

THE MFECANE AS ALIBI: THOUGHTS ON DITHAKONG AND MBOLOMPO¹

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THE MFECANE is a tenacious and still-evolving multiple theme in the historiography of the *apartheid* state. Its basic propositions are integral to a white settler, 'Liberal' history which gestated for over a century before Walker coined the term 'mfecane' in 1928.² Walker's neologism, meaning 'the crushing', has no root in any African language, but it crudely conveyed the myth of a cataclysmic period of black-on-black destruction in the era of Shaka (roughly 1810-30). Whereas in other colonial situations such settler versions of history tended to undergo substantial revision after the Second World War, in South Africa the mfecane went from strength to strength. Its elaboration in J. D. Omer-Cooper's *Zulu Aftermath. A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* in 1966,³ and the first volume of *The Oxford History of South Africa* in 1969,⁴ proved decisive. These refined legitimations of an older race historiography were taken up and caricatured by the propaganda and educational apparatuses of the Vorster and Botha regimes. In one variation or another they have since 1970 spread with unbelievable rapidity in the universities, schools, the press, television and cinema. For twenty years now the mfecane has enjoyed near-universal acceptance.⁵

The main assumptions are these. After about 1790 a *self-generated internal* revolution occurred within northern 'Nguni'⁶ societies to the south-west of Delagoa Bay, and this culminated in the Shakan military revolution at the turn of the 1820s.⁷ The consequent Zulu expansionism had a near-genocidal effect

¹ My thanks to Robert Berold and Elsabé van Tonder for help with improving earlier drafts, to Martin Hall, Patrick Harries, Paul Maylam, Robert Morrell, Andrew Roberts, John Wright and Dan Wylie for critical comment, and to Oakley West for the maps.

² E. A. Walker, *History of South Africa* (first edition, Johannesburg, 1928), 210. See also footnote 69 below.

³ Although *Zulu Aftermath* was written in Nigeria and London, Omer-Cooper comes from the eastern Cape of South Africa, a region to which many of the foundations of mfecane theory can be traced back.

⁴ Edited by M. Wilson and L. Thompson. Chapters 8 and 9 by Thompson refer to the mfecane. For briefer overviews see T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (Johannesburg, 1986), 12-21; and P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1986), ch. 4.

⁵ The first criticisms that I have traced are in M. Cornevin, *Apartheid. Power and Historical Falsification* (Paris, 1980), especially chs. 8-11 and 14. See also V. E. Satir, 'The Difaqane: Fact vs. Fiction', *Educational Journal*, LV, 2 (Sept. 1983), 6-14; and J. Cobbing, 'The Case Against the Mfecane', African Studies Centre Seminar Paper, University of Cape Town, March 1983, which was developed in Cobbing, 'The Myth of the Mfecane', Seminar Paper presented to the History Department, University of Durban-Westville, June 1987.

⁶ Like the 'mfecane' the concept 'Nguni' is a twentieth-century invention of European academics. See the important essay by J. B. Wright, 'Politics, ideology and the invention of the "Nguni"', in T. Lodge (ed.), *Ideology and Resistance in Settler Societies* (Johannesburg, 1986).

⁷ This internal revolution and suggestions of structural innovativeness were only given

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. Instantly 'Zulu-ized' first migrants such as the Ndebele and Ngwane 'set into motion' peoples further inland. In combination they extensively depopulated the future white areas of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and Natal, a process which accounts for 'the general distribution of white and Bantu land ownership [in South Africa today]'.⁸ Whites stood on the fringes as helpless spectators. The total pattern of migrations, given the first explosion, was as if predestined. Shaka became an explanation for everything. Or the need for explanations was removed.

The Afrocentricism and the pervasive teleology of this approach are striking. It corresponds with the normal pattern of South Africa's historical texts in which whites and blacks are 'pluralistically' treated in separate chapters or books, and where interactions are generally ignored. The felicitous timing of the self-destruction immediately prior to the white invasions of the 1830s is also noticeable. The easy legitimation this gives to modern *apartheid* propaganda is clear. Recent workers in the field have, nevertheless, had little success in tracing the causes and course of a purely internal revolution in 'Bantu Africa'. Initial assumptions that a population explosion led to transformations of indigenous state structures hang limply in the absence of evidence.⁹ Moreover, the edifice of mfecane theory is precariously poised on a deficient base of empirical research into either early Zulu history or into that of any of the other relevant African societies before 1830. The 'internal revolution' consists of little more than the erroneous claims that Shaka (or Dingiswayo; or Zwibe) first invented the *ibutho*, and transformed tactics by introducing the short stabbing spear and 'horns and chest' battle formations. But both the *ibutho* and short-handled spear go back long before Zwibe and Shaka, and 'horns and chest' signifies nothing very precise. No serious study of Zulu (let alone Ndwandwe or Mthethwa) military developments in the early nineteenth century has yet appeared, despite the relative abundance of material.

These gaps are more than matched by the shortage of research into the impact of white penetration at the turn of the nineteenth century. Even where, as in the studies of Smith and Hedges, the impact of European trade at Delagoa Bay has been discussed, it has been in order to discover the true causes of the internal revolution.¹⁰ The Afrocentricism of the mfecane has so far remained

rudimentary definition by Omer-Cooper in the 1960s, and were welded onto earlier highly pejorative misinterpretations.

⁸ Omer-Cooper, *Zulu Aftermath*, 180. This is a theme of the Tomlinson Report of 1955-6.

⁹ For inconclusive attempts to demonstrate rapid population growth after about 1790, see M. Hall, 'Dendroclimatology, rainfall and human adaptation in the later Iron Age of Natal and Zululand', *Annals of the Natal Museum*, xxii, 3 (Nov. 1976), 693-703; and J. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* (Johannesburg, 1982), 8-12. Evidence noted below, 504-507, suggests population must have declined.

¹⁰ D. W. Hedges, 'Trade and politics in Southern Mozambique in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1978), especially chs. 6 and 7; A. Smith, 'The trade of Delagoa Bay as a factor in Nguni politics, 1750-1835', ch. 8, in L. Thompson (ed.), *African Societies in Southern Africa* (London, 1969). Hedges attributes the stimulus to state expansion in black societies to competition to supply cattle to American whalers at Delagoa Bay after a downswing in the ivory trade in the early 1790s - an unconvincing hypothesis in a nevertheless important study.

immune to any disclosures as to the impact of the imperialistic attentions of mercantile and early industrial capitalism. Symptomatically, both Smith and Hedges failed to discuss the slave trade.¹¹ We are fortunate that some of the vital evidence of the extensive slaving operations of the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay, especially but not exclusively after 1815, has belatedly been assembled by Harries.¹² Harries's revelations surely mean that we have to begin afresh in assessing the causes of the upheavals in south-eastern Africa between about the 1770s and the 1830s. Nor has nearly enough attention been paid to Griqua, Boer and British raiding for labour and cattle from out of the Cape Colony in the south.

To give an example: earlier work on the Ndebele of Mzilikazi had revealed the absence of an explanation for their initial ejection in *c.* 1817–21 from the upper Pongola valley. The evidence of Zulu agency became more elusive the further back one went.¹³ W. M. Macmillan, slightly deviant here as in some other respects, linked this first migration to the slave trade at the Bay,¹⁴ and, as argued later, this hypothesis is better than anything we have. The work of Rasmussen and myself has also established that the subsequent Ndebele migrations of 1827, 1832 and 1837 were forced not by the Zulu, as most writers had assumed, but by Griqua and later Boer attacks from the south, that is by the advancing colonial frontier.¹⁵ An 'un-African' agency had interrupted the teleology of the 'Zulu Aftermath'. The Ndebele were caught and kept moving by a series of related 'external' pressures. Zulu agency at any stage remained unproven, and this called into question the Afrocentricism.

Were the Ndebele exceptional? Recently, in the course of my own teaching, my attention has been drawn to some puzzling features of the movements of the Mantatees on the one hand and the Ngwane of Matiwane on the other. Central to the migrations of these groups, indeed two key events in the whole mfecane, are the little-known battles of Dithakong (26 June 1823: north of Kuruman, northern Cape) and Mbolompo (27 Aug. 1828: near Umtata, Transkei). On the first occasion Europeans, Griqua and Tlhaping defeated the Mantatees, and on the second, Europeans, Khoi, Tembu, Gcaleka and Mpondo broke up the Ngwane (or Fetcani, as they were beginning to be called by 1828). Europeans were certainly active spectators. These two battles have, therefore, been somewhat arbitrarily chosen as pivots on which to hinge a case study to test the teleological and Afrocentric assumptions of mfecane theory.

¹¹ Smith, 'Trade of Delagoa Bay', 176–7, mentions slaving but only to belittle it as a cause of change in African societies: 'it can be seen that it [the slave trade] has little relevance for consideration of the trade hypothesis and the development of the Zulu nation'.

¹² P. Harries, 'Slavery, social incorporation and surplus extraction: the nature of free and unfree labour in South-East Africa', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xxii (1981), 309–30. Some of the conclusions of this crucial article are summarized below.

¹³ J. Cobbing, 'The Ndebele under the Khumalos, *c.* 1820–96' (Ph.D thesis, Lancaster University, 1976), 12–13. E. A. Ritter in *Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Kingdom* (London, 1955), 150, 228–9, has a fictional account of Mzilikazi joining Shaka, rising to be a general, and then rebelling.

¹⁴ W. M. Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton* (Oxford, 1929), 19–20.

¹⁵ Cobbing, 'Ndebele under the Khumalos', ch. 1; R. K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1978).

*Theal's chain reaction*¹⁶

The normally accepted version of the events which linked the Ngwane and the Mantatees appears to have originated with Theal in the 1880s.¹⁷ In about 1819–21, the story goes,¹⁸ the Ngwane were thrust out of their home to the east of the upper Mzinyathi river by the Zulu revolution. After fleeing south-west into the upper Caledon valley, they established a secondary reign of terror which inaugurated the difaqane.¹⁹ The most potent of the peoples set into motion by the Ngwane were the Tlokwa or Mantatees of MaNtatisi and her son, Sekonyela. They too became instantly Zulu-ized, although only for about three years,²⁰ and gyrated their way westwards across the Orange Free State depopulating as they went. Amongst their victims were the Patsa, or Kololo, of Sebetwane, whom they expelled across the Vaal to the north-west.²¹ Older versions of the chain reaction now had the Tlokwa (Mantatees) cross the Vaal into the northern Cape. Newer versions since the 1950s dispute the fact that the Tlokwa moved west of the Vaal, have them return to the upper Caledon, and replace them in the west with sundry tertiary victims (the Kololo, the Phuthing, the Hlakwana).²² Once across the Vaal the Mantatees turned south and continued their devastations. They (who it was is still obscure) were only prevented from destroying the mission station at Kuruman and perhaps invading the Cape Colony by the missionaries and a hastily improvised band of Griqua at the defensive battle of Dithakong on 26 June 1823.

While these events – the classic chain reaction of the mfecane – unfolded, the Ngwane, whom we left in the Caledon, spent a few years plundering the Sotho, but were then forced south across the Drakensberg by more Zulu (or Ndebele: there is no agreement on this point) attacks into the upper Mbashe valley in the south-western Transkei. Here, at Mbolompo on 27 Aug. 1828, the

¹⁶ See Fig. 1. The argument requires careful reference to the maps. In an attempt at clarity I have used modern territorial names, e.g. the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Transkei etc., anachronistically. It should be remembered that apart from the Cape Colony – which reached the Fish River in 1812 and the Keiskamma in 1820 – none of these boundaries existed in the 1820s.

¹⁷ See below, p. 515.

¹⁸ Outlined in Omer-Cooper, *Zulu Aftermath*, ch. 6.

¹⁹ A concept invented by D. W. Ellenberger in *History of the Basuto Ancient and Modern* (London, 1912), especially Second Period, 'The Lifaqane wars', 117 onwards. Unlike Walker's mfecane, which referred to a sub-continental *pattern* of destruction, Ellenberger's difaqane defined an alleged middle period, i.e. a *time-span* of Sotho history with particular reference to the Caledon valley. This period of bloody destruction (caused by Nguni invaders) separates a pre-1820 era of peace from a post-1833 (arrival of the missionaries) era of recuperation and progress towards civilisation. Mfecane and difaqane are now in practice used interchangeably, although the Caledon stress of the latter often remains.

²⁰ 1822–4, after which they returned to normal. See P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe. Chief of the Sotho* (London, 1975), ch. 4.

²¹ Apparently first alleged by Livingstone; see I. Schapera (ed.), *Livingstone's Private Journals 1851–1853* (London, 1960), 18, and footnotes 58 and 152 below.

²² Since Marion How's 'An alibi for Mantatis', *African Studies*, xiii, (1954), 65–76. The most accessible newer version is W. F. Lye, 'The Difaqane: The Mfecane in the Southern Sotho area, 1822–24', *J. Afr. Hist.*, viii (1967), 107–31. See also E. W. Smith, 'Sebetwane and the Makololo', *African Studies*, xv (1956), 50, repeated in Omer-Cooper, *Zulu Aftermath*, ch. 8. See also below, n. 30.

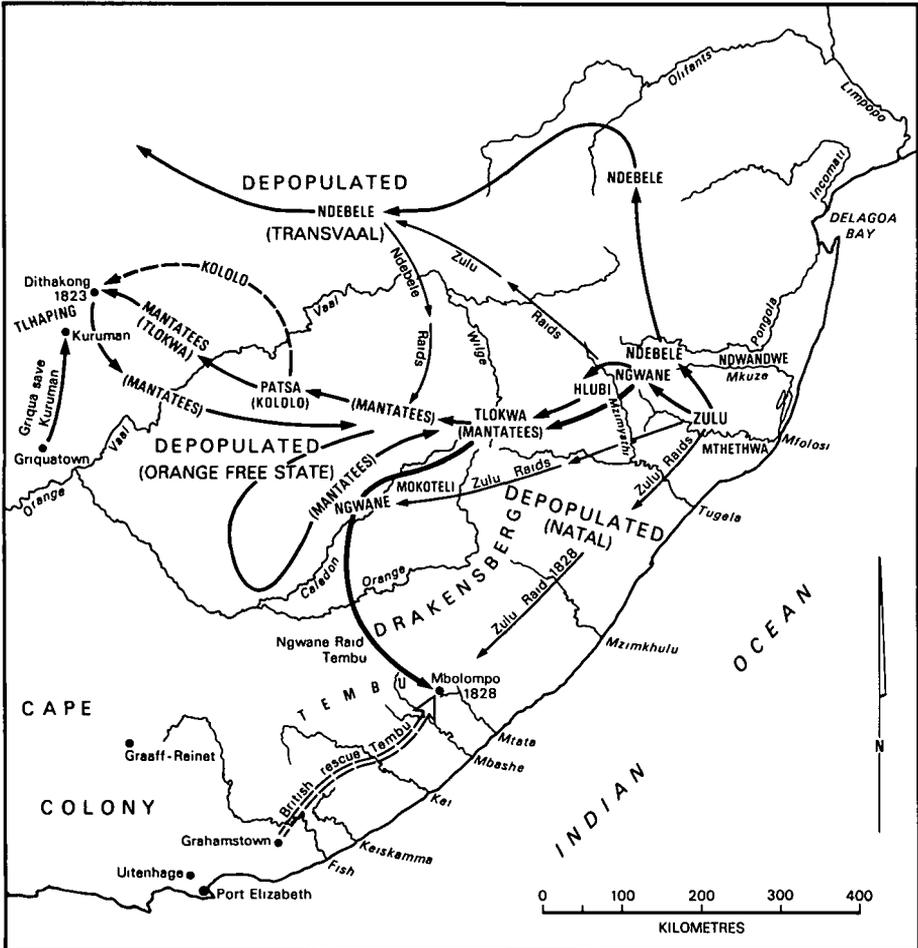


Fig. 1. The classic mfecane chain reaction according to Theal and successors.

Ngwane were at last halted by a British army coming to the rescue of their next prospective victims, the Tembu. Interestingly, the British thought they were attacking the Zulu, who were also reported to be operating in the Transkei in 1828. Cape historians have found this error amusing, but not worth investigating.²³

The warning provided by the Ndebele example, and the confusion as to the identity of the black opponents at both Dithakong and Mbolompo suggested conversely that these movements needed re-investigation. The research began with the 'battles' (which soon began acquiring inverted commas in my notes), and from them I worked outwards. The results were incorporated into the following narrative with explanatory pauses, and a diversion into Natal.²⁴ Although the general problems of the mfecane were kept in mind, I kept as

²³ E.g. G. E. Cory, *The Rise of South Africa 1820-34* (London, 1913), 363.

²⁴ Necessary to establish the truth of the rumours that the Zulu were operating in the Transkei in 1828.

closely as possible to issues arising from the battles themselves. And since mfecane theorists have a habit of repeating each other without enquiring into original sources, it was a condition of the exploration to rely as much as possible on the contemporary accounts of the 1820s and 1830s, and not to view events through the eyes of much later writers such as Theal, Walker or Omer-Cooper.

Dithakong: Mantatees as forced labourers

In 1829 Shane Bannister wrote of the early and mid-1820s:

'Amongst the Griquas and Bergenaars, who are ... in considerable connection with the Cape, slaves obtained by barter, or by capture from Bootchuanas or Bushmen, are a common article of saleable property... They sell some of them into the Colony at a low price.'²⁵

The first surprise is that the 'battle' of Dithakong was one such slave (and cattle) raid, unprovoked, on a still unidentified 'enemy', who became immortalized as Mantatees.²⁶ This is clear from the writings of Moffat, Melvill and Thompson, the former two of whom, both missionaries, were the instigators and organizers both of the raid and the disposal of the prisoners. This emerges best in Melvill's account.²⁷ In Moffat (whose account should be read slowly) we have to wade through a surreal,²⁸ self-exculpatory version of events, in which the missionaries are depicted as restraining their brutal Griqua and Tlhaping allies, solicitously protecting the women and children, wringing their hands at the bestiality of man. It was, however, Moffat who in early June 1823 interrupted a journey to the Ngwaketse and returned at top speed to Griqua Town on the basis of unsubstantiated *rumours* of a Mantatee presence.²⁹ It was Mr Melvill who brought the three most feared Griqua leaders of their generation – Waterboer, Adam Kok and Barend Barends – together, and organized the arms and powder. It was Moffat and Thompson who spied out the positions of the victims; and Moffat and Melvill who guided the army into 'battle' on 25 and 26 June.³⁰

In a seven-hour massacre possibly two or three hundred Mantatees were shot dead and their villages burnt.³¹ The Griqua rounded up over 1,000 cattle,

²⁵ S. Bannister, *Humane Policy or Justice to the Aborigines of New Settlements* (London, 1968 reprint [originally London, 1830]), 228.

²⁶ For the 'battle' see I. Schapera (ed.), *Apprenticeship at Kuruman* (London, 1951), 77–103. Moffat's account was first published in *The Cape Gazette*, 26 July 1823. See also below, nn. 28–30, for a discussion of the identification problem.

²⁷ See George Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1967 reprint [originally London, 1827]), 1, chs. xv and xvi.

²⁸ Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 91, the coming on the old man and child, for example; and 95, where the Mantatee 'poorer class' are depicted seizing and eating meat in the middle of the fighting.

²⁹ Moffat does not explain why he returned to fetch the Griqua. It is probable that certain information is being omitted. See also footnote 142 below.

³⁰ Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 1, ch. xv; Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 89. Note the surreal atmosphere of Thompson's alleged sighting of the Mantatees and the deserted village reminiscent of the *Marie Celeste* in *Travels and Adventures*, 1, 108–10.

³¹ Moffat (Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 95) claimed 'the slain of the enemy was between 400 and 500', but it is probably advisable to allow for exaggeration. For the claim that Mantatees burnt their own villages see *ibid.*, 93, and Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 1, 146.

one of their major objectives in joining the expedition. Thirty-three cattle were given to Melvill 'according to the custom of the country'.³² Moffat, Melvill and a mission labourer named Hamilton used armed Griqua to round up the women and children who were not dead or had not been able to escape. Over ninety prisoners were taken back to Kuruman on 26–27 June. There a squabble broke out between the missionaries and the Tlhaping chief, Mothibi, over their disposal. Griqua guns decided the issue in favour of the missionaries. During the next few days Melvill scoured the countryside and captured at least fifty more women and children. He avoided the men. Women and young males were what the Cape market preferred. Melvill immediately despatched fifteen Mantatees for sale to Graaff Reinet in the north-eastern Cape, for which he received payment in ammunition. At least thirty remained with the Griqua in Griqua Town. Moffat kept several at Kuruman, and took one boy as a personal servant who was 'affectionately domesticated in the family of his benefactor [*sic*]'. Others, including five women – who fortunately 'indicated nothing of cannibal ferocity' – and a 'fine boy', Moffat took with him for distribution in Cape Town in January 1824 to the applause of the local press. Almost certainly the rest were sent to various destinations in the Cape.³³

The missionaries tried to depict themselves as succouring the prisoners, and rescuing them from their evil chiefs and starvation (with all those cattle?). There is no doubt, however, that they were fully and consciously engrossed in what they were doing, i.e. collecting slaves, and that the cover of hypocrisy was intended to deflect the certain censure from the government in London and from their seniors in the London Missionary Society if it had leaked out that they were selling people into slavery. The word Mantatee was probably coined as a euphemism for forced labourers taken from the Tswana and Sotho north of the Orange and driven south into the Cape. At least that is what the word meant throughout the Cape in the 1820s. But why was there so much need for secrecy? And why was there a shortage of labour in the Cape in the early 1820s which this and many other such Griqua raids were designed to alleviate?³⁴

In 1823 slavery had not yet been abolished in the Cape Colony, but an increase in the number of slaves was (theoretically) prevented by the ending of the British slave trade in 1807. Such hatred was bred between white and black by British frontier expansionism that after 1809 blacks (as opposed to Khoi, i.e. Hottentots) were prohibited from being employed on farms in the Colony. After 1812 blacks were liable to be shot on sight west of the Fish River; and after the offensive east of the Fish in 1819, west of the Keiskamma as well.

³² *Ibid.*, 1, 153.

³³ For the detail about Melvill see *ibid.*, 1, ch. xvi, headed 'Mr Melvill's Narrative of Transactions after the Battle, and of His Excursion to Rescue the Women and Children of the Invaders'; the quote about 'cannibal ferocity' is *ibid.*, 1, 155; for Moffat in Cape Town see the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 7 Jan. 1824, reprinted in G. M. Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 34 vols. (Cape Town, 1903–6), xvi, 497–505; see also J. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, II (London, 1828), 142–6, for the quarrel over the prisoners; for Melvill's despatch of prisoners to Graaff Reinet see R. L. Cope (ed.), *Journals of the Rev. T. L. Hodgson* (Johannesburg, 1977), entry for 23 July 1823, p. 182; for the payment see Bird to Landdrost Graaff Reinet, 27 Aug. 1823, in Theal, *Records*, xvi, 223.

³⁴ For a rare intervention in this field see S. Newton-King, 'The labour market of the Cape Colony, 1807–28', ch. 7, in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London, 1980).

Blacks surviving these regulations were repatriated when discovered.³⁵ This left the numerically sparse Khoi who, once free to move about the countryside, were in 1809–12 turned into serfs through Codes issued by Governors Caledon and Cradock. Khoi children were compulsorily ‘apprenticed’ until the age of twenty-five.³⁶ But there were never enough Khoi. Attempts to stabilize the military frontier and to cultivate the ground newly seized from the Xhosa by bringing out the 1820 settlers from Britain produced a large extra demand for labour. This was quickly followed by the complete failure of indentured white labour schemes to work the farms.³⁷ The pathological and genocidal extermination of the San (Bushmen) made matters worse.³⁸ The labour shortage – most acute in the eastern divisions of Graaff Reinet, Albany (Graham’s Town) and Uitenhage – threatened the whole British settler scheme, and with it economic development and ‘defence’ on the eastern frontier.

This is why it was not possible to be open about the origins and mode of capture of the Mantatees who started being driven into the Colony at the latest by 1823.³⁹ Mantatees were black (hence illegal), and had been captured as slaves (doubly illegal). The misrepresentation of this to London tested the skill of Governor Somerset between 1823 and his recall in 1826. Truths, half-truths and lies were intermixed. The ‘Bootchuanas’ and Mantatees were represented as being driven by hunger and pleading for refuge; or seeking their children kidnapped by Bergenaars.⁴⁰ In contradistinction to the Xhosa to the east they were described as harmless. What was not mentioned was whom the Bergenaars were working for, and why the children were being kidnapped in the first place. Neither was anything said about the origins of the human-induced famine that accompanied the slave raids. Somerset was thus able to represent it as a kindness in a regulation of 1823 to ‘allow’ Mantatees to be turned into tied labourers, as the Khoi already had been. The funnelling of the Mantatees through to the settlers near the coast in Albany, where they were only to be apprenticed to ‘respectable persons on whose humanity you can depend’ (also for Bathurst’s consumption) became an act of charity. Somerset even lied that

³⁵ For these events see B. MacLennan, *A Proper Degree of Terror. John Graham and the Cape’s Eastern Frontier* (Cape Town, 1986); for the shootings see Theal, *Records*, xxiii, 212.

³⁶ For liberal mystifications of these serf codes see C. W. De Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa. Social and Economic* (London, 1941), 45–6; and T. R. H. Davenport, section: ‘The extension of freedom under the law’, in Wilson and Thompson, *Oxford History*, 1, 293 and 303. For Davenport the Caledon Code was a point where ‘the removal of the disabilities of coloured persons reached an important stage!’ For an admission that the Codes led to enslavement see Walker, *History of South Africa* (first edition, 1928), 155–6.

³⁷ Newton-King, ‘Labour market’, 182–91.

³⁸ Philip, *Researches*, II, chs. 14 and 15. This genocide needs a thorough study. The psychological dehumanization probably facilitated later massacres.

³⁹ See Newton-King, ‘Labour market’, 192–3 for the only source which correctly treats Mantatees as labour.

⁴⁰ Philip, *Researches*, II, 85–6, reported Boers’ claims that Sotho came voluntarily seeking food. Their account was they had been living peacefully ‘when a people (called Bergenaars) riding upon horses, and with fire-arms, came upon them and killed many of them, and took away all their cattle and many of their children’. Attempting to follow their children they were ‘detained by the boors’. See also *ibid.*, 90–5. For the myth see G. M. Theal, *History of South Africa 1795–1872*, IV (4th edition, London, 1915), 446. Bergenaars were Griqua who broke away from the main group under Waterboer in 1822–23.

they would be permitted to return home or change their masters if they wished. But, as he remarked: few Mantatees 'would feel inclined, *even if they had the power*, to rejoin their native tribes' (what was left of them). But they did not have the power. The whites took 'the most effectual means for protecting', i.e. enslaving, the Mantatees.⁴¹ Failure to spot the humanitarian euphemisms has spoiled many an account.⁴²

Almost certainly several thousand Mantatees had been captured and brought into the Colony by 1824.⁴³ Mantatee adults were paid 1/6 a month in the first year and 3/- a month thereafter. 'Children' were paid 1/6 a month, hence their popularity at any age.⁴⁴ This, besides producing labour in some areas where none had been before, must in other areas have led to a lowering of wages. It is to be stressed that Mantatees were *sold*. Farmers usually paid the Griqua or other suppliers (e.g. Melvill) in guns and/or gunpowder. Oxen and horses were also exchanged, especially for children.⁴⁵ Rumours abounded that white farmers accompanied the slavers, or organised commandos to fetch them out free. Legassick has shown how well-founded the rumours were.⁴⁶

The rumour, concealment and euphemism which accompanied the years of Mantatee procurement reflected the split between official policy and the requirements of the settlers. They were part of an intense debate about how to secure a permanent solution to labour supply when London forbade the slave trade and was known to be on the verge of abolishing slavery itself, and when access to black labour was still forbidden. This impasse was only to end with the passing of Ordinance 49 in July 1828, which sanctioned 'free' black labour. Mantatees – the first *black*, as opposed to Khoi, forced labourers in South Africa's history – are consequently firmly locatable in the period between the intensification of the labour shortage with the arrival of the 1820 settlers, and Ordinance 49. After 1828 different designations were to be used. The status of Mantatees in these years hovered indeterminately between slave, serf and 'free' labourer.⁴⁷ To split hairs over the terminology is to miss the essential point that they were involuntary labourers seized 'in battle'.

⁴¹ Somerset to Bathurst, 30 July 1825, in Theal, *Records*, xxii, 419–22; Bird to Landdrost Graaff Reinet, 27 Aug. 1823, *ibid.*, xvi, 223; Secretary to Government to Landdrosts Graaff Reinet and Somerset, 21 July 1825, *ibid.*, xxxii, 425, my emphasis.

⁴² E.g. Cory, *Rise of South Africa, 1820–34*, 236.

⁴³ By June 1825 there were nearly three hundred acknowledged Mantatees in Graaff Reinet alone, *excluding* those already apprenticed under Somerset's order of 27 Aug. 1823; see Stockenstrom to Secretary to Government, 1 June 1825, in Theal, *Records*, xxii, 422.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxiv, Minutes of Council, 2 Feb. 1827. For non-Mantatee labour of 3/- a day (plus food and wine) see Somerset to Bathurst, 31 March 1825 in *ibid.*, xx, 400–1.

⁴⁵ Philip, *Researches*, II, 91; letter from 'Investigatus' in *Graham's Town Journal*, 30 Jan. 1834; M. Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the missionaries, 1780–1840: the politics of a frontier zone' (Ph.D thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1970), 354–5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 353; Philip, *Researches*, II, 82–3.

⁴⁷ Mantatees were sold, alleged to have been paid, and legalized under 'apprenticeship', i.e. serf, codes. Whether they were resold is not known.

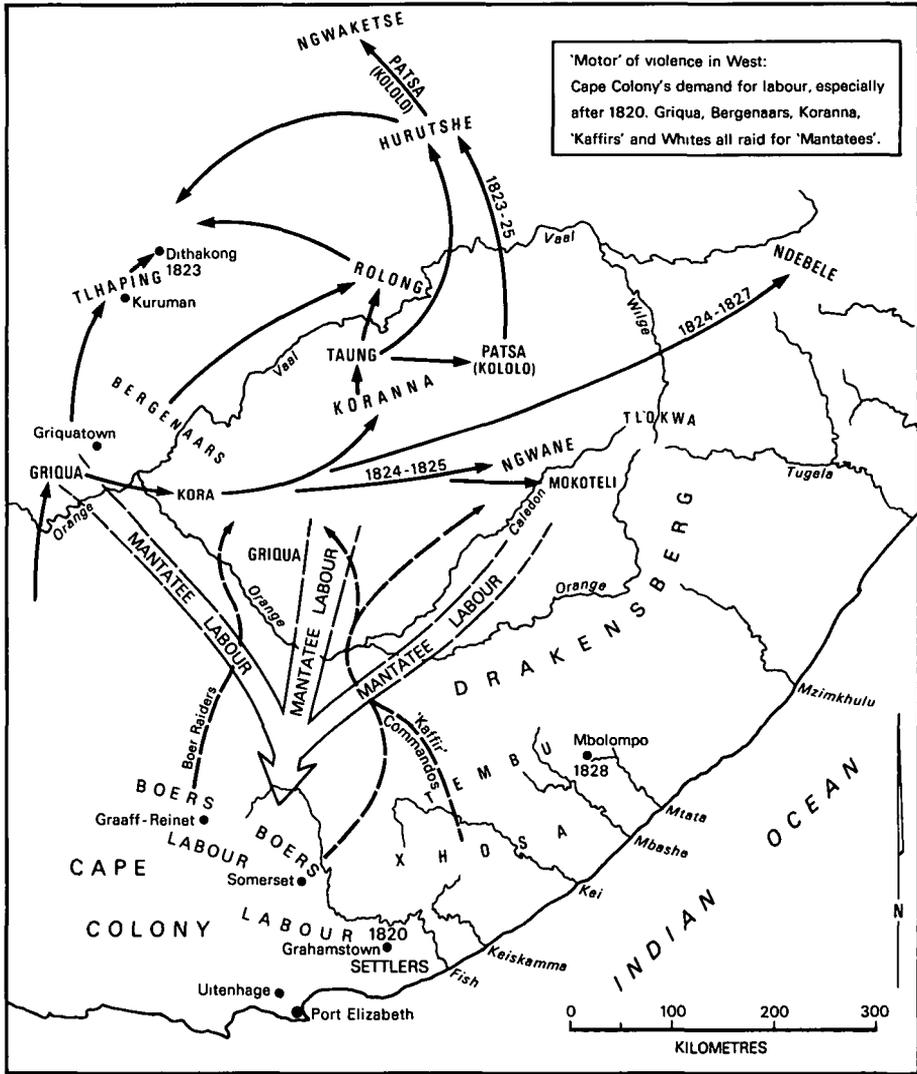


Fig. 2. The chain of violence in the west, c. 1820–1826.

*The chain of violence in the west (see Fig. 2) with alibis*⁴⁸

Griqua raids for slaves and cattle, such as the one at Dithakong, had been going on for years.⁴⁹ But in the early 1820s they became systematic and their reach was extended. Horse-riding gunmen based on the lower Vaal and middle Orange were by 1823–4 at the latest penetrating deep into the Caledon, and beyond to the upper Orange and even the upper Vaal, where the Ndebele had

⁴⁸ By taking the western chain before the eastern chain (see below, pp. 503–507) I do not mean to imply that the events in the west had a chronological or any other priority over those in the east. The 'chains' intermeshed simultaneously.

⁴⁹ M. Legassick, 'The northern frontier to 1820', ch. 7, in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1820* (Cape Town, 1979), 259, 262.

suffered half a dozen raids by 1827.⁵⁰ In 1834 Mokhoteli (Moshoeshoe's people) showed Smith their gunshot wounds acquired from Bergenaars in the early 1820s.⁵¹ There is every reason to believe, as we shall see, that Matiwane's Ngwane were also being attacked by Griqua in the mid-1820s.⁵²

Nearer the Griqua bases in the western Orange Free State and the northern Cape local Africans suffered far more damage. 'Kafir' commandos from the eastern districts of the Colony – groups displaced in the so-called frontier wars, and often mobilized and armed by 'frontier ruffians'⁵³ – vied with the Griqua. Additionally, Kora bands (originally Khoi) on the middle Orange, having been displaced by the Griqua into the northern and western Orange Free State, acquired guns and horses. Known as Koranna they in turn became plunderers, operating both north and south of the Vaal bend. For instance, Koranna attacked both the Hurutshe at Kaditshweni and Mothibi's Tlhaping in 1822–3, but then appealed to Mothibi for an alliance against the Hurutshe, just as the missionaries and Griqua were to entice the Tlhaping against the 'Mantatees' in June 1823.⁵⁴

Associated with the Koranna, partly their victims, partly allies, were the Taung of Mophete (succeeded by Moritsane in 1824). In the first two decades of the nineteenth century the Taung became partially 'Koranna-ized', acquired some guns, and absorbed neighbours to produce a new type of hybrid state which very badly needs a study.⁵⁵ The Taung were the group most frequently identified or disparaged as Mantatees.⁵⁶ The activities of the slave and cattle raiders produced bewildering sequences of attack, counter-attack, and permutations of alliances, aggressors and victims, in which the missionaries were extensively involved. In 1824, for example, Taung attacks on Sifunelo's Rolong induced Sifunelo's 'protecting' missionaries to employ Bergenaars as mercenaries against the Taung. The Bergenaars attacked the Rolong instead, however, a 'mistake' which did not prevent Melvill from taking his customary cut of thirty of Sifunelo's cattle. Later in 1824 the Bergenaars, this time with

⁵⁰ Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom*, 46, 51; Cobbing, 'Ndebele under the Khumalos', 21; Philip, *Researches*, II, 85–6. L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds. Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1786–1870* (Oxford, 1975), 57, dates the raids into the Caledon from 'about 1825', but this is too late.

⁵¹ W. F. Lye (ed.), *Andrew Smith's Journal of His Expedition into the Interior of South Africa, 1834–36* (Cape Town, 1975), 74, where Moshoeshoe's father, Mokhachane, 'called upon us to observe the many marks of wounds from musket balls'.

⁵² See below, pp. 508.

⁵³ Lye, *Andrew Smith's Journal*, 48–50, for Dantzer's group; see also B. Holt, *Greatheart of the Border. A Life of John Brownlee, Pioneer Missionary in South Africa* (King William's Town, 1976), 15.

⁵⁴ Legassick, 'Politics of a frontier zone', 326, 355–60; Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 65–6, 73; P. R. Kirby (ed.), *The Diary of Dr Andrew Smith, 1834–36* (Cape Town, 1939–40), I, 358, entry for 17 April 1835.

⁵⁵ Initial, but not always very reliable, information on the Taung is in G. M. Theal, *Basutoland Records, 1833–52*, I (Cape Town, 1964 reprint), 517–18; J. C. MacGregor, *Basuto Traditions* (Cape Town, no date [c. 1906]), 58–67; Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto*, 54–67, 165–9, 173, 306. See also Legassick, 'Politics of a frontier zone', 336–9. Legassick's pioneering study is marred by the symptomatic confusion of referring to the Taung as 'difaqane marauders', an error which is traceable to the Mantatee = MaNtatise elision discussed below, pp. 514–515.

⁵⁶ E.g. S. Broadbent, *A Narrative of the First Introduction of Christianity amongst the Barolong Tribe* (London, 1865), 158.

Moffat's help, did what they were first asked and aided the Rolong against the Taung.⁵⁷ Further east in the north-central Orange Free State (Welkom-Virginia area) the Taung achieved a near hegemony in the early 1820s. They absorbed the neighbouring Ghoya, and either absorbed or put to flight Fokeng chieftaincies such as the Patsa. The Patsa of Sebetwane – later known as the Kololo – extricated themselves from Taung⁵⁸ attentions by migrating north-west through Rolong and Hurutshe territory into the country of the Ngwaketse (Kanye area), where in 1824 the Ngwaketse chief, Makaba, was killed. The Patsa were only evicted when Sebege, Makaba's successor, hired white gunmen in 1826. In this way whites reinserted themselves into the chain, fanning the flames of violence, deciding the local outcome, and, on occasion, channelling south the booty.⁵⁹

More work is still needed to decipher these intricate sequences, but the outline is clear. The disturbances in the northern Cape, south-western Transvaal, Orange Free State and western Lesotho were rooted in the Cape Colony's demand for labour and cattle, not in Zulu expansionism. Allegations that the Orange Free State was depopulated by the Zulu or the Ndebele are without any foundation. The Zulu never once raided into the Orange Free State, and the first Ndebele raid south of the middle Vaal came in 1829, and that was a retaliation against Taung-Bergenaar cattle raids.⁶⁰ Even where, as in the north-eastern and eastern Orange Free State, Sotho groups came simultaneously under pressure from invaders from the east during the period c. 1818–26, these incursions did not derive from the 'Zulu revolution' but from an expansion in the European demand for sugar.⁶¹ Accounts of Tlokwa devastations in the Orange Free State go back to the error of eliding the word 'Mantatee' with the name of Sekonyela's mother, MaNtatisi, an elision discussed at the end of the article. In fact the Tlokwa did not migrate away from the upper Caledon. In sum, the dominant flow of violence in the west was not from east to west, as Theal claimed, but rather from west to east, or south-

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 131–3, 173; Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 145–55; Cope, *Journal of the Rev. T. L. Hodgson*, 9, 246, 322; Legassick, 'Politics of a frontier zone', 339.

⁵⁸ Livingstone (see Schapera, *Livingstone's Private Journals*, 18) claimed in the early 1850s that Sebetwane's people told him *Sekonyela's* Tlokwa drove the Kololo from Kurutlele (near modern Welkom) 'in the first instance', after which they 'fled to [my emphasis] Sekonyela's present country' (upper Caledon). Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto*, 60, 306, has one part of the Patsa driven north by the Taung, another by the Tlokwa. It is possible that this split is to accommodate both Livingstone and material from traditions. My suspicion is that both Livingstone and Ellenberger were conflating 'Mantatees' – a word applied to both Taung and Patsa-Kololo – with 'MaNtatisi' (hence Tlokwa), and that no Tlokwa attack took place. Ellenberger's dating of the Tlokwa attack to June 1822 (p. 306) is purely imaginary: we have no information as to the chronology of the Patsa-Kololo before 1824 (when they were in Ngwaketse country). Since Sekonyela was only a boy in 1821–3, Livingstone is likely to have supplied the name from missionary preoccupation with Sekonyela in the period 1834–54, during which time the mistaken Mantatees = MaNtatisi (Tlokwa) elision was becoming habitual. For the chronology of the elision see below, pp. 514–515.

⁵⁹ M. Lister (ed.), *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain* (Cape Town, 1949), 65–71; Legassick, 'Politics of a frontier zone', 352.

⁶⁰ Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom*, 62–7. For allegations about Zulu devastations in the Orange Free State see most Standard Eight school textbooks in South Africa.

⁶¹ Discussed below, pp. 503–507. The same caveat is necessary when considering the impact of the Ndebele in the southern and western Transvaal.

west to north-east, or even, in the case of the 'Kafir' commandos originating in the Fish-Kei region, from south north to the Caledon and the Vaal. Given the overwhelming disparity of force between the Griqua and even the more powerful of the black states north of the Orange in the 1820s this was inevitable. Only in the 1830s did Moshoeshoe's newly militarised 'Sotho' state, a quite revolutionary development, begin to counterattack.⁶²

Although the region north of the Orange was in the grip of a drought in the years 1820-2, this may have aggravated but was not sufficient to cause the widespread starvation noted by observers. In the 1820s this starvation, and the 'bones littering the veld' (so beloved of mfekane literature) were attributed to these Griqua raids for Mantatees.⁶³ Women and children were killed or captured; a greater percentage of men killed or wounded. The damage inflicted by fire-arms has been persistently underestimated. The loss of labour to black societies and the flight from fertile home bases seriously impaired cultivation; and this combined with the loss of cattle for milk to produce a crisis of malnutrition in the years 1821-5, especially in the west. Some of the missionary reports of cannibalism may have been accurate.⁶⁴ Memories of the hunger stand out in the traditions collected in later decades, although the causes were invariably glossed over. Some survivors fled into the Kalahari or joined groups such as the Taung and Tlhaping. These became revolutionary accretions of people unlike anything that had gone before. Others flocked to join Matiwane, Sekonyela and especially Moshoeshoe in and to the east of the Caledon, or to Mzilikazi on the upper Vaal. This is how their states grew. Other 'Bootchuanas', to return to Somerset's half-truth, did flee south of the Orange into the Colony. The acquisition of Mantatee labour in the Cape, the famine, and black state consolidation in the north were thus aspects of the same process.

A *grand peur* accompanied these events, especially along the middle and lower Vaal. This was sometimes fanned by missionaries and traders, as well as opportunistic black chiefs, to justify 'self-defensive' raids. Not only did literate whites attempt – successfully in the main – to provide themselves and their Griqua, or 'their Africans', with personal alibis,⁶⁵ but a more general psychological displacement took place in which the victims were burdened with the guilt of being the aggressors. 'Mantatee' was a word deliberately used to convey at once an idea of terror, and that of the black man as *Untermensch*. Melvill and Moffat fantasized about a huge Mantatee army of 100,000 people.⁶⁶ Out of this emerged the concept of the 'horde'. Genuine refugees

⁶² Sanders, *Moshoeshoe*, 51-2. Sanders has the difaqane end with Moshoeshoe's defeat of the *Koranna* in 1835-6. This epitomizes the confusion about the difaqane.

⁶³ Stockenstrom to Secretary to the Government, 1 June 1825, in Theal, *Records*, xxii, 423, for example.

⁶⁴ E.g. Cope, *Journals of the Rev. T. L. Hodgson*, 184-5, where Hodgson describes a case which he associated with the consequences of the Griqua raid at Dithakong.

⁶⁵ Moffat and Melvill at Dithakong, for example, and Bain at Dithubaruba in 1826, who claimed he loaded his guns with blank ammunition (for his readers), but in the attack used live bullets of course; see Lister, *Bain Journals*, 58, 69-70, and footnote 117 below.

⁶⁶ The initial estimate of the number of Mantatees at Dithakong was 30,000. Melvill calculated this by guessing the area of ground covered by the 'enemy', and allowing one square yard for each person. Within a few days 30,000 had become 50,000. To boost the alibi further, these engaged Mantatees were said to be half of the total Mantatee army,

from the slave raids were converted into marauding bands of semi-demonic women and children, as well as men, who ravaged the countryside like locusts and threatened the entire colonial civilization. Mantatees were even accused of self-propelling themselves into servitude. Mantatees *qua* hordes were accused of driving south Mantatees *qua* labour,⁶⁷ while the real suppliers of the labour and their white backers slipped quietly out of view. It was alleged that the Mantatees destroyed their own villages and crops. It was natural to depict them as cannibals, a facet of the alibi that fitted in with the fantasies of African behaviour with which the whites often started out. These displacements justified the attacks on 'cannibals' and brought in the subscriptions to the mission societies in London, Glasgow, Paris and Boston. Since there could be no conceivable motive for this self-mutilation, Mantatee hordes had to be subject to laws of behaviour and motion completely mysterious to rational people. This 'knowledge' was planted in the 1820s and 1830s and explains the surreal atmosphere infusing modern accounts. Black 'irrationality' became 'truer' with each repetition, and the impression was to be reinforced by the need for later alibis.⁶⁸

Mbolompo: Fetcani as forced labourers

In 1822–3 a second 'horde' appeared, this time in the north-eastern Cape: the Fetcani.⁶⁹ This word the Tembu applied to enemy bandits or sometimes to local rivals, and the Boers to describe any people whose cattle they happened to be raiding.⁷⁰ After 1823 (and possibly earlier) it additionally came to be used for raiders and/or migrants from north of the Orange River. For example in March 1825 some Fetcani attacked Tembu groups near Hangklip mountain to the north of modern Queenstown. A colonial commando discovered they were from the Caledon and had been repulsed by the Griqua. The Tembu under Pawana threatened to cross south into the 'Neutral Territory' – i.e. their old land from which they had been evicted by the British after 1820 – and, after further real or alleged attacks, did so in July 1827. This precipitated a frontier crisis. Troops were mobilised and the Governor, Bourke, made a tour of inspection. The leaders of these Fetcani were 'Masoto' and 'Manguane': our first definite reference to the Ngwane. Lt.-Col. Henry Somerset (the son of Bourke's predecessor) scoured the Winterberg with his cavalry; and the frontier military commandants strained at the leash to be allowed to fight them. Bourke equivocated, and decided first to ask them to recross the Orange so the Tembu could recross out of British territory. This was urgent as the Xhosa leader, Ngqika, was demanding to be allowed back west of the Keiskamma with alleged Fetcani in his rear.⁷¹

which produces 100,000, just enough to support claims of a danger to the Cape Colony. It is unlikely that the victims numbered more than about two thousand, and possibly less.

⁶⁷ Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, I, 179; II, 115. Thomas Pringle, in *African Sketches* (London, 1834), 359–60, has the labour driven partly by 'Mantatees' and partly by Griqua – the first stage of the alibi.

⁶⁸ See below, pp. 518–519.

⁶⁹ The word comes in many spellings: infanicama, imfetcanie, Il-Fitcanie, fickanees etc., but I have standardized on Fetcani. The word was used by Walker for his 1928 neologism 'mfecane'. The linguistic connexions between the 'Sotho' difaqane and the Tembu-Xhosa Fetcani are worth exploring.

⁷⁰ Van Wyk to Mackay, in Theal, *Records*, xxxi, 51–2.

⁷¹ Pringle to Thompson, May 1825, in Holt, *Great Heart*, 58–9; Rogers to Forbes, 27

The Ngwane/Fetcani were only 'a problem', it should be stressed, because of British expansionism to the Kei and Griqua raiding already referred to. The timing of their flight south of the Orange in 1826 or 1827 was unfortunate. For one thing, British missionaries who had arrived at Butterworth in December 1826 were already focussing on further advances north through the Transkei to Natal. In 1827 British 'frontier ruffians' (to be discussed below) established themselves on the Mzimkhulu River and in May 1828 relayed information via the missionaries to Bourke about a Zulu invasion of the Transkei.⁷² Militant expansionists used this news to press for an advance across the Kei, a response the message was intended to produce. In the second place, the Ngwane had some time between 1826 and late 1827 settled on the upper Mbashe River, right in the line of British reconnaissances.⁷³ Thus Bourke proved responsive to Tembu claims that the Ngwane/Fetcani were devouring the countryside. But more important than either of these considerations for Bourke was the need to solve the Colony's chronic shortage of labour. The Fetcani were now to be forcibly co-opted as the Mantatees had been earlier.

Despite their numbers, Mantatee labourers had only briefly helped the labour supply. By 1825 shortages of workers had put 'a stop to every undertaking, whether agricultural or of any other nature'.⁷⁴ Albany was worst hit; but the problem was colony-wide. The settlers tried everything, including ordering the missionaries to send out labourers from the mission stations.⁷⁵ By 1826 it was understood that the problem could only be solved in the long term by utilising black labour from beyond the Colony. This required a change in legislation. During 1825-8 a debate occurred which took into consideration the imminent abolition of slavery, and the likelihood of further frontier expansion. More labour would then be required, and the Xhosa would be even angrier. There was no unanimity. A considerable fraction of white farmers favoured maintaining slavery and keeping blacks out. Even for the realistic majority who, encouraged by the success of the Mantatee scheme, supported the utilisation of 'Kafir' labour, the problem was that it had to be 'free', or voluntary, *and* in large amounts. Bourke urged London to agree to the Colony

May 1825, and Pringle to Massey, 29 May 1825, both in Theal, *Records*, xxii, 428-33; *ibid.*, xxxiv, 18-22, 453-69.

⁷² Shrewsbury to Dundas, 12 June 1828, in Cory, *Rise of South Africa 1820-34*, 354-5; Dundas to Lt. Col. Henry Somerset, 14 July 1828, in M. J. Van Warmelo (ed.), *History of Matiwane and the AmaNgwane Tribe* (Pretoria, 1938), 238.

⁷³ Ngwane movements between about 1825 and 1828 are unclear. It is not known when they left the Caledon. Either they directed their raids on the Tembu in 1827 from the Mbashe, or they returned north of the Orange in 1827 and migrated later. It seems unlikely they were still engaging Moshoeshoe at the turn of 1827-8, as many accounts claim. Their route was probably across the Witteberg towards the Stormberg.

⁷⁴ Lord Charles Somerset to Bathurst, 31 March 1825, in Theal, *Records*, xx, 400-1; see also Van der Poel *et al.* to Bourke, 30 June 1826, *ibid.*, xxvii, 90-8: 'We inhabit a country of which the population is not and never has been equal to the extent of Territory nor adequate to the proper cultivation thereof'.

⁷⁵ Philip to Directors of London Missionary Society, Nov. 1826, in Theal, *Records*, xxx, 150-1: 'and when these [demands by the Graham's Town military] could not be complied with by the missionaries, when they could not send the number or the particular persons wanted, they received threatening letters or were summoned to appear at Graham's Town, as if they had been slaves themselves'.

'inviting' in not merely emaciated individuals (as the fiction about Mantatees went) but 'whole tribes'.⁷⁶ But would they come?

This was a grim moment for Africa. It was the first time in British colonial experience anywhere that the dilemma of how to 'attract' free labourers, to work at very low wages and in perhaps appalling conditions, had to be faced. The passing of an Ordinance permitting 'invitations' was unlikely to have much effect. Later, more thorough strategies were devised and perfected in the Cape to force out free labour: more extensive land alienation, hut taxation, the wrecking of the indigenous economy and the thwarting of the creative response of Africans to market opportunities. But in 1828 the only way to obtain 'free' labour was to send in an army and fetch it out. As soon as Ordinance 49 permitting the issue of invitations was safely drafted, Bourke seized on the news of the Zulu invasion as a pretext to send his armies across the Kei to bring out some labour.

In July 1828 a commando under the military commandant of Albany, Major Dundas, hurried to Vusani's Tembu to prepare them for an attack on the Ngwane or Fetcani. While the Tembu were mobilising, Dundas rode on to the Mpondo and discovered that the 'Zulu' army was in fact that of H. F. Fynn and his fellow Natal adventurers. Dundas's commando then doubled back and reached Vusani again on 24 July. The white and Hottentot gunmen and the by now fully mobilized Tembu moved east of the Mbashe and surrounded the Ngwane villages before dawn on 26 July. The Tembu climbed the ridges behind the *imizi* and drove the awakening victims onto the British guns. About seventy Ngwane were shot dead and 25,000 cattle plundered. There was now no realistic Fetcani problem to the east of the Tembu.⁷⁷

The main British army under Somerset was nevertheless not deterred from completing its mobilization and advancing for a second attack. This establishes that the mere punishment of the Ngwane was not the essential objective of the offensive. Somerset was joined on the march by contingents of both Gcaleka and Mpondo, so impressed were Hintsa and Faku at the ease of Dundas's success. Vusani deployed his Tembu east of the Mbashe once more in anticipation of being 'rescued' a second time. This huge army – one of the largest yet seen in Africa⁷⁸ – attacked the sleeping *imizi* of Matiwane's people (or the 'Zulu', as Somerset gave out in his communiqués in order to maintain the cover) before dawn on 27 August and carried out an even more dreadful massacre. Several hundred Ngwane were shot down. Howitzer fire turned the Khambi and Waka forests on the ridges above the villages into a blazing inferno as the British raked the Ngwane escape routes with fire. Droves of the remaining Ngwane cattle were rounded up and well over a hundred prisoners

⁷⁶ Bourke to Bathurst, 30 June 1827, *ibid.*, xxxii, 53.

⁷⁷ Dundas to Lt.-Col. Somerset, 1 Aug. 1828, in Van Warmelo, *History of Matiwane*, 239–40. Dundas and Somerset persisted in claiming they believed the Fetcani were 'Chaca's people'. It is inconceivable that the combined Anglo-Tembu intelligence system did not know that their victims were the Ngwane. For an account from the era of Theal by one present see B. E. Bowker, 'The Fetkanie commando of 1828', *Cape Illustrated Magazine*, v (Sept. 1894–Aug. 1895), 347–54, where the effect of fire-arms on the Ngwane is brought out. Omer-Cooper, *Zulu Aftermath*, 92, calls this 'a skirmish'.

⁷⁸ About 16,000 men, including c. 531 gun-armed whites (five times the number who dispersed the Ndebele at Mosega in January 1837), which included most of the 55th Regiment; see Cory, *Rise of South Africa 1820–34*, 360–1.

taken.⁷⁹ 'I directed the whole of my force, particularly the mounted part, to collect all the women and children they could find', Somerset noted.⁸⁰ This was Mbolompo.

Later passages in Somerset's report, intended for London and the philanthropists, attempted to tone this down. They echoed Moffat and Melvill's embroideries in 1823, and were a sketch for Ayliff and D'Urban's version of the 'rescue' of the Fingos in May 1835:

I found on halting that about 47 women and 70 children had been collected, many of them seriously mutilated. I was desirous to have restored all these persons to their people and altho my force was very much exhausted I would have done so but I found these women positively refused to return unless I compelled them to do so, they stated that their tribe was too numerous and that they could not return, now they saw we took care of them ... The Burghers having most kindly offered to take charge of these children to the Colony, I was glad to accede to this proposal, seeing no other way either of conveying them or securing their being taken care of.⁸¹

A number of exclamation marks are necessary here, which would not be needed if it were not for the fact that Cape historians habitually take this type of little speech at face value. Everyone knew what Somerset meant, though. As Fynn remarked much later (after the furore over this more publicized atrocity had died away, and the 'battle' of Mbolompo was establishing itself as part of the Cape's heroic past): 'The prisoners captured on that occasion became the first Kafir labourers who entered service in the Old Colony'.⁸² And that had been the primary objective of Somerset's commando, as it had been of Moffat and Melvill's in June 1823.

Before discussing the outcry which followed Mbolompo, two prior questions need to be explored. Why were the Ngwane on the Mbashe in 1828? And what was the truth of the claims that there was a *Zulu* army in the Transkei?

The chain of violence in the east: reincorporating the slave trade

Mfecane theory, it will be recollected, has the Ngwane expelled by the Zulu both initially from the upper Mzinyathi in c. 1817–21 and again from the Caledon into the Transkei in c. 1826–7. The preciser study of Hedges depicts the Ngwane as being attacked first by the Mthethwa (who at times were stiffened with Portuguese-linked mercenaries) and the Ndwandwe, before they experienced Zulu raids. Hedges notes: 'After Matiwane's subjugation by Dingiswayo, Zwide attacked the Ngwane and put them to flight through

⁷⁹ Van Warmelo, *History of Matiwane*, 250–66, especially Somerset to Bourke, 29 Aug. 1828. The information about the burning forests was only obtained from several informants in early 1938. For Hottentot participation see Bannister, *Humane Policy*, cclxxxii. Somerset said between four hundred and one thousand Ngwane were killed: hopefully this is an exaggeration?

⁸⁰ Somerset to Bourke, 29 Aug. 1828, in Van Warmelo, *History of Matiwane*, 254.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁸² J. Bird, *Annals of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1888), 1, 123. But n.b. the Mantatees, though technically they were not 'Kafirs' (= Xhosa etc.). The Ngwane prisoners of 1828 were the first substantial contingent of labourers to be called Fingos. Previously the word had applied only to the odd individual who had gravitated to the mission stations. See also footnote 140, below.

Hlubiland, *thus initiating the Mfecane*.⁸³ It is important, therefore, to lay bare the root source of these predations. Hedges leaves the problem unresolved with a hypothesis about competition to control east-west trade routes. This is a step in the right direction. But which trade; and why mercenaries with fire-arms?

The Ngwane were only one of a large number of groups fleeing away from an epicentre of violence which was not on the Mfolosi, as Zulucentric theories hold, but further north, roughly to the west of Delagoa Bay. The violence affected peoples to the north and north-west of the Bay as much as, if not more than, those to the south-west of the Pongola.⁸⁴ This locus of violence was correctly identified by writers of the 1820s; and they attributed it to the Portuguese slave trade at the Bay.⁸⁵ As a specifically British South African history developed after the 1830s, however, southern Mozambique became 'cut off' from 'Zululand'. This conceptual rift was frozen by the coming of the border between Portuguese Mozambique and the Union of South Africa after 1900, and by the particularist histories of Bryant and Walker which followed. This was accompanied after the 1820s by a virulent anti-Shaka literature, *one* of the intentions of which was to draw a curtain over the slave trade. Nowhere else in Africa was a thriving slave trade so closely intermeshed with colonies of European settler farmers whose propagandists had in the hundred and fifty years after the death of Shaka very good reason to 'forget' slave trades in general. The one at the Bay accompanied the one on the lower Vaal into oblivion.

It was not until 1981 that Harries, using the abundant evidence available, proved the large scale of the trade at the Bay.⁸⁶ The Portuguese trade had operated at a low level in the eighteenth century, but after 1815 it took off. The expansion was a response to a much-increased demand for sugar in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. The extra demand for labour on the Brazilian plantations was intensified by British attempts to restrict Portugal's slave trade to south of the equator.⁸⁷ The Portuguese turned with extra energy to the previously under-worked regions of southern Mozambique. Between about 1818 and the early 1830s at least a thousand, and probably twice if not three times that number of African males were exported from *both* Delagoa Bay and

⁸³ Hedges, 'Trade and politics', 193, my emphasis. Like Hedges, both Omer-Cooper, *Zulu Aftermath*, 29, n. 3, and P. Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State* (Johannesburg, 1983), 28, relocate the inception of the mfecane geographically from Zulu territory on the Mfolosi north to the Pongola and chronologically to the period before Shaka, but also without realizing the implications.

⁸⁴ P. Harries, 'Labour migration from Mozambique to South Africa, with special reference to the Delagoa Bay hinterland, c. 1862-1897' (Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1983), 147-83; and Harries, 'History, ethnicity and the Ingwavuma land deal: a short account of the Trans-Mkuzi in the nineteenth century', *J. Natal and Zulu Hist.*, VI (1983), 1-27.

⁸⁵ Bannister, *Humane Policy*, 143; S. Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria* (London, 1833), 403, for example.

⁸⁶ Harries, 'Free and unfree labour'. The material in the first half of the article has not received anywhere near the attention it needs.

⁸⁷ For general analyses see E. Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (London, 1970), ch. 17; and L. Vail and L. White, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique. A History of the Quelimane District* (London, 1980), ch. 1.

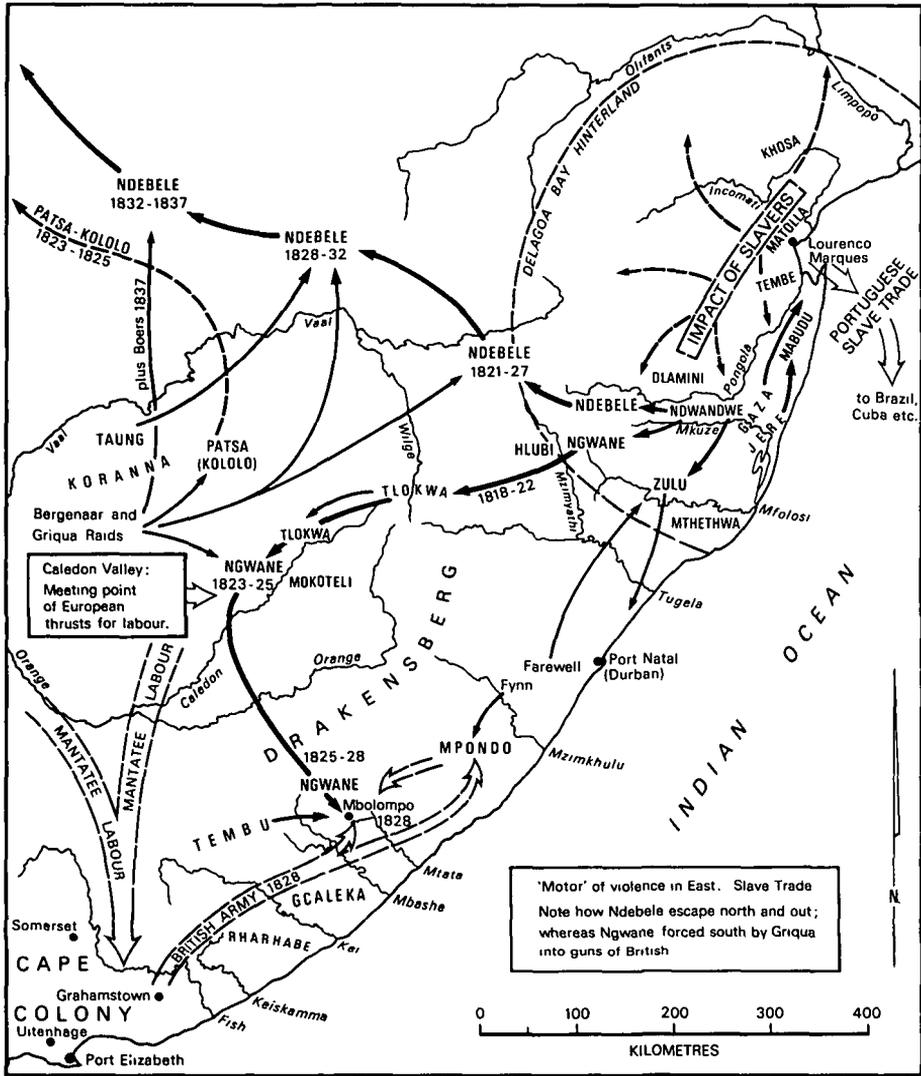


Fig. 3. The chain of violence in the east, c. 1815-1830.

Inhambane every year.⁸⁸ These are only the official figures, and exclude those killed or maimed in the operations of the slavers, or taken out clandestinely. This means a total loss in those years of at least 20,000, and probably a very much higher number, of mostly men from the 'Delagoa Bay Hinterland'. Population estimates for the region range from about 100,000 to 180,000.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Harries, 'Free and unfree labour', 316. In eighteen months of 1827-8, 2,800 slaves were exported from Lourenço Marques and Inhambane to Réunion alone. In the six years 1825-30 Rio de Janeiro alone received over four thousand *officially declared* slaves from Lourenço Marques, and 3,400 from Inhambane (*ibid.*, 315).

⁸⁹ Harries, 'Labour migration', 148, estimates a total population of 80,000 to 120,000 for a hinterland extending to the lower Mkuzi and upper Pongola in the south-west and to the Limpopo and Olifants in the north. The pivotal importance of the slave trade is

This gives a loss of between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the entire male population, in precisely the years of the mfecane.⁹⁰ And this has been ignored by every theorist of the internal revolution.⁹¹ This slaving must after *c.* 1815 have dramatically heightened the previously critical, but continuing impact of the ivory and cattle trades.

It is not surprising that there were unprecedented convulsions throughout the region and that these ramified inland. Whole peoples fled up the Limpopo, Olifants and Levubu River systems into the eastern Transvaal, where some of them were absorbed by the Maroteng (later known as Pedi) and by white war lords such as Albasini.⁹² Matolla, Mafumo and Tembe immediately to the west and south-west of the Bay were ravaged by conflicts which have only partly been put together.⁹³ Eyewitnesses on the Maputo River in 1822–3 observed Tembe chiefs selling slaves and taking a percentage of the profits.⁹⁴ The Pongola valley was one avenue of violence. Dlamini groups moved north-west out of the valley onto the escarpment.⁹⁵ The Ndwandwe rose and collapsed.⁹⁶ Portuguese-linked gunmen moved south to the lower Mfolosi.⁹⁷ The Gaza and Jere (the latter later known as the Ngoni) migrated north into the Bay area and began trading in slaves themselves.⁹⁸ There is an analogy with the Koranna and Taung on the lower Vaal. This scattering and relocation of Ndwandwe, of whom the Gaza and Jere were south-eastern components, may well have had more to do with the exigencies of the slave trade than with Zulu attacks. A western fragment of the Ndwandwe, the Khumalo chieftaincy of Mzilikazi, fled west to the headwaters of the Vaal. In 1830 Philip attributed this expulsion to the slavers.⁹⁹ And the Khumalo were a mere thirty miles to the north of the Ngwane. The Zulu themselves moved south (rather than towards the Bay) under the stress of these pressures, if Kay's

likely to lead to a debate over preciser definitions and estimates. Bryant's estimate for 'Zululand', i.e. the area between the Pongola and Tugela, in about 1820 was 80,000 plus; see A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London, 1929), 81.

⁹⁰ The losses would presumably have been concentrated in certain areas.

⁹¹ The exception that proves the rule is Smith (see footnote 11, above).

⁹² Harries, 'Labour migrations', 160, 161–75 (163 for Albasini); P. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal* (Johannesburg, 1983), 15–19. Delius, 15, admits: 'The full reasons for the apparent escalation of conflict in the region [*c.* 1780–1820] and the extension of political and military scale that emerged from it remain elusive'. The concept 'war-lord' is borrowed from Martin Hall (private correspondence) who, I gather, would apply the idea to a wide range of individuals, including Fynn, Shaka, Moritsane, Moshoeshe, Barend Barends etc.

⁹³ Harries in 'Labour migration', ch. 4, and in 'Trans-Mkuzi in the nineteenth century' makes a start.

⁹⁴ E. H. Burrows, *Captain Owen of the African Survey, 1774–1857* (Rotterdam, 1979), 120; see also 155.

⁹⁵ Bonner, *Evolution and Dissolution*, chs. 2 and 3. The Dlamini were extruded from the south Bay region in approximately the 1780s, from where they migrated to the north bank of the middle Pongola. Under Ndvungunye in the period *c.* 1790–1810 they contributed to the regional violence. The subsequent move north-west under Sobhuza has neither been satisfactorily explained nor dated.

⁹⁶ A study of Ndwandwe is urgently needed. For a beginning see Hedges, 'Trade and politics', 155–65.

⁹⁷ J. Stuart and D. Malcolm (eds.), *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn* (Pietermaritzburg, 1950), 7; see footnote 120 below.

⁹⁸ Harries, 'Free and unfree labour', 314.

⁹⁹ Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, 36.

observation of 1831 is to be believed.¹⁰⁰ They were closely followed by Ndwandwe remnants who drifted south from the Pongola across the Mkuzi. Not only the Gaza and Jere, but also the Ndwandwe and Zulu raided neighbours for slaves. If one re-examines Fynn one reads with reference to the early 1820s:

Trade with the Portuguese factories, on the east side of the English River, was equally beneficial. The ivory procured from the Zulus and Ndwandwes *together with the prisoners taken in their wars (which they sold as slaves)* they bartered with the Portuguese for beads and brass.¹⁰¹

The Ndwandwe and Mthethwa attacks on the Ngwane referred to by Hedges could well have produced prisoners. Moreover, the export of slaves from the *Orange River* to Delagoa Bay and Inhambane, a route which would have passed close to or directly through Ngwane territory, was reported by Bannister.¹⁰²

Given the figures for slave exports, all this can only be the tip of the iceberg. Precise research is urgently needed – especially into the impact of the slaving groups who triggered the upheavals. The circumstantial evidence is sufficiently strong nonetheless to justify the hypothesis that the Ngwane flight from the Mzinyathi was a response either directly to slave raiders or to secondary raiders such as the Ndwandwe, Mthethwa and Zulu who were themselves turned against each other by the compressions of the slave trade and by the prospects of profitable business.

The Caledon caught between fires

The Ngwane first migrated into the region around the upper Wilge, near modern Harrismith. It was inhabited by 'Sotho' groups such as the Sia and Tlokwa. For centuries this had been an established trade route to the Bay and had received along it 'Nguni' immigrants, sometimes peaceably, sometimes not. Few Sia and Tlokwa villages did not have a number of Nguni residents. Some of the Nguni had even advanced down the Caledon almost as far as the Orange confluence. There had long been interchanges between the two language groups across the passes of the Drakensberg.¹⁰³ It was not the Nguni migrations of 1817–23, but their scale and cause, that were unprecedented.

Both the established residents and the Ngwane and Hlubi were now pushed further south-west into the northern Drakensberg and by short stages into land on both sides of the upper Caledon.¹⁰⁴ Ellenberger not only did not delve very energetically into the causes of the migrations, but almost certainly considerably exaggerated the scale of the violence between these groups.¹⁰⁵ There were,

¹⁰⁰ Kay, *Travels and Researches*, 403.

¹⁰¹ Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 48, my emphasis. Dingane was doing the same in the 1830s; see Harries, 'Free and unfree labour', 314, footnote 21.

¹⁰² Bannister, *Humane Policy*, 137–9, cclxv.

¹⁰³ Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds*, 18–20.

¹⁰⁴ Theal, *Basutoland Records*, 1, 1–2.

¹⁰⁵ Ellenberger's largely fictional chronologies and battles have too frequently been accepted uncritically by recent historians. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe*, 31, reveals Ellenberger's mistaken dating of the alleged Ngwane–Hlubi battle to 1825. In fact the conflict was several years earlier. The interpretational consequences of such errors have been far-reaching. It is best not to rely on Ellenberger unless he is corroborated by completely independent sources.

inevitably in the circumstances, conflicts. The 'battle of the pots' was one of the worst. But all the black groups – Mokhoteli, Tlokwa and Ngwane – sought out flat-topped mountains for defence; and local accommodations were quickly made, both of which facts suggest an exterior menace, or menaces, common to all.¹⁰⁶ The Sotho supplied recruits to Ngwane *amabutho*, as they did to Mzilikazi's further north. Like the Ndebele the Ngwane expanded more as a defensive organization than as an offensive one.¹⁰⁷ Smaller groups of Nguni refugees joined not only Mzilikazi and Matiwane but Sekonyela and Moshoeshoe as well. As mentioned, Sotho groups fled into the Caledon from the Griqua and Taung in the west. By 1825 amicable relationships existed between the Ngwane and Moshoeshoe's Mokhoteli, as even admirers of Moshoeshoe accept.¹⁰⁸ What at this stage drove the Ngwane south?

The settler voice of the 1830s suggested: because the Ngwane or Fetcani 'found the distance a serious inconvenience in their habit of raiding Tembu cattle'.¹⁰⁹ But this is part of the alibi. Modern writers follow Ellenberger with stories of Zulu, alternatively Ndebele raids. But there is no evidence for either.¹¹⁰ Before I undertook research for this article, the hypothesis that Griqua-Bergenaar attacks from the *west* were responsible had occurred to me. The more powerful Ndebele *two hundred miles to the north-east* of the Ngwane were being attacked by Griqua in the mid-1820s. The Ngwane were far more exposed where they were west of the Caledon; even more so than the Mokhoteli to the east. And unlike the Ndebele an escape route to the north had been made more difficult by their initial flight to the south-west. Only the route over the lower altitude passes of the Drakensberg to the upper Kei and Mbashe lay open.

The contemporary evidence fully backs this hypothesis. There is the report in 1825 which said the Fetcani were repulsed by gunmen in the west. In 1829 Shaw was told by two of the prisoners taken at Mbolompo: 'They had seen when far to the north some white people with horses, which we suppose to have been some of the Griqua.' Bannister heard from other prisoners that the Ngwane had been 'repelled by the Griquas about two years since, and twice they sought for a place to rest'. Finally, Stockenstrom referred to 'great atrocities' committed by Adam Kok's Griqua on 'black fugitives' – and he meant the Ngwane – in the upper Caledon.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds*, 35–40.

¹⁰⁷ Mackay to Secretary to the Government, 8 Aug. 1827, in Theal, *Records*, xxxiv, 464, who described the Ngwane as 'two tribes formerly distinct "Masotu" and "Manguana"'. For the Ndebele see Cobbing, 'Ndebele under the Khumalos', 32.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds*, 44. Thompson describes Moshoeshoe as a vassal of Matiwane's. But the two growing states may have been more equally balanced in power. Note that after Mbolompo many Ngwane returned to join Moshoeshoe.

¹⁰⁹ R. Godlonton, *A Narrative of the Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes into the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope, 1834–35* (Struik reprint, 1965 [originally Graham's Town, 1835]), 51.

¹¹⁰ I do not regard the allegations either of Ellenberger or those in Van Warmelo as reliable. There is no evidence from the Zulu or Ndebele sides. 'Zulu' meant any Nguni. The Zulu stories were part of the myth of Shaka which took off after about 1826, and which needs analysing.

¹¹¹ Rogers to Forbes, 27 May 1825, in Theal, *Records*, xxii, 430; W. D. Hammond-Tooke (ed.), *The Journal of William Shaw* (Cape Town, 1972), 160; Bannister, *Humane Policy*, 157; A. Stockenstrom, *The Autobiography of the Late Andries Stockenstrom* (Cape Town, 1887), I, 213. See also Van Warmelo, *History of Matiwane*, 263.

The conclusion is inescapable. The Ngwane were first expelled from the Mzinyathi by the direct or indirect attention of the Delagoa Bay slavers. They had the misfortune to run into the Griqua in the Caledon who attacked them from the west for Mantatees and cattle. The peoples of the Caledon were thus caught in the transcontinental *cross-fire* of interrelated European plunder systems. Driven into the Transkei, the Ngwane were at once set upon by the British who were raiding for 'free' labour in the aftermath of Ordinance 49. Matiwane's people were flung helplessly between three thrusts of imperialism, each exacting labour by force in its special way. The pressures were applied by Europeans from the outside onto black societies who became like fish caught in a net. Both the teleology and Afrocentricism of mfekane theory collapse.

The Mbolompo campaign and the murder of Shaka

The second question: was there a Zulu army south of the Mzimkhulu in 1828, is best approached by understanding the origins of the first 'Natal Fever' to hit Cape Colony in 1827–8. Both the fever and the pejorative image of Shaka were orchestrated by H. F. Fynn, F. Farewell and J. King, would-be British conquistadores who had arrived on the coast of Natal variously between 1823 and 1825. In 1823 Captain Owen had attempted to 'bounce' the Portuguese out of Delagoa Bay.¹¹² He suggested to the Government in London that the Portuguese were not in effective occupation, and then faked a treaty dated 8 March 1823 in which it was claimed the King of Tembe had ceded all (*sic*) his land to Owen in return for knick-knacks. The British Government – at that moment confirming Portuguese ownership of the Bay in return for restrictions on the slave trade that were not to be observed – declined to ratify the rather obviously fabricated Tembe treaty.¹¹³ Farewell and his companions tried again, this time further south at Port Natal, not such a good port, but where there were no Portuguese claims. Some of Owen's mistakes were rectified. A large colonising party landed in the hope of creating a *fait accompli* for the only slightly interested Cape Government.¹¹⁴ In August 1824 a more plausible treaty was faked in which the Zulu paramount, Shaka, who was well to the north of the area, was credited with ceding Farewell a thirty-five mile coastal strip around the Port and a one-hundred-mile extension inland.¹¹⁵ The Zulu do not appear to have found out about this until early 1828. Mendacious propaganda was insistently relayed back to the Colony that Natal had been totally depopulated by the Zulu, and that Shaka was a bloody killer whom the

¹¹² The word 'bounce' was a favourite of Jameson's and is used here to signal the large number of parallels between what is now described and the machinations of Jameson and the British South Africa Company against Lobengula and the Ndebele in 1888–93.

¹¹³ G. M. Theal, *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, 1x (London, 1903), 24–8. For the competing cases of the Portuguese and British Governments and the MacMahon Award, in which the Owen Treaty was exposed, see 63–268. The failure of historians to connect the attempt on Delagoa Bay in 1823 with the 1824 Natal 'treaty' is partly the result of the particularist cutting off of southern Mozambique mentioned on p. 504. A very different picture emerges of the regional expansion of the British when the two treaties are reconnected.

¹¹⁴ Bird, *Annals of Natal*, 1, 71–3; Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 56–7.

¹¹⁵ This treaty is usually listed without comment by Cape historians; see e.g. T. R. H. Davenport and K. S. Hunt, *The Right to the Land* (Cape Town, 1974), 19.

British could virtuously and profitably crusade against.¹¹⁶ News of all this spread rapidly in the Colony during 1826–8.

The whites soon intervened in the local power struggles with a potency stemming from their possession of firearms and access to powder. In 1826 white guns decided the famous series of conflicts between the Zulu and Ndwandwe in Shaka's favour;¹¹⁷ and in early 1827 secured the defeat of Khumalo groups who had moved south from the Mkuzi towards the Black Mfolosi and against whom Shaka had been helpless.¹¹⁸ Both Fynn and Farewell established personal followings of blacks from Tuli, Tembu and Cele groups living south of the Tugela. The whites drew people who refused to submit to Shaka. By 1827 Fynn had built up a remarkable private kingdom of over two thousand people in the Mzimkhulu valley,¹¹⁹ strategically well placed far from the Zulu and within striking distance of the Colony. Fynn's people hunted elephants for ivory, intervened with increasing impunity in local politics, and were soon competing with Zulu tribute collectors. Contact between these rogues and the newly arrived missionaries at Butterworth was quickly established. By 1828 it looks as if Fynn was ready for what turned out to be an abortive bid to bring the British north. And news of a 'Zulu' army was despatched to the Cape.

In his 'diary'¹²⁰ Fynn depicts Shaka as benignly, if not half-wittedly standing by, more preoccupied with obtaining hair-oil than with worrying about his disintegrating southern security system. But there is every sign that by the early months of 1828 severe frictions between Shaka and the Fynn-Farewell team were developing. The Zulu were being wedged between two fronts of white activity. The probable objective of the delegation that Shaka at this point sent to the Cape was to protest about white destabilization. It was now, of all moments, that Fynn alleged Shaka intended to invade the Transkei as far as the Colonial boundary on the Keiskamma! Everything in the situation of May 1828 suggests that this was a lie. It was rather Fynn's own force which now attacked the Mpondo. Major Dundas reached Faku in July and reported:

That Fynn was present with the invading army was verified to me beyond doubt, as a man who had been wounded by a shot from a gun in both thighs was brought

¹¹⁶ James King, 'Some account of Mr Farewell's settlement at Port Natal, and of a visit to Chaka', July 1826, in Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, II, 243–52. Note the change of tone from factual description to anti-Shaka propaganda at the bottom of page 248.

¹¹⁷ C. Webb and J. Wright (eds.), *The James Stuart Archive*, 4 vols. to date (Pietermaritzburg, 1976–86), II, 269; Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 122–8; Hedges, 'Trade and politics', 202. Fynn received enough cattle in reward to establish his *umusi* of Insimbi. There is much in Farewell's background to suggest involvement with the slave trade. The possibility that Ndwandwe prisoners ended up at the Bay should be kept in mind. Fynn in his reminiscences has Farewell fall ill just before the battle, and himself watch proceedings from a hill. Hedges writes overcautiously: 'it is possible that both writers adjusted their testimony to minimise their role'.

¹¹⁸ N. Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa* (reprinted Cape Town, 1935–6 [originally 1836]), I, 162–71.

¹¹⁹ Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 130.

¹²⁰ Stuart and Malcolm's *Fynn Diary* is not a diary, but a welding together of a number of later propaganda essays written by Fynn mainly in the late 1850s and early 1860s. It contains interpolations by Stuart from the early twentieth century. The combined editing of Stuart and Malcolm is one of the major disasters of South African historical literature.

in to me who said that the person who shot him ... was Fynn ... Faku told me that there were other white people with Fynn.¹²¹

Fynn confirms this in his memoirs admitting that 'natives in our service' had raided Mpondo cattle. And Isaacs lets us know that Farewell and Ogle were among the whites mentioned by Faku.¹²²

Could there have been a Zulu army *as well*? This is unlikely. Dundas referred to 'the invading army', and this was Fynn's.¹²³ The sequence of events is only viewable through white accounts which are full of lies and concealments. But this is what appears to have happened. The British invasion of the Transkei took Shaka by surprise while his main army had been despatched *northwards*, where it raided (unsuccessfully) along the Olifants River.¹²⁴ News of the offensives of Dundas and Fynn was so critical that Shaka travelled south with a small personal retinue to remonstrate with Fynn and perhaps to try to intimidate ex-tributaries back into the Zulu fold. Fynn's motives for attacking the Mpondo, apart from the obvious one of obtaining booty, are uncertain; but he may have been trying to intimidate the Mpondo into supporting the British, an issue which both Dundas and Somerset also pursued. A row took place between Fynn and Shaka; and during the confrontation Fynn conspired with Dingane and other Zulu dissidents to kill Shaka. Fynn wrote with insider's knowledge:

There is little doubt that the intention of killing Shaka had been long in contemplation. As I have since understood, it was intended to have taken place at my residence during the attack on the amaMpondos, at which time both brothers remained behind with Shaka feigning sickness, when an opportunity was wanting to effect their purpose.¹²⁵

More likely it was deferred because the whites could not then have escaped implication.

Shortly after his return to Dukuza, Shaka's anger was further stoked by the news brought by his delegation which in August returned from the Colony. The *izinduna* told him they had been cold-shouldered by the white authorities and had been refused permission to visit either Graham's Town, where military preparations for the actual British invasion of the Transkei were underway, or Cape Town. The deteriorating situation demanded a confrontation with the whites on the Mzimkhulu, which would, however, have to await

¹²¹ Dundas to [Somerset?], 15 Aug. 1828, in Van Warmelo, *History of Matiwane*, 243.

¹²² Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 149; Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures*, 1, 227-8.

¹²³ Fynn, in *Diary*, 148, wrote of 'reports being circulated in the Colony of an intended invasion by the Zulus, with me at their head ... supposed to be a division of Shaka's army. Reports such as these induced the Colonial Command of 1828 to advance against [Matiwane].' This lets the cat out of the bag in more ways than one. For another version of the alibi see Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures*, 1, 227-8. For a suggestion that Shaka's *izinduna* in the Cape and later informants of Stuart denied there was a Zulu army, see Webb and Wright, *James Stuart Archive*, 11, 267, 274. It is possible this evidence has been interfered with by Stuart and 'straightened out' by the editors in footnotes 21 and 22 on page 303.

¹²⁴ Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 153. Fynn claimed that the 'Transkei army' was subsequently despatched north, but this was surely physically impossible.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

the return of his army. On 26 August (the day before Mbolompo) Shaka informed Isaacs:

Those whom they [Fynn and Farewell] assumed to take under their shield, and to support when assailed [by the Zulu requiring continuation of tribute?], were daily committing depredations on the tribes tributary to him and taking off their [e.g. Mpondo] cattle: he [Shaka] should therefore go to war with them [Fynn and friends] when he thought it good policy to do so.¹²⁶

Fynn acknowledged later, and must have known at the time, that 'Shaka had intended our deaths'. And Farewell may have been alarmed at Shaka's granting a real land concession to King (who had accompanied the *izinduna* to the Colony), which threatened his entire ambitions.¹²⁷

The thoughts and actions of Fynn and Farewell in early September are hidden from us. But the British army had not taken the bait of the 'Zulu' invasion, contenting itself with taking prisoners from the Ngwane. Shaka's army was due back imminently. The entire position of the conquistadores was liable to crumble. It was thus now that they decided to strike against Shaka. On 24 September, less than a month after Mbolompo, Shaka was stabbed to death by conspirators under Dingane. Fynn and an 'Mpondo' delegation were at Dukuza at the time.¹²⁸ The evidence that the black rebels and the whites were working together is circumstantial but strong. The conspirators spent an anxious month fearing the return of the army known to be loyal to Shaka.¹²⁹ But its defeat seems to have removed it as a threat. The whites sang the praises of Dingane, and probably aided him in the campaigns against Shaka loyalists which occupied much of the next two years. Farewell, for example, went to the Cape to advance his schemes and obtained considerable quantities of firearms for Dingane. Fittingly, on his return with the guns in September 1829 he was himself killed by Qwabe supporters of Shaka.¹³⁰

All this has far-reaching implications. It is improbable that the Mpondo lost all their cattle and had to depend exclusively on agriculture, a myth relished by historians of the Mpondo.¹³¹ Dingane was backed by the whites: comparisons with the setting-up of Mpande in 1839-40 need investigating. Above all it puts Shaka's murder in its proper perspective, and exposes another facet of the mfecane alibi. Shaka's killing is routinely depicted as a popular move amongst the Zulu because he killed too many people. But we only have the word of the

¹²⁶ Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures*, I, 238.

¹²⁷ Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 157. There is a chance that the land concession to King in 1828 was genuine, a sort of Lippert Concession of the era. King's own death a week before Shaka's has always been proclaimed (by Fynn *et al.*) as natural; but its timing was very convenient for Farewell. The possibility that King was murdered should be kept open.

¹²⁸ Webb and Wright, *James Stuart Archive*, II, 232, 295; III, 70. One suspects Stuart knew more about Fynn's activities than he lets appear in his notes. Questions about Fynn are infrequent in his interviews.

¹²⁹ Stuart and Malcolm, *Fynn Diary*, 161-2.

¹³⁰ Fynn, *ibid.*, 171, refers coyly to the Qwabe knowledge 'that Dingane would come by the whole stock Farewell was conveying to Natal'; and, *ibid.*, 170, refers to 'much property of considerable value'. Many of the guns fell into Qwabe hands.

¹³¹ Even W. Beinart, 'Production and the material basis of chieftainship: Pondoland, c. 1830-80', ch. 5 in Marks and Atmore, *Economy and Society*, 121-6, falls for this. There are several references to the prosperity of the Mpondo at the turn of the 1830s, including their wealth in cattle.

whites for this. The innumerable defections from Dingane which took place after September 1828 suggest that Shaka had the support of the bulk of his people.¹³² The assassination of Shaka's character and the role of the whites in his murder is, however, too important a subject not to require separate treatment. This is as far as we can come from Mbolompo.

The victory of the settler voice

Unlike after Dithakong, the massacres of the Ngwane in 1828 provoked an outcry within sections of colonial opinion. An English officer described Somerset's action as 'one of the most disgraceful and cold-blooded acts to which the English soldier had ever been rendered accessory'.¹³³ Bannister dwelt on the 'mistake' by which a people 'who would have joined us against the enemy we were seeking', that is the Zulu, had themselves been savaged, and called for a public reproof for Major Dundas. Stockenstrom compared Somerset unfavourably with 'that monster Nana Sahib', an apt comment in view of the Indian strategies devised by Clive and Wellesley now being inflicted on Africans.¹³⁴ The lie of the British army that their negotiators had first been fired on at Mbolompo was exposed: there had been no negotiators, as these are not needed in surprise pre-dawn attacks, a speciality of the British. The full horror began to sink in of using field guns against a people armed only with spears with which to protect their women, children and aged.¹³⁵

But only in certain quarters. The blustering Godlonton in the poisonous *Graham's Town Journal* leapt to the defence of Somerset. Godlonton referred cloyingly to Dundas's 'gallant little band',¹³⁶ and began the pantomime of the settler version of African history by organizing a Fetcana 'in the full costume of a Zoola warrior' to praise his own people's destruction: 'He [the Fetcana] was aware that the expedition alluded to had been grossly misrepresented: but he considered it in its consequences to have been one of the greatest blessings which had ever occurred to this part of Africa.'¹³⁷

No more raids of the Mbolompo type took place. It was too crude a strategy. The next land and labour expedition, D'Urban's war on the Xhosa of 1834-5, was organized on such a scale and defended with such an array of pretexts as to be accepted as a 'war', subject to the adjustments of moral perspective which allowed collective criminal acts to be dressed up as another humanitarian blessing.¹³⁸ Whereas Somerset brought out a couple of hundred prisoners, D'Urban and his missionaries brought out 17,000, eighty-five per cent of

¹³² Qwabe, Mbo, Cele and several other groups refused to recognize Dingane, the reasons for which have not yet been analysed. ¹³³ Kay, *Travels and Researches*, 331.

¹³⁴ Bannister, *Humane Policy*, 43, 238 (both italics in original); Stockenstrom, *Autobiography*, 1, 279. Bannister was an enthusiast for expansion into Natal, hence his animosity to the Zulu.

¹³⁵ Bannister, *Humane Policy*, 149-58; Kay, *Travels and Researches*, 330. Kay writes (*ibid.*, 332): 'their weapons were met with rockets; and for spears they received balls'.

¹³⁶ Godlonton, *Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes*, Introductory Remarks, 54.

¹³⁷ *Graham's Town Journal*, 14 Feb. 1833. This was (allegedly) prefaced: 'The speaker observed that that expedition had been the cause of the salvation of thousands and tens of thousand lives, - inasmuch as the people dispersed by the commando were wretches of the most atrocious character.'

¹³⁸ Godlonton, *Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes*, Introductory Remarks, 269-70; and Main Text, 229.

whom were women and children. They, too, were hypocritically described as full of gratitude for being rescued from the 'bondage' of their own rulers, and, for further disguise, supplied with a fictitious past.¹³⁹ These were the Fingos, or Mfengu, updated Mantatees and Fetcani, who at last solved the labour supply shortage on a more permanent basis.¹⁴⁰ Mbolompo was fig-leafed over by the greater propaganda success of the settler version of D'Urban's war. Godlonton's was to be the victorious voice. By the 1870s it had taken an unshakeable grip on South Africa's history. It was the voice of Theal, Cory and Walker, and not entirely undetectable in the Oxford History.

The evolution of the Mantatee–MaNtatisi (Tlokwa) elision

The question: who were the Mantatees at Dithakong? – has been left to the end because it cannot, yet, be answered. Old Lathakoo or Dithakong had immediately prior to 1823 been a Maida residence. But it is not even certain that the massacre took place at or near the town. The only prisoners identified were *Hurutshe* women. This suggests that the victims could have been fleeing from Koranna-Taung-Griqua attacks in the north-east.¹⁴¹ Any local 'enemy' were referred to as Mantatees, especially the Taung, though the victims of 26 June were probably not Taung. There is reason to suspect that Moffat and Melvill did not supply as much information as they might have done about the identity of those whom they attacked.¹⁴²

Further research may or may not turn up an answer. One thing that can be traced, however, is how MaNtatisi of the Tlokwa came to be framed as both enemy at Dithakong, and destabiliser-in-chief of the Orange Free State, and credited with the destruction of the twenty-eight 'tribes' that Thompson in 1827 had scored to Mantatees.¹⁴³

The more the real slave raiders of the 1820s were forgotten, the more obsessive became the interest of the settler voice in the career of the newly invented Mantatee Horde. The Mantatees were almost immediately assumed to have spawned the Fetcani 'Horde'. The first versions had the Fetcani as a portion of Mantatees who rebounded directly from Dithakong into the north-eastern Cape. After 1828, when the geographical origins of the Ngwane had

¹³⁹ J. Ayliff and J. Whiteside, *History of the AmaMbo Generally Known as Fingos* (Butterworth, 1912), chs. 1 to 7. Ayliff alleged the prisoners came from the Mzinyathi-Tugela region, survivors from an original 720,000 (*sic*) people. But no evidence has ever been cited to back this up. Most of the 17,000 were likely to have been Gcaleka and Rharhabe.

¹⁴⁰ For the most detailed study of the Fingos see R. A. Moyer, 'A history of the Mfengu of the Eastern Cape, 1815–65' (Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1976). Moyer, although trapped by the mfecane mythology in which he works, provides copious evidence that Fingo was a word given to *any* 'Kafir' who showed 'willingness' to work for or in other ways identify with the whites, their missionaries, or mode of life. They were collaborators whose lives had been thrown into disarray by British militarism. But the Fingos need separate treatment. See also footnote 82, above.

¹⁴¹ Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 102. Moffat quotes the women as familiar with the destruction of Kaditshweni, the Hurutshe capital, which is reputed to have been attacked by Koranna.

¹⁴² In May on his outward journey and June on his return dash to Griqua Town Moffat was provided with food and hospitality by the inhabitants of 'Old Lathakoo' (*ibid.*, 77, 87). He is, perhaps significantly, silent about who they were, which contrasts with his usual attempts at precise identification. ¹⁴³ Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, 1, 178.

been shadowily established, this was amended to have a branch of the Dithakong Mantatees migrate to the upper Caledon. Here they either metamorphosed into Fetcani, or chased a separate people called Fetcani south.¹⁴⁴ This – *via the Ngwane, not the Tlokwa* – located Mantatees for the first time in the upper Caledon.

Armed with this ‘knowledge’, Methodist missionaries migrated with groups of Rolong and Taung into the eastern Orange Free State in 1833. They soon visited the Tlokwa and met Sekonyela and his mother, MaNtatisi. Missing real Mantatees – Moritsane’s Taung – under their noses, Alison and Archbell made the Mantatee = MaNtatisi elision. A report to this effect appeared in the *Graham’s Town Journal* in January 1834, and was seized upon by Godlonton, one of whose hobbies was the study of Mantatee flight paths.¹⁴⁵ Andrew Smith picked up the elision on his visit to Lishuani and Marabeng in November 1834;¹⁴⁶ and so did Casalis and Arbousset, missionaries with Moshoeshoe at Thaba Bosiu.¹⁴⁷ The pejoratively loaded word Mantatee was used as ammunition against the ‘villainous’ Sekonyela in the war of words conducted against him by the ‘good’ Moshoeshoe’s missionaries in the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁴⁸ None of these writers, however, linked the Tlokwa/Mantatees with the ones at Dithakong.

It seems to have been Theal who in the 1880s invented the long chain reaction with which we began: Zulu attack Ngwane, who attack Hlubi, both of whom attack Tlokwa (Mantatees), who attack the Kololo and career on to Dithakong.¹⁴⁹ Via this remarkable alchemy, MaNtatisi soon began to rival Shaka as a monster of destruction. Aided by Mzilikazi, Matiwane and ‘the cannibals’,¹⁵⁰ they were accused by Theal of a sub-continental holocaust in which nearly two million blacks were allegedly killed.¹⁵¹ This cleared the region north of the Orange–Mzimkhulu for the European invasions of the 1830s and 1840s.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, ch. xviii, ‘History of the Mantatees’; Godlonton, *Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes*, Introductory Remarks, 51, 69.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Introductory Remarks, 67–70; *Graham’s Town Journal*, 30 Jan. 1834.

¹⁴⁶ Lye, *Andrew Smith’s Journal*, 92, and Smith’s footnote.

¹⁴⁷ T. Arbousset, *Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North-East of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, 1846), speaks of ‘some labourers sent to the Basutos with the Paris Society for Evangelical Missions’, who visited Sekonyela in 1833. There is a chance that they are the first source of the elision.

¹⁴⁸ For an uncritical acceptance of the anti-Tlokwa propaganda see P. B. Sanders, ‘Sekonyela and Moshweshwe: Failure and Success in the Aftermath of the Difaqane’, *J. Afr. Hist.*, x, 3 (1969), 439–55.

¹⁴⁹ Theal, *History of South Africa 1795–1834* (Cape Town, 1891), 301–4. Or, to be cautious, somewhere between Casalis in the 1860s and Theal the connective extension took place. An examination of the influences on Theal might prove rewarding.

¹⁵⁰ Ellenberger’s chapter on ‘Cannibalism’ (*History of the Basuto*, 217–26) is necessary reading. He claimed 300,000 people were eaten by cannibals in the Caledon region between 1822 and 1830, a figure arrived at by guessing there were initially four thousand cannibals, who each ate one person a month over six plus years (p. 225). Cf. his opinions on the origins of the San (Bushmen) pp. 4–5. And he is still cited as a respectable source!

¹⁵¹ G. M. Theal, *History of South Africa 1794–1828* (London, 1903), 389. Theal’s motive was to put white destruction in its ‘proper perspective’: see Theal, *History of South Africa 1795–1834* (1891), 305.

Theal's nonsense was embellished by Ellenberger, who injected swathes of additional fiction. He minutely depicted MaNtatisi's Tlokwa doing battle with the Kololo of Sebetwane near Dithakong just before 26 June 1823, and then engaging Moffat, Waterboer *et al.* on the day itself.¹⁵² This is a good example of Ellenberger's technique and reliability. Shortly before his death, Ellenberger confessed he had never believed that the Tlokwa were at Dithakong or had crossed west of the Vaal, news of which reached the world in an article by his granddaughter, Marian How, in 1954.¹⁵³ How, and after her Smith, merely changed the *dramatis personae* of the battles (*sic*), substituting the Hlakwana and Phuthing, whoever they were, for the Tlokwa, and retaining Kololo participation.¹⁵⁴ The fact that nobody saw the Kololo near Dithakong in June 1823 is sidestepped by Edwin Smith: 'We may suppose that they... were hidden from view in one of the valleys.' Moreover, the elision Mantatee = MaNtatisi has been retained since 1954.¹⁵⁵ The Tlokwa have thus continued, erroneously, to be held responsible by Lye and others for Mantatee occurrences *east and south* of the Vaal.¹⁵⁶ Given the large number of references to Mantatees (i.e. Griqua, Koranna, Taung, Tlhaping, Patsa-Kololo etc) some very strange maps of the gyrations of MaNtatisi's Tlokwa have continued to be produced.¹⁵⁷ Modern editors even 'correct' contemporary writers such as George Thompson in footnotes to reprints, inserting Tlokwa into contexts where it is clear they were not being referred to.¹⁵⁸ Even Ellenberger is nothing compared to versions in South Africa's school textbooks with which children come into the universities fully armed.

¹⁵² Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto*, 137–9. Ellenberger may have followed Livingstone in having the Kololo as part of the Mantatee horde at Dithakong; see D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1857), 84. Livingstone claims to have obtained this from Sebetwane's entourage in 1851. This is not conclusive. There may have been misunderstanding between Livingstone and his Kololo informant as to *which* conflict with the whites was being referred to: it could have referred to the known attack on the Kololo by whites at Dithubaruba in 1826 or to some other event. Besides, there is no relevant contemporary evidence whatever from 1823. Livingstone belonged to Moffat's group, amongst whom 'the battle of Dithakong' had become a well-known conversation piece. There was every possibility of misunderstanding, leading questions, or subsequent insertion. We are very short of precise information as to the migration path of the Kololo, particularly in the earlier stages.

¹⁵³ How, 'An alibi for Mantatis', 67.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 69; Smith, 'Sebetwane and the Makololo', 52–3. The attempts to link the shadowy Caledon groups, the Phuthing and Hlakwana, with Moffat's reference (Schapera, *Apprenticeship*, 102) to groups called 'Maputee' and 'Batclaquan' under, respectively, chiefs Chaane and Carrahanye, who were in the vicinity of Dithakong some days after 26 June 1823, are extremely dubious. Between them Ellenberger, How, Smith and Schapera (in footnotes) jump to as many unwarranted conclusions as Ellenberger did with the Tlokwa in the first place.

¹⁵⁵ How, 'Alibi for Mantatis', 69.

¹⁵⁶ Lye, 'Mfecane in the Southern Sotho area', 118–21.

¹⁵⁷ These include Tlokwa incursions into the central Orange Free State, a migration down the Caledon to the Orange confluence, and another migration up and down the Caledon, all within three years. The stacticness of the Tlokwa after c. 1823 is perhaps more suggestive.

¹⁵⁸ For example, Forbes's annotation of Thompson's chapter on the Mantatees in *Travels and Adventures*, 1, e.g. footnote 9, p. 81, footnote 5, p. 118, and footnote 4, p. 176.

Conclusions

This evidence accumulated from a re-examination of two superficially unimportant battles poses a challenge over a wide front to the very survival of the macro-theory, or macro-myth, of the mfecane in arenas other than the educational and propaganda organs of the South African state. The following arguments are advanced (necessarily briefly) as suggestive signposts for further consideration and research.

In the first place, the Afrocentricism, Zulucentricism, and both the spatial and chronological teleologies of mfecane theory are all untenable. The reconsideration of Ngwane movements, and the returning of the Tlokwa to the upper Caledon, break down the classic Thealean chain-reaction, or 'shunting sequence',¹⁵⁹ not merely at a single but at every point in the concatenation. This self-propelling chain dissolves, and is replaced – it is advisable to change the metaphor (which remains *metaphor*) – by the jaws of a huge vice grip. The eastern jaw: Portuguese slaving at Delagoa Bay pushed the Ngwane into the Caledon; the south-western: Griqua–Bergenaars operating simultaneously from the opposite direction as the foraying arm of the Cape Colony's advance, expelled them out of the Caledon. These complementary exterior propulsions were both rooted in the imperialistic demand for labour, the slaves at the Bay being exported to the sugar plantations of Brazil and Réunion etc., and those taken in the region north of the Orange River going to work the farms and towns of the explosively expansive Cape Colony. The Caledon in the early 1820s became one of the more spectacular points where these thrusts intersected. Black societies were caught in the cross-fires of European encirclement and interpenetration. Conversely, the Zulu were never the primary stimulus of forced migrations, and most frequently were not involved at all.

Other chain-reactions of the mfecane break down in the same way. The Ndebele are likely to have been expelled from the upper Pongola by pressures originating at the Bay. They were then driven across and eventually out of the Transvaal by the Griqua and the Boers. Likewise the Patsa-Kololo were driven out of the north-central Orange Free State primarily by attacks rooted in the western destabilization, and in 1826 were ejected further north from Dithubaruba by an alliance between the Ngwaketse and white gunmen. In none of these cases was there a single blow, but always a series. A re-examination of Gaza and Jere (Ngoni) migrations north from the Mkuzi to the Limpopo, and in the case of the Ngoni from there on across the Zambezi, will almost certainly reveal similar patterns. The hard evidence for Zulu agency is conspicuously lacking.

Additionally, the sequence of labour exactions at geographically widely dispersed points in southern Africa provides one, if not *the*, vital key determining the chronology of interactions between black and white communities. The arrival of the 1820 settlers in the eastern Cape had regional ramifications, and was considerably more decisive than the accession of Shaka. Ordinance 49 was more material than his assassination, though both were linked by white agency. Continuation of the slave trade at the Bay and of settler expansionism towards and beyond the Kei, was accompanied by the Boer invasions of the high veld

¹⁵⁹ For the metaphor see H. M. Hole, *The Passing of the Black Kings* (London, 1932), 35–6.

and British penetration into Natal to produce new patterns of demand for forced labour between the 1840s and 1860s, demands that were met by similar arrangements to those of the 1820s.¹⁶⁰ And they in turn gave way to more modern though equally brutal processes of proletarianization. Nothing, apart from the lives of the Ngwane and Shaka, was ended in 1828, or 1830, the traditional termination point of the mfecane. It was the myth of 'the first great [intra-Bantu] tragedy of South African history' giving way to an era of (European-introduced) enlightenment that began at that moment with the victory of the settler voice.¹⁶¹

The motor of change, secondly, was not a self-generated internal revolution with a short time scale, but rather European penetration, against which black societies threw up a series of complex reactive states, that matured over a much longer period of time, both before and after the irrelevantly truncated 'mfecane' era (c. 1790–1830). They were in inception defensive; but played a dynamic role in modulating historical process through autonomous intervention. The Taung, Gaza, Zulu, Ndebele, Ngwane, Moshoeshoe's Mokhoteli, Maroteng (Pedi), Dlamini-Swazi, Tlokwa, Mpondo, Tlhaping and others are all examples of reactive states. They were not purely Nguni, but invariably combinations of previously independent groups with a mixture of languages, dialects, even of race. They located themselves either in mountainous regions, or in otherwise marginal land into which the Europeans postponed penetration, such as the region north of the Tugela. Some were migrant; others evolved more or less in one place. Some endured; others (Nxaba, the Ndwandwe) were ephemeral. *All* the successful ones – not merely the Zulu (who were not imitated by anybody) – experienced military revolutions, usually superimposing firearms, larger armies and new objectives of warfare onto pre-existing structures such as, but not only, the *ibutho*. All were eventually compelled to adopt European boundaries and concepts of private property, witness the destruction of their land use systems, and suffer their re-emergence in caricature. In some respects there was a convergence between them: enlargement of scale, use of firearms; in others a divergence: e.g. of structure, capability and fortune. The successful reached their apogee in the 1850s and 1860s, rather than in the 1820s, when half of them were not yet properly conceived. Between the 1860s and 1890s they were eliminated one by one by white imperialism in the age of the transition to monopoly capitalism.

In the third place, it was the victory of the settler voice and the insular character of subsequent South African historiography that ensured the gestation and development of the mfecane as multiple alibi. On the one hand, settler history developed a wide range of amnesias: of the slave trade, the raids for Mantatees and 'free' labour, the destabilisations of the Natal conquistadores. On the other, a general psychological displacement took place, in which blacks were burdened with the guilt of various self-mutilations. Teleology became tautology. The first layer of alibi was concerned with concealing the strategies of obtaining forced labour already discussed, and concerns the era c. 1820–60. In the era of Theal, Ellenberger and Walker, roughly 1880–1940, this was overlaid by a second which attributed the land distribution of 1913,

¹⁶⁰ The Swazi built their power on supplying the eastern Transvaal Boers with 'apprentices' raided in the low veld in the 1850s and 1860s. See Bonner, *Evolution and Dissolution*, 80–84. Gaza slaving into the 1860s is outlined in Harries, 'Labour Migration', ch. 4.

¹⁶¹ Davenport, *Modern History* (3rd edition), 14, 36–53.

in fact a product of a hundred years of European conquest, to a black-on-black holocaust in the period 1815–35. The origins of the Natives Land Act were mystified as Ordinance 49 had been in the earlier period. Since the Second World War the stress of the alibi has been on the natural ‘pluralism’ of black societies and how they self-sequestered themselves into proto-Bantustans in the era of Shaka, leaving the whites merely the task of surveying and recognition. The violence of forced removals was conjured away with new euphemisms and lies. Whites could now legitimately fight for what was ‘by right’ theirs.¹⁶²

SUMMARY

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. A re-examination of the ‘battles’ of Dithakong and Mbolompo suggests very different conclusions and enables us to decipher the motives of subsequent historiographical amnesias. After about 1810 the black peoples of southern Africa were caught between intensifying and converging imperialistic thrusts: one to supply the Cape Colony with labour; another, at Delagoa Bay, to supply slaves particularly to the Brazilian sugar plantations. The flight of the Ngwane from the Mzinyathi inland to the Caledon was, it is argued, a response to slaving. But they ran directly into the colonial raiding-grounds north of the Orange. The (missionary-led) raid on the still unidentified ‘Mantatees’ (*not* a reference to MaNtatisi) at Dithakong in 1823 was one of innumerable Griqua raids for slaves to counter an acute shortage of labour among Cape settlers after the British expansionist wars of 1811–20. Similar Griqua raids forced the Ngwane south from the Caledon into the Transkei. Here, at Mbolompo in 1828, the Ngwane were attacked yet again, this time by a British army seeking ‘free’ labour after the reorganisation of the Cape’s labour-procurement system in July 1828. The British claim that they were parrying a Zulu invasion is exposed as propaganda, and the connexions between the campaign and the white-instigated murder of Shaka are shown. In short, 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. The core misrepresentations of ‘the mfecane’ are thereby revealed; the term, and the concept, should be abandoned.

¹⁶² See e.g. the extreme right wing Action White Natal pamphlet, Durban, 19 May 1986, in which, after alluding to the ‘mfecane extermination wars’, they go on: ‘The whites of Natal thus have the unequivocal right historically and lawfully to own certain areas and to govern such.’