

THE "WHITE" POPULATION OF THE CAPE COLONY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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This paper presents the results of an investigation into the demography of the so-called white population of the Cape Colony in the eighteenth century. (1) Owing to limitations of space it is not possible here to give a full analysis of the nature and the defects of the sources used, although this will appear when the expanded version of the paper is published in the July 1975 issue of Population Studies. Suffice it to say that the information presented below was gathered from the aggregated figures provided by the opgaaf lists (2), from J. A. Heese's recent study of immigration (3), and from the second edition of C. C. de Villiers's volumes of genealogies, the Geslags-registeer van ou Kaapse Families. (4) In the full version of this paper, it is argued that the people included in these sources formed a genuine social entity within South African society, namely the "whites" or the "Christians", whose descendants would form the mass of the Afrikaners. Moreover, they provide a wealth of information that would not otherwise be recovered.

In order to explain the crudity of various of the measures given below, and to account for the absence of various other rates which generally form part of demographic analysis, however, it is necessary at this point to mention the unfortunate but insurmountable fact that the Geslagregisters do not give the date of death of more than a small and highly unrepresentative fraction of the individuals whose birth, marriage and offspring they record.

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Population Mechanics

Throughout the eighteenth century the South African white population was increasing at a great rate. The gross figures, as provided by the opgaaf lists, show that in 1701 this population was around 1,250, that it had doubled by 1723, again by 1753, and for a third time by 1783. By the end of the century it had reached 15,000. This represented a gross growth rate of around 2.6 per cent per annum. The only time when population declined was during the smallpox epidemic of 1714, but, after that slide, recovery was swift and by 1718 the level was well above that of seven years previously. Another epidemic of the disease in 1755 also produced a slackening in the rate of growth. (5) For the rest of the century there was continuous, cumulative and rapid growth.

In part, this growth was due to immigration. The received orthodoxy is that immigration to South Africa ended in 1706, when the Dutch East India Company changed its policy of encouraging the settlement of the tip of the continent by family units, and did not restart until the British took over the government at the beginning of the next century. (6) Now, it is true that most of the stamvaders of the more numerous of modern Afrikaner families had reached the Cape by 1700. Certainly, the

large Huguenot contingent had arrived, as had such well known Afrikaner family names as van der Merwe, van Dyk, van Wyk, van Zyl, Pretorius and Smuts. On the other hand, many notable Afrikaners were descended in the male line from men who arrived at the Cape during the middle and late years of the eighteenth century. Examples of these are the Hertzogs, Hofmeyrs and Graafs. In fact, it is clear that throughout the century there was a continuous stream of immigrants into the South African white population. Many of the members of the garrison of the Cape left the service of the Company to work as servants for the farmers or the townsmen, before setting up on their own. In all the opgaaf lists this category contained about 100 men, until the 1780s, when war made the Company less willing to allow its soldiers to take civil employment. Moreover, many men seem to have entered the South African "white" population without having gone through this initial process of indenture.

The immigration that did take place was very largely by men, especially after the earliest years of the settlement, although increasing numbers of "non-white" women were incorporated by marriage. Heese has listed the marriages in which one or both partners were first generation "whites" either in a geographical or in a social sense. Totalled up, the structure can be seen in Table I. The effects of the sexual disproportion in the immigration pattern are clear. Adult females were constantly outnumbered by males, in a ratio which varied between a high of 100 to 180 in 1713, in the aftermath of the smallpox epidemic, to a low of 100 to 144 in 1753. (7) For children, not surprisingly, there was no clear sex pattern, with girls outnumbering boys rather more often than not. Thus the immigrants cannot have had a particularly great effect on the growth of population, for many of them, failing to find mates, would have left no legitimate offspring in the society. Moreover, even when the surplus men in the population are left out of account, which would have the effect of discounting the great majority of immigrants, the general trend still shows as one of almost continued growth at a high rate. Therefore the extension of the area of white settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, which proceeded throughout the eighteenth century - and indeed until at least the 1860s - resulted mainly from the natural increase of what was originally a small, but nevertheless healthy and fertile, white population at the beginning of the century.

In order to specify more exactly the mechanisms at work, I took a sample from the Geslags-registeers of 10 per cent of those women who were born at the Cape before 1760 and who were ever married. (8) This amounted to 298 individuals, for whom, ideally, information was available to show the date of their baptism, the dates of their various marriages and of the baptism of their husbands - providing these were not immigrants - the dates of baptism and the sexes of their children, and whether their children married. Obviously, such data is not invariably available, and some individuals had to be discarded from consideration on some topics, while it was occasionally possible and necessary to estimate the date of birth or a marriage from those of siblings or of the first child. Nevertheless, it is clear that the information recorded is generally complete and of a reasonably high order - as well as being all there is.

The analysis of the lives of these women proves what a general knowledge of the travel literature and of similar sources would lead one to suspect, namely that Afrikaner women generally married young, had children at regular and short intervals thereafter, and remained fertile well into middle age. The consequence of these three factors combined meant that they had very large families. Moreover, a considerable proportion of these children survived the rigours of infancy, childhood and adolescence, and themselves reached maturity to breed at the same high rate. Each of these points will be substantiated in turn.

Marriage

The age at which women reach puberty cannot be determined, for obvious reasons, but by their middle teens girls seem to have been considered ready to marry. The youngest at which any girl is known to have married was 13 years 4 months, a figure that might have to be increased by up to six months to allow for late baptism.

After that age, however, women were married quickly. Of the 279 women in the sample whose age at marriage could be determined, 147 (50 per cent) were married before they were 20, and another 88 (33 per cent) before the age of 25. In gross terms the mean age at marriage was 21 years, the median 19.6, and the calculated mode 17 years (9), figures which do not seem to have differed significantly for those born before or after 1730. As can be seen in Tables II and III, there was a slight tendency for those women who married immigrants to be older than those who did not, but the difference was not significant statistically. (10)

In general, women tended to marry men who were older than themselves, the mean difference in age between husband and wife being 5 years and 6 months, so that the mean age at marriage for men was 25 years 3 months. To a certain extent this was due to the imbalance in the sex ratio, but it could be argued that a far greater divergence might be predicted, in view of the fact that in many societies such a gap between male and female ages at marriage occurs despite a balanced sex structure. (11) Moreover, it has been argued that male ages at marriage are remarkably "sticky", remaining in the middle to late twenties for almost all European populations, while female ages at marriage fluctuate much more greatly in reaction to economic circumstances. (12) The South African evidence could thus be used to support this claim, showing the extent of conservatism within the culture pattern, which could not be displaced even by transportation to the Cape. On the other hand, the relatively young age at marriage for men at the Cape is further evidence for the suspicion that the majority of men were able to escape from the control of their parents at a relatively young age and set up on their own. (13)

The full distribution of these ages is to be seen in Table IV. Remarkably, it shows that there was no relationship between the age of the man at marriage and that of his wife. Whatever their age, men were just as likely to marry women of a particular age, and vice versa.

Once married, men and women were very likely to remain with the same partner while both were alive. At least one traveller reported that divorce was easy (14), but it seems to have been rare. Only one example was found in the sample. On the other hand, the remarriage of both widows and widowers was quite common and swift, and was significantly more so for men than for women. It is not known whether this was due to higher mortality among women - which, given the dangers of childbirth and the relative absence of death in war, was very likely or because a man in middle age was more likely to be an eligible match than a woman of the same age - despite an inheritance pattern which divided the property of the couple equally between the surviving partners, no matter what sex, and the offspring of the marriage. (15) On balance, no doubt both processes were at work. As against this, women who married immigrants were more likely to remarry than those who did not, as the postulated greater age of immigrants at marriage and the difficulties of adaptation to the climate took their toll.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the length of time between widowhood and remarriage, although it is generally, and probably reasonably, assumed that the gap was short, often as little as a year or less, as can be shown by many cases when a man remarried within a year of the baptism of his previous wife's last child.

Fertility

Once married, women began having children almost immediately. Precisely how many had children less than nine months after their marriage cannot be ascertained with any accuracy, as there would have been an incentive to delay baptism of children who had obviously been conceived before marriage. Nevertheless, the interval between marriage and first baptism was less than nine months in 20 cases out of 197 in which the figures are known. Of these, only two actually occurred before the marriage and in another three instances a couple were married on the day their first child was

baptised. None of the women are recorded as having more than one illegitimate child, but this was perhaps because the NGK clergymen demanded the presence of the father acknowledging his child before they would christen the infant. (16) Although this custom was mainly for the regulation of admissions to the Christian, free community of the offspring of slave or Khoisan women and white men, it must have exerted considerable pressure towards marriage on those who were already within the Christian community.

At the other end of the scale, the first child of only 38 women out of 197 who had any, and for whom this information is available, was baptised more than two years after marriage. In total, the mean difference between marriage and the baptism of the first child was 18 months. Once women had entered the breeding stock, it was evidently normal for them to start their families quickly. Nor was there any significant difference between women who married early and those who waited until they were 25 or older. (17)

Once the family had been started, further children were born at high frequency, until the woman ceased to bear them, for whatever reason. The mean interval between children was 26 months, which did not vary according to the age at which women married, although those who had nine or more children had them at significantly shorter intervals than those who had fewer than nine. (18)

At this stage it should be pointed out that all figures which relate to the birth of children, whether in regard to inter-natal intervals, the age of women at the birth of the last child, or family size, must be regarded as minimum estimates, since it is highly probable that children who died in the first days of life would not have been recorded in the genealogies. They would have passed out of the community without the community noting their membership of it by baptism. This is particularly true with regard to figures relating to the age of a woman at the birth of her last child, for, in general, as a woman grows older the likelihood of her offspring dying in infancy increases. Unfortunately, it is not possible to quantify the extent of this underestimate, and hence to allow for it.

The age at which women ceased to have children is difficult to ascertain, for although it is relatively easy to discover when a woman had her last child, in the absence of information as to death it is impossible to be sure why she ceased to produce. Nevertheless certain points can be made, particularly when consideration is restricted to those women who neither remarried themselves nor died in time to allow their husbands to remarry. Thus, on the one hand, it can be shown that 62 out of 138 such women (44.9 per cent) were over 40 when they had their last child. On the other hand, if it is assumed that the age at last child was distributed unimodally, were information available as to which marriages lasted beyond the menopause and consideration restricted to them, then it should be the case that the mode of this hypothetical group should correspond to the mode of the observed sample, as the distribution of the ages at which marriages were terminated by death should increase monotonically with age. This statistic lay in the early forties, while computation gives a value of 42.3 for the mode. (19) Moreover, there is a definite relationship between the age of women at marriage and the birth of their last child, as those who married before they were 20 ceased to be fertile about 5 years before those who remained unmarried into their twenties. With this caveat, then, it can be stated, albeit tentatively, that Afrikaner women in the eighteenth century remained fertile into their early forties, other things being equal. In a sizable minority of cases, of course, other things were not equal, which produced the distribution shown in the Tables. (20)

Family Size

The consequence of the pattern of early marriage, frequent child-bearing, and a relatively long fertile period was, naturally, that families became very large.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to construct figures for the size of completed families, for by definition a completed family is one in which the marriage has not been broken, by death or by divorce, before the age of, usually, 45. In the circumstances of eighteenth century South Africa, it is not possible to determine this. Nevertheless, rather crude formulations are possible, as it is known how many children any individual women had, even if no guess can be made as to why she ceased to bear them. Thus, the mean number of children of all married women was 5.8 and the median 6. If the sample is restricted to those women who took at least one non-immigrant husband, thereby eliminating a certain amount of under-registration, then the mean rises to 6.5 and the median to 7. On the other hand, those who married immigrants tended to have fewer children anyway, even when they were registered with the NGK. Thus the mean number of children born to women who had at least one was 6.6, but was 7.0 for those who married at least one non-immigrant husband and 5.6 for those who only married immigrants.

Recorded in another way, the probability of any bride having seven or more children was .47. If she married Cape-born men, the probability rose to .52, and if she had had at least one child the probability of having seven or more was .56. On the other hand, if she married an immigrant, the probability was .39, unless she is known to have had at least one child, when the chance of having at least seven was .51.

Naturally, the number of children that a woman had was likely to depend on the age at which she married. This is particularly so because, as has been shown, the age at which a woman ceased to have children was but slightly related to the age at which she started her family. It can be shown that those who married before they were 20 had significantly more children than those who married later. The same can be shown for those who married before they were 25. On the other hand, no difference was found in the family size of those women who were born before or after 1730.

The only indication that is given in the sources when a marriage ended before the end of the fertile period comes when one or other of the couple remarried. The fact of the second marriage evidently shows that the first had ended some while before. It is obviously not a foolproof method of discovering when marriages have drawn to a conclusion, as, on the one hand, many widows and widowers doubtless failed to remarry, while, on the other, a few marriages are excluded from consideration by such a criterion because the husband remarried although his first wife survived to the end of his fertile period. For instance, Allewyn Smit's first wife was at least forty-nine when she died (her twelfth and last child was born then), but nevertheless she is not included in the following calculation because Smit remarried, incidentally fathering another twelve children, the last being born when he was 85. Nevertheless, imposing such criteria on the data gives some indication of the degree of bias that their particular quality imposes, as compared to standard procedures. Thus the mean number of children born to those women in the sample who neither remarried nor left widowed husbands who remarried was 6.1 and the median 7. This figure varied as to the age at which women married in a similar way to that of the equivalent figure when no such criteria for inclusion were imposed, though at a higher rate, the means for the number of children born to those women married under 20, between 20 and 24, between 25 and 29, and over 30 being 7.4, 5.1, 4.5, and 3.4, respectively. The probability of any of these women having 7 or more children was .52, a figure composed of a probability of .64 for those married under the age of 20, and .22 for those who were over 25 when they married. (21)

In passing, it is no doubt worth noting that the general pattern of fertility and of family formation, in so far as it can be reconstructed, corresponds closely to the hypothetical model of natural fertility. There seems to be no indication that women attempted to restrict their fertility once they had borne a "target" number of children, but rather continued to bear children for as long as they were biologically able. In the conditions of early South Africa, of course, this is not surprising. (22)

Replacement

It is a theoretical possibility that the large family size of the Afrikaners might have been offset by a correspondingly high mortality rate among infants, children and adolescents. In order for any population to remain static, in default of large scale immigration, each married woman has to have at least one daughter who herself marries and begins breeding. When the ratio of married women to married daughters falls to unity, or perhaps just above, the population must necessarily decline. The contrary is true when it is above one by any significant extent. Thus the rise in the South African white population was ultimately due to the fact that each generation more than replaced itself. The 28 women in the sample for whom full information is available had between them 814 male and 824 female children. Of these, 463 boys and 527 girls married. This means that each married woman had, on average, the notional number of 1.87 married daughters. Even this rate is, in fact, artificially low, because the marriages of many of the daughters who were born late in the century were no doubt missed by the compilers of the genealogies, as their work became much less complete after 1800. If, therefore, only the daughters of those mothers who were born before 1730 are brought into account, then the ratio rises to 1:2.75. As all the women in question would have been at least 30 in 1800, this must represent the true replacement rate of the population.

It will be seen that a rather smaller proportion of men than of women married. If it is assumed that there was no difference in mortality between males and females before puberty, that the five year differential in the mean age at marriage may be left out of account, and that all women married, then it can be shown that 11 per cent of adult Cape-born men failed to find legitimate wives. (23) This was evidently the result of the imbalance in the sex ratio of immigrants. Now, in a society in which there was a large number of Hottentot, slave and Bastard women (24), all of whom were doubtless subservient to the whites, it is unlikely that such a high proportion of men would have remained celibate. Rather, they appear to have entered unions with women categorized as "coloured", which might or might not have been stable, which might or might not have been legitimized by marriage, but which almost certainly resulted in at least the male offspring being outcasts of pukka Christian society. (25) The demographic study of early South Africa reveals, therefore, not only the immense population growth that forced and enabled the great expansion of the territorial area of "white" South Africa but also suggests a continual process of recasting and redefining the lines of social stratification within the greater society of which the population with which this paper has been concerned formed the dominant section. Generation after generation, so it would seem, the poorer and less well connected male members of the Christian community were pared off into the mass of "non-white" underlings, for no doubt it was these people who were least able to acquire white wives. So began the process of equation between economic and racial stratification that has bedevilled South Africa ever since.

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Notes

My thanks are due to Roger Schofield, both for continued encouragement and for reading a draft of this paper.

- (1) In order not to overburden the references in this paper, I have generally restricted comparisons to four sources, namely: E. Gautier and L. Henri, La Population de Crulai, Paroisse Normande: Etude historique, Travaux et Documents de l'Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques, Cahier No 33 (Paris, 1958); J. Henripin, La Population Canadienne au Debut du XVIII^e Siècle, Travaux et Documents de l'INED, Cahier No 22 (Paris, 1954); E. A. Wrigley,

- "Family Limitation in Pre-Industrial England", Ec.HR, XIX (1966), pp 82-109; and P. J. Greven, Jr, Four Generations: Population and Land in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts (Ithaca and London, 1970).
- (2) I have used the figures tabulated by C. Beyers, Die Kaapse Patriotte (Cape Town, 1929), pp 240-49.
 - (3) J. A. Heese, Die Herkoms van die Afrikaner 1657-1867 (Cape Town, 1971).
 - (4) C. C. de Villiers, Geslags-registeer van Ou Kaapse Families, 2nd ed, ed C. Pama, 3 vols (Cape Town, 1965).
 - (5) M. W. Spilhaus, South Africa in the Making, 1652-1806 (Cape Town, 1965), p 110.
 - (6) See, for example, E. A. Walker, The History of Southern Africa, 3rd ed (London, 1957), pp 76, 88.
 - (7) This is a frequent pattern in colonial and frontier situations. See, for example, H. Moller, "Sex Composition and Correlated Culture Patterns of Colonial America", The William and Mary Quarterly, II (April 1945), pp 113-53; and R. Thompson, "Seventeenth Century English and Colonial Sex Ratios: a Postscript", Population Studies, XXVIII (March 1974), 153-65.
 - (8) Since the Geslags registers are not complete after 1800, there was a fair chance that children born to women born after this date would be missed by the compilers, hence distorting the pattern.
 - (9) These may be considered low figures, but not exceptionally so: cf values of 22.3 years for second generation women in Andover, Mass., and 24.5 for third generation women in the same place (Greven, op. cit., p 120), 25.1 years at Crulai (Gautier & Henri, op. cit., p 84), and 21.9 in French Canada for those women who married men who had not been married before (Henripin, op. cit., p 96).
 - (10) Using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-tailed test, $X^2 = 3.34$. Therefore $20 < p < .10$.
 - (11) For example, although the sex ratio had evened out in French Canada by the early eighteenth century, men were still marrying five years later than women, as they were in Andover at about the same time (Henripin, loc. cit.; Greven, loc. cit.). Even more extreme divergence was found in Belgrade early in the eighteenth century, where most men were "nearly ten years older than their wives" (Peter Laslett, "Age at Menarch in Europe since the Eighteenth Century", Journal of Interdisciplinary History, II (1971), pp 227-34. When the sex ratio has become badly imbalanced an even greater difference in the age of spouses can be found. Among the ruling families of fifteenth century Tuscany, who possessed a sex ratio of between 110 and 158 men to 100 women, husbands were on average 13 years older than their wives. See C. Klapisch, "Household and Family in Tuscany in 1427" in Peter Laslett and R. Wall (eds), Household and Family in Past Time (Cambridge, 1972), p 272.
 - (12) See the discussion in Wrigley, op. cit., p 88.
 - (13) This point has often been made with regard to the pastoral farmers. See John Barrow, An Account of Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, 2 vols (London, 1801-4), II, 398. It is more difficult to find similar evidence either for Cape Town or for the agricultural districts of the Boland. Indeed, one might predict that men would in fact marry older in these districts than on the platteland.
 - (14) C. P. Thunberg, Travels in Europe, Africa and Asia between ... 1770 and 1779, 4 vols (London, 1795), II, p 217.
 - (15) See E. F. Watermeyer, "The Roman Dutch Law in South Africa" in E. A. Walker (ed), The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Vol VIII, South Africa, 2nd ed (Cambridge, 1963), pp 870-71.
 - (16) Cf a value of 16.3 months \pm 2.4 for Crulai. Gautier and Henry, op. cit., p 138.
 - (17) In Crulai the interval varied between 22.4 months for the first inter-natal interval and 39.7 for the last. Ibid., p 141.
 - (18) The mean age at last child was 37 years 9 months and the median 39 years 3 months. The mode was calculated by the formula (mean - mode) = 3 (mean - median).

- (19) The impression produced by these figures corresponds closely to more definitive work done elsewhere. Thus, at Crulai the mean age at last child was 40.0, when family was "complete" in the sense that both parents lived beyond the fertile period. Ibid., pp 134-5. In French Canada, the equivalent figure was 41 years, but was 31 in those cases where duration of the marriage was not known (Henripin, op. cit., p 54).
- (20) Although it is impossible to provide figures which are fully comparable to the South African ones, the following examples, which all refer to completed families, may be useful. At Crulai, the mean family sizes of women marrying under 20 and at successive five year intervals were 8.84, 6.52, 5.07, 3.25, and 1.75 (Gautier and Henry, op. cit., p 126). In Colyton, even in the period of the highest fertility, mean family size for women marrying under 25 was 7.3, decreasing to 5.7 and 2.7 for those married at give year intervals subsequently. The successive generations after the foundation of the town of Andover produced 8.3, 8.7 and 7.6 children, respectively (Greven, op. cit., p 201). In French Canada, the mean size of completed families was 8.39, but fell to 5.65 when incomplete families were brought into consideration (Henripin, op. cit., p 50).
- (21) For a discussion of this, see Wrigley, op. cit., pp 106-8.

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Addendum

When I first prepared this paper, I was unaware that figures had been published for the age at marriage of 441 couples married at Potchefstroom between 1845 and 1863, and for 53 couples married at Ermelo in the Eastern Transvaal in the 1880s. The Ermelo sample presents approximately the same pattern as that presented in this paper, while at Potchefstroom women married even younger than in the eighteenth century, 82 per cent being married before they were 20. See G. A. Kooy, "Een Eeuw Boerenleven in Zuidoost-Transvaal", Mededelingen van de Landbouwhogeschool, Wageningen, 65-7 (1965), 117-8.

TABLE I

Immigrants marrying into the South African "white" population

<u>Period</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>White Women</u>	<u>Non-white Women</u>
1657-1687	63	53	8
1688-1717	300	156	50
1718-1747	317	91	72
1748-1777	565	49	145
1778-1807	738	64	205

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TABLE II

Age at 1st marriage for women

	<u>Born Before 1730</u>		<u>Born After 1730</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Husband immigrant</u>	<u>Husband non-immigrant</u>	<u>Husband immigrant</u>	<u>Husband non-immigrant</u>	
Number	48	61	42	128	279
Mean	21.3	21.5	21.3	20.6	21.0
Median	20.0	19.5	19.6	19.3	19.6

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TABLE III

Distribution of Ages of women at first marriage

Age	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35+
No.	5	4	27	23	29	33	25	29	17	19	14	8	13	9	6	2	1	5	2	1	5	2	4

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TABLE IV

Age of men at marriage by age of wife

<u>Husband</u>	<u>Wife under 20</u>	<u>Wife 20-24</u>	<u>Wife over 25</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
Under 20	8	2	2	12	7
20-24	48	25	10	83	55
25-29	16	16	5	37	24
30-34	11	3	4	18	11
Over 35	6	2	1	9	5
Total	89	48	22	149	100

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