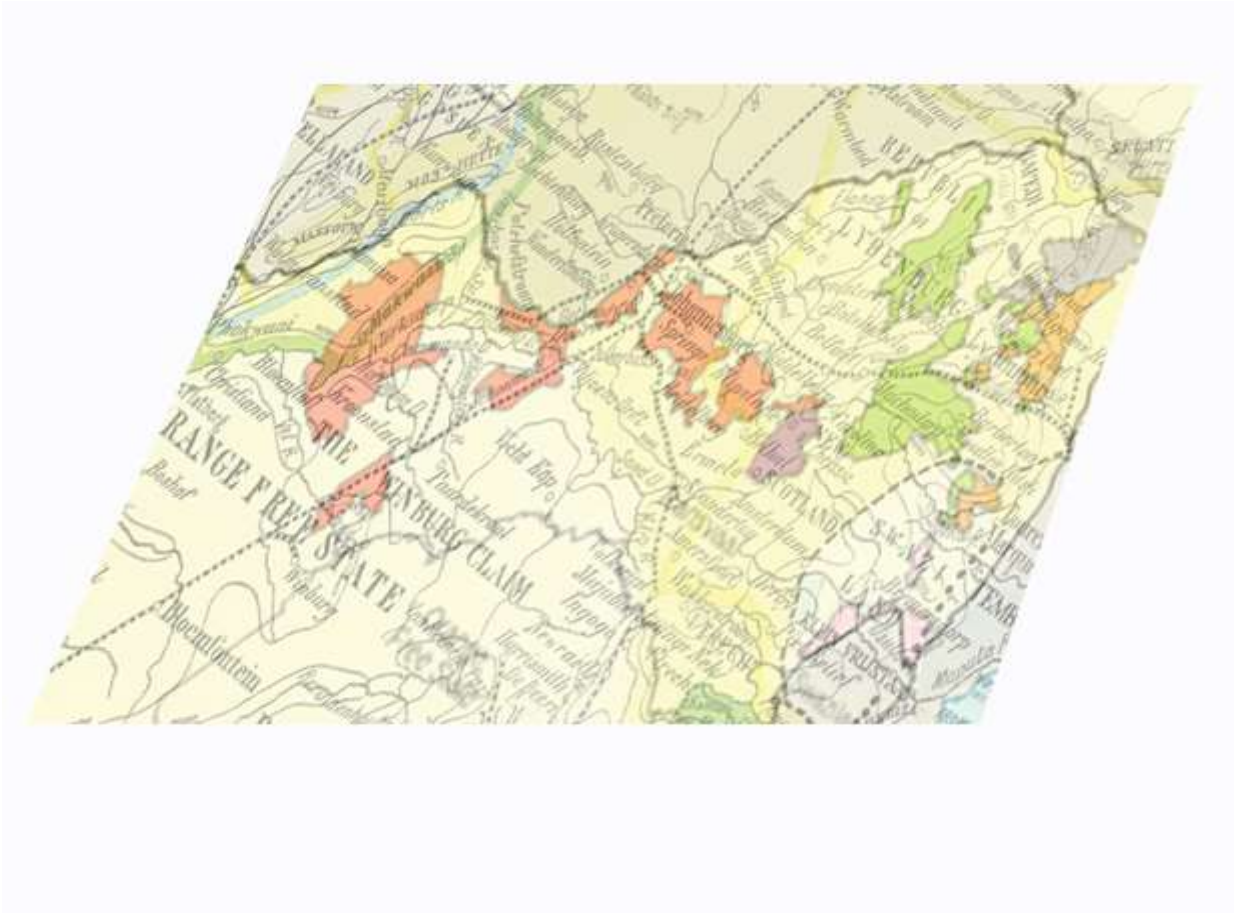
The Messed-up Map

A rash of republican dreams
past, present and imagined



Alex Stone

We, as individuals, are our history ... We don't leave history behind.
History is the present, history is the future"
– Amos Wilson

Till the lion gets its own historian, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter

"I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects. I never wished for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them. How can I believe that that is cause for shame?"

– JM Coetzee, from *Waiting for the Barbarians.*

There is no period so remote as the recent past.

– Irwin, the teacher in *The History Boys*

Democracy? Two lions and a lamb decide what is for lunch.

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Verby is verby

A note on words, language and emphasis

This book is by no means intended as a comprehensive history of South Africa. Too many fine writers have preceded me. This is why the big players in this story have received comparatively little cover (the 1961 Republic of South Africa, for instance). They have already generated an extensive historical bibliography, and an equally informative, sweeping literature in fiction.

It's the smaller, lesser well-known polities that fascinate me. I hope they will you too.

Our passage through the *Messed-up Map* is chronological. The order of the appearance of each polity is no reflection of its relative importance.

I have introduced each country with its own official title, in its own language. Then, mostly for ease of reading I have gone on to use Anglicisms or abbreviations or their best-known labels. A case in point is the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, also known as the ZAR or the Transvaal. One fictional state, the Country of the Freedom Charter, I have named myself. It could conceivably be called the New South Africa, or the Rainbow Nation, but on reflection I rejected these names. They have been used widely in the real world of the present South Africa, but that country in practise is not the shining democracy that was promised. The Country of the Freedom Charter is yet to become a reality.

As for the names of peoples and their leaders, I have tried to be both fair and clear. I have introduced names of the various nations and their language with the correct, currently accepted terms (amaZulu and isiZulu, for example), but often revert to shorter more common-usage versions (like Zulu). Likewise with leaders – introduced by full name (Matsebe Sekhukhuni) for example), later reverting to simply a simpler form (Sekhukhuni), in the same way we might use just a surname. The amaZulu lineage is confusing in this regard, as their leaders took (still take) their father's name as part of their full title – Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo, for example, both instantly recognisable names, so it's better I think, in the telling of these stories to quickly transfer to the simpler name.

In some cases, the one-sided nature of the historical record has left us with incomplete or misleading names; a situation which may be complicated to resolve. This is the case with reference the 'first nations' of our canvas. Initially, in European writing they were called Hottentots and Bushmen, and Dutch and Afrikaans variants of these names. Then they became lumped together as 'Khoisan' peoples. But they are very different cultures – the Khoikhoi had a system based on herding cattle and sheep; the San were hunter-gathers (itself a problematic term – some say, because of the ratio of food actually consumed, it should be reversed to gather-hunters; and perhaps a new term should be invented because this one implies these peoples weren't well fed, which is generally untrue).

Ruben Richards, author of *Bastaards or Humans: The Unpsoken Heritage of* Coloured People explains the complications of this nomenclature: "It bears mention that the word now commonly written 'Khoisan' was originally invented by German anthropologist Leonard Schultze in 1928 and spelt as *Koïsan* to describe the indigenous Khoikhoi and Bushman inhabitants of South Africa…Low (2004) in his thesis on Khoisan healing points out that *Khoisan* is a European constructed compound word comprising old Nama *khoi* or modern *khoe,* meaning people in most *Khoe* languages, an S_n (Saan), or more conveniently San, being the *KhoeKhoe* word used for Bushmen." San can mean a robber, a vagabond or a rascal. He goes on to say "The San people I encountered frequently referred to themselves as Bushmen. This may reflect repossession of a word that in former times held negative connotations amongst the San, or indicate that 'Western' sensitivity over the word Bushmen has been just that."

I have used the names Khoikhoi and San (Bushmen) – this last double reference due to the fact that, as Richards points out, not all San are happy with that name and actually prefer to be called Bushmen in English, as the term, to them, recognises their deep, ancestral knowledge of the veld. In an ideal world, the San groups would be referred to by their distinctive clan names; but English struggles with our available keyboard symbols to render pronunciation (as in the case of the 'Home People' inhabiting the Mier-Rietfontein area – N||n≠e); and this is near-impossible in the case of those that were exterminated by genocide. Likewise, because of their social structure, it has been difficult to identify any San (Bushmen) leaders – apart from Andries Waterboer.

The Khoikhoi, by contrast were almost wholly assimilated into Griqua and Coloured communities by the time of this narrative, so their saga continues under the names of these ethnic distinctions. Griqua is the name of just one of the Khoikhoi nations. In the South African context, naming is a complicated and endlessly-changing arena, subject to revisionist history and (sometimes) its political correctness. Suffice to say, my intent has been to try avoid any possible offence. Any shortcomings in this semantic area in this book are mine alone.

It has been a convention of writing like this to italicise words that are not in common usage in English. I have avoided doing this. I don't want African or Afrikaans words to be marginalised in this way, to be seen as part of 'the other,' or of languages foreign. They are as much – even more so – foundations of the landscape of languages in this complex country.

Trek, laager, commando, biltong, spoor, rooibos, veld, meerkat, springbok: Afrikaans has offered up some widely-used words to the English used worldwide (and even in interstellar travel, at least of the fictional kind). A word like inboekeling, used to denote an indentured servant or 'apprentice', has hidden meaning which I do identify. In this text, I capitalise Apartheid, to give due seriousness to its place as a crime against humanity – like the Holocaust – which it certainly was. Some words history has changed for their convenience to the writers' narratives. Voortrekkers is one: it was first applied by an Afrikaans historian in 1888. Prior to that, the trekkers called themselves Emigranten – Emigrants – though the words trek and Trekboer had long been used. But Voortrekkers, or 'First-Trekkers' suits the myth of them finding an 'empty' land for their taking.

Although often used in international English, the word commando now has a distinctly historical application in South Africa. The 'Commando System' used by the South African Army to call-up conscripts after their initial national service, was phased out by President Thabo Mbeki between the years 2003 and 2008. In this book, commando is most often used to describe a mounted party of armed Boer of Griqua horsemen – up to the 'Last Commando', one of those employed by the Maritz Rebellion in 1914 across the Kalahari Desert

South African English, likewise, has taken up many expressions from African languages. Words like indaba (a conference), or umfaan (a boy), or bonsela (a gift, or un-asked-for financial bonus), and wider concepts like ubuntu (the spirit of empathetic humanity many African cultures possess and articulate). The term Mfecane, used for a period of history, roughly the 1820s to the 1840s, has a place of importance in this narrative we are engaging in here.

The new South Africa (the country since 1994) has eleven official languages. Another reason for me not to treat African words as unknown 'others.'

It is ironic, however, that the most widely-used fusion language, Fanakalo, is not one of the official languages. The isiZulu-based pidgin came out of the mining industry where migrant workers from many different cultures, and their overseers, had to learn to communicate safely and well (though it effectively started in colonial Natal in the 1830s). In the mine setting, Fanakalo was taught formally. You will encounter Fanakalo in these pages, and in the observations of Evita Bezuidenhout. The most-spoken in the country as a first language is isiZulu, with 22.7 per cent of the population using it. It follows that Fanakalo must be up there too, as it's based on isiZulu (although it is not included in official demographic statistics). Officially English lies fourth as a first language, with 9.6 per cent of the population using it as a first language – though a much higher percentage will actually understand it in practise.

Also, given the heavy irony that is so prevalent in the mixed histories of South Africa (yes, written from the perspectives of different observers from different cultures), a use of aanhalingstekens – inverted commas – could have become repetitive, intrusive or didactic. So, I have kept them to a bare minimum, or just in a first usage of a troublesome word in any particular context. The inverted commas could possibly be just about everywhere. In reading these short bios of short-lived states, you will I am sure, get to place them mentally and quite naturally in the appropriate places. Good luck!

The book contains footnotes, rather than end-notes – I find it tiresome to keep flipping to the back pages to check things in books such as this. To allow for readers who have a deeper interest, and who would like to do

further reading, I've ensured that all books mentioned in the text are currently in print and are available to buy online; and likewise all academic papers I have referenced can be accessed (or at least read) online.

Dreams and dust

Short-lived republics of South Africa

How best can you organise a community? How should we make collective decisions? What systems of governance can ensure fairness and opportunity to all? What form of civil government works best? An enduring and vital interest in the history of humankind, possibly the most pertinent, is the question of how best to live together. These are some of the world's most vital questions, for they go to the heart of what good government is. And then, when we find it – *if* we find it – how do we sustain our hard-won polity? Often, our solutions have come about through sheer force of error. We have learned – or *should* have learned – by our mistakes. But sometimes we keep on making them, in history's oh-so-familiar circular route.

So where in the world has there been a concerted, repeated attempt at the establishment of new societies and states – all avowedly with this ideal in mind?

And so we turn to the truncated tales of the many short-lived republics that have come and gone in the borders of South Africa. They comprise a busy narrative brim-full of hopes and dashed dreams in equal measure.

It's a story with some peculiarities. All of these half-forgotten polities in real history – bar one – were established by Afrikaners or Afrikaans-speakers, and each was meant to become independent. None did. Well, maybe one, maybe two. An additional two exist only in the imaginations of Africanists and African National Congress (ANC) loyalists respectively. Of the other imaginary countries, two are world famous in South Africa, two more are genuinely world famous, both in the realm of fantasy literature. Their fictional existence is every bit as fascinating as the histories of all the others.

The erstwhile Boer republics were all distinctly different to the various British colonies and sovereignties, whose borders were imposed on the land by the distant Lords of the Empire. For a start, the British colonies nominally offered the franchise to all men. The Boer-made republics were for whites only. Or blacks only, as you shall see. The British colonies were subsidised economically, often reluctantly but it still happened, by Britain's coffers back home. The Boer republics were meant to go it alone, and all but one collapsed.

Then there were the many Baster or Griqua States established by Afrikaans-speaking people, with written constitutions in that language. But they differed from the Boer republics in significant ways – as we shall see. And history has treated them quite differently too.

There have been no less than 54 of these short-lived South African polities, mostly self-declared 'republics', starting with the first two, Graaff Rienet and Swellendam, proclaimed in 1795 (each lasting only a few months), and ending with those fucked-up footnotes to history that were the Bantustans, forcibly created by the Afrikaner-led National government of South Africa as the apogee of their deranged and inhumane Apartheid policy. These were followed by a few hopeful Volkstate (people's states) established for whites only Afrikaners.

The names of South Africa's short-lived republics read as a litany of lunatic hopes, shattered usually by the nature of the unforgiving land – and their differing human policies. In chronological order of their establishment they were:

Graaff Rienet, Swellendam, Campbell, Waterboer's Land, Daniels Kuil/Boetsap, Philippolis/Adam Kok's Land, Natalia Republiek, Klip Rivier Republiek, Free Province of New Holland in South East

Africa (Winburg), Potchefstroom, Winburg/Potchefstroom, Stokenström Kat River Settlement, Orighstad, Soutpansberg, First Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, Oranje Vrystaat, De Republiek Lydenburg in Zuid Afrika, Buffel Rivier Maatschappij (Utrecht Republic), Combined Republic of Utrecht and Lydenburg, Nieuwe Griqualand (East Griqualand), Mier Rietfontein, Grootfontein (south), Baster Gebied, Nieuwe Republiek, Diggers' Republic, Second Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek, Het Land Goosen, Republiek Stellaland, Verenigde Staten Van Stellaland, Upingtonia/Lidjensrust, Klein Vrystaat, Griqualand West, Provisional Government of the Maritz Rebellion, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei, Venda, Lebowa, Gazankulu, Qwaqwa, kwaNdebele, kaNgwane and kwaZulu (not). There's an instructive story to this last one. Add to that list the Republic of South Africa itself, declared by Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoed in 1961, which ended with the Mandela election in 1994. And, the exception to the 'short-lived' rule, Buysdorp.

Then there are the 16 fictional ones: Kukuanaland, Azania, the Country of the Freedom Charter, Fook Island, Bapetikosweti, The Empire, The Domination of Draka, Kambezi, Outer Heaven, Seko, the Federal Republic of South Africa, the United States of South Africa, District 9, Wakanda.

And in the 'how-exactly-do-we-classify-them?' section – Orania, Kleinfontein, and last and least Balmoral. Each was set up expressly to be a Volkstaat, an exclusively white Afrikaaner homeland, a goal they all acknowledge is unattainable.

It's instructive perhaps, inevitable surely, to learn that the longest lasting polities will be those that live in the realm of fantasy, or the fictions of alternate history. Kukuanaland. The Empire. The Domination of Draka. No, I hadn't heard of that last one before, either.

But one in the real world, Buysdorp, has survived for 200 years now. How? Perhaps its secret was to lay below the radar, and to bother no-one. Until now.

This is not counting the numerous communities, tribes, kingdoms and other and polities of the indigenous African occupants of the land. It's just the Boers have had this penchant for establishing their own states in the implacable and dusty earth, as self-proclaimed 'democracies.' The inverted commas are intentional. Perhaps there was an imperative in them to be seen as a civilising force. They certainly saw themselves as superior to black people: an attitude that stubbornly persisted for centuries. There's deep irony – some would say pure cynicism – here. It's true that every Boer republic established in the 19th had within its genesis an intimate and deadly relationship with the indigenous Africans. Something like family-violence on a sub-continental scale.

And certainly, in the orbit of individual families and their servants, the Boers were harsh in their treatment of those in their employ. Most often, the servants – inboekelinge, they were called – were laborers indentured by force, paid only in food, nothing more. And were held for set periods of time. Slavery in another name. Indeed, the organised, mass exodus of Boers from the Cape colony, starting in 1836, was based in part on their attempt to get beyond the influence of British laws prohibiting slavery. More on that to come.

A civilising force, the Boers were not. This was the primary motive of the many missionary societies that blossomed in Europe in the colonial age. The missionaries felt that, besides conversion to Christianity, they could also 'elevate' the 'savages' to enjoy the benefits of civilised life. Well, civilised life as *they* saw it. But the Boers never took part in this, at all. Despite being deeply religious, pious Old Testament (some might even say superstitious) believers, they very seldom established mission stations, or churches, and never schools for black or brown African peoples in the 19th Century. In fact, for the 'voor'-trekkers, those who ventured into the supposedly uncharted interior, their major stopping points were at mission stations that had been established there many years

before. And while availing themselves of missionary hospitality and generosity, they maintained a deep suspicion of them. This was made worse when they learned that some missionaries actively worked to provide African tribes with guns, and to work as political advisors and mediators on the black people's behalf. They retaliated against these 'fellow Christians' as they saw fit. For example, a Commando involved in the Batswana War destroyed David Livingstone's mission station buildings at Kolobeng in 1852. They had found out that he had been supplying black Africans with guns – an application, it seems of his 'masculine Christianity' ethos.

The Boers did cultivate an Old Testament-type parable of their own version of Manifest Destiny, considering themselves God's chosen people, and linking this to the story of the travels of the Canaanites as recorded in the Bible. Which is why the first river the Boers found flowing north, they named the Die Nyl – the Nile.

The Boer republics of the 19th Century were all aggressively expansionist. They won their land by military conquest, or as mercenaries. The killing of women and children was commonly in their playbook, as was the taking of inboekelinge. In the Batswana War of 1852-1853, they used African auxiliaries as human shields. Their histories are stained with massacres – yes, often as Biblical eye-for-an-eye retaliations. Many times not. The Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR, also known as the Transvaal) had its own colony – Swaziland. The Boers were out to destroy tribal society; not completely, but just to the point where dispossessed, rootless individuals could be rounded up as cheap labour. They did commit genocide. In the case of the San people (Bushmen) they actively hunted them with their extinction in mind in the Cape and Free State.[1] They were helped in this quest by British settlers in Natal, and the Eastern Bushmen of the Drakensberg foothills were effectively exterminated. But this was not part of any formal government policy. A Commando of the first ZAR that was despatched in 1854 to deal with chief Makapan pursued a campaign that was aimed at exterminating his entire tribe (the Kekana, an Ndebele sub-group) by trapping them in a cave.

The Boers could not tolerate stable or effective polities of Africans within or on their borders. The Transvaal and the Orange Free State both invaded neighbouring nations – even, in the case of the Transvaal, the other. This inconvenient historical fact goes against a commonly-held myth prior to the great self-destructive Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902: that the Transvaal was a humble, rural republic that just wanted to be left alone within its borders. It wasn't. In fact, at the outbreak of the Second Boer War, the Commandos of both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State poured out from their borders, invading the Cape Colony and Natal. They besieged towns deep within these territories, and pushed the front hundreds of kilometres into those British territories. They immediately annexed the overrun territories, indicating a sense of permanent conquest. British civilians were stripped of their possessions and land, and deported as refugees. At the end of the war, just two weeks before the peace negotiations were being thrashed out in Vereeniging in May 1902, a Boer Commando under Jan Smuts was busy besieging the small copper-mining town of O'Kiep, 800 km inside the Cape from the nearest Orange Free State border.

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[1] See the 2010 book T*he Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San* by Mohamed Adhikari.

A great challenge in looking at the turbulent history of South Africa, is to avoid the pitfalls of 'mythistory.' They say history is that version of past events written by the winners. That is very true in the story of South Africa's past. And that version can be full of misapprehensions, one-sided-evidence, or self-serving propaganda – to the point that it becomes a litany of lies.

The problem of one-sided evidence is especially apparent in the history of the Khoikhoi and San peoples; probably because much of their oral traditions were not recorded. As Cape Town historian Nigel Penn has said, their silence "is itself indicative of their fate." This in his 2005 book *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's Northern Frontier in the 18th Century.* As for the San in the Cape, East Griqualand and Natal in the mid-nineteenth century, he remarks "there was no place left for them on earth." This void has been partially addressed in scholarship within the last generation. Rock-painting by San (Bushmen) has been widely-recorded – but mostly in the context of a 'lost-peoples' narrative. (The existing San communities in the Kalahari Desert and Namibia appear to have no heritage of rock painting.) *People of the Eland: Rock Paintings of The Drakensberg Bushmen as a Reflection of Their Life and Thought*, first published by Patricia Vinnicombe in 1976, remains the seminal work on the rock painting of Natal and East Griqualand San; and much has new knowledge has been added since. In the book, Vinnicombe recorded paintings that are so accurate (in terms of numbers of mounted horsemen) that they can be matched to specific commandos that set out to exterminate San groups that had taken off with settlers' cattle. Then there's *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples* by Mohamed Adhikari (2010), which brings to new light the story of colonists who formed commandos with the express purpose of wiping out San groups; and which resulted in the virtual extinction of the Cape San peoples. Pippa Skotnes' 2009 book *Claim to the Country* which presents the work of pioneering colonial scholars Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, who in the 1870s recorded the stories of several Xam San men and women in Cape Town, is also an important contribution.

Khoikhoi history is in the process of being re-discovered and re-written; see *Khoikhoi and the founding of White South Africa* (1985), by Richard Elphick; *Bastaards or Humans: The unspoken heritage of Coloured People* (2017) by Ruben Richards; and the website on the Camissa People[2] which is the work of a family genealogist Patric Tariq Mellet, aka 'Zinto.'

The Griqua, possibly because of their connection with mission stations, their conversion to Christianity, their education and facility with Dutch and Afrikaans, are better served in the historical record. And there are historical books from their own viewpoint. There's Andries Waterboer's 1827 book, *A Short Account of Some of the Most Particular and Important Circumstances Attending the Government of the Griqua People;* and Hendrick Hendricks' 1830 pamphlet *Oppressions of the Griqua*. Notable more recent works are Nigel Penn's *The Forgotten Frontier* (mentioned above); *The Politics of a South African Frontier: The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries, 1780-1840* by Martin Chatfield Legassick (published 2010)*; The Making of Griqua, Inc: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Autonomy in South Africa b*y Erwin Schweitzer (2015); *Adam Kok's Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa* by Robert Ross (2009); and the self-published 2007 book *People of the Mist: The Lost Tribe of South Africa* by Scott Balsom. *The Griqua Conundrum: Political and Socio-Cultural Identity in the Northern Cape, South Africa* by Linda Waldmann (2007) addresses post-Apartheid issues.

Karel Schoeman, the novelist famous for his *Na Die Geliefde Land* (translated as *Promised Country*), has also written extensively on these subjects, with titles such as *The Griqua Mission at Philippolis,*

[2] https://camissapeople.wordpress.com/camissa/

1822-1837; The Griqua Captaincy of Philippolis, 1826-1861; Early white travellers in the Transgariep, 1819-1840; Early Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1717; A Debt of Gratitude: Lucy Lloyd and the 'Bushman Work' of G.W. Stow.

*Where are you from? 'Playing White' under Apartheid b*y Ulla Dentlinger is especially poignant – the reflections of a contemporary Rehoboth Baster woman, now living in Oregon in the USA.

Still, some Khoikhoi/Griqua mysteries remain. The community of Boetsap, for example, formed as one of the breakaway polities – along with Campbell and Philippolis – after internecine strife in Waterboer's Land in the 1820s, remains somewhat elusive in history. Likewise, the Baster States at Grootfontein (south) in South West Africa, in existence from the late 1800s to 1901, and Mier Rietfontein, which lasted from 1865 -1902 and covered 12,000 square km on the border with British Bechuanaland, and overlapping the nortyh-south straight-line border to South West Afrtica, which was drawn on the map only in 1885. The fiercely-anti-missionary Bergenaars group of the Griqua, under their leader Hendrick Hendricks (among others) are less well-represented in history because of the absence of missionaries among them, and their more traditional, nomadic ways – although they did settle near the Modder River for a while.

In the ongoing modern re-discovery of Griqua history, it's perhaps important to note that 14 of the stories ahead in this book are of independent Griqua states.

The story of the Mfecane is another 'mythistorical' case in point. For nearly a century, the standard tale went that South Africa was rent by widespread violence, dispossession and migration of many peoples, in the 1820s and 1830s. And all this was the ripple effect of the rise and expansion of the amaZulu kingdom and its tyrannical King Shaka[3].

The Mfecane is actually a construct of white historians. The term was first used by EA Walker in his book *History of South Africa* in 1928. (It comes from the Sotho word lifacane, which Sotho people employed to inform – perhaps gullible – 19th Century missionaries that was the cause of their own state-building. They did this to add credence to their own land claims.)

In a controversial paper in 1988, Julian Cobbing wrote[4]: "The main assumptions are these. After about 1790 a self-generated internal revolution occurred within northern 'Nguni' societies to the south-west of Delagoa Bay, and this culminated in the Shakan military revolution at the turn of the 1820s. The consequent Zulu expansionism had a near-genocidal effect and precipitated a series of destructive migrations into the interior. Peoples as far away as Lake Nyanza (Victoria) were scarred by the playing-out of chain reactions initiated by Shaka."

The Mfecane was said to have the effect of depopulating the lands the Voortrekkers subsequently moved into; thereby supposedly legitimising their settlement of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. This myth conveniently supported the white supremacist narrative, and was picked up and well-used by the Apartheid government. The notion of endemic violence among black nations suited their purposes too. This story was the standard fare of high school and university history for

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[3] But Shaka is an almost-mythological figure himself. Dan Wylie, author of the 2006 'anti-biography' *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* reflects, "the material for a trustworthy 'biography' of Shaka simply does not exist"

[4] *The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo*, published in *The Journal of African History,* Volume *29,* Issue 3 *(1988), 487-519.*

many years. It conveniently supported the myth (the lie, actually) that the Voortrekkers had entered an almost-deserted land, there for their taking.

But in re-examining the little-known, but major Battles of Dithakong (in 1823, between mounted Griquas armed with guns, and the 'Mantatees' a still unidentified tribe, possibly the Tlokwa); and Mbolompo (1828, between British forces and Thembu, in which the white men used artillery in a mistaken attack on a supposed Zulu invasion), Cobbing pointed to the contribution of forces *from the south*, to the Mfecane. He also cites the effects of the slave trade operating out of the Portuguese entrepôt of Delagoa Bay (today's Maputo), and how this decimated, then displaced the Ngwane people.

Cobbing concluded: "The 'mfecane' is a characteristic product of South African liberal history used by the apartheid state to legitimate South Africa's racially unequal land division. Some astonishingly selective use or actual invention of evidence produced the myth of an internally-induced process of black-on-black destruction centring on Shaka's Zulu.

"In short," he wrote, "African societies did not generate the regional violence on their own. Rather, caught within the European net, they were transformed over a lengthy period in reaction to the attentions of external plunderers."

Some of Cobbing's assertions were vigorously challenged in what became known as 'The Mfecane Debate.'[5] But the core contentions outlined above are now accepted as part of the complex tale of real history. The mythistory of the Mfecane has been altered.

Similarly, the story of the Great Trek of the Voortrekkers, also a founding tale in the mythology of Afrikaner nationalism, must be seen in the context of 'Many Great Treks' – the mass migrations of other peoples in the country at the same time. Most of them pre-dated the 'Great Trek.'

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I first became interested in the stories ahead in this book, as a teenager. At the time, I was enduring the ministrations of the biased education system of Apartheid-era South Africa. But, as it turned out, I wasn't the best material to be moulded by it.

Yes, I had grown up among black people. But I hardly knew them, or their history. My first language was isiBhaca, a variant of isiXhosa and isiZulu. My kindergarten was running with a joyous pack of Bhaca umfaans on the farm where I was born. We practised the age-old methods of boyhood hunting – shooting imbebas (striped field mice) at the mouth of their tunnels with bow and arrow at point-blank range, then scorching and eating them. We swam naked in the dam. We made clay figurines. We searched for kowa, giant mushrooms the size of dinner plates – delicious. We spied on amorous trysts between farm workers, and local weddings. In secret, we tugged at each others' winkies – only we called them ipipi. We hid from sangomas (diviners, witch-doctors), and wandering madmen. We danced after wandering minstrels, playing on home-made paraffin-tin guitars. We played with marbles, and doctored dice (for some reason, the dice we bought at the trading store at Lufafa Road, had to be ground down by hand on the concrete steps, to make new surfaces, which we drew new numbers on). We built tree houses, and forts in the forest. We visited a scary cave, where in the old days, it was said, a lion used to live. And rock overhangs, looking for faded Bushman

[5] Summed up in the 1995 conference record *Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, edited by Carolyn Hamilton.

paintings. We shared chunks of white bread dipped in sugar water for lunches. We stole and ate dog biscuits as a treat. When we could, we stole sips of tschwala, a pink-coloured, thick millet beer. We jumped on donkeys, and tried vainly to kick them into action. We hypnotised chickens. We collected wild birds' eggs – never the whole clutch, mind. We scuttled away from impis of knobkerrie- and machete-armed men on their way to faction fights. We chased sakabulas in the mist, running through the thigh-high, wet grass, hoping (but never succeeding) to catch the long-tailed bedraggled birds as they struggled to fly. We helped – or so we thought – with the manly work on the farm of burning firebreaks, and beating out the flaming edges with wet sacks. We rode on the sled behind the oxen, when it had to go down to fetch water, when the windmill wasn't working. We ran wild and free in the veld.

But still, I never really knew them. We each returned to our own beds every night, in separate, very different homes.

Yes, my parents were English-speaking, but not-quite-standard colonial stock. Looking back, my mother's genealogy stopped abruptly when she was born out of wedlock to a nurse working on Robben Island in 1930 (it was then a leprosy hospital). Some bounder by the name of Harry Barnard, apparently no relation to the family of the famous heart surgeon, shot through and left my grandmother all alone to bring up the child. Maybe he died in the war.

My father's family, by contrast had a well-documented past. His grandfather, Alexander, had emigrated from Britain, and pegged out a vast farm in the Ixopo district in southern Natal. Alexander's wife was from an 1820 settler family, and had been born in an ox waggon during a trek up from the contested area of the Eastern Cape (actually *through* the disputed zone), to supposedly safer territory near Umzimkhulu. Eesterling, the farm her family established there was the setting for the rural church in the famous 1948 novel *Cry, The Beloved Country* by Alan Paton.

Alexander came to know a fellow, recently arrived in the province, by the name of Cecil Rhodes. Yes, the one who later made waves as an arch-Imperialist, mining tycoon, and Prime Minister of the Cape, deposed after the Jameson Raid. Rhodes' initial cotton-farming venture in the nearby Umkomaas River valley failed, and he asked Alexander to build him a Scotch cart, so he could make his way to the new diamond fields at Kimberley. My great grandfather did so, but wary of Rhodes' local reputation as a not-especially-good-payer-of-bills, he rode with Rhodes to Kimberley so he could bring the cart back in the event of non-payment. Which happened. On the trip to Kimberley, under African night skies, Alexander recorded in his diary conversations where Rhodes dreamed of annexing the stars (!). So I am in some small and distant way connected to the greater saga that Rhodes wrought on the wider country, far from the green hills of Ixopo, "grass-covered and rolling…lovely beyond any singing of it" as Paton had it, in the opening lines of his novel.

My father grew up to be a bit different from the fellow farmers around us. He loved great and glorious writing, and read Shakespeare and Bertrand Russell and the romantic poets. But he was also much taken by modern masterpieces of film, such as the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* and Disney's *Fantasia*. While on the farm, he engaged in university study of English and Afrikaans literature. To us (my sister and I) as children, he read all the time, staring with Dr Seuss, then *The Long Grass Whispers* and the adventures of Kalulu the rabbit. Going on to the epics of British colonial literature –Rudyard Kipling's *Mowgli* and *The Just So Stories*, Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, Arthur Conan-Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld*; and epic poems from his own hand, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Anthony Sebastian Quinn and the Tune From The Stars*. He spoke isiBhaca (a variant of isiXhosa and isiZulu) well, and I remember his respectful relationship with the induna on the farm, Zoli Mtshwali. They would always end the working day with conversation and sharing a glass of brandy. Zoli's wife, Znogo, was my wet nurse.

But still, I never really knew them. Yes, my father did fill me in with the history of the amaBhaca – as far as he knew it. How, under their great chief Ncapaye, they foiled a southward-striking impi of Shaka Zulu, by a scorched-earth strategic retreat into the hills of East Griqualand. How his warriors defeated the emaciated Zulus on a mountain top with the help of a supernaturally-conjured freak snowstorm. How the hungry remnants of the Zulu impi staggered homeward, and had to be fed by the white folk at Port Natal (Durban) on their way. Which was why the Zulu named the local tribe the amaBhaca – those who run and hide away. He told me it also could be a name they gave themselves, referring to their ritual scarring of the cheeks of women. What seems like a thousand years later, reading a MA thesis on amaBhaca history[6], I discovered he got the basic story right, but muddled some of the details.

An Afrikaans family took over the huge farm next door, one of a few that my great-grandfather Alexander had staked out and claimed his own. The Van Zuydams were a larger-than-life family – four strapping boys, Dorie the bulwark matriarch, and Oompie, the stern, distant patriarch. I spent much time there, many nights in the creaking, sagging bed that had once been my Aunt Avril's in the great house (she later became my Uncle Alastair – but that's another story). Oompie would solemnly read at night from a great Bible that sat permanently on a lectern in the dark lounge. Dorie and her maids (for there were many) made butter, and biltong, and koeksisters, and huge meals that featured pumpkins roasted with brown sugar. Whatever they ate, was either salty or sugary. I assimilated into their family. I absorbed their culture. I soaked up their stories. From them I learned about Dirkie Uys, the boy who turned his horse back to try save his father in a Zulu attack, only to die himself; and Paul Kruger, who shot off his left thumb in a hunting accident; and the girl (I've forgotten her name) who froze to death holding her siblings while sheltering overnight in an aardvark hole. I became fast friends with Hennie and Flippie, their youngest sons. We tugged at each other's winkies – only we called them piele. I taught them how to hypnotise chickens. I never noticed, how, at the Van Zuydams, we never played *with* the black boys. Only *against* them, in stick fights and mock battles. It was just in the order of things. I learned to curse them in the Van Zuydams' language. By the time I went to school, I was fluent in Afrikaans.

Our farm failed. The heroic mission of Alexander's colonial enterprise, tumbled into a mortgagee sale and an ordinary life for my family in the suburbs of Johannesburg, where we moved to after a few years in Ixopo village. The farm failed because of my father's bad timing in planting a crop of wattle trees. Their bark had been used for the tanning of leather, but just as they were ready to be harvested, a new synthetic chemical process was invented to do the same job. Forces far away – in Japan, I believe – had the effect of cutting our (yes, tenuous), tenure on the land. As we will see in these stories ahead, things never seem to last in Africa – especially hopeful dreams. (In an ironic twist, the gnarled old wattle trees – the failed commercial crop – now provide a meditative backdrop (especially in the frequent mist there), for a famous Buddhist Retreat that has been established on the farm.)

But perhaps I was prepared for this disruption. From an early age, graver concerns had forced their way into my carefree bucolic life, my naïve consciousness. The earliest adult expressions I remember learning in English were 'overdraft' and 'faction fights' and 'Bambata rebellion' and 'common voters' roll.' These were often-used words of my parents jointly, other adults, my mother, and my father, respectively. The overdraft was a constant worry, and always in their conversation – with good reason. My mother was fearful of a return of the militancy of black people, as was evidenced in the Zulu revolt a generation before. This fear was heightened for her when dozens of women and

[6] *A Political History of the Bhacas from Earliest Times to 1910,* by Anderson Mhlauli Makaula, 1988, Rhodes Universtity.

children would take overnight shelter in our kitchen, and be fed by Znogo and her daughters, when faction fights disrupted the 'location' in the valley below the farm. 'Common voters' roll' were words my father often used as he lamented one of the great deceits of the Apartheid-era government, when by venal manoeuvre it took away the franchise that coloured people had held in the Cape Province for more than a century. I remember him standing up at community gatherings to speak on this subject; and how his position as an English teacher at Ixopo High School (taken up while the farm was failing), was threatened because of his views.

So we as a family were a little different. But ordinary all the same.

Yes, I listened to my teachers at school in Jo'burg, the great, grimy, un-lovely city we had migrated too. And no, I didn't come to believe everything they said. I became suspicious – just like I had early on at Sunday school, when after telling fine tales (burning bushes, the sea split open, people struck into pillars of salt, the walls crashing down because of music), the parson's earnest helpers then said we now must truly *believe* this stuff. Even then, my gullibility had its limits. I could sniff out figments of fiction. Great stories, certainly. But the cornerstones *of reality*, *of faith?* No.

And so, in history lessons at school, we were fed a doctored story. We, all of us of our generation, remember well the maps with urgent arrows drawn on them. How the white people forged eastwards and effortlessly from the Cape. How the encroaching Xhosa met them, moving aggressively in the opposite direction. How the black hordes burned farms, and killed women and children. How they were righteously driven back, river by river. How new boundaries were set. How the British arrived. How the frontier wars were won. How the persecuted Voortrekkers waggoned up, and drew their new arrows on the map, northwards from Graaff Rienet, across the Orange River, across the Vaal River, across the 'deserted' Highveld plains, to the Limpopo; then curving down again to Lourenco Marques. Some arrows petered out *en route*. As, we were told, did the brave people of Louis Trichardt's heroic trek through Mozambique, decimated by malaria.

Then there were the arrows of the Trekkers sweeping south-eastwards from the highveld they had conquered, down the Drakensburg escarpment, to meet the Zulus in flashes and crossed weapons, the icons on the maps denoting great battles won by the whites because they had guns, and horses and the laager, and the Bible. And how a river had run red with the bold of Zulu warriors. And God had smiled on the Trekkers, and gave them victory. And then how Britain attacked the Boer Republics, to get at the gold. How those brave Boers fought so valiantly. How they were always united against the British invaders. How the British attempted genocide of the Boers in the concentration camps. How they fed the women and children crushed glass. How it was a white mans' war.

And it was all lies.

My Sunday School suspicions came back.

Things just didn't add up.

Early on in my high school years, I – we – began to question those dots and arrows on the maps. Like, when Jan van Riebeck started the food station at the Cape in the mid-1600s….who sold him those cattle? And why did he need such a big fort? Or a hedge of bitter almonds? Or slaves? And when the arrows spread out so effortlessly from Cape Town, across the land…why did it seem there was nobody else there? And the arrows of the Xhosa moving southwards and westwards…why had they apparently been in such a rush, and then just stopped at that particular river? And about that river…who arrived there first? And that Great Trek…why, exactly had the Boers buggered off? And the Highveld…if it was such good grazing, why was no-one already using it? And the arrows of the

Boers in Natal…why did they reverse, and go back up and over the mountains? So if the Boers had so decisively beaten the Zulus…then why did they retreat so fast?

How could history have so many questions? So many self-made myths? They kept on piling up, like autumn leaves in a gutter. Was nothing true in all these stories they told us?

And so, like the arrows, everything in life became pointed, and accusatory. I began to suspect every story. In a way the propaganda of the system had, unwittingly, educated me very well. I learned to read between the lines. Strangely, for that I am grateful.

The few Afrikaners I encountered in Johannesburg, those from Helpmekaar the other great public school in our area, were just scruffy, rude urban yobs, far removed from the courtly, old-worldly manners of the Van Zuydams. The Helpmekaar louts also appeared as far removed from the valiant heroes of the Trek, and the crack mounted riflemen of the Commandos of the Boer Wars. The annual week of rugby competition between our school King Edward VII and Helpmekaar was a torrid affair, full of mutual hate and violence which, even in the ritualised arena of the game, verged on the truly ugly. It was the Boer War all over again, with all the prejudices of both sides still intact. And just like my early childhood interaction with the Bhaca umfaans on the farm and the Van Zuydams next door, there were areas of overlap and areas of no-lap. We lived in different worlds.

My early intimacy with the Bhaca people on the farm also changed when we came to the city. Yes, my parents were relatively kind to Anna, our maid. And yes, I would take her toddler Goodman to the park every afternoon when I walked the dog, him riding on my shoulders. And yes, my father helped Anna's oldest with studying for high school exams. But we really hardly new each other. We lived in separate worlds.

Interactions with black strangers on the streets were, for me, a truly crazy mixture of sullen-ness and spontaneous humour. For one thing, the bizarre, broad-daylight disguise of work gangs on roads or construction sites singing their deep-timbred acapella work songs that insulted their white overseers. On occasions my facility (or not) with language – isiBhaca is similar to isiZulu, which everyone seemed to understand, and as a fall-back there was always Fanagalo – would break barriers, and generate gleaming smiles and the endemic high-pitched laughter of Africa. But there were dark undercurrents too. The ever-present police. The pass-offence arrests on the streets. The fear of burglars in the night. We shared the city; hell, we even shared jokes, but we lived worlds apart.

Yes, I went to the great liberal university in Johannesburg, Wits. Yes, we finally came to know the cruel realities of Apartheid. Yes, we learned at last the how and why of where those arrows went. And where and why they stopped. Or doubled back on themselves. So, yes, we sang Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Yes, we supported the UDF. And yes, we were dispersed by the police in the piazza.

Yes, I read all the books. And yes, we sought out the banned ones too – even if only for the sexy bits. Our indigenous literature, for me, did much to flesh out the zeitgeist. And fill in the gaps. And make more sense of those senseless arrows. But still I did not get the full picture. The tumultuous history of our land was not fully there, then. Perhaps we were too taken with the present. How to survive in the mess. How to keep living the extra-ordinarily good life. How to suppress the great, over-articulated guilt. How to lay low, and avoid the army call-up letters. How to jol, how to party, like it was the end of the world.

But to get to this point, a lot had led us there. A bunch of arrows. And the people behind them. Vectors, almost always of violence. And within them, stories, hidden and unbridled, hopeful and dashed. Histories. Not lies.

And in uncovering this history, the arrows took on different lives. Although this book is in no way intended to be a comprehensive history of South Africa, we will find new arrows appearing in the pages that follow – and, of course, the boundary lines of all the half-forgotten polities and independent republics in this story. The new arrows will include the other 'Great Treks' – those of the Bastaards and later the Griqua peoples; and the mass migrations of the Ndebele, the amaFengu, and others. The mad hopes of the three fatal Dorsland Treks across the Kalahari Desert.

There will be the clashes and flashes drawn back onto the map, of the fights of little-known wars between the Boers themselves – the civil war in the Transvaal; the abortive invasion of the Free State by the Transvaal; and the extensive, but mercifully short conflict of the Maritz rebellion in 1914. There will be great battles – and their consequences – that the conventional history has overlooked. There will be the wars that black warriors won (with their guns) against white soldiers – the Bapedi under Matsebe Sekukhune in 1838, 1847, 1852, 1865, and 1876; the Basotho under Lepoqo Moshoeshoe in 1858, and 1880-1; the Batswana under Kgosie Setshele in 1852. And other traces, like those of the San (Bushmen) in the southern, central, eastern and northern Cape, the Free State, the Drakensberg foothills of East Griqualand and Natal – indeed over most of the country – that will entirely disappear.

The map will get more messy. But, hey, that is the problem with history. It gets complicated, precisely because people, many *peoples*, are involved in making of it – and the recording of it. The lies are much simpler; the supremacist narrative is clear, and bleached quite white.

So that is how I became interested in digging further into the history of my un-beloved country. I wanted to know a lot more about those arrows. What they really meant; and how they really ended, where they really went. And how so many fizzled out. The more I looked, the more *countries* I found – like a miner digging up the endlessly unexpected. I found how people had tried, so often, in this country to imagine a better future, to get things right, or to start again. And how, in a long litany of dispossession and deceit, so often they had ended up deceiving *themselves*. How mythistory was made. And how it stuck. Most of all, I learned how we might learn from this curious and complicated history, this messed-up map.

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Why were the Boers so enamoured with the concept of republics? Certainly, they were anti-royalty. And, at the time of their settlement in the interior of South Africa in the mid-1800s, *especially* the English king. Among their ancestors, there were the Huguenots, Protestant French refugees fleeing the persecution of Catholic Kings Louis XIV and XV, who settled in significant numbers in the Cape in the late 1600s and 1700s. The Boers' commitment to republican ideals was limited however: they aspired to egalitarianism, with every man having his say. Every *white* man, that is. It's generally accepted that the primary cause of the Second Boer War was the Transvaal Republic's refusal of the vote to Uitlanders (while at the same time taking taxes from them), the immigrants who had come to work on the gold mines. *None* of the Afrikaner-led republics had a universal franchise, and, notoriously in the eyes of the international community, right up to 1994.

A passage in the novel *Red Dog* by Willem Anker, based on the life of Coenraad de Buys, addresses this:

> News from Europe is slow coming to the Cape… but seditious ideas from France make landfall here faster than any new dress patterns. The words *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* are insubstantial and vague enough

> to fly over at speed. In Paris, the citizens storm the Bastille in the name of liberty, and on the eastern frontier there's nothing left but liberty. Indeed, as is always the case with messages that have to travel too far, the French slogans have a totally different look when they arrive, scurvy-ridden and scuffed, in Graaf Rijnet.

That they were called republics is problematic: "Typical of them was a strong strain of paternalistic, oligarchic tradition based on quasi-feudal client system, with a firm position of paternalistic military leaders enjoying wide, nearly authoritarian powers and quasi-monarchic leanings. This was characteristic of all trekker groups but was especially visible in the case of Boer communities in the Trans-Vaal area," historian Michał Leśniewski [7]wrote. Self-delusion persisted to the modern-era. The Apartheid government self-described itself as a "Christian democracy." And we know that self-delusion is the most virulent form of deceit.

Things get a little complicated in pegging exactly what the eight Baster and Griqua polities were. "…the people called Basters set themselves up, by one method or another, in largely autonomous political communities. These political units resembled little republics whose culture and systems of government were neither African nor European, by and large placing limitations upon their interaction with other people." So wrote Peter Carsten in his 2007 paper *Opting out of colonial rule: the Brown Voortrekkers of South Africa and their Constitutions.* But then he goes on to quote a fellow academic on this subject, "Robert Ross[8] has discussed the institution of government among the Griqua Basters. In this important paper Ross classifies the Griqua nation as a "democratic oligarchy" based on the institution of the "captaincy" which he holds was the central feature of the republic. But the captaincy also involved the principle of leadership (by the captain) for life, giving the Griqua and other Baster republics some of the characteristics of constitutional monarchies. For this reason Ross is wary of using the term 'republic' on the grounds that: "A monarchical republic is difficult to conceive of even if the monarch is elected."

And what are we to make of an additional four independent Baster communities, Komaggas, Steinkopf, Leliesfontein and Concordia in Little Namaqualand, that drafted their own constitutions with laws to govern themselves *after* their territories were formally annexed by the British Government as part of the Cape Colony? I have included them in a single chapter this book, for reasons you will see in their tales.

A counterpoint in history may lie in the contemporaneous consolidation of various new territories into the United States of America. The now 50 States of the USA were added to the initial 13 colonies of the Union, one by one, in the years 1791 to 1912, for those in the contiguous states, and Alaska and Hawaii in 1959. Before they joined the Union, they were all separate polities, usually barely-governed 'territories.' They had to reach a population of 60,000 (white folks – native Americans weren't counted) before being considered for incorporation into the Union. Parts of some territories were for a while independent Republics – eight of them in fact. The Vermont Republic 1777 to 1791; Frankland 1785 - 1790; the State of Muskogee 1799-1803; the Republic of West Florida 1810; Republic of Fredonia 1826-1827 (in part of Texas); Republic of Texas (Spanish) 1836 - 1846; the Indian Stream Republic 1832-1835; the California Republic, which lasted for only 25 days in June 1846 (though its flag is still used for the current State of California). And of course, the Confederacy.

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[7] In the academic paper *The Annexation of the Transvaal in 1877: The First Boer Reactions,* 2017.

[8] *Griqua Government*, by Robert Ross, 1974, in the journal *African Studies.*

Also, we know that the 'Five Civilised tribes' – Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole – proposed to establish a state called Sequoyah in 1905, but which the USA Federal Government didn't allow to happen.

In the Australian period of Federation, from the 1880s to 1901, six separate self-governing British colonies – News South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, West Australia – came together to form the Commonwealth of Australia. At stages, New Zealand and Fiji were also considered as possible candidates in this Federation, but both decided to go it alone as separate sovereign nations.

But the big difference is that in both the American and Australian models, the states and territories were all involved in a process of being *included* in the larger country – *not* trying to establish themselves as separate, independent entities.

A common feature of all the short-lived republics in Southern Africa, is that – until the Bantustans – they all were established by people who had *migrated* to new territories. In this sense, they were not truly indigenous states – although most claimed to be. This is true of the Griqua polities too: their people, their leaders, their values and traditions, all came from *outside* the land they settled in. Even with the Bantustans, which were nominally meant to be 'homelands' for various indigenous peoples, there was a strong migratory element. By the time the Bantustans were established, a majority of black South Africans had become urbanised, and lived in the great cities. Many new 'citizens' of the Bantustans had never been to their homeland territories; many had been born in the ghettoes attached to the cities. But many were *sent* there as a result of pass offence arrests. And Bantustan families almost all depended on income sent home to them from migrant workers. So, consistent with the nature of the Bantustans, were talking *forced migration* here.

Perhaps the saddest of the short-lived republics in South Africa was the 'provisional government' of the Maritz Rebellion in 1914. When the Union of South Africa joined the First World War on the side of Britain, some senior officers of the army, led by General Manie Maritz and supported by Boer War bitter einders (literally bitter-enders, those who fought to the very end), rebelled and set up as allies of the Germans who then had a colony in neighbouring South West Africa.

The provisional government had no land base, no logistical support, and no prospects. Its forces did however briefly, very briefly, occupy the far-removed towns of Keimoes (in the remote Northern Cape) and Heilbron (in the northern Free State). The regular South African army of 32,000 men (which included 20,000 Afrikaners) set out to subdue the rebellion before taking on the invasion of German South West Africa.

The greatest military loss of the rebellion was inflicted by nature itself, when one of the rebel leaders, General Jan Kemp, took his Commando across the Kalahari Desert to shelter in South West Africa. He lost 300 out of 800 men, and most of their horses, all without firing a shot. It must be one of military history's most fruitless, meaningless escapades.

An inversion of intent of intent occurs in the republics created by the Afrikaner-led National government of South Africa from the 1970s onwards. Previously, their republics had been set up *by Afrikaners, for Afrikaners* (or at a stretch, for other white people too.) Now republics were being formed *for others*. But there was nothing altruistic in this; for behind it was a sinister sub-text of racial domination. And a 'final solution' kind of approach to their enduring 'question of the blacks.' Which, if taken to its conclusion, would have resulted in environmental collapse, societal disintegration and the conflict that inevitably arises from this. Indeed, the short histories of these

artificial, non-viable states had their own instances of military coups d'état, and armed invasion. And from each, lessons can be learned. If only of the 'how-not-to' kind.

The story of the Bantustans is particularly sordid and sad. The Bantustans were to be the logical end point of the Apartheid policy of 'separate development.' This may sound neutral, but in effect is deeply cynical. Separate countries for different tribes. Exclusively, racially-based 'states' created by the master race. But over-crowed, with no proper infrastructure or access to the mineral wealth of the greater South Africa. That was reserved for the white state. Somehow this could be ethnically heterogeneous, containing large immigrant populations from overseas countries – as long as the people counted as 'white.' (The historical heritage of the Orange Free State added an additional caveat to this: no Indians, could live, start businesses, or even stay overnight while travelling through).

Inhabitants of the Bantustans – and those people of the home tribe who happened to be living elsewhere, mostly in 'locations' attached to the main cities – would lose their citizenship of South Africa, the land of their birth. And be relegated to their proper Bantustan. In the end, there would be no black citizens at all within South Africa. The Bantustans were then supposed to become, functional independent states. But no countries in the world community recognised them. And not one Bantustan, a railway network or a seaport, or any of the other usual accoutrements of a normal country. True, Bophuthatswana and Venda did have mines, but these were owned by white corporations. Most of the Bantustans were made up of scattered, un-connected pockets of land. They spread like an unsightly rash across the face of South Africa. All were far too small to sustainably house their theoretical population – except perhaps the Transkei.

The whole system of Bantustans, and their empty promise to their peoples of being 'separate but equal' foundered on the mighty amaZulu nation's blanket refusal, led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, to buy the scam. Buthelezi was both chief (of his tribal clan) and chief minister (of the KwaZulu 'homeland'). Try as they might, the Apartheid apparatchiks could not lure Buthelezi into accepting the Bantustan deal. The demise of the Bantustans was immediate following the election in 1994 of the ANC government led by Nelson Mandela. They were all naturally subsumed into the new Rainbow Nation, but in practise remained as overcrowded, over-grazed places of desperate poverty, environmental collapse, and under-development. Two of the Bantustan leaders tried to resist re-incorporation into South Africa, but they had no chance of standing against the incoming tide of democracy.

The only Afrikaner polity that has lasted is the self-governing enclave of Buysdorp near the Limpopo River, informally founded in 1818 and still there. The inhabitants of Buysdorp are the descendants of a legendary figure of the 18th and early 19th centuries, one Coenraad de Buys. A literally larger-than-life figure, this rough Boer cut a swathe through the frontier regions of the Cape Colony, the Highveld and the far north, living with a succession of wives and forced concubines, who were all Khoikhoi or black African. He fathered an immense mixed-race family, a tribe of its own, the second generation of which was offered land by President Paul Kruger as reward for services rendered to the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek – mostly as scouts for Boer Commandos. Buysdorp has endured in semi-autonomy for more than 200 years. This is ironic, given that Coloured people are not commonly regarded among white Afrikaners as being of them. The current whites-only enclaves of Orania, Kleinfontein and Balmoral, originally envisaged as the nuclei of each its own Volkstaat, have been there since the early 1990s, but their future as sustainable entities was in doubt from the start.

You'll see in this series of short biographies of each individual state, I have dealt with the biggest three – the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, Oranje Vrystaat, and the Republic of South Africa – relatively briefly. That is because their histories have been dealt with extensively elsewhere by many

other writers. The stories of the former, the two inland republics that together fought the Tweede Vryheids Oorlog (the second Boer War 1899-1902) and the nationwide regime of 1961-1994 that became notorious for its policy of Apartheid, are well known. The stories of all the others are often overlooked and little-known, and in all cases, equally fascinating and just as instructive as lessons in history.

Nor do I discuss at any length the various sovereignties, protectorates, colonies or dominions the British established in these times – except as sidebars. This is because these were not set up expressly to be independent polities (though the Cape did receive responsible self-government in 1872, Natal in 1893). Rather, they were a part of the extended enterprise of British Empire – and that is not the scope of this book.

This book also leaves out the many African kingdoms and other polities, whose concept of government and boundaries didn't quite fit with that of the white people. But inevitably, their stories are intimately intertwined with these that I have covered. But they are not what this book is primarily about. To talk of the African 'states', pre- and post-contact would be a whole new book, a whole new history, and one best left to a better writer (and a *better-placed* one) than me. Still, I have tried to be as fair as I can be in the contributions of the various African polities to these stories.

To add them to this tale would bring in dozens more tribal states to the long list of short-lived republics that we already have, and introduce an entirely new dynamic – that of *their* traditional forms of governance, which were usually not attempts at democracy as we know it. The list would include the countries of the Camissie People of the Cape Peninsula; the Korana of the northern Cape province; the amaXhosa (though covered, in a corrupted sort of way in the sad tales of the Transkei and Ciskei); the amaPondo; the amaBhaca; the amaZulu (pre-contact); the Ndebele; the Shangaan; the Bapedi; the Tswana; the Kakana; the vhaVenda; the Tsonga; the Basotho; the Swazi, and many more. They all do intersect with the stories of the short-lived republics, often only briefly; and their full histories, I believe are best told by their own chroniclers. I was heartened to find this already taking place in the form of many academic theses in South African Universities, and new books being printed in a South Africa that needs a more complete picture of its past.

There's much worth in this study, I think, arcane as it may seem. In the land that probably was the cradle of mankind (or at least one of them), these experiments in governance have value, given that the advance of civilisation, in my mind at least, should be marked by the acquisition and implementation of fair and sustainable ways to hold community together, and provide safety and advancement for all.

People in South Africa have tried, in many ways, to achieve this. Not always successfully. There are many lessons in that.

So, in that way, these short-lived republics may stand as pointers to precisely what *not to do*. They have their own intriguing stories too. And by some kind of negative osmosis, so may we in the wider world learn the secrets of what constitutes good government, and how we can achieve it. And that, of course, is of use to all of us - everywhere.