CHAPTER 1

XHOSALAND: A HISTORY OF CONFRONTATIONS

1. A snapshot of Xhosa life in the mid eighteenth century

By the middle of the eighteenth century, there were various groups of Xhosa people who went about their daily concerns in the south-eastern part of southern Africa.\(^1\) They lived in extended homesteads containing a number of families, and these patrilocal units were in turn part of larger lineage-based clans. Settlements were usually built close to a stream or tributary, and the people lived in round, beehive-shaped huts with thatched roofs, with low mud-dung plastered walls and floors.\(^2\) The Xhosa, like their neighbours, relied heavily on the bounty of nature for their provisions, including food. For meat, they hunted. They also practised subsistence farming: sorghum was the staple, but they also cultivated maize,

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millet, melons, beans, bananas, sugar cane, peas, and pumpkins. Cattle was very significant in the provision of food (both for meat and milk); other livestock included poultry, goats, and sheep. When nature provided in abundance, life was abundant; conversely, changes of the season, times of scarcity, and drought made life hard. A number of safeguards helped them to absorb part of the shock of these vicissitudes: they stored grains, diversified their crops, provided each other with mutual support, and engaged in trade.

Much of daily life focused on providing for basic needs: farming and herding, constructing huts, working leather, etc. But beyond attending to their immediate needs, people were involved in a variety of activities, including mining iron and ochre and manufacturing spears and other tools which they could use to work, hunt, or fight. They worked ivory and made pottery. They also cultivated and enjoyed tobacco and dagga.

They traded cattle, copper, iron, and beads to create wealth, rather than as a means of subsistence. These goods offered a general means of exchange for goods and labour, functioning as a form of currency. The goods were also exchanged as a form of speculation. Trade relations connected the Xhosa through various intermediaries with other peoples living farther to the north-east (the Hlubi) and the north-west (the Kwena), but also with neighbours closer by, such as the Mpondoland. Trade included dagga, elephant tusks, and other valuables.

Accumulation of goods was fairly limited, with the notable exception of cattle, the kingpin of the Xhosa economy. Cattle was an essential medium of exchange in social relations (for instance, in payment of labour, in establishing marriage agreements between families, etc.). It also served as a symbol of authority. Different levels of wealth existed, but in Xhosa society these differences were limited. Regarding the social importance of cattle, Mabona would later write:

Those of us who have seen the tailend of this cattle culture can only say that those who have not experienced or seen it can scarcely have an idea of what it was like and meant. Anybody who wants to understand the southeastern Bantu, though, must understand this background in all its implications.

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5 DP, p. 265.
Numerous aspects of routine life were subject to tradition and/or ritual, including, for instance, the formulae of respect, and more especially, the key events of life, such as coming of age, marriages, and deaths. Religious practices were performed at the level of the homestead or clan, and were associated with the main features of life, such as agriculture and war. The distinction between religious and secular life was blurred, as unseen forces continually acted in ways impenetrable to human understanding and largely impervious to human influence. There is no evidence of worship of a transcendent God; matters of good and evil were approached through the exemplars of the ancestors and through the mediation of traditional practitioners such as diviners.

Society was arranged primarily according to kinship relations, but ties could also be created through marriage. The chief, his counsellors, and the commoners formed the levels of social stratification. Work and daily duties were divided according to social role expectations: men took charge of hunting and stock farming; women and children were responsible for agriculture and housekeeping. The homestead was the basic unit of production, and functioned and planned in relative autonomy – in agriculture, trade, and hunting – but collaborated with other homesteads and groups.

The chiefs were responsible for the distribution of goods and trade, since they controlled land usage for agriculture, hunting, and dwelling; there was no private ownership of land. The chief was also the principal responsible for economic, religious, military, and judicial matters. Together with his counsellors, the chief also arbitrated disputes and decided on appropriate strategies regarding defence, food security, and other general concerns. However, a chief – although this differed to some extent from ruler to ruler and in various historical phases – did not hold absolute power. There were kings, but their powers over their subordinates were limited. In effect, consolidated, centralised power depended on nodes of supportive power which relativised the centralised power. Similarly, the power of chiefs tended to be held in balance, mutually, or through the power relations in their clans. The commoners granted the chief their respect.

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6 Peires, *The house of Phalo*, Chapter 5. Mabona’s own views will be summarised in Part 2, sections 7 and 9.


8 Switzer, *Power and resistance*, p. 34.


and obedience and made material contributions, and in this way participated in consolidating the chief’s authority, but sometimes they refused to pay the imposed levies or fines, and they adopted various strategies to undermine the chief’s authority and privileges. Sometimes, families split off from their chiefdom and moved away.\textsuperscript{12} In turn, this obliged the chiefs to adopt what they considered appropriate counter-strategies. The internal dynamics of Xhosa society did not result only in decentralisation\textsuperscript{13} – there were some chiefs who successfully consolidated their power, be it through force or by more peaceful means.

Factors such as the availability of grazing for cattle and the various internal power dynamics had an impact on the gradual migration of the Xhosa peoples towards the south-west,\textsuperscript{14} intensifying their contact with the Khoisan people. The different groups of Khoi and San\textsuperscript{15} had their own long history of settlement, intermingling, and strife, which I do not focus on here.\textsuperscript{16} Those who came into contact with the Xhosa very often did for similar reasons of life and subsistence, which led to overlapping land use and competition. Intensified contact between the Xhosa and the Khoisan brought into play a range of interactions: on the one hand, cultural influence (especially notable in respect of language and religion); on the other, affected trade relations with the Khoisan. Sometimes matters became heated, causing tensions to flare up, and sometimes escalated into war. Nonetheless, over time, the Xhosa emerged as the more powerful group, leading to the incorporation of some Khoisan into Xhosa groups.

\textsuperscript{12} Switzer, \textit{Power and resistance}, pp. 34–35: “The Bantu-speaking chiefdoms of the eastern Cape never developed centralised states to the degree that the Zulu and Swazi did in the early nineteenth century, but the exact nature of the state and its role in these African societies have been the source of considerable controversy. According to social anthropologist David Hammond-Tooke, the Xhosa polity, for example, resembled a ‘tribal cluster’ of genealogically related but politically independent chiefdoms. Historian Jeff Peires, however, maintains the Xhosa polity was more like a segmentary state that had supplanted earlier, clan-based polities. Individual Xhosa political units may have been autonomous, but they were never independent of the paramount chief or of the genealogically related chiefdom. The paramount was the head of a discernible Xhosa ‘nation’ sharing a common language, royal lineage, and geographical origin. [...] Segmentation provided the crucial social mechanism for expansion in a genealogically related chiefdom like the Xhosa, but it never threatened the essential unity of the Xhosa people before the colonial era”.

\textsuperscript{13} Reader’s Digest, \textit{Illustrated history}, p. 64; Switzer, \textit{Power and resistance}, p. 29.


\textsuperscript{16} Later I will give an overview of Mabona’s own views on the earliest history of Khoisan and Xhosa encounters – cf. Part 2, sections 7 and 9.
Lineage was a significant factor in Xhosa social structure, but the outer limits of Xhosa society were not determined on ethnic or geographical, but on political terms, in the sense that people such as Khoisan, survivors of shipwrecks along the coast, or renegade slaves were incorporated into Xhosa communities, provided that they accepted the ruling authorities (this is not to downplay the significant trauma which might be involved in such assimilation or to deny that the Khoi especially adopted various strategies to avoid such assimilation). 17

To the north-east of the Xhosa lived the Thembu and Mpondo, whose social organisation and practices resembled those of the Xhosa. These groups too had to deal with the same dynamics of decentralisation and attempts to consolidate power. The groups interacted and interfered in each other’s internal politics and sometimes intermarried.

2. Accelerated change: A typology of mounting conflict 18

The snapshot above suggests how life in the south-eastern part of what is now South Africa developed over centuries, as people engaged with the complexities of everyday life and negotiated a wide variety of interrelations between groups. Then, during the last third of the eighteenth century, a group of migrant and settling Dutch farmers 19 were added to this mix, bringing with them the cultural heritage, ideas, ways of life, and the technical advantages of belonging to the sphere of influence of the Cape-based Dutch East India Company. They valued their autonomy, but remained dependent on the Cape for ammunition and various cultural goods, as well as symbolic goods, such as religious rituals. 20 They brought with them, first, the material and symbolic influence of the Cape and, then, after 1806, the administrative, political, and finally military power of the British Empire. 21

17 Peires, The house of Phalo, pp. 19, 23.
18 For this section, see Leonard Thompson, A history of South Africa (revised fourth edition, by Lynn Berat), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014, Chapter 2.
19 The cultural complexities of this group are not of concern here.
20 Switzer, Power and resistance, p. 48. For an overview of the relations between the Cape Colony and the trekboere, cf. Thompson, A history of South Africa, Chapter 2.
21 “England’s privileged position is obviously merely the consequence of the global dominance it has enjoyed since the French Revolution. The dynamism of its trade, and then of its industry; its demographic vitality, which was able to sustain strong overseas emigration; and last but
The Dutch considered themselves superior to both the Khoisan and the Xhosa. They based this perception on different appearances, presumed cultural superiority, and difference of religious conviction (even though they appear to have adhered selectively to recognisable tenets of Christian faith). Admittedly, their horses and firepower, as well as their ideas about private property and their desire to live without a state, were substantial factors of difference. But they had a lot in common with the Xhosa: most were not very literate, they sometimes wore similar clothing, used similar techniques for constructing housing, practised subsistence living, and relied on what nature provided for their survival. They shared a similar view of the social and economic significance of cattle, and their practical concerns regarding grazing were similar. The insistence of the Dutch farmers on individual land ownership contrasted with the communal view of the Xhosa, but neither of these groups saw land as a mere commodity as the British later did. Finally, the Dutch farmers’ ideas about labour were closer to those of the Xhosa than to the capitalist wage-labour system introduced a century later. Perhaps even in their sense of superiority they were similar to the Xhosa, who, it seems, saw themselves as superior to the San (perhaps not even considering the San human). These similarities opened the way for an exchange of labour and trade. But, quite soon, another logical possibility took precedence: the overlapping interests of the Dutch and the Xhosa led to tension and then to mortal conflict. Disputes about land, grazing, cattle, and other livestock, aggravated by prejudices and other social or political frustrations, ended in killings.

The British, taken as a group, were an awkward combination of supremacist ideas and liberal egalitarian intuitions, of sheer military brutality and a desire for organising and order. They too were a source and later agents of conflict and ultimately war (from the first occupation of the Cape at the end of the century, 1795–1802, and later during the second occupation, from 1806 onwards). Whatever the differences and tensions between the Dutch and British may have been, the long-term outcome for those on the receiving end, the Khoisan and Xhosa, was quite similar (see discussion below).

However, this situation cannot be simply schematised as a stand-off between the Xhosa and a combined group of Europeans. Both the Dutch and the British

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entered into alliances and conflicts with the Khoisan who, in turn, sometimes sided with some Xhosa groups, and sometimes sided against them. By and large, the Dutch were antagonistic to the British, with whom relations remained tense even though, at times, they pursued the same objectives. Sometimes agreements were made between the Xhosa and the Dutch, only to be complicated because of intra-group differences on either the Xhosa or the Dutch side. Once the Cape came under British rule, the Khoisan, Xhosa, and Dutch all equally wanted to get out from under it. Intermittent conflict arose and continued three quarters into the nineteenth century: a series of attacks and retaliations were followed by new agreements (real or treacherous) and new alliances (real or not). The British co-opted the help of other groups such as the Mfengu and Thembu in their relentless fight against the Xhosa, and internal dissension and conflict among the Xhosa were exploited by the new powers in the region.

This typological rendering of the tragic situation which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century should suffice to give an impression of the forces at play in the formation of the world that we focus on in this book. This fraught situation gradually led to the military and eventually total political dominance by the British in the south-eastern region.

Meanwhile, the cultural life described above either continued or was adapted to the new circumstances: people married, worked, traded, and devised plans to survive and prosper. The Xhosa, for instance, traded copper, obtained through mediation of the Khoisan, to the Thembu and the Mpondoland people. This is important: our attention falls mainly on the area farther to the east of this zone of conflict, but the conflict had knock-on effects up to this region. Similarly, the lifeworld of the Dutch and British changed because of other dramatic changes – both in the larger southern African region and in the world. I would now like to turn to these changes, which will take us from the eighteenth century to the formation of the unified South African state.

3. A changing region in a changing world

Bearing in mind these mounting conflicts, what were the general social and political trends that take us from the end of the eighteenth century to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910? Let us describe the general tendencies of

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24 Switzer, *Power and resistance*, p. 44.
the larger region and include some observations about the international situation of the region in this period.

### 3.1 Spread of Boers and British expansion

The biggest losers in this fray were undoubtedly the *Khoisan*, who were either assimilated into Xhosa groups or become labourers for the Dutch. Some survivors fled to the north. Freed slaves and their descendants, the descendants of mixed relations, and then also the Khoisan – a heterogeneous mix of people – were gradually administrated into a group named the Coloureds.\(^{25}\) The Coloureds shared some social institutions, such as schools, with people of European descent. They also shared a language with the Dutch/Afrikaans speakers, and the Christian faith for those who were not Muslim, but their sociopolitical destiny was to be segregated gradually into a separate racial group, provided with their own institutions (or left without any).\(^{26}\)

On the other side of the spectrum is the extension of the *British* colony, which imposed its law on the region and placed everything in the region under its regulation based in the Cape: labour relations, jurisprudence, language policies, religion, etc. An important element of British policy was the abolition of the slave trade, and then of slavery. Initially, the formal economy grew well.\(^{27}\) However, as will be explained below (in §3.2), the general impact of the British on the entire territory was less positive.

The *Dutch* arrived at various compromises with their new circumstances. Under the British, they lost much of their autonomy; those who stayed on in the region were, however great their frustration may have become, mostly aligned with the British. But a significant minority fled north (with their Coloured labourers) in a series of attempts to realise the dream of independent and even stateless existence.\(^{28}\) This in turn led to many confrontations with the existing

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25 Aspects of historical orientation to the “Coloureds” can be found in Mohamed Adhikari’s *Not white enough, not black enough: Racial identity in the South African coloured community*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005.


28 The complex assessment of the causes for this move need not detain us here. The most sympathetic reading of South African history from the point of view of the Afrikaners is that by Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*. 
inhabitants of the respective regions these Dutch people entered. Here the temptation to revive old Frontier relations of domination with Africans proved to be irresistible.\textsuperscript{29} This interaction ranged between agreements and treaties at one end of the spectrum to war and massacres at the other. A number of independent republics were set up (most significantly, the Orange Free State and the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek); however, these were soon in turn the target of the British empire. Although the state in each of these republics was initially unable to impose its authority and power over the local chiefdoms, the political organisation of the republics already laid the foundation for later relations with Africans. Despite the setback of themselves being colonised at the end of the South African War (1899–1902), the republics already anticipated the decisive role they – together with Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking people in the whole country – would play in shaping twentieth-century South Africa. Over this period the Afrikaans language emerged (although it also had earlier Cape slave origins). Gradually among Afrikaans people, the constructs of peoplehood, an identity, a language, a history, and a calling were generated.\textsuperscript{30} This contributed to consolidate them, their ideals, and struggles, and laid the foundations for the later extension of these constructs into Afrikaner nationalism.

Whereas the descendants of the Dutch were eventually able to regain their social and political position in relative independence from the British at unification in 1910, the Xhosa and other African peoples in South Africa still had to wage a very long struggle for independence, until the end of the twentieth century and, indeed, beyond. However, in our period of interest, and more specifically the half-century from 1860 to 1910, according to Peires, the Eastern Cape region acquired its enduring features: the waning influence of the Cape liberal tradition; the destruction of a peasant economy, together with the rapid rise of migrant labour; and, finally, the inability of local elites to play their few remaining cards to the political and economic advantage of the people of the region.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Thompson, \textit{A history of South Africa}, p. 103.


\textsuperscript{31} Peires, “How the Eastern Cape lost its edge...”, p. 43.
3.2 British domination and its effects on Xhosaland and beyond

Irrespective of the details of the repeated wars in the region, the outcome was the subjugation of the Xhosa by the British, a fate that overcame all the African groups in what was to become South Africa. Their territory was gradually limited, then reduced; peoples were strategically divided and/or relocated and placed under new command or rule.\(^{32}\) In Xhosaland and elsewhere in southern Africa, some Africans were still to enjoy some autonomy, but henceforth their “autonomy” was at best already framed by a system of foreign values, influences, and pressures. Initially, the Cape nominally endorsed non-racialism, so those African men who had the required property at their disposal enjoyed the franchise in the colony; however, this franchise was steadily eroded.\(^{33}\)

The subjugating effects of direct armed confrontation aside, the authority of chiefs was diminished and “autonomy” increasingly meant the introduction of indirect rule, making chiefs responsible to the colonial authorities for the conduct of their tribespeople.\(^{34}\) These authorities could intervene and interfere in Xhosa life with financial support from Britain with the ostensible justification of “civilising” the Africans, funding mission schools, and establishing some medical facilities for the Xhosa.\(^{35}\) British rule gradually transformed the law and courts, administration and commerce, and exercised pressure in matters of education and religion.

The magnitude of these dramatic changes forced Xhosaland, and in similar ways most of the rest of the subcontinent, gradually to surrender its traditional ways “in the days of their independence”,\(^{36}\) to accept complex compromises, and end with a number of dysfunctions, never to turn back again. But this was only the start of many radical changes. Let us consider these changes over a long century from the perspective of Xhosaland.

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34 Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, p. 98. Later, a form of “direct rule” through appointed headmen was instituted in the Transkei region (see Chapter 2, § 3, p. 46-47).

35 Switzer, *Power and resistance*, p. 66.

36 This is the subtitle of Peires's 1981 book *The house of Phalo*. 
3.3 Changes from the Xhosaland perspective

**Economy and labour**

The south-western corner of Africa, the Cape, played a role in world trade for a long time, providing and buying commodities (agricultural) and labour (including slaves). However, this international role remained fairly limited, while local trade and trading with the interior slowly developed. Simultaneously, the Khoisan were progressively demoted from commercial partners to labourers – a fate later shared by the Africans of the Eastern Cape and then of the entire region.

Xhosa trade with the Dutch pre-dated settlement by the Dutch in the Eastern Cape by a long half-century. This trade then continued, fluctuating with the other contingencies of their interactions, and continued along similar paths with the British. From the nineteenth century onwards, items of English or European manufacture gradually entered these exchanges. From before the middle of the nineteenth century, the Xhosa sold agricultural produce to the British for export to North America. Forms of trade with the Cape Colony were also internalised into inter-Xhosa practices. Paradoxically, while rising conflict started to close some commercial doors to the Xhosa, this conflict opened up possibilities for new partnerships and thus an expansion of existing trade relations. This situation had diverse consequences. Some Xhosa people responded to the conditions by adapting to the new commercial forms and possibilities, which involved a shift to commercial agricultural production. Some were able to consolidate a reasonable degree of autonomy on the basis of their ability to produce surplus goods, so, by the end of the nineteenth century, there were a substantial number of professional African farmers in the Eastern Cape. However, many others had no or insufficient land, or could not manage to make the transition to the new form of production under demanding circumstances, and they became poorer and eventually destitute. These conditions arose due to the variety of cultural artefacts that Dutch and British culture had to offer and, more significantly, the rise of world capitalism behind this offering.

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37 Peires, *The house of Phalo*, p. 103.
38 On the specific situation of the Xhosa, see the opening page of Peires’s “How the Eastern Cape lost its edge...”
In traditional Xhosa culture, there was no labourer class (except if one wants to read the role of women in these societies as that of labourers\textsuperscript{43}), but a working class formed as a consequence of the events outlined above. Xhosa people started working for Dutch farmers under circumstances ranging from forced labour by abducted Xhosa people, to a free exchange of labour for (modest) payment. As colonial power progressively expanded, newly settled British and Dutch farms also made use of workers – notably, without any symmetrical position existing regarding Xhosa land. Under certain circumstances throughout the two centuries to follow, some labourers would maintain a form of home in the Xhosa territory, while working for whites for most of the year, already putting into place the form of migrant work so typical of South African industries in the twentieth century. The phenomenon of landless, black labour tenants persists to this day.

Labour – particularly that provided by the Khoisan and Africans\textsuperscript{44} – was subject to control and legislation from early on. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, African labour in the colony was prohibited, but the need for labourers in the expanding market overcame such regulation.\textsuperscript{45} Finally, great numbers of Xhosa were allowed to enter the Cape Colony to be integrated into the workforce there. But here (as under other circumstances of colonisation, for example, in Zululand/Natal, where Africans were transformed by legislation into foreigners), the colonial power was never strong enough to overcome a contradiction that was constitutive of that power: it wanted to keep the Africans out, but the territory that was demarcated in this way could flourish economically only by drawing on the cheap labour which only those same Africans could provide. In brief, the homestead-based system of subsistence existence gradually made way for forms of labour and agriculture that offered at least some surplus production for markets. This was de facto a step in the direction of the integration of the labour force into a developing capital-based economy.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Everyday life}

Changes in economic relations and practices had an enormous impact beyond labour relations, to affect everyday life, as Switzer illustrates:

\textsuperscript{43} Peires, \textit{The house of Phalo}, pp. 103–104.
\textsuperscript{44} The point here is that the different groups shared the same fate and, obviously, not to claim that Khoisan were not African.
\textsuperscript{45} Switzer, \textit{Power and resistance}, p. 84.
Currencies no longer favored were soon eliminated. The traders flooded the market with beads, for example, so they were worthless and could not be used by Africans in commercial transactions. Nevertheless, almost every traveller crossing the Fish River from the 1830s was in contact with Africans seeking to exchange whatever they had for European goods. The British-made Witney blanket, for example, supplanted the Xhosa rawhide kaross as a staple item of clothing in a single generation. Although numbers of traders were killed during the War of 1834-35 and frontier trade for some time thereafter slumped to below twenty thousand pounds a year, the Xhosa were now firmly in the colony’s economic orbit. Women, for example, would spend less time in the gardens with the introduction of plow agriculture, and they gradually stopped making household utensils, clothing, or ornaments. European-made goods would supply the basic necessities, and among the Ciskei Xhosa at least most indigenous crafts were no longer being practiced by the 1880s.47

The practice of compelling slaves and labourers to carry passbooks when they moved pre-dates our snapshot period of the later eighteenth century (discussed in §1, above). Then, the dawn of industrial mining saw the systematic implementation of passes.48 The other side of the successive pass systems is the enormous dislocations or “resettlements” that I refer to again later (see pp. 76 and 105).

The development of indirect rule (as described above, p. 28) turned the remnants of African settlement in rural areas into places of struggle for the heart of tradition. However, these struggles occurred in a framework of economic and political pressures which would make the interests of the colonial state weigh heavily on all parties.49

Religion

Although it is not possible to reconstruct in detail the historical development of Xhosa religion before the eighteenth century, it certainly incorporated some

47 Switzer, Power and resistance, p. 85.
48 Thompson, A history of South Africa, p. 121.
49 Cf. Mamdani, Citizen and subject, p. 22.
elements of Khoisan religion. Familiarity with Khoisan religious ideas, notably a stronger profile of a positive and a negative transcendent power than in traditional Xhosa religion, may have facilitated the subsequent adoption of Christian ideas of a God and a Devil by some Xhosa people. The idea of the creation of humankind has a parallel in Xhosa imagery that appears to be fairly readily reinforced by Christian imagery of creation. The Christian belief in resurrection was also well received in terms of Xhosa belief. These were of course tendencies and not the rule.

How Christian ideas came into circulation in this part of the world is a topic that we will return to later (see Chapter 2, §4). For now, it is important to note the effects of Christian missions. Whatever the intentions of each respective missionary or society may have been, the overall effect was never dissociated from the importation of Western culture and its paraphernalia. At the same time, the violence of colonial expansion repeatedly led to a rekindling of traditional views and opposition to Christianity, which came from the same world. The missions themselves were quite ambiguous: some mission stations became places of refuge, and missionaries did what they could to advance the legal and practical position of the Khoisan and Africans, but sometimes their ideas of conversion sat all too snugly with ideas about “true civilization” which helped to turn free humans into productive labourers.

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51 Peires, The house of Phalo, p. 65.

52 Mabona articulated the context of religious change in the period under discussion in these dramatic terms: “We have witnessed how in the eighteenth century the massive confrontation with an alien race and an alien culture evoked radical reactions in Xhosa society. Pride of race and material greed on the part of the colonists were merely met with disdain and armed resistance by the Xhosa. But cultural aggression caused fear and consternation that gave rise to strange and abnormal syndromes of behaviour among the Xhosa. This spiritual crisis was deepened when the missionaries arrived in the Eastern Cape in 1816. Here was a massive and direct confrontation with an alien culture that caused in the Xhosa polity an acute crisis of identity. [...] One need only read the reports of the London Missionary Society and Basil Holt’s ‘Joseph Williams’ to see what wave of religious frenzy and hysteria was raised in the first encounters of the Xhosa and other indigenous peoples of South Africa with missionary evangelisation” (DP, pp. 300–301). Marcel Dischl (Transkei for Christ. A history of the Catholic Church in the Transkeian territories. No place: no publisher, 1982, pp. 23–41) gives an overview of Protestant missions in his introduction to his history of Catholicism in the Transkei region.
Under these circumstances, some Christian ideas were adopted, but they were transformed to fit the traditional views and the personal insights of diviners and other people. This led to variants leaning more to the traditional and/or militant versions (cf. Nxele/Makhanda\textsuperscript{53}) or more pacifist versions closer to the faith of the missionaries (cf. Ntsikana\textsuperscript{54}). But in both cases, the relation between religious persuasion and political action was very close.\textsuperscript{55}

**African politics, anti-colonial resistance, and nationalism in Xhosaland**

Xhosa responses to these events cannot be reduced to the military, cultural, and economic spheres. In the years before the Union, there were some protest movements (even if one omits outright military and other violent opposition), demonstrating a variety of orientations and convictions.

Movements that fought for equal franchise started to form in the Eastern Cape; for example, in 1882, there was the foundation of Imbumba Yama Nyama, a political organisation. In the 1880s, J.T. Jabavu started two newspapers for critical political journalism on concerns closer to Xhosaland and to the Cape.\textsuperscript{56} New religious factions, such as Nehemiah Tile’s Thembu Church and Mokone’s Ethiopian Church (both established at the end of the nineteenth century), became vehicles for cultural politics and calls for autonomy. These instances represent opposing strategies: politics of liberal values or of African-centred values and modes of thinking.\textsuperscript{57}

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\textsuperscript{53} See DP, pp. 301–303, 304.

\textsuperscript{54} See DP, pp. 303–305.

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Peires, *The house of Phalo*, pp. 73–74.

\textsuperscript{56} Johns and Gerhart, *Protest and hope*, pp. 7–8; critical of these people who had enjoyed a formal education in the mission schools, Simphiwe Hlatswayo claims: “The elite disassociated themselves from any nationalistic movement such as the Ethiopism movement or the Africa for Africans movement – even from the trade union movement”. cf. *Education and independence. Education in South Africa, 1658-1988*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2000, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{57} Johns and Gerhart, *Protest and hope*, pp. 12, 14. "Counterposed to the hopes of those who clung to the promise of an inclusive Cape liberalism were those of an Ethiopian orientation. They argued that African self-preservation and advancement could best be realized through exclusively African organizations, acting with only minimal reference to white-defined standards of ‘civilization’. This perspective was a forerunner of subsequent Africanist philosophies whose main thrust was to challenge white power through black unity and initiative rather than relying on cooperation with supportive whites. Neither position was completely exclusive of the other, but they were two distinct poles around which African politics would continue to revolve". (p. 14)
The first decade of the twentieth century demonstrated two other strategic options: the first option was armed protest against taxes, as was adopted in the Bambatha rebellion of 1906; the other option was to write petitions or compile resolutions, or even to lobby in London to air objections. The Bambatha rebellion was suppressed with military force; the non-violent option had no significant effect.\(^58\) In these years, the Africans were not able to unify in order to set up a united front of resistance.

### 3.4 Changes from the broader South African perspective

Thus far, I have focused mostly on the Xhosa. However, their history has to be read against the bigger context of southern Africa. Leonhard Thompson writes that, by 1870, “[s]outhern Africa was occupied by numerous small agrarian societies, loosely linked by the dynamic forces of settler expansionism and merchant capitalism originating in northwestern Europe.”\(^59\) Despite these expansions, as a British colony, the Cape Colony remained tiny in proportion to the southern African region, compared to the settlement by people of European descent in North America at the same time.\(^60\) The discovery of gold and diamonds and the subsequent mining and industrial revolution was to continue and amplify considerably the social dynamics preceding these events.\(^61\)

The British consolidated their power over South Africa as a region\(^62\) by military subjugation of the Boer republics – and with them, of course, the Africans and others who had progressively been forced by these republics to live in them – by the end of the South African War (1899–1902), but, in the long run, majority


\(^{60}\) Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, pp. 53, 108 (referring to the 1870s).

\(^{61}\) Many historians see the discovery of gold and diamonds as a turning point in South Africa’s history. By contrast, Peires, in “How the Eastern Cape lost its edge…”, p. 43, argues that “[t]he great Nongqawuse cattle killing of 1856-7 marks the effective end of the frontier period in the EC – the period during which indigenous African people might reasonably have hoped to stop white expansion and preserve something of the political and economic integrity of the pre-colonial Xhosa way of life”. I bear in mind both arguments.

\(^{62}\) Not that there was simple harmony between what happened in the Cape Colony and British rule over the empire; cf. Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, p. 133. For the constitutional basis of such disagreement and the relevance thereof in practice see Peires, “How the Eastern Cape lost its edge…”, p. 45.
sentiment was not pro-empire. Whatever the different parties’ interests, the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910. With some minor exceptions, all voters in the Union were white, and since the Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking section of voters was the biggest, they resurfaced at the beginning of the twentieth century as a major political power.

But let us look at some developments over this long century in more detail.

**State form and administration**

After 1806, the British imposed their laws, language, systems of administration, etc. to relativise or replace the Dutch ones. Whatever the particularities of British (and previously Dutch) governance, the way in which Africans were integrated into colonial rule displayed significant similarities to what had happened and was still to happen across its empire. The theoretical means I use to discuss this situation are taken from Mamdani’s work on South Africa, which he claims applies to British colonies in Africa and sometimes further afield. Jacques Frémeaux, who studied colonialism as a global phenomenon, confirms the similarity of colonial practices everywhere. What he calls “legal dualism” consisted in granting indigenous peoples the nationality of the colonising power, without making them citizens; ironically, the colonising countries were democratic, and continued to claim to be so, while they did not extend the values of democracy to the colonised people.

What Mamdani calls “regimes of differentiation” were invented for contexts in which the native population was not exterminated, but rather remained by far the majority. This process consisted of two interdependent mechanisms. First, the state (or colony) was bifurcated, which entailed dividing the population in two: the “civilized” who were to be citizens in full right, and the “natives” who were destined to remain under the guardianship of the “civilized”. Separate institutions were created for each. On paper, the “natives” were granted the freedom to continue traditional ways of life in designated rural areas. The colonial states then governed the “natives” indirectly by incorporating traditional leadership into the framework of the state (when it was not created from scratch): matters of family and community, customary law, and culture remained the preserves of the

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65 Mamdani, *Citizen and subject*, p. 7.
traditional leadership, while the central government assumed power over people’s rights and imposed “modern” (Western) law, the formal economy, international relations, etc. However, in reality, this “freedom” involved being subjected to displacements, the manipulation of traditional leadership forms, and overall framing by the “civilized” state. Furthermore, when indirectly ruled “natives” then had to sojourn inside the domain designated for the “citizens” (urban areas, but usually also large tracts of rural land), the “natives” were subject to laws of direct rule, the kingpin of which was their exclusion from all political rights.66

Such a bifurcated system requires a “justification” that ultimately depends on the “deliberate and conscious conflation of racial and cultural distinctions”.67 This is the core idea which would later subtend twentieth-century segregation and apartheid in South Africa. The specifics of the South African situation were not determined by the general logic of colonial governance, since this was shared with many other colonised regions. Rather, in my opinion, one has to add to this the interaction between the Afrikaans and English power blocks and then the specific intensification of the situation, established under British rule, through the apartheid laws after 1948, and all these factors must be understood in a context of uncommonly high levels of urbanisation, industrialisation, and wealth creation, coupled with extreme inequality.

Obviously, this advanced bifurcation could not be instituted overnight. After all, there were liberal and Christian forces and tendencies at work even in British law, to the point where equality before the law was a declared principle of law in the Colony. Still, this principle did not always match the practice and in the long run it was not upheld. Hence, Africans (but, in different ways, also Coloureds) became foreigners in the country of their birth. This was reflected in budgetary allocations and institutional arrangements. Africans were not, however, exempt from taxes.

Agriculture and mining
The nineteenth century saw a rapid transformation of the economic landscape. Wool production began (in the Eastern Cape by the mid nineteenth century),

66 Mamdani, Citizen and subject, pp. 16–18, Chapters 3 to 5. However, the situation was often different in the Transkei – on the direct rule of that region, cf. Switzer, Power and resistance; Southall, South Africa’s Transkei, p. 88.

followed by ostrich farming and sugar cane plantations. To advance the sugar industry, workers were imported from India, most of whom would stay on and become a permanent part of South African society, contributing to the region’s social diversity.

It is only with slight exaggeration that Hart and Padayachee claim that, by the last three decades of the nineteenth century, “[t]he great mining houses were South African capitalism at this time.” Mining was practised in the southern African region long before European people arrived. However, the discovery of very large deposits of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) in the interior accelerated changes in South Africa, not only regarding mining, but virtually every aspect of life, with a wide ripple effect – in different ways in different sections of society. This enormous change could happen not only because of the quality and diversity of deposits, but also because of the advanced science and technology, coupled with financing and markets, for which the connection with the world financial capital at the time, London, was a boon. Initially, mining required solid financing, but it soon generated a lot of money and became independent. However, two additional factors were needed to help mining flourish. The first was predictable coordination of business with the state. One of the reasons for Britain’s casting

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69 Keith Hart and Vishnu Padayachee, “A history of South African capitalism in national and global perspective”, in *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 81/82, 2013, pp. 55–85, here p. 63. See further: “South Africa did not develop a staple export comparable to Australian wool and Canadian timber. All this changed with the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1868 and of gold in the Rand around the same time. Suddenly from the 1870s South Africa became a major exporter of precious minerals. For three decades from the 1880s, South Africa participated fully in a globalisation process driven by imperial rivalry and haute finance (Polanyi 1944), with Britain at the centre of both”, Hart and Padayachee, “A history of South African capitalism...”, p. 62. They comment, furthermore, that “Charles Feinstein (2005) depicts South Africa as being trapped until now between its origin as an imperialist export enclave and an aspiration to become a fully modern industrial economy which has been frustrated by continuing reliance on cheap black labour. The two poles of this story are export enclave development and ‘national capitalism’, the attempt to harness economic growth for the benefit of all citizens. South Africa has seen two such attempts, the first launched between the wars for the benefits of Whites only (led by Afrikaners); this culminated in the apartheid regime installed after the Second World War. The second is the ANC government’s drive to develop a genuinely inclusive national economy with the result that we have already indicated” (p. 60).

its imperial net over the Dutch or “Boer” republics was that they were (or would become) an obstacle to this end.\textsuperscript{71} Another reason was the fact that mining required cheap, reliable labour. For this, Africans (from the larger subcontinent), but also imported Chinese labour and some Dutch/Afrikaans people and other urban residents, were coerced into different levels of low-paid labour.

For millions of African men, this meant working most of the year in areas where they had no title to settle, or they were restricted to specific areas; they only returned home on holidays, and the women and the elderly had to maintain the continuity of the family. Everyday life at and around the mines was structured according to a more systematic instrumentalisation of racist relations dating from a previous era.\textsuperscript{72} It may be noted that during the first decades, the greater industrial system also resulted in the emergence of some wealthy African farmers who provided food for the mines, and a considerable number of so-called poor whites who struggled to make a living in the new towns.\textsuperscript{73}

From the point of view of infrastructure, the economic boost made possible the formation of a banking sector, and considerable extensions to the transport system, particularly the railroads. Postal and telegraph services\textsuperscript{74} were also developed in response to greater urbanisation and industrialisation.

**Education**

During this period, sometimes more liberally inclined administrations provided education for some African children. However, broad-based schooling was not part of the agenda, even though some Western-styled education for Africans, provided almost exclusively by missions well into the twentieth century, was introduced and maintained. The curriculum transmitted Western cultural values; in fact, the political powers counted on this and subsidised mission education for this reason.\textsuperscript{75} Unsurprisingly, the main purpose of mission-led education was to transmit Christianity, and the primary objective of teaching was to facilitate evangelisation; consequently, universalism and non-racialism were often part of the educational ethos.\textsuperscript{76} Some of those educated through this

\textsuperscript{71} Trapido, “Imperialism, settler identities, and colonial capitalism...”, pp. 86–87 (Trapido’s entire chapter deals with the causes for the war); Hart and Padayachee, “A history of South African capitalism...”, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{72} Cf. Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, pp. 112, 121.
\textsuperscript{73} Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, pp. 111–112, 132.
\textsuperscript{74} Thompson, *A history of South Africa*, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{75} Hlatshwayo, *Education and independence*, p. 31–32.
\textsuperscript{76} Hlatshwayo, *Education and independence*, p. 30.
system were integrated (to different degrees) in colonial society; often they came into conflict (or experienced tensions) with the remaining traditional authority of chiefs, or simply with traditional ideas and values as such. Differences also arose between the older generation and the views of “urbanised” migrant labourers.

The ambiguity of the missions played out in other ways too. Missionaries had an interest in local languages and started working on recording a linguistics of the Bantu languages. The Bible was translated into Tswana, Xhosa, and Southern Sotho by 1855. The missionaries also started studying (sometimes representing and sometimes misrepresenting) Africans from an anthropological point of view, making their work serviceable to invading administrators, but also archiving cultural heritage.

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79 For the history of the Bible translation into Xhosa, see Dischl, *Transkei for Christ*, pp. 38–39. It has now become quite common to refer, in English, to South African languages by using the word by which they are designated in those languages. Accordingly, I should have referred to Setswana, isiXhosa, and Sepedi. In this book, I do not follow this practice, simply because, for the sake of symmetry, I would then have to do the same for European languages – Deutsch, Nederlands, Français, etc. – which would be too awkward.