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Gendered Silence: Female Slave Imports and Khoikhoi Women in the Dutch Cape Colony

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Abstract

The Dutch East Indies Company had power in the Cape Colony of South Africa from 1652 to 1795. Under this rule, imported slave women and Indigenous Khoikhoi women were enslaved, despite the Khoikhoi being legally considered free. The purpose of this article is to synthesize the current research on the topic, and to bring a gendered perspective to Cape bondage. I show how gender, race, and origin influenced slave experiences and lifestyles. I present the environmental, social, and economic contexts that led to the start of slavery in the Cape, as well as the historical context that led to Khoikhoi enslavement. Despite the legal distinctions between slave and free, both groups lived under slave-like conditions, yet had unique experiences. This is shown through diverse examples of female slaves working in the domestic sphere, and Khoikhoi women working on farms. Additionally, I analyze the different treatment of female slaves and Khoikhoi women during the smallpox outbreaks in 1713, 1748, and 1755. Slaves and Khoikhoi both worked as washerwomen, which offered more freedom and a counternarrative to domesticity. Overall, it is concluded that although both these groups of women were enslaved under Dutch rule, each were responsible for different types of work, and received different treatment.

Keywords: slave, women, Khoikhoi, Cape Colony, South Africa, VOC.

Introduction

Slavery in South Africa began with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to Table Bay in 1652.[1] In my analysis of bondage in the Dutch Cape Colony, I focus specifically on women, differentiating between experiences of imported slaves and the Indigenous Khoikhoi. The Khoikhoi can be understood as a pastoralist peoples that occupied the Cape prior to the arrival of colonial powers. Before presenting the beginnings of slavery in the Cape, I will highlight the importance of acknowledging gender and defining bondage in this context.

Enslaved women in the Cape Colony cannot be discussed without acknowledging their gendered silence. There is a significant gap in the literature on both slave and Khoikhoi women in the Cape. Considering this silence, I attempt to synthesize evidence from the existing research on female slaves and Khoikhoi women. Analyzing information on these groups of women highlights the complexity of bondage in the context of gender, origin, and race. Murray argues that the eighteenth-century Cape is poorly represented in the historical records, but within these records women are doubly invisible.[2] Cape female slaves were not only marginalized as a result of their gender, but also as a result of their race (as non-Caucasian), and their status as slaves.[3] Jordan notes that the neglect of the importance of female slaves is not specific to the Cape, rather it is a general trend present in the study of female slaves overall.[4] This marginalization and silence is also true of the Khoikhoi people in

[1] Gerald Groenewald, "Slaves and Free Blacks in VOC Cape Town, 1652-1795." *History Compass* 8, no. 9 (2010): 965 ; "History of slavery and early colonisation South Africa," South African History Online, last modified June 7, 2017, https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-slavery-and-early-colonisation-south-africa

[2] Jessica Murray, "Gender and Violence in Cape Slave Narratives and Post-Narratives," *South African Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (2010): 446.

[3] Patricia Van Der Spuy, "What, Then, Was the Sexual Outlet for Black Males? A Feminist Critique of Quantitative Representations of Women Slaves at the Cape of Good Hope in the Eighteenth Century," *Kronos : Journal of Cape History* 23, no. 1 (1996): 43.

[4] Elizabeth Grzymala Jordan. "It All Comes Out in the Wash," in *Women and Slavery: Africa and the Western Indian Ocean Islands*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 336.

general, and Khoikhoi women in particular, as South African scholars have largely ignored Khoikhoi history and contributed to the continuation of their invisibility.[5] The Khoikhoi were not included in the census registers of the Cape until the nineteenth century which further contributes to their silence in the literature.[6]

There are numerous points throughout this work in which the discussion of slaves or Khoikhoi is general, rather than gendered. In these areas, this is due to the fact that information specifically on females is not available. This silence is important to pay attention to and acknowledge because it can be used as a piece of evidence highlighting some of the conditions in which they lived.[7] The silence of both slave and Khoikhoi women in the literature potentially reflects their silence in Cape society under the Dutch. Throughout my research I have not found any primary resources of either of these groups, but I have found primary accounts from women of the settler class. This is important as it highlights the variation of women's experiences influenced by their race and class, and influenced particularly by the intersection of gender, race, and class. I argue that, under the Dutch, enslaved women[8] did not have a common or homogeneous experience.

In the first section, I provide a historical background of the start of Dutch colonization in the Cape. I present environmental constraints and poor Dutch-Khoikhoi relations as causes leading to the import of slaves, followed by an analysis of the constraints in which the Khoikhoi were gradually reduced to enslaved peoples. Through this, I demonstrate how the distinction between slave and free is ambiguous and very difficult to define. In the second section, I focus on gender as a determining factor in the type of work and level of

[5] Shula Marks, "Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *The Journal of South African History* 13, no. 1 (1972): 55.
[6] Van Der Spuy, "What, Then," 50.
[7] Murray, "Gender and Violence," 447.
[8] I purposely use the term 'enslaved women' as a way to describe both imported slave women and Khoikhoi women who were reduced to servile status over time under the Dutch. It would be incorrect to refer to the Khoikhoi as slaves since they were legally free, however they were enslaved and this shall be shown throughout the paper.

vulnerability of labourers. I show the heterogeneity of the experiences of enslaved women through types of labour, race-based privileges, and manumission rates. In the third section, I further highlight the heterogeneity of the female slave experience through an example of smallpox. Although there is a lack of data on the treatment of female slaves during the outbreaks, it is clear that Khoikhoi women were assumed to be exacerbating the disease by Dutch officials. I then present a counternarrative to female slave domesticity in order to further elaborate on the complex interaction between gender and bondage.

Defining Cape slavery

Defining slavery in the Cape under the Dutch is a difficult task, especially as I am looking at groups that were categorized differently by Dutch law. There were four groups with different legal statuses and rights, including: Company servants, *freeburghers*, privately owned slaves, and Khoikhoi.[9] As a result of this variance, it is difficult to formulate a general definition of the system of slavery for women in the Cape. For example, imported slaves arrived in the Cape as property and were defined by their slave status which was passed on through generations.[10] Manumission was possible under Dutch rule, and did occur, however it was not the norm. For example, from 1715 to 1791, the rate of manumission of the entire slave force (Company and private slaves) was approximately 0.165 % manumitted per year.[11] Although this statistic does not include the entirety of Dutch rule, it offers a partial look into the stagnancy of slave status and the unlikelihood of manumission. Conversely, the Khoikhoi peoples were not legally allowed to be considered property.[12] Early in the settlement of the

[9] Emile Boonzaier, Candy Malherbe, Penny Berens, and Andy Smith, *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa.* (South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1996), 79.
[10] Richard Elphick and Robert Shell. "Intergroup relations: Khoikhoi, settlers, slaves and free blacks, 1652-1795," in *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840,* ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 206.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Elphick, Richard, and V.C. Malherbe. "The Khoisan to 1828," in *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840,* ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 11.

Cape, the Company was dependent on trade with this group and in order to avoid conflict, Dutch officials considered the Khoikhoi a 'free' people.[13] Under this cardinal policy, they could neither be conquered nor enslaved. However, this changed over time as the enslavement of the Khoikhoi was gradual and unofficial, (in the sense that they were never legally considered slaves) but shared a similar lifestyle and treatment to those of slave status.

Bondage should be understood on a continuum in which both of these groups of imported-slave and Khoikhoi women were enslaved under the Dutch, although they were legally distinct. Imported female slaves fit more clearly into a definition of slavery as they were property, outsiders, transferable by sale, and their status could be inherited. Although the Khoikhoi were not property, outsiders, or transferable by sale, they were gradually reduced to servitude. Miers describes this as virtual slavery, in which "the victim has most but not all the attributes of a slave".[14] Although Khoikhoi women were not considered property as imported slaves were, the jobs they performed and the conditions they lived under were very similar. Khoikhoi women worked in a system that may be classified as indentured servitude as the reality of their labour did not match the terms of their contract. They would enter into short-term contracts with settlers and were theoretically free to leave when finished, however the settlers often used force and various constraints to keep them.[15] Both imported slaves and Khoikhoi women experienced bondage in the Dutch Cape Colony.

Bondage was rooted in the very foundations of Cape Colony. In 1652, Jan Van Riebeeck, a VOC colonial administrator arrived in Table Bay with a goal of setting up a refreshment station and general 'rendez-vous' for VOC ships as well as other fleets navigating through the region.[16] The Cape was viewed as a highly fertile area that would

[13] Ibid.
[14] Suzanne Miers, "Slavery: A Question of Definition," *Slavery and Abolition* 24, no. 2 (2003): 4.
[15] Robert C-H Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838. (*New England: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 31.
[16] "Cape Town Timeline 1300-1997," South African History Online, last modified April 1 2011, https://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/cape-town-timeline-1300-1997.

allow for the production of enough goods to restock the ships with fresh water, vegetables, and meat. [17] Additionally, there was a hospital built by the Company that provided a place for sailors and crew members to restore their health or access treatment.[18] However there were various conditions that prohibited the Company from achieving the levels of production they had hoped for in the early years; including adverse geographical conditions and poor relations with the Khoikhoi, which led to a need for additional labour.

The Cape was originally admired by Company officials for its agricultural potential as it had fresh water, fertile soil, and a favorable climate.[19] Van Riebeeck had high expectations for the production potential of the land and assumed that intensive agriculture would be adopted. However, in the first attempt to cultivate, the soil did not meet the expectations of fertility that the Company had hoped for. Additionally, the Company did not have adequate resources such as the proper tools, or a sufficient amount of domesticated animals to work on the farms. Environmental factors including the harsh south-east winds and the planting of wheat seeds that had not been acclimatized to the Cape also contributed to the lack of success in farming. Considering these issues, Van Riebeeck hypothesized that the Cape would be more productive as a whole if land was given to individuals rather than worked on by Company employees. In 1656, land was given to Company employees to encourage them to settle and farm, and this formed the basis of the *freeburgher* population in the Cape.[20]

In the early years of settlement, the VOC could not produce the amount of goods necessary to support incoming fleets. Thus, the Indigenous Khoikhoi became an established group with a significant amount of cattle and grazing land that the VOC wanted to take advantage of. Although Van Riebeeck was interested in forming trading relations with this

[17] Robert Ross. "The Cape and colonists at the Cape, 1652-1795," in *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840,* ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 243.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Leonard Guelke. "Freehold farmers and frontier settlers, 1657-1870," in *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840,* ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 66.
[20] Ibid.

group, he faced numerous barriers to achieve this. Firstly, the Khoikhoi were suspicious of the settlers and accused them of stealing both land and cattle on multiple occasions. Additionally, in the Khoikhoi value system, cattle were of the highest importance. As a result of this, the Khoikhoi seldom traded cattle and therefore never met the demands of the Company.[21] The Dutch were unfamiliar with communal ownership, pastoralism, and the Khoikhoi value system, and therefore tried to win the group over with gifts to no avail. They viewed cattle simply as a commodity, and this misunderstanding led to tensions between the groups. The Dutch subsequently allocated Khoikhoi land to *freeburghers,* banned Khoikhoi ownership of weapons and ammunition, and took hostages. [22] The combination of these processes contributed to the Khoikhoi's eventual enslavement.

Nevertheless, labour shortages in Cape Colony meant that the Company remained in need of an outside labour force to produce the necessary amount of goods.[23] Van Riebeeck sought to do this through the importation of slaves. These slaves would help *freeburgher* production and therefore Company production as they were obligated to sell their produce to the Company.[24] In 1655, Van Riebeeck proposed "a good many slaves would be necessary for [the burghers] which could [...] be easily fetched from Madagascar or even India and given out upon credit until the settlers are in condition to pay for them… we shall at all events send to Madagascar for some slaves for the use of the settlers - as well as of the Company."[25] This led to the introduction of a slave population in the Cape, who were imported from a variety of areas.

[21] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 10.
[22] Boonzaier, Malherbe, Berens, and Smith, *The Cape Herders,* 74.
[23] Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7.
[24] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 11.
[25] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa,* 6.

Slaves arrived at the Cape in 1658, from various regions including Sri Lanka, Benghal, South India, Indonesia, Madagascar, and the East African Coast.[26] Their arrivals can be separated into three main types. Firstly, by voyages sponsored by the Company to pre-existing slave outlets in Mozambique, Madagascar, the East African Coast and once in West Africa (see figure 1). Secondly, slaves arrived as a result of returning fleets from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Batavia (Jakarta) that were *en route* to the Netherlands.[27] These slaves were not often used by the Company and were mostly sold to wealthy settler families. [28] Lastly, ships *en route* to the Americas would often sell some of their slave cargo to Cape settlers during a stopover at the refreshment station.[29] The *freeburghers* had household slaves who were mostly from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. However, the Company owned slaves mostly from Madagascar, as they were preferred for manual labour jobs. Out of the VOC sponsored trips whose purpose was to bring slaves to the Cape, approximately 66% were Malagasy (see figure 1).

Region	1652-1699	1700-1749	1750-1795	Totals
Madagascar	12 (1,064)	9 (779)	12 (977)	33 (2,820)
Mozambique, East African cost, and Zanzibar	-	-	5 (974)	5 (974)
Delagoa Bay	-	Several (c. 280)	-	Several (c. 280)
Dahomey	1 (226)	-	-	1 (226)
Totals	13 (1,290)	9+ (c. 1,059)	17 (1,951)	39+ (c. 4,300)

Figure 1: Company sponsored slave voyages between 1652-1795[30]

[26] "How unique was slavery at the Cape?," South African History Online, last modified November 28 2017, http://sahistory.org.za/article/how-unique-was-slavery-cape.
[27] James C. Armstrong and Nigel A. Worden, "The Slaves, 1652-1834," in *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840,* ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 112.
[28] Elphick and Shell, "Intergroup relations," 207.
[29] Armstrong and Worden, "The Slaves, 1652-1834,", 112.
[30] South African History Online, "The Early Cape Slave Trade."

Legally speaking, the Khoikhoi were considered a free people, and were not allowed to be enslaved like the imports. However, the increase of the Company's power lead to their increased influence over the Khoikhoi, which contributed to their eventual bondage.[31] There were various factors that lead to the degeneration of Khoikhoi power and their gradual enslavement. These cannot be analysed in detail due to the constraints of this work, however they must be acknowledged in order to contextualize how the Khoikhoi went from being an independent pastoralists peoples to farm labourers under the Dutch. There were many treaties and wars which contributed to Khoikhoi degeneration and loss of power. Various treaties seized Khoikhoi land and placed it in the hands of *freeburghers* to create farms, leading to the employment of Khoikhoi people on these farms. For example, in 1672 two treaties agreed upon by Khoikhoi representatives and the Dutch led to the sale of Khoikhoi land (see figure 2).[32] Elphick explains that they did not fully understand the repercussions of these accords and only received a fraction of the payment agreed upon in the treaties.[33] The importance of land to Khoikhoi livelihood and power cannot be overstated; as pastoralists, land is crucial to survival. These treaties therefore lead to the loss of Khoikhoi control over their livelihood, self-rule, and power. Furthermore, this lead to the division of Khoikhoi peoples internally. A Company official describes them in 1705 as being scattered everywhere, rather than having land to support their livelihoods as they had in the past.[34] The disruption of this Indigenous group by the Dutch lead to their increased vulnerability as a whole, and of women in particular.

[31] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 12.
[32] Boonzaier, Malherbe, Berens, and Smith, *The Cape Herders*, 79.
[33] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 12.
[34] Boonzaier, Malherbe, Berens, and Smith, *The Cape Herders*, 85.

A discussion of gender

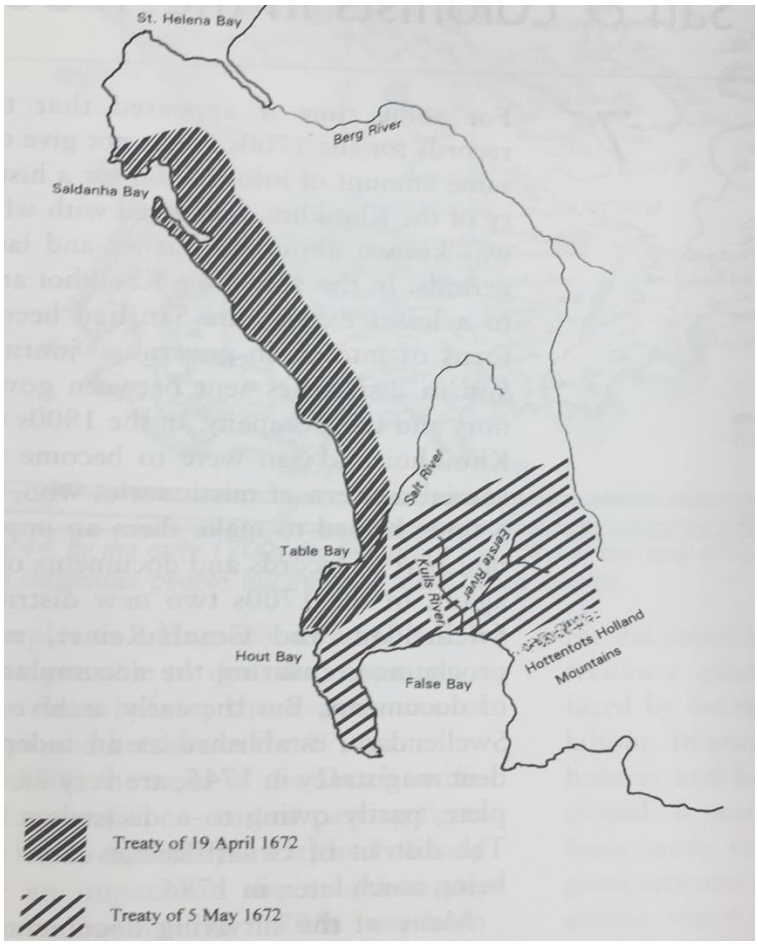

Figure 2: Loss of Khoikhoi land under two treaties in 1672[36]

In the Dutch Cape Colony, slave labour was highly gendered. Female slaves typically worked in the domestic sphere, performing household tasks, and male slaves typically worked outside the home, though this was a pattern rather than a strict rule.[35] There were numerous domestic jobs that were in fact unavailable to men, and assigned exclusively to women in the Cape, either slave or Khoikhoi. Some of these included: housemaid, wash maid, seamstress, nursery maid, laundress, knitting maid, and kitchen help.[37] Jordan explains that men's occupation outside the home allowed them to blur the lines between freedom and slavery, whereas females' lives were much more circumscribed.[38] The confinement of their master's home or the Company Lodge meant that female slaves were more closely supervised and subjected to the sexual and physical abuse of their masters.[39] Slaves with children were even more vulnerable because if they tried to reject the advances of their masters, their children could be used as pawns. The

[35] Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 339.
[36] Boonzaier, Malherbe, Berens, and Smith, *The Cape Herders,* 79
[37] Groenewald, "Slaves and Free Blacks " 969; Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 338.
[38] Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 339.
[39] Faye E. Dudden, *Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983) ; Groenewald, "Slaves and Free Blacks " 972.

master would often threaten to send away or sell the child, or in some cases directly abuse the child.[40] Not only was the physical mobility of female slaves limited, but they also had limited economic opportunities as they were classified as 'unskilled'.[41] Overall, female labour was treated and viewed as less valuable than male labour.[42] There were three categories of workers: skilled, unskilled, and female. Despite their skillset or the importance of their contribution to the family, (for example through wet nursing), females were paid as an unskilled male.[43] As a result of this, female slaves rarely obtained the levels of physical, social, or economic freedoms as some of their male counterparts.[44] As the division of labour was gendered, Khoikhoi women also occupied the domestic sphere more than their male counterparts, however they worked outside the home more frequently than slave women.

The expansion of Cape Colony into Stallenbosch and Drakenstein during the 1680s resulted in a settler demand for additional workers to complement the existing slave force.[45] The Khoikhoi were most in-demand in this context and their worsening politico-economic condition versus the Cape Colony at this time made them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. The Khoikhoi's expert knowledge of the region's environment made them prime candidates for servitude on farms.[46] Thus, contrary to imported slaves, many Khoikhoi women worked on farms. These women were highly skilled with cattle and were therefore often tasked with the milking and slaughter of cows. They had extensive knowledge on how to melt down animal fat and use it in a variety of ways.[47] They used the other parts of the animal for hides, and the production of whips, skin bags and thongs as by-products. Khoikhoi

[40] Patricia Van Der Spuy, "Slave Women and the Family in Nineteenth-Century Cape Town." *South African Historical Journal* 27, no. 1 (1992): 64.
[41] Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 340.
[42] Viljoen, Russel, "Aboriginal Khoikhoi servants and their masters in Colonial Swellendam, South Africa, 1745-1795." *Agricultural history* 75, no. 1 (2001): 48.
[43] Van Der Spuy, "Slave Women," 70.
[44] Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 340.
[45] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 16.
[46] Daniel S. Neumark, *Economic Influences on the South African Frontier, 1652-1836*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 175-6.
[47] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 16.

women were very valuable labourers on farms as a result of this knowledge; not only were they able to manage the animal itself, but could also create products from it that could be used or sold.[48]

Some Khoikhoi women also sometimes worked as kitchen or domestic help for the Company or for private households. However, this was not the norm, as they were viewed as more useful in manual labour positions such as agricultural work or as builders.[49] These women worked in contracts that lasted for varied amounts of time, but typically one season and would have the option of returning the following year.[50] This was the reality for most and would result in a form of circular migration. However, this often became a form of bonded labour in which these women were coerced to remain, made unable to exit, or returned due to the lack of other options for livelihood.[51] Despite Dutch law prohibiting Khoikhoi enslavement, regulations of their labour were scarce, and their conditions and wages varied significantly. These women were frequently paid in goods, such as beads or clothes, rather in than a monetary exchange. [52] They were also paid in farm products such as calves or lambs, products like bread, milk or vegetables, or tobacco and alcohol.[53]

Female slaves were frequently employed as wet nurses, a specifically domestic job. This can be understood as a woman who was primarily responsible for breastfeeding the infant(s) of a settler family. Although this was their main task, wet nurses were often also expected to help deliver the child (as a midwife), carry the infant to its baptism, and to care for children in the family.[54] The first indication of female slaves being used in private

[48] Elizabeth A. Eldredge. "Slave Raiding Across the Cape Frontier," in *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier,* ed. Elizabeth A. Eldredge and Fred Morton (Boulder: Westview Press Inc., 1994), 94.; Isaac Schapera, *The Khoisan peoples of South Africa: Bushmen and Hottentots.* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951), 316.
[49] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 16.
[50]Jacklyn Cock, *Maids & Madams : A Study in the Politics of Exploitation*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980), 174.
[51] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 28; Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa,* 82.
[52] Neumark, *Economic Influences on the South African Frontier*, 175-6.
[53] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 17.
[54] Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 304 & 307.

households was in 1713, during the first smallpox epidemic.[55] Wet nursing was an important form of female slave labour. This resulted in demographic effects of Cape slave and settler populations as fertility is influenced by the lactation period of a mother. As a woman breastfeeds she produces a hormone which inhibits ovulation, and as a result of this there is a period during lactation in which females are temporarily infertile. The presence of a wet nurse allowed the settler mother to ovulate sooner than if she were breastfeeding her own child. As a result of their hindered lactation period, settler women were able to conceive soon again after giving birth. Additionally, wet nurses who were almost constantly lactating were unable to get pregnant.[56] Wet nursing therefore resulted in higher numbers of children of the settler population, and low fertility rates of the servile population.[57] However, these rates may also be influenced by other factors including continual labour, poor living and working conditions, and disease.[58] Using statistics from 1719, it is clear that settler families with wet nurses had more children than those without.[59] Wet nurses are described by their masters as being an integral part of the family, as they acted as second mothers to the children.[60] It should be noted that there is no evidence that this position was available for Khoikhoi women under the Dutch. As previously mentioned, these women are often silent in the literature as a result of their triple marginalization, and therefore the lack of evidence does not necessarily mean there were no Khoikhoi wet nurses. Under British rule, there were some Khoikhoi (although very few), that were employed in this position.[61]

[55] George McCall Theal, *History of South Africa*. (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1964), 477.
[56]Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 305.
[57] Armstrong and Worden, "The Slaves," 131.
[58] S. Newton-King. "The labour market of the Cape Colony, 1807-28," in *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa,* ed. Shula Marks and Anthony Atmores (London: Longman ,1980), 180.
[59] Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 306.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Van Der Spuy, "What, Then," 52.

Working as a wet nurse came with a chance of manumission, as slaves in this position were the most likely of all slaves to be manumitted. This was often treated as a form of reward for good service and/or the raising multiple children.[62] Of all slaves, those of oriental descent were manumitted at much higher rates than their African counterparts (36.1% compared to 1.6% for African slaves and see figure 3). The evidence clearly shows that this preference existed, however Elphick and Shell explain that it is impossible to use the available statistical evidence to explain reasons for these variances.[63] It is clear however, that Cape-born slaves experienced the highest rates of manumission (51%) compared to all other groups. This preference was also present in the Company Lodge.

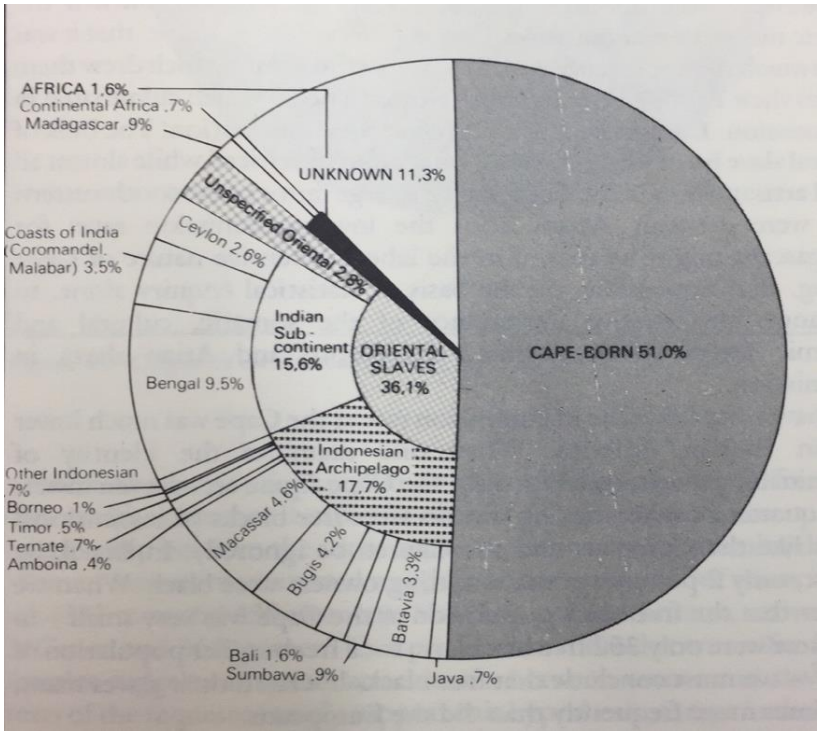

Figure 3: Origins of manumitted slaves, 1715-1791 (n = 1075)[64]

The Lodge was built and owned by the Dutch in order to house and keep Company slaves. Female slaves commonly worked inside the Lodge, performing domestic tasks and were considered to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. [65] Although many slave women worked in the Lodge, they were not all treated equally and did not have equal opportunities. Within the lodge there was a hierarchy of female labour that was often based on ethnicity, which further

[62] Otto F. Mentzel, *A Complete and Authentic Geographical and Topographical Description of the famous and remarkable Africa CAPE of Good Hope,* trans. G. V Marais and J. Hoge, vol. 2 (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1944), 108-109.
[63] Elphick and Shell, "Intergroup relations," 208.
[64] Ibid., 207.
[65] Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 199.

diversified the female slave experience. Two females worked as slave officers; a matron and an 'undermistress', who could be responsible for as many as 79 work maidens in the lodge, which is significantly more than their male counterparts. These officer positions were only available to Cape-born slaves who were, what was referred to as "mulatto", meaning of mixed descent.[66] This term does not only insinuate the mixing of races, but the mixing of particular races of which one is caucasian and the other is black (but not Khoikhoi).[67] These women benefited from special treatment and privileges; Shell explains that they experienced equal or greater privileges of manumission as males in the same position (also 'mulatto').[68] Additionally, these women had the advantages of manumitting or purchasing their children from the Company as a result of the improved wages they received in this position. The purchasing of children by their officer mother was quite common and the price was in fact standardised by the Company in 1685. These officers also received more clothing than other slave women as well as cotton cloth.[69] Although female slaves were a category of people in Cape society, it is clear that they were not treated as a homogeneous group and certain females received preferential treatment.

Disease amongst slaves vs. Khoikhoi women

The various groups in Cape society were perceived differently by the settler class. These perceptions were often determined by one's race, origin, gender, and status and resulted in a specific treatment based on that perception. This is clear in the example of disease in which the slave class as a whole and Khoikhoi women in particular, were treated very differently. Smallpox was the most notable disease in the Cape of which there were four

[66] Groenewald, "Slaves and Free Blacks " 968.
[67] Kimetta R. Hairston. "Dehumanization of Blacks," in *Encyclopedia of Race and Crime*, ed. Helen Taylor Greene and Shaun L. Gabbido (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2009), 187.
[68] Groenewald, "Slaves and Free Blacks " 968; Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 198.
[69] Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 199.

outbreaks; in 1713, 1748, 1755 and 1767.[70] This infectious disease is highly contagious, with an incubation period of about 10 to 12 days, leading to symptoms such as headache, fever, vomiting, rashes, shortness of breath and often ending in death.[71] The first outbreak in 1713 was thought to have been brought from India.[72] The VOC had established extensive trading links with Bengal, Ceylon, and India which were all considered to be smallpox prone areas.[73] The virus can survive for up to eighteen months outside of the human body, and although no one aboard the ship was sick, it was hypothesized to have been contained in the dirty laundry.[74] This was due to the fact that the Company washerwomen were the first ones affected by the virus which resulted in its spread to all of Cape Town. [75] The authorities were unable to cope with the chaos and results of its spread, of which more than 200 Company owned slaves (out of 500), died in the first six months.[76] Company slaves lived in close proximity to one another, therefore offering a favorable environment for the disease to spread. This disease affected the Cape as a whole and not only the Company slaves, it was very difficult to contain, and killed more than one third of the population (approximately 200) in its first outbreak.[77]

The third outbreak in 1755 spread quickly and was assumed by the settler class be caused by the slave population. The living conditions of Company slaves remained poor and therefore the disease spread rapidly amongst this population.[78] Privately-owned slaves often

[70] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa,* 61.
[71] John Walsh. "Smallpox" in *Encyclopedia of Environment and Society*, ed. Paul Robbins (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2007), 1615.
[72]Fenner, Frank, D. A. Henderson, I. Arita, Z. Jezek, and I. D. Ladnyi.. "The History of Smallpox and its Spread Around the World," in *Smallpox and its Eradication*, ed. Frank Fenner (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1988), 234; Russell S Viljoen, "Disease and society: VOC Cape Town, its people and the smallpox epidemics of 1713, 1755 and 1767." *African Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (1995): 27.
[73] South African History Online, "The Early Cape Slave Trade."
[74] Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan," 21.
[75] Viljoen, "Disease and society," 27.
[76] R.J Ross, "Smallpox at the Cape of Good Hope in the eighteenth century." *African Historical Demography* (1977): 424.
[77] Viljoen, "Disease and society," 27.
[78] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa,* 63.

lived in *freeburgher* households with their master, allowing for the disease to spread between both groups simultaneously. As a result, the VOC attempted to control the outbreak through the enforcement of policies as well as public notices discussing the severity of the issue.[79] Most of the slaves, however, were illiterate and therefore largely unaffected by the public notices.[80] The medical facilities at the Cape were poor and were unable to deal with the outbreak since there was no known cure for the disease at the time. This outbreak lasted for more than a year and had killed 2072 people by 1756, 870 of which were privately owned slaves or free blacks, and 239 Company slaves.[81] It is unclear how many of these slaves were women, as this was not recorded. Neither *freeburgher* nor Company owners took measures to prevent the spread of disease to or amongst their slaves. The only known method of prevention was quarantine, and although this was used by the settler class, slaves were forced to continue living in close proximity.[82] Furthermore, the Company Lodge was used to house the sick when the hospital became full, and this increased the rate of transmission for Company slaves.[83] Differences in treatment between genders amongst the slave population is unclear as the data was not recorded. However, when comparing between the slave population and Khoikhoi women in particular, differences do exist.

This outbreak also affected the Khoikhoi population, however sources did not record numbers of Khoikhoi deaths. It has been argued that the Khoikhoi suffered higher rates of death as a result of their low immunity towards smallpox, however Smith has argued against this. Smith highlights that this is a repetitive theme used by many authors to argue for high death rates of Indigenous populations specifically.[84] Smith does not ignore that the smallpox

[79] Viljoen, "Disease and society," 29.
[80] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa,* 98.
[81] Viljoen, "Disease and society," 32.
[82] Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa,* 63.
[83] Armstrong and Worden, "The Slaves," 127.
[84] A.B. Smith, "Khoikhoi susceptibility to virgin soil epidemics in the 18th century*," South African Medical Journal* 75, no. 1 (1989): 25.

epidemics in the Cape were lethal and resulted in high death rates. The author does highlight, however, that historians have overstated the severity of the effect of this disease on the Khoikhoi and ignored the other factors involved. One of these important factors was the worsened quality of life that the Khoikhoi experienced as a result of Dutch settlement.[85]

The death rates of Khoikhoi from smallpox were not as accurately recorded as those of slave imports. One traveller to the Cape described that 'hundreds' of Khoikhoi died and the others fled deeper into the interior to avoid the disease. In 1714 the Cape authorities notified the Netherlands saying, "as the Hottentots [Khoikhoi] die away, it is very likely that the farmers will not be able to reap what has been sown."[86] As many Khoikhoi were farm labourers, the epidemic affected the Cape economy as the crops would not be harvested in time. During the second outbreak which was assumed to have arrived on a ship in 1748, Khoikhoi washerwomen were the first affected. Following a similar pattern to the initial outbreak, the virus was likely hidden in the laundry on the ship. [87] As a result, Khoikhoi women were targeted by officials as they were assumed to be exacerbating its spread. These washer women were segregated from the rest of the population and were told that they would be shot if they tried to leave.[88] All of these women were thus highly likely to be infected from contact with one another. Officials claimed that this would reduce the spread of the disease, however they still welcomed foreign ships and therefore the threat of disease remained. During the outbreak in 1755, administrative measures were taken, many of which focused specifically on Khoikhoi women.[89] These women, and specifically their lifestyles were viewed by Cape officials as conducive to the spreading of disease. These conditions are not

[85] Smith, "Khoikhoi susceptibility," 82.
[86] Leibrandt Papers. "Letters Dispatched Cape-Batavia" (1713), 34.
[87] Percy Ward Laidler, and Michael Gelfand. *South Africa its Medical History 1652-1898: a medical and social study*. (Cape Town: Struik, 1971), 55.
[88] Viljoen, "Disease and society," 27.
[89] Victor De Kock. *Those in Bondage: An account of the life of the slave at the Cape in the days of the Dutch East India Company*. (Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1950), 145.

described in detail; however, they were described by officials as filthy and irregular. They were therefore prohibited from continuing to live as such and coerced to seek employment in Cape Town on farms.[90] This was a way for the settler farmers to replenish the labourers that had died, and lead to an increased amount of female farm labourers. The Khoikhoi were not given warning on how dangerous the disease was or how they could prevent its spread in other ways than changing their entire lifestyle. The campaign was designed to fit the needs of the settler community rather than the servile community including the Khoikhoi.[91] Although there is a lack of information on how slave women in particular were treated during the outbreaks, it is clear that Khoikhoi women specifically were viewed by officials as adding to the problem and therefore targeted by Dutch policy.

Washerwomen as a counternarrative

Archaeological research published in 2007 suggests that some slave women had a certain level of freedom outside the domestic sphere. Jordan explores the role of washerwomen in Cape Town near Platteklip Stream, which offers a counternarrative to the domesticity of slave women that this work has suggested. The task of being a washerwoman allowed for a significantly higher amount of freedom as it required both slave and Khoikhoi women to spend the entire day outside of their master's home. This task was vigorous and performed through nine separate steps which included soaking, pounding, washing, drying, and rinsing. Employed by private families or by the Company, these women could be seen by the stream from early morning to sunset often in the hundreds, engaging with one another.[92] Archeological excavation performed in Cape Town near Platteklip stream (see figure 4) shows evidence that these women notonly used the stream to wash the clothes but took this as

[90] Viljoen, "Disease and society," 31.
[91] Ibid., 32.
[92] Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 335.

an opportunity to socialize, trade, and share with one another. This is particularly important as slave women were mostly refined to the domestic sphere and rarely experienced levels of freedom such as those offered by this task. The archeological record shows pieces of glass from wine and beer bottles, which Jordan believes are remnants from a tavern culture that these women would not normally have the freedom to engage in.[93] Pieces of highly valuable objects were also found, suggesting an illicit trading network between these women, made possible by the freedom and social network at the stream.[94] The task of being a washerwoman allowed for these women to have a certain amount of control over their daily lives, which has not been comparable to other types of work performed by female slaves. This offers a counternarrative to female slave domesticity, and a continuation of Khoikhoi work typically offering more freedom.

Figure 4: A photo of modern Cape Town, with Table Bay at the front, and Table Mountain in the back. The arrow notes the excavation site of Platteklip Stream in which many washerwomen performed their daily tasks.[95]

[93] Jordan, "It All Comes Out in the Wash," 346
[94] Ibid., 347.
[95] Ibid., 337.

Conclusion

In the Dutch Cape, the experiences of enslaved women are highly heterogeneous and cannot be simplified. The category of 'enslaved women' in the Colony includes women of official slave status, who were imported to the Cape for this purpose, as well as Khoikhoi women who were legally considered free. Although there are shared characteristics of enslaved women, when compared to men, the experiences of these women were highly varied, and this heterogeneity was influenced by their race and origin. These factors, along with gender often determined one's main occupation, privileges, and the likelihood of manumission. I have attempted to bring a gendered perspective to Cape slavery which has long been ignored or left out. Both imported female slaves and Khoikhoi women are silent in the literature, pointing to their triple marginalization and silence in Cape society. Without primary resources it is difficult to present the realities of these women and represent them accurately. However, the use of statistics and secondary resources has allowed for a comparison between the different experiences of these two groups. This comparison has not only shown the complex interaction between gender and bondage, but also the diversity that exists within this interaction. The silence of enslaved women in the Dutch Cape Colony points to a need for further research in the area. The archeological evidence presented by Jordan has offered an important and previously silent perspective into the lives of the enslaved women in the Cape that blurs the distinctions between the lives of imported female slaves and ostensibly free female Khoikhoi. Further research of similar nature is necessary to bring attention to the voices of the women who played important roles in Cape society so that they are not forgotten.

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