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Capitalism, Expansion, and Incorporation on the Southern African Frontier

Ever since Frederick Jackson Turner introduced the concept of the frontier into the analysis of expanding societies it has had a double meaning. Turner hoped to explain American development by "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of . . . settlement," but he recognized that this area had to be won by "a series of Indian wars."¹ In other words, the land was empty, available to be taken into cultivation, but it was inhabited by members of another culture who had to be driven off the land before the processes could start whereby, as he saw it, America was Americanized.

Whenever there is expansion of an ethnic group—defined not in terms of race but as the bearers of a particular culture, with its associated systems of production—this dialectical relationship between the two facets of the frontier exists; and nowhere more so than in South Africa. It is not necessary to ascribe South Africa's ills to the survival of frontier attitudes into the twentieth century² to appreciate, first, that the modern boundaries of South

1. F. J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," reprinted in *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), pp. 1, 8-9.

2. It is ironic that the "Frontier Thesis" of the origins of the South African way of life is in many ways similar in its logic to the "germ" theory that Turner was combating, even though, to take a single example, the time gap between 1800, when MacCrone's historical investigations ended, and the 1930s, when he did his social-psychological testing, is far less than that ignored by H. B. Adams, who claimed that "the origin of the English constitution, as Montesquieu long ago declared, is found in the forests of Germany." See I. D. MacCrone, *Race Attitudes in South Africa: Historical, Experimental and Psychological Studies*, 2d ed. (Johannesburg, 1965), and Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians* (New York, 1969), p. 66. The irony would be doubled if the recent arguments of Alan Macfarlane were accepted since, very cautiously, they tend to resuscitate the "germ" theory, seeing the origins of capitalist individualism in the kinship system of the Germanic peoples. See *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford, 1978), esp. pp. 170, 206.

Africa are to a very large extent the limits of trekboer settlement before 1880, and second, that the incorporation of Africans into the labor process dominated by whites was partially a preindustrial phenomenon, even though its scale and the nature of the class conflict it caused were completely altered by industrialization. The relationship between the territorial expansion of the whites and the subjugation of the blacks can be seen by pondering the contrast between that part of the Afrikaner national myth symbolized by the Voortrekker monument overlooking Pretoria, and the fact that, in the pithy words of C. W. de Kiewiet, in South Africa there "was not a romantic frontier, like the American west, or heroic like the North-West frontier of India. Legend has denied the Ponds, for example, a place beside the Pawnees or the Pathans. The stuff of legend is not easily found in a process which turned Ama-Xosa, Zulus or Basutos into farm labourers, kitchen servants or messengers."³ And even this contrast ignores the important fact that many of those who opened up the interior of South Africa to exploitation by the European-dominated Cape Colony did not find a place in the Afrikaner pantheon.

The Griquas, the Basters of the north-west Cape, and the Afrikaner clan of Namibia—the name is almost ironic—exhibited very much the same characteristics as the rather whiter voortrekkers and trekboers. To a greater or lesser degree, all were stock farmers who originated in the Cape Colony and had an ambiguous relationship to the coastal markets and a drive to subject Africans, generally as laborers. They can generally be described together, although it is also necessary to analyze the forces that drove them apart.⁴

Even taking this into account, the process that produced the myth can only be understood with reference to the national environment in which it occurred. Not that the environment determined the form of the process;

3. C. W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic* (Oxford, 1940), p. 48.

4. Throughout this essay I have used the term *colonial* rather than *white*, except where the process described involves "whites" as a distinct group from so-called coloureds. This term is not strictly accurate, since Namibia, the South African Republic (the Transvaal), and the Orange Free State were not colonies, except intermittently. For a discussion of the problems of anachronistically using "racial" terms, see the preface to *The Oxford History of South Africa*, ed. Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (1969), 1: viii–x, especially the statement that "a third assumption—perhaps the most misleading of all—is that physical type, language and economy are necessarily connected." On the various "coloured" groups, see Martin Legassick, "The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries 1780–1840: The Politics of a Frontier Zone" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1970); Robert Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1976); J. S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652–1937* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 74–109; H. Vedder, *South West Africa in Early Times*, trans. C. G. Hall (London, 1938); Alan Kienetz, "The Key Role of the Orlam Migrations in the Early Europeanization of South-West Africa (Namibia)," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10 (1977): 553–72.

rather, it set limits to it, in conjunction with both the technology available at the time and the prevailing ideas about how a society should be organized. In this regard, the salient fact about the interior of South Africa is that, apart from few exceptional areas, it was suitable only for extensive stock-keeping. By the late eighteenth century, sheep were kept in large numbers throughout most of what was to become the Cape Province, both along the coastal belts north and east of Cape Town and farther inland, moving transhumantly between the mountains of the Cape folded belt and the bushy Karoo. Only in the far east of the colony, in the border districts with the Xhosa and Thembu, were there areas where cattle ranching was more advantageous. In the nineteenth century, when colonial settlement began on the highveld of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, cattle ranching was again a more attractive proposition. Even there, though, the presence of white and Griqua herds seems to have led to a steady deterioration of the veld, as the northward advance of the false karroo bushes at the expense of sweet grassveld bears witness. As a consequence, sheep farming became more regular farther north.⁵

Throughout South Africa, nevertheless, the first penetration of any given area came as a result of hunting and trading expeditions. These began early on in the history of the Cape, when Jan van Riebeeck sent out parties to buy cattle from the Khoikhoi,⁶ and continued in 1702 with the first meeting between whites from the colony and the Xhosa—a meeting which, almost prophetically, degenerated into a bloody cattle raid.⁷ The advance persisted throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, with the establishment of trading posts in the Ciskei and Transkei,⁸ and with the combined hunting and bartering in the Zoutpansberg of the northern Trans-

5. The classic study is J. P. H. Acocks, *Veld types of South Africa* (Pretoria, 1953).

6. Richard Elphick, *Kraal and Castle: Khoikhoi and the Foundation of White South Africa* (New Haven and London, 1977), pp. 151–70.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 228; Robert Shell, "European Immigration to the Cape Colony: The Forgotten Factor in Frontier Settlement and European Expansion, 1701–1793" (seminar paper, Yale University, 1979).

8. See, for example, the comment of the magistrate of Albany in 1833: "The trade of Albany has greatly increased during the past year, but not only so, it has also materially altered in character. The circulating medium of traffic with the nations of the interior was formerly beads, buttons and other worthless articles of that description, but of late demand has been for blankets, kersey, iron, iron pots, axes and other manufactured articles of a like description. The returns consist principally of hides, horns and Ivory, of which the quantity obtained during the last 12 months may be estimated at the value of £40,000. This trade with the interior has also lost its fluctuating character which it once had and it is now more equally stable with the trade carried on with any commercial people" (P.R.O. London, C.O. 53/70, 347). That this trade was largely with the Ciskei and Transkei can be seen from its great diminution during the frontier war of 1835 (P.R.O., C.O. 53/72, 301). For a later period, see W. Beinart, "European Traders and the Paramountcy in Pondoland, c. 1878–1894," paper presented to African Studies Association [United Kingdom] Conference, Oxford, 1978.

vaal,⁹ through eastern Botswana,¹⁰ and even into Ngamiland and Barotse-land.¹¹ Later still, the Afrikaner settlers of southern Angola¹² and Kenya¹³ followed much the same pattern. Nevertheless, major responsibility for the expansion of the Cape Colony and its successors lies squarely with the stock farmers. The characteristic southern African frontier, whether early in the southwestern Cape or 150 years later in the Transvaal and Namibia, was one where stock farmers searching for new land interacted with Africans, who themselves were generally in possession of cattle and/or sheep. With few exceptions the colonists fought the Africans in order to capture grazing ground or stock, not to control trade routes or agricultural land;¹⁴ and in those exceptional cases where the object of the whites was the acquisition of labor, the captives were used as herdsmen.

In time the first hunters and traders transformed themselves into, or were replaced by, people who were predominantly stock farmers. As P. J. van der Merwe has argued, "throughout the course of our history the pioneers of the frontiers lived, to a greater or lesser extent, by hunting, and saved their stock for the market,"¹⁵ and what was true for the Afrikaner trekboers with whom van der Merwe identified was also true for other South African frontiersmen. Van der Merwe took a rather more nuanced position than has been attributed to him¹⁶ on one of the major debates in the history of colonial expansion in southern Africa. This concerns the extent to which the stock farmers of the interior were dependent on the market and were pulled deeper into the country by the commercial opportunities which this mode of existence offered or, to see the problem inversely, the degree to which the

9. Roger Wagner, "Zoutpansberg: Some Notes on the Dynamics of a Hunting Frontier," University of London, *Collected Seminar Papers on Southern Africa* 6 (1975): 32-42.

10. See, for instance, R. C. Cumming, *Five Years of a Hunter's Life in the Far Interior of Southern Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1856); Neil Parsons, "The Economic History of Khama's Country in Botswana, 1844-1930," *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, ed. Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons (London, 1977), p. 116-19.

11. See David Livingstone, *Family Letters, 1841-1856*, ed. I. Schapera, 2 vols. (London, 1959), 2: 147-51; James Chapman, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, 1849-63*, 2 vols., ed. E. C. Tabler (Cape Town, 1971), 1: 194-95.

12. W. G. Clarence-Smith, "The Thirstland Trekkers in Angola: Some Reflections on a Frontier Society," University of London, *Collected Seminar Papers on Southern Africa*, vol. 6 (1975).

13. M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1968), esp. pp. 229-30.

14. The Africans may, of course, have seen the land as much as a locus for agriculture as for stock-raising. Nevertheless, it is notable that the major field of conflict in the Eastern Cape was the *Zuurveld*, first-rate summer grazing. Herman Giliomee, "The Cape Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812," in *The Shaping of South African Society*, ed. R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (Cape Town, 1979).

15. P. J. van der Merwe, *Die Trekboer in die Geskiedenis van die Kaapkolonie (1657-1842)* (Cape Town, 1938), p. 45 [my translation].

16. For example, W. K. Hancock, "Trek," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser. 10 (1957-58): 333-36.

stock farmers were driven onward by their need for subsistence. One of the poles of this debate was taken by S. D. Neumark, when he argued that "even if the frontiersmen were 99 percent self-sufficient, it was the 1 percent that tipped the scale, for it constituted the minimum factor in the frontiersman's economy."¹⁷ Against this, Leonard Guelke has argued that "under frontier conditions . . . in the midst of abundant resources, a small number of settlers were able to enjoy a modest standard of living with scarcely any participation in an exchange economy,"¹⁸ since "an early view of the South African frontier that maintained that the *trekboeren* were essentially subsistence farmers was not far from the truth, although it overlooked their few important links with the outside world."¹⁹ In a sense this is an unreal debate, or rather one in which at least three separate strands have become entangled. It is worthwhile attempting to unravel them.

First, there is no doubt that for the major part of their own subsistence the frontiersmen were dependent on what they produced themselves. It is impossible to be specific as to what proportion of a frontier family's requirements came from the farm itself. If sufficiently detailed sources exist—which I doubt—they have yet to be investigated quantitatively. Nevertheless, it is possible to give a variety of indications respecting the various sectors of the frontier economy. Perhaps it is best to distinguish the basic needs of the households from luxuries. Almost none of the former came through the market. In particular, food was almost entirely home-produced. The major component of the frontier diet was meat, when possible venison but more generally either mutton or beef. But it should be stressed that the monotonous consumption of mutton was by no means invariable. In all the frontier districts some farmers sowed grain, even if it was not always possible to harvest it. The climate of the interior of at least the Cape Province is such that unirrigated grain fails at least as often as it succeeds. Occasionally attempts were made to supplement the otherwise exclusively carnivorous diet by purchasing grain from other districts,²⁰ but that was a rare occurrence, not surprisingly when the problems of transport are taken into account. Even in Cape Town around 1800, bread was more expensive than meat per pound.²¹ Thus, when the butcher C. H. Olivier was asked what the eastern farmers lived on, he replied: "Meat and milk. Many of them have

17. S. D. Neumark, *Economic Influences on the South African Frontier, 1652-1836* (Stanford, Calif., 1957), p. 4.

18. Leonard Guelke, "Commentary," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67 (1977): 466.

19. Leonard Guelke, "Frontier Settlement in Early Dutch South Africa," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (1976): 41.

20. For example, *Belangrijke Historische Dokumenten over Zuid Afrika*, ed. G. M. Theal (London, 1911), 3:359.

21. For example, John Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1801-04), 2:169.

not tasted bread for six years. They used to get meal from the corn farmers, but these now rather prefer to sell their grain to the troops on the Frontier for money, than to barter it for cattle. They try to grow corn every year, but unless there is rain in January and February, the crop is burnt up and the seasons have been very bad."²² Thus, as Lichtenstein described for a sheep-herding district: "Six hundred wethers are requisite for feeding a family the year through, including the slaves and Hottentots, and in many a colonist's family no other food but mutton is ever tasted."²³

Clothing was generally homemade, and was initially very largely of soft buckskin, although a growth in prosperity would replace this with European cloth.²⁴ It is also notable that in almost all the frontier villages the first items to be manufactured were hats.²⁵ Fuel was collected on the farm itself and was more likely to be cow-dung than wood, to the detriment of the land's fertility.²⁶ As for shelter, the first colonial inhabitants of any area were almost certain to live in the movable, mat-covered *hartebeeshuisjes* they copied from the Khoikhoi,²⁷ but as settlement became more permanent, solid houses were to be constructed. They were no doubt built by the farmer and his family themselves—sometimes very badly even in those districts where there was abundant good wood.²⁸ Elsewhere it might require a considerable journey to collect the requisite materials. The Griquas of Philippolis, for instance, had to journey to the Kat River to obtain timber for the frames of their houses.²⁹ Occasionally, also, substantial constructions of corbelled stone were built in the treeless districts of the Karroo.³⁰

Second, it is clear that no frontiersman in southern Africa was outside the gambit of the market and of the money economy, even if they were marginal to him. To give perhaps the most striking example, in 1783 two brothers, Jacob and Carel Kruger, managed to escape justice and flee to the Orange River from the frontier districts of Karroo, where they had been living as traveling teachers. Their crime was forging the newfangled paper money and distributing it among their neighbors, a crime clearly unimaginable without at least a rudimentary money economy.³¹ More prosaically, it is impossible to ignore the point made by Neumark that no frontier farm could

22. *Records of the Cape Colony*, ed. G. M. Theal, 36 vols. (London, 1897–1905), 29: 478.

23. H. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805*, trans. Anne Plumtre (Cape Town, 1929–30), 1: 446.

24. R. G. Cumming, *Five Years*, 1: 140.

25. Cape of Good Hope, *Statistical Blue Book for 1840*, p. 300.

26. W. J. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of South Africa, 1822*, ed. I. Schapera, 2 vols. (London, 1953), 1: 83.

27. Van der Merwe, *Trekboer*, pp. 222–23.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

29. Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas*, p. 42.

30. A. J. Christopher, *Southern Africa* (Folkestone, Eng., and Hamden, Conn., 1976), p. 79.

31. Case of 25 March 1784, *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, The Hague, V.O.C. 4313.

operate without at least a few articles which could not be produced on the farm itself. The most notable of these were wagons, which, given the transhumant nature of most stock farming, functioned as dwellings in addition to their distributive task, and firearms, gunpowder, and lead, which were perhaps the most important instruments of production, at least in the farthest districts.³² These had to be purchased, and it was therefore necessary for each farmer to market his produce regularly. Perusal of the genealogies published by C. C. de Villiers demonstrates that in the eighteenth century almost all whites visited the southwest Cape at least once every two years, to have their children baptized if for no other purpose,³³ and it is reasonable to assume that these visits were combined with commercial activities. Later, as the farmers moved farther into the interior, so did the commercial system, first in the hands of itinerant traders (*smouse*), until, with the foundation of small market towns, it became more firmly rooted.³⁴

In general, the farmer attempted to cover as high a proportion of his costs as possible, not by selling his stock to the butcher or as draught oxen, but rather by marketing such goods as soap, tallow, butter, wax, dried fruit, hides, skins, or horns. By thus diversifying his wares, he was attempting to preserve the major component of his capital which, in a time when land was cheap and unimproved, was his stock. It was rational to maintain the flocks and herds at the highest possible level with the available grazing, since there was the ever-present threat of losing the complete herd, either to the deprivations of Khoisan—or, later, Xhosa or Sotho—or to drought and disease. Given the highly mobile and rootless nature of frontier life, what this did to the long-term quality of the veld was not the farmer's concern. However, because of the high costs of bulk transport, he was often obliged to market those of his possessions that could walk—in other words, sheep and cattle. Indeed, farmers were clearly fully aware of the market value of their stock and attuned to the fluctuations in it. In the 1790s, for instance, attempts to maintain an artificially low price level for meat in Cape Town foundered as a result of the Graaff-Reinet farmers refusal to sell at a rate they considered unacceptably low.

There is no doubt that all sections of the farming community were eager to exploit such commercial activities as were available. In this, as in so

32. On the importance of the trade in firearms to such frontiersmen as the Griquas, see *Records*, ed. Theal, 28:384, 437.

33. Robert Ross, "The 'White' Population in South Africa in the Eighteenth Century," *Population Studies* 29 (1975): 220.

34. A *smouse* was a traveling pedlar. Ample evidence for the process of town foundation in the Cape Colony can be found in the Cape of Good Hope *Statistical Bluebooks of the Colony* (an annual publication). Farther north, there is no such readily available source, and it is necessary to rely on such incidental descriptions as that of Potchefstroom in the 1850s by James Chapman in his *Travels*, 1:14–16.

many other respects, the Philippolis Griquas were typical of "frontier" farmers. Although during the 1820s, when they arrived in what was to become the southern Free State, they were far from wealthy, within a few years they had built up their herds to such an extent that the farmers of the northern districts of the Cape were complaining of the unfair competition that they experienced from the Griquas, who had access to better pastures and could thus command higher prices in the markets of Graaff-Reinet and Grahamstown.³⁵ At the same time, the Griquas were diversifying their activities. In 1836 one man opened a hotel on the road between the Orange River and Philippolis, since the traffic had become large enough to justify it,³⁶ while others traded, probably in grain and horses, into Lesotho.³⁷ Certainly most Griquas were concerned to make a profit from the presence of British troops north of the Orange during the 1840s and 1850s,³⁸ while, particularly after the discovery of the wagon routes to Ngamiland in 1850, many of the Philippolis Griquas, along with individuals from many other backgrounds in South Africa, took advantage of the temporary ivory boom this discovery caused.³⁹ At the same time, with the large-scale introduction of merino sheep north of the Orange, some Griquas were able to convert their flocks into wool-bearers, so that the 1850s became a boom decade for Philippolis, at least in economic terms.⁴⁰

Numerous similar responses to new economic possibilities could be described for all the frontiersmen of southern Africa. For much of the eighteenth century, the opportunities were limited to elephant hunting⁴¹ and aloe cultivation,⁴² but thereafter, with the increasing commercialization of the country, they were enjoyed by far more of the interior men. Examples range from the Mossel Bay farmers who invested heavily in the 1780s, when there was the chance of opening up the bay as a market for grain (and who suffered very considerable losses when the project was aborted);⁴³ via the

35. P. J. van der Merwe, *Die Noordwaartse Beweging van die Boere voor die Groot Trek, 1770-1842* (The Hague, 1937), p. 310.

36. W. B. Boyce, *Notes on South African Affairs . . .* (Grahamstown, 1838), pp. 155-56.

37. See *Basutoland Records*, ed. G. M. Theal, 3 vols. (Cape Town, 1883), 1:413; E. Cassalis, *My Life in Basutoland* (London, 1889), pp. 136-39; Peter Sanders, *Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho* (London, 1975), pp. 47-48; R. C. Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland* (Moriya, So. Africa, 1967), pp. 438-39.

38. Robert Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas*, p. 53.

39. See Livingstone, *Family Letters*, 2: 147-51; Chapman, *Travels*, 1: 194-95.

40. Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas*, pp. 66-81.

41. Shell, "European Immigration."

42. Anders Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope . . .*, ed. V. S. Forbes, trans. J. and I. Rudner, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1976-77), 2: 258-60.

43. See C. F. J. Muller, *J. F. Kirsten or die Toestand van die Kaap Kolonie in 1795, 'n kritiese Studie* (Pretoria, 1960), p. 61; *Belangrijke Historische Dokumenten*, 3: 36-38; D. G. van Reenen, *Die joernaal van Dirk Gysbert van Reenen*, ed. W. Blommaert and J. A. Wiid (Cape Town, 1937), p. 285.

eastern cattle farmers who profited from the presence of the British army in Algoa Bay (Port Elizabeth);⁴⁴ to Jan Viljoen, veld-cornet of the Marico district of the western Transvaal in the 1850s, who was so concerned to preserve his privileged position on the "Missionaries' Road" to Botswana and the north that he ordered the Griqua, Adam January (alias Apé), to constrain any Britishers from moving north of Molopolole—an order that was obeyed.⁴⁵

Still, to establish on the one hand that the frontiersmen were very largely, if never entirely, self-sufficient and on the other that they were responsive to market opportunities—that, each in his own way, both Guelke and Neumark are correct—does not provide any deep insight into the dynamics behind the rapid spread of colonial structure throughout what was to become South Africa. This is because the economic arguments they propose cannot penetrate the actual motivation as a whole—far less the economy as a whole. An explanation for frontier expansion in South Africa must necessarily attempt to be an explanation for an immense number of individual decisions to move out and found a new farm in territory as yet unexploited by the colonists. It is most persuasive to view these decisions as stemming from the structure of the colonial family and the tendencies within that institution that led to its regular fission.

In a sense, the most obvious explanation for the regular breaking up of colonial families was their immense size and the consequent high rate of population growth. It is known, for instance, that in the course of the eighteenth century the free population of the Cape Colony (excluding Khoisan) grew by about 2.6 percent per annum, and that this was only marginally the result of immigration.⁴⁶ Of course, population growth was a necessary cause of colonial expansion, though not a sufficient explanation for it. But certain problems remain.

First, what was the cause of the population growth? To a certain extent, it was the good nutrition of the colonists, who were able to enjoy the fruits of newly cultivated land and were cushioned from the effects of otherwise debilitating demographic crises by the slaves and the Khoisan doing their hard work for them. There can have been few hungry white men or women in South Africa before, perhaps, the 1880s,⁴⁷ and in consequence it is reason-

44. See n. 22 above.

45. See Jan Viljoen to Adam Januarie, 11 June 1852, LMS Archives, South Africa Odds 12/2/C, copy in the handwriting of David Livingstone; Chapman, *Travels*, 1:50.

46. Ross, "White Population," pp. 221–22. It should be noted that when I wrote that article, I had not examined the original lists (held in the Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague) and was therefore unaware that the figures given in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriote*, 2d rev. ed. (Pretoria, 1967), pp. 339–48 include large numbers of free blacks, especially in the Cape District.

47. See Carnegie-kommissie, *Die Armblanke-vraagstuk in Suid-Afrika*, vol. 1: *Plattelandsverarming en plaatsverlating*, by J. F. W. Grosskopf (Stellenbosch, 1932), pp. 19–20.

able to suppose that the death rate was both relatively low and, more importantly, not subject to massive fluctuations. But population growth as rapid as that of early white South Africans also requires a high birth rate, which was certainly to be found. Again, in part it was the health of the population which increased its fecundity, but the effects of this in the long term were probably minimal. Rather, the most important cause of the high fertility⁴⁸ of the colonists, and thus ultimately of their sharp increase in numbers, was low age at first marriage, particularly of women. In the eighteenth century, over half the women who ever married did so before they were twenty, while in Potchefstroom in the earliest days of the Transvaal, this proportion had risen to 82 percent.⁴⁹ In a precontraceptive society, the effects of such a low age of first marriage for women on the birth rate are clear.

Now, although such a low age at first marriage for women is the rule rather than the exception in world perspective, for a northwest European population it is highly abnormal;⁵⁰ and, as will be shown below, the family structure of the colonists was in other respects fairly typical of their continent of origin. In colonial society—and not only in South Africa⁵¹—the constraints against early marriage had clearly been lifted. In Europe, to generalize shamelessly, such constraints were largely economic. A man could not marry until he was independent, and he often chose a relatively old bride (say, in her late twenties) in an attempt to reduce the size of his future family.⁵² There is indeed some evidence that in South Africa, at least the first of these constraints was operative. However, in southern Africa the generally low age at marriage and consequent population increase derived from the opportunities for independence provided, ultimately, by the open frontier in land. As the frontier closed, the age at marriage went up.⁵³ In other words, it is wrong to explain southern African frontier expansion

48. It is important to realize that fertility rates are calculated on the basis of all women between the ages of fifteen to forty-five, whether or not they are married or otherwise indulging in regular sexual activity.

49. G. A. Kooy, *Een Eeuw Boerenleven in Zuidoost-Transvaal, Mededelingen van de Landbouwhogeschool, Wageningen*, 65/7 (1965), pp. 117–18.

50. See J. Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," *Population in History*, ed. D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London, 1965).

51. See, for example, J. Henripin, *La Population canadienne au début du XVIII^e siècle, Travaux et documents de l'I.N.E.D., Cahier No. 22* [Paris, 1954]; P. J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population and Land in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca and London, 1970).

52. This is argued, for instance, by E. A. Wrigley, "Family Limitation in Pre-Industrial England," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., vol. 19 (1966).

53. It is notable that in 1875 the proportion of women between twenty and twenty-four who were married [which is obviously an inverse index of the age at first marriage] was considerably higher in the Eastern Province of the Cape Colony than in the Western. Also, in both divisions there was a strong positive correlation between the proportion who were married and the proportion who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church.

solely in terms of population increase, since to a considerable extent that very increase was encouraged by the presence of the frontier.

The reasons for this independence were partly endogenous and partly imported from Europe. It should be remembered that the institutions and many of the settlers of the Cape Colony came from the Netherlands, and within the Netherlands from the Province of Holland. This was perhaps the classic locus of individualism in Europe,⁵⁴ by far the most urbanized region of the continent,⁵⁵ and one which, if it had ever had a peasantry in the true sense of the term, had lost it well before the mid-seventeenth century, to give way to highly commercialized agriculture.⁵⁶ It was only in the middle of the eighteenth century that the Dutch East India Company began to recruit large numbers of sailors from the areas of genuine European peasantries in central Germany, and by then the pattern of colonial society had been set.⁵⁷ Moreover, all immigrants to South Africa had been torn away from their own societies (except for those who came from a seafaring community in the first place) and were therefore not likely to attempt to reconstruct a "traditional" way of life which had rejected them, or at least placed them in a disadvantageous position. Only in the southwestern Cape, far from the frontier, were there incentives to establish a way of life built around a family farm passed on from generation to generation. Mobility was always too easy, and was, moreover, never discouraged in any way by the actions of government or any other institution.⁵⁸

It must be admitted, though, that in rural South Africa the role of kinship came to be far greater than it was in Holland. The high frequency of

54. Probably even more so than England. See Macfarlane, *Origins*, and H. P. H. Jansen, *Hollands Voorsprong*, inaugural lecture, Leiden, 1976.

55. W. Jappe Alberts and H. P. H. Jansen, *Welvaart in Wording, Sociaal-Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland van de Vroegste Tijden tot het Eind van de Middeleeuwen* (The Hague, 1977), p. 263.

56. For this subject, see the magnificent work of Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age* (New Haven and London, 1974).

57. J. R. Brujin, "De personeelsbehoefte van de VOC overzee en aan boord, gezien in Aziatisch en Nederlands perspectief," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 91 (1976): 235.

58. In a comparative work, it is worth stressing the similarities in terms of social structure of the Netherlands and England, and indeed of their respective colonies. It has been argued that "the only areas that never had peasantries at all were those colonized by England: Australia, New Zealand, Canada and North America" [see Daniel Thorner, "Peasantry," *International Encyclopedia of Social Science*]. Although there may well have been peasantries in South Africa (though this point is debatable), the white farmers could not be so described. It was not that they "seized privacy and intimacy for themselves as soon as they came off the boat," and thus did not establish the public, nonintimate peasant society, as Edward Shorter argues in *The Making of the Modern Family* (London, 1976), p. 202. Rather, the immigrants to South Africa did not come from a peasant society any more than those to the British colonies did. This argument, of course, largely follows Macfarlane, *Origins*.

marriages among kin would seem to bear witness to this. Nevertheless, there is never any suggestion of anything approaching lineage formation among the white (or Bastard) South Africans, but rather a loose, cognatic kindred, whose members were in all probability highly egocentric and in no sense corporate. It is far more likely that the prevalence of marriage among kin is a construct, first, of the low population density, coupled with large-sized families, which would have meant that a high proportion of available marriage partners were in fact kin, and second, of incipient economic stratification on the *platteland*.⁵⁹

The essential structure of colonial South African rural society can be seen in the mode and the effects of the transmission of property between the generations. This institution, after all, is crucial to the reproduction of social order, and has indeed received considerable attention by students of European peasantries and other rural groups.⁶⁰ It is useful to distinguish between two separate processes—namely, succession to property at the death of a member of the older generation, and grants made by the older to the younger generation during the former's lifetime, or, to use more technical legal terms, between succession post mortem and transfers inter vivos. As for the former, the Holland system of rigid partibility was introduced into South Africa.⁶¹ While it was possible to make a will, there were considerable limitations on this, and indeed there was no movement toward unigeniture. This meant that on the death of a man his property was divided, half going to the widow and the other half being distributed among his children. As a consequence, when a man died, his farm would be sold and the proceeds divided among the widow and offspring, a custom much denigrated by those who advocated agricultural improvement.⁶² The family group would then conclusively divide as any sort of economic unit, adding considerably to the motive for expansion.⁶³

This process could, of course, be accelerated if sufficient property to allow independence was transferred during the lifetime of the father. Here there is a considerable difference between the wine and corn farmers on the one hand and the stock keepers on the other. An agricultural holding is difficult to divide, whereas a sheep flock is very easy, and in any case it seems to

59. This impression, as yet untested quantitatively, has been gained from perusal of C. C. de Villiers, *Geslagsregisters van die Ou Kaapse Families*, 2d ed., rev. C. Pama, 3 vols. (Cape Town and Amsterdam, 1966), and Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (Jena, Germ., 1913).

60. *Family and Inheritance, Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200–1800*, ed. Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk, and E. P. Thompson (Cambridge, 1976).

61. J. A. van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch Indisch Plakkaatboek* (Batavia, [Jakarta], Indonesia, 1891), 1:401–90.

62. Barrow, *Travels*, 2:426.

63. For example, Lutz Berkner, "Inheritance, Land Tenure and Peasant Family Structure: A German Regional Comparison," in *Family and Inheritance*, ed. Goody et al., pp. 71–96.

have been the custom to give a newborn child a few cattle or sheep that could be the nucleus for a herd. There were also more possibilities for acquiring a herd by entering some form of client relationship with a wealthy man. The results⁶⁴ of this practice in stimulating the independence of young stock farmers can be seen in the fact that, although the average age at marriage for men in both stock-keeping and agricultural districts was more or less the same, the degree of variation in marriage age among the pastoralists was far less. They did not have to wait for their fathers to die before they could become independent.⁶⁵ One example will have to suffice as flesh for these dry statistical bones. On 29 October 1805, the members of the *Commissie van Veeteelt and Landbouw* arrived at the farm Groote Valleij, on the Oliphants River, which was owned by Johannes Lubbe. It was a prosperous farm that made its profits from citrus sold in Cape Town, although Lubbe also grew rice, for which there was both water and land in sufficiency. As always, the transportation costs to the market were a major problem for the development of the farm, but in this case it also seemed to the *Commissie* that "industry and hands were somewhat lacking." Nevertheless, Johannes's son, Schalk Willem, who was already married but had not yet become a father,⁶⁶ "intended to trek into the veld with a handful of sheep to begin his career," although the *Commissie* attempted to persuade him to remain and intensify the farming on the many unused stretches of his father's farm.⁶⁷ I cannot say whether or not he did in fact trek away, as his father had almost certainly done before him.⁶⁸ But the point is that he was able to do so and expected to do so.

It would of course be ridiculous to suppose that the structure of authoritative relations within the South African family was the only motive for colonial expansion, even if it may well have been the main one. There were certainly those who moved out to the frontier because of the material advantages it offered, whether in terms of market opportunities or because subsistence could be gained with relative ease in contrast to the more competitive commercial world to the south and west, where considerable capital was needed to become established as a farmer.⁶⁹ The Swedish botanist Sparr-

64. Sparrman, *A Voyage*.

65. See also the case of Scandinavia as reported by Jack Goody, *Family and Inheritance*, p. 8.

66. It is uncertain when he married. De Villiers, *Geglagsregister*, p. 511, has him marrying in 1799, at the young age of eighteen, but considering that he is not recorded as having any children until 1806, it would seem possible that there was confusion with another Schalk Willem Lubbe who married in 1804 but did not have any children until 1814. By this late date the genealogies were becoming somewhat less complete and trustworthy.

67. *Belangrijke Historische Dokumenten*, 3: 402-05.

68. Johannes's father had apparently lived in the area, though precisely where is not certain, while his brother Frans lived at Biedouw, some 20 kilometres away.

69. I owe this point to Leonard Guelke's critique of the draft of my paper during the Seven Springs conference in April 1979.

man relates how, when he was on the eastern fringe of white settlement in the 1770s, he received advice on how to set himself up as an independent farmer and on the benefits of so doing.⁷⁰ He did not follow that advice, but no doubt others did, and indeed, in this period there were various highly commercial farmers with land far in the east of the colony.⁷¹ Again, after 1836 there were obviously some farmers who moved deeper inland for political reasons, the most clearcut case being those who left Natal after the British conquest.⁷² There were also, it should be remembered, those who were forced out. In 1835, Carel Kruger told Dr. Andrew Smith that, twenty years previously, he had been forced to leave his farm in the Warm Bokkeveld as a result of a conspiracy among the leading farmers of the area and with the connivance of the landdrost of Tulbagh. His dark skin made him an easy target for men who wished to increase their holdings in that increasingly prosperous district, and he was thus forced north, eventually to the Orange River, where he became a Griqua.⁷³ Or again, half a century later, the first colonists in what became East Griqualand were unreconstructed Kat River rebels such as Smith Pommer.⁷⁴ These may have been exceptional cases, but the Bastards, and indeed many of the Khoi group along the Orange River and north into Namibia, were driven there by the pressure of white colonists in such districts as the Hantam, the Bokkevels, and the Roggeveld.⁷⁵

These examples demonstrate a wider truth—namely, that the expansion of colonial settlement had the effect of alienating large numbers of the original inhabitants of South Africa from independent access to the means of production. Indeed, the labor force of colonial South Africa was composed in part of those who were imported to fulfill various tasks in the production process and in part of those indigenous peoples for whom an independent existence was made impossible by the process of colonial expansion. This contrast between the immigrant and the autochthonous can be found between slaves and Khoisan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and again later with the Indians in Natal from the 1860s and the Chinese on the Witwatersrand in the 1900s. Perhaps weaker parallels could be drawn with

70. Sparrman, *Travels*, 2: 133.

71. Susie Newton-King, "Background of the Khoikhoi Rebellion of 1799–1803," University of London, *Collected Seminar Papers on Southern Africa*, vol. 10 (1981).

72. The best general survey of these events is still E. A. Walker, *The Great Trek*, 2d ed. (London, 1936).

73. A. Smith, *The Diary of Dr. Andrew Smith*, ed. P. R. Kirby, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1939–40), 1: 152–53. For the white point of view in this case, see P. J. Venter, "Landros en Heemrade; 1682–1827," *Archives Year Book for South African History* 2 (1940): 35.

74. It was estimated around 1860 that there were about 400 "coloured" rebels in the area. G. M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, 5 vols. (London, 1908), 3: 445.

75. See Marais, *Cape Coloured People*, pp. 10–12; Lichtenstein, *Travels* 2: 303–04; Fischer, *Rehobother Bastards*, p. 47–57; Vedder, *South-West Africa*, pp. 169–71.

the modern contrast between the migrant laborer and the permanently urbanized; but in this case there exists the important difference that the areas from which labor is recruited—"pressed out" might be a better description—themselves lie within the orbit of the South African economy, which in turn has exerted the pressures that have driven the workers out. In this sense the autochthonous have become migrants.

But this is only the current stage in a long process which began shortly after the foundation of the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope. It was also, especially in its preindustrial phases, largely a frontier phenomenon almost by definition, since it was a consequence of the interrelationship of individuals of different cultures. Indeed, it could be argued that the frontier closed in any particular region, at least in southern Africa, when control over the means of production passed definitively to the colonists. This, at least in that part of the world, is what "legitimate authority" is based on.⁷⁶ Even where Africans managed to maintain their *de jure* possession of land, as in the so-called reserves, their increasing dependence on migrant labor for new necessities—and indeed for many of the old ones—shows how far the inhabitants had been incorporated as inferior members of the white-ruled society.⁷⁷

This incorporation of Africans into the colonial economy as laborers was generally the result of the slow destruction of their indigenous system of production. In the early stages the progress was often brutal and individual. In the more prosperous regions near the coast, workers could be imported either as slaves (until 1807) or as indentured laborers (between 1860 and 1911).⁷⁸ On the frontier, in contrast, *de facto* slave labor was often used, but it was of local origin. In the Cape Colony of the eighteenth century, those few prisoners who were taken in the bloody wars with the Khoisan were generally distributed among the farmers who had taken part in the commando. Normally these were children, since adults were indiscriminately slaughtered.⁷⁹ Indeed, the carnage on these expeditions was so great that clearly the labor so provided was nothing but a minor by-product. However, in itself it was no doubt welcome, even if the farmers could never fully

76. For this concept as applied to the frontier, see Legassick, "Griqua."

77. The literature on this subject is vast. For a recent survey, see Francis Wilson, *Migrant Labour in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1972); J. Leeuwenberg, *The Transkei: A Study in Economic Regression* (London, 1976); Duncan Innes and Dan O'Meara, "Class Formation and Ideology: The Transkei Region," *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 7 (1976); and M. C. Legassick and Harold Wolpe, "The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa," in *ibid.*

78. For a view of this process in its international context, see Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920* (London, 1974).

79. For example, in Graaff-Reinet district alone, 2,504 San were killed in the commandos of the decade 1786-95, as against 669 taken prisoner. Marais, *Cape Coloured People*, pp. 17-18.

trust the bondsmen they acquired in this way. However, considering the small numbers involved, this slavery cannot have been the major course of labor in any district of the eighteenth-century Cape. The wars were fought for other reasons—above all, for the right to run sheep on the traditional hunting grounds of the Khoisan.

In the Transvaal after the Great Trek, the situation may have been qualitatively different. First, there is some evidence that the Transvaalers regularly "bought" children from the various groups of San in the northern Drakensberg, on the border with Natal. Mokazani, a "bushman" interviewed by J. M. Orpen in 1855, was asked whether

it was a custom among his people to sell their children, or give them willingly? He had never heard of such a thing. Three of his children had been taken away by the servants of some boers . . . but against his will, he only allowed them to be taken because he thought they would have killed him, had he tried to prevent it. He must acknowledge that he had been given a few articles, when the children had been taken away, viz. beads, meat etc. He mentioned the names of nine other men, from whom children had been taken.⁸⁰

But not only San were enslaved. Many of the wars the Transvaal fought against African tribes had as their motive the acquisition of slaves, which were then distributed among the burghers. Indeed, it has been argued that much of the prosperity and power of the Swazi state, in particular, derived from its large-scale participation in slave trading both to Maputo and to the Transvaal. In this way the Swazi aristocracy and royal family were able to accumulate the wealth on which their ascendancy was based.⁸¹

There were, of course, other less blatant methods of extracting surplus from African tribes. Most important was the imposition of tribute, as was achieved most spectacularly in Namibia, until the Herero revolt led by Maherero against domination of the central plateau by the Afrikaner clan.⁸² The levying of tribute was not always successful, as is shown by the failure of the Griqua to establish their hegemony over the southern Tswana in the 1820s.⁸³ But when it did succeed, as in the Transvaal,⁸⁴ it became possible for

80. *Correspondence between his Excellency Sir George Grey, K. C. B., and His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State of the Colonies on the Affairs of Cape Colony, Natal and Adjacent Territories* (Cape Town, 1857), p. 198.

81. P. L. Bonner, "The Rise, Consolidation and Disintegration of Dlamini Power in Swaziland between 1820 and 1889; A Study in the Relationship of Foreign Affairs to Internal Political Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1977).

82. Vedder, *South-West Africa*, pp. 325-63.

83. Legassick, "Griqua," *chaps. 8 and 9*.

84. On this, see in particular Stanley Trapido, "Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy: The Transvaal 1880-1910," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 5 (1978): 27-58.

the whites to transform their initial exploitation into a more or less regular system for the extraction of rent—in cash, kind, or labor—which often resembled the classic methods used by landlords to extract surplus (and indeed often the necessities for life) from peasants. But the subjected Africans did not form peasant communities,⁸⁵ at least in the ideal-typical sense.

Parenthetically, the incorporation of Africans into colonial society as laborers was not invariably the result of pressures emanating from the colonial economy. On the contrary, there are examples of individuals being incorporated as a result of events that were at most marginally the result of colonial expansion. The Tswana, who crossed the Orange River in the 1820s fleeing from the *Difaqane*, looked on the white farms as refuges from the wars and starvation that threatened them farther north. They came to work in large numbers in the districts of Graaff-Reinet and Uitenhage.⁸⁶ However, the odds are that most of them did not stay as permanent laborers.⁸⁷ Once some degree of peace was established farther north, they moved back, many of them settling in Lesotho under Moshoeshe.⁸⁸ Nor did many Mfengu of the eastern Cape remain permanently as laborers for the white farmers after their 1835 decision to quit Gcalekaland. Some managed to set themselves up in the better-paid positions of the colonial economy, for instance, as surf-boat workers in Port Elizabeth, while others were able to transform themselves into small farmers fully within the market economy of the Cape colony.⁸⁹ However, this was a normal phase in the eventual subjection of the vast majority of Africans to subordinate and exploited status within the economic system of South Africa.

The recognition of the initial phase of African prosperity consequent upon the expansion of the colonial economy has been one of the major

85. My vision on these has been formed by Macfarlane, *Origins*, pp. 7–33; Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966); James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London, 1976).

86. C. F. J. Muller, *Die Oorsprong van die Groot Trek* [Cape Town, 1974], pp. 85–134. However, Muller's claim that these immigrants fatally disturbed the delicate balance of forces in the Eastern Cape is patently absurd, since not even the most doctrinaire functionalist could claim that the society in the border region during the 1820s was in any way in equilibrium. Rather, the Tswana were merely one extra element in a fluctuating and highly volatile situation.

87. In 1832, the number of foreign natives in the colony was estimated at only 603 (the three being in Worcester District, the others in Albany, Somerset, and apparently, Graaff-Reinet). The majority of these must have been Xhosa (PRO CO 53/9, 236–37). Two years later, when Graaff-Reinet was enumerated separately, there were 41 "resident strangers" in the district (PRO CO 53/71, 208–09).

88. William Lye, "The Distribution of the Sotho Peoples after the Difaqane," *African Societies in Southern Africa: Historical Studies*, ed. Leonard Thompson (London, 1969), pp. 202–64.

89. Richard A. Moyer, "A History of the Mfengu of the Eastern Cape, 1815–1865" [Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1976].

themes in the recent historiography of southern Africa.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the speedy destruction of the small capitalist farmers has tended to be ascribed too exclusively to the growth of capitalist industry in southern Africa. There were, of course, many groups of commercial farmers who were crushed by the processes of class struggle deriving from the establishment of mining capitalist domination of southern Africa. But although the diamond and gold mines of Kimberley and the Witwatersrand have been the prime movers of southern African history ever since the late nineteenth century, they cannot be considered the only cause of the disruption of African commercial farming for the benefit of the whites. Analogous processes of rise and decline of commercial African groups preceded by decades—even by centuries—the discovery of diamonds. Colonial southern Africa had been within the orbit of capitalism long before the first diamond was mined. It had, after all, been founded by the premier capitalist organization of the time, the Dutch East India Company, and had been taken over by the British at the moment when Great Britain was in the process of transforming itself into the first industrial capitalist nation. In the interest of economy of argument, it would therefore seem valuable to propose an explanation for the subjugation of Africans to white rule that derives from the class struggle engendered by capitalism, and not merely by its local industrial variety. In this way, the paradoxical effects of colonial expansion in southern Africa, in other words of the frontier, can be seen and explained.

The argument begins from the recognition that, as a result of white expansion, a variety of economic opportunities were presented to some of the autochthonous Africans, which they were quick to grasp. Essentially, these derived from the great extension of the market for all products, but more especially for agricultural and pastoral ones.⁹¹ The benefits of this expansion, however, were not equally distributed. Socioeconomic stratification

90. The material of the following paragraphs is clearly derivative, even though, probably, none of the authors on which this argument is based would accept it in its entirety—or perhaps at all. Of particular importance have been: G. Arrighi, "The Political Economy of Rhodesia," in G. Arrighi and John S. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York, 1973); Colin Bundy, "The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry," *African Affairs* (1972), and *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, 1979); several of the essays in *Roots of Rural Poverty*, Terence Ranger, "Reflections on Peasant Research in Central and Southern Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 5 (1978). I am well aware that space, competence, and, to a certain extent, my purpose have tended to lead me "to emasculate hard-won and detailed evidence of diversity," for which I apologize to those who have unearthed it. See A. G. Hopkins, "Imperial Connections," *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*; ed. Clive Dewey and A. G. Hopkins (London, 1978), cited by John McCracken, "Rethinking Rural Poverty," *Journal of African History* 19 (1978): 612–13.

91. This is, of course, in no way to suggest that precolonial economies were stagnant or without developed mechanisms of exchange. But the arrival of the colonial economy presented opportunities of such a quantitatively different order that they amounted to a qualitative change.

among the Africans was intensified, either along precolonial lines or skew to them. Moreover, under the influence of market-oriented agriculture and the individualistic ethos engendered by capitalism, such redistributive mechanisms as there had been in precolonial society atrophied. Their place could not be taken by wage labor within the society, since the new farms were rarely, if ever, of sufficient size to permit the employment of labor. African farmers were able to rely exclusively on their families to fulfill the requirements of cultivation and stock-keeping.

At the same time, and as a result of the same extension of market possibilities, the frontier colonial farmer was enjoying economic opportunities similar to those of his African counterpart, and coming under similar pressure toward internal economic stratification. This was perhaps intensified by the pressure from the descendants of those who had made good on the superannuated frontiers to the south and west.

For the majority of Africans, the combination of land loss and increased stratification within their community made the traditional economic activities of farming and pastoralism decreasingly viable. Therefore, they found themselves obliged to enter the colonial labor market, either permanently or as migrant laborers. The result of this compulsion was that their bargaining position vis-à-vis their employers was weak. Since relatively few, if any, could find employment with African farmers, they were forced to work for whites, either on the land or in the towns, or to take up tenancies on white-owned farms in return for labor, cash, or goods.

In the countryside, then, a three-level stratification developed: large white farmers who employed labor or acted as rentiers; small farmers of all backgrounds (often tenant laborers who had built up their holdings); and agricultural laborers, almost invariably working for the whites. Slowly, the competitive position of the smaller farmers as against the larger deteriorated. Those who were tenants were particularly vulnerable, especially because an increase in the profitability of farming induced the rentiers themselves to farm on a larger scale. Moreover, the larger white farmers had a far more constant access to credit to tide them over cyclical slumps and to rationalize their enterprises. This was not simply a matter of racial prejudice on the part of the banks and other money-lending institutions—though this factor undoubtedly did play its part.⁹² Rather, the larger the farm, the better the security that could be offered, and so the operation of "Matthew's Law" was highly rational.⁹³ Further, since the 1770s the large farmers have almost always been a major element on which the various governments in South

92. Tony Kirk, "Progress and Decline in the Kat River Settlement, 1829-1854," *Journal of African History* 14 (1973): 415.

93. "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have in abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath," Matt. 25: 29.

Africa have relied. They have therefore generally been able to enforce compliance with their interests, whether regarding land alienation, labor regulation, or such seemingly mundane matters as the routing of railways.⁹⁴ Moreover, and crucially, they were able to maintain their strength by exploiting to the full the labor that had been driven to find work with them, in much the same way as the industrialists and mineowners would do. Thus the same processes which drove the Africans into a dependent position on the land or off it also contributed to the worsening competitive position of those who were able to retain some species of independence.

Conversely, there seem to have been few mechanisms for increasing the size of the small, African-run farms to enable them to compete with the large landowners in supplying the market. Probably, in default of considerable injections of capital, the intensive land use required to produce both a surplus and the family subsistence from these farms meant that the soil quality rapidly deteriorated. Moreover, there was no effective mechanism for accommodating the population increase which resulted from the elimination of subsistence crises by improved transport, from the imposition of peace, and from the increased proportion of monogamous marriages—a consequence of the widespread acceptance of Christianity among these “modernizers.” In any case, it seems to have been rare for small farmers to transfer their wealth to succeeding generations. Their heyday lasted around forty years at most, even though it was often the children of these farmers who went to school and used that education to enter the professions as teachers, clergymen, doctors—and politicians. But these were a minority of a minority. Agriculture could not support many of the descendants of the prosperous. Most had no alternative but to become migrant laborers.

At first sight, this analysis would seem to have strayed away from the frontier, at least as that concept is generally apprehended. Certainly, the motives for colonial expansion described earlier in this chapter do not seem fully to accord with the stress on capitalist farming and industry which, I have claimed, together slowly reduced the independent African agriculturalists and pastoralists to a status dependent on wage labor or other forms of subordinate participation in the white-dominated economy, and divorced them from independent access to the means of production. However, even if the initial penetration to the southern African interior was not impelled solely by rational decisions about the maximization of profits and the minimization of risks, the consequence of that settlement was that traders and export-oriented capitalist farmers eventually took over from the original settlers when they themselves did not begin to operate purely along the

94. As W. M. Macmillan pointed out, “to locate the native reserves, it is no bad rule . . . to look for the areas circumvented or entirely missed by even branch railway lines,” *Complex South Africa* (London, 1930), p. 212.

principles of commercial farming. Moreover, the clearest example of "the emergence and decline of a South African peasantry," on which much of this argument has been based, occurred in precisely that area which had been—and had remained—the scene of the classic "frontier confrontation" between Africans and settlers—namely, the eastern Cape Colony. To investigate the earlier stages of frontier interaction and to ignore the somewhat later manifestations of the growth of small capitalist farming—or indeed to concentrate solely on the latter to the exclusion of the former—would be misleading. They were clearly two phases of a single, logically progressing historical process.

The process of commercialization and decline can indeed be seen very clearly in the Ciskei. In 1880, regarding the 7,000 Africans under his control, an official conceded that "the people in this neighbourhood who have in one year raised 250,820 lbs of wool of a superior quality and excellent get up, besides 7,484 muids of corn, who attend to 77 wagons, which are mostly employed in the transport business, to say nothing of the labour they undertake . . . cannot fairly be charged en masse with indolence."⁹⁵ Even by this stage, however, as Bundy notes, increased economic stratification had begun to create a large group of poor, landless Africans, a process helped by the last of the "frontier wars" in 1879–81.⁹⁶

Groups similar to the commercializing farmers of Herschel, Glen Grey, and Victoria East can be found throughout southern Africa in the decades after the penetration of the colonial economy to any given region. The kholwa of Natal⁹⁷ are a clear example of the process, as is the landholder in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State who, with the passing of the Native Lands Act of 1913, became, in the classic words of Sol Plaatje, "not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth."⁹⁸ There were also those who, paradoxical as it may seem now, made Lesotho into the granary of South Africa toward the end of the last century,⁹⁹ as well as those maize and tobacco farmers from Rhodesia against whom the white settlers found it difficult to compete.¹⁰⁰ In some ways the most successful—or at any rate

95. Cited in Bundy, "Emergence and Decline," p. 377.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 378–79.

97. Norman Etherington, "African Economic Experiments in Colonial Natal," *African Economic History*, vol. 5 (1978).

98. Sol T. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa before and since the European War and the Boer Rebellion* (London, 1916), p. 4. On Plaatje, see Brian Willan, "Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an Old Tram Shed: Class Relations and Social Control in a South African Town," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 4 (1978). On agriculture in the Orange Free State, see Tim Keegan, "The Restructuring of Agrarian Class Relations in a Colonial Economy: The Orange River Colony, 1902–1910," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 5 (1979):2.

99. *Roots of Rural Poverty*, pp. 20–22.

100. See, for example, Robin Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (London, 1977), *passim*, but also Ranger, "Reflections," pp. 118–21.

the most long-lasting—were the generally aristocratic cattle barons of Botswana, who were able to convert their privileged position within Ndwato or Kwena society into relatively permanent wealth on the hoof at the expense of great differences of wealth within the society.¹⁰¹

The cycle of stratification followed by a slump, poverty for the many and wealth for the few giving way to poverty and subordination to the whites for almost all the indigenous people, did not begin in the nineteenth century. There are clear parallels among the Khoisan of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Cape, although the details of that process of rise and decline were obviously different. The monopolistic policies of the Dutch East India Company were designed to the advantage of the company and its shareholders in *patria*, while the combination of laissez faire and state regulation of black labor during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was clearly to the advantage of the local employers as well as to overseas capitalists. Moreover, the world economy in the earliest phase of industrialization was not the same as the full flowering of a century later. Nevertheless, it is far from fanciful to see forerunners of the small farmers of the Eastern Cape in individuals such as Herry, Klaas, and Koopman—all Khoikhoi who, albeit temporarily, profited from the commercial opportunities presented during the first half-century of colonial settlement.¹⁰² During the eighteenth century, as the frontier along the Hottentots Holland mountains gave way to the frontier of the Tsitsikamma and the Lange Kloof, so Klaas and Koopman were replaced by Khola (Ruiter)¹⁰³ and by those Khoikhoi cattle owners at the mouth of the Gamtoos who sold some three hundred cattle a year to the company before they were driven out of the area under increased pressure from capitalist-oriented white farmers.¹⁰⁴ Similar phenomena can also be seen on the frontier in Namaqualand and, later, in Namibia. A Khoikhoi farmer living high in the Cedarberg was met by George Thompson in 1823. "His farm consists of about fifty-four acres, three of which are sown with wheat. Besides this he raises annually about 100 lb. tobacco, and has upwards of 200 fruit trees in bearing, the produce of which he dries and sells at the drostdy. His live-stock amounted to sixteen head of cattle, twenty goats and forty sheep."¹⁰⁵ Evidently, this man was almost the prototype of the small market-oriented farmer found later throughout the eastern parts of southern Africa. The Basters, too, in particular the community which in

101. Parsons, "Economic History," pp. 132–36.

102. Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*, pp. 105, 141–44.

103. Sparrman, *Voyage*, 2: 123; *Reizen in zuid Afrika in de Hollandse Tijd*, ed. Godé Molsbergen, 4 vols. (The Hague, 1916–32), 3: 287–89.

104. Newton-King, "Background to the Khoikhoi Rebellion," p. 5.

105. George Thompson, *Travels and Adventure in Southern Africa*, ed. V. S. Forbes, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1967–68), 2: 82.

1860 moved from De Tuin to Rehoboth, deep in Namibia, could be considered as belonging to the same category, even if the reason for their trek was as much the destruction of their homes by !Kora raiders as the pressure from the whites who were at that time beginning to appropriate the grazing land on which their cattle roamed.¹⁰⁶

There is a considerable problem here. In general, in this chapter I have considered the Basters to be colonists, emanating from the colonial society and usually driven by the same pressure for expansion as their somewhat whiter brethren. Why, then, were they considered to be in competition with the whites, as the De Tuin community certainly was, and as were the Griquas, whether of Kokstad, Philippolis, or Griquatown? Clearly, it is impossible to ascribe this to many of the same factors as caused the decline of the various groups of "progressive" African farmers. The arrival of white farmers in the Griqualands and in Namaqualand put the Basters and the Griquas into a disadvantageous competitive position, especially in financial respects, since the whites had been able, in general, to have built up a more substantial working capital as a result of their closer relationship to the market and their exploitation of Khoikhoi and ex-slave labor farther south. Of course, not all whites were able to manage this, and many were forced to become members of the Baster community, just as a generation or two earlier the Baster community itself had included whites who had been unable to maintain a position within pukka white society farther south. Also, various of the Basters and Griquas were able to maintain their position, and these were slowly assimilated to the white society. But to maintain their position it was necessary for them to "pass." With the intensification of capitalist agriculture and, later, industry, came a far sharper dichotomy between the large landowners and employers, and the small farmers and employees. This conflict became increasingly internalized (at least by the former) as between racially distinct *Ständen*.¹⁰⁷

At first sight it would seem as if the arguments employed to explain the outcasting of the Basters and Griquas would be equally applicable to the poor whites. Indeed, the slow expansion of the more commercialized economy into the interior of southern Africa brought with it increased stratification among the whites, as within all other communities. It may well have been that these distinctions were sharper than those among the Africans. In

106. Marais, *Cape Coloured People*, pp. 88-89; Robert Ross, "The !Kora Wars on the Orange River, 1830-80," *Journal of African History* 14 (1975): 571.

107. There is, unfortunately, no English translation for this Germanic concept; but for its applicability to South Africa, see Robert Ross, "Racial Stratification in Pre-Industrial and Industrial South Africa," *Racism and Colonialism*, ed. Robert Ross (The Hague, forthcoming).

addition to the whites who were able to take advantage of the new conditions, and who very largely created them, there were those who found it impossible to maintain their status as independent farmers and employers of labor. However, even if they did sink to the level of laborer themselves, they did not remain there, in contradistinction to many of the Basters and the Griquas. The opening of the mines of the Rand began to offer opportunities at the moment when, finally, land ceased to be available in the Transvaal and the frontier of expansion finally closed. But there was a deeper reason, related to the different economies within which the poor whites and the Namaqualand Basters operated. Namaqualand was a sheep-farming region, where labor was not at a premium. In contrast, in the Transvaal profitability depended very largely on the exploitation of Africans, whether directly in agricultural activities or through the extraction of rent. Therefore, the landowners were required to employ considerable numbers of auxiliaries in order to extract the economic surplus. By preference these were landless whites, who frequently received remuneration in the form of being allowed to run stock themselves as bywoners. In this way they foreshadowed the position of their descendants as supervisors in mining and industry.

If we define the frontier as "a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies" (see p. 7 above), then it is clear that in South Africa the subordination of the African population to colonial rule and to the economic system of the colony, and ultimately of the world capitalist system, began on the frontier. Realization of the advantages of this subordination was not the sole—or even, perhaps a major—cause of colonial expansion, for all that it was the most important result of that expansion. The establishment of the class structure of South African society did not begin on the frontier, but rather with the introduction and exploitation of slave labor in the southwestern Cape Colony of the seventeenth century. Nor did it end there. It has, of course, not yet ended; and the influence of industrialization on the class structure and ideologies of modern South Africa cannot be overestimated. But neither should the importance of the "frontier" on the development of the South African way of life be ignored or devalued. It should not be seen as the single determinant cause, any more than historians of the United States see the frontier as the only factor in the Americanization of their country. Nevertheless, one fact is painfully obvious to the observer of modern South Africa: the bulk of the modern South African labor force are the descendants of those who, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were on the "other" side of the frontier as seen from Cape Town, Bloemfontein, or Pretoria. Aspects of the frontier process in South Africa may have been comparable to that of the United States. The effects were radically different. In America, reservations were places where

"useless" peoples were shut away: in South Africa, reserves were sources of that most useful of commodities, black labor. Within this difference, to the extent that it was the consequence of the frontier processes in the two regions, lies the great contrast between the frontiers of North America and southern Africa.