently problematic as it embodies multiple social and spatial perspectives derived from powered relationships, giving it an ephemeral quality. While a similar comparison could be made towards the archaeology of race relative in the colonial Caribbean, the important difference lies within the myriad of cultural differences that existed between white residents, free Sabans of African descent, and enslaved Africans, while no "culture of poverty" existed (Orser 2004; 2007). Archaeologies of poverty, therefore, are better off addressing how poverty was sustained and how it was used in powered relations rather than how it can be seen in material things. These examples reinforce the relevance of class relative to particular social and spatial contexts, and highlights the need to account for powered perspectives when employing object-centered approaches to reflect or suggest ideology.