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Christian Slavery, Colonialism, and Violence
The Life and Writings of an African Ex-Slave, 1717–1747

DAVID KOFI AMPONSAH

Abstract
This article examines the short but eventful life and writings of Jacobus Johannes Elisa Capitein, the eighteenth-century Gold Coast mulatto ex-slave turned missionary who defended slavery as necessary for the eventual salvation of Africans. I examine the racial assumptions and assertions that were at play in Capitein’s writings and place his views and actions within the context of the religious, political, and economic climates of eighteenth-century Netherlands, Europe more broadly, and the Gold Coast. I complicate the narrative that interprets Capitein’s defense of slavery as a mere alibi intended to garner support for his missionary agenda, contending that reducing his position to his missionary ambition underplays the import of Capitein’s position and the particular circumstances of his life in the Gold Coast. I further explore the existential dilemma that Capitein, an African ex-slave missionary, faced upon his return to his native Gold Coast, and I conclude by suggesting that Capitein’s defense of slavery should be understood as a heuristic and rhetorical device.

Keywords: slavery, Christianity, Gold Coast, violence, conversion

Very few individuals present us with a more limpid yet convoluted imagery of Christianity’s relationship to slavery than the Gold Coast native Jacobus Johannes Elisa Capitein, who penned a thesis defending slavery in 1742.1 When Capitein, the first black ordained minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, wrote his thesis, he was adding his voice to a chorus that was already
widely popular in Europe. However, what most have found intriguing about Capitein’s pro-slavery Christianity—but by no means unique—is the fact that he was at one time himself a slave. The portraiture to be set forth in this article offers a rare window into the uneasy and contested interplay between race, missions, colonialism, empire, and slavery.

The key narrative on Capitein, put forth by Grant Parker, contends that, rather than being a direct defense of slavery, Capitein’s thesis was meant to facilitate his missionary work in Africa and, at the same time, to appease his Dutch benefactors. Jon Sensbach has also argued that African returnee missionaries like Capitein were more preoccupied with the conversion of their fellow Africans than with the issue of slavery. Hence, the principal aim of Capitein’s defense of slavery was to make a case for the proselytization of Africans. Based on the logic of this line of argument, Capitein’s pro-slavery position is rendered secondary to his initial missionary ambition and later work on the Gold Coast. While I agree with the tenor of this argument, it blurs, I argue, three significant issues. First, this line of reasoning arrests a critical examination of indigenous slavery and conceptions of freedom in the Gold Coast society in which Capitein was raised. Second, this assertion fails to adequately account for the place of identity in the Dutch debates about slavery and freedom. Lastly, it elides the subtle yet powerful statements about African (black) subjectivity and religiosity that resolutely colored the racialized historiography of eighteenth-century Europe and, subsequently, Capitein’s position. My analysis complicates both the fascination with Capitein’s status as a black ex-slave vis-à-vis his slavery position and Parker’s position. I contend that by privileging Capitein’s ambition to convert his fellow Africans, Parker stymies the positioning of Capitein’s assent to slavery as a concrete site for analytical exploration, especially in light of the latter’s own life circumstances and his mission to Elmina. It is the interplay between his missionary ambition and the circumstances of his life that tells us most about Capitein’s slavery assent.

So, while I agree with Parker’s thesis, in this article I move beyond it by arguing that Capitein’s slavery defense, which capitulated to the whims of his Dutch benefactors, reconciled slavery to Christianity precisely because in the Akan (Fante) world he knew, slavery and unfreedom—or the notion of one person owning another—was unproblematic. Indeed, various forms of indigenous slavery were present in the southern part of the Gold Coast before, during, and after the Atlantic slave trade. Thus Capitein’s slavery position, I suggest,
might have had more to do both with his “local” and personal understanding and experience of slavery in the Gold Coast and the long history of human enslavement in the world than with his missionary ambition. My argument here is meant not as an apologia for Capitein but to insist that rather than simply subsuming his slavery position under his missionary zeal or casting him as a collaborator of colonialism and slavery—which is a foregone conclusion—and leaving it there, one must, as it were, dig deeper to unearth the complex gamut of particularities that might have underpinned his subscription to slavery. Thus, while I analyze the main argument of Capitein’s dissertation, I am more interested in discussing the historical context of its productions and its implications for the later stage of his life.

While the few books on Capitein provide some information about his time in Elmina, none situates and critically analyzes his return to the Gold Coast in light of his pro-slavery argument. What, for example, was the relationship between, on the one hand, the locals and, on the other, Capitein and the West India Company (WIC)? How did Capitein reconcile his Christian legitimation of the violence of the Atlantic slave trade not just in the New World but also in the Gold Coast, and, more importantly, in the Elmina castle that also served as holding space for slaves awaiting their transplantation? Important to this analysis will be an examination of the implementation of his theological and missionary strategies on the Gold Coast and the obstacles he faced.

Largely understudied because of the longer institutionalization and duration of the British and French empires in Africa, the Dutch tenure on the west coast of Africa, however brief, was marked by a number of episodes between African ethnic groups and Europeans. I highlight one of these to shed light on the complex nature of the Dutch-Elmina relations. Finally, I briefly draw on the biography of Olaudah Equiano and a few other Black Atlantic ex-slave figures to simultaneously highlight Capitein’s orthodoxy and peculiarity in relation to other eighteenth-century black writers.

Early Years: Theological and Intellectual Formation

Capitein was born in 1717 on the Gold Coast to a Dutch father and a local woman from Elmina. Orphaned at the age of eight or nine, Capitein was captured and sold to Arnold Steenhart, who later gifted him to Jacob van Goch, a
fifteen-year veteran of the WIC on the Gold Coast. At the end of van Goch’s mission in 1728—two years into his ownership of the young African boy—he took the ten- or eleven-year-old Capitein to the Netherlands, where the latter gained his freedom by default, since slavery had been legally abolished there following the attainment of Dutch independence from Spain in 1648. Subsequently, Capitein was educated at The Hague Latin School and later at Leiden University, where he became the school’s first black student. He was eventually ordained as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church on May 7, 1742, becoming the first African non-Catholic to be ordained. In the course of his education, he wrote two important documents that outlined his theological and intellectual positions on slavery in the context of Christianity. The first one, entitled *Call of the Heathen*, is no longer extant, but he includes a summary of it in his second and more important work, *Political-Theological Dissertation Examining the Question: Is Slavery Compatible with Christian Freedom or Not?* The second work was putatively submitted to Leiden University in fulfillment of his doctoral degree in theology.

Although Capitein was one of the first black ex-slaves—if not the first—to mount a defense of slavery in Europe, he was by no means the originator of this discourse. The peak of the Dutch slave trade in the seventeenth century brought in its wake an intense debate concerning the compatibility of slavery and Christianity. Argued along theological lines, the debate pitted the *predikanten* (Calvinist ministers), theologians, and jurists against one another. With freedom from Spain not far removed, the Dutch were eager to establish an identitarian distance from their former oppressors who, together with the Portuguese, had dominated the early stages of the Atlantic slave trade. To be Dutch, therefore, was to be against slavery. Marcus Vink has posited that “the discussion over unfree labor overseas was inextricably linked with the soul-searching controversy over ‘Dutchness’ and Dutch identity in the protracted freedom struggle . . . against the ‘unbearable slavery’ by the king of Spain.” Undoubtedly, the Dutch abolition of slavery owed much to the Dutch experience of oppression under the Spaniards. What this reveals is that the 1628 abolition of slavery in the Netherlands had very little to do with theological and moral reasoning and more to do with political motives. Two things about the Dutch slavery ban are worth noting. The ban was effective only in the Netherlands, not the Dutch colonies and protectorates. It did not bar Dutch companies and citizens from participating in the slave trade. Evidently, theirs was a political move that sought to reimagine Dutch society as ultra-liberal
and tolerant compared to other European powers. Of course, these important facts were not lost on Capitein. If anti-slavery—however circumscribed—was at the root of Dutchness, it afforded him the chance to defend slavery and Dutch participation in it without violating one of the principles of Dutch identity.

Among the Dutch ministers, a split between the orthodox and the moderates was marked by allegiances to Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), respectively. Voetius railed against slavery by preaching the equality of all humans and saw the activities of the WIC as subordinating the church to the state. Conversely, Cocceius, a professor of theology at Leiden University, explicitly justified slavery by stating that the biblical injunction against thievery excluded slavery. Later, another minister, theology professor, and follower of Cocceius, Godefridus Udemans (1581–1649), would directly relate the justifiability of slavery to the conversion of slaves.

Udemans argued that slaves ought to be Christianized after a seven-year period of enslavement and then set free by their Christian masters. Two positions become evident in Udemans’s proposition; first, Christians could own slaves, and second, only one group of people were immune to enslavement—Christians. His conditional defense of slavery was premised upon “spiritual over physical freedom, the curse of Canaan, and God’s selection of the Dutch as his chosen people.” In this estimation, the enslavement of heathens—Africans and the myriad of other non-Christian peoples covered under this moniker—was a sine qua non for their Christian conversion, a process described as benevolent despite slavery’s obvious financial benefit to Europeans and its destructiveness for Africans. On the other hand, another minister, Jacobus Hondius, condemned Calvinists and the West and East India Companies for their part in the slave trade. Hondius also accused the two trading companies of not prioritizing the evangelization of indigenous peoples. In fact, Hondius would go ahead and list slavery as number 820 in his infamous Black Register of a Thousand Sins, published posthumously in 1724. It was within this intellectual and theological ferment that Capitein wrote his defense of slavery. As will become clear, Capitein’s argument addressed the priority of conversion of African slaves put forth by Udemans and Hondius.

In Call of the Heathen, written in 1737, before he enrolled at Leiden University, Capitein spelled out his missionary worldview. Arguing for the gospel to be preached to heathens, Capitein drew upon the “myth of Ham”
and contended that the people of the non-Christian world (Gentiles) were the descendants of the biblical Ham and Japheth, adding that they were to be eventually accepted into Christendom as the children of God upon their conversion to Christianity. It is worth noting that the myth of Ham was being used as an apologia for slavery in both Europe and the Americas at the time of Capitein’s writing. It was therefore both paradoxical and strategic that Capitein used it to make a case for the Christianization of blacks in the midst of slavery. The paradox was that the myth, as (mis)interpreted by white Christians, bespoke the inherent inferiority of blacks and their corresponding suitability for slavery. Capitein thus used it as a rhetorical tool to counter this very concept of “natural slavery”—famously put forth by Aristotle—which was backed by the myth. Ignoring the inference that black people were inherently exiled from Christian (and hence free) status, Capitein instead presented the myth as describing only the initially abject position of blacks. He argued that this inferiority was not immutable but could be corrected by Christianity. Clearly then, his deployment of the myth of Ham was strategic: it proposed a path to Christendom, and implicitly freedom, for slaves without undermining the Dutch consensus on black inferiority. Capitein’s “redemptive” appropriation of this myth foreshadowed its use by African American Christians in the nineteenth century to locate blacks in history by mapping black presence and subjecthood onto the Bible. In his calculation, Capitein saw evangelization as a moral imperative, and he urged Christians to spread the Good News to the heathens. It is also in this work that we begin to see the contours of what will become one of the anchors of Capitein’s slavery defense: his emphasis on the evangelization of Africans.

Written amid the debate over slavery and freedom with its surging anti-slavery sentiments and coupled with the belated Dutch involvement in the slave trade, Capitein’s doctoral dissertation that argued for Christianity’s compatibility with slavery earned him popularity within pro-slavery Christian circles in the Netherlands and Germany, as evidenced by his numerous speaking engagements. His defense was based on the premise that freedom, as espoused in the New Testament, was spiritual and not physical. Yet his defense of slavery was not the main reason others were drawn to him; after all, he was not the first to link Christianity and slavery. His greatest allure was the powerful fact that he was a black ex-slave. Faced with declining fortunes in West Africa as a result of both stiff competition from other Europeans powers in the slave trade and an increasing outcry against slavery, the WIC could not have found a better “weapon” to try to silence its critics.
Among the Dutch theologians of the eighteenth century, Hendrik Velse seems to have had the most impact on Capitein in two key ways. First, it was Velse who championed the idea that Capitein be allowed to continue his studies with the understanding that he would later become a missionary in West Africa.18 Second, prior to Capitein’s *Call of the Heathen*, Velse had written an important work on missions, *Naauwkeurige berigten nopens de grondvesting van het Christendom onder de heidenen op de kust van Choromandel en Malabar door de Deensche missionarissen op Tranquebar* (1739), that enumerated successful principles for missionaries, including the use of vernacular languages as media of instruction. Velse’s missionary principles, highlighted by Capitein in his thesis and letters, also centered on the conversion of children and the exemplary lifestyle to be led by missionaries.19 These principles became the guidelines for Capitein’s own missionary strategy in Elmina.

Although the WIC had previously sent chaplains to the Elmina castle, these early European clergymen were primarily responsible for preaching to the European workers of the WIC. As both the ecumenical value of missionization and anti-slavery sentiments increased, the WIC was compelled to respond largely to mitigate criticisms from anti-slavery quarters. In Capitein, they found a double gift. Here was an employee who, as a native African, promised to be more successful at converting his fellow Africans and at deflecting some amount of anti-slavery criticism. More importantly, in Capitein they had an ally who would not interfere with the WIC’s lucrative slave-trading business on the West African coast.

**Bodily Bondage, Spiritual Freedom**

Look at this Moor! His skin is black,
But white his soul, since Jesus Himself prayed for him as high priest,
He goes to teach Faith, Hope and Charity to the Moors,
That they, made white, might honor the Lamb always.20

The history of the Black Atlantic, slavery, and the Afro-Protestant tradition is replete with individuals who believed that slavery was a redemptive divine injunction meant to guarantee their Christianization and civilization, in order that they might return to Africa to shine the light of the Christian gospel on their brothers and sisters living in darkness. Among such notable figures are Olaudah Equiano, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, and Phillis Wheatley.
Harping on this providential discourse, Capitein intimated that God “led me from Africa into the blessed land of Holland; indeed he [God] initiated me into a superior religion and endeavored to hand down to me the rudiments of knowledge.” There are a number of motifs at play in this poignant statement. Africa is “othered” from Holland, which is marked by its superior religion (Christianity) and an intellectual tradition. For Capitein, these were what set the Netherlands apart from his native Gold Coast.

That the psychology of colonialism fosters the desire of the oppressed to valorize the culture of the colonizer is well documented in colonial histories, and I need not belabor that point. Beyond the notion of the superiority of Christianity, however, lies the invention of the illegitimacy of blackness by which Europeans rationalized their racial superiority. As a result, Christianity and whiteness became the normative sites of purity against which not only whites but also some Christianized blacks measured the putative immorality and immutability of black pathology. Perhaps Capitein wished his own conversion to Christianity would serve as a testament to the convertibility and salvation of African heathens. At a time that sightings of blacks were rare in the Netherlands, and knowledge of whom was slowly but surely trickling into Europe’s metropolitan centers via missionaries and merchants, Capitein’s presence literally put him on display.

Beginning with European contacts with other peoples, racialized ideas about progress and development began to take shape, and these would crystallize into imperial alibis by the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Seen as the descendants of the biblical Ham, blacks were invariably consigned to their “natural” status as slaves and would later, through colonialism, be confined to what Dipesh Chakrabarty has aptly called “the waiting room of history,” in need of Christianity in order to achieve progress in their march toward salvation and civilization. Seen against this background, both the epitaph above and Capitein’s own rhetoric positioned him squarely within the narrative, imagining himself as having overcome the negative connotations associated with his blackness and Africanness by achieving whiteness (read Christianization). To be black was to be a heathen and therefore outside of Christendom—but such was the powerful transformative power of Christianity that it could whiten the “dark souls” of Africans, thus rendering their physical blackness inconsequential. Nevertheless, however much Capitein may have believed this rhetoric, blackness was a category whites used to mark themselves off from “less civilized” Africans. Thus, it was anything
but inconsequential. Racialization lay at the heart of the Dutch ban on slavery in the non-applicability of the ban to blacks outside the Netherlands and the ability of Dutch citizens to enslave blacks in its colonies. Rather than being concerned with slavery writ large, the Dutch were preoccupied with the protection of its citizens, who were white, from slavery.

In his summary of the *Call of the Heathen*, Capitein spelled out the key imperatives not only for Christians but also for Christianized Africans of his ilk to evangelize to heathens.24 It becomes obvious that, like William Carey25 and other liberal European utilitarians, Capitein believed that Christians had an obligation to proselytize to all non-Christians of this world—the heathens. However, being an African, he also saw the conversion of his fellow Africans as his utmost responsibility. This position is more explicit in the following:

> I have always thought that the greatest obligation was placed upon me also to be useful to my people at some time. This, I would say, is the greatest obligation, and no injustice. For God, who is to be praised from age to age for the profound richness of his wisdom and foresight, not only led me from Africa to the blessed land of Holland; indeed, he initiated me into a superior religion and endeavored to hand down to me the rudiments of knowledge.

Herein lies the classic discourse of European Christian benevolence that characterizes the writings of Black Atlantic ex-slaves such as Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, and fellow Gold Coast native Ottabah Cugoano. In this rationalization schema, the forced transplantation, enslavement, and subsequent Christianization of Africans in Europe and the Americas were necessary evils in the Christianization and civilization of Africans. Wheatley, whose poems both stunned and captivated audiences in America and Britain, could very well have written the statement above, save for “Holland” in its wording. In her poignant poem, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” Wheatley expressed divine benevolence in her transplantation to the New World:

> ’Twas Mercy brought me from my Pagan land
> Taught my benighted soul to understand
> That there’s a God, that there’s a Savior too:
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
“Their color is a diabolic die.”
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain
May be refin’d, and join th’ angelic train.27

Like Capitein, Wheatley was also interested in pointing out the convertibility and redemptiveness of Africans. If many eighteenth-century black writers sang the praise of Christianity, some went ahead and criticized Christian slavery. Equiano and Cugoano, both Christianized, would write scathing statements about slavery and offer their unabashed support to abolition. In this pursuit of the abolition of slavery, an emphasis on Europe and Christianity’s humanitarian goodwill was virtually unavoidable. Unlike Capitein, Equiano and Cugoano rejected the compatibility of slavery and Christian beliefs. But like him, they argued it was the misplaced culture of America and Europe that promoted slavery. Understood as such, their view on their own conversion experiences and the role of Christians in the Christianization of Africans, much like Capitein’s, is better read as heuristic and rhetorical.

Although Capitein embraced the same progress narrative as these prominent black ex-slaves mentioned above, he was also quite distinct from them. Few ex-slave Africans were able to return to the continent as missionaries as Capitein did. He is also distinguished by his scholarly defense of slavery. That a former slave could offer such a vigorous defense of slavery and be subsequently employed by the WIC, the leading slave-trading company in the world a few decades before, was unprecedented. In respect to the latter point, Capitein stands in sharp contrast to Olaudah Equiano and Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, both of who became ardent anti-slavery advocates after gaining their freedom.28

The central question that vexed the interested parties in the slavery debates in the Netherlands and throughout other parts of Europe was whether the Christian could be enslaved, a dissent which bore major implications for Dutch slave traders and holders. It was this concern, shared by Capitein’s network of slave trade benefactors, that he sought to allay. Capitein summed up his position in the following:

Nevertheless, I have come to the realization that some Christians fear that through evangelic freedom slavery will disappear entirely from those colonies which Christians own, to the great detriment of the overseers of those colonies. Indeed there were once, and still are,
people in the Christian world, especially in the Netherlands, who, led astray by some unknown spirit, have determined that evangelistic freedom cannot coexist with servitude of the body.29

It is from such a statement that Parker’s assertion about Capitein comes into better focus. Indeed, such sentiments against the conversion of slaves to Christianity were very widespread in Europe and elsewhere. It points to the widespread notion among eighteenth-century Europeans that to be Christian was to be free, hence the apprehension surrounding the Christianization of African slaves. Peter Kolchin has noted that bound forms of labor such as slavery, serfdom, and peonage were “the lot of most of humankind” until the nineteenth century.30 The system of serfdom was indeed common in neighboring Germany. Chattel slavery was certainly distinct from European serfdom in its ideological justification through notions of racial and cultural inferiority and its operation within a major international capitalist enterprise.31

Capitein was definitely concerned that anti-evangelization sentiments in Europe could scupper his missionary ambition. He believed that slavery, which dated to the earliest human civilizations, was too entrenched in human society to be abolished. Thus, envisioning no immediate end to the transatlantic slave trade, he would not have viewed writing an anti-slavery thesis to be helpful to his cause. David Brion Davis argues that recent studies tend to overlook “certain continuities and common features in the history of servitude,” and he warns against idealizing serfdom.32 Davis understands the challenge of making an argument for continuities in historical servitude to be the result of pro-slavery and abolitionist rhetoric of the nineteenth century.33 Whereas the former justified New World slavery by emphasizing that it was no different than other historical forms of unfree labor, the latter emphasized the uniqueness of racial subjugation and the profound levels of inhumanity constituting the system.34 Since 1947, the historiography of slavery in the Atlantic has followed the abolitionist strategy, arguing for the uniqueness of slavery in the Americas and rejecting any significant connection with previous forms of servitude.35

However, one cannot also discount the strong possibility that some of Capitein’s numerous benefactors influenced his position on slavery. After all, was not his former slaver in the Gold Coast and benefactor in the Netherlands, Jacob van Goch, affiliated with the WIC? It would have been impossible for him to argue against slavery without offending them. Caught in this conundrum, Capitein decided to, on the one hand, make a case for his
cause and, on the other, to stay faithful to his benefactors. For Capitein, the fact of enslavement ought not prevent Christianization and, hopefully, salvation. On this point, Jon Sensbach notes that Capitein and other early native Gold Coast missionaries such as Christian Protten and Philip Quaque “were motivated by a love of Africa, but their primary desire was to save their land spiritually rather than protect it from the slave trade.” Sensbach further adds that these “early evangelists, envisioning Africa through a new, international Afro-Protestant imagination, were motivated by their own form of antiracist belief. European condescension toward ‘Moors,’ they thought, should not exclude Africa from the possibility of Christian redemption.” Unfortunately for Capitein, he failed to consider that his association with a slave-trading company could hinder his conversion efforts. Ultimately, Capitein’s assent to slavery presented a mixture of intentions. His position was ultimately influenced by his sponsors, his sober reflection that slavery was an incontrovertible fact of life in the Dutch Empire and the world, and his belief that spiritual emancipation trumped physical emancipation in the divine economy.

Soul-Mining in Elmina

Whereas scholars such as Lamin Sanneh and D. N. Livingstone have lauded the work of Christian missionaries, others such as Jean and John Comaroff have characterized them as “vanguards of colonialism.” In Capitein’s case, one of the few English-language books that examine his life describes him as an “Uncle Tom,” an apparent reference to his unwavering allegiance to his numerous European sponsors and his employer in the Gold Coast, the WIC. It is my contention that while we can critique Capitein’s moral judgment as embodied in his writing for being blinded by his idealism and loyalty to his Dutch benefactors, his association with the WIC eventually compromised his missionary work, even according to the terms of his own conditionally pro-slavery perspective. For, as will be demonstrated, although evangelization was the core of Capitein’s moral vision and identity, it was never a priority for trading companies.

Elmina, the scene of Capitein’s missionary site, lies on the southwestern coast of present-day Ghana and was the first point of contact between Europeans and the people of the Gold Coast when the Portuguese arrived in 1471. The Portuguese proceeded to trade with Elminans and later built
the Castle São Jorge da Mina in 1482 to serve as their headquarters. It was in 1637 that the Dutch ousted the Portuguese from Elmina and took control of the castle and the brisk trade that was going on in the area. Subsequently, the Dutch West India Company was established in Amsterdam in 1621 with the objective of monopolizing the trade with Africa and establishing Dutch colonies. While the Dutch involvement in the Atlantic slave trade still remains obscure relative to that of the British, it is significant to note that Capitein’s presence at the Elmina castle coincided with the peak of Dutch engagement in the slave trade, from 1730 to 1775.

The Portuguese introduced Christianity to the Gold Coast on January 20, 1482, at Elmina. The subsequent years witnessed a trickle of various European Protestant missionaries. These early missionaries, who were attached to trading companies, were mainly responsible for preaching to their fellow Europeans in the Gold Coast and were unsuccessful in their few attempts to convert the natives. One such missionary, who also happened to be one of Capitein’s predecessors at the Elmina castle, was Johan C. Schies. In his attempt to evangelize to the locals of Elmina, Schies tried to learn the native Fante language but faced two challenges. First, his “fellow” Dutchmen ridiculed him and, second, his attempt was met with resistance from the local population, culminating in a letter to the executive body of the Reformed Church, the Classis, in 1731. He noted, “I take every pain to learn the language of the Negroes, but the people generally laugh at my efforts. The Negroes do not want me to learn their language and the secrets of their religion.” Schies became frustrated with the lack of support from the WIC and eventually returned to the Netherlands. It was the belief of Capitein and (putatively) his employers that his “native” credentials would erase the distance that had existed between previous European missionaries and the local population.

Capitein was the first African to be ordained by a Protestant church (the Dutch Reformed Church). Having been away in the Netherlands for fifteen years, Capitein returned to Elmina on October 8, 1742, as a missionary in the service of the WIC at the age of twenty-five and immediately began work. Unlike his predecessors at the Elmina castle, Capitein not only was responsible for ministering to the WIC European employees, but was also tasked with converting Africans from their so-called heathenism to Christianity. The WIC employees, however, did not make Capitein’s job easy. They were not particularly enthused about being directed by a native African. It has been pointed out that the Europeans who worked for the WIC came
from the lower ranks of European societies and were therefore uneducated, unlike Capitein. When Capitein arrived in Elmina, he found the practice of WIC workers cohabiting with “pagan” African girls to be so distasteful that he referred the matter to the authorities in Amsterdam, and he suspended administering the Lord’s Supper while he awaited instructions. His radical orthodoxy made him unpopular with the European workers, who then refused to cooperate with him. The mantra “There were no Ten Commandments south of the equator” has been suggested to summarize the attitude of this group of men who had, after all, fled a considerable distance from European Christendom. Thus, one could understand their resistance to any attempt to censure their behavior. It is ironic that while Capitein was trying to convert the locals of Elmina to Christianity, the white workers of the WIC took the near absence of the religion in Elmina as a reason to flout Christian principles. Their actions clearly undermined his proselytizing efforts.

Of greater concern, however, is Capitein’s encounter with the local people of Elmina and his perception of their religion. While this encounter lasted only five years and remains obscure in the available sources, a few important events present an opportunity to analyze it. It is significant to note that Capitein lived and worked from the Elmina castle, which served not only as the seat of the WIC operations in Africa but also as a major transit point for slavery. Slaves were placed in dungeons in the castle for weeks before they were eventually loaded onto ships bound for the New World. Despite the well-known fact that slavery was present in the Elmina region before the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade, it is necessary to ask what his association with the WIC and the castle meant to the Africans. How, in fact, some of that dynamic played out will become clear in what follows.

Capitein’s Pro-Slavery Christianity

Within two weeks of his arrival, Capitein had impressed the director-general of the WIC in Elmina so much that the latter wrote a letter to his superiors in Amsterdam praising the work of the new chaplain. In a report attached to his second letter to the WIC, Capitein indicated that he had set up a school for the black and mulatto children, in line with Velse’s aforementioned methodology of targeting heathen children. However, he encountered difficulties with enrollment, and the few children who enrolled were sporadic attendees,
limiting the daily number to eighteen to twenty students. These children were also mostly the servants of white employees of the company, an indication that Capitein was having very little success attracting the majority of the native children who were not affiliated with the castle. Capitein identified the “deplorable ignorance” of the benefits of literacy as the problem.

To correct this anomaly, he directly petitioned the elders of Elmina, and subsequently forty-five children enrolled at his school. In the same report, Capitein indicates that he impressed upon the elders that the Christianization of children was a policy of the WIC, and that Elminans, “being legal dependents” of the company, were to comply with the directive “without further delay.” Capitein’s directive presents an interesting case for charting the relations between the Dutch and the locals. Technically speaking, Elmina was not a Dutch colony, although in the early eighteenth century the Dutch believed Elmina was their sovereign territory. However, it is unlikely the locals saw themselves as Dutch subjects. The Dutch presence and participation in the slave trade would lead to the “emergence of a militarized elite that regulated trade; consequently, the so-called slaving frontier (or catchment area for human victims of the Atlantic slave trade) moved farther inland over the course of the eighteenth century.” What is clear, as Shumway points out, is that the majority of Africans put in place various measures to buffer the effects of the slave trade.

Whatever the degree of influence Capitein exerted, it was clear that after spending fifteen years in the Netherlands since the age of eight, he had to go through a process of reintegrating himself into the society he had left behind. He sought to achieve this in two ways. First, he relearned the vernacular Fante language and as a result translated a Christian catechism and the Ten Commandments into Fante in 1744. Second, in a letter he wrote to the WIC authorities in Amsterdam on February 15, 1743, barely six months into his tenure as Elmina chaplain, Capitein stated his intention to marry:

For the happier advance and more rapid achievement of this my great objective, I now find, after long deliberation, that it would not be a bad thing were I to take a wife, through a lawful marriage, a young negress who was not only born here in Elmina, but has shown herself to be fitter for and better capable of education than most. For by this means I intend at first to win the affection and trust of the negroes here in Elmina, since they would then be able to see that, although
I differ from them in manner of life and in religion, they are nevertheless not despised by me, and that my coming to this country is in their best interest.⁵⁸

Evidently, Capitein was fully aware of his outsider position despite being a native of the Gold Coast. Since the African woman was not a Christian, she had to be converted before Capitein could marry her. Although no one at the Elmina castle was deemed suitable to educate the woman “without exciting scandal,” she eventually received the education needed for her conversion.⁵⁹ When the African woman was nearing conversion, Capitein, in a subsequent letter to the WIC, reiterated his desire to go ahead with his plan. It is revealing that the WIC never responded to Capitein’s earlier letters or missionary report until he indicated his readiness to go ahead with his proposed marriage to the African woman. The WIC’s response came in the person of Antonia Ginderdros, a Dutch woman from The Hague, who was sent to Elmina to be married to Capitein without prior notice to him.⁶⁰ Whether Capitein knew Antonia from his time in The Hague is unclear. Regardless, they married on October 3, 1745.

The above episode indicates just how much control the WIC exerted over Capitein’s life, for there is no further evidence of the WIC sending future wives to their employees overseas. What was to be gained by shipping Capitein a Dutch wife? Going by Capitein’s own rationale for making the request, it can easily be surmised that his marriage to Antonia further alienated him from the local community, especially because he had to renege on his proposal to a local woman in the process.

In a colonial, oppressive, racist, and dehumanizing context such as this, it is surprising that none of the books on Capitein touch on the issue of power relations in Capitein’s encounter with the local people. Even though, as noted, Elmina was not officially a Dutch colony, Elminans could not have been oblivious to the Dutch economic and military might. The relationship between the people of Elmina and the WIC was not always cordial or mutual. Although H. M. Feinberg has rightly noted that the Dutch had little control over Elmina and its surrounding areas,⁶¹ evidence from his own work indicates that he downplayed the weakness of the Dutch. Between 1739 and 1740, roughly two years before Capitein came back to Elmina, there were a series of armed conflicts between the two factions. The WIC attacked and destroyed large parts of Elmina, leaving 427 people dead and 13 seriously wounded.⁶² The terrorism of the WIC could not have engendered anything but widespread
animosity and fear toward it and all affiliated with it. In his capacity as the second-highest-ranking official of the WIC, Capitein’s potential to visit terror on the locals could not have been lost on them. As the headquarters of the WIC, coupled with its imposing appearance, the Elmina castle was a symbol of enormous power.

Another issue also played a role in the people’s perception of Capitein: race. It is noteworthy that many of the prominent Elminan wholesale dealers in slaves were mulattoes, the offspring of European soldiers or traders and local women. Many of these people eventually became so rich that some of them are believed to have loaned money to the director of the Elmina castle when, for some reason, “communications with the mother country broke down and salaries could no longer be paid.” Clearly, this class of people saw themselves and was seen as different from full-blooded Africans. Perhaps Capitein’s intended marriage to an African woman was not only to reintegrate himself into Elminan society after a fifteen-year absence but also to legitimize his own African identity.

Irrespective of the fact that the people of Elmina partook in the Atlantic slave trade, Capitein’s association with the WIC was symbolically powerful, and it is this very link, I argue, that partly derailed his missionary efforts. Although a lot of material on Capitein has been lost, the available sources indicate his missionary efforts did not yield much. His plan to build a boarding school at Elmina for the purpose of removing the children from their heathen world never materialized. Besides the aforementioned plausible causes of his apparent failure, a few other circumstances shed some light.

During his five-year chaplaincy at the Elmina castle, Capitein incurred a rather large amount of debt. In one of his annual reports to his superiors in Amsterdam, the director-general of the WIC in Elmina, Peter de Jacobson, noted that this happened because Capitein was inclined toward trade. He further noted that Capitein lost his missionary enthusiasm as a result of this inclination. Hans Debrunner’s examination of early chaplain employees of trading companies in the Gold Coast offers us some insight into Capitein’s engagement in commerce. He indicates that the inadequacy of money on the coast meant that chaplains were “partly or wholly paid in goods.” He further cites the example of Rev. Trane, a Moravian chaplain at the Christiansborg castle in Accra, who complained, “I have to take my salary in goods and yet I am not allowed to trade.” So even though Capitein’s official salary was pegged at a hundred guilders a month, it was drastically devalued after he was
partly paid in goods. His dabbling in trade therefore seems to have been the norm rather than the exception. The fact that Capitein ran into debt only betrays his lack of business acumen.

Another dimension of Capitein’s life brings us to an even better understanding of his engagement in commerce. In one of his letters to the WIC, Capitein laments the nonpayment of his salary for a while. In that same letter, Capitein instructs that three hundred guilders (one-quarter of his annual salary) be paid to his former slaver and benefactor, Jacobus van Goch, as a result of his “everlasting obligation” to him.69 It is not exactly clear why Capitein had to make this payment to his former master. Was this “everlasting obligation” a mandatory repayment for what van Goch had spent on him during his time in the Netherlands, or was it merely a gesture of Capitein’s gratitude? We may never know. But given his meager resources and the lack of support from the WIC, it is unlikely Capitein willingly took this additional financial strain upon himself. Capitein had no option but to engage in trade in order to support himself and perhaps his missionary projects.

In a rather long letter dated July 1, 1745, Capitein asked to be relieved of his missionary responsibilities: “Your Excellencies will allow me hereby to request in the most humble and respectful manner that I be relieved of my duties.”70 He had stumbled upon an old church and Baptismal Register, which showed the deplorable state of the church in times past and the almost nonexistent commitment of the WIC to the chaplaincy office. He found those past conditions not dissimilar to his own and saw in them an indication of his own inevitable failure. If Capitein had been extremely courteous and subservient in his previous letter, the tone of this letter was markedly different. His frustration with his supervisors became more pronounced when he saw the failures of his predecessors. Capitein’s resignation threat revealed the extent of his frustration, given that his very livelihood was tied to the WIC.

In addition to all these problems, Capitein also had to deal with noncommunication between the governing body of the Dutch Reformed Church (the Classis) and the WIC, a matter for which he was not at fault. In a 1746 letter, the Classis asked Capitein to explain why he had not reported to them since his departure to Elmina, to which request Capitein pointed to the terms of his appointment with the WIC.71 It was unknown to the Classis that Capitein had already married a Dutch woman, for they chastised him for his desire “to contract with a woman who is reported to be a heathen still.”72 Concerning this issue, Capitein asked the Classis an important question in his reply. Since there were barely any Christian women in Elmina, he wanted to know whom
the Christian men were supposed to marry, noting that they could not all possibly marry European women like he had been made to do.73

Judging by the WIC’s lackadaisical support of Capitein’s missionary work, it is apparent that the idea of spreading the gospel to the heathens was only an excuse for the WIC to further strengthen its economic hold on the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, this was lost on Capitein, who truly believed that it was the company’s objective to spread Christianity. It was not the WIC’s intention to embark on a civilizing mission that included Christianizing Africans. This is borne out by the fact that trading companies recorded negligible successes in spreading the Christian gospel wherever they went. This is because trade and profits were first and conversion an afterthought. Unfortunately, Capitein bought into the facade and became the pawn of the WIC. It is notable that, unlike Capitein, the previous Elmina castle chaplains were primarily responsible for ministering to the WIC European workers. The WIC tasked Capitein with the conversion of the Africans not necessarily because he was one of them but because they understood he was not going to condemn slavery. After all, who was better qualified, as it were, to keep the peace than an African ex-slave turned missionary reputed for claiming slavery was compatible with Christian teachings.

Capitein’s untimely death in 1747 at the age of thirty was possibly partly caused by the numerous problems he encountered in Elmina. His life reveals an existential dilemma illuminated by his writing. Despite the illegality of slavery in the Netherlands at the time of Capitein’s arrival, the reality of his putative freedom must be questioned given the circumstances surrounding his stay and education in the country. His time as a slave in the Gold Coast was likely devoid of any physical or manual labor, not unlike his status in the Netherlands. Thus the difference in the shift in his legal status from slave to freed man was purely symbolic. In light of events surrounding his time in both the Gold Coast and the Netherlands, I proffer that Capitein’s freedom ought to be considered heavily qualified since his agency—per Foucault’s notion of governmentality—was largely constituted through others’ control.74 Parker rightly suggests the possibility of Capitein’s “social death” as a “naturally alienated” individual.75 In insisting that biblical freedom related to “spiritual” rather than “physical” freedom, Capitein might as well have been describing his own predicament.

His aforementioned experience in Elmina clearly attests to this idea. His frustration at the neglect of his employers would see him drift into exploring business opportunities. His death at the fairly youthful age of thirty and the absence of a marked grave has led to the speculation that Capitein must have
committed suicide. Although that scenario is not entirely impossible given the conditions he worked under, the mortality rate of the employees of the WIC on the Gold Coast was very high, and Capitein’s death may well have been of natural causes.\textsuperscript{76}

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to delineate a much more complex lens with which to interpret Capitein’s assent to slavery in the eighteenth century. My approach here, while building on the works of Grant Parker, Caryl Philips, David Northrup, and Jason Young, complicates the scholarly understanding of Capitein by examining the full facet of conditions that impacted his assent to slavery and his subsequent life in Elmina. I have argued that the fascination with Capitein’s slavery defense, then and now, stems from this lack of a fuller appreciation of this eighteenth-century figure. And while his defense of slavery is not original, he won much attention for it as a result of his race and his ex-slave status. Indeed, seventeenth-century Dutch (and in general European) discourse about religion and slavery evidences the theological or biblically inflected nature of racial imaginations in which whites were constructed as the people of God—“chosen people”—and blacks as the kind needing to be delegitimized or explained (away)\textsuperscript{77}

This biblical mapping of racial bodies was not only rhetorical violence; it also found expression in physical violence. Since there was no popular Dutch opposition to slavery and unity eluded the few Dutch abolitionists for decades, Capitein’s treatise was largely responding to the anti-slavery positions emanating from other parts of Europe.\textsuperscript{78} In the end, Capitein’s position on slavery was one that was particularly Dutch. If Capitein was aware of the racial dimensions of his argument—and it is inconceivable to think he was not—he did not address them. Conversion to Christianity might have guaranteed the “salvation” of African souls, but it did not minimize the suffering and pain that attended slavery in the New World. Speaking of U.S. colonialism, Jason Young has pointed out, “The very idea of race, so crucial in the development of national identities in the mother country and in their extension in the colony, was based on notions of ‘racial difference inherited from the pre-modern era.’”\textsuperscript{79} It is evident that Capitein ignored the racialized framework within which Africans were othered, believing that salvation in the afterlife was more paramount than freedom on earth.
Notes

I would like to thank David Hempton who read the first draft of this article and offered some suggestions. I also benefited immensely from the comments of JOAR’s three anonymous reviewers. My gratitude also goes to Alyssa Liles-Amponsah for reading my early drafts. All shortcomings are, of course, mine.


2. Although Capitein would legally gain his freedom upon his arrival in the Netherlands, the “extent” of his freedom remains in question because he literally lived at the mercy of his “former” owner and other benefactors. Despite his formal non-slave status, the circumstances of his life tell the story of a man whose life others decidedly defined.


5. See Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 7; and Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 10. It should be noted that the ban only applied to the practice of slavery within the geopolitical confines of the Netherlands. Dutchmen and Dutch companies like the WIC and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were at liberty to trade in and hold slaves as long as they kept them in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Caribbean. It becomes evident that the ban on slavery was not an indictment of the institution; rather, it was meant to protect the putative racial, moral, religious, and cultural superiority of the Dutch from heathen infestation.

6. Kpobi notes that there is a level of uncertainty surrounding Capitein’s attainment of a doctoral degree. While Capitein is on record as having enrolled at Leiden University and defended his doctoral dissertation, there is no record attesting to the conferment of the doctoral degree. See Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 51.

7. Markus P. M. Vink, “A Work of Compassion? Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indiana Ocean in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Contingent Lives: Social Identity and Material Culture in the VOC World*, ed. Nigel Worden (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2007), 468. This is a reference to the period before and during what is normally called the “Eighty Years War,” during which the Dutch successfully freed themselves from Spanish occupation and control. The 1628 abolition of slavery in the Netherlands owed much to the Dutch experience of oppression under Spain. The implication is that the 1628 abolition was based more on political than theological grounds, a point that Capitein made sure to emphasize. See Capitein’s dissertation in Grant Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 128–29. That is to say that “Dutchness” or Dutch identity was based on a liberalist view that positioned Dutch society as tolerant compared to other Western European
countries. However, the “neutral” position of the Dutch Reformed Church on the slave trade was a fallacious attempt to evade the issue even as some of its members benefited financially from slavery. For the neutrality of the Dutch Reformed Church on slavery, see Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 70.


10. Vink, “A Work of Compassion?”

11. Ibid., 473.

12. Ibid., 472. It should come as no surprise that trading companies had little interest in the evangelization of slaves and free indigenous populations. Evangelization was one of the few areas where these companies had to spend money on salaries and materials while recouping few, if any, monetary benefits.

13. The “myth of Ham,” taken from Genesis 9, was the (mis)interpretation of the Bible by slavery proponents that blacks were descended from Ham and that since his father Noah cursed him and his descendants, blacks were condemned to slavery. Japheth, another one of Noah’s sons, found favor with Noah and is believed to be the progenitor of Europeans, who were then inherently superior to blacks. However, according to the Genesis story, only Ham’s son Canaan was cursed, not Ham or any of his other descendants. See David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009); Sylvester A. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).


18. Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 8. Even though there is a hint that Capitein harbored a missionizing ambition prior to Velse’s intervention, at a closer examination of his thesis, one cannot help but infer that this decision was also greatly influenced by his benefactors. Also, see the impulse for Capitein’s study of theology on page 90.


20. This epitaph, written as a poem by Capitein’s friend Brandyn Ryser, appeared as a caption on a popular picture of Capitein that was widely circulated in the Netherlands and Germany during the eighteenth century, illustrating his wide appeal and popularity and the fact that he had literally become the face (poster boy) of Christian slavery in Western Europe, adorning the walls of living rooms in the Netherlands. See Albert Eekhof, *De Negerpredikant Jacobus Eliza Johannes Capitein 1717–1747* (Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1917), 20, quoted in Hans Debrunner,
A History of Christianity in Ghana (Accra: Waterville Publishing, 1967), 66; Henri van der Zee, “Jacobs Capitein: A Tragic Life,” in Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations, ed. Ineke Van Kessel (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2002), 72–79. Note that the English designation “Moor” derived from the words mauros (Greek), maure (French), more (Italian), and moro (Spanish), which denoted the Muslims of Iberia. The term was variously used to signify non-Europeans, non-Christians, and dark peoples of this world. Jon Sensbach notes that the term culturally marked off Europeans from all non-Europeans; see Sensbach, Rebecca’s Revival, 169; and Sylvester Johnson, “The Rise of Black Ethnics: The Ethnic Turn in African American Religions,” in Religion and American Culture 20, no. 2 (2010): 134. It is also noteworthy that the names of African countries such as Mauritania, Mauritius, and Morocco most likely derive from the various European languages’ renderings of the adjective Moor, an apparent reference to the racial, cultural, and religious peopling of these places vis-à-vis Europe and its people.


23. Van der Zee, “Jacobs Capitein,” 73.

24. See Parker, The Agony of Asar, 82. Capitein notes that

(1) In general, it is incumbent on all true Christians to promote diligently those means which enable this conversion of the heathen, God willing, to develop, whether independently or with the help of others.

(2) In particular, the task has been entrusted to those who are linked to this or that tribe, from which they themselves were converted to Christianity. This is found to be the situation when converts devote themselves to missionary work.

25. William Carey was an English Baptist missionary to India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His largely influential text challenged Christians to take up the mantle of converting heathens around the world. See William Carey, An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens (1792; repr., London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1961).


28. See Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself, 2nd ed. (London: T. Wilkins, 1789), and Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and
I must point out that while these men are believed to have experienced the horrors of enslavement in the New World, Capitein did not undergo this experience. Since slavery had been outlawed in the Netherlands, it stands to reason that his experience as a slave was limited to the two years of his childhood spent on the Gold Coast, and even in that case, it is unlikely he labored intensively. So it is not inconceivable that these men’s different experiences influenced their views on slavery. Nonetheless, the history of pro-slavery arguments by New World black ex-slaves who underwent slavery is also well-known.

31. David Brion notes that the serf is not part of the market demand for “a mobile labor market force,” and neither is the serf tied to a system intent on maximizing the production of agricultural commodities “thereby escaping the worst pressures and insecurities of slavery.” See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.
32. Ibid., 29.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Christian Protten was also a Gold Coast mulatto who was sent to Denmark to study theology. He returned to the Gold Coast as a missionary with the WIC. Protten is well known for his translation of a catechism into Fante and Ga and for being the first to write a grammar of those languages. See Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 62–63, 74–75, 92. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 162–247.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 70–71.
41. Despite this widely recognized date, there have been other suggestions that perhaps European contact with the Gold Coast dates much earlier. See C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, vol. 1 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 81–89; Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 13.

42. Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16–17. It must be pointed out however that in contrast to their success in the Indonesian archipelago and parts of the Caribbean, the Dutch failed to establish a significant colonial presence on the African coast, with the exception of Elmina and the port of Luanda, which they captured in 1641.

43. Ibid., 20.


50. Ibid., 239.

51. Ibid., 239.

52. Ibid., 240–41.

53. Ibid.


56. Ibid., 7.


58. Ibid., 235.

59. Ibid., 236, 241. This information is contained in two of Capitein’s letters to the WIC authorities in Amsterdam. These letters were written on February 15, 1743 and April 18, 1743.


62. H. M. Feinberg, “An Incident in Elmina-Dutch Relations,” *African Historical Studies* 3, no. 2 (1970): 362. In the official WIC record, the number of dead is reported as 414. In addition to the murders, the natives’ houses were also razed.

63. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 81. Indeed, a high-ranking official of the WIC, Willem Carstaris, was said to be so loathed by the natives, presumably for his wrong deeds, that he was confined to the castle premises, fearing for his life. Beginning on January 5, 1740, two years before capitein’s return to the Gold Coast, Elmina was surrounded by 30,000 Fante soldiers, called in by the WIC director-general, William Des Bordes, to attack Elmina. The disputes revolved around the issues of trade and territorial sovereignty. See Dantzig, *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast*, 340–50.


68. Ibid.


70. Ibid., 246–48.

71. Ibid., 249–53. Capitein reminded the Chassis that although he was ordained in the Dutch Reformed Church, the terms of his appointment as chaplain at the Elmina Castle demanded him to report to the WIC authorities in Amsterdam only. He also explained that he did not have to write to both bodies since it was his knowledge that they were in constant communication.

72. Ibid., 249–50.

73. Ibid., 252.


77. Johnson offers one of the clearest explications of Christianity’s uncontestable role in the formulation of a dehumanizing racist discourse, particularly as it pertains to the American context—and globally for that matter. Johnson points out that the idea of white Americans as the “people of God” was integral not only to the founding of the United States, but also to the oppression, enslavement, and killing of Native Americans and Africans. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in

78. P. C. Emmer explains that the Dutch generally demonstrated a lackadaisical approach or apathy to the abolition of slavery because the ban had been an order from the monarch rather than a result of mass protests. In addition, most of the Dutch abolitionists were either professors or clergy who conducted their debates in “peace and quiet.” See Emmer, *The Dutch Slave Trade, 1500–1850*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 126–27.