

THE FRAGMENTATION OF ZULULAND, 1879-1918

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History is largely about the exploitation of the weak by the strong. The history of civilization begins at the point where such exploitation stops. Even the constructive phases of British imperialism were commonly preceded by a period of military confrontation and conquest. The question, where Zululand is concerned, is whether such a constructive phase occurred at all. This article advances the view that there were constructive aspects of white rule in Zululand, but that the undermining of the Zulu state and its socio-economic system were a heavy price paid by the Zulu for benefits received.

It is a commonplace that the European empires of the nineteenth century resulted from a combination of different and complementary thrusts — by missionaries, soldiers, proconsuls, hunters, traders and investors. The exact chemistry of imperialism is a controversial topic, but exploitation of economic resources led to exploitation of people, to unstable frontiers in turn, and on the rebound to the periodic extension of imperial authority into new areas. Colonists and traders, in the pursuit of prosperity, often fell foul of the indigenous societies, missionaries and sometimes magistrates saw the protection of these societies as an important function. The resultant tensions between these dominant elements produced colonial constitutions which normally gave explicit protection to voteless minorities. The real problem was to make these constitutional safeguards effective in practice in those reaches of government where the wielders of local power found them inconvenient. It was a particularly tough problem in Zululand, which experienced a double penetration by both Colonial Natalians and Boers from the direction of the Transvaal.

The boundary of the Voortrekker Republic, Natalia, on the Black Umfolosi was brought back to the Buffalo-Tugela line when the Colony of Natal was established in 1843. Zululand continued as a single kingdom under Dingane's successors, Mpande (1840-72) and Cetshwayo (1872-79). The state had been weakened, but its political economy had not been shattered, as a result of Blood River. Under Mpande's long and relatively peaceful rule there was a rebuilding of resources, and an expansion of the **amabutho** (age-regiments) commensurate with population growth. Like the Sergeant King of Prussia in the eighteenth century, Mpande did not exhaust his military strength by making too much war.

Equilibrium, however, was not attained. Important changes undermined Zulu stability in the two decades immediately preceding 1879. The population grew substantially, nearly doubling itself. Cattle numbers diminished, through drought, and the export of beasts in return for trade goods (notably fire-arms). Over-mighty subjects soon began to arise in their own home districts, and Cetshwayo found them increasingly difficult to control. Loss of land in the north, to Boers infiltrating down from the Transvaal provided a further point of friction, until the stage was reached at

which Sir Theophilus Shepstone, whose relations with the Zulu were not as intimate as he often claimed them to be, announced that he could no longer hold the impis in check unless the Transvaal were annexed to Britain.

British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 merely diverted Zulu antipathy to the Transvaal's new rulers. A boundary commission, appointed to investigate the frontier dispute in the Blood River region between the Zulu and the Boers, reported substantially in favour of the Zulu. Sir Bartle Frere, who had been appointed High Commissioner in 1877, decided to suppress the report, on the advice of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Henry Bulwer, who discounted the Transvalers' case and recommended that the best policy was to enforce a just settlement without spelling out the detailed reasons for it. Cetshwayo now found he could neither control his people on the Colonial frontier nor bend to the demands of the High Commissioner, whose determination to punish the Zulu for breaches of the peace was fired by an apparent conviction that the Zulu state was too volatile to be allowed to survive. The fact that the unrest on the Zulu border was part of a much wider manifestation of instability in the African world, which had already affected the northern Transvaal, Griqualand West, and the Ngqika and Gcaleka peoples on the Cape eastern frontier, gave Frere's posture a measure of plausibility.

Under these circumstances, it would have been very difficult to prevent the war of 1879, which lasted for six months and resulted in acceptance of the defeat by the Zulu King. Although his forces had performed impressively during the first month of the campaign, they had neither weapons nor resources for a sustained war.

After Ulundi, the Zulu leaders accepted the dismantling of their state. Sir Garnet Wolseley, sent to replace Frere in South-East Africa as High Commissioner, disarmed the Zulu, sent Cetshwayo into exile in the Cape, and with the help of the trader John Dunn, divided the kingdom into thirteen chiefdoms, ostensibly in order to bring back the pre-Shakan political dispensation, and destroy the Zulu military capacity without the burden of direct annexation. Guy has argued that Zulu resistance was not destroyed, but that their leaders deemed it prudent to admit defeat in return for a promise, which Wolseley made, that they would be allowed to keep their cattle, their property and their land.

It involved trusting the promise of a high commissioner who was out of sympathy both with the missionary and with the white colonial as to the correct policy for Zululand. If the Colensoes wanted the Zulu monarchy left intact, the white Natalians preferred a British annexation of Zululand so that farms could be found there for development, and so that Natal could advance her influence northward towards the rich areas of Swaziland and the gold-bearing eastern Transvaal. Even Shepstone was thwarted by Wolseley's independent line; but if Guy is

right, it was the Shepstone policy, rather than that of Wolseley, which triumphed in the long run. It lived on through the influence of a man who became in turn British Resident, Resident Commissioner, and Chief Magistrate of Zululand in 1880-93, namely Melmoth Osborn.

Politically, the 1879 settlement proved unworkable. By 1883, the supporters of the exiled Cetshwayo were beginning to regroup their forces and challenge Wolseley's leading nominees, Chiefs Hlubi (a Sotho), Zibhebu (leader of the Mandlakazi and Osborn's special protégé) and Hamu (half-brother of Cetshwayo, who had helped the whites in 1879), and the master-spider John Dunn. The British Government now felt the need to build a Zulu counterpoise against the newly independent Transvaal, and therefore began in 1883 to yield to Treasury and other pressures in Britain for the restoration of Cetshwayo himself. The ex-king was allowed to return. His Usuthu then attacked bettered Zibhebu who fled. But at this point Osborn intervened and persuaded the British Government, instead of scrapping the 1879 settlement, to modify it by partitioning Zululand into three separate areas: first, a Reserve in the south, for Dunn and Hlubi, to be placed under the control of John Shepstone, second, a territory for Cetshwayo himself, comprising the large central area between the White Umfolosi and the Mhlatuze rivers; and third, an independent territory for Zibhebu in the north.

Osborn's settlement settled nothing. Zibhebu and Hamu still fought the Usuthu, and in July 1883 Cetshwayo retreated to the Nkandla forest, from where he waged guerrilla war with success. In 1884, he died, perhaps from poisoning at the hands of his opponents.

Meanwhile Boers in the north began to revive their land claims. They offered support to Dinuzulu, Cetshwayo's son and heir, whom they recognized as king. In May 1884, Coenraad Meyer and a party of Boers from the South African Republic helped Dinuzulu to defeat Zibhebu, and in return claimed a vast area of land "in extent more or less 1,355,000 morgen with the right to establish there an independent republic." The "remaining portion of Zululand and the Zulu Nation" were to be "subject to the supervision of the said New Republic". Dinuzulu agreed to these terms on the advice of William Grant, who was at the time, and remained, a trusted confidant. The importance of Dinuzulu's action, whether or not he realized it then, was that it was taken by white Natalians as a release from Wolseley's undertaking in 1879 that the land of Zululand should be kept for the Zulu people. Dinuzulu's biographer, C. T. Binns, has argued that the king and Grant were both misled. At a subsequent meeting before Grant and the leading Usuthu chiefs disagreed as to whether the former had explained to the chiefs the implications of what they were signing. Bulwer himself, a man of normally balanced judgement, felt sure that Dinuzulu was aware of what he had signed. So did Sir Arthur Havelock, who succeeded Bulwer as Governor. But it is very likely that Dinuzulu was taken by surprise when the New Republic extended its boundaries in December 1885 to include the whole area between the Reserve and the Mkuze River, and began to mark out a township at St Lucia Bay. It is also doubtful whether he really accepted the Republic as a protector power.

The expansion of the New Republic threw the Zulu on the mercy of the British, who were first able to persuade the Republic's leaders in May 1886 to pull back their frontiers so as to leave Ulundi in Zulu hands, and then to secure in October, in return for British recognition of the New Republic (from which the Mtonjaneni district, referred to as 'Proviso B' in the treaty, was excluded), Republican recognition of a British protectorate over the rest of Zululand. The Zulu leaders resented this deal. Their resentment was directed not against the British protectorate,

however, but at Britain's refusal to allow them to challenge the Boer leaders in London to establish their claims to the borders laid down in the agreement. British intervention had actually won back for the Zulu a large area of land, and this at a time when the only Englishmen to settle in Zululand were there with the agreement of the Zulu authorities. The question was whether this could last.

After conducting the negotiations with the Boers, Melmoth Osborn allowed his protégé, Zibhebu to return from the Reserve, into which he had fled, to his own lands north of the Black Umfolosi, where in the meantime some 5,000 Usuthu had settled. This precipitated a revival of the internal Zulu conflict, and when Osborn brought Natal troops as well as Zulu levies into the fight against Dinuzulu's Usuthu, the latter threw himself on the mercy of the Boers of the New Republic (which the Z.A.R. incorporated in 1888). At the urging of Harriette Colenso, Dinuzulu handed himself over to the British authorities in Pietermaritzburg. It did not help him. He was tried, convicted of treason, sentenced to ten years imprisonment and exiled to St Helena.

There he remained, while the whites of Natal brought to a climax their long drawn out debate over the merits of responsible government. Here black-white relations played a crucial role, for not only did the Indian franchise cause political tempers to rise until it was eventually abolished by legislative subterfuge in 1896, but there also developed a major dispute over the powers of the Governor as supreme chief, as defined in the Natal Native Code of 1891. The issue was whether, in exercising these very wide powers after the grant of responsible government, the Governor was to be allowed to act at his discretion, or solely on the advice of his ministers. The Colonial Office was adamant that the Natal ministers were not to be allowed to control the Governor's use of arbitrary power. The Colony eventually accepted this ruling, but the Natal politicians obtained what they desired through discreetly amended Royal Instructions, which required that before exercising the powers, the Governor should inform the ministers of his intentions and plan his actions jointly with them, while retaining ultimate responsibility.

In 1893 Osborn retired and was superseded by Sir Marshal Clarke as Resident Commissioner in Zululand. Clarke, who, unlike Osborn, viewed Zulu problems from an Imperial rather than a Natalian perspective, worked for the restoration of Dinuzulu as the best way of ensuring peace and a renewal of Zulu confidence — not as a reinstated paramount, but as a humble government advisor on native affairs, with a house near Eshowe and a salary of £500 a year. Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, the new Governor, accepted Clarke's proposals in May 1894. Dinuzulu therefore received a free pardon in January 1893, but his return was delayed by Natal governmental opposition: they now demanded incorporation of Zululand into Natal as a condition of his return.

This desire for incorporation of Zululand had not been very articulate before Natal acquired responsible government in 1893, and fears had been expressed that incorporation would be a security risk. Some Natal whites considered that their access to the trade of Zululand, and to the lion's share of Zululand customs revenue, which they had enjoyed since 1888 made trade incorporation unnecessary. But others who wanted incorporation argued the need for better control of Zululand minerals (gold in the Nquthu and Nkandla districts, and coal in Nkandla, Mtonjaneni, and Hlabisa), and also urged that land in Zululand be made available either for white settlement or for the resettlement of blacks from Natal. Such people came to see the restoration of Dinuzulu as a possible lever to hasten incorporation.

By December 1897, Dinuzulu and his fellow exiles were at last allowed to return from St Helena, and Natal had been

accorded the right to incorporate Zululand as a kind of *quid pro quo*. Significantly, this right now included the opening of Zululand to white settlement with British approval, provided a decent interval of five years, should elapse before redistribution of land occurred.

All that the annexation agreement had laid down was that there should be no grants or alienation of Crown Lands in Zululand until 'other provisions shall have been made in that behalf', though township lands, lands to be reserved for mining, and lands already alienated, were not to be so protected. This provision was included at the instance of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in a Minute of 17 May 1897; but on 17 June, Chamberlain accepted a qualification proposed by Harry Escombe, the Prime Minister of Natal, that H.M. Government would be prepared to consider 'any representations from the Natal Government made with the concurrence of the Boundary Commissioners in favour of opening up within the term of five years special localities and under special circumstances, with due regard to the state of feeling in the country'.

The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer war helped the five years to pass quickly. Then two delimitation commissioners, Brigadier-General Sir J. G. Dartnell representing the Imperial Government (who was replaced for health reasons by R. H. Beachcroft on 16 March 1904) and C. J. R. Saunders for Natal, were appointed on 1 August 1902. Their assignment was to delimit "sufficient Land Reserves in the Province of Zululand for Native Locations", confining their investigations "to an inspection and general survey of the lands along the Coast belt, comprising the Umlalazi, the greater portion of the Umfolosi, and the low-lying portions of the Hlabisa, Ubombo, and Ingwavuma districts . . . and to report as to what portions of the lands within the said area should be reserved for Native Locations". They had to look into the rights of 72 missionary bodies and those of the 89 storekeepers, 64 of whom lived in the areas set aside as Reserves, and examine the claims of 27 (mainly white) squatters. They were also instructed to find an area of ten to twelve thousand acres in Umlalazi for the family of John Dunn.

On 15 May 1903 the Commissioners telegraphed the Prime Minister of Natal and asked permission to "deal with lands outside the limit of the coastal belt as we see fit", in the interest of greater expedition. The Governor referred the matter to the Secretary of State, who, in a telegraphic reply of 18 June, saw "no objection to Joint Commission completing their labours without delay, as I understand your Ministers do not propose to give them more detailed instructions, and Commission are prepared to continue their work without them". This cryptic reply, in which the specific request to conduct investigations outside the coastal belt was not answered, was taken by the Prime Minister as sufficient authority for him to tell the Commissioners that "it is not the intention of Ministers to issue any further detailed instructions and the Commission are accordingly authorised in their discretion to continue the work of delimitation outside the Coastal Belt."

The Commission went ahead. They produced nine interim reports before the final one, of 18 October 1904. Their work was interrupted after the second report so that they could meet Joseph Chamberlain during his visit to Pietermaritzburg on 30 December 1902, along with the Governor Sir Henry McCallum, the Prime Minister Sir A. H. Hime, and C. A. S. Yonge, M.L.A. for Melmoth, who had objected to their approach. Chamberlain then told the Commissioners "that their first duty was to provide liberally for the Natives, and in doing so they were to consider the present and future requirements for some years to come, and to allow for a natural increase in population".

The Commission understood when it began its work that areas excluded from the Reserves would be available for

purchase by blacks as well as whites. Sir Charles Saunders (as he later became) explicitly told the Beaumont Commission a decade later that he and his colleague 'had no doubt whatever that (natives) would be allowed to purchase there, and we were under that impression until we had gone on with our work probably for a year or more'. If he had been aware of this restriction, he added, he would not have agreed to so much land being thrown open to European occupation. What in fact happened was that the Prime Minister of Natal told the Commission on 16 December 1903, that the Government had recommended to London that 'natives should not be allowed to enter into competition with Europeans for the acquisition of Crown Lands in the Province of Zululand'. The Secretary of State asked for the Commission's reaction to this suggestion. The Natal Government accordingly asked the Commission to accept such a ban on African ownership as 'the only possible means of completely carrying out the wishes of the Zulu people, and the recommendation of the Delimitation Commission, that under no circumstances should lands in the Province of Zululand be alienated to people of Asiatic extraction'. (This was a reference to a desire expressed by chiefs, and noted in the Commission's Fourth Report).

Next day the Commissioners replied that because it was of 'paramount importance to the Natives that people of Asiatic extraction should be very strictly precluded from acquiring land . . . we shall be prepared to acquiesce in the proposal'. Saunders had clearly allowed the passage of time to inflate the significance of his stand on principle.

So work did not proceed as the Commissioners claimed, exactly "on the lines on which it was initiated". But on 7 September 1904 when they were told by the Prime Minister of Natal that the Government could not accept their proposals in the 7th interim report (dealing with Eshowe) and the 8th report (dealing with Nquthu, Nkandla and Mahlabatini), this time they stood their ground and asserted that if the Natives of this Province are to be fairly dealt with . . . they cannot be deprived of any more land and . . . what we have delimited as Reserves is none too much for their requirements".

They went on to state that, as a result of their labours, they had set aside 3,887,000 acres as Reserves, and excluded from the Reserves 2,613,000 acres. As the native population was calculated at 220,000 souls, this meant about 17 acres per head in the Reserves. (The Zululand sugar planters' Native Land Committee, working on a basis of 18 acres per head, later told the Beaumont Commission that, by any standard taken, this did not imply overcrowding).

The Saunders-Dartnell Report does in fact reveal much evidence of a concern to preserve the land rights of the Zulu people, but they were also under strong pressure to find land for white settlement, the more especially because in key areas like the Nquthu cattle country, whites coveted "the most densely populated part", and because Europeans they met appeared to be labouring under the impression that all the Commission was required to do was to indiscriminately throw open the whole of the lands suitable for European occupation, irrespective of the interests of the Natives occupying those lands. The Commission claimed that it had resisted pushing Africans into fever-ridden lowveld areas. It also paid attention to the sites of ancestral graves, and drew criticism by leaving some forest land in the Reserves. At the same time, it tried to placate the whites by claiming that "we have been actuated by a desire to exclude from the Reserves as much land as we conscientiously could". All the same, Europeans complained that not enough land was found for the market, Africans asked rather for a simple assurance: that whatever conclusions the Commission reached, worse should not be allowed to follow. "They point to the Zulu war settlement, when they were distinctly promised that Zululand was to be left to its own people, to the acquisition by the Boers

of a large extent of the country, to the annexation by the British Government of what remained, when they were again promised that it was being annexed for their use; and finally to the annexation of the Province by Natal, under which they are again to be deprived of tribal lands”.

A Natal Act of 1904 brought coastal land under private ownership and cane cultivation, under leases of 2s. or less, which were to run for 99 years, with freehold title to follow at the end of that period. Occupiers had to reside for nine months in the year, and build a dwelling. Millers' monopolies were also established under the leases, but many leases were surrendered in favour of later 20-year purchase agreements under a Union Act of 1912. The surveying of white areas began immediately. Whites moved in quickly in 1905-07. But of 501 lots surveyed in the Tugela coastal area, Umfolosi valley, Amatikulu, Empangeni, Nquthu, Qudeni, Kwabonambi, and in the Umhlatuzi, only 294 were occupied by 1910. Then, in A. J. Christopher's words, the Government for the first time in many years had a greater number of good class farming lots available than were immediately needed. There was a further inflow as a result of the soldier settlement scheme at the end of the first world war.

While these settlement schemes were getting under way, rebellion broke out in Natal and Zululand in 1906. Although this outbreak has been attributed to a number of different causes, the Natal Native Affairs Commission of 1906-07 saw “apprehension in several districts about the alienation of lands for European occupation” as one of these, and recommended “the cessation of further alienation of land in Zululand and the strict reservation of all Locations and Reserves for Native occupation” as a necessary remedy. One Nquthu witness, Archdeacon Charles Johnson, attributed the decision of Mehlokazulu to join Bambatha “mainly to that, for the land taken away from him to be given to Europeans was the best part of his tribe's grazing ground”.

Nothing daunted, white settlement proceeded apace. But the Beaumont Commission of 1914, following its instructions, looked for ways of increasing the area of the Zululand Reserves, and recommended considerable additions, to the scheduled black areas, especially in north central Zululand, notably in Ngotshe, Nquthu and Nkandla. It found an extra 3,840,341 acres in Natal and Zululand. But the local Natal Natives Land Committee of 1918 pared the Beaumont recommendations down to 934,340 acres, very few of the extra areas it selected being located in Zululand. That committee felt that Natal was being asked to find relatively more land for blacks than the other provinces, which was true, and proposed a new category of ‘neutral areas’, where both black and white could theoretically buy land, as a way of redressing the balance. Sir William Beaumont, the chairman, argued that the Land Act ought not to be applied in Natal at all. The Commission's minutes of evidence show that there was a great deal of opposition among farmers in what had once been the New Republic to the establishment of Reserves in those parts, even though the black population there had once been very heavy in the long memory of J. D. Rudolph of Paulpietersburg, and no native areas had ever been set apart in the New

Republic. Farmers in Nquthu were divided into two groups: those in the poorer areas were generally prepared to be bought out and compensated elsewhere, but those in the good cattle country preferred to stay. The sugar planters further south, whose Native Land Committee denied that the Reserves were overcrowded, went on to assert that the Beaumont Commission, by not visiting the area, to the north of Empangeni, had greatly underestimated the amount of immensely rich farmland there, which in the opinion of local magistrates whose views they ignored, could have been brought under commercial production and realized £11 millions in a year, an asset equal in importance to that of the Witwatersrand itself. For the black witnesses, though, of whom there were a good number, the position was pretty desperate. There was resentment at exclusion from good arable land, as shown in the evidence of Chief Lugugu in the Vryheid district. He complained of “a zigzag boundary made for the purpose of keeping out the lands that are easily ploughed and giving us the hills”. W. W. Ndhlovu, a **kholwa** from Vryheid East, resented being turned off good grazing land, and suggested the forming of black syndicates to buy commonage for their beasts. Yet others, like Chief Maxidana from the same area, resented expulsion to the lowveld: “It is impossible to keep cattle. We own nothing there, not even goats,” he said. “There is fever, famine and funerals”.

The reports of the local land committees of 1918 were accepted by the Smuts Government in 1922 as the basis for territorial division of South Africa under the Land Act, and this principle remained undisturbed in its essentials, though the amount of land released for black occupation was reduced, by General Hertzog. By 1918, therefore, the pattern of land distribution had been laid down, some thirty years after the Zulu had lost their political autonomy, some twenty years after they had been incorporated into Natal. It would be unfair to criticize those who divided the land in 1918 for not anticipating the population explosion of the second half of the twentieth century, which even the Tomlinson Commission failed to discern, though the drawing of these tight boundaries around Zulu settlement is at least noteworthy. In December 1977, some 12,052 hectares of quota land still had to be found in Natal and Zululand in terms of the 1936 allocation, though according to an earlier estimate the consolidation plans for KwaZulu which were announced in 1972 allowed for the provision of extra quota land in Natal. Consolidation involved cutting three broad paths of white settlement through KwaZulu by means of the elimination of ‘black spots’ (for which compensation is intended), and placing almost the entire coastal strip in white hands. This may have strategic implications and suggest an echo both of 19th century Boer expansionism and of British containment strategy, but it can only aggravate the demographic problem so clearly set out by D. C. Grice in his presidential address to the S.A. Institute of Race Relations in 1973, even though the most recent policy decisions allow for the inclusion of more and more large black towns in KwaZulu to absorb the bulk of the people. There is a further aggravating factor, of which Dinuzulu complained with a little justice in 1886, and Buthelezi with much more in 1973: the operation was carried out without the consent of those most affected. □