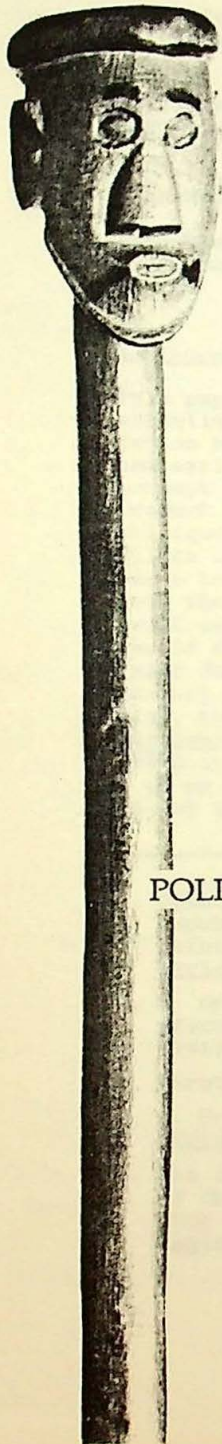


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THE 'MFECANE' AFTERMATH

towards a new paradigm

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POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN NATAL IN THE LATE
18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURIES

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POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE THUKELA-MZIMKHULU REGION OF
NATAL IN THE LATE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURIES

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1. Introduction

This paper is the third in a series in which I essay to establish a new baseline for research into the history of the region between the Thukela and Mzimkhulu rivers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In the first, I argue that the concept of the mfecane as it applies to this region is largely a product of colonial mythologizing, and, in support of the critique of mfecane theory developed over the last few years by Julian Cobbing,¹ that the concept is of no analytical value and needs to be abandoned by serious scholars.² (By the mfecane I mean the notion that the series of wars and migrations which swept over much of south-eastern Africa in the 1820s was a result of the supposedly explosive expansion of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka.) In the second paper I argue that the standard account of the history of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region before 1830, that which appears in A.T. Bryant's Olden Times in Zululand and Natal,³ is also based largely on colonial-made myths and cannot be regarded as reliable.⁴ In the present paper I go on to outline an empirical answer to the question of what to put in its place.⁵

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1. Cobbing's critique has been advanced in a series of mostly unpublished papers. See also his article, 'The mfecane as alibi: thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolombo', Journal of African History, vol. 29 (1988), pp. 487-519.
 2. J. Wright, 'Political mythology and the making of Natal's mfecane', Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol. 23 (1989), pp. 272-91.
 3. First published in London in 1929.
 4. J. Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and "the wars of Shaka"', History in Africa, vol. 18 (1991), in press.
 5. The interpretation put forward in this paper summarizes some of the main findings of my recently completed Ph.D. thesis, 'The dynamics of power and conflict in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: a critical

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Bryant's account of the history of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu area is scattered through his synthesis of the history of the broader Natal-Zululand region. This is based on a model which was first clearly articulated in the writings of settler and missionary historians in colonial Natal in the 1850s and 1860s.⁶ In terms of this schema, the region's history falls into four phases. In the first, the ancestors of the African population of Natal migrated into the region from further north in Africa. By Bryant's reckoning, this process had taken place during the period from about AD 1500 to 1700.⁷ The migrations were succeeded by a second phase, described by Bryant as a 'golden age',⁸ during which the people, divided into numerous small patriarchal 'clans', lived in relative peace and plenty. The third phase began dramatically in the 1810s with the sudden rise of the Zulu kingdom under the 'tyrannical' rule of Shaka and the 'invasion' of the region south of the Thukela by his 'blood-thirsty' armies. In the space of a few years, the region was 'devastated' and 'depopulated'. This phase gave way to a fourth, the era of 'civilization', with the arrival in the Zulu kingdom of British traders from the Cape in the mid-1820s.

Since the rise of Africanist history in southern Africa in the 1960s, a number of academic writers have gone a long way towards reclaiming the history of the area north of the Thukela (i.e. what is now called Zululand) in the period under study from the domination which settler-oriented historiography has exercised over it for a century and a half. By contrast, the contemporary history of the region south of the Thukela has received very little attention from academic historians, and Bryant's account of it remains dominant. This paper aims to demonstrate that, on the basis of the existing evidence, a quite different interpretation can be put forward. For background material it draws on several of the recently produced academic studies of the history of the region north of the Thukela.⁹ For empirical evidence it makes use particularly of the collection of oral traditions recorded by James Stuart in the first two decades of the 20th century.¹⁰ The period which it covers

reconstruction', University of the Witwatersrand, 1990.

6. For an account of the development of this model see Wright, 'Dynamics of power and conflict', pp. 1-6.
7. Olden Times, chs. 1 & 2, & pp. 232-5, 313-17.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
9. Especially D.W. Hedges, 'Trade and politics in southern Mozambique and Zululand in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1978; and C.A. Hamilton, 'Ideology, oral tradition and the struggle for power in the early Zulu kingdom', unpubl. M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986.
10. Stuart's notes are housed in the Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of Natal, Durban. Translated and annotated renderings of the oral testimonies which he recorded are currently being published by the University of

begins in the 1770s and 1780s with the first impact on the territories south of the Thukela of the political conflicts which were then building up in the region north of the river. It ends when, in the later 1820s, a new set of historical forces, rooted in developments in the political economy of the Cape colony, began to make itself felt in these territories.

2. Intrusions from the north c.1770-c.1815

The notion that the first black inhabitants of south-east Africa migrated into the region within the last few centuries was firmly put to rest in the 1970s by the results of archaeological research into the history of its Iron Age farming communities. Indications are that the first farmers established themselves in the Natal-Zululand area in the first few centuries of the AD era.¹¹ Whether they were migrants or, on the other hand, indigenous hunter-gatherers who took to farming is a subject of debate.¹² Research into the area's Iron Age history has focussed mainly on investigating subsistence patterns and settlement types and distribution, and very little is known about the political and social structures of local communities until the mid-16th century. From this period date the first written descriptions, made by Portuguese shipwreck survivors, of the region's inhabitants. Over the next two hundred years or so parties of European castaways and traders produced enough by way of written ethnographic evidence to indicate that at this time the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region was occupied by numerous small, politically uncentralized chiefdoms.¹³

This picture is consistent with one derived from recorded oral traditions, whose historical reach in this area extends back to about the mid-18th century. Evidence from the traditions suggests that at this time there were several dozen or several score discrete chiefdoms in the region, the largest

Natal Press in a series of volumes entitled The James Stuart Archive of Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples. Four volumes, edited by C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, have so far been produced (Pietermaritzburg, 1976-86). Three more are planned.

11. The evidence has recently been summarized in T. Maggs, 'The Iron Age farming communities', in A. Duminy & B. Guest, eds., Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910: a New History, Pietermaritzburg, 1989, pp. 28-33.
12. See M. Hall, The Changing Past: Farmers, Kings and Traders in Southern Africa, 200-1860, Cape Town, 1987, ch. 3.
13. For a survey of the evidence see Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 19-22. For a sceptical analysis of these sources by an anthropologist see J. Argyle, 'An evaluation of Portuguese shipwreck narratives as sources for Nguni ethnology', unpubl. paper, University of Natal, Durban, 1990.

of which probably numbered no more than a few thousand people and extended over no more than a couple of thousand square kilometres. In some areas, neighbouring chiefdoms whose rulers claimed to be genealogically related constituted loose clusters, which can be called 'paramountcies', headed by a senior chief. The authority exercised by these figures seems to have been mainly formal in character, and there is no evidence for the existence at this period of politically centralized and socially stratified polities, or what can be called embryonic 'states'.¹⁴

Patterns of political change in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region cannot be traced before the later 18th century, when the effects of conflicts which were taking place in the territories to the north of the Thukela began to make themselves felt. From about the third quarter of the 18th century, certain chiefdoms - notably the Thembe, Mabhudu, Dlamini, Ndwandwe and Mthethwa - in an area which extended from beyond Delagoa Bay to south of the Mfolozi river were beginning to expand in size and power, and increasingly to clash with one another and with their smaller neighbours. The causes of these developments are a subject of debate among historians of the period: the position taken here is that their initial dynamic, at least, seems to have been provided by the rapid expansion after about 1760 of an international trade in ivory at Delagoa Bay.¹⁵

Particularly significant in its import for political developments south of the Thukela was the expansion of the Mthethwa chiefdom in the area between the lower Mfolozi and the Mhlathuze.¹⁶ In what seems to have been a defensive reaction to the increase in Mthethwa power, the ruling groups in a number of chiefdoms along the lower Thukela sought to strengthen their polities by enlarging the territories which they dominated. The

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14. J. Wright & C. Hamilton, 'Traditions and transformations: the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in Duminy & Guest, eds., Natal and Zululand, pp. 57-9; Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 16-18.
 15. Pioneering research in this field was done in the 1960s by Alan Smith. See his essays, 'The trade of Delagoa Bay as a factor in Nguni politics 1750-1835', in L. Thompson, ed., African Societies in Southern Africa, London, 1969, ch. 8, and 'Delagoa Bay and the trade of south-east Africa', in R. Gray & D. Birmingham, eds., Pre-Colonial African Trade: Essays on Trade in Central and Eastern Africa before 1900, London, 1970, ch. 13. A more detailed investigation is that of David Hedges in his unpublished thesis, 'Trade and politics', chs. 3, 6. See also the arguments in Wright & Hamilton, 'Traditions and transformations', pp. 59-62, and Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 27-33.
 16. On the history of the Mthethwa chiefdom in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, see Hedges, 'Trade and politics', pp. 183-93; Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 112-38.

most successful in this aim seem to have been the rulers of the Qwabe chiefdom in the area between the Mhlathuze and the Thukela.¹⁷ Chiefdoms further up the Thukela which seem to have begun expanding in the later 18th century were those of the Nyuswa, the Mkhize and perhaps the Chunu.¹⁸ Inland, on the upper Mzinyathi, the Hlubi chiefdom was responding in much the same way to the threat posed by the growth of the powerful Ndwandwe chiefdom to the east.¹⁹

The expansion of the Qwabe seems to have been the main factor in dislodging a group of Thuli from the upper Matikhulu area, and, sometime in the 1770s or 1780s, sending them migrating southwards across the Thukela. After forcing their way through a number of small coastland chiefdoms, the Thuli re-established themselves in what is now the Pinetown-Durban area. From there they proceeded to extend their domination over the inhabitants of a territory which reached perhaps fifty kilometres inland, and the same distance southwards to the Mkhomazi river. Several offshoot chiefdoms set themselves up further south between the Mkhomazi and the Mzimkhulu. Numbers of groups displaced by these incursions moved still further southwards to the region of the Mzimvubu river.²⁰ These movements, it is argued here, may have been a factor in stimulating the initial expansion of the Mpondo chiefdom, which, by the 1820s, dominated the area about the lower Mzimvubu.²¹

Sometime after the migration of the Thuli, the continued expansion of the Qwabe was instrumental in pushing the Cele too across the lower Thukela. Their ruling house settled on the lower Mvoti, and subsequently supplanted the Thuli as rulers of the chiefdoms of the coastlands as far south as the Thongati-Mdloti area.²²

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17. On the expansion of the Qwabe see Hedges, 'Trade and politics', pp. 169-77; Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 155-61; Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 35-6.
 18. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 36-7.
 19. Ibid., pp. 37-9. On the expansion of the Hlubi see also J. Wright & A. Manson, The Hlubi Chiefdom in Zululand-Natal: a History, Ladysmith, 1983, pp. 4-10. On the expansion of the Ndwandwe chiefdom see Hedges, 'Trade and politics', pp. 156-64, P. Bonner, 'Early state formation among the Nguni: the relevance of the Swazi case', unpubl. paper, University of London, 1978, and P. Bonner, Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: the Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State, Johannesburg, 1983, ch. 2.
 20. On the migration of the Thuli and their establishment of a new paramountcy see Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 40-9.
 21. W. Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860 to 1930, Johannesburg, 1982, pp. 9-10.
 22. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 53-6.

The Thuli and Cele paramountcies were much larger than any of the historically known chiefdoms which had previously existed in the coastlands. Though there is no evidence surviving on the subject, the spheres in which they exercised political influence probably extended beyond the Mzimkhulu to the south, and into the Natal midlands to the west. But in both polities the central authority remained weak. In neither case were the rulers able to establish centralized institutions of government which gave them the degree of control over their adherents that was exercised by leaders in the Ndwandwe and Mthethwa chiefdoms. Both the Thuli and Cele polities remained loose aggregations of chiefdoms rather than budding states.²³

In the first ten or fifteen years of the 19th century, pressures from the north and east on the polities along the line of the Thukela and Mzinyathi rivers seem to have been increasing. In the coastlands, the Qwabe were seeking to expand southwards across the Thukela at this time. Further up the river, the Nyuswa may also have been doing so.²⁴ In the Hlubi chiefdom on the upper Mzinyathi, the authority of the paramount was weakening as subordinate sections of the ruling house sought to challenge his authority.²⁵ The extent to which these developments were a response to external pressures is not clear, but it is likely that they were in some measure a product of intensifying conflict between the emerging states of the Thukela-Delagoa Bay region, particularly between the Mthethwa and the Ndwandwe. By the late 1810s these conflicts were coming to a head, with major consequences for the inhabitants of the territories to the south.

3. Upheavals in the Thukela valley in the later 1810s

The causes of the confrontation between the Mthethwa and the Ndwandwe towards the end of the 1810s are still being explored. One influential explanation, which derives from the work of Smith and Hedges, sees this conflict as a more or less inevitable outcome of a growing rivalry between the two chiefdoms for control of the local trade in ivory to the chiefdoms on the southern shores of Delagoa Bay.²⁶ More recently, Julian Cobbing has pressed the argument that the fierce political struggles which were building up in the Delagoa Bay hinterland, including the Natal-Zululand region, in the later 1810s and early 1820s were largely the product of a rapid

23. Ibid., pp. 50-6.

24. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 164-8.

25. Ibid., pp. 177-8; Wright & Manson, The Hlubi Chiefdom, pp. 10-11.

26. Smith, 'The trade of Delagoa Bay', p. 185; Hedges, 'Trade and politics', p. 165.

increase after 1815 in a trade in slaves at Delagoa Bay.²⁷ Cobbing's hypothesis is becoming the subject of a vigorous academic debate, but on the face of it, it seems highly likely that by the later 1810s the impact of the Delagoa Bay slave trade was increasingly being felt in the regions to the south. The trade in slaves from south-eastern Africa to Brazil was rising rapidly after 1810,²⁸ and was supplemented by a continuing trade to the French colony on Bourbon (Reunion) island and to the British colony on Mauritius.²⁹ The export of slaves from Delagoa Bay was well-established by the early 1820s,³⁰ and it is a reasonable supposition that it was already expanding in the later 1810s. As Cobbing suggests, the violent aggressions of the Ndwandwe against neighbouring chiefdoms, including the Mthethwa, at just this time may well have been in part a response to pressures exerted by slaving groups nearer the bay, or possibly even the product of slaving operations on the part of the Ndwandwe themselves.³¹

The two hypotheses outlined above are not mutually exclusive. Whatever the precise explanation of the Mthethwa-Ndwandwe conflict, it is clear that its political consequences were felt

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27. Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp. 503-7; J. Cobbing, 'Grasping the nettle: the slave trade and the early Zulu', unpubl. paper, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1990.
28. J. Miller, 'Slave prices in the Portuguese southern Atlantic, 1600-1830', in P.E. Lovejoy, ed., Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade, Madison, 1986, pp. 44, 59. See also the figures in D. Eltis, Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, New York & Oxford, 1987, pp. 249, 250.
29. E. Alpers, Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa, London, 1975, p. 214; M. Jackson Haight, European Powers and South-East Africa: a Study of International Relations on the South-East Coast of Africa 1796-1856, London, 1967 ed. (1st ed. 1942), pp 158-62; B. Benedict, 'Slavery and indenture in Mauritius and Seychelles', in J. Watson, ed., Asian and African Systems of Slavery, p. 138; R. Beachey, The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa, London, 1976, pp. 27-35; G. Campbell, 'Madagascar and Mozambique in the slave trade of the western Indian Ocean 1800-1861', in W. Clarence-Smith, ed., The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1989, pp. 166-93; M. Carter & H. Gerbeau, 'Covert slaves and coveted coolies in the early 19th century Mascareignes', in Clarence-Smith, ed., Indian Ocean Slave Trade, pp. 194-208.
30. A. Smith, 'The struggle for control of southern Mocambique, 1720-1835', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1970, pp. 350-1; Smith, 'The trade of Delagoa Bay', in Thompson, ed., African Societies, p. 177.
31. Cobbing, 'Grasping the nettle', pp. 11-12.

over a wide area. As the struggle between them came to a head, some of the smaller chiefdoms caught up in it began to take to flight. One of the first to do so was the Ngwane chiefdom under Matiwane, which lay on the western borders of the Ndwandwe polity. After an attack by the Ndwandwe, Matiwane and many of his adherents made off to the westward.³² Falling upon the ruling section of the Hlubi, they killed the paramount chief, Mthimkhulu, and seized his cattle. Upon this, the Hlubi polity, which was little more than a loose clustering of semi-autonomous chiefdoms, broke up into its constituent parts. Some remained in the Hlubi territory, some moved off to the west and north in bids to maintain their autonomy, some made their way to give their allegiance to neighbouring chiefs, and some submitted to Matiwane.³³

To put a safe distance between themselves and the Ndwandwe, the Ngwane continued their migration south-westward across the Mzinyathi and the Biggarsberg into the valley of the upper Thukela. After establishing themselves near what is now Bergville, they began to bring the neighbouring Bhele and Zizi chiefdoms under their sway. Some groups of Bhele and Zizi sought to preserve their political independence by moving away southward to the Mzimkhulu region: others, unable to offer resistance to the Ngwane, had no option but to give their allegiance to Matiwane. Within a short time the Ngwane headed a paramountcy which dominated the upper Thukela basin.³⁴

The migration of the Ngwane caused major political and social disruptions among the chiefdoms between the Mzinyathi and the Thukela, and brought a new set of pressures to bear on the polities south of the river. Soon afterwards, a major shift in the balance of power at the epicentre of conflict to the north sent more shock waves across the region. In an attack on the Ndwandwe, the Mthethwa army was defeated and driven back, and the Mthethwa chief, Dingiswayo, captured and killed.³⁵ These events effectively destroyed the loosely structured Mthethwa state, and confirmed the position of the Ndwandwe as the dominant power between the Black Mfolozi and Phongolo rivers. To the south, the long-established Qwabe chiefdom and the newly rising Zulu chiefdom were left as the dominant polities in the area between the White Mfolozi and the Thukela.

The Zulu chiefdom at this time was headed by Shaka kaSenzangakhona, who, after the death of his father, had been set up as chief by his overlord, Dingiswayo, and encouraged to expand his

32. The sources on the flight of the Ngwane are often contradictory. The argument put forward here is based on the analysis in Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 110-16, 178-9, 210-13.

33. For an analysis of the evidence on the Ndwandwe attack on the Hlubi see Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 213-18.

34. Ibid., pp. 218-23.

35. Hedges, 'Trade and politics', p. 193; Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 136-7.

chiefdom as a sub-agency of the Mthethwa power.³⁶ After the defeat of the Mthethwa, the Ndwandwe launched several raids against the Zulu, which the latter survived only with difficulty. Faced with defeat and perhaps destruction, the Zulu leadership under Shaka moved rapidly to coerce or cajole neighbouring chiefdoms into a defensive alliance against the Ndwandwe.³⁷ Through a combination of military aggression and political manoeuvring, Shaka first brought the relatively powerful Qwabe chiefdom under his authority, and then turned his attention to the other chiefdoms of the lower Thukela valley. The Chunu under Macingwane were able to avoid the fate of the Qwabe by migrating across the Thukela, probably to the upper Mvoti region. The Mkhize under Zihlandlo submitted to Shaka without a struggle. The Nyuswa tried to resist, but were defeated by a Zulu force sent against them. To the west of the former Chunu territory, the Thembu chiefdom, which, under the leadership of Ngoza, was itself trying to expand at this time, sought to maintain its independence by shifting westward across the lower Mzinyathi.³⁸

The events described above completely transformed the political scene in the lower Thukela valley and in the extensive territories between the upper Thukela and the Mzinyathi. The chiefdoms which had previously been jostling for influence along the lower Thukela were now subordinate to the expanding Zulu power. The Hlubi chiefdom, which had dominated the basin of the upper Mzinyathi, had fragmented. The Ngwane were consolidating a new chiefdom about the upper Thukela. Poised uncertainly between the Ngwane and the Zulu were the newly displaced Chunu and Thembu chiefdoms.

4. Zulu expansion over the lower Thukela in the early 1820s

Zulu expansion towards the lower Thukela was primarily a defensive move undertaken to eliminate potential threats from the south, and to acquire the resources of cattle and manpower which were urgently needed to strengthen the new and relatively weak Zulu state against Ndwandwe raids from the north.³⁹ Shaka so far succeeded in his strategy as to be able to defeat and drive off another Ndwandwe raiding force. Soon afterwards, the Ndwandwe state broke up into a number of separate groups, all of which shifted away to the northward. The Khumalo under Mzilikazi moved to what is now the south-eastern Transvaal, the Msane under Nxaba to eastern Swaziland, and the Jele under Zwangendaba and the Gasa under Soshangane to the Delagoa Bay

36. Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 125-33, 225-7, 335 ff.

37. Ibid., pp. 247 ff.

38. Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 160-75, 247, 252-3, 258-60, 476; Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 180-5, 223-8.

39. Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 172-5.

area. The Ndwandwe ruling house itself moved across the Phongolo into southern Swaziland.⁴⁰

In the traditions of the Zulu ruling house, as rendered for instance by Bryant, the collapse of the Ndwandwe state came to be explained as the outcome of defeat at the hands of the Zulu. The Ndebele, Msane, Jele, and Gasa, as well as the Ndwandwe ruling house, were portrayed as having 'fled' from Shaka.⁴¹ The evidence from sources drawing on non-Zulu traditions (see the previous paragraph) points to a rather different explanation. While the rise of the Zulu power may well have been an important factor in the break-up of the Ndwandwe state, and in the shift of its offshoot chiefdoms northwards rather than in any other direction, it is unlikely to have been the only one. The most likely kind of explanation is that the state fell apart as a result of internal stresses which were exacerbated by external factors like the emergence of Zulu power and also, as Cobbing has argued, the expansion of the Delagoa Bay slave trade.⁴²

The break-up of the Ndwandwe polity and the consequent migration of several offshoot chiefdoms from the region north of the Black Mfolozi left something of a political vacuum in these territories. The prime strategic concern of the Zulu leaders was now to establish effective domination over the remaining groups in the area, and to secure their northern borders against possible raids on the part of groups in the turbulent regions beyond the Phongolo. To this end the Zulu set up a number of military settlements between the Black Mfolozi and the Mkhuze.⁴³ Contrary to the stereotyped view, they did not at this stage have anything like the military or political capacity to extend their domination two hundred kilometres further north to Delagoa Bay.

Again contrary to the common view, it is clear that the emergent Zulu state was not strong enough to pursue a policy of active expansion to the southward either. In this direction, the main aims of its rulers were to establish a stable and secure border in the valleys of the lower Thukela and lower Mzinyathi. To this end they sought to break up or drive away

40. On the Khumalo see J.R.D. Cobbing, 'The Ndebele under the Khumalos, 1820-1896', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976, pp. 15-16; on the Msane see Bryant, Olden Times, p. 460; on the Jele and Gasa see G. Liesegang, 'Nguni migrations between Delagoa Bay and the Zambezi, 1821-1839', African Historical Studies, vol. 3 (1970), pp. 317-23, and Smith, 'The struggle for control', unpubl. thesis, pp. 250-9; on the Ndwandwe see Bonner, Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires, p. 29.

41. Bryant, Olden Times, pp. 206-9, 279-80, 422-3, 448, 459-60.

42. Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p. 506.

43. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 188-9, 192. See also Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 219-24; Hedges, 'Trade and politics', pp. 214-16.

chiefdoms which they regarded as posing a threat to the stability of the region, and set up three semi-autonomous client polities to maintain control over it.

The sequence of developments that took place in this area in the late 1810s and early 1820s is impossible to establish with any certainty, but the overall consequences of Zulu intervention are clear enough. To the south-west they sought to establish their authority over the Thembu, who, to avoid domination either by the Zulu on one side or by the Ngwane on the other, made off southwards through the Natal midlands and ultimately across the Mzimkhulu. To maintain control over the area on either side of the lower Mzinyathi, Shaka set up Jobe of the Sithole as ruler of a partly autonomous client polity.⁴⁴ South of the Zulu heartland, Shaka set up Zihlandlo, ruler of the long-established Mkhize chiefdom, in a similar capacity. With Shaka's backing, Zihlandlo began expanding the area under his authority southwards across the Thukela towards the Mvoti, where the Chunu chiefdom had recently re-established itself.⁴⁵ In the face of Mkhize expansion, and alarmed by the Zulu attack which finally triggered off the migration of the nearby Thembu, the Chunu once again moved off. After pushing their way through the small polities of the Natal midlands, they halted in the mid-Mkhomazi-mid-Mzimkhulu area, and once again sought to consolidate.⁴⁶ Not long afterwards, pressures exerted by the Sithole and Mkhize to the east and the Ngwane to the west sent a large group of Memela, Nhlanguini and others from the northern midlands migrating southward.⁴⁷

South of the lower Thukela Shaka set up a third client polity to watch over Zulu interests. Its core was formed by the Cele chiefdom, which had dominated the lower Mvoti region for several decades, and had submitted to Shaka's overlordship without resistance. Under the rule of Magaye, who had been placed in the chiefship by Shaka, the Cele were required to exercise dominion over the numerous smaller chiefdoms in the coastlands which had been forced to acknowledge Shaka's supremacy. To buttress Magaye's authority, and to enable him the more effectively to raid cattle from the territories further south on Shaka's behalf, the Zulu chief stationed a force of armed men known as the iziYendane in his chiefdom. Within a short while this force had broken up the Thuli paramountcy in the lower Mngeni-lower Mkhomazi area. As ruler of the remnant Thuli chiefdom, Shaka elevated Mathubane, who belonged to one of its junior sections. Like other local chiefs, he came under the overall authority of Magaye.⁴⁸

44. Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 253-5; Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 247-8.

45. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 232-8, pp. 251-2.

46. Ibid., pp. 242-7.

47. Ibid., 249-51.

48. Ibid., pp. 252-66; Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 469-72.

By the early 1820s the emerging Zulu state had established indirect domination over a belt of territory on its south-western and southern borders which extended from the lower Mzinyathi south-eastward between the Thukela and Mvoti rivers to the coast, and thence south to the lower Mngeni-Mlazi area. But its authority in this region was not uncontested. To the west, the Ngwane chiefdom dominated the basin of the upper Thukela. To the south, the Chunu were seeking to establish their power between the middle Mkhomazi and the Mzimkhulu.

5. Upheavals in the midlands in the late 1810s and early 1820s

Since it was first articulated in print by British settlers in Natal and the eastern Cape in the late 1820s and the 1830s, the idea that the region south of the Thukela river was devastated and depopulated in a series of bloody attacks by Shaka's armies has gained virtually universal acceptance in the literature. Since the 1860s, when Theophilus Shepstone, Secretary for Native Affairs in the colony of Natal, first recorded evidence to this effect, some historians, including Bryant, have accepted that other groups from north of the Thukela were also instrumental in causing the political, social and economic upheavals which affected the territories south of the river soon after Shaka's rise to power.⁴⁹ But, again virtually without exception, these writers have portrayed these groups as having been 'driven out' by Shaka's armies. In their accounts the primary responsibility for the devastation of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu which is supposed to have taken place continues to be attributed to the Zulu.⁵⁰

A critical re-examination of the evidence points to a very different set of conclusions. The Zulu were not the main agents of the upheavals which took place south of the Thukela. The migrant groups which mainly caused them - the Ngwane, the Thembu, the Chunu, and the Memela and Nhlanguwini - were not in any simple sense 'refugees' from the Zulu, and, in the case of the Ngwane, were not refugees from the Zulu at all. And neither these groups nor the Zulu universally devastated or depopulated the region south of the Thukela.

As far as the Ngwane are concerned, the evidence suggests, as indicated above, that they took to flight after an attack by the Ndwandwe in the late 1810s. Why they chose to flee rather than give their allegiance to the Ndwandwe, or, alternatively, why the Ndwandwe drove the Ngwane out instead of seeking to incorporate them into their own polity, are subjects which need to be explained, not glossed over. That 'flight' was necessarily the response to 'attack' cannot simply be assumed, as it usually is in accounts informed by the notion of the mfecane. The explanation in this case has much to do with the

49. See the discussion in Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 99-110.

50. See for example J. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa, London, 1966, pp. 156-7.

aggressiveness with which the Ndwandwe were waging war by the late 1810s. To the south they were confronting the Mthethwa, and to the north the Dlamini, and very probably, slaving groups from the Delagoa Bay region as well. They may possibly have been engaged in slaving themselves: if so, this would help explain why they seem to have been less concerned with bringing the Ngwane chiefdom under their authority than with breaking it up.⁵¹

Very little is known about the chiefdom which the Ngwane set about re-establishing on the upper Thukela. What evidence there is suggests that, far from simply massacring or 'driving out' the local Zizi and Bhele communities, as conventionally they are supposed to have done,⁵² the Ngwane leaders sought to incorporate as least some of them as political subjects.⁵³ It made little sense for leaders who were constantly trying to augment the manpower and womanpower under their control to kill off the members of communities which they subjugated, even if one makes the assumption, which is dubious anyway, that they had the physical capacity to do so. Pace the specific case of the Ndwandwe cited above, most wars during the period of heightened violence which undoubtedly occurred in the late 1810s and 1820s were probably fought to capture cattle, to destroy the leadership structures of resistant chiefdoms, and to acquire more adherents, not to destroy populations.

Numbers of Zizi and Bhele gave, or were forced to give, their allegiance to Mawane. Others made off to the southward across the Mzimkhulu river. Little is known about the impact of their migration on the chiefdoms of the Natal midlands; as their movement seems to have taken place through the sparsely inhabited uplands along the Drakensberg, it probably had little directly destabilizing effect.⁵⁴

A much more disruptive series of migrations took place through the midlands in the early 1820s, when, as has been described in the previous section of the paper, the Zulu were consolidating their hold on the lower Thukela valley. The process of their expansion was watched with increasing consternation by the Thembu on the lower Mzinyathi to the west and the Chunu on the upper Mvoti to the south. Each of these large chiefdoms had already moved once before to remain outside the Zulu sphere of influence, but, given their size and strength, neither could expect to be regarded by the Zulu leaders as anything but a threat to the stability of their southern borderlands. There is some evidence that Shaka tried to secure the voluntary submission of the Thembu, but in the event their chief, Ngoza, refused to give it. A subsequent

51. See the discussion in Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 178-9, 210-13.

52. Bryant, Olden Times, pp. 139, 357.

53. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 220-1.

54. On the migration of Zizi and Bhele groups see Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 220, 302.

attack by a Zulu force was beaten off by the Thembu, but, to avoid further attacks, Ngoza made up his mind to migrate once again. With the Zulu to the east, the Ngwane to the west, and a country largely denuded of cattle to the north, the Thembu had little option but to head southwards. Pushing their way through the small chiefdoms of the midlands, and seizing cattle where they could, they eventually crossed the Mzimkhulu river and, on the margins of the Mpondo chiefdom's sphere of influence, set about trying to reconsolidate their chiefdom.⁵⁵

At much the same time, the Chunu chiefdom under Macingwane on the upper Mvoti also decided to shift further southward. For some time they had been coming under pressure from the Mkhize chiefdom, which, with Shaka's backing, was expanding southwards across the Thukela: the Zulu attack on the Thembu triggered their decision to move off through the midlands. Like the Thembu they broke up several smaller chiefdoms before coming to a halt between the Mkhomazi and the Mzimkhulu rivers, some 150 kilometres from their starting point.⁵⁶

Soon after the Thembu and the Chunu came the Memela and Nhangwini from the lower Ndaka (Sundays)-middle Thukela region. Under increasing pressure from the Ngwane to the west and the Sithole, another satellite chiefdom of the Zulu, to the east, the leaders of these chiefdoms, also chose to move off to the south. Apparently acting in concert, they followed a route which converged with those previously taken by the Thembu and Chunu. Their migration ended across the Mzimkhulu, where they became one of the by now numerous polities which were struggling to reconstitute themselves as coherent polities and to survive in what was becoming an arena of rapidly mounting conflict.⁵⁷

After these migrations the major powers between the Thukela and the Mzimkhulu were the three Zulu satellite chiefdoms - the Sithole, the Mkhize and the Cele - together with the Ngwane in the north-west and the relocated Chunu in the south. Between them they dominated the whole of the region. The independent small chiefdoms of the midlands and the coast had either taken to flight southwards, or had given their allegiance to one or other of the emerging powers, or had been broken up and dispersed.

6. The 'devastation of Natal' reconsidered

The stereotyped view that in the 1810s and early 1820s the Zulu state was the only significant agency of change in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region, and that the Zulu had the power to intervene more or less at will in the region's affairs, completely fails to capture the complexity of the region's history in this

55. Ibid., pp. 239-42.

56. Ibid, pp. 242-7.

57. Ibid., pp. 249-51.

period. So too does the notion that this history was mainly one of violence and destruction.⁵⁸

There is no doubt that these years saw a great political, social and economic upheaval taking place south of the Thukela as migrant groups from the north pushed their way into it and disrupted established patterns of existence. But, contrary to the commonly held view, these groups used force not so much to wipe out populations as to seize the resources and, at times, to destroy the political organization of communities which stood in their way. In the process, a number of small chiefdoms, particularly in the south, where the paths of a number of the larger migrant groups converged, were so thoroughly broken up that they ceased to exist as political entities. Many, probably most, of their members, though, survived to give their allegiance, either as individuals or in groups, to other chiefs. Outside the south, most chiefdoms seem to have been able to retain a degree of cohesion, even if many lost some of their component sections through secession. Generally speaking, for smaller groups there were three main strategies of survival: to migrate as an independent unit; to remain in situ and wait for dangers to subside; and to give their allegiance to a new leader who could offer effective protection. Numbers of groups may have followed all three courses at different stages. Comparatively few had the resources needed for successfully pursuing the first and second courses, and over time most ended up taking the third.

The history of the period was characterized not so much by the destruction of peoples as by two other, interlinked processes: the displacement and migration of populations, and the fragmentation of political units and their re-aggregation into new, enlarged entities. The numerous small polities which had previously existed were replaced by a handful of much larger chiefdoms, the cores of which were formed either by intruding groups - the Ngwane, Sithole, Mkhize, Chunu - or by local groups which, under varying circumstances, managed to maintain their cohesion - the Memela, Nhlanguwini, Zelemu-Wushe (or Bhaca), and Cele.

Political re-aggregation was accompanied by demographic concentration. The conventional view holds that if the inhabitants of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region were not mostly massacred in the violence of the period, they were driven out, either onto the highveld or southwards across the Mzimkhulu. The available evidence indicates clearly that this was not so. Numbers of groups did migrate out of the region (including some which made off to the Zulu chiefdom, pace the notion of the Zulu as destroyers), and there may have been a temporary drop in the overall population as a result. But most of the previous inhabitants remained within the region, and a fall-off of population would to some extent have been offset by the advent

58. This section of the paper draws on Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 266-77.

of intruding groups like the Ngwane and the Mkhize. As significant as migrations inward or outward across what are in any case rather arbitrarily determined boundaries were the internal movements which took place.

As numbers of people shifted into the territories dominated by the larger and more stable chiefdoms to find security, so these regions became relatively more populated, while other areas became relatively denuded of inhabitants. Regions in which concentrations of population formed were very likely the territories dominated by the Ngwane in the north-west, the Mkhize in the lower Thukela valley, the Cele south of the lower Thukela, and the Chunu and other large chiefdoms about the Mzimkhulu. The intervening regions - the area between the Mzinyathi and Ndaka rivers, the central midlands, the southern coastlands - probably experienced a drop in population. In these regions numbers of small groups clung on in the more broken or forested parts. They lived largely by gathering and hunting, and probably kept cultivation and keeping of livestock to a minimum to avoid attracting the attention of larger groups. Others took advantage of the breakdown of previously established authority structures to turn to banditry.

The members of most of the communities described as 'cannibals' in the literature were probably bandits. The literary stereotype about the widespread existence of cannibalism in Natal in Shaka's time was very much a product of settler ideology and its exaggeration of a handful of recorded eye-witness accounts and traditions.⁵⁹ It is likely that in areas where agriculture and livestock production had collapsed, some people took to cannibalism to stay alive. But in regard to traditions of cannibalism, the comments made by Delius in his study of the history of the Pedi chiefdom of the eastern Transvaal are pertinent. Such traditions, he suggests, functioned to show 'the dire consequences of the destruction of properly constituted authority'. They were thus liable to exaggeration in African society as well as by white commentators, and need to be treated with caution. Close investigation of his sources, Delius argues, shows that cannibal groups were 'principally distinguished by the fact that they

59. The making of this stereotype needs detailed research in its own right. Early writers like Gardiner (Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country, 1836, pp. 185-6) and Isaacs (Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa, 1970 ed., 1st publ. 1836, p. 78) mention the practice of cannibalism in the Natal region in passing, but it was not until the later 19th century that writers like Shepstone ('Early history of the Zulu-Kafir race', in J. Bird, ed., Annals of Natal, vol. 1, 1888, pp. 159-60) began to portray it as a major consequence of 'Shaka's wars'. In the early 20th century Bryant took delight in further embellishing the stories of Shepstone's informants about cannibals: see Olden Times, pp. 58, 248, 348, 377, 410, 504, 552, 558-9.

secured their subsistence almost exclusively through raiding, and were thus seen as living on their fellows'.⁶⁰

The scraps of evidence which exist suggest that south of the Thukela-Mzinyathi valley such groups emerged in precisely those regions which had been most heavily raided by larger chiefdoms and had been partially denuded of population. Several traditions indicate that in the north the country between the Mzinyathi and the Ndaka rivers was one such region. Others were the territory about the upper Mvoti, the broken country of the mid-Mngeni valley, and the coastlands from the Mngeni southward.

While the political map of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region changed dramatically in the late 1810s and early 1820s, the process of change was not one of unmitigated destruction. The stereotype about the devastation of Natal by the Zulu which began to emerge in the literature in the late 1820s and 1830s, and which has been reproduced by generations of historians up to the present, was a product less of historical analysis than of ideological interpolation by colonial writers.

7. The consolidation of Zulu domination south of the Thukela

By the early 1820s the emerging Zulu state was the most powerful political actor in the territories south of the Thukela, but it by no means completely dominated the region. To the west and south, the Ngwane and Chunu chiefdoms respectively exerted influence across considerable territories. There was nothing inherent in Zulu policy which necessarily entailed further expansion in these directions. But within a short space of time, political developments within the Zulu polity and on its northern borders set in train a process which saw Zulu domination extended westward to the Drakensberg and southward to the region of the Mzimkhulu.

The precise nature of these developments will not be known until the history of the early Zulu state has been studied in detail, but primarily they had to do with the growth of internal opposition to Shaka's rule at a time when his kingdom was facing increasing pressures from the north.⁶¹ As a usurper, Shaka had from the beginning of his reign faced strong, if muted, opposition from within the Zulu ruling house. In addition, as the Zulu state expanded, its rulers faced continuing resistance from sections of powerful subordinate chiefdoms such as those of the Qwabe and the Mthethwa. Exacerbating the resultant internal tensions was, very probably, the threat of incursions into the northern borderlands on the part of the raiding and slaving

60. P. Delius, The Land Belongs to Us: the Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal, Johannesburg, 1983, p. 24.

61. Carolyn Hamilton is the first writer to have paid close attention to the growth of resistance within the Zulu kingdom to Shaka's rule. See particularly the discussion in 'Ideology', pp. 174-5, 184-6, 354-5, 362-3, 506-8.

polities which had established themselves in the hinterland of Delagoa Bay.⁶²

One of the responses of the Zulu leaders to the internal and external problems of security which they faced was to shift their capital, kwaBulawayo, together with many of Shaka's amabutho, or age-regiments, from the mid-White Mfolozi area south-east to the Qwabe territory between the Mhlathuze and the lower Thukela. The move was made to suppress dissidence among the Qwabe, and perhaps also to put a greater distance between the state's nerve-centre and the unstable northern borderlands.⁶³ With this shift closer towards the lower Thukela, the territories south of that river became established as a zone of new strategic importance for the Zulu leaders. For the leadership as a whole, expansion to the southward presented a means of bringing new resources of cattle under its control. For Shaka and his party of supporters in particular, it also presented the opportunity of establishing a separate power-base which could be brought more directly under their control than was possible in the regions north of the Thukela where their authority was being contested.⁶⁴

To secure unimpeded access to the territories beyond the Thukela, it was necessary for the Zulu first of all to eliminate the rival Ngwane and Chunu chiefdoms. At some point in the early 1820s both were attacked by Zulu forces. Though they lost many of their cattle, the Ngwane succeeded in escaping across the Drakensberg and re-establishing their chiefdom in the Caledon valley. The Chunu chiefdom, however, was broken up. The cattle seized from it were placed at new cattle posts erected by Shaka in the country of the Cele chief, Magaye, and guarded by the latter's amabutho. Other posts may have been established in the Sithole domain on the lower Mzinyathi for the cattle taken from the Ngwane.⁶⁵

These campaigns extended Zulu power westward to the Drakensberg and southward to the vicinity of the Mzimkhulu. They were not, however, followed by effective occupation. While the Zulu state had the ability to mount occasional forays into these territories, it did not have the capacity to set up the permanent military presence which colonization would have entailed. The area west of the Mzinyathi was vulnerable to raids by the Griqua and other mounted gunmen who, by the early 1820s, were raiding further and further from the west and south across the southern highveld.⁶⁶ Similarly, the territories

62. Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp. 506-7.

63. Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 184-6, 350-7, 361-2; Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 281-3.

64. Hamilton, 'Ideology', pp. 350-7, 474-5; Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 283-4.

65. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 384-6.

66. Julian Cobbing has been the first to recognize the importance of the role played by these raiding bands in the upheavals which took place on the highveld in the 1820s. See

about the Mzimkhulu were exposed to raids from the groups which, at this time, were struggling for domination in the region to the south (see below).

In the face of these dangers the Zulu leaders held back from occupying more territory south of the Thukela. Their policy was instead to consolidate their hold on the coastland region which they already controlled by proxy through Magaye, and to send armed parties to raid cattle further and further south beyond the Mkhomazi.⁶⁷ In 1824 a force of Zulu amabutho from north of the Thukela penetrated to the vicinity of the Mzimvubu and seized cattle from the Mpondo. These were placed at posts set up in Mathubane's territory near Port Natal, and watched over by men of his Thuli chiefdom.⁶⁸ At no stage, as far as the evidence goes, did Zulu armies make the murderous sweeps through Natal which conventionally they are supposed to have done.

8. Upheavals south of the Mzimkhulu in the 1820s

The conventional literature on the 'devastation of Natal' sees large numbers of 'refugees' from the region as having fled from roving Zulu armies southward across the Mzimkhulu towards the Cape frontier. According to this view, most of these groups ended up as clients of the Thembu and the Gcaleka Xhosa, or as so-called Fingoes in the eastern Cape colony.⁶⁹ Recently Cobbing and Webster have called this orthodoxy into question. Few Fingoes, they argue, originated in Natal; most of them were Xhosa who had been dispossessed by British cattle raids and land seizures across the eastern frontier of the Cape, particularly during the war of 1834-5. Stories that they had fled from the Zulu and become virtual slaves of the Gcaleka were to a large extent evolved by the colonial authorities to cover their seizure of large numbers of Fingo captives in the course of the war.⁷⁰

his article, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp. 496-500; and also J. Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane": or a change of paradigm', unpubl. B.A. Hons. essay, Rhodes University, 1988, chs. 2-4.

67. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 286-95.

68. Ibid., pp. 287-90.

69. See for example Omer-Cooper, Zulu Aftermath, chs. 10, 11.

70. J. Cobbing, 'The myth of the mfecane', unpubl. paper, University of Durban-Westville, 1987, pp. 21-3; J. Cobbing, 'Jettisoning the mfecane (with perestroika)', unpubl. paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988, p. 13; A. Webster, 'Ayliff, Whiteside, and the Fingo "emancipation" of 1835: a reappraisal', unpubl. B.A. Hons. essay, Rhodes University, 1988; A. Webster, 'Land expropriation and labour extraction under Cape colonial rule: the war of 1835 and the "emancipation" of the Fingo', unpubl. M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1991.

The details of the arguments put forward by Cobbing and by Webster are open to debate, but a close examination of the evidence on political developments in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region in the 1820s lends support to their general hypothesis that most Fingo were not of Natal origin. There is little doubt that numbers of groups displaced by the upheavals of the late 1810s and early 1820s migrated across the Mzimkhulu. But, contrary to the stereotyped view, most of these groups re-established themselves between that river and the Mzimvubu rather than moving on further south.

The first major group to move into these territories consisted largely of Bhele displaced by the Ngwane from the area south of the Biggarsberg. Sometime afterwards, the comparatively powerful groups of Macingwane's Chunu and Ngoza's Thembu arrived on the scene. They were followed by the Nhlangwini of Nombewu, the Memela of Mdingi, and the Bhaca under Madikane. Besides these larger groupings, and the fragments of other polities which adhered to them, numbers of smaller parties from the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region also made their way southward.⁷¹

The groups which moved across the Mzimkhulu found themselves entering the sphere of influence of the larger and more powerful Mpondo paramountcy. This was located on either side of the lower Mzimvubu, and since 1820 or before had been ruled by Faku, son of Ngqungqushu.⁷² To the south-west across the Mthatha were various groups of Thembu, most of which acknowledged the paramountcy of the Hala section under Ngubencuka, or Vusani. Though the polity under his authority seems to have been more loosely constituted than that of Faku,⁷³ it would still have represented a major obstacle for the migrant groups which were making their way south across the Mzimkhulu before and after 1820. For these groups, the choices were to make their submission to established and relatively powerful rulers like Faku and Ngubencuka, to fight them for dominance, or to attempt to re-establish themselves on the edges of the Mpondo sphere of influence.

In the first instance most of the larger migrant groups seem to have chosen the latter course. Their sudden advent inaugurated a long period of political instability and violence in the territories south of the Mzimkhulu. What little is known of the region's history in the 1820s is largely about fights and raids. The first major conflict of the period was probably that between the Mpondo and Ngoza's Thembu. In the event, the Mpondo defeated the Thembu in battle, killed Ngoza, and broke up his

71. Wright, 'Dynamics', pp. 301-5.

72. Beinart, Political Economy of Pondoland, pp. 9-10; Peires, House of Phalo, p. 86.

73. Peires, House of Phalo, pp. 84-6; E. Wagenaar, 'A history of the Thembu and their relationship with the Cape, 1850-1900', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Rhodes University, 1988, pp. 1-4.

chiefdom. While numbers of his people probably gave their allegiance to local chiefs, many of them eventually made their way back northward and submitted to Shaka. Not long afterwards the Zulu made the first of a series of interventions in the politics of the region. As already described, they attacked and destroyed the Chunu chiefdom. The chief, Macingwane, disappeared, and numbers of his people returned to make their submission to Shaka.⁷⁴

It is significant that, contrary to what the conventional view would lead one to expect, the remnants of the Thembu and Chunu retraced their footsteps to the north and gave their allegiance to Shaka rather than continuing further to the south. Several other smaller groups also returned northwards from the Mzimkhulu region at this time. All, it seems, preferred to join Shaka or to try to maintain an autonomous existence in the Zulu sphere of influence north of the Mzimkhulu rather than to remain in the zone of intensified conflict which was emerging in the south.⁷⁵

The destruction of the Thembu and Chunu powers marked the end of one phase of conflict in the Mzimkhulu-Mzimvubu region, and the beginning of another. In this, the main protagonists were the Bhaca, the Memela, the Nhlanguwini and the Mpondo. From the north, raiding parties from the Zulu domains made occasional forays into the coastlands south of Port Natal and, eventually, as described above, over the Mzimkhulu. By the end of the 1820s the dominant powers in the region were the Mpondo and Bhaca chiefdoms. More groups had moved out of the zone of conflict to settle north of the Mzimkhulu; others had moved away southward.⁷⁶

The disruptions caused in the territories south of the Mzimkhulu in the 1820s by the intrusion of groups from the north were compounded by the effects of the conflicts and confrontations which were taking place at this time on the Cape eastern frontier and also on the southern highveld. The precise nature of these effects awaits further research. In spite of the size of the corpus of works, published and unpublished, on the history of the eastern Cape region, there is still no study which comprehensively assesses the far-reaching impact of British policies and the British presence on the African societies beyond the Cape colonial boundary in the eventful period of the 1810s and 1820s. Nor is there any work which does much to recognize, let alone to analyze, the overall impact on this region of raids and threats of raids from the other side of the Orange river.⁷⁷ In the absence of such studies, the most that can be said here is that the interactions between

74. Ibid., p. 305.

75. Ibid., pp. 305-6.

76. Ibid., pp. 306-9, 374-5.

77. Exceptions are Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp. 500-1; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', pp. 22-3.

established chiefdoms like those of the Mpondo, Thembu and others with intrusive groups from north of the Mzimkhulu in the 1820s are likely to have been shaped in important ways by pressures which they were all coming under from the south and from the north-west.

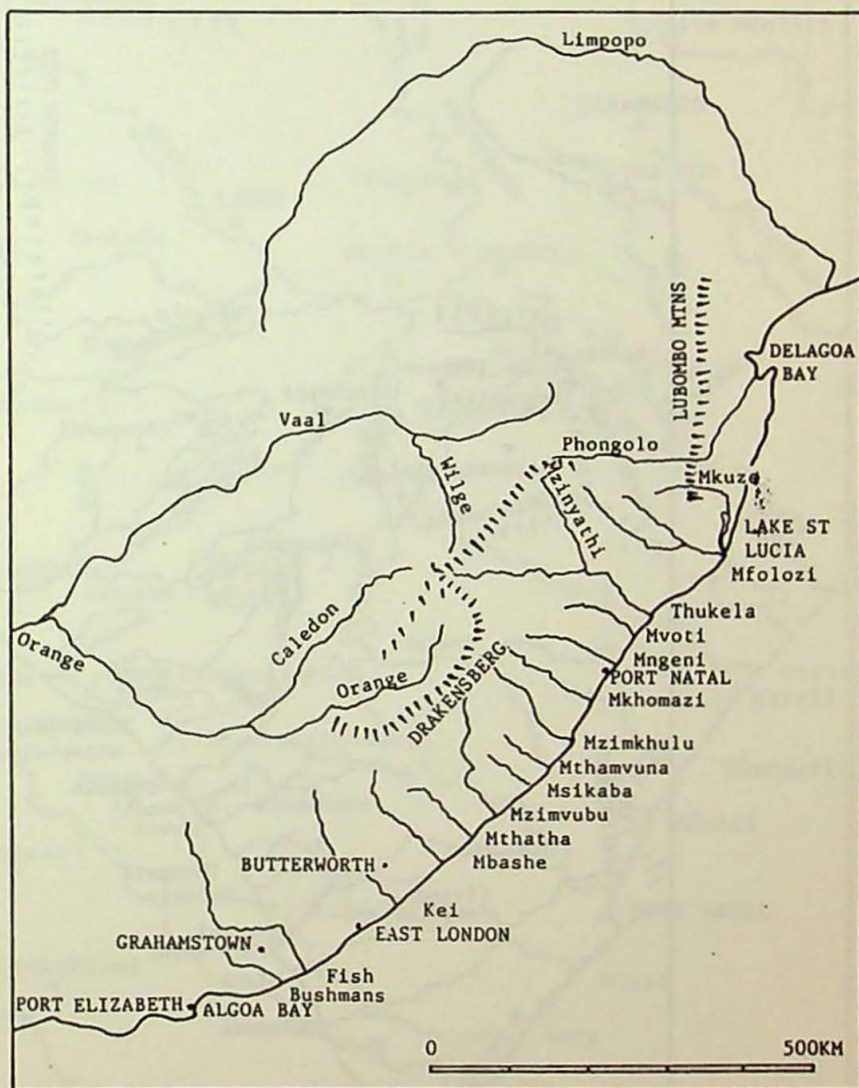
9. Conclusion

The Zulu were still consolidating their domination over the territories south of the Thukela when, in the mid-1820s, a completely new set of political factors began to come into play in the region. These stemmed from the advent at Port Natal from 1824 onward of parties of British traders and hunters from the Cape colony. Their coming was a product of the growing interest which, after the end of the Napoleonic wars, merchants and officials in the Cape and Britain were showing in south-eastern Africa as a field of commercial enterprise. The traders were welcomed by Shaka as sources of manufactured goods, as potential intermediaries with the British authorities in the Cape, and as potential allies in his struggles against his opponents inside and outside his kingdom. By 1827 they had become an important factor in the politics of the Zulu state, and by 1829, with the backing of groups of merchants and missionaries in the Cape, were pressing for British intervention in the affairs of Port Natal and its hinterland.⁷⁸

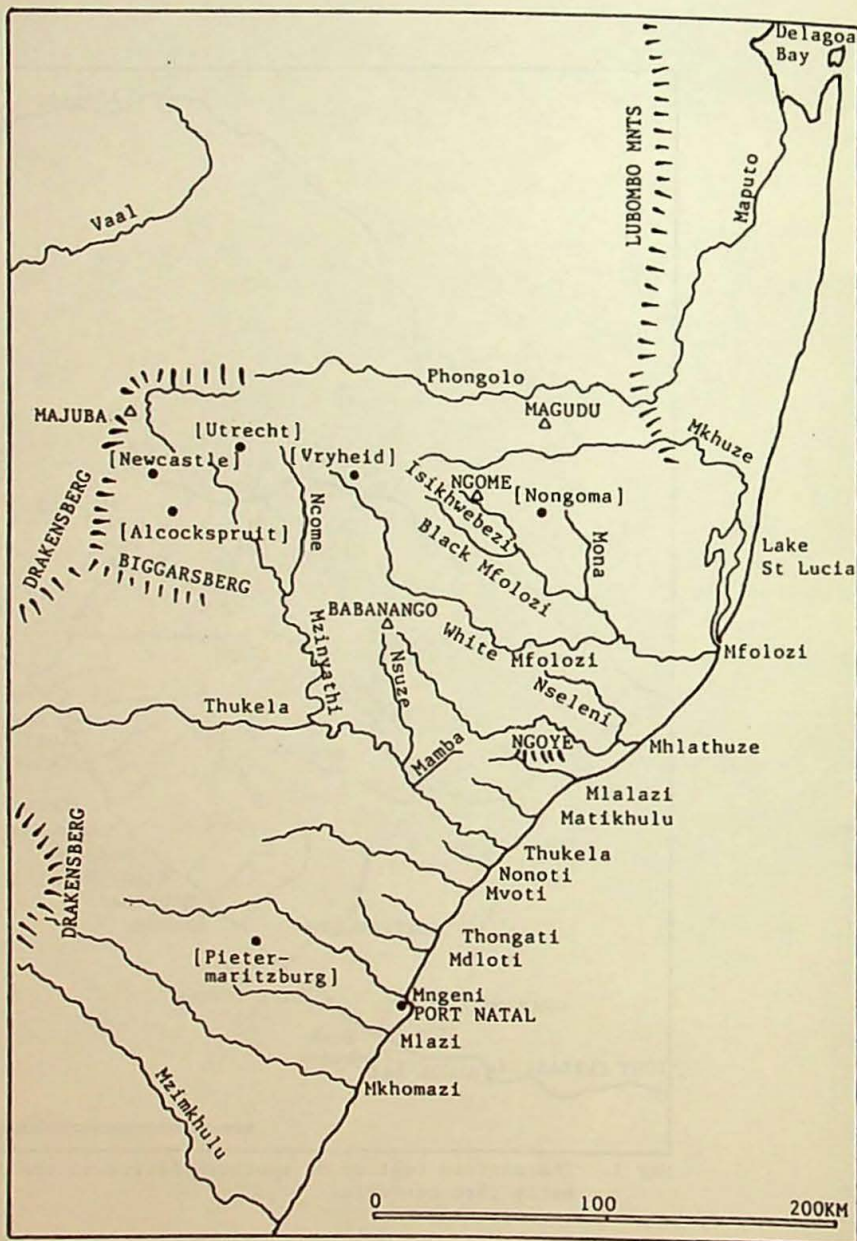
For their part, the Cape authorities were by this time actively extending the colony's sphere of influence northwards towards the Mzimkhulu.⁷⁹ The field was becoming set for a struggle between the Zulu state and Cape-based interests, backed ultimately by imperial Britain, for control of the territories about Port Natal. The forces which, for more than half a century, had operated to lock the region south of the Thukela ever more firmly to the politics north of that river were now starting to be countered by forces which sought to pull it into the political and economic orbit of the Cape. A new era in its history was beginning.

78. Wright, 'Dynamics', ch. 7.

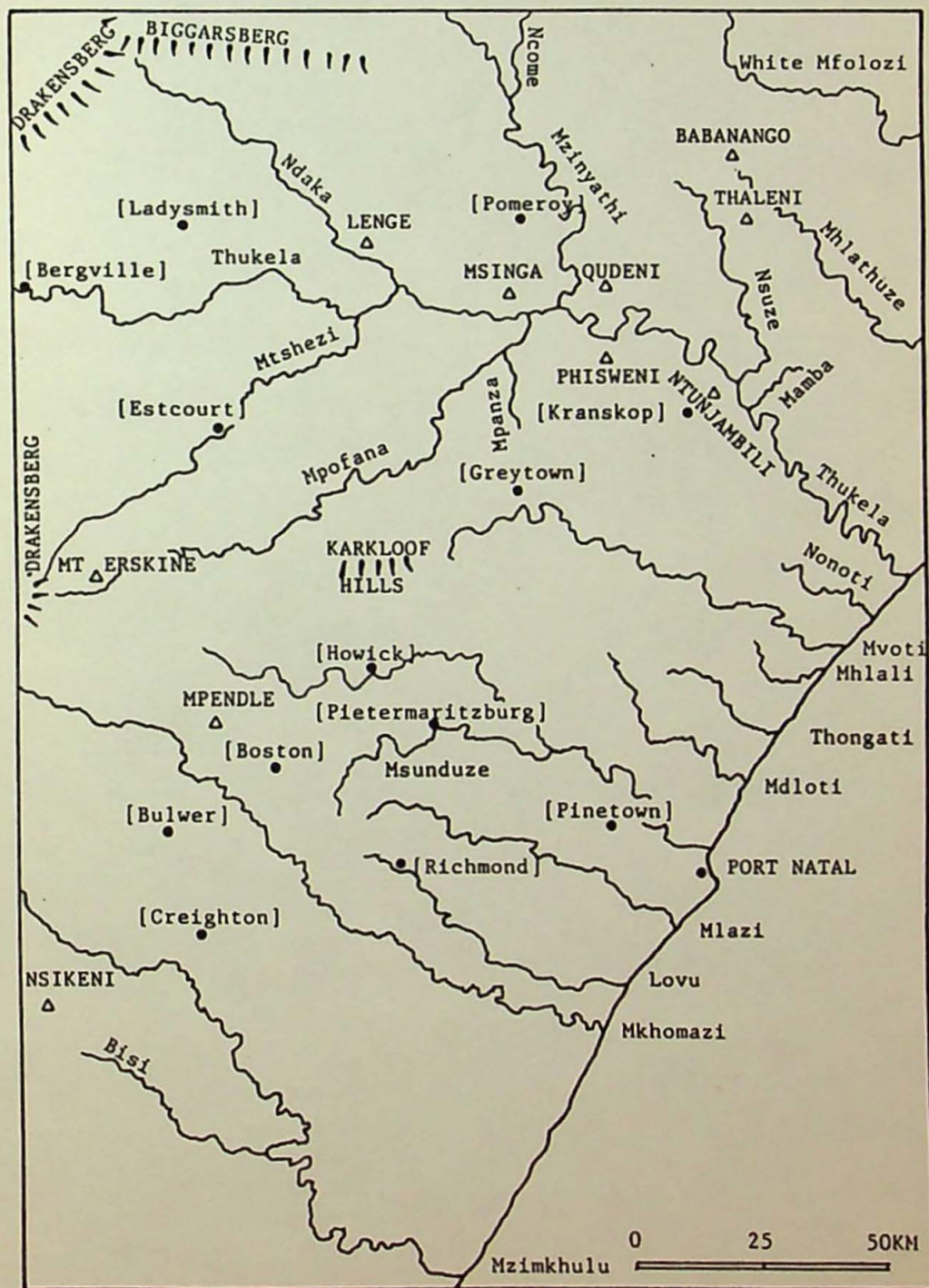
79. Ibid., pp. 369, 375-80.



MAP 1. The eastern regions of southern Africa in the late 18th and early 19th centuries



MAP 2. The Delagoa Bay-Mzimkhulu region in the late 18th and early 19th centuries



MAP 3. The Thukela-Mzimkhulu region in the 1810s and 1820s