Tutorial Letter 502/3/2018

Southern Africa until the early 1800s: encounters and transformations

HSY1512

Semesters 1 and 2

Department of History

This tutorial letter is the second and last part of your study guide for this module.

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CONTENTS

Page

4 LEARNING UNIT 4: KHOESAN COMMUNITIES AND THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM

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

- What was the situation of Khoesan communities in the south-western Cape before contact with people from Europe?
- Discuss early encounters between the Khoesan and Europeans.
- Explore the impact of the establishment and expansion of the Dutch settlement on the Khoesan before 1700.
- How do we account for the disintegration of Khoesan societies in the south-western Cape by the early 18th century?
- Discuss the experiences of Khoesan people during the 18th century.
- What is the situation of Khoesan communities in contemporary South Africa?

The Khoekhoe and San people (the Khoesan) were independent herders, hunters and gatherers who moved regularly from one place to another in search of greener pastures to support themselves (see the discussion of their lifestyle in Learning Unit 1).

When they came into contact for the first time with people from Europe (initially the Portuguese) in 1488, they had various reactions to them, which included avoidance, peaceful trade and strong resistance and violence. Over a number of decades, they were obliged to become used to the presence of Portuguese traders at the Cape, who visited on a temporary basis.

After the permanent settlement of the Dutch from 1652, however, the Khoesan became increasingly resistant to the presence of Europeans. The expansion of the Dutch settlement into the south-western Cape and the Cape interior led to the disintegration and impoverishment of the Khoesan.

This learning unit explores the socio-economic life of the Khoesan before their encounter with Europeans, and then examines the impact of colonialism on their societies. In many cases, independent herders, hunters and gatherers were reduced into landless and dispossessed subjects of colonialism; but others adapted and continued to survive in different ways.

4.1 The Khoesan before the advent of Europeans

The term ‘Khoesan’ – coined by an academic called Leonard Schultz in the 1920s – refers to both the Khoekhoe (generally understood to be herding societies) and the San (usually regarded as hunter-gatherers). The contemporary Khoesan revivalist movement today also uses the term ‘Khoesan’ or ‘Khoisan’ to describe themselves. They have sometimes been regarded as two distinct groups, but they had many similarities – in their origins, languages, religion, and social structure. Historically, they comprise five main groupings – two of them, the San and the Cape Khoekhoe, date from early times, whereas the other three, the Nama, Koranna and Griqua, date from the colonial period.

We will sketch their economic and social life before the arrival of Europeans in southern Africa, so that we can better understand the impact of colonialism on their societies. Refer also to Learning Unit 1 for additional information.

Economic life

The Khoesan were hunter-gatherers and herders who secured a livelihood for themselves by nomadic behaviour to exploit the natural resources of their areas of settlement. They practised transhumant pastoralism, following the rains with their livestock and setting their cattle kraals in different places as they sought to utilise natural resources effectively.

Livestock, particularly cattle, were central in many Khoekhoe societies. Cattle were the main source of wealth. They were not used primarily for meat (although this did occur on special or ritual occasions) but for their milk, which was an important part of their diet. Although cattle were herded by men, women milked both cattle and sheep, and stored the milk in animal skin containers. Meat was obtained mainly from the hunting of wild animals, which were hunted by men armed with bows and poisoned arrowheads, as well as by traps made from various types of plants, branches or skins. Cattle were also used as pack animals when the Khoesan were on the move, and Portuguese sources also mention that Khoesan used their cattle in war, as they were chased ahead of warriors to act as a buffer against enemies.

The Khoesan gathered wild fruits, berries, bulbs, roots and tubers as an important part of their diet. This was done by women and young girls. Women had vast knowledge of the veld, and gathering was an easy task for them. They had special implements which they used to dig underground foods. These consisted of long sharp digging sticks of various kinds. Vegetable foods that were gathered were often supplemented with insects such as locusts.

Khoesan who lived along coastal areas used seafood as an important part of their diet. They developed different ways of catching fish, the most common of which were the use of hooks made from bones attached to a long string, spears to kill the fish in shallow waters and the building of trap pools into which fish were washed during high tides.

Trade was an important economic activity for many Khoesan communities. They traded with each other, and in later times also with Bantu-speaking groups in the southern African interior and with Europeans who visited the coasts near their settlements. Items that were traded generally included products not easily available to them, such as copper and iron. They did not mine or smelt iron and copper themselves, and they depended on others for a supply of these two valued products. Iron was used for making arrowheads, spearheads and ornaments. This made their hunting activities more effective, and also enabled them to make better weapons. Copper was used mainly for making ornaments and items such as earrings, bangles and pendants.

Social and cultural life

The Khoesan lived in groups that varied in size from as few as 20 people to groups that were much larger. Those who survived by hunting and gathering tended to live in much smaller groups (no more than a few family members or people connected to them, who recognised that all could participate in decisions affecting the group) than those who owned livestock, who settled in larger villages. Villages tended to consist of a number of clans consisting of several families, each distinguished by its male members, who mingled with friendly neighbouring villages to find wives and establish new family units. A single village often consisted of ten to twelve huts, and clusters of villages had influence over large areas of land. Groups of families that made up a village were overseen by a headman, or leader. Group membership was often fluid, and members often left groups for others, and allowed new people to join.

Livestock ownership was central in determining leadership of groups who owned cattle and sheep. As the main source of wealth, livestock also conferred political influence on the individuals who owned cattle in particular. The most powerful leaders were generally those who owned the most livestock. Livestock gave them influence over poorer people, through practices such as clientship; in return for their loyalty to a livestock owner, poorer people were offered food security.

Khoesan groups often cooperated with one another in times of danger posed to a particular area. However, conflict between them (which took the form of livestock raiding and open warfare) was also common, and this is depicted dramatically in some of their rock paintings. The conflicts were generally caused by one group encroaching into another group's hunting and grazing areas, access to which was vital for their economic well-being.

Religious expression frequently reveals insight into the lives of different groups. Khoesan rituals and myths point to a central concern for cattle, such as how cattle were acquired by their ancestors. Hunting was also important within ritual expression. Animals in Khoesan rock paintings stand at the symbolic and ritual centre of the initiation ceremonies of numerous Khoesan groups, as well as their trance and curing dances. They worshipped their creator god named *Tsui-//Goab*, who was associated with the sky and the rain, and who was believed to reside in the 'village in the sky'. This was believed to be the destination of the souls of the dead Khoesan. They prayed to their god to supply them with sufficient food and water. Some groups also directed their prayers to the sun and the stars.

Many rituals marked the critical periods of change in a person's life – birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage and death. Transition rites were important within societies: the emphasis on transition rituals to mark an individual's change in status showed clearly how important age was in defining status within Khoesan communities. The ritual and festive activity which took place when a child was born often recurred in other Khoesan rituals. Prior to delivery, the mother to be was taken to a hut where she remained for at least seven days after delivery. After this period of seclusion, both were ceremonially reintroduced into society. Their bodies were smeared with cow dung, fat and buchu (a fragrant plant). The rituals of incorporation were accompanied by a feast in which members of the kraal and blood relations from other kraals participated.

All the Khoesan groups had medicine men (sometimes called shamans) who played a pivotal role in their spiritual life. They were an important link between the people and the supernatural world. Medicine men had power to heal diseases, and their cures took place at a dance ceremony around the fireplace, where they entered a state of trance and used their power to heal the sick and drive away evil. They also controlled the making of rain during their trances.

These traditions and practices built up over a number of centuries among Khoesan people living in southern Africa, and particularly in the area known as the south-western Cape. They were to be greatly tested as they came into contact with people from Europe in the late 15th century and thereafter.

Activity 4.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 4.1 in Learning Unit 4, which deals with Khoesan life and experience before contact with Europeans.

4.2 Early encounters between Khoesan and Europeans, 1488–1652

The first recorded contact that we know of between the Khoesan and Europeans occurred in 1488. The Cape was officially colonised by the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) in 1652. Thus, a period of 164 years passed from the time of initial contact between the two groups and permanent European settlement, and there were many shifts in relationships during this period.

At first, interactions between the Khoesan and the Europeans were characterised by curiosity, suspicion, avoidance and some peaceful trade, but violence was also a feature. It was natural for the Khoesan to be suspicious of white people, whom they had neither met nor seen before. They did not know what to expect from people who looked, dressed and spoke differently from them. Certainly, however, the Khoesan were extremely wary of the intentions of Europeans who visited the Cape.

When the Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Dias and his crew set foot at the Cape in 1488 (near present-day Mossel Bay), they were the first Europeans to encounter the livestock-owning people in the region. There was little real interaction between them, because both the Khoesan and the Europeans kept to themselves. Nine years later, in 1497, the Khoesan encountered another Portuguese sailor, Vasco da Gama. This meeting ended in some skirmishes, which wounded several sailors. Renowned Portuguese sailors like Antonio da Saldanah and Francisco d'Almeida, who met the Khoesan in 1503 and 1510 respectively, testified to similar violent encounters. These unpleasant meetings created the impression among the Portuguese that the Khoesan were a violent people. However, from a Khoesan perspective, they were merely defending the land which historically belonged to them. Through these actions, the Khoesan probably managed to delay possible settlement and colonisation by Europeans. The Portuguese established other bases along the west and east African coasts, and tended to avoid the Cape coast as much as possible.

This, however, did not deter other Europeans from visiting the Cape, and they could leave neither the Khoekhoe nor their country alone. Avoiding the Cape coast on the sea journey to the East was often not practical, especially because of its strategic location. Sea journeys were long and difficult, often requiring many stopover points to acquire fresh supplies from local communities. Southern Africa's pivotal position and the strategic location of Table Bay proved vital to seafarers. Europeans came to feel that any voyage around the Cape without actually dropping anchor in Table Bay was an error of judgement which could easily jeopardise their reaching their various final destinations in the East.

There was occasional and infrequent contact between the white and Khoesan people for most of the 16th century. By the 1590s, however, European exploration of new trading routes to the East had intensified. This resulted in increased contact between the two groups. In 1497, Da Gama and his men had bartered livestock, as had other occasional sailors after him. However, a period of much more extensive trading in livestock began between 1591 and 1610, when Khoesan contact with mainly English and Dutch sailors increased because they were attracted by the livestock resources of the Khoesan.

A new era of economic relations dominated by trade therefore began. The Khoesan were willing to trade large numbers of cattle and sheep in return for goods such as tobacco and iron. Iron in particular was greatly valued, because the Khoesan could make iron weapons to improve their hunting activities and defend themselves more effectively. The Khoekhoe also were more relaxed during this period about encounters with white sailors, because they believed that they were only interested in trading and not in settlement. The sailors needed fresh provisions most

of all, particularly meat, from local Khoekhoe communities. This they obtained, at prices which they themselves found hard to believe: in the 1590s, in exchange for a few pieces of iron, the Khoekhoe supplied the sailors with sufficient livestock to supply their ships for long voyages.

The trading boom lasted almost two decades, but it suddenly ended in 1610, when the iron market became flooded. The Khoesan were now sophisticated traders who could control the terms of trade. The English responded by infiltrating the Khoesan communities in a bid to bribe them. They even went further and captured influential leaders, one example of whom was Coree, who was captured and taken to England. The English hoped they could brainwash Coree to divulge information about the Cape and its inhabitants, which could be used at a later stage, and to persuade his people to resume the former levels of trade. Coree was not swayed in deceiving his own people. In fact, his abduction did the English cause more harm than good. On his return to the Cape in 1614, Coree first refused to barter any livestock at all, and later took up arms against the English. In 1616, he drove a party of English sailors to Robben Island, and in 1618 the Khoesan killed four English sailors in Table Bay. As a result of this mistrust, livestock bartering came to a virtual halt until 1652.

Whereas Coree refused to become an agent and go-between to the English, Autshumato – commonly known as Harry – was prepared to assist the Dutch. Autshumato was the leader of a mixed group of cattleless Khoesan, called ‘Strandlopers’, who lived along the beach in the Cape peninsula, and survived from their fishing and gathering activities. Though cattleless, Autshumato established himself as double agent for the Dutch and English. A versatile person who mastered both the English and Dutch languages, he became the link and interpreter between cattle-owning Khoekhoe and European traders. Through these activities, he showed a different response to that of Coree to the presence of Europeans in the south-western Cape.

Of all the ships that visited the Cape coast from 1488, the one which ran aground in 1647 most changed the course of South Africa's history. In March 1647, a Dutch vessel named *Nieuwe Haerlem* was shipwrecked in Table Bay. Although the majority of its crew soon left on other vessels bound for Europe, about 60 men were left stranded at the Cape for more than a year, and lived off what they could barter from the Khoesan. Contact between the two groups was generally friendly, and the Khoesan probably tolerated their presence in the belief that they would shortly depart – which indeed they did.

However, the main consequence of this episode lay in the fact that two of the stranded sailors, Leendert Janszen and Matthijs Proot, compiled a report known as the *Remonstrantie*, in July 1649. They recommended that the VOC establish a refreshment station at the Cape. The report can be seen as blueprint for colonisation and white settlement. The authors argued that the Cape could play an important role in trade, which would benefit the VOC.

The Khoesan had no knowledge of this report or its contents. No vessel called at the Cape until April 1652, when three Dutch ships under the command of Jan van Riebeeck docked in Table Bay with the aim of carrying out the recommendations of the *Remonstrantie* and making a permanent settlement in the area.

This settlement brought an immediate end to the first phase of Khoekhoe-white contact, which had been dominated by bartering, mutual mistrust and the creation of negative perceptions. A new period began, during which the Dutch saw themselves as undisputed rulers of the Cape. From a Khoekhoe perspective, of course, this settlement represented an invasion of their land, and signalled a period of uncertainty and increasing levels of conflict, which was to result in dispossession.

Activity 4.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 4.2 in Learning Unit 4, which deals with the early phases of Khoesan contact with European sailors and traders.

4.3 The expansion of Dutch settlement in the south-western Cape, 1652–1720

As the commander of the Cape colony for the first decade of settlement (1652–1662), Jan van Riebeeck was only interested in fulfilling his mission: the establishment of a successful refreshment station. In order to succeed, he was instructed by the VOC to stay on a friendly footing with the Khoekhoe, in order to secure livestock. Dutch interest in the Cape was mainly profit-driven, and from the outset relations between Khoesan and Dutch centred on trade and securing land for cultivation.

It is difficult to say exactly when the Khoesan realised that the Dutch had settled permanently, and were not intending to depart. The allocation of land on the banks of the Liesbeeck River, behind Table Mountain, to freeburgher farmers in 1657 (see Learning Unit 2) came as a surprise to many Khoesan on the peninsula. This was certainly an indication of Dutch permanent settlement to them. Access to land thereafter dominated relationships. The farms of the freeburghers encroached on Khoesan grazing land and placed restraints on their nomadic way of life.

The Khoesan demonstrated their opposition to these developments by withdrawing from the cattle trade and by stealing from the Dutch. They then trebled the price of livestock, which made it difficult for Van Riebeeck to supply passing ships with fresh meat. Some of the Dutch thereafter forcibly confiscated Khoekhoe cattle. Escalating tensions led to the outbreak of armed conflict, often called the first Khoe-Dutch war, in 1659. All the various Khoesan groups in the peninsula became involved in the war, and their guerilla tactics and theft of oxen brought the activities of the Dutch settlement to a virtual standstill.

In April 1660, however, the Khoesan asked for peace. They protested against the wrongful occupation of their land, which they argued had been theirs for as long as they could remember, and they demanded free access to their land again. Van Riebeeck's response was that the land was now in Dutch hands and they were not willing to relinquish it. Although the idea of private land ownership was foreign to their way of thinking, the Khoesan were convinced that the Dutch had taken their land without permission. It would seem clear that the Dutch claimed the Cape peninsula by right of conquest.

Over the next two decades, the white settlement expanded rapidly and soon various Khoesan groups found themselves within the VOC's sphere of influence. In late 1670, the Cochoqua Khoe, under the leadership of Gonnema, attacked Dutch settlers who entered their territory. This led to heightened tension and a growing number of attacks. However, in 1672, two treaties were concluded with the Khoesan, which allocated to the whites the whole of the coastal plain, including Saldanha Bay and False Bay. It is unlikely that the Khoesan understood the full implications of these agreements. They perhaps agreed because of a provision that they could retain grazing rights. Despite this, however, the more the Dutch settled in the area, the more they intensified their resistance.

This led to the outbreak of the second Khoe-Dutch war, a struggle which lasted four years between 1673 and 1677. During this intermittent war, the horses and firearms which the Dutch possessed led to the eventual downfall of Gonnema and his followers. Gonnema's defeat meant that resistance by the Khoesan in the peninsula came to an end. As a result, the Dutch could occupy increased amounts of land with little resistance from the Khoesan.

Not all Khoesan were opposed to the presence of the Dutch. A number of groups and individuals were prepared to cooperate with them. In both wars, the Dutch had relied heavily on Khoesan who offered them loyalty, and some had actively helped in the defence of the Dutch settlement. One of these was Dorha, or Klaas, who supplied the Dutch with considerable information about his arch-enemy, Gonnema, and who supplied 250 men to assist the Dutch in the second Khoe-Dutch war.

The two Khoe-Dutch wars had a disastrous effect on the political independence of the Peninsula Khoesan. Powerful chiefs were disempowered and capitulated to Dutch conquest. By the end of the 17th century, the Dutch were firmly in control of the Cape peninsula, as they ensured that Khoesan resistance was crushed or, alternatively, they secured the collaboration of Khoesan leaders.

The breakdown of the Khoesan communities in the south-western Cape does not mean the complete extinction of these communities, but rather the breakdown of their community structures and cultural practices (as outlined in Section 4.1 above). Loss of livestock had cultural implications. It affected social and economic functions within Khoe society, such as births, marriages, burials, inheritance, clientship, and, above all, their social status.

Many Khoesan communities became economically dependent on the colony for their livelihood and security. The VOC had been mainly responsible for this situation: through trade, it consumed large numbers of Khoesan livestock; through war, it fought and defeated the Khoesan, subordinated their chiefs, drew the Khoesan into their legal system, and sponsored the expansion of the colony into Khoesan pastures and hunting grounds.

Some have argued that the VOC was not wholly responsible for the collapse of independent Khoesan communities. They have noted that Khoesan were not completely united in their opposition to the VOC and Dutch settlement, but some had cooperated and collaborated with the Dutch to differing degrees. We have noted examples of this above. In addition, the trade of livestock tended to weaken some communities, as they traded away their most precious resource, and this weakened the ability of chiefs to attract loyal followers.

The Khoesan economy rested on the two interdependent pillars of land and cattle. Thus, for pastoralists, one without the other was useless. This explains why loss of land by the Khoesan was so important. Without land, the Khoesan could not keep the same numbers of cattle, whose retention was essential for the nourishment of their communities and their continued independence and self-esteem.

From the 1660s, Khoesan herds and flocks began a steady decline. At times, the Khoesan may have bartered too many livestock for valueless commodities. This is a partial explanation for the decline, however. Most historians agree that the freeburghers greatly contributed to this loss of livestock through robbery, illegal trade and forced tribute. These increased demands compelled the Khoesan to respond with defiance, sometimes slaughtering their cattle rather than paying tribute to the Dutch. The failure of the VOC to control these illegal activities of the freeburghers also contributed to the Khoesan's loss of livestock.

Thus, the demand for the livestock of the Khoesan by both the VOC and freeburgher farmers intensified the decline of their herds. The demand increased yet further after 1690, when the

area of white settlement began to increase beyond the south-western Cape. One heavy blow to the Khoesan occurred when the Dutch began to settle in the Tulbagh area, where the fertile land and attractive climate provided excellent opportunities for both pastoral and agricultural farming.

A second and perhaps even more significant blow to the Khoesan was the outbreak of smallpox in 1713. Of all the western diseases brought to the Cape by sailors and settlers, smallpox was undoubtedly the worst. During the course of the 18th century, three major outbreaks of smallpox occurred – in 1713, 1755 and 1767 – and these killed thousands of white, slave and Khoesan people. Smallpox played a crucial role in the further breakdown of Khoesan society. For example, the disease spread to the furthest districts of the colony, and people in the Swellendam region were particularly severely affected. Khoesan people died in significant numbers, and as a result, livestock were neglected, left unattended and scattered. Smallpox victims who fled from Swellendam infected other communities with whom they came in contact. In the 1720s, groups further into the interior were infected. Some estimates are that approximately one-third of all Khoesan succumbed to the disease, which is a devastating number, and in a few districts, led to the near disappearance of the Khoesan.

The Khoesan-Dutch wars, Dutch technological superiority, the loss of land and cattle, and smallpox all combined to reduce the freedom and independence of the Khoesan. They became increasingly incorporated into the colonial economy as labourers. After losing their valued cattle and land, coupled with the loss of freedom and independence, most Khoesan went to work as labourers on white farms, and effectively became clients of the settlers' economy.

A number of Khoesan groups did leave the Cape permanently. Some settled deep in the interior, well beyond the borders of the white settlement. Those who settled beyond the Gariep River became known as the Korana (or Kora) in the 18th century.

Activity 4.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 4.3 in Learning Unit 4, which deals with the decline of Khoesan communities in the south-western Cape.

4.4 The Khoesan experience during the 18th century

As we have seen, independent Khoesan communities had broken down in almost all parts of the Cape colony by 1720. Dispossessed and landless Khoesan societies had to become labourers after losing their cattle, land and independence. This meant permanent settlement on the farms in the south-western Cape or on farms of the trekboers in the Cape interior, away from the colony. Their lives as subjugated farm labourers were dominated by work, and they began to become alienated from their traditional cultures and language. Some began to wear European-style clothing and to adapt to European norms and values.

Experiences on farms

The master-servant relationship between Khoesan and white farmers reflected economic and social inequalities. Khoesan herders often offered their cattle-keeping expertise to trekboers in exchange for access to water and grazing. Those who had for some reason lost all their

livestock, would work for trekboers in exchange for food (meat and dairy products) and a portion of the offspring, similar to what they had been used to during the precolonial period. Such mutual dependence relationships could potentially work well, but were often very difficult to maintain, especially when trekboers defrauded Khoesan clients of their rightful portion of cattle, making it impossible for them to regain their economic independence. In the agricultural sector of the south-western Cape, Khoesan became farm labourers, doing agricultural tasks such as ploughing, sowing and harvesting, which was a clear indication of the loss of their independent hunter-gatherer and herder status. Women and children were also incorporated into farm labour forces: women had domestic duties which included tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and the hauling of firewood, while their children tended small livestock.

The social position of Khoesan servants on farms was little different from that of the slaves (to whom we pay attention in Learning Unit 5). Their inhuman treatment often reflected their low status in the colonial society. Since Khoesan were neither owned nor regarded as saleable property, as slaves were, masters seldom cared about their wellbeing, and they could even be treated worse than the slaves. Violence was a common experience of Khoesan labourers on farms.

On farms, Khoesan servants were frequently responsible for their own livelihood. Their living conditions were appalling, usually because they were extremely poor. They sometimes put their knowledge of constructing reed huts to good use on the settlers' farms. On some large farms, Khoesan servants of both sexes were allowed to share lodging, meaning there was overcrowding and no privacy. Incest, rape and other forms of sexual abuse were common. Khoesan women were often rape victims of masters, as well as slaves and Khoesan men.

Despite harsh laws against them, Khoesan servants in principle had access both to local *landdrosts* (magistrates) and the Court of Justice, the highest legal authority in the colony. They thus did have legal rights. Most of their complaints that reached courts concerned maltreatment and non-payment for their labour services. Lack of written contracts often complicated labour disputes in court, and as a result most cases were settled in favour of the white farmers. Those farmers who were found guilty were generally given minor punishments, such as fines or even a caution. In essence, it seems that access of the Khoesan to law was deemed a privilege rather than a right.

Miscegenation (sexual relations across colour and cultural barriers) led to the emergence of a new group from the slaves and Khoesan. They were known as *Bastard-Hottentotten* and were initially deemed to have legal freedom (that is, they were not slaves). In both 1721 and 1775, influential and wealthy settlers petitioned the Cape government to introduce a law compelling the Khoesan-slave offspring to work for them on farms until the age of 25. In 1775, the VOC agreed to this request, and instituted a labour system known as the *inboekstelsel* (indentured labour system). The farmers agreed to provide indentured labourers with clothes, food and shelter, while children were forced to work for a specified period (either to 18 or 25). Indentured labour can essentially be seen as another form of slavery, because children and young adults were forced to work up to the age of 25, and were seldom offered freedom between the age of 18 and 25.

Khoesan people who lost their livestock and freedom were frequently under severe stress. This made them prone to alcoholism. During leisure time, many consumed a great deal of alcohol in a bid to escape their situation for a short while. In addition, throughout the 18th century, settler farmers often used alcohol in part payment for labour, making it more easily accessible.

Resistance

Khoesan servants frequently resisted their conditions and their treatment, either as individuals or in groups. Planned and spontaneous desertion was the most common form of resistance because it deprived the trekboers of cheap labour. Khoesan servants and slaves often aided each other when escaping. Other forms of resistance included the poisoning of farmers' food, arson, murder, go-slows and refusal to work, the ignoring of instructions, swearing and mocking in the Khoesan language, and stock theft. These expressions of resistance showed that Khoesan people did not passively accept their position as menial labourers, and were willing to resist white colonialism and expansion.

In parts of the interior, such as the Roggeveld and Bokkeveld areas, white trekboer farmers came into contact with Khoesan communities who until then had successfully existed by independent hunting and gathering. Some of these were massacred by trekboer commandos on expeditions into the interior. Men were often killed or enslaved, while women and children were taken as prisoners and incorporated into the trekboer economy as a labour force. By the 1780s, many of these captured Khoesan peoples were legally indentured.

Despite this, there were still some Khoesan communities in the Roggeveld that managed to retain their independence. Many of them vigorously resisted white settlement in the interior. Their attacks made life very difficult for the trekboers, and they often succeeded in driving them from their farms. Towards the end of the 18th century, large numbers of uprooted Khoesan formed new groups, occasionally numbering as many as 1 000 people, and provided considerable resistance to white settlement; for example, in 1785, large parts of the Roggeveld were controlled by the Khoesan, not white settlers. The fact that there were greater numbers of Khoesan in the interior made the success of collective resistance more likely.

One particular example of resistance illustrates this, although it was ultimately not successful. In 1788, a Khoekhoe rebel and prophet named Jan Paerl persuaded about 300 Khoesan people to rebel against the Dutch. In the wake of serious land dispossession, cultural decline and forced labour, the Khoekhoe of Swellendam staged an uprising during which they hoped to drive Dutch settlers from the Cape colony and to restore their own form of government. As rebel, prophet and 'messiah', known as *Onsen Liewen Heer*, Paerl told his followers that the world would be destroyed on 25 October 1788. He urged his followers to slaughter the cattle of white people, build new straw huts with two doors, and burn their western-style clothing.

The participation of Khoekhoe women strengthened this act of Khoesan resistance considerably. Slaves, too, showed solidarity with those who hoped to reap the benefits of a freed Cape colony. Colonists became alarmed at these events in Swellendam, calling the movement an 'unholy threat' (*gedreigt onheil*). The movement was aborted in November 1788, when the landdrost reported that 'everything was calm and quiet'. Little came of this first recorded attempt at the Cape of millenarian resistance – resistance through a belief that a new world of prosperity and abundance would come about with the help of a higher being, bringing deliverance from social oppression. Paerl was arrested and jailed for two years. Despite his failure to prevent white people from living on ancestral land, Paerl's act of defiance showed strong Khoekhoe opposition to white dominance.

Soon after the failure of this rebellion in Swellendam, a group of Khoesan rebels under the leadership of Captain Kees staged a revolt in 1793, protesting against maltreatment and non-payment of wages. Another uprising flared up in 1799 in the eastern Cape. Known as the 'servants' revolt', several Khoesan rebels torched and raided farms in the vicinity of Graaff-Reinet on the eastern Cape frontier, killing 29 white farmers. Although their grievances included

non-payment and maltreatment, the main cause of the uprising was summarised by a rebel when he said that they wanted to restore the country of their forefathers.

By the early 1800s, the Khoesan were marginalised and subsumed into colonial society. Although they obtained legal equality, with the so-called 'Black Circuit' of 1812, when circuit court judges investigated cases of maltreatment, and with the promulgation of Ordinance 50 of 1828, which freed Khoesan servants from coerced labour, the Khoesan were to remain landless individuals haunted by an oppressive past and faced with an uncertain future.

Christianity

The fact that many Khoesan were losing contact with traditional belief systems, combined with the fact of their servitude and extremely difficult circumstances, did mean that some were ready to turn to other forms of belief. Unsurprisingly, Khoesan people experienced other religions differently. Some viewed Christianity as linked to honour, status and respectability, while others associated it with the conditions of exploitation.

Missionary activity among the Swellendam Khoesan commenced in 1737 when the Moravian missionary, Georg Schmidt, arrived at the Cape with a specific mission to convert the Overberg Khoesan people to Christianity. After spending several years in the district at Baviaans' Kloof (now known as Genadendal), preaching and baptising Khoesan converts, his stay came to an abrupt end in 1743. One of his well-known converts whom he baptised was a Khoesan woman, Vehettge Tikkuie, called 'Magdalena'. After Schmidt's departure, she kept his teachings alive among the Khoesan, and so became the first woman evangelist at the Cape.

The preaching of Christianity and the baptism of Khoesan people became a contentious issue among white settlers. Baptism implied equality and full 'burgher' (citizen) status. White people were threatened by the possibility of the Khoesan becoming their equals, and opposition by white people to mission activity led to Schmidt's departure from the Cape in 1743.

Some Khoesan people embraced Christianity, for various reasons. Early Khoesan interaction with mission Christianity was shaped by existing Khoekhoe religious beliefs. Khoesan converts during the early phase of religious contact did not receive the gospel the way missionaries intended, but heard and accepted the message in accordance with their own needs, desires and social circumstances. Some converts, therefore, were genuinely inspired by religious reasons, while others saw Christianity and the mission station as a means to escape the harsh realities of farm life.

The return of the Moravians to Genadendal in November 1792 brought some relief to the Overberg Khoesan, as many lost their original way of life. The mission station became a haven to hundreds of Khoesan peoples from all over the Cape colony, and led to the emergence of a new community. Their presence also paved the way for other missionary societies to begin work at the Cape.

The rise of missionary enthusiasm in Europe in the late 18th century explains why the Christian gospel of salvation was exported to the Cape at the time, but many Khoesan were also ready for conversion by some missionary teachings. For example, the violent actions of farmers could be explained by the view that they were trapped by original sin, and Christianity offered Khoesan the hope for a better tomorrow as a reward for their present suffering.

In the late 18th century, as one example, a new mission station at Bethelsdorp (near present-day Port Elizabeth) became a place for Khoesan who were seeking spiritual and economic asylum from their conditions in the area. They migrated there looking for shelter against

violence, and in the hope of establishing greater economic dependence, as well as acquiring literacy and salvation. Bethelsdorp became a threat to white farmers, because it seemed to jeopardise a supply of indentured labour to their farms. The farmers did not want their labour supply undermined, and hence they tried to oppose the conversion of their Khoesan labourers to Christianity. This demonstrates that the missionaries and the farmers were in direct competition for the Khoesan, and many farmers tried to curtail opportunities for their servants to access Christianity.

In addition to being used as short-term shelters, mission stations also were a means to improve the economic and social status of the Khoesan converts. Khoesan labourers could, if financially stressed, hire themselves out and escape conditions of bondage. Mission stations could also become legal bases for Khoesan people. This meant that they could leave their families and cattle at a mission station while being away on long-term contract work on a farm. Many also were able to learn how to write and speak English or Dutch at mission stations, and so advance their education as well.

Some Khoesan women were also converted to Christianity during this colonial period. Women were attracted by the promise of status, success and freedom. Some female Khoesan servants were baptised because male settlers wished to marry them. They were often baptised not so much because of the efforts of missionaries, but because of the shortage of women for the European settlers.

Activity 4.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 4.4 in Learning Unit 4, which deals with the Khoesan experience during the 18th century.

4.5 The Khoesan in contemporary South Africa

Perhaps one of the questions that we as students of history studying the hunter-gatherers and hunter-herders in southern African history can ask ourselves is: where are the Khoesan people in modern South Africa? The answer, though arguably not obvious, is: they could be in all of us. Because of a long history of intermarriage in the country, it is difficult to identify ‘pure’ Khoesan people, or any other ‘pure’ ethnic or social groups in our modern world.

Despite this, there are descendants of Khoesan people in contemporary South Africa who are advocating for their recognition as a people. Khoesan culture and heritage is therefore very much part of the new South Africa. At present, museums, cultural organisations, universities, government departments and the Khoesan people themselves are trying to keep Khoesan cultural identity alive. Conferences have recently been convened with the aim of making the broader public more aware of marginalised Khoesan communities.

South Africa continues to deal with the legacy of colonialism, and apartheid more recently, during which periods indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their land, and their communities and cultures were destroyed. Although indigenous peoples are not specifically recognised as such in modern South Africa, and official statistics are silent about their presence, the Constitution of 1996 does refer to ‘Khoe’ and ‘San’ people. No clear official

information indicates the number of Khoesan people in modern South Africa, and they are not specifically recognised as indigenous people in the Constitution.

Khoesan culture is still visible in contemporary South Africa, in the legacy left by numerous rock paintings. Many reflect a lifestyle that was destroyed by colonialism. Most Khoesan rock art sites are protected by law to preserve them for posterity. Another cultural legacy is that among the Nama Khoesan, the building of *matjieshuise* (mat houses) has become a powerful tool of identity. The recognition of Khoesan culture and identity is an ongoing struggle. Languages face the risk of extinction, and none has official-language status. It should not be forgotten, however, that Khoesan languages have had great influence in shaping the Xhosa language. Many of the sharp clicks in the Xhosa language were acquired from Khoesan languages.

In modern South Africa, several Khoesan groups, such as the Nama of the Richtersveld and the Griqua under Adam Kok V, have recently emerged to lay claim to their Khoesan heritage. The search for minority rights and the struggle for land, as well as cultural recognition, can also be seen in Namibia and Botswana, where Oorlam Afrikaners, Basters and Basarwa San are engaged in attempts to attain land rights and cultural recognition.

For many others in South Africa, Khoesan-ness is a matter of self-identification. Many Khoesan people in modern South Africa reject terms such as 'Coloured', and prefer to be called Griqua, Nama, or the collective names Khoekhoe, San, Khoesan or Bushman. The struggle for recognition and access to basic services and land by Khoesan communities continues.

It is of historical significance that descendants of those who were victims of early colonialism in the country are today joining together with one another to assert their identity within a larger South African nation. It is further evidence of their resilience and ability to adapt to new situations, something that their forefathers demonstrated during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Activity 4.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 4.5 in Learning Unit 4, which deals with contemporary Khoesan identity in South Africa.

4.6 Conclusion

The once-thriving herding and hunter-gathering communities of southern Africa lost their valued livestock and hunting grounds in the wake of European colonial expansion. The loss of livestock and land stripped the Khoesan of their wealth and influence, and led to the loss of their independence, traditional lifestyles and community structures.

The Khoesan communities did not disappear, but people were assimilated into colonial society as labourers on farms in the south-western Cape and the northern and eastern Cape frontier regions. Many endured very difficult living and working conditions, but they responded to subjugation and dispossession as individuals or by grouping under influential leaders to fight Dutch and later British rule. Though in most cases they were defeated, their attempts to drive white farmers from their land does demonstrate significant political will, which later became a strand of future African nationalism in South Africa.

5 LEARNING UNIT 5: SLAVERY AT THE CAPE

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

- What is slavery, and why do we study it?
- What were the origins of the slave system at the Cape and the slaves themselves?
- What role did slaves play in the economy of the Cape?
- Discuss the experience of slaves at the Cape and the ways in which they were treated.
- In what ways did slaves react to their situation at the Cape, and how effectively?
- Examine the impact of slavery on the social order at the Cape.

This learning unit will explore the system of slavery that was used at the Cape from the early Dutch settlement until the early 19th century. Slavery had an important impact on the Cape economy, and although the slave system was formally abolished in 1838, it helped to shape the nature of future South African labour and race relations to a significant extent.

Many South Africans are also descended from slaves, and unsurprisingly desire to learn more about the experiences of their ancestors. A study of Cape slavery and its legacy helps us to understand subsequent historical developments and appreciate the complexities of the society we live in. The influence of slavery is still relevant today, and can be seen in everyday South African actions and expressions, such as in Islam, in language, in 'coloured' identity, in food, and in many South African names.

5.1 Slavery and bonded labour

Slavery is a major feature of human history. Most societies and regions of the world have utilised and experienced slavery or other forms of bonded labour. In many of these societies, slaves were only a minor part of the labour force, and fulfilled chiefly domestic functions. In other parts of the world, such as Brazil, the Caribbean and North America, slavery was a major component of the economy. In such cases, slave labour was of fundamental importance, and was governed by a complex set of codes and laws to ensure its maximum efficiency.

Slavery existed in many forms throughout the world. For example, forms of bonded labour had existed all over the African continent for several centuries before the arrival of the Europeans in the 15th century. This has sometimes been described as 'slavery', but the African forms of bonded labour were usually different from the slavery imposed by Europeans. In almost all African communities, including some in southern Africa, bonded labour took the form of clientship and serfdom. Clients enjoyed all the rights of freemen, although serfs often had fewer rights. This was different from slavery imposed by Europeans, who denied any rights to slaves and defined them as property. Slaves in Africa generally did not lose all their personal freedom. They had several rights and privileges, and they often had access to family and kin groups.

Although there was significant trading of Africans as slaves, mainly by Islamic merchants in northern Africa and in the Indian Ocean world, for many centuries, slavery was arguably never as important for economic production in Africa as it was to be for European-dominated colonial settlements in Africa, Asia and the Americas after the 15th century. There is considerable debate

among historians and others about differences between slave conditions and experience in various settings where slavery was used.

Activity 5.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 5.1 in Learning Unit 5, which deals with different views of the practice of slavery in Africa.

One of the most important results of the expansion of Europeans into Asia, Africa and the Americas after the 15th century was the introduction of modern slavery. This saw the most extensive transfer of people yet seen in world history. The Spanish, Portuguese, English and Dutch had a huge demand for labour in their newly acquired colonies in the Americas in particular, but also elsewhere in the world. Indigenous people in North and South America, expelled from their land and decimated by diseases of European origin, were unable to fulfil the labour requirements of the new plantations and mines of the Europeans. Europeans solved this difficulty by importing slaves from Africa.

The introduction of slavery at the Cape has to be seen against the background of this great expansion of slavery in the world that occurred mainly during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

For the purposes of our discussion, there are perhaps three main features of slavery that need to be highlighted, and that distinguish slavery from other forms of bonded labour:

- Slaves were fundamental in economic production, and often made up the majority of the labour force, as well as of the population of the slave-holding society overall in which they worked. Their role as a labour force was, above all, to boost the economic profits of their owners and the society in which they were forced to work.
- Slaves were defined in law as items of property, and were subject to a set of laws that denied them personal freedom and legal rights.
- Slaves were almost always imported into the society where they were forced to work. They were strangers or outsiders to that society (although those who lived for a long time, and their descendants, began to establish more permanent bonds within it), and were cut off from traditional family and community bonds, worsening the psychological effects of their conditions immensely. This distinguished slaves from other workers, who often performed similar jobs and also had limited personal freedom, but who did at least have access to family and community life.

All three of these aspects of slavery were prominent at the Cape. Nonetheless, the Cape slave system also had some unique features, which distinguished it from those in other places.

5.2 The origins and importation of Cape slaves

The importation of slaves to the Cape was the result of the deliberate policy of the Dutch East India Company (the VOC). The VOC faced a shortage of labour after the establishment of their base at Table Bay at the Cape. There were several reasons why the VOC quickly turned to the importation of slaves to solve their labour problems:

- The use of indigenous Khoesan labour was not initially an option for the Dutch, as they were required to be on friendly terms with them so that they could trade more effectively, and acquire livestock in particular.
- Further, the Khoesan were unwilling to abandon their transhumant pastoral activities in order to work for the Dutch, on farms or on other projects; such a way of life was very alien to them.
- In view of its policy of minimum expenditure, the VOC rejected the idea of using wage labour which would have been too expensive.
- The VOC also realised that it would be difficult to attract white wage labourers from Europe to an outpost as remote as the Cape.

The introduction of slavery made sense to the VOC, for several reasons:

- Slavery had been an integral part of the Dutch colonial experience elsewhere, and was an accepted and developed labour system. A legal framework, which regulated the system, was in existence in Batavia, and could easily be transferred to the Cape, which fell under the authority of Batavia.
- Moreover, slavery was the cheapest form of labour; slaves were believed to be easy to control and, by keeping a tight control of the slave supply, the VOC would also prevent the freeburghers from becoming too independent.
- Finally, slavery had the advantage of offering all whites the opportunity to become slave owners, which served to diminish potential class divisions and tension between white landowners and white labourers.

Clearly, then, the introduction of slavery was a logical and practical step which suited the VOC's economic and political goals at Cape.

For almost the whole of the VOC period, the demand for slaves at the Cape exceeded the supply. Despite this, imports of slaves were frequently erratic and poorly organised. The VOC also faced much competition from other European powers and trading companies, while large numbers of slaves died during the lengthy and hazardous voyages to the Cape.

The VOC had to rely on regular slave importations to maintain the labour force, because the slave population at the Cape was unable to reproduce itself fast enough. Too few slaves were born to meet the labour demands of the expanding population of slave owners. There were usually far fewer slave women than men at the Cape; a more balanced sex ratio only developed after 1808 when the external slave trade was abolished. In addition, the death rate (especially among children) constantly exceeded the birth rate.

There were four main ways in which slaves were brought to the Cape:

- Many slaves who were brought to the Cape were imported by the VOC itself and brought on VOC ships. They were retained by the VOC for use on their own projects.
- The freeburghers generally had to depend on foreign slave traders to acquire slaves. These traders frequently called at the Cape for supplies of fresh produce, and they were sometimes willing to sell some of their slave cargo to farmers.
- Another method of obtaining slaves, though very unreliable and uncertain, was from individual travellers who were sometimes willing to sell their personal slaves. Many of these slaves possessed various skills.
- A further method of obtaining slaves was through internal sales at the Cape itself. The estates of deceased farmers, or of farmers who were bankrupt, disposed of slaves

through auction. Again, this source of supply was erratic, and certainly could not meet the entire labour needs of the settlement.

Slaves were imported from a variety of places. Some of the earliest slaves to be imported came from the west coast of Africa, from Angola and Guinea, but other European trading companies had a monopoly of slave trading in this area, and did not allow the VOC to encroach on this. Thus, the VOC turned to its main source of supply, which was the Indian Ocean region, where competition from other slave traders was not so intense. Madagascar and Mozambique were the two most common places of origin of the African slaves at the Cape, while Zanzibar became more popular towards the end of the 18th century. A very significant proportion of slaves came from further afield, outside Africa. India and the Indonesian islands, such as Batavia, were the major sources of slaves from the East, but there were even a few slaves from as far as China and Japan.

Activity 5.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 5.2 in Learning Unit 5, which deals with slave trading and the origins of slaves at the Cape.

5.3 The role of slaves in the Cape economy

Slave demography

It is important to understand slave demography, or the distribution of slaves, at the Cape. Slaves were settled in different regions of the colony and in different sectors of the economy.

Slaves were to be found in all areas of the Cape: in the urban settlement of Cape Town, in the agricultural rural districts of the south-western Cape, and on the frontiers. However, they were not evenly distributed in these three main areas:

- The densest concentration of slaves was to be found in and around Cape Town. About one-third of Cape Town's slaves were owned by the VOC, while the remainder of urban slaves were privately owned.
- The great majority of slaves at the Cape worked on the wine and wheat farms in the south-western districts where agricultural activities required a lot of manual labour. These slaves were privately owned.
- A small number of slaves were also employed on pastoral farms in the interior.

The majority of Cape slaves were owned by agricultural farmers, and were thus scattered on the farms of the south-western Cape. Some wealthy citizens closer to Cape Town had as many as 12 domestic slaves, while certain officials had much larger slave holdings than they were prepared to report, knowing that this was not permitted by the VOC. These slaves were not necessarily concentrated on a single property. The owner of the largest number of slaves at the Cape, Martin Melck, owned 204 slaves, but these were distributed over 11 properties which were scattered throughout the colony.

An important shift in slave demography occurred in the early 19th century. The second British occupation in 1806 stimulated the Cape economy and gave rise to an expansion of slavery, especially in the agricultural sector. This led to a greater demand for slaves, which was

intensified by the abolition of the external slave trade in 1808 and by greater European immigration after 1816. Consequently, an increasing number of urban slaves were sold to farmers in the inland districts. This led to a decline in slave density in the Cape Town area, while slaves became more widely distributed throughout the high rainfall area along the coast. The Eastern Cape, where several thousand British settlers established themselves after 1820, saw the fastest growth of slave numbers at this period.

During the VOC period, slave women were always in the minority. The greatest concentration of women was in Cape Town, and they were found in decreasing numbers in the more remote districts. After the abolition of the external slave trade in 1808, when it became more difficult to obtain slaves, slave women became more evenly distributed throughout the colony. Slave gender roles also changed after the end of the 18th century. Whereas many female slaves performed domestic service in the urban areas during the VOC period, an increasing number of male slaves were employed in this sector of the urban economy in the 19th century.

Similarly, in the earlier period, younger slaves were concentrated in and around Cape Town, while newly established slave owners in the interior had to rely on older, more dependent slaves. After 1808, older slaves were still found in the frontier region, but increasing numbers of younger slaves were sold to owners in this area.

Economic function of slaves

Slaves had varied functions connected with the economic life of the Cape settlement. Company slaves worked in the VOC's administrative departments, warehouses, hospital, workshops and stores. Building, dock-work and wood-cutting were also occupations which required a fair number of Company slaves. Some slaves also worked as overseers and auxiliary police, while others possessed skills and worked as craftsmen for the VOC.

Slaves who were privately owned in Cape Town worked mainly as domestic servants, artisans, craftsmen, hawkers, pedlars and fishermen. Many of these slaves were of Eastern origin and brought their skills with them to the Cape where they were hired out by their masters to work for their owners' profit. Although the wages they earned had to be given to their masters, some were able to earn additional money for themselves through these trading activities.

In the agricultural districts of the south-western Cape, slaves performed a wide variety of seasonal tasks, such as planting, harvesting and threshing of crops. They were also responsible for maintenance work, and in addition undertook a variety of more regular labour: tending livestock, collecting fuel and wood, driving wagons, growing vegetables and domestic work in the farmhouses. Because of the varied tasks that slaves had to perform on the farms, there was little specialisation of labour.

In the interior of the Cape, on the farms of trekboers, slaves played a less important role, in that the trekboer pastoralists required fewer labourers. Many trekboer farmers could not afford slaves, and, in addition, Khoesan workers were both more available and more suited to work for trekboers because of their familiarity with livestock. Nonetheless, some trekboers did own one or two slaves, who were employed mainly as domestic workers or as shepherds.

The economic impact of slavery

Some economists have questioned the productivity and profitability of slave labour as opposed to wage labour. There is no doubt, however, that slaves and slave labour made the refreshment station of the VOC viable and the expansion of agriculture into the south-western Cape region possible.

The Cape economy was heavily dependent on slaves for its functioning, productivity and profitability. At times when there was a labour shortage, because of an insufficient number of slaves, such as during the 1740s, economic depression in the farming area occurred. It can therefore be argued that, in the short term, slavery benefited the Cape economy.

In some ways, however, slave labour did retard rather than advance economic development. The fact that the Cape was so dependent on slave labour meant that more efficient, labour-saving methods of production were never explored, and new agricultural techniques such as crop rotation were never introduced. The Cape thus remained technologically backward. In addition, much capital was tied up in slaves, which could otherwise have been invested in the development of farming, industries, towns and roads. The fact that much of this capital was paid to slave traders, who never invested any of it at the Cape, exacerbated this problem. Slave labour was indeed one of the main reasons why the Cape economy remained fairly stagnant and undiversified.

The economic value of slaves was not linked only to their labour function, important though this was. Slaves were a considerable investment for a slave owner. Slaves were often the most expensive commodity, or items of 'equipment' on a farm, and many farmers invested a great amount of money in their slaves. There were no banks or financial institutions at the Cape, and slaves therefore represented a potential source of accumulating capital. Slaves could bring much profit and income to owners. They were also used as security for the raising of loans, and were regarded as a good protection against inflation, for their prices never lagged behind inflation rates.

Slavery also enabled many whites to live a life of relative leisure. Many became overseers, fulfilling supervisory roles in the economy. This led, however, to the impoverishment of some whites, because there were not enough such jobs at the Cape. Unemployment problems for whites became more acute as the population grew during the 18th century. Most of these people moved into the interior to become subsistence trekboer farmers. Ironically, slaves could sometimes compete better for jobs in the south-western Cape or in Cape Town because they had skills that whites lacked. Whites also spurned many jobs because they regarded them as fit only for slaves.

The VOC was aware of many of these problems, and even considered reversing its policy on slavery in 1717, by replacing it with European labour. By this stage, however, slavery was well established, and many officials and freeburghers had a direct interest in the continuation of the system. The Cape economy thus remained dependent on slave labour, which was only abolished in 1834.

Activity 5.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 5.3 in Learning Unit 5, which deals with the role of slaves in the Cape economy.

5.4 Slave life at the Cape

Cape slaves were not treated in a uniform fashion. Their treatment varied between the regions and the different sectors of the economy. For example, the domestic slaves of Cape Town, who were often not subject to heavy manual labour, and those of the rural areas had diverse experiences. Even within each of these areas, the treatment of slaves varied, depending on the attitudes of the master and the functions of the slave. There are certainly examples of masters who treated their slaves in a humane fashion, but there are many more instances of slaves who received extraordinarily brutal treatment.

Legal status

Cape slavery, like all other slave systems, was coercive and inhumane. Slaves were regarded primarily as the property of their owners, and their humanity was only accepted in that context. They were economic commodities or objects for sale and valuation, and they were usually listed under 'stock' on census rolls. Some slaves were bought 'on trial' for a period of a year, and were returned to their sellers if found to be unsatisfactory. Their prices were determined by factors such as their potential as labourers, their age, gender and state of health, and their geographical origins and skill levels.

Although some slave owners probably looked after their slaves because slaves were expensive, many owners worked their slaves harder if they had paid a great amount of money for them, in order to extract the maximum profit from the slave and thereby recover their investment.

Slaves did have some legal rights. A master who beat a slave to death could be charged for murder. In the VOC period, however, he was seldom convicted especially if he could claim that the behaviour of the slave had led to the necessity of heavy punishment, which was then accepted by the court as an extenuating circumstance.

The law also permitted slaves to give evidence in court against their owners. In practice, however, it was extremely difficult for a slave to make use of the courts, especially during the VOC period. Unlike in the early 19th century, when slaves took their masters to court more frequently in response to measures passed by the British government aimed at improving the lives of slaves, slaves in the earlier period were unwilling to testify against owners for whom they would have to work in the future. They were also unfamiliar with the workings of the courts, and the cases they brought before the court were often dismissed because of technicalities. Evidence had to be overwhelming, backed up by witnesses, before a slave might win his case.

Moreover, sentences given to owners were often extremely light, and differed greatly from those administered to slaves for similar offences. There were often great delays before cases were heard because of distances of farms from Cape Town, and in remoter areas, farmers often refused to recognise the authority of the VOC if it suited them. The operation of law in civil cases heavily favoured the slave owners. However, as slaves gained greater access to the courts of law and became more self-assertive in the early 19th century, their complaints often produced positive results, resulting in fines or letters in which the owner was reprimanded.

Lack of human rights

Civil law allowed the slaves none of the rights enjoyed by free citizens. Because they were items of property, slaves were legally obliged to obey any order of their masters and were not allowed to own property. A few slaves in Cape Town did manage to control property, but this was a privilege in special circumstances, not a right. Slaves were unable to make wills or any legal contracts. They were unable to marry, and they had no rights over their children.

Some slaves did form stable family relationships, but these were the exception rather than the rule in the VOC period. In the early 19th century, however, more stable slave families seem to have developed. The greater stability was the result of the abolition of the external slave trade in 1808, which led to a balancing of sex ratios, an increase in the number of Cape-born slaves, improvements in the living and working conditions of slaves and the emergence of an 'underclass culture' in Cape Town.

The control of slaves

Both slave owners and the VOC believed that effective control of slaves was essential for the Cape to be productive and self-sufficient, as well as for their own security.

The slave system in fact operated on two levels of discipline and control:

- First, there was the individual relationship of the master and slave, in which the slaves were subordinate to the particular owner and subjected to a high level of coercion.
- Second, there was also the wider framework of the administrative and legal system which strongly supported the authority of slave owners.

There were areas of tension between the VOC and slave owners, but the firm control of slaves was one issue in which they were in strong agreement. When slave discipline broke down on farms, masters could request VOC assistance.

There were different ways in which slaves were kept under control. The master-slave relationship varied considerably, but the fundamental method by which an owner exercised his rights of property was the use or the threat of force. Corporal punishment was common, and many owners, especially on the farms, were able to whip and flog their slaves without fear of intervention by the authorities. Only in the case of death of a slave from beating was there the possibility of legal action against an owner.

Masters sometimes delegated their responsibilities to *knechts*, who were VOC employees hired out to farmers on contract to act as overseers. These *knechts* had no vested interest in the development of the farms; their primary function was to control the slaves and to ensure that they were productive. As a result, they were often more brutal than owners in the administration of their powers. The extremely violent punishments were related to the need of slaveholders to extract the maximum profit from slaves, and thereby redeem their purchase price. They also reflect the widespread fear of slave revolt and insubordination. The fact that male slaves outnumbered male whites for most of the 18th century increased the sense of insecurity of the owners.

The VOC's courts also meted out severe punishment to slaves who had committed crimes, and the use of gruesome torture formed an important part of the punishment of slaves. The various kinds of torture equipment including spikes, wheels, racks, hot irons and pincers, were used by the auxiliary police of the VOC. This tough punishment was designed to deter future offenders from insubordination of any kind.

Slave owners also tried to maintain control of their slaves by making use of the many laws and regulations that governed the lives of slaves. Slaves were often locked up at night, both in Cape Town and on the farms. Slaves in the rural areas had to have a pass signed by their owner if they left the farm. Curfews, the forbidding of gathering of slave groups larger than three people, and the prevention of slaves from carrying firearms, are other examples of such laws.

A powerful mechanism of psychological control of slaves was threat of sale. Many slaves did not want to leave their fellow slaves, or feared the brutality of slave masters in the rural areas and therefore behaved well out of fear of being sold.

Another psychological form of slave control was paternalism (a father-child relationship). The historian Robert Shell argues that slaves were legally and socially regarded as permanent children in the owner's household. He believes that this paternalistic relationship, rather than physical coercion, was the most effective means of slave control. However, he admits that, although slaves often shared the living quarters of the owners or were housed very close to the owner's house, they did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as the owners' children and were punished more severely. This was especially the case on isolated farms, where there was little or no VOC supervision of how owners treated their slaves.

It can be argued, therefore, that more intimate contact between the slaves and their masters on small slave holdings in the absence of large-scale plantations at the Cape, often meant that slaves were more closely supervised and punished more severely than might otherwise have been the case. A paternalistic relationship clearly did not rule out violence towards slaves within the household.

It should also be borne in mind that paternalism as a form of slave control was also less effective in Cape Town than in the rural areas. The practices of hiring out slaves, the occupational mobility enjoyed by the urban slaves as well as their integration into an urban 'underclass' (for more information see the section on the absence of organised slave revolt) weakened the social control of the urban slave owners.

Yet another way to keep slaves under control was to keep them divided. Most of the VOC slaves were housed in the Company slave lodge, although a few lived at their places of employment if these were some distance from town. Slaves in the lodge were not all of the same rank or status, and there was a definite hierarchy.

The most privileged of the slaves in the lodge were the interpreters, who were of great value to the Dutch because of their skills. Below them were the *mandoors,* or the slave overseers, who were usually people of mixed origin born at the Cape. Many had even been born in the lodge. Their privileges were not as extensive as those of the interpreters, but they did have separate living quarters within the lodge, and better clothing rations. Each *mandoor* had a number of slaves under his control. According to the 1714 census, each commanded 66 slaves. The *mandoors* were responsible for the discipline within and the smooth running of the lodge. They were known to report regularly to VOC officials on the activities of the slaves. Beneath the *mandoors* in the hierarchy were 'officers', responsible for between five and eight slaves, and who distributed food, clothing and other essential items. It seems that the *mandoors* appointed the 'officers' themselves, and this ensured that their authority was effective.

The ethnicity and the skills of slaves determined their position in the hierarchy. All senior positions were filled by people of mixed origin born at the Cape, but newly imported slaves could never hope to rise to the top. They could, however, fill some of the middle ranks, even ahead of people of clerical or artisan categories. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the manual labourers, usually newly imported African slaves, who lived in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the basement of the lodge. The auxiliary police and the executioner's assistants, who were responsible for the administration of VOC justice and torture, even for white offenders, also enjoyed minimal status in the lodge. They were, however, accorded some separate privileges. They were, for example, allowed to ignore the curfew and were permitted to carry clubs and knives. Ironically, it was slaves who predominated in law-enforcement jobs in

Cape Town. This is further evidence of divisions between slaves which prevented the emergence of a common slave identity.

There were also considerable distinctions between women in the lodge. Slave women fell under the overall supervision of a *matres*, or matron who was also a Cape-born slave of mixed origin. Under her was an 'undermistress' and two female slave officers. Apart from child-bearing, there was little distinction between the types of labour which men and women in the lodge were expected to perform. Women were used for the heaviest work. The presence of women in the lodge, however, was a source of considerable attraction to single VOC employees, sailors from passing ships and slaves from outside the lodge. The lodge was the most renowned brothel in the settlement, although there were a few places in Cape Town where prostitution occurred.

The organisation of the slave labour force on farms in the south-western Cape was also hierarchical in nature. Distinctions were drawn between domestic slaves, who developed closer bonds with their masters, and field workers. On larger farms *knechts,* and in a few cases slave *mandoors,* supervised and disciplined other slaves. Similar to the urban areas, this practice kept rural slaves divided.

Living and working conditions

Slave experiences at the Cape varied considerably, depending on where slaves were employed, their jobs, masters and even origins.

Privately owned slaves in Cape Town probably had the best living conditions of all slaves at the Cape. There is no evidence that they were supervised by *mandoors*, and controls on them were far less rigid. These slaves normally lived in the homes of their owners, in attics, kitchens or outbuildings.

The living conditions of the rural slaves were considerably worse than those of their counterparts in Cape Town. Work dominated their lives. It is possible that they worked up to 15 hours a day during peak periods in the summer months. The intricate controls of the slave lodge were obviously absent on the farms, but the structures of authority on the farms impinged heavily on their lives. Slaves were often under the direct supervision of owners, their sons or their *knechts*. There were also a few *mandoor* overseers on the very large farms, who made sure that slaves worked hard. Moreover, although sexual encounters between slaves and owners were forbidden by law and were severely punished if the perpetrator was black or Asian, slave owners were able to exploit their female slaves on a regular basis.

The provision of food, clothing and shelter varied from farm to farm. Although rural slaves sometimes complained of hunger, their rations could often be supplemented from the produce of the farm, and even occasionally from the countryside.

Education and religion

Slaves had limited access to education. There was a school for slave children in the VOC lodge, which was established in 1685, and which replaced the few small schools that had failed to survive. The school was intended to create loyalty to the VOC in slave children, and to teach them fluency in Dutch as well as the basic principles of Christianity. Only a very small minority of slave children, however, was able to attend this school. In the rural areas, the availability of education to slaves was even more restricted. A few *knechts* were expected to give slave children some rudimentary education, but this was erratically and rarely done. The large majority of slaves probably remained illiterate, and were unable to acquire an education even if they wished to.

Apart from being a tool to promote order and discipline among the slaves, religion could also form a possible basis of a new sense of cultural identity. There was, however, little attempt to spread Christianity among slaves until the very end of the 18th century. An average of about 20 slaves only were baptised each year, the majority of whom were VOC slaves. Some of these were attracted to notions of honour and status that Christianisation brought, but Christianity only started to win converts once active mission work began in the 19th century, after the VOC period.

Islam, on the other hand, began to gain converts in Cape Town during the 18th century, and it started to play a role in uniting slaves after 1800. Many slaves at the Cape were from south-east Asia and east Africa, where Islam was strong, and they brought this with them. Islam did offer some independence from Christian slave owners. It also drew slaves and free black adherents together and offered its followers much more than just a religious haven. Cape Muslims began to create their own collective identity and developed support networks such as educational facilities, medical aid and financial support to buy the freedom of slave converts. Much of this had to happen 'underground', as slave owners and authorities were highly suspicious of Islam.

Family life

During the VOC period slaves at the Cape were generally unable to develop any kind of stable family life. The legal provision forbidding marriage was the least of the slaves' problems in this regard. The sexual imbalance of the slave population, with the great predominance of males over females, meant that only a minority of males were able to find partners. The problem was especially acute in the rural areas.

Because of living conditions, few slaves were able to find privacy to maintain a family unit. Moreover, fertility rates among slave women were low and the death rate among slave children high. There was also the possibility of partners being forcibly split up because they were sold separately. Children born of a slave mother were born into slavery, and, although children were usually sold with the mother at an auction, this was not guaranteed. Only after 1782 it was made illegal to sell children separately from their mothers.

Another consequence of the lack of family life and shortage of women was the tension and violence that resulted from the unavailability of sexual outlet for the majority of the male work force. Women were often the cause of disputes, and rape, homosexuality and bestiality were other consequences of this situation in the rural areas.

Manumission, miscegenation and free blacks

Manumission (the freeing of individual slaves by their owners) was certainly a feature of Cape society, but most historians now agree that its significance has been exaggerated. The level of manumission at the Cape was extremely low during the VOC period. Although 1 075 slaves were manumitted between 1715 and 1791, which was an average of 14 a year, this figure is almost negligible when seen in the context of the overall population. Only a fraction of one percent of the slave force was manumitted, with the result that the free black population was extremely small.

Slaveholders were obviously unwilling and unlikely to free slaves voluntarily, when they had been costly originally and while they could still yield an income through their labour. This economic fact helped to keep the rate of manumission low, but, in addition, the VOC imposed a number of restrictions on the freeing of slaves. These became more numerous as the 18th century progressed.

Before 1722, owners could manumit slaves at their discretion. Thereafter, the approval of the VOC was required. Owners also had to take responsibility for the welfare of their manumitted slaves. Any slaves who were unable to support themselves were legally entitled to claim money from their former masters. This regulation prevented masters from freeing elderly or ill slaves who were no longer economically productive. By the end of the 18th century, slaves needed a good command of Dutch, they had to be baptised Christians, and they needed to produce proof of long service and good character, before they had a chance of manumission.

Few slaves could meet all these criteria. They would have had to acquire some education to meet the language requirement. Few were given the chance of conversion to Christianity, for owners were reluctant to expose slaves to the Christian religion in the knowledge that this might cause them to lose the services of their slaves. Few slaves too, had private funds available to support themselves as free citizens. In addition, the great majority of slaves freed were Cape-born or of Asian origin, which shows that slaves of African origin had almost no chance at all of being manumitted. For these reasons, manumissions occurred mainly in Cape Town and its immediate vicinity.

The rate of manumission increased substantially in the 19th century to an average of 86 per year in the decades between abolition and emancipation. The main reasons for this increase were the easing of government restrictions on slave manumission after 1826 and the increased slave assertiveness which persuaded some owners to manumit their slaves.

Some free blacks were able to acquire land and even slaves but most were occupied as artisans or traders. The free black community, though significant, never became numerically and economically strong. Very few free blacks acquired great wealth or status. Moreover, they were subjected to several important restrictions: they were excluded from certain jobs; they did not have access to loans and therefore found it difficult to buy land; they could be enslaved again if they broke the law, and they faced many petty discriminatory laws, such as prescriptions on the dress of women.

Miscegenation (sexual relationships between members of different ethnic backgrounds) also failed to lead to the development of a large free black class. The precise amount of sexual contact between racial groups at the Cape is impossible to determine, but it was not uncommon. Marriages across racial divisions were not encouraged by the VOC, and were rare. The greatest amount of such contact took place outside of marriage, through prostitution or concubinage. The offspring of such liaisons followed the status of the mother, and so they were absorbed into the slave class. Occasionally, owners chose to free their concubines or children born from them, but this was unusual. The important point about such contact between owners and slaves is that it neither led to a significant growth in the number of free blacks, nor did it break the basic divide between white owners and black labourers.

In addition to the policies of the VOC and the attitudes of the slave owners, there were structural factors which prevented the growth of a large free black community at the Cape. There were few positions that free blacks could fill in the Cape economy, for the dependence on slave labour had kept the economy undiversified. The majority of jobs in the settlement were on the farms, and these were filled by slaves. Free blacks existed almost exclusively in Cape Town, where they never became sufficiently powerful even to begin to challenge the slave-holding society at the Cape.

Afrikaans

Recent research has shown that slaves played a significant role in the emergence of the Afrikaans language. Others have even advanced the argument that Afrikaans was originally a creole language developed in the south-western Cape and used mainly by slaves to communicate with one another. Some have dismissed it as a 'kombuistaal' (kitchen language), but was later (in the late 19th century onwards) appropriated, advanced and codified by white Afrikaner nationalists.

Contested though various arguments are, there is certainly strong evidence to suggest that Afrikaans emerged as a combination of Malay, Arabic, and Khoesan languages with the European languages (mainly Dutch, German and French) of the colonists.

Activity 5.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 5.4 in Learning Unit 5, which deals with aspects of slave life at the Cape.

5.5 The reaction of slaves to their conditions

As we have seen, slaves were greatly disadvantaged by their position in Cape society and in the economy. Their loss of personal freedom, harsh treatment, lack of legal options and general conditions of their enslavement were designed to keep slaves subservient and powerless. It would be a mistake, however, to see slaves as weak, docile and passive victims of all powerful masters. Slaves exploited every possible means to express deep opposition to their position and their treatment in society, and slave resistance was at all times a constant and an obvious feature of Cape society.

Resistance

Slave resistance was clearly localised and uncoordinated because of the cultural diversity which undermined slave solidarity, but it was nonetheless widespread and frequent. These responses were often a violent reaction to the harshness of the slave system. Many acts were deliberate, but many, too, were spontaneous, emerging out of frustration and extreme pressure.

Slave resistance expressed itself mainly in individual ways such as escape and desertion, inefficient or slow work, refusal to carry out orders as well as disobedience and inefficiency. Some slaves also attacked their masters and their families and property or committed arson and theft. On a few occasions, slaves even killed fellow slaves, knowing that this was often a considerable financial loss for an owner to bear. A few slaves sought revenge by poisoning the food of their masters, while others committed suicide. Suicide was either an expression of their defiance, despair and refusal to operate within the system imposed on them, or of their fear of punishment and torture. As we have seen earlier in this unit, slaves would also resist oppression in the 19th century by taking their masters to court more frequently than in the VOC period.

Slave resistance clearly displayed a regional dimension. Court records have shown that urban slaves rarely assaulted or murdered their masters, while rural slaves often resorted to such forms of resistance as a result of the greater brutality towards slaves in the agricultural districts further away from Cape Town. Urban slaves enjoyed greater economic and social mobility, which made them less likely to commit desperate acts of violence against their owners. Moreover, the strong military presence of a large British garrison in Cape Town in the early 19th century made urban slaves less likely to revolt openly. Non-violent forms of slave protest nevertheless increased substantially in the final decade of slavery as slaves became aware of the possibility of freedom.

Accommodation and collaboration

Of course, not all slaves were able to or willing to participate in acts of resistance. These slaves resigned themselves to their situation, and served their masters loyally if resentfully in the hope of gaining manumission. Some slaves also collaborated actively with their masters, and were known to inform on and betray the activities of fellow slaves. Apart from active collaboration, the passive acceptance by many slaves of their captivity also played a role in the lack of organised protest.

Absence of organised slave revolt

There was no large-scale co-ordinated slave rebellion at the Cape. Two attempts by slaves to organise a revolt on a larger scale, in 1808 and 1825, were both quickly suppressed by the slave owners. There were several reasons that prevented the slaves from planning and achieving a major rebellion.

Firstly, no distinctive, unified slave cultural tradition emerged at the Cape before the end of the 18th century. Because slaves came from widely different places, it would have taken a few generations for a sense of unity to develop. This never occurred, because new slaves were constantly imported which created divisions between locally born slaves and more recent imports thereby preventing any unity or common identity from emerging.

There were certainly subcultures that played a role in giving slaves a sense of identity, for example the slaves in the Company lodge who came from Madagascar shared a Malagasy culture. Moreover, slaves in Cape Town had a sense of community in the sense that they formed part of an ‘underclass culture’ in which slaves and non-slave labourers interacted with one another. This underclass culture became more vibrant especially after the abolition of the external slave trade, the emergence of a more balanced gender ratio, higher fertility rates and the growth of a more stable, homogeneous, Cape-born slave population. Cape Town’s ‘underclass’ developed some sense of community through participating in recreational activities such as drinking, gambling, card-playing, music-making and dancing; developing a creole language which assisted slaves from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate with one another; and finding a religious home in Islam.

There were, however, deep divisions within the slave community as a whole. The diverse origins of slaves created immediate barriers within the slave community. Language differences between slaves caused further divisions. Many Indonesian slaves spoke Malay, and Portuguese was often heard. Other African and Oriental languages were soon forgotten as new slaves struggled to make themselves understood. As noted above, many learnt a simplified form of Dutch to communicate with their owners, which had considerable influence on the emergence of Afrikaans.

Slaves were also widely dispersed on the farms of the Cape, which prevented easy communication between them. The Cape slave community was tightly controlled, and laws curtailing rights of movement and association hindered contact between slaves. Moreover, the complex hierarchy of the lodge kept slaves divided and under control. On the farms there were often intense divisions between categories of workers, such as domestic workers and farm labourers. Slave experience also differed markedly, and those who received better treatment may have had less reason to participate in planning a large-scale rebellion.

Because of these factors, it was very difficult to organise a united resistance movement, and no popular slave leader emerged who could unite the slave community as a whole. Slave resistance was therefore forced to express itself in more individualistic ways. As we have seen, these were frequent, and provided strong evidence that most slaves rejected their situation.

Activity 5.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 5.5 in Learning Unit 5, which deals with slave resistance.

5.6 The impact of slavery on the social order

At the Cape, as in other slave-holding societies, slavery had a profound impact on the social order.

Slavery gave rise to a racially divided society in which whites became accustomed to the view that people who were workers were black. Slavery created a slave-owner mentality among white people at the Cape, and sharpened their sense of superiority over black people. White people also developed a distaste for manual labour, dismissing it as the occupation of slaves, and beneath them.

As white trekboers moved into the interior, they also applied this slave-owner mentality to the indigenous communities of the interior. The Khoesan, Xhosa and the Sotho-Tswana, who were legally free, were seen as potential labourers rather than as equals. The authorities often turned a blind eye to, and even participated in, commando raids for livestock and captives, especially of women and children. These raids, which some historians interpret as slave raids, became an important part of frontier relations from about the 1730s. Captives were employed under the ‘inboek’ system (indentureship), which enabled farmers to engage a child’s services until the age of 18 years (and sometimes 25), and was therefore very similar to slavery.

Slavery also caused a blurring of class distinctions within white society. Even the poorest white people enjoyed preference over slaves and other people of colour. Slavery provided poorer white people with the opportunity to own slaves themselves and thereby to improve their social position. White people therefore regarded themselves automatically as the ruling class.

As slavery caused white people to become ever more race or colour conscious, free blacks and people of mixed descent were increasingly burdened by discrimination and eventually fell to the lowest level of society. Slavery also gave rise to racial stereotyping. Depending on their origin, slaves were often categorised as ‘industrious’, ‘reliable’, ‘lazy’, ‘uncooperative’, and so on.

A further important psychological effect of slavery was that it created deep feelings of fear and insecurity among both white people and slaves. Fear of slaves was most acute in the rural farming regions, where white owners were often greatly outnumbered by their slaves. Consequently, the levels of control and force required to maintain the system were often extreme, and the extent of violence at the Cape was thus high.

Activity 5.6

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 5.6 in Learning Unit 5, which deals with slavery and the ways in which the system affected the Cape social order.

5.7 Conclusion

Shortly after the British took control of the Cape for the second time (1806), the oceanic slave trade was abolished in 1808. This decision had important implications which could be felt throughout the Cape colony. This learning unit has mentioned some of these: the abolition of the external slave trade increased the demand for slaves at the Cape; this in turn led to a change in slave demography, and also led to a growth in the size of the free black community. Further, a more balanced gender ratio emerged, as did the development of a Cape-born slave community through natural increase, the emergence of a stronger underclass culture, and different patterns of slave resistance in the 19th century.

Unlike in the VOC period, the control of the ruling class over their slaves became weaker in the early 19th century. From the 1820s, slavery came under further pressure as a result of measures taken by the British government to improve the lives of the slaves. The Act of Emancipation was eventually implemented at the Cape on 1 December 1834, but slaves remained tied to their owners as ‘apprentices’ for another four years (to give masters the opportunity to adjust to the new dispensation), leading a life very similar to that of slavery.

After the final emancipation of slaves in 1838, legal and statutory divisions between master and slave disappeared, but the racial distinctions between employer and employee, as well as the attitudes which developed during the slave period, remained. This underlines the strength and significance of the slave system at the Cape. The legacy of slavery was thus very deep-seated and enduring. The significance of slavery reached well beyond the period when the Cape was a formal slave society, and was to have an influence on wider labour relations in southern Africa well into the future.

6 LEARNING UNIT 6: THE CAPE NORTHERN FRONTIER

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

- What do we mean by the concept of a 'frontier'?
- Explain the differences between an 'open frontier' and a 'closing frontier'.
- Discuss the geographical features of the Cape northern frontier.
- Identify the various inhabitants of the Cape northern frontier.
- Explore conflict and cooperation between the different inhabitants of the Cape northern frontier.

In Learning Units 2, 3, 4 and 5, one of the main themes we explored was the history and relationships between white people, Khoesan and slaves mainly in the south-western Cape (the urban settlement of Cape Town and the area surrounding it, dominated by the wheat and wine farms established by the white settlers).

In this unit and the next one, we turn our attention to the interaction of people on the margins of the main white-dominated settlement of the south-western Cape, in the so-called frontier zones of the Cape colony.

Two distinctive frontier zones developed to the north and to the east of the VOC-dominated white settlement during the 18th century. Both were to play a prominent role in southern African history. We will study the northern frontier zone in this study unit, and the eastern frontier zone in Learning Unit 7.

The northern frontier zone was an area where many different communities came into contact with one another, and through this contact – both peaceful and violent – they merged, disintegrated, and regrouped. The relationships forged in the northern frontier region also foreshadowed the large-scale opening up of the interior for white settlement in the 19th century (these were later developments that are outside the scope of this learning unit and this module).

In this unit we will focus on the following themes:

- The concept of a frontier
- Environmental features of the northern frontier
- The inhabitants of the northern frontier
- Interaction between the inhabitants of the northern frontier

6.1 The concept of a frontier

A 'frontier' or 'frontier zone' can be defined as an area of contact between peoples who differ widely in origins and background. In a historical context, a frontier is not merely a boundary line or border line between different countries. Rather, it is best to understand frontier as an area of contact and interaction between two or more previously separate communities. Frequently, this area can be very large indeed, covering many hundreds or even thousands of square kilometres.

Interaction between people is frequently determined by the limits of the environment, which includes vegetation, climate, the terrain, and the fauna and flora of a particular area. As you

work through Learning Units 6 and 7, be consistently aware of how the natural environment influenced the lifestyles of people and the relationships between them.

The different societies which interact in a frontier zone are initially distinct communities with their own cultural traditions and political, social, economic and belief systems. These societies are not necessarily rigidly structured or homogeneous, and there may be a considerable degree of diversity within the respective communities and groups that make up the larger societies. Alliances between the different groups may be entered as quickly as they are dissolved. Interaction, therefore, is a process characterised by fluidity, as well as changing social and environmental conditions on the frontier.

We speak of two phases of a 'frontier' zone, an open phase and a closing phase.

A frontier 'opens' when the first contact and early interaction between members of different societies occurs. After this initial contact, a period of unregulated interchange of activities and movement follows, as there is usually no group in complete control of the region. Therefore, one can say that, during this initial phase of contact, a power vacuum exists. Different relationships occur, often at the same time, such as in the following examples:

- In some cases, various groups might cooperate with one another through trade and military alliances, often resulting in one group becoming clients of another, stronger group.
- Sometimes one group is absorbed into another by a process of acculturation, by adopting customs, beliefs or other practices of another, more powerful group.
- In other cases, a period of open conflict might occur, with power tending to shift from one society to another as they compete for the use of the natural resources and eventually for physical control over an area.

As soon as a particular group manages to establish control over an area, the frontier zone 'closes'. Thus, a closing frontier situation occurs when a single, undisputed authority or power establishes political and economic control over the zone. The openness or fluidity of the zone disappears, and the frontier becomes controlled or more rigidly defined. However, when we speak of a closing frontier, we do not mean that the relations or interaction between the various societies that inhabit the frontier zone have become completely static or have disappeared. Rather, a new situation has come into being in which relations are regulated, and movement and activity are limited and controlled by the dominant group.

It is important to note that we can speak of frontier zones, or disputed areas of interaction, in many different contexts and periods of history. For instance, in Learning Unit 1, although we did not use the term 'frontier zone' when we spoke of relationships between hunter-gatherers, hunter-herders and mixed farming communities in the period before colonisation, we could have conceived of these relationships in terms of 'open' and 'closing' frontiers of interaction. We introduce the concept only here because, traditionally in South African historical writing, 'frontier' has been commonly applied to the areas on the outskirts of the established VOC-dominated colony of the south-western Cape.

We can consider another example that is now familiar to us, but in terms of 'frontier': the south-western Cape itself:

- If we look at this region as a frontier zone, we can say that a frontier opened in this area when there was initial contact between various European sailors and the Khoesan people living in the region from the 1480s onwards. Relationships were fluid and

dynamic, and kept changing – at times, European traders seemed to be in control of events, at other times the Khoesan were more powerful.

- A significant shift began to occur when the Dutch established the refreshment station that became Cape Town in 1652. All the same, neither the Dutch nor the Khoesan were dominant during the 1650s and 1660s, and so the frontier between them could be said to have remained open, until the Dutch began to control events after their military successes during the second Khoekhoe-Dutch War in the 1670s.

- The frontier therefore began to 'close' at this stage, and was finally consolidated after the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1713, which left the Dutch as the undisputed power in the south-western Cape.

Thus, this particular 'frontier' in the south-western Cape between the Dutch and the Khoesan was 'open' for many decades (indeed, almost two centuries), before 'closing' between the 1670s and the 1710s.

As can be seen from the example above, the increasing supremacy of one group over other results in the disappearance of the 'openness' or fluidity of the frontier. The activities of communities were increasingly limited and dominated by the centralising force of a single political authority. This process ended with the subjugation of the early inhabitants of the south-western Cape frontier zone by a stronger group, that of the VOC government and the predominantly Dutch settlers.

We will now turn to consider the northern frontier situation. Be alert to significant differences between developments in this frontier zone and those that occurred in the south-western Cape. The situation was considerably more complex and fluid in the northern frontier, and as a result, this frontier mainly retained 'open' characteristics throughout the period we are considering.

Activity 6.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 6.1 in Learning Unit 6, which deals with some questions about the concept of a frontier and its 'open' and 'closing' phases.

6.2 Environmental features of the northern frontier

The Cape northern frontier region was a vast area which lay north of the white settlement in the south-western Cape. It extended from the Stellenbosch district in the south – from the Cedarberg mountains and the Koue Bokkeveld area – to the region that lay north of the Gariep (Orange) River – which came to be referred to as Gordonia. It included areas such as the Hantam, the Roggeveld and Little Namaqualand in the western part of the region, to areas in the east that came to be known as Bushmanland and Transorangia.

The area was vaguely defined throughout the period we will consider (roughly the early 1700s to the early 1800s, or the early 18th to the early 19th centuries). Neither the colonial powers nor any of the indigenous inhabitants were able to impose their authority over this large area or

declare certain districts or territories as permanently under their control, and hence definitive boundaries were never established or agreed.

Part of the reason for this situation was the relative strengths of different groups, none of whom was able to exert power over others for a lengthy period, as we shall see. But even more importantly in explaining this situation was the natural environment of the area. The northern frontier zone was characterised by harsh environmental conditions. It was an arid region with low rainfall and a high evaporation rate. Because of the absence of abundant natural resources, the inhabitants were forced to spread widely over the area. The only perennial river, the Gariep (also known as the Orange River), became the lifeline of many indigenous groups, who cooperated and fought over access to its water, and to the grazing and game resources along its banks. There were no other permanent rivers in the area. The little underground water that existed was only available in scattered and widely separated places, which also influenced the settlement patterns of the inhabitants.

The region was primarily a rugged, semi-desert area with scanty vegetation, which forced the different groups to subsist by keeping small herds of domestic stock and hunting wild animals. Initially, wild animals roamed the area in abundance, but as the population increased and firearms were introduced, these numbers were drastically depleted. The rather harsh geographic circumstances of the northern frontier were to play a determining role in the relationships between the indigenous and intruding societies as they struggled to survive.

The official boundary of the Cape Colony was to shift northwards under the various colonial authorities. During the period when the Cape was governed by the VOC, however, the inhabitants of the northern frontier region had very limited contact with the colonial authorities, and boundary declarations by the VOC essentially had very little real meaning.

If you were to look at a map of modern South Africa's provincial boundaries, the northern frontier zone or region of the 18th century would have been located mainly within the modern Northern Cape province.

Activity 6.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 6.2 in Learning Unit 6, which contains some maps and deals with the environmental features of the Cape northern frontier.

6.3 The inhabitants of the northern frontier

Throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries (the 1750s to the 1820s), the influence of the colonial government based in Cape Town over the northern frontier zone was weak, and even when the authorities tried to exert control, they struggled to establish power over the region. They essentially lacked the ability as well as the desire to control directly the affairs of such a vast region from the distance of Cape Town. Significant resources and manpower would have been required to do so, and these were not available to the colonial government.

It is also important to bear in mind that the colonial government changed hands four times between the 1790s and the 1810s – the VOC, the British, the Batavians and then the British again. This discontinuity meant that policy towards the frontier was frequently in flux. Thus, for a

long time, relationships between the various communities in the northern frontier region depended on their own skills, the availability of natural resources and their ability to control trade goods, especially guns, rather than on any laws and regulations that were proclaimed by the colonial authorities. It was only during the 1820s and later that the colonial government began to manage to exert some degree of control over the northern frontier, but even so, its power was never very secure.

Despite the distances between most parts of the northern frontier zone and the south-western Cape, economic influences extending from the south-western Cape did affect the lifestyle of communities on the northern frontier. European commodities, such as firearms, gunpowder and clothing, began to penetrate the northern frontier region in the period before the consolidation of colonial rule.

The northern frontier zone was inhabited by a variety of different people and groups who cooperated and conflicted with one another in this area of limited resources.

Khoesan peoples

The Khoesan peoples, comprising the San, the Nama, the Korana (or Kora), and the Einiqua, were the earliest indigenous groups to inhabit the northern frontier region.

- The San were predominantly hunter-gatherers, although at least in a few areas, some of them also possessed livestock. They were to become renowned for the fierce manner in which they resisted new settlers who entered their land.

- The Nama, who lived on each side of the lower Gariep River, were mainly pastoralists, who supplemented their diet by hunting and gathering. The mobile lifestyle of these communities did mean that they moved at times between various parts of the region, in order to exploit the differences between some of the environmental zones within the northern frontier zone, which ranged from the desert coastal belt along the Atlantic Ocean to the comparatively well-watered mountain range of the Kamiesberg.

- An important Khoekhoe group were the Korana, who were settled in the middle Gariep River region, on both the northern and southern sides of the river. Like the Nama, they were mainly herders, and also hunted and collected food. They developed strong ties with the south-western Cape during the 18th century, and the knowledge they had of the white settlement would influence their dealings with other groups.

- Another Khoekhoe group, the Einiqua, populated the region of the middle Gariep River between the Nama in the west and Korana in the east.

In all these cases, although we have noted particular groups, it is difficult to draw very clear ethnic boundaries between these different communities. There was regular contact between them, through trade, client agreements and intermarriage, and thus rigid distinctions become blurred. Both contemporary visitors of European background and later scholars have often disagreed with one another when they tried to differentiate between the Nama, Einiqua and Korana groups.

Bantu-speaking groups

The more northerly parts of the middle Gariep River region were occupied by the Bantu-speaking Sotho-Tswana people. The area offered sufficient water and grazing for pastoralism and also for some agricultural activities. They therefore enjoyed a more sedentary and less nomadic way of life than the Khoesan people.

The most southerly Sotho-Tswana chiefdom was the BaTlhaping – sometimes called 'Briqua' by the Khoekhoe, which meant 'people of the goat'. At the beginning of the 19th century, the main settlement of the BaTlhaping, Dithakong, had a population of about 16 000 people, which made it equal in size to Cape Town.

The BaTlhaping and the Korana had close social and economic links with one another – which was further evidence of fluidity between groups of people.

New communities

An important feature of the northern frontier region was the emergence of new mixed communities. Predominant among these were the Oorlams and the Griqua.

The word 'oorlam' probably comes from the Malay language spoken among some of the slaves, and it was used to denote acculturated people or people of mixed Khoekhoe-European origin, who had acquired special skills and embraced certain aspects of the European way of life. They knew how to handle guns, horses and ox-wagons, and they spoke Dutch.

These people had been dispersed from their grazing and hunting grounds at the Cape through the advance of the European settlement. After they had lost their land and livestock, they often worked for European farmers before they moved further north to regain a measure of independence. There were several Oorlam bands in the northern Cape which were to play important roles in the territory that was later to be called Namibia, such as the Afrikaner Oorlams (not to be confused with Afrikaans or Dutch-speaking trekboers) and the Witboois.

The Griquas (who were known sometimes as 'Basters', particularly before the early 19th century), were people of mixed Khoekhoe, European and slave origin. Owing to their status as 'coloureds', they were sometimes employed in more specialised or skilled occupations. Like the Oorlams, some of them had adopted elements of Western culture, such as reading and writing skills and Christianity. These aspects of cultural change played an important role in the shaping of a new identity of the Griqua.

The Kok and the Barends families assumed important leadership roles when these heterogeneous groups – in other words, groups comprising people from different backgrounds – emerged in the 18th century.

White trekboers

In the Cape northern frontier zone, the harsh environment prevented any large-scale penetration of trekboers, especially in comparison with the southern Cape and eastern Cape frontier. There were, however, some white adventurers who travelled into the interior mainly to hunt, to trade and to establish cattle posts. Most were typical frontier pioneers, who relied solely on their own resources for everything they needed. Their dwellings were crude, as was their clothing. One symbol of their self-sufficiency was the commando, a small military band which

was their own system of protection, but which was often used for raiding and counter-raiding other communities, as livestock theft in the region was common.

Individual refugees from the Cape

Since the region was difficult to reach for colonial authorities based in Cape Town, it offered a useful place of refuge for fugitives from the law. Most of these people were either convicted criminals or had contravened various laws of the south-western Cape and fled before they could be brought to trial.

One good example of such an individual who played an important role on the northern frontier was Jan Bloem. He was a German sailor who was accompanied on a journey by his wife; but when the ship reached Cape Town, he escaped from the ship, murdered his wife, and fled north from Cape Town to the northern frontier. He settled on a farm belonging to an influential trekboer farmer, Petrus Pienaar, who was one of the few trekboers to have established a permanent presence in the area. Pienaar supplied Bloem with firearms and gunpowder, and Bloem began to raid cattle from Korana groups in the area. He also began to attract the support of individuals and communities who had become impoverished in the area. Under his leadership, these people merged into a new group, the Springbok Kora, who were much feared because of their aggressive raiding of other frontier communities.

Bloem was one example of a fugitive from justice who played a role on the northern frontier. Another was Stephanas, who is the subject of Activity 6.3.

Activity 6.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 6.3 in Learning Unit 6, which deals with an intriguing and unusual character called Stephanas.

Missionaries

European agents of social change, who were more directly involved in the northern frontier zone than the colonial government, were the missionaries. The first members of the London Missionary Society (LMS) to enter the area established mission stations among the San at the Zak River in 1799, and in 1801 they extended their work to the Basters and the BaTlhaping. William Anderson of the LMS was the first permanent missionary in the middle Gariep River area from 1801. In 1806, other missionaries crossed the Gariep River and founded mission stations among some of the Khoesan groups.

The missionaries were often welcomed by people in the area, because they imported trade goods and provided new skills, apart from their Christian teachings. Indeed, it is important to note that most of the early missionaries in the area did not impose themselves, but were invited by different groups – notably the Basters and various Khoesan communities – to establish a presence among them.

The presence of missionaries began to affect the lifestyles of people in significant ways. Let us take the example of the Nama, who hoped to benefit from the economic benefits and the social

services that they believed the missionaries might bring them. The missionaries strongly believed that the Nama needed to settle permanently around the mission stations so that they could become an established Christian community, but the Nama's lifestyle depended on the transhumant patterns of finding sufficient grazing and water for their livestock. The missionaries hoped that the importation of European commodities such as clothing, tools and firearms, combined with their serious attempts to establish viable agriculture around mission stations, would encourage the Nama to settle. This often did not occur, although mission work did begin to affect the internal power structures in local communities, as some were more open to missionaries than others. Conflict ensued as a result – both between the missionaries and the communities with whom they were trying to work, as well as within the communities themselves.

Further, since some missionaries did not hesitate to defend the rights of local people, they often quarrelled with the trekboer farmers in the area as well as the colonial government. In general, neither the trekboer farmers nor the colonial authorities appreciated the work of missionaries, and they tended to regard them as a cause of conflict and instability that undermined any attempts by government or white trekboer farmers to regulate relationships.

Activity 6.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 6.4 in Learning Unit 6, which deals with a consolidation of knowledge about the six main groups of people that we have encountered on the Cape northern frontier.

6.4 Interaction between the inhabitants of the northern frontier

Interaction between the various groups on the Cape northern frontier can sometimes seem complex and confusing. However, if one bears in mind that the struggle for survival in a harsh environment dominated relationships, it might become easier to understand.

The battle to survive or even prosper certainly resulted in conflict between different communities. However, individuals and communities were also often forced to cooperate with each other in order to survive. Thus, the relations between people were fluid and constantly shifting. This was because all people competed for access to the scarce natural resources of the region, while many also fought for the control of trade links with the Cape. Sometimes groups formed alliances in order to attack other groups or to defend themselves against intruders.

The possession of firearms played a major role in the northern frontier region, not only for hunting but also for raiding. As groups were forced to survive, mainly as highly mobile hunter-pastoralists in an arid environment, raiding became a prominent feature in the economic and political relationships between the various frontier communities. In times of drought, impoverished pastoralists took to raiding other herding communities. Weaker groups sought protection from attacks by joining more powerful leaders who had access to guns. Sometimes groups attacked each other to obtain firearms and ammunition. A vicious circle was set in motion which increasingly depleted the natural resources of water, grazing and game, and made life in the northern frontier zone much more hazardous for poorer people who lacked the protection of stronger communities.

Essentially, any individual or group that possessed firearms were able to acquire resources such as livestock, and also win followers. Both of these conferred power on people, giving them a decisive advantage over those who were unable to command such resources.

Conflict and cooperation were both features of a process which led, on the one hand, to the impoverishment and displacement of groups, and, on the other, to a regrouping of people which facilitated the rise of new societies.

Let us look at some different examples of this process of conflict and cooperation. The examples illustrate the struggles of communities who had had a distinct identity for many generations and attempts to maintain this; but they also illustrate how a successful strategy to cope was to form new bonds and new communities to protect their interests and independence.

Older communities: contestation and consolidation

The original inhabitants in the Cape northern frontier region, the San, became famous for their fierce resistance to any intruders. Pastoral people who arrived in the area, such as the Nama, threatened the living space of the San hunter-gatherers. Sometimes these pastoralists were forced to leave the area as a result of violent clashes between the two groups. At other times, however, there was considerable cooperation and goodwill between hunters and herders, which was based on the sharing of the natural resources of the area.

From about 1700 onwards, the San also tried to prevent the expansion and settlement of white hunters and trekboer farmers. The intrusion of these settlers not only meant the potential loss of large tracts of land for use by the San, but also led to a significant decline in the numbers of wild animals, because of the access to firearms that the white frontiersmen had.

San resistance provoked fierce reprisals against them from white frontiersmen. The trekboer farmers formed commandos, or bands of men who had access to horses and to firearms, in order to attack enemies, such as the San. These commandos often comprised both the trekboer farmers as well as their Khoekhoe servants, who grouped together in order to annihilate the San. The so-called ‘Bushman hunts’ of the later 18th century saw the brutal killing of large numbers of San people, men in particular. Surviving women and children were forced to work on trekboer farms under appalling conditions.

A few San groups, many of whom had become destitute after the pattern of continual raids and counter-raids that they experienced, joined the Baster groups led by Adam Kok and Barend Barends, or attached themselves to Oorlam leaders, such as Jager Afrikaner. Some San also cooperated with the BaTlhaping, with whom they established trade ties.

The Nama were also affected by the violence which accompanied the advancing colonial frontier into the northern Cape frontier zone. Threatened by both San hunter-gatherers and trekboer frontiersmen, many of these impoverished Nama retreated further north where they joined Baster and Oorlam groups. A great number of Nama people also settled on the farms of white frontiersmen, where they became subservient as cattle herders and labourers.

Korana groups were also pushed northwards by the settlement of trekboer frontiersmen, which intensified their contact with the BaTlhaping. After an initial phase of conflict, they cooperated with each other in order to resist attacks from other hostile groups. Collaboration between the two groups was based on the considerable wealth of the BaTlhaping chiefdom and the military expertise of the Korana, who were skilled in the use of guns. Many Korana groups were absorbed into the BaTlhaping chiefdom through intermarriage.

The BaTlhaping's initial wealth was also to attract the attention of other groups and individuals, including the fugitive criminal, Jan Bloem. After he had escaped into the frontier region and established some power and wealth, Bloem carried out a series of devastating raids on the inhabitants surrounding his base. As a result of these, an increasing number of uprooted people joined him. Eventually a new group, the Springbok Kora, emerged under his leadership. Between 1794 and 1796, Bloem led his followers against the southern Tswana chiefdoms, particularly the BaTlhaping. These raids had a debilitating effect on them, and they found it difficult to recover from the destruction caused by the Springbok Kora. In the aftermath of these raids, the BaTlhaping realised that they had to enter alliances with other groups, such as the Basters and some Korana, who owned guns and could protect them. In 1801 and 1804, government expeditions tried to establish trade contacts with the BaTlhaping, but they were disappointed because the BaTlhaping had already been robbed of most of their livestock by Bloem and the Springbok Kora.

New communities: Oorlam groups

The Afrikaner Oorlams were to gain a reputation for raiding and plundering, as well as for attracting many new members from impoverished frontier communities. For many years, they had cooperated with the influential trekboer farmer, Petrus Pienaar, who had several loan farms on the northern frontier. The Afrikaner Oorlams were equipped with guns and undertook many commando raids on the northern frontier.

In this capacity, the leaders of the Afrikaner Oorlams, Klaas and Jager Afrikaner, became experienced frontier pioneers, who became well known for attacking other inhabitants in the region. In 1796, they killed Pienaar and several members of his family after a dispute. This murder resulted in the flight of the Afrikaner Oorlams to the Gariep River, where they became the terror of the Cape northern frontier, attacking other groups and stealing their cattle, while at the same time integrating destitute Khoisan and fugitives from the law among them.

The Afrikaner Oorlams, however, soon realised that legal trade links with the Cape Colony, which had been disrupted when they killed Pienaar, were important in order to replenish their supplies. When the first missionaries arrived on the northern frontier between 1801 and 1806, the Afrikaner Oorlams began to make use of the educational and diplomatic skills that the missionaries offered to consolidate their own influence. Initially, relations between missionaries and the Afrikaner Oorlams were very tense and they mistrusted each other, but Jager Afrikaner was eventually baptized into the Christian faith in 1815.

The famous missionary of the LMS, Robert Moffat, who worked among the Afrikaner Oorlams in south-eastern Namibia for about a year, used his influence to re-establish more peaceful ties between the Afrikaner Oorlams and the Cape government. He was certainly well aware that the acquisition of guns was an important motive for the Afrikaner Oorlams to attach themselves to mission stations. Moffat then accompanied Jager Afrikaner and his son, Jonker, to Cape Town in 1819. The Cape governor pardoned the outlaw for his crimes, gave him a passport and an ox-wagon, and thus gave him legal access to the Cape colony.

This event was an impressive success for the missionaries, who gained a reputation as important intermediaries between the colonial authorities and people on the frontier. It also shows how closely economic, political and religious aspects were intertwined in the interaction between the missionaries and their converts.

From the 1820s, the Afrikaner Oorlams shifted their sphere of influence to central Namibia, where they gained an unprecedented position of power by establishing a raiding and trading network among the Bantu-speaking Herero pastoralists and other Khoesan groups. They

founded the present-day capital of Namibia, Windhoek, as their main settlement and centre of operations.

Another Oorlam group in the northern Cape were the Witboois, who lived under their leader Kido Witbooi in the region of Pella, south of the lower Gariep River. They also established close links with the LMS missionaries, who helped them to safeguard their trade links with the Cape. Like the Afrikaner Oorlams, the Witboois later played a crucial role in Namibia where they became one of the most powerful groups of the 19th century.

New communities: The Griqua

Another group which illustrates similar processes is the Basters, once known as the 'Bastaards', which term originally denoted people deemed of illegitimate birth. Like the Afrikaner clan, they emerged from a background of close ties between local groups and the emerging trekboer frontier society. As the offspring between Khoekhoe and trekboers, and in some cases slaves, they were often discriminated against by people from the south-western Cape. Those who did not want to accept inferior social status as transport riders or farmhands moved away into the northern frontier region, to pursue an independent lifestyle as hunters, herders and traders.

One of the most important Baster families was the Kok family. Adam Kok, who is generally understood to have been a former slave who had bought his freedom, and his son, Cornelius, acquired influential positions by attracting followers from other groups on the northern frontier. In the 1770s, the Kok clan settled along the Gariep River. Within about 30 years, they had established significant wealth through elephant hunting far into the interior north of the Gariep. They formalised their trade links with the BaTlhaping, and they dominated the ivory trade with Cape Town. In this way, they began to develop significant influence in the frontier zone.

In 1801, the Koks (and another influential family, the Barends) settled with two missionaries of the LMS, William Anderson and Christian Kramer, at Klaarwater on the middle Gariep. Cornelius Kok became an important supporter of the various missionaries on the northern frontier by assisting them with advice and provisions. The missionaries were therefore able to draw on the knowledge and experience that the Baster frontier pioneers had gathered in exploring the northern Cape region.

The close links between the Basters and the missionaries proved to be very important for the consolidation of the social and economic structures of the community. The Basters built stone houses, planted crops and assumed a leading role in 'Transorangia' on the middle Gariep.

Apart from the economic and political support which the Basters obtained from the missionaries, Christianity became a fundamental aspect of their group identity. As acculturated and 'modernised' Africans, the Basters hoped to secure a special role for themselves by retaining their economic and political links with the Cape. The Basters used the missionaries as intermediaries with the colony in order to control their own integration into colonial society, or at least to secure and maintain their independence on the northern frontier.

The visiting inspector of the LMS, John Campbell, persuaded the Basters to change their name in 1813 because of its derogatory connotations. The new name adopted by the community was 'Griqua', which derives from the Grigriqua (or Gurigriqua) Khoekhoe, whom most of the Basters claimed as their ancestors. Klaarwater was renamed Griquatown.

The historian Martin Legassick has pointed out that Griqua 'state building' involved the domination of other local communities on the northern frontier. He has suggested that the Griqua aimed to establish their supremacy over the Khoesan, the Kora and the Sotho-Tswana through the force of the commando and the power of the church – in much the same way that white settlers had done in other parts of the Cape.

The interests of the Griqua and the missionaries, however, soon clashed. Political tensions developed because the Griqua insisted on their independence against the attempts by missionaries to dominate the affairs of the community. On the one hand, the missionaries wanted to build up an orderly and permanent settlement according to their own notions of how Africans should adapt to European domination. On the other hand, they were under pressure from the government to act as representatives of colonial rule. These conflicts increased, because the various factions within the Griqua community fought with each other for influence.

In 1814, the British colonial government attempted to use missionaries to recruit Griqua people for military duties. This resulted in the 'Hartenaars rebellion', and the Griqua community split into different factions. However, the colonial authorities were also divided in their dealings with the Griqua. Some wanted to use them as allies who could protect the frontier, but others were hostile to any idea of treating the Griqua as independent allies, preferring to subjugate them.

A number of treaties were adopted that intended to bind the Griqua closer to the colonial state, but the Griqua continued to attempt to keep their own power as far as possible. By the 1840s, these attempts had largely failed. This was the result not only of the increasing economic and political actions by the colonial authorities in the frontier region, but also of the resistance of other Africans, such as the Sotho-Tswana, against Griqua supremacy. Thereafter, the Griqua lost their independence and became dispersed. The descendants of the Griqua, however, have kept up the struggle for their own identity and historical heritage until today.

Activity 6.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 6.5 in Learning Unit 6, which deals with the life of an influential individual, Adam Kok.

6.5 Conclusion

This learning unit has outlined how, from the middle of the 18th century, trekboer farmers gradually moved into the northern frontier area. This expansion was accompanied by a variety of responses from different people in the region: resistance, accommodation, and withdrawal. Those who stayed, particularly south of the Gariep River, eventually succumbed to the superior military efficiency of trekboer commandos, and lost their independence.

Thus, as a result of the increased penetration of trekboer frontier farmers into the interior, and of growing numbers of government officials and expanding missionary activities, particularly from the early 19th century, the inhabitants of the Cape northern frontier were gradually brought into the sphere of colonial control. By the 1820s, many who did not withdraw to the more inhospitable regions to the north of the Gariep River were often forced to accept inferior social positions as farm labourers on trekboer farms.

It does need to be stressed, however, that processes of domination were very different from those that had occurred in the south-western Cape. The northern frontier zone has sometimes been described as a racially 'grey' area, because status and power did not depend on skin colour. In the south-western Cape, particularly during the whole of the 18th century, white colonists and the VOC government dominated society. However, in the northern frontier zone, this did not occur. Much more important than race or ethnicity was the ability of leaders to defend their communities against stronger groups by providing them with guns and protection; to control access to scarce natural resources; and to control trade with the Cape Colony. Most of the groups who succeeded in doing this were of mixed or of direct African descent.

Relations between the various groups were volatile and frequently violent, as different leaders and their followers struggled for domination over weaker communities, although there was also considerable cooperation between people at different times. It was only in the 1840s that the political influence of the Cape government became increasingly effective in this isolated region.

7 LEARNING UNIT 7: THE CAPE EASTERN FRONTIER

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

- Describe the environment of the eastern frontier region of the Cape.
- What was the impact of the environment on people living in the eastern frontier region?
- What was common about the lifestyles of the Xhosa, Khoesan and white settlers in the eastern frontier region, and what divided them?
- Explore interaction between Xhosa, Khoesan and white people in the eastern frontier region during four different phases of colonial settlement
- What was the impact of colonial settlement and expansion in the eastern frontier region before 1820?

The Cape eastern frontier was in many ways the most famous of all southern African frontiers. It was here that some of the first major wars between the indigenous African people and settlers of European background took place. The process of interaction was complex, as we shall see: on the one hand, it was characterised by cooperation, as new economic and social bonds between people were established, and on the other hand, there was serious conflict, as different groups of people struggled with one another to obtain control of the region during the period with which we are concerned.

After about five decades (approximately the 1770s to the 1820s) of interaction between the Khoesan, Xhosa and white people, the colonial power eventually succeeded in temporarily 'closing' the frontier on its own terms. Consequently the fluid political, social and economic relationships which had existed between the members of these three communities became more rigid and structured. In 1812, the British colonial authorities succeeded in ending the power vacuum that had existed on the frontier up to that time, and were able to control and regulate interaction more effectively than before. However, it does need to be understood that this situation was to be regularly challenged during the following decades, up to as late as the 1870s and 1880s (well outside the period of this module).

All the same, the power established by the colonial authorities was never all that secure during the period with which we are concerned. Their power was regularly challenged, not only by the Xhosa and the Khoesan, but also by white frontiersmen who were frequently unhappy with the intervention of colonial power in the region. Further, the intervention and role of missionaries, who established some of the first mission stations among the indigenous people at the very end of the 18th century, began to affect relationships between people, although the full impact of missionaries was to occur after the period with which we are concerned in this learning unit.

In this unit, we will focus on the following main themes:

- The eastern frontier environment
- Interaction between people up to the 1770s
- Developments during the late VOC period (1770s to 1795)
- Developments during the period of the first British occupation (1795 to 1803)
- Developments during the Batavian period (1803 to 1806)
- Developments during the second British occupation (1806 onwards)

7.1 The eastern frontier environment

The Cape eastern frontier zone was a wide coastal area which stretched from the Gouritz River in the west to land as far as the Kei River in the east. It included the Great Fish River, and was bounded in the north by mountain ranges and by the Indian Ocean in the south.

The Cape eastern frontier was situated in the south-eastern section of the most fertile parts of southern Africa, although parts of the frontier zone – the areas well inland from the coast – were relatively arid and even mountainous, and did not support agriculture. Most of the region received enough summer rainfall to enable dense natural vegetation as well as crops to grow – particularly those areas that were close to the Indian Ocean coast.

The region did experience some climatic problems, as there were inconsistent and unpredictable patterns of rainfall and climate. Rainfall was often erratic, severe droughts were fairly common, and there were also extremes in temperature, which could range from severe heat to intense cold.

The numerous wild animals in the eastern frontier region offered good hunting opportunities for all of the inhabitants who occupied the region. However the Khoekhoe, Xhosa and white settlers, who were all mainly involved in some form of stock farming, were dependent on large areas of natural pasturage, as they made little serious effort to increase the carrying capacity of the land. Once an area became overgrazed or exhausted, the tendency among all groups was to move to other pastures. The problem was that the various groups of stock farmers could only continue in this manner as long as there was sufficient available land. As soon as land became exhausted or stressed, a conflict situation arose.

The most sought-after part of the eastern frontier region, the area where most of the interaction between groups took place, was a portion known as the Zuurveld. This was an area of some 120 kilometres long and 80 kilometres wide between the Sundays River and the Great Fish River. The vegetation in this area was suitable for stock farming, but was not available for grazing throughout the year. The sour grass in certain parts provided excellent pasturage for livestock during the spring and early summer months, but was not edible in autumn and winter. Sweetveld, which was found in the valleys, provided good grazing for most of the year, except in the spring, when it grew slowly.

These types of grass and their distribution in the Zuurveld meant that stock farmers had to practise transhumance, that is migrate from one area to another in order to have grazing throughout the year. This pattern of migration meant that tension and friction were bound to arise among the various communities of stock farmers, as they competed to gain control over the limited pasturage (grazing grass).

Activity 7.1

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 7.1 in Learning Unit 7, which deals with the environment of the eastern frontier region, and makes some comparative points with the northern frontier region which you studied in Learning Unit 6.

7.2 Interaction between people up to the 1770s

Khoesan societies

As in other parts of southern Africa, the original inhabitants of the eastern frontier region were the hunter-gatherers. For many centuries, different groups moved freely in this area, living off the wild animals they hunted and plants they gathered.

Although the archaeological record is not entirely clear or consistent, we do know that some of these hunter-gatherers acquired livestock, probably between 10 and 12 centuries ago. Livestock owners, often called pastoralists, lived in larger and more complex societies than hunter-gatherers, and tended to push hunter-gatherers away from the most fertile regions. At times, hunter-gatherers made fierce attempts to exclude livestock owners from their territory, but others tended to withdraw and they dispersed into the more arid areas or inaccessible mountain ranges in the interior away from the coastal belt, from where some of them would continue their attacks and raiding activities. Others were merely absorbed by the livestock-owning groups and adapted their lifestyle. We do know, as in the south-western Cape, that there was sometimes fluidity between the hunter-gatherer and hunter-pastoralist lifestyles.

In the first half of the 18th century, increasing numbers of pastoralist Khoesan entered the region, as they moved east in order to escape the growing colonial settlement in the south-western Cape. Many were impoverished groups who had been forced away from the south-western Cape because of growing VOC power and increasing numbers of colonial settlers. They had been weakened by inequities in trade and barter, particularly of cattle, and had also been deprived of access to pasture and water, and were struggling to survive.

Bitter conflicts arose during this period between these newer groups and those who had been established in the region for much longer. There was considerable conflict and turmoil as a result, and distinctions between hunter-gatherers and hunter-pastoralists became even more blurred.

Xhosa societies

The main indigenous group whom the Khoesan encountered in this region were the south-westward-moving Xhosa people. The Xhosa formed part of a larger group of Bantu-speaking mixed farmers, called the southern Nguni – who had, from about the 10th century, been moving slowly south from the area where northern Nguni were established along what is now the Kwazulu-Natal coastal region. By the late 16th century, they had reached the coastal region around the Kei River, where they herded their livestock, hunted wild animals and cultivated their crops.

The Xhosa economy resulted in a dispersed pattern of settlement, which was compounded by their territorial expansion that occurred continuously as the population slowly increased and as sons left to establish their own households. Xhosa groups were often embroiled in disputes over land, cattle or authority, and this also led to splintering off and the formation of new chiefdoms. Politically, Xhosa society was often characterised by fierce power struggles between competing chieftains. This rivalry led to divisions and the absence of effective political unity. This arguably was to play a significant role in undermining the Xhosa people's attempts to resist encroachment by other communities in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Despite the rivalries and tensions which we have just mentioned, the Xhosa were also recognised for being tolerant in their relationships with their neighbours, as well as being hospitable to people who were in need. They were regularly involved in alliances with

communities they encountered, for beneficial trading relationships, and for intermarriage. As a result, they have often been described as largely an 'open' society, because of this tradition of including or absorbing other groups.

In Xhosa society, land was regarded as belonging to the community and 'every man had the right to the use of land just as he had the right to breathe the air'.[1] There were no fixed boundaries between different clans, and the chief regulated this right to share the use of the soil among all clans and adults within society.

Another characteristic of Xhosa society which influenced their relations with other communities was the important role that cattle played in their lives. Besides being a source of food, cattle were also important as a store of wealth, as a medium of exchange or trade, as bridewealth, as being used as draught animals, and as having an important role in ritual occasions within Xhosa society.

We do know of significant conflict between Xhosa and San hunter-gatherers at times. The harsh manner in which many of the Xhosa treated the San was largely as a reaction to the San's hostile attacks and relentless raiding of Xhosa cattle. The San also resisted Xhosa advancement into their traditional hunting and gathering areas. Despite this intense conflict between the two societies at times, we also know of cooperation that developed between the two groups. The San traded feathers, ivory and eggshell beads with the Xhosa in exchange for grain and iron. Certain Xhosa groups depended on the San as rainmakers, paying them in cattle and with part of their crops. Occasionally, San groups joined Xhosa chiefdoms and there were several cases of intermarriage.

Khoesan pastoralists and Xhosa also came into conflict with one another. They clashed over access to water and grazing areas, as well as raided one another's cattle. There were also incidences of both groups being absorbed by the other: in the 18th century, some Khoekhoe incorporated groups of destitute Xhosa, like the Gona, while the Xhosa also incorporated other Khoekhoe clans, giving rise to the mixed Xhosa-Khoekhoe chiefdom, the Gqunukhwebe.

The contact and interaction between the Xhosa and the Khoesan was facilitated by the similarities in their social organisation along clan-lineage lines, their ability to absorb strangers into their communities, their practice of pastoralism and, to a lesser degree, hunting. A network of reciprocal relations developed between different groups as they traded, intermarried and formed political alliances against other local rivals. That Xhosa-Khoesan interaction had been intimate and of long duration is evident in the marked influence Khoesan languages had on Xhosa dialects.

This interaction between peoples in the centuries before 1750 was very characteristic of an 'open' frontier. Relations were fluid and neither group ever appears to have been in complete control over the other.

This situation was to change once white trekboer farmers moved into the eastern frontier region from the south-western Cape, followed by government officials and others.

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1 M Wilson and L Thompson (eds), *A history of South Africa to 1870* (Cape Town, 1982), p 268.

Activity 7.2

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 7.2 in Learning Unit 7, which deals with early interaction between people in the region which became known as the eastern frontier zone.

7.3 Interaction on the frontier: the late VOC period (1770s to 1795)

Before the 1770s, when the first white frontiersmen began to move in significant numbers into the territories as far east as the Fish River, a number of individuals of European background had already entered the region. They were explorers, traders and big game hunters who travelled, both officially and unofficially, to the geographically more attractive eastern frontier. By the middle of the 18th century (around 1750), the route into what became known as the eastern frontier, or the eastern Cape, was well-known and well-used.

Early interaction between these white people and the various indigenous Khoesan and Xhosa peoples was characterised by both cooperation and conflict. However, as the trading activities between them began to change when whites appeared to settle on a more permanent basis, conflict began to increase.

After 1700, when the VOC opened the cattle trade to freemen and granted settlement rights beyond the limits of the Cape colony (the south-western Cape), migration into the interior increased rapidly. Within seven decades, the area occupied by people of European descent had increased tenfold. This was the result of the land allocation systems of the VOC, as well as population growth and the social pressure on white males to establish their own farms. White frontiersmen were granted individual rights of ownership and usage and lived in small-scale, closely-knit units, making the white population densities in the frontier region extremely low.

This relative isolation of the white frontiersmen, which was further enhanced by their nominal alliance with the colonial authorities, led them to become virtually entirely self-sufficient and individualistic. It also led to a feeling of fear and insecurity when they confronted other large groups, such as the Xhosa, who outnumbered them. This element of fear resulted in aggressiveness which was often intensified by racial prejudices and religion. Some of them felt they had to uphold their Christian norms against the non-Christian Xhosa and Khoesan, and were therefore often seen to be a ‘closed’ group not amenable to closer cooperation or incorporation.

These white farmers were mainly cattle farmers, but they also hunted game. Some of them planted crops on a small scale. Their cattle were important as a source of food, as a form of capital, and as a means of exchange. Their wealth and status were measured by the quality of their cattle. It was therefore imperative that they had an adequate supply of grazing land, as they did not attempt to improve the grazing capacity of the land, but simply moved on to new pastures when an area became overgrazed or overpopulated.

The arrival of the white settlers had a serious effect on Khoesan hunter-gatherers in the region. The introduction of firearms that the white frontiersmen possessed led to an immediate decline in the number of wild animals. The San also raided the cattle of the white frontiersmen, leading to aggressive attacks on them in turn. Many survivors of these conflicts were forced to move well away from the main fertile districts of the frontier zone.

The encounters of white frontiersmen with Khoekhoe herders also resulted to some extent in the dispossession of land and the destruction of Khoekhoe social structures. For many of the Khoekhoe, contact with the white frontiersmen caused impoverishment. This compelled many of them to take employment with the white frontiersmen. Although the majority of these relationships were exploitative, there were some cases of mutually beneficial arrangements. In return for labour services, some Khoekhoe were allowed to retain their livestock and grazing rights, as well as being afforded protection by frontiersmen's firearms. However, as the frontier began to 'close', this type of relationship largely ceased to exist as labour relations became more repressive.

Some Khoekhoe, because they were opposed to Xhosa association or domination, opted voluntarily for attachment to white frontiersmen. This practice of amalgamation had its precedents in the clientship custom of Khoekhoe society and the fact that they had no tradition of strong or centralised chieftainship (see Learning Units 1 and 4).

Once the white frontiersmen encountered and faced the Xhosa in the same frontier region, the chances of conflict were heightened. The identical character of the two groups' economic needs – the need for land, grazing and water – lay at the root of their interaction with one another. This was further complicated by the inability of either group – who were relatively evenly matched in the initial decades of their contact with one another – to establish complete and undisputed control in the area.

Various forms of cooperation existed between the white frontiersmen and the Xhosa. At times trade was a vehicle of cooperation. The Xhosa traded cattle and ivory for metal, glass beads, tobacco, and blankets, as well as firearms and horses. Employment was also sometimes mutually beneficial: the white frontiersmen obtained herdsmen, while the Xhosa were able to buy European commodities. Even during the periods of mounting conflict, there were instances of cooperation. White frontiersmen became temporary allies of various rival Xhosa chieftains, in their various internal political power struggles.

However, the competition for the extremely limited grazing resources, particularly in the Zuurveld, and the increasingly restricted living-space lessened the opportunities for cooperation. In other words, as the frontier began to 'close', a conflict situation seemed inevitable.

During the 1770s, the white frontier farmers began to complain to the VOC authorities that the Xhosa had occupied and exhausted virtually all the available grazing land. Since the Xhosa were numerically superior, they had no fear of white domination and they were more concerned with their own political disputes than with the situation of white frontiersmen. It does appear that animosity arose mainly among the colonists, who resented the fact that the Xhosa occupied most of the Zuurveld, which was coupled with their fear that the much larger size of the Xhosa population posed a threat to white survival.

The VOC, whose authority over frontier districts was seldom more than nominal, could do little or nothing to control the situation on the frontier. They regarded the Cape in purely commercial terms, and therefore did not regard the particular group interests of the white fontiersmen as a priority. They did, however, repeatedly move the official boundary of the colony in order to prevent the white pioneering columns and black settlements from meeting, but this failed to prevent further expansion. The VOC had also declared it illegal and punishable by death to trade with the Xhosa, but the trading exchanges continued regardless.

In 1778, the governor of the Cape, Joachim van Plettenberg, travelled to the eastern frontier in an attempt to establish the Fish River as the boundary between the Xhosa and the white frontiersmen. However, the minor Xhosa chieftains with whom he negotiated had no authority to

speak on behalf of the Xhosa as a whole. Furthermore, owing to the Xhosa's concept of land ownership, they paid little regard to these border provisions. The continued presence of the frontiersmen gave rise to the first of a series of violent clashes between the two groups.

According to contemporaries, including prominent frontier farmers, the First Frontier War (1779-1781) resulted from the theft of Xhosa cattle by white frontiersmen. There is no doubt that the white frontier farmers must have felt rather overwhelmed and threatened by the Xhosa. As was the case in many of the subsequent frontier wars, lives were lost, cattle were stolen, very little land was won, if any at all, and neither group emerged victorious.

In an attempt to assert greater control over the area, and in response to the pleas of frontier farmers, the VOC established the district of Graaff-Reinet in 1786, while at the same time tried to maintain the Fish River as a boundary. However, because of the VOC's virtual bankruptcy by this stage, there was no military support to enforce the VOC's policy of separation. A policy of conciliation towards the Xhosa was instead adopted. They were urged to return across the border and restore the cattle they had stolen. At the same time, commando attacks were prohibited. The VOC's efforts were further hampered by two developments. First, severe drought conditions prevailed in 1792 and 1793, which depleted the already limited pasturage of the Zuurveld just as some Xhosa, who were fleeing from the chief Ndlambe, settled in the area. Second, there was increasing hostility to the VOC among frontiersmen, who resented the VOC's attempts to interfere in their relationships with their Khoekhoe servants.

The frontier again became extremely tense, particularly because no authority was able to fill the 'power vacuum' there, and the frontiersmen increasingly began to take the law into their own hands. This caused the outbreak of the Second Frontier War in 1793.

The immediate spark occurred when Ndlambe persuaded a group of white frontiersmen, led by Barend Lindeque, to join him in an attack on the Gqunukhwebe Xhosa in the Zuurveld. The Gqunukhwebe and other minor chieftains were forced out of the Zuurveld, and Ndlambe succeeded in making the Rharhabe clan supreme in the western areas. Meanwhile, chaos broke out among the white frontiersmen, and raids were followed by counter-raids. A commando from the Swellendam and Graaff-Reinet districts tried in vain to force all the Xhosa across the Fish River, after which an ineffective peace settlement was concluded with the Xhosa.

Thus, in the last quarter of the 18th century the circumstances on the frontier had deteriorated even further. The VOC had become notorious for its vacillating and inefficient policy, as well as the corruption of many of its officials. The frontiersmen's anti-government feelings were to come to a head in the various burgher rebellions of 1795, 1799 and 1801.

Activity 7.3

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 7.3 in Learning Unit 7, which deals with the conflict and cooperation in the eastern frontier zone during the late VOC period.

7.4 Interaction on the frontier: the period of the first British occupation (1795 to 1803)

As a result of wars in Europe, Britain occupied the Cape from 1795 until 1803. This change in administration by no means implied a change in policy. Britain undertook to return the Cape to the Dutch at the end of the conflict in Europe, and therefore the British government regarded the Cape as a fortress defending its external interests, and not as a colony to be developed. The British also had a shortage of funds, which resulted in continuity of policy from the VOC period, rather than change. The British armed forces initially did no more than try to contain the situation on the eastern frontier, and the unsettled conditions there persisted.

By 1797, various Xhosa chiefdoms had again established themselves in the Zuurveld, and tension with the white frontier farmers began to mount. In 1799, a force of British and Khoekhoe troops was sent to drive the Xhosa back across the Fish River. In the ensuing conflict, which was to become the Third Frontier War of 1799-1802, many of the Khoekhoe employed by white frontier farmers deserted, and under the leadership of Klaas Stuurman they allied themselves with the Xhosa. This came to be known as the Khoekhoe rebellion. The Xhosa-Khoekhoe alliance was so effective in its strategy and tactics that most frontier farmers fled, leaving the Zuurveld almost entirely in the hands of the Xhosa. This effective alliance between the Xhosa chieftains and the Khoekhoe rebels became an important factor in the balance of power on the frontier. It also paralysed the economic activities of the frontier farmers, and rumours began to circulate that the whites would abandon the Zuurveld region entirely.

Activity 7.4

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 7.4 in Learning Unit 7, which deals with the Khoekhoe rebellion and the Third Frontier War, to deepen your understanding of this important phase in the history of the frontier.

7.5 Interaction on the frontier: the Batavian period (1803 to 1806)

In 1803, the British returned the Cape to Dutch rule. The three-year period between 1803 and 1806 is known as the Batavian period at the Cape, named after the ruling Batavian regime then in power in the Netherlands. During this period, relationships were more settled on the eastern frontier after the end of the Third Frontier War, there was a general absence of major disturbances on the frontier. The Batavian administration blamed the frontier crises of the past on the weakness of central authority in the region and the mistreatment of the Xhosa and Khoekhoe by white frontiersmen.

Their policy was to create a permanent and satisfactory boundary line between the Xhosa and colonists at the Fish River. Therefore, like their predecessors, the Batavians did not recognise the rights of the Xhosa west of the Fish River. They also hoped to persuade the Xhosa in the Zuurveld to leave and to cease dealing with the white frontiersmen, except under Batavian supervision.

Although some historians have argued that the Batavian government had more tolerant attitudes towards the Xhosa and the Khoekhoe than their VOC and British predecessors, they were committed to maintaining a social order whose political and economic arrangements were dominated by a minority of white colonists. They differed from their predecessors in that they

envisaged a permanent settlement of frontier relationships, and they introduced constructive administration along civil, and not military, lines.

The Batavians therefore advanced a policy of conciliation, and tried to implement it consistently. The governor, Jacob de Mist, and the commissioner, Jan Janssens, attempted to defuse the situation by dealing first with the Xhosa-Khoekhoe alliance. The major grievance of the Khoekhoe was their shortage of land. De Mist and Janssens persuaded the Khoekhoe captain, Klaas Stuurman, to move further away from the Xhosa and settle near the Gamtoos River. They also allocated some 6000 hectares at Bethelsdorp to the London Missionary Society where the Khoekhoe could live under the supervision of the missionaries Johannes van der Kemp and James Read. Numerous displaced Khoekhoe settled there. Some of the Xhosa chieftains were also open to the presence of the missionaries for reasons of political prestige and possible contact with the colonial authorities, rather than for religious reasons. The Batavian government hoped that the missionaries would have a stabilising effect on the Khoekhoe.

Controlling Xhosa movements was more difficult, because the Batavians had limited military force available to patrol the borders that they tried to establish, and it was still possible for Xhosa to cross into the territory to which both they and the Batavian authorities laid claim.

Batavian policy was restricted by a scarcity of funds. The garrison was small and the Batavians were less equipped to deal with confrontation on the frontier than the British had been. Nevertheless, they were fortunate enough to have a skilful official called Lodewyk Alberti, who succeeded in upholding the Fish River boundary at least as far as the colonists were concerned. He also had some success with the Xhosa chiefdoms and managed to prevent full-scale war between them. His diplomacy enabled him to establish good relations with Ngqika, Ndlambe and some other chieftains. For example, when Ngqika actually crossed the Fish River in 1805, Alberti rode out to meet him and persuaded him to return.

Although the policy of ‘divide and pacify’ worked relatively well during the short Batavian period, a situation of relative peace may not have lasted. There was considerable rivalry between different Xhosa chieftains at the time, which meant that the Xhosa were more concerned with this than challenging the Batavian authorities or the white frontiersmen. Also, whatever successes the Batavians may have had in ensuring peace on the frontier, they were unable to arrange a permanent boundary with the Xhosa.

7.6 Interaction on the frontier: the second British occupation (1806 onwards)

As we explained in Learning Unit 6, the ‘closing’ of the frontier depended on whether or not one group could establish its hegemony, or its dominance, over others in its immediate vicinity, or, alternatively, whether or not some external power was able to take control and end the relative anarchy of the open frontier situation. As we have seen, no single group had managed to establish such hegemony on the eastern frontier before 1806. However, when the British took over from the Batavian government in that year, new policies were adopted which would lead to the closing of the frontier on British terms.

After 1806, British colonial policy was primarily concerned with establishing an efficient centralised administration, which could ensure law and order among the various groups in the Cape colony. The British now wanted to secure the Cape to act as a safeguard of Britain's lucrative trade route to India. The policy of conciliation that the Batavian authorities had attempted began to be applied less sympathetically, and government actions were often harsh and autocratic.

British colonial policy was also dictated by the need to economise as far as possible. Because Britain had incurred great debt in the European wars it had fought over the previous decade, it was initially unable to provide the frontier with the military forces it ideally required. Therefore, colonial officials on the frontier had to maintain peace by trying to persuade the Xhosa to stay on the east side of the Fish River and avoid confrontations. With the increase in Ndlambe's power and the overgrazing of the Zuurveld in the first decade of the 19th century, however, some Xhosa chiefdoms began to move further west.

In 1811, the new governor at the Cape, Sir John Cradock, decided to resolve the increasingly conflictual situation on the frontier by ordering Lieutenant-Colonel John Graham to expel all Xhosa living west of the Fish River, and also by applying a new determined military strategy. The battles which followed, constituting the Fourth Frontier War (1811-1812), were of unprecedented violence. British officers headed a military force of some 2 000 troops, including 700 men from the 'Cape Hottentot [Khoekhoe] Regiment', drove more than 8 000 Xhosa over the Fish River and then proceeded to establish 27 military posts along the border to prevent the Xhosa from returning. The war was marked by many atrocities, and there was very significant devastation of land, crops and livestock.

Thus, after almost forty years of interaction and struggle between Xhosa and white frontiersmen when neither managed to subjugate the other, the British army finally succeeded in putting an end to the long-standing 'power vacuum' on the Cape eastern frontier. The British colonial government therefore stabilised relationships by throwing its weight behind the white frontiersmen, and thus it temporarily 'closed' the frontier.

Activity 7.5

Go to the MyUnisa site of this module and work through Activity 7.5 in Learning Unit 7, which deals with the closing of the eastern frontier region by the British.

7.7 Conclusion

The interaction between Xhosa, Khoesan, white frontiersmen and various colonial authorities on the eastern frontier during the late 18th and early 19th centuries played a significant role in the broader history of southern Africa. The eastern frontier was the region where the south-westward-moving Xhosa and the eastward-moving white frontiersmen encountered one another for the first time. As was the case with the northern frontier, groups had to adjust to the presence of one another, and both violent and more peaceful forms of interaction occurred.

The contact that occurred between the Xhosa and the white frontiersmen in particular was to have far-reaching consequences. For much of the remainder of the 19th century, the competing interests of the British and the Xhosa would result in significant conflict. These would place a heavy financial and administrative burden on the Cape colonial government, which regularly needed to commit military and other resources to impose its control over the region. The desire of the Xhosa to maintain their independence and way of life would see determined resistance to white settler interests. Conflict on the frontier also contributed to the departure of many of the frontier farmers of Dutch background into the interior of southern Africa in the 1830s, a movement which was known as the Great Trek, which would open a new chapter in the history of southern Africa.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

There are many different sources that may be consulted for additional reading for this module. This list is certainly not comprehensive, and is highly selective. If you wish to read more widely (which we encourage), you should consult the bibliographies in these books, and you are also welcome to contact your lecturers for additional guidance.

The books listed under the heading of 'General works' contain standard and relatively recent surveys of South African history. Some of these books do not deal with all sections of this module.

We have not listed specialised academic articles, which you may find difficult to locate, although some of these have been consulted in the compilation of the study material, and a few of which are cited in some of the activities on MyUnisa.

General works

- Cameron, T and Spies, SB (eds), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1991).

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- Wilson, M and Thompson, LM (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, vol 1: South Africa to 1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

- The website of South African History Online (SAHO) has useful information, and it is regularly updated: www.sahistory.org.za

Learning Unit 1

- Boonzaier, E *et al*, *Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa* (Cape Town and Athens: David Philip and Ohio University Press, 1996).

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Learning Unit 2

- Boxer, CR, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (London: Penguin, 1973).

- Elphick, R and Giliomee, H (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989). This book is also available in Afrikaans: *'n Samelewing in Wording, 1652-1840* (Kaapstad: Maskew Miller Longman, 1982, of later uitgawes).

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Learning Unit 3

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Learning Unit 4

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Learning Unit 5

- Elphick, R and Giliomee, H (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989). This book is also available in Afrikaans: *'n Samelewing in Wording, 1652-1840* (Kaapstad: Maskew Miller Longman, 1982, of later uitgawes).
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Learning Unit 6

- Elphick, R and Giliomee, H (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989). This book is also available in Afrikaans: *'n Samelewing in Wording, 1652-1840* (Kaapstad: Maskew Miller Longman, 1982, of later uitgawes).

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Learning Unit 7

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