

MAATSKAPPY, STATE, AND EMPIRE: A PRO-BOER REVISION

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As we approach the centennial of the Second Anglo-Boer War (*Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, or “Second War for Freedom”), reassessment of the South African experience seems in order. Whether the recent surrender by Afrikaner political leaders of their “central theme” and the dismantling of their grandiose *Apartheid* state will lead to heaven on earth (as some of the Soweto “comrades” expected), or even to a merely tolerable multiracial polity, remains in doubt. Historians have tended to look for the origins of South Africa’s “very strange society” in the interaction of various peoples and political forces on a rapidly changing frontier, especially in the 19th century.

APPROACHES TO SOUTH AFRICAN FRONTIER HISTORY

At least two major schools of interpretation developed around these issues. The first, Cape Liberals, viewed the frontier Boers largely as rustic ruffians who abused the natives and disrupted orderly economic progress only to be restrained, at last, by humanitarian and legalistic British paternalists. Afrikaner excesses, therefore, were the proximate cause and justification of the Boer War and the consolidation of British power over a united South Africa. The “imperial factor” on this view was liberal and progressive in intent if not in outcome.

The opposing school were essentially Afrikaner nationalists who viewed the Boers as a uniquely religious people thrust into a dangerous environment where they necessarily resorted to force to overcome hostile African tribes and periodic British harassment. The two traditions largely agreed on the centrality of the frontier, but differed radically on the villains and heroes.¹

Beginning in the 1960s and ’70s, a third position was heard, that of younger “South Africanists” driven to distraction (and some

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¹*The Oxford History of South Africa*, Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969 and 1971), 2 vols., is probably the most important summary of the Cape Liberal tradition. Thompson gives an unfriendly account of Afrikaner nationalist historiography in *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985). Very little seems available in English from the nationalist side.

degree of Marxism) by the ongoing South African crisis. By some Hegelian “cunning of Reason,” these writers improved our understanding of the complexities of the South African frontier while—intentionally or not—building the foundations of a modestly pro-Boer revisionism.² (The parallel trajectory of Eugene D. Genovese, the stalwart of Marxist writing on the American South, is worth remarking.) In addition, a few *verligte* (“enlightened”) Afrikaner authors (Marq de Villiers, Rian Malan, and even André Brink) suggest, here and there, the need for a second look at the imperial factor.

South African history down to the Boer War constitutes a particular instance of what Walter Prescott Webb called *The Great Frontier*.³ The Great Frontier was European expansion realized as parallel processes in the Americas, Southern Africa, and the Antipodes. Like Australian Westerns, the early 1960s film, *The Helions*, set in South Africa, nicely illustrates common frontier themes.

Debate over the Turner Thesis deeply influenced South African historiography, with Cape Liberals and Afrikaner nationalists taking opposite evaluative positions on the frontier’s impact on the Boers. More recently, some writers have taken to presenting frontiers as the frontline on which the capitalist mode of production was busily incorporating the nonwestern world into its fold. (See Immanuel Wallerstein and a cast of thousands.) At the same time, others, beginning perhaps with William Christie MacLeod, have sought to look seriously at the role of the peoples on the other side of the frontier.⁴ One result of this work is the distinction between “frontiers of exclusion” and “frontiers of inclusion.” Frontiers of exclusion were the work of northwestern European Protestants who intended to settle new lands, driving out aboriginal inhabitants. Frontiers of inclusion were established by Iberian Catholics who, perhaps lacking manpower and actuated by a different ideology, were prepared to subordinate, Christianize, and incorporate native peoples into their system.

Perhaps by default, South Africa became a Protestant frontier of inclusion where natives, once they saw who was *baas*, were put to

²E.g., Martin Leggasick, Timothy Keegan, Stanley Trapido, Shula Marks, and others who will be cited *eundo*. (Not all these writers are necessarily South Africans by birth.)

³Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas, 1951).

⁴See Christopher Saunders, “Political Processes in the Southern African Frontier Zone,” in Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 149–50; and William Christie MacLeod, *The American Indian Frontier* (New York: K. Hall, Trench, Trubner, 1928).

work under various forms of unfree labor. It is perhaps best to put aside the question of whether or not Boer benevolence or unfavorable numerical ratios led to this particular result, but mid-20th-century Afrikaner apologists had a point when they complained about anti-*Apartheid* critics from settler-colonies whose natives had mysteriously “disappeared” during the frontier period. This reproduced nicely the American debates of the 1880s between Indianless Eastern philanthropists and Western settlers. (This does not mean the philanthropists were wrong, but it does make their objections to what Westerners were doing seem a bit *strategic*, ancillary to other goals.) How the South African way station grew from a mercantilist outpost to a new nation and people is the subject of what follows.

DUTCH CAPE COLONY TO 1815

In the mid-17th century, the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) established a way station on the South African coast to provision company ships on the long voyage between the Netherlands and the East Indies. Two hundred V.O.C. functionaries and indentured servants came ashore in 1652 at what became Cape Town. The Cape Colony was a thoroughly mercantilist enterprise. Its purpose was to make money for a chartered monopolistic company and for the Dutch government that created it. Any development of local enterprise, beyond what the company wanted, took place over its opposition.

In 1657, the Governor freed some 40 company “servants.” These burghers, or freemen, went into farming and stock raising. They expanded their operations by trading for cattle with the Khoikhoi (or Khoi), the first natives encountered at the Cape, some of this trade being “illicit” and unauthorized. Contact with Europeans and their diseases soon demoralized the Khoi (as with Amerindians). Expansion of Dutch farming encroached on Khoi land. Two Dutch-Khoikhoi wars resulted (1659–60 and 1673–77). Thousands of cows and sheep seized by the whites in these wars helped expand their economy. A 1713 epidemic of smallpox further weakened the natives. (One is reminded, somehow, of Pequots and Puritans.) The Khoi disappeared as a distinct culture, contributing their genes to the Cape Coloured population.

As their societies disintegrated, many Khoi entered into client relationships with white farmers, or “Boers,” becoming their ox-wagon drivers, herdsmen, and so forth. Native dependents helped make Boer economic and geographic expansion possible. By the 1780s, when Boers ran up against the more numerous and organized

Xhosa tribes, armed Khoi servants were serving as members of Boer “commandos” (militias, or frontier patrols). Further complicating matters, the V.O.C. chose to import chattel slaves from East Africa and the East Indies (Malays) rather than bring in white labor from the Netherlands. Roman-Dutch law provided legal categories for slaves (derived from classical precedent), which had needed to be reinvented in the English overseas empire.

Their life-style led the Boers increasingly to disdain manual labor. At the same time, the Dutch-descended colonists (complemented by French Huguenots and Germans) thought of Africa, not the distant Netherlands, as their home. Their form of Dutch, with its borrowings from Portuguese, Malay, African, and other languages, and its simplified grammar, emerged as the newest Germanic language: Afrikaans. The people began calling themselves Afrikaners. The Huguenots reinforced the severe Calvinism of the settlers.

The Boers, or Afrikaners, chafed under V.O.C. mercantilism. Coming into Cape Town, a Boer often found that the fixed prices paid for goods did not cover the costs of transporting them. As a result, frustrated farmers “trekked” east and inland to escape the V.O.C.’s regulations. The company forbade them to barter with natives or trek into the frontier in 1677, 1727, 1739, 1770, 1774, and 1786. (Obviously, an effective piece of legislation!) “Trekboers” simply packed up and moved into the frontier when so inclined.

As Boers moved east toward the Fish River, they came into hostile contact with the Xhosa. Wars involving the Colony were fought in 1779–81, 1789, and 1799. Here, by contrast with raids against the San (cousins of the Khoi), *some* rules came into play. Both sides looted and destroyed property, but neither intentionally killed women and children. Prisoners *might* be taken. As in Britain’s North American colonies, the activities of frontiersmen caused friction with natives which the V.O.C. wished to avoid. Afrikaner grievances against company rule grew correspondingly. In the 1780s and ’90s, the V.O.C. ran deeply into debt and, naturally enough, issued its own paper money to “solve” the problem. Courts ruthlessly foreclosed on those unable to keep up with the inflationary spiral and specie vanished from the Colony. Lack of regular judicial services for the outlying Boers created a situation which in the colonial Carolinas had led to Regulator movements. J.A. de Mist, Batavian (Netherlands) Commissioner General, wrote of “murmurings and revolt against such a stepmotherly government.” One result was the creation, in a frontier district, of the Republic of Graaf-Reinet (1795–96), inspired by the French Revolution. This was poorly timed, and ran up against British occupiers

who arrived to secure the sea-route to India as part of the larger world struggle set off by the French Revolution. The British authorities added to the colonists' economic woes by issuing a million paper rix-dollars in 1795, and another million between 1810 and 1815, after their return.⁵

Another Boer grievance concerned Dutch, and later British, attempts to protect natives. In this, the Boers resembled American pioneers. When, in 1806, the British returned to stay, the stage was set for confrontation with the Boers, who had grown into a tough, independent frontier *volk* that resented even *Dutch* government. Rule by foreigners armed with what seemed to be Liberal and Evangelical cant was intolerable. Even the first mild British legislation filled the Boers with horror, leading to small revolt at Slagters Nek in 1815, when Boers resisted service of legal papers on a farmer. One defendant said: "I am a young man who does not yet know what a Government is, as I was never near one."⁶ (He was not among the five Boers hanged for rebellion.)

STATELESS PATRIARCHY

That comment reflects the practical anarchism of Boer life on the edges of the Colony. The Boer ideal was *maatskappy*, "a society of free and independent men."⁷ Coming from the most commercialized, bourgeois, and individualistic society in Europe (with the possible exception of the British Isles), Afrikaners turned away from the patrician bourgeois high culture of the Netherlands and toward extensive farming and pastoralism. In the ecology in which they now lived, this was economically rational, especially given the absence of capital with which to undertake intensive farming. As they raised cattle and sheep, however, they did not give up their Dutch individualism; indeed, their frontier life may have intensified it. DeKiewiet writes,

On the great farms each man fled the tyranny of his neighbor's smoke. It followed that their communal life was loosely organized. They came together when compelled by danger or crisis. . . . The habits of their social life were like the discipline of their commandos. It was the sum of individual willingness.⁸

⁵Quoted in Alexander W. Flynt, "South Africa; Apartheid in Historical Perspective" (M.A. Thesis, University of Washington, 1968), p. 70. On the British monetary inflation, see T.R.H. Davenport, "The Consolidation of a New Society: The Cape Colony," in Wilson and Thompson, eds., *Oxford History*, vol. 1, p. 295.

⁶Quoted in Thompson, *Political Mythology of Apartheid*, p. 111.

⁷Marq de Villiers, *White Tribe Dreaming* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), p. 129.

⁸De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 13, 19.

A higher (than Dutch) birthrate combined with partible inheritance meant that each young man had to move outward to enjoy the Boer way of life. Boers had come to expect large “farms” as their birthright. This meant increasing collision with African land-users, but the incremental character of Boer expansion kept their “wars” at the level of skirmishes and cattle-raids out of the Old Irish epics. Boers would move every generation to get land, and would trek large distances to get away from unwanted governmental supervision.⁹ (*Táin Bo Vaailnge?*)

The realities of frontier life—pastoralism, migration, mobility, patriarchy—corresponded to and directly reinforced a religious outlook based on the pastoral-nomadic parts of the Old Testament involving conquest of promised land. Boer theory and practice went hand in hand. Their theory was Dutch Reformed Calvinism dating from the Synod of Dort (1618) which rejected Arminianism. Rejecting the latter, they certainly could not go in for Enlightenment ideas which had flowered since their ancestors left Europe. Their Protestantism was another source of individualism.¹⁰

The Boers were united as *maatskappy*, a loose community of individual proprietors, the commando, a volunteer military arm of their society, and as co-religionists. More supervision than this they did not want. A Boer patriarch, sovereign on his own *plek* (place) with his wife, children, and retainers, and armed for defence of his family and property, corresponded quite well—like the Anglo-Celtic Southerner—to the ideal citizen of classical republican theory. Unlike the Southerner, who had some classical liberalism in his republicanism, the Boers were of a simpler school. Their nearest approach to liberalism was the notion of covenant. Thus it makes sense to think of the Boers as patriarchal, pastoral Calvinists living out a practical frontier anarchism.

COERCIVE LABOR PRACTICES

Just as they expected land, Boers had come to expect native labor. On this, they differed less from the British than is commonly supposed, and it is the matter of *scale* which is significant.

Boer “feudalism” was part of a household economy on large farms. Even without the outright chattels brought in by the V.O.C.,

⁹See John Solomon Otto, “The Migration of the Southern Plain Folk: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis,” *Journal of Southern History* 51, no. 2 (May 1985): 183–200, for Southern extensive farming. A Boer needed 6,000 acres to feel independent.

¹⁰Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 45–96.

farmers and stockraisers had acquired dependent laborers as a result of small-scale conflict with Khoi and, later, Xhosa tribes. A whole literature exists which discusses just how to categorize the Boers' labor practices. Boers were stung by British slave emancipation in 1834, but continued to employ native workers termed "apprentices," "servants," *Woonkaffers* (Africans living on a Boer's "place"), and so on, who worked as stockmen and farm hands in exchange for wages, land for their own animals and crops, or protection from raiders. The Boer received rent in kind, labor rent, and, one way or another, cheap labor, which was the whole point.

Marxists wonder what mode of production this is, but most of them have decided to call these customs "semifeudal relations of production" compatible with an overarching capitalist mode and a prelude to proletarianization of African labor. However characterized, the practices were personal, patriarchal, and coercive, and rested somewhere on a spectrum of slavery, serfdom, sharecropping, and debt peonage. A British colonel noted in 1809 that due to debt, "A Hottentot can now seldom get away at the expiration of his term."¹¹

It bears remarking that when the Boers were first in school, so to speak, all the civilized powers with overseas possessions tolerated slavery in the unnuanced form. Slavery, sad to say, has been a trait of most societies with any level of organization at all. Thus, the Khoi and Xhosa were not entirely surprised at being put to work by the Afrikaners, as similar practices existed in their societies. Toward the middle of the 19th century, the Swazi chiefdom (or incipient state) regularly captured neighboring people to sell to Maputo or to the Transvaal Boers. As Ludwig von Mises pointed out, it was only with the rise of classical liberalism and capitalism that anyone bothered to condemn slavery in a principled fashion.¹²

Boers were not running large-scale plantations or factories, and had had little need to participate in the global slave trade. They

¹¹Quoted in Flynt, "South Africa," p. 79.

¹²Large-scale slave systems, logically enough, seem to coincide with the formation of states. See Robert L. Carneiro, "The Chiefdom: Precursor of the State," in Grant B. Jones and Robert R. Kautz, eds., *The Transition to Statehood in the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 37–79 (esp. 65). On Swazi, see Philip Bonner, "Classes, the Mode of Production and the State in Pre-colonial Swaziland," in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, eds., *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman Group, 1980), pp. 95–97; and Robert Ross, "Capitalism, Expansion, and Incorporation on the Southern African Frontier," in Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 224. On the role of *laissez faire* ideas in relation to slavery, see Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963), p. 632.

could acquire their “apprentices” by taking captives when on commando raids against local enemies. This brings us to the Boers’ subjective attitude toward their servants (which for some seems to be the only significant question): “racism,” the only sin believed in by modern Man. Hannah Arendt suggested that the Boers were so “frightened” when they first ran up against the dense Xhosa populations that they took on a permanently irrational need to dominate them ever after. I think it might be simpler to view the matter in terms of Harmanus Hoetink’s notion of “somatic norm”: that people naturally dislike, or at least are not terribly fond of, people whose appearance is radically different from their own. Add to this the massive differences in culture, language, and level of technology, and you are well on your way to grasping the Boers’ reaction to native peoples. Over time, the Boers’ easy assumption of superiority hardened into a system of thought so that, in *defending* the Boer cause in 1898, J.F. van Oordt admitted that “the Boers as a whole doubt the existence of a Kaffer- or a Hottentot-soul.”¹³

BRITISH RULE, BOER DISCONTENT, GREAT TREK

British policy in the Cape reflected an ever changing mixture of economic interest, global strategy, missionary influence, and liberal and humanitarian ideas. The year 1807 saw the abolition of the slave trade within the Empire. By 1809 the administration was trying to regulate treatment of “apprentices” and “servants.” Legal equality, which Boers found quite distasteful, was introduced. Characteristically, the British introduced a “pass” system (a central feature of this century’s Grand Apartheid) while reforming native status. The 1820s saw drought, economic depression, and renewed friction with “Bantu” peoples (leading to another Cape-Xhosa war in 1834–35), which added to settler unhappiness.

The last straw was emancipation in all British possessions in 1834. Compensation was to be paid in London (easy for Jamaican planters, not so easy for Boers). Agents offered to collect the Boers’ money, but at a high commissions. Angered at the compensation “swindle” and the whole tenor of British policy, Boers quietly prepared to leave the Cape and press on into unknown land to escape

¹³Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 192. On somatic norm image, see Harmanus Hoetink, *Slavery and Race Relations in the Americas* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 192–210. Van Oordt quoted in Thompson, *Political Mythology of Apartheid*, p 85. A.J. Boësen states that the earliest documents reveal that in the first several decades of the Cape Colony’s existence, distinctions of status were more important than those of race. See “Die Verhouding tussen Blank en Nie-Blank in Suid-Afrika aan die hand van die Vroegste Dokument,” *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal* 2 (1970): 3–18.

British rule. Some 10,000 Boers, led by Pief Retief and Andries Pretorius, among others, set off in 1836, leaving their freed slaves but taking other dependents with them. Pief Retief's "Manifesto" expressed the *Voortrekkers'* grievances:

We are resolved that wherever we go we shall uphold the just principles of liberty; but whilst we shall take care that no one remains in a state of slavery, we are determined to maintain regulations to suppress crime and to preserve proper relations between master and servant.¹⁴

British authorities initially laughed off the Great Trek. Lord Glenelg, Colonial Secretary, wrote:

I can hardly suppose it serious; they are subjects of the Queen, who put themselves beyond her protection, and if reports be true, they are no longer useful citizens but freebooters.¹⁵

Just in case the Voortrekkers could become a threat, Glenelg persuaded Parliament to pass legislation extending the theoretical reach of Cape laws up to the 20th parallel. Whether the British would actually try to enforce their writs at that distance was unknown. Humanitarians, including the missionary lobby, favored doing so, "treasury-watchers," who wanted to save money, opposed it. As for the Boers, their scouts told them they were marching into empty but devastated land. To see just why it was devastated is our next task.

MFECANE, ZULU STATE FORMATION, AND A FLUID FRONTIER ZONE

The most striking phenomenon of the early-19th century in southern Africa was the *mfecane* or *difaqane* ("forced migration"). Fierce competition for land and water, intensified by drought, led to the rapid, violent expansion of the cattle-herding Nguni people under their paramount chief Shaka, founder of the Zulu state. Organizing his warriors into age-graded regiments, Shaka Zulu instituted a shift from thrown weapons to close-in "shock" weapons and tactics, a strategy typical of state-building rulers. Shaka's

¹⁴Full text in W.A. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 22–24. In *Die Oorsprong van die Groot Trek* (Kaapstad[Capetown]: Tafelberg, 1974), Afrikaner historian C.F.J. Muller lays great stress on what one might call the "anarcho-tyrannical" aspects of British rule, i.e., the attempt to enforce humanitarian notions about racial relations while failing to deal with the overriding issue—from the Boer standpoint—of frontier security (esp. at 180–96). And, for this useful concept, see Samuel Francis, "Anarcho-Tyranny, USA," *Chronicles* 18, no. 7 (July 1994): 14–19.

¹⁵Quoted in Flynt, "South Africa," p. 121.

wars decimated as many as 100 tribes with as many as a million dead, increasing Zulu territory from 100 square miles to 200,000, and his armies from 500 to 50,000 warriors.¹⁶ Despite his current vogue, he was not exactly a mild ruler. As de Villiers writes, “[t]o increase his insurance, he effectively depopulated the southern part of Natal. . . . Almost a fifth of Africa was affected in some way by the *mfecane*.”¹⁷ Shaka’s enemies fled east, west, and north, creating an empty desolated zone. This was the land towards which the Boers were trekking.

The Voortrekkers and their immense wagons had to bear north-east to avoid the Griqua states to the north and the main Xhosa centers to the east. The Griqua were “Cape Coloured” frontier folk who had trekked from the Cape in the 1810s and maintained rather minimal states advised by missionaries. Eventually, the Boer parties faced the choice of continuing north into the highveld, a large elevated plain above the Orange River, or of turning east through the Drakensberg Mountains. The main body of Trekkers chose the latter course, which would bring them into Natal, depopulated by the *mfecane*.

In Natal, the Boers would have access to the Indian Ocean and a homeland, but first they had to deal with Dingaan, Shaka’s successor. Pief Retief agreed to recapture stolen cattle in exchange for land. This done, Dingaan ordered the killing of the “wizards” when Retief and a party of 70 some Trekkers came to conclude the deal. Initially caught off guard, the remaining Voortrekkers circled their wagons into a laager formation and inflicted a stunning defeat on the Zulu kingdom on 16 December 1838. (3,000 Zulu warriors killed by Afrikaner riflemen; three Boers wounded.) Mpande, half brother to Dingaan, offered the Natal Voortrekkers an alliance against Dingaan, which they immediately accepted. They now dictated terms to Dingaan who ceded a full half of his territory. To the Trekkers, the Battle of Blood River was an Old Testament miracle demonstrating their special covenant with God.

They set up a Republic of Natal to the non-amusement of the British. James Stephen summed up the Colonial Office’s goals: “to deny the trekkers independent access to the sea . . . and so to smoth-

¹⁶See Jeff Guy, “Ecological factors in the rise of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom” in Marks and Atmore, eds., *Economy and Society*, pp. 102–19. On Shaka, see *Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 342–51. *Mfecane* literally means “the crushing.” Muller notes that estimated deaths from military action, disease, starvation, and the killing of refugees by large animals and cannibals (themselves often near starvation) range from the hundreds of thousands up to George Theal’s estimate of nearly two million (*Oorsprong van die Groot Trek*, p. 82).

¹⁷De Villiers, *White Tribe Dreaming*, pp. 109–10.

er the potential dangers of Boer independence to imperial security.” Britain “annexed” Natal in 1844, backing this up with force. Disgruntled Boers trekked again. De Villiers comments that “British colonial realities were different from philanthropic intentions. Boer and Briton proved not so very different after all.” The administration restricted native movement and dumped “surplus” laborers into reserves from which the “poll tax” could flush them back out as needed. As in the Cape, these experiments showed how *political* means—as opposed to the direct Boer methods—could provide extra-economic coercion to depress native labor below a free-market price.¹⁸

MAATSKAPPYE, CHIEFDOMS, MINIMAL STATES AND EMPIRE ON A FLUID FRONTIER

Revisionist writings on 19th-century South Africa make one thing abundantly clear: there was a multiplicity of contending forces not reducible to Britons and Boers. In addition to the missionary-sponsored Griqua states already mentioned, there was an array of chiefdoms, some of them sufficiently consolidated and centralized to be termed native states. These include at least the Zulu kingdom, the Pondo, the Swazi, and Lesotho. These societies existed in a pluralistic environment in which changing combinations of trade, small-scale warfare, and diplomacy were the method of survival. Alliances cut across racial and cultural lines, and it was not unusual to see Boers allied with Griquas or Africans against some current opponent (which could include the Empire). Participants in the 1815 Slagters Nek rebellion had seriously negotiated with a neighboring Xhosa chief for support in driving out the British. Martin Legassick notes that while Boers expected their servants “to be non-white: they did not expect all non-whites to be their servants” (another possible contrast with the Empire). When necessary or expedient, individual Afrikaners or whole communities might live in alliance with, or even under the theoretical jurisdiction of, a native chief. Andries Pretorius and Hendrik Potgieter, Voortrekker leaders, were torn between being leaders in the European sense or transforming themselves into African chiefs who happened to be white.¹⁹

¹⁸Stephen quoted in Flynt, “South Africa,” p. 115; de Villiers, *White Tribe Dreaming*, p. 138. On “extra-economic coercion,” see David S. Landes, “The Nature of Economic Imperialism” in Kenneth E. Boulding and Tapan Mukerjee, eds., *Economic Imperialism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), pp. 128–29.

¹⁹Martin Legassick, “The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography,” in Marks and Atmore, *Economy and Society*, pp. 64–67. On the Slagters Nek radicals’ proposed alliance with Ngqika, see Thompson, *Political Mythology of Apartheid*, pp. 111–12.

Perhaps the most interesting figure in relation to all this is Moshweshwe (or Moshesh), paramount chief of the Sotho (Lesotho or Basuto) state. Timothy Keegan characterizes the Sotho kingdom as a “reconstruction state” built up out of the ruins of the *mfecane*. Moshweshwe fought Bergenaars (offshoots of the Griqua) and !Kora, but his strong points were relative benevolence at home and adroit diplomacy to play off potential enemies—Zulus, Boers, and British—against one another. De Villiers says, “[e]ven in his diplomacy he was unusual, resorting to deceit only after many years of being lied to by the British.” He thought it politic to Christianize his people but brought in French missionaries to keep his distance from the British. Lesotho became a great source of grain for the Eastern Cape and for Trekboers further out, and so large-scale trade developed.²⁰

Market relations ramified through the frontier zone, decentralizing tribal economic life and undermining the traditional power of the chiefs (which rested on redistribution of goods).²¹ New trading opportunities encouraged expansion of production and innovation at the same time that culturally based misunderstandings—especially regarding use and ownership of land—made resort to violence reasonably frequent. There was certainly the appearance of irresolvable instability here. The *Oxford History*, which (like Nature) abhors a vacuum, comments: “During the 1840s Britain was progressively sucked into this scene of anarchy.”²²

Following the Misesian path of social rationalism, I think it fair to say that almost all “cooperation” above the level of *maat-skappy* or tribe which took place on this complex and fluid frontier followed precisely the form of market exchange.²³ “The market,” as one might expect, receives the usual criticisms from many historians of this subject for not immediately catapulting all the participants into the Garden of Eden and for being “unequal.” It goes without saying that all benefited from exchange to one degree or another and that alleged “market failure” on the South African fron-

²⁰Timothy Keegan, “Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment: Mercantile Capital and the Economic Transformation of Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1920,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 1986): 197-98; de Villiers, *White Tribe Dreaming*, p. 114. Muller recounts that Moshweshwe “even handled with tact” the cannibals that had eaten his grandfather, Peete. Once he had them in his power, he referred to them as “the tomb of the departed” and worked to convert them into useful adherents of his kingdom. See *Die Oorsprong*, p. 79.

²¹See, for example, William Beinaart, “Production and the Material Basis of Chieftainship: Pondoland c. 1830-80,” in Marks and Atmore, *Economy and Society*, pp. 120-47.

²²*Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. 1, p. 415.

²³Joseph T. Salerno, “Ludwig von Mises as Social Rationalist,” *Review of Austrian Economics* 4 (1990): 26-54.

tier has entirely to do with the use of force by all parties at different times, and by the persistent tendency of chiefs, local states (where they existed), and the Empire to intervene to alter market outcomes.

From the Cape, the British tried to impose order via state-level violence, as in the 1846 Cape–Xhosa War (there are nine of these in all). The hard-pressed Xhosa turned to magic reminiscent of the Amerindian Ghost Dance movement, and slaughtered all their cattle. Some 70,000 starved and wandering beggars ran through the frontiers. The British made treaties with Adam Kok, the East Griqua chief, and with Moshweshwe, in an attempt to keep control and offset Boer influence. The British gave them arms and put them on salary. In 1848, they proclaimed British “annexation” of everything up to the Vaal River.

In the meantime, Voortrekkers had established themselves above the Orange River, and some had pushed on above the Vaal. The Natal Voortrekkers had joined them. British assertion of authority over “Trans-Orangia” directly challenged the Boers living there. When British forces defeated Boer “rebels” at Boomplaats in August 1848, thousands followed Pretorius into the Transvaal. An attempt to conciliate the Boer with grants of native land led to warfare with the latter. Expenses rose, and the Colonial Office decided that toleration of independent Boer republics might be the best short-run option. By 1854, the British had effectively withdrawn from Trans-Orangia.

Timothy Keegan argues that British involvement in Trans-Orangia set off Boer state formation when some Boer leaders realized the opportunity that a real state could provide for capital accumulation (especially of land) through political means. What is fascinating is that the old Boer *maatskappy* ideal of ordered near-anarchy had adherents who opposed creation of a proper state. This comes out in Keegan’s discussion of the British Orange River Sovereignty’s attempt to rally or coerce Boers into fighting Moshweshwe’s Sotho in 1851. Those who traded with the Sotho, had agreements with them, or found the British more threatening, refused to go on commando, and stated their satisfaction with their “friend” Moshweshwe.²⁴

²⁴Timothy Keegan, “The Making of the Orange Free State, 1846-54: Sub-imperialism, Primitive Accumulation and State Formation,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 17, no. 1 (1988): 26–54. M.C.E. van Schoor, in “Politieke Groeperinge in Transgariep,” *Agief-Jaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis* 13, no. 2 (1950):111–2 (my translation), writes:

Despite the confusion which prevailed along the frontier and the fact that there were Boers who had left the district to seek safety, there

State formation set in train by the British continued after their withdrawal despite widespread opposition. The results were the Orange Free State (1854) and the South African Republic (Transvaal, 1856). These structurally weak states—"minimal" by default—somewhat vainly tried to replicate the Cape and Natal controls on native labor and pursued the usual rent-seeking policies dear to governors. For the moment, it seemed that the Voortrekkers had achieved the independence from Britain that they craved.

SMALL-SCALE VS. LARGE-SCALE GOALS, OR THE VELDCORNET'S LAMENT

A Boer veldcornet (officer) complained, somewhat defensively, to the Scottish traveler Thomas Pringle in 1840:

We were living in a state of bitter feud and constant warfare with the natives, and both parties were intent on mutual extermination. But what had your Ficani done when *they* were destroyed by wholesale slaughter by your British commanders? . . . Here we had massacre in all its horrors. . . . But all this, I hear, your English missionaries defend or wink at, because it was done by Englishmen in authority, and does not tell against us unfortunate Boors.²⁵

The veldcornet was essentially right in contrasting Boer expansion with British imperialism. Their goals, methods, and scale of operations differed. Britain's goals required, at each step of the way, large-scale solutions. British administrators undertook big wars against the natives to establish the kind of order they thought necessary. In time, their consolidation of southern Africa made possible a sort of modernization in which political coercion by "hut taxes" and the like made cheap native labor available on an industrial scale. Their conception of trade did not include the right of natives, including Boers, to refuse participation in foreign-directed economic development. As Lord Palmerston put it in 1841, "It is the business of Government to open and secure the roads of the merchant."²⁶

were still Boers who continued to live unmolested in the heart of Sotho territory. Many Boers even dared to go unarmed in Basutoland [the Sotho kingdom], to carry on intercourse freely with the natives, and on a flourishing basis to exchange the kaffer corn, which they acquired there, with traders at Burgersdorp for lead and gunpowder. These Boers made no secret of it and openly declared that they would rather choose the authority of Moshweshwe than that of the British.

²⁵John Fisher, *The Afrikaners* (London: Cassell, 1969), pp. 54–55. The veldcornet was referring to a campaign waged in 1828.

²⁶Flynt, "South Africa," p. 112.

During their struggle for control of South Africa, the British learned to deploy humanitarian arguments against the Boers. In this connection, missionaries provided useful cover. Dr. John Philip of the London Missionary Society, a man the Boers regarded as the ultimate foreign pseudophilanthropist, commented:

the missionaries have been employed in locating the savages among whom they labor, teaching them industrious habits, creating a demand for British manufactures, and increasing their dependence on the colony. . . . Missionary stations are the most efficient strength of our colonies, and the cheapest and best military outposts a government can employ.²⁷

Missionaries served as technical advisors to Christianized native chieftains, and contributed to frontier state-formation by showing native rulers (like those of the three Griqua states) how to build bureaucracies of their own.

Missionary and humanitarian pressure was but one source of British policy. From the 1830s to the 1880s, four major factions sought to direct British efforts: 1) imperialists for whom expansion of the empire was always a good; 2) humanitarians including missionaries; 3) *laissez faire* liberals; and 4) the “treasury-watchers.” The *laissez faire* liberals wanted to keep intervention to a minimum, and the “treasury-watchers” cooperated with them to keep expenses down. The imperialists and humanitarians favored greater British control.²⁸

To secure the route to India (it apparently could never be *too* secure), British officials wanted British sovereignty or at least “suzerainty” over the whole region. They also wished for a favorable climate for British investment and enterprise. Down to the 1880s, achievement of these goals was limited by reluctance to put much money into it. For the time being, Britain preferred the “imperialism of free trade”: a cost-conscious use of political and military resources to incorporate, channel, and control the economies of peripheral areas. *Within* the new framework so created, trade would run its natural course. This strategy, which resembles the Open Door policy pursued by the United States from 1898, combined broad economic freedom for businessmen with the politics of empire. Benthamite “Radicals,” Colonial Office bureaucrats, and

²⁷Flynt, “South Africa,” p. 92.

²⁸Flynt, “South Africa,” p. 192. Muller sees approximately the same division in British policy-making circles. See *Die Oorsprong*, pp. 172, 177, 179.

investors could all agree on this inexpensive, liberalized mercantilism. For them, cost-effective empire was “free trade.”²⁹

AN UNEASY BOER, BRITISH, AND NATIVE STANDOFF UNDERCUT BY MINERAL REVOLUTION

For the moment, British policy makers were satisfied with putting economic pressure on the Boer Republics while annexing native territories to cut them off from the sea. Imports purchased by Republican citizens came through the Cape and Natal, which put them at the mercy of the Colonies’ tariff policies. This pressure led the Transvaal leaders to look for access to the Indian Ocean. They hoped to annex enough land to reach Delagoa Bay, a Portuguese possession, and by-pass real or potential colonial interference with their trade.

The discovery of gold and diamonds in and around the republics greatly complicated matters. The Transvaal and Orange Free State both claimed the diamond fields near present-day Kimberley. In August 1870, West Griqua chief Nicholas Waterboer, possibly encouraged by outsiders, claimed the Kimberley fields and petitioned for British intervention. Officials and journalists in the colonies suddenly discovered, once again, the cruel Afrikaner treatment of native labor and presented humanitarian arguments for British intervention. An allegedly neutral arbitrator—the Lieutenant Governor of Natal—awarded the disputed territory to Waterboer. Just as Britain had annexed the Sotho state in 1868 (Moshweshwe having come under attack when the war party in the Orange Free State got their way), so did they now annex Waterboer’s claim.³⁰

²⁹John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953): 1–15.

³⁰Le Roy Hooker, *The Africanders: A Century of Dutch-English Feud in South Africa* (New York: Rand, McNally, 1900), pp. 144–47. J.J. Oberloster, in “Die Anneksasie van Griekwaland Wes,” *Argief-Jaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis* 8 (1945): 185 (my translation), comments:

The annexation of [Waterboer’s] Griqualand West was done on behalf of the poor, oppressed Griquas. The conscienceless oppressors were the Free State Boers. The British government, however, robbed them [the Griquas] of their territory and independence. Then it let seven years go by before making any provision for them. But the provision was of such a kind that the greatest part of the genuinely Griqua lands soon fell into the hands of avaricious speculators. The Griquas believed themselves to have a legitimate grievance against their protectors and in 1878 they, along with other tribes, rose in rebellion. The British government suppressed the uprising mercilessly and many Griquas were shot dead, especially in the skirmish at Koegas. . . . The annexation . . . meant the downfall of the Griquas—not their salvation.

Having lost this round, the Transvaal president was determined to gain access to the sea. He tried, and failed for the moment, to find foreign investors to build a railway line to Delagoa Bay. With their trade impeded by Britain and a native war under way, the Transvaal government was near collapse. Egged on by creditors and humanitarians, the British “annexed” the Transvaal in April 1877, allegedly to save the whole region “from the most calamitous circumstances.” Just as things seemed settled, the British found themselves at war with the Bapedi (Mpedi) and Zulu peoples who were desperate to preserve some of their lands. A disastrous British defeat at Isandhlwana led to an expensive war to resolve matters to imperial satisfaction.³¹

In Britain, the Liberal statesman William Gladstone was campaigning on a platform of free trade and retrenchment. Encouraged by the prospect of imperial withdrawal, Transvalers proclaimed a republic and rose against British rule. The Orange Free State sent war materiel. Gladstone, now Prime Minister, reversed himself and tried to suppress the “rebellion.” In December 1880, Boer commandos inflicted a stunning defeat on British forces at Majuba Hill. Busy with their primordial original crisis, Ireland, the Cabinet decided to make peace and concede the Transvalers’ independence under a vague imperial “suzerainty” (not actually mentioned in the second draft treaty). The first Anglo-Boer War was over.

The “mineral revolution” did not work only to the benefit of the British. Discovery of deep-level gold at Witwatersrand (the “Rand”—possibly the original White Water problem) in 1886, as well as diamond deposits in the republics, brought an economic boom to the highveld. Foreign investors, miners, and mining engineers flocked to the republics, and Johannesburg became a colossal mining town overnight. “Unwittingly, British capitalists freed the Transvaal nationalists from the colonial yoke and made the republic the leading state in South Africa.” Further, “[t]he key to the prosperity of southern Africa was falling into the hands of its most anti-imperialist *régime*.”³² As the Boer Republics became solvent,

Oberholster lays much of the blame on Waterboer’s agent, David Arnot, for fraudulently exaggerating Waterboer’s territorial boundaries and then involving the British in the dispute.

³¹Quote in Flynt, “South Africa,” p. 182. For an account of the Zulu War which blames the British for wrecking a stable situation, partly out of imperial security concerns and partly because of pressure from colonial politicians, see Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879–1884* (London: Longman Group, 1979); also see Donald R. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Great Zulu Nation* (London: Cardinal, 1990).

³²Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1961), pp. 210–11.

plans for a railway to Delagoa Bay became realistic. The republics, having taken the measure of Britain's real respect for their independence, began buying modern arms from the German Reich.

This fed British imperial paranoia about the Germans, who—egged on by navalists and missionaries—had recently acquired a much needed colony in Southwest Africa (site of the “proverbial tributary”³³). The cosmic plottings of Cecil Rhodes, mineral magnate, Cape politician, and imperial arch-manipulator, further inflamed the delicate situation. The stakes were now higher than the unedifying petty “economic warfare” which had prevailed between the republics and the colonies (and even among the republics).

The emerging class of “Randlords,” or mining magnates, jumped-up financial speculators,³⁴ and mining engineers (many of them Americans) focussed on one important goal: much more than ridding themselves of the Transvaal's state dynamite monopoly, they wanted a reliable and predictable supply of cheap native labor for industrial mining processes. Barney Barnato, one of the jumped-up magnates, ridiculed the Transvaal government, saying, “[i]t is not a government at all, but an unlimited company of some twenty thousand shareholders.”³⁵

This would not do. What was needed was a powerful regional state capable of coercing native labor on an enormous scale. Already by 1899, the mines were employing 160,000 Africans at Witwatersrand,³⁶ and if they were to cut costs, they needed greater leverage over native labor than the Boer Republics could give them. Engineers, the New Class of natural Comteans, supplied ideological underpinnings for unification and centralization, and “sought the interventionist state of the ‘experts.’”³⁷

³³“Excrement estuary” in present-day Namibia, as reported by Andrew Dinwoodie, “Beyond the Vestiges of Colonialism,” *The Independent*, 13 May 1989, Weekend, p. 48. The poor Germans obviously didn't know what they were stepping into.

³⁴Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 197–204. She sees the South African situation as an example of her theme of the “alliance of capital and mob.” Jeff Hummel has suggested to me that the rapid emergence of a few powerful mining concerns may have to do with the absence of a clearly articulated property-rights system in the Transvaal.

³⁵Quoted in Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 199.

³⁶Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 297.

³⁷On the magnates' and engineers' goals, see Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, “Lord Milner and the South African State,” *History Workshop* 8 (Autumn 1979): 60–62. Anthony Atmore and Shula Marks, in “The Imperial Factor in South Africa in the Nineteenth Century: Towards a Reassessment.” in E.F. Penrose, ed., *European Imperialism and the Partition of Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1975), pp. 105–139 (quotation at p.

Although Rhodes did not live to see his work consummated, it is worth getting his “take” on the native question. Running for office in 1887, he said, “there must be Pass Laws and Peace Preservation Acts. . . . We must adopt a system of despotism, such as works so well in India, in our relations with the barbarians of South Africa.”³⁸ Already in the policies adopted by the Chamber of Mines, the Rhodes-dominated mining interest group, we can discern the outlines of the state-capitalist pattern with which *Apartheid* ran wild. Political regulation of natives would keep labor below its free-market price³⁹; large-scale bureaucratic fiddling would replace the direct patriarchal style of management of the Boers.

The agitations of the *uitlanders*, as the Boers called the foreign miners who inundated their societies, seemed made-to-order to give a progressive cover to these larger goals. Herbert Spencer wrote to a friend that “the outlanders were a swarm of intruders and had no right to complain of the social regime. . . . The advocacy of annexation is nothing more than a continuation of our practice of political burglary.”⁴⁰ Transvaal President “Oom” Paul Kruger got at the essentials when he told the British at the Bloemfontein conference of June 1899: “It is my country that you want.”⁴¹

A WAR FOR UNION OR INDEPENDENCE: THE SECOND ANGLO-BOER WAR

We shall pass over the Jameson Raid fiasco, when the *uitlanders* failed to rise, and go straight to the outbreak of war—following the usual intentionally futile negotiations—on October 9, 1899. For the colonies, the British authorities, and the mining interest, the Second Anglo-Boer War (or Boer War) was a war for Union. For the republics, it was a war for independence. Africans, one supposes, had mixed feelings about the whole thing, as 100,000 of them served the British and the Boers as laborers, guides, and drivers. It was

109), write that the cause of the war was “the failure of the Afrikaner societies to fulfill the role of collaborating groups to the satisfaction of the gold-mining industry.” On the need for local cooperation, see Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,” in E.R.J. Owen and R.B. Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman Group, 1972), pp. 117–140.

³⁸Rhodes quoted in Fisher, *Afrikaners*, 127.

³⁹Compare Mark Thornton, “Slavery, Profitability, and the Market Process,” *Review of Austrian Economics* 7, no. 2 (1994): 21–47, for the dependence of coercive labor systems on state power.

⁴⁰Spencer quoted in Flynt, “South Africa,” p. 235.

⁴¹Kruger quoted in Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century*, p. 307.

the British who broke the unwritten rule (as usual?) and enrolled some 10,000 native soldiers.⁴²

As horsemen famous for their marksmanship, the Boers had an initial advantage. As the Empire struck back, bringing in forces from settler colonies (Australia, New Zealand, and Canada), the Boers undertook guerrilla war, which came naturally to people who had been “on commando” for two centuries. John Ellis writes:

[t]hough these pious, Bible-carrying stalwarts would turn in their grave for being so maligned, one could even say that their commandos had more in common with the Anarchist units of the Spanish Civil War, than with any other recent type of European military formation.⁴³

To fight these partisans, Britain had to put four times as many men in the field as Boer guerrillas, and “concentrate” Boer women and children in barbed-wire enclosures where some 26,000 died.

The results were a Vietnam-like blow to the Empire, soon to be embroiled at home with syndicalism, feminism, and Ireland, and a split in the Liberal Party between “pro-Boers” who opposed the war (or at least its methods) and Liberal Imperialists who supported it. (This is one sense in which one can be pro-Boer.) “Social imperialists” of all parties supported the war. The playwright Bernard Shaw supported it because he disliked “stray little states lying about in the way of great powers.”⁴⁴

Civilized opinion sympathized with the Boers, with the major exception of the ruling elite of the United States, which was conducting a gory counter-insurgency in the Philippine Islands. Speaking for the American expansionists, the *New York Times* said,

[i]t is not the machinations of Cecil Rhodes or any other individual with which the Boers are contending. . . . It is the ‘Zeitgeist,’ the ‘spirit of the age.’ . . . There is no room in the world for ‘peculiar people’ who insist on nonconformity, and upon taking up more room than belongs to them or than they can use to the utmost advantage. . . . They must conform, like the Mormon, or be extinguished like the North American Indian.⁴⁵

⁴²Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. xxi. Probably the best study.

⁴³John Ellis, *A Short History of Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Ian Allan, 1975), p. 119. Cf. Fisher, *The Africaners*, pp. 164–67. See also George M. Frederickson, “Why Did the Confederacy Not Fight a Guerrilla War after the Fall of Richmond: A Comparative View” ([pamphlet] Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1996).

⁴⁴Quoted in Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The Fabians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), p. 273.

⁴⁵Quoted in Thomas J. Noer, *Briton, Boer and Yankee: The United States and South Africa, 1870–1914* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978), 64.

The reluctant anti-imperialist William Jennings Bryan pointed out the other side of the coin:

Our refusal to recognize the rights of the Filipinos to self-government will embarrass us if we express sympathy with those in other lands who are struggling to follow the doctrines set forth in the Declaration of Independence. . . . Suppose we sent our sympathy to the Boers? In an hour England would send back, 'What about the Filipinos?'

There was no danger of that, as Secretary of State John Hay did all he could to support the British cause in South Africa.⁴⁶

THE WORLD, AND THE ENEMIES, THE BRITISH MADE, OR WAS THE IMPERIAL FACTOR SO LIBERAL?

In the end, the Boers could not prevail militarily. They fought to live and to preserve their society and people, and when continued fighting threatened those things, they chose peace. The country—already injured by cattle-killing rinderpest and drought before the war—was in shambles. But the Boer nation, the Afrikaner people, had been formed by the war. Many of the Cape Dutch, whose ancestors did not trek, had come over to the side of their rustic cousins once the war got under way.

The years immediately following the Boer capitulation—interestingly called “Reconstruction”—revealed the actual bearing of imperial policy. Lord Milner’s reordering of the South African political economy resembles Reconstruction in the United States with the difference that, absent any “social Bonapartist” impulse at all,⁴⁷ South Africa’s Union-savers could go directly to issues of power and wealth. Of the four factions present in mid-19th-century debates over South African policy, the *laissez faire* liberals and humanitarians were now sidelined, the “treasury-watchers” had stepped aside, leaving the field to the empire-builders, who held it long enough to conquer the republics and dictate the broad outlines of political-economic order.

With regional hegemony and British control of the leading economic sectors (mining and banking) secured, the imperium delegated power over other details to the four self-governing colonies

⁴⁶Quoted in Noer, *Briton, Boer, and Yankee*, p. 87. On Hay’s complete lack of neutrality, see Kenton J. Clymer, *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), pp. 158–61.

⁴⁷I applied Edvard Kardelj’s notion of “social Bonapartism” to U.S. Reconstruction in “The War for Southern Independence: A Radical Libertarian Analysis,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1979): 39.

(and Union after 1910) confident they would do the right thing respecting native “rights” and native labor. After all, everyone agreed on the latter question. It does little good for the Cape Liberals and their allies, the free-market economists (off looking for the real killers, I suppose), to speak of the “failure” of the imperium to be liberal on native rights down to 1910, and then still praise the British and condemn the Boers. As Anthony Atmore and Nancy Westlake ask, “had British intentions ever been other than the maintenance of this [white] supremacy?”⁴⁸ The Afrikaner-based the South African Party called for “placing the Native question above party politics.”⁴⁹ The English settlers’ Unionist Party did not disagree.

Out of this period of renewed state-building and white political competition within the imperial frame came the famous “alliance of gold and maize.” As Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido write, “it was during the reconstruction period that many of the guidelines of twentieth-century segregationist policies were set out.”⁵⁰ Just as British wars against the Xhosa, Zulus, and others had been more disastrous for natives than their fights with Voortrekkers, so too was the subimperial Union government better able to implement comprehensive coercive labor policies.

As in the American South, segregation was the relatively “liberal” alternative at the beginning of this century, embraced by advanced thinkers and scientific racialists like Jan Christian Smuts and Jan Hofmeyr. The interesting Natal writer and politician Maurice S. Evans actually visited the Southern states to get a comparative perspective on segregationist policies.⁵¹

With the predictable failure of Milner’s policy of Anglicization, Afrikaner political entrepreneurs competed with their English South African counterparts to control the economy. Continuing the struggle by other means, Afrikaner nationalists (along with

⁴⁸Anthony Atmore and Nancy Westlake, “A Liberal Dilemma: A Critique of the Oxford History of South Africa,” *Race* 14, no. 2 (1972): 117.

⁴⁹S.A.P. platform quoted in Fisher, *Africaners*, p. 215.

⁵⁰For “gold and maize” as the basis of a South African “Prussian Road to Capitalism,” see, out of many accounts, Stanley Trapido, “South Africa in a Comparative Studies of Industrialization,” *Journal of Development of Studies* 7, no. 3 (1971): 309–20. Quote from Marks and Trapido, “Lord Milner and the South African State,” p. 72.

⁵¹See generally, John W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Maurice S. Evans, *Black and White in the Southern States* (London: Longman, Green, 1915). On Hofmeyr’s tightrope act, as the most liberal of the group, see generally, Alan Paton, *South African Tragedy: The Life and Times of Jan Hofmeyr* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965). On Smuts’s view of the “native problem,” see J.C. Smuts, *Jan Christian Smuts* (London: Cassell, 1952), pp. 303–13.

their opponents) built up a protectionist, corporatist, interventionist state apparatus which could easily have earned the admiration of Mexico's P.R.I. (all of this subject to the paradoxes of "Herrenvolk democracy"⁵²). The imperium ignored these exercises in mercantilism, which had no important impact on Britain's strategic and economic interests. Anyone who thought the British were a global force consistently favorable to free markets had not looked at India or (inevitably) Ireland.⁵³ As part of asserting *baaskap* ("domination") in the countryside (this is the maize part of the marriage), Native Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 eliminated a prosperous African peasant stratum called into being by the market from the last decades of the 19th century.⁵⁴

Afrikaner Nationalists had learned from the British that control over economic life was the essence of politics. Their nationalism—with its Calvinism, racialism, and a positive Boer self-image—was an ideological force *not* reducible to an economic base.⁵⁵ Their corporatism was the expression (however "irrational" economically) of a need to control their own destiny, a modernization of their Trek to escape outsiders' rule. National Party victory in 1948 inflicted a political Majuba Hill on English South Africa. In the hands of Daniel F. Malan, Hendrik Verwoerd, and B. J. Vorster, the South African state that the British had forced on the Afrikaners went in for gigantic, teleocratic social engineering seldom seen outside the Soviet bloc or the United States post-1954. According to Rian Malan, Daniel Malan was "a classic early-20th century intellectual, a utopian social engineer inclined to speak of socialism as a 'passionate and imperious and demand for justice'. . . ."⁵⁶ *Apartheid*, "separate development," which involved a genuine idealism for some of its supporters, created a monstrosity sclerotic bureaucratic system out of which P.W. Botha, cast in the role of a southern Gorbachev, tried—a bit tardily—to reform his way.

⁵²Kenneth P. Vickery, "'Herrenvolk' Democracy and Egalitarianism in South Africa and the U.S. South," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 3 (June 1974): 309–28. Cf. George M. Frederickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), chap. 17, "The South and South Africa: Political Foundations of Segregation," pp. 254–94.

⁵³Hyam, in *Britain's Imperial Century*, pp. 216–17, notes that the Empire ran India as a form of state socialism. On Ireland, see the redoubtable agronomist Raymond Crotty, *Ireland in Crisis* (Dingle: Brandon Books, 1986).

⁵⁴Out of a vast literature, the most important studies may be C.M. Tatz, *Shadow and Substance in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1962); and Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London: Heinemann, 1979).

⁵⁵Akenson, *God's Peoples*, p. 79.

⁵⁶Rian Malan, *My Traitor's Heart* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), p. 21.

STRUCTURAL PRO-BOERISM

So we return from this dismal excursion still asking, Was the imperial factor all that liberal? Taking up the South Africanist Marxists' burden, I think we can say that the Empire probably made the overall situation worse, much as the Yankees did in a comparable war for Union. While perhaps too much can be made of the New South's "Prussian Road to Capitalism" under the Yankees' supervision, something like that did happen, and the South African case seems a species of the same genus. I will not belabor the parallels, but the Great Trek, which took perhaps a sixth of the European population out of the Cape, looks like a pre-emptive secession movement by migration.⁵⁷ Southerners and Afrikaners had their bad habits with respect to nonwhite labor, but these did not excite much comment until both peoples stood in the way of goals important to external imperial forces. In both cases, the imperial factor proclaimed a degree of emancipation for servants or slaves, unified refractory separatists by force, and then, forgetting its alleged high ideals, turned over the Negro or Native Question to the defeated parties and went on to resolve the issues it thought really important.

Certainly, the British had the habit of showing up, offering to serve, ordering everyone about, and then expecting to be admired for it. The Yankees did their best to emulate the practice. In South Africa, the benevolent British paternalism (so admired in Canada) seems present mostly by its absence. Imperial political control perhaps froze Southerners and Boers into the politics of *Herrenvolk* democracy by precluding other roads to capitalism and bourgeois revolution.⁵⁸

In any event, the subjective attitudes of Boers, Southerners, and outsiders may not be the most important consideration. The question of scale may be more important. State-building beyond some point (or indeed, at all) appears to create as many problems as it is supposed to solve. Joseph Tainter writes that "bad government is a *nor-*

⁵⁷Muller, *Die Oorsprong*, p. 13, states that by 1840, 20% of the Boers had trekked out of the Eastern districts, or about 9% of the population of the whole Cape Colony.

⁵⁸See Stromberg, "War for Southern Independence," pp. 46-48. Barrington Moore, Jr. developed the notion of a Prussian Road to Capitalism in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). Jonathan M. Wiener applied the concept to the New South in *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama 1860-1885* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). Probably neither would care for my giving the Yankees and the British a share of the responsibility for such outcomes.

mal cost of government.”⁵⁹ One need not be an anarchist to suspect that larger governments might well do more harm than smaller ones. This possibility is precisely what the Empires supplied when they rationalized government and economy in the American South and in South Africa.

It is the alternative of a polycentric, pluralistic, and decentralized southern Africa toward which the work of the Marxist-oriented school of younger South African historians points. Without the Empire’s state-building efforts, the African chiefdoms, incipient African and Coloured (Griqua) states, and Boer *maatskappye* would have been unable to do large-scale harm, and would have come to varying understandings with one another. Localized violence might disrupt other activities here and there, but no one party could have imposed its solutions on all parties. Market relations, which had begun to revolutionize society on the frontier, would have been the main unifying force tying these societies together. (How’s *that* for “diversity”?) If market relations tend to erode coercive labor practices and other precapitalist institutions, as economists writing in the Cape Liberal tradition have implied, it seems clear that they would have eroded more successfully coercions existing in minimal states and chiefdoms.⁶⁰ Racialism would not have been much of a *political* program in such circumstances. (I am also implicitly assuming the right of the Afrikaners to defend their society and property and to resist being jammed into third parties’ multicultural teleologies.)

By the 1840s, arguably, British power was getting in the way of this scenario. “Legassick,” de Villiers remarks, “attributed the Griqua failure to the British annexation of the Orange River Sovereignty” rather than to the Voortrekkers.⁶¹ British efforts in the O.R.S. destabilized the West Griqua state and at the same time stimulated Afrikaner state-formation in the future Orange Free State. On their own, the Orange River Boers might have continued

⁵⁹Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 72.

⁶⁰Cf. Jeffrey Rogers Hummel’s discussion of how Confederate independence would have undermined slavery, in *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 353-55.

⁶¹De Villiers, *White Tribe Dreaming*, p. 96. See Martin Legassick, “The Northern Frontier to c. 1840: The Rise and Decline of the Griqua People,” in Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, eds., *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), pp. 358–420. On p. 405, Legassick writes: “The establishment of white supremacy in the Transorangia, and the marginalisation of the Griqua in the area, followed not so much because of a dramatic increase in the power of white frontiersmen—but more because of economic and political changes in the era of British sovereignty.”

to find their *maatskappy* organization, their commandos, and their market relations with Moshweshwe adequate enough for their purposes. On their own, these patriarchal Calvinist anarchists might have taken a while to catch on to the rent-seeking and land-alienating opportunities a state presents.

The Boers were far from perfect. They trekked into the wilderness on an Old Testament errand and to escape hostile authorities. (Only self-restraint and lack of space keeps me from developing the Mormon parallel.⁶²) Had the Boers escaped successfully and avoided incorporation into the Empire,⁶³ they would have been hard pressed, in practical terms, to wreak the havoc that their leaders got them into after 1948, when Afrikaner nationalism took a decidedly fascist turn and the South African state systematized the political coercion of African labor.

Since the disastrous French Revolution, we have had time to reflect on how to realize liberal values, especially in relation to the scale of political organization. If we can come even part of the way with the Southerners and Afrikaners, we may come to see that in an imperfect world, it is generally better to support the forces of devolution, decentralization, separatism, and particularism,⁶⁴ and—if necessary—teach them pure economic theory later. This approach, which substitutes for the over-engineered Prussian Road a sort of Austrian country road, perhaps offers the best line of attack at a time when big centralized states and empires are experiencing a well-earned loss of legitimacy.

⁶²For a very suggestive beginning, see D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Nation and the American Empire," *Journal of Mormon History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 33–51.

⁶³Here I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Timothy J. Gillin, then at the University of New South Wales, who wrote me in 1980 to suggest that my analysis in "The War for Southern Independence" had direct application to the South African case.

⁶⁴For a defense of particularism, see John G. Gagliardo, "Cosmopolitanism and Federalism: Germany's Neglected Tradition," *Continuity: A Journal of History* 4/5 (Spring–Fall 1982): 71–92. For similar approaches to German political history which are also economically informed (and mildly *grossdeutsch*/decentralist), see Wilhelm Röpke, *The Solution of the German Problem* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1946); and Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1944). And Americans, certainly, ought to be able to sympathize with Paul Kruger's words: "*Ge-boren onder de Engelsche vlag, wens ik niet daaronder te sterven*" ["Born under the English flag, I do not wish to die under it"], in "President Kruger's Last Message to His People," F.A. van Jaarsveld, ed., *Honderd Basiese Dokumente by die Studie van die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis, 1648–1961* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Opvoedkundige Uitgewery Beperk, 1971).