Regulating relations: controlling sex and marriage in the early modern Dutch empire

Rose, A.S.

Chapter 6. Children and the blurring of colonial categories

Introduction

As we have seen in chapter one, the marriage policies adopted by Dutch colonial authorities across the globe were meant to maintain an orderly social hierarchy within a diverse society. By only allowing Christians to marry other Christians – and this under strict conditions – the companies involved in colonial exploitation hoped to maintain a demographic base on which their power could rest. This population was to be 'Dutch' – if not strictly in terms of ethnic or geographic origin, then at least in terms of political allegiance, behavioral norms, and cultural belonging. As we have also seen, this idea was not easy to enforce in practice, not only because it was difficult to control the behavior of those recruited under the 'Dutch' umbrella, many of whom did not necessarily share the cultural and behavioral norms of colonial elites, but also because deviations from these norms often involved sexual contact with people outside the community. Inevitably, children were born whose very existence defied the boundaries set by colonial policies, and governments and church leaders alike had no choice but to confront this reality. This raises the question what position these individuals of ambiguous status took within colonial hierarchies, and how this position was determined: how did race, religion, wealth and legal status converge for those whose birth did not facilitate a straightforward categorization? To answer this question, this chapter will start with an exploration of illegitimacy, a central concept at play in the status of children born across colonial divides. It will then examine the specific means that parents and wider communities had at their disposal to shape the lives, livelihoods and affiliations of children, starting with manumission (for children born to enslaved mothers) and then focusing on testamentary bequests, followed by baptism and religious education. Finally, the often ambivalent attitudes taken by colonial authorities will be explored.

(il)legitimacy and legal status

Illegitimacy can be defined as the state of children born out of a union unsanctioned by the reigning norms of the society the parents live in. In any society where status or property is transferred from parents to children, families and communal authorities can be expected to have a vested interest in controlling this inheritance and the social order it (re)produced, and thus treat children born from unsanctioned unions as a problem. This is particularly the case in patrilineal kinship systems (traditionally found throughout much of Europe and Asia) in which property and status pass primarily from the father rather than the mother and her (male) relatives, and in which "proper" inheritance is secured through sanctioned unions, such as marriage, in which sexual fidelity is expected.[1] In the Dutch legal system, since the Reformation and especially with the issuing of the Political Ordinance of 1580, reproductive unions were sanctioned through registered and properly formalized marriage, whose procedures (pre-registration, proclamations, and finally the confirmation before secular or church authorities) served to prevent unions deemed undesirable by the authorities (bigamy, forbidden degrees of

[1] John Hartung, "Matrilineal Inheritance: New Theory and Analysis," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8, no. 4 (December 1985): 661–70.

kinship, inter-religious marriage) or by an (underage) bride or groom's family.[2] As we saw in chapter one and three, the colonial context added new dimensions to this dynamic, with Christians now living among not just a Jewish minority, but a majority of people of other religions, whether Muslim or what colonists called "Heathens" (i.e. Animists, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.), and with colonial authorities as well as families interested in retaining racial or ethnic divisions as well as other boundaries of status, such as slavery. This, unsurprisingly, led to conflicts, first of all in places where the Dutch came to rule over populations who had different systems of sanctioning reproductive unions: in Ceylon, for example, where the VOC heavily relied on both taxation and hereditary services and thus had a vested interest in matters of inheritance, authorities had to reconcile Dutch legal norms with Sinhalese practices in which communal approval, rather than registration and marriage formalities, were decisive in sanctioning unions, and thus legitimacy.[3]

If illegitimacy was already a complex matter for children born *within* specific moral and legal communities, the situation was especially complicated for those whose birth transgressed the boundaries (racial, religious, socio-economic) which colonial marriage regulations were meant to police. All three of these boundaries were closely wrapped up in parentage and parenting: racial or ethnic classification occurred based on appearance and who one's parents were, but also secondary factors such as education and broader familial and social connections. Religious affiliation was strongly tied to family, and involved not just a formal initiation (such as baptism or a confession of faith) but also beliefs and practices passed down from parents to children. Socio-economic status, in colonial settings, involved not just inheritable wealth and social capital, but could also mean enslavement and slave-ownership.

Of the above three boundaries, the laws around socio-economic status were the most explicitly defined through the legal concept of (il)legitimacy, although here too, considerable room for variation existed: children born out of wedlock, as per Roman-Dutch law, did not automatically inherit from their father the way legitimate offspring did, unless the latter decided to purposefully make arrangements for them in his will, or unless the children were retroactively legitimated through a special government grant or through the parents' marriage.[4] This latter option was only available to so-called *speelkinderen* (litt. "children of play", natural children) meaning those born from unmarried parents who had no legal impediments to marriage.[5] These children also automatically inherited from their mother, and in this sense were legally equal to a mother's legitimate children.[6] By contrast, so-called *overwonnen kinderen* (litt. "conquered children"), who were born from adultery or incest, could not inherit from either their mother or their father.[7]

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[2] Cau, "Ordonnantie vande Policien binnen Holland, in date den eersen Aprilis 1580."
[3] Luc Bulten et al., "Contested Conjugality? Sinhalese Marriage Practices in Eighteenth-Century Dutch Colonial Sri Lanka," *Annales de Demographie Historique* 135, no. 1 (September 20, 2018): 51–80; Rupesinghe, "Navigating Pluralities Reluctantly."
[4] Van Wamelen, *Family life*.
[5] "Spelen" in the early modern period, could be used to connote intercourse, as also becomes clear from the terms *minnespel* (referring to amorous pursuits) and *overspel* (adultery). T.H. Buser, "Overijselsch taaleigen," *De Taalgids: Tijdschrift tot uitbreiding van de kennis der Nederlandsche taal* 3 (1861): 162.
[6] Gerald Groenewald, '"A Mother Makes No Bastard": Family Law, Sexual Relations and Illegitimacy in Dutch Colonial Cape Town, c. 1652-1795', *African Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (November 2007): 61; Hugo de Groot, *Inleydinge tot de hollandtsche regts-geleertheyt* (Dirk Boom, 1767), 488.
[7] Groot, *Inleydinge tot de Hollandtsche regts-geleertheyt*, 116.

While for children born out of wedlock, illegitimate status had predominantly negative consequences – they were generally stigmatized as bastards or *hoerenkinderen* and did not have the same inheritance rights legitimate children had – for fathers, illegitimacy could actually be advantageous. We have already seen how non-marital sex, for freeborn and especially European men, was rarely prosecuted. Similarly, the fathering of children of out wedlock was unlikely to cause run-ins with the law for European men in colonial settlements, whether criminal or civil: whereas for the seventeenth century, there are some records of women – even those whose name suggests they were of enslaved background – filing for child support at Batavia's Court of Justice, by the eighteenth century such paternity suits become more rare, and are usually limited to 'defloration' suits filed by unmarried Christian girls assisted by their parents. This may in part be explained by the prohibitive cost of filing a civil suit against a company servant before the Court of Justice, which likely prompted many unwed mothers to seek out more informal means of securing support.[8] In some settings, such as Elmina, colonial authorities made legislative attempts at making European fathers financially responsible for their illegitimate offspring, but there is little evidence of these laws being enforced in practice.[9]

Moreover, as will become clear, fathers arguably had more freedom and power in making arrangements for their illegitimate children than they did with regards to their legal offspring: in absence of the legal framework that regulated familial relations within wedlock, which came with obligations of care and mandatory minimums for children's inheritance – the so-called 'legitimate portion' – fathers to illicit children were free to make their own arrangements, or abstain from doing so.[10] This discretionary power went the furthest for men who fathered illegitimate children with women they held in slavery, and whose offspring were thus their property.

Shaping ambiguous lives

Enslaved status and manumission

The inheritance of enslaved status, in contrast to legitimacy, was not dependent on parental marriage, but rather strictly matrilineal: following the principle, derived from Roman civil law and found across every Western-European colonial empire, that "the birth follows the womb" (*partus sequitur ventrem*), children born to enslaved mothers were automatically enslaved themselves (whereas children born to free mothers were born free, regardless of the status of the father).[11] These *huijsboorlingen* (litt. "natives of the house"), as they were called in the VOC

[8] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 9225 (1641), scan 443; , inv.no. 9230 (1655) scan 122; , inv.no. 9242 (1734) scan 645; 9253 (1746) scan 189; , inv.no. 9265 (1759) scan 453. By comparison, Donald Haks has shown how, in the Dutch city of Leiden, several paternity suits were initiated each year, about half of which were resolved extra-judicially. Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin*, 98. See also Christi Boerdam, "Ongehuwd Moederschap Als Sociaal Verschijnsel. Casus: Rotterdam Op Het Einde van de Achttiende Eeuw," *Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis* 98 (1985): 165–68; Jeannette Kamp and Ariadne Schmidt, "Getting Justice: A Comparative Perspective on Illegitimacy and the Use of Justice in Holland and Germany, 1600–1800," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 4 (June 1, 2018): 676–78.

[9] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 124, Resolutions 10 March 1700, scan 335-339.

[10] Grotius specified this *legitieme portie* that children were entitled to, even in case of alternative testamentary bequests, as at least one third of what they would receive if their mother or legitimate father died *ab intestato*. Groot, *Inleydinge tot de Hollandtsche regts-geleertheyt*, 123.

[11] Markus Vink, '"The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 131–77; Jennifer L. Morgan, 'Partus

world, were the property of the mother's master. This meant that the fate of children born to enslaved women conceived by their masters depended almost entirely on their father, but in his capacity as owner rather than progenitor: if he wished, he was entirely in his right to treat them just as his other human property, and sell them or draw on their labor, and if he died, his legitimate heirs would inherit them along with the enslaved mother and the rest of his estate.[12] It was only when a father decided to treat his enslaved biological children as more than property – informally recognizing them as his and taking legal steps to express that recognition – that the situation could become complicated, both because of the wide range of options available, and because these children, who skirted the boundary between free and enslaved people, became, as we will see, an object of colonial authorities' concern and active intervention.

When fathers manumitted their enslaved children, whether in life or by testament, authorities' concerns were those regarding manumission in general. The VOC administration was primarily concerned with preventing the formation of a class of financially needy freedmen and -women, and in 1682 mandated that Batavian slaveowners who wished to emancipate their dependents had to guarantee the costs of their livelihood for a period of six years following manumission.[13] In 1753, this was changed to a mandatory payment of 10 rixdollars to the church's charity board upon manumission, as an insurance against future dependence on alms. In 1765, this stipulation was extended to VOC-settlements beyond Batavia.[14]

Regulators in Suriname had similar concerns to the VOC, but took a slightly different approach: a 1670 ordinance required freed people to enter into an employment contract, or risk being whipped.[15] This provision specifically targeted "negroes", however, and likely did not target the mixed-race offspring of well-to-do white men who formed a distinct (albeit small, especially in the seventeenth century) class among the free non-white population that was considerably more privileged than the "urban proletariat" made up of freed black men and women and children of lower-ranking or uninvolved white fathers.[16] In 1733, the Surinamese colonial government issued a more sweeping piece of legislation regarding manumission that explicitly included "mulattoes". These so-called "Manumission Regulations" addressed concerns that went beyond indigency – although the first clause did make provisions for this: manumission could only happen with explicit permission from the Governing Council and only if the freed person was deemed "capable of earning their own keep."[17] The other clauses were

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Sequitur Ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery', *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 1 (55) (1 March 2018): 1–17; Stuart M. McManus, 'Partus Sequitur Ventrem in Theory and Practice: Slavery and Reproduction in Early Modern Portuguese Asia', *Gender & History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 542–61.

[12] Beckles, "Perfect Property"; Ramona Negrón, "The Enslaved Children of the Dutch World: Trade, Plantations, and Households in the Eighteenth Century" (unpublished MA thesis, Leiden, Leiden University, 2020), 38–39.

[13] NIP vol III, 15 January 1682, "Voorschriften nopens emancipatie van lijfeigenen bij acte onder levenden en nopens personen, besmet met de sieckte van lazarije," 75.

[14] NIP vol VIII, 10 December 1765, "Toepassing op de buiten-kantoren van het bepaalde op 13 November 1753 nopens het betalen van 10 rijksdaalders voor elken vrijgegeven slaaf en nopens het onderhoud van dergelijke verminte of zieke slaven," 83.

[15] Fatah-Black, 'The Use of Wills', 626; WIP-S Vol I, #32, 12 March 1670, 56-57.

[16] Ellen Brigitte Aurelia Neslo, "Een ongekende elite : De opkomst van een gekleurde elite in koloniaal Suriname 1800-1863" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Utrecht, Universiteit Utrecht, 2016), 29; Rosemary Brana-Shute, "The Manumission of Slaves in Suriname, 1760-1828" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Florida, 1985), 101–3.

[17] WIP-S vol I, #350, 28 July 1733, 411.

primarily concerned with regulating the social position of freed people: on the one hand, they were to form a distinct and separate class from the enslaved population, to the point where fraternization with the latter was rigorously punished. On the other hand, the regulations prescribed that freed people owed deference and assistance to their former masters and the latter's descendants.[18] In 1743 these stipulations were expanded, as freed people were ordered to show deference and respect to any and all white people, and a further expansion in 1760 required a guarantor assuring the freed person would be able to support themselves.[19] These laws, along with the requirement that manumission came with instructions in the Christian faith, demonstrate an anxious desire to make freed people, no longer under the direct control of their former masters, conform to the behavioural norms and economic requirements of the free, white-dominated society they joined, without being full and equal members of that society.

These concerns regarding the transition from enslaved to free status were closely entangled with those involving other forms of boundary-crossing embodied in illegitimate children, including those born to free mothers of a different ethno-religious status from the father. Along with a potential for social mobility, these children's lives were marked by *cultural* mobility and ambiguity of status, which colonial authorities could view as both an opportunity to capitalize on, *and* as a threat. Understanding this dynamic requires, first of all, an appreciation of the variety of options available to European fathers and the consequences these had for children: although paternal recognition as a legal construct did not emerge in Dutch jurisprudence until the nineteenth century, early modern fathers in the Dutch world had other, often overlapping, ways of 'recognizing' their children as their own and thus imparting certain elements of their socio-economic and cultural status to them.[20] The most important of these were testamentary bequest, baptism and religious education (which, in the East Indies, was sometimes coupled with adoption). In each of these, questions around ethnic, religious, and socio-economic belonging converged.

Testamentary bequest

A major way for fathers to express any paternal responsibility they might feel towards the children they conceived out of wedlock – whether freeborn or manumitted – was to make financial arrangements for them for after the father's death. As Francisca Hoyer has shown through her analysis of wills issued by Germans in the East Indies (many of them in VOC service), last wills and testaments were a remarkably flexible tool through which fathers could give structure and meaning to their family relationships. They could choose to distribute their property between their legitimate, natural, and adopted children regardless of legal status, or draw lines and hierarchies between them, and indeed, different men took radically different approaches.[21] The fathers in Hoyer's cases are all German, but Christians of various origins took advantage of the institution of the last will and testament as a means of organizing the financial

[18] Ibid.
[19] WIP-S vol I, #419, 8 June 1743, 508-509; #573, 19 May 1760, 690; Camilla de Koning, "Kinship as a Factor in Manumissions and Straatvoogdschap in Suriname, 1765-1795" (Unpublished MA thesis, Leiden, Leiden University, 2022), 71.
[20] Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 453.
[21] Francisca Hoyer, "Relations of Absence: Germans in the East Indies and Their Families c. 1750-1820" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Uppsala, Uppsala University, 2020), 200–208.

future of their family, legitimate and illegitimate. There is also evidence, at least for the city of Batavia, which had several urban notaries, that non-Christians, and particularly Chinese and Muslim denizens, drew up testaments as well, although more testaments will need to be uncovered to make any generalizable claims about these testators' provisions for illegitimate children born out of inter-religious or inter-ethnic unions.[22] In this section, I will focus on European fathers and their natural children born to non-European mothers, for whom a relatively substantial body of wills is available.[23]

The practice of organizing difference between children through testaments was not unique to the East Indies: in Elmina, European men rarely left behind legitimate children (by Dutch legal standards), as Christian marriage was almost non-existent on the Gold Coast, but they did sometimes differentiate between their natural children – not just financially, but also in the futures they intended for them. In 1765, for example, former Governor Hendrik Walmbeek bequeathed gold and linen to all six of his children, conceived with two different African women. But his youngest son Willem, the only child he had with a woman named Adjuwa, was the only beneficiary of an additional stipulation: he would receive 250 guilders annually out of Walmbeek's estate for the rest of his life and receive a European education: Walmbeek's colleague Coenraad Willem Roghe would temporarily serve as his guardian, up until the time that Walmbeek's sister Johanna Christina, who lived in Amsterdam with her husband, would be able to take him in.[24] This type of allocation of funds was generally reserved for sons, whereas daughters tended to receive bequests that would serve them in Akan society, rather than in Europe. Gerardus de Kort, commander of the WIC fort Crevecoeur in Accra, specified in his 1770 will – after making various arrangements for African manservants and his African and Eurafrican wives – that his daughter Gerarda Sara would receive "six loyal female slaves at least four foot four inch tall, under age twenty" to be bought with gold or merchandise from his estate. His son Jan Gerardus, by contrast, was to receive a sum of three thousand guilders in gold, and a young slave. The funds were to be held in the Company coffers for the time being, until notice would arrive from Jan Gerardus' intended guardian: De Kort requested the Leiden-based merchant Johannes de Poorter, whom he also appointed as his universal heir (i.e. the person inheriting the remainder of his estate left after the bequests specified in the will), to fulfil this role, and "teach him to read and write in the Christian religion, and raise him into a civil [*burgerlijke*] state."[25]

Cornelis Klok, Governor of the WIC castle St. Sebastian at Chama, left the future of his Eurafrican son Jan Kolk up to the location of his death: if he were to die in Africa, the boy would receive a bequest in the form of merchandise, and be raised by his African maternal grandmother

[22] A 1765 marriage contract between a Muslim couple from Makassar, for example, makes reference to several testaments, and several inheritance disputes before the Court of Justice, within Chinese and Malay Muslim families, refer to family members' wills. ANRI Notarissen inv.no. 6244 [1765] # 17312; ANRI Raad van Justitie inv.no. 154, 15 may 1765, folio 241, 26 June 1765,folio 371. ANRI Notarissen inv.no. 7190 #485 contains a testament by a Muslim couple. Testaments and other acts drawn up by Chinese and Malay Batavians can be found in the notarial archives in the Arsip Nasional in Jakarta, Indonesia. An inventory of this archive can be found in Gaastra, "The Archives of the Dutch East India Company," 404–529.

[23] The testaments contained in NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.nos. 6847-6891 ('Oostindische testamenten') are almost exclusively those of European VOC servants, although , inv.nos. 6899-6927 contain the wills of some others, such as two Muslim widows (inv.nos. 6924-6925).

[24] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #17, 10 August 1765, scan 69-71.

[25] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #43, 6 April 1770, scan 201-209.

who lived in Moree; if Klok died in Europe or on his way to Europe (presumably having taken Jan with him), his son would receive a sum of four thousand guilders instead and be raised by his paternal grandmother, Maria Alstorphius in Groningen, whom Cornelis Klok also appointed as his universal heir.[26] Although not explicitly stated in the wills, some of these decisions were likely informed by local circumstance and in particular the agency of the child's mother and her family: depending on the status and kin connections of the mother, it might not be so simple to take a child to Europe. An Akan woman's kin, known as her abusua, could lay a matrilineal claim on her children, either as free members of the community or as slaves taking a subordinate status in the abusua, depending on the mother's status.[27] Nicolaas Heinsius, commander of the WIC fortress Batenstein in Butre, learned this the hard way when he tried to intervene in his deceased partner's abusua claiming her inheritance and proclaiming guardianship of their Eurafrican son – a battle which he lost.[28]

An alternative to testamentary bequest that WIC servants in West Africa sometimes practiced was the *donatio inter vivos*, done when death seemed imminent. Governor Huijdekooper, for example, issued two separate documents on the same day, 7 July 1767. One was his last will and testament, in which he appointed his sister Sophia, who lived in Amsterdam, as his universal heir.[29] In the second document he made arrangements for his family in Africa: while on his deathbed, he gifted four enslaved children – two boys and two girls – to his young son Constantin Ferdinand, who was "conceived with the *Tapoeyerin* Johanna,"[30] and to his son Cudjo, "produced with the *negerin* Abeba," an enslaved man and woman whom he had recently purchased. He also released his two *impias* (female debt-servants) from their debts. The document included a clause, however, that these gifts would be null and void in case he recovered from his illness. In practice the 'donations' thus amounted to testamentary bequests, but because he bestowed them while still alive (even if just barely), Huijdekooper was able to keep them out of the estate he was leaving to his sister in Europe, and thus keep his two worlds separate while shielding his African beneficiaries from any contestation of their legacies.[31]

The above examples are all high-ranking company servants, who generally did not institute their natural children as heirs who would control their estate, opting for bequests instead. Less propertied Europeans, however, were much more likely to leave everything in the hands of their natural children and the latter's mothers. The carpenter Cornelis de Nijs, for example, left everything he owned to his African partner Efuwa and the child he had with her, named Alida.[32] Surgeon Gotlieb Kuhn named his underage son as his universal heir, while leaving his bed to his African partner Abba, presumably the boy's mother.[33] Jan George Schik, lieutenant at Crevecoeur, left one-fourth of his possessions to his African partner Atta, and one-fourth to each of his three sons, but also bequeathed modest amounts of gold to his colleagues: one ounce to

[26] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #26, 22 April 1767 scan 119-122.
[27] Everts, "A Motley Company"; Heijer, "Institutional Interaction on the Gold Coast: African and Dutch Institutional Cooperation in Elmina, 1600–1800."
[28] Natalie Everts, 'Cherchez La Femme: Gender-Related Issues in Eighteenth-Century Elmina1', *Itinerario* 20, no. 1 (March 1996): 45–57.
[29] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #30, 7 July 1767, scan 149-151.
[30] "Tapoeyer" was the term used for people of Mixed African and European ancestry on the Gold Coast.
[31] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #31, 7 July 1767, scan 153-155.
[32] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #20, 18 April 1766, scan 81.
[33] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 336, Testament #13, 14 July 1794, scan 65.

the WIC assistant Hermanus Meijer, one ounce to the sergeant Jan Tobias Schiebel, and one ounce to the garrison as a whole, which was a common practice among the WIC military.[34]

This stark contrast between the testamentary practices of elite and non-elite company servants suggests that the European community in general, and especially governing elites, accepted a father's inclination to provide comfort and security to his children regardless of their status, but that the transfer of control over considerable fortunes to non-Christian, mixed-race, illegitimate children was an entirely different story. In part, this can be explained by pragmatic constraints: whereas the humble possessions of lower-ranking employees were usually physically with them in Africa, and could thus easily be handed over to local beneficiaries, high-ranking company servants frequently had most of their assets in Europe – assets that could not easily be transported to the West-African coast. This still begs the question, however, why men such as Walmbeek and De Kort, who ordered their natural sons to be raised in Europe, did not institute those same sons as their heirs, nominating other relatives or even non-relatives instead.

The answer may lie, at least in part, in the status of illegitimate children, and elites' attitudes towards them. Dutch inheritance law did not unequivocally preclude the transfer of estates to children born out of wedlock, but it does reflect a certain degree of discrimination based on birth. *Overwonnen* children, i.e. those born from adultery or incest, were most stigmatized out of all non-legitimate offspring, and were barred from inheriting anything more than that which would be necessary for their livelihood.[35] For 'natural' children born to unmarried, unrelated parents (*speelkinderen*), legal restrictions were not as unequivocal: according to Van Leeuwen, they could inherit from their parents as freely as any non-relative named in a will could, although there might be local restrictions if the deceased also had legitimate children: in Friesland, for example, natural children were only allowed to inherit a maximum of one-twelfth of the estate in such a case; in Leiden they could not get more than a quarter of a child's legal portion.[36] Most of the children discussed thus far were natural children not born from adultery or incest, but their status differed somewhat from European-born *speelkinderen* in that they were usually born to a non-Christian African or Eurafrican mother. This meant that, unless their mother was baptized, they could not be legitimated retroactively through marriage.

Moreover, there are some indications that the racial or cultural component of their birth impacted their perceived status, giving rise to conflicts over inheritances by such children. There are examples of such battles in which the interpretation of inheritance law came to be wrapped up in questions of race, religion, and cultural belonging all over the globe: Hoyer, for the VOC world, has shown instances of family members in Europe contesting the succession of Europeans in Asia by their Eurasian children and their non-Christian mothers.[37] In chapter four, we saw how in Suriname a conflict broke out over the inheritance of Hendrik Diederiks who had nominated his natural son Hendrik Jr. as his universal heir, with his long-time domestic partner, the enslaved woman L'Esperance, second in line. One of the arguments made by the executors' council and the colonies prosecutors against L'Esperance inheriting the estate when it became

[34] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 336, Testament #15, 6 October 1795, scan 77.
[35] Groot, *Inleydinge tot de Hollandtsche regts-geleertheyt*, 116.
[36] Simon van Leeuwen, *Het Rooms-Hollands-Regt, Waar in de Roomse Wetten Met Het Huydendaagse Neerlands Regt … over Een Gebragt Werden …*, 9th ed. (Amsterdam, 1720), Vol III, 223.
[37] Hoyer, "Relations of Absence: Germans in the East Indies and Their Families c. 1750-1820," 67–68.

clear Hendrik Jr. had died – in addition to her status as a black, formerly enslaved concubine – was that Hendrik Jr. could never have been made a legal heir to begin with. Citing Grotius and the German jurist Andreas Gaill, *fiscaal* Texier (who would later become Governor) argued that "bastards" could not inherit "anything more than that pertaining to their livelihood, unless they have been legitimated before the death of the father, which would allow them to be nominated as heir". Because this had not been the case for Diederiks, "the Mulatto Hendrik" had never been a valid heir, nor could his mother therefore take his place.[38] Texier, here, notably, based his claims on restrictions for '*overwonnen'* children born of adultery or incest, although there is no indication that Diederiks had been married and his son anything other than a *speelkind*. Apparently, the other circumstances of his birth (to an enslaved, black woman) relegated Hendrik Junior to the more stigmatized category of illegitimate offspring in the *fiscaal*'s eyes, even if he technically did not fit that definition.

Han Jordaan has demonstrated that similar conflicts took place on Curaçao. When the islander Jan Gloudij died in 1739, leaving everything to his natural son Dirk, whom he had conceived with the free mixed-race woman Catherina Marrit, a group of self-professed relatives protested. They argued that Marrit had tricked Gloudij into believing the child was his and, incorrectly citing Van Leeuwen's *Rooms Hollands Recht,* they claimed that neither natural children nor *overwonnen* children could be legal heirs.[39] Similarly to the Surinamese case in which L'Esperance and black unmarried partners like her were described as "cunning whores", the plaintiffs in Curaçao painted the conflict as part of a larger societal threat posed by transfers of wealth from the 'white' community to nonwhites through inter-racial concubinage:

> "These cases, if they were to continue on this Island, could have very evil consequences as Mulatto whore riffraff [*Hoere moulatte gespuijs*] will insert themselves into the sentiments of men to such an extent as to pull them from their families and become full owners [of their property]."[40]

Despite such opposition, bequests to illegitimate mixed-race children, born free or enslaved, were not uncommon in the Dutch empire, although there seems to have been considerable variation between colonial settlements with regards to how accepted it was. The VOC-world seems to have been relatively the most accepting on the matter: dozens of wills can be found among the VOC records that were issued by company servants leaving considerable bequests to, or even naming as their sole heirs, so-called "natural children", usually conceived with manumitted women. These fathers varied from low-level soldiers and sailors to mid-level

[38] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 328, Memo from Bernard Texier in the case between Fiscaal Jan Nepveu and the executors of the Diederiks estate, 28 February 1766, folio 176-182. The passages by Grotius that the case refers to are from his *Inleydinge tot de Hollandtsche Regt-Geleertheijt* book 2, chapter 18, paragraphs 7-9 (which stipulated that only legitimate or legitimated children were legally entitled to inherit from their fathers, while natural children also automatically inherited from their mothers) and chapter 16, paragraph 3-7 (which set restrictions for testamentary bequests, stipulating that *overwonnen* children could not receive anything other than basic provisions for their livelihood.

[39] H. R. Jordaan, 'Slavernij en vrijheid op Curaçao : de dynamiek van een achttiende-eeuws Atlantisch handelsknooppunt' (Leiden University, 2012), 179. This argument rested on a misrepresentation of Van Leeuwen's argument, which did not preclude inheritance for children not born from adultery or incest. Leeuwen, *Het Rooms-Hollands-Regt*, 223.

[40] NL-HaNA, Curaçao, Bonaire en Aruba tot 1828, 1.05.12.01 inv.no. 4, Request 16 December 1739, quoted in Jordaan, 'Slavernij en Vrijheid', 179.

bookkeepers – even very high-ranking company servants did not shy away from naming illegitimate children in their will, although outright naming them as full heirs was not as common for this elite. Marten Meurs, merchant and second resident of Semarang, for example, left 4000 rixdollars and a female enslaved servant to his illegitimate daughter Cornelia Johanna Hendrietta, another 3000 rixdollars and an enslaved servant to the illegitimate daughter who was to be named Martina upon baptism, and 3000 to his illegitimate son Willem Jacob. He did not name any of them as his heirs, however, opting for his four siblings (three in the Netherlands, one in Ceylon) instead.[41]

There are even some instances of Dutch men naming legatees whom they described as "natural children", even though the latter were technically born from adultery. Bookkeeper Jacobus Mooijaart separated from his wife in May 1772, but remained legally married. Four years later, in 1776, he drew up his will, bequeathing a sum of five hundred rixdollars to his "natural son, still unbaptized, two years old". It is possible that Mooijaart's married status, making the boy a child of adultery in the eyes of the church, hindered his ability to get the child baptized, but he clearly did not view it as an obstacle to naming him in his will. Interestingly, he also made provisions for two other children: "the children of his manumitted *slavinne* named Julia van Boeton, of whom the oldest is manumitted and the youngest freeborn, named Willem and Minerva van Batavia." He left both fifty rixdollars, an act which hints at paternal recognition, but notably did not explicitly name them as his natural children. It is possible that Mooijaart conceived these children prior to his separation from his wife and therefore considered openly acknowledging them as his too much of an affront to her, especially considering he named his wife as his heir and as guardian over the two-year-old.[42]

In Suriname, another place for which a substantial number of testaments remains, people also made bequests to children born out of wedlock, but fathers were much less likely to explicitly acknowledge these legatees as their natural children than they were in the East Indies or even West Africa. A possible exception is Johan Friedrich Ulrici, who named as his universal heir "my mulatto child [*mijn Mulatte jong*] Frederik", who was to be manumitted, but even here the phrasing is somewhat ambiguous, as "*mijn jong*" could conceivably be applied to any boy he held in slavery.[43] Notably, one of the rare testaments that explicitly mentions biological offspring as such is one that was not issued publicly at the notary, but written by the testator J.N Hoen himself and sealed in seven places, only to be unsealed upon his death. Thus it was only posthumously that Hoen acknowledged his "bodily mestizo son named Ferdinant," who was so be manumitted and inherit a young black slave.[44] Much more common was for testators to describe their heirs and legatees as "child of [mother]", a custom which might in part be explained by a greater taboo on fathering illegitimate, mixed-race children in Suriname, but may also be due in part by the general Surinamese emphasis on matrilineal kinship: the same mode of describing children of black and mixed-race women can be found in the wills of free non-white, non-Christian men, for whom such a taboo would have been less relevant. The free Tranquil, formerly of the plantation Des Tombesburg, for example, named as his heirs "the children of the

[41] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 6987, Testament #10359, 30 July 1795, scan 857.
[42] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 6847, Testament #236, 4 May 1776, scan 675.
[43] NL-HaNA, Notarissen Suriname tot 1828 [digitaal duplicaat], 1.05.11.14, inv.no. 43, 19 June 1776, folio 138.
[44] NL-HaNA, Notarissen Suriname tot 1828 [digitaal duplicaat], 1.05.11.14, inv.no. 43, 18 June 1780, scan 257.

free Truij van Stolting, mamed Willemina, Regina, Catharina, Dorothea, Louisa and Johanna, naming Truij as their guardian."[45] The free Joseph Nassij, of Eurafrican descent and a member of the Surinamese Jewish community, named two heirs whom he described as "the minor children of the free *mulattin* Pomba van Davilar, named David Jopseph Haim Nassij and Anna Jacoba IJssam" – Pomba would only take their place as heir if both children were to die before reaching adulthood.[46]

By the final decades of the eighteenth century, the Surinamese wills make clear, it was not unheard of to make financial arrangements for manumitted or free-born children conceived with free or enslaved black women in the Caribbean, although it would go too far to say it was the norm.[47] The many references to "mulattoes" among the documentation of enslaved workers and the relatively small number of free people with this designation suggests that many white men who fathered children with enslaved black women never freed their offspring – either because they were unwilling or because they found themselves unable. The latter scenario could happen if the mother was owned by someone other than the father. This was the case, famously, for Joanna, the mixed-race young woman about whom John Gabriel Stedman waxes lyrical in his *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition*: although her father was reportedly in a long-term committed relationship with her mother, he was unable to free her or their children, including Joanna, because they were the property of another slaveowner who refused to sell or release them.[48] Somewhat similarly, the Paramaribo-based ship captain Pieter Jurgenson seems to have relied on the goodwill of his partner's master, Laurens Johannes Nepveu, stating in his will that he had requested Nepveu to transfer "the Mulatta Albertina with all her children to him or his estate, without demanding any payment" so that he could manumit them, but that he had not yet received an answer at the time of issuing his testament.[49]

When mixed-race children born out of wedlock *were* named in wills, they usually received modest sums, or simply the right to remain living in their fathers' home along with their mothers without becoming proprietors. A small subset of these children, however, inherited substantial enough property to veritably become part of the planter class. Johannes Feer, member of Berbice's Council of Policy and Criminal Justice, specified in his will that his two natural children, Johannis Daniel and Johanna Catharina, "conceived with Johanna Francina my manumitted slave, now deceased," would inherit half of his plantations De Goede hoop and Charlottenburg.[50] Through last wills such as Feer's it was possible for children born into slavery to become slaveowners themselves, and sometimes even hold their own family members in possession – a phenomenon which Aviva Ben-Ur has termed "close-kin ownership" and which she argued was in part the result of slave-owners' strategies to impose a certain order on their families even after

[45] NL-HaNA, Notarissen Suriname tot 1828 [digitaal duplicaat], 1.05.11.14, inv.no. 63, 21 June 1790, folio 258.
[46] Pomba would only take their place as heir if both children were to die before reaching adulthood. NL-HaNA, Notarissen Suriname tot 1828 [digitaal duplicaat], 1.05.11.14, inv.no. 63, 25 February 1790, folio 98.
[47] See also: Fatah-Black, *Eigendomsstrijd*, 52; Neslo, "Een ongekende elite," 109–10.
[48] Stedman, *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition*, 88.
[49] NL-HaNA, Notarissen Suriname tot 1828 [digitaal duplicaat], 1.05.11.14, inv.no. 63, 15 May 1790, folio 223.
[50] He did not appoint them as his immediate universal heirs, however: Feer's mother who lived in Switzerland was to inherit control of the estate, and only if both she and Feer's brother were to die before Johannes would Johannis Daniel and Johanna Catharina qualify as universal heirs. NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 37, 19 July 1758, scan 251-253.

their death.[51] The above-mentioned J.F. Ulrici, for example, who freed his mixed-race son Frederik by testamentary bequest, also specified in his will that Frederik would not only inherit his home in Paramaribo, but also his own family, consisting of five black women and girls, who would be obligated to help raise him and work for his benefit. His mother Philippa, pending good behavior, would be eligible for freedom after two or three years "after the other slaves are old enough to earn a living for both of them."[52] In these cases, mixed-race offspring found themselves, at least to a degree, in a similar position their father had been, with a range of options regarding how to give shape to their relationship to their family-cum-property. On one side of the scale, they had the right to exploit their mother, siblings, or other relatives for personal gain with the same legal discretion they had regarding other property; on the other side they could choose to recognize familial bonds through the institutions of manumission – sometimes giving rise to what Ellen Neslo has called a "chain reaction of freed people" – and testamentary bequest.[53]

The factors that went into these choices were not just emotional and economical (i.e. the potential profit to be extracted from enslaved kin's labor, the cost of manumission), but also concerned social status: it is conceivable that for some close-kin owners, choosing between retaining the status of master or, conversely, to give shape to familiar relations by manumitting family members, amounted to the choice between allying oneself with the predominantly white slave-owning class or with the free non-white population.[54] This was, uniquely, the dilemma of those of mixed descent, as they could potentially belong to either group: the status of those descending from both European and African or Amerindian ancestry was indeterminate and fluid, and whether they integrated into the white-dominated elite or were identified with the free black community depended not just on their skin color, education, and wealth, but also on whom they associated with, and particularly their family. This became all too clear in the case of a young military officer in Suriname, named Hendrik Otto Cremer, and his fiancée, the mixed-race daughter of the planter Adolf Essers. Governor Crommelin objected to this match as unworthy of an officer and demanded Cremer's dismissal. He based his judgment not so much on the bride's own status – she was Christian and had been legitimated after her mother converted to Christianity and married her father – but on her family: her grandmother had been a black woman "who had never married, and had several children of various types"; the girl's uncle was "a mulatto born to the late captain Hanecroth" but her aunt was black, "born to a negro, [and] still lives in the Heathen way." Crommelin concluded that "her entire family consists of Negroes and Mulattoes, and the girl herself is so black that one might doubt if Adolf Essers had really been

[51] Aviva Ben-Ur, 'Relative Property: Close-Kin Ownership in American Slave Societies', *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 89, no. 1–2 (1 January 2015): 1–29.
[52] NL-HaNA, Notarissen Suriname tot 1828 [digitaal duplicaat], 1.05.11.14, inv.no. 43, 18 June 1780, scan 257.
[53] Fatah-Black, "The Use of Wills," 624; Neslo, "Een ongekende elite," 50.
[54] As recent research on close-kin ownership and manumission has shown, however, this choice was not necessarily a binary: many close-kin owners gave shape to familial bonds *within* ownership relations through obligations of care. De Koning, "Kinship as a Factor," 47–51; Fatah-Black, "The Use of Wills," 637; Ramona Negrón, "The Ambiguity of Freedom: Kinship and Motivations for Manumission in Eighteenth-Century Suriname," *Slavery & Abolition*, 2022, 1–21.

her father."[55] Thus the bride's skin color converged with the status of her family to exclude her from 'respectable' society, in the authorities' eyes. The color line was porous, but strictly policed.

The cases discussed here show that testaments were an extremely powerful, although not all-powerful, tool for shaping the lives of offspring born out of wedlock. Through wills, testators could determine where and how, including in what religion, children would be raised, and sometimes even create relations of ownership to other family members. Simultaneously, the transfer of considerable wealth, be it in the form of liquid assets, plantations, or enslaved people, could also have major implications for which group beneficiaries of mixed descent belonged to, moving them from a dispossessed or even enslaved status to an affiliation with the predominantly white colonial elite. This is where tensions could arise, because there were some things that could not be passed down or controlled through testamentary bequest: illegitimate children of mixed descent differed from their European fathers in the way they were perceived for their color and their birth, and as such were not always welcomed with open arms into the community their fathers belonged to.

An example of this is the case of Jan Elias van Onna, a manumitted man of mixed descent educated in the Netherlands. When van Onna applied to work as a solicitor (*procureur*) in Paramaribo in 1790, he was met with resistance from the sitting justices of both the criminal and the civil the court. In a letter to the Directors of the Society of Suriname (who had recommended Van Onna), the council members of the Court of Civil Justice wrote that they felt that Van Onna's appointment would threaten the dignity of both the court and the office of *procureur,* because of the "state, condition, and circumstance" of his person. They based this assessment on three grounds: his racial status – he was described as a *mulat* – , the fact that he was born into slavery, and his illegitimacy. Although there was some 'grace' legally extended to "natural children which are the product of human weakness", the councillors argued that this did not apply to Van Onna, who was conceived by a married man committing adultery with an enslaved black woman and thus "produced from an illicit and highly punishable mixing."[56] These three factors converged to brand Van Onna as being of inferior social status, which the Council considered to be every bit as important as qualification and skill. In response, Van Onna wrote to the Directors in Amsterdam to ask that they overrule the councillors, but to no avail.[57] He did, however, have Suriname's Governor on his side, and as a result was able to gradually build a career in the colony's bureaucratic apparatus.[58]

In addition to color and (il)legitimacy, affective and possibly religious ties children of unsanctioned inter-ethnic unions might have to the communities on their mother's side frequently rendered them an object of suspicion, or at least concern, among colonial authorities, and thus a target for intervention. Questions of belonging were not settled at birth, but rather deeply wrapped up in how a child was raised, by whom, and in what faith.

[55] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 54, Missive from Governor Crommelin to the Society of Suriname, read and approved 3 October 1764, folio 343-344.
[56] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 397, folio 383.
[57] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 81, June 1st 1791, folio 150.
[58] Jean Jacques Vrij, "Jan Elias van Onna en het 'politiek systhema' van de Surinaamse slaventijd, circa 1770-1820," *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis* 17 (1998): 141.

Baptism and religious education

In the religiously and ethnically pluralist world of Dutch colonial settlements, in which European identity and Christianity were, if not quite synonymous, then at least closely wrapped up in each other, baptizing a child had more than just spiritual implications. Parents who baptized their children in a Dutch Reformed church initiated them into the Christian, and by extension Dutch-affiliated community, and this membership came with legal privileges as well as expectations of cultural and political allegiance. For legally married Christian parents, it was self-evident that the children would be baptized and join their parents' cultural, religious, and social community. For children born out of wedlock, however – and especially those whose parents had different religions – it was not. Here, the decision depended on both the parents' calculation and that of the political and ecclesiastical authorities, who through varying motivations and circumstances could either restrict or actively encourage the initiation of these children into the Christian community.

For parents, the decision to raise a child as a Christian was a weighty one. Beyond any concerns parents may or may not have had for a child's soul, baptism also determined in large part the circles the child would move in, what their career prospects would be, and who they could or could not marry. For VOC servants, the power and influence of the Company meant that the advantages of Christian status were quite clear in places like Batavia, Ceylon, or the Moluccas: a Christian education almost guaranteed employment for sons, whereas the option to marry off a baptized daughter to a company servant offered, to low-ranking VOC fathers, a way of assuring her a relatively stable livelihood, and to company elites a valuable networking opportunity.[59]

In other places, however, baptism was not necessarily the most obviously advantageous choice. On the West-African Gold Coast, pastors in WIC-employ regularly lamented that European fathers and their African partners outright refused to have their natural children, and especially their daughters, baptized. This trend was a testament to the limited power of the WIC and of Christianity at large on the Gold Coast, and conversely to the resilience of local institutions: because the matrilineal *abusua* system meant that Africans derived status, property, and kin connections from their mother and her family, the importance of (Christian) marriage as a means of safeguarding status and property was de-emphasized. Rather than a means of social advancement, Christian status could actually be a hindrance to Eurafrican women and girls' prospects, because it closed the door on *calicharen*, the dominant conjugal practice between Europeans and Africans in the region.[60]

Pastor Jacobus Capitein, who started a school with the aim of instructing Eurafrican and African children in the catechism, complained that it was particularly difficult to enrol girls due to parents' resistance: after attending his classes, several girls had refused to participate in the *calicharen* system, rejecting it as sinful concubinage – much to the dismay of their parents, who had hoped for an advantageous match with a European.[61] It seems to have been especially a Christian education that parents resisted, rather than baptism itself: Capitein also complained

[59] Bosma and Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies*, 55–62; Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*.
[60] At least, this was the explanation offered by WIC preachers such as Gerardus Verbeek and Jacobus Capitein. NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 492, 757.
[61] Kpobi, "Mission in Chains," 147.

that WIC servants had their children baptized but then failed to take an active role in raising them in a Christian manner, with the children growing up outside the castle among their African mother's family.[62]

Indeed, especially by the late eighteenth century there does appear to have been an uptick in WIC-servants – especially among the higher ranks – baptizing not just their sons but also their daughters, as evidenced in the increase in Christian names for Eurafrican children mentioned in wills during this period.[63] This trend is consistent with that identified by Pernille Ipsen for the case of the Danish presence on the Gold Coast. Like in the Danish case, this may point to a gradual increase in status derived from European, and by extension Christian, affiliation, but this did not necessarily mean an adoption of Christian cultural norms at the expense of African practices.[64] Rather, both Eurafrican women and their European partners drew on a combination of status-enhancing elements from Christian as well as Akan practice. The will of Gerardus de Kort, the commander of Crevecoeur castle who mandated a Christian education for his son but not his daughter is a prime example of this type of hybridity: he left his Eurafrican partner Elisabeth – whose name suggests she was baptized – a variety of goods and slaves, but also the equipment she would need to perform a traditional Akan funerary rite on him: rum, gunpowder, blue *bafta* cloth, and a cow.[65]

The Caribbean colonies can be seen as taking a middle position between these two extremes: because the WIC was far less economically dominant than the VOC, property ownership, along with race, was a far more important factor in socio-economic status than education and company affiliation. Elites, here, were not just comprised of company-appointed administrators, but also of independent traders (predominantly in Curaçao) and planters (on the Wild Coast). However, since these elites were overwhelmingly Christian (or also, in Curaçao and Suriname, Jewish), church membership here carried considerably more prestige than it did on the West-African coast. If parents of mixed-race children born out of wedlock wished for their children to join "respectable" society, therefore, baptism and a Christian (or, alternatively, Jewish) education were a requirement.

On the other side of the baptismal font, clerical and political authorities made their own calculations when it came to the baptism of children born across ethno-religious divides. Common features across the empire were a suspicion of the motives of non-Christians who presented themselves or their children for baptism and a general distrust of non-protestant mothers of mixed-race children. In Colombo, for example, Ceylonese mothers who had children with Dutch men could lose custody of their children to the Dutch Reformed diaconate if the father died, because the colonial administration did not trust these women to raise their Christian

[62] Kpobi, 139.
[63] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #43, 6 April 1770; , inv.no. 336, #3, 11 August 1791; #9, 5 February 1793; #16, 17 May 1796; #17, 29 June 1796.
[64] Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 115–17.
[65] NL-HaNA, Kust van Guinea, 1.05.14, inv.no. 335, Testament #43. Rum was traditionally poured down a deceased person's throat with the aim of delaying decomposition. The gunpowder was likely for the gunshots that were customarily fired while the bereaved wailed over the body, while the blue *bafta* was likely for the mourning attire (blue being one of the colors of grief, along with red and black) and the cow possibly intended for a sacrifice. Kwame Arhin, 'The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 64, no. 3 (1994): 307–22; Mensah Adinkrah, '"If You Die a Bad Death, We Give You a Bad Burial:" Mortuary Practices and "Bad Death" among the Akan in Ghana', *Death Studies* (15 May 2020): 1–13.

children in the appropriate doctrine and feared that "because of the well-known weakness and fragility of the faith in Christ regarding the mothers" the children would fall back into "heathendom" or "papal superstition".[66] These mothers, although mistrusted by the Dutch authorities, were baptized in the Reformed church and thus formally Christian; there was even more suspicion where unbaptised women had children with European men, and the question arose early in the VOC's tenure in Asia whether such children should be allowed to be baptized at all.

The Synod of Dordt (the most important Reformed convention in the Dutch Republic) ruled on the matter in 1618, after being consulted by the *classis* of Noord-Holland on behalf of pastors in the East Indies: children who did not have two Christian parents could not be baptized in infancy, the Synod decided, but had to be taught and examined in the Reformed doctrine first.[67] In the reality of the Indies, however, where inter-religious concubinage was, as we have seen, extremely common, as were Christian slave-owners wishing to baptise enslaved children in their home, this was challenging, and especially so in places where the Reformed Church faced stiff competition from Catholicism. The Cochin-based minister Canter Visscher expressed concern, for example, that some of his congregants would turn to a Catholic priest if he refused – as Reformed doctrine mandated – to baptize babies born to enslaved 'Heathen' women.[68]

In Batavia, which in the seventeenth and even eighteenth century was the site of considerable struggle over the question how exclusionary the church should be with regards to access to the two prime sacraments – baptism and holy communion – a solution was reached that drew on an adaptation of the pre-existing Southeast Asian practice of adoption: children born to non-Christian mothers could be baptized in infancy if there was a guarantee that the godparents – who had to be reputable Christians – would ensure the child had a Christian education.[69] In practice, this guarantee came to be offered primarily through the institution of adoption which, in this period, did not carry the legal weight as to give adopted children equal status to legitimate, biological children, but did arrange for obligations of care and education and, importantly, connoted a certain assurance of cultural affiliation.[70]

Baptism and adoption thus worked hand in hand to regulate the 'belonging' to the Christian community of children whose birth resisted easy categorization, by attempting to ensure that their behaviour and beliefs conformed to the community they were initiated into. The Reformed Church in the East Indies thus adapted its practice to local circumstance and, going against the decisions of the 1618 Synod, regularly baptized infants born out of wedlock, including those born to non-Christian mothers, keeping their records in a separate registry. This was not unique to Batavia: the church in Makassar, for example, kept a separate list of *onechte* [illegitimate] children baptized in the church. For the years 1752-1759, a total of 32 illegitimate children, mostly infants and toddlers, are recorded. For six of these, the mother was either 'unknown' or

[66] CP-I, January 2 1666, 127; Rose and Heijmans, "From Impropriety to Betrayal," 329; Negrón has found similar arguments being used against non-Christian black mothers in Suriname. Negrón, "The Ambiguity of Freedom," 12.
[67] Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 466–67; Schutte, *Het Indisch Sion*, 59–61.
[68] Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 470.
[69] L.J. Loosse, "Kerk en zendingsbevel," in *Het Indisch Sion: de Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, ed. G. J. Schutte (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 39–40; Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 474.
[70] Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 463–71.

simply described as a "non-Christian" – these children were placed in the orphanage. Some mothers are explicitly described as Christian whereas others are mentioned without a surname or with a toponym denoting an enslaved background, making it likely they were not Christian.[71]

A legal battle from 1761 Batavia shows how property, religion, status and power could become entangled in the question of adopted heirs' education. It involved the underage Adriaan de Nijs, the adopted illegitimate son of a high-ranking VOC servant by the same name and his concubine, Elisabeth Breton. Elisabeth was the daughter of De Nijs Senior's colleague Hendrik Breton and Aurora van Bengalen, an enslaved woman owned by De Nijs. Adriaan de Nijs had thus been Elisabeth's legal master when he impregnated her, but he manumitted her in August 1758, a month before she gave birth, so that their son was born free. The boy was baptized and adopted by De Nijs, who also named him as his universal heir in his will. He appointed three executors of his estate, who would also be the child's legal guardians: the boy's maternal grandfather Hendrik Breton, who was a senior merchant based in Semarang, and two high-ranking company servants based in Batavia, T.F. Wannemaker and E van Pleuren.[72]

When Van Nijs died in 1761, Elisabeth Breton wished to take her three-year-old son with her from Batavia to her father in Semarang, but the other two guardians refused to allow this. A civil suit ensued, revealing two competing visions for how the young heir should be raised. The Bretons argued that Adriaan should be with his biological family, and that Semarang was a perfectly suitable place to raise him.[73] Wannemaker and Van Pleuren, on the other hand, did not believe 'Java' offered an environment for educating the boy that was "appropriate for his considerable means". They argued that Adriaan should remain in Batavia, where there were "decent married people who in the Fatherland already had the profession of raising the children of people of rank and giving them a good education," until he was old enough to be sent to Europe.[74] They also rejected fellow guardian Hendrik Breton's claims of familial relations, because he had (allegedly) fathered Elisabeth with another man's slave and thus had no legal paternal rights. And although Breton was reportedly planning on retroactively legitimating his daughter, they argued that this actually worked against him: if he stood to inherit from the wealthy young boy as a grandfather, this posed a potential conflict of interest in raising him.[75]

Wannemaker and Van Pleuren also made it clear what they thought of Elisabeth, hinting that they thought of her as not much different from "public whores"[76] and reminding the court that her status as a respectable Christian woman – she was addressed in documents with the honorific *mejuffrouw* – was a recent acquisition that she owed entirely to her former master De Nijs who had left her 5000 rixdollars in his will, but who had decidedly *not* named her as her son's legal guardian. They also linked her enslaved background to her lack of education in order to stress her unfitness for raising a boy of considerable fortune:

> [she] was transformed only three years ago from a slave to a manumitted slave and so far does not have the slightest knowledge of the faith or religion; it is true, she has been

[71] ANRI Burgerlijke Stand inv.no. 225, Baptismal Records Makassar.
[72] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 6850, Testament #1082, 17 June 1761, scan 47-51.
[73] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 9268, CivR, 16 March 1762, scan 325-326.
[74] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 9268, CivR, 24 November 1761, scan 321-322.
[75] Ibid., scan 322-323.
[76] Ibid., 10 March 1762, scan 339

> baptized, and initiated into the Christian church, but alas! That is all. Reading or writing she has never learned, so what kind of education can this minor expect from her?[77]

While the position taken by the two Batavian guardians can be seen as a case of colonial elites policing the cultural and social conformity of a new member that entered their ranks through a hefty inheritance, their reasoning suggests not merely political and socio-economic calculation, but also a certain affective motivation. Wannemaker and Van Pleuren had been friends with De Nijs, and had reportedly promised him to look after the boy "as if he was their own child", which they understood as making sure that "he is not exposed to any dangers, and that he is not only given any and all physical necessities, but also raised in the fear of God and educated in virtues and sciences, in accordance with the means left to him by his late father."[78] Elisabeth and her father, meanwhile, built their case on no less affective reasoning, appealing to natural law and common sense in stressing a mother's right to raise her own child, and pointing out that Wannemaker and Van Pleuren were essentially strangers to young Adriaan.[79]

The court, however, sided with the Batavian guardians, and Adriaan would be raised in Batavia until 1764 when, aged six, he would be sent to the Netherlands. That year, Elisabeth drew up a testament which indicates that she had married a military officer and was living in Surabaya in Eastern Java. Although she and her husband named each other as their heirs, Elisabeth specified that "her prior son Adriaan de Nijs, six years old and about to depart to *patria*" would receive his "legitimate portion" upon her death, and that should husband and wife both die childless, Adriaan would inherit everything.[80] As was the case for many women in the Indies who had a child with a wealthy European or even a (former) master, the power imbalance between Elisabeth and her child's late father meant that she had little say in her son's life, but her will suggests that she continued to be aware of his whereabouts and found at least one way to institutionally express her role as mother, even if she had been denied the role of caretaker and educator.

In the WIC-world, adoption was not as strongly a part of the cultural and legal repertoire as it was in the East Indies, but church authorities here struggled with the same questions regarding children of mixed parentage. In 1708, the Elmina-based pastor Johannes van der Star wrote to the WIC, asking what to do about children born to non-Christian women offered up for baptism by their Christian fathers, and suggesting that perhaps they should be sent to Europe to assure they would actually be raised in the Christian faith rather than predominantly by their 'heathen' mothers.[81] The Gentlemen X rejected this latter proposal, arguing that "one wouldn't know what to do with them here, and they would only be a burden."[82] The directors had no objection to such children being baptised in Africa, however, and urged the preacher to heed Christian fathers' requests.[83] Their successors gave a similar blessing to Capitein some four decades later, when

[77] Ibid., 24 November 1761, scan 320.
[78] Ibid., scan 318.
[79] Ibid., 10 March 1762, scan 325-331.
[80] NL-HaNA VOC 1.04.02 inv.no. 6892, Testament #9495, Elisabeth Breton and Johan Jochum Paulus van Rensburg, 1 September 1764, scan 645.
[81] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 918, Letter from Johannes van der Star to the WIC directors, 23 April 1708, scan 422-423. .
[82] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 56, Letter from the Gentlemen X to Johannes van der Ster, 28 Nomvember 1708, folio 86-87.
[83] Ibid.

the latter brought up the dilemma again, with the distinction that Capitein was now granted permission to start a school for the baptized children's religious education (a solution which, as we have seen, backfired somewhat).[84]

In Curaçao as well as the Guyanas, Dutch reformed Pastors regularly complained to their superiors of being asked to baptise babies born to "Heathen" women, which they saw as signs of the wide-spread moral depravity of the places they had been assigned to. The church council of Curaçao, in 1772, wrote that church discipline was so lacking that "people who are not members of the church, nor desire to be, and who cannot for the life of them prove to be Christians, try to force us to baptise their children."[85] We might compare the constraints the Reformed Church in Willemstad was under to the situation sketched by pastor Visscher in Cochin: like in Cochin, the church in Curaçao occupied a minority position among a highly diverse population and faced stiff competition from the Catholic Church whose conditions for membership were considerably less exclusive. As a result, Curaçao-based preachers at times had to answer to church authorities in the Dutch Republic as to why they were not baptising as many people as the Catholic priests on the island.[86] The 'spiritual shopping' that this situation enabled apparently also extended, in some respects, to Judaism: in the same 1772 letter, the Reformed elders complained that some Christians turned to the Jewish community of Willemstad with a request to pray for their sick relatives in exchange for money, "even though such [requests] are not refused in our church."[87] The church authorities of Curaçao thus found themselves in a considerably more precarious position than their colleagues in the Republic or even in Batavia, on the one hand trying to maintain a certain degree of exclusivity and control in baptism and other services, but on the other hand finding they had very little leverage in doing so, because islanders had alternative options to turn to.

The Guyanas were considerably less religiously diverse than Curaçao, but here too questions around baptism and children's ethnic and religious affiliation emerged. The Essequibo-based pastor Zacharius Hofman wrote an outraged letter in 1720 to his employer, the WIC, reporting on being asked to baptise children born to Catholics, Amerindians, and Africans, and asking to be relieved of his post. The directors responded by refusing his resignation and dismissing the baptism question as a churchly matter outside their "department", suggesting he take his concerns to the *classis* of Walcheren in Zeeland or to fellow pastors in similar situations.[88] Someone who did just that was Johan Christian Frauendorff, the pastor of the Reformed Church in Berbice. In a 1736 letter to the church classis in Amsterdam, in which he complained about the poor moral standards in the colony, Frauendorff expressed outrage at the expectation that he baptize children "which are bred by so-called Christians, because this is what all whites are called, with Indian or Black women who are Heathens."[89] In Frauendorff's view, this posed a dilemma that was particularly challenging for the Dutch Reformed faith, because unlike more

[84] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 842, Resolutions 27 April 1746, folio 10-11.
[85] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 608, folio 297-298 .
[86] Gemeente Archief Amsterdam - Archief van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk; Classis Amsterdam, 379, inv.no. 224, #36-37, 4 July 1741 and January 1742.
[87] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 608, folio 297-298 .
[88] NL-HaNA, WIC, 1.05.01.02, inv.no. 813, Letter to Zachaeus Hofman, 27 August 1720, scan 80.
[89] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 66, letter from *Predikant* Johan Christian Frauendorff, 14 October 1736.

exclusive Protestant sects such as the Anabaptists who exclusively baptized adults, Calvinism allowed for the baptism of infants. And unlike Catholicism, which, as he scathingly remarked, had such lax standards for Christianity that its missionaries "simply baptize all un-Christians down to their own slaves, as soon as the latter can cross themselves and say *Ave Maria*," Calvinism relied heavily on the prospect of a Christian education so that a proper faith could be instilled in the child.[90] And this was unlikely, he feared, if the father was a proven sinner and the mother a heathen. Unsure what to do, Frauendorff asked for advice from both his superiors in Amsterdam and his colleagues in Suriname. The Amsterdam Classis responded in October 1736, advising the following:

> That illegitimate children, even those produced with heathen women, who are presented for baptism by their fathers, who are not church members but nonetheless of our religion or at least Lutheran [...] may and must be baptized. Nevertheless, this should be under the condition that the fathers, following serious punishment, will be admonished to make a true confession of faith, and that the illicit children in question, once they achieve a certain age, and only then, will have been educated and examined in the first tenets of the faith in accordance with their age and aptitude.[91]

The phrasing of this advice, as Frauendorff would later remark, was somewhat ambiguous, because it left open to interpretation whether the condition of education and examination only applied to school-aged children (meaning infants could freely be baptized) or if the Classis was following the Synod of Dordt in not allowing baptism in infancy at all for children of 'Heathen' mothers.[92] The church council of Suriname, whom Frauendorff consulted subsequently, explicitly took this latter position, explaining that they only allowed such children to be baptised once they were old enough to pass the examination.[93] It is likely that Frauendorff wanted a decisive and unambiguous answer from his superiors in the Netherlands because, as he would explain in a letter from May 1741, he faced quite a bit of pressure to baptize illegitimate children from several colonists, including those of considerable wealth and influence.[94] The matter went back and forth between Berbice and Amsterdam for several years until finally, in 1741, the church council, led by Frauendorff, decided to take matters into its own hands and submitted a lengthy treatise to the Governor and his Governing Council, in which it argued its position on the matter: neither 'Heathens' not their children should be allowed to be baptized in infancy, as this would encourage the sin of concubinage and risk creating a generation of people who were Christian in name only but reverted back to 'Heathen' ways. They also hinted that the Governor and Council should take political action, issuing new legislation to curb concubinage and thus limit the number of illegitimate children born in the colony.[95] Indeed, just a few weeks later, the

[90] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 80, Pastoral treatise on illegitimate children, 5 April 1741.
[91] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 68, Missive from the Classis of Amsterdam to Frauendorff, 1 October 1736, scan 100.
[92] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 80, Pastoral treatise on illegitimate children, 5 April 1741, folio 12, scan 184.
[93] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 80, Copy of the Letter from the church council of Paramaribo, 15 July 1738, scan 191.
[94] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 80, Letter to the Directors from Christiaan Frauendorff, 10 May 174, scan 85.
[95] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 80, scan 187-188. The treatise made a reference to an old ordinance, dating from the Van Peere family's private control over the colony, which set increasingly

colonial authorities issued a new set of rules for plantation employees which included fines for "carnal conversation" with black and indigenous women, as well as the Berbice adaptation of the Surinamese punishments set for white women engaging in inter-racial sex.[96]

While church authorities were anxious to ascertain that those who formally joined the ranks of Christians conformed to Reformed religious dogma and behavioral norms, the political authorities of colonies such as Berbice and Suriname were no less interested in religious education. For them, however, it was not just a matter of congregational compliance, but also a marker of social and cultural allegiance of those inheriting property from Christians. In 1730 the Governing Council of Suriname ordered the colony's predikant to locate any and all mixed-race children whose fathers had provided for them in their will, in order to inquire after their education. Their findings reveal the ambiguous social status children of mixed parentage often experienced. The pastors found three brothers, the oldest of whom, age 20, was already an accomplished carpenter, but whom the church nonetheless ordered to be placed in school so he could learn to read and write, as well as the tenets of the Reformed faith. The middle brother had already had a religious education for a year, whereas the youngest was still living on a plantation without an education. Another mixed-race young man who emerged in the investigation, named Adam van Para, had actually been baptised in the Netherlands, which had left his guardian unsure of whether he was now free or still legally enslaved.[97] This uncertainty also existed for another child, the illegitimate daughter of a Joseph St Andre. This girl's father reported to the church that she knew how to pray and how to answer several questions from the catechism, both in German and in French. Despite her education and the fact that St. Andre recognized her as his daughter, however, his new family did not accept her as one of their own. Some time after the girl's birth, he had married a white woman and fathered legitimate children. His wife and children, as he put it, "oppress[ed] his mulatto girl every day and sometimes abuse[d] her horribly, leading to constant and great strife between him and his wife." He wished to send his first-born daughter to live with a decent Reformed family in the community, but the church council refused this request, reportedly because they did not believe the girl was legally free yet.[98]

The pastors also knew of several adults who were beneficiaries of a white father's will, but considered Christianization to be futile for them, especially since many already had children born out of wedlock of their own.[99] The secular authorities nonetheless ordered the pastors to

harsh punishment for concubinage on repeat offences, but argued that, even if it was still legally applicable (which they were not sure of) it was inadequate for the current situation because the punishments were based on lost wages, which would be difficult to put into practice considering most colonists were now employed by privately owned plantations, rather than by the colony as a whole. The ordinance they referred to was likely the one from May 20 1681 – the very first recorded ordinance for the colony: NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 219, folio 1-4

[96] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 219, folio 72-73, 77-83 (no. 9); NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 82, folio 394-408, 412-413. In 1742, they notified the Classis and the Directors in Amsterdam that they had decided on the matter unilaterally, taking local circumstance and the example from Suriname into account. NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Berbice, 1.05.05, inv.no. 83, Missive from the Berbice church council to the Directors in Amsterdam, 27 February 1742, folio 194-5.

[97] On the legal ambiguity regarding the question of "Dutch soil" and slavery, see Hondius, "Access to the Netherlands of Enslaved and Free Black Africans."

[98] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 132, Predicants' Letter to the governor, 28 April 1730, folio 375-377.

[99] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 132, folio 376

report the "mulattos living in sin" to the judicial authorities so they could be punished, but this does not seem to have happened.[100] The Governor and Council's eagerness to bring those of mixed parentage into the Christian fold should be seen, in the case of men at least, not just in light of property-ownership, but also military allegiance. In the face of the perceived threat of the numerically overwhelming enslaved black population, and particularly in light of the conflicts that arose with Maroons in Suriname in the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonial authorities were eager to recruit able-bodied, mixed race men for military service. Indeed, the free black and colored militia was heavily relied upon for expeditions against plantation escapees. In 1727, the Surinamese government had actually resolved to manumit all enslaved sons of white fathers for this explicit purpose. This resolution was never implemented and was revoked two years later, but the Council continued to take into account, in case of manumission requests, "the good use and great service" they could be put to, "in case of expeditions and other matters".[101] Since Christianity, in Suriname too, functioned as an important marker of political and cultural allegiance, it is not surprising that the Council was interested in the religious education of this key group.

Capitalizing on ambiguity

A particularly vocal proponent of bringing illegitimate children of mixed parentage – male *and* female – into the colonial fold was Jan Gerhard Wichers, who was Governor of Suriname from 1784 to 1790. At the start of his tenure, Wichers wrote a letter to the secretary of the *Sociëteit,* Jan Andries Munter, laying out his vision for the colony and its population. An enthusiast of Enlightenment philosophy, Wichers entertained notions of racial taxonomy, and particularly ascribed to Charles Bonnet's conceptualization of the Great Chain of Being, which, in Wichers' interpretation, gradually and hierarchically ordered all creatures from angels through various types of humans to animals and other creatures. This notion dated back to the Middle Ages, but in the eighteenth century, starting with Linnaeus, had become imbued with natural philosophy's attempts at systematic classification, and sometimes extended to differences between human races.[102] Wichers, like many of his contemporaries, considered both Africans and Amerindians to be closer to animals than Europeans were, but deviated from the likes of Linnaeus in ranking the indigenous peoples of South America below people of African descent:

> Of the Nations I know I believe that the Indians of the southernmost parts of the world occupy the very lowest step, and one step higher [are] the inhabitants of Africa's coast; both are unamenable to abstract or rational ideas, and are only ruled by sensuous objects, [but] the latter surpass the former in that they can be brought to greater perfection through education and civilization, even if only in mechanics and machinery.[103]

This contemptuous assessment, which he extended, to some degree, to those of combined African and European descent, did not stop Wichers from being in favor of religious education

[100] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 133, Resolutions 29 April 1733, scan 106.
[101] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 132, Resolution 22 July 1727, scan 132; Resolution 19 January 1729, scan 446-447.
[102] Bethencourt, *Racisms*, 252–54; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 218, 311.
[103] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 511, Missive from Governor J.C. Wichers to J.A. Munter, Secretary of the *Sociëteit*, 14 December 1784, folio 20.

for non-white inhabitants of Suriname: while he considered Africans' and Afrodescendants' approach to and grasp of religion to be superficial, he did see Christianity as "a means to make them into more useful inhabitants".[104] This was especially the case for "Mulattos, mestizos, and castizos," who, in his view,

> are all too necessary in a land that does not have a common or lower class, and who deserve particular encouragement. Attached to the land, and not burdened by the desire to make a show in Europe, they are the best inhabitants, but have thus far been neglected. They have always been marked as a lesser kind, tainted as it were with a *levis notae macula*. It is true that in recent years they have started to be used more and more as special house scribes and at the secretary offices, but they continue to struggle with the infamy of natural children.[105]

In light of the recent exodus of Europeans, in the wake of the financial crisis of the 1770s, Wichers thus saw in mixed-race natural children an answer to the colony's problems. They could be educated in agriculture, learn a craft, or serve a military function, and "make good plantation staff of which there is a shortage."[106] To achieve this, he was in favor of manumitting children born to white fathers, making funds available for their education, and encouraging marriage within this group, for example by making it an avenue towards achieving legitimate status, regardless of birth.

Wichers was never quite able to implement his grand vision, but his letter is emblematic of a more widely observable attitude among Dutch colonial authorities, viewing children from inter-racial relationships as not just a problem in terms of classification, but also a potential asset to be capitalized upon. The VOC had embraced mestizos as a demographic backbone of its Asian settlements ever since the plan to import Dutch brides to the Indies had been abandoned in the mid-seventeenth century. As early as 1632, Governor-General Brouwers had made an assessment reminiscent of Wichers' comparison between those with local roots and those "burdened by the desire to make a show in Europe":

> [Dutch women] come here poor and, having prospered, never stop complaining until they can return home and appear before old acquaintances in their new riches [...] there are good households here where the men are married to Indian women, their children are healthier, the women have fewer demands, and our soldiers are much better off married to them.[107]

Over time, as we have seen in chapter four, it was effectively normalized for lower-ranking company servants to father such children in a long-term or even short-term concubinage rather than a legal marriage. These children, if they were boys, rarely climbed to the highest echelons of VOC-service, but they did form an essential component of the rank and file of the company in Asia, while the girls formed the social glue for colonial society.[108] A role particularly suited for the sons of European fathers and Asian mothers was that of translator or interpreter, as they were frequently bi- or multilingual and had cultural competencies for both the local context and

[104] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 551, folio 28.
[105] Ibid., folio 34.
[106] Ibid., folio 33.
[107] Hendrik Brouwer, 1632, cited in Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*, 14.
[108] Bosma and Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies*; Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*.

the VOC-sphere. These go-between functions were essential to cross-cultural encounters across the globe, especially in the context of trade. This is particularly well documented for the West-African coast, where the WIC and other European traders relied heavily on intermediaries, or brokers, to not only translate but also take an active part in bartering and make conversions between different mathematical systems.[109] This was quite an influential role, however, and not necessarily accessible to every child of a European with an African woman, nor the exclusive prerogative of Eurafricans. Sons of European fathers and African mothers who were not involved in trade – usually those of lower status, born to enslaved or otherwise subaltern mothers – frequently served the Company in a military capacity, just as young, locally born men of mixed descent did in the Guyanas and the VOC world. [110]

In the Guyanas, colonial authorities also relied quite heavily on the mixed offspring of Europeans and Amerindians to mediate and communicate with nearby indigenous groups, both for commercial and military purposes. An example is the Broer family in Berbice, whose mestizo members frequently performed services for the colony: they were sent as envoys and served on the colony's outposts as *posthouder,* charged with maintaining good diplomatic and trade relations with Amerindians and overseeing the catching of enslaved runaways.[111] The family's skills, knowledge, and even physical appearance were particularly capitalized upon during the great revolt of 1763, when the Dutch authorities sent members of the Broer family out on expeditions leading Carib forces from the Mazaruni river when the latter refused to be led by a black guide, and sent a Jan Broer Jr. on an undercover mission, in indigenous garb, to company plantations in order to dissuade their enslaved workers from joining the rebels.[112]

Categorizing creolized identities

Those of mixed descent who climbed the ranks through service in the colonial apparatus can be difficult to identify in the archives, because one of the privileges of high status was to no longer be designated with a racial marker. This is very clear in the VOC records, where the civilian, non-company-affiliated population was generally described as either *burgers, mesties burger, inlands* [i.e. Asian] *burgers,* Chinese, Moor, or the marker "free" followed by an ethnic or religious descriptor. For company servants, only the lower ranks were sometimes marked by an ethnic descriptor (e.g. "the *inlands* soldier") whereas those in administrative positions were generally just described by their job title, even if they were of Eurasian descent. Similarly, in the Caribbean, enslaved individuals were meticulously labelled according to racial category, and manumitted people frequently appear in the records as "the free..." followed by a racial descriptor, and sometimes a reference to their former owner or plantation ("Van …") by way of a surname.[113]

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[109] Natalie Everts, 'Social Outcomes Of Trade Relations: Encounters Between Africans And Europeans In The Hubs Of The Slave Trade On The Guinea Coast', in *Migration, Trade, and Slavery in an Expanding World: Essays in Honor of Piet Emmer*, ed. Wim Klooster (Leiden: BRILL, 2009), 146. See also the volume Toby Green, ed., *Brokers of Change: Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Precolonial Western Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[110] Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595-1674* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 69; Everts, "A Motley Company," 61–63.
[111] For an description of a *posthouder*'s duties, see the instructions from Essequibo and Demerara: PG, "Instructie voor de posthouder aan de Cuyuni", 29 November 1757, and "Instructie voor de posthouder van Boven-Essequibo," 14 August 1764.
[112] Kars, *Blood on the River*, 134, 225.
[113] See also Fatah-Black, 'The Use of Wills', 627-630.

Only those who were considered white, or who were wealthy enough to obtain a social status approximating whiteness, would appear in the official records without a racial designation. These distinctions could be subtle, but in some contexts, such as the militia, they were explicitly formulated.

In the militia regulations of Suriname we see how color and descent converged with legitimacy in determining racial status. The regulations issued in 1781 laid out the criteria for the segregation of the corps, distinguishing three 'classes'. The first was for black men of fully African descent. The second was for 'mulatto's' and so-called 'carboekers' (from Spanish *cambujo*), denoting people of mixed African and Amerindian ancestry. The third was for 'mestizos', meaning those born from one white and one 'mulatto' or Amerindian parent. Anyone with more European ancestry than this third group would be classified as white, as would be any 'mestizos' born out of a legal marriage.[114] The power of legitimacy to functionally move someone towards 'whiteness', however, did have its limits. In 1795, the governing council intervened when individuals born out of two married parents who were both mixed-race joined the white militia, and stated that "as much as they may be born from a legal marriage, they remain in the same degree of mixedness as their parents and thus belong in the Mulatto Company."[115]

Although rarely discussed so explicitly and deliberately, similar modes of racial classification can be found in Dutch sources from various colonial settlements in both the Eastern and Western hemispheres. The *vrijbrieven* (manumission papers) issued in Curaçao, for example, indirectly show how different racial labels were defined, because they often document the family relations of those manumitted. Those with one black and one white parent were described as 'mulatto' like in Suriname, and those with one white and one 'mulatto' parent were similarly called mestizo. The Curaçao records also show some additional categories, such as '*sambo'* (one black and one 'mulatto' parent), *casties* (one white and one mestizo parent), and *poesties* (one white and one *casties* parent).[116] In addition, people would sometimes be described as being either creole (i.e. born in the New World) or from a specific African nation.[117]

On the Gold Coast, the most commonly used term for those of mixed descent was *tapoeyer*, generally referring to someone with one European and one African parent. According to J.A. de Marrée, who in the early nineteenth century wrote a travel account of the Gold Coast, *mulat*, *casties*, and *caboeger* were also used – the first for the child of a white and a *tapoeyer*, the second for the offspring of a *mulat* and a white person, and the third for the child of a black person and either a *tapoeyer* or *mulat*. Children of a *casties* and a European were considered white.[118] In the East Indies, the most commonly used term for people of mixed descent was *mesties* or *mixties* (mestizo) or, specifically for people of partly Portuguese ancestry, *toepas*. Less common, but occasionally used in the records was *casties,* used similarly to in the Atlantic world. The Dutch minister François Valentijn, in his famous work on the VOC world, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*, also

[114] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 173, Resolution 28 February 1781.
[115] NL-HaNA, Sociëteit van Suriname, 1.05.03 inv.no. 185, Resolution 12 June 1795.
[116] The Surinamese manumission papers used similar racial labels, except using *karboeger* instead of *sambo*. Brana-Shute, "The Manumission of Slaves in Suriname, 1760-1828," 227.
[117] T. van der Lee, *Curaçaose vrijbrieven 1722-1863 met indices op namen van vrijgelatenen en hun voormalige eigenaren* (Den Haag: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1998). Notably, these labels disappear from the manumission papers after 1830.
[118] J. A. de Marrée, *Reizen op en beschrijving van de goudkust van Guinea: voorzien met de noodige ophelderingen, journalen, kaart, platen en bewijzen…* (The Hague/Amsterdam: Van Cleef, 1817), 135.

mentioned *poesties* (from Portuguese *postiço,* meaning adopted or false) which he described as a step between *mesties* and *casties.*[119] Like elsewhere in the Dutch world, there was a point where those of mixed ancestry functionally became indistinguishable from whites: in Valentijn's account, this applied to any children born to a *casties* and a European, who would be "counted among the Dutch".[120]

The fact that the same or similar terms for racially classifying people of partially European descent emerge in colonial archives and travel accounts from across the Dutch empire should not be seen as the result of a universal racial vision emanating out from the Dutch Republic. Rather, as the Spanish and Portuguese origins of the words suggests, they were part of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iberian legacy upon which many Dutch settlements were built, from Curaçao to Elmina to Cochin, Ceylon, and the Moluccas. The fact that they continued to be used until well into the nineteenth century, however, and especially for population groups expected to be under strict control by authorities, such as military regiments and (former) slaves, suggests their continued relevance for Dutch administrators as tools for creating order in the ambiguity of status presented by people of mixed descent. As growing groups of imperial subjects of 'in-between' status were recruited by the empire with the goal of safeguarding its social order and profits, their racial status was not ignored, but rather further regulated, standardized, and transcribed into institutional records. The gradual acceptance of the existence of natural children born across colonial divides and their co-optation in pursuit of colonial hierarchies thus seems to have fostered, rather than diminished, a conception of race as a meaningful category.

Conclusion

The cases in this chapter show how there was no such thing as a singular status of being 'mixed' in the early modern Dutch empire. The identity and social position of children born across the boundaries set by colonial authorities were highly fluid and indeterminate. Factors in this fluidity of status included not just the attitudes authorities held to 'mixed' children – which as we have seen, were ambivalent in and of themselves, with authorities seeing such individuals as both a problem and a potential asset – but also the social positions and desires of the parents, as well as local circumstances and individuals' life courses. Through the lives of those born across social divides, colonial societies negotiated the terms and limits of belonging within an ongoing process of creolization, and confronted questions about the relation between birth, wealth, religion, and political allegiance.

Children born to European fathers and non-European mothers were just one group – albeit a particularly illustrative one – of people who made up the rich and complex reality of colonial societies. This reality was marked by a constant tension between colonial and communal authorities' desire to categorize and compartmentalize people and maintain hierarchies between them, and on-the-ground sociability that both defied *and* reaffirmed these efforts: men and women from all walks of life engaged in relationships – legal and illicit, born both of violence and genuine affection – that constantly resulted in new connections and identities for themselves

[119] Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, 2:256; Van Wamelen, *Family life*, 421.
[120] Ibid.

and their children. They rarely did so naïvely, with no regard for the realities of differences in status, class, cultural affiliation, and power. Particularly when children came into the picture, men and women alike must have been acutely aware of the ways in which material, institutional, and social resources could shape a child's life, and that the question which parent got to determine this was strongly influenced by their respective positions and local power dynamics. It is not surprising, for example, that on the Gold Coast, where, out of all the places discussed so far, the Dutch had the least established institutional and territorial power or even socio-cultural influence, European fathers also seem to have had the least straightforward control over their sons and especially daughters' futures.

Even in Elmina, however, where matrilineal legal practices and local circumstances strongly empowered well-connected women, mothers are easy to miss when relying on Dutch institutional sources. The records of notaries, courts, and churches across the Dutch empire, so frequently the only written traces remaining of the societies they were produced in, privilege wealthy European fathers just as the institutions themselves did. Similarly, 'mixed' children born between different, non-Christian communities (such as those who would form the extensive and diverse Peranakan-Chinese community in South East Asia) are easy to miss in the VOC and WIC's records, not because they did not exist or because their respective communities did not concern themselves with them, but because the record-producers (the companies and their affiliates) did not consider them as relevant to their political calculations as children born to Europeans. The testaments, court cases, administrators' reports, and baptismal records in this chapter should therefore not be seen as a representative *reflection* of the daily reality for mothers, fathers, and children in the Dutch empire, but as *performances* that themselves shaped that reality in limited but nonetheless extremely impactful ways. Through institutions, the unequal ways in which people were able to engage with them, and the new or renewed ways in which they were categorized by them, a re-negotiated order and hierarchy took shape within the ever-changing, creolizing world of the empire.