

## SLAVERY AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THE CAPE COLONY : A COMPARISON WITH MAURITIUS

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### 1. Cape slavery and the S-W Indian Ocean

In 1641 Van der Stel, governor of the new VOC (Dutch East India Company) settlement at Mauritius, brought over a hundred slaves from the nearby island of Madagascar. The purpose was to place the small agricultural and timber producing settlement on a firm setting with the aid of forced labour. The plan badly misfired. Many slaves escaped and fled into the forests, where they regrouped themselves into maroon communities, surviving by farming, hunting and raiding the Dutch settlement. As more slaves were brought to Mauritius by the Dutch, more escaped to join the forest dwellers. By 1658 the attacks had become so troublesome to the Dutch that they abandoned Mauritius having decided instead to set up a new 'halfway house' between Europe and their East Indies possessions at the Cape of Good Hope. (Nwulia 1981 : 18-19). The Dutch, at first rather hesitatingly in the light of their Mauritian experience, brought slaves to the Cape and a slave economy was the mainstay of their colony up to the end of the eighteenth century. They traded extensively in Madagascar and the Indian Ocean for slaves throughout this period.

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This episode serves to introduce the theme of Cape slavery to a conference on the history of Madagascar and the S-W Indian Ocean. Although the Cape of Good Hope lay on the fringes of this area, its very colonial origins and much of its subsequent history was linked to the region. The VOC depended upon its Indian Ocean trade for slave supplies, particularly from Madagascar.

This link continued after the demise of the VOC. In the course of the Napoleonic Wars the British acquired both the Dutch colony at the Cape and the French possession of Ile de France (Mauritius). In both areas they brought about important economic changes, and in the 1830s they ended chattel slavery. Although there were significant differences between the Cape and Mauritius in the early and mid-nineteenth century, British experience in each colony affected their policies in the other. In neither colony did the ending of slavery break down a racially-structured society, but whereas in Mauritius slave labour on the plantations was replaced by indentured Indian workers, at the Cape the freed slaves and their descendents continued to form the mainstay of the agrarian labour force and still do today.

As yet the significance of these links between the Cape and S-W Indian Ocean region has been little appreciated. Work on the Malagasy and South-East African slave trade has recognised the significance of the Cape (Campbell 1989 ; Armstrong 1983 ; Armstrong and Worden 1989). But writers on Cape slavery itself have paid much more attention to comparisons with the Americas than to the slave society of Mauritius.

The myopia of those writers includes that of the present author. Only in preparing for this conference have I begun to consider the parallels (and the significance of the contrasts) between slavery and its aftermath in Mauritius and at the Cape. It also seems that Mauritian historians have neglected this comparative dimension. This paper therefore aims to outline some of the key developments within Cape slave society between the late eighteenth century, when the VOC first relinquished power to the British, and the aftermath of emancipation, and then to suggest reasons for the differing labour structures of the Cape and Mauritius in the mid-nineteenth century. It is hoped that the Cape Colony will thus begin to be integrated more into the history of the Indian Ocean on which it borders and to which its origins and much of its development depended.

It must also be stated at the outset that slavery has only recently been examined in any depth by South African historians. Much of the emphasis of South African historiography before the 1970s focussed on the conflicts of colonial frontiersmen (little being said about frontierswomen) and indigenous inhabitants. An influential work published in the 1930s cited the frontier of the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the locus of the racial order which came to dominate modern South Africa (MacCrone 1937). The slave-based settler society behind this frontier of conflict and racial ordering was little considered, and then only by white supremacist writers who wrote the slaves out of the story.

From the 1970s the wave of new radical writing by South Africanists has fundamentally transformed the historiography of the country. But its focus moved away from the frontier, not back towards the early colonial and slave settlement of the Cape, but forwards (in time and place) to the mining revolution of Kimberley and the Rand of the late nineteenth century. It was here that the origins of segregation and apartheid lay, and not surprisingly in the circumstances of South Africa in the past few decades, these themes have captured the imagination of historians.

But while the main attention of South African historians has been on the frontier and then on the mining towns, in the last few years detailed analysis of the pre-industrial western Cape (the heart of the colonial slave economy) has begun to take place. Although none of these writers have claimed that Cape slavery and its aftermath can fully explain the peculiarly distorted trajectory of modern South Africa, nonetheless the structures of race and class that emerged at the time of slave emancipation at the Cape did provide an important background to later developments (Ross 1982).

Such approaches first came from historians in the Netherlands, Britain and the United States, but now it has been added to by students and scholars based in Cape Town (Southey 1989 ; Bank 1989). Much of this work is still unpublished, or only very recently available.

## 2. Cape slavery in the late eighteenth century

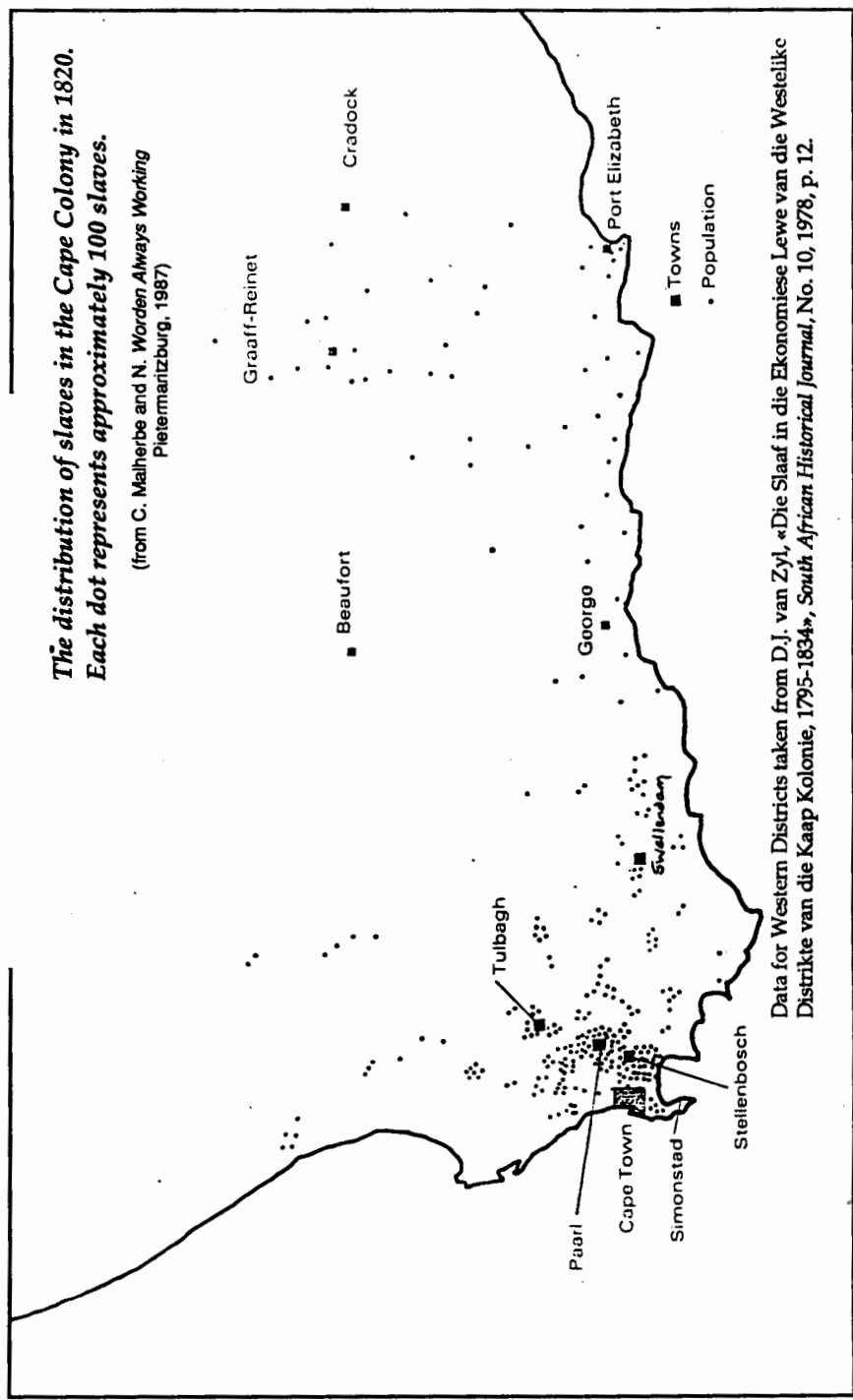
By the end of the period of VOC rule at the Cape in 1795, the number of slaves in the colony had increased steadily from the first few brought in the 1650s to an official figure of over 15,000. In fact the total number was closer to 20,000<sup>1</sup>. Of the adult slaves almost three-quarter were male. This sexual imbalance points to one essential feature of the VOC period. At no stage were sufficient slaves born within the Cape to sustain the numbers required and male imports had to supply the gap.

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1. These figures are based on the official census return (*opgaaf*) taken by the Cape government. When the British took over in 1795, the numbers in the returns jumped by over 5,000. Some new slaves were imported by the British, but it also seems that either the VOC had under-recorded because of inefficiency towards the end of their period of rule, or else they had deliberately excluded slaves owned (illegally) by Company officials.

**The distribution of slaves in the Cape Colony in 1820.  
Each dot represents approximately 100 slaves.**

(from C. Malherbe and N. Worden *Always Working*  
Pietermaritzburg, 1987)



Data for Western Districts taken from D.J. van Zyl, «Die Slaaf in die Ekonomiese Lewe van die Westelike Distrikte van die Kaap Kolonie, 1795-1834», *South African Historical Journal*, No. 10, 1978, p. 12.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the VOC was dependent on slave imports. They organised slaving expeditions to Madagascar and the East African coast and for a brief period between 1724 and 1732 maintained a slaving trading post at Delagoa Bay. In addition, they received large numbers of slaves from Batavia and the East Indian slave trading network which operated around it, drawing from the Indian sub-continent, the islands of the East Indian archipelago and from as far away as Japan. In the earliest years a few slaves were obtained from the Guinea coast, but this source was soon stopped by the VOC's rival company trading from West Africa to the Caribbean (Armstrong and Worden 1989 : 110-122). This differed from the situation in Mauritius, where the large majority of slaves in the eighteenth century came from Madagascar and later Mozambique and where Asian slaves formed only a small proportion of the total (Jumeer 1989 : 97).

Whatever the precise figure, the number of slaves at the Cape in 1795 was considerably less than the 60,000 recorded on the Mauritian tax rolls when that colony was handed over to the British in 1810 (Nwulia 1981 : 41). In the Ile de France, slave numbers in the middle of the eighteenth century had been comparable to those at the Cape, but from the 1770 slave imports increased rapidly as the island began to develop sugar cultivation for export (North-Coombes 1978 : 87-8). In the eighteenth century neither colony was dominated by large scale plantation agriculture. In the Ile de France slaves were used on small-scale farms and it was not until the boom in sugar plantation agriculture in the early nineteenth century that the island began to develop a pattern of slave usage more reminiscent of the Caribbean islands. But the majority of Mauritian slaves even in the early 1830s lived and worked on smaller scale farms (Reddi 1989 : 114). At the Cape a concentration of large numbers of slaves on staple crop plantations orientated towards the export market never developed. Instead they were scattered in small groups over a wide area of smaller-scale grain, wine and, to a lesser extent, stock farms while just under a quarter worked as domestic servants, porters and artisans in Cape Town<sup>2</sup>. The majority of slaves lived on the grain and wine farms in the hinterland of Cape Town, in groups which averaged less than twenty per farm (Worden 1985 : 32).

Although this pattern differed from the plantations which emerged in nineteenth century Mauritius and which dominated the Caribbean, the level of profitability obtained by Cape farmers from their slave labour was sufficiently high to ensure that the system never came under question on economic grounds

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2. The attached map shows the geographical distribution of slaves in 1820. Although there had been some shift in location of slaves from Cape Town to its arable hinterland by then, for which see more detail below, the overall spatial distribution was similar in the 1780s and 1790s.

(Worden 1985 : 64-85). The expansion of the arable economy of the south-western Cape was almost entirely dependent on slavery. Almost all arable farmers owned several slaves at least and panic set in when slave import levels were threatened or when slave mortality rates rose above the norm in time of plague.

One important addition to the settler labour force was the use of indigenous Khoisan workers. They tended to be employed more on the stock ranches of the interior than on the arable farms of south-west Cape. Yet in 1806 the first census to record Khoisan labourers showed that 60% of the farmers in the Stellenbosch and Drakenstein districts, which included the main wine growing region of the colony, employed Khoisan workers.

The average labour force of Cape farms in the late VOC period thus included slaves from a wide variety of African and Asian societies, indigenous Khoi and San and the locally-born offspring of this international supply of forced labour. This has led some historians to explain the apparent absence of a distinctively Cape slave culture in the countryside. Slaves were too diverse in their origins, and too atomised across the dispersed farms of the region to be able to form a unified and distinctively slave culture of the kind found on the plantations of the Americas (Ross 1983 ; Worden 1985). Although there was similar diversity of place of origin and splitting of slaves in small-scale units in Mauritius, nonetheless strong Malagasy traditions and language contributed to the emergence of a creole slave culture on the island (Reddi 1989 : 110).

By contrast Cape slaves became part of a broader culture together with other subordinate classes in the colony. The roots of Afrikaans, for instance, originated as a pidgin with strong slave, but also Khoi, linguistic features (Holm 1989 : 338-50 ; den Besten 1989). In Cape Town however, where there was a concentration of slaves, many from the East Indies, a distinctive slave sub-culture did develop. It was defined by the adoption of Islam and by bonds kinship with freed slaves and other exiles from Batavia (Bradlow 1988).

Neither were slaves unable or unwilling to resist their owners. Contrary to the comfortable assumption of settler historiography that slaves well treated by their owners and therefore had little desire to resist (a view which still pervades South African school textbooks), recent work has shown that levels of slave coercion and slaveowner brutality was just as high as in other plantation-based colonial slave societies (Ross 1983 ; Worden 1985). Some difference of opinion has arisen in the writing of Shell (1986 and 1989) who argues that slave control was exercised more by paternalism and family incorporation than by whips and chains.

Nonetheless, the implicit violence and the coercive controls, either physical or psychological, under which Cape slaves found themselves was sufficient to

ensure their active response. Running away, individual attacks on masters and overseers, and more hidden forms of resistance such as crop arson, food poisoning and theft abound in the court records of the period (Worden 1985 : 119-137); An equivalent to the early marooners of Mauritius was the runaway slave community that existed in rocky caves on the False Bay coastline within sight of Cape Town , from which raids were mounted on settler farms and on wagons travelling over the mountain passes. Runaways also escaped beyond the borders of the colony and were absorbed into indigenous communities in the north along the Orange River and the east amongst the Xhosa. A few particularly enterprising slaves managed to escape as stowaways to Europe, where they acquired their freedom (Ross 1983).

Although dangerous and often unsuccessful, escape was a more likely means of attaining freedom than voluntary grant from the owners. Manumission levels in the Dutch Cape were very low. The VOC placed increasingly stringent controls on manumissions, each of which required the approval of the Council of Policy. Throughout the eighteenth century it has been calculated that less than 1% of the total slave population were manumitted ; "as a result by the late eighteenth century the Cape Colony had become one of the most closed and rigid slave societies so far analysed by historians" (Elphick and Shell 1989 : 214). Those slaves who were freed were mostly based in Cape Town rather than the rural areas, had worked as domestics rather than field hands, and over half were Cape-born.

Manumitted slaves, known as "Free Blacks" in the official records, tended therefore to be based in Cape Town rather than in the countryside. In the earlier years of VOC rule , some Free Black farmers did exist in the rural Cape and Stellenbosch areas, but their lack of access to good land and sufficient capital meant that by the end of the eighteenth century none had survived as arable farmers (Hattingh 1986). Elphick and Shell have stressed that the initial racial patterning at the Cape followed the VOC's Asian models, whereby free blacks attained considerable social status, rather than the North American colonial pattern in which they were highly discriminated against. By the 1780s, however, this had changed. Discriminatory sumptuary laws, demands that Free Blacks moving outside Cape Town had to carry passes (ostensibly so that they could be distinguished from runaway slaves) and increasing legal association of Free Blacks with the convicts and exiles sent by the VOC from Batavia, reduced the social status of the freed slaves (Elphick and Shell 1989). It is this discriminatory practice which may well explain the increasing cohesion of the Cape Town sub-culture.

There are parallels with Mauritius in some, but not all, of this. Escape was also an option frequently attempted by Mauritian slaves, although campaigns by the *Compagnie des Indes* in the mid-eighteenth century succeeded in wiping out the maroon settlements that had so plagued the Dutch (Riviere 1982 : 122). The possibilities of being recaptured on a small island were greater than for those slaves who escaped into the extensive hinterland of Southern Africa. Manumission in Mauritius seems to have been more frequent than at the Cape, although I have not yet discovered precise figures for the French period. Certainly there emerged a distinctive Free Black community in Port Louis (Toussaint 1936 : 491). It is also apparent that by the early part of the nineteenth century some Free Blacks in Mauritius, unlike their counterparts at the Cape, were landed proprietors (Nwulia 1981 : 79).

There was a further important difference between the slaveholding societies of Mauritius and the Cape at the end of the eighteenth century. Slaveholders in Mauritius received a severe shock in 1794 when the French revolutionary government declared that all slaves should be freed. No compensation was to be paid, and slaveholding was hitherto to be regarded as a criminal offence. An expeditionary force was dispatched to the island to enforce such measures (Mannick 1979 : 32). In addition news was received of the slave uprising in the French Caribbean colony of St. Domingue. It appeared that the world the slaveowners depended upon for status and wealth was coming dramatically to an end.

The actions of the French revolutionary government led to concerted slaveowner opposition in the newly created Mauritian Colonial Assembly. The delegates sent from Paris to administer the freeing of the slaves were attacked and expelled in 1796 and preoccupation with the war in Europe prevented the French government from enforcing their authority on the island (Riviere 1982 : 123). Effective independence from France existed until control was re-established under Napoleonic authority in 1803. The significance of these events was thus not that slavery was ended but that it had rallied the Mauritian planters to active defence of slavery and it had demonstrated their political power. As a result concessions to the slaveowner interest was granted even after the ending of planter government in 1802, concessions which were maintained after control of the island passed to the British in 1810.

In the Cape Colony revolt of settlers against the VOC also took place in the Patriot movement of the early 1780s, but there was no threat to the institution of slavery by the government. As a result, early Afrikaner political writings made little attempt to formulate the clear defence of slavery or justification for its role on the model of the Mauritian planters (du Toit and Giliomee 1983 : 32). Nor



were slaveowners in a position to be able to assert power in the colony had they so desired - there was no equivalent at the Cape to the Mauritian planter-dominated Colonial Assembly, short lived as it was. This difference was to be of major importance to the two colonies as they faced the decisive changes to the system of slavery that came after the advent of British rule.

### 3. Changes to the system : towards emancipation

In responding to questions posed by the new British governor in 1797, W.S. Van Ryneveld, Fiscal and leading political commentator in the colony, stated that, "I perfectly acknowledge... that if there were no slaves at the Cape the peasants [white settlers] would then be more industrious and useful to the State, and that the facility of procuring slaves renders the inhabitants of this country lazy, haughty and brutal... Yet, the business is done. Slavery exists and is now even indispensable"<sup>3</sup>.

This comment is highly significant. Firstly it points to the lack of an assertive defence of slavery as an institution *per se* ; rather it was seen as an unfortunate consequence of earlier policies the effects of which could not now be overturned. The contrast to the powerful defence of slavery by the Mauritian settlers is clear. But, secondly, Van Ryneveld believed that slavery was nonetheless entrenched, "it is absolutely necessary because there are no other hands to till this extensive country, and therefore it will be the work, not of years, but as it were of centuries to remove by attentive and proper regulation this evil established with the first settling of the Colony"<sup>4</sup>. In this Van Ryneveld was proved wrong. Just over forty years later slavery was ended under circumstances which certainly did not bring ruin to the Cape.

One of the purposes of asking Van Ryneveld to comment on the significance of slavery to the colony was that the British government was considering the abolition of the slave trade and was concerned about its possible effects. Under the First British Occupation (1795-1803) this did not take place : indeed many slaves were imported, especially from Mozambique. However very soon after the British re-occupation of the Cape in 1806 the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed through the British parliament. Slavery itself was not, of course, challenged by the state until the 1830s. Nonetheless the cutting of external supplies was to combine with other forces operating within the Cape economy

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3. Replies of W.S. Van Ryneveld to questionnaire of Governor Macartney, 29 November 1797, Article 6. Cape Archives, A 455, Henry Dundas papers, fil 455.

4. *Ibid.*, Article 6.

and its slave population to weaken the dependence on slavery which Van Ryneveld had claimed for the colony.

The Cape had not developed a self-reproducing slave population and was therefore dependent on imports. In this it did not differ from Mauritius. What was different, however, was that in Mauritius the power of the planters was such when the British took over the island in 1810 they did not fully enforce the ban on the slave trade and they turned a blind eye on continuing slave imports from Madagascar well into the 1820s (Campbell 1989 : 169). At the Cape no such toleration was permitted. Doubtless some slaves were smuggled ashore, but the Cape authorities kept a close watch on suspected traders and imposed penalties on those discovered. As a consequence the growth in slave numbers at the Cape slowed down and stabilised at about 30,000.

That the Cape government had no intention of inhibiting the supply of labour to the rural cultivators of the colony, however, was clear in their decision to apprentice slaves captured from foreign slaving vessels. Over 2,000 such "Prize Negroes" captured from Mozambique and Madagascar by Portuguese traders were landed in Cape Town and apprenticed to farmers for a period of fourteen years under conditions which differed little from that of the slaves alongside which they worked (Saunders 1985).

These changes in the supply of forced labour were accompanied by some important shifts in the slave-based economy of the Cape. The arrival of the British brought the Cape into the network of an imperial trading system which opened up new markets for local produce, protected by low tariffs from foreign competition. To Cape producers this marked the end to the restrictions on settler international trading imposed under the VOC. The Cape did not develop a boom staple crop equivalent to the sugar production of Mauritius. However a mini boom did take place in one sector of the Cape economy as a result of new market opportunities.

Wine farming at the Cape had developed from the late seventeenth century and was perhaps the most prosperous sector of the colony's rural economy. Wine production was closely correlated to slave numbers and the largest concentration of slave workers was on the major wine estates of the Stellenbosch and Constantia hinterland of Cape Town (Worden 1985 : 22-26). During the 1810s and 1820s a boom took place when Cape wines were given preferential access to the British market. (Ross 1989). In a detailed study of the Stellenbosch wine farming sector Rayner (1986) has shown how the government encouraged the expansion of vine planting, often with loans and mortgaging of land and slaves. Production increased by over 150% and by 1823 wine contributed 72% of the value of all Cape exports.

Yet this was precisely the time at which the supply of slave labour was restricted by the ending of the external trade. The increased demand for slave labour led to higher prices and subsequent sales of slaves to the wine farms from Cape Town. The burden of increased production fell heavily on the backs of these slaves ; older men as well as women were employed in the vineyards and cases of increasing exploitation were widely recorded (Rayner 1986).

This boom bore some resemblance to the rapid shift in Mauritian sugar production which took place in the 1820s. Both were responses to new market conditions and both were largely financed by merchant capital (traders and investors based in Port Louis and in Cape Town). In both cases slave labour was increasingly exploited, although at the Cape this was confined to the increasingly locally-born slave population.

But here the similarity ends. The sugar plantation economy of Mauritius grew from strength to strength in the mid-nineteenth century (North-Coombes 1978). At the Cape the wine boom was short-lived. In 1825 the British government abandoned its preferential tariff for Cape wines and thus overnight destroyed the export market ; Cape wines were unable to compete on the British market with superior and now cheaper imports from France. Farmers who had borrowed heavily to plant new vines were scarcely able to reap the benefit from them before this disaster struck (production of quality wines taking at least seven years from vine planting). Many farmers were bankrupted and others were deeply indebted. Slave prices fell sharply, many coming on to the market from the vineyards. By contrast 1825 was also the year in which the British permitted the importation of Mauritian Sugar on the same tariffs as that from the Caribbean, thus removing the artificially high costs which their previously discriminatory action had produced. Mauritian sugar production was boosted at precisely the same time as Cape wine production was destroyed.

Under such circumstances it was not surprising that the responses and actions of Cape and Mauritian slave owners at the time of emancipation differed markedly. At the Cape there was only a muted protest from some farmers against moves towards slave emancipation which became increasingly clear in the late 1820s and particularly when the possibility of obtaining cash in compensation became apparent. Many Cape farmers had staked much on the expansion of a slave-based export sector, and lost. Slavery was no longer the mainstay of the economy by the late 1820s.

These changes in the wine-producing countryside were accompanied by a less dramatic but no less significant transformation in Cape Town. Recent work by Bank (1991) has proved conclusively that slavery as an institution in the town was being steadily eroded long before formal emancipation in 1834. Slave

numbers, both absolute and as a proportion of the urban working force, fell sharply in Cape Town during the period of British rule. Bank accounts for this in part by the sales up-country during the wine boom, but more significantly by the inability of masters to maintain control over a slave population that was becoming increasingly unified. The ending of the slave trade had led to the growth of a locally-born slave population which played a major role in forging the powerful sub-culture of the city. This was accentuated by the growing importance in the town of a new British mercantile elite at odds with the prevailing ideology of predominantly Dutch slaveowners ; "the economic, ideological and ethnic splintering of the urban elite (and the general political weakness of Cape slaveowners) ensured that their collective and consensus hold over labour remained no more than tenuous" (Bank 1991 : 210).

This structural and ideological weakening of slavery in Cape Town was accompanied by a rocketing in the rate of manumission. Manumission rates in Cape Town had always been higher than those in the rest of the colony, but during the nineteenth century they increased markedly in number. In part this was aided by an easing of state restrictions on slave manumission after 1826. More fundamentally, it was a sign of the loosening of the hold of slavery over the labour system of the town ; over 90% of manumissions between 1816 and 1834 were from Cape Town (Bank 1991 : 185). The majority of freed slaves were Cape-born. Many were freed by cash payments from kin who were themselves Free Blacks in Cape Town. The importance of the increasingly cohesive free black and slave community in the city is apparent from these trends.

Although Bank's study is confined to Cape Town, the erosion of slavery which he identifies has important implications for our understanding of the changes taking place in the Cape slave system as a whole. When taken together with the crisis of the late 1820s in the heart of the slave-based arable countryside, it points to a fundamental dislocation of the secure dependence on slavery which Van Ryneveld had stressed in 1797.

It is against this background that the move towards general emancipation at the Cape must be seen. Undoubtedly the main force behind emancipation came from legislation in the metropolis ; first the ending of the slave trade in 1807, then ameliorative measures which limited the absolute control over slaves exerted by their owners in the 1810s and 1820s, and finally emancipation in 1834. In this the changing perceptions of colonial produce, markets and labour in an industrializing Britain played the crucial role . Such metropolitan changes affected all British colonies ; the Caribbean and Mauritius as much as the Cape. However the difference was that at the Cape slavery was already in decline as a mainstay of the economy and the social order by the late 1820s.

There is another crucial factor to take into account in explaining the background to the ending of slavery at the Cape. Recent work has shown the importance of the role which slaves themselves played in weakening the ties that bound them. The British period saw a marked increase in slave resistance and assertiveness. As in the New World, the period after the Haiti revolution saw the outbreak of revolts by Cape slaves aiming to overthrow the social order in which they were bound, rather than escaping from it as previously.

In 1808 two Cape Town slaves, influenced by the account given to them by Irish sailors of countries that existed without slavery believed that the ending of the slave trade in that year was merely a pretext by the Cape government to stave off total emancipation. They persuaded over 300 slaves and Khoi workers from the grain farms near Cape Town to attempt a march on the city to enforce the freedom of all slaves. They were overcome by the colonial militia on the outskirts of the town, but their actions greatly alarmed the government.

In 1825 slaves in the remoter region of the Bokkeveld, over a hundred miles from Cape Town, also influenced by news of debates in Britain and at the Cape over the future of slavery and convinced that their owners were holding them in bondage against the wishes of the government, attacked their owners and planned to assert their freedom. The Bokkeveld revolt was limited to a remote farm and its surroundings, but the impact of the revolutionary claims to freedom within Cape society were not lost on the master class of the colony. This, together with reports of fearsome slave uprisings elsewhere, such as St Domingue in the 1790s, and Jamaica in 1830, thoroughly unnerved many slaveowners at the Cape.

Slaveowner alarm at the assertiveness of their slaves was not confined to panic at rebellion, dramatic as that was. Dooling (1989) has shown that slaves asserted claims to their freedom and objections to the conditions of their employment in the courts of the colony during the 1820s ; claims that were provided for in the ameliorative legislation of those years. The means of complaining against severe slave maltreatment in the Cape courts had existed under the VOC, although the extent to which such complaints were listened to by the authorities depended on the reputation of the slaveowner in the Cape settler community (Dooling 1991). In the nineteenth century however, such assertiveness became more noticeable. In other words slave consciousness was transforming, not only in the sub-culture of Cape Town but also in the remoter rural districts of the Bokkeveld and the eastern pastoral frontier. As Mason has demonstrated, this assertiveness persuaded at least some Slave owners that manumission was a preferable alternative to continued slave ownership (1990).

The ideological and legislative changes stemming from the metropolis were thus accompanied at the Cape by economic uncertainty, a more cohesive and

oppositional Cape-based slave culture and community and overt resistance, shown in the courts and in open rebellion. This is not to say that slaveowners made no objection to emancipation when it was clearly on the cards by the beginning of the 1830s. Slaveowner opposition to enforced loosening of the master-slave bonds was marked by letters to the press, public meetings and in one incident in Stellenbosch in 1831 a minor riot in opposition to demands to report all domestic slave punishments to the authorities (Armstrong and Worden 1989 : 166).

Nevertheless there never emerged a cohesive and clearly articulated pro-slavery movement at the Cape. Perhaps this was because it was not until the late 1820s that it became clear that the British authorities intended to go all the way. There was no strong anti-slavery movement at the Cape to provoke slaveowners into defending themselves before then (Watson 1990). By the time that emancipation was apparent, the masters had been sufficiently undermined by the internal changes discussed above that they put up little fight. Their main concern was to obtain adequate compensation. A few slaveowners in the eastern districts responded to emancipation by trekking from the colony, although the notion that the Great Trek originated in a revolt against the ending of slavery is a myth ; few of the trekkers were slaveowners.

Thus by 1834, slavery had been undermined from within as well as from outside the Cape. Slaveowners had been both unwilling and unable to maintain the institution. The contrast with Mauritius is acute. There slaveowners rallied to protest against moves towards emancipation. As a result amelioration policy was rarely implemented, and in 1832 there was open rebellion sparked by the appointment of an anti-slavery sympathiser as Procurer-General which led to his forced removal from the island and the breakdown of the authority of the governor (Burroughs 1975). The economic power of the Mauritian slave owners gave them a strong voice, confirmed in a constitutional role denied to their Cape equivalents by the admission of locally elected advisors to the colonial authorities in 1831 (Mannick 1979 : 43 ). Their protests were over-ruled by Westminster and the Mauritian rebellion was crucial in convincing the metropolitan government that emancipation could only come with outright legislative action from above. Nonetheless the colonial authorities ensured that adequate labour was forthcoming to maintain the Mauritian sugar economy.

#### **4. Emancipation and after : breaking the chains ?**

The British colonies at the Cape and Mauritius underwent the same process of a legislated end to chattel slavery. The Act of Emancipation, passed in London in 1833, was put into effect at the Cape on 1 December 1834 and two months later

in Mauritius. In both colonies, however, slaves remained tied to their owners as apprentices ; originally intended to last for six years but in the event confined to four. Life for apprentices differed little from that under slavery. They were bound to remain with their owners in unpaid employment, although they were to be compensated if required to work beyond 45 hours a week. Runaways were subject to corporal punishment, and 'indolence', 'carelessness' or negligence were subject to penalties of additional work. Special magistrates were appointed to enforce the apprenticeship regulations and to smooth the path to final freedom in 1838/9 (Nwulia 1978 : 90-1).

The apprenticeship system showed clearly the intentions of the colonial state. Slaves were to be apprenticed to the 'trade' they already carried out : farm labour. They were given no money, no land and no special training for any other occupation. As James Backhouse, the Quaker missionary who visited Mauritius in 1838 commented, the idea that they are training to be better prepared for freedom is a complete illusion (Backhouse 1839 : 25). Compensation was paid to the owners rather than to the freed people. Apprenticeship thus gave the masters a chance to adjust to emancipation ; to the slaves it offered nothing. But there was an important contrast between the subsequent history of freed slaves in the two colonies. At the Cape the majority remained on the farms as low-paid labourers. In Mauritius plantation labour shifted to dependence on a new force of indentured Indian workers.

In Mauritius freed men and women followed the pattern of ex-apprentices in many of the sugar islands of the British Caribbean. Most of them left the plantations : by 1847 only 189 ex-apprentices remained as sugar workers (North-Coombes 1984 : 81).

This was made possible by two important factors. Firstly, some land, albeit much of it marginal, was available for subsistence cultivation on the island. But as Carter (1991) has recently pointed out, this was not true to the same extent as some of the Caribbean islands such as Jamaica, and a thriving ex-slave peasant sector did not emerge. More significantly planters and the state made little attempt to prevent ex-slaves leaving the estates and Carter argues that they might even have encouraged them to do so, or at least offered no incentive for them to stay - since they had acquired access to a new source of forced labour. The British government attempted to secure some contract labourers from Madagascar (Campbell 1989 : 169). But the main supply for the post-emancipation plantations of Mauritius came from India.

Indentured Indian labourers had been introduced to the island as early as 1829 and some were imported during the apprenticeship period (Toussaint 1973 : 84). Despite a hiatus in 1837 when accusations were made that their treatment

was identical to that of the slaves, large-scale immigration was resumed in 1842. The plantation economy of Mauritius was thus saved by the labour of Indian indentured workers (Hazareesingh 1977 : 11-23).

Why was the British colonial state, having abolished chattel slavery, prepared to convert the plantation labour force of Mauritius to an alternative form of enforced labour ? North-Coombes (1984 : 88-89) has suggested three main reasons. Firstly, Mauritian planters, as we have seen, exerted a measure of political power and influence on government policy which was strengthened in 1831 by their representation on the new Legislative Council (Mannick 1979 : 43). It was they who pushed for alternative sources of indentured labour during and after apprenticeship.

Secondly, the reason why these requests were heeded by the government was because Mauritian sugar production was of prime importance, not only to the planters, but also to merchant investors in the plantations and to the metropolitan market. By 1840, with the collapse of the Caribbean economies, Mauritius was Britain's prime sugar-producing colony.

Finally, North-Coombes argues that agreement by the Colonial Office in London to the demand for indentured immigrant workers in Mauritius was secured by 'the convergence between the planters' racist interpretations of the labour crisis and metropolitan perceptions of the respective rights and duties of masters and servants (1984 : 89). Ex-slaves were not considered as reliable as indentured Indians. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley, declared in 1842 when Indian indentured immigration to Mauritius was resumed, that it was rendered necessary by the 'indolence and self-indulgence' of the ex-apprentices, who had demonstrated their inherent inability to contribute towards the welfare of the colony. In practice the years of resistance and the inherited tensions between planters and ex-slaves made new indentured workers a more attractive alternative for rural employers (Carter 1991). The stereotyped presentation of this viewpoint was made clear by an anonymous writer in 1842 (in fact a former special magistrate from the colony) who stated that freed slaves were 'addicted to idle, vagrant and unprofitable habits' and that a fresh supply of labour would "stimulate the indolent to a vigorous competition" (Anon 1842 : 112).

These explanations for the transfer from ex-slave to indentured labour in Mauritius can be usefully contrasted with the example of the Cape. There was no general flight of freed slaves from Cape farms and no replacement of the ex-slave labour force by new immigrant workers. Certainly some apprentices left the employment of their masters ; some went to Cape Town, others to mission station lands or to eke out a living on the small amount of unoccupied land suitable for cultivation. Others moved into seasonal employment on the grain and wine farms. Women withdrew from farm labour as in many post-



emancipation societies, including Mauritius (Scully and Mason, work in progress). But in general by the 1840s the arable farms of the south-western Cape were still worked by the ex-slaves, now operating under a labour tenancy or cheap wage system (Marinkowitz 1985; Worden 1989).

One possible reason for the difference between the two regions was the availability of land for cultivation by the freed slaves. Some such land was available in Mauritius, although not as much as is often suggested. In the arable western Cape there was little such land available and only in Cape Town was there a cohesive ex-slave community to join. Nor was the colonial government prepared to help in this regard. In November 1837 the missionary John Philip applied to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, for a grant of land near Cape Town, "to build a black town or village for the slave apprentices who will be thrown on their own resources at the end of next year". This was rejected on the grounds that, the most desirable result (of emancipation) would be that they would be induced to work for wages as free labourers. Whatever tends to counteract that object seems to me unadvisable, with a view to the interests of all classes<sup>5</sup>.

However explanation of differences between the fate of ex-slaves in the two colonies based solely on the availability of land is unsatisfactory. More significant is the readiness of the colonial government in Mauritius to approve the introduction of new, and preferred forms of labour for the plantations, thus rendering it unnecessary for the planters to attempt to retain their ex-slave workers. By contrast, Cape settlers had no such support from the government. Nor were they actively supported by the British mercantile class of Cape Town, whose interests were in commercial investments of other kinds. There was no equivalent, after the collapse of the wine boom, to the profitable sugar cultivation of Mauritius, so essential to the colonial economy. Indeed it was not until the following decades, with the expansion of commercial wool production in the eastern and central Cape, that such a sector did emerge, but this was not in the region of previous slave usage and it relied primarily on indigenous workers.

Not only did Cape slaveowners fail to obtain new external labour supplies, they also met with little co-operation from the state when they proposed vagrancy legislation to tie ex-slaves to the farms, or the apprenticeship of slave children, a loophole in the emancipation act. They did obtain some relief with the assignment of more 'Prize Negroes' captured from Portuguese slavers in the early 1840s but there was no equivalent to the extensive immigration to Mauritius of indentured labourers.

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5. Cape Archives, Government House correspondence 1/117, pp. 134-5 and 147-8, Napier to Glenelg, 7 November and 9 November 1837.

But although the ex-masters thus lacked the political and economic clout of their Mauritian counterparts, they retained a labour force. Adjustments to a seasonal, wage and tenant labour force. Adjustments to a seasonal, wage and tenant labour system were made in the period immediately following the end of apprenticeship without serious disruption to production and despite the failure to secure the unanimous support of the colonial state. Earlier explanations for this development included lack of access to land and capital by the freed people (for example Worden 1989). But the recent work on the transformations taking place within the Cape slave system during the two decades before emancipation may be as important. By the early 1830s, the Cape had already begun to make adjustments away from chattel slavery. Its decline in Cape Town, and the uncertainties that pervaded the vineyards led to a partial move towards a low-wage and tenant labour system before the emancipation act came into effect. There was little need for an indentured alternative after 1838. And the Mauritian example suggests that it was the presence of a stable alternative labour force which ensured that freed slaves in that colony left the plantations, rather than the pull of attractive land alternatives unavailable to their Cape counterparts.

Ultimately the chains of slavery were less decisively broken by Cape freed people than their Mauritian counterparts. In 1841 the Masters and Servants Ordinance laid down conditions of employment and the obligations of workers on the farms. When Cape settlers did acquire a voice in the government of the colony in the 1850s one of the first pieces of legislation they enacted was the 1856 Masters and Servants Act, which increased penalties on labourers for desertion and made neglect, insubordination and 'use of abusive or insulting language' criminal offences. The Mauritian freed slaves had at least escaped from this kind of subordination, even if they were reduced to a long-term condition of poverty. The majority of Cape freed people found themselves in the ranks of a rural proletariat which remained alienated from land and control over produce.

## 5. The legacy of slavery

The landowning classes of both Mauritius and the Cape survived intact into the post-emancipation era. They had both faced similar issues and problems in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, but had resolved them in strikingly different ways. In Mauritius the power of the French planters and the profitability and expanding levels of sugar production meant that no shifts in the slave system came about before emancipation, that the freed slaves left the plantations in 1839, and that they were replaced swiftly with an indentured labour force from India. It was only later, in the 1860s, that plantation sugar production in Mauritius was threatened by changing international market forces,

leading to the splitting up of the large estates and a shift to sharecropping by predominantly Indian cultivators (Allen 1987).

At the Cape, the early nineteenth century was one of economic instability, internal erosion of the slave system and a politically handicapped slaveowning class. Nonetheless, the freed slaves at the Cape found themselves transformed after emancipation into a proletariat whose economic and political powerlessness has endured to the present, and who notably failed to achieve independence or even tenancy agreements akin to the Mauritian Sharecroppers of the late nineteenth century.

The legacy of slavery to the western Cape is strikingly apparent in the inequalities of power and wealth which still exist between the descendants of the slaves and those of the settlers. Cape farmers did not have everything their own way during the later nineteenth century ; for instance, they had to compete for labour with Cape Town employers as the city developed a manufacturing economy. But as the region moved into the era of segregation and apartheid in the twentieth century, the close indentity of race and class which had been entrenched in the region during and after slavery melded well with the order of racial capitalism in modern South Africa.

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## FAMINTINANA

Tao anatin'ny folo taona dia niova tanteraka ny fomba fijerintsika ny fanandevozana sy ny fiantraikany teo amin'ny toekarena sy ny fiaraha-monina tao amin'ny faritr'i Le Cap nandritra ny taonjato faha-18 sy ny fiandohan'ny taonjato faha-19. Misy asa vaovao, ny sasany efa tafavoaka, ny sasany tsy mbola vonona, mifanandrina amin'ny maro amin'ireo hevitra nisy teo aloha momba ny fanandevozana sy ny fiantraikany. Ny fiforonan'ny prolétariat tao an-toerana talohan'ny Revolosiona Mineraly ihany koa no itarihan'ity laha-teny ity ny saina, tahirin-kevitra izay nifantohan'ny asa fanavaozana ny tantaran'i Afrika Atsimo hatramin'izao.

Mitanisa ny voka-pikarohan'io asa vaovao ity famelabelarana ity, ka mifantoka indrindra amin'ny anjara toeran'ny fanandevozana teo amin'ny toekaren'ny faritra atsimo-andrefan'i Le Cap tamin'ny taonjato faha-18 sy ny fiandohan'ny taonjato faha-19; ny herim-piovana teo an-toerana izay nanorina fototra nanana ny lanjany tamin'ny fiafaran'ny fanandevozana tamin'ny taona 1834 (ka isan'izany ny fiovana ara-toekarena tany ambanivohitr'i Le Cap sy ny fitsofohan'ny mpivarotra mpangoron-karena avy any amin'ny tanan-dehibe, ary ny fihemoran'ny fanandevozana teo anivon'ny toekaren'ny tananàn'i Le Cap, izay toekaren-tanàn-dehibe); ny anjara toeran'ny lehilahy sy vehivavy vao nafahana sy ny endriky ny fanaraha-maso vaovao ny hery mpamokatra nisongadina taorian'ny fanafahana; ary ny fiantraikan'ny fanandevozana tamin'ny fifamahofahoan'ny firazanana sy ny sokajin'olona tany Le Cap.

Hatrany hatrany dia hisy ny ezaka hampitaha ny fiaraha-monina kolonialy nisian'ny fanandevozana tany amin'ny tontolon'ny Ranomasimbe Atlantika sy Indiana.

## RESUME

*Au cours de la dernière décennie, notre conception de l'esclavage et de son impact sur l'économie et la société de la colonie du Cap durant le dix-huitième siècle et au début du dix-neuvième siècle s'est transformée. De nouveaux travaux, dont certains ont été publiés tandis que d'autres en sont encore dans un état non publiable, ont remis en question nombre d'hypothèses au sujet de l'esclavage et de ses conséquences. Ce travail a également attiré l'attention sur la création d'un prolétariat dans la colonie antérieurement à la Révolution des Mines, laquelle a fait jusqu'ici l'objet de beaucoup de travail révisionniste sur l'histoire de l'Afrique du Sud.*

*Cette communication passe en revue certains des principaux constats de ces nouveaux travaux, avec une attention particulière pour le rôle de l'esclavage dans l'économie du sud-ouest du Cap au cours du dix-huitième siècle et du début du dix-neuvième; la dynamique locale qui a permis un important arrière-fond historique à la fin de l'esclavage en 1834 (y compris les changements économiques dans le Cap rural et la pénétration capitaliste des marchands provenant des centres urbains, la résistance des esclaves et le déclin de l'esclavage dans l'économie urbaine du Cap) ; la position des hommes et des femmes libérés et les formes de contrôle substitutif de la main-d'oeuvre qui a émergé après l'émancipation, et l'impact de l'esclavage sur les relations entre les races et les classes au Cap.*

*Tout au long de la communication, l'on s'efforcera de faire la comparaison entre les sociétés esclavagistes coloniales dans les univers des Océans Atlantique et Indien.*