

## The Dutch: The Framers of Racial Superiority in South Africa

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**Abstract:** *For centuries, the South African social order was shaped according to the needs of the White colonizers. It was based on legal separation of the White race from the Black one. Moreover, the Whites officially introduced racial segregation to legalize its racist practices. This complex situation led to a divided society that infringed the rights of the Black South Africans. Then, it changed The South African society for a very long time. Indeed, the Whites became the new masters of the country, and it was important for them to preserve this "privileged" position to ensure their dominance. At this level, it is noteworthy to mention that this became possible thanks to the early Dutch who were the first colonizers to shape a racially segregated South African society.*

**Key-words:** *South Africa, segregation, Dutch, Blacks, free burghers, superiority and the Bible.*

**Résumé :** *Pendant des siècles, l'ordre social sud-africain a été façonné selon les besoins des colonisateurs blancs. Il était fondé sur la séparation juridique entre la race blanche et la race noire. De plus, les Blancs ont officiellement introduit la ségrégation raciale pour légaliser leurs pratiques racistes. Cette situation complexe a mené à une société divisée qui usurpé les droits des Sud-Africains noirs changeant la société sud-africaine pendant une très longue période. En effet, les Blancs sont devenus les nouveaux maîtres du pays,. Il était important pour eux de préserver cette position "privilégiée" pour assurer leur domination. A ce niveau, il est intéressant de mentionner que cela est devenu possible grâce aux Hollandais qui ont été les premiers colonisateurs à façonner une société sud-africaine racialement séparée.*

**Mots clés :** *Afrique du Sud, ségrégation, Hollandais, noirs, supériorité, Bible.*

South Africa is marked by an era of racial discrimination that changed the course of its history for centuries. The Black South Africans endured this unfairness through segregation, injustice, imprisonment, torture and of course the official introduction of the apartheid system<sup>1</sup>. The present article is an attempt to clarify the main reasons that shaped this race-based society with a specific focus on the early Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> Apartheid is Afrikaans word which means separateness. Afrikaans is the language that was developed by the early Dutch; it is a combination of Bantu languages and the Dutch one.

settlers as the initiators of discrimination in South Africa.

The Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries were the golden ages for the European trading activity and colonialism. One of the leading European countries at that time was the Netherlands. The Dutch developed a great colonial empire in Asia thanks to its trading activities. Indeed, the Dutch controlled the spice trade in Java, Sri Lanka and Mallaca after the withdrawal of the Portuguese and the British from the area<sup>2</sup>. However, this trading empire had to be under the official control and of the States General<sup>3</sup>. In 1602, the latter founded the Dutch East India Company—known as Vereenigde Nederlandsche Ge-octroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie – or VOC<sup>4</sup>. From one hand, VOC was granted privileges and powers and authorized to build forts and establish colonies. On the other hand, it was the official way to secure a safe and licensed trading route directly from northeast across the Indian Ocean from the Southern tip of Africa.

During that period, the Dutch were in need for a safe wharf for their large ships as a midway landing dock for their long voyages from their motherland to Asia. The harbor would also be a recovering place for the ships and its crews in order to relax and recover. As a matter of fact, in 1652, the Commander in Chief of the East India Company Jan Van Rieebeck, who was amazingly attracted by Table Bay, ordered the establishment of a temporary refreshment station on its shores: the Cape of Good Hope<sup>5</sup>. Next, he ordered the construction of a fort, the plantation of a huge vegetable garden and the building of a freshwater reservoir. Through the years vegetables grow abundantly and the crew members were able to recover from their long and tiring journeys.

However, It is worth mentioning that Van Rieebeck had no plans for the establishment of a permanent settlement in the Cape because he was an ambitious leader and was expecting to be given a more important post mainly in one of the Dutch Asian colonies. Yet, after three years of its permanent establishment in the Bay, the Company started to face serious problems. Indeed, it failed to meet the needs of its growing crew staff and the production of food became

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<sup>2</sup> Coquerel, Pierre, **L’Afrique du Sud des Afrikaners**, Brussels, Edition Complexe, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> The States General is an assembly of all the provinces of the Netherlands.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, Harold, South Africa: a country study, Atlanta, The American University, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Guelke, L., “The Anatomy of a Colonial Settler Population: Cape Town (1657-1750)”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 1988, Vol 21, n 3, pp.453-473.

insufficient to satisfy their demands. In 1657, the Company decided to release nine of the Company employees from their contract and gave them farming lands on condition that they remain part the company. The new farmers became known as freeburghers<sup>6</sup>.

Even though the free burghers were small in number at the beginning of heir establishment in Rondebosch<sup>7</sup>, they were, later, known as Boers -farmers in the Dutch language- to distinguish themselves from the VOC employees. Throughout the years the Boers were increasing progressively in numbers mainly with the coming of newsettlers. First, the retired members of the VOC joined them, and then came a group of French Calvinist Protestants known as Huguenots<sup>8</sup>. Finally, the Company brought colonists and orphan girls from the Netherlands. Later VOC ordered Van Der Stel -the new Cape Governor in 1679- to encourage more immigrants because the Colony became a major continental shipping advantage. That expansion was structured by Europeans of different social classes: farmers, traders, adventurers, but the area also attracted criminals and vagrants<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to that, the colony's population was supported by the introduction of slaves that were brought mainly from Asia and West Africa in order to face the shortage in labor<sup>10</sup>. The latter increased the population of the colony. Moreover, they consistently outnumbered the white settlers<sup>11</sup>. The free burghers became dependent on the slaves to secure the performance of manual tasks including: domestic works, building constructions, farming, carpeting and gardening. This situation encouraged a mentality of "superiority" among the white settlers who were convinced that they were beyond performing the same tasks as the slaves. As a matter of fact, it was the beginnings of a "color consciousness" among the whites.

The one main factor that reinforced the idea of superiority among the free burghers was a religious motive. The settlers thought themselves different from all the other races including the Company's

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<sup>6</sup> The freeburghers are the ancestors of the Afrikaners or the Dutch Whites of South Africa.

<sup>7</sup> Vide Coq, R., "l'occupation des terres et la constitution des fermes au Transvaal (1835-1877)", *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 1975, Vol XV, n 58, pp.239-245.

<sup>8</sup> The Huguenots came from France. They are French Calvinists of the French Reformed Church .They were named after the Reformer Jean Calvin .The latter wrote a book called *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) , and his doctrine Calvinism became a major branch of Protestantism

<sup>9</sup> The Whites could not use South African indigenous people as slaves because the Dutch law prohibited it.

<sup>10</sup> Vide Coq, op.cit., p26.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 47

employees. These first free burghers, who used to speak the Dutch language, introduced gradually a new language proper to them that became known as Afrikaans since they considered themselves as Africans or part of the South African land. They were also bound together by an extreme fundamentalist Calvinist version of the Bible. Broadly speaking, the believers were people of the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, they added to their doctrine new principles proper to them. Indeed, they thought themselves as a protected race that was preserved by God's good judgment. They justified such belief through the fact that they had common points with the Jewish who suffered, but God had given them unique grace because they were "the chosen people". Indeed, they were convinced they were the newly chosen people "on the way to the Promised Land" i.e. the moorlands of South Africa. As a matter of fact, they could not accept the idea of sharing their life style with any other race, for all the other races mainly the black one was too inferior to them.

Accordingly, the Dutch government emphasized the need for a Reformed Christian religion in the area. Its goal was, from one hand, to execute the same official religious policy all over its empire. On the other hand, the Dutch wanted to spread the Christian doctrine "among these wild insolent people" -the Africans- in order to become obedient slaves serving the Dutch interests.

In 1910, the Whites including mainly the Dutch descendants and the British created the Union of South Africa<sup>13</sup>. Its government enabled the Whites' minority to establish a constitution based on the implementation of legalized racial discrimination.

As a matter of fact, the first major segregate legislation of the new constitution occurred when the government of Botha passed the Natives Land Act in 1913<sup>14</sup>. The latter restricted the area on which the Blacks could purchase or owe land and drew legal separated reserves - as the areas came to be known- to limit their move to the areas reserved for the Whites' minority.

In general, racial discrimination in South Africa had been wrought by a White minority of colonizers. Not only did they change the history of the country, but they also introduced to the world a new

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<sup>12</sup>The Old Testament is the first part of the Christian Bible referring to a series of religious writings of ancient Jews. The Old Testament is basically based on the Hebrew Bible known as Tanakh.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, Leonard, *the Unification of South Africa, 1902-1910?* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960.

<sup>14</sup> 14-Ibid.

concept called racism.

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