

“We are free, you are slaves. Come on, let’s run away”: Escape from Constantia, 1712

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Abstract

Slaves were imported to the Cape from 1658 to 1808. The majority of the captives lived in Cape Town and many other slaves lived on farms. Added to this captive population were political exiles. In 1712, 23 slaves and exiles gathered at Constantia, a renowned wine farm, to run away. Since the holding was an important homestead, one would expect that this escape would have been reconstructed in the histories of the farm and slavery at the Cape. At the time, the escape raised sufficient alarm among authorities to warrant a copy of the judicial record be entered into the daybook of the Dutch East India Company (hereafter referred to as the Company).¹ However, it would appear that the non-participation of the farm’s captives lessened the apparent significance of the desertion and distracted historians from engaging with the dynamics surrounding the plot and with the escapers’ eventual dash to freedom. Carefully planned to succeed, the escape failed and the trial of the runaways who were captured brought the desertion into the historical record. To date, the brave hopefuls, their risky strike at liberty, and the disruption they caused at Constantia one spring day have received minimal scholarly attention.² To address this oversight, the following account will provide as full details of the escape as possible.

Keywords: Constantia; Company slaves; Cape exiles; Khoikhoi; Constantia slaves; Knecht.

1 WCARS VC 20; Research for this article was part of post-doctoral studies funded by the National Research Foundation. I am grateful for the support of Andrew Bank and the Department of Historical Studies at the University of the Western Cape. I appreciate Sue Newton-King’s mention of the significance of the entry in the daybook. Tasnim Nathoo read a draft of this article and I am grateful for her comments. The advice of Robert Shell and the assistance of Neville Lintnaar is appreciated. The court record was translated by Annemarie Krzesinski. The article was edited by Chris Fox and Erika Steeves and copy edited by Alison Jacques.

2 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways: Eighteenth-century Cape characters* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1999), pp. 74, 76, 80-85.

Introduction

Slaves were initially imported to the Cape to fill a need for labour at the Company.³ The Company established a refreshment station at the Cape for crews on its vessels bound for the East and sailing back to the Netherlands. Tending the Company vegetable and fruit garden for scurvy-ridden sailors became the primary task at the station, where labour was also required to collect timber for fuel, erect buildings, tend and cultivate animals for food, and service visiting ships. In the late 1650s, with authority from its headquarters in Batavia (as the capital of Indonesia was then called), and after two failed Company-sponsored slaving voyages to Madagascar, the Company began importing captives to the Cape. Slaves from Madagascar formed a large portion of Company slaves for much of this era, but slaves were also transported from Mozambique and East Africa. The Company also brought slaves on Company ships from the East that were bound for the Netherlands and housed them at the Slave Lodge, where it kept its captives, keeping the slaves mainly for its own use. Free burghers Company employees who had been released from their employment wanted slaves to work as personal servants and farm labourers but could not officially use Company slaves and purchased captives from foreign slavers who anchored their ships at the Cape during their journeys to the Americas. Burgher slaves at the Cape actually outnumbered Company captives; in 1750 the ratio was more than 10 to 1, and in 1793 the number of burgher slaves to Company captives reached almost 30 to 1. The use of captives by the Company was nonetheless a primary cause of slavery at the Cape.

Forceful means were necessary to establish and maintain this coercive system of labour.⁴ The Company and the free burghers used firearms to force people into slavery and exert authority and control over captives. To establish its authority at the Cape, the Company assumed ownership of land that belonged to the territory of the Khoikhoi and gave numerous hectares to free burghers. The burghers needed labour to work their holdings and thus slavery at the Company garrison normalised the deployment of coerced labour on farms. In agreement with James Armstrong and Nigel Worden that slavery at the Cape resulted from a labour shortage Robert Shell stated that the possession

3 J Armstrong & N Worden, *The slaves, 1652-1834*, R Elphick & H Giliomee (eds), *The shaping of South African society, 1651-1840* (USA, Wesleyan University Press, 1988) pp. 111-123; R Shell, *Children of bondage: A social history of slave society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), pp. 1-2.

4 R Shell, *Children of bondage...*, pp. 1-5.

of firearms and large tracts of land was pivotal to the system of captivity.⁵ Had the Company and burghers not had the means to coerce labour, and had there not been abundant land to give away requiring workers, slavery at the Cape would not have occurred.

In addition to captives, the Company held political exiles under its authority. Since 1680, the Company had sent political exiles (primarily aristocrats and learned Islamic teachers who had been sentenced by the Company in Batavia) to serve their terms in Cape Town and its outlying areas.⁶ Generally, the exiles were sent to live in the surrounding rural areas so that they would have minimal opportunity to interact with slaves, the majority of whom lived in town. The geographic separation was preferred because exiles were known to encourage slaves to escape.⁷

Degrading work conditions and poor treatment prompted slaves to run away.⁸ Company captives and burgher slaves deserted in bids to free themselves from the rigours of captivity. Laws, severe punishments, and public executions to deter escapes failed to stop desertions because escapees believed they could overcome the difficulties inherent in running away. It was with this conviction that 23 slaves and exiles ran away from the Cape on October 20, 1712, after first gathering at Constantia, 14 kilometres outside Cape Town.⁹ Constantia was a renowned wine farm on the Cape Peninsula and belonged to the estate of Simon van der Stel, a former governor of the Cape, who died in June 1712. When the deserters met at the farm, slaves of Constantia reported them. The interference became the first of many incidents that defeated the escape.

Political exiles planned the escape and most of the deserters were Company slaves. Lampi, an exile from the Indonesian archipelago, initiated the escape because he was optimistic he could avoid the failures of other unsuccessful attempts. He spoke to Company slaves who had escaped and been recaptured, noted their common failures, and planned a desertion he thought would succeed. He belonged to a community of slaves and exiles in Cape Town, and because he was mobile in the urban centre, he was able to contact his friends

5 J Armstrong & N Worden, *The slaves 1652-1834*, p. 110; R Shell, *Children of bondage...*, p. 2.

6 K Ward, "The bounds of bondage: Forced migration from Batavia to the Cape of Good Hope during the Dutch East India Company era, c. 1652-1795", Ph. D. thesis, University of Michigan, 2002, p. 127; R Ross, *Cape of torments: Slavery and resistance in South Africa* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 20.

7 K Ward, "The bounds of bondage...", pp. 175, 227.

8 J Armstrong & N Worden, *The slaves 1652-1834*, R Elphick & H Giliomee (eds), *The shaping of South African society, 1651-1840* (USA, Wesleyan University Press, 1988) pp. 150-157.

9 Originally stated as 9 miles. R Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope* (London, C and R Baldwin, 1804), p. 181.

and acquaintances who he thought could meet the challenges of desertion. Lampi preferred to have a collective action rather than to run away on his own because it would more sharply repudiate the Company and its structure of social domination at the Cape. However, a large collective action required more skilful management than did the more typical desertions involving only a single slave or a small group of captives.¹⁰ Potential participants had to be contacted without detection by authorities, everyone had to keep the planned desertion a secret, and a more complex getaway had to be engineered. Not insignificantly, the group had to be kept organised while on the run. The band of hopefuls he recruited eventually formed a large group, but they were not the largest gang of runaways to flee in the early eighteenth century.¹¹

Lampi's recruitment efforts began in earnest after he met Santri, an exile who lived at Constantia, and in whom he confided his desire to escape. Santri also agreed to run away and offered his house as a place where the deserters could meet on the day of the desertion. Santri came from the village Chiribon in Batavia where Sheikh Yusuf had hid from the Company after a failed revolution.¹² (Sheikh Yusuf, himself, was banished to the Cape in 1694 and lived on the Cape Dunes, present-day Cape Flats.)¹³ Exiled around 1707, Santri was at the time of the escape between age 40 and 50 and lived in a house across the garden at Constantia. In his sketch of the farm done in 1710, EV Stade illustrated three small houses near the manor on the west side.¹⁴ Two other small houses stood isolated from the manor on the far southeastern side of the farm beyond a large garden and shrubs, at the foot of a craggy plateau mountain. The distance of the dwellings from the manor suggests the houses were used for means that were marginal to the main residence and suited "guests" such as Santri. The relative isolation of the house where Santri lived made Santri's home seem well suited to the planned escape.

Slaves at Constantia noticed slaves approaching Santri's house and exposed the escape. Captives on the farm did not necessarily realise an escape was occurring, but they did know Santri was not permitted to receive guests because he was an exile, and they elected to inform against the slaves and exiles they spotted. Coercive methods of control trained the captives of the

10 N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 120.

11 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, pp. 76, 82-85.

12 A Davids, *The mosques of Bo-Kaap: A social history of Islam at the Cape* (Cape Town, South African Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980), pp. 37-38.

13 N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 20.

14 WCARS, M1/984, EV Stade, Sketch of Constantia, 1710.

holding to be submissive, and, though the slaves resisted captivity through their own means, they clearly did not perceive concealing this intrusion to be in their best interests.¹⁵ The exposure of Santri's guests would prove critical to the failure of the escape, although the deserters still managed to flee the farm. A shortage of food, and the subsequent hunger in the weeks after running away, forced the deserters to approach settlers and Khoikhoi for sustenance, which resulted in this ambitious desertion ending in a manner similar to the failures of other escapes in the eighteenth century.¹⁶

Through testimonies made by the prisoners when they were interrogated and tortured, the prosecutor extracted statements regarding events leading up to the desertion as well as the events of the escape itself, and witness testimonies added to the account. The interrogations were conducted in Dutch, the official language of the Cape, which was then translated into Malay and Portuguese, the languages of the prisoners. The inmates' responses were then translated into Dutch. The skill, attention, and accuracy of the translator therefore influenced the veracity of the record. Official regard for the translator's transcript protected it from scrutiny on how closely it reflected the prisoners' statements. Due to the focus of the trial, details on how the deserters maintained relations with one another as they ventured through unfamiliar territory and worried about their food supply remained known only to the escapees. It was recorded that, during the interrogations, prisoners testified that, when Santri and Lampi met with potential deserters, Santri said, "We are free, you are slaves. Come on, let's run away." Different versions of the statements were recorded, but each one referred to Santri's and Lampi's freedom, which was contrasted with the slaves' captivity. However, this apparently authentic assertion cannot be seen as entirely correct. Though not slaves, Santri and Lampi were detained at the Cape without any possibility of going home; therein lay their captivity. Still, Santri's proposal that the slaves free themselves from social domination was sufficiently compelling. As Nigel Penn showed, the slaves and exiles recruited by Lampi and Santri were a fraction of the captives, deserters, and criminals who fled the Cape during the eighteenth century because they rejected its social structure.¹⁷

15 J Mason, *Social death and resurrection: Slavery and emancipation in South Africa* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2003), pp. 153-154.

16 N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, pp. 125, 126; N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, pp. 74, 76, 80-85.

17 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, p. 73.

The Escapees

Both Lampi and Santri, two exiles, were found to have led the escape; however, the official record contains less information on Lampi than Santri because Lampi was killed during the desertion. Reference to him in the judicial pages seems to have been made primarily to implicate him as a leader. Fluent in Malay and Dutch, Lampi was highly mobile in Company establishments and had friends at the Slave Lodge. Santri (Joudan Tappa of Chiribon) was an exiled Javanese imam, also known as Souka Tappa at the Cape. (It was usual for male exiles from Batavia to have two and even three names.)¹⁸ Santri spoke only Malay and appeared to live the isolated life the Company intended; slaves on the farm did not interact with him and he went to Cape Town only to sell chickens he raised and vegetables he cultivated. On his commute to Cape Town, Santri crossed terrain that was home to mammals of the continent and “fynbos”, flora native to the Cape, that grew in pure white sand and offered a pleasant view from the road that led through Wynberg, continued to Rondebosch, and finally gave way to Cape Town.¹⁹

Lampi met Santri through a mutual acquaintance, and two weeks after they met he visited Santri and asked if he could share Santri’s house. This was an interesting request because, by the mid-eighteenth century, officials in Batavia chose where exiles lived; however, Lampi’s request suggests that prior to that period exiles of his status could choose where they stayed.²⁰ Santri’s house, being on an 891-morgen wine farm set in a valley beneath the Steenberg, seemed to have attracted Lampi, whose own lodgings might have been in more modest surroundings. Lampi also likely anticipated that sharing Santri’s house would enable he and Santri to more easily work out the innumerable details the escape would require. During their nascent friendship, Lampi told Santri he wanted to escape and he wanted to flee with a group. Despite the penalties escapees faced if captured and the low success rate of escapes, Lampi was optimistic he could avoid events that caused unsuccessful desertions to ultimately fail. He determined the causes of failure from his conversations with recaptured slaves at the Slave Lodge and made his plans accordingly. Santri also wanted to desert and joined Lampi, offering to have provisions stored at his house and to have the deserters meet at his home before the desertion. In offering his house as a rendezvous, Santri struck another similarity with Sheikh

18 K Ward, “The bounds of bondage...”, p. 150.

19 R Percival, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, (London, C. and R. Baldwin, 1804), p. 76; W Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, (London, Longman, 1824), Vol. II, pp. 46-47.

20 K Ward, “The bounds of bondage...”, p. 127.

Yusuf: Yusuf's house was said to have been a meeting place for deserters in the 1690s.²¹ Lampi's friendship with Santri provided material aid and motivated Lampi to realise his desire to flee the Cape.

Thus encouraged, Lampi went on to recruit the majority of the other escapees from his social network, which belonged to the small following of Islam in Cape Town.²² The only female asked to run away was particularly close to Lampi: Omboe of Samarang was Lampi's partner and pregnant with the couple's child. Exiled after being convicted in Batavia, Omboe, age 24, was sentenced in 1711 to labour on public works in chains for 10 years at the Cape and was one of only a few females that authorities in Indonesia banished to the Cape.²³ Her sentence resulted from gendered attitudes embedded in punitive responses towards antagonists in the East to Company authority in Batavia. Since she stayed with Lampi for six months, it appears Omboe was mobile outside her work hours.

Lampi also selected other slaves and exiles he believed could bear the challenges of an escape. The origins of the captives and exiles Lampi chose, suggested Lampi belonged to a sector of the slave population that came from the same region and with whom he shared a religious identity; though captives from Madagascar, Mozambique, and East Africa formed a majority at the Company, all the Company escapees in the band came from the East and had a reverence for Islam.²⁴ Abdul of Bali, age 30, a convict also known as Paris, had been exiled to the Cape after being convicted for recruiting people to an unstated cause in 1706. Exiles rarely arrived at the Cape with documents outlining the reasons for their banishment, and the court appeared not to know the specifics of Paris's banishment.²⁵ Paris, according to the court, was a very persuasive man. Another recruit, Poasse of Batavia, a Company slave, age 20, lived at the Slave Lodge. Poasse and Santri were friends, and it was Poasse who originally introduced Santri and Lampi. When Poasse learnt of the escape he agreed to join the runaways because he could no longer endure the work required of a Company slave, who must toil long days at the docks

21 N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 20.

22 N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 86.

23 K Ward, "The bounds of bondage...", p. 248.

24 J Armstrong & N Worden, *The slaves 1652-1834*, pp. 111-112.

25 K Ward, "The bounds of bondage...", p. 244.

or in other Company establishments.²⁶ Jannis of Bali, age 21, a Company slave who shared living quarters with Poasse, arrived at the Cape from Batavia less than a year before the escape. Flogged and branded in Batavia for offences he had committed, Jannis had a physical memory of the Company's methods for maintaining social domination. Tjinkzaij of Bali, age 30 and a Company slave, had previously been punished for a foiled attempt to flee on an English ship. Tjinkzaij knew Poasse, and he had met Santri at the farm previously when he had accompanied Poasse on a visit. Despite regimentation at the Slave Lodge, Tjinkzaij and Poasse avoided being monitored and found respite from their confinement as far away as Constantia. However, the captives did not translate their mobility into an escape of their own. Tjinkzaij, who might have learnt of the escape from Poasse, was persuaded by Lampi just one day before the desertion to join the group of escapees. Baccar of Sumbawa, age 20, learnt of the escape from Lampi in a doorway at the Slave Lodge. Lampi frequented the Slave Lodge often, so his usual presence in the building allowed him to approach friends and speak of the desertion without attracting attention. Langa of Macassar, age 30, learnt of the dash for freedom at the company hospital from another deserter, Jagga of Macassar. Balik of Sumbawa, age 20 and a Company slave, also agreed to escape. Cartta Laxana of Romma at Macassar, another convict, age 30, and Totting of Romma at Macassar, another convict, age 20, were also exiles, both sentenced to life in chains for crimes committed on Java's south coast. Cartta Laxana's and Totting's ability to run away suggests they were in fact not chained during their banishment. The eastern origin of all the escapees indicated common geographic, cultural, and religious bonds among captives and exiles from the East.

A number of deserters were private slaves. Boedia (also called Paaij) of Bali, age 45 and the captive of a free burgher, was one of at least four escapees who were privately owned slaves. Boedia learnt of the escape at the Castle, the Company headquarters, from Paris. Azar of Boegis, age 25, was the slave of a vice-merchant and warehouse keeper. On the day of the escape Azar delayed his departure to tend to his chores so that his disappearance would be less noticeable. A slave with a strong body, Abram of the Coast of Coramandel, age 25, was the captive of Hans Jacob Conterman, a blacksmith; according to the court record, Abram was a thief, a fugitive, and a seducer. Coridon of Timor at Macassar, age 40, was the slave of a burgher. Bron of Batavia, Bappa

25 R Ross, "Rather mental than physical: Emancipations & the Cape Economy", N Worden & C Crais (eds), *Breaking the chains: Slavery and its legacy in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), pp. 145-167; J Armstrong & N Worden, *The slaves 1652-1834*, pp. 110-111.

Saptoe, Thana, Massi, Catha Naga, and Arsa Goena were others who chose to join the escape. Although the exiles, Company slaves, and privately owned slaves came from different places in the Indonesian archipelago and India, all shared the experience of enduring both the forced upheaval from their homes and the social domination at the Cape. Everyone who agreed to desert, with the exception of Santri, lived in Cape Town.

The Cape had a social hierarchy in which difference amounted to meaningful distinction. Distinctions among the underclass resulted in varying levels of status within the social group. Exiles perceived they had a higher social status than slaves, and exiles, who were not chained and forced to labour, claimed more status than banished people whose movements were restricted. Thus, Santri's phrase at a meeting to recruit deserters "we are free and you are slaves" was carefully chosen. Compelling as it was superficial, the claim contrasted the partial liberty of exiles with the complete enslavement of captives and suggested that slaves could raise their status to freemen if they deserted the Cape. Escape was risky and everyone who agreed to desert knew it. A successful getaway depended on traversing the boundaries beyond the settler frontier, finding sources of food, protecting themselves from wild animals, and evading the inevitable search party. Company slaves who had been flogged and branded on their necks after running away and being captured were a daily reminder at the Slave Lodge of the punishment that awaited escapees who were caught. Abram agreed to escape only if Santri and Lampi could be certain of their destination and how to reach it. At first Santri and Lampi planned to flee to Groot Namacqua and then Klein Namacqua, which lay north of the Cape. In doing so, they chose the same region that many escapees would select during the 1720s.²⁷ Escape to Namacqualand seemed the best option to achieve freedom because the coastline stretching north of Cape Town to the region served as a natural pathway and also provided a bountiful source of food.

Santri later proposed that the group escape instead to 't Cappersland (present-day Eastern Cape). This destination involved an inland route, and not knowing the way, Santri suggested they hire three Khoikhoi to guide them in exchange for three rolls of tobacco and 30 rix dollars. Thus, capital Santri raised from his chickens and garden became a means to freedom for many. In the days leading up to the escape, Santri secured the Khoikhoi guides, which virtually guaranteed a food supply because the guides could contact

²⁷ N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, p. 75.

other Khoikhoi for livestock. However, Khoikhoi beyond the Cape disliked runaways because they tended to be desperate for food and had previously caused conflict when their hungry pleas were not satisfied.²⁸ Escape to the east rather than to the north also offered a destination from which a longer-term plan to reach Indonesia could be achieved.

Preparing the Escape

The size of the band of hopefuls grew over a period of weeks. Recruiting occurred mainly at the Slave Lodge, the Company hospital, and at the Castle. Benefitting from weak monitoring at the Slave Lodge, Santri and Lampi held a recruitment meeting in Poasse's living quarters. Santri visited the Slave Lodge two or three times over a period of up to six weeks before the escape and Lampi frequented the building in the evenings. Cramped living quarters at the Slave Lodge meant meetings had to be guarded to avoid being overheard and yet kept casual enough to prevent suspicion. Lampi succeeded in recruiting his friends to escape because he assured them they would have sufficient provisions and arms. He delivered bullets to Santri's house at night and other members of the band also helped to stock food and weapons. Collectively, the deserters accumulated three flintlocks, three pikes, a sword, and a pistol. Once the day of the escape was set, the members of the group received a message from their initial contacts to go to the farm over a period of two days.

Meeting at the farm had advantages and disadvantages. The location, size, and low density of the holding made it a suitable place to gather. Moreover, the escapees lived and worked in different areas of Cape Town and so needed to assemble before they fled. If they met in town, they would be noticed, but the rural location of the farm meant they could meet out of public view and leave without being seen.²⁹ Santri thought his house would be a suitable place because he lived an isolated life on the farm and the slaves there appeared not to notice him. He assumed that his "invisibility" would extend to the rest of the group on the day of their escape. In the weeks prior to the desertion, Lampi delivered provisions to Santri unnoticed. Company captives had also visited Santri's house for meetings without being spotted, concealed by the trees, bushes, and plants on the landscaped holding when they crossed the

28 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, pp. 74, 77, 81.

29 MW Spilhaus, *Company's men* (Cape Town, John Malherbe, 1973), pp. 169-170.

garden to his house.

However, not everyone in the group knew where the farm was located. Unfamiliarity with the area introduced the risk of getting lost and bypassing the farm. In 1810, William Burchell wrote, “neither of us being acquainted with the proper road to Constantia, we missed it.”³⁰ The distance of the farm from town also added more risk because everyone had to reach the holding without attracting attention. The intensity and excitement of the desertion also occupied them and they feared detection. Bron of Batavia was the first to arrive at Santri’s house. When he found out the escape was going ahead, Bron, a slave cook, had been especially eager to leave his master and arrived two nights before any of the other deserters. The secretiveness of the escape made his disappearance from his master’s house appear to be the action of a single slave and prevented alarm from being raised, unlike when Coridon’s and Abram’s masters noticed their slaves had fled within moments of each other. The deserters who knew the location of the farm teamed up with escapees who did not know where the holding lay to ensure no one would get lost.

The escapees did not all know one another but most of them spoke the same language. They had not met as a group, so when they gathered at Santri’s house on the day of the escape they did not speak to each other because they were strangers. All but two of the escapees spoke Malayan; Paris was bilingual (he also spoke Dutch) and Abram and Azar communicated most comfortably in Portuguese. The deserters’ enslavement, exile, shared region of origin, and religion and for most of them, their friendship with Lampi, provided a sense of commonality in the group.

Events at Constantia

Constantia had expansive baroque-style gardens landscaped with oak trees, fruit trees, plants, shrubs, and vines.³¹ Slaves tended the gardens daily and their chores provided a built-in capacity for surveillance of the estate.³² It was while engaged in this work that the captives of the farm spotted Company slaves

30 W Burchell, *Travels in the interior of South Africa, 1* (London, Longman, 1822), p. 47.

31 F Valentyn, *Description of the Cape of Good Hope with matters concerning it, Vol. 1* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1971), pp. 195, 197; M van der Merwe, *Groot Constantia 1685-1885: Its owners and occupants* (Cape Town, South African Cultural History Museum, 1997), pp. 10-13.

32 J Noble (ed), *Official handbook: History, productions, and resources of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, Saul Solomon, 1886), pp. 268-272.

stealing across the garden towards Santri's house. The farm captives exposed the deserters for several reasons: the threat of punishment if caught failing to report intruders; non-identification with the Company slaves; and suspicion regarding the intentions of these intruders. The distant relationship between the farm captives (the holding had 60 slaves in 1709) and Santri compounded their inclination to inform on the Company slaves.³³ On the day of the escape (a Thursday) captives tending to their chores saw the Company slaves, who could be identified by their Company-issued clothing.³⁴ The captives then alerted Phillip Constant the "knecht" (a soldier, or perhaps a sailor, employed by the Company), and main authority on the farm since Simon van der Stel's death.³⁵ Constant rounded up five slaves, then went to Santri's house and told him he would be evicted if his visitors did not leave. The low-key nature of this first request suggested that Santri's usually quiet and solitary life on the farm made this visit from Company slaves pass without raising a major alarm.

Slaves who arrived later and aimed to reach Santri's house, however, caught the sight of a loyal slave. Fabia of Brazil, one of 14 slaves who Van der Stel freed in his will, spotted 11 slaves crossing the garden.³⁶ Lampi and Santri had failed to consider the bottleneck that would occur when so many escapees arrived at the farm at the same time. Prompted by loyalty to his late master, if not fear of losing his pending freedom as well as alienation from Santri, Fabia turned the captives away and reported them to Constant. By informing on the escapees, Fabia behaved as the trusted slave Van der Stel had regarded so highly and rewarded with freedom. Sensing a serious matter afoot, Constant rounded up 20 slaves to investigate Fabia's report. On his way to Santri's house, Constant instead commanded his slave party to pursue six captives he noticed heading up the mountain. They eventually captured the fugitives, bound their hands, and led them back to Santri's house (catching another escapee on the way) upon learning that five more escapees were hiding there. The growing gathering of "visitors" at Santri's house signalled that the intruders were more than just guests.

Although slaves of Constantia helped to capture the deserters, this does not imply that they agreed with slavery.³⁷ In her research on slaves in Curaçao,

33 M van der Merwe, *Groot Constantia 1685-1885...*, p. 15.

34 OF Mentzel, *A complete and authentic geographical and topographical description, Vol. I* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1921), p. 169.

35 R Shell, *Children of bondage...*, p. 12; N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 108.

36 A Böeseken, *Slaves and free blacks at the Cape* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1977), pp. 59-60.

37 R Ross, *Cape of torments...*, p. 3.

in the Caribbean, Rose Mary Allen stated that captives lived out their daily lives in different ways not necessarily defined by resisting or accommodating masters.³⁸ On every farm and in every household slaves both resisted and accommodated bondage in some form, though not always both every day. At the Cape, resistance ranged from desertion, assault and murder, to subtle sabotage.³⁹ On the other hand, loyalty was a form of accommodation that led to becoming a favoured slave. Thus slaves resisted and accommodated slavery to survive captivity, “a substitute for certain death maintained by brutality”.⁴⁰ Internal and external forms of control and identity influenced the degree to which slaves resisted and/or accommodated captivity. Favoured slaves imposed control internally, and masters and “knechts” severely punished disobedient slaves, which was especially intense in rural areas, to keep order externally.⁴¹ Heavy-handed coercive control of slaves along with the differences captives perceived among themselves resulted in skewed loyalties in the captive population at the Cape.⁴²

Mayhem unfolded at Santri’s house when Santri refused to expose his visitors. Constant demanded that Santri open the door and when Santri refused he broke the padlock. Fearing the escape had been exposed and they would be arrested, four escapees inside the house dashed out and attacked Constant with pikes. Constant overcame their onslaught and even though Lampi had a pistol, Totting and Thana each had a flintlock, and Azar had a sword, none of those deserters used their weapons this may have been due to the tradition in Indonesia of carrying arms as symbols rather than for actual defence.⁴³ Constant and his slave party outnumbered the escapees by at least four men and had the advantage of surprise, but the captives under his command did not attempt to subdue the runaways. An apparent (in the court record) lack of action on the part of the slaves to subdue the escapees, and to defend Constant, suggests the farm captives passively witnessed the commotion. Psychologically trained to accept captivity, the slaves did not defend their commander. The escapees were likely astounded by the challenge to authority they witnessed, and which they had imagined enacting themselves but had not. Constant’s numerical advantage over the escapees vanished when Omboe

38 RM Allen, *Di ki manera? A social history of Afro-Curacaons, 1863-1917* (Amsterdam, SWP Publishers, 2007), p. 25.

39 J Mason, *Social death and resurrection...*, pp. 152-165.

40 O Peterson, “Slavery as human parasitism”, M Bulmer & J Solomos (eds), *Racism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 92.

41 R Ross, “The structure of domination”, *Cape of torments...*, pp. 29-37.

42 R Shell, “The metaphor of family: The management of involuntary labor”, *Children of bondage...*, pp. 214-227.

43 E Bradlow, “Running Amok and its historical significance: A Cape case study”, *Cabo*, 5(1), 1990, p. 10.

managed to free the runaways who had been captured on the mountain. During the uproar, one or all of the deserters shouted “Amok”, a cultural behaviour perceived by the settlers as an affront to domination and intent to cause harm. Less common and more feared than running amok, in the late eighteenth century shouting “Amok” was perceived as a war cry that often coincided with murder.⁴⁴ Constant commanded his slave party to retreat while Lampi ordered the escapees to take food and their belongings and to run. They raced after him because he knew the way.

Across the Cape Dunes and the Mountains

A pursuit followed, with attendant mishaps that disadvantaged both sides. Constant pursued the escapees with his rifle, a party of slaves, and two dogs (usually kept on farms to protect slave owners and hired help against attacks by captives at night).⁴⁵ At a river near Baas Harmenskraal, Constant fired a warning shot. The fugitives fled across the waterway and Constant raced after them but fell into the river. Sensing an advantage, the runaways turned back: one of the fugitives struck a dog with a pickaxe as it advanced to attack and another stabbed the second dog. According to testimony, at the sight of the hacked animal, one of the fugitives said, “I would not mind drinking the dog’s blood”. This statement confirmed to the court the savagery of Indonesian slaves and exiles. With his trusted backup incapacitated, Constant retreated upon gaining his footing; his bullets were wet and he had no other firepower because his slave party was unarmed. Constant’s retreat disadvantaged Baccar and Abram, who were not with the main group, as Constant and his slave party happened across these escapees and captured them.

The fugitives fled to the Cape Dunes. In their urgency, they left behind at the river two bags of rice, 50 bullets, 30 cartridges, and five blankets, which lightened their load but put them at greater risk of falling short of food, being defenceless against animal or human antagonists, and sleeping cool at night. Two hammers, a file, a mirror, and tailor’s thimbles were also left behind at the river (and later found), suggesting that the escapees had packed tools so that they might continue their trades in a free land. The escapees knew they had to cross the Hottentot Holland Mountains to put distance between themselves and the Cape. Therefore, they hurried along the beach near Onrust and

⁴⁴ E Bradlow, “Running Amok...”, *Cabo*, 5(1), 1990, pp. 8-10.

⁴⁵ N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 104.

crossed the Cape Dunes, a sandy, barren, and sparsely populated landscape, by way of the False Bay coastline, where they roasted black mussels and dug out holes beneath rocks in which to sleep.⁴⁶ The Cape Dunes provided a path to reach the mountains to the north.

At the north end of the bay, they turned toward the Hottentot Holland Mountains. From this point onward, they were less certain of a food supply, and more dependent on the provisions they carried. Steep, wild, and barren, the mountains formed a decisive barrier between the Cape and the interior beyond.⁴⁷ The fugitives were less clear of the route to their destination beyond the settler frontier, no longer having the coastline as a guide. Bread and other provisions they might have carried from the food that Paris and Lampi had stored at Santri's house enabled them to delay contact with the Khoikhoi as they trekked further inland, certain that Constant had alerted authorities. Eight hours behind the fugitives, a search party set out (search parties took time to form because it was difficult to find men willing to participate).⁴⁸ The delay was of minimal consequence, however, since the search party travelled by horseback while the deserters fled on foot. Six Khoikhoi, who had been enticed with gifts because they were skilled trackers, accompanied the hunting crew. Khoikhoi cooperated with settlers to capture escapees until the late eighteenth century, when settlers intruded farther into Khoikhoi land and disrupted Khoikhoi traditions.⁴⁹ Runaways, desperate for sustenance and thus easily agitated, usually contacted Khoikhoi for food, but conflict often erupted when their requests for meat were denied. (Khoikhoi were wary of supplying escapees with food because the Company punished them for assisting runaways.)⁵⁰ Khoikhoi also denied requests from deserters to barter for sheep because they were frequently contacted and so felt they must guard their own food supply. Without aide from the Khoikhoi, many escapes failed.

When the escapees fled the farm, Santri dashed into the reaches of the Table Mountain range to the rear of the holding, believing he had a better chance of surviving in the local mountains. Santri had gazed at the mountain range

46 J Barrow, *Travels into the interior of Southern Africa: in which are described the character and conditions of the Dutch colonists of the Cape of Good Hope, and of the several tribes of natives beyond its limits ... comprehending also a topographical and statistical sketch of the Cape Colony* (London, T Caddell & W Davies, 1806), Vol. I, p. 11.

47 H Leibrandt, *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope, Journal 1699-1732* (Cape Town, WA Richards & Sons, 1896), p. 12; J Barrow, "Travels into the interior of Southern Africa", Vol. I (London, T Caddell & W Davies, 1806), pp. 59-60.

48 N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 123.

49 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, p. 77.

50 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, pp. 74-75.

every day from his house and entertained thoughts of living there free from the strictures of Cape society. The escapees subsequently fled without Santri, who broke away from the group because he apparently did not have a strong bond with them. Santri's desertion meant the escapees lost their means of contacting the Khoikhoi Santri had hired; however, when Lampi and the rest of the escapees realised the consequence of Santri's absence, they resolved to continue. Runaways often fled into the mountains and successfully hid there for periods of time.⁵¹ For three days, Santri hid and wandered the mountains until hunger drove him to approach Domingo of Bouton, a slave and an outpost stable keeper, for food. Small mammals scurried about the mountain, but Santri lacked the skills to trap and prepare them for consumption.⁵² Santri asked Domingo to buy bread for him and gave him two schellings. A well-trained captive, Domingo reported his interaction with Santri to his master, who then commanded him to return Santri's money; when Domingo did, Santri attacked him with a knife. With the help of two other slaves who came to his aid, Domingo subdued Santri, who was later delivered to justice. The irony of being captured by three captives would not have been lost on Santri, whose statement "we are free, you are slaves" acquired an ironic meaning upon his capture by slave men.

The rest of the fugitives fled with difficulties of their own. Hunger nudged them to re-captivity. Narratives of escape often contain the theme of a food crisis, where escapees quickly exhaust the food supply they carried with them and suffer the consequences.⁵³ At one location they traded tobacco for a Khoikhoi sheep. Khoikhoi lived in different kraals in and beyond the Hottentot Holland Mountains, and the runaways contacted a group that was amenable to their needs. Since they had the means to prepare the sheep for consumption, the escapees could have sustained themselves for several more days without having to contact other Khoikhoi if they had not abandoned the two bags of rice at the river. At a later date, approximately 26 days after fleeing the Cape, the escapees contacted another circle of Khoikhoi, near the Steenboks River, and bartered three more rolls of tobacco for three more sheep. The fugitives calculated that having more sheep would allow them to journey independently of help from other Khoikhoi for a longer period of time.

51 R Ross, "The structure of domination", *Cape of torments...*, p. 62.

52 JA Mabbutt, *The Cape Peninsula* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 1952), pp. 70-72.

53 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, p. 77.

Their contact with this second group of Khoikhoi turned unfriendly and a deadly fight erupted, in which eight Khoikhoi and seven runaways died. The escapees, fuelled by hunger and frustration, demonstrated a fierceness unseen at Constantia, and the Khoikhoi responded with skilful combat. The Khoikhoi captured seven of the runaways and several of the survivors were wounded. When the search party arrived, having been informed that Khoikhoi were holding fugitives at their kraal, the Khoikhoi turned over their prisoners, a considerably smaller group than the band that had fled the colony. In all, only 14 of the 23 escapees were captured and taken to Cape Town to be tried.

The Trial

In Cape Town, the prisoners experienced an intolerant and a punitive judicial system. The Court of Justice, representing the judicial system at the Cape, was inquisitorial. Prisoners were interrogated by a prosecutor, who in this case expressed particular distaste for Islam, for Santri, and at the prisoners having shouted “Amok” at the farm. In its violent punishment of criminals, the system imitated a European form of justice, but also bore the insignia of the Company at the Cape, which emphasised the institution of slavery and a determination to control slave dissent.⁵⁴ Because the legal system was designed to maintain Company social domination, fairness towards escapees by the judiciary was all but non-existent and the prisoners were interrogated under torture.

Islam gained a following at the Cape in the seventeenth century. While it had been introduced primarily by Indian slaves, Islam gained prominence at the settlement because of Indonesian captives and because slave owners did not allow their captives to be baptised or to attend their churches.⁵⁵ Political exiles from Batavia practiced Islam and leaders of Islam welcomed slaves into the religion. Conflict with followers of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, who opposed Company control of territories in the islands, fostered contempt for Islam at the Cape. Referred to as a “so-called holy man”, a “sanctimonious and deceitful paap”, and a “crafty villain”, Santri was tried and tortured for his faith as much as he was judged for his leadership role in the escape. Santri, who stated he would “die rather than confess”, could not expect a fair trial at

⁵⁴ P Spierenburg, *The spectacle of suffering: Executions and the evolution of repression from a preindustrial metropolis to the European experience* (United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. viii-xi.

⁵⁵ N Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, p. 98.

the Court of Justice; his fate and the future of the rest of the “Mohammedan rabble” was made explicit in the opening of the proceedings:

[T]he Mohammedans of Macassar, Sumbawa, Bali and the east end of Indonesia. [B]ecause of their perfidious disposition and as a result of their attacks and misdemeanours, this nation is being decimated partly by painful death, partly by flogging, branding, cutting off of ears and nose and being sent in chains into exile to this corner of the world.

Punishment similar to that inflicted on Moslems in the East awaited Santri and the rest of the prisoners.

Shouting “Amok” during the attack on Constant at Santri’s house at Constantia amounted to an additional charge against the prisoners. Some or all of the prisoners had shouted “Amok”, and the savagery attributed to the Malayan call, brought forth the charge that the prisoners maliciously intended to destroy and plunder the manor at Constantia. This was a significant allegation because the homestead, property of a former governor of the Cape, was synonymous with Company authority at the southern tip of Africa.

The prisoners’ sentences belonged to a wider strategy to stop desertion. The Council of Policy set penalties in 1686 to dissuade running away and introduced more intense measures in 1711 when escapes persisted.⁵⁶ The certainty of Company authorities that penalties and public executions would deter escapes was outmatched by the yearning of captives to be free. Santri’s tongue was cut out and his body broken on the wheel; he was left there until his spirit broke and he died.⁵⁷ His body was then taken to the outside court, put on a wheel again, and left there until it decomposed. Paris and Poasse were sentenced to death on the gallows; their bodies were dragged through the streets and hung on the gallows until they decomposed. The appetite of the Company to display executions at the Cape was a cultural behaviour transplanted from Holland.⁵⁸ Jannis, Tjinkzajj, Cartha Laxana, Totting, and Abram were roped around their necks, lashed on their bare backs, and branded; their noses and ears were severed from their heads. Jannis, Tjinkzajj, and Abram were chained for six months. Baccar, Langa, Boedia, Azar, and Coridon were lashed on their bare backs, branded, and chained for six months as well. Slaves could be lashed an extraordinary number of times until the British limited the number of lashes struck on a captive to 39 in

56 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways...*, pp. 73-74.

57 WCARS, CJ 317; WCARS, VC 20, 20 January 1713.

58 P Spierenburg, *The spectacle of suffering...*, p. x.

1812.⁵⁹ Boedia, Abram, Azar, and Coridon were sent back to their masters after serving their sentences. Omboe was lashed on her bare back, branded, had both ears severed, and had five years of labour in chains at the Cape added to her sentence. Omboe's pregnancy was not a matter for the court to consider. Balik was lashed on his bare back and worked in chains for six months; he received a lighter sentence than the rest of the prisoners because he was only accused of being a Mohammedan and escaping with his friends. The trial displayed both the authority of Company rule and the vulgarities of slave society.

Conclusion

The escape was planned to succeed selecting the deserters, storing provisions, and securing weapons were all intended to ensure success. Having the escape occur on a Thursday, when captives on the farm were tending to their chores and could notice unusual behaviour, however, proved to be a disastrous oversight. The chance of a quiet escape vanished when the deserters were spotted and reported. Might the outcome have been different if the escape had taken place on a Sunday, when slaves would not have been busy in the gardens because it was the slave holiday? The failure of the escape was facilitated by the lack of solidarity between slaves at Constantia and Company slaves and exiles, promoted by the pervasive social class domination, which motivated captives of the farm to expose the runaways. A chronic shortage of food beyond the Cape frontier ultimately brought the escape to its tragic end. No other group escape occurred from Constantia, whose rural quiet had once held the hope of freedom of 23 slaves and exiles.

⁵⁹ W Freund, "The Cape under the transitional governments 1795-1814", R Elphick & H Giliomee (eds), *The shaping of South African society*, p. 338.