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Women in the Early Modern Dutch Atlantic World

A Dissertation Presented

by

Annette Michèle Ricciardi - Cramer van den Bogaart

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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for the Degree of

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History

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation explores the myriad ways in which women, both overseas and in the Netherlands, engaged in the early modern Dutch Atlantic world. It argues that women in the Dutch colonies around the Atlantic perimeter and at home made significant contributions to the formation and expansion of the Atlantic World because of their participation in the public sphere. Through an examination of court and church records, in addition to notarial papers, it becomes clear that women in the Dutch territories had more independence than their peers of other European maritime powers at the time, and thus were able to exert more influence on the development of the early modern Atlantic world.

Women participated in the economy in this territory not only by aiding male relatives and husbands in their business endeavors, but also by establishing themselves independently in a variety of occupations such as merchant, plantation holder, and tavern keeper. In addition, women devised several other strategies for survival and upward mobility in the colonies and territories governed by the Dutch West India Company. Many married several times while ensuring their financial independence and the inheritance of their children through prenuptial contracts. Moreover, women frequently used the courts to further their own and their families' interests. They did so in the colonies and some even traveled to the Netherlands to bring their cases to the highest court. Not only did white women in the colonies use these strategies for survival and advancement, free black women and some of the enslaved used them as well.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters which examine the legal precedents set in the Netherlands with regard to women, the position of wives and widows in the Atlantic world, women's economic contributions, the position of enslaved women, and the role that concubinage and miscegenation played in the Dutch colonies. The concluding chapter explores the ways in which women in the Netherlands participated in, and were affected by, the Atlantic world. Finally, a short additional chapter deals with the travel experiences of women on board ships in the Atlantic.

For Esmé with love

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List of Abbreviations

CBA	Archives of Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba, 1707-1828
FOCM	Fort Orange Court Minutes, 1652-1660
FOR	Fort Orange Records
NA	National Archive, The Hague
NAS	Notarial Archives Suriname, 1699-1828
OWIC	Archive of the First Westindische Compagnie
RNA	Records of New Amsterdam
SA	Municipal Archive Amsterdam (Stadsarchief)
SG	Archive of the States General
VDR	Journals of Commanders at the African Coast (Vijf Dagregisters)
WIC	Archive of the Second Westindische Compagnie
ZA	Archives of Zeeland (Zeeuws Archief)

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INTRODUCTION

Around 1636, a Dutch woman named Teuntje Straetmans sailed from the Netherlands to Dutch Brazil with her soldier husband and settled at the coastal fort Cabadelo, near present day Recife. The Portuguese surrendered the fort just before Christmas in 1634, so Straetmans and her husband were some of the earlier Dutch arrivals in Brazil. The couple had a son there and noted governor Count Johan Maurits van Nassau was a witness to his baptism in the small but growing Dutch community. Unfortunately, they lost their young son, but his death was followed by the birth of a daughter a few years later. The couple named her Margariet. In the mid-1640s tragedy struck again as the soldier died, leaving his wife and a toddler to fend for themselves in South America.

Probably seeing few opportunities to take care of herself and her baby daughter, other than remarriage, Straetmans married a field-trumpeter from Bavaria who was employed by the Dutch West India Company. Again she gave birth. This time she had twin boys, Laurens and Pieter, who were baptized in 1649, but again she lost one of the children. Pieter died as an infant.

When during the early 1650s it became apparent that the Dutch would not be able to hold on to the colony, Straetmans decided to join the stream of refugees from Dutch Brazil and set sail for the Caribbean. Her second husband died as well, and she married a third time. With third husband Tieneman Jacobsen she had a daughter named Anna, born in Guadeloupe in 1654. For unknown reasons, Jacobsen stayed behind on the island while Straetmans and her three surviving children left for the Dutch colony of New Netherland on a ship also carrying famed governor Petrus Stuyvesant.

Straetmans had a sister in the colony and perhaps thought she would be able to take care of her children there with the help of relatives. At first, she may have hoped that Jacobsen would

follow her to New Netherland to live together there as a family. Eventually, however, she tired of waiting for her husband and had him officially declared dead. With the explicit consent of Petrus Stuyvesant, she married her fourth husband, Gabriel Corbesij. The couple did well financially and owned a house near the town's wall on Manhattan Island. The house was listed in her name, so the couple likely had a prenuptial agreement that kept their property separate. In 1662, the couple moved to Brooklyn where they started a small farm.

Straetmans also dabbled in the beaver trade with Native Americans and was not a woman who would let others walk all over her. She appeared in court several times for assaulting other women, once wielding a knife to inflict wounds on others. She had to be strong and determined to survive in the early modern Atlantic World where so many men died and where people were uprooted by the ever-changing political tides.

After her death in October of 1662 it was revealed that she had been a bigamist. Her third husband, Tieneman Jacobsen, was still alive and well, living on the island of Jamaica as a tailor. An Englishman who had been to Jamaica and was familiar with Jacobsen told the Dutch Reformed church in Brooklyn of this fact. The church leadership wrote to Jacobsen to inform him of his wife's death, thinking he might want to send "a token of paternal affection" to his daughter. After receipt of the letter, Jacobsen did not send a token of his affection, but came to New Netherland himself to take care of his child.¹

The tale of Teuntje Straetmans' life may seem extraordinary because of her extensive travel around the Atlantic perimeter and her multiple marriages, but nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, her life's story is almost emblematic of the experience of Dutch women

¹ For Straetmans see: Annette M. Cramer van den Bogaart, "The Life of Teuntje Straetmans: A Dutch Woman's Travels in the Atlantic World," *Long Island Historical Journal* 15, no. 1-2 (Spring 2003): 35-53; Annette M. Cramer van den Bogaart, "Teuntje Straetmans," in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse Geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 375.

in the early modern Atlantic World. She was widowed multiple times, as many women were because of the extremely high death rate among European men, especially in the Caribbean and in South America. Straetmans had children from several marriages, which led her to keep her property separate from that of her second, third, and fourth husbands in order not to endanger the inheritances of each child, this too was a common practice among Dutch women.² Furthermore, she traveled around the Atlantic World and among Dutch women frequent travel was certainly not unusual. Lastly, she engaged in some trade and business, tapping into major trade routes and contributing to the commercial networks in the Atlantic World, as many of her female compatriots did.

This dissertation explores the ways in which women in the Dutch colonies and at home engaged in and with the early modern Dutch Atlantic World. Women contributed to the economy in this arena not only by aiding male relatives and husbands in their business endeavors, but also by establishing themselves as merchants, plantation holders, and tavern keepers, as well as in a variety of other occupations. In addition, as a strategy for survival or for upward mobility, women devised several plans with regard to marriage in the colonies and territories of the Dutch West India Company. Many married several times while insuring their independence and the inheritance of their children through prenuptial contracts. Moreover, women frequently used the courts to further their own and their families' interests. They did so in the colonies and some even traveled to the Netherlands to bring their cases to the highest court, if necessary. These strategies for survival and advancement were used not only by white women in the Dutch Atlantic, but by free black women and some of the female enslaved population as well.

² Although I have no evidence of her doing so for Georg Haff and Tieleman Jacobsen, it is very likely that she did because it was customary among the Dutch, and because she had a prenuptial contract with her last husband.

Everyday life for ordinary men and women overseas was generally influenced by the laws and customs of the mother country, as both women and men brought along to the “new world” their understandings of sexual difference. For the Dutch, this understanding was not always in concordance with the ideas of other Europeans or with Native American and African traditions of gender. An assessment of the Dutch Atlantic colonies with regard to gender, and more specifically the roles of women, can enhance our understanding of the differences and similarities in colonial styles.

Kathleen Brown, in her book *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs*, introduced the concept of “gender frontiers,” which in her work relates to Native American women and English men in the Chesapeake area of Virginia in the seventeenth century. She posits, “By examining the confrontations of different gender systems, including the gendered patterns of colonial domination, historians can assess how challenges posed to ‘natural’ categories of gender shaped colonial encounters.”³ When speaking of gender frontiers, Brown juxtaposes the European with the indigenous but this concept may be expanded to include differences among European powers. Taken in this context, one can speak of a multiplicity of “frontiers” in the Atlantic world where one finds cultural differences in division of labor, etiquette, sexual practices, and other signifiers of gender identity not only among Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans, but also between European groups themselves.

In myriad travel writings by men from various regions in Europe from the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries, we find descriptions of Dutch women, as they tried to explain the phenomenon of “the Dutch woman”. They all agreed on one thing: Dutch women were different

³ Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 318.

from their own women. Women in the Dutch Republic were educated, good with money, prudent, hard working, and engaged in all kinds of trade. It is no surprise, then, that to foreigners, and in particular the English, the Dutch woman was too independent and forward. Moryson, an early seventeenth century English traveler in the Netherlands wrote, “I may boldly say, that the women of these parts, are above all other truly taxed with this unnatural domineering over their husbands.”⁴ Moryson believed that this attitude started in childhood when he noticed girls calling their brothers names and in general showing a lack of respect towards men. Some noted that Dutch women were “masculine” in the sense that they traveled to trade or do business not only in the cities in the Netherlands, but also Hamburg, Germany and even more remote places.⁵ These “more remote places” included the Atlantic world.

The Dutch Atlantic colonies and territories were not only peopled by white women, though; African women also played a very significant part in the Atlantic world. African females both assisted and resisted European men and were essential to the genesis of new hybrid cultures around the Atlantic rim. Enslaved and free, black and mulatto, they too used strategies for advancement and survival in an increasingly foreign and challenging environment. African women and those with African origins also used the Dutch colonial courts, sometimes even taking their cases to the courts in the Netherlands. They used marital strategy and concubinage as a method for survival, and engaged in trade just as white women did. However, where white and

⁴ Quoted in: A.Th. van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, vol. 2 of *Het Kopergeld van de Gouden Eeuw* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1978), 12. Van Deursen’s four small volumes on Dutch Culture during the 17th century have been combined into one volume in later editions. I have used the original edition.

⁵ Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary* (London, 1617), II: 350. For more accounts from travelers see: Julia Bientjes, *Holland und die Holländer im Urteil Deutscher Reisender, 1400-1800* (Groningen: Wolters, 1967). See also: Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 402-404. Schama cites John Ray, William Aglionby, Fynes Moryson, and Joseph Shaw who were all British and made several comments on Dutch women.

For more on observations of Dutch women by foreigners see also: Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic, its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1-2, 677-678.

black women were united in their subjugation by white men, they were divided by race. African women had to take additional hurdles because in addition to issues of gender and class, they faced institutionalized racism in the form of slavery. And even though racism may not have infused the letter of the law, white society, especially among the upper classes, vigorously resisted the presence of blacks other than in a servile capacity. Chapters four and five explore these issues further.

There are several factors which, when taken together, form a unique framework that allowed for the active participation of Dutch women in the Atlantic World. First among these is the fact that the Netherlands was a seafaring nation. In this culture where men were often absent for extended periods of time, women took on many duties traditionally carried out by the male head of the household. In coastal provinces some fifteen percent of the male population over the age of fifteen was at sea at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the port cities this number rose to twenty percent by 1650.⁶ The women who were married to these sailors and other seafaring men could not always count on the income of their husbands. Many men who served one of the two major Dutch trading companies, the West India Company (WIC) and East India Company (VOC), provided for their families at home through a system of monthly warrants or *maandbrieven*. Wives could present these warrants to the local company office and receive money each month. However, studies of the VOC have revealed that this income was generally insufficient. Hence, many women provided additional income either by working in typically female occupations such as washing, sewing, or knitting, for example, or they earned extra

⁶ Els Kloek, "Women of a Seafaring Nation: A Chapter in the History of the Dutch Republic, 1580-1700," in *Dutch New York between East and West: The World of Margrieta van Varick*, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis et al. (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2009), 25-39.

income by engaging in trade.⁷ Women also took up other duties and made decisions for their families in order to keep the family functioning in the absence of a husband.

A second factor that contributed to the relative independence of women in the Netherlands was that many women were indeed independent or unmarried for part of their lives and therefore had the same legal status as men. In this urbanized society where over half of the population lived in towns, most women generally married late while others never married. It is well documented that Europe had a surplus of women during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and many would never marry.⁸ In Roman Catholic areas of Southern Europe this surplus was often dealt with by closeting women away in convents, especially those of the middling and upper classes, but in the Dutch Republic a number of women remained single and formed their own households, providing their own income. Some unmarried women solved their economic problems by becoming members of a household through domestic service, while others were part of the household of relatives. Of course the latter could not rely on an income from a husband either and often had to make a living for themselves.

Women who did marry often did so at quite a late age, because many worked in a variety of occupations in order to gather adequate funds to purchase household inventory to set up their own homes. The average age at marriage for brides in Amsterdam was twenty-four and a half at the beginning of the seventeenth century, climbing to twenty-six and a half at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and reaching its peak during the middle of the eighteenth century when

⁷ Kloek, "Women of a Seafaring Nation," 28.

⁸ Lotte van de Pol, "The Lure of the Big City: Female Migration to Amsterdam," in *Women of the Golden Age: An International Debate on Women in the Seventeenth-Century Holland, England, and Italy*, eds. Els Kloek, Nicole Teeuwen, and Marijke Huisman (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), 73-81. See also: Els Kloek, "De Vrouw," in *Gestalten van de Gouden Eeuw: Een Hollands Groepsportret*, eds. H.M. Beliën, A.Th. van Deursen, and G.J. van Stetten (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2005), 241-279; Maryanne Kowaleski, "Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective," in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, eds. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999).

the average age at marriage was twenty-eight.⁹ We find a similar pattern in the rest of northwestern Europe. In Britain up to 1750 the average age at marriage was about twenty-six, but fell by 1800. However, this contrasts sharply with countries surrounding the Mediterranean where girls married earlier, and with women of the aristocracy who also married at a much younger age.¹⁰ Marriage at a more advanced age meant that women remained single for many years. As mentioned above, a great number of young women entered domestic service where they were parts of households, but others entered into trades and more independent occupations. In addition, many women were single for a good part of their lives because they were widowed. Their legal status, as with other unmarried women, was the same as that of men.

Thirdly, in the Netherlands most people were part of conjugal families or nuclear families, described as families with little contact with extended family, a free and affinity-based choice of partner, and a measure of equality and intimacy between the partners and between children and parents.¹¹ Although the opinion of parents weighed heavily when it came time to choosing a marriage partner, men and women in the Dutch Republic were free to choose partners based on affection and attraction. Some travelers to the Netherlands made much of this affection between the parties and noted that husbands and wives openly displayed their affection through hand holding and kissing in public, which seemed shockingly improper to some visitors. In these small nuclear families, husbands and wives stood together to care for and advance the interests of the family. Women, especially those of the *burgher* household, or middling and merchant class,

⁹ Kloek, "Women of a Seafaring Nation," 27.

¹⁰ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 115 and 134-135,

¹¹ Donald Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de eeuw* (Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1985), 219.

had their own duties to be sure, but these were closely intertwined with those of their husbands as they stood together for the betterment of the family.¹²

A fourth factor in the independence of Dutch women was the legal system. A civil law system based on Roman law and Dutch custom, it afforded women some rights that others in the rest of Europe did not have, perhaps as a result of the above-mentioned cultural circumstances. Although society was patriarchal and women could generally not hold political office or serve in official functions in the courts or church, Dutch women could act independently if they so desired. Court records for the colonies, for example, frequently feature women, both married and single. Unmarried women were essentially unrestricted in their legal activities, yet married women owed obedience to their guardian husbands, at least in theory. Legal scholar Hugo Grotius wrote at length about the status of married women and acknowledged that although husbands had much control over their wives' lives and property, there were many exceptions to the husband's control and many ways for women to circumvent it. Moreover, Grotius' view on women and the law was unique in a sense that he saw the subjugation of women not as a part of natural law, but as a result of cultural customs. Chapter one of this dissertation gives an in-depth overview of women and the law in the Netherlands and expands on this issue.

Finally, the Dutch empire in the seventeenth century was commercial and less based on settlement than the English and the Spanish. Moreover, over half the population lived in towns, in Holland as much as 61 percent.¹³ And even though there was a difference between town and countryside, in the Netherlands this was less pronounced than in neighboring countries. City

¹² For a characterization of the Dutch housewife see: Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 375-480. Schama's work is somewhat controversial because he argues that the alleged emphasis on cleanliness by the Dutch housewife was inextricably linked to morality. See also: Els Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes: Een cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse huisvrouw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2009); Harry Peeters, Lène Dresen-Coenders, and Ton Brandenburg, eds., *Vijf Eeuwen Gezinsleven: Liefde, huwelijk en opvoeding in Nederland* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1988).

¹³ Kloek, "De Vrouw," 256.

living was inherently commercial, forcing urban residents to participate in economic exchanges. The majority of women in this society lived in cities where they saw the hustle and bustle of ships loading and unloading cargo on a daily basis. They heard of successes beyond their wildest imagination, and of the death and loss that were also associated with the trade. They experienced the prosperity the trade brought when they saw merchants build their exquisite homes along the canals of Amsterdam, Delft, and other cities. The Dutch would trade in almost any commodity that brought a profit and as part of this commercial empire many women were well schooled about the trade. Dutch men partnered with female family members because they were needed, educated in the trade and financial affairs, and because they were capable and trustworthy. Many a Dutchman trusted female family members to take care of business matters in his absence. Single women, and some married women as well, engaged in the trade on their own as they sought to get their piece of the proverbial pie.

Lest we forget, in spite of the reputation of Dutch women as independent and bold, women in the Dutch Atlantic world were there because they followed men into the territories of the Dutch West India Company, and their activities around the Atlantic were closely tied to those of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Most often a woman was defined in relation to the men in her life as “daughter of”, “wife of”, or “widow of”. As soon as a Dutch woman married, she was no longer independent in the eyes of the law, but fell under the guardianship of her husband, with some notable exceptions. It is all the more remarkable, then, that so many women carved out spaces for themselves, started and maintained businesses in their own right, and claimed their stakes in the “new world”, all while raising new generations of colonists.

In spite of the many comments on Dutch women from seventeenth century observers, in contemporary literature Dutch women and their contributions to the Atlantic World are strangely absent. In Henk den Heijer's seminal work on the West India Company, he does not mention women once.¹⁴ Jonathan Israel in his voluminous tome on the Dutch Republic mentions women only in a few places, and another expansive work on the Dutch economy devotes only one short section to the economic position of women and children, carelessly lumping them together.¹⁵

Perhaps the lack of women in these larger works is not surprising. Women's history, quick to take root in the English-speaking world, had a slow start in the Netherlands. While historians such as Joan Wallach Scott, Louise Tilly, Olwen Hufton, and Merry Wiesner wrote important works on women in the early modern period, Dutch historians lagged behind.¹⁶ Not until the 1970s did historians in the Netherlands begin to write women's history at all, and then mostly about well-known women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Only in the 1990s did historians start to publish monographs on women with studies by Lotte van der Pol on prostitutes in Amsterdam, Els Kloek's studies on women in the household, Ariadne Schmidt's work on widows and their economic position in the early modern period in the Dutch Republic, and Manon van der Heijden's work on marriage in the Netherlands.¹⁷ To date, publications on

¹⁴ Henk den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1994).

¹⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*; Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Hufton, *The Prospect Before her*; Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Merry Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

¹⁷ Lotte van der Pol, *De Burger en de Hoer: Prostitutie in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003); Els Kloek, *Wie hij zij, man of wijf: Vrouwengeschiedenis en de vroegmoderne tijd: Drie Leidse studies* (Amsterdam: Verloren, 1990); Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes* (2009); Ariadne Schmidt, *Overleven na de dood: Weduwen in Leiden in de gouden eeuw* (Amsterdam: Prometheus/Bert Bakker, 2001); Manon van der Heijden, *Huwelijk in Holland: Stedelijke rechtspraak en kerkelijke tucht, 1550-1700* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1998).

women in the Dutch Atlantic world are missing, although these women certainly had an impact on the development of the Atlantic world.¹⁸

There is a growing body of literature on women and the role of gender in the American colonies, but again, Dutch women seem to be missing from that picture as well, as historians have focused predominantly on the experience of the English. Yet the experience of Dutch women was different. For example, in her influential book *Good Wives*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich suggests that the role of English colonial women as “deputy husbands” (wives who acted on behalf of the family in the absence of a husband) was limited because of a lack of education. English girls learned to read, but not write while boys learned to write and cipher.¹⁹ Most Dutch girls, however, learned to write, and they certainly learned arithmetic. Ulrich writes, “Few women were prepared either by education or by experience to become “independent women of affairs”.”²⁰ This certainly did not hold true for the Dutch.

In the last few decades, historians have developed a body of literature on gender and empire, with a particular focus on British imperial history, which examines the role of women within empire.²¹ At the same time, historians have also begun to examine the effects of empire and gender roles on indigenous and migrant women. For the Dutch, this literature focuses exclusively on the East Indies and in particular on Indonesia during the late nineteenth and early

¹⁸ One notable exception is Natalie Zemon Davis who included Maria Sybilla Merian in *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 44.

²⁰ Ulrich, 50.

²¹ See: Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720-1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003).

twentieth centuries.²² The colonial Atlantic world was only a small part of the expanding Dutch empire during the seventeenth century, and thus it is perhaps no surprise that historians have focused their attention on the part of the empire that is perceived as most important to the development of the Dutch Republic.

A useful concept in the context of this dissertation is the doctrine of separate spheres. Historian Mary Beth Norton describes the participation of Anglo-American women in the public sphere, roughly as defined by Jürgen Habermas, and posits that around the end of the seventeenth century a change took place in the male view of women's participation in public life.²³ Whereas before the end of the seventeenth century class was a determinate factor in said participation, during the eighteenth century gender became the overriding concern, excluding women from the public sphere, even those of the upper or ruling classes. Women were now relegated to the home and child rearing, while men were excluded from the realm of the home and occupied the public sphere instead. This doctrine of separate spheres is not new and has also been noted and defined by many other historians.²⁴ Norton, though, gives us a new chronological

²² Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002); Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

²³ Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

Feminist critics have rightly noted that Habermas portrayed the early modern public sphere as masculine, even though women participated in it. Norton terms the public sphere that included women the “informal public”, which she describes as “community opinion about people and topics of general concern, including but not limited to politics”. Norton, 183-184.

²⁴ For a discussion of the development of the doctrine of separate spheres see: Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9-39.

turning point, which she argues came with the end of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689 in England.

Dutch women, however, extended their influence well beyond the private sphere and did so for a much longer time than Norton argues for British women. Habermas' definition of the public sphere separated it from the state, which was decentralized in the Dutch Republic and fairly weak. But if we use an expanded definition of the concept to include not only places where public discourse took place, such as taverns and inns, but also the marketplace where commercial exchange took place, trade organizations, and the courts where women took their private matters public, Dutch women were certainly active in the public sphere all around the Atlantic world. This stands in stark contrast to the ideal of the Dutch woman, promulgated by seventeenth century writers, as a bourgeois housewife who managed her household well and who tended to her domestic duties.²⁵

The discussion about the participation of women in the public sphere has often included discussions of class boundaries. Women of the upper classes could participate in the public sphere as they took precedence over men of the lower classes, whereas middle and lower class women were excluded. For the Dutch, however, women of all classes could be part of the public sphere, perhaps because class boundaries were not as sharply drawn in the Republic -which lacked a court culture- as they were in surrounding monarchies. Many women from the upper and merchant class were part of the public sphere, to be sure, but women from the lower classes in the colonies also had access to spaces where public discourse took place.

²⁵ For male ideas on the ideal housewife see the emblem books of Jacob Cats. His writing was very popular during the seventeenth century. Relevant works by Cats include: *Houwelyck* (Middelburg: Wed. J.P. van de Venne, 1625) and *Proteus ofte Minne-beelden verandert in sinne-beelden* (Rotterdam: Pieter van Waesberge, 1627).

With some notable exceptions, many historians still have a tendency to write about colonial women as caretakers and childrearers. Women who fell outside of the ideal of the model wife were reviled in their day and many historians continue to write about women's lives in terms of "the good wife" who was concerned with motherhood, child rearing, and women's work without acknowledging ambition, strive, a competitive spirit, and colonial women's will to succeed. If men were ambitious and entered the colonies in order to increase their wealth, so were women. If men were willing to fight for the colonies, so were women. If men sought adventure and the thrill of the unknown, so did women. For this dissertation, I have sought out the many stories of women who helped shape the early modern Atlantic World. They were ambitious, adventurous, and had a fighting spirit. It was not difficult to find them because they were everywhere. The lives of women such as Elisabeth Samson, Margariet Hardenbroeck, Apollonia van der Meulen, and their counterparts are a testament to the resilience, determination, and ingenuity of the women who helped shape the Atlantic world.

Because women were officially subjugated to men and because most married women did not have an independent place in society, it is difficult, though, to retrace their steps and unearth the details of their lives. Although women in the Dutch Republic were generally well educated when compared to contemporaries, very few letters and diaries remain that were written by the hand of women. Only when they were involved in unusual circumstances, such as in the case of crimes, do we find women in the written record. As a result, the historian can only find those who went through official channels to achieve a goal, or those who were subject to criminal law or civil law. It is quite possible to have lived a long life and never have been in touch with the authorities. These women are invisible to us and their stories have been lost to history.

In addition to the problem of the scarceness of sources on women, many of the records of the West India Company were lost over the years. Entire bundles of paper were sold for scrap, while some records burned and were lost in other ways. Moreover, many archival sources, especially those from Suriname and the Caribbean, have been badly damaged by the ravages of time and the elements in the tropics. Of what was left of the Dutch records in New Netherland after the English administration took over, much was burned in a fire. As a result, much of the archival record on the Dutch colonies in the Americas and the trading stations in Africa has been lost or is too damaged to consult. Moreover, when records do exist, such as court minutes for instance, they may not be complete and only cover certain years.

For this dissertation, I looked mainly at court records, notarial records (where available), and church records. A surprising number of women made an appearance in the courts, especially in New Netherland, where they sued and were sued often. Notarial records yielded prenuptial contracts, wills, and powers of attorney to and from women. Women also appeared frequently in the records of the Dutch Reformed Church. Ministers and so-called “comforters of the sick”, who were the only church officials where there was no minister, accompanied Dutch colonization efforts and settlements everywhere. They generally kept records of the life of the church community and reported to church authorities in the Netherlands about their trials and tribulations. Women played an important part in the life of the church and many congregations had more female than male members.

The individual stories of the women who crossed the Atlantic and of those who lived their lives on the borders of this ocean are buried in miles of archival material in both the Netherlands and in the United States. The National Archives in The Hague hold the largest collection of records of the Dutch West India Company, both the first and the second company.

This archive is also the repository of many other collections that may be consulted by the Atlantic historian such as the archives of Dutch islands in the Caribbean, the archives of Suriname, and the archives of Brazil. Other archives consulted in the Netherlands were those of the Municipal Archive in Amsterdam, especially the notarial and church archives, and the archives of Zeeland in Middelburg.

The New York State Archives hold most of the documents relating to New Netherland and these have been translated over the years in volumes accessible at several libraries. Van Laer and Fernow did the earliest translations. Especially Fernow's translations, however, have been called into question repeatedly, and where they have been used in this dissertation they were checked against the original archival text. The modern translations by Janny Venema, Charles Gehring, and those by Van Laer are generally accepted as accurate and only when there were doubts did I check those.

The Dutch Atlantic World

When discussing the Dutch Atlantic World, one runs into a few problems almost immediately. Who were the Dutch, and what was the "Dutch Atlantic World"? The Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries consisted of a loose confederation of provinces under the governing body of the States General. The people who inhabited the provinces, however, were not all born Dutch. Especially in the seventeenth century, many people from the areas around the Netherlands, mainly from Denmark, the German states, and Switzerland, came to the Republic to find work. Moreover, many who were persecuted elsewhere in Europe by the Roman Catholic inquisition found refuge in Holland. Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, Huguenots from France, and some Puritans from England peopled the cities of

the Netherlands, enhancing the early modern Dutch economy with their capital, expertise in trade, and their knowledge of languages. As a result, the cities of the Dutch Republic were polyglot spaces where various languages were spoken and several religions were practiced. For the purpose of this dissertation, all who lived under the government of the Dutch Republic, including those in the Dutch colonies, are called “Dutch”, although their roots may have been elsewhere.

The areas where the West India Company was active define the Dutch Atlantic world for this dissertation. In 1621, the company received a charter from the States General and, as it was modeled on the VOC, was split into five divisions, which had their own directors.²⁶ A board of nineteen men called the *Heeren XIX* led the overall company. It was given a monopoly on trade in the Americas, including the right of colonizing and of maintaining armed forces. While merchants initially formed the WIC to bring home profits from the lucrative trade in West Africa and the Americas, the States General also recognized the company’s potential as a weapon against enemy Spain. Using the WIC to counter Spanish power had several advantages for the Dutch. The country’s struggle against Spain would be fought on foreign soil, not in the Netherlands itself, and the company could undermine the domination of the Spanish while greatly increasing the wealth of the Republic. For these reasons, the States General generously supported the initiative.²⁷

Despite some resounding successes, mainly the result of privateering, the company suffered ongoing financial losses. The WIC found it difficult to attract settlers to its colonies and

²⁶ The divisions or chambers were as follows: Amsterdam, Zeeland, Maze (Rotterdam), Noorderkwartier (Hoorn), and Stad en Lande (Groningen). The first two were preeminent among the chambers and contributed the bulk of the directors and capital. The directors of the chambers were chosen from the largest shareholders. To become a director one had to own company stock valued at a minimum of 6,000 (Amsterdam) or 4,000 (other chambers) guilders. Although some women owned large amounts of stock, no woman was ever appointed.

²⁷ For a history of the Dutch West India Company see: Den Heijer.

thus the territories were difficult to defend as the many wars took their toll on the company's finances. In addition, after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which recognized the hard-fought independence of the Dutch Republic, privateering and raiding Spanish ships was no longer an option. After a failed attempt to fuse the WIC with the VOC, the company was no longer able to fulfill its financial obligations and was finally dissolved in 1674.

There was, however, still a demand for trade with Africa and the Americas, mostly in slaves. The second WIC, chartered in 1675, continued the trade within the same areas as its predecessor and consisted of the same chambers, yet the board was reduced. The new, leaner company focused mostly on West Africa and the slave trade. However, the company's monopoly of the West African trade was partly dismantled around 1730, which brought an even greater focus on, and intensity of, the slave trade. During the 1730s the slave trade was very profitable for the company, but because of ever increasing competition from the British and the French, in addition to poor decisions made by local directors in Africa, the slave trade began to lose its viability for the company. Around 1740 its decline began and it was eventually dissolved in 1791.

At some time during the seventeenth century the Dutch empire stretched from Indonesia to Brazil, to New York. The colonies changed hands often, though, and it is perhaps illustrative to give an overview of the Dutch colonies around the Atlantic Ocean (see fig. 1), as well as a description of the most important colonies in the context of this dissertation.

New Netherland

After Henry Hudson's 1609 Dutch-ordered exploration of the region we now call New York, some small outposts were founded mainly for the trading of furs (beaver) with Native Americans. The rights to these trading posts were taken over by the WIC in its charter of 1621.²⁸

Some individual *patroons*, or landholders, were relatively successful in establishing farming communities in the area, but the company did not fare as well. The precarious financial situation of the company, and mismanagement by the first directors-general Wouter van Twiller (1633-1637) and Willem Kieft (1637-1645), contributed to the WIC's problems. They were responsible for the ever-worsening relations with the surrounding Native Americans, which led to a war in 1643, lasting four years. The result of Kieft's eight years as director-general was the massacre of a thousand Native Americans and settlers.

The States General in the Netherlands recognized the problems and demanded the West India Company do something about the deteriorating situation in North America. The company responded by appointing Petrus Stuyvesant as the new director-general. Stuyvesant was dictatorial and unpopular but stabilized the situation. He reorganized affairs in the colony and put a new council in place. Stuyvesant also entered into negotiations with the English, who had been slowly encroaching on territory that the Dutch considered theirs. In 1650, they formally established a border between New England and New Netherland. The Connecticut River valley and the east end of Long Island were ceded to the English.

²⁸ There is a more substantial body of literature on New Netherland than on the other Dutch colonies. Currently, the best available general history of New Netherland is a study by Dutch scholar Jaap Jacobs entitled *Een Zegeerijk Gewest: Nieuw-Nederland in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Prometheus/Bert Bakker, 1999), translated into English under the title *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). An abbreviated version appeared in paperback with the title *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). Older studies include: Oliver A. Rink, *Holland on the Hudson: An Economic and Social History of Dutch New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), and Michael Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

In its early days, the colony had few settlers, who were spread out over the territory of New Netherland in order to claim as much of it as possible. The initial group of settlers consisted of some thirty, mostly Flemish, families. The colony grew slowly until the period between 1655 and 1664 when the population increased to about nine thousand. At the time of the English takeover in 1664, New Netherland boasted two cities, New Amsterdam (now New York City), which at the time was reminiscent of a Dutch town with much of the architecture copied from the fatherland, and Beverwijck (Albany), in addition to some 20 villages with between 125 and 200 inhabitants each.²⁹ As in many of the other Dutch territories, the colony was populated with soldiers, some sailors, farmers, servants, and merchants. In New Netherland, many merchants were found who traded in fur. The nature of the colony was very different from those in South America because the climate was not suited to large-scale plantation development or dependent on the slave trade, as for example was Curaçao. However, there was a significant slave population in New Netherland. Many slaves were owned by the WIC, which used slave labor to build much of the infrastructure, rather than by individuals. Chapter four explores this topic more in depth.

Dutch Brazil

Under Portuguese rule Brazil became a wealthy sugar-producing colony and much of this sugar was refined in the Netherlands. In 1630, the Dutch chose Pernambuco as their point of entry to Brazil and succeeded in taking the region. As the seat of government the Dutch chose Recife.³⁰

²⁹ Jacobs, *Een Zegenrijk Gewest*, 69.

³⁰ For the Dutch in Brazil see: C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); José Antonio Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië: De invloed van de Hollandse bezetting op het leven en de cultuur in*

When planning to take the colony, the Dutch were of the opinion that the Portuguese subjects would readily submit to their authority because of the heavy taxation imposed upon them by the Spanish crown. Moreover, the colony consisted for a large part of *marranos*, or Christianized Jews, who were often disadvantaged and threatened under Iberian rule. Many of them had close relationships with Jews in Amsterdam who had fled the inquisition, and under the Dutch they could freely exercise their religion, which is why many readily accepted Dutch rule. The predicted cooperation of the Portuguese population, however, did not come to fruition. On the contrary, during their entire tenure in Brazil, the Dutch would continue to struggle against the Portuguese. Constant reinforcements were needed to secure the colony, and from the inception of the colony through 1647 more than 22,000 men were sent from the Netherlands to hold on to power in the region.³¹ The need for such great numbers of men was not only a result of warfare, however. Disease and malnutrition also caused large numbers of deaths.

In spite of many setbacks, the Dutch were able to expand their power in the region by 1632. Around the same time, the free population of the colony expanded because the three-year contracts with the WIC expired of the men who arrived with the initial forces. Many of these men chose to stay in Brazil as the numbers of immigrants increased as well, including women and children. During this period, employees of the WIC, mainly its civil servants and officers, also had their wives and children come to the colony to join them. The result of these various

Noord-Brazilië, 1624-1654 (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2001; Portuguese edition 1947); Frans Leonard Schalkwijk, *The Reformed Church in Dutch Brazil, 1630-1654* (Boekencentrum, 1998); Wim Klooster, *The Dutch in the Americas, 1600-1800* (Providence, RI: The John Carter Brown Library, 1997), 25-40; Den Heijer, 35-55. For a Portuguese perspective on the Dutch in Brazil see: João Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History, 1500-1800*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, originally published in 1907).

³¹ Source: Den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 35-54. Den Heijer writes that the initial force consisted of 7,000 men. In 1630 the WIC sent an additional 2,000; in 1638 an unknown number of soldiers; in 1640 2,500 men; in 1646 2,000 men; in February 1647 2,400 men, and finally in December of 1647 6,000 men.

streams of immigrants was a population explosion in Recife and housing, as well as food, was hard to come by.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many people lived in Dutch Brazil. A census taken in 1636 reveals that some 1,800 men lived in Recife and nearby forts who were “servants” of the WIC, which was responsible for feeding them, but this census did not include women and children. Other sources reveal that ten years later some 8,000 people depended on help from the Netherlands to stay alive.³² The Dutch were slow to adapt to local circumstances and climate as they built houses in the Dutch style with imported brick, and were dependent on food from their home country as well.

In 1637, Johan Maurits, Count of Nassau-Siegen, arrived as governor in charge of the colony. A competent leader, Maurits urged the WIC to send more colonists to secure the area from the Portuguese settlers. As was the case with the other Dutch Atlantic colonies, however, it was difficult to attract sufficient numbers of colonists. The colony attracted mostly merchants but not the much-needed farmers. As a result, Recife was predominantly populated by *marranos* and Dutch merchants, while the Portuguese continued to dominate the sugar production outside town.

Johan Maurits, nicknamed the “humanist prince,” left his mark on the area. A lover of art, poetry, science, and architecture, Maurits set out to develop Recife and the area around it into an enlightenment paradise. He persuaded some forty-six scholars, scientists, artists, and craftsmen to come to Brazil, including well-known painters Albert Eckhout, Frans Post, and poet/scholar Caspar van Baerle. Maurits had an astronomical observatory built and founded the first botanical

³² Gonsalves de Mello, 63. In 1646 among the free people in Recife were 855 men, 452 women, and 397 children. The term “free” refers to people who were not employed by the WIC but were independent settlers. These included men whose contracts with the WIC had expired and who remained in the colony. The number of men and women in Mauritsstad was 685. Itamaracá, Paraiba, and Rio Grande had 510 free men, women, and children. The WIC in Brazil employed 4,433 men and had under its umbrella another 500 women and children of its employees. The Portuguese population and slaves numbered another 4,871 people. The estimated total population of Dutch Brazil in 1646 was 12,703 people. (Source: Gonsalves de Mello, 114/115, note 122)

and zoological garden in the “new world”. Since Recife was not large enough to support Maurits’ vision of a city, he built his own. Mauritsstad, on the island Antonio Vaz just outside Recife, boasted a population of six thousand within just a few years. It had sewers and public gardens, and was connected by bridge to Recife. Johan Maurits’ city planners included a section for the poor containing inexpensive housing built with wood. Visitors described it as an elegant and fine town in which many *burghers* were building respectable houses.³³

In spite of Johan Maurits’ love of refinement, the area had a reputation for hedonistic living. With the immigrants from Europe, many prostitutes made their way to the colony, some dressed as men to make the passage to Brazil as soldiers or sailors. Syphilis and gonorrhea ran rampant and the Dutch clergy was at a loss as to how to stop the drunkenness and sexual licentiousness. Travelers to Dutch Brazil noted that they found themselves in the liveliest brothel in the world where English, French, Germans, Native Americans, Jews, Africans, mulattos, and Portuguese freely mingled. A minister wrote, “In one word, it seems to me that I’m in Sodom, or worse... The excesses cannot be expressed in words.”³⁴

The WIC had also had its problems with excesses because they were no longer willing and able to subsidize Johan Maurits’ endeavor in South America. They called him back to Holland because of his extravagant expenses. His love of art, architecture and opulence had cost the company a large sum of money and Johan Maurits eventually left Brazil in 1644. The following year saw a revolt by the Portuguese population and by the end of the year it was not safe for the Dutch to leave Recife. In 1653 King João IV gave orders to retake Recife and the Portuguese succeeded in doing so in 1654.

³³ Klooster, 28.

³⁴ Soler quoted in Gonsalves de Mello, 97-98. “En un mot, il me semble que je suis dans Sodome, et encore pis... L’excès ne se peut représenter par parolles.”

Curaçao and the Caribbean

The colonization of the Caribbean islands by the Spanish ended when England, France and the Netherlands began the establishment of colonies in the area almost simultaneously in 1625. Twenty-five years later, most of the Caribbean islands had been taken over by Western Europeans except for Dominica, St. Vincent, and Santa Lucia, where the native population was not rooted out.

Until the 20th century, only Curaçao was developed among the southern Caribbean Dutch islands, while Aruba and Bonaire were only sparsely populated.³⁵ Curaçao was not suited to large-scale agriculture but instead developed as a trading center for the Dutch in the Caribbean, figuring prominently in the slave trade. Until the end of the 18th century, both Curaçao and St. Eustatius would be important trade hubs for the Dutch between Africa, Europe and the Americas. St. Eustatius fulfilled this role for the Leeward Islands, to which St. Maarten, which had a limited number of plantations, and Saba also belonged. Saba was barely developed by the Dutch, but St. Eustatius played an important role in the trade to North America, while Curaçao focused on South America and the Caribbean islands.³⁶

The Dutch took the island of Curaçao from the Spanish in the spring of 1634 when the West India Company sent a fleet of six ships to the Caribbean. It was no great feat because the island was sparsely populated. It had only ten to twelve adult Spanish whites living there and of the indigenous population some claim that only about fifty people were left.³⁷ The first director

³⁵ Bonaire was primarily used for salt production, while Aruba became a ranch for horse breeding. Salt production was particularly important to the Dutch fishing industry, which relied on salt as a conservation product.

³⁶ For the Dutch in the Caribbean see: Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast, 1580-1680* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971).

³⁷ The estimates of the indigenous population of the island run from 50 to 400 people. See: Johannes Hartog, *Curaçao: Van Kolonie tot Autonomie* (Aruba: D.J. de Wit, 1961), 1:49.

of Curaçao, Johan van Walbeek, who brought his wife Catharina along, occupied the island with about 400 men. As elsewhere in the Dutch sphere of influence, the soldiers were a mixed lot of Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Englishmen, Scots, Welsh and some Germans.

Curaçao did not develop as a “typical” Caribbean plantation colony because of its poor soil and arid climate, even though some sugar, indigo, and tobacco were grown on the island. Instead, the Dutch saw the island as an excellent maritime supply point in the area. From 1634 until 1648, the year of the Peace of Westphalia, the Dutch used the island primarily as a naval base for their vessels to and from their colonies in North and South America. Initially, its strategic location near the coast of Venezuela also made it a successful base for attacks on the South American mainland and for plundering the surrounding Spanish islands, but the island would later develop as a center for the Dutch slave trade with the Spanish colonies, after the WIC was awarded an important share in the Spanish *asiento* trade.³⁸ After 1674, with the founding of the so-called “second” WIC, the States General in the Netherlands opened the port of Curaçao for trade by all nations. Owing to this status, the island developed as one of the most important centers for trade in the Caribbean. This proved very lucrative for the WIC, which taxed import and export of goods in addition to *hoofdgelden* (head tax) on inhabitants of the island, including slaves. The slave trade would remain the single most important trade on the island until about 1730.³⁹

As a result of its status as a free harbor and because of the fact that the island was a base for all kinds of illegal activity, the population was highly transient and diverse. After the loss of Brazil to the Portuguese in 1654, many Dutch Brazilians came to the island together with a large

³⁸ Den Heijer, 93.

³⁹ Den Heijer, 147.

group of Jews from Dutch Brazil. Because of the fact that the island first belonged to Spain, and perhaps because of its proximity to the largely Spanish mainland of South America, most of the population was Roman Catholic. Papiamentu was the language of choice, although Dutch was the official language.⁴⁰ The white population was small but fairly stable, in contrast to Suriname, which had a larger, more transient population of whites. The population of freedmen was fairly high with about 5,000 by the end of the 18th century. Mulattoes on the island were usually uneducated, spoke Papiamentu and most became Catholic, likely because of the Spanish influence in the region and because the Dutch did not attempt to convert the non-Dutch population of the island to Protestantism. Historian Allison Blakely argues that this occurred because of the presence of more white women who maintained the legitimacy of the white line, despite the fact that there were mixed race children in Curaçao. This again stands in sharp contrast to the situation in Suriname where a mulatto elite developed because sons of common-law mixed marriages were often sent to the Netherlands to be educated, and they returned to work in governmental positions in the colony.⁴¹

Suriname

In exchange for New Netherland, the English ceded the plantation colony of Suriname to the Dutch in 1667. Generally seen as a good bargain at the time because of its plantation economy, the colony was administered by the province of Zeeland until the WIC took over in 1682. The company did not have a monopoly on the trade between the Republic and Suriname; only the slave trade was exclusively in the hands of the WIC. Because the company could not

⁴⁰ Papiamentu is still spoken and taught on the islands Curaçao and Aruba. It is a creole language made up of several African languages, Portuguese, Spanish, and some English, Dutch, and Caribbean languages.

⁴¹ Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 30.

benefit from the general trade it lost money, resulting in the establishment of the Sociëteit van Suriname. This company was roughly divided in three parts, with one third in the hands of the city of Amsterdam, one third belonging to the WIC, and the last third controlled by wealthy *burgher* Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck.⁴²

In spite of a chronic lack of labor, the colony's sugar plantations were profitable and their numbers increased from about fifty in 1683 to two hundred in 1713.⁴³ Although sugar was the most abundant cash crop, planters also grew tobacco, cacao, and wood. During the early period, most Dutch people lived on the plantations, where they expected to raise their families and put down roots. Life on the plantation was isolated, though. In early Suriname, there were virtually no roads so transportation had to take place over water. The distances between plantations were very large, so most people had to travel much further to reach a church or meeting place than they were used to in the Netherlands. The transportation issue was even further complicated by the fact that one had to wait for the tides.⁴⁴

It is perhaps no surprise then that during the early decades of the eighteenth century, many planters' families decided to make the port city of Paramaribo their place of residence while an overseer (*directeur*) managed the everyday affairs on the plantation. There were political reasons for this move to the city as well. In Paramaribo one was close to the harbor where one could easily negotiate with captains and super cargoes of incoming ships, and one was close to the political center of the colony where a planter could influence decision-making. Many

⁴² For a general history of Suriname see: Hans Buddingh, *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1995); G.W. van der Meiden, *Betwist bestuur: Een eeuw strijd om de macht in Suriname, 1651-1753* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1987); J.W.C. Ort, *Surinaams Verhaal: Vestiging van de Hervormde Kerk in Suriname, 1667-1800* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2000). See also: Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 88-92 and 137-147; Klooster, *The Dutch in the Americas*, 61-70.

⁴³ Den Heijer, 140.

⁴⁴ Ort, 44.

planters did not stay in Suriname, however, but left the colony after they made their fortunes. They then left their plantations under the care of a *directeur* who had *blankofficieren* (white officers) who worked under them and who ran the daily operations of the plantation. And last but not least, many planters feared for their safety on the plantations with frequent slave uprisings and a maroon community nearby.⁴⁵

The inhabitants of Paramaribo adhered to what came to be known as “colonial habits,” meaning that the usual social customs were not followed as in *patria*. The hot climate, paired with white feelings of superiority of those unaccustomed to wealth, led to a “loose” style of living that also abounded elsewhere in the Caribbean. Suriname was essentially a frontier society where social cohesion was lacking and which had a sense of impermanence because of the frequent migration of the planter population.

As was typical for plantation colonies all around the Atlantic, the slave population greatly outnumbered the white population. Tax registers for 1684 reveal that only 352 white men were living in Suriname at the time, and just 127 white women. Together, they had about 90 children under the age of 12. The Jewish population was smaller but quite significant given the size of the overall community. 105 Jewish men and 58 women lived in the colony at the time and most of them had come from Dutch Brazil.⁴⁶ When contrasted with the slave population of 4,281 slaves in 1683, the number of whites was very small. The following years saw an explosion of the slave population while white population growth remained stagnant for about two decades.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Buddingh, *Geschiedenis van Suriname*.

⁴⁶ Ort, 63.

⁴⁷ In 1706, the colony had 747 whites and a population of 9,988 slaves. In 1728, the population figures were 969 whites and 16,547 slaves. Source: Cynthia McLeod, *Elisabeth Samson: Een vrije zwarte vrouw in het 18e eeuwse Suriname* (Utrecht: Vakgroep Culturele Antropologie, 1993.) Buddingh, however, has very different numbers for the white population. He claims Suriname had a white population of 2,133 in 1738 (page 108), only ten years after McLeod's population figure of 969. More research is needed in this area.

The planters continually complained of the lack of labor. Although slaves were imported from Africa on a regular basis, the company's solution was to send convicted criminals to the colony as white servants so they could be made into honest and upright citizens through hard work. If they fulfilled their term of service, they could look forward to eventually owning their own piece of land. Crimps pressed the poor into going overseas and between 1686 and 1690 many orphans from Amsterdam were sent to Suriname as well.⁴⁸ What resulted in the Netherlands was an image of the colony as a disease-ridden place for undesirables, which was not fit for white women. There was, however, a great number of black women, the majority of whom were slaves. White men took black women as concubines and in spite of an official prohibition to do so, did not suffer any consequences for their behavior.

During the early days of Dutch rule, in 1686, governor Van Sommelsdijck published a plantation *regelement* (set of rules), which was meant to protect slaves from cruelty. According to these rules, it was forbidden to treat slaves harshly, to murder them, or to give them the death sentence. Offending slave owners and overseers were seldom punished, however, and since slaves in the colony could not testify on their own behalf, unlike in other Dutch colonies, it was almost impossible to prosecute plantation owners who mistreated their slaves. Perhaps as a result, contemporaries judged the slave system in Suriname to be particularly harsh.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Budding, *Geschiedenis van Suriname*.

⁴⁹ Particularly well known in this context is Stedman's *Narrative* in which he described the brutality of the Surinamese slave system. John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Year Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796).

West Africa

Portugal was first in establishing a foothold in Africa. According to the treaty of Tordesillas, the entire African continent belonged to the Portuguese sphere of influence. Shortly after their arrival, the Portuguese started establishing forts on the west coast to facilitate the trade in gold, ivory, and, starting in the mid-15th century, slaves. São Paulo de Loanda became the most important trading station for slaves. The Dutch, French, and English burst onto the scene in the second half of the sixteenth century to take part in the lucrative trade, and the Dutch established small forts along the coast. In 1624, the WIC took over these possessions and became the most prominent trade organization in West Africa.⁵⁰ In a 1637 skirmish with the Portuguese, the Dutch conquered the Elmina Fort, which had long been an important trading center for the region with traders coming from several inland areas and from places as far as the kingdom of Benin.⁵¹ This expanded their influence even further.

Chama and Boutry followed in 1640, and in 1642 the WIC took Axim. In May of 1641, a contingent of 3,000 men under the command of the one-legged Pieter Corneliszoon Jol took Angola from the Portuguese. The Portuguese slave trading center of Loanda was crucial to the fight against Spain and Portugal. By taking Loanda, the Dutch were now in control of the flow of slaves that supplied the Iberian colonies in the Americas. To stave off attacks from the Portuguese, some five to six hundred soldiers were stationed permanently in Angola. By the mid-1640s the Dutch were in full control of the Guinea coast and their empire was now at its pinnacle.

⁵⁰ For the Dutch in Africa see: Henk den Heijer, *Expeditie naar de Goudkust: Het Journaal van Jan Dircksz Lam over de Nederlandse Aanval op Elmina, 1624-1626* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2006); Klaas Ratelband, *Nederlanders in West Afrika: Angola, Kongo en São Tomé, 1600-1650* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2000).

⁵¹ The Portuguese named Elmina's castle São Jorge da Mina. The Dutch referred to it as Elmina and I will use that name. The castle is situated in present day Ghana.

Dutch Colonies in the Atlantic World	
Demerara (Guyana)	1611 - 1796
Essequibo (Guyana)	1616 - 1814
New Netherland (New York)	1621 - 1664, 1673-1674
Tobago	1628 - 1678 (not permanently settled), changed hands frequently (33 times) until 1814
Brazil	1630 - 1654
St. Maarten	1631 (1633-1648 Spain) - present. The Treaty of Concordia divided the island between the French and the Dutch in 1648.
Curaçao	1634 - present
St. Eustatius	1636 (Zeeland), 1678 WIC - present
Aruba	1636 - present
Bonaire	1636 - present
Saba	1640 - present (numerous changes until 1816)
Suriname	1667 - 1975
<i>Territories in Africa</i>	
Luanda (Angola)	1640 - 1648
Ghana	1548 Komenda Kormantsi until 1874 1617 Olini Castle 1642 - 1872, fort at Axim

Fig. 1

CHAPTER ONE

The Legal Position of Dutch Women in the 17th and 18th Centuries

The relative independence of Dutch women and the fact that most stood with their husbands, instead of behind them, made them distinct from many other early modern women in Europe, at least in the eyes of their contemporaries. This difference was expressed in the legal system that afforded women some rights that their counterparts in the rest of Europe did not have. Astonishingly, though, there are no studies that specifically address the legal situation of Dutch women during the early modern period, although there are some works on European history that address the legal situation of women in a European context without stressing the unique circumstances in the Netherlands.¹

It is difficult to pinpoint a single reason for this difference in legal systems, but it may have to do with the earliest history of women in the Netherlands and with the particular social, political, and religious situation in the Republic described earlier. Dutch law was a complex mix of Roman law, common law, Germanic custom, and Judeo-Christian beliefs. Judicial regulations that are of particular interest to this study are those concerning marriage, and laws that were specific to the ability of women to trade and do business. Anglo-Saxon England, often seen as normative in the early modern Atlantic world by historians who study colonial America and early modern England, presented a different situation from that of the continent because it was not as thoroughly Romanized and its legal system was based on common law. Other colonizing

¹ I would like to thank Els Kloek for alerting me to this fact and for encouraging me to write this chapter.

Some of the works on the legal situation of women in early modern Europe include: Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially chapter 1 – “Ideas and Laws Regarding Women”. On England: Nancy E. Wright, Margaret W. Ferguson, and A.R. Buck, eds., *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993); Susan Staves, *Married Women’s Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

entities from the continent, in particular Spain and France, also presented a different situation from that of the Netherlands because of the overwhelming influence of the Roman Catholic Church on law and custom.

In discussing law in society there is an important caveat that needs to be mentioned. Although laws were commonly backed by force or customary procedures that declared alternative actions invalid, it is also true that at times, a considerable chasm existed between the letter of the law and its practice. This is especially true for laws in the colonies where the economic, demographic, and religious framework of reference varied from that of Europe itself. Moreover, within the Dutch Republic various provinces, and even municipalities within these provinces, had differing regulations concerning the guardianship of women and marital law. Yet, in spite of these qualifications, the law is an important part of this study as a basic framework of reference, a “baseline” of sorts to explore the discrepancies between the Netherlands and its Atlantic colonies. Legal systems in the various European regions provide one of the principal discourses through which early modern people conceptualized their world, and notions of gender embodied in the law placed direct restrictions on the way in which individual people lived out their lives.

It is problematic to establish exactly when and where the system of Roman-Dutch law was implemented. Although the system was many centuries in the making, R.W. Lee saw as the starting point for the implementation of this legal system the year 1473, which saw the establishment of the Great Council at Mechlin.² The council had jurisdiction over all the provinces of the Netherlands, at the time subjected to the Duke of Burgundy, and it survived

² R.W. Lee, *An Introduction to Roman-Dutch Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 3.

until 1809 when it was replaced by Napoleonic codes. After the Napoleonic era, these laws were replaced by modern codes, but in some of the former Dutch territories such as South Africa and Sri Lanka, the Roman-Dutch civil codes still exist.

The degree of reception of the Roman-Dutch law system varied among the provinces, which makes it difficult to determine exactly what the legal position was of women in the Netherlands and in the Dutch colonies overseas. During the centuries before 1809, the year of the issuance of the *Burgerlijk Wetboek*, a legal code for the kingdom of the Netherlands during the Napoleonic era, there was no unity in the law codes of the Netherlands. Instead, each province and city had its own rules and laws, and even the nomenclature of legal concepts was not uniform among the various regions of what now composes the Netherlands.³ For instance, Roman-Dutch law was most fully implemented in Friesland, but least so in the provinces of Drenthe and Overijssel. And although in principle the major trading companies, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Dutch West India Company (WIC), carried these laws to the colonies, the laws of the mother country would not apply unless they were expressly declared to be applicable. The governing bodies of these companies sometimes deviated from the laws of the provinces, issuing their own ordinances and placards.⁴ Especially in matters relating to commerce, the States-General in essence left legislative decisions to the VOC and WIC, which ruled the colonies through their appointed governors who could adapt the judicial system to their own needs based on the local situation. In each case, however, the laws were clearly based on the laws and customs of the fatherland.

³ Dianne Meulmeester-Jacobs, “‘Op Saaken van Houlijken’ Het wereldlijk recht inzake verloving en huwelijk,” in *Kent, en versint eer dat je mint: vrijen en trouwen, 1500-1800*, ed. Petra van Boheemen (Zwolle: Waanders B.V., 1989), 121-137.

⁴ Plakkaten were rules and ordinances issued by governmental entities. For some of the colonies so-called “plakkaatboeken” survive, which are collections of said rules and ordinances.

Hugo Grotius

The man who was most influential in the development of the legal system in the Netherlands during the early seventeenth century was eminent legal scholar Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). His ideas about women and their position within the legal system were nuanced and at some important points differed from those of his contemporaries. He expressed his ideas as part of a book he wrote entitled *Inleydinge tot de Hollantsche Rechtsgeleertheit*, written during his imprisonment at Loevenstein Castle from 1619 till 1621.⁵ Written in the vernacular, the work meant to instruct Grotius' sons in the laws of Holland. This important work, first published in 1631, became the foundation of Roman-Dutch jurisprudence. Grotius' Roman-Dutch law incorporated Germanic customs in the original sources of Roman law, and adapted the principles of Roman law to life in the seventeenth century.

Women played an important part in the life of Grotius. His wife, in particular, was a strong inventive woman who fought for her family and managed its affairs well. In 1617, Grotius was arrested because he chose sides in a theological debate that raged within the Netherlands, and that led to the incarceration and death of many a Dutchman.⁶ While imprisoned at Loevenstein Castle, Grotius' wife, Maria van Reigersbergh, whom he married in 1608, was allowed to live with him and was given two rooms for herself and their children. During his confinement, which was intended to be lifelong, Grotius was allowed to study, and he regularly received books, which were carried to and from the castle in a large trunk. Seeing her husband wither away at the prison, Maria van Reigersbergh conceived of a plan to let her husband escape.

⁵ Translated into English with a transcript of the original Dutch text. Hugo Grotius, *The Jurisprudence of Holland*, Text, Translation, and Notes by R.W. Lee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926). For this chapter I have used the Dutch text because it is less gendered than it would appear in the English translation.

⁶ For the struggle between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants see: Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29-37; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 421-477.

She had him practice fitting himself in the book trunk. His successful escape took place on March 22, 1621. While his wife misled the guards by pretending to be sick and in the curtain-covered bed with Grotius, her husband made his escape in the trunk, accompanied by Van Reigersbergh's maid Elsje van Houweninge. A female merchant and friend of Van Reigersbergh, Johanna Daetselaar-van Erp helped him with clothes, provisions, and money for his journey. Dressed in the clothes of a commoner, Grotius traveled to Paris where his family eventually joined him. After his escape, Grotius composed a poem in Latin, *Silva ad Thuanum*, in which he explains that his wife conceived of and orchestrated his spectacular escape. In later writings he would refer to her as courageous, dedicated, and faithful.⁷

Maria van Reigersbergh was from The Hague and had no formal, classical education, but since Grotius could not travel to Holland after his escape, she handled the couple's affairs. She tried to have their confiscated goods returned to them and she negotiated with publishers to have Grotius' work published. Through her contacts and visits to The Hague, Van Reigersbergh found a publisher for Grotius' *Jurisprudence of Holland*, Machteld Aelbrechts van Leuninghen, widow of Hillebrant Jacobse van Wou. Aelbrechts van Leuninghen was a printer's daughter who had married the son of the mayor of The Hague who took over the business from his father-in-law. In 1618, after 17 years of marriage, Jacobse van Wou had fallen ill and his wife had taken over the business with the permission of the States General and the States of Holland. After her husband's death, between January and July of 1622 she fully took on the business and continued to be an official printer for the States General and the states of Holland. They printed all official publications of the States between 1625 and 1650. In 1631, Aelbrechts van Leuninghen circulated the first edition of Grotius' *Inleydinge tot de Hollantsche Rechtsgeleertheit* or, *Jurisprudence of*

⁷ For a short overview of the events in her life see: Henk Nellen, "Maria van Reigersbergh," in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse Geschiedenis*, Els Kloek, ed. (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 293-298.

Holland. It proved to be a very successful endeavor, for later that year she would print another four runs. Because she did not obtain an *octrooi* or patent from the States, other printers soon followed with their own editions of the work. Aelbrechts van Leuninghen then printed a new and improved, but cheaper edition using Gothic type which required less space on a page.⁸

Despite the obvious importance of women in his life, Grotius, like his contemporaries, saw men as leaders and heads of households, while females were to be subordinate to men. The natural order had given parents power over their children and husbands power over their wives, but it did not define how far this power should extend in individual cases. Although a number of theories for the subjugation of women were advanced by seventeenth century scholars based solely on religious beliefs, Grotius gave legitimacy to his ideas by using the ancient theory of the “humors”.⁹ This medical theory, based on the work of Galen, sought to explain sexual dimorphism by pointing to physiology. In this view, also referred to as the single-sex model, women were of a cold and humid temperament. Their “sperm producing” organs were colder and softer than those of a man and as a result their bodies were defined in terms of impotence and deficiency.¹⁰ Grotius described women as follows: “The female sex, as colder and more humid, has less ability in business, demanding intellect, than the male sex, so the male sex was born to have some authority over women.”¹¹ He qualified his statement with “some” authority, indicating that the power of husbands over wives was not absolute.

⁸ For the life of Machtelt Aelbrechts van Leuninghen see: J.E. van Someren Brand, “De Familie van Leuninghen, een boekdrukkersgeslacht,” *Algemeen Nederlandsch Familieblad* 6 (1889): 109, 110. For a short biographical sketch see: Maarten Hell, “Weduwe van Wouw,” in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse Geschiedenis*, Els Kloek, ed. (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 281-282.

⁹ Haks, 150.

¹⁰ See: Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 25-62.

¹¹ Haks, 150.

Yet Grotius held a more unorthodox view of the sexes as well. A well-known proponent of natural law, he asserted that “all law is natural or positive” and that natural law is inborn or present at birth and intuitive, imposed on all by God.¹² Since the coming of Christ, he argued, divine law is that which was revealed to man by God, through the figure of Christ. Human law, according to Grotius, was either law common to all nations, or civil law that originated from the will of the Sovereign of a civil community. The latter would be specific to one people. And here he used a very interesting example. He wrote, “[civil law] is either peculiar to one people, as the power of husbands over their wives is pretty well peculiar to Holland, or common either to all or to most peoples”.¹³ Here, Grotius suggested that the power of men (husbands) over women (wives) was not a part of natural law, but rather a result of civil law and custom. He also believed it was not common to all people. Thus, according to Grotius, the subordinate position of women was not a result of natural law imposed by God, but a result of custom. Elsewhere he stated that all matters left undefined by the law of nature had been defined by civil law in a variety of ways in different countries.¹⁴

¹² Grotius, 4.

Grotius’ view contrasted sharply with those of other natural law proponents. John Locke, for example, rested his assertion that women were inferior to men on the Bible and Eve’s sin. He went to great lengths to show that the subjugation of women did not lie in law, but rather in nature. See: Lorene M.G. Clark, “Women and John Locke: Or, Who Owns the Apples in the Garden of Eden?,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 7, no. 4 (1977): 699-724.

For more on natural law and women see, among others: L.D. Derksen, *Dialogues on Women: Images of Women in the History of Philosophy* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996); Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Richard Allen Chapman, “Leviathan Writ Small: Thomas Hobbes on the Family,” *The American Political Science Review* 69, no. 1 (1975): 76-90. For Grotius and gender see: Helen M. Kinsella, “Gendering Grotius: Sex and Sex Difference in the Laws of War,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 2 (2006): 161-191. In her article, Kinsella focuses on the text *On the Law of War and Peace* by Grotius and traces it through 20th century treaties on the laws of war such as the Geneva Protocol of 1949. She used an English translation of the text, however, and notes that her observations come from the translation. As I explain in note 17, Grotius’ language is not as gendered as it appears in translation.

¹³ Grotius, 9. Original text: “Dese [burger-wet] is of eens volcks eigen, gelijk de macht der mannen over haer huisvrouwen dien van Holland genoegaem eigen is, ofte gemeen, ‘t zy met allen, ‘t zy met meest alle volcken.”

¹⁴ Grotius, 18.

In a section on the legal condition of persons, Grotius asserted that regulations concerning the relations between people indeed were shaped by civil law but that these customs have their origin in natural law. It is significant that here he referred to the relationship between children and parents, stating that “children owe their parents honor, gratitude and submission,” and not to the male/female relationship.¹⁵ Moreover, he wrote that nothing but confusion would result if “all men were to rule over all women” in spite of the fact that men should, by nature, have some authority over women because of the aforementioned theory on the sexes.¹⁶ He also explicitly stated that all people are created equal by birth but that, not without reason, one man has been subjected to the direction and authority of another.¹⁷ Here Grotius referred to the relationship not between the sexes, but to the hierarchical structure prevalent in early modern European society in general.

He also asserted that private law was less important than public law, and that the former informs people about the rights of persons with regard to material possessions and the means of defending and pursuing said possessions. Most of the laws concerning marriage between the sexes dealt with the having and holding of property by individuals and by entire families. Women generally fell under the guardianship of their husbands, but still had ways of safeguarding their property.

¹⁵ Grotius, 14.

¹⁶ Grotius, 16.

¹⁷ Grotius, 18. Grotius’ language is not as gendered as it appears in the translation. In the English translation the word “*mensch*” is translated as “men.” This, however, does not do justice to the author’s intent. The word “*mensch*” includes people from both sexes. Similarly, in the translation of this sentence the word “man” can mean a person of both sexes when one takes into consideration that the original word used was “*mensch*.” In much of the translation the word “person” should have been used instead of “man.” As a legal scholar, Grotius expressed himself with great accuracy.

Guardianship and marriage

In *The Jurisprudence of Holland* Grotius stated in the section on marriage that all married women were under the guardianship of their husbands and noted that “in times of old” all women in the Netherlands were legally of limited capacity, even if they were unmarried and of the age of majority or widowed.¹⁸ From this practice, according to Grotius, the custom remained that a woman chose a guardian if she wished to perform a legal act or alienate property. Yet at the time of his writing he contended that even that practice was disappearing, so that what was done by an unmarried woman of full age was perfectly valid.¹⁹

Married women, however, were *sub tutela* and owed obedience to their guardian husbands. Guardianship of the husband over the wife entailed, among other things, that a married woman had no legal standing in court and thus could not appear as either a plaintiff or a defendant in legal cases. As a result of the fact that she was not a *persona standi in iudicio* (a person who has a right to sue or defend action in court), judgments against her were of no effect, unless her husband represented her. In certain places, though, executions of such judgments could be deferred until a woman’s status changed.²⁰ Yet, as we will see, many married and single women frequented the courts in the Dutch colonies.

Guardianship of minors was common but there were some differences in the guardianship of husbands over their wives, versus the guardianship of minors. A husband was *ipso jure* (by operation of law) guardian of his wife and needed no confirmation from a magistrate as a

¹⁸ Here Grotius likely means the Middle Ages. He refers to the feudal era as “times of old” in several places. Jurist Fockema Andreae noted that these changes in guardianship took place slowly but that women could act without a guardian as early as the thirteenth century. See: S.J. Fockema Andreae, *Bijdragen tot de Nederlandsche Rechtsgeschiedenis* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1888), 56.

¹⁹ Grotius, 22.

²⁰ This was the case in Utrecht. See: R.W. Lee, *Commentary*, vol. 2 of *The Jurisprudence of Holland by Hugo Grotius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 26.

guardian of a child did. Moreover, a husband did not need to make an inventory of his wife's possessions or account for his administration of her goods. He was not liable for criminal negligence in dealing with her property and could, if he so desired, use up his wife's money with impunity. In this sense, a minor had more judicial protection than a married woman because the minor's interests were protected by the court or by the local orphan chamber. The power of the husband over a wife was not limitless, however. Husbands were not to mistreat or cause bodily harm to their wives. If either spouse misbehaved, the community got involved in the private sphere and imposed either fines or harsher punishments.

From the concept of guardianship, it seems to follow that husbands in the Netherlands had, as Grotius writes, "a very great control" over their wives' lives and property.²¹ A married woman could not buy or sell property, and she could not incur debts. In the important provinces of Holland and West Friesland, marriage automatically produced community of goods between the husband and wife, except when restricted by a prenuptial contract. Furthermore, spouses were liable for the other's debts, including debts acquired before marriage.²² Yet in practice the control of husbands over wives was not as simple as Grotius indicates here. In fact, there were important restrictions and exceptions concerning the control of husbands over their wives. In most cases, these exceptions seem to firmly contradict the description of women's "fragilities, infirmities and imbecilities" by some jurists and other leading thinkers.²³

The first, and perhaps most important exception in the context of this dissertation, is the exception concerning women traders. The husband's control over a wife was qualified by Grotius' explanation that "in times of old" women could engage in small businesses such as

²¹ Grotius, 28.

²² Grotius, 122.

²³ Meulmeester-Jacobs, 136.

selling small quantities of homemade bread or beer, or the sale of yarn or linen. Later, even after “the commerce and wealth of the country” increased, women retained these rights, and in the early seventeenth century, married women who were engaged in public trade or commerce could represent themselves in matters pertaining to their business. “A husband cannot prevent this, unless at the same time he forbids his wife by legal process to exercise this function, and causes the same to be proclaimed,” Grotius wrote.²⁴

Here he explained and established the role of the *openbare koopvrouw*, a female public merchant whose business might range from a small local enterprise selling baked goods to a global venture in trade, as we shall see later. Grotius almost certainly did not conceive of large businesses run by women, but rather of small enterprises comparable to those of a bread maker, beer brewer, and cloth merchant, all common and typically female vocations. The legal concern here, of course, was with debt. A wife was liable for debts incurred by her husband, even if he was deceased, but husbands were also liable for the debts contracted by wives. If a woman was not a public *koopvrouw*, then her husband had limited liability because ostensibly, he did not know of her activities and did not give his consent. In such cases, his obligation was limited.²⁵ If his wife was a *koopvrouw*, however, then he publicly agreed to have her engage in business, and thus he was liable for her debts since she traded openly and with his consent. There is evidence, though, that even if a husband did not give his consent, or if he withdrew his consent, his wife could appeal to the court in some jurisdictions and ask a judge to overturn her husband’s objections if she felt these were unreasonable.²⁶ In that case, the judicial authorities could take

²⁴ Grotius, 30. For the regulations concerning the *koopvrouw* see also: Willem van der Muelen, *Costumen, Usantien, Policien ende Styl van Procederen, der Stadt, Jurisdiction ende Vryheid van Utrecht* (Utrecht, 1709), 154-159.

²⁵ Meulmeester-Jacobs, 137.

²⁶ J.C. Overvoorde, *De Ontwikkeling van den Rechtstoestand der Vrouw volgens het Germaansche en Oud-Nederlandsche Recht* (Rotterdam: Drukkerij J. de Jong, 1891), 133.

over the role of the husband and give a woman the status of *koopvrouw*. These cases were likely few and far between because in general the legal authorities did not challenge or upset the patriarchal order.

Furthermore, a female trader could and often did appear in court to represent herself, either as a plaintiff or a defendant. There was some discussion on this point among legal scholars in the seventeenth century. Women traders could represent themselves in courts in South Holland, The Hague and Gouda, but apparently, in Amsterdam they could only appear in court in the absence of a husband. Yet, seventeenth century legal scholar Johannes Voetius wrote, “A married woman who publicly carries on a trade either together with her husband, or on her own account by his consent, in matters relating to the trade may contract, buy, sell, and, if necessary, borrow money. This is the general rule in the Netherlands.”²⁷ Voetius seemed to take this to be the law of the land, and not just of some of the provinces. Other women for whom the status of *koopvrouw* was similar were tavern- and innkeepers.

A second exception to the rule that women could not represent themselves in court was in the case of the prolonged absence of a husband. This could commonly be the case if a husband was a soldier, a sailor, or an employee in a variety of capacities for the WIC or VOC. It was also common in the Dutch colonies where men were sometimes absent for months or years at a time, or where people sometimes lost track of one another. Banishment was another cause of prolonged absence and although the marriage bond was not dissolved in such cases, a woman could then be considered a *persona standi* (one who can sue and defend action) before the court. This was especially imperative if there was peril in the delay of a decision by the court, as in the arrest of a debtor for instance.

²⁷ Johannes Voet quoted in: Lee, *Commentary*, 28. Johannes Voet of Utrecht (1647-1713) was a legal scholar also known as Voetius.

Thirdly, a married woman could make contracts for the maintenance of the family, even if her husband had no prior knowledge of such contract. At times, the court even intervened in cases where a husband refused to ratify a contract entered into by his wife for her advantage. Since the household was seen as a woman's province, she was presumed to have the implicit consent of her husband in affairs relating to that household. One would assume that matters such as purchasing food and clothing for household members would be the purview of women, and that a wife did not need the expressed consent of her husband to purchase or barter for such items.

The guardianship of husbands over wives could further be limited by marriage contracts and by the separation of goods.²⁸ Prenuptial contracts restricted men's rights to a woman's property before the wedding took place, while with a separation of goods the restrictions went into effect after the wedding took place. Meulmeester-Jacobs notes that a community of goods whereby all property, real and moveable, was held in common by the couple was most common in the cities of Holland and Zeeland but that in rural areas immovable goods such as land and real estate did not revert to the community of property between the spouses. The absence of feudal relationships and the burgeoning of commerce caused an increased importance of movable goods in the cities and in the colonies.²⁹

If a couple married with a prenuptial contract, the woman could stipulate that her future husband would not have any rights to her property. In general, the prenuptial contract was composed not because a woman wanted to strengthen her position in marriage - although this

²⁸ Grotius, 30. The presence of a marriage contract, indicated by the term *huwelickse voorwaarden* in Dutch, had its antecedent in Roman law where a marriage could be contracted in *manus* or *sin manus*, i.e. with or without a prenuptial contract.

²⁹ Meulmeester-Jacobs, 132. Even community of goods did not always mean that all goods in a marriage fell under that subject. There were many locally administered regulations that varied widely. Yet in most marriages, some goods fell outside the community.

happened as well - but rather to benefit the family of the bride who wanted to ascertain that their interests were protected.³⁰ To that effect, interested relatives had to be present at the signing of the contract. Family members who were interested parties but who were not involved in the contractual procedures could challenge the validity of the contract.³¹ In the states of Holland and in Utrecht the contracts had to be published, although in Holland this did not always happen. Prenuptial contracts were more common among women who were widowed and had children, and among men who had children from a previous marriage. Especially in the Dutch colonies where women often married several times and blended families were no rare occurrence, prenuptial contracts were common. In such cases, the inheritance of the children from a former husband was at stake and a prenuptial contract was crucial. Another issue often addressed by a prenuptial contract was the matter of care for the longest surviving spouse. Typically, a surviving spouse was granted essential household goods before the separation of the estate.³²

Furthermore, if a husband tried to use, sell, or encumber a woman's property, she could prohibit him from doing so by legal process. In addition, she could specify in this process that she would not be liable for her husband's debts, provided that she also did not share in his profits accrued during the marriage. These prenuptial contracts were not to upset the patriarchal order, however. A wife had to show the proper respect due to a husband and, for instance, could not sue her husband or have someone sue him on her behalf.³³ Grotius was of the opinion that a husband could not touch his wife's property with a prenuptial contract in place, yet other jurists disagreed with him on this point on the grounds that such a clause in a prenuptial contract was inconsistent

³⁰ Meulmeester-Jacobs, 133.

³¹ A.S. de Blécourt, *Kort begrip van het oud-vaderlands burgerlijk recht* (Groningen: Wolters, 1967), 77.

³² Meulmeester-Jacobs, 134.

³³ Lee, *Commentary*, 30.

with the respect due to a husband. The courts, in general, upheld the validity of Grotius' view. Husbands could, however, still administer their wives' property since women were not expected to enter into business transactions themselves, and a husband could not be sued for mismanagement of his wife's property. Yet there were exceptions to this rule as well. If a husband acted in bad faith and sold his wife's property below value, for instance, or if a wife stipulated in the prenuptial contract that her property was to be returned to her intact, then a woman had some recourse if her husband managed her affairs badly.³⁴

A wife could use a prenuptial contract to keep her property out of the community of goods, but so could her husband. Upon dissolution of the marriage, a wife would then get back the property that she brought into the marriage and she was liable for half of the debt accrued during the marriage. If there was no debt, she received half of the profit. Many contracts stipulated that upon her husband's death or in case of divorce, a woman could choose to share in the possible profits made during the marriage, or she could leave the marriage with her own fortune excluding losses or profits. Complications arising from debt and dissolution of marriage in individual cases will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Yet even if a couple married without a contract, a wife could still ask the court for a separation of goods if she noticed that her husband mismanaged the joint finances.³⁵ If she feared she would be reduced to poverty because of her husband's financial actions or inactions, she could ask the court to prohibit her husband from administering her property, thus freeing her from liability for his debts.³⁶ In cases where husbands had gambling problems or where they

³⁴ Lee, *Commentary*, 121.

³⁵ Marriage without a contract is called *in gemeenschap van goederen* (with a community of goods) and is still common in the Netherlands, as is *huwelijkse voorwaarden* (marriage with a prenuptial contract).

³⁶ Grotius, 30.

were alcoholics squandering the household's money, one might see this provision enacted. It was not easy, though, for a wife to obtain such a separation of goods. Community members would have to stand with her and the family's problems, in most instances, would have to be well known. If she was granted a separation of goods, she was also free from her husband's guardianship from the moment the separation was a fact because he would no longer be considered competent to take care of the family's affairs.

Another area in which a married woman was not bound by the guardianship of her husband was in the making of her last will and testament. Although it was common for couples to do this together, and we certainly have examples of this from the colonies, she did not require her husband's consent for this. Finally, if a husband was unfit and required a guardian himself, such as in cases of mental illness or addiction, his guardianship over his wife came to an end.

Dissolution of Marriage

In case of dissolution of marriage through the death of one of the spouses, the joint estate was divided equally with fifty percent going to the surviving spouse, and the other fifty percent going to the heirs of the deceased, most commonly the children. Grotius argued that the surviving spouse was always entitled to the control "which belongs to a parent by the law of nature and of God".³⁷ A mother had a great say in her children's education and choice of marriage partners and was never removed from this control, unless she was unfit. In most cases the heirs were the couple's children, or, in more complicated cases, children of former marriages. Generally, the inheritance was divided equally among the children, regardless of sex. The rule of primogeniture, common in England for instance, did not exist in the Netherlands. If there were

³⁷ Grotius, 36.

children who had received goods or money from their parents during the marriage, they had to return these to the estate so that an equitable division could be made. By far the most common cause for the dissolution of the marriage bond was the death of one of the spouses, and in this case the surviving spouse was not liable for the debts contracted by a spouse before the marriage, but he or she was liable for debt acquired during the marriage. Creditors could sue the husband and his heirs, or the wife and her heirs for their half of the debt owed.

Yet a woman could quite literally walk away from the joint debt by renouncing all interest in the joint property. As a result of her status as what amounted to a ward of her husband, a married woman was assumed to be innocent and ignorant of all affairs concerning business and finances. To escape the creditors, all she had to do was dress in everyday clothing and walk out of her house in front of her husband's casket. By not walking behind his casket in mourning clothes she symbolically disassociated herself from her spouse and their property. If she renounced her interest she would be left with nothing, but this may have been a solution for wives whose husbands owed more than the joint property was worth.³⁸ A man could have incurred debt without her consent and against her will. The consequence of this was that creditors could not take what was acquired after her renunciation of the community property.³⁹ Men, as administrators and heads of household, did not have this option. When a wife died, her husband was fully responsible for her actions and outstanding debt.

Female traders also did not have this option of walking away from debt, for they had handled their own and perhaps joint affairs with the consent of their husbands. As a consequence

³⁸ Lee states in his *Commentary* that the clothes of the spouses and jewels given by the husband to the wife were treated as separate property, so she may have been able to keep those. Lee, *Commentary*, 99.

³⁹ Lee, *Commentary*, 106.

of their involvement in the public arena, they could not claim innocence and were liable for their husbands' debts.⁴⁰

Among the Dutch, divorce was only possible in cases of adultery and malicious desertion. Grotius mentioned only adultery as a cause for divorce, but Simon Groenewegen van der Made mentioned in a writing from 1644 that malicious desertion was also cause.⁴¹ It is perhaps interesting to note that for the English, divorce was only possible if a wife could prove, in addition to adultery or malicious desertion, that she was abused by her husband, and even then she would still have to prove he used excessive force, violence and cruelty. Dutch law, however, allowed for many grounds of judicial separation other than *nimia saevitia* (excessively severe punishment).⁴² Among the ancient Romans there were many grounds for separation but after the rise of the Catholic Church and the installation of the popes, marriage became a sacrament and only adultery and malicious desertion remained as legitimate reasons for divorce. In the Netherlands, however, a separation of bed and board could be agreed upon if the situation in a certain household was untenable or, as mentioned earlier, if a woman accused her husband of mismanagement of their finances. In 1656, after the death of Grotius, the States General enacted a provision for women who were abandoned by their husbands. If a woman believed her husband to be dead, she could remarry with the consent of the court, but had to wait five years to do so.⁴³

⁴⁰ Grotius, 22. Grotius spoke specifically of the public role of a female trader when he wrote, “[vrouwen die] met de koopmanschappen in ‘t verkoopen ofte koopen openbarelick hebben onderwonden.” He noted here that these women dealt publicly with buying and selling. As such, their activities would be known in the community and creditors could hold them responsible for their actions.

⁴¹ Cited in: De Blécourt, 56. Simon Groenewegen van der Made was a jurist from Delft (1613-1652).

⁴² Dodwell F. Browne, *Separatio Quoad Mensam et Thorum et Communionem Bonorum according to Roman-Dutch Law* (Colombo: Ceylon Examiner Press, 1902), 5.

⁴³ Lee, *Commentary*, 11.

In cases of a separation of bed and board, which did not dissolve the marriage bond and thus did not leave the parties free to remarry, Grotius did not make a distinction between the guilty and the innocent party. Other jurists such as Simon van Leeuwen, however, took a different view and argued that a guilty wife did not deserve alimony from her husband.⁴⁴ Through her unseemly or adulterous behavior she forfeited not only the rights to monetary assistance from her husband, but also the right to raise her children. Johannes Voetius agreed with Van Leeuwen but also argued the opposite point: that an innocent wife who could not provide for herself should receive alimony from her guilty husband, even if she did not bring a dowry to the marriage. After a legal separation had taken place, the wife was considered unmarried and thus had full authority over her own body and property. Spouses could also separate by mutual consent but in that case the legal marriage and all of its financial consequences remained intact.⁴⁵

After the Reformation, the involvement of the church in Dutch marriage decreased, yet was not eliminated altogether. One important difference that was instituted after the Reformation was that because of the new freedom of conscience, couples could choose to have a secular wedding officiated by a civil servant. This option was particularly attractive to Catholics who saw their churches banned but refused to marry in the Dutch Reformed church.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Simon van Leeuwen is credited with inventing the term “Roman-Dutch law” for he used it as a subtitle of his work *Paratitula Juris Novissimi*, which was first published in 1652 at Leiden. Later, in 1664, he would publish a better-known work entitled simply *Roman Dutch law*. Like Grotius, Van Leeuwen wrote a descriptive treatise about the laws of Holland.

Simon van Leeuwen, *Het Rooms-Hollands regt, waar in de Roomse wetten met het huyendaagse Neerlands regt ... over een gebragt werden* (Amsterdam: Hendrik en Dirk Boom, 1678).

⁴⁵ Lee, *Commentary*, 21.

⁴⁶ Van Apeldoorn, 85.

Judicial matters pertaining to marriage became the purview of individual states and the States General after the Reformation, but the Dutch Reformed church took on the role of state church and fulfilled many functions having to do with marriage and the dissolution of marriage, not only for those who were in fact Dutch Reformed, but also for members of different confessions. Couples could have their banns published by the church, or by the local legal official. The province of Zeeland, however, was the exception to the rule in that one could not be married there by a magistrate, and thus members of other religions had no options beyond having their wedding presided over by a member of the Dutch Reformed clergy. Again, as with the legal codes in the Netherlands, church rules involving marriage also varied among different regions and cities, but generally the Dutch Reformed church adhered to the precepts of the New Testament, arguing that the Old Testament rules applied only to the Jewish people. L.J. van Apeldoorn states that although during the time of the Dutch Republic it was often argued that canon law was no longer in effect, in reality it played a large role because it was never explicitly abolished by the Dutch Reformed government and canon law had become entrenched in the mind of most.⁴⁷ While this is undoubtedly true for the early republic, later law codes such as those described by Grotius moved further away from canon law.

The wedding itself had to be a public affair with witnesses, for the Dutch Reformed Church did not allow secret marriages. Unlike in the Catholic Church, the primary goal of marriage in the Dutch Reformed view was not the having of children. As a result, sexual relations as a part of the ritual to confirm the marriage were no longer necessary. The marriage was valid after the ceremony had taken place in front of witnesses, whether the marriage was consummated or not. Moreover, the wedding ceremony at the church became a blessing of the

⁴⁷ Van Apeldoorn, 74.

marriage that took place, but did not have a judicial meaning. Marriage was no longer a sacrament but became the purview of state and government. The church had to be authorized by the state to perform duties belonging to the state or worldly power.

Local ordinances and customs varied widely. In Friesland in 1586 the state issued an ordinance that from then on those who intended to marry had to “solemnize” their union before the community of God after the publishing of banns. Yet during the entire time of the Republic, two intended spouses could simply say their vows to each other and the marriage would be valid. This did not have to happen in public, nor did banns have to be read. If a couple wanted to separate and the marriage had not been consummated, the civil authorities looked the other way and allowed a separation by not intervening. If, however, the marriage had been confirmed in church, the bond could not be broken.⁴⁸ In Zeeland one could only wed in church and marriages could not be performed by a magistrate. All had to marry in the Dutch Reformed church, regardless of their own confessions. As always, there were exceptions, for some cities in Zeeland allowed a magistrate to marry a couple, and Baptists and Lutherans could marry in their own communities. Unlike in Friesland, where the guardianship of the husband started after consummation of the marriage, guardianship started after the confirmation of the marriage in church.⁴⁹ In Utrecht, as in Holland, it was possible to choose between a magistrate and a member of the clergy.

⁴⁸ Van Apeldoorn, 103.

⁴⁹ Van Apeldoorn, 107.

Comparisons

Clearly, ideas about gender were expressed in the judicial system and these had a far-reaching effect on relationships between the sexes and on society at large. For this study about women in the Atlantic World it is important to see how different the ideas in various countries were. Although in much of Europe ideas about the subjugation of women were similar, there were some variations in the legal systems between several countries that reflected the construction of gender in the respective societies.

England

The English legal system was based on common law, canon law and customary law. As was the case in the Netherlands, English law varied by region. Customary law, for instance, was administered by manorial courts and could vary by locality.

English jurist Sir William Blackstone wrote, “By marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything, and she is therefore called in our law a *feme covert*.”⁵⁰ More recently, a noted English historian has argued that husband and wife were one person before the law, and that person was the husband.⁵¹ In essence, under the common law doctrine of coverture, the legal person of a woman was merged with that of her husband who held the rights to both her body and her property. Once a woman was married, she could not enter into contracts, she could not appear in court, and she had no rights

⁵⁰ Sir William Blackstone, cited in: Bonnie G. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History since 1700* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 21. Under coverture, a woman’s rights were subsumed by those of her husband upon marriage.

The spelling of *feme covert* is English and based on medieval Anglo-Norman terms.

⁵¹ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 136.

whatsoever. She went from her father's protection to that of her husband. By entering into marriage, women lost their right to choose where they lived, their right to property, their right to make a will, their right to inherit, and, unlike in the Netherlands, their surnames. In English society, only widows were free from subjection to coverture.⁵²

Perhaps the best known compilation of laws regarding women's legal rights and obligations in England during the early modern period is *The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights*, written in 1632. Unlike Grotius' work, which was based on natural law, this compilation started with Biblical scripture, in particular Genesis and Eve's sin, as the law's ultimate authority. By basing laws concerning women on Eve's sin, English jurists justified the subjugation of women by tying it to divine providence. Grotius had a more humanistic view and, as we saw before, did not believe that God decreed the subjugation of women. This fundamental difference in views about women may not have led to radical differences in the view of women in society, but there were certainly nuances that were expressed both in law and in civil society.

As in the Netherlands, marriage could not be entered into by force but required the consent of both partners. Unlike in the Netherlands, however, consummation of the marriage was necessary to have a valid union. In this view, as in the Roman Catholic view, the principal goal of a union between the two partners was procreation. And since couples entered into marriage voluntarily, having made a free choice to be joined together before God, divorce was not possible. Unlike under Dutch civil law, where there were multiple reasons for divorce, in England there were only two causes that warranted divorce. The first was adultery by one or both spouses, and the second was infertility. Since the primary goal for marriage was procreation,

⁵² For the legal rights of women in early modern England see also: Nancy E. Wright, Margaret W. Ferguson, and A.R. Buck, eds., *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993).

impotence or failure to produce a child meant the marriage did not fulfill its purpose. Divorce could only take place, though, if infertility originated before the marriage. In cases where impotence came later during the course of a couple's life together, then it was seen as an unfortunate occurrence similar to illness and thus no grounds for divorce. Finally, if a husband's whereabouts were not certain and he had essentially abandoned his wife, a woman could not remarry under common law.⁵³

In most cases, the only dissolution of marriage in England was death. If a wife predeceased her husband, he held her property. If, however, he predeceased her, she would get her dower, usually given to the husband to be his during coverture. Under common law, dower was understood as a life interest in property – usually one third – to which a widow was entitled as long as she lived. After that, the property would go to her husband's heir.⁵⁴

The anonymous author of *The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights* extolled the virtues of widowhood and questioned remarriage. Like a man, a widow could manage her own property, she could sell crops growing on her dower land, and she could make her own will. Only in widowhood was an English woman a legal person and mistress of her own body and property. He concluded that although the laws of the land “may seem somewhat rigorous towards wives,” they usually managed well because they handled their husbands well. In fact, he seemed to think that women could be so enticing and beguiling that their husbands would usually give them whatever they wanted, even though the law gave them nothing.⁵⁵

⁵³ “The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights, 1638,” in *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640*, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 38.

⁵⁴ Klein, 43.

⁵⁵ Klein, 51.

As in the Netherlands, English couples, especially those of the upper and upper middle classed, could also enter into marriage with a prenuptial contract. In these cases, couples were responsible for each other's debts. Even with a contract, however, an English husband had full rights over his wife's estate. In England, theoretical and legal doctrines were insistent upon the subordination of women to men in general, and their husbands in particular. This is not to say that women did not at times dominate their husbands. All of this is less clear in the middle and lower classes where families formed an economic unit. Women in these classes worked, but this did not mean that their economic activity gave them higher status or greater power.

France

France's laws were based on a combination of Roman law, canon law, and custom. The Catholic Church had a profound influence on society, but between 1556 and 1639 significant reforms took place in legislation concerning marriage to strengthen the authority of the state and family over young people. Agreement between the state and the family reordered regulation concerning marriage through new laws that superseded canon law. These new laws ensured that families could make alliances they deemed in their interest, while, unlike among the English and the Dutch, they were less concerned with the consent and free will of the couple entering into the married state.⁵⁶

In order to increase family authority, the age of majority was increased from twenty to thirty for men, and from 17 to 25 for women. Parental or family consent was always needed for a marriage between minors, and for women this held even if they were widowed before the age of 25. Furthermore, marriages contracted before a notary were no longer valid and a priest needed

⁵⁶ Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France", *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 9-11.

to be present to perform the ceremony, in addition to four witnesses. Banns were read three times and the couple needed written proof of parental consent, social status, and parental domicile. All these increasing restrictions were meant to prevent so-called “secret” or “clandestine” marriages in which parents and the community were not involved. The penalties for non-compliance with the marriage laws were confiscation of assets already received and disinheritance. An edict of 1681 extended these laws to French subjects in the colonies.⁵⁷

Divorce was not possible in the Catholic Church but in some cases couples did have the option to separate before a judge. A voluntary separation of bed and board was an option for couples who no longer wanted to live together, but their assets in such cases would not be divided and they were not free to remarry. The husband remained in control of the joint property and the wife was at his mercy, since his consent was needed if she wanted to access money or property. A separation of bed and board affected a couple’s property but it was very difficult for a woman to get this separation. She could bring suit but she would have to prove that her husband had committed a multitude of sins because men were rarely charged with adultery, which in other regions was a valid reason for divorce. Very few women were successful in charging their husbands, but some were able to legally withdraw their dowries.⁵⁸

If a husband brought suit, however, he was almost always successful and if a woman was charged and found guilty of adultery or debauchery she was punished severely. Husbands could negotiate reconciliation within two years of the infraction, or they could set the terms of punishment, usually confinement. A woman had very few options in such cases. Either she reconciled with her husband, or he put her away in a convent or prison. Female incarceration for

⁵⁷ Hanley, 11.

⁵⁸ Hanley, 13.

adultery could last anywhere from five to ten years, or life. The type of convent the husband chose dictated the quality of life of a woman, but most families sought to avoid public prisons. Yet, a particularly vengeful husband could lock his wife up in a prison or Spartan convent.

For women in early modern France, the rules of *coverture* were strict and fathers and husbands could lock up those who rebelled or disobeyed. Families frequently used a *lettre de cachet*, a document that could be obtained from royal officials authorizing the imprisonment - without trial - of a family member who was seen as a source of dishonor. These documents were used against young women who refused to enter into convents, or against wives suspected of adultery by their husbands. According to historian Merry Wiesner, the practice was often abused and people could be imprisoned for years if their families refused to agree to their release.⁵⁹

The inheritance customs, especially in Paris, favored community of goods, unlike the prenuptial contracts that were quite common in the Netherlands. A married couple's possessions usually incorporated investments by both families of origin. The husband would typically bring an estate share to the union and he reserved a dower portion for his potential widow. The wife brought a dowry over which the husband had usufruct but he could not dispose of the principal, which in some cases had to be returned to the bride or her family. Thus the lineage property remained linked to the families until the birth of children to whom it would descend, ensuring the maintenance of future generations. The importance of children thus becomes clear again because only blood children could inherit and if a couple died without issue, the lineage property would revert to the family of origin. As in England, a widow above the age of majority was legally a person and could act on her own.

⁵⁹ Wiesner, 295.

Conclusion

Women all over Europe had much in common. Most married, had children, worked to support their children and husbands, and many became widows. Nowhere in Europe did men and women think they were equal, nowhere could married women act completely independently, and nowhere did they participate in politics or government in an official capacity. In most cases, the laws provided for coverture of married women, although there were many exceptions to the rules of coverture in the Netherlands, more so than in France or England. Dutch women could and did act more independently than others, but they had a price to pay for this independence. Women who chose to remain in the domestic sphere were subject to their husbands, but they were also protected by them, according to the law. Dutch women who chose to enter the public sphere by engaging in business and other activities did not enjoy such protections. For some this may have been a challenge they did not relish, perhaps forced upon them by their circumstances, but others seem to have enjoyed the freedom it gave them.

CHAPTER TWO

Wives and Widows: Challenges and Opportunities in the Atlantic World

In the Dutch Atlantic world, women overseas faced special challenges that their cohort in the Netherlands did not face. Because of the high mortality rate on board ships and in the tropics, many were widowed at least once and often multiple times. Because of the prevalence of widows on the one hand, and the scarcity of white women on the other, women could remarry quite quickly if they so desired. For some, this was neither desirable nor necessary, but for others remarriage was the only way they could keep themselves and their children out of poverty. This strategy of what I will call “serial marriage” was quite common among Dutch women who either sought to improve or maintain their positions in colonial society. Moreover, some who married multiple times could expect to gain wealth from these unions because of Dutch inheritance customs. Although the environment in the Dutch Atlantic world was challenging for many women, some managed it quite well and created opportunities they would not have had in the Netherlands. The impact of distance from extended kin provided opportunities and challenges as well.

Marriage

In the Dutch Atlantic World, women generally married earlier than they did in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands during the early modern period, couples waited to get married until they had enough resources to set up their own households, since extended family households were uncommon. In the Atlantic world, however, high mortality and a scarcity of

women seem to have caused women to marry earlier. Constantia Maria Pichot, who we will meet later, was first married at age sixteen, and there are many more examples of teenage brides.

In the Netherlands, a marriage between two people most often meant that the two were social equals, of roughly the same age, and adherents to the same religion. In fact, many, such as influential seventeenth century moralist Jacob Cats and eighteenth century minister Willem de Vos, argued that social equality was indispensable for a successful marriage. A great difference in age, they argued, would lessen the chance of having children and could lead to sexual impropriety and extra marital affairs. Social inequality was deemed especially undesirable if the husband was the “lesser” partner in the marriage because this could upset the power relation within the relationship. Moralists argued that small differences between the partners in “unequal marriages” could be overcome, but large differences in social background were unwelcome and seen as potentially dangerous.¹

In the colonies, however, such marriages between unequals seem to have taken place more often. This is not to say they were commonplace, but since white women were scarce, they often had an opportunity to marry someone with more wealth and of a higher social status than their own. Yet, wealthy women could choose to marry less affluent men as well. Geertie Brantse married Goosen Gerritsz van Schaick who came to Rensselaerswyck, New Netherland in 1637 at wages of just fifty guilders per annum for a contracted period of three years.² His marriage to Brantse, however, the daughter of a successful early settler, brought him out of poverty and he became one of the most prosperous men in town. When his wife died in 1655, he was able to set aside 6,000 guilders for their four children.

¹ Haks, 106-108.

² FOR, 80-81. See also: Janny Venema, *Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652-1664* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), 255. Jonathan Pearson, *Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany, from 1630-1800* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1872), 131-132.

Betrothal

Marriage in the Netherlands, as noted before, was not necessarily a religious union but rather a civil one that could be sanctified by the church, as it was in most cases. Prior to the marriage, a betrothal would take place, which was almost as binding as the marriage itself. Neither party could unilaterally break the engagement, and both parties could enforce the promise to be married. Proof of the betrothal was required and usually consisted of a written contract, a sum of money, or an article such as a ring, glove, or handkerchief.³

Betrothal in the colonies, as an extension of policies and customs in the Netherlands, was taken very seriously and women overstepping the bounds of what was considered proper could be severely punished. Such was the case with Margarita van der Hoft in Brazil who was accused of being a “whore” for living with a man to whom she was not betrothed.⁴ In July of 1645, Van der Hoft was brought before the *fiscaal*, or chief justice in the colony, accused of whoring because she lived with Hans Nietes, a man who was not her husband. What was worse, she was betrothed to another man, Marcus Marcusse. Van der Hoft admitted that she was indeed engaged to be married to Marcusse, and not Nietes.⁵

Apparently, this was not the first time that Van der Hoft was brought up on charges. She had been banished previously, but had returned and continued to live with Nietes while her fiancé was overseas. This time, her sentence was particularly harsh and included corporal punishment in the form of lashes with a rod, in addition to banishment from the colony.

³ Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 11-32; see also: Haks, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴ The term *hoer*, or whore, was used to describe women who did not conform to Dutch sexual mores. The term was also used to describe prostitutes who exchanged sexual favors for money or goods.

⁵ NA: OWIC, 60:112. July 11, 1645.

Van der Hoft's punishment was unusually severe by Dutch standards. The likely cause of this was two-fold. For one, the Dutch clergy in Brazil complained frequently and bitterly about the immoral behavior of men in the colony. The colonies were seen as places from which a state and an individual could extract wealth, but many also had a reputation as places where lasciviousness, lewdness, and licentiousness thrived. From its very inception in the colonies, the Dutch Reformed Church fought against what it regarded as excesses of immorality, and attempted to regulate people's behavior. The clergy accused women of inciting immoral acts in men, and church authorities tried to regulate women's bodies and sexual behavior. Perhaps the church and Dutch authorities felt it was necessary to nip these kinds of immoral excesses in the bud by setting an example with Van der Hoft.

It is important to note that pre-marital sex was not necessarily at issue here because although sexual relations before marriage were officially frowned upon, they were tolerated, and many a Dutch bride was pregnant at the time of her wedding. The second cause of Van der Hoft's severe punishment was, therefore, undoubtedly that this was not her first offense. She may even have been one of the cross-dressing women who embarked on ships set for Brazil in order to seek their fortune there as prostitutes, or to become respectable wives to wealthy men.⁶ Since Van der Hoft was betrothed and this betrothal was seen as binding, she was punished for living with someone other than her fiancé. He, however, was apparently not in Brazil to complain to the courts about her behavior.

Some men who felt betrayed by their fiancées could take their grievances to the authorities in the colonies. In the case of Annetje Lievens and her fiancé Goossen Gerritsen in

⁶ For these cross-dressing women see: Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*; Rudolf Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

New Netherland, Gerritsen already acted as a husband and would-be guardian before the court. Gerritsen appeared before the court of Fort Orange as a plaintiff against Jurriaen Jansen in 1657. The matter stemmed from the fact that Janssen “boasted and spread the rumor” that he was engaged to Gerritsen’s fiancée, Annetje Lievens. Janssen admitted publicly that he was indeed not engaged to her but that he said he was, even in the presence of Gerritsen, allegedly because someone else spurred him on to say it. In the eventual outcome of the case, Janssen declared that the words he spoke were false and begged forgiveness of Gerritsen who declared before the court that he had “sufficient satisfaction from Jurriaen Janssen, considering his youth.”⁷

There are several conclusions that flow from this incident. Because sexual relations between the engaged couple were often tacitly permitted during the betrothal, the particularly egregious matter here was that Janssen implied that Lievens was sleeping with two men. However, Lievens herself did not go to court to fight these slanderous allegations, but rather her future husband did, suggesting that he was the injured party and not his prospective wife. A prominent and wealthy member of the community, Gerritsen could not marry a woman whose chastity and integrity were in doubt. Just days after the matter was settled and the very public apology from Janssen was accepted, clearing Lievens’ good name, the couple proceeded with their marriage plans and drew up a prenuptial agreement.

In the case of Lievens and Gerritsen, the future husband was the “injured party.” A woman, however, could also sue for injury done to her. The following case illustrates that it was difficult, though, for women to prove that a wrong had been done to them. Maria Groot Davelaar of Curaçao was engaged to be married to Frans Grootenstam, was raped by him, and sued him

⁷ FOCM, 139 & 322-323 (July 19, 1657); Venema, 247.

for it. Davelaar was assisted by her 71-year-old grandfather, Gerardt Striddels, who raised her, and who undoubtedly wanted her to marry and see her settled because of his advanced age.

The case had unfolded in the following way. Frans Grootenstam had come calling at the house of Davelaar and her grandfather quite frequently, and had told them that he wanted to enter into a “Christian marriage” with Maria. The grandfather had drunk with him and agreed to a marriage, and although he thought Grootenstam took too many liberties with him and with his granddaughter, he chalked it up to the fact that Grootenstam was not a young inexperienced boy but a widower. Grootenstam also spoke to them in quite familiar terms, telling the grandfather to call him “Frans” or “son” while he called Striddels “grandpa.” He told Maria during one of his visits that it would be best that they would get to know each other “as if they were married”. What he apparently thought of as a natural occurrence before the wedding, Davelaar experienced as rape, and she was greatly distressed and cried about it.⁸

Davelaar filed suit against Grootenstam, assisted by her grandfather, and accused him of “defloration”. Grootenstam defended himself by stating that he thought she was remarkably clever but a “lover of novels”, a quite common term used at the time by men who forced themselves on women. Davelaar lost her suit by a majority of votes because the court decided that she did not have the right to be compensated for “defloration” since she could not prove she had been a virgin.

It was difficult, if not impossible, for a woman in the Dutch Atlantic world to charge a man of rape if the couple was engaged. Men argued that the women in these cases were “lovers of novels” or “lovers of romance” and thus suggested that women did not experience relationships on their terms. Women were often depicted as silly, infantile, and misunderstanding

⁸ NA: SG, 9505. 1754.

of men. Moreover, Davelaar's grandfather testified in this case that he drank with Grootenstam, sealing the deal, but that he thought Grootenstam was too familiar with him. By his testimony he may have inadvertently hurt his granddaughter's case. He no doubt intended to help her by showing the court that Grootenstam was a kind of con man, but he also established that there was indeed a sense of familiarity, that Grootenstam clearly courted Davelaar, that he was allowed entry to their house, and that he agreed to the match.

Although this case went to court, the two married in spite of it, or perhaps because of it. Since Davelaar was now publicly known to have lost her virginity, it was impossible for her to marry someone else. Grootenstam, although he probably did not relish the fact that his fiancé sued him, also had little choice since he based his defense on their betrothal. He now could not break his engagement, especially since it became known that their union had been consummated. If their marriage was a success we do not know, but in December of 1800 she is mentioned as the widow of Grootenstam, so their marriage lasted more than 45 years.⁹ In general, the courts did not easily release either a man or a woman from their obligation to marry once a promise had been made.¹⁰

Prenuptial Contracts

The final step before the wedding often included the drawing up of a prenuptial contract. It seems that these contracts were more frequently used in the colonies than in the Netherlands itself, although a precise statistical analysis is impossible because of the deficiency of the sources. Despite the fact that the safeguarding and transfer of property were important in both the

⁹ NA: CBA, 1487.

¹⁰ See also: RNA: I: 54, 167, 192 & 199.

Netherlands and in the colonies, in the Netherlands contracts between future spouses were especially prevalent among the upper classes. In the colonies, particularly in the tropics, but also in New Netherland where frequent wars with Native Americans took their toll, the death rate was high, especially among men. As a result, even those with relatively little property sought to protect it in case the marriage was dissolved.

The prevalence of prenuptial agreements in the Americas was likely caused by the need of widows and widowers to safeguard not only their possessions, but also those of their children from previous marriages. Such seems to have been the case in Suriname in 1735 when Hendrik Holleboom, a planter, married Catharina de Frees who was the widow of Wilhelm van Geel. As was customary in the Netherlands, the couple sought the services of a notary public who composed and filed prenuptial contracts.

In this case, arrangements had to be made for the maintenance of De Frees' son from her prior marriage, Sebastian Ferdinand van Geel. Before the notary, the couple stated that they were planning to marry, but that before their upcoming nuptials they wanted to set some affairs in order and determine each spouse's rights and responsibilities. First, they excluded community of property and stated that each spouse would be liable for his or her own debts. Second, each agreed to make an inventory of his or her possessions. Third, with regards to the son of De Frees, the couple agreed to pay jointly for his maintenance and education until the boy reached the age of majority, or until he returned to Holland.¹¹ Lastly, the couple declared that the longer living spouse could choose whether or not he or she wanted to inherit from the deceased. This would depend on whether there were debts or gains.¹²

¹¹ The age of majority was twenty-five, unless one married before the age of majority or parents emancipated a minor. See: Haks, 158.

¹² NA: NAS, 108.

The fact that Holleboom agreed to pay half the costs of the upbringing of De Frees' son means she likely did not inherit enough money from her first husband for the maintenance of Sebastian, although she was apparently not completely without means either. Widows like De Frees were not that rare and this may mean that many women remarried not because they wanted a partner, but because they needed a partner in order to provide for their children. In this case, both spouses were likely from a similar socio-economic background, they could both read and write, and the widow was not destitute. Yet, this was not always so and often a second marriage was the only way a woman could stay out of poverty.

This was certainly so in the case of Petronella Simons Donker and Cornelis Lever, who at the time of his marriage was the former first commissioner of the WIC's slave trade in Suriname, a lucrative position, while the bride was clearly less well off financially than her husband-to-be. Their prenuptial contract stipulated that there would be no community of goods –presumably in order to protect the groom's assets – and the parties would each be liable for their own debts incurred both before and after the wedding.¹³ One can easily see how this union benefitted Donker because the groom agreed to pay all household expenses and, more importantly, he agreed to adopt Donker's son Cornelis and make him his heir. Lastly, if she were to survive her husband, she received five thousand guilders, quite a princely sum at the time, while he stood to gain only one hundred guilders if his wife predeceased him. This marriage seems to have been advantageous for Donker from a financial standpoint.

Prenuptial agreements could include not only financial provisions for children, but also settle the issue of guardians. When Eva Albertsen was engaged to be married to Roelof Swartwoud, the couple appeared before a notary public on August 13, 1657 to draw up a

¹³ NA: NAS, 108. January 8, 1736.

prenuptial agreement.¹⁴ This was not Albertsen's first marriage, however. From her first marriage with church deacon Anthonij de Hooges she had five children.¹⁵ The prenuptial agreement was short and dealt only with a provision for the children of De Hooges, who were to receive 100 guilders each. Albertsen used her house and lot in Beverwijk, New Netherland as a security for the 500-guilder amount. All other property was to be brought and held together by the couple.

The only other provision in this agreement concerned the appointment of guardians for the children. Under Dutch law, when a parent died, regardless of whether this was the father or the mother, a child was considered an orphan and the Orphan Masters in larger towns or those with a city charter looked after the child's interest. In smaller villages, the Dutch Reformed Church generally took on the duties of the orphan masters. The existence of such oversight rested on the premise that children were deemed unfit to manage their own affairs until they had reached the age of twenty-five, and that no person should be named a guardian of a child if his or her death would benefit said guardian. Therefore, a surviving parent was never named curator of property to which a child was entitled. In this case, the Orphan Masters were already involved and appointed two guardians. It seems though, that the couple disagreed with the choice of the Orphan Masters and in their prenuptial agreement appointed Barent Albertsen, Eva Albertsen's brother, and her former brother-in-law, Teunis Slingerlant. Both were uncles of the children and Albertsen was likely comfortable with both.

Another common feature of a prenuptial contract was the dowry clause. Most women could count on being their husbands' heirs according to Dutch custom whereby women inherited

¹⁴ FOR: 83-84.

¹⁵ *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 67, nr. 1 (1936), 5-6.

from their husbands according to a fifty/fifty formula in which the widow received fifty percent of the estate, and the children jointly received the other fifty percent of the estate. In many a prenuptial contract, though, the contract included a dowry clause. This clause anticipated the death of a spouse when no children were present. In such cases, the estate of the deceased could be left to someone other than the widow or widower, as determined by the Last Will and Testament of the deceased. The dowry ensured that the surviving spouse would not be left without a means of support. Some dowries were quite substantial while others were not enough to live on. In the Netherlands, a dowry clause could also be included for the husband, although dowries for women were often considerably larger than those for men, presumably because of the higher income potential for men whose source of income was often not dependent on a wife.

One woman who stood to receive a substantial dowry from her husband was Johanna Elisabeth Weesman van der Horst. Since she was a minor at the time of her marriage, she was represented by her parents for the contract negotiations. Weesman van der Horst was slated to marry Dirk Guldensteeden, a lieutenant for the WIC who had some wealth. Both brought all moveable and immovable goods into the marriage property, but they did not hold these in common, nor did they hold their debts in common. Again, an inventory of goods had to be made by the prospective spouses. Future gains were to be split fifty-fifty by husband and wife in case the marriage ended. If there were no children, Weesman van der Horst would receive a dowry (in this prenuptial contract called a “dowry” or “marriage gift”) of ten thousand guilders. However, if she predeceased her husband and left him childless, he would only receive one thousand guilders.¹⁶

¹⁶ NA: NAS, 109. February 15, 1737.

When negotiating a prenuptial agreement, parents or guardians almost always represented minors or children who had never been married. When Matheus Freher and Hermina Beek sat down with a notary to have their prenuptial agreement written down, he was represented by his father, while the bride, apparently an orphan, was represented by Gerrit Pater and Juan Labadie, both high-ranking officials in the colony.¹⁷

At the signing of most prenuptial agreements, even if the couple were not minors, the prospective groom and bride were usually advised by a parent or other adult with some knowledge of legal affairs. Yet, this was not always the case. When the above-mentioned Annetje Lievens married Goossen Gerritsen, she came by herself but the signatures on the document suggest that she could write, and probably read as well, while the groom could not. As in the previous case, there were children from a former marriage in play. He had been married before and bestowed on his four children the sum of 6,000 guilders, to be released when they reached the age of majority. The joint property of the couple also excluded clothing and jewelry belonging to Gerritsen's late wife. The children were to be brought up by the couple and maintained from the income of the 6,000 guilders, without touching the principal.¹⁸ The Orphan Masters seem not to have been involved in this case, likely because there was a will.

As in the case above, women who were married before could represent themselves in contract negotiations, but not all did. When Maria Magdalene Maincourt married Paul Gillette de Beaudumont, for example, she spoke for herself and brought no one to represent her, but her future daughter-in-law, Marie Anne Gillette, was represented by her husband Jaques Richard de Maison Neuve. Judging from the names in this case, all involved were of French descent, likely

¹⁷ NA: NAS, 108. 1737.

¹⁸ FOR: 80-81.

Huguenots, and perhaps members of the French aristocracy. Since the groom had a daughter who was married, her husband was present to safeguard his wife's, and by extension his own interests. Marie Anne's mother, Marie Serré, left an inheritance and the groom agreed to pay his daughter 1200 guilders from this money in two installments of 600 guilders to be paid before a set date (March 1737). For the second installment of 600 guilders, the groom even agreed to pay interest. In this case, the two men were the major players and both Paul Gillette and his son-in-law signed the agreement, not father and daughter.¹⁹

Disparate ethnic and religious groups within the colonies under the auspices of the WIC also took advantage of the Dutch custom of prenuptial contracts. Most prominent among those groups were Jews, who through the use of these contracts provided for property transfer within the kinship group. Especially in Suriname, many of the marriage contracts involved those of what the Dutch called the "Jewish Nation". Although outside the scope of this study because the Jews formed a society within a society, kept their own customs, and did not intermarry with gentiles, Jewish and Dutch women had much in common. Both were independent, active economically, relatively well educated, and known to invest in their husbands' and extended kin's businesses. In Jewish marriage contracts we also see young men and women assisted by their elders. For instance, at the marriage contract negotiations between Joseph Cohen Nassij and Gratia Mementon, both were represented by their mothers who were widowed, rather than by another male member of the community.²⁰

¹⁹ NA: NAS, 108.

²⁰ NA: NAS, 108. January 4, 1736.

Partnership: Women as Actors for the Family

Marriage in the early modern Netherlands was based on the ideals of the Protestant church, which described the goal of marriage as not only the means to procreate and prevent sexual misconduct, as the Catholic Church considered it, but also to form a bond between the spouses through which they could be each other's support system. Marriage partners generally worked together, with the caveat that the husband was the dominant spouse who had the final say in matters concerning the household.

Yet women overseas were often partners of their husbands in the full sense, frequently acting as agents for their nuclear families and often for extended kin as well. Catelijntje van Elslant went to Holland in 1677 from New Netherland to collect monies due her and her brother, Claes van Elslant, from an inheritance of their late mother's uncle. She received a power of attorney from her brother and her husband to collect and receive said inheritance. The power of attorney stated that she was not only to confirm receipt but she was to "perform and execute all things which may be necessary and her judgment may suggest."²¹ Her husband, Jacob Abrahamse Cuyper, was a cooper in Albany and may not have been able to leave his business for the considerable time it took to travel to Holland and take care of things there.²² Yet, rather than appointing kin in the Netherlands or a male friend, he and van Elslant's brother chose to have their wife and sister deal with these matters because they had faith in her judgment and abilities, and trusted her to take care of the family's interests.

In this case, husband and brother explicitly stated in the power of attorney that they relied on Van Elslant's judgment to assess the situation in the Netherlands and handle their affairs. This

²¹ FOR: 240.

²² Venema, 451. She lists his trade as cooper in the appendix.

is a far cry from the view of married women who lived under coverture elsewhere in Europe. These women could not appear in court, since they were one with their husbands and thus had no legal status of their own. It has to be said, though, that Van Elslant did need permission from her male family members to act as their agent. However, if her husband and brother had appointed a man, they would have to have given him a power of attorney also. Yet, they did not trust any other male to handle their affairs as well as Van Elslant could.

Women not only acted as agents of their families when settling business or personal financial matters required overseas travel, they also frequently appeared in local courts to represent absent or otherwise occupied husbands. Such was the case with the wife of Jan van Bremen who appeared at a session of the court in Fort Orange, New Netherland, on January 23 of 1657. Her husband owed money to Frans Barentsen Pastoor and she appeared in court to acknowledge the debt. The court's decision was that she had to pay the outstanding debt within six weeks.²³ Van Bremen's case is just one example out of many. The courts in the colonies recognized the married women who appeared before them, acknowledging their right to speak for their husbands and their families. This is quite remarkable because, according to Grotius, a married woman had no legal standing in court.²⁴ Again, husbands could have chosen to appoint other men to handle affairs for them through a power of attorney, but most chose their wives to represent them. From this, an image develops of married women in the colonies who were indeed full partners of their husbands and stood with them, instead of behind them.

In some cases, however, this partnership between wife and husband could be a hardship for women in the Atlantic World. The court held Jannetje Silvers, for example, wife of Abraham

²³ A.J.F. van Laer, ed. trans., *Minutes of the Court of Fort Orange and Beverwijck, 1657-1660* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1923), 2:13.

²⁴ See chapter 1.

Landuit, responsible for her husband's actions. Landuit illegally purchased a slave boy from a certain captain Pets who anchored his ship in Suriname in 1686. Landuit apparently took this boy to the Netherlands, leaving his wife Jannetje behind. Then governor of the colony of Suriname, Cornelis Aarssen van Sommelsdyck wrote about her in a letter to the WIC dated July 8th, 1686 in which he complained about the company's lack of enforcement of trade regulations. Van Sommelsdyck, angered by the illegal sale of slaves in his colony, ordered the prosecutor to have the wife appear before him.

Silvers did indeed appear as the owner of the effects and goods of her husband, defendant in the same case. Two witnesses testified that Silver's husband, before leaving for the Netherlands and against the regulations of the WIC and the Society of Surinam, had taken a "negro boy" from the barber of captain Pets from the slave ship *De Vrede*, and transported him out of the colony, which was strictly prohibited. Jannetje and her absent husband were ordered to return the boy but, since this was not possible, she had to pay the same price for the boy that others from the ship *De Vrede* fetched, in addition to a fine. Moreover, for the export of the boy out of the colony, she had to pay yet an additional fine.²⁵

That van Sommelsdyck had enough of people disobeying the laws was not very surprising. Also around that time, he chronicled the arrival of an English ship that was in desperate need of repairs and was thus given permission by him to enter the harbor in Suriname. He was told that the ship contained mostly salt but that it also carried two slaves for sale. Van Sommelsdyck told the captain not to sell the slaves in Surinam but his order was ignored. Moreover, he later found out the ship carried not two, but four slaves. The slaves were stolen "goods" from the Guinea coast. Another captain, Henry Fermes also brought two slaves into the

²⁵ NA: Archive of the Radermacher Family, 609. Paramaribo: July 2, 1686.

colony. He apparently stole them from St. Jago. With high prices to be fetched, unscrupulous profiteers kidnapped people all around the Atlantic.

That Van Sommelsdyck was frustrated by all these illegal activities is certain. Captain Pets, who sold Jannetje's husband his slave, apparently set sail for Africa again under the auspices of the WIC. Van Sommelsdyck argued that Pets was not worthy of the protection of the company and at this point he was getting increasingly frustrated with the company as evidenced by his direct language, which expressed his palpable anger. He wrote, "The longer I stir this filth, the more it stinks and the more I am repulsed by the company's actions. This is because there is only the pretense of honesty in her actions while she is by the sour dough of hypocrites so infected that there is no true honesty left in her."²⁶

Van Sommelsdyck may have vented his frustrations on the wife of one of these profiteers since she was the only one left to prosecute. We do not know if Silvers knew about her husband's plans, or if she was ignorant of them and a victim as well. As long as Van Sommelsdyck was governor, Silvers' husband could likely not return to Suriname without punishment, so it seems unlikely that Silvers was a collaborator, unless she planned to follow her husband to the Netherlands.

Widows

Serial Marriage: a Tool for Survival and Advancement

All over the Dutch Atlantic World, women practiced "serial marriage", most often as a tool for survival, but at other times in order to gain wealth and influence. If a woman's husband

²⁶ NA: Archive of the Radermacher Family, 609. Letter Van Sommelsdyck: August 29, 1686.

died, as happened frequently in the Atlantic World, and she had no income of her own, she could not take care of herself and her children unless she remarried. The only women who could afford to be widows were those who either had a substantial amount of money of their own, or those whose husbands had a substantial amount of money, which they then left to the widow and her children. If there were no children, wealthy women most often had a considerable dowry according to a prenuptial contract. Most women, however, were not wealthy and most did not marry wealthy men. For these women, widowhood was a struggle and often the only way out was to marry again.

The struggles of widowhood are apparent from several cases, including that of Trijne Hendricks. Hendricks was one of the women whose strategy for survival included serial marriage. Hendrix was probably one of the very few females who accompanied her husband to Elmina but, as was likely to happen because of the extremely high death rate among Europeans in Africa, he passed away shortly after their arrival. After her husband's death, another soldier, apparently a close friend of Hendrix' husband, proposed to her. On February 23, 1645, Trijne Hendrix and Jan Suerman were engaged.²⁷ He was a soldier who came to Africa on the ship *Haarlem* and hailed from Bochum in North-Rhine Westphalia, a region that yielded many soldiers and sailors for both the WIC and the VOC. On March 9th, bans were read, and on the 12th of March they were married by *ziekentrooster* Adriaan Lourensen.²⁸ They had a small party

²⁷ VDR, 17.

The *Vijf Dagregisters* are a collection of transcriptions of the daily journals of the WIC commanders at the African coast. They contain the journals of Jacob Ruychaver of January 19, 1645 until April 22, 1646. They also contain the records of Jacob van der Wel of April 2, 1646 till May 31, 1646, as well as a journal and ships' journal by Van der Wel dating from June 1, 1646 till March 18, 1647.

²⁸ A "comforter of the sick" was an official of the Dutch Reformed Church in areas where there was no *dominee*, or minister. Lourenssen committed suicide in a particularly gruesome manner when he fell ill in Africa, illustrating the desperation of many Europeans at the African coast.

at the house of Jacobus Fiddelerus and his wife where the wedding ceremony took place in the garden. Another woman, Helena, was there, and Meester Pieter and Domincus de Snijder.²⁹ The marriage did not last long for Jan Suerman died on May 8, 1646. On August 12, 1646, not even a year and a half after she married Suerman, Hendricx married Jan Wolf, listed as a *jonghman*, or never married man, who was also a soldier, while she is listed as the widow of Jan Suerman.³⁰

Trijne is one of the many women in the Dutch Atlantic world who married multiple times. In this case, she had three husbands in the span of two and a half years. Although one can never be entirely sure of the motivations of historical actors, it is plausible that she remarried quickly, twice, because she was forced to by economic circumstances. In Africa, there were very few opportunities for her to make money, unless she could enter the trade with Europe. In order for her to do that, she would have needed a starting capital she probably did not possess.

If widowhood in the Atlantic world had its challenges, it also afforded some women unprecedented opportunities. A case in point is Charlotta van der Lith, who wielded considerable influence in Suriname and featured prominently in documents relating to the effort to oust governor Joan Jakob Mauricius during the first half of the eighteenth century. Van der Lith was part of a group of colonists who wanted to remove Mauricius from his position because of alleged wrongdoings. Apparently, the governor evoked the wrath of the planter aristocracy when he threatened their hegemonic position in the colony by working to advance the position of

²⁹ This may have been Helena Berck, the Scottish wife of Irish captain Cornelis Danofant (probably Donovan) who was employed by the WIC. They arrived in Elmina on March 17. The name Helena may also refer to Helena Correa (see chapter 5).

³⁰ *VDR*, 216.

shareholders of the WIC, and by openly and sarcastically criticizing what he viewed as their sinful and hedonistic life-style.³¹

According to Mauricius, who divided his opponents into six groups, van der Lith was the self-appointed leader of a faction consisting of older women who opposed him. She had been married to three of his predecessors and according to the governor she could not “stomach having no influence any longer”. The main accusers, Salomon du Plessis and Daniel Pichot, Mauricius asserted, were aided by “a certain lady who is just as sly and who has acquaintances throughout the entire colony”, an oblique reference to Van der Lith.³²

The women not only formally opposed the governor and testified on behalf of his opponents, they also made life difficult for the governor and his wife by openly tormenting them. They sat outside their homes on a *stoep* high above the ground and spit on the governor and his wife when they passed by. They also refused to greet the governor and his wife and jeered at Mrs. Mauricius when she came anywhere near them.³³

Charlotta van der Lith may indeed have been disturbed at the fact that she was no longer the most influential woman in the colony, for she was remarkably adept at holding on to her position of power and increasing her wealth through a series of marriages. The daughter of a Lutheran minister, Van der Lith came to Suriname in 1722 as the governess of Catharina, daughter of Governor Hendrik Temming and his wife Machteld van Wouw. Shortly after their arrival in Suriname, however, Machteld died and to Hendrik the most sensible course of action

³¹ For more on the life of Mauricius see: U.M. Lichtveld and J. Voorhoeve, *Suriname: Spiegel der Vaderlandse Kooptlieden* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980).

³² Salomon du Plessis, *Recueil van Egte Stukken en Bewyzen door Salomon du Plessis, ... en door andere; Tegens Mr. Jan Jacob Mauricius, ... als mede door de Societeit van Suriname, en den selve Gouverneur Mauricius, tegens den gemelde du Plessis en andere ... ingedient en overgelevert : met ende benefens de Resolutien van haar Hoog Mogende en van de Societeit daar toe betrekkelijk* (Amsterdam, 1752).

³³ Journal of governor Joan Jakob Mauricius cited in: J. Wolbers, *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (Amsterdam: H. de Hoogh, 1861), 211.

must have seemed marrying Van der Lith. Two years after the marriage took place, the couple had a daughter, Johanna Baldina. The little girl would not really get to know her father, however, for he died when she was just one year old. Temming left his plantation *Berg en Dal* to his wife, their daughter, and to his daughter from his first marriage. Van der Lith did not move out of the governor's house at this point, so when the next governor arrived, he found the widow still in the governor's mansion. The new governor, Carel Emilius de Cheusses, must have liked what he saw, for the two were engaged and married two months later. The pair had a daughter, Henriette Maria, born in 1731, but the baby's father died in 1734. Again, Charlotta van der Lith stayed at the governor's mansion anxiously awaiting the next appointee.

This time, her late husband's brother, Jacob Alexander de Cheusses, who was married to her stepdaughter and former pupil, Catharina Temming, took up the governor's post. The governorship remained in the family and Van der Lith could stay in the house and in a position of power. Yet her brother-in-law died shortly after his arrival and Charlotta and her stepdaughter remained at the mansion.

Joan Raye, the next governor of Suriname entered their lives in 1735 and, astonishingly, he also married Van der Lith and also died in office. The two had a prenuptial contract in which she, as widow of De Cheuses, brought all her possessions into the joint property established by the marriage, except for the inheritance she expected to receive from her father because her mother was still alive. He too brought all his possessions into the joint property, but also excluded the inheritance of his father since this mother was still alive and the inheritance was still being processed. Material possessions other than real estate were excluded as well from the joint property. She kept her own furniture, jewelry, gold and silver. Both spouses had to make an inventory of goods brought into the marriage to have an account of them in case of death or

separation. Profits accrued during the marriage were to be split fifty/fifty. If Van der Lith was to be widowed again and the marriage produced children, the widow could count on a substantial dowry in the amount of 20,000 guilders. Both spouses signed the agreement. Van der Lith signed in her own hand.³⁴ As luck would have it, Raye also died in office. Van der Lith then inherited a plantation owned by him, but apparently she did finally have to move out of the governor's mansion before the next governor came in with his family. This was the above-mentioned governor Mauricius who had good reason to believe she conspired against him.

Van der Lith then married yet again. Her fourth husband was another prominent member of the Suriname colonial community, a Flemish minister by the name of Antoine Audra. At the time of the disputes with Governor Mauricius, Charlotta was known as the widow Audra, for this husband also died shortly after marrying her. Her fifth and last husband, also a Flemish minister, died after only three years of marriage.

Through this string of marriages and deaths, Charlotta van der Lith maintained her position of influence in Suriname, while increasing her wealth at the same time. And although she has been reviled because the main source on her life is governor Mauricius, her adversary, she is also described as a woman of "sound understanding" in papers belonging the family.³⁵ Of course we cannot know if van der Lith employed marriage as a deliberate strategy to gain wealth and power, or even just to survive, but the fact remains that with each marriage, she held on to her position of influence, possibly increasing it. After her first marriage, her governor husbands were always new to the colony and likely relied on her to introduce them to the leading planters and to provide them with the information needed to successfully navigate the treacherous

³⁴ NA: NAS, 109.

³⁵ For a short biographical sketch see: Anna de Haas, "Charlotta van der Lith," in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse Geschiedenis* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 641-643.

network of political and social relationships in colonial Suriname. With each marriage she gained not only stature, but also property. At the end of her life, Charlotta van der Lith owned two large plantations and died a wealthy woman.

Widows in Charge of their late husbands' Businesses

Widows who did not have to remarry because they had some wealth did not necessarily have an easier time without their husbands than poorer women, although they presumably did not have to worry about where their next meal would come from. Some had family they could rely on in the colonies, but this was not always so, as we will see in the case of Johanna de Laet who took care of her husband's business affairs after his death to ensure her continued income. Born in Leiden, Holland around September 5th, 1623, De Laet was the daughter of well known WIC historian, scholar, and director of the Amsterdam chamber of the WIC, Johannes de Laet. De Laet personally invested 54,000 guilders in the WIC and was a partner of Kiliaen van Rensselaer in his colonial enterprise in New Netherland as a *patroon*. When her father died in 1649, Johanna inherited her father's one-tenth interest in the colony.³⁶

Johanna married Johannes de Hulter in 1644 when she was 21 years old. He was older, a widower, and son of a merchant from Dordrecht. The couple had five children who were born in the Netherlands, and two who were later born in New Netherland. On February 26, 1652, the couple made a will before notary public Willem van Vredenburg in Leiden. In this mutual will, they left the entire estate to the surviving spouse who would then provide for the children until they became of age or were married. If the survivor remarried, however, the children's lawful

³⁶ Jaap Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) 29; Klooster, *The Dutch in the Americas*, 45-47; Den Heijer, 84.

share (one half of the estate) would have to be turned over to them, or their independent guardians.³⁷

They likely made this will when they were still in Leiden because of their impending journey to New Netherland, for in 1653 they sailed to New Amsterdam on the ship *De Graft* and settled in Rensselaerswyck where on March 7, 1654 they leased a farm.³⁸ De Hulter was charged for land conveyed to his wife by Jan Baptist van Rensselaer on August 24, 1654 when he established a farm, brick yard and tile kiln.³⁹ With the expected expansion of the colony and lots of building going on around them, they must have thought this to be a good investment, and indeed it was. De Hulter, however, died after less than three years in the colony and left Johanna de Laet with the entire estate, as outlined in their joint will. After his death, she briefly returned to the Netherlands, probably to confer with family on what to do next, but on February 8, 1656 she appeared in court in New Netherland to make an agreement with Thomas Chambers regarding the expense of having their grain thrashed.⁴⁰ The following year, she petitioned director-general Stuyvesant and the Council of New Netherland to grant her letters patent, or ownership papers, to the land her late husband bought from Native Americans in 1654. The petition states,

As since that the Lord has taken out of the world the husband of petitioner, leaving her as an afflicted widow with four fatherless children, in this vale of tears, she is now compelled to turn to your Honorable Worships with the humble petition, that Your Worships will please favor her with letters patent for the land bought by her deceased husband..., so that petitioner an her young

³⁷ William J. Hoffman, "An Armory of American Families of Dutch Descent," *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 69, no. 4 (1938): 339-346.

³⁸ Berthold Fernow, ed., *Documents Relating to the History of the Early Colonial Settlements Principally on Long Island*, vol. 14 of *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1881), 202.

³⁹ See also: Venema, 90.

⁴⁰ FOCM, 220.

children may have some hope, to reap evenings and mornings some advantage of the great and excessive expenses and labors which her late husband has had with it in rather an excessive manner.⁴¹

It was signed in her hand.

The letter appealed to the men's gendered sentiments of having to protect widows and children and aiding them in their plight, conjuring up images of a black clad widow in tears over her lover's death and not knowing how to proceed. As we shall see, she knew very well how to proceed and ably handled matters by herself. In actuality, De Laet was far from destitute and did not need the land to survive, something the director and council were probably also aware of as her family was not unknown to them. Stuyvesant's decision came that same day. He granted Johanna de Laet, widow and remaining possessor of the late Johan de Hulter's estate, a parcel of land at the Esopus.

De Laet continued her husband's business for a while, delivering brick and tile to various people and appearing in court several times to demand payment for her deliveries, but in November of 1657 she decided to dispose of several of her holdings at Beverwijck.⁴² At auction, she sold the brick kiln for 1,100 guilders, a pan tile kiln to make roof tiles for 3,717 guilders, a pasture for 880 guilders, and her house with barn and garden for 2,100 guilders. The proceeds from the auction totaled 7,797 guilders to be paid in three installments over three years. This means she was guaranteed an annual income of some 2,600 guilders for the next three years. In addition she also sold a house with a tenant for 740 guilders and a cart and horse for 284

⁴¹ Berthold Fernow, ed., *Documents Relating to the History and Settlements of the Towns along the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, 1630-1684*, vol. 13 of *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1881), 71.

⁴² She demanded payment from various defendants during 1656. See: FOCM: 230, 244, 247, 262, 263, 266.

guilders, for a total of 1,024 guilders.⁴³ Even after the disposal of much of her holdings, however, she still faced difficulties with payment. During the following year, she had to go to court herself to demand payment for bricks and pan tiles.⁴⁴

In the meantime, she met Jeronimus Ebbingh, who she found to be a suitable marriage partner. He was the son of a prosperous cloth merchant from Hamburg, and the couple married at New Amsterdam in March of 1659, some three years after her first husband's death.⁴⁵ Since De Laet and De Hulter had a will that did not exclude the Orphan Masters, she was now subject to their jurisdiction because she had four living children by de Hulter. On May 7th, 1659, two months after her marriage to Ebbingh, she went to the Orphan Masters meeting and explained that she owned some land at the Esopus, but that she could say no more about it at that time. On August 27, she again appeared before the Orphan Masters and was told that she could make one of two choices. She could either make a final settlement with the children, or, in this case, their guardians in the Netherlands, the children's uncles Michiel and Paulus de Hulter, or she could manage the estate herself, but she then had to put up her husband's house and all her own possessions in New Netherland as security. In the latter case, she would have to settle with each child when he or she came of age. Apparently, she decided to manage the estate herself with the assistance of Francois Boon, her husband's attorney, and Philip Schuyler, her own long-time attorney.

At the next meeting, De Laet gave an account of money paid out of the estate of her late husband. An indication that the Orphan Masters were vigilant in their job was that after scouring

⁴³ FOR: 94-99.

⁴⁴ FOCM: 378, 391-392.

⁴⁵ He is also known as Hieronymus Ebbinck. The betrothal took place on February 22, 1659 in New Amsterdam. The reverend Johannes Megapolensis married them on March 9, 1659. *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, 6 no. 2 (1875): 87.

the expenses, the board asked why de Laet gave Ebbingh 500 guilders from the estate of her first husband as payment for a loan. The Orphan Masters demanded to know how that money was paid (in beavers and wampum) and asked him to swear under oath that the debt was just. Ebbingh refused to do so and answered that he never thought the board had so little faith in him. He then erased the debt and paid the estate back the 500 guilders.⁴⁶

Apparently, De Laet was also determined to improve the land at the Esopus granted to her by governor Stuyvesant. A month after her wedding, she was to appear in court as a defendant, sued by Cornelis Woutersen who demanded payment of 275 guilders for making a bridge in the Esopus for which she promised to pay. Her attorney, Philip Pieterse Schuyler, asked to have the case adjourned till De Laet returned “upriver” from New Amsterdam with her new husband. In July the case continued when she appeared in court and admitted to a debt of one hundred guilders, but also asked for an extension of payment. The court did not rule in her favor and told her to pay every penny within eight days. It is unclear why she could not pay the one hundred remaining guilders since she received thousands for the estate. Part of the problem was likely that that some people who bought property from her did not pay her immediately. When she sold much of the estate at auction in 1657, the payments were stretched out over three years. On July 8 and July 15 of 1659, she went to court as a plaintiff to demand payment from two different men. They were ordered to pay her within eight days and she now could pay back Woutersen for building the bridge.

Apart from the above-mentioned examples having to do with the bridge at the Esopus, she did not appear much in court after her wedding to Ebbingh, with whom she would have four

⁴⁶ Berthold Fernow, ed., *The Minutes of the Orphanmasters of New Amsterdam, 1655-1663* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1902), 105.

Fernow incorrectly identified Johanna de Laet as the widow of Johannes de Laet. She was his daughter, not his wife.

more children who were all baptized in New Amsterdam.⁴⁷ The only time she went to court was in 1661 when another woman, Sophia van Wyckersloot, acknowledged a debt she owed De Laet. Van Wyckersloot promised to pay by August of 1661.

When in 1676, after the English took over and renamed New Netherland New York, she needed to get payment from Philip Schuyler, but Ebbingh appeared in court as her “husband and guardian” to collect a debt owed to De Laet by Schuyler. She no longer represented herself, although she was the one who originally sold the property that this concerned. Likewise, Jeronimus Ebbink conveyed a farm to Jurian Teunnisen Tappen. The farm was originally a tenth part of the colony, which passed between Jeremias van Renselaer and Johanna de Laet, as heir of her father, Johannes de Laet.⁴⁸ As a married woman under British law, she was no longer allowed to represent herself.

Not all widows had complicated businesses or large sums of money to deal with as De Laet did. Those whose husbands had been tradesmen had a few choices as to what to do with the businesses left to them. Women could pick up the trade themselves, as some women in the Netherlands did who were then admitted to guilds, they could attempt to sell the business, or they could try to find a compromise between the two. Elisabeth Bienman, widow of Jan Chemen, chose the last option. Her late husband was a blacksmith in Paramaribo, Suriname who had his own store where she likely helped him with the business. Unable to perform the work herself, she found someone willing to partner with her. In May of 1736, Elisabeth Bienman and Nicolaes Tesson entered into a formal partnership where she contributed the labor of four slaves and all

⁴⁷ *Notarial Papers 1 and 2, 1660-1696*, vol. 3 of *Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1918), 75.

⁴⁸ FOR: 194-196.

the tools belonging to the blacksmith's shop, while Tesson agreed to keep the shop at his house and run it for her. The two planned on expanding the business and agreed to share the expenses of hiring more personnel or buying more slaves. This shop was obviously not a one-man operation with an apprentice or two as in the Netherlands. Instead, slaves learned the trade and the fruits of their labor translated into profits for the two owners who agreed to share these. For Bienman, this was an excellent arrangement. She got rid of the inventory and slaves belonging to the blacksmith's shop in exchange for a regular income in the form of profit sharing.⁴⁹

For those who had little or no income, unlike the women above, and were in danger of falling into abject poverty, the WIC sometimes was willing to help. Vrouwtje Ides, was the widow of Cornelis van Vorst of New Netherland. Van Vorst had been the agent of Michiel Pauw, *patroon* of Pavonia. Ordinarily, the *patroon* would care for the widows in his area but apparently Pauw had been unwilling or unable to do so. Director Willem Kieft, however, found a solution to Ides' problems and had her keep a number of sheep, rams, and wethers that belonged to the company. She, like her husband before her, could continue to take care of the flock and it would provide her with an income for her and her two children, Anna van Vorst and Ide van Vorst, since the profits would be shared equally between Ides and the company director Kieft. This arrangement lasted for a number of years, after which the company could divide the flock and its increase by taking half away from Ides, leaving her with the remaining livestock.⁵⁰ The company did not pay her for her care of its sheep, but she did get to keep the milk for her maintenance. Ostensibly, she could use some of the milk for herself and probably sell the

⁴⁹ NA: NAS, 108. May 11, 1736.

⁵⁰ Date illegible in originals.

remainder to receive some income. In sum, she received half the increase of the flock and the milk.⁵¹

Ides remarried shortly after her husband's death, but then she died as well. Her second husband, Jacob Stoffelsen, was now left with two children who were not his, and two guardians were appointed to see to the interests of the children. In this case, the guardians were the Dutch Reformed minister Everardus Bogardus and Tymen Jansen. For members of the church who were uneducated and fairly poor, the choice of having the minister tend to their affairs after death seems to have been a common arrangement. The guardians made an inventory of Vrouwtje Ides' possessions, which gives us a good idea of the level of comfort of a poorer household in the colony.

This couple certainly was not wealthy but had lived with a certain level of comfort. They had some money, but it was only a little over one hundred guilders. Vrouwtje Ides had not had much jewelry or clothes, certainly not when compared to women like Margariet Hardenbroeck or Elisabeth Samson, whom we will get to know in subsequent chapters. Ides had one gold hoop ring and two silver medals and chains. She also had one silver goblet and two small silver brandy cups. Her clothing in the inventory was mostly referred to as "old", "worn" or "half worn" and "old fashioned", although she did have a new red bodice as well. Most of her clothing seems to have been used for work outdoors. Although some poorer folk slept on the floors of their homes on straw bags, Ides did have two beds and some linen, indicating that she was not entirely poverty stricken. However, without the help from the company, Vrouwtje Ides could easily have fallen into extreme poverty.

⁵¹ A.J.F van Laer, *Register of the Provincial Secretary, 1624-1647* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1974), 125.

The plight of some widows is further evident from the number of women who were in debt for various reasons, not always discernable to the contemporary reader. In Curaçao, Susanna Nazareth was one such widow who was in debt. In 1737 she borrowed a sum of two hundred pesos from Bernard Schagen, an elder of the Dutch Reformed Church in Curaçao. She agreed to pay him back, over the course over a set period of years. To secure this money, she mortgaged a house, a male slave, a female slave, and her own person and goods. In other words, she mortgaged everything she had in order to secure this sum. It is unclear what she did with this money, but whatever investment she made, she was successful and paid the money back within three months.⁵²

Other widows, such as Catharina Pedro, also borrowed money from prominent members of the community who acted as benefactors to these women, while simultaneously making money by charging interest. The women, though, seemed to have been a low investment risk for these prominent men because the loans were almost always paid off, and often faster than the payment schedule called for.⁵³ Pedro borrowed money from Pieter Diedenhooven and Elisas Snijdens who were two of the Orphan Masters on the island of Curaçao. She borrowed 250 pesos on April 2, 1737. Sixteen months later, she paid off the principal and an additional twenty-five pesos in interest.⁵⁴

Among the list of loans on the island on Curacao in 1737, women held many. Unfortunately, it is impossible to come to some kind of statistical analysis because of the state of the archive. Many of the documents are unreadable and thus it is not possible to see if they were

⁵² NA: CAB 140. February 15, 1737. Includes a remark at the bottom, “paid May 1737”.

⁵³ This seems to be similar to the microloans that are given to women in the developing world today. They too prove to be a low risk investment because they rarely default on their loans and often pay them back ahead of schedule.

⁵⁴ NA: CAB, 140. April 2, 1737.

held by women or by men. However, widows who often must have had difficult times, both personally and financially, held a great deal.

Separation and Divorce

Divorce was unusual among Europeans in the Atlantic world, with the Dutch having perhaps some of the most progressive laws in the colonies because of the civil nature of the marriage contract in the Netherlands. Aside from the Dutch colonies, New England also had relatively progressive laws. In New England a wife could obtain a divorce because of adultery, bigamy, desertion or, in rare cases, male sexual incapacity. Similar to the Dutch, Puritans saw marriage as a civil contract that could be broken for breaches such as adultery, whereas in most other jurisdictions, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, marriage was seen as a union made by God and could not be broken for any reason.⁵⁵

A separation “of bed and board,” as the Dutch called it, did not need to be complicated if both partners in a marriage agreed that it would be better for them to live apart, and if the couple had a prenuptial agreement, as in the following case. In the year 1739, things came to a head in the household of Willem Gerard van Meel, the *raad fiscaal* in Suriname at the time, and his wife Constantia Maria Lichert. The two had been married for about four years but did not see eye to eye during much of that time, leading to many fights. They declared that, much to their chagrin, they found that their temperaments were incompatible and that the fights between them were escalating. Therefore, they stated, they decided an amicable separation of bed and board would be best. Because the couple had a prenuptial contract, it was relatively easy to divide their

⁵⁵ Thomas A. Foster, “Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1999): 723-744; Nancy Cott, “Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1976): 586-614. See also: John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

possessions. Everything each spouse brought into the marriage was to be returned to that spouse, and the couple agreed to make a list of everything acquired during the marriage. These things too would be divided between husband and wife. In this case, Van Meel agreed to pay Lichert a yearly sum of one thousand guilders, and 250 guilders every three months for her maintenance.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the marriage contract made up in 1735 in Suriname does not survive so we do not know exactly what was in it. If it was similar to other contracts at the time, it would have included a dowry provision for Lichert that remained in effect since the separation agreement specifically stipulated that the prenuptial contract would be unchanged and valid.

The couple now moved to two different dwellings and went on with their lives. Yet, they could not remarry. For Van Meel this may not have been much of an issue because as a male member of the Suriname elite, it was perfectly acceptable for him to get a *bijzit* or concubine, although any offspring resulting from such a union would not be legitimate, as will be discussed in chapter five. For Lichert, however, this would mean the expectation of a life of celibacy and it also meant she would likely never be a mother, unless her husband died and she could remarry. Thus a separation of bed and board could not be taken lightly. In Suriname, as in Curaçao and West Africa, it meant that a husband's sexuality was not restricted since tolerance of white male licentiousness was a marked feature of Suriname society.

There is evidence, however, that some white women in Suriname did not adhere to the moral standards imposed upon them by Western European culture either. Lichert is the same woman who is known as Constantia Maria Pichot, a woman of ill repute because she lived together with Jean David Cellier without being married. After her separation from Van Meel, she cared not that she was still officially married and openly lived with Cellier, who would later

⁵⁶ NA: NAS, 110. October 1739.

become her husband. Daughter of Daniel Pichot and Sara (de) Swart, Pichot entered into her first marriage at the very tender age of 16.⁵⁷ She then married Van Meel and after his death, when she was free to remarry, she married the French-Surinamese Cellier, a high-ranking officer of Police and Criminal Justice in the colony. The couple married during a lavish ceremony on April 21, 1748 in Paramaribo.⁵⁸

Of course not all separations and divorces were amicable, and some were particularly contentious. Apolonia Jacoba van der Meulen filed for divorce in Suriname from her husband Harman Nicolaes van de Schepper, who fought her all the way to the States General in the Netherlands. Her case is interesting because many wives in Suriname tacitly allowed their husbands to have relations with other women, mostly slaves on their plantations or free black women. Van der Meulen, however, fought against this practice and used the provision in the law that allowed her to file for divorce on the grounds of infidelity.

Van der Meulen married Van de Schepper without a prenuptial contract because “she loved him and trusted he would return her love, even though she had a substantial amount of money”, according to governor Mauricius and the members of the Court of Police and Criminal Justice of the colony.⁵⁹ Van de Schepper was the son of Gerard van de Schepper, Governor of Suriname from March 5, 1736 till October 1742 when he had to leave his post because of alleged abuse of power. He left the colony in 1743.⁶⁰ The family was well established in Suriname.

⁵⁷ She had two brothers, Armand, born November 29, 1699, and Daniel. Source: Fred. Oudschans Dentz, “Beteekenis van Surinaamsche plantagenamen,” *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 26, no. 1 (1944): 155.

⁵⁸ Governor Mauricius of Suriname later declared this marriage null and void because of a procedural mistake.

⁵⁹ NA: SG, 9502. Dossier Apollonia van der Meulen contra Harman Nicolaes van de Schepper. These are the documents from her divorce case in Suriname. Unfortunately, there are no records of the Dutch Reformed Church from the early 1740s when Van der Meulen and Van de Schepper likely married. The couple had no children.

⁶⁰ For a short description of the life of Governor Gerard van de Schepper see: Fred. Oudschans Dentz, “Eenige bladzijden uit het leven der commandeurs van Suriname in de jaren 1680-1804,” *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 24, no. 1 (1942): 169.

Harman Nicolaes had two sisters who were married to two brothers, Gerrit and Cornelis Pater two prominent planters.⁶¹ Yet Van der Meulen had a significant amount of wealth, thus making her a desirable partner for Van de Schepper.

Soon after the marriage took place, she was disabused of the notion that her husband loved her because, according to Van der Meulen, he made known that he despised her. Moreover, and more egregiously, he pursued female slaves to have “indecent and criminal conversation” with them. He also physically abused Van der Meulen by kicking her. Mauricius and the Court described an incident that took place a few days before their writing, when Van der Meulen came home at night and found her husband engaged in sex with one of the female house slaves. Van der Meulen yelled at him and asked him if he married her so that he could treat her like this before storming upstairs. He then got “indescribably angry” and followed her with their slave to Van der Meulen’s room where he continued having sex with their slave while he made her watch. When she fled the room and tried to go down the stairs, he kicked her down but she managed to hold on to the bannister to prevent her falling all the way down. She fled her home and went to a friend’s house where her husband followed her. She refused to go back with him, however, for fear of being abused again.⁶²

The heart-wrenching scene that played out in the house of Van der Meulen illustrates several points about the differences and commonalities between white and black women in Suriname and all over the Dutch Atlantic. Tied together by occupying the same space, white and black women lived together, and to a point they shared in the suffering imposed upon them by white men. In the Dutch colonies, however, white women had some agency while black women

⁶¹ The youngest sister was assassinated by a female slave on November 5, 1743.

⁶² NA: SG, 9502.

had almost none, at least not in Suriname.⁶³ Van der Meulen could quite literally “walk away”, while the house slave, who was raped quite publicly, could do nothing to evade her master.

Apolonia Jacoba van der Meulen took her case to the court in Paramaribo and requested a divorce based on a number of infractions her husband committed. She established that she did everything to save the marriage and that she tried to live with her husband in good faith. Apparently, some members of the community were involved and they tried to act as brokers between the two spouses. Van de Schepper appeared to be quite reasonable and offered to consent to a separation, but begged her to return to him. In the court petition his attempt to win her back is described as “she had the misfortune to again be persuaded by sweet words to cohabitate with the defendant”.⁶⁴ When she returned home, however, instead of treating her well, Van de Schepper continued to treat her with the utmost disdain and abused her repeatedly. Moreover, he did not cease his relations with female slaves, in particular women called Fortuna and Margo, and frequently stayed out all night with what the Dutch men called “whores”. He even continued to have sex with them in the house he lived in with his wife.

Many male witnesses were called and questioned in this case, and all seemed evasive and unwilling to testify. Most were reluctant witnesses because they engaged in the exact same behavior and did not want to expose their own deeds. One of them was Ernst Lefeber who was asked if he saw Van de Schepper with a female slave named Margo, who belonged to the Societeit Suriname, and if he saw her on his bed. Indeed he did, was his answer. He also accompanied Van de Schepper to the slave dwellings of the Societeit and drank there with him.

⁶³ See chapters 4 and 5.

⁶⁴ NA: SG, 9502.

“...het ongeluk heeft gehad omme zich wederom te laten door zoete woorden persuardeeren om bij den gedaagde weder in te trekken.”

Van de Schepper then went into one of houses and slept there with Margo. She and a mulatto woman both went into the “bottelarije” or bar but not at the same time. The official asked if Van de Schepper kissed the “whores” there. “Yes”, came the answer. Apparently, he also put his head in the lap of Fortuna. Another question was whether the black woman’s child was his, and the answer was that he had heard rumors about that. To the question if van de Schepper had slept with more black women the answer came, “I can’t remember.”⁶⁵

Another witness, Maes van Eeden, testified that Van de Schepper frequented the slave quarters where he allegedly forced Van Eeden to stay over also. While Van de Schepper was inside with Margo, Van Eeden slept outside in a hammock, claiming his own innocence. He testified that he had been to several plantations with Van de Schepper where the latter slept with slave women, but he could not give any names of slaves because he was never actually there when it happened. Van Eeden mentioned that he saw fights between Van de Schepper and Van der Meulen but “forgot” what these were or what happened.

Six more people testified in the case and all were just as reluctant. Maurits van Hanekroth heard husband and wife curse at each other, and said that Van de Schepper had been on the bed with Margo because there were no chairs. He also joined Van de Schepper and others at the back door of mulatress Fortuna because she was a neighbor and they drank wine there, but van Hanekroth claimed that he never saw anything. Likewise, Louis George de Boisguion was a neighbor of the couple but claimed everything he knew was hearsay, although Van de Schepper had to cross his land and creek to get to Fortuna.

The court in Paramaribo had heard enough and granted the divorce on March 5th, 1744. Governor Mauricius signed the decree. The court dissolved the marriage and demanded Van der

⁶⁵ NA: SG, 9502.

Meulen get back all of the possessions she had before the marriage, with the exception of debts that the community of goods accrued. Apparently Van de Schepper had some fines that were not yet paid and these were exempt, and he was liable for the cost of the legal process.

Van de Schepper, however, was not satisfied with the court's sentencing and stated that he was greatly disadvantaged by this matter, presumably financially. He wrote that the demands of his wife were the result of "typical female passion and jealousy" and vowed to appeal to the States General of the Netherlands, which he did. Her lawyer vehemently denied that Van der Meulen's grievances were the result of passion and jealousy, and threatened to countersue for defamation of character.⁶⁶

When the case came before the States General, Van der Meulen asked that if the States General could not grant her a divorce, they at least consent to a separation of bed and board. Governor Mauricius asked to grant her the right of judicial authority, independent from her husband (*venia agendi*) so she could represent herself in all matters, and that she would be reinstated in the possession of her house and goods from which she had been banished by her husband.⁶⁷ The legal documents submitted to the States General stated that the plaintiff, Van der Meulen, thought they proved adultery as a ground for divorce as defined in Grotius' legal work *Hollandsche Consultatien*.⁶⁸

Other documents deal with the financial situation of the couple. Van de Schepper accrued some debts from outstanding fines and Van der Meulen, because of the lack of a prenuptial agreement, was as liable for these debts as he was. However, her lawyer argued, she should be excused from these liabilities because he committed adultery. Again, he backed up his legal

⁶⁶ NA: SG, 9502.

⁶⁷ Signed April 7, 1743, Paramaribo.

⁶⁸ Cited was Part III, page 707.

argument with quotes from Grotius. He concluded that a woman was not liable for the fines accrued by a husband because of a crime. “The judicial scholars teach us that after our custom the dominance of a man over his wife is not so great and absolute that he could settle his wife with debts or endanger common goods (estate) resulting from his crimes.”⁶⁹

The States General sided with Van der Meulen and upheld the divorce. Van de Schepper left Suriname in July of 1751 and remarried in The Hague where he and his second wife, Johanna Angelina van den Ende, became embroiled in another complicated case on the legality of their marriage, stemming from the fact that she was a Roman Catholic and he was a Dutch Reformed Protestant.⁷⁰

Several conclusions can be drawn from this case, both about white women and about black women and slaves. Van der Meulen suffered the indignity of her husband having sexual relations with several women, some under her own roof, while her husband did not care that he broke his marriage vows. Van der Meulen was likely not only concerned about her husband’s behavior with other women, however. He also had debts, and since she brought a substantial sum into the marriage, she did not want to see him squander that. Because she was a woman of means who had the support of the governor, she could appeal to the courts for help and eventually she was able to wrestle out of her deteriorating situation when the divorce became final. The black women and slaves were not so fortunate.

Finally, authorities could also grant a divorce based on abandonment. When the husband of Poulina den Oude of Curaçao went back to the Netherlands around 1736, she filed for divorce

⁶⁹ NA: SG, 9502.

⁷⁰ *Generaale Index op de Registers der Resolutien van de Heeren Staaten van Holland en Westvriesland: in haar Edele Groot Mogende Vergaderingen, 1761-1770* (The Hague, 1772).

based on the fact that he had gone to the Netherlands and would not be coming back. Although it took three years, in May of 1739 she indeed was divorced from her husband of 22 years.⁷¹

Bigamy and Annulment

Miscommunication and confusion about people's whereabouts in the Atlantic World could lead to unusual circumstances resulting in bigamy. Most of these cases involved women and men who did not purposely marry two men, or two women, but rather those who lost track of their first spouses and assumed they were deceased, as was the case with Teuntje Straetmans in the introduction. Although not a frequent occurrence, we do find cases of bigamy in all of the Dutch Atlantic colonies.

Take for example the case of Femmetje Aelbrechts⁷² and her husband Michiel Antonisz. Aelbrechts was from Katskil in New Netherland and Antonisz was from Utrecht in the Netherlands. Antonisz was probably a contract worker, as were so many, and left for a certain period to work in the colony. His previous wife, Grietge Jacobs, did not accompany him but stayed home, perhaps to care for her mother with whom she lived. Antonisz heard from a Utrecht neighbor who traveled to New Netherland that his wife had died. However, the neighbor had been mistaken because, as it turned out, Jacobs' mother, and not the daughter, was deceased.

Believing he was a widower, Antonisz turned to Femmetje Aelbrechts whom he married. As Jacobs now no longer had her mother, she decided to embark on a ship heading for New Netherland to join her husband. Much to her surprise, she found her husband living there with another woman. Femmetje Aelbrechts declared before the court in 1656 that she no longer

⁷¹ A.J.C. Krafft, *Historie en Oude Families van de Nederlandse Antillen* (The Hague, 1951), 150.

⁷² She was also known as Femmetje Albertsen or Femmetje de Baxter (the baker).

wished to live with Antonisz because his Dutch-born wife had the oldest papers and should have the priority and continue her marriage with Antonisz, “her own and lawful husband.” Jacobs joined in Aelbrechts’ request.

The women had made up their minds, but colonial officials wanted to proceed with extreme caution. The court at Fort Orange noted that this was a civil case, as well as an ecclesiastical matter. Therefore they referred to the Christian authorities for their approval. The consistory requested that Femmetje Aelbrechts be granted letters of divorce.⁷³ The court, after “mature deliberation” on this weighty matter, had the couple, Aelbrechts and Antonisz, appear before them and handed them their decision.⁷⁴ First, the court ruled that there did not appear to be any fault on the part of Antonisz, who could have been charged with bigamy. They acknowledged the difficulties in communication, arising from the distance between the colony and Holland, since Antonisz had not been in Holland for nine years, and he had not heard from his wife for five of those years. Likely, the couple could not write and it would have been problematic to communicate. Second, they stated that all marriages entered into by mistake were *ipso jure* (by the law itself) null and void. Third, they acknowledged that Aelbrechts herself wished to renounce her matrimonial rights and relinquished them in favor of Jacobs. Therefore, they declared Aelbrechts free from the marriage bond “restoring her to her former liberty and granting her the right to at all times marry again, where and whomever she pleases, without interference or objection by anyone.”⁷⁵ She was given a *brieff van vrijheijt* or letter of freedom.

⁷³ This was a memorial from the consistory stating an annulment, not a divorce in a modern sense.

⁷⁴ This was considered to be such an important matter that Peter Stuyvesant and La Montagne corresponded about it. Venema, 146.

⁷⁵ FOCM: 248-249. July 4, 1656.

Antonisz and Jacobs likely returned to the Netherlands for no further records can be found. We'll meet Aelbrechts again in the next chapter.

Another case of bigamy in New Netherland was the case of Adriaan Vincent who, according to Marcus de Sousoy, had another wife while he lived with his wife in New Amsterdam. Apparently De Sousoy had been spreading the rumor that Vincent was a bigamist and the latter was determined to clear his name. The court ordered him to prove his assertion whereupon Vincent brought a certain Tousein Bryel to court to testify on his behalf. The court asked Bryel if he knew that Adriaan Vincent had another wife and four children. He answered that he had been in Amsterdam for 24 years and had indeed heard this stated. Apparently, De Sousoy was so certain of his case that he offered to have his wife go to Holland to collect evidence if Bryel's testimony was not considered sufficient. Why De Sousoy was so certain, and why he felt the need to expose Vincent is unclear. Perhaps he had had an argument with Vincent and decided to pay him back with this, or perhaps he was genuinely outraged at the thought that a husband could abandon his wife and children. Eventually, the court ordered De Sousoy to have a declaration drawn up by a notary.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Marriage strategies, from choosing a suitable partner, to debating whether to marry at all, to negotiating favorable prenuptial agreements, were important to women in the Atlantic world who often had to survive without the benefit of extended family around to support them. The great number of widows in the colonies had to look out for their own interests while also providing for their children, which they often did through prenuptial agreements. Through

⁷⁶ B. Fernow, ed., *Minutes of the Court of Burgomasters and Schepens, September 3, 1658 – December 30, 1661*, vol. 3 of *The Records of New Amsterdam* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1897), 70.

strategic marriages some women acquired great wealth, while others regretted the decisions they made. Fortunately, for these women there was the option of divorce or separation.

CHAPTER THREE

Women's Economic Activities in the Dutch Atlantic World

Even though a Dutch woman was in no way the equal of her male counterpart by law and could not hold political office or function in leadership positions in the church, because of her treatment under Dutch law a married woman could bequeath property in her own right and enter into commercial contracts if she was a *koopvrouw* or female public merchant. As a result, married Dutch women had all the qualifications to engage in business and commerce and to participate in the “informal public” as Mary Beth Norton termed her definition of the public sphere. In a general tax assessment, some fifteen percent of all taxable enterprises in Amsterdam and twenty-four percent of businesses in Leiden were operated and owned by women.¹ While enterprising married English colonial women needed a husband or other male relative to obtain a license to run their businesses, in many cases Dutch women could operate these businesses under their own names.² Those under the age of twenty-five, however, did need a male guardian of standing to represent them in the legal process. Unmarried women and widows over the age of twenty-five did not need a guardian at all and could operate as a man would.

The role of Dutch women in the Atlantic trade network has heretofore been ill understood and often dismissed or overlooked. Yet, there were a great number of ways in which women contributed to both the formal and informal economy of the Dutch Atlantic world. Women were small merchants, but also large traders, supercargoes, moneylenders, plantation holders, bakers,

¹ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 407. This refers to an assessment done in 1752.

² Sarah Hand Meacham, “Keeping the Trade: The Persistence of Tavernkeeping among Middling Women in Colonial Virginia,” *Early American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2005): 140-163.

and inn- and tavern keepers.³ To some extent, the line of work they were engaged in was determined by their family relations and social background, as well as by their geographic location in the Atlantic world. A woman in New Netherland, for instance, was more likely to be engaged in a mercantile business or trade, while a woman in Brazil or Suriname was more likely to be involved with the plantation business.

Widows accounted for a large portion of women who were engaged in business or the trades. Although Dutch women usually inherited half of the estate of their husbands, which, in theory at least, ensured that widows could take care of themselves, this was only feasible if there was enough money and property to divide. For a widow who lacked assets, often the only option was remarriage, as discussed in the previous chapter, or employment to either supplement her income or provide an income. This is a stark contrast with the circumstances for English widows who often saw their husbands' estates go to their eldest sons, who were then to take care of their mothers. If an English widow had small children, a male family member would likely take on the job of caring for the estate, or the widow herself would be a caretaker of the estate until her eldest son came of age. Widows who were not left with an estate sufficient to sustain them had to find ways of caring for their families through engaging in a business or trade as well.

Finally, women, of course, were also engaged in the Atlantic trade network as consumers of European goods, or goods that were processed or shipped via the Netherlands. We have evidence that women in Suriname were dressed according to the latest European fashions and from inventories of homes, we know that the East Indian articles *en vogue* in the Netherlands made their way to the colonies around the Atlantic world as well. Moreover, many common household goods and linens also had to be shipped from the Netherlands as the early American

³ A supercargo was a person, usually a man, who sailed on board merchant ships and who was in charge of the cargo. The supercargo bought and sold goods in the ports around the Atlantic and negotiated their price.

colonies did not have their own textile production, for example, and colonists relied on products manufactured in Europe.

Merchants

While some women were wildly successful as merchants and operated all around the Atlantic world, most who were involved in mercantile operations were small traders who made just enough money to sustain themselves, or provide an additional income for their families. According to some estimates, there were as many as 134 female traders active in New Netherland, and roughly an equal amount of Amsterdam women were trading primarily with the Dutch, but also other European colonies.⁴ Historian Susanna Shaw argues that most of these women did not act as independent traders on their own behalf, but rather acted as representatives and managers of their families.⁵ Although this was undoubtedly true in some cases, the fact remains that Dutch women could and did operate as independent agents, contributing to the expansion of the Atlantic trade network. Moreover, because Dutch women could keep their assets separate from those of their husbands, the wealth they gained benefitted them directly.

Women engaged in trade on varying levels, and for many their activities were closely related to their geographic locations, although some, like Margrieta Hardenbroeck, operated all around the Atlantic.⁶ Margrieta was born into a family of Atlantic traders and settled in New Netherland together with one of her brothers in the late 1650s. She lived in New Amsterdam as

⁴ SA, Notarial Archive, 5075.

⁵ Susan E. Shaw, "Building New Netherland: Gender and Family Ties in a Frontier Society" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2000).

⁶ For a short biography of Margrieta Hardenbroeck see: Annette M. Cramer van den Bogaart, "Margrieta Hardenbroeck" in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse Geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 324. There is also a historical novel based on her life by journalist Jean Zimmerman entitled *The Women of the House*.

an agent for her cousin, Wouter Valck, who was an Amsterdam merchant, and she appeared frequently in court to collect debts owed to Valck and to Daniel des Messieres, another merchant for whom she apparently served as an agent.⁷ Initially she was to help her brother who was to be the agent for Valck, but it soon became apparent that he had no head for business and that Margarieta was better suited to this kind of work. During this time, she was a single woman and did not appear to suffer any restrictions on her commercial activities because of the fact that she was female.

In 1659, Hardenbroeck married Amsterdam merchant Pieter Rudolphus de Vries, and the two made New Amsterdam their home base. No prenuptial contract survives, but we can be reasonably sure that the two had one because they both kept businesses and they kept them separate, although they worked together as well. At this time, Hardenbroeck was known as a *koopvrouw* since her husband clearly knew of, and approved of, her business. Thus, she could do business on her own and continued as she had before the marriage. Together, the couple owned land in New Netherland and traded in numerous products ranging from lumber and paper to tobacco, vinegar, and furniture. Just two years after their marriage, however, De Vries died and Hardenbroeck and her infant daughter were left with substantial land holdings and his trading business. Throughout the marriage, Hardenbroeck continued her own business, but now she had to manage her late husband's affairs as well. Apparently, he had not been a good record keeper and not all of his affairs were in order. This necessitated Hardenbroeck's frequent appearance in court to settle debts.

She appeared in court five times as a defendant who did not pay her debts before March 1662. On March 7, it became clear why she had trouble paying her creditors. In a case brought

⁷ Linda Briggs Biemer, *Women and Property in Colonial New York: The Transition from Dutch to English Law, 1643-1727* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 33-43.

by Mighiel Muyen, for Matthys Bode, a merchant in Amsterdam, she said that she wrote to Holland and sent a power of attorney to “some person” and asked him to settle with creditors in the Netherlands. She thought this trusted person, in fact her brother, would take care of some issues for her in the Netherlands and pay her husband’s debt to Bode. In addition, if Muyen wanted to be paid in New Netherland, he only had to wait until the arrival of two ships, the *New Netherland Indian* and the *Morning Star* in which she had a share. She argued that Muyen had agreed to wait after she let him read the letters and documents concerning creditors and her share in the two ships. Her problem, it appears, was a matter of cash flow and she asked for patience of her creditors.⁸ Muyen, however, argued that he had agreed to no such thing and eventually the court agreed with him. On May 16, she was still in default and the court now ordered her to pay “on pain of imprisonment”.⁹ Again, she asked the court and her creditor for patience because she expected that with the next ship she would receive letters stating that her brother in Amsterdam had made arrangements with Bode. On August 15, the case was still not resolved and the court now appointed four prominent men to make an inventory of De Vries’ books and papers and mediate the case.¹⁰ Hereafter, the case was probably solved because she did not appear in the court records again.

This case exemplifies the difficulties merchant women could face when operating in the Atlantic world. Her livelihood, and here even her freedom, was dependent on swift communication lines between Amsterdam and New Amsterdam. Yet, ships often did not leave on time, met with bad weather during the journey, fell prey to pirates who roamed the seas, or met some other obstacle that prevented them from arriving on time. In some cases, the ships did

⁸ RNA: IV: 46.

⁹ RNA: IV: 83.

¹⁰ RNA: IV: 113. For the entire case see: 46, 53, 59, 74, 78, 82, 83, 85 & 113.

not arrive at all. Hardenbroeck was a woman of some means, had an established reputation as a merchant, and had strong allies in both Amsterdam and New Netherland society. All these circumstances allowed her to first delay paying her creditors, and then to negotiate an outcome that could be satisfactory for all parties involved. Had she been a poorer widow without influence and investments, she may not have been able to escape imprisonment.

A little less than two years after De Vries' death, Hardenbroeck married Frederick Philipsen, a carpenter and small trader. Apparently, she was not willing to give up control of her holdings for the two married with a prenuptial contract, ensuring that all goods and real estate each partner brought into the marriage would remain under the control of that partner for the duration of the marriage.¹¹ Throughout their union, Hardenbroeck would continue her own business, but she also partnered with her husband in joint ventures in what would become a vast enterprise encompassing not only trade with New Netherland and Amsterdam, but also the West Indies. Philipsen, like De Vries before him, undoubtedly benefitted from Hardenbroeck's wealth, her contacts, and from the fact that she possessed four ships for the trade with the West Indies and Holland.

After 1664, however, when New Netherland became New York, Hardenbroeck found herself increasingly restricted by English imperial rule. At first she tried to work within the confines of English mercantile law but when her attempts were thwarted, she continued to trade, using loopholes while still obeying the navigation acts that required her ships to stop in England to receive clearance to continue to Amsterdam. Since ethnic rivalries ran high in colonial New York, making it more difficult for Dutch-speaking inhabitants to do business, the couple was also

¹¹ *The Minutes of the Orphanmasters*, 225-228. Hardenbroeck also appeared before the Orphan Masters several times and Philipsen agreed to essentially adopt her daughter, and made her his heir since there was no money from De Vries. All this was agreed upon in the prenuptial contract.

involved in illicit activities, including smuggling and involvement with piracy. Philipsen reportedly used profits from piracy to buy real estate in the colony and to purchase ships. Moreover, they aided pirates as far away as Madagascar by supplying them with essentials in return for “cash, slaves and East Indies goods”.¹²

Hardenbroeck, meanwhile, continued to control the business she built and she directed all aspects of it. According to the journal of two Labadists who traveled to New York on board one of her ships, she was an aggressive trader who exerted complete financial and administrative control over everyone on board, including her husband. Before the voyage, Jasper Danckaerts and Peter Sluyter, the Labadists, made arrangements for their passage to New Netherland directly with Hardenbroeck. When the Labadists asked her when the ship might depart, she said that she had given orders to have everything ready to sail that day, a clear indication that she was in charge.¹³ When they docked at Falmouth in England, Hardenbroeck had part of their cargo reloaded on a ship she purchased there and which was to set sail for Barbados.¹⁴

Hardenbroeck persisted in her trade with Holland and did business with other women such as Trijntje Willems in Amsterdam, who mainly dealt in cloth and who was listed as a *koopvrouw* in the city.¹⁵ She also had her hand in the trade in rum, wine, and slaves with the West Indies and Virginia. Apparently the business interests of Hardenbroeck and her husband in the Caribbean were so extensive that the couple required a home in the region and they settled on a house in Barbados. Hardenbroeck died in 1691, leaving her husband and five children with a

¹² Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 63.

¹³ Jasper Dankers and Peter Sluyter, “Journal of a Voyage to New York, 1679-1680,” in *Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society*, ed. Henry Murphy (Brooklyn, 1867), 1-106. This is a transcription of the journal.

¹⁴ Dankers, 30.

¹⁵ SA: Notarial Archive, 5075.

vast business empire, which Philipse continued to manage. In 1695, he was the wealthiest man in the colony when his estate was assessed at £2,610. He died in 1702.¹⁶

Hardenbroeck does not seem to have used marriage as a strategy to advance her interests; on the contrary, her husband's enterprises were greatly aided by her influence and contacts. She could have found a wealthier husband than Philipse, but apparently married him for other reasons, perhaps because of mutual attraction and affection. Theirs seems to have been a truly companionate marriage where both partners aided each other on a basis of equality and respect. Although Philipse could have asserted his legal influence over her after the couple fell under English law post-1665, yet he never restricted her independent commercial activities.

Not every woman started a business on her own before she was married, as Hardenbroeck did. Many women who were widowed continued the businesses of their husbands. Women such as Clara Catharina Kerkrinck for instance, widow of Curaçao WIC director Jeremias van Collen, were left to handle their husbands' complicated and extensive legal and business affairs while they were not necessarily prepared for this task. The complexity of issues some widows managed is illustrated by the legal cases Kerkrinck brought against various merchants.

Clara Kerkrinck, born in 1680 in Amsterdam as the daughter of prominent and wealthy merchant Willem Kerkrinck, moved to Curaçao with her family in 1686 as a young child when her father was appointed director of the island for the WIC. She eventually married Jeremias van Collen, son of Juan Pedro van Collen who, like her father, had also been a director of Curaçao. The couple had five children.

¹⁶ Matson, 27, 54.

In 1715, however, Van Collen died and Kerkrinck, not a complete stranger to the trade because of her family's involvement with the WIC, was left with young children and the management of the couple's holdings. When he was still alive, Van Collen partnered with a Jewish merchant on the island of Curaçao, Philippo Henrix. The two sold cacao and tobacco grown on the island to several outlets on the neighboring coast of Venezuela through a ship's captain named Jurriaen Exteen. According to the agreement with Exteen, he would pay Van Collen and Henrix once the goods were sold. Unsold goods were to be returned to them. The partners were not to pay any rental fee for Exteen's vessel, nor would they share in the expenses relating to the ship's crew. In June of 1713, they sent Exteen some shipments and he was to take care of them from that point on. Upon his return, Exteen was to show the partners his account books.

After her husband died, Clara Kerkrinck took over his affairs. Unlike other women who might have asked relatives to take care of financial matters, Kerkrinck took an active role in the management of her business. She wrote to Exteen about the state of affairs of the cacao and tobacco. As it turned out, Exteen did not sell the goods and fabricated the account for goods on his vessel.¹⁷ Kerkrinck and Hendrix took him to court in Curaçao, which found that he owed the partners 13,977 pesos and two realen for unsold goods.¹⁸ Kerkrinck corresponded directly with Exteen about the matter of receiving her part of the judgment, some 7,000 pesos. He assured her that he had nothing but her best interest at heart and expressed his sympathy for her after the loss of her husband. He clearly avoided the matter, however, writing to her that before he could take his ship and load it with her cacao and tobacco, he first had to make a small trip with his vessel

¹⁷ Original Dutch: "na zijn phantasie."

¹⁸ NA: SG, 9489.

to get meat for the Curaçaoan's consumption. After that, he said, he would get right to it.¹⁹ The case ended up before the States General in the Netherlands and eventually, Kerkrinck and Henrix won their argument before the States General and Exteen had to compensate them for the costs of the legal procedure.

Kerkrinck's husband was apparently not only involved in the cacao and tobacco trade, but in the slave trade as well, and she continued that business too. In a letter from Kerkrinck she secured the sum of 33,334 pieces of eight and four realen that Jan Chourio and company owed to the WIC stemming from a "cargo" of slaves that were sold and delivered to Chourio by Kerkrinck's late husband. Kerkrinck personally agreed to serve as a guarantor for the above-mentioned amount, ostensibly until Chourio could sell the slaves. She signed the document herself at Fort Amsterdam in Curaçao.²⁰

Not only was Clara widowed, she also lost her brother who was a *vendumeester*, or auctioneer, and after his death she tried to secure that position for her son, Willem van Collen.²¹ As one would expect from a mother, widows often tried to secure positions for their children, and in Dutch plantation colonies like Brazil and Suriname, they frequently held on to property to sell or transfer it to their children when they came of age.

Nor did Clara only have to deal with all of the financial matters that plagued her after the death of her husband. Life could also be very dangerous on the Caribbean islands because of the frequent attacks from foreign entities. In 1713, the Frenchman Cassard took the island and bombed part of Willemstad. According to eyewitness accounts "a bomb fell on the house of the widow Kerkrinck." Apparently the bomb went straight through the roof and blew the door out of

¹⁹ NA: SG, 9489. Letter from Jurriaen Exteen to Clara Catharina Kerkrinck dated February 6, 1715.

²⁰ NA: WIC, 206. February 28, 1715.

²¹ NA: WIC, 206.

what was a *pakhuis* or warehouse Kerkrinck owned that served as a prison for seventeen Frenchmen. After the blast, the prisoners walked out the front door but Clara's building was destroyed.²²

From one of the documents in the file of Clara Kerkrinck at the National Archive in The Hague, we get a good sense of what items were desirable for Curaçaoans. The cargo of one of her ships, the *Juffrouw Rachel* (Miss Rachel), contained goods for several inhabitants of the island and contained silk, ribbon, French linens, paper, distilled water, hats, pepper, candles, liquor, woolen stockings, pewter ware, madeira wine, damask, silk stockings and lace. Many of these goods would be used for women's clothing, while others, such as pewter cups and plates, would be for use in the household as well and would likely be bought by women.²³

Plantation Owners

An example of a female plantation owner who successfully navigated her business through the changing political tides during the mid seventeenth century was Anna Paes.²⁴ Paes lived the early part of her life as a Portuguese woman in a Portuguese colony, but when given a chance to integrate into Dutch colonial society, she did. Like many other Portuguese women who were quick to accept Dutch customs and religion, at least according to Catholic priest father Antonio Vieira, Paes may have enjoyed the opportunity to manage her own business.²⁵ Moreover, under Dutch law and custom, she was free from male relatives who potentially could

²² For an architectural history of Willemstad see: Bernard R. Buddingh, "Van Punt en Snoa: Ontstaan en Groei van Willemstad, Curacao vanaf 1634, De Willemstad tussen 1700 en 1732 en de bouwgeschiedenis van de synagoge Mikve Israel-Emanuel 1730-1732" (Dissertation, Technische Universiteit Delft, 1994).

²³ NA: WIC, 206. Copy cargo list *Juffrouw Rachel*.

²⁴ Also known as Anna Gonsalves Paes de Azevedo.

²⁵ Gonsalves de Mello, 145.

take her property from her. Portuguese women were unusually sheltered and often confined to their homes, so much so, that even the fairly rigid Spanish thought they were too restrictive. Paes may have appreciated the freedom Dutch colonial society gave her as a woman.

Paes was the daughter of prominent Luso-Brazilian parents who gave her a sugar mill, named *Casa Forte*, at her marriage with Portuguese military officer Pedro Correia da Silva in 1630. *Casa Forte* was a formidable *engenho* (mill) known as the largest and best in the entire Recife area. Da Silva, in what by now has become a familiar story, died soon after the wedding. Paes kept the mill going and, unlike many of her compatriots, did not flee the Dutch who took over the colony. Instead, she integrated into Dutch society and, some seven years after her first marriage, married Charles de Tournalon who became a captain of the personal guard of Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, the governor general of New Holland. Paes corresponded with the governor and was a welcome guest at the court of Johan Maurits in Brazil.²⁶ Paes was well read and a master of diplomacy. In a letter to Johan Maurits she asked him to accept six boxes of white sugar from her mill as a token of her affection for “his excellency” in the hope that he would forgive her boldness, but that she prayed God would increase the life and health of “his excellency” to the benefit of all the ladies who were his subjects.²⁷ Paes was also known as a beautiful woman of her time, and this gift to the governor, together with her lovely appearance at his court, must have made the governor look favorably on the Portuguese woman, even though she was a member of an enemy nation.

Yet her position in Dutch society was always in jeopardy because as a native Portuguese woman she was not above suspicion of aiding her countrymen in their resistance against the

²⁶ For a short biographical sketch see: Michiel van Groesen, “Anna Paes,” in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, Els Kloek, ed. (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 359-360.

²⁷ Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 170.

Dutch. In order to alleviate these suspicions, she had all of her children baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church. It was to no avail, however, for in 1643, her husband was arrested on suspicion of treason and sent to the Netherlands. Paes was now pregnant with her daughter Isabel and wrote letters to the Chamber Zeeland of the WIC to have her husband released. When he was finally allowed to return to his wife in Brazil, he died just before his departure from Zeeland.

When she married yet again, she chose a true Dutchman beyond reproach in Gijsbert de With, who let the Council of New Holland know that his bride was now more Dutch than Portuguese.²⁸ In 1645, during the Portuguese planters' uprising, Recife became embroiled in a guerilla war that would last nine years and culminate in Portugal retaking the colony. Some of the fighting took place at Paes' sugar plantation, which she kept going through marriages and skirmishes. Because she was Portuguese, Paes could have kept the mill but perhaps she was tired of switching allegiances. She left Brazil for the Netherlands with her husband in 1654.

At the capitulation of Taborda on January 27, 1654, when New Holland reverted to the Portuguese, some agreements were made considering the Dutch inhabitants. All were welcome to stay and live together with the Portuguese. As far as possessions were concerned, the Dutch had asked permission to ship moveable goods to the Netherlands and sell real estate. The Portuguese were willing to give the Dutch three months to ship their goods and leave. An exception was made, however, for the sugar mill *Casa Forte* noted as belonging to Anna Paes, and the real estate belonging to the military officers.²⁹ Paes' husband was involved in the negotiations and may have been able to persuade the Portuguese to let her sell her sugar mill, or Paes herself may have had some valuable contacts among the Portuguese. The fact that her

²⁸ NA: OWIC, 70.

²⁹ Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *De Braziliaanse Affaire: Portugal, de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en Noord-Oost Brazilië, 1641-1669*, trans. Catherine Barel (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2005), 121.

husband was sent as a negotiator for the Dutch certainly supports the notion that Paes was still involved with the Portuguese. With her flexible identity, born out of pragmatism, she managed to navigate treacherous waters successfully. She died in The Hague in 1674 when she was about 62 years old.

Many other women also became plantation owners. New Netherland, of course, did not develop a plantation culture because of its climate, but Brazil, Suriname, and certain islands in the Caribbean were perfectly suited to grow cotton, indigo, coffee, sugar, and other cash crops. Although the soil on the island of Curaçao was poor and not particularly conducive to large-scale plantations, small plantations did exist and women owned many of them, almost all of them widows. Perhaps one would expect a widow to continue to live on the plantation she owned with her husband, but on the island of Curaçao an astonishing number of widows purchased plantations during the first half of the eighteenth century, often even from each other. A.S. Schut, a widow herself, for instance, sold the plantation *Bakker* to the widow Da Costa Gomes. Da Costa Gomes held on to the plantation for five years and then sold it to another widow, Mrs. H. van Dijk. Such transfers of property among widows were common on the island.³⁰ The death rate among men on the island was high and widows held and transferred property in order to provide for themselves. In 1739, 23% of all outlying plantations on Curaçao were in the hands of women, all widowed.³¹ Overall, the participation of women in the colonial real estate market was high on the island. Of the 218 homes in Willemstad in 1715, women owned fifty-five, again mostly

³⁰ Although Van der Lee did not comment on women who owned plantations, he did include a full list property transfers on the island. See: T. van der Lee, *Plantages op Curaçao en hun Eigenaren, 1708-1845* (Leiden: Grafaria, 1989).

³¹ This percentage is based on a list of plantations and owners composed by Pieter Beek, commander of the outlying bays on the island at the time. 38 men held 44 plantations, while 8 women owned 10 plantations. List printed in: Van der Lee, 86 -87.

widows. This means that 24% of the real estate in the city was in the hands of women, roughly equaling the percentage of plantations in female hands. Many widows who owned homes in Willemstad did not live in them but rented them so that they could provide a steady income.³²

In Dutch Brazil we find women such as Maria Maerschal, a sugar planter. Maerschal was a widow who continued her husband's plantation after his death around 1641.³³ She could have returned to the Netherlands and sold the plantation, as some women did or, with the dearth of European women in the colony, she certainly could have remarried. Maria chose to do neither. Instead, she decided to manage the plantation herself, selling the sugar from her plantation to an Amsterdam agent in Paraiba. In early March of 1641 she was mentioned as "the widow of Josias Marschael" in a bill of sale of goods purchased from her.³⁴ Four years later, in 1645, she still ran the plantation because she sold sugar to a Mr. Verpoorten, who was a representative of Crol and Company, a trading venue in Paraiba. Maerschal partnered with four men, Samuel Tresel, Gillis Crol, L. de Keijser, and A. van Daele who undoubtedly had been her husband's partners as well. At that time she was no longer referred to as the widow Maerschal or as a married woman. By 1654, she still actively managed the plantation³⁵

Margrita van Solst was also a planter in Brazil, but she grew indigo at her plantation. We know of her because she appears in the archives as someone who owes money.³⁶ Another planter

³² NA: WIC, 206. March 12, 1715.

³³ NA: OWIC, 61/54. Her name is spelled in a variety of ways including Marchal, Marschael, and Machals.

³⁴ NA: OWIC, 56. March 4, 1641.

³⁵ NA: OWIC, 56.

³⁶ NA: OWIC, 61.

in Brazil was Catharina de Albercque in 1640.³⁷ She likely owned a mill as well because she is mentioned as “Catharina of the *engenho Santo Antonio*” when she wrote to the governor general of Brazil, Johan Maurits van Nassau, and his council with a request to extend her credit to purchase slaves.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century in Suriname, the consummate plantation colony, some thirty women, mostly widows, were plantation owners.³⁸ This does not mean, however, that all of these women actively managed their property or properties. In the early period, most Dutch planters lived on the plantations where they expected to raise families and put down roots, but life on the plantation was isolated because there were virtually no roads, so transportation had to take place on the rivers. The distances between plantations were so large that people had to travel much further to find social contacts than they were used to in Holland.³⁹ As a result, many planters resided in Paramaribo while overseers managed the plantations.⁴⁰

Suriname women participated in the larger Atlantic slave trade by purchasing slaves, either for their outlying plantations, or for their Paramaribo homes. Jannetjen Kuypers, for instance, bought a slave for the amount of 3,000 pounds. Her name appears on a list, dated April 28, 1683 in *Surinamburgh*, of people who owed money to the WIC for the “delivery and sale of slaves” from the ship *d’ Orange Boom* of captain Cornelis Jansz Pyl. Like Jannetjen Kuypers, Sara Alonza also appeared on the 1683 list of people who owed money to the WIC for the purchase of slaves. Sara bought two slaves and owed the company 6,000 pounds. Kuypers and

³⁷ Also known as Catharina Albuquerque.

³⁸ ZA: 827. *Zelandia Illustrata* (294) Illustrated map of Suriname with list of plantations and owners.

³⁹ Ort, *Surinaams verhaal*, 44-45.

⁴⁰ Buddingh, *Geschiedenis van Suriname*, 55.

Alonza may have been widows who needed slaves to do housework or other tasks around the house; most likely they did not need slaves for large plantations since they were usually bought in larger quantities. There were men on the list who purchased large numbers of slaves, probably for plantation work.⁴¹

One woman who undoubtedly purchased large numbers of slaves was Sara van Scharpenhuijsen, wife of Johannes Basseliers. Basseliers was a Dutch Reformed minister from Zeeland who served the church in Surinam from 1668 to 1684. While in Surinam, he acquired a large sugar plantation, *Surimombo*, where he owned some fifty slaves in 1682, which, at the time, made him the sixth largest slave owner in the colony.⁴² He acquired two plantations with the help of his powerful brother-in-law, Jan van Scharpenhuijsen, who would later become governor of the colony. From the beginning his wife ran the plantation, perhaps because she came from a family that had been involved in the plantation business for many years. Not much is known about Sara van Scharpenhuijsen's life except that she had a daughter named Elisabeth who was born in Curaçao, so the couple must have lived there for some time before moving on to Suriname. They started the plantation business because Basseliers did not get paid for his vocation as minister during the first seven years of his tenure.

The Basseliers liked to live comfortably and they built a large house at their main plantation. A visitor to the plantation after Basselier's death described the house as follows: "In the large house there is a room of cedar wood with magnificent decorations. It has a cabinet with many curiosities (*rariteiten*) of little birds, flies, and animals worth seeing."⁴³ The Basseliers'

⁴¹ NA: Archive of the Radermacher family, 609.

⁴² Gerald Francis de Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Negro Slavery in Colonial America," *Church History* 40, no. 4 (1971): 434.

⁴³ Jan Reeps cited in: Jaap van de Veen, "Met grote moeite en kosten: de totstandkoming van een zeventiende eeuwse verzameling," in *De Wereld Binnen Handbereik: Rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735*, Ellinoor Bergvelt

daughters were the epitome of fashionable young ladies in the colony, dressing according to the latest trends in Europe, and having sleepover parties with their friends from Paramaribo.⁴⁴ Most often, families lived in the city because of the isolation and dangers in the country, but the Basseliers family surrounded themselves with everything they could have wanted in the city, and their social life perhaps was more active than that of others because they had frequent visitors to their famed natural history collection.

Aside from being a plantation owner or merchant, which required considerable capital, there were a number of other possibilities open to less affluent women in the Dutch colonies who wanted or needed to provide for themselves and for their families. In order to see what kinds of occupations were open to women, it is useful to look at what kinds of jobs they held in Amsterdam. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, some 416 primary occupations were listed in the notarial archives, of which twenty-one were practiced exclusively by women, 280 were exclusively male, and 115 were practiced by both sexes. From these records we learn that women were involved in occupations ranging from baker, beer brewer, printer, and bookkeeper, to midwife and metalworker. Of course, they also worked in a number of marginal occupations, such as street singer or prostitute.⁴⁵ Some of these female occupations, such as retail flower merchant or printer for instance, were most likely not practiced overseas but others, such as midwife, prostitute, tavern keeper, or beer brewer, certainly were.

and Renée Kistemaker, eds. (Zwolle: Waanders, 1992), 62. This book was the catalogue for an exhibit at the Amsterdam Historisch Museum on collecting in the seventeenth century.

⁴⁴ Ort, *Surinaams Verhaal*, 69.

⁴⁵ Wayne P. te Brake, Rudolf Dekker, and Lotte C. van de Pol, "Women and Political Culture in the Dutch Revolutions," in *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, ed. Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 124-125.

The Trades: Bakers, Tavern- and Innkeepers

An example of a woman engaged in a trade was Femmetje Aelbrechts in New Netherland.⁴⁶ The widow of Hendrick Jansen Westerkamp, a baker, she continued his work after he passed away. Probably necessitated by lack of capital, she entered into a partnership with Michiel Teunnissen, but wanted out in September of 1657. The two appeared before the court in Fort Orange and arbitrators appointed by the court found, after examining the business records, that Teunnissen owed about eighty-four guilders. Once the eighty-four guilders were paid, he would be released from all the debts accrued during the partnership and the business relationship was terminated.⁴⁷ A year later, however, Ester Fonda, a plaintiff, demanded Teunnissen pay her around one hundred guilders he owed her. Yet, this debt had been accrued during his partnership with Aelbrechts and thus he argued that, since he had been released from the partnership and all debts a year earlier, Aelbrechts was the one who should pay her.⁴⁸ Such partnerships between widows and investors in their businesses were not uncommon. But as we see here, after such partnerships ended, women were solely responsible for their enterprises. In the colonies, we do not find many bakers, but, by contrast, the occupation of tavern keeper seems to have been popular among women.

All around the Atlantic world and in Europe, taverns or alehouses fulfilled a central function in society as public spaces where men could go to fraternize, exchange news and engage in business like the buying and selling of slaves. In early modern England, for example, alehouses sprang up during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, as a response to an

⁴⁶ See also chapter 2.

⁴⁷ FOCM: 332-333.

⁴⁸ FOCM: 418.

increase in vagrancy. Alehouses became places where those who were essentially homeless could gather and pass some time away from the outdoors. In effect, these public spaces provided an alternative home and community, especially for the young and those of the lower classes such as itinerants, journeymen, and servants.⁴⁹

It is easy to see, then, why taverns would be so popular in the colonies where many sailors, soldiers, and merchants circulated and essentially formed an itinerant community. The taverns and inns in the towns along the Atlantic seaboard developed as sites where news was exchanged about ships, people, politics, and business, and where men could forge bonds with one another by drinking together. The taverns as public spaces in the seaports were essentially nodes in a network of commerce, seafaring, and military expansion. Women, as custodians of many of these network nodes, but also as patrons, played a pivotal role in the public sphere in the Atlantic system.

The Dutch in particular were well known around the Atlantic world for their love of beer and wine, and most of them were not at all embarrassed by what foreigners considered their excessive imbibing of alcohol. On the contrary, it was quite common for a wife to excuse her husband with the statement that he was hung over because of last night's revelries when asked if her husband was home.⁵⁰ It is no surprise then that there were a great many taverns where people came to drink and spend some of their time. In 1613, the city of Amsterdam counted 518 so called *tapperijen* or taverns, which amounted to one for every two hundred inhabitants. In New Amsterdam, the number was even higher.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Patricia Fumerton, "Not Home: Alehouses, Ballads, and the Vagrant Husband in Early Modern England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 32 no.3 (2002), 494.

⁵⁰ Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 39.

⁵¹ Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 41.

The Dutch tavern was not an establishment enjoyed only by men, however. Foreigners were stunned to learn that some respectable Dutch women occasionally feasted all through the night, not only at local taverns, but also at taverns that were located at ten or even twenty miles from their homes. In early modern England, by contrast, women could not enter alehouses by themselves and could only do so in the company of their husbands, as unaccompanied women in these establishments were seen as prostitutes and did not fall under the category “respectable.”⁵² Of course English men could come and go without being stigmatized.

Some argue that the acquisition of a tavern was expensive and required a fair amount of capital for the purchase of alcohol. In the mainland English American colonies, only those with a middle or higher income could afford to run such businesses. Typically, men acquired licenses and their wives and daughters ran the establishments.⁵³ Yet, whereas English colonial women who ran inns and taverns needed a husband or other male relative to obtain a license to run the business, many Dutch women operated these businesses under their own names. In the case of the Dutch, many of these so-called “taverns” were not much more than a room in a house or a one room dwelling of the tavern keeper, requiring less of an investment. Well-known seventeenth century genre painter Jan Steen was the owner of an “inn” which he kept in his house.⁵⁴ Historian Patricia Fumerton notes that English taverns were frequently family run and that the woman of the house usually took a major part in them, because the husband often had a different job during the day.⁵⁵ This seems to have been the case for many Dutch taverns as well where the wife ran the tavern while the husband had a different occupation. Since women were

⁵² Fumerton, 494.

⁵³ Meacham, 142-143.

⁵⁴ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 463.

⁵⁵ Fumerton, 495.

undeniably tied to the image of the house and keepers of the household, and since many, if not most, taverns seem to have been run in a room in the household of the tavern keeper, the female alehouse mistress became an emblem of the extension of the domestic sphere into the public sphere.

An inn was generally a more respectable business than a tavern or tap house. When Adriaen Jansen van Leyden asked the Director General and Council of New Netherland if he could build a house in an area that was considered off limits, the Council announced that they needed accommodations for travelers and foreigners, so they allowed him to build a structure that was suitable for an inn. However, they warned Jansen that it would always have to be used by him and his heirs as an inn and it could not be “turned into a common saloon and tavern”. He could only use it as a respectable lodging house for travelers.⁵⁶

Another popular leisure activity was smoking tobacco, and it was enjoyed in the taverns. What was a curiosity in the late sixteenth century quickly became a staple in the Netherlands and it was even thought to be of medicinal value. By 1640, it was quite common to see people smoke tobacco, both in the Netherlands and in the colonies, and women and girls enjoyed tobacco smoking just as much as men.⁵⁷

Curaçao

On the island of Curaçao, and specifically in Willemstad, taverns and inns fulfilled an important role in the life of the colony because many of their customers inhabited the island only temporarily. Curaçao did not have an extensive planter population, unlike many other Caribbean

⁵⁶ Gehring, *Council Minutes, 1652-1654*, 134 (April 30, 1654). Signed by P. Stuyvesant and Council.

⁵⁷ Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 42.

islands, and the community thrived only because of the slave trade and some salt production. The people who frequented the island were mostly sailors, soldiers, and merchants in the service of the Dutch West India Company. For this transient population the inns and taverns on the island served as gathering places and functioned as a space where they could fraternize with people with whom they shared a common experience and interest. In these establishments men came to share the news and they conducted business which included the selling and buying of slaves.

The tavern keepers on the island were members of the so-called *tappers gilde*, or tappers guild. The guilds provided protection from competition by outsiders and many also had some kind of provision for their members when they reached old age, as well as provisions for widows and for those who became ill or handicapped and could no longer practice their trades.⁵⁸

Although some guilds excluded women, others afforded them full membership and most allowed widows to continue their husbands' trades.⁵⁹ Although no records are available of guilds in Suriname, where we know women ran taverns, there are records concerning Brazil and Curaçao, which show that women were members of the guild.

In fact, two thirds of the guild's tavern keepers in Curaçao were women. Moreover, seventeen of the twenty-seven female tavern keepers on the island of Curaçao were never married and only six of them had husbands.⁶⁰ Ten of the twenty-seven were literate in the sense that they could write, although all must have been able to do the basic arithmetic required to sell alcohol and tally the customers' purchases. Even though not enough documents survive to be absolutely sure, the married women likely had the status of *koopvrouw* or some similar

⁵⁸ A. Th. van Deursen, *Het Dagelijks Brood*, vol. 1, *Het Kopergeld van de Gouden Eeuw* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1978), 20.

⁵⁹ Te Brake, 125.

⁶⁰ NA: WIC: 208. See figure 2.

recognition of their independence. Because these women were part of a guild, it is inconceivable that their husbands would not have known that they ran businesses. As we know, in many cases the acknowledgement of a husband was an important part in obtaining the *koopvrouw* status.

The guilds were regulated by the colonial government, which was concerned, as in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the Dutch Atlantic, with disorder resulting from drunkenness. For example, sailors could not be served any drinks after a certain hour because this interfered with shipping. In a certain case in Curaçao a ship could not depart because the majority of the crew was drunk and unable to work. After this debacle, which cost the company money, they passed an ordinance stating that tavern keepers could not serve alcohol to sailors. Other ordinances on the island were instated to prevent soldiers and sailors from spending all of their wages in the taverns.⁶¹

Brazil

New Holland, or Dutch Brazil had a tavern keepers' guild as well and Lijsabeth Martens, as the owner of an inn or tap house, was a member of this guild. Compared to Curaçao and New Netherland, there were relatively few taverns; only ten people were members of the guild, including two women. Martens signed a surviving petition from the tavern guild, which was sent to the High Council of Brazil in 1646 and concerned the unfair competition by unscrupulous and

⁶¹ Specifically the ordinance of July 16, 1709 forbids tavern keepers to serve alcohol to sailors or to extend them credit. Source: NA: WIC: 203.

As part of a series of publications containing the laws of the Netherlands, the ordinances for Curaçao are printed in the following: Jacob A. Schiltkamp, *West Indisch Plakaatboek Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, 1638-1782* (Amsterdam: Emmering, 1973). Other ordinances may be found in: Gehring, *Curacao Papers*.

unlicensed tavern keepers who did not pay excises or taxes and thus could sell their wares below market value.⁶² This was a common complaint heard all around the Dutch Atlantic world.

In Brazil, inn- and tavern keepers were common as well, and the tappers, as in Curaçao, were members of a guild that licensed tavern- and innkeepers. Innkeepers were frequently women who belonged to the middling classes because providing lodging required a larger home than a one room or two-room dwelling, and it was more respectable than keeping a tavern. It was not always a lucrative operation, though. Rachel, the wife of the minister in Brazil, Jodocus A. Stetten, was one such innkeeper.⁶³ After Portuguese rebels captured her husband in 1647, the Dutch tried in vain to exchange him for Portuguese prisoners. His wife, now no longer receiving the income from her husband, asked the West India Company to pay her his wages since the enemy captured him. This, however, the company denied.⁶⁴ Yet, a second request was more successful and was approved. They argued, among others, that no minister would go to the colonies if his family would not be guaranteed some sort of income if something happened to him.⁶⁵ In 1648, the Portuguese transported him to Portugal where he was most likely killed because of his Protestant faith, although there are no records of a trial.⁶⁶

The fact that she needed support from the WIC indicates that she likely did not make enough money through the inn to support herself. Moreover, the WIC did not take into account that she owned a business, even though they could have argued that she had her own income.

⁶² NA: OWIC, 61 & 62. 1646.

⁶³ Her last name is unknown.

⁶⁴ SA: Classis Amsterdam van de Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, 212, folio 208. May 18, 1647.

⁶⁵ SA: Classis Amsterdam van de Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, 212, folio 210. July 12, 1647.

⁶⁶ L.J. Joosse, "Jodocus A. Stetten," in *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlands Protestantisme*, ed. C. Houtman et al (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2001) 5: 492.

New Netherland

New Netherland had a high frequency of taverns. On a 1660 map of New Amsterdam we count 253 houses and twenty taverns, one for about every thirteen homes, and an even higher concentration of taverns than in Amsterdam in the Netherlands.⁶⁷ Women ran some of these establishments, although, if we go by official lists of tavern keepers, not as many as in Curaçao.

A feature of life in the Dutch Republic and in most colonies, as we have seen in Brazil and Curaçao, was guild protection of tapping and brewing. In New Netherland, however, unlike in Brazil and Curaçao, guilds were non-existent. The tavern keepers were not allowed to regulate themselves and had no trade organization. Instead, the colonial government laid down extensive regulations to protect the interest of the community, and they licensed tavern keepers.

When looking at the number of ordinances enacted against excessive drinking and tapping, one gets the distinct impression that drunkenness and disturbance of the Sunday's rest were difficult to manage for the colonial government. In March of 1648, Petrus Stuyvesant, the director-general of the colony, and his council noted that former ordinances enacted against drinking to excess were not obeyed. The cause of this, they believed, was the fact that tavern keeping was so lucrative and relatively easy to do, that many left their "original and first vocation, trade and business" in order to start a tavern. They found that almost one fourth of New Amsterdam consisted of brandy and beer taverns and tobacco shops. The Director-General and Council found that the proliferation of taverns brought with it a number of problems, arguing that it corrupted the youth, the common man, and the company's servants. In addition, the sale of liquor to Native Americans was another problem they wished to address. It led, they argued, to

⁶⁷ See for the so called "Castello plan" of New Amsterdam in 1660: I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1916), vol. 2.

increased hostilities. Moreover, many of these taverns were not licensed and impeded the business of regulated taverns that dutifully paid their taxes and excises.⁶⁸

The ordinance of 1648, however, did not solve the problem long term and over the years, until 1664, the ordinance would be renewed and improved upon. An additional ordinance in 1651 set prices for brandy, wines, and spirits because many complained that tavern keepers charged too much for drinks.⁶⁹ At least twice more, the ordinances were repeated. In 1656, it became clear that it was difficult for New Netherlanders to honor the Sabbath as the church and government thought they ought to. They continued their trades on Sundays and participated in amusements such as dancing, playing cards, and playing games. Games such as tricktrack (a version of backgammon), handball, and bowling often took place in and around the tavern where people gathered for leisure time. The church, however, clearly condemned these practices, especially during church services.⁷⁰

Several women had to appear in court and were fined because of tapping on Sunday. For example, Lysbeth Ackermans had to pay a fine for serving brandy for two soldiers and beer for two Native Americans on a Sunday. She admitted it but said she was not aware of the ordinances, and that she sold the alcohol before the sermon. Apparently, the court saw this as a mitigating circumstance and had her pay a ten-guilder fine, instead of the twenty-four guilders the prosecutor asked for.⁷¹ Annetje Smits was also accused of serving alcohol on a Sunday. In her defense, she said that the persons who drank beer at her tavern lodged at her house and

⁶⁸ Charles T. Gehring, trans. and ed., *Laws and Writs of Appeal, 1647-1663* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 14; Jacobs, *Een Zegenrijk Gewest*, 210-211. See also: Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland*, 132-134.

⁶⁹ Gehring, *Laws and Writs of Appeal*, 25-27.

⁷⁰ Gehring, *Laws and Writs of Appeal*, 71-74.

⁷¹ RNA: IV: 320.

served themselves. That exonerated her, but she still had to pay a fine for yelling at the officer who came to her tavern to check on them that Sunday.⁷²

In Fort Orange (now Albany), the court decided to make an example of some women who continued to sell alcohol to Native Americans, in spite of the ordinances strictly forbidding this practice. Dirkie Harmensen and Egbertjen Egberts both appeared in court on October 4th, 1656, although their cases would be handled separately. Hermense, an innkeeper in the village of Beverwijck was accused of selling beer to the Indians, “contrary to the express prohibition of the commissary and magistrates”. She freely confessed and was fined an exceedingly high five hundred guilders for selling beer. In addition, the court stated that “as an example to others” she was to receive corporal punishment and correction and be banished from the colony. However, because she freely confessed, they showed her leniency and condemned her to pay three hundred guilders. She was to remain in civil detention until the sum was paid. The case of Egbertje Egberts was identical to that of Harmensen. She too confessed and was condemned to pay three hundred guilders.⁷³

The people of New Netherland must have been particularly incorrigible because in June and January of 1657 the ordinances were reissued yet again, and illegal tap houses were still thriving.⁷⁴ Perhaps this is unsurprising because in the Netherlands itself authorities also had great difficulty with the same issues.⁷⁵

⁷² RNA: IV: 102.

⁷³ FOCM, 252-254. October 4, 1656.

⁷⁴ Gehring, *Laws and Writs of Appeal*, 78-79 (January 23, 1657) and 83-84 (June 12, 1657).

⁷⁵ Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) 10-11; Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 190-193. Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 38-42.

Women likely kept many of these illegal tap houses. There are three years for which lists of tavern keepers in New Amsterdam are available, 1648, 1657, and 1665. In 1648, twelve men were listed as tavern keepers and no women. In 1657, twenty-one people were listed, including four women, and in 1665 the list included sixteen people with a license, including four women again.⁷⁶ The number of licensed female tavern owners in New Netherland is below the numbers found in other colonies. The likely cause of this is that with so many illegal tap houses, women may have run many because they required a lower investment and could easily be done from a room in a woman's or family's home. In fact, most of the taverns in New Netherland were little more than a room in the front of a house with a table and a few chairs, where community members could gather to have conversations and drink. The drinks, mostly beer, wine, and brandy, were served out of vats and on a chalkboard on the door one kept a running tab for the customers.⁷⁷

Many women who ran taverns had occasional difficulties getting paid and appeared in court to get the money owed to them. For example, Leuntje Pietersen, a licensed tavern keeper, demanded payment from a customer who ran up a fairly large balance of more than eighty-four guilders. He requested six weeks to pay, to which she agreed.⁷⁸ Madaleen Vincent, another licensed tavern keeper, demanded payment from a customer, Jacob Willemsen, who owed her eleven guilders for brandy. Yet, he claimed he did not know of this debt and refused to pay, after which the burden was placed on the tavern keeper to prove that she sold him the brandy.

Eventually, in a following court session, Willemsen again argued that he did not know he had

⁷⁶ RNA: I: 8 (1648); II: 263 (January 9, 1657) Female tappers: Madaleen Vincent, Leuntie Pietersen, Mary Polet, Sara Schepmoes; V: 262 (June 24, 1665) Female tappers: Anneke Litsco, Jesyntje Verhagen, Grietje Provoost, Geertje Corssen.

⁷⁷ Jacobs, *Een Zegenrijk Gewest*, 211.

⁷⁸ RNA: II: 398. June 3, 1658.

had the brandy but admitted that he was in the company where the wine was drunk. He was likely drunk and did not remember the night all that well. Since Madaleen Vincent was willing to swear under oath that she sold him the brandy, and since Willemsen was not willing to swear an oath, he was condemned to pay the eleven guilders.⁷⁹ Eleven guilders was not much money, but Vincent must have brought her customer to court to avoid more of such incidents where people were drunk and did not want to pay.

Some of these taverns owned by single women may have been more than just places where men could come to eat and imbibe. The women may also have done some domestic work for the men such as mending clothes and writing letters.⁸⁰ All these services can be viewed as an extension of the domestic sphere, and we can perhaps add to that the rendering of sexual services as well.

Prostitution

Amsterdam and other cities in the Netherlands had taverns where one could find alcoholic drinks, as well as female companionship as procuresses lurked around to find a good mark for their wares. Some of the inns and taverns in the Netherlands were known places for prostitution such as the *Herberg van Overveen* in Haarlem where, according to contemporary accounts, “evil and an unruly company of whores and criminals” gathered.⁸¹ Some of the tavern

⁷⁹ RNA: I: 319. June 7, 1655; RNA: I:323. June 21, 1655.

⁸⁰ Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, “She Said She did not Know Money: Urban Women and Atlantic Markets in the Revolutionary Era,” *Early American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2006): 330-331.

⁸¹ Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 35.

keepers could provide their clientele with prostitutes who did not necessarily live at the establishment the woman was running. This system was quite common in Amsterdam.⁸²

In the Netherlands at the time, brothels were exclusively female owned.⁸³

Historian Thera Wijsenbeek writes that it is difficult to determine how many women who had small taverns in their homes in Delft and The Hague also engaged in prostitution, because if we go by most official documents, prostitution did not occur.⁸⁴ Indeed, if we are to look just at the WIC documents, prostitution did not occur much in the Atlantic world either. The company officially did not condone prostitution in its territories, but it also did not want any behavior that could interfere with business. Prostitution and lewd behavior could potentially be problematic for both the WIC and the VOC, mainly because it went hand in hand with drunkenness. VOC governor general Jacques Specx wrote in 1629, “The crews are fit and well, and we want for nothing save as many honest maids and housewives in place of as many filthy strumpets and street-walkers who have been found in all the ships. They are so numerous and so awful that I am ashamed to say any more about it.”⁸⁵ Of course prostitution was a logical corollary to the fact that the Dutch towns at the Atlantic seaboard were places where a highly transient, male population looked for female companionship.

The two worlds of the brothel and the home, as the worlds of the tavern and the home, were closely related, yet while one was the seat of cleanliness and virtue, some have argued, the

⁸² Van de Pol, *De Burger en de Hoer*.

⁸³ For more on the history of prostitution in the Netherlands see: Van de Pol, *De Burger en de Hoer*; Van Deursen, *Volkscultuur*, 34-38; Rudolf M. Dekker, “Sexuality, Elites, and Court Life in the Late Seventeenth Century: The Diaries of Constantijn Huygens, Jr.,” *Eighteenth Century Life* 23, no. 3 (1999): 94-109.

⁸⁴ For female occupations in Delft and The Hague during the eighteenth century see: Thera Wijsenbeek, “Van Priseursters en Prostituees: Beroepen van Vrouwen in Delft en Den Haag tijdens de Achtiende Eeuw” *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 8 (1987): 173.

⁸⁵ C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia, 1602-1795* (London: Variorum, 1988), 100.

other was the seat of vice and squalor. Historian Simon Schama in his chapter on “housewives and hussies” has tried to reconcile the opposing views of women as housewives obsessed with cleanliness on the one hand, and the filthiness of the whore on the other, arguing that cities such as Amsterdam depended on the unofficial toleration of prostitution in brothels so that the zones of virtue and vice were clearly marked.⁸⁶ In his book, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, Schama feels the need to reconcile a number of polarities in Dutch society because, he argues, that the Dutch themselves saw this need. This “soothing of the Dutch conscience” that Schama sees is exactly what feminist historians in the Netherlands object to because they see no such thing.⁸⁷ In fact, historian Lia van Gemert argues that the need to reconcile polarities stems from Schama’s narrative paradigm, which, as Schama himself explained, needs a “coherent literary form”.⁸⁸ Instead, historians like Van Gemert see Dutch society as accepting of plurality, especially with regard to women.

Some astute, enterprising women readily recognized the opportunities for prostitution, and thus financial gain, that the Atlantic world could provide for them and set sail for the West. Christientje Harmens and Sara Hendriks, were just two of the many adventurous women from the Netherlands who made the crossing to Brazil donning men’s clothes. The WIC would not let single women without family or husbands take passage on their ships, so the women had no other choice but to enlist as soldiers or sailors. Once they arrived in Brazil, they threw out their

⁸⁶ Schama, chapter 6, “Housewives and Hussies: Homeliness and Worldliness.” Schama based his contention on comments by Bernard de Mandeville in *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews* (1724). See: Schama, 467.

⁸⁷ Lia van Gemert, “The Power of the Weaker Vessels: Simon Schama and Johan van Beverwijck on Women,” in Kloek, *Women of the Golden Age*, 49.

⁸⁸ Van Gemert, 50.

disguises, taking on their female identities once more, and set up brothels.⁸⁹ Especially from Dutch Brazil we have many such examples. Yet, and perhaps not surprisingly, few records of such businesses are to be found in the Company archives. We only know about them because church officials complained about the immoral activities in the community, because at times young teenage men who enlisted were unmasked and found to be women, and because they occasionally appear in court records. It seems that, unofficially at least, the WIC condoned or tolerated prostitution as a necessary evil, but it did not tolerate drunkenness, which could interfere with business operations.

Female transvestism, in the above-mentioned case, seems to have been mostly pragmatic. However, there were women who practiced transvestism because they were uncomfortable with their sexual identities as well. Many a woman was unmasked on board the ships of both the WIC and the VOC and not all were prostitutes.⁹⁰

Sometimes, as was the case in New Netherland, we find clear indications that tavern keeping and prostitution could indeed go hand in hand. Magdalena Dircks, a known prostitute, was banished from the colony because of her “tavern keeping” which in this case included prostitution. She and her husband Harmen Hendricksz were allowed to return after a period of banishment, but only on the condition that they would live as honest people and not return to “tavern keeping”.⁹¹ Although the above-mentioned example indicates that prostitution could be a corollary to tavern keeping, the fact that female tavern keepers in Brazil and Curaçao were members of an officially established guild indicates that they most likely did not openly advertise possible illicit activities.

⁸⁹ Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilie*, 95-97.

⁹⁰ See: Dekker, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism*.

⁹¹ Jacobs, *Een Zegenrijk Gewest*, 363.

Perhaps an even more convincing example, though, is Maria de Truwe, also known as *de Eenhoorn* (The Unicorn).⁹² In May of 1654, the court in New Amsterdam discussed her way of life and that of two other women, Cristyntien Greveraet and Geertien Jacobsz, also known as *de Schone Boerin* (The beautiful farmer's wife). All three were married, and all three lived on the same street called the Herenweg, which the English later named Broadway. De Truwe and her husband were innkeepers, but the women were accused of having "consorts" and they were to be notified that they had to change their ways or risk banishment. The *fiscal* was to keep an eye on them and their associates and "if during the night any other whores or whoremasters" were found with the women they were to be brought before the Director-General and Council.⁹³ The inn with its extra beds could very well have served as a brothel where the three women worked.

The inn/brothel was clearly run by De Truwe, and not her husband. She appeared in court in matters of payment without her husband. In November of 1654, only six months after the court decided to "keep an eye" on De Truwe for her illicit behavior, she appeared in court as a plaintiff. She sued Arent Jansen, the Provost Marshal of New Netherland, for approximately twenty-seven guilders for a can of Spanish wine and a wine glass. By November 30th she had gone to court three times to get her money. Finally, on that day, he acknowledged the debt but pretended to have discharged it by imposing a fine on her in return.⁹⁴ Of course the court could not allow that and ordered the defendant to pay within 14 days. After fourteen days, however, she went to collect from Jansen and he responded, "I'll give you the devil for your sick heart!

⁹² Her name is also spelled Mary de Truy, or Mareye de Truy. The practice of giving prostitutes nicknames was common in Amsterdam, as well as in the colonies. These nicknames are yet another indication that these women were indeed prostitutes.

⁹³ Gehring, *Council Minutes, 1652-1654*, 137.

⁹⁴ RNA: I: 268. November 30, 1654. See also: RNA I: 265. November 23, 1654.

Get out or I'll throw you out!" He then kicked her outside by grabbing her by the arm and forcefully removing her. He also threatened to throw her in the hole if she did not go away.⁹⁵

The position of Provost Marshal was a powerful one in the colony and if De Truwe indeed ran a brothel, his attendance at her tavern could damage his reputation. No wonder then that he responded with anger about her march to his home where people could see him be visited by a well-known prostitute. He probably did not want her around his house at all, but abused his power to intimidate her. She, however, would have nothing of the sort and ran right to the High Council to complain of his behavior. Unfortunately, other than the court order to pay her, there is no other judgment from the court about his behavior towards her at his home.

Another connection between the tavern and the brothel can be seen in the world of art. The brothel was a popular subject in seventeenth century genre painting. Many paintings seem to depict tavern scenes, but upon closer inspection turn out to be brothels. Women in these paintings are usually either lascivious and bawdy or drunk, or more demure and blush at the indecent proposals of men. The sex act in such works is represented by the presence of mussels, a pipe being stuffed with tobacco, money exchanging hands, or animals copulating. The painting by Van Mieris, for example, is one such work, which, at first glance at least, could depict a tavern scene (see figure 3). A well-dressed man is seated in the center of the composition while a young woman serves him a drink. There are, however, clear indications that this is a brothel. The woman serving the drink is clearly not a proper housewife or tavern owner because her dress is open at the top and reveals some of her breasts. Another clear indication is the copulating dogs in the background that serve as a metaphor for what is about to happen between the two figures in the foreground. The bedding overhanging the bannister is another signifier of what is about to

⁹⁵ Gehring, *Council Minutes, 1652-1654*, 214.

happen here. Contemporaries would have readily understood such hints at the occupation of the woman and the intent of the man.⁹⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the work women did in the informal public sphere, and focused on economic contributions. However, it should be mentioned that much women's work took place at home. Wives and female domestics cared for gardens and animals, did laundry, cleaned, and prepared food. Moreover, as keepers of the home, women furnished their houses and adorned themselves and their families with European and East Asian wares which linked the West and East, contributing to the integration of two distinct, but not separate commercial networks.

Women's work, whether in the household or in the public sphere, was indispensable to the development of the Atlantic world. In the public sphere, women participated in the expanding economy by working in the mercantile system as traders, by running plantations and mills that exported their goods, by engaging in various trades, and by operating taverns that were nodes in the Atlantic information system, among others. Through these positions in the public sphere women were able to negotiate changing political environments to their advantage and they could sometimes influence decision making, although this is not always readily apparent from the extant sources.

⁹⁶ Seymour Slive, *Dutch Painting, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 168.

List of Female Tavern Keepers on the Island of Curaçao, 1723	
Name	Status
Widow Diedenhooven	Widow
Anne Ince	Independent
Susanna Naseret	Independent
Maria Duurling	Independent
Christina Huybens	Independent
Treijntje Dam	Independent
Widow Jacobs Kron	Widow
Anna Olij	Married
Wife of Jan Jurjansen	Married
Geertruyd Boode	Ran a tavern for her father
Widow Jacob Harmensz Eel	Widow
Catharina Boekhout	Independent
Widow Jan Lipman	Widow
Helena Deurlo	Independent
Maritje Croes	Independent
Wife of Gijsbert de Jong	Married
Wife of Johannes Boudewijn	Married, husband incapacitated
Adriana Blom	Independent
Anna Holtsman	Independent
Lena Redoch	Independent
Dorothea	Independent, mulatto
Martijntje Bonrepos	Independent
Susanna Bont	Independent
Maria Brij	Independent
Wife of Benjamin Scharlet	Married
Grietje Willems	Independent
Wife of Axel Andries	Independent

Fig. 2. Source: NA: WIC, 208.



Fig. 3. Frans van Mieris (the elder), *Inn Scene*, 1658, oil on wood, 42.8 x 33.3 cm, *Mauritshuis*, Den Haag.

- INTERLUDE -

Women's Travel Experiences

Most Dutch women who traveled in the Atlantic World did so with their husbands, or as part of a family or larger kinship group. The first challenge they faced was the voyage overseas. The initial journey to the colonies must have been an unfamiliar and oftentimes harrowing experience for many. We learn something about just how terrifying and life altering these voyages could be from several sources, including the unique journal of Elisabeth van der Woude who journeyed to the Guyanas with her father and two siblings when she was a teenager.¹

Elisabeth van der Woude was born in 1657. Her father, Harman Hartman van der Woude, was a board member of the well-known Dutch East India Company (VOC) and of the Compagnie van Spitsbergen, a company that primarily dealt with whaling. In 1658 Elisabeth had a brother, Johannes, and in 1661 a sister, Margariet, followed. When Elisabeth was only five years old, her mother died and her father never remarried.

During the 1670s, a group of investors was interested in setting up a colony on the so-called "wild coast" of South America, or the area between the Orinoco and the Amazon rivers. Their plan was to settle in the Oyapoc River area.² Although they estimated they would need about 1600 people to set up a viable colony, they only managed to find about 350 people who

¹ Dutch language scholar Kim Muller transcribed the journal and provides a short textual analysis in her work, comparing the journal to other writings by women. I have used her transcription.

Kim Muller, *Elisabeth van der Woude: Memorije van 't geen bij mijn tijt is voorgevallen met het opzienbarende verslag van haar reis naar de Wilde Kust, 1676-1677* (Amsterdam: Terra Incognita, 2000). For the failed colonization at the Oyapoc river as seen described by Van der Woude see: Marijke Barend-van Haeften, "Een mislukte kolonisatie aan de Oyapoc door vrouwenogen gezien: Het verslag van een reis naar de Wilde Kust door Elisabeth van der Woude (1676-1677)," *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, 21 (2005): 91-98.

² This is the river Oiapoque, which now forms the border between French Guiana and Brazil. The initiator of the Oyapoc project was Johannes Aprius, an Englishman born John Price. He was a minister in The Hague who had previously lived in Dutch Brazil.

were willing to go.³ Harman van der Woude, at the advanced age of 55, decided to take a chance and bring his family and a great number of servants to set up sugar and tobacco plantations with the consent of the States of Holland. And so it was that Elisabeth boarded the *Sint Lourens* for her journey to South America. She was 19 years old.

The departure from Texel must have been quite a sight to behold, for the *Sint Lourens* did not set sail for the West Indies by itself. As was customary, ships bound for both the East and West Indies combined into a larger fleet, often accompanied by warships for security reasons. The fleet departing for the Oyapoc River consisted of six ships, but at the departure from Texel in the Netherlands, they were part of a fleet of about 75.⁴ Elisabeth wrote that in addition to her immediate family, they brought five maids, 45 male servants, three horses, six cows, some sheep and fowl, cloth, tin and copper, an array of building materials and tools, and a year's worth of food for all of their people. Other prospective male colonists would also have had their families and servants, although perhaps not as numerous as the wealthy van der Woudes.

The fleet left on December 14th, 1676. Elisabeth's adventures at sea started right at the beginning of the long journey because the fleet left in December during an extraordinarily severe winter when ice made passage difficult for the ships. The cold and heavy winds wrought havoc upon them right at the outset when the *St. Lourens* had a collision with another ship and lost some of its small topsails because the ropes of both ships became intertwined. Later that night, the ship suffered even more damage, this time to the stern, because of a second collision. When the fleet arrived in the Atlantic after yet another accident and the firing of a cannon in the middle

³ Muller, 103.

⁴ The Dutch Republic was at war with France, and especially in the small Channel between England and France the Dutch ships were vulnerable, increasing the need for a large fleet as protection against the French.

of the night to thwart a French pirate ship, Elisabeth may have wondered if they would ever make it safely across the ocean.

Moreover, she must have had some trouble adjusting to life on board a vessel. The space of the ship was not a woman's world but rather a man's world where women were tolerated but served no real purpose. Men took care of every aspect of life on board where there was no gendered division of labor. Men cooked, washed, took care of the ship, its cargo, the navigation, and they managed quite well without women.⁵ For Elisabeth and the other women on board this was almost certainly an unfamiliar experience. Although women were not entirely autonomous within the household, they were seen, especially in Holland, as essential to the household and they were certainly not used to being superfluous. On the ship, however, there was not much for them to do but pray and hope that all would be well while the men took care of almost every aspect of life on board. Probably the only thing women were able to assist with was the care of the sick.

When the *St. Lourens* finally arrived in the Atlantic, south of England, another shock awaited the would-be colonizers. The warships announced that they would leave them there to return to the Netherlands. Having to face the dangers of the Atlantic by themselves must have induced anxiety in all on board. The next separation came on the 21st of December when the entire fleet broke up and the six ships bound for Guyana were left to sail the rest of the way by themselves. However, on the way to Sao Tiago, one of the Cape Verde Islands, the six repeatedly lost one another because of bad weather.⁶ Although Elisabeth does not mention it in her journal, her father must have been sick at the time. On January 8th he died after a two-week illness. She

⁵ For a discussion of gender and seafaring see: Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁶ Santiago, Cape Verde.

poignantly described her feelings when she wrote that he left "...me, my brother and my sister in great sadness, traveling to a strange land bereft of our best friend, not knowing what difficulties were in store for us."⁷

Unbeknownst to Elisabeth, the first difficulty would present itself the very next day. As it happened, Harman van der Woude died while the *St. Lourens* was anchored off the island São Tiago, then under Portuguese rule. As the eldest child, Elisabeth went ashore with some other people to ask the Dominicans if her father could be buried on the island, but because he had not been a Roman Catholic she did not get permission to inter him there. With this disturbing news, the group decided to secretly bury van der Woude at a very small and uninhabited island close by where they stayed out of sight of the Portuguese.

The *St. Lourens* had orders to stay in Cape Verde for ten days, during which the passengers of the vessel frequently went ashore. Once, when Elisabeth and some others went out to explore the island, they came upon a plantation house with a verandah where the party rested. She described her group as consisting of twenty people, men, unmarried women and some servants. She wrote, "We thought we were as free as in Holland."⁸ When the owner of the plantation saw them, he walked by the young women inspecting them as he walked back and forth. It made the women so uncomfortable that they pulled their head coverings or hoods from their coats over their faces. Van der Woude wrote that a young man sitting next to her warned her that she seemed to be of special interest to the plantation owner. The rest of the group, fearing for their lives, agreed to leave when they saw a contingent of 60 to 70 soldiers coming

⁷ Muller, 33. Original text entry January 8, 1677: Sijnde vrijdach is mijn lieve vader harman hartman vander woude cristelijck in den heer gerust, na dat hij 12 a 14 dagen hadde kranck geweest latende mij, mij broeder en suster, in groote droefheijt gaende na een vrent lant van onse beste vrint berooft, niet weten was swaricheijt ons noch overt hooft hingh.

⁸ Muller, 35. Original text entry January 10, 1677: "...Wij dochten soo vrij te sijn als in hollant.."

their way. A captain who knew some Portuguese spoke with the plantation owner who wanted to know who Elisabeth was. The captain, in a valiant effort to protect her, told the Portuguese that she was his wife. The plantation owner called him a liar, however, and said that he knew she was unmarried.

The incident illustrates the differing social expectations of the two cultures and the tension between Roman Catholics from southern Europe and Protestants from the north. The Portuguese clearly expected women to behave in a certain way. In fact, the Dutch, and even the Spanish thought the attitude of the Portuguese towards their women was unduly restrictive and jealous, while Dutch women enjoyed more liberties than anywhere else in Europe. In Brazil, a prominent Dutchman noted that the Portuguese “jealously secluded their womenfolk” and, according to him, that they were prone to covet their neighbors’ wives.⁹ Elisabeth indeed remarked in her journal that the Dutch women thought they were “as free as in Holland.” Throughout the early modern period, several visitors to the Netherlands noted how free and casual the contact between women and men was. Men and women embraced in the open and married couples publicly showed affection for one another. Even unmarried girls were not always chaperoned, but this did not mean they were unchaste. For Elisabeth and the other women, the unwelcome attention from Portuguese men must have been a startling and somewhat frightening experience.

In the meantime, the group somewhat casually wandered away from the plantation to the shoreline where some entered a rowboat to the ship to send for another boat to get the passengers back on board. While they were waiting at the beach, however, some African men came out of

⁹ C.R. Boxer, “The Humanist Prince Johan Maurits in Recife, 1637-1644,” in *People and Issues in Latin American History: The Colonial Experience*, eds. Lewis Hanke and Jane M. Rausch (Princeton: M. Wiener Publishers, 2000), 247.

the woods and stole the hats of some of the more prominent men among the colonists. They could not leave this challenge unanswered and drew their swords while both African and European women stood at the sideline. Elisabeth wrote that the African women cried out for fear their husbands would be killed, while the European women cried out for fear that they themselves would be captured if the European men lost. Fortunately, however, a boat soon came from the ship to bring the passengers back on board the *St. Lourens*. An old captain on the ship told Elisabeth that she had been in much more danger than she knew.

On the 17th of January they left the Cape Verde islands and set sail for South America where they arrived at the mouth of the Amazon on February 1st. Of this passage Elisabeth notes nothing. However, when they finally reached the Oiapoque River, Elisabeth's 15-year-old sister Margareta died, presumably of the same illness that her father succumbed to. Again, Elisabeth was forced to find a spot to bury a family member. They settled upon a place at the foot of a mountain, near the river. She was now left with just her brother and the servants.

Now that they had arrived, a group of men set out to find a suitable place to settle and they eventually decided upon a place up river which had been pointed out to them by the local native population. Elisabeth first encountered Native Americans when they came to the ship with their canoes. The head of the tribe, whom Elisabeth referred to as the king, came aboard with his wife and children and stayed overnight. Unfortunately, she made no other observations. At first, the colonizers lived in tents since it was the rainy season, while they brought more animals and goods ashore and started to build simple houses. In another journal of the same expedition written by Gerardus de Myst, we read that the rain was so steady that there were almost no periods of dry weather.¹⁰ The heat and humidity led to the fact that much of the food spoiled and

¹⁰ Gerardus de Myst, *Verloren Arbeyt ofte klaer en kortbondigh vertoogh van de Colonie in de lantstreke Guiana aan de vaste kuste van America op de rivier Wiapoca* (Amsterdam, 1679).

that much of the linens and clothes simply rotted away until they built a large covering with roofing shingles for these goods. Myst also mentioned that 60 people had died since the start of the voyage.¹¹

Elisabeth described the flora and fauna of the strange land but other than a short reference to the nuisance of ants, does not complain or mention the incessant rain or the danger travellers faced from wild animals and Native Americans. She called it a paradise on earth, likely because of the lush vegetation she encountered.¹² The group built a small hospital for all the sick, and soon Elisabeth had to make use of it for after some four days ashore she became ill, apparently after her brother had had the same illness. As soon as she was better, she asked the governor of the group if she could return home to Holland, the only indication in the journal that she found the expedition difficult and that she was unhappy. Her request, however, was denied. Two or three days later she took matters into her own hands and embarked on a boat that went back to the *St. Lourens*. Although she did not explain who allowed her to stay, she managed to remain on board as the ship set sail for Holland on March 18th.

On the return trip, the ship anchored in Tobago and afterwards was stuck in the doldrums for some ten days. Between Guadeloupe and La Desirade they entered a narrow passage full of cliffs where they only got through with God's help, Elisabeth wrote. The ship progressed along the Bahamas and Bermuda where it survived a hurricane. Elisabeth wrote that it seemed as if the wind came from all four directions with such force that the ship seemed to disappear into a deep ravine. Twice the captain assembled the people aboard to pray and told them to prepare for death because he did not expect the ship to survive the storm. Yet, they did and sailed past New York,

¹¹ For a comparison of De Myst's and Van der Woude's journal see: Barend-van Haefen, "Een mislukte kolonisatie."

¹² Muller, 35. January 10, 1677.

which they still called New Netherland, and New France to Newfoundland. At the beginning of May, they reached Iceland and on June first, one of the Shetland Islands.

At this point, Elisabeth must have been relieved to have crossed the Atlantic twice and survived. She was now not all that far from home. However, while anchored at one of the islands, three French pirate ships came directly at them at two o'clock in the morning. Knowing there was nothing they could do to avoid the pirates, the Dutch readied for battle. Elisabeth wrote that they swore to be true to each other till death, they prayed, and sang a psalm. After that, there was nothing to do but wait for the enemy. They sat in silence as the three pirate ships approached under the command of the infamous pirate Jean Bart. Bart had served as a soldier for the Dutch Republic during the second English war, after which he had begun a successful career as a pirate commanding his own ship from Duinkirk.

The captain of the *St. Lourens* left the ship with five other men to avoid the coming fight, but when Bart sailed straight for the small boat in which the captain escaped, Elisabeth noted in a rare display of anger and sarcasm, "our hero quickly returned to the ship." The twenty men left on the ship were no match for some 100 pirates, though. The captain quickly lowered the flag as a sign of surrender when pirates armed with swords and guns entered the *St. Lourens*. Since they surrendered, however, they did not harm anyone. Elisabeth wrote that she was in the main cabin at the time with her maid and some other people when the three French pirate captains entered. They demanded the keys to her luggage, which she gave to them, and she had to stand there and watch as they emptied her cases and divided the content among the three of them. The men took good care of her though and did not physically harm her, she wrote, which surprised her and made her less fearful.

Jean Bart took Elisabeth and some others with him to his ship where she wrote she was well treated and met a Roman Catholic who said he once lived in a village near Elisabeth's hometown. Moreover, this man had known her father. However, she soon had to endure daily attempts to convert her to Roman Catholicism. "But God, our Lord gave me the boldness and liberty to resist this", she wrote. Sometimes they were friendly to her, while at other times they threatened her if she did not convert. "But I said I would never convert, not for lovely promises, nor because of threats."¹³ She wrote that Bart was a religious and good-natured man but not as vehement about his religion as his compatriot. He told her that the efforts to convert her were on behalf of a skipper, Jacop van Acker, who wanted to have her if she changed her religion. Upon hearing that, Elisabeth threw a rosary through the room and blew out the candles. Eventually, they let her be, realizing that she would not change her mind. She wrote that she had a great many books, most of them spiritual, which they took and said they would burn once they returned to Dunkirk.

On June 22 they reached the waters around Norway after skirmishes with another ship. Here they received word that the *St. Lourens* had been taken by another group of pirates from Oostende and Jean Bart did not like it one bit. He decided to look for the ship to take revenge and Elisabeth feared this would not end well. Fortunately though, they sailed to the mouth of the river Thames where they encountered an English merchant ship bound for Holland. Jean Bart asked the captain if he would take some of the people on his ship. Elisabeth asked to be allowed to leave with the merchant ship, which was permitted. On the English ship she found a contingent of young women who were bound for Holland as well, and on the 24th she finally reached the island of Texel where she hired a small boat that brought her home.

¹³ Muller, 51. June 2, 1677.

Elisabeth van der Woude came back alone to the hometown she left some seven months earlier with her father, sister, brother, and a host of servants. Upon her arrival she was rushed by so many people that it made her head spin, for they all wanted news from their families. It must have been difficult for Elisabeth to relay the news of so many deaths. Looking back, she noted that her trip had been very difficult and that she often thought she would not make it, but that God delivered her from her enemies.

The colony in Guyana failed when the French invaded. Elisabeth's brother managed to escape because Native Americans in the area sheltered him. He went to Suriname and found passage back to the Netherlands where he arrived in December of 1677.

Elisabeth van der Woude's journey illustrates the difficulties women faced on the passage to the colonies and when they returned to Holland, sometimes just for a visit or, to do business at home. Not only did the weather sometimes pose grave dangers to the ships, but piracy and warfare could also prove particularly treacherous for women. Women without a male relative, such as van der Woude, were especially vulnerable to kidnapping and rape.

Even married women, although ostensibly protected from would-be suitors, kidnappers, or rapists by their husbands or simply by their marital status, could still face significant hazards during travel. Perhaps the most prevalent danger was childbirth on board a ship. Annetje Barents, wife of Albert Andriesz Bradt, a 29-year-old tobacco planter, was pregnant when their ship, the *Rensselaerswyck*, left Amsterdam for New Netherland on September 25, 1636. Although Barents would go on to have seven more children, her first child was born on November 2nd, 1636 during a particularly violent storm at sea described by the captain as follows: "...the wind about west, the latitude by dead reckoning 41 degrees, 50 minutes with very high seas. That day the

overhang above our rudder was knocked in by severe storm.”¹⁴ Appropriately, the couple named their first-born son Storm.¹⁵ The birth itself may have been smooth, although this is somewhat unlikely for a first child, but it must have been unnerving, and potentially dangerous, for a young pregnant woman to give birth on board a violently rocking ship without the comforts of home and a midwife or female relatives to assist her. Likely, other female passengers helped her through the birthing process.

Meanwhile, the captain wrote in the logbook that because of the weather the ship was not making progress as expected, that he had 50 to 52 souls on board ”to keep dry,” and that the provisions were not enough. The number of sick people, he wrote, increased daily because of the hardships. At this point, the ship had only reached Cape Finisterre on the Galician coast of Spain. Fearing they would drift into the bay and fall into the hands of the Spanish, the captain, together with the supercargo and the first mate, decided to set sail for England instead to try to reach Plymouth or Falmouth.¹⁶ On November 16, they finally reached land again when they landed in Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast of England. Because of the bad weather, the ship could not be repaired and some of the families set out every day, probably just to get off the ship and get food in the small harbor town. On December 8th, the logbook entry states that some of the passengers went on land to sit and drink in the tavern. A doctor may have been consulted for the sick. They finally set sail again on January 9th and encountered severe weather again and met up with a French pirate ship during the middle of the month. They averted an attack by stowing all

¹⁴ A.J.F. van Laer, transl. and ed., *Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1908), 360. Contains the Logbook, or journal, of the *Rensselaerswyck*.

¹⁵ The meaning of the word “storm” is identical in English and Dutch.

¹⁶ Van Laer, *Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts* (journal of the *Rensselaerswyck*), 360.

the chests and cattle below deck and by telling them that they too were looking for booty. By now they had reached Porto Santo, one of the Madeira islands.

The very day after the threat of pirates attacking the ship, on January 25th, another woman gave birth on board the ship. Johannes La Montagne's wife Rachel De Forest gave birth to a little girl they named Marie. Rachel De Forest had been to the Americas once before, in 1629 when the couple sailed to the island of Tobago where the Zeeland chamber of the WIC had some interests. She only stayed for two years because the climate reportedly did not agree with her. She returned to Amsterdam in 1631, two years before the return of her husband.

When they decided to find another place in the "new world" they could call home, their eye probably fell on New Netherland because of its more temperate climate and the fact that there they could live as Protestants, together with other Huguenots. And so it was that a pregnant Rachel, Johannes, and their three young children embarked on the *Rensselaerswyck* where she gave birth to her fourth child. Since she had some experience with maritime life, and because she had experience with childbirth, she may have supported the other expecting women on board and even attended the births of the other women. Her husband may also have assisted because he was educated in Leiden and had established himself as a physician in New Amsterdam.

Incredibly, five days later, yet another child was born. Catelijntje Martens was on board with her husband, Cornelis Maesen, to sail to New Netherland because he had entered into a contract with Kiliaen van Rensselaer to set up a farm. When they set sail for New Netherland, Martens was pregnant and so she gave birth to a son, Hendrick Cornelisz, on board the ship.¹⁷ After a 48-day crossing, the passengers on the *Rensselaerswyck* finally saw land on February 26 when they saw Smiths Island (now Maryland) and passed Cape Henlope (Delaware) two days

¹⁷ Van Laer, *Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts* (journal of the Rensselaerswyck), 369.

later. On March first, the ship anchored at Sandy Hook and sailed to Manhattan on the fourth. The weather was “bitter cold” as the captain described it and the Hudson River was not passable. On Sunday March 8th, now that they were able to go to a Dutch Reformed church, two of the children born during the voyage were baptized. Storm Albertsz Bradt, who later took the surname “van der Zee” (of the sea), was likely baptized during the delay in England. Finally, on April 7th, the ship reached her destination at Fort Orange where the women were able to disembark for their new lives.

Elisabeth van der Woude’s ship did not bring her to the shores of Africa, but many women must have been there for both VOC and WIC ships would often stop in Africa to take on water and food for the transatlantic crossing. An example of such a ship is the *Houtuyn* from Medemblik, which arrived on August 5th, 1646 in Elmina. The captain, Latringh van Bonnema had his wife, Geertruytie Beyens, with him on the trip. The ship carried 94 soldiers, 17 women and children, and 16 ship’s crew. They sailed from Holland on May 9th with the destination of Pernambuco, Brazil. Van der Wel, the director of Elmina, commented that the ship did not have sufficient supplies and mentioned that scurvy had begun to rear its ugly head. Two days after their arrival, Geertruytie Beyens and her husband went ashore for an afternoon meal with Van der Wel and stayed ashore until the 11th when they returned to the ship. Such a stay was often used for some sightseeing and visiting with the people ashore who undoubtedly wanted to hear the latest news from Holland. The other women on board were likely wives of soldiers who were sent to Brazil by the WIC, or wives of men who wanted to set up plantations in South America. Although Van der Wel did not mention the other women in his report, they must have gone ashore as well, much as Van der Woude’s company did in Cape Verde. On August 15, ten days

after their arrival in Elmina, the *Houtuyn* set sail for Pernambuco with enough provisions to last them till they docked in Brazil.¹⁸ Women sailing with their captain husbands became more common during the 19th century.¹⁹

These stories of women who sailed the Atlantic Ocean illustrate the perils they faced and the unique challenges they met as females. Yet, even in the early days of the seventeenth century many women crossed the ocean at least once, and often women crossed the ocean more than once, either to return to the Netherlands permanently or for a visit. Some even traveled among various colonies in the Atlantic World before settling on a permanent residence. Together, they were part of the network that made up the early modern Atlantic World.

¹⁸ *VDR*, 213-216.

¹⁹ See: Creighton, *Iron Men, Wooden Women*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Enslaved Women in the Dutch Atlantic World

Thanks in part to Dutch law and custom, African women and their female descendants who found themselves caught up in the slave trade were able to exert some control over their lives, especially during the early colonial period. Some of the enslaved were able to obtain land, sue in court, marry, have businesses, adopt children, and -perhaps most importantly- gain their freedom. Black women not only held on to their property, but they also sought and found ways to secure this property for their children. Yet in spite of some of the advantages of living under Dutch law and custom, which were tied to specific time periods and geographic locations, there was relatively little an enslaved African woman could do to gain freedom and autonomy. In general, it was easier to gain liberty or a measure of independence during the early years of the slave trade, and it was easier in New Netherland than in the tropical plantation colonies.

There are some works that were published in the Netherlands that examine the economics and machinations of the Dutch slave trade, and these are valuable studies that establish a framework for the study of slavery among the Dutch.¹ The focus on the trade and on the systems of slavery in the various colonies, however, minimizes the role of the individual and the agency of black women. Studies of individuals who found themselves caught up in the Dutch Atlantic

¹ Pieter C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse Slavenhandel, 1500-1850* (Amsterdam: ArbeidersPers, 2003); Pieter C. Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880: Trade, Slavery and Emancipation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1998); Willie F. Page, *The Dutch Triangle: The Netherlands and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1621-1664* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Even though the slave trade was an integral part of the “golden age”, the Dutch have only recently begun to collectively confront their colonial past and their part in the slave trade, perhaps because of the growing multiculturalism in the Netherlands. Further evidence of the belated confrontation with a past that included slavery is the fact that the first and only monument to slavery in the country was unveiled in 2002, some 400 years after slavery began, and 140 years after slavery was officially abolished.

slave trade and in its colonies are few and far between, and if they have been done at all they lack a focus on gender and on the unique position of women who dealt with issues of gender, in addition to those of race. In this area, American historians have made considerable advances, but these kinds of studies are in short supply for the Dutch Atlantic.²

As is the case for much of the international slave trade and slavery in the early modern period, sources that reveal the individual struggles of women are scarce. We find female slaves mentioned in inventories of plantations but they most often only include numbers. Other sources where slaves are mentioned are of course those relating to the trade, but again, these only include numbers of men, women, and children. The lack of names not only reflects the insignificance of the individual in the slave trade, but also poses great difficulties for historians who want to reconstruct the lives of slaves. In this way, the dehumanization of African slaves continues. What can be gleaned from the sources, however, is the general attitude of the Dutch towards female slaves and their circumstances. On occasion, we do find some sources that point to individuals, but this is relatively rare.

The Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade

The presence of African women in the Netherlands and its overseas territories was a consequence of the Dutch involvement in the slave trade. With the Dutch estimated to have sold

² For studies on women in American slavery see, among others: Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Hilary Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston: B.M. Wiener, 1999); David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Kingston: Heinemann Publishers & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also: Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie, eds., *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

around half a million Africans to the Americas, the Dutch part in the slave trade led not only to slave labor in the colonies, but also to an increase of blacks in the Netherlands itself.³ Estimates are that about ten million Africans were transported to the Americas as part of the slave trade.⁴ The Dutch share in the trade was relatively small, about five and a half percent, but at times during the seventeenth century, the Dutch were dominant.

Although the founders of the Dutch West India Company initially rejected slavery based on theologians' belief that the trade in human beings was morally unjustified, before long individual captains participated in profitable slaving expeditions. By 1630, the Dutch were able to gain control of the Portuguese colonies in Brazil. The main staple of the colony, renamed New Holland, was sugar. Since the late sixteenth century, Brazilian sugar had been brought to the Netherlands to be refined there and the Dutch sought to control the sugar trade after relations

³ This number is based on the following source: "Voyages Database," in *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University, 2009 [accessed April 17, 2013]); available from <http://www.slavevoyages.org>. Hereafter cited as "Voyages Database". According to the database, the Dutch carried out 1,546 slave voyages, and transported 544,478 slaves to the Americas.

⁴ This is the latest figure according to the Voyages Database to which many historians have contributed. In his book *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, David Eltis suggests that the number was about seven million. See: David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9. The database number seems to be accepted by most historians, although there is no exact agreement on the number of slaves brought from Africa to the Americas. Some estimate the number to be as high as twenty-one million.

Although there are relatively few sources on the Dutch slave trade specifically, historians have written much about the slave trade in general. In addition to Eltis' work, these include, among others: Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1998); Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For slavery in North America see, among others: Anthony S. Parent Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Graham R. Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975). For slavery in Africa and the internal African slave trade see: Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

with the Portuguese were severed. The sugar planters, however, complained to the West India Company that they did not have enough hands to work the plantations. The Portuguese had used slaves to do the labor-intensive sugar cultivation and the Dutch planters now demanded slave labor as well. Eventually, the company acquiesced. In 1635, when they conquered the Portuguese fort Elmina in present day Ghana, the Dutch entered the slave trade.

As part of the monumental movement of people to the “new world,” the Dutch transported roughly one hundred thousand women to the Americas.⁵ The Dutch were among the earliest traders to keep records of the sex of slaves, but even they did not start this practice until around 1680 when the slave trade entered a phase of higher volume, and even then did so only occasionally.⁶ At present, we know of only twenty-four ships where the sex ratio on board was documented before 1680. What can be gleaned from this data is that during the early days of the slave trade, planters preferred men to women, but that women were still in higher demand than they would be during the eighteenth century. A summary of these voyages reveals that on average about 29% of the slave population on board these ships was female, and that on board seven ships women were in the majority. On board the *Prinses* the percentage of women was the highest with 150 female slaves (98.8% women) sailing for Pernambuco in Brazil in 1642. Almost all of these ships set sail for Dutch Brazil where the slaves were sold.

We can infer from the numbers that, in Brazil at least, women were desirable workers for the colony. Historian Judith Carney argues that planters wanted and needed female workers because in some regions in Africa at the time, agriculture was the purview of women. Their knowledge, she argues, was extremely valuable to European planters who initially had little

⁵ Voyages Database. According to the database, the estimated percentage of male slaves transported was 62.5% and children 18.9% for the Dutch voyages. This means that the Dutch sold about 18.6%, or 101,273 women.

⁶ Herbert S. Klein, “African Women in the Atlantic Slave Trade,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, eds. Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 30.

experience with the crops they were growing in the Americas.⁷ As a result, female captives, especially during the early decades of the slave trade, were more valuable and often cost twice as much as men. Thus the value of female slaves was based on the sexual division of labor, which assigned more of the productive labor to women.⁸ This may have been the case in Brazil as well. In addition, most people who were enslaved in West Africa were women as the large internal slave market's demand was primarily for women, and since male captives of war and other political conflict were more likely to be killed or used in the military.

For the period 1680 to 1700 there are not enough records to make any inferences about the desirability of female slaves. During the first half of the eighteenth century, however, we see a decline in the numbers of women transported directly from Africa in the Dutch slave trade to fifteen percent of the total number of slaves.⁹ These numbers, however, do not tell us the entire story because of the lack of data from the majority of slave ships. Anecdotal evidence points to a sustained demand for female slaves after the center of the Dutch slave trade moved from Brazil to Suriname and Curaçao. Female slaves were still desirable during the 18th century, particularly younger women of childbearing age. As early as the 1680s there were requests for young women, particularly from the Loango-Angola region, for Curaçao, perhaps for the Spanish colonial markets. By 1728, slave traders in Curaçao expressed their preference for women in no uncertain terms: 'It is more profitable for the company [WIC] to send women rather than negro

⁷ Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). See chapter four: "This was 'Woman's Wuck'".

⁸ For the slave trade and the effect on gender relations see: Hilary Beckles, "Female Enslavement and Gender Ideologies in the Caribbean," in *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy (London and New York: Continuum, 2000); Judith Carney, *Black Rice*.

⁹ Voyages Database. The total number of slaves transported by the Dutch during the period 1700-1750 was 158,076. 70% was male, 15% women, and 15% children. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the percentage of women increased by 5%.

men, especially since the Spanish spare no money for women 15-20 years old, and ... these can be bought for less on the Guinea coast.”¹⁰

The Experience of African Women in the Slave Trade

The Dutch initially traded in slaves only through their own forts and trading posts. They built some of the forts themselves, while others were conquered from the Portuguese. The European men seldom left the forts and let African slave brokers do the buying and negotiating. Occasionally, those in charge at the forts would send African men into the hinterland to buy slaves if none were available at the coast. After 1650, the West India Company had its own representatives go into the African villages to purchase slaves. Eyewitness Willem Bosman described how the process worked.¹¹ The slaves would be brought together at a central place in the village where they would stand, stark naked, for inspection by the company doctor, a humiliating process, especially for women who were publicly subjected the gaze of a man. The physician then separated them into two groups, those who were able bodied, and those who had “defects”, whom they called *makrons*. The able bodied slaves were then brought to one of the coastal forts.

During the course of the seventeenth century, the slave trade increased in size and more coastal areas became involved in the trade. The well-known sites for the purchase of slaves now often had no slaves for sale while other, initially lesser-known, areas had more slaves available for purchase. This situation resulted in the fact that slave ships often sailed up and down the

¹⁰ Postma, 230-231.

¹¹ Willem Bosman, *Nauwkeurige Beschryving van de Guinese Goud- Tand-, en Slavekust* (Utrecht: Anthony Schouten, 1704), 145. The work was also popular in an English translation entitled *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*.

coast for months in their search for human cargo.¹² African traders would come alongside the ship in a canoe with a few slaves. On deck, the captain and the ship's physician examined the slaves, after which the captain indicated if he was interested in purchasing the slaves offered to him. If a sale was made, the slaves were escorted to the lower decks where they would get something to eat and drink and where they were chained at the ankles.¹³ Because of the long "coasting" period, women could be on board these ships for several months before the middle passage even started. During that time, diseases could and often did break out, which killed many.

If the female slaves were "fortunate" enough to be held at one of the forts, they were at least able to go outside on a regular basis. According to the West India Company instructions for the slave supervisor at Elmina, the slaves who were held there left the fort in the morning to work outside. If a person was too weak to go to work, he or she would have to stay inside for the rest of the day. The traders needed strong, healthy looking adults who could survive the middle passage and who would fetch a good price upon arrival. At eleven o'clock they would come back to the square at the fort where they were forced to line up and be counted to make sure no one ran away, although some did manage to escape. After everyone was accounted for, each received his or her apportioned lunch. The same procedure was followed for dinner. At night, the slaves slept inside the fort.

Women were also put to work at the task of preparing food. Each morning the slave supervisor received one can of millet for every slave. The women prepared this food and apparently sometimes managed to take some extra food for themselves or perhaps an extra

¹² See: Emmer, *De Nederlandse Slavenhandel*.

¹³ Emmer, *De Nederlandse Slavenhandel*, 84.

portion for their children. Of course, these acts could also be acts of resistance by the women. In any event, the slave supervisor was urged to be on the look out for slaves who took more than their allotted portion. The company urged him to keep the cupboard with pepper, salt, and palm oil locked.¹⁴

For women being held at the castle this meant not only that they had to work, but also that they were subject to potentially long term sexual abuse. At Elmina Castle, the main Dutch trading fort on the West African coast, women who were selected for the trade to the Americas were locked up in cells on the ground floor, far from male slaves and soldiers of the company. There was a small inner courtyard where the female slaves could be outside and where they were watched by the governor and other high-ranking officers of the WIC. Should one of the women catch their eye, they could let her into their apartments through a special door at the courtyard that led to a staircase where a wooden panel was located that could only be opened from above. This way, the “gentlemen” had easy access to female slaves without the risk that the women would flee. After abusing a woman, she could be sent back down and shipped overseas. If, however, a woman had the status of a favorite, was sexually abused often and got pregnant, then she was generally manumitted.¹⁵ Some women may have used these encounters to establish relationships with high-ranking men and somehow negotiate their freedom. Unfortunately, there are no records that can substantiate this.

Before departure to the Americas, the trading companies wanted the slaves to be marked or branded with the company marker. For the Middelburg Company (MCC), for instance, they used a silver implement marked with the letters CC N. The company gave specific instructions

¹⁴ “Instructions for the Slave Supervisor at Elmina” dated 1710. Printed and translated in: Postma, 402. Appendix 21.

¹⁵ Bosman.

for the branding of slaves. The skin was to be prepared for branding by rubbing candle wax or oil on it. Then the marker was heated to the point that when applied to paper, the paper got red immediately. When the marker was thus prepared, the slave was branded, usually on the chest. The company claimed that if its precautions were observed, the slaves would not suffer any harm from the procedure.¹⁶ Willem Bosman gave an account of the branding of slaves in his narrative about the slave trade, remarking that the procedure may have seemed quite barbaric to his readers, and indeed it still does. Bosman claimed, however, that it was very necessary, for the English and the French would otherwise try to steal the Dutch slaves. Moreover, the Dutch feared that if slaves were not branded, Africans could exchange healthy slaves for people who were sickly or older than the age of thirty-five. The women were treated with more consideration, according to Bosman, who defended branding by stating “we take all possible care that they are not burned too hard, especially the women, who are more tender than the men.”¹⁷ Here Bosman acknowledged their humanity, although the practice of branding was otherwise reserved for animals.

The Middle Passage

Once on board the slave ship, women and men were separated. Bosman noted that the slaves entered stark naked, both male and female, for the traders took literally everything they owned. In most cases, the slaves remained nude for the rest of the voyage unless a caring captain gave them something to cover themselves. According to Bosman, the slaves were treated well on board the Dutch ships. They received three meals a day and, weather permitting, they went on

¹⁶ “Instructions for a Slave Ship Captain of the MCC.” Printed and translated in: Postma, 366-368. Appendix 8.

¹⁷ Bosman, 146. See also: Postma, 7.

deck daily to get some exercise. Bosman extolled the cleanliness of the Dutch and noted that the slaves often ate better than they had done in Africa.¹⁸ We must keep in mind that his primary audience was the Board of the West India Company, for this supposed excellent treatment is not evident from the records. On the contrary, mortality on board the Dutch slave ships, both among slaves and among the crews was among the highest in the trade. It ranged from eighteen percent in the early period to fourteen percent in the free trade era.¹⁹

In general, women had slightly more space on board a Dutch slaver than men did, and they were usually not chained together. Women and children were held in separate quarters on the upper deck. The women's quarters were sometimes referred to as the *hoeregat*, or "whore hole", indicating that the male crew took advantage of the women who were suffering so much already. In the instructions for slave ship captains from the Middelburg Trading Company, the company's second rule was that none of the slaves should be mistreated on board its ships. They wrote, "We also seriously demand that you do not permit any Negroes, slaves, or slave women to be defiled or mistreated by any of the officers or crew members."²⁰ The directors were well aware of the fact that sexual misconduct could lead to revolt on board its ships, which in turn could lead to deaths among both crew and slaves. The company could not afford to lose valuable slaves and thus admonished their crews not to take advantage of the slaves. Yet although sexual exploitation was against the rules and the company threatened the crew with severe punishment for such behavior, the absence of white women during much of the journey, and the fact that the

¹⁸ Willem Bosman cited in: Emmer, *De Nederlandse Slavenhandel*, 111.

¹⁹ Postma, 251 and 257.

²⁰ "Instructions for a Slave Ship Captain of the MCC." Printed and translated in: Postma, 366-368. Appendix 8.

crews of these slavers were frequently a rough lot that consumed copious amounts of liquor, means that many a female slave must have fallen victim to these men.²¹

Historian Pieter Emmer, however, argues that the male crew did not frequently subject women on board slave ships to sexual exploitation. He writes, “Of course this must have happened, but the frequency cannot have been high because often a large number of those on board had fallen ill during their stay at the African coast or had died so that the remaining men had to try to sail the ship to the other side of the ocean in weakened condition.”²² Moreover, he argues, if the women were raped on board the ships, this would have resulted in births of mulatto babies which was not the case. However, Emmer overlooks the fact that the company found it necessary to warn their crews and institute harsh punishment for those who broke the rules, which is an indication that there was probably indeed a problem. As to his claim that there were no large numbers of mixed race babies, this could have a host of other causes. The arduous circumstances on board the ships, including malnutrition, disease, and lack of hygiene, may have diminished women’s fertility significantly. In addition, sexually transmitted diseases, common among sea-faring men, could be transferred to women and often led to infertility.

Additional evidence for the sexual abuse of female slaves is provided by the customs in the forbidden private trade, which took place in addition to the WIC trade and the free trade. Some WIC employees took part in this forbidden private trade, which turned its back on many of the regulations instituted by the company. A common violation of the regulations was the carrying of slaves who were not accounted for on the ledgers. Part of this violation included the

²¹ Postma, 243.

²² Emmer, *De Nederlandse Slavenhandel*, 91.

practice of slave captains taking their own slave girls or boys on board, often for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and then selling them after the middle passage.²³

The crossing to the Americas generally took around eighty days, although the duration of the voyage could vary greatly. The range between the shortest and longest trip was from twenty-three to 284 days.²⁴ The periodic absence of wind on the equator, called doldrums, was particularly dangerous to the ships. Delays made for prolonged voyages, which meant that the ship could run out of food and, more importantly, fresh water. Even if the captain managed to steer his ship through doldrums and its counterpart, storms, then he still had to contend with privateers. It is no surprise then that some ships did not make the crossing at all.

An example of a slave ship that encountered problems was the *St. Jan*, with captain Adriaen Blaes van der Veer.²⁵ In March of 1659, the ship arrived at the coast of present day Nigeria where they traded for slaves during the months of April and May and purchased 219 slaves. On the 29th of May, many of the slaves were sick with dysentery, caused by what little food they were able to obtain. They made the passage to the Americas with 195 slaves, among whom 105 women and three girls. Twenty-four slaves had died on this ship before they even made the passage. On August 17th, after some of the women had been on board the slaver for over four months, they finally set sail for Curaçao. After a stop at Tobago to take on fresh water, the crew lost the ship during a storm when they hit a reef on the island of Los Roques, 125 miles

²³ Postma, 137.

²⁴ Postma, 162.

²⁵ For the ships' journal see: Charles T. Gehring and Jacob Schiltkamp, transl. and ed., *Curaçao Papers, 1640-1665: Transcription* [online source] (New Netherland Research Center and the New Netherland Institute, 2011), 161-166, 184; available from: http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/5313/6082/3614/Curacao_Transcription.pdf.

See also: Voyages Database, voyage identification number: 21566. The database names as the point of disembarkation the island of Jamaica. This may have been where the English privateer took the surviving slaves.

east of Curaçao, on November first. In a stunning display of cowardice, the crew abandoned the ship for a small boat because of the “heavy surf” and left eighty-five survivors, almost all women, to fend for themselves.²⁶ Privateers who were in the area spotted the ship and took the “cargo” which now also held two newborn infants.²⁷ From the original point of embarkation in Africa, only eighty-five slaves reached the Americas. In this case, the death rate was an astounding thirty-nine percent.

From the above, it is clear that women on board slavers suffered unimaginable hardships and that the chances of survival were generally not good. In fact, on the *St. Jan*, one of the male slaves committed suicide by jumping overboard. Although we have no numbers for the casualties among the groups of women who were led from their hometowns to the Americas, the mortality must have been extremely high.

Corporate Slavery

Once female slaves made it to the Americas on a Dutch ship, chances were that they found themselves either in Brazil, before 1660, or in Curaçao. The slaves in Brazil were sold to individual plantation owners, while slaves on the island of Curaçao were mostly traded to the Caribbean islands or to the North or South American colonies. Some, however, were not sold to plantations or individuals at all because the WIC used them as workers for the company itself. The WIC was unique in the Atlantic world because it employed slaves for the company and

²⁶ Gehring, *Curaçao Papers*, 164.

According to a list of slaves who died aboard the *St. Jan* from the 30th of June till November first, 59 men, 47 women, and 4 children had died during the voyage.

²⁷ Gehring, *Curaçao Papers*, 179-185.

initially housed them in company quarters.²⁸ The WIC had slaves working in West Africa, where some three hundred slaves labored at the forts, on the island of Curaçao, and in New Netherland.²⁹

Perhaps the most well documented example of corporate slavery under the WIC is found in the colony of New Netherland. To deal with its continual labor shortage, the company imported slaves to aid in building the fort and surrounding infrastructure. The first documented group of Africans who came to colony consisted of eleven African men who probably entered the colony through the Caribbean in 1625 or 1626. In 1628, three African women would follow, apparently as partners for the company's black men. Once they arrived, slaves were put up in same-sex barracks with men greatly outnumbering women, and while the men were put to work at the fort, in the harbor, on the farms, and in military service, women were usually employed as domestic servants. The gender balance would remain skewed until after 1700. During the Dutch period from 1626 – when the first black slaves arrived – until 1664 some 307 slaves were imported of which 174 were men and 132 were women.³⁰ Yet, even when we take into account the children born to slaves, the gender balance remains uneven.

²⁸ The Dutch also employed this system in the Cape Colony in South Africa under the aegis of the Dutch East India Company. See: Robert Carl-Heinz Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

²⁹ For slavery in New Amsterdam/New York see: Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, eds., *Slavery in New York* (New York: The New Press, 2005); Thelma Wills Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Robert J. Swan, "The Other Fort Amsterdam: New Light on Aspects of Slavery in New Netherland," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 22, no. 2 (1998): 19-42; Morton Wagman, "Corporate Slavery in New Netherland," *Journal of Negro History*, 65, no.1 (1980): 34-42; Joyce D. Goodfriend, "Burghers and Blacks: The Evolution of a Slave Society at New Amsterdam," *New York History* 59, no. 2 (1978): 125-144; Gerald Francis de Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Negro Slavery in Colonial America" *Church History* 40, no. 4 (1971) 423-436; Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966).

³⁰ Hodges, 16.

The gender imbalance meant that black women in New Netherland did not have any problems finding partners in the colony among the enslaved men, and many were able to marry. The nature of white immigration to the colony, with entire families settling the area, also meant that not many white men entered into relationships with black women who became their concubines, as in Suriname and Africa. Although the institution of a Christian marriage must have seemed somewhat foreign to Africans who were used to having extended kin involved in brokering such relationships, slaves in the colony used Dutch institutions like the Dutch Reformed Church and the colonial government to improve their lives, going so far as to adopt the Christian religion. With no other recourse, some probably felt it was advantageous to adopt the ways of the rulers of the colony, while others did not. In the period of 1639 till 1664 twenty-two black couples were legally married according to Dutch custom, and one interracial couple.³¹ The dearth of marriages during some years may have had something to do with the minister who served the Dutch congregation at that time. All ministers refused to officiate at a wedding of non-Christians, but since some black couples converted to Christianity, they were wed in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Dutch corporate slavery further set itself apart from other slave systems because the company employed a system of “half freedom.” When the WIC first started using slaves for the construction of the colony, it needed a lot of labor to fill the demand. However, as the basic needs for defense were met and the company started losing money on much of its endeavors, it allowed large stockholders, like well-known Killiaen van Rensselaer, to operate their own small colonies called patroonships. In order to fulfill the need of individual settlers and *patroons* for

³¹ Samuel S. Purple, ed., *Records of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Amsterdam and New York: Marriages from 11 December, 1639, to 26 August 1801* (New York: Genealogical and Biographical Society, 1890). The interracial marriage took place between Harmen Janszen from Hessen and Maria Malaet from Angola in 1650.

labor, and to unburden itself from the financial strain that housing, feeding, and clothing the company's slaves posed, the company hired out some of its workers and set others free for part of the year. Settlers could hire slaves for blocks of time, which gave slaves some form of autonomy and freedom. In this manner, the line between free and enslaved could be blurred and vague. After the company's loss of the Brazilian colony in 1654, it was on the edge of bankruptcy and paid some of its debt with slaves. On the one hand, slaves became chattel and were seen in purely economic terms, yet on the other hand the company's own slaves were treated as employees of the company and received some benefits and privileges that privately owned slaves did not have.

Because of the system of half freedom, many company slaves could earn wages from other employment. With the funds available to them they could purchase livestock and cattle, and some were granted small plots of farmland. Finally, and most importantly, slaves were promised freedom after having served the company for a number of years. In 1644, a group of eleven slaves petitioned the governor stating that they were promised their freedom when they entered the service of the WIC some eighteen years earlier. They, together with their wives, were indeed released from bondage and all received farmland on Manhattan Island. Yet, their freedom was not unrestricted. They still had to pay annual dues to the company in the form of farm products and livestock and if they were needed for labor, they had to agree to work for the company as wage laborers. Moreover, although the women and men were set free, their children, present and future, were still bound to the company. Although no freed man was ever called to work for the company again, the stipulation that their children were technically still enslaved must have been a heavy burden to bear for parents, and they did everything they could to keep

their offspring out of bondage. In many cases, parents petitioned for a child's freedom when the child reached adulthood.

After they were given freedom, many slaves were given plots of land. Although most of the black landowners were men, there are some records of women who owned land as well. Anna Negerinna, for instance was the widow of Andries d'Angola who worked for the WIC. She was given a piece of land located on the island of Manhattan in February of 1647.³² The WIC likely owed this land to her husband Andries d'Angola. His name indicates that he was not a creole but born in Africa, and he was likely brought to the colony in its early years. If this is true, then he would have been freed in the mid 1640s but apparently he died before he could receive his plot of land. The couple cannot be found in the marriage records, but this may mean they married before 1639 when records were not kept or did not survive. In any event, the WIC honored the validity of this marriage and gave the allotted land to his spouse Anna. Other widows of company slaves were also given land.³³ In fact, it seems from the available records that widowhood was the only way black women gained property.

Both in New Netherland and in Curaçao, slaves resided on small individual family plots, which were just big enough to erect a small house or hut with the remaining area used for food production so people could sustain themselves. Women likely tended these gardens as men were often hired out or sought paying work in the colony. Women could garden and sell excess produce and fruit on local markets. New Netherland had a weekly market, and so did Curaçao. Furthermore, black women may have used skills from Africa to make items such as baskets and

³² Charles T. Gehring, ed. and trans., *New York Historical Manuscripts: Land Papers* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1980), 48. The original source has no date but the entry is located between entries from February 8, 1647 and February 9, 1647, so we may assume this land grant was from February 1647 as well.

³³ Other women who received properties during this period were Catalina Anthony (July 13, 1643) and Marycke (December 12, 1643). Gehring, *Land Papers*. See also: Christopher Moore, "A World of Possibilities: Slavery and Freedom in Dutch New Amsterdam," in *Slavery in New York*, 42-43.

sell these at the market. Historian Robert J. Swan mentions that these gardens were subject to looters who looked for food during times of famine, but the company was concerned with the integrity of the boundaries of these lands and explicitly forbade whites to go and raid these lands under threat of punishment.³⁴

In the WIC instructions from 1640, the company gives the directors of colonies specific instructions on how to deal with the company's black women. It stated, "no one shall treat the Black and Indian women dishonestly, much less associate with them lasciviously, whether voluntary or by force, on pain of forfeiting all their monthly wages and other [], and banishment from the place as a liability".³⁵ It also stated that both black men and women who ran away should be punished. Furthermore, the director was not to permit Christians to marry Indian or black women before they were baptized "following sufficient instruction, and incorporated into the community of Christ; just as black servants who are without the same preparation, may not marry one another, neither one nor the other, unless the proponent or comforter of the sick has the authority and charge to do so by the church council."³⁶ The company officials were specific in their aims by stating that, although black servants were to be treated well, or, as they worded it, "without unchristian treatment", the goal was to have them perform work from which the company would derive maximum use and profit. The profit, of course, was to go to the shareholders in the Netherlands.³⁷

³⁴ Swan, 31.

³⁵ Gehring, *Curacao Papers*, 5.

³⁶ Gehring, *Curaçao Papers*, 6; Swan, 25.

³⁷ Ibid.

As mentioned earlier, African women in the slave trade were especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. However, some were able to achieve a measure of justice by using Dutch institutions. Francisca, a black slave who had been on the island Fernando in the Brazil colony, was one of the many victims of sexual violence.³⁸ She used the council of the Dutch Reformed Church to get justice, likely thinking that this was the best avenue for help. Perhaps she had been in the colony for a while and converted to Christianity for she seemed to know the minister of the local church, Johannes Hartman Osterdach.

For four months Francisca had been kept prisoner in the house of a certain Captain Daij in the city of Olinda where he apparently used her as his personal sex slave. According to her testimony, she had her menstrual period when she was first brought to Daij's house and since then she had no relations with other men. He kept her for another month until he saw from the swelling of her abdomen that she was pregnant. As soon as he observed this, he told her to leave his house so that she would not give birth there and so that people would not think the child was his. Francisca had no choice but to leave, although she stated that it was against her will. She was then housed by friends who hid her, another indication that she was not a newcomer to the colony. It may seem odd that she would not want to leave her abuser, but he was probably her only chance at a living if she could prove the child was his. She then confronted Daij again and told him she wanted to go back to the island Fernando. He just cursed at her and told her he did not care where she went as long as she did not name him as the father of the child.³⁹

If the social climate in Brazil had been such that Dutch authorities and the community in general did not care about the sexual abuse or relations between white men and enslaved black

³⁸ Now known as Fernando de Noronha, an archipelago of twenty-one islands off the coast of Northeast Brazil.

³⁹ NA: Verspreide West Indische Stukken, 1408.

women, Captain Daij would not have been concerned about the fact that he was the father of Francisca's child. Yet, the fact that he instructed her to not name him as the father of her child indicates that this behavior was not generally acceptable in his circles, even though concubinage in Brazil, as in West Africa, was fairly common and white men frequently broke regulations by living with black women.⁴⁰

Francisca asserted herself by seeking out *predikant* Osterdach to explain her situation and to seek his help for her plight. He took up her case and represented her, together with Jacques van der Neussen, the mayor, before the church council of November 10, 1635. There is no record of what the church did with this information. Francisca, however, went back to the island, six months pregnant, and three months later gave birth to a baby girl she named Elunam. The baby was baptized by *ziekentrooster* Duijck Janssen, an unusual occurrence since this baby was conceived outside of marriage, but perhaps baptism of this baby and his acceptance in the Dutch Reformed community was what Francisca had been concerned about all along.⁴¹

Female slaves were naturally concerned with the future of their children and tried to keep their children from sharing their lot. One strategy to keep children out of bondage, also used in the early British North American colonies, was baptism by an official of the Dutch Reformed Church. Many African parents baptized their children, or requested to have their children baptized, in the belief that the Dutch would not enslave fellow Christians. Especially under *dominee* Bogardus in New Netherland, we see a surge in the number of baptisms of black

⁴⁰ Swan, 29. See also: Jose Antonio Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos, Influência da Ocupação Holandesa na vida e na Culura do Norte do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1947).

⁴¹ NA: Verspreide West Indische Stukken, 1408. Written by domine Jodocus a Stetten who was a military chaplain. In the late 1640s, the Portuguese captured him. In vain the Dutch tried to exchange him for Portuguese prisoners, and in 1651 he was transported to Portugal where his trail ends.

infants, as not all of the members of the clergy allowed baptism of black children. From 1639 till 1656, forty-seven black children were baptized in New Netherland. (The number of white children for the same period was 879.)

Elsewhere, African couples employed the same strategy to prevent their progeny from sharing their lot. For example, in Brazil in 1635, a black couple by the name of Antoni and Catelina Roderigo requested baptism in the Dutch Reformed Church for their child. Dominee Jodocus Stetten did not baptize children of “heathens” but since he had taught the parents, he was satisfied with their conversion to Christianity. Stetten was one of the few Dutch ministers who actively tried to convert Africans and African Americans to Christianity with some success. He wrote that, if needed, he used the services of a translator to reach people.⁴² Especially between 1649 and 1654, many black children were baptized in the colony.

Dutch Views on African Women

As the Dutch entered the slave trade, they developed a racial ideology that was expressed both in writing and in visual culture. Although many an urban Dutchman was probably familiar with Africans who traveled around the Atlantic World, the general public was fascinated with the exotic and “other” and the interest in travel narratives and descriptions of foreign peoples was voracious with multiple printings selling out as soon as they were available to the public. The narratives intended to describe a land, people, and culture that were foreign to the Dutch reader, but in the process these narratives also defined Africans as “other” while framing Europeans as superior. Descriptions of gender roles and women within African cultures served not only to

⁴² NA: Verspreide West Indische Stukken, 1614-1795, 1408. October 20, 1635.

define Africans as savages, but they also informed Dutch men about their own identities and culture as they characterized “their” women in opposition to African women.

Starting with Dutch trader, Pieter de Marees in 1602, descriptions of African women’s alleged licentious behavior were quite persistent. His work was hugely influential, not only in the Netherlands, but also abroad, and many later travel writers would repeat some of his contentions.⁴³ One of these travel writers was Willem Bosman, a chief merchant for the WIC at the African coast.⁴⁴ One of the few men who survived life at the African coast, he was considered an expert on Africa. Born in the Netherlands in 1672, Bosman started work for the WIC in Africa at the age of 16 until he returned fourteen years later in 1702. His travel narrative read like a novel, unlike the more scholarly descriptions of some other writers, and was extremely popular reading, not just for scholars, but also for the general public.⁴⁵ Bosman thus had a great influence on the way in which Dutch people viewed African women, regardless of whether his descriptions were accurate or not.

Bosman promulgated the view of African women as promiscuous and sexually insatiable in his writing about West Africa. He stated that both boys and girls as young as eight or nine knew about the sex act and that they became sexually active themselves around the age of twelve. Therefore, men married very young girls if they desired a virgin. But even then virginity could not be guaranteed because, according to Bosman, these girls were so concupiscent from all the talk of intercourse that they seldom waited for marriage, which he thought could be

⁴³ Pieter de Marees, *Beschryvinghe ende Historische Verhael van het Gout Koninckrijck van Gunea* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1912). The original was published in 1602. De Marees’ description of the gold coast was translated in the following languages: German (1603), Latin (1604), French (1605), and English (1625).

⁴⁴ Bosman, *Nauwkeurige Beschryving*.

⁴⁵ Albert van Dantzig, “Willem Bosman’s ‘New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea’: How Accurate is it?” *History in Africa* 1 (1974): 102.

advantageous for men who did not want to deal with the emotional backlash of deflowering a young girl. These girls did not call for their mothers after the wedding night, and the “heaviest work was done” for the groom.⁴⁶ As many European men did, he also noted that African women did not make such a fuss about childbearing as their Dutch counterparts did. After they give birth here, he stated, they get up and go about their business again, unlike the Dutch women who spend days in bed to recover from the birth.

Bosman’s description of African women recognized them as human, but barely so. According to him, African women’s instincts were base, they were driven by lust, and they gave birth and went about their business as if nothing happened, just as animals might do. His description of women as savages, however, stands in stark contrast to his contention that the women in Africa knew on an instinctual level how to attract European men.⁴⁷ If proper Christian men copulated with these women, it was not their fault. These sirens led some of the weaker European men into a life of sin. Bosman, however, did not tell his readers that he belonged to this supposed category as well, for he did not escape the “siren call” either. Even in modern day Ghana there are many people with his last name.

Dutch poet and playwright, Willem Godschalck van Focquenbroch also spent some years at the Dutch fort in Elmina as *fiscaal*, the second in command at the coast. In a published letter to a friend he wrote of his arrival at Elmina and stated that very few men there were worthy of his friendship, as they all drank too much and engaged in sex with local women. If Bosman

⁴⁶ Bosman, 107.

⁴⁷ This issue is explored further by Jennifer Morgan in her book *Laboring Women*, and especially in her first chapter entitled “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder’: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology”, which was published years earlier as an article in the *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (January 1997): 167-92. The conflict between perceptions of black women’s beauty and that of the black woman as a “monstrous laboring beast”, Morgan asserts, ... “demonstrates a larger process through which the familiar became unfamiliar as beauty became beastliness and mothers became monstrous”, 15-16.

described African women as temptresses, Van Focquenbroch was even less beguiled by the African female than Bosman. He described black and mulatto women as so terribly and godlessly ugly that “even if I were a dog I wouldn’t piss against them so that I will be able to leave this country in cleanliness.”⁴⁸ Yet his disdain for African women did not prevent him from liking a black boy who was his servant. Unlike the women he described, this boy’s facial features were “noble” and “like a king”, he asserted, making one wonder if his hatred for the African female was perhaps related to homosexual feelings. In addition, he also wrote that it seemed that Africans lived by the rules of the old Hebrews, a respected and classical society. To support this he mentioned that a brother’s widow would marry the brother and that wealthy or powerful men could have as much as six hundred wives.

In European poetry we find the same ideas about African women, for it was common to apologize for the “defect” of color of Africans. White skin was the ideal of beauty. Christian moralists commonly viewed darkness as encouraging sexual and sensual excess.⁴⁹ Thus, African women were seen as exotic and possessing differing sexual mores from Christians. The practice of polygyny in some West African societies made white men see black women as strange and promiscuous and, some have argued, gave them license to use and abuse African women as they saw fit.⁵⁰

In Dutch visual culture, so important to the in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, African women were not often depicted. Unlike the grand narrative canvasses and history paintings produced for court culture in much of the rest of Europe, Dutch paintings were most

⁴⁸ Willem Godschalck van Foucquenbroch, *Afrikaense Thalia* (Amsterdam: Weduwe Gysbert de Groot, 1682), 161.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth McGrath, “Goltzius, Rubens and the Beauties of Night,” in *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas*, exhibition catalogue (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2008), 65-67.

⁵⁰ Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 5.

often small and made for the market, as opposed to commissioned, and were displayed in regular homes. In Renaissance and Baroque paintings in other European art traditions we occasionally see black women appear as figures in these history paintings, but apparently they were not a popular subject for the Dutch market, perhaps because they were not seen as pleasing to the eye.

A few painters depicted Africans with surprising sensitivity, however, for generally people of sub-Saharan African descent did not conform to the ideals of beauty in the seventeenth century European world.⁵¹ In a popular guide for artists, *On Human Proportions*, Albrecht Dürer claimed that the faces of black people were seldom beautiful because of “their very flat noses and thick lips” and asserted that they were not as pleasant to look at as those of whites.⁵² Their bodies, on the other hand, he considered in a more positive light. Dürer’s views were further promulgated by Pieter de Marees in his popular description of the coast of Guinea from 1602, in which he asserted, like Dürer, that the faces of Africans were round, with flat noses and large lips.⁵³

Cultural anthropologist and sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues that the images of Africans in Europe were mainly positive or “normal” during the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, while during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a negative image of Africans came to predominate. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries he sees as a transitional period during which both positive and condescending or denigrating images could be found.⁵⁴ Yet in Dutch art of the seventeenth century we see mainly neutral or positive depictions of Africans and not the

⁵¹ See for example Rembrandt’s paintings of Africans: *Two Negroes*, Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague; *Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch*, Rijksmuseum het Catharijne Convent, Utrecht.

⁵² Albrecht Dürer cited in: Elmer Koflin, “Black Models in Dutch Art between 1580 and 1800: Fact and Fiction” in *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas*, exhibition catalogue (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2008), 72.

⁵³ Koflin, 74.

⁵⁴ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 29.

monstrous creatures described by De Marees and Bosman. The painting of Moses and his Ethiopian wife by Jacob Jordaens, for example, depicts the African woman with surprising sensitivity. (See figure 4.) Here we see a man and his wife who look straight at the viewer, almost challenging the seventeenth century onlooker to find fault in their union. The African woman is not shy, and has an almost regal bearing wearing jewelry and fine silk. Unlike so many etchings of African women, her breasts are not bare and the hat she wears frames her face like a halo, giving her an aura of chastity and spirituality. In this woman, we do not recognize the lascivious, monstrous being of the descriptions of De Marees, Bosman, and Van Focquenbroch. Moses' wife is pleasant to look at and does not have any of the characteristics described by the above-mentioned writers.

Another artist who depicted black women with sensitivity and honesty was Albert Eckhout. The painter worked in Brazil for governor of Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen and was part of his inner circle. His painting of an African woman in Brazil is not so much an individual portrait, however, but rather an ethnographic study of the African female in Brazil.⁵⁵ (See figure 5.) In spite of the fact that this image was not meant to be an individual portrait, Eckhout did not reduce this African woman to a stock figure. She does have uncovered breast, and her child is nude, hallmarks of "the savage", but she is clearly a healthy and attractive young woman, unlike the women in the descriptions of De Marees and Bosman. Her left hand is resting on the head of her child who is slightly lighter in color than she is, perhaps as an indication of the many interracial relationships in Brazil. In her right hand she holds an ornate bowl full of fruit, a representation of the products of the region. Her son holds a corncob, a product of the Americas,

⁵⁵ Eckhout also did portraiture of African subjects, but no portrait of a woman survives. Among others, he painted Dom Miguel de Castro, an envoy from the Kingdom of Kongo to Brazil (1643-1650. National Gallery, Denmark). He depicted Castro in the European tradition of portraiture in European dress with full regalia and a hat with a plume. The subject looks straight at the viewer and has all the individual characters of a portrait. Eckhout certainly did not reduce him to a stereotypical stock character.

and a colorful bird. The young woman and her son in the lush landscape serve to illustrate the riches and fertility of Brazil and perhaps were meant to entice people to come to the Brazilian colony.

Enslaved Women in the Netherlands

Some black women were taken to the Netherlands after they survived the harrowing journey to the Americas, while others were taken there from Africa or after having been born in the “New World”. There is a well-known story of a ship full of Africans, which docked in Middelburg, Zeeland in 1596. On board were 130 African people. At first, the States of Zeeland were at a loss as to what to do with the people on board this ship. Eventually, though, they decided that these people could not be sold, in order to prevent the establishment of a European slave market, as did happen in Liverpool, England.⁵⁶ On November 15, 1696, the States declared that the following Sunday, churches in Middelburg had to proclaim that this African group, men, women and children had liberty and were not to be sold. In spite of the fact that this group of Africans could not be sold, the people of Zeeland did organize a “viewing day” for those who wanted to hire them as servants. As was customary in servant contracts, potential employers had to promise to “bring servants up in the Christian way.” Some members of the group died shortly after arrival. It is not known what happened to the rest.

In the Notarial Archive of Amsterdam there is evidence that blacks lived in the Netherlands in the period from 1621 till 1710. Blacks were married in the Netherlands. For example, on October 6, 1636, Diego van Angola and Catharina Antoine, both listed as “negro”, married before notary Jacobus Nicolaes Jacobs in front of three witnesses named Christoffel

⁵⁶ Gert Oostindie and Emy Maduro, *In het Land van de Overheerser Part II: Antillianen en Surinamers in Nederland 1634/1667-1954* (Dordrecht, Holland: Foris Publications, 1986), 142.

Capitano, Anthonio van Angola and Francisco van Angola. At the same time, the couple also had a will made in which, according to Dutch tradition, they declared the survivor to be the sole heir. In case both died, the witnesses, with whom they were apparently very close, inherited. These five may have been part of a larger black community within Amsterdam.⁵⁷

Even though the Netherlands did not recognize slavery within its boundaries, there were slaves in the country. Aletta Houtuins, for example, the widow of Captain Laurens de Rosière, freed her slave Jan Pick van Angola, eighteen years of age, who had served her husband well for some years. Pick had requested his freedom and stated that he wanted to “find his own fortune.” Jan Pick may have come straight from the African continent, brought there by the husband of Houtuins who was a captain.

In other cases slaves were brought to the Netherlands from Curaçao, usually traveling with their masters. On July 12, 1709, Anna Emerentia Kerkrinck, widow of Jacob Beck, freed three slaves, two men and a woman, who had come with her from the island. She also offered to make it possible for them to return to Curaçao if they so desired.⁵⁸ Beck had been a *directeur* at Curaçao from 1704 till 1708 when he was forced to resign because of an argument with the Heren X. Together with his wife and three children, he left for the Netherlands, but the ship landed in Norway because of bad weather. Beck died in Norway in the town of Bergen, which forced his wife to travel to the Netherlands with her three children, and apparently their slaves.⁵⁹ The men were likely servants for the household, while it is possible that the female slave served as a “ladies’ maid”. Kerkrinck apparently felt that she could not keep these slaves in the Netherlands, as the institution was not in use there. We do not know if her three slaves returned

⁵⁷ SA: Notarial Archive, 414: 377.

⁵⁸ SA: Notarial Archive, 6728: 629.

⁵⁹ Oostindie, 145.

to Curaçao, but Kerkrinck herself did. She is on the list of people who had to pay French pirate Jacques Cassard to prevent him from raiding the island in 1713. Both Beck and Kerkrinck were offspring of two Dutch families who had settled on the island shortly after it was conquered and it is probable that Kerkrinck felt more at home in Curaçao than in the Netherlands.

Similarly, Pieter Schuurman, a former WIC officer, freed a slave woman named Catharina when he returned to the Netherlands. Catharina also returned to Curaçao. It is not clear how long she served or, in this case, whether she even wanted to return to the Caribbean or not.⁶⁰

In J.D. Herlein's *Beschrijvinge van de volk-plantinge Suriname*, he described how a slave woman was brought to Amsterdam by her master. She worked for him in Amsterdam, learned the Dutch language, and converted to Christianity in the Dutch Reformed Church.⁶¹ After seven years she returned to Suriname to the great dismay of Herlein who did not understand why she did this. He wrote that she went back to her own people saying that she did not want to live in captivity because liberty came above all. Moreover, in spite of the fact that she was instructed in the Dutch Reformed religion, she preferred her own. "My religion is more pleasant to the all the senses than that of Christianity because those people are more taken with outward appearance than true feelings." These may be the only words we have from a female enslaved by the Dutch during the entire early modern period.⁶² Despite the efforts of the Dutch to "civilize" and turn people to Christianity, black women held strong to their own belief systems. The statement by this unnamed Dutch slave is proof that some, perhaps many or most, accepted Christianity in

⁶⁰ SA: Notarial Archive, 7164: 649.

⁶¹ J.D. Herlein, *Beschrijvinge van de Volk-plantinge Suriname* (Leeuwarden: Meindert Injema, 1718), 93.

⁶² Herlein, 94. "Zeggende dat zy onder geen dwang van conscientie met die beswaarnis wilde leven, om dat de vryheid van dien alles te boven kwam, enz. Zijnde hare religie veel aangename aan de zinnen dan die van 't Christendom; wat die menschen zijn meer ingenomen met wezentlijke betogen, als gevoelens van vermaklijkheden, die by haar min bekend zijn, daarom by haar niet gegrond en aangenomen worden."

order to adhere to the socially acceptable conventions and institutions of whites, so that they could form families and gain freedom, or at least some independence. In general, they must have assumed these few “outward displays” would get them acceptance from the Dutch. In the early years this was certainly true, but as ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church started to suspect that Africans only converted to receive the benefits of Christianity, they were reluctant to baptize and marry blacks.

Conclusion

Especially during the early days of colonization, there seemed to be a duality in the dealings of the Dutch with slaves and the institution of slavery. Not fully comfortable with the institution and the trade because many in the Netherlands had moral objections to the trade in human beings, the Dutch entered the slave trade in spite of these criticisms. This duality is also expressed in the racial ideology that developed among the Dutch. Writings of travelers to Africa described black women as monstrous and uncivilized, yet they also saw African women as beguiling and irresistible to white men. In addition, in spite of the negative views of black women in literature and poetry at the time, in much of the visual art African women were depicted with surprising sensitivity. These contrasting views of African women were perhaps a consequence of the fact that many a Dutchman was uncomfortable with the trade.

During the early period, especially in New Netherland where the burgeoning colonial economy was not dependent on slaves, slaves could marry, obtain their freedom, get land, and testify in court. African women and men took advantage of these opportunities to improve their lives and those of their children. As in the example of the slave named Francisca in Brazil, women sought and received justice in Brazil and in New Netherland. However, after the loss of

Brazil and New Netherland, the WIC focused on Suriname and the Caribbean islands and with the riches to be made by the sale of slaves to the Spanish, their objections quickly vanished. As the slave system became more entrenched in the Americas, it became increasingly difficult for black women to assert themselves.



Fig. 4. Jacob Jordaens, *Moses and his Ethiopian Wife*, 1650. Rubenshuis, Antwerp.



Fig. 5. Albert Eckhout, *Negra*, 1641. National Museum Denmark, Copenhagen.

CHAPTER FIVE

Concubinage and Miscegenation

In most areas around the Atlantic Ocean where white men set foot ashore, the practice of concubinage and race mixing was common; so too in the Dutch Atlantic. Although it officially prohibited unions between African or Native American women and its employees, the West India Company could not avoid the social realities overseas and tacitly allowed these liaisons. The possible social mobility of black and mixed race women induced anxiety in colonial officials in the Netherlands who sought to restrict these interracial unions, yet they rarely, if ever, succeeded in preventing them because the local colonial elite eagerly participated in the custom, and because of the scarcity of white, Christian women.

The women in these, some would argue, forced relationships, used Dutch institutions wherever they could. Yet, especially in Africa, they were often powerless to get justice when they sought to receive inheritances they justly deserved from the men who were their husbands according to African customs. Many of the free women at the African coast and in the “new world” used the same marriage strategies we have seen used by white women. Some black women, like Elisabeth Samson, sought to have their unions with white men legitimized by the Dutch colonial government. Samson was unique in this sense because she went so far as to go to the States General in the Netherlands to get the right to marry a white man.

West Africa

The Portuguese, who frequented the West African coast much earlier than other Europeans, set precedents for the relationship between Africans and Europeans, and especially for the Dutch. They established the practice of castle occupation on the coast, a dependence on

local food markets, and sexual relationships with Akan women, leading to the early formation of a mixed racial group.¹ The establishment of forts and castles was mutually beneficial for Africans and Europeans. Local African leaders encouraged forts along the coast since they were commercial magnets that brought traders from the interior and allowed Africans to expand their share in the growing international trade system. In addition, forts could provide an important military advantage over neighboring rivals. For Europeans, the forts were advantageous positions to tap into the interior African trade, and agreements with local leaders were designed to keep competitors out.

The highest authority of the WIC in Africa was the director-general who was stationed at the castle in Elmina (Ghana). The director, as in all of the Dutch colonies, had authority over all political, military, judicial, and commercial activities in WIC territories, as well as its personnel stationed in Africa, and over the WIC ships in African waters. A council, of which he was chairman, assisted him and included the *fiscaal* and a small group of high-ranking officers.² On average, the WIC had about 200 to 400 men stationed in West Africa. About one-fourth of these were civil servants and the remainder consisted of soldiers, sailors, and craftsmen.³ These lesser ranking servants were taken from the lower strata of society and included convicts and beggars. Many saw employment with the WIC as inferior to that with the Dutch East India Company and the African coast was among the least desirable stations. The only redeeming quality of service at the Guinea coast was that one could rapidly be promoted because of the high death rate among Europeans. One of the only qualities needed for promotion was the ability to read and write

¹ Harvey Feinberg, "Africans and Europeans in West Africa: Elminans and Dutchmen on the Gold Coast During the Eighteenth Century," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 79, no. 7 (1989): 1-186.

² A *fiscaal* was a superintendent in charge of judicial and revenue matters at the fort.

³ Postma, 61.

Dutch and other languages common in the Atlantic world at the time, such as English and Portuguese.⁴ No experience was necessary.

Because West Africa was known as the “white man’s grave” where many European men succumbed to diseases like malaria, dysentery, and yellow fever, it was not deemed a suitable environment for European women.⁵ As a result of this belief, and because the WIC did not engage in a colonizing effort on the coast, only a small number of white women ever lived on the continent during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, although greater numbers visited the African coast. This meant that European men, who often spent years in Africa, looked for female partners among the local population, caring not whether they themselves were single or married.

The WIC tacitly allowed its men to take local women for their wives, although it was officially against such unions, ostensibly not based on race but on religion. The preachers of the Dutch Reformed Church, however, were dismayed about a company rule that men could not bring their wives to Africa, because they felt only wives could stop the many illicit affairs. Abraham Oudewater, one such preacher, wrote that he found a considerable church community in Elmina which had several men with whom he could be much pleased because of their intelligence and understanding, if it were not for the “close friendships and special relations with black women.”⁶ He added that he would use all his powers to end these practices. Evidently he was unsuccessful, for in the early eighteenth century his colleagues were still bemoaning the practice of Dutch men entering into relationships with black or mulatto women. One of them

⁴ Postma, 65.

⁵ Den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 128.

⁶ SA: Archives of the Classis Amsterdam, 379: 210. Letter from Abraham Oudewater to the Classis dated August 14, 1671.

wrote that there was no one who did not openly live with said women in “overspel or hoererij,” meaning in adultery or whoring. He noted that even men who had wives in the Netherlands engaged in relationships with local women, and that they sometimes took local wives whom they replaced with others after some time. This preacher would also have liked to effect change but acknowledged that his efforts were in vain.⁷

Later in the century, church officials seem to have given up on preaching against concubinage and instead focused on the children who sprung from these unions. Of course the effort of the church aimed at the saving of the souls of these children by bringing them up in the “proper” Christian faith. One *predikant* wrote to the *Classis* about his concern that children of fathers who returned to the Netherlands would fall into the hands of heathens. He asked if there was no way to bring up the children according to Dutch customs and have them marry according to Dutch law.⁸ Again, many of these efforts seem to have fallen on deaf ears, although the company did sometimes withhold a part of the wages of employees who had children in order to pay a share to the mother or guardian.

What church officials failed to understand, though, was that these relationships were anything but illegitimate from an African perspective. At the coast these unions were referred to as *calisaren*, which was recognized within the customs of the Akan-speaking people.⁹ The Akan followed a system of kinship where people belonged to a matrilineal descent group called an *abusua*. People could be connected to an *abusua* either as relatives in the female bloodline, or as

⁷ SA: Archives of the Classis Amsterdam, 379: 210. Letter from J.C. Schiess to the Classis dated 1731.

⁸ SA: Archives of the Classis Amsterdam, 379: 210. Letter dated January 3, 1756.

⁹ A verb originating from the Portuguese *casar*, meaning “to marry”.

slaves or servants. Therefore, the status of the mother determined that of her children.¹⁰ Local African conventions included polygamy. The agreement for the Akan marriage was usually made between the mother of the bride and the groom. The European suitor would make a gift to the bride and he provided a note to her mother who also played an important role in the ceremony of union. Every month, the mother could trade this note for goods for as long as the union lasted. These marriages were not affordable to all because the price paid for a bride was generally too high for a newly arrived man.¹¹ Some scholars argue that these interracial unions were mutually beneficial for African women and European men.¹² Yet, it is difficult to defend the position that all, or even most of these relationships were beneficial to women. African women could indeed benefit financially from a marriage with a white man, but not all did. Some women were abandoned multiple times and had to renegotiate their place in the coastal society time and time again. Moreover, white men's primary concerns, with some exceptions, were almost always with wives and families in Holland, leaving black women with little resources when the men left or died.

Not all women at the coast had their relations formalized. Slaves often did not, and women who liaised with lower ranking personnel also had unsanctioned unions because the above-mentioned bride price was prohibitive for many men. Such women at the coast were in an awkward and often difficult position. Especially mulatto women, of whom there were many after the first generations of European men lived on the coast, could have trying times because they

¹⁰ Natalie Everts, "Brought up well according to European Standards: Helena van der Burgh and Wilhelmina van Naarssen: Two Christian Women from Elmina," in *Merchants, Missionaries, and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-GNAian Relationships*, ed. I. van Kessel (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2002), 101.

¹¹ William St. Clair, *The Door of No Return: The History of Cape Coast Castle and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: BlueBridge, 2007), 148-149.

¹² Rachel Jean-Baptiste, "A Black Girl should not be with a White Man," *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 59.

were neither fully African nor fully European. Instead, these women filled a social and geographic liminal space around the Dutch forts. To survive in this space, women of color utilized various strategies to secure their own and their offspring's futures, with differing rates of success.

One such mixed race woman was Helena Courrea, daughter of a Portuguese Governor of Axim, Emanuel Courrea, and an unnamed African woman.¹³ Helena, in turn, also had a relationship with a Portuguese man at the coast whom she married. However, after the Dutch took over from the Portuguese in February of 1642, Helena's husband left her behind to return to his native Portugal. Apparently he would not, or felt he could not, go home with a mulatto wife. This, of course, left her in a difficult situation. Not fully a part of African tribal society and raised around the fort, she was left with a child but without a means of support. The Dutch acknowledged her status as the daughter of a former governor, and referred to her specifically as "free" and a "daughter of the former governor." Since she was recognized as a, though perhaps marginal, member of the European community in Africa, she received help from the new rulers at Axim.

Helena Courrea found a new partner, Jan Geelendonck, with whom she shared a similar background. He was the son of a Portuguese captain and a slave woman at the coast and they must have been kindred spirits who understood each other's backgrounds well. The couple planned to marry, but of course her Portuguese husband was a hindrance to their union. The couple appealed to Dutch governor Van der Wel for permission to marry. Even though both had African mothers and lived on the African continent, the approval of the Dutch rulers of the fort was important to them because they were, however marginally, part of the European community.

¹³ Captain Emanuel Courrea lost his ship to the Dutch WIC in 1623, or 1624.

Geelendonck worked for the WIC as *ondercomys*, a lesser official partially charged with overseeing the trade at Axim. According to Van der Wel, Geelendonck succeeded in rising through the ranks quickly through hard work and excellent behavior. Even though Van der Wel was sympathetic to the desires of the couple, in his journal he wrote about his struggle with his decision about the marriage. He must have felt that he could not in good conscience consent to bigamy, yet on the other hand, he argued, Courrea could be a widow since they did not know the whereabouts of her former husband.¹⁴ He included the *ziekentrooster* in the decision making process and asked him for advice.¹⁵ After discussing the matter, the *ziekentrooster* felt that under this circumstance, the two could marry. On November 18, 1646 the wedding took place.¹⁶

This does not conclude Courrea's story, however. During the 1640s, prior to her marriage to Geelendonck, she must have thought about how to support herself and her child and apparently started her own small trading venture. The specifics of her business cannot be found in the sources, but she must have participated in some small way in the Atlantic trade. Around 1650, her husband followed suit and left the WIC to establish himself as an independent merchant. Like her previous husbands, Geelendonck also left Axim and it is not clear if they ever lived together again. Abandoned for the second time, Helena looked to replace a husband, but she knew she would likely not be allowed to remarry according to Dutch custom and law.

Courrea's next relationship was with a married man from the Netherlands, Jan van Valckenburgh, who came to the coast as a high ranking official who oversaw all trade at the coast. Helena, at this point, had acquired some wealth from her activities as a *koopvrouw*.

¹⁴ *VDR*, 256-257.

¹⁵ Literally: comforter of the sick. An official of the Dutch Reformed Church entrusted with the spiritual care of a community when a full time preacher was not at hand.

¹⁶ *VDR*, 263.

With van Valckenburgh she had a child named Jasper around 1653. In January of 1656, Van Valckenburgh became governor at Elmina and his *de facto* wife, Helena Courrea, was at his side and openly living with him. Van Valckenburgh, however, planned to return to Amsterdam and to his wife, Dina Lems. Courrea knew this. At the end of his term, around the beginning of 1659, Van Valckenburgh left to return to the Netherlands and to his wife. Courrea was now abandoned for a third time at the age of thirty six.¹⁷

The same year that Van Valckenburgh left, however, she met twenty-three-year-old Dirck Wilre, a WIC company servant. He was young, and when he came to the African coast he did yet not have the stature of Van Valckenburgh. Wilre started as an assistant, then became *commies*, and finally *oppercommies* at the Castle. In 1662, after only three years in Africa, he became acting governor at the coast, a lightning fast career, mostly because of his skill as a merchant and because of the high death rate at the coast. Courrea now was restored to her former position. She was the official concubine of the Dutch governor in Africa. The couple had three children, but only their son Hendrick survived childhood. Yet Wilre would be the fourth man to abandon her, and the third to leave her for a European woman.

Wilre returned to Holland in the summer or fall of 1665 to marry Maria de Perel from Antwerp. Although he left the Netherlands as a low ranking assistant in service of the WIC, he now came back a governor. His newly found status greatly increased his marriage prospects in the Netherlands and the chance at a status-filled marriage and legitimate heirs may have been important to him. The groom told his new wife of his earlier union with Courrea and the couple settled at the Brouwersgracht in Amsterdam, the residence of De Perel. In July of 1667, they had a daughter they named Maria. At the end of the war with England (1665-1667), the WIC called

¹⁷ NA: NBKG, 81.

on Wilre to go back to Africa. On January 10, 1668 he accepted his post in Africa again where he was instrumental in boosting the slave trade, more than doubling the amount of slaves sold. We do not know if he took up his relationship with Helena Courrea again, but he did care for his son Hendrick very much. In fact, at the end of July 1668, he sent the seven-year-old boy to Amsterdam to be educated. Although the boy did not live with his wife, she would have known of his arrival and if Wilre did not care for his son much, he would have avoided this possible conflict with his wife. Wilre was not able to return to Holland until 1674, and drowned when a small sloop meant to carry them to safety capsized after their ship hit a reef off the coast of Schiermonnikoog, one of the islands off the northern coast of the Netherlands.

Maria de Perel, not well disposed towards Wilre's son by Courrea, made sure he did not get the inheritance his father wanted him to have, six thousand guilders and twenty marks gold, and she asked the WIC chamber of Amsterdam to return the boy to Africa. Since his guardian also died, there was no advocate for the boy. Hendrik returned to Africa, the voyage paid for by his mother, only months after his father's death. He was now twelve years old and had lived in Amsterdam for the last five years.¹⁸

Helena Courrea's life illustrates the difficulties of mixed race women at the African coast. Not part of African society because of her close ties to the European community, she married or forged relationships with European men to survive. Her story also shows remarkable similarity to that of some white women in the Dutch Atlantic like Teuntje Straetmans and Charlotta van der Lith. These women are examples of the many who used serial marriage as a strategy for survival. In this their lives have some parallels. All suffered the loss of husbands, all because husbands either died or abandoned them, and all remarried or found other men fairly

¹⁸ Franz Binder and Norbert Schneeloch, "Dirck Dircksz. Wilre en Willem Godschalk van Focquenbroch (?) geschilderd door Pieter de Wit te Elmina in 1669," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 27 (1979): 7-29.

quickly. Straetmans and Van der Lith, however, had a distinct advantage over Courrea because they were white. Courrea's race meant that she, like other black and mixed race women who forged relationships with white men, could not count on loyalty or an inheritance from a white man, even if they were married according to African tradition.

Courrea was the daughter of an important Portuguese governor and received some aid from the new rulers at the fort because of her status. However, not all mixed race women at the coast could count on the understanding and help from the Dutch. Jacobus Fiddelerus, for instance, married the African-born daughter of a Portuguese man and a mulatto African woman.¹⁹ Fiddelerus was an important member of the Dutch military and community in Elmina for he was the *vaandrig* who had the command over the military, which made up about a half to three quarters of WIC personnel at the coast.²⁰ We never learn his wife's name, which is telling, because she was just referred to as the "wife of the *vaandrig*." In their journals, Ruychaver and Van der Wel did not omit her from the historical record, but they marginalized her by not even naming her.

Fiddelerus' wife had a son who died after a 3-week-long illness. He was buried at the Dutch Reformed Church graveyard in a Christian ceremony that included three "salvos", or gunshots.²¹ Although the wife of Fiddelerus was marginalized, her young son was fully accepted as a member of the Dutch community and received a dignified burial. On May 21st, 1645, the *vaandrig*'s wife had another son. Ruychaver notes that on June 18th, she went back to church for

¹⁹ *VDR*, 579.

²⁰ Personnel numbers varied widely from year to year but were always between two- and five hundred. See: Den Heijer, 127.

²¹ *VDR*, 5.

the first time after the delivery of the baby.²² Unlike Helena Correa, the daughter of a governor, the vaandrig's wife had no important social standing, although her son seems to have been accepted. So it seems that class, in addition to gender and race was an important distinction to the small Dutch community at the Ghana coast.

Although she was a Christian and her husband was an important member of the Dutch community at the African coast, and although the governor saw fit to write about details of her life in his journal, another expression of the marginalization of this woman was the fact that upon her husband's death in May of 1646, she did not inherit from her husband as most Dutch women did. This also means that this was likely not a legal marriage in the Dutch sense, even though the governor did refer to this woman as a "wife". The couple's one-year-old child, however, inherited 4,000 guilders from his father; the rest of his belongings went to his wife, presumably his house, where the couple had once hosted a wedding, and household goods. As it was customary to appoint a guardian for a child who had lost one of his or her parents, Van der Wel was appointed guardian to the child at the request of the father.²³ The sum of 4,000 guilders is astronomical considering that Fiddelerus only made 39 guilders a year from the WIC. He probably supplemented his income by engaging in -possibly illegal- trade endeavors. It was not uncommon for men at the coast to smuggle gold dust to the Netherlands.

Not all children of African mothers and Dutch fathers were as fortunate as the above-mentioned mulatto women. Children of servants of the WIC and slave women could be enslaved themselves, as would become the norm in North America. This is evidenced by governor van der Wel's notation on March 25, 1645 of the death of a female slave who was the lieutenant's

²² *VDR*, 56.

²³ *VDR*, 179.

child.²⁴ Apparently the Dutch community recognized this woman as the child of one of them, but this was not enough to include her as a member of the community. There was no special burial for her or any further recognition from her father.

So, in Africa at least, it seems that the status of both the mother and the father was important in the social acceptance of mulatto children. If the father was a high-ranking officer and the mother had a European father, then acceptance into Dutch Elminian society was possible. If, on the other hand, the mother was a slave, the status of the child would be no higher, perhaps as a result of the matrilineal surrounding community. The children of Fiddelerus and Correa were products of a legitimate marriage, but the child of the lieutenant, although he acknowledged paternity, was the product of an illegitimate relationship. It is even possible that the lieutenant, who remains nameless, had a wife in the Netherlands.

Generally, people of mixed race were treated as inferiors and regarded with suspicion. However, in some circumstances, as above, they were treated as equals and their position often improved with time. WIC policy was that company personnel should always maintain distance from black Africans. Blacks were not allowed to spend nights directly outside of the locked gates of the Dutch trading castles, and African women could not spend the night inside. “Obviously, this policy was only selectively enforced as evidenced by the growing number of mulattoes and the common practice of regular liaisons between WIC officials and African women.”²⁵

²⁴ *VDR*, 29.

²⁵ Postma, 69.

Willem Bosman perhaps voiced the sentiment of many Dutchmen when he wrote about the offspring of African women and European men, called *tapoeijers* or *mulatten* by the Dutch.

He wrote,

This half-breed of people is *schelmachtig* and able to do all kinds of evil. They do not get involved with anyone, not with us, not with the negroes and they do not even associate with each other because they don't even trust their own people. They call themselves Christians, but meanwhile they worship idols just as much as the negroes do. Most women behave like whores with the whites in public and even with negroes, although they do that in secret. I cannot but call them the scum of the earth, the scum of both whites and blacks together. The worst of both races, whores and rascals. The men are usually soldiers in our service and dress as we do, but the women deck themselves out in outrageous fashion. On their heads they wear several hats on top of each other, the top one is silk, ruffled in the front, and with a round top. To hold that hat in place they wind a ribbon two or three times around their heads so that they make a spectacle of themselves. When they are young they are not very good looking, but when they're old you can chase kids off to bed with these women. On their skin they have white, brown, and yellow spots making them resemble tigers, which agrees with their general evil nature.²⁶

Bosman's account about mixed race people, popular in the Netherlands and in translation, reflects the distrust both the black and white communities had for people who were not fully "theirs". His was not the only writing that deplored the looks of African and mulatto women, but it did not seem to have diminished the interest of Dutch men, who eagerly entered into relationships with said women. The "otherness" of African born women may have intrigued and facilitated the needs of Dutch men, but these relationships were not a substitute for a "proper" marriage with a white woman.

African societies at the coast were polygynous. Men on the coast could have three to ten wives and, according to Bosman, men around Benin could have forty to fifty wives. The kings, Bosman claimed, could have wives in excess of a thousand. Bosman was astonished by the

²⁶ Bosman, 133.

number of wives and children some men had. Perhaps this custom influenced European men, for some of them had more than one concubine.²⁷

Godlieb D. Huger for example, a sergeant, left to his *tapoeijerin* (mixed race woman) Elisabeth personal effects in the form of clothing and to his *negerin*, or black woman, he left a male slave and some gold. Apparently he also had some debt. He did not leave all of his possessions to the women, though, and made a fellow sergeant, Godfriet Lehman, his only and universal heir.²⁸

Especially those who could afford it, like the former governor of the North and South Coast of Africa, Hendrik Walmbeek, kept more than one concubine. In August of 1765, Walmbeek fell ill and made up his last will and testament in which he left some possessions to his eldest “negro woman” Abanneba, but also to his other “negro woman” Badoe. He had children with both women and he provided for them in his will.²⁹ Abanneba had five children, two sons and three daughters, to whom Walmbeek left a mark of gold dust and and some linen. To his sons, Jan and Christiaan, he left his stockings, shoes, and two young slaves. There is no indication in the will of how old these children were at the time of his death but it seems that they had reached the age of majority. Walmbeek had another son, though, named Willem whose mother was his younger concubine Badoe. He received the same mark of gold dust and some linen plus the sum of 220 guilders yearly. To administer his money he appointed Willem Sulijan van Leydael, *raad fiscaal*, and Coenraad Willem Roghe, another official of the WIC at the

²⁷ Willem Bosman cited in: Aad van den Heuvel, *Goud en Slaven* (Amsterdam: Meulenhof, 1981), 96-98. Many European observers commented on the number of wives African men could have. Bosman remarked on the wives of kings that only the most good looking ones stayed home, the others had to work the land. The king spent a few days with each new wife but after this period she had to live like a nun for the rest of her days.

²⁸ NA: NBTK, 335.

²⁹ NA: NBTK, 335.

African coast, to serve as Willem's guardians. Presumably, his older children had reached the age of majority at the time Walmbeek made his will, but he provided well for his younger son. Moreover, he requested in his will that his sister, Johanna Christina van Huyven, who lived in Amsterdam, take his youngest son in. Walmbeek was apparently very concerned for this youngest child and wanted him to be raised in the Netherlands. Whether van Huyven consented to this and took in Willem is unknown.

Several men who had relationships with black and mixed race women were concerned about their concubines and what would happen to them after their deaths, yet they also clung to a life in Europe and success by European standards. On April 7, 1762, Stephanus Barreveld, a high-ranking commercial officer at the coast, was ill and had his last will and testament made whereby he left to his *tapoeijerin* Eva a sum of fifty ounces of gold, and three slave women named Annmantuma, Aquisiba and Jameneissie. In addition, he left her three female slaves who had to be sold, and a male slave named Accra. On his sickbed and perhaps feeling that death was closing in on him, Barreveld wanted to get his affairs in order. However, he also stipulated that if, by God's grace, he recovered from his current illness, the will would be null and void. Apparently, he wanted to take care of his affairs for the short term, but did not intend to leave his belongings to an African woman. He may have had other aspirations, as *commies* he could certainly acquire more wealth, and perhaps desired to marry a white woman and have legitimate heirs.³⁰

Some African women did inherit from their Dutch men. Efussa, a black woman who had a relationship with carpenter Corneelis de Nijs, inherited all of his possessions when he died. He made her his only and universal heir. The couple had a daughter and although de Nijs left his

³⁰ NA: NBKG, 335. April 7, 1762.

tools and clothing to a fellow carpenter, he requested that he give his child a special item from his toolbox.³¹ Another example is Johanna, a mixed race woman who was a concubine to Jan Pieter Theodoor Huijders. The couple's son, Constantin Ferdinand, inherited four of Huijders' slaves. A second son, Cudjo, who had a different mother named Abiba, also inherited slaves. It is interesting to note that the first wife, Johanna, was of mixed race, and thus her son was likely lighter in color than his son by Abiba. The first son was given a European name, while Huijders' son by his African concubine received an African name.³²

Suriname

Unlike in Africa, there was a strictly defined racial hierarchy in Suriname, perhaps influenced by the Spanish that included mulattos (white/black), mestizos (mulatto/white), kastiezen (white/mestizo), poestiezen (mestizo or kasties/white), and karboegers (Native American/black). Racial definitions, however, did not indicate anything about one's status, free or enslaved, for the children followed the status of the mother. Mulattos had some advantages over black slaves. They almost never did field work and they had a better chance of being manumitted or allowed to buy their freedom. In this strictly hierarchical society, people also distinguished between free born and manumitted slaves. For manumitted slaves some restrictions remained for life, while free blacks had no restrictions placed on them. From notarial documents we see that white fathers did often make provisions for their mulatto children. Sometimes a black or colored woman and her children were the sole heirs of a white man.³³

³¹ NA: NBKG, 335. April 18, 1766.

³² NA: NBKG, 335. July 7, 1767.

³³ Cynthia McLeod, *Elisabeth Samson: Een vrije zwarte vrouw in het achttiende-eeuwse Suriname* (Utrecht: Vakgroep Culturele Antropologie, Universiteit Utrecht, 1993), 25-26.

White men, both single and married, often lived together with a mulatto or black woman, either enslaved or free. She would be called a *huishoudster*, a literal translation of the word housekeeper. On occasion, a white man also had one or two *bijzitten*, or concubines, women with whom he also had a sexual relationship and who were part of his household. These relationships could be of various durations but on average, a white male did provide for the upbringing of children who sprung from these various relationships. Married men often had a concubine in addition to their wives. If a black or colored woman were enslaved, her “suitor” would usually purchase her freedom at the end of his life. In Suriname society such unions were tolerated but certainly not encouraged. Both governors and members of the clergy complained about them.

Just as in Africa, white men left possessions to their concubines upon their deaths. Nanoe, the *bijzit* of Johan Hendrik Schaap, inherited most of his worldly goods, except for a sum of one hundred guilders that he left to the church. Although Schaap had a plantation with slaves, his concubine was a free woman. The executors of his estate were instructed to build a decent house for Nanoe, which would be comfortable for her to live in. She also inherited a number of slaves whom she could choose from his plantation *Schaapstal*. In addition, she received a yearly sum of three hundred guilders for as long as she lived.³⁴ The rest of his estate went to his relatives in Europe, but he stipulated that they had to come to Suriname and live there in order to claim the property. Apparently his closest relatives had died for he stipulated that the heir had to prove he or she was a blood relation.

If black women thought they would gain acceptance in white circles because of their relationships with white men and the fact that they carried their children, they were wrong.

Concubines were not equal to wives. A concubine often did not eat at the table as an equal, and

³⁴ SA: Archief van de Weeskamer en Commissie van Liquidatie der Zaken van de voormalige weeskamer, 210. September 10, 1766.

certainly not if her white partner received friends. Author Cynthia McLeod mentions that they formed a separate group that lived close to, but was not equal to married women. At the end of the eighteenth century, white men did congregate at balls and other social events with other men who had colored concubines, but at these events colored men and white women were never present.³⁵

In Suriname, there were also many examples of mulatto women legally marrying white men. For example, Elisabeth Samson, a free black woman who will be discussed later, had an older half-sister who had a white father and who was born a slave named Maria. Maria married a white man in 1714 after she was manumitted in 1713. In fact, she was thrice married and her third husband, Frederik Coenraad Bossé, was an esteemed member of Suriname society. In Mauricius' journal he also mentions Anna Buys-Julien, an "old mulatress" who married her boss Willem Ouwater on November 2, 1750.³⁶ Earlier, she had been married to Hendrik Buys, owner of plantation Buys en Vlijt, with whom she had two children, Suzanna and Elisabeth. After the death of Willem Ouwater in 1760, Anna Buys married Johan Godfried Clemen. When Buys died, she was quite wealthy and left a house she lived in with Hendrik Buys, the plantation Buys en Vlijt, a second home in Paramaribo and three additional plantations. Buys' daughter Elisabeth, now a mestizo since her mother was a mulatress, married the owner of plantation Stolkwijk and after his death in 1766, she married Jan Nepveu who would become governor of the colony. By intermarriage with white men, subsequent generations of colored women could gain property, status, and eventually acceptance in Dutch society.

³⁵ McLeod, 29.

³⁶ Jan Jacob Mauricius was the governor of Suriname from 1742-1751. Du Plessis, *Recueil van Egte Stukken*, 88.

Not only white men had concubines, though. Elisabeth Samson's brother, Charloo, married Johanna Stuart in 1718. She was likely also a mixed race woman. When the couple had their wills made up in 1727, Charloo mentioned a female slave by the name of Magdalena and her two children, Maria and Jannetje. He wrote that there were "special reasons" for his desire to set her and her children free after his death. His brothers, Jak and Quackoe, were to build a "solid house" for her where she and her children could live comfortably. Maria, possibly Charloo's daughter, received a *legaat* of four thousand guilders and a "male negro" named Annoba. Charloo also desired that she would learn to read and write like he could. Jannetje, Magdalena's second daughter was to receive an Indian slave woman.³⁷

Free Black Women

Elisabeth Samson

Perhaps one of the most remarkable and fascinating women to inhabit the Dutch Atlantic World in the first half of the eighteenth century was Elisabeth Samson. A descendant of slaves, she was a female plantation owner who actively managed her properties and accumulated unprecedented wealth because of her business acumen and inheritances. She is well known for the case she brought against the Suriname government because it would not allow her to marry a white man, but historians have not focused on her family network consisting of black, white, and mixed race members that helped her sustain and increase her wealth. This in turn allowed her to

³⁷ McLeod, 36-37. Cynthia McLeod, the daughter of the first president of Suriname and wife of a Surinamese diplomat, has studied the life of Elisabeth Samson. In 1993, she published the results of her research in, *Elisabeth Samson: Een vrije zwarte vrouw in het achttiende-eeuwse Suriname*. She also wrote a novel about Samson entitled, *De vrije negerin Elisabeth* (2000). The novel was translated in English under the title *The Free Negress Elisabeth* (2008). For a short biography of Elisabeth Samson see also: Marcel Otto, "Elisabeth Samson," in *1001 Vrouwen in de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 669-670.

confront obstacles in her life as a free black woman and ultimately triumph in court. Although many black women all around the Dutch Atlantic used the legal system, few were able to take their cases all the way to the States General in the Netherlands as Samson did.

Samson was born free in Paramaribo, Suriname in 1715 to a former slave named Nanoe who had once belonged to planter Jan van Susteren. After the death of van Susteren his widow, Prijna Rubbens, requested manumission for Nanoe and her two mulatto children, Charloo and Maria, probably the offspring of van Susteren. Nanoe was manumitted in 1713 and changed her name to Mariana. Nanoe also had other black children who remained enslaved. Between 1715 and 1718 Charloo, the eldest, bought his half brothers and sisters from the widow van Susteren. Since Samson was born after her mother's manumission, she was born free. She herself notes that she was born free and a member of the Dutch Reformed church. She was baptized July 25, 1725.³⁸ Her father was black but whether he was free or enslaved is unknown.

Samson grew up in the house of her older sister Maria, who married Frederik Coenraad Bossé in 1727. Maria, known as Maria Jansz., had been married twice before. In 1714 she married Pierre Miville, the first owner of the plantation *Saltzhalen* who died in a slave uprising. In 1720 she married Jan Spies who died in 1726. Bossé, her third husband, was a white small merchant who imported alcoholic beverages, among others. Because of his marriage to Maria he acquired *Saltzhalen* and he operated the plantation well. McLeod speculates that Elisabeth may have helped him with his correspondence and administration. On a list of inhabitants of the colony in 1734, when she was nineteen years old, Samson is noted as the owner of a number of

³⁸ McLeod, 53.

slaves. She may have inherited these slaves or she could have acquired them herself as she joined her brother-in-law Bossé in the trade with other colonies.³⁹

In 1736 Samson found herself in the middle of a dispute between the governor of the Suriname colony, Joan Raye, and a white coppersmith named Peltser. In July of that year Peltser's wife asked Raye to remove a renter from her home because he did not pay the rent. However, Raye did not handle the case swiftly enough to satisfy Mrs. Peltser who complained to her husband. Together they were called to the governor's office where Raye gave them a piece of his mind. He scolded them for complaining and told them to get out. When Mr. Peltser came home, Elisabeth Samson was there visiting his wife and Samson heard him use some choice words about the governor, in addition to Peltser's disdainful comment that he would never have to go through what the governor had gone through (the governor had had to give up his sword as a military man). Samson, in turn, told the governor about the offensive remarks and, as a result, the governor interrogated Peltser and wife. They denied what Samson said. In a twist of fate, Samson became the accused. Other, white witnessess came forward who claimed that Peltser never said such things.⁴⁰

The white community stuck together to accuse a black woman. The governor even wrote that the Dutch had learned from experience that blacks lied and displayed nothing but hateful attitudes towards whites and Christian virtues. The authorities wanted Samson to prove her allegations or she would be whipped, burned with a mark and banned from the colony. She was charged with endangering the life of Peltser, who could have received the death penalty for insulting an officer of the republic, and for lying under oath. Her lawyer, Josephus de Cohue,

³⁹ McLeod, 55.

⁴⁰ McLeod, 54-56.

argued that she could not possibly be charged for offenses that could not be proven. Even if Peltser had been charged, the prosecution could not prove that he would have indeed received the death penalty.

Samson was indeed banned from the colony in 1737, although the punishment of lashes and burning did not stick. Her lawyer announced the next day that he would ask for reversal of the verdict at the States General in the Netherlands. Samson remained free and in the colony because her brother in law, Frederick Coenraad Bossé, vouched for her and guaranteed she would not flee from justice. In September of 1737 she arrived in the Netherlands to pursue the matter further before the States General.⁴¹

On September 30, 1737 her lawyer, Mr. Hoyer, handed in a legal request at the States General stating that Elisabeth Samson was wrongfully convicted, that she told the truth, and that she asked for revision of the sentence.⁴² All of the paperwork had to be sent from Suriname and finally arrived on January 27, 1738, after Governor Raye had already passed away. The packet was not complete and Samson's lawyer sent the legal request again. Only in May on 1739 was everything complete and the States General could review the case dealing with the slander of the now deceased governor. On October 31, 1739 Samson won her case and could return to Suriname.

Samson undoubtedly threatened the social order as a member of a black family of which there were several very wealthy members. As a relative to one of the upper class members of Suriname society, she had access to the governor because she could apparently tell him something in passing. She had a prestigious address at the Waterkant, and as the sister of the

⁴¹ McLeod, 59-60.

⁴² NA: SG: Requesten, 7771.

mistress of the house she could come and go freely. Samson was not servile, she was proud, she was black, and she liked to flaunt her wealth and influence.

After her return to Suriname, Samson started a relationship with Carl Otto Creutz with whom she lived in concubinage. Creutz was white, born in Emmerich in present day Germany, and in the service of the Societeit Suriname. He arrived in Suriname in 1733 and rose through the ranks, making captain-lieutenant in 1745, and eventually becoming a high-ranking member of the Court of Police and Criminal Justice. He was instrumental in negotiations with the maroon community, which was frequently threatening security at the plantations in Suriname, and won many plaudits for his skill, not to mention land for a plantation from governor Jan Jacob Mauricius.

Before his plantation ownership, Creutz did not have much to offer Samson in a material sense. She had money from her brother Charloo and her mother Mariana, as well as income from her plantations. In addition, she inherited several plantations from her sister Maria. Maria Jansz. lost her husband Bosse in 1742 and when she died some ten years later, left all of her possessions to her sisters Catharina, Nanette and Elisabeth.

In 1746, Samson had land at the Hoer-Helenakreek. The governor, Mauricius in those days, assigned land between large plantations for free persons (*vrijlieden*) to purchase small coffee plantations. Samson owned two coffee plantations in the area, *Toevlugt* and *Welgemoed*. Until 1763 *Toevlugt* was rented to Pierre Planteau Janszoon. In 1753 it was valued at more than fifty-five thousand guilders. *Welgemoed* was run by a supervisor and not rented out.⁴³ Together, Samson and Creutz built a house at the corner of Wagenwegstraat and Heerenstraat. Their

⁴³ McLeod, 84.

dwelling was separate from the slave quarters and the stables. Creutz bought the land, but the money for exploitation of the land came mainly from her.⁴⁴ In addition, they owned a country home named *La Solitude* and the plantation *Clevia*.⁴⁵

Samson's plantations *Toevlucht*⁴⁶, *Welgemoed* and *Clevia* yielded enough coffee to make her wealthy. Her agent in Amsterdam was trading firm Pieter Reijdenius and Son with whom Samson had an excellent relationship. Reijdenius took care of the loading of ships that sailed between Samson's plantations and Amsterdam. She also ordered personal goods from Holland through this firm. From Amsterdam ships were loaded with material for the plantations such as various types of brick, but also with luxury goods such as silk, velvet, porcelain, silver, wine, beer and other consumer goods. She sold these in the colony and purchased other articles for personal use.⁴⁷

Upon the death of Carl Otto Creutz on November 6th, 1762, an inventory of his possessions was made for the division of the estate. Samson oversaw the process and made sure everything was carefully noted. The inventory is quite extensive and impressive and illustrates the lifestyle she had become accustomed to. Other than the house at the Wagenwegstraat, valued at some 22,500 guilders and a building and plantings adjacent to the house, the couple owned the country home *La Solitude* and the plantation *Clevia* at the Suriname River.⁴⁸ The plantations *Toevlucht* and *Welgemoed* were left out of the inventory because they were owned by Samson alone.

⁴⁴ McLeod, 70-73.

⁴⁵ McLeod, 74.

⁴⁶ *Toevlucht* was valued in 1753 at fifty-five thousand guilders.

⁴⁷ McLeod, 82, 83.

⁴⁸ NA: NAS, 213, folio 713-740.

The house at the Wagenwegstraat was Samson and Creutz's main dwelling and since this was their home in the city where they would likely entertain, Samson did not spare any expense in furnishing it. She wanted to keep up with white society who lived very well indeed as described by governor Nepveu and others. In Suriname during this period of 1740 to 1773, planters were fabulously wealthy. Conspicuous consumption was everywhere; in expensive furniture, silver, porcelain, crystal in the dining halls, and the clothing of the *burghers* was luxurious and expensive with silk, velvet, gold and silver tassels, and gold buckles and buttons. Moreover, the women wore expensive jewelry. Governor Nepveu described it as follows, "The profusion at large meals, balls, etc is indescribable. Tables with a hundred place settings have to be densely littered with meat dishes, fruits etc. for a total of two to three hundred dishes, or one would be embarrassed."⁴⁹ In addition, wealth was displayed by keeping a large household of slaves.

In the same manner, Samson's house was furnished. The house was well appointed with candelabras, gilded mirrors, expensive cabinets and fashionable paintings. To make sure she could entertain as well as any white, upper class inhabitant of the colony, she even bought some of the furnishings for her house from the estate of her half-sister Maria, the widow F.C. Bossé. Among these was a porcelain cabinet with content for over 534 guilders. Twenty-four armchairs should have seated a large company comfortably while they ate from porcelain plates and used silver utensils. The couple had twelve tablecloths and at least six-dozen napkins to complement their tableware and Elisabeth seemed to like having the latest trends in design. She owned quite a few enameled dishes and Japanese lacquer ware, goods that were shipped with the Dutch East India Company to Amsterdam, and which were quite in fashion in Europe at the time. Moreover,

⁴⁹ NA: GS, 10, Journaal Gouverneur Jan Nepveu.

the cellar was kept well stocked with four hundred bottles of beer, one hundred bottles of red wine, and sixty bottles of white wine.⁵⁰ It seemed Samson enjoyed the ostentatious display of her wealth, perhaps to compensate for the fact that she was not accepted in white society circles because of her color. The quest for acceptance would haunt her her entire life.

After the death of Creutz, she contacted his heirs and offered to purchase their half of *Clevia* and *La Solitude* at a value of about 97,000 and 52,500 guilders respectively, adding to her already large holdings. Another sister of Samson, Catharina Opperman, was responsible for further additions to her plantation empire. Catharina, a black woman, was the concubine of Pieter Courvlught, owner of two plantations named *Catharina's Burg*, named after Opperman, and *Vlaardingen*, named after a city in Zeeland. When Courvlught died in 1758, Catharina inherited the plantations, among others. She, in turn, died in 1764 and Elisabeth together with her sister Nanette Samson inherited.

After the death of Carl Otto Creutz and Catharina, Samson seems to have focused her energy solely on running and expanding her business ventures in partnership with her sister Nanette Samson. Most of their relatives had now died and Samson was forty-nine years old. In 1766 the sisters bought the plantation *Onverwacht* that yielded mostly wood and a country home. In 1767 they thought to expand their business venture in other areas as they sought to cut out the middlemen and use their own ship for the exportation of their plantation goods. They had a ship built in Amsterdam and named it the *Juffrouw Nanette en Elisabeth*. Unfortunately, the ship did not last long. It was shipwrecked in 1769 in the Atlantic Ocean. The crew was rescued but the ship was lost. The last purchase Nanette and Elisabeth made together was the plantation

⁵⁰ NA: NAS, 213, folio 713-740.

Belwaarde, a large plantation next to *Clevia*, making it a logical choice for expansion. They bought the plantation from the widow of governor Mauricius.

Because of her financial success Samson now had everything she could possibly buy, but it seems there was one thing she wanted more than anything and that was acceptance into society. A concubine could never achieve entrance into society, but a wife could. The status of a married woman, recognition of her acceptance into white society, still eluded Samson after a lifetime of wealth and material successes. To finally gain entrance, she requested to marry Christoph Policarpus Braband, the organist for the Dutch Reformed Church in Paramaribo. However, when the couple registered their desire to marry in February of 1764, the Court of Police, the highest Court in Suriname, forbade the marriage. Not about to let her dream slip away, Samson again decided to take her case to the highest court in the Netherlands, the States General. Through Reijdenius and Son she wrote a request to the States General dated June 6, 1764. Again, the court was not swift in its decision and after three years the answer finally came that there was no law to prohibit their union. To aid in its decision, the States General heard arguments from the Court in Suriname, which, in a stunning reversal of its earlier opinion, had since decided to support the marriage on the grounds that Samson's wealth would revert to the whites if she married. They wrote that through this marriage the young man could acquire the wealth of Elisabeth Samson "so that it would reside with the whites, which is not bad because having free men who are too powerful under the Negroes is undesirable since it makes our slaves think that they can rise as high as we can."⁵¹

Samson finally had her victory but the groom-to-be had since died. Samson did not give up easily, however, and found a marriage partner in Hermanus Daniel Zobre, an adventurer born

⁵¹ Quoted in: McLeod, 7.

in The Hague in 1737. The couple married on December 21, 1767. The groom was 30; the bride was 52. This was not a marriage entered into for love. The marriage did not last long for Samson died in 1771, leaving an estate valued at well over a million guilders. Zobre paid the church 50 guilders to bury her but did not even get her a gravestone. He was her only heir.

The fact that she was a black woman does not seem to have impaired her ability to do business. She exported coffee, mainly to the Netherlands, and imported goods from Europe. But even though she was a success in business, she was not able to break through the color barrier that prevented her from taking her rightful place among the planter elite in the colony. The same color hierarchy in the colony that allowed mulatto and mestizo women to marry white men also implicitly forbade black women to do so. Samson's tenacity, her unwillingness to compromise, and her wealth afforded her unprecedented opportunities for a black woman. Yet despite all of her legal and financial victories, she was never fully accepted in Suriname society because of the color of her skin.

Other Business Women

A number of black women, like their white counterparts in the colonies, set up businesses. However, these businesses did not always flourish, and often women needed to borrow money to keep their enterprises or personal affairs afloat. On the island of Curaçao, for instance, a free black woman Sophia, referred to in the records without a last name, borrowed cash in the amount of a hundred pesos from a white woman, Jannetje Exteen. In order to borrow this amount, Sophia used as collateral a house at the south side of the road to Altoona and her person and goods. Fortunately Sophia was able to pay her debt eventually, because at the bottom

of the document is a note stating that the amount was paid.⁵² Several other free black women like “free negress Catharina” and “free mulatress Catharina Anthonio” also mortgaged their properties.⁵³

Another mixed-race woman, Anna Maria Konings, borrowed an astonishing three thousand pesos from Abraham Visser to pay Schipper Willem Welvaren. She mortgaged her house in Willemstad at the Keukenstraat and all of her goods and her person in October of 1737. She seems to have made a wise investment for a few years later, in 1741, she was able to pay off the debt with interest.⁵⁴ Since I have found no other references to this woman in the remaining archives of Curaçao, we are left to speculate on what Konings did with the three thousand pesos she borrowed. Since the money went to a ship’s captain, she probably was involved in the Atlantic trade and purchased goods from the ship. She may have dealt in slaves or in European goods. Also, she must have had a good reputation in the community and enough equity to borrow this amount of money, so she was likely a successful woman in Willemstad.

Free black women also owned small plantations with slaves on the island of Curaçao. Francisca Jansz, for instance, a free black woman, owned two slaves named Diana and Victoria. She borrowed money from Pieter Redoch, 200 pesos, and mortgaged her house and the two slaves in November of 1737. It took her five years to pay off the loan.⁵⁵

Another avenue for the generation of income was the keeping of a tavern, as discussed in chapter two. Although it was rare for black women to own taverns, and even more rare for women, let alone black women, to be part of a guild, there was one mixed race tavern keeper

⁵² NA: CBA, 140. February 1737.

⁵³ NA: CBA, 140.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

named Dorothea in Curaçao who was a member of the tavern keepers' guild. To own a tavern one had to have some capital to buy supplies, even if a space was available in one's home to operate the tavern. Dorothea likely had a white father and a black mother. She may have inherited or been given money by her father or mother. More records on her were not found.

Mixed race and black women who inherited from their white male partners could run into unexpected troubles from relatives of the Dutch men. Catharina Mennit, for example, had a son with Jan Glaudi who died on November 19, 1739 on the island of Curaçao. She inherited a black slave girl named Lena, while her son, Dirk Glaudi, his "natural son" inherited everything else. He made his son his sole, universal heir. His relatives did not take this lightly and went to court to contest the will. They had some choice words for Catharina, calling her a public mulatto whore who managed to persuade an old man that her son was his. The relatives argued that they were now cheated out of an inheritance that was rightfully theirs but which would now "belong to such scum as a mulattress whore." They referred to Roman Dutch law; book III, page 221 for inheritance law. There it states that illegitimate bastards cannot inherit nor can *speel kinderen*, an interesting term that translates as "play children". They requested the annulment of the will and demanded to be declared legal heirs of their uncle. The court came with a decision on December 16, 1739 and essentially refused to get involved in this case. They stated that the relatives should go to the executors of the will to be heard by them. It is not know what the eventual outcome of this case was.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ NA: CBA, 1517.

Conclusion

The black women who lived on the margins of Dutch colonial society could endure hardships as white men almost always shifted their allegiances to the white women they were married to according to Dutch law and custom. Although many men both emotionally and financially cared for their mixed race children, their Dutch wives would be the beneficiaries of their estates. This practice led some, like Helena Courrea, to enter into relationships with men which resemble the strategy of serial marriage that we have seen employed by white women in the colonial world as well.

In addition to race, however, class also seemed to have played an important role in Dutch colonial society. Women and men who were the illegitimate offspring of high ranking European officials could count on some marginal acceptance and assistance, while women and children of the lower ranking men often received no acceptance at all. Not fully European and not fully African, the mixed race children filled a social, and in the case of Africa even a geographic, liminal space.

Finally, free black women in the Americas, such as Elisabeth Samson, could try to gain entrance to Dutch colonial society, but their efforts were thwarted again and again. In spite of the economic and other successes of some African and mixed race women, they were never fully accepted into white colonial society.

CHAPTER SIX

Women in The Netherlands and Their Participation in the Atlantic World

Like their peers who traveled overseas, women in the Netherlands also contributed to the development of the early modern Atlantic World. It is common to forget those who stayed at home and neglect them as uninvolved, but nothing could be further from the truth. Women in the Netherlands engaged in the Atlantic world in various ways. Many women had husbands who traveled around the Atlantic world while they stayed home and acted as business associates who took care of matters in the Netherlands. Men needed reliable partners whom they could trust to deal with their business ventures, and many deemed their wives to be trustworthy and capable of handling affairs in the Netherlands. In addition to women who helped their husbands with their businesses in the Atlantic World, some traded with the colonies in their own right and imported and exported goods from Amsterdam and other Dutch seaports. Moreover, women of all classes invested money in the newly formed VOC and WIC.

Because of the rapid expansion of Dutch empire through these two companies, people in the Dutch Republic were increasingly curious about the people, customs, flora, and fauna of the two newly discovered continents. Enlightenment thought fostered an interest in science and the natural world, and educated women in the Netherlands, almost all from the upper classes, eagerly participated in the exploration of the Americas, collecting plants and objects from the natural world for their greenhouses and display cabinets.

Of course, not all women benefitted from the expansion to the West. Many a woman lost her husband, sons, brothers, and other relatives to the seas or to war in the west and was left to fend for herself. Moreover, some would experience the degradation and heartbreak that came

from their husbands taking second wives and concubines overseas, caring little for the families they left behind. These women could sometimes get help from the WIC in the form of wages sent to them, or they could go to court to get a divorce or separation.

Doing Business in the Atlantic World

During the late twentieth century in the archives of the city of Amsterdam, a partial index was made of women who called themselves *koopvrouwen* there during the seventeenth century. Many did business only within the city itself as sellers of fish, bread, flowers, and other consumable and non-consumable goods, but others also traded with the Dutch colonies. Living in a bustling port city with ships coming and leaving daily, many Amsterdam merchants gained unprecedented wealth, and people of the middling and lower classes must have wanted a share of the trade as well. Some women did business under their own names, while others worked in partnership with their husbands.

Engeltjen Joppe was a never-married woman who traded with New Netherland. In 1659, she appeared before a notary in Amsterdam to acknowledge a debt she owed of 100 guilders to two merchants at twenty-two percent interest. She needed the money to ship goods to New Netherland on board the *Trouwe*.¹ Her parents co-signed the loan, ostensibly because she had little or no assets of her own. It is uncertain who her partner was in New Netherland, but it may have been her uncle and aunt who lived in Manhattan. They could have acted as her agents in the colony. Her case is remarkable because we do not see many women who were young, unmarried, and able to borrow in order to start a business in overseas trading. It was far more common to see married women and widows engage in business.

¹ SA: Notarial Archive, 2206.

Janneken Jans, a married woman, also called herself a *koopvrouw* in Amsterdam. Familiar with the Atlantic world because she and her husband were part of the Dutch colonizing effort in Brazil in the 1640s, Jans was an experienced trader. Her husband, Reinholt Reinholts, was a member of the shoemakers' guild in Amsterdam. A skilled craftsman was always in demand in the colonies and the couple lived in Recife for some years. In 1650, when back in Amsterdam, Jans took steps to collect a debt owed to her husband stemming from their time in Brazil.² Because she lost the original documents relating to the debt when they were shipwrecked on their way to Holland, during which fifty people drowned, she asked fellow survivors to testify on her behalf to establish the legitimacy of the claim.

When in 1654 her husband was ready to try his luck in another Dutch Atlantic colony, New Netherland, he left his wife with a power of attorney authorizing her to act on behalf of the couple to collect an inheritance from a family member in Leeuwarden, Friesland.³ When she, in turn, prepared to leave for New Netherland herself to follow her husband, she authorized a member of her husband's guild to collect more debts owed to the couple.⁴ Reinholts could have given a power of attorney to his fellow guild members to take care of his affairs, but, as so many other Dutch men, he trusted his wife to do a better job of taking care of their joint interest than another man. When she was unable to finish her affairs before her departure to New Netherland, she chose the person she thought was best able to represent the couple's financial interests, although she likely discussed this with her husband. The power of attorney, however, did not come from Reinholts but from Janneke Jans.

² SA: Notarial Archive, 560B.

³ SA: Notarial Archive, 561B.

⁴ SA: Notarial Archive, 1305.

In November of 1658 Jans was back in Amsterdam now calling herself a *koopvrouw*. Yet there is some question if she really was trading with the colonies in her own right. The notary wrote that Jans had “verbal orders” from her husband to carry out all of their affairs in Amsterdam but that, in addition, she also claimed she was a *koopvrouw*.⁵ As such, she could conduct affairs on her own, without a broad power of attorney from her husband. It is likely though that she did indeed trade with the colonies. Undoubtedly she would have brought highly desirable beaver pelts back to the Netherlands to sell there, and on her trips to New Netherland, she may have brought wares from Amsterdam to the colony. Unfortunately, there are not enough surviving records to flesh out the extent of her trade relations.

There were, of course, more women who traded with the colonies. For example, Lobbrich Ysbrands, a married woman who called herself a *koopvrouw* in Amsterdam, dealt in tobacco which she imported from Brazil in 1639 and probably some time before and after this year.⁶ Tobacco had quickly become popular among the Dutch who smoked it in long ceramic pipes. Both men and women enjoyed the use of tobacco, which was often hailed for its supposed medicinal value. By importing tobacco from Brazil, Ysbrands inserted herself in the lucrative trade of this commodity.

Many wives who stayed behind in the Netherlands became business partners of their husbands. In Africa, for example, where European men most often did not take their wives with them, Governor Jacob Ruycaver, based at the fort in Elmina, had his wife as a trading partner in the Netherlands. Ruycaver was from a prominent family in Haarlem and married Maria

⁵ SA: Notarial Archive, 1358.

⁶ SA: Notarial Archive, 803B.

Hendrixs with whom he had two children. As many other men did, Ruychaver spent a long time abroad. In 1639, he was named second in command at the African coast, which means he had to have been there since at least 1637, for the WIC did not give such positions to men without experience. He worked under Arent Jansz van Amersfoort but when van Amersfoort died in 1641, Ruychaver took over for four years. After those years, he did not want to extend his time in Africa but chose to return to *patria* because of his wife and children. He had been absent for eight years.⁷

Ruychaver's income as governor of the WIC on the African coast was 300 guilders a month, which was a princely sum compared to the salary of a common soldier at ten guilders a month. Yet the WIC allowed Ruychaver and other governors to supplement their incomes by selling lemon juice, a highly prized item in the Netherlands, and keeping half of the profits. Ruychaver partnered with his wife to sell the juice. On board the *Zeelandia*, which arrived at the end of July 1644 in the Netherlands, he sent 24 small barrels of lemon juice to his wife Maria Hendrixs. Hendrixs would sell these, keep half of the profit for the couple, and send the other half to the WIC.

It was certainly not unusual for wives to handle affairs of their husbands. On the ship *De Eendracht* on December 31st, 1646, the captain, Jan Teunissen Bottelier, lay dying. He asked Ruychaver to send a message to his wife that she should pay 150 guilders to a certain Jan Machielsz who lived in Haarlem. Shortly after this request, he died.⁸ We can only speculate as to what happened after this, but presume his wife took care of his affairs in the Netherlands both before and after his death.

⁷ *VDR*, introduction.

⁸ *VDR*, 98.

Investors

The independence of Dutch women during the early modern period also extended to various financial affairs. Since the fifteenth century, women helped fund cities by purchasing so-called *renteleningen*, or interest bearing bonds. These financial instruments were technically not loans because in exchange for a sum of money, the purchaser of the bond could name a beneficiary who would receive interest on the bond for his or her lifetime. Another type of bond provided an annual income in the form of interest for as long as the municipality held on to the principal and these bonds had no date of maturity. In effect, many of these bonds did not mature during a person's lifetime and the interest would then continue to be paid to the heirs of the holder of the bond.⁹ Women held many of these bonds. In cities such as Zutphen in the early fifteenth century, some 60 percent of purchasers of bonds were female. The participation of women in investments varied from city to city with a low of 20 percent in Amsterdam during the second half of the sixteenth century, and a participation by women in Rotterdam of 49 percent during the second half of the seventeenth century.¹⁰ This robust participation of women in the financial market was expanded with the creation of the VOC, the world's first corporation to issue stock, and its cousin the WIC.

Both the VOC and WIC relied heavily on small investors to finance their ventures, with about half of the initial capitalization of about six and a half million guilders for the VOC coming from small investors, while the other half came from a group of fewer than 200 people. The WIC, modeled on the VOC, also relied on investors, although some one million guilders of

⁹ These two types of bonds are called *lijffrente* and *losrente*, respectively.

¹⁰ Manon van der Heijden, *Geldschieters van de stad: Financiële relaties tussen stad, burgers en overheden, 1550-1650* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2006), 161-165.

its initial capitalization of about seven million guilders came directly from the government.¹¹ The small investors, also called *gemeene participanten*, or ordinary participants, were limited partners who placed their money in the hands of the active partners or *bewindhebbers* who possessed sole authority in the management of the company, while *hoofd participanten*, or principal participants, invested larger amounts and had some say in the running of the company. The variety of people who invested in the companies as small investors was astounding. They came from all socio-economic backgrounds and included bakers, butchers, tailors, carpenters, and even domestic servants, as well as physicians, lawyers, teachers, and members of the clergy. A certain Tryntgen Pieters invested sixty guilders in the VOC, quite a princely sum for a servant, and she must have saved for quite a while to accumulate this amount.¹²

Among WIC investors for the chamber of Amsterdam in 1656 and 1658 were several women who were *hoofd participanten*, although there were only four of them among a list of over 165 investors. Moreover, the four women on the list were all widows whose husbands invested in the WIC and they probably continued their husbands' involvement. Among these women we find Catharina de Bas, a widow from a prominent Dutch family in Amsterdam, and Catharina Nellis Cassart.¹³ Their continued investments in the WIC may not have delivered the financial windfall they hoped for, however. The WIC's greatest financial success came early on, in 1628, when admiral Piet Heyn captured the Spanish silver fleet carrying a cargo of eleven and a half million guilders worth of silver. After this capture, the WIC paid its investors a 75%

¹¹ De Vries, *The First Modern Economy*, 385-400.

¹² Leonard Blussé and Jaap de Moor, *Nederlanders Overzee: De eerste vijftig jaar, 1600-1650* (Franeker, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij T. Wever B.V., 1983), 41.

¹³ L.P. de Boer, "Naamlijsten van Bewindhebbers en van Hoofdparticipanten der West-Indische Compagnie," *De Navorscher* 64 (1915), 17-21.

dividend, and the following year its share prices rose significantly.¹⁴ This was the only large dividend the company would ever pay, however, and the WIC was never as successful as its counterpart, the VOC. The wealthy widows among the principal investors could probably weather the storm, but small investors would have had more difficulty absorbing financial loss.

Another group of principal investors in the WIC, also listed in 1658, named 32 females among its 280 investors. This was about eleven percent. Given the fact that most women during the early modern era in Europe were not supposed to manage their own money, this percentage is astounding. Moreover, among this list we find only thirteen widows, while for the rest of the women there is no reference to their marital status. Two women, Neeltje Wombouts and Judith van Maskel, even invested as a team.¹⁵

This list of investors reads as a veritable “who’s who” of the Dutch Republic in the first half of the seventeenth century. Most of the widows on this list were well known and belonged to some of the wealthiest families in the Republic. Aletta Adriaansdr, for instance, was the second wife and widow of Elias Trip, one of the most successful and powerful Amsterdam merchants of the early seventeenth century. Her elevated social position is evident by the fact that after she was widowed for two years, Adriaansdr was chosen to host Amalia van Solms, wife of Frederik Hendrik, stadholder of the Netherlands, and mother of William II who married Mary Stuart, on

¹⁴ De Vries, 399.

¹⁵ De Boer, “Naamlijsten van Bewindhebbers en van Hoofparticipanten der West-Indische Compagnie,” *De Navorscher*, 63 (1914): 382-388.

Investors in the WIC invested through the chamber of the company in their region. The first list with only four widows came from the Amsterdam chamber. The second list with 32 female investors was found among the WIC papers at the Pennsylvania Historical Society and makes no reference to a specific chamber.

the occasion of a visit of Maria de' Medici to Amsterdam in 1638.¹⁶ The following year, Rembrandt painted the widow's portrait. (See figure 6.)

Other notable women among the investors were Margaretha Tibout, wife of Guillermo Bartolotti (born Willem van den Heuvel), and mother of a successful banker and merchant with the same name. At her death, Tibout left such an enormous sum that her family argued over the estate for many years. The Bartolottis belonged to the top ten wealthiest families in the Republic.¹⁷

Most of the other women on the list were also widowed and daughters of fortune, although they were not listed as widows. Maria van Reigersberg, for example, was another wealthy widow from a powerful family. The fact that she was not listed under her husband's name with the remark "widow" may be because she lost her husband, Willem van Liere, after only three years of marriage and never remarried. Instead, she devoted herself to her two young children and to patronage of the arts and architecture.¹⁸ Listed as Emmerentia Bannings, was probably Emmerentia Benningh. She was also a widow but not listed as such because she too never remarried but lived another 25 years as a single woman without children.¹⁹

Most likely these extremely wealthy widows did not actively manage their investment portfolios, as both men and women relied on financial advisors. They probably invested heavily in the VOC, with WIC investments at a lower level since its dividends were lower. These women and their advisors were aware that the WIC was fundamentally different from the VOC, although

¹⁶ Kees Zandvliet, *De 250 rijksten van de Gouden Eeuw: Kapitaal, macht, familie en levensstijl* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2006), 24-25.

¹⁷ Zandvliet, 15-17.

¹⁸ Zandvliet, 341/342.

¹⁹ Zandvliet, 238-240.

modeled after it, because the WIC's initial goal was privateering and undermining the position of the Spanish in the Atlantic World. Less savvy investors who belonged to the group of small investors may not have been as fortunate and likely lost money on the endeavor.

Science, Art, and Collecting

The thriving Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century spawned a number of male scientists such as Anthony van Leeuwenhoek and Christiaan Huygens who made important discoveries and contributions to various fields of science. Women, with at least one notable exception, were not welcomed in the hallowed halls of academia, which were centered in Leiden, even though a change was taking place in the view of women. Philosophers, poets, and writers wrote defenses of women against the views of Aristotle, who called women "misbegotten males", and Plato, who doubted if women should be classified under "reasonable creatures" at all. Under Jakob Thomasius, the University of Leipzig debated the topic and pointed to noble, brave women, and those who were involved with poetry and science.

Women indeed made their own contributions, although the official institutions of science did not always recognize these. Historian Londa Schiebinger suggests that, "in order to evaluate women's contributions to science, our definitions of science may need to be broadened."²⁰ Perhaps we should include among female scientific accomplishments the collecting and cultivating of foreign species of plants, including species native to the regions around the Atlantic world, in gardens and hothouses all around the Netherlands. During the second half of the seventeenth century, scholarly essays on nature and treatises on the garden reveal that the study of nature had become a serious occupation, accompanied by a trend for collecting plants.

²⁰ Londa Schiebinger, "The History and Philosophy of Women in Science: A Review Essay," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 2 (1987): 315.

Dutch horticulture enjoyed international fame as Dutchmen imported many plants from all over the world.²¹ During the seventeenth century, a number of upper class women in the Dutch Republic were involved in botany and they undoubtedly knew each other and likely corresponded with each other as well. These women succeeded in bringing part of the empire home by bringing plants and seeds from the Americas, as well as other regions of the world, to the Netherlands to cultivate and study them.

One such woman interested in botany, among others, was Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678). Perhaps the most well-known and well-educated woman of her time, Van Schurman was accomplished not only in the arts she was expected to master as a woman of her class, but also in the sciences, philosophy, and theology.²² Van Schurman corresponded with some of the great thinkers of her time, such as René Descartes and Constantijn Huygens, in several languages. A thorough knowledge of the language of academics, Latin, was common among the educated classes, although the use of Latin among women was not widespread. Most men did not think it useful for women to learn Latin because they had no need of it. Women did not attend universities and neither could they enter the clergy or professions where the use of Latin was required. Van Schurman's father, however, taught her Latin after discovering that she had a basic knowledge of the language attained through being in the room where her brothers received instruction, and thus she gained entrance to the academic culture from which women

²¹ Eric Jong, *Nature and Art: Dutch Garden and Landscape Architecture, 1650-1740* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 30.

²² A woman of her class was expected to be proficient in some of the arts, languages, and music. Women commonly wrote poetry, practiced calligraphy, engraved glassware, and did embroidery. Van Schurman also drew and painted. She experimented with pastels and was very accomplished in the art of paper cutting. In addition, she was fluent in 14 languages. See: Mirjam de Baar, "Anna Maria van Schurman," in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 345-348. For more on Van Schurman's theological work and her decision to become a Labadist see: Mirjam de Baar, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: How women in the Dutch Reformed Church evaded Paul's admonition, 1650-1700", in *Women in the Church*, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 393-399.

were usually excluded.²³ She even attended classes at the University of Utrecht where she met Descartes and noted Dutch theologian Gisberthus Voetius.²⁴ People came from all over Europe to hear this truly erudite woman speak or to meet with her, and she published many poems, as well as a *dissertatio* on the right of women to be educated. She never married and some posit that this was the result of a promise she made to her father on his deathbed, who was concerned that she would not be able to further develop her mind if she married.

Given her status as an accomplished artist, botany was ideal for Van Schurman since it could be a combination of art and science, as it was for some other women as well. The university at Leiden started its *hortus botanicus* in 1594 and was a reflection of the new interest in botany.²⁵ Van Schurman and her contemporaries undoubtedly visited this garden and corresponded with each other about its content. Her love of botany is not as well established or well published as her letters and theological thought, but in her garden she grew foreign plants, which included plants from the Americas.²⁶

A contemporary of Van Schurman was Magdalena Poulle (1632-1699). The twice-widowed Poulle bought the manorial ruin of *Gunterstein* in Utrecht after the death of her second husband, an affluent silk merchant, in 1680.²⁷ *Gunterstein* was situated along the river Vecht where during the seventeenth century many wealthy Amsterdam merchants built country estates. This particular estate came with a title, gaining Poulle entrance to the small Dutch nobility. She

²³ Pieta van Beek, *De Eerste Studente: Anna Maria van Schurman* (Utrecht: Uitgeverij Matrijs, 2004), 13.

²⁴ Van Beek, 53-60.

²⁵ Katlijne van der Stighelen, *Anna Maria van Schurman of 'Hoe hooge dat een maeght kan in de konsten stijgen'* (Leuven, Belgium: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1987), 252.

²⁶ E. Martin, "Anna Maria van Schurman," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 33 (1891).

²⁷ Magdalena Poulle was married to Jean Dormion, and after his death she married Adriaan Daem. Both husbands were Huguenot merchants and both marriages were childless. See: Marisca Sikkens-de Zwaan, "Magdalena Poulle (1632-99): A Dutch Lady in a Circle of Botanical Collectors," *Garden History* 30 (2002): 206-207.

had the house completely rebuilt and had the gardens and orangery designed with the latest technology.

In order to grow plants that originated in the tropics, horticulturalists had to overcome the challenge the cold and wet Dutch climate provided. Poulle had her gardens built with the help of Jan Commelin, a famed horticulturalist at the time. The orangery, or greenhouse, was built with its draft-proof windows facing south and had an enclosed yard in front of it (see figure 7). In addition, Poulle had two stoves installed for heating which became essential to the renowned botanical collection she established.²⁸

English gardener George London listed the plants in Poulle's collection in his *Speculum Herbarum* after he visited *Gunterstein* in 1685 during a tour of Dutch gardens ordered by his employer Henry Compton, the bishop of London. The English gardener found and collected many plants unknown to the English. His list of plants at *Gunterstein* included species from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the species originated in the Dutch colonies, both East and West, and some had been exported from one colony to another. An Asian species of okra, for example, was imported in South America, most notably in Suriname from where Poulle obtained her specimen. On the list of 44 plants and trees at *Gunterstein*, compiled by George London, eleven species from the Americas appear, including Arbor Coral from Brazil and Curacao, the Papaya, Bryonia from Surinam, Calaminthu from Surinam, and several cacti from South America.²⁹

Poulle had an extensive network of relatives through whom she was able to obtain tropical seeds and plants. The aforementioned Jan Commelin was her second cousin and

²⁸ Erik Jong, *Nature and Art: Dutch Garden and Landscape Architecture, 1650-1740* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 30.

²⁹ Sikkens-de Zwaan, 215-218.

commissioner of the *Hortus Medicus*, the botanical garden at Amsterdam, who had a network of people who provided him with plants. Moreover, several other family members had connections to the circle surrounding Stadholder William III and were clearly influential and well positioned to take advantage of their extensive networks of merchants and VOC and WIC officials.³⁰

Another member of Poulle's circle was neighbor Agneta Block (1629-1704).³¹ Three years older than Magdalena Poulle, Block started collecting plants some ten years earlier and the two had much in common. Block was born into a wealthy merchant family and she too married twice, both times to prosperous silk merchants. In 1670, after the death of her first husband, Hans de Wolff, she also bought a country estate along the river Vecht named *De Vijverhof*. When she married again, Block and her second husband, Sijbrand de Flines, kept a house in Amsterdam, but the couple also spent time at the country estate before settling there permanently. Block, although not as accomplished as Anna Maria van Schurman, filled her days with study, reading, and art. She was the niece of noted Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel and became particularly close with him during the end of his life.³² Like Poulle, Block was childless. She did, however, have two stepdaughters from her second husband's earlier marriage.

Agneta Block is best known as the horticulturalist who succeeded in growing the first pineapple, a fruit native to South America, in the Republic. Gualtherius Blok, in a 1702 poem dedicated to Block, described the kinds of fruits and plants she grew at *De Vijverhof*. The poet referred to the famous pineapple, extolling the fruit's smell, appearance, and taste, but also noted that she had plants from all corners of the world, including Asia and Africa, as well as the

³⁰ Sikkens-de Zwaan, 207/208.

³¹ She is also known as Agnes Block or Blok.

³² For Agneta Block see: Catharina van de Graft, *Agnes Block, Vondels nicht en vriendin* (Utrecht: A.W. Bruna, 1943); Marloes Huiskamp, "Agneta Block," in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013).

Americas.³³ In a 1674 family portrait, Block is depicted with her husband and stepdaughters at the Vijverhof (see figure 7). On the left, one can clearly see the pineapple plant for which she became famous.

Block not only cultivated foreign plants, but also had them depicted by well-known artists, most of them female, to preserve them for posterity. She collected some of these drawings and paintings in albums. Well-known artists who worked for Block were, among others, Alida Withoos, who was the first to sketch the famed pineapple, Maria Moninx, Herman Saftleven, and Maria Sibylla Merian, whose work for Block consisted of eighteen plant studies in watercolor.³⁴

Merian was one of the artists/scientists who frequented *De Vijverhof*, as did her daughter, Johanna Helena Graff.³⁵ Although many women who studied the natural sciences and used them as an arena for visual exploration and representation were derided as “amateurs”, Merian was quite successful as an entrepreneur of science and art. In 1699, she financed her own research trip to Surinam, accompanied by one of her daughters, Dorothea Graff, which resulted in the publication of her seminal work, *Metamorphosis of the Insects of Suriname*.³⁶ Although she is often regarded first as an artist skilled in watercolor and oils, her *Metamorphosis* is proof of her entomological skill as a scientist.

³³ Gualtherius Blok, *De Vyverhof van Agneta Blok* (Amsterdam, 1702).

³⁴ Elisabeth Alice Honig, “The Art of Being ‘Artistic’: Dutch Women’s Creative Practices in the 17th Century,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 22, No. 2 (Fall 2001/Winter 2002), 36.

³⁵ For the life of Maria Sybilla Merian see: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Helmut Kaiser, *Maria Sybilla Merian: Eine Biographie* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1997); Astrid de Beer, “Maria Sybilla Merian,” in *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, ed. Els Kloek (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2013), 472-475.

³⁶ Maria Sybilla Merian, *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensis* (Amsterdam, 1705).

Merian's Atlantic voyage came as a result of her dissatisfaction with natural science collections in the Netherlands, which displayed many butterflies and other insects, but did not show how these emerged from caterpillars. Like Poulle and Block, Merian was familiar with the *hortus botanicus* in Amsterdam, led by Commelin, and other collections, but felt that in the interest of science, she should go to Suriname to collect specimens and study them herself. In order to finance her voyage, Merian sold much of her insect collection and drawings. She was forced to fund her trip herself because years earlier, in 1685, she had left her husband, painter Johann Andreas Graff, to join a group of Labadists in Friesland that included her brother Caspar Merian.³⁷ Merian took with her her mother and her daughters, then seventeen and seven years old, but Graff followed and tried to persuade her to come back to him. When she refused, he finally divorced her in 1692, even though by that time she had changed her mind about the Labadists and left them for a life as an independent artist and shopkeeper in Amsterdam.

Merian's journey to Suriname was not without precedent, as naturalists had been traveling to the "new world" since the sixteenth century, but few naturalists went overseas specifically for the purpose of observation of foreign flora and fauna. Large companies such as the VOC and WIC were not interested in funding naturalists because their only concern was with cash crops. Research, then, had to be funded by private entities with enough resources and whose interest was to advance the knowledge of other continents. For example, two physicians

³⁷ The Labadists were a Protestant sect that followed the teachings of Jean de Labadie (1610-1674), a French Jesuit who initially became a Calvinist, but then set up his own religious community in the Netherlands in 1666. De Labadie died in 1674, and under the leadership of his successor, Pierre Yvon, they established a community in Wieuwerd, Friesland. The Labadists shared everything in common and adhered to a simple lifestyle. In 1684, John Locke visited the community and found them "much separated from the world." Anna Maria van Schurman was also a member of this Labadist community, but died seven years before Merian joined.

Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 670; Miriam de Baar, "Godsdienstvrijheid voor de labadisten in Wieuwerd (1675-1732)," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 20, no. 1 (2004): 66-82; L. Knappert, "De Labadisten in Suriname," *De West-Indische Gids* 8 (1926): 193-218.

documented their findings of nature when they accompanied Prince Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen to Brazil, and Franciscan Charles Plumier observed plants in the Caribbean.³⁸ Princes and kings funded these men, while Merian had to make her own arrangements. Historian Natalie Zemon Davis noted that fifty-two-year-old Merian was anomalous in traveling around the Atlantic without men, although we now know this was not as extraordinary among Dutch women as she thought.³⁹ Instead, Merian was part of a larger female cohort that took up a journey around the Atlantic, although not many had her profession.

Her choice to go to Suriname was likely influenced by a number of factors in Merian's life. Her eldest daughter, Johanna, married fellow ex-Labadist Jacob Hendrik Herolt who became a merchant in Amsterdam and traded specifically with Suriname and the West Indies. Moreover, in the mid-1680s, the Labadists established a community in Suriname, and undoubtedly she heard much about the trials and tribulations the brothers and sisters underwent there as the Labadists settled much further inland than other Europeans in order to convert the native population. By the time Merian left the Netherlands, though, the Labadist settlement was all but extinguished. Yet, some sent to the Netherlands reptiles and insects caught in Suriname, and these may have piqued her interest in South America.

In Paramaribo, Merian settled with her daughter Dorothea in a house where she painted and recorded her first metamorphosis overseas. She had some connections with the elites in Paramaribo through her former Labadist brethren, and through her work for elites in the Netherlands. Merian, like other Europeans in the Americas, had a few slaves whom she sent ahead of her "with ax in hand to hack an opening" when she went into the forest to study plants

³⁸ Museum Boerhaave, *Het Groene Goud: Botanische Kennis en Gewin* (Leiden: Museum Boerhaave, 1997), 4.

³⁹ Davis, 168.

and insects.⁴⁰ She would take plants with her and then plant them in her garden there for observation. In order to study caterpillars she traveled to the Labadist settlement during the rainy season, visiting various plantations on the way and collecting caterpillars, chrysalises, and cocoons.

Although Europeans found Merian's interest in and study of the natural world somewhat curious for a woman, Amerindian and African women brought her maggots and various insects such as the lantern fly whose light and sound delighted her. Davis posits that this may be because in native communities of Africa and the Americas women often played the role of healers and because they were knowledgeable about herbs and plants.⁴¹

After two years, however, Merian could not bear the hot climate any longer and feared she would not survive if she stayed. She left with cases full of paintings, and specimen in bottles and crates. In addition, she brought with her one of her slaves, an Indian woman. Her book, the *Metamorphosis of the Insects of Suriname*, came out in Dutch and Latin in 1705 and was marketed and published by Merian herself. It became a great success and received rave reviews from the scientific community, as well as the art community. Through her images and study of the natural world in South America, Merian managed to bring part of the empire home and advanced the knowledge of entomology and botany in Europe.

Collecting

During the early modern period, the upper classes liked to display their special collections of what the Dutch called *rariteiten* or rare and special objects. These collections were

⁴⁰ Davis, 176.

⁴¹ Ibid.

an extension of the Renaissance study chambers of humanists who surrounded themselves not only with classic texts, but also with artifacts such as ancient coins. The objects in the study were meant to aid in contemplation and served as illustration of the assembled texts, forming one system of knowledge with which humanists could surround themselves. Since the ordinary did not lead to much contemplation or wonder, many collectors came to focus on the unusual, rare, and plain bizarre for the collections they assembled.⁴² After the end of the sixteenth century, international European collectors, most notably those from Italy, started to take an interest in academic developments in the Netherlands, where an important university was just founded, and where ships with exotic items moored daily.⁴³ As the Dutch empire expanded, however, non-academics and the general public also became interested in collecting.

As noted before, with European overseas expansion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came an interest in the people, flora, and fauna in the colonies. The reading public's thirst for stories and travel journals from both the West and East Indies was insatiable as publishers in Amsterdam encouraged fleet commanders and ship's captains to keep journals of their adventures abroad in order to sell them for profit. Undoubtedly, women consumed many of these stories. While one could read about, and see pictures of "exotic" people, animals, and plants in books, the public could also see some of the animals on display. In Amsterdam the VOC staged an exhibit of live and mounted animals, which could be viewed for a small entrance

⁴² Eric Jorink, *Het Boeck der Natuere: Nederlandse Geleerden en de wonderen van Gods schepping, 1575-1715* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2006), 270-271.

⁴³ The oldest university in the Netherlands is Leiden University, founded in 1575 by William of Orange. Many of today's well-known Dutch universities such as Groningen University, the University of Amsterdam, and Utrecht University, date from the first half of the seventeenth century.

fee. The people of the city and its visitors could go there to see and interact with animals from all over the globe.⁴⁴

Private collectors of note received visitors to their collections from all over the Netherlands and the rest of Europe, but their homes were not open to the public at large. The aforementioned Agneta Block was one of many women who were interested in the world outside of Europe but who could not travel to these “exotic” places, having to rely on others to do the traveling for them as they collected images and samples of life from all over the world to enhance what they already knew about the Americas and Africa from travel accounts and ships’ journals. Throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, collectors kept their collections in cabinets called *rariteitenkabinetten* and sometimes they dedicated an entire room of their house to their ever-expanding collections in a so-called *kunstkamer*. In these collections they could keep everything from seashells, colorful bird feathers, and dried flowers, to animals preserved by taxidermists. In her collection, Block had birds, and “from both Indies” she had preserved animals and insects, among which exceedingly large spiders from Brazil.⁴⁵

There were several ways for women (and men) to obtain highly desirable items from overseas. First, they might get some of these things as gifts from family members who were in the service of the VOC and the WIC. Pretty shells and feathers from exotic places might just be the thing to please a wife, daughter, niece or granddaughter. One could also frequent auctions held by the company where one could purchase so-called *rariteiten*, or rare and foreign objects. Collecting became all the rage, and even in many Dutch middle class homes one could find

⁴⁴ Blussé, 47-49.

⁴⁵ Blok, *De Vijverhof*.

porcelain from China, small stuffed animals such as lizards, crabs, and birds in addition to seashells.⁴⁶

There were also some other commodities from the colonies that became staples in the Dutch household, such as tobacco, tea, and coffee. The Dutch lower classes quickly embraced tobacco from the Americas as both men and women smoked long elegant pipes. Although there was some discussion during the early seventeenth century of the effects of tobacco on one's health, physicians such as well-known Nicolaas Tulp quickly became advocates of the use of tobacco for all sorts of ailments. Tea and coffee were slower to take root, primarily because of the cost of these commodities, which were prohibitive for the middle and lower classes.

Left Behind: Women who Suffered Losses

Willem Usselinx, an early promoter of the WIC, argued that a possible objection to the long distance trade and settlement could be the long absence of men noting that “many women who stay at home often suffered enormous hardships” and that “much adultery was being practiced”.⁴⁷ Indeed, women in the Netherlands saw their world change as their husbands and fathers were away for years and many of these men became involved with African, Amerindian, and Asian women.⁴⁸ For women married to men who served overseas this meant that they were essentially single for the time their husbands were away. Moreover, if a husband did not return, either because he started a new family, or because he died, a woman could not remarry. She

⁴⁶ Blussé, 47-49.

⁴⁷ Cited in: Van Deursen, *Volkskultuur*, 21-22.

⁴⁸ Employees of the Dutch East India Company also had concubines, and the VOC even encouraged it as a colonial strategy.

would need proof of her husband's death through testimony of others, or petition to have him officially declared dead, which was not common.

The wife of Hermanus Raven, for example, a church official who functioned as a schoolmaster and comforter of the sick, may have thought that her husband would not be unfaithful to her since he was an official of the Dutch Reformed Church at the African coast. Yet, in his will we read that he was sick and left his wages that were still to be paid to his parents, Herman Raeven and Johanna Leenderts. Furthermore, he left to his "black woman", Aquisiewas Acon and his two children by her, Herman Anton Raven and Johannes Coenraad August Raven, most of his worldly goods, including his slaves. His wife in the Netherlands was left with nothing, although he did note that she should not be liable for any of his debts.⁴⁹

For men this was a way to get a *de facto* divorce. They could leave their wives and children by enlisting to go overseas and start new families. Victims of the gender hierarchy, the women left behind remained bound to their wayward husbands, which, as in the example above, could create genuine hardship. These women were not able to remarry unless their husbands were dead, and could often not count on wages sent to them for the maintenance of the family, although some women petitioned the WIC and had wages sent to them for their minor children.

Wives who were faced with children born out of wedlock and concubines did not always take kindly to the offspring of their husbands with other women. Dirck Wilre, governor of the WIC in West Africa, returned to Holland in the summer or fall of 1665 to marry Maria de Perel from Antwerp. The couple had a daughter together but when he returned to Africa three years later, he sent his son from his relationship with Helena Courrea, a local mixed race woman, to

⁴⁹ NA: NBKG, 335. December 19, 1769.

the Netherlands to be educated.⁵⁰ To De Perel this must have been humiliating. Although the boy did not live with her, people in her circle may have know of the arrival of her husband's illegitimate son. After her husband's death in 1674, De Perel made sure that the boy was returned to his mother in Africa without the inheritance his father wanted him to have.

It is easy to see how the acts of De Perel after her husband's death may be interpreted as hateful and vengeful. Indeed, they may very well have been. Yet, she also had to think of herself and her daughter, as the inheritance was likely to be their sole support, unless she remarried, or until her then seven-year-old daughter was old enough to marry. Given the size of the estate, however, she could certainly have given the boy a sum of money, or at least paid for his passage back to Africa. The fact that his African mother had to pay for the journey is an indication that De Perel felt no love for the boy, and certainly did not feel any obligation towards him. Other Dutch women in similar situations undoubtedly also felt embarrassed and angered by their husbands and their illegitimate offspring.

The fact that many men were overseas did not mean couples were deprived of all communication, however. Couples could write to each other, although letters were frequently lost or misplaced along the Atlantic routes. In fact, many letters written by women in the Netherlands are now at The National Archives in Kew, just outside of London. These letters, part of the so-called "Prize Papers", survive because they were taken by English privateers who took Dutch ships and thus these letters never reached their destination.⁵¹ Some of the letters give us a good insight into the hardships many women underwent while their husbands were away.

⁵⁰ See chapter five.

⁵¹ In 1980, an article was published in a Dutch journal that dealt with the author's discovery of some 38.000 Dutch letters at the archive of the High Court of Admiralty in London. The papers are now housed at the new National

Marietje Jans' husband, Pieter Carelsen, was an officer on the ship *Het Geloof*, which sailed on May 8, 1664 with destination Algeria. However, famed fleet commander Michiel Adriaensz de Ruyter received secret instructions to continue his expedition to the coast of West Africa to support the Dutch settlements, and to retake WIC ships that were taken by the English. Carlsen and Jans had two daughters, Trijntje, then five years old, and Grietje, who was only a year old when her father left. On November 6, some six months after his departure, Jans wrote to him.⁵²

Her letter illustrates the concern the two spouses had for each other while both were in potentially dangerous circumstances, and the support women offered each other when faced with difficulties. When her husband left, the plague raged through Amsterdam in what would be the last epidemic of its kind that the city saw. Carelsen undoubtedly knew of the epidemic and must have been concerned about leaving his wife and daughters behind. Jans wrote to him of the great death toll the disease exacted. She noted that the plague had not ended but that it was subsiding because there were “only” 444 deaths in the week preceding her letter.⁵³ That year, however,

Record office in Kew and did not receive much attention until historian and journalist Roelof van Gelder studied them in an initiative supported by the Dutch National Archives, The Dutch Royal Library, and historians from Leiden University. Prior to his work, which was published in 2008, very little was known about the *Prize Papers*. Perhaps because of the language difficulty, no one in London ever systematically organized the archive and no one knew how many letters there were, from what period they stemmed, or what the nature of the content of the letters was. Van Gelder translated and published a number of personal letters he felt were representative of the larger collection. I have relied on his work, but this archive can potentially yield much information for the Atlantic historian. Among the letters are also ship's logs and other papers that could inform us further about the Atlantic trade since Van Gelder reports that 62% of the papers are from ships to and from the West, although the number of letters to and from North America is very small.

Roelof van Gelder, *Zeepost: Nooit bezorgde brieven uit de 17de en 18de eeuw* (Amsterdam/Antwerp: Uitgeverij Atlas, 2008).

⁵² Van Gelder, 76-80.

⁵³ The last great plague in Amsterdam occurred from 1663-1669, peaking in 1664. Jans' estimates of plague victims were indeed correct. In 1664 it claimed 24,148 lives in the city, significantly more than the preceding year when it claimed 9,752 lives. After 1664, the worst of the epidemic was over in Amsterdam but it continued in other cities and villages in the Netherlands. Source: Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 625.

20,000 people died already, she wrote, and she stated, “so many acquaintances died here that I cannot even write down half of them.”⁵⁴ She also reported that Carelsen’s cousin, Jacob Pietersen, was among the plague’s victims. Pietersen’s wife contracted the disease as well, but recovered and, Jans wrote, was now living with her. The two women, both without husbands at the time, must have decided that it would be best to pool their resources and live together for the time being. Pietersen’s wife was pregnant and probably needed the support of another woman.

On the other hand, Jans was just as concerned about the life of her husband when she heard that the ship would continue to Africa to engage the English there. Her language was quite forceful and expressed great love for him. “Because if I should have to miss you, what greater sorrow could I experience? Then I would wish that God would take my children before my eyes and then me as well.” She added advice to him about being in battle speaking of her love for him. She wrote, “Dearest, do not endanger your life because of the booty that you may receive because your body is worth more to me than a ship full of gold.”⁵⁵ One has to believe that theirs was indeed a marriage based on love and affection because she also added some lines about the wife of a fellow soldier onboard *Het Geloof*. She wrote that this husband did not receive many letters from his wife because she had only written one since they left, adding that it could not be good for a marriage if husband and wife did not make an effort to communicate.

Jans would have to wait a long time for her husband because De Ruyter’s fleet returned home in August of 1665, fifteen months after their supposed short journey to the Mediterranean. These situations were not uncommon and wives often did not know when or if their husbands

⁵⁴ Letter from Marietje Jans, November 6, 1664. Van Gelder, 79.

⁵⁵ Letter from Marietje Jans, November 6, 1664. Van Gelder, 79.

would ever come home. The uncertainty and longer than expected absences took their toll on the women and children who were left behind.

From the letters, it is also clear that rumors and information circled around the Atlantic World by word of mouth and through letters. Trijntje Hendrickx, whose husband was a silversmith who set sail on *De Spiegel*, Michiel de Ruyter's flagship, noted that she received four letters from him in the span of five months and that she had written the same number of letters to him.⁵⁶ Geertrui Jans received three letters from her spouse who sailed with the same fleet of De Ruyter in May of 1664 and apparently became the victim of vicious rumors that were spreading surrounding her conduct in her husband's absence. He must have severely scolded her in his last letter to her and sworn not to have anything to do with her upon his return. She, however, defended herself vigorously. He must have written that he heard she had taken a lover, but she replied, "What I have done since [your departure], for that I may stand before God and all men in the light."⁵⁷ She continued, "I cannot help it that false tongues are there to stir your anger. It saddens me and I cannot help it. I wish it were different." Her sister-in-law spread rumors that her brother would not return to his wife, threatening to make her an outcast. She wrote that she contemplated leaving the city and moving to Leiden if she were certain that her husband, Reinier Witte, would approve of it. She awaited a reply from him adding, "I do not pay attention to what people say or what they charge me with. I shall first await my angel's reply."⁵⁸

Women at home were familiar with the work their husbands did and often knew much of the rest of a crew on board a ship as well, indicating there was a close link between the men and their families. Maartje Nanninghs, for instance, wrote to her husband on board *Het Graafschap*

⁵⁶ Letter Trijntje Hendrickx, November 10, 1664. Van Gelder, 82.

⁵⁷ Letter Geertrui Jans, November 15, 1664. Van Gelder, 89.

⁵⁸ Letter Geertrui Jans, Van Gelder, 90. Jans frequently referred to her husband as her "angel" in the letter.

Mark in La Rochelle, France, where he would return from a voyage to the Azores. She wrote that she was relieved to have heard from several people that the captain of his ship was a good man. Moreover, she asked him to greet a number of people on the ship from her, and asked him to give her love to a certain Jan Pietersen and to tell him that his wife and daughter were well. Jan Pietersen was not on Nannings husband's ship, but he apparently passed through Bretagne to bring goods to the port of Calais. Somehow Nannings knew they might run into each other. In several other letters, she also told her husband to greet acquaintances and provide information to some men about their families.⁵⁹

Many women had financial difficulties in the absence of their husbands. Trijntje Hendrickx, at the time of her writing, had been married to Hendrick Batens for eight years and the couple had four children ranging in age from infant to seven years old. She wrote to him that their circumstances were not good. They had many debts and Batens added to them by borrowing money and telling people to go to his wife's house to get paid. She mentioned that the appearance of a man to whom he owed money gave her such a shock that she was ill for eight days because she could not pay him. She wrote to her husband, "Do not do such things again because you are deceiving people."⁶⁰ The young man he borrowed money from told Hendrickx that her husband used the money to go ashore, probably to drink. This must have angered her and she wrote to her husband, "That you could be so happy and forget my sadness and did not consider the fact that God's punishing hand is upon us. Think of the fact that God's punishing hand will not turn from us as long as we follow sin. If you are seduced by sin, please take a step back and think about our circumstances and the fact that everything happened because of sin."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Letter Maartje Nannings, January 2, 1665. Van Gelder, 107-108.

⁶⁰ Letter Trijntje Hendrickx, November 10, 1664, Van Gelder, 84.

⁶¹ Letter Trijntje Hendrickx, November 10, 1664, Van Gelder, 84.

In fact, her circumstances were not all that dire because she had a grandmother who was willing to take care of her and her children. This, apparently, caused difficulties with their extended family because her husband's sisters and some other women thought that she got off too easily and should take up sewing work to contribute to her household. In response, she wrote to her husband that her grandmother wanted her to tend to her children and her household instead of taking in sewing work. She repeated this later in her letter, indicating it was important to her that her husband did not think she was lazy. Her grandmother did indeed take good care of her and purchased her furniture from a pawnbroker who had some of the inventory of her house. Moreover, she also purchased clothes for the children and helped Henrickx with the funeral expenses of two of her children who succumbed to the plague. In a cutting remark about his sisters, she noted that she did not visit after the death of their six-year-old daughter.

In her letter, Hendricks also noted that she thought they would no longer live together, even if he did return from his journey around the Atlantic World, because an acquaintance or family member, Gerrit Harmsen, said that he would have Batens arrested as soon as he returned. It is likely that Batens owed Harmsen money. Perhaps her inclusion of this fact was to warn her husband, although it might also tempt him to stay away.

Another letter also bears witness to the fact that many women had financial struggles. Neeltje Jans' husband, again with the fleet of Michiel de Ruyter on board the ship *Het Geloof*, learned from her husband's letters that he was considering leaving the ship. "But my dear husband Gerrit Claesz, I cannot believe that you are serious," she wrote. "Where would we go?" "My dear husband, there is nothing to do here, there is no work and one cannot sail here." She added, "The sailors here walk around with their hats in their hands looking for work they cannot get." "That is why, my very beloved husband, you must think of the fact that together we have to

bite the sour apple until God gives us better fortune.”⁶² Apparently, he also wrote of the possibility of deserting. As one may expect, his wife was vehemently against this idea and wrote that he should consider the shame this would bring upon them. She asked him to please stay on board the ship and expressed her concern for him, while at the same time also making him aware of her difficulties. The women whose husbands left them *maandbrieven* to collect their wages from the WIC had only received money once during the six and a half months the men had been away, adding to their financial stress.

Conclusion

The letters are a good indication that women in the Netherlands were involved with the lives of their husbands overseas and that they were in touch with the families of crewmembers who also sailed around the Atlantic world. In a sense, they formed their own community in which they exchanged information and supported each other. Some of these wives also traded with the colonies, either as partners of their husbands, selling goods in the Netherlands that their husbands sent to them, or as independent businesswomen. Women of the upper classes were also involved in the Atlantic world as they invested large sums in the WIC, and brought parts of the empire home when they established botanical collections and studied the flora and fauna of the colonies.

⁶² Letter Neeltje Jans, November 15, 1664. Van Gelder, 92. “Biting the sour apple” is a Dutch expression that is still in use, meaning one has to do something unpleasant to achieve a desired outcome.



Fig. 6. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Aletta Adriaensdr*, 1639. Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Beuningen.

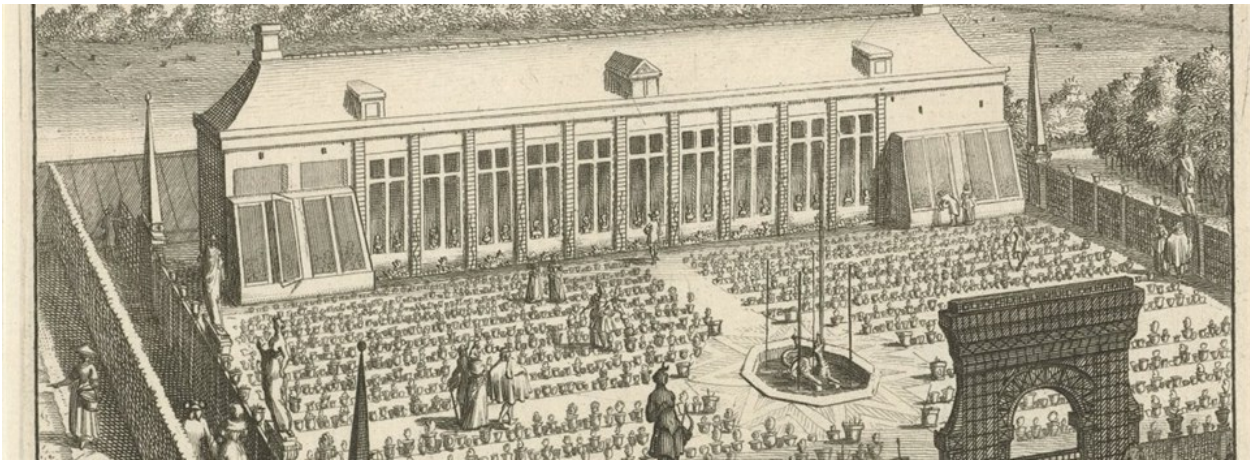


Fig. 7. The Orangery at Gunterstein.
From: J. Mulder, *Veues de Gunterstein* (Amsterdam: N. Visscher, 1690)



Fig. 8. Jan Weenix, *Agneta Block and husband Sybrand de Flines at the Vijverhof*, ca. 1694. Amsterdam, Amsterdam's Historisch Museum.

EPILOGUE

The women who peopled the Dutch Atlantic World were resilient, resourceful, and enterprising. These women did what they could to survive and get ahead in a difficult environment, in many cases far away from their homeland. Many of these women entered the public realm to claim their part of the Dutch empire, which stretched well beyond the Atlantic.

Dutch laws and customs did not prevent women, even those who were married, from participating in the public sphere around the Atlantic world. The previous chapters reveal that women were active in the marketplace where public commercial exchange took place, both in the colonies and in the Netherlands. Since the Dutch Atlantic colonies were primarily concerned with trade and less with settlement, the contributions of women such as Margariet Hardenbroeck, Elisabeth Samson, Anna Paes, Sara van Scharpenhuijsen, and many others, in this public arena were important and valuable to the Dutch trade as a whole. As part of this commercial exchange trade organizations such as guilds were a vital part of the regulation of certain trades in all but the New Netherland colony. These advocacy groups for the tappers, for instance, where in some cases women were in the majority, were part of the public sphere as guild members negotiated with governmentalities. In addition, women were both customers and custodians of the taverns and inns around the Atlantic world, which served as “nodes” in the commercial networks, and where women were able to contribute to the public discourse that took place in these establishments.

The courts, although ostensibly an extension of the state, can also be considered as places belonging to the public sphere. Dutch women appeared in the courts in the colonies and in the Netherlands very frequently to sue and because they were sued, as women who used the courts

essentially brought matters from the private into the public sphere. Laws and regulations could be changed as a result of actions taken by the courts as precedents were set there, demonstrating the influence of women in that arena as well. We saw that women took advantage of the opportunities they had according to the law, and in some cases even expanded them. They used prenuptial contracts, which became very common in the Dutch colonies, represented themselves in contract negotiations, and sometimes even sued for divorce. Elisabeth Samson sued for the right to marry a white man and took her case all the way to the States General in the Netherlands, clarifying for colonial authorities that there were no legal inhibitions that prevented interracial marriage. Her case clearly set a precedent for the Surinamese government.

Of course many women endured hardships in the Atlantic world as they were often far removed from extended kin and because of the sometimes limited resources in the colonies when compared to Amsterdam and the Netherlands. Women who had no means of earning an income used serial marriage as a strategy for survival or they used it to gain wealth and influence, as Charlotta van der Lith did in Suriname. It was not only white women who used this strategy, however. Helena Courrea, for instance, a mixed race woman at the African coast who was in a difficult position because she was not fully African and not fully European, also used this strategy. In her case, though, she was not always widowed but her relationships with both mixed race and white men frequently ended because the men abandoned her.

Women in the Netherlands also did not always benefit from Dutch expansion to the East and West and letters from women are a testament to the fact that many of them faced enormous hardships because of the absence of the men in their lives. Moreover, some felt humiliated by the fact that their husbands took on concubines overseas with whom they lived openly. Men had

relationships with other women and could essentially start a new life abroad, while women at home could not.

In spite of these hardships at home and overseas, women like Teuntje Straetmans, with whose life story I started this research and dissertation, were fighters who navigated the difficult world of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Atlantic successfully. As “citizens of the world”, these women navigated their way around the Atlantic world quite well.¹ Although men in the Netherlands initiated the quest for empire, women eagerly participated and staked their claims as well.

¹ This is a term taken from David Hancock. See: David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Like Hancock’s merchants, the women in this dissertation helped link the various colonies and their ties to Europe, sometimes even extending their ties to Asia.

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