

Du Toit, Brian M. The Boers in East Africa: Ethnicity and Identity.
Westport, Conn: Bergin and Gravey, 1998.

What seems to be the third part in a series of histories by Brian du Toit on three Afrikaner (Boer) diasporas (one in Argentina and another in the American southwest) this book sets out to track the movement of Dutch descendants who migrate out of South Africa into and through East Africa. The subtitle "Ethnicity and Identity" suggests that there is also to be an examination of this sub-topic so salient in other African contexts, but in this case White identity is to be examined. The aim was to trace the movement of Afrikaners and understand how their identity changed and how it was perceived through the eyes of both the Afrikaner settlers and those leaders from the three denominations of the Dutch Reformed Church who made special visits from South Africa to the settlers on their homesteads in eastern Africa over the decades. By the end of the book, however, our understanding of Afrikaner identity and how it has been constructed over the past century remains vague.

In what would have made for an informative short article about the formation of Afrikaner identity, the impressive introduction piques the reader's interest. Du Toit compares the Boer diasporas in Argentina, the American southwest, and East Africa, a comparison which gives the best sense of Afrikaner ethnicity in the entire book, a sense that there might in fact be something linking the Boer diasporas. The first two chapters of the book summarize the broader history of Europeans in eastern and southern Africa in the late nineteenth century. This background serves as a framework for understanding the colonial states in place at the time the Afrikaner trekkers arrive in East Africa. This background is important because part of the Afrikaner identity, according to du Toit, was the impulse to be continuously "trekking away from restrictive control" towards an open frontierland. Because the German officials in Tanzania had a tendency toward strong authority and meticulous organization, the Afrikaners quickly found themselves migrating back to British control which they had been fleeing in the first place after the Anglo-Boer wars. Again, in Kenya, the Afrikaners had to contend and negotiate with the British colonial state. While the first chapter focuses on the history of the

administrative control of East Africa by the British and Germans, the second chapter (6 pages) surveys the Anglo-Boer conflicts which culminated in the Anglo-Boer wars. The post-war economic conditions and social divisions caused disillusionment among the *bittereinders*. The socio-economic conditions and divisions among Afrikaners (*bittereinders*, glossed as those who fought the British to the end, and *hensoppers*, glossed as surrenderers) at the end of the war, as well as anti-British sentiment, are given as the motivating factors for the exodus to the Americas and East Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five survey the processes of trekking and settlement in East Africa. Discussion, planning, and exploratory expeditions being sent out to evaluate the situation preceded each of the various treks into East Africa. Additionally, the precedent of treks between the 1860s and the 1890s in southern Africa and those to Argentina, Mexico, and Texas beginning in 1902 served as encouragement for the Afrikaners seeking independence. The Boers in East Africa is based on information about several Afrikaner families who migrated to East Africa. This group never formed a critical mass and in fact migrated in individual groups (Du Toit trek, Von Landsberg trek, Engelbrecht-Bothma trek, Barend Vorster trek, de Beer trek, Pieter Joubert trek, and Abraham Joubert trek). The bond between these families remains elusive, as the evidence for a tenacious closely-knit community does not materialize at any point in the book, and the Boer identity is never convincingly established in these three chapters. Du Toit does not give a rigorous examination of the manner by which Boer or Afrikaner identity formed and what elements made-up that identity. The reader must simply accept the statement that the situation of Afrikaners in East Africa with a common language, religious membership, national background, and institutional expression was fertile ground for ethnicity to form. What is clear is that the Afrikaners did not tend to mix with Africans or British and "[t]hey never were less than Afrikaners living outside South Africa." Du Toit only includes a small glimpse of colonial policies regarding Europeans, Africans and Asians living on the Uasin Gishu in Kenya but he gives no real analysis of how Afrikaners saw themselves as different from Asians, Africans, and other Europeans. Whether or not a few Afrikaner families living on isolated homesteads in eastern Africa constitutes ethnic identity is questionable because there does not seem to have been a consciousness that tends to be prevalent in

the phenomenon of identity formation (for example in the mid-twentieth century when the Nationalists rose to power in South Africa). These three chapters exemplify the theoretical weakness of this book.

Since journals and memoirs are an important source for understanding history, the reader expects this book to bring into relief the Afrikaner life and outlook. What makes the book so disappointing is that Du Toit had journals of various trekkers at his disposal; yet the Afrikaner is more distant than ever. Though the author claims in the introduction that he is presenting the Afrikaner through Afrikaner eyes, the voice of the trekker is absent. This is true of both the male and female trekker. Du Toit argues that the Afrikaner woman was merely a follower of her husband, which may well be true, but given the availability of the diaries of one, Mrs. Pienaar, this would have been better demonstrated through their own words. Du Toit does not make this history of Afrikaners in East Africa come to life but rather presents a caricature of the impoverished wandering Boer adhering to no authority except that of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The last section of the book covers the economy, the church, and education in the Afrikaner communities. There was limited economic prosperity among the Afrikaners who were mainly farmers living on homesteads so isolated that setting up schools and churches that could accommodate the communities was difficult and basically required individual visits to bring education and religion to people. Most Afrikaner children, however, were sent to boarding schools and orphanages in South Africa so that they could maintain their language and religion. By the 1960s, with the rise of African independence, the majority of the small number of Afrikaners who had ever migrated to East Africa had returned to South Africa. Hence this was a short lived emigration lasting just from 1900-1950.

The history of the Afrikaner diaspora is an important topic of study. The topic would have been better served had the author made more use of the journals of trekkers to establish a sense of the importance and context of community among them. A thorough examination of what constituted the Afrikaner identity and the use of more recent secondary scholarship on ethnicity would have benefited this work. Since du Toit has himself written other admirable work on ethnicity in Africa, this book which claims to examine Boer identity and ethnicity is unexpected. Perhaps a comparison of Afrikaner trekkers in Argentina, North America, and East Africa would have

provided more substance for backing up the claim that there was an Afrikaner identity and ethnic sense in the first place, and a more detailed comparative examination of the patterns of trekkers in their migrations and economic past-times would have deepened our understanding. Neither the data used for this book nor the analysis have any thread linking the small number of families that trekked to any larger issue of identity. The disjointed information on the social economy of Afrikaners in East Africa remains without larger meaning.

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