

**Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants:**

*300 years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations*





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# Merchants,

*300 years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations*

# Missionaries

*I. van Kessel (ed)*

# & Migrants

KIT-Publishers

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## Colofon

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*Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants.  
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I. van Kessel (ed.)

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*Page 2 and 3: Map of Africa. Illustration from Johannes Blaeu, Atlas Maior, Amsterdam 1662. Adapted from the map his father Willem Jansz. Blaeu made in 1617.*



# *A past for future generations*

Ghana and the Netherlands have come a long way since David van Nyendael paid his historic visit in 1701 to the royal court of King Osei Tutu of Ashanti as an envoy of the Dutch West India Company. From a trading relationship that focused on the exchange of Ghanaian gold, ivory, slaves and cocoa for Dutch textiles, weapons and consumer products such as the famous Dutch genever, we have advanced to a stage where the Netherlands has become one of Ghana's most important development partners. It is my hope that this fruitful relationship will be intensified by way of increased Dutch direct investments in Ghana in the future.

The contributions in this book focus on the longstanding and occasionally intricate economic, political, cultural and human ties that have evolved between our two countries over the past centuries. The various chapters deal with central themes such as the slave trade, the cocoa trade, liaisons between European men and African women and present-day Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands.

Of particular concern to us must be the continued practice of slavery under various guises in several parts of the world. The international media is replete with news of women and children being either lured or coerced into sexual bondage, child soldiers being forced into their vocation by adults who should know better, and children from poor families being sold into perpetual servitude.

Modern slave markets are highly mobile and situational, and discussions around the buying and selling of slaves are coded. Slaves remain the property of their master, subject entirely to his will, working long hours for no remuneration, with no access to education and no freedom to marry or to associate freely. They escape servitude not by exercising their 'legal' rights, but mainly through escape. The challenge before us today is to come up with strategies that would help overcome this tragic manifestation of human greed and insensitivity. The hope of freedom depends in real measure upon our commitment to the principle of the dignity of man.

The past was not so good. The present has been mutually beneficial. It is our responsibility to strive to build a future that is even more advantageous to our two countries. We must ensure that out of the ashes of that which was wrong, a new future blossoms, a future of which unborn generations of our two countries can be proud.

Dr Grace Amponsah-Ababio

*Ambassador of Ghana to the Netherlands*



# Children of Anansi

*This preface is based on the speech given at the conference 'Past and Present of Dutch-Ghanaian relations' in The Hague on 7 November 2001 entitled 'Relations between Ghana and the Netherlands: more than footnotes?'*

The sustainable relations developing between Ghana and the Netherlands must involve children. Their stories and songs contain pearls of wisdom. Take for instance the Ghanaian children's song about the spider Anansi:

*'Children of Anansi are we  
and the wide world is our spider's web.  
Love, longing and fate  
send us to different points  
in this worldwide web.  
Where they bring us  
we find threads to grasp,  
threads to leave hanging  
and threads to let go.'*

I hope the pieces in this book will show us which threads we should grasp, which we should leave hanging and which we should let go.

Given my job of shaping cooperation between Ghana and the Netherlands, both now and for the future, I often wonder what the past should mean to us today, how we should deal with it and how we can use it. As the Ambassador of Ghana has said: 'we must learn to understand each other, we must respect each other and then we can work together'.

This certainly includes being aware of and acknowledging mistakes, because only then can we understand what has hurt or humiliated another. The slave trade, which has scarred so many people of African origin, is one example.

It was the Netherlands' struggle for independence from Spain that first took the Dutch to the Gold Coast. They initially bought pepper, ivory and gold there, but after they had conquered

forts on the coast and acquired colonies on the other side of the ocean, they also yielded to the temptation of the slave trade.

The presence of the Dutch at the forts on the coast of what is now Ghana sparked an interest in the lifestyle of the local population. The books Pieter de Marees and Willem Bosman wrote on the subject in 1602 and 1702 respectively are still of interest. Africans like Jacobus Capitein and the Ashanti princes Kwasi Boachi and Kwame Poku came to the Netherlands and became 'ambassadors' between the two cultures.

Awareness of each other's background and history – and the efforts both sides have made to treat the other with respect – have provided the basis for the sustainable cooperative relationship to which I am committed as Director-General for International Cooperation.

I am interested to hear not only what there is to discover from oral history, but also how today's Ghanaian migrants feel about Dutch society. I hope that the Netherlands-Ghana Tercentenary project will encourage Ghanaians living in this country to make their voices heard. Are they able to grasp new threads? What do they regard as important in relations between Ghana and the Netherlands? I am confident that our relationship is destined to be more than just a footnote in history.

Ron Keller

*Director-General for International Cooperation  
at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs*



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# *Merchants, missionaries and migrants*

## *An introduction*

The title of this book – *Merchants, missionaries and migrants* – covers the most important areas of contact between Dutch and Ghanaians over the past centuries. The book grew out of the conference ‘Past and Present of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations’, which was held in The Hague on 7 November 2001 to commemorate three centuries of diplomatic relations between Ghana and the Netherlands. Scholars from Ghana and the Netherlands presented papers on a wide range of issues of mutual interest ranging from the slave trade to the cocoa trade, from the role of Dutch ‘schnapps’ in Ghanaian ritual to relations between African women and Dutch men. The substantial number of contributions on the Ghanaian diaspora, covering Suriname, Indonesia and the Netherlands, illustrates that Dutch-Ghanaian relations are not just a bilateral affair. As a testimony to the globalizing impact of Dutch-Ghanaian contacts, scholars from Suriname and Indonesia also contributed to the present volume. The conference was organized by the African Studies Centre in Leiden, in cooperation with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both of whom also contributed to this book.

The point of departure for the celebration of this tercentenary is a mission carried out in 1701-1702 by David van Nyendael, envoy of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), to Kumasi, capital of the emerging Ashanti empire. In fact, Dutch-Ghanaian relations go back even further, to the last decade of the 16th century, as related in Michel Doortmont’s chapter on the Dutch presence on the Gold Coast. Van Nyendael’s adventurous mission to Kumasi, which is described in Henk den Heijer’s chapter, has been chosen as a convenient starting point for a year of commemorations and cultural exchanges between Ghana, the Netherlands and Suriname.

### **Balance of power**

Trade was undoubtedly the main reason for the Dutch to venture to the unknown lands of the West African coast. It was also the main reason for the people on the coast to welcome the newcomers. Portuguese traders had given Africans a taste for European merchandise, but their heavy-handed conduct had caused resentment. Traders from other parts of Europe added to the range of products available to the Africans, while increasing competition among European trading nations simultaneously increased African leverage. In the 17th century, the Gold Coast hosted five European nations – Dutch, Danes, Brandenburgers, English and Swedes – who between them occupied no less than 21 forts and castles. A unique feature of this part of the West African coast, which was to last until far into the 19th century, was the presence of numerous rival European nations who at best managed a precarious control over the immediate environment of their trading posts. While European powers were busy carving out empires in America and Asia, West Africa for centuries was the scene of trade relations that were heavily dependent on the voluntary cooperation of local partners. A pattern of shifting alliances developed between competing European nations and various African states, in which both sides were aware of their interdependence. Business was perceived as a matter of mutual interest, but both sides persistently kept trying to change the terms of trade in their favour. The local balance of power determined the outcome.

One notable exception to the game of shifting alliances was of course Elmina, headquarters of the WIC in Africa, which from 1637 on was the ever-loyal ally of the Dutch. Ashanti, having established itself as the most powerful state in

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*Opposite page:*  
*Allegory – an African*  
*maiden with the horn*  
*of plenty. Illustration*  
*from Johannes Blaeu,*  
*Atlas Maior,*  
*Amsterdam 1662.*



the hinterland, became the third leg of this durable alliance.

A central feature of the charter of the Dutch West India Company was its monopoly on trading rights on the African coast. Dutch ships trading on their own, or on behalf of other committees of merchants, were considered illegal interlopers. The WIC's ambition was to establish a monopoly over its West African trading partners as well, an endeavour that was doomed to fail. African states welcomed new trading partners, but had no intention of accepting them as overlords or granting them exclusive rights.

Following the example of the Portuguese, the Dutch concluded treaties with coastal states, stipulating the duties and obligations of the contracting partners. The very first such treaty was concluded in 1612 with the king and elders of the small coastal state Asebu. One of the oldest surviving treaties is the agreement drawn up in 1642 between Axim and Director Ruychaver on behalf of the WIC and the States General of the Dutch Republic, after the Dutch navy had conquered the Portuguese stronghold of Fort St Anthony in Axim. In this agreement, the people of Axim declared that they would be the loyal servants of the Prince of Orange and the WIC, for now and for eternity. They would not engage in trading with any other European nation and vowed to extradite all Portuguese to the Dutch. All civil and criminal cases were to be brought to the Dutch commander of the fort, while the local headmen were entitled to their share of the fines. The Dutch and the people of Axim would consider each other's enemies as their own enemy. The Dutch were entitled to one-fifth of the fish catch. On the other side, the local headmen were entitled to a toll for every Dutch ship that anchored off Elmina, and to a piece of linen per fixed amount of merchandise on these ships (Van Dantzig 1980: 36),

In Axim, the Dutch invoked the right of conquest as the basis for their claims, as they had evicted the Portuguese. But in Accra, for example, the Dutch position was much weaker. The

Portuguese had already left before the advent of the Dutch, and Accra was a more powerful state than Axim. Here was no question of Dutch jurisdiction or of taxation in the form of fish. In exchange for payments in gold, the king of Accra did promise exclusive trading rights to the Dutch, but the Dutch were in no position to enforce their claim to monopoly rights. Most treaties stipulated that the Dutch were to pay ground rents in fixed amounts of specified goods for the right to build and maintain a fortification, while they were also expected to make their contributions to customary festivities.

These ground rents were a source of much misunderstanding. The Europeans believed that they had purchased ownership titles to the land where they built their fortifications. But selling individual titles to land was a notion alien to African custom. In return for gifts and payments, African rulers ceded user rights to land where Europeans were allowed to settle and build forts (Daaku 1970: 49). This was to become a source of conflict in 1869, when the Dutch and the British decided on an exchange of territories without involving the local rulers. The Europeans considered this a transaction between two owners of property, while the affected African populations were understandably infuriated: how could these Europeans cede territories that were not theirs in the first place?

Even if the treaties stipulated monopoly rights, African rulers insisted on their right to trade with others. The result was a frequent change of allies, as old friends did not deliver on their promises and new friends looked more promising. In the 1690s, the rulers of Asebu teamed up with the Fanti and the English against the Dutch, whose claim to exclusive rights in Komenda was thwarted by powerful local traders. Dutch-English rivalry was to continue until the 19th century. The Dutch used dumping practices, known as 'cladden', to undercut the English merchants and squeeze them out of the West African markets. This practice could also turn against the Dutch, as African merchants simply held up their gold and waited for better

bargains (Ratelband 1953). African traders soon found out that the Dutch would drastically lower their prices when an English ship appeared.

The African traders were known as 'Akanists', described by Olfert Dapper as famed merchants, 'very clever in their trade, they (...) travel as unpartisan men through the lands of Sabu and others. (...) These big merchants are rich in gold and slaves and provide two-thirds of the gold which is annually collected by the Europeans on the Gold Coast' (Dapper 1668: 458-9). In pre-colonial times, the Europeans never gained direct access to the gold mines.

### **Merchants and merchandise**

What was the trade all about? In the WIC years, Dutch imports to Ghana consisted mainly of textiles, guns, powder, metal ware and alcoholic drinks. In this period, gold, ivory and slaves were the most important exports from Ghana, followed by products of less importance such as pepper and lemon juice. The Dutch also played an important role as carriers in the inter-African trade (Den Heijer 1997). The organization of the slave trade, in which Ghanaians and Dutch acted as business partners, is described in Akosua Perbi's chapter. Alcohol, notably geneva, remains an important Dutch product in Ghana today, although Emmanuel Akyeampong's chapter makes clear that its meaning has shifted over time from social booze to ritual drink.

Trade remains the core business of Dutch-Ghanaian relations even today. Nowadays, Dutch imports consist mainly of used cars, electrical machinery, textiles, mineral fuels, oils and processed food products, notably dairy products and salted pig feet. The major commodities imported by the Netherlands from Ghana now include cocoa, timber and aluminium. Victor Nyanteng's chapter spells out the central position of cocoa in present commercial relations. In the days of the WIC, both sides attempted to outwit the other with a range of cheating tricks. Ghanaians mixed gold dust with sand, added to the weight of ivory by pouring lead in the tusks and rubbed old or sick slaves with oil to give

them a healthy, shiny appearance. The Dutch sold inferior guns, made false folds in their bales of cotton, silk and linen to cheat with the length and diluted their genever with water. Tricks and all, the overall picture is that of a relationship between equal partners. The Dutch, who numbered a few hundred at most during the peak years of the Guinea trade, were never in a position to impose their will and remained dependent on the cooperation of local partners.

### **Missionaries**

During the centuries of Company rule, the Protestant Dutch showed very little missionary zeal in their overseas possessions and footholds. Ministers of religion sent out by the Company ministered only to the European personnel of the WIC, and perhaps to a handful of Euro-Africans, the descendents of European men and African women. One attempt to reach beyond the small European community and to cater for the spiritual needs of the Africans ended in dismal failure, as is related in the two chapters by Henri van der Zee and David Kpobi on the tragic life of Jacobus Capitein, the first black minister stationed in Elmina.

While for a long time Dutch Protestants had little interest in 'converting the heathen', the Catholic Church in the Netherlands by contrast would later become known for its extraordinary outburst of missionary fervour. Dutch missionaries and nuns swarmed out to Africa in great numbers, Ghana included.

By the last quarter of the 20th century, the tables were turned. The Netherlands had become one of Europe's most secularized nations, while Ghana witnessed a flourishing of various Christian churches, both old and new. Ghanaian churches, notably of the Pentecostal type, proliferated not only in Ghana but also in Dutch towns with a substantial Ghanaian migrant population. Ministers followed their flock to the diaspora, but the Ghanaian diaspora also feeds into religious life in Ghana. Older, established churches also participate in this reverse missionary effort. Thus, David Kpobi, the author of a

chapter on Jacobus Capitein, served from 1987-1991 as pastor in Utrecht on secondment from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The role of Pentecostal churches in moulding a new identity and a sense of self-esteem among Ghanaians, who often find themselves at a loss in the paper jungle of the Netherlands' immigration policies, is highlighted in Rijk van Dijk's chapter.

### **Voluntary and involuntary migrants**

For better or for worse, the European presence in West Africa introduced Africans to other parts of the world. European merchants organized a massive forced migration of Africans to the New World. The Dutch were major players in this transatlantic slave trade, both as suppliers for the Portuguese, Spanish and British colonies in the New World, as well as for the Dutch colonies of Dutch Brazil, Suriname and the Dutch West Indies.

The destiny of Africans of Ghanaian origins in the New World is examined in two chapters on Suriname. The focus is on two distinct types of experiences. André Pakosie, himself a member of the Ndyuka maroons, examines the African legacy of the Maroons and the linguistic and socio-religious parallels with the Akan of Ghana. Jean-Jacques Vrij traces the destinies of individuals, some of slave status, some emancipated slaves and some free blacks, who made their own careers in the unpropitious environment of a plantation colony.

More ambiguous was the position of the Africans recruited in the 19th century as soldiers for the colonial army in the Netherlands East Indies. The vast majority of these recruits was originally of slave status, but they were manumitted when entering army service. Moreover, in the East Indies they counted as part of the European contingent of the army, with conditions of service similar to those of Europeans. Although the recruitment venture hovers on the border between voluntary and involuntary migration, the Africans in the East Indies army experienced a rapid rise in social status. As described by Ineke van Kessel and Endri Kusruri

in two chapters on these 'Black Dutchmen', the African soldiers jealously guarded their European status and considered themselves somewhat superior to the native Indonesian population.

Over the centuries, individual people also migrated back and forth between the Netherlands and Ghana. Early examples are discussed in Natalie Everts' chapter on two Euro-African women in Elmina who experienced life in Amsterdam as well as in Elmina. Some of these early migrants acquired international fame, such as the slave boy Jacobus Capitein, who became a minister of religion, or the two Ashanti princes Kwasi Boakye and Kwame Poku, whose dramatic life story is the subject of Arthur Japin's famous novel, *The two hearts of Kwasi Boachi*.

By the last quarter of the 20th century, these pioneers were followed by a substantial flow of young Ghanaians looking for job opportunities. Ghanaians became known as an enterprising immigrant community. Some settled permanently in the Netherlands, while others are saving their earnings hoping to return to Ghana one day. But nearly all Ghanaian migrants maintain intensive contacts with home, travelling back and forth, sending money, supporting relatives and often closely following the latest political developments. Their contribution to the Ghanaian economy and the welfare of relatives at home is discussed in Daniel Arhinful's chapter.

By the end of the 19th century, the Dutch connection had brought Ghanaians to all five continents: to North and South America, Europe, other parts of Africa and to Asia. Indeed, even to Australia. Travelling on foot across the continent in 1882, George Morrison, a young adventurous Australian, met an old gentleman in the middle of Australia by the name of John Smith. He described this new travelling companion as 'a toothless darkie, a native of the Gold Coast of Africa, a cook by profession and one of the kindest, most considerate men it has been my lot to meet with' (Pearl 1967: 30). As a young man, John Smith of the Gold Coast had enlisted on a Dutch man-of-war that was taking Prince Hendrik of the Netherlands around the world.



Thus John Smith became the first black man ever seen in Iceland, and after his maritime travels he ended up in Australia.

### Aftermath

On the eve of the transfer of the Dutch Possessions on the Coast of Guinea to the British, Dutch scholar C.M. Kan noted in 1871 that the history of the Dutch on this coast makes for a dark page in Dutch colonial history. 'While initially this history testifies to the fortitude and industry of our forefathers, later it provides testimony of more than usual cruelty, more than common narrow-mindedness, regretful neglect, both of our own interest and those of the local population, great immorality, indifference and egoism. Let us burn the historical records which tell about the Coast of Guinea, which ought never to be opened and never to be used for haughtiness or instruction' (Kan 1871: 7).

Fortunately, his advice to burn the archives was not heeded. The rich documentary record enables us today to trace Dutch-Ghanaian relations over the centuries, not 'in haughtiness', but indeed for instruction. The prevailing 19th-century Dutch perspective on the Gold Coast was that of a failed colony, where the Dutch for centuries had made profits with the infamous slave trade without any efforts at local development. But this is a perspective coloured by the heyday of colonialism. The Dutch presence on the Gold Coast belongs rather to the pre-colonial episode, in which Dutch and Ghanaians interacted, traded and quarrelled as equal business partners. Even if the business indeed included the inequitable slave trade, this was basically a relationship between equals. In this book, published on the occasion of the Dutch-Ghanaian tercentenary, past and present come together, hopefully laying a solid foundation for equitable cooperation in the future.

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### Note

For convenience sake, in this book we use 'Ghana' and 'Ghanaians' to refer to the area of present-day Ghana and its people, although these names of course only came into existence when Ghana proclaimed its independence in 1957. Similarly, 'Dutch' in the context of this book can occasionally include people from other European nations, as the West India Company, being a true multinational, recruited its personnel all over Europe.



**Merchants,**

*Part 1*

**Missionaries**

**& Migrants**



ALDUS VERTHOONT HET CASTEEL DE MINA VYT DER ZEE .



# 1. An overview of Dutch relations with the Gold Coast

## *in the light of David van Nyendael's mission to Ashanti in 1701-02*

### **Introduction**

The years 2001-2002 mark the commemoration of 300 years of diplomatic relations between Ghana and the Netherlands, looking back on the mission of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) official David van Nyendael to the court of asantehene Osei Tutu I in Kumasi in 1701-1702. The commemoration of this event as a starting point in the relationship between two modern states is of course merely symbolic. Current relations can hardly be compared with those of 300 years ago, and besides, the Ashanti kingdom does not equal Ghana, nor does the WIC equal the Kingdom of the Netherlands. However, the WIC did – in its day – act as the representative of the Dutch Republic, the forerunner of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the historical Ashanti state is an important constituent part of modern-day Ghana.

This chapter will review the Dutch-Ghanaian relationship from the earliest beginnings in the late 16th century to the 20th century, in the light of the mutual interests of the African and European partners over time. Before arriving at this broadly chronological-thematic approach, David van Nyendael's mission is briefly discussed, highlighting its symbolic meaning for the relationship between Ghana and the Netherlands.

### **David van Nyendael's mission to Kumasi, 1701-1702**

Van Nyendael's mission came at a time when trade on the Gold Coast had been disrupted for several years, much to the chagrin of the European trade companies on the coast, including the Dutch, as well as the Akanist and other middlemen-traders who acted as intermediaries with the suppliers in the interior. Trade stagnated because of a number of political and strategic

changes in the hinterland during the second half of the 17th century, leading to the formation of larger and more powerful states. One of these new states was Denkyira, which by the early 1690s was in control of many of the gold-producing areas. When it incorporated the kingdom of Akanny in 1697, it established a virtual monopoly over the gold, ivory and slave resources in a large hinterland area. Instead of providing a stable environment for European trade, the Denkyira monopoly only gave rise to further disruptions.

The situation in Denkyira was not the only problem facing the Dutch. Further to the east, the Dutch trading posts in Senya Beraku and Accra had difficulties, too. Here the rival hinterland states of Akyem and Akwamu were the cause of disruptions in trade. The entry of Ashanti into the political arena in the closing years of the 17th century complicated matters even further. All through the 17th century, the Dutch – or other Europeans for that matter – had had little need to establish close contact with the hinterland states. As long as trade flourished and relations with the Akanist middlemen traders worked out well, the WIC was happy with the situation. In 1701, however, the situation had become so perilous that the WIC governor in Elmina, Joan van Sevenhuysen, decided to take the uncommon step of sending an envoy into the hinterland. In a letter to the WIC board, Van Sevenhuysen noted that Van Nyendael was being sent to Kumasi partly on the advice of the senior 'Akanist', the Akanist middlemen being the most important allies of the Dutch with regard to the hinterland trade.<sup>1</sup> This suggests a strong bond and mutual trust between the two parties. The motive behind Van Nyendael's mission, which put a priority on the political objective – ('so that the

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*St. George Castle in Elmina as seen from the sea. From Vingboons Atlas (with maps of WIC and VOC; 1660).*

KIT Library, Amsterdam RF-202.

1. Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, WIC Archives 97. J. van Sevenhuysen to General Board ('Heren Tien'), Elmina, 16 November 1701.

warfare may end and trade be taken up again'), makes Van Nyendael first and foremost a diplomatic envoy. The charter of the WIC did indeed provide for such an appointment, in the sense that the governor of the Gold Coast (or any other WIC governor for that matter) was not only the highest company official on the spot but was also the representative of the States General, the suzerain body of the Republic of the Netherlands at the time.

Van Nyendael's mission heralded the beginning of a longstanding relationship between the Dutch in Elmina and the court in Kumasi, which was marked by an irregular exchange of envoys and representatives. Van Nyendael turned out to be the first of thirteen known Dutch representatives to the court of the asantehene in a period of 168 years. In time, the asantehene was to send his own representative to Elmina, too, emphasizing the special relationship that had developed between the two parties, and that was mutually beneficial (Yarak 1990). But it was only in the beginning of the 19th century that new Dutch envoys made their way to the Ashanti court.

Van Nyendael's mission to Ashanti stands out as an important historical landmark in the Dutch relations with the Gold Coast. From the late 16th century onwards, the Dutch had been interested in the Gold Coast for two reasons: commercial interests and strategic reasons. The economic interest initially focused on the gold, ivory, gum and other products the area brought forth. By extension, from the middle of the 17th century onwards the Gold Coast foothold also served as a trading headquarters for the slave trade, which started to extend further down the West African coast, east of Accra and all the way south to Angola. Van Nyendael's mission of 1701-02 heralded the first European contact with the newly formed expansionist state of Ashanti. Because of the local growth of the slave trade in the 18th century, the nature of the European presence on the Coast changed. The relationship with Ghanaian peoples and states became more intensive, and in a sense also more exploitative. In the 18th century, the rapidly expanding

Ashanti empire became the main supplier of gold and slaves to the Dutch in Elmina, Accra and Axim. Secondly, the Dutch interest in the Gold Coast was inspired by political and strategic motives. This was true for the first establishment of the Dutch in the early 17th century, and remained the case for the full period of Dutch presence on the Gold Coast. For most of this period, the interests of the Dutch and the Ashanti coincided nicely. The landlocked Ashanti empire never managed to subdue the coastal Fanti states, but found a reliable coastal outlet in Elmina, where the Dutch provided a steady supply of European goods, including guns and powder. While the British – eternal commercial rivals of the Dutch – developed alliances with the Fanti states along the coast, the Dutch had secured friendly relations with the most powerful state in the hinterland.

### **Commercial and strategic interests in the 17th and 18th century**

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish themselves on the Gold Coast where in 1482 they constructed the castle of São Jorge da Mina (later called St George d'Elmina) in modern-day Elmina or Edina, the first European building south of the Sahara. By the mid-16th century, English and French traders joined them, all seeking the riches of the gold trade for which the Gold Coast became famous. Soon it became clear to the Europeans that the trade in alluvial gold, mined in the coastal area, was difficult to penetrate. The local producers kept it to themselves, so the Europeans had to tap the sources of gold further inland. This forced the Europeans to strike up alliances with local coastal merchants and rulers, who could deliver gold from the hinterland. A complex political situation developed around the European coastal settlements, in which Europeans competed with each other – even to the point of launching armed skirmishes – and were assisted by local rulers, who were thus able to enhance their own political and economic positions. The settlements around the European forts grew into towns, which also



served as commercial centres for international trade and political trait-d'unions between the Europeans on the coast and the states of the Gold Coast inland. By the third quarter of the 16th century, the European presence on the Gold Coast had given rise to a new, urban, cosmopolitan society, with a unique political, economic and cultural outlook. The Dutch entered the picture in the mid-1590s.

Since 1568 the United Dutch Provinces had been engaged in a war with Spain, which was to end 80 years later with the formal international recognition of the Dutch Republic in the Treaty of Westphalia. After the merger of the Portuguese crown with the crown of Spain in 1581, the Dutch found themselves at war with Portugal as well. Blocked from the ports of Spain and Portugal, the traditional sources for the supply of salt, spices and oriental products, Dutch ships began to venture further south, to the Cape Verde Islands and beyond. The period after 1590 marked the successful entry of the Dutch in the field of economic and political expansion beyond the confines of Europe, making them, within half a century, a major player in the East and West Indies, to the detriment of Spain and Portugal.

The first Dutch encounter was accidental. Barend Erickszoon, a sailor from the Dutch town of Enkhuizen, lost his way when sailing to Brazil in 1590, and subsequently landed on the African island of Principe, where he was caught by the Portuguese. From information gathered during his captivity, he surmised that the Gold Coast would be a good place with which to trade. After his return to the Netherlands in 1593, he managed to convince some Dutch merchants to invest in a voyage to the Gold Coast to trade for gold. This voyage, with one ship, was successful, and Erickszoon's return with a cargo of gold and ivory can be regarded as the start of Dutch business with the Gold Coast. More Dutch merchants joined in and soon organized themselves in trading companies, uniting their capital, strength and know-how. By 1607 almost all trade with West Africa was organized in this way. In the merchants' own words:

'The Dutch merchants, having considered and felt the molestation inflicted upon them from time to time by the king of Spain, have taken into their own hands the trade on the coast of Africa, along Guinea up to Manicongo.'<sup>2</sup>

Initial attempts to establish a general West India Company failed, but in 1621 the first Dutch West India Company was incorporated. According to the terms of an armistice with Spain, concluded in 1609, the Dutch government was bound to refrain from trading in any areas in the world occupied by Spain or Portugal. Because of this treaty, Dutch merchants were confined to areas which they considered not to be under Portuguese control, namely the kingdoms of Asebu, Efutu and Komenda. However, the Portuguese in Elmina apparently used a broader interpretation of the treaty and persecuted all Dutch merchants along the Gold Coast, killing them when possible. The kingdom of Asebu, because of its friendly relations with the Dutch, suffered most. The Portuguese and their allies attacked them on several occasions, destroying villages and pillaging the countryside. In 1611, the king of Asebu, who had seen his trade with the Dutch grow considerably in recent years, invited the Dutch to build a military fortification in the coastal town Mouri.

The story goes that the king of Asebu sent two envoys to Holland to convey the message. However, evidence of this early West African embassy to Europe is slim. The historian J.K.J. de Jonge mentions the embassy, basing his remark on the instruction of the States General to the commander of the fleet that was to establish a stronghold in Mouri. The passage roughly runs as follows:

'And he will travel to the place called Mouri, belonging to the territory of the King of Sabou [Asebu]. And arriving there, with God's help, he will, with a number of competent men from the fleet, who are knowledgeable about the area and speak the language, present himself to that King of Sabou, congratulate him in the name of the Prince-Stadholder of the Netherlands on his offer

2. Account of the early history mainly based on compilation of sources by J.K.J. de Jonge, *De oorsprong van Neerland's Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea*, p. 7, from a letter written by the merchants and company directors trading on the West Coast of Africa to the States General, c. 1607.

of friendly relations, his correspondence and good will.

Also conveying the reason for his arrival, being for the protection and security of the merchants in the country, and those with whom they trade.

To which end he will show that the States General are willing to entertain the proposal and request of his [i.e. the king's] envoys, recently present in these quarters [i.e. the Netherlands], to build a fort or stronghold and to man it [with soldiers to act] against all those who want to offend, perturb, hinder or hurt either the trade or the king' (De Jonge 1871).

The Ghanaian historian K.Y. Daaku mentions the envoys as well and names them as Carvalho and Marinho (Daaku 1970). The use of Portuguese names possibly indicates that these men were local Christians, or descendants from a Portuguese (fore-)father who struck up a relationship with a local woman. The death of one of the men at Elmina is later reported in a WIC journal. The establishment of Fort Nassau at Mouri inaugurated the Dutch residency on the Gold Coast, which continued for the next 260 years. As the relationship with Asebu was established at government level, it can be asserted that official relations between Ghana and the Netherlands are now in their 390th year.

Now a struggle for the European hegemony over large parts of the Gold Coast ensued between the Dutch and the Portuguese. After the incorporation of the WIC and the end of the armistice with Spain in 1621, the road was clear for open warfare. In 1625, the Dutch tried to conquer the strategically and commercially important Portuguese headquarters at Elmina, but were unsuccessful in the face of massive resistance by an army made up of Portuguese and local companies. In 1637, however, an expeditionary force from Dutch Brazil conquered the Castle of St George in a concerted effort from both the sea and the land. From their new stronghold in Elmina, the Dutch overtook the Portuguese settlement in Axim in 1642, and subsequently

those in Ahanta, Boutri and Sekondi. During the 17th century, the WIC would acquire more possessions, mainly to the east of Elmina, such as Accra, Senya Beraku, Kormantin and Apam, to name only the most important.

From the 17th century onwards the Dutch established official and private relations by means of treaties and contracts with many local rulers and states. Most important, of course, were the treaties with the government of Elmina, originally a treaty with Elmina's nominal overlord, the state of Eguafu, just inland, and treaties with the overlords of the other main Dutch footholds: Axim, Ahanta, the chiefs of Accra and many others (Den Heijer 1997). With these contracts, the parties may have differed regarding the interpretation of matters such as ownership of land and land rent, as African and European ideas about ownership of land were vastly different, but in practice this made little difference. The Dutch – and other Europeans – had jurisdiction over a delimited area of land and specific legal matters, which the African parties accepted. In some cases money changed hands, or rent was paid, and in others it was not. Conflicts about the parameters of a treaty or contract were generally solved through negotiations. The regular renewal of contracts can be seen as a ritual performed by parties from disparate cultures, trying to establish common ground. And indeed, looking at the stability of relationships over time, it seems that common ground was found through the process of regular negotiations and renegotiations, oiled by the exchange of gifts.

A fitting illustration of the cordiality and equality between the parties at state level, and its preservation in local folklore, is to be found in Accra in the palace of the Nai Wolumo. Still to be seen today in the compound of the palace is a mural depicting the conclusion of a treaty of peace and friendship between the Dutch, represented by the WIC governor Jan Pranger, and the Nai in 1734. The painting shows two hands, Pranger's and the Nai's, and the staff of office handed by the former to the latter. A hardwood

staff with engraved silver knob is kept in the palace and is brought out for official occasions. The engraving on the knob confirms the year 1734 and names the then commandant of the Dutch Fort Crevecoeur at Accra. The absence of open conflict between the Dutch and their African neighbours during the 17th and 18th centuries is indicative of the care with which relations were established and maintained. Local leaders were regularly invited to the forts and castle for discussions, and for the celebration of festivities. The Dutch contributed to local festivals in kind and money, and paid homage to local authorities. In turn, local leaders would do the same at the arrival of a new fort commandant or a new governor in their midst. These rituals were kept intact for over 200 years, adapted where necessary, and modernized in terms of the type and amount of gifts.

The slave trade was, of course, one of the important economic activities of the 18th century, requiring extensive regulation through negotiation. Much work connected with the slave trade was not only done by the slaves 'employed' by the West India Company, but also by local labourers (both free and slave). For transport, for instance, the task often fell to carriers and canoe men from the town, who were hired privately through contracts, usually co-agreed with the local governments. Local traders supplied food for the contingents of slaves who had to be fed while waiting at the assembly points as well as during the transatlantic voyage. The local communities provided many other services too.

As the trade cycle between the Netherlands, the Gold Coast and the Caribbean had a span of many months, the Dutch set up a detailed network to exchange information on supply and demand, between trading posts and incoming ships, and with boats and canoes travelling up and down along the West African coast as far as Sierra Leone.

The rise of Ashanti in the first half of the 18th century destabilized the political status quo in the region for several decades. Wars in the interior regularly upset trade in general, and it was not

until 1742, when the Ashanti defeated the state of Akyem, that peace returned to the area. From that point onwards, the Ashanti were also more able to control the trade routes, resulting in an increase in the volume of trade. The WIC itself had already lost its last commercial monopoly by then (it ended in 1734) and was unable to profit from the situation. Private Dutch slave traders took over and did good business for several decades. The end of the Company monopoly opened the doors for a whole new set of local traders. Many of them had close relations with the Dutch because they descended from European fathers and African mothers. These Euro-Africans became a powerful group in the second half of the 18th century, especially in Elmina. Some entered WIC service, others established themselves as private merchants, quite a few became powerful. One such merchant was Jan Nieser, son of a German WIC official, who set up a large trading network along the coast and was active in Dutch as well as British territory. It was

*Coat of arms in a courtyard in Accra, Ghana, illustrating the bond between Ghanaians and Dutch.*

*Photo I. van Kessel.*



men like him who benefited from the slave trade long after it had ceased to be of importance for the WIC and many of the European traders. It also brought them into conflict with the Europeans, who often complained about the 'unfair advantages' the 'mulattos' had because of their family networks and better information systems.

Another notable Euro-African merchant was Jacob Ruhle, also son of a German WIC official. Jacob went to school in the Netherlands, together with several of his brothers and sisters. On his return to the Gold Coast in 1769, still a young man, he started a career in WIC service, acting as a purchasing agent for several governors (Doortmont, Everts and Vrij 2000). This gave him the opportunity to build up capital of his own, which subsequently enabled him to set himself up in business. By the late 1780s, he – along with Jan Nieser – was one of the wealthiest men on the Dutch Gold Coast, trading in slaves and produce, and managing a large family business in which his brothers and sisters took part, and which stretched from the town of Elmina along the Gold Coast to Suriname and eventually also to the Netherlands. In Suriname, Jacob had a direct interest in plantations through a sister and elder brother. After 1790 he built a huge estate in Elmina town, encompassing a country house and a plantation, where he experimented with all kinds of tropical products – perhaps already contemplating how to negotiate the coming demise of the Atlantic slave trade. By 1802 he had moved to Amsterdam, where he settled permanently, leaving the family business to be managed by his brother Carel and two of his sons. He remained in the Netherlands until his death in 1828, resembling by then more an upper middle class Amsterdam merchant than the Elmina slave trader he had been four decades earlier. Jacob's commercial exploits provided his family with an income for several decades after his death, and the Elmina estate, 'Buitenrust', is still home to distant descendants and relatives.

The successful exploits of the local private traders were probably less harmful to the Dutch interests than some of the European officials

would have their superiors believe. They themselves were at a disadvantage, but the extensive and well-organized trading networks of the Dutch Euro-African merchants and their local families were, in this period at least, still firmly focused on the Netherlands and Dutch trading firms. Their profits were reinvested in the Netherlands or in Dutch financial interests, and luxury products were normally also bought in the Netherlands. As we shall see, setting up a Euro-African trading network was not a prerogative of the Euro-African group alone. Dutch officials also had opportunities to join in.

### **Social life in Elmina in the 17th and 18th centuries**

Relatively little is as yet known about social life in the Dutch settlements in the 17th century. More evidence is available for the 18th century, enabling us to sketch a picture of social relations, especially in the largest community, Elmina.

At any given time during the 18th century, several hundred European officials, soldiers, seamen and skilled labourers lived in Elmina. With a lack of European women and an awareness that close familial relations offered important points of entry into commercial networks, it was only a matter of time before European men of all ranks and local African women came together and set up house and shop in the town.

When one visits Elmina Castle today, the tourist guide will tell a story of how, during the slave-trade era, the governor or another high-placed official would pick young slave girls from the female dungeons and sleep with them. When a girl became pregnant, she would then be freed and would settle in the town. Her offspring would be named after the European father, hence the large number of Dutch (and English and Danish) family names still in existence in Ghana. This rather emotive story, in itself illustrative of the horrors of the slave trade, is historically false. There can be no doubt that female slaves were indeed taken as concubines for one or more nights by all European staff who had access to them; violent oppression, physical as well as



sexual, was inherent to the system of the slave trade. On the other hand, one has to keep in mind that slaves were trade goods, and damaged trade goods fetch less money. This fact will have made the men in charge very careful in their treatment of the slaves, limiting access to females by the lower staff. Also, it is highly unlikely that many slave women stayed long enough in the castle for the men to find out whether they were pregnant. And even in such cases, pregnancy by a European man would almost certainly never have led to manumission. Those unfortunate women were without doubt sold overseas, just as their fellow victims were.

So who then are these Ghanaians with Dutch names? How did this group come into being? Most of the well-known Ghanaian families with Dutch surnames stem from voluntary alliances – marriages – between Dutch officials and daughters of local (elite) families. Forging an alliance through customary marriage was mutually beneficial to the Ghanaian elite families and Dutch officials alike. During the slave-trading era, such marriages gave WIC officials access to a vast family network with economic and social ties, often reaching far into the hinterland (Doortmont, Everts and Vrij 2000).

An example of such a successful and profitable marriage is that of Dutch WIC official Pieter Woortman and his African common-law wife Afodua. Woortman first arrived on the Gold Coast in 1721 as a soldier with the WIC. When he retired to the Netherlands nine years later, he had seen a successful career as fort commandant and acting military commander. While in the Netherlands, he set up his own business and married a Dutch lady, with whom he had several children. In 1741 he decided to return to the Gold Coast and WIC service, most likely because of some financial mishap. His former local experience made him an ideal candidate for an administrative position. Very soon he was appointed to the position of fort commandant in Apam, one of the slave-trading terminals east of Elmina. While stationed there, he met Afodua, a member of a prominent family in her hometown of Jumba,

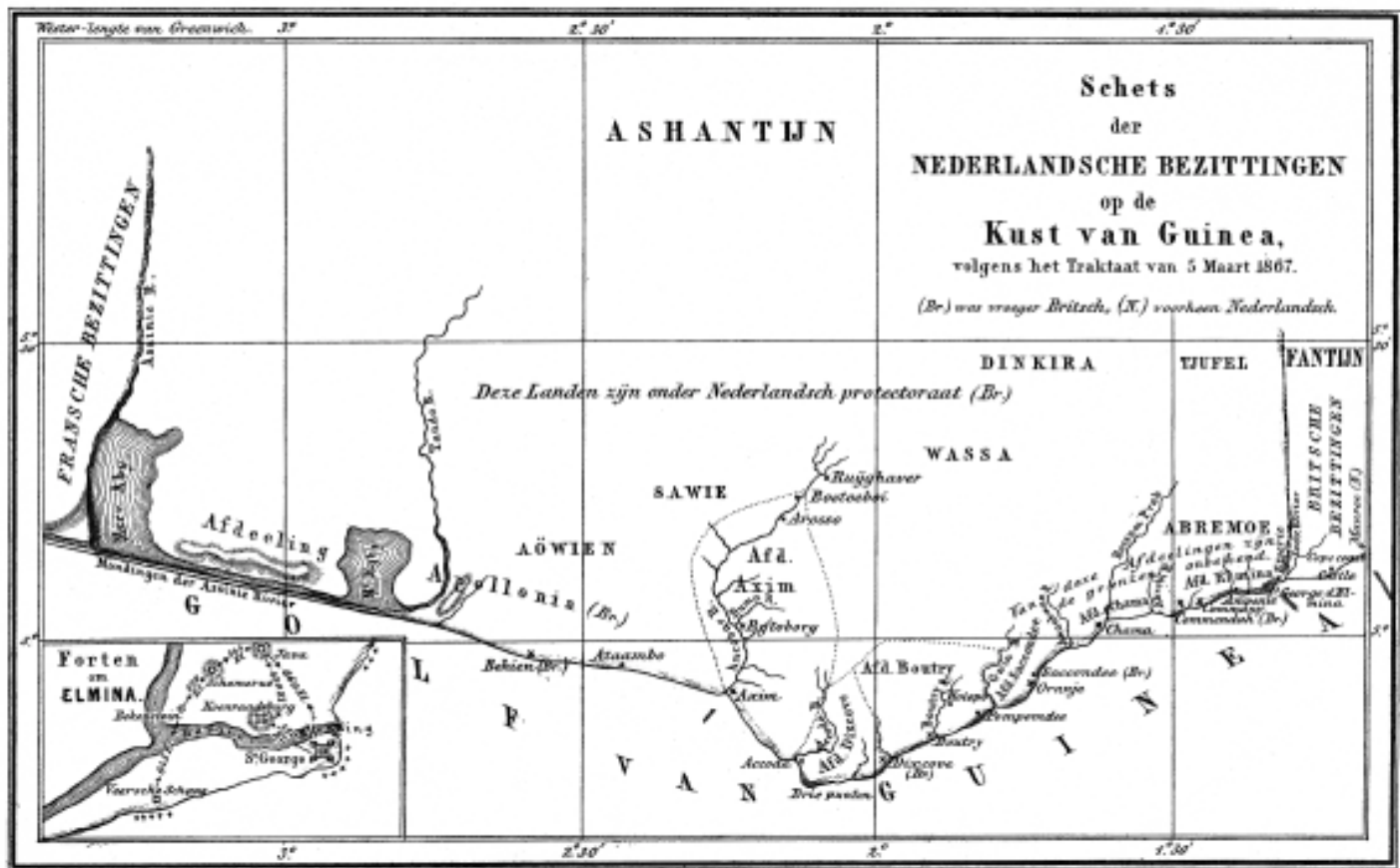
near Apam. Woortman and Afodua were able to run a very profitable private slave-trading operation, at times undercutting the British trade. Woortman was apparently quite happy with the situation, and for a very long time did not try to improve his position by applying for a more prominent posting. When he eventually did, he rose to the position of governor within four years. Over time, Woortman was joined by two of his sons from his Dutch marriage, Jan and Hendrik Woortman, who also acquired WIC positions and entered into the business owned by their father and Afodua. Later on, the children from the relationship of Pieter and Afodua – carrying the surname Plange, after Woortman's mother – also entered into business and kept it going until long after Woortman's death in 1780. Pieter Woortman and his Jumba family-in-law played the slave-trading game quite well. Woortman carefully used his WIC position and connections to build up his own business. Afodua and her family provided the hinterland contacts and organized access to local infrastructure. Pieter Woortman's Dutch sons on the Gold Coast followed in their father's social footsteps and also married local women, extending the family network even further.

The example of Pieter Woortman can be replicated by many others. Euro-African relations did not exactly follow fixed patterns. Relationships between European men and local women were on the whole quite stable, and were socially acceptable for all parties. Regularly children were sent to the Netherlands for schooling. These Euro-African relations belonged to the social fabric of cosmopolitan coastal towns such as Elmina. In the 18th century Elmina already had well over 10,000 inhabitants and at some point grew to 20,000, outsizing many important European towns in the same period.



*Portrait of Euro-African merchant F. I. Dolphijn at Elmina. He died in 1895.*

KIT Fotobureau Album 1643 Elmina, 00024053.



With the exchange of territory between Britain and the Netherlands in 1867, the British footholds to the east of Cape Coast were transferred to the Netherlands. The British took over the Dutch possessions west of Cape Coast. (Br) stands for ex-British and N for ex-Dutch. The grandiose claim to 'landen onder Nederlandsch protectoraat' (lands under Dutch protectorate) had no basis in reality.

Collection I. van Kessel.

In a sense, these strong social contacts made up for the weak political and military position of the Dutch. From the beginning, the local and the Dutch authorities developed a system in which the jurisdictions of 'Castle' and 'Town' were clearly delimited, and where official relations were marked by formal and informal negotiations and contracts.

Occasional incidents happened, to be sure, but these did not upset the basic consensus between Dutch and local Africans. The murder of Acting Governor Hoogenboom in 1808, for example, caused remarkably few ripples. Hoogenboom had apparently offended the locals, and when he refused their demand to pay a fine he was attacked and killed while playing billiards in the officers club in town. The Dutch at the time were extremely powerless, as Elmina was isolated from the Netherlands because of the Napoleonic wars. But the point can also be made that the murder was regarded as justifiable in social terms, and for that reason the Dutch did not pursue the matter. In other words, consensus had it that the killing of Hoogenboom was

unfortunate, but better forgotten quickly.

While many Dutchmen adapted reasonably well to local conditions thanks to their integration in African family networks, life could also be lonely and depressing. Life on the Ghana coast was particularly difficult for the ministers of religion who were occasionally dispatched by the WIC. Their mission was confined to ministering to the Europeans and sometimes the Euro-Africans. The Calvinist Dutch showed very little missionary fervour in their overseas possessions. The most tragic example of a Christian minister who could not manage the straddling act between Calvinist morals and African mores is perhaps Rev. Jacobus Capitein, the first African minister at Elmina. The story of his extraordinary career is told in two chapters elsewhere in this book.

Many ordinary men had similar difficulty negotiating the huge cultural gap between Europe and West Africa, and drowned their sorrows in liquor, probably the most common cause of death among Europeans after tropical disease. But, as illustrated in the chapter on Euro-

African women in Elmina, quite a few Europeans on the Coast enjoyed a normal family life.

Specific to Dutch-Ghanaian social relations on the Gold Coast is the way in which both parties used the available judicial systems (Doortmont and Everts 1997). Local families were quite willing to make use of the Dutch administrative system to regulate and agree upon issues like probate or ownership of land. The specific and well circumscribed local customs were happily combined with a system of registration and administration rooted in Dutch law. This worked well because of the system of intercultural negotiation and consensus discussed above. On the other hand, the Dutch authorities fully recognized the local judicial systems and did not hesitate to defer to them.

### **The 19th century: a decaying interest**

For the Dutch presence on the Gold Coast, the 19th century actually started in 1791 with the dissolution of the WIC. The WIC itself had already lost most of its commercial importance several decades before, when the trade monopoly was given up and Dutch private slave traders took over the business. By 1790 the WIC was bankrupt and its possessions were subsequently taken over by the State, which continued the administration more or less unchanged.

By the late 1780s the financial position of the Dutch government in Elmina had become so precarious that the governor felt compelled to appeal to the local merchants to assist the government with huge loans. On the whole, the Elmina merchants reacted sympathetically to this appeal, thereby safeguarding the continuity of the Dutch administration. An eyewitness report for the period between 1802 and 1810 by the Dutch Secretary to the Government during this period, J.A. de Marrée, describes a very pedestrian life in a society which had lost much of its outward looking, cosmopolitan character (De Marrée 1817-1818). Governor Abraham de Veer, who arrived in Elmina in 1810, undertook an attempt at administrative revival. During his

term of office, Elmina was threatened with an attack by the Fanti, which was repelled – causing a renewed sense of solidarity in the Elmina community. Things were not as they were before, however, as a mutiny by the Elmina garrison showed. De Veer was able to suppress it, but it was indicative of the weak state of the Dutch government and diminished mutual understanding between the Dutch and the Gold Coast.

De Veer wrote a report on the desperate state of affairs on the Gold Coast, and the new Dutch king, Willem I, decided to act positively and put forward a large subsidy to ‘stimulate both trade and cultivation’ on the Gold Coast. The area was designated as a free trade area, and the officials were encouraged to set up private businesses to enhance economic development. The king appointed Hendrik Willem Daendels as the new governor. Daendels was a colourful and controversial figure, a leader of the original resistance against the ancien régime in the Netherlands in the 1780s, a former governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, and a general in Emperor Napoleon’s army. His anti-monarchist past was no asset now that the Dutch Republic had been turned into the Kingdom of the Netherlands. For this reason perhaps he was sidelined to the unenviable position of Governor of the Netherlands Possessions on the Coast of Guinea, the new name for the Dutch footholds on the Ghanaian coast.

Daendels’ governorship of the Gold Coast was short but marked by a frenzy of activities. The abolition of the slave trade by the Dutch in 1814, following the British abolition in 1807, forced Daendels to experiment with new types of activities, mainly in the development of plantation agriculture. Daendels started a business of his own on the Gold Coast in which private and public affairs were mixed (Van ‘t Veer 1963; Zappéy 1969). His actions led to complaints from other Dutch officials, who saw their own trading activities hampered by his monopoly. Local Elmina merchants were not happy either. Jan Nieser – formerly an important slave trader – was put out of business by Daendels. One of the

most powerful Euro-African merchants of the period between 1780 and 1820, he was now indeed quite desperate. In 1818, the situation had deteriorated so much for Nieser that he started to wage outright war against the Daendels regime and its Elmina allies, going so far as to ambush Dutch military patrols with his own army of slaves.

Daendels started constructing a modern trade road to Kumasi, after the example of the Post Road he built across Java several years before. In the field of diplomacy, a concerted effort was made to re-affirm the relationship with the Ashanti court by posting a resident representative in Kumasi. All efforts came to nothing, as Daendels died after only two years in Elmina, in May 1818. He succumbed to yellow fever, the great killer of Europeans.

The Dutch government used the opportunity of Daendels' death to minimize the Dutch presence. The number of Dutch officials was limited to a mere handful of men. The subsidy for the upkeep of the possessions was drastically reduced, leading to the reorganization of the garrison (henceforth consisting of local men only), the wholesale dismissal of the government slaves in favour of occasional hired labour, and the 'closure' of most of the forts. For their income, the Dutch officials on the Gold Coast in the 1820s and 1830s had to rely on private trade, which they were allowed to pursue, especially when stationed at one of the outer forts (i.e. outside Elmina). In the mid-1820s the option of leaving the Gold Coast altogether came up in official documents for the first time, and it would remain a political issue until it finally happened in 1872.

During the following decades the form of the Dutch administration was altered several times, mostly in reaction to external events. The most dramatic change came in 1838, when several Dutch officials, including the young, inexperienced acting governor and the military commandant, were killed in Ahanta (near Boutri in the western Gold Coast) in skirmishes with the rebel king of Ahanta. The episode showed the absolute

weakness of the Dutch administration on the Gold Coast. The ministry in the Hague took action and sent an expeditionary force under the command of General J. Verveer, who quickly quashed the Ahanta revolt with the help of local allies. The administration was reorganized and somewhat strengthened. In the same period (1836-1838), Verveer went on a mission to the court of the asantehene in Kumasi to negotiate a contract for the delivery of army recruits to Elmina for military service in the Dutch East Indies (Tengbergen 1839).

In the 1860s, the administration was reorganized in the light of an exchange of properties with the British, leaving the Dutch all British territories to the west of Elmina, and the British all Dutch possessions to the east of Cape Coast. The British in particular regarded the consolidation of their jurisdictions as a way to enforce customs duties and thereby to generate income to cover part of the costs for the British administration.

The exchange of territory caused much political upheaval. The Fanti of the British hinterland, in cooperation with a number of leading British Euro-Africans, set up the Fanti Confederation in 1867, an effort at an independent European type government, to counterpoise the nascent British colonialism in the area. Within the new Dutch territory local populations resisted the exchange, too, especially in British Komenda. Eventually the unrest and revolts led to war, whereby Elmina was beleaguered in April and May 1869 by an African army of over 20,000 men. The Dutch garrison counted less than a hundred men. The threat was repelled with the assistance of local Elmina troops, who sided with the Dutch – as they had done many times before – and a small expeditionary force from the Netherlands that was already present (Van Braam Houckgeest 1870). The exchange of territory became the local stepping stone to the definitive departure of the Dutch in 1872.

In economic terms, the period between 1820 and 1872 was of limited importance for Dutch-Ghanaian relations. The heydays of the slave

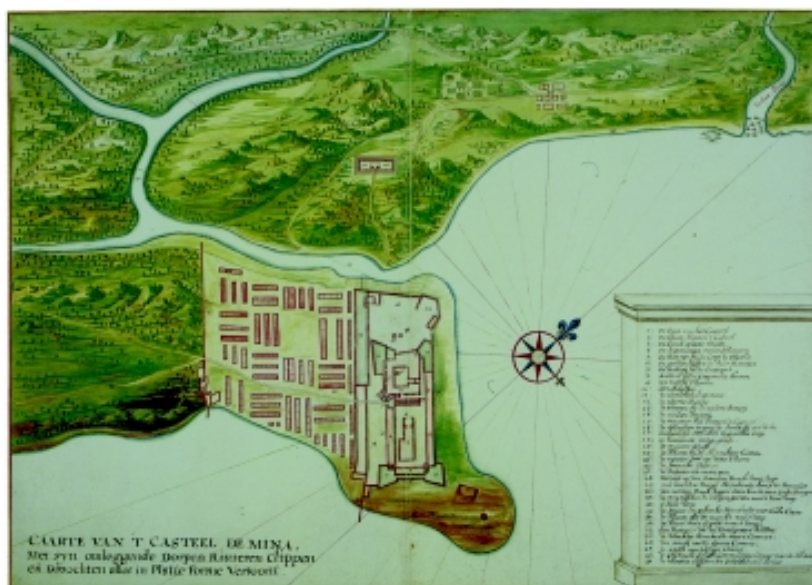


trade were gone, and in the 1820s there was still little to replace this lucrative trade. It would take another decade before the replacement staple of the international West African trade took off: palm oil, used as an all purpose oil (for lubrication, and as a base product for soap, candles and margarine) in the second phase of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and soon afterwards elsewhere in Europe. Apart from palm oil production, the Dutch areas saw a growth in secondary activities such as logging and casket production in the western forest areas, as well as the provision of storage space and transport for the palm oil. From the 1840s onwards, the Rotterdam trading firm of H. van Rijckevorsel & Co. claimed a virtual monopoly on the Dutch trade with the Dutch Gold Coast. The firm normally used the Dutch governor and one or more fort commandants as its local agents to run the trade for them. On the African side, the leading mercantile families of Elmina, Accra and Cape Coast increasingly came to dominate the commercial activities along the coast. The importance of Britain became such that many Elmina families sent their children to school in Cape Coast, and by the 1850s English was being used as the commercial *lingua franca*.

Efforts to make the possessions on the Guinea Coast commercially viable failed miserably. The only successful enterprise the Dutch government set up was the recruitment of soldiers for the Netherlands East Indies army, a venture that is discussed elsewhere in this book. For a while the recruitment of soldiers was a reason to hold on to the possessions on the Gold Coast. The costs of the recruitment operation were covered by the budget of the Netherlands East Indies government, which thereby in effect subsidized the Netherlands Possessions on the Gold Coast.

### Departure and after

The final departure of the Dutch from the Gold Coast in 1872 cannot, in retrospect, be regarded as a surprise. The Danish had sold their possessions to the British in 1850, leaving the Netherlands and Great Britain as the only European



powers. At that time both had limited colonial aspirations in West Africa, but there was a genuine wish on both sides to work towards closer cooperation. By 1867 the two governments had decided that an exchange of territories was the answer to the modernization question. When implemented, however, the measure caused an earthquake in the otherwise so peaceful and sedate relations between European and African authorities. The British community at Komenda declared itself the arch-enemy of the Dutch, and the government of Elmina showed strong resentment about the exchange, supported by the Ashanti, who witnessed the status quo of their relationship with the coast being upset (in a period when Ashanti-British relations were already extremely bad).

Soon afterwards, the government in The Hague decided to abandon its modest 'Possessions on the Coast of Guinea', which were increasingly regarded as a financial burden and certainly not worth a colonial war. Efforts by the Elmina government, who even sent a mission to the Netherlands to object to the proposed transfer, were to no avail. Eventually, the Dutch – rather suddenly – signed over the Gold Coast to the British on 6 April 1872. The Elmina authorities and population felt deserted, and riots broke out in the town. The town divided into two camps, one pro-British, one anti-British. Less than

*Map of Elmina from Vingboons Atlas (1660)*

KIT Library, Amsterdam RF-202.

## West Africa's Favourite



Favourite wherever people prefer the genuine Dutch Schnapps. Ask for Henkes' - see the name and signature on bottle and label.

**J. H. HENKES**  
**AROMATIC**  
**SCHNAPPS**

**Holland's Best!**

*Schiedam schnapps still ranks prominently among Dutch merchandise.*

*By courtesy of Henkes/Bols Distilleries.*

a month after the handover, the chairman of the Commission for the Transfer of the Netherlands possessions to Great Britain, Lieutenant Joost, was killed in the streets of Elmina. Later the same year, the king of Elmina and some of his chiefs revolted openly, with the assistance of the Ashanti, and moved into the bush. To quash the revolt, the British eventually bombed and burned the old town in June 1873, leaving it in ruins. It would take more than a decade before Elmina was rebuilt in a different spot. In the meantime, the king, Kobina Gyan, a faithful supporter of the Dutch government, was sent into exile to Sierra Leone, only allowed back to Elmina some 22 years later.

To sweeten the loss of the Gold Coast possessions for the Dutch parliament, where a majority initially opposed giving something away free to the British, the Dutch government pretended that it had made a good deal. To placate Dutch public

opinion, the government tabled three treaties with Britain at the same time, pretending that Dutch interests in the Netherlands East Indies and Suriname benefited from the transfer of the Gold Coast to Britain. The Sumatra Treaty gave the Dutch a free hand in northern Sumatra, including Atjeh (Aceh). The so-called Coolie Treaty entitled the Dutch to recruit cheap Indian contract labourers for the plantations of Suriname, replacing the former African slaves. For its part, the British government had made it clear that it would not give anything in exchange for a series of derelict forts and some dubious claims to territorial jurisdiction. London did, however, pay the modest amount of 46,939 Dutch guilders and 62 cents for the buildings and equipment left behind by the Dutch (Mollema 1954).

Some Dutch merchants, who saw the departure as a lost opportunity for Dutch trade, briefly established trading firms in Elmina in the 1870s and 1890s, but with limited success. From around 1900, the Dutch presence in Elmina was taken over by a succession of Dutch priests and nuns working in the Roman Catholic Mission established there initially by two French priests in 1880. Only in the 1920s and afterwards did Dutch business return in force to the Gold Coast, with well-known firms like Bols ('Schiedam schnapps') and Vlisco ('Real Dutch wax prints'), the Holland-West Africa Line (shipping), KLM and many smaller firms.

After 1872, the Dutch government kept up a consular and diplomatic presence on the Gold Coast. The Department of Colonies needed some kind of representation to pay out the pensions of former local personnel, as well as those of returned veterans from the East Indies. After a succession of various consuls based in Elmina, Cape Coast and finally Accra, the Dutch government again decided to have full-fledged diplomatic representation with the independent Republic of Ghana: in 1961, the newly established Royal Netherlands Embassy in Accra opened its doors.

## Conclusion

In 1612, the States General of the United Dutch Provinces concluded a treaty with the king of Asebu, creating a foothold and a military alliance on the Gold Coast and thus beginning their political and economic involvement with the coastal area of what is now Ghana. Ninety years later, David van Nyendael inaugurated a long-lasting relationship of trade and diplomacy with Ashanti, the major power in the hinterland. Trade was indeed central to Dutch-Ghanaian relations. Sometimes it was honourable business, for a long period less honourable and even immoral – the period of the Atlantic slave trade – but it was always a relationship of equals, looking for the best bargain and highest quality product for their specific market. The coastal settlements of various European nations acted as focal points for the development of towns with an urban and outward-looking culture in which African and Europeans lived together on an equal footing doing business together, negotiating big and small issues, intermarrying and producing offspring. Despite the period of British colonial rule, which followed the departure of the Dutch in 1872, the Dutch-Ghanaian relations are still vivid and worth commemorating.

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## 2. Merchants, middlemen and monarchs

### *Dutch and Ghanaians in the Atlantic slave trade*

#### **Introduction**

The history of Ghana cannot be told without reference to the Dutch, who are known in Ghana to have been the first European power to challenge Portugal on the Ghanaian coast from the 1590s onwards. Before then the Portuguese, who first arrived on the Ghanaian coast in 1471, had enjoyed a monopoly of trade for one whole century. The establishment of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in 1621 enabled the Dutch to intensify their trading activities on the Ghanaian coast. The Dutch built small forts at Mouree, Butri, Kormantin, Kommenda and Fort Dumas on the Ankobra river. In 1637 the Dutch captured the Elmina Castle from the Portuguese. Five years later, they captured the Portuguese Forts at Axim and Beyin. The Portuguese lost all their major forts to the Dutch. In 1664 the Dutch took Cape Coast Lodge from the Swedes but lost it a year later to the British. The Dutch came to possess over 24 forts and castles in Ghana, through conquest of other forts and castles and through building some of their own. These forts and castles stretched from Axim in the west to Keta in the east, an area covering virtually the whole 300-mile coastline. The Dutch became the strongest European power not only on the Ghana Coast but also the whole of the Guinea (i.e. West African) Coast. It was from these forts and castles that the Dutch traded with the people of Ghana. The making of the Atlantic world from the 16th to the 19th centuries by Ghana and the Dutch was made possible through trade. In 1611 the directors of the Guinea Company, a precursor of the WIC, stated that 'the trade in Guinea is of the highest importance to the country'.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The nature of trade from the 16th to the mid-17th century**

From the 16th to the mid-17th century, Ghana provided gold, ivory and gum to the Dutch in exchange for European goods like provisions, liquor, cloth, guns and gunpowder, and metals like copper, tin and iron. Archaeological evidence indicates that Ghana has had a long tradition of gold mining. There were ancient gold mining areas in Ghana, which enabled Ghana to take part in the trans-Saharan trade from the 4th century A.D. until the early 19th century. Garrand has estimated that between 1400 and 1900 the Akan of Ghana produced a total of about 14 million ounces (400 million grams) of gold by traditional methods and that an average of 40,000 miners may have been at work each year when the gold trade was at its height in the 17th century. Of the gold produced, roughly one-third was carried across the Sahara and two-thirds traded with Europeans on the coast of Ghana (Anquandah 1982: 41). No wonder the Portuguese called Ghana the 'Gold Coast'. Dutch documents stress in no uncertain terms the importance of gold in their trade with Ghana during this period. Postma relates that during the early decades of the 17th century, Dutch involvement in the Atlantic slave trade was limited to an occasional capture of a foreign slave ship (Inikori and Engerman). Uncertain about the value of the captured cargo, Dutch captains apparently disposed of the slaves in a haphazard manner. In 1619 for example, a Dutch warship landed 20 slaves at the young English settlement at Jamestown, in present-day Accra, in return for needed food supplies. The Dutch did not understand the commercial potential of the Atlantic slave trade until they established their own plantation settlement in the Americas.

#### **Akosua Perbi**

*University of Ghana,  
Legon*

*Page 32:  
'Gate of no return' at  
the Gold Coast. Slave  
ships departed from  
here.*

*KIT Kindermuseum.*

1. Document entitled 'Jovis, 25 August 1611' in Dutch Records 1610, Resolutions of the States General, kept at the Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon.

2. 'Short Memoir on Trade within the present limitations of the Charter of the WIC 1670', in Dutch documents relating to the Gold Coast 1680-1740, Part I, compiled from The Hague, Netherlands by A. Van Dantzig, Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon.
3. Dutch Documents, Part I. W. De la Palma to Assembly of Ten, 31 August 1704.
4. *Ibid.*, letter dated 5 Sept. 1705.
5. Dutch Documents, Part II. W.I.C. no. 596. February 1730.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Dutch Documents, Part I., WIC 180 Van Hoolwerff to Assembly of Ten, 14 August 1688.
8. Dutch Documents, Part I, W.I.C. 180, Valentyn Gros to Chamber Amsterdam 7 August 1691.
9. Dutch Documents, Part I, W.I.C. 97, Van Seven-huysen to Assembly of Ten, Elmina, 8 May 1699.

The catalyst for the Dutch slave trade was the acquisition of northern Brazil in 1630. This action prompted the Dutch to get more deeply involved in the slave trade. The slave trade to Brazil was brief but intense. In a little more than a decade more than 26,000 slaves were landed in New Holland, as the Dutch called their Brazilian colony. The trade reached its peak in 1644 when more than 5,000 slaves were disembarked. When the Portuguese reconquered northern Brazil during the late 1640s, the Dutch lost their one and only slave market, and their participation in the trade declined. But having acquired experience and a taste for profits from the trade, they soon found other outlets. They supplied the Spanish American colonies, the French Caribbean islands and the colony of Suriname, founded by the British in 1651. In 1667, the Dutch acquired Suriname from the British through diplomatic means and the colony became its largest market, accounting for nearly 47 per cent of the Dutch slave trade. This was followed by the Spanish colonies with about 31 per cent, while the settlements in Guyana absorbed 9 per cent of the slaves carried by the Dutch (Inikori and Engerman 1992: 283-285 and 287-288).

### **The nature of trade from the mid-17th to the early 19th century**

From the mid-17th to the early 19th century the Dutch became active participants in the slave trade. The trade in gold with Ghana was eclipsed by the slave trade. The Ghanaian historian Daaku laments that between 1642 and 1650 the Gold Coast, which had been a gold mine both literally and figuratively for the Europeans, now became a 'slave mine' for virtually the whole of Western Europe (Daaku 1970: 15).

In 1670 the Dutch merchants on the Guinea Coast sent a memorandum to the West India Company showing the contribution of each of the forts and castles along the West African coast to the slave trade. They indicated that the slave trade was of 'great importance.'<sup>2</sup> In this period the WIC practised a division of labour: slaves were obtained mainly from the Slave Coast

(present-day Republic of Benin to the Cameroons), Congo and Angola, while on the Gold Coast gold was the most coveted product. This was to change after 1700 with the emergence of Ashanti as a major power in the interior. While Director-General Van Sevenhuijsen had sent his envoy Van Nyendael to Kumasi in the hope of reviving the gold trade, which had stagnated because of war, his successor Willem de la Palma decided to concentrate his efforts on the slave trade. In 1704, De la Palma, then the Director General in Elmina, wrote to the Assembly of Ten and stated, 'The slave trade is considered by us as the unique cornerstone of Your Highness' interest and that Your Highness should be persuaded that apart from that nothing could be found which could render the Noble Company happy.'<sup>3</sup> A year later De la Palma had this to say: 'Concerning the trade on the coast, we notified Your Highness already that it has completely changed into a slave coast, and that the natives nowadays no longer occupy themselves with the search for gold, but rather make war on each other in order to furnish slaves.'<sup>4</sup>

In 1730 a report to the West India Company on the trade in Ghana indicated that the WIC would pay private traders the following prices for slaves:<sup>5</sup>

- A good male slave from the Gold Coast fl. 70
- A good female slave from the Gold Coast fl. 56
- A good male slave from Fida or Jaquyn fl. 50
- A good female slave from Fida or Jaquyn fl. 60
- A good male slave from Angola fl. 60
- A good female slave from Angola fl. 55

In the report it was further noted that 'in the first place it should be observed that that part of Africa which as of old is known as the 'Gold Coast' because of the great quantity of gold which was at one time purchased there by the Company as well as by Dutch private ships, has now virtually changed into a pure Slave Coast'.<sup>6</sup> It appears from the price list of slaves given above that male slaves from Ghana fetched the highest price along the West and Central African coast. Documents on Ghana relate that the



Ghanaians were hardworking, responsible and malleable. Female slaves from Ghana, but also from Africa in general, did not fetch higher prices than the male slaves. Recent literature asserts that a higher premium was put on female slaves in Africa than those sold in the Atlantic trade because female slaves in the indigenous trade were prized for their sexuality as well as their reproductive and economically productive roles. Daaku observes that in the 1700s, the Dutch exported 6,000 slaves annually from the West African coast. Large numbers of slaves were obtained from the Slave Coast (Daaku 1970: 19 and 46). Isaac van Hoolwerff, WIC merchant based in Offra on the Slave Coast, told the West India Company on 14 August 1688 that he had dispatched a ship called Gideon with a cargo of 482 slaves, 330 of whom were men and 152 women.<sup>7</sup> A year earlier they had bought 300

slaves. In 1691, his successor in Offra, Valentyn Gros, reported to the Chamber in Amsterdam that the slave trade was thriving and that King Abangla of Allada had sold more than 9,000 slaves to the Dutch as well as to the English, the Brandenburgers and Portuguese over the last eight or nine months.<sup>8</sup> But around 1700, Dutch settlements on the Gold Coast also became more involved in the slave trade. In May 1699 Director General Van Sevenhuysen reported that trade at Kpone on the Ghana Coast was going very well. They had ‘very good slaves and abundant gold.’<sup>9</sup> In August, he reported that the slave trade had been prosperous in Ghana as well as at Fida on the Slave Coast. In April 1700 he again reported that apart from the Dutch there were 35 sailing ships at the Brandenburg Fort and 80 ships from England, Jamaica and Barbados participating in the slave and gold trade.

*A sugarmill in Dutch Brazil (1624-1654). Pen and ink drawing by Frans Post. Stichting Atlas van Stolk, suppl. 1600-1650, Rotterdam.*

10. *Ibid.*, 25 August 1699; Elmina, 21 June 1700; De la Palma, 31 Aug. 1704; W.I.C. 98 Elmina, 13 Nov. 1705.  
11. Dutch Documents, Part II, NBKG 33, dated 9 September 1733 and 29 October 1734; NBKG 105, 28 March 1742.

In 1704 Director General De la Palma assured the Assembly of Ten that he could supply them with at least 6,000 slaves annually from the Ghana and Benin coasts. A year later Director General Pieter Nuyts reported that the slave trade on the Ghana coast was very favourable. The ships *Peaynburgh* and *Christina* both got their loads of 348 and 548 slaves within two months from Apam, Breku and Accra.<sup>10</sup> In 1733 the Dutch merchant stationed at Apam encouraged the Company to build a fort there. He asserted that he would be able to supply 2,500 slaves every year, mainly from Apam but also from Elmina and other places on the coast. In 1742, Tema was also mentioned as a place where slaves could be bought.<sup>11</sup> The goods that the Dutch traders on the Gold Coast exchanged for slaves remained the same from the 16th to the mid-17th century, although the Dutch traders complained about frequent changes in Ghanaian tastes with respect to textiles, guns, etc.

### **Sources of slave supply**

The slaves were supplied to the Dutch by Ghanaian traders through five major means: warfare, market supply, raids and kidnapping, tribute and pawning. Prisoners of war were enslaved, and they constituted a large proportion of the total slave output. The greatest suppliers were the strong monarchical states in the north and south of Ghana. The importance of warfare in the slave trade was stressed by several European traders who came to Ghana to trade. In the late 1600s for example, the French trader Barbot related that when the inland countries were at peace there were no slaves available on the coast, but whenever there was a war, it was possible to get 400-500 slaves in a fortnight or three weeks. In the early 1700s, the Dutch trader Bosman disclosed that 'most of the slaves that are offered to us are prisoners of war which are sold by the victors as their booty'. He asserted that the chief occupations in Ghana were commerce, agriculture and warfare. In 1874 the English trader Gordon revealed that prisoners of war constituted the largest proportion of all the slaves

exported from the coast (Barbot 1732: 155-6, 186, and 270; Bosman 1705: 69-70 and 183; Gordon 1874: 24).

There were numerous slave markets scattered across the length and breadth of Ghana, which Ghanaians had access to. From oral and documentary data collected, I identified about 33 inland markets in Ghana. There were also three markets outside the boundaries of modern Ghana. Modern Burkina Faso oral tradition mentions the Ouagadougou market. In modern La Cote d'Ivoire the Buna and Bonduku markets were important for slaves. In the modern Upper East, Upper West and Northern regions of modern Ghana there were four slave markets: Salaga, Yendi, Bole and Wa. Salaga was the most famous of the markets, not only in those regions but also in the whole of Ghana. In every region of Ghana where research was conducted, Salaga market was always mentioned as the first and most important. In what is today the Brong Ahafo and Asante regions there were five notable slave markets at Kintampo, Atebubu, Bono Manso, Begho and Sampa. In the Volta region tradition describes the middle of the Volta and the northern areas as rich in slaves and points to Kete Krachi as the most famous inland market in the region. On the Volta coast Keta was an important market during the period of the Atlantic slave trade. There were nine markets in the Greater Accra and eastern regions, five markets in the Central Region and three markets in the Western Region. When the Atlantic slave trade was introduced in Ghana, all the European castles, forts and lodges on the coast and virtually every coastal town from Assini in the west to Keta in the east developed a slave market either around the fort or in the town. The coastal markets numbered about 30. All the inland and the known coastal markets numbered 63. If one adds the three markets outside modern Ghana, then the grand total of markets would be 66. The markets were supplied with slaves acquired through warfare, raids and kidnapping, tribute and from the personal stocks of individual and professional traders.

Raids and kidnapping contributed their quota



to the slave supply. Towards the end of the 17th century and in the first few decades of the 18th, slave raiding and kidnapping became an established occupation among the Akwamu, Akyem, Kwahu, Krepi and Fante in the southern parts of Ghana and among all the major ethnic groups in the northern part of the country. In the northern region, the Dagbon people raided the Dagarti, Grushi, Kanjarga, Frafra, Kusasi and Lobi peoples. Tribute paid by conquered states to the victor was also an important source of slaves. The Ashanti kingdom, for example, demanded an annual tribute of between 600 and 1,000 slaves from Salaga and between 1,000 and 2,000 from the Dagbon.

Pawning was basically the act of offering a person as security for money borrowed. The pawn became a pledge, a mortgage or security for what a person owed. The pawn worked for the creditor, who fed and clothed him/her until the debt was paid. Pawning was not slavery, but pawns who were not redeemed found themselves enslaved. In 1751 the Dutch were asked by one of their soldiers to free his mother, who had originally been pawned but had been sold as a slave and was being held in the Elmina Castle (Feinberg

1969: 226). Christian records that among the Akwamu, men and women who owed debts were sold into slavery during the 17th and 18th centuries to recover the debts (Christian 1974).

### Organisation of the slave trade

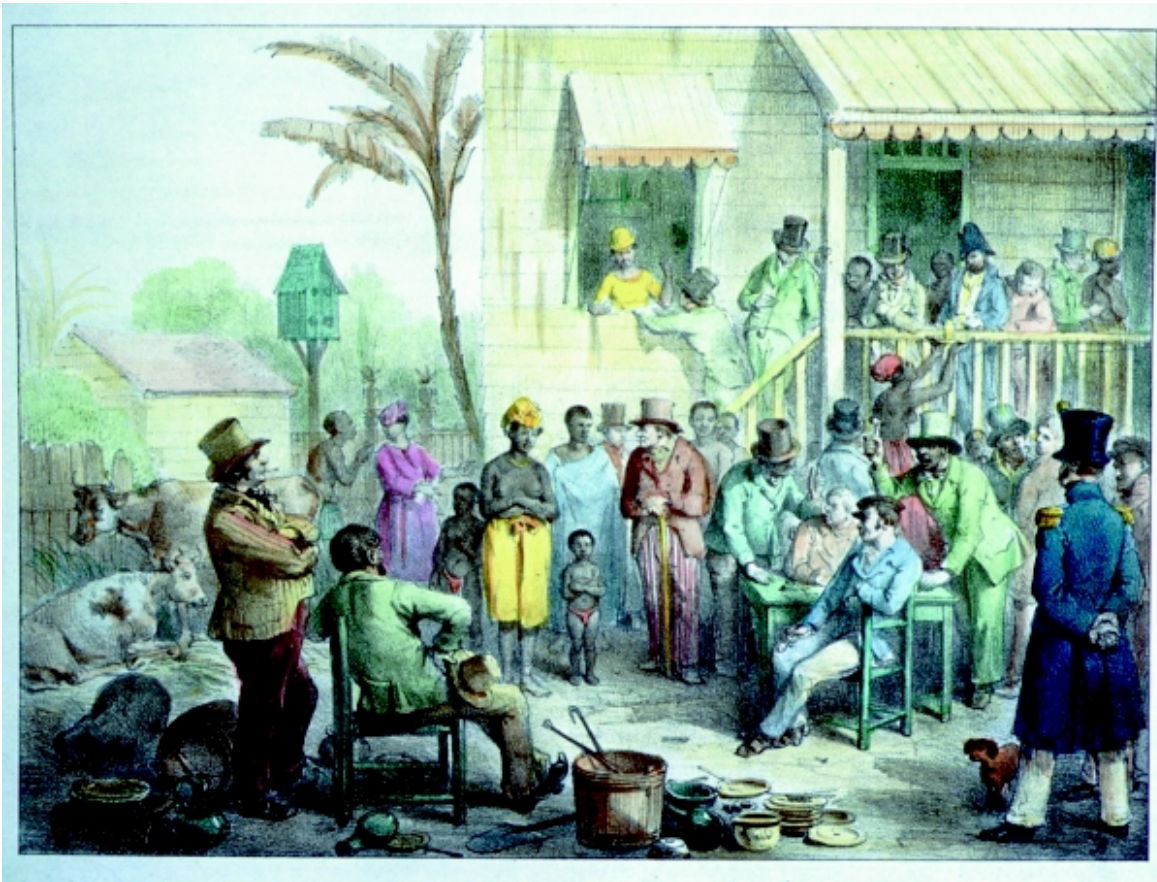
Ghana's social and political organization was such that every Ghanaian was free to engage in the slave trade. Consequently there was both private and official participation in the trade. With respect to private participation anyone who had the means could go to any of the inland slave markets to purchase slaves. Individuals could also sell their pawns. Official participation involved the kings and chiefs. They usually had officials who traded on their behalf. Since warfare, raids, kidnapping and tribute paying were state decisions, slaves from these sources were often supplied by official traders.

Private and official traders marched their slaves down to the coast where the Dutch forts and castles were stationed. The slaves were sorted out according to their sex and age, priced and exchanged for Dutch goods. After the slaves had changed hands from the Ghanaian private and official dealers to the Dutch merchants, they

*Canoes with slaves and merchants on the Guinea Coast. Engraving from Barbot on Guinea: the writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712, part 2, P. E. Hedley (red), London 1992.*

KIT Library E 1060-175/176.





*Female slave being sold on a Suriname slave market. Plate 89 from P.J. Benoit, Voyage à Surinam, 1839.*

KIT Library RF-29.

were kept in the forts and castles for transportation across the Atlantic.

### **The benefits of the slave trade**

The records indicate that both Ghana and the Dutch benefited immensely from the slave trade. Traders' memoirs, Company records, travellers' accounts and oral tradition indicate huge profits from the trade. The Asantehene Osei Bonsu testified to the profitability of the slave trade during the visits of British envoys Bowdich and Dupuis to his kingdom in 1817 and 1820 respectively. He also stated that the Atlantic trade provided a ready outlet for a redundant slave population. The trade enabled the Ashanti kingdom to control and regulate the size of the domestic slave population. It became Ashanti policy not to allow slaves to outgrow the free population for fear that they would take over the kingdom.

As far as Ghana is concerned it is difficult to get any trade records from the chiefs' palaces or from individual households. All that oral tradition tells

us is that both the state and individuals benefited immensely from the trade. This was reflected in the way in which various families put up several houses and lived a wealthy kind of life.

Economic historians such as Inikori and Engerman relate that there is general agreement in the literature on the costs and benefits of the Atlantic trade for Africa: those who raided and took captives and the African traders who bought and sold captives all realized private gains. The export centres on the African coast benefited economically and demographically from the trade. They also point out that it is useful when looking at the effects of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa to distinguish between private/personal gains and social gains ( Inikori and Engerman 1992: 2).

### **Negative effects on Ghana**

The slave trade increased the incidence of warfare in Ghana. Slave raiding and kidnapping created a state of insecurity, panic and fear. Large areas of land were desolated and depopulated as

a result of wars and raids. The slave trade marred family ties and social relationships. It corrupted the administration of justice because victims of court cases were sold into slavery instead of being asked to pay fines, as was the traditional practice. The trade retarded economic development because it affected the section of the population which was biologically and economically most active and productive.

### **Abolition**

The Atlantic slave trade was abolished by the Netherlands in 1814, seven years after Britain had passed its abolition law and nine years after Denmark had passed its abolition law. This was because before 1814 the Netherlands was under French occupation. It took awhile, though, for the trade to grind to a complete halt. Ghana participated in what became known as 'legitimate' trade. Ghana turned its attention from slaves to the production of export crops like cocoa, palm oil, rubber and timber. The mining industry was revitalized and the traditional mineral – gold – reassumed its importance. In addition to gold, manganese, bauxite and diamonds were also mined. On 17 February 1872, the Dutch government ratified the transfer of all their possessions and rights on the coast of Guinea to Great Britain.

### **Conclusion**

Ghana and the Dutch made significant and important contributions to the shaping and the making of the Atlantic world from the 16th to the 19th centuries through the medium of trade, in which they were equal partners. Initially it was the gold trade that attracted the Dutch, as it attracted all the other Europeans to the Ghana coast. For almost one and a half centuries gold dominated the trade. From the middle of the 17th century onwards, the demand for slaves in the New World turned the scales. Ghana and the Dutch responded to this demand and shifted from gold to slaves. This was such a dramatic change that some Dutch merchants found it appropriate to label the Gold Coast as part of the 'Slave Coast', a view also supported by other

European traders. In the 1720s, for example, a British trader named William Smith came to Ghana to trade because he had heard of the fame of Ghanaian gold. He was disappointed to find that gold was no longer important, but slaves. He exclaimed in exasperation "Why this is called the Gold Coast I know not!" (Smith 1744: 138)

The Dutch merchants waited on the coast in their forts and castles while the Ghanaian traders supplied slaves from five major sources: warfare, markets, raids and kidnapping, tribute and pawning. The organisation of the slave trade inland was in the hands of Ghanaians, who then sent the slaves down to the coast where the Dutch merchants liaised with them in sorting out the slaves and pricing them according to their age and sex. The organisation of the slaves on the coast, specifically in the forts and castles, and their shipment and disposal across the Atlantic Ocean was the responsibility of the Dutch. There is no shadow of doubt that although Ghana suffered some negative consequences from the slave trade, both Ghana and the Dutch benefited immensely from the trade.

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# 3. David van Nyendael

## *The first European envoy to the court of Ashanti, 1701-1702*

### Introduction

Some years ago, the Dutch student Pieter van Grunsven discovered the diary of David van Nyendael in the Musée de la Marine in the southern French port of Marseilles. The diary, which was mentioned in Willem Bosman's *Nauwkeurige Beschryving van de Guinese Goud-, Tand- en Slavekust of 1704 (A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, London 1705)*, but was thought to be long lost, proved to contain a very valuable eye-witness account of the Ashanti kingdom. David van Nyendael was the first, and for many years the only, European to visit this West African kingdom. What this student uncovered is something which anthropologists and historians concerned with West Africa only dare dream about. Van Nyendael's journal is comparable to the accounts of important nineteenth-century explorers such as Cameron, Speke and Burton. But alas, those who wish to consult Van Nyendael's journal must, as before, restrict themselves to dreams, because the student Pieter van Grunsven exists only on paper. He is one of the main characters in *Een verre moordenaar (A Distant Murderer)*, a thriller by Dutch television maker and author Aad van den Heuvel published in 1998. The fact that Van den Heuvel chose the document by David van Nyendael as the starting point for his thriller demonstrates that the writer of this vanished diary is still a figure who speaks to the imagination. Unfortunately, very little is known about this, the first European traveller to Ashanti. Who was David Van Nyendael, why did he undertake an extremely hazardous trip to the then unknown Ashanti kingdom in the early eighteenth century, and what did his journey ultimately achieve? These three questions form the basis for this chapter about the first European contact with the Ashanti kingdom.

### Changes on the Gold Coast

Before sketching the youth and career of David Van Nyendael, the reason for his journey will be explored. It is not entirely coincidental that it was made in 1701, in the middle of a period of great political and economic change on Gold Coast. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had founded a settlement in this coastal region in connection with the lucrative gold trade with West African states in the interior. They dubbed the region the 'Gold Coast', a name which remained in use until the independence of Ghana in 1957. In the first half of the seventeenth century, however, the Portuguese were driven out of the Gold Coast by the Dutch. Control of the Dutch settlements and trade there passed into the hands of the West India Company (WIC). For the Dutch, too, gold was the most important product to be exported from the coastal region to Europe. The trade in other African products and in slaves accounted for only a modest portion of the overall trade conducted on the Gold Coast. Until the early eighteenth century, the Dutch drew their slaves mainly from the Slave Coast (modern-day Togo and Benin) and the Loango-Angolan coast. The power of the WIC in West Africa did not extend much beyond the range of its canons. As a result, the Dutch were heavily dependent on military-political relations along the coast for the success of their trading ventures. The Company was involved with the various states or political units on the Gold Coast in two different ways. Firstly, there were the small coastal states from which the WIC had to operate. In order to be able to establish and maintain trading posts there, it was essential to have good relations with local rulers. In addition, the Company had to take account of the states in the interior, which not only supplied the gold but

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*Page 40: Popular  
characters from the  
Gold Coast (17th  
century) as depicted in  
J. Barbot, Description of  
the Coast of North and  
South Guinea, London  
1735.*



also controlled the trade flows to and from the coast. Conflicts or wars between states could disrupt trade, as the Dutch found time and again. However, in the seventeenth century, the states of the Gold Coast and the interior were small, which meant that wars were usually limited in their duration and extent. Finally, the WIC had dealings with merchants who brought products and slaves to the coast from the interior. On the Gold Coast, trade was dominated by a group of professional merchants, known as Akanists, until the end of the seventeenth century. In particular, these merchants, who were based in the Pra-Ofin region, controlled the gold trade.<sup>1</sup>

The Dutch mainly had contacts with the states in the coastal region. Their knowledge of the kingdoms of the interior was limited. Contacts were generally restricted to the sending of gifts in order to keep trade routes open and to obtain military support against enemy states. However, the European members of the WIC's staff never travelled inland themselves. Contacts with states beyond the coast were maintained by African employees or allies. The management of the Company in Elmina, the power base headquarters of the Dutch on the Gold Coast, were aware that they were dependent on the states of the interior for the supply of products and slaves. But the hinterland was terra incognita to the Dutch. This explains why, until the end of the seventeenth century, they had no knowledge of the rise of new states which would drastically alter the balance of power on the Gold Coast from the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The first new state with which the WIC was confronted was the Denkyira kingdom. The name of this state first appears in source material at the end of the seventeenth century. Within a short space of time, Denkyira managed to grow into a major power which the Dutch could not ignore. Willem Bosman describes how Denkyira managed to subjugate a number of surrounding kingdoms around 1690. Among them were Wassa, Encasser and Twifo, small states within which gold was mined.<sup>2</sup> The Company quickly recognised the important position of Denkyira

and maintained good contacts with the new power. This was indeed essential, since Denkyira controlled a significant part of the supply of gold to the coast.<sup>3</sup> Their good relations were underlined by the supply of weapons worth a hundred benda of gold (6500 guilders) to Denkyira in 1697. This was not an entirely selfless act, since the weapons were used against the coastal state of Komenda with which the WIC had been on a war footing for some years.<sup>4</sup> It was convenient for the Company that, in addition to securing the gold trade, this action served to settle a score with an old enemy. However, Denkyira soon began to abuse its position as a regional power and to oppress the populations of surrounding states and treat them as slaves. According to Willem Bosman, Denkyira's leaders were 'difficult devils to deal with'. As a result of such power politics, the number of conflicts and wars in the interior grew, which led to a drastic reduction in the supply of gold to WIC settlements on the coast.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, the management in Elmina strove for an end to the conflicts, in order that the gold trade could be restored, but it had few resources to impose a peace.

Soon after the Company had supplied weapons to Denkyira and was negotiating with various states in the coastal region for an end to the conflict, a major new power rose up in the interior, whose name had not previously appeared in the sources: the kingdom of Ashanti. The existence of Ashanti is first mentioned in a letter from director-general Joan van Sevenhuijsen to the directors of the Company in the Dutch Republic in March 1699.<sup>6</sup> At that time, Ashanti had already been at war with Denkyira for some time. According to Willem Bosman, hostilities had begun after Bosianté, the king of Denkyira, had molested one of the wives of asantehene Osei Tutu, the king of Ashanti. Bosianté had previously sent several of his own wives to the asantehene as a mark of respect. 'In order to show his pleasure at this consignment, and to accord the same honour to the leader of Denkyira, [Osei Tutu] similarly sent some of his women.' But Bosianté's eye had fallen on one of

1. Van Dantzig 1990: 205-216.

2. Bosman 1704: 73-74.

3. ARA: WIC 124, Resolution of 24 November 1693.

4. ARA: WIC 122, *Akkoord met de braffo en caboceers van Fante* (Agreement with the braffo and headmen of Fante), 15 August 1697; NBKG 233, Orders for David van Nyendael, 9 October 1701.

5. Bosman 1704: 75-78; Den Heijer 1997: 129 table 5.8.

6. ARA: WIC 97, J. van Sevenhuijsen to directors, 1 March 1699.

The asantehene-elect Otumfuo Osei Tutu II at the commencement of the installation rites. He is a lineal descendant of Osei Tutu I, the Ashanti king at whose court envoy David van Nyendael lived from 1701-1702.

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them, whom he 'abused to his own ends'.<sup>7</sup> The insult described by Bosman may indeed have been the immediate cause of the conflict, but the deeper cause lies in the struggle for military and economic hegemony over the interior. Initially, it was unclear what the outcome of this conflict would be.

The state of war in the interior had serious consequences for the Company's trade. The already modest supply of gold since the conflicts with Komenda reached a low point in 1701. In that year, the WIC exported only 530 marks of gold (approximately 120 kg).<sup>8</sup> By then it was becoming clear that Denkyira was losing the war. In the spring of 1701, director-general Van Sevenhuijsen was hoping for a rapid victory for Ashanti, in order for trade to recover.<sup>9</sup> His wish was granted, because at the end of that year, Denkyira suffered a catastrophic defeat. But this did not signal a restoration of trade. In order to achieve that aim, Van Sevenhuijsen sent an envoy to the capital of Ashanti. In November 1701, sub-factor David van Nyendael, who had volunteered for the mission, left for Kumasi. There he was to congratulate the leader of the new power, Osei

Tutu, referred to in company sources as *Great Zaay*, on his victory and honour him with gifts. The most important objective of his trip was to establish trade relations with Ashanti. But who exactly was the man who had taken this task upon himself?

### The youth and career of David Van Nyendael

David Van Nyendael must have been a man with an adventurous disposition. That, at least, was the opinion of Willem de la Palma, the successor to director-general Joan van Sevenhuijsen and, in that capacity, Van Nyendael's most senior superior in Elmina.<sup>10</sup> That disposition would explain why Van Nyendael volunteered for the dangerous mission to Kumasi. David's appetite for travel and discovery of unknown cultures must have originated in his youth, which he spent in India. His father, Jan van Nyendael, had arrived on the Coromandel coast of India as a young man in 1655 on board the Dutch East India Company (VOC) ship *Amersfoort*. He had joined the VOC as a *hooploper*, an apprentice sailor and must have been between sixteen and eighteen years old at

7. ARA: VWIS 928, *Memorie van ingehandelde retourwaren* (Statement of returned goods\*).

8. Bosman 1704: 76.

9. ARA: WIC 97, J. van Sevenhuijsen to directors, 30 May 1701.

10. ARA: WIC 98, W. de la Palma to D. van Nyendael, 18 July 1702.

the time of his arrival in India. Jan van Nyendael did not return to the Republic, but took up the post of scribe at a trading post at Palakollu, where he carried out clerical work for several years to the full satisfaction of his superiors. In May 1661, he was promoted and appointed merchant in the recently opened factory (trading station) in Golkonda.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, his talent for languages – Jan Van Nyendael spoke Portuguese, Hindi, Persian and a local language – contributed to his appointment. Until his death in 1682, he lived and worked at this trading post, located approximately three hundred kilometres from the coast, for the last 6½ years as ‘chief factor’. While in India, Jan Van Nyendael married one Barbara de Wit who, in spite of her name, must have been of Indian extraction. Such unions were not uncommon, since many company servants in Asia married native women; certainly those who belonged to the lower and middle ranks.<sup>12</sup> Jan van Nyendael would not have been in a position to marry a European woman. As far as is known, the couple had three children, Anna, David and Johannes. Jan Van Nyendael was a helpful and generous man, to the point that ‘he actually harmed himself and did not secure the best for his children, as became clear after his death in the bequest of his property.’ However, that did not make him a bad father. Anna was Jan and Barbara’s eldest child. She married Daniël Havart on 19 June 1681, who at that time was working under Jan Van Nyendael in Golkonda as a cashier and warehouse employee.<sup>13</sup> Anna’s husband, who must have studied medicine before his departure for India, worked his way up to become a doctor and later managed to establish himself as such in the Republic. The couple had a daughter named Elisabeth on 18 January 1685 who died two days after her birth. Anna herself died a year and a half later, on 6 July 1686, on board a company ship bound for Batavia. From there, Anna and her husband were to leave for the Republic. Daniël Havart’s name will appear again as the executor of David Van Nyendael’s will and as the writer of the foreword to Willem Bosman’s *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*.<sup>14</sup>

David’s younger brother Johannes died in Golkonda on 13 April 1676 at a young age. His mother, finally died the following year on 6 July 1677.<sup>15</sup>

On 28 November 1682, the day that his father died, David Van Nyendael was orphaned. David’s age at that time cannot be determined with certainty, but from notarial deeds it can be deduced that he must have been fifteen or sixteen. For in December 1692, the orphan’s court gave him authority over his father’s estate.<sup>16</sup> According to the rules of the court, an estate only passed to the heir when he reached the age of majority, in those days 25 years old. We therefore know that David had reached that age by December 1692 and, counting back, must have been born in 1667. After the death of his father, David left for his new mother country the Dutch Republic, where he was received by family members. It was probably his uncle, Gosvinus Van Nyendael, who had transferred authority for Jan Van Nyendael’s estate to the orphan’s court in September 1685, who took care of young David.<sup>17</sup> Between 1692 and 1699, David Van Nyendael left no trace in the archive material. Some time at the end of the seventeenth century he must have applied to the WIC in Amsterdam for a post in West Africa. However, his name does not feature in the minutes of the Amsterdam chamber, from which may be deduced that he was appointed to the very junior rank of assistant or provisional assistant. From the rank of sub-factor, one of the lower administrative functions within the hierarchy of the company apparatus, employees were always interviewed by a committee of directors and as such were recorded in the minutes. David Van Nyendael is first mentioned in the archives of the WIC in mid-1690. At that point he was sub-factor on the ship *Neptunis*, a small barque with a crew of twelve men, which was trading along the West African coast.<sup>18</sup> As sub-factor or assistant merchant, Van Nyendael was responsible for ensuring that barter trade with Africans went smoothly. The *Neptunis* was provisioned for a trading voyage along the Ivory and Grain Coast (present-day Ivory Coast) to last

11. Havart 1693: 172-175; Gommans 2001: 299.
12. Gaastra 1991: 104-105.
13. CBG: Havart Collection; Havart 1693: 177; Molhuysen 1937: 339.
14. Van der Aa 1867: 287.
15. Havart 1693: 175-176.
16. GAA: NA 4993, 22 April 1705; NA 4775, 25 April 1705.
17. GAA: NA 4775, 22 April 1705.
18. ARA: NBKG 233, Orders for Cornelis Penne and David van Nyendael, 29 July 1699; Den Heijer 1997: 408 appendix 2.

over three months.<sup>19</sup> Between July 1699 and his departure for Kumasi in early October 1701, David Van Nyendael would make several coastal voyages along both the Ivory and Grain Coast and the kingdom of Benin and Rio Calabares, the coastal region that lies between present-day Nigeria and Cameroon. During his second voyage to Benin, from April to September 1701 on board the *snow* (a two-masted, square-rigged vessel) *Johanna Maria*, Van Nyendael paid a visit to the king of that realm who resided in the capital city of the same name.<sup>20</sup> He left behind a highly detailed report of his visit to Benin which Willem Bosman, who had no first-hand experience of the kingdom, included as an appendix to his *New and Accurate Description*. In this report, David Van Nyendael sketches a vivid picture of life and work in Benin, with social relations, law, religion and court life being extensively discussed. His account remains one of the earliest and most valuable sources on the kingdom of Benin in early modern times.<sup>21</sup>

### Sojourn in Kumasi

Soon after his return from Benin in September 1701, David Van Nyendael must have learned at Elmina that the director-general was planning to send a European envoy to Ashanti. It was not the first time that company staff had been sent to the unknown kingdom. Several weeks before Van Nyendael heard of the plan, two Africans in the service of the WIC named Bossum and Chinees had departed for the court of the asantehene bearing trade goods and gifts. However, they were captured in Twifo and robbed of their goods.<sup>22</sup> Even so, this fiasco did not lead the company management in Elmina to abandon attempts to establish contacts with Ashanti. On the contrary, they attempted to find people prepared to undertake the journey to the kingdom. David Van Nyendael's curiosity, his predilection for unknown places and the lure of glory prompted him to volunteer for the journey.<sup>23</sup> Director-general Joan van Sevenhuijsen accepted his offer with both hands and had detailed instructions drawn up for the journey. Armed

with these orders, a large number of gifts for the rulers of Ashanti and accompanied by several African bearers, David Van Nyendael departed for Kumasi on 9 October 1701. The journey of approximately two hundred kilometres to the court of asantehene Osei Tutu was expected to take some twelve days.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, no documents by David Van Nyendael's hand about his journey to the kingdom of Ashanti and his time there have been preserved. What is certain is that he sent at least two letters from Kumasi to Elmina. After a stay of nearly seven months, he sent the first letter to the coast on 5 May 1702. The second letter was sent on 22 June and arrived in Elmina on 16 July 1702. It had taken the Akanists who delivered the second letter twenty-five days to reach the coast, which suggests that Van Nyendael's journey to Kumasi actually took longer than the twelve days estimated before his departure. However, the letters, which undoubtedly contained extremely interesting information about the earliest history of Ashanti, have not withstood the test of time. For a reconstruction of the experiences of David Van Nyendael we have to rely on the orders given to the sub-factor, a copy of a letter which director-general Joan Sevenhuijsen sent him in response to the letters he had received from Kumasi, and several other documents.<sup>25</sup> The orders instructed Van Nyendael to travel to Ashanti via Twifo. In Twifo, he was to recover the goods stolen from the Company, including a precious cane clad in gold leaf. In addition, he was to visit Akjesim and Crantje, two influential Akanists who would accompany him to the court of asantehene Osei Tutu. Both Akanists were known for their good relations with Ashanti. In return, Akjesim and Crantje received a consignment of brandy, and the prospect of further gifts was held out to them in the event of a successful mission. After the visit to Twifo, Van Nyendael continued his journey to the seat of Osei Tutu. Although no location is mentioned anywhere in the sources, it may be assumed that the envoy eventually arrived in Kumasi. After his reception at the court, David Van Nyendael congratulated

19. ARA: WIC 97, Overview of coastal trade 1696-1699.

20. ARA: NBKG 233, Orders for Jan van Zanen and David van Nyendael, 6 April 1701; Bosman 1704: 256; Den Heijer 1997: 408 appendix 2.

21. Bosman 1704: 215-256; Davidson 1991: passim; Ugo Nwokeji 2001: 47-68.

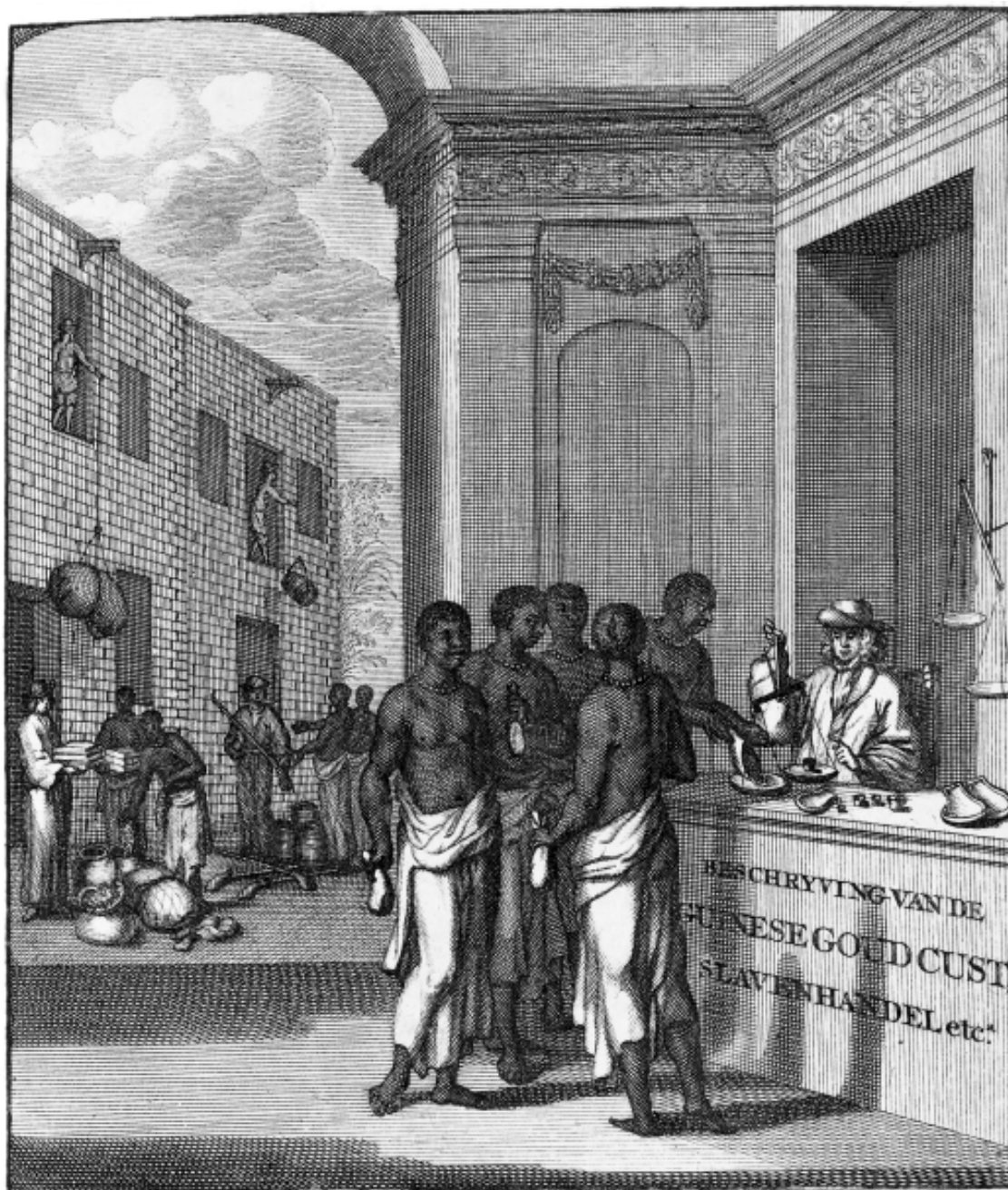
22. ARA: NBKG 233, Orders for David van Nyendael, 9 October 1701.

23. ARA: WIC 98, W. de la Palma to D. van Nyendael, 18 July 1702.

24. ARA: WIC 97, W. de la Palma to directors, 6 November 1701; WIC 98, W. de la Palma to directors, 25 September 1702.

25. Unless otherwise stated, David van Nyendael's sojourn is based on ARA: NBKG 233, Orders for David van Nyendael, 9 October 1701 and WIC 98, W. de la Palma to directors, 25 September 1702.





*Marketplace: gold and slaves at the Gold Coast. Engraving from W. Bosman (1709).*

*KIT Library, Amsterdam RP 217.*

the sovereign on his glorious victory over Denkyira and presented him with a number of gifts as a mark of respect, including a velvet cloth embroidered with silver and gold thread and four gilded hides. He also made clear to the king that the rumour that the Dutch 'had bribed or at least attempted to bribe' the rulers of Denkyira 'was not only false and untrue, but indeed without any basis'. The reason that the WIC 'had provided Denkyira with a hundred bendas of gold' was 'to exterminate Abe Tekki [the sovereign of Komenda] and his followers'. He further assured

the asantehene that the Dutch had not supplied weapons to support Denkyira in its conflict with Ashanti. Finally, he proposed that Osei Tutu establish trading relations with the Dutch on the coast. To that end, the envoy had brought with him a so-called 'market letter'; a price list for items ranging from textiles to trumpets, with the purchase prices shown in gold. In extension to his proposal, Van Nyendael invited the king to send one of his sons to Elmina, along with his merchants. If the asantehene 'will send a son hither accompanied by our boys Affo and Jan',



the director-general would ‘treat him as a prince of the country’. Besides bestowing honours and gifts on him, the envoy also guaranteed that the prince would be allowed to return to Ashanti any time he wished. This was no irrelevant promise, as in those days important persons were often held hostage for long periods. Only when payment was received for goods delivered or certain undertakings honoured would the hostage be granted freedom and permission to leave. But Osei Tutu did not agree to the proposal and did not send any of his sons to Elmina. On the contrary, he requested that the envoy should offer himself as security for a debt of forty benda (2600 guilders) owed to Ashanti by the Akanists. As the representative of the regular trading partners of the Akanists, David Van Nyendael acceded to the request, which meant that he must remain in Kumasi as a hostage until the Akanists or the WIC had honoured the debt.<sup>26</sup>

At the start of June 1702, Willem de la Palma, who had by now succeeded Joan van Sevenhuijsen as director-general, sent his African servants Jan and Affo to the Akanists in the interior. They were to urge the leaders of the Akanists to secure the trade routes and resume trading with the Europeans on the coast. Both were important for establishing a trading relationship between Ashanti and the WIC. Jan and Affo were given the second letter from David Van Nyendael, which they delivered to De la Palma. In this letter, dated 22 June 1702, the envoy reported that he had received permission from the asantehene to depart for Elmina, from which may be concluded that the Akanists had fulfilled their debt to Ashanti. Nevertheless, David decided not to return to the coast immediately. He asked the director-general to send him tobacco, medicines and several other products. It may be that Van Nyendael was ill and hence not in a condition to travel. Almost immediately, De la Palma again sent his servants Jan and Affo off with bearers, this time bound for Kumasi. In addition to the goods requested, they took new gifts for Osei Tutu. The director-general once again impressed on David Van Nyendael the

importance of not losing sight of the Company’s trading interests. He held out the prospect of a position as factor by way of reward. But Van Nyendael never took up that post. On 12 October 1702, more than a year after his departure for Kumasi, David Van Nyendael returned to Elmina ‘with an emaciated body’. Director-general Willem de la Palma hoped that the envoy would present a detailed account of his travels, but it transpired that Van Nyendael had no diary. Nor was he able to report his experiences subsequently, due to the seriousness of his condition.<sup>27</sup> On 16 October, Jacobus d’Outreleau, bookkeeper for the garrison at Elmina, recorded the last will and testament of David Van Nyendael.<sup>28</sup> Those must have been virtually David’s last words. He died four days later on 20 October 1702 at an age of 34 or 35 years. His estate was disposed of 2½ years later in the Republic by his brother-in-law Daniël Havart, whom Van Nyendael had named as his executor.<sup>29</sup> The same Daniël Havart had several years previously written the foreword to Willem Bosman’s famous treatise about the coast of Guinea. Bosman had undoubtedly expected that Havart would sooner or later be able to supply him with information about Van Nyendael’s journey to Ashanti.

Willem Bosman was convinced that David van Nyendael had left behind an account of his mission. He believed that such a document had been passed to several good friends of Bosman shortly after Van Nyendael’s return from Kumasi.<sup>30</sup> They had subsequently boarded the slave ship *Beschermer* at Elmina, which would take them back to the Republic via Angola and Curaçao. Bosman hoped to receive this report from his friends and include it in the following edition of his *New and Accurate Description*. However, the *Beschermer* fell into the hands of two French privateers off the Angolan coast and was forced to sail for La Rochelle.<sup>31</sup> However, there was no report by David Van Nyendael on board the *Beschermer*. Indeed, as various archival documents show, such a report never existed. At most, there may have been copies of the two letters which Van Nyendael sent to Elmina from

26. ARA: NBKG 1, Resolution 5 June 1702.  
 27. ARA: WIC 484, W. de la Palma to directors, 10 October 1703.  
 28. ARA: WIC 98, General muster roll 31 December 1703; GAA: NA 4993, 22 April 1705.  
 29. ARA: WIC 360, Minutes of Amsterdam chamber, 21 April 1705; GAA, NA 4775, 25 April 1705; NA 4993, 22 April 1705.  
 30. Bosman 1704: 77  
 31. ARA: WIC 358, Minutes for 27 August 1703; WIC 359, Minutes for 24 June 1704. Den Heijer 1997: 397 appendix 1.

Portrait of W. Bosman.  
Engraving from  
W. Bosman (1709,  
frontispiece).

KIT Library, Amsterdam RP 217.



Kumasi on board the ship. But the likelihood of those letters ever surfacing in a French archive or museum is small. Any potential Pieter van Grunsven would therefore be well advised not to undertake a fruitless search for the supposed journal or letters of David Van Nyendael. It would be more profitable to consult the rich archives of the WIC and the Dutch Ministry of the Colonies, which contain innumerable other ‘treasures’ that may throw more light on relations between the Netherlands and Ashanti.

### Conclusion

David Van Nyendael’s mission marks the beginning of a long relationship between Ashanti in the interior and the Dutch on the coast. They would maintain economic and diplomatic relations for over 170 years. Those relations were based on mutual interest. Ashanti wished to expand its territory and maintain trade contacts with the Europeans, and could well use the support of the Dutch in its ambitions. The Dutch were important suppliers of gunpowder, firearms and other European goods. Moreover, they could exert their influence over the coastal states to make sure that trade went smoothly. The WIC, in turn, saw in Ashanti a powerful ally and trading partner. In the competition with other European companies on the coast, having an ally in the interior was of great importance. But contacts with Ashanti did not lead to the desired resumption of the gold trade. On the contrary, Ashanti

expansionism and its conflicts with groups of warriors belonging to the defeated Denkyira and other Akan states ensured many years of turmoil in the interior. Prisoners of war were transported to the coast as slaves, which led to the gold trade slowly but surely being supplanted by the slave trade. As early as 1705, director-general Willem de la Palma noted in a letter to his superiors in the Republic 'that the natives no longer occupy themselves with the search for gold, but start one war after another to supply slaves.'<sup>32</sup> Various trade routes were established in the course of the eighteenth century to facilitate the trade in goods and slaves between Ashanti and the coast. The oldest route, the one between Kumasi and fort St Anthony in Axim, originated in the years 1706-1707.<sup>33</sup> The Dutch forts at Elmina and Accra were also linked to Kumasi by trade routes. The most important of them, between Elmina and Kumasi, fell into disuse at the end of the eighteenth century. Ashanti began to focus more and more on trade with the English, which was mainly conducted via Cape Coast Castle. Nonetheless, contacts between the Dutch and Ashanti, however minimal, continued until the departure of the Dutch in 1872.

### Abbreviations

ARA	Algemeen Rijksarchief, Den Haag (National Archives)
CBG	Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, Den Haag (Central Office of Genealogy)
GAA	Gemeentearchief Amsterdam (Amsterdam Municipal Archives)
NA	Notarial archives (Notarial archives)
NBKG	Nederlandse bezittingen ter kust van Guinea (Dutch possessions on the Guinea coast)
VWIS	Verspreide West-Indische Stukken (Diverse West Indian Documents)
WIC	Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (Second West India Company)

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32. ARA: WIC 98, W. de la Palma to directors, 5 September 1705.

33. Wilks 1975: 11; Yarak 1990: 118.



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# 4. Ahenfo Nsa (the 'Drink of Kings')

## *Dutch schnapps and ritual in Ghanaian history*

### Introduction

European liquor has long been an important ritual fluid in the Gold Coast/Ghana. This practice built on an earlier use of palm wine and water as sacred fluids that facilitated communion between the living and the ancestors, and bridged the gap between the physical and spiritual worlds. Imported gin, schnapps and rum were established ritual fluids and social drinks in the pre-colonial era. From the 1930s onwards, locally distilled gin or 'akpeteshie', illicitly distilled during the colonial period and legalized in the early years of independence, joined the ranks of social and ritual drinks. Its cheap price eased the financial burden for commoners. Royal or court protocol was incomplete without liquor. One always went to see the chief with a drink in hand, preferably a bottle of European schnapps. The Dutch envoy David van Nyendaël observed this protocol on his visit to the Ashanti king in 1701. His travel instructions specified that he should bring a few jars of geneva to the court to celebrate the occasion of the first European visit to Kumasi.<sup>1</sup> Libation – a prayer accompanied by the pouring of water or an alcoholic drink on the ground – preceded most formal gatherings at court. Judicial deliberations at court involved the use of liquor as fees and fines, and significantly as a fluid that promoted reconciliation between the disputants after the matter had been resolved. To share a drink was a sign of peace and amity. The sale or lease of land was witnessed and sealed by libation and the sharing of a drink by those present. Festivals were colourful occasions that involved the ritual offering of liquor to the deities and ancestors to thank them for a successful year and harvest and to invite them to protect and bless the community. Akan, Ewe and Ga chiefs seldom approached the stool house

without a bottle of liquor. Liquor also played an important role in rites of passage. For an Akan baby being 'outdoored', or named on the eighth day, alternate drops of water and schnapps on the tongue signified the deceptive similarity in colour yet an alarming difference in taste. The child is enjoined to be discerning in life, to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and to be a person of integrity and principle. Puberty rites constituted an all-female occasion on which women consumed liquor. The gift of schnapps or gin from the bridegroom to the bride's family represented the most important component in the material transactions that marked Akan marriage. And liquor punctuated all the rituals associated with funerals, an occasion on which intoxication was actually encouraged (Akyeampong 1996: chap. 2).

The 20th century witnessed important shifts and changes in the history of liquor and ritual in Ghanaian history. Rum, gin and schnapps were the most popular imported spirits in 19th-century Gold Coast. The Akan, Ewe and Ga-Adangme of southern Ghana used these drinks for ritual and social drinking. Indeed, in the 19th and early 20th centuries one could describe the Gold Coast as a rum-drinking nation with gin and schnapps coming in a distant second. Naturally, these spirits were condemned by missionaries and temperance crusaders, appalled by what they considered to be excessive drinking in the Gold Coast. In the mid-19th century, when rum and gin could be bought more cheaply than drinking water in coastal towns, rum shops littered the coast (*African Times*, 23 December 1862). In Kumasi, the Ashanti capital, 'schnapps bars' abounded in Bantama in the late 19th century.<sup>2</sup>

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*Page 50: Advertisement of Henkes as a social drink (1950s).*

*By courtesy of Henkes/ Bols Distilleries*

1. ARA (Algemeen Rijksarchief), NBKG (Nederlandsche Bezittingen ter Kuste van Guinea) no. 233, dated Elmina, 9 October 1701. Also in A. van Dantzig, *The Dutch and the Guinea coast 1674-1724. A collection of documents*. Accra, 1975. I am grateful to Pieter van Dijk for this reference.
2. Basel Mission's 1898 Kumase Station Correspondence, Ramseyer to Basel, 28 September 1898 (Jenkins, n.d.).



A few puzzles remain as to how Dutch schnapps came to reign supreme in Ghanaian ritual by the independence period. First, we need to examine the demise of rum as a ritual and social drink after 1919. Second, we have to analyse the local backlash against gin and Dutch geneva in the 1920s that resulted in the Gin and Geneva Ordinance of 1930. This ordinance sought to prohibit gin and geneva by 1940, reducing imports by a tenth each year, using 1929 as the benchmark and beginning the process in 1930. Somehow by 1933-34 a transformation in local opinion occurred and Dutch geneva was back in favour. In 1940, the proposed prohibition of gin and geneva was abandoned. In the period after 1920, Dutch aromatic schnapps was introduced into the Gold Coast as a distinct brand, gradually replacing existing brands of geneva. The irony lay in the fact that Dutch aromatic schnapps and geneva were the same product though differently packaged. This marketing success story has yet to be told. Third, a shift occurred in the image and the use of Dutch schnapps: it became a ritual drink, preferred over gin, and it lost its place to gin as a social drink. 'Holland' came to define quality schnapps. Today, all the schnapps on the Ghanaian market claim to be direct 'products' of Holland or are advertised as having been made according to 'original recipes from Holland'. That evolution is a fascinating story. This chapter will endeavour to shed light on these developments. It draws on the author's research into the social history of alcohol carried out over the past decade, especially including official archival material from Ghana and Britain, Basel and Wesleyan Mission records, newspaper reports, secondary literature and oral interviews.

### **The Golden Age of rum**

In 19th-century Gold Coast, rum and tobacco from the United States became two very popular commodities. Although the West African trade was insignificant when compared with the total volume of American trade, the rum and tobacco supplied to the Gold Coast were of enormous importance to the Gold Coast economy, social life

and ritual. To quote George Brookes' work on Yankee traders in West Africa:

'Tobacco and rum were the foundation of American legitimate commerce and the chief source of profits. These, plus cotton cloth, guns, and powder were the staples of the West African trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the main stock in trade of European merchants from all countries. The quality and competitive price of American tobacco and rum ensured their entry into West African markets, whether through official import channels or smuggling' (Brookes, Jr. 1970: 4).

Since the sugar industry was not established in the United States, New England traders imported rum from the Caribbean and Latin America, repackaged it as popular brands such as 'Pure Boston (American) Rum' and 'Daniel Chase and Nash', and shipped the product to the Gold Coast in casks.<sup>3</sup>

As early as 1822, British merchants in the Gold Coast commented on the popularity of rum and how it was indispensable to European trade. Unfortunately for British merchants in the Gold Coast, British mercantilist policies either banned American vessels from British settlements or imposed high tariffs on American goods. Danish and Dutch settlements on the Gold Coast stocked up on American rum and their trade flourished, unlike trade at the British settlements. American rum, it was observed:

'[is preferred] by the Natives to any other in the proportion of four to five. This article they [the Dutch and the Danes], of course, purchase free of Duty, and on such favourable terms otherwise as to bring it below the price at which we can import West Indian rum. Rum is indispensable in the trade here, and its importance may be judged of, by the fact that at least 1500 puncheons are Annually disposed of in this part of Africa' (Brookes, Jr. 1970: 246).

Colonial rule facilitated the regulation of shipping and the collection of customs duties. American rum represented an important source

3. Local Opinion on Liquor Traffic. Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, CSO 21/18/18.

of revenue during the early years of British colonial rule in the Gold Coast, contributing as much as 50 per cent of the total customs revenue between 1875 and 1885. American rum dominated liquor imports in the Gold Coast through World War I.<sup>4</sup>

Rum was popular in the Gold Coast because the quality was good and the price was cheap. Equally important was the fact that rum was imported in casks and retailed in rum shops, enabling purchases as small as 3d. Thus, rum was affordable even for the working classes. Rum also played an invaluable role in ritual. Two types of rum were imported into the Gold Coast, one colourless or 'white' and the second brownish or golden colour. Both had distinct uses in ritual. Apparently, the frequency of warfare during the pre-colonial period had promoted the ascendancy of war deities over nature deities. 'Nyigbla', the Anlo war deity, was promoted to the head of the Anlo national pantheon. For the Adangme-speaking Krobo, the war deities 'Nadu' and 'Kotoklo' became central not only to warfare but also in social life, such as in the organization of male initiation rites. In Ashanti, war deities were the direct property of the asantehene (King of Ashanti), and their custodians reported to the king. These war deities demanded sacrifices of blood (human and animal) and also delighted in rum of a golden colour. 'Obaa panin' (the female head of an Asante 'abusua' or matrilineage) Afua Pokuaa of Amoaman emphasized that gods liked the golden colour of 'Buccaneer Rum', a colour she described as 'kokoo' (red). Afua Pokuaa's family holds custodianship of an Ashanti war-god, 'Abotirimu', and the preference of 'abosom abrafo' (war gods) for golden rum was associated with their penchant for blood.<sup>5</sup> The connection between war gods, blood and rum was explicitly expressed by one of Huber's Krobo informants: 'In ancient time ... if a warrior brought home an enemy's head, he was given rum, mixed with some drops of blood, to drink. This, they say, not only protected him against the avenging ghost of the beheaded, but also made him braver' (Huber 1963: 268).

'Abosom' (gods) such as Kubi, Tano and Apomesu favoured rum. In the absence of rum, brandy could be used for some of the gods for it 'has the scent and colour the abosom like'.<sup>6</sup>

White rum played an equally central role in ritual and social life in the Gold Coast. In the 1930s, more than a decade after the importation of rum in casks was abolished in the Gold Coast, Gold Coast Africans reminisced about white rum, some comparing its merits to coloured rum. The 'Mantse' (chief) of Teshie in Accra opined that, 'The Africans will welcome the importation of pure white American Rum in preference to the coloured one; viz Jamaica and Cuban rum'.<sup>7</sup> The 'Daniel Chase and Nash' brand was an example of American white rum well patronized in the Gold Coast. Nee [Nii] Kpakpo Oti, the 'Adontenhene' of Otublohum quarter of Accra, commented that: 'Rum is a thing that cures the natives of all their bodily illnesses. It is a thing that is good for all our troubles, etc. All our native customs, especially customs relating to stools [ancestors], etc., are performed with Rum or Gin. If an elderly man dies, a full puncheon is bought, rolled throughout the street to show the rank or dignity of the deceased. In all funeral matters Rum and Gin is [sic] used by the natives'.<sup>8</sup>

For nature gods and ancestors, white was the preferred drink in ritual. For these, palm wine, gin, white rum or schnapps were the fluids used in libation. Some nature gods actually detested

4. 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Consumption of Spirits in the Gold Coast' (1930). Hereafter referred to as the '1930 Commission Report'.
5. Interview with Afua Pokuaa, Kumase, 18 August, 1994.
6. Interview with Afua Pokuaa, Kumase, 18 August 1994.
7. PRAAD, Accra, CSO 21/18/18. Local Opinion on Liquor Traffic.
- 8 Ibid.

*Van advertising  
De Kuyper schnapps.  
Collection H. den Heijer.*



blood and alcohol. In the Guan town of Larteh, it was believed that the god Brofo, associated with rainfall and good harvests, 'does not like to be contaminated with blood', and thus took no part in revenge or death (Brokensha 1960: 160). Water was used in pouring libations to gods that detested alcohol. But given this popularity of rum as a ritual and social drink, how can the demise of rum in the 1920s be explained?

International liquor conventions, British business politics, the lack of official American support for the trade in West Africa, and the decline of war deities with the establishment of colonial rule combined to exterminate rum as a social and ritual drink in the Gold Coast. The St Germain-en-Laye international liquor convention was passed in France in September 1919. This convention banned the traffic in 'trade spirits', defined as spirits injurious to the health of natives. Each signatory government was left to define what fell under the category of trade spirits. This, in the opinion of the British secretary of state for the colonies, Walter Long, was an opportune time to end the German and Dutch domination of liquor traffic to the Gold Coast.<sup>9</sup> British merchants in Manchester and elsewhere also believed that the trade in liquor, dominated by powers other than Britain, detracted from the patronage of British goods such as textiles. British distillers of gin viewed the 1919 liquor convention as an opportunity to expand their share of the West African liquor market.

Consequently, the definition of trade spirits in the Gold Coast under the Spirituous Liquors Ordinance of 1920 came to encompass Dutch geneva and rum from America. The list of banned spirits in the Gold Coast reflected the bias against foreign trade, a fact very pleasing to British distillers. Dutch geneva is made in a pot still, as distinct from the patent still used in the manufacture of British gin. Rum, the 1920 Ordinance stipulated, should be distilled directly from sugar cane products in sugar cane growing countries, and should be stored in wood for a period of three years. This eliminated American rum, often improperly matured (Pan 1975: 68). The cessation

of warfare in the colonial Gold Coast had eliminated the ritual demand for coloured rum for war deities. Since white rum, schnapps and gin were interchangeable in ritual use, the stage was set for gin and schnapps to take over the ritual functions of rum. Official Dutch representations would retain the Dutch trade in geneva to the Gold Coast, while the New England trade in rum disappeared due to the absence of official American lobbying.

### **Dutch geneva in the Gold Coast**

Gin, geneva and schnapps were essentially similar products in the Gold Coast, with gin representing the British product, geneva the Dutch variant, and schnapps the German equivalent. The prices of Dutch geneva and German schnapps from Hamburg were affordable to commoners. This promoted their popularity over the more expensive British brands. Gin replaced rum as the drink of choice in the 1920s, and the Gold Coast could be described as a gin-drinking population well into the 1940s and 1950s. The social use of gin informed the contest between chiefs, elders and young men or commoners in the Gold Coast. For a type of liquor to remain sacrosanct in ritual, it was important that the liquor not be profaned through misuse or abuse. This engendered an indigenous ethic of temperance, which distinguished between the uses of liquor. Chiefs and elders in the pre-colonial Gold Coast thus firmly excluded young men and women from the use of liquor. As the colonial economy spawned new economic opportunities such as wage labour, young men in towns began to usurp the use of liquor to express their newly found freedom or independence from the elders. The activities of the Tiger Club of Winnebah and the 'akonkofo' ('gentlemen traders') of Kumasi reflect the use of liquor as a badge for aspiring social groups (Akyeampong 1996: chap. 3).

Chiefs, elders and missionaries joined ranks in their opposition to the young men's social use of liquor, and schnapps and geneva came in for special condemnation. Mischlich, a Basel missionary in the Volta District in 1897, sent an

9. Public Records Office (PRO), London, CO 554/41/19073.

interesting report to Basel that touched on the new opportunities in trade for Africans in the Gold Coast, new wealth, and the conspicuous consumption of schnapps. What is particularly important here is that schnapps was a social drink, unlike the situation in post-colonial Ghana. ‘Reports the death of an Akim merchant in Katsenke – died while drunk and everyone believed that he had died because of the drink [schnapps]. His two wives were there and had shaved their heads. .... At the entrance to the town 4 drunken merchants were dancing around the grave of another merchant who had died several weeks before – tho[ugh] M[ischlisch] spoke to them earnestly they were prepared only to pour away the Schnapps they had in their glasses – not the whole bottle’ (Jenkins n.d.).<sup>10</sup>

Several chiefs had asked Mischlisch to write to the Kaiser asking him to stop the trade in schnapps to the Gold Coast. (Dummett 1974)<sup>11</sup>

The Kaiser did not halt the exportation of German schnapps to the Gold Coast, but the Spirituous Liquors Ordinance of 1920 did. Having fought a war against Germany, Britain was certainly not disposed to the idea of a continued German trade in liquor to British West Africa. Dutch geneva also had its detractors. As the 1930 Liquor Commission demonstrated, several chiefs and educated Africans believed it was deleterious to the health of Africans. The Native State of Akim Abuakwa, for example, argued that ‘Geneva gin is deleterious to health and causes impotency’.<sup>12</sup> Geneva was included in the Gold Coast list of trade spirits. But unlike Germany, which in 1920 was not in a position to protest against the Gold Coast’s discrimination against German schnapps, Dutch distillers lobbied the Dutch government to intercede on their behalf. Lynn Pan points out that: ‘The Dutch distillers managed, through pressure on the Gold Coast government and through undertakings to improve the quality of their geneva, to remove the ban against its entry into the Gold Coast’ (Pan 1975: 70).

*Schnapps available at the ‘Spot de Dutch’ cafe in Elmina. It looks out on the Dutch cemetery.*

*Photo I. van Kessel*



But the Gold Coast government was also advancing its financial interests in the readmission of Dutch geneva. With the prohibition of rum and geneva in 1920, liquor imports and liquor revenues plummeted. In 1924 a new ordinance was passed paving the way for the readmission of Dutch geneva. Geneva was defined as a spirit distilled at ‘least three times in a pot-still from a mixed mash of barley, rye, and maize saccharified by the distaste of malt and then rectified by re-distillation in a pot-still after the addition of juniper berries and other vegetable flavouring materials’ (Pan 1975: 70). The result was instantaneously beneficial. Gin imports, this category including Dutch geneva, increased ten-fold from 377,347 litres in 1921 to 3,866,220 litres in 1925. The Gold Coast had shifted from being a rum-drinking population to a gin-and-geneva drinking one.

By 1929-30 local opinion in the Gold Coast had rallied against the importation of Dutch geneva. The protests of chiefs, the educated elite, and mission societies were such as to compel the colonial government to appoint a commission of enquiry to review liquor consumption in the Gold Coast. In all 125 witnesses presented evidence, 64 Africans (chiefs and others), 59 Europeans, and two Syrians. The commission reported in 1930 that although the Gold Coast did not have a

10. Mischlisch to Basel, 16 September 1897 (Jenkins, n.d.).

11. Raymond Dummett has argued convincingly that missionary propaganda against liquor consumption among the Akan of the Gold Coast and Asante between 1875 and 1910 was not in consonance with the Akan ethic of a temperate use of liquor.

12. PRAAD, Accra, CSO 21/18/18.



13. This scheme followed closely the proposal of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society submitted to the 1930 Commission. See Notes of Evidence.

14. '1930 Commission Report', letter received from the Omanhene of Berekum, 3 November 1929.

15. Governor Shenton Thomas, *Memorandum on Liquor Policy* (Accra, 1934). Copy in PRO, CO 96/715/21702.

16. This date is deduced from a newspaper advert in 1969 touting J. H. Henkes Schnapps as 'Ghana's favourite for half a century'. *Daily Graphic*, 31 December 1969.

liquor problem, there seemed to be a genuine demand for the exclusion of geneva. The report thus recommended an ordinance to prohibit gin and geneva by 1940 with a progressive reduction in the quantity imported between 1930 and 1939.<sup>13</sup> The new regulations put the price of gin and geneva beyond the means of most commoners in the Gold Coast. The period 1928-30 marked a triumphant phase in the Gold Coast temperance movement, African and European.

Gold Coast chiefs versed in the ritual use of liquor were not advocating a general prohibition, but a denial of access to young men, who profaned the use of liquor and acted in a disorderly manner when drunk. Chiefs were elated that Dutch geneva had been made expensive and that it would be phased out within a decade. The 'omanhene' (paramount chief) of Berekum jubilated:

'My young men [emphasis mine], learning of the fact that alcohol will be buried in the grave next year in the Berekum Division, are keeping the funeral custom for gin and whisky to-day by swallowing as much of the 'liquid dead bodies' as the capacities of their drinking organs will permit' (Gold Coast 1930).<sup>14</sup>

This funeral wake or the mourning of imported liquor, especially Dutch geneva, becomes more comprehensible when one considers the fact that a vibrant popular culture had emerged in the first three decades of the twentieth century revolving around cheap Dutch geneva. The forms of leisure included popular music ('highlife') and dance, a proliferation of European-style drinking bars and the emergence of the bar as the fulcrum of social activity, and comic opera or 'concert'. The Gin and Geneva (Restriction of Importation) Ordinance of 1930 thus threatened to nip in the bud the emergent lifestyle of commoners in colonial towns and peri-urban villages. Salvation came from an unexpected quarter: the proliferation of illicit distillation of gin, hitherto unknown in the Gold Coast, came to the rescue of popular culture (Akyeampong 1996b). The advent of akpeteshie or local gin around 1930 was instrumental to the

reform in local (establishment) opinion on the prohibition of Dutch geneva. But the African protest against Dutch geneva between 1919 and 1930 had certainly convinced Dutch distillers of the need to repackage the image of their product.

### **Exit Dutch geneva; enter Dutch aromatic schnapps**

Just three years after the 1930 Commission Report and the passing of the Gin and Geneva (Restriction of Importation) Ordinance of 1930, local opinion did a complete *volte face* regarding geneva and gin and advocated for the repeal of the 1930 ordinance. How do we explain these developments? For the chiefs and elders in the Gold Coast, akpeteshie was a more dangerous threat than geneva. Illicit distillation of gin took the manufacture, distribution, and consumption of liquor completely beyond the control of the traditional authorities and their ally, the colonial government. Indeed, akpeteshie had become a symbol of protest against the arbitrariness of chiefly and colonial rule. Between 1 April 1933 and 31 March 1934, there were a reported 558 cases of illicit liquor traffic with 603 persons convicted (Gold Coast 1934).<sup>15</sup> The colonial police proved unable to contain the new menace of illicit distillation. The resultant precipitous drop in liquor imports severely affected the colonial government's revenues in a decade of economic depression and brought the issue of direct taxation to the forefront. It is against this background that the opinion of native councils, polled in 1933 through an official questionnaire, now supported the governor's requests for continued imports of gin and geneva, the re-admission of rum in cask, a reduction in license fees, and an increase in the hours of sale (Gold Coast 1934). The desire of chiefs and elders to control young men and women and their use of liquor, and a proverbial hostility to direct taxation among Gold Coasters promoted the change in climate.

But Dutch distillers were astute and had read correctly the change in mood: they knew it was not just going to be business as usual. Dutch

geneva had come under repeated attacks since 1919. If they were to maintain their share of the Gold Coast liquor trade, they had to change the image of their product. Significantly, the most esteemed Dutch aromatic schnapps in Ghana, 'J. H. Henkes Aromatic Schnapps', made its entry into the Gold Coast around 1919-20.<sup>16</sup> The entry of J.H. Henkes Aromatic Schnapps' thus coincided with the immediate passing of the St. Germain liquor convention. For Henkes Distilleries (established in 1824), West Africa had become the main market for 'old geneva' (oude jenever). A decline in the Dutch economy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century made German ships the major carriers of Dutch geneva to West Africa. The Germans named the Dutch product 'Schiedam Schnapps', to distinguish it from German Schnapps. Schiedam has been the major geneva-producing town in the Netherlands since the 1780s. It is noteworthy that 'schnapps' is not a Dutch word.<sup>17</sup> Henceforth, schnapps in the Gold Coast mind would be associated with Holland and not Germany.

The 1930s witnessed not only a Gold Coast attempt to abolish Dutch geneva, but also an official government endeavour encouraging Gold Coasters to switch from gin to lager beer as their social drink. At the opening of Accra brewery, the country's first, in 1933, Governor Shenton Thomas (1932-34) made an interesting sales pitch for beer:

'There are some who say that beer is bad for you. Don't you believe it. What is the secret of England's greatness? Certainly not lime juice. Anyhow beer is not as bad as gin, and not nearly so bad as the liquor which is manufactured by certain enterprising persons of this country by means of two old petrol tins and a piece of copper tubing. You call it 'Kelewele', or 'Akpeteshi' which means 'going around the corner'' (Gold Coast Independent, 1 July 1933).

Akpeteshie may have given Dutch geneva a new lease on life, but it was apparent that the death knell had been sounded for gin and geneva as the leading social drink. Although it took a couple of decades more for the Gold Coast or Ghana to

become a beer-drinking nation, Dutch distillers seemed to have anticipated this shift.<sup>18</sup>

Gold Coast chiefs and elders still needed their gin for ritual. Akpeteshie was viewed as a 'bastard' drink, and certain deities expressed a particular distaste for this new drink. Although commoners incorporated akpeteshie into rites of passage, it did not feature in chiefly protocol and ritual. Indeed, akpeteshie seemed to be giving gin in general a bad name. And that is when an interesting bifurcation occurred between gin as a social drink and schnapps as a ritual drink. Dutch distillers appreciated the need for a ritual drink. They also understood the current ambivalence about gin and geneva. J. H. Henkes sought to exploit this niche. Today, it is advertised as the 'king of Schnapps' on billboards depicting the spokesman of a chief ('okyeame'), holding a royal staff and pouring libation. Chiefs and elders needed a ritual drink that was sacred, that was not subject to social abuse. It is unlikely that Dutch distillers of schnapps made a conscious decision to forego the sale of their product as a social drink, and hence in the same category as akpeteshie, for a new image of their product as uniquely designed for ritual. But the decision by Gold Coasters to consign Dutch aromatic schnapps to ritual, which led to social drinkers choosing other gin brands, ensured the longevity

17. Personal correspondence from Pieter van Dijk, 27 November 2001.

18. Liquor imports did not recover from the 1930s slump. Lager beer definitely became the national drink in the 1950s and 1960s. Economic decline from the 1960s, especially from the mid-1970s, increasingly put lager beer beyond the purchasing power of the working classes. Akpeteshie remains the most common drink for ordinary workers.

*Collection of liquor bottles (1950s). Locally produced schnapps imitates the distinct green square bottles from Schiedam.*

*KIT Fotobureau  
Album Ghana 1652.*



of Dutch aromatic schnapps on the Ghanaian market.

Geneva was a Dutch product patronized in Holland (known there as genever or jenever) and in West Africa. It was called jenever or geneva because it was flavoured with juniper berries. The original product was old geneva, followed around 1900 by young geneva (jonge jenever). The difference between 'young' and 'old' does not refer to years of maturing, but to a slight difference in ingredients. The new variety became quite popular in the Netherlands during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while old geneva remained the product of choice for the Gold Coast and other West African markets. The desire by Dutch distillers to maintain their place in the West African liquor market led to the packaging of aromatic schnapps specifically made for the West African market and unknown in Holland. Schiedam schnapps came in distinct green, square glass bottles, a method of packaging used

19. 'Henkes en West Afrika', information provided by Bols Distilleries, Zoetermeer, Netherlands, October 2001.

*Market booth selling schnapps as the drink of Kings, present-day Ghana.*

*KIT Kindermuseum.*



not only by J. H. Henkes, but also by 'De Kuyper's Celebrated Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps', the second imported Dutch schnapps in Ghana today. Geneva was repackaged for the West African market with a new image. The connections between history, ritual, and the economics of schnapps were explicit in the 1960s. A state-owned distillery, IDC Ghana Distilleries (now Gihoc Distilleries) was established in Accra, and it entered the schnapps market. Significantly, it called its product 'Kaiser Imperial Aromatic Schnapps', claiming the tradition of German schnapps in the pre-colonial period. It is advertised today as the 'Schnapps for Kings', emphasizing its use in ritual. Henkes Distilleries in 1969 was involved in setting up Paramount Distilleries Limited in Kumasi in partnership with a Ghanaian businessman, Kwame Peprah, and it also produced Dutch schnapps in Ghana using concentrates imported from the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> In the economic exploitation of ritual and history, Dutch distillers of aromatic schnapps have found local competitors. While Henkes and De Kuyper use the text 'Produce of Holland' stamped in red on the label as their mark of authenticity, local Ghanaian competitors utilize bottles with an uncanny similarity to J. H. Henkes and with 'Original Recipe of Holland' stamped in red on the package or bottle. These include 'E. M. Rodic Celebrated Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' and 'J. H. Asonaba Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps'. In 1986, J. H. Henkes was taken over by Bols Distilleries, but the schnapps is still marketed under its traditional brand name. While geneva is becoming an unfashionable drink in Holland today – except among old men in the lower and lower-middle classes – schnapps remains an essential ingredient in Ghanaian ritual. Strangely, 'J. H. Henkes Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' used to be unavailable in Holland, a fact that would surprise most Ghanaians who insist on this specific brand in the performance of ritual. However, in 1994 Henkes schnapps was introduced on the Dutch market, aimed specifically at the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. Ghanaians in the Netherlands use schnapps for

outdooring ceremonies, marriages and funerals. Aromatic schnapps was an important ingredient in the funeral ceremonies for Ghanaians who had died in 1992, when an Israeli plane crashed into high-rise apartment blocks in the Bijlmer, in Amsterdam.<sup>20</sup> Dutch and Ghanaians ended up with the same drink, but with different meanings. In the Netherlands, jenever (old and young) remains a social drink mainly associated with old men. Although J. H. Henkes touted its aromatic schnapps as ‘the most refreshing drink in hot climates’, Ghanaians consigned it to the realm of ritual.

### Conclusion

Today, Ghanaian ritual is incomplete without Dutch schnapps. Depending on the occasion and the social class, specific brands from Holland may be specified or local brands of schnapps may suffice. ‘Holland’ is what defines schnapps, and local manufacturers of schnapps peddle their products as original recipes of Holland to pass muster. This chapter has sought to reconstruct the developments by which Dutch schnapps became the quintessential ritual drink in the Gold Coast. It reviews the earlier displacement of rum as the ritual and social drink of choice in pre-1920 Gold Coast. It then analyses the twists and turns in the history of Dutch geneva in the Gold Coast. Adverse developments between 1919 and the 1930s convinced Dutch distillers of geneva of the need to alter the image of their product if they were to maintain their footing in the Gold Coast liquor market. Responding to the need in the Gold Coast for a ritual drink distinct from akpeteshie and not marred by the controversy surrounding geneva, Dutch distillers packaged Schiedam aromatic schnapps for the West African market. Though touted as a refreshing drink in the tropics, local circumstances in the Gold Coast limited schnapps to the role of ritual. It lost its clientele, who were social gin-drinkers, but it carved a niche for itself as the Gold Coast or Ghana moved from being a gin-drinking nation to a beer-drinking nation. As a ritual drink, Dutch schnapps is the drink par excellence.

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# 5. Cocoa trade between Ghana and the Netherlands

## *Past, present and future*

### **Introduction**

The Netherlands collaborates with Ghana in many mutually beneficial economic activities, particularly the merchandise trade, of which, from the standpoint of Ghana, cocoa has been the most important for at least the past half century. The object of this chapter is to analyse the trade in cocoa between the two countries in the past, present and future. The chapter begins by briefly discussing the contribution of the cocoa sector to the economy of Ghana, the genesis and progress of cocoa cultivation in Ghana, the production resources and the output trend. The general merchandise trade and balance of trade between the two countries are discussed prior to discussing the trade in cocoa. The future of the cocoa trade is then discussed followed by conclusions.

### **Contribution of cocoa to the Ghana economy**

Cocoa has been the backbone of the Ghanaian economy since the early 20th century (Stamp 1966; Manu 1974; Nyanteng 1980). The cocoa sector has contributed to the economy in several ways, including foreign exchange earnings, government revenue, employment, non-farm investments, community development and as a market for manufactured goods and services. Cocoa has made the highest contribution to Ghana's foreign exchange earnings since the early 20th century. The cocoa contribution increased from 10 per cent in the early 1900s to over 70 per cent in the 1920s. There was a steady decline in the 1930s to a low of 28 per cent in the mid-1940s. In the early 1950s, the proportion reached 67 per cent and declined steadily to 54 per cent in the 1970s. The decline continued sharply in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching 28 per cent. The decline was due either to low produc-

tion, low world market prices or both. In the 1990s, the major cause was the persistent low world market prices, while in the 1980s low production was the major factor.

The cocoa sector contributes to the government revenue through export duty and other levies. The contribution increased from 9 per cent in the mid-1930s to about 47 per cent in the early 1950s. It then declined in a fluctuating fashion to below 10 per cent at the end of the 1990s. The duty on cocoa export is a residual of the free-on-board (FOB) price after the deduction of the producer price determined by the government and the operational and administrative costs of the Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod). Government policy since 1999 has been to gradually increase the producer price from 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the FOB price by the year 2004-05, stabilize the administrative and operational costs of the Cocobod at 15 per cent and the export duty and other levies at 15 per cent (Ministry of Finance 1999).

The cocoa sector absorbs a higher proportion of the economically active population in the country than any other sector of economic activity. The sector offers employment to self-employed farmers, farm labourers, employees of the Ghana Cocoa Board, input manufacturers and distributors, cocoa buying companies, processors, transporters, etc. Many of the households in the cocoa-growing areas are more engaged in cocoa production than any other agricultural enterprise. Many people migrated from the non-cocoa-growing areas of the country and also from the neighbouring countries, notably Burkina Faso and Togo and also Benin, to the cocoa-growing areas for employment (Becket 1947; Arhin 1974). In the early 1970s, about one-fifth of the total labour force in the country was engaged in cocoa

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*Legon*

*Dock-workers carrying cocoa (1950s in Ghana).*

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related activities (Manu 1974). There are no indications that the labour force in the cocoa sector has been reduced.

Up to the mid-1970s, the cocoa-growing households were among the richest in the country and provided a substantial part of the market for goods and services. During the cocoa boom era, the European trading firms were not only active in the cocoa trade but were also very active in the distribution of manufactured household goods in the cocoa-growing areas. Many of them located their warehouses for the household goods they distributed in the fast-growing towns and villages in the cocoa-growing areas such as Nsawam, Suhum, Mangoase, Kumasi, etc. (Agbodeka 1972).

The cocoa farmers made considerable investments in housing and transport ventures. Many of the beautifully constructed houses in the towns (including Kumasi) and villages in the cocoa-growing areas were built by cocoa farmers and others who were associated with the cocoa sector. Many towns and communities in the cocoa-growing areas – such as Nsawam, Suhum and Mangoase – grew rapidly and then declined, following the same pattern as cocoa.

### **Genesis and progress of cocoa in Ghana**

The Dutch were probably the first to bring cocoa to the shores of Ghana, the then Gold Coast, in 1815. They attempted unsuccessfully to grow the crop in the coastal area, which turned out to be an unsuitable environment (Ghana Cocoa Board 2000). Cocoa was again brought into the country in 1857 by the Basel missionaries from Switzerland and planted at Aburi, about 30 km from Accra (Milburn 1977; Odamtten 1978; Ghana Cocoa Board 2000). One tree survived and produced pods, but the effort did not result in spreading the cultivation of the crop in the country. The cocoa that set in motion the commercial cultivation of the crop was brought into the country in 1879 by a Ghanaian, Mr Tetteh Quarshie (Bourret 1960; Stamp 1966; Milburn 1977; Acquah 1999; Ghana Cocoa Board 2000).

Tetteh Quarshie brought a few pods back from Fernando Po, a small island off the coast of Cameroon, where he saw the crop being successfully cultivated for export (Bourret 1960; Acquah 1999).

The introduction of the cocoa plant came at an opportune time. It was able to replace oil palm, which was an important export crop and was rapidly being destroyed by a disease that could not be controlled. The shift from oil palm to cocoa cultivation was facilitated by the fact that the forest environment, which had supported the successful cultivation of the oil palm, was also the most suitable environment for cocoa, and the workloads involved in cultivating the two crops were also not very different (Bourret 1960). The successful cultivation of cocoa in Ghana is limited to the deciduous rain forest zone in the southern half of the country (Map 1). Beginning in Mampong, a town in the eastern region, the cultivation spread rapidly and in an almost orderly fashion to the Central Region, Volta, Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo and finally the western regions. The incentives for the rapid spread of cocoa cultivation were generated by a rapidly expanding market in Europe and America during the first quarter of the 20th Century (Bourret 1960).

Cocoa cultivation in Ghana is highly land extensive and labour intensive and requires a high proportion of the country's scarce forest lands and economically active population. All other inputs have been relatively minor in application and cost. The introduction of cocoa in the forest zone did not compete with the production of the inhabitants' staple food crops, notably plantain and cocoyam. The production of these staple crops was complimentary to the cultivation of cocoa, and the expansion of cocoa cultivation resulted in the increased production of these staple crops. Plantain was planted on newly established cocoa farms in order to provide the shade required for young cocoa trees. Cocoyam, however, sprouted freely on the newly established cocoa farms, and its growth also benefits from the shade provided by the plantain trees.

The canopy formed by matured cocoa trees, however, created an unsuitable environment for plantain and cocoyam, causing them to disappear.

The establishment of new cocoa farms in the country has slowed down considerably since the mid-1970s. On the other hand, the demand for plantain and cocoyam has been increasing, partly as a result of population growth. These staples are now being cultivated on separate fields and are therefore competing with cocoa for the use of the scarce forest lands.

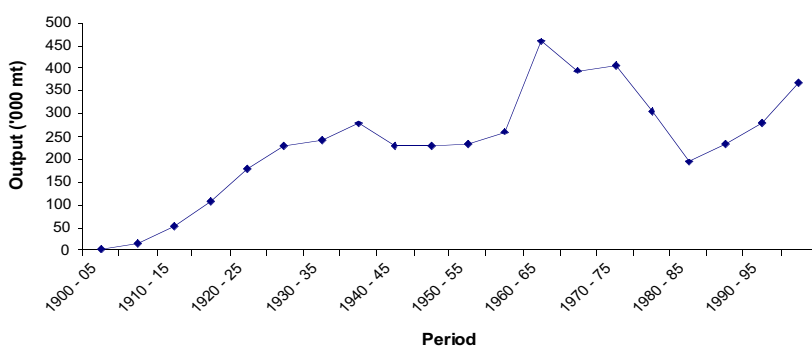
The output of cocoa beans was naturally small when the industry began and averaged 3,000 mt (metric tons) per season in 1900-05. It increased by leaps and bounds to an average of 250,000 mt per season in the late 1930s (Figure 1). The rate of increase, however, slowed considerably in the 1930s and became negative in the early 1940s, the period of the Second World War. Thereafter, output increased steadily to a peak of 459,000 mt per season in the early 1960s. The highest output per season was 580,000 mt in 1964-65. This was followed by a steady downward trend that reached an average output of 193,000 mt per season in the early 1980s. The lowest output in over 60 years was 158,000 mt in 1983-84. The output recovered steadily to an average of 369,000 mt per season in the late 1990s. Targets for output have been set at 500,000 mt per season by 2004-05 and 700,000 mt by 2009-10 (Ministry of Finance 1999). These targets, which are achievable, were not set in order to compete with other producing countries but to avoid an oversupply in the world market and a subsequent depression of prices.<sup>Fig 1</sup>

As a share of the world production, Ghana cocoa bean output increased enormously from 2 per cent in the early 1900s to over 40 per cent in the 1920s and 30s <sup>Fig 2</sup>. Thereafter, the proportion declined almost steadily except in the 1960s and stabilized around 12 per cent in the 1980s and 90s. The targets set for the output of cocoa beans in the near future are not likely to increase Ghana's share in the world output to any significant extent.

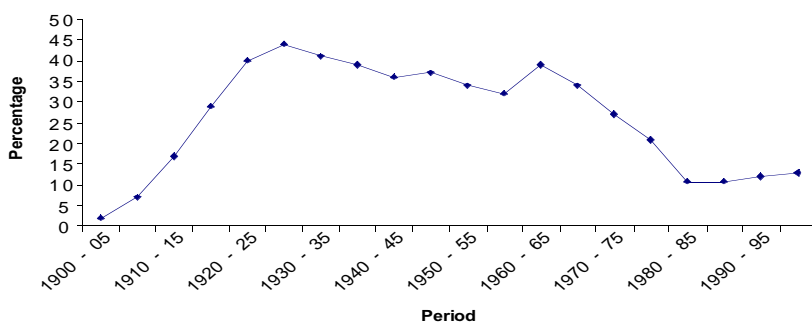
In 1910-11 and for over 60 years, Ghana was the leading producer of cocoa beans in the world. The position was lost to Cote d'Ivoire in 1977-78 and Ghana has since ranked mostly second.

Ghana produces cocoa beans with unique flavour and high quality (higher fat and shell content contents, fewer defects and with a less slaty colour) than cocoa from the other producing countries. These factors are preferred for chocolate manufacturing and also fetch the Ghana cocoa beans a premium price in the world market. To reduce cost, Ghana cocoa is not used alone in chocolate manufacturing but blended with relatively cheaper cocoa from other sources. Ghana has three factories for processing cocoa beans, producing intermediate products as well as chocolate, a finished product. The facilities, which have a total installed capacity to process 90,000 mt of beans per annum, are under utilized. However, a target has been set to process 150,000 mt of beans by the year 2009-10, which

**Figure 1: Ghana output of cocoa beans, 1900-2000 (five years averages)**



**Figure 2: Ghana cocoa beans outputs as proportion of world total, 1900-2000 (five years averages)**



implies expanding the facilities or building new ones.

Barry Callebaut, a worldwide giant in cocoa processing and chocolate manufacturing, opened a processing factory in the Ghana Export Free Zone in November 2001 to process 30,000 mt of beans per annum, to be eventually increased to 60,000 mt.

### Trade between Ghana and Netherlands

Ghana and the Netherlands have been trading in many products for centuries. The major commodities being traded, however, have shifted many times. Prior to the mid-19th century the major commodities that Ghana imported from the Netherlands included textiles, guns and powder and alcoholic beverages (schnapps). By the mid-20th century the major commodities being imported shifted to processed foods (dairy products, fish, meat and cereals), clothing (particularly footwear), with alcoholic beverages (schnapps) remaining important. By the 1990s, the major commodities shifted again to used vehicles and parts, electrical machinery and equipment, mineral fuels, oils and products derived from oil distillation, nuclear reactors, etc. Some processed food products, particularly dairy products, continued to be imported in large volumes, with a prominent inclusion of salted pig feet.

Among the major commodities that the Netherlands imported from Ghana prior to the

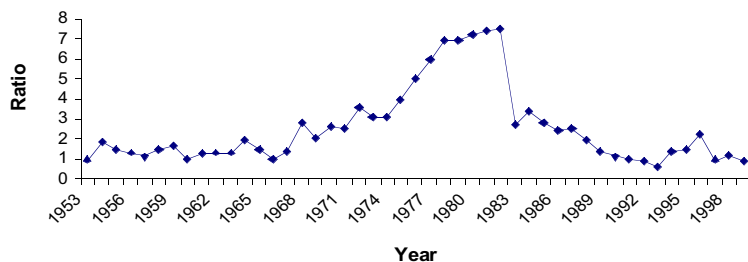
mid-19th century were slaves, gold, palm oil, rubber, etc. In the last 50 years, the major commodities imported by the Netherlands were mainly cocoa beans and cocoa products, timber logs and more recently, aluminium and its products.

Ghana has enjoyed a healthy balance in her trade with the Netherlands in the last 50 years (Figure 3). The ratio of the value of Ghana's exports to and imports from the Netherlands exceeded 1 but was less than 2 in the 1950s and early 1960s, except in 1953, when it dropped below one. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s the ratio exceeded 2 and went as high as 7.5 in 1982. The ratio decreased to between 2 and 3 for the rest of the 1980s. In the 1990s the trade balance was mixed, being below 1 for half of the period (1992, 1993, 1997 and 1999) and above 1 for the other years.

Ghana's cocoa trade with the Netherlands involves three forms of cocoa: beans, cocoa products and bean shells. The Netherlands began importing cocoa beans directly from Ghana in the late 1940s. Earlier, Ghanaian cocoa beans reached the Netherlands through European firms, particularly British and German. The list of firms that were importing cocoa beans from Ghana in the mid-1930s did not include verifiable Dutch firms (Nowell, Thompson and Irving 1938). In the last 50 years, the Netherlands has been an important destination for Ghana cocoa beans. In many years however, the Netherlands trailed behind the UK, USA and Germany in the volume imported. In other years (1977-78 to 1979-80; 1983-84, 1997-98 and 1999-2000) Dutch imports were the largest (Gill and Duffus series and ICCO series).<sup>Fig 3</sup>

The channel of trade between Ghana and the Netherlands has been mainly from government to firm. The Government of Ghana has been represented in the external cocoa trade since the early 1950s by the Cocoa Marketing Company (CMC), a subsidiary of the Ghana Cocoa Board. Over the years, some of the Dutch trading firms folded and new ones emerged. Among the firms that have been trading for over a century and are still trading, not necessarily importing from

**Figure 3: Balance of trade between Ghana and the Netherlands, 1953-1999**



Note: Ratio = 1 trade balance is even for both countries  
 > 1 trade balance is in favour of Ghana  
 < 1 trade balance is in favour of the Netherlands

Ghana during the entire period, are Theobroma NV and W.F. Westermann & Company. Continaf BV has also been trading for a very long time. Other Dutch firms that are currently importing cocoa beans from Ghana include ADM Cocoa International BV, Barry Callebaut Nederland BV, Dutch Cocoa BV, Cargill, and Unicom (International) BV. Some firms that traded in Ghanaian cocoa for several decades have been recently absorbed by others; Cacao de Zaan by ADM Cocoa International, an American firm; Gerken's Cacao Industrie BV by Cargill; Daarnhouwer & Co. BV by Continaf BV; and Bendsdorp NV by Barry Callebaut.

Dutch cocoa-trading firms have become larger and more concentrated. Currently there are only five active trading firms: ADM Cocoa International, Barry Callebaut Nederland BV, Continaf BV, Cargill, and Theobroma NV. Even though W.F. Westermann & Co BV is still trading, it is not active. This concentration gives the firms greater negotiation power than Ghana has as exporter. <sup>Fig 4</sup>

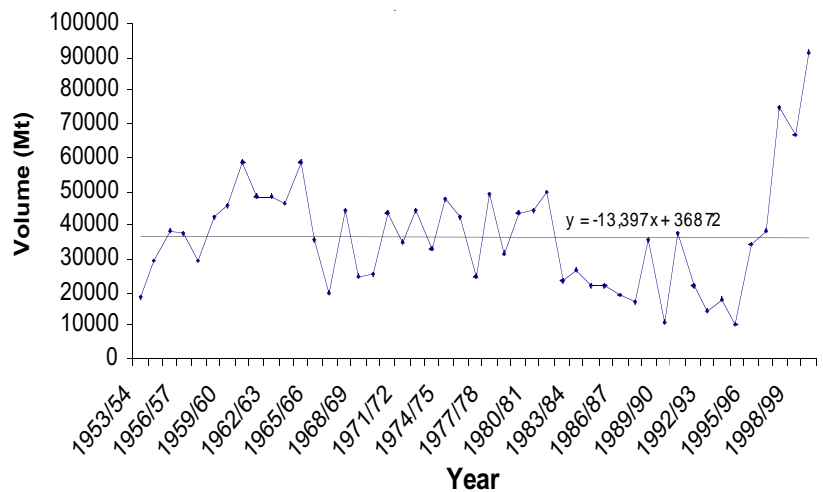
The volume of Ghanaian cocoa beans imported by the Netherlands increased, with wide seasonal fluctuations, from 16,000 mt in 1948-49 to 91,400 mt in 1999-2000 (Figure 4). The volumes in the last three seasons (1997-98 to 1999-2000) were substantially higher than in any of the earlier seasons, and the last season of the 20th century ended with Dutch imports reaching an all-time peak of 91,400 mt. The volumes of Ghana cocoa beans imported by the Netherlands in the last 50 years show distinct ten-year trends, which are difficult to explain. The trends are as follows:

- 1950 to 1959      Upward trend
- 1960 to 1969      Declining trend
- 1970 to 1979      Horizontal trend
- 1980 to 1989      Declining trend
- 1990 to 1999      Upward trend

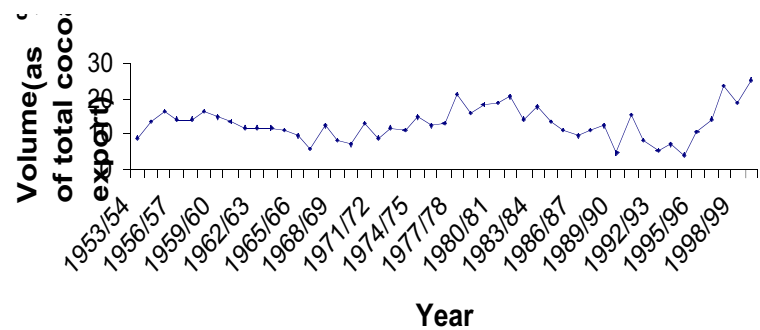
The Dutch share in Ghanaian cocoa bean exports of the last 50 years also shows wide seasonal fluctuations. In the late 1950s, the share averaged 15 per cent per season and dropped steadily to 9 per cent in the late 1960s <sup>Fig 5</sup>. It went up to 12 per cent in the early 1970s and increased

steadily to 17 per cent in the early 1980s, declined to 8 per cent in the early 1990s and increased in the late 1990s to 19 per cent. In 1999-2000, the last season of the 20th century, the Dutch share in Ghanaian cocoa bean exports exceeded one-quarter, the highest proportion ever.

**Figure 4: Volume of cocoa beans Netherlands imported from Ghana, 1953-2000**



**Figure 5: Share of Ghana's cocoa beans exported to Netherlands, 1953-2000**



The trend in the Dutch share in Ghanaian cocoa bean exports in the last 50 years indicates four distinct periods, which are also difficult to explain. The periods are as follows:

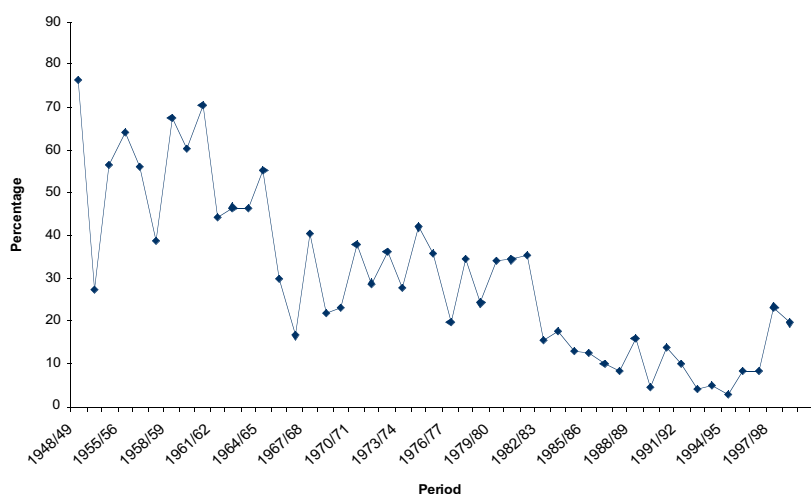
- 1955 to 1966      Declining share
- 1967 to 1981      Increasing share
- 1982 to 1994      Declining share
- 1995 to 1999      Increasing share

The share of Ghanaian cocoa beans in Dutch imports in the last 50 years shows a declining trend and three distinct phases <sup>Fig 6</sup>:



- 1954 to 1964 Share range 40 per cent to 70 per cent
- 1965 to 1982 Share range 20 per cent to 40 per cent
- 1983 to 1996 Share range 3 per cent to 18 per cent

**Figure 6: Netherlands total cocoa beans imports from Ghana, 1948-2000**



The Netherlands also imports different forms of cocoa products from Ghana, which began about 30 years ago. The rationale for the imports is not clear, since Netherlands produces and exports large volumes of the same cocoa products. Like the cocoa beans, the volumes of the respective cocoa products that the Netherlands imports from Ghana show wide seasonal fluctuations. And unlike the cocoa beans, the volumes have been relatively very small.

*Ripe cocoa.*

*KIT Fotobureau 5548*

*Page 67: Sundried cocoa beans.*

*KIT Fotobureau 5556*

The Netherlands' imports of Ghanaian cocoa butter began in 1970-71, even though Ghana has been exporting this product since the early 1950s. The volume imported by Netherlands averaged 1,000 mt in the early 1970s and increased to 2,000 mt in the late 1970s. It was less than 400 mt in the late 1980s. The volumes were much higher in the 1990s: 3,200 mt in 1991-92 and reaching a peak of nearly 6,000 mt in 1998-99. The Dutch share in Ghanaian cocoa butter exports fluctuated widely. It was 4 per cent in 1970-71 and increased to 36 per cent in 1980-81. It declined to 5 per cent in 1985-86 and increased

to 42 per cent in 1990-91. It went down to 3 per cent in 1994-95, increased sharply to 14 per cent in 1996-97 and 20 per cent in 1997-98 before declining to 17 per cent in 1998-99 <sup>Table 1</sup>.

The Netherlands began importing Ghanaian cocoa powder and cake in 1977-78. Starting at 1,000 mt, it increased to 4,500 mt in 1989-90 and declined sharply to 400 mt in 1990-91. It then increased equally sharply to 3,600 mt in 1991-92 and declined steadily to 700 mt in 1994-95. It increased steeply to a peak of 11,600 mt in 1997-98 and declined sharply to 3,500 mt in 1998-99. As a share of Ghana's exports of cocoa powder and cake, the Netherlands' imports increased steadily from 8 per cent in 1977-78 to 81 per cent in 1984-85. In 1989-90 and 1997-98 the share exceeded 50 per cent. In other seasonal periods, the share ranged from 9 per cent to 46 per cent but mostly below 30 per cent. Generally, Netherlands has been the major destination of Ghana's exports of cocoa powder and cake. The Netherlands' imports of Ghana cocoa paste and liquor are relatively more recent, beginning in 1985-86, and the volumes imported have been very small compared with the other cocoa products. Starting with a volume of 0.6 mt, it increased to 2.9 mt in 1992-93 and declined to about 0.1 mt in 1998-99. As a share of Ghanaian exports, the Netherlands' imports increased in a fluctuating fashion from 18 per cent in 1985-86 to 43 per cent in 1992-93 and down to 0.3 per cent in 1998-99.



Ghana began exporting cocoa bean shells in 1992 and the Netherlands began importing them in 1996. Even though the volume that the Netherlands imported in 1998 is not available, in the other years it accounted for 63 per cent to 99 per cent of the total Ghanaian exports. The Netherlands stands out clearly as the major destination <sup>Table 2</sup>.

### The future of cocoa trade between the Netherlands and Ghana

The cocoa trade between Ghana and the Netherlands will definitely continue for a very long time, probably as long as Ghana produces the crop and products it for export. However, the volumes of future trade can only be extrapolated from the trend of previous volumes, the desire of Ghana to increase domestic grindings and the price differences between premium Ghanaian cocoa and that from other sources.

By extrapolation, the gradual declining trend and wide fluctuations in the volumes of Netherlands' imports of Ghanaian cocoa beans in the last 50 years are predicted to continue in the next 50 years. Two methods that were used to estimate the future trend (with and without fluctuations) show that the high levels of the Netherlands' imports of Ghana cocoa beans in the 1997-2000 period are not sustainable over a long period.

The future trend estimated without fluctuations indicates that the Netherlands' imports of Ghana cocoa beans will decrease at a marginal rate of 0.04 per cent per season over the next 50 years, with the volume declining from 36.3 thousand mt in 2000-01 to 35.6 thousand mt in 2049-50. Allowing for fluctuations in the future trend estimation, the Netherlands' imports are expected to increase from 36.3 thousand mt in 2000-01 to a peak of 40.9 thousand mt in 2029-30, declining to a low of 30.8 thousand mt in 2044-45 and finally increasing to 35.6 thousand mt in 2049-50. In the last three seasons (2047-48 to 2049-50), both methods of estimation indicate the same volume.

**Table 1: Ghana Exports of Cocoa Products to the Netherlands, 1970-2000 (000 MT)**

Period	Butter			Powder/Cake			Paste/Liquor		
	Neth.	Total	% Neth	Neth.	Total	% Neth	Neth	Total	% Neth
1970/71	0.84	22.11	3.8						
1971/72	0.80	19.20	4.2						
1992/73	1.60	20.20	7.9						
1973/74	0.78	20.30	3.8						
1974/75	1.48	18.79	7.9						
1975/76	-	17.56	na						
1976/77	1.12	17.16	6.5						
1977/78	2.20	14.31	15.4	1.10	13.39	8.2			
1978/79	1.48	12.11	12.2	1.90	10.13	18.8			
1979/80	2.49	10.20	24.4	2.97	11.49	25.8			
1980/81	2.55	7.14	35.7	3.42	11.16	30.6			
1981/82	-	3.58	na	na	na	na			
1984/85	1.28	5.60	22.9	6.53	8.08	80.8	-	1.98	na
1985/86	0.30	6.64	4.5	3.81	8.45	45.1	0.58	3.28	17.7
1986/87	0.38	5.88	6.5	2.20	7.04	31.3	0.40	3.65	11.0
1987/88	0.45	7.28	6.2	1.80	8.29	21.7	1.22	6.59	18.5
1988/89	0.35	4.73	7.4	1.53	3.99	38.3	1.38	6.60	20.9
1989/90	2.80	7.93	35.3	4.50	8.45	53.3	0.72	6.42	11.2
1990/91	2.30	5.53	41.6	0.40	4.36	9.2	2.25	6.93	32.5
1991/92	3.22	8.27	38.9	3.55	8.94	39.7	1.45	7.07	20.5
1992/93	1.28	5.75	22.3	1.55	7.90	19.6	2.88	6.68	43.1
1993/94	0.43	5.90	7.3	0.80	5.34	15.0	1.30	7.68	16.9
1994/95	0.63	19.50	3.2	0.69	5.00	13.8	1.66	8.20	20.2
1995/96	na	na	na	2.28	5.00	45.6	na	na	na
1996/97	5.32	39.43	13.5	8.78	31.57	27.8	0.71	10.82	6.6
1997/98	5.26	26.92	19.5	11.55	22.27	51.9	0.67	10.04	6.7
1998/99	5.94	35.82	16.6	3.54	12.83	27.6	0.08	23.84	0.3

Source: ICCO (series), Quarterly Bull. of Cocoa Statistics, London  
na = not available

**Table 2: Netherlands' Imports of Ghana Cocoa Bean Shells, 1996-99**

Year	Ghana Total	Netherlands Imports	
	(000 MT)	(000 MT)	%
1996	4.6	3.3	71.7
1997	11.5	7.2	62.6
1998	18.1	na	na
1999	8.8	8.7	98.9

Source: Ministry of Trade and Industry (series) Ghana Export Bulletin; Accra





*Dock-workers carrying cocoa to a train.*

*KIT Fotobureau Album Ghana 1652*

Among the factors that might influence future volumes of cocoa beans imported by the Netherlands from Ghana would be the latter's desire to add value to increasingly larger portions of the beans produced. Everything being equal, this would reduce the volume of cocoa beans available for Ghana to export and the share that would go to the Netherlands.

The volume of cocoa beans the Netherlands imports from Ghana would continue to fluctuate from season to season, caused partly by the difference in prices between Ghana's high quality beans and beans from other sources. Ghana's cocoa beans have been used largely in chocolate manufacturing for taste and quality. However, because of the premium price that Ghana cocoa beans fetch on the world market, it is expensive to use Ghana cocoa beans alone in chocolate manufacturing. The beans are therefore blended with relatively lower quality cocoa beans from other sources. Thus, the lower the price difference between Ghanaian cocoa and those from other sources, the more Ghanaian cocoa will be used in chocolate manufacturing and vice-versa.

### **Conclusions**

The Ghanaian cocoa industry has survived 120 years and will continue for several decades to come. This is partly because there is no crop in sight to replace it as a major export crop to earn the country a higher proportion of the scarce foreign exchange needed for economic develop-

ment. The other contributions that the cocoa sector makes to the economic development of the country will also remain significant, particularly employment, government revenue and domestic market for manufactured goods and services. Competition is increasing for the use of forest land and labour, the two major resources required for cocoa cultivation. Consequently, the rapid increase in the cocoa production that peaked in the mid-1960s is not likely ever to be repeated. The country's target, taking several factors into consideration including the major resources available for cultivation, is to increase production and sustain it at 20 per cent above the peak reached in the mid-1960s. Thus, as the world population increases and the demand for cocoa products increases accordingly, the proportion of Ghana cocoa beans supplied to the world market will decline.

Ghana's desire to increase domestic grindings will reduce the volume of cocoa beans available for export. Another factor is the Barry Callebaut factory in Ghana, which plans eventually to process 60,000 mt of Ghanaian cocoa beans annually.

The Dutch and Ghanaian cocoa trade will definitely continue for several decades to come, but the product mix is likely to change in favour of cocoa products. Dutch imports of Ghanaian cocoa beans declined gradually over the last 50 years, and by extrapolation the trend will continue over the next 50 years. During this period, Ghana will be looking for markets to increase its export of cocoa products. It is likely that the Netherlands will provide part of the market, thus partly shifting from importing Ghanaian cocoa beans to cocoa products in the future. The relative prices of premium Ghanaian cocoa beans as opposed to beans from other sources, as well as the prices of cocoa products, will determine the volume of cocoa beans and products that the Netherlands imports from Ghana in the future.

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**Merchants,**

*Part 2*

**Missionaries**

**& Migrants**



JACOBUS ELISA JOANNES CAPITEIN,  
*AFRICAANSCH E MOOR.*  
Beroepen Predikant aan het Kasteel st. George op Delmina.  
Aantehouwer zie dee z' MOOR! zijn vel is zwart; maar wit  
zijn ziel, daar JESUS zelf als Prieester voor hem bidt.  
Hij gaat Geloof, en Hoop, en Liefde aan Mooren leeren,  
Op dat zij, witgemaakt, met hem het LAM steeds eeren.

IN LEYDEN by ABRAM KALLEWIJER.

*Et Blaguet fecit*

## 6. *Jacobus Capitein* *A tragic life*

'As a child of seven or eight years old, having been stolen from my parents in war or in some such incident, I was sold....'. With these simple words Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein sketched for his Dutch audience the drama that 17 years earlier had led to his enslavement. The 25-year-old former slave told the shocked Dutch how and why he had come to their country where he had become a free man, where he had been baptized and where on 10 March 1742 he, the first black student at the University of Leiden ever, had completed his theological study. For the complacent Dutch burghers living in the affluent United Provinces, it was a completely unfamiliar story. The personal drama of Capitein, the tale of how he had been carried off from the Gold Coast in dark and distant West Africa to the Netherlands, was for them strange and surreal.

Perhaps even stranger was that he himself did not remember his original name, what his parents were called or where he came from. As he related many years later, the few facts he knew were told to him by the sea captain, Arnold Steenhart, from the Dutch West India Company, the man who had found and bought him as a slave on the St Andreas River, almost certainly the current Sassandra River in the west of the Ivory Coast.

The captain of the Zeeland frigate was kinder than his name – Stoneheart in English – suggested. When on his journey along the coast he visited the small Dutch fort of St Sebastian, he presented the young boy to his friend Jacobus van Goch, a kind-hearted merchant and the local representative of the Dutch West India Company. Pleasantly surprised by the gift, and to mark his gratitude for the seaman's gesture, Van Goch called his new 'acquisition' simply Capitein.

What the young boy thought about the

transaction was probably of little concern to the two traders, but he himself later remembered that Van Goch, a childless bachelor, had treated him like a son. He was in any case much luckier than the huge majority of Africans who had been shipped across the oceans as slaves for at least the two previous centuries. Three years later Van Goch returned to the Netherlands, taking the young boy with him. According to Dutch law, Capitein was now no longer a slave, as the institution of slavery no longer existed in the Netherlands.

By coincidence, the two sailed from Elmina with the same Captain Steenhart who had bought Capitein and given him to Van Goch. On 25 July 1728, the young African set foot for the first time on Dutch soil. After a few days at Middelburg they travelled over land to The Hague, the birthplace of his protector, where they now settled. For the young boy it must have been a culture shock and certainly very traumatic, in spite of the fact that he at once became a member of the Van Goch family.

### **A black intellectual in Holland**

In Holland, where black people were seldom seen, he must have been a rarity, a freak. He was stared at in the streets as though he was some fun-fair attraction and was considered a biological aberration, a somewhat sinister phenomenon. Some Dutch people believed that Africans had no souls, some had strange prejudices such as that all blacks were lazy, stupid and adulterers, and for a small section of the population, the slave traders, blacks were simply 'products' which you bought and sold like 'living ebony'.

Other great problems for the young boy were the alien customs of his new fatherland and of course the new language. No wonder he felt very

**Henri van der Zee**  
*journalist*

*Page 72: Portrait of J. Capitein. 'See this Moor! His skin is black, but white is his soul.'*  
*Poem by Brandijn Ryser. Engraving by Francois van Bleiswijk.*  
*Iconografisch Bureau, Den Haag*

isolated at first and often took refuge in the Haagsche Bosch, a park on the outskirts of town. There, as he wrote later 'one can forget one's worries'.

Capitein had, however, the luck to be intelligent and to possess a certain charm, which served him well when he was sent to school and catechism lessons. He was soon discovered by a young lady, the 'unforgettable jonkvrouwe Roskam', who taught him Hebrew, and – more importantly – by two highly esteemed theologians, who took him under their wings. They introduced the young heathen to Christianity with such success that on 8 July 1735, seven years after his arrival in the Netherlands, he was christened in the Kloosterkerk in The Hague. Then and there he received the names Jacobus, Elisa and Johannes, after his adopted father and two members of his new family.

Two years later he took another big step when he moved to Leiden, where he chose to study theology with the intention of eventually going back to the Gold Coast and in particular to Elmina Castle, the headquarters of the West India Company, to try 'to draw away his fellow-countrymen from the service of false gods and show them the way to the true religion'.

Luck was with him again. Not only did his adopted father, Van Goch, help him financially as far as he was able, but Capitein found in Leiden another protector, Pieter Cunaeus. This member of an important Dutch family sat on the committee that accorded fellowships, and thanks to his mediation, Capitein received yearly an extra 150 guilders. How Capitein had fared at the Latin School in The Hague has not been recorded, but it was soon obvious that in Leiden the 'African Moor' had found his place. He passed all examinations with good results and was very popular in university circles.

When on completing his four years of study, Capitein announced his intention to return to the Gold Coast, a great number of his friends were deeply upset. They poured out their hearts out in enthusiastic – if indifferent – poetry containing such passages as: 'Your departure is bitter for me,

O black Moor, internally much whiter than alabaster' and 'Go and leave with courage the Netherlands, leave Leiden, say farewell to the University, even if you feel that your tender soul is breaking with sadness and nostalgia'.

Before he sailed, however, Capitein surprised everybody, and not least his friends and teachers, by reading a dissertation which made history and which soon became a sort of bestseller in Holland. This success was not surprising because Capitein's reasoning in this thesis suited the Dutch very well – and in particular the men who had appointed him preacher in Elmina, the Directors of the West India Company. He in fact had given his blessing to the slave trade, the main business of the West India Company. The title of the 2.5-hour-long oration, translated from Latin, speaks for itself: 'Political-Theological Dissertation on slavery, as being not in conflict with Christian freedom'. In other words: as a Christian one can enjoy spiritual freedom without being physically a free person.

At one stroke Capitein became famous. He was invited to preach in several churches and in some places the crowds were so enormous that many had to stand outside. At one point the pressure became too much even for the young preacher, and he became, according to his publisher, 'quite unwell'. Portraits were printed of him, and for years to come in many Dutch houses his face stared gloomily from the living room walls.

He himself enjoyed those last weeks in Holland, telling his audiences over and over again how fortunate it was that he, 'a blind heathen who had been a poor slave was now sent by God as the first African to tell his compatriots of God's qualities, his eternal goodness and his righteousness'.

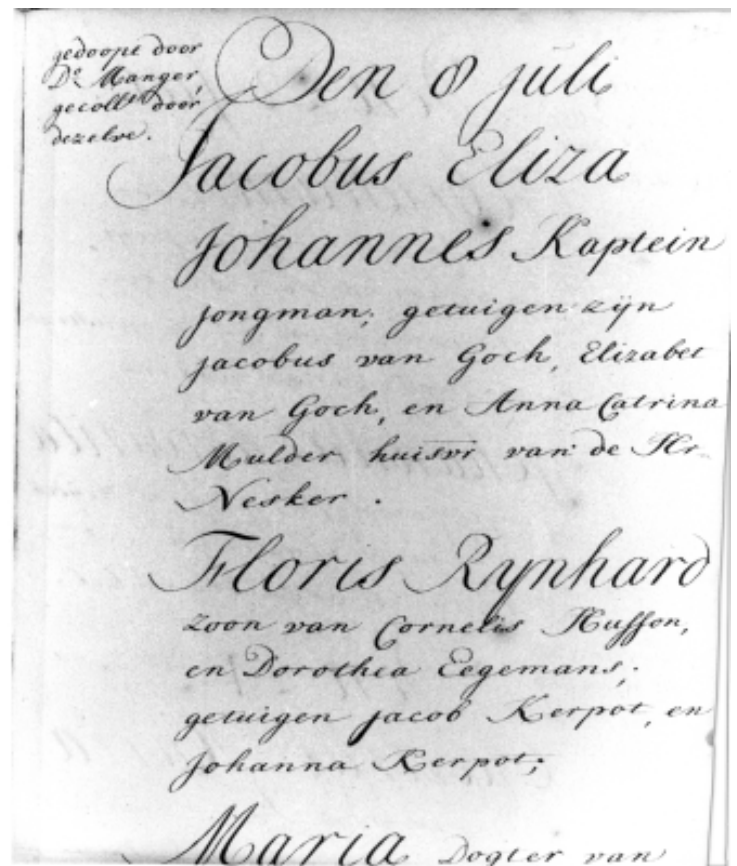
In July 1742 the moment of farewell came. Capitein sailed away on board the 'Catherine Galey'. He had lived for 14 years in the Dutch Republic, where he had grown from a lonely stranger to a self-assured and popular young man. As he wrote to his best friend, Brandyn Ryser, saying goodbye was not easy. 'Perhaps I

will never return to Holland and I will never see you again'. One of his other friends, Johannes van Dijk, the painter of one of Capitein's portraits, gave him a last warning not to expect too much in Africa. 'Your work will not be appreciated by those who buy and sell their fellow man'. These turned out to be prophetic words.

The voyage was long, but Capitein travelled in reasonable comfort. While other blacks were crammed nearly naked between the decks of the ships that took them away from Africa, the young vicar, as an important employee of the West India Company, enjoyed his own cabin. Not for him the beans and barley of the slaves, but meals at the captain's table.

On 8 October 1742, Capitein reached Elmina, where Director-General Jacob de Petersen received him with great warmth. He himself had arrived 18 months earlier and was delighted to welcome a man with whom he would be able to converse.

Elmina Castle, from where De Petersen ruled as a sort of overlord over the numerous Dutch settlements on the West African coast, was shipshape and bustling with activities. A few years earlier the situation had been different. Through the stubbornness of one of De Petersens predecessors, the West India Company had been involved in a long and costly war with the inhabitants of the surrounding town, but when Capitein arrived peace reigned again. The slave trade had resumed, and on average 5,000 slaves were bought and sold every year. So full were the slave cellars that the Company had decided to use the warehouses as well, built at the beginning of the century, for the storage of slaves. Elmina Castle had been built around 1505 by the Portuguese, who called it Castelo Sao Jorge after their king Jorge II. It was the first grand European building in Africa. Ever since its establishment in 1621, the West India Company (WIC) had set its eyes on Elmina Castle and its harbour. Their efforts to conquer it were twice thwarted by the Portuguese, however. The third time, on 27 August 1637, the Dutch at last were successful. Supported by 1,200 soldiers sent with nine



ships from Dutch Brazil, a combined force of WIC personnel and allied Africans stormed the castle and conquered it without much effort. It became at once the headquarters of the Company and remained in Dutch hands until it was transferred to the English in 1872.

'Den 8 juli', register of Baptisms of the Kloosterkerk mentioning Capitein (1735).

Gemeentearchief Den Haag, bnr 377 inv 176.

### A puritan vicar in Elmina

While all travellers who visited the castle raved about its beauty, they were much less taken with the inhabitants. As Capitein would soon notice, the employees of the Company were mostly 'the scum of the nation'. One predecessor of De Petersen wrote: 'They are of low birth, have had no education, are without virtues, arrogant and without a shadow of knowledge'. The Dutch used to say that across the equator the Ten Commandments do not exist. After a visit to Elmina, a Frenchman once remarked: 'One would wish that they had a little more respect for the principles of Christianity'.



It was with people of this kind that Capitein had to work, but at first it was of no great concern to him. On 21 October, 13 days after his arrival, he preached his first sermon. He reminded his listeners how he had left the region 14 years ago to go to 'blessed' Holland, to return now 'like an Eagle floating above his young....in peace in this same country, in this same place'. Emotionally he confessed: 'my soul is moved because of the ways God leads me'. Not only had God saved Capitein from a lifetime of slavery, but He had also taken him to Holland, where he had been fed and educated.

De Petersen was highly satisfied and wrote a day later to the Company that 'the preacher as far as his character is concerned, pleases me very much'. It is questionable whether his underlings were of the same opinion. Capitein had been educated in the very strict regime of the Dutch Reformed Church, which – as he soon found out – would hardly make for an easy relationship with the kind of ruffraff that worked for the company. Theirs was a community where alcohol, gambling and prostitutes played a major role, financed by the profits from their slave trade.

He did not have to wait long for the first blow. Shortly after his arrival he decided that the best way to make friends with the natives – he was appointed as their missionary – was to marry a black girl. He put the proposal before De Petersen who rejected it at once. The Director-General pointed out to him that the rules of the Company did not permit such a liaison, as his future partner was not a Christian. The only solution was to educate and convert the girl before marriage.

Capitein decided to appeal against this rule and in February 1743 wrote a letter to the Company in which he explained that a marriage with a local girl would give him the goodwill of the blacks as it would demonstrate that in spite of his education and religion, he did not look down on them. He admitted that it would also be the best way to arm himself against the 'seductions of Satan'. Capitein, however, had to wait two years before the question of his marriage

was finally decided by the Company Directors, who in 1745 chose to send as his bride a girl from The Hague, Antonia Ginderdros, a Christian. Capitein married her very soon after her arrival, calling her a 'gift of God'.

The failure of his efforts to make himself more acceptable to his compatriots was the beginning of the slow downfall of Capitein. At first everything seemed fine. With the letter in which he spoke of his wedding proposal, he had proudly sent a report of his activities in the first four months. It was an impressive document. Among other things, he spoke of the school that had grown from 20 to 45 pupils, all African, of whom the majority were able to recite the Our Father and the Ten Commandments. He was, however, concerned about the absence of girls at the school. The problem was that the parents kept their daughters home because they knew that once the girls could read and write and perhaps be converted to Christianity they would no longer be able to live with white men – and earn some money – since the church did not permit that.

He complained, too, about the fact that only a few people came to church on Sunday, no more than 17 souls. The rest of the white population was Lutheran, Catholic or simply indifferent. And even with those few who did attend he was unable to celebrate the Lord's Supper, as all of them were living with native women.

Capitein was not the first person to report to Amsterdam about what had become a common practice in most Dutch settlements abroad. As early as 1667 a complaint about the immorality of the inhabitants of the Castle had cost a preacher his job. He encountered such anger and resistance when he tried to put a stop to the habit that he was forced to resign. In 1731, just before Capitein arrived, a vicar wrote sadly to Holland that there was no one in Elmina 'who did not openly live with whores or in adultery'. He decided to return home and advised the Company not to send another vicar to try to change things 'as this would be utterly in vain'.

In spite of his complaints, Capitein was at



Gesigt op de ACADEMIE, te Leyden.  
*In 1720. A. W. G. de G. & A. K. Kellerman, sculp.*

that time still optimistic about his future, and De Petersen also was still very pleased. The Director-General wrote at about that time: 'I cannot remain silent, but I have to say that I am daily a witness of the unending zeal which his Honour, the vicar, practises in order to achieve his holy ends'. It was to be the last occasion that the Director-General praised his preacher so wholeheartedly.

The year 1744 was the turning point. Capitein became more and more disillusioned about the prospects of converting any of the natives after having been able to baptize only one baby in the beginning. But he was particularly upset by the lack of any moral support from his employers in

Holland. In one of his first letters, he had asked the Amsterdam Church Council, which together with the Company had appointed him to go to Elmina, whether he could baptize the children who were able to say the Our Father or whether he had to wait until they knew the whole Creed by heart. The answer from Amsterdam was disheartening. In a letter of only two paragraphs they told him curtly to stick to the usual rules. The gentlemen in Amsterdam obviously had no interest in the special problems their vicar was faced with.

His feelings of abandonment and frustration had been deepened by the discovery of a note-book amongst a pile of documents. It was a so-

*Academy of Leiden University, where Capitein defended his thesis in 1742. Copperplate by Abraham Delfos adapted from Joannis Jacobus Bijlaert (1763).*

*Academisch Historisch Museum, Leiden.*

called Church Book, in which christenings and weddings were registered. The neglected state of this register made it very clear that nobody in the past had taken the task of the Reformed Church in Elmina very seriously. Someone had started the registration in 1683, but apart from the five marriages since that year, a few christenings and a list of churchgoers from 1690 till 1734, it contained no other information concerning church life.

Even more shocking were the comments in the back of the book about the behaviour of two men who, shortly before Capitein's arrival, had been the most important officials in the Castle: Director-General Martinus des Bordes and the Reverend Ketelanus. According to the story in the book Des Bordes 'had been as useful in the church congregation as a rotten fruit amongst the ripe ones' and Ketelanus sinned seriously by celebrating the Lord's Supper with Des Bordes and 'a certain young lady'. The rest of the white population had stayed away as they 'did not want anything to do with a cleric who had so many stains on his cloth'.

Capitein wrote extensively to Amsterdam about the book, explaining that he was not only upset because of the fact that many illegitimate children had been baptized but also that the rest of the book was 'profaned with filthy language', which ridiculed and slandered the 'Servants of the Word'. He warned the Company and the Church in Amsterdam that if they did not support him, those people who lived here 'as if there was no God' would end up in control. In that case he asked 'humbly and reverently' that they should accept his resignation.

It was not just the problems of his professional life that drove Capitein to this desperate act. He was also made wretchedly unhappy by the attitude of some of the white employees at the Castle. From the moment of his arrival he had been the target of mockery and insolence that sometimes made his life hell. Many Europeans found it very hard to accept that an 'African Moor' had joined them as an equal and was in fact hierarchically even placed above them. For

the average white, blacks were slaves, and they had never met an educated black man like Capitein.

Their abuse led many times to clashes, and in March 1743, only six months after Capitein's arrival, to a violent dispute. The occasion was a birthday dinner for De Petersen, who looked on helplessly while one of his aides-de-camp, Huibert van Rijk, drunkenly insulted first the vicar and then religion and the church in general. The Director-General played down the affair in his report to Amsterdam, but his bosses there urged him to put an end to this kind of incident at once, as it would damage the prospects of the Company. De Petersen repeated these instructions in Council and reported back that the guilty ones had promised to mend their ways.

### **The fall from grace**

For Capitein, this had not been the end. In his later letters he often complained about officials in Elmina who treated him badly or ignored him, and it became more and more obvious that the whites in Elmina had little love for their puritanical and disapproving 'dominee'.

For a short while it seemed that things might improve. The arrival of Antonia Ginderdros, his marriage to her and a parcel of presents from the Company gave his spirits a much-needed lift, but it did not last long. Disappointed in his work and probably bored with his church duties, Capitein, against all advice, began trading like everybody else in Elmina Castle. As De Petersen later wrote, 'the longing for trade dulled his zeal for ordinary religion'.

In December 1746 he was found to have debts of 8,447 guilders and fifteen stuyvers, a very large sum for a man who earned 1,200 guilders a year. He was summoned to court and, after a humiliating trial, condemned to pay his dues. The hope that the young vicar had learned a lesson and would return to a life of rectitude was in vain. Two months later, on 1 February 1747, Capitein died, about 30 years old.

The question of course arises: how and why did Capitein die so young? Nothing has been said

about the cause of his death. In a later letter, De Petersen merely mentioned, somewhat bitterly, that the vicar had neglected his missionary duties and had forgotten the 'general honour and the great favours' which he had received at his arrival, but gives no further explanation. His employers, the Company and the Church Council in Amsterdam, simply noted during a meeting in October 1747 that the Rev. Capitein was deceased. From his friends and family, so jubilantly proud at his departure, not a single word has ever been heard. This silence, and the fact that no grave or tombstone has ever been found, has convinced me that Capitein almost certainly took his own life. In his age this was a mortal sin, not only in the Christian church but also among Africans – an unmentionable deed.

That Capitein would commit such a desperate act is not improbable considering the pressures he had been under in the last years of his life. After his happy time in Holland, where he was feted and famous, surrounded by loyal friends and a loving family, he had been unprepared for the disdain and even hatred that he found in Africa. He was deeply upset by the lack of respect and friendship from the white men as well as from his black compatriots. He, who in Holland had filled churches to overflowing, preached in Elmina to empty pews.

It must have been a bitter blow for the young man to realize that he was no longer at home on the Gold Coast, but that neither did he belong to the Netherlands. For the whites he was a black 'upstart', and for the Africans he was a black man with a Dutch, white heart. Even De Petersen no longer supported him, as was obvious from his later letter, while the Company and the Church in the Netherlands left him in the lurch altogether.

But if he indeed committed suicide, there must have been something more to drive him to his dramatic gesture. Although he never spoke or wrote about the many slaves who were 'stored', sometimes for months, in the cellars of the Castle under his apartment, he must have been very aware of their presence. He was never able to run

away from that enormous suffering, the sobbing and screaming, the sharp stink of the branding of flesh and the smell of sweat and dirt that rose from the slave holes.

The man who had defended slavery as being compatible with Christianity, and who had in a certain sense chosen the side of the white slave traders, discovered there and then in Elmina what kind of dirty business his employer, the Company, was engaged in. But most of all he discovered what slavery really was. Had it been too much for him? Is that what destroyed him? We will never know. We can only guess.

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# 7. Free to be a slave

## Capitein's theology of convenient slavery

### Introduction

The issue of slavery and the slave trade will continue to be a vexing topic of discussion for a long time to come, especially when it comes to the historical relations between Europe and Africa. This is understandable, since the period of the slave trade was one of the most intensive periods of contact between the two continents. While there still remains much that is not known about the period and the practice, much information has been gathered that can inform present discussions. Some of these known facts include the whole system of acquisition of slaves, the conditions under which they were held, the mutual benefits that accrued to both the African and European traders and even the theoretical and intellectual support that sustained the whole enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter concentrates on one particular aspect of the subject: the theology of slavery developed by the ex-slave Jacobus Capitein in defence of the system of slavery. His writings on the subject earned him popularity and fame as well as condemnation and controversy. Capitein was one figure in the slave trade who sprang from relative obscurity to the centre stage of Dutch history in the 18th century, and has since refused to disappear. He was one of the very few who escaped the fate of the countless other faceless African slaves who were shipped from the continent in the 17th and 18th centuries and often referred to as just 'heads' without names. As a young African boy, Capitein was captured and sold into slavery in Elmina around 1735. His master, who gave him the name Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, brought him to the Netherlands where he was baptized in the Kloosterkerk in The Hague and given a formal education. Having proven himself an eager and promising

student, he was admitted to a four-year course in theology at the University of Leiden. He completed his theological studies with a dissertation that defended the institution of slavery as not being opposed to Christian liberty, and advocated that it could be practised alongside the evangelization of Africans. Subsequently, the West India Company sent him as missionary and chaplain to Elmina, where he worked for five years before his untimely death at the age of 30. It is both curious and ironic that his writings became an important source of legitimacy for the continued subjection of Africans to slavery.<sup>2</sup>

### The context of Capitein's theology

Capitein's views on slavery, as developed in his dissertation, did not come just out of the blue. He appears to have been echoing some of the strong voices of the time and giving them his own distinctive stamp. Indeed, slavery was an issue which the Dutch public had been debating for many years as the nation evolved through wars and foreign domination into a major sea-faring nation and eventually into a prosperous economy. Being a Christian nation, the issue of religion (specifically Christianity) and slavery was one of the most important ethical themes of the time, since much of the prosperity of the period was based on the Dutch participation in the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>3</sup> Dutch public opinion therefore differed considerably on the question of slavery, and many discussions and arguments took place everywhere. The main issue was whether Dutch citizens, who cherished freedom so much, should in turn make other people slaves and thereby deprive them of their freedom. This was a particularly important question because slavery was not permitted in the Netherlands itself, although Dutch merchants were major partici-

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*Page 80: Capitein was baptized in the Kloosterkerk (minster) at Lange Voorhout in The Hague. Anonymus engraving adapted from Gerrit van Giessen (1692-1750).*

Collection Gemeentearchief  
Den Haag, gr B 196.

1. There are a number of important studies on this subject that the reader may refer to, including Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, Boston 1961; James Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, New York 1981; and Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815*, Cambridge, 1990.
2. For a fuller account of the life and work of Capitein, the reader is referred to D.N.A. Kpobi, *Mission in Chains. The life, theology and ministry of the ex-slave J.E.J. Capitein with a translation of his major publications*, Zoetermeer, 1993.

pants in the slave trade. Outside the Netherlands however, many Dutch citizens were known to have owned slaves in the colonies.

Within the circle of the lawyers, the strongest voices were in favour of slavery and the slave trade. They contended that slavery, as an ancient institution, had operated for the benefit of society over the years and there was no reason to abandon it now. Moreover, slavery was a more humane way of treating prisoners of war than executing them, as had been practised in times past. The views of Hugo de Groot (or Grotius), one of the most celebrated Dutch lawyers of the 17th century, echoed this position and helped to shape much of the public opinion on the subject. Contemporary theologians, however, held substantially different views on slavery, although the general attitude was that it was an acceptable practice. The church as an institution, while not condemning the practice of slavery, often pleaded for a humane treatment of the slaves, arguing that slavery was a natural practice in every human society. The duty of the Christian church, in their view, was to help develop rules that would ensure that the slaves were not unduly maltreated. It is even known that a few Dutch ministers of the Gospel themselves owned slaves who worked for them on their plantations in the colonies.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding their general acceptance of slavery, all the Dutch theologians were of the view that no Dutch person should make another Dutch citizen a slave. It must be mentioned however, that there were a few ministers of the Gospel who openly criticized and condemned the slave trade as an inhumane system that was contrary to the teaching of the Gospel. Notable among them were the Rev. Jacobus Hondius from Hoorn (1629-1691) and the Rev. Bernardus Smytegelt from Zeeland (1665-1739), both of whom condemned the slave trade as an exploitation and dehumanization of the Africans.

For most of the theologians, their endorsement of the enslavement of the Africans was based largely on the so-called 'Curse of Ham' theory. This theory claimed that Africans were

the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah, whom Noah cursed to become a slave of his brothers. The enslavement of the Africans was therefore justifiable as divinely ordained. Apart from this theory, most Calvinist theologians rationalized the whole system of slavery and shifted the argument from the level of the present sufferings of the slaves to the future salvation of their souls, which, in their view, deserved more attention. Many theologians therefore pleaded not for an end to the slave trade but for the evangelization of the slaves in order to ensure the salvation of their souls.

### **In defence of slavery**

Capitein thus entered a debate that was already ongoing and added to it his own distinctive slant. In order to understand his views on the subject, we shall consider his defence of slavery from three main perspectives, beginning with a summary of his main arguments, followed by a consideration of the motivations for his theology and ending with some comments and observations on his theology and its relevance for modern African Christianity.

The title of the paper in which Capitein defends slavery was itself indicative of the line of argument to be followed. The title, 'Politico-Theological Dissertation on Slavery as not being opposed to Christian Freedom', made it clear from the beginning that the writer had taken a stand already.<sup>5</sup> In this study, Capitein was considering the question whether or not Dutch citizens could be allowed to continue engaging in the slave trade when the Netherlands was a Christian country that professed to seek the welfare and salvation of all human beings.<sup>6</sup> Capitein's contention was that the evangelization of the slaves could be pursued side by side with the slave trade. The introduction to his study made it clear he was writing to assure the slave owners that they would not jeopardize their commercial interests by converting their slaves to Christianity since, in his view, the practice of Christianity 'does not require an outer freedom (...) but only a spiritual freedom'. In other words, Christianity is

3. One of the most comprehensive studies on the subject is J.M. Postma.

4. See R.B. Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, vol. 4, 1974, p.179.

5. The dissertation was published in 1742 in Leiden by Phillipus Bonk and in Amsterdam by G. de Groot. It was originally written in Latin and later translated into Dutch.

6. See the English translation of Capitein's Dissertation in D.N.A. Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, p.204.

not synonymous with physical freedom. Capitein argues that it is a person's will that determines whether he/she is a slave or not, and not his/her personal circumstances. It is the things that a person allows to become a master over him that enslave him. Following in the footsteps of the majority of Dutch theologians, he also traces the origin of slavery to the Bible (Genesis 9:25), thereby endorsing the Curse of Ham theory. In his view, therefore, slavery is rooted in history and not in nature. Slavery was a practice that developed as a result of a historical incident of cursing. Significantly, therefore, slavery was given divine assent in the Old Testament and the patriarchs endorsed slavery even among their fellow Hebrews.<sup>7</sup>

Capitein goes on to emphasize that even though the spirit of the New Covenant is abhorrent to the practice of slavery, this abhorrence is only related to spiritual slavery and not physical slavery. He points out that the New Testament indicates in many places that what is to be avoided is slavery to sin and to the desires of the flesh and not so much physical slavery. He quotes extensively from Paul's writings to support his point (including 2 Corinthians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 7:23, Galatians 5:1), showing that Paul is quite emphatic that Christians should seek to escape the slavery imposed by adherence to the Law of Moses, i.e. mental slavery, and not physical slavery. It is for that reason that Paul advises everyone to remain what he/she was before conversion and not to spend valuable time trying to change that status. Indeed, Paul urges slaves to be obedient to their masters as if they were serving the Lord. For Capitein, the clearest statement by Paul that supports his position is the one he makes in 1 Corinthians 7:22: 'He who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed man of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ'. He also finds support from Paul's letter to Philemon, where he urges Philemon to accept his runaway slave back as a slave and also as a Christian brother, and in the words of Peter that 'a person becomes the slave of anything [anybody] that overcomes him'

(2 Peter 2:19). If anyone pointed out that the early Christians had a practice of freeing their slaves occasionally, Capitein would argue that they did it out of Christian charity and piety and not out of a guilty conscience. According to Capitein, there is no record of any Christian society in history that did not practice slavery, and whenever the practice had ceased in any society, it was not because of any prohibitions from Scripture but out of other considerations. Capitein further echoes the views of the 16th-century Flemish humanist, Ogier Busbeek (1522-1591) that not all men are born capable of taking care of themselves. Some people need others to take care of them and to check their freedom for their own sake and for the sake of society. The institution of slavery therefore ensures that the weak in society are helped by the might of their masters and the masters, in turn, benefit from the labour of their slaves.

7. See Leviticus 25.

### **What moved Capitein to defend slavery?**

Capitein was no doubt in a peculiar situation as he wrote his dissertation. Why did he choose the topic in the first place? As a former slave and now a Christian and an intellectual, was he trying to prove a point to the Dutch society or were there external pressures on him that proved too strong to resist? We may not be able to answer all these questions satisfactorily, but we can come as close as possible to the truth by considering all the influences and circumstances under which Capitein grew up, both in Elmina and in the Netherlands.

We may begin with his two most important mentors, his academic supervisor, Professor Johannes van den Honert, and his missionary mentor, Rev. Hendrik Velse, both of whom were known to hold views that encouraged the continuation of the slave trade alongside the evangelization of the slaves. It is therefore not surprising that Capitein took such a line of argument. Even if Capitein did not simply re-echo their views, there is the likelihood that they urged him on.

There was also the overarching influence of the West India Company (WIC), which controlled the slave trade and stood to benefit from a defence of the trade. It was the only body that could make Capitein's dream of returning to Elmina a reality, and it is not unlikely that they were active in the background, urging Capitein on in the writing of the dissertation. It is therefore not surprising that Capitein appears to be treading cautiously: making a case for the evangelization of the slaves without attacking the slave trade itself because it was the commercial and financial backbone of the WIC. Capitein was certainly aware that no opponent of the slave trade ever got an appointment with the WIC. Indeed there had been cases of employees whose appointments had been terminated for advocating a more humane treatment of slaves.<sup>8</sup>

There is therefore every likelihood that Capitein was under great pressure, whether directly or indirectly, to defend slavery, although that does not absolve him from bearing responsibility for what he wrote. There is much to indicate that he believed what he wrote. It is most likely that Capitein saw it as a double chance to echo the views of his mentors and at the same time to put across his own convictions about slavery. From our modern perspective, we may call Capitein an opportunist, but for him it was a God-sent opportunity which he was not willing to let slip by. When one considers the zeal with which he approached his work of evangelization among the Africans in Elmina, one has to concede that Capitein may not have been just an opportunist who wanted to get back to Elmina but that he had a genuine desire to help convert the Africans, even if they were still slaves.

Having alluded to the possible influence of Capitein's benefactors on his views, we should move beyond that and consider other factors that must necessarily have created the Capitein we have been referring to. It is absolutely necessary to try and understand his circumstances as a means of understanding the man himself. The scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed discussion of this aspect of his life, but

some factors that contributed to his psychological and social make-up ought to be examined here.

The formative years of Capitein's childhood were no doubt turbulent and traumatic. It was the period when the slave raids and kidnappings made life unsafe for everyone, and even children lived in fear of being captured. Capitein's capture and enslavement meant the beginning of a period of psychological and emotional adjustment, a process that started in Elmina and continued all throughout his stay in the Netherlands. He perhaps never really got used to living among the Dutch people in the Netherlands and was determined to find ways and means of getting back to Elmina to live among his own people. It is therefore not wrong to surmise that Capitein's decision to become a minister of the Gospel was partly motivated by his traumatic childhood and the consequent desire to return to Elmina, since the ministry was the most likely means open to him. One gets the impression that he took the decision to go back to his 'father's house' quite early in his stay in the Netherlands because he never felt at home. The impact of these circumstances on the young mind of Capitein can only be imagined in both its negative and positive dimensions. No child goes through such an experience without being scarred in one way or another, and I wish to suggest that this traumatic childhood experience contributed in no small way to his later social and psychological make-up.

The early childhood trauma also produced ambivalence in him, although this was not recognized until he started his work in Elmina. As a growing child in the Netherlands, Capitein must have quickly recognized that he needed to learn to conform to Dutch standards before he could achieve any measure of acceptability. Yet he was also aware that as an African boy he would never become fully Dutch because of the colour of his skin. He had to be content with being an African Dutch man, or to put it in the words of one of the poems written in his honour, to be 'a white soul in a black body'.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore clear

8. One such case is recorded of the Rev. Jan Willem Kals (1700-1781), who was expelled from Suriname in 1733 when he advocated the conversion of the African and Indian slaves there. See J.M. van der Linde, *Jan Willem Kals – Leraar der Hervormden, advocaat van Indiaan en Neger*, Kampen, 1987, p.132.  
9. This poem, *Klinkdicht*, was written by his friend, Brandijn Ryser, and printed under one of his portraits.

that Capitein's traumatic childhood had begun having an effect on him even before he left the Netherlands, and must therefore have been partly responsible for his views on the enslavement of his fellow Africans.

### Taking issue with Capitein

While recognizing Capitein's possible motivations, we can also not fail to take issue with him on the style of his arguments, which were largely biased and without objectivity. His motivation to please and to make a strong case for slavery, led him to be unduly selective in his use of sources. A clear example can be seen in his use of Scripture to support his points. It is obvious that he makes use of only those passages of Scripture that appear to favour his views, to the virtual exclusion of the many others that stated otherwise. When he refers to the practice of slavery in the Old Testament, he does so without alluding to the many rules that governed the practice and which were meant to guarantee the protection and humane treatment of slaves. Nor does he mention the important difference that was made between a Hebrew slave and slaves from other nations. Also, in using the writings of Paul to argue in support of slavery, Capitein fails to indicate that Paul considers slavery as an acceptable state only if it is unavoidable (see 1 Cor. 7:21). Even when he refers to the practice in the early church where the occasional freeing of slaves occurred, he tries to play down its importance by showing it as merely an act of piety. One wonders why he does not see enough good reason to recommend the same act of piety to his contemporaries.

Moreover, Capitein ignores the views of those Dutch theologians who spoke against the slave trade. He lumps all of them together under the anonymous term 'our opponents' and fails to consider their objections. Even the well-known Reformed minister Godfried Udemans (1581-1649), who did not condemn slavery but advocated a humane treatment of slaves, was ignored by Capitein apparently because his endorsement of slavery was not explicit enough.<sup>10</sup>



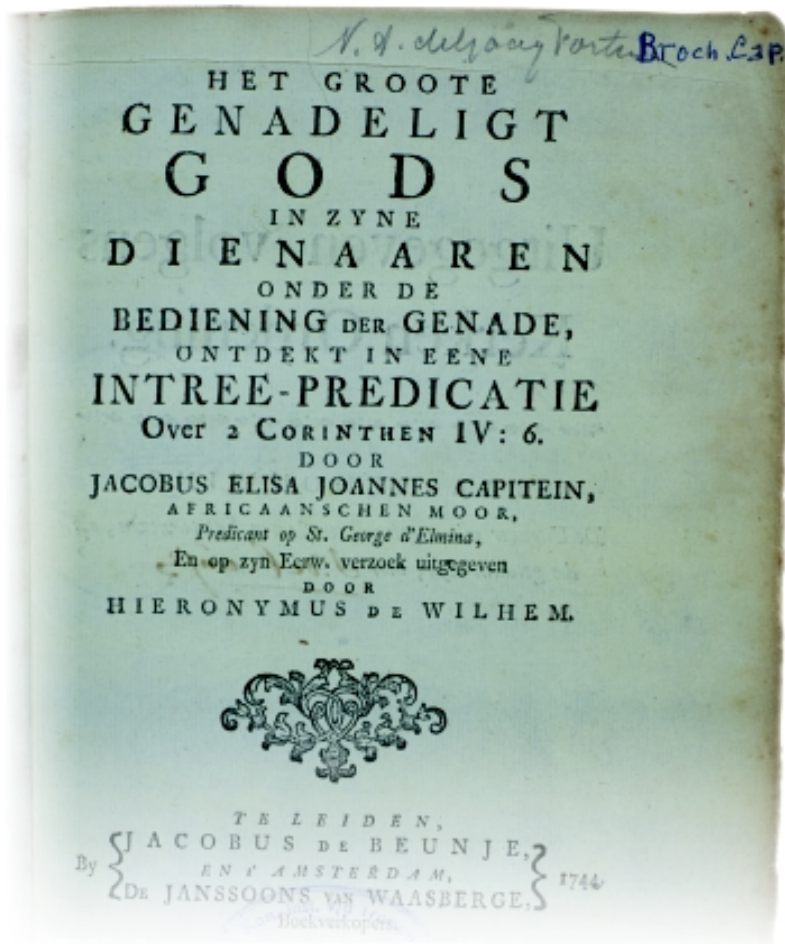
We may also cross over to Elmina to consider the impact of Capitein's views on slavery as he worked there, far removed from the academic environment of Leiden. Although not much is written about it, there is no doubt that Capitein's theology of convenient slavery came to the fore when he started to work in Elmina as a chaplain and lived in the same castle where the slaves were incarcerated before shipment. One cannot help but imagine what kind of feelings he had in those circumstances, for there is no doubt that he saw and knew the dehumanizing conditions under which they were held. Did he have any sympathy for them? Did he have any relationship

*Psalm 132 above the entrance of the church hall in St. George Castle in Elmina.*

*Photo I. van Kessel.*

10. G. Udemans, *'t Geestelijcke roer van 't Coopmans Schip*, Zierikzee, 1640, p.360.





Frontispiece of the inaugural sermon by Capitein (1744).

KIT Library Br CAP:998=017.

with them? Did he indeed want to have a relationship with them? The circumstances of his daily life in Elmina constituted an untenable situation for any minister. As an employee of the WIC, he was duty bound to support – and even promote – the commercial interests of the company if he wanted to keep his job. But he was also faced with a situation that he could not have imagined.

His dissertation on slavery was written at a time when he had not yet experienced the treatment of slaves from close quarters, and his manner of writing indicates that he had almost no insight into the practical aspects of slavery. He himself had not experienced the life of a slave in the dungeons and plantations and was therefore understandably bereft of any feelings of sympathy or solidarity with his fellow Africans. His position of relative freedom had blinded him to the evils of slavery. But as an African and a

Christian his attitude must have undergone some readjustment in the face of the reality in Elmina. How could he minister to the Europeans who put the slaves on transport, and to the free Africans, some of whose relatives were probably among the slaves, and yet not feel an urge to minister to the slaves themselves? It was understandable if Capitein's predecessors ignored the spiritual needs of the slaves, but how could he also do the same? He had argued in his dissertation that the conversion of a slave need not lead to his/her freedom, and therefore one would have expected that he would at least try to convert some of them even before they were shipped out. Or was the opportunity lacking due to the circumstances under which the slaves lived? He must also have come to realize that the Elmina situation was far removed from the situation of Onesimus which Paul had dealt with in his letter to Philemon and which Capitein had used to argue his case in his dissertation. How was it possible to regard as brothers those maltreated anonymous slaves in Elmina, when their very lives were not their own?

### Dealing with Capitein today

We can hardly speak of Capitein's life and theology without considering what it has to say to us today, especially at a time when relations between Ghana and the Netherlands have once again come to the fore. Capitein was one of the important links between the two nations, even in those early years of contact. Apart from the commercial enterprise that was so important in the relationship, Capitein's involvement took it beyond those limits and stretched it into the area of Christian mission and all the questions related to it. We shall therefore devote a few lines to consider the place of Capitein in the history of theology in Africa today as well as to other relevant comments.

Since Capitein was an African, and indeed one of the first African theologians, it would not be out of place to ask to what extent he promoted theology in Africa. In a sense, Capitein considered his theology a genuine search for what was best

for the Africans, although Africans were not thought to have a 'theology' at the time. He could not see a chance of using theology to stop the slave trade altogether and therefore went for the second best option: to save slaves even in their bondage. Capitein chose such an option because of the cultural and theological captivity in which he had grown up. He had no other standards than the standards of the West and he could only define himself in terms of those standards. He was doing his best to contextualize Reformed theology in the Elmina setting and did not consider it in any way injurious to the well-being of the Africans. It was a theological captivity that Capitein could hardly have realized. Sadly, the church in Africa today is not completely free of this theological bondage. Many theological training institutions in Africa are still struggling with the curriculum left behind by Western teachers and have in many cases not been able to develop any that are new and relevant. Many African theological problems are therefore being addressed with European presuppositions. It is absolutely necessary to avoid creating more Capiteins who, with the best of intentions, spend their time promoting a Western Gospel.

It must be said, though, that there is a refreshing awareness among African theologians today with an emphasis on contextual theology. A few institutions in Ghana and Nigeria are now actively pursuing the concept of a 'mother-tongue theology' by trying to bring the Gospel across in the language of the people. Fortunately, Bible translation into African languages has been an ongoing exercise for more than two centuries, and through this mother-tongue theology new African theologies are being developed side by side with the traditional Western ones. Gradually, Africans are beginning to develop relevant theologies to confront their own challenges. Incidentally, mother-tongue theology is perhaps one of the areas where Capitein may be given credit, for he was one of the first Africans to start writing and teaching in the local language. Within a few months of his assuming duty in

Elmina, he started to translate some of the important documents of Reformed doctrine into the local Fanti language. He sent these to Holland to be printed, and he used them to great advantage in his work. It was his singular contribution to the development of an indigenous theology based on the language of the African.

The Capitein story therefore comes full circle. The man attracts many different kinds of response, from pity to condemnation, from disgust to compassion, but we may want to end this chapter with a little display of magnanimity towards him. We have to understand his traumatic childhood; we have to take into consideration his theological orientation, which was inevitably Western and Calvinist; we need to understand his overriding zeal to get back to his 'father's house' in Elmina; and we also need to acknowledge the divided personality that he became as a result of his experiences. How can we blame him for becoming what society had made of him?



# 8. Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands

## *Religion mediating a tense relationship*

### **Introduction**

For decades, Ghanaians have formed a substantial immigrant community in the Netherlands, but only since 2000 has the Ministry of Home Affairs begun to consider the option of granting Ghanaians the formal status of a 'recognized minority'. However trivial this issue might appear in the eyes of the general public, it nevertheless marks the start of a new episode for Ghanaians living in the Netherlands. Whereas the previous period was dominated by concerns over (illegal) immigration of Ghanaians and the faltering measures to control that influx, new policies with regard to the major Dutch cities ('Grote Steden-beleid') are causing a change in perspective. It is now acknowledged that in addition to the established, large minorities – Chinese, Indonesian, Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese – other and generally much smaller minorities have come to stay. As a recognized minority, the immigrants concerned are entitled to policy measures geared towards their specific needs. Hence, we are witnessing a major shift from control and exclusion to policies of inclusion and care as far as the Ghanaian migrants' predicament is concerned.

Despite these shifts in policy, the tense relationship between the Dutch state and the Ghanaian community, specifically where the Ghanaian identity documents are concerned, still persists. Not only is Ghanaian life in the Netherlands generally marked by a high level of suspicion with regard to the Dutch state, but the migrant community itself has long taken over certain functions that are otherwise provided by the state. In a recent report, Nimako (2000) has labelled this phenomenon 'Emancipation by self-reliance' ('Emancipatie op eigen kracht'). He stresses the fact that the Ghanaian community

has constructed its own place in the Netherlands without an extensive reliance on the public goods of this society. In addition, the measures taken by the Dutch government with regard to Ghanaian immigration and the control and investigations of Ghanaian identities – which extend into Ghana itself – have recently been tightened.

This chapter explores the various dimensions of this tense relationship. It pays specific attention to the many Ghanaian churches that have emerged in the Netherlands and the role they play in the creation of a notion of self-reliance and self-esteem. There is some evidence to suggest that religious structures in Ghana have a history of antagonism with regard to state policies. This feature seems to have been carried over into the Netherlands. The Ghanaian churches escape overt attention by the Dutch government, do not take part in the formal contacts between the government and Ghanaian interest groups and societies, and hardly take part in the formal structures of Dutch religious life and its various church bodies. The moral authority they represent within the Ghanaian community is a distinctive one.

The first section is devoted to aspects of the Ghanaian immigration itself, while the second section deals with the position of these churches within the migrant community. What has been the role of these churches with regard to Dutch identity politics and present changes in its policies?

### **Ghanaian immigration**

Since the early 1970s a massive overseas migration has occurred of Ghanaians seeking 'greener pastures' in Europe and the United States. This migration occurred in two waves, starting around 1973 when Ghana experienced the effects of the

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*Page 88: Ladies' choir*  
*Mariama at the*  
*Begijnhof church in*  
*Amsterdam.*

*Photo Angèle Etoundi Essamba.*

oil crisis, followed by a new wave around 1981 when the coup by flight lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings added political upheaval to a deepening economic crisis. Migration initially focused on the West African region itself, Nigeria in particular. When economic and political conditions deteriorated, Ghanaian migration in the late 1970s started to focus on prosperous European countries such as Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. Sizeable communities of Ghanaian migrants developed in London, Hamburg and Amsterdam. In 1995 it was estimated that more than 12 per cent of the entire Ghanaian population was living abroad (Peil 1995: 345), and that after cocoa and gold, migrant remittances had become the third main source of income in Ghana.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, Ghanaian politicians have been aware that the Ghanaian diaspora is vital to Ghana's survival in the world economy of today. The frequent visits by Ghanaian political leaders to Ghanaian communities abroad have underscored the importance of this economic umbilical cord.

The Ghanaian community in the Netherlands comprises both first and second generation migrants. In his recent report, Nimako (2000) provides detailed data on the composition of the community, and indicates that of the nearly 13,000 officially registered 'ethnic' Ghanaians (1998), 22 per cent belong to the second generation, having been born in the Netherlands. Moreover, 56 per cent of the first generation migrants have adopted Dutch nationality. Therefore, a total of 78 per cent of officially registered Ghanaians have become fully 'Dutch' in terms of their citizenship, as it is common that these children born in the Netherlands are granted Dutch nationality.

The Ghanaian community is quite young. Migrants were and are mostly young men and women, usually around their mid-twenties. Many aspired to establish a family and therefore began exploring ways of marrying partners from Ghana. Young families settled from the early 1990s onward and the second generation of Ghanaians, born from Ghanaian parents in the Netherlands, is therefore now in the age group up to about

nine years of age. With middle-aged or even older Ghanaians numbering only a few, the Ghanaian migrant community is young and dynamic, marked by high labour productivity and eager to 'make it' in life. The rise of this energetic community has caught the attention of scholars, students and policy makers concerned with the position of minorities in Dutch society. Of all the Sub-Saharan African minorities, the Ghanaians are by far the most researched and best described. Reports deal with statistics, population, coping strategies, home ties, religion, gender and health, the colourful cultural expressions of the Ghanaian community and its relative success in overcoming the hardships of adaptation and integration. The 'Profile', published by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2001, concludes that Ghanaians by and large are well-integrated in the Netherlands. Employment is not really an issue of great concern as many Ghanaians even have multiple jobs, impoverishment is not a haunting problem, whereas the language barrier (many speak only English and Twi) is only felt when people wish to apply for higher ranking, qualified jobs. There is a disparity between their overall level of education in comparison with the unskilled or semi-skilled jobs Ghanaians hold, but because of their age many still see possibilities for improvement by enhancement of their language skills.

With a few noticeable exceptions, most of these studies have difficulties in grappling with the issue of illegal or undocumented immigration. Over the past two decades, the Dutch government has developed policies to curb the influx of what it perceived as mainly 'undocumented' and therefore illegal labour migrants. In a strange way the influx of illegal Ghanaian migrants has coincided with the efforts by the government to establish what Rouse has called a taxonomic state: an increasing use of censusing and mapping, the growing emphasis on the registration of births, marriages and deaths, the history of the passport, the identity card and fingerprinting... (Rouse 1995: 362)

1. Personal communication, Dr B. Agyeman-Duah, Institute of Economic Affairs, Ghana (October 1998).



## Dutch suspicions

Particularly towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, Africa came to figure as a 'force' largely responsible for undercutting the taxonomic efforts of the Dutch state, which had developed various techniques to control access to the common goods of its welfare society. In the early 1980s the so-called SoFi-number was introduced, a fiscal code given by the Dutch state to every resident at the moment of birth. This made it possible to keep a record of a person's income, tax-pay status, and use of social security benefit schemes throughout their life. This taxonomy was particularly meant to prevent illegal access to the common goods of the Dutch social benefit schemes.

One of the problems that surfaced, however, was that records on the population, particularly in the larger cities, showed many gaps. Identities were not fully known, could not be fully tracked or had escaped supervision. This came to be known as 'statistical dirt' ('vervuiling') in the population registration: records and statistics on the nation-state's subjects were not 'clean', 'consistent' and 'compatible'. From the 1980s on, a widely shared, public concern with 'illegality' ('het illegalen-vraagstuk') was born. Wild guesses began circulating in Dutch politics with regard to the total size of the illegal labour migrant population and the extent of the 'damage' done to the Dutch economy, labour market and the social services apparatus.

As public alarm was growing about the 'volume' of illegal aliens, and premised on the idea that one's identity is inseparably tied to one name and to one number, Dutch civil servants in the big cities began complaining bitterly about the strange identities, often considered 'fraudulent', that were discovered in their records and statistics. Since the late 1980s this concern has focused predominantly on the documents belonging to Ghanaians and Nigerians. When I interviewed civil servants in The Hague they revealed that in the years between 1992 and 1996 those dealing with Ghanaian and Nigerian identity-documents would consider *a priori*

almost 100 per cent of these to be fraudulent, forged or otherwise incorrect. The crash of the Israeli plane into the Amsterdam Bijlmer area in 1992, causing over 40 deaths in a blazing fire, stirred public concern about the possible size of the Ghanaian population as numbers of them went missing. Police officials initiated a public debate about the numbers of illegal Ghanaians supposedly living in such low-cost housing areas, now assuming a link between the numbers of illegal Ghanaians and the crime rate. In contrast with other ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, this provoked disproportionate concern for the West African community on the part of Dutch officials. It was soon estimated that the number of 'undocumented' West Africans was likely to be double if not triple the official figures (Van den Broek 1992).

The Dutch government introduced laws aimed at curtailing illegal immigration with the hope of enhancing the state's effectiveness in supervising civil society. These laws sought to prohibit contract marriages ('Wet Schijnhuwelijken'), thereby limiting the use of marriage as a way of gaining entry into Dutch society. Another law made it obligatory to be able to prove one's identity whenever asked at one's place of work ('Wet Identificatieplicht') and a law called the 'Koppelingswet' provided for the connecting of a range of different databases which each contain highly private, personal information on Dutch residents. Through their interconnection, this legislation will increase the visibility of those who have thus far escaped through the loopholes and inconsistencies of the various data systems, finding ways to reside and work in the Netherlands on an illegal basis.

These laws were also introduced in order to enable further research into the supposed relationship between illegality and criminality (Staring et al. 1998, Van der Leun 1998). In 1994 a special parliamentary commission of enquiry was established aimed at reviewing police methods of investigating criminal organizations in the Netherlands (the Van Traa parliamentary commission). An entire chapter of its report was devoted

to the Nigerian and Ghanaian involvement in criminal organizations and their intertwined relations in such activities. Although criminal activities among Ghanaians and Nigerians appear to be limited to a few domains (drug trafficking, car theft and trafficking in women for the prostitution business), these activities involved the supplying of identity papers and other documents (a type of activity known as 'making papers') for which they have become particularly well known. It is because of the taxonomic nature of the Dutch state that this activity was perceived as undermining its very basis. In other words, fraudulence with documents now began to be regarded as a serious crime.

This trend culminated in 1996 with the publication of yet another government ruling that came to be known as the 'Probleemlanden circulaire' (the circular letter on problem countries, April, 1996). This circular blacklisted five countries as having a notorious record concerning the production of fraudulent identity documents. At the top of this list was Ghana followed by Nigeria, India, Pakistan and the Dominican Republic.

For the first time, the Dutch government stated that it had no confidence in the capability of these five governments to control the flow and authenticity of identity documents. On top of the normal procedures related to migration and documents, another instrument would be added to controlling and checking identities. This instrument is called 'verification' ('verificatie'). It basically implies that for any identity document required of Ghanaians and Nigerians in the Netherlands (passport, marriage certificate, birth certificate, etc.), the Dutch government is entitled to investigate the person's identity in the country of origin. In practice it meant that as of 1996 the Dutch embassies in both countries stepped up their investigation of antecedents of any person applying for visa or residence permits, or for the adoption of the Dutch nationality. Such investigations carried out by Dutch officials in Ghana, usually with the help of local informants and detectives, involve the interrogation of relatives,

friends and colleagues, and researching schools, churches and hospitals for any further bit of information on the person. Only after the full verification of the person's identity is completed can documents be assessed and stamped as being 'verified'. In other words, any Ghanaian person hoping to settle in the Netherlands or anticipating to marry within the Netherlands knows in advance that permission to do so will only be obtained after a full and costly investigation of his or her private life in the country of origin.

Enormous difficulties with this verification procedure have arisen. Many Ghanaians have complained about the fact that in Ghana birth records are often missing or simply non-existent, that names are spelled differently or have been changed during the course of one's life, that dates and places of birth, of residence, of marriage, etc., are often not recorded, and that schools, churches and hospitals often have lost their records due to lack of funds for proper storage. Some have also indicated that families are often divided among themselves due to conflicts and rivalries, resulting in an unwillingness to give information or in deliberate distortions. It has even been suggested that local detectives have been bribed to give details or to mislead the investigation and so on.

### **A blow to Ghanaian dignity**

The impact of this procedure on the Ghanaian migrant community has been devastating. Many of the migrants had hoped to be able to marry prospective partners in Ghana and bring their spouses to the Netherlands, a trajectory which has now become virtually impossible as all sorts of 'verified' documents are requested which have proven to be very hard to come by (birth, marriage or bachelor certificates). The questioning by local detectives of relatives, friends, church leaders and others about personal identities has become a nightmare as it gives way to confusion, dealings, intimidation, family rivalries, suspicion and so forth. Monies paid for documents for the services of local civil servants often vanish. The latest verification questionnaire that any Ghana-



ian applicant has to fill out now contains over 25 question sections that relate even to uncles, aunts, half-brothers, half-sisters and grandparents back home in Ghana, a task almost impossible to complete and an interference with private life spheres that Ghanaians consider completely inappropriate in cultural terms.

When the effects of the verification procedure became felt, Ghanaian interest groups presented a petition to the Dutch parliament in 1998 including reports on a number of cases in which, for unclear reasons, verification had failed. The report, although supported by legal rights groups and lawyers in the Netherlands, effected little change in the situation. In 1999 this was followed by an official complaint filed with the Ghanaian government against the Dutch government and their treatment of such and similar cases. While interest groups in the Netherlands

began organizing their collaborative protests against these measures, in Accra the prizes for forged documents were skyrocketing (for Accra see De Thouars 1999). So-called 'paper-boys' and 'connection-men' increased their prices for forged passports, visas or any other type of required documents to unprecedented levels.

Within the Ghanaian community these measures were increasingly being felt as insulting and as a new feature of late postcolonial and highly unequal state relations. The Netherlands' authorities' investigations of citizens' identities on the territory of another state is a telling sign of this inequality and was felt as a blow to Ghanaian dignity and self-esteem. Ghana's and Nigeria's weaker systems of civil administration, both in the present and in the past, act in that sense against their own territorial integrity. They have been forced to allow investigations of the

*The Ghanaian church community Resurrection Power and Living Bread Ministries in the Egeldonk car park in Amsterdam.*

*Photo Angèle Etoundi Essamba.*

identities of their citizens by another, more strongly organized state. From the perspective of Dutch officials, this entire exercise is a reaction to the failure of previous attempts to tighten access.

The Dutch state wants to supervise the state's perimeters and to curb migration from Africa (and the rest of the non-Western world for that matter). Economic migrants are considered parasitic to its wealth and resources. West African immigration in particular sent shock waves through the Dutch system, demonstrating that access control was far from watertight. The porous system offered many loopholes for taking up illegal residence and gaining illegal access to social benefit schemes and the like. Above all, many began to realize that a system based on the creation of external memory for the identification of persons, in terms of a paper-based bureaucratic control of identity as opposed to a social memory of such identities, is the result of a specific and certainly not universal cultural rationale. It is particularly in West Africa (though not exclusively so), where the social memory of names and identities is so important, that the confrontation between cultural rationales in establishing identities became so pertinent.

It is in the context of this tightening of immigration laws that the number of Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands rapidly began to increase. Although this growth at first sight could be interpreted as coincidental, the question arises how these churches have helped to mitigate the impact of Dutch identity politics on the Ghanaian community.

### **Ghanaian Pentecostalism and the quest for respect and self-esteem**

While Ghanaian identity in the Netherlands began to be criminalized during the late 1980s, various Ghanaian migrant communities witnessed the emergence and proliferation of many Pentecostal churches. Elsewhere I have described the interplay between migration from Ghana and the growth of Pentecostalism, as one of the most popular forms of Christianity in Ghana (Van Dijk 2000, 2001).

The Ghanaian Pentecostal churches that then emerged, particularly in the big cities, were either branches of similar churches in Ghana or newly established within the migrant community itself. A more recent development is the 're-migration' of these churches from the Netherlands back to Ghana.

Pentecostalism is a brand of revivalist Christianity with profound roots in black American communities. From the United States, this faith started spreading to other parts of the world around 1910-1920. It is marked by charismatic inspiration through the Holy Spirit, by which ecstasy, speaking in tongues and various forms of faith healing become available to the believer. It is also distinguished by its emphasis on strict moral codes and its ideologies relating to the material well being of its members, sometimes mockingly called the 'prosperity gospel'. Much more should also be said about the personalism surrounding the leader-founders of the vast number of churches, the sense of individualism that they propagate and the critical attitudes they adopt vis-à-vis various forms of traditional cultural life. As many authors have argued, Pentecostalism is very much a faith within modernity, and much of its present appeal in African countries such as Ghana can be understood on that basis.

In Ghana this popularity has acquired unprecedented proportions. Particularly in the urban centres many young, upwardly mobile urbanites are fascinated by the Pentecostals, who are highly visible and audible in the public domain. They are particularly successful in accessing or controlling the media and thus are able to make their (moral) messages heard in practically every corner of society. This message propounds the establishment of a Christian nation and a morally rejuvenated society. While the churches on the one hand provide prayer services for the spiritual benevolence and the success and prosperity of every individual believer, they also provide a new idiom of power on a higher level of social and political life. Central concerns are how Africa – and Ghana in particular – can earn a respected

place in today's world community, and how dignity, pride and self-esteem can be re-established by getting rid of all evil and ancestral relations that tie the country to its past. The state is morally untrustworthy and politics a matter of great spiritual danger, whereas the nation must be liberated from the evil authorities that rule it. While the old and established missionary churches are condemned as preaching a gospel that teaches that there is bliss in being poor, most Pentecostal churches pursue (religious) entrepreneurship and urge their members to dress according to the latest fashions and styles. Displays of prosperity are welcomed as signs that God is with those who are economically active and independent. In Ghana, membership in the Pentecostal churches therefore comprises primarily the emergent middle classes, whose wealth is demonstrated through enormous donations of money. The services provided by these churches, such as marriages, funerals and birthing rituals, have turned into matters of prestige. It is in these Christianized rituals that the 'old' society and its traditional customs can be left behind and an embarrassing past of ancestor worship, 'superstition' and 'ignorance' can be critically engaged.

A church such as the large Church of Pentecost International has established congregations in over 40 countries around the world. As a consequence of the trans-nationalization of Pentecostalism there are now over 40 different Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands. While these churches often have thousands of members in Ghana, here in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe membership usually numbers somewhere between 250 to 500 adults. Many of these churches relate as closely to African cosmological notions as their predecessors do in Ghana. This means that concepts of spiritual protection, healing and deliverance from evil are considered as important for the true Ghanaian Pentecostal believer in the Netherlands as they are back home in Ghana.

This principle also applies to the issue of Ghanaian dignity and self-esteem in a globalizing

world. For a long time, the Ghanaian migrant community did not have organizations that would be able to make statements about the moral life of the community. Neither did it have clear-cut forms of social authority that could 'rescue' (as one informant explained to me) or safeguard dignity, respect and self-esteem in times of culturally important life-crisis rituals. Of particular relevance are the elaborate funeral arrangements. If these rituals are not observed properly, the social prestige and esteem of an entire family might be jeopardized. The Dutch government could not fill this void, while during the 1980s the small and emergent interest groups such as RECOGIN or Sikaman were not in a position to take up these roles. In other words, there was a need for moral authority, for a system and a setting that could preserve common notions of dignity, both with regard to the situation in the host society as well as with regard to the Ghanaians' 'own' cultural norms and feelings. Most Ghanaian migrants had been forced to accept menial work, ranging from fish-processing to cleaning jobs. These types of jobs are often held in contempt by Dutch citizens, but they are also looked down on by the emergent middle class groups for whom Pentecostalism holds an appeal. The stiffening Dutch identity policies that occasionally resulted in police 'razzias', as they were called, only aggravated the dominant feelings of loss, embarrassment and social shame (most particularly in cases where arrest by the police resulted in deportation back to Ghana, which often led to a humiliating confrontation with the family). The verification procedures only served to worsen this situation. These intrusions into the private life of the applicant demonstrated that any outside power could reach into the very heart of family life, of kinship relations and such sensitive issues as marriages, birth and citizenship in even the most remote places in Ghana, and that nothing could be done about it. All these developments ran counter to a deeply felt sentiment that migration must create respected 'big men' and 'big madams': people who had been able to 'make it in the



West', who had earned the social esteem of being able to build a 'mansion' in one of the suburbs of Accra or Kumasi and who would therefore have every right to claim a prominent place with his or her kinship relations.

The unprecedented growth of the Pentecostal churches in terms of numbers and membership coincided with these developments. The churches took on crucial roles with regard to the arrangement of funerals and marriages, and provided reliable channels of communication with Ghana – an important service in view of all the enquiries that Dutch officials wanted to make about identities. Even more important, however, was the atmosphere of prestige, pride and self-esteem offered by these churches. Ostentation became part of the church meetings, fashion and style became crucial elements of the outfit of the true believer and monetary donations the reciprocal wheel that kept the community going as a way of self-help and as a mode for displaying success and prosperity. Furthermore, the churches filled many functions and positions of authority in one form or the other (prayer leader, choir leader, president of men's, women's, youth fellowships, masters of ceremonies, chair of funeral fund and so on) so that ample channels of social esteem were created.

In short, what Ghanaian men and women lacked in the outside world is being created inside the church community. In this new moral order no questions are asked concerning a person's identity in taxonomic terms – that is, a person as a 'state-constructed' individual. Instead, questions are asked concerning an individual's moral standing in life, which is largely determined by his or her spiritual strength and social behaviour. In 'saving one's soul', the person is not cut off from his or her social environment. In Pentecostal ritual the person is regarded as the product of that family and community. It is that community which needs Christianizing to purge it from any evil influences. The Pentecostal churches thus replace the ancestral community with a new one, one in which the church leader often takes the position

as the new 'abusua panyin', the family head, who at all times is responsible for the proper execution of marriage, funeral or other important rituals. Whereas the Dutch state is utterly untrustworthy and Dutch society is held in contempt because of its permissiveness in moral terms, the churches have vied to establish a kind of community where aspirations for respect, esteem and authority have found an expression. Sadly, it has to be noted that some of these churches themselves have become embroiled in internal leadership struggles that sometimes have led to a breakdown in trust and to splits in communities and congregations.

Since the turn of the century, the churches have begun to face competition from associations formed on an ethnic basis, the so-called 'kuos'. These ethnic associations provide another, although much more restricted setting, where the identity politics of the Dutch state are mitigated and issues of respect and esteem are lived out in a different way. These associations establish kings ('ohene') and queen-mothers ('ohem maa') as the symbolic carriers of an identity that resists being encapsulated by the state. Although in this sense they occupy a position similar to that of the Pentecostal churches, they have a limited role to play when it comes to the life-crisis domains such as birth, death and marriage. It is therefore to be expected that the moral authority assumed by the Pentecostal churches will for the time being remain significant as a counterpoint to any other authority Ghanaians happen to meet while living in the diaspora.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has investigated the changing policies of the Dutch government vis-à-vis immigrant minorities. While previously the Ghanaian minority was primarily the concern of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice, now the Ministry of Home Affairs seems to have taken an interest in enhancing the position of 'small minorities'. The Dutch state has come to realize that these minorities have come to stay

and that therefore attention needs to be focused on the make-up of the local multicultural social fabric in the big cities. These policies, however, are likely to be handicapped by a lack of understanding of the cultural, moral and religious idiom used by this community in positioning itself within Dutch society.

State policies are caught in a contradiction. While aspiring to promote the integration of the Ghanaian minority, the state's taxonomic identity politics run counter to these efforts. As a result, the Ghanaian community remains suspicious of the state altogether. Cultural and moral forms of authority have emerged within the community, manifested notably by the Pentecostal churches, which in the eyes of the Dutch state cannot act as its interlocutor. Dutch policies are guided by the principle of strict separation of church and state. Despite the Pentecostal churches' moral authority, they can therefore not be 'targeted' as the facilitators of 'integration'. The role of these churches as mediators in the tense relationship created by the Dutch state through its identity politics, and as actors in carving out a profitable place for the Ghanaian community as whole, has been insufficiently recognized. The Pentecostal churches deserve full recognition for their role in helping Ghanaians overcome some of the effects of this tense relationship by preserving a sense of prestige and moral status on their own terms.

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**Merchants,**

*Part 3*

**Missionaries**

**& Migrants**



GEZICHT van het WEST-INDIËCH-HUYS, op de  
Binnen plaats te zien, tot Amsterdam.

*à Amsterdam by P. Faquet junior*

VUE de la MAISON des INDES OCCIDENTALES,  
à Amsterdam.

*à Amsterdam des P. Faquet junior*



# 9. 'Brought up well according to European standards'

## *Helena van der Burgh and Wilhelmina van Naarssen: two Christian women from Elmina*

### **Introduction**

On 11 February 1723, Helena van der Burgh, widow of the deceased clergyman Adama, left her native town of Elmina bound for Amsterdam. Travelling on the same Company supply ship *Amsterdam* was Carel van Naarssen, who had just finished his term as senior merchant of the West India Company (WIC) on the Guinea Coast.<sup>1</sup> It is very likely that Wilhelmina, Van Naarssen's little five-year-old Euro-African daughter, was also on board the *Amsterdam*. Later in life, the Widow Adama would be closely involved with Wilhelmina's upbringing; her involvement with Wilhelmina van Naarssen probably started then and there in the ship's cabin. Both Helena van der Burgh (the Widow Adama) and Wilhelmina van Naarssen were Euro-African women, daughters of high-ranking Company officials and local African women. Yet they occupied different positions in Elmina society. Helena's mother was the free woman Acre Sonque, but Wilhelmina was the daughter of Amba Intiem, a domestic slave who belonged to the 'abusua' of 'the black woman' Maay Accoma. Consequently, like all children of slave women in Elmina, Wilhelmina was considered to be a slave.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will explore the life stories of these two women – Euro-African women who on the one hand were firmly anchored in their African lineage, while their Christian education on the other hand made them part of European society.

For Helena, who was born in 1678, this was the second time she had left her native town to travel to Amsterdam. The first time she herself had boarded ship as little girl of about five or six years old. Now she had to leave the country of her birth because her husband, the Company minister, had died. It was general practice in the WIC settlements in West Africa to discourage the

presence of single women of European status. Even married couples were allowed to take up residence only as a matter of exception.<sup>3</sup>

The parents of Helena van der Burgh and Wilhelmina van Naarssen had entered into the usual mixed relationship, designated in the lingua franca of the coast as 'calisaren' (from Portuguese 'casar', to marry). 'Calisaren' was recognized within the customary law of the Akan-speaking people of the Guinea coast (Everts 1998: 609-616). As the Akan followed – and still follow – a matrilineal system of kinship, both women belonged to the 'abusua' or matrilineal descent group of their mothers. Within an abusua, people were connected according to the female bloodline as relatives or as subordinates or slaves (Rattray 1923: 34-37; Rattray 1929: 33-46). The status of the mother therefore determined the status of the children. Thus Helena was born a free woman, while Wilhelmina was born a slave girl.

Elmina, the setting of most of this story, was a large cosmopolitan trade centre in the 18th century counting over 12,000 inhabitants. St George Castle in Elmina served as WIC headquarters for a small community of traders, on average 250 men from various European countries. The WIC's West African settlements were trading posts, not colonies. The Company never wielded any political power over the people of Elmina and made no attempts to Christianise the native population (Feinberg 1989: 84, 155-158; Priestley 1969: 3-9). The European presence, however, implied an ongoing exchange of people and ideas between the Gold Coast and the Dutch Republic. Supply ships, and even the slavers plying the triangular route with their human cargo held in degrading conditions, also carried Company employees. Sometimes fathers sent their Euro-

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*Page 100: Courtyard of the WIC House in Amsterdam pulled down in 1817. Reproduction from Fouquet, Nieuwe atlas van de voornaamste gebouwen en gezigten der stad Amsterdam (...) Amsterdam 1783.*

1. The Hague General State Archive (ARA), Letters and papers sent from the Guinea coast to the directors of the Amsterdam Chamber (OBPA), West India Company archives (WIC) 486, Letter from Governor A. Houtman to the directors of the Amsterdam WIC Chamber (A), Elmina, 12 May 1723, 363-373.
2. ARA, Register of manumission letters etc., Archive of the Dutch possessions on the Guinea Coast (NBKG) 239, Elmina, 13 February 1736.

African children to Holland to receive a Christian education, as happened to Helena and Wilhelmina (Doortmont and Everts 1996: 81-99). The unusual element in their life stories is that afterwards both returned to their place of birth, where Christian women were quite exceptional at that time. Although they cannot be considered ordinary Elminian women, the lives of Helena en Wilhelmina, pieced together from bits and pieces in the archives, can shed some light on a typical but little-known aspect of the Ghanaian-Dutch connection.

### **Helena van der Burgh**

The search for Helena's story starts with that of her father. On 16 March 1684, senior merchant Martijn van der Burgh, said to suffer from a constricted feeling in his chest, was dismissed from WIC service and received permission to leave the coast on the first ship bound for Amsterdam. When he boarded the ship *Vrijheid*, he seemed to be one of the few lucky men who had survived his African years to return to the Republic as a wealthy man. But on his return voyage he was 'killed in an action against a certain pirate'. Subsequently, the 'Gentlemen Ten' (the Company board) in Amsterdam ordered that Van der Burgh's last will should be handed over to the guardians of his children. Five children, including Helena, had accompanied him on his fatal trip, while two had stayed behind with their mother in Elmina.<sup>4</sup>

Van der Burgh's will itself has not been found, but the inventory of his belongings is kept in the municipal archives in Amsterdam. It was drawn up on 5 March 1685 by an Amsterdam notary on request of the guardians over his 'five natural children Jan, Willem, Helena, Abraham & Jacob, begot by a certain black woman in Guinea' (those who were now in the Netherlands) who were designated to be his heirs. The estate varied from five children's shirts, a set of five little plates and spoons, clothes, a Guinea sword to books and jewellery. Moreover, he left a total amount of over 10,000 guilders in bonds, a Company salary in credit and gold dust from Guinea. Thus Helena

and her brothers, having lost their father so suddenly in a dramatic incident, could each dispose of about 2,000 guilders. The inventory also reveals that Van der Burgh had left a certain amount of merchandise behind in Elmina, in the trust of a former colleague who was to barter those trade goods and use the profit for the benefit of his two children who had stayed with their mother in Elmina.<sup>5</sup>

### **Mixed marriages**

In Elmina it was a common sight to see 'many children of white fathers wandering in the midst of the heathens'. The Dutch Reformed minister who in 1756 disapprovingly reported this state of affairs to the church authorities in Amsterdam blamed the fathers for their indifference.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly there must have been many fathers who did not concern themselves with their African born offspring. Those men were only too glad to see the 'abusua', to which the mother of their children belonged, taking over responsibility. But this was not generally the case. For many of the men in Company service, their African family meant the only chance they had to experience family happiness. Sending a child to school in Europe was the ideal, but most fathers lacked the financial means to do so. Helena's father Martijn belonged to the minority of 'old hands' who had earned enough to make arrangements for his children's future. In addition, he must have been able to overcome the resistance of his African wife and her relatives.

Seen from the perspective of the mother, Acre Sonqua, taking leave of five children while keeping only two must have felt like an enormous sacrifice. Akan people believed that the abusua is united by the transfer of blood from a woman to her offspring. Descendants in the female line therefore symbolized the continuous existence of a lineage. Children, and girls especially, were highly desired. Separation from her daughter Helena must have been extra difficult for Acre Sonqua (Everts 1996: 49-54). But she did not regard the departure of her children as a final farewell.

3. See for instance: ARA, OBPA, WIC 489, Letter from Governor J. de Petersen to A, Elmina, 1 May 1744, 118-121.

4. ARA, Resolutions of governor and council to A, WIC 124, Elmina, 16 March 1684; Minutes of the 'Gentlemen Ten' (X) or Company directors, WIC 833, Report, Amsterdam, 21 December 1684.

5. Amsterdam Municipal Archive (GAA), NA 5075, Protocol notary S. Pelgrom 4771, 394-403.

6. GAA, PA 379, 210, Letter From the Rev. M. Beckeringh to Amsterdam Classis, Elmina, 3 June 1756.

Fort Coenraadsburg  
(also known as Fort  
St. Jago) in Elmina  
(20th century).

KIT Fotobureau.



Elmina girls were raised with the notion that the 'abusua' was all-important. Compared with the matrilineage, the bonds of marriage were of somewhat lesser importance. The matrilineage offered the individual a deep sense of security, whereas a relationship between partners was bound to come to an end at some time. Acre Sonqua could rely on her family, but she could also earn a living herself (Clark 1994: 95-104; Everts 1998: 609). Elmina offered a range of economic opportunities. It was frequented by merchants from the interior, who came to barter slaves, gold and ivory for European imports such as textiles, salt, fish, pottery, fruits and palm oil. Company employees received an allowance in trade goods (like tobacco), which they had to barter for food. Many of the inhabitants, women included, earned a living as traders (Feinberg 1989: 16, 39). From the documents, Acre Sonqua emerges as an independent and active person. She may well have been a tradeswoman herself.

In 1694, ten years after her husband's death, Acre Sonqua apparently managed to put her concerns to the Company Board. In October 1694, the guardians of the children requested the WIC

directors in Amsterdam to permit free passage to Elmina for a son of the late Van der Burgh, to enable him 'to pay his mother a visit'. Permission was granted but the documents do not reveal which of the four boys went. Possibly two boys returned in the end, entering WIC service after having attended school in Holland. The payroll of 31 December 1699 lists a Jan van der Burgh as assistant at Elmina castle, while assistant Willem van der Burgh, born on the coast, appears on the death list of the same year.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately nothing can be said with any certainty about Helena's childhood in the Netherlands. She resurfaces only at the age of 22, at the moment of her marriage. On 23 January 1700, Helena van der Burgh 'from Delmina', who resided in St Annenstraat in Amsterdam, married master goldsmith Mattheus Deldeijn. The groom was 32 years old and lived a few blocks away, in St Jacobstraat. As the marriage was concluded in the Dutch Reformed Church of Diemen, a village close to Amsterdam, it is most likely that Helena had been baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church. She had obviously learned to read and write, as two weeks after the wedding she put an elegant

7. ARA, Minutes A, WIC 394, Amsterdam, 26 October 1694, 201-202; OBPX, WIC 97, Company payroll and death list, Elmina, 31 December 1699, 178-187.



*Maria Vtringa Coulon, a Euro-African woman in Elmina in the 19th century.*

KIT Fotobureau Album 1643  
Elmina, 00024062.

signature on the will drawn up by the newly weds. Part of their father's inheritance was obviously used to secure an education for the children. At her wedding, Helena was accompanied by her guardian, who had apparently been involved in her upbringing. The Deldeijn couple had one daughter, born on 27 October 1700, who however died six months later.<sup>8</sup>

A few years later, Helena's spouse took service with the WIC. We can only guess at the reason why a master goldsmith would leave his wife to serve as a soldier in her native country. Could it be because of lack of means of support? As the Company directors generally did not permit wives to follow their husbands to Guinea, Helena had no option but to stay in Amsterdam. In 1707, one year after his arrival, Mattheus Deldeijn was appointed assistant at Elmina Castle. But five years later, in 1712, Helena

received the message that her husband had died the previous year, leaving her nothing but his salary, a credit of 126 guilders.<sup>9</sup> What did Helena do all those years, during her husband's absence? Did she manage to earn a living herself? Little is known about Helena's personal circumstances, but obviously she had somehow managed to keep in touch with her mother in Elmina. Moreover, Acre Sonqua provided for her widowed daughter in Amsterdam.

### **Back to Elmina**

On 3 May 1712, Helena, now the Widow Deldeijn, went to the West India House to tell the Company Board that her old mother Acre Sonqua in Elmina very much wished to see her daughter before her death. Helena said that she had already received several letters on behalf of her mother with the same request. She had asked the advice of her former guardian, who had tried to convince Acre Sonqua in a letter that her daughter's manners, because of her Christian upbringing, no longer matched those of her native country. He had asked Acre Sonqua to appoint Helena as her heir. Acre Sonqua had turned down the request and had made it clear that if Helena would not come right away, she would stop sending goods to her daughter. As Helena 'could not make a living without her mother's support', she had no choice but to meet Acre Sonqua's wishes. She asked the Company directors permission to travel with the first ship bound for the Guinea coast. Helena added that she definitely had no intention to stay. She was to visit her mother, look after her own interests, and would 'repatriate' directly afterwards. She assured the directors that her mother would pay for all the expenses.

Helena boarded the slave ship *Acredam* in July 1712, after having obtained permission from the Directors to take a few 'necessities and refreshments' along for her mother. Before long she was reunited with Acre Sonqua, after an absence of 28 years. More than two years later she was still in Elmina.<sup>10</sup> She had a compelling reason for staying on.

On 4 December 1714, the Elmina council considered a request by minister Ludovicus Adama, asking permission to marry Helena. 'Dominee' Adama had taken up his position in Elmina around March 1713. Company rules did not permit Company employees to take their wives along to the coast, but in this particular case the governor could not think of any objections. He explained to the council that upon the arrival of the Widow Deldeijn he had received a letter from the Amsterdam Chamber, urging him to keep a watchful eye on her and to see to it that she did not slide back into paganism while staying with her mother. The governor was of the opinion that this was likely to happen if Helena's 'feelings of affection' for the minister were not allowed to take their course. He also consented to the marriage because Helena still had not wound up her private affairs. However, if the 'Gentlemen Ten' in Holland nevertheless ordered her to leave, the governor would execute their orders. On Sunday 22 January 1715, the couple were married in a public session of the Elmina council. In April the Rev. Adama announced his wedding to the 'Ten'. He explained that the thought of marrying occurred to him while consulting the Elmina church records, which mentioned two Christian marriages in 1683. As Mr and Mrs Adama did not receive any negative reaction from the fatherland, they were able to establish their household in the ministers' chambers at the castle. Unfortunately, their good fortune did not last long. In a letter to the 'Ten' dated 28 July 1719, Widow Ludovicus Adama announced the death of her husband. In the same letter she thanked the directors for the 'provisions' she had received with the Company ship *Emmenes*. Almost four years later, on 10 February 1723, the governor reported to the Amsterdam Chamber that the Widow Adama was to leave the coast with the supply ship *Amsterdam*.<sup>11</sup> From this point, the destinies of Helena van der Burgh (the Widow Adama) and Wilhelmina van Naarssen became intertwined.

Among the other passengers on the *Amsterdam* was Carel van Naarssen, probably accompa-

nied by his little daughter Wilhelmina. Taking Wilhelmina to Holland would have served a double purpose: to provide her with a Christian education, and to keep her out of slavery. Although Carel van Naarssen was officially 'gecalisaard' with Amba Intiem, leaving the girl behind would have meant that she would belong to the abusua of her mother's owner in a subservient position. Possibly the father had already taken other steps to take Wilhelmina out of her abusua and therefore out of slavery by having her baptized by the Rev. Adama in the Castle church, but there is no surviving evidence in the records. Parents who had their children baptized in the Dutch Reformed church had to promise that the child would be raised in the Christian religion, for which purpose a godparent was appointed (Everts 1996: 48-49). Could Madam Adama have been Wilhelmina's godmother?

Nothing is known about the next three years that Madam Adama spent in Holland, but she was apparently determined to return to her native land. On 22 August 1726, Madam Adama again appeared in the meeting of the Amsterdam Chamber, to thank the directors for giving her permission to return to Africa and to settle in Elmina. The directors also consented that she could take along a child of about ten years, who 'was born on the coast as well'.<sup>12</sup> Apparently Carel van Naarssen, who at that time faced accusations by the 'Gentlemen Ten' for illegal private trade in gold, had agreed that Madam Adama could take his daughter back to the coast.<sup>13</sup>

### **Christian women in an Akan setting**

Back in Elmina, Madam Adama and Wilhelmina moved into a house in town that had belonged to her mother Acre Sonqua. From that time onwards, she is consistently mentioned in the records as Madam Adama: Helena apparently used her status of minister's widow. When the Rev. Ketelanus celebrated Holy Communion in the castle church on Easter Sunday 1733 – for the first time in 42 years – the 'pious' Madam Adama and someone who acted as deacon were the only people in Elmina entitled to participate.<sup>14</sup>

8. GAA, DTB, 701, 316, Amsterdam, 2, 23 January 1700; NA 5075, Protocol Notary F. Nolet 6400, 81, Amsterdam, 3 February 1700; DTB 1214, 423, Amsterdam, 4 May 1701.

9. ARA, OBP Zeeland Chamber, WIC 918, Company payroll, Elmina, 31 December 1707, 141; Minutes A, WIC 367, Amsterdam, 26 February 1712, 37-38.

10. ARA, Minutes A, WIC 367, Amsterdam, 3 May 1712, 116-117.

11. ARA, Resolutions of governor and council to A, WIC 124, Elmina, 4, 24 December 1714; OBPX, WIC 102, Letter from the Rev. L. Adama to X, Elmina, 25 April 1715; WIC 104, Letter from H. van der Burgh to X, Elmina, 28 July 1719; OBPA, WIC 486, Letter from Governor A. Houtman to A, Elmina, 12 May 1723, 363-373.

12. ARA, Minutes A, WIC 381, Amsterdam, 22 August 1726, 94.

13. ARA, Minutes X, WIC 8, Amsterdam, 14 October 1730, 94-95.

14. ARA, OBPX, WIC 109, Letter from the Rev. Ketelanus to X, Elmina, 30 May 1733, 672-673.



Page 107: Front and back of St. George Castle in Elmina. Engraving from W. Bosman, *Nauwkeurige beschrijvingh van de Guinese Goud-, Tand- en Slavekust, Amsterdam 1709*. KIT Library, Amsterdam RP 217.

As Protestant rules considered 'calisaren' to be sinful, most European men were not admitted as members of the congregation and not entitled to take Holy Communion. Wilhelmina's Christian education was probably provided by her foster mother, as no lessons were given in the castle prior to the arrival of the famous minister Jacobus Capitein, who in 1743 established a school for children of mixed parentage as well as African children (Kpobi 1993: 138-139, 146).

Now that Madam Adama had established a clear Christian identity in Elmina's European circle, she also had to safeguard her interests and especially those of Wilhelmina within the Akan world. She did not hesitate to use rather sweeping methods to achieve her goals. After the death of Wilhelmina's mother Amba Intiem, Madam Adama laid claim to her estate on behalf of her adopted daughter. But Maay Accoma, who had been Amba Intiem's owner, refused, arguing that Wilhelmina's mother had been a slave all her life. Amba Intiem had been given to her as a present by the late WIC governor Butler, with whom Maay Accoma had been 'gecalisaard'. The fact that Amba Intiem had later been 'gecalisaard' with the merchant Carel van Naarssen had not changed her slave status. Therefore, 'according to the customs of the country', Maay Accoma, as the rightful owner of Amba Intiem, was entitled to inherit the possessions of the deceased. Madam Adama however challenged Akan custom and had even gone so far as to 'panyar' or distraint two slave women who belonged to Maay Accoma's household (see Baesjou 1979: 54-55).

On 13 February 1736, the 'black woman' Maay Accoma appeared before the governor to have a public deed drawn up in order to settle this conflict. As the Company often and gladly lent its services to Elminians who wanted to conclude their disputes at the castle, this was no unusual request. The Akan family system implied the risk that a disagreement between individuals might escalate into a lengthy conflict between matrilineages. In the interest of a stable atmosphere conducive to trade, the Company was only too willing to accommodate the African 'host'

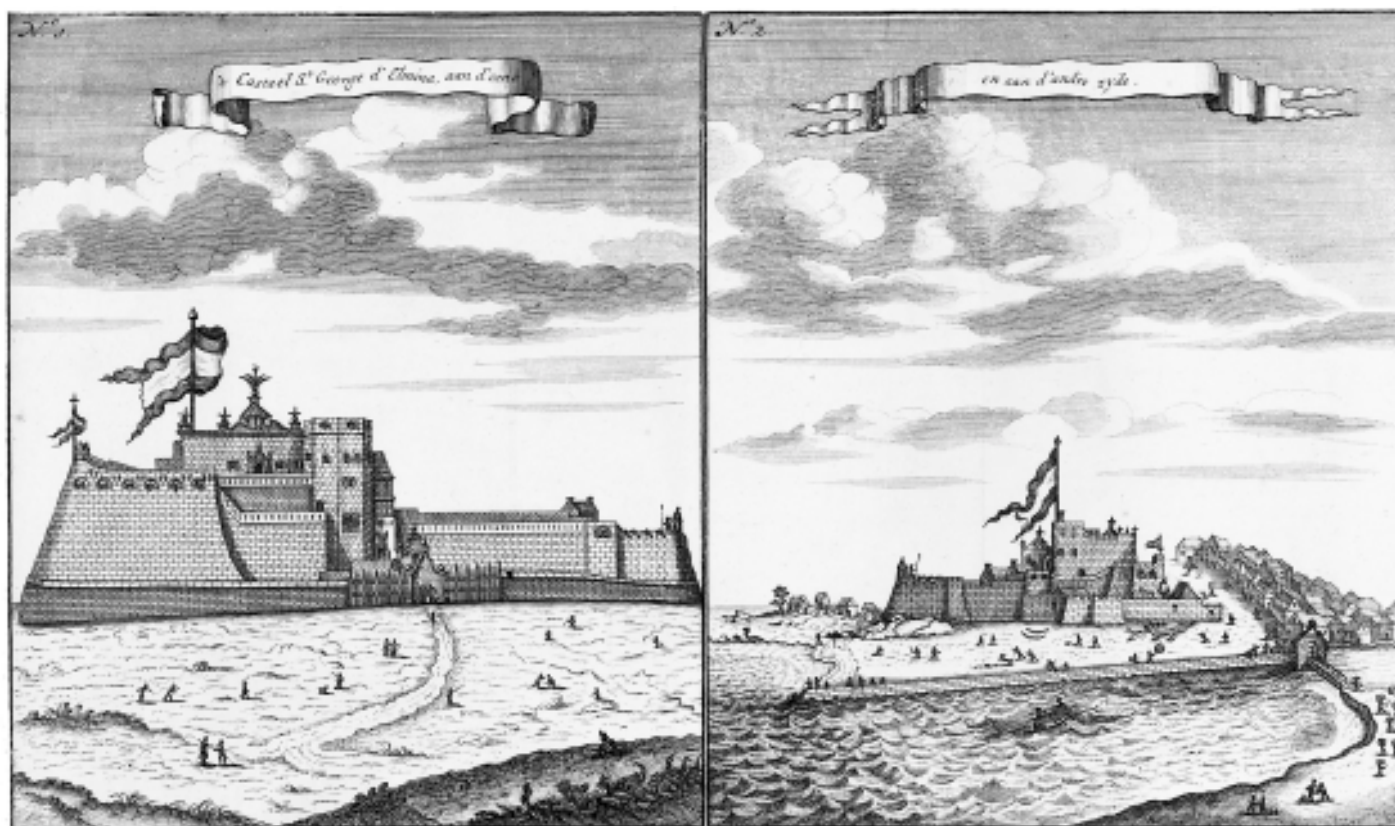
culture. Company officials always consulted the Elmina headmen first before they dealt with such matters. Within Elmina, these acts served as documentary evidence against future claims (Feinberg 1989: 118).

Maay Accoma argued that Wilhelmina's mother Amba Intiem had been a slave all her life, and that children of slave descent never should have expectations about inheriting anything. However, as they were considered to be kin, an owner could decide to present the slave children of his or her 'abusua' with gifts, as tokens of affection. In the case of Wilhelmina, because she was a Christian and 'brought up well according to European standards', Maay Accoma did not intend to undertake any action to re-claim the two slaves Madam Adama had seized from her. Out of fondness for the girl, she presented these two slave women to Wilhelmina as a gift. But she would not condone any more trespasses by Madam Adama, who had recently seized a third slave woman to enforce her claims on behalf of Wilhelmina. Maay Accoma insisted on the immediate return of this slave, as she was attached to this woman.

After hearing the advice of the Elmina headmen, the governor rejected the claims made by Madam Adama on behalf of Wilhelmina as being contrary to customary law. He granted Maay Accoma the public deed which would forever count as proof, to her and her descendants, that Wilhelmina van Naarssen, or anybody of her future offspring, could never claim any possessions from the matrilineage to which her mother had belonged. On the other hand, Maay Accoma's 'abusua' would never again claim ownership of Wilhelmina or her descendants.<sup>15</sup>

No longer burdened by fears of reverting to slave status, Wilhelmina herself now possessed two domestic slaves, who could perform all kinds of duties in the house as well as undertake income-generating activities such as hawking or practising a craft. Wilhelmina, now 18 years old, was ready to establish her own household. Shortly after the court case, in March 1736, 'virtuous Miss Wilhelmina van Naarssen of

15. ARA, Register of manumission letters etc., NBKG 239, Elmina, 13 February 1736.



Elmina' married 35-year-old Monsieur Theodorus Noelmans of Amsterdam. Life was not a bed of roses for the newlyweds. In 1740, Theodorus reminded the governor that after years of service on the coast he was qualified for promotion. He begged his superior to keep in mind that he was a married man with a family to support. If he were to keep the humble rank of junior merchant, then his wife and children would eventually be reduced to poverty. In a next letter, Theodorus expressed his grief about the death of a daughter. In 1746 he was indeed promoted to senior merchant, but he died shortly afterwards.<sup>16</sup>

Wilhelmina inherited her husband's salary in credit, valued at 1,874 guilders. The Company apparently permitted her to stay in Elmina, where she used her inheritance to enter into business transactions. In January 1747, the Widow Noelmans was listed among the creditors of a deceased governor: she was entitled to receive 1,101 guilders from the estate.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Wilhelmina looked after her ageing foster mother.

On 18 August 1748, the Company secretary

visited 70-year old Madam Adama to draw up her will. He found her physically weak but mentally in good condition. In accordance with matrilineal rules, she bequeathed the house and her slaves Effiba, Biba, Ampiaba and Effiba's children to her niece Eva van Daalen, possibly a daughter of a sister who had remained on the coast in 1684. Wilhelmina, however, was instituted as her universal heir on the condition that she arrange a proper Christian funeral.<sup>18</sup>

The Elmina journal of 5 February 1750 records the death of Madam Adama. She was indeed given a proper Christian funeral and was buried in one of the castle courtyards.<sup>19</sup> Wilhelmina was now preparing to leave the African coast, and her foster mother's estate probably came in useful. On 2 May 1751 she married Johan Casper Pietsch, who had just completed his term as Company surgeon. The newlyweds left Elmina on board the slaver *Eerste Edele*, bound for Middelburg. Their final destination is unknown; possibly they settled in Pietsch's native country, Silesia. From this point on, Wilhelmina disappears into the mists of time, but not without leaving a trace.

16. ARA, Protocol of original documents (POS), NBKG 291, Elmina, 9 February 1736, 58; Journal, NBKG 105, Letter from junior merchant T. Noelmans to Governor J. de Petersen, Mouree, (...) March, April 1740; POS, NBKG 294, Elmina, 9 May 1746, 129.  
 17. ARA, OBPA, WIC 498, List of creditors, Governor M. de Bordes, Elmina, 13 January 1747, 617.  
 18. ARA, POS, NBKG 295, Elmina, 18 August 1748, 66.  
 19. ARA, Journal, NBKG 111, Elmina, 5, 6 February 1750.



*The Castle St. George d'Elmina in the 20th century before the restoration.*

KIT Fotobureau.

On 7 February 1768, her daughter, Jacoba Hendrina Noelmans of 'Delmina', age 26, married Benjamin Rave of Amsterdam. As both her parents had died, the bride was assisted by her uncle, Jan Willem Noelmans.<sup>20</sup>

### **Epilogue**

As Christian women, both Helena and Wilhelmina occupied a distinct position in Elmina society. Their life stories are atypical, as they moved back and forth between the Guinea Coast and Holland. But while living in Elmina, they were also clearly identified with their mother's matrilineage. Helena's mother did not accept separation from her daughter and pressured her to accept her responsibilities according to the custom of her native world. At the same time, Helena's position as a free Akan woman offered opportunities for active participation in the coastal society with the support of a family network. This may be the reason why she

decided to return to Elmina for the second time. Wilhelmina's position was more ambiguous: her unfree descent meant that she could be reclaimed by the 'abusua' of her mother's owner.

Helena's efforts to protect the interests of her foster daughter almost got her entangled in a serious conflict with a matrilineage. By seizing three slaves from her opponent she risked provoking a reprisal. Was she simply ill-informed about Akan law, or did she believe that she, as a Christian woman, could bend the rules and get away with it? In any case, Helena had her way. The deed obtained by Maay Accoma actually served as a letter of freedom for Wilhelmina herself. She could now set up a life of her own with her European husband. Maay Accoma, the owner of Wilhelmina's mother, explained that she respected Wilhelmina's Christian identity. She could conceivably have had reasons of her own for this liberal attitude. Wilhelmina was about to marry a Company merchant and it could be

20. ARA, Journal, NBKG 112, Elmina, 2, 24 May 1751; GAA, DTB, 613, 288, Amsterdam, 22 January 1768; PA 378, Members Dutch Reformed Church, 673, Amsterdam, 22 August 1764.

advantageous to maintain good relations with the European circle.

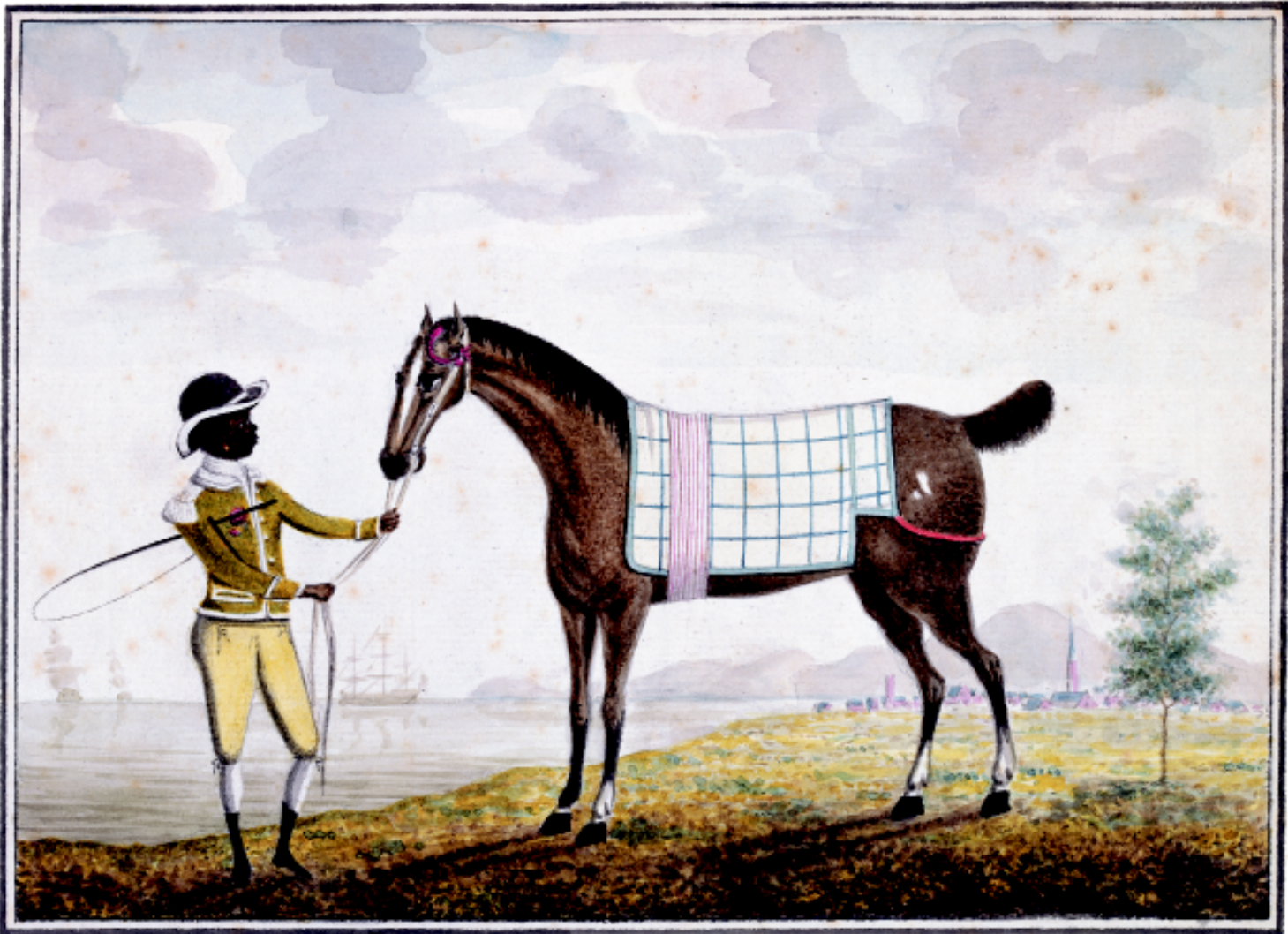
Combining Christian values and Akan custom was occasionally problematic, but both women managed a balancing act, straddling the boundaries between the small European community and the dominant African society. Helena was most successful in having the best of both worlds. Her will leaves us with the impression of a wealthy independent woman, just as her mother had been. She left a house and some slaves to her niece – that is, to her lineage. But she made sure that part of her material possessions went to Wilhelmina, whom she had raised according to her own Christian principles.

Mother Amba Intiem and daughter Wilhelmina also maintained liaisons with the world of Europeans, but here the issue of slave status resulted in a more ambivalent position. Wilhelmina's way out of slavery meant a rupture with her mother's world. As a person without a lineage, she now had only one option left: merging into the Castle community. Her Christian upbringing made her a suitable candidate for a lawful Christian marriage. Thanks to the material and spiritual legacy of her foster mother, she could start a new life in Europe.

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# 10. Maroons, futuboi and free blacks

## *Examples of Akan immigrants in Suriname in the era of slavery*

### **Introduction**

Around 215,000 people were brought from Africa to Suriname in the era of the slave trade, of whom about a quarter – or more than 50,000 people – boarded ship somewhere along the coast of modern Ghana (Van Stipriaan 1994: 184-6). A large, albeit unknown, number of these were Akan-speaking people. Others came from neighbouring peoples such as the Ewe and the Ga-Adangbe or from the lands to the north of the Akan culture area. In 18th-century Suriname, immigrants from the Akan culture area were regarded as belonging to one and the same ‘nation’ (or ethnic group), known as the ‘Kormantijnse natie’. They were therefore all called ‘Kormantijnen’, even though their original ethnic affiliations in fact could have differed. In the British Caribbean, Akan speakers were similarly categorized as Coromantees, a term which will be used in this text as well.

Nearly all immigrants from Ghana came to Suriname against their will and most became slave labourers on sugar, coffee and cotton plantations. This was generally a dead-end street as the plantations offered very limited opportunity for social mobility, vertical or horizontal. Nevertheless some immigrants’ experiences were, or turned out to be, relatively positive. These fairly atypical cases are the subject of this chapter.

### **The host society**

In the era of slavery Suriname consisted of three geographical divisions where very different social conditions prevailed: Paramaribo, the colony’s only town, where every overseas immigrant first set foot on Surinamese soil; the plantation area, bordering the rivers to the south and east of Paramaribo and their tributaries; and finally the interior.

By the end of the 18th century, around 20 per cent of the colony’s population lived in town. Paramaribo counted 7,000 to 8,000 slaves and some 3,000 to 4,000 free people. Town slaves served in the homes of their owners, assisted them in their trades or were left free in the choice of their occupation in return for a specified amount of money which had to be paid to their owners every week. A large – and growing – proportion of the free town dwellers were of African descent: former slaves who had been manumitted (often having purchased their liberty from their owners) and their offspring. In 1805 they already accounted for more than half the number of free inhabitants of Paramaribo.

On the plantations (numbering around 500 at the time) the imbalance between the slave and the free segments was much more dramatic. Social divisions were much sharper as well. The population of the area as a whole consisted of 40,000 to 50,000 slaves and only about 1,000 free people, most, if not all, whites in management and supervisory positions. Most physically able slaves worked long days in the fields, while a minority performed skilled jobs like those of cooper or carpenter, worked as domestics or held supervisory positions like that of ‘basja’ (or black overseer).

In the hinterland lived the maroons: fugitives from slavery and their descendants. In the last quarter of the 18th century the maroons numbered about 6,000 (Hartsinck 1770: 757; *Essai Historique* 1788 I: 121; Wolbers 1861: 538-9). Three large groups, the Ndyuka, the Saramakaners and the Matawai, who together made up perhaps 80 per cent of the maroon population, had signed peace treaties with the colonial government during the 1760s. This meant that their status as free people had been recognized,

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*historian*

*Page 110: The slaveboy Kwaku was painted by his owner Stedman. Picture from J. Stedman, Narrative of a five years expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam. London: Johnson & Edwards, 1796.*

though they were not allowed to travel freely through the plantation area. With these treaties the Maroons had committed themselves to hand over new refugees to the government. But this circumstance hardly deterred people from attempting to escape from slavery on the plantations and in town. Some of them formed new groups, which were regarded by the government as runaway slaves. To the southeast of the plantation area, a new group was formed under the leadership of Boni, while the people later known as the Kwinti settled to the west of Paramaribo. Colonial forces fought many battles with these two major new 'rebel' groupings during the last four decades of the 18th century.

### **Status differentiation**

Except for the division between freemen and slaves, other distinctions were operative in contemporary Surinamese society. Free people of African or partial African ancestry were the most obvious victims of discrimination based on skin colour. With subtle and not so subtle means, European colonists made sure that they were kept in second-class position vis-à-vis whites. For instance: schools were segregated, the men were assigned to separate companies of Paramaribo's 'schutterrij' or citizen's militia and they were for a long time effectively barred from higher-level government jobs. Institutionalized discrimination against free people of African descent was a by-product of slavery. Living amidst an overwhelming majority of restless slaves, 18th-century European colonists felt as if they were living on the edge of a volcano. As one means of defending the status quo (which in the 18th century was its primary task), the colonial government opted for a policy of impressing the slaves with white supremacy. But the laws of supply and demand gradually worked in favour of the free inhabitants of African descent. In the last decades of the 18th century, Suriname was confronted with a shortage of whites fit for office work. Men of mixed ancestry, including people of Ghanaian descent, gradually moved into positions of relatively high social status (Vrij 1998: 138-9).

A second source of differentiation was the place of birth. This carried less weight among free inhabitants than slaves, among whom two categories were identified: Creoles, who were born in Suriname, and 'zoutwaternegers' (or saltwater Negroes), who were immigrants from Africa. During most of the 18th century African-born slaves were in the majority (Van Stipriaan 1993: 341; Price 1976: 9-12), but they were held in low esteem. Naturally, Creoles were better adjusted to life in Suriname. Planters therefore had more confidence in them and singled them out for responsible or skilled jobs like that of basja, artisan or domestic worker (Oostindie 1989: 113-6, 166-7; Van Stipriaan 1993: 276). This was the unpromising environment awaiting nearly all new arrivals from Ghana: a society in which he (or she), being a slave, black and fresh out of Africa, was placed at the lowest rung of the ladder. Even many of his fellow slaves regarded him with suspicion and disdain. Modern Surinamese still uses the word 'sowtwateranengre' indicating someone who is uncivilized and unadjusted.

### **'New Negroes'**

Out of sound business considerations, planters were sensitive to the adjustment problems that newly arrived Africans (called 'nieuwe negers', i.e. 'new Negroes') had to cope with. Age was critical. Some people were over thirty when they arrived in Suriname. In that case, according to plantation manager Anthony Blom, the chances that they would fit in were very small. They would never be able to get over the loss of their relatives and would, actively or passively, hasten their own death. Furthermore, as Blom knew from experience, there would always be some who would rebel by running away (Blom 1787: 119, 326-9). It was not considered safe to bring too large a number of unadjusted Africans onto a plantation simultaneously (Oostindie 1989: 178). Such groups would generally have come to Suriname aboard the same ship, and hence often were compatriots (cf. Thornton 1992: 192-9). When they conspired, consequences might be



grave, as will be seen in the following example. In June 1765, three slaves of a certain DuCretot were arrested in upper Commewijne and subsequently interrogated in Paramaribo. Their names are rendered as Margo, Kwasi and Kwame. All three were recently arrived Coromantees, and it was only possible to question them with the help of an interpreter. A female slave inhabitant of Paramaribo, apparently an already established Akan-speaking immigrant, acted as interpreter. Apart from them, three other slaves of DuCretot were heard who were all referred to as 'old Negroes', meaning they had been living in Suriname for some time. One of them, named Adjuba, was also a Coromantee.

It appeared that the six of them had been in upper Cottica with at least nine other slaves of their master, chopping wood under the direction of a white man. Besides Margo, Kwasi and Kwame, there were five other 'new' Coromantees among them – four men by the names of Yaw, Akra, Jan and Kofi and a woman named Affiba.

Under the leadership of Yaw, the Coromantee men had conspired to run away. One morning in May 1765 they had killed the white man while he was still lying in his bed, tied the other male slaves' hands and feet and ran away with Margo and Affiba. However, one of the slaves whom they had left behind managed to remove his fetters and warned the neighbours. A pursuit followed in which Kwasi, Kwame and Margo were captured while Affiba was killed.

Under interrogation the captives pointed at their more experienced compatriot Adjuba as the evil genius. She had incited them to run away, playing on their fears and their ignorance of the land and the people. Adjuba had told them that their master was seriously ill and would soon die – and that as a consequence they would again suffer the degradation and agony of being sold. She had told them that their present place of work was not far from their homeland – not such an implausible contention, as Cottica was far to the east of Paramaribo. Finally she had made

*Three free Negro artisans talking together; a wig-maker (Creole slave) followed by a slave boy carrying comb, pomatum and curling-tongs. Plate 18 from Benoit (1839).*

KIT Library RF-29.





Map of Suriname,  
 Alexandre de Lavaux  
 5e edition (ca. 1770).  
 KIT Library, Amsterdam.

them believe that the other slaves, with whom they themselves could not speak because of the language barrier, had been planning to run away, too. Under torture Adjuba confessed that she had prodded her compatriots to escape. She then was sentenced to death, together with Kwasi and Kwame. Margo, who was not considered an accessory to the killing of the white man, received corporal punishment. It is not known what became of Yaw, Kofi, Jan and Akra, but they may have joined one of the maroon communities in the area and settled there.<sup>1</sup>

### Coromantees and integration

It has been said that Coromantees had 'a universal reputation in the Americas as a violent and rebellious people' (Thornton 1998: 162). Voices from Suriname tell a somewhat different story. Mention is made of their pride and their strict sense of justice, as well as a tendency to commit suicide when being badly treated, at least when they were unable to take revenge in another manner (Van den Bouwhuijsen, De Bruin and Horeweg 1988: 76, 78; Beeldsnijder 1994: 123; Hartsinck 1770: 921-2). But the overall judgement is quite positive. Writing in the mid-18th century, a plantation manager considered them 'the best of all, fit for any trade, taking pride in their work'.<sup>2</sup> John Gabriel Stedman, in his famous book about the five years he served in Suriname as army captain, called the Coromantees 'naturally good temper'd' and even 'the most esteem'd' (Stedman 1988: 514, 526).

Stedman had a special bond with a young Coromantee named Kwaku (see picture on page 110), who during his stay in Suriname was his ever loyal Man Friday and constant companion.<sup>3</sup> As Stedman tells it, Kwaku was kidnapped when still a toddler while playing with his brothers in the sands. He then became the slave of a king, whom he served together with hundreds of other slaves. When his master died, most slaves were killed to serve the spirit of the deceased in the hereafter, but the lives of Kwaku and other young slaves were spared. He was finally sold to a European slave trader on the Ghanaian coast 'for

some powder & a musquet', and brought to Suriname on a slave ship (Stedman 1988: 528-9). When he became Stedman's servant (or 'futuboi' in 18th-century Surinamese), Kwaku was about twelve years old. Their relationship became so close that Stedman took the boy with him on his return to the Netherlands in 1777. Here Kwaku automatically became a free person. He lived with Stedman in garrison towns such Zutphen, Deventer and Breda and went to school there. Later he took up service as a butler with the countess of Roosendaal (Stedman 1988: 147, 604, 620; Thompson 1962: 209-10, 216, 219, 341).

Stedman's relationship with Kwaku may have coloured his general opinion of the Coromantees. There is in fact little evidence that the integration of Coromantees in Surinamese society went more smoothly than that of other African 'nations' in Suriname, such as the Loango or the Papa. Members of all these ethnic groups could be found among the Maroons who had escaped from slavery (Hoogbergen 1985: 42-6), as well as among the people who adapted to life on the plantations or in Paramaribo as best they could.

### Among the Maroons

The first Maroon group whose existence has been recorded in the history of Suriname is reputed to have consisted entirely of Coromantees. Under the leadership of a man named Jermes, they had established themselves in Para (to the south of Paramaribo) before the Dutch took over the colony from the English, that is before 1667.<sup>4</sup> In later years there were other Maroon communities consisting exclusively, or almost exclusively, of Coromantees. An example is the group led by Kormantijn Kodjo.

A Loango man who had escaped from a plantation in 1772 and was captured again afterwards told his interrogators about his short stay in Kodjo's village – *Kodjo Kondre*. Together with his compatriot Musinga, he had left the village in a hurry after they discovered that the Coromantees had such a virulent dislike for Loangos that they feared for their lives.<sup>5</sup> Though Kodjo's group subsequently joined the larger group led by Boni,

1. ARA (Algemeen Rijks Archief), RvP (Raad van Politie Suriname) 811, PCZ (Processtukken Criminele Zaken) 1765, not folioed; SvS (Sociëteit van Suriname) 157, 'hofnotulen' 30 May and 12 June 1765. See also Hoogbergen 1985: 90-91, 444, 461 n.31.

2. Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 'Ontwerp tot een Beschrijving van Surinaamen' (ca. 1745), typescript copy of a manuscript written between 1739 and 1748, p. 56-7.

3. Kwaku taught Stedman to speak a few sentences in his native language, called 'the Coromantyn' by Stedman (1988: 515): 'co fa anso na baramon bra' ('go to the river and fetch me some water', according to Stedman) and 'me yeree, nacomeda mee' ('my wife, I am hungry').

4. *Recueil van egte stukken en bewijzen door Salomon du Plessis en door andere tegens Mr Jan Jacob Mauricius etc.*, Amsterdam 1952, part IV: 251. See also Price 1976: 23-4, 30; Hoogbergen 1985: 10-11.



in 1780 only Coromantees were still living in his village (Hoogbergen 1985: 232).

Maroon communities that had signed peace treaties with the government – the Ndyuka, the Saramakkaners and the Matawai – also included Coromantees. This is illustrated by the story of Kwamena, formerly a slave of a certain Moses Nahar, who visited Paramaribo in 1765 together with some fellow Ndyuka. While having a drink at the home of the free mulatto Abraham de Para, feelings ran high and the Maroons showed such a hostile disposition towards the government that De Para considered it his civic duty to inform the governor and his council. The leader of the Ndyuka party thereupon apologized for their behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

Much more complicated was the fate of another Coromantee known as Kodjo Kormantijn. While still a ‘new Negro’ or recently arrived immigrant, he had escaped from slavery and ultimately found shelter in a Saramakka village headed by Etja – who would later become ‘granman’ or supreme head of the Saramakkaners (Price 1990: 151-2). Bad luck had it, however, that Kodjo arrived after the peace had been signed. Under the treaty obligations Etja had to surrender him to the government. Before this happened, years passed. Etja’s procrastination is partly to be explained as an attempt to find out how far he could go in denying the government their claims, but also in part by the fact that meanwhile Kodjo had found his niche in Dossoe Kriki, the name of Etja’s village. He was married to Etja’s elderly crippled sister, who considered him a replacement for her former spouse who had been killed in battle during the bygone wars. Furthermore he had become one of Etja’s ‘gadoman’ or diviners and had also obliged Etja’s brother by providing him with ‘obja’ or magic expedients. It was said that one of the reasons for his ultimate extradition was that his reputation as ‘objaman’ was fatally damaged when he was accused of being a ‘wisiman’, or witch, and held responsible for the death of a Saramakka man. Finally, in June 1775, some fifteen years after he had disembarked there from a slave ship, Kodjo

was back in Paramaribo. In accordance with the gentlemen’s agreement between the government and the Saramakkaners he was not sentenced to death but to lifelong hard labour in the Nieuw-Amsterdam fortress on the other side of the Suriname river.<sup>7</sup>

### Among the slaves

Some African immigrants became integrated into Suriname’s slave society so rapidly that they were assigned jobs for which Creole slaves were generally preferred. Given the views about Coromantees discussed above, it is not surprising that they are to be found in this class as well. We have seen one example already: Stedman’s ‘futuboi’ Kwaku. Another is the female slave who accompanied her mistress, a certain Mrs Couderc, to the Netherlands, where she made her last will and testament on 6 September 1768. In this document the woman is referred to as ‘Susanna of Cormantin, born in Guinea, Africa’. She lived in Leiden on the Rapenburg with her mistress, to whom she bequeathed all her – probably scant – possessions. Incidentally, although Susanna apparently was still in Mrs Couderc’s service, the will makes no mention of a master-slave relationship. Possibly the women no longer conceived their relationship in these terms.<sup>8</sup>

Around the same time, the Coromantee slave woman Prisina lived in Paramaribo with her mistress, a Mrs De Crepy. Prisina was connected to colonial society in more ways than one. She had a man who lived elsewhere in town. His name was Joo, he was the slave of a planter named Dandiran and may very well have been a Creole. Though a slave, Joo was a pillar of society who led many small-scale armed expeditions against the Maroons living in the vicinity of Paramaribo (see also Hoogbergen 1992b: 36-7). One evening in July 1762 Prisina received a visit by two Coromantees who went by the names of Kofi and Akshem. They had only recently arrived in Suriname and were just learning to speak the native – Creole – language. The men were in trouble. They had been treated so badly by their owner, the bargeman Stoltenberg, that – six

5. ARA, RvP 824, PCZ 1773, fol. 141 ff; see also Hoogbergen 1985: 180-2, 43; 1992: 285. For other examples of all-Coromantee maroon communities see Hoogbergen 1985: 128 and 1996: 32-4.

6. ARA, RvP 71, ‘hofnotulen’ 6 April 1765.  
7. ARA, RvP 828, PCZ 1775, fol. 84 e.v.; RvP 92, ‘hofnotulen’, 15 August 1775; idem, appendix to ‘notulen’, 23 June 1775: letter from ‘posthouder’ Daunitz to the governor and his council, Bambey, 18 June 1775; idem, appendix to ‘notulen’, 28 August 1775: ‘journael gehouden bij de bevreedigde Boschnegers van Sarmaca’ by J. Daunitz, entries for 26 November 1774 and 10 February 1775; RvP 88, ‘hofnotulen’ 13 December 1773.  
8. Gemeente Archief Leiden, protocol of notary Johannes Thijssen 2301, akte 187.



weeks before – they had run away. They had reached a Maroon village south of Paramaribo, but there their life had been made even more miserable. When they tried to return to Paramaribo, the Maroons had first wanted to kill them, but ultimately their hosts decided on another course. They had made the fugitives swear an oath that they would not betray the Maroons while they made them drink a concoction ('sweerie'); next they had rubbed them with a substance that they said would kill the men if they broke their oath. Then they escorted them to Paramaribo, where they were to steal tools and ammunition. Instead, Kofi and Akshem went for help to their compatriot Prisina, who was apparently known to them as someone who knew her way around in Surinamese society. Prisina sent for Joo, who persuaded the men to turn themselves in and assist the government in

catching some of the maroons who were waiting for them on the outskirts of Paramaribo. As a consequence Kofi and Akshem were not punished for running away. Still, they were returned to their owner and one is left wondering what the future had in store for them.<sup>9</sup>

### Among the free inhabitants

Some Ghanaian immigrants in Suriname joined the class of free people residing on the plantations or in town. Jacob Christiaan van Guinée had been a slave of the planter Rijnsdorp, who took him along on trips to the Netherlands several times. During one of their stays in Amsterdam in 1765, Christiaan, then twenty-seven years old, became a member of the Lutheran church. In 1784 he was given a job as police assistant in Paramaribo.<sup>10</sup> Since he acted as interpreter in the 'Coromantee language' during the examination of

*Planter with two slaves. Plate from Benoit (1839).*

*KIT Library RF-29.*

9. ARA, RvP 806, PCZ 1762, not folioed.

10. Gemeente Archief Amsterdam, PA 213, Evangelisch-Luthersche gemeente, 608 ('lidmatenboek') and 322 ('huisboek' Mr Klepperbein); ARA, RvP 124, 'hofnotulen', 4 November 1784.

a slave suspected of having murdered a fellow slave, Van Guinée most probably came from Ghana. In an initial confession, the man, named Kodjo, declared that he and the woman named Adjuba had come to feel so desperate when they realized how they would have to toil in the sugar fields that they had decided that he would make an end to both their lives. Later he retracted his statement and maintained that Adjuba had committed suicide – out of despondency, he suspected, as she had killed her own child in their native land (after it had bitten her in the breast while she was nursing it), and her malevolent behaviour in general was the cause of both of them being enslaved. Kodjo called Adjuba his sister, but a fellow Coromantee who had come to Suriname aboard the same ship and was living on the same plantation as they maintained that she was his spouse. Kodjo was sentenced to be sold abroad.<sup>11</sup>

Another example is Matthijs Rühle who, as plantation manager, belonged to a somewhat higher station. His knowledge of the Coromantee language came in handy, too. In 1770, for instance, he questioned a number of recently arrived Coromantee slaves who were being offered for sale on behalf of the owner of the plantation where he worked as manager (Doortmont, Everts and Vrij 2000: 507). Like Jacob Christiaan van Guinée, Rühle was a native speaker, but unlike him he was of mixed Euro-African descent and had never in his life been a slave. He was born in Elmina, the son of a German official of the Dutch West India Company and a Ghanaian woman named Jaba Botri. He came to Suriname in 1765, where he worked as plantation manager unto his death thirty years later. At times he ruled over some 250 slaves. He owned a house in Paramaribo where his common-law wife – whom he had redeemed from plantation slavery – lived with their children and some slaves. Other members of his family followed in Rühle's footsteps. His sister as well as his niece Elizabeth also settled permanently in Suriname. At the age of eight years, Elizabeth Rühle, daughter of his brother Jacob and Akusuwa Esson, came from

Ghana to Suriname in 1788 to attend school. Her Suriname-born son Matthijs Louis Goede was one of those of Ghanaian descent who gained entry into the upper levels of Surinamese society. He served as a notary around the middle of the 19th century.

## Epilogue

In the 18th century the Coromantee nation was a living reality in Suriname, to which many people could be said to belong. Due to a process of intermixing with people from other parts of Africa, Creoles and whites, the Coromantees eventually disappeared as a distinct identity in Suriname.

The last arrival from Ghana during the era of slavery was Ajua Japiaba, a woman from Elmina who settled in Paramaribo in 1851. She was not a slave, but had been banished for life from her native community after having insulted the Elmina government and having uttered politically dangerous remarks (such as that all Elminas were slaves of Ashanti). When Surinamese officials wanted to know more about the nature of her crime, it proved almost impossible to overcome the language barrier. In similar cases during the 18th century it had never been a problem to find someone who could speak an Akan language in addition to Dutch or the Surinamese Creole language. Now it took two weeks before someone was found who was able to translate Ajua Japiaba's deposition; the interpreter was a free resident of Paramaribo named Gratia van Gomperts.<sup>12</sup>

In the following years Ajua Japiaba settled down in Suriname. She learned to speak the vernacular and earned a living as a market woman. Meanwhile, she acquired fame as a 'lukuman' (diviner) and 'dresiman' (herbalist). Among her clients were several upper-class residents. She also organized dance parties in her yard, known as 'Apijaba-djari' or Apijaba's yard for decades after her death. She died in Paramaribo in 1880 at the age of 60.<sup>13</sup> In 1916, someone who had known her well told a Surinamese newspaper that she used to perform 'the real African dances' instead of the Creole variety. Ajua Japiaba's fame lives on

11. ARA, RvP 855, PCZ 1792, fol. 13. For this case also see Oostindie 1989: 178.

12. ARA, Ministerie van kolonieën (1850-1900) 106 verb. 5 July 1851: letters from the governor of Suriname 33 March and 8 April 1851.

13. I want to thank Okke ten Hove who found the death certificate (dated 19 November 1880) in the Centraal Bureau voor Burgerzaken in Paramaribo.

in oral tradition, in which she is often represented as a princess.<sup>14</sup>

Adjua Japiaba's contribution to Surinamese culture can be regarded as the symbolic closing scene to several centuries of – largely involuntary – migration from Ghana to Suriname. The Coromantee nation probably did not survive the 18th century, but the tens of thousands Akan-speaking immigrants have made a clear imprint on the culture of present-day Suriname. But that is another chapter altogether.

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14. See for instance the tale 'prensès Apiaba' in Aleks de Drie, *Sye! Arki Tori!*, Paramaribo, 1985, pp. 126-30, in which her conversion to Christianity is explained.







# 11. Akan heritage in Maroon culture in Suriname

## Introduction

The Maroon societies of Suriname were founded by people coming from different parts of Africa, who took their cultural heritage with them when they were forcibly transported to Suriname. The political and social structures of the Surinamese and French Guyanan Maroons are therefore based on their African origins, which is clearly recognizable for instance in their languages and religion.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is primarily concerned with components derived from the Akan, and in particular the Ashanti, culture which the Maroons have managed to retain after almost three and a half centuries, and in spite of slavery. Because the slaves were brought to Suriname from different parts of Africa, diverse influences can be discerned in Maroon culture, but the Akan tradition is certainly among the dominant influences. Akan influences are clearly recognizable in the way society is structured, in the system of authority, and in religion, language, nomenclature and the significance of drums. First of all, the Maroon social structure, system of authority and conception of religion will be examined. Subsequently, the administration of justice, language and nomenclature will also be discussed. The chapter will close with the talking (Apinti) drum.

In the course of my travels to countries such as Ghana and Nigeria over a number of years, and in my contacts with people from various African countries, I have been able to compare a number of these components.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, each year thousands of people from different regions of Africa, including present-day Ghana, were forcibly transported to Suriname as slaves for the coffee, sugar and cotton plantations. The working conditions on the slave plantations were appalling and inhuman. 'Day after day the

Maroons were digging away in the mud. Maroons will never forget the memory of those days as they may return. It should therefore not come as a surprise that through rebellion they managed to free themselves. They threw off the yoke of slavery and withdrew into the South American rain forest' (Pakosie 1996:264). What is astonishing is that these people, the Loweman or Maroons were able, in a very short time, to found viable societies, known as *Nasi* or *Gaan-lo*: Ndyuka or Okanisi, Saamaka, Pamaka, Matawai, Aluku or Boni and Kwiinti, with ordered structures and characteristics strongly based on those of their African past.

The Maroons successfully waged an intensive and well-organized guerrilla campaign against the planters and their mercenaries. As early as 1760, over 103 years before the official abolition of slavery in Suriname, the colonial government was forced to recognize them as free people and to sign peace treaties with them. As a result, the Maroons were able to retain their African culture and to continue to develop it as they chose.

## Social structure

The social structures of Maroon societies in Suriname and French Guyana display remarkably similarities with that of the Akan in West Africa. The Akan of Ghana are classified into twelve ethnic communities: Ashanti, Akyem, Akwapim, Brong, Fante, Kwahu, Akwamu, Guan, Sefwi, Wassa, Assin and Denkyira. (Kwadwo 1994:1)

Just like the Akan, Maroon society is ordered along matrilineal lines. Children are counted in the line, *Abusua* or *Bee*, of the mother. The Akan *Abusua*, like the *Bee* of the Surinamese and French Guyanan Maroons, is a family system formed by a group or by groups of people descended from the same ancestress in the female line.

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Page 120: Runaway slave. Plate 90 from Benoit (1839).

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1. This chapter is a shortened version of a yet to be published book about the search for the African origins of components of the Surinamese and French Guyanan Maroon culture.

2. In most Dutch literature on the Maroons, these functions are labelled 'granman' and 'kapitein', but these are corruptions of the Maroon names 'gaanman' and 'kabiten'.

3. In 1994, Nana Odeneho Odura Numapau II was Essumjahene (leader of the place Essumeja) and President of the National House of Chiefs.

The family and authority structures of the Maroons consist of various matrilineal (sub-) groups: *Osu*, the family, *Mamapikin*, matrilineal segment, *Bee*, the maternal line, *Lo*, matrilineal clan and *Gaan-lo* or *Nasi*, Maroon ethnic group (community). The functions of authority, among others those of *kabiten*, village head, and *gaanman*, leader of a *Nasi* (Maroon community), are hereditary.<sup>2</sup> Each *Bee* (maternal line) has its *kabiten*. Hence, every member of the *Bee* may theoretically be considered for this position of authority. Today that includes women.

The *Osu*, the family, is formed by the mother and her children (they belong to the same maternal line), together with the husband, the father of the children, who belongs to a different maternal line. The authority of the *Osu* lies with the parents. The elder children in the family also have some authority over their younger brothers and sisters. For the child is taught to respect adults and everyone else who is older than him or her, hence also older brothers and sisters and all older children outside the family. The older children are in turn taught to behave in a dignified manner, in order to earn the respect of the younger children.

The *Osu* derives from the *Mamapikin*. The authority of the *Mamapikin* is invested in the maternal *Tiyu* or *Tiyo*, uncles, and *Tiya*, aunts. It should be noted that the terms uncle and aunt, and indeed brother and sister, have a different value in Maroon society. The cousins of both parents are also uncles and aunts to the children, because the terms brother and sister also apply to first cousins.

According to Maroon law, the matrilineal uncle and aunt are also (de jure) 'father' and 'mother' of their sister's children. These *tiyu* and *tiya* must ensure that their sisters' children are brought up properly. The heads of family, the mother and father, are accountable to the matrilineal uncles and aunts about matters concerning the life of the family.

The *Mamapikin*, in turn, derives from the *Bee*. The authority of the *Bee* falls to the matrilineal uncles

and aunts of those who hold authority within the *Mamapikin*, the uncles and aunts in the *Mamapikin*. The uncles and aunts in the *Mamapikin* are accountable to the uncles and aunts in the *Bee*. In addition, the *kabiten* or village headman is appointed from the *Bee*. He, moreover, is head of the *Bee* and of the *Lo*. The uncles and aunts in the *Bee* are accountable to the *kabiten*. Because the *Lo* is part of the *Gaan-lo* (the larger Maroon community), the *kabiten*, as head of the *Lo*, is accountable to the highest authority, the *gaanman*, leader of the larger Maroon community and of the council of *kabiten* and *basiya*. The *kabiten* of the *Lo* is also a member of this council (Pakosie 1999: 14-15).

The Maroon social structure displays a marked resemblance to that of the Akan in Ghana. Naturally, there is a difference of scale: the Akan people number many millions, whereas the Maroons have small communities. The social structure of the Akan may be compared to the *Gaan lo* or *Nasi*, the six (large) Maroon ethnic communities. An example are the Ndyuka, which are used as a case in this chapter. Like the Akan, the Ndyuka Maroons are subdivided into smaller ethnic communities. As there are 12 distinct Akan communities within Ghana, so the Ndyuka *Nasi* or *Gaan lo* has fourteen *Lo*. Each *Lo* consists of one or more *Bee* or family groups. The *Pinasi-lo*, for example, consists of the following *Bee*, among others: Kamina Kiisi, Gainsa Komfo, Dido, Yona, Kaabai, Akuba. This corresponds to the Ashanti in Ghana, which number seven *Abusua* or family groups, namely: Aduana, Asenie, Asekyire, Asona, Bretuo, Ekuona and Oyoko (Braffi 1992:3).

Another correspondence is inheritance which, in the case of both the Maroons and the Akan, is governed by the maternal line, the *Abusua* or the *Bee*. The position of asantehene, the king of the Ashanti, is passed down through one of the *Abusua*, the Oyoko. In the case of the Ndyuka, the *gaanman*, the king of a Maroon community, is born into the *Otoo-lo*.

During my visit to Ghana in 1994, Nana Odeneho Oduro Numapau II<sup>3</sup> told me that candidates for succession are first sought in the



Maroon paddles.  
Collection R. Price and  
S. Price.

maternal line. Only if there is no suitable candidate, or none at all, will an attempt be made to ‘borrow’, as he put it, a successor from the paternal line.

### Conception of religion

In spite of the forced relocation of the ancestors of today’s Maroons from Africa to Suriname and the slavery they endured, 350 years later their conception of religion still displays clear similarities with those of numerous African peoples, including the Akan. Maroons believe there is a God, a Sublime Being, an “Almighty Power, who is responsible for the creation of the universe – the entire realm of natural existence as we know it – and for the termination of life” (Pakosie 1985).

This God, a male-female unity, is regarded as the very first ancestor, from which all things originated and who ordered the world. Just like the Akan, the Maroons call this God *Nana*<sup>4</sup>, ancestor. According to the Maroons, *Nana* ordered the world as five different cosmic domains or pantheons, *Osolo* (air), *Bunsu* (water), *Asasi* (earth) and *Ababuki* (forest). The fifth domain is *Asamando*, the realm of the dead, where one of the spiritual components of man, the *Yooka*, goes after his death. The Akan have almost the same names for the cosmic domains as the Maroons. The air (*Osolo*), is *Osoro*, the earth (*Asasi*) is *Asase* and the realm of the dead (*Asamando*) is *Asamando*.

Having ordered the world, *Nana* separated from mankind. As a result, direct contact is no

4. The Akan also use the word *Nana* as a title indicating respect.

longer possible with this Very First Ancestor. Contact between *Nana* and mankind is mediated by the lower gods, to be found in the first four cosmic domains or pantheons, with the *Yooka* (ghosts) of the dead family members who reside in *Asamando* playing an important role.

The Ndyuka concept of the soul also displays a correspondence with that of the Akan. Both the Ndyuka and the Akan believe that man is a unity of body and soul. One of the spiritual components of human beings is the *Akaa*. The *Akaa*, or *Okra* to the Akan, is a spirit of life which enters man directly from *Nana*, and returns to *Nana* after the person died.

### Names of God

In his book 'The Akan Doctrine of God', Dr. J.B. Danquah writes: 'What a race takes God to be, or believes he ought to be, hangs upon the meaning of the name. If a people, for instance, call God by their own vernacular name for 'rainfall', it must be because the copious nature of God as provider of the rain is the seed of their impression, teaching and knowledge of God' (Danquah 1968).

The Ndyuka and the Akan names for God also display close similarities. Some of these names are: *Nyami* (Akan: *Nyame* or *Onyame*), the Greatest of All; *Odamankama* (Akan: *Odomankoma*); *Keedyamaa Keedyampon* (Akan: *Twiaadampon*), the tree on which others lean in order not to fall; *Nyankinponu* (Akan: *Onyankopon* or *Nyankopon*), the Greatest Friend of All; *Tetekwafaamuwa* (Akan: *Tetekwafraamuwa*), The One Who Will Always Be There, the Endless One or the Eternity. When the Ndyuka address God in his capacity as the One From Whom All Things Originated, they use the form of address *Nana Oboade* (Akan: *Oboadee*).

### Crime and punishment

Each society has a system of crimes and punishments, based on the notion of good and evil. The deeds of humans are labelled as being right or wrong. What the community considers good is regarded positively. What it considers objectionable (crime) is subject to sanction (punishment). Deeds which are liable to attract punishment in

the Maroon society relate to the breaking of laws associated with the individual or religion. Breaking these laws will undoubtedly lead to punishment (Jonas 1994: 1-2). Among the Maroons, justice is administered at various levels. The administration of justice at the *Nasi* level is the responsibility of the *gaanlanti*, the leadership of the *Nasi*, with the *gaanman* at its head. At the village level, justice is administered by the *kondeelanti* (village leadership), made up of *kabiten*, *basiya* and the people's representative, the *bendiaseman*. In some cases, an *edekabiten*, the highest authority within a region, may take charge of proceedings. At the *Bee* level, the *kabiten* or *gaantii* (great uncle) of the *Bee* is *unus iudex*, sole judge, although he will consult with others, such as the *basiya* (Jonas 1994:2).

Among the Maroons, punishment not only has a retributive function, it also has a protective one. Jonas says the following on this subject: 'The community, and thus also the individual, must be protected against evil, but the unit (the individual, his family, *bee* or *lo*) may take revenge. The exercise of revenge is strictly monitored and sanctioned by *Lanti* (the judicial bodies)' (Jonas 1994:3). For the Maroons, the general purpose of punishment is forgiveness. Jonas: 'Forgiveness leads to reconciliation. Hence, the leading principle is: no punishment without forgiveness. Forgiveness followed by reconciliation, is the basis for the restoration of the disrupted harmony within society. By means of the punishment, the perpetrator (the family) is made clear that he or she has done wrong' (Jonas 1994:4).

In the system of law, the community (*Nasi*, *Lo*, *Bee*, *Mamapikin* and *Osu*) is charged with responsibility for the deeds of the individual. If an individual has committed a crime which demands action from the highest authority, it is not the individual but his *Lo*, and the *kabiten* of his *Lo*, which are called to account. A punishment or fine is imposed on them by the highest authority (the *gaanman* and the council of *kabiten* and *basiya*). The *kabiten*, and hence the *Lo* of the individual who committed the crime, will subsequently call that individual's *Bee* to account

and impose the punishment or fine on it. The *Bee* in turn will call the *Mamapikin* of the individual to account and impose the punishment or fine on them. The *Mamapikin* calls the individual's *Osu* to account, imposes the punishment or fine and ensures that the individual ultimately receives his punishment or fine (Pakosie 1999: 15).

### System of authority

The system of authority of a Maroon community consists of the *gaanman*, the bearer of ultimate authority, and the *edekabiten*, the *gaankabiten*, the *kabiten*, and the *basiya*. The following comparison may be made, with the help of a table describing the system of authority among the Akan drawn up by Dr. Kwame Nimako (1999:9), himself from Ghana.

<b>Ndyuka</b>	<b>Akan</b>
<b>Gaanman</b> ( <i>king of the whole Ndyuka people</i> )	<b>Asantehene</b> ( <i>king of the Ashanti people</i> )
<b>Edekabiten</b> ( <i>head of a number of lo in a region</i> )	<b>Omahene</b> ( <i>highest headman</i> )
<b>Gaan Kabiten</b> ( <i>head of a lo and one or more village communities</i> )	<b>Ohene</b> ( <i>headman of a village</i> )
<b>Kabiten</b> ( <i>head of a village</i> )	<b>Odikro</b> ( <i>village supervisor</i> )
<b>Basiya</b> ( <i>assistant to a holder of authority</i> )	<b>Okylene</b> ( <i>spokesperson for authority</i> )

### Language

The languages of the Maroons contain many traces of their African past. The Maroon languages are Afro-Surinamese languages, which scientists classify among the Creole languages. These are languages which originate and develop through the meeting of groups of people who cannot understand each other. They are in origin artificial (Pidgin) languages, in other words, which arise through trade contacts.

There are various hypotheses that the Surinamese Creole languages originated in Suriname itself. Personally, I believe that such hypotheses are false. The language process may have developed further in Suriname, but they began in Africa. At least two languages had

already developed in the slave depots in Africa; from them, the other Surinamese Creole languages came forth.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, West Europeans – among them English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese – used thousands of people as goods for the slave trade, also with the cooperation of certain societies in Africa, such as the Ashanti. These people were captured in different parts of Africa. For months, sometimes years afterwards, they were held in depots, such as St. George d'Elmina Castle on the coast of modern-day Ghana, before being transported to their eventual destinations, the slave plantations of the Americas. The journey to the plantations could take months more.

The captured Africans belonged to various ethnic groups, each with their own language and culture. One group would not be able to understand the language of the others. But precisely in such circumstances, the need to communicate with each other was urgent. And this situation forced them to find a new means of communication. In this way, a new language originated which could overcome the Babylonian confusion of speech created by their enforced togetherness. It goes without saying that a language like this is built up of words from the respective languages of the different African ethnic groups. For the sake of convenience, let us call this new language Afro-African.

Together with Afro-African, another new language emerged through the language contact between the captive Africans and the West-European slave traders. This was formed of words from the European languages, words from Afro-African and words from the various ethnic African languages. This second language we will here call Afro-European or Euro-African.

During the passage to the slave plantations in Suriname and on the plantations themselves, further new languages originated, and 'old languages' which could no longer be used disappeared. To these new languages, words were now added from the language or dialect of the slave owners, the dominant white people on the





André Pakosie on a visit to Ghana.

Collection A. Pakosie.

plantations where the Africans now found themselves.

Among the Maroon groups, the process of language development took place not only on the slave plantations but also subsequently, when they left for the jungles, where they founded new societies. These new societies consisted not only of people of different African ethnicities but, significantly, also of people from different types of Surinamese slave plantation. Thus six new languages emerged in the Maroon societies, Ndyuka or Okanisi tongo, Saamaka, Pamaka, Matawai, Aluku and Kwiinti. These six languages may be divided into two main groups:

1. The Surinamese Afro-Portuguese group, formed by Saamaka, Matawai and possibly also by Kwiinti (the late *gaanman* Abone Lafanti of the Matawai, however, numbers Kwiinti, too, among the Surinamese Afro-English group).
2. The Surinamese Afro-English group, formed by Ndyuka, Pamaka and Aluku. (Dubelaar and Pakosie 1999:9.)

The Maroons distinguish two more main groups in the sphere of language, which lie in

between the original African languages and their current languages. They are languages which are predominantly used on religious occasions. One group will subsequently be referred to as the 'instrumental languages' and the other group as the 'vocal languages'. The 'instrumental languages' include Wanwi, Kwadyo, Agbado, Benta, (Botoo) Tutu and Abaankuman.

#### **Instrumental and vocal languages**

The instrumental languages are not spoken languages. Wanwi and Kwadyo are played on the drum. Agbado on the Agbado, a string instrument. Benta on the Benta, a percussion instrument, and (Botoo) Tutu on the (Botoo) Tutu, a wind instrument. Abaankuman is a sound or tone code language, related to particular events. For example, in traditional Maroon society, the sound of a gunshot means that game has been caught, so there is meat to be had. The sound of the Apinti means that a public event is taking place. The following languages are numbered among the 'vocal languages': *Loangu, Anpuku, Papa, Kumanti, Amanfu* and *Akoopina*.

Among the Maroons, *Loangu* still ranks as the 'lingua franca' in religious matters. Every religious leader is expected to be able to understand and speak *Loangu*, in addition to his own specific religious language, such as *Kumanti*, *Anpuku*, *Papa* or *Amanfu*, regardless of which of the Surinamese Maroon group he belongs to.

Perhaps we can cautiously propose that this Surinamese *Loangu* language – which, it may be pointed out, has no direct link with the Loango people of Africa – was the language which originated in the depots in Africa. In other words, it could be Afro-African.

It may also be that it is the language which functioned as the lingua franca for those Africans who were later brought to Suriname from the central depot on Curaçao. In that case, it would have developed during the first voyage from the central depot on Curaçao to the colony of Suriname.

During one of my trips to Ghana in 1994, I visited Asantemanso which, I was told, is the best-preserved city of the Ashanti, and Kokofu, the city in which the founder of the Ashanti kingdom, Otumfuo Osei Tutu, was born. I was also taken to see his birthplace. When the Okyeme (the *basiya* or assistant of a *hene*, leader) poured me a glass of rum, I raised my glass to the gods and the ancestors, speaking the following words: 'Nana Keedyamaa Keedyampon, Asasi Nana Nyankinponu. Nyakwaanu Bonponu kude Kumasi. Adyei fu adyei, adyei fu Kantamatu, Kentu kanfretutu Boadi wo di ni o. Fingamatoto, Fingamayaa, nana Diki Kwaami wo di ni o. Dompomama Poina Paaya, dompomama Kiisi wo di ni o. Osalan de belebele na etwa oman mu. Ma tande u yeu Bibilim, Afilikansa. Da mi dasi, mi dasi'. (Translation: Great God of the universe, on whom the world leans, and who has established the seat of the king in Kumasi. Respected great-great-grandfather Kentu Boadi, this is for you. Respected great-great-grandfather Diki Kwaami, this is for you. Great-great-grandmother Poina Paaya and great-great-grandmother Kiisi, this is for you. However long it has taken, still, as the moon moves slowly forwards but nevertheless traverses the village, so I have today finally reached Africa again. I thank you, I thank you).

After this libation, two notables who sat beside me, asked me which city in Ghana I was from. When I said that I came not from Ghana but from a village in the interior of Suriname, they were amazed that they had been able to follow my prayer. One of them repeated a sentence from my prayer and I heard that he used an **R** where I had used an **L**, for example 'Osran de brebre' instead of 'Osalan de belebele'. One of the *komfo*, the priests of the village, also stood up after a short address by myself in (Surinamese) Loangu, in order to reply in his own language. He then came to me and said: 'We are colleagues and cousins, let us immortalize our meeting with a photograph', which we did.

### Comparisons between Ndyuka and Akan

Before making certain comparisons between elements from, in particular, the Ndyuka culture and from the Akan culture, first the following comments. In contrast to the Akan, Ndyuka (and the other Maroon languages) does not have the letter **R**. Where the **R** has been dropped from the original word, it is replaced either by a (compensatory) lengthening of the associated vowel, or by an **L**. For example, *Abeewa* (old woman) instead of *Aberewa* in Akan. Or *Osolo* (air) instead of *Osoro* in Akan. The following four texts, in Ndyuka and Akan, which have the same meanings, show that much has been preserved in Ndyuka.

**Ndyuka:** 'Madye madye tyai abeewa go okun'.

**Akan:** 'Makye makye kum aberewa'.

**Meaning:** By constantly replying good morning, good morning, the old woman died.

**Ndyuka (Loangu):** Wo pe ase akaa atyee Nyami naa u okaa tyee afaama

**Akan:** Wo pe asem aka akyere Nyame a na woka kyere mframa.

**Meaning:** If you want to say something to God, say it to the wind.

**Ndyuka (Loangu):** Obi nkwan si obi nkwanmu.

**Akan:** Obi kwan nsi obi kwan mu.

**Meaning:** Each has his own path.

**Ndyuka (Loangu):** Odamankama bu wo ne u wo Okun no.

**Akan:** Odomankoma boo owuo na owuo kum no.

**Meaning:** God created death and death killed God.

### Names

A comparison of names among the Maroons, and in particular the Ndyuka, and among the Akan shows that the Ndyuka have retained a great many of the African names. A clearly discernible influence of the Akan may be seen in the Ndyuka names for the days of the week. Among some of the Ndyuka, it was common to give a child the name of the day of the week on which he/she was born as their first name (see comparison below).

NDYUKA	AKAN			
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Born on:</i>				
<i>Sunday</i>	Kwasi	(Kwasida/Kwasiba)	Kwasi	Akwasi
<i>Monday</i>	Kodyo	Adyuba	Kodyo	Adwoa
<i>Tuesday</i>	Kwamina	Abeni (Abena)	Kwabena	Abena
<i>Wednesday</i>	Kwaku	Akuba	Kwaku	Akuwa
<i>Thursday</i>	Yaw	Yaba	Yaw	Yaa
<i>Friday</i>	Kofi	Afi (Afiba)	Kofi	Afua
<i>Saturday</i>	Kwaami	Amba (Ama)	Kwame	Ama

Comparison of ordinary names (not names of days) has shown that the Yoruba culture has also had a major influence on the naming tradition of the Ndyuka. This runs counter to that which was previously thought, namely that the Akan culture had had the greatest influence on the overall Afro-Surinamese culture. In addition, there are components in Ndyuka names which may be found in, among others, Swahili (East Africa), Mwera (Kenya) and Zaramo (Tanzania). This indicates that, in whatever manner, other African ethnicities than had previously been assumed have played a part. Further research will be necessary to establish where and how this

influencing took place. The list below contains examples of Ndyuka names with African origins.

Ndyuka	African origin
Abeeku	Abereku (Fante)
Adebaya	Adebayo (Yoruba)
Ageyna	Agyeman (Akan)
Ankono	Akono (Yoruba)
Kayode	Kayode (Yoruba)
Simba	Simba (Swahili, East Africa)
Aluna	Aluna (Mwera, Kenya)
Doto	Doto (Zaramo, Tanzania)
(A)Sakiya	Zakiya (Swahili, East Africa)
Kaamo	Kramo (Fante, Ghana)

During my research, I have also discovered that certain words have been retained by the Ndyuka but given different meanings. An example is the Ndyuka word *Bantifo*, used to denote a divinity; the related Akan word *Bayifo*, by contrast, means a human vampire. In a similar way, the Ndyuka use the word *Akantaasi* to denote a spirit in a termite nest, but the meaning of the related Akan word *Akantamansu* is a solemn oath.

### Apinti Akeema, the talking drum

An obvious Akan cultural survival among the Maroon peoples in the interiors of Suriname and French Guyana is most definitely the *Apinti*. The name *Apinti* is derived from the Akan word *Mpinti*, drum. As among the Akan (Ashanti) in Ghana, the *Apinti* of the Ndyuka and the other Surinamese and French Guyanan Maroon groups is used to pass on messages. It is a means of communication both among people and between people and the ancestors and the gods. The everyday *Apinti* language used by the Maroons is *Wanwi*. A comparison of the messages relayed by the *Apinti* and the names of things demonstrates that the Ndyuka and the other Maroon groups have maintained this Akan (Ashanti) tradition in vibrant form even over several centuries. One difference is that the *Apinti* in Suriname and French Guyana is played with both hands, while in Ghana it is played with two sticks.

Below are examples of two messages transmitted using the Apinti Akeema. The first is a combination of two separate Apinti messages of the Surinamese Maroons, played by Anikel

Awagie of the Saamaka Maroons and by Moli Sentele of the Ndyuka Maroons.<sup>5</sup> The second is also a combination of two Akan Apinti messages, transcribed by R.S. Rattray.

5. Interview with da Awagie Anikel in 1990 and with da Moli Sentele in 1999.

6. *Nteneboa* is a corruption of the Akan word *Twereboa* = a variety of cedar.  
7. *Koobuwa* is in all probability a corruption of the Akan word *Kodia* = a place somewhere in Africa (Ghana).  
8. *Twereboa Kodia* = the cedar from *Kodia*.

<b>NDYUKA (Wanwi)</b>	<i>(translation)</i>
Odyan Koobuwa be si ankama	Odyan Koobuwa
Mi Odyan Koobuwa be si ankama	I Odyan Koobuwa
fu osiosi wataa dyande	of the river
Domba	Player of the consecrated drum,
Asanti Kotoko boadu	the unity drum of the Ashanti
Asanti Kotoko tintin	Which consists of the drum wood,
Asanti Kotoko man ntenebuwa <sup>6</sup>	the drum skin,
Falamanpopo	the cord and
Kwansa	the drum pin
Afiamantanta	Made of cedar wood
Akan	The spokesman of the Akan
Gbolokoso gbologbolo	Venerable ancestors,
Msi agama gbologbolo	the consecrated drum asks permission
Futi-uti fili fili fili fili	to speak
Futi-uti bilimba	He has been away,
Uyumuna keeku, keeku uyumuna	but now he is back
Ketekei keenki, ketekei keenki ampo	A new day has broken
Keedyamaa Keedyampon	He greets you,
Odamankama nanti, Odamankama bala,	God of the universe,
Odamankama betele	the gods,
Odyuwa Bunsu Bunsu Bunsu obala	the dead and the living
Mi Odyan Koobuwa be si ankama	He greets you mother Odyuwa Bunsu
Fu osiosi wataa dyande	Strong Odun tree on which everything leans
Kelebe ten ten ten ten Odun Akansangele	Strong Odun tree on which everything leans
Kelebe ten ten ten ten Odun Akansanbili	Bearer of the staff of honour of the Ashanti
Kokotibaibati, kokotibaibati fu Asanti ako	I, Odyan Koobuwa, greet you with all respect.
Uyemuna keeku, keeku uyemuna	
Ketekei keenki, ketekei keenki ampon	
<b>NDYUKA</b>	<b>AKAN (Ashanti)</b>
Asanti kotoko man <i>nteneboa</i> <sup>7</sup>	Asante kotoko monka ntoa, Korobia
Koobuwa	yerefi anwoma Asante Kotoko monka
Asanti Kotoko man nteneboa	ntoa
<b>AKAN (Ashanti)</b>	<i>(translation)</i>
<i>Akan drum language</i>	
Twereboa <sup>8</sup> Kodia	O, cedar tree (from which the drum is made)
Birimpon	The mighty one
Odomankoma Kyerema	The divine drummer says



*Aukaner Maroons at  
Tempatie River in  
Suriname (ca. 1885).  
Photo by Julius Müller.*

*KIT Fotobureau, collection Müller  
no 24.*



Se, okoo, babi a  
 Wama ne ho mmereso  
 Firimpon  
 Asiama Toku Asare  
 Otweadumpon 'bo' Nyame  
 Opontenten Asi Akatabaa  
 Asiama Nyankopon  
 Odomankoman 'Kyerema se  
 Oko babi a  
 Wa mane-ho mene so oo  
 Wa mane-ho mene so  
 Akoko bon anopa  
 Akoko tua bon  
 Nhima hima hima  
 Ye re kyere wo  
 Nso wo be hu

he had gone elsewhere for a while  
 but that now he has returned  
 Spirit of Asiama Toku Asare  
 Opontenten Asi Akatabaa (strong names)  
 Asiama (who came from) the God of the sky  
 Asiama of the Supreme Being  
 The divine drummer declares that  
 Had he gone elsewhere (in sleep)  
 He has made himself to arise  
 He had made himself to arise  
 (As) the fowl uprose and crowed  
 as a cock gets up and crows  
 Very early  
 Very early  
 Very early  
 We are addressing you  
 And you will understand

(Rattray 1914:136 and 1969:269-270)

## Conclusion

The fact that so many African, and in particular Akan cultural components may be found in the Maroon, and in particular the Ndyuka culture, does not prove that all Maroons or the Ndyuka are directly descended from the Akan of Ghana. Account must be taken of the fact that various African ethnic groups strongly influenced each other in the slave depots, on the slave plantations and in the new communities in the jungles of Suriname and French Guyana. It was also the case that on particular slave plantations, one (cultural) group was more dominant than others. Further research is therefore necessary to trace the African origins of the various subgroups of the Ndyuka and the other Maroon communities. In such research, the *Bee* (or *Wosudendu* in Saamaka) can provide the most information because it is structured on the basis of persons or groups with a common ancestress in the maternal line. In Maroon society, each ancestress – the African woman from whom the group is descended – was known under her own African name.

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## 12. The Black Dutchmen

### *African soldiers in the Netherlands East Indies*

Between 1831 and 1872 some 3,000 African recruits sailed from Elmina to Batavia (now Jakarta), the capital of the Netherlands East Indies. They had been recruited to serve in the Dutch colonial army, which throughout most of the 19th century experienced a chronic shortage of European manpower. The Africans counted as part of the European contingent of the army and were to be treated as Europeans. After expiry of their contracts, some returned to the Gold Coast. The majority settled in Elmina, where the Dutch governor allocated plots for the veterans on a hill behind St George's Castle, which today is still known as Java Hill. Their army pensions were paid out in the castle. Others, having established families during their long years of army service, opted to settle in the East Indies. They became the founding fathers of the Indo-African communities in the Javanese towns of Purworedjo, Semarang, Salatiga and Solo. On Java, the African soldiers and their descendants became known as 'Belanda Hitam' – Black Dutchmen. An army career became a family tradition, for many sons and grandsons of the African soldiers also served in the Dutch army. After Indonesia's independence, most Indo-Africans opted for repatriation to the Netherlands.

#### **'Children of nature'**

The shortage of manpower in the Dutch colonial army became particularly acute in the wake of the Java War (1825-1830), which took the lives of 8,000 European soldiers and many more native soldiers, and the secession of Belgium in 1830, which meant that the national reservoir for army recruitment had shrunk considerably. Various options were explored to find new sources of manpower to supply the army in the East Indies, by far the most profitable part of the Dutch

colonial empire. The example of the black regiments in the British West Indies inspired government officials in The Hague to look first of all at the possibilities of recruiting blacks in the New World. A report submitted to the Department of War with the portentous title 'Thoughts on an inexpensive and efficient organization of the army in the Netherlands East Indies' proposed to recruit liberated Negroes and runaway slaves in the United States.<sup>1</sup> But the Department of Colonies objected: American Negroes were likely to cause problems, as they would be infused with ideals of equality, which thus far had been frustrated in the United States. And if the US government itself at some point were to acquire colonial ambitions, the loyalty of American troops in the East Indies could not be taken for granted. The Department of Colonies preferred to recruit 'children of nature', unspoilt blacks who would willingly submit to European guidance.<sup>2</sup> These children of nature, it was believed in The Hague, were to be found in Africa.

Thus, the Department of Colonies turned to the almost forgotten Dutch Possessions on the Guinea Coast, where commercial activity was at a low ebb following the abolition of the slave trade in 1814. These neglected outposts now had the opportunity to make themselves useful in the eyes of the Dutch government by supplying manpower to the army. It was assumed that Africans would be better equipped to withstand the hot climate and dreaded tropical diseases in the East Indies. The Negro race was deemed to be very strong and used to a tough life under harsh conditions: 'where whole populations become extinct, the Negroes will remain'.<sup>3</sup> Most European soldiers in the tropics succumbed to diseases, while casualties on the battlefield itself were relatively low.

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Page 132: *Wounded African KNIL soldier Kees Pop. Oilpainting by Isaac Israels (1880).*

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-4954.

1. ARA (Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague), Kolonien 1814-1849 (henceforth Kol. I), 4217, geheim verbaal 15 Dec. 1829 :

'Gedagten nopens eene weinig kostende en doelmatige organisatie der Landmagt in Neerlands Oost Indische Bezittingen'.

2. ARA, Kol. I, 4217, 7 Nov. 1829.

3. ARA, Kol.I, 4217, 7 Nov. 1829.

Like all colonial armies, the East Indies army (Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger, known as KNIL) also recruited native soldiers in the Indonesian archipelago. Army policy in the 19th century dictated, however, that roughly half the troops had to consist of Europeans, who were deemed more reliable and better qualified. Reliance on native troops carried the inherent danger that some day they would use their training and their weapons to turn against their colonial masters.

The most favoured native troops were the Amboinese, as the people from the Moluccan islands were commonly known. As Christians, they were considered more loyal to Dutch rule than the largely Islamic population on Java and most of Sumatra. The Amboinese were much better paid than other native troops, had more opportunities for advancement and were in some respects placed on equal footing with the European troops.

The African soldiers were to be counted as part of the European contingent. It was deemed most unlikely that they would make common cause with the local population. Dutch officials were convinced that the inhabitants of Java and Sumatra would fear the Africans as 'cannibals'. On the other hand, the Africans would certainly look down on Asians, as these were neither properly black nor properly white.<sup>4</sup> It is not quite clear how the Dutch officials arrived at these stereotypes, but they evidently saw no risk of fraternization between Africans and Asians. Troop reinforcements were urgently needed to counter local Moslem rebellions on West Sumatra, led by leaders whose religious fervour had been fuelled during a pilgrimage to Mecca. As the Africans held a 'fetish religion', the Dutch saw little danger that they would collude with Moslem insurgents. Army policy aimed to keep the Africans at a distance from the local population. The Africans were encouraged to be baptized as Christians: Catholicism was seen as the most suitable cult for people who indulged in elaborate rituals.

Their conditions of service were mostly the same as those of Europeans, and considerably better than those of the indigenous soldiers. This policy of equal treatment made sense in the context of diplomatic relations in Europe and perhaps also in the still largely pre-colonial societies of the Gold Coast, but it was incongruous with developments in the Netherlands East Indies. In Europe, the Dutch government had to defend African recruitment against British accusations that this operation amounted to a covert form of slave trading. If the Africans were paid and treated as Europeans, they were demonstrably not of slave status. On the Gold Coast, the balance of power between Europeans and Africans had not yet shifted decisively in favour of the Europeans. Racial boundaries were still relatively fluid. In the East Indies, by contrast, the mid-19th century marked an episode of empire building and consolidation of Dutch rule. With the racial hierarchy of a colonial state rapidly consolidating in the mid-19th century, the rules with regard to equal treatment for Europeans and Africans must have seemed incongruous, and thus were constantly eroded.

In at least one important respect the army did not succeed in its intention to maintain social distance between Africans and natives of the East Indies. Like other KNIL soldiers, the Africans established a relationship with native women. In due course, the Indo-African descendants of these liaisons became part of Indo-European society. They spoke Dutch as their mother tongue, their children attended Dutch schools and they held Dutch nationality. The largest Indo-African community lived in the garrison town of Purworedjo in central Java, where in 1859 king William III allocated them a plot of land. Other garrison towns such as Semarang and Salatiga were also home to a number of Indo-African families. Indo-Africans living outside these main centres tended to assimilate into Indo-European or Indonesian society, often becoming oblivious of their African roots.

4. ARA, Kolonien na 1850 (henceforth Kol. II), *Generaal Overzicht van hetgeen betrekking heeft tot de werving van Afrikanen en van de verkregen resultaten*, bijlage La G, aantekeningen op nevenstaande memorie.

### Three phases of recruitment: a slow start

In 1831 the Department of Colonies instructed Governor J. Last in Elmina to recruit 'a company of 150 Negro soldiers'. If the experiment proved satisfactory, recruitment would then be organized on a more sustained basis. Instructions from The Hague emphasized that recruitment had to take place 'without coercion or force'.<sup>5</sup> Last doubted whether volunteers could be found but sent agents to Axim and Accra, while in Elmina he invited the king and his council to St George Castle to outline the new scheme. He advised the king of Elmina that service in the Dutch army would offer a unique opportunity for his subjects 'to abandon their usual loafing, to earn an income, see the world and secure an old age pension'. The king promised to cooperate, but also made it clear that he could not force his subjects into army service overseas.<sup>6</sup>

Last's doubts proved well founded. Three ships that were sent from Holland in 1831-1832 collected eighteen, nineteen and seven recruits respectively in Elmina. Among them were the sons of several well-known Afro-European families in Elmina and Accra: Jan Nieser, Willem Nieser, Manus Ulzen, Matthijs Rühle and Willem van der Puye. Some, such as Jan Nieser, who belonged to a well-known Eurafrican merchant

family, had previously served with the Elmina garrison and were now qualified for the rank of corporal. Manus Ulzen was the great-grandson of Roelof Ulzen, governor of the West India Company in Elmina from 1755 to 1757. He had been enticed into army service with the promise of immediate promotion to corporal. His knowledge of Dutch gave him the bargaining power to obtain a better deal than most others. Some of the other volunteers were young men who needed the enlistment premium and their advance pay to clear debts or to settle fines for various offences. To make enlistment more attractive, the Dutch introduced a system of 'delegated payments'. The recruits, which included both free men and slaves, could authorize the Dutch army to deduct a certain amount from their salaries, that would then be sent to their relatives, creditors or masters on the Gold Coast. This system of delegated pay ('delegatiën') was open to abuse and would become a contentious issue in the next years.

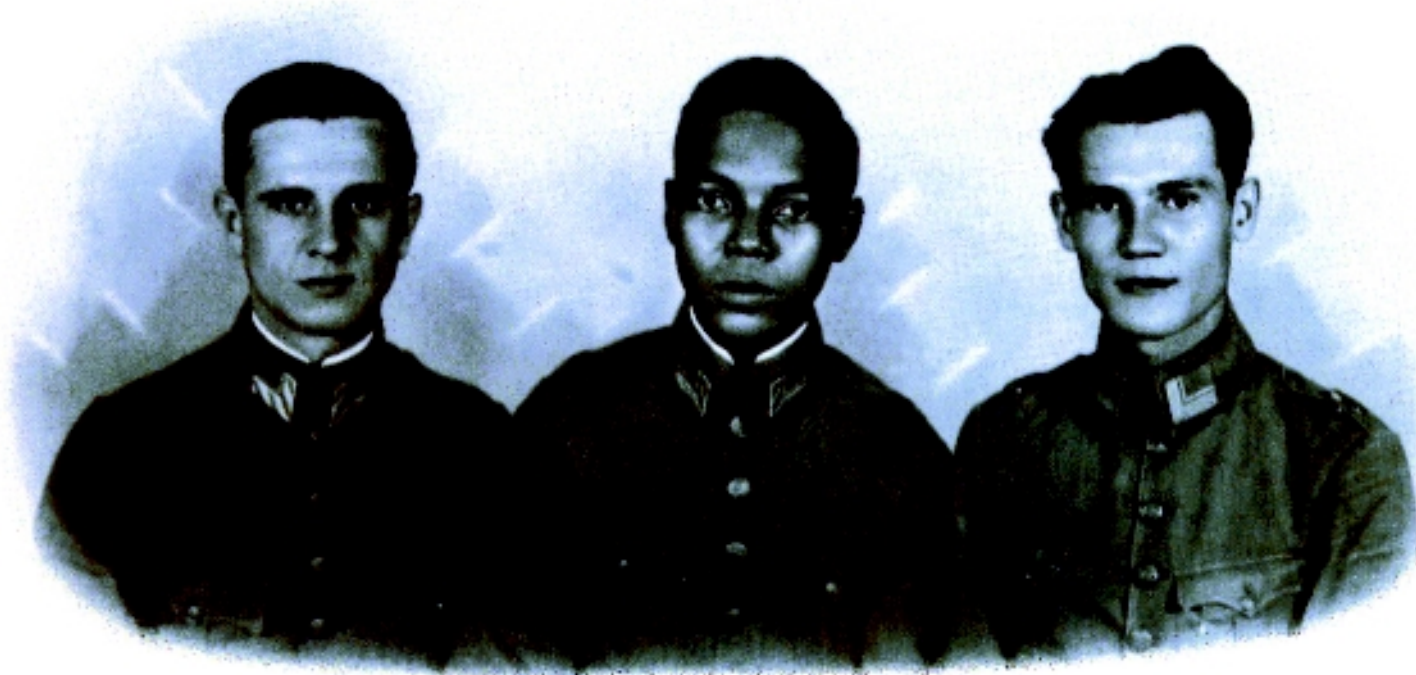
This first batch of 44 African soldiers took part in a military expedition in southern Sumatra, where the army was sent to quell an uprising by Islamic fundamentalists known as the Padri Wars. Initial reports about their qualities as soldiers were highly favourable. Reports from Batavia to The Hague stated that the

5. ARA, Kol. I, 4222, geheime resolutie 29 Juni 1831, no. 77/A.

6. ARA, Kol. I, 3964, Kommandeur Last aan Kolonien, 29 Nov. 1831.

*Three KNIL soldiers in the 1930s: a Dutchman, an Indo-European and an Indo-African (Pierre Nelk)*

*Collection I. van Kessel.*





Sumatrans were 'full of awe and admiration' for these black giants, who were reputed to be somewhat ill-disciplined but very courageous in battle. However, because of the small number of men, the costs of the experiment were excessive. Governor Van den Bosch calculated that the 44 African volunteers had cost the Dutch State the astronomical amount of 1,232 guilders per head, while European soldiers were shipped to Batavia at a cost of 120 guilders per head. He suggested abandoning the experiment because of these excessive costs, but once the recruitment operation was in progress, it was not easily abandoned.<sup>7</sup> The next frigate with another 68 soldiers on board arrived only in 1836, but meanwhile the Dutch government had decided to expand its recruiting operations.

7. ARA, Kol. I, 4235, no. 214 J, Van den Bosch aan Kolonien, 29 Aug. 1832.

8. ARA, Kol. I, 4246, no. 176.

### **1837-1841: a massive influx**

In September 1836 an official mission, headed by Major-General Jan Vermeer, sailed from the Netherlands with a vast array of presents for the king of Ashanti and instructions to arrange for the enlistment of between 2,000 and 3,000 soldiers. Along the coast volunteers were few and far between, but the Kingdom of Ashanti, which since olden days had been on friendly terms with the Dutch and was a traditional supplier of slaves, was seen as the key to solving the manpower problem. Vermeer, accompanied by a large retinue of over 900 men and women, finally arrived in Kumasi in February 1837. They were well received and the presents – ranging from liquor and guns to perfume, silverware, sweets, crystal, a clock and a camera obscura – were much appreciated. Asantehene Kwaku Dua I was particularly pleased with the performance of the brass band, and later sent some of his own musicians to Elmina to learn the same repertoire and to acquire similar outfits. The asantehene manifested a keen preference for the Hunters' Chorus from *Der Freischütz*, which became known as the asantehene's Song.

On 18 March 1837 a contract between king Willem I of the Netherlands and Kwaku Dua I of Ashanti was duly signed.<sup>8</sup> The asantehene would

deliver 1,000 recruits within a year. He received 2,000 guns by way of advance payment, with the promise of 4,000 more to come. Moreover, the Dutch obtained permission to open a recruitment agency in Kumasi that, for the next few years, would be headed by Jacob Huydecoper, a mulatto from Elmina. Witnessing the frequent human sacrifices in Ashanti, the Dutch delegation was convinced that the asantehene and his court controlled vast amounts of manpower, some of which could be made available to the Dutch army. As recruitment was still supposed to be voluntary, slaves offered to the recruiting agent received an advance payment to purchase their freedom. Upon arrival in Elmina, they were given a certificate of manumission as proof of their legal status as free men.

As part of the deal two young Ashanti princes, Kwasi Boakye and Kwame Poku – the son and the nephew of the king – accompanied Vermeer back to The Netherlands, where they were to receive a Dutch education. Boakye later continued his studies in Delft and became a mining engineer. Contrary to the initial plans, he did not go back to the Gold Coast but went to work in the Netherlands Indies, where he died in 1904. Kwame Poku did return to Elmina in 1847, but never made it back to Kumasi. He committed suicide in St George's Castle in 1850. The story of the two Ashanti princes has become justly renowned with the publication of Arthur Japin's novel (Japin 1997; 2001).

Recruitment in Kumasi never met Dutch expectations. In the first year, the asantehene delivered only 51 recruits. Huydecopers's own efforts at recruiting were somewhat more successful, but still remained far below target numbers. Ashanti law prohibited Ashanti citizens from leaving Ashanti territory, and the supply of slaves was much smaller than had been anticipated. The Ashanti would only sell a few of their slaves to the recruiting agency when they were in need of cash. Most recruits were probably bought from traders who brought new supplies from slave markets such as Salaga. As the army records list the place of birth of the recruits, it is



*African KNIL soldier on Java by Ernest Hardouin (ca. 1850). KITLV, Leiden, cat no 36 b 187.*

possible to make a rough estimate of their origins. Among the places of origin are Dagomba, Mamprusi, Grushi, Hausa and a very substantial number of Mossi (Latorre 1977). So a large number of the Africans in the Dutch army did not come from present-day Ghana but from present-day Burkina Faso and other neighbouring countries. In spite of their disparate ethnic origins,

the recruits soon developed strong bonds of solidarity. In Africa they were known as Mossi, Grushi or simply 'Donko' (general label for Africans of slave status who originated from territories north of Ashanti), but in the East Indies army the soldiers acquired a new, additional identity as 'Africans'. Dutch army records provide ample evidence of a strong 'esprit de

corps' in the African companies of the KNIL: individual grievances could escalate easily into collective protests.

Later generations of Indo-Africans tended to know very little about their African origins. Their fathers had told them that they were now Dutch, and that they had to find their place in the East Indies. While memories of the African past faded away, the ethnic identification was sometimes the only element of African identity that was passed on to the next generation. Thus, Mrs Mes, now living in the Netherlands, remembers her grandmother telling her that great-grandfather was a Mozie who had sailed to Batavia from Port Elizabeth. Therefore she had concluded that her family roots originated in Mozambique or South Africa. She proved her point by singing Boer War songs in my interviews.<sup>9</sup> But her great-grandfather, who had been given the Dutch name 'Trappen', was indeed a Mossi who sailed from Elmina on the ship *Elizabeth*. While Oscar van den Berg, whose grandfather was a 'Groessie' (Grushi), firmly believed that the family tree could be traced to Ethiopia.<sup>10</sup> As a 12-year-old schoolboy in the Javanese town of Solo in the 1930s, he made plans with Indo-African schoolmates and soldiers to form an auxiliary corps that would go to Africa to help liberate Abyssinia from Mussolini's invaders. Abyssinia equalled Africa, and he identified with the struggle of the Africans.

In several families, some fragments of information were handed down to the next generations, but without much context. Some descendants had African names, or knew a few places such as Elmina, Sinjoors (St George) or Ashanti, but without having any notion that these can be located in present-day Ghana. A few families did relate their family history to Ghana, but most only re-discovered their region of origin when they started organizing reunions in the Netherlands in the 1970s. The Dutch historian Dr Sylvia de Groot, who at that time was working with students on a research project on the Africans in the KNIL, was instrumental in assisting the descendants in uncovering their Ghanaian 'roots'.

Equally important element in reconstructing the past was a publication in which the origin of the wax prints on the West African Coast was linked to the history of the African soldiers (Kroese 1976). Between 1837 and 1841, some 1,500 Africans were recruited in Kumasi. From Kumasi, the recruits were escorted to Elmina, a journey of ten to twelve days. Meanwhile, recruitment also continued in Elmina. All in all, between 1836 and 1842 some 2,100 African soldiers left via Elmina for the East Indies. In 1840, a group of 50 soldiers was sent off to Suriname, but this was the only time recruits went across the Atlantic rather than across the Indian Ocean (De Groot 1990).

Recruitment was first suspended and then abandoned altogether in 1841. The British government had protested that this mode of recruitment amounted to a covert form of slave trading. The Dutch, having long lost their naval superiority, could ill afford to alienate the government in London. Several mutinies by African troops in the East Indies had meanwhile also led the colonial administration to doubt the wisdom of the African recruitment scheme. Most mutinies followed a similar pattern. Infringements on the promise of equal treatment were almost invariably the cause of discontent and at times violent protest. Before the arrival of the African soldiers, the Dutch army in the East Indies had three categories: Europeans, Natives and Amboinese. Official instructions stated that the Africans were to be treated as Europeans in every respect. In local practice however, various exceptions were made, sometimes to the benefit of the Africans, but mostly to their disadvantage.

Once the African recruits began to arrive in large numbers, problems of communication became more pressing. The languages of instruction in the army were Dutch and Malay. Some among the first batch of Africans, recruited in the neighbourhood of Dutch settlements on the Ghanaian coast, had a working knowledge of Dutch. But the large detachments from the interior, who had never seen Europeans before, found it at first difficult to cope. Some battalions used improvised translations of the army's penal

9. Interview with Mrs G.B. Mes, 3 March 2000, Spijkenisse.

10. Interview with Oscar van den Berg, 28 Aug. 2000, Echt.

code in Twi or Fanti, written in phonetic script, others read the rules to the troops monthly in Dutch and Malay, and again others had no official instruction.

Not surprisingly, army officers found that the instruction of Africans took more time and effort than the instruction of Amboinese recruits. So it did not make sense to give these newcomers better treatment than the tried and tested loyal Amboinese. The process of eroding the promise of equal treatment in fact began with an economizing measure affecting the Amboinese troops: in 1835 they were given native sleeping mats rather than the straw mattresses used by European soldiers. The army advertised this decision of course as being in the best interest of the health of the Amboinese, who were much better off with sleeping mats and leather cushions. Like the Europeans, the Amboinese in the army wore shoes. As this was an important attribute of European status, they always wore shoes outside army barracks. But since shoes were most uncomfortable, they preferred to walk barefoot inside the barracks. Thus their muddied feet soiled the straw mattresses. The Africans, also equipped with shoes, followed the Amboinese practice. But while the Amboinese accepted their sleeping mats without protest, the Africans protested vociferously when in 1838 the bedding arrangement for the Amboinese was extended to African troops as well. The measure, of course, was advertised as being in the best interest of the Africans, as they 'were known to be of an uncleanly nature, to have a greasy skin, greasy hair and a peculiarly strong and unpleasant smell'.<sup>11</sup> The issue of the sleeping mats was a factor in several mutinies. In April 1840, the three African companies of the 4th infantry battalion in the garrison town of Kedong Kebo (Purworedjo) in central Java had risen in armed protest against infringements on the equal treatment clause with regard to pay, clothing and bedding (sleeping mats). The grievance with regard to clothing was that the army no longer issued underpants to Amboinese and Africans. The discontent on pay was related to the matter of the delegated

payments to the Gold Coast. The army deducted 8½ cents a day from their pay. Sometimes the Africans had authorized this deduction, as the money was meant for their relatives. But in most cases, the deductions were meant to pay off the advance that the army had given for the manumission payments. After about three years, a soldier would have paid off his debt (about one hundred guilders) made to purchase his liberty. Yet, the deductions had become institutionalized, without any direct relationship with obligations incurred on the Gold Coast. Thus, the Africans received a structurally lower wage than their European comrades did. The African soldiers in Kedong Kebo had sworn an oath that they would go on strike if on the 16 April 1840 they did not receive pay equal to that of the Europeans. Shouting rebellious slogans, they disobeyed their officers and stormed the barracks to get hold of the guns. As the commander had had prior warning, the European troops beat off the attack, dispersed the rebels and followed them in hot pursuit. They succeeded in apprehending 85 rebels, while three escaped.<sup>12</sup>

The next year, in June 1841, 37 Africans of the 10th infantry battalion, fully armed, walked out of the Dutch Van der Capellen fortress on the West Coast of Sumatra after repeated refusals to obey orders. A detachment of soldiers was sent out in pursuit and met the deserters near Fort Kayoetanam on the way to Padang. Attempts to persuade the Africans to return to their duties were futile. When the pursuing party attempted to take them by force a fight ensued, leaving two Africans dead and four badly wounded. The remainder were taken prisoner.<sup>13</sup> In both cases, the mutineers were court-martialed. They got off relatively lightly. The most severe sentence, passed in the Kedong Kebo case, was two years in prison and 25 lashes.

Now the army command had had enough. Even before the Sumatra mutiny, the commander-in-chief of the Netherlands East Indies army, major-general Cochius, had requested the government in The Hague to scale down African recruitment or halt the operation altogether:

11. ARA, Kolonien II, Generaal Overzicht, bijlage La G.

12. ARA, Kol. II, Generaal Overzicht, Missive van den militairen kommandant te Kedong Kebo, 17 April 1840.

13. ARA, Kol. II, Generaal Overzicht, Missive van den militairen kommandant ter Sumatra's Westkust, 9 Julij 1841.



*African soldier with his children by August van Pers (1851).*

KITLV, Leiden, cat 37 c 27.

‘Wherever the Negro soldiers served together in a company, they have banded together in mutiny, under the pretext that infringements had been made on the promise of equal treatment.’<sup>14</sup> The general’s complaint is an eloquent testimony to the bonds of solidarity among the recruits, who now apparently banded together under their newly acquired identity as ‘Negroes’ or ‘Africans’. Cochijs believed that the promise of equal treatment had been a serious psychological error, which had encouraged the ‘childish conceit’ and ‘stupid pride’ of people who had just recently been liberated from the most abject state of slavery. The Africans, he stated, had no reason at all to look down on Javanese and Amboinese. It was just another proof of their conceit and ignorance.

For The Hague, the Sumatra mutiny was the final straw. By government decree of 17 December 1841, recruitment at the Guinea Coast was abandoned. Those soldiers already in the Indies served the remainder of their contract, but there would be no new arrivals.

However, after the upheavals in the period of massive influx (1838-1841), things calmed down. Reports of incidents were few and far between, less so than with the Europeans who were a notorious bunch of ill-disciplined drunkards. The African soldiers turned out to be no less

vulnerable to diseases than their European counterparts. Mortality rates among the African troops were as high as those among the Europeans. As with the Europeans, most Africans died in hospital rather than on the battlefield. Mortality during the three-month voyage on the ships was low, but vast numbers died within a year of their arrival in the East Indies.

One initial motive behind the African recruitment scheme was the hope that African soldiers would be less expensive than Europeans because of the shorter voyage – three months instead of the five to six months from the Netherlands to Batavia – and their longer terms of service. High mortality rates undermined this logic however. Recruitment expenses, including sizeable advance payments, had already been made, while the benefits proved short-lived. However, this type of cost and benefit calculation apparently did not figure into subsequent deliberations about the pros and cons of African recruitment.

### 1860-1872: a modest operation

After some reconsideration, recruitment was resumed in the late 1850s but on a much smaller scale and with more precautions to ensure the voluntary nature of enlistment. A decisive element had been the performance of the Africans in the third expedition to Bali in 1849. The newly arrived commander of the East Indies army, Duke Bernhard van Saxon-Weimar Eisenach, had been greatly impressed by the courage, loyalty, state of health, strength and endurance of the Africans in this expedition. They compared favourably with the Europeans below the rank of officer, who for the most part were ‘soldiers with a criminal record, deserters from the Dutch national army, drunkards, deserters from the Belgian and the French army and Germans, most of whom are rascals and tramps, for whom the service in this colony is a last refuge’.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch government initially decided against his recommendation to resume African recruitment, but in the late 1850s recruitment in Elmina was reopened.

Between 1860 and 1872, another 800 African soldiers sailed from Elmina to Batavia. They took



an active part in the decades-long ferocious Atjeh (Aceh) War. Recruitment ended in 1872 with the transfer of Elmina and the other remaining Dutch Possessions on the Guinea Coast to the British. Arrangements were made for the continuation of pension payments, while the veterans retained their right to plots on Java Hill.

However, few demobilized soldiers opted for repatriation to Africa during this last period. Most chose to stay on in Java, where they were welcomed into the now well-established Indo-African communities. After one more unsuccessful experiment in 1890 with recruitment in Liberia, the Dutch colonial army finally ceased its recruiting efforts in Africa. By 1915, there were no longer any African soldiers in active service in the East Indies.

### The aftermath

Many of the sons and grandsons of the African soldiers continued to serve in the Netherlands East Indies Army however, establishing colonial control over the vast Indonesian archipelago, fighting the Japanese in the Second World War, suffering the hardships of prisoner-of-war camps and ultimately fighting the Indonesian nationalists until the final transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in 1949. Along with vast numbers of Dutch and Indo-Europeans, most Indo-Africans were repatriated by ship to the Netherlands. Here, contact among the group was re-established when the generation that grew up in the East Indies reached the age of retirement. Since the 1980s, a bi-annual reunion has offered an occasion for old-timers as well as for the new generation born in the Netherlands to explore Indo-African roots, to fill in the gaps in family histories and of course to enjoy Indonesian cooking and African music.

The 10th reunion, held in September 2000, was pleased to welcome a special guest: Professor Thad Ulzen, the great-great grandson of Corporal Manus Ulzen, travelled from the United States to the Netherlands to meet the other descendants of the African soldiers. The story came full circle later that same year with a visit

to Ghana and Elmina by Daan Cordus and his wife Eef Cordus-Klink, both descendants of African soldiers, and for a long time the driving force behind the Indo-African reunions in the Netherlands. Now that contact between the descendants in Ghana and those in the Netherlands had been established, a new initiative was launched to keep the memory of the story of the *Belanda Hitam* alive. The Ulzen family decided to host a permanent exhibition on the African soldiers in the East Indies in their family house in Elmina, which was baptized the Java Museum. The Java Museum in Elmina, to be opened in 2002, will stand as a fitting monument to the largely forgotten history of the Black Dutchmen.

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## 13. Reminiscences of the African community in Purworejo, Indonesia

For almost a century, the central Java town of Purworejo was home to a community of Africans from the region of present-day Ghana and their Indo-African descendants. African army veterans from the Dutch East Indies army (Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger, or the KNIL) also settled in other towns such as Gombong, Semarang, Salatiga and Ambarawa. But the garrison town of Purworejo was the only place where Africans had their own settlement. At first they lived among the Indonesian people, but as more and more pensioned African soldiers came to live here the Resident (the Dutch administrator) thought it advisable to give the Africans a place of their own.

So a plot of land in the village of Pangenjuru-tengah was bought from the local peasants and allocated to the African veterans. This decision was formalized by Government Decree no. 25 on 30 August 1859. Until recently, the street names still indicated the location of the African 'kampung' (village): Gang Afrikan I and Gang Afrikan II (Africa Alley I and II). At present, there are no more Indo-African descendants living here, while in Purworejo itself only one descendent of the African soldiers can still be found. Unfortunately, the street names in Kampung Afrikan have recently been changed into Gang Koplak I and II (which means a place to tie up horses). When I did a new round of interviews and surveys in Purworejo in early 2001, 100 per cent of respondents indicated that they would like to have the street names changed back to Gang Afrikan. Obviously, the people of Purworejo harbour no negative memories of their erstwhile African neighbours.

### A strategic town

Purworejo was a strategic town in the early 19th century. In this region, then known as the district

of Bagelen, the Dutch colonial administration built no fewer than 25 fortresses. Dutch power in the East Indies had been undermined first of all by the English occupation during the Napoleonic wars. This period marked the end of the rule by the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie). As the newly established Kingdom of the Netherlands struggled to assemble a colonial army and to regain control, it was confronted with a large-scale uprising on the island of Java. Under the leadership of Prince Diponegoro, the Javanese staged a guerrilla war, known as the Java War (1825-1830), against Dutch troops. The Dutch colonial army suffered very severe losses. Over 8,000 European soldiers and many more native soldiers lost their lives. In 1822 the Dutch administration was confronted with another uprising, the Padri War in Western Sumatra. This uprising, mounted by Islamic fundamentalists, was not quelled until 1837. Meanwhile, the Dutch colonial army lost a traditionally important reservoir of manpower after the secession of Belgium in 1831. This crisis of manpower in the army was solved by recruiting soldiers in West Africa, where the Dutch possessed a string of forts and castles along the Guinea Coast, remnants from the days of the West India Company, which dealt mainly in gold, ivory and slaves.

The first batches of African recruits were sent off to West Sumatra, where they took part in the campaigns against the Padri insurgents. But it was perhaps no accident that the Dutch colonial government chose Purworejo as their place of more permanent settlement. In spite of all the fortresses built in the area, the region of Purworejo had become known as a stronghold of Pangeran Diponegoro Anom, the son of rebel prince Diponegoro. African veterans were

**Endri Kusruri**  
*Salatiga.*

*The author wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance of Dr S.W. de Groot, Daan Cordus and Eef Cordus-Klink, who provided documents, information and clarifications.*

*Page 142: The Indo-African family Land-Cordus posing in front of the Land family house, Purworedjo ca. 1932. Standing second from the right is Daan Cordus.*

*Collection Daan Cordus.*

considered very loyal to the Dutch administration; in case of disturbances, local authorities could always count on the assistance of the African veterans. The presence of dozens of qualified army veterans meant that the Dutch administration could always call on volunteers for policing duties.

### **A remarkable career**

The Africans in the East Indies made a remarkable career. Most of the African recruits started from a lowly slave status in Ghana, where they were known as Donko's. In the Dutch army, they were given a status equal to European soldiers. In due time their descendants achieved middle class status, which compared favourably with that of their Indonesian neighbours. In Ghana, they had been prisoners of war: tribute owed by conquered territories to the powerful king of Ashanti, or merchandise that was sold on the various slave markets in the interior. While recruitment into the Dutch army was in many cases probably not a voluntary choice, this new career nevertheless opened the way to social advancement. Old photographs of the African village in Purworejo show elegant and comfortable houses, well-kept gardens and immaculately dressed Indo-African families, sometimes posing with their Javanese domestic servants.

Kampung Afrikan covered a relatively small area with two central alleys, Gang Afrikan I at the west side and Gang Afrikan II at the east side.<sup>1</sup> In the 20th century, part of the western area was ceded to the Protestant Mission to build a mission hospital. Plot owners who had to relocate used the proceeds to build themselves better houses in the eastern part of the kampung. Every retired soldier was allocated a plot of land for a house and fields for gardening and farming. Pig breeding was a profitable business, as the Dutch and Chinese provided a ready market, which could not be supplied by the Moslem Javanese. Pensioners also earned an income by growing coffee or cassava, hiring Javanese labour to work on the fields. Escorting coffee and salt convoys was another source of income. These activities

were needed to supplement their pensions, which ranged from about 9, 12 or 15 guilders a month.

The history of this settlement has been recorded by Doris Land, an African army veteran who acted as the informal head ('wijkmeester') of the Africans in Purworejo. This document, entitled 'The origins of the African camp in Purworejo', consists of three closely typed pages written in 1939.<sup>2</sup> It is an unusual testimony. Doris Land was highly respected among the Indo-Africans. The wijkmeester maintained order, settled disputes and kept an administration of births and deaths among the Africans. School children would come to his house to do their homework after school hours, and he would urge them to do it properly. While he took the trouble to record everything he knew about the Africans in Purworejo, their origins and their history, he never shared his knowledge with anybody. The document was recovered after his death in 1986 in the Netherlands, when it was found in an old suitcase. The people close to him never understood why Doris Land had decided to take his knowledge with him into his grave.

The African past and African heritage were never discussed in Purworejo. Until the discovery of Doris Land's typed pages, the Indo-African descendants assumed that knowledge about their origins had simply been lost. In the secure environment of the African camp in Purworejo, Indo-African children grew up with a Dutch identity. They spoke Dutch as their home language, attended Dutch schools and considered themselves Dutch, in accordance with their local Malay nickname *Belanda Hitam*, meaning Black Dutchmen.

### **'Black White Men'**

Hardjo Wikromo, who once worked as a gardener for the Africans Anton de Ruyter and Baas, for a wage of 15 cents a day, called the Africans 'Landi Cemeng', a polite form of the Javanese expression 'Londo Ireng'. This is really a unique label, as the meaning of *Londo Ireng* is in fact contradictory: 'Black White Men'. Lieutenant-General Oerip

1. Kampung Afrikan was located between the General Hospital and Widodo Senior High School, Purworejo.  
2. Doris Land's statement is entitled 'Het ontstaan van het Afrikaansche kamp te Poerworedjo, 20 June 1939'.





*Identity papers of Doris Land.*

*By courtesy of his daughter Mary Land.*



*David Klink.*

*By courtesy of the family Klink.*

Soemohardjo, a high-ranking officer in Soekarno's nationalist forces, recalled his childhood in Purworejo in his memoirs: 'almost all of those Negro children spoke Dutch fluently and without any accent. They made fun of the accent of Oerip, the little native...'

The first head of the African camp was J. Klink, who had arrived from Africa in 1837 and made a successful career in the army, achieving the rank of sergeant. Although he lived to a very old age (he died in 1901), he was succeeded in 1890 by his son-in-law Hendrik Beelt, a pensioned sergeant who also belonged to the first generation of African soldiers. Beelt was reputed to be a fluent speaker of Dutch, Malay and Javanese. His eight sons also joined the army, as did most of the other sons from liaisons between African soldiers and their Indonesian wives. When Hendrik Beelt died in 1923, G. Artz was the only remaining first generation African in Purworejo, but in view of his advanced age he could not take up the position of village head. One of Hendrik Beelt's sons, Johannes, now took over the leadership position. After his death in 1933, the camp

no longer had an official wijkmeester, but in practice Doris Land came to be seen as the unofficial head of the African community. He was a son of Govert Land, who had been a first generation African soldier from the Gold Coast. In demographic terms, the African camp in Purworejo was a settlement of women, children and old men. From the age of 14, boys eagerly waited until they too could join the army, although the official age for recruits was 16. But from the age of 14, boys could join as juniors. In order to qualify for a pension – a rare privilege at the time – soldiers had to serve 12 or 15 years. When they left army service, they were about 30 years of age, much too young for actual retirement. Moreover, their pensions would not support a life of retirement. Many signed on for another term in the army, or joined the police, the prison service, the railways, the postal service or other government services. Some worked for private companies, for example as overseers on sugar plantations or factories. So they did not immediately return to Purworejo when leaving the army. The absence of adult men



meant that living conditions in the African camp were sometimes poor, as insufficient repair work was done to houses and roads, which during the rainy season suffered from damage and floods. But starting in the 1920s things began to change. Pensioned men now returned to settle in Purworejo, and worked together to improve streets, bridges and houses. Doris Land reports that the camp was in much better condition after 1930 than before.

By now, the Indo-African community had become more settled. In the early days, women and children lived with the soldiers in the barracks, moving on from garrison town to garrison town. This pattern was common not only among the Africans but also among Indonesian soldiers and Dutch soldiers with local wives. Sometimes these relationships resulted in established families; sometimes the relationships were of a more fleeting nature, resulting in many natural children. Adoption was a widespread phenomenon among the Indo-Africans, providing many natural children with a family home. In the

early 20th century, the colonial army launched a civilizing offensive among its soldiers, discouraging alcohol abuse and cohabitation in the barracks. From this period on, the African settlement in Purworejo must have grown into a more established community. When Doris Land typed his statement in 1939, the settlement was made up of 25 families, totalling 88 individuals. This fits well with the drawing of G.G. Pangenjurutengah, that I found in the land registry administration, detailing the various plots in the settlement and the names of the owners.

No.	Owners name	no. of plot
1.	David Klink	1
2.	A.L. Maurik	2
3.	Dora Keijzer	3
4.	E. Cordus	4
5.	Adriaan de Keijzer	5
6.	Huidecooper	6
7.	A.D. Ruiter	12, 24
8.	J. Beelt	7, 8, 9
9.	W. Cucumba	10
10.	S. Heuvel Hassamina	11
11.	R.H. Beelt	13, 15
12.	C.A. Beelt	14
13.	Wed. Mot	16
14.	F.G. Maas	17
15.	D. Land	18
16.	V.D. Hassamina	19
17.	Wairata	20
18.	G. Artz	21
19.	A. Nobel-Artz	22
20.	H.J. Baas	23
21.	Zeller	25, 26
22.	Schuitemaker	29
23.	Paulus	30
24.	B. Kooi	31
25.	Ch. A. Paulus	32

Most names here are Dutch names, which were given to the Africans at the time of recruitment in Africa. A few kept their African names, such as no. 9, Cucumba. Names of African soldiers can still be found at Purworejo cemetery, where some tombstones mention as the place of birth: 'born in Africa'. On the graves are the Dutch names given to the Africans: P. de Ruiter and G. Artz.

Most of the Africans and their descendents were baptized in the Catholic Church. A minority became Protestant. According to some stories, some parents had their children baptized more



*Tombstone of P. de Ruijter 'geboren in Afrika', Purworedjo cemetery.*

*Photo E. Kusurri.*

than once, since both the Catholic and the Protestant Church paid five pennies for every baptism (Kroese 1976). The Catholic Church in Purworejo still possesses the baptism records of the African Catholic families.

The most important festivity in the African settlement was Christmas and New Year's. Often relatives would come from other parts of Java to join in the celebrations. On New Year's eve, all the people in the African camp would join in an extensive tour of house visits, starting with the house of the oldest inhabitant, to pay their respects. As Doris Land recalls, all families would take care that their house had a proper supply of Schiedam geneva, and various snacks. As everybody was obliged to taste a bit in every house, 'only the strong would make it to the finish of this nightly round'. But, as he relates, later the consumption of alcohol and snacks became voluntary, so that now all could keep it up until the next morning at six o'clock when the round ended with a visit to the last house. This activity is similar to the Moslem tradition in Java, when they celebrate the Idul Fitri by forgiving each other and visiting each other.

### **Marriage**

As the Dutch recruited only men in Africa, the soldiers found themselves without African women. Most of them took native Javanese women as their wives, while liaisons with Indo-European women were also common. In the next generation, there was a considerable degree of intermarriage among Indo-Africans. H.J. de Graaf remembered how remarkable these couples looked: 'It was an odd sight, to see such a black African giant walking with a little Javanese nyai' (De Graaf 1968).

Through marriage they became to some extent integrated into Indonesian society, adopting Indonesian food and clothing habits. While the Javanese women were readily accepted into the Indo-African community, their families remained at a distance. Most descendants state that they saw and knew very little about the family from their mothers' side. The Javanese

women who married an African, or an Indo-African, in fact married into 'European' society, which kept its distance from the 'natives'.

According to present-day inhabitants of Purworejo, the Africans considered themselves somewhat superior in status to the native Indonesians. Marriage produced a mix of black and brown, of long and short, of the tough character of the military men and the gentle nature of the Javanese women. Although the African soldiers were known for their lack of discipline, at home they submitted to the rule of their wives. According to the journal *Intisari* (1976), 'purportedly, in their dormitory, they submitted to their wives rather than to the military rules'.

However that may be, the Africans also demanded that their wives remain faithful to them while they were away from home on duty. They threatened their wives with reprisals if it turned out that the women had disgraced them during their absence. The Africans were known to be hot-tempered. They could make a lot of noise and yell loudly, so that people thought they were fighting among themselves. But there was no fight; this was just the way they behaved. This hot-tempered nature explains all the mutinies by the Africans on Sumatra and elsewhere, when the Dutch broke their promise of equal treatment for Africans and Europeans in the army.

The Africans were reputed to love their children more than their wives; they were very fond of their children and bought European style clothes for them. It is said that they made better fathers than husbands.

According to former Indonesian neighbours, the African camp used to close its gates between 6.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. Former Indo-African inhabitants of the camp, however, do not remember any type of gate. These two different memories may indicate two distinct perceptions of the relationship between Kampung Afrika and the Indonesian neighbours: while the descendants remember the settlement as an open community, the Indonesian neighbours cite the gates as proof that the Africans wanted to isolate themselves



*Gang Koplak II in Purworejo. The old streetname, Gang Afrikan II, is still in use on the Ladytailor's advertisement.*

*Photo E. Kusurri*

somewhat and only made contact with the outside world when they found it necessary. But the Africans also adopted many Indonesian customs in terms of food, clothing and lifestyle. The Javanese mothers brought with them Javanese influences, of course, and many Indo-African families also had Javanese domestic servants, who sometimes belonged to the mother's side of the family.

As the children spent more time with their mothers than with their fathers, Javanese influences became stronger. The children played with Dutch, Indo-European and Javanese schoolmates. Some Indo-African descendants adopted a peculiar habit of Javanese women known as 'Nginang', chewing betel leaves. To the betel leaves they added boiled 'gambir' leaves and 'njet' (lime mixed with coconut juice), and sometimes mixed this with 'areca' nuts. This

mixture tastes good and is thought to strengthen the teeth and redden the lips.

The Indo-African community of Purworejo was dispersed at the end of the Second World War, when Indonesian nationalists took over the area of Purworejo. The Indo-Africans were evacuated to other parts of Java, mostly Bandung and Batavia. During the years of the Indonesian war of independence, most of the able-bodied men fought in the Dutch army while their families anxiously awaited the outcome of a decade of war. After the formal recognition of Indonesian independence in 1949, most of the Indo-Africans opted for repatriation to the Netherlands. Those who initially chose to stay on in the Republic Indonesia were in most cases forced to join the second wave of emigrants after 1956.

This later batch of emigrants included Doris Land, who had long resisted the idea of leaving his native land. At the time of Soekarno's anti-Western confrontational politics, life for Indo-Europeans and Indo-Africans became increasingly difficult. Official policies of job preferences for Indonesians, combined with the Dutch refusal to hand over Dutch New Guinea to Soekarno, resulted in the socio-economic marginalization of the remaining Indo-Europeans and Indo-Africans. In 1956, Doris Land, at the age of 66, had to join the exodus to the Netherlands against his will. His children adjusted well in Dutch society, but Doris Land and his Indonesian wife never found their place. In Purworejo, and later in Bandung, he had been a respected man whose opinion was highly valued, someone who through hard work had made it to the rank of captain in the army, in spite of his limited education. Now, in cold and rainy Holland, he lived on for 30 more years as an anonymous old man who hardly ever talked. The Indo-African descendants had built a new life for themselves in various parts of the Netherlands; there was no longer any role here for the *wijkmeester*.

The houses of the African Kampung still stand today, as they were mostly solid and well-built structures. But no more Londo Ireng can be found

nowadays in this neighbourhood. In present-day Purworejo, only one family remains of the descendants of the African soldiers. Evelien Sujarno was born in Kampung Afrika and now lives with her family in a nearby part of Purworejo. She stayed on because of Sujarno, her Indonesian husband. Her African great-grandfather was known by the Dutch name G. Artz. In the cemetery his name can still be seen on a tombstone. During his army service on Java, Artz married a Javanese woman by the name of Yem. From this marriage, three children were born. The youngest child, the girl Koosje, married a soldier from the Indonesian island of Timor, named Daniel. Out of this marriage, Evelien Daniel was born.

### **Remnants of the African settlement**

After Indonesian independence, all that remained of the century-long African presence in Purworejo were the tombstones, some scattered documents and the street names, Gang Afrikan I and II. When in the early 1990s the municipal administration changed those street names into Gang Koplak I and II, even this reminiscence was lost. But the Indonesian inhabitants of these alleys all replied in the affirmative when asked if they wanted the original street names restored. My campaign to restore the old names of these alleys was also supported by a petition from Indo-African descendants in the Netherlands, signed by about a hundred sympathizers. On 13 September 2001, I submitted the petition to the regional administration of Purworejo. The response was favourable, which gives me good hope to believe that these streets will soon regain their former names of Gang Afrikan I and II.

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## 14. 'We think of them'

### Money transfers from the Netherlands to Ghana

#### Introduction

Migrants from developing countries often encounter several social, economic and emotional problems in foreign lands. Officially, their presence is often viewed in terms of the social burdens they may impose on the host state, and data on them is commonly used for political purposes and more generally for rigid immigration regulations and procedures. However, obligations towards relatives back home constitute an important aspect of the social obligations that migrants also have to cope with in their host countries. This aspect of migrant life, however, is not frequently addressed. Based on a case study of residents in Amsterdam, this chapter examines how money transfers and remittances made by Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands support their relatives at home and help them deal with insecurities such as sickness and disability, old age and death. It also looks at what assistance the immigrants get from their relatives. This discussion on how the big political and economic issues of international migration are lived and experienced 'on the ground' by individual actors demonstrates the relationship between international migration and informal or traditional social security support based on reciprocity.<sup>1</sup>

The high expectations of the family back home are well illustrated by the following letter, sent by a mother in Ghana to her son in Amsterdam-Zuidoost, otherwise known as the 'Bijlmer', an area with a substantial number of Ghanaian migrants.

Sikamankrom, Ghana

16/6/1998

Dear Kwame,

*This is your Mum writing from Ghana to you in far Holland. I hope you are bathing jubilantly in the ocean of good health. As for us in Ghana we are all as fit a fiddle.*

*Kwame when Bobby was coming we gave a letter to be given to you but as at now we have not heard from you. It pains a lot not to hear from you and Ria. If you know you are not coming to Ghana soon then come and take Jack and buy me one car so that I use it for chop money. Because now in Ghana it is really hard to stay without any work. It is really difficult to live in Ghana nowadays Kwame so try to listen to what I am saying and act now. Otherwise you will only hear of my death because of starvation.*

*Also Kwame I have develop eyes problem. I have accordingly gone to Aniwa hospital several times but I can't afford the high cost of drugs so try to send me money to cure my eyesight.*

*Greetings from me and Bobby and everybody in the house to you and Ria.*

Thanks

Yours Alice Osei

This chapter examines how Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands provide social security support through money transfers and/or material assistance to relatives at home for daily subsistence and against insecurities such as sickness, disability and old age. In particular I focus on the experiences of the migrants in order to explain how informal (or traditional) social networks still

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Page 150: 'At the airport' (1996).

Studio Photo Philip Kwame  
Apaagya.

1. This chapter is based on my book: D.K. Arhinful, 'We think of them': How Ghanaian migrants assist relatives at home, Leiden, 2001.

operate in spite of international migration. Specifically, I look at what forms of assistance are provided and how and why these are provided within the context of the opportunities offered by the international setting.

After a brief introduction to the context of social security mechanisms in Ghana and the phenomenon of Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands, I will explore some examples of relationships between the Ghanaian diaspora and relatives at home. These case studies illustrate the kind of assistance migrants provide to their relations in Ghana. The conclusion discusses the impact of international migration on the social security of migrants and their relatives in Ghana.

### **Background: traditional and state social security in Ghana**

In most societies, traditional social security is a simple, collective, indigenous social institution by which members afflicted with social and economic contingencies such as sickness, disability or old age are protected. In Ghana, as in most African societies, this traditional system of social security is based on reciprocity. It was first and foremost the extended family or kinship system that provided the social framework for long-term reciprocity. Among the Akan, for example, the family is the group of kinsfolk held together by a common origin through matrilineal descent and a common obligation to its members, both living and dead. The individual is brought up to think of him/herself in relation to this group and to behave in a way as to bring honour and not disgrace to its members. Particularly in the past, its members were supposed to assist one another in times of distress and insecurity, and the entire lineage was held responsible for the (mis)behaviour of any one of its members (see e.g. Fortes 1969; Assimeng 1981; Nukunya 1992). The research carried out by social scientists in Ghana shows that lineage solidarity manifests itself for example during sickness, old age and death (Read 1966; Kludze 1988; Arhin 1994).

Following the advent of colonial rule, a Western-style social security system was added to the existing one. It was based on the principles of the market economy and the state. However, this form of social security arrangement was limited to the formal sector of the economy and left out the largest proportion of the Ghanaian population: those who earned their livelihood in the 'informal' sector (including the traditional sector of the economy). People suffering the greatest insecurity, such as the aged, the young, women and children and particularly the ill or handicapped outside the formal sector were excluded from this new form of social protection and therefore still relied mainly on traditional mechanisms.

In present times, however, both systems, but especially the traditional one, have come under severe stress. The role of lineage in health care for the sick members of lineage has been reduced to home or hospital visits and health advice. From its traditional respectable position, old age is becoming a problem as substantial numbers of old people are finding themselves in an insecure situation (Apt 1996; Brown 1995; Darkwa 1997a; Van der Geest 1997: 24). Financial support at funerals still comes in the form of 'nsawa' (donations), but the section of the lineage that actively organizes the funeral has in recent times shrunk to children and close relatives.

In the midst of this growing insecurity brought about by social transformation, international migration appears to have had a double effect on migrants and their relatives. Though being in foreign lands has physically removed Ghanaian migrants from the immediate pressures of obligations of mutual help towards an extended circle of relations, most maintain contact with their relations at home and provide social security assistance through various means. Indeed, the relatively prosperous conditions abroad enable them to provide more financial and material assistance than they would be able to if they were staying in Ghana.

## **Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands**

The substantial influx of migrant labour from non-European countries into the Netherlands dates from the 1950s and 1960s. Initially conceived as temporary sojourners, these 'guest workers' were recruited from countries such as Turkey, Morocco and Italy. The economic boom that caused the need for extra manual labour went hand in hand with the development of the Dutch welfare state (Spruit 1986). The spontaneous influx of Ghanaian migrants into the Netherlands on a significant scale, however, did not take place until 1974. Between 1974 and 1983, an appreciable number of Ghanaians migrated into the Netherlands in search of greener pastures due to deteriorating economic conditions at home. After 1983 their numbers increased, principally as a result of the worsening economic crises and drought in Ghana between 1981 and 1983 and the repatriation of nearly a million Ghanaians from Nigeria. Available statistics indicate that by 1990, more than 5,000 Ghanaians had settled in the Netherlands. In 1992, the official Ghanaian population in Amsterdam alone stood at 4,197, 60 per cent of whom lived in southeast Amsterdam, making Ghanaians the third largest ethnic minority group in that community (Nimako 1993). As of January 2000, official statistics put the population of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands at about 15,610, with 54.93 per cent (8,575) of them being in Amsterdam (CBS, 2001).

As a highly visible group, the presence of economic migrants from developing countries is, from an official viewpoint, often seen in terms of the social burdens they may impose on the host state. Data on them is therefore commonly used for political purposes and more generally for rigid immigration regulations and procedures. At the individual level, too, the migrant condition is replete with many socio-economic and socio-psychological difficulties such as poor jobs, housing difficulties and legal insecurity as well as cultural differences with accompanying health consequences (Colledge, Van Geuns and Svensson 1986). In the Netherlands, the common settle-

ment problems that Ghanaian migrants encounter include 'paper problems' (an apparent reference to rigid immigration and resident permit procedures), marginal jobs and inability to communicate in Dutch. In particular most are very disturbed by the way immigration procedures for regularizing their stay in the Netherlands are handled, due to what most of them regard as a lack of appreciation by the Dutch immigration authorities for the Ghanaian social context. Other problems include lack of social time and perceived high taxation (Arhinful 2001). Nevertheless, irrespective of these conditions, most Ghanaian migrants maintain contacts with their relations at home and also provide some form of social security assistance, as will be seen in the following three case studies.

### **Case Studies**

#### *Adom*

Adom is 37 years old and lives with his wife and two daughters, aged four and one. He first came to Europe in 1990, had immigration problems and was subsequently deported to Ghana. He came back in 1993. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Ghana. His sole aim for travelling abroad was to 'make enough money to put up a house back home', but while abroad he also sought to educate himself further. At the time of the interview, he was pursuing a Masters course in Business Administration on part-time basis, but making a living by washing dishes in a hotel. He had visited Ghana twice since he became an official resident and still maintains contacts with classmates, friends and relatives back home through letters, but mainly through phone calls.

His father is dead and all his brothers and sister are living abroad. He sends 300 guilders home every month to his mother, his only immediate relative in Ghana. Part of the money however, sometimes goes to support his two nephews in the university and other maternal relatives. When problems arise, such as his mother getting sick, he has to send more money. For example, a week before our conversation, he

had to send extra 150 guilders for medication when his mother suffered an attack of high blood pressure. During the previous year he had to contribute 1,000 guilders towards housing for his mother when she became dislocated as a result of flooding in the part of Accra where she was living.

Adom finds this form of support burdensome, but he still considers the need to send money home essential 'because of the current difficult economic situation in Ghana'. He explains that 'it is a moral obligation to help one's parents...it is part of our culture'. In his view, this obligation becomes even more compelling for the sheer reason that because all the children of his mother are living abroad, the people at home expect her to live well.

Adom indicated that when he sends them money, the people at home 'have you in mind'. They pray for him to avert ill fortune, and offer services when something needs to be done at home. For example, his mother is supervising the building of his home and helped with the legalization of his Dutch residence permit by going to the Netherlands embassy in Ghana on his behalf. His mother also attends and makes donations on his behalf at funerals. Overall, he feels travelling abroad has enabled him to fulfil his goal of building his own house in Ghana, and has put him in a better position to support his mother and other relatives, including assisting another brother to travel abroad.

#### *Maame*

At twenty-eight, Maame was quite a successful young migrant. She completed elementary school in 1984 in Ghana but did not continue her education. Two years later she came to the Netherlands. She operates her own small-scale marketing firm in Amsterdam and appeared quite satisfied with her returns and net monthly income of about 3,000 guilders. At the time of the interview, she lived with her partner and their two-year-old daughter. She is in regular contact with some of her relatives in Ghana through letters, audiocassette messages and recently mainly through phone calls.

Maame sends money to her relatives through a forex bureau or entrusts it to people who are visiting Ghana. The amount of money varies from time to time depending on the circumstances and period, but she estimated that in the previous year she sent home approximately 4,000 Dutch guilders altogether. The major beneficiary is her mother, but her father, two brothers and half-sister also receive assistance. Apart from money she also sends clothes and dresses to relatives and friends when she goes home to visit, and occasionally medicines when her mother sends prescriptions to her. She has helped a relative travel abroad and has also sent two vehicles home, although they turned out to be a bad investment because those she entrusted with the responsibility misused the proceeds from the sale of the cars. She considers sending money and material things to her relatives a reciprocal moral duty. 'Its something I have to do because they brought me into this world'. She feels this is very important 'because of how difficult Ghana is, so if I have made some money after travelling I have to provide a little help for them even if it means borrowing money from the bank'. Although she does not receive any tangible assistance from relatives back home, she acknowledges her mother's assurances of prayer support when she speaks to her on the phone.

She counts her stay abroad as a 'blessing' because she has a job, has no problem with money, has clothes to wear, has her own car, is building a house in Ghana and also feels that her family is very happy with her because they receive a lot of assistance from her. She does not like the cold weather, however, and the lack of support at home while she is at work.

#### *Papa Samo, the non-assisting migrant*

Papa Samo is 35 years old and divorced with a child from that marriage. When he completed secondary form five, his only wish in life was to travel and live abroad because he felt that was the best means to a secure future. With financial support from an uncle, he travelled to Europe in 1984, but in his own words that has been a

decision that he has 'lived to regret' when he compares himself with his classmates who remained in Ghana to pursue an education up to university level. During the 14 years of his stay in Europe he has lived in Germany, Belgium and France. He moved to the Netherlands when he separated from his wife in 1994. In the early years of his stay in Europe, life was good and he even managed to send two vehicles home to relatives. He now thinks people at home did not take good care of those things because they thought money and material things are readily available abroad.

He visited home twice while living in France, but since moving to the Netherlands in 1994 his life has taken a turn for the worse. Now when he receives a stressful message from home requesting money he thinks, 'they are all exaggerated to make you panic'. He rarely contacts the people at home and has even 'tried to break the contact by changing the phone number they know'. When one of his friends personally delivered a letter from relatives, he accepted the letter but ignored them. Now he phones once or twice a year when he feels the need to know about their state of health. He explained, though, that he has not lost his sense of moral attachment to his relatives: 'It's a bit disturbing when you do not hear about your relatives for a long time, because you may not know if there is death at home. We think of them a lot but we also face hardships here.'

### **What, how and why assistance is provided**

The above accounts of Adom, Maame and Papa Samo recollected here are more than just individual life dramas. They reflect in many respects the experience of Ghanaian migrants in general. The cases contain several facets of the contacts that are made and maintained. Migrants contact their close relatives at home through letters, audiocassettes, phone calls and occasional home visits. Adom and Maame provide ideal examples of this type of relationship. Improved communication with Ghana has even narrowed the social distance between migrants and their relations



back home, as they are now able to speak to each other more frequently on the phone.

Assistance provided to relatives in Ghana is mainly in the form of money but also of material goods. There are no official data on the monetary flow from migrants abroad, but even if there were it would not present an accurate picture since most contributions are sent through informal channels. Compared with the net capital gain in the Netherlands, it may be a relatively modest sum, but certainly the total amounts entering Ghana from migrants to relatives would be quite substantial. The cases therefore help to throw light on some of the positive effects of

*'In the house' (1996).*

*Studio Photo Philip Kwame Apagya.*





*Ghanaian store at  
the Dappermarkt in  
Amsterdam.*

*Photo Angele Etoundi Essamba*

migration. Monetary transfers to Ghana are a boost to the economy. Apart from making available hard currency, they generate small local private investments. For relatives of migrants the monies received from abroad constitute a major form of economic assistance, providing or supplementing their means of support and thereby raising their standard of living. The money sent home is used for health care, old age support, school fees, food, housing and funeral support as well as for assisting other relatives to travel abroad in search of better economic opportunities.

Fundamentally, the desire to assist, as Adom indicated, is perceived as a moral obligation to help and to meet the perceived expectations back home. Indeed, once they set foot in Europe and the West, there is always enormous pressure on them as 'been tos'<sup>2</sup> to send money and similar assistance home to relatives whose perception of the West is a very bright one where everything is achievable. The moral imperative to fulfil that reciprocal obligation therefore becomes all the more compelling, as recollected by 42-year old Ama, a married women with two children and a nanny:

'When you travel the entire burden is on you. It is easy for some and hard for others, but if you do not send assistance it is just not good.... The little you get here you have to manage and send something home. You cannot live here and say you are enjoying life here forever. It will not work that way. 'Eye den ara wo be ko w'akyi' (Whatever happens you will go back to your roots). So if you do not prepare home, how will you go back? Nobody knows the future. You may experience hardships when you go home. The people at home may not be able to help you, so when you travel you have to 'force', to do something at home.' (Arhinful 2001)

Invariably parents and offspring are the most important recipients of assistance, particularly where the emotional bonds are very strong. However, as the case of Papa Samo indicates, not all migrants are able to fulfil the expectations

that they themselves and their relatives have of the life abroad. Some no longer contact the people at home in order to avoid requests for assistance. Papa Samo described himself and other such people during our conversation as 'contact-no-good'. His inability to find a balance between the challenges abroad and memories of what he described as bad treatment from his family for not putting to good use the money he sent home in the past, has compelled him to play a 'hide-and-seek game' with them. It is interesting to note, though, that he has not lost his emotional bonds with them. As he described it, 'we think of them, but we also face difficulties here'. Indeed, most migrants 'think' of their relatives and send money and material things to them as a reciprocal moral obligation for what they have received in the past or expect to recoup in future. However, when life abroad becomes difficult, this sense of moral attachment could lead to a freeze-up in social contacts with relatives back home. Migrants in the diaspora who fit the description of Papa Samo and rarely make contact with their relatives are castigated by the famous Ghanaian highlife singer A.B. Crenstil in his song entitled 'Papa Samo' (from whom I appropriate the name here) for their inability to make contact, send money or go home.

Reciprocal assistance from relatives back home comes in the form of services rendered and emotional support such as prayers, overseeing the building of a new house, assisting with immigration papers and attending and making donations at funerals on behalf of migrants. The recognition of prayer support is quite revealing but not surprising, as it underscores the importance the Ghanaian attaches to religion. As Sarpong (1974: 133) has noted, prayer permeates the life of the Ghanaian: 'Religion for him is everything. He makes no distinction between his religious activity and his politics or administration of justice. Whether he is eating or hunting or settling cases or dancing or weeding or travelling (...) he is deeply involved in a religious experience. (...) The Ghanaian relies on his religion to help him on his journey through life.'

2. This is a common term that is used to refer to those who have travelled abroad before.

Apparently constrained by time demands, Ghanaians abroad look to people at home for this support in the difficult challenges abroad. Looking after the children of migrants who are left behind or sent home reflects the old tradition of parent substitutes, people who act as socialization agents in the upbringing of the child in Ghanaian society (Assimeng 1981: 70).

**Conclusion:  
the effect of migration on the social  
security of migrants and relatives**

The impact of migration on family social security is commonly assessed in terms of changes that affect the social fabric in the countries of origin. This chapter, however, starts from a more cheerful appreciation of migration and explores how the opportunities offered by the relatively 'prosperous' international setting impacts on migrants and social security support to their relatives at home. Contrary to the negative connotation that migration breaks up family life and causes economic and social insecurity, the evidence here indicates that Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands maintain contact with their close relatives at home through letters, cassettes and phone calls and assist in various ways through monetary transfers and material goods.

The dominant use of money as an item in the provision of assistance typifies it as a global commodity that is subjected to achieving endless cultural goals (Van der Geest 1997). As a means of exchange, money finds a wide range of uses in the hands of people and they appropriate it for other social values. It is easier and more convenient to handle and deal in money. In the international setting, money has become a source of happiness and security, and an indispensable means of realizing reciprocity between Ghanaian migrants and their relatives back home. Money has kept family ties intact.

The purpose for which migrants send money home, and the cultural imperatives involved, however, needs to be discussed. In the first place, one of the most consuming motivations of Ghanaian migrants for sending money home is to

build a house. The reason this is so important for many migrants is that it provides security both for the present and the future. This importance and meaning that Ghanaians attach to building a house has been observed by other writers on the Akan of Ghana. 'A house is someone's identity; it is a sign of security and happiness. A house represents a particular period in one's life and brings back the memories of that time. A house is the concretization of social relations and the sentiments accompanying them. A house, not least of all, is a status symbol.' (Van der Geest 1998)

The cases in this analysis confirm that a house in Ghana to most migrants is not merely a place to retire and a source of security but a virtue and a symbol that the life abroad has been worth its toil and hard work.

In addition to houses, the practice of sending money to help other relations to settle abroad is quite striking. Phenomenal as it is ingenious, helping a sibling or child to travel abroad is another way of broadening or enhancing the economic support base of migrants and their relatives back home. Similarly, one can partly attribute the thriving second-hand car market in Ghana to the illustrious way migrants in the Netherlands and other European countries fulfil obligatory roles to relatives back home. Another unique feature of assistance is that in the Netherlands, Ghanaian women migrants are more inclined to fulfil their kinship obligation of sending assistance home to relatives than their male counterparts. This challenges traditional Ghanaian assumptions about the vulnerable status of women when it comes to family decisions about expenditure and remittances.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates how informal mechanisms of social security continue to cater to the needs of people, even though migration has put them at a great physical distance. Without trying to romanticize, the transfer of money and goods is a significant way by which the traditional social security mechanism, based on the principle of reciprocity, finds positive expression in the opportunities offered

by international migration. One basic theme has been that international migration has not prevented Ghanaians living abroad from discharging their moral obligations towards their relatives, despite their being far from home. Rather, the appropriation through monetary transfers has provided a means of achieving reciprocity, thereby making migrants primary sources of social security assistance. This is particularly true for close relatives. Traditional values in the realm of social security assistance in the case of sickness, old age, housing, education and funerals remain important. This analysis thus adds a little to the knowledge of how the big political and economic issues of international migration are lived and experienced 'on the ground' by individual actors in the sphere of social security based on traditional informal reciprocity.

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