"It is my argument, then, that it was not the frontier, seen as a social system distinct and isolated from a parent society, which produced a new, or even intensified an old, pattern of social relationships. Indeed, as Owen Lattimore has written, 'frontiers are of social, not geographic origin. Only after the concept of a frontier exists can it be attached by the community that has conceived it to a geographical configuration. The consciousness of belonging to a group, a group that includes certain people and excludes others, must precede the conscious claim of the right to live or move about within a particular territory. ... In large measure, when he [Turner] thought he saw what the frontier did to society, he was really seeing what society did to the frontier.' The pattern of racial relationships established in the eighteenth century Cape must be seen in the light of the formation of the Cape colonist as a whole, the form of his inheritance from Europe and the exigencies of the situation he had to face." (1)

This precisely summarizes the views of Legassick on the so-called "Frontier Tradition" in South African historiography. In his discussion, Legassick pointed out the necessity of paying closer attention to "the frontier" itself and then asks: "What is the frontier, what are its specific influences, and how does it produce and perpetuate them ... if indeed it does at all?" (2) This paper will concern itself with "the pattern of relationships established" in the Eastern Cape in the early nineteenth century, as well as "the exigencies of the situation" which the various groups that make up the society had to face.
For want of a better phrase, the Cape Eastern districts will be referred to as a "frontier zone." This term, however, could be interchanged with "the frontier" in its narrowest sense without suggesting that the area was an exclusive "frontier," rigidly defined with an easily definable and recognizable tradition of social relationships. It was an area which witnessed the goings and comings of people. It saw the conflicts between various peoples, as well as the co-operation between them. It also saw the conflicts and co-operation within specific groups, not in isolation from but as part of the same social set-up.

The meeting of the far advanced colonists with the expanding Xhosa created a frontier zone of contact and conflict, and ultimately Government intervention. Before the more violent conflicts between the colonists and the Xhosa in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, both had had at least between forty and fifty years of trading contact during which their habitations were mixed without trouble. The transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century witnessed a succession of events with far reaching consequences for both black and white. In 1795 the Dutch East India Company handed over the Cape and its eastern district rebellion of the colonists to the British Government. In 1796, Ngqika and Ndlambe fought a war of succession. In 1799, the colonists in the eastern district of Graaff-Reinet attempted another rebellion, which was aborted by the presence of Government troops and the armed invasion of the colony by Khoi and Xhosa. In 1803, the Colony reverted to the Batavian Government, which finally gave it up to the British in 1806.

Looking at the eastern frontier zone itself, the visit of Barrow, the English traveller, to Ngqika in 1797, two years after the war between that chief and his uncle, brought the Colonial Government into the internal politics of the Xhosa. Barrow recognized Ngqika as the Xhosa paramount, on behalf of the Government, and the Xhosa who were already in the Zuurveld were instructed to return to him. During the course of his journey to Ngqika, he met a group of Xhosa who were told

"... that if some few of the colonists had been so imprudent as to transgress the treaty, they had done it contrary to the express orders, and without the knowledge, of government: that the colony was now in the possession of a great and powerful sovereign, the King of England: that one of his first chiefs had deputed us to say that the established boundary should be observed on the part of the colonists, but he expected also that all these chiefs, who had spread themselves over the country of the colonists, with their families, and dependants, and cattle, would, without any further delay, quickly and peaceably return into their own country, and, as a proof of the good intentions and friendship of the English Government towards the [Xhosa] nation, we were now on our journey to their great chief, or King Gaika, carrying for him a present from the English Governor at the Cape." (4)
There is a seeming contradiction in Barrow's mission. He was the agent of a government which sought to curb white expansion as well as keep frontier peace with the Xhosa, but at the same time he was trying to persuade the Xhosa to retire from their habitations in an area which the chiefs maintained was uninhabited by the colonists. (5) Moreover, the chiefs expressed fear of going back to Ngqika, with whom they had quarrelled, and Barrow decided to plead their cause with that chief.

Barrow's interview with Ngqika revealed that the chief had no effective authority over the other chiefs, though he claimed first rank among them. According to Barrow, Ngqika acceded to his proposals except that he would not agree to send back colonists found in Xhosaland under a strong escort, as suggested by Barrow, though he was willing to return them. (6) At this time deserters like Coenrad Buys (7) were already residing with Ngqika, and, in fact, the presence of a number of armed supporters of colonists was important in bolstering the position of that chief against his rival Ndlambe; presumably, he hoped in the same way to use the colonial recognition of his paramountcy though the true paramount was the Gcaleka chief, Hintsa, further east.

Despite Barrow's apparent agreement with Ngqika, a section of the Xhosa combined with Khoi and invaded the colony in 1799. This invasion was far more disastrous to the colonists in the eastern district of Graaff-Reinet than any of the earlier conflicts between white and black, as it spread as far west as Swellendam, depopulating the frontier of colonists. (8) This invasion had hardly subsided when the Batavians took over the administration of the Colony.

Before setting out for the Colony, De Mist had his ideas of the eastern frontier carefully prepared and included in his memorandum. He desired peace and organized trade with the Xhosa. The colonists were to be directed to intensive cultivation of the soil rather than cattle-keeping. The supply of arms and ammunition to the colonists nearer the Xhosa was to be replaced with "knives, shears, pins, hammers, large nails, thread, ribbons, pipes, tobacco, and all sorts of small wares and ornaments" which could do no harm. In Holland he was convinced that the Xhosa were embittered, basing his conclusions on Barrow's accounts. (9) Evidence suggests that during the three years of Batavian rule not much was done to improve the relationship between Xhosa and colonists. De Mist would have declared war on the Xhosa if he had had enough forces. (10) His tour of the frontier at the close of 1803 was a failure. (11) He later modified his views on the ill-treatment of the Khoi when he noted:

"This Jeremiad, based on the assertions of De Grandpré and Barrow, I wrote before I had ever traversed the Cape. I did not then realise that it was possible for any individual to indulge in such violent abuse through sheer national envy. If a half of what is written is ignored, a fourth considered doubtful, and the rest modified by reforms, it will be seen that the [Khoi] are even more favourable situated than the peasant farmers of Meierij." (12)
The Xhosa, with whom peace had continually to be negotiated, were not united. The conventional explanation for the disorder in Xhosaland during this time is to attribute this disunity to the inherent fissiparous tendencies of the Xhosa, their search for more grazing land and water. (13) These alone do not supply the answer. In 1796 a major split occurred between Ngqika and his uncle, Ndlambe, over succession; war ensued, and the latter was defeated and made prisoner of the former for two years. Dissatisfied with his lot under Ngqika, and unwilling to subject himself to him, Ndlambe withdrew into the Zuurveld. The disagreement between these chiefs escalated into rivalry and a struggle for power over people. At the moment we can only guess at the root causes of this, though the presence of whites in Xhosaland may have been partly responsible. This internal disagreement, added to the attitude of the colonists, complicated frontier politics. In the rivalry between Xhosa chiefs, both individual colonists and the administration became heavily involved. (14)

The visit of Governor Janssens to the eastern frontier early in 1803 did not yield any results radically different from those of Barrow. During this period, Ndlambe was firmly settled in the Zuurveld. (15) During the course of Janssens's tour he had interviews with the various Xhosa chiefs and the records show that he was out to impress on the Xhosa the wishes of the Government, which, at least in principle, were in accord with those of the colonists. He met the Zuurveld chiefs at the Sundays River and, because he was sickened by the odour emanating from the Xhosa, his officials had to negotiate with them. (16) The most important point discussed was to impress on the Xhosa the Fish River boundary and their withdrawal from the Zuurveld. (17) To effect this, Janssens, like Barrow, decided to intervene in the internal quarrels between the Zuurveld chiefs and Ngqika. The Zuurveld chiefs desired peace with the colonists, but that was not to be at the expense of a foot of their ground. (18)

If the Zuurveld Xhosa desired peace with the colony though keeping their hold on their land, Ngqika's discussions with the Governor do not suggest that land was an issue in his relationship with the Colony. For him, status and paramountcy were more important. The discussions centred on the Zuurveld Xhosa with whom Ngqika was at variance. He was advised by the Governor to make peace with the "rebels" and to receive them back from the Zuurveld. Ngqika agreed he was at war with the Zuurveld Xhosa, who, he claimed, were his subjects, and shrewdly gave as one of his reasons his friendship with the Colony and his refusal to join them against the colonists. (19) He therefore was quite willing to accept the Fish River as a boundary. Neither at this interview nor at any other with a colonial official did Ngqika raise issues of land ownership. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, he was more intent on the expulsion of the Zuurveld Xhosa by force, so that he could gain control over them. (20)

The intricate politics on the frontier are well illustrated by the actions of Colonist, Government and Xhosa. Everybody desired peace. Ngqika, "the friend of the Colony", had appealed in vain to the Cape Government for supplies of arms and ammunition (21), and had now resorted to persuading the Government to expel the Zuurveld Xhosa by force of arms. The Government, which recognized him as the Xhosa
paramount, promised him that the so-called rebels would not be treated with, though in fact they continued to negotiate with them, in many cases even before they met Ngqika. The colonists were themselves witnesses to these manoeuvres, and saw to it that the Government pressed their interests forward through exploiting the basic divisions among the Xhosa. This continued even after the British regained possession of the Cape in 1806.

So long as the Government eschewed the use of force, there was an uneasy stalemate on the frontier zone, and Ndlambe and his followers remained in the Zuurveld until 1811-12 when war broke out anew. The war was preceded by the visit in 1809 of Colonel Collins of the 83rd Regiment to investigate the causes of unrest on the frontier. In the course of his tour he had interviews with distant Hintsa, chief of the senior Gcaleka Xhosa chiefdom, Ngqika and Ndlambe. The accounts of these interviews clearly reveal that the Xhosa chiefs were far from reconciled with one another. Hintsa claimed a definite portion of land and would not accept Collins’s suggestion to allow any of the other chiefs to move near him. (22) Ngqika claimed the whole country extending from the Kyba River to the Colony, and even the country of the San. (23) In spite of this claim, he accepted the Fish River boundary once more, and in emphasising his relationship with the other chief declared that

"he had been born and appointed to govern the country where he now resided, and that he would rather lose his life than the possession of it". (24)

The recommendations of Collins were to have far reaching consequences. Convinced that the Xhosa were at variance one with another, he noted:

"The misfortunes that have happened from the want of a chief of the rank and talents necessary to secure respect and obedience, point out the necessity of a military commander." (25)

He then recommended to Lord Caledon, the then Governor, the forcible expulsion of the Zuurveld Xhosa and the extension of the boundary to the Koonap. (26)

The recommendations of Collins made little impression on Lord Caledon. But during the first quarter of 1811 reports of Xhosa depredations increased. (27) These reports, though frequently exaggerated and even falsified, were implicitly believed by frontier landdrosts or magistrates and transmitted to Cape Town. Accompanying these reports were calls for total warfare against the Xhosa by colonists and landdrosts. (28) It was left to Sir John Francis Cradock to take the crucial decision whether to go to war or not against the Xhosa.

Sir John Francis Cradock took over the governorship of the Colony on September 6, 1811. In his first despatch to Lord Liverpool he confessed that he could not give any information as a result of the
short time that had elapsed since his arrival. (29) His next despatch shows how quickly he accepted frontier opinion. He wrote:

"the aggression, at present, appears invariably to have been on the part of the [Xhosa] kraals, and that most of the Dutch settlers do not seem to have acted in any manner likely to produce these disorders." (30)

He quoted the views of his predecessors as necessitating his taking effective steps against the Xhosa. What were the views of his predecessors?

We have at least the views of his immediate predecessors. Lord Caledon agreed that the policy of conciliating the Xhosa had failed, but he observed in addition that,

"as the evil is only partial, it may still be hoped that a partial act of coercion will have an adequate effect." (31)

This view was held also by Ryneveld, president of the Burgher Senate, who thought that it was

"better to submit to a certain extent of injury than [risk] a great deal for a prospect by no means certain". (32)

Lt-Gen Grey, Acting Governor before Cradock's arrival, was not convinced that all the Xhosa were guilty of depredations. During his brief period in office, he ordered Major Lyster to assemble a commando of farmers to check the depredations of the Xhosa. He instructed Major Lyster, then commanding on the frontier and stationed in Graaff-Reinet, to consult with Landdrosts Stockenstrom and Cuyler and to give such assistance and dispose of troops as they required, but warned that the troops were

"on no account to act with hostility against the [Xhosa], without the most positive and unavoidable necessity; they are merely as a support, and protection to the inhabitants, and that their efforts are to be considered in the present instance as directed against a set of wandering Vagabonds, and Marauders, in whose atrocities the [Xhosa] nation has no concern". (33)

Even after the war in 1812, Lord Caledon maintained, presumably as a reply to the Government, that he did not at any time contemplate a war against the Xhosa. (34)

Be that as it may, Sir John Cradock went on with his plan of opening up determined hostilities against the Xhosa. He sent reinforcements to the frontier under the command of Lt-Col Graham, with instructions to clear the Zuurveld of the Xhosa. As part of the preparations for war, a deputation led by Landdrost Stockenstrom visited
Ngqika to assure him that the intended hostilities were to be directed against Ndlambe and the Zuurveld Xhosa and to buy off his neutrality by persuasion and gifts. (35) Not unexpectedly, Ngqika, who had long advocated the expulsion of the Zuurveld Xhosa, concurred and kept aloof during the war which began at the close of 1811.

The war, which ended with the expulsion of the Xhosa by about March 1812 (36), represents the first decisive victory of the Colony against the Zuurveld Xhosa. It equally represented a signal triumph of frontier opinion and a deliberate step in the direction of land-grabbing by colonists, in which the Government took the lead. Through it Cradock immortalized his name among the colonists. On his recall from the Cape, the Court of Justice, the Burther Senate, and other Boards, civil and ecclesiastical, thanked him for the religious, educational, legal, and land improvements he had carried out and, above all, for the expulsion of the Xhosa and the extension of the boundaries of the Colony. (37) The missionaries at Bethelsdorp thought the expulsion of the Xhosa was long overdue. (38)

The attitude of the Home Government to the beginning, course, and end of the war was one of typical inconsistency. Sir John Cradock was too intent on war to wait for approval from London. When a reply to his despatch of October 4, 1811, announcing the declaration of war, came, it counselled against it.

"It must be quite unnecessary for me to point out the impolicy of a systematic war with the Xhosa Nation, or the little benefit that could possibly be derived from it by the most complete success, and I am convinced that the general interests of the Settlement would be better promoted by taking measures of precaution against Marauders and repelling their intrusions when made than by resorting to general offensive hostilities." (39)

Lord Liverpool went further to suggest that Cradock investigate whether Xhosa aggression were not measures of retaliation and therefore justified by the conduct of the colonists, and referred to Lord Macartney's earlier proclamation. (40) This warning came too late. And, from the beginning of the war to its termination, every despatch of Cradock's was aimed at convincing the Home Government of the validity of his policy. (41)

But in July 1812 Lord Liverpool emphasised his earlier view on systematic warfare against the Xhosa. This time, however, Cradock got the benefit of the doubt. Lord Liverpool noted:

"The operations against the Xhosa were undertaken at an early period after your arrival in the Colony, but I feel assured that you had not only received the most satisfactory proof that the Xhosa have no claim or rights to the Territory which they have occupied, but also unless there
was ground for supposing that the occupation of those Lands by them whether by right or indulgence was injurious to the Colony." (42)

In the end, it was the Home Government which surrendered to Cradock, and, indirectly, to frontier opinion.

"His Royal Highness has learnt with peculiar satisfaction the termination of the warfare with the [Xhosa] Tribes and has commanded me to signify his entire approbation of the conduct of Colonel Graham and of all the Officers and Men employed upon that laborious and disagreeable service. The Regulations you have made for preventing any infringement of [Xhosa] Territory - for collecting into villages the inhabitants resident in their vicinity added to the vigour with which their late aggressions have been repelled and the continued presence of so considerable a force upon their frontier appear well calculated to secure the Colony against future invasion." (43)

The expulsion of the Zuurveld Xhosa brought them into close proximity with Ngqika. The years between 1812 and 1818 saw the rise of a new kind of leadership and a drive for unity amongst the Xhosa who had been expelled from the Zuurveld, and joined the true paramount, Hintsa, who resented Ngqika's pretensions. The central character in this new move was Makana, a prophet-figure who succeeded in combining Xhosa customs with Christian ideas and with his preachings won a greater number of Xhosa followers than any of the three principal chiefs (Ngqika, Ndlambe, Hintsa) could muster at the time. (44) At this stage, it is only reasonable to suppose that Ndlambe teamed up with Makana in order to use him against Ngqika.

In April 1817, Lord Charles Somerset, who had taken over the Administration of the Colony from Cradock in 1814, held a conference with some Xhosa chiefs at the Kat River. At this conference, Somerset carried forward the tradition of recognizing Ngqika as the Xhosa paramount. Ngqika once more professed his friendship with the Colony. On being told that the Governor of the Colony considered him to be the first chief and had never treated with any others, and that if any other chiefs wished to trade with the Colony they could only do so by obtaining a pass from him,

"Gaika said the conversation was very important, that he regretted there were not more present to hear it, but that the Governor's acknowledging him thus publicly was enough. He was now ready to enter into any arrangements with him". (45)

The minutes of the conference, as recorded, reveal that Ngqika, in his characteristic way, both accepted and rejected paramountcy at one and the same time. (46)
One of the products of the Kat River Conference was the introduction of the Spoor Law, i.e., that the Xhosa would collectively be responsible for all stolen colonial cattle. This Spoor Law has been criticized vehemently by Professor Macmillan (47), but it was not entirely the brain-child of Governor Somerset. Indeed, it was an extension of the commando system whereby colonists had followed traces of stolen cattle. Shortly before Somerset's arrival at the Cape, Cradock had introduced what virtually amounted to a Spoor Law. (48) Somerset simply obtained the consent of Ngqika to the arrangement which had long been demanded by the colonists.

The expulsion of the Zuurveld Xhosa, their proximity to Ngqika, the rise and influence of Makana and the public recognition of Ngqika by the Government and the Kat River Conference, meant that, sooner or later, the problem of Xhosa paramountcy would have to be faced on the battlefield. In 1818, a powerful combination of the followers of Ndlambe and Hintsa took the field against those of Ngqika, whom they defeated and put to flight with serious casualties. Ngqika himself escaped to a hide-out near the Great Winterberg Mountain, from where he appealed to the Colonial Government for help. Then came the swift intervention of colonial troops from Grahamstown. The erstwhile victors took to their heels and Ngqika was reinstated. (49) Incensed by what seemed the wanton intervention of the Colonial Government in a purely Xhosa affair, the chiefs mustered another combination and marched on Grahamstown, the military headquarters on the frontier. This invasion was repulsed with tremendous loss, and the Xhosa once more took flight, leaving Ngqika as the ultimate victor. (40) The peace treaty concluding these successive wars established a belt of the so-called neutral territory, free of both Xhosa and colonists, though for the first time Ngqika lost part of his land. It was not till the mid-1820s, as the "neutral belt" changed into the "Ceded Territory", that the reality of this treaty unveiled itself to Ngqika. The records of this period are full of loud complaints by the Xhosa against the colony for their loss of land. (51)

The complex politics of the frontier zone, with both black and white manipulating each other for their own purposes, suggest that any simple view of a "frontier tradition" is misleading. In fact, the fluidity of movement renders the very concept of it suspect.

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Notes

Colonel Collins's notes made on his visit in January to the Southern branches of the River T'ky, and through Kaffraria, p. 52.


Ibid., p. 172.

Ibid., pp. 193-96.


For an account of the 1799 frontier war, see J. S. Marais, *Maynier and the first Boer Republic* (Cape Town), pp. 104-112.


M. Oloyo, "The Xhosa", *op. cit.*, p. 4.


Ibid., p. 121.

Ibid., *pp. 179-83.*

M. Oloyo, "The Xhosa", p. 4.

Ibid.
(22) CO 48-6. Colonel Collins's notes, op. cit., p. 110.
(23) Ibid., pp. 126-127.
(24) Ibid., pp. 150-151.
(26) CO 40-6, op. cit., pp. 213, 217.
(30) Ibid., Cradock to Lord Liverpool, October 4 1811, p. 104.
(31) Theal Records, op. cit., p. 111.
(32) Ibid.
(37) CO 48-23, p. 210. There were tributes from other organizations at the Cape. See also pp. 206-7.
(38) Box 5, Folder I, Jacket F. Annual Report of the Missionary Institution at Bethelsdorp for the Year 1812. This manuscript is marked 2 in the file (IMS Archives, London).
(41) Ibid., Cradock to Lord Liverpool, October 4 1811, p. 104. CO 48-13, Cradock to Lord Liverpool, January 23 1812, pp. 3-4; ibid., Cradock to Lord Liverpool, March 7 1812, pp. 192-193. CO 48-14, Cradock to Lord Liverpool, June 10 1812, p. 42; ibid., Cradock to Lord Bathurst, November 18 1812, p. 208.
(43) CO 48-14. Downing Street to Sir John Cradock, November 20 1912, pp. 179-180; Downing Street to Sir John Cradock, April 2 1813, p. 216.

(45) CO 48-33. The Minutes of the Kat River Conference between His Excellency and Chief Gaika, April 2 1817, pp. 128-129.


(48) CO 48-22, Captain Frazer's Expedition into Xhosaland, p. 20; Colonel Vicars's comments on Frazer's Expedition, p. 23, and Cradock's comments on same, p. 23.

(49) M. Oloyo, "The Xhosa", p. 8.
