Tutorial Letter 501/3/2018

Southern Africa until the early 1800s: encounters and transformations

HSY1512

Semesters 1 and 2

Department of History

This tutorial letter is the first part of your study guide for this module.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your studies in the Department of History, and in particular to this module, entitled 'Southern Africa until the early 1800s: encounters and transformations' (HSY1512). We hope that you will find this module interesting and fulfilling, and that it will stimulate you to further study of the complex but fascinating history of southern Africa.

As you are surely well aware, we live in a rapidly changing society. We experience frequent change and ongoing transformation in our families, close networks, communities and wider society. This means that we are constantly confronted by new questions about many issues, and we regularly need to evaluate our responses, feelings and attitudes. Like many spheres of life, the study of history is affected by these changes, and as society shifts, new questions about the past are necessary.

In the past 20 or 30 years, a considerable number of historians (and other scholars) have advanced knowledge about the history of southern Africa before 1800. Among other things, they have shown how important this period was in shaping later developments in the region. This module aims to bring some of their insights to you.

Purpose and outcomes of this module

This module is offered in the Department of History at the first level of undergraduate university study (or NQF Level 5).

The formal purpose statement of this module is as follows: 'Qualifying students will gain an understanding of the major developments and changes in the history of southern Africa in both the precolonial and the colonial periods up to the early 19th century by engaging with and analysing a wide range of sources, and will acquire multiple perspectives on the importance of this period in the shaping of modern South Africa.'

Essentially, we hope that we will enable you to gain an understanding of some major themes in the history of early colonial southern Africa, and to appreciate how this period of history shaped modern South Africa. We aim to:

- develop an understanding of the historical roots of South African society
- acquire respect, appreciation and understanding of different societies, cultures and points of view
- produce effective learning, analytical and critical skills which are appropriate to the discipline of History and are transferable to other disciplines and other contexts.

If you work carefully through the learning units in these tutorial letters, you should be able to achieve the following outcomes:

1 Discuss the lifestyle of the main societies that lived in the southern African region before colonisation by Europeans.

Evidence shows that learners are able to:

- show insight into why the history of precolonial southern African societies is essential to a full understanding of the complexity of the region's past
- demonstrate an ability to understand the types of sources historians use to collect relevant information on precolonial hunting, herding and mixed farming southern African societies
- understand the main features of the economic practices, political structures and social practices of precolonial hunting, herding and mixed farming communities in southern Africa.

2 Discuss the reasons for Dutch colonisation of the south-western region of southern Africa and the main developments in the expansion of the Dutch colony in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Evidence shows that learners are able to:

- understand why the Dutch decided to establish a colonial presence in the south-western part of southern Africa
- demonstrate insight into the nature of the early Dutch settlement, intensive agriculture and extensive agriculture
- explain the reasons for the emergence of independent pastoral farming in the Cape interior in the 18th century
- explore the lifestyle of independent pastoral farmers in the Cape interior in the 18th century.

3 Analyse the impact of colonialism on indigenous people and imported African and Asian slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Evidence shows that learners are able to:

- understand how the loss of land and livestock undermined independent Khoekhoe communities in the south-western part of southern Africa
- demonstrate insight into the adaptation of Khoekhoe herders and San hunter-gatherers to white colonisation during the 17th and 18th centuries
- examine the reasons for the importation of African and Asian slaves into the Cape colonial settlement, as well as the experience, life and resistance of slaves in the settlement
- explain the impact of the destruction of independent Khoekhoe societies and of slavery on the racial and social order of the Cape colony during the 17th and 18th centuries.

4 Analyse the importance of the contact between colonists and colonised people in the frontier districts of the Cape colony during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Evidence shows that learners are able to:

- distinguish between the concepts of an 'opening' and 'closing' frontier
- demonstrate insight into the nature of contact, conflict and cooperation between people on the Cape northern frontier
- demonstrate similar insight into the nature of contact, conflict and cooperation between people on the Cape eastern frontier
- identify similarities and differences between the northern and eastern frontier situations of the Cape
- explain the influence of the two frontier situations on the emerging racial order within Cape colonial society.

Study material

When you registered, you should have received Tutorial Letter 101 and a study guide. The study guide is produced in the form of Tutorial Letters 501 and 502:

- Tutorial Letter 101 introduces you to your studies in this module. It contains essential information about what is required, your work programme and your assignments.
- Tutorial Letters 501 and 502 contain the main material that your lecturers wish to convey to you, and encourages you to participate actively in learning this material. It therefore contains varied activities, questions and exercises, as well as some feedback, which you are expected to complete as you work through the module.

If you were studying at a residential university, you would attend a set of lectures and perhaps tutorials as well, conducted by lecturers and tutors. In a sense, Tutorial Letters 501 and 502 are a set of 'lectures' and activities related to these 'lectures', similar to lectures and tutorials in a residential university.

The Tutorial Letters 501 and 502 have been divided into seven different units. Each of the units has a particular theme. Every unit begins with a clear statement of the objectives of the unit, telling you what knowledge you should master by the time you have completed working through it. There are also some skills you are expected to learn as you work through the units. The activities are designed to develop your reading and writing skills, as well as your ability to select information and to organise it logically in response to different kinds of questions.

At the end of Tutorial Letter 502, you will find a list of sources for further reading and study. There is no prescribed book for this module, but you are encouraged to consult further sources where possible. Most of the general published histories are available in public libraries and bookshops, and all of the titles are available in the Unisa library, although some are in short supply. The list of sources is very selective; there are many good books and articles which are not listed. You are free to use any

books or resources available to you. When in doubt, consult your lecturers about additional reading.

Tutorial Letters 501 and 502 are fundamental to your studies. Their main aim is to guide you through the syllabus of this module.

Overview of the contents of this module

Until approximately the 1960s, some South African historians who took a certain ideological stance, believed that southern Africa's history began when people from Europe started to settle in the area that is now part of the modern Western Cape province in the middle of the 17th century, 366 years before the present (the year 2018). This process of settlement by people from Europe and their descendants (commonly referred to as 'white people') is called 'colonisation'. Historians believed that in the period before colonisation (also known as the precolonial period) that there was no history to be recorded or discussed, because there were no written records to inform us about the period. Indeed, some even believed and propagated the myth that nobody lived in the region, and that southern Africa was an 'empty land'.

The contents of this module show how wrong these early historians were. In the last 50 years, historians have come to realise the vital importance of the precolonial period in southern Africa's past. Through different kinds of research, conducted mainly by archaeologists, we now know that many people had settled and lived all over southern Africa for many centuries, indeed millennia, before white people began to settle in parts of the area 366 years ago. They lived in diverse ways, in dynamic communities that had regular contact with one another.

We have divided the content of this module into seven learning units. Although we have divided the history of the region in the period we are examining into these seven units, which we hope are logical divisions, it needs to be borne in mind that there is some overlap and regular cross-referencing, and that the seven units do contribute to a more coherent whole.

- Learning Unit 1 explores some of the major environmental features of the country that have shaped the destiny of humans in this region, before turning its attention to the major societies that lived here before colonisation by white people. Three major economies are discussed: the hunter-gathering and hunter-herding economies of the Khoesan people, and the mixed farming economies (based on cultivation of crops and the herding of livestock, with significant trading and mining activities as well) practised by Bantu-speaking people in the region.

- Learning Unit 2 introduces European explorers and settlers. In the 15th century, some European countries, particularly Portugal and the Netherlands in the context of southern Africa, began to sponsor voyages of exploration beyond their shores. This initiated one of the most significant developments in the history of humanity in the last 500 years, in which large parts of the world were colonised by European traders, hunters, missionaries and adventurers. Colonisation was the process by which these European countries extended their power and control over other areas. This learning unit looks at the

background to this process and why the Dutch in particular decided to settle in southern Africa, and the early years of the Dutch settlement and the establishment of agriculture.

- In Learning Unit 3, we look at the expansion of the Cape settlement into the interior of the country, where white people turned to hunting and pastoralism as their main economic activities. We also outline the Dutch settlement during the 18th century, both in the established zone of the south-western Cape as well as the less settled interior, in order to show that, although the Dutch did not initially intend to colonise southern Africa in any formal sense, an established colonial settlement had indeed been founded and developed by the early 1800s.

- From the outset, colonists at the Cape encountered and interacted with indigenous peoples. In Learning Unit 4, we explore the contact between whites and the Khoekhoe. Though there was opposition among the Khoekhoe to European settlement, sometimes violently expressed, their communities declined as they lost land and livestock, and they were unable to prevent colonisation. Their contact with white people took various forms in different areas; although many were uprooted and were impoverished, others managed to retain some independence.

- Learning Unit 5 focuses on the role of slavery at the Cape. The Cape economy was dependent on slave labour for its productivity, and, as a result, slavery had an enormous influence on the Cape's economy and society. We focus not just on economic issues, however; we also examine slave life and culture, slave resistance to their conditions, as well as the legacy of the slave system.

- In Learning Units 6 and 7, we discuss the impact of colonisation in the frontier districts of the Cape, or the areas furthest removed from the established base of the colony in the south-western Cape. As the white colonists moved into the interior, they encountered many different peoples in areas to the north and east. Interaction in these frontier zones took many different forms of co-operation and conflict. New relationships were forged between individuals and groups, and new economic and social relationships took shape in both regions.

The main theme of this module is the encounters of people with one another in southern Africa in the many centuries before the early 1800s, and particularly the two centuries between the early 1600s and the early 1800s (the early 17th to the early 19th century), which was when colonisation made its influence felt. The main impact of colonisation was primarily in the areas which now form the modern provinces of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. Although trading and raiding activities of white colonists were beginning to affect peoples in parts of present-day Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal by the end of the 18th century, all the regions outside the Cape were really only seriously influenced by colonial advance during the 19th century (the period immediately after the end of this module).

While colonialism is one main focus of this module, we do not concentrate exclusively on the activities of the white colonists. We are concerned with the history of all the peoples of southern Africa during this period, on how they shaped their lives and on how they reacted to new circumstances. At no stage should we assume that Europeans had exclusive control of the Cape; colonial advances were often determined by the peoples being colonised.

We are also concerned to stress that patterns of colonialism that affected southern Africa very significantly after the 16th century emerged within the historical context of the history of European power. We need to be aware that we should not conflate these historical developments with the notion that European ways of thinking and acting are universal and fixed, and should therefore not be questioned or challenged. As we approach the content of this module, we need to reflect critically on how the colonial project in southern Africa operated, and be open to challenging both its power and the patterns of thought that it imposed.

The period up to the early 1800s was of considerable importance in shaping later developments in southern Africa. Naturally many developments in 19th and 20th century South Africa affected the growth of the society in which we now live in crucial ways, but this does not negate the importance of the early period in shaping human relationships and interaction.

Above all, we hope that the contents of this module will encourage an interest in South African history, as well as an appreciation of the contribution of all the people of South Africa to our past.

1 LEARNING UNIT 1: PRECOLONIAL SOCIETIES: HUNTER-GATHERERS, HUNTER-HERDERS AND MIXED FARMERS

When you have completed this learning unit, you will be able to answer the following questions:

- Why do we need an understanding of the history of precolonial southern African societies?
- How did the natural environment of southern Africa shape precolonial economies and settlement patterns?
- What was the nature of the economy, social organisation and political structure of the precolonial San?
- In what ways was the lifestyle of the precolonial Khoekhoe similar or different from that of the precolonial San?
- What was the nature of the lifestyle of mixed farming communities who settled in southern Africa from around 200 AD?
- How did the mixed farming communities interact with the Khoesan?

1.1 Why do we need an understanding of the history of precolonial African societies?

In this module you will meet a wide variety of indigenous people who did not only interact with one another but also with European visitors and colonists. You will learn how they engaged in conflict with the colonists as the latter settled on Cape soil and expanded their settlement into the Cape interior. On the other hand, at times they also cooperated with the colonists for reasons that will become clear in the learning units to follow.

There are six main reasons why knowledge of the precolonial southern African past may be useful in understanding the complexity of historical developments after 1652:

- The precolonial history of southern Africa is important, because it is in this sub-continent that human beings first emerged and then spread to other parts of Africa and the rest of the world.

Activity 1.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.1 in Learning Unit 1 that relates to this. This will deepen your insight into this statement.

- Many present-day South Africans, who feel politically marginalised, trace their cultural roots back to the precolonial period. They argue that the land originally belonged to their forefathers, the precolonial Khoekhoe and San, and claim that their political and land claims should therefore be taken more seriously.

Activity 1.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.2 in Learning Unit 1 that relates to this. This will stimulate your thinking about these opinions and claims.

- Knowledge of our precolonial past also helps us to be critical of the view of the early European visitors and settlers, who did not understand the nomadic behaviour and concept of land ownership of the indigenous communities, and therefore argued that the sub-continent was empty of inhabitants and belonged to no one.

- An understanding of precolonial hunter-gathering, hunter-herding and mixed farming lifestyles within the global context of gradual transitions from hunting and gathering to pastoralism and mixed farming, will broaden our perspective and will prevent us from viewing historical developments in southern Africa in isolation.

- If we grasp the nature of the precolonial hunter-gatherer and hunter-herding lifestyles which suited the natural environment of southern Africa well and functioned successfully for thousands of years, it will assist us in explaining the interaction between these indigenous societies and the European settlers during the colonial era, as discussed in the remainder of this module.

- Finally, an understanding of the emergence of mixed farming during the precolonial period, which ultimately culminated in very successful kingdoms and powerful states in the interior of the sub-continent, with global connections through international trade, will instil in us an appreciation of the historical contribution and achievements of the Bantu-speaking communities. It will also cast light on the interaction of the descendants of these communities with other societies, including the Khoesan, the white trekboer farmers, and the inhabitants of the Cape northern and eastern frontier regions, covered in later learning units.

1.2 How did the natural environment of southern Africa shape precolonial economies and settlement patterns?

Throughout precolonial history, people were influenced by the natural environment in which they lived. The natural environment provided opportunities and presented obstacles for the economic, social, political and technological development of human society. In many cases, although not always, it played a determining role in the way the different communities succeeded or failed in their lifestyles, and in the ways they interacted with one another.

On the other hand, precolonial communities also had an impact on the environment in which they lived, either preserving or changing it in their efforts to survive.

Therefore, when studying the early history of southern Africa, it is important to have an understanding of the main features of the natural environment.

In Learning Unit 2, you will learn how environmental factors such as location, the coast line and the quality of the soil in the southwestern Cape influenced colonisation and agricultural production at the Cape. For the purposes of this learning unit, however, we need to focus more on the role of topography, climate, vegetation, fauna and minerals in order to explain the precolonial economies and settlement patterns that were viable in different parts of southern Africa.

Topography

Topography refers to the physical characteristics of a region such as the mountains, plains, plateaus and rivers. This feature gives a clear idea of what the area looks like and has an important influence on the settlement patterns and migration of both animals and human beings.

Most of southern Africa is part of the Great African Plateau. A plateau is an area of fairly level high ground. The South African plateau is between 1200 and 1800 metres above sea level and is highest in the east and gradually slopes downwards towards the west (see the map in Activity 1.3, Source 1, on the MyUnisa site of this module). It has been described as resembling a 'tilted upside-down saucer'.[1] The plateau provided pasture for wild animals (game) and livestock, ample space for human and animal migration, as well as space for extensive human settlements towards the east, where rainfall and vegetation were conducive to mixed farming.

Along the edge of the plateau is a long steep slope which drops towards the sea, known as the escarpment. The escarpment extends from the Drakensberg mountain range in the northeast to the Stormberg and Sneeuberg mountains in the southeast and Nuweveld range in the southwest. From there the escarpment turns north where the Roggeveld mountains form the edge of the plateau and continues north into the Damara-Namaqua highlands of Namibia.

The steep seaward slope of the escarpment has been divided into numerous valleys by the fast-flowing rivers which have cut deep below the level of the surrounding mountain plains. These river valleys were popular mixed farming regions, because they provided water and alluvial (surface) soil as well as protection from the wind – all of which suited the planting of agricultural crops. The valleys also determined the routes of the various communities moving into the interior.

South Africa does not have many perennial rivers — that is, rivers that flow constantly throughout the year. Most of the rivers rise on or near the escarpment and flow fast towards the sea. An example of this is the Tugela River, which begins in the Drakensberg mountains and flows through KwaZulu-Natal into the Indian ocean. Other rivers, such as the Gariep (Orange) River, are found on the plateau. The Gariep River has the greatest basin of any river in the country, but much of the basin is so dry that the river mouth often closes up, while some of its tributaries such as the Molopo, Fish and Hartebeest Rivers are also quite frequently dry. The rivers in South

[1] J.M. Nicholson and J.G. Morton, *Man's Environment: Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1974), 92.

Africa are therefore important only as temporary sources of water. They are not reliable boundaries and cannot be used for navigation.

Climate

The climate refers to the weather conditions of a particular area. There are three main determinants of climate: rainfall, wind and temperature. The climate affects human beings directly in that it influences the crops they can cultivate, their eating habits, dwellings and clothes. It also affects human beings indirectly because of its effect on flora (vegetation) and fauna (animal and insect life) and therefore is an important factor in determining the survival potential of a region.

Rainfall is perhaps the most important of the environmental elements in that it determines so many of the other natural factors. For example, rain is directly related to the availability of water, which in turn regulates the growth of vegetation, which in turn attracts animals.

In South Africa the rainfall is generally low. The map of South African rainfall shows an average annual rainfall of 1 000 millimetres (mm) on the east coast, which drops to less than 125 mm on the west coast. The internationally accepted minimum requirement for the successful cultivation of crops and the maintenance of good grazing is 625 mm of rain a year. About 80 percent of South Africa receives less than 625 mm per year, while a third of the subcontinent has an annual rainfall of less than 250 mm (see Activity 1.3, Source 2, on the MyUnisa site of this module). In these dry regions the only economic activities that would have been viable, were hunting, gathering of naturally occurring plant food for human consumption, and the herding of smaller livestock, for example sheep and goats. The population distribution would have been sparse and communities would be nomadic.

To make matters worse, much of South Africa's rain comes in the form of torrential storms, which washes away the soil and does not allow for much absorption of moisture. In the interior regions, where temperatures are high during the rainy season, most of the rain which is received just evaporates. In some areas the evaporation rate is higher than the total rainfall. Rivers are therefore often dry, and water can be found only in isolated waterholes or dykes where underground water is brought to the surface. Moreover, the rainfall throughout the country is also often erratic (inconsistent/irregular), which increases the chances of drought. This often made it very difficult for the various communities to survive, and they had to either adapt their lifestyles accordingly or migrate to other areas.

Wind has a direct bearing on rainfall. In South Africa the wind accounts for the predominantly summer rainfall pattern in the interior and the winter rainfall in the southernmost parts of the country. The wind in the south-western Cape is particularly strong, and is renowned for the devastation the southeaster wind causes both on land and along the coast. Bear this in mind in the next learning unit when you explore the failure of intensive agriculture in the south-western Cape during the first decades of European colonisation.

Vegetation

There is great variety in vegetation (flora) to be found in southern Africa. In order to understand the lifestyles of the precolonial communities discussed in this unit, we focus on the following main types of vegetation:

In the dry north-western part of southern Africa, vegetation consists of sparsely distributed Karoo shrubs and succulents. Karoo shrubs have thick fibrous leaves that enable them to thrive in areas with very low rainfall, extreme temperatures, high evaporation rates and compacted soil. They can be found in the interior of the western Cape, including both the Little and Great Karoo and parts of the Northern Cape. Although they do not offer nourishment to larger livestock that prefer grass, they do provide good grazing for sheep and goats. Similarly, Karoo succulents are extremely drought-resistant and can survive in the low-rainfall desert-like conditions in the western regions of the Northern Cape. This vegetation is suitable only for certain small buck and sheep, many of the plants having edible roots and berries. This explains why the precolonial inhabitants of these dry regions practised hunting, gathering and herding of smaller livestock, and why they needed to adopt a very mobile (nomadic) lifestyle.

The north-eastern part of the country, on the other hand, has a higher rainfall and is therefore suitable for crop cultivation. The region also offers two types of vegetation: savannah and thornbush, and grassland vegetation, both of which are suitable for livestock herding (pastoralism), including cattle. Savannah refers to a grassy plain in a sub-tropical region, and thornbush to fairly hardy thorn trees and bushes. The savannah and thornbush region stretches along the southern and eastern foothills of the escarpment in KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland to the north of Limpopo and into North West and the Northern Cape (see Activity 1.3, Source 3, on the MyUnisa site of this module).

A wide variety of these kinds of trees and grasses are found in South Africa, and their density depends on the rainfall. Of the various grasses found in this region (sweetveld, sourveld and mixed veld) none is suitable for year-round grazing. The precolonial – and later also the colonial pastoral farmers or *trekboers* (see Learning Unit 3) – therefore had to practise seasonal migration in order to get sufficient grazing throughout the year and provide their livestock with a balanced diet. The treed areas were probably denser at one time and covered larger areas. However, over the years both precolonial and colonial communities destroyed many trees. The various communities used the timber to build houses and make firewood, or cleared the trees and grasses away to cultivate crops.

Grassveld vegetation includes lush grassland but relatively few trees. It can be found in the highveld region of the plateau including parts of the Eastern Cape, Lesotho, Free State, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. The grasses in this region include both sweetveld and sourveld, which made both precolonial and colonial pastoral farmers practise seasonal migration.

Fauna

Fauna refers to the natural animal and insect life of a particular region. The southern African region is renowned for its rich abundance and variety of wild animals (game)

and insects. Both the precolonial and colonial communities relied very heavily on the hunting of wild animals for food (meat) as well as for ivory and hides, which were often traded. Game also tended to migrate in response to erratic rainfall patterns. This caused the precolonial San and the Khoekhoe to follow the game to areas where it had rained.

Insects were often an asset to some precolonial communities as they were a food source, for example locusts and the mopani worm. On the other hand, certain insects were a pest as they destroyed both natural vegetation and cultivated crops. Examples include swarms of locusts and worms. There were also insects that caused diseases affecting both humans and animals, such as mosquitoes that caused malaria and the tsetse fly that caused sleeping sickness.

Minerals

South Africa has a wide variety of minerals which have been discovered and mined over many centuries. The minerals in the region include iron, tin, copper, gold and diamonds. Many of these resources were used by the precolonial mixed farming communities of southern Africa as tools (e.g. agricultural equipment and weapons), ornamentation and trade items.

All the above environmental factors would have a distinctive influence on the lifestyles and settlement patterns of the precolonial communities discussed in this learning unit.

Activity 1.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.3 in Learning Unit 1 if you have not already done so.

1.3 What was the nature of the economy, social organisation and political structure of the precolonial San?

Who were the San hunter-gatherers?

The San hunter-gatherers were the earliest indigenous people of southern Africa. They were the descendants of people who hunted wild animals and gathered plant foods in the Late Stone Age, about 40 000 to 20 000 years ago.

The San hunter-gatherers were not an isolated phenomenon in world history. Hunter-gathering societies were common all over the world prior to the practice of livestock raising and crop growing. They could be found in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and Australasia, in environments where hunting and gathering could be supported. Diets naturally varied, as did lifestyles, social organisation and customs, but invariably groups were small, flexible, nomadic and seldom had formal leadership structures.

The San of precolonial southern Africa lived throughout the region. Late Stone Age sites and artefacts have been found in the cool mountains of Lesotho, in the dry Karoo and in wet, subtropical KwaZulu-Natal, as well as in the Namib and Kalahari deserts. San bands (or small groups) therefore lived in many different natural environments.

Much of our knowledge about the San has come from archaeologists who have examined remains in rock shelters and caves all over southern Africa. In addition, anthropologists, who study different cultures around the world, have learnt a great deal from those San who still survive in parts of the Kalahari desert in Botswana and in the Nama desert in Namibia. They give us clues about the lifestyle of San groups over a long period, even though we cannot be sure about the extent to which this has changed over thousands of years. Moreover, the linguistic study of San languages, with their many clicks, is important in establishing connections among various San hunting bands and with other groups such as Khoekhoe herders and later with African farmers.

In this module we will be using the term 'San' in referring to the original inhabitants of southern Africa. You may encounter various other words in the literature to describe these hunter-gatherer communities. This is partly because we do not know what they called themselves, and also because Europeans used the term 'Bushmen' in a rather general way.[2] For some people the term 'Bushmen' has a negative connotation, but for others it is a term of preference. For example, there are currently descendants of the San in various parts of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia who are proud to be called 'Bushmen' because this establishes their identity as the first indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa.

Activity 1.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.4 in Learning Unit 1 that provides additional material about naming and identity.

The economy and technology of the San

The economy of the San was closely linked to the natural environment in which they lived. As we have seen, South Africa is largely a dry country with unreliable and low rainfall. Two-thirds of the country is unsuitable for crop cultivation, has sparse vegetation and cannot sustain cattle farming. Precolonial South Africa did, however, provide abundant wild life which frequently migrated to where it had rained and where good grazing could be found. The natural environment also offered a variety

[2] J. Wright, 'Sonqua, Bosjesmans, Bushmen, abaTwa: Comments and Queries on Pre-modern Identifications', *South African Historical Journal*, 35 (November 1996), 16–29.

of edible plants, berries and bulbs which were a potential source of food for both animals and people.

Hunting

One of the San's main economic activities was hunting for meat as their main source of protein. Hunting took many forms, and a large number of different game (wild animals), from giraffe to warthogs, were hunted with the bow and arrow. The most common prey, however, were various antelope. Another popular method of hunting was to use snares and traps. These were used to capture small animals, such as foxes and mongooses, or birds, such as guinea fowl and francolins.

Gathering

Another economic activity which formed the basis of the diet in most San communities, was gathering, using weighted digging sticks to dig up roots and bulbs. A wide variety of plant foods, such as fruits, nuts, berries, roots, bulbs, melons, and edible gums formed a broad subsistence base. Not all plant foods were of equal value; some foods were prized because of their wide distribution, their abundance, the ease with which they could be collected, or the seasons in which they were available. In desert areas, for example, some water-bearing roots enabled the San to survive for weeks at a time when no standing water was available.

Division of labour

While men were responsible for hunting, women took care of plant gathering, and this activity was done in groups of three to five members. The gatherers had minimal but necessary equipment: digging sticks, skin pouches to carry food, and a few stone tools. A certain well-defined area was exploited each day, and the women returned to camp during the afternoon, where they distributed among their immediate families the produce they had gathered.

Concept of wealth

The hunter-gatherer economy of the San aimed at being self-sufficient and meeting the immediate needs of the community in order to survive in often challenging environmental conditions. They did not think in terms of material wealth and therefore did not attempt to store food, accumulate possessions, or actively engage in trade in order to increase their wealth.

This simple lifestyle has been interpreted negatively by some observers as a lifestyle of poverty and struggle for survival. However, it could be argued that the hunter-gathering lifestyle of the San suited the environmental conditions of southern Africa well, and that San groups lived quite successfully on hunting and gathering for thousands of years. It was only when herding and farming economies came on the

scene that the San lifestyle was put under pressure. We should therefore guard against portraying the San as victims or heroes.[3]

The social organisation of the San

Nomadism

Environmental conditions do not only explain why the San economy was based on hunting and gathering rather than any other economic activity, but also why the hunter-gatherers had to adopt a nomadic (migratory) lifestyle.

The San did not wander randomly across vast areas but tended to move in a systematic way at different times of the year, using the resources available during different seasons. This meant the San had a loose sense of territorial control and a concept of place that was linked to animals, plants and seasons. They saw no separation between people and place or between people and animals.

There has been a debate among researchers about whether the San claimed any clearly defined territory. Some think they did not, while others think each language group had water sources which it regarded as its own. Anyone could use these resources, but permission had to be obtained first.

Egalitarianism

Because the San did not value wealth, no individual was richer or poorer than the next. All members of the same age group, gender and marital status had the same access to resources and had the same social status. We call this an egalitarian society. Egalitarianism does not mean that there are no differences between people. We have seen, for example, that there was a division of labour between men and women: men did the hunting and women the gathering. Because hunting was regarded as men's work and considered more strenuous and challenging than gathering, successful hunters were highly regarded in San society and often became shamans (medicine people). However, this division should not be exaggerated as the economic role of the women was critical to the survival of the band, and, as we shall see, women participated fully in decision-making.

Flexible social structures

A high degree of mobility did not only prevent the accumulation of possessions. It also required small and flexible group structures which would ensure survival in a harsh environment. Since equality was an important feature of social relations among the San, groups were not rigid. They often changed, depending on how much fauna (wild animals) and flora (natural vegetation) were available. This means that they exercised a 'strategic flexibility', not only in how they 'distributed themselves across the landscape broadly in proportion to their perception of resource distribution … [but would also be] flexibly strategic in their response to the elements of food

[3] R.J. Gordon, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 1-12.

production and food producers themselves.'[4] Apart from responding to the availability of food resources (plants and game), bands could also split up when there were disagreements. San bands could be as small as a single family or as large as a clan of 80 people.

Sharing ethic

The San are also known for their culture of sharing or sharing ethic. This was closely linked to the provision of food. Meat from the hunt was shared among the members of the camp and with other bands of hunter-gatherers on certain occasions, until it had been completely eaten after a few days; however, plant food that was more readily available, was shared within the immediate family. The San did not store a surplus of food, because they saw the environment as a communal storehouse.

Ritual participation among the San

Another element of the San's social organisation was their ritual ceremonies in which shamanism, symbolism and trance dances played an important role.

Within the San communities some of the men and women had the ability to enter into a state of trance and offer ritual services to the group. These trances were entered into during the regular ritual dancing of the communities, which normally took place at night around the campfires. No drugs were used to induce the state of trance; it was reached only through concentration during dancing. The dances gradually increased in intensity; dancers experienced sweating, shaking and falling, until they suffered bleeding from the nose and eventual collapse. At this stage they entered a state of trance, when they were said to 'die' and when it was believed that supernatural potency entered into them.

Those able to enter into trance were referred to as medicine people (shamans). They were believed to act as links between the physical and supernatural worlds. There were probably four main categories of medicine people: medicine people of the game, who had powers over animals and the hunt; medicine people of the rain, who had powers over rainfall; medicine people of sickness, who controlled illness; and curers, who were believed to remove sickness. Moreover, these medicine people were almost certainly the painters of rocks, and the paintings represented their experience within trance. The symbols and representations of the paintings would have been clearly understood by the San as containing messages from the supernatural world.

Rock paintings

Scholars now interpret the rock paintings and engravings in the context of the social and economic life of the San. But equally important is the context of their religious life, and it is clear that the paintings and engravings contain many religious symbols.

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[4] J. Parkington and S. Hall, 'The Appearance of Food Production in Southern Africa, 1,000 to 2,000 Years Ago', in C. Hamilton, B.K. Mbenga and R. Ross (eds), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Volume 1: From Early Times to 1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 66-7.

They depict much about, and reflect, the belief system of the San. The paintings are not simply ‘pretty pictures’ done by a skilled hunter in his spare time. They were obviously of vital importance within the social and religious life of the San people.

Let us take one example that is very prominent in many paintings — the representation of the eland. The eland is the largest of the antelopes and was much sought after by the San. It was fairly common and had a great deal of meat and fat, it played a central role in important ceremonies, such as those of puberty and marriage, and it served as a symbol of unity and abundance. For these reasons it was also, not surprisingly, a central religious symbol. A medicine person who relied on the eland as the source of his power was most respected. In the paintings the dying eland often shows the same behaviour as the person entering a trance: sweating, trembling, falling over and bleeding from the nose. The medicine people believed they ‘became’ the animal whose power they controlled; their identities merged into one, and they acquired the ability to heal and control the movement of game and rainfall. The representation of figures that are half human and half antelope, not uncommon in the paintings, probably portrays the state of the medicine people bridging two worlds.

This single example illustrates the sophistication and complexity of many of the paintings. They clearly played a more important role in San society than serving as artistic representations of the immediate environment (although many of them do, of course, reveal details of this). They were part of the religious and ritual activities of the San. It is not entirely certain why painters felt it necessary to record their experiences. One likely reason is that they wished to give people visual reminders of the power that linked people, animals and the environment. They may have served as a focus of unity, particularly in times of stress, when it seems that more paintings were produced.

Activity 1.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.5 in Learning Unit 1 that provides additional material about symbolism in rock art and the role of trance in San cultures.

Political organisation and system of justice

Because of the small size of San bands, the absence of wealth as a foundation for political power, and the flexibility of the San’s social structures, there were few signs of chiefly authority in precolonial San society. There were no chiefs, because decisions were made by the group as a whole. This process included both adult men and women, while shamans (medicine people) used their wisdom and spiritual powers to provide guidance during the decision-making process. This informal and equal political organisation grew out of the fact that all adults had fairly good knowledge of the natural environment and participated actively in the various economic activities that ensured survival. Consensus in the group was generally the basis of decision making, which also influenced how justice and punishment were

dealt with in San communities. Disputes were therefore settled on a one-to-one or family-to-family basis. If conflict could not be resolved, individuals could join other camps.

Activity 1.6

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.6 in Learning Unit 1 that provides a discussion of why one writer argues that the San were not involved in a constant struggle for survival.

Activity 1.7

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.7 in Learning Unit 1 that provides additional insight and discussion about San society.

1.4 In what ways was the lifestyle of the precolonial Khoekhoe similar or different from that of the precolonial San?

Who were the Khoekhoe?

Although some scholars initially believed that the first Khoekhoe pastoralists emerged in the present northern or north-eastern Botswana between 2000 and 3000 years ago, acquiring livestock from Bantu-speaking mixed farmers who were living there, archaeological excavations have uncovered remains of sheep bones in southern Africa that pre-date the arrival of Bantu-speakers in Botswana. Some now believe that the hunter-gatherers may have obtained their first livestock from east Africa.[5]

As descendants of the hunter-gatherers, it is to be expected that the Khoekhoe's lifestyle would be similar to that of the San. Their language, with all its click sounds, is also related to the languages spoken by many hunter-gatherers. However, the Khoekhoe introduced livestock into southern Africa for the first time, pastoralism being their main economic activity. This represented a major transformation in the history of southern Africa and has sometimes been called 'the pastoral revolution'.

There are different theories about the dispersal of livestock into and within southern Africa: some argue that the spreading of livestock occurred through the migration of people who owned livestock (the Khoekhoe); others are of the view that livestock were dispersed mainly through trade (not human migration), during which hunter-

[5] N. Swanepoel and C. Bruwer, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa: Only Study Guide for AGE1501* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2015), 96.

gatherer communities obtained livestock through 'down-the-line exchange' taking up at least some elements of pastoralism.[6]

There is also difference of opinion about the routes of Khoekhoe migration into southern Africa, the details of which need not be discussed here. What is important, however, is to realise that the expansion of Khoekhoe herders was not a sudden, military conquest that immediately changed previous conditions. It took place very gradually, spreading slowly over vast distances, driven by the need to find water and grazing for their livestock.

The Khoekhoe economy

The Khoekhoe economy had much in common with that of their San ancestors in that they also practised hunting and gathering — the former task performed by men and the latter by women similar to the division of labour in San society. However, their lifestyle focused primarily on pastoralism (livestock farming), probably having acquired their first livestock from southward migrating Bantu-speakers. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Khoekhoe initially herded mainly sheep (and later also goats), but that cattle became increasingly important. It also shows that the Khoekhoe used thin-walled pottery probably for storing and transporting milk, although there is uncertainty about who made the pottery.[7]

Livestock was regarded as a symbol of material wealth in Khoekhoe society and would therefore be accumulated, nurtured and protected. This influenced the layout of their settlements which were structured around a central livestock enclosure for the safe-keeping of livestock at night. Having no wealth to protect, the San simply lived in caves or in temporary shelters made of branches.

It is also not surprising that the Khoekhoe would frequently engage in livestock raiding in order to expand their herds or regain their wealth after they had lost livestock as a result of drought, livestock disease or stock theft. In view of their material value, livestock was only slaughtered for special and ceremonial reasons and was never used as a regular supply of meat. This is where hunting for meat played a crucial role in preserving their livestock and of course their wealth.

Cattle were more valuable than sheep or goats, in that they supplied more milk (the staple diet), they could be used as pack animals to facilitate easier movement and transport of camps, and they were valuable items of trade.

Activity 1.8

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.8 in Learning Unit 1 on the importance of livestock in Khoekhoe society.

[6] For more information about this debate, see Parkington and Hall, 'The Appearance of Food Production in Southern Africa', 104-8; Swanepoel and Bruwer, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa: Only Study Guide for AGE1501*, 96, 102-4.
[7] Parkington and Hall, 'The Appearance of Food Production in Southern Africa', 66, 74, 97-99.

Social organisation

We have seen how the ownership of livestock conveyed wealth on individuals in Khoekhoe society. This in turn led to superior social status and the emergence of divisions between wealthier and poorer people. This means that Khoekhoe society was hierarchical unlike the San who were relatively egalitarian (equal in status), because all adults shared in the economy and the distribution of resources, and enjoyed fairly equal status.

Group size

Khoekhoe communities were generally much larger than those of the San, as livestock ownership supported larger concentrations of people. Hunter-gatherer clans were small, usually numbering fewer than 50 people. They were sometimes larger during prosperous times and much smaller in periods of scarcity or stress. The Khoekhoe communities, on the other hand, frequently numbered about 500 people. However, these larger groups were not permanent, because, similar to the San, flexibility was necessary for survival. Periods of environmental stress required Khoekhoe clans to split apart and disperse over new areas. On the other hand, new leaders who had built up livestock herds, offering a reliable diet of dairy products, attracted followers from a range of clans.

Transhumance

Although both the San and the Khoekhoe practised some form of migration, the Khoekhoe were less mobile than the San. There were three reasons for this: the large group size of Khoekhoe communities; their extensive livestock herds; and the availability of a more stable source of food (dairy products) which made it unnecessary to relocate all that frequently.

Unlike the more regular and more informal nomadism of the San, the Khoekhoe had a well-developed pattern of seasonal migration, or transhumance, which provided their livestock with sufficient water, grazing and a balanced diet. This was necessary in view of the lack of year-round grazing in southern Africa, discussed earlier in this learning unit. Similar to the San, who preserved rather than overexploited natural resources, the Khoekhoe also used transhumance to ensure that natural resources were never seriously depleted. An added benefit of transhumance was that it gave the Khoekhoe access to fresh plant food and game for human consumption. In short – transhumance was an essential component of the survival of Khoekhoe communities and their herds.

Settlement pattern

The Khoekhoe's concept of wealth indirectly determined where they settled. They could only survive in areas which had suitable grazing for their livestock (their wealth) and which had reliable and plentiful water supplies. They therefore settled along the southern and south-western coastal belt, as well as in some grassland areas of the interior. San groups, on the other hand, could be found in all

geographical regions of the country (including very arid areas), with the exception of the dense forests of the southern Cape, where few lived.

Social relationships

Livestock was of great significance in many social relationships among the Khoekhoe. It was exchanged at marriage ceremonies, and when a household head died, his wife and children could inherit his livestock. In this manner some individuals considerably increased their wealth. Livestock also played a central role in the administration of justice, such as the demand that offenders, who had infringed the rights of other group members, pay fines in livestock to chiefs or to communities. Moreover, livestock was slaughtered on important ritual occasions, to mark births, initiation rites, marriages and deaths, as well as in religious ceremonies in honour of, and sacrifice to, the god whom they recognised as the Supreme Being. All of this was absent from San communities who did not possess wealth in the form of livestock.

Gender in Khoekhoe society

In Khoekhoe society women did not have the same social status as men. They were allowed to inherit livestock, but men and women did not share equally in access to livestock: as a result, men regularly were more powerful than women. A Khoekhoe woman could also take over the chief's office if there was no male heir in patrilineal succession, but this did not happen frequently. In general, women were excluded from the formal structures of society, which were dominated by males. In spite of the important contributions they made to the economy – such as gathering, milking the cows, producing the mat houses and other utensils, and taking care of their families – they were not admitted to the council of elders. There were also rules preventing women from drinking cow's milk, which was declared a male privilege. In addition, the inferior status of women was reflected in the way some Khoekhoe groups arranged their huts in the camp. Unmarried and widowed daughters and sisters had to build their huts in the section of the camp allocated to servants and clients of the group.

But women were not treated without respect. They had the right to own livestock, and they played an important role not only in the daily affairs of the household (where a man was not allowed to eat without his wife's permission) but also in performing various ceremonies.

Political structure

The social organisation of precolonial Khoekhoe communities in turn shaped their political structure.

We have seen that social equality in San society implied that San bands did not have formal political structures such as chiefs and councils; all members (men and women) participated equally in decision-making and the execution of justice. In Khoekhoe society, on the other hand, high social status based on wealth in livestock, brought political power to individuals. Khoekhoe chiefs and their advisers were

invariably owners of the largest herds. Chiefs did not own land, but managed all aspects of the herding economy. One of a chief's major responsibilities was to ensure fair access to land and water resources, and to control transhumance. He could also grant neighbouring clans access to natural resources in return for a payment of tribute in the form of livestock. Moreover, he could organise cattle raiding in order to increase his wealth and political influence, and solve disputes within his clan with the assistance of his Council of Elders.

Chiefs were also able to win followers through the employment of 'clients', who in return for their labour and loyalty were awarded the milk and – usually after longer service – some of the offspring of the livestock. In this way poorer Khoekhoe who had lost all their livestock through drought, stock theft or livestock disease, were offered a survival strategy other than having to resort to hunting and gathering or engaging in stock theft. In the long run, clientship enabled them to build wealth for themselves and regain their economic independence which was so important in Khoekhoe society. You will discover in Learning Unit 4 how this traditional survival mechanism was disrupted by labour practices on European farms during the colonial period.

Unlike San women who participated fully in communal decision-making, Khoekhoe women were excluded from the decision-making process.

Activity 1.9

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.9 in Learning Unit 1 which enables you to identify similarities and differences between San and Khoekhoe communities.

Interaction between the hunter-gatherers and hunter-herders

The migration of the Khoekhoe pastoralists into southern Africa compelled the hunter-gatherers to make major adjustments to their lifestyle. The herding lifestyle of the Khoekhoe led to competition for natural resources such as water, vegetation and game. The San argued that the Khoekhoe were settling on their traditional hunting and gathering areas, used up the pasture and chased away the game. This led to friction between the two societies. The Khoekhoe and San also had very different perceptions of animals: the Khoekhoe regarded animals as a source of wealth that needed to be preserved and protected, whereas the San viewed all animals (including livestock) as a source of food that could be hunted. This led to conflict in the form of stock theft and clashes, while the hunter-gatherers were often driven into less hospitable regions which were not suitable for livestock farming.

However, archaeological evidence suggests that San and Khoekhoe communities often co-existed peacefully in the same area. They cooperated with one another in the form of trade, intermarriage, and clientship relations, in which the San performed various tasks for the herders as hunters, guides and servants. This was made possible by the economic similarities between the two societies and the flexibility of the Khoekhoe's social and political structures, which made it relatively easy to

incorporate those hunter-gatherers who were prepared to adopt the new pastoral lifestyle.

This brings us to the blurring of boundaries between the San and the Khoekhoe. The Khoekhoe and San were not only genetically related in that they had common ancestors, but both also practised hunting and gathering as part of their economy. In addition, close interaction between the Khoekhoe herders and their San clients made it difficult to distinguish between hunter-herders and hunter-gatherers. Another aspect to bear in mind is that Khoekhoe individuals who had lost their livestock often resorted to hunting and gathering to survive.

It is therefore not surprising that the Europeans who would later settle at the Cape, often found it difficult to distinguish between the San and the Khoekhoe. People without livestock who pursued a hunter-gathering lifestyle were frequently identified as San or 'Bushmen', while those who were in possession of livestock were taken as Khoekhoe. Sometimes the differences between the two groups were associated with physical characteristics. The Khoekhoe were thought to be taller than hunter-gatherers because they had a fairly regular provision of milk from their herds, and were therefore better nourished. But such distinctions are generally unreliable, especially because the Khoekhoe and San were biologically related.

The fluidity of boundaries between the San and the Khoekhoe would be strengthened further during the colonial era by the disintegration of Khoehoe society as a result of the loss of land and livestock – a theme which will be discussed more fully in Learning Unit 4.

From the above discussion, it should be clear that it would be unwise to draw very rigid distinctions between the San and the Khoekhoe. Archaeologists have, for example, excavated animal bones, pottery and other artefacts at the site of Kasteelberg in the northern Cape. This site was occupied by herders between 1 800 and 1 600 years ago. Other locations nearby show that there was a greater proportion of bones of wild animals rather than of domesticated stock. Stone tools and arrows of different styles were discovered at the various excavation sites, which constitutes further evidence of the distinction between hunters and herders. These findings suggest that Kasteelberg was inhabited by herders who also hunted, while the other places were occupied by hunters who also owned small numbers of livestock, probably exchanged or stolen from herders. The scholars involved in this project have therefore concluded with a degree of certainty that hunters did indeed differ from herders in the precolonial period.

1.5 What was the nature of the lifestyle of mixed farming communities who settled in southern Africa from around 200 AD?

From around 200 (third century) AD a new lifestyle emerged in southern Africa which differed significantly from the hunter-gathering and hunter-herding lifestyles of the San and Khoekhoe discussed so far. This new lifestyle – which was introduced to the sub-continent by Bantu-speakers from East and Central Africa through a very gradual process of southward migration – marked the beginning of the emergence of a new and dynamic society, and a long process of continuity and change which we will explore in this section of the learning unit.

We prefer to refer to this period as the mixed farming period, because the term accurately captures the most important economic change to the lifestyle of precolonial South Africans – that of crop cultivation as part of a mixed economy. The period is sometimes also referred to as the 'Iron Age' of precolonial southern African history, because the farmers mined and processed minerals such as iron. In our discussion of continuity and change in the mixed farming lifestyle, we will refer to the early mixed farming period (roughly 200 AD to 1000 AD) and the late mixed farming period (after 1000 AD) when important shifts in the economy, social organisation and political structure of the mixed farming communities became apparent.

Economy

The shift from crop cultivation to herding

The economy of the early mixed farming communities was more diverse than that of the San hunter-gatherers or Khoekhoe herders who had settled in southern Africa before them. The early mixed farmers practised a mixed economy consisting of crop cultivation, livestock herding, hunting, mining and trade. They planted a variety of crops such as millet, sorghum, legumes, squashes and pumpkins; herded sheep, goats and cattle; hunted for meat and ivory; mined and processed minerals such as iron (for agricultural implements and weapons) and copper (for ornamentation); and engaged in trade (in crops and/or minerals), mostly with neighbouring communities but sometimes also with communities living further afield. These activities remained key components of the mixed farming economy for centuries, which points to continuity between the early and late mixed farming lifestyle.

What is further significant here, is that crops such as millet and sorghum were not indigenous to southern Africa, while livestock such as sheep, goats and cattle were first domesticated in the near east and North Africa. Similarly pottery-making had its roots in North-Africa, whereas the skill to mine and process minerals were also introduced from outside the sub-continent.[8]

But societies do not remain static – they change over time. In this case, the early mixed farmers gradually developed over the centuries, and crop cultivation slowly gave way to a greater emphasis on livestock herding. As early as approximately 500 AD, livestock herding became more prevalent. By the time we reach the late mixed farming period, from about 1000 AD, livestock herding had supplanted crop cultivation as the most important economic activity, and crop cultivation became of secondary importance in this period. The shift in emphasis from crop cultivation to livestock herding led to significant changes over time in their lifestyle.

Hunting

Both societies also hunted for meat, skins and items of trade, but in the late mixed farming period, the hunting of elephants for ivory became a lucrative activity, because ivory could be traded for many useful luxuries.

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[8] Parkington and Hall, 'The Appearance of Food Production in Southern Africa', 69.

Trade

This brings us to trade, which both communities engaged in, but once again there was a difference: trade in the early mixed farming period was fairly localised in nature. Neighbouring villages traded with each other for items that they could not produce themselves, such as iron, crops or salt. As time progressed, however, the early mixed farmers established regional and even long-distance trading networks, making contact with Arabian traders by roughly 800–900 AD. Trade routes gradually became more important, and by the time we enter the late mixed farming period, trading was much more extensive and important to the economy. The late mixed farmers had access to extensive trading networks and could trade gold, ivory and other items for a variety of exotic items, such as cotton cloth from India or even porcelain vases from China. The case study on Mapungubwe later in this unit (see Activity 1.12 on the MyUnisa site of this module), provides clear evidence of how control of long-distance trade during the late mixed farming period, led to the emergence of a very wealthy ruling class, controlling a vast geographical area, large cattle herds and thousands of people.

Mining

Both societies also practised mining, but once again the scale differed. The early mixed farmers mined iron and copper, as well as a little gold found in alluvial deposits. However, as time progressed and mining techniques improved in combination with a greater demand for mineral resources, especially gold and copper for trading purposes, the scale of mining became more extensive. Mining in the late mixed farming period was therefore on a much larger scale.

Social organisation

With regard to social organisation, we again notice both continuity and change from the early to the late mixed farming period.

Settlement pattern

The early mixed farmers preferred to settle in low-lying regions near the coast or in river valleys, which offered abundant water and fertile soil suitable for crop cultivation (their main economic activity). Their settlements were relatively stable, but due to the practice of slash-and-burn agriculture, they moved every few years to a new site once the old fields had lost their fertility.

In contrast, the late mixed farmers emphasised livestock herding, especially with cattle, as their main economic activity. They therefore settled in high-lying grasslands, for example on the Highveld plateau, which provided their livestock with suitable and abundant grazing.

Population density

Early mixed farming communities had a higher population density than Khoekhoe communities and San bands. There were three main reasons for this: they had a balanced diet in the form of meat, milk and agricultural crops and could therefore raise healthier children; they were able to build up a food surplus which could sustain larger communities; and lastly, they had a more stable and settled lifestyle than the Khoesan who regularly migrated in response to changing environmental conditions.

Due to a higher population density, the early mixed farmers had a more elaborate social organisation than the Khoekhoe and San. They lived and worked in family homesteads which were grouped together into organised villages. These villages were relatively self-sufficient, producing and storing food for their own use. The late mixed farmers had an even higher population density than the early mixed farmers, as a result of extensive cattle herding. They therefore also lived in organised societies, and, similar to the early mixed farmers, they operated in family homesteads. However, unlike the early mixed farmers, the family homestead supplanted the village as the most important economic unit. This was primarily caused by a more scattered settlement pattern which facilitated access to larger grazing areas. Higher population density meant that late mixed farming society was more hierarchical than the early mixed farmers, with a much clearer divide between the ruling classes and the poor.

Division of labour

More continuity can be noticed in the division of labour, but there were also a few noteworthy changes in the late mixed farming period. In the early mixed farming period, women and girls were mainly responsible for crop cultivation, and looked after the children and prepared food. This continued to be the case in the late period, except that women were now also responsible for pottery making, which previously was a male task. The division of labour became more pronounced in the late mixed farming period due to the dominance of livestock herding. Since livestock was so important, men assumed responsibility for it and spent much of their time in the veld looking after the cattle. Younger boys, in both the early and late mixed farming periods, were assigned to look after the smaller livestock, such as goats, calves and sheep. In addition, men dominated the other very important source of wealth, which was trading, and they also were responsible for mining. Lastly, hunting activities continued to be the task of men, as was the case in the early mixed farming period.

Status of women and men

In the early mixed farming communities, women did not enjoy the same social status as men. For example, they were excluded from male-dominated decision-making and were prohibited from entering the livestock enclosure. Women also did not own the crops they produced; these belonged to the head of the patriarchal household. Women, however, were not completely marginalised. Since they were closely involved with crop cultivation, and the trading of crops was an important form of social interaction between communities, women did play an important role in social relations. Archaeologists have even found evidence at a few sites of women who

were buried in the kraal (the traditional male domain), which suggests that although women were lower on the social ladder, they did at least have some status.

In comparison, women in the late mixed farming communities had an even lower social status. This was mainly caused by the fact that men completely dominated the wealth of the community, namely cattle ownership and trading. Men were also totally in control of the products produced by crop cultivation, despite the fact that women were the main crop producers. As a result, women had significantly less power in a society that had become highly stratified due to greater levels of wealth, which was controlled by men.

Activity 1.10

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.10 in Learning Unit 1 which enables you to identify similarities and differences between San, Khoekhoe and mixed farming communities.

Social practices

Again we notice some continuity, but also slight changes between the two periods in terms of social practices. In the early mixed farming period, men exchanged cattle for wives. In the late mixed farming period, this practice continued, but it became much more common and widespread thanks to the dominance of livestock herding, and the practice became known as *lobolo* (bride wealth usually in the form of livestock). Through *lobolo*, men could enhance their wealth, because the more wives they had, the more fields could be cultivated – and since more wives also meant more children, the patriarch would also have more labour available to look after livestock and for other activities.

In the late mixed farming period, the practice of *mafisa* was introduced, which did not appear to have been prevalent in the early mixed farming period. *Mafisa* involved richer livestock owners lending cattle to poorer members of society, who could then use the milk and sometimes meat. In this way, the rich livestock owner built up a group of loyal dependents, who in turn increased his political influence in society.

The last cultural practice, which characterised both periods, was initiation. Initiation ceremonies involved both boys and girls, and these ceremonies were important rites of passage to help mould them into responsible adults in society.

Architecture and art

The late mixed farmers continued to dwell in houses similar to those built in the earlier period. These houses were circular in shape, and poles, reeds, dhaka (mud) and grass were used as building material. A significant change in late mixed farming period, however, was the extensive use of stone as building material. This is

evidenced by Late Iron Age stone ruins in parts of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, Free State and Zimbabwe.

Mixed farmers from both periods practised pottery-making and art. Being crop cultivators, they manufactured clay pots for the purpose of storing food. However, pottery also had a symbolic meaning. Pots were associated with puberty rituals, and the decoration of pots used in trading was often a method of signifying and reaffirming social relations between villages, based on the exchange of cereal crops.

Other examples of art are bone, soapstone and ivory carvings as well as ceramic images of animals. These animal figurines may well have been used during ritual ceremonies and were probably also used to teach children proper social behaviour.

The mixed farmers also made rock engravings which clearly differed from those made by the San. Whereas the San depicted animals, humans and symbols that formed part of their religious beliefs, the engravings performed by the mixed farmers showed homesteads and sometimes humans, animals and weapons such as shields.

Religion

With regard to religion, it is likely that there was more continuity than differences between the early and late mixed farming periods, and both societies followed a form of traditional African religion. The late mixed farmers were ancestors of the present Bantu-speaking people, and their religion seems to have been similar in many respects to more modern forms of African traditional religion. They believed in a Superior Being with whom they communicated through their ancestors. Objects which are thought to have served as religious symbols have also been discovered in some late mixed farming sites. One example is soapstone images of birds and snakes that were found at Great Zimbabwe. It is believed that these soapstone birds symbolised the ancestors of the late mixed farming communities and therefore had an important role to play in religion.[9]

Political organisation

Due to a larger population because of their mixed farming practices, the early mixed farmers needed some form of formal political structure, although during this period it was still small-scale. Villages were small, and the fact that buildings were very similar to each other indicates that their society was not yet highly stratified. Villages generally did not accumulate more wealth than other villages, which meant each village operated more or less on its own and shared resources with neighbours. There were therefore no large chiefdoms, states or kingdoms. Within each village, there were certainly some individuals who were wealthier than others, which meant that at some villages there was a form of chiefdom, where the chief would settle disputes and organise food production effectively.

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[9] T.N. Huffman, *Snakes and Crocodiles: Power and Symbolism in Great Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 134–136.

As time progressed, however, and wealth increased because of the growing importance of livestock, political structures also changed. By the time of the late mixed farming period, several communities enjoyed a significant increase in wealth due to the ownership of livestock and their trading activities. As a result, their political structures became more sophisticated, as a clear divide between rich and poor emerged in more highly stratified societies. In addition, the late mixed farming communities had much larger populations, and, as a result, they required more hierarchical political and social structures for these large communities to function effectively. The wealthiest men assumed the role of powerful chiefs, who maintained their power through their control of livestock and trade. Chiefdoms became the basic political unit of the late period as a result. Several chiefdoms would combine under the rule of a single chief, and thus the foundations for the formation of states and kingdoms were laid. As one chiefdom absorbed smaller chiefdoms, it became increasingly powerful. This process eventually led to the emergence of states and kingdoms, such as Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe.

Activity 1.11

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.11 in Learning Unit 1 which provides further information about Great Zimbabwe.

Activity 1.12

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 1.12 in Learning Unit 1 which provides further information about Mapungubwe.

1.6 How did the mixed farming communities interact with the precolonial Khoekhoe and San?

The early mixed farming communities moved into territory inhabited by San hunter-gatherers and Khoekhoe hunter-herders. However, they did not occupy all the land and automatically displace the original inhabitants of the region. On the contrary, their presence sometimes encouraged hunter-gatherers to settle in the same area, making it possible for the two societies to interact for their mutual benefit. At first the mixed farmers had only sporadic relations with the Khoekhoe and San. They regarded the San as inferior to their more nuanced economy and settled lifestyle. On the other hand, they also admired the San for their environmental knowledge, rain-making skills and spirituality.[10] As more substantial farming villages emerged, this interaction became more complex, and long-term alliances were established.

Although some Khoekhoe and San communities were hostile to the incursion of the mixed farmers into their traditional territory and withdrew from areas occupied by the

[10] Parkington and Hall, 'The Appearance of Food Production in Southern Africa', 92-97.

newcomers, the mixed farmers coexisted and interacted with the Khoekhoe and San for many centuries, usually peacefully through trade, intermarriage and clientship. The Khoekhoe and San probably acted as hunters, rain-makers, tool makers, healers and herders for the mixed farmers in exchange for food (agricultural crops) and iron implements. While some Khoekhoe and San communities adopted some or all of the new farming techniques as well as social and cultural practices, others maintained their culture and traditional lifestyle. Bantu-speaking mixed farmers, on the other hand, were also influenced by their interaction with the Khoekhoe and San. For example, linguists have shown that the 'click' sounds in the Zulu and Xhosa languages are borrowings from the Khoekhoe and San languages.

1.7 Conclusion

In this learning unit we have explored the lifestyles of the precolonial San hunter-gatherers, Khoekhoe hunter-herders and mixed farming communities of southern Africa. These are the people whose descendants – following lifestyles very similar to those of their predecessors – you will meet in the remaining learning units which focus on the early colonial history of South Africa.

We have traced important continuities in lifestyle through time, but have also indicated how precolonial economies became progressively more varied and complicated: from hunter-gathering to hunter-herding and eventually mixed farming. We have seen how these transitions occurred very gradually and only in those parts of the sub-continent where environmental conditions were suitable. Moreover, we have noted how new economies did not necessarily replace the former, but rather interacted and often co-existed with earlier economies in the same geographical region.

Another major focus of the unit was to show how continuity and change in terms of economy affected the social and political organisation of the precolonial societies, ultimately culminating in powerful Late Iron Age states based on enormous wealth, successful food production and international trading connections. Remember this when you read in Learning Unit 2 about how the early Dutch settlement at the Cape almost collapsed during the 1650s.

Lastly, we have taken a brief look at how the precolonial communities interacted with one another through different forms of conflict and cooperation – a theme that runs through all the learning units.

In the next learning unit, we introduce you to a new people entering southern Africa in the mid-seventeenth century – people with a European cultural background, perceptions of individual land ownership, a money economy and firearms – and the significant impact that this development would have on the history of southern Africa.

2 LEARNING UNIT 2: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DUTCH SETTLEMENT AT THE CAPE

When you have completed this learning unit, you will be able to answer the following questions:

- Why did Europe manage to build its power to the extent that it began to dominate other parts of the world?
- Why did Portugal and the Netherlands become prominent European powers?
- What was the Dutch East India Company and what were its objectives?
- Why was a refreshment station established on the Cape coast of southern Africa in the middle of the 17th century?

2.1 Introduction

One of the questions facing scholars of the modern world is that of the rise and expansion of Europe. There is nothing automatic or self-evident about the fact that it was Europe, rather than any other part of the world, that was the first to expand beyond its own boundaries, found colonies of settlement, and come to conquer large parts of the world's population.

This unit will briefly outline some of the achievements of the non-European world and explain Europe's rise to dominance which commenced in the 15th century. It will then discuss the establishment of a colonial settlement by the Dutch in Table Bay at the Cape.

We focus on the following:

- Europe and the non-European world
- the emergence of Portugal as a world power
- the rise of the Netherlands
- the foundation and objectives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)
- the foundation of a refreshment station at the Cape

Activity 2.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 2.1 in Learning Unit 2 which provides an outline of European perceptions of people outside Europe.

2.2 Europe and the non-European world

The process known as the 'expansion of Europe' has often been seen as the basis of the 'birth of the modern world' or the equivalent of the 'rise of modernity'. Many people have regarded European politics, economics, ideas, and culture as central in shaping modern history, and suggested that European actions arising from its alleged superior civilisation enabled Europeans to dominate world events from the 15th century through to the 20th century.

It can be strongly argued, however, that the 'rise of Europe' was never inevitable, and neither was European power certain. Indeed, if one looks at the period before European power and influence in world affairs began to increase during the 15th century (the period from the 10th to the 14th centuries), other regions of the world significantly outstripped Europe in terms of technological sophistication. We can take a few examples briefly:

- *The development of agriculture.* In most parts of the world, agriculture had been established for many centuries, to as far back as between 6000 and 8000 years ago. Before this, people survived mainly by hunting and gathering, and sometimes by herding livestock, but agriculture enabled greater quantities of food to be produced for larger numbers of people, and the world's population could gradually increase. This process was not accidental, but involved a great deal of experimentation. In this process, the world's great staple foods emerged: maize, wheat and rice. None of these was produced in Europe. The earliest evidence of maize cultivation is to be found in Central America, of wheat production in the Middle East and in northern Africa, and rice in the eastern parts of Asia.

- *The development of non-agricultural economic activities.* Once agriculture was well established, and food supplies secure and able to support a growing population, societies could develop knowledge in other spheres of life and become involved in non-agricultural pursuits. In China, for example, agricultural productivity underpinned the growth of domestic trade, and the region developed an extensive network of paved roads and canals. Another example is the people of central and South America, who produced a sophisticated calendar and magnificent architecture long before any contact with Europeans. We know that the Arabs developed algebra and trigonometry, and the Chinese developed mathematics and science, all of which were considerably more advanced than these areas of knowledge in Europe.

- *Knowledge of other societies.* Europe had very limited knowledge of other regions in the period of the 10th to 14th centuries. They had no idea that the American continent existed. Arab and Chinese sailors possessed far greater knowledge of the world's oceans. China and India were also significantly wealthier than Europe. In 1400, China possessed the world's largest mechanised industry, producing cotton, silks, porcelains and firearms. The Chinese also engaged in extensive regional and even intercontinental trade. By the early 1400s, Chinese ships were trading in the Persian Gulf and East Africa, and it is even possible that the Chinese might have reached the

southern African coast (which we know now as the western Cape) in the 14th century.

- *The building of states.* In various parts of the world, extensive state-building occurred before these regions came into contact with Europe. This contrasts markedly with Europe, where states were weak. The Aztecs, for example, with their base in Mexico, built an empire that stretched from the Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and incorporated between 11 and 25 million people within their area of control. The Inca built an empire that included present-day Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Ecuador, incorporating between 7 and 9 million people. In China, between 1368 and 1644, the Ming dynasty ruled over a massive empire of 200 million people.

We can therefore see that in around the years 1000 to 1400, significant powers dominated large parts of Asia and South America (all outside Europe). These dominant societies did not, however, use their power to expand to other regions of the world, and indeed most experienced decline as they reached their peak. Reasons include rapid population growth, a decline in agricultural production, technological stagnation, and a breakdown in state authority which saw power devolved to localised levels in smaller regions.

Thus, by 1500, when most of the world's powerful societies had lost momentum, European power began to assert itself in a major way.

Europe slowly began its rise to dominance after a catastrophic plague in the 14th century killed large numbers of people, perhaps as much as 40 per cent of the European population. Some historians have argued that this provoked a deep crisis for European ruling classes. The decline in the numbers of peasants (or dependent workers on the land owned by the ruling classes in Europe) following the plague meant a decline in income received by the ruling classes, or nobility. The nobility therefore tried to restore its position by demanding more labour services from the peasants. This resulted in widespread peasant unrest across large parts of Europe, and encouraged the European nobility to look elsewhere for ways of increasing revenue. This saw them beginning to explore new areas outside Europe. If they could find, seize and distribute resources outside of Europe, the wealth they obtained would generate additional surplus for them. Essentially, the success of these new ventures set Europe upon the path of world-wide conquest and dominance.

In addition, in the period after the plague, Europe also experienced significant improvements in agricultural productivity, and strong states began to emerge. Most important among them were Portugal, Spain, France, England and the Netherlands. The two which were initially most influential around Africa, and particularly southern Africa, were Portugal and the Netherlands.

2.3 The emergence of Portugal as a world power

Portugal was the first European state to embark upon sustained overseas expansion. At the time that expansion occurred, during the 1400s, this seemed unlikely. Portugal was a poor agricultural country, with a population of only about one million people.

How could so small a country have been responsible for such major exploration and discoveries? Some historians have argued that Portuguese expansion was solely due to the role of its chief maritime patron, Infante Henrique (otherwise known as Prince Henry, the Navigator). Infante Henrique was a member of the nobility as well as an important merchant. He was also Administrator of the Order of Christ, a Christian order dedicated to countering Muslim power. Between the years 1410 and 1460, Infante Henrique sponsored a large number of voyages down Africa's Atlantic coast. But this was not a sufficient explanation of Portuguese expansion.

Other historians have suggested that the declining population following the plague meant that the nobility needed to search for labour. This does not seem likely, however, because large numbers of slaves were imported into Portugal. It is also unlikely that Portugal went in search of food, as some have suggested, since there were no serious food shortages.

The most likely explanation seems to be that Portuguese overseas expansion was motivated by the search for resources by Portugal's nobility. The king of Portugal at the end of the 1400s acknowledged that the great majority of those who left Europe did so for profit.

Europeans certainly had knowledge of the extensive gold fields of West Africa, an area which had been a source of gold for countries for many centuries. While Infante Henrique was certainly motivated by the desire to convert people to Christianity, he was also attracted by the prospects for material wealth. Members of the nobility and merchants who began to settle outside Portugal discovered many opportunities for material gain.

Geographical factors certainly aided Portuguese expansion. The country was well-placed to commence overseas expansion, because it was part of Europe that was closest to Africa. Portugal was also able to take advantage of favourable wind systems prevailing down the African coast. What has been called the 'maritime revolution' of the 15th and 16th centuries was really the discovery of the wind systems of the world. By the middle of the 15th century, the Portuguese had learnt to navigate their ships according to these wind systems.

Portuguese expansion underwent several notable phases during the 15th century, each of which built on the former one, and each seeing Portuguese influence further and further away from Portugal itself:

- In 1415, the Portuguese captured Ceuta in Morocco. Here they learnt details of the gold routes of the Sahara Desert, to the south of Ceuta.

- Between 1419 and 1460, the North Atlantic islands of Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde were respectively settled. These islands provided a base from which to explore the Atlantic Ocean.

- By 1460, expansion along the west coast of the African mainland was beginning to develop, when the Portuguese reached Sierra Leone.

- By 1471, Portuguese sailors reached the so-called Gold Coast.

- In 1483, Portuguese traders entered Congo.

- In 1488, Bartholomeus Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope (in southern Africa) in the hope of finding a sea route to the Indian subcontinent.

- Finally, in 1497, the aristocrat Vasco da Gama navigated all the way to India, round the Cape and via east Africa. This opened the way to the highly profitable spice trade with parts of India and the East Indies.

The Portuguese navigation of the entire Atlantic coast of Africa was therefore a slow process. It took Portugal roughly 100 years to accomplish this task. In the process the Portuguese established themselves all along the coast by building forts at many places, and this had lasting consequences for Africans right into the 20th century. In the north Atlantic, the Portuguese established themselves on Cape Verde and Sao Tomé; in central Africa at Luanda, off the coast of present-day Angola; and on the east African coast, on the Indian Ocean, they developed a strong presence on the Mozambique coast.

Once these key bases in Africa were established, the Portuguese were in a position to begin to control the Indian Ocean spice trade. Pepper, by far the most important spice, came from the Indian coast, while cinnamon came from Sri Lanka, and cloves, nutmeg and mace from the Maluku and the Banda Islands. Although the Portuguese were never able to monopolise the spice trade to Europe, by the 1560s, they were responsible for half the spices that reached Europe.

The exploration of the African coast made Portugal, with its small population, extremely wealthy. After the discovery of the Gold Coast, large quantities of gold found its way to Lisbon. Crucial, also, was the trade in slaves and spices, and Portugal became one of the leading states of Europe as a result of the profits that this trade bestowed. By the beginning of the 17th century, Lisbon was the third largest city in Europe. Portugal held almost exclusive control over slave trading out of Africa from about the 1450s to 1600. Portuguese forts were strategically located to control the growing Atlantic slave trade, and the profits of the trade in slaves made continual exploration possible.

This is not to suggest that the Portuguese were simply able to defeat and conquer Africans. They entered into many treaties and agreements with different Africans along the coast, and many Africans were able to engage in this trade on their own terms. Many African coastal rulers were presented with gifts or tribute by the

Portuguese in return for the right to trade. The profits were much more favourable to the Portuguese, however, and by the 1500s, the kings of Portugal derived almost three-quarters of their wealth and revenue from the trade in Indian spices, African gold and African slaves.

Although the Portuguese were the first European power to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, they made little attempt to establish a settlement on the coast of southern Africa. Even though much of southern Africa was better suited climatically to European settlement than other parts of the continent, the area had a bad reputation among Portuguese sailors, for several reasons:

- They found the coastline difficult to navigate, because there were dangerous sea currents, powerful gales and limited shelters in the bays.
- In addition, they found there were no navigable rivers leading inland and there was a very limited supply of fresh water.
- They also found the local Khoekhoe inhabitants hostile to their settlement. Alternative bases north of southern Africa, on both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean coasts (areas now known as Angola and Mozambique), were more suited to their purposes.

Activity 2.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 2.2 in Learning Unit 2 which provides maps and questions about European and Portuguese expansion.

2.4 The rise of the Netherlands

The Portuguese faced increasing competition from rival European powers, particularly Spain and the Netherlands. In 1492, the Spanish, who were also in search of spices from the East Indies, but were exploring different routes from the Portuguese, inadvertently stumbled across the Americas, which they called the 'New World'. Thereafter, they concentrated on exploring and exploiting this region, while Portugal maintained its control of the trade from the East until rivalry from the Netherlands began.

Until the end of the 16th century, the Dutch obtained spices through trading with Spain and Portugal, rather than through any direct trading activities themselves. However, war in Europe in the 1590s cut the Dutch off from a great deal of this trade, and as a result the Dutch began to try to locate spices directly in Asia.

The process of Dutch overseas expansion was made possible by wealth founded upon massive improvements in Dutch agriculture. Further, they began to build a

huge maritime industry. During the 16th century, the Dutch had come to dominate the European shipping trade because they could carry goods more cheaply than any other power. Other significant developments included urbanisation in the Netherlands, as well as the development of Amsterdam as Europe's main financial centre.

By 1600, the Dutch had achieved relatively little by way of overseas expansion because of rivalry among many competing Dutch ports and companies. This fierce competition between Dutch companies had the effect of increasing the prices of spices in Asia, but lowering them in Europe. It was thus proposed that numerous small companies co-operate with one another rather than compete, and thereby advance Dutch power at the expense of that of the other European powers, particularly Portugal. This search for cooperation led to the founding of a powerful commercial company, called the Dutch East India Company (or the VOC).

Activity 2.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 2.3 in Learning Unit 2 which provides maps and deals with Dutch influence and power in the 16th and 17th centuries.

2.5 The foundation and objectives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)

The breakthrough in Dutch overseas expansion came with the founding of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) – the Dutch East India Company – in 1602. In this year, the States General, which was the highest governing authority in the Netherlands, granted the VOC its charter, which gave the company certain privileges and rights. In particular, the charter gave the VOC a trade monopoly in the East, which meant that no other Dutch company would be allowed to trade there.

Within about a decade, the Dutch had established themselves in the Banda islands and the Moluccas, the very centre of clove and nutmeg production in the East. The process was violent – for example, they entirely eliminated the indigenous population of the Banda islands. In 1619, the Dutch conquered Jakarta, or Java, where they erected fortresses and renamed it Batavia. By 1650, they had also conquered the island of Ceylon (later known as Sri Lanka).

So powerful did the VOC become, and in such a short time, that the Portuguese were not able to hold their own against the superior ships, capital resources and organisational strength of the Dutch. Their control of trade was destroyed, and Dutch merchants were able to take advantage of the collapse of Portuguese power.

Some knowledge of the structure and objectives of the VOC is necessary to understand the later settlement and administration of the Cape by the Dutch. The VOC operated for commercial benefit, according to the principles of monopoly, maximum profit and direct returns.

The monopolistic nature of the VOC operated at three levels:

- First, there was the monopolisation of trade between the East and the Netherlands: the VOC held the sole right to trade and sell Asian goods. This was the most valuable aspect of the monopoly, since the largest profits came from the sale of spices in Europe.

- Second, the VOC had the sole right to trade in different parts of the East, and this gave the company almost unlimited authority in the region. In terms of the charter which it obtained from the state, it could make treaties with local rulers, occupy lands and declare war.

- And third, the company had the sole right to profit by internal trading activities in the area it controlled. As a result, even where private individuals were allowed to participate in the trading economy, the VOC could dictate what they could produce, which products they could trade and at what prices they could sell to the company.

Another cornerstone of VOC policy was the principle of maximum profit for minimum expenditure. Expenditure was always kept as low as possible in order to obtain the greatest short-term profit, and goods were always sold at the highest possible prices.

Finally, the VOC desired direct, rather than indirect, returns. This meant that they wished to have immediate profits on investments, and they avoided investments that would only yield a profit after some years. The result of this policy was that little was done to create an infrastructure (such as building roads or bridges) in Dutch colonies, or to improve areas under VOC control.

This business model worked very effectively in the first half of the 17th century for the VOC. It attempted to enforce its monopoly wherever it operated, and by 1650, two-thirds of Europe's pepper was supplied by the VOC. It also had effective control of nutmeg and cinnamon production.

Despite controlling these resources, the VOC did not set out to be a territorial power. It was first and foremost a business institution. Where it did occupy islands or tracts of land, it did so merely out of a desire to control agricultural production, not to found colonies of settlement. After it eliminated the indigenous population of the Banda islands, it divided the land among Dutch planters, each working a holding of fifty nutmeg trees with slave labour. But the VOC supplied the slaves, bought the crop at its own price and taxed the planters. The majority of Dutch nationals in the East were soldiers, seamen, artisans and officials, not colonists, although settlers – who the Dutch called freeburghers – were allowed to settle in Batavia and a few other places.

Activity 2.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 2.4 in Learning Unit 2 which provides maps and deals with the Dutch East India Company.

2.6 The foundation of a refreshment station at the Cape

We have noted above that the Portuguese preferred to avoid the Cape, for various reasons. By the 1640s, the Dutch, however, had no possessions on the African coast or along the route to the East, and they began to investigate the potential advantages for the obtaining of fresh water and provisions that the Cape offered.

One significant attraction for the Dutch was the favourable situation of the Cape. It was roughly halfway between the Netherlands and the VOC-controlled territories in the East. This strategic location made it suitable for ships on both the outgoing and return voyages.

In March 1647, a VOC ship, the *Nieuwe Haerlem*, ran aground in Table Bay. A whole year passed before the 60-member crew of this vessel were rescued by a returning Dutch fleet. During this time at the Cape, they built a small fort, planted and sowed some crops, and hunted and traded with the Khoekhoe pastoralists in the area for livestock. On their return to the Netherlands, they were able to give first-hand information to the VOC about conditions at the Cape, which proved very valuable to the company.

In 1649, a report written by Leendert Janzsen (one of the stranded crew) and Mattijs Proot gave details about the Cape. This document has become known as the *Remonstrantie*. Janzsen and Proot strongly advocated to the VOC that a Dutch base be established at the Cape. They provided a very positive description of conditions in the region. The report asserted that water was plentiful, and that the soil was fertile for the growth of abundant fruit and vegetables. Cattle, sheep and pigs could be acquired without difficulty, and prospects for fishing were excellent. Table Bay was navigable, particularly if a wharf were built and pilot boats could guide ships in the bay. As far as the Khoekhoe inhabitants were concerned, the *Remonstrantie* reported that they were not aggressive, they were interested in trade and were potentially willing to learn Dutch and be converted to Christianity.

The Council of Seventeen, who formed the governing board of the VOC, accepted the recommendations of the *Remonstrantie* and decided in March 1651 to establish a refreshment station at the Cape. No-one thought of the Cape as a potential colony or even a fully-fledged trading post. It was intended to be a mere stopping point for ships on the way to and from the East.

The VOC appointed Jan van Riebeeck, a merchant employed by the company, to establish the refreshment post, and gave him the position of commander. There was no thought that he would be the founder of a European colony in Africa. The aim was to keep the refreshment post as small as possible, in order to cut costs. There was even a plan to dig a canal between False Bay and Table Bay to isolate the Cape peninsula from the rest of the region, although this scheme was not in fact carried out.

Activity 2.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 2.5 in Learning Unit 2 which deals with conditions on the Cape coast at the time the Dutch East India Company established its refreshment station.

2.7 Conclusion

Jan van Riebeeck and his followers settled at Table Bay, at the foot of Table Mountain, in April 1652. Despite fairly regular contact between various Europeans (the Portuguese, Dutch and others) and southern African groups over the previous 150 years, this date is commonly regarded as the first time that a permanent European presence was established in southern Africa.

Although the VOC intended that the settlement of Van Riebeeck should be contained and limited, it instead was to become an extensive colony. These developments form the focus of the next learning unit.

3 LEARNING UNIT 3: THE DUTCH SETTLEMENT AT THE CAPE

When you have completed this learning unit, you will be able to answer the following questions:

- Explain the early objectives of the VOC at the refreshment station in Table Bay.
- Discuss early agricultural farming at the Cape.
- What were the difficulties of agricultural farmers in the south-western Cape?
- Explain why some agricultural farmers became pastoral farmers and moved into the Cape interior.
- Discuss the lifestyle of pastoral farmers in the interior.

3.1 Introduction

When it founded the refreshment station in Table Bay, the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) intended to establish nothing more than a small and contained settlement. The primary objective of this settlement was to supply the needs of passing ships. However, over the next century, and under the control of the VOC, a large and extended colony came into being. This unit explores these developments, and this unintended transformation.

We will look at the following issues in this unit:

- The Cape as a refreshment station
- Intensive agriculture at the south-western Cape
- The south-western Cape during the VOC period
- Pastoral farming in the Cape interior

3.2 The Cape as a refreshment station

As we saw in the last learning unit, although the Dutch crossed the Atlantic and the Indian oceans to trade, ideas of permanent colonisation were not their main objective. In the charter of the VOC, there was no reference to colonisation. The aim of the VOC was not to win overseas colonies, but was to secure trading items and trading routes. In cases where it did occupy territories, the intention was solely to ensure its own security and to eliminate competition from other traders.

The settlement at the Cape was not intended even to be a major trading post. Extensive trading interests and related activities did not lead to its establishment. The principal reason was the need to obtain supplies (fresh water and food) for the increasing number of ships that were plying the seas between Europe and East Asia.

Early goals

When Jan van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape in 1652 as an official of the VOC, there was no question of establishing a colony. The place was to be a halfway station that would place the immediate interests of the VOC above all else. The Cape would remain a small outpost and not be expanded at all. The group of white officials and soldiers (about 80 of them) who accompanied Van Riebeeck were all in the service of the VOC, and their task was to obtain sufficient food for themselves and the ships calling at Table Bay. They would do this through the produce of a small vegetable garden that they would tend themselves and from trade with the local Khoekhoe in the immediate vicinity. The profit motive of the VOC was paramount: the cheaper that commodities could be supplied to passing ships and the lower the administration and defence costs of the Cape, the better.

Van Riebeeck began to carry out his tasks with enthusiasm. He aspired to a higher position within the VOC (at one of its possessions in the East) and he hoped to fulfil his obligations at the Cape within a year. These essentially involved

- the building of a fort;
- the laying out of a garden;
- the supplying of fresh provisions to VOC ships; and
- the obtaining of livestock from the Khoekhoe.

His expectations were not realised, however: he was to spend ten years at the Cape, and when he finally left in 1662, he had not completed his instructions to establish a compact and profitable refreshment station.

Early experiences

During the first few years, the small refreshment station teetered on the brink of disaster. It appeared impossible to satisfy the needs of the soldiers in the fort, let alone to supply passing ships. Indeed, at times, ship crews themselves had to save the members of the struggling settlement from starvation, rather than the other way round. This state of affairs was mainly the result of the VOC's policy of saving money wherever it could. The VOC did not supply Van Riebeeck with sufficient staff, and the people who were based at the Cape struggled to carry out their responsibilities in difficult circumstances.

By 1655, it appeared that the gardens were incapable of providing sufficient vegetables and fruit, partly as a result of environmental conditions such as droughts, floods, strong winds and infertile soil. Moreover, the cattle trade with the Khoekhoe did not yield the required meat supply. The gardens were all planted and harvested by the employees of the VOC, but Van Riebeeck began to believe that if these people were permitted to farm more independently, outside the direct service of the VOC, solutions to the problems would be found.

Thus, Van Riebeeck recommended to the VOC's directors that a system of freeburgher ('free citizen') farming be instituted at the Cape. This would allow these employees and officials of the VOC at the Cape to make a living on their own.

Emergence of freeburgher farmers

After initial reluctance, the VOC approved Van Riebeeck's plan, particularly after Van Riebeeck argued that this proposal would save the VOC money.

- The VOC planned to purchase the produce of the freeburghers at fixed prices, which it would set as low as possible.
- Further, VOC officials at the Cape would also buy their own provisions from the freeburghers themselves, thus saving the VOC the expense of supplying these to them.
- The VOC also hoped that the freeburghers would do military service and pay various taxes to boost VOC profits.
- Thus, the VOC became attracted by the possibility of achieving savings and limiting its costs from the system of freeburgher farming.

In February 1657, the first nine officials, at their own request, left the service of the VOC to make an independent living as agricultural farmers, or freeburghers. Each of these new freeburghers received a farm of 11,3 hectares in the Rondebosch area, some distance away from the Company gardens and the fort. This sounds small, but such a farm in the Netherlands, where intensive agricultural methods such as the cultivation of forage crops, fertilisation of the soil and stable feeding were applied, would have been large. The VOC envisaged similar methods of farming at the Cape. In addition to providing produce for human consumption, Van Riebeeck expected the farmers to cultivate fodder crops as pasture for cattle, which, in turn, would provide manure for the soil.

When Van Riebeeck left the Cape in 1662, there were about 60 freeburgher farmers, but the expectation that they would make a success of farming was not yet fulfilled. We shall now explore the reasons for this failure.

Activity 3.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.1 in Learning Unit 3 which deals with the experience of the first Dutch farmers at the Cape.

3.3 Intensive agriculture at the south-western Cape

The early freeburghers were unable to farm successfully. Indeed, until about 1680 (over 20 years after the freeburgher experiment began), the farmers could not satisfy their own needs, let alone supply sufficient produce for the market.

It proved to be impossible for the freeburghers to cultivate their farms according to the methods envisaged by Van Riebeeck and the VOC. There are a number of reasons for this:

- *Inexperience of the first freeburghers:* The first generation of freeburgher farmers had no experience of the local climate and soil conditions at the Cape. They also lacked farming skills and the right kind of motivation, seeing that many who became freeburghers did so not because they wanted to farm independently, but because they wanted to distance themselves from the authority of the VOC. Thus, Van Riebeeck and his successors complained frequently of the inefficiency of the majority of the freeburghers.

  It is true that the first freeburghers were inexperienced, but this was not the only reason for their difficulties.

- *Financial matters*: Capital investment was needed to establish a profitable, intensive farming industry in the new area of the south-western Cape. This was beyond the capabilities of the freeburghers themselves, most of whom had limited or even no funds. Most of them came from backgrounds of poverty. Thus, all of them began their farming careers by going into debt in order to establish themselves on their new farms. The VOC could have assisted them by granting credit at a low rate of interest, or by fixing prices high enough to enable farmers to build up the necessary capital themselves, but it adopted neither of these strategies. Its policy of economising, which was aimed at achieving the highest possible profit on the lowest possible expenditure, handicapped the freeburghers and eventually defeated the aims of the VOC as well.

- *VOC control of farming and marketing activities*: Apart from offering no financial support to the freeburghers, the VOC also tried to interfere directly in many aspects of their farming activities. It laid down what crops had to be planted, and what seeds sown. Sometimes these instructions were irrational, such as demands that freeburghers plant a certain quantity of rice every year, despite the fact that rice crops failed each year, or a ban on the cultivation of tobacco, which thrived at the Cape. Even when farmers managed to produce a good wheat crop, there was little chance of a decent profit, since farmers were not permitted to sell their harvests on an open market. The VOC was the sole buyer of crops, and it fixed the prices. Despite rising production costs faced by freeburghers, prices were seldom increased, with the result that it became impossible for the freeburghers to accumulate sufficient capital to invest in their farming activities.

- *VOC continuing its own farming activities*: A further problem for the freeburghers was that the VOC did not abandon its own farming operations after it started the freeburgher system. In addition, although it was illegal to do so, VOC officials themselves also farmed. These officials were in a very privileged position, because they often allocated the best land to themselves, and they were also able to control the market to a significant degree. Some of them, such as two governors, Simon van der Stel and his son Willem Adriaen, were wealthy and well known, but there were others too. Such

competition from VOC officials who were farmers contributed to the difficulties faced by the freeburghers.

- *Climate and soil*: Environmental factors also played a role in contributing to the initial failure of agriculture. Farmers suffered heavy losses on account of periodic droughts, floods, and the destruction caused by strong south-easterly and north-westerly winds during summer and winter respectively. In 1665, for instance, some farmers could not even recover enough seed for the following season, because of the drought and the heat. In addition, soil in some areas was very stony, or in other areas very sandy and infertile. Without proper implements, draught oxen and fertiliser, it was almost impossible for the freeburghers to produce a good harvest.

- *Labour issues*: Another problem that seriously handicapped the freeburghers was a chronic shortage of labour. It was initially hoped that the Khoekhoe could be employed as labourers, but when this proved impossible ─ mainly because the Khoekhoe were a nomadic people who were unfamiliar with agricultural farming and refused to give up their independent hunter-herding lifestyle ─ Van Riebeeck was compelled to make VOC soldiers available as labourers. This form of labour, however, was both expensive and in short supply. Further, soldiers lacked agricultural skills and frequently refused to work or they deserted. Labourers from the Netherlands were almost impossible to recruit, as few people wished to leave that country for destinations far away about which they knew little in order to be labourers. Immigrants who did come to the Cape had no desire to work as labourers, but preferred to try to farm themselves, and hence required labourers themselves. When immigrants did arrive, especially during the administration of Simon van der Stel, the situation worsened rather than eased. The issue of labour difficulties caused many freeburghers to seek other forms of income and lessen their dependence on crop farming.

  In an attempt to solve the labour problem, slaves were imported in ever-increasing numbers from 1658 onwards. The VOC did not strongly support the importation of slaves, because their experience in the East had shown that when the Dutch became slave owners, they were reluctant to work themselves. Initially, in any case, slaves did not solve the labour problems, both because they were untrained as agricultural workers and because freeburgher farmers lacked the capital to be able to buy them. Towards the end of the 17th century, however, when larger numbers of slaves were imported during the administration of Simon van der Stel, the labour problem eased and slaves became the most important source of farm labour. (We will look at the importance of slavery in more detail in Learning Unit 5.)

The combination of low grain prices, high production costs, labour difficulties and repeated crop failures affected agriculture so negatively that many freeburghers could not make a proper living and fell deeper into debt. By 1664, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the VOC decided to allocate church collections and money from some fines to assist needy freeburghers. Six years later, in 1670, the crisis in freeburgher farming had deepened further and the complete collapse of wheat farming was imminent. After desperate petitions from the freeburghers, the VOC agreed to increase the price of wheat, although its main motive was to prevent

the collapse of the entire refreshment station, rather than merely to assist the freeburghers. Despite this price increase, many farmers could still not produce crops at a profit.

Some freeburghers had to abandon farming completely, because of bankruptcy and poverty. Many asked to be re-employed by the VOC, and some left the Cape completely, returning either to the Netherlands or going to the East. A few explored possibilities of becoming artisans, fishermen or bakers in Cape Town — the small town that was developing around the harbour in Table Bay and the fort — but here, too, the VOC applied strict controls. It employed its own tradesmen, so independent artisans were restricted to working for the small numbers of freeburghers and could therefore hardly make a proper living. Also, as soon as any economic pursuit started to show a profit, the VOC took it over. This happened in the case of seal-hunting, whale-oil refining and fishing. The VOC generally prevented any chance of a person making an independent living from any kind of trade.

The arrival of Governor Simon van der Stel

After the arrival of Simon van der Stel as governor of the Cape in 1679, the situation changed. He promoted the expansion of the settlement through a new land allocation system. He issued land to prospective freeburghers on a freehold basis, giving each farmer as much land as he thought he could cultivate. The first freeburghers of the Stellenbosch district were allocated large stretches of land next to the rivers, and these farms were large enough to enable the farmers to make a living using extensive agricultural methods. This meant that they occupied as large an area as possible with little or no attention to conserving or improving the land (as happened with intensive farming). They did not grow clover or other forage crops, nor did they graze their cattle in cultivated areas, but used the open fields adjoining their properties for this purpose, having been given access by Van der Stel to large communal grazing areas that surrounded their freehold land. This meant the loss of manure to fertilise the lands. This led to an increase in stockfarming, and to a wider and sparser distribution of the freeburgher population.

In time, overproduction became a problem, especially after increasing numbers of immigrants arrived during the administration of Van der Stel. Wheat prices were raised considerably as an incentive to wheat farmers to produce more. As a result, by the end of the 17th century, wheat production had risen to the point where the Cape not only supplied its own needs but could start exporting a surplus. However, the isolation of the Cape market and the consequent high cost of transportation presented serious obstacles to successful exports. Large stocks of wheat began to rot during the 1690s owing to these difficulties in selling wheat. As a result, farmers began to limit wheat production and plant only for their own needs.

Wheat farmers were now compelled to seek other sources of income or to cultivate different crops. Some turned to stock farming, while others turned to extensive farming. Because the veld in the south-western Cape provided limited grazing for livestock, large areas of pasture were required to support livestock. Wheat was grown on an extensive rather than an intensive basis: instead of intensively planting and fertilising small patches of land to obtain a high yield, farmers sowed wheat over

a wide area, which was not fertilised or carefully tended. Yields per unit of land therefore became extremely low.

The VOC made little effort to oppose this trend. On the contrary, grazing rights to unused land were freely granted. The VOC now began to go against its policy of maintaining a contained settlement at the Cape, to ensure that sufficient grain and meat were produced. Van Riebeeck himself had even begun to see that the policy was doomed to failure. Before his departure in 1662, he conceded that the small area which he had initially believed would support 1 000 families was not able to accommodate more than about 15 farms. By the end of the 17th century, the compact settlement envisaged by the VOC did not exist at all. It was evident that most farmers were unable to make a living from intensive agriculture alone. Extensive farming, supplemented by livestock farming to a greater or lesser extent, had to be introduced for people to survive, and was becoming the main form of agriculture at the Cape.

Thus, livestock farming was initially a supplementary economic activity to wheat cultivation, but it was to grow significantly and even become more popular than crop farming. This is revealed in the records of the period: in 1673, the livestock herds of freeburghers numbered about 600; these had grown to 1 000 by 1682 and to 2 600 by 1689.

Activity 3.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.2 in Learning Unit 3 which deals with intensive agriculture at the Cape.

3.4 The south-western Cape during the VOC period

As we have stressed, the VOC never envisaged territorial expansion at the Cape. The dispersal of white people throughout the south-western Cape during the 17th and 18th century was not initially the result of a deliberate colonisation policy. In addition, the VOC rarely attempted to bring people to the Cape, so the number of immigrants was never large.

For the Dutch people, there was little incentive to leave the Netherlands at this time, as it was relatively prosperous and there was no political or religious persecution from which people wished to escape. Those who did emigrate chose to go to the East Indies. The Cape, with its poverty and uncertain future, held little appeal.

Although the Dutch were therefore sometimes reluctant settlers at the Cape, Europeans from other countries did immigrate there. By the end of the 17th century, roughly 20 per cent of the Cape settlers were of German descent. Many Germans fled to the Netherlands after the devastating Thirty Years War in Europe (1618-1648) and some of these people joined the VOC as soldiers. In this way, some ended up at the Cape, and became freeburghers. In 1688, the Cape also experienced an unexpected influx of French refugees (Huguenots) as settlers. They had fled from

France to the Netherlands to avoid religious persecution. These German and French settlers were gradually assimilated into the Dutch settlement.

In 1717, the VOC decided to try to end white immigration completely, and allow the economy to be boosted by the importation of slaves only. Thereafter, white population growth was mainly dependent on natural increase. By the end of the VOC period in 1795, the white population numbered about 27 000 people.

The white population was unevenly distributed between Cape Town, which became the only town of a substantial size during the 17th and 18th centuries, the farms of the south-western Cape and people who left the area of settlement and moved into the Cape interior.

Cape Town

Cape Town, where the white settlement began, and where the VOC had hoped that it would be permanently contained, had about 1 000 inhabitants by 1710. By the end of the 18th century, this had grown to about 16 500 people, of whom about one-third were of European background. Despite this increase in the number of inhabitants, the harbour town continued to be regarded by the VOC as no more than a refreshment station. For the Cape settlers, however, it was the most important market, and the place where all goods were traded, exported and imported. The economy was largely dependent on the number of ships that called at the harbour. This number fluctuated greatly, depending on the amount of trade Europeans were conducting and whether or not European powers were at peace or at war. The ships did not engage in official trade only, but also offered good opportunities for smuggling, of which some Cape Town dwellers were able to take advantage.

Cape Town was the home of a large number of VOC officials. The senior officials formed a small, closely knit group. Many were related to each other. They wielded considerable power because of their position within the VOC and because they were members of the governing structures of the Company. Although some of these officials had contact with the freeburgher farmers of the south-western Cape, they often tended to disregard the farmers, and it is not surprising that many farmers accused officials of having no interest in their welfare and of offering them little support.

VOC officials in the lower ranks formed another group. Their salaries were very low, and it was common knowledge that many of them supplemented their income through private trading or smuggling. They sometimes remained at the Cape for lengthy periods but, like the senior officials, they could be transferred to the VOC's territories in the East.

A relatively large number of soldiers were stationed in Cape Town. Not all were Dutch, but included Germans, French, Danes and other Europeans. Many of them had signed five-year contracts with the VOC, and were displaced and impoverished persons. Few soldiers renewed their contracts, and when they left the Cape and returned to the Netherlands, they often left their children, born in many cases to

slave women, behind. For a few, however, social advancement was possible, and some came to occupy senior positions in the VOC administration or became wealthy freeburghers.

The ordinary white citizens of Cape Town made a living from renting accommodation, ox-wagons and slaves, and from trading and smuggling. Some enjoyed a high standard of living, others less so.

The majority of Cape Town's population consisted of ‘free blacks’ (slaves who were granted freedom on an individual basis – see Learning Unit 5), slaves and Khoekhoe. Various trades were practised by free blacks, who constituted a small percentage (about 10 per cent) of the free population. They had occupations such as tailors and shoemakers, builders and bricklayers, harness- and saddle-makers, fishermen, bakers and vegetable sellers. Many of the free blacks struggled for survival. An official report in 1732 described the majority of free blacks as 'very poor'. Some of them did succeed in making a good living, and a few even became rich enough to become slave owners, but this was very rare. Socially they tended to be excluded by the white community, even though many worshipped in the main Cape Town church and received a Christian education. By the end of the 18th century, significant numbers of them had converted to Islam.

From the beginning of the VOC settlement, there were some Khoekhoe people living in Cape Town, but their numbers were small. Most worked as servants.

There was also an Asian, more specifically an Indonesian and Malay, element to Cape Town’s population. This came about because of the connections through the VOC between Cape Town and the East. VOC officials often served duties in the East before settling in Cape Town, and they, together with the slaves they brought with them, introduced various Asian fashions and customs, in architectural, furniture and cooking styles. The diversity of people at the Cape gave Cape Town a somewhat multilingual character. Besides Dutch and the northern European languages, other languages included Portuguese and Malay. The official language was high Dutch, as this was the language of the senior VOC officials from the Netherlands.

Agricultural districts of the south-western Cape

In the south-western Cape lay the agricultural districts outside Cape Town. Among the white farming population, there were close ties, of language, culture and religious affiliation. There was also a lack of job opportunity, and almost all of these people had to become farmers, which contributed to the formation of a relatively close-knit community with a common destiny. The community was divided, however, into two distinct groups, or classes: white people who constituted the free population, and black people who formed the slave or labouring class. Although a few slaves on farms attained their legal freedom and became free blacks, almost all of them moved away from the agricultural districts to settle in Cape Town.

By the 1730s, the majority of the white population had been born in the Cape, and were not first-generation immigrants. Different degrees of wealth determined their social status. Some were wealthy farm owners, while others were less well-off and had to struggle to maintain their position, particularly as they could not compete with the wealthy farmers who were favoured by the VOC administration. There were also landless white people who worked for other farmers, mainly as overseers.

The economic position of the farmers, whose chief farming activities were the production of grain and wine, was not always stable, since their farming activities were subject to the Cape market. As we have seen, the great majority struggled greatly before the 1680s. Thereafter, for the next century, at times they enjoyed great prosperity, such as between 1781 and 1784, when a French fleet was stationed at the Cape to protect the Cape against a possible attack by the English. The presence of the French caused a great demand for agricultural produce, and prices soared. At other times, however, prices were so low that crop cultivation was uneconomical, and many abandoned agriculture for stock farming.

The wine farmers were the only group that, to some extent, practised intensive agriculture according to the European model. They planted their vineyards in sheltered valleys, out of the path of the south-east wind and in well-drained soil. The Cape wines, however, were of relatively poor quality, and the excessive sunshine tended to make them sweet and heavy, which did not suit the European market. Outdated manufacturing techniques contributed towards the low quality. There was little incentive to improve the standard, since the authorities paid low prices and purchased only a limited amount of wine and brandy. Wine was nonetheless an important commodity, and was in great demand in Cape Town taverns and boarding houses, and on ships that called at the settlement. The VOC authorities also benefited from the sale of wine, as they had a monopoly, as well as from the taxes they imposed.

Wheat farming, in contrast with wine farming, was practised on a more extensive scale. The farmers who lived relatively close to Cape Town earned a good income, but those who lived further away had their profits cut by high transport costs, and so had to supplement their incomes from stock farming. Wheat production still generally rose throughout the 18th century.

Both wine and wheat farmers owned their land according to the freehold system. Land allocated, inherited or purchased according to this system became the farmer's property. There were, however, certain conditions. In the early VOC period, the owner had to pay one-tenth of his harvest to the VOC. It was also frequently stated

that an owner had to cultivate all his land, and that if he failed to do so, his farm could be expropriated.

The success of the farmers in the south-western Cape depended on having sufficient labour at their disposal. This was mainly met by slave labour, but slaves were often expensive and hence affected the economic viability of farms. The Cape farmers were also reliant on the provision of roads to Cape Town for the transporting of their produce. In this regard, the VOC's desire to keep costs to a minimum negatively affected farmers. The VOC only spent money on fortifications around Cape Town and on public works directly related to shipping. Even by the 1770s, roads were not much more than wagon tracks, and there were still no bridges in the south-western Cape.

Activity 3.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.3 in Learning Unit 3, which deals with society in Cape Town and in the agricultural districts of the south-western Cape.

3.5 Pastoral farming in the Cape interior

We have discussed the development of the Cape settlement and changes to agriculture, as intensive farming methods gave way to extensive farming and livestock rearing. Now we will consider the emergence of a community of white hunter-herders who abandoned agriculture altogether. They were often called the 'trekboers' – which literally means 'journeying farmers' or 'migrant farmers'.

By the end of the VOC period (1795) they comprised two-thirds of the white farming community at the Cape. They extended the frontiers of the Cape to the Gariep (Orange) River in the north and the Great Fish River in the east. This expansion greatly widened the area of interaction between white colonists and indigenous peoples. It also gave rise to a colony that was sparsely populated and economically backward.

We will consider the following:

- the origins of the trekboer economy
- white expansion into the Cape interior
- characteristics of the trekboer lifestyle

The origins of the trekboer economy

The dispersal of the trekboers completed the transition of the Cape from a refreshment station into a colony. This process began with the release of the first freeburghers in 1657. The trekboers, to a far greater extent than the other whites at

the Cape, weakened ties with Europe and began to regard themselves as permanent inhabitants of Africa.

Whites began to move away from the south-western Cape at the beginning of the 18th century, some 50 years after Van Riebeeck established the refreshment station in Table Bay. There were a number of reasons for this. These have sometimes been divided into two sets, called 'push factors' and 'pull factors'. The 'push factors' were those issues which forced (or 'pushed') some whites out of the south-western Cape, while the 'pull factors' were those which attracted (or 'pulled') them into the interior.

The 'push factors' essentially consisted of the problems facing most of the freeburghers in the south-western Cape, which we discussed above in Section 3.3.

Activity 3.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.4 in Learning Unit 3, which encourages revision of the problems of freeburgher farmers in the south-western Cape.

Remember that by the end of the 17th century, although these problems had affected many whites in the south-western Cape, some whites had managed to establish successful farms, and that agricultural activities, particularly grain and wine farming, supplemented by pastoral farming, were well established.

Many whites, however, found that they were unable to make a living as independent farmers in the south-western Cape, and so they began to explore the Cape interior. They were attracted by a number of factors.

Let us examine these in a little detail:

- *Stock-farming*: Stock-farming offered an alternative means of making a living to many of the struggling small-scale cultivators in the south-western Cape. The undeveloped Cape economy offered few openings in the trades or in commerce, and potentially profitable enterprises such as whaling and fishing were monopolised by the VOC. Jobs on the farms of other freeburghers were few, and often regarded as demeaning. Menial and hard labour was done by slaves. The most viable option was to turn to a herding and hunting life. This afforded economic independence, which many whites craved above all else.

  Some members of trekboer society did not register land for themselves. The young and the poor, and even those who just desired another lifestyle, could commence their herding activities on the loan farms of others as *bywoners* (landless squatters). In the 18th century, this was not regarded as demeaning. While land was still plentiful, it was readily shared, as the *bywoner* provided welcome assistance and additional security on farms.

Not all trekboers concentrated on pastoralism. Some kept small herds but subsisted mainly by hunting, trading and raiding. These trekboers tended to be single men with no family ties or other social commitments — they were often called *eenlopendes* — and did not conform to colonial society. They were often more nomadic and formed closer ties with indigenous communities than the family groups, who were the majority of trekboers. Although relatively few in number, they were a significant element in the community as they were the 'cutting edge' of white expansion.

For all these different pioneers, the interior of the Cape offered the opportunity of remaining economically independent as long as they could maintain themselves on the natural resources there.

The main attraction of the trekboer life was the relative ease with which a man could establish himself as a pastoralist. Stock farmers were not subject to many of the problems that confronted the freeburghers.

- *Environment:* Problems such as drought and exhausted soil could be overcome by the adoption of a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Unlike the agriculturalist, who was tied to his cultivated lands, and above all to the market, where he had to sell his produce, the trekboer could migrate when an area could no longer support him and his herds.

- *Capital:* A stock-farmer needed little capital. He did not require special equipment as the agriculturalist did; land and labour suitable for pastoral farming could be found more easily, and herds could be built up with little difficulty.

  The first settlers did not bring livestock with them to the Cape, but acquired animals through trade with the Khoekhoe, despite the ban imposed on such independent and individual trading that the VOC tried to enforce. In this way, as well as through uncontrolled breeding, white-owned stock increased from 350 head in 1658 to over 76 000 by the end of the 17th century, and thereafter individually owned herds grew very rapidly. For example, by 1673 some of the largest cattle holdings were in the region of 600 head; by 1689, the biggest numbered as many as 2 600.

- *Land*: The free issue of grazing permits by the VOC after 1703, and later extensions of the loan farm scheme, effectively gave trekboers access to unlimited land for much of the 18th century. When grazing was exhausted in one area, the trekboer simply migrated and settled on a new loan farm. He was therefore spared the high price that freehold landowners had to pay for agricultural land in the settled south-western Cape, as well as the capital and labour costs required for improving land.

- *Labour and farming skills:* Stock farming was far less labour intensive than agricultural farming. In addition, the services of uprooted and impoverished Khoekhoe were available at small cost to trekboers. Khoekhoe labourers had been of little use to crop farmers, since as a pastoral people they were unreliable and lacked expertise in agriculture. But they were very competent herdsmen, and trekboers could rely on their experience and knowledge. The

use of Khoekhoe labour also spared the trekboers from the expense of purchasing slaves.

- *Marketing problems:* Whereas agriculturalists had to transport perishable produce at great cost over difficult routes, stock-farmers could drive their animals to market. However, as the trekboers moved into the interior, even slaughter-stock suffered from the long trip back to Cape Town. Also, as markets were controlled by the VOC, profits were not sufficient to encourage trekboers to trade on a large scale. Hunting and pastoralism offered a good subsistence base for trekboers, however, which reduced their dependence on the market. To a large extent, many avoided the problems of the market altogether.

Activity 3.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.5 in Learning Unit 3, which deals with 'push' and 'pull' factors affecting freeburgher and trekboer farmers at the Cape.

White expansion into the Cape interior

The VOC had not envisaged territorial expansion; indeed, it opposed it, so the dispersal of whites into the interior was not the result of any planned colonisation. Some of the governors, such as Simon van der Stel, were interested in colonising further, but their influence was short-lived and did not reflect VOC policy.

The reasons for the extension of the area of white settlement over a large area of the Cape must be found in a combination of local circumstances and not in deliberate policy or official initiative.

- *Population growth:* In 1707, the VOC abandoned assisted immigration to the Cape, when it sponsored whites who had expressed a desire to go to the Cape to help to make the settlement profitable. After this, population growth at the Cape was largely self-generated, apart from a trickle of former VOC employees who elected to stay on after their contracts with the VOC had expired. White population increase was relatively strong throughout the 18th century, owing to the very large families which were common in rural society at this time. Sons of farmers established independent households, especially on the death of their fathers. Thus, expansion of the area of white settlement accelerated with the maturing of each generation.

- *Stock farming:* In the first fifty years of the VOC settlement, it was the agriculturalist freeburghers in the south-western Cape who led expansion, in their search for more fertile farming land. Thereafter, the increase in stock-farming provided the major impetus to expansion. As herds increased, however, they could no longer be accommodated only in the settled area.

The VOC initially issued grazing concessions to farmers further inland, and these were used seasonally, particularly in summer, when grazing land in the dry south-western Cape became parched. Soon, however, livestock was left permanently at cattle posts in the interior and stock-farmers themselves moved there.

From the beginning of the 18th century, dispersal of whites into the interior grew rapidly. Governor W.A. van der Stel encouraged this by granting grazing licences more freely than before. Later governors did not give similar support to stock-farmers, but the process of stock-farming in the interior had its own momentum by then, and there was little they could do to control farming in the interior. The extensive use of natural resources for hunting and pastoralism became a way of life for an increasing proportion of the white population. Geographical expansion was the inevitable result.

In 1717, the northern-most cattle post was at Piketberg; by 1725 it had moved to the Olifants River, and by 1750 farmers had spread as far as the Kamiesberg area. Further expansion north was limited by semi-desert conditions and Khoekhoe and San resistance. Other trekboers moved in an easterly direction, along the mountain ranges. When Swellendam was established in 1745, to administer the eastern parts of the settlement, trekboers had already reached the Great Brak River area, and some were moving beyond this region. By 1770, they reached Bruintjes Hoogte and certainly would have trekked further had they not been halted in the vicinity of the Fish River by the south-westerly expansion of Xhosa farmers.

- *VOC land policy:* Whereas stock-farming and territorial expansion were not encouraged directly by the VOC, its allocation of land encouraged these developments. Its original grants of land to freeburghers were not suitable for Cape conditions, as the area of land granted was too small. By the 1680s, freeburghers and immigrants in the Stellenbosch, Drakenstein and Franschhoek areas were given full possession of land allotments of reasonable size for cultivation, and then given grazing rights (but not ownership) to adjoining common land. These allocations were orderly, as the land was surveyed and registered by the VOC, but could not keep pace with demand.

To satisfy the need for more land, especially grazing land, a system of free grazing permits was introduced from 1703. Under this system, farmers could graze their stock on land which was not formally surveyed and registered. This gave way in 1714 to the *leeningsplaats* (loan farm) system, in terms of which farmers themselves could select and register a vast area of land at the cost of a small rental payment each year.

Under this system, the land did not belong to the farmer, and the grant could be revoked by the VOC. In practice, however, the farmer's tenure of the land was secure. Land itself could technically not be inherited or sold, since it was on loan from the VOC, but since structures built on farms could be sold, land began to trade between farmers, sometimes at significant values.

Also, it was very simple for people to acquire their own loan farms; they had merely to go out and claim some land. This encouraged rapid expansion into the interior, as children of pastoral farmers moved to claim their own land. In addition, land that was depleted by overgrazing was readily abandoned for new farms further inland. Loan farms in the interior were also large (usually about 6 000 acres), which further encouraged rapid expansion away from the south-western Cape into the interior.

- *Hunting opportunities:* Hunting was an important aspect of the trekboer economy, as is indicated by the fact that the first grazing licences were applied for in good hunting areas. Trekboer hunters with horses and firearms were able to deplete game in a given area far more rapidly than indigenous hunters. In addition, their livestock depleted the grazing resources of wild animals. Often it was the hunters who led the way into the interior, in their quest for game.

- *Breakdown of Khoekhoe society:* As you will see in Learning Unit 4, the breakdown of Khoekhoe society meant that land was vacated for white expansion. Many Khoekhoe retreated into the interior in an attempt to escape the areas of white settlement, but in doing so they unwittingly guided whites to good hunting and grazing areas.

- *Environmental factors:* Once the trekboers had penetrated the mountain ranges which surrounded the south-western Cape, expansion into the interior was relatively easy, in that there were few significant geographical barriers. Although parts of the interior were very dry, which meant that grazing could be quickly exhausted, the open plains facilitated travel. The favourable climate and distribution of vegetation also did not restrict expansion.

- *Psychological factors:* Some attitudes played a role in the process of expansion. The desire for independence from the VOC and the aversion to manual labour of many whites were significant factors. Individualism and intolerance were two characteristics which manifested themselves in the interior, and contributed to the tendency to maintain distance from

neighbours and government. The compulsion to keep moving seems to have become very embedded in trekboer society.

Expansion did not take place without resistance from indigenous groups. Many Khoekhoe communities had fragmented by the beginning of the 18th century, but they continued to resist encroachment on their traditional land, mainly by small-scale but persistent raiding, which delayed and diverted expansion, especially in the northern areas. Scattered San bands were often even more of an obstacle to the trekboers. Totally dependent on the environment for their survival, they were most threatened by advancing white pastoralists, and resisted fiercely and effectively in some regions, such as in the Sneeuberg region.

- *The limits of expansion:* Children of trekboers tended to follow the lifestyle of their parents, thus accelerating the expansion process. In the short term, hunting and stock farming offered considerable advantages, enabling subsistence where few alternatives existed. But the advantages soon disappeared when the increase in population placed excessive demands on available land, and long-term disadvantages started to become obvious.

  To improve farming methods, stock farmers needed markets, supplies, and better transport. These could not be provided until population density and commercial opportunities attracted traders and merchants into the interior in sufficient numbers to allow villages and small towns to grow. This had not happened by the 1780s, when trekboers could no longer continue to move freely in search of new grazing land, in both the north and the east. In the north, the region became increasingly inhospitable, and the competition for resources more intense, while in the east they encountered strong resistance from the Xhosa and the San people.

  Trekboer farming methods were, in addition, wasteful, and had led to a serious deterioration in the quality of land and grazing. These factors led to a severe crisis during the 1780s and 1790s, when continued and relatively unhindered expansion proved impossible.

It was thus a combination of factors which led to the expansion of the area of white settlement.

Activity 3.6

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.6 in Learning Unit 3, which encourages debate about the reasons for the expansion of white farmers into the Cape interior.

Characteristics of the trekboer lifestyle

The trekboer lifestyle was very different from that of the freeburgher farmers of the south-western Cape. The different economic base of their society led to the development of a distinct way of life, in some respects very similar to that of indigenous inhabitants such as the Khoekhoe. This represented an adaptation to local conditions, markedly different from their traditional European background.

- *Trekboer economy:* Hunting and pastoralism formed the economic foundation of trekboer life. These, together with some small-scale planting, provided them with the bulk of their food requirements and raw materials. Hunting and herding also provided the trekboers with their only source of trade. Ivory and feathers in particular were popular in the Cape Town market and brought good returns. These enabled the trekboers to meet their few cash commitments, such as rentals and taxes for their loan farms.

  There seems to have been little incentive for the trekboers to become more than marginally involved in commerce and trade. Transport was time-consuming and hazardous, and most commodities sent to Cape Town suffered spoilage. The livestock market was, in addition, manipulated by the VOC and prices were frequently artificially low. Goods had either to be transported from Cape Town by the trekboers themselves, which was difficult, or obtained from the few traders in the interior, who could demand high prices as they had no competition.

  In these circumstances, exchanges were kept to a minimum, and the trekboer households became virtually self-sufficient, not only in food but in all respects. They met their needs with their own skills and available materials, such as timber, stone, animal hides and horns. There were no specialists, such as carpenters or builders, in the interior, since there were no towns or centres of settlement where they could practise such trades successfully.

  There has been considerable debate about the extent to which trekboers were tied into the market economy of Cape Town and the south-western Cape. Certainly, the degree of market involvement varied. Some trekboers, particularly those closer to the south-western Cape, were more closely tied into the market economy than those further in the interior. In general, however, the majority only operated on the fringes of the market-exchange economy.

- *Social life:* The sparse and scattered settlement in the interior resulted in physical isolation, and consequently led to social and cultural impoverishment. With no community life, schools or churches, intellectual and spiritual life were limited.

  Trekboer material culture was similarly restricted. In addition to the scarcity of money and the difficulties of supply, the mobility of the trekboers prevented the establishment of elaborate homes and the accumulation of possessions.

Domestic arrangements often appeared unsophisticated and crude. Dwellings were often extremely simple, consisting of a single room serving many purposes: sleeping, living and cooking arrangements would often be in a single space, which could also serve as a livestock enclosure as well. Many trekboers, particularly the *eenlopendes*, lived in their wagons or in reed shelters.

- *Political life:* Isolation and independence encouraged individualism, which was often expressed in rebellion against authority. In particular, trekboers were intolerant of all attempts to control their relations with free indigenous peoples and with their labourers. As distances from Cape Town increased, direct control by the administration became impossible.

  Local agents of government, such as 'landdrosts' (magistrates) and 'heemraden' (representatives of rural farming communities), were introduced into the interior only after the 1740s, and were so few and remote that their influence was limited. Also, they lacked military power to assert their will or that of the VOC. By the 1780s and 1790s, VOC authority began to decline in the south-western Cape as well, as the economic power of the Company began to weaken. This was the period when conflict between trekboers and indigenous inhabitants began to increase, as competition for land in the interior became more serious. The VOC's lack of military power in the interior meant that it was unable to control the settlement patterns or the trading activities of the trekboers.

  As a result, trekboers did not hesitate to take the law into their own hands, which contributed to the turbulent relations between different groups in the interior. Weak though the controls were, the trekboers could not entirely ignore the Cape government. They remained dependent on the administration for supplies of arms and gunpowder, which was a lever with which the VOC occasionally tried to use to enforce its authority.

  When the VOC did try to curb the independence of the trekboers, it was generally met with trekboer resistance. The VOC was often uncomfortable at the way in which trekboers appeared to alienate the Khoekhoe, especially through their plunder of Khoekhoe livestock. There were occasional strong mutinies by trekboers against VOC authority during the 18th century, such as the rebellion by Estienne Barbier in 1738-1739 or that of Adriaen van Jaarsveld in 1793. In general, though, the trekboers were able to live largely free of VOC authority during the 18th century.

3.6 Conclusion

By the end of the 18th century, the expansion of the trekboers was halted in the north by harsh environmental conditions and competition for resources from various people, while in the east they encountered the Xhosa who presented a formidable barrier to their continued advance. Their fortunes and their interaction with the people they encountered in these regions will be explored in Learning Units 6 and 7.

Activity 3.7

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 3.7 in Learning Unit 3, which ties up the themes of Learning Units 2 and 3.