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Oppression, Sexuality and Slavery At the Cape of Good Hope

Robert Ross

During the eighteenth century the Cape was a male-dominated society, at least in numerical terms. In 1749, for instance, the *opgaaf* lists reveal that among those taxed were 4,871 adult males (made up of 1,243 burghers, seventy-five free blacks, eighty-three *knechts*, who were soldiers and sailors released by the Dutch East India Company to work for burghers, and 3,470 slaves). In addition, there were 1,067 Company servants, ranging in status from the Governor, Hendrick Swellengrebel, to Hendrick Pieters van Gale, who had already spent eighteen years as a prisoner on Robben Island, recorded in the muster rolls of the same year.¹ As against this, the *opgaaf* lists recorded 1,728 adult women, made up of 774 burghers' wives or widows, seven unmarried adult whites (although at least one of these was unmarried only in law),² ninety-one free black women, of whom twenty-three were married and three widows, and 857 slaves. If only the recorded population is taken into account, then there were 344 men to every hundred women. Nor was this year exceptional. Essentially similar figures could be given for any year in the eighteenth century.

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[The abbreviation *KA* stands for the series *Koloniaal Archief* (VOC) in the *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, Den Haag.]

1. *KA* 4155 and *KA* 9044. The number of Free Blacks is not given in the totals, but can be deduced from the lists, at least for Cape Town, as, from around 1720 on, this group was enumerated separately and placed together at the end of the *opgaaf* list for the Cape District. In addition, they are not credited with possessing arms, although not too much should be read into this as, from about 1710 onwards, the number of guns a man possessed was not accurately recorded, each white man being, clearly erroneously, described as having one flintlock and one pistol.

2. Dirk Marx, a noted elephant hunter in the Swellendam district, lived with Dorothea Becker for many years and had six children by her, without their ever marrying.

These figures perhaps overstate the imbalance in the sex ratio to a certain extent. They exclude both the Company slaves, probably around 650, whose sex ratio seems to have been more balanced than was that of the other slaves,³ and the Khoisan, a group which presumably had as many women as men but the number of whom within the orbit of the colony is impossible to estimate. They also exclude the women who were married to men in the service of the Company, perhaps sixty in all, and, for technical reasons, probably underestimate the number of white women. On the other hand, they also exclude the crews of the seventy-five ships which spent an average of about a month in Cape Town harbour during that year.⁴ However, no amount of refinement or of correction of putative biases could lead to any conclusion other than that a large number of adult men could not have been able to find mates. Moreover, in the circumstances of the society, a very large number of these must have been slaves and, to a certain extent, the low-level employees of the Company, soldiers, wood-cutters and so on. This paper will deal with the ways in which slaves managed to accommodate to this particular aspect of their oppression, and the ways in which some of them failed to cope with the social and psychological pressure which slavery imposed on them. If it tends to overplay the failure above the success, this derives in part from the nature of the sources, though I have tried to compensate for the biases inherent in them, but in the main from the conviction that slavery, like modern apartheid, was a brutish system that degraded both master and slave. There were, of course, as in all slave societies, mechanisms developed in the slave community to soften the impact of exploitation, but they can never have been sufficiently all-encompassing to prevent occasional crack-ups leading to violence to other slaves, to psychological break-downs, or to both. Since at the Cape a major field of the exploitations of slaves by their masters lay in the creation of the imbalanced sex-ratio, break-downs of slaves tended to occur in relation to their family life and their sexuality.

The reasons for the imbalance in the colony's sex-ratio are clear. Such a large proportion of the population were first-generation South-Africans that the overwhelming number of men among the immigrants disturbed the balance that would otherwise have been naturally produced. This, at any rate, can be demonstrated for the whites.⁵ With regard to the slaves, it can only be inferred from the figures I have presented above as, so far as I know, there is no way of discovering what proportions of slaves were born at the

3. In 1810, according to Governor Louis van Assenburg, the Company owned 127 male and 183 female adult slaves, and 130 children. See F. Valentijn, *Beschrijving van Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indië...*, 5 vols. (Dordrecht and Amsterdam, 1724-6), vol. 5, Book 10, p. 145. Although breakdowns by sex of the Company slave holdings probably do exist for other years, I know of none until 1784, when the slave lodge contained 472 men [both slaves and *bandieten*], 176 women and 89 children. See H.P. Cruse, *Die Opheffing van die Kleurlingbevolking* (Stellenbosch, 1947), p. 201.

4. C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte, 1779-1791* (Johannesburg, 1930), p. 210.

5. Robert Ross, 'The "White" Population of South Africa in the Eighteenth Century,' *Population Studies* 29 (1975): 210-212.

Cape. The only sources for this currently available, namely the birth-places of liberated slaves and of those arraigned on criminal charges,⁶ are so far from being representative samples of the slave population as a whole as to be nearly useless. Nor are there figures on the importation of slaves, which would allow greater light to be thrown on the matter.

In the long run, the disproportionate number of men among the Cape slaves derived from the positions that they held within the Cape economy, which was itself tied to the economic system as it emanated from Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The colony had been founded in 1652 as a refreshment station for the ships of the Dutch East India Company on their way to the East Indies. The initial intention of the Dutch was not to found a colony of settlement, but rather to rely on trading with the indigenous population, the Khoisan. For a variety of reasons, this arrangement failed to work. In place of maintaining their independence as a trading nation, the Khoisan were slowly displaced by intruding white farmers and reduced to the level of labourer whose rights were, in practice, little different from those of the slaves, although a number of Khoisan were able to escape this by moving deeper into the interior, while many others restricted white advance and their own enslavement in a century and a half of intermittent guerilla warfare.⁷ Nevertheless, by the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the colony had developed a characteristic economic pattern. It revolved around the port of Cape Town, which contained perhaps a third of the population and was the only harbour of the colony, into which, throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, between sixty and eighty-five ships put every year. Outside of the town, but within about sixty miles of it, were the wheat and wine farms of the South-West Cape. In general these were around sixty hectares, although as the century progressed there was a tendency towards amalgamation and increase in the size of farms. However, in no way were they plantations, the agricultural factories of the New World. Even less was this the case further inland, beyond the mountains of the Cape folded belt. These formed the barrier for profitable agriculture, since bulk transport to Cape Town was no longer possible. Ox-wagons, the only available vehicles, broke up too quickly on the passes for it to be otherwise. Stock farming was the only alternative, since the cattle and sheep could be driven to market. In part as a result of the nature of the pasture throughout the interior of the colony, this farming was of an exceedingly extensive kind, with settlement at a very low density and with scarcely any villages to provide for the farmers, at least until after 1800.

The tripartite division of the economic spheres of the colony was reflected in the differing organization of labour in Cape Town, the agricultural districts and the interior. Among the pastoralists, indeed, slave labour was little used, since the tasks of herding, milking, butter-churning and soap-making fell either to the lot of the white family or to that of the

6. For the former, see Cruse, *Ophessing*, p. 269; for the latter, J.M.L. Franken, "Vertolking aan die Kaap in Maleis en Portugees," in *Taalhistoriese Bydraes* (Amsterdam and Cape Town, 1953), pp. 42-44.

7. Shuka Marks, "Khoisan resistance to the Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," *Journal of African History* 13 (1972).

Khoisan as they were incorporated into lowly positions in the Cape economy.⁸ On the wine and wheat farms, slaves were mainly put to heavy manual work, such as ploughing, digging, pruning, reaping and the gathering and pressing of grapes. Since these tasks required only a modicum of skill, but much strength, the slaves on these farms were largely imported adult males. In Cape Town, too, there was much demand for "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (literally), but, in addition, the retail trade in foodstuffs and the skilled trades tended to be in the hands of the slaves. Many masters, indeed, lived as rentiers, hiring out their slaves to building contractors, while others simply sent their slaves out into the streets with goods and demanded they bring back a certain sum of money each week, the so-called "koelie geld." Again, domestic servants were far more common in the town than in the countryside. Since these tasks demanded a higher level of socialization of the slave, but could more efficiently be performed by women than those entailing mere strength and stamina, there was more incentive to buy women slaves and to create a rather more balanced slave population.⁹ Thus, while in 1749 there were throughout the colony 405 adult slave men for every 100 slave women, in Cape Town there seem to have been "only" 235.¹⁰ In contrast, the larger number of slaves in possession of one master, the greater the discrepancy between the sexes was likely to be, particularly in the countryside. Among slaves whose owners possessed eleven or more, there were 505 men for every 100 women. They lived, of course, mainly on the larger wine and wheat farms.

Despite the general superfluity of males among the population, there is some evidence that slave-holders realized that the fertility of their female slaves was an asset and, at the very least, that they did nothing to hinder it. For example, in the late stages of her pregnancy, Hagar van Mandhaar was sent to Jan de Timmerman by her master, Joachim von Dessin, presumably because she would be cared for there better than at home. Twelve days after leaving home, she gave birth to a girl and remained with de Timmerman for another month before returning home. De Timmerman received twenty-four Rijks dollars as his fee. Moreover, when she once again became pregnant, a year later, von Dessin gave Hagar a large amount of cloth for nappies and baby clothes. Similarly, it seems clear that fecund slave women fetched high prices in the slave market.¹¹

By the early nineteenth century there were owners who admitted that the

8. The beginnings of this process are handled in R. Elphick, *Kraal and Castle; Khoikhoi and the founding of White South Africa* (New Haven and London, 1977). See also my "Social Processes on the South African Frontier," paper presented to the conference on Comparative Frontier History, Mount Kisco, New York, April 1979.

9. See my "The Occupations of slaves in Eighteenth Century Cape Town," paper presented to Conference on Colonial Cities, V.U., Amsterdam, 1978.

10. Since place of residence is not specified in the lists, I have considered as Cape Town slaves all those who lived in the Cape district and whose masters possessed no agricultural property.

11. J.M.L. Franken, "In Kaapse Huishoue in die 18e Eeu uit von Dessin se Briefboek en Memoriaal," *Archives Year Book for South African History*, Vol. 1 (1940): 66-67.

primary purpose of some of their farms was the breeding of slaves.¹² The abolition of the slave trade had by then changed the economics of slavery at the Cape, along with slave demography. After 1810 slaves no longer outnumbered whites in the Colony¹³ while, by 1832, the slave sex-ratio had so evened out that there were "only" 136 males to every 100 females.¹⁴

In the eighteenth century, in contrast, it can be seen that most men and women had little chance of marrying and living in reasonably stable nuclear families. Some were luckier than others, of course. A number of masters owned what appears to have been a family unit, or perhaps two. For example, Jan Lategaan and his wife, Beatrix Olivier, who worked a small wine farm, *Het Doolhof* in Drakenstein district, possessed one adult male and one adult female slave to help tend for their two teams of oxen and their 8,000 vines (in reality probably rather more) and, no doubt, to help look after their three small children.¹⁵ But such a situation was comparatively rare, especially outside Cape Town, as can be seen from the fact that in 1749 only a quarter of the women slaves in Drakenstein district either outnumbered or equalled the males in their master's possession. What is more, it cannot be shown that even those masters who maintained a balance among their slaves did so from choice, or from any policy of fostering slave family life. I do not know of any case in which a farmer purposely bought one of his slaves a spouse, although Spartman comments that if a master did not provide a slave with a wife he stood a high risk of being murdered. On the other hand, there is no available information on the frequency with which slave families were broken up by sales. At times they clearly were not, as when, at the liquidation of von Dessin's estate at his death, Joris van Bengal, "sy beiminde Marie van de Caab and their son Piet were sold as one lot."¹⁶ Nor, of course, is it certain that Lategaan's slaves on *Het Doolhof* were man and wife. If they were estranged, unfriendly towards each other or, for that matter, of wildly differing ages, then they could not be described as a genuine family unit. In this case they were unlikely to have been so, as Lategaan had been a farmer for only about six years, but not infrequently there must have been tensions between the sexes, even on farms where their numbers were equal.

As regards the slaves, the use of the terms "marriage," "husband" and "wife" is rather loose. The legal position of South Africa with regard to slave marriages is highly unclear, but it does not seem that slaves ever availed themselves of the right to marry, if they had it,¹⁷ even though a fairly large

12. M.D. Teenstra, *De vruchten mijner werkzaamheden, gedurende mijne reize over de Kaap de Goede Hoop...* (Cape Town, 1943), p. 217. Cf. J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937* (Johannesburg, 1957), p. 10.

13. George Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa*, ed. V.S. Forbes, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1967-68), 2:256.

14. Public Record Office, London, CO 53/69, pp. 236-237.

15. See *opgaaf* list 1749, in *KA* 4155, and C.C. de Villiers and C. Pama, *Geslagsregisters van die Ou Kaapse Families* (Cape Town, 1966) 2:463.

16. Franken, "Kaapse Huishoue," p. 66. Anders Spartman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, ed. V.S. Forbes (Cape Town, 1975), p. 102.

17. The laws of neither Batavia nor the Cape specifically allowed slaves to marry. Theoretically, then, the Roman law that slaves could not marry was still in force. In 1693, however, the *Raad* of Batavia, whose edicts held good at the Cape, decreed that slaves were exempt from paying the fee for permission to marry, and in 1696 it was laid

number of them, especially among the Company slaves, were baptized Christians.¹⁸

Despite the various obstacles placed in their way, many slaves did succeed in establishing relatively long-lasting relationships, talking of their partners as their "man" or their "vrouw." What sort of ceremonies signalled this cannot be established, although, at least among the Islamic section of the population, the Muslim customs later to be characteristic of the Malay quarter were already in use.¹⁹ It is also uncertain how many slaves were married and at what age. Equally, the fertility of the slave population cannot be established. This might have provided some sort of index of the level of sexual activity among the female population and of the number who remained chaste. H.P. Cruse argued that the fertility of the slaves was very low, at least in comparison to that of the whites, a fact which he attributed to the prohibition of lawful marriages. Now it is true that the *opgaaf* lists show that the slave women consistently outnumbered the slave children. In 1749, to take the same sample year, there were 856 *slavinnen* as opposed to 450 slave *jongens* and 360 slave *meisjes*. In contrast to this, the 781 white women had a total of 2,324 children, while the 91 free black women had, among them, 148 children. Unfortunately, analysis of the *opgaaf* lists presents too many technical problems to allow the obvious inference to be drawn from these figures. Moreover, even if the fertility of slave women can be shown to be less than that of their white sisters – it can hardly have been more²⁰ – it would remain an open question whether this was due to less sexual activity or to such causes as poor health or prolonged breast-feeding.

Among an unknown, but certainly not negligible, proportion of slaves, long-lasting, monogamous relationships formed both the ideal and the general practice. Here, again, evidence is extremely difficult to assemble. Travellers and residents who wrote accounts of the Cape rarely mentioned it. Were only their testimony to be taken into account, the impression would be given that, with few exceptions, the slaves were abandoned to prostitution and promiscuity. To counteract this view, which is undoubtedly partially correct anyway, there are scarcely any records from the slave-holders themselves, which might give some idea of the actual circumstances of their bondsmen and women. It is thus necessary to fall back on the voluminous records of the court of justice. The disadvantage of so doing is evident. Only when things had broken down to such an extent that serious crimes, such as murder or assault, were committed did the Court receive information as to what was going on. Moreover, although the depositions of witnesses and the confessions of criminals survive, they tend to have been altered by the conceptions of the secretary of the Court, who took them down and prepared them for the judges. Nevertheless, particularly in the relatively frequent cases of *crime passionnel*, a clear impression can be gained of what life was like in

down that a slave could not marry a free person or another master's slave without permission from the master. See *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek, 1602-1811*, ed. J.A. van der Chijs (Batavia, 1891), 9.402-403.

18. Dr. H.A. Heege, personal communication.

19. J.C. du Plessis and C.A. Lückhoff, *The Malay Quarter and its People (Cape Town and Amsterdam, 1953)*, p. 71.

20. See Ross, "White Population," and Cruse, *Opheffing*, p. 204.

the slave quarters.

Sometimes, there is merely incidental information which shows, for instance, the *bandiet* Samuel van Batavia living peacefully together with his wife, apparently in reasonable privacy even in the crowded conditions of the Company slave lodge.²¹ On other occasions, things came to a head because the slave couple remained faithful to each other. For example, in February 1787, Daniel Dikkop, a Khoi living on Hendrik van der Wat's farm on the Groot Brakrivier, near Mossel Bay, where he was a cowherd, was hanged for murdering Cathryn van Batavia, a slave of Van der Wat. She lived there as the wife of a fellow slave, Damon van Bengal. In August 1786, Damon had been sent by his master to fetch some food, and had to be away for several days. While he was away, Daniel asked Cathryn to sleep with him, and, when she refused, knocked her out and then strangled her, later mutilating her body to make it seem that she had been killed by a leopard.²² Moreover, marriages could survive in the most adverse circumstances. For instance, Lea and Jochem, two Cape-born slaves, the former belonging to the Company, the latter to Gerrit Victor, lived together as man and wife for several years as runaways, initially at Hout Bay and then in a fairly large community of fellow escapers at Hangklip on the eastern shore of False Bay. Indeed, Lea's devotion was such that, after Jochem was killed in a fight, she left the comparative safety of Hangklip, where life was clearly now intolerable for her, and moved around Gordon's Bay and the mouth of the Eerst river, where she was later caught and sentenced to spend the rest of her life chained to a block.²³

Although devotion and faithfulness may well have been the rule among married slaves, the crime records tend to show another picture. A large proportion of those slaves who murdered other slaves did so out of jealousy or because a marriage had broken up and they wished to get revenge on their former partner. A typical case occurred in 1755. After living with Maert van Maccassar for several years, Philida van Mallebar left him. Instead she now began to sleep with Samson, a man from Natal. As all three were slaves of the same master, Casper Batenhorst, they remained very close together, so that Maert must have been continually reminded of his loss. Moreover, Philida seems to have been the only female slave on Batenhorst's farm near Stellenbosch, so that Maert can have had little opportunity to find another wife. In time the tension grew so great that, one day early in February, he left his sheep flock, went to the field where Philida was working, and strangled her. Captured almost immediately by his fellow slaves, he was tried, convicted and broken on a cross with-- for this at least we may be thankful--

21. Case against Antoni de Noose, 4 October 1725, *KA* 4077.

22. When he was asked if he knew that such a crime deserved death, Daniel Dikkop's comment is instructive. He claimed that he did not, "because sometimes this sort of murder remains unpunished, and Europeans shoot Hottentots dead without anything being done about it." Case of 3 February 1787, *KA* 4314.

23. See Cases of 9 November 1730, *KA* 4093, No. 19, and also of 15 August 1737, *KA* 4113. Although it is scattered, evidence on this fascinating runaway community is quite plentiful, especially in the crime records for 1733 (*KA* 4101), and I hope soon to write it up.

the *coup de grâce*.²⁴

With different principals and slight variations, this tragedy was repeated many times during the century. On one occasion, a man had been sold away from his wife, but continually ran away from his new master to see her, until he saw her with another man and went for her with a knife. Significantly, his former fellow slaves had been protecting him up until then, but then abandoned him to be caught by the whites.²⁵ Once Jan de Wit forbade a certain *Caffer* (or hangman's assistant) to continue his association with Sanna van Bengal, one of de Wit's slave women. The *Caffer*, Tagal van Bali, refused to accept this, and one evening broke down de Wit's front door and attempted to beat up his slaves before he was overpowered.²⁶ On another occasion, a slave went to his master to persuade him to force his wife to return to him, but when the master refused to intervene he killed both his wife (as he undoubtedly saw her) and her new man.²⁷ It was not always the cuckolded man who took vengeance. Alphasia van Madagascar, a forty year old slave woman of the Company, assaulted a fellow slave for sleeping with the woman she considered to be her daughter-in-law.²⁸ Again, Bitjoe van Batavia was not the only one who killed himself after attacking his unfaithful wife, thus saving himself from a terrible death at the hands of the executioner.²⁹ Many more, like July van Ternaten, must have left their farm for a day or two to avoid doing anything rash in the heat of anger and then, unlike July who had a murderous row with another slave on his return, came slowly and painfully to accept their enforced celibacy and their estrangement from their wives, with whom they were still in contact and who, perhaps, even slept in the same room.³⁰ There was, so it would seem, even a ceremony whereby the cutting in half of a candle signified divorce.³¹

Clearly, murders inspired by sexual jealousy, by the breakdown of marriages or by the family to persuade someone to agree to a marriage occur in every society. In modern Britain, a wife is much more likely to be murdered by her husband (or vice versa) than by anyone else. The slaves of the Cape Colony were not in any way exceptional to this. Nor, for reasons of registration, is it possible to tell if the rate of *crimes passionnels* was particularly high among them. Many, perhaps most slave marriages survived without being disrupted by the decision of one of the partners, by mutual consent or by sale of a slave far away from his or her spouse. Nevertheless, despite the barbarous punishment inflicted on murderers, slaves regularly did kill in cold blood those whom they felt betrayed them sexually. This is further evidence to show that the psychological damage of slavery was not restricted to tearing people away from their homes, and their subjection to

24. For the trial, see Case No. 7, 1755, KA 4078. For Batenhorst's holdings, see KA 4071, *opgaaf* list for 1753.

25. Case of 27 March 1721, KA 4066.

26. Case of 3 August 1752, KA 4168, No. 10.

27. Case on 10 July 1760 against Pieter van Bali, slave of Gysbert Rogiers, KA 4201, No. 10.

28. Case of 25 May 1747, KA 4151, No. 11.

29. Information in Court, 17 March 1761, KA 4205.

30. Case of 30 July 1772, KA 4249, No. 10.

31. Information given in court, 30 March 1766, KA 4230.

the will and the *sjambok* of foreign masters and mistresses.

As against this, a number of slave women were able to exploit the relative scarcity of their sex to achieve upward mobility for themselves and their offspring. Between 1657 and 1807, 480 women of apparently "black" descent married into the white population.³² Most of these must have been brought to the Cape as slaves — or at least their parents must have been.³³ Slowly their masters recognized that they were not just slaves, and so they were incorporated into the white community.³⁴ Their descendants could reach the highest positions in the Colony, as, for instance, occurred with the Bergh family.³⁵ Others again never married, but nevertheless lived with soldiers, sailors, *knechts* and respectable burghers. Even if they never married,³⁶ the women must have enjoyed an easier life than many other slaves, and the children of the couple are likely to have been freed.

Rather more slave women were more actively exploited sexually. It was, so it would appear, far from unusual and not considered reprehensible (by the white community) for a young white man to begin his sexual activity by seducing slave women, and the woman in question no doubt had little choice in the matter.³⁷ These escapades do not seem to have continued to any large extent after the white man had married, unless, that is, the mores of the society accepted black mistresses to such an extent that regular liaisons were never construed as adultery. There is no evidence for such an attitude in eighteenth century South Africa, at least to my knowledge, and it seems too much at variance with other features of the society to have been the case. Moreover, in at least one case, a prominent member of the white community, Diederik Bleumer, who at the time was an officer in the Stellenbosch militia and married to the widow of a *heemraad*, was fined 100 Rds and deprived of this rank for committing adultery with a bastard Hottentot woman, Lys, and two of his own slaves, Clara and Eva. He had threatened to whip them if they did not comply with his wishes, and they had consequently informed their mistress. However, this seems to have been a unique case, and the absence of other such prosecutions would seem to suggest that Bleumer's behaviour was rarely followed by other white men.³⁸

There were also certain slaves who used their power within the slave community on a farm to demand sexual favours from the female slaves under their authority. For instance, it cannot be chance that Willem van de

32. Ross, "White Population," pp. 222-223.

33. It is significant that all the four women with obviously black names who were recorded as the wives of white men in 1749 were known as *van der Caab*, which indicates that they had been born in South Africa.

34. For a fascinating example of this process, see Margaret Cairns, "Geringer and Bok — a Genealogical Jig-saw," *Familia*, 13 (1976), No. 2.

35. The *stamvader* Olof Bergh married Anna de Koning, daughter of Anna van Bengal. One of his descendants became *landdrost* of Stellenbosch and another a burgher lieutenant.

36. The high proportion of unmarried women among the Free Blacks suggests that many concubines were emancipated but did not marry their lovers.

37. O.F. Mentzel, *Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, ed. H.J. Mandelbrote, (Cape Town, 1924) 2:110, and (Cape Town, 1944) 3:118-119.

38. Case of 21 August 1777, *KA* 4266, No. 7.

Caab slept in the *meyden kamer* (women's quarters) of the farm Elsenburg, which was owned by Marten Melk and was one of the largest in the southwest Cape. He was the *mandoor*—a term which would be translated into American English as driver-- and thus literally held the whip-hand over the other slaves.³⁹

Although there were thus a few men who used their power to gain sexual access to women, there were many more who used their cash. According to contemporary reports, a large number of slave women of Cape Town, in particular, were prostitutes, and a certain proportion of the slave men acted as pimps. The Company's slave lodge acted as the main brothel, mainly serving the soldiers and sailors of visiting ships. Moreover, these relationships, and even some with the overseers on the farms, were conducted on a purely business basis. According to Mentzel, the motto of these women was "Kammene Kas, Kammene Kunte."⁴⁰ The sailors recognized this. Once, one said to another, rejoicing that they were nearing the Cape: "Then you will be able to have a good time with the black women, if you have the money."⁴¹

This view is exaggerated, but is far from completely untrue. On the one hand, it was general for the Company to identify its Cape-born slaves by matronymics, suggesting that it considered the paternal tie to be weak and uncertain.⁴² On the other hand, there is clear evidence within the criminal records of slaves who worked as prostitutes, and almost any slave woman on the streets of Cape Town was considered no better than she should be. This assumption was occasionally proved false, as when Fortuyn van Ceylon offered Sara van de Caab six *schellingen* to let him lie with her. He was rebuffed with the crushing comment: "Jous swart canailje, wie wil met jou te saamen gaan." (You black trash, who would want to go with you.) He thereupon tried to rape her.⁴³ What cannot be established, unfortunately, is whether she refused him because he was a dark-skinned man and thus, presumably, a slave, because she was in general not in that line of business or because he got the price wrong.

It would seem that prostitution was generally a relatively ill-organized affair, relying mainly on personal initiative, although the evidence for this is scanty. Suffice it to say that I have found no clear example of a master forcing his slaves to work as whores. Given the frequent pattern of slaves being allowed to work independently, paying their master a fixed sum (*Koelie geld*) at the end of the week, this was probably not necessary anyway. Nor do commercially run brothels seem to have been at all common, or at least their madams were almost never prosecuted. On one occasion one was, but that was mainly because one of her girls was a runaway. Even in this case it is clear that the establishment run by the free black, Flora van Rio de la Goa, was small, with just two or three rooms, and that her share in the

39. Case No. 16, 1768, *KA* 4234.

40. Mentzel, *Description*, 2:125, 3:99; Abbé N.L. de la Caille, *Journal historique du voyage fait au Cap de Bonne Esperance* (Paris, 1776), pp. 309-312.

41. V. de Koek, *Those in Bondage* (London, 1950), p. 45.

42. Unlike other slave names, the matronymics did not survive slavery, suggesting that they were not of importance to the individual identities of the slaves concerned.

43. Case of 29 November 1742, *KA* 4133.

business came mainly from renting rooms to sailors and to slave girls who required them.⁴⁴

Provided they were not accompanied by force, inflicted on young girls or adulterous, heterosexual relationships were never *per se* illegal. Slaves do not even seem to have been prosecuted for having sex with a white woman, perhaps because such acts occurred exceedingly rarely. Other forms of sexuality, in contrast, were heavily punished by the Dutch at this time. This was not a uniquely colonial phenomenon. The Republic itself was periodically swept by epidemics of prosecution against male homosexuals. In the years 1730 to 1732, more than 200 men were convicted of homosexuality in one of the greatest of these razzias, and at least seventy-six of them were put to death.⁴⁵ In South Africa, the soldiers and sailors on the ships were the main victims of this prejudice. Indeed, even before the foundation of the Colony, a sailor had been drowned in Table Bay for homosexuality, and throughout the Dutch period men were arraigned before the Court of Justice for "sodomic" committed on board ship, although the punishment seems to have become less severe during the eighteenth century. Slaves, on the other hand, were still drowned for this offence, although in fact very rarely. My impression is that the slave community was very infrequently willing to inform on one of its own members, and many masters also seem to have kept the matter quiet when it came to their notice. After all, homosexuality was not a threat to their authority, and to give information to the *fiscaal* would entail the loss of a valuable part of their property.

When slaves were no longer under their master's control, and working for his profit, these considerations did not, of course, apply. As in all prisons, there seems to have been a definite homosexual culture on Robben Island.⁴⁶ Even there it did not come too often to the court, perhaps because the prisoners were able to conceal the details of their life from their warders. Nevertheless, it would seem significant that within a week of their arrival on the Island, both Christoffel de Koning and Frans Dollink were importuned by the *bandiet* Hendrik Pothoven. Hendrik seems to have been too hasty in attempting to claim them as his own, and therefore they informed against him.⁴⁷ It also seems significant that the only clear cases of interracial homosexuality occurred on Robben Island.⁴⁸ Racial pride can have been hard to maintain among people condemned to spend the rest of their lives dragging chains on their feet round the island.

It may, of course, be that here and in general too much can be read into isolated incidents. An alternative explanation is in fact quite in keeping with the evidence. It may have been that homosexuality was exceedingly rare among the slaves at the Cape and that all infractions against this code were dealt with severely, both by the slave community and by their masters.

44. Case of 13 November 1766, KA 4230, No. 27.

45. I.J. Boon, "De grote sodomietenvervolging in het gewest Holland, 1730-1731," *Holland* 8 (1976): 140-152.

46. Cf. Charles van Onselen, "The Regiment of the Hills: South Africa's Lumpenproletarian Army, 1890-1920," *Past and Present* 80 (August 1978): 102-112.

47. Case of 23 April 1739, KA 4120, No. 11.

48. Case of 23 December 1751, KA 4163, No. 12, and of 18 August 1735, KA 4106, No. 12.

Nevertheless, given the horrifying sexual imbalance in the society on which they lived, this seems unlikely. That many men cannot have been that controlled that much of the time. The particular nature of their oppression must have forced it onto them.

Rather more commonly than for homosexuality, slaves were prosecuted for bestiality. In the eyes of the Dutch, indeed, the two offences were described by the same term ("sodomic") and the punishment was the same. The unfortunate man was towed out into Table Bay, with enough heavy weights attached to him to make certain that he would sink, and thrown into the water, frequently tied to his correspondent in the deed. There can be no clearer proof of the oppressive nature of Cape slavery than that it regularly drove men to engage in these activities, for which they knew that the punishment was drowning.

The finest example of the quality of relationships and of the jealousy, envy and sexual frustration that could exist on a slave-owning Cape farm is perhaps provided by the trial and eventual release of Patentie van Ceylon in 1774. Patentie was a thirty-three year old slave of Johannes Louw, one of the biggest farmers in the Cape district. He lived on a farm in the Tygerberg, which produced large quantities of wine and wheat and a certain amount of barley. Louw also possessed a good number of horses and cattle and a large flock of sheep, although it is not certain whether these were kept in the Tygerberg or, as is more likely, on a *veeplaats* elsewhere in the country. Patentie therefore lived in one of the most thickly populated and richest areas of the Cape countryside. There were many other farms in the neighbourhood, and Cape Town itself was not too far away, although no doubt it was out of bounds to Louw's slaves except when they were driving wagons loaded with wine and wheat to the market.

Louw possessed a total of eighteen slaves: eleven men, three women, two boys and two girls. Probably one or two of the men lived elsewhere, looking after Louw's sheep, but most of them must have been in the Tygerberg, with Louw, his wife and his four young sons. There was also a certain number of Khoisan living there, including a woman called Rosalyn, with whom Patentie seems to have been intimate.

On 26 March 1774, Patentie got drunk and went to sleep off the alcohol in a barn. Also asleep in the barn was a black dog. The other slaves on the farm thereupon accused Patentie of bestiality with the dog, and called Louw and his son to witness what was going on. In fact, these two, and three slaves, gave evidence in court. However, there is absolutely no evidence that Patentie even touched the animal, let alone committed the offence of which he was accused. This, indeed, was the opinion of the *fiscaal*, and it convinced the court before which Patentie was brought. Not that the court required much convincing. Very rarely did its verdict differ from the opinion of the prosecutor, although it frequently imposed a lesser punishment than that demanded. The court, therefore, ordered that Patentie be released and sold inland, and that Louw pay the costs of the case.⁴⁹

Perhaps the examining officers deliberately suppressed information or

49. Case of 15 September 1774, KA 4257, No. 12. For Louw's holdings, see *opgaaf* list for 1774, KA 4254, Cape District, p. 22.

refused to ask the witnesses the necessary questions to establish a *prima facie* case against Patentie strong enough to commit him to torture and thus extort a confession from him. This seems unlikely, however. The legal officers of the Dutch East India Company were not renowned for their leniency and would have had no reason to support a slave against his master. Indeed, the length of time between his arrest and his trial makes it seem plausible that they kept Patentie in custody in the hope that he would break down and provide them with the evidence required to convict him. That being the case, the problem remains why he was brought to trial in the first place. It can only be that Patentie had made himself extremely unpopular with his fellow slaves and that they set him up in the most convenient and, so far as they were concerned, safest way. No one, not even the dog, got hurt. The most plausible reason for Patentie's unpopularity with his fellow slaves was his connection with Rosalyn, of which other slaves must have been jealous. This is certainly in keeping with the general atmosphere of social relations within the community. As this paper has tried to argue, sexual tensions among the slaves were very considerable. Slave men were prepared to kill others in their competition over women, and some may well have been prepared to send others to torture and death in a quarrel over women. After all, there were very few slave women, and many of these were appropriated by others of greater power and wealth in the strongly stratified society of the eighteenth century Cape of Good Hope.

There have been many other social situations, far less oppressive than slavery, in which men and women have done far more inhuman things to each other. At the Cape in the eighteenth century, the particular form of oppression meant that slave men were particularly vulnerable to attacks of sexual jealousy. To deny the existence of the problems the slaves faced, and to hide the evidence of those who broke down in face of it, is to gloss over a facet of their oppression which weighed heavily on them and, more importantly, implicitly denies credit to those slaves who managed, not to accept their bondage, but to survive it and, despite everything, to maintain their standards and some of their decency. That struggle of the many can probably never be documented at the Cape but its existence can be inferred, and applauded, from the failure of the few.