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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.*
Keywords: *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[1].

[1] 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.

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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 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 [2]. However, this trading empire had to be under the official control and of the States General[3]. In 1602, the latter founded the Dutch East India Company–known as Vereenigde Nederlansche Ge-octroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie – or VOC[4]. 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[5]. 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 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[6].

Even though the free burghers were small in number at the beginning of their establishment in Rondebosch[7], 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.

[2] Coquerel, Pierre, **L'Afrique du Sud des Afrikaners**, Brussels, Edition Complexe, 1992.

[3] The Sates General is an assembly of all the provinces of the Netherlands.

[4] Nelson, Harold, South Africa: a country study, Atlanta, The American University, 1980.

[5] 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.

[6] The freeburghers are the ancestors of the Afrikaners or the Dutch Whites of South Africa.

[7] 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.

First, the retired members of the VOC joined them, and then came a group of French Calvinist Protestants known as Huguenots[8]. 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[9].

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[10].They zere from a wide range of areas including: West Africa, Mozambique, Bali, Madagascar and India in order to face the shortage in labour 15. Others were already owned by the VOC and laboured on the Company's farms, outposts, and docks in Asian settlements .A smaller number landed in 1658 and came from the Guinea coast; another was of Angolan slaves captured from the Portuguese.

Here it is worth noting that as Dutch colonial settlement expanded in the late seventeenth century by expropriating of grazing land and the destruction of Khoe and San societies, a number of deprived indigenous did work alongside slaves on settler farms.These new comers and the locals shared different languages, yet they welded into a united group for they were brutally subjugated to the colonizers.

Indeed, in accordance with the VOC judicial policy, the slaves were severely punished once found guilty of any misconduct or violated the slave law. The life of the slaves was inhuman, for they worked very long hours under harsh conditions. They were not given enough food and lived in poor and dirty conditions. Slaves were locked up at night, and had to obtain a pass to leave their master‟s place of work. They were not allowed to marry, and if they had illegitimate children, then they also the owner‟s slaves. Women slaves were often at danger of being raped by their owners or male slaves.

Otto Friedrich Mentzel (1709-1801), a German clerk who lived in the Cape in the 1730's, reported that:

It is not an easy matter to keep the slaves under proper order and control. The condition of slavery has soured their tempers. Most slaves are a sulky, savage and disagreeable crowd "¦ It would be dangerous to give them the slightest latitude; a ²tight hold must always be kept on the reins; the - taskmaster‟s lash is the main stimulus for getting any work out of them.

However, Menzel was fair to mention that

…of this I could give many instances; and if many historians have a good deal to say about the extraordinary wickedness of slaves, they should also point out the unchristian, often unhuman treatment they receive from their masters.

Throughout the years, the freeburghers became dependent on the slaves to secure the performance of manual tasks including: domestic works, building constructions, farming, carpeting and gardening. In the meantime, the slaves steadily outnumbered the

[8] 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

[9] The Whites could not use South African indigenous people as slaves because the Dutch law prohibited it.

[10] Vide Coq, op.cit., p26.

white settlers 19.at an annual average rate of 2.56 percent. For the sake of illustration, in 1700 there were 838 slaves altogether, of which 668 were adult males. The total was documented as 14,747 near the end of Company rule in 1793; in 1806 there were 29,861, and a total of 36,169 by the time of emancipation in 183.420.

The latter increased the population of the colony. Moreover, they consistently outnumbered the white settlers[11]. 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.

Indeed, the 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 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.[12]

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.

While there were many unfair practises inhibiting the life of slaves, there were also laws to protect them for abusive masters. For example, in theory, female slaves could not be beaten; otherwise, their owners would be punished for any ill treatment that may cause the death of the slave, but of course the laws were often ignored because the slave owners were often the wealthiest Whites of the Cape.

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[11] Ibid. p. 47

[12]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 bascically based on the Hebrew Bible known as Tanakh.

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

Therefore, the then government introduced the 1913 land Act.The latter restricted the area where the Blacks could purchase or owe land and drew separated reserves, homelands of the natives, in order to limit to move to the areas reserved to the white minority.

Immediately after, families lost their lands; for others, it became very difficult to live in restricted areas where the daily life became limited in commodities and resources. The disastrous 1913 Land Act was the cause poverty and overcrowding. As a matter of fact, the Blacks were compelled to look for work on the mines.

The Act was followed by the introduction of the pass system. Its main function was to control their movements and made sure they worked either on the mines or on the farms, and compelled them to go back to their reserves as a permanent place of living.

The life of the Black people began to worsen and with no guarantee of rights .This situation was the turning point in their history of fighting against an official and concrete political discrimination .It became urgent for an action against the oppression of the Whites.

Nonetheless, the Dutch were still active all the coming decades in order to preserve their supremacy .This occurred even in a worse form by the 1940's. In 1948, the country held parliamentary elections in which various parties took part including the United Party, the Afrikaner Party and the National Party (NP) .In order to get the highest number of Afrikaners‟" voices, the NP members began an advanced election campaign four years earlier .The nationalists -as the NP members came to be known- started to mobilize the support of Afrikaners by recalling the Afrikaner volk symbolism.

They began by organizing mass speeches in which they glorified the Afrikaner people through their resistance to the many obstacles and the sufferings they endured; they recalled the oppression and the maltreatment of the British, the clashes with the Africans,

their forced trekking and finally the two Boer wars. By advocating these unforgettable memories, the nationalists wanted to assure the re-birth of Afrikanerdom and the revival of their racial supremacy. The Party seized the opportunity of the yearly celebration of the Great Trek to spread its ideas and to shift the Afrikaners‟ ' voices for to its own benefit. The NP‟s next target was the Afrikaner working class's support, and it promised to give this category a particular attention; the Afrikaner traders were asserted that their business could challenge the British one and the workers would form their own trade unions separated from the British ones.

The National Party's official program was rigorous. First it proposed the establishment of a native policy which could definitively draw the Blacks rights. Second, it recommended the abolition of the white representation for the Blacks in Parliament in order to withdraw legally their rigid control political representation.

Third, the same program urged over the African settlements of the white urban areas. Fourth, it also emphasized the concrete separation between the non- whites and the Whites' cultures. According to the party, they were too opposite and could not match together. In the labour field, the NP emphasized on an effective state control over the non-white labourers, especially the urban ones who formed the overwhelming majority of the whole South African labour force –more than 70 per cent of the total labour force.

The Nationalists believed that only a concrete segregative legislation would ensure a dominant white minority. Their goal was to serve the Whites‟ needs. In this context the NP stressed the non-efficiency of the then ruling United Party government. Once in office, the newly elected government started to enact other specific pieces of legislation which were used to determine the position of the whites and the non-whites .The apartheid system was introduced as a means to preserve the white dominance and to subjugate the non-white population.

In 1948, the NP enacted the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act which made marriages between whites and non-whites illegal. Two years later , it established an official population classification according to racial belonging through the Population Registration Act .The South African people were then classified as Whites, Coloureds, Asians and finally the black Africans9. The latest category was put at the bottom of this classification in order to minimize its importance. The government intensified the pressure on the relation between the white and non-white racial groups through the introduction of the Immorality Amendment Act in 1950. This Act prohibited sexual intercourse between the white and non-white people.

The NP government extended the principle of legal segregation through the enactment of the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) which appointed chiefs in the Bantustans and abolished the white representation of Africans in the white areas.

Later, and in order to intensify black urban dwellers, the Separate Amenities Act of 1953 was introduced to guarantee a total separation between the whites and

the non-whites in all the Separate Amenities Act of 1953 was introduced to guarantee a total separation between the whites and the non-whites in all public amenities of the white areas such as transport, restaurants, schools, sport fields, recreational working areas and others.

These laws were introduced for a total social separation between the master race and the non-white ethnic groups in order to preserve the privileges of the Whites as the leading

group of the country.

Not only was the apartheid system a large scale social reorganisation , but it was also a process which sought to deny political representation and participation of Black people at all levels of government and the country‟s sectors i.e the Black communities were citizens of the homelands and not South Africa. It was this atmosphere that mounted tension of a popular resistance to the apartheid state in the 1950s.

According to different definitions, racial discrimination is any segregative practice that urges to treat any human on the basis of his race, colour or ethnic origin. It is also defined as a policy that favours one group on another one because of an unfair prejudice based on beliefs of superiority. Concretely, in South Africa discrimination dictated that the different races, Whites and non-whites, should be totally separated from one another; they should have their distinct living areas and develop their own institutions such as schools, and hospitals. Moreover, the non-Whites should have no rights to occupy significant posts because officially they were not citizens of South Africa. Nevertheless, the main issue of segregation and the recognition of the all the non-Whites as belonging to South Africa was not yet solved.

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