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# Dynamic Otherness: Technologies of Representation in Colonial Dutch Brazil

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The transnational turn in history has brought new scholarly interest to the visual culture of colonial Brazil. Crucial to these analyses are the paintings of Albert Eckhout and Frans Post, Dutch artists who studied the flora, fauna, and people of the new land. However, most discussions of these painters' oeuvres place their non-European subjects within bimodal notions of "self" and "other," rather than within the complex matrix of slavery, commerce, and morality that pervaded the colonial Atlantic. An analysis of migration dynamics allows us to reconceptualize the ways in which racial otherness was understood and represented by contemporary painters. This paper examines the paintings within the networks of trade, migration, and consumption that permeated the Dutch and Portuguese Atlantic. Indeed, in these paintings, race is not cast as a static accessory, but rather as a dynamic feature of identity and motion. In particular, while racial otherness previously existed in the imaginations of contemporary Europeans, transatlantic migration allowed racial otherness to be consumed by European viewers, merchants, and burghers.

Upon first glance, Albert Eckhout's *A Black Brazilian Woman and her Son* (c.1641, Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark) (**Figure 1**) appears to mimetically illustrate a voluptuous dark-skinned woman who stands next to her lighter-skinned son while holding a basket of tropical fruits. The landscape surrounding her evokes the tropical paradise of the Dutch port at Pernambuco, a new settlement along the Brazilian coast. The verticality of the woman's form is accentuated by both the picture frame and the erect palm trees surrounding her, punctuated only by her round breasts, red sash, and wide-brimmed hat. Agricultural references to the woman's exotic location abound; as the child points an ear of corn toward the woman's groin, and holds a parrot, which, more than any other animal in early modern European art, represented the resplendence of New World fauna.<sup>1</sup> But Eckhout did not include a cornucopia of botanical forms to merely

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<sup>1</sup> Irma B. Jaffe, "The Tell-Tale Tail of a Parrot: Durer's Adam and Eve," *The Print-Collector's Newsletter*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May-June 1993), p. 52-53. The author cites earlier scholarship by Wilma George, who in her book *Animals and Maps*, argues that many explorers, including Columbus, Vespucci, and Cabal reported sightings of colorful parrots in central and south America. See Wilma George, *Animals and Maps*, London, 1969.



FIGURE 1. ALBERT ECKHOUT: *A BLACK BRAZILIAN WOMAN AND HER SON*.  
COPENHAGEN, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DENMARK.

locate the woman within the landscape. Rather, Eckhout, along with landscape painter Frans Post, (**Figure 2**) was part of an expedition of scientists and artists who were sent to the Americas to study the flora, fauna, and indigenous people of the new territories, taxonomically arranging them within the growing Dutch world. Under the commission of Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, Governor-General of colonial Dutch Brazil, these painters became best known for their visual representations of indigenous peoples and tropical flora.

Western visual culture is replete with images of nude and naked women, who most frequently occupy the tropes of the heroic Odalisque or the lascivious pin-up girl. Yet the history of black female portraiture is much more complicated, due in no small part to the ambiguous identity of the black female in Western art history. Portraits of black female subjects therefore do not purely correspond to the hetero-normative male gaze, which is often theorized to describe the positions of white women in European art. The enterprise of colonial slavery and subsequent intercontinental migration rendered the black female body simultaneously



FIGURE 2. FRANS POST: *VIEW OF OLINDA, BRAZIL*.  
RIJKSMUSEUM AMSTERDAM.

an erotic fantasy and a mercantile asset. Yet the latter position of the black female is not as frequently discussed when examining the identity of black subjects in Dutch colonial art.

Perhaps this reticence can be explained by the rich history of hyper-sexualizing black women, or by the tendency to subject images of female nudes to Lacanian gaze theory. Indeed, scholarly discussions of the painters' oeuvres, while already sparse, often isolate the artists within the tradition of ethnographic painting, eschewing comparisons with contemporary portrait, still life, and landscape imagery in the Netherlands.

The most comprehensive analyses of the visual culture of colonial Dutch Brazil were undertaken by Quentin Buvelot and Rebecca Parker Brienen in their writings on Albert Eckhout.<sup>2</sup> Buvelot pursues a thorough study of Eckhout's oeuvre, and attempts to draw connections between the painter's iconography and earlier European travelogues. In her essay, "Albert Eckhout's paintings of the '*wilde natien*' of Brazil and Africa" and subsequent monograph, Brienen describes the black subjects featured in four of these paintings, noting aptly that these images in particular reflect European ideas about the fecundity and sexual availability of black Africans. Drawing on earlier work by Peter Mason, Brienen details the system of racial categorization that Eckhout espouses within his series, and con-

<sup>2</sup> Quentin Buvelot, ed. *Albert Eckhout: A Dutch Artist in Brazil*. (Zwolle: Waanders, 2004).  
Rebecca Parker Brienen, *Visions of A Savage Paradise: Albert Eckhout, Painter of Colonial Dutch Brazil* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

nects the classificatory imagery to contemporary tropic representations of the four known continents. But Brienen also builds upon Mason's thesis, arguing that these paintings cannot be categorized singularly as ethnographic portraits or images of slaves.<sup>3</sup>

Buvelot's and Brienen's discussions, however, treat Eckhout's black subjects as static and rooted within their landscapes, thereby ignoring the migration dynamics that brought them to the Brazilian coast. As a result, the discussions largely place non-European subjects within bimodal notions of "self" and "other," rather than within the complex matrix of slavery, commerce, and morality that pervaded the colonial Atlantic.

In this paper, I argue that Eckhout's paintings of nonwhite subjects must be analyzed within the networks of trade, migration, and consumption that permeated the Dutch and Portuguese Atlantic. By analyzing the migration of goods, people, and ideas across the colonial Atlantic, we can reconceptualize the ways in which racial otherness was understood and represented by contemporary painters. Indeed, in Eckhout's series, race is not cast as a static accessory, but rather as a dynamic feature of identity and motion, locating individuals both on the Brazilian coast and in their native lands. Perceptions of racial otherness brought Eckhout's subjects from their native lands to the Dutch colony, just as it justified the consumption of these individuals' labor and bodies by Europeans. In particular, while otherness previously existed as a distant form of *exotica* in the imaginations of many contemporary Europeans, it was only through transatlantic migration that this form of otherness could be consumed by European viewers and traders.

### *I. Exotic Impulses in Early Modern Holland*

In the early decades of the seventeenth-century, as the Netherlands continued to fight Spain for their independence, the nation was also gripped by a thirst for the exotic. This fascination inspired the burgeoning nation to sow the seeds for a global empire - one which would surpass Spain's in scope despite its comparatively limited geographical size. While the Spanish Empire looked inward, trying to suppress numerous rebellions in its bloated Empire, the Dutch looked outward, laying the groundwork for an overseas enterprise that would span both East and West. Additionally, while the Spanish crown attempted to weave an empire with a common thread of Catholicism, Protestant ideology was only a tangential motive for Dutch merchants.

Yet as the Netherlands built a global presence, it maintained distinct notions of self and other due to the simultaneous rise of nationalism that was fueled by the war for independence, and the rise of exoticism in cosmopolitan cities like Amsterdam. The subsequent expansion was therefore not motivated by a belief in

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<sup>3</sup> Parker Brienen, 114.



FIGURE 3. PIETER DE HOOCH: *AT THE LINEN CLOSET*.  
RIJSMUSEUM AMSTERDAM.



FIGURE 4. GERARD TER BORCH: *PATERNAL ADMONITION*.  
RIJSMUSEUM AMSTERDAM.

religious supremacy, but rather a desire to collect and possess objects from across the globe. As such, the Dutch mercantile empire was an intricate nexus of trade posts and shipping routes that spanned from the Americas to Japan, rather than a circuit of missionary outlets alone.

Luxury and abundance were quintessential aspirations of the Dutch Republic despite being enjoyed by only a few politicians and nobles. Officials ranging from Stadhouder Johan Maurits (1604-1679), to the lawyer-statesman Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), who had fought alongside William of Orange, shared a fascination with foreign objects. Upon van Oldenbarnevelt's execution, an inventory of his home showed that he had amassed a large collection of foreign and exotic goods, including bed linens, lacquers, porcelains, and spices, all labeled "Indian" in the survey.<sup>4</sup>

Yet genre scenes by Pieter de Hooch, (**Figure 3**) and Gerard ter Borch (**Figure 4**), long hailed as meticulous and accurate depictions of Dutch interiors, hide the exotic imaginations of the new nation.<sup>5</sup> An analysis of Maurits' and van Oldenbarnevelt's collections would suggest that other upper-class homes mirrored the cosmopolitan nature of the Dutch Empire, since they were nexuses of exotic world culture, rather than *sancta sanctorum* of domestic values alone. Indeed, interspersed with Dutch paintings in Oldenbarnevelt's collections were maps of the Dutch territories, and a portrait of a 'Turk' clad in elaborate turban and long robes.<sup>6</sup>

The seventeenth-century explosion of exoticist interest also pervaded the artistic sphere. As a painter educated in the humanistic traditions of his day, Eckhout also participated in this visual turn.<sup>7</sup> Surviving works by contemporary major artists, including Rembrandt's *Man in Oriental Costume* ("The Noble Slav") (**Figure 5**), Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (**Figure 6**) and Jan Lievens' *Man in Oriental Costume* ("Sultan Solimans"), suggest that the Dutch perspective of the Orient was performative in nature, mediated by objects and props, rather than racial and cultural identities alone. Prior to Eckhout's departure for Brazil, Rembrandt and Lievens collaborated on a series of images called *Turcqs tronies*, or orientalist paintings of faces and torsos. Like Eckhout's paintings, their pieces illustrated tropes of Turks and Indians, rather than specific individual subjects. But many of these images illustrate European subjects in Eastern garb, rather than indigenous populations in other parts of the globe. Identity was therefore reduced

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Swan, "Lost In Translation: Exoticism in Early Modern Holland," in *Art in Iran and Europe in the 17th Century: Exchange and Reception*, edited by Axel Langer (Museum Rietberg, Zurich, CH, 2013), 100-116.104.

<sup>5</sup> Swan, 105. The author argues that the label of these objects as "Indian" is insignificant, as Chinese, Persian, East Indian, and Indian were mostly signified as such, and the descriptor marked otherness more than national or ethnic origin.

<sup>6</sup> Swan, 106. The author notes that the label 'Turk' was not limited to only those of Turkish origin, but was rather a descriptor for turbaned individuals who sported clothing often seen in the Ottoman and Saffavid Empires.

<sup>7</sup> J. de Sousa-Leao, "Post et Eckhout," in *l'oeuil*, 43/44, 49-52, 49.



FIGURE 5. REMBRANDT: *THE NOBLE SLAV*.  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART NEW YORK.

to costume, and was signified through a series of gestures that corresponded to each cultural group.

The Orient could be imagined, performed, and enjoyed by upper-class Europeans who could themselves construct new identities through reference to these distant lands. Oriental props became convenient ways to convey distance, yet their placement on Dutch bodies conveys a sense of adoption and appropriation. Thus, costume could represent the vastness of the Dutch trade network, in which foreign wealth, objects, and people were brought closer to the center of the empire through a capitalist system of governance. Exoticism was therefore a method of hybrid constituency, wherein the Dutch subject could begin to identify with the colonies through a series of appropriative gestures.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Joy Kenseth, "A World of Wonders in One Closet Shut" in *The Age of the Marvelous*, Joy Kenseth, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 25. Kenseth notes that this ex-



FIGURE 6. VERMEER: *GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING*.  
MAURITSHUIS, THE HAGUE.

Orientalist accoutrements also became useful tools for Europe to define its own Christian heritage, as turbans and jewels became frequently used in history paintings of biblical scenes.<sup>9</sup> Artists like Rembrandt and Lievens might have believed that Eastern exotica were vestiges of the material culture of ancient times. Indeed, Rembrandt may also have believed that exotica, which he enthusiastically studied, preserved accurate costume elements from biblical times.<sup>10</sup> Thus, orientalist depictions of both white and nonwhite bodies became condoned within the high art traditions of Northern Europe. When such techniques were sanctioned within the highest levels of painting, they could also be adopted within mainstream visual culture.

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oticist interest spans multiple media, including the visual arts, drama, literature, religion, natural sciences, and philosophy. This interest also spanned across national boundaries.

<sup>9</sup> Swan, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Swan, 114.

For other Northern European artists, such as the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens, exoticism was itself hybrid in nature, created by combining visual tropes from several different cultures.<sup>11</sup> Such an “exotic effect” was created by combining German, Italian, and Burgundian habit with that of cultures of the Near East.<sup>12</sup> Rubens, however, observed foreign dress not through direct interaction with foreign cultures or people, but rather by sketching miniatures and curios that had come to Europe.<sup>13</sup> Thus Rubens’ vision of the periphery was already influenced by the biases of the artists creating miniatures, and thus were not true representations of the cultures depicted. Thus, in Rubens’ case, the exotic became a hybrid *mélange* of cultures, in which some aspects of European culture were preserved while other aspects were appropriated from abroad.

To describe this phenomenon of assuming some cultural artifacts without the rigor of scientific study or meticulous observation, Paul Vandebroek uses the phrase “ethnographic eclecticism.”<sup>14</sup> This phrase describes the appropriation of American Indian cultural and artistic production, such as headdresses, and feather skirts, by non-indigenous peoples.<sup>15</sup> This approach may describe Eckhout’s paintings as well, as cultural artifacts, such as the figures’ beaded necklaces and feathers, are frequently paired with signs of European intervention, such as long linen dresses or, in the case of *A Black Brazilian Woman and her Son*, a mixed-race child.

Eckhout’s and Post’s depictions of Brazil, however, mark an important turn in the tradition of exoticist European painting. Because these artists migrated to the periphery as part of a colonial expedition, their paintings no longer locate exotic objects within European settings. Now, the land itself was foreign, with familiar people, objects and architecture built into it. European merchants and settlers became foreign objects in their new surroundings, so the precariousness of their control may have been all the more apparent. Eckhout and Post reflect this tension in their paintings, as they do not depict the landscapes as untouched and wild. Instead, the painters visually represent the migration of European people, customs, and goods to other lands, rather than the migration of indigenous culture into the European ethos.

But how did this translocation occur? The artists’ presence in Brazil was not merely a result of one man’s pioneering expedition into a “new world,” but rather the culmination of an elaborate competitive strategy that brought people, goods, religions, and ideas across the Atlantic.

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<sup>11</sup> Swan, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Swan, 114 and Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann, “From Treasury to Museum: The Collections of the Austrian Habsburgs,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, Jon Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 137. The Austrian Habsburgs were among the first Europeans to amass a collection of *exotica* from across the globe.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Vandebroek 1992, p. 395; expanded on by Mason 1998, pp. 24–25. Detailed in Swan, 116.

## II. Establishing Transatlantic Migration Networks

In 1621, The Dutch established the *Geoctroyeerde Westindische Compagnie*, or the West India Company, in order to expand their economic interests in the Americas. The company also attempted to compete with the previously established (and ultimately more successful) East India Company, or VOC, whose exploits largely supported the thriving Dutch economy. Before it was dissolved and replaced in 1674, the WIC had established ports in present-day New York (New Amsterdam), the mid-Atlantic coast, and Brazil. The WIC participated in the Dutch Revolt as well, as the company's exploits in Brazil diminished Iberian interests, as competition over sugar crop mitigated the Portuguese monopoly in the area.

In the Americas, the Dutch became very successful privateers, harnessing their naval prowess to seize ships and eventually, territory from the Portuguese.<sup>16</sup> At one point, the Dutch held almost half of previously Portuguese territory, although the territory was ceded back to the Portuguese less than three decades later.<sup>17</sup> Johan Maurits, governor of Dutch Brazil, established the capital of the colony at Marritsstad (Recife) and built a palace there.

Maurits' rule contrasted sharply with that of his Iberian counterparts, as he built a colony that was much more religiously tolerant than Portugal or Spain. Mauritsstad became a haven for ostracized European Jews, offering another effective mode of resistance to the rigid Spanish monarchy.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Iberian Jews in the Americas often allied with Dutch colonists as they had a common enemy - the Spanish crown.<sup>19</sup>

Yet religious tolerance in the colonies did not translate into total religious and cultural acceptance. Like many other Europeans, Dutch colonists were both shocked and fascinated by the religious and cultural practices of American indigenous. Contemporary travelogues captured some of the social and sexual practices of foreign people, highlighting indigenous groups' "aberrant" sexual practices.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, according to Carmen Nocentelli, the "periphery" was the region in which perverse and foreign modes of sexuality prevailed to the chagrin of European colonizers.<sup>21</sup> These practices were often associated with the untamed wildness of the natural landscape. These sentiments were echoed in Eckhout's paintings, which simultaneously feature tropes of cannibalism, nudity, and visual splendor.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade. Dutch – Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 22-23. The author points out that Dutch merchants captured numerous Portuguese slave ships traveling from Africa and resold them to the Spanish.

<sup>17</sup> Meuwese, 26-7. Several Protestant moralists in the Netherlands believed that Portugal was a fair target because mercantile intervention would disrupt the Portuguese slave trade.

<sup>18</sup> Meuwese, 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Carmen Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press),

<sup>21</sup> Nocentelli, 8.



FIGURE 7. ALBERT ECKHOUT: *TAPUYA WOMAN*.  
NATIONALMUSEET COPENHAGEN.

Indeed, in Eckhout's *Tapuya Woman* (**Figure 7**), a nearly-naked woman carries severed human limbs while surrounded by lush tropical plants.

These cannibalistic and hypersexual depictions of indigenes in the Americas contrast with the images of domesticated and civilized natives in the images that follow. In Humboldt's coconut cup, the preliminary image of the Amerindian woman carrying a severed limb is followed by a clothed woman who carries a basket of fruit upon her head. As Virginie Spenlé argues, Eckhout uses various degrees of clothing in his cycle to illustrate the influences of Europeans upon the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies.<sup>22</sup> When viewing Eckhout's paintings in the order that they are presented, one can observe that subjects become increasingly clothed and Europeanized. The last image in the series, which depicts a

<sup>22</sup> Virginie Spenlé, "'Savagery' and 'Civilization': Dutch Brazil in the Kunst- and Wunderkammer," *JHNA* 3:2 (Winter 2011).



FIGURE 8. ALBERT ECKHOUT: *MAMELUCA WOMAN*.  
NATIONALMUSEET COPENHAGEN.

light-skinned Mameluca woman wearing a full white dress, (**Figure 8**) contrasts sharply with the earlier painting of the naked Tapuya woman.

The aberrant practices of foreign people contrast sharply with the mores of reformed Christian practice in seventeenth-century Holland. Detailed in moralist Jacob Cats' writings, *Nadere Reformatie* ideology attempted to connect Christian practice to everyday life.<sup>23</sup> The *Nadere Reformatie*, which roughly translates to "further Reformation," was a religious and social movement that rose from Calvinist principles.<sup>24</sup> Domestic life was the primary front on which these cultural

<sup>23</sup> Amanda Pipkin, *Rape in the Republic: 1609-1725: Formulating Dutch Identity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 87. Also see Jacob Cats's *Werelts bedin, midden, eynde, besloten in den trouwingh, met den proefsteen van den selven*, (Dordrecht: voor Matthias Havius. Ghedr. By Hendrick van Esch, 1637).

<sup>24</sup> Pipkin, 87.

changes were supposed to occur.<sup>25</sup> As a result of these theological developments, numerous domestic conduct-books were published, all advocating a domestic social hierarchy that placed the husband-father at the head and minister of his household.<sup>26</sup> Thus, while travelogues offered Dutch burghers purviews into the vast world, they also filtered morally suspect practices through the sieve of European literary and scientific respectability. Eckhout's paintings may illustrate some of the "civilizing" aspirations of Dutch colonists.

But despite their negative perceptions of indigenous populations' religious and cultural practices, Dutch Protestants were appalled by Spanish colonists' brutal treatment of indigenes, which was documented in Bartolome de las Casas' popular book, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.<sup>27</sup> De las Casas' account was translated and widely distributed, and enterprising Dutch colonists used the pamphlet's notoriety to encourage Amerindians to unite against the Spanish crown.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Maurits and his Dutch compatriots found useful allies in several indigenous groups from the Americas.

Across the Atlantic, Dutch merchants also attempted to rally support among black Africans. Because the new Dutch Republic maintained an ambiguous relationship with slavery, supporting it in colonies while outlawing it domestically, it was able to negotiate with Akan leaders who welcomed the opportunity to trade with Europe.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the migration of Dutch religion, morals, and goods helped to forge closer alliances between the Dutch Republic and indigenous populations, while the negative implications of Portuguese migration pushed some indigenous groups away from the Iberian cause. Black and indigenous populations were therefore perceived to be invaluable resources for the Dutch Republic's economic growth. The Netherlands' struggle for Brazil was a smaller manifestation of the domestic war against the Spanish, which pitted the Protestant, mercantile Dutch against the Catholic, militaristic Spain. In Brazil, the Dutch sought to wrest the territory from the hands of the Catholic Portuguese to increase their share in the sugar trade. In order to accomplish this, the Dutch sought the alliance of the Tapuya people, even though they were still perceived as morally inferior. This tension reflects the liminal hybridity of colonized populations in Dutch Brazil; even though the latter did not fully enjoy equal status in the eyes of Dutch colonists, they were useful in

<sup>25</sup> Pipkin, 88. The belief that the family should be transformed into a small church was echoed by several contemporary writers: William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1622); Willem Teelinck, *Noodwendig Vertoog* (1627)

<sup>26</sup> Pipkin, 86-90.

<sup>27</sup> Bartolome de las Casas, *Brevisima Relacion de la Destruccion de las Indias*. José Miguel Martínez Torrejón, ed. Madrid: Real Academia Española. 1554 (orig.), 2013(ed.)

<sup>28</sup> Meuwese, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Meuwese, 64-71. The author notes that several Akan and Kongo leaders sought luxury goods from Europe and Asia, and as a result, welcomed the opportunity to trade slaves with the Portuguese and Dutch.



FIGURE 9. PIETER AERTSEN: A MEAT STALL WITH HOLY FAMILY GIVING ALMS.  
NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF ART.

advancing the nation's economic interests.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, then, migration patterns helped to transform the distant “exotic” into a consumable and easily-monetized labor force in Europe.

### *III. Bringing Paradise Back: Rituals of Consumption in Early Modern Europe*

Eckhout's series became immensely successful in Europe, and Johan Maurits gifted the paintings to King Frederick of Denmark in 1654. The paintings, along with other exotic objects such as shells, feathers, and silver, were understood as naturalistic and objective renderings of Dutch Brazil. Indeed, several of Eckhout's European contemporaries imitated these images in their own travel accounts.<sup>31</sup> Among these writers was Georg Marcgraf, who published several woodcuts imitating Eckhout's paintings in *Historia rerum naturalium Brasiliae*.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, not only did these propagandistic and allegorical works support colonial conquest, they also inspired migration and created a supposedly objective natural history that colored Europeans' imaginations of the Americas.

<sup>30</sup> Bhabha describes the liminality of hybridity in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Spenle, ““Savagery” and “Civilization”: Dutch Brazil in the Kunst- and Wunderkammer.”

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Eckhout and Post's paintings were not exempt from this discourse on consumption, as the images were created with a keen awareness of the European eye. Thus when discussing the themes of consumption in Eckhout and Post's paintings, one must consider the space in which the scenes are framed.

In modern discourse, the desire to demarcate the public and private spheres is prevalent, especially within the Foucauldian context of the surveillance state. The propensity to understand consumption patterns similarly raises questions of viewership, subjectivity, and display space. This section will address the differences between indoor and outdoor still-life paintings. First, because Eckhout's relationship with his subject matter is motivated by mercantile activity (and in particular, slave trade) in Brazil, comparisons with contemporary market (**Figure 9**) scenes are apt. Ultimately, Eckhout's portraits are props in the Dutch mercantile expedition- objects that "sold" the Dutch enterprise to viewers and patrons at home. Specifically, images of the New World cannot be understood only as scientific studies motivated by curiosity- they must also be interpreted as advertisements, ways to present the Dutch mercantile experience within a positive, consumable light. By showing colonial exploits, the newly independent Netherlands as a whole could be considered on par with other European courts- both as a self-governing entity and as a global colonial power.

When presented outdoors, in the vicinity of the port with ships and traders in the background, Eckhout's image of an African woman may be compared to Northern European market scenes. But as Elizabeth Honig argues, markets were not just places for showcasing wares, they were also scenes that featured (positive) judgment within the picture frame.<sup>33</sup> The market was a stage for the public ritual, although it evolved convergently from two different traditions. Southern Low Countries (modern-day Belgium) market scenes evolved from "high art" traditions: religious and mythological history paintings. But in the Northern Low Countries (modern-day Netherlands), market scenes arose from cityscapes at the margins of books, manuscripts, and other printed media, and were first very crudely depicted.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in the Low Countries, connections between market scenes and the landscape (whether urban or not) are deeply steeped in tradition. As a result, one must consider Eckhout's ethnographic paintings within the contexts of consumer choice. After all, the marketplace was one of the first social spaces in Europe where middle class burghers (as opposed to nobles or royals) could access goods from migratory networks across the globe. The market, in other words, democratized the notion of consumption, and helped to transform the Netherlands into an increasingly cosmopolitan society.

However, the placement of non-white colonial subjects within the matrix of consumer choice and middle-class consumption also highlights the ambivalent

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Honig, "Desire and Domestic Economy," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (Jun., 2001), pp. 294-315

<sup>34</sup> Honig, "Desire and Domestic Economy," 300.

position of the colonial subject.<sup>35</sup> After all, the migration of black subjects from Africa to South America, the migration of indigenous people from inland to coastal settlements, as well as the migration of Protestant religion from the Netherlands to Brazil were motivated by mercantile interests. When located within an ordered space in which moral Protestants could acceptably consume the exotic other, colonial labor could be justified as part of capitalistic order. However, the naked “savagery” of the black subject could never be fully accepted within the European moral framework. After her physical and sexual labor was exhausted, the black female body was discardable and undesirable. In short, the need to consume the colonial subject only applied insofar as the European economic and moral hierarchy could be preserved.

### *Conclusion*

Eckhout and Post’s paintings of Dutch Brazil illustrate the influence of religious and mercantile migration networks in the colonial Atlantic. While Northern Europe maintained a long history of exoticist interest prior to and during the artists’ voyage to Brazil, migration patterns allowed the exotic to be consumed by European viewers, eaters, and buyers. Religious and mercantile competition facilitated alliances as well. Insofar as the colonies and their populations could be tamed and placed within the Dutch matrix of order, hierarchy, and taxonomy, they were allowed to be consumed within the moralistic mores of the post-Reformation capitalist society. At the same time though, the liminality of the colonial subject had to be maintained, ensuring that aberrant moral practices would not infiltrate the new nation. Dutch society was therefore paradoxically open to foreignness yet hermetically sealed from its dangers as it established a condition of global hospitality that only existed as far as its violent welcome.<sup>36</sup> An analysis of the visual culture of colonial Brazil also allows us to reconceptualize the contemporary notions of race, which was not just interpreted as a static color that occupied the surface of the skin, but rather as a commodity that could acceptably become available for use after religious change and transatlantic trade. The materialistic motivations for migration also have implications for the modern day, as we can now rethink and begin to amend the mechanisms through which the commodification of race through trade has been painted into history.

<sup>35</sup> Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Here, I refer to Jacques Derrida’s description of hospitality, as described in Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle’s, *Of Hospitality*, Rachel Bowlby, trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000),