The lodge women of Cape Town, 1671 to 1795

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The women in the slave lodge were in a vastly different situation from the settlers’ women slaves. Lodge women, for instance, were not under the direct domestic supervision of any settler or European official. There were almost as many slave women in the lodge as there were men. There were thus possibilities of finding a slave spouse among the Lodge inmates. Slave women in the Lodge, in contrast to their counterparts owned by settlers, could “be effectively married” to slave men from as early as 1671, although this did not entail a wedding solemnized by the Dutch Reformed Church across the way (actually a graveyard separated the two buildings).1

According to Lord Adriaan Van Rheede’s more carefully worded instructions issued in 1685, “[Company slave] man and wife were to be left together” and to be “married in their manner.”2 If a slave couple wished to be wed, they had to ask permission to be placed on the “marriage list.” It is important to establish that the official church of the colony never sanctioned or even recorded such marriages, moreover the mandated “lists” of such Company slave couples have never been found in the voluminous Company books or censuses of company slaves.3 Significantly, one year after Van Rheede had left the colony, the local authorities used the Dutch word “wijven” to describe these Company slave spouses and not the expected word “vrouwen” which was used for the settlers’
wives. Several scholars of the period have suggested that local officials regarded Van Rheede as an aristocratic busybody and all but ignored his heavily touted reforms.

Getting on to one of these married lists also meant moving to new quarters, since the architecture of the Lodge was based on sex: young bachelors on the east wing, spinsters on the west wing, married couples in their own quarters.

According to the 1717 report on the new slave lodge, the entire second story of the lodge was to be given over “to the best and most respectable paired slaves.” This “pairing” spilled over into the workplace; even the heaviest labor contingent on the “general works” in 1693, where one would expect to find a high proportion of males who were physically more capable of the heavy labor, suggested this pairing. Whether this racial pairing was organized by the Company or the slaves themselves is obscure: the Company though, recorded the following:

Gender and descent status of Company slaves, 1693

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half-breed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-breed</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each “half-breed” [halfslag] male slave there was one half-breed female slave; for each full-breed female slave there was one full-breed male. Only two extra “overlapping” woman spoilt the otherwise perfect symmetry of what one might term descent pairing.

All half-breed females in the lodge were actually encouraged to marry “a man from the Netherlands,” who would be expected to pay back the cost of upkeep and education of the slave women and to free her. The process of settlers formally marrying Company half breeds was common enough for the Company to resolve to exact compensation from the bridegroom, who was, after all, acquiring property from the company. Not all bachelor settlers could afford this expense. Consequently, there are several examples of ante nuptial contracts, whereby the settler or soldier promised that should his slave bride die before him and not have any heirs, he would leave half of the estate of the marriage to the Company as compensation for the education and upbringing of the slave bride. As can be seen from the following extract from just such a contract, the...
...Andries Oelszen, free settler at Stellenbosch presently intending to marry Sara van de Caap, the Company's half-breed slave, declares that in the event of his bride's pre-deceasing him and in the event of her leaving no legal heirs, that a half of the estate, including land and movables, should be given over to the company, at the death-house [sterfhuijsje], before the debts of the estate are settled, to acknowledge and pay off the Company's rôles in bringing up and feeding the above-mentioned bride...10

According to Van Rheede's calculations in 1685, at 22 years of age this amounted to 150 Guilders.11 European males were often willing to pay.12 Full-breed women slaves, on the other hand, had to wait much longer for their manumission.13 Officials obviously presumed that no European would want to marry a full-breed, since no provisions were made for such an eventuality, one source even claiming these unions were illegal.14

Because of the long-term shortage of women at the Cape, half-breed company slave women had a good chance of being married to a European — and this was encouraged officially at the same time as regulations were promulgated against concubinage with full-breed slaves.15 This seeming contradiction represents a head-on clash between racial attitudes of the time and the demographic reality of the shortage of European women at the Cape. Basing arguments about miscegenation (and indirectly race relations) at the Cape on the marital trajectories of the Company's few half breed slave women should not be regarded as hard evidence of racial fluidity. In those regions of the colony where European women were more plentiful, the incidence of miscegenation declined.

The Lodge slave censuses disclose that the women were under the overall supervision of a male mandoor at the work-place outside the lodge.16 In the lodge itself, the women had an equivalent authority figure in the matres, literally a schoolmistress. Her separate lodging, strategically located next to the chamber
set aside for the schoolgirls, discloses that her duties exceeded those of the traditional “schoolmarm.” Therefore, the translation “matron” seems more appropriate.\textsuperscript{17}

The two references where matrons were mentioned by name confirm that they enjoyed the same, or greater, privileges of manumission as did the male half-breed mandoors, but then as mothers they had their own children to free. Significantly both matrons mentioned were half-breeds; both were allowed to manumit their children. For example, Armoijn van de Caab, the matron before 1711, who had been manumitted because of good service by the previous Governor, Willem Adriaan van der Stel, made a special request to free her daughter, Marie van de Caap, who still languished in the Lodge.\textsuperscript{18} The Company granted the request, but the resolution stipulated that the slave-girl would still have to work for the Company for three years after which she would be sold to her mother at the price which Lord van Rheede had laid down in 1685 for all such miscegenated children.\textsuperscript{19} In August, 1728 Christijn van de Caab, another matron, freed her 13 year old child, Johanna Barbara van de Caab, before she thought of her own freedom.\textsuperscript{20}

Below the matron was the under-mistress.\textsuperscript{21} Again the documents confirm the half-breed descent status.\textsuperscript{22} Women slaves in these supervisory positions somehow managed to obtain cash as well as their normal perquisites. For example, the Company instantly freed Anna van Dapoer van de Caap, who had worked for “ten unbroken years” as an under-mistress in the lodge, when on the 23rd September, 1727 she presented a male slave, Julij van de Kust, whom the Company surgeon, Jan van Schoor, had examined and pronounced “upstanding and healthy.”\textsuperscript{23} She had bought Julij out of her own pocket to exchange him for her freedom.

This exchange system was the Cape equivalent of the Cuban coartición, which entitled any slave to purchase freedom at a stipulated price.\textsuperscript{24} But unlike the Cuban custom, the Cape practice usually involved an exchange of persons, rather than money, and a slave’s chances of freedom were statutorily greater if the slave could prove European descent.\textsuperscript{25} The purchase price of an exchange slave was large by contemporary standards, where such a slave might be worth
Illustrating Anna van Dapoer’s ordeal, a further twelve years’ work as a free woman was needed before she was able to free her children, Jan and Frans, in 1739.27

Each of the two women slave officers, the last and lowest rung in the Lodge’s female hierarchy, had an average of 79 “work-maidens” under her supervision, i.e. many more underlings than her male fellow officer which suggests greater compliance among the Lodge women. Like her male counterpart she received more clothing than her fellows. The women slave officers however also received bolts of linen. Each officer, male and female, received a length of cotton cloth, presumably as part of the overall incentive scheme of the lodge.28

Elements of the family mode of slave management were fused into the control of the Lodge slave women, but noticeably never among the men, who lived according to strict army style regulations.29 The interpolation of the family trope was accomplished through the offices of the “internal” and “external” mothers.30 External mothers were surrogate slave mothers outside the lodge, usually European official’s wives, who must have served as ombudspersons (apologies to all Scandanavians). In 1687, the political Council appointed and charged four external mothers with seeing that the maidens and younger girls of the Lodge were well brought up, were familiar with the handicrafts of the “fatherland,” specifically the sewing of linen and making of woolen clothes.31 Internal mothers looked after their own children and other mothers and their children in the lodge creche and hospital. If the slave-child became sick, the biological mother would be called in, and placed in the Company hospital with her child. However, the child would have to be seriously sick. According to the complete hospital records of the year 1710, nineteen slave children were bed patients, yet only one mother, Margriedt, was recalled from her work to look after her children.32 The company also consulted the internal mothers about conditions in the lodge, which suggests that they had some control over the other female slaves.33 They did not, however, receive any extra rations.34 Their continuance through the remainder of the eighteenth century is dubious. Perhaps they did their job too efficiently and became a nuisance, but this is arguing from silence. We do know that the internal mothers disappear from the sources.
The most important aspect of female slave labor in the lodge was that apart from childbearing, the Company made little distinction in the type of labor which men and women could do. The Company throughout this period had no hesitation in assigning slave women to the most gruelling tasks. For example, at the Company mine at Silvermine (on the road to present-day Kommetje), a mine which was worked around the clock, a small undivided hut was set aside for the men and women slaves. It should be remembered that woman in contemporary England had proved efficient miners as they could crawl through the narrow coal tunnels dragging carts with ropes between their legs without encumbrance. The legend in the illustration of this Cape mine shows that the Dutch made a distinction between the maximum number of Europeans (50) and slaves (150) who could safely be in the mine at one time, but no mention was made of women, a further hint that no gender deference was shown to Company slave women with regard to heavy manual labor.

European women, on the other hand, never appear on the Company payrolls, except as midwives or “external mothers.” When adventurous individual Dutch women did disguise themselves as men, joined the Dutch East India Company to come to the Cape, and were caught, they were tried and sent home, even though several male settlers “instantly asked for their hand in marriage.” Settler women at the Cape, like their Virginian counterparts, were supposed to work at home; it was left to settler and slave men and Lodge slave women to work in the field and the ditch.

The only evidence of gender differentiation for the slave women of the lodge was that the Company did not allow them to work in the Company hospital as nurses because of the “rough soldiers and sailors” who were often afflicted with the “Venus sickness [venereal disease].” Such nursing “work was wholly incompatible for a woman” the internal mothers complained on the 10th February, 1710. The Political Council agreed to use fewer women in the hospital, but
The Hospital (opposite the Lodge)

1. a, a, a, represent the wall around the hospital; formerly it was enclosed by a ditch only is the main entrance (the main entrance was in the Heeren-Gracht, now known as Adderley St., facing the present Dutch Reformed Church.
2. a side entrance opposite the Company’s Gardens
3. a back entrance facing a road
4. the main entrance through the portico into the Hall; above this door is the inscription copied below (p.116); the back exit opposite is also marked
5. the porter’s lodge
6. an apartment for the bookkeeper
7. a dark room formerly occupied by the porter
8. the mortuary
9. the staircase

A the hall: a sermon is preached here every 14 days.
1. here the evening-prayers are read but not the morning-prayers.
B the infirmary or surgery. The mild cases are accommodated upon benches, but lightly wounded or seriously sick persons lie upon “catels” (Vide note p.30)
m. a house for the “Schaaf-Baas” or food-inspector of the hospital.
3. the dispensary
4. the operating theatre
p. the kitchen and the cook’s quarters
q. the apothecary’s dwelling
r. the laboratory
s. the “Poccage” or ward for venereal diseases
t. the residence of the under-surgeon
u. a door opening on the courtyard
v. the sudatorium (literally sweating box)
w. the sub-inspector’s quarters
x. the bell which hangs from a trestle. It is rung at nine in the morning and at three in the afternoon as a signal for meals; it rings again between nine and half-past nine at night to indicate bed-time
yy. these are palisades in front of the principal doctor’s house.
CC. wards: the convalescents and those suffering from minor ailments lie upon benches; serious cases are arranged in two rows upon “catels”
DD. These are wards for patients who have been some time in the hospital; they are removed to make room for newcomers in the other wards; they are accommodated in the manner aforementioned.
E. the residence of the principal doctor who also acts as the chief surgeon
F. the house of the second doctor and under-surgeon
G. a court-yard planted with beautiful and shade-yielding Amacqua trees.

There are many benches where the convalescent rest and enjoy the fresh air. It is the porter’s duty to warn them not to stay out too long in the open lest the keen air might prove injurious to them at the commencement.
Z. a cross wall that partitions a small court from the rest of the grounds.
did so on epidemiological grounds rather than from notions of gender difference.  

How the slave women perceived themselves in the hierarchy in the lodge is a difficult question. The detailed crime records rarely provide a glimpse. Attitudes have perforce to be inferred from behavior, reconstructed from the baptismal records, and also deduced from European commentary originating outside the walls of the lodge. If the women slaves of the settlers had to be coerced to make love to European visitors, this did not apply to the lodge slave women. Their reputed slave “husbands” forced them to sleep with visitors, both settlers and the famous “Lords of six weeks,” those soldiers and sailors who had money and only a short time to spend it. Ambrose Cowley, an English visitor to the Cape in 1686, claimed the lodge “husbands” were easily persuaded to pimp their wives: “If a slave of the Company’s should have a mind to have carnal knowledge of one of their women, let him but give her husband a bit of Tobacco-Roll of about three inches long, he will fetch her forthwith to the slave and cause her to lie with him.” Mentzel, who actually delivered salt to the Lodge and was thus one of the few settlers to pass through the Lodge’s portals, confirms Cowley’s accounts, namely that male slaves actually forced their partners to take a European lover. Elsewhere he suggests that not all lodge women were “loose,” those that were however, scrupulously insisted on advance payment from their patrons.

There was another side to these accounts of the lodge women. Many travellers and other sources emphasized that Lodge slave women willingly courted European sexual attention. For instance, according to the genuinely pained Political Council members in 1681, the slave women in the lodge flaunted their European lovers in public: “dancing, stark naked even on Sundays, in full aspect.” Charles Lockyer, who visited the Cape in 1711, claimed that: “There is little notice taken of the sailors who lodge in their rooms, and as for the women themselves, they are so fond of white children, that they would willingly have no other, whence the breed is highly improved, many of them being as white as Europeans.” Johan Daniel Buttner, a doctor who stayed at the Cape in the

Petronella Lammerts, born circa 1688. Petronella is listed in the 1693 slave census as a “full-breed” school child of unknown origin. She would therefore have been between four and thirteen years old in 1693, and it is likely she was born around 1688 as her first child was baptised in 1708. The baptismal register for 1708 lists her as “Petronella Lammerts”. In later references, “Lammerts” is sometimes recorded as “Lambertse” or “Lambertz”.

Flora manumitted a woman named Eva (no relationship to Flora listed) in 1742.

c1 Harmanus, born 1728 in Cape Town, baptized 1 August 1728 in Cape Town. Possibly manumitted 1749? There was one male named ‘Hermanus’ listed as manumitted from the Lodge in 1749 but there is no way of discerning whether or not he was Flora’s child (no matronym mentioned).


d1 Flora Wilhelmina, baptised 18 June 1752 (De Villiers Pama: p. 923).


c3 Eva, birthdate unknown. Married Jan (Johann) Rudolph Timm van Hamburg, 4 June 1752 (De Villiers Pama: p. 979-980).

d1 Johannes Hendrik, birthdate unknown, baptized 22 April 1753.

d2 Francina Elisabeth, birthdate unknown, baptized 4 January 1761. Married Johann Jacob Kibe van Danzig, 7 April 1782 (De Villiers Pama: p. 444).

e1 Elisabeth Louisa Dorothea, birthdate unknown, baptized 12 March 1780 (De Villiers Pama: p. 444).

e2 Johan Rudolph, birthdate unknown. Married Elisabeth Catharina Bakker, 16 May 1802 (De Villiers Pama: p. 444).
Johan Frederik Ephraim, birthdate unknown, baptized 1786.
Cornelia Maria Christina, birthdate unknown, baptized 1788.
Jacob Georg Daniel, birthdate unknown, baptized 1791.
Elisabeth Francina, birthdate unknown, baptized 1793.
Johannes Christoffel, birthdate unknown, baptized 19 June 1763.
Johannes Rudolph, birthdate unknown, baptized 13 October 1765.
Jacoba van Petronella, born 1713 in Cape Town, baptized 8 January 1713 in Cape Town.
Hendrina, born 1717 in Cape Town, baptized 11 July 1717 in Cape Town.
Anna Lies van Elisabeth van der Kaap, born 1768 or 1769. As Anna Lies was manumitted and adopted on 2 January 1776 when she was seven years old by Johan Michiel Greiner von Krombach/Krumbach, she would have been born in 1768 or 1769.
Gesie/Geesje, born May 1778 in Cape Town, baptized in Cape Town. As Gesie was manumitted and adopted on 16 February 1779 when she was nine months old by Gerhardt Meijer von Stade, she was probably born in May 1778.
Jurgen, born between 1767 and 1769. Sometimes between 1768 and 1770, Johan Georg Renner requested the manumission of “Jurgen, son of Elizabeth Jacoba Petronella of the Cape, eighteen months old”. Jurgen would therefore have been born between 1767 and 1769 (Leibbrandt: Requesten: v.III: P-S: p. 971).
Christiaan, born 1717 in Cape Town, baptized 11 July 1717 in Cape Town.

1 Linen, L. Blair, Madagascar to manumission: survival strategies of female slaves in the Dutch East India Company Lodge; Cape of Good Hope (Thesis (B.A.)—Princeton University, 1996): p. 94.
4 Leibbrandt: Requesten (Memorials): P-S: p. 971.
5 Linen: p. 94-96.
1720s also remarked on the mixed race children in the Lodge, the result of willing miscegenation from “men of many nations.”

The most compelling evidence comes from the church records: the independent church archives reveal that Company slave women took great pains to drive a genealogical stake into the baptismal records of the colony, always naming their invariably absent European lover as the “father” by providing an exact patronym. Whether the slave women were coerced by their slave spouses, or were willing partners, the result was the same, what Mentzel termed an entire “mestiço class” in the lodge. Were the slave women of the lodge being defiant of the growing racial order by flaunting their European partners, or simply establishing for their offspring the best possible chance in a colony where the advantages depended so clearly on a light skin color? If slavery became increasingly racially based in the colony, than the genius of the lodge women lay in their success in making that association as difficult and troublesome as possible for the ruling order and by flaunting European fatherhood, they also put their pimping slave spouses in their places.

Conclusions

Emerging racial descent criteria came to override long-established patterns of European gender deference in the lodge. No European women worked at heavy manual labor, while all lodge women were used in the heaviest work, including mining. Further, it was more important in the lodge to be mestiço than female, at least as far as the allocation of easier tasks and the granting of freedom were concerned. But lodge women used the system to acquire the best life chances for their offspring and then themselves.
1. Isbrand Goske, “Memorie voor den E. Hr. Pieter Hackius” (1671) in Anna Böeseken, (ed.) Memoriën, pages 101 and 108 and also 208 for compulsory recording of slave marriages; Resolusies, 5:162. These marriages were not official; they were not recorded in the marriage register, and who conducted the ceremony is a mystery. Only one other document refers to the married company slaves, significantly, only a few years after van Reede’s visit, see CAD, C.502, Letters Despatched, “Companje Slaven,” (16th April, 1688), folio 72.

2. Van Reede did mention in 1685 that Company slaves should unofficially marry other company slaves “after their own fashion [“op haar wijze”], but such couples should be warned that they could not marry another partner, “without danger of severe punishment.” in H. A. van Reede tot Drakenstein, “Instruksie” (15th July, 1685) in Böeseken, ed., Memoriën en Instructiën, 1657-1699 1: 205.

3. The Dutch Reformed Church archives recorded all company slave baptisms but no such slave “marriages.” DRCA passim, 1652-1795.

4. PB (17 December 1686) 1:224; It is true that “wijf” could mean “wife” but the word was not a true cognate, it was more properly a term for gender differentiation in the animal and plant kingdoms. In Afrikaans the word came to have the latter as its leading sense, see J. Verdam, Middel Nederlandsch Handwoordenboek s.v. “wijven.”

5. Personal communication with Richard Elphick and James Armstrong.


8. VOC. 4030, “Generale Opneming...,” folios 359 to 367, recto.


10. DO: Transporten en Schepenkennis (31 December, 1689) 18/90, pages 292-3.


12. Using the most scientific genealogical techniques, Hans Heese, the son of South Africa’s leading genealogist, J.A. Heese has painstakingly documented all such cases, which has resulted in a million Rand law suit against him by self-styled “white Afrikaner” descendants of these mixed unions; see H.F. Heese, Groep sonder Grense (Bellville: Wes Kaaplandse Institute vir Historiese Navorsing, 1984), passim.


14. A. Hulshof, “Journaal..., “ pages 189-223; F.C. Dominicus in his classic work on domestic life of South Africa in the eighteenth century claims that it was forbidden for a European to
marry “a pure breed,” in Ibid., Het Huiselijk en Maatschappelik Leven van de Zuid Afrikaner in der Eeerste Helft der 18de Eeuw (S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1919) page 79, but the present author has been unable to find the original source.

15. A. Hulshof, “Journaal . . .” 1-245, Kaapse Plakkaatboek, (30th November, 1678) 1:151-152. Since all Company “half-breeds” were baptized, an assumption has been made that references to “heathen slave-women” are equivalent to references to “full-breed.”

16. See chapter on the Lodge for a discussion on the mandoors, VOC. 4030, “Generale Opneming...,” folios 359 to 367, recto; and CAD: Attestaties C.336., “verklaring na gedane monsteringe bevonden te hebben onder te naeme ‘s Comp: leijsiegenen,” (Ultimo, August, 1714), folios 457 to 475.

18. Resolusies, (3rd April, 1711) 4: 203.
19. Resolusies, (3rd April, 1711) 4: 203.
21. [Ondermeesteress].
23. CAD C.344, Attestatiën (1727), folio 579.
26. For the equivalent prices see the testament of Anna van Banchem, CAD MOOC (14 June, 1726), 10/3/no. 57.
29. See chapter on Lodge, page 000.
30. [“Binne” and “buijten” mothers, Resolusies, (23 June 1716) 5: 89. I am grateful to Anna Böeseken, whose help here has led to a fundamental revision of this section.
31. Res, (15 September 1687) 3: 171. A month later the number of external mothers was increased to 6, see Res, (23 October, 1687) 3:173-4.
32. AR: VOC: 4063, “Rolle van’s Compagnie Slaven die siek in’t hospital leggen,” (sedert ultimo August 1709 tot 9 May 1710), folio 837.
33. Resolusies (23 June 1716), 5:89.
34. CAD: C.338, (1st August, 1719), folio 376.; C.339, “(6 or 16 October, 1720), folio 253; C.339, (21 May, 1721), folio 503.
35. [“Bij daege en bij nagt”].
37. AR:Kaartenafdeeling no. 813 “Model van een Bergwerck off mijn” (1686) see also VOC 4022: folios 667-668.
40. Morgan writes: “For reasons not altogether clear, English women were not ordinarily employed in growing tobacco or other work on the ground” in Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, page 235.
41. [“Geheel incompatibel voor een vrouws persoon”], Resolusies (10th February, 1710), 4:131.
42. Resolusies (23rd June 1716) 5: 89.
43. At first the company slaves were listed together with the settlers, but after 1700, listed separately, see Cape Town: DRCA Kaap Notule, 1665-1695, Doop Register, GR1 Vol.1/1-5.
44. For the merits of these sources, see Elphick and Shell, “Intergroup relations,” pages 129 ff.
45. Ambrose Cowley, Voyage round the Globe... as quoted in Raven-Hart, Cape Good Hope, 2: 310.
46. Mentzel, A Complete... Description, 2:124; see also Elphick and Shell, “Intergroup relations,” page 127.
47. [“Kammene Kas, Kammene Kunte” = If you have no money, I have no ____] Mentzel, Description, 3:99.
49. Charles Lockyer, An Account of the Trade in India (London: Samuel Crouch, 1711), page 297 [emphasis added].
51. See page 000.
52. Mentzel, A Complete...Description, 2: 125.