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19TH CENTURY TRAGEDY, VICTORY, AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE AS THE FOUNDATIONS OF
AN AFRIKANER NATIONAL IDENTITY

by

KEVIN W. HUDSON

Under the Direction of Dr. Mohammed Hassen Ali and Dr. Jared Poley

ABSTRACT

Apart from a sense of racial superiority, which was certainly not unique to white Cape colonists, what is clear is that at the turn of the nineteenth century, Afrikaners were a disparate group. Economically, geographically, educationally, and religiously they were by no means united. Hierarchies existed throughout all cross sections of society. There was little political consciousness and no sense of a *nation*. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century they had developed a distinct sense of nationalism, indeed of a *volk* [people; ethnicity] ordained by God. The objective of this thesis is to identify and analyze three key historical events, the emotional sentiments evoked by these nationalistic milestones, and the evolution of a unified Afrikaner identity that would ultimately be used to justify the abhorrent system of apartheid.

INDEX WORDS: Great Trek, Blood River, Transvaal Rebellion, Majuba, South African War, Concentration camps, Paul Kruger, Dutch Reformed Church, Afrikaner nationalism

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KEVIN W. HUDSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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Kevin W. Hudson
2011

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May 2011

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Bunny, my two sons William and Austin, and my father, Walter Hudson. Their steady encouragement and support has been critical in my completion of this degree.

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INTRODUCTION

Giuseppe Mazzini, a romantic republican nationalist during the Italian unification stated, “Nationality is the role assigned by God to a people in the work of humanity. It is its mission, its task on earth, to the end that God’s thought may be realized in the world.”¹ As nationalism swept 19th century Europe, it changed the political and social landscape of the continent forever. Embraced by increasingly divergent ethnic groups, a desire for nationhood brought about the collapse of the great empires of Austria / Hungary and the Ottomans, while propelling 20th century fascist dictators such as Dollfuss, Franco, Hitler and Mussolini to the fore.

The passion of nationalism was by no means limited to Europe. By the mid-19th century, Spain and Portugal had lost their South American empires as viceroyalties once controlled by peninsulares were overthrown by liberal creoles that had consumed the writings of the Enlightenment philosophes. By mid-century, Britain too was forced to confront challenges to her imperial authority. Often overshadowed by events such as the massacre of Elphinstone's army in the First Anglo-Afghan War or the Sepoy Rebellion in India, a relatively small group of Dutch descendants nonetheless effectively resisted British rule in the Cape Colony and Natal. However, to categorize this early colonial struggle as rooted in nationalism would be premature.

When the British finally secured control of the Cape in 1806, the colonists had not yet developed a sense of nationality. For the Cape residents there was little difference in terms of the presence of authority under early British rule when compared to the conditions in the colony under the control of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* [Dutch East India

¹ William L. Langer, *Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 115.

Company or the Company] or during the Batavian Republic period of 1802-1806. Floris

Albertus Van Jaarsveld notes,

Another indication that the Colonists were content, is to be found in the fact that *during the Company's reign* they had also been ruled autocratically, and the new Government, therefore, did not involve a radical change. The constitutional institutions remained Dutch for the first twenty years...Furthermore, the British occupation brought with it material advantages and put an end to the economic pressure experienced during the Company's rule.²

Indeed the controlled economy of the Cape had been at the center of complaints among the colonists of the late eighteenth-century. The Burgher Petition to the Dutch Chamber of Seventeen, on October 9, 1779, made the following plea for redress from the colonial authorities in the Netherlands: "So bad is the situation for the inhabitants of this colony, that in the midst of an abundance of cattle, wheat and wine, they must lead a narrowly circumscribed way of life or suffer complete poverty, because there is no adequate market for their produce."³ However, with the transition from Company to British rule, the Afrikaners of Cape Colony found themselves grappling with a paradox. People who had for one hundred and fifty year been colonizers were now themselves colonized. A brief account of these Dutch colonizers and their perspective of historical events in the Netherlands give insight into their psyche and the development of their responses to the British administration.

In the century preceding Jan van Riebeeck's arrival to establish a provisioning station at the Cape in 1652, the Dutch endured a long and violent war with Spain. Phillip II was determined to elicit obedience from and impose Catholicism upon not only the richest area

² Floris Albertus Van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868-1881* (Capetown: Human & Rousseau, 1961), 33.

³ André Du Toit and Hermann Buhr Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, Perspectives on Southern Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 40.

of his Hapsburg kingdom, but of Europe as well; the Netherlands. Intent on enforcing the decrees of the Council of Trent, Phillip II appointed a council in 1559, headed by Cardinal Granvelle, which he hoped would retard Protestant gains with internal church reforms. The merchant towns of the Netherlands were, however, Europe's most independent and were also Calvinist strongholds. Under the leadership of Louis of Nassau, a national covenant called the *Compromise* was drawn up in 1564, as a pledge to resist the decrees of Trent as well as the Inquisition. Unfortunately for the Protestant rebels, anticipated support from French Huguenots and Germans Lutherans never materialized. In 1567, determined to make an example of the Calvinists, Phillip II dispatched the Duke of Alba and his army of 10,000 northward from Milan in a show of combined Spanish and papal might. For the next six years, the Netherlands were ruled by a tribunal known to the Spanish as the Council of Troubles and among the Netherlanders as the Council of Blood. The Spanish levied new taxes on the Netherlands to pay for the repression of their own revolt. By the time Alba's reign ended, thousands of suspected heretics had been publically executed.

During this period of harsh subjugation, William of Orange, an exile in Germany, began to organize a broad movement for independence from Spain. Early victories in the north included the capture of the port city of Brill by the "sea beggars," an international group of anti-Spanish exiles and criminals including many Englishmen. As the resistance spread southward, town after town rebelled against Alba. In 1574, the people of Leiden resisted a long Spanish siege. Relief came when William opened the dikes and flooded the countryside to repulse the Spanish. Simon Schama notes that this event was ingrained in national memory as having a direct Biblical parallel to the experience of the Jews' flight

from Egypt. Thereafter, William was portrayed in Dutch paintings as Moses and referred to “Ons Moyses” in pamphlets.⁴ Allister Sparks notes:

...because it was a war for religious as well as national independence, when the Dutch finally triumphed, their victory merged with the amphibious geography of their homeland to form a national myth of a reenacted Exodus. Spain was seen as the Antichrist from whom William of Orange had delivered his people by leading them through ordeal and exodus to a national rebirth in their promised land...⁵

The greatest atrocity of the war came in November of 1576, following the departure of Alba. Spanish mercenaries, leaderless and unpaid, rampaged through Antwerp leaving 7,000 people dead in the streets, in what became known as the Spanish Fury. This massacre accomplished what patriotism and / or religion had previously been unable to achieve. The ten, largely Catholic southern provinces came together with the seven largely Protestant northern provinces in unified opposition to Spain. Known as the Pacification of Ghent, this union provided for internal regional sovereignty in matters of religion and political cooperation among the signatories. In 1577 Spanish land forces, under the command of Don John, hero of the Turkish defeat at Lepanto, suffered a major setback. Faced with unified resistance, Don John was forced to sign the Perpetual Edict, which provided for the removal of all Spanish troops from the Netherlands within twenty days and left William of Orange in power.

However, the Spanish were persistent in their efforts to reassert their authority over the Netherlands. William of Orange was declared an outlaw and a bounty of 25,000 crowns was placed on his head. In a defiant speech to the Estates General of Holland in 1580, known as the *Apology*, William denigrated Phillip II as a heathen tyrant who was not to be

⁴ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches : An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1987), 110-13.

⁵ Allister Haddon Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf : distributed by Random House, 1990), 25.

obeyed. In 1584, William of Orange was assassinated, garnering martyr status. His son, Maurice continued to lead the resistance with the aid of England and France. Phillip II, unwisely began to meddle directly in English and French affairs. These hostilities culminated with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 in the English Channel at the hands of a combined English and Dutch fleet. In 1596, England and France recognized the independence of the northern provinces known as the Union of Utrecht. Peace was concluded with Spain following the Twelve Years Truce in 1609. However it was not until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, or four years prior to the departure of Van Riebeeck, that full recognition was achieved with the Peace of Westphalia.

The ninety Europeans who arrived with Van Reibeeck at Table Bay on April 6, 1552, no doubt had an awareness of the history of the Netherlands and the tribulations endured at the hands of the Spanish during the sixteenth century, but to consider them religious or political ideologues in search of a new Canaan or to establish a utopian society would be a gross overstatement of their intentions or motivation. Van Riebeeck described them as “weak and ignorant people.”⁶ For the first three decades, most immigrants were male peasants or laborers employed under contract with the Company as soldiers or sailors. The majority were illiterate or semi-literate. Allister Sparks remarks of Company servants,

...these first white settlers in South Africa were not religious zealots, like the New England Puritans, making their way purposefully to a new world to establish the ideal society there that they could not create at home. They were social and economic dropouts who, as Leonard Thompson points out, had failed to make it in the competitive society of seventeenth-century Holland... When fourteen of them presented Van Riebeeck with a petition of protest five years after their arrival at the Cape, only half could sign their names.⁷

⁶ Hermann Buhr Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 1st ed. (Cape Town, South Africa Tafelberg ; Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 4.

⁷ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 28.

Employment on the lower rungs of the Company was unpromising. Daily wages were one fifth of those received by a polder-boy or peat cutter in the Netherlands. Company servants endured strict discipline, poor food and disease. Mortality rates on the voyage from the Netherlands approached twenty per cent. “A career in the Company was truly for those who could think of no other solution to their problems.”⁸ French Huguenot families and German men also migrated to the Cape in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however it was the Netherlands that influenced the character of the colony, not France or Germany. Of all eighteenth century European nations, the Netherlands afforded its citizens the greatest social mobility as well as equality before the law. A French visitor to the Cape in 1665 observed that Company servants enjoyed so many privileges that their masters could not even strike them.⁹ Among European immigrants, egalitarianism would be at the core of the legal system.

At home, the Reformed Church, founded on the teachings of Calvin, was the predominant Protestant denomination, but only one half of the population belonged to it. In contrast, at the Cape, the Reformed Church was the only church. The state had oversight of the church both at home and at the Cape. It paid some church employees and owned the church buildings. Ministers were instructed not to be critical of the government. Cape ministers as employees of the Company were expected to be obedient and respectful. Despite their low literacy rate and low socio-economic status, Company servants were no doubt familiar with the Calvinistic tenant of divine pre-destination. Sparks notes, for the colonists arriving at the Cape, “among seemingly primitive heathens; the presence of these strangers must have been reassuring to people whose low station back home would have heightened their anxiety about which half of God’s great

⁸ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

divide they belonged to.”¹⁰ In Batavia, the Dutch showed contempt for the indigenous people in their midst. This was equally pronounced in the Cape where the Khoikhoi were viewed as the Biblical descendants of Ham. Wouter Schouton wrote in 1665,

Although descended from our father Adam, [the Khoikhoi] yet show so little of humanity that truly they more resemble the unreasonable beasts than reasonable man...having no knowledge of God nor of what leads to their Salvation. Miserable fold, how lamentable is your pitiful condition! And Oh Christians, how blessed is ours.¹¹

However, less than one half of the colonists attended church regularly, a frustration voiced by pastors of the Reformed Church. André du Toit cautions scholars not to be misled by what he calls the “Calvinist paradigm” of Afrikaner history. According to du Toit, this heavily subscribed historical myth that “the *Voortrekkers* [emigrant farmers; pioneers] and the Republican Afrikaners conceived of themselves as a chosen and covenanted people, like the Israelites of the Old Testament, and early Afrikaners presumed a divine mandate to smite heathen peoples and reduce them to their pre-ordained position as perpetual hewers of wood and drawers of water” is a “cluster of constructs, which has been used to explain and justify racial inequality and repression in latter-day Afrikaner-dominated societies.”¹² He argues, that while the Calvinist origin of Afrikaner racial ideology has its own history it is not based on seventeenth and eighteenth century contemporary sources. In fact, the central tenants of this paradigm are noticeably absent from the accounts of the views of early Afrikaners and don’t manifest themselves until the middle of the nineteenth century.¹³ To identify oneself as a Christian for seventeenth century Europeans was much more than a denominational label. Christianity connoted “civilization”, while heathen was equated to “barbarous.” Nowhere was this

¹⁰ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹² André Du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology," *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (1983): 920.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 928.

differentiation more pronounced than in the interaction between the colonists and the indigenous Africans as the frontier of the Cape Colony was slowly pushed inland.

In addition to a mentality of autonomy as well as the Calvinistic belief of membership in the elect, three local developments over the one hundred and fifty years preceding the arrival of the British shaped Cape society: the creation of “free burghers”, the introduction of slavery, and the frontier conflicts with the pastoral Khoikhoi. Five years after Van Riebeeck’s arrival, the Company released nine employees from their contracts of service and placed them on twenty-acre plots.¹⁴ While released from their service contracts, these “free burghers” remained subject to Company regulations as well as the decisions of the Cape authorities. The decision to create these free landholders was strictly economic. The Company determined that it would be less costly to have these men produce grain and vegetables and sell them at fixed prices set by the Company directors, than to rely solely on food produced by Company slaves and servants. The governing body was known as the Council of Policy, comprised of the highest company officials. When matters concerned burghers, three were appointed to the Council to hear the case. Despite this procedure of representation, these burgher councilors were often disparaged as shown in this 1789 account, “...they are without real authority and are not nominated by the citizens...Thus they cannot represent the citizenry in any way except extremely inadequately and uselessly...They are simply silent attendants.”¹⁵ Further, the status of the burghers was ambiguous. The Company considered them accountable yet the burghers described themselves as free citizens. Further excerpts from the same account reflect this tension.

This High Council is composed of members who, far from representing the people...are manifestly in opposition to the settlers and citizens...On the basis of the extortion of which

¹⁴ Leonard Monteath Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 3rd ed., Yale Nota Bene (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 35.

¹⁵ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 259.

they are guilty with respect to the citizens I could say, without deviating far from the truth, that the members who constitute the High Council are always personal enemies of the settlers and citizens.¹⁶

Over the next century the burgher population increased partly through reproduction within the families, partially through the release of more Company servants from their contracts, and to a far less extent through the freeing of slaves. “In 1793, according to Company records, there were 13,830 burghers (4,032 men, 2730 women, and 7068 children).”¹⁷

The second development that shaped the complexion of Cape society was the introduction of slavery. In 1658 the Company imported two shiploads of slaves; one from Dahomey and one from Angola. From that time forward the Company and the burghers became dependent upon slave labor. Slavery at the Cape developed distinct characteristics when compared to slavery in the Americas. First, most of the Cape slaves were not, in fact, from Africa. They were drawn from across the Dutch empire, namely Madagascar, Indonesia, India and Ceylon. This geographic diversity brought with it differing languages and religions. Indeed the Cape had a large minority of Muslims. Second, much like the sugar producing islands of the Caribbean, from 1711 onward, the number of slaves outnumbered the free burghers. Because they were outnumbered, masters brutally punished their slaves as a deterrent to large-scale rebellion. When recaptured, slaves who had attempted to flee were whipped and branded on the face. Slaves convicted of theft were often hanged. Those convicted of murder were broken on the wheel. Mutilation was common, with ears and noses cut off. Indeed by 1727, so many slaves in Cape Town were disfigured that out of consideration for the feelings of the whites, the law was changed. Thereafter, slaves were branded on the back.¹⁸ Third, the slave population was never

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁷ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 35.

¹⁸ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 76.

self-sustaining and was heavily dominated by males requiring new imports to meet the labor needs of the colony. Fourth, there was no plantation economy at the Cape. While over fifty percent of the free burghers owned slaves, few owned them in large numbers. Finally, manumission of slaves was rare, so “free blacks” never constituted a significant social group. Baptism and a good command of the Dutch language were pre-requisites to freedom. Further, while they initially had the same rights as whites, by late eighteenth century, people of color were subject to legal discrimination and required to carry passes. Slaves’ occupations were a function of their masters. Company slaves were used for infrastructure work. Privately owned slaves worked as domestic servants, artisans, fisherman, and farm laborers.

In addition to the creation of burghers and the introduction of slavery, it was the frontier interaction with the pastoral Khoikhoi living east and north of the colony that influenced early Cape society. Contact with the Khoikhoi was frequently violent. As early as 1659, quarrels over cattle led to warfare. When the Khoikhoi destroyed five settler farms and took numerous cattle and sheep, the colonial government responded with advanced weapons and tactics that included exploiting divisions between the indigenous inhabitants. This recurrent pattern of conflict and company reprisals over the next century led to the disintegration of Khoikhoi society. By 1713, whites controlled the fertile territory fifty miles north and forty miles east of Cape Town. Company records show that between 1662 and 1713, 14,363 cattle and 32,808 sheep had been taken from the Khoikhoi.¹⁹ In 1713, the Khoikhoi population was further depleted with an epidemic of smallpox. Carried by an infected passenger on a Dutch ship it decimated the local indigenous population who had no previous exposure and therefore had no immunity. In their weakened state as a group, the Khoikhoi were slowly absorbed into Cape society as a servile

¹⁹ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 38.

class not dissimilar to slaves. Most worked as herdsmen on burgher farms. On the frontier, practices were developed to ensure the immobility of this labor force, namely a pass system like the one imposed on “free blacks.” As early as 1780, The *Landdrost* [local governor] and *Heemraden* [local burgher council] of Stellenbosch proposed the following:

...it was also remarked upon that the number of these free bastard Hottentots who are entering the wage service of the inhabitants, particularly in the outlying districts, was increasing more and more each day...that... Each and every one of the free bastard Hottentots residing among the inhabitants is to be obliged, within a fixed time, to receive a document or pass, stating his name, on whose land he lives and in whose service he is. He must always have this document or pass with him, and must be able to show it every time he leaves his place of residence.²⁰

While initially, the Company did not accept this restriction, the British did re-affirm later pass laws with the “Hottentot Proclamation” of 1809.

That all and every Hottentot in the different Districts of this Colony...shall have a fixed place of Abode...and that they shall not be allowed to change their place of abode...without a Certificate from the Fiscal, or Landdrost of the District...which Certificate they shall be bound to exhibit...while every Hottentot neglecting this order, shall be considered as a Vagabond, and be treated accordingly.²¹

The combination of a huge gender imbalance as well as the sexual interaction of company servants, burghers, slaves and the Khoikhoi contributed a high degree of racial mixing. By 1700, adult burgher men outnumbered women of the same class, two to one. In the interior, the ratio was three to one. Marriages between white men and fair-skinned non-white women were common during the first seventy-five years.²² For the most part, children born of non-white mothers and white fathers were baptized and absorbed into Cape society with the same rights as other European descendants. Stable mixed relationships also occurred outside of wedlock. However the illegitimate offspring of such unions tended to gravitate to the Cape “colored”

²⁰ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 45.

²¹ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, ed. G. W. Eybers (New York: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1918), 17.

²² Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 18.

community. Soldiers and sailors working for the Company frequented the slave lodge. Marriage between white women and non-white men was rare. On the farms, burghers engaged in sex with both slave and Khoikhoi women. A result of this large-scale miscegenation was that the “black” population of the Cape was lightened and the “white” population became somewhat darkened. Indeed it has been estimated that seven per cent of the genes of the modern Afrikaners are of non-European origin and this occurred during the early Company period.²³

White society itself was also diverse. In Cape Town traders, innkeepers, and artisans were predominant. North and east of Cape Town burghers farmed the arable land. Further afield, the isolated trekboers of the interior herded cattle and sheep. All had conflicting interests and different levels of education and culture. Indeed, Ann Laura Stoler notes, “Colonial cultures were never direct translations of the European society planted in the colonies but unique cultural configurations, homespun creations in which European food, dress, housing, and morality were given new political meaning in specific colonial social orders.”²⁴ For all of their internal differences, by the end of the eighteenth century the majority of inhabitants had one thing in common. In contrast to the European-born Company officials and other expatriates, most whites no longer considered themselves Dutchmen, Germans, or Frenchmen. Their hereditary roots were African. The term Afrikaner came into general use at about this time. While these third and fourth generations of white settlers referred to themselves by other labels like “Christian”, “inhabitant,” and “colonist,” Afrikaner came to mean a settler society that had become indigenous. “It was a term worthy of esteem, of pride; it reflected the self-conception of a group

²³ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 45.

²⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power : Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 24.

beginning to articulate its sense of its own social existence and political status.”²⁵ In the mind of the British drafters, the Articles of Capitulation dated January 10, 1806, indeed made reference to this distinction of “natives.”

The Garrison shall, at the surrender, march out with all the Honors of War, and shall then lay down their Arms and become Prisoners of War; but such Officers as are natives of the Colony, or married with natives, or in possession of sufficient Landed property to become regularly and bona fide domiciliated, shall be at liberty to continue here so long as they behave themselves as becometh good Subjects and Citizens,²⁶

Du Toit notes, “By the end of the eighteenth century Cape society was no longer in a state of flux; social and racial divisions had lost much of their earlier ambiguity and fluidity, and the various groups had been more firmly incorporated in the segmented order of a plural society.”²⁷

He equates Cape society to a caste system. Company officials and burghers comprised the dominant caste. Poor whites and free blacks constituted the middle caste. Khoikhoi, slaves, and free black servants were resigned to the lower caste. However race transcended all castes. Poor whites identified with richer whites, expecting the same rights and respect shown to burghers.

By 1795, the colony had been partitioned into four districts: Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Swellendam, and Graaff Reinet. The government appointed a president to oversee a regional board in each district. His salary was paid out of the public treasury. His title was Landdrost and he had an official residence where meetings convened. Along with the Landdrost, six men, the Heemraden, served at this local council level. Heemraden had to be burghers and they had to reside in the district. No company servants, other than the Landdrost could sit on these district boards. Duties of these councils included upkeep of public buildings, repairing streets, tax collection, and civil jurisdiction. Each district was further sub-divided into wards in which a

²⁵ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 5.

²⁶ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 14.

²⁷ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 6.

burgher was appointed to preserve order and make arrests if required. He bore the title of field-cornet. Generally this was the most prosperous farmer, but also a man known for integrity and ability. The field-cornet drew no salary, but was excused from the payment of certain dues. Like the office of Heemraad, this was a sought after appointment. When violence arose between San, Khoikhoi and Afrikaners, the field-cornets could call the burghers to arms and organize commandos. All burghers between the age of sixteen and sixty were liable to be called up. It was, however, always a challenge to maintain discipline among the farmers or enforce the call to arms.²⁸

However, apart from a sense of racial superiority, which was certainly not unique to white Cape natives, what is clear from the previous discussion is that at the turn of the nineteenth century, Afrikaners were a disparate group. Economically, geographically, educationally, and religiously they were by no means united. Hierarchies existed throughout all cross sections of society. There was little political consciousness and no sense of a nation. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century they had developed a distinct sense of nationalism, indeed of a *volk* [people; ethnicity] ordained by God. The objective of this thesis is to identify and analyze three key historical events, the emotional sentiments evoked by these nationalistic milestones, and the evolution of a unified Afrikaner identity that would ultimately be used to justify the abhorrent system of apartheid. This paper is organized into three main chapters. The first chapter evaluates the causes for and the impact of the Great Trek and its utility in the creation of a national history. The second chapter considers the causes for and the impact of the Transvaal Rebellion of 1880-1881 as movement of defiance. The third chapter presents the use of concentration camps in the Second Boer War and the manner in which Afrikaner nationalists

²⁸ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, xxi.

embraced a shared tragedy to further unify the broader *Boer* [descendants of the Dutch speaking settlers; farmer] community. The fourth chapter discusses the overriding role of the Calvinistic theology and the perception of God's divine providence in the fruition of an Afrikaner nation.

CHAPTER 1

The Tragedy and Triumph of the Great Trek

On July 17, 1828, the Lieutenant-Governor repealed the Hottentot Proclamation of 1809 with Ordinance 50. This piece of legislation became one of the key catalysts for the two decades of emigration by Afrikaners eastward and northward from the Cape Colony known as the Great Trek. Entitled the “Extension of Hottentot Liberties,” its principal terms were:

Whereas certain Laws relating to and affecting the Hottentots and other free persons of color...require to be repealed, and certain obnoxious usages and customs, which are injurious to those persons, require to be declared illegal and discontinued...

II...Be it therefore enacted, that from and after the passing of this Ordinance, no Hottentot or other free Person of color, lawfully residing in the Colony, shall be subject to any compulsory service to which other of His Majesty’s Subjects therein are not liable, nor to any hindrance, molestation, fine, imprisonment or punishment of any kind whatsoever, under the pretence that such Person has been guilty of vagrancy or any other offence, unless after trial in due course of Law;

IV...whereas it is expedient to protect ignorant and unwary Hottentots and other free Persons of color as aforesaid from the effects of improvident Contracts for Service: Be it therefore enacted, [that it shall not be legal for any person to hire by written agreement any Hottentot or free person of color for a longer period than one calendar month at a time...]

V...Liquor or tobacco given to a servant, not to be regarded as wages. At the expiration of the period, no goods or cattle of a servant shall be detained except by sentence of a competent court...²⁹

The Afrikaners considered this *gelykstelling* [equalizing] an affront to their inherited principles.

The Afrikaner response to Ordinance 50 is articulated in a memorial of P. Aucamp and forty-six inhabitants of Rhenosterberg to Sir Lowry Cole on February 5, 1829.

But the memorialists have, with regret, learnt from experience that these people have not yet by any means arrived at such a state of self-esteem as to make beneficial use of these wholesome provisions...that some of them, on the sudden change in their condition, have not reformed, but have given themselves up to the most dangerous excesses. As they have given

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

themselves over to licentiousness, frivolity and idleness, they are obliged to support themselves by plunder to the great loss of the memorialists.³⁰

Further, in a letter from N.T. van der Walt to Lieutenant-Governor Stockenström on August 31, 1837, the author stated,

Liberty without subordination produces insecurity, but liberty with submission and due respect is necessary to our existence. It is not our intention to subject the Bushman people to slavish bondage, but [rather] not to allow them to remove themselves from society...For many years, at our own expenses, efforts have been made to civilize this people as they now are...I dread conspiracies and [fear] that they will congregate to commit mischief as in former times...³¹

In the mind of the Afrikaner, gelykstelling became exacerbated with the freeing of slaves six years later. Anna Steenkamp, niece of the Trek leader Piet Retief captured the Afrikaner frustration toward British policy with the following grievance:

The shameful and unjust proceedings with reference to the freedom of the slaves...And yet it is not so much their freedom which drove us to such lengths as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke; wherefore we rather withdrew in order thus to preserve our doctrines in purity.³²

A memorial forwarded to the editor of the Cape Town newspaper, the *Zuid Afrikaan* in 1839, reiterates the complaints toward gelykstelling.

The reasons for our emigration are different...Those of a public nature principally consist of the disgusting Ordinance No. 19 which is so degrading for us, and the several laws afterwards published, whereby our slaves have been spoiled, and we ourselves ruined. The emigration was also greatly influenced by the vagabondizing of the Hottentots and free blacks, to whom this and also other offensive acts of drunkenness, - cursing, swearing, and profanation of the Sabbath, was allowed with connivance and impunity,³³

The Great Trek occurred in two phases. The first emigrant group was called the trekboers and the people in the later wave were called Voortrekkers. The trekboers had begun settling

³⁰ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

³² Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 105.

³³ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 155.

beyond the established boundaries of the colony in the 1820s, in search of greater pastureland. Migration was on the basis on single free burghers or families looking to improve their material prospects. The Voortrekkers on the other hand cited political grievances. This movement in the late 1830s and 1840s travelled in organized parties of families, often led by charismatic figures, with the intent of moving far beyond colony borders.

Causes for the Great Trek varied. In summary, they were a lack of land, loss of labor, insufficient protection from indigenous people, and growing sense of marginalization. Land shortage had been an acute problem that intensified between the period 1812 -1830s. Farmers felt increasingly restricted. By 1812, only two-fifths of the married burghers in the Graaff-Reinet district had land of their own.³⁴ In 1813 the British closed down the previous loan farm system and replaced it with perpetual lease scheme. Farmers had to pay for and obtain a survey before the government granted a lease and the ultimate cost was significantly greater than under the previous loan program. In addition, there were substantive delays in the issuance of titles, with some applications outstanding for ten or twenty years after surveys and been conducted and the related fees had been paid. In 1834 it was determined that hundreds of farms were improperly surveyed with fees pocketed by unscrupulous surveyors. In the 1820s, grants of crown land vanished and in 1832, all crown land grants ceased. J. Prinsloo, President and the Members of the Council of the People of Pieter Maritz Burgh, Natal, expressed their disappointment with land policies in a letter of grievances to Major-General Sir G. T. Napier on February 21, 1842. “Was it not the same Government that put us off with a third of the real value of our property, and then left us a prey to boot to avaricious and money seeking dealers

³⁴ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 145.

who have been enriched at the expense of our purses?”³⁵ Andries Stockenstrom, commissioner-general of the eastern colony was determined to increase the farming efficiency of the burghers and break them of their seemingly insatiable appetite to expand and seize native lands. In theory, by restricting colony borders, inefficient farmers would be forced to work for other farmers or move to the towns in search of employment. But the farmers did not adapt as Stockenstrom had hoped. Investment capital was unavailable to improve farming technology because the yield on investment was low since the domestic market for crops was too small. People crossed the borders to continue as subsistence farmers along traditional lines. Initially farmers requested and were granted temporary permits by the Landdrosts to graze their herds north of the Orange River in the Free State province. However, by the early 1830s, these trekboers were no longer asking permission, they simply sold their farms, informed the authorities and crossed the boundary.

Separately, Stockenstrom was also intent on providing a settlement for Khoikhoi herdsmen and their families, when he set aside four hundred square miles of fertile land that had been previously occupied by the Xhosa on the upper reaches of the Kat River. By 1833, there were 2,114 settlers with 2,444 head of cattle, 4,996 sheep and two hundred fifty horses. They produced wheat, barley, and fruit. The residents dug irrigation channels, built stone houses and wattle-and-daub cottages.³⁶

A second cause of the Great Trek was the loss of labor. Over the century following the first arrival of slaves to the colony, the settlers had become dependent on servile workers. With the end of slavery throughout the British Empire, many Afrikaners were unable to maintain their agriculturally based existence without slaves. The Emancipation Act as it applied to the Cape read,

³⁵ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 168.

³⁶ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 62.

Slavery was to cease...in the Cape Colony the 1st of December 1834. Slaves over six years of age he to pass through a transitional stage, a period of apprenticeship. The British Parliament voted a sum of £20,000,000 to compensate the owners for the loss of their slaves throughout the Empire. There were 39,021 slaves in the Colony when the Act came into force, for which the owners were offered £3,014,290.³⁷

Inconveniently slaveholders were required to travel to London to collect their recompense.

On the frontier, farmers did not pay their laborers well. They had not yet made the transition to a wage economy. Instead many burghers attempted to retain labor through paternalism granting servants the right to keep their own stock, however with the increasing pressure on pastureland this became less feasible. Ordinance 50 further contributed to the dearth of labor as large numbers of Khoikhoi and San (collectively Khoisan) began to abandon the farms. An observer described the frontier scene. "I have myself known farms which had been completely abandoned by the last remaining Hottentots having given up service or retired to the missionary schools, taking with them the flocks or herds which they have earned in their employer's service and rejecting every offer or bribe to continue any longer in such service."³⁸ Khoisan who left the farms settled at missionary stations or squatted on crown lands. By the mid-1840s there was a shortage of herdsmen on the frontier. A British officer observed, "It is idle to say why do the farmers not properly guard their cattle, the thing I say is impossible in this country where servants are not to be had."³⁹ Thereafter, Xhosa provided the primary source of farm labor.

A third reason for the Great Trek was a lack of security both internally and on the frontier. In a plan presented to the British authorities in 1801, to upgrade police, W.S. van Ryneveld presented the situation as:

Whosoever should cast but a very slight regard on the interior Police of the Settlement will immediately be aware that it is wholly insufficient to preserve good order in general, and to

³⁷ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 38.

³⁸ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 146.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

administer Justice to every one in particular...the opposite interests of the peasant and the Hottentot, who are both equally to be considered...in order that Justice may be done to every one, and that tranquility may be restored to the interior of the Colony.

The boundary of the Colony has been extended by slow and insensible degrees under the former Government, which with a careless indifference was overlooked and disregarded...no public notice however has properly been taken of the extortions and depredations of farmers upon the Hottentots, depriving them of their Lands and afterwards driving them into the interior, or forcing them to become their servants...

The farmer on the other side perceives very well that the Hottentot is only restrained by awe and superior power. He is jealous of all the regulations made in favor of the Hottentots...in short both parties, especially in the remote Districts, consider one another in the light of enemies...⁴⁰

While Ordinance 50 depleted the labor supply for farmers, in certain circumstances it also contributed to vagrancy that the colonists perceived as a direct threat to their property.

Ordinance 49 further contributed to vagrancy and petty theft by admitting pass-carrying Xhosa to the colony. Small groups of vagrants lived off the cattle they stole from farms. By 1832, large numbers of “Manatees”, victims of the Zulu mfecane north of the border, entered the frontier zone causing a nuisance as they roamed from farm to farm in search of food.⁴¹ Over one third of the Voortrekkers came from the northeastern part of the colony known as the Tarka area. When combined with the aforementioned land reforms this insecurity of property further incentivized emigration. On the eastern frontier, these threats to land to livestock were brought to a head with the disastrous frontier war of 1834-35. In an 1838 letter, a once prosperous farmer lamented how he was left destitute on two occasions by native raids. “What is left to me after all my years of labor and sweat? Literally nothing.”⁴² While the Great Trek itself was fraught with danger, it was these circumstances on the frontier that made departure from the colony seem a viable

⁴⁰ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 95-96.

⁴¹ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 147.

⁴² Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 17.

alternative. J. Prinsloo's reference to the massacre of Piet Retief's party and others, provides insight into dangers faced by the Voortrekkers.

Meanwhile what did the Colonial Government [do]...did it offer us any assistance when we were in need and expected momentarily to be destroyed by the savage and blood thirsty heathens, when more than Six hundred of our number had already been most treacherously murdered innocent, or did I remain an indifferent Spectator to the misery of its pretended Subjects whilst total destruction threatened them?

...also confiscation of their own weapons an ammunition, and this indeed under the pretence of preventing from a feeling of philanthropy further bloodshed when no fear existed for the shedding of Christian blood, but when vengeance was about to be wreaked upon those whose hands were still stained with it.⁴³

If the British government could not provide sufficient security, perhaps the Afrikaner farmers could do better through cooperation and resorting to the traditional commando system of defense.

A final cause of the Great Trek was the appeal of patriarchal and /or charismatic leaders and a sense of marginalization among the Afrikaners. Renowned trek leaders included Louis Tregardt, Pieter "Gert" Maritz, Hendrik Potgieter, Piet Uys, Piet Retief, and Andries Pretorius.



Figure 1.1 *Piet Retief*



Figure 1.2 *Andries Pretorius*

⁴³ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 170.

Tregardt, a successful farmer and slaveholder, decided to leave the colony when the government refused to grant him a long term land lease as long as he continued to own slaves. Determined to ignore the emancipation proclamation, he took his ten skilled slaves and departed for the interior. Maritz claimed to have lost £1,000 through emancipation and left for similar reasons. But slaveholders could not have rallied support for the trek by simply denouncing emancipation. Only one-fifth of the colony's slaves were in the districts from which the greatest number of Voortrekkers originated.⁴⁴ Indeed some Voortrekkers departed with no intent of holding slaves. The authors of the aforementioned 1839 memorial published in the *Zuid Afrikaan* claimed: "The emigration did not also take place (as some of our enemies presume) on account of the emancipation of the slaves; on the contrary, and after a long and sad experience has sufficiently convinced us of the injury, loss and dearness of slave labor; so that neither slavery nor slave trade will ever be permitted amongst us."⁴⁵

Other leaders had been involved in scrapes with the law over disciplining slaves or servants. Both Ordinance 50 and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1834 forbade the punishment of Khoisan laborers and slave apprentices. This was an affront to patriarchal authority. In a speech at a protest meeting of slaveholders on September 17, 1832, Christoffel Brand presented the following analogy: "Some people accuse us Afrikaners of being vicious oafs. But, my friend, the charge is false. Our children are beaten and punished when they deserve it. Yes, we chastise our own blood, and are the slaves better than that?"⁴⁶ Indeed, Retief and Potgieter were accused at one point of mistreating their slaves. In both cases the accusations were dismissed as groundless. Piet Uys was inspired to leave the colony in order to bring the Gospel to Africans of

⁴⁴ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 147.

⁴⁵ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 154.

⁴⁶ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 109.

the interior. His motivations became politically charged when his wife was arrested on what he considered malicious charges brought by an indentured slave. Referring again to the memorial of 1839, these Voortrekkers took personal offence with the treatment of Mrs. Uys. “Some [reasons] of a personal nature... which are numerous we will just record one; namely, the illegal arrest, without cause, of Mrs. Uys, during the absence of her husband, who was on the Commando against the Caffers.”⁴⁷

Beyond the appeal of the individuals, what is clear from the correspondence of the time was an increasing resentment of being regarded as a subject and inferior race by the British. In their letter of grievances, the Council of the People of Pieter Maritz Burgh complained,

We deny also most positively that we are animated by a feeling of hatred against the English Nation, every person on earth is naturally more partial to his own than to any other Nation, but as Christians we have learned to love all men; and, although we South African Boers have often been regarded by Englishmen with arrogance and contempt, let the many Englishmen...who at present live here in security amongst us...bear witness, whether any such felling of hatred is fostered in our bosoms.⁴⁸

It was not only landless people who left the colony but also wealthy farmers who sold their land cheaply. Some left without collecting compensation for their slaves or for supplies provided to the army. Once their mind was made up, they simply left. Oliver Schreiner, who lived and worked in the districts of Colesburg and Cradock between 1874 and 1881 remarked:

But that which most embittered the hearts of the colonists was the cold indifference with which they were treated, and the consciousness that they were regarded as a subject and inferior race...[The] feeling of bitterness became so intense that about the year 1836 large numbers of individuals determined to leave for ever the Colony and the homes which they had created.⁴⁹

Perhaps the best summary of trekker grievances is presented in the *Manifesto of the Emigrant Farmers*, written by Piet Retief and published in the *Grahamstown Journal* on February 2, 1837.

⁴⁷ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 155.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁹ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 149.

In the introductory paragraph, Retief explains that the manifesto was drafted in response to a rising prejudice against those who have decided to emigrate. He also reveals the posture of the Afrikaners as “natives.” “Numerous reports...with the intention of exciting...prejudice against those who have resolved to emigrate from a colony where they have experienced, for so many years past, a series of the most vexatious and severe losses...and are anxious that they and the world at large should believe us incapable of severing that sacred tie which binds a Christian to his native soil, without the most sufficient reasons...”⁵⁰ The manifesto lists complaints in four groups and then sets forth the objectives of the trek. Retief’s objections were:

1. We despair of saving the colony from those evils which threaten it by the turbulent and dishonest conduct of vagrants, who are allowed to infest the country in every part...
2. We complain of the severe losses which we have been forced to sustain by the emancipation of our slaves and the vexatious laws which have been enacted respecting them.
3. We complain of the continual system of plunder which we have ever endured from the Caffres and other colored classes, and particularly by the last invasion of the colony, which has desolated the frontier districts and ruined most of the inhabitants.
4. We complain of the unjustifiable odium which has been cast upon us by interested and dishonest persons, under the cloak of religion, whose testimony is believed in England...and we can foresee as the result of this prejudice, nothing but the total ruin of the country.⁵¹

The manifesto continues to outline the conditions under which the trekkers would set up their new life beyond the colony’s boundaries.

5...wherever we go...we will uphold the just principles of liberty; but, whilst we will take care that no one shall be held in a state of slavery, it is our determination to maintain such regulations and as may suppress crime, and preserve proper relations between master and servant.

6...we quit the colony with a desire to lead a more quiet life...We will not molest any people, nor deprive them of the smallest property; but, if attached, we shall consider ourselves fully justified in defending our person and effects, to the utmost of our ability, against every enemy.

⁵⁰ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 144.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

7...we shall have a framed code of laws for our future guidance, copies shall be forwarded to the colony for general information.

8...on arriving at the country in which we shall permanently reside, to make known to the native tribes our intentions and our desire to live in peace and friendly intercourse with them.

9. We quit this colony under the full assurance that the English Government has nothing more to require of us, and will allow us to govern ourselves without its interference in future.⁵²

The manifesto concludes with an eerie clairvoyance that their undertaking was dangerous but based on a firm believe in God's provision.

We are now quitting the fruitful land of our birth, in which we have suffered enormous losses and continual vexation, and are entering a wild and dangerous territory; but we go with a firm reliance on an all-seeing, just, and merciful Being, whom it will be our endeavor to fear and humbly obey.

By authority of the farmers who have quitted the Colony.

(signed) P. Retief⁵³

By 1836, following reconnaissance expeditions, large groups of trekkers headed north to the Highveld beyond the Orange River and to the area south of the Tugela River in what was to become Natal. The areas were fertile, but more importantly appeared uninhabited, a consequence of the mfecane. By 1840, about six thousand men, women, and children had migrated from the Cape Colony. The same number of Khoikhoi servants and slaves accompanied them.⁵⁴ As the emigrants began to spread out on either side of the Vaal River they were unaware of Mzilikazi's Ndebele kingdom centered one hundred and twenty miles west of modern Pretoria. The Ndebele, victims themselves of the Zulu mfecane and Griqua commandos from the south, confronted these new intruders. In October 1836, five thousand Ndebele warriors

⁵² *Ibid.*, 144-45.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵⁴ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 88.

launched an attack on the Afrikaners near the Vaal River. They lost their livestock, but saved their lives by lashing their wagons together in a laager, which the Ndebele could not break through. With the arrival of more trekkers in 1837, the emigrants went on the offensive with commandos on horseback. In January, they destroyed an Ndebele settlement, killing four hundred people and recovering their livestock. In October, a commando of about three hundred and fifty Afrikaners attacked the Ndebele headquarters dispersing the entire community northward across the Limpopo River.⁵⁵

Efforts to organize the various trekker parties into a unified community failed. Potgieter, Maritz, Retief, and Uys quarreled among themselves, as did their followers. When some elected Retief as governor and chief commandant and Maritz as president and judge, Potgieter and Uys felt slighted. In his capacity as “governor”, Retief engaged in correspondence with various tribal chiefs as well as colonial authorities. In his letter to the Griqua captains dated July 17, 1837, he claimed divine appointment and cautioned the Griquas not to challenge the trekkers.

As a Christian I advise you all first to wait and see the result of Matsellikatsé’s treachery against us. Rest assured that we shall not attack or interfere with any tribe or people: but on the contrary you may also rely upon it, that whoever interfere with us, will have to rue it for ever after...I have sufficient reasons to recognize the hand of God in placing me at the head of my countrymen. Let it, therefore, be sufficient for you to know that I can fearlessly call upon God, and may safely depend upon His might arm.⁵⁶

Recalling the October 1836 incident he noted, “...it will also be well for you, for us, and for the world, to remark how wonderfully God has enabled us, with so weak a force to stand against the frightful and superior numbers of Matsellikatsé.”⁵⁷ Just one month prior to the annihilation of the Ndebele headquarters, Retief stated in his letter to Governor D’Urban on September 9, 1837, “I have heard that great apprehensions are entertained in the Colony that we shall treat

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁶ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 172.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Matzalikatse too harshly...Rest assured that I can thank God I do not possess a thirst for blood, or an unfeeling heart; but while I take care not to act with undue severity, I shall be equally guarded that I do not by indecision increase the evil.”⁵⁸ Other issues further divided the trekkers. Should personal rule prevail? Or should there be an elected representative body? How should they deal with the British authorities? Finally, where should they permanently settle?

As the trekkers split, Potgieters’s party settled in the Highveld. Most others continued eastward to Natal. Retief went ahead with a small party in October 1837 to secure a non-intervention agreement with a group of British traders at Port Natal and to ask for a land grant from the Zulu chief, Dingane, in order to forestall a Zulu attack. The English traders, hoping for increased security, welcomed the white trekkers despite Retief’s assurance that as Boers would be in the majority Boer law would prevail. When Retief arrived at Umgungundhlovu, Dingane eluded a firm agreement and instead demanded a show of good faith by Retief. In 1934, Eric Walker published his account of the Great Trek to coincide with the centennial celebration. As a professor at both Cambridge and the University of Cape Town, his narrative is at times biased and frequently archaic. However, his use of primary sources was extensive. Walker provides the following description of Dingane, which while shaded with metaphor, is supported by the king’s actions.

The Zulu king was by nature cunning, and, as successor to Chaka, a killer *ex officio*. He had long been mortally afraid of the *Amaboela*, the great company of men armed with guns and mounted on ‘hornless cattle’ that had gradually drawn nearer and nearer to his dominions, overawing the Highveld chieftains and making all the valor of the Matabele of none effect....Dingaan resolved to deal with it in his own way, to play the fox first and then the lion. When all is said and done, he was a Zulu patriot.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁹ Eric Anderson Walker, *The Great Trek* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1934), 161-62.

Dingane then lured Retief and his party, unarmed, into the central kraal for a parting drink of draught beer. As the cup was stirrup-cup was passed and the Zulu warriors danced, the chief rose to his feet and cried, "Kill the wizards."⁶¹ The warriors swept down upon the unsuspecting Boers and carried them off to execution hill, where they beat their brains out with knobbed sticks. The native servants were slain with assegai at the gates of the kraal. William Wood, an interpreter for Dingane, as well as an English missionary living among the Zulu, the Reverend Francis Owen, were eyewitnesses to the slaughter. Wood's account was published in 1840 by Collard & Co. of Cape Town. According to Wood, "Retief [was] held and forced to witness the deaths of his comrades before they dispatched him...Retief's heart and liver were taken out, wrapped in a piece of cloth, and brought to Dingane."⁶² Tragedy ensued as Zulu impis then went on a rampage, attacking trekker encampments around the Tugela River. They killed forty more white men, fifty-six white women, one hundred eighty-five white children, and over two hundred colored servants and captured about 35,000 cattle and sheep at a place now called Weenen, the place of weeping.⁶³ Among the dead were the trek leader Piet Uys and his son. Those that survived lost another leader when Gert Maritz died in September.

For much of 1838, the Zulu appeared in control of Natal. However, by December with reinforcements from the Cape Colony, the trekkers, under the leadership of Andries Pretorius, a prosperous burgher from Graaff-Reinet, organized a powerful commando of five hundred men with the intent of avenging the murder of Retief and his followers. Every white man was armed with at least one gun and the expedition had two small canons. With fifty-seven wagons they

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² D. C. F. Moodie, *The History of the Battles and Adventures of the British, the Boers and the Zulus, in Southern Africa from the Time of Pharaoh Necho to 1880, with Copious Chronology*, 1st ed., 2 vols., Cass Library of African Studies South African Studies, (London,: Cass, 1888), 424.

⁶³ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 91.

travelled toward the center of the Zulu kingdom. When camped at night, they formed a laager by lashing the wagons together for defense. On Sunday, December 9, under the leadership of acting chaplain Sarel Celliers, Pretorius' party took an oath, that if God granted them victory, they would build a church to His name, wherever it might please Him and that thereafter they would celebrate the anniversary of deliverance as a day of thanksgiving.⁶⁴ In his journal, Celliers highlighted their numerical disadvantage.

We saw this, and that if the good God was not with us, there was little hope of victory. I saw, to the extent of the light granted to me, that we must become suppliants to the Lord to entreat that He would be with us at our standards, as he was with Moses and Joshua. I made the people sensible that if the Lord were not with us we must be overwhelmed. Mr. Andries Pretorius was our chosen general in that expedition. He and I spoke to each other on the subject of the promises made holy by the Bible, and how we, too, were bound to make a promise to the Lord, that if He gave us the victory over our enemy we should consecrate the day, and keep it holy as the Sabbath in each year.⁶⁵

On Saturday, December 15, the trekkers made camp on the banks of the Buffalo River (later named Blood River). The laager was constructed with three sides facing land and the fourth side facing the river. The river was very deep at this point with steep banks. When morning dawned on Sunday, Pretorius' party faced between ten and twelve thousand Zulu. In a battle that lasted two hours, three trekkers were slightly wounded and none were killed. In the end, three thousand Zulu lay dead. Much like Rorkes Drift in 1879, Blood River was a classic example of the "superiority of controlled fire, by determined men from a defensive position, over Africans armed with spears, however numerous and however brave."⁶⁶

Pretorius and his commando pressed on to Umgungundhlovu where they found the town deserted and the palace burned. On execution hill they found the remains of Retief and his

⁶⁴ Walker, *The Great Trek*, 186.

⁶⁵ J. Alton Templin, "God and the Covenant in the South African Wilderness," *Church History* 37, no. 3 (1968): 291.

⁶⁶ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 91.

followers. In Retief's knapsack was the deed granting all Natal to the trekkers, miraculously preserved for eleven months. The Battle of Blood River dealt a crippling blow to Dingane. The Zulu nation split and Dingane's half-brother Mpande aligned himself with the Afrikaners. He sent ten thousand Zulu warriors to assist Pretorius in a subsequent expedition against Dingane. The commando returned to Natal with 41,000 head of cattle. Dingane fled northward where the Swazi killed him. Pretorius declared Mpande king of Zulus and a vassal of the Natal republic.⁶⁷ Thereafter, the Zulu settled north of the Tugela River and the Afrikaners to the south. Vengeance was theirs and the victory at Blood River would be memorialized in the collective memory of the Afrikaners. In a letter to Governor D'Urban dated February 24, 1839, Pretorius made clear to the British the Afrikaner's "right" to Natal.

Once again I am sending Your Honor the sworn treaty which I also found with the remains of the late Mr. Retief in order to make our false libelers see that we did not go out...with aggressive purpose...This is how we have acted towards all people. But if they first harm us by such gruesome murders, then we shall defend ourselves as brave Afrikaners

...and we know very well we are a freeborn people, and that we have a right to Natal, which was acquired not only by means of free purchase, but for which we had to pay the price of suffering

...But on the other hand, we shall never surrender our weapons and subject ourselves to the law...It is vain to nurse the hope that we shall return again, all would rather die than that...⁶⁸

The Natal *Volksraad* [parliament] further enunciated this position on November 11, 1839, in their *Declaration of Protest*. The allusions to the French wars of religion and their Huguenot heritage are interesting.

...whilst the gathered, bleached bones of the additional 370, innocently and treacherously murdered relations and friends at Boschjesman's River, will remain a lasting evidence and a visible beacon of right on that land, until another beacon of similar materials shall

⁶⁷ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 165.

⁶⁸ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 217.

overshadow ours...guided by the same mighty Hand, which in former days saved our ancestors on the fearful St. Bartholomew's night...⁶⁹

While Afrikaner nationalists and historians embraced the tribulations of the Voortrekkers in the century following the Battle of Blood River, this chapter has shown that the participants themselves *at the time* of their emigration, did not think of themselves as a unified volk. To the contrary their motivations were disparate and their leaders often differed. Some wanted to retain their slaves, others had no intention of perpetuating slavery. Some went in search of land as none was available in the Cape colony, others sold their farms cheaply, packed up their wagons and just left. While the leaders of the parties were usually prosperous farmers from their district, such as Andries Pretorius, others had experienced frequent financial ruin, such as Piet Retief. Potgieter's party settled in the Highveld, while Pretorius and his parties settled in Natal. A letter between Potgieter and Pretorius on August 28, 1841, gives evidence of division between the leaders as pressure was mounting between the British and the residents of Natal concerning annexation. A year earlier, in October 1840, Pretorius had entered into negotiations with Potgieter, leading to an act of unification between the republic of Natal and the Highveld community centered at Potchefstroom. With the threat of British intervention looming, Potgieter began to distance his community from tensions in Natal. He stated, "I do not want to subject myself to any Briton, no, I hope and trust, will I ever become one, and I pray to the Almighty for this... and I would rather go ten steps forward than one backward...but all the land that has been bought with the blood of our citizens, should be defended and championed...but, in justice, more should be sought after, in the interest of our society..."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

If there was one common complaint among the trekkers it was that of marginalization. With an enduring mentality of independence dating back to early seventeenth century Netherlands, the Afrikaners could not subject themselves to British rule. Sparks states, “They were simple folk, fed up with the interfering British and their *kaffirboetie* (“nigger-loving”) ideas, and they were intent on moving on to where they could be on their own to deal with the blacks as they pleased.”⁷¹ Constant references to the guidance and provision of the Almighty confirm that the Voortrekkers were devout in their Calvinistic beliefs, but they had no sense of nationalism as a special people, beyond their membership in the broader Elect. In fact their covenant with God, sworn by Pretorius prior to the Battle of Blood River was more or less forgotten for forty years, despite His deliverance. Sparks notes, that the men on the spot were “...somewhat less fervent in their civil faith than the gospel writers who came after them...Only when the British prodded Afrikaner nationalism to life in the 1870s was it suddenly remembered and turned into the annual thanksgiving ceremony and celebration of the *volksgees* – the national spirit...”⁷² Indeed, it was only in the early twentieth century that the Great Trek was resurrected, sanctified, and memorialized as a national epic of a people ordained by God, with a mission to establish themselves as the dominant race in South Africa. On December 16, 1938, 100,000 Afrikaners gathered for the laying of the foundation stone of Voortrekker Monument. The centennial celebration concluded with the singing of Die Stem van Suid Afrika (The Voice of South Africa).

⁷¹ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 109.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 113.

Ring out from our blue heavens, from our deep seas breaking round;
Over everlasting mountains where the echoing crags resound;
From our plains where creaking wagons cut their trails into the earth-
Calls the spirit of our Country of the land that gave us birth.
At thy call we shall not falter, firm and steadfast we shall stand,
At thy will to live or perish, O South Africa dear land.⁷³

⁷³ Leonard Monteath Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 37-38.

CHAPTER 2

Victory in the Transvaal Rebellion 1880-1881

On December 16, 1880, Dingaan's Day, the first shots were fired in the Transvaal Rebellion against the British. In the mind of the Afrikaner it was no coincidence that the war started on the forty-second anniversary of their victory over the Zulus at Blood River. The Boers' sovereignty was under siege and once again they drew upon the Lord for deliverance. After all, He had placed the gold in the Transvaal Mountains for the benefit of the Boers. Templin writes, "The Anglo-Boer war became a Holy Crusade wherein God chose not to make the Boer army victorious, but rather to make their spirit unconquerable. Their leader, Paul Kruger, was equated with Moses as he led the Israelites against fierce opposition."⁷⁴

The progression to conflict began to accelerate in the 1850s. Following the annexation of Natal to the Cape Colony in 1844, the Afrikaners once again began to emigrate to territories which they believed were not under the jurisdiction of the British. Specifically they crossed the Drakensberg Mountains and settled in the territory between the Orange and Vaal Rivers. The British administrators at the Cape, were however determined to extend their authority over the defiant Afrikaners wherever they might move. The frustration of Sir Peregrine Maitland is obvious in his proclamation of August 21, 1845.

...whereas there is reason to apprehend that ignorant persons may mistake , and that evil-minded persons may misrepresent, the said Proclamation, and may treat and consider...the same as a tacit renunciation of the Royal Authority of Her said Majesty over such of Her subjects as may remove to or reside in Territories beyond the limits of the said Districts...I DO HEREBY PROCLAIM...that Her Majesty the Queen, by graciously establishing in the District of Natal a settled form of Government, is not to be

⁷⁴ Templin, "God and the Covenant in the South African Wilderness," 296.

understood as in the least renouncing Her rightful and sovereign authority over any of Her Subjects residing or being beyond the limits of the said District...⁷⁵

Despite the British fortitude, enforcement of authority proved elusive.

It's important to understand the terms of independence negotiated by the Afrikaners in order to appreciate what they lost in the British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 and hoped to regain through rebellion in 1880. By January 17, 1852, the Sand River Convention gave Transvaal Afrikaners the right of self-governance and of equal importance, approval to purchase arms and ammunition from the British colonies. It further disclaimed all previous alliances with the "colored nations" north of the Vaal and renounced the sale of arms to the natives. The only condition was that Zuid-Afrikanasche Republiek (ZAR) prohibits slavery.⁷⁶ Two years later, with the Bloemfontein Convention, the Afrikaners between the Vaal and Orange Rivers were also given the right of self-governance and the ability to purchase arms from the British colonies. With the creation of the Orange Free State, the British relinquished all alliances with native chiefs, bar one.

The British Government has no alliance whatever with any native Chiefs or tribes to the northward of the Orange River, with the exception of the Griqua Chief, Captain Adam Kok; and Her Majesty's Government has no wish or intention to enter hereafter into any treaties which may be injurious or prejudicial to the interests of the Orange River Government.⁷⁷

By the 1860s, Kok sold his land and migrated across the Drakensberg to establish East Griqualand.

Through retreat, the British had acknowledged the challenge of ruling the cantankerous Boers. In 1863, the British repealed the Punishment Act that "freed British subjects north

⁷⁵ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 183.

⁷⁶ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 175.

⁷⁷ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 283.

of the Orange from the jurisdiction of the Crown.”⁷⁸ The two conventions amounted to a system of alliances. Both the Orange Free State and the ZAR eventually implemented constitutions. The ZAR remained isolated by choice and the Orange Free State maintained closer links with the Cape Colony, serving as a conduit to the north for British influence. In the eyes of the founding Voortrekkers, the new republics were “states” in name more than substance. In 1850, Potgieter lamented the following to Andries Pretorius.

The time of our general deliverance has not yet been born, and that day will only dawn once we, through our own industry, concern and peaceable behavior, as well as through the blessing of God, will have become a nation, substantial in numbers, acting in concord, courageous, with the sword of righteousness in our hands and with available resources in a struggle to defend ourselves.⁷⁹

For Potgieter and others, a national identity remained more conceptual than reality.

A true bond of Afrikanerdom began to form with the renewed British interest in the interior. The annexation in 1868 of Basutoland and then Griqualand West seemed to endanger the independence of the Orange Free State. Empathetic Boers in both the Transvaal and the Cape Colony expressed support for their “brothers” in the Orange Free State, who they believed had been wronged by British intervention in the republic’s conflict with the Lesotho kingdom. This was followed by the annexation of the diamond fields in 1871 and ultimately the Transvaal in 1877 (see Figure 2.2) This revived British imperialism was a shock to the peevish Boers of the north, who found themselves once again ruled by a foreign power, and left the Afrikaners of the Orange Free State encircled by British possessions. F. W. Reitz, as most Boers, contended that the British seizure of the diamond fields had been illegal.

⁷⁸ John Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 14.

⁷⁹ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 175.

Instead of honestly saying that the British Government relied on its superior strength, and on this ground demanded the territory in question, which contained the richest diamond fields in the world, it hypocritically pretended that the real reason of its depriving the Free State of the Diamond Fields was that they belong to a Native, notwithstanding the fact that this contention was falsified by the judgment of the English Courts.⁸⁰

British bullying further stoked the fires of nationalism. This was manifest in the founding of the *Die Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* [The Fellowship of True Afrikaners] in 1875, by Stephanus du Toit. To promote their agenda, Du Toit published the first Afrikaans language newspaper, *Die Afrikaanse Patriot*.⁸¹ The position the paper drove home was,

...that Afrikaners were a distinct nation, occupying a distinct fatherland, which was South Africa, speaking God-given language and enjoying God-given right to rule South African and civilize its heathen Africans. The paper struggled until revived by the annexation of the Transvaal...when its call on the Boers to drive out the British by force of arms led to a leap in circulation.⁸²

Du Toit went on to found branches of *Die Afrikaner Bond* [Afrikaner League] in 1879 to unite various nationalistic groups on the Cape. The Bond attacked all things English and embraced neo-Calvinism.

The British made little attempt to understand the rising antagonism among the Boers that resulted from their annexation of the Transvaal. Sir Garnet Wolseley, the man who would later lead the unsuccessful relief mission to free General Charles Gordon at Khartoum in 1885, was charged along with Sir Owen Lanyon with taking control of the Transvaal's administration in 1879. His calloused journal observations were characteristic of British condescension.

A Boer's idea of life is, that he should pay no taxes of any sort or kind, that he should be amenable to no sort of law he disliked, that there should be no police to keep order, that he should be allowed to kill or punish the Natives as he thought fit, that no progress

⁸⁰ F.W. Reitz, *A Century of Wrong* (London: Review of Reviews Office, 1900), 25.

⁸¹ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 25.

⁸² *Ibid.*

towards civilization should be attempted, that all foreigners should be kept out of the country & that he should be surrounded by a waste of land many miles of extent each way which he called his farm, in fact that he should have no neighbors as the smoke of another man's fire was an abomination to him. These Transvaal Boers are the only white race I know of that has steadily been going back towards barbarism. They seem to be influenced by some savage instinct which causes them to fly from civilization... Altogether I regard them as the lowest in the scale of white men & to be also the very most uninteresting people I have ever known or studied.⁸³

To the fastidious Wolseley, the Boers' lack of hygiene and the unkempt state of their homes and children were further indicators of their uncivilized state. His observations about the ugliness of their women are to say the least, entertaining.

The women are all prematurely old in appearance; very ugly with complexions like mutton-fat: their figures are detestable: the use of stays is little resorted to: if they have breasts, they must hang down inside their gowns for externally their bodies are as flat about the chest as mine is. Bottoms they have none, but they run largely to stomach. I hear that this last named phenomenon is owing to the quantity of coffee they drink daily at all hours. They are an ill-favored race certainly.⁸⁴

Henry Rider Haggard, on the staff of Sir Theophilus Shepstone at the start of the Second Boer War in 1899, reiterated British observations of the Boers. He emphasized a Boer lack of honesty with "an absence of regard for the truth." In appearance the Boer men were as a rule ugly and their women grew stout with age. The Boer home he categorized as "too frequently squalid and filthy to an extraordinary degree." He considered the Boers xenophobic, resistant to taxes and ready to move when civilization began to encroach on their lifestyle. Haggard emphasized that their brand of Christianity was founded on "the darkest portions of the Old Testament" and that "they think they are entrusted by the Almighty with the task of exterminating the heathen native tribes around them, and are

⁸³ Garnet Wolseley and Adrian W. Preston, *Sir Garnet Wolseley's South African Journal 1879-1880: Zululand/Transvaal: Military Campaigns/Cetywayo/Sukukhuni/Negotiations with Boer Committee*, South African Biographical & Historical Studies, (Cape Town, A. A. Balkema, 1973), 139.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

always ready with scriptural precedent for slaughter and robbery.” He scornfully concluded that the Transvaalers resembled “no other white man in the world.”⁸⁵ In his 1882 account, C.L. Norris-Newman accurately captured Boer consternation with the arrival of the controversial Wolseley when he said,

The monotonous course of the Zulu War, varied, as it occasionally was by brilliant flashes, produced no decided effect on the position of affairs in the Transvaal, until the arrival of Sir Garnet Wolseley...Then the people awoke to a sense of their position, and knowing of old Sir Garnet’s decisive and autocratic was of dealing with things, they dreaded his advent and looked doubtfully and despondently to the future...unless a vigorous stand was made...their liberties would be still further curtailed, and the hope of eventual freedom farther off than ever.⁸⁶

Lanyon’s determination to root out tax evaders in the region was the catalyst for the start of the Transvaal rebellion. One particularly belligerent offender in the Potchefstroom District was P.L. Bezuidenhout, son of the “martyr of Slachter’s Nek.” When he refused to pay all of the taxes due on his farm, Lanyon took him to court. While Bezuidenhout won the case, he refused to cover the court costs and the Landdrost seized his wagon and put it up for auction. On the day of the auction, November 11, 1880, approximately one hundred armed men arrived and seized the wagon to return it to Bezuidenhout.⁸⁷ Furious, Lanyon demanded the arrest of the Potchefstroom ringleaders. A standoff between British troops and the Boers ensued.

Recognizing the stalemate and the inability of the British garrison to enforce Lanyon’s arrest warrant, the Boer *Volkskomitee* [People’s Committee] accelerated a public gathering of burghers that had been scheduled for January to early December. Arrogantly, Lanyon did nothing to call up reinforcements, but instead exacerbated the situation by issuing a

⁸⁵ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 34.

⁸⁶ C.L. Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, vol. 6, Africana Reprint Library (Johannesburg: Africana Book Society (Pty) Ltd., 1976), 95.

⁸⁷ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 50.

public notice stating that those intending to participate in the meeting would be considered seditious. Roughly 4,000 to 5,000 burghers gathered at Paardekraal for a rally that lasted until December 15th. After conferring from December 9th to 11th, the Volkskomitee proclaimed the restoration of the republic on December 13th. The old Volksraad was reconstituted. In the absence of the former president, T.F. Burgers and at the urging of the former vice-president Paul Kruger, the Volksraad elected a triumvirate consisting of Kruger, and two other former presidents, Marthinus Wessel Pretorius and Piet Joubert.⁸⁸ The Boers erected a monument in the form of a cairn, “not for the heroes of the past but for the heroes of the future: it was to be a symbol of the fact that the burghers had ‘sworn loyalty to each other to fight to the death.’”⁸⁹ The armed rebellion had begun.

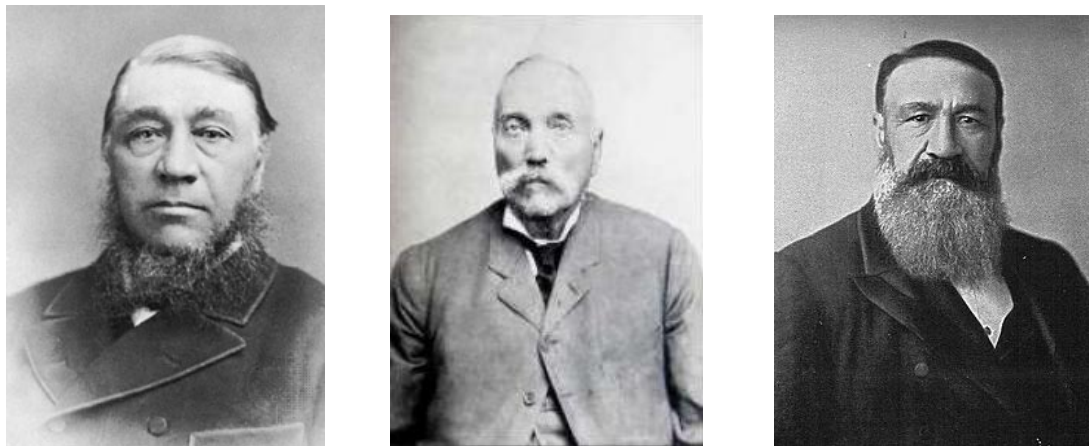


Figure 2.1 *The Triumvirate: Kruger, Pretorius, Joubert*

The British seriously underestimated the resolve and military capabilities of the Boers. Norris –Newman, and former English army officer, turned news correspondent stated, “After repeated deputations and memorials had been sent to Natal, to Cape Colony, and to England, the Boers found that their statements were laughter at, their acts ridiculed, and

⁸⁸ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners : Biography of a People*, 230.

⁸⁹ Van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868 -1881*, 171.

their unity, determination, and pluck not only doubted but held in derision.”⁹⁰ The triumvirate declared a state of martial law and placed Piet Joubert in the role of Commandant-General. Boer forces amounted to approximately 7,000 mounted burghers. The British had only 3,500 troops in all of South Africa and the new ministry in London under William Gladstone was reticent to over commit resources to the Transvaal having only recently brought the Anglo Zulu conflict to a close. Armed with Westly-Richard rifles, with a lethal range of up to six hundred yards, the armed Boers proved a formidable opponent. On December 15th, the Boers cut the telegraph lines breaking all communication between Lanyon and Pretoria and Colley’s garrison in Pietermaritzburg. They seized the printing press in Potchefstroom and began to print the proclamation of the republic for circulation. A capital was established at Heidelberg as the British were in control of Pretoria. A commando of eight hundred men arrived at Heidelberg where the British were forced to surrender and the old republican flag, the *Vierkleur*, with its red, white, and blue horizontal stripes and green perpendicular stripe next to the pole, was raised with much cheering. Meanwhile in Potchefstroom shots had been exchanged between the British troops and the Boers in their standoff. Casualties were suffered on both sides. In the minds of the Boers, on this anniversary of Dingaans Day, God was with His people. Lanyon was presented with a copy of the proclamation of the restoration of the ZAR. The representative of the Volksraad, Hendrik Schoeman, gave Lanyon forty-eight hours to turn over administration of the Transvaal or face a fight. Laynon’s response was unflinching. On December 18th, he instructed Colonel Bellairs, commander of the imperial garrison, “to vindicate the authority of Her Majesty’s Government, and to put down insurrection

⁹⁰ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 296.

wherever it may be found to exist.”⁹¹ According the Norris-Newman, “This exasperated the younger Boers to such a pitch as to render them ripe for anything.”⁹² Paul Kruger

summarizes the simplistic but effective Boer military strategy in his memoirs.

...in view of their very small number - in all about 7,000 men – it was necessary for the Boers to go to work with the greatest circumspection. The plan was to cut off all the villages in which the English had a garrison and to send the rest of the burghers to the Natal frontier, there to arrest the approaching reinforcements of the enemy. Another difficulty was the scarcity of ammunition. At the beginning of the war the Boers had only about 15 rounds per man, so that they had to do precisely as they did in the later stages of the last war, first capture ammunition from the enemy and then fight him with his own ammunition.⁹³

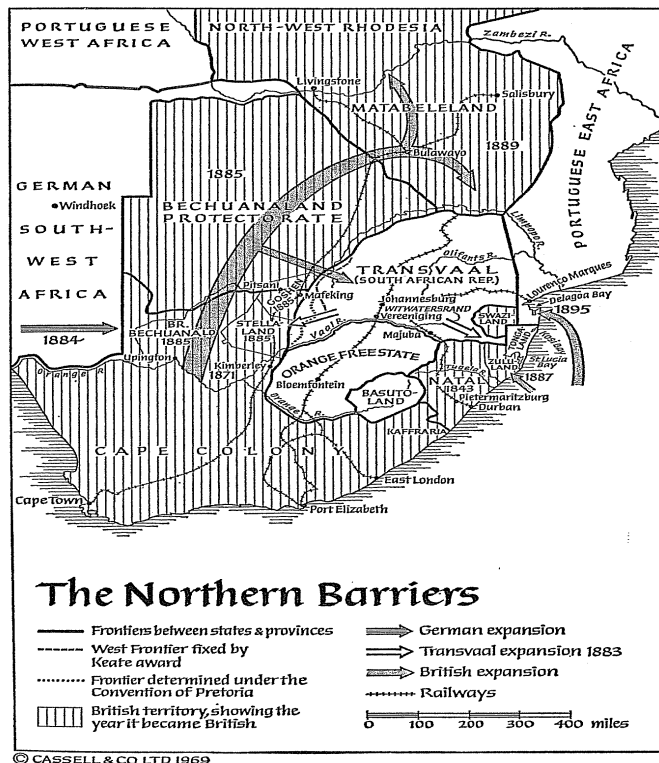


Figure 2.2 *British Expansion*⁹⁴

⁹¹ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 52.

⁹² Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 296.

⁹³ Paul Kruger, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger, Four Times President of the South African Republic* (New York,: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 152-53.

⁹⁴ John Fisher, *The Afrikaners* (London,: Cassell, 1969), 95.

Before discussing three specific engagements in the rebellion the following paragraph summarizes Norris-Newman's perceptive summary of the reality that warfare with the Boers was unconventional and the British failure to recognize and adapt to their style of fighting was paramount to their defeat.

The days of the bayonet and cavalry charges, at least in Colonial wars are gone by; the sword is almost useless and obsolete as a weapon, the revolver nearly as much so, except for close quarters; and sending our officers into battle, conspicuous as they are, un-mounted and comparatively unarmed, is nothing but homicide when fighting against men armed with breech-loading weapons of precision in difficult or rocky country, where they know every inch of the ground, and can fight or decline as best suits them. Bravery alone-always a characteristic of the British officer-is now-a-days unavailing.⁹⁵

With regards to their rifles he observed, "I myself saw, during my stay amongst the Boers, that many of the rifles captured on this occasion were sighted at 200, 300, and some cases 500 yards."⁹⁶ Of their mobility, Norris-Newman admired that, "Their tactics have taught us lessons with might with great advantage be studied by men who are considered authorities on military matters. They move with a rapidity that, compared to the snail-like pace of our men, seems like lightning. Their doings are not cut and carved by rule, precedent, and red-tape; good commons sense governs their actions."⁹⁷ He further admires the relative autonomy enjoyed by the Boer officers.

...a Boer leader can mature his own plans as best suits the occasion; he gets his general instructions from his Commander-in-Chief, but there the hampering ends, and the instructions are not to be allowed to weigh for a moment against any act that may appear justified by circumstances; in short, a Boer leader instead of being, as an English officer is, but a part of a great machine, very petty to look at, but very cumbersome and at times useless, is a living thinking human being, free to exercise his judgment, and move wherever he thinks he may be of the greatest service to the army to which he belongs.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 298.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

In conclusion, Norris-Newman notes, "But when the enemy fights irregularly and on a totally different system, success is to be obtained solely, if at all, by meeting them with their own weapons, and by a ready method adaptation to the practical circumstances. Evidence of the soundness of this line...is supplied by the occurrences of the Zulu and Afghan campaigns..."⁹⁹

The first fracas occurred within days of the Paardekraal gatherings. Colonel Bellairs was the commanding officer in charge of British forces in the Transvaal. Following the Bezuidenhout affair in November, he had recalled the outlying regiments of the 94th Regiment to Pretoria from the northern and eastern districts. One detachment was en route from Middelburg when the rebellion broke out. On both December 15th and again on December 17th, Bellairs had sent warnings to the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Anstruther that he was at risk of attack. Specifically, they warned him to be particularly cautious twenty miles east of Pretoria in the Botha's Hill range. At about 1:20 on the afternoon of December 20, 1880, a Boer commando under the direction of Frans Joubert, uncle of the Commandant-General Piet Joubert, confronted the 94th Regiment as they were approaching a small stream called the Bronkhorstspruit. Anstruther's force consisted of nine officers, two hundred and fifty four other ranks, three soldier's wives and thirty-four wagons.¹⁰⁰ Each troop carried thirty rounds of ammunition as opposed to the seventy specified in regulations for combat ready troops. Further, the lids on the ammunition chests in the wagons were screwed tight. With a culpable insouciance, the column slowly advanced, a band playing at the head. Suddenly, one hundred and fifty mounted Boers

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁰⁰ G. H. L. Le May, *The Afrikaners : An Historical Interpretation* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 87.

appeared on the left flank of the British at about three hundred yards distance. Laband notes that there were numerous contradictory and confused accounts of the battle.

In the testimony carefully elicited after the battle witnesses were responding to loaded enquiries by military officers and officials who were anxious to discover why and in what ways the British military system had failed, and if it were possible to ameliorate the humiliation by pinning defeat on a specific failure in command, or on unanticipated treachery by the unscrupulous Boers.¹⁰¹

Joubert sent forth a herald under a white flag. The messenger presented Colonel Anstruther with a sealed message that had been signed by the triumvirate in Heidelberg. It “informed the ‘Commander-in-Chief of Her majesty’s Troops on the road between Lydenburg and Pretoria’ that, until the Boers’ ‘diplomatic commissioner’ had returned with a reply from Lanyon, they did not know whether or not they were ‘in a state of war.’”¹⁰² The letter stipulated that Anstruther should advance no further. In the dispatch the Boer leaders emphasized that they were only recovering their independence and had no desire to go to war with the Queen or people of England. They concluded however, than any further “‘movement of troops’ would be taken by them as a ‘declaration of war, the responsibility whereof we put on your shoulders, as we know what we will have to do in self defense.’”¹⁰³ An eyewitness reported that Anstruther replied, “I have got my orders from Pretoria, and to Pretoria I’ll go.”¹⁰⁴ In his testimony of the event, the messenger, Paul de Beer, remembered that throughout this terse conversation, the band played “God Save the Queen” in the background. Giving Anstruther one final opportunity to reconsider, De Beer challenged, “War or Peace?”¹⁰⁵ The colonel gave no response and walked away. De

¹⁰¹ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 96.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

Beer returned to Joubert with the defiant British riposte. The Boers dismounted and at about 140 yards distance directed devastating fire at the British column. They specifically targeted the British officers and NCOs. The traditional scarlet and blue tunics made for easy shooting. Recently issued khaki uniforms hadn't reached the 94th Regiment in their isolation. Band Conductor Egerton, who later saved the 94th Regiments colors and delivered them to Pretoria recalled, "The 94th fought remarkably well, but their fire did not seem to take effect - they did not seem to find the proper range, and all the officers were down."¹⁰⁶ The Boers were lying prone or concealed behind rocks, firing down on the column and had set distance markers out before the engagement. The British on the other hand had not adjusted the sights on their rifles and ending up shooting over the Boers.

By kind permission of the Illustrated London News



'THE BOERS' METHOD OF FIGHTING'. PUBLISHED IN THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, FEBRUARY 1881. BRITISH GENERALS SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE CAPABILITY OF THE TRANSVALERS

Figure 2.3 *Boer Fighting Methods*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The confrontation lasted about ten minutes before Anstruther surrendered. One officer and fifty-six other ranks had been killed, and seven officers and ninety-two other ranks were wounded. Boer losses were limited to two killed and five wounded.¹⁰⁷

Accounts of the Boer treatment of the prisoners and wounded vary greatly. Egerton recounted "The Boers took off the arms and ammunition at once-three wagons...Joubert gave leave for the men to take what rations they pleased, and to pitch tents for the wounded and to work the water carts...gave me permission...to come to Pretoria for doctors and ambulances."¹⁰⁸ The account of a second bandsman taken prisoner portrays the Boers as less civilized. "The Boers searched the pockets of the dead and wounded, taking rings, watches, and everything worth taking they could lay their hands on. I saw one Boer search Mr. Carter's pockets and take his watch. All our wagons were taken away, ambulance wagons as well: only leaving us with tents, but no provisions."¹⁰⁹ Perhaps Anstruther's account is closest to the truth. As the vanquished participant he would have incentive to portray the Boers in a negative light and he does not.

The Boers were very sorry at having wounded a woman, and the minute after the arms were laid down they became most obliging and civil. They offered to get everything they could for our comfort, and it was not a hollow promise. Every day they come in numbers, bringing milk, butter, eggs, bread, apricots...and if a man goes to any of their farms they at once, without payment, give him anything he wants.¹¹⁰

In the first engagement between British and other white combatants since the Crimean War, and the 94th Foot had fared poorly. The loss at Bronkhorstspuit was both militarily humbling and politically humiliating. Someone had to be held accountable and as far as Bellairs was concerned, it was not going to be him. Conveniently, Anstruther died of his

¹⁰⁷ Le May, *The Afrikaners : An Historical Interpretation*, 88.

¹⁰⁸ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 338.

wounds two days prior the publication of Bellairs' report. He drew attention to Anstruther's "neglect" as a commander and blamed him for his "absence of caution on the march" and not adequately reconnoitering the ground before advancing. Comfortingly for the general populace, the disaster at Bronkhorstspuit was attributed to the incompetence of an individual, allowing other officers and soldiers to be exonerated as gallant and enduring.¹¹¹

While the official government of the Orange Free State remained aloof, there were rumors of Free Staters volunteering to join the Transvaalers. Sympathy amongst the Afrikaners in the Cape Colony was overwhelming. Stoking the nationalistic fervor,

Commandant-General Frans Joubert published a proclamation in which he 'bowed down in the dust before Almighty God' who had given victory to the heroic burghers in their 'war of self-defense'; triumphant burghers, it needs be said, who where nevertheless Christian (if tartly political) in their compassion for 'the loss of the unfortunate victims of tyranny and deceit, who have not even the consolation of having lost their lives in a good cause.' Joubert ended his proclamation on an even more inflammatory note, accusing the British 'before the whole world' of having started the war 'without notice' and having conducted it 'contrary to all the rules of war accepted by civilized nations.'¹¹²

Paul Kruger's ire with the continued British misrepresentation of events at Bronkhorstspuit is clear as he strove to elicit national memory and strengthen Afrikaner tenacity in the South African War.

...notwithstanding the earlier lying accusations that the English had been treacherously attacked on this occasion, if Field-Marshal Earl Roberts...had not rescued this contemptible calumny from oblivion. When, in the course of the last war, he arrived at Bronkhorstspuit, he telegraphed to the England that he was now at the spot where the British had been decimated by treachery in 1881. But this only shows what a regular genuine Englishman Lord Roberts is.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 99.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹³ Kruger, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger, Four Times President of the South African Republic*, 154.

The job of avenging the defeat at Bronkhorstspuit fell to Sir George Colley, General Wolseley's replacement as High Commissioner, Governor and General Commanding in Natal and the Transvaal. He was in Pietermaritzburg in Natal as the December events unfolded in the Transvaal. Colley was forty-five years old and had graduated from Sandhurst at the top of his class. He was considered one of the finest of his generation of officers. Having already served with Wolseley in the Ashanti War of 1873, Colley was on his fifth tour of duty in southern Africa. Of proven ability and with local knowledge, the only thing he lacked was first-rate troops. When he began his advance toward the Natal / Transvaal border he was particularly lacking in cavalry. He had only one hundred and twenty mounted men comprised of the 58th and 60th Regiments, King's Dragoon Guards, Natal police, and infantrymen who had only recently learned to ride. In addition he had twelve companies of infantry, one hundred and twenty sailors and six artillery pieces, totaling about 1,200 men.¹¹⁴ Lanyon's recently bloodied nose tainted the reconnaissance he provided Colley on Boer military skills. "They are incapable of any united military action, and they are moral cowards, so anything they may do will be but a spark in the pan."¹¹⁵ Sir Archibald Alison, Deputy Quartermaster-General for Intelligence in the War Office had a more informed opinion more in line with the view of Norris-Newman provided early in this chapter.

The Boers are an enemy different from any with whom we have had hitherto to contend. Mounted upon active, hardy little horses, provided with the best firearms, and accustomed from their earliest years to their use, they combine the rapidity of Asiatic cavalry with more than the precision of fire of the most highly trained European infantry. They are thus probably the most perfected Mounted Infantry in the world. These peculiarities render them especially dangerous in 1) the defense of mountain

¹¹⁴ Le May, *The Afrikaners : An Historical Interpretation*, 89.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

passes and 2) in the attack of long trailing convoys bringing up supplies to an army in the field.¹¹⁶

Colley would experience the inimitable strengths of the Boer commando cited by Alison when he attempted to pass into the Transvaal via Laing's Nek at the end of January, 1881.

In his official report, General Colley gives a detailed description of topography of the area.

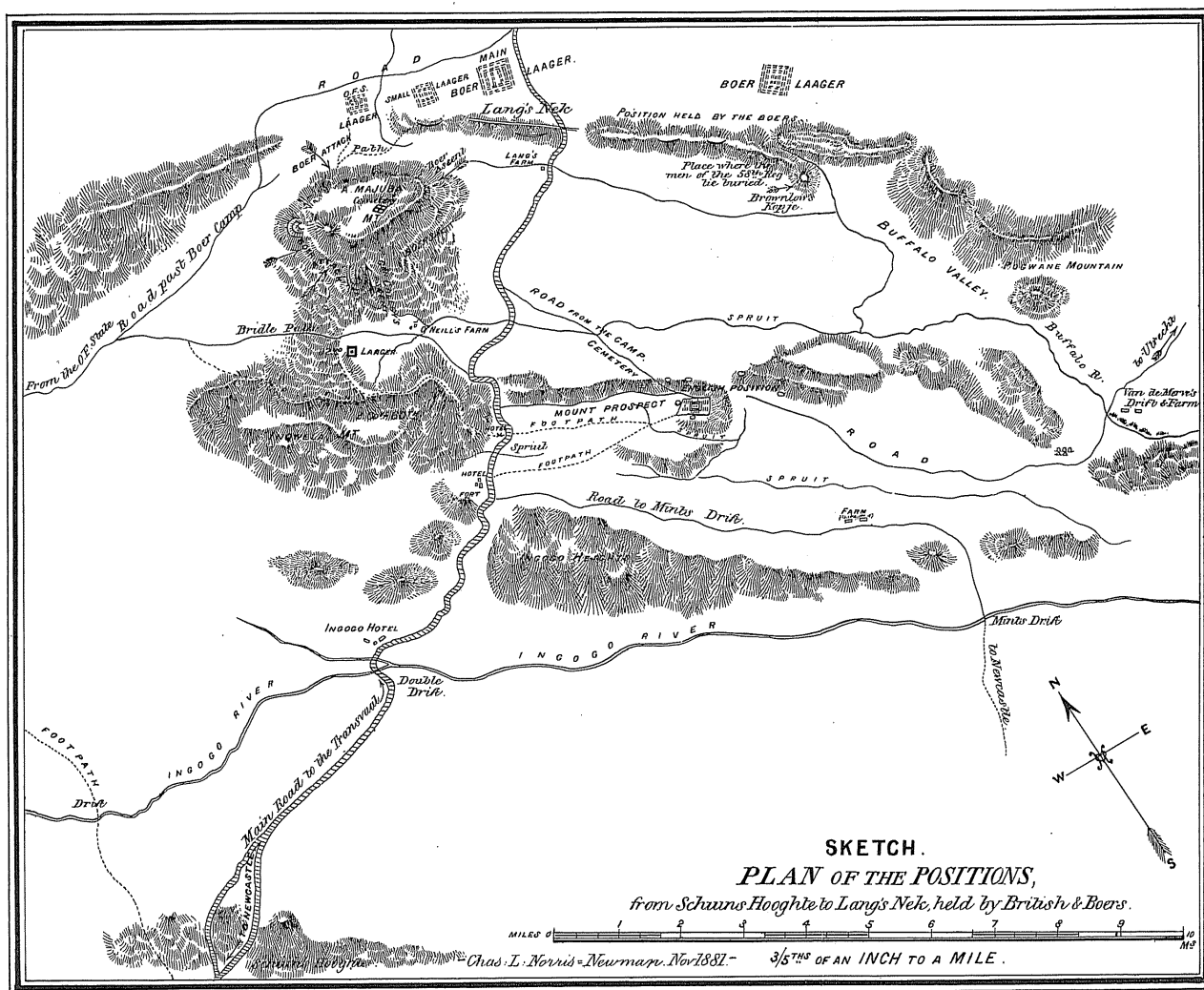


Figure 2.4 Laing's Nek and Majuba¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1.*

The kloof over Laing's Nek wound through a semi-circle of hills about six miles long. The hills terminated in the west at Majuba Mountain. The terrain between the pass and the mountain was defined by a series of ridges and deep ravines. Above the pass to the east was a flat-topped hill about 1,000 feet in length and 600 feet above the plain. On the slopes to the north, the Boers established three defensive laagers. According to Sir Evelyn Wood, the Laing's Nek was a perfect defensive position, allowing its occupants to direct flanking fire across bare, steep slopes.¹¹⁸ On January 28, at six o'clock in the morning, Colley's force set out from their base camp at Mount Prospect for an assault on Laing's Nek. Upon reaching the low ground at the base of the Nek, at 10:00 AM the 58th Regiment was given the order to advance on the Hill to the right of the Nek. Concurrently the Mounted Squadron charged a hill further to the right, with the objective of out-flanking the Boers. The mounted troops quickly ascended the hill, but were subjected to heavy fire. Over half of the men and most of the officers had their horses shot out from under them by the well entrenched Boer infantry. Norris-Newman observes:

Had the men been dismounted and allowed to creep up steadily in skirmishing order, as Mounted Infantry ought to do, the fortunes of the day might have been changed. Neither bravery nor numbers avail to enable cavalry to approach infantry, especially up steep ascents when charging against men under shelter, armed with breech loading weapons of precision.¹¹⁹

The 58th fared poorly as well. They were able to proceed in close formation; four abreast, halfway up the steep hill with relatively little resistance. However, as they approached the Boer positions, the order was given to charge with the dragoons still out of breath. Both the steep grade and wet grass clinging to their legs had hindered the pace of their progress. Before they were able to disperse left and right into a firing line, the Boers fired directly

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

into the men from above. This was followed by lethal enfilade from Boers on their right flank. The commanding officer Colonel Deane gave the order to “charge” and immediately had his horse shot out from under him. Jumping to his feet, he called to his men “I am all right,” and was instantly shot dead. His orderly officer, Lieutenant Inman of the 60th Rifles, was also mortally wounded at the same moment. Major Hingeston assumed command and gave the order to “fix bayonets”. The officers pushed forward to encourage their men but were quickly overcome with unremitting Boer rifle fire. Hingeston soon fell dead.

Determining that further advance was futile, the British retreated down the hill, “but only after nearly all of the Staff and officers were killed or wounded.” The 60th gave covering fire for the retreat but were also subjected to a relentless Boer cross fire from soldiers ensconced in the bush covered donga on the left. The British used both artillery and naval rockets to temporarily deter the Boers, who chose not to leave their defensive positions and pursue the fleeing British.

As they retired to Camp Prospect, Colley was struck with the realization, that nearly all of his general staff had been killed. If the defeat at Bronkhorstspuit hadn’t convinced the British of tenacity and discipline of the Boers, Laing’s Nek certainly did. The British had fired 8,635 rounds of rifle ammunition and eight hundred forty-five of carbine and eighty pistol rounds. That was an average of over seventeen rounds per man, nearly triple the 6.4 rounds per man spent at the Battle of Ulundi on July 4, 1879, which brought the Zulu nation to its knees. According to Joubert’s official report, only sixteen Boers were killed or died of their wounds and another twenty-seven were wounded primarily by artillery fire. “In stark comparison, between five and six hundred Zulus had been killed within close range of the British infantry square at Ulundi and an additional six hundred killed in mounted pursuit.”

¹²⁰ After the obligatory praises for valor and sacrifice accorded the British soldiers at Laing's Nek Colley concedes that this enemy was unlike any he had faced before in his African campaigns.

I must do my adversaries the justice to say that they fought with great courage and determination. A good deal of fighting was at short ranges of 20 to 100 yards, and the Boers showed no fear of our troops, but rather advanced to meet them. I have also to acknowledge the courtesy shown by some of the leaders in giving facilities for the care and removal of the wounded.¹²¹

British casualties were intolerably high, especially among the officers and NCOs whom the Boers had intentionally targeted. Within the 58th Regiment three officers and seventy-one other ranks had been killed as well as two officers and ninety-nine wounded or a casualty rate of thirty-five per cent. The mounted squadron suffered four dead and thirteen wounded and the naval brigade two killed and one wounded. In all seven officers had been killed and three wounded.¹²² In his report, Colley calculated that his adversaries had numbers close to 2,000. From first hand accounts collected after the battle Norris-Newman estimates the number of Boers to be closer to two hundred and fifty. "In Britain, Colley's repulse (the press could not bring itself to describe it as a 'defeat')" was not well received "especially since it had been administered by contemptible 'undisciplined bands of yeomen.'"¹²³ When he had regained his composure, with much bravado Colley assured his subordinates, "we certainly shall take possession of that hill eventually." In juxtaposition, Joubert humbly wrote to the Assistant Commandant-General, P.A. Cronje', "with the help of

¹²⁰ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 155.

¹²¹ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 344.

¹²² Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 156.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 157.

God, they have been repulsed with heavy losses...looking up to God that may further bless us.”¹²⁴

As reports of one military debacle after another reached London, Gladstone’s liberal ministry and eventually the more conservative Kimberly, as Colonial Secretary, began to consider alternatives to reach some form of reconciliation with the Afrikaners in Heidelberg. Three developments contributed to this shift away from militant resolution. First, reports from the Cape showed growing support amongst the Afrikaner population for their brothers in the Transvaal. Simultaneously, British loyalist had become increasingly dismayed. Pro-Boer sentiment was manifest even in loyalist Natal where “public opinion became even more vehement, openly regretting the ware, condemning the nature of British rule in the Transvaal, deploring Britain’s violent methods, and calling for the restoration of the Transvaal’s independence.”¹²⁵ A second cause of concern in London was that Africans might look to take advantage of the conflict between the white races. The British government denounced anything that might lead to a racial war throughout South Africa. Kimberly noted that drawing Africans into the conflict would be “lamentably disastrous to the interests of white colonists.”¹²⁶ The final factor causing British reassessment of their Transvaal policy, was that despite Colley’s assurances, he was not winning a war that had already lasted longer and cost more than had been imagined. By early February, with an offer of mediation by President Brand of the neutral Orange Free State, the British government was fully prepared to negotiate a settlement that would include the annulment

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

of the annexation of the Transvaal. The Boers were clearly amenable to a peaceful solution. In his letter to Colley, dated February 12th, Kruger reiterated their position.

...I should esteem myself responsible to my God if I did not once more make known our intention, knowing it is in your Excellency's power to place us in a condition to withdraw from the position taken up by us. The people have repeatedly declared their willingness, on the annulling of the Act of Annexation, to work together with Her Majesty's Government in all things which can serve the whole of South Africa.¹²⁷

Determined to avenge Laing's Nek and clearly unaware of the Cabinet's resolve to end the hostilities immediately, Colley vented his frustration to Wolseley on February 21st.

I am now getting together a force with which I think I could command success, but the Home Government seems so anxious to terminate the contest, that I am daily expecting to find ourselves negotiating with the 'Triumviate' as the acknowledged rulers of a victorious people; in which case my failure at Lang's Nek will have inflicted a deep and permanent injury on the British name and power in South Africa which is not pleasant to contemplate.¹²⁸

Further, on the 21st, under instruction from Kimberly, Colley sent a reply to Kruger's letter of the 12th, offering a negotiated settlement subject to a Boer ceasefire and that all British military operations would halt *if* Kruger accepted this proposal within forty-eight hours. This caveat of forty-eight hours was unauthorized and proved to have fatal consequences. When the letter reached Heidelberg, Kruger was in fact in Rustenburg. He did not respond until February 28th. By February 24th, having received no reply, Colley convinced himself that Kruger had rejected the offer and decided to take matters into his own hands.

Intent on restoring his military reputation, Colley formulated a plan to seize and occupy Majuba Hill to the immediate southwest of Laing's Nek. In order to succeed, surprise was paramount and Colley planned a night assault. In the late hours of February 26th he wrote clairvoyantly,

¹²⁷ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 351.

¹²⁸ Le May, *The Afrikaners : An Historical Interpretation*, 90-91.

I am going out tonight to try and seize the Majuba Hill...and leave this behind, in case I should not return, to tell you how very dearly I love you, and what a happiness you have been to me...It is a strange world of chances; one can only do what seems right to one in matters of morals, and do what seems best in matters of judgment, as a card-player calculates the chances, and the wrong card may turn up and everything turn out to be done for the worst instead of the best.¹²⁹

In the early hours of February 27th, Colley set out to summit Majuba Hill with a force of twenty nine officers, five hundred sixty eight men, three newspaper correspondents, and an unrecorded number of African guides and servants, carrying three days provisions. They carried no artillery or Gatling guns because Colley believed the slopes of Majuba were too steep to transport the equipment to the top. Three further officers and seventy-seven men from Mount Prospect carrying sixteen boxes of ammunition reinforced them before daybreak. Confident of the defensibility of the hill, Colley detached three companies to protect lines of communication, leaving him with just nineteen officers and about four hundred men to hold the position.¹³⁰ The top of Majuba has a rough triangular shape. The men of the 92nd Highlanders, the 58th, and the Naval brigade each occupied one side of the summit. As dawn broke, Colley had successfully taken the summit, seemingly undetected, and the mood of the troops became relaxed and sanguine. The 92nd did little to conceal their position and as the Boers in the three laagers below awoke they were astounded to see the silhouettes of British soldiers shaking their fists and taunting Joubert's men.

General Joubert and General Nicholas Smit quickly developed a plan to re-take Majuba. Four hundred and fifty men gathered at the base of the slopes to attempt the assault. In addition, one hundred and fifty horsemen were sent to the western side of the mountain to prevent reinforcements from reaching Colley and to cut off any potential British

¹²⁹ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 193.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 198-200.

withdrawal. As the younger Boer troops began the ascent, Smit arranged a cordon of older Boers at the base of the mountain to lay down a steady covering fire, preventing the British from exposing themselves and therefore unaware of the assaulting troops. According to Laband, the Boers “demonstrated their mastery of fire and movement techniques as the rear line of skirmishers provided covering fire for the advance line until it had come to a halt behind suitable cover when the second line moved up and the process was repeated.”¹³¹ At 9:30, unaware of the gravity of the developing situation, Colley signaled “Occupied Majuba Mountain last night, immediately overlooking the Boer Position. Boers firing at us from below.”¹³² He concluded with confidence that the Boers were wasting ammunition and only one man had been wounded in the foot. At 12:10 his second and last message was received. “Boers still firing heavily on hill, but have broken up their laager and begun to move away.”¹³³ He was sorely mistaken. The Boers were not retreating but redirecting more resources at the offensive. Just after mid-day, the Boer forces broke through to the high ground known as Gordon’s Knoll and directed flanking fire on the 92nd Highlanders. With the Highlanders pinned down, more Boer troops poured up the slopes and the British ranks began to collapse as casualties mounted. General panic set in and the British troops began to run from their positions down the southern slope with cries of terror, headed for Mount Prospect. In the midst of the bedlam, Colley was fatally shot in the head. In the aftermath of the battle, one of the correspondents who had witnessed the battle, Mr. Carter of the *Times of Natal* identified the body for the Boers. He reported,

The Boers doubted me when I said, ‘It is the General.’ But when they questioned me again and again, ‘Do you know him? Are you sure you know him?’ I replied, “I give you

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹³² Le May, *The Afrikaners : An Historical Interpretation*, 91.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

my word of honor it is General Colley,' they were satisfied. No word of exultation escaped their lips when they learnt this. I said, 'You have killed the bravest gentleman on this field,' and they answered, 'Yes, he fought well.' One man said, 'He was a very nice gentleman; he dined in my house when he went to Pretoria;' and said another, 'He did not think we were wrong, but was a soldier and he must obey orders.'¹³⁴

When the survivors of Majuba finally straggled into the fort at Mount Prospect, the magnitude of the losses was appalling. Of the officers engaged, five were dead, eight were wounded and seven taken prisoner. Of the enlisted men, eighty-six were killed, one hundred and twenty five were wounded, fifty-one were taken prisoner, and two were missing. The 92nd Highlanders suffered the highest casualty rate of fifty eight per cent.¹³⁵ The Boers suffered casualties of one killed and six wounded. Boer fighting tactics had been vindicated when faced by a formidable force of professionals. For the British command, the collapse of morale and the undisciplined retreat was the most troubling aspect of the whole unfortunate catastrophe. Laband draws upon John Lynn's reflections in *Combat and Culture* with regards to the military methods and outcomes of Bronkhorstspuit, Laing's Nek and Majuba.

...what happens when sharply differing discourses on the conventional expectations of armed conflict and the soldierly values associated with it come into collision. The temptation is to become infuriated with the other side for its flouting of the perceived codes of honor and fair fight, and to justify in response an alternative and less restrained form of war. The Transvaal Rebellion would not last long enough for these more extreme methods to take hold, but bitter memories of its lapses in soldierly ethics would prepare the ground for lowering the threshold of 'civilized' war in the greater war of 1899-1902.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Norris-Newman, *With the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1880-1*, 204.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹³⁶ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 101.

August 3, 1881, the Pretoria Convention was signed. The Republican flag was hoisted over Pretoria and power was transferred back to the Transvaalers. The document was complex and while re-establishing the independence of the Transvaal, Britain still retained imperial control through the precept of a British Resident in Pretoria to represent the Queen's suzerainty. This nebulous term was characteristic of Gladstone and limited the Transvaal's right to make treaties and offered some protection to Africans.¹³⁹ In 1897 F. Reginald Statham wrote that the success of the Transvaal Rebellion had the inadvertent benefit of awakening the "Dutch population" of South Africa, "whose national feelings had been so deeply touched by the manifest injustices committed against their kinsfolk beyond the Vaal River", to a "sense of its political importance." Their victory certainly emboldened them to believe that they could assert their power more generally in South Africa. A pamphlet published in Dutch in the Cape in 1882 trumpeted the "marvelous victory" over England and her "policy of robbery and murder", and boldly forecast the emergence of an Afrikaner "nation" as an expression of God's will.¹⁴⁰ Bill Nasson notes that from the British perspective,

...a leaden Majuba came to symbolize the blemishing of nation honor, provoking mockery everywhere...the disaster rankled especially because it represented humiliating loss to a congenitally inferior colonial adversary. In the political culture of Tory imperial patriotism, this bruising loss of face was not something to be easily brushed over. There was lost glory to be restored.¹⁴¹

In 1981 the farm containing Majuba Hill was acquired by the Potchefstroom University for Christian National Education and was administered by the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg. Majuba remained a site of passionate pilgrimage and national

¹³⁹ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, 455-63.

¹⁴⁰ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 238.

¹⁴¹ Bill Nasson, *The South African War, 1899-1902*, Modern Wars (London, New York: Arnold ; Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

commemoration for Afrikaners. It was a symbol of the victory of the volk over British imperialism that could be joyfully celebrated, in contrast to the memories of the South African War of 1899-1902 that would elicit national anger and anguish.

CHAPTER 3

Suffering and Sacrifice in the South African War of 1899 - 1902

During the spring and summer of 1900, the officer in charge of British forces in South Africa, Field Marshall Lord Roberts, became increasingly frustrated with an elusive enemy who had adopted the hit and run tactics of a guerilla force. Determined to bring their Boer adversaries to heel, Roberts and his chief of staff, Major-General Lord Kitchener, undertook a scorched earth policy of farm burning. While an effective military strategy, the consequences were severe and the brunt of the destruction was borne not by combatants, but by the civilian population. In response to the unforeseen dislocation of thousands of surrendered burghers and their families as well as the wives and children of burghers still on commando, refugee camps were hastily erected. These camps became quickly overcrowded and supplies were inadequate. Disease spread rapidly and death rates approached epidemic proportions. As news of the desolate conditions reached England, anti-war Liberals, led by Emily Hobhouse, mounted a campaign to address the suffering. Fortunately, "By 1902, the joint efforts of Emily Hobhouse, in publicizing the facts, Millicent Fawcett and her team of women doctors and nurses, and Lord Milner had reduced the death rate to the level then current in many British towns."¹⁴² This statistic indicates that the tragedy of the concentration camps was the result of mismanagement and not malevolence. Attempts by the Nazis to draw parallels between Britain's treatment of the Boers and their designed genocide of the Jews, are intentionally deceptive. However, the lack of malice on the part of the British administrators did little to alleviate the fact that roughly 28,000 Boer civilians died in the camps. Of this number, 4,000 were women and

¹⁴² Tony Lucking, "Some Thoughts on the Evolution of Boer War Concentration Camps," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 82(2004): 161.

22,000 were children.¹⁴³ In the years after South African was granted independence in 1910, “the deaths in the camps gave Afrikaners ‘common victims to mourn and common grievances to nurture’. This was a ‘shared national tragedy’, which enabled Afrikaner nationalists to forge a common identity amongst people who were divided by class and allegiance.”¹⁴⁴

In its examination of the South African War concentration camps, this chapter is organized into three sub-sections. The first considers the rationale for and implementation of the camps by both Roberts and Kitchener. The second sub-section presents the efforts to both expose and rectify the horrific conditions in the camps. Finally, the third sub-section reflects on the memorialization of the camps and their place in the creation of an Afrikaner history.

Implementation of the Camps

In June of 1900, Roberts began a policy of farm burning in the Orange River Colony, previously the Orange Free State, annexed by Britain in May. Between June and November of that year, more than six hundred farms were burnt. This destruction of farms and supplies *did* starve the guerillas of much needed food and shelter, however it also caused deep resentment among the Afrikaners who were not directly involved in combat with the British. Feelings among the British troops setting the fires were mixed. Captain R. F. Talbot of the Royal Horse Artillery wrote:

...we burnt and blew up two farms with gun-cotton, turning out the inhabitants first. It is a bit sickening at first turning out the women and children, but they are such

¹⁴³ Donal Lowry, *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester, UK ; New York New York: Manchester University Press ; Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin's Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth van Heyningen, "The Concentration Camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, 1900 - 1902," *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (2009): 23.

brutes and the former all spies; we don't mind it now. Only those are done which belong to men who are sniping or otherwise behaving badly.¹⁴⁵

Captain Phillipps' account was more moving.

The old grandmother was very angry. She told me that, though I was making a fine blaze now, it was nothing compared to the flames that I myself should be consumed in hereafter. Most of them however, were too miserable to curse. The women cried and the children stood by holding on to them and looking with large frightened eyes at the burning house. They won't forget that sight...not even when they grow up. We rode away and left them, a forlorn little group, standing among their household goods...strewn about the *veld* [field; plain];¹⁴⁶

When commando attacks on both the railway and telegraph lines did not cease, Roberts' methods became even more draconian. After serious breaks in railway communications occurred in the Orange River Colony in October 1900, Roberts ordered to "lay the country to waste."¹⁴⁷ All farms within a radius of ten miles of the rail disruption were burnt.

Following the destruction of rail lines near Vnetersburg, the town was cleared of supplies and burnt to prevent the Boers from returning to re-provision. Lieutenant-General Archibald Hunter, who was charged with carrying out this scorched earth policy in the Orange River Colony was given great latitude by Roberts. Hunter was instructed "that all people suspected of disloyalty who lived in areas where railway and telegraph lines had been destroyed should have their farms burnt and should be deported."¹⁴⁸

Contemporaneous with the burning of farms, Kitchener implemented a strategy to carve up South Africa into a series of fenced areas using blockhouses. Originally built of thick stone, Kitchener shifted to corrugated iron and timber structures to save time and

¹⁴⁵ Denis Judd and Keith Terrance Surridge, *The Boer War*, 1st Palgrave Macmillan ed. (New York, N.Y. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 192.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1977), 110.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

money. Every blockhouse was garrisoned with up to six men and connected to the next adjacent by barbed wire. The intervals between the small fortifications were gradually reduced from an average of one and half miles to an average of less than half a mile.¹⁴⁹ This “fixed grid” allowed the British columns to conduct sweeping drives against the commandos and impeded the Boers’ mobility. Defending the blockhouses against attack became increasingly easy as Boer units diminished in size and artillery was abandoned. Ultimately, Kitchener built 8,000 blockhouses, extending over 3,700 miles.¹⁵⁰ Kitchener dispersed as many as sixty “flying columns” of 1,200 to 2,000 troops at one time on man-hunts through the fenced grid.¹⁵¹ He employed sporting metaphors throughout his campaign. He would report weekly to Roberts and St. John Brodrick, War Secretary, about his “bag.” He informed Roberts on August 23, 1901, “I look more to the numbers I kill or capture than anything else.” He reminded Brodrick, “...the real criterion of the war is my weekly bag.” As he grew more frustrated with the evasive Boers, he complained, “It is no longer real war out here, but police operations of considerable magnitude to catch various bands of men who resist, and do all they can to avoid arrest. Like wild animals they have to be got into enclosures before they can be captured.”¹⁵² Roberts’ and Kitchener’s tactics were supported at the highest levels in the British Government. Prime Minister Salisbury wrote to Brodrick on December 19, 1900, “I do not like this protection of isolated hills. I should prefer to see a complete protection of lines and bridges; and then you ought to be

¹⁴⁹ John Millin Selby, *The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage* (London,: Barker, 1969), 214.

¹⁵⁰ Philip Montefiore Magnus, *Kitchener; Portrait of an Imperialist*, [1st American ed. (New York,: Dutton, 1959), 177.

¹⁵¹ Nasson, *The South African War, 1899-1902*, 212.

¹⁵² Magnus, *Kitchener; Portrait of an Imperialist*, 177.

able to destroy food with flying columns of considerable strength. You will not conquer these people until you have starved them out..."¹⁵³

It was, therefore, out of a necessity caused by the dual strategies of scorched earth and the sweeping drives that the idea of refugee camps was developed. Both dislocated women and children as well as *hensoppers* [surrendered burghers] or and British "joiners", those cooperating with British, had to be fed, sheltered, and protected. On August 1, 1900, two District Commissioners separately advised Roberts that camps be established for civilians. Further, intelligence officer H.R. Abercrombie, justified their need as follows:

...to make all surrendered farmers with their families go into laagers at various points, to apply the same policy to the natives, to stop the markets in disaffected districts, and give our troops a neutral country to operate in.

In this way we avoid punishing innocent people, solve the difficult problems of giving security and prevent the enemy refilling his ranks by forced commandeering..."¹⁵⁴

The concept of refugee camps was not new. Four years prior, Valeriano Weyler, Marquess of Tenerife and a Spanish General, was sent to Cuba in February 1896, to crush a rebellion.¹⁵⁵ Weyler dealt with the Cuban insurrection by limiting the area of conflict by dividing the island into sections with lines of fortifications and responding to the guerillas' scorched earth policy with counter-destruction. His most controversial move was to order all non-combatants into 'reconcentrado' camps, where they were quartered in small huts, while their houses were burnt and their livestock commandeered or destroyed.¹⁵⁶ Anyone found outside of the camps was considered a rebel. Due to inadequate supplies and

¹⁵³ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 174.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵⁶ Lucking, "Some Thoughts on the Evolution of Boer War Concentration Camps," 155.

overcrowding, the death rate in the camps was extremely high, with estimated civilian deaths in excess of 100,000. With hindsight, it seems hypocritical that at the time, the British chastised Weyler as a 'butcher', a 'brute', and 'an exterminator of men'.¹⁵⁷

In September 1900, the first refugee camp was established at Bloemfontein in the Orange River Colony. By the end of November a camp was established in the Transvaal, just south of Pretoria at Irene. By early 1901 Transvaal camps were located at Johannesburg, Krugersdorp, Standerton, Heidelberg, Klerksdorp, Vereeniging, and Potchesfroom. In the Orange River Colony, additional camps were established at Heilbron, Norval's Pont, and Kroonstad.¹⁵⁸ In total, forty-six camps were built for white Boers. Additional camps were established for dislocated African natives. At peak occupancy the total number of inmates exceeded 116,000.¹⁵⁹



Figure 3.1 Bloemfontein Concentration Camp

¹⁵⁷ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 148.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Warwick, *The South African War : The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1980), 169.

As the camp network expanded in late 1900 and early 1901, Kitchener replaced Roberts as supreme commander of the British forces in South Africa. Despite his successful defeat of the Mahdists in the Sudan and his diplomacy at Fashoda, not everyone was convinced of Kitchener's qualifications. In November 1898, Arthur Balfour had stated,

He possesses, without doubt, boundless courage and resolution. How far he could adapt himself to wholly different and perhaps larger problems than those which he has been dealing, I do not feel confident. He seems to have a profound contempt for every soldier except himself, which, though not an amiable trait, does not make me think less of his brains.¹⁶⁰

Winston Churchill, *Morning Post* correspondent, on the other hand, felt Kitchener was well suited for the position. He wrote to Sir Alfred Milner, South African High Commissioner,

I am astonished at the pitiless spirit which is everywhere displayed. Lord Roberts has lost a certain amount of popularity because it is thought he has not been sufficiently severe and Kitchener's name has been several times mentioned to me as the kind of man for the business. I wish him joy of his reputation.¹⁶¹

On December 21, 1900, Kitchener issued the following instruction to his generals:

The General Commanding is desirous that all possible means will be taken to stop the present guerrilla war. Of the various measures suggested for the accomplishment of this object, one which has been strongly recommended,...is the removal of all men, women and children, and natives from the districts which the enemy's bands persistently occupy. This course has been pointed out by surrendered Burghers, who are anxious to finish the war, as the most effective method of limiting the endurance of the guerrillas, as the men and women left on the farms, if disloyal, willingly supply the Burghers, if loyal, dare not refuse to do so. Moreover, seeing the unprotected state of women now living out in the districts, this course is desirable to ensure their not being insulted or molested by natives.¹⁶²

The previous day, Kitchener had been more to the point about his motivations in a cable to Brodrick. "Every farm is to [the Boers] an intelligence agency and a supply depot so that it

¹⁶⁰ Magnus, *Kitchener; Portrait of an Imperialist*, 142.

¹⁶¹ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 171.

¹⁶² Lucking, "Some Thoughts on the Evolution of Boer War Concentration Camps," 156.

is almost impossible to surround or catch them.”¹⁶³ He also believed that men on commando would surrender so that they could join their wives and children in the camps. Kitchener, the quintessential soldier, considered the concentration camps a solution to a military problem. He never considered how the Boers, the British public, or the broader European community would receive them. Pakenham observed, “Thus, the plan had all the hallmarks of one of Kitchener’s famous shortcuts. It was big, ambitious, simple, and (what always endeared Kitchener to Whitehall) extremely cheap.”¹⁶⁴

As reports of the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions slowly reached Britain, Brodrick was faced with the task of justifying their necessity. Early in the controversy, he struggled as to how best to portray the purpose of the camps. In his December 20 cable, Kitchener had reported that women had been deported to the camps for spying. When Brodrick made reference to this communication in Parliament, M.P. John Dillon asked to loud cheers, “What civilized Government ever deported women? Had it come to this, that this Empire was afraid of women?” Brodrick was further lambasted for his retort that “Women and children who have been deported are those who have either been found giving information to the enemy or are suspected of giving information to the enemy.” Outraged, Dillon chided, “I ask the honorable gentleman if any civilized nation in Europe ever declared war against women...A pretty pass has the British Empire come to now!”¹⁶⁵ Thereafter, the government ceased to present the camps as holding pens for alleged enemy

¹⁶³ Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire : Public Discourse and the Boer War*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture ; 23 (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 59.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 1st American ed. (New York: Random House, 1979), 494.

¹⁶⁵ Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire : Public Discourse and the Boer War*, 60.

collaborators. However, despite Brodrick's claim that "those who come may go", the reality was the women and children were confined to the camps.¹⁶⁶

Ultimately, the British government honed in on the last statement in Kitchener's proclamation to position the camps within a familiar nineteenth-century discourse. White women needed to be protected by white men. In June 1901, Brodrick replied to the Liberal M.P. Lloyd George that if the Boer combatants had been willing "to provide for *their women* and children, many of those difficulties which are now complained of would never have occurred."¹⁶⁷ The conservative newspaper *The Times*, cautioned readers that, "To release most of these women now would be to send them to starve and to expose them to outrages from the natives which would set all South Africa in a flame."¹⁶⁸ Paula Krebs has argued that the government and the conservative press therefore "brought together two central ideologies in Victorian Britain – the weakness of woman and the sexual savagery of the black man towards the white woman."¹⁶⁹

While Brodrick dealt with the outcry among the anti-war contingent at home, Kitchener sought to justify the camps' necessity to the Boer leaders themselves. He also sought to shift the blame to the Boer fighters. On April 16, 1901, he wrote the Boer Commander-in-Chief, Louis Botha, "that he had been driven to adopt the repugnant expedient 'by the irregular manner in which you have conducted and are conducting hostilities, by forcing unwilling and peaceful inhabitants to join your commandos.'"¹⁷⁰ Kitchener was alluding to a March 16 proclamation issued by General Botha following the

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Magnus, *Kitchener; Portrait of an Imperialist*, 179.

collapse of peace talks at Middleburg, where Botha stated, "I am entitled to force every man to join me, and if they fail, to confiscate their property and leave their families on the veld. The only thing that you can do is to send them out in the country, as if I catch them, they must suffer."¹⁷¹ A year earlier, Marthinus Steyn, President of the Orange Free State, similarly declared, following the fall of Bloemfontein on March 13, 1900, "all burghers commandeered by the republican authorities were still compelled to go on commando, and burghers who aided the British in any way or who laid down their weapons without good cause were liable to be tried for high treason."¹⁷²

Despite all of the efforts to rationalize the need for the camps, there exists no evidence that Kitchener desired the deaths of women and children any more than he wanted the disease related deaths of 16,000 of his own soldiers in the typhoid-ridden hospitals of Bloemfontein.¹⁷³ As Pakenham observes, "He was simply not interested. What possessed him was a passion to win the war quickly, and to that he was prepared to sacrifice most things and most people, other than his own small 'band of boys', to whom he was invariably loyal, whatever their blunders."¹⁷⁴

Exposé and the Campaign for Improvements

At a dinner given by the National Reform Union on June 21, 1901, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, leader of the opposition party in Britain, posed and then answered his own question when he queried, "When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by

¹⁷¹ Lucking, "Some Thoughts on the Evolution of Boer War Concentration Camps," 159.

¹⁷² Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 36.

¹⁷³ Warwick, *The South African War : The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 170.

¹⁷⁴ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 495.

methods of barbarism in South Africa.”¹⁷⁵ Campbell-Bannerman was referring to the decimation of the countryside as well as the concentration camp atrocities as described to him a few days earlier in a meeting with Emily Hobhouse. Miss Hobhouse recalled the interview.

As I dwelt upon the wholesale burning of farms and villages, the deportations, the desperate condition...the people deprived of clothes, bedding, utensils and necessities, the semi-starvation in the camps, the fever-stricken children lying sick unto death upon the bare earth, the disease-laden atmosphere...he was deeply moved and now then murmured *sotto voce* ‘methods of barbarism’. He was right. His words, criticized or resented by many who were unaware of the circumstances, seemed to me, who had witnessed those methods and their result, most fitting.¹⁷⁶

Emily Hobhouse, along with Millicent Fawcett became the improbable central figures in a humanitarian controversy overshadowed by a male dominated Victorian military campaign. The former was a “pro-Boer” anti-war activist and the later was a suffragist who supported the war and led a government appointed commission to investigate camp conditions. Despite their differing political dispositions, they were unified in their determination to bring about improvements in the camps. Paula Krebs noted, “In the South African camps and back in Britain, women influenced the course of the Boer War and South African history through a curious set of circumstances where by they were simultaneously victims, symbols, and political actors, sometimes all in the same person.”¹⁷⁷

Emily Hobhouse, born in 1860, was the daughter of a Cornwall rector. Much of her early life was spent assisting her father in his duties as a clergyman. Her mother died in 1880 and her father in 1895. Following the loss of her parents, she travelled to the United

¹⁷⁵ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Emily Hobhouse and Rykie Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2000), 125.

¹⁷⁷ Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire : Public Discourse and the Boer War*, 56.

States to do interdenominational church and social welfare work with Cornish miners who had emigrated there from Britain. Following a broken engagement to a Virginia businessman, she returned to England just prior to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. She was quickly absorbed with the debate over the war's justification and found herself in the national spotlight. In a tribute to Hobhouse, the Boer leader, Jan Smuts wrote:

She was in every way a very remarkable woman. She had more than a touch of real genius; she had a strong and vivid personality which at times made her difficult to work with; she had an invincible faith in spiritual things and values; and, above all she had a great spirit of human service which concentrated all the energy of her ardent nature, triumphed over all difficulties...¹⁷⁸

Of course not everyone held Hobhouse in high esteem. Dr. Alec Kay who worked in the camps wrote scathingly of the 'agitation...raised by a few unsexed and hysterical women who were prepared to sacrifice everything for notoriety.'¹⁷⁹

Hobhouse, under the influence of her uncle Lord Hobhouse, joined a women's branch of the anti-war organization, the South African Conciliation Committee.¹⁸⁰ In the summer of 1900, she travelled to a number of towns, speaking out against the war. By the second half of 1900, the English press reported an increase in the farm-burning policy in South Africa. Hobhouse recorded her reaction.

A picture of wretchedness lay beneath the bald telegraphic words: That these poor families, bandied from pillar to post, must need protection and organized relief, was certain, and from that moment I was determined to go to South Africa in order to help them. Late in September I tried to start a fund on the broad grounds of pure and simple benevolence toward those made homeless by the war.¹⁸¹

In her memoir for Mrs. Isabella Steyn, she wrote:

¹⁷⁸ Patricia Ann Shaw Ashman, "Anti-War Sentiment in Britain During the Boer War" (1972), 297.

¹⁷⁹ Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 195.

¹⁸⁰ Ashman, "Anti-War Sentiment in Britain During the Boer War", 299.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 301.

But now, as the months advance and every post brought news of the effects of English policy and actions upon an innocent population of women and children, when one saw the concrete results of our policy upon human life, I was filled with indignation and a passionate desire to show concrete sympathy to these unfortunates by taking them material relief to soften their suffering.¹⁸²

With the assistance of her aunt, Lady Hobhouse, she created the South African Women and Children Distress Fund. Hobhouse raised £300, with which she purchased relief supplies and set sail for South Africa on December 7, 1900.¹⁸³

When she arrived in Capetown, Milner granted Hobhouse permission to visit any of the camps, but Kitchener restricted her from traveling into the Transvaal. In January she set off for the camp at Bloemfontein. Hobhouse took a train truck of clothing, bedding, and foodstuffs. During the next three months she visited several camps in the Orange River and Cape colonies recording conditions and passing out relief aid. Upon her arrival in Bloemfontein, Hobhouse identified an immediate flaw in the management of the camps. The laagers were civilian establishments administered by male soldiers. In fact it was not until November 1901, that all of the camps came under Milner's direct control.¹⁸⁴ Of the officers in command Hobhouse noted:

The Authorities are at their wits' end and have no more idea how to cope with the one difficulty of providing clothes for the people than the man in the moon. Crass male ignorance, stupidity, helplessness and muddling. I rub as much salt into the sore places of their minds as I possible can, because it is so good for them; but I can't help melting a little when they are very humble and confess that the whole thing is a grievous and gigantic blunder and presents an almost insoluble problem, and they don't know *how* to face it. ¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Hobhouse and Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 25.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸⁴ Emanuel C. G. Lee, *To the Bitter End : A Photographic History of the Boer War 1899-1902* (Harmondsworth ; New York: Viking, 1985), 179.

¹⁸⁵ Hobhouse and Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 49.

The Bloemfontein camp had 2,000 occupants, of which 900 were children. While there were a few hensoppers, the majority of internees were women. The camp was located two miles outside of town, “on the southern slope of kopje right out on the bare brown veld. Not the vestige of a tree in any direction, nor shade of any description.”¹⁸⁶ Families and servants were housed in rows of canvas bell tents (see Figure 3.1). Hobhouse described the women as “...wonderful: they cry very little and never complain. The very magnitude of their sufferings, indignities, loss and anxiety seems to lift them beyond tears...Only when it cuts afresh at them through their children do their feelings flash out.”¹⁸⁷ The children bore the brunt of the suffering. Mrs. Meintjes, for example, had six children; all sick. Two were in the hospital with typhoid and the other four were sick in the tent. Hobhouse lamented, “It is such a wholesale cruelty and one of which England must be ashamed. It never can be wiped out of the memories of people here. And it presses hardest on the children. They droop in the terrible heat and with the insufficient, unsuitable food.”¹⁸⁸



Figure 3.1 *Boer Children in the Camps*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Beyond her emotional criticism of the camps, Hobhouse did offer constructive solutions to improve the situation. First, she recommended that a matron, who could speak both Dutch and English be added to the officer-in-charge of every camp. While supervising the “morals” of the camp she would also be a resource to the women and their gender specific problems. Second, a mortuary tent needed to be added. Corpses rotting in the heat, left in occupied tents, were unsanitary and putrid. More water was needed. Two buckets a day for seven or eight people did not come close to meeting washing, cooking, and drinking needs. Soap should be added to the rations. Finally, some form of schooling needed to be provided for the children.

Not all camps were as dire as Bloemfontein. Norvals Pont had an adequate supply of fresh water pumped in from a nearby spring. The Orange River was therefore relegated to bathing and washing. Hobhouse reported,

Much to my delight I found there was much less overcrowding in Norvals Pont and that each tent was supplied with a low wooden bed, one or more mattresses, a bench table utensils. Consequently the whole aspect of the people was different. The rations also were slightly better. There was no violent outbreak of sickness...two large marquees are set apart and mistresses (teachers) duly certified are available from the camp population.¹⁸⁹

The conditions in all of the camps were inadequate, however the degree of scarcity was primarily a function of the energy of the superintendent, the proximity of fresh water and fuel, and the charitable support provided by the local community. As Hobhouse travelled about the countryside distributing relief, Kitchener continued with his sweeps. Thousands more women and children were being herded into the already overcrowded camps. Brought in by rail cars, the scene at railway sidings was appalling.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

Open trucks full of women and children, exposed to the icy rain of the high veld, sometimes left in railway sidings for days at a time, without food or shelter...truck-loads of homeless mixed up with animals of the veld, 'frightened animals bellowing...for food and drink, tangled up with wagons...and a dense crowd of human beings.' Here was 'war in all its destructiveness, cruelty, stupidity, and nakedness.'¹⁹⁰

In her memoirs, Hobhouse described a scene that would become the subject depicted at the *Vrouemonument*, or Women's Memorial erected in 1913 (see Figure 3.3).

The people massed here had no tents. Some crept under the railway trucks while some had begged for bits of sailcloth from Tommies...To such a shelter I was called to see a sick baby. The mother sat on her little trunk with the child across her knee. She had nothing to give it and the child was sinking fast...There was nothing to be done and we watched the child draw its last breath in reverent silence.

The mother neither moved nor wept. It was her only child. Dry-eyed but deathly white, she sat there motionless looking not at the child but far, far away into depths of grief beyond all tears.¹⁹¹

By the time Hobhouse returned to Bloemfontein in April, the number of people housed at the camp had doubled. While death was ever present, the overcrowding exacerbated the mortality rates. Death rates peaked in the African winter and spring of 1901. There were 2,666 deaths in August (a mortality rate of 311 per 1,000 per annum), 2,752 in September (287 per 1,000 per annum), and 3,205 in October (344 per 1,000 per annum).¹⁹² Children suffered the most. At the Middelburg camp, 342 of 3,567 children died in July 1901. In August, 270 of the 1,727 children at the Kroonstad camp died.¹⁹³ According to Jan Smuts the total white population of the two Boer republics was less than 200,000 at the start of the war. If his estimate is correct, the Boers lost over 10% of their population in the

¹⁹⁰ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 507.

¹⁹¹ Hobhouse and Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 112.

¹⁹² Warwick, *The South African War : The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 170.

¹⁹³ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 215.

concentration camps.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, 14,000 native Africans died in other camps where conditions were generally worse.¹⁹⁵

On May 24, 1901, Hobhouse arrived back in England determined to direct the attention of the government and the British public to improving camp conditions. Through her letters, reports of the awful “refugee” situation preceded Hobhouse’s return. Brodrick had informed Kitchener that ‘pretty bad reports’ had been received. In April, anticipating the looming outcry, Brodrick wrote:

I think I shall have a hot time over these, probably in most cases inevitable sufferings or privations – war of course is war – and we cannot expect everything, nor have I personally a very strong bias in favor of those who are still fighting being assured of all they care about being in comfort, but we must do the best we can for them. Tell me all that will help the defense.¹⁹⁶

The Liberal backlash against the concentration camps was, as expected, unbridled. Despite government efforts to justify the internment of civilians as part of a broader and increasingly successful military campaign, a decision was reached in early July to appoint and disburse a Commission to investigate the camps and to recommend practical improvements. In an unprecedented move for 1901, the Commission consisted of six women only. Two were doctors, one a nurse, and the leader was Millicent Fawcett. Fawcett was a Liberal Unionist and the head of the women’s suffrage movement. Lady Knox, wife of Major-General Sir William Knox, Kitchener’s general, also accompanied her.¹⁹⁷ Despite their differing backgrounds, all of these women shared a common belief; the war was just. From August to December, they travelled across the veld in a specially designated

¹⁹⁴ Warwick, *The South African War : The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 170.

¹⁹⁵ Lowry, *The South African War Reappraised*, 2.

¹⁹⁶ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 216.

¹⁹⁷ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 515.

second-class train. Fawcett was suspicious of anyone who might be “pro-Boer” and she refused assistance from those in South Africa who had been associated with Hobhouse. In turn, Hobhouse and her supporters instantly dubbed Fawcett’s group “The Whitewashing Commission.”¹⁹⁸ Total strangers sent letters of abuse to Fawcett. One read,

How can you expect the Boer women to make you their confidante when they know perfectly well (as we know too) that you have been sent to South Africa for the express purpose of whitewashing the administration of the Concentration Camps? You have been well paid for your dirty work, and that ought to be a sufficient reward to you.¹⁹⁹

Hobhouse cynically referred to Fawcett and her colleagues as “great and shining lights in the feminine world, they make one rather despair of the ‘new womanhood’ – so utterly wanting are they in commonsense, sympathy and equilibrium.”²⁰⁰ As the Ladies’ Commission continued to visit camps, gathering evidence, and preparing their report, Hobhouse’s frustration with the process reached a crescendo. In an open letter to Brodrick and the press she begged, “Will nothing be done? Will no prompt measures be taken to deal with this terrible evil? Instead we had to wait a month while six ladies were chosen.

During that month 576 children died.”²⁰¹ She wrote to Kitchener on November 1, 1901,

Your brutality has triumphed over my weakness and sickness. You have forgotten so to be a patriot as not to forget that you are a gentleman. I hope that in the future you will exercise greater width of judgment in the exercise of your high office. To carry out orders such as these is a degradation both to the office and the manhood of your soldiers. I feel ashamed to own you as a fellow-countryman.²⁰²

To Milner, she wrote on the same day,

Your brutal orders have been carried out and thus I hope you will be satisfied. Your narrow incompetency to see the real issues of this great struggle is leading you to

¹⁹⁸ Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, [1st ed. (London,: J.Murray, 1931), 194.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Hobhouse and Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 462.

²⁰¹ Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, 194.

²⁰² Hobhouse and Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 151.

such acts as this and many others, staining your own name and the reputation of England...You have lost us the heart of a fine people; beware lest that is but the prelude to the loss of their country also.²⁰³

Hobhouse's sentiment toward the treatment of a soon to be defeated foe was one shared by other members of the Liberal establishment. Lloyd George made the argument that, "We want to make loyal British subjects of these people. Is this the way to do it? Brave men will forget injuries to themselves much more readily than they will insults, indignities, and wrongs to their women and children."²⁰⁴

During its three-month investigation, Fawcett's Commission was empowered to and did institute numerous changes. These improvements included the appointment of a travelling Inspector of Camps, compulsory labor of nine hours daily for the good of the camps and the male inmates, compulsory education for school age children, the isolation to hospitals of the seriously ill, an increase in food and fuel rations, the addition of boilers and bake ovens to all camps, the addition of fresh vegetables and lime to summer rations, and the appointment of a camp matron. Further, incompetent camp superintendents as well as doctors were replaced.²⁰⁵ Of the mortality rate in the camps, the Commission stated,

The high death rate in camps may, we believe, be attributed to three groups of causes, viz.:

1. The insanitary condition of the country caused by the war.
2. Causes within the control of the inmates of his camps.
3. Causes within the control of the administrations.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 509.

²⁰⁵ "Report on the Concentration Camps in South Africa, by the Committee of Ladies Appointed by the Secretary of State for War; Containing Report on the Camps in Natal, the Orange River Colony, and the Transvaal," ed. Parliament (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1902), 9-13.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

Of the causes listed above, perhaps the most contested was the second. It redirected blame for the high mortality rate back to the unsanitary habits of the Boers themselves. Embraced by the Jingo press, it was fervently discounted by the Liberals as a denial of culpability. The Commission report compared the Boers to the “more ignorant of the English poor.” It continued,

...the Boer woman has a horror off ventilation...and the tent becomes a hot-bed for the breeding of disease germs. It is not easy to describe the pestilential atmosphere of these tents...The Saxon word ‘stinking’ is the only one which is appropriate...It is, therefore, no wonder that measles, once introduced, has raged through the camps and caused many death; because the children especially are enervated by the foul air their mothers compel them to breathe and fall more easily victims to disease...²⁰⁷

The report further claimed that Boers prefer not to bathe. In addition mothers were accused of inadvertently poisoning their children with laudanum. Dr. Alec Kay observed: “Inflammation of the lungs and enteric fever are frequently treated by the stomach of a sheep or goat which has been killed at the bedside of a patient being placed hot and bloody over the chest or abdomen.”²⁰⁸ Spies notes, “There can be little doubt that there were people in the camps whose habits, ignorance, superstitions and beliefs, and refusal to enter hospitals, made them unsuitable members of a camp community.”²⁰⁹ However this does not explain the disparity between different camp death rates or the marked decrease in the number of deaths once reforms were implemented.

There was a more subtle reality predisposing the Boer children to infection. Most Boer families lived on isolated farms or in small villages. They socialized only occasionally and then for brief periods. Sick children were left at home. They enjoyed healthy diets and

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰⁸ Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 195.

²⁰⁹ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? : Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, 267.

relative isolation; unexposed to infectious diseases. Not surprisingly, malnutrition resulted when those with the least resistance were introduced into unsanitary, overcrowded conditions with inadequate shelter and food. In a weakened physical state, mundane childhood illnesses became lethal. “Then when epidemics of scarlet fever, gastroenteritis and measles began, the doctors compounded their error, systematically starving the camp inmates of the vitamins which were so badly needed...”²¹⁰ Ultimately, *all three* causes identified by the Commission contributed to the tragedy in the camps.

The report was “severely practical”. Nothing was “whitewashed” from start to finish, and yet pro-Boers denounced it. One article claimed, “...there was not a word of pity for the misery they witnessed...No one would dream of charging Mrs. Fawcett or any of the ladies forming her Committee with ‘hysteria’ or sentimentality.”²¹¹ However, the task of the Commission had not been to garner empathy. It had been to critically evaluate the camp situation and propose concrete solutions. While Hobhouse criticized their unsympathetic attitude, she later admitted in her book *The Brunt of War and Where it Fell* that the Commission did not shy away from condemning poorly chosen campsites, dismissing inept administrators, and initiating remedies. Once the recommendations of the Commission were adopted, mortality rates declined dramatically, and no further serious complaints about the camps were received.

Memorialization of the Camps in the Creation of Afrikaner History

It was unlikely that Lloyd George fully appreciated the accuracy of his statement when he forebode,

²¹⁰ Lee, *To the Bitter End : A Photographic History of the Boer War 1899-1902*, 186.

²¹¹ Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, 197.

When children are being treated in this way and dying, we are simply ranging the deepest passions of the human heart against British rule in Africa...it will always be remembered that this is the way British rule started there, and this is the method by which it was brought about.²¹²

In the years and decades following the end of the war, Afrikaner nationalists embraced the deaths in the concentration camps as a shared national calamity that touched all volk. The memory of the camps became a unifying tool as the Afrikaner identity was sculpted.

Further, nationalists positioned the Boer internees as innocent victims. As they created an apartheid state, Afrikaners dared the world to question their policies of racial oppression in light of “what had been done to their women and children” during the war. “[The war] became more and more manipulated, privatized actually-it was only the Boers’ war, it was only the Afrikaner’s pain and misery, and so it was used as an ogre to say everyone was against us...big world powers wanted to destroy us...and we even had to make unjust laws for the sake of our self-preservation.”²¹³

Post the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, Afrikaners literally had to invent themselves. Benedict Anderson argues in his book *Imagined Communities*, that nations are systems of representations through which people imagine a shared experience of identification with a broader community.²¹⁴ In addition to the need to create a single print-language, a literate populace, and a popular press, the nationalists endeavored to invent a political tradition/history. In the production of a national political mythology certain events were memorialized as triumphs such as the Great Trek and the defeat of the

²¹² Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 509.

²¹³ Liz Stanley, *Mourning Becomes - : Post/Memory and Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War* (Manchester ; New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 1.

²¹⁴ Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983).

Zulus at Blood River in 1838, and the Boer defeat of the British in Transvaal Rebellion in 1881. The concentration camps were, on the other hand, positioned as a time of testing where God's chosen people had fallen from grace. The rise of nationalism in the 1930s as embodied in the Centenary *Tweede Trek* of 1938 and the National Party election victory of 1948 placed the Afrikaners once again in God's favor. In 1902, Emily Hobhouse published *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell*. E. Neethling followed in 1903, with *Should We Forget*. Both books were widely distributed in South Africa and contained poignant testimonials of Boer women who had been incarcerated.

In 1906, one of the early authors of Afrikanerdom, ex-Free State President Steyn, proposed the idea of a national monument to commemorate the Boer women and children who had died in the concentration camps.²¹⁵ The monument was funded through subscriptions, with money raised not only in South Africa but also in Britain and elsewhere. It was built near Bloemfontein, at the site of the first concentration camp with one of the highest mortality rates. Aptly named the National Women's Memorial or the *Nasionale Vrouemonument*, it makes no reference to the 6,000 Boer men who died in combat or in the camps, nor does it mention any of the black or colored women who were imprisoned or died. The monument was designed as a circular enclosure where women stand weeping with their children beneath a tall obelisk.

²¹⁵ Elsie Cloete, "Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender," *Agenda*, no. 13 (1992): 48.



Figure 3.2 *Nasionale Vrouemonument*

McClintock notes, “By portraying the Afrikaner *nation* symbolically as a weeping woman, the mighty male embarrassment of military defeat could be overlooked and the memory of women’s vital efforts during the war washed away in images of feminine tears and maternal loss.”²¹⁶

Emily Hobhouse was invited to the dedication of the monument on December 16, 1913, but was unable to attend due to failing health. (Following her death in 1926, Hobhouse’s ashes were transferred from England to Bloemfontein and placed in a niche at the monument.) She did however prepare a speech that was read, in shortened form, to the 20,000 people in attendance. It was later printed in a special commemorative issue of *Die Volksblad* [The People’s Paper].²¹⁷ What was printed and was not printed revealed much about burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism. This cautionary paragraph was frequently reproduced.

²¹⁶ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather : Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 378.

²¹⁷ Stanley, *Mourning Becomes - : Post/Memory and Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War*, 52.

Beware lest you forget what caused that struggle in the past. We died without a murmur to bear out part in saving our country from those who loved her not but only desired her riches. Do not confuse the issues and join hands with those who look on her with eyes of greed and not with eyes of love.²¹⁸

Noticeably absent, however, was the following plea for racial harmony.

We meet on Dingaan's Day, your memorial of victory over a barbarous race... Does not justice bid us remember today how many thousands of the dark race perished also in the Concentration Camps in a quarrel that was not theirs? Did they not thus redeem the past? Was it not an instance of that community of interest, which binding all in one, roots our racial animosity?²¹⁹

Further, references to gender equality were omitted.

For remember, these dead women were not great as the world counts greatness; some of them were quite poor...yet they have become a moral force in your land...They have shown the world that never again can it be said that woman deserves no rights as Citizen because she takes not part in war. This statue stands as a denial of that assertion.²²⁰

After all, it would be another twenty years before women were granted the right to vote in South Africa. Further, the icon of the *Volksmoeder* [mother of the nation] as crafted by the male Afrikaner nationalists disempowered the hardy Boer woman of the veld and placed her as distinctly subservient to the men of the rising *Broederbond* [Afrikaner Brotherhood; exclusive organization of male, white, Protestants]. McClintock observes, "...women's martial role as fighters and farmers was purged of its indecorously militant potential and replaced by the figure of the lamenting mother with babe in arms. The monument enshrined Afrikaner womanhood as neither militant nor political, but as suffering, stoical and self-sacrificing."²²¹

²¹⁸ Hobhouse and Van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse : Boer War Letters*, 403.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 406-07.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 407.

²²¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather : Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, 378.

However, this portrayal of the weeping Afrikaner woman is paradoxical. Women did play a crucial role in the invention of Afrikanerdom. The Afrikaner household was the last bastion beyond British control. Women undertook the task of transforming every aspect of daily life into symbols of the Afrikaner spirit. Food, clothing, and furniture all became distinctly Afrikaans. While the Vrouemonument attempted to erase Afrikaner women's historic agency, it also sought to negate their complicity in the history of apartheid. However, white women were *not* weeping victims of apartheid history. They were active participants in the conception of the Afrikaner identity. "As such they were complicit in deploying the power of motherhood in the exercise and legitimation of white domination."²²²

From their inception, the refugee or concentration camps were ill conceived. The male dominated Victorian military apparatus was completely unprepared for and in many instances indifferent to the care of over 100,000 civilian internees, primarily women and children. A confluence of catastrophes including poor sanitation, inadequate supplies, malnutrition, and contagious diseases culminated in the senseless deaths of 28,000 Boers as well as an estimated 14,000 native Africans. In spite of post-war Afrikaner efforts to portray the deaths as intentional on the part of the British, there is no evidence to support this allegation. Unlike the Nazi death camps of World War II, the deaths in South Africa resulted from maladministration and not a genocidal policy.

Women played a crucial role in the exposé and rectification of deficient camp conditions. While hailing from very different political backgrounds, both Emily Hobhouse and Millicent Fawcett set aside individual biases for or against the war to concentrate on

²²² Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa," *Transition*, no. 51 (1991): 110.

humanitarian relief. As a result of their efforts, conditions in the camps were drastically improved.

Even in death however, the concentration camp victims found little rest. Their individual suffering was usurped as a nationally shared tragedy, incorporated into an Afrikaner mythology, and manipulated to justify the oppression of apartheid.

CHAPTER 4

God's Divine Providence for His People

"Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself."²²³ The Afrikaner people were the vine and this was the biblical basis for their claim over South Africa. As discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two, this theology was not fully developed among the actual participants of events such as the Great Trek and the Transvaal Rebellion. Templin notes that it was first systematized in 1877 by S.J. du Toit's *The History of our Land in the Language of our People* and in 1882 by C.P. Bezuidenhout in *The History of the Afrikaner Lineage from 1688 to 1882*.²²⁴ Bezuidenhout interpreted Afrikaner history in the following context:

It is the wish and prayer of the author that his nation and descendants may gain wisdom from this history, and that they may be convinced that, just as Israel of old Egypt was planted as a vine in Canaan and protected, so also our nation, this people who came from Holland, France, and Germany and were by God's Providence planted in Africa, may be preserved.²²⁵

It is relevant, therefore, to consider what changes occurred in the Afrikaner community during the nineteenth century leading up to this theologically augmented national awakening. The Voortrekker settlements and the embryonic republican communities of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal were culturally insulated. They lacked regular schools and the organized church of the Cape Colony was noticeably absent. There was no easy access to newspapers or literature. The Afrikaners of the frontier were in effect cut off

²²³ *The Holy Bible : Containing the Old and New Testaments : New Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Psalm 80: 14-15.

²²⁴ Templin, "God and the Covenant in the South African Wilderness," 282.

²²⁵ Van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868 -1881*, 192.

from much of the development of social thought sweeping the rest of the world. Du Toit points out that,

It is in fact a matter of considerable difficulty to ascertain just what the patterns of political thinking and religious belief were that formed under these conditions. But whatever they may have been, they cannot be summarily equated with the views that obtained in the very different set of conditions that existed *after* the various frontiers had finally closed.²²⁶

By the 1860s and 1870s, the republics were becoming much less socially and culturally insulated. Road construction linked the interior to main ports, standardized education was established, organized religion in the form of functioning congregations spread to the villages throughout the interior, central and local governments became more efficient, regional and local newspapers grew in circulation, and finally, railways connected the whole of South Africa in the 1870s and 1880s. By the 1890s, even the rural Afrikaners lived in an entirely different world than their predecessors two generations earlier.

Changes in church practices and religious traditions were particularly conspicuous. Among the Voortrekkers, religious practices of frontier farmers were centered on Bible readings within a patriarchal family unit with quarterly meetings for Holy Communion. Subsequent Afrikaner church history was transformed by external influences. Missionary societies, especially their criticism of colonial conquest and labor practices, had contributed to intense political and religious debate from the early nineteenth century. The London Missionary Society, specifically Dr. John Philip aroused the ire of the Afrikaners. According to Jack Boss and Michael Weiskoff,

But despite the Revival's concern over the rising influence of Reason, it too was considerably affected by the very rationalism it attacked. The platform of the LMS,

²²⁶ André Du Toit, "Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner "Calvinism" and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 2 (1985): 216.

for example was based on “broad and liberal principles” and called for the cooperation of all interested denominations. The Society’s Fundamental Principle, formulated in 1796, stated that its design was “to send out not, Presbyterians, Independency, Episcopacy or any other form of Church Order and Government...but the Glorious Gospel of the blessed God...”; and not only the “heathen and other enlightened nations” but “the whole human race” were deemed proper material for religious instruction.²²⁷

It was the last clause of this mission statement that the Afrikaners took personally. They went on to blame the evangelicals for the passage of Ordinance 50 and the process of gelykstelling. With the arrival of Scottish ministers during the period of British rule, in lieu of clergy from the Netherlands, the Cape Dutch Reformed Church responded by fashioning a “specific tradition of orthodox evangelical piety.”²²⁸ Others challenged the legitimacy of this reversion by claiming to represent true Afrikaner religious tradition, including the separatist S.J. du Toit (inspired by Kuyperian neo-Calvinism).²²⁹

Comprehension of the transition from early Afrikaner religious beliefs to a complex civil theology is further complicated by the formation of a national consciousness in the later part of the nineteenth century. Van Jaarsveld asserts that this nationalism was largely a reaction to British imperial policies in South Africa. Memories of the British failure to respond to the “grievances” of the trekkers had faded with the recognition of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. The Republican North and Colonial South were to some extent remote, lacking a group consciousness. The revival of British imperialism in South Africa commenced with the annexation of Basutoland in 1868 and the diamond fields in 1871 and concluded with the First War of Independence. The British threat forced the

²²⁷ Jack Boas and Michael Weiskopf, “The Activities of the London Missionary Society in South Africa, 1806 - 1836: An Assessment,” *African Studies Review* 16, no. 3 (1973): 420.

²²⁸ Du Toit, “Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner “Calvinism” and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa,” 217.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

Afrikaners in the Cape, the Free State, and the Transvaal to call upon their innate resourcefulness for self-preservation. "Across the territorial borders the upper strata 'discovered' one another and were united in their sympathies in the face of the great danger...They realized that they shared a common fatherland; patriotic feelings entered into their lives and gave voice to nationalistic utterances."²³⁰ An understanding of a shared past could provide insight into the fate of the Afrikaner's future.

How were the volk dispersed? Who were the Afrikaners? Where did they spring from? These enquiries into their own nature and origin, the sum total of common recollections, became a "national" history; it led to a mutual "discovery" and to the creation of an historical image that was "closed" (comprehending all the Afrikaans-speaking)...Examples were sought from the past to throw light on present trials. New grievances resulted in the discovery of old ones. Grudges that had been latent at the time of the Great Trek were activated...²³¹

As their national heritage was threatened, the Afrikaners turned to collective memory for their identity. "They rediscovered the contemporary struggle in the past and the conflicts of the past were viewed therefore with contemporary eyes."²³² The adulation for the Voortrekkers that became core to the Afrikaner civil theology commenced around the period of the two Anglo-Boer Wars.

At the confluence of religion and nationalism was Calvinistic doctrine. For Christians, suffering is not always a sign of God's anger and rejection. Rather, suffering and tribulation are judged in the context of Christ's crucifixion and ultimate sacrifice on the cross. This commonality between Christians and Christ Himself, may indeed be taken as confirmation of God's favor. Suffering therefore becomes an assurance of righteousness

²³⁰ Floris Albertus Van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History* (Cape Town: Simondium Publishers Ltd., 1964), 55.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*, 59.

with God. As the cross was the instrument of death, Christians are called to bear crosses in imitation of Christ. Calvin wrote:

How much can it do to soften all the bitterness of the cross, that the more we are afflicted with adversities, the more surely our fellowship with Christ is confirmed...to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake is a singular comfort. For it ought to occur to us how much honor God bestows upon us in thus furnishing us with the special badge of his soldiery.²³³

Moodie notes that, "the logic of Christian theodicy does not rest alone in the notion of suffering for righteousness' sake."²³⁴ The pain of the cross is followed by resurrection and the promise of eternal life. Calvin stated further, "Whenever we consider the resurrection, let Christ's image come before us. In the nature which he took from us he so completed the course of mortal life that now, having obtained immortality, he is the pledge of coming resurrection."²³⁵ The Afrikaners superimposed Christ's passion and resurrection upon their own sufferings of the Great Trek and the establishment of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal republics. As the God, who seemed to have forsaken His own son on Good Friday raised Him on Easter Sunday, so too had He allowed Piet Retief and his cavalcade to be struck down at Dingane's Golgotha only to raise up their descendants in their own free states. In his 1848 manifesto to Governor Smith delivered just six years prior to the recognition of the Orange Free State's independence, Andries Pretorius made the following appeal at Bloemfontein. He had left Natal following British annexation.

Oh, we could mention a volume of hardships and support them with many testimonies of truth; however, we will pass it all by. But we wish to entreat Your Excellency to leave us unmolested and without further interference, on those grounds which we have justly obtained from the legal proprietors, and thus we shall

²³³ T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom; Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, Perspectives on Southern Africa, (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1975), 13.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

exclaim to the world and our Creator, (who we know looks down upon us from on high, and to Him alone we owe all gratitude and reverence), that we have not yet been totally extirpated.²³⁶

For the Afrikaner it was only a small step to extrapolate the resurrection analogy to its final conclusion. As Christ's second coming was promised, so did the young republics foreshadow the arrival of an even greater united republic. As John prophesized in his Book of Revelations, the Afrikaner awaited final republican triumph.

Then I saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out off heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.'²³⁷

Because of God's election of the Afrikaner, anything that threatened Boer separateness was considered not of God or satanic. British imperialism was cast as the greatest perpetual evil and could be traced from Slagtersnek through any contemporary testing. As Slagtersnek marks the nascence of imperial persecution for the Afrikaner, a brief summary of the event is warranted.

Thompson considers Slagtersnek "a tale about a particular historical episode, which is interpreted as illustrating both elements in the core mythology [of apartheid]- the ethnic element and the racial element."²³⁸ The episode occurred on the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony between 1815 and 1816. In April of 1813, a Khoikhoi servant known as Booy brought a complaint before the circuit court, later to be named the Black Circuit of 1812.

According to Booy, his employer, Cornelis Fredrick Bezuidenhout, known as "Freek,"

²³⁶ Du Toit and Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought : Analysis and Documents*, 225.

²³⁷ *The Holy Bible : Containing the Old and New Testaments : New Revised Standard Version*, Revelation 21: 1-5.

²³⁸ Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*, 105.

withheld some of his pay and would not allow him to leave with his cattle, in spite of the fact that his contract of employment had expired. Over the course of the next two years, Freek repeatedly refused to respond to Booy's allegations. By 1815, two colonial judges found Freek guilty of contempt of court and sentenced him to one month's imprisonment. The undersheriff charged with arresting Freek could not get help from the local civilian authorities and instead turned to a detachment of the Cape Regiment. Locals considered Freek dangerous; a member of the Boer's society fringe element. He never married yet had been involved in transient relationships with Colored women and fathered several children with different partners. On October 15, 1815, the undersheriff, accompanied by sixteen Colored soldiers and two white officers, confronted Freek at his farm.²³⁹ As they approached, Freek along with his son fired warning shots and retreated to a cave on a nearby hillside. After several hours of verbal stalemate, a Colored sergeant entered the cave to arrest Freek, and seeing him standing with his rifle mounted, shot him dead. At a rowdy gathering following Freek's funeral, Freek's brother, Hans Bezuidenhout, swore vengeance against the three white authorities he believed were responsible for his brother's death at the hands of a Hottentot: Landdrost Stockenstrom (see Chapter 1), the field cornet in Freek's ward, and the officer in charge of the unit that shot Freek.

Hans Bezuidenhout began to organize a conspiracy to challenge British civil authority and the Cape Regiment in the Baviaans River area. He gathered a motley gang, most of whom had dubious histories smattered with petty crimes and minor rebellions. By November word of the plot reached the colonial authorities. There was in fact little local support amongst the Boers of the eastern frontier for Bezuidenhout. When an accomplice,

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

Kasteel Prinsloo, was arrested and imprisoned at a military post called Vanaardtspos, Bezuidenhout set out with a force of two hundred armed men to demand his release. Confronted by a loyalist Boer force and British dragoons, most dispersed or surrendered, but Bezuidenhout, his family and several others fled northward into Xhosa territory. On November 29, the contingent of Boers and Cape Regiment regulars caught up with Bezuidenhout fifty miles north of Slagtersnek. Following a brief firefight, Hans Bezuidenhout was killed, and his wife and son were captured. Shortly thereafter, forty-seven prisoners were tried before the colonial High Court. On January 19, 1816, two judges, both of whom were Dutch, delivered their verdict. Thirty-eight were convicted of participating in a rebellion and six were to be hanged near Vanaardtspos. One execution was commuted and the other five were carried out on March 9, 1816. However, the executions did not go smoothly. The hangman arrived with only one rope. When he located four others, they turned out to be rotten. When the trap of the gallows was sprung, four of the ropes snapped leaving the condemned writhing on the ground. Recounting the incident, a local minister wrote,

The hangman was a black. The halters were too weak, or rather, as some suspected, intentionally cut; but no sooner had the delinquents been turned off, and the platform removed, than four of the five fell from the gallows. Having unfortunately been persuaded to believe, that by English custom, a man thus falling down is free, the poor wretches cried for mercy...that by this accident it was made manifest, that God would not permit them to be put to death. The Landdrost...was, however, obliged to let justice take its course, and other halters being procured, they were launched into eternity.²⁴⁰

For much of the nineteenth century, this insurrection faded into oblivion. In fact there does not appear to be any substantial links between Slagtersnek and motivations for the Great Trek. It was S.J. du Toit's *The History of our Land in the Language of our People*,

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

which revived the incident and reinterpreted the events in the light of rising Afrikaner nationalism. The heart of the conflict was not law and order, but British tyranny. The Boers who sided with Cape regiment were traitors and Bezuidenhout and his followers were heroes. Du Toit claimed Slagtersnek was a major cause in the Great Trek. F.W. Reitz, State Secretary of the South African Republic, memorializes the episode in his history published in 1900, *A Century of Wrong*. "It was at Slachter's Nek that the first blood-stained beacon was erected between Boer and Briton in South Africa, and the eyes of posterity still glance back shudderingly through the long vista of years at that tragedy of horror."²⁴¹ Du Toit provided the following verse.

Weep Afrikaners!
 - Here lies your flesh and blood!
 - Martyred in the most brutal fashion.
 Wrong it was to rise up against their government:
 yet they did it not without reason!
 Wrong it was to take up weapons:
 only because they were too weak!
 They were guilty, says the earthly judge;
 but what will the Heavenly Judge have to say?
 ...But come! It grows darker!
 - If we sit here too long we too shall be regarded as conspirators!
 - come, another day will dawn,
 - then we shall perhaps see the grave in another light!
 - come, let us go home with a quiet sigh.²⁴²

Concurrent with the Afrikaner's study of Toit's national history, before his death in exile in 1904, Paul Kruger systematically preached the civil religion that blossomed in the ensuing decades prior to the National Party election victory of 1948. This mixture of religion and nationalism proved intoxicating for the Afrikaner. Kruger was a Voortrekker whose father had joined Hendrik Potgieter, an ultra-conservative Calvinist. With almost no

²⁴¹ Reitz, *A Century of Wrong*, 16.

²⁴² Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom; Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 4.

formal education, Kruger claimed to read only one book, the Bible. When the British annexed the Transvaal in 1877 Kruger led the resistance movement. He ultimately became the president of the South African Republic from 1881 – 1900. Kruger was affectionately known as “Oom Paul” or Uncle Paul. Theologically, Kruger was closely associated with the highly conservative faction of the Dutch Reformed Church, known as the *Doppers*. In 1859, led by *predikants* [ministers] from the Netherlands who embraced a fundamentalist biblical literalism, the *Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid Afrika*, split with the *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk* ruled by the Cape Colonial Synod.²⁴³ While the most public disagreement between the *Doppers* and the more liberal Dutch Reformed factions centered on the former’s opposition to singing evangelical hymns in church, Templin argues there is a much deeper theological schism.

The theological principle the *Doppers* kept uppermost in their minds...They interpreted their covenant with God as their promise to do His will as far as possible in their national as well as their personal life...To fail God, knowingly, was to leave oneself and one’s nation liable for punishments...any activities that opposed the will of God...were to be shunned. The more seriously one took one’s promise to God...the more determined was one’s opposition to changes both in religious forms and political policy. In this way the *Doppers*’ theological attitude gave strength to their growing self-consciousness, as they thought of themselves closer to God than other groups.²⁴⁴

Reinforcing this notion of *Dopper* theology, Moodie interprets Calvin’s doctrine of predestination to include a promise beyond the “covenant of grace” that exists between God and the elect. According to Moodie, Calvin also developed an ethnic covenant or a special calling between God and His chosen people. “This is the doctrine of the ‘intermediate election’ of an ethnic group, which must be distinguished from the

²⁴³ Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion, the First Boer War 1880-1881*, 26.

²⁴⁴ J. Alton Templin, *Ideology on a Frontier : The Theological Foundation of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1652-1910*, Contributions in Intercultural and Comparative Studies, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 151.

individual's special call to salvation."²⁴⁵ Kruger applied the doctrine of a national covenant to the people of South Africa in the context of this intermediate election.

Kruger was careful to distinguish in his speeches between the personal experience of salvation, solidly based on God's reconciling act in Christ, which he called the "inward call" [*inwendige roeping*], and God's "external calling" [*uitwendige roeping*] of the people of the Transvaal. This latter call was proved by God's intervention in their history, a revelation "which God attests to His whole people in the Old Covenant as well as in our own time."²⁴⁶

According to Kruger, God chose his volk in the Cape Colony and called them out into the wilderness. There He subjected them to trials so they would turn to Him for help and strength. When the volk entered into a covenant with God, He delivered them. The Blood River covenant remained central to Kruger's civil theology. However, because God's people had neglected to celebrate His deliverance over Dingane for over thirty years, His wrath re-emerged in the form of British oppression and occupation. Despondent, broken and truly repentant, between four and five thousand Boers gathered at Paardekraal between December 8 and 15, 1880, to once again seek His blessing and renew their covenant with God. Kruger was elected one of a triumvirate that also included Piet Joubert and Mathinus Wessel Pretorius to lead the Boers in their struggle against British annexation of the Transvaal. Kruger responded to his election with:

I stand here before your face, chose by the people; in the voice of the people [*volkstem*] I have heard the voice of God, the King of all people, and I am obedient...The people have never forsaken the rule of law. After the annexation they protested, have resisted and suffered, and would have attempted every other peaceful means had not English Authority in Pretoria made this impossible. The right of the people are on our side; and although we are very weak, God is a just God. My friends! May the Lord bless your activities and protect our Fatherland.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Du Toit, "Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner "Calvinism" and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa," 222.

²⁴⁶ Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom; Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 26.

²⁴⁷ Templin, *Ideology on a Frontier : The Theological Foundation of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1652-1910*, 173.

Nine months later, the Transvaal celebrated its restored independence on August 8, 1881. At the opening session of the Volksraad Kruger reminded the people of God's favor in light of their renewed covenant. "We are...sure that that God who has so visibly led us hitherto, will not withhold from you His support and help, but will complete the work of his hands...When at Paardekraal the Government undertook its important task, the people bound themselves by a solemn oath. This oath is faithfully fulfilled, and the unity of purpose of the people will be the strength of the land."²⁴⁸

Along with the Great Trek and Blood River, the independence of the Transvaal republic became a third precept of Kruger's civil faith. A pattern of disobedience, reckoning, and reconciliation characterized his simple theology. Accordingly, Psalm 89 was one of Kruger's favorite Old Testament verses:

If they violate my statutes
And do not keep my commandments;
Then I will punish their transgression with the rod
And their iniquity with scourges
But I will not remove from him my steadfast love
Or be false to my faithfulness.
I will not violate my covenant,
Or alter the word that went forth from my lips.²⁴⁹

But who were the "people" that Kruger referred to at Paardekraal? Were all of the inhabitants of the Transvaal; Boers, English speaking whites, and indigenous Blacks to be included in God's elect. What is certain is that the native Africans were not among the elect. Van Jaarsveld asserts that frontier isolation increased the Boers' literal biblical interpretation. As the Israelites had been cautioned by God not to intermarry with the

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁴⁹ *The Holy Bible : Containing the Old and New Testaments : New Revised Standard Version*, Psalm 89: 31-34.

Canaanites, so too were the Afrikaners not to intermix with the non-White South Africans. The natives were not only descendants of Ham but they were equated with the Canaanites as occupants of God's promised land for the Afrikaners. The Boers referred to them as *naatsies* or nations without the law.²⁵⁰ In contrast to his more extreme countrymen, Kruger insisted, at least notionally, on equality before the law for all people and advocated missionary evangelism. He argued that Christianized Africans might own land in white areas. In practice however, Kruger acquiesced to the popular view that no black man, heathen or Christian could ever be a member of the Transvaal volk. Again theoretically, before the First War of Independence and even in the interwar years, Kruger considered Englishmen as part of the volk. At one of his Paardekraal speeches following the influx of foreigners that accompanied the discovery of gold in 1886, Kruger maintained "that the 'external calling' of the Transvaalers applied to all: 'the old inhabitants of the land, foreigners, new immigrants, yea even murderers and thieves.'"²⁵¹ However, for Kruger the independence of the republic was paramount and the rights of any individual or ethnic group were therefore secondary. "I shall particularly ensure that the independence of the land is not in the least endangered; not the least right which might undermine the independence of the land shall be given over...Indeed, God led us visibly so that the blindest heathen and the unbelieving creature must acknowledge that it was God's hand which gave us the independence."²⁵²

With the onslaught of the South African War in 1899, political rhetoric focused more on the "old inhabitants of the land" as the true volk, and English speakers were juxtaposed

²⁵⁰ Van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, 7.

²⁵¹ Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom; Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 31.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

as part of the opposition. Perhaps the best indication of the degree to which civil religion had pervaded the collective consciousness of the Afrikaners is found in the minutes of the debates at Vereeniging in May of 1902. General de Wet, who was determined not to surrender pleaded, "The war is a matter of faith...Let us again renew our covenant with God. If we fix our eyes on the past...we have ground to continue in faith. The entire war has been a miracle and without faith it would have been childish to commence the war."²⁵³ Yet, not everyone adhered to blind obedience toward God's "perceived" will. General Hertzog retorted, "It grieves me that in every public meeting the question of religion is touched upon. It is continuously said that this or that is God's finger. Now, although I also have my beliefs, I say that neither you nor I know in the least what is the finger of God! God has given us a reason and a conscience, and if these lead us we need not follow anything else..."²⁵⁴ For the Afrikaner grappling with the humiliation of military defeat coupled with widespread destruction of farms and death in the concentration camps, solace was to be found in the assurance that in the cycle of civil theology "reckoning" always preceded "reconciliation". Kruger ended his memoirs with the following reaffirmation of faith. "

For, quite apart from the fact that the bloodshed and the fearful sufferings of the people of the two Republics are now ended, I am convinced that God does not forsake His people, even though it may often appear so. Therefore I resign myself to the will of the Lord. I know that He will not allow the afflicted people to perish. He is the Lord and all hearts are in His hand and He turneth them whithersoever He will.²⁵⁵

D.F. Malan, who would lead the National Party to victory in 1948, lucidly presented his understanding of God's providence and promise when he said,

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁵⁵ Kruger, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger, Four Times President of the South African Republic*, 329-30.

Our history is the greatest masterpiece of the centuries. We hold this nationhood as our due for it was given us by the Architect of the universe. [His] aim was the formation of a new nation among the nations of the world...The last hundred years have witnessed a miracle behind which must lie a divine plan. Indeed, the history of the Afrikaner reveals a will and a determination which makes one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of men but the creation of God.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom; Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 1.

CONCLUSION

The 19th century Afrikaners were descendents of Dutch, French, and German immigrants. During the 17th and 18th centuries, miscegenation, particularly with slaves from Asian parts of the Dutch empire, was not uncommon. The majority of the Dutch arrived as servants of the Dutch East India Company. They were, for the most part, from the lesser rungs of Dutch society. Despite their low social status, they were aware of the oppression their nation had suffered at the hands of the Spanish. They brought with them an inherent spirit of independence, knowledge of republicanism, and a disdain for imperial oppression. Interaction with the indigenous Africans was frequently contentious. The Khoikhoi and the San were subjugated in the Cape Colony. On the frontiers violence erupted with the Xhosa and the Zulus. McClintock notes, "Afrikaners had no monolithic identity, no common historic purpose, and no single unifying language. They were a disunited, scattered people, speaking a medley of High Dutch and local dialects, with smatterings of slave, Nguni and Khoisan languages..."²⁵⁷

With the permanent arrival of the British in 1806, initially the Afrikaners noticed little change in their day-to-day existence. There were confrontations such as the 1816 incident with Freek Bezuidenhout at Slagtersnek, but this was more the exception than the norm. However as British policy increasingly provided liberties for non-Whites, the Afrikaners began to chafe at the imperial bit. The transition from colonizer to colonized simply proved unpalatable to some. Specifically Ordinance 50, the "Extension of Hottentot Liberties" in 1828, and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1834, were more than the Boers could bear. With their captive labor force depleted and land becoming increasingly scarce, groups of

²⁵⁷ Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," *Feminist Review*, no. 44 (1993): 68.

Afrikaners left the Cape Colony and migrated eastward and northward. Known as Voortrekkers, their departure was not a nationalistic statement of resistance. They simply left in groups; often lead by charismatic and prominent burghers such as Potgieter, Maritz, Retief, Uys, and Pretorius. Yet there was often disagreement amongst these leaders and there was no coordinated form of governance that transcended all the Voortrekkers. The trek was perilous as evidenced by the slaughter of Piet Retief and his followers at the hands of Dingane. However retribution was absolute. The Battle of Blood River demonstrated the advantage of modern weapons in the hands of relatively few against a numerically superior native force armed with spears. In and of itself, the Great Trek was not a nationalistic movement. The Afrikaners remained independently minded and primarily focused on their individual self interests. It was only a century later, in the hands of the Afrikaner nationalist historians, that the Great Trek became invaluable. The Battle of Blood River and the covenant sworn by Pretorius were resurrected as confirmation of God's divine destiny for the Afrikaner people. Daniel Francis Malan, leader of the "Purified" National Party, published the following message in the magazine *Die Huisgenoot*.

Genuine religion, unadulterated freedom, and the pure preservation of one's white race and civilization are essential requirements for our own People's existence. Without this the South African people can have no soul and also no future.

If that is true, then the Great Trek was the most important, most decisive, and all-overshadowing event in our People's history. The Great Trek gave our People its soul. It was the cradle of our nationhood. It will always show us the beacons on our path and serve as our lighthouse in our night.²⁵⁸

The Transvaal Rebellion was a pivotal moment in Afrikaner national awareness. Following the Sand River Convention of 1852 and the Bloemfontein Convention of 1854, South Africa was divided into the "colonies" and the "republics". The South African Republic or the Transvaal

²⁵⁸ Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*, 40.

was remote and isolationist. The Orange Free State maintained closer relations with the British authorities and the populace of the Cape Colony and Natal. The Transvaalers themselves had little sense of allegiance to the government in Pretoria. Van Jaarsveld notes:

...the farmers were kings on their own ground, and their interests stretched only as far as the boundaries of their own farms. Each was his own politician, wanted full say and share in the Government and furthermore also the right to apply censure; they enjoyed a freedom that was almost exaggerated; and they showed a sense of independence that made it difficult for them to accept authority... There was no feeling of having a link with the State or having a common fatherland; there was no Transvaal "nation", only a collection of several families each of whom helped themselves to the best of their ability.²⁵⁹

It was the 1877 annexation of the Transvaal that bound the previously loosely connected Afrikaners. The loss of freedom and the reality of an alien administration made the Boers appreciate and yearn for what they had once taken for granted. Newspapers such as the *Volksstem* and the *Cape Patriot* unified Afrikaners not only in the Transvaal but also throughout South Africa. Of greater importance to the shaping of a political consciousness was the initiation of mass meetings of the people where the future of the country was openly discussed. In April of 1879, 4,000 burghers gathered at Kleinfontein and in December of the same year, over 6,300 attended a rally at Wonderfontein. It was there, while standing under the Vierkleur, that Nicolaas Smit, hero of Majuba Hill, had exclaimed, "Men, this flag the flies here is the flag of our fathers, treasured by them and doubly treasured by us."²⁶⁰ Prior to the annexation, President Burgers could hardly garner 1,000 men for a commando; now they congregated together of their own free will. The pinnacle of these meetings was Paardekraal in December of 1880, where Kruger gave his inspirational speeches, infused with his Calvinistic beliefs of a divine destiny for God's chosen people, the Afrikaners. The struggle of the Transvaal Rebellion united not only the

²⁵⁹ Van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868 -1881*, 157.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 158-59.

Transvaalers, but more importantly Afrikaners throughout the Orange Free State and the colonies as well. Of the Cape Colony, Jan Hofmeyr wrote: "The annexation of the Transvaal has taught the people of South Africa that blood is thicker than water. It has filled the (Cape) Afrianders, otherwise groveling in the mud of materialism, with a national glow of sympathy for the brothers across the Vaal, which we look upon as one of the most hopeful signs for the future."²⁶¹ A memorandum signed by six hundred and forty two Potchefstroom burghers was sent to the Orange Free State, thanking them for their sympathy and beseeching them to come help. "We are all of one flesh and blood. We serve one and the same cause. We all strive for Freedom and Religion. The same danger threatens you too. Our welfare is your welfare; our freedom is your freedom."²⁶² The camaraderie of the Free Staters was captured in the *Free State Express*. "Notwithstanding all previous differences we feel that we are one nation with the same love for freedom, the same hatred for oppression."²⁶³ The battles of Bronkhorstspuit, Laing's Nek, and Majuba Hill and their accompanying tales of Boer pluck and cunning, all served to further hearten and unify the Afrikaners. With independence restored in August of 1881, having defeated the greatest imperial power on Earth, the future seemed bright.

Unfortunately for the Afrikaners, with the advent of the South African War of 1899-1902, the era of imperial reprieve came to a stark conclusion. Both Field Marshall Roberts and his chief of staff Lord Kitchener had studied the fighting tactics of the Boers. They realized that guerilla style warfare would require an unconventional response. The British undertook a two-pronged offensive, which while not intentionally designed to target

²⁶¹ Sheila Patterson, *The Last Trek; a Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner Nation* (London,: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 26.

²⁶² Van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868 -1881*, 168.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 187.

civilians, did in fact gravely affect them. The first was a scorched earth policy of burning Boer farms in regions where guerilla activity was persistently disruptive. The idea was to diminish supplies available to the Boer commandos. The second was the establishment of refugee or concentration camps for the displaced Boer families and surrendered burghers. Hastily erected, with little foresight for the needs of women and children, the camps quickly deteriorated. Disease, poor hygiene, and insufficient food and water all contributed to death rates approaching epidemic levels. Thanks to women like Emily Hobhouse and Millicent Fawcett reports of the camp conditions reached Britain. Under pressure from opposition party leaders led by Campbell-Bannerman, who aptly labeled the camps as barbaric, conditions were drastically improved and mortality rates dropped. Tragically, 28,000 Boers, primarily children, had died in the span of just over two years. For the Afrikaner volk, the South African War was a shared tragedy that touched almost everyone. Perhaps more so than victory in the Transvaal Rebellion, defeat and loss of independence drew the Afrikaners across South Africa closer. It also challenged them to reconcile their fate with God. What had happened in twenty years between the two Anglo-Boer conflicts such that God would relegate his "chosen people" from deliverance to testing? For the staunch Calvinists, there was never a concern of outright abandonment, but more the uncertainty of their path that would once again place them in God's favor.

While Calvinistic beliefs had always been core to the Boer family and the greater Afrikaner community dispersed across the veld, the precept of divine predestination did not have nationalistic connotations until Kruger's Doppe interpretation was published and embraced during his presidency; specifically following his Paardekraal speeches in 1880. Nineteenth century references to God's deliverance during conflict and expressions of

thanks for His provision were by no means unique to Calvinists. These can be found in the letters and memoirs of Christians of all denominations of the period. Kruger's belief in an "external calling" to the perpetuation of the nation, apart from the personal "internal calling" of reconciliation through Christ, was unique and became the foundation of the Afrikaner civil religion. In the aftermath of the South African War, Afrikaner nationalists re-interpreted historical events like the Great Trek and the Transvaal Rebellion and embellished them with comparisons to the Israelites as an elixir to numb the pain of defeat.

For the Africans, who in the mind of the Afrikaners, were not among God's chosen people and were therefore considered Canaanites in the promised land, the awakening of Afrikaner nationalism would prove toxic. With an eerie foreboding of the evils of South African apartheid it was the late nineteenth-century English historian, Lord Acton, who criticized nationalist zeal when he stated,

Nationality does not aim either at liberty or prosperity, both of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mold and measure of the State. Its course will be marked with material as well as moral ruin, in order that a new invention may prevail over the works of God and the interest of mankind. There is no principle of change, no phrase of political speculation conceivable, more comprehensive, more subversive, or more arbitrary than this. It is a confutation of democracy, because it sets limits to the exercise of the popular will, and substitutes for it a higher principle.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ *Essays in the History of Liberty*, ed. J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 433.

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