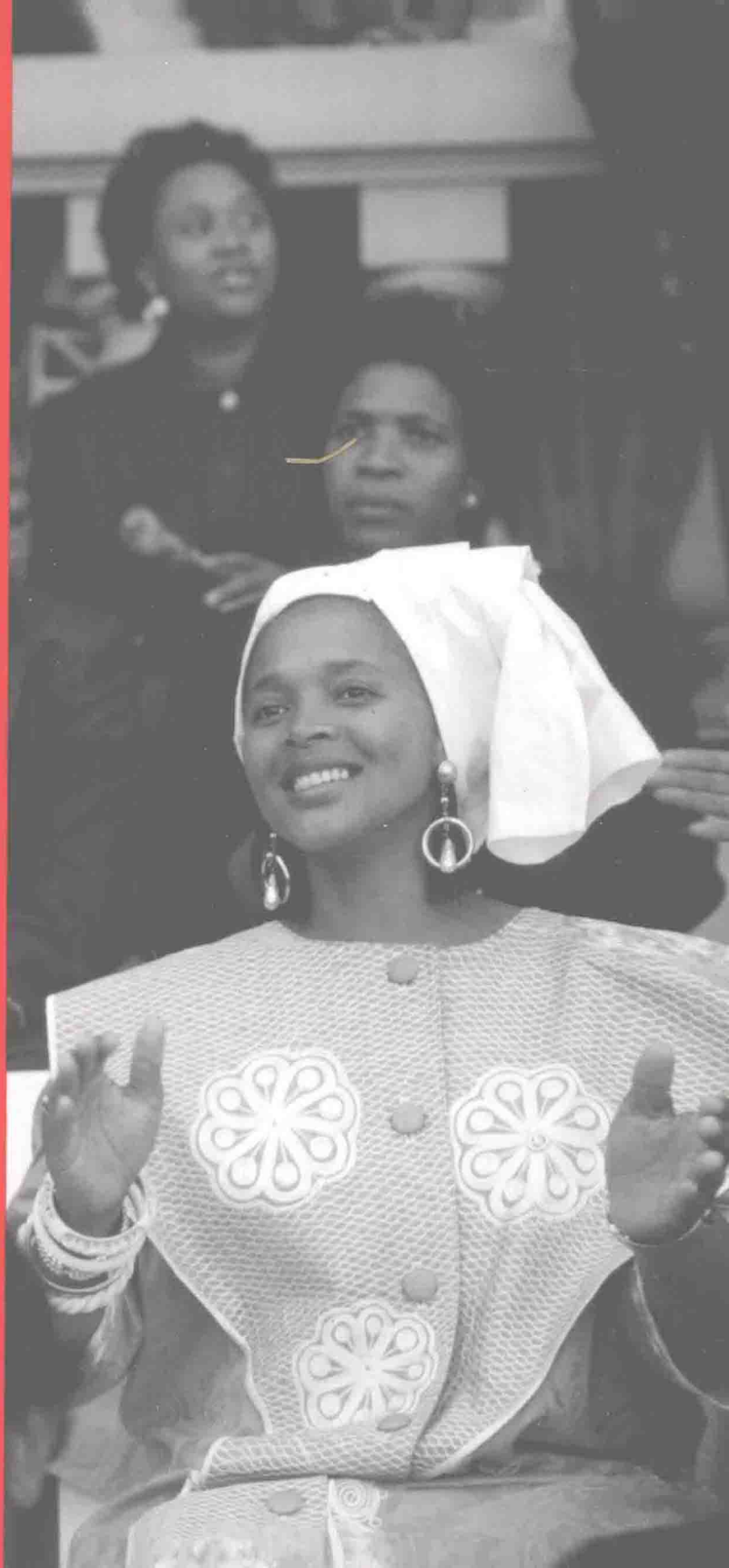# MODERN SOUTH AFRICA

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MODERN SOUTH AFRICA

A Volume in the Comparative Societies Series

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In one of the early scenes of the movie *Reds*, the U.S. revolutionary journalist John Reed, just back from covering the beginning of World War I, is asked by a roomful of business leaders, "What is this War really about?" John Reed stands and stops all conversation with a one-word reply—"profits." Today, war between major industrial nations would disrupt profits much more than create money for a military industrial complex. Highly integrated global markets and infrastructures support the daily life of suburban families in Chicago and urban squatter settlements in Bombay. These ties produce a social and economic ecology that transcends political and cultural boundaries.

The world is a very different place than it was for our parents and grandparents. Those rare epic events of world war certainly invaded their everyday lives and futures, but we now find that daily events thousands of miles away, in countries large and small, have a greater impact on North Americans than ever before, with the speed of this impact multiplied many times in recent decades. Our standard of living, jobs, and even prospects of living in a healthy environment have never before been so dependent on outside forces.

Yet there is much evidence that North Americans have less easy access to good information about the outside world than even a few years ago. Since the end of the Cold War, newspaper and television coverage of events in other countries has dropped dramatically. It is difficult to put much blame on the mass media, however: International news seldom sells any more. There is simply less interest.

It is not surprising, then, that Americans know comparatively little about the outside world. A recent *Los Angeles Times* survey provides a good example: People in eight countries were asked five basic questions about current events of the day. Americans were dead last in their knowledge, trailing people from Canada, Mexico, England, France, Spain, Germany, and Italy.* It is also not surprising that the annual report published by the Swiss World Economic Forum always ranks American executives quite low in their international experience and understanding.

Such ignorance harms American competitiveness in the world economy in many ways. But there is much more. Seymour Martin Lipset put it nicely in one of his recent books: "Those who know only one country know no country" (Lipset 1996: 17). Considerable time spent in a foreign

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*For example, whereas only 3 percent of Germans missed all five questions, 37 percent of the Americans did (*Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1994).

country is one of the best stimulants for a sociological imagination: Studying or doing research in other countries makes us realize how much we really, in fact, have learned about our own society in the process. Seeing other social arrangements, ways of doing things, and foreign perspectives allows for far greater insight into the familiar, our own society. This is also to say that ignorance limits solutions to many of our own serious social problems. How many Americans, for example, are aware that levels of poverty are much lower in all other advanced nations and that the workable government services in those countries keep poverty low? Likewise, how many Americans are aware of alternative means of providing health care and quality education or reducing crime?

We can take heart in the fact that sociology in the United States has become more comparative in recent decades. A comparative approach, of course, was at the heart of classical European sociology during the 1800s. But as sociology was transported from Europe to the United States early in the 20th century, it lost much of this comparative focus. In recent years, sociology journals have published more comparative research. There are large data sets with samples from many countries around the world in research seeking general laws on issues such as the causes of social mobility or political violence, all very much in the tradition of Durkheim. But we also need much more of the old Max Weber. His was a qualitative historical and comparative perspective (Smelser 1976; Ragin and Zaret 1983). Weber's methodology provides a richer understanding of other societies, a greater recognition of the complexity of social, cultural, and historical forces shaping each society. Ahead of his time in many ways, C. Wright Mills was planning a qualitative comparative sociology of world regions just before his death in 1961 (Horowitz 1983: 324). [Too few American sociologists have yet to follow in his footsteps.]

Following these trends, sociology textbooks in the United States have also become more comparative in content in recent years. And while this tendency must be applauded, it is not enough. Typically, there is an example from Japan here, another from Germany there, and so on, haphazardly for a few countries in different subject areas as the writer's knowledge of these bits and pieces allows. What we need are the textbook equivalents of a richer Weberian comparative analysis, a qualitative comparative analysis of the social, cultural, and historical forces that have combined to make relatively unique societies around the world. It is this type of comparative material that can best help people in the United States overcome their lack of understanding about other countries and allow them to see their own society with much greater insight.

The Comparative Societies Series, of which this book is a part, has been designed as a small step in filling this need. We have currently selected 12 countries on which to focus: Japan, Thailand, Switzerland, Mexico, Eritrea, Hungary, Germany, China, India, Iran, Brazil, and Russia. We selected these countries as representatives of major world regions

and cultures, and each will be examined in separate books written by talented sociologists. All of these basic sociological issues and topics will be covered: Each book will begin with a look at the important historical and geographical forces shaping the society, then turn to basic aspects of social organization and culture. From there each book will proceed to examine the political and economic institutions of the specific country, along with the social stratification, the family, religion, education, and finally urbanization, demography, social problems, and social change.

Although each volume in the Comparative Societies Series is of necessity brief to allow for use as supplementary readings in standard sociology courses, we have tried to assure that this brief coverage provides students with sufficient information to better understand each society, as well as their own. The ideal would be to transport every student to another country for a period of observation and learning. Realizing the unfortunate impracticality of this ideal, we hope to do the next best thing—to at least mentally move these students to a country very different from their own, provide something of the everyday reality of the people in these other countries, and demonstrate how the tools of sociological analysis can help them see these societies as well as their own with much greater understanding.

Harold R. Kerbo
San Luis Obispo, CA
June 1997

South Africa has long been a world supplier of fine wines, glittering gold, sparkling diamonds, and world-class golfers, surfers, and tennis and rugby players.

But until the 1990s, South Africa was most widely known as the land of Apartheid—its violently imposed, violently sustained system of racial inequalities that reduced Nonwhites to the status of noncitizens rather than merely second-class citizens, of the lands of their and and their ancestors' birth. Apartheid was especially onerous in that not only did it deprive Blacks of all the basic citizenship rights enjoyed by white South Africans, it also stripped Blacks of any basic human right that any White was obliged to respect.

Then, after decades of both violent and nonviolent opposition to the Apartheid state, things changed. The laws of Apartheid were finally no more. People of all races could vote. People of all races could hold elected offices. All the "Whites Only" signs came down. All professions, occupations, schools, beaches, hotels, motels, theaters, parks, restaurants, towns, neighborhoods—everything was now legally open to persons of all races.

The Republic of South Africa gives official recognition to four races, or **population groups:**

- **Africans**—sometimes referred to as Blacks, and much less often Natives—are South Africa's largest group, constituting approximately 77 percent of the country's current population of nearly 45 million.

- **Whites,** who constitute somewhere between 10 and 12 percent of the country's current population, are its second largest population group.

- **Coloureds**—persons of mixed racial ancestry—constitute approximately 9 percent of South Africa's current population and are its third largest group.

- **Asians** constitute approximately 3 percent of South Africa's population in the early twenty-first century.

Approximately 60 percent of South Africa's current white population call Afrikaans (a Dutch derivative) their native language. The remaining 40 percent of the white population live in homes where the primary spoken language is English. Afrikaans is also spoken by the majority (80–90 percent) of the country's officially designated Coloureds. Most black Africans speak English and, to varying degrees, a

tribal language. In all, the Republic of South Africa has 11 official lan-
guages and scores of officially recognized black African tribal groups.

Though about two-thirds of its approximately 45 million citizens
profess to be Christians of one sort or another, within the South African
population are also significant numbers of Muslims (1.1 percent), Hindus
(1.3 percent), Jews (1 percent), and adherents to a plethora of indigenous
African religious beliefs (30 percent).

On April 27, 1994, the political party that gave the world Apartheid
was voted out of power and replaced by a multiracial party pledged to
end all vestiges of Apartheid. To make South Africa a "rainbow nation"
where people of all races lived together in peace, harmony, social and
political equality, and economic prosperity was the oft-stated goal of the
new governing party.

The 1994 elections brought about real, concrete, substantive, revo-
lutionary changes. Persons who just a few years ago had been in prison,
in exile, under "banning orders," or otherwise prevented from engaging
in political activities were suddenly the country's top political leaders. In
some cases people shared power with, or directly exercised it over, some
of the same state, military, police, and intelligence agency officials re-
sponsible for their decades of imprisonment, exile, or banishment.

"A miracle," some people called the new situation. Blacks in power
didn't line up former Apartheid state officials against a wall and shoot
them. There were no expropriations of white wealth and properties. The
majority of South African Whites seemed committed to remaining in
South Africa, hoping that racial peace, harmony, and equity, in concert
with economic prosperity, were possible in a society in which primarily
Blacks hold political power. Maybe life really would be better, or at least
no worse for anyone, than before, most South Africans hoped. Maybe
white South Africans had finally done something of which they could be
exceedingly proud. Maybe the world had a lot to learn from South
Africans. If racial peace, harmony, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice,
equality, and all the rest can come to be in South Africa after Apartheid
and all that went before, why can't it happen everywhere? it was asked
(Gay 1997: 250).

That was then, the mid-1990s, in the immediate aftermath of South
Africa's first multiracial elections. Now, during the 2000s, more and
more people both inside and outside the country are beginning to see the
Republic of South Africa as shaping up to be more of a big disappoint-
ment or a sad shame than a miracle. White, Black, Coloured, and Asian
people didn't all suddenly come to love each other with the death of
Apartheid and coming to power of a multiracial political party.

South Africa's official rates of both interpersonal and interracial
crime and violence are now among the highest, if not the highest, in the
world. There is widespread White, Coloured, and Asian disgruntlement

over the government's affirmative action programs and taxation systems, which many see as being discriminatory against all Nonblacks.

There are Blacks who, having neither forgotten nor forgiven the inequities of the past, feel that all governmental policies and decisions should be implemented with the purpose of giving the advantage to Blacks. As an African country, their reasoning goes, South Africa should be ruled by and in the interests of indigenous black Africans. Not by and in the interests of descendants of Europeans, Coloureds, or Asians. Africa for Africans is their stated goal. Africa for *black* Africans, that is.

Growing numbers of Whites, on the other hand, have come to feel that South Africa has already become, and will forever remain, a country governed by and for black Africans, and only black Africans. Many are now seriously considering getting out of South Africa while they can, before their social, political, and economic situations worsen to the point of becoming similar to the life situations of Blacks before and during the years of Apartheid.

There also exists widespread dissatisfaction among the masses of unemployed, unskilled, undereducated South African Blacks still subsisting at the bottoms of the social, political, and economic hierarchies—many still without electricity, indoor plumbing, and the same educational opportunities available to growing numbers of other Blacks.

Having never wanted to be a part of any rainbow of colors, there are still Whites agitating for the creation—somehow, somewhere within the country's present territorial boundaries—of a separate, politically independent white homeland for themselves and their descendants.

Plus, as both cause and consequence of its present-day high rates of crime and violence and long history of violent interracial relationships, South Africa also has one of the highest rates of firearms possession by private citizens of any nation in the world. This itself could turn into a full-fledged political problem. Politically dissatisfied groups, as well as socially and economically frustrated individuals, with guns are more likely to engage in gun-violence against their perceived enemies than are those not in possession of guns. It only stands to reason. And since very few people in possession of guns are willing to surrender them, the South African government could soon be faced with more resistance than it can handle if it were to try to force them to do so.

Also, though South Africa's major political parties can all claim *some* support from persons of all races, there exists no political party in which the country's four population groups are even close to being proportionally represented. Political party affiliation, like most other things in South Africa, still tends to greatly correlate, though not perfectly, with race. It also tends to correlate to a significant extent with tribal membership.

All in all, then, the demise of judicially mandated Apartheid notwithstanding, South Africans remain sharply divided along racial

lines. Not very many South Africans live in other than essentially one-race neighborhoods. Racially integrated church congregations are rare, as are racially integrated nonprofessional sports teams, social clubs, and close friendships across racial lines. In fact, outside of work situations where it is required, very few South Africans are involved in close, sustained personal contact with persons of other races, and most seem to accept it as a not particularly undesirable fact of South African life.

The Republic of South Africa. Where is it? Why is it? How did it come to be as it is today? What is the likelihood of it evolving into a nation in which interracial, interethnic, intertribal peace, harmony, justice, equity, respect, and congeniality are norms rather than goals? Can economic inequalities be reduced before they come to constitute a more serious threat to political stability than they already do? This book is an attempt to help provide answers to these and other questions.

As everyone knows, no book of this sort is the work of only person. Those to whom I am most indebted are cited in the text and the bibliography. I thank them, and all those whose names appear in their bibliographies.

I thank Harold R. Kerbo, Professor of Sociology, California Polytechnic, San Luis Obispo, and editor of this Comparative Societies series.

Thank you, Harold for allowing me to come aboard.

I thank Kate Purcell, the former McGraw-Hill editor who was so very helpful in getting this book off and running. I thank Alyson DeMonte, one of the current McGraw-Hill editors of this series, and the person with whom I worked most closely. Thank you, both Kate and Alyson, for your patience, understanding, open-mindedness, flexibility, and cool, calm, constant encouragement. I needed that.

Phillip T. Gay

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Introduction

A TOPOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

The Republic of South Africa lies south of the equator at the southern-most tip of the African continent, between latitudes 23 and 45 degrees north and longitudes 19 and 33 degrees east. Its total land area is 471,445 square miles, making it less than one-eighth the size of the United States but more than twice the size of France and approximately one and four-fifths the size of Texas.

The *World Book Encyclopedia* (Fetter 1992: 616) gives its greatest extension from east to west as 1,010 miles, from north to south as 875 miles. Beyond its northern borders are the independent nations of Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Swaziland. The Indian Ocean runs along its eastern shores; the Atlantic Ocean runs along its western shores. The two oceans converge at its southern tip.

South Africa is not only a land populated by diverse peoples, it is also a land of great topographical diversity. Within its borders are arid deserts, expansive plains, broad mountain ranges, and deep, verdant valleys. There are also vast stretches of fertile farmland and productive ranches of diverse sorts and sizes, ranging from tiny to huge, from cattle ranch to ostrich farm. There are world-acclaimed vineyards in South Africa's Western Cape Province. Great surf and warm sunny beaches are found along its coasts. The country has modern cities with towering sky-scrapers of glass, steel, and concrete and affluent suburbs of meticulously maintained lawns and clear, temperature-controlled backyard swimming pools. And ringing the modern cities, towns, and affluent suburbs are squalid urban slums and rural shantytowns where goats, chickens, wild dogs, and raw sewage water still run freely.

South African weather, on the other hand, is not generally as variable as its landscape and people. Snow and drought are not unknown at

certain times in certain areas, but daytime weather throughout most of the country is most often sunny and warm without being scorching or otherwise uncomfortably hot. Like other countries in the Southern Hemisphere, South Africa's warmest month is usually January; its coolest month is July.

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Although South Africa's white (i.e., European-ancestored) population is larger than that of any other sub-Saharan African nation, the lands that it now encompasses remained free of sustained European incursion far longer than did any of the African lands to the north. This was so for several reasons. There were relatively few hospitable harbors along its coast. There were no reports of rich gold deposits in any of its inland areas. There were no extensively navigable inland waterways, thus making incursions into the inland areas more difficult than seemed worth the trouble. There were also those formidable mountain ranges not far from the region's eastern and western edges. And there were the region's indigenous peoples, reputed to be widely scattered and fiercely resistant to being enslaved or involved in the enslavement of others.

The term **culture,** or a group's culture, refers to the means by which that group adapts to its environment in order to meet its members' needs for food, shelter, intergroup communication, intergroup solidarity, protection from enemies, recreation, and other things necessary for survival. Thus, cultures may be differentiated by their different values, beliefs, lifestyles, technology, language, cuisine, aspirations, and whatever else serves to affirm and contribute to the maintenance of their members' distinctive ways of living, thinking, and interacting with each other and with members of other groups.

Before the arrival of the first white settlers there were three culturally distinct groups of indigenous people living on the lands at the southern tip of the African continent: the Khoikhoi, the Bushmen/San, and the Xhosa.

The light-brown-complexioned **Khoikhoi** were a pastoral people; their peripatetic way of life centered around cattle and sheep tending. They had clicking, clucking sounds in their speech, which caused Europeans to called them **Hottentots,** a pejorative term.

The **Bushmen** were nonpastoral hunters and gatherers, living on the edges of Khoikhoi territory along the Atlantic coast and in and around the desert regions of what would become the Cape Colony. Though the Bushman tended to be shorter in stature than Khoikhoi, the two groups were linguistically related. Bushmen were also of lightish brown complexion and **steatopygic** (possessed of excessively large buttocks) body type. Until quite recently, sensitive scholars considered *Bushmen* to be a

pejorative term and took care to refer to these people as **San** or the San people. But Bushmen is no longer a politically incorrect term; in fact, it has come to light that San originally carried a pejorative connotation.

The **Xhosa** were speakers of a variety of Bantu languages; in addition, they were physically larger and typically darker brown complexioned than the Khoikhoi and Bushmen. They lived in tribal communities of mixed farmers—settled agriculturists who also maintained herds of cattle—in and around communities located north and east of the Khoikhoi and Bushmen areas. It was the Xhosa and other equally dark Africans who would come to be referred to as Blacks, Natives, **Africans,** Bantu, or **Kaffirs.** Although Bantu, which literally means "people" is a pejorative term, *kaffir,* which in Arabic means "nonbeliever," is even more so. It has long carried the same contemptuous connotation as *nigger.*

Relations between Khoikhoi herders, Bushmen hunters-gatherers, and Xhosa mixed farmers were sometimes cordial and purposefully cooperative—as when herders and hunter-gatherers exchanged milk for meat. Or as also sometimes happened, "hunters served their herder patrons . . . by defending them against human and animal aggression and even looking after their sheep and cattle." It also sometimes even happened that "entire bands [of hunter-gatherers] were assimilated into the herding way of life and incorporated into the herders' clans" (Thompson 1995: 14).

It was also the case—as evidenced by the light-brown complexion and Asiatic eyes of former South African president Nelson Mandela and others of the Thembu and other Cape tribal groups—that herders and hunter-gatherers were sometimes both culturally and biologically assimilated into Xhosa tribal groups.

At other times, though, relations between the herder, hunter-gatherer, and mixed farmer groups were not so cordial. Violent conflicts frequently arose over sheep and cattle rustling, conflicting land usage, or the killing, by poisoned arrows, of Khoikhoi and Xhosa cattle by Bushmen, either desperate for food or sick and tired of Khoikhoi and Xhosa encroachments onto the lands over which only they had traditionally roamed.

THE FIRST EUROPEANS TO ARRIVE

The first Europeans to come to South Africa with the intention of staying for a while arrived on a ship that dropped anchor in Table Bay, which leads into what is now the port city of Cape Town, located on the lower southwestern tip of the Cape of Good Hope. The year of their arrival was 1652. Approximately 100 or so in number, they were all employees of the **Dutch East India Company,** under the command of Jan van Riebeeck.

Like van Riebeeck, most of these first Europeans to arrive were Dutch, but there were also Germans, Danes, and Englishmen among

them. And though some may have arrived with slaves (Le May 1995: 15), none were of the Dutch, German, Danish, English, or any other upper-class nobility. Nor did any member of the van Riebeeck contingent belong to any national or other formal military order. In addition, few of members of this first contingent were highly skilled or educated. Nor was it their intent to establish a political, religious, or other kind of colony or to subjugate the natives and establish farms and villages all over southernmost Africa.

There were a few women among this first contingent—van Riebeeck's wife, Maria de la Quelliere, and the wives of Hendrik Boom ("the master gardener") and Willem Wylant (the contingent's lay chaplain) being the most prominent—but few members arrived in families (Welsh 1999: 27). They were mostly men from the lower social classes of their countries of birth, arrived to construct and maintain a replenishment station—replete with military fortifications—at which Dutch East India Company ships enroute to and from Asian ports could stop and take in fresh water, fresh fruit and vegetables (to be grown by Company employees), and meat (to be secured during peaceful negotiations with the Khoikhoi). The replenishment station was also to serve as a place for Dutch East India Company ships to drop off their gravely ill and seriously injured for more extensive medical treatment than they could receive at sea.

If they had something to offer in return, ships flying the flags of other nations would also be able to stop in at the Table Bay station and receive the same services as received by Dutch ships. The Dutch East India Company, after all, existed to make money for its shareholders, any way it could.

But the Dutch East India Company was much more than just your common, ordinary money-making company. Formed in 1602 by the merging of a number of small companies, the Dutch East India Company was, by 1652,

> the world's greatest trading corporation . . . a state outside the state. Operating under a charter from the States-General [the Dutch government], it had sovereign rights in and east of the Cape of Good Hope, and . . . was the dominant European maritime power in southeast Asia. Its fleet, numbering some 6,000 ships totaling at least 600,000 tons, was manned by perhaps 48,000 sailors (Thompson 1995: 33).

Primary among the Company's sovereign rights were the rights to conclude treaties, maintain military forces, issue coinage, and administer the systems of government and justice in the lands over which it held control.

The Table Bay settlement (later Cape Town), thus started out as a business enterprise, operated by an organization whose main concern was profits. This concern with making the Cape station a profitable enterprise