

ning of the end for Western peoples as they succumbed to the syndrome of white guilt and penance for 500 years of excellence.

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University of the Witwatersrand and Université de Paris VIII (Vincennes/St. Denis). He is a well-known novelist and Afrikaner commentator who has played a leading role in what has become known over the past four years as the

"Third Afrikaans Language Struggle." Like his ancestors, he is forced to live in a laager, a Johannesburg security village surrounded by an electrified fence and cameras, and patrolled by armed guards. **Q**

The Great Trek

The Dutch ancestors of today's Afrikaners founded the first permanent white settlement near present-day Cape Town in 1652. In 1795, following the French victory over the Netherlands, the British occupied the Cape Colony to secure the sea lanes around the Cape of Good Hope. The Dutch chafed under what they considered heavy-handed British rule. They resented the abolition of slavery in 1834, and the tendency of the British to treat them as they did the native blacks. These policies were, in the words of one Boer woman, "contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke, wherefore we rather withdrew in order to preserve our doctrines in purity."

Between 1835 and 1843, some 12,000 Boers, a quarter of those living in the Cape Colony, hitched their oxen to covered wagons, and, with their wives, children, servants, and livestock, moved to the interior in what became known as the Voortrek, or Great Trek, the defining event in Afrikaner nationalism.

The Boers' intention was not conquest. The lands in and around the Transvaal, north of the Orange River, had been largely depopulated by tribal warfare. Piet Retief, a Boer leader, had written in a published manifesto that, "We propose . . . to make known to the native tribes our intentions, and our desire to live in peace and friendly intercourse with them." Nevertheless as the Voortrekkers continued north across the Vaal River they entered lands claimed by the Ndebele, the second most powerful native tribe in southern Africa after the Zulu, and now a substantial portion of the population of Zimbabwe. The Ndebele under Chief Mzilikazi let the first Boer wagons pass unmolested, but began attacking later parties, killing women and children. It was during the fighting against the Ndebele that the Boers perfected their style of warfare.

On October 19, 1836, a party of 40 Boer men, along with their women and children, successfully fought off an attack by thousands of Ndebele warriors at the Battle of Vegkop. They formed their 50 wagons into an outer *laager*, or ring, lashed them together with chains, and jammed thorn bushes under and between them to prevent attackers from creeping through. Each Boer kept a spare gun or two that his wife had loaded for him. The Boers also cut their bullets so



The granite monument at Blood River.

they would split apart in flight and hit several men.

During the battle, Boer women and children sheltered inside an inner *laager* of four wagons formed into a square and covered with planks and hides. The Boer men used the *laagers* only as a final retreat, riding out on horseback with long, large-caliber muskets, called *snaphaans*, which they loaded and fired from the saddle. They rode well away from the *laager* and tried to pick off as many warriors as possible before returning.

The Ndebele suffered heavy losses at Vegkop, perhaps 1,000 dead. Their spears could not penetrate the thick canvas covering the wagons, while a blast from a musket loaded with splintering bullets could take down as many as six men. The Boers lost just two men at Vegkop and no women or children. In early 1837, the Boers launched a punitive raid against Chief Mzilikazi, burning his village and killing 400 warriors.

Many Boers were content with the lands they settled in the Transvaal, but others, including Piet Retief, believed the Afrikaner nation needed access to the sea. This meant crossing into Natal, the land of the powerful Zulus. Retief thought he could negotiate with the Zulu, and on February 6, 1838, he led a party of 66 Boers and 30 black servants under a flag of truce into the camp of Chief Dingaan. After three days of feasting, Dingaan suddenly ordered his fiercest warrior regiment, the Wild Beasts, to "Kill the Wizards!" The massacre of Retief, his men, and their black servants began the Zulu-Boer war.

On February 17, 1838, the Zulu attacked the Boer *laagers* along the Blaauwkrans River, killing 85 adults and 148 children. It was on this day that Zulus earned a permanent place in the Afrikaner memory by killing infants by dashing their brains out against wagon wheels. Zulu raids continued throughout the year, killings hundreds of Voortrekkers.

By late 1838, the Boers had a new leader, Andries Pretorius (for whom Pretoria is named), who was determined to avenge the murder of Retief and the massacre at Blaauwkrans. On December 15, Pretorius and his force of 470 men spotted an approaching Zulu army of 12,500 men along a tributary of the Buffalo River near present-day Dundee. Pretorius formed his wagons into a D-shaped defensive ring, with two cannon to cover the entrances. Although facing overwhelming odds, his men carried modern Western weapons—flintlock rifles and muskets—whereas the Zulus carried only shields and short stabbing spears known as *assegaais*, which they seldom threw.

Before the battle, the Boers made a covenant with God: "Here we stand, before the Holy God of heaven and earth, to make to Him a vow that, if He will protect us, and deliver our enemies into our hands, we will observe the day and date each year as a day of thanks, like a

Sabbath, and that we will erect a Church in His honor, wherever He may choose and that we will also tell our children to join with us in commemorating this day, also for coming generations. For His name will be glorified by giving Him all the honor and glory of victory.”

The Zulu attacked at dawn on December 16, 1838. The Boers held off the first attack, and the second. Although the Zulu drove right up to the line of wagons, they fought in such tight groups their men stumbled over each other, and

withering fire from inside the *laager* drove them back. After the second repulse, the Zulu seemed hesitant to attack again, but Pretorius lured them into a third assault by sending some men outside the *laager* as bait. When they attacked again, Pretorius routed the Zulu with cavalry. The fleeing army left behind more than 3,000 dead along the banks of what became known as the Blood River. Astonishingly, not one Boer was killed, and only three were wounded. To the Afrikaners, the victory was in-

deed divinely ordained.

The Boers kept their vow to God. They built a memorial church in Pietermaritzburg two years later, and celebrated each December 16 as the Day of the Covenant (which the ANC government has officially renamed Reconciliation Day). There are two monuments on the site commemorating the victory. The first is an ox-wagon sculptured out of granite. Nearby is a reconstruction of the *laager* made of 64 full-size ox-wagon replicas cast in bronze. **Ω**

Another Zimbabwe in the Making?

Philip du Toit, *The Great South African Land Scandal*, Legacy Publications, 2004, 271 pp. (softcover), \$25.

The many forms of white dispossession.

reviewed by Ian Jobling

There have been muted reports about the attacks on white farmers in South Africa since the African National Congress (ANC) took power in 1994, but Philip du Toit's new book is the first detailed account of the many wrongs they have suffered officially at the hands of a hostile and incompetent government. This book dramatically illuminates the failure of South Africa's "land restitution program," which transfers white-owned land to blacks. In case after case, the government has taken once-profitable and well-managed farms from whites and turned them over to blacks who run them into the ground. This process could have a devastating effect on South Africa's agriculture.

Dr. du Toit is a lawyer who has represented many of these farmers in court, and has thoroughly researched the struggles of white farmers. Although the book is sometimes confusing for Americans unfamiliar with South Africa, it does a valuable service in fleshing out the details of a tragedy of which the world is only dimly aware.

When the ANC came to power in 1994 it passed the Restitution of Land Rights Act, which promised to transfer 30 percent of white-owned land to blacks during the next 10 years. This was meant to compensate blacks who lost land after the passage of the 1913 Native Land Act, which restricted black ownership. In

subsequent years, white governments relocated millions of blacks to native homelands that comprised about 12 percent of the area of South Africa.

The 1994 Land Rights Act also established the Land Claims Courts to govern restitution. Claimants had to prove in court that they or their ancestors had



been dispossessed of the land after 1913, and that they had not been fairly compensated. The land-owners could present evidence that the claim was invalid, and haggle over the value of the land. Valid claimants were eligible for government help to buy the land. The deadline for applications for land restitution was Dec. 31, 1998, by which time blacks filed 68,878 claims. This legal process has been slow, and blacks have received about three percent of white-owned land.

Militant groups constantly criticize the government for its slow pace.

In response, the ANC amended the Land Rights Act in 2003 so that the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs does not need a court decision to take land, as long as the minister is satisfied the claimants were dispossessed, and that the owners are getting a fair price. Predictably, this change has outraged white land-owners. As Andries Botha of the Democratic Alliance Party said: "We are moving from the rule of law to the law of rule. ANC ministers imagine themselves as beings of infinite wisdom whose actions should not be questioned. In 1990 the Zimbabwean minister of agriculture also held this kind of view."

Dr. du Toit points out that the land restitution process has always been fraudulent. Courts favor blacks, and often award land even when claims do not meet legal standards. A particularly egregious example is that of the Botshabelo mission in Mpumalanga Province established by Germans in the 19th century on land not owned by any tribe. The missionaries sheltered black refugees from tribal wars, and gave them education and training. The missionaries built a village with a mill, a book bindery and press, a blacksmith, and other industries where the refugees worked. In 1972, the government removed the descendants of the refugees, and gave them housing and compensation in another area. After 1994, the resettled tribesmen successfully claimed the missionary land for themselves on the grounds that their forefathers lived there, although they were there only because of the generosity of the missionaries and never in any