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A PEOPLE IN TRANSITION : THE HLUBI IN NATAL

1848–1877

A. Manson

What has often come to be known as the Langalibalele “affair” or “rebellion” in Natal in 1873 has recently been the subject of a considerable amount of attention from historians. Guest’s monograph, *Langalibalele, The Crisis in Natal*, a revised version of his earlier theses,¹ concentrates on the implications of the Langalibalele “incident” for the history of Southern Africa. The way in which the crisis was seized upon by Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, to activate his plans for a confederation of states in Southern Africa is the main theme of Guest’s work. Much of the content of Guest’s research was borrowed by Herd to write a “popular” but vigorous and often incisive historical account of the trial of Chief Langalibalele.² An article by Etherington³ sheds further light on the events immediately prior to the attack on the Hlubi. Making use of information in the archives of the Berlin Missionary Society and the Hermannsburg Missionary Society in Hermannsburg, W. Germany, Etherington gives a blow-by-blow account of the actions of the Natal administration, the white settlers and the Hlubi in the last six months of 1873, showing that they tell mainly “a simple story of tragic misunderstandings”. The purpose of this article is to examine the events of 1873 in the light of Hlubi history from 1848. By examining the “rebellion” of 1873 from a deeper chronological perspective, it is possibly easier to understand the motives of those people involved in this particular crisis.

All the evidence relating to Hlubi history before 1848 indicates that they were a large but politically decentralized people occupying, in 1800, a large tract of territory around the upper Mzinyathi river in south-east Africa.⁴

1. W.R. Guest, “The Langalibalele Rebellion and its consequences, 1873–74”, (unpublished B.A. (Hons.) thesis, Natal University, 1962); and “Natal and the confederation issue in the 1870’s”, (unpublished M.A. thesis, Natal University, 1966).
2. N. Herd, *The Bent Pine; The Trial of Chief Langalibalele* (Johannesburg, 1966).
3. N.A. Etherington, “Why Langalibalele ran away”, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. I, (1978).
4. See A.T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, (London, 1929), pp147-9; J.H. Soga, *The South-Eastern Bantu*, (Johannesburg, 1970), pp. 402–10; James Stuart Collection (Killie Campbell Africana Library, File 59, nbks. 29 and 30, evidence of Mabhonsa).

Under Mthimkhulu, Chief of the Hlubi in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, it appears that there was a tendency towards political centralisation under a single authority. However, the trend towards increased political control over a large area of land was not as marked among the Hlubi as it was with other chiefdoms in the Phongola-Thukela region.⁵ Consequently, the Hlubi fled in groups from the Mzinyathi, following the disturbances caused by the war between Shaka and Zwide in about 1819.

However, in the late 1820's and early 1830's the Hlubi were able to begin a process of re-formation within the Zulu Kingdom, firstly under Dlomo, Mthimkhulu's heir, and then under Langalibalele. By about the time when trekker groups arrived in south-east Africa in 1837, the Hlubi under Langalibalele appear to have re-established their homes at the confluence of the Mzinyathi-Ncome rivers (Buffalo-Blood rivers). At this time Langalibalele is reported by Mabhonsa, an elder of the Hlubi interviewed by James Stuart in 1909, as having eleven *amabutho* (age-regiments) as opposed to two known regiments in Mthimkhulu's time and none in the period of Mthimkhulu's father, Bhungane.⁶

It has been suggested that the functions of the *amabutho* in Nguni society were being transformed in the early nineteenth century and that they were becoming "units with a wide range of socially important duties expected of them".⁷ By keeping men in *amabutho*, the Chief could delay the marriage age and was able to divert labour from production for the homestead to production for himself. Power could be centralized in the person of the Chief and his advisors. Thus, in Langalibalele's early years as Chief of the Hlubi, their society was undergoing a radical transformation, one of the most important results of which was an increase of the Chief's authority over his adherents.

In the reign of Dingane the Hlubi appear to have enjoyed a certain amount of independence from the central Zulu authority. Dingane probably permitted the re-constitution of the Hlubi under Langalibalele because they formed a defensive front on the kingdom's north-west flank, the direction in which

5. Possible reasons for this centralisation of political power are given by M. Gluckman, "The Kingdom of the Zulu", in M. Fortes and E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems*, (London, 1940); A. Smith, "The Trade of Delagoa Bay in Nguni politics, 1750-1835", in L. Thompson (ed.), *African Societies in Southern Africa*, (London, 1969); J.J. Guy "Production and exchange in the Zulu Kingdom", and "Ecological factors in the rise of Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom", (Papers presented to workshops at University of Lesotho, 1976 and University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1977); H. Slater, "Transitions in the political economy of South-east Africa before 1840", (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1976), pp. 71-92.
6. James Stuart Collection, File 59, nbk. 29 p.8; J.B. Wright, "Pre-Shakan age-group formation among the northern Nguni", *Natalia*, No. 8, (1978), p.11.
7. Wright, "Pre-Shakan age-group formation", p.1, from Bryant, *Olden Times*, pp. 641-2.

the Ndebele kingdom lay. Thus independence was threatened in the 1840's by the jostling for political dominance that was taking place in south-east Africa between groups of trekkers, Mpande (the Zulu king after 1840), and finally the British. Late in 1847 Mpande, in a manoeuvre probably designed to test his spheres of influence in south-east Africa, launched an attack against the Hlubi. They were able to evade the first Zulu *impi* by moving quickly northwards, but with another Zulu attack imminent, Langalibalele and his advisors decided, some three or four months later, to seek permission to move into Natal.⁸

It is wrong therefore to regard the Hlubi as typical of groups of Africans who entered Natal in the 1830's and 1840's from across the Mzinyathi-Thukela or from south of the Mzimkhulu. Although nominal vassals of the Zulu, the Hlubi seem to have enjoyed a large measure of independence. Moreover, Langalibalele, a young man of about thirty years of age, appeared to hold firm control over the newly regenerated Hlubi chiefdom. As John Shepstone later remarked when he was Acting Secretary for Native Affairs, Langalibalele "was about the most independent chief in Natal".⁹ In addition, the Hlubi crossed into Natal with nearly all their cattle and as a composite group, Langalibalele claiming to have lost only one man in the course of the entire Zulu attack.¹⁰

After about eighteen months near the Klip River in Northern Natal, the Hlubi were forcibly expelled from this district and were settled by the Natal government in a location situated on the upper Bloukrans and Little Bushman's rivers. Here they were expected to guard the white farmers along the Bushman's river from Sanraids into Natal. Despite the presence of established leadership structures, the possession of large herds, and access to some good grazing and cropping land, the Hlubi were not easily able to re-establish themselves in their former agricultural pursuits.

Adaptations had to be made to the colonial system which demanded from the Hlubi money in the form of rents and taxes. Because the boundaries of the location were not properly delineated, some of the Hlubi found themselves, in the early 1850's, resident on privately owned (but unoccupied) land and were forced to pay a rent either in cash or kind. Those who settled on occupied farms were obliged to offer rent in the form of labour. Members of the Hlubi who lived in the locations had to find ways of paying a hut-tax of seven shillings a year imposed by the administration in 1849 on Africans living in locations in Natal. Money had to be raised, either by working for the

8. James Stuart Collection, File 59, nbk. 30, pp. 9-10, evidence of Mabhonsa; CSO, 44 No. 37, Statement of Hadebe to T. Shepstone, 21 March, 1848.

9. Quoted in D. Welsh, *Roots of Segregation, Native Policy in Natal 1845-1910*, (Cape Town, 1971), p. 113, from James Stuart Collection, "Notes on Sir T. Shepstone", by J. Shepstone.

10. CSO 44, No. 37, Statement of Hadebe to T. Shepstone, 21 March, 1848.

whites or by selling agricultural surplus to the colonists.¹¹ Whether as rent-payers, tax-payers or labourers, the Hlubi were now bound into a cash nexus and into the economic system of the whites.

However, within this system there were certain parts of action which the Hlubi could follow. Some individuals, particularly the younger men, seem to have voluntarily entered into employment with the colonists in the late 1850's and 1860's.¹² In 1858 John Macfarlane, the Magistrate at Weenen, reported that "considerable numbers of the tribe of Langalibalele are in the custom of going to the Cape Colony to hire as servants" where they were paid higher wages than in Natal.¹³ A year later Macfarlane again reported that many of the Hlubi were working in the "lower districts" of Natal, where they were taking advantage of the increased rates offered there.¹⁴ It seems likely that many of the younger men could earn sufficient income from working for the colonists to purchase their own cattle which they exchanged for wives. In this manner they would have been able to establish their own homesteads and to by-pass the social mechanisms that kept a young man subordinate to his elders.

For some of the younger men there appear to have been very definite advantages to living under white overlordship. Not only could a man buy wives and status at an early age in life but, by placing himself outside the area of the jurisdiction of the powerholders in Hlubi society, he could avoid paying tribute or rendering service to the Chief. One Hlubi tribesman told the court during the course of a trial of Hlubi warriors, that when he began working for a white farmer he no longer had "to arm myself under Langalibalele (as) on former occasions".¹⁵ This did not mean however that all Hlubi who went out to work wanted to escape from the ambit of "traditional" control. Some were undoubtedly forced to seek employment outside the location by the need to pay taxes or fines. But it must be noted that the opportunities for the Hlubi to remove themselves from the sphere of chiefly command increased once they lived in the colony of Natal.

The movement of people away from the location, and the formation of Hlubi homesteads on private or Crown land represented a severe reduction of the authority of the Chiefs and elders. Langalibalele took action, in 1850's and 1860's, which seemed calculated to counter this trend among his followers. He discouraged his followers from working or living on neighbouring farms,

11. This process has been observed by C. Bundy, "African peasants and economic change in South Africa, 1870-1913", (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1976), pp. 222-52.

12. Anon. *The Kafir Revolt in Natal in the year 1873; Being an Account of the Revolt of the Amahlubi Tribe under Chief Langalibalele* (Pietermaritzburg, 1874); Statements of Baleni, p. 68; Tshiabantu, p. 75, Gelikana, p. 93; Kolwane, p. 100.

13. SNA 1/3/7, no. 67, Macfarlane to Shepstone, 7 May 1858.

14. SNA 1/3/8, no. 50, Macfarlane to Shepstone, 4 October 1859.

15. Anon. *The Kafir Revolt*, Statement of Baleni, p. 68.

he assisted people from other districts of Natal or from outside Natal's borders to settle in his location, and it appears as though he tried to act as a spokesman for Hlubi who resided outside the location.¹⁶

The difficulties for Langalibalele of ruling his subjects were compounded by the fact that the colonial government looked upon Chiefs as its agents in the administration of African affairs.¹⁷ While appointed Chiefs owed their elevation to the Government and were usually amenable to governmental control, hereditary Chiefs such as Langalibalele were less disposed to accept the authority of the Supreme Chief. Chiefs were often obliged to fulfil functions which demeaned them in the eyes of their own subjects. For example they had to provide labourers for the unpopular *isibhalo* (forced labour) system and were often called to account for the behaviour of all their followers, even if they were not location-dwellers. The demands of the colonial authorities upon Langalibalele gave rise to a number of altercations which were revived at his trial in 1874 to prove his general "contumacious disposition". In 1855 for example, Langalibalele angered the local magistrate, Macfarlane, by refusing to co-operate in the removal of Hlubi cattle infected with lung-sickness (bovine pleuropneumonia).¹⁸ And in 1869 Langalibalele was fined ten shillings and reprimanded for failing to ensure the payment by his followers of a £5 fee for African marriages under the provisions of the 'Marriage Act' of 1869.

The discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West in 1868 gave impetus to the trend of migration from the location and increased the difficulties of rule for the powerholders in Hlubi society. The Hlubi, favourably placed geographically for travel to the fields and pursuing an established pattern of migrancy to the Cape, took advantage of the higher wages offered at the fields as no other group of Africans did in Natal.¹⁹ As increasing numbers of Hlubi men became enmeshed in the colonial economy it became even easier for a commoner to escape from the jurisdiction of the ruling hierarchy. Thus the problems of control for Langalibalele became even more complex.

In the early 1870's therefore, Langalibalele found that his adherents were leaving the location in greater numbers than before and were placing themselves increasingly under white overlordship. According to a contemporary, the exodus of Africans to the diamond fields had "revolutionised the ideas and feelings of the native race. It had undermined the political influence

16 See SNA 2/1/3, Minute Paper, Putile vs. Struben, 11 September 1851; SNA 1/3/4, no. 95, Blaine to Shepstone, 10 July 1855; SNA 1/3/4, no. 26, Blaine to Shepstone, 20 February 1855, SNA 1/3/7, no. 38, Macfarlane to Shepstone, 6 March 1858.

17 See Welsh, *Roots of Segregation*, pp. 111-13.

18 SNA 1/3/4, nos. 140, 147, Macfarlane to Shepstone, 6 October 1855, 11 October 1855.

19 See R.F. Siebörger, "The recruitment and organisation of labour for the Kimberley diamond fields 1871-1888", (unpublished M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1975), p. 18; SNA 1/3/23 pp. 649-656, Mellersh to Shepstone, 14 February 1873.

of the elder chiefs, such as Langalibalele".²⁰ This was the position in which Langalibalele found himself in the early 1870's. Over a period of twenty years in Natal his influence and power had been whittled away as many of his subjects expanded into the wider colonial world and the authorities sought to make him a puppet of the administration.

In order to obtain a fuller picture of the position of the Hlubi, it is important to examine developments taking place among the White Weenen country farmers, the Hlubi's neighbours, in the late 1860's and early 1870's. The discovery of diamonds had profound effects upon the midland and northern district farmers of Natal. Agriculture in Natal had stagnated in the 1850's because of the difficulties of obtaining labour and the lack of a domestic market.²¹ Many landowners gave up the idea of farming altogether and were content to lease land to Africans.²² The result was that Africans in Natal, possessing both land and family labour, were able to provide for the limited but nevertheless fairly lucrative domestic market.²³ With the opening up of the diamond fields however, came the possibility that farming operations in the midlands and northern districts could be established on a commercial footing.

However, the white farmers of Weenen county were unable to take full advantage of the new markets presented by the concentration of people at the diamond fields. The financial position of many whites in Natal between 1865 and 1869 was precarious owing to a slump in the economy. It became impossible to raise loans and there was little money available for land purchase. Several Weenen county farmers ran up large debts.²⁴ In addition, many farmers in the northern districts, who were predominantly wool producers, were severely hit by outbreaks of "Blue-tongue" among their flocks in the mid 1860's and by a dramatic fall in the price of wool in the late 1860's.²⁵ The quickening economic tempo caused by the discovery of diamonds raised hopes among white land owners that they could restart farming on a commercially viable basis. However, the sheep farmer "had no means to re-coup his losses" because many had concentrated totally on wool production.²⁶ Moreover, farmers who had managed to weather the

20 T.J. Lucas, *The Zulus and the British Frontiers*, (London, 1879), p. 161.

21 Bundy, 'African peasants', pp. 225-35.

22 H. Slater, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal: the Natal Land and Colonisation Company 1860-1948", *Journal of African History*, XVI, (1975), pp. 262-64.

23 Bundy, "African peasants", pp. 230-7; N.A. Etherington, "Natal's first Black capitalists", *Theoria*, XLV, (1975); N.A. Etherington, "African economic experiments in colonial Natal, 1845-1880", *African Economic History*, no. 5, (1978).

24 B.J. Leverton, "Government finance and political development in Natal, 1843 to 1896", *Archives Year Book for S.A. History* Vol 1, (Pretoria, 1970), pp. 99-101.

25 J.M. Sellers, "The origin and development of the Merino Sheep industry in the Natal Midlands, 1856-1866", (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1946), p.50.

26 Leverton, "Government Finance", p. 101.

slump and the decline of the sheep industry were still unable to produce for the Griqualand West market because of the unavailability of black labour. A final reason why white farmers were unable fully to reap the advantages of the higher prices offered at the fields was that they were coming into competition with African producers. In 1869 the *Natal Witness* tersely summed up the position: "The Kafirs are coming into competition with the white man and are fairly beating them in the markets".²⁷ The following year Lieutenant-Governor Keate informed the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley, that the Africans in Natal were land-holders, and "as such they are producers, in which they compete with the colonists. The habits of industry they are gradually contracting make this competition year by year more serious".²⁸

The inability of white farmers to compete successfully with their African neighbours in the production of foodstuffs gave rise to frequent jealousy and resentment. This was particularly so in the Weenen district, where the wealth of the Hlubi was well known. This wealth is probably best reflected in the increase of cattle owned by Africans in the Weenen magistracy. In 1866 they were the owners of 51,478 head; in 1872 of 70,998. While this increase may be partly attributable to natural increase or improvements in counting methods, it is interesting to note that the Africans of Weenen District in 1866 were the third largest group of African stock-owners in Natal, yet by 1871 they owned more cattle than the more populous districts of Pietermaritzburg and Klip River.²⁹ It can be assumed that the Hlubi, who comprised about a third to a half of the total number of Africans in the magistracy,³⁰ substantially increased the number of cattle in their possession from about the mid-1860's. Evidence that the Hlubi were increasing agricultural production is given by Missionary Hansen who observed in 1873 that the Hlubi had substituted the hoe for the plough in three-quarters of their cultivated fields.³¹

The resentment of the white farmers against their Black neighbours in the vicinity of Bushman's river was given expression at a meeting in Estcourt in 1872. Here a prominent Bushman's river farmer, J.B. Wilkes, told the assembly of farmers,

You are aware, as employers of labour, of the great difficulty in obtaining it. There is a native policy in this country opposed to labour. In fact in the locations, and in various other places — Crown lands — these natives have plenty of land and large flocks, and they are independent of labour.

27 *Natal Witness*, 12 January 1869.

28 G.H. Vol. XXII, no. 1269, L.C. no. 5, Keate to Kimberley, 24 October 1870.

29 *Natal Blue Books*, Statistical Returns 1866-1872.

30 B.B.P., C.-1141, *Langalibalele and the Amahlubi Tribe*, p. 14

31 N.A. Etherington, "The rise of the Kholwa in South-East Africa: African Christian communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Yale University), p. 253.

Wilkes went on to remark that he could

of late years see a marked difference in the behaviour of Kafirs Formerly it was the custom of Kafirs not to travel with cattle without a pass. Is it so now? No. The other day, seeing two driving cattle, I asked for their pass and they answered with the greatest insolence (that) they wanted none, as they were for their Chief Ballela. They would not have answered so some years ago.³²

A letter from an Estcourt farmer to the *Witness* in 1873 conceals his resentment of conditions in the Weenen district in quasi-religious terms:

Verily the land is dried up like unto a withered leaf, and blades of green grass are few and far between. The sheep and goats of thy servant are perishing of want. There is a green and fertile country above us, from the headwaters of the great Tugela to the head of the little Bushman's river, but this is reserved for the favoured Black children of Cain.³³

However, the authorities were extremely concerned about the stagnation of white agriculture in Natal, particularly as African labour in the late 1860's was siphoned off to the diamond fields. From the time he had taken office, Shepstone had sought means of increasing the flow of Africans into the labour market without basically altering his policy in regard to African land tenure in Natal. For example, he attempted to force African Chiefs to impress their subjects as labourers for the colonists. In the late 1860's he adopted an extra-territorial labour policy, drawing labour into Natal from as far distant as Tsongaland in 1869.³⁴ But as long as Africans in Natal had access to land in the locations and on privately owned white farms, there was bound to be shortage of labour for white employers.

The situation in 1873 between the Hlubi on the one hand, and the settlers and officials on the other, pointed towards a confrontation. Langelibalele was losing control over many of his adherents and was attempting to assert his authority over them and to assert his independence from the administration. Farmers in the Natal midlands resented "not only the economic success"

32 *Natal Witness*, 3 September 1871.

33 *Natal Witness*, 7 October 1873.

34 C. Ballard, "Migrant labour in Natal 1860-1879: with special reference to Zululand and the Delagoa Bay hinterland", *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. 1, (1978), pp. 25-41.

of Africans in the vicinity but also the fact that they withheld labour from them; and the Natal authorities, concerned about the parlous state of white agriculture in the inland districts of Natal, were keen to rectify the situation. This did not mean that a conflict was inevitable, or that it should be violent. Furthermore, there was no specific cause that in any way could set in motion a dispute. But there were certain factors causing dissension between the Hlubi and the colonists.

It is important therefore to summarise the events from early 1873 to late October 1873 to understand how this dissension turned into violence. In the early months of that year Macfarlane decided to enforce the Gun Law against Langalibalele. The Hlubi Chief, for reasons which are not clear, refused to send in any of his followers guns for registration. It was rumoured among Africans in Weenen magistracy that guns held at Macfarlane's office in Estcourt were often damaged or not returned.³⁵ Langalibalele claimed later that he did not know which of his followers owned guns, neither had he the means of enforcing their collection.³⁶

Whatever the reason, Langalibalele sent no reply to Macfarlane and in April messengers arrived from Estcourt instructing Langalibalele to appear in Pietermaritzburg to account for his lack of response to Macfarlane's orders. He temporised, finally sending his chief *induna* Mabuhle to Zwart Kop with a message that a painful leg prevented his arrival. He did however travel to Estcourt, where he found only Rudolph, Macfarlane's interpreter, a man with whom he had had a long-standing feud.³⁷ An altercation followed, Rudolph accusing the "old ruffian" of failure to pay his taxes.³⁸ This visit, instead of being interpreted as a possibly conciliatory move on Langalibalele's part, served only to aggravate the position between him and the local white officials.

In May another order from Macfarlane to meet Shepstone was apparently ignored. Early in June the Hlubi took fright from the presence of the Weenen/Karkloof volunteers in the vicinity of the location. The presence of this camp at this time caused concern because the volunteers had already held their annual camp.³⁹ It seems probable, as Etherington has argued, that the presence of the camp raised suspicions among the Hlubi that they were either about to be attacked or were under surveillance.⁴⁰

35 F.E. Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin* (Westport, 1970), p.22.

36 T.J. Lucas, *The Zulus and the British Frontiers*, pp. 160-1.

37 R.N. Curray (ed), *Letters of a Natal Sheriff: Thomas Phipson, 1815-76*, (Oxford, 1968), p. 183.

38 SNA 1/6/8, p.12, Macfarlane to Shepstone n.d., enclosing Rudolph to Macfarlane, 21 May 1873.

39 B.P.P. C-1141, p.56.

40 Etherington, "Why Langalibalele ran away", p.12.

It appears at this point that Langelibalele again attempted to meet Macfarlane in order to break the deadlock between him and the authorities. He sent three men to Estcourt to pay the taxes which were overdue (presumably those referred to by Rudolf). These men took the opportunity to explain that Langelibalele would meet Macfarlane in Estcourt but saw no reason to travel to Pietermaritzburg. Colenso's defence of Langelibalele later showed that he had a fear of travelling to the seat of government because he regarded it as a prologue to his capture and his people's destruction.⁴¹ A few days later Langelibalele attempted to get Faku, Macfarlane's *induna*, to intercede with Macfarlane on his behalf. But by this stage Macfarlane was in no mood for concessions. "Even if Balele should obey before his (Pine's) arrival," he wrote, "I would allow him to hang on till you (Shepstone) determine the course to be taken. Signal punishment it must be."⁴² Macfarlane appeared to want an officially sanctioned punishment to be executed as early as July. However this was not speedily forthcoming as Shepstone was away in Zululand from mid-July to mid-September, conveying to Cetshwayo the Natal government's recognition of his accession to the kingship. But Macfarlane was prepared to wait and in this manner closed the door to further negotiation. He may have remained "cool" about the situation, as Etherington claims, but his aim to administer "signal punishment" and his warning that it would "never do to give way now"⁴³ cannot be seen in any other way than as an undisguised statement of his intention to strike at Langelibalele.

While Shepstone was away, local white farmers such as David Grey and Frederick Moon were fanning the flames of settler resentment. Undoubtedly, Macfarlane was annoyed at the rumour-mongering activities of these people. His anger stemmed from a fear that the panic would spread throughout the district and prevent the government from bringing the Hlubi Chief to heel in an orderly fashion. It was the Weenen country farmers in their fear of a native uprising, and in their desire, patently seen by Captain Lucas, the magistrate of Klip river, to "force the hand of the Governor and oblige him to take action in the field",⁴⁴ that caused Macfarlane's plans for an officially conducted and disciplined punishment of the Hlubi to go awry.

The alarmist activities of the whites in turn caused panic among the Hlubi. Many of them returned to the location⁴⁵ either to protect their property or simply to see what was happening. Langelibalele appeared to be losing control of the situation among the Hlubi. He may have wished to

41 *B.P.P.*, C-1141, pp. 38-40.

42 SNA 1/6/8, no. 6, Macfarlane to Shepstone, 3 July 1873.

43 *Ibid.*

44 SNA 1/6/8, no. 30, Lucas to Shepstone, n.d.

45 *Extra to Natal Witness*, 28 October 1873.

terminate the dispute, but he had manoeuvred himself into a corner. What had begun probably as a gesture of defiance turned slowly into the reality of defiance. Macfarlane was not prepared to compromise, nor were the Weenen Country farmers. But even more significant was the fact that Langalibalele was surrendering control to the young Hlubi man in the location. Missionaries Hansen and Neizel, respectively of the Hermannsburg and Berlin Missionary Societies, observed the large numbers of young men thronging around their Chief, urging him not to travel to Pietermaritzburg on any account.⁴⁶ Power had passed out of the hands of the elders by October 1873 and a group of younger advisors (Magongolweni, Keve, Mabalule and Nkumjana) now counselled the Chief.⁴⁷ The crisis illustrates the transformation that had taken place in the traditional leadership structure of the Hlubi chiefdom. Nearly twenty years earlier, Bishop Colenso, on a visit to the Hlubi, noted how Langalibalele turned to his elders for advice (although he was at this time a fairly young man of about 35 years).⁴⁸ But in 1873 Langalibalele's chief counsellors were apparently pleading with the white missionaries in an attempt to seek their intercession with the authorities. Had Langalibalele not once been a powerful and influential Chief, and had his powers not been diminished by the incorporation of his adherents into the colonial economy, he may not have felt the need to take a stand against the authorities. But this was not the case, and a relatively trivial issue such as the refusal to register guns became complicated by mutual fears and panic, allowing the settlers and some white officials an opportunity to give expression to their resentment, jealousy and ambitions.

The final outcome has been widely recorded. A force was sent to arrest Langalibalele, whereupon he fled from Natal with many of his supporters. This precipitated an attack upon their location by a British force that dispossessed the Hlubi and Ngwe (a related group accused of assisting the Hlubi) of their land and wealth. A week after the military sweep of the Hlubi location, the *Witness* suggested that "there is no location in the colony so suitably situated for occupation by white settlers";⁴⁹ and soon after, in late November, Lieutenant-Governor Pine informed Kimberley of his plan to "re-people the locations (of the Hlubi and Ngwe) entirely by white settlers."⁵⁰ During the next six months, over 160 applications were lodged for 2 000 acre grants of land in the location and the successful applicants took up residence in the latter half of 1874.⁵¹

In the first half of 1874, sales of captured Hlubi and Ngwe cattle took place in Estcourt and Pietermaritzburg,⁵² money from these sales going

46 *Berliner Missionsberichte*, 1874, p. 347.

47 Anon. *Kafir Revolt in Natal*, p.82.

48 J.W. Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, (Cambridge, 1855) p.124.

49 *Natal Witness*, 18 November 1874.

50 *B.P.P.*, C-1025, p.19, Pine to Kimberley, 29 November 1873.

51 C.S.O. Vol. 1910; Applications are dispersed throughout this volume.

52 *The Natal Colonist*, 3 January 1874; *Natal Witness*, 1 May 1874.

to the Government. By February 1875 £24,558 had been realised from the sale of captured Hlubi and Ngwe stock.⁵³

As early as November, Macfarlane wrote to Shepstone suggesting that the labour of Hlubi and Ngwe male prisoners could be "utilised in the form of chain gangs",⁵⁴ and in the same month the *Natal Mercury* suggested that prisoners could be farmed out to work for white farmers.⁵⁵ In January the Legislative Council passed a bill enabling the government to assign prisoners as servants to private individuals.⁵⁶ By the end of the year, 532 Hlubi were working for whites in the Pietermaritzburg and Weenen districts alone.⁵⁷ The main beneficiaries of this scheme were B. Wilkes, R. Ralph and J. Barnard, all farmers from Weenen Country, who employed 124 Hlubi between them.⁵⁸

The haste with which Hlubi land was occupied by whites, the numerous applications for members of the chiefdom as labourers and the eager manner in which their property was bought up by the colonists suggest, as Guest has observed, that the attack on the Hlubi may "have been engineered with a deeper purpose in view than those professed at the time".⁵⁹ The complaint attitude of the Natal authorities to the wishes of the colonists after November 1873 strongly suggests that the government regarded the recalcitrance of the Hlubi as a fortuitous opportunity to destroy the chiefdom, and, at the same time, to appease colonial opinion by forcing several thousand Africans onto the labour market. Thus de Kiewiet over forty years ago interpreted the dispossession of the Hlubi as an:

intemperate and vindictive manifestation of the desire of the colonists to destroy what they conceived to be the too great economic independence of the natives, to limit their lands, and finally to limit the "restraints" that kept them from freely entering the labour market.⁶⁰

Even after the British Government, bowing to pressure from Bishop Colenso in Natal and humanitarian societies in Britain, had agreed to recompense the Hlubi for some of the losses they had sustained, the Natal authorities made only superficial efforts to carry this through. The Hlubi were given a choice of returning to the location or of living with other African groups in Natal. However, the location had been reduced in size, and, during the fourteen or fifteen months that the Hlubi were still under sentence,

53 *B.P.P.*, C.—1187, enclosure 4 in No. 4, Pine to Carnarvon, 22 February 1875.

54 SNA 1/6/8, no. 71, Macfarlane to Shepstone, 24 November 1873.

55 *Natal Mercury*, 27 November 1873.

56 GG 1874, Law No. 18, 15 January 1874.

57 *B.P.P.*, C.—1187, Enclosure 3 in no. 4, Pine to Carnarvon, 22, February 1875.

58 *Natal Witness*, 27 January 1874.

59 Guest, "Crisis in Natal", p. 26.

60 C.W. de Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa*, (Cambridge, 1937), p.37.

had been populated by Africans "loyal" to the government.⁶¹ Consequently, many of the Hlubi opted not to return to the location. Magistrates' reports in 1875 and 1876 show over a thousand Hlubi living with the Thembu or Chunu near Estcourt or at Ladysmith or near the Thukela river.⁶² Groups of Hlubi who had fled Natal in 1873-74 during the disturbances, were reported living in the Harrismith district and in Lesotho.⁶³ Most of these people were reported as being employed by whites as farm labourers or as migrant workers at the diamond fields.⁶⁴ Although Hlubi released from gaol in Pietermaritzburg received some compensation in the form of supplies,⁶⁵ the majority, unlike the Ngwe, were not compensated either in cattle or cash. Under these conditions, many of the people of the chieftdom would have been forced to become wage-labourers.

Moreover Shepstone, because he figured so prominently in Carnarvon's plans for a confederation in Southern Africa, was still allowed a free reign over African administration, and in accordance with his "new policy (as he called it) to destroy Chieftainship"⁶⁶ he was determined to keep the Hlubi weak, leaderless and divided. Thus Langalibalele was banished for life to Robben Island and after his sentence was revoked by Carnarvon, he was kept prisoner near Cape Town. When he was finally allowed to return to Natal in 1887 he was obliged to live under a government *induna* in the Zwartkops location. Pine, on Shepstone's recommendations, ordered the Secretary for Native Affairs to instruct Wheelwright, the Superintendent of the new, smaller Hlubi location, to place those people returning to the location under "Headmen who owe their elevation to the Government".⁶⁷

Thus a large number of the Hlubi were initially, if not permanently, unable to assume their former occupations as peasant producers. Many were forced into a position of clientship with other groups of Africans in South Africa or were obliged to become wage-labourers. The courses of economic activity open to them in the 1850's and 1860's were now closed. The ruination of the prosperous Hlubi people pre-dates, by some two decades, the beginnings of a similar but more intense and widespread destruction of an independent peasantry in Natal.⁶⁸ Significantly, the ruin of the Hlubi followed the first major catalyst in the transformation of Natal's economy

61 *B.P.P.*, C.-1322, no. 27, Wolseley to Carnarvon, 17 May 1875.

62 SNA 1/6/, Reports on border disturbances and native locations, 1865-1876.

63 GH 1635, No. 62, R.M. Newcastle to Shepstone, 19 May 1875.

64 GH 1635, No. 64, R.M. Ladysmith to Shepstone, 20 May 1875.

65 *B.P.P.*, C.-1342, Enclosure in No. 23, Wolesley to Carnarvon, 7 May 1875.

66 SNA 1/7/7, Reports, August 1873 to November 1876, Minute by T. Shepstone, 18 October 1875.

67 SNA 1/6/8, No. 166, Pine to Shepstone, 15 October 1874.

68 See Bundy, "African peasants", pp. 252-65; Slater, "Land, Labour and Capital", pp. 275-82; Etherington "African economic experiments in Natal", p. 1.

– the discovery of diamonds. The more thorough devastation of an independent black peasantry in Natal followed two further catalysts, the development of the Witwatersrand mining industry and the opening of the Klip River coalfields, both of which created an expanded market and intensified the need for a mass labour force in Natal.

The Hlubi chiefdom was in a transitional state when it entered Natal. From 1848 it was altered in a different way as many members of the group were incorporated voluntarily or forcibly into the wider colonial economy. But up to 1873–74, there were several avenues of economic action which the Hlubi could pursue. Thus many Hlubi were able easily to meet the monetary requirements of the state by selling agricultural surpluses or cattle, and were able to continue living as agriculturalists and herders. But by depriving the Hlubi of much of their land, by expropriating their livestock, and by destroying their leadership structures, most members of the chiefdom were stripped of their options. While other Africans in Natal were relatively slowly transformed from peasant producers to wage-earners, for the Hlubi this process was dramatic and traumatic. The pivotal point of this change was the crisis of 1873–74. It is in the light of transitions that were taking place in the political economy of South Africa (and Natal particularly) and within Hlubi society that one can also profitably view the misnamed Hlubi rebellion of 1873.