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1988-09-12
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10263

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A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW
4.00pm SEPTEMBER 1988

Title: The Mfecane: Beginning the Inquest.

by: John Wright and Julian Cobbing

No. 241A

JETTISONING THE MFECANE (WITH PERESTROIKA)*

Julian Cobbing/August 1988

In this paper I elaborate on the argument that 'the mfecane' is a pivotal component of a 'liberal', settler, apartheid-skeletal form a new analysis. The main assertion of mfecane propaganda is that a 'Zulu-centric' revolution produced an extensive depopulation which explains in historiographical sequence: the flight of peoples into the 'liberation' of the European economy, the land division of 1913, and, since the 1950s, the configuration of the Bantustans. In reply, it is shown that the sub-continental destabilisations and transformations within black societies sprang from the synchronous and converging impact of European penetration at Delagoa Bay, the Cape, north of the Orange, and Natal. In order to disguise what had occurred the whites erased themselves from their own impact, and retrospectively inserted Shaka and other victims of the process as initiators in situations where they were absent. The chronology is lengthened far beyond the (in this context) irrelevant reign of the Zulu monarch. Particular attention is paid to the sequences of this extended chronology and to the cross-interactions between the sectors of the white advance. It is not the intention to minimise change internal to black societies, but rather to make a call for this to be researched in its proper context. The huge gaps in our knowledge revealed by this approach ensure that this task is a formidable one.

Where we are and how we got there

The basic propositions of mfecane propaganda are blissfully simple (a necessary attribute of myth: see Barthes). The 1980s version - a product of the refinements of Omer-Cooper and The Oxford History - has an 'explosion' amongst the northern 'Nguni' triggered by overpopulation which (somehow) led to the hegemony of the Zulu 'empire' of Shaka. This uniquely revolutionary and predatory state depopulated Natal and forced neighbours in flight into the interior where they set up 'shock waves' (the semiology of mfecane literature would repay a study) over half of Africa. The instantly 'Zulu-ised' Ndebele depopulated the Transvaal before being chased (by the Zulu) into Zimbabwe. Fleeing Dlamini groups formed Swaziland in the eastern escarpment. Gaza and Jere refugees from Shaka devastated the Delagoa Bay area (or perhaps the Zulu did), the Jere, i.e. the Ngoni, creating a Zulu-inspired havoc as far as Lake Nyanza. The equally Zulu-ised Ngwane of Matiwane marauded into the Caledon and 'set into motion' the Tlokwa, that is Mantatees of MaNtatisi who, briefly Zulu-ised herself (though only for three years) depopulated the Orange Free State, and - either the Tlokwa or tertiary victims in

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* The arguments in this paper are not necessarily those of John Wright. It is a provisional study for discussion: if you wish to quote from it please obtain clearance from me at Tel (0461) 26365/22023. A bibliographical note will be available at the seminar.

the chain reaction such as Sebetwane's Kololo: there is no unanimity - were only thrown back from an attempted invasion of the Cape Colony at the heroic battle of Dithakong in 1823. In the Caledon Moshoeshoe gathered exhausted survivors and began to form Basutoland, an island of security in the Zulu-inspire holocaust. The Ngwane meanwhile met nemesis when their next proposed victims, the Tembu, called in a British *commando to their rescue* (Mbolompo: 1828). *Survivors of perhaps* 720,000 (sic) peoples fleeing Shaka through and out of Natal found only brief respite amongst the Gcaleka of Hintsa before succumbing to new persecution. This necessitated the British 'rescuing them from bondage' in the 'war' of 1835. These Fingos, transformed by their misfortunes, became at once 'the Jews of Kaffirland', immediately receptive to labour, Christianity, profit and life as peasant farmers. Fortunately this holocaust (nearly two million dead) died down as quickly (and mysteriously) as it began. In the 1830s the whites were able to move into empty areas, survey the bleached bones in the veld, wean the cannibals *from their habit, and provide a rallying point for the* survivors. These, nevertheless, remained in the peripheral areas (shaped rather like a horseshoe) - desert, mountains, low-veld - which provided the original delineation of the later Bantustans.

To laugh or not to laugh? Students are never quite sure; but the lecturer's cue invariably turns them straight-faced to their notes and exams. It is true that heavy camouflage conceals the blood-line of this nonsense. Still, how astonishing that it was not questioned before the early 1980s? The exaggerated teleology and Afrocentricism are noticeable, as are the pluralistic separation off of black from white history (to remedy this would justify a year's moratorium in our history examinations), the whites as incidental and innocent by-standers, and the over-happy coincidence of the depeopling of Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal immediately prior to the white occupation. A colossal, self-induced Auseinandersetzung a split-second before the whites arrive; as soon as eyewitnesses appear everything is quiet! A few writers, notably Dora Taylor, Hosiah Jaffe and, more recently, Marianne Cornevin, have shown how aspects of this legitimate apartheid. These texts, however, have not been taken seriously by the Universities. (My own course was unanimously axed when it was seen where my thoughts were going.) Moreover, nobody has yet questioned the mfecane as total concept. Modern Ph.D. students concentrate on 'manageable', i.e. non-controversial issues. A law not unlike that at work at Chernobyl has led, in short, to disaster. A far-reaching inquest is necessary.

The 'perfection' of our mfecane is the product of much accretion, honing and purifying: but the main pillars of the mythology were in place by the 1830s. By then the literature was already heavily contaminated with fantastical descriptions and fictions composed by settler propagandists such as Fynn, Chase and Godlonton. (The style was typical of the period, but has only been exposed by Curtin in the west African context.) Behind this 'proto-mfecane' lay the needs to obfuscate the Cape's labour procurement strategies in the years after the arrival of the 1820 settlers, and to depict Natal as depopulated so as to encourage a northern extension of colonisation. The first produced the myths of the Mantatee and Fetcani 'hordes'; the second the fantasy of Shaka and the equally 'horde-ish' Zulu. Mystifications about the 'gyrations' and

self-inflicted damage of the Mantatees swelled in ratio to the growing amnesia about the slave trade north of the Orange in the early 1820s. The subsequent switch in 1828 to a 'free' labour strategy produced the massacres of the Ngwane in the same year, condemnation of which was drowned in the hypocrisies of Godlonton and his Graham's Town Journal. White destabilizations south of the Tugela and almost certain manipulation of the Zulu succession in 1828 intensified the anti-Shaka campaign in the early 1830s. The unfortunate timing of a yet huger raid on the Gcaleka for cattle and labour in 1834-5 - a year after Britain's abolition of slavery - was to necessitate the even more ornate fictions depicting Fingos as victims of the Shaka terror. In this manner the two originally separate sources of the mythology were fused. Most incredibly of all, the Mantatee 'horde' was - also in the mid-1830s - elided with the harmless and inconspicuous 'MaNtatisi', the mother of the Tlokwas leader, Sekonyela, an elision additionally connected to a local Caledon valley propaganda campaign of the British-backed Moshoeshoe against the 'villainous' Sekonyela, his regional rival.

In the half century before 1910 there was a tension between attempts at a pan-South African mythology, and the particularistic local propagandas of the Cape, Natal and, growingly after 1868, Basutoland, a tension which mimicked the pushmipullu-like political tendencies of the era. The Cape after 'Responsible Government' concentrated on embellishing the story of the Fingos (this reached an apotheosis in Whiteside's History of the AmaMbo in 1912) and of drawing lurid portraits of Matiwane. Mbolompo and 'the rescue of the Fingos' became founding battles of Hastings for the lack of anything more appropriate. The 1840s settlers in Natal took up the Zulu mythology. A crescendo of anti-Zulu denunciation occurred to cover the land seizures, hut taxation and chibaro labour systems of the 1840s and 1850s; the attack on Cetshwayo's kingdom in 1879; and the seizure of land within Zululand itself after 1897. Cetshwayo was sedulously cloaked in the myth of Shaka; perhaps more importnatly Shaka was attributed with the armies of Cetshwayo and Bambata. The myths reverberated back and forth across the decades, producing an analytical timelessness detectable in the traditions of James Stuart, whose informants speak with ventriloqual voice. After Bryant had further worked on this it was difficult not to see the whole tree of South African history as predestined in the acorn that was Dingiswayo. Myth crystalised not merely around the least known men (and women) but sprouted most luxuriantly in those geographical regions which were the last to be explored by Europeans. Encouraged thus, Ellenberger - in the same era as Stuart and Whiteside - staged his 'lifaqane' in the unknown Caledon of the 1820s: an alleged bloodbath between - precisely - 1820 and 1833 organised by Mzilikazi, Matiwane, MaNtatisi and 'the cannibals'. In Ellenberger the hagiography of Moshoeshoe begun by the French missionaries in the 1830s reached a peroration. Black chiefs everywhere were thus sorted into 'heroes' or 'villains', as they had served, or not, white expansionism.

G.M. Theal was mainly responsible for amalgamating the sectorial myths to produce a pan-South African history that pre-annexed the Boer Republics and was the ideological facet of the drive for Union. Theal sculpted even more extraordinary versions on which the text-books are still inexcusably but logically based. Extra stress was placed on Mzilikasi's 'depopulation' of the Transvaal. The central chain-reaction

of 'the mfecane': Zulu attack Hlubi/Ngwane, who attack Tlokwa (i.e. Mantatees), who expel Kololo, some of whom career on to Dithakong, is now (1880s) invented. A Zulu-inspired self-genocide of blacks put into 'correct perspective' any damage the whites might have caused. The magisterial pronouncements of Theal and Cory echo around the deliberations of the Lagden Commission as they help themselves to 93% of land in the Union. Maps produced by Theal's main heir, E.A. Walker, splashed hatchured lines into the central Transkei and Bechuanaland depicting yet greater swathes of depopulation. In 1928 only did Walker coin the neologism mfecane (the italicisation an additional disguise) to denote the total process; his translation, 'the crushing', despite pathological repetition in the text-books, has no legitimacy. The appearance of the Fynn 'Diary' in 1950 and of the largely fictional Shaka Zulu by Ritter established Shaka's world popular reputation, whilst Omer-Cooper's Zulu Aftermath in 1966 improbably established 'the mfecane' as a centre-piece of the new 'Africanist' history. The Oxford History (1969) injected all this into academic arteries world-wide in the early 1970s, as a comparison of text-books of that era with those of the 1950s will show. The further simplification and caricature of these versions by television and cinema, and by writers of South Africa's school text-books has probably ensured that this mfecane/Shaka is semiologically ineradicable this side of a revolution in our educational system. The failure to see the links between 'the mfecane' of the past twenty years and Verwoerd, Vorster and Both's Bantustan strategies - despite its presence on the election platforms of the far right - is not the least of the items on the agenda of self-criticism for the contemporary historical profession.

Interlude

My attempts to teach 'the mfecane' in 1982 (as an optional third year course, paralleling the compulsary South African course!) turned into a determination to dig up by the roots and expose the very object of instruction. I was confronted with an ever lengthening list of errors, omissions of all too easily accessible evidence, and an equally inexhaustible list of fictional insertions and false ascriptions. Wherever I looked - in 'Natal', the trans-Mkuzi, or the Caledon - the Zulu presence vanished altogether or needed to be rewritten in its correct scale and circumstance. Stuart's informants continually contradicted his assumptions of a depopulated Natal. No explanation existed for the first move of the Ndebele; whilst their subsequent propulsion north was arranged by the Griquas and the Boers. Nothing reliable existed in explanation of any of the Ngwane movements. The Tlokwas had never been reported out of the upper Caledon. A fog of hypocritical mystification surrounded the 'battle' of Dithakong. There was a conspiracy of silence as to the events of 1828 and 1835. The circumstances of the 1828 events at both ends of the Transkei had been shredded, whilst the stories of D'Urban's military of huge migrations through the Transkei seemed a more than convenient alibi for labour-hungry conquerors. There was a resonant silence as to Portuguese slaving at the Bay: indeed, southern Mozambique had been snipped out of South African history altogether. Repeatedly there had been a 'levelling up', so that spear was depicted as more decisive than the rifle, minor skirmishes between black groups as dwarfing Austerlitz, Borodino and 'the mfecane' as a whole approximately equal in scale to

the Napoleonic Wars. Settler propaganda had had a century and a half in which to manipulate, forget and rearrange the facts. The sacred texts of Ellenberger and Bryant contained no coherent histories at all, merely a bombardment of suggestion, confusingly over-complex detail, patronising pronouncements, chronological inversions, hundredfold increases or diminutions in scale, credulous speculation dressed up and accepted as expertise, the repeated resort to fiction when the threads of evidence ran out (or were tactfully discarded), and, throughout, the most repellant and racist self-glorification. Nothing of any of this had been challenged. Stories however surreal, however absurd, had been humourlessly repeated by the most respected historians right the way to the present.

The trouble ahead was illuminated by my failure to answer the first question: what was 'the mfecane'? It was, for example, impossible to delimit chronologically. Confusion as to the termination sent me in hot pursuit across the borders of South African history 'proper', a territory where my questions were not welcomed. Did the Mbolompo campaign, the 'frontier war' of 1834-5 or the Zulu war of 1879 belong to the course on the mfecane or the one on 'South African history'? Attempts at arbitration evaded the real problem, the untenability of separating the material into two courses in the first place. As for the mfecane's initiation and causation, the literature was in spectacular disarray. The fragile attempts of Guy and Hall to provide substance to the somewhat desperate hypothesis of overpopulation revealed on the contrary its untenability. The nearly complete vacuum in knowledge about Shaka and his Zulu had switched attention back to Zwide in the 1790s, and away from the Mfolosi as 'storm centre' to the Pongola. But Zwide's Ndwandwe were even more of a blank. Hedges attempted to replace the argument about excess population with one that attributed the initiation of structural revolution to the supplying of American whalers at Delagoa Bay with cattle in the 1790s. This seemed equally unsatisfactory. Moreover, this sort of hypothesis formed a different species of explanation which exploded the subject of explanation. How could an 'internal revolution' that was isolatedly integral to black societies have been caused by exogamous impacts? Even the military revolution evaporated on close inspection, or, rather, Omer-Cooper's version did. The ibutho long predated the 1790s. That it may well have been readapted to hunt elephants, cattle (and people?), as Hedges, argued very plausibly, begged a chain of questions. Assumptions about the short stabbing spear and 'horns and chests' tactics were amusing. The fixation with the 'Nguni' was a projection back of twentieth-century tribe-manufacture. Surely 'Tsonga' and 'Sotho' societies had also experienced dramatic change? Were the 'Nguni' predators and everyone else victims? My conclusion that Mzilikazi's Ndebele and Moshoeshoe's 'Sotho' kingdoms were sister formations had been anticipated by Macmillan. If one brought in the 'bastard' states, the Taung, the Xhosa bands, the raiders of Coenrad de Buys, and the constellations built up by Fynn and Farewell in southern Natal, not only the concept of 'tribe', but even that of 'race' became redundant. Uncoincidentally, this ran up against another of the litanies of the 'liberal' world view.

Hedges had advanced to the brink of shattering the mfecane without realising it. My own 'swingeing' onslaught was handicapped by an initial failure to provide a coherent overview of events that had, at

least some of them, all too clearly occurred. The mfecane was peppered with buckshot, but it still lived. The missing bones which permitted a full restructuring of the skeleton of the real animal that had stalked the sub-continent were supplied by Harries who in 1981 (as spin-off from his Ph.D. thesis!) produced incontrovertible evidence of a flourishing slave trade at Delagoa Bay in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was now possible to explain an exodus of peoples in all directions from an epicentre neither on the Mfolosi nor the Pongola, but further north to the west of the Bay. It was immaterial whether this trade had taken off after 1815 or whether it had existed (at a lower level perhaps: we need research) in the eighteenth century. Either way, decisive additional weight was given to Hedge's hypotheses concerning the transformatory impact of the ivory and cattle trades. The intensification of regional violence after 1815 was now explanable. the devious need to resort to the (in fact hypothetical) coming to power of Shaka 'in 1816' fell away. Peoples such as the Ngwane and the Ndebele were likely to have been expelled from the south-west Bay hinterland by the slave trade, just as peoples to the north were. But, in the southern sector their flight drove them straight into the guns of the Griqua and, later, Boers operating out of the Cape Colony. It was this double pinning, or the simultaneity of antipodal pressures which distinguished southern Africa. Both of the slave trades, as well as the upheavals north of the Bay had been removed from history by settler propaganda, and Shaka ubiquitously inserted as explanation. The result, 'the mfecane', was a contrived illusion of the literature, the negation of 'events on the ground'.

It was this juxtaposition which accounts for the fact that an unparalleled pattern of dislocation occurred in proximity to and, in part, as consequence of the relatively weak (as compared to central Mozambique or west Africa) slave trade at the Bay. Put the other way, the specific combination of events was driven dominantly by the settler presence: without this, black reactions to the local slave trade would have reassembled - perhaps at an equivalently weaker level - the sequences along the Zambezi and the Rufiji. As explained later, the short initial moves of both Ndebele and Ngwane support this conclusion. The black experience is southern Africa is, thus, quite different from elsewhere in Africa, and the nature of the changes within their social formations has a specific flavour. Nevertheless, such a peculiar and complex series of interactions was then thrown comprehensively out of focus by settler writing ('the mfecane'). This misdescription of the 1830s and 1840s has, as mentioned, parallels too in other parts of Africa. 'Normally' - if South African had been decolonized after 1945 - a return to history would have been effected long ago. Equally without parallel (perhaps in world history), however, is the perpetuation of these early sleights of hand and literary habits into the present era of the cinema, the television and the paperback; and the readaptation of mythologies which served one group of purposes before 1850 and then around 1900 to new objectives of concealment in the late twentieth century.

To Return To History

Extricating ourselves from the quicksands of the Cape-Natal propaganda, we must gain height for a subcontinental view. Observing this with one

eye, we must fly higher yet and inspect the human world as a whole, and over a much longer time-span. We have to concentrate on the two processes at the same time, that in western Europe, 'big' and 'quick', the other beneath us, 'small' and 'slow'. And while one eye is fixed on each, a third must measure the accelerating convergence and impact. Ridding ourselves of assumptions of 'merrie Africa' (whilst reserving the right to be uneasy about where the now united process is going), and concentrating on choosing the words with nuances which will offend the least part of the audience; with a final check on our backgrounds, prejudices and dreams, we can extricate the spare sixth hand and begin.

Out of feudalism in western Europe emerged capitalism, in the first phase of which the Portuguese and Spanish 'discovered' America, rounded Africa, and began to harvest the former with the labour of the latter. The fruits returned to Europe to generate new technologies, trades, an obsession with profit, upheavals in 'world view', population explosion, and, sadly, a new era of ever heightening warfare. This phase of trading/slaving-based, or plunder-based 'mercantile' capitalism produced titanic struggles between new 'nations', the most strategically fortunate and politically innovative of which, England - taking Portugual under a quasi-protection (1654; 1703) and making the Dutch junior partners (1625-1713), took on the French and by 1800 were half way to achieving a world empire. Utilising slave labour in the Americas, and revolutionising land tenure at home, investing the profit from the former and juxtaposing it with the internal labour released by the latter, the British began to industrialise a generation ahead of her rivals. Seeking markets for her depression prone cotton and wool industries, naval hegemony against the French, and 'temperate' lands in which to settle a perceived (and indeed for a time actual) surplus population - in short lebensraum - the British moved into amongst other places southern Africa (1806), taking the already present Dutch into a frictioned tutelage.

On the ground beneath us some very interesting 'interactions' have already been occurring - and will now intensify - on several simultaneous fronts. Around Delagoa Bay, firstly, Portuguese, British, 'Austrian', American and French traders have already by 1800 had a considerable impact on local 'Tsonga', 'Sotho' and 'Olentont' societies. Cloth, beads, brass and guns are going in, ivory, cattle, ambergris, gold etc. are going out. There is some uncertainty - c.1800 - whether yet substantial numbers of slaves are being exported; but in view of the sporadic references to an eighteenth-century trade and of the lateness of our being informed of the very substantial trade after c.1810 we are checking the evidence very carefully. Following Hedges, we can see that interrelationships between states are powerfully affected by these trades. Conflict between Mabudu, Tembe and Mattolla is intensified. Ndwandwe and her satelites reorientate themselves to the trade. Further south an Mthethwa-Mabudu coastal alliance is split into two by the west-south-east axis of Ndwandwe and allies. A glance north of the Bay, however, indicates that trends in state formation and a heightening of violence are not confined to the south. Throughout the region older intra-African trade routes are captured by the new dominant ones ending at the sea. Peoples as far apart as the Pungwe, the Kei and the Molopo are brought within one huge trading network. But all this is unexceptional. It resembles, mutatis mutandis, similar experiences of

west African societies in the same era. We have merely lacked a Curtin to chronicle it.

To the south-west, secondly - and here we come to the 'specificity' of southern Africa - are the Dutch who find no counterpart in west Africa. Between the 1650s and the arrival of the British the Dutch had spread out and settled the land. They brought new diseases, began the task of exterminating the San and Khoi, and interacted with the Mozambique coast by importing slaves, and even for a time establishing a trading company at the Bay (1720s). 'Miscegenation' produced Christianised, gun-armed, horse-riding 'Bastards', who moved into the interior seeking more land, subsumed Khoi groups along the Orange - such as the Kora -, trading, raiding - a reach which extended well beyond the Limpopo by the 1790s. (Overland contacts with the Bay cannot be ruled out.) Remarkable and very powerful 'commando states' emerged, such as that of Klaas Afrikaaner - which require detailed research. The trading-raiding for ivory, cattle and, increasingly slaves - mostly San until the 1810s - had a comparable and simultaneous impact in transorangia' as the trading/slaving in the Bay hinterland. Legassick notes that Moleabangwe's Tlhaping had been 'revolutionised' by about 1810 (a comparison between them and Makhasane's Mabudu or Dingiswayo's Mthethwa might be revealing). These considerations too should wean us from our fixation with the Mfolosi.

The Dutch, in the third sector, had additionally penetrated east, making contact with 'Xhosa' groups such as the Gqunukhwebe the Ndlambe and Rharhabe (='Gaikas') east of the Gamtoos. Trade links were established with the Gcaleka east of the Kei (who also received goods from the Bay). Inevitably there were struggles of slowly mounting intensity over land and cattle. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries these fairly balanced interactions ('frontier wars' 1-3) were dramatically upset by the supercession of Boer rule by that of the British, who brought with them the world's most modern weaponry and a 'total strategy' new to Africa. Both the Khoi and the Xhosa worlds fell apart. In 1809-12 the British enserfed the Khoi and began a genocidal campaign to force Bantu groups east of the Fish in order to seize their land. The first relocations over a huge area in South Africa's history were achieved with a depth of brutality only recently revealed by Maclennan. This 'fourth Frontier War' of 1811-12 began the process of land attenuation and 'Fingoisation'. To speak of 'frontier wars' is deceptive (the euphemism is a favourite one of Cape historians): it was an unending series of attacks, pressures, subversions, 'treaties', robberies, cattle seizures, proselytizations, betrayals, misrepresentations, and restructuring. The European God and value system, monagamy, and clothing (to uplift the people of Lancashire and Yorkshire) were forcibly introduced, land, labour and cattle seized in return. Settler propagandists sedulously minimised the comparative scale of this horror (as compared to the mostly imaginary Zulu 'upheavals'), and encapsulated it off both geographically and textually from relevant events elsewhere in the subcontinent. The near conceptual impossibility of mentally connecting these events of c. 1810-20 with the contemporary careers of Dingiswayo and Shaka is a significant triumph of settler historiographical suggestion.

Between about 1815 and 1840 there occurred both a growing convergence and interpenetration between the three sectors of the European advance (as well as the opening up of a fourth between the Mzimkhulu and the Tugela), and a mounting intensity of violence, as Europeans seized land in the south, and labour in each of the sectors - destined either for the Cape farms or the sugar plantations of Brazil, Réunion etc. This led to a subcontinental-wide crisis for black and 'Khoisan' peoples which is not remotely comparable to anything that had gone before. No statement of this appears in any text book of South African history (or monograph for that matter). The Bay slave trade was only detected in 1981. And the slaving north of the Orange was only clarified in outline in my own article due later this year (1988). It is the least of coincidences that these years are precisely the years of 'the mfecane'.

In the Cape after about 1810 enserfment of the Khoi, and Griqua raids for San never came near to solving a chronic labour shortage. The British ban on the slave trade, the ban on the utilisation of 'kaffir' labour, the intrinsic sparcity of Khoi labour and the impossibility of policing a huge region ensured that the large batches of British settlers arriving from the unhappy Britain of Lord Liverpool had no legal means of obtaining sufficient labour - an unpropitious fact for the farming and defending an easterly creeping march. With the compliance of the Governor the settlers and Boers arranged with Griqua and 'frontier ruffians' to supply them with Tswana and Sotho (i.e. black) labour from north of the Orange. This doubly illegal supply necessitated the extensive use of euphemisms and lies: the mainly women and children brought south by force were labelled 'Mantatees' coming 'in search of refuge' from an auto-violence organised by their own chiefs! The 'battle' of Dithakong was merely one such raid (in fact on Kwena and Hurutshe) for slaves and cattle, unusual only in the extensive evidence left by the missionary leaders. The early and mid 1820s thus certainly saw extensive destabilisations in the region north of the Orange: but the roots of the violence and of the accompanying hunger lay in the south, not in the 'Zulu' east. The flow of violence was from south-west to north-east. The Taung emerged as a predator state - alongside the Bergenaars, Koranna and Griqua - in the northern Orange Free State: it was almost certainly a combination of Taung and Bergenaars which forced the Patsa-Kololo north sometime before 1824. Peoples fled in all directions, enlarging the Tlhaping and Taung, as well as Moshoeshoe's growing state east of the Caledon, and Mzilikazi's on the upper Vaal. Others sought their stolen children in the Cape, ending up as labourers themselves. The ripples of settler invasions thus had far-reaching effects on black societies not only east of the Gamtoos, but north of the Orange, even of the Vaal. It is artificial to speak of distinct 'northern' and 'eastern' frontiers: the Caledon and Kei regions were fused into one interconnected theatre by criss-crossing raiding bands and fleeing peoples. Xhosa bandits raided north, while groups such as the Ngwane fled from the Bergenaars south of the Orange, when they were immediately characterised by the propaganda of the British and Tembu as a new 'Fetcani Horde'. As the Mantatees before them, the Fetcani became the target of British raiding - the Ngwane being massacred in the very month of Ordinance 49 (July 1828), which, in response to continuing labour shortages, further expansion east of the Fish, and the imminence of the ending of slavery, permitted the utilisation of 'free' black

labour for the first time. Mutiliated Ngwane prisoners taken in the raid at Mbolompo became the first 'kaffir' labourers to respond to the 'invitation'. Soon they were subsumed under the more versatile euphemism 'Fingo'. Ingeniously, settler propaganda attributed the regional violence to the Mantatees and Fetcani themselves, a mendacious displacement that converted the captives into Untermenschen, the lucky recipients of British humanitarian attention. Dithakong and Mbolompo became heroic vindications of the new order.

Paralleling the labour-raiding in the Colony was a coterminous escalation of the slave trade at Delagoa Bay and Inhambane. This badly needs a detailed study, but the following points may be stressed. After 1815 an extra demand for sugar in Europe with an accompanying rise in slave prices, an increasing activity of Brazilian and United States slavers, and British attempts to keep Portugual from slaving north of the equator (treaties of 1815 and 1817) produced a convergence on, amongst other ports, Delagoa Bay. By 1821-22 both Gaza and Mthethwa were present around the Bay, the former at least trading slaves to the Portuguese fort. Tembe, Mabudu and Mattolla were all involved in the trade. By the later 1820s at least 3,000 slaves - mostly men in this case - were being exported annually from both the Bay and Inhambane: this is only the detected number of declared slaves. The slaves were exported to Réunion, Rio de Janeiro, Havane, Buenos Aires and innumberable other destinations. These numbers persisted into the 1830s and 1840s, before declining in the 1850s - when exports switched to the Boer farms in the Transvaal. However the figures are read a very high percentage of males were being seized in the 'Delagoa Bay Hinterland', a fact overlooked by every theorist of the mfecane's causation.

It is not yet known where the slaves were taken from. An army of black musketeers with Portuguese officers existed at Lourenco Marques for the seizure of slaves; but the details of their activities are missing. Local 'tribal' warfare in the hinterland was virtually certainly excacerbated by the market. Fynn in one of his earlier and more plausible essays indicates that both the Ndwandwe and Zulu sold their prisoners into slavery. It raises the question discussed by Curtin for Senegambia to what extent slave supply came from 'normal' wars, or was fed by raiders stimulated into business by the commercial propsects. Inexplicably Hedges fails to mention slavery at all, although his arguments for the impact merely of the ivory and cattle trades - which also intensified during the 1820s - would have been immeasurably strengthened. What seems certain is the dominance of 'Tsonga' and Ndwandwe-linked groups in the trade. There is absolutely no evidence of a Zulu hegemony in the Bay area in the early 1820s, or at any time for that matter. The allegations to this effect were inserted backwards by writers (or their ghosts) such as W.F.W Owen in the 1830s: their contemporary accounts of 1823-25 contain no such references. Tshopi groups north of the Bay were among the victims. But there are indications that peoples of the Nkomati, Mbelezi, Usuthu, Ingwavuma, Pongola and perhaps Mfolozi valleys were attacked. The heightening of tension in the subregion can only be explained in this context. The otherwise inexplicable collapse and dispersal of Ndwandwe itself must surely be seen in this light. Whether Zwide himself was a slaver supremo must remain an open question. The mechanics of the triangula struggle between Mthethwa, Ndwandwe and Mabudu at the turn of the 1820s

need studying, but, given the background, it is unlikely that issues of slaving will be absent. Whether the Ndwandwe-linked Gaza and Ngoni (Jere) were slaver states and moved into the Bay region attracted by new business opportunities must also for the moment remain hypothesis, although the absence of evidence for a Zulu role in these northerly movements should be noted. On the contrary, the Zulu movements were to the south. Whether the subsequent slaving careers of Ngoni groups beyond the Save and Zambezi were a logical continuation of their earlier experiences should also be researched. At the least the absurd assumption of 'mfecane theory' that the Ngoni migrations were impelled by atavistic Zuluism, or even of Zulu attacks, should be discarded. A last question (for now) is whether the slavery-connected migrations of 'Tsonga' peoples away from the Bay, up the Olifants, Letaba and Levubu valleys that Harries describes for the 1830s - when the slave trade reached a peak - can be antedated to the 1820s or even 1810s. Answers to these and many other questions are blocked by our present lack of evidence. But at least a search within a promising framework can be begun.

Turning to the comparable cases of the Ndebele (or Khumalo) and the Ngwane: it is obviously significant that contemporary writers connected the 'upheavals' in the Pongola region with the Bay slave trade. In the 1820s Macmillan repeated Dr Philip's observation of 1828 that the Khumalo had been evicted by slavers. The Ndebele, on the upper Pongola, and the Ngwane, about thirty miles south-west on the upper Mzinyathi, were not only both well sited for attacks by slavers, but are both known to have been attacked by the slaver Ndwandwe - and in the more knowledgeable accounts are depicted as having been expelled by the Ndwandwe. The Ngwane were also attacked by the Mthethwa (the precise sequence of these attacks is shadowy, but probably not relevant here) who had an alliance with the slaver state of Mabudu, borrowed Makhasane's musketeers, and are known to have been near Lourenco Marques in 1821. Conversely, the evidence for Zulu attacks is non existent, at least for the period before 1830. In both cases there is otherwise a blank in place of an explanation, a blank that I ran into when studying the Ndebele in the 1970s. I therefore repeat the argument in my recent paper, 'Mfecane as Alibi', that both the Ndebele and the Ngwane were expelled wither by primary or secondary slave raiders, and that the timing of these events is attributable to the rapidly rising export demand at the Bay in the years c. 1816-21 and not to the activities of the African Napoleon.

It is also crucial to understand, to return to an earlier point, that the initial moves of both peoples were short - in the Ngwane case about fifty or sixty miles south-west into the upper Wilge, the Ndebele about seventy miles north-west to the east side of the headwaters of the Vaal somewhere near modern Ermelo. (There was, it should be noted, no Ndebele migration into the eastern Transvaal.) After further short Ngwane moves from the Wilge into the upper Caledon, the gap between the two groups had increased from about thirty to nearly two hundred miles, a distance which was to make the difference between survival and destruction. In an Africa wide context such flights from slavers were 'normal'. Even in the context of the eastern high-veld the incursions of 'Nguni' from the east was unexceptional per se. What was exceptional about these incursions of c. 1818-21 was the scale and the causation. A

both the Ndebele and the Ngwane came under attack by the Griqua/Bergenaar raiders operating out of the south-west and searching for cattle and 'Mantatees' (i.e. slaves) for the settler farms. Both Matiwane and Mzilikazi were thus caught in the crossfire of the two inter-related plunder systems: both were caught and kept moving by a second 'system'. Mzilikazi's people, about 400 miles/600ks from the Griqua bases!, were in a more favourable position, but were nonetheless severely harrassed in the mid 1820s by Griqua attentions. The exact moment of the Ndebele migration out of the south-eastern Transvaal into the western Transvaal is still open to question (some time between 1827 and 1833), but the Griqua causation is undisputed. The Khumalo state expanded by the absorption of 'Sotho' and 'Tswana' refugees displaced in the southern destabilisation - people fleeing the Taung and Bergenaars - on the one hand, and 'Nguni' (e.g Ndwandwe) and possibly 'Tsonga' groups displaced like themselves in the eastern displacements on the other. It was in these circumstances of a sequence of harrassments that the peculiar evolution of Ndebele amabutho began. The Ngwane, conversely, were by 1824 much more exposed to Griqua attacks where they had arrived west of the upper Caledon - far more endangered than Moshoeshoe's more propitiously sited Mokhoteli in the mountains east of the river. Emulating the Ndebele in some respects, the Ngwane were shattered by Griqua attacks in c. 1825-26. The following migration through the north-eastern Cape into the southern Transkei - the only direction of escape open - ended in a third disaster when they were massacred by the British army in July and August 1828 in the immediate aftermath of the sanctioning of 'free' labour in Ordinance 49. The Ngwane were flung helplessly between the three penetrative fronts of white activity. Both the teleology and Afrocentricism of mfecane theory collapse.

With some of the ground cleared, it is safe, and chronologically apposite to turn to the early Zulu. The general failure to probe the fictions of Owen, King, Farewell, Fynn, Chase and Godlonton, and the most uncritical use of Stuart and Bryant, has ensured that - with the notable exception of Hamilton and Wright's recent studies - the analysis of the pre-1840s Zulu kingdom is a disaster area. The first thing to note is that what linked the three theatres of Delagoa Bay, 'Natal' and the trans-Kei was not Shaka's impis but settler propaganda. Thwarted at the Bay by the failure of the British Government to accept Owen's 'Tembe Treaty' of 1823 (as well as by malaria), settlers landed at Port Natal in 1824 and at once proclaimed: a recent Zulu devastation of the Mpondo; a Zulu depopulation of Natal; and a land treaty granted by Shaka to the area so generously depopulated. During 1825-27, as an aphrodisiac for the scarcely interested Cape administration and merchant houses, a vilification campaign was unleashed against Shaka and the Zulu. Every exhortation, slander, deception and exaggeration was deployed in an initially unsuccessful attempt to tempt Britain north. Zulu tyrany over the Bay hinterland was also invented in case British chances in that area took a turn for the better.

Not one of these charges stands up to examination. There was no depopulation of Natal, no Zulu hegemony at the Bay, no 1824 land treaty, and, virtually certainly, no Zulu attack on the Mpondoin 1824. Neither was Shaka the monster depicted in the pages of Fynn and Isaacs. If anything, the signs are that as a 'reactive' state (or 'defensive' state to use the terminology of Wright and Hamilton) the Zulu were in the

1820s as yet comparatively weak. The emergence of Zulu power after the demise of Mthethwa (c. 1815-23) must be seen both in the context of the slave trade and the opening of a second European front at Port Natal. The first Zulu amalagamations occurred along the White Umfolosi. Peoples along the Mkuzi and the upper Mzinyathi - such as Hlubi and Ngwane, even Ndwandwe groups - fled into the growing state. The 'Ndwandwe-Zulu' fighting so precisely (and erroneously) dated to 1818-19 by Bryant (the repeating of Bryant's guessed datings is a sympton of the literature) is 'a myth' - probably indicating not a sequence of specific battles, but a reference to the generalised upheavals between the Pongola and Mfolozi. (And what were the Ndwandwe doing when they attacked south of the Mfolosi in '1818-19' and drove 'the zulu' to the Tugela?) In this regional struggle the Zulu-linked units were worsted and at the turn of the 1820s the centre of the growing Zulu state shifted south-east into Qwabe territory, leaving military units to the north of the black Mfolosi in a defensive ring. From 1824 the Zulu, like the Mabudu in the far north, received the aid of white gunmen, who in 1826-7 enabled 'the Ndwande' to be attacked and Khumalo groups along the Mfolosi forced to khonza. These 'victories' in fact merely indicate the weakness and unexceptionality of the Shaka state until that date. They were followed by a further shift of the Zulu centre southwards, the capital itself moving south of the Tugela in 1825. If anything the axis of the state was at this stage along the Tugela, as Cele and Mbo groups in the region voluntarily fused with Shaka. Whether these southerly movements are to be viewed as a reaction away from the slaving areas, or as positive alignments towards the Europeans at Port Natal is an open question. To attempt to explain these sequences in terms of a search for a better combination of grazing and cultivation fails to provide an adequate balance between cause and the issue (the growth of the Zulu state) to be explained.

It should be stressed that whilst the evolution of this state, as Hamilton makes clear, is complex, the scale of the changes should not be exaggerated. The formation associated with Shaka is comparable with other emergent states of roughly the same era such as Mzilikazi's and Moshoeshoe's, both equally complex, equally 'revolutionary', equally assimilative. Additionally, Shaka's state was in the context of Zulu history merely the first and most primitive stage in an evolutionary sequence which was to culminate in Mpande's kingdom of the 1860s. In view of the regional circumstances in which the Zulu kingdom developed between about 1815 and 1830 it is surely misleading to term it a 'precolonial' state at any point in its career. Its very nature was influenced by white pressures and intervention. The whites themselves created mini-states in the area to the south of the Port which changed from being allies of the Zulu to profound threats. In 1828 it was an alliance of these white-led predatory groups which attacked the Mpondo. Ordinance 49, the raids on the Ngwane, and Fynn and Farewell's attempts to entice settlement north led to a reckoning in which the whites joined with internal opponents to kill Shaka in September 1828 and install the hopefully more malleable Dingane. It is significant that some of the most powerful of Shaka's supporters refused to accept Dingane, and that an extensive civil war occurred between 1828 and c. 1832 in which the whites backed Dingane. Dingane's victory, the transference of the state back north of the Tugela, the slaving activities of Farewell, Fynn and Isaacs, the falling out of the whites and Dingane, the adaptations in

state structure during Dingane's career, the extent and nature of Zulu involvement at the Bay and as slavers in the 1830s are all issues which have so far remained unstudied. By another irony, explainable by the later historiographical manipulations, the post-1830s development of the kingdom under Mpande and Cetshwayo produced something like the propaganda picture of the 1820s - another conjurer's illusion which 'confirmed' the early literature and closed it to question.

Possibly even less researched than any of the foregoing are interactions in the region between the Kei and the Mzimkhulu during the 1820s. The repeated insinuation of 'mfecane theory' that this area was penetrated by huge numbers of refugees fleeing Shaka has never been seriously investigated and is not supported by the evidence. On the contrary, the 'transkei', like the Caledon, was a regional interface between the fronts of white penetration - within reach of refugees from the south-west Bay hinterland, the Caledon and Orange, and the eastern frontier. Local predators such as Faku's Mpondo, Ncaphayi's Bhaca and Ngugencuka's Tembu were joined by Fynn's own raiders, by white and 'coloured' hunters, traders and bandits, by the cross Drakensberg raids of the Mokhoteli and Tlokwa, and by the incursions of the Ngwane. In the north-west, Hlubi incursions are as likely to have had their origin in slaving as in Zulu action (and note the Hlubi who fled into Shaka's kingdom). Most lethal of all were the compressions of the British in the south. In 1826 British missionaries crossed the Kei into Gcaleka territory. A crossfire of propaganda between the Mzimkhulu and Butterworth pleaded for direct expansion north of the Kei through Mpondo into Natal; to further this, alliances were made with both Mpondo and Tembu first against the Ngwane, subsequently against the Gcaleka themselves. Both groups were caught between two fires of white destabilisation; but we have heard that before. All this awaits a study; nevertheless the primary of southern pressures is clear. What passed south was British disinformation, not Zulu armies and refugees displaced by them.

The first people labelled 'Fingo' were the odd individuals who gravitated to the mission stations set up east of the Fish river in the early 1820s. There are some indications that the word had southern origins west of the Fish, and that its versatile meaning embraced early initiates, tribal misfits, opportunists and 'collaborators', displaced 'kaffirs' in the region south of the Kei, as well as migrants, for example from north of the Orange. In missionary useage around 1828 'Fetcani' and 'Fingo' are interchangeable in many passages. One does not have to look far for the agents of this uprooting and labelling. The Ngwane captured in the raids of 1828 were also designated Fingos, an early use of the term for 'forced labourer'. In the early 1830s the word was being used for people as widely divergent as forced labourers and a contingent of armed Xhosa collaborators who were to be used in the next 'frontier war'. The accretion of meaning; the very fuzziness of the word was to have advantages after 1835.

By 1833 an even acuter shortage of labour on the eastern frontier coincided with Britain's abolition of slavery. This did not deter the settlers from raiding the Rharhabe for slaves in the period before the war. But even more elaborate covers as compared to those of 1828 were necessary. The 'war' that followed, 'D'Urban's war' of 1834-35, was in

essentials a massive land, cattle and labour raid on the Rharhabe and Gcaleka in particular, which dwarfed the Mbolompo campaign in scale. The British army seized well over 50,000 'Xhosa' cattle, and, a fact unnoticed even by specialists on the Gcaleka, 17,000 (sic) Gcaleka prisoners - 85% of whom were women and children - in a series of spectacular raids in the first few months of 1835. A combination of the 'war' and the penetration of the region between the Keiskamma and the Kei by British administration at last solved the labour supply crisis at the crude level. The further land seizures over the next twenty years, masters and servants ordinances, hut taxation, and missionary encouragement soon fine-tuned a modern labour procurement strategy which during the 1890s spread throughout Africa. Given the context of 1835, however, the true provenance of the Fingos, as the prisoners inevitably were called, was concealed. The raids around Butterworth and along the upper Kei of March-June 1835 were erased from the texts. An elaborate, though threadbare, story of vast groups fleeing from the Zulu only to be persecuted by the Gcaleka - an updating of the 1828 Zulu raid alibi - was unimaginatively evolved by D'Urban's military entourage, which, suspiciously, included H.F. Fynn. It is not yet known where the Zizi and Bhele 'chiefs' were obtained, but the possibility that they were members of Fynn's Mzimkhulu hierarchy, temporarily unemployed, is the hypothesis under investigation. As for the Hlubi 'Fingos', they were peoples who migrated into the north-eastern Cape from the eastern Orange Free State in the early 1850s and after, who were inserted back into the 'flight from the Zulu in the 1820s' in subsequent historiographical adjustments. The fingo fiction satisfied 'London' with one and a half eyes averted. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s the false history, originally attributable to the military, was embroidered by intellectuals and missionaries. The Butterworth missionary, Ayliff, for example, whose contemporary diary of 1831-34 makes no mention of these Fingos, plagiarised the settler-military myth in a series of essays in the early 1850s, which were paraded by later writers as if they had been written in the early 1830s. This in turn, along with much later fantasies about 'the Mbo' penned by Scully, was incorporated into Whiteside's History of the AmaMbo (1912). The uncritical repetition of this material by historians of the eastern Cape is worth an inquest in itself. Of course, the spectacular increase in the population of Fingos between the 1830s and Union has nothing to do with sexual reproduction, but quite a lot to do with displacements in subsequent 'frontier wars', hut taxation, accelerating peasantisation, and adjustments to image in the schools. 'Xhosa' collaborators who crossed north of the Kei into Fingoland in the 1860s took with them the baggage of a false history as part of the price for the land.

It is time, too, to end the debate as to the relative centrality and 'creativity' of the 'Great Trek' and 'the mfecane'. Whilst the former occurred, the latter is an historiographical illusion. They are facets of the identical process. The Boer invasions of the high veld after 1835 were now to trigger events which were continuation and intensification (as well as modernisation) of previous pressures, as the trek itself was merely a stage in European expansion. The collision at Vegkop (1836) and the slaughter of Retief's band (1838) coloured and heightened the myths about the Ndebele and the Zulu which the Boers, departing from Godlonton's Grahamstown, took with them in the first place. Black states grew into their own myths. Like the Ngwane in

1828, the Ndebele were now hit by a third and infinitely stronger force: an alliance between the Boers, Griqua and both 'Sotho' and 'Tswana' from the far from depopulated Orange Free State. After bitter fighting during 1838 the Ndebele fled north of the Limpopo. Dingane was eliminated two years later, Mosega and Blood River indices of the true balance of power in the subcontinent. Mpande's kingdom of the 1840s and 1850s was an opportunistic response to the particular outcome of the Anglo-Boer struggle south of the Tugela. Moshoeshoe's precisely contemporary kingdom east of the Caledon had analogous foundations. Both 'Sotho' and 'Zulu' kingdoms were defined in terms of boundaries during a lengthy struggle to prevent themselves caving in completely. Both kingdoms reached their peaks in the 1850s, the former collapsing under Boer attacks in the 1860s, the latter succumbing to direct British invasion in 1879. To repeat an earlier point: at no time can either of these formations be termed 'pre-colonial'. It was the pressures of colonial expansion and slaving which produced them in the first place. Modern concepts of 'pre-colonial societies' and 'Africanist history' have closely accompanied the concept of the mfecane, and have served even when unintentionally, the same type of ends.

Similar patterns of state evolution occurred during the era of the Boer invasions of the northern and eastern Transvaal. Albasini's state on the Letaba, for example, drew peoples fleeing the slave trade at the Bay. In certain respects it paralleled the mini-states set up by Fynn and Farewell on the Mzimkhulu a decade earlier. The Maroteng-Pedi and Dlamini-Swazi 'reactive' states effloresced (after relatively fortuitous beginnings) in the 1840s, reached a peak in the early 1860s, and progressively collapsed after about 1875. Maroteng state building goes back at least to the 1770s. Delius notes a general interconnection between an increased regional violence at that time and the trade at the coast. Not having information about the slaving, however, he quite rightly remained puzzled by the lack of sufficient cause for trends which extended to the Steelpoort. The Dlamini fled from the south Bay area across the Lebombo into the middle Pongola valley, perhaps sometime between 1750 and 1790. The bids to produce 'mfecane' genealogies for both states is somewhat artificial, Delius resorting to a possible Ndwandwe invasion of the Steelpoort valley in c. 1822, Bonner, for the Dlamini, to a hypothesis that Swazi militarism derived from Zwide via Sobhuza's Ndwandwe wife, Fulata. Without the Boer invasions of the 1840s and the slaving at the Bay, however, there would have been nothing to write about. As with his competitor Albasini, Sekwati (Pedi) augmented his following with peoples who had fled both from the Boers and from the eastern low veld, as the Gaza stepped up slave raiding after about 1842. As with Moshoeshoe in the Caledon, Sekwati had to shoulder aside local rivals: who was to create the nucleus of the local 'reactive' state remained in doubt until fairly late. More spectacular still was the expansion of Mswati's 'Swazi' state in the 1850s. Declining slave prices at the Bay induced Manukosi of the Gaza to switch supply to the eastern Transvaal Boers - with payment mainly in guns and horses - whose demand for labour reassembled that of the Albany settlers in the 1820s. Mswati's successful challenge of the Gaza monopoly was accompanied by far-reaching military restructuring in the 1850s. The state began to swell into its later boundaries with the absorption of the hitherto independent amakhandzambile ('those found ahead'), again in the 1850s. Nothing of this was predestined in Sobhuza's reign.

'The mfecane' thus breaks down in every one of its sectors, whether geographical or chronological. The whole is rotten; and so is each of the parts. The attempts to 'reform' the mfecane by Maylam and Davenport by conceding the point about depopulation, or contending that this or that was exaggerated (perhaps a little rephrasing...) are doomed to frustration. (There is no half-way house). The thing is unreformable, unadjustable, unrepairable. Keep it (if you like) or abandon it altogether. In the latter case an enormous hole opens the filling up of which should keep us busy for many years (if we have those years).

In my remaining paragraph I must ultra-briefly turn to the problems inherent in defining and classifying the new type of states which emerged during this (longer: c. 1740s - 1850s) era. They were not specific to southern Africa at all, but resembled (and differed from) contemporary formations in both east and west Africa. The changes did not revolve around the emergence of a 'regimental' or 'raiding' formation: that is a legacy of the Zulu-centric approach, an error which follows from swallowing 'the mfecane'. Yet the Zulu was a variant example of the general process. It was not the emergence of the ibutho, but the restructuring and readaptation of the ibutho in the context of European pressures which was significant. The 'revolution' was not even 'Nguni'. It was not even 'Bantu'. Parallel and equally far-reaching changes took place within 'Tsonga', 'Sotho', 'Tswana', and, for that matter, 'San' and 'Khoi' formations. Given the fusion of different peoples in many of the examples, these terms become a hinderance to analysis. There was such a wide spectrum of equally relevant 'emergent' states, with 'war lord' leaders (to use Martin Hall's term), that it is difficult to know where to place the boundaries. Note the rainbow sequence: Boer commando - Griqua commando - Koranna - Taung - Kololo - Ngwaketse for example. Or, British army - Fingo units - Ndlambe - Tembu - Mpondo - Gcaleka. Or, Fynn and Farewell's organisation - Thuli - Cele - Mbo - Zulu. Alternatively, Albasini's state - Sekwati's - Pedi - 'Swazi' - Gaza - Portuguese slavers - to go round in a circle. In nearly every instance there were increased power of chiefs, new hierarchies, new patronage systems, restructuring of military organisations, the obtaining of firearms, larger size, amalgamations, greater levels of violence etc. To attempt to establish a general 'law' for all this - a sort of mathematical formula - is surely to chase a mirage. None of these adapted states was 'pre-colonial' at any moment: the idea of 'a precolonial mode of production' (southern African variant) is also a fantasy. Each, if I may make my one reference to Perry Anderson, is definable in terms of its 'superstructure'. This gives us greater analytical flexibility, and enough oxygen to be able to return to history and submerge for long enough to be able to retrieve sufficient empirical material free from the worry about having to pronounce a general law. A prize for the one who discovers an unsullied, 'pure' African state, with a real, uncontaminated 'internal revolution'. The mere existence of evidence precludes non-contamination. And with no evidence the secret of the 'inner trajectory of change' will go to the grave in silence. Two things are surely certain: in origin all were 'defensive', or 'reactive' even, indeed, especially when successfully expansionist; and all of them, brought into being by capitalism, embracing what they could of capitalist techniques in order to avoid catastrophe, were, nevertheless, one by one, ununitedly, broken down and exploded by the system which had

jolted them into life.

In Briefest Conclusion

The Afrocentricism, Zulucentricism, and both the chronological and spatial teleological chain reactions of 'mfecane theory' collapse on close inspection. External pressures - particularly the heightened demand fo sugar in Europe and British market and lebensraum requirements - involved change over a much lengthier period than the (in this context) irrelevant boundaries of Shaka's reign. The Zulu were only one of a spectrum of 'reactive' states, some of which experienced accelerated change in the eighteenth century, others only developing after Shaka was dead. There was never either a Zulu or 'Nguni' centre to 'the mfecane'; rather, there were several peripheral but converging foci of white penetration: the Cape, 'transorangia', Natal and the Bay. Black societies were like fish caught in a net: flight from one pressure invariably took them straight into another perhaps worse (the Ngwane nightmare being only the most notable). This accounts for the paradox that the relatively unexceptional slave trade of southern Mozambique came particularly in the period after 1800 to be interinvolved in concatenations and escalations of violence which are unusual in Africa. Whereas the 'normal' slave trade was critically amplified by settler expansion and labour procurement systems, memory of the slave trades was erased by settler propaganda. Removing themselves from the scene of their own impact settlers achieved an historiographical sleight of hand which was perfected over one hundred and fifty years. This vanishing was accompanied by the unscrupulous framing of Shaka and other 'innocent' black figures such as, wierdly, MaNtatisi. The initial alibi of concealing labour raids of the period c. 1820-1870 was overlaid by another in the early twentieth century misaccounting for the land division of 1913. A post 1940s variant depicts the Bantustans as resulting from a self-sequestration by blacks into the areas they occupy today during the 1820s and early 1830s. The longevity of such compound lies was assured by the failure of decolonisation in the aftermath of the Second World War, and by the deceptive normality and quality of South African historiography during the 1960s and 1970s. It was not, therefore, 'the mfecane' that was unique to the world; it was, rather, the unsifted preservation of the flamboyant fictions, fantasies and lies of the era of Fynn, their ornamentation by Theal and his colleagues before the First World War, and their delivery intact to the media, educational and propaganda machinery of one of the most efficient and futuristic of totalitarian states of the present. The resultant even further embroidered mythologies and lies are fed to our schoolchildren and university students daily.

POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY AND THE MAKING OF NATAL'S MFECANE

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Introduction

Over the last twenty years or so the concept of the mfecane has come to be deeply rooted as a notion round which much of the history of southern Africa in the first half of the 19th century is written. As generally used, the term refers to a series of wars and migrations which are supposed to have been sparked off by the emergence of the Zulu kingdom in the late 1810s, and then to have swirled across most of the eastern half of the sub-continent. In the view of many historians, these upheavals were the direct cause of the profound changes in the political map of southern Africa which took place in the 1820s and 1830s, changes which in turn were of the greatest significance in shaping the nature of black-white interaction in southern Africa for the rest of the century. (1)

In a series of so far unpublished papers written since 1983, Julian Cobbing has formulated a radical and sweeping critique of the notion that the mfecane actually happened. (2) While not denying that the history of African societies in the earlier 19th century was marked by numerous violent conflicts, he rejects the particular significance which white writers since at least the mid-19th century have attached to them. He empasizes that they were a continuation of conflicts which had begun long before the 1810s, conflicts whose primary cause was not the expansion of the Zulu kingdom but the onslaught which Dutch and British settlers and imperialists at the Cape and, to a lesser extent, Portuguese slavers at Delagoa bay were making on neighbouring African societies in their unrelenting attempts to seize control of land and labour-power. The upheavals of the times had not one but several epicentres. The

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1. For example J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa, London, 1966, chs. 1, 12; P. Maylam, A History of the African People of South Africa, Cape Town, 1986, ch. 4; R. Edgecombe, 'The Mfecane or Difaqane', in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies, eds., An Illustrated History of South Africa, Johannesburg, 1986, ch. 9.

2. J. Cobbing, 'The case against the mfecane', unpublished seminar paper, University of Cape Town, 1983; 'The case against the mfecane', unpublished seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1984 (a slightly modified version of the UCT paper); 'The myth of the mfecane', unpublished seminar paper, University of Durban-Westville, 1987; 'The mfecane as alibi: thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', unpublished ms., 1987.

role attributed in the literature to the Zulu is not based on historical evidence: rather, it is a product of the search made by imperialist and settler ideologues for a plausible alibi for the colonial-based interests whose aggressions were ultimately responsible for the violence and social disruptions of the period. For their own various ideological reasons, subsequent generations of historians, including that of the present, have either been concerned to maintain the alibi, or at the very least, have done nothing to demonstrate its falsity. From this perspective the notion of the mfecane is nothing but an interest-serving myth. Historians, Cobbing argues, urgently need to abandon not just the term itself, but the whole set of interlinked assumptions, distortions and falsehoods which it embodies, and to address themselves to the business of developing an entirely new analysis of southern African history in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

This paper, which focusses specifically on the Natal region, lends support to Cobbing's notion of the mfecane as myth. (3) It presents, in bald outline, the results of a survey of accounts published since the late 1820s of the upheavals which are supposed to have taken place in Natal south of the Thukela river in the late 1810s and early 1820s. In these literary descriptions, as they have emerged over a period of 160 years, three elements have been found to recur. First, that Natal was 'devastated' (to use one of a group of synonyms which appear in the literature with monotonous regularity) and its population largely exterminated or driven out. Second, that the devastation was the work of the Zulu. Third, that it was carried out as an act of deliberate policy. Over time, the historical context of what is here called the devastation stereotype has varied, but the three elements which make up its content have remained firmly fixed. In its entire history, only one writer has made more than a token attempt to root it in historical evidence. (4) From a historiographical perspective, the mfecane as it is supposed to have happened in Natal turns out to be the latest reworking of a set of ideas whose history dates back directly to the late 1820s and early 1830s. Generation after generation of writers has uncritically reproduced these ideas to form one of the most enduring myths in southern African history-writing. Before the history of Natal in the early 19th century can be rewritten, the poverty of mfecane-theory's intellectual lineage has to be laid bare. This paper aims, by outlining an explanation of how the stereotype came into existence, and why it has survived for so long, to contribute to that process.

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3. The argument that follows is a heavily compressed version of a much longer study written as a chapter of a not yet completed Ph.D. dissertation on the history and historiography of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. My thanks go to Julian Cobbing and Philip Bonner for their critical comments on the fuller version.

4. This was A.T. Bryant: see pp. 10-11 below.

The stereotype created

The history of the devastation stereotype begins soon after the arrival in 1824 of the first party of British traders to establish themselves at Port Natal. Within a short time of their arrival they were beginning to report that the region round Port Natal was largely empty of population, and to develop and publicize an explanation for this phenomenon. This explanation, to the effect that the previous inhabitants had either been killed or driven out by the Zulu under Shaka a few years before, was beginning to appear in Cape Town newspapers in 1825 and 1826, and in printed books by 1827. (5) At the same time specific literary images of the Zulu and of Shaka were beginning to take shape, with the Zulu being described by writers like King and Thompson as the warlike and bloodthirsty agents of Natal's devastation, and Shaka as the ferocious and savage leader who directed them. (6) Over the next decade these ideas were consolidated by a number of other writers - Owen, Pringle, Kay, Boteler, Steedman and, in particular, Isaacs - into literary forms which in their essence have survived to the present day. (7)

Few of these writers had actually set foot at Port Natal, and none of them had been eyewitnesses of the processes of destruction which they adumbrated. The evidence on which they based their descriptions was derived directly or indirectly from Africans living in Natal, but nowhere in the works of these writers is there any mention of the identity of these informants, or of the circumstances in which their testimony was obtained and recorded. Most of the information which was distilled into the devastation stereotype was probably collected from members of the remnant groups which the traders found living about Port Natal and in the neighbouring coastal regions. It is germane to make the point here that Port Natal

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5. B. Leverton, ed., Records of Natal, vol. 1, Pretoria, 1984, p. 51; G. Thompson, Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa, ed. V.S. Forbes, Cape Town, 1967 (1st ed. London, 1827), vol. 1, p. 172, vol. 2, p. 249.

6. Thompson, Travels and Adventures, vol.1, pp. 172, 174-5, vol. 2, pp. 248, 249.

7. H.W. Robinson, ed., Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar Performed...under the Direction of Captain W.F.W. Owen, R.N., vol. 1, Farnborough, 1968 (reprint of 1st ed., London, 1833), p. 71; T. Pringle, African Sketches, London, 1834, p. 362n; S. Kay, Travels and Researches in Caffraria, New York, 1834, pp. 281, 341, 343, 344; T. Boteler, Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia, vol. 2, London, 1835, p. 303; A. Steedman, Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of South Africa, vol. 2, London, 1835, pp. 200-201; N. Isaacs, Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa, ed. L. Herman & P.R. Kirby, Cape Town, 1970 (1st ed. London, 1836), esp. ch. 18.

was situated precisely in the one region of Natal which had in fact been overrun by Zulu forces, (8) and it is likely that the generalized depictions of the destruction of Natal which were noised abroad by the traders were a reflection of the particular experiences of informants from this region.

For their own part, the traders had every interest in propagating the idea that Natal was, by the time of their arrival, largely empty of inhabitants, and that Shaka's Zulu had been the agents of their dispersal or destruction. From the very first, the leading traders at Port Natal were concerned not only to open up commerce with the Zulu but also to try to establish rights to large tracts of land round the port. (9) In the face of the express reluctance of the Cape government to sanction the acquisition of further territorial possessions, (10) they attempted to minimize objections to their proceedings by asserting the claim that the land in question was virtually uninhabited.

If the Port Natal traders had a direct material interest in propagating the 'myth of the empty land', so too did the Cape merchants who in large part financed their early trading ventures. (11) In the late 1820s and early 1830s the rising commercial class and its associates in both the eastern and the western Cape were beginning to exert pressure on the British authorities in Cape Town and London to annex Natal and establish it as a colony of British settlement. (12) This class's spokesmen often used the notion of a depopulated Natal to underpin their arguments for the desirability of the territory's annexation. (13)

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8. This emerges from a piecing together of the evidence contained in A.T. Bryant's works (see pp. 10-11 below) and in the four volumes so far published of The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples, eds. C. de B. Webb & J.B. Wright, Pietermaritzburg, 1976-86.

9. H.F.Fynn, The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn, ed. J. Stuart & D. McK. Malcolm, Pietermaritzburg, 1950, pp. 86-8; Isaacs, Travels and Adventures, pp. 142, 180-1; Leverton, ed., Records of Natal, vol. 1, pp. 37-40, 247-8.

10. Leverton, ed., Records of Natal, vol. 1, p. 36.

11. On the financing of these expeditions see Fynn, Diary, ch. 3; B. Roberts, The Zulu Kings, London, 1974, pp. 8-19, 75-6, 78-81.

12. S. Bannister, Humane Policy; or Justice to the Aborigines of New Settlements, appendices 1, 6 & 7; J. Chase, ed. The Natal Papers, Cape Town, 1968 (1st ed. Grahamstown, 1843), pp. 23-31; P.R. Kirby, ed., Andrew Smith and Natal, Cape Town, 1955, pp. 5-7, 145-6; Roberts, The Zulu Kings, pp. 222-5.

13. Kirby, ed., Andrew Smith and Natal, pp. 148, 155, 170; L. Herman & P.R. Kirby, 'Nathaniel Isaacs: a biographical sketch', in their edition (cited at note 7 above) of Isaacs's

Propagation of the myth thus served a clear material purpose. So too did the fostering of the image of Shaka as the cruel and despotic leader of a warlike Zulu nation. Though in writing of Shaka and the Zulu in lurid detail, writers like King and Isaacs clearly had an eye on their reading public, they and others also wrote to publicize and propagate the pro-annexationist cause. By depicting the Zulu and their king as a potential threat to the security of the Cape's eastern frontier region, or alternatively as the potential allies of rival powers, they hoped to influence the British authorities into annexing Natal and thereby paving the way for the extension of British trade and settlement. (14) Though some scepticism was voiced in the Cape Town press about the reality of the image of Shaka put about by the Natal traders, (15) in the early 1830s the notion of the 'numerous and warlike' Zulu as a 'threat' was becoming widespread in the discourse of Cape merchants and others with an interest in Natal. (16)

By the mid-1830s, then, the devastation stereotype was well established in the literature on southern Africa. It is important for the argument being advanced here to note that of the writers so far cited as having been responsible for fixing the stereotype in print, virtually all were either members of, or had close associations with, the business communities of Cape Town and the eastern Cape. (17) All of them directly or indirectly propounded the virtues of the regions beyond the borders of the Cape colony as fields for the expansion of Cape and British commerce.

From the later 1830s the stereotype began to be taken up and disseminated by members of another influential body of opinion-moulders and image-builders, the missionaries who were active in southern Africa. Though there were wide differences of opinion between them as to the benefits or otherwise of the extension of European settlement, they were united in wanting to promote 'civilized' European government. Many aligned themselves with the merchants' call for the 'opening up' of the interior, and at the same time used much the same kind of his-

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Travels and Adventures, p. xi; R. Godlonton, Introductory Remarks to a Narrative of the Irruption of the Kafir Hordes, parts I & II, Cape Town, 1965 (1st publ. Grahamstown, 1836), pp. 165-6.

14. Thompson, Travels and Adventures, vol. 1, p. 174, vol. 2, p. 249; Isaacs, Travels and Adventures, p. 339.

15. Roberts, The Zulu Kings, pp. 154, 177.

16. Chase, ed., Natal Papers, p. 27; Godlonton, Introductopry Remarks, pp. 162-8, 172; Kirby, ed., Andrew Smith in Natal, pp. 149-51, 153-4, 166-8, 171-2.

17. The evidence is presented in detail on p. 14 of the wider study mentioned in note 3 above.

torical rationale to justify it. (18)

The stereotype appropriated

In the 1840s the hopes of merchants and missionaries for the 'opening up' of Natal at last began to be realized. In 1843 Britain annexed the region between the Thukela and the Mzimkhulu, and in 1849-51, several thousand British settlers were established in the new colony to help speed up the process of 'civilizing' it. But with the achievement of some of the main goals of its progenitors, the devastation stereotype did not wither away. On the contrary, over the next few decades it was vigorously taken up, embellished and propagated by numerous writers in the service of a new cause - that of the Natal colonists.

Though there were often strong differences of opinion between officials, settlers and missionaries over what policies were appropriate for dealing with the colony's now rapidly increasing African population, they were by and large united in the notions that the safeguarding and expansion of their various newly acquired estates required the subordination of Africans to the political tutelage of Europeans. Like colonizing groups everywhere, the Natal colonists sought to justify to themselves and to others both their occupation of lands formerly inhabited by other people, and their status as overlords or would-be overlords of the indigenous peoples. The devastation stereotype was admirably suited to the version of Natal's history which they developed to suit their ideological needs. It justified the presence of European colonists in Natal on the grounds that they had established themselves in a largely empty land. It justified their attempts - ultimately successful - to establish domination of the African population on the grounds that the coming of white rule had put an end to the ravages of the Zulu and inaugurated an era of peace and stability. It justified their continual demands for an increase in the size of the British garrison to defend them against the threat posed by the savage Zulu kingdom across the Thukela.

Perhaps the clearest example of the early appropriation of the devastation stereotype by settler ideologues is to be found in the report, which appeared in 1853, of a major official com-

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18. Kay, Travels and Researches, pp. 281, 341, 343, 344; D. Kotze, ed., Letters of the American Missionaries 1835-1838, Cape Town, 1950, p. 97; G. Champion, Journal of the Reverend George Champion 1835-1839, ed. A. Booth, Cape Town, pp. 15, 62; W. Boyce, Notes on South African Affairs, Cape Town, 1971 (reprint of 1st ed., Grahamstown, 1838), pp. x, 171, 173-4; B. Shaw, Memorials of South Africa, Cape Town, 1970 (1st ed. London, 1840), pp. 44-5; T. Arbousset & F. Daumas, Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North-East of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Town, 1968 (repr. of 1st English ed., Cape Town, 1846), ch. 17, esp. p. 148.

mission appointed to enquire into the state of the colony's African inhabitants. The commission was dominated by representatives of the settlers: its declarations on the precolonial history of Natal were of the kind that became common in the literature over the next seventy years. After Shaka had become king, the commissioners reported, the Zulu became 'a desolating scourge to all the surrounding tribes and nations within a circle of 500 miles'. He 'completely conquered the Natal tribes with immense slaughter, devastated the whole country and added it to his dominions, from the Itongati down to St. John's River'. The survivors were carried off and incorporated in small groups into the Zulu people. 'The Natal tribes then ceased to have any separate national existence ...'. (19)

Stated in these sentences is an important part of the historical creed of an emerging settler society. The last sentence is perhaps the most significant. For intruding settlers, thrown together from disparate backgrounds and attempting to establish, first, a social existence and identity in territory previously inhabited solely by African communities, and second, political domination over their Africa fellow-colonists, it was important to minimize in their own eyes the rights to land of the people among whom they settled. The notion that the African societies which had formerly occupied Natal no longer had any coherent existence was clearly convenient to their purpose.

The accounts of Natal's history which emerged from the pens of colonial-based writers in the 1850s and 1860s served to codify views such as those expressed by the commission. (20) But these writers did not simply reproduce the existing stereotype: they also placed it in a more elaborate historical context. The Cape and British-based originators of the devastation thesis had been concerned primarily to expand the geographical orbit of the Cape's commerce, and had had little interest in investigating Natal's history beyond what was necessary for constructing the thesis in bare outline. The settlers, on the other hand, needed a more elaborate - and denigratory - history of African societies in pre-European Natal: one which spelt out in unmistakeable terms that the history of independent African societies was mostly one of wars and destruction. Civilization in Natal had begun with the com-

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19. Proceedings and Report of the Commission Appointed to inquire into the Past and Present State of the Kafirs in the District of Natal..., Pietermaritzburg, 1853, p. 6.

20. W.C Holden, History of the Colony of Natal, Cape Town, 1963 (reprint of 1st ed., London, 1855), pp. 55-7; and The Past and Future of the Kaffir Races, Cape Town, 1963 (reprint of 1st ed., London, 1866), pp. 9-16, 20-28; J. Shooter, The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu Country, London, 1857, ch. 8; L. Grout, Zulu-land; or, Life among the Zulu-Kafirs, London, n.d. (1863), chs. 7, 8.

ing of Europeans: for its impact to be the more fully apparent, the barbarism and savagery of 'Zulu' society had to be revealed in some detail. Hence in the works of settler ideologues the devastation thesis came to be situated in the context of a 'Zulu' history that extended back into the 18th century and forwards to the Boer victories in the late 1830s and the British annexation in the 1840s. (21)

The stereotype reinforced

The devastation stereotype as it had become entrenched in settler historiography in the 1850s and 1860s survived quite unchanged into the early 20th century. In the late 19th century, as an alliance of British imperial interests and white settler interests in southern Africa set out to bring the sub-continent's African societies once and for all under white domination, the stereotype began to penetrate more widely. It moved beyond the accounts of colonial historians and local travellers to become established in reference works ranging from Natal schools text books to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, (22) and to become almost universally accepted in literary discourse on southern Africa. (23)

Until this time the stereotype had remained based on the most meagre and tenuous empirical evidence, and set mainly in the context of the history of the Natal region. It existed very much as a formula reproduced by rote rather than as scientifically argued history. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries it was for the first time given powerful intellectual underpinning. The voluminous writings of George McCall Theal rooted it firmly in the wider context of southern African history, and the works of Father Alfred Bryant on 'Zulu' history served to give it an apparently firm empirical foundation.

Except for his very earliest work, Theal's histories were strongly pro-settler in their slant. (24) Like other settler

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21. The first author to have developed a detailed account of this history seems to have been Shooter: see his Kafirs of Natal, pp. 249-60.

22. H. Bryan, Our Country: an Elementary History of Natal, London, n.d. (1909), pp. 28-31; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th ed., vol. 24, Edinburgh, 1888, p. 828; and 11th ed., vol. 28, Cambridge, 1911, pp. 1051-52.

23. Only two authors in the period under review have been found in this study to have written in some respects directly counter to the stereotype: A. Wilmot, The Story of the Expansion of Southern Africa, Cape Town, 1895, p. 126; J. Voigt, Fifty Years of the History of the Republic in South Africa (1795-1845), vol. 1 Cape Town 1969 (reprint of 1st ed., London, 1899), pp. 185-92.

24. Recent critical studies of Theal are D. Schreuder, 'The imperial historian as "colonial nationalist": George McCall

historians before and after him, he made no changes to the essentials of the stereotype, but an immensely important innovation on his part was to detach it from the history of the Natal region and set it in a new context. Most previous writers had treated the pre-European history of Natal as part of the overall history of that region: in Theal's works, by contrast, the upheavals in Natal before and after 1820 were treated as part of the history of the African societies of southern Africa in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In his main work, this history was covered in a block of chapters which broke into a sequence of chapters on the history of European settlerdom and officialdom at the Cape. (25)

With hindsight it can be seen that this structuring established the preconditions for the emergence of mfecane-theory. By sharply segregating the histories of African and European societies in southern Africa, it allowed the impact of pre-1820s European settler and imperial influences on African societies largely to be side-stepped, and the violence of the 1820s to be attributed to purely 'African' causes. By linking the history of the Zulu kingdom in this period ethnically with that of other African societies across southern Africa rather than regionally with that of neighbouring societies, both African and European, in eastern southern Africa, it allowed the rise of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom to be portrayed as the spark which touched off a holocaust of intra-African violence which swept across the whole sub-continent. Where, in the earlier literature, the devastations supposedly caused by Shaka had usually been projected as having been confined to the eastern coastal regions, from Theal's time onward they were universally seen as having affected much of the interior as well. The devastation in Natal now came to be seen as simply one aspect of a wider series of wars and migrations.

Schreuder has suggested that Theal's fairly novel sub-continent-wide perspective was rooted in the movement towards the creation of a common anti-imperial 'colonial' identity which was beginning to emerge among the English-speaking commercial classes and Afrikaner rural interests in the Cape in the last two decades of the 19th century. In Theal's view, the central theme of southern African history was the march of European civilization, carried by Boer and British colonists together, across the sub-continent in the face of resistance from barbaric African tribes and of 'meddling' on the part of the British imperial government. As Schreuder puts it, 'It

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Theal and the making of South African history', in G. Martel, ed., Studies in British Imperial History: Essays in Honour of A.P. Thornton, London, 1986, pp. 95-158; C. Saunders, The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class, Cape Town, 1988, chs. 1-4.

25. G.M. Theal, History of South Africa since 1795, vol. 1, London, 1908, chs. 14, 15.

was Theal, in fact, who historically invented white "South Africa"', and his histories provided an important element in the emergence of an ideology of colonial nationalism and white supremacy. (26)

Theal's treatment of the history of African societies, it is suggested here, was a necessary counterpart of his concern with the white colonial civilizing mission. If white colonists were to be seen as the bearers of civilization, then, in a pioneering colonial nationalist historiography that was emerging when the process of bringing African people under the control of white settlers was by no means over, it was important to demonstrate in some detail that the culture of African peoples was barbaric, and their history largely one of war and destruction. The 'Zulu devastations' posited by Theal thus formed an important backdrop to what he saw as the essentially civilizing mission of the Great Trek.

If Theal provided the devastation stereotype with a new context, he added nothing to it by way of fresh evidence. The first author to go much beyond the handful of primary accounts on which the stereotype was based was Father A.T. Bryant, whose career as a writer of history overlapped with the latter part of Theal's. Where Theal had been the first historian in South Africa to produce full-length studies based on intensive, if superficial and selective, archival research, Bryant was among the first writers to produce histories based largely on oral testimony collected from African informants. Between 1905 and 1929 he published a number of works on the history of the Natal-Zululand region which are still widely used - usually quite uncritically - as primary sources. (27) These works were the first to set out detailed, though discontinuous and confusing, accounts of the upheavals of the late 1810s and early 1820s, but, far from challenging the stereotype, Bryant presented his information in such a way as to reinforce it.

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26. Schreuder, 'The imperial historian as "colonial nationalist"', in Martel, ed., Studies in British Imperial History, pp. 96-8, 114-15, 129-33, 138-47. The quotation is from p. 97.

27. Bryant's first major historical work was the essay entitled 'A sketch of the origin and early history of the Zulu people', which was published as a preface to his Zulu-English Dictionary, Mariannhill, 1905, pp. 12*-66*. This was followed by a series of articles published in the newspaper Izindaba Zabantu in 1910-13; these were reprinted after the author's death in A.T. Bryant, A History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Tribes, Cape Town, 1964. His widely influential Olden Times in Zululand and Natal, was published in London in 1929. His major ethnographic study, The Zulu People as They Were before the White Man Came, Pietermaritzburg, 1929, begins with two historical chapters.

Bryant's own work indicated that several 'waves' of non-Zulu invaders had swept through much of Natal some time before the advent of Shaka's Zulu armies, and that Zulu incursions had in fact been confined to a comparatively small area. But, in keeping with the established stereotype, he all but submerged the role played by these precursors in favour of an emphasis on the doings of the Zulu. His dramatized and often hyperbolical description of Shaka's wars and conquests, one inherited directly from the settler stereotype, underscored the idea that Shaka and his 'Zulu murderers' were the main destroyers of Natal. (28) In addition, Bryant's method of presenting the region's history through a recital of the individual histories of the numerous chiefdoms of Natal had the effect of repeatedly bringing Shaka and the Zulu into the narrative in the role of conquerors, exterminators, and tribute-takers. For the reader trying to pick his or her way through the mass of often contradictory historical detail which Bryant presented, the Zulu could hardly have emerged as anything other than the main villains of the piece. In spite of the empirical richness of his account, he was unable to break with the established stereotype.

The stereotype sanctified

In the works of the liberal academic historians who dominated the writing of South African history in English from the 1920s onward, interest both in regional history and in the history of autonomous African societies began to dry up. By this time the affairs of the recently established Union of South Africa were coming to overshadow those of its constituent parts in political significance, and the social and political impact of the country's ongoing industrial revolution was preoccupying its intellectuals as well as its politicians. The consequence was another new turn in the history of the devastation stereotype.

The emergence of liberal historiography in the post-World War I era needs to be seen against the background of the erosion of the bases of the old agrarian-commercial order, the spread of poverty in the African reserves, the large-scale migration of Africans to the urban areas and the resultant problems of social control, and the formation of potentially formidable, if unstable, political alliances between sections of the exploited African proletariat and frustrated and militant elements of the emerging African petty bourgeoisie. For liberal intellectuals these developments posed a profound dilemma.(29)

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28. The phrase 'Zulu murderers' occurs in his Dictionary, p. 49*.

29. On the nature of South African liberalism between the wars see P.Rich, White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, Johannesburg, 1984, chs. 1-3; S. Dubow,'"Understanding the native mind": the impact of anthropological thought on segregationist discourse in South Africa, 1919-1933', unpublished conference paper, Uni-

On the one hand they were concerned about the possible political consequences of increased legal entrenchment of discrimination against Africans, and of the increasing suppression of the material and political aspirations of the African 'elite'. On the other, they were fearful about the threat which, to their minds, the processes of African urbanization and proletarianization presented to 'civilized values' (read 'capitalist order') in South Africa. The response of liberal historians was two-fold. (30) In reaction against the racism of settler historiography they turned their attention to the history of 'race relations' in South Africa, and, to enable liberals the better to grapple with the complex ramifications of the 'native problem', they began to focus on the nature of the historical forces which, as they saw it, had drawn Africans and whites into a common society. Those fields of history which offered little or nothing by way of an explanation of these issues were neglected.

As a result, the writing of precolonial history, whether locally focussed as in Natal colonial historiography, or broadly focussed as in Theal's works, virtually died out. In turn this meant that the devastation stereotype escaped the critical scrutiny of the first generation of academic historians to emerge in South Africa. With their main fields of interest lying elsewhere, these historians were content to absorb Theal's generalized view of the 'Zulu devastations' into their own work, even if in the process they were concerned to strip it of its more racist forms of expression. Thus in the works of writers like Walker, Agar-Hamilton, Macmillan, Hattersley, De Kock, De Kiewiet and others, the notion remained quite unchallenged that Natal had been swept almost clear of inhabitants during wars of extermination waged by Shaka and the

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versity of the Witwatersrand, 1984', pp. 1-22; S. Dubow, 'Race, civilisation and culture: the elaboration of segregationist discourse in the inter-war years', in S. Marks & S. Trapido, eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa, London, 1987, ch. 2. Less critical studies are R. Elphick, 'Mission Christianity and interwar liberalism', in Butler et al., eds., Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Middletown, Conn., & Cape Town, 1987, ch. 3; and J. Butler, 'Interwar liberalism and local activism', in Butler et al., eds., Democratic Liberalism, ch. 4.

30. On liberal historiography from the 1920s to the 1950s see M. Legassick, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography', in S. Marks & A. Atmore, eds., Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, London, 1980, ch. 2; C. Saunders, 'Liberal historiography before 1945', in J. Butler et al., eds., Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Middletown, Conn., & Cape Town, 1987, ch. 7; J. Butler & D. Schreuder, 'Liberal historiography since 1945', in Butler at al., eds., Democratic Liberalism, pp. 148-56; Saunders, Making of the South African Past, chs. 5-9.

Zulu. (31)

But the stereotype did not survive in early liberal historiography simply by default. Part of the neglect of African history by liberal historians from the 1920s onward must also be put down to their often elitist attitude to the culture of the African underclasses, and to their ambivalence on the issue of what political rights to accord to Africans. (32) Even if liberals rejected the notions put forward by racial theorists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the effect that the African 'race' was incapable of 'catching up' with the civilization of the European race, until at least the 1950s many of them still thought of cultural differences in strongly evolutionist and hierarchical terms. Africans were expected to 'adapt' their own cultures in the direction of European culture, and, in effect, to reject their own past, which had little, if anything, to do with 'progress'. From the 1920s, African history was largely discounted by liberal intellectuals, and the study of African societies was increasingly seen as belonging to the emerging discipline of anthropology rather than to history. Now that autonomous African societies had been thoroughly subjugated, their versions of history did not have to be contested, as had been necessary in the era of white settlement: their overlords could simply disregard their history altogether.

In the years between the two world wars one of the central concerns of South African liberal intellectuals had been to try to identify the 'problems' in white-black 'race relations' which were seen as preventing orderly social evolution towards the 'civilized' society which they ardently hoped for. Liberal historians had been concerned to look for the historical roots of those problems as one means of working towards their solution. After the National Party's electoral victory of 1948, and the further entrenchment of racial discrimination and repression, the problem for liberal historians came to be

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31. E. Walker, A Modern History for South Africans, Cape Town, 1926, p. 225; E. Walker, A History of South Africa, London, 1928, pp. 182-3; J. Agar-Hamilton, The Native Policy of the Voortrekkers, Cape Town, n.d. (1928), pp. 2-3; W.M. Macmillan, Bantu, Boer and Briton: the Making of the South African Native Problem, London, 1929, pp. 13-14; A.F. Hattersley, South Africa 1652-1933, London, 1933, p. 75; M.H. de Kock, The Economic Developmentof South Africa, London, 1941, p. 50; C.W. de Kiewiet, A History of South Africa Social and Economic, Oxford, 1941, pp. 49-50.

32. On this ambivalence see Rich, White Power, passim; Saunders, 'Liberal historiography before 1945', in Butler et al. eds., Democratic Liberalism, pp. 139, 145; Butler & Schreuder, 'Liberal historiography since 1945', in Butler et al, eds., Democratic Liberalism, pp. 154-6; D. Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968', in Butler et al., eds., Democratic Liberalism, pp. 117-19, 125-30.

why whites had taken the 'wrong road' and refused to share power with blacks. The focus of their work swung further towards political and constitutional history, with a concomitant further decline in the attention paid to African history. (33)

If early liberal historiography showed little interest either in the history of African societies, or in the history of Natal before the advent of Europeans, these subjects received even less attention in the Afrikaner nationalist historiography that was emerging from the early years of the 20th century onwards. Whether it was in popular histories or in the works of the professional historians who were becoming established in the Afrikaans-language universities after World War I, the focus of this historiography was overwhelmingly on the history of Dutch-Afrikaner societies from the Great Trek to the South African war of 1899-1902. So far as it touched on the history of pre-Trek Natal, it simply reproduced the stereotypes entrenched by Natal settler historiography and by Theal and other contemporary writers, though now placing them in the context of Voortrekker history rather than in the context of Natal's history or the history of African societies. In this context, the devastation stereotype served conveniently to portray Natal as having been emptied of population before the coming of the Voortrekkers. (34) Together with contemporary liberal historians, then, Afrikaner nationalist historians carried the devastation stereotype, set in the context of settler history, from the early 20th century through into the 1960s.

The stereotype africanized

It was not until the 1960s that historians turned back to writing the history of the African societies of southern Africa. As is well known, its revival was an aspect of the growth of interest in African history in general which accompanied the political decolonization of most of the continent north of the Zambezi. The ending of colonial rule stimulated an eager demand among African political activists and intellectuals, and among sympathizers in Europe and North America, for a 'decolonized' African history, one which would rescue Africans from the virtual oblivion to which they had

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33. Saunders, 'Liberal historiography before 1945', in Butler et al., eds., Democratic Liberalism, p. 147; Butler & Schreuder, 'Liberal historiography since 1945', in Butler et al., eds., Democratic Liberalism, pp. 151-4, 160-1.

34. S. Gie, Geskiedenis vir Suid-Afrika, vol. 2, Stellenbosch, 1928, p. 306; E. Jansen, Die Voortrekkers in Natal: Opstelle, Cape Town, 1938, p. 1; A. du Plessis, 'Die republiek Natalia', Archives Year Book for South African History, 1942, part I, Cape Town, 1943, ch. 1; A. van der Walt, 'Die Groot trek tot 1838', in A. van der Walt et al., eds., Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika, vol. 1, Cape Town, 1951, p. 264.

been consigned by colonial historiography, and which would emphasize African 'achievements'. An alliance of African nationalist and metropolitan liberal historians moved to meet this demand by producing history which took as its main themes the emergence of great states in precolonial Africa, the mounting of resistance to European conquest and colonial rule, the growth of African nationalism, and the role of African elites.

Within this context there was published in 1966 the first work since Theal's to attempt a broad synthesis of the history of the upheavals which had taken place in south-east Africa in the 1820s and 1830s. This was J.D. Omer-Cooper's full-length study, The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa. (35) In important respects Omer-Cooper's account was similar to Theal's. It saw the violence of the period as having emanated from a single epicentre, the Zulu kingdom, and as having radiated outward across much of southern and central Africa. Omer-Cooper attributed the ultimate causes of the upheavals to a build-up of population pressure in south-east Africa in the later 18th century, rather than to the personality of Shaka, as Theal had done, and he went beyond Theal in seeing the effects of the violence as having extended over wide areas of Central Africa, and as having persisted into the latter half the 19th century. But, as the title of his book indicates, like Theal he was looking for a compendium explanation to cover what he saw as a single historical phenomenon. (36)

In two respects, though, Omer-Cooper introduced major conceptual innovations into the treatment of the subject. In the first place, in sharp contrast to Theal, who had emphasized the violence and bloodshed that had accompanied the upheavals in order to portray them as an indication of African barbarism and savagery, Omer-Cooper depicted them in positive terms as 'one of the great formative events of African history', as an episode of 'nation-building' on the part of 'a galaxy of great leaders'. (37) In the second place, he gave the upheavals a single label, one which has stuck both in academic and in popular usage ever since. This was the term 'mfecane', which he gave as meaning 'the wars and disturbances which accompanied the rise of the Zulu'. (38) The word had been used sporadically in the literature since the 1920s, though without a clearly defined meaning. (39) Omer-Cooper both standardized its meaning and projected it into general usage.

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35. London, 1966.

36. Omer-Cooper, Zulu Aftermath, introduction & pp. 19-27.

37. Ibid., pp. 4-7.

38. Ibid., p. 5n.

39. Cobbing, 'The case against the mfecane', unpublished paper, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 5.

In his treatment of the region south of the Thukela, to which he devoted a chapter, Omer-Cooper drew heavily on Bryant's Olden Times in Zululand and Natal. (40) There was nothing in his account that explicitly contradicted the devastation stereotype; if anything, The Zulu Aftermath served to give it further academic respectability, and, by presenting it as an integral part of the long-established and now revamped notion freshly packaged as the 'mfecane', to publicize it more widely than ever. From this time on, the history of the stereotype was closely intertwined with that of mfecane-theory.

Few works on southern African history have had so immediate and widespread an effect as The Zulu Aftermath. As Cobbing has pointed out, within a few years of the book's publication both the term mfecane (or difaqane) and the notion that the mfecane was one of the central events of southern African history had become embedded in Africanist discourse outside South Africa. (41) It was widely established in general histories of Africa, in academic articles and monographs, in university and schools text books, and once again, though now in a quite different context, in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. (42)

In the late 1960s and early 1970s South African academics began to catch on to the notion of the mfecane. The first to do so were Afrikaner nationalist historians, who were quick to spot the support which mfecane-theory lent to the ideologically important notion that the first white settlers in the interior of southern Africa had moved into a land largely depopulated by intra-African warfare. (43) A little later, under the influence of overseas Africanists, liberal writers began to incorporate the mfecane into their work as the fons et origo of the processes of African 'state-formation' (another term for 'nation-building') round which they wrote the history of African societies in south-eastern Africa in the first half of

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40. Omer-Cooper, Zulu Aftermath, ch. 10.

41. Cobbing, 'The case against the mfecane', unpublished paper, University of the Witwatersrand, pp. 5-7; and 'The myth of the mfecane', unpublished paper, pp. 8-9.

42. S.M. (Shula Marks), article on the history of southern Africa in Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 17, Chicago, 1974, p. 281.

43. C. Muller, 'The period of the Great Trek, 1834-1854', in C. Muller, ed., Five Hundred Years: a History of South Africa, Pretoria & Cape Town, 1969, p. 125; D. Ziervogel, 'The natives of South Africa', in Muller, ed., Five Hundred Years, pp. 445-8; F. van Jaarsveld, Van Van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd 1652-1966, Johannesburg, 1971, ch. 7; J. Bruwer, article on Shaka in Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa, vol. 9, Cape Town, 1973, p. 598; C. Muller, Die Oorsprong van die Groot Trek, Cape Town, 1974, esp. pp. 74-83.

the 19th century. (44) They were followed by some African nationalist writers, particularly those sympathetic to Zulu ethnic nationalism, for whom the 'nation-building' aspects of the mfecane were an obvious attraction. (45)

By the later 1970s the mfecane was an established 'fact' of southern African history. Though by then a reaction against the more uncritical assumptions and assertions of Africanist history was manifesting itself among liberal and radical-revisionist historians alike, the mfecane lived on in South Africa and abroad virtually unchallenged. In 1983 mfecane-theory found standardized form in the first academic dictionary of south African history to be published. (46) In 1986 it achieved coffee-table status, (47) and in 1987, some twenty years on from The Zulu Aftermath, it was re-invigorated by Omer-Cooper himself in a new text book on South African history. (48) In the late 1980s liberals, radicals, African nationalists, and Afrikaner nationalists continued in an unlikely, if unwitting, alliance, some propounding, some merely accepting, but virtually none challenging the validity of the notion of the mfecane.

Mfecane-theory emerged at a time when liberal and African nationalist historians outside southern Africa were seeking to break away from racist and patronizing colonial cliches about African culture and African history. It is easy to understand why the notion of the mfecane as a period of African 'nation-building' caught on so rapidly among them, and why it survives today in the uncritically Africanist histories that continue to be produced. It is easy, too, to understand the continuing attraction of mfecane-theory's 'depopulation' thesis for the ideologues of apartheid.

More problematic is the failure of contemporary critical lib-

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44. For example the present author's Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg 1840-1870, Pietermaritzburg, 1971, pp. 15-17; several of the articles in C. Saunders & R. Derricourt, eds., Beyond the Cape Frontier, London, 1974; C. Webb, 'Of orthodoxy, heresy and the difaqane', unpublished paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1974; and 'The Mfecane', in Perspectives on the Southern African Past, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1979, ch. 9; T. Davenport, South Africa: a Modern History, Johannesburg, 1977, pp. 10-17.

45. J. Ngubane, 'Shaka's social, political and military ideas', in D. Burness, ed., Shaka King of the Zulus in African Literature, Washington, D.C., 1976, pp. 140, 147.

46. C. Saunders, Historical Dictionary of South Africa, Metuchen, N.J., & London, 1983, pp. 107-8.

47. Edgecombe, 'The Mfecane or Difaqane', in Cameron & Spies, eds., Illustrated History, ch. 9.

48. J.D. Omer-Cooper, History of Southern Africa, London, 1987, ch. 4.

eral and radical-revisionist scholarship to challenge mfecane-theory. At a superficial level this failure can be explained in terms of the general decline of interest among scholars abroad in African history since about the mid-1970s. (49) Researchers are thinner on the ground than they used to be in the days of the Africanist boom, and they have little incentive to tamper with what appears to be a coherent and well-grounded set of notions which puts the precolonial African states of southern Africa firmly on the historical map. In South Africa itself, after a brief flowering in the 1970s, interest in the region's precolonial history has waned as liberal and radical historians have increasingly focussed their research and debates on the effects of capitalist penetration in southern Africa from the late 19th century onward. Partly, then, mfecane-theory survives today by default.

But, at a deeper level of explanation, it survives among liberal historians, as Cobbing has argued, because it functions to obscure the processes by which a white property-owning class came to be politically dominant and in possession of most of the land south of the Limpopo river. (50) By omitting the role of white agency in the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s, and by attributing them ultimately to the rise of the Zulu kingdom, mfecane-theory is able to portray them as a consequence of internecine African conflict. African agency thus becomes responsible for opening the way for the penetration of white settlers into a largely 'empty' interior, and the land-grabbing of whites later in the century can be down-played. Cobbing's argument perhaps overstresses the cohesion and strength of white settler societies in the 19th century, but its central point seems essentially correct. For liberal defenders of South Africa's capitalist order, as well as for the ideologues of South Africa's bantustan policies, mfecane-theory provides an ideologically incontrovertible explanation of the historical basis of South Africa's present-day patterns of land distribution.

Among radical historians too mfecane-theory survives today partly for ideological reasons. The 'structuralist' approach which was dominant among radical writers in South Africa in the 1970s did not encourage detailed scrutiny of historical evidence. While the reaction on the part of many contemporary radical historians against the often reductionist analyses that were generated by their predecessors has made for the production of a far more textured and nuanced kind of history,

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49. T. Ranger, 'Towards a usable African past', in C. Fyfe, ed., African Studies since 1945, London, 1976, p. 17; P. Curtin, 'African history', in M. Kammen, ed., The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States, Ithaca & London, 1980, p. 115.

50. Cobbing, 'The case against the mfecane', unpublished paper, University of the Witwatersrand, pp. 1, 7-8, 16, and 'The myth of the mfecane', unpublished paper, pp. 1, 9-10, 30.

it has also meant a loss of much of the political punch which radical history carried a decade ago. With their focus often on microstudies, and with their tendency to be suspicious of schematizing and generalization, present-day radical historians are often less overtly concerned than the previous generation was to identify and hammer away at the ideological props, such as mfecane-theory, which help sustain the current racial and social order in South Africa.

Conclusion

A hundred and sixty years after it first surfaced, the devastation stereotype lives on, embedded now in mfecane-theory. Cape merchant interests created it in the 1820s and 1830s on the basis of hearsay evidence. Natal settlers from the 1840s onward, the first South Africanists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Afrikaner nationalist historians from the early 20th century onward all had a common vested interest in keeping it alive. Early liberal historians in South Africa, with their attentions elsewhere, incorporated it as an element in what they saw as the not very important history of the country's African underclasses. Later liberal historians, first outside and then inside South Africa, helped resuscitate and reconstruct it in a way that would be aceptable to emerging African nationalist elites. After a brief period of concern with developing new approaches both to pre-industrial history and to the macrohistory of southern Africa, the majority of radical historians turned away towards the more recent past and towards a partially depoliticized social history, leaving the stereotype intact. Present-day writers of all shades of opinion continue to pick it up from the previous literature and to incorporate it into their own work without attempting to seek empirical verification for it. Natal's mfecane exists today by virtue not of historical argumentation but of uncritical repetition of a racist and elitist myth.