

ARMOSYN

REVISITED

Finis can never be written to a story such as this. The possibility always exists that at some future date other untapped sources may reveal further pieces of this jigsaw and so present a fuller picture of the family of the fascinating *Armosyn Claas van de Kaap*.
Margaret Cairns

Additional primary source material on the Company Slave Lodge matron and later free-black ARMOSYN CLAASZ has emerged: two earlier wills have been found; the fate / whereabouts of her daughter MARIA STUART and grandson ABASALOM BAREND CLEEF are further clarified; Armosyn's brother, the Lodge schoolmaster (*schoolmeester*) CLAAS CORNELISZ - likewise equally well-placed in the Slave Lodge hierarchy and also given to formalising legally his personal affairs, is introduced and Armosyn's parentage investigated. The writer is indebted to the late Margaret Cairns for her ever-generous help and for kindly having allowed him access to her personal papers.

Margaret Cairns pioneered biographical and genealogical research on **Armosyn Claasz**¹ - one of the VOC-occupied Cape of Good Hope's earliest recorded locally-born slave women. Her findings she published in 1979². Since then, there has been little new primary research on Armosyn Claas. Cairns states unequivocally that "Armosyn held a privileged position in the world of freeblack women". Land grants to free-blacks were infrequent. Although Armosyn's grant was the 16th one of such grants, she was only the third grantee to be a free-black woman.³ Her former position as matron – *matres* or *matrice* - of the Slave Lodge eased her peculiar transition from Company slave to free citizen. She left a unique legacy of detailed and personalised testamentary bequests (still housed in the Cape Archives Repository in Cape Town) to both her free and unfree(d)

¹ Also found as *Armosij*, *Armosy*, *Harmosiy de cleine*, *Klein Armosi slavin*, *Klein Armosi slavin van de Comp[agnie]*, *de vrij Swartinne / de vrij Swartin Armosijn Claasz*, *Armosijn Claasse van de Caab*, *Armozijn van de Caab* and *Armozijn Claasse* .

² See her article 'Armosyn Claasz of the Cape and her Family, 1661-1783 [*sic*]', featured in *Familia: Quarterly Journal of the Genealogical Society of South Africa*, vol. XVI, no. 4, pp. 84-89 & 92-99.

³ The first grant was to **Angela van Bengale** (9 December 1690) - the Cape's first imported slave woman to be granted land. The second grant was to the Cape-born **Maria Hansdogter** (11 December 1691) - the first Cape-born 'half-caste' or *halfslag* to be granted land. The third grant was to **Armosyn van de Caab** (30 June 1708 - the first Cape-born *heelslagh* to be granted land.

heelslagh and *halfslagh* children. In this regard alone, Armosyn, stands virtually in a league of her own.

Recently, popular writer Karel Schoeman has centered a number of his writings around Armosyn Claasz⁴. It was Cairns who *liberated* Armosyn out of the shadows. It is Schoeman, however, who popularises her. Promoting Armosyn as an important historical and socio-political icon of the early colonial Cape, his secondary version of Armosyn serves as a backdrop explanation for her pietistic blood descendant - the famous ‘mission helper’ and devout Christian: **Machtelt Smit** or **Mother Smith**⁵ - whom Schoeman considers to be the first South African-born to achieve fame in her own right (“die eerste gebore Suid-Afrikaanse vrou wat in eie reg bekendheid verwerf het”). The two women form links in the chain of a newly-conscious complexity (and complexion) of ‘Afrikaner’ social, cultural and political development. Armosyn is presented as a ‘representative’ early Cape ancestral figure and historical leit-motiv. Only in two significant aspects does Schoeman augment Cairns’s research. He endorses Hans Heese’s theory that Armosyn’s mother was “in all probability a slave from West Africa” and mentions the free-burgher **Cornelis Claasz** (from Utrecht) as the likely biological father.⁶

Research into primary archival sources subsequent to the pioneering research of Cairns reveals greater complexity involving, and surrounding, the life of the historical Armosyn Claasz. The discovery of her brother **Claas Cornelisz van de Caab**⁷ – a former *schoolmeester* in the Lodge and thereafter a prominent free-black at the Cape settlement and his lawful wife **Beatrice van Cochin**⁸ (c. 1650-1720) (former *matres* and Armosyn’s predecessor at the Lodge) – also reveals an Armosyn by no means in limbo but actually having ‘connections’.

The name Armosyn

Had Armosyn Claasz’s mother been of West African origin, it seems odd that her mother would have chosen to name her daughter after this exotic silk material originating from the East. Although the Cape’s slave population was predominantly West African at the time of Armosyn Claasz’s birth (c. 1659 or 1661), there were also Asian and Madagascan

⁴ See his ‘Kaapse Stamouers: Die Voorsate van Machtelt Smit, 1661-1749’, *Kronos: Journal of Cape History* no. 23 (Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, Bellville November 1996), pp. 36-42; his *Dogter van Sion: Machtelt Smit en die 18de-eeuse samelewing aan die Kaap, 1749-1799* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town 1997) & his latest two-volume work: *Armosyn van die Kaap: Voorspel tot vestiging, 1415-1651* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town 2000) & *Armosyn van die Kaap: Die Wereld van ‘n slavin, 1652-1733* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town 2002).

⁵ See “Schmidt Machtelt”, *Dictionary of South African Biography* (DSAB), vol. I, p. 694 // SABW, vol. I, pp. 724-725.

⁶ Schoeman has subsequently revised his portrayal of Armosyn, see his *Armosyn van die Kaap: Die Wêreld van ‘n slavin, 1652-1733* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town 2002) & *Early slavery at the Cape of Good Hope 1652-1717* (Protea Book House, Pretoria 2007).

⁷ He signed his name **Claas Cornelisz**. He is also found as **Claas Cornelis** and **Claas Cornellussen van de Caap**.

⁸ Also found as **Matries**, **Beatrix van Couchin**, **Beretrice van Coutchin**, **Bertres Cornelisse van Coutzien**, **Bertries van Couchin** and **Bertrise van Couchin**.

slaves living at the Cape - mostly privately owned by officials and free-burghers.⁹ We know of at least two Company slave women from the East – both convicts (*bandieten*).¹⁰ The fact that there were **two** recorded contemporaneous women both named **Armosyn** (both Cape-born and both Company slaves) also complicates the issue. These are termed **Armosyn I**¹¹ and **Armosyn II**, the latter being Armosyn Claasz.

The two Armosyns

Two aspects need to be clarified when distinguishing the two Armosyns:

- whether they were *heelslagh*¹² or *halfslagh*¹³; and
- if Cape-born, why were they baptised at the Cape as adults (*bejaardes*) and not as infants?

The records are unambiguous in stating that Armosyn I was Cape-born and *halfslagh*. The same cannot be said for Armosyn II (Armosyn Claasz) who, although also Cape-born, appears never to be recorded *halfslagh*.¹⁴ This important distinction explains why their respective manumissions differ fundamentally from each other. Armosyn I, unlike Armosyn II, is never found recorded as a *swartinne*. In the case of freed *halfslagh* women, we are invariably reminded of their white paternity. Resolutions by the Council of Policy specifically mention white paternity when liberating Company-owned *halfslagh* slave women. The fact that they all were single mothers to children by white men appears to have proved a further incentive for their manumission on the understanding that marriage would be the outcome. Armosyn I was freed at the age of 28¹⁵, while Armosyn II (if we accept her year of manumission to be *c.* 1702) was freed at the age of 40. As a Cape-born *heelslagh* slave, she was legally entitled to her freedom after 40 years service subject to certain conditions. Cape-born Company slaves who were not *halfslagh* had to serve for 40 years (plus payment) before qualifying for manumission whereas imported

⁹ The muster roll (1663) indicates 55 slaves belonging to the Company: 11 men & 10 women from Guinea, 5 men & 12 women from Angola, 6 slaves from Madagascar & 2 slaves from Batavia & 27 children (see Anna J. Böeseken, *Slaves and Free Blacks at the Cape 1658-1700*, pp. 14, n. 67 & 24).

¹⁰ **Groote Catrïjn van Paliacatta** (*c.* 1631-*c.* 1683) and **Susanna Een Oor van Bengale** (executed 1669). The former's progeny has been identified but not all those of the latter (see M.G. Upham, 'In Hevigen Woede - Groote Catrïjn: earliest recorded female convict (*bandiet*) at the Cape of Good Hope – a study in upward mobility', *Capensis*, no. 3 (1997), pp. 8-33; 'Maaij Ansela & the Black Sheep of the Family', *Capensis*, no. 2 (1998), p. 27 & 'Consecrations to God: The 'nasty, brutish, and short' life of Susanna from Bengal otherwise known as 'One Ear' - 2nd recorded female convict at the VOC-occupied Cape of Good Hope', *Capensis*, no. 3 (2001), pp. 10-23).

¹¹ Also found as *een beiaerde Companijs meit* **Groot Armosy**, **Grote Armosy**, **Armosy de grote**, **Armosijn van de Caap** & **Armozijn van de Caab**.

¹² *Heelslagh* = 'full-caste' or full-blood (refers generally to non-white slaves having no white admixture). These were further distinguished by the 17th century Dutch *inter alia* as *neger*, *caffer*, *indisch*, *chinees* etc.

¹³ *Halfslagh* = 'half-caste' (slaves having white or European admixture).

¹⁴ Of all her recorded children, only her infant son **Frans** and her youngest child **Machteltje** are recorded as being *halfslagh*. The children of her daughters **Manda Gratia** & **Maria Stuart** appear to have been mostly (if not all) *halfslagh* as opposed to *kasties* (ie the term used for children that would have been only a quarter black (or white?))

¹⁵ Being *halfslagh* she was entitled to her freedom already at the age of 22.

Company slaves only had to serve 30 years.¹⁶ She was already in occupation of her *erf* (granted belatedly 30 June 1708) as early as 20 April 1702.¹⁷ Armosyn II's brother, **Claas Cornelisz van de Caab**, who is recorded as being a *halfslagh* Cape-born Company slave, also appears to have been manumitted long before his (presumably *heelslagh*) sister. The fact that they have differing patronymics is telling.

The Company appears to have been consistent in baptising all its slave children born at the Cape.¹⁸ Why would the two Armosyns (and Claas Cornelis?) have been excluded? Why were the two Armosyns baptised only later and with *un*-Christian names? It is possible that Company slave mothers who were not Christian, but loyal to their own religion, could refuse to surrender their children to baptism. Followers of Islam, in particular, would fall into such a category. The slaves brought from Guinea were unlikely to have been baptised prior to their arrival at the Cape, whilst those from Angola and captured from the Portuguese were likely to have been baptised *en masse* prior to their capture by the Dutch. The validity of Papist (even mass?) baptisms appears to have been accepted in principle by the Dutch.¹⁹ The abnormally high mortality rate and desertion amongst the slaves from Angola and Guinea from the time of their arrival at the Cape – in particular the spring of 1661 – may have resulted in incomplete record-keeping. Motherless children in particular, could conceivably have escaped infant baptism. Are there likely to have been many such children?

Significantly, it was in this period that the two Armosyns and Cornelis Claasz were born at the Cape. An indubitable recorded baptism for Claas Cornelisz still evades the writer, either as infant or as adult. Privately-owned slave children, more often than not, were seldom baptised by their owners. Should any of these have been sold or resold to the Company (though not a common feature), the possibility exists that some slaves could end up in the Lodge as *un*-baptised slave children. Records of these sales to the Company by officials appear to exist, but those by free-burghers do not. We know for instance that outgoing commander **Jacob Borghorst** sold his slaves to the Company before leaving the Cape as did the free-burgher **Thomas Christoffel Müller** (from Leipzig). The former is directly recorded²⁰, whilst the latter transaction is merely mentioned indirectly²¹.

¹⁶ Cape Archives (CA): C 700 (*Memorien en Instructien*, 1657-1699), p. 217); Anna J. Böeseken, *Slaves and Free Blacks of the Cape, 1658-1700*, p. 46.

¹⁷ J. Leon Hattingh, 'Grondbesit in die Tafelvallei. Deel I, Die eksperiment. Grondbesit van Vryswartes', *Kronos*, vol. 10 (1985), p. 45, n. 2.

¹⁸ Records are non-existent only for the period (8 April 1663 – 28 August 1665) – a period of two years & four months. The majority of infant slave baptisms are recorded previously in the Company Journal, but the children and the parents are not mentioned individually by name.

¹⁹ For policy directives on baptism at the Cape (including Papists [Roman Catholics] and slaves), see Ds. Johannes Overney's letter (c. 1678) to the *Classis* Amsterdam in C. Spoelstra, *Bouwstoffen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederduitsch-Gereformeerde Kerken in Zuid-Afrika*, Deel I, pp. 28-29.

²⁰ Commander **Jacob Borghorst** sold all twelve of his slaves at cost price (f 2 842:10:0) to the Company before he left the Cape (March 1670) [see RPR]. Of Borghorst's slaves, the following female slaves (provenances unspecified) and their children were placed in the Slave Lodge: a slave woman **Pollecij** together with her daughter, **Lijsbet en twee kinderen** and **Marija**.

²¹ The free-burgher **Thomas Muller** (from Leipzig) sold **Gegeima** (*alias Lobbitje*), a slave woman from Guinea, back to the Company (no record of sale found) but claimed later that her daughter **Maria** had not been part of the deal. The child was subsequently manumitted.

The position of the *Matrice* in the Company Slave Lodge

It remains unclear when the position of *matres* / *matrice* came about officially. The church's list of communicants or active members (*communicanten*) confirms that already by 1684, a freed (Company?) female slave from the Malabar Coast – described in Dutch as *Mallebarin* - held the position of matron of the Company Slave Lodge. Listed together with two others, she is named only in terms of her position *Matrice*:

23 April [a:[nn]o 1684] met belydenisse **Matrice**, een vrie slavyn, Malle-barin: **Grote Armosy**: en **Jan Pasquael**

All evidence points to this woman being **Beatrice van Cochin** (c. 1650-1720) - informally and (affectionately?) known as **Maije Batrice** [literally 'Mother Beatrice'] - who later became lawful wife to Armosyn Claasz's brother, **Claas Cornelisz van de Caab**. Significantly, she appears together with Armosyn I and **Jan Pasqual**, the Lodge's schoolteacher who was predecessor to Armosyn Claasz's brother. No record of her baptism or manumission has been found. She is not listed (1688) as part of the free population. Her arrival at the Cape has been narrowed down to the year 1677 when the VOC despatched a large contingent of slaves to the Cape from Tuticorin and Ceylon. Was she part of this group? Did she arrive already baptised?²² The majority of these slaves were from the Madurese and Malabar Coasts and neighbouring Cochin and Quilon.

As earliest known matron, Beatrice van Cochin would have played a pivotal role in monitoring all 'carnal conversations' that were generally acknowledged to take place within the Company Slave Lodge. She appears to have been succeeded as matron by her husband's sister, Armosijn Claasz, who in turn was succeeded by her daughter, **Manda Gratia**²³ whom we know to have been *matres* (already by 1711).²⁴ In effect, a certain line of succession and hierarchy had been formed within the Slave Lodge. This raises the question: To what extent could Company slaves of West African origin entrench themselves in positions of authority within the Slave Lodge? Would it have suited the Company to have slaves overseen by other slaves of similar ethnic background or would it have been more effective to have slaves from the East supervising a majority of 'negroid' or black African slaves? Were Claas Cornelis and Armosyn Claasz specially groomed for their future senior positions in the Lodge? What role would an older Beatrice van Cochin have played as initial *force majeure* within the Lodge?

On the recommendation of visiting commissioner, **Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakestein**, for the education of the colony's children, provision was made for - not just separation of the free and unfree ('half-castes' included) - but also the slave boys from

²² Coming from Cochin, an important Portuguese factory, she is even likely to have been baptised before coming into Dutch hands.

²³ Also found as *Manda van de Caab*, *Maanda Gratia* or *Maenda Gratia*, this Portuguese name could either have Angola or Asian origins.

²⁴CA: C 3, pp. 201-202 & 213-216), Anna J. Böeseke, *Resolusies van die Politieke Raad, Deel II 1670-1680*, pp. 180-181.

the slave girls. Prior to that, education of the colony's children appears to have been arbitrary, depending on the vicissitudes, not only of the ever-changing commanders, but also the limited availability of competent persons. In terms of the newly-proposed separation, the *mestizo* **Jan Pasqual**²⁵ van Batavia continued to attend to the Company's slave boys, whilst the ex-slave woman **Margaretha** was appointed to teach the slave girls.²⁶ Both teaching careers, however, were abruptly terminated. That same year Margaretha married a prominent free-burgher and relocated to the new colony at Stellenbosch. The division of the sexes appears to have fallen away and Pasqual was convicted (1687) for sexually molesting his female wards. He was subsequently banished to Mauritius.²⁷ The task of morally uplifting the Company's slave children was left to Armosyn Claasz's brother, Cornelis Claasz van de Caab. He was appointed in terms of a resolution by the Council of Policy (15 September 1687):²⁸

*D' E. Heer Commendeur door verscheide berigten versetendigd zijnde als soude **Jan Pasqual**, schoolmeester der E.Comps. slaven kinderen, betigt werden met verscheide meisjes of dogterjes sijner onderwijsinge anvertrouwd, te meermalen vuijle onkuijsheden en vleeslijke lusten gepleegd te hebben; So is eenpariger stemme verstaan en goedgevonden den voors. Pasqual anstonds door den geweldiger in versekering te laten nemen, en hem hier ten Castele in hegtenis te stellen en de waare beschapenheid dier sake door d' E.E. **Andries de Man** en **Domincus de Chavonnes** als gecommiteerdens ten overstaan van den secretaris van Justitien Rade te doen ondersoeken, sullende de plaats van de gedetineerde an **Claas Cornelisz. van de Caab**, 's Comps. halvslag lijfeigen, een persoon van goeden wandel en vereijschte bekwaamheid opgedragen werden, onder een maandelijx tractement van drie realen mitgs. vrije kost en klederen.*

Two years later Claas Cornelisz became a member of the Church. He is listed as one of the new *communicanten* together with none other than the learned secretary to the Council of Policy, **J. G. de Grevenbrouk**²⁹ (his *protégé*?):

*Den 21 December [1689] sijn tot de ghemeente overgekoomen met belijdenisser 'S [ie 'Sieur = Monseigneur] **Joannes Gulielmus de Grevenbroek** Secr[etaris]: tot deeser Plaetsen ende **Claes Cornelisz**: Schoolmeester in Comp[agnie]:s Logie.*

The next year (1690), we find him marrying **Beatrice van Cochin** the *matres* of the Slave Lodge on 9 July. The marriage was childless. Not only can his baptism be located (a prerequisite for his marriage); so too his record of formal manumission to which he was entitled in terms of his acknowledged (uncontested?) white paternity. It appears that once he became a free-black he no longer carried on as *schoolmeester*. He was

²⁵ Also found as *Pasquaal, Pasquaals & Pasquael*.

²⁶ O. Geyser, *Die Ou Hooggeregshofgebou* (Cape Town 1958), p. 38. She was the Cape-born *halfslag* **Margaretha Jans Visser** who married the Norwegian **Lambert Laurensz Barzenius van Hoff** (from Bergen).

²⁷ 15 September 1687 (Resolution: Council of Policy): banished to Mauritius after molesting children in the Slave Lodge [CA: CJ 1597]: *Vrijdag 11 Julii 1687: Melchior Kemels vs Jan Pasquaal Schoolmeester S'Comp=es Slavenkinderen ter sake van enige vuijligheden omtrent deselve gepleegt ... swarte bandiet, die op Batavia gegeesselt, gebrandmerkt, en met den strop aan den hals onder de galg gestaan heeft en vandaar voor eeuwich verbannen is.* [CA: CJ 2 (Crim.[fiele] en Civiele regsrolle, 1674-1688), p. 356].

²⁸ *Resolusies van die Politieke Raad*, (15 September 1687), vol. III, pp. 170-171.

²⁹ **Johannes / Jan Guillelmus / Gu(i)lielmus / Guiljelmus / Guglielmus de Grevenbroe(c)k / Grevenbrou(c)k** (1644-1725).

succeeded by **Daniel Rodrigo**.³⁰ As a free-black couple their popularity can be gauged by the numerous appearances they make as baptismal witnesses in the church registers. On 12 August 1701 Claas Cornelisz van de Caab was granted a rather sizeable *erf* in Table Valley.³¹ This grant effectively makes him the first Cape-born *mestizo* / *mulatto* to be granted land in the colony. His property faces Church Square diagonally opposite the Slave Lodge and just down the road from the property that was later granted (1707) to his sister Armosyn. Scrutiny of both the deceased estate papers Claas Cornelisz (and his wife) and that of Armosyn (and Manda Gratia) indicate a definite helping hand being extended to Armosyn and her family from time to time. On 12 October 1709 **Claas Cornelisz geboortigh alhier aan de Caab ende Beretrice van Coutchin** drew up a joint will.³² The following provision was made:

Should the wife predecease the husband, the following legacies would come into operation:

- *an zijn suster Armozijn Claasse f 700*
- *aan zijn cousijn Frans van Leeuwen zijnde een soontje van zijn nig Manda van de Caab een somma van ses honderd guld:[er]s*
- *aan het soontje van den burger Hendrick Oswalt Eksteen, genaamt Michiel Eksteen f 300*

We find, however, a surviving *Bertrise van Cochin* listed as a widow (1709) with no children. On 1 October 1719 *Betrise van Couchin* made a testamentary provision for the manumission of a slave child **Maria van de Caab** and a legacy of *f 3000* that the child might not become a burden to the diaconate - this slave child was put into the care of **Jacob Cruger**.³³ In this will she made provision for money to be paid out to her late husband's sister *Armosijn Claasse / Claasz*. The executors to her will were **H.[einrich] O.[stwald] Eksteen** and **B.[althazar] Pot**.³⁴

Armosyn's earlier wills

Two earlier wills drawn up on behalf of (but both signed by) Armosyn Claasz have been found. Although the existence of her will (1721)³⁵ was known, it had not yet been located.³⁶ Her will (1713)³⁷ comes as a total surprise. In both instances she was ill and bed-ridden but survived, not only the 1713 smallpox epidemic, but also her illness of 1721. The contents of her two wills are dealt with briefly.

³⁰ His position as *schoolmeester* is confirmed by the Membership List of the Church (27 July 1691): *Den 27 Julius [1691] sijn tot de Gemeente overgekoomen, Hildegonda Bonen met Attestatie van Amsterdam, met Daniel Rodrigo, Schoolmeester in Comp:[agnie]s Logie met belijdenisse.*

³¹ J. Leon Hattingh, 'Grondbesit in die Tafelvallei, Deel I, Die eksperiment. Grondbesit van Vryswartes', *Kronos*, vol. 10 (1985), pp. 32-48.

³² CA: CJ 2650, no. 10 (12 October 1709) & MOOC 7/1/1, no. 71, Joint Will: **Claas Cornelisz geboortigh alhier aan de Caab ende Beretrice van Coutchin** (23 January 1710).

³³ CA: CJ 2600, no. 22 & MOOC 7/1/2, no. 126 (will: **Beatrice van Couchin oud omtrent 70 jaar**) 27 January 1720 (*vertoont 7 September 1720*).

³⁴ H.C.V. Leibbrandt, *Précis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope: Requesten*, (no. 105, 15 October 1719), vol. IV, p. 1244g.

³⁵ CA: CJ 2601, no. 57 (12 October 1721), pp. 56-61.

³⁶ Margaret Cairns, 'Armosyn Claasz of the Cape and her Family, 1661-1783', featured in *Familia: Quarterly Journal of the Genealogical Society of South Africa*, vol. XVI, no. 4, p. 87.

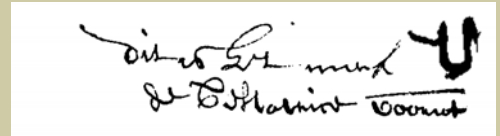
³⁷ CA: CJ 2650, no. 82 (6 May 1713) (pp. 376-379).

1713 Will

Armosijn Claasse geboren aan deser uithoek oud omtrent 54 jaren, zijnde door de E, Comp:e vrijgegeven, en derhalve vrije inwoonder alhier van de gereformeerde godsdienst siekkelijk te bedde leggend.

Her heirs were: *drij kinderen met namen Claas, Maria, en Magtella.*

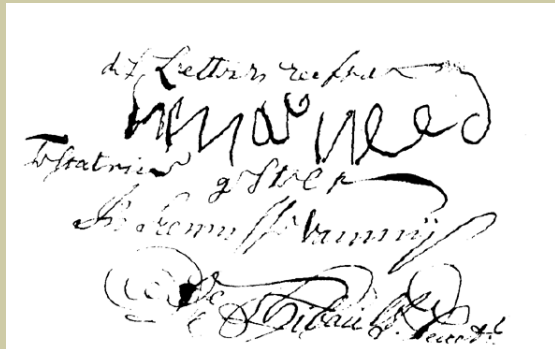
The guardians – *voogden* - for the onmondig **Magtella** were to be *de voorsz: Claas en Maria* benevens nog een *dogter van de Testatrice genaamt Maanda*; dat's *versoggen de laatste niet aen voordat geemancipeert en in vrije staat gesteld sal zijn.*



1721 Will

Dit zeegel behoort tot het inleggende Testament van de vrij swartinne Armosijn Claasz van de Caab, gepasseert de dato den 12e October 1721.

De vrije Swartin Armosijn Claasz: van de Caab oud omtrent zestig Jaaren siekelyk te bedde leggend.



Her legatees were:

- *Diaconij Armen* f 15
- **Harmen Comrink** [Combrink] married to her daughter **Magteltje Leij** f 1000
- **Claas Jonasz van de Caab** f 1000
- The minor **Maria van Maria Stuart** vrij swartinne f 1000
- **Absalon Barendsz:** still a Company slave – if free at the time of his grandmother's death, **Maria van Maria Stuart** was to only receive f 500, the other half would

- become his inheritance
- The children of the deceased **Manda van de Caab** wife of **Guilliam Frisnek** to receive f 1000
- **Frans van Leeuwen** soldier in Company's service and gone to Batavia
- **Willem Frisnek** van de Caab
- **Geertruy Frisnek** van de Caab
- The two remaining children **Jan Sniesing** & **Pieter Cornelisz** both still in slavery – if freed, to get equal portions of the f 1000.
- Remainder of estate to **Christina Armosina Comring**

The executors & guardians to **Maria van Maria Stuart** were to be **Harmen Comring** & **Claas Jonasz**.

When perusing the three wills of Armosyn Claasz, one is awed by the detailed stipulations so rarely found in the testamentary dispositions of the time and by her real and almost insurmountable attempts to rise above her circumstances. Her life-long struggle to realise the emancipation of all her children, which was only partially successful, makes for painful contemplation indeed.

What happened to Maria Stuart

Cairns makes the assumption that Maria possibly died at the Cape in the Smallpox epidemic (1713):³⁸

“In 1711 when the Cape was under the control of **Louis van Assenburgh**, she, then a free black according to this same document, made application to the Council of Policy for her daughter **Marie (Maria Stuart)** to be freed from slavery, either gratuitously or at a named price. The request was granted by the governor on condition that the girl served for a further three years and in addition the payment of a sum of money that would later undoubtedly be fixed by him”.

She states further that her emancipation “was deferred for three years ... circumstances suggest that she did not gain her freedom but died about 1713 probably during the smallpox epidemic of that year”. Shell is correct in stating that it was Maria Stuart (rather than her mother as indicated by Leibbrandt) who would have had to slave *again* for three more years:³⁹

“In the Lodge itself, the women were under an equivalent authority figure, the *matres* – literally, a schoolmistress⁴⁰ – who lived in a separate room strategically located next to the chamber set aside for the Lodge’s schoolgirls. Her duties exceeded those of the traditional “schoolmarm”, and matron seems a more appropriate term. In the two references in which matrons are mentioned by name⁴¹ it is clear that they enjoyed the same, or greater, privileges of manumission as the male mulatto mandoores. As mothers themselves, they also had children to free. Both matrons mentioned were also mulattos [*sic*], and both were allowed to purchase and free their children. Armozijn van de Caab, the matron before 1711, was manumitted by Governor **Willem Adriaan van der Stel** because of good service; she asked the Company to free her daughter, **Marie van de Caap** [described as *de meijt Marie* in the record in question], who was still in the Lodge. The Company granted her request, but required that the slave girl work for the Company for three years before being sold to her mother at the price Lord van Reede had laid down in 1685 for all such mulatto children”.

The actual situation is set out in the relevant, self-explanatory, resolutions of the Council of Policy quoted *verbatim* below in the original Dutch together with Leibbrandt’s translations of the Company Journal entries.

“**Armosyn**, lately Matron of the Company’s slave children, and manumitted for her faithful service, is granted the freedom of her daughter on condition that she (*Armosyn [sic]*) shall serve the Company three years longer”.⁴²

³⁸ Margaret Cairns, ‘Armosyn Claasz of the Cape and her Family, 1661-1783’, *Familia*, vol. XVI, no. 4, pp. 85-86, 89 & 92 [CA: C8, pp. 63-8 (3 April 1711) is given as the source].

³⁹ Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A social history of the slave society at the Cape of Good Hope 1652-1838* (Johannesburg 1994), p. 198.

⁴⁰ It is not clear whether the *matron* was in fact the same position and office as the *schoolmistress*. The appointment of **Margaretha** as schoolmistress for the Company slave girls appears to have coincided with the ongoing appointment of **Beatrice van Cochin** as matron.

⁴¹ **Armozijn van de Caab** (*ante* 1711) & **Christijn van de Caab** (1728). Shell (*Children of Bondage*) is unaware, however, that **Beatrice van Cochin** and **Manda Gratia** are also mentioned by name in the records as being matrons in the Lodge.

⁴² Leibbrandt’s Précis, *Journal* (3 April 1711), p. 246.

*Armozijn van de Caab, gewesene matres van 's Comps. Slavinne kinderen in de logie, door den Heer Willem Adriaan van der Stel in vergeldingh harer goede diensten, in vrijdom gelargeert geweerde, mede aan den Edle. Heer Commissaris versogt hebbende dat zij haar dogter genaamt Marie, zijnde een 's Comps slavin, door Zijn Edeles gunste van slavernij in vrijdom gestelt mogt zien; ofte dat haar mogt vergunt werden, de zelve haar dogter, tot een behoorlijke prijse te mogen vrije; Zoo is op gemelt versoek goed gevonden om haar toe te zeggen dat de voor noemde dogter wanneer zij de E. Comps. Nogh drie jaren (als voren) gedient zal hebben, tegens de prijs, bij zijn Hoog Edelsht. de Heer van Rheede daar toe gestelt, in vrijdom zal gelargeert werden. Op't gedaan versoek van de presente matres der slavinne kinderen genaamt Manda, is verstaan niets te disponeren, voor en al eer daar een andere matres voor in de plaats is.*⁴³

“As **Mrs Scheideruit** is willing to take **Marie**, the daughter of **Armosyn** (see April 3), with her to Batavia [*sic*], she is allowed to do so, provided the girl is replaced by a slave boy named **Tandewa**, well versed in gardening, who will in consequence obtain his liberty three years hence, according to the arrangement made in the case of **Marie**”.⁴⁴

*Ter vergaderingh voorgedraagen zijnde, dat de hujsvrouw van den schipper de E. Steeven Scheijderuijt, vermits haare in dispositie wel geneegen was, om de meijt Marie genaamt, dewelke in vergadering van den 3n deese op haar moeders versoek toegestaan is, om wanneer zij d'E.Comp.e nogh drie agtereenvolgende jaaren als slavin gedient zal hebben, met betaaling van 't geene door de Edle Her Commissaris Hendrik Adrian van Rheede daar op gesteld is, in vrijdom gelargeert te werden, meede na 't Patria te neemen, omme geduurende de rijse eenige handrijkingh van haar te hebben; mits dat het bedraagen daar toe stande in Comp. Cassa soude werden gesteld, en dat daaren booven voor de drie jaaren die gedagte meijd, volgens gemelte besluit nogh soude moeten dienen, een jonge Tandewa genaamt, voor in de plaats zou gelaaten werden, om de gemelte drie jaaren in haar plaats dienst te doen, welk versoek vervolgens bij den raad gaarne is geaccordeert geworden, door dien men, teegenwoordig om jongens heel verleegeen is, waar bij komt, dat deselve altijd in een thuijn gearbeijd heeft; welke jonge dan ook na expiratie der drie jaaren in vrijdom van hier na Batavia zal werden voortgesonden.*⁴⁵

By offering the services of a substitute in the form of the slave boy **Tandewa**, Armosyn astutely managed to circumvent an intricate legal *impasse*. A departing Maria Stuart's freedom could only be realised on condition that an outstanding three years of her services would have to be extinguished in terms of a suitable replacement. Armosyn's personal sacrifices, being expected to make provision for further services in order to secure the premature freedom of at least *one* of her children, gives us a rare glimpse of how difficult it was for any Company slave woman desiring civil freedom - and *not* being able to rely on being acknowledged (or appearing to be) *halfslagh*.

Maria Stuart was thus freed conditionally (3 and 7 April 1711) and allowed to accompany the wife of the VOC official and skipper **Steeven Scheijderuijt** to the Netherlands on board the *Raadhuis van Middelburgh*. The ship was part of the Return Fleet, departing (15 April 1711) from the Cape and arriving (7 August 1711) at Remmekens, in the Netherlands. If Maria Stuart did indeed survive the voyage to the Netherlands to be at the beck and call of an ailing official's wife, she may have ended her days better off than any of her family at the Cape. Had she ended up in Batavia, her fortunes could perhaps have gone either way. That she had to leave without her children is a damning

⁴³ *Resolusies van die Politieke Raad*, Deel IV (3 April 1711), p. 203.

⁴⁴ Leibbrandt's Précis, *Journal* (7 April 1711), p. 246.

⁴⁵ Anna J. Böeseken, *Resolusies van die Polieke Raad*, Deel IV (7 April 1711), p. 207.

indictment on Dutch attitudes towards childcare. Did she die an untimely death before 1721 (she is unmentioned in her mother's will (1721) unlike her sister Manda Gratia mentioned by name and as being deceased), or did her mother allow her to 'disappear' anonymously for the sake of escaping to freedom without constant reminders that she once was socially dead - a *morte vivante* ? Her daughter **Maria van Maria Stuart** later known as **Maria Francina Cleef** (baptised as a Company slave 14 July 1709) was freed in 1720.⁴⁶ Her son **Absolom van Maria Stuart** *alias* **Absolom Barend Cleef** who is referred to as being "absent" (*absenten*) in his grandmother's will (1728), was not so fortunate. He absconded when still a Company slave into the interior (or did he stow away?) sometime in or before 1728 and is still listed (1732) as a deserter (*droster*).⁴⁷

Kees de Boer, Isabella van Angola and Catharina van Malabar

A preliminary investigation into the (biological) parentage of both Armosyn Claasz and her brother Claas Cornelisz, raises more questions than answers. The assumption that the former Company official and free-burgher **Cornelis Claasz** (from Utrecht) – better known as **Kees de Boer** by his contemporaries - is based solely on an attestation (21 March 1661) - and hearsay evidence - by two men, the cook **Claas Lambertsz:** (from Alsemeer), and the cooper **Arent Gerritsz van der Elburgh**, alleging that Kees *de Boer* had admitted to them that he had fathered the child (unnamed, gender unknown) of **Isabella van Angola**⁴⁸, the slave woman belonging to the free-burgher **Jan Reyniersz** (from Amsterdam):

“25th March: - Declaration of **Claas Lambertsz:**, of Alsemeer, cook, and **Arent Gerritsz van der Elburgh**, cooper, stationed here and made at the request of the burgher **Jan Reyniersz:**, that **Cornelisz:** [*sic*] **Claasz:**, of Utrecht, also a burgher, had confessed to them that the child of the female slave **Ysabelle** owned by **J. Reyniersz:**, was his child, &c”.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, no investigation that might have ensued thereafter seems to have been recorded (or survived?). Perhaps the allegations were even dismissed out of hand. Had the allegations been true, Reyniersz as legal owner of Isabella van Angola could have qualified in terms of claiming damages from the father. On 14 April 1672 Reyniersz, returning to Europe, sold Isabella *born on the Angolan Coast* (aged 30) years to the free-burgher **Wynand Leendertsz [Bezuidenhout]** for *Rds* 200. She is not to be confused

⁴⁶ Resolutions of the Council of Policy [CA: C 54, pp. 66-71 (17 September 1720)]: *Geeft met schuldige eerbied en diep respect te kennen Uwe Wel Edele Gestre. en E. Agtb. oodmoedigen dienaar, Harmen Combrink, burger deeser Colonie, hoe in 's Comps. logie alhier sijn bevind eenen Maria van Maria Stuart, oud omtrent 10 jaren, in slavernij van d' E. Comp. gebooren, zijnde des supplts. vrouws suster; den supplt. voorn. kind wel gaarne, soo het met Uwe Wel Edele Gestr. en E. Agtb. welbehagen mogte zijn, uijt slavernij en op vrije voeten sagh. Derhalven wend hij sijn tot Uwe Wel Edele Gestr. en E. Agtb., ootmoedigh smekende dat gem. Zijne vrouws suster hare vrijdom mogte erlangen, zijnde den supplt. gereet om een gesunde mansslaaf en zoodanige zomma van penningen als  r toe staat, in 's Comps, cassa te voldoen. (Onderstont) 't Welk doende &a. Is naar deliberatie verstaan desselfs versoek bij deesen t' accordeeren, mits alvorens in 's Comps. cassa betalende Rds. 50 en in Haar Edele eigendom overgevende een bequame mansslaaf, genaamt **Claas van Mallebaar**, alhier in Raade verthoont.*

⁴⁷ CA: C 1240, (*Attestatien, Lys van Drosters*), p. 95.

⁴⁸ Also found as **Ysabelle**.

⁴⁹ Leibbrandt's *Pr cis, Attestations*, p. 450.

with another **Isabella van Angola** who belonged to Commander **Jan van Riebeeck** who confirms in a declaration (18 September 1659) that he had already purchased in 1658, four female Angola slaves - one named **Isabel** - together with three male Angola slaves and four male and two female Guinea slaves “as shown by the books, under the dates of 30th April, 10th May and 31st December 1658”. A departing, Batavia-bound Van Riebeeck sold (22 April 1662) his slave Isabella earlier - without children - to the free-burgher **Hendrik van Zuerwaerden** (*Hendrik Snijer*).⁵⁰ Her new owner made testamentary provision for her manumission from his deceased estate and she was subsequently freed (15 May 1672) on the death of her master. She had been manumitted together with the Angola slave **Jackje Joy** (later known as **Gracias Maialas**) and the impression is given that they were freed as a *de facto* ‘married’ couple. No children are mentioned.⁵¹ She appears as a free-black woman alone in the *Opgaaf Rollen* for the years 1692 (as *May Isabel*) and 1695 (as *Isabella van Angola*).

Reyniersz baptized (12 September 1666) a *halfslag* slave child **Catharijn** by an unnamed slave mother [presumably his only surviving female slave, Isabella van Angola].⁵² No mention of any children is made in the sale by Reyniersz of Isabella to Bezuidenhout. Could Reyniersz have sold them to the Company? If any were *halfslagh*, would that have influenced his disposal of such children? Would he have been obliged to allow for their freedom at the prescribed ages of 22 (for girls) and 25 (for boys) whose fathers were European? We know nothing more about Bezuidenhout’s slave Isabella. Following the death of her second master (1673), she may have belonged to his widow, **Jannetje Gerrits** (from Amsterdam), and her new husband, **Cornelis Stevensz Botma** (from Wageningen [Gelderland]).

Given that Armosyn Claasz was born either in 1659 (according to her earliest will) or in 1661 (according to her two later wills) and that she has the patronymic of *Claasz*, the temptation is there to assume that Kees *de Boer* was her biological father. The writer is of the opinion that such an assumption is incorrect. The evidence weighs in favour of Armosyn Claasz being born *heelslagh* - possibly with an enslaved non-European father named *Claas* and having to remain in slavery without an automatic right to freedom like her brother. If there is any likelihood of a connection to Kees *de Boer*, I would rather consider Armosyn’s Claasz’s brother, the *halfslagh* Claas Cornelisz van de Caab, to have been the biological son of Kees *de Boer*. The evidence weighs in favour of him being *halfslagh*, having an automatic right to freedom on becoming 25 years of age and with a patronymic in keeping with the usual practice of the time. It was customary to use the father’s *first* name and not *last* name as patronymic. Kees *de Boer*’s legitimate children (and those that were initially illegitimate) all used their father’s first name as a

⁵⁰ He was born c. 1635 in Sürwürden (*geboortigh van Seurweurden*) in the duchy of Oldenburg [now Oldenburg, Germany] which for centuries was ruled by the Danish crown.

⁵¹ *Een meijt slavinne genaemt Isabelle sijnde onder d’voors[eijde]. leijffeijgenen twe namenl.[ijck] Isabelle en Jackje, welcke van Hendrick van Zuijwaerden vrijdom beloofit.* [CA: MOOC 23/5, nos. 19-21 (*Staat en Inventaris & Taxatie van Hendrick van Zuijwaerden & verclaaring van Margaritha Frans Meekhoff*, 15 May 1672)].

⁵² *den 12 Sep[tember] gedoopt een slavinne kint van Jan Reijniersz onder getuychen van hom en syn vrouw en wiert genaemt Catharijn.*

patronymic: *Cornelis*, *Cornelisse*, *Cornelisz* or *Cornelissen*. Any identification of parentage, however, is bedeviled by the fact that the names *Cornelis* and *Claas* were fairly common amongst both slaves and non-slaves at the Cape at the time.

Had Isabella van Angola (Reyniersz's slave) been mother to either Armosyn Claasz and/or Claas Cornelisz, one would expect the name to have been perpetuated by their descendants. It is a curious fact, however, that the uncommon name *Isabella* (or *Sijbella*) does feature prominently amongst the descendants of the freed slave woman the Cape-born **Maria Hansz** whose one child's baptism was witnessed by Cornelis Claasz.⁵³ Were they related by blood? Had Armosyn Claasz and Claas Cornelisz been of West African origin, it is surprising that there is never once any reference to their 'negroid' origins. Often in the records special mention is made of either *neger* or *zwarte* or *kaffir* and even the female form *cafferinnen*. Claas Cornelisz's marriage to Beatrice van Cochin further points to a more likely Indian connection or cultural affinity. The possibility that both Armosyn Claasz and Claas Cornelisz might have been *voorkinders* of Kees *de Boer*'s concubine and later wife, **Catharina van Malabar** must be ruled out. Her baptised *halfslag* *voordochter* **Adriaentje Gabriels**, referred to as the stepdaughter of Kees *de Boer*, clearly had a different father. All the *voorkinders* fathered by Kees *de Boer* by Catharina van Malabar – a privately-owned slave – were legitimised by their marriage and those born in slavery, automatically liberated. As this was a large and established family who later relocated to Stellenbosch, one would expect evidence of biological ties in the records. Certainly Armosyn Claasz and Claas Cornelisz were close and acknowledged openly their blood ties. This is not the case between Kees *de Boer* / Catharina van Malabar and them.

Cairns & Schoeman revisited

In conclusion, the writer concurs with Margaret Cairns's general assessment of Armosyn Claasz's life.

"The study of her life bears out what is true for most periods, that the descendants of a particular person demonstrate an increase, decrease or maintained level of social development. Armosyn, by her own efforts while still a slave in the lodge raised herself from the ruck of her fellow slaves to a position of authority and trust. The characteristics she displayed in so doing she passed on to some of her descendants who continued the work she had begun. That others failed to do so must be accepted as the inevitable consequence of human nature".⁵⁴

That Armosyn had help from her brother and his wife, however, needs to be brought into the equation when determining the extent of "her own efforts". The assumption that the descendants of three of the four children of Armosyn Claasz were all taken up into what became the 'Cape Coloured' community needs to be reviewed.⁵⁵ Maria Stuart went to

⁵³ *Den 27 dito* [April 1691] *Een kindt gedoopt waervan vader is Dirk Pretorius, de moeder Margariet* [sic] *Hanze, als getuijge stonden Claes Cornelisse, ende Maritie, de kindt is genaemt Joannes.*

⁵⁴ Margaret Cairns, *Familia*, p. 87.

⁵⁵ See Karel Schoeman's statement that "[d]rie van Armosyn se kinders het getrou met persone wat as 'halfslag' of vryswartes aangedui word, en namate kleurbewussyn gedurende die agtiende eeu in die

the Netherlands and the Jonas family was an accepted part of the ‘white’ community and well represented in the Zwartland to this day – a rare example of a ‘white’ family descending from a *heelslagh* black man.⁵⁶

Schoeman’s portrayal of Armosyn as an example of how slaves could compete openly in a prejudice/colour-free 17th century world is problematic. Indeed, it was only some, or a few, (privileged?) slaves that could play a future or prominent (*aanstaande*) role in Cape colonial society.

“... the lack of any confirmatory racial discrimination at the Cape in the 17th and early 18th centuries and the leading role that [only some?] slaves and free-blacks played in the community.”⁵⁷

In the Dutch overseas factories no [?] proclaimed colour prejudice existed and in the East relations between whites with indigenous women were common.⁵⁸

Schoeman’s observations about race relations in the Dutch East Indies do not apply to the Cape of Good Hope which evolved differently. Slave women at the Cape were not indigenous (‘inheems’). ‘Accepted’ or formalised relationships with indigenous women as in the East were never common at the Cape. That non-indigenous Eastern women at the Cape had it easier, as it were, can be substantiated, but the same cannot be said for African women - whether, Khoe/San, or from Angola and Guinea. Armosyn Claasz’s elusive parentage, her unmarried state - even after manumission, is testimony to the general predicament of Company slave women, few of whom even came to be emancipated during the early VOC period at the Cape - as opposed to the easier ‘escape hatch’ open to privately-owned slave women.

Schoeman’s claim that the lives of Armosyn and her children fit the pattern of the upcoming Cape’s mixed race *petite bourgeoisie* that could ‘pass for white’, is not credible:

“**Armosyn Claasz** and her children were thus part of what can be described as an upcoming local small bourgeoisie of mixed origins, chiefly of Eastern origin and coming from modern India (especially Bengal) and Indonesia (especially Macassar and Bugis) with only a few [black] Africans such as **Armosyn** herself or **Maria Everts** amongst them”.⁵⁹

Kaapse samelewing toeneem, is hul afstammeling in die gekleurde gemeenskap ingetrek, dog die jongste dogter sou die stammoeder van ‘n blanke [sic] familie word”. (*Dogter van Sion*, p. 16).

⁵⁶ See J.A. Heese & R.T.J. Lombard, *South African Genealogies* (Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria 1992), p. 100 for a comprehensive genealogy of the JONAS family in the male line.

⁵⁷ “... die gebrek aan beduidende kleurdiskriminasie aan die Kaap in die sewentiende en vroë agttiende eeue en die vooraanstaande rol wat [sommige?] slawe en vryswartes in die gemeenskap gespeel het.” [‘Kaapse Stamouers: Die Voorsate van Machtelt Smit, 1661-1749’, *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, no. 23 (Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, Bellville November 1996), *Kronos*, p. 36].

⁵⁸ “In die Nederlandse handelskolonies het daar geen uitgesproke kleurvooordeel bestaan nie, en in die Ooste het verhoudings van blankes met inheemse vroue algemeen voorgekom.” [Karel Schoeman, *Kronos*, p. 39].

⁵⁹ “**Armosyn Claasz** en haar kinders was dus deel van wat as ‘n opkomende plaaslike kleinburgery van gemengde herkoms beskryf sou kan word, hoofsaaklik van Oosterse oorsprong en afkomstig van die

Armosyn and her family never ever attained the heights of a **Maaij Ansela van Bengale** (Mrs **Arnoldus Willemsz Basson**) or her Cape-born *halfslag* daughter **Anna de Koninck** (Mrs **Olof Bergh**). Only some of her children came to be freed, others remained / died in bondage, one was even taken away, a grandson absconded and some descendants ultimately would have become classified as 'Coloured'. Perhaps being of possible 'negroid' extraction albeit it Indianised, over and above being a Company slave, further frustrated her chances of marriage and liberating all her children. Contrary to Schoeman's claims that Armosyn's descendants "probably felt no need to disguise their slave origins and ... were thereby not prevented from taking up their rightful in Cape society", they cannot be said to have all taken up their rightful place in Cape society.⁶⁰

Mansell George Upham

moderne Indië (veral Bengale) en Indonesië (veral Makassar en Boegies), met slegs enkele Afrikane soos **Armosyn** self of **Maria Everts** tussen hulle)" [Schoeman, *Kronos*, p. 40].

⁶⁰ ... *het klaarblyklik geen noodsaak gevoel om [hul] slawe-herkoms te verdoesel nie, en ... nie daardeur verhinder om h[ulle] regmatige plek in die Kaapse samelewing ... in te neem nie*) [Schoeman, *Kronos*, p. 42.]