

THE MISSING MOTHERS OF THE SLAVE LODGE
SLAVE FAMILIES IN THE COMPANY LODGE, 1658 TO 1828

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UCT

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THE MISSING MOTHERS OF THE SLAVE LODGE

SLAVE FAMILIES IN THE COMPANY LODGE IN 1791

Robert Shell and Linda Mbeki

Although the family structure of Cape slaves has generated considerable discussion,¹ there remains several mysteries of the nature of slave family structure and therefore of the Cape's changing slave demography. In 1980, Hans Heese, a leading genealogist, argued that slaves differed little from their free counterparts in terms of fertility. He has provided a series of examples drawn from the various lodge documents all revealing if not high fertility than normal fertility.² One can accept every one of his slave genealogies as correct.

However, were these families typical or representative of all lodge slaves? Hans Heese himself, has found a document in the Hague which promises to yield the results we need.³ This is the only document which lists married couples in the lodge in the Dutch period, although more than a century before Commissioner Adriaan van Reede had stipulated a) that slaves could be married according to their custom (*op haar wijze*) and b) that a list of these married should be made every year.⁴ This seems to be the only such document in the Dutch period although there should be more than a hundred such documents if his suggestions had been followed.

The six page document which has been transcribed and glossed by Linda Mbeki and myself lists the name of the slave and his or her relationship to other slaves, whether the slave was creole (*inboorling*) or imported, the exact age of the slave; whether the slave was baptised or heathen (*onchristen*). On the facing page the clerk placed each individual into one of three gender/age categories, viz. healthy men (*kloeke jongen*); healthy schoolboys (*kloeke skool jongen*), a final, category of healthy male sucklings (*suijgeling*) and the same set of data for females. A total of 176 individuals were tabulated. These individual slaves formed fifty-four families with very varied structures.

An example of a genealogical table of the first family in the 1791 census follows. From the census entry itself, one can see that this family is at least three generations deep. But the Lodge Blom family may be dated back to the seventeenth century.⁵ By 1714, there were eleven Bloms in the lodge; another eleven Bloms appear in the lodge 1727. One notices that Geertruij was a favoured family name throughout the century and a Geertruij duly appears in the 1791 census as a sister. This same Geertruij forwarded a manumission request in 1784 which

¹Pamela Scully, "Liberating the family?: gender, labor and sexuality in the rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853." PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1993; Patricia Van der Spuy, "Slave women and the family in nineteenth century Cape Town." *South African Historical Journal* 27 (1992): 50-74.

²Hans Friedrich Heese, "Slawegesinne in die Wes Kaap, 1665-1795" *Kronos* 4 (1981): 38-48;

³VOC. 4347. List of Company slaves who lived together as families; VOC 4347 "Naamlyst van 'S Compagnies Slaven ofte Leifeijgenen dewelke in Familien bestaan," folios 1076 ff; see appendix for copies.

⁴H. A. Van Reede also mentioned that such couples should be warned that they could not marry another partner, "without danger of severe punishment"; H. A. Van Reede, in Anna J. Böeseke, *Memoriën en Instructiën*, vol. 1, (16th July 1685): 205.

⁵Dutch Reformed archives: GR 1 8/1 66 30 JAN 1 1702 baptised details:- 026 Johannes baptised mother: Maria Blom.

partly explains why she is listed as a “sister,” but not a “mother” in the 1791 census. The record provides some confirmation for the accuracy of the census.

Geertruij; daughter of Maria Adriana Blom, slave in the Company’s lodge; states that among the Company’s slaves, there is her little son named Adriaan, son of Geertruij, daughter of Maria Adriana Blom, three years old. She wishes him manumitted, and offers f100 for the purpose.⁶

One cannot call slave families “dynasties,” but the Blom family in the lodge must give the reader pause as to what perpetual uterine servitude means. Slavery was unlike any sentence of a crime, since the stem slave woman’s progeny was doomed to slavery in perpetuity.

One also wonders why such slave families, so faithfully recorded by the VOC find little mention in the official genealogies, such as De Villiers/Pama’s⁷ three volumes and R. T. J. Lombard’s seventeen volumes.⁸ For all such unanswered questions we must turn to the careful and pioneering work of Hans Heese who for all his pains was dropped from the faculty of the University of the Western Cape and is, to this date, unable to have his own work copied and placed on the web.⁹ At the same time a conservative political party took him to court for revealing their slave ancestry. Writing about slavery seems to be a subversive activity whether on the left or the right.

⁶H. C. V. Leibbrandt, *Requesten, F-O*, s. v. “Geertruij., , number 48 of 1784, page 484.

⁷Christoffel Coetzee De Villiers, compiler. *Genealogies of old South African families=Geslagsregisters van die ou Kaapse families*. Completely revised edition of *Geslacht-register der oude Kaapsche families*; augmented and rewritten by Cornelis Pama. Cape own: Balkema, 1966.

⁸*South African genealogies=Suid-Afrikaanse geslagregisters*; compiled by Johannes August Heese; edited by Roelof Theunis Johannes Lombard. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council; Genealogical Institute of South Africa, 1986-.

⁹Hans Friedrich Heese, *Reg en Onreg: Kaapse regspraak in die agtiende eeu*. Bellville: Instituut vir Historiese Navorsing Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland, 1994. Publikasiereeks C, Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland, Instituut vir Historiese Navorsing; 6. Also available on CD from Ancestry24.com: Cape Town 2005; —. *Groep sonder grense: die rol en status van die gemengde bevolking aan die Kaap, 1652 to 1795*. Second edition. Protea, 2005. Also available on CD from Delia Robertson in translation; ——. “South African sources on the slave trade with Madagascar and Malagasy slaves at the Cape of Good Hope.” Bellville: Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, 1996. Paper presented at the South African and Contemporary History Seminar: University of the Western Cape; no. 57, 8 October 1996; ——. “Slawerny in die Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing.” Bellville: University of the Western Cape, Institute for Historical Research, 1991. Paper delivered at the annual symposium of the Institute in 1991. This paper was later published in Henry Charles Bredekamp, *Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing en letterkunde: verlede, hede en toekoms: geredigeer deur Henry Charles Bredekamp*. Bellville: Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland se Instituut vir Historiese Navorsing, 1992. Publikasiereeks D2; ——. “Kerk en slawesamelewing in Paarl: tydens en na slawerny.” Paper presented at conference on Cape Slavery and After, Cape Town, 10-11 August 1989; ——. “Enlightenment, Europeans and slaves in eighteenth century,” *Kronos* 14 (1988): 66-71; ——. “Kriminele sake: hofuitsprake aan die Kaap, 1700-1750.” *Kronos* 12 (1987): 33-42; ——. “n Huigelaar en sy slavin: Tryntjie se glas koringbier.” *De Kat* 10 (May 1986): 50-53; ——. “Mortaliteit onder VOC Slawe, 1720-1782.” *Kronos* 11 (1986): 7-14; ——. *Groep sonder grense: die rol en status van die gemengde bevolking aan die Kaap, 1652-1795*. Bellville: Wes Kaaplandse Instituut vir Historiese Navorsing, 1984. Appendices contain best researched lists of mixed marriages and miscegenated couples; ——. “Slawegesinne in die Wes Kaap, 1665-1795” *Kronos* 4 (1981): 38-48.

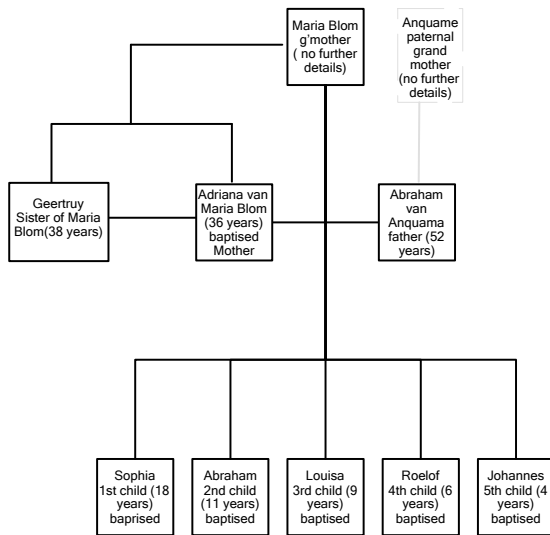


Fig.: 1:- The first family in the census of 1791
VOC 4347 "Naamlyst...."

Since the 1791 census lists both the exact age of the slave and the age grouping of the slave, we now have a conversion key for all lodge censuses which use the broader categories without providing any clue as to the exact age of the slave. For example while the other lodge censuses only list (say) school children, we had only the haziest notion of what that meant. The following table groups the general age groups from the exact ages of the 1791 census.

One notices in the following table that female slaves enjoyed a longer time in school than the boys.

	Males	Females
Adult slaves	11 to 70	13 to 70
School children	3 to 10	3 to 12
Infants (<i>Suijgelingen</i>)	0 to 2	0 to 2

We know from another, far less detailed census that in June 1789 there were 942 Company slaves and convicts.¹⁰ Of these only 207¹¹ were adult females. If we can assume that the 1791 census itself was typical (more about this later) then only approximately twenty-three percent of all adult slave women in 1789 were mothers. The question then arises where are the mothers? In a pre-contraceptive era, it is difficult to explain why so many adult women had no children whatsoever.

Thus, we may also estimate that the 176 persons in the 1791 census constituted just over twenty percent of all lodge slaves and were in families with an average family size of 3.5 persons.

Using the same age categories as the 1791 document, we can visualize the entire (married & unmarried) 1789 lodge in the following diagram.

¹⁰WCARS "In de Companje Slavenlogie den 29 de Junij 1789."

¹¹This figure is inaccurate in the original census.

We can safely conclude that the majority of slaves in the lodge knew nothing of family life. The high sex ratios were primarily responsible for this as males (obviously) could not bear children. These high sex ratios were not an artefact of this particular census nor of preceding epidemics, but of the intensive slave trade which favoured males in the ratio of five males for every female (see the quote of Van S.J. Rijneveld, page 7).

However, there were many women of child-bearing age who were returned as childless. What explains this drastic change of fertility?

Peter Kolbe, a resident astronomer at the Cape between 1706 and 1713 had noted that the lodge slave women were keen to have children as this allowed them a six week period without work before and after birth:

...The Negro-Women at the Cape are very lascivious Creatures. As they are excus'd there from Working, and indulg'd in an idle Life, for about Six Weeks before and Six Weeks after Travail, they are the most intemperate Wretches upon Earth in the Article, and greedily swallow, and enflame themselves with, all the Provocatives they can come at, till they are got with child. The Provocative they mostly take, and are the fondest of, is one of their own Preparing, consisting of Milk, Wine, Eggs, Sugar, Saffron¹² and Cinnamon. The Slaves Lodge at the Cape swarms with children...¹³

Otto F. Mentzel, writing a few years later confirms that the Cape administration believed that it was less expensive to encourage a creole slave population.¹⁴ While Kolbe's and Mentzel's evidence was true for their respective periods, by 1791 there were no "swarms" of children. This represents a radical change in fertility.

This means that only 25% of all slave women of child-bearing age in the lodge were mothers. The vast majority of women of child-bearing age reported no children whatsoever. In the following breakdown of relationships on the lodge, the range of

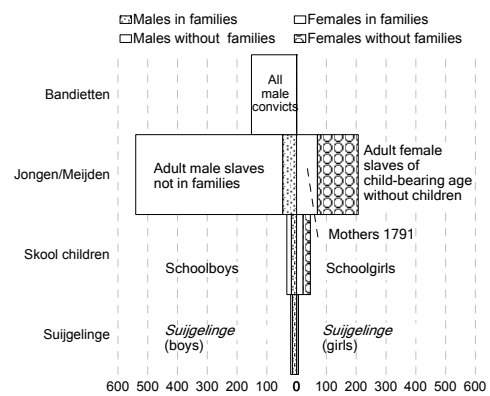


Fig. :2:- Broad age groups in the lodge for 1789
WCARS "In de Companje Slavenlogie; VOC 4347 "Naamlyst..."

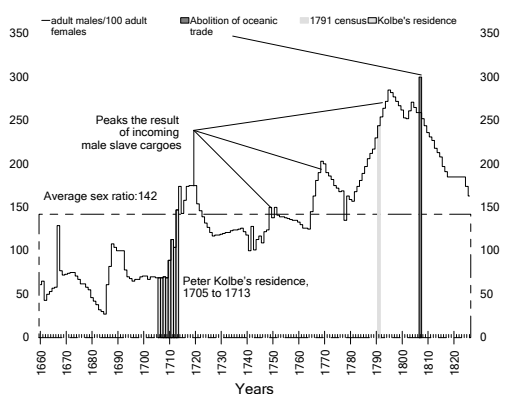


Fig. :3:- Sex ratios of the lodge, 1660 to 1820
Database: Lodglock.

¹²The skipper of the *Soldaat* mentioned that saffron was available in Madagascar.

¹³Kolben, *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*, 2: 340.

¹⁴O. F. Mentzel, *Description...*, 2:145.

relationships may be appreciated, but all these relationships together touched only 176 individuals.

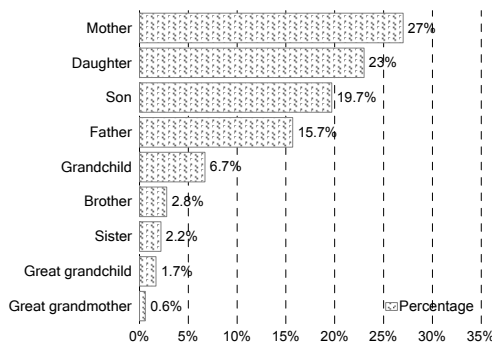


Fig. :4:- Family relationships for 1791
VOC 4347 "Naamblyst..."

Forty-eight slave mothers can be identified in 1791. Sons and daughters add up to seventy-six individuals. This works out as 1.58 children per mother. This is well below the standard replacement ratio of 2.1 children per mother.¹⁵ The only explanation of this is that the fertility of lodge slave women had dropped from the prior high estimates of Kolbe.

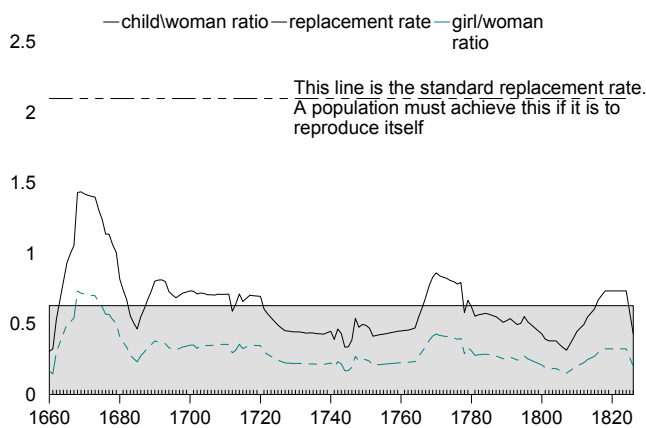


Fig. :5:- Child women ratios in the lodge
Databases: Lodgclock

If one read C. G. Höhne's¹⁶ 1793 essay on the lodge, one would believe that the company was still being encouraged to return to a pro-natalist position as the locally born slaves survived better and lived longer:

"Concerning the aforementioned school and suckling children, one can certainly do no more than refer to

them as a passive possession, because although they can in no way serve their master they receive the same quantity of rations as older or other competent slaves, then when one considers that when these children reach a certain age and are found capable for any actual work for the Honourable Company, one could derive far more benefit and service from those born here than from foreign slaves, because the former would be handier and more clever than the others through being trained for their jobs through punishment, and that the former live longer in the climate of their birth, as many of the recently arrived slaves soon die, and that the rations that they or rather their parents receive serve as a reward or rather a means for said parents to exchange these for trifles not supplied by the Company, and which are indispensable for small children, as well as that these children will have to successfully fill the place of slaves who die from time to time, one would like to keep more or less enough or an indispensable number of slaves in the service of the Honourable Company."¹⁷

¹⁵Roland Pressat, *The Dictionary of Demography* (New York: Blackwell Reference, 1985) s.v. "replacement of generations" page 200.

¹⁶He was the superintendent of the slave lodge and members of his family are buried in the courtyard of the lodge.

¹⁷WCARS: C210 [old series], Bijlagen, (1793), Report on the Lodge transcribed by H. Liebenberg, Christian Gottlob Höhne, Lodge superintendent (b. 1759 d. 1820), folios 539 following.

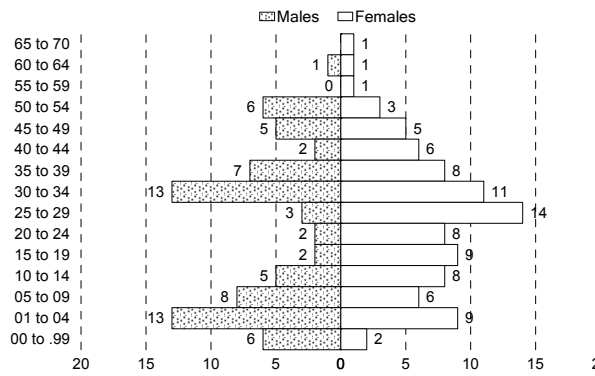


Fig. :6:- Family population pyramid for 1791
VOC 4347 "Naamblyst..."

But Höhne's advice was not heeded. Indeed the company in its final stages seemed intent on abandoning the lodge altogether. For example, Höhne was asked to bring the population down to 450, little more than half of its size in 1789.

Be that as it may, the abandonment of any pro-natalist position is well supported by one official source of the period. Lord McCartney interviewed W. S. Van Rijnveld in 1797 and asked about the importation of slaves:-

[Lord George McCartney]: As to the question: To what degree should the said importation be permitted and how may the same be regulated?

[Willem Stephanus Van Rijnveld]: I think, in the first place, that the Government should not yet restrict the annual importation of slaves, to less than six hundred, namely 500 men and 100 women. This proportion of six [sic] will at first view appear pretty strange, because it speaks of itself, that the said necessity of having slaves being evident, it would then in many respects be better to obtain the greatest part of them in time by procreation here as they would then be not only fitter for every kind of work, but also, of course, more attached to the country; but experience shows us that this is not attainable. Tillage and particularly the culture of grain, we know, requires no women; but by all means stout men slaves: women are a charge, if they do not serve for procreation. And procreation in proportion to number, is amazingly small; this needs no discussion, as all the families on an average, sufficiently shew it.

For the small number of fertile women slaves, there is a very large number of them who either are entirely sterile or do not bring forth more than one or two children during their whole lives.... Sterility of the women slaves... Which sterility [sic], ascribed to the continual labour, a circumstance very prejudicial to procreation, ought moreover to be attributed. It is to the custom of their having carnally to do with men before their puberty; Second to their loose life, in having carnally to do with many men.¹⁸

Conclusions

The census of 1791 while promising to reveal much about the demography of the lodge raises new questions. The most puzzling question is how could such a sizeable population have such low fertility, far below replacement rates. How and why did fertility fall so radically over the 18th century? Second: what did it mean to have a small community in a single building with such little familial affect? Could it be that

¹⁸Gubbins Collection of Africana at the Witwatersrand University, "Replies to the questions on the importation, etc. of slaves into the Colony" W. G. A. Mears]. A version of this 'Replies to the questions on the importation, etc. of slaves into the Colony' (29.12.1797), was published in the Journal of Secondary Education (September and December 1931).

the company' local officials had by the 1780s worked out with all their accounting skills and slave documentation that it was much cheaper to acquire slaves via the oceanic slave trade than to encourage motherhood in their lodge. In this, perhaps an important economic aspect of slavery is revealed. The slave trade meant—above all—that a foreign country would bear the costs of rearing the work force of the lodge.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Willelmus van Maluanne	1							
...
27 Familien	71	17	71	19	27	10	3	61

Fig. :9:- Page three of the census
 NA: VOC 4347 "Naamlyst van ... Slaven ... dewelke in Familien bestaan"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Willelmus van Maluanne	1							
...
30 Familien	100	33	100	33	33	14	10	54

Fig. :10:- Page four of the census
 NA: VOC 4347 "Naamlyst van ... Slaven ... dewelke in Familien bestaan"

