

THE NDEBELE STATE

by

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The Ndebele state was ruled by Khumalo kings who had emerged from the Ndwandwe. They probably were not absorbed by the Zulu at any time. During the Zulu-Ndwandwe wars of 1818-20 the Khumalo were ejected, and one of them, Mzilikazi, came to dominate a mixed band of marauders in search of more peaceful pastures. They - how many is not known - moved west of the Drakensberg into the upper Vaal valley during the early 1820's. In about 1828 they crossed the Vaal, north into the modern Pretoria region. In about 1832 west into the modern Rustenberg area. And between 1837 and about 1841 they migrated in two separate groups to the Matopos region of what is now Zimbabwe.

During these wanderings the original Nguni had absorbed many Sotho by marriage and capture. On the Matopos high veld Kalanga, Rozvi, other 'Shona', as well as Sotho and Venda groups were absorbed. The Ndebele, as they were coming to be called (the meaning is still unexplained) were culturally somewhat eclectic, although linguistically and in other senses too a process of Nguni-isation took place. Still, cultural and other differences between the Ndebele and other Nguni states are partly to be accounted for by the specific characteristics of the assimilants. But so far no serious research has been done into this field.

Mzilikazi was one of the greatest figures thrown up by the mfecane. Maybe the greatest. The Ndebele state was Mzilikazi's state and had nothing to do with Tshaka. Mzilikazi was an independent and outstanding innovator. He ruled fifty years to Tshaka's ten. He solved his own military and organisational problems in his own way, though within the context of his own Ndwandwe-Nguni thought patterns. Unlike the Zulu kingdom the Ndebele one was for over twenty years highly mobile and the new military organisation adapted itself to this circumstance. Though quite different in evolution and history, the

Zulu and Ndebele kingdoms share a common terminology in many instances. This has led to much confusion.

Mzilikazi ruled until his death in September 1868. After a power struggle between his sons, Lobengula became second king of the Ndebele. He ruled until his death in about 1894 after the invasion of 'Matabeleland' by the British South Africa Company. In 1896 Lobengula's son, Nyamanda, was made king, though that year also the Ndebele were finally conquered by British imperial and BSAC settler troops. The whites took all the Ndebele land and 80% of their cattle. Not until the 1970's has any serious attempt been made to get the land back.

Ndebele, or rather Mzilikazian political pattern have many clear similarities with those of other Nguni states. So let us keep an eye open for contrasts concealed under identical terminology. At the top was Mzilikazi (or Lobengula), the nkosi, the great man. His powers were extensive. The king ruled judicially, raised amabutho, coordinated strategy, distributed captives and cattle, allocated land, eliminated opponents if he could, tried hard to make it rain - but anyway assumed a quasi religious function, with the shades of his ancestors elevated into superior national spirits. All this, as well as national fertility, found its focus in the annual nxwala ceremonies in January and February. If you stayed away from the nxwala without good excuse it was a token of rebellion.

The kingdom, or the land (ilizwe) was divided into what we might as well call chieftaincies, under chiefs. Chieftaincy among the Ndebele was denoted as either umuzi wenkosi (settlement under the king), or isigaba (subdivision). There was nothing more exact. We have to invent the terminology as we go along as the Ndebele frequently did without. Perhaps there were sixty or seventy izigaba under Lobengula. Within the isigaba were many chiefs (izinduna), but usually only one big chief (induna enkulu) who within the context of the isigaba had extensive powers. These were the great families, the Mafus, Masukus, Ndiwenis, Mlotshas and of course Khumalos. Chieftainship was hereditary. Eldest sons by the great wives theoretically succeeded and usually did. The chiefs were aided in the government of the isigaba

by a sort of council of big men (izikulu) from the locality. The chiefs sat in judicial judgement with the advice of this council, the inkundhla. Evil-doers were rounded up by a chief's police gang, the izibonda. Sometimes gangs from the royal capital came as well, and clashes could take place. Chieftaincy politics were as exciting and intricate as national politics, as my own studies in Godhlwayo showed. Sadly, few studies of individual Ndebele chieftaincies have been made. This must be a major though increasingly tenuous goal. The chiefs too had certain (I mean uncertain) powers over the distribution of captives (abathunjiweyo) and 'state' cattle (see below). A good proportion of directly-owned cattle found their way into a chief's ownership. These he farmed out, aisa'd to subjects.

Many of the big chiefs travelled periodically to the royal capital, say Mhlahlanhlela or Bulawayo, where collectively they formed the king's advisory council. Those in the centre as they were imaginatively called: the umpakathi. The umpakathi played a crucial role in the determination of national policy. They sat in judgement. Both Mzilikazi and Lobengula were perfectly strong enough to dominate the umpakathi, but frequently, especially Lobengula, pretended to have their hands forced by the chiefs in order to avoid being the open instigators of unpopular courses of action. Both kings were genuinely willing to be persuaded by the chiefs. Until the Rudd Concession there is an impressive smoothness about most decision-making in the Ndebele state. The king would throw persistent Europeans to the izinduna who knew how to deal with them. They were a suspicious cunning, intelligent for the most part, worldly-wise group of men who could handle most things except armed invasion. Then the king suddenly found himself effectively alone.

In the umpakathi alongside the territorial chiefs were members, male members of the royal family - the brothers, uncles, cousins of the king. Note too that most of the chiefs were related to the king through marriage, either the king's or theirs. These royal relatives had their own villages inside the outlying chieftaincies, but were considered too superior to rule in the chiefly sense. How this convenient piece of ideology developed is not known. But the royal males, whilst

not ruling chieftaincies, did play an unusually important part in the collective decision-making, and were often important in the army. Royal Khumalos were also behind the regularity of the rains in November and organised the nxwala. On the other hand, royal men who developed real or imagined personal ambitions for the crown were got rid of. There are many examples.

In view of the role of royal women in the Zulu amakhanda, and because of the general ambiguity of the evidence, the precise function of royal women is an important one to grasp. But so far I have not succeeded very well. Lobengula had scores of wives, sisters, aunts etc. The big wife, Lozigeyi, had political influence. The royal wife, one of Mzila's daughters named Xwalile, neither had any influence nor did she produce an heir. The mother of Nyamanda, Mbida, played no political part apparently. Yet royal women were scattered around the chieftaincies, having status there. The chiefs kept an eye on them. They had their own villages, captives and cows. In some villages there were isigodhlo for royal women. Some of the older writers assumed this was the real machinery of political authority in the kingdom, but I doubt it. All the signs are that, apart from a few important women such as Lozigeyi, the state was dominated by men. But further research would be welcome, especially on the isigodhlo.

Let us return to the umuzi wenkosi, the chieftaincy. Note in this context the term umuzi means large area of settlement. Inside were many, perhaps hundreds of villages, also settlements, and therefore called imizi. Some early writers ignored the flexibility of the word and dreamt of towns several miles in diameter, all heavily militarised. Needless to say such monstrosities did not exist. The villages, imizi (or sometimes imizana), were for the most part imizi zamathanga, literally 'private' villages of ordinary people. They were family villages surrounded by a fence, with associated places for cattle and grain storage. The head of the family was the owner of the village, the umniniumzana, exactly as with the Zulu. From the ranks of the abaniniumzana came the advisers of the big chief. Geographically within the chieftaincy were certain parts, termed izigatshana (little subdivisions), over which one or more abaniniumzana

might have extra political weight. Such men referred to themselves as izinduna too. As for Jeff Guy then, one man with two titles. But the Ndebele might take a third. As an induna he was a subordinate, helper, nurse (?) of the senior chiefs, and in this capacity was termed umlisa. After Europeanisation took place umlisa rather than umniniumzana was chosen to translate the specifically European concept of 'headman'. Invariably Ndebele males referred to themselves positively, which is why in the literature there were so many izinduna and so few abalisa.

In this way a rough political hierarchy can be sketched from king and royal family, down through the induna enkulu, to the umniniumzana. Military organisation we will leave aside just for a moment.

The economic structure of the kingdom was as simple, though it is equally important to get the emphases and detail right. The fundamental, first economic activity was the production of grain. These were mainly the millets, amabele, inyaouti and rapoko. The evidence that exists strongly suggests that this cultivation was centred in individual villages, each family's planting, reaping, feeding being governed by the umniniumzana. Authority mainly lay with the old. Fields were shifted at intervals. Presumably the induna enkulu would arbitrate over land disputes and allocation. I say presumably because there is virtually no evidence for pre-1896 land allocation. We must also find refuge in the unsatisfactory cliché that the king owned the land. When individuals or even families wished to shift their homes from one isigaba to another, of which there a few examples implying it happened frequently, it is more likely that permission would have been sought from the chiefs rather than troubling the king. Both men and women worked in the fields. I suspect the concept of the Nguni man disdaining work in the fields is a myth. So did slaves - but the Ndebele were agriculturalists, whilst not talking much about it. They did not feed off the Shona. Even chiefs worked in the fields. So did the soldiers the amajaha, who took home-leave in the planting season. The Shona were planting at the same time so defence was not impaired much. So far I have no evidence of a tribute being paid to the induna enkulu, which is not to say it did not happen. Gifts probably were made.

Certainly such tribute in grain etc. was paid to the king. Special 'king's fields' were planted in each isigaba, and were harvested first. Exactly how the corvées for these fields were organised is not known. But they existed. It is on these corvées that any theory of class exploitation for the Ndebele is going at least partly to be founded. If I had more field-work time these are the areas I would now explore hardest.

The next major economic concern was cattle-rearing. We can virtually interchange any paragraph assessing the significance of cattle for the Ndebele with any other Nguni group, though the obsession is at least partly in the minds of their historians. Still, the Ndebele did love their cattle, thought and dreamt of little else, except the gun, which, naturally, in the end they exchanged mainly their cows for. The whole kingdom was organised to protect both the cows and the fields, and by cows I mean the grazing areas. Raiding was partly designed to steal the cattle of others, expropriating the lot, if possible, not the surplus, whatever that means. Inside the kingdom and the tributary area (of which more below) a seasonal transhumance took place, when in the winter the soldiers and herders took cows down to the middle-veld, e.g. the Umzingwani valley, for the sweet grass, uhatshi. This need to protect cattle in vulnerable frontier regions in winter underlay Ndebele relations with neighbouring peoples. National tensions increased dramatically when the national herd was threatened, as during the lung-sickness of the early 1860s, and the systematic exactions of the BSAC during 1893-5. Much of the violence in the high-veld originated with cattle. After 1893 the Europeans progressively destroyed the Ndebele system by destroying its cattle-owning mechanism.

This mechanism is interesting. There were at least two distinct concepts of cattle ownership. Firstly, in a collective sense, as a nation. Under Mzilikazi a national herd had been established. A large percentage of raided cattle for example became designated in this way as king's cattle, or regimental cattle: izinkomo zenkosi, izinkomo zebutho respectively. (NB, these terms are synonyms.) These the king distributed to the izigaba. The role of the izinduna in this process is not known, though direct distribution by them was regarded as

illegal in theory. Such cattle appear to have gone equally to the needy and the loyal and to the successful. They were inalienably the nation's. The milk, manure and occasionally meat from these animals induced many outsiders to stay and share the king's bounty. In return they fought for him and praised his name. It used to be assumed, largely as a result of BSAC propaganda and a general mystification of 'bantu cattle ownership systems' that all Ndebele cattle were communally owned in this way, and therefore ultimately the king's. But this was not the case at all. Additionally, there were privately owned cattle, izinkomo zamathanga. Chiefs, successful warriors, izanusu etc. tended to have the largest herds. The king himself had by far the largest. Such king's cows were really king's cows, unlike the previous category. One man's cow was distinguished from his neighbour's and from 'regimental/king's' cattle within the chieftaincy by a system of izimphawu, earmarks. Such cows a man could do what he liked with. He might also be fined with them for serious misdemeanours. For treason his whole herd would go. But above all izinkomo zamathanga were for lobola, a use to which the king's cows were never put. (Again I mean communal cows. The king paid lobola to the chiefs for their daughters from his private herd, as did any other man.) Private cows thus produced wives of rank, and larger villages, more sons, and more followers, and guns, and more cows.

And they had to be looked after and herded where the grass was green. Private cattle were frequently sisa'd out by a wealthy man to followers, even slaves, who - as in the other Nguni systems - utilised the fruit of the cows but never assumed ownership. Such cattle relationships were of course political relationships binding men together, and they frequently lasted for generations. Herder-out and herder families would have common histories and the children would grow up together. In many cases sisa'd cows would for practical purposes become the herder's, though he, or in some cases she, could be deprived of them for breaches of loyalty. The son of a slave took over the cows his father had herded. Note that the two ownership systems were clearly separated even when cattle of several different statuses were herded together, eg. in winter pastures. This was the main way in which

slaves acquired access to cows. The herder might under unknown circumstances be given a calf in full, mathanga ownership. Was this class exploitation of commoner by chief as Jeff Peires suggests? I would here simply at least stress, I hope without becoming too romantic, the element of symbiosis. Certainly, elderly Ndebele informants of commoner status tend to be nostalgic about those relationships of their lost paradise. But that might be equally misleading in view of what they had to put up with in the twentieth century.

In 1894 the BSAC abolished private ownership for a time on the spurious ground that it was both rare and impossible to define. It was simply an expedient to steal everyone's cattle, not just the 'king's', i.e. communal cows which the British Government readily allowed to be passed to the whites 'by right of conquest'. Thus private Ndebele cattle also ended up in South African butcheries, stocking white farms, and worst of all, as gifts to collaborators during 1894-6. It was a language the Ndebele understood only too well. In 1896 their response was to rise and kill as many whites as possible in an attempt to save the few remaining cattle, which, after the outbreak of rinderpest, the Europeans were determined to shoot.

Cattle herds had both to be built up and defended. So had the land holding. So too had the king's law and the king's peace. The dangers of political rebellion and secession had to be guarded against, and Boers and later gold prospectors kept at arms length. Tribute had to be enforced and trading licences had fines collected. Punishment expeditions had to be despatched. These necessities, as well as the founding of the whole structure were only achieved by Mzilikazi's military expedients, especially the particular way that he raised amabutho. Practically all the Nguni states had amabutho or at least were aware of the concept. The way Ndebele 'regiments' were raised and evolved however appears to have been unique, so it is worth attention.

As Professor Wilson observes, much Nguni terminology has a variety of senses. The Ndebele ibutho is a good example. It could for example refer to an actual army of men on a raid. It could also be men from a given area who when called out to fight would be so collectively. These usually older men would have to march off to

collecting points and await the king's officers. If away overnight they would sleep in groups called amaxhiba. After the business the mature men would go home again if they were lucky with a cow or, better still, a child captive. Such amabutho were therefore transitory.

In another more important sense the king raised amabutho from young men of the kingdom who did not return home. The king's messengers would comb the villages for candidates of the right age and strength. The recruits would be trained, subdivided, and over a period of years be used as police and soldiers, also, though incidentally, as king's labourers. They would herd cattle for example. Such recruits for a time occupied military encampments. As in European armies, the women got in: grandmothers came to cook; young women came as prostitutes. There is no extant description of such an encampment away from the king's capital as Europeans did not go into them. They must have been untidy ephemeral structures. In winter the ibutho would break up and groups go cattle-herding, establishing much smaller shelters, the famous amalaga. Some of the communal cattle would be allocated to the ibutho for keeps, hence the title izinkomo zebutho. There is no evidence, but surely a levy of grain must have been made from somewhere to keep them? If so, then a whole organisation of grain-growing for regiments, its harvesting and distribution has escaped description. Somewhere men must have been worrying about commissariat problems.

Many of the amabutho can be traced, their dates of formation, their chiefs and geographical history, though there is much less detail for the earlier ones. Inqobo for example was raised in the 1860s, Imbizo in 1871, and Insuga in about 1883-4. There was no exact regularity, though regiment-raising appears to have accelerated in times of national danger. Several were raised between 1887 and 1892. In them the martial spirit was literally cultivated. There were no Ndebele pacifists. Very high standards of discipline and punishment existed. The psychology would have been frightening for us had we to step out of our comfortable rooms into the past. Having gone through the mill, the ijaha, young warrior, became iqawe, experienced warrior. From this school emerged some of the

next generation of chiefly families. Founders of earlier chieftainces such as Godhlwayo were often great soldiers. As an igawe grew older the king said he could marry and have children, which was a way of saying he could stop being a full-time soldier. The wife would come back to the ibutho nevertheless, which started having aspects of the nursery. The warrior would in time become an igawe and an umniniumzana as he built his own village. It is easier to represent this process diagrammatically, but this is inadequate. We have to visualise the barracks breaking up, consolidating its hold on one particular valley, private villages proliferating, new relationships being established. There would be a great book describing one such transformation if only the evidence were available. Suddenly the children were growing up, the chief was old and had lots of wives, and the king would send his messengers for the next ibutho. In this way amabutho, at least many of them, had continuous histories, and differed from age-sets which broke up. The origins of this continuity are a matter of doubt, and whether the observable evolution of Lobengula's amabutho during stable circumstances was identical to the careers of Mzilikazi's early amabutho during time of movement, is also not known.

The king was clearly making a levy of men from the outlying izigaba. A levy of women was also being made, though they would have gone in any case. The outlying chieftaincies did not collapse though, because only a smallish percentage of their young men went off in the end. Ibutho-raising was permanently irregular. Not all young men went. There were exemptions. Sometimes men were permitted to return home. They were allowed back to plant. Heirs would still succeed to property. But it implied much to and froing, and also a thorough mixing of people. Aged parents would go off to the settlements of their sons. Sometimes sons would come back to look after them. Daughters would run off to an ibutho to be with a man they had fallen in love with. Parental authority fought in vain. Indeed, the idea of the family must have been diluted. The history of the Ndebele is to be written around the successful chieftaincies, not clans. How the Kalanga and Rozvi organisation was

modified during the process of being swallowed (see below) is even more mysterious, largely because no one has studied these people historically. People were now men of the king, and of the chief, as well as of their fathers.

To dismiss such complicated happenings as 'exploitation' or 'extraction of surplus' is simply ducking the issues involved. The main problem is that there is still too little evidence to be able to describe exactly what was going on. Even with the information at hand there is still much ambiguity. In the Ndebele kingdom however, it is clear that individual families laboured for the king, either by contributing to corvées or by yielding the labour of their sons for amabutho. What they gave up to the chiefs is not so clear. In return they got cattle sometimes, captives more rarely, security and justice invariably. It was a sufficiently good bargain to attract migrants. The contrast between the lives of the wealthy and those of the less wealthy was much less than that between urban workers and capitalists in nineteenth-century Europe. How the competition for wealth and power between the king and great chiefs, between the latter and the little chiefs, between them and the ordinary abaniniuzana, and for authority within the family between the latter and their wives, slaves and children fits into concepts of class struggle is a subject still to be researched.

As a debating hypothesis I have already suggested that the amabutho were production units, expanded 'work parties'. The other productive unit lay within the umuzi, that is the village, this producing the authority of the uminiuzana. Similarly the king's power derived from his control over men in amabutho. It was an idea which was attacked, though I notice Jeff Guy is saying much the same thing for the Zulu. It is an idea I advance again. Some people have resisted the view of the ibutho as a productive unit. There is a difference, they say, between extraction through raiding and production. All I will repeat here is that quite apart from direct seizure of cattle, captives etc., the amabutho were productive in both the acquisitive and protective sense. Without these defence forces the Ndebele would have quickly succumbed to foreign enemies and production

itself, would have halted. The amajaha were as much direct producers as the women in the fields.

So far I have mentioned the individual villages, the imizi, the chieftaincies, the izigaba, the amabutho, and by implication the king's place, enkosini, a town on a different scale and structure from either the ibutho encampment or the largest umuzi zamathanga or private village. In other words the old idea of the Ndebele state being an agglomeration of huge regimental towns is not tenable. Various types of settlement existed independently and simultaneously, evolving and shifting in their different patterns.

There were yet other patterns, but before mentioning them, there is one further question associated with amabutho and settlement. Were the regiments grouped together into divisions à la British army, and were these four divisions, namely amnyama, amhlope, igapha and amakanda, formal military-cum-territorial subdivisions of the kingdom? Virtually all previous writers from Maund onwards assumed this to be the case. But it is, in this writer's view, a serious misdescription. They were certainly not formal military units. Geographically they existed though. Amnyama for example was a generic name given to settlements in the upper Umzingwane valley, between the Mulungwane and Matopos ranges. Amakanda (nothing to do with Zulu amakanda) embraced chieftaincies to the east of the Mulungwane along the upper Insisa. Amhlope was to the north of the Matopos; and igapha to the west, north and east of the others. They appear to have been earlier amabutho which for some quite mysterious reason gave their names to areas in the Matopos region. All four originated south of the Limpopo. Undoubtedly there were settlement and blood relationships between later chieftaincies and/or amabutho and these earlier amabutho. Why these particular four should have been singled out is not obvious nevertheless.

The Ndebele chieftaincies, the state that is, clustered together in the relatively restricted area of about 4 000 square miles in the shape of an egg, with the rounded end to the south-west on the watershed between the Shashani and Gwai rivers, its pointed end reaching as

far as the Gwelo and Ingwenya rivers, its northern edge skirting the Shangani valley and tsetse fly area, its southern edge the upper Insisa and Nuanetsi rivers. The pointed end was an extension occurring about the 1860s. The total population of this central state is conjectural, my own calculations from early European censuses giving a figure of 50-70 000. This falls well short of most contemporary European guesses though.

This area occupied by the central kingdom was almost purely coincidentally previously occupied by the Rozvi-dominated Changamire 'empire'. These Rozvi groups were conquered and absorbed by the Ndebele during the 1840s. Those who resisted were forced to flee, as was Mambo Towechipi who ended up far to the east in the upper Sabi valley. Towechipi was finally captured in 1866, given a lecture, and sent back. Other Rozvi fled to the Belingwe and Mpateni regions to the south-east. Non-Rozvi peoples who had paid tribute to the mambos, for example the Nyubi of the Matopos valleys, were also absorbed and paid tribute to Mzilikazi instead. These people were swallowed whole and in the end Ndebele-ised. Their children were recruited into amabutho, grew up speaking Sindebele and pierced their ears. Some of their leaders became izinduna; their women were taken as wives by the Nguni and Sotho. How far Rozvi village organisations were left intact is not known. Unlike the Tumbuka in the Ngoni areas however the Rozvi accepted 'kaffirisation'. They became Ndebele. The Ndebele from down south regarded them as inferiors, termed them 'holi'. No one knows what this means.

The population of this central Ndebele state can thus be divided into several groupings. There were those of pure Nguni descent, and those Ndebele-ised Sotho who crossed north of the Limpopo with Mzilikazi. There were also some Swazi. Then there were Rozvi, other 'Shona' especially the Kalanga, as well as more Sotho assimilated in the Matopos. Finally there were captives - abathunjiweyo. Rather, finally there were innumerable voluntary migrants, including a group of Fingos under the Mazizis. These brought with them their skills (William Mazizi became Lobengula's chief isanusi) and cultural enrichment. The mix seems to have been far more positive than among Mbelwa's Ngoni as Dr Vail describes them.

Did these groupings correspond to castes, as many writers have asserted? This is still a common misconception: that there were the three castes of Zansi, Enhla and Holi. The first thing to stress is that Zansi simply meant someone from down south, and Enhla one from the top, i. e. from north of the original Nguni area in Zululand and Natal. Zansi were thus Nguni, and Enhla Sotho. They were geographical expressions denoting tribal origin. They were never caste terms. Naturally the Nguni, controlling the state, regarded themselves as superior. By far the majority of the great chiefs, though not all, were Nguni. These Nguni families did tend to occupy the position of an aristocracy, and intermarried with an eye to economic exclusiveness and racial purity. Chiefs selected marriage partners carefully from a narrow group of families. They were as inbred as sealpoint siamese cat lines. These families are still astonishingly unpolluted by non-Nguni blood to this day. Physically the elderly women are quite distinctive. But I think a ruling class rather than a rigid caste. There was much intermarriage across the blood divisions, though it is true that slave usually ended up by marrying slave, and Ndebele-ised Rozvi someone from the Rozvi or Sotho. Lobengula had openly to preach the virtues of cross-marriage to bind the nation together.

Around the central kingdom was 'the tributary state'. This is an artificial concept which covers the non-Ndebele living on friendly terms with the Ndebele, whose major duties were to aid the Ndebele graze their cattle and support the king in war. They occupied precisely the area which previous experts described as a scorched-earth belt. They didn't look hard enough. Such tributees seldom lived comfortably as they were either sandwiched between the Ndebele, and further away anti-Ndebele chiefdoms, such as the Ngwato to the south-west or the Kololo/Lozi in the north-west, or faced with the temptations of complete independence. Chivi, for example, a Shona (Mhari) chief in the south-east was both compelled to pay tribute and resented it. The Ndebele raided him partly to punish him, partly to lift his cattle, partly to prevent him receiving guns from the Boers and Venda. If he had submitted none of this would have happened. Similarly in the far north-east the Hera chief Hwata was also brought back to

Mhlahlanhlela and warned. By 1868 Hwata was forgetting his tribute and was raided again. He was an acute embarrassment to Mzilikazi because of his connections with the Portuguese. Similarly too the well-established tributee Nemaqonde (Lomagundi) was outbid by the Portuguese, and was murdered by the Ndebele in 1891 for forgetting to send his presents.

You escaped this sort of intimidation if you paid tribute. Closer to the Ndebele the tributees had no choice except to flee. Few did. They were left in peace as long as they sent tokens of allegiance. Sometimes they received Ndebele governors. For example, the Ndebele chiefs of Nqama in the upper Tuli sent agents amongst the Birwa, a Sotho group living to the south in the Jahunda Hills (modern Gwanda area). The Birwa started piercing their ears and becoming martial. In the west the Kalanga were grouped together into villages such as Usaba and Lulwana. Sometimes they received Ndebele rulers. More often they continued under their own lines, their chiefs becoming more Ndebele than the Zansi. The western Kalanga reached the king through the Sithole chieftaincy of Amagogo on the upper Khami, and Gampu Sithole quickly became an overpowerful subject. In the north the Shangwe of Sileya and Inyoka received visits from Inqobo and sent a tribute of tobacco. In the north-east, Chiwundura and Gambiza (Shona) allied with the Khumalo of Mbambanjeni. In the east the Mhari of Nhemba, in contradistinction to their relatives in Chivi, herded cattle for the Ndebele of Nxa. One of the Ndebele governors, Nkomiyapi is still well remembered today. The chiefs of Nxe aided the people of Nhemba against Nhemba's enemies further east, a situation which led directly to the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893. In the south-east the Ndebele chiefs of Godhlwayo, the Mafus, dominated Venda, Rozvi and Lemba groups, in an arc between the modern towns of West Nicholson and Shabani.

Who was parasiting off whom? Take the last example. The Godhlwayo Ndebele were able to herd out their cattle in Mpateni. The Lemba supplied them with copper. Men from the Dumbuseya imitated their military ethos and supplied them with troops. Some supplied the king with skins, others with iron hoes. In return they were left in peace.

The relationship could not have been entirely unhappy since virtually 100% of the Ndebele tributees rose with the Ndebele against the Europeans in 1896. This line-up had nothing to do with a religious network as Ranger suggested. Was the tribute economically significant? It may have been, but its intention was aufond political. Lobengula was sometimes so delighted when wavering tributees returned to the fold that he sent them presents in return. Much of the tribute was symbolic. Birwa tribute was to kill a cow in honour of the local Ndebele governor. The Ndebele were economically just about self-sufficient and certainly did not depend on tribute, which is not to say the king did not appreciate Inyoka's tobacco. Payment of tribute was a sure, indeed the only insurance against raids. It was a protection racket, but the victims paid up, and there were advantages. Do not confuse the levying of tribute with raiding. The two were in essence alternatives.

As mentioned the geographical extension of the tributary state coincided with the area of Ndebele winter cattle grazing. Or put the other way, the Ndebele utilised the pastures of safe tributees such as Nhema for their own cattle. It was cattle siaa'ing carried out on a tribal level, since the tributees frequently supplied the herders too. As with the slaves inside the Ndebele kingdom, the tributees gained calves, manure, meat. Ndebele impis were placed at their disposal for help against local enemies. A vast frontier opened up which advanced and ebbed. Ndebele warriors were joined by non-Ndebele, e. g. the Dumbuseya, in their raiding. Patrols were out continuously. Some years the focus was in one direction, other years another. Europeans ceased to be able to distinguish between Ndebele and Ndebele imitators. Behind the amajaha came spy networks and then hunting parties. As accurate news passed back to the capital, the kings decided where punishment raids were necessary and organised the amabutho to carry them out. At the outer limits Ndebele armies reached as far as southern Botswana, southern Zambia, the lower Zambesi below Kariba, the Salisbury area, and as far as the 'border' with the Gaza in south-eastern Rhodesia. For the heartland in the centre a relatively peaceful environment was achieved which only European conquest was to destroy.

Finally, trade. After all it was not all violence and theft. Another of the older views was that the Ndebele didn't know how to trade, and were not susceptible to the enticements of European trade goods. Nothing could be further from the truth. Another myth was that the Ndebele scorned the gun. See recent writings of Rasmussen and Mudenge. This is also quite untrue. The Ndebele were obsessed with guns and ammunition ever since the 1820s. Later they wanted cloth, and other things such as beads. As much junk passed from Shoshong to Bulawayo, and from there to the outlying chieftaincies, as to any other African society in the nineteenth century. Any taboo the Ndebele may have had about selling their cows was quickly overcome by the demand for firearms. Europeans sold guns worth two guineas for cows worth six at Mafeking. The Ndebele tried to use the firearms so acquired in offensives, but never had enough ammunition to be able to discard the assegai. They began to dress in European clothes. The best-dressed chiefs had old jackets for important occasions. Many of them invested in alcohol first. Some tried to sell their daughters to the whites for brandy or a musket. White traders outnumbered missionaries by ten to one. They purchased grain and sheep for their own supplies. The Ndebele began producing specially for them. The quantities were probably too small to support any theory of underdevelopment though. The king used his status to get the best bargains, and expected to sell his cows at a royal price. A scale of comparative prices was established, and slumps and booms fluctuated. Above all the Ndebele sold their labour. Europeans always needed help with wagons and guides. The Ndebele would work six months for a gun. This included the Nguni, who were shy of derisory wages rather than of work. By the 1870s Ndebele were working in the diamond mines in the Kimberley area. If you travelled the road between Kimberley, Shoshong and Bulawayo you met Ndebele going north or south to find work or returning with the proceeds. Much banditry took place. When they got home, if they did, the village would celebrate. Whether part of the wages went to the izinduna I haven't been able to discover. You would also see large herds of Ndebele cattle being driven south to the slaughter houses. When the whites occupied Mashonaland in 1890

Ndebele cattle were traded in Salisbury. Ndebele labour flocked into Mashonaland in 1890-3. The Europeans at that time had a prejudice in their favour in contrast to the 'lazy' Shona. After 1894 the Ndebele became 'lazy' and good for nothing too. The Ndebele did not like the new era of forced labour which followed the conquest. But there was no anti-work ethos or workshyness.

We will leave the Ndebele worshipping their various Gods. The Nguni communicated with Unkulunkulu and Somandhla, the Sotho with Mlimo and the Kalanga, Venda and Rozvi either with their mhondoro or the Mwari cult. Some Ndebele were even converted to Christianity, with especially Thomas Morgan Thomas reporting some success at Shiloh in the early 1880s. It would be a golden field for religious history but so far it has not been touched. We are left with myths and nonsense.