

A clash of cultures

Understanding the nature of psychological oppression to discover precisely where one fits in the scheme of things in an unequal society requires that we briefly examine the history of the conflict that has developed between the oppressed and the oppressor.

In 1652 Jan van Riebeeck and his party landed at the Cape. That date signified for the peoples of this country the beginning of the battle between the indigenous people and the white colonisers from Europe.

From the outset there developed a conflict of interests in that the colonisers sought to exploit the wealth of the land at the expense of the indigenous people.

The indigenous people themselves saw the colonisers as a threat to their continued existence and their rightful ownership of the land. Therefore, the indigenous people began to resist the efforts of the colonisers to encroach upon what was rightfully theirs.

In the beginning the conflict took the form of a series of skirmishes between the Khoi and San people against the Dutch colonisers. The skirmishes followed upon disputes over land and cattle.

These military attacks were bound to end with the colonisers being more successful because of their superior military power. As the colonisers

realised that there was much to be reaped from the land they stepped up their campaigns against the Khoisan and eventually defeated them.

The Khoisan people were literally wiped off the face of the earth by the colonisers who used a variety of tactics to win their battles for supremacy, and lost little time in subjugating the indigenous people in whom they saw a ready labour force.

As it has been seen throughout the world where Europeans invaded other lands, the colonisers had a particular view of the original inhabitants of the land.

For Jan van Riebeeck and his party, the inhabitants of this land were 'savages', 'simple-minded', 'dirty', 'quarrelsome', and a 'nuisance'.

They also regarded them as 'pagans' (non-Christian) and thus looked down upon the people they came into contact with in this part of the world.

This superiority complex gave the colonisers the excuse that they required to be able to oppress the people and exploit the land. They believed that they had the authority from God to 'civilize' the indigenous people who had become the children of satan.

What we witnessed in this part of our

history was the meeting of two different ways of living. The one more militarily and technically advanced; the other still emerging from its own feudal development.

Not only was this a clash of two different economic systems; but it was also a clash of two different cultures, two different value systems.

The powerful system was able to defeat the weaker one. After the defeat of the weaker system the conqueror set about a task of completely destroying the vestiges of that system. It did so to more easily control and manipulate the defeated people so that they could be oppressed and exploited to maintain the power and the privilege of the stronger system.

However, unlike in the other areas where there was a clash of systems, in South Africa the conquerors did not develop an assimilative strategy, i.e. they did not incorporate sections of the defeated people into their system. Rather they opted for a system of exclusion where the defeated people became the hewers of wood and the drawers of water.

A clear division was marked between the ruler and the ruled based upon the colour of the skin. Whites were the rulers and blacks were the ruled.

