Chapter 1

The colonization of Southern Africa

As far as colonised countries go, South Africa’s history is unique. Three distinct patterns of colonisation can be distinguished. The first pattern was a gradual overland migration determined by population growth, tribal customs and geographical influences. The second pattern was started by establishing a provision station at the Cape and determined by population growth and economic factors initially to be heavily influenced by demographic and political influences in its final phase. The third pattern was similar to the way the U.S.A, Australia and New Zealand were colonised.

1.1 Black colonisation

It has been generally established that the Bantu-speaking people of Southern Africa gradually migrated from West and East Africa.

“Archaeological evidence and the use of radio-carbon dating methods on artefacts have shown that as long as 500 to 400 BC there were people living in West and East Africa who knew how to work and use iron. These Iron Age men, today regarded by archaeologist as Bantu-speakers, moved southwards in slow successive waves, the tempo of migration in all likelihood determined by population growth.”

Overgrazing and cyclical droughts could in all probably have been major contributory factors.

“Eyewitness accounts by mariners and survivors of shipwrecks provide historians with a source of more reliable information about the presence of black groups in Southern Africa. Examples are the accounts of survivors of the Santo Alberto (1593) and the Stavenisse (1686-88) who found Bantu-speakers on the east coast of South Africa.”
“They (Nguni) migrated southwards along the east coast of Southern Africa between the Drakensberg range and the sea, and in the last years of the 17th Century survivors of the wrecked Stavenisse found them as far south-west as the Qonce/Buffalo River. By 1800 the forefront of the Nguni had advanced to the west of the Nxuba/Fish River.”

“By 1800 the Sotho were living in the interior to the west of the Drakensberg, having settled in an area roughly bounded by the Limpopo and the Senqu/Orange Rivers.

“As the Bantu-speaking groups migrated southwards, they came into contact with the Khoi/Khwe (Hottentots) and the San (Bushmen) who were widely dispersed over large areas of Southern Africa. Neither the Khoi nor the San were any match for the Bantu-speakers and were soon forced to take refuge in the drier, more mountainous parts. Linguistic research has proved, for instance, that the Khoi along the south-east coast of South Africa had earlier occupied a territory that stretched as far north as at least the Mzimvubu River. By 1736 they had been driven so far south-west that the Xesi/Keiskamma River was accepted as the ‘boundary’ between the Khoi and the South Nguni (Xhosa-speakers), though some of the Khoi remained living as subordinates amongst the Bantu-speakers.

“Contact between the South Nguni and the Khoi, with each influencing the other, occurred over a very long period and led to cultural and linguistic interaction, facilitated by the fact that the cultures and the social organization of the two groups in some respects showed some similarities. Contact occurred in several ways, of which trading and intermarriage were probably the most important [1].”

1.2 White colonisation – First phase

In 1652 the Dutch East India Company sent Jan van Riebeeck with a party of 60 company servants to establish a depot to provision ships with fresh produce. The first attempts were highly unsuccessful and by 1657 the first ‘privatisation’ in South Africa took place. Nine ‘Vryburghers’[2] were granted land to farm. They were expected to trade exclusively with the D.E.I.C. The Company was never interested in colonising South Africa with the result that the relatively stagnant community soon led to the farming activities of the ‘Vryburghers’ reaching a stage of over-production of farm-produce.

As their children reached adulthood they had no choice but for most of the sons to accept their inheritance in the form of implements, seed and livestock and set off inland to farm for themselves. Because of the limited market at the Cape they were forced into subsistence farming and total self-dependence preparing the way for the Great Migration (Great Trek) that was to open up and civilise the interior of Southern Africa. Generation after generation penetrated the interior further away from the community at the Cape of Good Hope giving rise the name ‘Trekboere’[3].

The religious wars in Europe between the Catholics and the Protestants resulted in a spate of immigration of French Huguenots who first arrived in 1689 and by intermarriage eventually assimilated with the Cape community. They were primarily responsible for the establishment of the wine industry of the Western Cape.
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The Bushmen in the Cape, who were nomadic hunter-gatherers with few possessions, had been driven out of the Western Cape through conflict with the Hottentots and the Trekboere. By the middle of the 17th Century the Hottentots, decimated by small-pox epidemics in 1713 and 1755, had become dispersed. By this time the Cape Coloured people had come about through the intermixture of Muslim prisoners from India, Hottentots, Bantu slaves from Madagascar, Angola and the West African Slave Coast with a sprinkling of Malay slaves and whites. The Malay community, like the white community, has largely retained its racial identity and culture.

By 1800 150 years had passed since Van Riebeeck landed at the Cape. In the history of colonies this is a crucial period. The American Revolution took place after this period of time had passed. Britain took over Canada after the French colony had been established for 150 years. To this day the French-Canadians have not buttoned down the English rule. By the time Britain finally took over Cape rule in 1814 two attempts at independence had already been made in the form of the republics of Graaff-Reinette and Swellendam.

1.3 White colonisation – Second phase

In 1795 Great Britain seized the Cape to prevent its use by France who was allied to Holland during the French Revolutionary Wars. Following the peace of Amiens in 1802 the colony was returned to Holland in 1803. However, in 1806 Britain reoccupied the Cape and in the peace settlement of Vienna in 1814, the colony was permanently ceded to British.

From the outset Britain followed a policy of Anglicisation. As early as 1814 Dutch was unofficially forbidden in the courts. In spite of the fact that the Dutch population of the Cape had reached the stage of natural emancipation, Britain sent 5,000 British settlers to the Eastern Cape in 1820. In 1826 English was officially made the language of the courts and the familiar structure of administration, the ‘Landdrost’ and ‘Heemraden’ that gave the Boers some form of representation, was replaced by magistrates and civil commissioners.

In the 1820's the Mfeqane[4] broke loose in the interior of Southern Africa. The result was that a tense and dangerous border situation was made hopelessly untenable through the swamping of the Eastern Cape countryside by fugitives from the north. They formed bands of armed marauders that existed on the cattle they could steal from the isolated farms. At the same time the British administration at the Cape, under the influence of the philanthropic British missionaries, while incapable of affording the Boers adequate protection at the same time forbade them taking punitive action.

After the emancipation of the slaves by an act of the British Parliament in 1833 it was the manner in which compensation for owners of slaves was determined that became the proverbial last straw. Not only were the Boers offered a third of the value of any slaves they had but the money had to be collected in London and in person. A horde of speculators descended on the Cape from London and bought up claims at a tenth of their value.

The Boers in the east had enough and in 1835 the first organised emigration towards the north took place. By 1838 the trickle had turned into a flood. At the time these emigrants were referred to in the press as ‘De Uitgewekene Boeren’, ie. The Emigrant Boers. In 1852 the Sand
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River Convention recognised the independence of the 'Emigrante-boeren' north of the Vaal River. By 1854 the 'Emigrante-boeren' between the Orange and the Vaal Rivers were granted their independence by the Bloemfontein Convention.

Until 1880 the word 'Afrikaner' meant simply 'African'. But with the founding of the Afrikaner Bond in 1880 it attained a political nuance and described a person of a particular political conviction. By 1882 the Afrikaners of the Bond decided to accept the sovereignty of the British Queen and membership of the British Empire and during the British War (Boer War) they supported the British war effort on all fronts in the Cape Colony.

The present meaning of the word 'Afrikaner' – a linguistic adulteration and totally unacceptable – only evolved after 1925 when the 'Taal', as it was generally referred to until then, was officially named 'Afrikaans' in order to replace Dutch as an official language. For a more detailed discussion of the developments please refer to Chapter 13, page 135.

The second wave of British immigration resulted from the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and 1870. In 1874 gold was discovered at Pelgrimsrust and in 1886 the main reef was discovered on the Witwatersrand. Immigrants now poured into Southern Africa in vast numbers creating serious political tensions in Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. When it was established that this particular supply of gold was not going to peter out after a few years but that the world was looking at the greatest El Dorado of all time, the British War became inevitable[5].

The last significant wave of British immigration started under Verwoerd's premiership. A total of approximately 500,000 British immigrants were brought to South Africa since then [the author wrote this in 1977 or before. Ed].

The dates of natural emancipation of the descendants of these different waves of British immigrants, applying the 150 year rule would be 1970, 2030, 2050 and 2100. Now bear in mind that modern communication techniques have shrunk the world, that English is one of the official languages, that English is the dominant commercial language and this country's continued exposure to the spin-offs of Anglo-American culture. Add to this the fact that we have of late been told that we are all 'South Africans' even though we speak fifteen different languages and belong to widely divergent cultural groupings. Should one not then expect the English-speaking South African to experience and identity crises? Because to be a 'South African' is to be unidentifiable. The meaning of the word identity explains why: “The quality or condition of being the same; absolute or essential sameness; oneness[6].”

2. Literally: ‘Free Citizens’.
3. Literally: ‘Migrant farmers’.
4. For a description of this orgy of blood-lust and annihilation see the quote from E. A. Ritter's Shaka Zulu in Chapter 5 page 30.
5. For confirmation read 'The Boer War' by Thomas Pakenham.
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