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Cape Town: synthesis in the dialectic of continents

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7. CAPE TOWN (1750–1850): SYNTHESIS IN THE DIALECTIC OF CONTINENTS

by

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Cape Town is probably the most beautifully set of all the cities in the world. Even if man has not done much to enhance that setting and occasionally has done everything possible to rape it, the combination of the mountains ringing what was once called Table Valley and the oceans along both sides of the Cape peninsula is unique and exquisite. Add to this a climate which, excepting occasional winter storms and the force of the South-Easter on some summer days, is ideal for human existence – to say nothing of high quality vineyards nearby – and Cape Town should offer an almost idyllic existence.

Unfortunately, it does not. For the lucky minority who live along the slopes of Table Mountain or, increasingly, the Tjgerberg, there is much to enjoy, for, in contradistinction to Braudel's Mediterranean but just as in many other 'developed' colonial settlements, the rich live on the mountains and the poor on the plains.¹ For the many, forced to dwell on the Cape Flats in the townships of Windermere, Bonteheuvel, Langa or Guguletu, the quality of life leaves much to be desired. The principles of town planning applied to these black ghettos have not been those designed to make them more liveable, but more controllable. Of prime consideration was the preservation of open fields of fire. The houses are separated from each other by stretches of loose sand. The architecture does everything possible to rob the estates of any sense of community. Indeed, the old community of District Six near the centre of Cape Town, which had once been the living heart of the city and has remained its symbol, was wantonly destroyed. Hanover Street is now an open space, and most of its old inhabitants have been driven out into the Cape Flats, where they fall prey, too often, to the gangs and the dagga dealers.² It is no wonder that Cape Town has one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world.³ Not even the streets of Central Cape Town are safe at night. On the Flats, even during the day the wise are very careful where they go.

In a sense, then, Cape Town is merely another South African city, only more so. Nevertheless, it has a quality which is not to be found elsewhere in the Republic, and which derives from its position as the Mother City of white South Africa, two hundred years older than the mining and governmental centres of the north.

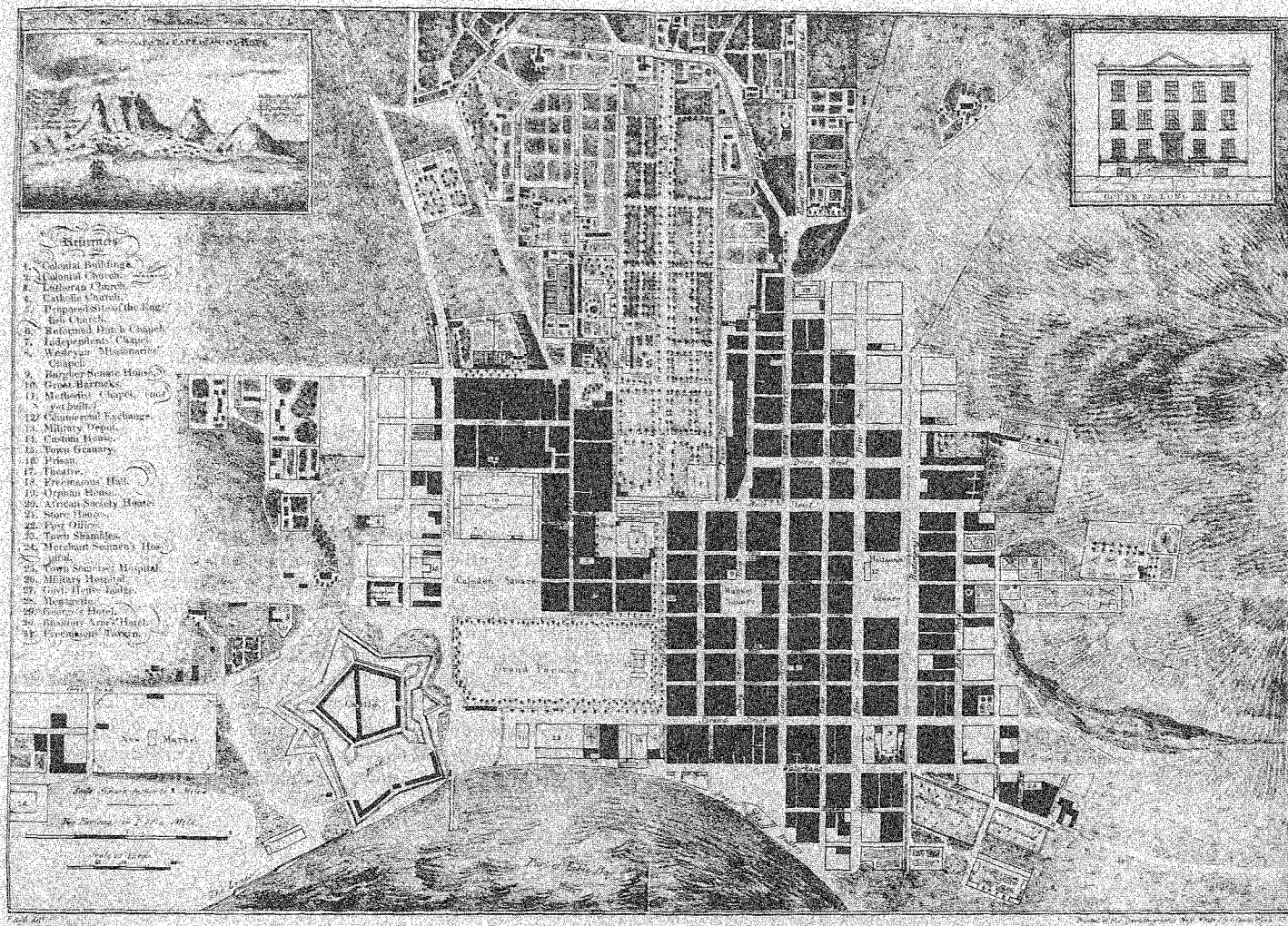


Figure 7.1. Cape Town and its environs, 1827, from George Thompson, *Travels in Southern Africa* (London, H. Colburn, 1827).

It was the centre of the colonial society of pre-industrial South Africa, a society that has by no means been fully submerged in the new world of industrial capitalism, difficult as it is to tease out the precise relations between the two. In this chapter, I will analyse the ways in which early Cape Town grew and developed, in the hope of being able to describe it as it was at the time of industrialisation, as this was the basis on which modern Cape Town was formed.

The Cape Colony was founded in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.) as a half-way house between Europe and Asia, and that position on the route to the East and the West was one it maintained at least until the opening of the Suez Canal. To the British, when they conquered the Cape, the settlement was 'the master link of connection between the western and eastern world'.⁴ But they would have had difficulty in deciding to which of the two worlds Cape Town belonged. This came because its population was comprised almost entirely of immigrants or their descendants. In 1806, the first date at which it is possible to make precise distinctions, under 4% of the total population of the town (626 out of 16,428) were considered to be 'Hottentot'.⁵ Nor had any Xhosa yet arrived in Cape Town, although in the twentieth century they became very numerous.

The figure of 16,428 for the population of Cape Town included neither the government employees (taken in the broadest sense to include the 264 slaves⁶ inherited by the British authorities from the V.O.C.) nor the garrison, in total around 4,000 men at this time, to say nothing of the numerous sailors who spent a few days, or a few weeks, in Cape Town harbour, so that the town became full when the fleet was in, in the first four months of the year. Rather, in addition to the Khoi, there were 6,435 free persons and 9,367 slaves. Of the former group, over 800 consisted of freed slaves,⁷ since almost all slaves manumitted lived in Cape Town.⁸ Most, however, had arrived at the Cape in the service of the Dutch East India Company — or were descended from someone who had. Throughout the eighteenth century there was a steady trickle of Dutchmen and Germans who were released from Company service and set up, very often, as craftsmen and traders in Cape Town.⁹ By 1806, too, there were the beginnings of the English merchant community that was to dominate Cape Town during the nineteenth century.

The slaves, in contrast, came from the various shores of the Indian Ocean. There were Indians, Sinhalese, Malagasies, Mozambiquans, Indonesians, even the odd Thai and Philippino at the Cape, while by 1800, after the colony had been established for well over a century, obviously a fair proportion (but well under half) had been born at the Cape.¹⁰ Of the first generation South Africans, it would appear that there were proportionally more Eastern slaves (Indians and Indonesians) in Cape Town than in the colony as a whole. They were seen by their masters to be more suitable for the various urban occupations, such as the skilled crafts, retail trading and service, that did not require great bodily strenght, this as opposed to the Africans and Malagasies who were more frequently found in the countryside and in the heavier occupations within the town, carrying water and

cutting wood, for instance.¹¹ As a result, the slave culture of Cape Town derived very largely from Asiatic sources. Linguistically, Low Malay and the *lingua franca* — a term recorded as a description of Portuguese at the Cape — were used alongside Dutch well into the nineteenth century and were of great importance in the creolisation process that led to the creation of Afrikaans.¹² Islam became the slave religion, if in a remarkably pacific form.¹³ Even Cape cookery has largely remained of Eastern inspiration, though the ingredients have changed.

Those slaves owned by the V.O.C. itself, with the *bandieten*, criminals transported from Batavia to the Cape, in total over 700, were housed in squalid conditions in a single building at the head of the *Herengracht* (now Adderley Street).¹⁴ The privately owned slaves, in contrast, were generally given quarters alongside their owners, though often not in the same buildings. Usually they had small apartments connected with or slightly separated from the main buildings, often above the kitchen, across a small courtyard.¹⁵ In less opulent houses though, the slaves might well have to sleep in an attic, while those who were self-employed, as it were, might provide their owners with a weekly sum of money from their earnings, and rent a room commercially in the town.¹⁶

To reach the total of 16,500 in 1806, the population of Cape Town had been growing throughout the eighteenth century. Figures have to be reconstructed by a complicated (and far from reliable) method, as it was only in 1798 when its population had reached 15,500 — again excluding the garrison, the Khoikhoi and the government slaves¹⁷ — that the Town was separated in the official lists from a large section of the surrounding countryside. Nevertheless, approximations for earlier periods would seem to suggest that the burghers, free blacks and their slaves numbered somewhat above 1,450 in the mid-1720s, 2,500 in about 1750 and 4,500 a quarter of a century later.¹⁸ The first spurt of growth in the population of Cape Town thus occurred in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, during which time it tripled. Unfortunately, however, this is precisely the period for which the available information on the demography of the town is least, since the original tax lists for the Cape district were no longer sent to the Netherlands, and had disappeared before the Cape archives depot was set up. All the same, the effects of the economic boom of the 1780s are clear.¹⁹

From 1806 on the population of Cape Town remained stable for almost three decades, even declining to 16,030 in 1816 before rising to 19,186 in 1831, to 20,181 in 1840 and 23,749 in 1850.²⁰ Since the sex ratio of the slave population had always been wildly out of balance,²¹ it had never been able to reproduce itself, and, with the ending of slave imports after 1807, a steady decrease set in, while the numbers of men and women slowly began to even out. From over 9,000 in 1806, the number of slaves in 1831, on the eve of emancipation, was but 5,827. This decrease was offset to a degree, by the settlement of 'Prize Negroes' in Cape Town,²² but they were never enough to compensate for the decline in the number of slaves. In contrast, the free population of the Cape rose considerably. Part of this rise

derived from manumission, but this does not explain the entire growth: between 1816 and 1824, 430 slaves were freed in the colony, an average of just over 50 a year.²³ Although the great majority of these lived in Cape Town, not all did. The increase was mainly due to the whites, especially those who were born in the colony.²⁴ By 1831, the free population of the town was more than double that of 1806, having reached 13,359. A decade later, after emancipation, a distinction was made between whites and so-called 'coloureds'. At that moment, in 1840, there were 10,784 whites to 9,307 'coloureds'. It was probably only in the 1830s that the whites had reached a majority of Cape Town's population.

As with all ports, Cape Town justified its existence, and earned its keep, by linking the sea — and the world economy that it represented and carried — with the land and the agricultural economy of the farms of the South African interior. It is thus no surprise that the economy of the Cape — both the town and the country — was in part determined by the fluctuations in the traffic that passed and put into the port of the Cape of Good Hope. There was a certain relationship between the number of ships in Cape Town harbour and the economic welfare of the colony, while the strength of the garrison was of considerable importance. The residents of Cape Town, nevertheless, provided the major market for many agricultural products, especially grain. Even in the eighteenth century the level of exports was considerably higher than is often appreciated, so that there was a certain cushion for the agricultural sector of the Cape economy against the fluctuations of world trade.²⁵ But during the nineteenth century the direct export of Cape goods became greater. When this happened the centre of gravity of the colony's economy began to move away from Cape Town to the wool producing areas of the east. Symbolically, in 1850, the exports from Port Elizabeth (almost entirely wool) for the first time exceeded those of Cape Town.²⁶

Cape Town itself, though, earned its money largely from the passing ships, either indirectly, like the V.O.C. officials, or directly. This was evident in the occupational structure of Cape Town, even if this trade would decrease as the nineteenth century progressed and the Cape became less popular as a point of call.²⁷ Thanks to the research of Shirley Judges, it is possible to give a breakdown of the pursuits followed by the householders in 1830.²⁸ Among the 527 whites, while a relatively small proportion followed professional pursuits,²⁹ there were 180 in various branches of the retail trade. Many of these presumably were also merchants on a larger scale than such a designation would suggest. In addition, as many as 8.7% (46 out of 527) ran various forms of hotel, lodging, eating or drinking houses. It is probable that many other householders took in lodgers to supplement their income.³⁰ In contrast, there were a total of 253 white householder craftsmen, including many smiths, waggonwrights, saddlers, carpenters and others in the building trade, tailors and cobblers. There were also 23 in 'unskilled and domestic' occupations, mainly widows who acted als laundresses, and fishermen in Table Bay.

With regard to the free black householders, the situation was very different. Aside from a handful of watchmen and tap and lodging house keepers and a fair number of apparently the poorer retailers (46 out of 277; 16.6%), the great majority were either fishermen and laundresses or worked as craftsmen, where they were strongly represented in the various clothing trades or in building. In total 78.3% of free black householders (217 out of 277) were to be found in one of the craft or service occupations, or, a few, as unskilled labourers.

Clearly this survey is in no way representative of the Town as a whole. While a few of the top layers of society seem to have disappeared, it is the lower ranks that were sorely underrepresented. Even if they were free, it is unlikely that many of the manual labourers would have been independent householders. Most of course were slaves. While no occupational census of slaves was ever made, so far as I am aware, which therefore makes it impossible to give any quantitative picture of their employment, it is clear that very large numbers were forced to work as labourers, in the docks, fetching firewood or water and so on.³¹ The fishing boats of Table Bay were mainly manned by slaves. Also many were trained for the skilled crafts, or for domestic service, while for a long time the retail trade in foodstuffs, in particular, was very largely in the hands of slaves, who had to provide their masters with the profits. Indeed, many owners lived as rentiers, not of the produce of the land or houses, but of humans, hiring out their bondsmen and women by the day, week, or month.³² Masterbuilders in Cape Town might hire as many as 79 slaves from numerous owners to complete a building.³³ Nevertheless, it was generally the poorer slaveowners who let their slaves out, while the slaves themselves seem to have welcomed the system, since they generally received money from their hirer, in addition to the sum he paid to the owner.

Cape Town at this stage was certainly not a pleasant place to live in, at least not for its poorer inhabitants who were concentrated on the fringes of the old town. They were to be found above all in the narrow alleys on the foreshore, along the lower slopes of Signal Hill and to the east of the town on the fringes of what was to become District Six. In these alleys, offal, rotting fish and night soil piled up and were at best sporadically collected. The stink of the butchers' slaughterhouses pervaded these quarters. Water was not widely available, being distributed in no more than sixty-three pumps and fountains, which were mainly concentrated in the richer areas of the town. Those elsewhere were thronged with men and women washing clothes and cleaning fish, so that they must have been heavily polluted.³⁴

It should not be imagined that these slums were exclusively inhabited by the free blacks, even though on the eve of emancipation this group made up about 18% of the town's population and between 35% and 40% of the so-called 'coloureds'. As Shirley Judges noted, 'the overall pattern suggested by an analysis of the 1830 street directory is one of racial mixing'.³⁵ A few streets had only white owners, although even there slaves would have lived in the rich houses, and even the richest merchant might have a so-called 'coloured' wife.³⁶ Against this, several of the alleys

were inhabited only by free blacks, but even the most poverty-ridden of the town's wards, on the foreshore, had white residents, mainly immigrants from Europe, many of whom were Irish. While the slum landlords took great profit from the fact that the Malays (but in theory not the other free blacks) were debarred from buying land without the direct authority of the governor,³⁷ they were just as prepared to exploit everyone else who was vulnerable to them. Capetonians certainly recognised racial differences, but did not act on them, at least not in any sense of racial antagonism.

For all its deficiencies, the survey of 1830 does show the Janus-face that Cape Town shared with all other ports. On the one hand there are the notable numbers of occupations profiting from the recreation needs of the sailors, the ale and wine-housekeepers, the hoteliers and so forth. It was these who have given Cape Town its name as the Tavern and Brothel of the two Oceans. On the other, there were the saddlers and waggonwrights who served the farming community and the shopkeepers who linked the two worlds. The Cape Colony had been shaped by the needs of the Cape Town population and the market it represented. For the wine and wheat farmers of the South West Cape, within eighty miles of Cape Town, this is evident. They were always linked to Cape Town as it was the only place where they could sell their produce, buy their slaves and their other necessities for production, arrange loans if necessary and so forth. The richest farmers indeed had a house in Cape Town as well as on their farms – or perhaps it should be said that they had farms alongside their townhouses, since most often they had accumulated their wealth through merchant activities and then invested it in agricultural enterprises. The symbiotic relationship between Cape Town and the Boland, between the relative freedom of the city and the harsh repression of labour in the countryside, had already begun.³⁸

As regards the stock farmers of the far interior, there has been considerable academic controversy on the motives for their move inland. Either they went because of the superior commercial viability of pastoralism or because they saw a virtual subsistence economy, with minimal ties to the market, as providing a high standard of living, given the capital they had to invest.³⁹ Whatever the stock farmers' motives, the market pursued them into the interior of the continent. Cape Town and the South West Cape that depended on it were always chronically short of meat and draught oxen. The butchers followed on the heels of the trekboers, even if they were not ahead of them. The leading Cape Town meat contractors had farms on the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony from the 1770s and the butchers' agents raced each other to important sales. Commercial ranching soon replaced subsistence pastoralism.⁴⁰

The influence of the Cape meat market went beyond the leading edge of white settlement, too. The first white contacts with the Xhosa and Tswana were almost all in the form of trading expeditions, first for ivory,⁴¹ later for cattle.⁴² Nor did these contacts remain peripheral to African⁴³ society. In time, war followed the

trade. The Hundred Years War⁴⁴ between the Xhosa and the whites was a long contest for cattle and for grazing grounds. Thousands of head were periodically lifted and many of them found their way onto the Cape market. Even before the first black Africans had found their way to Cape Town,⁴⁵ the city and the world economy it represented had made their malevolent presence felt seven hundred miles away, in what is now the Ciskei.

If the economy of Cape Town was based on linking the two worlds of the ocean and the continent, a third element has to be introduced to create a triangle of forces if the society of the city is to be understood. This is the mountain. In the twentieth century Table Mountain has become a friendly place, swarming with pick-nickers each sunny weekend — if for no other reason than that it cannot be segregated off. Two centuries earlier it had another significance. It may be seen as that part of the city's life that was not under control of the white authorities. When a slave had to escape from his (or her) owner, he took to the mountain. Many were caught shortly thereafter, but many others continued to live there. When a European party trudged up the mountain, they often found traces of the runaways, their abandoned fires and so forth, but they were never able to capture the escaped slaves themselves.⁴⁶ A slave who had disappeared up into the maquis-like *fynbos* vegetation of the Table plateau was only likely to be apprehended when he came down into Cape Town again, as he or she would have to from time to time in order to obtain food. Even then it was far from certain. Throughout the eighteenth century, there were occasional reports of groups who maintained themselves by cutting wood on the mountain and selling it on the streets of Cape Town, buying bread and meat and araq with the money.⁴⁷ The mountain was, as it were, a liberated, unconquered zone, not within the city but above it, beckoning or threatening the city dwellers.

Like all cities, and particularly all South African cities, then, Cape Town was and has remained a constant theatre for social conflict. In the eighteenth century, the initiators of this were largely the slaves. While there were many who had acquiesced in their lot, or at least were too cowed to take active measures to change it, there were numerous others who had not. Their actions took a wide variety of forms, from the deliberately inefficient performance of daily tasks to the borders of open rebellion. To the whites, most of these activities were 'criminal', so that, with the possible exception of the low-level Company employees and sailors who had deserted or who had been brawling outside the tap-houses, slaves were by far the largest category of offenders dealt with by the Cape Court of Justice. In many cases they were convicted of theft, often from their masters. Cape Town provided great opportunities for this. There were goods to steal, such as cloth, money, jewellery, even, on occasion, bales of coffee.⁴⁸ The slaves could obtain access to these goods, since they were often charged with their care and had the run of the houses and warehouses in which they were kept. No master could protect effectively the content of a building against the depredations of those who lived in it but

did not accept the rules of property. There were also channels to dispose of the goods. The steady flow of sailors through the port of Cape Town ensured an easy and virtually untraceable route for taking goods out of the colony. Between the 'producers' and 'consumers' of the stolen goods, there were also definite groups of 'middlemen', the receivers, including, at least in the first half of the eighteenth century, many Chinese who had been banished from Batavia for criminal activities and seem to have fallen into the same niche at the Cape.⁴⁹ Later, various Europeans came to dominate this dangerous side of business.⁵⁰ The slaves used the money so gained either for direct consumption, above all alcohol, or for buying freedom.⁵¹ The latter course was probably a rarity, however, since the money would be suspect and would only lead to closer investigation by the master.

The slaves also committed other, more violent crimes. On occasion a slave would be driven to assault or murder his master, even knowing that, if caught alive, a peculiarly barbarous form of death penalty would be imposed.⁵² Many, of course, were not taken. Either they reached the mountain, although in such cases severe measures were taken to effect a capture,⁵³ or they ran *amok* in the town, since, realising their days were numbered, they would try to do as much damage as possible before they would be killed.⁵⁴ In this way they fell back onto an Indonesian tradition that indeed outlasted slavery at the Cape.

Arson was another major method used by slaves against the town. The thatched roofs, dry climate and strong winds made Cape Town a prime target for this type of assault,⁵⁵ although the slaves never succeeded in destroying the town as they were able to do to the village of Stellenbosch.⁵⁶ In part this derived from decisions that changed Cape Town from a thatched to a flat-roofed town,⁵⁷ as can be seen, for instance, in the Malay quarter, the oldest more or less complete section of the modern city. The establishment of a fire-brigade was also of great importance.⁵⁸ While the whites who had left the Company's service joined the militia, as much for protection against foreign attacks as to maintain order in the colony itself, the ex-slaves — who could perhaps not be fully trusted with arms — had to counteract the attempts of their erstwhile fellow bondsmen to burn Cape Town.

It is against this background that the administration of Cape Town needs to be seen, although well into the nineteenth century the haphazard arrangement left many opportunities both for extortion on the part of the authorities and evasion among those who opposed them. This was especially so with the police, clearly the most important section of government in a town where public order was so precarious. Nevertheless, the policing of the streets of Cape Town was divided between two distinct authorities. Part of the task fell to the *burgerwagt* (citizen guard) and the *ratelwagt* who were paid from the income of an annual tax on the houses and remained under the control of the *burgerraad* (or Senate). They were to patrol the streets of the town at night, and, whenever they came across anything untoward, to sound their rattles in order to summon help.⁵⁹ Not infrequently they were successful in arresting slave criminals and in times of general panic their vigilance

clearly increased.

The other arm of the police came under the control of the *fiscaal*, an official who combined the functions of public prosecutor and chief of police and whose position was notorious and allowed such rapaciousness that the colonists named the most savage bird around them 'Jan Fiscaal', the fiscal shrike.⁶⁰ To carry out his orders he had under him a number of 'caffers', who were convicts banned from the East to the Cape and thus effectively in the position of slaves. They worked as hangman's assistants, as inflictors of corporal punishment and in capturing and arresting prisoners. They were neither popular nor revered. Even their chief once described them as 'evil, yes very evil and the dregs of humanity'.⁶¹ This was not entirely without reason as they were themselves able to use their freedom of movement to perpetrate numerous, generally untraceable crimes.⁶² One of the major demands of the Cape patriot movement was that they should be removed, although this derived as much from a desire to hamstring the *fiscaal* and so from the earliest political expressions of the rights of the white burghers as from a fear of the *caffers* themselves.⁶³ By the time of the British take-over of the Cape, a number of Europeans had been added to the *fiscaal's* staff, so that the *caffers* were then only used to arrest, flog and execute slaves.⁶⁴ In the years that followed the convicts' disappeared, and the role of the *burgerwagt* decreased, so that old soldiers from the British army came to exercise policing functions. This did not make life easier for the inhabitants of Cape Town. In 1828, the Commissioners of Inquiry into the affairs of the colony contrasted the 'great alacrity', with which the police chose to extort money from the Free Blacks, on very dubious pretexts, with 'their frequent remissness in the apprehension of culprits and the little respect that is paid by them to the right of personal freedom in any of the coloured classes of the community'.⁶⁵

The Commissioners also accused the *burgerraad* of wantonly increasing the difficulties under which the Free Blacks lived by the way in which they manipulated the regulations as to the fire service to restrict the movement of free blacks out of the city. It is by no means clear whether this was merely an administrative regulation without deep causes or whether it was deliberately employed by the leaders of Cape Town society to impose their control over a portion of the population that might otherwise be at once difficult to control and potentially opposed to their hegemony. The *burgerraad* was certainly representative of the dominant mercantile groups within the town. Originally its members had been appointed with primarily judicial tasks, since under the V.O.C. they represented the interests of the burghers as the non-official members of the Court of Justice. This they lost with the professionalisation of the legal system first under the Batavian republic and then under the British. What they retained was the control over the fire service, irksome as that may have been, over the watch, over prices and supplies of food, over water supply and the cleaning of the streets and so forth, administrative duties that they did not perform satisfactorily in the eyes of those who were striving for a professionalised civil service for the Cape Colony.⁶⁶ As a result of the commissioners' recom-

mendations, therefore, the *burgerraad* as such disappeared after 1827. However, this did not mean that the domination of Cape Town by its notables came to an end, since the municipality was reestablished in 1843 on a more formal basis, in which the dominance of the property owners was ensured by the institution of a householder suffrage.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, 40% (830 out of 2,069) of the voters for the new municipality were so-called 'coloureds'.⁶⁸

In the course of this chapter, I have been dealing with the structure of Cape Town society as it was during the period in which its human relations were dominated by the bondage of the majority of Capetonians. As long as slavery existed, the bases of urban society remained unchanged. Emancipation presented a new range of problems and brought about the development of a new social structure. These changes could only occur within the framework of the shifting economic base of Cape Town and the Cape colony as a whole.

Some of the main trends are clear. Although it continued to grow in size, Cape Town steadily lost its preeminent commercial position within the colony. At mid-century the exports from Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Province first exceeded those of Cape Town and with the great decrease in wine sales some years later,⁶⁹ Cape Town's position further declined. All the same, Cape Town did not merely remain a governmental centre. Even if the most dynamic economic centres were far away, Cape Town merchant groups retained a great degree of influence even over the Eastern Cape, despite considerable efforts on behalf of the Easterners to escape from their clutches.⁷⁰ Cape Town not only had capital built up through the years by its trading, but it also could raise it on the London markets, and with this it could ensure that its primacy was never lost.

As it had always been Cape Town remained a merchant-dominated city. The Cape Town Chamber of Commerce (first Commercial Exchange) was as important as the Town Council.⁷¹ But the merchants were not the same as they had been in the previous century. The driving force of the town in the nineteenth century was clearly British, not only in government but also in the life of the city. St. George's Anglican cathedral dominates the centre of the city;⁷² the Dutch Reformed Church, though much older (and much more beautiful) seems almost apologetic. British immigrants had taken over the leading positions in the Town's economy, presumably because with all ties to Holland cut, the vast majority of Cape Town's — and indeed of South Africa's — contacts with the rest of the world were with Britain, and the Scots and English were in a better position to exploit them. Cape Town therefore never became a linguistically unified city. Although Portuguese creole disappeared in the course of the nineteenth century, the cleavage between English and Dutch remained. Dutch was increasingly the language of the poorer strata, whether so-called 'coloureds' or whites, while English was identified with the ruling groups of the town, mercantile and political, who managed to maintain their domination of the city, if by somewhat dubious and corrupt means.⁷³ And the two groups were seen as opposed to each other. In the 1890s a Cape Town paper described the political

battle at a local election (in which sanitation – and the contracts for laying main drains – was a major issue) as one between the ‘clean party’ (the English) and the ‘dirty party’ (the Dutch and the Malays).⁷⁴

The separation was never absolute, of course, either between the languages or between the putative racial groups. Even the languages themselves did not remain absolutely distinct. As can be seen in the writings of Alex la Guma and Adam Small, above all, in the speech of District Six, English and what was to become Afrikaans were shaken up together lexically and grammatically, as the former language had a status to which Afrikaans speakers aspired.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, emancipation led to a definite shift within the spatial arrangements of the town. Once they were fully free in 1838, the slaves were no longer prepared to live on their ex-masters’ premises.⁷⁶ The memory of slavery was too fresh, so they moved out into the slums, alongside their friends and kin who had been free before 1838. They were joined by a large number of ex-slaves who had moved into Cape Town from the countryside, so that overcrowding became worse. As a newspaper described it, ‘in low apartments, twelve feet square, as many as twenty human beings have been discovered lodging, feeding and sleeping’.⁷⁷ But even there they could not escape the grip of their ex-masters. In one of the ironies of emancipation, the compensation money provided by the British government to the slave owners was often invested in real estate. A building boom occurred in Cape Town,⁷⁸ and the main so-called ‘coloured’ quarters of later Cape Town, District Six and the Malay Quarter on Signal Hill, were built at this time and put out to rent. The profit that the slave-owners once gained from the law of slavery was now replaced by the similarly strict laws of capital and the housing market. The scanty evidence so far recovered would seem to show that as a result the level of inter-racial mixing in Cape Town, at least in residential terms, was steadily decreasing during the course of the nineteenth century.⁷⁹

Even so the ‘races’ were not fully separated. It is significant that in the annual statistical blue books from 1841 on, no distinction was made between the ‘whites’ and the ‘coloureds’ in Cape Town, while such was the case in all the other parts of the colony.⁸⁰ The clear distinction between white and black could not be maintained in the town, because the sharp contradictions between master and servant, so characteristic of the South African countryside, was also absent. There were too many small shops, too many independent artisans, for this to be possible. In part as continuation of the service sector during slavery, many of the so-called ‘coloureds’ were able to gain positions for themselves where they could operate independently of white men and women and in which manual labour was merely a subsidiary part of their work, not the main theme. The urban economy and the port provided the opportunities for this just as it had ensured that the slaves had been trained in those skills necessary to allow the town to function. This long remained important in Cape Town’s economic organisation. So-called ‘coloureds’ were found in large numbers in the craft unions of the early twentieth century,⁸¹ but not in

such mass movements of manual labourers as the I.C.U.⁸² These were dominated by the African blacks who had come to Cape Town from the 1890s on to work in the docks and at other similar activities.⁸³ They remained a distinct group, living in the great locations of Ndabeni, Langa and Guguletu.⁸⁴ For long, their political and social aspirations were not in accord with those of the mass of Capetonians, in part of course, as a result of their different legal position. As late as 1960, for instance, when 30,000 Africans marched on central Cape Town from Langa, largely under the inspiration of the Pan-African Congress, they found little support among the so-called 'coloureds'.⁸⁵ Only in 1976, in the great wave of political action, was there any great cooperation between the two groups, as their own deteriorating social position had made the latter more amenable to calls for black unity.⁸⁶

While the deterioration in the texture of life in Cape Town is there for all to see, it is explained in various ways. To liberal white Capetonians, this is a delayed response to the growth of formal apartheid, a cancer that has been imported from the Transvaal and which has no place in the paternalist society of old Cape Town. Even among those Afrikaners to whom liberalism is a dirty word, the conflict between the Transvaal and the Cape has been a profound motif in politics and, with the massive immigration of Afrikaners into such suburbs of Cape Town as Belville and Parow, coinciding with the largely Cape-based growth of Afrikaner capitalism, the Cape nationalists have come to differ less extremely from their fellow white *Kapenaars*.⁸⁷ The so-called 'coloureds' and the Africans are less naive. They realise that, wherever the impulses for the introduction of apartheid may have derived, the local whites have done little to prevent it, and have profited from it. But all the same they know, far better than the whites, that things are not what they once were. For the so-called 'coloureds' of Cape Town, in their past there was a Golden Age, before racial laws drove families apart and smashed the egalitarian communities they had created.⁸⁸ As such, of course, this is a myth, necessary to sustain hope in the new slums of Bonteheuvel, Mitchell's Plain and Atlantis, but it is a myth with substance. These people come to work in the centre of Cape Town; barring a few pockets they do not *live* there. The old areas of District Six and Woodstock have been cleared.⁸⁹ The new 'coloured' townships are copies of Langa, Guguletu and the other African ghettos found throughout the Republic. The processes of South Africa's capitalist industrialisation have done as much violence to the society of Cape Town as to that of other parts of the country, but in a different way. Elsewhere the processes of incorporation of Africans into colonial society had been going on before the gold mines became the powerhouse of a new economy, but were then intensified and the colonial society rigidified. In Cape Town, the industrialisation of the country radically changed social arrangements, and the changes were, and were perceived as having been, for the worse.

NOTES

1. Like all generalisations, this one has exceptions, most notably the fact that the Malay community, certainly not the richest (though far from the poorest) of Cape Town's inhabitants, still looks down on the city from the slopes of Signal Hill.
2. The gangs and the dagga (hash) sellers were in District Six too. For a time around 1950, the district was a no go area for the police, because of the power the gangs had over it. See Don Pinnock, 'From Argie Boys to Skolly Gangsters: The lumpenproletarian challenge of the Street Corner armies in District Six, 1900-1951', *Studies in the History of Cape Town* (hereafter *SHCT*) III (1980).
3. *Cape Argus*, November 1979.
4. Macartney to Dundas, 10 July 1797, in: C.McC. Theal (ed.), *Records of the Cape Colony*, 36 vols. (London, 1897-1905) (hereafter cited as *RCC*), II, p. 114.
5. *RCC*, VI, pp. 72-2.
6. This is a figure for 1807. *RCC*, VI, p. 180.
7. Frank E. Bradlow and Margaret Cairns, *The Early Cape Muslims; A Study of their Mosques, Genealogy and Origins* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 98.
8. Richard Elphick and Robert Shell, 'Intergroup Relations: Khoikhoi, settlers, slaves and free blacks, 1652-1795', in: Richard Elphick and Herman Giliomee (eds.), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1820* (Cape Town and London, 1979), p. 143; and William M. Freund, 'The Cape under the transitional governments, 1795-1814', in *ibid.*, p. 223.
9. See Robert Shell, 'European immigration to the Cape Colony: the forgotten factor in frontier settlement and European expansion, 1701-1793', unpublished paper, New Haven, 1979.
10. Bradlow and Cairns, *Early Cape Muslims*, p. 100.
11. Robert Ross, 'The occupations of slaves in eighteenth century Cape Town', *SHCT*, II (1980).
12. This point is fiercely argued by Marius Valkhoff, *Studies in Portuguese and Creole with Special Reference to South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1966), especially pp. 146-241.
13. Robert Shell, 'The establishment and spread of Islam at the Cape from the beginning of Company rule to 1838', Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1974.
14. O.L. Geyser, *Die Ou Hoogeregshofgebou* (Cape Town, 1958); James C. Armstrong, 'The slaves, 1625-1795', in: Elphick and Giliomee, *Shaping*, pp. 85-90.
15. Robert Semple, *Walks and Sketches at the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1805), p. 34; M.D. Teenstra, *De vruchten mijner werkzaamheden*, edited by F.C.L. Bosman (Cape Town, 1943), p. 179. The only Cape Town house in which this pattern may still be seen would appear to be the Koopmans-de Wet house in Strand Street. See Hans Fransen and M.A. Cook, *The Old Houses of the Cape* (Amsterdam and Cape Town, 1965), p. 9.
16. For instance, this was the case with Louis, leader of the 1808 rebellion, although in this case he lodged with his free black wife. On Louis and this whole episode, see Robert Ross, *Cape of Torments; Slavery and Resistance in South Africa* (1983), chapter VIII.
17. Herman Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind, 1795-1803* (Cape Town, 1975), p. 16.
18. Ross, 'Occupations'. Since the figures given there are underestimates, I have increased them here by ca. 10 per cent.
19. *The Buildings of Central Cape Town: I. Formative Influences and Classification* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 13.
20. For 1816, see *RCC*, XI, p. 238; for 1831, Public Record Office, London, C.O. 53/68, 433; for the later years see the *Statistical Blue Book for the Cape Colony*.
21. On this, see Robert Ross, 'Oppression, sexuality and slavery at the Cape of Good Hope', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* VI (1980), pp. 422-425.
22. These were slaves who had been captured by the British Navy from illegal slavers. On them,

- see C.C. Saunders, "'Prize Negroes' at the Cape of Good Hope', unpublished paper, 1979.
23. *RCC*, XXVI, p. 112.
 24. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the sex ratio in Cape Town among whites was approximately 100.
 25. This will be demonstrated in a forthcoming work by Pieter van Duin and myself on the economy of the eighteenth century Cape.
 26. See the table given in Robert Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 151.
 27. J.R. Bruijn, personal communication.
 28. Shirley Judges, Poverty, living conditions and social relations – aspects of life in Cape Town in the 1830s, M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1977.
 29. Government personnel and other professional groups cannot have been included. For instance, no clergymen (except for Islamic priests) are mentioned.
 30. Numerous travellers' reports show that this was the case in the eighteenth century.
 31. *RCC*, III, p. 45.
 32. See Ross, 'Occupations', pp. 10–11.
 33. *RCC*, XXIX, pp. 457–462.
 34. Judges, Poverty, pp. 57–70.
 35. Judges, Poverty, p. 127.
 36. Howard Philips, 'Cape Town in 1829', *SHCT* III (1980), p. 8.
 37. *RCC*, XXVIII, p. 36; *RCC*, XXXV, p. 138.
 38. Robert Ross, 'The rise of the Cape gentry', *Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London: The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* XII (1982).
 39. S.D. Neumark, *Economic influences on the South African Frontier, 1652–1836* (Stanford, 1957); Leonard Guelke, The early European settlement of South Africa, Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974; and Robert Ross, 'Capitalism, expansion and incorporation on the South African Frontier', in: H. Lamar and L.M. Thompson (eds.), *The Frontier in History; North America and South Africa Compared* (New Haven, 1981).
 40. Susie Newton-King, 'Background to the Khoikhoi rebellion of 1799–1803', *Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London: Southern Africa* IX (1979), and her further research which will appear in her Ph.D. thesis.
 41. For a list of the major expeditions, see Monica Wilson, 'Co-operation and Conflict: the Eastern Cape Frontier', in: M. Wilson and L.M. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1968–71), I, pp. 234–235.
 42. Neumark, *South African Frontier*, pp. 97–106, 121–125.
 43. Terminology is always a bugbear in South African history. By 'African' I mean Bantu-speaking agriculturalists and their descendants.
 44. This description was first used, to my knowledge by C.C. Saunders, 'The 100 years war: some reflections on African resistance on the Cape-Xhosa frontier', in: D. Chanaiwa (ed.), *Profiles of Self Determination* (Northbridge, Ca., 1976).
 45. S. Judges and C.C. Saunders, 'The beginnings of an African community in Cape Town', *South African Outlook* (August 1976).
 46. For an example, see A.M. Lewin Robinson (ed.), *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Hendry Dundas from the Cape and Elsewhere, 1793–1803* (Cape Town, 1973), p. 49.
 47. See case 9 of 1735, *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, Den Haag (ARA), VOC 4128.
 48. This statement, and what follows, is based on an analysis of the criminal records in the ARA, Den Haag.
 49. This was both a regular occurrence in the criminal records and a point of white complaint to the company. For the latter, see N.L. de la Caille, *Travels at the Cape, 1751–53*, edited by R. Raven-Hart (Cape Town, 1976), p. 35, and G.McC Theal (ed.), *Belangrijke Historische*

- Documenten*, 3 vols. (Cape Town, 1896), I, p. 12.
50. E.g. case of 6 May 1785, ARA, VOC 4340.
 51. Case 28 of 1725, ARA, VOC 4109.
 52. Robert Ross, 'The rule of law at the Cape of Good Hope', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies* IX (1981), p. 13.
 53. E.g. *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, 6 vols. (Cape Town, 1944–56), III, p. 29.
 54. To give a few examples, cases 20 and 24 of 1766, ARA, VOC 4240; case 13 of 1766, ARA, VOC 4251.
 55. The most serious attempts were in 1736. See Dagregister, 12.3.1736, ARA, VOC 4131.
 56. H. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806*, translated by A. Plumtree, 2 vols. (Cape Town 1929–30), II, p. 128.
 57. *The Buildings of Central Cape Town*, I, p. 10.
 58. *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, II, p. 93.
 59. Kaapse Archiefstukken, *Resolutien van de Raad van Politie*, 8 vols. (Cape Town, 1957–1975), III, p. 14 and IV, p. 365).
 60. *Lanius collaris*, Linnaeus.
 61. Cited in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte, 1779–1791*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town, 1967), p. 38.
 62. e.g. case 10 of 1766, ARA, VOC 4243; case 15 of 1771, ARA, VOC 4267.
 63. Beyers, *Kaapse Patriotte*, pp. 38–39, 50.
 64. *RCC*, I, p. 244.
 65. *RCC*, XXXV, p. 139.
 66. Report of the Commissioners of Enquiry upon the Administration of Government, 6 Sept. 1826, *RCC*, XXVII, pp. 391–397.
 67. Rodney Davenport, 'The extension of freedom under law', in: Wilson and Thompson (eds.), *Oxford History*, I, p. 334.
 68. E. Hengherr, *Emancipation – and after; a study of Cape slavery and the issues arising from it, 1830–1843*, M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1953, p. 84.
 69. D.J. van Zyl, *Kaapse Wyn and Brandewyn, 1795–1860* (Cape Town and Pretoria, 1975), pp. 155–158.
 70. Basil le Cordeur, *The Politics of Eastern Cape Separatism, 1820–1854*, (Cape Town, 1981), pp. 123–9.
 71. R.F.M. Immelman, *Men of Good Hope, The Romantic Story of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce* (Cape Town, 1955).
 72. At least it did until the building of that monument to Afrikaner capitalism, the Golden Acre.
 73. For a long time they were able to maintain their dominance by being the only constituency in the colony that allowed the use of the 'plumping vote'. However, when the Malays threatened to use this system to ensure the election of one of their own people, this 'anomaly' was immediately removed.
 74. Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Dangerous Cape Town: middle-class attitudes to poverty in Cape Town in the late nineteenth century', *SHCT* IV (1982), pp. 29–66.
 75. V.A. February, *Mind Your Colour: The Image of the "Coloured" in South African Literature* (London, 1980); Graham Watson, *Passing for White* (London, 1969).
 76. Judges, Poverty, p. 80.
 77. Cited in Hengherr, *Emancipation*, p. 79.
 78. Judges, Poverty, p. 80.
 79. Judges, Poverty, p. 135.
 80. *Statistical Blue Book of the Cape Colony, 1841*, p. 222.
 81. P.L. Wickens, *The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa* (Cape Town, 1978), chapter I.
 82. *Ibid.*, chapter III.
 83. Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Black labour in the docks at the beginning of the twentieth century',

SHCT II (1980), pp. 75–126.

84. C.C. Saunders, 'The creation of Ndabeni; urban segregation and African resistance in Cape Town, *SHCT* I (1979), pp. 132–167.
85. Tom Lodge, 'The Cape Town troubles, March–April 1960', *Journal of Southern African Studies* IV (1978).
86. Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash; The Soweto revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London, 1979), pp. 216–243.
87. Heribert Adam and Herman Adam, *Ethnic Power Mobilized: Can South Africa Change?* (New Haven and London, 1979), pp. 202–205.
88. For an example, see M.G. Whisson and R.M. Kaplinsky, *Suspended Sentence, a Study of the Kalk Bay Fishermen* (Johannesburg, 1969), p. 9.
89. For an analysis of the misery so caused, see John Ester, *Outcast Cape Town* (London, 1982).