

## **Background Information for Studying *The Calling of Katie Makanya***

Before the coming of Europeans, the lands that are now South Africa were inhabited by a variety of African peoples. They were distinguished by differences in language and lifestyles. Some were hunter-gatherers, others nomadic shepherds, and some practiced settled agriculture. The main form of wealth was cattle.

Dutch colonists established the first European settlement in 1652, as a way station for ships sailing to and from the Indian Ocean. The descendants of the Dutch colonists form the largest group among South Africa's white population. They speak Afrikaans, a language related to Dutch. By the late 19th century, they had come to be known as Boers (pronounced "Boo-ers").

The English seized the Cape Colony in 1795, during the wars vs. revolutionary France. To escape English domination, many of the Dutch colonists later migrated farther inland in the "Great Trek" of 1838. During the 19th century, they established independent countries in the interior (Orange Free State and Republic of South Africa).

Both the English and Dutch colonists relied heavily on the exploitation of black labor. Slavery was officially abolished in the 1830s, but there were various other arrangements that kept blacks in inferior status. Although both groups practiced discrimination, the Boers were generally regarded as harsher toward blacks. In the early 19th century, for example, blacks could own land in the British Cape Colony and some even qualified to vote. British missionaries had played a leading role in the campaign against slavery and established several churches that worked to convert and educate blacks. Parts of South Africa remained largely untouched by European influence, such as Soekmekaar, the home town of Katie's father.

The expansion of white domination in South Africa has many similarities to the expansion of the United States in wars with Native Americans during the same period. Throughout the 19th century, several black kingdoms fought against the white colonists, as well as against each other. The blacks learned to use guns, and had the advantage of numbers. Although the general trend was toward greater white control, black armies won several notable victories over them. Katie's "old ancestor" remembers the time of one of the greatest of the African warrior-leaders, Shaka Zulu (killed in 1829). The descendants of his followers are the Zulus, one of the important black ethnic groups in South Africa today. Katie herself is a Sotho, one of the groups that suffered from Zulu attacks in Shaka Zulu's time. Another major Zulu revolt against the British took place in 1879-1880 (Cetshwayo's rebellion) and is mentioned in the book.

South Africa was being transformed in the years around Katie's birth in the 1870s because of the discovery of diamonds and gold ore in the northern region of the Transvaal. These minerals could only be mined with modern European technology. The discoveries brought a rush of new settlers, the building of railroads, and the creation of new cities, such as Kimberley and Johannesburg. Black workers in the mines were subjected to rigid controls and paid much less than white workers. This was the

beginning of the system that grew into *apartheid* (legally enforced segregation) in the 20th century. The British also imported laborers from other parts of the Empire, particularly India, adding another minority to the population. A young lawyer from India, Mohandas Gandhi, began his career leading protests against the British in South Africa before returning to his native country and leading it to independence in 1947.

The discovery of South Africa's mineral wealth raised the stakes in competition for control of the region. British imperialists were determined to bring the Boer republics under their control. The result was the Boer War (1899-1903). Katie recounts the flight of the Zulu population from the Boer city of Johannesburg at the start of the war (pp. 134-7). The British victory brought all of South Africa under their control. In 1910, the various European states in the region were joined together as a British dominion, the Union of South Africa; some black enclaves remained separate and were governed as colonies (Botswana, Swaziland). Eventually, they would become independent countries; they are not part of South Africa today.

Increasingly dominated by the hard-line Boers, South Africa adopted an all-encompassing system of racial segregation known as apartheid (separation) in 1948. Katie's story mentions several of the initial steps in this direction, such as the Native Lands Act (1913, p. 207), which prevented blacks from buying land in "white" areas (the vast majority of the country) and the repeated efforts to extend the pass system, which limited black men's movements, to black women as well. In 1961, the Union broke away from the British Commonwealth and changed its name to the Republic of South Africa. The white minority used increasingly brutal means to maintain its rule until internal resistance and world pressure forced it to grant political rights to the black majority in 1989. The dominant political party is now the African National Congress, whose predecessor organization Katie supported (p. 207).

Black protests against white rule occurred periodically throughout the 20th century. Black movements gradually shifted from armed revolts like the Cetshwayo uprising or the Bambatha insurrection (p. 181-82) to "European" forms of protest, such as labor unions, demonstrations, and political parties. The South African Native National Congress, ancestor of the present-day African National Congress, is mentioned on p. 207. The ICU was a Communist-dominated trade-union movement. The book also mentions the influence of African-American leaders, particularly the black nationalist Marcus Garvey (p. 214).

Background information mostly from Robert Ross, *Concise History of South Africa* (1997)