



WHO ARE THE BOERS

THE TRUTH AT LAST

Dedicated to the 37,000 (NOT 24000 as previously documented) Boer Children and 3,000 Boer women who died in the Great Boer Holocaust of 1900-1902.

THE cries of the dying children have been scattered by time, but the message of sacrifice and struggle which they carried can still be heard, the sound of distant drumming, the march of feet, the legions of the dead marching on. They beckon on those left behind: find the strength to carry on, for we died not in vain. (50 %

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[half] of all Boer CHILDREN were killed)

Foreword

THIS work has an essence to do with the difference between culture, race and nationhood. Too often, either through ignorance, indifference or maliciousness, the distinctions between these three concepts are blurred, obscuring the real drivers of history and preventing an understanding of the true causes of events.

A race can be defined as a group of individuals who share broadly the same common genetic characteristics. In this way, broadly speaking, the people of Europe share a common genetic inheritance which can be seen through their physical appearance. The same applies, broadly speaking, to the other main racial groups around the world: the Black (Negroid); the Mongolian (Asian) and so on. This common genetic heritage defines not only the different races' physical appearance, but also (and more controversially), their intelligence and cognitive abilities.

Nationhood can be defined as the feeling of unity experienced by a group of individuals, and not necessarily racially defined. It is possible for a collection of individuals from different races to claim a common nationhood, depending on how that nation defines itself.

This is linked to the concept of culture: for example, although the peoples of Europe share more or less a common genetic heritage, no-one in their right mind will claim that Irish culture is identical to that of, say, Austrian. The fact remains that cultures differ, even amongst virtually identical racial groupings. It is this difference in culture which forms the basis of this paper.

It is important to note that culture is transferable. An example: if a German born baby is taken at birth and raised in a Scottish household, that child will, culturally speaking, be a Scotsman first, and then a White person second. Being a German will not even rate as a third place.

In this way a nation known as Boers has come into existence in South Africa. The Boers are a collection of people originating in Europe who have coalesced into a culturally, and even ideologically, uniform group which has set them apart from others in Africa - including Whites who have not made the cultural shift.

The Dutch, German, French, Belgian, Danish, English and Irish surnames one sees amongst this group testifies to the transferability of culture - and also to the unique blending process which has given rise to one of the hardest indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. It is towards a greater understanding of the drivers of culture, race and nationhood that this work is presented to the reader.

Arthur Kemp

Historical note: the outline of this paper started life as a submission to the United Nations Sub Commission on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples when the Commission held its annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in June 1995.

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1. Introduction

There is a conception held by the outside world - and indeed by many within South Africa - that all the White inhabitants of South Africa are a uniform group - that they are all united and until very recently, all wished to dominate other peoples under the banner of Apartheid. This is a misconception, a factual inaccuracy, perpetrated by those who had either absolute political power in South Africa as their aim, or who wished to see the only indigenous White people of Southern Africa, the Boers, be taken up and destroyed in a larger whole.

There are Whites in South Africa who are not part of the colonial heritage, who are not part of the "white South Africans" who until recently were regarded as the polecats of the world. This group of people is known as the Boers.

2. Definitions

According to the Oxford Dictionary, "indigenous" is an adjective meaning "native, belonging naturally to the soil," (from the Latin Indigena). An indigenous people is therefore a people occupying a territory whose roots can be shown to have come from that particular territory, and not some other part of the globe. This is a crucial definition to bear in mind when the Whites of South Africa are analyzed. Although the outside world has now for many years wrongly regarded the Whites of South Africa as a single ethnic group, there are in fact three distinct ethnic groupings within the White population:

- (i) the British South Africans,
- (ii) the Afrikaners, and
- (iii) the Boers.

The distinction between these three ethnic groupings, and particularly the last two (the "Afrikaners" and the "Boers") is of crucial importance in determining the Boers' rights as an indigenous people.

3. White Settlement

Although the first Whites landed at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, they did not come as settlers. They were Hollanders who came to set up a refueling station for their ships traveling to and from the east. The first White Hollander ashore, Jan van Riebeeck, in fact left Africa shortly afterwards and never returned.

It was however a number of other Europeans who came to the Cape shortly after this Dutch supply station had been set up, who formed a core of real settlers, based around the Western Cape. These settlers came from various European countries such as Holland, Germany, France and a number of other smaller nations. Many of these people were members of the Protestant Churches in Europe and came as religious refugees. This wave of Protestants firmly established a Protestant ethic in South Africa to the extent that to this day Protestantism is the dominant Christian religion in the country.

The Cape was all this while under Dutch rule, which became increasingly autocratic and intolerable. Slowly but surely a section of these white settlers, many of whom had already once fled persecution and therefore had an already established tradition of independence, began to agitate against the Dutch colonial rule. This agitation resulted in the "Vryburger" movement (the "Free Burgers") which pressed the Dutch colonialists for more and more independence.

The Free Burgers were the first Whites in South Africa to make the transition from "settlers" to an indigenous people growing "out of the soil". Most of the Vryburgers had been born in Southern Africa, and many were two or more generations removed from Europe already. It was members of this community which started migrating away from the Cape, motivated by a desire to escape Dutch Colonial rule.

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This agitation against colonial rule can be said to be the first origins of the only White indigenous people of Africa. It is therefore crucial to bear in mind that the very first anticolonial movement in Africa was the White Vryburger movement - which was the Boer nation in germination. These attempts to escape colonialism were the origin of the Boer people.

However, it is also equally true that a large number- in fact the majority - of White settlers at the Cape did not support the Vryburger movement. Most of them were quite happy with the colonial situation, and perfectly happy to stay under the Dutch flag. These people formed the core of what is today known as the "Afrikaner" people - mainly Cape based. This group is dealt with in detail below.

A third wave of White settlers arrived in South Africa in large numbers after 1820. The British Empire had by this stage occupied the Cape during the Napoleonic wars in Europe to protect the eastern Sea Route. As a result of the British occupation of the Cape, a large number of English-speaking settlers arrived in the Cape, bringing with them their language, religion and other cultural expressions.

4. The Cape Dutch Settlers

When the White population at the Cape split over the colonial issue - as detailed above, those who wanted to escape colonial rule migrated away from the Cape, while those who had no nationalistic zeal and who wished to keep their links with Europe stayed behind. These people who stayed behind were all Dutch citizens, and when the British occupied the Cape, were perfectly happy to become loyal British vassals.

Those who stayed behind in the Cape became known amongst the independence minded Boers as the "Cape Dutch" - symbolizing their attachment to Europe. This group loyally supported any European colonial government and vehemently opposed all attempts by the fledgling Boer population to break ties with the colonial governments.

This group stood in strong opposition to the fledgling Boer population and differed with them on all levels - starting with their approach to colonialism and extending all the way through even to language. It is not widely known for example that there are for example marked accent and pronunciation differences between the Boers and the "Cape Dutch".

The vehemence with which the Cape Dutch opposed the Boer population was underlined when the Boers were excommunicated from the Cape Dutch Reformed Church when they moved away from the Cape.

This group of Cape Dutch settlers therefore always opposed the Boers' drive for independence and anti-colonialism, and, along with the British settlers, were the true colonial masters of Southern Africa, while the Boers always tried to escape from this mentality and state of affairs.

5. The British South Africans

After the British occupied the Cape for the first time in 1795, the British decided that Africa should be added to the then expanding British Empire. For this purpose, the British government engaged in large scale settlement of its citizens in South Africa.

The first large wave came in 1820, and these people settled in first the Cape and then later in what became known as Natal. While a few of the British settlers immediately assimilated themselves in the mindset of the Boer frontiersmen, a large number retained the British link.

The reaction of the Boers to the British occupation of the Cape is important because it provided an impetus for the continuation of the migratory process away from the Western Cape, a process which had already started in protest against the White Dutch colonial rule.

The Boer rebellion against British rule in the Cape reached a high point with an armed rebellion in 1815,

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known as the Slagtersnek rebellion. Although this rebellion failed, it did exemplify what the difference between the Boers and the White settlers - both Dutch speaking and English speaking - was all about).

The Boers wanted independence and not to be part of a colonial expedition, while the other settlers were just colonists and nothing else.

The British settlement in South Africa formed the second major ethnic grouping of Whites in South Africa. To this day they have retained their British heritage and affinity for their homeland, even down to the extent of most of them having dual nationality or at least access to such dual nationality - South African and British. This British element, for the greatest part, has remained loyal to Great Britain throughout their history in South Africa, and needless to say, actively opposed the Boers' anti-colonization drive as well. The culture of these British settlers is still firmly part of their European homeland.

This does not however counteract that fact that a portion of English speakers actively identified themselves with the Boer cause - then and now. Those who did, and do today, are assimilated into the Boers as quickly as other nationalities are.

6. The Boers

As the first anti-colonialist drive began under the Dutch colony in the Cape, so did the most zealous "Boers" (the word originally means a farmer) begin to move away from the Cape in search of freedom and independence. These people were continually moving further and further away from the Cape and eventually met the first great Nguni migrations - the Xhosa people - who were moving South at the same time. This meeting took place in what is today known as the Eastern Cape.

As the two great migrations - Boer and Xhosa - met at the Fish River in the Eastern Cape, so did these two migrations stop for a while. In the interim however, the British Empire occupied the Cape Colony, and the Boers, who had sacrificed so much to escape their White colonial Dutch masters, once again found themselves under White British rule.

It was from the Eastern Cape that the first of what became known as the Great Trek movements started. This Great Trek was in fact the migration of the Boer people away from the British Empire - proof yet again that the first anti-colonial movement in Africa was a Boer movement - an indigenous people trying to escape colonization by a European power. In many ways this of course mirrored events in North America.

The main cause of the Great Trek was the British colonial masters trying to colonize the Boers of the Cape frontiers. There were other smaller factors, but it can be said in summation that it was the Boers' desire to be free and independent of colonial rule which caused the Great Trek. It is of crucial importance to note that whenever a reference is made to the Great Trek, history writers always refer to the "Boers" who took part in the great Trek. There was no "Afrikaner" Great Trek, and there were no "Afrikaner" Great Trek Leaders, just Boer Great Trek leaders. This is an indication that at this stage already the Boers had developed an identity of their own, as distinct from the Cape Dutch and English settlers of the Cape.

The independence minded Boers packed up their belongings and headed north - into what today is known as the Orange Free State, Transvaal and into Natal.

Although there were scattered Nguni speaking peoples living in these territories, particularly in Natal where the Zulus held sway, large parts of these territories were vacant, having been decimated by the Difaquane, or inter-tribal wars said to have originated with the Zulu King Shaka.

The first Boer movement into Natal attempted to negotiate land from the Zulu King, Dingaan. These attempts to trade land with the Zulu ended in failure and the Boer leaders were murdered. The Zulu army was however defeated at a Battle which became known as the Battle of Blood River in 1838, and the first Boer Republic

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was established in Natal shortly thereafter. The Battle of Blood River is regarded by Boers as the symbolic birth of their nationhood, although of course in reality the Boers had established their own identity long before this event. The reason why the Boers, however, regard the battle as being the symbolic birth of their nation was that they felt that their victory against overwhelming odds was divinely inspired. The Boer Trekkers had taken an oath to the Christian God that if they were given the victory that day, they would hold the day as holy - and the Boers have held this tradition ever since.

Immediately after the Battle of Blood River - and the defeat of Dingaan – the Boers renewed negotiations with the Zulus, and their new King, Mpande. The new Zulu King agreed to let the Boers have territory in Natal. It can be seen that from this early period then, the Boers were recognized by other peoples in Southern Africa as an independent nation and not part of the colonial governments - in other words already then they were recognized as an indigenous people.

However, the British Empire still wished to colonize the Boers, and in 1840 annexed Natal. After a few skirmishes with the British, the Boers once again packed up their belongings and left Natal, leaving behind only a small number in Northern Natal.

The Boers from Natal then went and joined their fellow Boers in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, which had in the meantime been put on the road to nationhood as well.

One of the major clashes of this period took place at a place called Vegkop in 1836, where a Boer party was attacked by an advanced army of Matabeles, many miles before the Boers had actually penetrated Matabele territory. The Matabele were defeated, and fled across the Limpopo River, where they are to this day, in what is now called Zimbabwe.

While there were scattered Black indigenous tribes living in the territories which became known as the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, there were very few other major clashes between them and the Boers. When such clashes did take place, they were usually over matters such as stock or grazing rights - things over which indigenous peoples would clash, rather than the battles of conquest which conventional colonization produces.

In 1852 the British Empire recognized Boer independence at the Sand River Convention. This year marks the firm establishment of the Boers as an indigenous people in international law, in the same manner in which American independence was achieved.

At this early stage not one, but two independent Boer Republics were recognized by the international world and were granted contractual capacity as with any other independent indigenous nation. The mere fact that the British colonial masters accepted this state of affairs shows that even the European powers recognized the independence of the Boer nation and also accepted that this independent was not a colonial experiment. The Boers had in the interim developed their own culture and language - in fact the language spoken by the Boers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Republics is one of the newest languages on earth. Many of its words have origins in Africa - and not in any European language.

Linguistically then, the language of the Boers was created in Africa – yet another indication that the Boers and their culture are indigenous to Africa, and not a colonial import.

It is also of crucial importance to note that when any mention is made of the independent republics is made, they are always called "Boer Republics" - and never "Afrikaner Republics". This is of course confirmation that the Boers had a separate identity from the Cape Dutch and British settlers.

This separate identity was confirmed in International Law by the Sand River Convention of 1852. Although the Boers though they had at last found freedom from colonialism, they were wrong. The British Empire

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launched two more attempts to recolonize them – the second time being successful. The first attempt to colonize the Boers came with the occupation of the Transvaal by a small British contingent in 1877. This event led directly to the First Anglo Boer War (note again that it is called an "Anglo Boer War" and not an "Anglo-Afrikaner" war) and by 1881 the British forces had been defeated by the Boers to such an extent that the British were forced to once again recognize the independence of the Boer republics. This recognition was given formal effect by the London Convention of 1884 - the second time that the Boers had been recognized as an independent and indigenous people in international law.

It is a sobering thought to realize that the very first liberation war against colonial masters was in fact fought by the White Boers against the White British colonialist - preceding any Black liberation war by many decades. It can be argued that only an indigenous people can wage a liberation war, and that this therefore shows once again that the Boers had by this stage firmly established themselves as an indigenous people of Africa.

The second attempt by the British to colonize the Boers resulted in the Second Anglo Boer War of 1889-1902 (once again note that it is called the Anglo-Boer war and not the Anglo Afrikaner war). This war resulted in the development by the Boers of the guerrilla warfare method, since it was used by many liberation movements in all parts of the world.

Although the Boers fought bravely against overwhelming odds, the British used a cruel and till then unheard-of measure of fighting - they rounded up as many Boer women and children as they could find and put them into concentration camps scattered around South Africa. In these camps, as a result of judicial executions, starvation, disease and ill treatment, some 27,000 Boer women and children died - some 20 percent of the total Boer population of the time.

Against such inhumane methods the Boers could not fight, and eventually the British succeeded in their dream of colonizing the entire Southern Africa in 1902, when the treaty of Vereeniging, ending the Second Anglo Boer War, was signed. Even in defeat, the Boers were recognized under international law.

The position of the Cape Dutch and British settlers during this conflict also goes to show that these people did not associate themselves with the Boers. Although a few Cape Dutch did take up arms and fight on the side of the Boers, (they became known as the "Cape rebels" for this reason - and they were severely punished if caught) the vast majority of the Cape Dutch and British settlers in the Cape and Natal supported the British colonization of Southern Africa, which then also included today's Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and territories even further north.

The treaty of Vereeniging therefore marks the subjugation of the Boers by White European colonial masters - a fate shared by countless other indigenous peoples while the British and other European empires still regarded Africa and other parts of the world as their personal possession. The Boers were however unique in that they were the only White indigenous people to be subjected in this way.

7. The Afrikaners

Thus, at the time of the ending of the Second Anglo Boer War, there were three distinct ethnic groupings amongst the broad White population of South Africa:(i) the internationally recognized and indigenous Boer people;(ii) the Cape Dutch Settlers, loyal to the British Empire; and(iii) the British settlers, also loyal to the British Empire.

The British Empire realized that it had to bring the Boers under control for once and for all and therefore devised a plan to neutralize the Boer Republics - a plan to make them join up with the other two White segments of their colonies in South Africa.

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The British masters of Southern Africa therefore engineered the National Convention of 1908, which saw the creation of the Union of South Africa. This union consisted of the former Cape Colony, the Natal colony, and the two former Boer Republics. This union was not merely a geographic convenience, but a deliberate plan to try and destroy the independence minded Boers by mingling them with the Cape Dutch and British settlers.

It is worth noting that the British Empire used their technique in other parts of Africa as well - reference can be made to the short-lived federation of Nyasaland (Malawi); Northern Rhodesia (Zambia); and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to name but one.

The prime representative of the British Empire in South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner, put it this way: "The new tactic (to subjugate the Boers) must be to consolidate the different areas of British South Africa into one nation. Although unification will initially put the Boers into political control of the entire South Africa, it will, ironically, eventually lead to their final downfall." This was of course precisely what happened - but not until a new name had been developed for the new "nation" which Milner spoke about. They could not continue to call the new nation a "Boer" state, because the Boers had been subjugated.

They could not call it a "Cape Dutch" state, as the Dutch colonialists were now British colonialists, and they could not call it a British state, for obvious reasons. The answer then was to give a general term to all the White inhabitants of the new union - "Afrikaners". Although the word originally meant "African" it was politicized by a group of Western Cape Dutch propagandists under one SJ du Toit in 1880 (the same year the Boers in the Transvaal took up arms to fight the British colonialists) in literature of the time. It was then decided to try and blend the Boers into the Cape Dutch and British populations by calling them all Afrikaners instead of referring to their real cultural bases.

This then is how the world began to hear of "Afrikaners" - although only 80 years ago there was no such word in the international vocabulary.

That the concept of an Afrikaner is all embracing is underlined by the fact that in 1998 the former Afrikaner Broederbond (now called the Afrikaner Bond) announced that it classified all those sharing a broad Afrikanerism to be Afrikaners - to this end they acknowledged that many Cape Colored's, also known as the Brown People, who speak Afrikaans and who attend a Dutch Reformed Church are Brown Afrikaners. In reality they are of course correct.

This illustrates the difference between Boers and Afrikaners in a very vivid way: A Colored will readily agree with the definition that he is an Afrikaner, but will emphatically deny being a Boer. If Boers and Afrikaners are the same thing, why the differentiation in the view of other groups? By forcing the Boers into the Union of South Africa, the British made them co-responsible for the policy of racial segregation, which had of course been established and legislated by the British colonial government.

The new "Afrikaners" - in fact a coalition of Cape Dutch, British and some Boers - tried as best they could to come to grips with the racial and geographic legacy left to them from the British colonial times - and it was from this disaster that the policy of Apartheid was developed.

It is of supreme importance to note here that the Boers were dragged unwillingly into the Union of South Africa - and at the first opportunity which presented itself they tried to extricate themselves by force of arms. This was the unsuccessful 1914 Boer rebellion, which ended when some Boer war era generals were killed or imprisoned by the pro-British Union of South Africa government.

It is a little-known fact that the manifesto which was issued by the 1914 Boer rebellion leaders contained as its primary demand the restoration of the Boer republics and the dissolution of the Union of South Africa.

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It is thus unfair of the international world to regard the "Boers" as having been responsible for what happened in South Africa during the second part of the 20th century - the Boers were just as many victims of the colonial powers as were any other indigenous people of Africa.

Milner's words were true - by forcing the Boers into the Union of South Africa, he was forcing them to be subjugated by the broad South African British colony, and this has led directly to the situation the Boers find themselves in today.

8. An Indigenous People

The Union of South Africa led directly to the attempt to extend and hold the British originated policy of racial separation in South Africa - an attempt which ended with the election of April 1994 and the coming to power of the African National Congress in South Africa.

This change over of the reins of power does not however mean that the underlying causes of the downfall of the Union of South Africa (later the Republic of South Africa) have been removed. They are still there - namely the reality that there are numerous different ethnic groupings in greater Southern Africa, all wrestling to establish their own territory and space. The Boer nation is one of these groups. The Boers have not disappeared - the British Empire and their unitary state merely tried to define them out of existence - in vain. The existence of the Boer nation has nothing to do with racism or apartheid - the Boers existed long before Apartheid, and continue to exist after Apartheid, for that matter. The Boers are a well-established indigenous grouping who fought the first anti-colonial liberation wars in Africa. If the Boers were, as the world might like to view them, just "white racists" then they would never have come into conflict with the White colonialists! The subjugation of the Boers does not, however, negate the fact that they are a people all by themselves - they have their own unique history, their own traditions, own festival days, political dispensation, political philosophy, they have their own territory (state), own symbols, own flags, anthems and so on - all developed in Africa.

This then is truly an indigenous people - in contrast to the Afrikaners and British South Africans, who developed nothing new or original but remained loyal to their colonial masters' emblems and traditions. The Boers do not want a state or territory for the "Whites" of South Africa. This is a falsehood which must be dispelled once and for all. All the Boers want is an own independent territory, just as they had before the White colonialists took it away from them. Nothing more and nothing less will do. This has nothing to do with race or racism - merely the desire of an indigenous people to be themselves and to rule themselves in their own territory - a right, incidentally, enshrined in the United Nations charter.

9. Conclusion

In summation then it can be clearly seen that there are differences between the cultural groupings making up the White South African population.

It is important to note that the cultural differences are to a large extent determined by the groups themselves, with no force or law creating these divisions.

Many English-speaking South Africans, for example, will never agree to being defined as Boers, while equally some Afrikaans speaking Whites will never agree to being defined as Boers. The multi-racial nature of the Afrikaner grouping, as evidenced in the 1998 decision by the Afrikaner Bond (and discussed above) is another differentiating characteristic.

Perhaps one of the clearest differences in the cultures of Boers, Afrikaners and British South Africans is illustrated by the political divide. At the time of the referendum over the republic of South Africa, the

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Transvaal and Orange Free State voted overwhelmingly in favor of breaking ties with Britain, while the Cape and Natal voted in favor of staying on as a British vassal. Because of this division, it was only by the slimmest margin (51 percent) that the Republic was created. It was only the vote of the inhabitants of the former Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State which clinched the Republic.

This north/south division continued to present times, with the north always being known as more conservative than the south.

This does not mean that only the descendants of the original inhabitants of the Boer Republics qualify as Boers. The concept of a Boer (as opposed to an Afrikaner or a British South African) is a cultural concept and is as such transferable.

Such assimilation must, however, be mutual - it is possible for anyone to become a member of any of the groupings mentioned - providing they are amenable to the notion and providing the group they are assimilating into fully accept them as such. In this way it is possible to Afrikaners to join the British group (Sir Laurens van der Post being a prime example) and for British South Africans to join the Boer grouping in the same way that many Irish or other European nationalities have done.

The Boers then can ultimately be defined as a group with a common genetic heritage (European) and a common cultural heritage, which has its roots in the desire to be part of a new and independent nationhood.



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