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ABSTRACT

What we know about the material culture of eighteenth century Cape Colony settlers is mostly limited to qualitative evidence found in official documents, letters, travel accounts and other correspondence. This paper uses a new quantitative source – the MOOC probate inventories – to ascertain the nature, growth and distribution of luxury good ownership in the Cape Colony. The survey reveals a marginal increase over the course of the eighteenth century in per capita ownership, although the trend masks greater movements within different wealth groups, which supports the notion of high inequality within the European society at the Cape. Yet, even given such inequality, the evidence suggests that even the poorest had access to the most basic amenities. In fact, comparisons with European and North American regions suggest that the Cape settlers were often more affluent, refuting the notion that the Cape Colony was an “economic and social backwater”

Keywords: South Africa, Cape Colony, French Huguenots, VOC, wine, slaves
JEL codes: N37, D31, D63

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1. INTRODUCTION

Probate inventories have become a popular source for investigating the social and economic aspects of the early modern era. Inventories contain unique and detailed information regarding the everyday lives of individuals and their households. The descriptive entries are inherently quantitative, providing valuable statistics of economic and other activities.³ Such information can be used to quantify the production of agricultural goods, study debt and credit patterns, construct and analyse price series as well as determine the number and variety of an individual's household possessions.

Probate authorities administered the estates of deceased individuals in the Cape Colony from as early as 1673. A considerably large number of probate inventory records remain from the late seventeenth century Cape until 1834. A number of studies have focussed on agricultural production in the Colony using the *opgaafrolle*, a series of annual tax returns that primarily provide information on agricultural output (Van Duin and Ross 1987, Guelke and Shell 1983, Fourie and Von Fintel 2010). Yet the consumption behaviour of Cape inhabitants remains less understood. This study uses data from digitised probate records to determine the growth and distribution of luxury goods in the Cape Colony for the period 1696 to 1805. Data regarding a selection of nine luxury items has been collected from 2378 inventories and is used to construct a luxury ownership index. Mean index scores as well as the per capita ownership of separate items give valuable insights pertaining to the consumption behaviour of the Cape population as well as changes in wealth during the period.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw an increasing awareness of luxury and display with regard to the acquisition of household items. This was a global phenomenon as mostly Western Europeans (in Europe but also as settler communities elsewhere) started producing and consuming larger varieties of amenity items and improving their respective living standards. Probate records can reveal if a similar trend is observed for the Cape Colony during the eighteenth century and how the consumption behaviour of Cape inhabitants compares to those of other regions.

To this end, the paper is outlined as follows: Section two discusses material culture and the "consumer revolution" since the seventeenth century. Section three gives a brief overview of the Cape economy during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Section four discusses the uses and limitations of probate records, followed by a brief account of earlier probate studies. Section five discusses the Cape probate records as well as the various challenges encountered with the use of this data source. Section seven describes methodological aspects of the paper and section eight presents the results. Section nine compares the Cape findings with other countries and colonial settlements. Section ten concludes.

2. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Increased economic prosperity during the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century lead to an observed change in the consumption behaviour of Western Europeans (Kwass 2003). This "consumer revolution" relates to a shift towards the accumulation of greater quantities as well as a bigger variety of material goods (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1982). Western European societies were undergoing a transition from traditional economies of minimalism and morality to economies of relative abundance, happiness and utility (Slack 2009: 577). New moral philosophies advocated that the pursuit of material advancement was natural and that the human desire for

³ For a detailed overview of probate inventories, see Overton, Whittle, Dean and Hann (2001).

riches is unrelenting. Wealthier groups increased their consumption of durable manufactured goods like textiles, expensive furniture and mirrors. Such fashionable objects became status symbols and replaced other earlier ways of conveying status. Canons of taste started to evolve at an ever increasing pace, fuelling the desire of consumers who already owned luxuries to acquire even newer and better goods (Pomeranz 2001:114). Items were bought because of a social need and consumption was no longer based on the principle of physical necessity.

An increased desire to own luxury goods was not only confined to the upper classes. Even the so called “lesser folk” comprising the middle and lower classes developed a taste for luxury items (McCants 2007). Urbanisation led to the concentration of markets and further stimulated the imitation of status-based consumption patterns. Luxuries became more accessible to various types of individuals and previous restrictions based on certain social criteria were no longer applicable. The expansion of labour opportunities in the cities, especially for women, resulted in increased disposable income, placing individuals in a position to afford the newly available material goods. The pursuit of purchasing luxuries drove individuals to undertake more productive enterprises, thus resulting in further supply (Kwass 2003).

Changing perceptions of what desirable lifestyles entail was not just limited to the European continent, but can also be seen in the consumption patterns of Chinese, Japanese and Indian societies from roughly the 1400s until the 1800s (Pomeranz 2001:126). Those with the means to do so filled their homes with more and better furnishings, fashionable clothing, cutlery and dinnerware as well as decorative items such as framed pictures. Western European colonies also exhibited similar behaviour during the eighteenth century. British colonies in North America were displaying an increased awareness of comfort, pleasant appearances and fashionable trends (Carr and Walsh 1988: 137). These changes facilitated the formulation of modern ideas of what the standard of living should be and established the cultural foundations of demand that encouraged the industrial revolution (De Vries 2008). Clever marketing that appealed to consumers and the establishment of supply systems reaching a wider variety of markets further fuelled the trend towards fashion and luxury.

European immigrants settled in the Cape Colony during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. The Cape of Good Hope offered a new beginning to newly arrived settlers in search of better opportunities for prosperity. It is arguably then that European fashion trends and the growing interest in owning luxury goods would also be reflected in the consumption patterns of the Cape population. Ross (1999) has argued that social status and gentility were already signalled by material items such as the clothing worn by eighteenth century Cape inhabitants. Ross substantiates his findings based largely on anecdotal archival accounts which may not reflect the experience of all societal groups, especially the poor. A quantitative macro analysis over the long eighteenth century expounded here, provides a more representative view of the rise of luxury ownership in the Cape Colony.

3. THE CAPE ECONOMY OF THE 18TH CENTURY

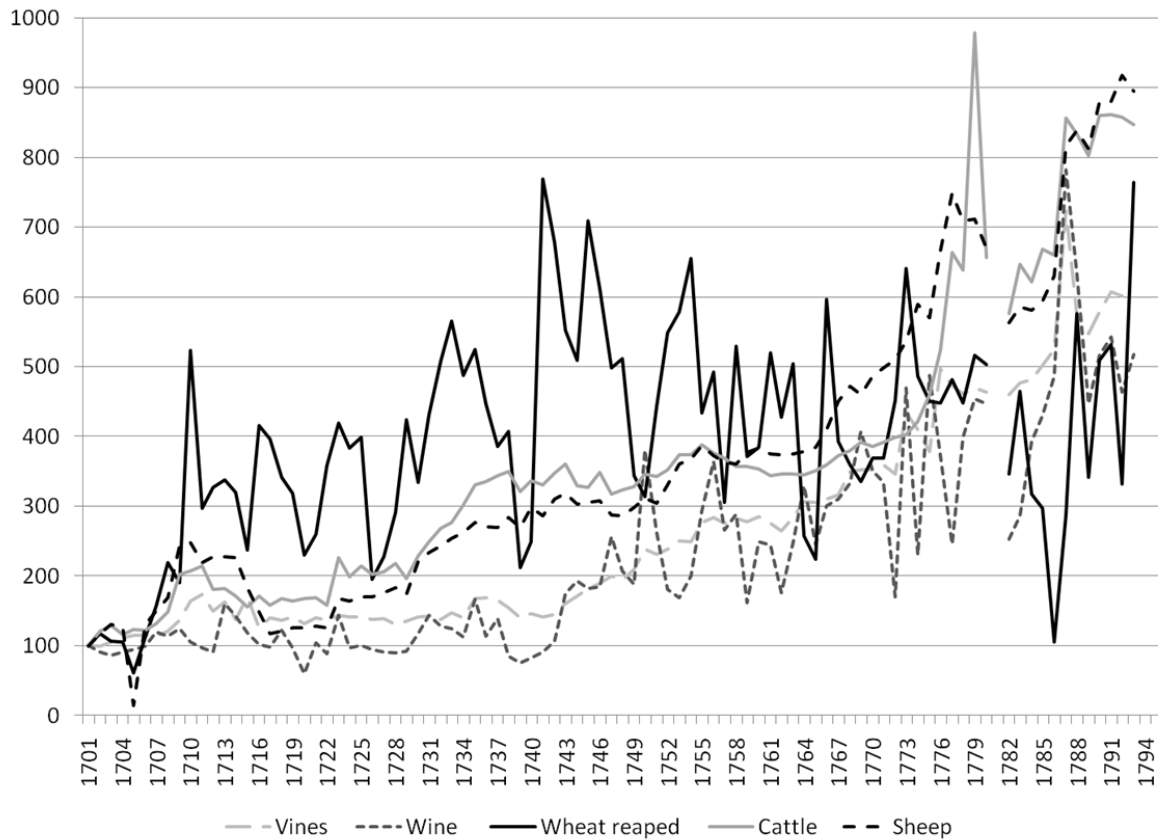
The origin of the Cape Colony can be traced back to the first stage of expansion in European overseas involvement. The Cape of Good Hope was originally intended to be used only as a refreshment station for the trading ships of the Dutch East Indian Company (VOC). The VOC ships needed to restock supplies before continuing on their journey towards trading partners in the Indies, and on their way back to Holland. The company had no initial intention of reaping direct economic reward from the Cape and the Colony was eventually run at a substantial loss during its 143 years under VOC rule (Ross 1990:249). In 1657, 5 years after Jan van Riebeeck founded the

colony, a number of company employees were encouraged to resign from their official duties in order to pursue farming activities as free burghers in areas near Cape Town. By then it had become clear that existing VOC production as well as trade with the local Khoikhoi were not sufficient in providing supplies. The company needed a much larger amount of meat, grain and wine in order to meet the needs of sailors on passing ships. This period also saw the immigration of men and a few women to the Cape in the pursuit of employment opportunities other than farming (Ross 1990: 250). The VOC continued to expand its activities as well as its employee list and Cape Town soon became a bustling small town. By the start of the eighteenth century the economic roots of the Colony had been formed, ensuring its future existence and growth.

Agricultural endeavours dominated economic activity with farmers producing various grains, planting vines and investing in livestock. The VOC acquired all production supplies and a broad system of monopoly contracts dictated economic activity (Groenewald 2007). Cape farmers have traditionally been described as having been inefficient and debt-ridden with a tendency to overproduce (De Kock 1924, De Kiewiet 1941). It is thought that most producers struggled to make ends meet, as the supplies delivered by company officials who farmed saturated the small markets for fresh produce (Guelke 1983; Giliomee 2003). While pockets of wealth occurred (Guelke and Shell 1983), most farmers – especially those on the frontier – lived a life of poverty and material adversity (Van der Merwe 1938).⁴ A picture thus emerges of a stagnant Cape economy, restricted by many regulations and severe prohibitions and few opportunities for settlers to improve their economic wellbeing; in short, the Cape was an “economic and social backwater” (Trapido 1990).

⁴ Two recent papers attempt to quantify the degree of this inequality. Fourie and Von Fintel (2010) use the *opgaafrolle* to calculate a measure of wealth inequality, while Fourie and Von Fintel (2011) use both the *opgaafrolle* and historical price series to construct income inequality.

Figure 1: Agricultural indicators in the Cape Colony, 1701-1795



Source: Van Duin and Ross (1987), own calculations. Notes: 1781 data not available

This view has recently come under some scrutiny (Van Duin and Ross 1987; Brunt 2007). The *opgaafrolle* – annual censuses used for tax purposes – reveal that the production of grains and wine consistently increased from 1720 until the late eighteenth century. Planted vines increased from slightly above two million in 1720 to almost nine million in 1790 (Ross 1983: 202). Wheat production similarly increased from roughly eighteen thousand *muid* in 1720 to more than fifty five thousand *muid* in 1790 (Ross 1983: 202). Figure 1 shows these indices of output between 1701 and 1795 as compiled by Van Duin and Ross (1983). Van Duin and Ross (1983) also account for significant undercounting in the *opgaafrolle*, as do Brunt (2007), who adjusts output towards the end of the century to even higher levels. Both sets of authors, however, use the quantitative results to argue in favour of a “more dynamic economy”, with aggregate *improvement* in the lives of farmers across the income spectrum.

Changes in the physical structure of farms during this time further support the argument of increased prosperity of especially land owners (Fransen and Cook 1980). Farmers were financially able to invest in expensive alterations of existing buildings or build new farmsteads at a considerable expense. Free men who did not own or lease land found employment as fishermen, artisans, transport riders or supervisors and tenants on other landowners’ properties. The maintenance and service industries in the Colony’s urban centre greatly expanded in order to cater for the flow of ships and accompanying sailors who arrived and spent a considerable time in Cape Town (Boshoff and Fourie 2010; Du Plessis and Du Plessis 2007: 3). This included the establishment

of numerous taverns, stores and lodgings as well as individuals working as carpenters, builders, bakers and other suppliers of needed goods or services. Randle (2007: 57) notes that men often diversified their economic undertakings by simultaneously carrying the title of fisherman, butcher, wine lessee and lodger. Company officials and free burghers were not authorized to openly operate merchandise shops or warehouses, as the VOC had monopoly control of all public trade in the colony. Private trade was, however, conducted somewhat stealthily from private homes during the eighteenth century, with the amount and variety of goods fluctuating during different times (Mentzel 1925: 79). Private traders obtained merchandise from the officers of passing ships, local auctions and even through direct ordering from suppliers in the Netherlands. Coffee and tea, spices, silk, linen, mirrors, crockery and various eating utensils could all be purchased from these private shops. Any number of merchandise articles could be obtained by the Cape inhabitants, but at different times, at different locations and also often at varying prices. Such practices were known to the Company and tolerated because of the increasing consumer demand of the growing population. Recently digitised probate inventories invite us to further explore the micro-economic activities of these colonial households in greater detail.

4. PROBATE INVENTORIES

4.1 Introduction to probate inventories

Probate records and wills document the legal process through which an individual's assets are administrated after their death. Records have been compiled under the supervision of legal authorities and therefore offer consistent, specific and monitored reports of individual wealth for extended periods (Shanahan 2001:59). Probate inventories give detailed accounts of the number of goods persons possessed at the time of their death. Inventories were often accompanied by a valuation, giving the approximate worth of the estate at the time. Scholars in various fields of study have used such records to shed light on questions pertaining to genealogy, colonial economies and cultural differences.

Probate inventories have frequently been used as a substantial source in uncovering the behaviour of early modern consumers. Records offer researchers the opportunity to gain insights into the development of material culture. These lists shed light on economic life, which paints a more vivid picture than what would be concluded from solely observing monetary wealth and wage data in different periods. Wage data for North-Western European workers in the 1800s have had historians believe that workers could barely cover day to day living expenses. Studies of their material possessions have however revealed a more optimistic outlook on living conditions, showing improvement in the number and quality of goods consumed (De Vries 2008: 123).

Inventories are usually very detailed, listing even the most insignificant of items. The broad range of people inventoried also means that insights are gained into the lives of many individuals who were most likely illiterate at the time of their death. Such individuals did not have the means to leave behind many other forms of records as to how they chose to spend the monetary assets they possessed at the time. Probate inventories are therefore helpful in portraying the consumption behaviour of individuals across the income spectrum.

4.2 What we learn from probate inventories

A significant number of probate studies have accumulated over the past five decades. De Vries (1975: 220-224), for example, examines the consumption behaviour of inhabitants in Friesland from 1550 until 1750. Here evidence from probate records shows how smallholders in rural areas

as well as a number of tenants acquired various nonessential items during the period. The amount of furniture, cutlery, decorative items and other wooden goods mentioned in inventories also increased over time. It is interesting to note that certain types of consumption goods, most notably textiles, did not increase during the period and capital goods still grew at a higher rate than consumer items. One explanation for the lack of observed increases in certain items is the argument that some consumer goods were also being discarded at a faster pace (Pomeranz 2001: 153). Some goods may have fallen out of fashion and have been thrown out, which would mean that increased purchases would not necessarily translate into greater stocks of goods at the end of a person's life.

Probate records can be used to demonstrate the level of living standards of various groups at different times. Several such studies have been conducted for British colonies in North America. Carr and Walsh (1980) consider the changes in living standards of inhabitants of St. Mary's County, Maryland from 1658 until 1777. Evidence from probate records is used to show when and how lifestyle changes occurred during the period. Inventories were used to collect data regarding twelve amenity items. Each of the items represented increased comfort in living arrangements relating to either sanitation, convenience, increased elegance, variety in diet, education and leisure activities or luxury. An amenity index was calculated to show how mean index scores changed over the period. Their results reveal a substantial increase in mean scores across time, indicating that the standards of living of St. Mary's County inhabitants improved during the period. In similar fashion, Main and Main (1988) examine probate wealth of a large sample of estates from Connecticut and Massachusetts for the period 1640 to 1774. The total value in inventories of land, debts receivable, money and consumer goods are calculated separately and adjusted for price increases. It is shown that the average wealth of probated estates of adult males grew steadily during the period, driven mostly by the increased value of real estate holdings. The value of consumer goods per estate decreased somewhat during the early 1700's, although an item by item analysis of the inventories reveals that families were acquiring a greater variety of household amenities.

Probate records have been used to answer questions regarding wealth distributions of not only a single area, but of entire regions. Jones (1982) discusses the usefulness of probate inventories in obtaining wealth estimates of the living population for various time periods. Probability samples for the North American region were obtained by drawing cluster samples of 21 records from 13 North American counties. The resulting 919 records, together with supplementary tax documents, were then used to estimate the wealth of the population in 1774. Adjustments were made to correct for age biases and the wealth of individuals whose estates were not valued by the probate courts were also considered. It is argued that these estimates provide a benchmark for the further measuring of economic growth in the United States of America.

The study of specific commodities is also popular. Smith (1995) utilises probate inventories listing map ownership at Cambridge during the Sixteenth Century. It is found that maps were acquired for mainly two reasons: to display as decorative ornaments and to be used for teaching or scholarly purposes. Gibson-Woods (2002) studies picture consumption in London, England during the late 1600's. Surviving auction catalogues and household inventories reveal that "by the 1690's, thousands of English women and men from the 'middling ranks' were buying pictures with which to decorate their homes; this suggest that patterns of middle-class picture consumption in London in this period did not differ radically from those already established in the Netherlands (Gibson-Woods: 2002: 491)."

Cape Colony probate records have attracted considerably less attention, owing most likely to the level of resources required to turn the original documents available in the Cape Town Archives Repository into electronic format. Fortunately, as part of the Transcription of Estate Papers at the

Cape of Good Hope (TEPC) project which ran from October 2004 to December 2006 and funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria, a team of 7 researchers transcribed and digitised the complete set of Master of the Orphan Chamber (MOOC)-8 inventory series (consisting of 75 volumes). The transcription team, consisting of three editors and four transcribers, converted the hand-written Dutch records into a digital database of XML-code.⁵ A brief synopsis of this process is available in Liebenberg et al. (2007). This noble project has allowed economic historians – for the first time – to explore the material culture of Cape colonial society.

5. PROBATE INVENTORIES AT THE CAPE

This study utilises 2254 probate inventory records from archives of the Master of the Orphan Chamber (MOOC) as the main source of data. The MOOC records have also been supplemented with 124 estate inventories of the Stellenbosch area. The Orphan Chamber (*Weeskamer*) had operated from soon after VOC arrival at the Cape until well into the second British occupation. With the relinquishment of power by the VOC in 1795, a lack of sufficient resources resulted in the continued use of existing legal and bureaucratic systems. The Orphan Chamber continued to take inventories and organise auctions until 1834, when its duties were taken over by private companies.

The Chamber of Orphans was charged with the responsibility of collecting and administering the property and estates of individuals who died intestate in the Cape and who left behind children under the age of 25 years (TANAP 2007). The Chamber also functioned as executor under certain other conditions, for example when individuals died without a valid testament or if they had heirs who were abroad at the time. Where assets of liquidated estates were auctioned off, the Chamber would oversee the forced sales in order to protect the interests of minor children. The original written records of the Orphan Chamber are currently located at the Cape Town Archives Repository in Roeland Street, Cape Town. The records are the result of the documentation of 161 years of continued execution of administration duties by the Chamber.

The Cape probate entries vary in size per year and inventories are expectedly few in the beginning of the period. As the population in the Cape increased, so did the number of inventories recorded. The sample size seems relatively small when compared to the figures of present day household surveys. The 2378 entries can however be seen as a substantial amount in comparison to the number of records utilised in similar studies for other regions. Approximately 150 entries were not included in the sample as these inventories did not mention the year they were recorded in. Cape inventories give a comparably detailed representation of what households owned at the time of assessment and evaluation. Bar a few exceptions, appraisals commenced within days of the deceased's passing. A list of fixed properties with names and location, cattle, material possessions and slaves was compiled and given to the Orphan Chamber. Outstanding debits and credits of the deceased were also recorded. A clerk would subsequently record, number and file the inventories in more or less chronological order.

Inventories were generally compiled in a standard format giving details regarding different estates. Inventories of less wealthy individuals were mostly recorded in a straightforward way by listing items from most valuable to least valuable or alternatively according to the ease of access appraisers had to each item. In the case of larger estates, items were listed under certain headings according to their respective location including various rooms, attics, and outbuildings. A number of inventories also contain detailed catalogues of book titles and paintings and pictures with

⁵ XML-code is the most basic form of digital coding available and is now an international standard for all archived digital data.

descriptions. Even objects with no material value were listed such as junk as well as broken items.

A clear picture of an individual's life in the colony can emerge from careful study of inventoried lists. Records give clues as to the profession of the deceased in instances where no outright mention of a profession is included. Medical equipment or building tools in inventories would lead one to assume that the deceased was a doctor or builder respectively. Outstanding credits can also be informative as in the case of MOOC 8/12.54 where in 1768 money was owed to Adriana Strijdom because a painting of hers had been delivered to a gentleman named Philip Hartog. Painting brushes and half-finished paintings in the inventory further confirm the assumption that Adriana Strijdom was an artist. The inventory mentions that she had been widowed and lists the names of her five children. Painting commission work presumably provided additional funds to support her family as she had never remarried. The professions of slaves listed in the inventories are also sometimes mentioned in brackets next to the slave's name. Slaves were in general not registered under their respective family name or surname, but rather according to their first name as well as their place/country of origin. A small number of inventories can be found that also provide some insights into the lives of indigenous people who worked and functioned inside the Cape households.

6. ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS WITH THE DATA

Historians have long since recognised the fact that historical records of any kind run a risk of delivering biased research results. Different sets of probate records can exhibit similar challenges and several methods exist that can help to resolve the complications identified when conducting probate investigations. A number of concerns can be identified from working with the inventory data of the Cape Colony.

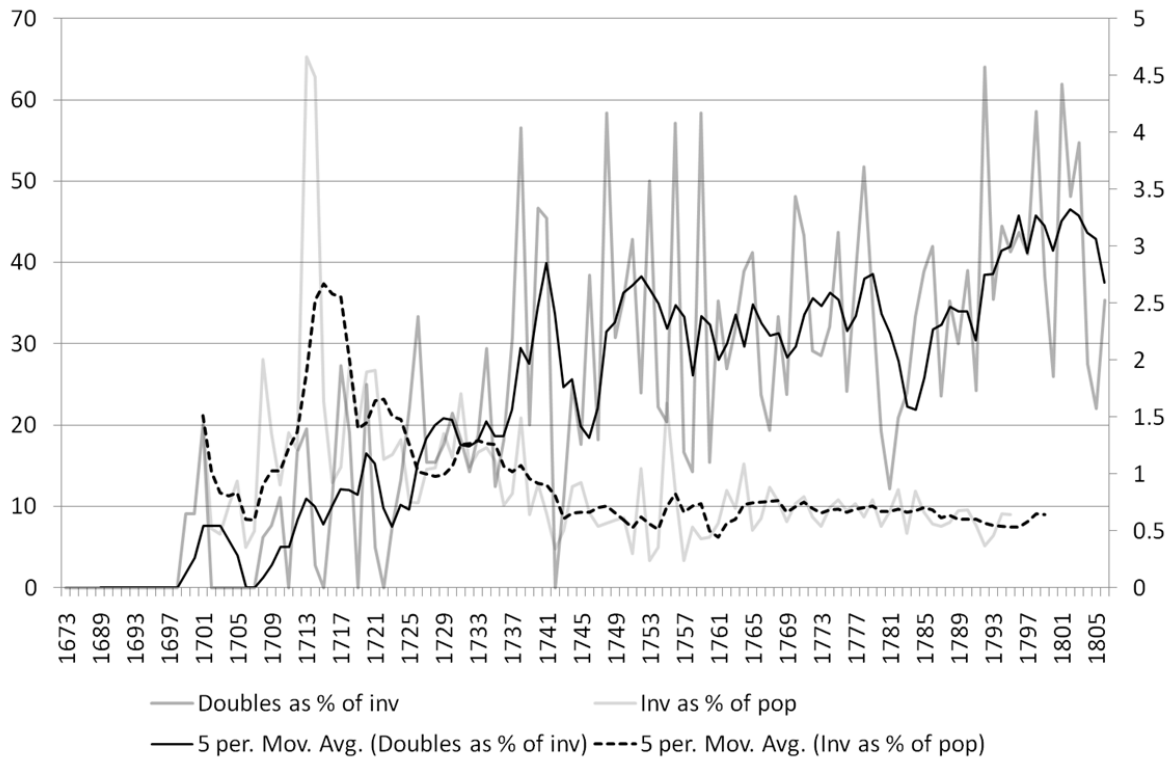
6.1 Sample issues

One of the most important questions concerning probate inventories relates to the representativeness of the records. Is it possible to draw conclusions concerning the population as a whole from data collected in the surviving records? In the case of the Cape Colony inventories were not always collected for every deceased individual. The Orphan Chamber only recorded inventories of deceased persons under certain conditions. Individuals who died with fully grown children, who did not have relatives overseas and who did not have outstanding debts would most likely not have been inventoried. Couples who married under British law were also excluded from the Orphan Chamber's jurisdiction after the British occupation, as a different inheritance system applied to them. The Chamber did, however, operate within a wide geographical boundary. The MOOC records therefore include people, even stock farmers (*trekboeren*) in their wagons, from throughout the Colony. Stock farmers managed to expand the area under European influence by close to 10 fold from 1703 to 1770 (Guelke1980: 67). Districts where the deceased resided as well as nearby rivers are often mentioned in inventories, listing areas reaching as far as the Fish River and Graaff Reinet district.

Figure 2 compares the number of inventoried individuals per year as a fraction of the total population (as reported in Van Duin and Ross 1987). The number of double entries (see discussion in section 6.2) as a proportion of total inventories is also shown separately in the graph. The percentage of inventoried individuals in the population fluctuates around the 1% mark until 1740. Reporting rates then decrease to between 0.5% and 0.6% towards the end of the period. One possible explanation for the decline in reporting rates is that presumably mortality rates decrease as colonial settlers became better adapted to their surroundings and less vulnerable to the

elements, increasing their living age and reducing the number of individuals that die with children younger than 25 years. The steady increase in double entries also point to the fact that settlers expanded their geographic territory, increasingly dying outside the boundaries of Cape Town and her immediate surroundings.

Figure 2: Inventories, double entries and total population, 1673-1806



In order to establish the level of wealth group representation within the sample inventoried individuals have been divided into four wealth groups by using the number of slaves owned as a proxy for household wealth. This is done because of the lack of monetary values in a substantial number of inventories, which prevented the calculation of the worth of estates in monetary terms. Previous studies have applied this method of wealth estimation, as historical research supports the assumption that slave ownership and wealth are highly correlated (Fourie and Von Fintel 2010: 9; Guelke and Shell 1983: 270). The number of slaves used for this calculation includes male, female and child slaves owned. The 4 respective wealth groups correspond to individuals who owned zero slaves, 1 to 5 slaves, 6 to 15 slaves and 16 slaves or more. Individuals who owned zero slaves are considered to have been poor. The lower middle class are represented by individuals who owned 1 to 5 slaves, while the upper middle class owned 6 to 15 slaves respectively. Individuals who owned more than 16 slaves are classified as Cape Gentry and represent the wealthiest group of the Cape population.

Table 1 depicts the percentage of inventories in the sample representing wealth groups per ten year period. Over 40% of the sample entries represent bottom wealth group individuals at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This percentage decreases towards a low of 18% in the middle of the time period and steadily increases again to 44% at the end of the century. The representation of the two middle wealth groups remains fairly constant during the majority of the eighteenth

century. Percentages remain near the high 30% and mid 40% mark for the lower middle wealth group and between 20% and 30% for the upper-middle wealth group. The proportion of individuals inventoried from each wealth group remains largely unchanged and there are no clear trends showing increases or decreases of wealth group percentages in inventories across the period. No group, therefore, reveals a consistent bias over time, which allows us to proceed with the analysis.

Table 1: Percentages of wealth groups in inventories, 1696-1805

Time period	N	No slaves	1 - 5 Slaves	6 - 15 Slaves	16+ Slaves
1696-1705	76	42.11	38.16	10.53	9.21
1706-1715	155	34.84	40.00	21.94	3.23
1716-1725	146	24.66	43.15	26.03	6.16
1726-1735	145	22.76	44.14	24.14	8.97
1736-1745	131	22.14	38.17	26.72	12.98
1746-1755	148	18.24	40.54	28.38	12.84
1756-1765	184	30.98	45.11	18.48	5.43
1766-1775	248	29.03	46.37	16.13	8.47
1776-1785	310	41.29	31.29	17.42	10.00
1786-1795	336	28.57	37.50	21.13	12.80
1796-1805	499	44.89	31.86	16.83	6.41

6.2 Double entries

A significant amount of double entries can be found within the transcribed MOOC records. These entries are generally labelled with a "1/2" or an "a", "b", "c" etc. and are frequently copies of the original inventory list. Records stating which possessions have been bequeathed to certain individuals are also often included. In some instances the supplementary inventories refer to possessions that were inventoried on a later date, for example when the deceased had more than one farm or living quarter that was not inventoried and listed with the original inventory. In the majority of cases, however, the double entries exist because the original list was drawn up by an acquaintance of the deceased and then subsequently rewritten by one of the clerks in the Orphan Chamber office. Both documents would then have been filed. This was specifically done if the deceased was not domiciled near one of the major towns, most notably Cape Town. In such a case the inventory was taken by an acquaintance of the deceased and subsequently sent to the Orphan Chamber. Figure 2 shows the significant increase in the percentage of double entries in the records throughout the eighteenth century. This is as to be expected as more and more people moved away from Cape Town or even further into the interior parts of the country. Including the double entry inventories in the dataset would lead to unwanted double counting, and an overestimation of goods possessed at the time. Double entries can easily be identified and ignored when collecting data.

6.3 Language inconsistencies

During the VOC period in the Cape colony, seventeenth century Dutch was most commonly spoken by officials and newly settled Western European immigrants. Cape Dutch also developed, which differed from the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands. The MOOC series therefore has a lack of uniformity regarding the way words are written and spelled. Inventories and documents have been transcribed exactly as they were originally written. Regular spelling conventions were not yet

adhered to during the VOC period and one word could be spelled in a variety of ways. The names of people, places and ships were also spelled in a number of different ways. The letters “c” and “k”, “f” and “v”, “t” and “d”, as well as “i”, “j” and “ei” could all be used interchangeably. This made searching for and identifying certain items very difficult. Identifying, for example, the number of watches each inventory included meant searching for the words “horologie” as well as “horlogie” and even “orologie”. This is a time consuming process as neglecting to search for all the different variations of a word would lead to an underestimation of the amount of goods possessed. To simplify matters somewhat, the so-called “stem” or “most essential” part of the word can be determined and then searched for. When determining the number of paintings owned, “schild” can be searched for instead of “schilderij”, “schildery” or “schilderijen”.

6.4 The absence of monetary values

Inventoried goods were not always appraised as a considerable amount of the inventories do not have monetary values corresponding to each item. The presence or absence of monetary values also does not follow a specific pattern, as some inventories in specific years may have monetary values, while other inventories in the same year do not. The lack of monetary values of items prevents the straightforward calculation of the overall monetary value of estates. This information would be helpful when dividing estates into different wealth categories as well as calculating the proportion of consumer goods in relation to the total value of each estate. Missing monetary values also make it more difficult to calculate price indices and to observe the rates of change in the values of certain goods.

6.5 Age and wealth bias

One critique against the use of probate records stem from the belief that they only represent the older and wealthier societal groups. Wealth rises with age and older individuals are more likely to die, thus inventories can be biased towards wealthier groups. A similar concern relates to the possibility that certain sets of inventories may only have been compiled for individuals deemed to have had a substantial enough collection of possessions to be accounted for at the time. Biases can therefore arise because of changes in the age structure of the population or because of changes in inventory reporting rates. This is, however, not an issue in all circumstances as a significant number of colonial records still exists with regard to younger and older individuals of various wealth standing (Main and Main 1988: 27).

If the possibility of age biases is a concern, one way of addressing it is to include a lifecycle in the analysis. Inventories are ranked according to the estimated age of the individual to determine if one age group is severely over or under represented. The data can then be adjusted by assigning greater weights to underrepresented groups according to their numbers in the total population (Shammas 1978: 297). It is important to note that even in the case where age is roughly estimated and used to include a lifecycle analysis, adjusting for age structures does not necessarily affect the end results to a great extent. This was indeed the case in the American colonial settlement of St Mary’s Country, Maryland. Here age-adjusted and unadjusted mean scores from 1658 to 1777 remained comparably the same (Carr and Walsh 1980: 99).

Cape inventories do not include the age of the person who is being inventoried. Inventories generally only include the date the specific inventory was compiled. Information is also lacking regarding the age structure of the Cape population as well as mortality rates per year. It is therefore difficult to determine if the inventory data substantially over or under represents a certain age group. Adjusting the sample for possible age biases could distort results even further, as it is

challenging to accurately establish what kind of biases exist in the sample to begin with. We know for certain that the Orphan Chamber's main duty was to see to the interests of children under the age of 25. In the majority of cases, younger individuals have children of a younger age. It is therefore reasonable to assume that inventories in the sample might largely represent younger and less wealthy individuals, rather than over representing the wealthy. Previous studies have shown that correcting for age biases that favour older individuals usually makes the subsequent correction of wealth biases unnecessary (Main and Main 1988; Carr and Walsh 1980). It is therefore also possible that the Cape Colonial inventories are largely self-correcting with regard to biases in the data. The argument that individuals with little or no valuable possessions have been left out of the sample is also not plausible in the case of the Cape inventories. It was the responsibility of the Orphan Chamber to collect precisely those inventories where no heir was apparent, presumably young households without any dependents or single male farmers with no spouse. Moreover, many of the inventoried lists contain only small amounts of trivial articles.

7. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

There are numerous ways of analysing the contents of probate inventories. Among the more frequently used methods are the compilation of tables containing values of selected items, identifying the absence or presence of specific goods during selected periods, notation of the quantities of selected goods as well as the compilation of consumption goods indexes. In order to draw conclusions regarding lifestyle changes, the introduction of non-essential consumer goods is of interest. These "luxuries" make life more comfortable and can be seen as items that advertise social status. Goods that are required for basic day-to-day survival are not the focus here. Such items would include shelter from the elements as well as necessary food and drink. Following the literature, nine luxury items have been selected for study, namely pictures, small mirrors, large mirrors, pocket watches, other timepieces, wigs, snuff boxes, gloves and gold rings. Each of the nine items can be seen as an amenity as households were not dependant on them for their survival.

Following the example of Carr and Walsh (1880), this study uses abstraction to detect changes in luxury consumption patterns. Items that represent luxury are noted as either being present or absent in each inventory, which allows for the construction of a mean index of luxury good diversity. Abstraction is a useful method of depicting initial entry into the consumption of specific goods. The presence or absence of each of the nine items was recorded. This method is admittedly somewhat rudimentary as it does not take account of the specific amount or value of each item. A silver pocket watch is, for example, scored the same as a gold pocket watch. The luxury scores calculated indicate only a consumer's *entry* into the market for specific goods and not to what extent they *participate* in the market. The method is used to provide basic information regarding initial luxury goods ownership and has the benefit of being simple. By counting the number of item varieties present in each inventory, a luxury index score is calculated. The maximum score that can be achieved is thus 9, if each of the nine items are found in a single inventory.

While it is useful to know *whether* a person possessed a particular item, we are also interested to know exactly *how many* of those items they possessed. The total number of each of the nine luxury items found in the 2378 inventories has therefore also been identified and counted. To do this, paintings, portraits, and prints are aggregated as pictures. Other timepieces refer to larger standing clocks, hanging clocks and table clocks. Many inventories contained wig boxes or material heads for displaying wigs, but neglected to mention the wigs themselves. In those cases a wig box or material head have been counted as a wig. These luxury items will be assessed using the four wealth groups defined earlier.

8. RESULTS

8.1 Aggregate trends

Figure 3 depicts mean luxury index scores per ten year period from 1696 to 1805, showing for each year the average number of luxury items owned by individuals in the inventories. Scores increase initially, reaching a high of slightly above 2 in the middle of the century. Averages decrease somewhat after 1755 with the final ten year period showing a mean score of slightly below 1.5. If the diversity of ownership of luxury items can be used as one measure of wealth, the results suggest that the average individual at death was not worse off – and possibly better off – at the end of the eighteenth century than at its beginning. This already provides some initial support for the thesis that the Cape economy was more dynamic and faster growing than previously suggested (Brunt 2007; Van Duin and Ross 1987).

Figure 3: Aggregate mean per capita luxury index scores, 1696-1805

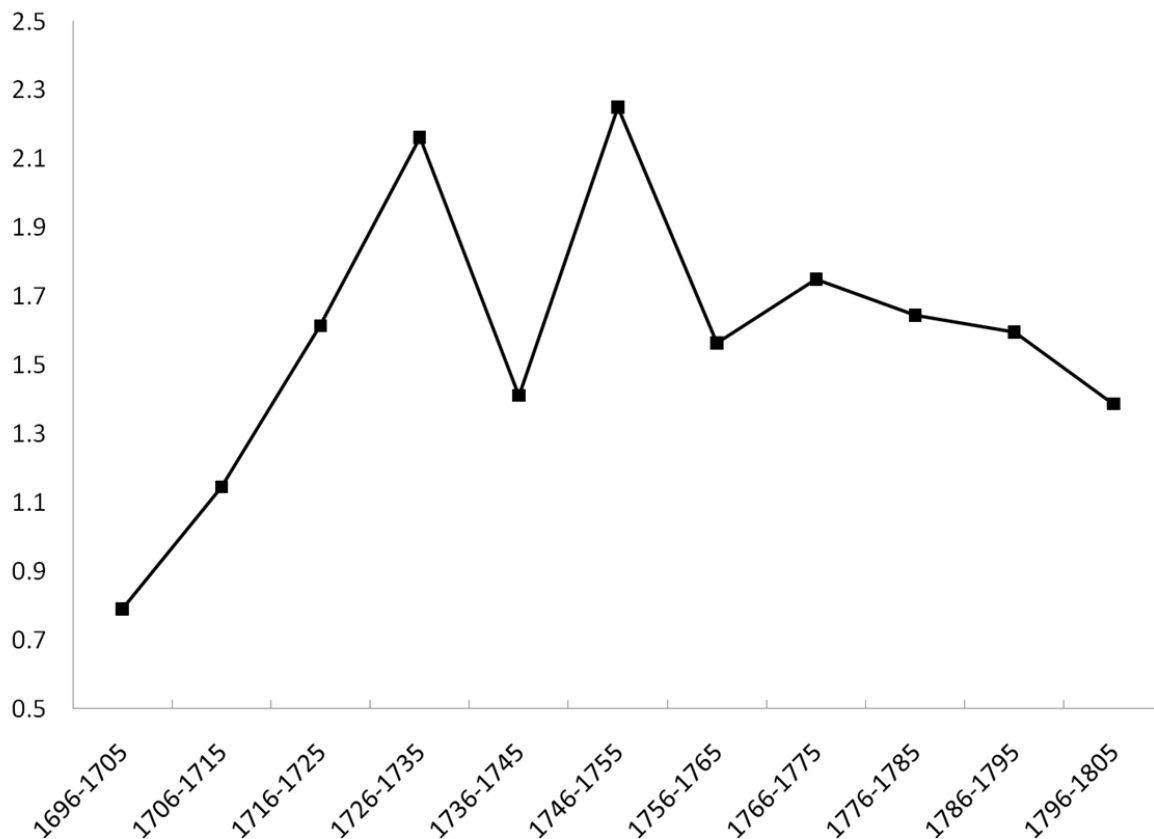


Figure 3 raises two questions: What drives the high volatility in luxury product diversity during the four decades from 1726 to 1765? And, secondly, what explains the decline in luxury product diversity after 1775?

The high volatility clearly visible in Figure 3 is mostly the result of a demographic shift in the Colony. To show this, Figure 4 depicts the same mean luxury index scores per ten-year period from

1696 to 1805, but now split the results by wealth group. Calculated averages for the period reveal that the poorest group had a score of 0.62 during the eighteenth century. The lower- and upper-middle wealth groups averaged 1.32 and 2.24 respectively while the richest group scored 3.5. In short, mean luxury ownership changed little for the two bottom wealth groups, while the diversity of goods amongst the two wealthiest groups increases towards the middle of the eighteenth century.

Figure 3: Mean per capita luxury index scores by wealth group, 1696-1805

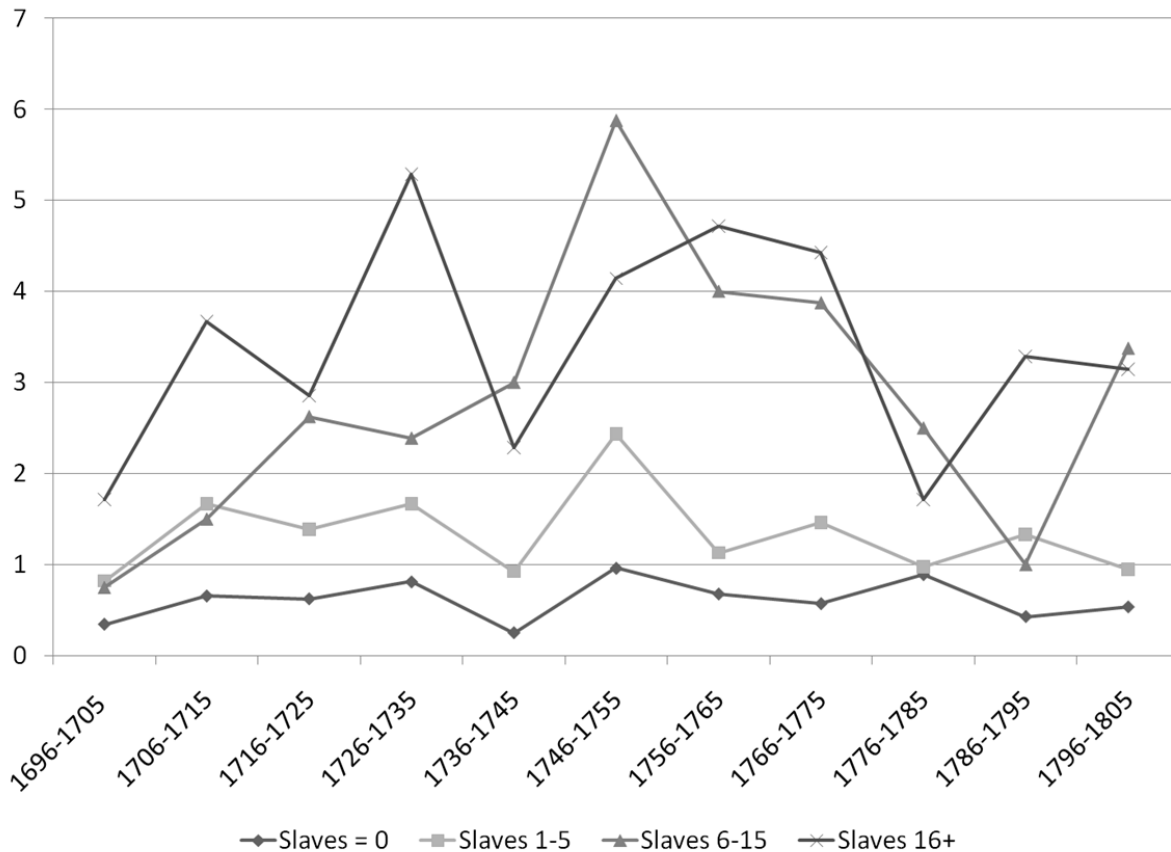


Figure 4 shows notable increases in the possession of luxury goods for the periods 1726 to 1735 and 1746 to 1755. The averages across the two peak periods are somewhat inflated due to wealth group representation within the sample. Table 1 indicates that the percentage of wealthier individuals in the sample increases during the two periods, while the percentage of entries representing the bottom wealth group falls. This supports the argument that the wealthier groups are somewhat overrepresented in these two periods, i.e. a larger proportion of wealthy individuals died during these years. Yet mean luxury index scores decrease from 2.25 to 1.5 in the period from 1736 to 1745. This period also has a low percentage in bottom wealth group entries, indicating that the overrepresentation of wealth groups in inventories cannot alone account for the high volatility of the two peak periods.

The relatively moderate decline in luxury good diversity is due to a geographic shift in the composition of the Colony's settlers. Table 1 confirms that the two bottom wealth groups in the

sample increase to approximately 77% at the end of the period. During the eighteenth century settler migration shifted the borders of the Colony eastward, with those moving to the frontier often forced into subsistence living. By 1770 more than 30% of the farming community in the Colony consisted of stock farmers in the interior (Giliomee 2003: 31), and this group was increasing as a proportion of the total Cape population. These farmers were largely nomadic and the lack of property rights in the interior enabled them to move freely as soon as grazing pastures became depleted. Interior farmers were at a substantial disadvantage regarding the rough terrain that had to be crossed in order to deliver their produce to Cape Town, which was the only outlet for their goods (Guelke 1980). Not only did these transport barriers result in lower affluence and thus their ability to purchase luxury items, but, according to Main and Main (1988:41) transportation difficulties presumably also affect the accumulation of various material amenities, as the spreading of lifestyle trends are highly dependent on transportation factors. Fourie and Von Fintel (2009: 7) note that the capital goods acquired by these farmers were limited to what could be transported by their ox-driven wagons. It is therefore arguable that their accumulation of certain non-essential luxuries would also be limited, as a framed painting or large timepiece would be difficult to transport. This geographical shift is perhaps the key to understanding the decline in ownership diversity of luxury goods towards the end of the seventeenth century.⁶

8.2 Luxury good diversity

Having discussed trends over time, we investigate the composition of the luxury good basket. Table 2 lists the absolute number and percentage of entries per ten year period which contained a given number of the nine luxury items. From 1696 to 1705 slightly more than 72% of the inventories did not list even one of the specific luxury goods. This figure diminishes towards the middle of the century, reaching a low of approximately 30% during the period from 1746 to 1755, followed by a steady increase towards the end of the eighteenth century. In absolute terms, the number of poorer individuals possessing zero luxury items increased considerably after 1755. The number of inventories containing one or several luxury items also increased, but proportionately less when compared to those of the poor. A sizeable amount of inventories contained 2 to 3 items across the period. A small portion of entries listed more than seven items with 5 out of the 2378 entries listing all nine luxury items in their respective inventories. The first 9 score appears in 1755. Table 2 indicates that richer individuals were remaining wealthy and that some individuals were even increasing their wealth, but the effects of these increases on luxury goods possession is dampened by the rise in the number of poor individuals in the population.

⁶ Another explanation for the decline might include the introduction of sumptuary laws in the Colony in 1755. These ordinances aimed to limit the possession of certain items, for example jewels, by the different classes (Giliomee 2003: 30). But although sumptuary laws were explicitly intended to somewhat dampen excessive non-essential consumption and display in the Cape, it is doubtful whether these laws would have had any material influence on whether settlers owned luxury items, especially those in the interior.

Table 2: Percentage of inventories by number of items listed

Time period	0 Items		1 Item		2-3 Items		4-6 Items		7-9 Items	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1696-1705	55	72.37	5	6.58	9	11.84	7	9.21	0	0
1706-1715	60	38.71	43	27.74	39	25.16	12	7.74	1	0.65
1716-1725	50	34.25	32	21.92	47	32.19	17	11.64	0	0
1726-1735	47	32.41	20	13.79	46	31.72	28	19.31	4	2.76
1736-1745	58	44.27	21	16.03	38	29.01	13	9.92	1	0.76
1746-1755	44	29.73	26	17.57	38	25.68	32	21.62	8	5.41
1756-1765	84	45.65	30	16.3	44	23.91	19	10.33	7	3.80
1766-1775	107	43.15	42	16.94	57	22.98	34	13.71	8	3.23
1776-1785	144	46.45	39	12.58	79	25.48	43	13.87	5	1.61
1786-1795	161	47.92	49	14.58	67	19.94	56	16.67	3	0.89
1796-1805	275	55.11	88	17.64	84	16.83	45	9.02	7	1.40

8.3 Luxury good priorities

Table 2 shows only the numbers of items in inventories without revealing which items were most likely to be possessed. It would also be meaningful to describe what kinds of patterns of acquisition were present in the colony from 1696 to 1805. Table 3 therefore depicts luxury consumption priorities for the period, indicating in which order items were most often acquired. Individuals with only one luxury item generally owned mirrors, with gloves, snuff-boxes and wigs being the least likely choices. It is not surprising that mirrors were a popular item as they varied in size, shape and quality in the inventories. They could therefore presumably be acquired at reasonable prices depending on their characteristics. As mentioned previously, local industries were prohibited at the Cape under VOC rule. Inhabitants were thus only able to acquire certain luxuries from the Company or through illicit trade. Mirrors were most likely easier to import than more expensive items such as timepieces. Mirrors also had two unique purposes during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, namely to enhance artificial lighting and to provide owners with the ability to view themselves within their own homes (Overton *et al.* 2001:112). Inventories containing mirrors often also listed mounted candle holders referred to as “spiegelblakers”. These were hung next to mirrors to ensure that candles would be reflected, providing more light.

Table 3 further shows that pictures, large mirrors and small mirrors were frequently listed in the case where 2 to 3 items were present. The large number of individuals owning pictures is also to be expected: pictures, specifically portraits, formed a distinctive part of Dutch culture and paintings were regularly among the shipments of goods from the Netherlands for sale in the VOC Cape (Taylor 2007:514). It has already been noted that inventories reveal how artists were actively undertaking commission work and selling paintings in the Cape during the time period, making the acquisition of such items even more accessible. Wigs, snuff-boxes, gloves and gold rings only became more popular in inventories where the acquisition of at least 2 to 3 of the other items was listed.

Table 3: Luxury consumption priorities, 1696-1805 (percentage)

	With 1 item N=397	With 2-3 items N=550	With 4-6 items N=310	With 7-9 items N=44
Paintings	11.10	82.33	89.61	100.00
Pocket Watches	10.83	15.64	39.07	86.67
Other Timepieces	2.52	11.10	51.97	77.27
Gold Rings	3.79	12.57	36.56	75.00
Small Mirrors	31.82	57.92	63.44	77.27
Large Mirrors	49.48	64.64	89.25	100.00
Gloves	3.03	8.75	27.60	79.55
Snuff-boxes	2.53	11.65	41.58	90.91
Wigs	2.27	8.01	22.22	65.91

8.4 Wealth inequality

Table 4 reveals the frequency of appearance of luxury goods in the inventories of the four wealth groups. As expected, the percentage of inventories containing one or more of each separate item increases as we move from the poorest wealth group to the wealthiest group. The table reveals that even the poorest of individuals in the Colony owned certain luxuries during the observed time period. This is in line with the internationally observed trend of “lesser folk” acquiring some luxuries (McCants 2007; De Vries 1975; Carr and Walsh 1980; Pomeranz 2001). More than 1 in 10 inventoried individuals in the poorest wealth group owned at least one mirror at the time of their death. Some inventories of the poorest wealth group even listed more expensive items such as pocket watches. The possession of pictures and mirrors is a frequent occurrence in the case of the middle-lower wealth group. Pocket watches and other time pieces were popular items in the inventories of the two wealthiest groups, while wigs were less often owned by all 4 groups.

Table 4: Appearance of luxury items per wealth group, 1696-1805 (percentage)

	No Slaves N=826	1-5 Slaves N=941	6-15 Slaves N=483	16+ Slaves N=210
Pictures	13.08	28.87	48.03	70.95
Pocket Watches	8.72	10.08	16.56	22.86
Other Timepieces	2.18	6.48	16.77	46.67
Gold Rings	4.36	9.45	13.66	18.10
Small Mirrors	11.38	24.95	37.47	54.76
Large Mirrors	10.53	30.36	56.73	79.52
Gloves	4.72	5.73	10.97	17.62
Snuff Boxes	4.60	8.92	14.70	20.48
Wigs	2.91	5.10	8.28	17.62

While the poor may have had some access to luxury goods, the gradual rise from 1726 to 1775 observed in Figure 4 is in line with the findings of Guelke (1980) who argues that although the average estate wealth of farmers increased during this period, the rise was mostly due to a small group of elite farmers at the top of the distribution. Similarly, Guelke and Shell (1983) have argued that wealth was unequally distributed in the early Cape colonial society, as economic and political

power rested in the hands of a small number of landed gentry. Fourie and Von Fintel (2010) use the *opgaafrolle* to calculate wealth inequality, revealing high levels of initial inequality that persisted throughout the eighteenth century. The results tabled here support these findings; while a large group of farmers at the bottom of the distribution (those with either zero slaves or those owning less than 6 slaves) had little access to even the most basic luxuries, a small group of farmers at the top of the distribution had access to a wide array of luxury consumption choices.

8.5 From luxury product diversity to mean luxury product ownership

Although Table 4 shows that wealthier groups owned a larger number of the nine luxury items, we have yet to investigate the differences in the *number* of luxury goods owned by each individual within the four wealth groups. To do this, each individual's basket of luxury goods was computed from the inventories. Figure 4 shows the absolute number of timepieces, mirrors and pictures across the total population by decade. As expected, all three items reveal strong growth in items over the eighteenth century (pictures are plotted on the right logarithmic axis to ease comparability). This again confirms the notion that the Cape economy was more dynamic than simply "an economic ... backwater".

Figure 4: Absolute number of luxury items, 1696-1805 (logarithmic scale)

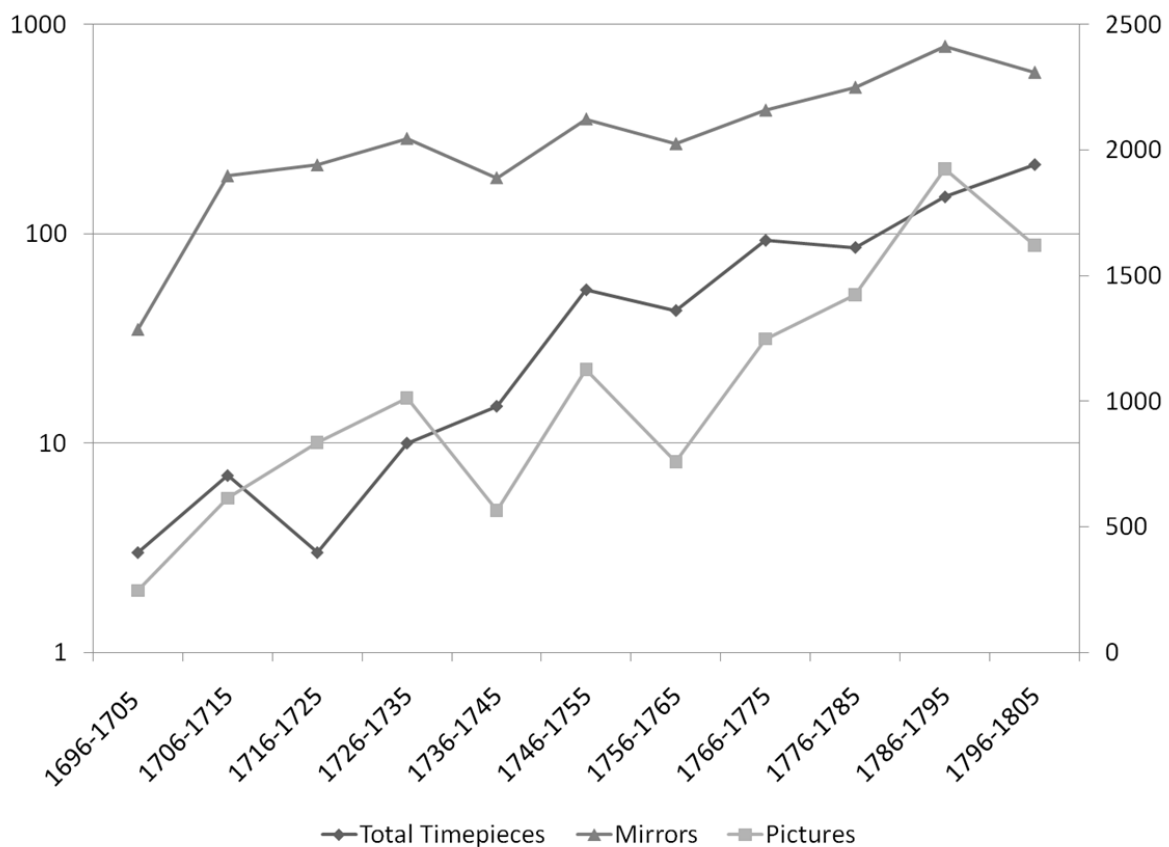


Table 5 provides the mean per capita ownership results which controls for the rapid rise in the population. The per capita results reveal little change to the results described in section 8.1, suggesting that the luxury consumption of the mean farmer was relatively similar at the beginning and end of the eighteenth century, with a slight increase during the mid-eighteenth century.

Table 5: Mean per capita ownership of luxury items, 1696-1805

	1696- 1705	1706- 1715	1716- 1725	1726- 1735	1736- 1745	1746- 1755	1756- 1765	1766- 1775	1776- 1785	1786- 1795	1796- 1805
Paintings	3.25	3.96	5.73	6.99	4.32	7.61	4.13	5.03	4.59	5.73	3.25
P/Watches	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.18	0.13	0.19	0.15	0.18	0.30
O/Timep.	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.06	0.18	0.10	0.19	0.13	0.26	0.13
T/Timep.	0.04	0.05	0.02	0.07	0.11	0.36	0.23	0.38	0.28	0.45	0.43
Gold Rings	0.25	0.37	0.42	0.63	0.39	0.72	0.29	0.21	0.07	0.30	0.20
S/Mirrors	0.28	0.59	0.72	0.86	0.34	0.51	0.60	0.48	0.75	1.17	0.62
L/Mirrors	0.18	0.63	0.74	1.10	1.07	1.88	0.86	1.09	0.87	1.16	0.56
T/Mirrors	0.46	1.22	1.46	1.97	1.41	2.39	1.46	1.57	1.61	2.33	1.18
Gloves	0.12	0.08	0.90	3.51	0.06	4.13	0.79	0.64	0.33	0.44	1.11
Snuff boxes	0.00	0.09	0.12	0.49	0.34	0.57	2.91	1.88	0.24	0.55	0.21
Wigs	0.05	0.16	0.16	0.27	0.54	0.53	0.30	0.42	0.17	0.04	0.02

Even when the results are split by wealth group (not shown), the trends continue: average number of pictures decreases somewhat while timepieces and mirrors increase. Per capita levels of luxuries do, however, vary considerably with wealth status, with the Cape gentry consistently possessing higher averages of all three items. It seems that over the entire eighteenth century, the inequality between those that owned luxury items and their poorer neighbours was persistent.

The results presented in this section revealed the trends in luxury goods ownership for the Cape Colony in general as well as for the separate wealth groups within the population. We can now move on to a comparison of luxury goods possession between the Colony and other countries and regions.

9. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

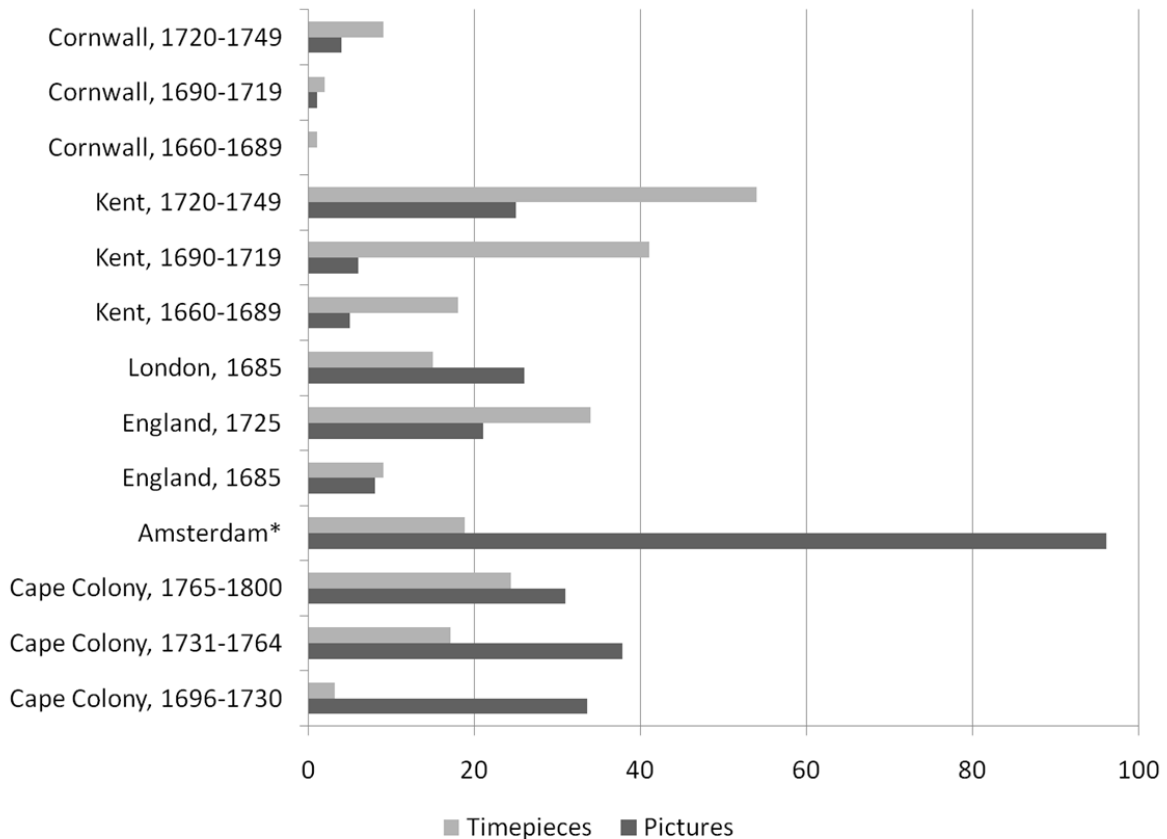
Data for the Cape colony shows how the mean ownership of certain luxury items changed during the eighteenth century, but how do these figures compare to those of other countries and colonial settlements? Results from similar probate studies can be used to ascertain the differences or similarities in the consumption behaviour of individuals with regard to certain luxury items. Pomeranz (2001:116) notes that an ideal comparison of consumption patterns would involve comparing whole market baskets instead of individual goods. It would also be assumed that preferences remain relatively similar across cultures, so that varying ownership levels are indicative of purchasing power. While this approach has its constraints, there is still great value in observing and comparing the levels of luxury goods in other countries and regions.

9.1 Holland and England

Figure 5 depicts luxuries ownership information regarding the Cape Colony, Amsterdam and various parts of England. Aggregate percentage figures for the Colony are given for three time periods during the eighteenth century. The 1700 to 1710 data for Amsterdam shows that the acquisition of pictures was already extremely popular in the city at the start of the period under observation, even amongst poorer individuals (Faber 1980: 153). This substantiates the previously mentioned statement that pictures formed a significant part of the Dutch culture. Here the sample

of inventories was compiled from individuals within the lowest burial tax bracket in Amsterdam. The Dutch influence in the Cape ensured that paintings, portraits and prints were obtained by a large number of colonial individuals, appearing more often in inventories of the Colony than in English records during the early to mid-eighteenth century.

Figure 5: Comparisons between Cape Colony luxury consumption and other regions



Source: * Amsterdam 1701-1710, Amsterdam (BWH) 1740-1784

The reverse is observed with regard to timepiece acquisition. This is to be expected as better quality household clocks were produced in various parts of England from as early as the late 1650s (Overton *et al* 2001: 111). Timepieces were more frequently possessed in the country, although the surprisingly dismal statistics of Cornwall form the exception in this case. A large portion of inventories from Amsterdam’s Municipal Orphanage (BHW) as well as the Cape records do, however, list timepieces. The Colony’s figures from 1765 to 1800 are somewhat similar to those of the Amsterdam inventories from 1740 to 1784. The Chambers in Amsterdam and the Cape fulfilled similar probate duties and it is arguable that the two samples are well suited for comparing luxury ownership. The fact that local industry was by law largely inhibited in the Cape makes the considerable percentage of timepiece ownership even more impressive. The broad possession of the above discussed luxuries indicates that the Cape was comparatively rich during the eighteenth century.

9.2 North American counties

The ownership patterns of wealth groups with regards to pictures and timepieces in the Cape

Colony and two North American counties are compared in this section. Tables 6 to 8 show the frequency of appearance of pictures and timepieces in sample inventories of the Cape Colony, Southern New England and Anne Arundel County. The Cape Colony and both North American areas were all founded in roughly the mid seventeenth century. Anne Arundel is situated in the State of Maryland and was founded in the early 1650s as a result of organised migration of inhabitants from Virginia (Carr and Walsh 1988: 137). Connecticut and Massachusetts form the southern part of New England, an area situated in the North Eastern corner of the United States. Migrants settled in these parts until the early 1640s and population figures increased rapidly even after migration came to a virtual halt (Main and Main 1988: 27).

The data for Southern New England is shown according to the poorest third, middle third and richest third of estates inventoried in this area. Main and Main (1988) argue that shifts in tastes prompted inhabitants in this region to acquire larger varieties of items representing comfort and luxury, including pictures and timepieces. It is, however, clear that both pictures and timepieces were not as popular in the homes of Southern New England inhabitants as they were in the Cape Colony. Even though the number of individuals possessing pictures increased from 1650 to 1774, the percentage figures are notably lower than those of the Cape inhabitants. 1 in 10 individuals of the poorest wealth group in the Cape inventories possessed 1 or more picture during the early 1700s. This figure is the same as those of the richest third of inventories in Southern New England from 1760 to 1774. Timepiece possession also increased in these parts, yet again it seems that larger numbers of Cape inhabitants owned one or more watches or clocks towards the end of the eighteenth century. 64% of the gentry inventoried in the Cape during 1765 to 1800 owned timepieces. This is nearly three times as much as the percentage figures for the richest third of Southern New England inhabitants.

Figures for Anne Arundel County are shown for rural and urban inhabitants separately, with estates divided into five wealth groups according to their respective total values. Carr and Walsh (1980) argue that the inhabitants of Anne Arundel were influenced by European fashion trends and that the consumption behaviour in eighteenth century England was soon mimicked in the households of Anne Arundel. It seems that this was indeed so in the case of timepiece ownership, as the appearance of timepieces was already quite commonplace in Anne Arundel during the early 1700s. Fewer rural inhabitants possessed watches and clocks than Cape inhabitants towards the end of the period, while urban figures are somewhat higher for all wealth groups. The reversed is observed in the case of pictures as fewer Anne Arundel inhabitants acquired pictures than individuals in the Cape. Percentages for urban inhabitants are somewhat higher during the period, but still generally lower than those of the Cape colony.

Table 6: Percentage of inventories listing pictures and timepieces in the Cape Colony

	1696-1730	1731-1764	1765-1800
	Pictures		
Slaves = 0	10.71	15.83	15.08
Slaves 1-5	36.81	34.08	26.86
Slaves 6-15	50	54.35	44.81
Slaves 16+	74.07	64.15	75
	Timepieces		
Slaves = 0	0.71	5	12.56
Slaves 1-5	1.65	9.42	20.86
Slaves 6-15	3.26	35.87	32.55
Slaves 16+	25.93	50.94	64.29

Table 7: Percentage of inventories listing pictures and timepieces in Anne Arundel

	1700- 1709	1710- 1722	1723- 1732	1733- 1744	1744- 1754	1755- 1767	1768- 1777
	Pictures (Rural)						
£0-49	2	0	3	0	3	0	0
£50-94	4	0	0	0	4	0	0
£95-225	4	5	8	6	3	2	5
£226-490	0	9	7	7	10	10	12
£490+	11	19	38	23	24	15	18
	Pictures (Urban)						
£0-49	17	20	10	32	7	0	22
£50-94	0	36	25	50	0	17	40
£95-225	0	33	67	42	67	33	0
£226-490	67	60	43	100	50	50	50
£490+	100	33	67	30	63	69	100
	Timepieces (Rural)						
£0-49	2	0	0	2	0	1	3
£50-94	4	0	0	0	0	3	4
£95-225	4	5	4	10	10	4	13
£226-490	0	14	14	13	20	8	10
£490+	44	42	55	61	60	43	39
	Timepieces (Urban)						
£0-49	0	7	0	11	7	14	33
£50-94	0	9	25	0	0	0	40
£95-225	0	18	50	67	67	50	50
£226-490	0	46	29	88	75	63	50
£490+	100	18	50	60	63	92	67

Source: Carr and Walsh (1988: 146, 149)

Table 8: Percentage of inventories listing pictures and timepieces in Southern New England

	1650- 1674	1760- 1774
	Pictures	
Poorest 3rd	0	4
Middle 3rd	0	4.3
Richest 3rd	0.8	10.4
	Timepieces	
Poorest 3rd	2.6	4
Middle 3rd	1.1	3.8
Richest 3rd	3.2	22

Source: Main and Main (1988: 43)

In general the ownership of observed luxury goods in the Cape compare favourably with the aforementioned North American areas. A relatively larger proportion of the Cape population was able to decorate their homes with pictures, while watches and clocks, with the exception of urban Anne Arundel, were also more widely owned at the Cape.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Inventories are regarded as valuable data sources for the study of the consumption behaviour of households. Various studies using probate inventory data provide evidence that individuals were acquiring an ever increasing desire to possess items representing comfort and luxury during the long eighteenth century.

A large number of digitised probate inventories remain for the Cape Colony of the eighteenth century. These records have been used in this study to analyse the growth and distribution of luxury goods possession from 1696 to 1805. Our constructed luxury ownership index reveals a marginal increase in the possession of various luxury goods during the eighteenth century, although the aggregate trend masks movements within wealth groups. While absolute amounts of luxury items increased, the rapid population growth of poorer individuals largely eroded the effect on per capita figures, suggesting a rise in inequality. Yet, the results suggest that even poorer individuals were in a position to obtain some luxury items.

Luxury goods possession figures compare favourably with other parts of Western Europe as well as North American colonial counties. Previous depictions of the eighteenth century Cape as an “economic and social backwater” are, therefore, not in line with the findings of this paper.

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