

The slavery under British and the VOC: The Chain of the Revolt

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Abstract. Slavery plays an important role in studying the history of Cape Town and South Africa. The beginning and the development of slavery were naturally accompanied by the slave uprisings. The history of Cape Colony has seen two major ruling governments, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the British Empire. There was no organized resistance that occurred in Cape Town during the VOC period. However, a series of slave improvements by the British government led to the outbreak of the revolt. In contrast to the harsh laws of the VOC period, the British kindness to the slaves freed them from their shackles and led to the outbreak of the revolt. The British policy to improve slavery seems to have changed the psychology of slaves, accelerated their desire for the abolition of slavery, and led to the occurrence of revolt. This seems "Unthinkable" to the British government. Although the slave revolts that happened in Cape town are valuable for studying the history of slavery, scholars and the public have overlooked this part of history. This essay aimed to analyze the Behavior of slaves to understand and encourage people to analyze historical events and figures through psychology.

Keywords: Slavery; The VOC; The British empire; Unthinkable; Cape colony.

1. Introduction

Slavery has existed for thousands of years, along with the progress of human society, as a bad and evil institution. In the slave society, slaves were regarded as property and had the same class as livestock. They had no personality, freedom, or rights of their own. They could be bought and sold, and slave owners could force slaves to work without pay. Where there is oppression, there is resistance. In history, people under cruel and tyrannical rule have always ignited the fire of resistance and revolution, and slaves also. For example, the Haitian revolution and the two slave revolts happened in Cape Colony during the British rule. The Haitian Revolution, the most successful slave uprising in history, began with a slave uprising and ended with the establishment of an independent state. This epic revolution shook France and even the entire Europe. Trouillot suggested that the Haitian Revolution was an "unthinkable" event in his book. Compared to the two slave revolts that happened in Cape Colony during the British rule, I want to borrow the term "unthinkable" to define those two slave revolts.

"Slavery was introduced to the Cape Colony by the VOC in its desire to boost the agriculture and food supply while Colonial control in the new settlement." Slavery in Southern Africa to an important institution in the colonies until it was abolished in the colony by the British. The end of slavery at the Cape was not due to internal pressure but from a decision from the outside. In 1807 the British government banned the slave trade in all her colonies, including the Cape. This meant that no more slaves (from any destination) could be sent to work in the Cape. However, those who were already in the Cape continued to work as slaves until 1834 when all slaves in the British Empire were to be set free. British started to rule Cape Town in 1806, and from this year, the British introduced laws -the Amelioration laws aimed at improving the welfare of slaves in the Cape. The slave protector appointed by the British government was responsible for enforcing these laws. As a result, the lives of some slaves improved after 1807. Apparently, the British seemed to be the hope of the local slaves. Slaves in Cape Town experienced centuries of slavery during the VOC period before the arrival of the British. However, the two most important Rebellions in Cape Town occurred after the British came to power. "The first Uprising took place in 1808. Two slaves, Louis van Mauritius and Abraham van de Caap met a couple of Irish sailors in a Cape Town tavern. The second uprising took place in 1825 on a remote farm in Bokkeveld. A number of slaves and Khoekhoe laborers, led by Galant van

der Caap, Killed the farmer and some of his family. "The benevolent rule of the British seemed to break the chains of the slaves. The chains were not physical but psychological, a fear of the VOC rule.

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2. The VOC settlement

Firstly, back in the time to the VOC period, large numbers of slaves came to Cape Town through the trade. However, in 143 years of Dutch rule, there was almost no slave rebellion except for a few slave escape events, which were related to the distinct slavery system during the VOC period. Many scholars have analyzed this issue in their studies of slavery societies during the VOC period.

The article by Mountain suggests the reasons why slaves couldn't organize a rebellion against their owners. Slaves holding were relatively small, and farms were isolated, and this made it difficult for slaves to organize themselves into a cohesive force that could effectively challenge the authority of slave owners. "Besides, the high turnover of slaves in the Cape was another factor that militated against rebellion. At last, another deterrent to rebellion was the practical difficulties that would have to be overcome in trying to organize a rebellion in an isolated environment where slaves had no access to arms on a scale large enough to be able to resist government retaliation." Mountain's article mentioned several factors that slaves in Cape Town had difficulty organizing an effective rebellion before the British came to power. First of all, strict laws made it impossible for slaves to incubate a sense of resistance. The sense of resistance is the key to organizing insurrections and limiting communication and circulation between slaves limits it. The booming slave trade during VOC also led to a high turnover of slaves in Cape Town. This factor not only contributed to the high death rate of slaves but also led to cultural differences. Cultural differences among the slaves eventually diluted any sense of resistance and solidarity that remained.

Moreover, Loos's article further argues that during the VOC period, the punishment was always harsh, but that reserved for slaves was particularly brutal. In Loos's article, she described how slaves were cruelly abused by their masters and the miserable suffering of slaves through many specific cases. In addition, there are historical records "Even in Cape Town intense fears of slave gatherings prompted a 1754 law that imposed a curfew on the enslaved. The legislation also forbade slaves from riding horses or wagons in the streets, singing, whistling, or making noise in the evening, meeting in bars, buying alcohol, or gathering at church entrances during services." This shows that the slaves, to some extent, succumbed to the slavery of the time, because they were afraid and restricted from confronting the colonial government. Those arguments and evidence by scholars show the plight of slaves caused by harsh laws and administration.

What the Dutch did seemed to create a harsh and horrible slave society, where slaves were completely "enslaved." During this period, slaves were born with a sense of fear. The VOC period seems to create a "chain" of slaves in the Cape colony. The strict laws and special social structures form this powerful chain. Once the chain is formed, the psychological effect on the slave is obedience and acceptance. This also explains why there was no organized rebellion by slaves during the VOC period. Slaves in Cape Town seems began to psychologically accept and obey the slave society and their status as slaves.

3. The British Colonisation

After a brief period under Napoleon, the British captured Cape Town in 1806 and formally started to rule it in 1814. The Arrival of the British did not continue the harsh treatment of slaves during the VOC period. The British began to show their “mercy” to slaves. British’s “mercy” here refers to a series of laws enacted during British rule to improve the rights and status of slaves. This “mercy” seems to be the key factor in breaking the chain. It was also the catalyst for the rebellions of 1808 and 1825.

“On 25 March 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act entered the statute books. Nevertheless, although the Act made it illegal to engage in the slave trade throughout the British colonies, trafficking between the Caribbean islands continued, regardless, until 1811.” The Abolition of the slave trade by the British was equivalent to breaking the “high Turnover” of slaves during the VOC period. The local slave population also became more stable, and the bonds between slaves were strengthened. This caused a great change in the mentality of slaves. Would the abolition of the slave trade be the signal of the abolition of slavery? The fact is a sense of freedom was born in the minds of the slaves. This freedom consciousness was also spread among slaves by the abolition of the slave trade. On October 27, 1808, around 340 slaves from Cape Town's Swartland and Koeberg hinterlands rose up in rebellion. They stormed around thirty of the region's lucrative grain fields, captured the farmers, and marched on Cape Town, vowing to “hoist the bloody banner and battle themselves free. This is the first organized slave revolt that happened in Cape Town. British’s policy did not make the colonies and slaves more stable, which is “unthinkable” for them. The British did not realize that their policy was changing the way slaves thought and behaved. So, after the 1808 revolt, Fiscal Dennyson Codifies the Cape Slave Law in order to give slaves more rights and provide some protection for slaves. It’s worth noting that Fiscal Dennyson mentioned in the RCC summary of laws pertaining to slavery, “Slavery considered in itself I acknowledge to be contrary to the principles of the Law of Nature, and an evil in Society, But it is an evil which has Modified into this and other communities by the acquiescence of the Sovereign. Supposing upon these grounds that Slavery will during an uncertain number of years still continue in this Colony.” This quote from Dennyson is very vague. He acknowledges the evil of slavery but the legitimacy of slavery, which is very difficult for slaves to understand. This misinformation easily led to psychological misunderstandings of slaves. Continued to issue laws protecting and benefiting slavery also led them to mistakenly believe that slavery was about to end, and the arrival of The British was to liberate them.

“Framed in terms of Christian morality and opportunities for the conversion of enslaved people, Lord Charles Somerset's unilateral decree outlined new standards of treatment and introduced limited rights for slaves, including the right for baptized slaves to marry, a prohibition against separating families (in actuality limited to children under nine years old), and recognizing Christianized slaves' right to testify in court.” Somerset's proclamation further protected the right of slaves, but it caused more chaos among the slave owners and slaves and led to the Galant revolt. The Galant revolt was another revolt that happened during British rule. In 1825, a 25-year-old slave named Galant organized a revolt of twelve slaves and Khoisan laborers in the Koue Bokkeveld. Galant and his followers killed his master and two other whites before fleeing into the nearby mountains. Galant and his supporters were apprehended by the commando. Galant and two others were executed after they were tried and convicted of murder.

Further rebellions erupted after further laws were issued that improved slave rights, which was “unthinkable” to the British government. In particular, two slave owners died during the revolt, and the rampant behavior of the slaves was further encouraged by the British government's series of mercy. During the Galant Revolt, the behavior and motives of Galant and his companions are intriguing. They reported “dissatisfaction with their state of slavery” as the slave's principal motive for the revolt, combined with the slave's 1823 Amelioration Proclamation which had led them to believe that the government had decreed their freedom. The Galant and his companions believed slavery did not exist for them. Slaves with limited education had no ability to discern the accuracy of what they heard, but when they were sure that even their masters were discussing the matter, it became extremely credible.

In the Galant trial record, Galant claimed ill-treatment as his main motive, together with his belief that His master had killed his son. In addition, He and other slaves had overheard his owner say, “he would rather shoot all his slaves than make them free,” and “the first Englishman who came to make the slaves free should be shot as well as the slaves.” The slaveholders acted perverse and angry when they learned of the British government's Amelioration Proclamation, which had to make slaves believe more in the act as they understood it. In the end, the revolt led by Galant made slave owners in the surrounding colonies more nervous about the slave issue, which also profoundly reflected their distrust of the British government. The Article from Rayner mentioned that the Cape Governor Somerset Realized that his ambiguous declaration had caused so much trouble after Galant's revolt. Reyner's article it's mentioned that Somerset reissued the proclamation of April 20th opened with the emphatic assertion “that the property of the proprietors in their slaves and their just claims to their services are not, in any degree, Affected and thereby.” Although the rebellion had taken place, the British government and Somerset began to realize that their good intentions and the slave's protective act were the main causes of the rebellion. To conclude Rayner and Watson's article and the behavior of the slaves, Somerset's legislation had contributed to an Insurrectionary spirit that causes the revolt.

The Galant Revolt not only shocked the colonies, but it also apparently intensified the conflict between slaves and their owners. The most direct manifestation of the intensification of conflicts is that the psychology of slaves has intensified their resentment against slave owners and slavery, which is an idea that slaves never thought about during the VOC period. The slaves had a sense of hope and overcame the Sense of Fear of the VOC period. Through analyzing the behavior of slaves, the British's “mercy” was consistently returned with slaves more rampant actions. Although the two revolts in Cape Town in 1808 and 1825 both failed, they were both influenced by the policies of the British government and eventually accelerated the abolition of slavery.

4. Conclusion

In Brink's novel Chain of voices, Galant said that to be free is not going to the Cape. It's not wandering through the mountains either. “My feet remain bare: it is the mark that brands me. To be free is to want to be where you belong: to dare to be who you are .” Although Brink's novel is fictional, it's analyzed through mental shows that slaves understood their own situation, no matter how much they fought to escape, they were bound by an invisible chain or brand. They could not be truly free until slavery was completely abolished. Brink's novel is a metaphor for slaves awakening to a sense of resistance. Compared to Haitian revolution, why Trouillot suggested that the Haitian Revolution was an “unthinkable”? To analyze his term in with the background that time that, the slave owners and colonists never anticipated that the slaves would break out in a revolution against them. They thought that the slaves did not have the consciousness to resist. Having a sense of resistance was crucial in leading to a slave revolution, and a sense of resistance would be the key to breaking the chains of resistance.

In general, the VOC era put an invisible chain on the slaves of Cape Town, and they were bound by this chain without the consciousness or ability to launch any kind of rebellion. It was not until the arrival of the British that the new slavery policy and rumors of its abolition gave slaves the confidence and hoped to break the shackles. With hope, the slaves began to try to demand more, and the kindness of the British became a major factor to the rebellion in Cape Town.

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