Introduction

This thesis is largely interpretative and revisionist in approach to Ndebele history. It is built upon the works of Kent Rasmussen, Ngwabi Bhebe, Julian Cobbing, and Pathisa Nyathi. These pioneering works were largely premised on an empiricist methodology that made them to concentrate on “event” history, rather than ideology and social practice. This thesis goes beyond the realm of event and empiricist history to grapple with the ideological issues. Its theoretical framework is situated within the context of the novel and critical perspective of democracy and human rights and Antonio Gramsci’s innovative theory of hegemony. The theory of democracy and human rights has generally been assumed to be useful in illuminating only late colonial and post-colonial experiences of Africans. In this thesis, this theory is projected backward and effectively applied to the analysis of the pre-colonial Ndebele state, society, and the early colonial Rhodesian state.

In broad terms, the thesis covers three phases of Ndebele history, beginning with the period 1818 to 1842. This is the period of the Mfecane, migration, state formation and initial settlement of the Ndebele on the Zimbabwean plateau. The second phase is traced from 1842-1893. It is the period of settlement dominated by coalescence of various ethnic groups into a united and heterogeneous Ndebele nation, as well as the consolidation of Khumalo hegemony via the process of ritualisation of kingship and delicate balancing of coercion and consent. The last phase is reconstructed from the first encounter between the Ndebele and the representatives of Western imperialism up to the
mid-colonial period. It is a period of engagement with Christian missionaries, the British South Africa Company (BSAC), conquest, and interactions between the Ndebele and the early Rhodesian colonial state up to 1934.

The significance of this study lies in its approach to the Ndebele past. It links together historical process, social practice, and cultural mediation in its reconstruction of the Ndebele history. In other words, this thesis goes beyond the existing sheer increment of positivistic narratives that only serve to disguise the underlying structurations of the Ndebele state. It moves away from the common approach confined to the realm of events to the higher level of analysis situated in a scientific understanding of structure, social practice, and transformation. As noted by Jean Comaroff, the socio-cultural structure and the “live-in” world of practice are mutually constitutive: the former, because of the contradictory implications of its component principles and categories, is capable of giving rise to a range of possible outcomes on the ground. The world of practice, because of its inherent conflicts and constantly shifting material circumstances, is capable not only of reproducing the structural order, but also of changing it, either through cumulative shifts or by means of consciously motivated action. For instance, in the Ndebele state it was clear that the pre-colonial structural forms continued to be reproduced as long as the Khumalo leadership exercised control over the primary means of production and over those centralised institutions that underpinned the division of labour.
The approach of this thesis, therefore, entails a comprehensive re-consideration of Ndebele historical events as the practical embodiments of a more deep-seated structural order. In a way, one significant feature of the Ndebele historical events was to reflect the manner in which the Ndebele themselves struggled to reproduce their socio-cultural forms under different environments and circumstances. In short, the theoretical innovation of this thesis is predicated on the realisation that there is need to take into account the interplay of subjects and objects, of the dominant and the subservient, and treats the social process as a dialectic one at once semantic and material. Thus, in the Ndebele historical experience lie the basis for understanding the reciprocal scenario and the interactive site in which ideology “make” people, and people “make” ideology.  

In its endeavour to unpack the complex interactions between the state and society and to unravel cultural practice and its attendant specificities, the thesis combines the insights from the radical materialist approach to democracy and human rights with the powerful theory of hegemony as elaborated by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci’s theory is very useful in illuminating the history of society and of cultural practice and specificities. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted in this thesis as a very useful tool of analysis and a basis for an agreed charter of rights. It is used to critique both the pre-colonial Ndebele practices as well the practices of the agents of colonialism and the colonial state itself.
The thesis is the first of its kind to delve deeper into the ideological intricacies of the Ndebele state with a view to tease out logical meaning out of what was sometimes dismissed as autocracy, militarism, superstition or barbarism. The thesis addresses very fundamental questions as: How did the Khumalo establish hegemony? How did they manage to pass on to other members of the Ndebele society their values and ideas? How successful was the Ndebele ruling elite in making the Khumalo ancestors relevant for the consolidation, legitimacy, and dissemination of ideology? How did the Ndebele ruling elite manage conflicting interests within the Ndebele society? What strategies were used to gain support from the people who became part of the new Ndebele nation? What was the content and meaning of Ndebele oral literature? What was the nature of the relationship between the state and society among the Ndebele? These are indeed fundamental questions whose answers are situated in a deeper reconstruction of the Ndebele history beyond the common narrative and ordinary event history. Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is effectively employed to penetrate the body politic of the Ndebele state and society.

A deeper analysis of Ndebele past that goes beyond narration and event history help in grappling with such new questions as: How, precisely was Ndebele consciousness made and remade? How was it mediated by such distinctions as class, gender, and ethnicity? How did some meanings and actions, old and new alike, became conventional-either asserted as collective Ndebele values or just taken for granted-while others became objects of contest and resistance? How, indeed, are we to understand the connections, historically and conceptually,
among culture, consciousness, and ideology in the Ndebele context? These new questions have not been covered adequately in existing historical works on the Ndebele. This thesis proceeds again to tease out meaning and logic out of the ambiguous and contradictory colonial encounter with the Ndebele.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters where Gramsci’s theory and insights from the democracy and human rights perspective are employed at various points, where and as they seem appropriate.

In chapter one, the main concern is with theoretical issues that underpin the whole thesis. It summarises Gramsci’s main theoretical ideas, it defines the materialist conception of democracy and human rights and spells out the criteria of human rights adopted in this thesis, derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The chapter also contains a detailed literature review on the Ndebele past, starting with early missionary and settler accounts up to the present work of Terence Ranger and Phathisa Nyathi.¹⁵

Chapter two is devoted to the formation of the Ndebele state and the emergence and construction of Khumalo hegemony in the midst of the Mfecane Revolution. Attention is paid to the Khumalo group’s search for autonomy and how Mzilikazi Khumalo, here considered as a typical “traditional intellectual” used the tactic of balancing coercion with consent to build personal power base and built the Ndebele state. The complex processes that are teased out include migration as a tactic of preserving one’s autonomy and sovereignty in the face
of violent politics of the *Mfecane* and powerful enemies. Migration is also viewed as a voluntary enterprise of ambitious personalities who sought to establish hegemony away from powerful states. The *Mfecane* is defined and understood as a product of ambitious leaders’ hegemonic projects at their decisive phase. The main symptoms of this phase was the rise of new royal houses and clans that sought to challenge the status quo, and that sought create personal power bases away from other powerful royal houses.

Chapter three investigates the whole gamut of the constitution of a heterogeneous Ndebele nation that was now permanently entrenched on the western part of the Zimbabwean plateau. The main focus is on how the Khumalo ruling elite was able to construct a durable though unstable hegemony over people of different ethnic groups, and how they ceaselessly worked to forge alliances and how they consistently attempted to convert sectarian ideas into universal truths. It was during this period that the Ndebele ruling elite worked very hard and succeeded to a great extent in capturing popular mentality and common conceptions of the world of the Ndebele nation. This was achieved through various means, including a strategic shift from control of the means of violence to control of the means of production, civilianisation of the main Ndebele institutions, strategic distribution of resources, full accommodation of non-Nguni groups, and above all ritualization of the kingship. In short, this chapter grapples and teases out the complex ideological matrix and mix that constituted the Ndebele nation. These ideological contours included egalitarianism, clan and family intimacies, mutual assistance,
welfarism, communalism, which co-existed with domination, exploitation, violence of the big men, seniority, aristocratic, authoritarian, and militaristic tendencies—all in turn underpinned by a strong patriarchal thinking and an all-embracing ideology of kinship.

Chapter four is concerned with secular and religious control and domination exercised by the ruling elite over their subjects during the settled phase of the Ndebele state. This chapter benefits much from insights from Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, and it is in this chapter that a considerable body of Ndebele oral literature is subjected to systematic analysis with a view to distil issues of democracy and human rights contained in them.

Chapter five evaluates the initial encounter between European agents of colonialism and the Ndebele state. The focus is on the activities of Christian missionaries. The theoretical framework of this chapter is constructed from the ideas of Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff on the ambiguities of colonial encounter with African societies in general. According to the Comaroffs, Christian missionaries were not only the vanguard of British colonialism. But were also the most active cultural agents of empire. They were driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the African world in the name of God and European civilization. Christian missionaries, unlike the mining magnates who wanted minerals and labour of the Africans, they wanted the African soul. The whole missionary enterprise in Africa was an attempt to replace one form of
hegemony with another, and this raised crucial clashes over norms, ideas and
the general conception of the world, as well as resistance from the Africans.

Chapter six is a critique of colonial conquest of the Ndebele state and the
general disregard of Ndebele economic and political rights.

Chapter seven grapples with the crucial ambiguities of colonial domination of
the Ndebele up to 1934. The theoretical framework of this chapter is derived
from the concept of “citizen and subject” as articulated by Mahmood Mamdani.
Mamdani’s theory about citizens and subjects in colonial societies help to
explain not only the denial of human rights and democracy to the Ndebele by
the early Rhodesian colonial state, but also the ambiguous responses of the
Ndebele to their domination and exploitation under a colonial regime.\(^7\) The
chapter also benefits from the insights of the Comaroffs on the colonial
encounter that far transcended a simple paradigm of domination and
resistance. Shula Marks’ idea of ambiguities of dependency also contributes to
the unravelling of the colonial encounter with the Ndebele in the period 1898 to
1934.\(^8\)

The last section of this thesis is the conclusion, where further meaning, impact,
and long-term implications of the findings of this study are brought out and
related to contemporary issues in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular.
Endnotes


5. Professor T.O.Ranger is currently working on a social history of Bulawayo and Phathisa Nyathi is continuing to explore various aspects of Ndebele history. He has just finished a clan history of the Bhebe clan.


CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction
This chapter outlines a theoretical framework that informs the whole thesis on the reconstruction and reinterpretation of Ndebele past between 1818 and 1934. The overall thesis is inspired by the innovative concept of hegemony as articulated by Antonio Gramsci; the radical materialist perspective on democracy and human rights as propounded by such scholars as Paul Tiyambe Zeleza; and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which is taken as the basis of an agreed charter of rights. The theoretical framework is followed by a detailed literature review on the Ndebele history.

1.1 Antonio Gramsci’s Theory of Hegemony
Gramsci’s theory was constituted by the ideas of *egemonia* (hegemony), *direzione* (consent, that is, the sense of collaboration or subscription to leadership by the ruled), and *dominio* (coercion, with implications of domination and force).\(^1\) In broad terms, hegemony referred to that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images, and epistemologies-drawn from a historically situated cultural field-that came to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabit it. In short, hegemony was related to the whole business of habit forming, capturing popular mentality, creation of common conceptions of the world, and secure power bases by ruling groups.\(^2\) According to Gramsci, hegemony referred to the spontaneous consent given by the greater masses of the population (subjects)
to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group (ruling elite). ³

Hegemony was realized through the balancing of competing forces of consent and coercion, not the crushing calculus of class domination as the orthodoxy Marxists wanted us to believe. Effective hegemony, therefore, depended on “cultural imperialism”, that is, on the ceaseless effort of the ruling group to forge alliances and their consistent energy to convert sectarian ideas into universal truths.⁴

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, though it was unsystematically stated and developed by its propounder, is very important because it offers a ready rapprochement between theory and practice, thought and action, and ideology and power. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is very useful for generating a dialogue between the history of structures and the history of cultures, and for relating social and cultural practices to their mental, intellectualist and ideological representation. His treatment of the articulation of consent has the virtue of liberating cultural practice from the ossified and synchronic definition.⁵

The theory of hegemony enables historians to tackle effectively the issue of connections between cultural practice and its representations to historically revealed structurations of social reality. It is, therefore, the submission of this thesis that any meaningful reconstruction of the Ndebele past requires an integration of their material circumstances, their action, and their cultural
practice. Gramsci noted correctly that the historical process could not just be reduced to crude materialism as the orthodoxy Marxists wanted us to believe. Gramsci’s theory, therefore, was intended to put cultural specificities back to the materialist historical agenda.⁶

At the present moment, the historiographical marginalization of Ndebele society and cultural practice in the existing literature is directly related to the current very limited comprehension of the historical determinants of Ndebele civil society. Gramsci makes it clear that the articulation of consent is rooted firmly in the institutionalized practices, comprising of belief, religion, knowledge, custom, habit, and pattern of thought—all of which constitute civil society.⁷

Thus using Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, this thesis seeks to avoid the tendency of detaching and isolating the history of political superstructure from the history of Ndebele social practice and society, over which it presided and in which it was embedded. It also avoids the pitfalls of reducing the social order, that is, society itself, to a passive, inert or “given” status that need no problematisation, and the presentation of the political order as though it was autonomous and just interventionist on a passive social order.⁸ Therefore, the discussion of democracy and human rights in this thesis takes into account indigenous concepts of belief, religion, knowledge, custom, habit, and pattern of thought, as the leading elements in cultural practice. These ideological and social issues are taken on their own complex terms.
Since this thesis is dealing with ideological and cultural issues, it is vital to briefly define these as concepts. The work of the Commaroffs provides useful scientific definition of the concepts. Culture is defined as the shared repertoire of shared practices, symbols, and meanings from which hegemonic forms were cast and resisted. It is a historically situated field of signifiers, at once material and symbolic, in which occur the dialectics of domination and resistance, the making and breaking of consensus. It is a space of signifying practice, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct themselves and others—and hence, society and history. On the other hand, ideology is a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economics and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. It is the dominant conception, an orthodoxy that has established itself as “historically true” and “concretely universal”.

In contrast, hegemony exists in reciprocal interdependence with ideology: it is that part of a dominant worldview which has been naturalized and, “having hidden itself in orthodoxy, no more appears as ideology at all.” The making of ideology, therefore, involved the assertion of control over various modes of symbolic production: over such things as educational and ritual processes, patterns of socialization, canons of style and self-representation, public communication, health and bodily discipline.

In the context of above theoretical framework, Ndebele historical experiences are presented as a broad struggle for autonomy, punctuated by domination,
resistance, reaction, and innovation. It was a long battle for establishment of hegemony by the Khumalo clan and its Nguni allies, which partly shaped their notions of rights, and partly constrained the full development of the same notions. Given both the continuities and disjunctures, the contradictory nature of people’s actions reflected a social that was itself contradictory.

The other concept utilized in this is that of ambiguities as articulated by Shula Marks. The concept of ambiguities helps in the understanding of relationship between “things” and enables historians to operate at several levels simultaneously. The focal point is to look at historical episodes that are on the surface puzzling, and continue to the deeper level of teasing out the meaning of the situation. Thus a study as like this one focused on ideological and cultural issues cannot escape from using the concept of ambiguities to tease out hidden meanings in Ndebele oral literature, for instance, and in the whole evolving Ndebele historical experience, from 1818 to 1934.

1.2 The Radical Materialist Conception of Democracy and Human Rights

According to the radical materialist school of thought, democracy and human rights are products of human struggles against oppression. The roots of democracy and human rights are in demands, aspirations, and concerted struggles of the oppressed for emancipation, material survival, human dignity, and social justice. This conception of democracy and human rights is clearly stated by Mahmood Mamdani who wrote that:
Without the experience of sickness, there can be no idea of health. And without the fact of oppression, there can be no practice of resistance and no notion of rights.¹⁴

Indeed oppression in human history has generated resistance that has contributed to the transformation of society and the production of democracy and human rights. In fact, the whole issue of democracy and human rights is a terrain of struggle between oppressors and the oppressed. Since the engagement between the dominated and the dominating is generally couched in ambiguous and contradictory terms, then democracy and human rights as ideological issues and artifacts of human struggles are themselves fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. This observation implies that a fuller reconstruction of democracy and human rights history of any society must necessarily take full range of diversities and complexities of political, economic, and social realities, churned out by human struggles over power and dominance, and against oppression and exploitation.¹⁵

The materialist conception of democracy and human rights is very useful as it is predicated on the investigation of the dynamics, patterns, and traditions of power and politics over long durations of time. It can be usefully utilized in teasing out the complex connections between state formation and the structured inscriptions of class, community, and gender. This thesis, therefore, uses the materialist conception of human rights and democracy to decipher the ambiguous and contradictory modes of domination and modes of resistance, sites where democracy and human rights are produced.
The strength of the radical materialist paradigm of democracy and human rights lies in its criticism of both western liberal and African cultural relativist theories of democracy and human rights, while at the same time upholding the universal criteria of human rights. For instance, the western liberals are criticized for projecting a one-sided and Eurocentric notion of democracy and human rights based on what is termed the Athens-to-Washington narrative of democracy and human rights. The Athens-to-Washington thinking is that democracy and human rights are products of the wisdom of people with white skins, and as such are only organic to western cultures. This approach is an idealistic and simplistic abstraction divorced from the complex universal human struggles against oppression and exploitation in non-western part of the world.

The African cultural relativist thinking is also put under serious criticism for trying to project various versions of democracy and human rights based on romanticization, generalization, and simplification African cultures and histories. The most serious danger of the African cultural relativist argument is that it has been used by African dictators to justify some of their ugly scenes on the basis of being different from the rest of the world and on the bases of cultural differences. The reality which African cultural relativists try to gloss over is that the notions of democracy and human rights were all products of human struggles rather than culture. Resistance to oppression was a common phenomenon throughout the human globe and the end product of all these struggles gave birth to notions of human rights and democracy.
The position of this thesis is that democracy and human rights are universal notions. They are both products of human struggles for the construction of a better world and for harmonious human relations. They are actually a terrain of struggle as well as demands against both society and the state.

1.3 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a culmination of long standing human struggles for tolerant societies, material survival, emancipation, protection, human happiness, and social justice. It came into being after holocaust and the Second World War, all of which were characterized by human carnage and massacre. The Declaration continues to generate human struggles as human beings are still trying to implement it in full and as some are trying to block its full implementation. It is incorrect, therefore, to dismiss this landmark Declaration in human history as a mere embodiment of core European values as though western societies were tolerant and respected human rights by their very constitution prior to 1948. Europeans just like other human beings practices magic, human sacrifices, torture, burnt witches, burnt even books and practiced authoritarian governance. It was also the Europeans that drew and quartered condemned criminals, and sent six million innocent people to their death in the Holocaust.18 Worse still, it is clear that western democracy was hardly discernible in any European country prior to the 18th Century, only a short time before the starting year of this study, that is, 1818. As such it does not make much historical sense to view the Universal Declaration
of Human Rights as describing core European values, as suggested by some anthropologists and African cultural relativists.

The significance of the Declaration lies in its being a testament of what human beings hope for and wish to achieve in their different political journeys in all parts of the world. The majority of human beings as the measuring stick of good and bad governance have accepted it. The thirty articles of the Declaration of Human Rights capture the main aspects of harmonious co-existence and enjoyment of human rights.

It is with the above hindsight that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is accepted as a universal criterion of human rights. This thesis, therefore, is based on the appreciation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the basis of an agreed charter of human rights. The Declaration is effectively employed to critique both the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom and the early colonial state practices. The Declaration is also used to dissect the issues posed by the Ndebele people’s encounter with European agents and colonial conquerors. At the end of the day, both the Ndebele chiefs and European colonizers were found wanting in a number of respects.

The thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights make a lot of sense when applied to both the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom and the colonial encounter. They help in teasing out various issues related to segregation,
provision of social security, legitimacy of leaders, brotherhood, religious tolerance, as well as treatment of criminals.\textsuperscript{19}

Finally, the theoretical framework sketched above, is very useful again in relating past historical issues to the present world.

1.4 A Review of Available Literature

While social scientists, legal scholars and historians have tried to deepen our understanding of human rights and democracy in contemporary Zimbabwe with regard to the role of the colonial and post-colonial state vis-à-vis society, the pre-colonial epoch has not attracted the same research interest and attention. However, for Ndebele history in the nineteenth century, a lot of works exists as the Ndebele past dominated English historical writing about African societies in the Limpopo-Zambezi region. This was so because the Ndebele state was considered as a barrier to the approaches of travelers from South Africa since its establishment in the 1840s.\textsuperscript{20} A lot of negative things were said by white travelers, traders, hunters, adventurers, missionaries, concession-seekers, diarists, soldiers, and colonialists about the state of human rights and democracy in the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century.

These works of the white literate observers on the Ndebele state commonly judged various aspects of Ndebele society, life, politics and governance on western Christian values and other western standards. However, this is not meant to deny the existence of a pro-Ndebele counter tradition among early
white fraternity. There was indeed the Welsh London Missionary Society (LMS) personality, Bowen Rees of Inyathi, who is said to have loved king Lobengula like a brother, and who had been taught in Wales by a fierce radical who announced from the pulpit that he preferred the Ndebele king to the capitalist, Rhodes. There were even divisions of opinion between those Native Commissioners who wanted to use “Zulu” traditional models and those who wanted to divide and rule the Ndebele. But, by and large, the problematics and paradigms of European history and Western ideas were used as a yardstick in assessing Ndebele experiences and institutions. The net result of this approach necessitated exaggerations, biases, out right falsifications, of issues that seemed to be different from what was considered a norm in Europe.

To begin with, the distortion of the Ndebele past started when the missionaries like Robert Moffat first visited the Ndebele in the 1820s. There are two volumes entitled, *The Matebele Journals of Robert Moffat*, edited by J.P.R. Wallis, which contain various aspects of Ndebele past as seen and interpreted by Robert Moffat. His depiction of the Ndebele people as violent, brutal and the Ndebele King as a powerful, despotic and dictatorial leader, the Ndebele soldiers as bloodthirsty destroyers of human life, and the areas where the Ndebele settled as characterized by destruction, desolation and depopulation, became the first source of the mythology about the status of human rights and democracy in the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century.\(^{21}\) It must be noted that when Robert Moffat first visited the Ndebele in the 1820s, it was at the peak of the Mfecane Revolution which was mainly characterized by wars, raids, destruction,
disturbances, violence and insecurity in which the Ndebele and other Africans as well as European groups were involved. The Ndebele like other groups were participants as well as victims of the Mfecane Revolution. However, Robert Moffat and other missionaries after him presented a one-sided story about the Ndebele as perpetrators of violence, raids and destruction. Hence Robert Moffat’s journals need to be used with extreme care as they are full of distortions, assumptions, and exaggerations of some episodes of Ndebele past, while at the same time they remain a valuable written primary source for Ndebele history in the nineteenth century.

However, to argue that the early missionaries like Robert Moffat “established” the “myth” of the Ndebele as perpetrators of violence, raids and destruction, is not meant to imply that the production of Ndebele history in the nineteenth century was carried out by Europeans only, independent of historical consciousness of the Ndebele. It is also not meant to say the Ndebele were without an intellectual history of their own and that they were unable, or at least failed, to produce history in the service of complex ideological objectives worthy of comparison with that of the Europeans they came into contact with, nor significant enough for the latter to need to take cognizance of. Indeed the productions of Ndebele history took place even in contemporary African settings. The disaffected elements in the Ndebele state as well as the Ndebele authorities themselves took an active part in the presentation of the Ndebele state and its leadership as powerful and indomitable for hegemonic and ideological purposes.
The diaries of Dr Andrew Smith were also influenced by earlier reports about the Ndebele and they were also influential in their own right in the distortion and exaggeration of some episodes of Ndebele history. Smith’s diarised works exist as a corpus of evidence on the Ndebele before they crossed the Limpopo in the form of P.R. Kirby, *The Diary of Dr Andrew Smith, 1834-6* and like Robert Moffat’s journals they are organized and edited by Kirby into two volumes. Smith’s diary is important because it touches on some aspects of how the Ndebele lived South of the Limpopo River as opposed to other written documents which are only very detailed about the Ndebele past after the 1840s. The same is true about T. Arbousset and F. Daumas’s *Narrative of An Exploratory Tour to the North-east of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* where they touched on the events of the 1820s when the Ndebele were still south of the Limpopo River.

D.M. Malcolm’s. *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, D.J. Kotze, *Letters of the American Missionaries, 1835-8*, A Steedman, *Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of Southern Africa*, A.F. Gardiner, *Narrative of a Journey to the Zulu Country in South Africa*, and W.C. Harris, *The Wild Sports of Southern Africa: Being the Narrative of a Hunting Expedition from the Cape of Good Hope, through the Territories of the Chief Moselekatse, to the Tropic of Capricorn*, and a few others help in the reconstruction of the Ndebele history while they were still south of the Limpopo River. In the majority of these documents what emerges are mainly details of raids and counter-raids and a few highlights on non-military events which again focus on the cruelty of the
Ndebele and their king such as the pathetic appearance of those people who were captured and the punishment of Ndebele people after committing such offences as adultery and witchcraft. In other words, what emerges from these documents is a picture of Africa being dominated by what came to be styled “black upon black” violence, long night of savagery and disorder. Hence, in using these documents for the re-construction of Ndebele history before they crossed the Limpopo River, one needs to seriously deploy internal and external criticism of his/her source material. With this hindsight, they remain very valuable written sources of early Ndebele history. W.F. Lye and R. Kent Rasmussen used these documents and came up with academic works on the Ndebele South of the Limpopo River.

What needs to be noted is that what was said about the Ndebele by the literate observes like Robert Moffat and others who saw them while they were still south of the Limpopo became oral traditions among the later missionaries, travelers, diarists and traders. They were repeated to newcomers to the Ndebele country, believed implicitly and then passed on by word of mouth or writing to others. This led to the perpetuation of the negative portrayal of the Ndebele state, its people, and leaders that eventually spread to the early twentieth century observers. Those whites who lived, visited or passed by the Ndebele kingdom before 1893 produced numerous books and articles, which are useful in the writing of Ndebele history as long as they are approached critically. The major ones are Montagu Kerr, *The Far Interior: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure from the Cape of Good Hope Across the Zambesi to the*
lake Regions of Central Africa, J.P.R. Wallis, *The Northern Goldfields Diaries of Thomas Baines*, E.C. Tabler’s *The Far Interior: Chronicles of Pioneering in the Matabele and Mashona Countries, 1847-79*, Zambezia and Matabeleland in the Seventies: The Narrative of Frederick Hugh Barber, 1875 and 1877-78 and the Journal of Richard Frewen, 1877 – 78, and To the Victoria Falls Via Matabeleland: The Diary of Major Henry Stabb, 1875, T. Baines, *The Gold Regions of South Eastern Africa* and F.C. Selous, *A Hunter’s Wanderings in Africa*, to mention a few. Some of these writers, especially Montagu Kerr, crossed the Shona country which was profoundly peaceful and untroubled by the Ndebele raids upon the Shona in the period up to the 1890s, but went on to write detailed accounts of Ndebele surprise attacks, because Kerr, like Baines before him, had been “briefed” by whites resident in the Ndebele country.

J. Mackenzie in his *Ten Years North of the Orange River*, and many writers after him, repeated the myth of the annual raids carried out on surrounding peoples by the Ndebele on their ruler’s orders, in spite of the fact that there was no evidence for it and a good deal against it. Very little was said about the internal dynamics of the Ndebele society.

The picture of the Ndebele history, which emerged from these works, was that of horrors of Ndebele raiding, of the Shona as defenseless victims of Ndebele brutality and of bad or aggressive Ndebele relations with the subject peoples. The portrayal of the Ndebele in the negative accelerated when the political and economic interests of the British Empire began to be directed to Matabeleland’s
human and natural resources. This period saw the emergence of what one can term “colonial” writing on the Ndebele past, full of propaganda, half-truths, exaggerations and outright lies. The clearest examples of this crop of literature was represented by W.A. Willis and L.T. Collingridge, *The Downfall of Lobengula* and H.M. Hole, *The Making of Rhodesia* and these writers thought it necessary to point out absolutism and brutality of the Ndebele kingdom so as to justify and legitimize Cecil John Rhodes’ imperialist adventures and conquest of the Ndebele state as an emancipatory exercise especially to the Shona who were said to deserve protection from extinction by the Ndebele.

In short, the portrayal of the Ndebele state as a military machine based on a crude system of “savagery” as a form of government, the Ndebele leaders as repositories of supreme powers being the accusers, the prosecutors, the executive, legislative and judges, and the Ndebele people as surviving through violence, brutality and raids against their neighbours, had the impact of influencing modern historical writing on the Ndebele.

The early twentieth century saw the emergence of academic works, which, unfortunately, were largely influenced by the early accounts of the Ndebele history and the prejudices of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and Rhodesian Native Department prejudices and propaganda. Rhodesian colonial officials like ‘Mziki’ (A.A. Campbell), ‘Mlimo’: *The Rise and Fall of the Ndebele* and F.W. T. Posselt, “The Rise of the Amandebele” in F.W. T. Posselt, *Fact and
*Fiction*, 47 based their works more on oral traditions but failed to escape the biases, prejudices and distortions of the Native Department rooted in the propaganda of the 1890s.

After the Second World War, the works of the anthropologist A.J.B. Hughes *viz; “Restructuring of Ndebele Society Under European Control”,* 48 *Kin, Caste and Nation Among the Rhodesian Ndebele*49 and Hughes and J. van Velsen’s section on the Ndebele in *The Shona and Ndebele of Southern Rhodesia*, 50 constituted the best available overview of the Ndebele at the moment. However, it was Hughes who emphasized the existence of a caste system in the Ndebele state as though there were no intermarriages between the various social groupings within the Ndebele state.

It was in the 1960s that academic historians on the history of the Ndebele cast a refreshing insight. The interest in African history in general and Ndebele history in particular was signified by the *Leverhulme Inter-Collegiate History Conference* held in Salisbury in 1960 and the *History of Central African Peoples Conference* held in Lusaka in 1963. These two conferences brought together modern scholarship to bear on African history in Rhodesia. The active scholars by then on the aspects of Ndebele history were T.O. Ranger and R. Brown. Ranger used the colonial documents to describe the relations between the Ndebele and Europeans in the period between 1890 and 1930, 51 Ranger also worked on the issue of African response to colonialism in the following works; *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7*52 and later, *The African Voice in Southern
Rhodesia, 1898-1930. It was these main works of Ranger that established a resistance and nationalist historiography in Zimbabwe. Brown used the documents of whites who were resident in the Ndebele state in the examination of Ndebele politics during the scramble and the Ndebele relations with their neighbours. It is important to note two issues at this stage: one is that both Ranger and Brown like their predecessors tended to ally their treatment of other aspects of the Ndebele history to the theme of the kingship, and secondly, after showing a positive interest in Ndebele history by Ranger and Brown, by 1965 both had left the country.

After Ranger and Brown left the country, Ndebele history fell into limbo, as the next generation of scholars like D.N. Beach embarked on the history of the Shona communities, save for the works of S. Glass, S. Samkange, G.S. Preller and the combined work of R. Summers and C.W. Pagden. Glass’s main work on the Ndebele is The Matabele War, Samkange’s main work on the Ndebele is, Origins of Rhodesia, Preller’s work is a biography entitled, Lobengula: The Tragedy of a Matabele King, and Summers and Pagden’s work is, The Warriors. While Glass’s work provides excellent details on the events leading to the 1893 war and the war itself, its main weakness is that Glass failed to move an inch from a Victorian or worse still from colonial historiography in his depiction of the Ndebele king as a “savage” with absolute power over a “primitive society” where economic and political needs were secondary to bloodlust. Samkange’s main concern was with “exposing” the British South Africa Company representatives’ treacherous treatment of Lobengula. He dealt
with the Ndebele relations with the Europeans up to 1894. In his analysis of
deception and chicanery by whites during the concession-hunting period,
Samkange revealed his sympathies with the Ndebele as a vanquished people.61

The exposure of deception and chicanery by whites during the concession-
hunting period in the Ndebele history is vital for the analysis of human rights
and democracy, since it was on the basis of the fraudulent and bogus
concessions and treaties that the whites partly justified their conquest of the
Ndebele state and the subsequent expropriation of natural resources such as
minerals and land. Preller, as an Afrikaner historian produced a semi-polemic
analysis of the Anglo-Boer competition for Matebeleland, with a clear bias
towards the Boers, instead of concentrating on the life of Lobengula and his
political career as the title of his book seems to imply.62

Summers and Pagden’s work provides a fresh, but controversial history of the
Ndebele based on a mixture of secondary sources, oral traditions collected by
R. Foster Windram in the 1830s, and a few new oral interviews done by
Pagden. The main contribution of Summers and Pagden’s book is that it
provides new maps of Ndebele settlement, it gives some concrete names for
the Ndebele amabutho, details on arms, training, strategy, and tactics of the
Ndebele on the basis of the battles of 1893, regimental strengths are judged
and a list of commanders of the soldiers is appended.63
However, the main weakness of Summers and Pagden’s book lies in its strength of details about military issues. It would seem to them the history of the Ndebele is in fact military history, hence the emphasis on military considerations. Non-military aspects of Ndebele history were completely ignored. Moreover, the two authors uncritically accepted some of the older judgments on the Ndebele history as gospel truth such as the notion of the existence of a scorched-earth zone around the Ndebele state that averaged 100 miles in width. The acceptance of this myth indicates that Summers and Pagden did not do much new research since the “scorched-earth’ zone notion easily falls flat in the face of evidence of the presence of Shona chiefdoms around the Ndebele state throughout the nineteenth century.  

The 1970s witnessed a renewed interest in Ndebele history by young scholars such as N.M.B. Bhebe, J.R.D. Cobbing and to some extent D.N. Beach who had to shed light on Ndebele history from a perspective of his knowledge of Shona history. By 1971 Bhebe was the only researcher who was working on aspects of Ndebele history focusing initially on the relations between the Ndebele people and the missionaries up to 1923. The result of this research was a Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled, “Christian Missions in Matebeleland, 1859-1923,” completed in 1972. While Bhebe’s research was not specifically concerned about the history of the Ndebele people, his study of Christian missions in Matabeleland inevitably led him to touch on aspects of Ndebele history, especially religious issues. In the end Bhebe produced a substantial work entitled, Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe, 1859-
whose publication in 1979 was rather late when one considers the desperate situation of Ndebele history in the 1970s. Bhebe’s book was indeed a well come contribution as it raised interesting aspects of Ndebele and Kalanga social history.

However, it is important to note that after finishing his Ph.D. in 1972, Bhebe began research on various aspects of Ndebele history such as religion, trade, politics and Ndebele relations with the Shona. In 1977, Bhebe produced a short biography entitled, *Lobengula of Zimbabwe*. In short, Bhebe’s contributions to the Ndebele history had the effects of diminishing the orthodox school of thought which reduced Ndebele history to military issues and to some extent political aspects, as he highlighted such issues as religion and trade as aspects of Ndebele history which also deserved attention. In his analysis of aspects of Ndebele relations with the Shona, Bhebe exploded the myth of war, conflict and raids as the main landmarks of Ndebele-Shona relations.

The work of J.R.D. Cobbing in the 1970s remains the most comprehensive research project on the Ndebele history up to today. Cobbing questioned, revised, formulated alternative view points and convincingly proved a lot of his propositions in his still unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled; “The Ndebele Under the Khumalos, 1820-1896”, completed in 1976. In his re-examination of the existing evidence on the Ndebele he came up with new interesting conclusions which were really innovative and refreshing for people
fed up with biases, distortions, propaganda, lies and half-truth of the Rhodesian state.

Cobbing pointed out that while Ndebele kings were powerful, their power was checked by that of chiefs who also became powerful in their respective areas of jurisdiction in the outlying areas of the Ndebele state. He identified the existence of forces of tension between considerable forces of centralization represented by the kingship at the centre and the forces of decentralization represented by chiefs in the outlying areas. He convincingly destroyed the myth of the Ndebele state as organized on military lines, by pointing out that the Ndebele *imizi* (residential areas) were not military divisions but civilian villages containing men, women and children. *Amabutho* (the supposed regiments) were not military structures in the main, instead they were basically a unit of production that assumed military dimensions in times of military crises only. In other words, the military functions were always subordinated to the civilian state institutions and the Ndebele state is best described in political, civilian and socio-economic terms rather than military ones.

On the economic issues in the Ndebele state, Cobbing was able to demonstrate that the Ndebele state like other pre-colonial African states did not survive on the basis of raiding and seizure of grain and cattle from their neighbours. The Ndebele were instead competent agriculturalists, pastoralists, traders, miners and hunters in their own right, such that raiding was not a main branch of production in the Ndebele state. In terms of social life, the Ndebele state was
not divided into castes, instead intermarriage was encouraged by both Mzilikazi and Lobengula, moreover, the Ndebele had their own religion centred on *amadlozi* worship and on Nguni high-God, *uNkulunkulu*, rather than on the Mwari cult which was treated with reserve.\(^{76}\)

Cobbing was also able to demolish further the myth of the Ndebele state being surrounded by a “scorched-earth” zone, by demonstrating empirically that conquered people were not decimated; instead they existed as a clearly defined tributary relationship with the Ndebele state characterized by peaceful co-existence and symbiosis precisely in those areas claimed to have been scorched-earth belts. While Cobbing is not denying the existence of raids, he pointed out that the Ndebele were not bloodthirsty since raids were seldom indiscriminate, they were largely punitive devices undertaken to protect the Ndebele state.

Cobbing went further to revise the Ndebele history during the scramble period when he argued that Lobengula was not “waverling” in his policies towards whites instead, he was unequivocal in his rejection of the Rudd Concession of 1888, he pointed out that in 1893, the Ndebele were not totally defeated, and this enabled the Ndebele to organize another war in March 1896, the Ndebele state was not destroyed in 1893, and it was the Ndebele traditional political leaders rather than religious leaders, and worse still Mwari cult, that organized and guided the Ndebele in their bid to eliminate whites and to restore the Ndebele monarchy.\(^{77}\)
However, without down playing the impressive contribution made by Cobbing to the Ndebele history, there is still need to go beyond event history and explosion of colonial myth in an endeavor to delve deeper into crucial aspects of Ndebele ideological and social order. There is need to grapple with such themes as the degree of accountability, sources of legitimacy for the rulers, ideology, distribution of wealth, structural and cultural oppressions, especially the issue of slavery in the state and democratic and human rights spaces, and gender issues which remain unclear in the history of the Ndebele up to today. Cobbing ended his analysis of the Ndebele state in 1896 before examining the crucial issue of the ambiguities and contradictions of the colonial encounter. In Cobbing’s analysis of the Ndebele history the aspects of human rights and democracy were not considered important, hence the endeavour of this thesis to fill these gaps in the Ndebele past. There is need to systematically unpack Ndebele oral literature so as to grapple with the inner logic of Ndebele ideology of democracy and human rights.

While a number of scholars emphasized the central role of cattle in the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century, and pointed to British South Africa Company’s seizure of vast numbers of Ndebele cattle after 1893 and during 1896, very little efforts have been made to examine the immediate and long-term effects of this Company looting on economic security of the Ndebele in the early twentieth century. Only Pathisa Nyathi in his book entitled, *Uchuku Olungelandiswe: Imbali Yama Ndebele, 1893-1895* (Untold Cruelty) outlines in detail the reign of terror and looting that was perpetrated by the British settlers on the Ndebele in
the 1890s, whereas Arthur Keppel Jones in his book entitled, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: The White Conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884-1902* explored in detail some of the setbacks that engulfed the Ndebele as a result of white conquest. Recently, T.O. Ranger together with Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor have produced a major work entitled, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the “Dark” Forests of Matabeleland* which documents the history of the former “Shangani Reserve” from the 1890s up to the 1990s. The book is very valuable as it examines aspects of the colonial conquest, violence of the Rhodesian settler state and evictions of the Ndebele from their homelands around Bulawayo. These activities firstly provoked Ndebele protest, later territorial African nationalism and finally sparked off the war of liberation. Aspects of landscape, religion, conservation, political symbolism and war in Matabeleland are meticulously examined by Ranger in his *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe*. Ranger also examined such questions as the relationship of men and women to the land, dynamics of ethnicity, roots of dissidence and violence and historical bases of underdevelopment.

There are also a few unpublished research papers by B.A. Honours and M.A. students that touched on some aspects of the Ndebele and Matebeleland history. The main ones are by F. Ntabeni, S.J. Mhlabi, S. Mlotshwa, T.V. Ncube, A.R.M. Ruwitah, S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and B. Mahamba. These research papers are valuable as they examine such issues as Ndebele responses to colonial rule and policies of recruitment of agrarian labour, roots of
underdevelopment, role and status of women in the Ndebele state and Ndebele strategy and tactics in the resistance of 1896.

Finally, one needs to note that the vernacular literature on the Ndebele by the Ndebele speaking people like M.M. Sibanda’s *uMbiko kaMadlenya*, Pathisa Nyathi’s *Igugu LikaMthwakazi*, and P.S. Mhlangu’s *Umtwakazi*, to name only a few, has concentrated on the glory of the Ndebele as militaristic conquerors. No attempt was made in these works to critically examine political ideas and worse still the questions of democracy and human rights. The literature is largely full of praise names for the pre-colonial Ndebele rulers and the life of the ordinary Ndebele people is ignored. The questions of ideology and legitimation remain untouched. It was only Pathisa Nyathi in his *Uchuku Olungelandiswe* that the picture of the Ndebele as victims of violence, dispossession and brutality are explored. Hence the need to adopt a human rights and democracy perspective which enables one to re-examine and re-interpret Ndebele history in the nineteenth century and early colonial period from a non-military angle.

1.5 A Brief Note on Primary Sources

It is true that sources tend to be more reliable when they are closer to the events they describe, and that the possibility of bias or distortion behind any given statement must be understood. However, what needs to be made clear is that the closeness of a source to an event can be explained in different ways. For instance, the Ndebele of present day Matebeleland are still “closer” to the
events that took place in the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century due to cultural and linguistic affinities and continuities. Hence their contemporary testimonies cannot be dismissed as remote to the events of the nineteenth century on the basis of chronological time.

Thus in this thesis I made use of a few recently collected oral interviews kept in the Bulawayo Records Centre. The archivist, Mr. Mark Ncube, collected the interviews in the 1980s. These interviews constitute what is known as “oral history” as some of them were collected from informants who are still alive. Apart from that, they proved very useful on some issues that took place in the nineteenth century. This prompted me to do my own fieldwork in Matebeleland in 1999. I concentrated on known chiefly families still using such Nguni surnames as Dlodlo, Masuku, Ndiweni, Gatsheni, Khumalo, and Mkhwananzi in my search for informants. A total of 24 people were interviewed [see the list of names of interviewees in the bibliography].

The chiefly families in Matebeleland have all the reasons to know the culture, traditions and general history of the Ndebele better than anybody in contemporary times because the current chiefs still derive their legitimacy from their link with the nineteenth century power houses. Despite the fact that colonial intervention disrupted some of the Ndebele institutions, the colonialists tended to reinforce the chiefly institution for purposes of “indirect rule.” Hence the institution of chiefs remained to this day with sons succeeding their fathers. Even the “modernization” efforts of the post-colonial state have not been
successful in sweeping the chiefs aside. Instead, the Zimbabwean government has tried to reinforce the powers of chiefs as the traditional representatives of the rural communities.

Thus in Matebeleland, the Ndebele chiefs still see themselves as the true custodians of Ndebele culture and traditions. Hence a number of them still remember a lot about their forefathers and foremothers. A knowledge of Ndebele traditions and culture makes a chief very influential and generates profound respect from the community and as such nearly all respected chiefly families have kept useful information about their descent going back to the nineteenth century. Even some ordinary elderly Ndebele people happened to know much about their cherished past which they remembered as better than life today. Hence the value of oral interviews conducted.

In recent times, the Ndebele as a community have become even more interested in their past as indicated by commemoration of the death of king Mzilikazi on 9 September 2000 at Old Bulawayo as well as the rebuilding of Old Bulawayo itself. As such the Ndebele of present day Matebeleland are still “closer” and are even trying to be much more “closer” to their past in this century of rapid change spearheaded by the hegemonic and universalizing forces of globalization. Hence the value of their contemporary testimonies blended together with existing written primary and secondary sources.
On the archival side, I was able to re-read the enormous piles of written material deposited in the National Archives. Some of these files have been in the public domain for many years, because I was convinced that they still contained valuable information on aspects of Ndebele culture and traditions, which underpinned their notions of democracy and human rights in the nineteenth century. As mentioned earlier on, the previous scholars who wrote on the Ndebele did not focus on the issue of democracy and human rights hence some information contained in historical manuscripts is very vital although various researchers have used these manuscripts before. I was able to gain a lot that was relevant to the theme of the dynamics of democracy and human rights in those files (see the list of primary sources in the bibliography).

In exceptional cases, I was compelled to quote directly from some of the documents because of the relevance of the information to the theme under investigation. I must emphasize that the information that has been in the public domain for even forty years can be extremely useful depending on the theme under investigation. Hence in this thesis I was able to revisit archival files, including those that have been used before, to highlight such issues as state formation, pre-colonial ideologies of governance, patriarchal dominance, militarism, aristocratic tendencies, iniquities of Rhodesian colonialism and dynamics of Ndebele responses, so as to reveal the crucial and complex ambiguities, contradictions as well as the clash of human rights and democracy conceptions within and between the Ndebele and white colonialists.
Endnotes


5. T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1995). He successfully employed the Gramscian concept to produce a very complex study of state and society in pre-colonial Asante.


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


18. Ibid. Shakespeare’s play Macbeth and William Blake’s poetry captured the ugly scenes of Europeans, such as witchcraft, slavery and general oppression. The history of Germany and Italy under the dictatorships of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini revealed the extremism of oppression and denial of human rights in Europe in the 20th Century. See C. Waterlow, The Hinge of History, (The One World Trust, London, 1995), which is an ambitious look at the universal development of humanity from about 3000 B.C.


23. P.R. Kirby (ed), The Diary of Dr Andrew Smith, 1834-36, 2 volumes, (The Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1939-40).
24. T. Arbousset and F. Daumas, Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the Northeast of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, (R.S. Robertson, Cape Town, 1846).


33. Montagu Kerr, The Far Interior: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure from the Cape of Good Hope Across the Zambezi to the Lake Regions of Central Africa, 2 volumes, (Sampson Law, London, 1886).


41. Ibid.


45. Ibid.
49. Hughes, Kin, Caste and Nation Among the Rhodesian Ndebele, (Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 25, Manchester, 1956).
55. The 1960s saw intensification of Rhodesian political repression and this was manifested in the arrests, restriction, detention and imprisonment of the leading African nationalists and the attack on academics in the form of their expulsion and deportation and Ranger was one of those who were deported.
60. S. Glass, The Matabele War, pp. 2–5.
64. Ibid.
67. By the 1970s, a number of scholars were interested in Shona history which had not received sufficient coverage as well.

68. N. Bhebe, Christianity and Traditional Religion, pp. 6-18.


73. Ibid, Chapter 2 entitled, “The Inner State”.


77. Cobbing, “The Absent Priesthood.”


80. Ibid.


82. F. Ntabeni, “The Underdevelopment of Mzingwane District” (unpublished B.A. Honours Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, Department of History, 1985) see also her M.A. thesis of 1986 on the same issue of
underdevelopment; S.J. Mhlabi, “The Effects of and African Responses to
the Land Husbandry Act of 1951 with Special Reference to Ntabazinduna
Communal Lands” (unpublished B.A. Honours Dissertation, University of
Zimbabwe, Department of History, 1984); S. Mlotshwa, “The Matapos
Research Station: Origins and Contribution to the Agrarian Development of
Zimbabwe”, (unpublished B.A. Honours Dissertation, University of
Zimbabwe, Department of History, 1984); T.V. Ncube, “Aspects of Agrarian
Labour in Matebeleland South from 1899 to 1948” (unpublished B.A.
Honours Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, Department of History,
Comparative Study of African Underdevelopment in a Colonial State,
Rhodesia, 1890-1960”, (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Zimbabwe,
Department of History, 1987); S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The First Chimurenga,
1896-1897: Considerations of Ndebele Military Strategy and Tactics”,
(unpublished B.A. Honours Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe,
Department of History, 1992) and B. Mahamba, “Women in the Ndebele
State” (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Zimbabwe, Department of
History, 1996).

86. P. Nyathi, Uchuku Olungelandiswe.
CHAPTER TWO

EMERGENCE OF NDEBELE HEGEMONY AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM, 1818-1842

Introduction

This chapter seeks to analyse the process of state formation among the Ndebele and the establishment of the Khumalo hegemony in the context of both the human rights and democracy discourse and the current Mfecane controversy. The focus of the chapter is on the formative years of the Ndebele state, 1818-1842. This period of Ndebele history has remained outside the spotlight of scholarly analysis compared to the period after 1842.

R. Kent Rasmussen, W.F. Lye, Cobbing and Norman Etherington have remained the only scholars that studied Ndebele past south of the Limpopo River. However, their works concentrated on tracing the routes followed by the Ndebele after leaving Zululand in the 1820s and the identification of the various areas where the Ndebele settled before they crossed the Limpopo River in 1838. While their works really widened our understanding of the Ndebele past during the formative years of their state, they avoided a systematic treatment of the process of state formation among the Ndebele and the mechanics of the establishment of Khumalo hegemony, which remains crucial aspect of Ndebele history south of the Limpopo River.
It is even more surprising to note that the scholars who gathered and delivered interesting papers at the colloquium; “The Mfecane Aftermath: Towards a New Paradigm,” held at the University of Witwatersrand in September 1991 seem to have glossed over the issue of the Ndebele contribution to the *Mfecane* as both victims and perpetrators of violence.²

However, despite the existence of powerful revisions on the *Mfecane* as championed by J.R.D. Cobbing and the availability of such powerful works as Carolyn Hamilton’s *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, it remains true that the *Mfecane* really existed and was partly a process of African state-building and establishment of hegemony by various “traditional African intellectuals”.³ Mzilikazi Khumalo was one of those African “traditional intellectuals” and nation-builders who were active during the *Mfecane* period building their own states out of the *Mfecane* refugees, creating independent, and personal power bases. Historians like J.D. Omer-Cooper alluded to this point from as long back as 1966 when his book, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-century Revolution in Bantu Africa* appeared and he reiterated the same point in the colloquium; “The Mfecane Aftermath”.⁴ What is lacking is a systematic analysis of state formation among the Ndebele during the *Mfecane* or as an aftermath of the Mfecane. A systematic analysis of the complex process of state formation among the Ndebele in the period 1818 to 1842, and the actual strategies and tactics used by Mzilikazi and his allies to create Khumalo hegemony. A closer look at these issues raises crucial ambiguities about African notions of democracy and human rights in the
nineteenth century. Moreover, the adoption of human rights and democracy discourse reveals that the Mfecane while having its positive aspects was largely a period when both Africans and early whites and their allies violated human rights and democracy on a large scale.

This chapter, therefore, starts off with a discussion of the current Mfecane controversy and the role of the Ndebele in it. It proceeds to examine state formation among the Ndebele in a systematic way. In the process it brings out aspects of strategies and tactics of establishment of hegemony, violation of autonomy of weaker states, resistance to oppression, gender, and class dimensions of African social history. The whole complex process of state formation is here presented as a hegemonic project and a stressful activity that was characterized by both “losses” and “gains” by different groups. The nation-builders themselves were both victims and perpetrators of the violence of the Mfecane period. Individuals, chiefdoms, clans, states, kingdoms, groups and communities lost autonomy and cherished rights as societies were burst asunder, groups scattered, forced to migrate, and individuals separated from their parents and forcibly integrated into the ranks of powerful groups.

2.1 The Mfecane Controversy and the Ndebele

J.D. Omer-cooper was the first modern historian to publish a book on the Mfecane in 1966. In this pioneering work, Omer-Cooper presented the Mfecane as a positive process of political change that led to state formation. To him, the Mfecane was an African revolution and the achievement of African
leaders as nation builders. The *Mfecane* illustrated the capacity of African leaders for creative statecraft and the adaptability of traditional African institutions to new purposes.⁵ Omer-Cooper saw the *Mfecane* as starting in the latter half of the eighteenth century in response to population growth beyond what could be comfortably sustained within the area by traditional food production practices.⁶ The initial phase of the *Mfecane* according to Omer-Cooper was dominated by Dingiswayo’s Mthethwa and Zwide’s Ndwandwe as the people who converted the corporate initiate-mate system into a military institution which absorbed young males from alien societies. This first phase of the *Mfecane* also saw the emergence of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka who introduced the idea of continuous military service in the institution of *amabutho*, the close-formation fighting strategy and the use of the short stabbing spear. Omer-Cooper singled out the emergence of the Zulu kingdom as a cause of intensification of the *Mfecane* and as a trigger to the northward migrations of Soshangane, Nxaba, Zwangendaba, Maseko, and Mzilikazi. Mzilikazi is singled out for carrying both devastating warfare and the process of state formation on the trans-vaal highveld. Finally, Omer-Cooper stated that the careers of Mzilikazi and others like Soshangane and Zwangendaba, constituted a series of experiments in state building involving the rapid assimilation of political, linguistic and cultural aliens and the development of a sense of common identity and loyalty within the new rapidly aggregate composite communities. To him these were basically remarkable achievements.⁷
The major weakness of J.D. Omer-Cooper’s analysis of the *Mfecane* was that he largely presented the process of state formation generated by the *Mfecane* as a neat activity that was largely positive. The reality was that the emergence of the Ndebele state was intricately intertwined with the construction of Khumalo hegemony. This construction of hegemony involved not only migration, but also adjustments in some traditional Nguni ideologies and greater tolerance of diversity within the emerging states. This was necessary because the establishment of hegemony necessarily involved winning support of other people and extension of the ruling elite’s worldview to other groups of people. It also involved ceaseless forging of alliances.

Omer-Cooper’s standpoint was a product of the “Ibadan nationalist school” of the 1960s which tried to cast many activities of the Africans in the pre-colonial era in positive terms in an endeavour to destroy the white agency in African history. Moreover, Omer-Cooper down-played the contradictions, conflict and social cleavages that were part and parcel of the complex process of state formation during the *Mfecane*. The *Mfecane* itself was not simply a process of state formation, as Omer-Cooper wanted us to believe. It was a period of Nguni hegemonic projects at their decisive phase. This phase saw the emergence of new leaders like Mzilikazi and others who began to challenge some of the norms of Nguni society. For instance, Mzilikazi detested vassalage, which made him to switch allegiance from Zwide to Shaka, and also to defect from Shaka. Mzilikazi also challenged the habit of handing over all raided cattle to Shaka who then distributed the cattle to his subjects. It was this behaviour of Mzilikazi
that led to his clash with Shaka and to his eventual migration to the South African Highveld. Mzilikazi’s behaviour was symptomatic of the simmering clashes for power among leading Nguni royal houses and clans that eventually provoked the *Mfecane*.

However, Omer-Cooper satisfied himself by just casting people like Mzilikazi as nation-builders and in positive terms at the expense of highlighting their own individual contribution to the violence of the *Mfecane*. On the positive side, Omer-Cooper’s books elicited a number of responses from the Marxists of the 1970s to the post-modernists of today. Their revisions have deepened our understanding of the *Mfecane* as well as state formation. It was the Marxist scholars who raised the lack of a clear understanding of contradictions, conflict and social cleavages in the previous studies of the *Mfecane*. The period between 1970 and 1980 saw various attempts at explaining the *Mfecane* from the perspective of ecological, climatic and trade perspective. Various localized studies were produced which were largely influenced by the “mode of production” perspective with its emphasis on differentiation, production and exchange.

The early 1980s witnessed a general sense of irrelevance of pre-colonial studies especially among specialists in the *Mfecane* until 1986 when a “Workshop in Pre-Colonial History” was organized by the Centre of African Studies at the University of Cape Town. This workshop indicated a shift away from the “mode of production” perspective and the “political economy approach”
of the materialists to an analysis of ideology and the concern with methodology.\textsuperscript{12} It was after this workshop that J.R.D. Cobbing came up with his radical revision of the \textit{Mfecane} that reached its climax when he called for the “jettisoning” of the \textit{Mfecane} as a category of analysis in Southern African history altogether.\textsuperscript{13} In brief, Cobbing’s main arguments were that: the \textit{Mfecane} was not caused by the rise of the Zulu kingdom but by slave traders from the Delagoa Bay and from the Cape Colony. He stated that those who argued that the Zulu caused the \textit{Mfecane} and devastated and depopulated vast territories were trying to justify white settlement and apartheid and that the Ndebele did not carry devastating warfare to the trans-Vaal highveld rather the whites and the Griqua caused untold suffering and violence as they engaged in slave raids on behalf of the Cape Colony.\textsuperscript{14} In short, Cobbing’s argument was meant to destroy what he termed “Zulu centric” or “Afro centric” origins of the \textit{Mfecane}, which he thought was an ideological exercise in support of white colonial occupation of the highveld. In short, Cobbing ended up championing the long discarded white agency in African history. To Cobbing, the Zulu and Ndebele states arose as defensive societies against slave raiders.\textsuperscript{15}

Cobbing’s argument that the \textit{Mfecane} did not flow from the rise of the Zulu state is generally accepted by a number of specialists on the history of the \textit{Mfecane}. However, his other two arguments that the notion of the Zulu generated \textit{Mfecane} was invented and perpetuated to serve the interests of white settlers and that labour-raiding to service the Cape and Mozambican economies was
the root cause of commotions on the highveld and in Natal has generated what is here termed the *Mfecane* controversy.\(^{16}\)

However, this chapter is not directly concerned about the *Mfecane* controversy *per se*. Its focus is on the issue of state formation among the Ndebele during the *Mfecane* and the construction of Khumalo hegemony. What emerges from the *Mfecane* controversy, which is vital for the purposes of this chapter, is that all the participants in this controversy, including Cobbing himself, agree that social turbulence in Southern Africa took place and that violence and warfare occurred. What is a bone of contention is the "causation" of this social turbulence. Cobbing and other revisionist scholars try to absolve the Ndebele from the violence of the trans-Vaal highveld by blaming the Boers and the Griqua.\(^{17}\)

In order to resolve the *Mfecane* controversy, historians like Elizabeth A. Eldredge have employed a multi-dimensional approach as opposed to simple mono-causal explanation in order to consider all possible factors such as the role of great leaders, environment and ecology, over population, ivory trade, slave raiding and many others, as the sources of conflict that became known as the *Mfecane*.\(^{18}\) Yet, others like John Wright have focused their analysis on the internal dynamics of the conflicts within and between local African chiefdoms as a way of going beyond the "Zulu explosion".\(^{19}\) Others like Alan Webster, Jeff Peires and Margaret Kinsman have focused on specific people like the Fingo, Matiwane and Rolong, respectively, as a way of contributing to the *Mfecane*
controversy. In the same way an analysis of state formation among the Ndebele in the period 1818-1842 is meant to be a contribution to the *Mfecane* controversy. At the moment the Ndebele input is rather lacking. At the same time, however, the Ndebele input reveals crucial human rights and democracy ambiguities of nineteenth century Southern Africa. It comes to grips with the complexity of relations of domination, subordination, resistance and interaction within and between the various states of pre-colonial Southern Africa.

2.2 The Autonomous Khumalo Clans Prior to the Mfecane

Studies of pre-*Mfecane* northern Nguni societies have shown one thing. They have shown that northern Nguni societies were not organized into powerful centralized states but existed as decentralized clans. Kinship ideology, kinship loyalties, clan intimacies, and blood solidarities were very important in keeping people together. This was coupled by the existence of the spirit of brotherhood that was a source of strength as well as weakness. The principle of kinship was centred on the clan and the homestead. R. Kent Rasmussen noted that the Khumalo who formed the nucleus of the Ndebele state, as was the case with most Nguni societies, were organized into clans. They were divided into several autonomous branches, each of which was organized under a clan-head. The notable clan-heads were Magugu, Mashobana and Ndoda. The Khumalo enjoyed autonomy that was a product of what Rasmussen termed “the traditional northern Nguni practice of political fission with its resultant dispersion of peoples”. This northern Nguni practice was democratic in that whenever a group of people was dissatisfied with the leadership of any powerful clan-head,
they had the option of breaking away to establish other autonomous branches. Power struggles, witchcraft accusations, succession disputes, and jealousies dominated politics at clan level.

When Magugu became too powerful and dictatorial as a clan-head of the Khumalo, Mashobana, Ndoda, and others broke away from him and founded new clans between the sources of the Mkhuze River and the Ngome Forest of northern Natal. However, each clan was linked to its neighbours by the need for local co-operation in herding, hunting, feasting, defence as well as blood relationship. The other important feature of the Nguni practice of political fission was the voluntary nature of commoner subordination to a preferred clan-head, without use of force. This is demonstrated by the example of some Khumalo families who broke-away from Magugu to follow Mashobana and Ndoda while others chose to remained with Magugu.

However, to say that these societies allowed for democracy must not be taken to mean that there was no form of exploitation and domination. Instead what can be said is that the pre-Mfecane period was democratic compared to the Mfecane period and its aftermath The noticeable forms of exploitation and domination, prior to the Mfecane, were that the clan-heads and their few closest supporters formed the chiefly class that expropriated the proceeds from herding and hunting at the expense of the commoner groups, even to the point of “conspicuous consumption” as noted by P. Bonner. The clan-heads as leaders had redistributive functions to perform and were not mere parasitic exploiters.
Lack of concrete evidence makes us fail to establish whether the clan-heads appropriated a significant part of the surplus produced by the commoners.

However, Jeff Guy boldly stated that “Redistribution is something, I feel, of a misnomer because it gives an impression of egalitarianism when, in fact, it was very, very specific, and it was redistribution to reinforce state power”. The fact is that like other societies of the period, ambiguities and contradictions riddled the organization of northern Nguni societies even in their decentralized and autonomous status to the extent that egalitarianism co-existed with some degree of exploitation, autonomy with some degree of domination, kinship ideology with subordination, popular power with some degree of authoritarianism, and clan-heads were challenged by ambitious brothers, uncles and cousins. Moreover, redistributive functions of clan-heads were counterbalance by acquisitive appetite for goods.

What is without doubt is that the decentralized and autonomous status of the northern Nguni societies prior to the Mfecane afforded the people like the Khumalo a degree of democracy compared to what they experienced during the Mfecane. As noted by E. Eldredge, the increasing inequalities within and between societies coupled with a series of environmental crises at the beginning of the nineteenth century transformed long-standing competition over natural resources and trade in south-eastern Africa into violent struggles for dominance and survival. She proceeded to argue that accumulation of wealth by some Africans allowed them to consolidate their power at the expense of the
weak. The weaker found themselves incorporated into the lower echelons of stronger societies, either conquered or submitting voluntarily for the sake of survival.  

What Eldredge was describing were the circumstances that brought about the Mfecane. It is necessary to briefly examine the Khumalo life during the *Mfecane* period.

### 2.2 The Mfecane and the Fate of Khumalo, 1818-1825

As noted by Rasmussen, the Khumalo clans in about 1818 found themselves in the midst of two powerful and aggressive neighbours. To the east, the Khumalo clans found themselves close to the growing Ndwandwe league of Zwide and to the southeast were the Mthethwa confederation of Dingiswayo. This geographical arrangement posed an immediate threat to the weak but autonomous Khumalo clans. The main concern of the Khumalo clans became that of trying to play off the two powerful, rivals and expansionist powers which were near them.

However, the aggressive and expansionist Ndwandwe state under Zwide soon attacked the autonomous Khumalo clans between 1817 and 1818 killing the clan-heads, Mashobana and Ndoda and made the Khumalo clans his vassals. It must be noted that one major characteristic of the *Mfecane* was the attack and incorporation of weaker groups into the lower echelons of stronger societies. This is what happened to the Khumalo clans in the period 1817 and...
1818. Eldredge pointed out that the process of state formation under Dingiswayo and during Shaka’s early years was a process of incorporation of people, not extermination.\textsuperscript{32} The Khumalo clans were victims of the same process. Ndoda and Mashobana were victims of Zwide’s campaign of conquest and incorporation of weaker groups in his expansionist policy.\textsuperscript{33}

The campaigns of conquest and incorporation of weaker groups by the powerful states like the Ndwandwe of Zwide, Mthethwa of Dingiswayo, and Zulu of Shaka inevitably led to loss of autonomy and rights by the defeated and incorporated groups. The weaker groups cherished their autonomy and rights as the powerful states hence defections of smaller groups from the grip of powerful states were another major characteristic of the \textit{Mfecane}. For instance, when the Khumalo clans were made vassals of Zwide and his Ndwandwe people, they constantly sought ways to shake-off domination and vassalage. Their opportunity came when the Ndwandwe and Zulu clashed in 1818 near Mhlathuze River. In 1818 when Shaka was about to defeat Zwide’s Ndwandwe, Mzilikazi, the new leader of the Khumalo defected with his people and joined Shaka’s forces.\textsuperscript{34}

Rasmussen mentions that perhaps Mzilikazi could have had two motives for switching his allegiance to Shaka. Firstly, Mzilikazi feared Zwide’s duplicity as he had killed Mashobana, the father of Mzilikazi. Secondly, the defection was a product of the Khumalo’s desire to be on the winning side at the conclusion of the war and Mzilikazi’s realization that a speedy and voluntary submission to
Shaka would greatly enhance his chances for preserving as much as possible of his own people’s autonomy.\textsuperscript{35}

It must be noted that the Khumalo and their leader’s desire to maintain their own freedom seems certainly one of the most striking features of Ndebele history south of the Limpopo River. It was this desire for autonomy that made the Ndebele to defect from Shaka in 1820 as they did from Zwide in 1818.\textsuperscript{36} However, what is important to note is that after 1820 as Mzilikazi and his people were migrating away from the Zulu and entering Transvaal, they adopted the policies of raiding, conquest, incorporation and assimilation of weaker groups they met on their way to the north. The basic ambiguity and contradiction is revealed in the fact that while Mzilikazi and his followers cherished their rights and autonomy they went about attacking, raiding, incorporating, and assimilating the Pedi, Tswana and Sotho, violating their autonomy and depriving them of their cherished rights as they were incorporated into the lower echelons of the Khumalo groups and other Zansi people.\textsuperscript{37} It was through these processes that Mzilikazi was able to build the Ndebele state south of the Limpopo River and to establish Khumalo hegemony.

The participation of the Ndebele in raiding, conquest, incorporation and assimilation of other communities, groups, and individuals as they migrated to the north led scholars like Omer-Cooper to argue that Mzilikazi and the Ndebele carried “both devastating warfare and the process of state formation to the trans-Vaal highveld and subsequently, after their defeat by the Boer trekkers, to
western Zimbabwe”. However, it must be mentioned that the Ndebele under Mzilikazi like the Zulu under Shaka have been stigmatized as “bloodthirsty destroyers of human life”. Mzilikazi like Shaka has been described as a fearsome and aggressive leader that led the Ndebele in the devastation of the South African highveld and beyond. Current revisionist scholarship does not succumb to this stigmatization. Cobbing, for instance, has convincingly shown that the Ndebele were not responsible for the devastation of the highveld, instead Mzilikazi’s kingdom was essentially a defensive state which attempted to gather different communities together and offer them protection against the Griqua raiders and other mounted and firearm-wielding agents of the white settler capitalist economy of the Cape. To Cobbing, the concept of the Difaqane (the Mfecane on the highveld) remains essentially an alibi created by white settlers, colonial officials, and missionaries to conceal these slave-raiding and trading activities in which they were all implicated. Cobbing’s arguments are given credence by the fact that it was really the Boer trekkers with their Griqua allies who broke up Mzilikazi’s composite Ndebele state in the trans-Vaal region and forced him on his last migration across the Limpopo River in 1838.

Margaret Kinsman on the other hand argued that the presence of Ndebele on the western highveld from 1826 to 1838 introduced a period of ambiguous peace rather than devastation. The Ndebele cleared the area of the brigands, who had destabilized Rolong settlements with their unpredictable raiding, and replaced these with a stronger, more centralized Ndebele state. Thus instead
of the Ndebele exterminating and devastating the highveld they absorbed members of the conquered communities and their herds. Some were incorporated into *amabutho* while others were kept as servants in the central settlement, yet others were taken as client communities on the outskirts of the Ndebele state. Kinsman supports Cobbing’s argument that the violence that took place in the highveld was not caused by the Ndebele but by people like the brigands of Jan Bloem.

However, Cobbing and Kinsman’s arguments must not be taken to mean that the process of state formation among the Ndebele was a peaceful one. Their argument is that the violence of the Ndebele in the highveld needs not to be exaggerated as they established a strong centralized state in the highveld that protected some weaker groups from raids by the Griqua and the Kora. However, very little is known about the Ndebele state south of the Limpopo River.

2.4 The Ndebele State South of the Limpopo River 1826-1837

By the time the Ndebele reached the western part of the highveld in 1826, they were already a multi-ethnic group consisting of the Pedi, Hurutshe, Ngwaketse, Kwena, Khudu and the “Ndebele” of Ndzudza and Magodonga who were attacked, conquered, incorporated, and assimilated into Mzilikazi’s followers between 1820 and 1825. In other words, Mzilikazi was already succeeding in his hegemonic project. The creation of the Ndebele state was based, at least in part, on raiding local communities and a welcoming weaker groups that
desperately wanted security. Although some members of the above mentioned communities were killed and others fled into open country, the Ndebele largely absorbed members of the conquered communities and their herds.\textsuperscript{45} 

In the process of state formation, Eldredge noted that women were highly valued both for reproduction or because they were the primary agricultural producers. She continued to state in general that growing vulnerability to famine in times of food scarcity drew people to any strong leader who could provide them with a livelihood and protection. The employment of women in agriculture left men free to acquire surplus directly through raiding and the accumulation of booty. The booty from raids provided an easy way for chiefs to satisfy the needs and demands of their people in order to keep followers from falling away.\textsuperscript{46} Thus when the Ndebele entered western Transvaal they did not exterminate the Rolong and other Tswana and Sotho people, rather they welcomed those who submitted to them and conquered others and absorbed them into their ranks. 

In western Transvaal a composite Ndebele state came into existence. The little evidence that exists show that the Ndebele state was organized into four belts of territory.\textsuperscript{47} This organization was largely determined by security concerns. At the centre were a series of large Ndebele settlements under the direct control of Mzilikazi. The centre was surrounded by extensive pasturelands where Ndebele livestock were herded. The pasturelands were interspersed with client chieftainships made up of conquered or voluntarily assimilated groups that
accepted over lordship of the Ndebele state. The client chieftaincies were semi-autonomous. They retained their preferred leaders, though they accepted Ndebele representatives in their towns whose main purpose was to supervise the political activities of the residents and local trade. Finally, in the outer most areas, the Ndebele maintained a cleared area, which functioned as a march.\textsuperscript{48}

M. Kinsman pointed out that though the Ndebele re-organized large areas of the central highveld into the core of the state; they left communities like the Rolong under Tawane and Sefunela largely unmolested. This remained the situation until movement of the capital required that certain regions be cleared to establish the “opening” further west.\textsuperscript{49} The idea of a “march” was very central to the Ndebele survival and maintenance of their autonomy. In the face of possible and actual attacks by powerful groups, the Ndebele abandoned settlements and “marched” to new areas.

While in the Transvaal the Ndebele attacked and raided the Ngwaketse in 1828 and 1830 raising fear on the Rolong who were enjoying peace under Ndebele overlordship.\textsuperscript{50} However, Ndebele violence was limited because they had established their own fields, which gave them food, and they had accumulated a large herd of cattle. The conquered and assimilated people were used as agricultural producers, especially women, whereas men were drafted into Ndebele \textit{amabutho} that herded cattle and participated in raids. The client chieftaincies were forced to pay tribute to the Ndebele in the form of skins, tobacco, karossess, iron tools and grain. For instance, Kwena chief grew
tobacco for the Ndebele, Moile, chief of the Hurutshe provided skins and karosses whereas the Ngwato paid tribute in iron tools and other weapons.  

Dr Andrew Smith who came into contact with the Ndebele in 1835 was concerned with the internal affairs of African chiefdoms, especially aspects of governance. He noted that Mzilikazi at times referred to his captives as his “dogs” and that if ever the captured people wanted favours they had to exhibit “the most supplicating looks, employ the most humiliating gestures and give utterance to the most endearing and at the same time most submissive expressions such as Baba Kosi, etc”. Respect for leaders was indeed an important aspect of African pre-colonial states in general where government was not clouded in non-personal institutions. However, Smith was quick to note that all African leaders were bound by the “caprice of his subjects”. He proceeded to point out that the most difficult thing to achieve in the newly established states like that of the Ndebele in the highveld were the maintenance of the consent of the governed. Secondly, he noted that even powerful leaders like Mzilikazi soon found that their people would desert them if the terms of survival under their leadership and patronage became onerous. Thirdly, he pointed out that: “it is to the liability of chiefs to being forsaken by their subjects that the latter owe their principal privileges…otherwise there would be no protection for them against tyranny and oppression.” Finally, Smith observed that the organization of food production, the distribution of proceeds of raiding, the levying of tribute, the hearing of cases, the balancing of different interest groups and especially of the clans of the wealthy, the management of the army,
and the administration of subsidiary settlements and headman ships, all had to be undertaken in a manner that ensured the consent of the governed.55

However, evidence is weak on the aspects described by Smith, though there is no doubt that the incorporated people were indeed placed at the lower echelons of the Ndebele society, they furnished the powerful in the Ndebele state with servants and were constituted into a defence perimeter around Ndebele settlements. Moreover, there is no doubt that Mzilikazi distributed cattle and food to his followers so as to ensure their loyalty to him. Above all, the Ndebele state offered security to the subject people.

It must be noted that due to lack of detailed evidence there is little that can be said beyond the above about the organization of the Ndebele state in Transvaal. What is clear is the fall of this composite state and the migration of the Ndebele to Matebeleland. The raids of Kora brigands under Jan Bloem, commondo attacks of the Griqua under captain Barend Barends and the activities of the Boers and their African and Coloured allies helped to destroy the composite Ndebele state in the highveld in the period between 1835 and 1838.56 The entry of these groups in the Transvaal inevitably led to clashes with the Ndebele over material as well as human resources of the highveld communities. The Ndebele absorption of the formerly dispersed, scattered and independent but weak Tswana and Sotho communities into a single powerful Ndebele state deprived the firearm wielding Griqua, Korana and Boers of their easy prey.57 Thus the Ndebele became the target of raids, theft and outright
attacks as from 1836 until they abandoned their settlements in Transvaal in 1838 to embark on a northward migration to Matabeleland.

2.5 Establishment of the Ndebele State in Zimbabwe, 1838-1842

What is important to discuss here is not the route followed by the two Ndebele groups as they moved to Matabeleland but rather how the Ndebele after entering the Zimbabwean plateau continued the process of state formation and to spread the rule of the Khumalo over more people of different ethnic and religious origins. It must be noted that as the Ndebele left South Africa they lost a lot of their followers especially the Sotho and Tswana who decided to remain behind as the Boers pushed the Ndebele out of Transvaal. Thus they were desperately in need to replenish their numbers through conquest and incorporation of the people of the southwestern part of the Zimbabwean plateau. The main groups that occupied the southwest were the Rozvi, Kalanga, Nyubi, Venda, Birwa and other “Shona” groups. The main political unit that had dominated the southwest was the Rozvi state and by the time of the arrival of the Ndebele this political unit was tottering. The last Mambo of the Rozvi, Chirisamhuru was attacked and killed by the Swazi of Queen Nyamazana.58

However, it must be noted that the Ndebele having experienced the disadvantages of aggression and violent incorporation of members of neighbouring communities in western Transvaal did not make the same mistake when they entered the southwest. They avoided attacking the central part of
the Rozvi state preferring to settle in Ndumba’s area west of Mbembesi River. Ndumba and his people did not offer any resistance. Rather they vanished from the scene relatively early. But despite the fact that the Ndebele tried to limit aggression on their neighbours, they were forced to embark on limited wars of conquest of the south-west since the people of this area did not readily accept their rule. For instance, the person who gave the Ndebele the main opposition in the immediate area was Mutinhima of the Rozvi, based in the Malungwane hills. He was able to resist and defend his Malungwane Hills against the Ndebele under Gundwane Ndiweni. The Ndebele under Gundwane Ndiweni were only able to dislodge him after they had united with Mzilikazi’s group.

It is vital to note that between 1839 and 1842, the Ndebele were very cautious in the way they dealt with their neighbours. While they continued to conquer the southwest and to absorb communities into their ranks, the Ndebele offensive capacity was limited by three main factors. Firstly, the Ndebele were weak due to numbers, secondly, they needed a rest after the long migration from South Africa, and finally they were affected by internal tension among themselves caused by the “unlawful” installation of Nkulumane as king of the Gundwane group while his father was still alive. These factors limited the aggression of the Ndebele. The period 1839-1842 was, in short, characterized by a civil war that culminated in Ntabyezinduna massacre which saw a number of Ndebele chiefs and two wives of Mzilikazi being executed. The violence with which Mzilikazi crushed those who had installed Nkulumane demonstrated beyond doubt his intolerance of anything he considered a challenge to his power. This was proved by the fact that he killed even his other sons,
destroyed Gibixhegu residential area, and others like those of Mahlangu
isibongo survived his wrath by migrating back to South Africa.\textsuperscript{64}

It was after Mzilikazi had crushed those who had installed Nkulumane that he proceeded to consolidate his followers into a new phase of settled life after almost twenty years of life of migrations and warfare. The indigenous people of the southwest responded differently to Ndebele settlement in the Malungwane-Matopos area. Those who had suffered seriously at the hands of the Ngoni invasions and raids decided to abandon their lands and migrated to other areas fearing that the Ndebele could harass them like the Ngoni invaders. Others who were still powerful like Mutinhima offered some resistance before migrating or accepting Ndebele rule while others responded by readily accepting to exist as vassals of the Ndebele and paid tribute while retaining their lands.\textsuperscript{65} In short, what must be said is that the way the indigenous people of the south-west responded to the Ndebele and the way the Ndebele conducted themselves towards them demonstrated the continuation of nation-building process by Mzilikazi that began in South Africa and reached its climax in the Malungwane-Matopos area. Even the violence that took place was part and parcel of the problems of state formation in an alien place and was not very different from that which took place south of the Limpopo River in the 1820s and 1830s.

The Ndebele approach to the various people they found in the southwest was a combination of violence and pacific efforts. Some groups lost their cherished autonomy and rights, which they had enjoyed prior to coming of the Ndebele.
Those who happened to be at the centre of where the Ndebele state was established were attacked, conquered and incorporated into the ranks of the Ndebele state as the *Hole* group. Those like Rozani of the Gwelo area who submitted without offering resistance were accepted as a tributary group and their positions as chiefs were confirmed and respected. They were given the responsibility to look after Ndebele cattle. The Nyubi of Matopos fell under direct rule of the Ndebele and some of their chiefs were reduced to the status of *abalisa* (headmen) subordinate to Ndebele *izinduna* (chiefs). The Kalanga of the Nata-Plumtree area were organized into a defensive perimeter of the Ndebele state and placed under the supervision of Ndebele chiefs though their original leaders were not deposed.

In the areas of Gwanda, Belingwe, Shabani, Selukwe and Que Que, the Ndebele did not make serious changes to the local systems. For instance, the Birwa of Gwanda remained under Hwadalala their original chief, though they were under the overall supervision of chief Ndiweni of eziNaleni. The Birwa’s responsibility under the Ndebele was like that of the Kalanga of the Nata-Plumtree area. They were categorized as *izikhuza kumbe izihlabamkhosi zenkosi* (those who were supposed to report to the Ndebele king about any strangers who entered the south-west from the South). The Ndebele also continued to take young men from the Shona communities so as to draft them into *amabutho* and in this way they replenished their numbers.
However, the Shona chieftaincies that continued to resist Ndebele political hegemony were subjected to Ndebele raids, but this did not create a serious demographic impact in the south-west that amounted to what Summers and Padgen termed a “scorched-earth zone” around the Ndebele state that averaged one hundred miles in width.\(^71\) The Ndebele raids were directed on recalcitrant chiefs only and it was these chiefs and their people who elected to migrate from their lands rather than submit to Ndebele rule. For more details on the Ndebele state in the southwestern part of the Zimbabwean plateau see chapter three.

In concluding this chapter, there is need to emphasize that the Ndebele history in the period 1818 to 1842 must be seen as a case of state formation or nation-building and initial construction of Khumalo hegemony by Mzilikazi Khumalo. As such the period saw widespread violation of the autonomy of weaker groups who were incorporated into the ranks of the nascent Ndebele state. The Ndebele state itself emerged from the violence of the *Mfecane*, as part and parcel of a hegemonic project spear-headed by an enthusiastic traditional intellectual. During this period issues of human rights and democracy took a back seat as individuals, groups, and communities fought wars of resistance against domination while others fought for dominance as well as freedom.
Endnotes

1. W.F. Lye, “The Ndebele Kingdom South of the Limpopo River” in Journal of African History, Volume x, (1969), R. Kent Rasmussen, Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi’s Ndebele in South Africa, (Rex Collings, London, 1978), and N. Etherington, Greet Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815-1854, (Pearson Education, London, 2001). Etherington spends a lot of time and effort in trying to explain why the Mzilikazi and his allies moved from Zululand and the dates they left their coastal homes to the highveld. He ends up with at least five accounts, which he think were so contradictory to the extent that he suggests suspension of judgment and conclusion. His problem is that he is an empiricist who tends to grapple with the surface manifestation of historical reality, and tends to be confused by it to the extent that he throws up his hands in surrender. He forgets that reality operates in ambiguity and contradictions. What he terms five accounts of Mzilikazi’s migration to the highveld are in reality a macrocosm of hegemonic struggles that engulfed Nguni land in the period 1810s to the 1830s.


5. J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, pp.24-7.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. For a detailed historiography of the Mfecane see C. Saunders, “Pre-Cobbing Mfecane Historiography” in C. Hamilton (ed), The Mfecane Aftermath, pp.21-34.


12. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid. See also File W11/1/1 George Wilkerson, “The Matabele Nation”.


33. R. Kent Rasmussen, Migrant Kingdom, discusses in detail the differing versions of the death of Mashobana, p.13.

34. Ibid, pp.14-16.

35. Ibid.


37. While they were still south of the Limpopo River, the Ndebele social organization was divided into two segments Zansi and Enhla.

38. J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, pp.24-37.


41. The Boers and Griqua attacked indeed the Ndebele between 1835 and 1837. The most remembered battle in that of Vegkop of 1836 with the Boers.


43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. R. Kent Rasmussen, Migrant Kingdom where the exploits of the Ndebele South of the Limpopo River are excellently presented.


49. Ibid.


53. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
59. Ibid. See File Historical Manuscript W18/1/2 Ntabeni’s statement.
60. File NB6/1/1 S.N.I. (Belingwe N.C.) Report, 31 December 1898.
61. Ibid.
65. D.N. Beach, War and Politics, pp.21-38.
66. For a clear description of Hole see chapter three.
68. For a detailed analysis of the Ndebele relations with the conquered people see J.R.D. Cobbing, “The Ndebele under the Khumalos, 1820-1896” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster 1976), see especially chapter four.
69. Ibid.
71. R. Summers and C.W. Pagden, The Warriors, (Cape Town, 1970) where they champion a military thesis of the Ndebele past. The history of the Ndebele to them was merely military history.
CHAPTER THREE
GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NDEBELE STATE IN THE 19th CENTURY

Introduction

After the tumultuous years of state formation and migration, which spanned a long period of twenty-years, the Ndebele finally settled permanently in the present day Matebeleland. Since the early years of the Ndebele life south of the Limpopo River up until they reached Matopos in 1839, their activities have been reduced to military issues.¹ A number of scholars who wrote on the Ndebele did not emphasize the changes that took place among the Ndebele as they transformed themselves from a nascent state into a settled heterogeneous nation on the Zimbabwean plateau. This failure on the part of scholars led to the emergence of biased accounts, which emphasized continuity in the Ndebele state in the activities of the state formation (1818-1842) into the “settled phase” (1842-1893). Only D.N. Beach alluded to some of the changes in the Ndebele thought pattern.²

However, the truth is that the formative stage dominated as it was by nation building had its own distinguishing features compared to the “settled phase” where the issue of state formation was no longer central. There is utmost need to assess how the Ndebele adapted to a permanent settled way of life and secondly, the nature of governance they evolved. This approach reveals fundamental issues about Ndebele notions of democracy and human rights. This chapter focuses on Ndebele notions of power and governance and it also
examined the issues of accountability, legitimacy, gender, oppression and domination in the Ndebele state.

3.1 Settled Life and New Political Realities

It must be noted that while the Ndebele public ideology of the state remained aggressively militarist, the actual realities of power shifted during the “settled phase” to the control of the means of production which superseded the control of the means of violence as the base of wealth and privilege. As the Ndebele state entered the “settled phase” some of their major institutions such as amabutho (age sets) which were largely geared towards the military were quickly “civilianized” to suit the exigencies of a less aggressive environment on the Zimbabwean plateau.³

Robert Moffat noted during his visit to the Ndebele in 1854 that there was reduction in offensive wars. However, instead of attributing this change to the peaceful and settled life of the Ndebele in the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau, he gave himself and God the credit of what was plainly the result of more settled circumstances.⁴ The “civilianization” process in the Ndebele state was proved by the fact that the law of celibacy was relaxed and those who were renowned for courage and prowess in warfare were permitted to marry and build villages for themselves. In other words, the right to marry and to found a family was accorded to many people during this phase of Ndebele history. Others were given largely civilian oriented posts of administering the segments of the Ndebele state, since the state had expanded greatly.⁵
The tumultuous period of warfare was over. The issues that were of concern to the Ndebele were consolidation of power and strengthening of legitimacy of the ruling house and solidification of national unity. With these transformations came changes in the contents and tone of izibongo (praise poems) and izaga (proverbs), and these changes were reflecting the new political realities. The praises and izingoma (songs) now helped in legitimizing Mzilikazi’s rule, they set out to tell his followers that Mzilikazi was the rightful descendant of Mashobana and that the latter was the rightful descendant of ancient Nguni kings. The now unknown inxwala song Nansi Indaba Yomkhonto (the Song of the Assegai) was clearly meant to emphasize national unity and ancestral power. The song assumed the role of a national anthem. The praise poems, songs, and proverbs played a crucial part in promoting a version of national unity based on the figure of king who was the central figure in all national ceremonies.

The office of the king was transformed and “ritualised”. Whatever Mzilikazi might have become in his old-age, he could hardly have been described in his youth as being primarily a rain-maker administering a system of grain production, distributing cattle, and heading a cult of ancestor worship. Yet, indeed during the “settled phase”, the king’s importance was best described in ritual terms. He was “the rainmaker in chief” and “a collector of charms and medicines designed not only to secure rain but to protect the state against the machinations of its enemies”. On top of this, the king administered justice, maintained a monopoly over the important long-distance trade to the South, and
distributed the proceeds of tribute and of raiding. In other words, Mzilikazi was no longer the absolute and arbitrary tyrant of European travelers’ tales. The king became involved more in ivory trade and spiritual satisfaction of his subjects.

Another important development of the settled phase was the emergence of a strong aristocratic group quite different from that which had held power because of its military prowess in the 1820s and 1830s [see Appendix B]. Achievement or meritocracy was increasingly replacing ascriptive status in the Ndebele state. Cobbing noted that although the king was indeed the focus of national unity and although without him “there would have been an inchoate collection of feuding chieftaincies,” he was no longer able to exercise absolute power. His power was kept in check by the relatively strong subsidiary chiefs and headmen who maintained a great deal of independent wealth and power based on personal ownership of cattle and achievement. The power structure acquired a “firm genealogical basis,” with authority passing from father to eldest son. As the power of this group increased, the kingship vigorously ritualized itself to the level of “ideological glorification”. It was the king’s ancestors who were invoked in ceremonies as the state’s protectors and “prayers to them lay at the root of tribal cohesion”.

The refugees and captives of earlier decades and those who were acquired in the southwest now coalesced into a nation, broadening the heterogeneity of the Ndebele state. Some of them as will be demonstrated later, assumed powerful
positions as chiefs and commanded a lot of respect from the kingship. As such they deserved to be treated in a more humane manner for them to be fully incorporated into the ranks of the Ndebele. The *Enhla* and the *Hole* now dominated the *Zansi*, in terms of numbers. Democratic spaces naturally opened in line with new social and political realities in their state. For instance the society became even more tolerant and accommodative so as to fully assimilate non-Nguni groups. These non-Nguni groups were gradually accorded more and more rights so as to placate them. The unity of the nation lay at averting filliparous tendencies and satisfaction of various ethnic groups.

Raiding which had been relied upon as an economic as well as a political ploy was changed. Raiding lost much of its attributes as an economic ploy and became largely a political ploy meant to weaken neighbours of the Ndebele and to punish the recalcitrant chiefs. In the words of D.N. Beach, raiding became “target-specific”. To note these changes is vital as it helps one to understand that there were changes in the experiences, activities, notions and ideas among the Ndebele from those they developed during the formation of their state and to those they formulated, articulated and practiced during the “settled phase”. This is not meant to say there were no continuities between the two phases of the Ndebele history. There was continuity and change.

### 3.2 Notions of Power and Governance

The Ndebele exhibited a clear system of governance that was modeled around the person of the king (*inkosi*). The institution of kingship among the Ndebele
originated with Mzilikazi who was the first Ndebele king that presided over a new state.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that the Ndebele state was organized around the person of the king led some scholars to depict the Ndebele king as despotic, absolute monarch, and dictatorial.\textsuperscript{19} The truth is that the Ndebele king was powerful, but not to the extent that he became an absolute dictator. Besides the person of the king, the Ndebele state had other mechanism, which acted as checks on the power of the king. The Ndebele had a clear hierarchy of power, which facilitated communication between the leaders and the ordinary people. It also facilitated communication between the lesser chiefs and the senior leaders up to the king. See Fig. 1.

![Hierarchy of Power Among the Ndebele](image)

**Fig. 1: HIERARCHY OF POWER AMONG THE NDEBELE**

- Inkosi (King)
- Indunankulu Yesizwe (Prime Minister)
- Umphakathi (Inner Advisory Council)
- Izikhulu (Outer Advisory Council/Council of Prominent Men)
  - Izinduna Zezigaba (Provincial Chiefs)
  - Abalisa (Headmen)
- Abamnumzana (Homestead Heads)

**Source:** Adapted from J.R.D. Cobbing. “The Ndebele under the Khumalos, (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976,) pp.44-64

What must be noted from Fig. 1 is that the Ndebele king, while wielding power, was not an autocratic ruler like the Tsars of Russia in the nineteenth century. Absolute dictatorship checked by the powerful officials who were active in the governance of the Ndebele state. There was the *indunankulu* (prime minister).
During Mzilikazi’s rule Mncumbatha Khumalo occupied this post and even acted as a regent after the death of Mzilikazi in 1868. Mncumbatha was a powerful figure. He was described by the Ndebele as umqamelo wenkosi, which meant the pillow of the king. He was so described because the king relied on him more than anybody for advice.\textsuperscript{20} He acted as a deputy to the king and the king took his advice seriously. He represented the king on various important occasions and could sign treaties on behalf of the king as happened in 1836.\textsuperscript{21}

The Ndebele king did not rule by decree. State policies were subjected to serious debate, and meetings were considered important in deciding the future of the state. A loose group of the king’s personal confidants comprising of the king’s relatives and other men who were considered wise formed the inner advisers of the king and were collectively termed umphakathi. In practice the umphakathi played a crucial role in determining state policy and they also deliberated on the difficult judicial decisions.\textsuperscript{22} Another set of advisers of the king were a large group of the state’s prominent men collectively termed izikhulu. It was through these two councils that the ordinary Ndebele people were able to participate in the government of their country. Umphakathi and izikhulu operated as representative councils. The members of these councils, however, were mainly rich people, rather than ordinary persons. They were not freely chosen by the people, their positions were largely hereditary. It was members of umphakathi and izikhuku that were responsible for the interrogation and interviewing of European visitors to the Ndebele kingdom.
It was also the members of these councils who were responsible for discouraging reception given to missionaries in the Ndebele state. The members of umphakathi and izikhulu made regular journeys to the isigodlo (capital) where the king resided in order to advise and inform the king about the situation in the izigaba (outlying areas of the state) and to debate crucial state policies.

In theory, the king was the head of state, head of government, religious chief, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and the supreme judge of all criminal cases. In practice, however, the king was basically a ceremonial figure in all these posts and a source of unity in the state. There is need to note that there was always tension between forces of centralization and those of decentralization of power. Like all rulers of his time the Ndebele king tried to keep as much power in his hands as was possible. At the same time, the leaders of izigaba worked tirelessly too to gained more and more power and increasing influence in state issues. It was the provincial leaders who were members of umphakathi and izikhulu, which were influential councils that shaped state policy. It was these people who practically commanded the armed forces during military assignments and it was these same people that determined outcomes of difficult judicial decisions. While the king could differ with the views of his advisers on a number of issues; he was often forced to endorse the popular views of his advisers. Whenever the king was defeated in argument he would say inkunzi yehlulwe ngamathole (the bull has been defeated by the calves) and concede to their views. In other words, the leaders of the outlying areas had crucial influence on the centre and the king attempted to achieve a consensus in
decision-making in the Ndebele state by conceding to the views of the provincial leaders.  

The leaders of izigaba rather than the king were the practical representatives of amahlabezulu (the ordinary population of the Ndebele state). The king had to listen to their views in order to keep in touch with the popular sentiments of his people. Chiefs of izigaba were initially appointed by the king especially during the inception of the state and the formation of specific izigaba as the state grew. Provincial chiefs, however, had to work hard to cultivate the allegiance of the people within the territorial area of their rule. Upon the death of an appointed chief, the king’s power to appoint another chief fell away as the deceased chief was to be succeeded by his eldest son from his senior wife (indlu enkulule). If the senior wife failed to produce a son, other sons from junior wives were accepted as successors. In short, as the state became permanent, the chiefs of the outlying areas lost the attribute of being “royal officials” appointed by the king. They developed strong genealogical power propped up by local politics in their respective izigaba within the Ndebele state. Local politics tended to dominate in the succession disputes within izigaba.

J.R.D. Cobbing was able to come up with eighteen case studies of leading Ndebele families who dominated local government in the outlying areas while at the same time having strong influence on the centre (kingship). The kingship worked very hard to contain the tension between the forces of centralization and decentralization and to cement the unity of the state and predominance of the
kingship. This was done through marriage alliances and exchange of cattle. The powerful chiefs of the Ndebele state competed to marry the daughters of the king and produced children who inherited leadership of izigaba. This was part and parcel of their attempt to royalise themselves and to keep as close as possible to the king. On the other hand, the king too married women from the influential and wealthy provincial families. This was part of the king’s attempt to keep close link with the powerful members of the society and to further cement national unity through marriage. In this way, there were few powerful, wealthy, and influential families in the Ndebele state who had no direct marital links with the royal family.  

However, the above outline is not meant to imply that the Ndebele system of governance was characterized by consensual politics and democratic tendencies. Instead, the Ndebele system of governance was characterized by a mixture of democratic tendencies and practices on the one hand, and aristocratic, autocratic and/or militaristic practices and tendencies, with varying degrees of despotism on the other. Tension, competition, jealousies, and violence also characterized Ndebele system of governance. It is important to note that the fact that a majority of the influential and powerful Ndebele families had some direct link with the royal family had three crucial implications. Firstly, it implied that they benefited more from the king at the expense of other ordinary members of the Ndebele state. Secondly, it implied that they worked for the perpetual leadership of the royal family. Finally, it led others to develop insatiable ambitions and appetite for the royal throne. For instance, Mbiko Masuku of Zwangendaba isigaba who had married Mzilikazi’s daughter Zinkabi, felt so powerful that after the death of
Mzilikazi he opposed the succession of Lobengula to the Ndebele throne. It was the activities of this provincial chief that plunged the Ndebele state into a bloody civil war.\textsuperscript{35} Cobbing noted that in the Ndebele state consensus broke down at times and \textit{umphakathi} was perfectly capable of throwing up its own leaders during a period of interregnum.\textsuperscript{36}

It must be noted that the kinship ideology in the Ndebele state was a source of both strength and weakness. Both Mzilikazi and Lobengula were known for suspecting their own relatives to be their worst enemies and for harshness towards male royals. The idea of a royal house limited the chances of ordinary people to participate fully in the governance of the state and to attain higher posts in the Ndebele state. Hence it was only the members of the royal family who could attain the posts of kingship and senior chiefs. This scenario helps to explain why Mzilikazi and Lobengula tended to execute a lot of their relatives on the ground that they harboured and exhibited ambitions of being kings. The popular case in Ndebele history is that of Lobengula’s killing of his brother Hlangabeza because some members of the Ndebele state mistook him for the king.\textsuperscript{37} Mzilikazi, in the period 1840-1842, massacred a lot of his relatives including two of his wives and some of his sons on the grounds that they did not respect him as the only ruler of the Ndebele.\textsuperscript{38}

Politics in the Ndebele state were not open to competition. Power was hereditary, that is confined to royal houses. Thus, while the Ndebele conceded that power was to be contested, they never tolerated opposition to the incumbent leader.
Ndebele emphasized that power belonged to those with power. For instance, the ruling Khumalo house was praised as *ndlangamandla* (those who rule because of their power). One issue which shows that opposition and resentment was not tolerated in the Ndebele system of governance was the fact that Mzilikazi ruled until he died of old age without a clear successor. The Ndebele feared even to mention the issue of succession when Mzilikazi was still alive.

In the Ndebele state, governance was also characterized by patriarchal ideology. The term patriarchy as used here is not similar to its contemporary use by feminist theorists. It does not refer exclusively to relations between men and women. It is employed in the Weberian sense, referring to a type of domination based on strictly personal loyalty to a father-like ruler who invoked the sanctity of tradition to justify his acts. In the Ndebele state, patriarchal ideology exalted the leadership of older men who inherited their high rank from ancestors related to kingship. Women, young men, and captives, generally stood outside the centre of power. The Ndebele king was a "father" figure and the people he governed conveyed their respect by referring to themselves as his "children". Political life was acted out in terms of personal relations rather than in terms of depersonalized and rational law. The Ndebele considered themselves as one family (*umthwakazi*) and the family was an idiom through which political conflict and alliances were expressed.

In summary terms, one can say that the Ndebele state like the Mutapa state studied by S.I.G Mudenge, exhibited a clear hierarchy of rights and governance.
It ran from *umuzi* (nuclear or extended family) under *umnumzana* through *imizi* (villages) under *abalisa* (headmen), through the *izigaba* (provinces) under *izinduna* (chiefs) to the *ilizwe* (kingdom) under the overall administration of *inkosi* (king).  

44 These arrangements in the Ndebele state like every facet of Ndebele life and work were shot through with political import. There were complex dialectics between egalitarianism, competition, tensions, clan and family intimacies, mutual assistance; communalism, co-existing with domination, violence of the "big men," seniority, aristocratic, and militaristic tendencies, under-pinned by patriarchal ideology and an all embracing ideology of kinship. 

3.3 Accountability and Legitimacy Among the Ndebele

Proverbs, praise poems, and tales of the Ndebele past reflected more than anything else popular expectations of the Ndebele about their king and the Ndebele government generally. Ndebele oral literature is dealt with in detail in chapter four. Among the Ndebele, the king and his chiefs were expected to be generous with food and productive resources. They were also expected to provide protection against enemies and drought. Ndebele oral tales captured the ideal qualities expected of Ndebele kings and chiefs. These ideals were captured in fearsome and comforting as well as destructive and generous images. 

46 Diversity of metaphors and images employed indicated the ambiguities of popular regard for the kingship. The king was a lion or elephant to be feared and revered, and a man to be controlled and made generous. 

47
In the Ndebele state for the king to remain a legitimate ruler he had to combine human and animal traits judiciously. The Ndebele clearly expressed their fear of the king while at the same time celebrating their king’s ability to "eat" his enemies.\textsuperscript{48} Mzilikazi the founder of the Ndebele state was respected by his people mainly because of his ability to build the Ndebele state, his ability to outwit leaders like Shaka and Zwide and his ability to seize cattle from his enemies for the benefit of the Ndebele. All these qualities of Mzilikazi’s rule are expressed in his praise poems.\textsuperscript{49} Thus for Mzilikazi, he legitimized his rule on the basis of his credentials as a leader who built the Ndebele state, as a leader who conquered a lot of people and incorporated them into one nation. Indeed Mzilikazi acquired kingship as a wandering warrior, practising a variety of stratagems to retain the loyalty of groups of refugees of different origins.\textsuperscript{50}

As noted by Leroy Vail and Landeg White, when the Ndebele state became settled in Matebeleland, the praises and songs of the Ndebele helped in legitimizing Mzilikazi’s rule. They were organized in such a way that they reminded his followers that Mzilikazi was the rightful descendant of Mashobane and the latter was the rightful descendant of ancient Nguni kings.\textsuperscript{51} For instance, in Mzilikazi’s praise names, his forefathers like Zimangele and Ndaba and his father Mashobane are mentioned.\textsuperscript{52} When Lobengula took over the kingship after a civil war, he tried hard to legitimize his rule as well. In his praise names, there was emphasis on the rightfulness of his succession. His praise names partly read; "Calf of a black cow...The black duck of Mzilikazi."\textsuperscript{53} For Lobengula, there was an attempt to emphasize that he was the true descendant of the founding
ancestors, Mzilikazi and Mashobane. Lobengula had no credit as a conqueror. Hence his legitimacy had to be propped up using the fact that he was a son of Mzilikazi. Lobengula inherited an established state hence he could not argue that he built the nation as a way of legitimizing his rule.

At another level, the Ndebele king's legitimacy as a ruler depended over and above all on gaining popular support of his people by judiciously distributing wealth to them and by consultation with other influential men in the Ndebele state. The chiefs were also obliged to grant some material support to their subordinates. In other words, the patron-client relationships in the Ndebele state had the potential of making and unmaking of kings and the ideology of patriarchy was by and large based on distribution of wealth to clients. Political power and economic wealth were interdependent. Mzilikazi and Lobengula safeguarded their secular power through the strategic redistribution of cattle and land to their followers. The simple logic of clientage ensured that no one escaped accountability to the governed in the Ndebele political hierarchy.

In other words, the Ndebele leaders tried by all means to ensure that everyone had the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself/herself and his/her family. Guarantees of social security in times of want and famine as outlined in article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were better provided in by the Ndebele system of governance. Everybody had land. In times of famine, the Ndebele ruling elite made sure food was secured for the people. This is made clear in the later sections of this chapter.
Some previous scholars distorted the whole issue of property rights in the Ndebele state. One traditional argument was that the Ndebele king owned all the cattle and all the land as his personal property. This was indeed not true, bearing in mind that the king owned land in trust for his people. The right to own property as an individual as well as in association with others was embedded in Ndebele society. For instance, cattle were owned at two levels, that is, individual level and communal level. *Inkomo zamathanga* referred to privately owned cattle, whereas *inkomo zebutho* or *inkomo zenkosi* referred to communally owned cattle.

While during raids, some Ndebele neighbours were forcibly deprived of their herds of cattle the “citizens” of the Ndebele state did not suffer from arbitrary deprivation of their property.

With land, the Ndebele king and his chiefs distributed land to their followers. Land among the Ndebele was neither sold nor bought and every member of the state was entitled to it. The people who lost land to the Ndebele were those who decided to migrate rather than accept Ndebele rule. The Ndebele on arrival in the southwest embarked on a limited national re-organization policy and this process saw some communities like those of Malaba being moved to Tegwani River, and those of Mehlo being moved from the headwaters of Khami River to Dombodema. The idea behind the process was not to deny these people their land but the Ndebele intended to create a defence zone against the Ngwato using these Kalanga families. Above all, the people who were incorporated and assimilated into the Ndebele society were allocated land and other resources and in return were expected to obey laws, customs, and traditions of the Ndebele. On
Among the Ndebele cattle (*inkomo*) constituted a vital branch of production as the ownership of cattle determined social status and their acquisition was the major long-term economic objective of all Ndebele males. The Ndebele acquired cattle mainly through raiding. The cattle, which were seized through raids, were first of all taken to the king for him to distribute to his subjects. Cattle also expanded by natural growth. It was through the distribution of cattle that the king was able to boost his popularity among his followers. Baines watched the arrival of the raiders from Gutu at Gibixhegu in 1870 and he pointed out that:

> The division of spoils seemed to be arranged on well-understood and tolerably equitable principles. A number of cattle were distributed as prizes to the captors; a hundred and fifty were given to the "doctor," for having charmed the shield and persons of the warriors against hostile weapons. The greatest number were reserved and given to the king as national property, to be herded by such regiments, as he might trust, and to be used by him for public purposes. A smaller herd was apportioned to him for the support of his household and retainers and for affording hospitality to guests; and I believe he was allowed several cattle as private and strictly personal property.  

Although in the Ndebele state the king and his chiefs emerged as the richest in society, they tried hard to distribute wealth to their subordinates and followers. There is no doubt that the king and the ruling elite as the organizers of the production process gained most from it economically. On the other hand, the king and the chiefs were the ultimate providers, so that in times of economic distress individual Ndebele went to them for consent to kill a beast or barter a cow for grain.
As noted above the national herd/inkomo zebutho or inkomo zenkosi/ communal herd were different from the king's personal cattle were different from the king's personal cattle. The were also different from the privately owned cattle/inkomo zamathanga. The differences lay in the fact that the communal herd was state property and while they were under the overall administration of the king, he could not use them for his private affairs. It was this state herd that was distributed to the provinces for people to tend and for those without cattle to benefit from them in the form of manure, milk and meat. The power of the king to distribute cattle gave rise to an ideological glorification of the person of the king especially among the poor who happened to benefit materially from these cattle.

The accountability of the Ndebele leaders was usually expressed during indlala (famine), they had to provide food to the people. The king and his chiefs usually distributed cattle and amabele (millet, sorghum and maize) to the starving people. The king and the chiefs kept grain in secure places so as to distribute to their people during times of crisis.

Indlala among the Ndebele was not just considered as a natural occurrence. Rather, causes were to be sought for it. Thus, besides distributing cattle and grain to the starving people, the king was also obliged to investigate the causes of famine. If the famine was caused by isikhongwana/intethe (locusts), the king and his chiefs had to look for medicine and if the famine was caused by lack of izulu (rain), the king had to send people to the rain-shrines like Njelele so as to get an
In this way, the Ndebele leaders tried by all means to be accountable to their people.

In order to reinforce their legitimacy and to validate it, the Ndebele kings resorted to religion. The Ndebele kings were important religious leaders. The inxwala ceremony was partly a festival of unity serving as a means of maintaining the power of the king over his subjects. The numerous men and women who assembled around the capital for inxwala ceremonies also came partly in order to renew their allegiance to the kingship, politically to the person of the king, and spiritually to the memory of the royal amadlozi as national ancestral spirits. As a result of the central role played by the king in the religious affairs of the Ndebele state, the kingship quickly acquired a deep-rooted religious significance [religion is discussed in detail in chapter four].

3.4 Forms of Oppression and Domination

While no one articulated an abstract concept of oppression and domination in the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century, it is clear that the Ndebele state was not a "classless" society. There were the powerful royals and the weak, captives and non-captives, senior and junior, old and young, women and men, able-bodied and disabled and the elderly and the youth. These dichotomies were characterized by tendencies of domination and oppression. Inequality rather than equality was the order of life in the Ndebele state. Power in general was stored in unequal human relations that were underwritten by an ideology of lineage seniority and kinship. In order to fully understand the dynamics of oppression and domination in the
Ndebele state, it is vital to focus the analysis on two segments of people in the Ndebele society, namely, captives and women.

Before proceeding to analyse the status of women and captives in the Ndebele state as constituting a group of oppressed and dominated people, it is vital to discuss the general social structure of the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century. In the upper level of the Ndebele state was the royalty who comprised the king and his relatives. The royalty indeed enjoyed privileges and rights that were far above other groups in the Ndebele society. They were the richest as they were given cattle by the king so as to make sure they did not constitute a threat to the king. The royalty as noted by Cobbing received reflected authority from the king. They were the prominent members of umphakathi. For instance, Mzilikazi’s brother-in-law, Maqhekeni Sithole and his cousin, Mncumbatha Khumalo, held influential positions, whereas Lobengula’s brothers: Ngubongubo, Sibambamu, Nyanda, Muntu, Silwane, Fezela and Mahlahleni were prominent as his inner advisers.

Below the royalty were the Zansi who consisted of those people who left with Mzilikazi from Zululand in the 1820s and their descendants. This group of people in the Ndebele society formed an aristocracy and claimed a number of privileges and rights far above other groups in the exception of the royalty. The senior chiefs in the Ndebele state were drawn from this group. They had power because they suffered with the king during the turbulent years of the Mfecane and they had
fought for him in various battles of the migratory phase. In short, the Zansi were a privileged group.

There was the Enhla group within the Ndebele society who comprised the Sotho and Tswana people. Mzilikazi incorporated these into the Ndebele state before crossing the Limpopo River. They occupied a position lower than that of the Zansi even though they had suffered with the king, as well as having accompanied the king up to Matebeleland. The Enhla also had a claim to positions of authority and power. They largely occupied positions of headmen under the Zansi who occupied positions of chiefs.

Below the Enhla were the Hole group, which consisted of the Kalanga, Rozvi, Nyubi, Nyayi, Birwa, Venda and other indigenous people of the southwest who were incorporated into the Ndebele state mainly in the 1840s when the Ndebele arrived in the Matopos. Some early observers had a wrong impression that the Hole were treated as slaves in the Ndebele state. The Hole were subordinated to the Zansi and Enhla groups socially and politically. Thus, while they were belittled and looked down upon, they were not slaves, as some even became headmen. After all they were the largest group in the Ndebele society. By the 1890s, up to sixty per cent of the inner Ndebele state was of Hole origin. It is not possible that such a majority can simplistically be described as slaves.

It must be noted that the words Zansi, Enhla, and Hole, at times convey a false sense of ethnic rigidity and rigidly ranked Ndebele state. They also convey a
picture of distinction based on national and social origin. The reality is that people continuously moved across categories as they negotiated new alliances, usually by marriage, merit, and loan of cattle. A respectable Hole was able to move closer to the Ndebele chiefs and could become richer than a relative of a chief who had fallen into disfavour. For instance, in the Matshetsheni isigaba, a Zansi man called Sinanga Khumalo was succeeded as a chief by a Hole man called Ntuthu Msimangu. Ntuthu was succeeded by another Hole, Swina Nkala.73

There were also subject people, that is, those whose villages and communities paid tribute to the Ndebele but were not directly under the Ndebele political administration. There are sometimes termed “tributary” communities.74 These communities had no serious trouble with the Ndebele as long as they paid tribute and acknowledged Ndebele power. They were free to do whatever they deemed necessary within their jurisdiction. They suffered only during Ndebele punitive raids after their failure to pay tribute.75

3.5 Captives

The idea of capturing individuals as well as groups of human beings and forcibly incorporating them into the Ndebele society began when the Ndebele were wandering south of the Limpopo River in the midst of the Mfecane Revolution. W.F Lye and R. Kent Rasmussen have made the most impressive studies so far of Ndebele history south of the Limpopo and tell us that the Ndebele took such people as the Pedi after having been defeated to perform manual labour. They also mention that they were treated as slaves.76 The whole practice of capturing
people and forcibly integrating them into the Ndebele society was a violation of human rights of the people who were captured. This practice also interfered with the captives’ right to nationality as they were forced to adopt Ndebele nationality.

However, the issue of whether the Ndebele kept slaves or captured people in order to use them as slaves remains unclear even today. The Ndebele term for an “unfree” person is isigqili. Ubbugqili was not equivalent to slavery as it was practiced in West Africa and the new world. While the Ndebele violently attacked their neighbour and took women, children, and youth away, they did not practise the system of selling these people to gain profit. Captives were fully integrated into the Ndebele society as full citizens, after a short probationary period. It was only during the probationary period that captives were subjected to ill treatment and where they were kept as “unfree” people within the Ndebele state.

When Robert Moffat visited the Ndebele in 1829, he mentioned Hurutshe children who were kept by one of Mzilikazi’s brothers, but again he never mentioned whether they were kept as slaves.\(^77\) The overwhelming evidence that exists is that the Ndebele indeed captured individuals as well as groups not to keep as slaves but to incorporate into the Ndebele society. But the practice of capturing people was itself a violation of human rights, if seen within the context of article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which condemns slavery in all its forms. As mentioned earlier, Dr Andrew Smith on his visit to the Ndebele in 1835 mentioned that Mzilikazi called some of his subjects “dogs”.\(^78\) Again it is not
clear that the reference to them as “dogs” meant that they were his slaves. A dog in Ndebele is *inja*, and it was not respected at all beyond its ability to hunt.

When the Ndebele arrived in the southwest there is no indication that they came with slaves who worked for them. There is no evidence pointing to the king’s fields and gardens being worked by slaves. What is evident is that Ndebele villagers organized themselves into work parties called *ilima lenkosi* to work in the king’s fields.\(^7^{9}\)

As the Ndebele settled in the southwest and as they continued to attack and capture people from their neighbours, they came to keep a number of captives within their families. *Abathunjiweyo* (newly acquired) were taken as individuals into Ndebele families where they were accepted as part of that family.\(^8^{0}\) The Ndebele themselves argued that the captives were treated in a humane manner and even better than the Nguni themselves because they were considered as *abantu benkosi* (king’s people).\(^8^{1}\)

It was the Europeans who described the captives as down-trodden slaves for colonial ideological purposes.\(^8^{2}\) Captives were newly acquired people who had to serve a probationary period, learning to speak Ndebele, familiarizing themselves with Ndebele culture and customs, before being fully integrated into Ndebele society.\(^8^{3}\) What was apparent in the Ndebele state is that some privileged groups like the royalty and the *Zansi* sometimes abused captives under their tutelage, by forcing them to perform certain tasks that were tedious and dirty. This was part
and parcel of the operations of a patron-client type of relationship in the Ndebele society. However, such exploitative and oppressive relations were very dynamic allowing some downtrodden people to gradually climb the social, economic, and political ladder. Thus the existence of such derogatory designation of some people as *abafuyiweyo* (those who were domesticated) by the rich and the powerful in the Ndebele state reflected the existence of client-patron relations and some measure of oppression rather than slavery.\(^{84}\)

According to Cooper-Chadwick, P.W.G. Mbofana, Kirby and Posselt, it was a general practice among the Ndebele for the raiders to come in after a raid with children and women and that these captives were commonly tied their hands behind their backs to ensure that they did not escape.\(^{85}\) This was indeed one aspect of subjection to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of fellow human beings. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights condemns the whole practice of torturing, cruel treatment, and other barbaric form of punishment in any society. It is not clear, however, that the Ndebele society tolerated torture as a form of punishment. The issue of justice and punishment in the Ndebele state is discussed in later sections of this thesis.

The captives were first of all brought and paraded before the Ndebele king in the capital. The Ndebele king had the duty to distribute the captives. The females who were old enough to be married were immediately distributed among their captors, especially chiefs. The king took a percentage of well-selected captives to reside in the capital and to work for him. These selected captives were termed
imbovane. According to Ndebele informants, those who remained at the capital as servants of the king received the best treatment, which led them to be fanatical supporters of the king. The king trusted them because they were loyal and did not harbour ambitions to become kings. Some of these loyal servants were elevated to bodyguards of the king while others received such favours as being promoted into positions of headmen and even chiefs. Hence such people do not qualify to be termed slaves.

The greater proportion of captives was distributed around the Ndebele kingdom. As noted by Bhebe, any Ndebele man of substance such as amaqhawe (those who excelled in the military duties) who wanted to have a young captive, female or male, could ask for permission from the king. Permission was granted only on full understanding that the applicant had the means of looking after a captive. The king was really concerned about the welfare of the captives. If the request was successful, the applicant would take the captive to his own home where the latter became, to all intents and purposes, a member of his "master's" family rather than a slave.

Ndebele informants maintained that captives were the king's people (abantu benkosi) and this designation meant that they had to be treated fairly. Whenever, the king suspected that captives were being ill-treated, he would just order the captive to come and live enkosini/esigodlwini under royal care. Lobengula was said to "over-feed" his captives with enormous amount of meat.
To describe captives as slaves is not enough. It is to simply issues of social integration and structurations in the Ndebele society too much. The social conditions of the captives in the Ndebele society were tolerably humane, and with time they gradually climbed up the ladder of success and gained more rights. This is even reinforced by the way some former captives strove to identify themselves with their conquerors. Bhebe noted that even some translated their totems from Shona to Sindebele, for example, Shumba to Sibanda, Nyanga to Nkomo, Gumbo to Msipa, Shiri to Nyoni, Dziva to Siziba, Shoko to Ncube and Moyo to Nhliziyo.\(^{91}\) This suggests not only favourable conditions for the captives, but also the success of the Khumalo hegemonic project, which facilitated their smooth absorption into the Ndebele society. They were not treated as slaves as indicated by the absence of resentment and revolts, which dominated slave-owning societies in other parts of Africa. The resentments only came in the 1890, when the British colonialists tried to instigate internal revolt in the Ndebele state so as to weaken it. They particularly encouraged the Ndebele subjects of the tributary zones to stop paying tribute to the center. This situation is well treated in chapter six of this thesis.

The London Missionary Society representative, Thomas Morgan Thomas who worked among the Ndebele through the Matebeleland Mission from 1859 to 1870 noted that among the Ndebele "...the African slave is almost his master's equal, and enjoys from the beginning the privileges of a child; and looks upon his master and mistress as being in every respect his parent again."\(^{92}\) T.M. Thomas proceeded to argue that in the Ndebele state servitude did not "convey the true idea of a slave" because the captives could leave their patrons and live wherever
they liked within the Ndebele kingdom and could even be "masters" on their own right. Thomas was short of only saying there were no slaves in the Ndebele society.

Captured boys instead of being kept as slaves as they grew up were drafted into Ndebele *amabutho* and underwent the same stages as any Ndebele boy. Captured girls too grew up into womanhood in the same way as other Ndebele females and were either married by their own adopted fathers or by other men. They were similarly regarded for *lobola* purposes as the daughters of the captor.

Although the captives were afforded favourable conditions, they experienced difficulties during probation. Firstly, on arrival as noted by Kirby, the child captives had their hands tied behind their backs "and a Matabele gives them milk and also medicine to wean them from thinking about their parents". The simple scenario of being separated from their parents as children was traumatic. Secondly, the captives suffered the stigma of having been uprooted from their own societies forcibly.

Bhebe noted that probably all the captives in the Ndebele state were reminded now and again of their being second class citizens by some Ndebele laws discriminating against them. T.M. Thomas gives us some insight into how Ndebele law discriminated against the captives, he pointed out that if a captive or "slave" murdered a "real" Ndebele would certainly be punished by death because the former was a vassal and the latter a member of the aristocracy. On the other
hand, if a "real" Ndebele murdered a captive he would be charged with homicide and punished with a fine of a number of cattle to the king.\textsuperscript{97}

The issue of the existence of slaves in the Ndebele state becomes an issue in early colonial law dispute records. In the early colonial law records there are instances of the Ndebele keeping as slaves people captured on the Zambezi, and there is mention of disputes concerning the slaves brought into the Ndebele state by the Gaza queens who were married by Lobengula. Some later colonial civil cases concerned the slaves of chief Mabikwa.\textsuperscript{98} However, the fact that these issues appear from the early colonial law records reflect that the pre-colonial Ndebele traditional forms of oppression and domination of some group of people over others were now designated as slavery. For instance, the patron-client relationship between the royalty and their captives was now seen as a form of slavery. It must be noted that during the nineteenth century the Ndebele patriarchal ideology permitted oppression, domination and even exploitation of women, young men, and captives by the "big men" in society.

3.6 Gender Relations

The Ndebele state was a male dominated society and as such women were perpetually considered to be minors (\textit{abesintwana}). Their custody before marriage was vested in their fathers or eldest brothers where the fathers were deceased. Upon marriage, the custody of women was transferred to that of their husbands.\textsuperscript{99} Women were always subordinate to men.
In the Ndebele state participation in warfare and taking care of cattle were deemed special duties. These duties were designated for men. The men's participation in warfare and raids, which brought cattle as well as captives to the state, put them in a higher status compared to that of women who did not participate in warfare. This mentality of the inferiority of women was expressed by the founder of the Ndebele state, Mzilikazi in a remark after listening to a sermon by white missionaries on the words, "honour thy father and mother". Mzilikazi responded by remarking that children should honour their fathers, but when it came to honouring their mothers he protested saying; "it is false. What honour can be due to a women who did not go to war?" (my emphasis).  

In the Ndebele state women were not allowed to partake in national issues such as war and they were not represented in the various fora such as umphakathi and izikhulu where national issues were debated and discussed. Politics was a preserve of men. However, women could affect national policy and politics in general indirectly through their husbands, brothers and sons who were prominent in the Ndebele state.

However, women were not a monolithic group of dominated and oppressed people in Ndebele society. The categories of women in the Ndebele state followed the pattern of the social division or stratification of the Ndebele society discussed above. There were royal women namely, the sisters, wives, and daughters of the king. There were daughters, sisters, and wives of amaqhawe and other prominent men in the Ndebele state such as chiefs. There were
daughters, sisters, and wives of the Zansi. There were daughters, sisters and wives of Enhla men. There were daughters, sisters, and wives of the Hole men. There were female captives as well. On top of these divisions, there was also the hierarchy of senior and junior wives in the Ndebele society. These divisions afforded women different rights and privileges and were affected different by male domination and oppression.

The daughters, sisters, and wives of the king like their male counter-parts received reflected power though not equal to that of their royal brothers. It is unfortunate that the mothers of Mzilikazi and Lobengula died before their sons had become kings, so that we do not know about their privileges. However, recently Jennifer Weir has shown that royal women actively participated in state institutions in the Zulu State. She noted that among the Zulu, royal women were placed in positions of authority in the amakhanda and were invested with a degree of authority and autonomy, because of their age and freedom from ritual constraints. Weir built her case from the works of Sean Henrietta who was one of the modern researchers to take exception to andocentric interpretations of pre-colonial leadership, and Carolyn Hamilton who challenged the view of women as a homogenous group marked by universal subordination. Thus, the general insights drawn from other Nguni societies such as the Zulu and Ndwandwe, makes it clear that the mothers of Shaka and Zwide had privileged positions in society. When Nandi (the mother of Shaka) died she received a state funeral whereas Ntombazi (the mother of Zwide) was renowned for keeping the heads of the kings whom her son had killed. Helen Bradford was very critical of the
dominant attitude among previous researchers to just see Nguni societies as models of hierarchical patriarchy in which men dominated both domestic and public affairs. She was also very critical of the tendency to see royal women as mere mothers, aunts, sisters, and wives of kings and chiefs. Bradford concluded by pointing to the dangers of taking at face value andocentric versions of the South African past. To her the consensus on female subordination and powerlessness was a twentieth century creation.  

At another level, we have the case of Lobengula's sister, Mncengence who enjoyed reflected power and authority from his brother. She stayed in the capital, and possessed a lot of cattle just like men. She was consulted on Lobengula's matrimonial affairs and as a favoured sister of the king, and she had the privilege of advising the king on state politics. The other influential woman was Lozikheyi Dlodlo. She was Lobengula's senior wife. Marieke Clarke who is working on a full biography of Lozikheyi has pointed out that she was as powerful as any man in the Ndebele state. The king trusted her to the extent that she was given control over the sacred state medicines. Lozikheyi lived in the capital where she was the head queen. She led other queens in dances during crucial national ceremonies. Apart from that, Lozikheyi was a renowned rainmaker. During the fall of the Ndebele state she played a crucial role in the resistance of 1896 through making war medicines. She became a focal point of Ndebele opposition to British rule. The place known as KoNkosikazi in Matebeleland North was named after this powerful woman. Women like Mncengence and Lozikheyi had even more power than some men in the Ndebele society. However, such women were few.
The king's daughters were another group of women who enjoyed privileges beyond that of ordinary women in the Ndebele society. The daughters of both Lobengula and Mzilikazi enjoyed some privileges far above other women. It was a must in line with the wider stratification of the Ndebele society for them to be married to the Zansi and more so to wealthy chiefs. Royal women were widely used for political purposes by their brothers and fathers. For instance, the sisters and daughters of both Mzilikazi and Lobengula were employed in the creation of alliances between the powerful and wealthy chiefs and the royal house (kingship). As noted earlier on, the wealthy and powerful chiefs in turn tried to move closer to the kingship by allowing the king to marry their daughters and sisters. In this way royal women were used as political objects. In other words, royal women were actively used in the construction of Khumalo hegemony. [see Appendix C for some of the names of Mzilikazi and Lobengula's daughters]

Even alliances between powerful states were cemented through the use of royal women. The case in point is that of the alliance between the Ndebele royal family and the Gaza royal family by Lobengula and Mzila. Mzila sent more than ten women to be married by Lobengula including Xwalile his daughter. Mzila in turn married women from the Ndebele state. While the royal women enjoyed some privileges such as being served by captives in the royal capitals, the truth remains that they were being used by males for their political gains.

The Enhla women enjoyed the "privilege" of being married by the influential and rich Zansi men although the Enhla men were not allowed to marry Zansi women.
Zansi and Enhla men generally looked down upon Hole women. However, the social stratification that divided the Ndebele society did not succeed in stopping the proud Zansi men to have illicit relationships with Hole women and subsequently produced belittled offspring termed incukubili (half-breeds). At another level, it must be noted that both Mzilikazi and Lobengula’s policies of state expansion and consolidation emphasized increments to their population and social harmony within the state and they tried to achieve this aim through encouraging intermarriages among different people of the Ndebele society. In this case, again women were used for the purpose of establishing unity and harmony within the state.

The lowest grade of women in the Ndebele state was the captives. These women were exposed to the king’s use; he usually gave them to any men who were prepared to have them as wives. They did not enjoy the privileges of being married to men of their choice. In general the underlying idea about marriage among the Ndebele was that marriage was not a contract between two people, but rather a pact between the families of the man and the woman which formed a bond of friendship between the members of such families. At times pre-arranged marriages were made although they were rare. However, in the marriage process, the parents of the people intending to marry each other interfered at every stage.

It must also be noted that white missionaries and other whites who were frustrated by the existence of the Ndebele state as an independent entity and by the refusal
of the Ndebele to embrace Christianity, tended to use women as a means to an end. They portrayed them as victims of male savagery in order to solicit and justify the destruction and colonization of the Ndebele state.\textsuperscript{113} The whites went to the extent of pointing out that the position of women in traditional Ndebele society was no little better than that of a slave.\textsuperscript{114} Pre-arranged marriages were also over-emphasized by the white commentators to give the impression that marriage in the Ndebele society diminished the status of women.\textsuperscript{115} The payment of \textit{lobola} as part and parcel of the marriage process in the Ndebele state was vulgarized by the whites into a system of selling and buying of women. For instance, T.M. Thomas concluded that marriages among the Ndebele were "little more than commercial transactions in which the heart had no share".\textsuperscript{116} This was indeed an over-generalization which did not take into account the various categories of women in the Ndebele society and their various and different privileges and rights outlined above.

Within a family in the Ndebele society the privileges and rights of women also varied. For instance, in the family of the king, the \textit{indlovukazi} (senior wife) among his other wives had higher privileges and wide rights than the junior wives.\textsuperscript{117} The senior wife’s privileges were reinforced by the fact that his eldest son became the heir to the Ndebele throne. The senior wife and her family played a very fundamental role in grooming the king to be.\textsuperscript{118} While it is not clear how the senior wife of a king interfered in state politics, a hint can be gleaned from the fact that in the period 1840-42, Mzilikazi executed both Mwaka and Fulatha, the mothers of Nkulumane and Lobengula respectively, as part and parcel of his crackdown on
rebels. The fact that these two women were lumped together and executed with such powerful chiefs as Gundwane Ndiweni implies that Mzilikazi considered them as political actors.\textsuperscript{119} [see Appendix D for some of the names of the wives of Mzilikazi and Lobengula]

Jeff Guy’s once popular article entitled, \textit{Gender Oppression in Southern Africa's Pre-Capitalist Societies} raised a number of andocentric assumptions and generalizations about gender oppression in pre-colonial Southern Africa in general. One was that any history of women in Southern Africa is the history of their oppression. The other was that one can only develop an understanding of women oppression if he/she analyses the way in which production took place, focusing specifically on such questions as to who participated in production, how that participation was controlled, and how surplus produce was expropriated. Finally, he pointed out that the oppression of women was fundamental to the total functioning of pre-colonial African societies in general as they survived through exploitation of female labour power and control of reproduction and fertility of women.\textsuperscript{120} These generalizations has since been overtaken by more nuanced studies of gender relations in Southern Africa alluded to above. Women are no longer simply regarded as beasts of burden.

Indeed in the Ndebele state women participated in agriculture together with their male counter parts. The members of \textit{umuzi} (household) included the head of the household who was always a man, his wife or wives, children as well as grand children. This household was the smallest unit of production and if ever Jeff Guy's
arguments are anything to go by, then the oppression of women began to be reflected at this level of organization in the Ndebele society. Among the Ndebele, the man, his wife or wives and children collectively worked in the *amasimu* (family field). However, the man (*umnunzana*) remained the overseer of whole production process. The *umlabathi* (land), which the whole family cultivated, was considered to belong to the male head of the household.\(^{121}\)

In the Ndebele state there was clear division of labour between men and women within a family as well as in society in general. Since women spent more time in the field than men they had control over grain whereas men had control over cattle. To emphasize this dichotomy in the control of the grain and cattle, it became a Ndebele custom that whenever a woman died she has to be buried behind *isiphala* (granary) and the man behind *isibaya* (cattle kraal).\(^{122}\) At another level, the man with many wives tended to have bigger fields as the women were to collectively work the bigger fields. Among the Ndebele, tasks such as clearing of land for new fields, fencing of the fields, and burning of tree branches for fertilizer were considered to be *umsebenzi wamadoda* (men's duty). On top of this, in situations where the fields were located long distances away from the homes, men tended to erect *amadumba* (summer houses) in these fields where they spent nights.\(^{123}\) All this demonstrates that in the Ndebele state the burden of agriculture did not fall on women alone. Added to this was the fact that *amabutho* (age-regiments) as a unit of production was actively involved in agricultural activities.\(^{124}\)
In the Ndebele state fertility and reproduction were considered as an important mark of womanhood and determined at times the value of the woman and the amount of *amalobolo* to be paid. Barrenness (*ukuswelinzalo*/*ubunyumba*) made a woman's place in marriage very insecure.\(^{125}\) If a woman was considered barren, the man reserved the right to claim back his cattle he paid as *amalobolo*. Alternatively, a man could be given another sister to raise seeds for the barren woman. The woman who was given to a man on these circumstances was termed *umthanyelo*.\(^{126}\) Since the Ndebele state was male-dominated, barrenness was commonly considered to be a problem of women, and men were rarely diagnosed for barrenness. The case in point is that of Somhlolo Mathema, the chief of eNqameni who married a daughter of Mzilikazi called Lomawa. Lomawa was considered to be barren and Somhlolo was given Mzilikazi's niece called Nala as *umthanyelo* to raise up seeds in the "great house", however, again no child was produced until Nala was impregnated by Somhlolo's cousin.\(^{127}\)

Women in the Ndebele state were commonly considered or labelled as leading culprits in *ubuthakathi*/*ukuloya* witchcraft. The case of Lobengula going to the extent of killing his favoured sister Mucengence over the suspicion that she caused his wife Xwalile to be barren and the case of Mkhanjana nearly wiping out the whole elderly female members of his family over his unexplained illness are cases in point (more details on witchcraft in the Ndebele state are given in the later section of this chapter).\(^{128}\)
Though women did not feature much in the public sphere, they sometimes possessed power and wealth. Royal women, in particular had more say in public affairs than did their counterparts even in European societies. However, like in other pre-colonial African states women dominated more in the private sphere in the Ndebele society. Women emerged as powerful and influential figures in the world of rituals where they became izanusi, izangoma and izinyanga (magicians/diviners). In the world of rituals a certain level of equality was accepted between men and women. When possessed some women were even addressed as man. A woman was possessed by the spirit of a departed male figure was addressed as ukhulu (grandfather). If ever a spirit of a departed female figure possessed a man, he could also be addressed as ugogo (grandmother). One female religious figure that was respected by the Ndebele was referred to as Usalukazana. She was a renowned rainmaker and Ndebele people still visit her shrine for rain ceremonies in Matabeleland North.

In the Ndebele state, the laws of inheritance did not favour women. When a man died, his estate was supposed to be inherited by his sons. The female children could not become heirs to their father's estate. The underlying idea was that female children would not stay with their father's family forever as they would get married. When the cattle of a deceased father were being shared among his sons, female children would get what was known as inyembezi zikababa (tears for the father). This was a beast which was allocated by the eldest son of the deceased man to his sisters during umbuyiso ceremony. Female children could also inherit some of their mother's estate such as pots and a female beast
(inkomo yohlanga), a beast which was given to their mother by a man who married one of her daughters. However, a rare case exist where a female person, Sidambe, the daughter of Lozikheyi one of Lobengula's queens, inherited 130 cattle after the death of her mother.

Thus gender relations in the Ndebele state were complex, reflecting both female powerlessness as well as exceptional power of some women.

3.7 Notions of Justice and Punishment

White observers who wrote on the Ndebele in the nineteenth century tended to emphasize the existence of injustices and cruel punishment among the Ndebele without a clear analysis of Ndebele notions of justice and punishment. Diana Jeater in a paper entitled, A Dying Practice? African Arbitration and Native Commissioners' Courts in Southern Rhodesia, 1898-1914 stated that the Rhodesian colonial officials especially the Native Commissioners (NCs) assumed that Africans brought cases to them because they offered a superior kind of justice that was far much better than that offered by African arbiters. On a different note, H.F. Child pointed out that among the Ndebele democracy and human rights were unknown because the judiciary system was characterized by only two forms of punishment, that is, fines and death. Robert Moffat who was in touch with the Ndebele state since 1829 described the Ndebele system of justice as "tyrannical in the strictest sense of the word" and that the king's word was law. These were all distortions and exaggerations of the Ndebele notions of justice and punishment.
What need to be said is that in the Ndebele state the notions of justice and punishment were closely intertwined with Ndebele customs and traditions. Hence, the political leaders of the state performed both administrative and judiciary roles. In the execution of justice the political leadership summoned the wisdom of other traditional officials in society such as izanusi, izinyanga, izangoma (diviners, wise men and magicians) at times even the services of the religious shrine such as Njelele were sought to establish justice.

While the Ndebele king was the highest-ranking judiciary official in the Ndebele state, his word was not law as he was assisted by a lot of people before arriving at a judgment. As mentioned earlier on, the umphakathi and izikhulu greatly assisted the king in deciding the outcome of serious crimes in the Ndebele state.

In the Ndebele state amacala (criminal cases) were basically divided into two categories, that is, amacala amakhulu (serious crimes) and amacala amancane (minor crimes). The serious crimes included ukubulala (murder), ubuthakathi/ukuloya (witchcraft), amacala ezombuso (political crimes) and ubufebe (prostitution and adultery). The king commonly dealt with serious crimes whereas minor crimes such as ukweba (theft) and inxabano emagumeni/emizini (domestic misunderstanding) were dealt with by either abalisa (headmen) or izinduna (chiefs) depending on the gravity of the case within their respective territorial jurisdiction. Even abamnuzana (heads of households) could deal with very minor cases without the interference of either a headman or a
chief.\textsuperscript{142} In other words, in the Ndebele state there was a clear system of justice which ran from the household up to the state level and there were clear channels and mechanisms of dealing with various crimes and punishment. Conflict resolution mechanisms were also available to cater and protect both communities and private interests. However, while an attempt was made to achieve even handed justice in the Ndebele state the judiciary system, like other state institutions, was prone to abuse and manipulation by the "big men" such as the king, chiefs, headmen and senior men to the detriment of others such as the powerless women and children.

In the Ndebele state witchcraft was considered to be one of the most serious offences equal to murder. A belief in witchcraft emanated from the Ndebele religious beliefs. Witchcraft was considered prejudicial to the lives and property of others in society. Death and illness were not considered to be natural among the Ndebele, it was attributed either to the anger of \textit{amadlozi} (ancestral spirits) or witchcraft.\textsuperscript{143} Diviners and magicians usually raised accusations of witchcraft (\textit{ukunuka abathakathi}) and their allegations usually led to trials.\textsuperscript{144}

In many occasions those who were accused of witchcraft were punished by death. The Ndebele public ideology has it that \textit{umthakathi kancengwa uyaphohozwa ngenduku} (there was no sympathy for wizards and their fate was execution).\textsuperscript{145} A number of examples help to strengthen this view. In 1880 Lobengula had his own favoured sister, Mncengence killed because he thought she was responsible for the barrenness of the royal wife, Xwalile.\textsuperscript{146} In a separate occasion, Xukuthwayo
Mlotshwa, the chief of Intemba, had nine people of his own family executed because he suspected that his illness was caused by them. In another case of 1880, Makhanjana Khumalo and other male members of his family fell ill with malaria fever. Makhanjana tried to serve his life and that of other patients by summoning the service of isangoma named Sithoma. Sithoma washed the patients with a solution made from boiled leaves and roots of a tree (umuthi) and proceeded to order Makhanjana to slaughter a sheep to appease the ancestral spirits. However, when the condition of the patients worsened, Makhanjana accused all the older female members of his family of having bewitched him. He detained them in a hut with the intention of setting it on fire. These women were saved from painful death by Makhanjana's sudden recovery.

However, despite the emphasis in the Ndebele public ideology that witches' punishment was death and that there was no sympathy for them, it is also evident that among the Ndebele doubtful and unproven charges of witchcraft did not lead to execution, instead unsubstantiated accusation of witchcraft led to banishment away from the mainstream of the Ndebele society. Villagers were reluctant to harbour unestablished witchcraft cases and a place of refugee came into being for the victims of such charges at a place called eZihwabeni between Solusi and Plumtree. Amagusu amnyama (dark forests) of Matebeleland North were also places "where witches were thrown to live". In these places of exile, those accused of witchcraft were supplied with meat and grain from the state coffers despite the fact that these people were hated by the rest of the population they were still considered as the king's people.
The other serious crimes were those related to politics (amacala ezombuso) and those who were accused of these crimes faced serious consequences. Those who enjoyed power among the Ndebele guarded it jealously. The clear case in point was that of 1840-1842 known as the Ntabayezinduna massacre or crisis, already dealt with above. Mzilikazi descended mercilessly and ruthlessly on his close relatives including his own children and his wives because they were accused on political grounds.\textsuperscript{152} In the Ndebele state political opposition and harbouring political ambitions were considered as criminal. The intolerance of challenge in the Ndebele state manifested itself more clearly when Mzilikazi and Lobengula adopted a ruthless approach to their relatives because they suspected them of harbouring political ambitions towards the kingship and for being political contenders.

Mzilikazi executed his brothers, Gqugqu, Mbangazidlo and Ndwangubani. After taking power in 1870, Lobengula descended mercilessly on his brothers; he executed Qualingana, Zingwana and Mezwane whereas Mangwana and Mabele fled the country in 1868 after the death of their father Mzilikazi, fearing being labeled competitors by Lobengula.\textsuperscript{153} As mentioned earlier on, in 1888, Lobengula even eliminated his popular brother Hlangabeza because he looked like him and the people mistook him for the king and greeted him with the royal salute of "Bayethe wena weNdlovu" which was reserved for the king only.\textsuperscript{154}

The prominent and powerful members of the Ndebele society tended to manipulate and abuse their power and positions in the umphakathi and izikhulu to
eliminate each other by accusing each other of witchcraft and plots against the king. In other words, the accusation of witchcraft was used as a political weapon in moves for favours. For instance, one of Mzilikazi closest confidants, Manxeba Khumalo the son of Mkaliphi Khumalo was executed in August 1862 on a charge of witchcraft elaborated by his rivals in the umphakathi. Earlier on, in 1854 Mpondo, another of Mzilikazi's confidants was executed because he was accused of witchcraft.\(^{155}\) The real crime, however, was that they were too close to Mzilikazi to the extent that they generated jealousy from their colleagues who also wanted to be nearer to the king.

During the crisis of 1870-1872 following Lobengula's controversial accession to the Ndebele throne, prominent men like Mtikana Mafu and Thunzi Ndiweni who were respected by Mzilikazi were eliminated after being accused of being witches and for plotting against the king. Lotshe Hlabangana, a close confidant of Lobengula was in 1880 accused of witchcraft by his rivals, however, he survived execution, only to be executed in September 1889 on a charge of having misleadingly commended the Rudd Concession of 1888 to Lobengula.\(^{156}\) In short, what one can say is that when it came to political issues too much was at stake and too much emotions were invoked and involved to the extent that tenets of justice were abrogated or tilted to the side of the powerful. Witchcraft was mixed with political issues with serious consequences for those who fell victim to such backbiting and manipulation.
There was indeed dynamic politics of witchcraft bordering on fear and accusation. Mzilikazi was said to have never slept in the same place twice for fear of witches.\textsuperscript{157} There was indeed a complex mixture of witchcraft fears and beliefs. At one level the services of the religious shrines were summoned as courts of appeal against accusations of witchcraft. There was the case of one of Lobengula's brother who was summoned before the religious shrines so as to be tested for witchcraft and the story had it that when he appeared before it he was told that of course it knew that he was not a witch but that it had called him because the shrine had been neglected by "important people".\textsuperscript{158} Hence Ndebele notions of justice and punishment were complex to the extent that they cannot be reduced to tyranny only.

Mzilikazi and Lobengula had numerous wives, some stayed in the capital while others were scattered in the outlying areas where they formed what was known as umdlunkulu (royal house) where the king resided during visits and tours of his state.\textsuperscript{159} Since they stayed away from their husband for too long and since they were so numerous numbering between 200-500, their husbands could not satisfy or visit all of them, cases of adultery with other men of the Ndebele state were common.\textsuperscript{160} Robert Moffat in 1829 during his visit to the Ndebele state reported that he saw a man being led with his hands tied over his head and at a distance followed another man bearing a club. On inquiring he was told that the man had been tried for "crime con" with one of Mzilikazi's wives and was found guilty and that he was being taken to the river to be drown. The duty of the clubmen was to prevent the man from escaping. The woman who was involved in adultery with
the man was also executed.\textsuperscript{161} This is one of the earliest recorded case of a man
and a woman being punished for adultery. During Lobengula's reign, Mhlaba
Khumalo and Sidlodlo were executed in June 1892 having been accused for
possession of medicines bequeathed on them by Mncumbatha enabling them to
overpower Lobengula's queens for purposes of rape.\textsuperscript{162}

E.C. Tabler, however, noted that the Ndebele kings, especially Mzilikazi was not
as tyrannical as portrayed by white observers who judged Ndebele system of
justice and punishment on western Christian standards. He argued that Mzilikazi
was influenced by public opinion to carryout executions for witchcraft offences.\textsuperscript{163}
Even among Ndebele oral tales of their past, Mzilikazi is portrayed as \textit{inkosi
ebunene} (a sympathetic and kind king) because he pardoned a number of
accused people whom public opinion wanted severely punished or executed. It
was even mentioned by some informants that if ever a criminal including those
accused of murder and witchcraft happened to run away to seek asylum in the
capital, he or she became immune to further harassment or execution.\textsuperscript{164}

To argue that in the Ndebele state the most common punishment was death is to
misrepresent notions of justice in the Ndebele society. Some offenders were just
reprimanded and pardoned by the king. The Ndebele term for being pardoned is
\textit{ukuxolelwa}. Some offenders were just asked to pay \textit{inhlawulo} (fine) in the form of
cattle for their crimes.\textsuperscript{165} Hence it is not true that in the Ndebele state criminals
always paid with their lives. The Ndebele notions of justice and punishment were
diversified and complex, they incorporated respect and well as abuse of human life depending on the nature and gravity of the offences committed.

Thus when judged on the universal criteria of rights derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it becomes clear that the Ndebele system of governance was permeated by a strong spirit of brotherhood as well as aggression towards brothers. Kinship ideology was an embodiment of brotherhood. Article 1 of the Declaration of Human Rights, refers to the spirit of brotherhood. The communal nature of the Ndebele society was partly a product of the working of the spirit of brotherhood. In the Ndebele state a complex mixture of discrimination and assimilation underpinned the social organization. Aliens were welcomed and assimilated, while at the same time the Ndebele society emphasized the issue of origins of a person in its classification of people. For instance, there were the Zansi (those who came from the South), the Enhla (those who came from the North, and the Hole (those who were found on the Zimbabwean plateau). Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Rights refers to the fact that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of national or social origin. As clearly outlined above the Hole were victims of discrimination on the basis if their national or social origin. Ndebele discrimination, however, was subtle and did not include outright deprivation of property, liberty, and security of person. Neither did it allow reduction of some members of the Ndebele society into servitude and forced labour.
While some of the methods used to punish offenders such as piercing the anus with a sharp stick and tying of a stone around the neck of an offender were horrific, the Ndebele did not practice torture of offenders as punishment. However, one needs to comment that the methods of carrying out capital punishment amounted to subjection to torture or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers to the fact that no one should be subjected to torture. The Ndebele society had no institution of incarceration like prisons and detention camps, where offenders were kept. The traditional practitioners such as magicians, doctors, diviners, and other seers, were expected to act as competent tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted to the Ndebele citizens by the unwritten Ndebele constitution. The constitution was written only in invisible Ndebele customs and traditions. The expertise of magicians, wise men, doctors and other seers, including the Mwali shrines, were expected to ensure fair and public hearing and to act as independent and impartial tribunals, in the determination of the accused’s rights and obligations. However, theory and practice, always contradicted each other, as expectation and reality rarely tallied.

The Ndebele system upheld the right to marry and found a family, referred to in article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even captives were accorded this right from start to finish. However, such practices as pre-arranged marriages and serving in the age-set institution before being allowed by the king to marry, could be cited as interference with aspects such as entering into marriage with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
All these issues demonstrate the usefulness of deploying the universal criteria of rights in teasing out meaning and rights in Ndebele political and social practice. When exposed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Ndebele system of government just like other systems of governance elsewhere is found wanting in a number of respects. The application of the universal criteria of rights to Ndebele past also allows one to also commend aspects their system of governance. For instance, guarantees of social security in times of want and famine were better provided for by the Ndebele system of governance.

It is clear from the above analysis of the Ndebele state that their system of governance was characterized by a complex mix of egalitarianism, communalism, tensions, competition, co-operation, clan and family intimacies, mutual assistance, co-existing with domination, violence of “big men”, seniority, authoritarianism, aristocratic and militaristic tendencies, all in turn underpinned by patriarchal ideology and an all-embracing ideology of kinship. This complex situation permitted both respect for human rights as well as their violation.
Endnotes


5. Ibid.


8. J.R.D. Cobbing wrote on the rise of an ideological glorification of the person of the monarch" "The Ndebele under the Khumalos, 1820-1896", pp.54-55.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. J.R.D. Cobbing, "The Ndebele under the Khumalo", he wrote about "royalization" of the aristocracy through marriage system and mentioned the existence of tensions i.e. forces of centralization versus forces of decentralization, see pp.44-64.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. G.G.B. Woods, "Extracts from Customs and History: Amandebele" in NADA, ix, (1939) see also Mhlagazanhlansi (N. Jones), My Friend Khumalo, (Bulawayo, 1944), p.27.
19. Ibid.
22. The reference is to the Treaty signed between Mncumbatha and the British Governor in Cape Colony in 1836 that was for friendship.
23. File Historical Manuscript, MAI/2/2, "Maxwell Diary" entry for 28 November 1889.
24. File L05/6/5 Prestage to Grey, 9 October 1896, See also F. Coillard, *On The Threshold of Central Africa: A Record of Twenty-Five Years' Pioneering Among the Barotsi of Upper Zambesi*, (London, 1897), pp.37.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Interview with Nicholas Tshabangu, Njube Township, Bulawayo, 10 March 1999.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. See also J.R.D. Cobbing, "The Ndebele Under the Khumalos", pp.61-62.
31. Interview with Majaezansi Ndlovu, Luveve Township, Bulawayo, 10 March 1999.
34. Ibid. pp.64-81.
35. Ibid.
41. Interview with Edward Ndlovu, Gwanda, Matshetsheni, 26 February 1999.
42. Ibid.
44. P. Nyathi, *Igugu Lika Mthwakazi*; pp.ix, see also one of the earliest Ndebele historical novels by P.S. Mahlangu, *uMthwakazi*, (Longmans, Cape Town, 1956).
46. Interview, with Jeremiah Ndlovu, 26 February 1999.
48. Ibid. See also S. Nyembezi, *Izibongo Zama Khosi* (Shooter and Shuta, Cape Town, 1972) pp.46.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. J.R.D. Cobbing in a Chapter entitled "The Ndebele Economy" in his "The Ndebele Under the Khumalos" pp.152-171 provided impressive details on Ndebele cattle ownership system and distribution for the benefit of the Ndebele society at large.
56. Ibid. This idea was successful destroyed by Cobbing.
57. D. Munjeri, "A Brief Outline of the Political, Economic, Social and Religious History of the Kalanga".
60. Interview with Mbhoda Mkheswa Ncube, 26 February 1999.
61. The meaning of these words clearly explained by Cobbing in his discussion of Ndebele economy.
62. Ibid.
63. Even today the custom of the king distributing cattle among his people is remembered proudly by the Ndebele. See interview with Macence Khumalo, Jawunda Township, Gwanda, 30 February 1999.
64. Ibid.
65. Interview with Nguqa Mkhwananzi, Ntelezi Tshuma and Robert Dube, Matshetsheni, Gwanda, 10 March 1999.
67. The ideology of lineage seniority and kinship is well expressed by Diana Wylie, *A Little God*. See also K.M. Phiri, 'Pre-colonial states of
Central Africa: Embodiments of Despotic Culture?" (Conference Paper, University of Zimbabwe, 9-14 September 1996).


69. File Historical Manuscript M01/3/11, J.S. Moffat Diary 1887-1892 entry for 30 December 1887.


71. File Historical Manuscript MA1/2/2, Diary of Major Thomas Maxwell, 1889-91, entry for 28 November 1889.

72. Ibid.


74. Interview with Headman John Sangulube, Bulilimangwe, Sangulube (Brunapeg), 30 May 1999. See also P.W.G. Mbofana, "The Capture of My Grandmother by the Matabeles", in NADA, xxiii, (1945), pp.4-5.

75. File Historical Manuscript W18/Miscellaneous, Statements and Notes by R. Forster Windram, See also Rhodesian Government Delineation Report, Matshetshie Tribal Trust Land "History of the Tribe", 1964, see also interview with Mr Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 26 February 1999.

76. J.R.D. Cobbing was able to delineate five divisions of the "non-Ndebele peoples" who lived within or on the perimeters of the Ndebele State, namely those who were directly incorporated as individuals, those who lived in the central area of Ndebele settlement, those who lived adjacent to the inner state, those tributaries at a further distance and those who resisted or paid tribute sporadically and with ill-grace. For details see Cobbing, "The Ndebele Under the Khumalos", p.11.


79. P.R. Kirby, The Diary of Dr Andrew Smith, p.237.


82. Ibid.

83. File NB1/1/1 Census for Insiza District, August 1897.


85. In Ndebele Society, the term ukufulu refers to animals, which are domesticated.


88. File FR2/2/2, Reminiscences of Ivon Fry.

89. N. Bhebe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion*, p.8.

90. File FR2/2/2 Reminiscences of Fry.


92. Ibid.


94. Ibid.


97. N. Bhebe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion*.


99. From a written comment by Professor T.O. Ranger sent to me, dated Wednesday, 16 June 1999.


102. J.R.D. Cobbing, "The Ndebele Under the Khumalos", p.61, see also N.M.B. Bhebe, "Some Aspects of Ndebele Relations with the Shona", pp.3-5.


104. We are only told that Mzilikazi's mother was Nompethu, a daughter of Zwide and thus all, as for the mother of Lobengula, she was Fulatha and she was killed before Lobengula became king during the Ntaba Yezinduna crisis of 1840-18. See the work of Helen Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c.1806-70", in *Journal of African History*, Volume 37, (1996), pp 351-70.


106. J.G. Wood, *Through Matebeleland: Ten Months in a Wagon* (Books of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, 1974), p.72, see also File Sy1/1/1 Miscellaneous 1889. B. Mahamba tried in her M.A. thesis to provide details of


108. This point is emphasised by Cobbing in his Ph.D thesis where he discussed the "royalization" of the aristocracy.


110. File W18/1/1, Statements by Various Matabele connected with the Royal House, November 1973- April 1940, collected by Forster Windram.


112. Ibid.


116. Ibid.


118. Ibid.

119. Ibid. See also interview with Mr Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 26 February 1999.

120. This issue of the civil war of 1840-1842 is discussed in the chapter.


123. Ibid.


125. The amabutho actively participated in such issues as fencing fields, cutting and burning tree branches for manure.


127. File NB6/1/1, Annual Report, Mzingwane for the year ending 31 March 1898.

128. Ibid.


130. Interview with Mr. John Ndlovu, Enyandeni Village, Gwanda, 26 February 1999. See also Rev. W. Bozongwana, Ndebele Religion and Customs, pp.10-17.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid.
133. B. Mahamba, "Women", p.25.
134. Ibid.
135. File N3/19/3-5 Queen Lozikheyi.
140. Interview with Solani Matshazi, Silobini Area, Mtshabezi, 3 March 1999.
142. Interview with Solani Matshazi.
143. Interview with Freddy Sikhosana (a Headman), Matshtsheni, Gwanda, 26 February 1999.
145. Ibid.
146. Interview with Mr. Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni. The same sentiments are expressed in M.M. Sibanda's Umbiko KaMadleya.
147. B. Mahamba, "Women" pp.24-30. See also File Historical Manuscript TH2/1/1.
150. File Historical Manuscript TH2/1/1, File NB3/1/16 Chief Native Commissioner to Native Commissioner Matobo, 5 January 1909.
152. File NB3/1/16.
153. J.R.D. Cobbing in his PhD thesis recorded a number of royals who were killed by both Mzilikazi and Lobengula.
156. File LMS ML1/2/A, Robert Moffat to Tidman, 25 December 1862.
158. Personal Communication with Professor T.O. Ranger.
159. Written communication by Professor T.O. Ranger Wednesday, 16 June 1999.
163. File CT1/8/4 Telegram of Colenbrander to Harris, 5 July 1892.

165. Interview with Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni.
CHAPTER FOUR

DYNAMICS OF COERCION AND CONSENT IN THE NDEBELE STATE

Introduction
The Ndebele ruling elite in the nineteenth century sought to establish effective control over their people, material wealth, and territory. These were the main standards by which their power was judged. In the previous scholarship, the emphasis was on the use of violence and tyranny by the Ndebele ruling elite as the main means of ensuring respect and even instilling fear among their people. This biased view has remained unchallenged for decades.

It is not true that the Ndebele rulers always maintained control over their subjects through violence and tyranny. Instead the Ndebele rulers tried by all means to be accountable even on such issues as natural disasters. They were actively involved in the strategic distribution of wealth and captives to attract respect from their followers and as a means of legitimizing their rule.

This chapter seeks to examine two major means, which were evolved by the Ndebele rulers to ensure effective control over their subjects and to gain wealth through the effective use of the human resources at their disposal. These two means are identified here as the setting up of the institution of amabutho (age-set groups) and the use of ritual power. In this chapter, the setting up of amabutho and the Ndebele rulers’ close supervision and monitoring over this institution is referred to as the secular control. This mechanism was more aligned to coercion. The ritualisation of the kingship and the ruling elite is here
regarded as the religious control. This one had inclinations as well as connotations of consent. This chapter also examines Ndebele oral literature with a view to tease out crucial Ndebele notions of democracy and Human rights. Ndebele oral literature is presented as a granary of Ndebele notions of rights and democracy. Even the unwritten Ndebele constitution was embedded in Ndebele oral literature. More so, the whole gamut of coercion and consent is reflected in Ndebele oral literature.

4.1 Use of Amabutho

In the previous literature, *amabutho* were referred to as “regiments” or “soldiers”. They were reduced to instruments of force and violence.\(^1\) J.R.D. Cobbing was the only scholar who came up with a refreshing analysis of the evolution of *amabutho* in the Ndebele state even though he also aligned the institution closely to military issues at the expense of other purposes of the institution.\(^2\) Cobbing saw the term *amabutho* as a concept with a specific military and masculine connotation as compared to *umuzi* (homestead/household). *Ukubutha* in Ndebele means to gather together/collect into a single group. *Amabutho* were therefore a gathering of young men who were collected from various *imizi*. *Umuzi* in Cobbing’s understanding was a residential unit containing men, women and children and was essentially concerned with non-military activities.\(^3\)

The term *amabutho* was used in the Ndebele state to designate three different but related notions. Firstly, it was a theoretical concept that defined men from a
given *imizi* (residential units) who when called out for military duty would be called out together. Secondly, it was a term that defined an actual squad of men assembled from the adult male inhabitants of *imizi* to which they returned after the specific assignment they were called out to perform was completed. Finally, *amabutho* were young men grouped together in separate and temporary settlements of varying sizes for both offensive and defensive fighting purposes. Cobbing emphasised that it was only in this last sense that *amabutho* approximated to British idea of a regiment.¹⁴

Cobbing’s analysis of the evolution of *amabutho* in the Ndebele state was indeed useful though he was not concerned to show that the ruling elite in the Ndebele state used this institution to establish effective control over the productive as well as reproductive potential of their subjects.⁵ This dimension has not been explored in the analysis of the *amabutho* as an institution in the Ndebele state. However, for the Zulu kingdom, a lot of effort had been put in trying to understand the real purpose of *amabutho*. For instance, on 26-27 October 1977, the Department of Historical and Political Studies at the University of Natal organized a workshop on the theme *Production and Reproduction in Zulu Kingdom* where the issue of *amabutho* and their functions and purposes was put under scholarly spotlight.⁶

Prominent scholars like Jeff Guy, John Wright as well as J.R.D. Cobbing who had just finished his Ph.D on the Ndebele history grappled with the subject of *amabutho* within the framework of production and reproduction purposes in the
Zulu state. However, their insights and conclusions have not stimulated a similar interest in the issue of *amabutho* in the Ndebele state. The Zulu king was able to use *amabutho* to influence the most fundamental processes of the kingdom. He used the system to establish control over the very processes upon which the very existence of the kingdom was based. The institution of *amabutho* gave the king the means to control the processes of production and reproduction within the Zulu kingdom.

While Cobbing argued that the Zulu method of handling *amabutho* and the evolution of the system differed in important ways from that of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi, it remains true that in the Ndebele state like in the Zulu kingdom, the Ndebele kings used the institution of *amabutho* to their advantage. It was one way of centralizing control of male labour power and tightening control over the processes by which the Ndebele society reproduced itself over time. In other words, the organization of Ndebele males into *amabutho* ensured that these people were firmly subordinated to the Ndebele aristocracy. The service provided by young men as *amabutho* enabled the ruling elite to extend the scope of their authority over the bulk of the robust population in the Ndebele state.

*Amabutho* were basically a lever used by the ruling elite to extend their hegemony over the whole of the Ndebele population. It was part and parcel of the initiation of Ndebele youth into adulthood. The Ndebele youth learnt *how to be Ndebele* within the confines of age-set grouping. Before a young person had
undergone the experiences of membership of amabutho was not considered a Ndebele but a child of a Ndebele. Captive boys also graduated together with son of the Ndebele into adulthood in the amabutho institution. It was within the confines of amabutho that an Ndebele youth was fully immersed into Ndebele culture.¹⁰

The major functions of belonging to amabutho were three-fold. It was a period, which the initiates were taught and indeed graduated into full members of the Ndebele society. The institution was used by the ruling elite as a fundamental tool of continuous revival of the Ndebele culture and inculcation of this culture to the youth. This process indirectly contributed towards social cohesion. Military training was not in any way the sole important aspect of amabutho, the experience nevertheless played a significant role in the life of Ndebele youth. Military training helped to instill courage and endurance, which were very important qualities in the life of an Ndebele.¹¹

The greater part of life within amabutho institution was spent teaching the cadets about culture and about their responsibilities as adults within the community. The secrets of the Ndebele nation and society were revealed to the youth. They were taught the importance of living as members of their communities rather than assuming the position of detached individuals. In other words, being part of amabutho was a form of national service. The content of teaching included inculcation of patriotism and Ndebele nationalism on the
youth. Without having passed through *amabutho* system, no Ndebele youth was allowed to marry and found a family.\textsuperscript{12}

Belonging to *amabutho* had a therapeutic effect on the cadets. The very act of undergoing training together had a way of bringing people together and cementing the relations between them. Captive boys and sons of the Ndebele came to respect each other and to see each other as colleagues of equal standing in society. This was one way of attaining social solidarity. Indeed, people who had gone through *amabutho* institution together regarded each other as brothers from then on. This was the significance of the *amabutho* system. The age-set assumed by the cadets did not merely play a nominal role, it was a point of reference for each member’s commitment to his fellow initiates and to the community at large. Each member of *amabutho* had to live up to the expectations of his fellow-members and also to the expectations the Ndebele community had towards each age-set.\textsuperscript{13}

It is no wonder therefore that the Ndebele king himself took a special interest in the *amabutho* institution. *Amabutho* were an important lever of continuous nation building and consolidation of the power of the ruling elite. The king established the institution of *amabutho* and gave each age-set a distinguishing *ihawu* (shield). The *amabutho* (gathered boys) swore an oath of allegiance to the king. It was also the Ndebele king that subsequently gave the *amabutho* permission to marry and establish individual homesteads after five to ten years of service to the Ndebele nation in general and to the ruling elite in particular.\textsuperscript{14}
Moreover, *amabutho* were always placed under the supervision of loyal senior chiefs who constituted the Ndebele ruling elite.\(^{15}\)

Therefore, Cobbing was correct in asserting that the setting up of *amabutho* in the Ndebele state could be better described as a process of internal self-regeneration of the Ndebele state both politically and militarily. This process was indeed a means of extending the control of the rulers over their subjects so as to gain most benefits from both the political and economic system\(^ {16}\)

However, one disturbing issue in Cobbing’s analysis of the Ndebele state in general and *amabutho* in particular, is that while he proceeded to explode the myth of the state as a military machine with all men as soldiers, at times he fell into the trap of those who saw military institutions everywhere in the Ndebele state. For instance, while he impressively demonstrated that *amabutho* of Imbizo, Insunga, Umcijo and Ihlathi were raised at specific times; his intention was link them to nothing other than military exigencies of the 1870s and 1890s. He linked the raising of Imbizo to the civil war in the Ndebele state of 1870-1872, the Insunga to the wars against the Tawana of 1883-5 and Ihlathi to the European Pioneer invasion of Mashonaland in 1890.\(^ {17}\) The bottom line is whether these events which required military resources did not exist, *amabutho* were going to be raised during these times as long as there was the availability of many young men whom the Ndebele king wanted to put under his control. Moreover, it must be noted that it took time to train *amabutho* into effective and reliable soldiers who could handle crises mentioned by Cobbing. It was
commonly the seasoned and experienced soldiers rather than recruits that usually handled such issues as mentioned by Cobbing.\textsuperscript{18} For instance, during the civil war of 1870-1872, it was not the Imbizo that were dispatched to deal with the dissidents but all those forces that supported Lobengula took part in crushing Mbiko Masuku’s Zwangendaba and their allies.\textsuperscript{19} Hence the fact that the raising of Imbizo, Ihlathi and Umcijo happened during those particular times that required military efforts noted by Cobbing could just have been coincidental.

If ever the Ndebele state was faced with a military crisis like that of 1893, their best way was to mobilize the seasoned and experienced men who were part and parcel of the civilian population. The majority of men in the Ndebele state passed through the \textit{amabutho} institution where they underwent military training before being swallowed by the civilian population. Thus trained personnel for military eventualities was always available.\textsuperscript{20}

Cobbing noted that the Ndebele male youth was brought up as a cattle herder, hunter, and soldier in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{21} Cattle herding, hunting of wild animals, and accumulation of cattle and human resources through raids were the processes which were considered as wealth generating. The Ndebele king and the ruling class always wanted to control these processes especially for strategic distribution. The ruling elite used \textit{amabutho} were to control the production process. For instance, they hunted, herded cattle, and participated in raiding that benefited the ruling elite.
By having a say in the stage and time at which the males in the Ndebele state could marry, indirectly enabled the ruling elite to control the reproductive potential of women.\textsuperscript{22}

A.T. Bryant was correct in asserting: “male regiments were essentially multifunctional organized labour gangs rather than regiments of professional soldiers”.\textsuperscript{23} In the Ndebele state, \textit{amabutho} engaged in “multi-functional” activities. They had an internal law and order function, they were used by chiefs to do such duties as cutting poles and grass for huts or being utilized for building and repair works as well as collection of tribute.\textsuperscript{24} As the Ndebele kings abandoned their previous \textit{izigodlo} (capitals) and moved to establish new ones, the \textit{amabutho} were actively involved in the building of these royal capitals.\textsuperscript{25}

\section*{4.2 Use of Amabutho as Instruments of Violence}

It is true that in the Ndebele state \textit{amabutho} were sometimes used to raid neighbouring communities for cattle, grain, and human resources. Recalcitrant subject groups that failed to acknowledge Ndebele hegemony through payment of tribute were commonly raided. \textit{Amabutho} were also used by the ruling elite in crushing dissidents who provoked civil strife and civil wars.\textsuperscript{26} However, the use of \textit{amabutho} as instruments of violence need to be handled with care so as to avoid the pitfalls of the champions of the “military thesis” as the only way of understanding Ndebele past.
It must be noted that up to today a number of people including the surviving descendants of the nineteenth century Ndebele, believe that *umkhonto* (spear) and *induku* (knobkerrie) played a fundamental role in the Ndebele governance. The Ndebele novelists have constantly perpetuated the idea of the Ndebele as aggressive and militaristic conquerors of neighbouring communities and Ndebele *amabutho* as a proud and indomitable instruments of violence. For instance, in some novels the Ndebele are described as *onduku zibomvu* (a people with red knobkerries due to blood spilling).²⁷

Perhaps the notion of the importance of violence through the spear and the knobkerrie among the Ndebele is drawn from *inxwala* song entitled, *Nansi Ndaba Yomkhonto* (Here is the story of the spear). This song served as a national anthem among the Ndebele in the nineteenth century.²⁸ The white missionaries who entered the Ndebele state tried to influence the Ndebele to change their cherished way of life, which they wrongly believed was based on violence and warfare. They composed an opposite song to the historic Ndebele song and the new tune was: *Nansi Indaba Engasiyo Yomkhonto* (Here is the story, not of the spear) meaning the bible and Christianity.²⁹ However, it would seem the Ndebele historic “song of the spear” was not meant to glorify violence. Rather the Ndebele celebrated through the song their survival in the midst of the violence of the *Mfecane* and the emergence of their state out of that violence. The spear in this song was glorified as a weapon of liberation rather than mere violence.³⁰
Military significance and violence has even been allied even to the essentially religious and ceremonial festival of *inxwala* (annual national religious ceremony). The ceremony has been reduced by the advocates of the militarism of the Ndebele to a grand military parade where *amabutho* as instruments of violence were displayed to the public with their weapons. The ceremonial throwing of the spear by the Ndebele king was taken to suggest and indicate in concrete terms by the king himself the direction in which raids would be undertaken.\(^31\)

It is important for current scholarship to try and understand the real nature of Ndebele military units. There is need also to measure the magnitude of their offensive capacity of the Ndebele military units. This way one is able to lay to rest the negative portrayal of the Ndebele as “blood thirsty destroyers of human life” both in the South African high veld and the Zimbabwean plateau.\(^32\) Cobbing, in his revisionist studies on the *Mfecane*, acknowledged the role of whites in the violence and destruction that took place in South Africa in the nineteenth century, and in a way absolving the Ndebele from being the sole perpetrators of violence.\(^33\)

The Ndebele military units like those of other pre-colonial African kingdoms did not have a strong offensive capacity to inflict devastating military effects over a wide area. They did not have a backing to sustain prolonged military engagements. Their offensive capacity was limited by a number of factors. Firstly, their weapons were poor such as spears and knobkerries; hence they
were only effective at short, sharp and close-combat fighting. Secondly, the Ndebele military units lived off the land; hence they were not in a position to sustain prolonged military engagements in far away places. Their attempts to attack the Kololo of Sebetwane and the Tawana far away from their state proved to be disastrous on their part. Thirdly, since the Ndebele were cattle herders and farmers, they considered defensive warfare to be paramount in their lives. Moreover, engagement in military activities usually took place in winter. In summer the amabutho usually took leave to engage fully in agriculture. Hence engagement in warfare was not a full time activity for the Ndebele.

Jan Vansina, a well-known expert in African history identified two types of warfare in pre-colonial Africa, that is, restricted war and destructive war. In a destructive war, Vansina noted that there was no stringent set of rules that limited the violence in the fighting. The war is characterized by the powerful military forces proceeding to burn the villages of the weak and the losers. In this war, the intention of the victor is to destroy or chase away the vanquished, take the land, plunder the wealth, take captives and finally subject the defeated and captured people to a dependant status within the victorious forces’ state.

Indeed during the formative years of the Ndebele state which is fully discussed in chapter two, the Ndebele rulers used amabutho in destructive wars whereby they burnt villages of their opponents, occupied the defeated people’s land, chased away other groups, plundered their wealth, took captives, and
incorporated the defeated people into the lower ranks of the Ndebele society. The case in point was that of the Pedi who were attacked, defeated and chased away. Their lands were occupied and their food stores plundered for two full years in the 1820s.\textsuperscript{38}

The Ndebele state suffered encirclement complex and loss of military hegemony after the European pioneer column occupied Mashonaland in 1890. To try and recoup their waning hegemonic, they again resorted to destructive wars on their Shona neighbours. The reality is that some the Shona groups who had previously acknowledged a subordinate position to the Ndebele state took advantage of the white presence to raid Ndebele cattle, stopped payment of tribute or tried to turn upside down their “tributary” status.\textsuperscript{39}

However, by and large, when the Ndebele settled permanently on the southwestern part of the Zimbabwean plateau after the 1840s, they rarely resorted to destructive wars. They gradually switched off from destructive warfare to restricted warfare where issues of defence were paramount. In these restricted wars, violence was hedged by a stringent set of rules that served to limit the damage and the duration of each encounter. For instance, enemies were specifically identified and their crimes spelt out before an attack was launched.\textsuperscript{40} Wars that fell in this category included the target specific punitive raids on recalcitrant chiefs and their communities.\textsuperscript{41} One needs to add that in general warfare among the Ndebele was undertaken for very limited tasks such as obtaining tribute, seizing cattle, keeping potential enemy
neighbours in perpetual weakness, and incorporation of new communities into the Ndebele state.

The Ndebele state did not possess professional soldiers that were stationed in barracks; always ready for military assignments. There was no standing army in the Ndebele state. Military forces were mobilized for specific military duties from among the civilian population. Amabutho were more of a unit of production than a military force, which was always out raiding the neighbours of the Ndebele state. The amabutho acquired military attributes during training and a temporary concrete military definition when called upon to carry out specific military assignments. After the assignments, they were absorbed by the civilian population where they performed non-military duties. All these issues need to be taken into account if one is to understand military issues in the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century and avoid relying on the exaggerated and biased accounts of early white travelers.

The issue of raiding as a major aspect of Ndebele military history also need to be carefully handled because it was on the basis of the Ndebele state’s raiding that they earned such names as “savages”. One issue for certain is that during the formative years of the Ndebele state raiding was resorted to as a survival tactic and an economic as well as political ploy. However, during the “settled phase,” raiding gradually ceased to be an economic ploy for the Ndebele. They were able to keep their own cattle. In fact they came to the south-west of the Zimbabwean plateau with more cattle than people.
Secondly, the Ndebele proved to be very competent farmers of crops such as *amabele* (cereals like millet, sorghum, maize, rapoko) for their consumption. So raiding largely lost its attribute of being a branch of production. What it retained was its attribute as a target-specific element of Ndebele defence and foreign policy. The Ndebele intention was to maintain their state as a dominant force, firstly in the southwestern part of the Zimbabwean plateau and, secondly they wanted to keep far away neighbours like the Ngwato and Kololo in perpetual weakness. They cherished their newfound peace and stability in Matebeleland, hence they used raiding as a defensive mechanism. To the Ndebele, aggressive strikes on potential enemies was considered to be the best way of defending themselves.

Another fact which needs close scrutiny is that the Shona who fell victim to any raids in the nineteenth century especially in the 1830s onwards, lumped all ferocious raiders as *madzviti*. The use of this term led the Shona groups who were attacked by such people as the Ngoni of Zwangendaba, Nxaba and the Swazi of Nyamazana prior to the arrival of Ndebele to later telescope events and blame the Ndebele. At the moment, a number of the surviving descendants of the Shona of the 1830s and 1840s know nothing about Ngoni and Swazi raids prior to the arrival of the Ndebele. What they talk about are the Ndebele as the only *madzviti* who are even recorded in their folk tales. Thus what now exists as public Shona memory are the devastating raids of the Ndebele on their forefathers. Some who were raided by the Gaza also confused the Gaza with the Ndebele. There is need to differentiate the impact
of the Ngoni, Swazi and Gaza on the Shona societies from that of the Ndebele if Ndebele violence is to be properly understood. On top of this, it is important to note that the Shona also raided each other.

One needs to mention that even when the Ndebele were wandering south of the Limpopo river, the Sotho and Tswana communities who termed all wandering and plundering Nguni leaders and refugees, matebele, ended up using this term to refer to Mzilikazi’s followers specifically. The term matebele like madzviti did not originally refer to the followers of Mzilikazi specifically. When it was now specifically directed at Mzilikazi’s followers, it exonerated other Nguni groups that attacked the Sotho and the Tswana and all the havoc, violence, and destruction that took place in the Transvaal was piled on the Ndebele. Hence the issue of telescoping need to be taken seriously.

It must also be noted that when the Ndebele settled in the southwest especially after 1842, they adopted a simple general policy towards their neighbours. Those who submitted to them and paid a small amount of tribute as a token of submission and acknowledgement of Ndebele power were left alone and co-existed with the Ndebele very well. Those who were hostile, recalcitrant, who raided the Ndebele and in general failed to practise good neighbourliness as defined by the Ndebele, were subjected to raids and attacks.

The Ndebele amabutho were also used by some of the powerful provincial leaders to carry out imihaso (unofficial raids which were not known or given
blessing by the king) on neighbouring Kalanga, Tonga, Nanzwa, Shangwe and Shona communities.\textsuperscript{54} The proceeds of these unofficial raids were taken by \textit{amaqhawe} (those who were renowned for excellence in the military) and chiefs who commanded the \textit{amabutho}, and were not even taken to the king.\textsuperscript{55} Mzilikazi was not pleased about those group of chiefs like Manxeba Khumalo who carried out unauthorised raids and who threatened the king’s control over \textit{amabutho}. For instance, in 1859 Mzilikazi was “much displeased with some of his people who had gone from some of the north-east outposts and attacked a people called Malepi and taken their cattle.”\textsuperscript{56} Mzilikazi went to the extent of summoning Manxeba Khumalo to his capital where he reprimanded him severely in September 1860 and pointing to him that by staging raids on the neighbouring people without his permission, he was “making spears” for Mzilikazi.\textsuperscript{57} The point to emphasize is that some raids were not authorized by the Ndebele king but were a product of mischievous provincial leaders who were able to use \textit{amabutho} for their selfish purposes.

The \textit{amabutho} as instruments of violence were also unleashed on internal dissidents. For instance, during 1839-1842, Mzilikazi used the loyal \textit{amabutho} to destroy those who had installed Nkulumane as king in his absence. The \textit{umuzi} of Gibixhegu where those who were considered as rebels resided was razed and burnt and those who survived the onslaught either fled to exile or were forcibly incorporated into other \textit{izigaba} and denied access to some privileges and rights, which they had enjoyed previously. It is said that \textit{baba dlisi mbuya ngoluthi} (subjected to cruel treatment). \textsuperscript{58} In the period 1868-1872,
again *amabutho* were used to confront and crush Mbiko Masuku and his allies who resisted Lobengula’s leadership. Zwangendaba *imizi* like those of Gibixhegu were destroyed.

Thus, *amabutho* in the Ndebele state were used for various activities such as defence of the state, defence of the kingship, raiding, and maintenance of internal order and crushing internal opposition to status quo, while at the same time, they performed non-military activities which again benefited the ruling elite most and the Ndebele nation in general.

### 4.3 Use of Ritual Power by the Ruling Elite

The Ndebele ruling elite tried to establish rapport with their subjects. Their rule was not always enforced through violence and force. The ruling elite worked very hard and consistently to gain consent of their subjects in whatever they did. To gain this consent, the Ndebele ruling elite summoned the force of religion and rituals.

However, previous scholars including Cobbing tried to understand the Ndebele concept of God and how this was linked to the worship of the *amadlozi* (ancestral spirits). Efforts were spent on demonstration of the connections between Ndebele religious beliefs and such issues as *ukufa* (death), *ubuthakathi* (witchcraft), and such ceremonies as *umbuyiso* (calling home of a spirit of a departed person). 59
The various names by which the Ndebele referred to God such as Nkulunkulu, Mvelingqaki, Mlimo/Mlimu and Ngwali/Mwari also came under spotlight of previous research on Ndebele religion. These various names were due to the multi-ethnic nature of the Ndebele nation. It was clearly stated that such names like Mlimo/Modimo came with the Sotho/Tswana who were incorporated into Mzilikazi’s followers north of the Vaal River whereas the ideas of Ngwali/Mwali came from those people whom the Ndebele found in the southwest of the Zimbabwean plateau. As for such terms as Nkulunkulu/Mvelingqaki, these were Nguni names for their high God. Cobbing mentioned that the Ndebele respect for God waged on fear, and this fear led them to propitiate God at great ceremonies such as inxwala by killing oxen and offering lengthy prayers via the amadlozi.

What has not been studied is how the Ndebele ruling elite used religion to establish respect and legitimacy from their subjects, and the significance of the relationship between the spiritual and political function of the king and of the chiefs. In other words, there is need to establish the linkages between the hegemony of the Khumalo and religion. It is clear that hegemony is not given but has to be constructed and sustained. Religion played a fundamental role in this process.

In order for the Khumalo to consolidate their power and dominance, they worked very hard to make their ancestors relevant. One-way of achieving this was through ceremony, ritual, and myth that were passed from one generation
to the next. Ndebele ruling elites were not simply the manipulators of public opinion to maintain their own interests and position. They used ideological means that was permeated through and through by religious beliefs. Most recent writers on African pre-colonial societies have pointed out religious dimensions of life as inextricably intertwined with other aspects of life, particularly power.\textsuperscript{62}

The inception of the Ndebele state in southwestern part of the Zimbabwean plateau meant extension of Khumalo power over other Shona paramounts and royal families. The question is how did this happen? Did the indigenous people of the southwest just gave up their own spiritual and political life and then offered that spiritual as well as political allegiance to a “foreign” king? Indeed Mzilikazi and Lobengula would have found it difficult to extend their power outside their immediate following without reference to religious beliefs and practices. This argument is strengthened by the realization that when a group held a territory for a significant time, the group’s chiefly ancestors retain an interest and influence even long after the people had been subjected by another ruler.\textsuperscript{63}

The Ndebele like other pre-colonial people such as the Pedi, the Swazi, the Zulu, the Tsonga, and many others devised methods of extending their hegemony over conquered people and their subjects. The common method was that of the use of annual ceremonies. In the Ndebele state, ethnographic and historical sources attest to the central significance of the \textit{inxwala} (annual
national religious festival) in Ndebele life. The nineteenth century Europeans habitually referred to inxwala as first fruits festival. This characterization of inxwala was partial, reductionist, incomplete, and ultimately simplistic and misleading. Food, for example, with its unqualified significance for the maintenance of physical existence and the ongoing temporal survival of the Ndebele social order, was vital to the general equation, but at a secondary level below more salient determinations of knowledge and belief.

The inxwala ceremony needs to be understood at two main levels, that is, at the society and individual level. At the level of society and the individual, inxwala was dedicated to the sustenance and continuity of the indispensable historical, cognitive, and ethical relationship that was held by the Ndebele to exist between all presently living Ndebele, their deceased ancestors, and their unborn descendants. What was deeply and profoundly implicated in this unity of address were fundamental references to key items of knowledge and belief, and indeed, to the entire register of concerns that informed the Ndebele epistemological world.64

The eating of new season fruits was an obviously appropriate analogue of the bigger hegemonic project of inxwala. By definition inxwala was a festival of cleansing and purification oriented towards a ritual mediation on the seamless unity of the dead, the living and the unborn. The initial determination of inxwala and its elaboration derived from the fact that the Ndebele nation was founded on a delicate balancing of coercion and consent, and the spectacularly
aggrandized by a combination of military conquest and pacifist policies. Therefore the *inxwala* came as an ideological annual forum for the mandatory affirmation and renewal of personal allegiance by subjugating or otherwise constituent office bearers.  

During *inxwala*, the king profusely sanctified the spirit of his deceased predecessors in office with great and calculated ceremonial, in which wealth, authority, and power were constantly displayed and rehearsed. This activity directed all the attention to the king as the individuated representation of the state, and as the spokesman, as first citizen, for all of his office bears, people, and subjects. Thus in the marked absence of a corporately institutionalized priesthood, such occasions also pointedly underlined the crucial place of the state, personified in the reigning *inkosi* (king), in the arbitration and ideological structuration of belief. In a very direct sense too, *inxwala* was an ideological structuration of knowledge of knowledge in that it observed and celebrated the triumphalist history and essential rectitude of the state in the collective person(s) of successive king(s).  

In all its modes, and with the enabling participation of the king, the *inxwala* was a reading, a review and an affirmation by the state of its own hermeneutical master text. During *inxwala* ceremony what was celebrated was the received order of history, and to confirm this as the right order. *Inxwala* was essentially articulated by, and served the objectives of the state presided over by the person of the king. The Ndebele state authored and constructed the narrativity
of the *inxwala*. The Ndebele ruling elite tried to reduce all the principal constituents of belief and knowledge into the still center of a highly purposeful ideological structuration. It was part and parcel of the continuous attempt of the royal family to centralize power.\(^{67}\)

The efficacy of *inxwala* and its capacity to work in and across historical time, relied in the first place upon a consensual understanding, albeit one shadowed by the state’s coercive potential. All people assembled in the capital as a demonstration of their allegiance to the king and as a sign of spiritual respect to royal ancestral spirits. According to Cobbing, “the *inxwala* was a great national catharsis in which the sexual, personal, spiritual and political frustrations of individuals as well as of the whole tribe found a peaceful outlet.”\(^{68}\)

In this structuration, past, present, and future were unified in a reading of the Ndebele cultural experience that was conducted under the presiding aegis of the state and orchestrated by it. The overarching intention of this reading was hegemony. Inxwala was both the most directed and the most highly elaborated of all the ideological structurations that determined the history of the nineteenth century Ndebele state.

It was during *inxwala* ceremony that the blending of religious issues and political exigencies manifested it more clearly. During *inxwala*, every member of the Ndebele state, from the royalty to the captive, for sometime put aside the worship of their individual *amadlozi* (family ancestral spirits) to worship together
with the royal family, the *amadlozi esizwe* (royal ancestral spirits) like Mashobana Khumalo, the father of Mzilikazi. During the reign of Lobengula, Mzilikazi Khumalo, the father of Lobengula, was now part and parcel of the royal ancestral spirits and prayers were directed to him.69

The fact that the royal ancestral spirits were elevated to national ancestral spirits and protectors, had the effect of making every member of the Ndebele state to accept the centrality and superiority of the royal family and to accept their right to rule the Ndebele state as their ancestral spirits protected everybody. In this way, the *inxwala* ceremony was partly a festival of unity serving as a means of maintaining the power of the king over his subjects. The fact that before the whole national could partake of new crops, they had to take crops to the king to taste first, was another way by which the king tried to maintain effective control over his people.

During the *inxwala*, *amabutho* were paraded at the capital where they performed various dances (*imigido/ukusina*). The king as part of his activities threw his spear towards the rising sun. It was these activities that led some observers to characterize *inxwala* as a great military parade. However, the throwing of the spear had nothing to do with the military activities of the Ndebele state. It was a religious act that officially indicated that the old year was past and that a new year had begun. As for the parading of *amabutho* perhaps its significance was to demonstrate the strength of the state and a way of intimidating those whose allegiance was wavering.70
The failure by any individual or a group to attend the Ndebele *inxwala* ceremony was considered as a clear case of rebellion and defiance of the authority of the king. Such individuals and groups were supposed to be punished by execution. However, there are no clear cases of either individuals or groups who dared failed to attend *inxwala*, in the exception of Mbiko Masuku and his Zwangendaba group during the reign of Lobengula who deliberately absconded because they did not accept Lobengula as their leader. This action of Mbiko Masuku provoked the anger of Lobengula and his supporters who branded Mbiko and Zwangendaba as rebels who deserved to be crushed by force. Indeed they were crushed in a fight, which took the form of a civil war.

When Mzilikazi died in 1868 and was buried at Entumbane in the Matopos Hills, he acquired religious significance that far transcended his days as a leader of the Ndebele state. His personal bodyguard while he was alive, the Inyathi *ibutho* was given the task of guarding the grave from intruders and veld fires. They sang songs to him as though he was still alive. Black cattle were sacrificed to the spirit of Mzilikazi during *inxwala* ceremonies. Pilgrimages were made not by the royal family but by other ordinary members of the Ndebele society to the grave of Mzilikazi. The reverence given to Mzilikazi’s grave demonstrated beyond doubt that the kingship among the Ndebele succeeded in ritualizing itself for the benefit of perpetuating the ruler ship of the Khumalos as a royal family with the power to protect the Ndebele state. The national *inxwala* ritual was thus important for the dissemination of Khumalo ideology and a visible sign of Khumalo power over the state. The right to hold *inxwala* was
reserved for the most powerful group and was thus an extremely important element in the ideology of dominance.

It is important to understand note that subordinate groups as well had their own ideologies, which needed to be handled with care by the ruling elite. For instance, the interactions between the Ndebele and the more indigenous people of the southwest need careful examination. Previous scholars articulated two major ways of interaction, that is, military conquest of the indigenous people and religious conquest of conquerors by the indigenous people. N. Bhebe wrote of a “religious conquest of the conquerors by the vanquished.” However, Cobbing rejected the importance of Mwari cults on the Ndebele. He pointed out that for the Ndebele, the Mwari cult never replaced their primary recourse to the Nguni God, uNkulunkulu and their amadlozi worship. According to Cobbing Mwari cult became an alternative means of acquiring rain and of providing solutions to personal problems.

What must be noted is that in an endeavour to capture “popular mentality” and “common conceptions of the world”, the Ndebele ruling elite was under pressure to embrace aspects of the Mwari cult worship. This fell neatly within their hegemonic practice of incorporating and assimilating people of various ethnic backgrounds. Incorporation and assimilation of human beings was not going to be successful and complete without a corresponding assimilation of indigenous people’s conception of the world and their varied religious beliefs.
The Ndebele hegemonic project was not scattered on barren ground. They worked very hard to establish themselves at the expense of prior Shona forms, which they failed to totally supplant. This necessitated the Ndebele hegemonic project to be highly evangelical, constantly seeking to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order. At the end of the day the Ndebele ruling elite were forced by the prevailing social situation in the southwestern part of the Zimbabwean plateau to tolerate the use of indigenous languages and religious diversity. What prevailed can be properly described as “religious pluralism” based on mutual tolerance. This was made inevitable by the “multi-ethnic” nature of the Ndebele nation and latent ideology of resistance among the subordinate groups.77

The tendency was for the Ndebele leaders to tolerate the various religious beliefs of their subjects. The interaction at economic and political levels among the various groups in the Ndebele state went hand in hand with religious mixing to the extent that the Ndebele or those of Nguni stock among the Ndebele did not abandon their original religious beliefs while at the same time they adopted aspects of the religious beliefs of their subjects. Mzilikazi is said to have sent gifts to Matopos Hills for purposes of good rainfall, despite the fact that Ndebele tradition is also strong on frictions between the Mwari cult priests and the Ndebele ruling elite.78

All this was symptomatic of the main realities of hegemony: that it must constantly reconstructed lest it is unmade by the threat of resistance by
subordinate groups. One needs to note the crucial fact that reactions of subordinate groups consist of a complex admixture of tacit (even uncomprehending) accommodation to the hegemonic order at one level and diverse expressions of symbolic and practical resistance at another. The latter works to reinforce the former by displacing attention away from, or by actively reproducing, the hidden signs and structures of domination. Thus, acceptance of some aspects of the *Mwari* cult worship backed by *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits), *mhondoro* (spirit mediums) and mountain shrines like Njelele and Dula by the Ndebele ruling elite, was part of the hegemonic aim to contain resistance and to solicit for consent and recognition by the subject people.\(^{79}\)

However, the growing influence of the cult priests among the Ndebele had the inevitable implication on the role of the Ndebele kingship as a religious institution. They possessed as representatives of a cultural and social order that the Ndebele tried to supplant. Hence some of the influential cult priests like Mbikwa Ncube were killed during Lobengula’s reign.\(^{80}\) It is said that such cult priests had taken advantage of Mzilikazi's old age to gain influence among the Ndebele and the old king was falling more and more into the hands of these cult priests.\(^{81}\)

There is evidence that Lobengula rather than Mzilikazi came more and more closer to the *Mwari* cult influences. This is explained on the basis of the fact that Lobengula ascended to the Ndebele throne amidst political confusion and he wanted *Mwari* cult priests’ support to legitimise his rule. Lobengula is known
to have sent gifts to *Nevana* or *Salukazana* in Nemakonde’s country and to Chireya of the Shangwe.\textsuperscript{82} However, D.G. Lewis, stated that when Lobengula succeeded his father, he did not rely heavily on the *Mwari* cult to the same extent as his father.\textsuperscript{83} He even killed some of the cult priests.\textsuperscript{84} These seemingly contradictory arguments among scholars were also reflective of the complex manifestations and operations of Ndebele hegemonic project in practice. Recent research has shown that *Mwari* cult had influence on Ndebele politics. There is the case of Mtwane Dlodlo who was called by the Dula shrine and “given power of war” during the Ndebele uprising of 1896. The Dula Shrine was part of the *Mwari* shrines and Mtwane Dlodlo was an Nguni and part of the Ndebele ruling elite.\textsuperscript{85}

The *Mwari* shrines like the Ndebele rulers operated on a hegemonic basis and in turn tolerated and entertained all people of the southwest and even from beyond irrespective of their ethnic background and language. The Rozvi, Sotho, Kalanga, Venda, “Shona” and Ndebele were all received in the shrine centres and gifted linguists who served the shrines transmitted their requests and answers. The myth of the *Mwari* shrines has it that the shrines accepted and legitimated the successive political regimes that dominated the area such as that of the Rozvi and that of the Ndebele and then deposed them in turn because of their failure to respect the shrines and flouting *Mwari’s commands*.\textsuperscript{86}

As a result of a religious compromise, while the Ndebele took over as a politically dominant force in the southwest in the 1840s, on the religious front
they left the non-Nguni and more indigenous people to dominate the ritual sphere. The more indigenous people remained as priests of the shrines and in that way they were able to exercise some influence even on the royal power of the Nguni who constituted the ruling elite in the Ndebele state.

4.4 Ndebele Cultural Practice and Civil Society

The pre-colonial Ndebele state like other traditional societies simply lacked the infrastructure and technology to command society solely by coercive force. Consent in the Ndebele state was situated in the institutionalized practices-belief, religion, myth, knowledge, custom, habit, pattern of thought-that together constituted civil society. In existing historical works on the Ndebele, there is historiographical marginalization Ndebele society and cultural practice. This void is directly related to the present very limited comprehension of the historical determinants of Ndebele civil society. There is urgent need to generate dialogue between the history of structures and the history of cultures, and for relating social and cultural practices to their mental, intellectualist and ideological representation.

The entire thrust of the Ndebele historical record points to a sophisticated working out or elaboration overtime of discrete principles and imperatives that were identified as being the instruments of maximization and the guarantors of order and rights. There is in Ndebele history a unity of knowledge and belief, of understanding and purpose that implies very considerable levels of reflective or meditative self-consciousness. Clearly, there were areas of potential conflict as
well as congruence between the goals of the state and the social order. The
range and diversity of this relationship are very complex, and correspondingly
very difficult to analyse. Thus, in this section, I intend to glean meaning from
Ndebele oral literature as an embodiment of Ndebele culture and their notions
of rights.

Ndebele oral literature was and is a living reservoir of the people’s culture. It
was a vehicle through which the society articulated its hopes, fears, and
aspirations. It was for this reason that this creative material was used in the
socialization process of the younger members of the society as a way of
indicating cultural values in them. Unlike the written literature, Ndebele oral
literature was not a monopoly of a particular individual but the product of
collective creativity of communal groups. The fact that they were conveyed
orally in their authentic form accounted for their brevity as compared, for
example, to the written short story or novel.88

Ndebele oral literature is divided into four broad genres namely; narrative
stories, songs, proverbs, and riddles. In Ndebele oral literature there is
dominance of use of animal characters. This enabled the narrator to satirize
society without identifying particular individuals in the community. The Ndebele
discovered that the manipulation of animal characters helped in presenting
events and absurd situations as vividly as possible without making too much
demand on the audience’s emotions. In reality, however, the animal characters
represented human behaviour that was either to be emulated or discouraged.89
Ndebele cultural values were enshrined in their proverbs. For instance, one of the popular Ndebele proverbs was: *inkosi yinkosi ngabantu* (It is the people who make the king). This was indeed an important political statement that captured Ndebele notions of governance and power. The Ndebele were clear that political power emanated from the people. In other words, the Ndebele knew that at a theoretical level the will of the people must form the foundation of kingship and government. They also knew that power was very transient, it could just vanish from an individual's hands, hence their proverb: *ubukhosi ngamazolo* (Power is like dew).

At the community level the issue of despising others was no encouraged. This was apparent from the Ndebele oral literature. Elderly people, disabled people, and other disadvantaged groups were not to be treated as a laughing stock. A hungry person was to be provided with food. The common Ndebele proverb was that *isisu somhambi kasinganani singango phonjwana lwembuzi* (The stomach of a traveler was so small to the extent that it was equivalent to a goat's horn). This proverb advised the Ndebele community not to deny travelers or visitors food. Provision of food to visitors was not to be taken as an expense. In Ndebele oral literature greediness and selfishness was not tolerated. The hyena in Ndebele oral tales is used as a representative of greediness and selfishness. Because of selfishness the hyena is always acting foolishly and getting punished. In pursuit of personal gains the hyena is presented as breaking all community rules in the Ndebele folktales. The hyena
does not care about his safety or about the safety of others in his search for food. His greed often leads him to fatal consequences.  

Thus, at the civil society level, the espoused norms and values revolved around mutual assistance, mandatory hospitality, seniority, fraternity, and other forms of solidarity, the right to arbitration, and collective decision making within an established and learned but unwritten consensual framework. For instance, Ndebele folktales also emphasized the idea of collective spirit among the people. This culture was elaborately articulated through the medium of animal characters. For instance, the hare is a very popular character representing a trickster and a cheat who rarely worked together with others.  

The cultural terrain of the Ndebele embodied some of their notions of right and wrong. If one is to understand such issues as Ndebele ideas about community life, generosity, tolerance, and the general ideals that were upheld by the society, there is need to embark on a systematic teasing out of meaning from Ndebele oral literature. The whole question of how the Ndebele treated or viewed such people as the disabled is clearly articulated in their oral literature. What is problematic about using oral literature is that it is extremely hard to date it. One cannot say with certainty which oral literature belonged to the nineteenth century, and which one was produced in the 20th century. However, what can be said with certainty is that the content of Ndebele oral literature help to shed light on the neglected issue of Ndebele civil society.
In summary terms, it is very clear from the above analysis of the Ndebele cultural practice and the institution of *amabutho* that the ruling elite tried hard to use a combination of coercion and consent in its administration of the Ndebele state. It becomes clear again that violence in the Ndebele state was exaggerated as a means of ensuring compliance of the subordinate groups. Both secular and religious means were used to ensure harmony, compliance, and consent to authority. Through the institution of *amabutho*, the ruling elite was able to establish their control over the production and to a limited extent reproduction processes. Religion was used to ritualize the kingship so much that the ruling elite could also claim spiritual power over their subjects.
Endnotes


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


8. Jeff Guy’s paper was entitled, “Ecological Factors in the Rise of Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom” and the paper appeared in a published form as a chapter in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (eds), Economy and society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, (Longman, London, 1980), pp.102-119, John Wright’s paper was entitled, “Pre-Shakan Age-Group Formation Among the Northern Nguni” (Workshop on Production and Reproduction in the Zulu Kingdom, University of Natal, 26-27 October 1977) and J.R.D. Cobbing’s paper was entitled, “Zulu Amabutho and Production: Some Preliminary Questions” where he noted differences in the amabutho institution of the Zulu and the Ndebele.


12. Ibid, see also oral interview with Nkonkobela Matshazi, Masenyane, Lupane, 29 March 1999.


15. Ibid.


17. Ibid, pp.87-88.

18. Ibid. see also oral interview with Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Matshetsheni, Gwanda, 26 February 1999.


22. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
41. D.N. Beach, *War and Politics*.
42. M. Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion*.
45. D.N. Beach, *War and Politics*.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Oral interview with Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Gwanda, Matsheletsheni, 26 February 1999 who mentioned that the Ndebele sometimes described themselves as “abantwana besijula” (sons of the short stabbing spear).
55. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
59. J.R.D Cobbing, “The Ndebele under the Khumalos.”
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
66. Ibid, compare with umkhosi among the Zulu.
67. Compare to Odwira festival among the Asante.
68. J.R.D, “The Ndebele Under the Khumalos”.
69. Terence Ranger, *Voices From the Rocks*, (Baobab, Harare, 1999) where a refreshing insight into Ndebele religion is contained.
70. Pathisa Nyathi, *Imbali YamaNdebele*.
71. Ibid.
72. Terence Ranger, *Voices*.
73. Ibid.
(University of Rhodesia, History Department Seminar Paper No.22 (5 May 1973).

75. Ibid.
76. J.R.D. Cobbing, “The Ndebele Under the Khumalos”.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
83. D.G. Lewis, “Mlimo”.
84. Ibid.
85. Terence Ranger, Voices.
86. Ibid.
87. Tom C. McCaskie, State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1995), tried to grapple with the issue of civil society in pre-colonial society and the whole gamut of social practice.
89. P.N. Mkandla, Abaseguswini Lezothamlilo, (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1983), gives a vivid picture of interaction between animals and people.
91. P.N. Mkandla, Abaseguswini.
92. Ibid.
CHAPTER FIVE
A CLASH OF TWO HEGEMONIC PROJECTS: THE NDEBELE VERSUS
CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Introduction
The spread of Europeans to Africa in general and to the Ndebele state in particular was part and parcel of the wider Victorian hegemonic project. The main objective was to gain control over the practices through which the would-be subjects produced and reproduced the bases of their existence. This Victorian hegemony related to the meeting of two worlds, one imperial and expansive, the other local and defensive. The interaction that followed was characterised by contestation and compliance, fascination and repulsion, as the Ndebele proved to be hardly passive recipients of European culture. The Ndebele did not only remain sceptical of some of its ways and means, but they also read their own significance into them, seeking to siphon off evident powers of the mission while rejecting its invasive discipline.

Missionaries were not just the bearers of a vocal Christian ideology, nor merely the media of modernity. They were also the human vehicles of a hegemonic Victorian worldview. Christian missionaries were the leading western cultural brokers who were later followed by colonialists. Their assault was driven by a universalising ethos whose prime object was to engage the Ndebele in a web of symbolic and material transactions that was to bind them ever more securely to the colonising culture.
The Ndebele had their own worldview and were motivated by quite different axioms. Their own taken-for-granted world was founded on the assumption of cultural relativity and political autonomy. The Ndebele certainly did not equate exchange with incorporation, or learning of new techniques with subordination. However the whole missionary enterprise was an attempt to replace one hegemony with another. Like all other hegemonic projects the Victorian project was often less a directly coercive conquest that a persuasive attempt to colonise consciousness, remake the Ndebele by redefining their taken-for-granted surfaces of their everyday worlds.

The major articulators of Ndebele traditional norms were mainly the Ndebele kingship and the various Ndebele traditional religious practitioners, These included professionals and opinion leaders like the rain-priests, diviners, magicians, and army-doctors. They resisted the missionary enterprise, which tried to turn their worldview upside down and render them irrelevant.

The missionaries were not only the vanguard of the British presence. They were also the most active cultural agents of the empire. They were driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the Ndebele world in the name of God and European civilization. They wanted the Ndebele soul unlike the mining and farming magnets that merely wanted African labour and land. Theirs was a long battle for the possession of salient signs and symbols, a bitter and drawn out contest of conscience and consciousness that led to a clash of notions of rights.
As noted in the previous chapters, the Ndebele had their own cherished traditions and culture that embodied their own notions of democracy and human rights. The coming of Europeans to the Ndebele state entailed a challenge to the Ndebele traditional values and customs. The Europeans came into contact with the Ndebele with their own cultural values which were largely underpinned by Western Christian morality and western historical experiences and culture. Inevitably, the interactions between the representatives of western values and the Ndebele raised important dimensions to the dynamics of human rights and democracy debate in Africa in general and the Ndebele state in particular.

Scholars like N. Bhebe offered interesting insights to the theme of the interactions between the Christian missionaries and the Ndebele in the nineteenth century.\(^1\) J.R.D. Cobbing, Stanlake Samkange, T.O. Ranger, and Richard Brown concentrated on secular interactions between the Ndebele and the Europeans during the Scramble for Africa period. They interrogated the problem of policies of the Ndebele kingdom in the 1890s and they also exposed details of deception and chicanery by whites during the concession-hunting period in the Ndebele history.\(^2\) The main weakness of this literature is that it captures the colonial encounter with the Ndebele in terms of simple dichotomies of domination and resistance. The colonial encounter needs to re-defined and re-conceptualised beyond the simple paradigm of domination and resistance. The colonial encounter was a dialectical encounter that altered everyone and everything that was involved.
The reality is that the encounter was very complex, as the final objective of the missionaries was to colonize Ndebele people’s consciousness with axioms and aesthetics of an alien culture. The force of the alien cultural imperialism was at once ideological, and economic, semantic and social. The Ndebele response was also complex involving those who succumbed, those who resisted, and those who tried to cast its intrusive forms in their own image.

As noted by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, the study of the colonial encounter is at once concerned with the colonizer and the colonised, with structure and agency. It was an exchange of signs and substance, with each party trying to gain some purchase on, some mastery over, the other: the churchmen, to convert the Ndebele to Christianity; the Ndebele, to divert the potency of the church to themselves. Thus these western cultural brokers came to the Ndebele state with cherished western supremacist ideas about their culture, traditions, customs, religious beliefs and even mannerisms. As a result, they became highly intolerant towards non-western cultures, values and norms that were different from theirs. They made no attempt to empathise, learn, and understand the culture and traditions of the Ndebele. Instead what they did was to condemn, stigmatise, castigate, and try to supplant cherished Ndebele values and traditions as manifestation of `savagery' and lack of civilization.3

They sought to destroy the cherished Ndebele culture mainly through converting them to Christianity. Christianity was viewed as the only way, which could open the Ndebele to the western values. However, the dominant members of the
Ndebele society such as the kingship and the religious practitioners who benefited most from the traditional Ndebele status quo ardently defended Ndebele cultural and traditional values and norms and resisted Christianisation of their society.\(^4\)

One needs to note that the encounter between the Europeans and the Ndebele prior to colonial conquest raised one of the crucial ambiguities in the human rights and democracy debate in Africa. The ambiguity is that of the clash between the right to cultural autonomy and the right to struggle against oppression even within one’s own culture.\(^5\) The Ndebele strongly resisted the encroachment of western values and norms to their cherished culture by remaining mainly indifferent to Christianity. This was part and parcel of a struggle to preserve cultural autonomy. However, Ndebele culture was not free of structural oppression, since culture remains the reflection of the ideology of the dominant and powerful in society.\(^6\) The emergence of internal subordinate resistance to Ndebele hegemonic project, taking advantage of the presence of missionaries has escaped the analysis of previous scholars. This is indeed a crucial human rights contradiction. While the Ndebele were busy resisting Christianity, new kinds of experimental consciousness and new ideologies were emerging that pointed to the discrepancies between received Ndebele worldviews and the worlds they claimed to mirror. Indeed some members of the Ndebele society exhibited their resistance to traditional denials of human rights and democracy within the Ndebele state by embracing aspects of Christianity.\(^7\)
The emergence of Ndebele Christians prior to colonial conquest proves the crucial fact that Ndebele hegemony like other hegemonic projects was invariably unstable and vulnerable. It also proved that the missionaries were managing in seeding their culture, especially in the fissures of local communities. Internal resistance to traditional denials of human rights within the Ndebele state was a reality, and became more manifest towards the fall of the state in the 1890s. 

However, one issue which needs to be pointed out is that when the major western cultural brokers failed to convert the Ndebele to their side, and when the Ndebele resisted Christianity and refused to open up their natural and human resources to uncontrolled exploitation by whites, they advocated for the destruction of the Ndebele kingdom so as to open space for western values and European colonialism. \(^9\) Ironically, even the advocates of the destruction of the Ndebele state resorted to human rights rhetoric to justify their unprovoked violent actions. The destruction of the Ndebele state was presented as a process of opening the way for "civilization", Christianity and as a way of serving the Shona from Ndebele cruelty. \(^10\) Hence an analysis of this period in the context of human rights and democracy debate is indeed crucial as it reveals important ambiguities in the encounter between Europeans and Africans in the nineteenth century.

5.1 The Encounter Between the Whites and the Ndebele

It is important to note the colonial encounter was not a contingent set of events, a cosmic coincidence in which some human beings happened arbitrarily into foreign text. It was an integral part of the rise of industrial capitalism, an expression of the
expansive universalism that marked the dawn of modernity. The impact of the early missionaries as harbingers of industrial capitalism lay in the fact that their civilising mission was simultaneously symbolic and practical, theological and temporal. In other words, the colonial encounter was a highly ritualised meeting of Europeans and Africans-endowed alike with their own history, their own culture, their own intentions-set the terms of the long contestation and conversation to follow.

The Ndebele first encountered the white people while they were still south of the Limpopo River. The white friend of King Mzilikazi, Reverend Robert Moffat came into direct contact with the Ndebele in Mosega in 1829. At the same time, two European traders namely, Schoon and McLuckie visited the Ndebele king's headquarters in early August 1829 where they demonstrated to the king the use of guns. Ndebele envoys led by Mncumbatha Khumalo visited Kuruman to invite Robert Moffat to visit the Ndebele king in the 1820s. After 1834 the Ndebele experienced open confrontations with the Voortrekkers. The climax of the Ndebele interactions with the white people prior to coming to Matebeleland was the signing of a treaty of general friendship between Mncumbatha Khumalo representing the Ndebele king, and Governor Benjamin D'urban of the Cape Colony on 3 March 1836. In short, the Ndebele had a long history of contact with white people prior to the conquest of their state in 1893.

What needs to be examined is the dynamics of the contact between the Ndebele and the white people. From the encounters of the 1820s, the Ndebele king
showed a keen interest in the white people. For instance, he asked Schoon and McLuckie to send missionaries to the Ndebele state. It would seem from this period onwards the Ndebele king’s attitude towards the whites was that of using them to secure guns rather than as western cultural brokers. Mzilikazi saw Robert Moffat not as a Christian missionary but rather as a powerful white king who could enable him to acquire guns and facilitate trade between the Ndebele and whites.\textsuperscript{14} Stanlake Samkange noted that Mzilikazi treated early whites with love and friendship and emphasised to them “how men seek to do evil against me”. He presented himself as a peaceful man who only wanted guns for shooting elephants and for defensive purposes.\textsuperscript{15} Mzilikazi’s wish for friendship with the early whites was spelt out in his prayer to his ancestors, which was witnessed and recorded by Robert Moffat during one of his visits. The prayer went like this: 

Moffat is saved by God. God is good to him. My companion, who is Mchobane, is come. God must preserve him, that he may return home in safety. No evil must befall him while he is with his children. We are his children. No one must tease him but let him go in peace, when he goes. He must stop long and then take a good report to Kuruman, to them, the white people also. Had my brother been alive, I would have sent him to remain at Kuruman for initiation, but he is dead by the late sickness which has killed so many of my people. My children are little. If I had one youth among them, I would send him. I wonder, I wonder to see such a man as Moffat, he is indeed my friend. Though I live among my own people, they will not inform me of an approaching enemy, but he will inform me. There is Machobane (pointing at Moffat). I shall send indunas with cattle to the Kuruman and he will send them to the white king, that they may inform him how men seek to do evil to me, and I shall hear and them pay a visit to the Kuruman, where I shall hear everything. When I obtain guns from the white king, I shall shoot elephants and give him ivory...\textsuperscript{16}

If Robert Moffat recorded Mzilikazi’s prayer properly, it is indeed necessary for the prayer to be quoted at length here because it encapsulates how Mzilikazi understood his encounter with the early whites. Firstly, Mzilikazi viewed Moffat as
his late father Mashobane who came to protect him and his people. Secondly, he viewed Moffat as a good man who would inform him about the approach of enemies to the Ndebele state. In short, to Mzilikazi, Moffat was important for diplomatic purposes. Finally, Mzilikazi in his prayer never alluded to Robert Moffat as a Christian missionary who came to teach him and his people about western values and morality. In other words, Mzilikazi showed in his prayer that he regarded the encounter between himself and the white people as a blessing only as far as they could protect him and his people from their enemies.

R. Kent Rasmussen noted that all interpretations of the encounter between Robert Moffat and Mzilikazi Khumalo are distorted by "our one-sided perspective: Moffat was literate and Mzilikazi was not. Hence, we know little about Mzilikazi's feelings towards Moffat beyond what Moffat himself chose to tell us."17 This was indeed a brilliant observation. However, as noted above the prayer of Mzilikazi, which Moffat recorded, reveals to some extent Mzilikazi's feelings towards the whites. To Mzilikazi, Robert Moffat was an important political figure; he was a king of Kuruman rather than a Christian missionary. Mzilikazi understood Moffat as a secular leader of great prestige, and who exercised influence over both the Tswana and the Griqua unmatched by any other individual.18

Mzilikazi was not open to such people as the Methodist missionary James Archbell who sought a new mission field because he considered him less powerful than Moffat. Mzilikazi solicited the introduction of resident missionaries among the Ndebele not for religious reasons but strictly secular purposes.19 He never asked
Robert Moffat to serve as a missionary among the Ndebele. Since he regarded Moffat as his political equal, a man with whom he might potentially exchange "state visits", asking him to serve as a missionary among the Ndebele was tantamount to giving the Ndebele two leaders and Moffat could challenge Mzilikazi's political position. Mzilikazi clearly stated his attitude towards Moffat in his farewell statement to him:

Tell the white king [i.e. Colonial governor] I wish to live in friendship, and he must not allow the Bastards [Griqua] and Korannas to annoy me as they have done. Let the road to Kuruman remain open.

Mzilikazi regarded Moffat as his only completely trustworthy European contact. On the other hand, Moffat acted as Mzilikazi's unofficial liaison with all European traders, hunters, and missionaries who entered the interior.

Even though it is difficult to get a clear and full picture of the Ndebele and their king's attitude and feelings towards their encounter with the white people, Robert Moffat's writings gives us a clear picture of how the white people represented by Moffat himself tried to inculcate their western values on the Ndebele and how they were intolerant and even dismissive of Ndebele traditional customs and traditions. Robert Moffat as an early white person to come into contact with the Ndebele mainly interacted with the powerful and wealthy chiefs and their clients. Moffat's visits were directed at the Ndebele king's court; hence his writings reflect what he witnessed at the Ndebele king's court rather than among the ordinary Ndebele people. His writings inevitably focused on such issues as the governmental system, the treatment of servants at the court of the king, and the administration of justice.
One needs to note that Robert Moffat as reflected in his writings, was deeply prejudiced against African culture in general and the Ndebele traditional norms in particular. As such Moffat tried hard to use his friendship and acceptance by the Ndebele king to inculcate his own worldview on the Ndebele. Despite the seemingly friendly relations between Moffat and Mzilikazi, Moffat still regarded Mzilikazi not as his equal but as a "savage" king who presided over a tyrannical system of government.\(^{23}\)

Moffat criticised such Ndebele customs and traditions as the law of celibacy, aggressive wars and what he considered to be cruel treatment of offenders. He mentioned that as a result of his requests, teachings and influence on Mzilikazi, the Ndebele king was forced to embark on a reform process. He even claimed that during his presence among the Ndebele, the Ndebele king pardoned offenders who might have been punished by death. Moffat also pointed out that as a result of his requests to Mzilikazi, the Ndebele king was forced to relax the law of celibacy and allowed considerable numbers of his male population to take wives and "don the head ring, the symbol of their new dignity".\(^{24}\) However, these claims of Robert Moffat need not to be taken at face value. Moffat as a Christian missionary and as an over zealous London Missionary Society (LMS) agent in Africa might have appropriated to himself what might have been an inevitable internal reform process among the Ndebele necessitated by changing political circumstances rather than Moffat's influence. In chapter three I discussed the changes that were adopted by the Ndebele as they transformed themselves from a life of migrants into a settled way of life.
Robert Moffat was indeed the first European to try and transmit Western values and norms to the Ndebele society. He tried to do so by exploiting the cordial relations between himself and the Ndebele king. However, it is difficult to ascertain the degree of his influence on the Ndebele norms and values. The Ndebele king was the main representative and defender of Ndebele traditional norms and culture. Hence one can mention that Moffat's attempt to inculcate western values "the top-down" style was bound to fail. Worse still Robert Moffat never established a personal mission station among the Ndebele to act as a launching pad for his ideas on the Ndebele. He only visited the Ndebele at intervals. For instance, he first visited the Ndebele in 1829, his second visit was in 1835 and his third visit was in 1854. Hence his influence should not be exaggerated.

However, there is evidence that show that even the Ndebele considered Robert Moffat to have had important influence in their lives and the actions of Mzilikazi. There is a widely-believed Ndebele tradition that Moffat warned Mzilikazi that the war with the Voortrekkers was inevitable if the Ndebele remained in the Transvaal, and that he should avoid such a disaster by leading his people to the region which became the present Matebeleland.²⁵ Rasmussen terms this tradition the "Moffat Myth" in the migration of the Ndebele from South Africa to the Zimbabwean plateau.²⁶ It is hard to believe that Moffat recommended that the Ndebele migrate to their new region because Moffat did not know anything about the Zimbabwean plateau until his third visit to the Ndebele in 1854. However, it would seem Robert
Moffat himself accepted and popularised the 'myth' in order to enhance his prestige among the Ndebele.\textsuperscript{27}

The white people, especially the Christian missionaries tried hard to spread their western values and norms after the Ndebele had settled in Matebeleland. N. Bhebe noted that both secular factors and traditional religion determined Ndebele reactions and attitudes towards the first missionaries, and that in 1857 Mzilikazi consented to the coming of the London missionaries purely for non-religious reasons.\textsuperscript{28} It was from this date that the Ndebele traditional society came to be directly challenged by western values and ideas.

5.2 The Ndebele Kingship and the Challenge of Western Influences

As mentioned in chapters three and four, the Ndebele kingship after the 1840s had succeeded in ritualising itself. It assumed both secular and religious powers to the extent that the political leadership could not be clearly separated from the leading religious figures. The Ndebele kingship was also a religious institution. The Ndebele culture and traditions buttressed the religious and political centrality of the kingship in the Ndebele society. Hence the kingship became the strongest defender of Ndebele traditional norms and status quo.

However, diplomatic and trade requirements forced the Ndebele kingship to consent to the settlement of the L.M.S missionaries in the Ndebele state in 1859. As noted by Bhebe, Mzilikazi hoped to use the missionaries as trading agents with white South Africa, secondly, he hoped that the settlement of L.M.S missionaries
in the Ndebele state would draw his personal friend Robert Moffat of the Kuruman mission station near to him and finally, the Ndebele king hoped to exploit missionary technical skills in mending and repairing of his fire arms.²⁹

The reality, however, was that the settlement of the L.M.S missionaries in the Ndebele state in 1859 posed a serious challenge not only to the Ndebele kingship but to the entire cherished Ndebele traditional way of life and norms. This was so because the L.M.S. missionaries' teaching conflicted and subverted Ndebele way of life. The Christian missionaries did not respect Ndebele traditional religious systems. Inevitably, a religious clash between the missionaries and the Ndebele began immediately after the Christian missionaries started their teaching and preaching.

The Christian missionary teaching was influenced by the western liberal ideas of individual rights, equality and fraternity.³⁰ In the Ndebele state collective or group rights were upheld and some aspects of communalism were regarded highly. The Ndebele society emphasised strict respect for the elders and the leaders. The leaders were particularly respected because they were considered to have both political and religious powers.³¹ However, only after a few months the L.M.S. missionaries were allowed to establish a mission station in the Ndebele state, they began to radically teach the Ndebele about western values and norms. For instance, on 15 July 1860, John Smith Moffat who was one of the L.M.S. missionaries, preached about the equality of all men regardless of age, sex and position in society-before God.³² This was indeed an attack on the social and
political structure of the Ndebele society where the king was not equal to anybody. The Ndebele also did not believe in the equality of men and women, as mentioned in chapter three, women were considered to be abesintwana (minors). J.S. Moffat, however, pointed out that all men were equal in the presence of Mzilikazi. This offended the king directly to the extent that he suddenly flared up in rage and ordered the interpreter to stop "telling the people such stuff and lies". 33

The missionary teaching with its implied equalitarianism challenged Mzilikazi’s supreme secular and religious position in the Ndebele society. The Ndebele conception of the relationship of the living with the supernatural world also emphasised seniority and status in the intercession with the ancestral spirits whereas the Christian view held that anyone could have direct access to God through prayers and sacrament. 34 As noted in chapters three and four, in the Ndebele state the royal ancestral spirits were held above other ancestral spirits and they protected the state as well as everybody. When it came to national issues God could only be reached via the royal ancestral spirits. Hence Mzilikazi was really angered by J.S. Moffat’s preaching about the equality of all men. On top of ordering the interpreter to stop telling people lies, he proceeded to order his people to sit well away from the missionary preacher in the next Sabbath so that they could hardly hear the sermon. The king from that day desisted from attending the services, he abandoned his observance of the Sabbath as a "sacred day," and finally, the king decided to go and live away from the missionaries. 35 He castigated the Sabbath as sacred only to the Christian missionaries and not to himself. 36
The missionaries also dismissed such important occasions as the *inxwala* ceremonies and other rain-ceremonies as "meaningless traditions and dreams" of uncivilised people. As noted by J.R.D. Cobbing, Christian missionaries pre-occupied themselves with the inculcation of a code of behaviour which had little relevance for the Ndebele. Their emphasis and opposition to polygamy and witchcraft made them to appear to be setting up themselves as an opponent of the Ndebele norms and way of life. As a result the L.M.S. missionaries failed to make meaningful inroads into the Ndebele way of life in the period 1859 to 1868. Their failure as noted by Bhebe, was compounded by their refusal to satisfy the Ndebele people’s material aspirations. They refused to trade on behalf of the Ndebele king, arguing that Christianity should be accepted by the people on its own merits without any bribery. However, the Ndebele were used to their own religion that offered immediate material benefits such as women fertility, rain, good crops and livestock as well as protected them from enemies and illness.

The Ndebele king thus did not accept Christianity as an alternative way of life that was superior to the traditional Ndebele traditions and culture. G.V. Austin noted that even though in the 1860s, Mzilikazi was getting older, he was still shrewd and clear minded to the extent that he realised the revolutionary impact of embracing Christianity and that his exclusive sovereignty included extensive religious and secular power as well.

Even though the reign of Lobengula Khumalo witnessed a growth in missionary interest in the Ndebele state, Lobengula like his father did not renounce his
traditional religion. Like his father, Lobengula's power and security as a leader rested on his ability to combine secular and religious activities to the benefit of his subjects. Much of Lobengula's prestige in the Ndebele state rested on his reputation as a good rainmaker, and his co-operation with the Mwari cult priests as well as Christian missionaries. He widely relied on the both Shona and Ndebele diviners to smell out potential rivals and rebels as witches.\textsuperscript{41} Bhebe noted rightly that a formidable alliance between the Ndebele kingship and the religious institutions largely accounted for the Ndebele indifference to Christianity.\textsuperscript{42}

When Lobengula was installed as king of the Ndebele, he did not accept the Christian missionary faith as a way of survival even in the face of formidable opposition to his accession to the Ndebele throne. Even though he once stayed with the missionary Thomas Morgan Thomas and not withstanding that Lobengula was given asylum by missionaries during Nabayezinduna crisis of the 1840s he did not embrace Christianity at the expense of his religion, instead he accepted the insignia of the Mwari cult "order" consisting of "black cloth" which he wore round his waist and was accepted into the Mwari cult priesthood.\textsuperscript{43} However, Lobengula like Lewanika of Barotseland who made use of both missionaries and the royal graves to legitimise his rule, tried to indigenise Christianity without throwing away traditional Ndebele customs. Lobengula emphasised that Christianity and Ndebele traditional religion had equal conceptions of the supernatural world and its relationship with the living human beings. Lobengula believed that the two religious systems were divinely willed at creation and that it was wrong for Christianity to be imposed on the other. It must be noted that the
Ndebele had already integrated Mwari cult into their religious beliefs so Lobengula tried to absorb aspects of Christianity to Ndebele traditional religion. In defence of Ndebele culture and religion, Lobengula was quoted as having said to the Christian missionaries:

He believed in God, he believed God had made all things, as he wanted them. He had made all people and that he had made every country and tribe just as he wished them to remain, he believed God made the Amandebele as he wished to be and it was wrong for any one to seek to alter them.\textsuperscript{44}

This was indeed an enlightened defence for the Ndebele right to cultural and religious autonomy that the Christian missionaries sought to destroy. What Lobengula did for missionaries was to allow L.M.S. to open a second missionary station called Hope Fountain. Above all Lobengula, like his father realised that he could not excite the displeasure of the religious institutions without loosing much of his power and prestige.

In short, the Ndebele kingship was indeed the major defender of Ndebele cultural autonomy from European influences. The kingship defended Ndebele traditional norms and way of life because it was a prop to its power and privileged position. On the other hand, the Christian missionaries stigmatised the Ndebele kingship's resistance to western values and ideas especially Christianity as a sign of savagery. Their correspondence with their colleagues commonly described the Ndebele kingship as symptomatic of dictatorial and despotic government. The failure of the Christian missionaries ultimately led them to advocate for the destruction of the Ndebele kingdom as the only way to open it up to Western ideas and values. This view was clearly expressed by Reverend D. Carnegie's
prayer of 1889. He specifically called for the destruction of the kingdom in the following words:

Oh! For liberty and freedom and a power to break the cords of this savage monarch! This done then our mission will begin. It was so in Zululand it is so here and will continue to be so until a new government is formed and just laws administered to the people.  

The call for the destruction of the Ndebele state and for the removal of Lobengula indicated beyond doubt Christian missionaries’ intolerance of the autonomy of African societies and their culture. Moreover, the call for the removal of the Ndebele kingship was misplaced because the king was not alone in the struggle to resist cultural imperialism. Another group that was vehemently opposed to Christian missionaries and western values was that of religious practitioners.

5.3 Ndebele Religious Practitioners and Western Ideas

N. Bhebe noted that Lobengula was as much the pawn of the traditional religious authorities, as the latter were his. He could not act contrary to the interests of these religious practitioners without some serious loss of popularity and hence undermining his very position as king.

In the Ndebele state, there were various religious practitioners with different professions. There were the rain-priests (amahosana), and diviners (izangoma) these excelled in the field of divination. There were also izanusi (magicians), witch doctors (izinyanga) and army-doctors (izinyanga zebutho). These group of people were closely allied to the Ndebele traditional norms and acted as the major
Ndebele cultural brokers. They were specialised in different fields, for instance, the rain-priests concentrated on issues related to the provision of rain to the Ndebele state. As the Ndebele were an agricultural people, rain was very important to their lives, hence everybody respected rain-priests. Diviners and magicians specialised in foretelling future events and discovered causes of illness and other hidden "facts" through spirit possession, and by *ukuvumisa* process (make agree). Witch doctors concentrated on witch-hunting.\(^{48}\) These different professions carried with them privileges and even material gains in the Ndebele state. A number of these professionals received payments in the form of cattle and other goods for their services.\(^{49}\) These religious practitioners constituted a group of respected and wealthy people in the Ndebele society. On the other hand, these Ndebele religious practitioners were useful to the society especially in establishing the justice of witchcraft charges.

The attempt by missionaries to turn upside-down traditional Ndebele norms that recognised the services of the Ndebele traditional religious practitioners was vigorously resisted. The Ndebele traditional religious authorities working together with the Ndebele kingship had a powerful hold on the people. Hence the coming of western ideas posed a threat to these people's profession. As a result the Ndebele traditional religious practitioners constituted a formidable force that stood for the autonomy of Ndebele culture and they vehemently resisted western ideas. For instance, when Robert Moffat led the first group of Christian missionaries in 1859 into the Ndebele state, he observed signs and symptoms of lung sickness among their draught oxen and immediately reported these to Mzilikazi. Mzilikazi's
response was not only to quarantine the diseased animals but he also arranged for his traditional religious practitioners to administer medical treatment to the missionaries themselves. The missionaries were cleansed and their possessions were sprinkled with medicines soaked in water. This was the first sign of clash between missionaries and the Ndebele traditional religious practitioners. On the missionary side, the cleansing ritual was of no significance, but on the Ndebele side, the ritual was an important process meant to chase away "bad spirit" causing diseases and other misfortunes.\textsuperscript{50}

Immediately after the arrival of the missionaries, the Ndebele religious practitioners became active and vigilant for any misfortunes befalling the Ndebele society and were quick to blame them on the presence of the whites in the Ndebele state. The Christian missionaries isolated themselves more from the mainstream of the Ndebele society by deliberately showing lack of respect for Ndebele religious beliefs and cultural taboos. For instance, in November 1859, when the Ndebele were preparing for their most important annual religious \textit{inxwala} ceremony through which they worshipped the royal ancestral spirits, the missionaries became rather dismissive of the whole affair. When the Ndebele entered \textit{umthontiso} rituals, which preceded \textit{inxwala}, everybody was supposed to stop engaging in the normal daily activities for that week. However, the missionaries defied this norm by going out hunting and fishing during this sacred national holiday.
The intolerance and lack of respect by Christian missionaries towards Ndebele culture and norms gave the Ndebele traditional religious practitioners ammunition to stigmatise and blame the missionaries for any misfortunes that befell the Ndebele society after 1859. In defence of the Ndebele culture and their professions which were challenged by the white man’s religion, the traditional religious practitioners began to blame the white people for having come with such animal diseases as lung sickness which claimed a lot of Ndebele cattle in the 1860s. The death of Loziba, the favourite wife of Mzilikazi on 5 October 1862 of rheumatic fever, the outbreak of smallpox by December of the same year and the severe diarrhoea were all seen as disasters associated with the permanent presence of whites among the Ndebele. A Ndebele song that was composed in the 1860s revealed how the Ndebele associated the epidemics with the missionaries. The song had the following words:

Umoya lo uvelapi na?
Uvela koMtshede enkulumana.
(This wind whence comes it?
From Moffat from Kuruman).

As to how the Ndebele religious practitioners attributed the disasters to the presence of the whites, one needs to understand the tenets of Ndebele religion. As mentioned in chapter three and four, the Ndebele believed that the amadlozi (ancestral spirits) had power over their lives. Fortunes manifested their pleasure and misfortunes exhibited their displeasure. Generally, the Ndebele believed that the anger of ancestral spirits could be aroused by a person or a group of persons not conforming to the proper respect of Ndebele culture and more specifically not respecting the proper relationship between the living and the dead. The Christian missionaries easily fell in this category.
The Ndebele traditional religious practitioners together with the Ndebele kingship formed a strong resistance to the activities of the Christian missionaries. As will be shown later, it was also the same people that called for a violent confrontation with the whites. Lobengula, for instance, depended on both Shona and Nguni diviners to smell out potential rivals and rebels as witches and could not easily do away with these people because the security and authority of his office partly rested on them.54

5.4 Other Ndebele People's Response to Whites

Generally, the Ndebele welcomed the white traders and exchanged goods with them constantly. Even the Ndebele king is said to have consented to the first missionary's entry into the Ndebele state because he wanted them to trade on his behalf. Bhebe noted that the Ndebele did not mind about commercial people who came and went.55

The Christian missionaries expected the ordinary Ndebele people to readily accept Christianity because they thought they lived under a tyrannical system of government. They thought women were going to welcome Christianity as they considered them to be suffering under the "yoke" of polygamous marriages. Moreover, they thought ordinary Ndebele people were going to welcome them so as to escape "tyrannical" practices like witch-hunting.56 Their sermons about equality of all men-regardless of sex, age and position in society - before God, was meant to appeal to the down-trodden members of the Ndebele society such as captives and what the whites preferred to term "slaves". 57
However, the overwhelming evidence shows that not only the kingship and the Ndebele traditional religious practitioners resisted the invasion of their culture and religious beliefs but also even the ordinary people did not readily accept Christianity. As noted by such scholars as R. Oliver, M. Wright and J.F. Ade Ajayi who worked on the theme of Christian enterprise in East Africa and West Africa, missionaries got their first faithful converts from among the slaves they rescued from traders and among their house-hold servants.\(^5\) However, in the Ndebele society this was not the case, and Bhebe explains the uniqueness of the Ndebele society on the basis of the fact, that slavery and the slave trade, the factors that so encouraged the early westernisation of East and West Africa, were somewhat lacking in western Zimbabwe.\(^6\) He proceeded to say that,

> Although nineteenth century European observers sometimes described the capturing of the Shona and the Hole as equivalents of slave raiding and slavery, the Ndebeleised indigenous people never felt their social position so precarious as to make them seek security among the missionaries.\(^7\)

Since the Ndebele culture was a blend of Nguni, Sotho and Shona inputs, it tended to accommodate almost everybody from the lowest in the socio-economic and political hierarchy to the kingship. The missionaries's challenge to such Ndebele traditional institutions as polygamy and witch-hunting did not appeal even to the ordinary Ndebele people. In other words, the Ndebele society in general displayed a strong cultural conservatism and resistance to alien forces that led the Christian missionaries to labour for decades without converts.

At another level, the ordinary people did not readily embrace Christianity openly because of fear of the Ndebele leadership that was opposed to it. Bhebe
mentioned that "Witch-doctors and medicine men were in power, and no one would have dared to be different from anyone else". Mzilikazi is said to have warned the Ndebele people who attended school regularly in 1862 in these words; "Yes I see you listen to the teachers more than to me, you love them more than me". Such threats from the king himself made the ordinary people to fear to embrace Christianity and other western ideas. In another instance, when the missionary Sykes told Mzilikazi that God spoke to all men through the bible, Mzilikazi declared, "I tell my people my own words". Indeed such statements show to some extent that perhaps the ordinary Ndebele people did not embrace Christianity because they were warned not to do so by the Ndebele kingship.

Some people went to the extent of saying that,

> We like to learn and hear about God and His Word but if we say openly that we belong to King Jesus, then we shall be accused of disloyalty to Lobengula and of witchcraft and killed.

The engagement between the Ndebele and the Christian missionaries was nothing more than a clash of two hegemonic projects. Both projects were predicated on winning the consent of the great masses of the Ndebele population. The contest was characterised by high level of evangelism by the Ndebele and the missionaries, intrigue, threats, and fear among the subordinate groups. The subordinate groups constituted the fish open to be caught by the missionaries. But the Ndebele ruling elite could not just let the fish to go. The end product was the clash of hegemonies.

5.5 The Few Who Embraced White Religion
The fact that they were few Ndebele people who openly embraced Christianity demonstrates that the Ndebele hegemonic project was porous. While it largely succeeded in capturing the popular mentality and the Ndebele common conceptions of the world, it was never total. The coming of missionaries posed a serious threat to the Ndebele hegemonic edifice. Christian ideology generated a contradictory consciousness in the Ndebele state, whose main features were to foster a discontinuity between the world of the Ndebele as hegemonically constituted and the world as practically apprehended, and ideologically represented, by subordinate people (the man-in-the-mass).

The act of embraced Christianity in the midst of a Ndebele ruling elite that was against it, demonstrated a form of complex response of subordinate groups, consisting of an ambiguous admixture of tacit (even uncomprehending) accommodation to the Ndebele hegemonic order at one level and diverse expression of symbolic and practical resistance at another. The missionaries thought the Hole whom they considered to be slaves in the Ndebele state were most likely to respond favourable to Christianity as a liberating religion. But it turned out that the people they thought were oppressed were equally resistant to Christianity. For instance, Father Prestage was allowed by Lobengula in 1887 to open a mission station at Empandeni in the midst of the Kalanga, but the Kalanga did not respond favourable to Christianity. Father Prestage tried to explain his failure in the following manner:

Our failure at Empandeni was not owing to the unwillingness of the natives to learn, and even become Christians, but it was due to the overwhelming terror, engaged by the system of government, which seizes every native in
the country, when it is a case of [casting?] off their pagan customs to [adopt the] new system.68

He simply blamed the Ndebele kingship for the failure of Christianity in the Ndebele state. This indicated the deep-rooted ness of Ndebele, anti-Christian hegemonic project in the minds of the subordinate groups.

However, it would very unscientific to gloss over the reaction of subordinate groups to the Christian message. The missionaries were busy trying to win the consent of subordinate groups in the Ndebele state as a way of replacing the Ndebele hegemonic social order. While previous scholars took comfort in concluding that the missionary enterprise failed in the Ndebele state prior to colonial rule, it is clear that they down played the significance of the few who openly embraced Christianity. They missed the opportunity to understand the fact that subordinate groups, particularly those with communal identities, also have ideologies. Their ideologies of resistance are only overshadowed by the bigger wave of state hegemony. Among the Ndebele were a few people who defied all odds and showed keen interest in the teachings of the missionaries. By May 1888 Frederick William Sykes found that about 50-60 people attended Sunday service at Inyathi. At Hope Fountain twenty-five to thirty people came to Church and always paid great attention to the words of the preacher.69

The question, which needs to be addressed, is that of the forces that led a few people to embrace Christianity and to dissociate themselves from traditional Ndebele religion. N. Bhebe identified a few examples of Ndebele people who embraced Christianity. The first example is that of Manqeba who became a
staunch supporter of the idea of opening up the Ndebele kingdom to missionary enterprise. He gave up the whole idea of going to Ndebele traditional doctors preferring western medical attention given by missionaries. He also preferred to wear European dress. However, Manqeba's association with western traditions led some Ndebele chiefs to make allegations that he wanted to usurp Ndebele kingship with his white friends, that he made love to Mzilikazi's wives and that he intended to kill the king. These allegations forced Mzilikazi to execute Manqeba in July 1862.

Bhebe points out that it is difficult to know why Manqeba showed such an interest in the missionaries to the extent that he was prepared to die for his friendship with them. The reality is that these people represented a small but growing critique to the existing Ndebele social order. They were attracted by the teachings of missionaries, who attempted to present their activities as representing a historically true religion that was concretely universal. Manqeba, Lotshe Hlabangana who was executed in 1889, and a few others were a concrete evidence of the fact that missionaries had managed in seeding their culture, especially in the fissures of local communities. These people were sceptical of some aspects of Ndebele culture and religion. These were people who sought to take advantage of the spaces created by the missionaries' presence to fight some of the inhuman practices in their own Ndebele culture such as witch-hunting. Lotshe, for instance, once survived execution sometime before 1889 when he was accused of being a witch. Hence he wanted such practices to come to an end.
There were others like Shisho Moyo who became the first London Missionary society ordained minister. As for Moyo, he was not part and parcel of the Ndebele ruling class. Manqeba and Lotshe were prominent advisers of the Ndebele kings. Moyo belonged to the subordinated and belittled captives. He was under the care and control of an Ndebele chief called Mabiza.\textsuperscript{74} His case perhaps can be easily explained on basis of the fact that he embraced Christianity in order to escape his downtrodden status. Christian missionaries preached about equality of all men before God. Such teachings were inevitably attractive to those people who were subordinated to other people like Moyo to Mabiza.\textsuperscript{75}

Another group of people who tended to embrace western religion were those who worked as servants of the white missionaries. Thomas, who was based at Shiloh, was the first missionary to preach to the Ndebele who worked for him in his station.\textsuperscript{76} In the morning, just before the workers went to their different task and at break time, they were taught how to read and write on top of bible reading and praying. The first case in point was that of Lomaqele who worked as a servant of Thomas for twelve years and was baptised on 3 July 1881.\textsuperscript{77} On 24 April 1882, Lomaqele was "united in holy wedlock" with another convert named Baleni Gumbo.\textsuperscript{78} There were few others who embraced Christianity openly like the above mentioned people. It would seem the few people that embraced Christianity realised some attractive aspects in it. They could have compared some aspects of the Ndebele culture and religion and realised that Christianity was more liberal. Christian missionaries emphasised peace rather than war, forgiveness rather than revenge, equality rather than oppression and it criticised such practices as witch-
hunting, which claimed a lot of Ndebele lives. These were indeed some of the aspects of Christianity that could have attracted a few people. One can even say that the coming of Christian missionaries offered a critique to Ndebele traditional religion which ended up being accepted by a few who realised that the society needed reform.

It is not enough to just conclude that, by and large, Christian missionary enterprise was not a success in the Ndebele state. While it is true that the majority of the Ndebele people rejected it, it was able to demonstrate the crucial fact that Ndebele hegemony was invariably unstable. From the mute experiences of those who embraced Christianity, a picture of tensions emerges predicated on new kinds of experimental consciousness, new ideas that pointed to the discrepancies between received worldviews and the world they claimed to mirror. Having made some inroads, the missionaries as part of the Victorian hegemonic project, joined the colonialists in calling for the formal colonization of the Ndebele state.

5.6 Imperial Interests and the Ndebele State

The imperialists like Cecil John Rhodes were another group of westerners who worked hard to destroy the Ndebele people’s traditional way of life. The imperialists were different from the Christian missionaries in that their concentration was on economic resources of the Ndebele state.

Cecil Rhodes in the period 1888 to 1892. He isolated nine aims in Cecil John Rhodes’ grand imperialist design about the African societies north of the Limpopo River in the 1890s. The prominent aspect in it was the intention to destroy the Ndebele state and to exploit both human and material resources on the Zimbabwean plateau.

Other scholars like Stanlake Samkange, P.R. Warhurst, R. Brown, Ake Holmberg, and Julian Cobbing produced impressive details of the deception and chicanery of Cecil John Rhodes’ representatives as they worked very hard to make his grand imperial plan a reality between 1888 and 1890. What needs to be emphasised here is that Rhodes and his associates, including some missionaries like Charles Helm and David Carnegie, all tried to use human rights rhetoric to justify imperial destruction of the Ndebele state. The period 1888 to 1890 saw a number of descriptions of the Ndebele state as an obstacle to the spread of civilization and Christianity, as a "kingdom of heathen tyranny" which "cannot remain intact for many months".

The associates of Rhodes like Rutherford Harris and Leander S. Jameson went to the extent of collecting exaggerated details on previous Ndebele raids on the Shona and the previously ignored missionary letters and other documents calling for intervention on behalf of the Shona were also collected and sent to the British press. Rotberg argued that Rhodes and his friends had glean of gold in their eyes and avarice for land in their blood as they advanced to Matebeleland. On 27 September 1893, Harris wrote to London Board that:
The question of contention between the Company and Lobengula is not one of the gold or land or taxes, but is the unfortunate slave or Maholi.  

It is clear that Harris tried to hide the economic designs of the imperialists behind the human rights issues. Even hunters like Frederick C. Selous did not sympathise with the Ndebele after the whites had conquered them. He wrote that:

No one knowing their abominable history can pity them or lament their downfall. They have been paid back in their own coin.

Indeed, the imperialists and other enemies of the Ndebele state seized the Ndebele raids on the Shona to justify their attack on the Ndebele state in 1893. The irony is that after the fall of the Ndebele state both the Ndebele and the Shona were subjected to cruel treatment by the British colonialists. Details on how the British conquered and ruled the Ndebele are given in chapter six.

What can be said here is that the spread of whites to the Ndebele state in the nineteenth century became the major source of the gradual destruction of the Ndebele state. As noted by Bhebe in his article, "Ndebele Politics During the Scramble," white influences ended up polarising the Ndebele leadership into two camps, namely the "pacifists" which included Lobengula, Lotshe and Gampu Sithole and the "anti-white block" or the so-called "conservatives of the conservatives" mainly led by Ndebele religious practitioners like the army doctor, Hlegisane.

The so-called "conservatives of the conservatives" could be further characterised as the hard-core Ndebele nationalists. Their main views were that Mzilikazi, the
founder of the Ndebele state had no business with white prospectors, and hence Lobengula must pursue the same course of action. They described whites as intruders who wanted to turn their society upside-down, they argued that the minerals that existed in the Ndebele state was not for the whites to mine but it was a Ndebele heritage and property, for them to sell in gulls and finally, this group did not even want whites to be allowed to enter Mashonaland, they wanted confrontation with the whites. The newly created amabutho joined this group in calling for a violent confrontation with whites.  

Hlegisane raised a brilliant argument in his opposition to the Rudd concession. This is how he put forward his case:

I have been at Kimberley Diamonds Fields and one or two white men cannot work, it takes thousands to work them. Do not those thousands want water and they also want land? It is the same with gold, once it is found the white men will come to work it, and then there will be trouble. You say you do not want any land, how can you dig for gold without it? Is it not in the land? and by digging into the land is it not taking it, and do these thousands not make fires? Will that not take wood?

Indeed Hlegisane, though whites like William Frederick Sykes blamed him as one of the so-called "conservatives of the conservatives", demonstrated beyond doubt that he had a long foresight and he expressed the far-reaching consequences not only of the Rudd Concession, but also of the imperialist adventures in general. Hlegisane had worked at Kimberley Diamond Mines as a migrant worker. It seems he imbibed some tenets of “enlightenment” from other migrant workers from other parts of Southern Africa. However, he remained a “nationalist” who understood
white ideas of dominance and supremacy but remained an ardent supporter of traditional Ndebele life and beliefs.

The "pacific group" accepted the inevitability of white dominance in the Ndebele state and what they tried to do as noted by Bhebe, was to make whites enter the Ndebele state on Ndebele terms rather on their own terms with the consequences of destroying Ndebele traditional life.89 This group could be further described as "realists" who first of all considered that other powerful states like that of the Zulu fell on the hands of whites when the Zulus tried to offer violent resistance.90

However, what needs to be said is that the polarisation of the Ndebele state into "conservatives of conservatives" on the one hand, and the "pacific group" on the other was caused by the white influence which began with the entry into the Ndebele state by missionaries in 1859. The polarisation of the state made it to fail to offer meaningful resistance when attacked in 1893.

It is clear that the colonial encounter had the long-term impact of altering everyone and everything involved. The hegemonic project created by Mzilikazi Khumalo had come into direct conflict with Victorian hegemony that was expansive and more universal.


6. Ibid.

7. We have cases of people like Manqeba and Lotshe Hlabangana who exhibited a liking for western ideas and Christianity.


9. Christian missionaries like Charles D. Helm and David Carnegie openly sided with the imperialist agenda of the destruction of the Ndebele state.

10. File Historical Manuscript W16/1/1, Elliot to Wilson, September 1890 where at Palapye, the missionary Elliot heard" of the joy of the poor Mashona of Tjibi's people and others at the prospect of their deliverance".


16. Ibid.
17. R.K. Rasmussen, Migrant Kingdom, pp.67-68.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
22. R.K. Rasmussen, Migrant Kingdom, pp.68-69.
26. The idea of the "Moffat Myth" is borrowed from R.K. Rasmussen, Migrant Kingdom, p.43.
27. R. Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.500-587, he presented himself as a symbol of the efforts of Christian mission work to preserve peace in Southern Africa.
28. N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.27.
29. Ibid, pp.27-29.
31. See Chapters 3 and 4 in this thesis.
34. N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.30.
36. Ibid.
37. Quoted in N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.33.
41. This view is derived from N. Bhebe, Christianity, pp.47-48.
42. Ibid, pp.48-50.
43. File Historical Manuscript BE2/1/1 where Lobengula is referred to as Ngwalongwalo, see also J.B. Richards, "The Mlimo - Belief and Practice of the Kalanga" in NADA, xix (1942), pp.51-55.
44. File B1/F2/JD, Thomson to Secretary, 2 December 1870, also quoted in N.Bhebe, Christianity, p.53.
46. N. Bhebe, Christianity, pp.47-50.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. J.P.R. Wallis (ed), Matabele Mission, p.75.
51. Ibid. See also N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.28.
52. Ibid.
53. This is widely discussed by N. Bhebe, Christianity, pp.27-35.
54. T.M. Thomas, Eleven Years, p.230. N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.31 also quotes the song.
58. Robert Moffat described the Ndebele system of government as "tyrannical in the strictest sense of the word" see J.P.R. Wallis (ed), The Matabele Journals Volume One, p.24.
59. The Christian missionaries and other whites tended to describe Ndebele women and captives as slaves, see N. Rouillard (ed), Matabele Thompson: An Autobiography, (Books of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, 1977) p.112 and T.M. Thomas, Eleven Years, p.260 where he concluded that marriages among the Ndebele were "little more than commercial transactions in which the heart had no share".
61. N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.158.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid. p.40. See also File Historical Manuscript, MISC/CA5, Mrs Carnegie to Good, 1 November 1937.
64. Quoted in N. Bhebe, Christianity, p.38.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid. p.61.
67. File Historical Manuscript B01/2/2, Alexander Boggie, "Lobengula" Unpublished article, 1905, see also N. Bhebe, "Missionary Activity", pp.41-52.
68. Ibid.
69. Quoted in N. Bhebe, Christianity, p. 59.
70. File Historical Manuscript MISC/SY1/1/1 Sykes's Journal, pp.8-9; see also File Historical Manuscript MISC/CAS, M.M. to Good, 1 November 1937.
71. This case of Manqeba is borrowed from N. Bhebe, Christianity, pp.33-4.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
75. File Historical Manuscript MISC/SY1/1/1 Sykes's Journal, pp.7-9.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. File Historical Manuscript TH2/1/1 Thomas's Journal, pp.131-133.
79. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
84. See Cape Argus, 3 January 1893.
85. File L05/2/30, Harris to London Board, 27 September 1893.
86. File Historical Manuscript, SE1/1/1, Selous to his mother, 15 November 1893.
87. N. Bhebe, "Ndebele Politics", pp.28-34.
88. Ibid.
89. File Historical Manuscript W16/2/1, Wilson's Journals, entry for 12 March 1889.
91. Ibid, pp.28-29.
CHAPTER SIX

IMPERIAL VIOLENCE AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NDEBELE STATE, 1890-1897

Introduction

In the period 1890 to 1897, the Ndebele state became a victim of imperial violence and destruction. The existence of an independent Ndebele state was interpreted by the advocates of Victorian aggrandizement, as a barrier to the advances of "Civilization and Christianity" in general and the imperial interests of Cecil John Rhodes and the British South Africa Company (B.S.A.Co) in particular.¹

The subjugation and colonization of the Ndebele state was a catalogue of violence. Some self-proclaimed "liberators" of the Shona from Ndebele tyranny took part in this violence.² While the agents of British imperialism including Christian missionaries portrayed the Ndebele state as profoundly undemocratic and human rights unconscious, and colonial conquest as bringing freedom and human rights to the Africans, the activities of the B.S.A.Co in the period 1890 to 1897 made it abundantly clear how hypocritical these ideas were in practice. The period saw ruthless destruction of the Ndebele state that left a legacy of bloodshed rather than peaceful westernisation. The British colonialists behaved "with callous contempt toward the political rights of Africans."³ Robert R. Rotberg noted that Rhodes and his colleagues in the destruction of the Ndebele state moved with no discernible feeling for the fate of the Ndebele, they brushed aside the inconvenient admonitions of humanitarians and suffered no pangs of conscience over their part in the violent destruction of the Ndebele state.⁴ The role
and duty of people like Charles D. Helm, Charles D. Rudd and other friends of Rhodes was to "mollify, sweettalk and square" the Ndebele King so as to open up the Ndebele kingdom for whites to exploit the natural as well as human resources without interference. However, Lobengula and his people realised the impeding jeopardy and tried to repudiate all dangerous concessions such as the Rudd Concession of October 1888 in an endeavour to recoup their autonomy and sovereignty before it vanished forever. Their efforts nonetheless proved fruitless in the face of aggressive British imperialism.

The chapter, therefore, seeks to examine firstly, how the B.S.A.Co instigated violence between the Ndebele and the Shona in the period 1890 to 1893 in an endeavour to weaken the Ndebele state and "soften" it before coming in to make the final obliteration, secondly, analyse the actual destruction of the Ndebele state in 1893 when the B.S.A.Co. military forces directly attacked the Ndebele. An attempt is made to expose the ruthless tactics employed by the white forces such as plunder, looting and burning of Ndebele properties and homes by people who claimed to be representatives of civilization and Christian ideals in Africa. Finally, the chapter examines the desperate last stand of the Ndebele against the white colonialists in 1896 and how the failure of Ndebele rising heralded the formal colonization of their state. All these were indeed landmarks of the white people's callous contempt for Ndebele economic, social and political rights.
6.1 Imperial Instigation of Violence Between The Ndebele and the Shona, 1890-1893.

The entry of the Pioneer Column, a collection of filibusters in Mashonaland in September 1890 brought imperial violence nearer to the Ndebele state than before. As noted by Cobbing, the occupation of Mashonaland changed for all time the balance of power on the Zimbabwean highveld, and the consequences for Ndebele hegemony were considerable.\(^7\) After the occupation of Mashonaland, the B.S.A.Co began to engineer and instigate violence, firstly, between the Ndebele and the Shona, and secondly, between the Ndebele and B.S.A.Co so as to justify their attack and destruction of the Ndebele state.

The instigation of violence between the Ndebele and the Shona of the "tributary zone" had twofold purposes. Firstly, it was meant to justify the B.S.A.Co as a force that came to restore order, make peace and liberate the Shona from Ndebele tyranny and to stamp out Ndebele "savagery and violence". For instance, in February 1892 the B.S.A.Co. Secretary wrote that:

I hope they do raid the Barotses. All these raids and deaths and murders ought to be entered into a book, so that we may always be able to prove justification and their being a cruel damnable race.\(^8\)

At a second level, the B.S.A.Co instigated violence between the Ndebele and the Shona of the "tributary zone" so as to weaken Ndebele hegemony through creating as many enemies for them as possible. The B.S.A.Co wanted allies in its planned attack on the Ndebele state and the Shona who were paying tribute and those who were raided by the Ndebele were correctly identified as potential allies if properly instigated to stop paying tribute and even to raid the Ndebele.\(^9\)
This is how the B.S.A.Co engineered and instigated violence between the Ndebele and the Shona in the period 1890 to 1893: to the Shona of the "tributary zone", they promised protection from Ndebele raids and encouraged them to stop paying tribute to the Ndebele and even to defect from Ndebele control. To the Ndebele, they pretended to be neutral to the way the Ndebele related with the people of the "tributary zone" and sometimes going to the extent of reporting some Shona to the Ndebele who happened to be too close to the Portuguese. Secondly, they encouraged Lobengula to exaggerate the extent of Ndebele power and influence so as to sustain the claims of the Rudd Concession. Lobengula fell into their trap by launching full-scale raids on the Shona in the period 1890 to 1893 and one of these raids was used as a pretext to destroy the Ndebele state in 1893.

The classic instance of how the B.S.A.Co instigated violence between the Ndebele and Shona in order to achieve its own objectives came in December 1890, just three months after the Pioneer Column had occupied Mashonaland. In December 1890, the B.S.A.Co sent off a messenger to Bulawayo to inform the Ndebele king that Nemakonde in the northeast had accepted a Portuguese flag and was flying it in his chieftaincy in subversion of his status as a subject of the Ndebele. F. Rutherford Harris, the B.S.A.C.O. secretary went to the extent of stating that:

Lo Magunda for the last seventy (sic) years had paid tribute to Lo Bengula. This action of the Portuguese is an invasion of Mashonaland.
On the basis of this encouragement Lobengula launched an attack on Nemakonde and Nemakonde was killed. After the death of Nemakonde, the B.S.A.Co did not celebrate that Lobengula had responded promptly to their report. Instead Jameson, the B.S.A.Co's administrator responded by telling Lobengula that:

I am sending a party of Police to investigate and ...in the event of any subsidiary chief not paying his tribute as formerly, his (Lobengula's) proper course would be to appeal to the white man in Mashonaland, whose laws are framed for black as well as white.¹²

In short, the B.S.A.Co was deliberately causing confusion with the intention of weakening the Ndebele state's hegemony. The action of sending a messenger to Lobengula in December 1890 to inform him about Nemakonde's relations with the Portuguese was meant to outwit the Portuguese who were threatening B.S.A.Co's hegemony in Mashonaland by entering into treaties with some Shona chiefs especially in the eastern parts of the Zimbabwean plateau.

Between 1891 and 1893, after the Nemakonde saga, the B.S.A.Co entered into "unholy alliances" with a number of the Shona chieftaincies that bordered the Ndebele state and encouraged them to defect, to refuse to pay tribute and even assisted some in their resistance to Ndebele punitive raids. Lobengula failed to see the "invisible" hand of the B.S.A.Co behind the resistance of the Shona of the "tributary zone" and decided to launch full-scale raids on Chivi Madlangove,¹³ Nemakonde Mazimbangura,¹⁴ intervened in a succession crisis in Chirumhanzu chieftaincy,¹⁵ attacked Bere and his people in the Victoria district,¹⁶ and even launched a raid across the Zambezi to attack Lewanika in 1893 which proved
disastrous for the Ndebele.\(^{17}\) In this way Lobengula fell directly into the B.S.A.Co’s trap unawares. To Lobengula and the Ndebele the raids of the period 1890-1893 were defensive, they were meant to maintain status quo that was being subverted by the defection of such groups as those of Sipolilo, Hwata, Gutu, Chirumhanzu, Chivi, Matibi and others who decided to throw off their allegiance to the Ndebele state.\(^ {18}\) However, on the B.S.A.Co side the raids confirmed their argument that the Ndebele state survived on violence against the Shona and that such a state could not be allowed to exist. Moreover, the raids forced some Shona chieftaincies to ally with the B.S.A.Co against the Ndebele, for instance, Chivi Madlangove was raided by the Ndebele in November 1891 and in July 1892 which forced him to ask for white support, and Nemakonde Mazimbangura also asked for white protection in July 1891.\(^ {19}\)

As noted by Cobbing, the raids launched by Lobengula between 1890 and 1893 instead of recouping Ndebele hegemony and keeping the tributaries within the fold, generated a chain reaction of events that accelerated the process of the fall of the Ndebele and its climax was the "Victoria Incident" which became the pretext for open confrontation between the Ndebele state and the B.S.A.Co forces.\(^ {20}\) However, D.N.Beach's argument that the Anglo-Ndebele war was the culmination of many years of fighting between the Ndebele and the central and western Shona who were sufficiently strong and far removed to have avoided full submission, is rather apologetic of the role of whites in engineering and instigating the violence between the Ndebele and the Shona.\(^ {21}\) The war of 1893 was part and parcel of Cecil John Rhodes' grand imperial design. Indeed the strategic
encirclement of the Ndebele state and the gradual strangulation of Ndebele power was not so much brought by efforts of the African opponents of the Ndebele but by the Europeans' advance northward into the interior of South-Central Africa.\(^\text{22}\)

What the whites did in the period 1890 to 1893 was to instigate and strengthen the anti-Ndebele Shona groups such as the Mhari, Gutu, Zimuto and many others to the extent that when the B.S.A.Co decided to attack the Ndebele they had ready and enthusiastic supporters.\(^\text{23}\) In short, the anti-Ndebele Shona groups were manipulated by the whites in such a way that they ended up helping them to weaken the Ndebele prior to the white onslaught of 1893 which destroyed the Ndebele state. The B.S.A.Co's secretary popularised the idea that the entry of the whites into Mashonaland meant that "the Matabele raids will cease" and that their aim was to "deliver" the Shona from "Ndebele tyranny".\(^\text{24}\) Such tactics and propaganda made the B.S.A.Co to get allies from the Shona chieftaincies that hated Ndebele dominance over their people.

At another level, one need to note, that behind all the activities of the whites, which undermined Ndebele power and independence, were strong economic motives. Rotberg noted that the members of the Pioneer Column had a gleam of gold in their eyes and avarice for land in their blood.\(^\text{25}\) Indeed the land, minerals, cattle and human wealth of the Ndebele attracted the white settlers and persuaded them to destroy the Ndebele state.
Cobbing like Rotberg noted that the members of the Pioneer Column were rootless white settlers who were marshalled into order by the economic ambitions of Cecil Rhodes who was backed by successive British governments anxious to hem the Boers in the South of the Limpopo and fortified in their disregard for Ndebele interests by partially propagandistic accounts of their bloodthirsty misdeeds.\(^\text{26}\) This view is reinforced by the fact that each person who participated in the destruction of the Ndebele state was promised three thousand morgen of Ndebele land, fifteen ground and five alluvial gold claims and the enormous herds of Ndebele cattle was also offered as tangible prizes.\(^\text{27}\) Hence, Rotberg reduced the whole affair into "nothing less than a contract for robbery under arms."\(^\text{28}\)

6.2 Direct White Violence on the Ndebele

The pretext for the white invasion of the Ndebele state was the Ndebele punitive raid on the Mhari of Bere. The Ndebele having stolen their cattle accused Bere and his people. What had happened was that in May 1893 Bere's people taking advantage of the presence of whites in the Victoria area raided cattle that were herded by Bonda of Chief Mupakane in the uMlungulu Hills. The Ndebele response was to dispatch a force to regain the cattle from Bere but Bere living only 20 miles west of Victoria ran to the whites claiming the cattle were his own.\(^\text{29}\) The whites at Victoria responded enthusiastically to the "Ndebele-Bere" affair and protected Bere. Captain Lendy ordered the Ndebele forces to leave Bere alone, and added that Jameson was the ruler of the Victoria area and that whenever Lobengula wanted his cattle back his proper recourse was to appeal to Jameson.\(^\text{30}\)
Lobengula failed to understand the rationality of Jameson as a ruler of the Victoria area but at the same time he tried to avoid direct confrontation with the whites. Hence in late June 1893 he dispatched a large army to punish Bere under the dual command of Mgandani Dlodlo and Manyewu Ndiweni. In order to avoid clashes with whites, Lobengula sent Manyewu Ndiweni with a letter explaining the necessity for the raid and assuring the whites that they were not going to be affected and molested.\(^3\)

However, when the attack on Bere commenced, Jameson ordered Manyewu Ndiweni to cross the "border" into Matabeleland immediately while at the same time instructing Captain Lendy to attack the retreating Ndebele and he opened fire and killed the chief of Nxa, Mgandani Dlodlo and several other Ndebele forces.\(^2\) This incident marked the beginning of white invasion of the Ndebele state.

It must be noted that when the Ndebele were attacked by whites in October 1893, their strategic position was at its worst because a large Ndebele force had been sent to attack Lewanika across the Zambezi River and when they came back they were useless as they had contacted smallpox. W.A. Thompson observed this strategic weakness on the Ndebele side when he stated that:

> We have got them [the Ndebele] at an advantage [sic] and the opportunity is not to be lost. If we wait till these warriors come back we will find it much more difficult to settle this account.\(^3\)

The whites as self-proclaimed civilised people and as representatives of civilised western cultures in Africa which were far advanced than the Ndebele who
survived by plunder and savagery, did not exhibit any of these qualities in their invasion of the Ndebele state. The tactics they evolved were tantamount to "savage warfare" characterised by raids, looting, plunder and destruction of Ndebele homes and properties.\textsuperscript{34}

S. Glass who studied the war of 1893 did so from the perspective of the whites and was mainly concerned with the rationality of white policies and actions rather than the suffering of the Ndebele in the face of white invasion.\textsuperscript{35} There is need to assess the white invasion of the Ndebele state in October 1893 from the perspective of the Ndebele. Only Pathisa Nyathi has tried to study the war from the perspective of the Ndebele themselves. To him, the white invasion was nothing rather than \textit{uchuku olungelandiswe} (untold cruelty).\textsuperscript{36}

As a result of the fact that the whites who participated in the war of 1893 were filibusters, the invasion was accompanied by violence and bloodshed as well as looting, plunder, theft and burning of Ndebele residential areas comparable to the Ndebele raids on the Shona. B.S.A.Co exacerbated the violence and destruction. propaganda that characterised all the big Ndebele residential areas as military divisions, every male member of the Ndebele state as a soldier and the white invasion as a military exercise meant to de-militarised the militarised Ndebele state.\textsuperscript{37}

When the Victoria Column began to move towards its rendezvous in the north with the Salisbury Column, large forces of Shona joined it. Zimuto sent 120, Madziviri
50, Gutu 80 and Churumhanzu's ruler Chinyama offered 300 men. Later, Chivi's men marched through Victoria to catch up with the advancing columns.\textsuperscript{38} Hence to some extent the invasion of the Ndebele state was carried out by an Anglo-Shona alliance. The entry of the Shona in the invasion accelerated plunder and looting as Shona raiders from all over the Southern Shona country and from as far away as the upper Save valley rushed to loot Ndebele herds.\textsuperscript{39}

The Victoria and Salisbury Columns linked up at Iron Mine Hill on 15 October and began to march Southwestwards. The Ndebele residential areas in the upper Gwelo areas were the first victims of white invasion. As the white forces commenced their invasion they simultaneously began looting Ndebele cattle, burning Ndebele grain and residential areas and random shooting of Ndebele people they met on their way. The residential areas under Manondwana Tshabalala in the upper Gwelo were all destroyed and the Ndebele properties plundered and looted.\textsuperscript{40}

The Company forces marched towards upper Shangani burning Ndebele residential areas and looting Ndebele properties near their line of march. However, the first major military encounter between the Company forces and the Ndebele defence forces took place on 25 October 1893 at Banko (Shangani River).\textsuperscript{41} The Ndebele forces tried to stop the white invasion at the Shangani River, however they failed to stop the white march because the white forces were better armed than them. For instance, it was at the Shangani River Battle that for the first time the Maxim gun was put to effective use. The weapon of mass
destruction was invented by Hiran Maxim in 1885 and could be fired continuously simply by steady pressure on the trigger. This gun had hardly become standard issue by 1893. It was different from the Gatling gun invented in 1861 which had to be cranked by hand.\textsuperscript{42} When the whites confronted the Ndebele on the Shangani River, they put to effective use the following arms: five Maxim guns, three rapid-fire Gatling gun, two cannons and two-hundred rifles.\textsuperscript{43} Up to today the descendants of the nineteenth century Ndebele still re-call and remember their forefathers that were cut to pieces by \textit{isigwagwagwa} (Maxim gun) that cut the Ndebele knees.\textsuperscript{44}

The Ndebele made another determined effort to stop the invasion forces at Gadade (Mbembesi). The respected and feared Imbizo kaLanga commanded by Mtshane Khumalo took part in the Gadade Battle. However, the white invasion forces put to effective use the Maxims and Gardner guns to the detriment of the Ndebele defence forces that were armed with spears and light Martin-Henry rifles. At Gadade about eight hundred to one thousand Ndebele forces were killed.\textsuperscript{45} The defeat of the proud Imbizo kaLanga demonstrated that the Ndebele could no longer resist white invasion and Lobengula decided to set his capital on fire and fled northward before the whites entered Bulawayo.\textsuperscript{46} The whites entered Bulawayo on 4 November 1893.

The invasion of the Ndebele state amounted to a lighting attack on everybody on the way of the white forces as they advanced towards Bulawayo, either to kill or kidnap the king or holding him hostage in Bulawayo in exchange for the surrender
of the entire Ndebele kingdom. However, when the whites entered Bulawayo in November, they found nothing as the king had fled to the north. What needs to be emphasised is that looting its material wealth that had enabled it to stand as a sovereign state and intact destroyed the Ndebele state. It is, therefore, vital to assess the impact of the white conquest of 1893 on the Ndebele and their state.

6.3 The Impact of White Conquest on the Ndebele, 1893-1895.

Cobbing has underestimated the impact of the white conquest of the Ndebele state in 1893. These are his main arguments on the impact of conquest on the Ndebele: firstly, the Ndebele were by no means decisively defeated in 1893, secondly, the Ndebele leaders were temporarily shaken but remained intact, thirdly, the Ndebele "military system" was misunderstood by the Company and was not broken up, fourthly, the occupation of Bulawayo by whites did not mean total defeat of the Ndebele and the full extent of Company spoliation affected mainly the non-Ndebele.47

To Cobbing, the overall situation of the Ndebele people in about mid-1894 was that they existed as a state very much as they did a year earlier, except that they were without a king. He pointed out that the Ndebele still occupied their old sites and that those Ndebele men and women who had escaped to the north in November and December 1893 only spent the summer months beyond the Shangani River before returning to their old homes. The basic military organization of the Ndebele and the potential of the kingdom remained intact for Cobbing because the white invaders did not engage the bulk of Ndebele izigaba.
especially to the South and South-east of Bulawayo militarily. Moreover, Cobbing noted that in the exception of the disruption of planting in some areas, the planting seasons of 1894 and 1895 proceeded quite normally. Finally, Cobbing stated that the B.S.A.Co’s strength was at that time insufficient to dominate even the central kingdom and that the Matabeleland Native Department was only formed in 1895, prior to that the government was confined mostly to cattle and labour raids.\footnote{48}

In the first place, the way the white invaders conquered the Ndebele state was so swift between October and November 1893 that its impact could be easily underestimated. Moreover, it is true that not all Ndebele forces participated in the fight against the white forces at Shangani and Mbembesi Battles. The last battle at Pupu was a victory for the Ndebele.\footnote{49} All this gives credence to Cobbing’s argument that the Ndebele were by no means decisively defeated in 1893. However, a focus on the military aspects tends underestimate to the overall impact of white conquest on the Ndebele and their state. What is needed is a systematic analysis of the full extent of B.S.A.Co spoliation that takes into account the way the whites destroyed the pre-conquest Ndebele economy that sustained the Ndebele state and kept it intact, and to some extent the impact of the destruction of the Ndebele kingship that also helped to keep the Ndebele state intact.

It is really surprising that Cobbing who produced an impressive analysis of the pre-colonial Ndebele economy in his chapter five could in the same thesis fail to understand the impact of white cattle looting and raids on the resilience of the Ndebele state.\footnote{50} The white invaders seem to have correctly seen that the only
way to destroy the Ndebele state was to combine military assaults with plunder of Ndebele economy which underpinned the survival and strength of the Ndebele state. While the Ndebele of the South and Southeast did not participate in the battles of October 1893 against white invaders, they did not survive the looting of their cattle. The Ndebele of the north as well did not participate in the defensive battles of 1893 but did not escape the forays of the looters. For instance, after reaching Bulawayo on 4 November 1893, Rhodes and Jameson decided" to devote all... energies to the king in the north and the cattle in the south". The Ndebele residential areas along the Mangwe road were burnt and their cattle looted. Between 1893 and 1895 the northern Ndebele residential areas were subjected to cattle looting by individual as well as groups of whites.

Colonel Colin Harding explained the underlying philosophy behind the white looting of Ndebele cattle. He stated that:

Next to burning the home of native, you cannot inflict a greater injury than to deprive him of his cattle, which are really a part of his family. Besides this, it is a suicidal policy to cripple a native farmer's prospects by taking for slaughter cattle, which can be and are used for breeding purposes.

In the Ndebele state, cattle played a fundamental role. Cattle sustained the institution of amabutho, they enhanced the legitimacy of the kingship through the king's powers to distribute cattle to his subjects, they enhanced the client-patron relationships in the state and they played a fundamental role in the Ndebele religious system. Added to this, cattle were a source of national wealth and determined the status of individuals in the Ndebele state.
communities were loyal to the Ndebele state because they were given cattle.\textsuperscript{54} Hence the looting of cattle by the B.S.A.Co. officials as well as private loot groups and individuals crippled the Ndebele state in the period 1893 to 1895.

T.O. Ranger was correct to note that the establishment of colonial rule in Matabeleland was by military defeat and that a considerably harsher and more intensive colonial pressure even than in Mashonaland followed the conquest. Ranger was not exaggerating issues when he stated that between 1893 and 1896, Matabeleland witnessed a dispossession of Africans and a development of white enterprise unparalleled anywhere else in Central and East Africa.\textsuperscript{55} P. Mason argued that the cattle were one of the strand that bound the Ndebele together, the way they were held contributing to the royal dominion, to the cult of the ancestors and to the stability of marriage.\textsuperscript{56} The plundering and looting of Ndebele cattle in the period 1893 to 1895 paralysed every institution in the Ndebele state and the state never remained intact in anyway.

It must be noted that in order for the B.S.A.Co. to legitimise the plundering and looting of Ndebele cattle in 1893 they evoked crude arguments of "right of conquest" and that all the cattle in the Ndebele state belonged to the defeated Ndebele king.\textsuperscript{57} The cattle looting in the Ndebele state began with the invasion of the Ndebele state in October 1893 and the plundering of Ndebele cattle was systematised after 4 November 1893. Official police, private groups and individuals operated throughout the Ndebele state-looting cattle. Julius Schultz, a typical company cattle looter stated that:
My plan is to pick out the best of each herd and allow the native who brings them in to take the remainder back to herd.\textsuperscript{58}

Schultz said this after looting over two hundred head from Baleni’s area near Shiloh.\textsuperscript{59} Other known cattle looters were James Dawson who by January 1894 had assembled nearly five hundred head of cattle,\textsuperscript{60} Goold-Adams of the Bechuanaland Border Police (B.B.P.) who used patrols to loot at least two thousand head in the western and northern parts of Matabeleland in February 1894,\textsuperscript{61} and John Meikle who took a personal active part in looting Ndebele cattle.\textsuperscript{62}

The destruction of pre-conquest Ndebele economy within the new environment of exploitative European capitalism was quickened by the decision of Jameson in June 1894 of sending out large patrols to all directions of Matabeleland to raid for Ndebele cattle.\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, it must be noted that by June 1894 the B.S.A.Co forces were still prosecuting war against Ndebele chiefs who were considered to be failing to toe B.S.A.Co. line. For instance, a notice in \textit{The Matabeleland Times} had the following instruction:

\begin{quote}
A detachment of about 25 B.S.A.P. with one Maxim will leave at the end of the month to suppress those refractory natives who refuse to give up their cattle and arms.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

Moreover, in June 1894 patrols under Colenbrander and Dykes were sent to Nata area where they assaulted rebellious chiefs and one Kalanga chief was killed. The patrols looted about three thousand cattle and forcibly recruited one thousand labourers.\textsuperscript{65}
By mid-1894 well over one hundred thousand Ndebele cattle had gone with the looters. Mason was correct to note that the Ndebele society was disrupted by tearing out one of the binding strands in the whole fabric. Over five thousand Ndebele cattle were auctioned by Napier, Weir and Slater on 14 June 1894. The B.S.A.Co. supplied Combrinck and Company, the largest butchers in Cape Town, (South Africa) with Ndebele cattle at very cheap prizes. [see Appendix A]

In summary terms, it is important to emphasise that through looting of cattle, the B.S.A.Co was able to destroy the Ndebele systems of cattle ownership namely private ownership (izinkomo zamathanga) and communal ownership (izinkomo zebutho kumbe izinkomo zenkosi) as they did not differentiate the private cattle from the communal cattle or those that were assumed to belong to Lobengula. Indeed through systematic cattle seizures the B.S.A.Co. was able to destroy one of the major branches of the pre-conquest Ndebele economy very quickly and in a way smashed the Ndebele state. Hence Cobbing's argument that after 1893 the Ndebele state remained "intact" underestimates the impact of white conquest. There is need to see the conquest of the Ndebele state not as an "event" of 1893 but as a "process" that began in 1893 and was completed after the defeat of the Ndebele in 1896.

The seizure of cattle was only one way of destroying the Ndebele state, there were other measures that were taken that further facilitated white conquest of the Ndebele state in the period 1893 to 1896. These were removal of Ndebele kingship, acquisition of Ndebele land, and general use of brutality on Ndebele
people, and reduction of the Ndebele into white labourers. These measures needs to be discussed as well if a full and systematic picture of the destruction of the Ndebele state is to be produced.

6.4 Removal of Ndebele Kingship and Reduction of Ndebele Chiefs into Colonial Civil Servants

Cobbing's argument that the Ndebele state remained "intact" after 1893 even though Lobengula had been removed from power trivialises the role of the king in providing unity to the Ndebele state. According to Ndebele informants the Ndebele king was the insika yesizwe (the cornerstone of the Ndebele state). Umbuso (power) was likened to indlu (house) whose uphahla (roof) was strengthened by insika (the king). This view is also expressed by Pathisa Nyathi who argued that despite the fact that the king ruled with the assistance of other men who acted as advisers, the king in his own right was the centre or cornerstone of the Ndebele state. Pathisa likened the king to umlilo (fire) which gave warmth to the Ndebele and Bowen Rees was correct when he wrote “With their King, the Ndebele lost shield and spear, the pride of the … race”.

The removal of Lobengula from power in 1893 greatly weakened the Ndebele state. The whites realized the importance of the Ndebele kingship to the Ndebele state. After their occupation of Bulawayo on 4 November 1893, the whites concentrated on capturing the Ndebele king in the north. The Wilson Patrol was wiped out by the Ndebele while trying to capture Lobengula. It must be noted as stated in chapter three that the Ndebele king was not only a
political administrator, he was also a religious leader, hence the removal of the
king indeed affected the Ndebele state. In an endeavor to make sure that the
Ndebele state was effectively destroyed, Cecil John Rhodes made sure that
there was to be no successor to Lobengula. The sons of Lobengula, Njube,
Nguboyenja and Mphezeni were taken to South Africa away from the
mainstream of the Ndebele population.73 The pretext was that they were going
to school, however, the reality was to make sure the Ndebele kingship was not
revived. Nyamande who tried to revive Ndebele kingship in 1896 escaped
Rhodes’ idea of sending the sons of Lobengula to South Africa only by hiding
among the Shangwe people.74 In short, what can be said is that the loss of the
Ndebele kingship undermined the social and political cohesion of the Ndebele
state.

The Ndebele chiefs who in the pre-colonial era had acquired power and
property in the outlying areas of the Ndebele state were adversely affected by
the imperial conquest of 1893 and its aftermath. The B.S.A.Co. tried to
transform them into colonial civil servants. Firstly, they were expected to
actively participate in the “de-militarisation” process by encouraging their people
to hand in spears and guns to the whites in Bulawayo. Secondly, the Ndebele
chiefs were supposed to show that they had succumbed to white power by
collecting cattle in their areas of jurisdiction so as to hand them over to the “loot
kraals” in Bulawayo. Thirdly, the B.S.A.Co. tried to force the Ndebele chiefs to
recruit labour among their people for white farms and mines.75 Those chiefs
who were considered to be unco-operative and who proved to be reluctant in

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carrying out B.S.A.Co. activities and arbitrary policies were liable to attacks, imprisonment and even summary executive by white military patrols.\textsuperscript{76}

It is really not true that after 1893 the average Ndebele chieftaincy remained relatively unaffected by the European presence.\textsuperscript{77} The very fact that at the centre of the state (in Bulawayo) there was white presence affected the chieftaincies. The king at Bulawayo used to be the focus of national unity and helped to avoid the chieftaincies falling into an “inchoate collection of feuding chieftaincies”.\textsuperscript{78} The Ndebele chiefs after 1893 lived with the bitterness of being barred from discussing the issue of kingship. The discussion of the issue of kingship became an offence after conquest. Meetings held by the Ndebele chiefs to discuss the kingship issue alarmed the white administration and resulted in punitive action. For instance, in 1894 Chief Sikhombo Mguni was punished for illicitly convening a meeting of chiefs and in 1895 Lobengula’s brother, Mabele was banished for holding an illegal council of chiefs.\textsuperscript{79}

With the introduction of Native Department in 1894 the powers of the Ndebele chiefs were taken away. The Ndebele chiefs were transformed into the lowest ranking officials of the Native Department. The Native Commissioners (NC) were the real people with power and control over the Ndebele. See Fig. II.
A. Keppel-Jones noted that the overall meaning and implication of the above outlined power structure was that the white authorities had taken over the power formerly belonging to the chiefs who were now to “hold office during pleasure and contingent upon good behaviour and general fitness” and “to receive such pay and allowance as shall be fixed from time to time”.80

In summary terms, the Ndebele chiefs in the period after 1893 were transformed into minor colonial civil servants. They became responsible to
white superiors for maintaining order, preventing or in the last resort reporting crimes, reporting “suspicious disappearances”, deaths, outbreaks of disease and giving publicity to government orders and notices in their district. Chiefs were to aid the police in arresting offenders and besides other general functions were to submit names of suitable men to be nominated by the secretary for native affairs as district headmen. On the other hand, Ndebele headmen were to perform for the Ndebele chiefs the sort of duties that they performed for their white superiors: reporting and notifying in both directions, keeping order, arresting criminals and checking the movement of strangers. In this way the whites continued to destroy the pre-colonial Ndebele institutions and the Ndebele state in the period after 1893. The cattle seizures after 1893 added to the transformation of Ndebele chiefs and headmen into the lowest ranking officials of colonial administration. It must be mentioned that the Ndebele chiefs and headmen themselves did not quickly realize that they were no longer as powerful as they were prior to 1893 and they still tried to model themselves as representatives of their chieftaincies. However, it was those Ndebele chiefs who were considered to be loyal to the colonial administration that were given some of the cattle in November 1895 by the B.S.A.Co The Matabeleland Native Department had even assumed the role of the Ndebele king of distributing cattle to the Ndebele chiefs right up to the Ndebele rising of 1896.

6.5 White Acquisition of Ndebele Land

Since Jameson had promised his volunteers each three thousand morgen of Ndebele land, after 1893 this promise was to be fulfilled with adverse results on
the Ndebele. Ranger noted that the overthrow of the Ndebele state indeed led to a veritable land rush. However, Cobbing noted that in the period 1893 onwards, the Ndebele were still for the most part occupying their old sites in spite of the fact that Rhodes’ men began to carve out their three thousand morgen farms in the old heart of the Ndebele kingdom. He proceeded to say while in the end the seizure of land was to prove the most dramatic, during 1894-6 it affected the Ndebele only slightly as most of the land was not at this stage worked and since the bulk of the Ndebele who remained in situ were often unaware that ownership had changed.

It is not true that the carving out of land in the heartland of the Ndebele kingdom by the whites “affected the Ndebele only slightly” and that the Ndebele “who remained in situ were often unaware that ownership had changed”. Despite the fact that between 1893 and 1895 the Ndebele remained occupying their old sites, the pegging and carving of their land by whites offended them. The fact that the Ndebele were aware of their predicament under white rule was expressed in 1896 by Somabhulana Dlodlo when he stated to Rhodes that:

You came, you conquered. The strongest takes the land. (My emphasis). We accepted your rule. We lived under you. But not as dogs! If we are to be dogs its better to be dead.

Somabhulana’s statement demonstrated beyond doubt that the Ndebele were aware of the implications of white rule and the seizure of land. By 1895 the whites had pegged one thousand and seventy farms covering an area of over ten thousand square miles identical with the region settled by the Ndebele. While the change of ownership did not in itself mean the displacement of most
of the Ndebele but it adversely affected their sense of nationhood. Prior to
conquest the Ndebele king in trust of his people owned the land. The king and
the chiefs distributed the land to their people but after 1893 the whites were
seen busy pegging farms without any discussion with Ndebele chiefs.

The Ndebele were agriculturists; they knew the importance of the land for their
crops as well as cattle. Some of the deeply offended Ndebele people like
Lobengula’s brother Simbamumbamu decided not to sit and suffer humiliation
by white activities, and he and his wives and other Ndebele trekked out of
Matabeleland which was now under white control and they moved northwards
until they crossed the Zambezi River, hoping to find a place and land there to
re-create the Ndebele state. These people were given asylum by Lewanika.89

The very process of pegging farms on Ndebele land eroded Ndebele land
rights. Living in the private farms affected the Ndebele adversely because it
entailed paying rent, and random evictions and providing labour to the whites.

After claiming the land the whites began to complain that the Ndebele were too
numerous in and around Bulawayo and on the newly pegged white farms in the
vicinity. This led to the Matabeleland Order-in-Council of 18 July 1894 that
provided for a Land Commission. The Land Commission’s mission was to
“assign land sufficient and suitable for the personal and individual agricultural
and grazing requirements of the natives” of Matabeleland.90 However, before
the setting up of the Land Commission, the B.S.A.Co. had already made grants
of land to Europeans in the centre of the Ndebele state. This led the
commissioners to look for the nearest unclaimed areas and found them on the Gwayi and Shangani. The commissioners claimed that evidence got from chiefs like Mtshani Khumalo, Somabhubana Dlodlo and Mazwi Gumede indicated that Gwayi and Shangani were good areas for human and animal habitation and that Lobengula had an intention before Forbes pursued him to the north to settle with his people on the Shangani. The fact that the defeated Ndebele families fled in these directions was used as further evidence to suggest that they had chosen the reserves themselves.

However, Ranger, J. Alexander and J. McGregor have recently shown that the Ndebele never considered Shangani forests as a good place for human habitation, rather the Ndebele considered the areas as *amagusu amnyama* (dark forests), as thickets to be afraid of, as dark and fearful, full of lions, spirits and other scary things, places of tall, crowded trees and no people, and as places where outcasts and witches were thrown to live. Hence, the Land Commission proved totally ineffective as a protection for Ndebele land rights.

In addition to land claims, by the end of 1895 over six thousand gold claims had been registered in the Bulawayo and Gwelo districts and innumerable shafts were sunk whenever there was a hint of gold. Taken together the designation of two vast arid reserves on the lower Shangani and Gwayi Rivers for future Ndebele settlement and the sinking of innumerable shafts on Ndebele land indicated that the power had shifted from the Ndebele to the whites. In short, the claims of whites over the bulk of Ndebele lands in the centre of the kingdom...
was another way of destroying pre-conquest Ndebele economy and part and parcel of white destruction of the Ndebele state. The Ndebele suffered the stigma of being informed that they were now living on white farms and this demonstrated that indeed their state was no longer intact it was really destroyed in 1893.

6.6 The Reduction of the Ndebele into Mine and Farm Labourers

Another device used by the whites to destroy the Ndebele state was to compulsorily recruit the labour of the Ndebele for white mines and farms. Early in June 1895 the Native Department recruited over a hundred men from among the Ndebele and trained them how to shoot. These people formed the first crop of what was termed the Native Police. It is vital to note the fact that the Native Police were recruited from the former members of the proud Imbizo kaLanga “regiment”, indicating beyond doubt that the Ndebele state, which depended on these forces for defensive as well as offensive military assignments, was no longer intact as claimed by Cobbing.95

The Native Police were put under the command of Native Commissioners. Their major function was to expedite the final seizures of Ndebele cattle and “the impressments of labour”. A series of unofficial labour regulations were enacted to establish the flow of Ndebele labour to the mines.96 In the first place Ndebele men were supposed to report to the local Native Commissioners where they would then be allocated to white employers to work for “contracts” of two or three months with heavy penalties for leaving before the contract had
expired. The African chiefs who were now transformed into salaried colonial servants were instructed to recruit labour for the mines and farms but the Ndebele people just defied them outrightly. The fact that the Ndebele defied the chiefs as recruiters of labour led the whites to use the services of armed Native Police to force the Ndebele to work in the mines and farms.

The white colonial official, H. P. Fynn who was stationed at Insiza stated that:

In the event of [the Induna] failing to supply [labour], and upon them stating to me that they had no control over their people and could not manage them and further asking me to act for myself, then I send Native Police to collect labour.

The Chief Native Commissioner (CNC), H.J. Taylor who was the organizer of the Native Police admitted in the latter quarter of 1895 alone that nine thousand Ndebele people had been compulsorily recruited by the Native Police. Cullen Reed observed that in response to the Ndebele reluctance to work in mines, the “Government turned itself into a Slave Registry Office.” This is one clear example of colonial human rights ambiguity. It must be noted that the compulsory recruitment of labour by whites among the Ndebele entailed extreme brutality on the Ndebele. Samboks were used on those who were reluctant. Whipping sometimes to death commonly punished those who escaped from mines. Native Police were stationed in mine compounds to prevent Ndebele labourers from escaping and to pursue them if they did.

What can be said is that the compulsory recruitment of labour from among the Ndebele was a direct device by whites to show the Ndebele that their pre-
colonial ways of life had come to an end. The Ndebele boy who previously grew up as a cattle-herder, hunter and soldier was now forced to be a labourer in the mines. This was a further indication that the Ndebele state was no longer intact.

In summary terms, it is important to note that the burning of Ndebele villages and looting of cattle that commenced with the invasion of the Ndebele state in October 1893, the removal of the Ndebele king, the transformation of Ndebele chiefs and headmen into the lowest ranking officials of the Native Department, white seizure of Ndebele land and the compulsory recruitment of labour with its attendant brutality in the period 1893 to 1895 left the Ndebele really traumatized, defiled and humiliated. The drought of 1893, the great clouds of locusts of 1895-1896 and the spread of an inflammatory epizootic disease (rinderpest) from Somalia and Uganda into the Matabeleland added stress to the Ndebele who were already chafing under the man-made exactions of the B.S.A.Co. In short, the activities of the B.S.A.Co. in the period 1893 to 1895 were geared towards finishing off the remnants of pre-colonial Ndebele institutions that sustained the Ndebele state. The B.S.A.Co realized that the effective way of destroying the Ndebele state was not engaging them militarily but rather was by way of destroying pre-conquest Ndebele economy within the new environment of exploitative European capitalism. This they effectively did in the period 1893 to 1895 to the extent that it is wrong to argue that in this period the overall situation of the Ndebele people was similar to the period prior to conquest.
6.7 The Last Stand of the Ndebele Against Colonial Rule.

The last stand of the Ndebele against colonial rule in March 1896 cannot be explained in terms of the argument that the Ndebele state had remained intact. Rather, the last stand of the Ndebele against colonial rule in 1896 must be seen as a last desperate attempt to recover lost land, sovereignty, an attempt to reinstate their shattered dignity, a move by a people who had decided to die fighting rather than succumbing to extremes of B.S.A.Co. administration. The continued burning of Ndebele villages, the arbitrary punishment of Ndebele chiefs, the relentless looting of Ndebele cattle, the wholesale white claims of all the land in Matabeleland, refusal of the whites for the Ndebele to revive their kingship, transformation of Ndebele chiefs into lowest ranking colonial servants, the forcing of the Ndebele youth to work in the mines and farms of whites, the reduction of the Ndebele into tenants in their former lands and ecological disasters that affected the few Ndebele cattle and their crops, created a desperate situation for the Ndebele and desperation launched them into violence as the last resort to save their lives from total collapse under the ruthless weight of British colonialism.

T.O. Ranger in a preface to the first paperback edition of his book, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* stated that:

Yet when all is said 1896 did constitute a crisis if that word is ever to mean anything. There was the ecological crisis of cattle plague and drought and locusts; there was the political crisis of threat to sovereignty; there was the economic crisis of confiscation of cattle and land and ..., there was military crisis of superior military technology of the whites.
Indeed in 1896 among the Ndebele there was nothing that was functioning normally after the systematic and violent way in which the B.S.A.Co. and its Native Department destroyed the various features of traditional Ndebele life in the period 1893 to 1895. The administration of Matabeleland by police patrols and summary execution indeed caused confusion in the Ndebele districts and quickened the destruction of the Ndebele state. Cobbing having underestimated the impact of the white conquest of 1893 and logically underplayed the idea of crisis in 1896 among the Ndebele as noted by Ranger.\(^{106}\)

On the issue of prophetic role in the last stand by the Ndebele against colonial rule, Ranger pointed to the issue of how holders of certain religious roles often responded to crisis and that evidence exists that demonstrate prophetic response to crisis as a key element in 1896.\(^{107}\) The debate was joined by Ngwabi Bhebe who demonstrated that there was continuous fusion between the Nguni, Sotho and Shona religious beliefs in the Ndebele state even during the reign of Mzilikazi and that under Lobengula the Shona religious beliefs spread wide in the Ndebele state. Bhebe criticized Cobbing’s view of an “Absent Priesthood” in the 1896 war, he pointed out that the natural disasters from 1894 to 1896, like those of the early 1860s, gave added influence to the religious institutions.\(^{108}\) In the 1860s, the Ndebele and Shona religious practitioners, as shown in chapter five blamed the natural disasters like rinderpest on the presence of whites who did not respect Ndebele traditional religious beliefs. It must be mentioned that in the period 1893 to 1895 the whites had
demonstrated their lack of respect for Ndebele ancestral spirits in a very open way by not hesitating to seize and even kill the sacred amadlozi animals without reference to those in whose custody they were, and thus made themselves universally hated.¹⁰⁹ This behavior of the whites automatically offended the traditional religious practitioners and induced them to direct the first killing of whites by the Ndebele.¹¹⁰ Recent evidence show that indeed in 1896 the prophetic element was active, for instance, the Dula Shrine summoned Mthwani Dlodlo and gave him “power for war”.¹¹¹ Ranger in his Voice from the Rocks, provides further evidence of the role of the Mwari cult in the Ndebele resistance of 1896.¹¹²

What is important to raise here is the fact that the desperate last stand of the Ndebele against the whites in 1896 witnessed more bloody deeds than the white conquest of 1893. A. Keppel-Jones argued that the history of the bloody deeds then about to be done in Rhodesia would be false if it did not emphasize their moral and emotional aspects. He proceeded to mention that on both sides there was cruelty and hatred. To Keppel-Jones, if it was the Ndebele that were cruel first, and the whites that retaliated, it was the whites who had robbed the blacks of their country in the first place.¹¹³ Without summoning the ideas of “just and unjust” wars, the last Ndebele stand against the white invaders and rulers was from the point of view of the Ndebele the great national struggle to recover lost dignity, shake off humiliation, recover freedom and lost independence.¹¹⁴ The Ndebele fought against an alien political, economic, social and cultural
network represented by the inhabitants of half a dozen small towns, by white prospectors, miners and farmers.\textsuperscript{115}

The Ndebele offensive began in March 1896 targeting the isolated whites in the mines, stores, mission stations and farms and taking back their cattle which were seized by whites in the period 1893 to 1895. Unlike in the defensive battles of 1893, in 1896 the Ndebele targeted every white person and any institutions that had connections with whites including even churches. Stores and churches were looted and then set on fire.\textsuperscript{116} The white response was equally brutal and unrestricted. Exploratory patrols shot any Ndebele they came across; burnt Ndebele villages destroyed Ndebele crops and rooted out hidden stores of the 1894 and 1895 crops. Selous aptly described the tactics of the whites in 1896:

As we advanced burning kraal after kraal on the northern slope of the range which was south of and parallel to the course of the Insiza, column after column of smoke continually ascending into the clear sky from Southern side of the hills let us know that Colonel Spreckley's column was on a devastating line of march as effectively as we were doing on ours.\textsuperscript{117}

Looting and plunder also characterised white tactics in the war of 1896. For instance, on 12 June 1896 Laing was busy mercilessly attacking pro-Ndebele Rozvi in the western Mapilabana range and was forced to stop the violence because “the amount of loot they had collected, and the wish to keep it, made them anxious to get home.”\textsuperscript{118} On top of this those Ndebele who were unfortunate to be captured were not treated as prisoners of war, rather they were summarily hanged on trees and summarily executed without any recourse
Even after the last Ndebele stand was broken, Sir Alfred Milner proceeded to prosecute those Ndebele who were suspected of having instigated specific “murders” as well as those suspected as the actual perpetrators. These people were excluded from the Amnesty Proclamation. A series of trials before Judge Vintcent and assessors began in Bulawayo. By December 1896, Milner could report twenty-five prosecutions for “murder” in Matabeleland. After “a careful study” of cases by Milner’s legal adviser Malcolm Searle who found the trials to have been fair and the evidence incontrovertible, Milner confirmed the death sentences.120

It must be noted that the fact that the last Ndebele stand against whites in 1896 was brought to an end as a result of negotiations in the Matopos Hills between Ndebele chiefs and Cecil John Rhodes unlike in Mashonaland where the resistance was crushed through the “machine gun, dynamite and the noose”, but this must not blind us about the violence of the whites in 1896. Rhodes’ “indabas” and the “promises” did not reverse the total colonization of Matabeleland and the reduction of the Ndebele into colonial subjects.121 Ndebele cattle were not given back to them and those who did not accept the cease-fire based on the Matopos “Indabas” were hunted down by white patrols who, ruthlessly crushed them and brought them to court and they were executed. No white person was ever prosecuted for looting Ndebele cattle, burning Ndebele villages, shooting unarmed Ndebele villagers and for summarily executing Ndebele prisoners in the bush. These ruthless activities were considered lawful, and legitimate move to destroy an evil state.
It is necessary to conclude this chapter by emphasizing certain important points. In the period 1890 to 1897 the Ndebele were victims of European colonial disregard for African aspirations, which was consonant with the prevalent European attitudes of the time. By that time the European imperialists like Cecil Rhodes saw Africans in general as both obstacles to be pushed aside and as strategic pools of available labour. As a result the Ndebele rights were subordinated to Rhodes and the B.S.A.C.O’s over-arching imperial design. The Native Department officials imposed their own rough hardly impartial notions of rights and justice on the Ndebele. They arrogantly alienated Ndebele land, appropriated Ndebele property like cattle, abused the Ndebele as tenants and labourers, they became ruthless, brutal and unfeeling, rude and insensitive and enthusiastically resorting to open violence whenever the Ndebele raised their heads, over and above all they deprived the Ndebele of their livelihood and primary means of subsistence that underpinned their pre-colonial state.

In order to destroy the Ndebele state and to reduce the Ndebele people to colonial subjects, the B.S.A.C.O. used both open violence and hypocrisy. As a way of justifying the looting and seizure of Ndebele property, the B.S.A.Co. evoked tenets of western legal system that were different from the Ndebele ideas of ownership of property. The B.S.A.Co argued as if the distinction were the same as would be drawn in western legal system. They pointed out that a conqueror takes over the property of the defeated government, however according to the western legal system the conqueror had no right to seize the
property of citizens. They deliberately misinterpreted the cattle-ownership system arguing that all cattle in the Ndebele state belonged to Lobengula by "right of conquest" they now belonged to the B.S.A.Co., which defeated Lobengula in 1893. The reality, however, was that the whole exercise of land alienation and cattle looting was meant to fulfill Jameson’s promises to the volunteers that participated in the invasion and conquest of the Ndebele state in 1893.

Finally there is need to re-consider some of Cobbing’s conclusions about the impact of conquest of 1893 on the Ndebele state and on the Ndebele. While the invasion of 1893 was swift, it commenced in October 1893 with a combination of open violence, looting plunder and destruction of Ndebele residential areas, and these processes immediately made an impact on the Ndebele state. The removal of the king was not a small event but facilitated a swift collapse of the Ndebele state into disarray. By 1896 the Ndebele state was indeed obliterated through the systematic and ruthless destruction of the pre-conquest Ndebele economy that underpinned the Ndebele state and ensured its resilience over-time. This was effectively and actively done in the period 1893 to 1895 so much that by the time of the outbreak of Ndebele violence in 1896, the Ndebele were in a desperate situation and engulfed by social, economic and political crises that launched them into a last stand to “die fighting” rather than to be treated “as dogs” by alien people. The way the whites crushed the last stand of the Ndebele exhibited beyond doubt the whites’ disregarded for African rights and aspirations and indicated the whites’
determination to maintain their domination of the Africans by violence. In short, one can say the destruction of the Ndebele state was not an “event” but it was a process that covered the whole period from 1890 up to 1897.
Endnotes

2. See File L05/2/2, F.R. Harris to Lochner, 5 July 1890, See also File Historical Manuscript, W16/1/1, Elliot to Wilson, September 1890, where the issue of liberating the Shona from Ndebele tyranny was repeated over and over.
5. Ibid, p.2.
8. File Historical Manuscript CO4/1/1, F. Rutherford Harris to J.W. Colenbrander, 9 February 1892.
9. File LO5/2/3, Pennefather to Harris, 13 August 1890. The Shona did not enjoy being subjects of the Ndebele. Like all human beings they wanted autonomy and indeed a number of them allied with the whites hoping that they would attain autonomy after the destruction of the Ndebele state.
11. File L05/2/5, Harris to London Board of Directors, 8 December 1890.
12. File L05/2/16, Jameson Minute Number A271 of 2 December 1891.
13. Cape Times, 12 December 1892, see also File Lo5/2/15.
14. File Historical Manuscript, CTI/15/5, Lendy to Jameson, 4 August 1892.
17. Files L05/2/24, Imperial Secretary to Acting Secretary B.S.A.C.O. 30 November 1892, L05/2/25 Harris to London Board, 15 February 1893 and File Historical Manuscript, MISC/TH5/1/1, Out letters and Other Papers of W.A. Thompson, Thompson to his father, 13 August 1893.
18. Files L05/2/23, Hole to Harris, 22 August 1892 and Lo5/2/27, Lendy to Jameson, 1 April 1893, see also D.N. Beach, War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840-1900, (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1986) where he discussed in detail the response of the Southern Shona to the Ndebele after the arrival of the Pioneer Column in 1890.
19. Files L05/2/22, Harris to London Board, 14 September 1892 and L05/2/21, Jameson Telegraph Conversation with Rhodes, 24 July 1892.
23. D.N. Beach, War and Politics, see especially chapter 3 where he wrote about the politics of collaboration among the Southern Shona.
24. File Lo5/2/2, Harris to Lochner, 5 July 1890.
28. Ibid.
30. File L05/2/28, Lendy to Jameson, 19 June 1893.
31. File Historical Manuscript W18/1/2 Statement of Ntabeni Khumalo, November 1937.
32. See File C. 7555 Report by Mr. F.J. Newton upon the circumstances connected with the collision between the Matabele and the forces of the British South Africa Company at Fort Victoria in July 1893.
38. D.N. Beach, War and Politics, p.36 see also Files Historical Manuscripts Mo14/2/1-8 10 October 1893, ME3/2/3 and W19/2/4 16 October 1893.
39. Ibid.
40. Files Historical Manuscripts MA1/2/2 Maxwell Diary 4-7 October 1890 and WE3/2/4 Recollections of the Matabele War and Mnyenyeyezi.
41. File Historical Manuscript WO7/1/1, Diary of C.H. Wolcott, June to October 1893 entry for 15 October 1893 and oral interview with Bongani Bongo Maphosa, Luveve Township, Bulawayo, 10 December 1999. Bongani is one of the nephews of Mtshani Khumalo.
43. Ibid.
46. File LO5/2/31, Jameson to Harris, 9 November 1893.
49. For a fresh assessment of the Pupu battle see P. Nyathi, *Uchuku Olungelandisive*, pp.66-81.


51. File LO5/2/31. Jameson to Harris, 9 November 1893.

52. File Historical Manuscript PO2/2/1 Ponsoby Diary entry for December 1893.


54. Tributaries like those of Bonda of chief Mupakane were given cattle by the Ndebele to herd, the same is true of Lukuluba at the Hoko Hills and many other who were formerly part of the Rozvi state.


57. Cape Argus 3 January 1894 where Rhodes speech of 19 December 1893 to the white volunteers is quoted. He said, “It is your right for you have conquered the country”.

58. File Historical Manuscript CO4/1/1, Schutz to Colenbrander, 24 January 1894.

59. Ibid.


61. File LO5/2/34, Good-Adams to Loch, 22 February 1894.

62. File Historical Manuscript WE1/1/1 Meikles Reminiscences.

63. Matabeleland News, 30 June 1894.

64. Matabeleland Times, 25 May 1894.


66. Ibid.


69. A detailed analysis of the Ndebele system of cattle ownership is J.R.D. Cobbing in his Ph.D. thesis.


75. File C.8547, 59-60 Annexure C, Thomas to Taylor, 14 May 1897, see also Oral Interview with Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 19 February 1999 and File AOH/1 Oral interview with Mafimba by Mark Ncube, 9/10/81.
76. Matabeleland News, 14 April 1894, see also File NB1/1/7, Report by Chief Native Commissioner Taylor on the Resignation of B.W. Armstrong C. April 1899.


78. Ibid, Cobbing wrote about the “royalization” of the aristocracy through marriage system and “ritualization” of the kingship through religion. He also discussed the existence of tension i.e. forces of centralization versus forces of decentralization, see pp.44-64.

79. Files A3/18/18/5, Lo5/2/36, Minute by Prime Minister, Natal 19 July 1894.


81. Ibid.

82. Government Gazette Number 49 of 26 June 1895, File Lo5/2/42, Harris to Loch, 4 June 1895, see also File Lo5/2/50, Report on Rhodes-Ndebele Indaba of 21 August 1896 detailed in The Cape Times, 24 August 1896.

83. T.O. Ranger, Revolt where he pointed out that Matabeleland Native Department was a product of the Land Commission and was essentially a cattle collecting concern p.112.

84. Ibid. p.101.


86. Ibid.

87. Somabhulana Dlodlo’s speech was quoted in full in V. Stent, A Personal Record of Some Incidents in the Life of Cecil Rhodes, (Cape Town, 1925), pp.45-46.


89. File A3/18/18/5.


92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.


95. The Imbizo and Ihlathi amabutho were harassed by European patrols and their residential areas destroyed. With the addition of Umcijo ibutho were dispersed and some of its members were trained as Native Police, see Matabeleland News, 14 April 1894.

96. File C.8547, 59-60 Annexure ‘B’ Taylor to Grey, 13 May 1897.


100. File Historical Manuscript ML1/5/c, Reed to Thompson, 10 April 1896, see also A.M. Chirgwin, The Blood Brother. The Story of Cullen Reed, (London, 1930).

106. Ibid, p.xiii.
112. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
121. After 1896-7 the Ndebele like their Shona counter-parts were subjected to total colonization.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COLONIAL STATE AND THE NDEBELE, 1898-1934

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the colonial encounter with the Ndebele, and to tease out the ambiguities and contradictions of early colonialism as well as Ndebele responses in the period 1898 to 1934. The theoretical framework of this chapter is drawn from Mahmood Mamdani’s ideas of the bifurcation of the colonial state into “citizens” and “subjects”, Shula Marks’ concept of “ambiguities of dependence”, and Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff’s more nuanced analysis of Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness. This theoretical framework helps to understand and to explain the overlapping and intersection of the language of modernity with the language of tradition in the complex interactions between the Ndebele and the early colonial state.

The chapter is partly a critique of previous nationalist scholarship that concentrated on exposing the iniquities and wickedness of settler colonialism. Nationalist historiography simplistically presented every aspect of Ndebele protest, be it passive or active, political or economic, agrarian or religious, as part of a common struggle for democracy and human rights, not realizing that Ndebele reaction to early colonialism was equally characterized by crucial ambiguities as they tried to appropriate traditional, modern, Christian, rural, urban, and even external (South African) influences, mixing them with theories
of individual, divine, secular as well as collective rights in their responses to settler colonialism.

It is the submission of this chapter that perhaps Mamdani over emphasized his concept of the bifurcation of the colonial state. This is so because the case study of the colonial encounter with the Ndebele defies the idea of a rigidified and straightforward “citizen” and “subject” dichotomy. The situation on the ground was more complex. For instance, political consciousness of the early Ndebele activists was characterized by meticulous blending of ideas from both the modern sector (Mamdani’s sector of citizens in the towns built around the liberal ideas of equality, civil, and political rights) and from the traditional sector (the sector of subjects in the rural areas built around decentralized despotism of traditional chiefs). ² The Ndebele case presents a picture of a more complex encounter that facilitated imbibing of modernistic ideas by the early Ndebele activists as well as drawing from the resilience of pre-colonial Ndebele ideas of legitimacy, sovereignty, and entitlement to land.

Shula Marks’ concept of ambiguities of dependence reinforces the issue of teasing out meaning out of complex historical episodes that look puzzling on the surface and helps to concentrate on the relationship between historical phenomena and ideological controversies. For instance, Marks noted that in all societies, new classes and productive forces grow out of the old world order. In colonial societies, in which new classes were frequently fashioned by external agencies, before older hierarchies had disappeared, there was often an
articulation of new as well as old ideologies. The colonial encounter, therefore, was characterized by both continuities and disjunctures, giving birth to the development of contradictory and ambiguous political consciousness among the colonized, reflective of the colonial social order that was itself contradictory and ambiguous in outlook.³

Marks emphasized that the inner workings of the colonial encounter necessitated that the words and actions of individuals were both deliberately and accidentally ambiguous, as the colonizer donned the mask of deference before the colonized. According to Marks, at the psychological level, colonial domination was both experienced as ambiguous and in turn elicited ambiguous behaviour. However, the ambiguity of ideology and behaviour of individuals arose not simply out of personal psychology, but also from their structurally dependent position within the colonial political economy and the colonial state, and the contradictory nature of the colonial social order itself.⁴

Therefore, the changing nature of domination lies at the heart of this chapter. Marks’s concept of ambiguity is crucial to any understanding of domination, because even while demanding obedience, and provoking resistance, colonial domination, like all other hegemonic projects, did not simply operate through coercion, but also through concessions that themselves were shaped by the nature of resistance. These in turn become the basis of consent as well as of further struggle by the dominated.⁵ This framework is very useful in understanding and teasing out logical conclusions from the ambiguities and
contradictions of colonial domination, that goes far beyond the common and unsophisticated previous studies that reduced the comprehension of the colonial encounter to a simple paradigm of domination and resistance.

The detailed work of Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff has further illuminated the understanding of the ambiguities and contradictions of the colonial encounter and the equally ambiguous and contradictory responses of Africans to domination and exploitation. According to the Comaroffs, the colonial encounter must be understood as a “historical anthropology of cultural confrontation—of domination and reaction, struggle and innovation,” and its impact “altered everyone and everything involved.” In other words, it was a dialectical encounter.

The Comaroffs raised the crucial fact about the nature of reaction and resistance to colonial domination. They noted that subordinate populations with communal identities like the Ndebele in this case had resilient ideologies. As such, these subordinate groups continually tried to assert themselves against the dominant colonial order and reversing existing relations of inequality, by calling actively upon those ideologies of the past as well as the present. The struggles of the dominated were purely ideological for they necessarily involved an effort to control the cultural terms in which the world was ordered and power legitimized. The Ndebele were thus drawn unwittingly into the dominion of settler colonialism, and they continuously contested its presence and the explicit context of its worldview. At the end of the day the reactions of the
Ndebele consisted of a complex admixture of tacit (even uncomprehending) accommodation to the hegemonic colonial order at one level, and diverse expressions of symbolic and practical resistance at another. The latter reaction had the crucial role of reinforcing the former, by displacing attention away from, and by actively reproducing, the hidden signs and structures of domination. All the Ndebele responses to colonial domination were underpinned by skepticism about its operations and the continuous process of reading their own significance into the colonial encounter, seeking to siphon off evident powers in it while at the same time rejecting its invasive discipline.

What is clear is that while the Ndebele tried to resist the colonial enterprise in favour of their own conventions, they were inevitably and subtly transformed by their engagement with its discourse. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Ndebele found themselves speaking and articulating a new political discourse, including liberal ideas, trade unionism, and independent churches in their confrontation with the Rhodesian colonial state.

This chapter, therefore, outlines in detail the dynamics of the encounter between the Ndebele and the colonial state, beginning with an analysis of the colonial state ideology of democracy and human rights, and Ndebele responses to colonial rule. It proceeds to examine the particular responses of the traditional Ndebele authorities and the royal house that drew strength from pre-colonial ideologies of sovereignty, legitimacy, and entitlement to land as well as ownership of cattle, the Ndebele appropriation of Christianity as an ideological
resource in their struggles, and the use of protest associations such as the Rhodesian Bantu Voters Association (RBVA) that derived ammunition from liberal traditions.


The Rhodesian colonial state ideology emphasized that African pre-colonial societies in general and the Ndebele state in particular had been profoundly undemocratic and human rights unconscious, and that colonialism in general brought new ideas of democracy and human rights to Africa in general and to the Ndebele in particular. As noted by Mahmood Mamdani, the colonial officials used the rhetoric of human rights in its relations with its African subjects and the practice of democracy was restricted to the white colonial citizens.\(^8\)

The assault amounted by the Rhodesian Native Department on some Ndebele customs and institutions such as witch-hunting, child-pledging, ritual murders and many others was legitimized and justified as a crusade of democratization through abolition of hitherto oppressive pre-colonial customs and institutions which had denied human rights in traditional Ndebele society.\(^9\) The Rhodesian Native Department often prided itself of its emancipatory achievements. For instance, the Native Department officials claimed that they freed young Ndebele women from child or compulsory marriages. The *Hole* whom they believed to have been subjected to the legal status of slave in the Ndebele state, were also freed by the colonialists and young Ndebele men who used to be compulsorily drafted into regiments were freed and given the option of working in the mines,
farms, and towns. Above all, the colonial propagandists said that they abolished the traditional Ndebele system of justice, which they dismissed as an oppressive, informal, and bizarre mixture of compensation and arbitrary violence. They replaced it with a formalized and equitable western system of justice predicated on Roman and Dutch law. This colonial mentality explains why under colonial rule African kings ceased to exist and Ndebele chiefs were transformed into salaried servants and incorporated into the lowest echelons of the Native Department (see Fig. 2 in chapter 6).

The white Christian missionaries added to the colonial claims of having emancipated the Ndebele from the oppression, not only of their king but also of nature and of amadlozi (ancestral spirits). To the missionaries, the Ndebele like other Africans had a religion of fear. As noted by T. O. Ranger, missionaries claimed to have brought liberation to the Ndebele men and women so that they came to realize that God had given them control of nature and that they owed no obedience to their amadlozi but were themselves individually accountable before God.10

In Rhodesia the colonial ideology of democracy and human rights was underpinned by imperial ideas of “Civilization”, “Commerce”, and “Christianity”. The Rhodesian colonial state was said to stand for these principles. The offer of rights was to be limited to those who had imbibed and embraced western culture and were deemed to be “responsible” citizens. All white settlers were considered to be responsible citizens from start to finish. Africans were
supposed to graduate to responsibility and citizenship under the tutelage of the whites.

In practice, the Rhodesian settler state relied more on direct coercion in carrying out its policies that dealt with the Ndebele. For instance, the evictions of the Ndebele from their traditional lands around Bulawayo were backed by overt coercion. This was despite the fact that Native Commissioners tried to model themselves as paternal aristocrats rather than direct agents of colonial coercion. They articulated this untrue position because they wanted to retain some degree of acceptability among the Ndebele. The Native Commissioners modeled themselves as the fatherly protectors of the Ndebele from some of the more blatant state injustices.

In reality, however, the colonialists like all other builders of hegemonic projects, sought to dominate and control the Ndebele and to inculcate their own worldview in Matebeleland. This, they sought to achieve through various means. This is why they spent a lot of time debating issues like segregation versus integration, land partition versus protection, and trusteeship as part and parcel of colonial side of human right dialogue. Theirs was a search for a better way of administering the Ndebele after defeating them, rather than a genuine search for a framework of democracy and human rights.

Rhodesian colonial ideologies of democracy and human rights were highly hypocritical in practice. For instance, while the colonialists claimed to have
freed the Ndebele women from oppressive customs and institutions, it became clear that many of the so-called freed women were taken by both white administrators and their black subordinates.\textsuperscript{12} African women who were said to have been freed from Ndebele patriarchal control were soon accused of being dangerously assertive when they began to enter the urban areas in large numbers. The urban center as noted by Mamdani was a domain of white citizens, who needed seclusion from the irresponsible subjects. Therefore, the Native Department quickly took steps to put these African women back to the patriarchal African male control. The colonially codified customary law declared women to be perpetual minors. It was this situation that led Elizabeth Schmidt to argue that African women came to suffer from the double yoke of oppression in the form of African traditional patriarchy and colonialism capitalist patriarchy. She noted that the Native Department worked very hard to reconstitute the so-called tribal patriarchy, with serious implications on the crucial issue of property rights and property accumulation by women.\textsuperscript{13}

The colonial Magistrates’ and Native Commissioners’ courts that were said to symbolize an ideal and incorrupt system of justice largely existed to punish Ndebele tax ‘defaulters’, labourers on white farms who had infringed the draconian Masters and Servants Act, as well as ‘deserters’ from farms, plantations or mines. According to Ranger, the colonial courts even tolerated violence by white employers against their African labourers unless it was considered too excessive.\textsuperscript{14}
Hypocrisy in the Rhodesian colonial ideology of democracy and human rights was clearly revealed when it came to the concept of property rights, especially pertaining to land and cattle of the Ndebele. The colonial state showed no respect for Ndebele property rights. As demonstrated in chapter six, the Ndebele cattle were seized and confiscated in broad daylight by the BSACo as well as individuals in proper violent primitive accumulation style. On the land issue, even before the Reserves Commission of 1915 and the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, the Native Commissioners had already moved hundreds of thousands of Ndebele families from good land so that white farmers could occupy it. The Gwai and Shangani Reserves were established in 1894 prior to the total pacification/subjugation of the Ndebele.¹⁵

Christian missionaries were also culturally arrogant and deliberately blind to the positive aspects of African culture. According to Carole Summers, the missionaries exercised an almost medieval ecclesiastical discipline over their African converts and generally ignored the immoralities of white Christians.¹⁶ For example, Father O’Neil, a Jesuit missionary based in the middle of the Kalanga speaking people was well known for violence against the Kalanga who continued to visit and perform activities related to the Shumba cult. He sometimes used dogs to disperse a group of Shumba adherents.¹⁷ Father Biehler, the Superintendent of Empandeni, was particularly notorious for his violent means of fighting the Shumba cult. One day in 1911 he invaded a Kalanga village where people were holding the cult’s ceremony and with a “substantial shambock of the donkey-cut” lashed mercilessly the old women
who were dancing. In general, neither the Rhodesian colonial state nor the Christian missionaries were fully committed to the practice of the ideology of “Civilization” and “Christianity.” Even the so-called “advanced” or “civilized” Ndebele did not enjoy the freedom and rights that were extended by the colonial state to the white settlers.

It must be underscored that it would be an oversimplification of complex issues to simply write about “white Rhodesian ideas” as though they were monolithic and harmonized into a neat single entity. There were crucial fissures such as the colonial state versus the church represented by such missionaries as White who remained critical of the brutalities of the Rhodesian state. Divisions were also noticeable within the Native Commissioners pertaining to use of Ndebele traditional institutions in local government. There were also ethnic divisions among Britons of “imperial” stock, English-speaking “colonials” as well as both and Afrikaners. According to Ranger, these existing fissures within the Rhodesian colonial society provided limited spaces for the Africans to define and push for their rights. They also generated a lively internal white debate about democracy and human rights. Some whites insisted on the imperial identity and imperial traditions, others on traditions of the Cape, yet others emphasized on the traditions of the development of separate representative institutions like in South Africa. The debate even extended to A.S.Cripps’ plea for equitable segregation as a protection for the Ndebele land rights.
There was division of opinion between those Native Commissioners who wanted to use “Zulu” traditional models and those who wanted to divide and rule the Ndebele. Many Rhodesian Native Commissioners were recruited from South Africa and they wanted to apply the Natal Code of Law and tried to treat the Ndebele like the Zulu. As a result, some Native Commissioners pushed for the rehabilitation of Ndebele authority through enforcement of *amalobolo* payments. These ambiguities and contradictions pertaining to colonial ideology of democracy and human rights emerged clearly within the Native Department when colonial officials began to explore the strategies of maintaining colonial discipline over the Ndebele within their collectivities.

The Rhodesian officials began to explore the concepts of Ndebele traditional authority to the extent that some colonial officials contradicted their previous position regarding the Ndebele traditional institutions as profoundly undemocratic and authoritarian. They began to argue that Ndebele traditional institutions were really democratic and began to lament why they were destroyed by colonial rule.

The Native Department became the centre of Rhodesian white debates about Ndebele traditional forms of governance and authority. Some colonial officials began to look for powerful Ndebele subordinates to use in an “indirect” rule fashion. Others insisted on the formula of dividing and ruling the Ndebele as a suitable system of governance in Rhodesia. What was interesting in this whole debate is that some colonial officials who supported the violent destruction of
the Ndebele state and its institutions in 1893 and 1896 on the basis of its strength, inflexibility, and authoritarianism, by as early as 1898 were already swallowing their words and lamenting the lack of strong central control in Matebeleland. For instance, the Native Commissioner for Bubi and later Sebungwe, Val Gielgud in his assessment of Ndebele, Tonga, and Shona political authority, stated that the Ndebele society was characterized by secession and disorder rather than despotic or authoritarian control. He argued that the Ndebele men and women were prone to “rebellion against authority either black or white”. He proceeded to cite that the Ndebele rebelled against Shaka, Lobengula, and that they did not rebel against Mzilikazi because of external pressures. Gielgud went on to assert that for the Ndebele:

Authority was divided among hundreds of headmen. The religious rites were similarly plural, their kraals being full of altars of different kinds for sacrificing to the river, their amadhlozi, the hippo, or any other beast, stone or tree.

This was indeed a ridiculous statement from a member of a colonial society that destroyed the Ndebele state between 1893 and 1896 on the grounds that it was profoundly despotic.

Some colonial officials after 1898 were making frontal efforts to rehabilitate the lost Ndebele institutions, especially the chiefly institution. Their efforts even led to a meeting of chiefs in Bulawayo for the draft of a Code of Law which culminated in some attempts to even revive Ndebele inxwala ceremony. The Native Commissioner for Insiza, Archie Campbell in his May 1898 monthly
report noted that the meeting with Ndebele chiefs was meant to give the Ndebele chiefs power to preside over “minor tribal cases and disputes in future” as a way of restoring the discipline on the nation.\textsuperscript{27}

The fact that some colonial officials were regretting the consequences of direct rule, the erosion of Ndebele chiefly authority, as well as the general collapse of traditional societies was indeed a glaring example of ambiguities that beset the colonial society in its dealings with the Ndebele. However, it must be noted that the main concern of the Rhodesian officials like Campbell and Gielgud was to come up with institutions that ensured the discipline and control of the Ndebele as colonial subjects rather than as citizens.

The BSACo as the government of Rhodesia between 1898 and 1923 preferred direct rule as well as the tactic of playing Ndebele chiefs against each other so as to diffuse their supposed power and influence in Matebeleland. The Ndebele chiefs were still seen in the government circles as a potential threat to the rule of the white people. Even some Native Commissioners who lacked the experience of the South African model of “indirect rule” supported the BSACo’s approach to the Ndebele chiefs. For instance, Alfred Drew of Mazoe wrote in May 1911 that no attempt should be made to build the lost power of chiefs as their control did not reach much beyond their own kraals.\textsuperscript{28} Other colonial officials like Sir George Grey advocated for the fragmentation of Africans and sounded a word of warning that if the Native Department was supporting
African chiefs: “Is it not likely to lead to all natives eventually getting cooped up in the Reserves under chiefs and combining against us?”

Thus what emerges from the above analysis is that while some colonial officials were seeking to rebuild the lost chiefly institutions once more for administrative purposes others were busy undercutting the political, social, and economic basis of Ndebele chiefly authority. The net effect of this contradiction and ambiguity on the part of the colonial state was its failure to gain the needed support from the Ndebele chiefs and their followers. As a result, the Ndebele chiefs and their followers responded to early colonial rule in a variety of ways that also mirrored the ambiguities and contradictions manifest in their new colonial environment. Some chiefs exploited the fissures within the colonial society to accumulate large herds of cattle like chief Gampu Sithole of Amagogo constituency. Others lost their power and were reduced to depend on their colonial salaries as the lowest ranking servants of the Native Department. Yet others decided to migrate with their followers to the Reserves in search of grazing lands and some degree of independence from white interference. The iNqama chiefs in Wenlock tried to revive a pre-colonial regimental identity around them within the confines of a colonial environment. The Mafus of Godlwayo became radicalized and allied themselves to the early Matebeleland protest movements. However, some Ndebele chiefs who drew their legitimacy from colonial appointment, depended on colonial salaries, and were given cattle given by the colonial state in exchange for their loyalty during the 1896 war of independence, became repressive to Ndebele protest movements.
All these varied responses of the Ndebele chiefs were related and partly influenced by the contradictory and ambiguous operations of the early colonial state, to the extent that the general Ndebele responses to early colonial rule turned out to be equally ambiguous and contradictory combining “reactionary” and “progressive” tendencies as shown below.

7.2. Ndebele Responses to Early Colonial Rule.

Arthur Keppel-Jones noted two important unique features about the colonization of the Ndebele state, which differed from the same process in Mashonaland. He noted that the B.S.A.Co and the white settlers “occupied” Mashonaland and then they “conquered” the Ndebele state. The Ndebele rising of 1896 was ended by “indabas” and agreements whereas the Shona rising was suppressed piecemeal, by dynamiting cave after cave and killing or capturing of chief after chief. It was out of the “indabas” that began in the Matopo Hills that compelled Cecil John Rhodes to offer promises to the Ndebele as a condition for Ndebele “surrender” in 1896. The Matapos Indabas proved clearly that even the most repressive regime constantly like that of the BSACo sought to win the consent of the subordinated groups to the existing social order. Coercion alone had proved to be inadequate as a means of subjugating the Ndebele.

Rhodes’ promises included an amnesty to all those Ndebele who laid down their arms by August 10th, 1896, provision of agricultural seeds for the next farming season, abolition of the Native Police, personal security of the senior Ndebele chiefs, continuation of Ndebele chiefs as salaried leaders of their
people, and more importantly Rhodes promised that the Ndebele were to continue occupying their traditional homes around Bulawayo. Some cattle were distributed to the Ndebele senior chiefs as personal property and as part of placating them to accept the colonial social order.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus Rhodes’ promises raised hopes on the Ndebele that perhaps the colonialists realized their mistakes of the period 1893 and 1895. The fact that senior Ndebele chiefs were integrated into the Native Department hierarchy of power with some authority made some to still see themselves as spokesmen and representatives of their people rather than colonial civil servants in the aftermath of the Ndebele state. The limited authority they gleaned from their active participation in Rhodes’ Indabas led some Ndebele chiefs to still keep the hope of an Ndebele national home and the restoration of a Ndebele monarchy even within a colonial environment. Moreover, the fact that the Ndebele chiefs participated in Rhodes’ Indabas and secured a negotiated settlement different from brutal crushing of Shona resistance made them to develop and think of an exclusive Ndebele political development even within the confines of colonial rule.\textsuperscript{33}

The Ndebele returned to their traditional homes around Bulawayo including those Ndebele families who had gone to hide in the Shangani forests during the rising.\textsuperscript{34} As such some Ndebele after the rising still had a vision of a single nation that needed a monarchy to rule over it. This fostered Ndebele protest associations crafted around the land issue and the restoration of an Ndebele
national leader. Ndebele people interpreted Rhodes’ promises differently. To some they meant that Rhodes conceded to their national rights and entitlement to land. Hence the land issue dominated Ndebele protests in the aftermath of their state. Some people were later to try and justify their claim to particular land on the basis of Rhodes promises, even after the fall of the colonial state. There is an interesting example of the Siphezini people under chief Sigola, who refused to be resettled by the ZANU-PF government on the grounds that they were given Siphezini by Rhodes.

The land issue and the question of restoration of the Ndebele monarchy were not the only problems that affected the Ndebele in the aftermath of their state. One needs to note that colonial rule affected all aspects of Ndebele life and sought to redefine the Ndebele as colonial subjects with very limited rights. For instance, Christianity that had failed to take full hold on the Ndebele prior to the conquest of the Ndebele state (see details in chapter Five) emerged in the aftermath of the Ndebele state with its own discourse of human rights and notions of equality of every human being before God. This was indeed an attractive project to the oppressed people and was quickly seized by some Ndebele people as a tool to challenge some aspects of settler colonialism. Urbanization attracted some young Ndebele people and exposed them to modern forms of political organization to challenge colonial deprivation and oppression. In the countryside, the evictions of the Ndebele from their traditional lands around Bulawayo to far away areas like the Gwai and Shangani Reserves exposed the falsity of Rhodes’ promises to the Ndebele
and generated resentment. The close tutelage and patronage of Ndebele chiefs under the Native Commissioners revealed where real power and authority lay and the powerlessness of the Ndebele chiefs in a colonial environment. Worse still, Rhodes’ idea of taking the sons of King Lobengula away from the Ndebele to South Africa extinguished the flame of a new Ndebele monarchy from the minds of some Ndebele. Some Ndebele people did not like the whole idea of the royal family and the idea of power emanating from hereditary rights.

Taken together, these realizations on the part of the Ndebele generated discontent and produced various but related responses of despondency, agitation, compliance, and protest that lumped together Ndebele Christians, urban elite and traditional leaders into an ambiguous response to settler colonialism. The Ndebele responses to colonialism in the period 1898 to 1934 even borrowed ideas from South Africa and Nyasaland traditions of resistance to fight and resist settler racism, exploitation, and domination. What follows below is an attempt to discuss the main responses of the Ndebele to early colonial rule, the main players, and their ideological and tactical inclinations prior to 1934.

7.3 Ndebele Traditionalists and the Royal House.
Ndebele chiefs and members of the Ndebele royal family were the first group of people to protest and to form associations to agitate for a Ndebele homeland, return of Ndebele cattle, and restoration of the Ndebele monarch. Theirs was a
response that drew inspiration from Ndebele pre-colonial culture as well as from traditional Ndebele religion with its doctrines of political legitimacy, entitlement to land and relationship to environment.\textsuperscript{38}

Some Ndebele chiefs and the members of royal family emerged from the Ndebele rising of 1896 and the subsequent Matopos Indabas as the richest people with large herds of cattle compared to the ordinary members of the Ndebele society. Some became salaried members of the Native Department. This new position of the Ndebele chiefs, first made them to support the colonial government prior to the evictions and after the evictions, they became the major critics of the colonial government’s land policies. It must be noted that Ndebele chiefs in the post-rising period could roughly be divided into three groups, that is, the “collaborators/loyalists” (those who had allied with the settlers during the rising of 1896 like Gampu Sithole), the “resisters/non-loyalists” (those who resisted settler forces until the final settlement in the Matopos), and the “royals” (direct relatives of King Lobengula like Nyamanda who also became a salaried chief in the Native Department).\textsuperscript{39} To note these categories is very crucial for the understanding of the ambiguities and contradictions in Ndebele responses as represented by the Ndebele chiefs and the royal family. For instance, the “loyalists” chiefs were not pardoned by the “non-loyalist” chiefs and by the members of the royal family, especially Nyamanda the eldest son of Lobengula who actively participated in the rising on the side of the “non-loyalist” chiefs. What offended the “non-loyalist” chiefs more was that the settler government thanked the “loyalist” chiefs by giving them large herds of Ndebele cattle.\textsuperscript{40}
Thus the responses of the Ndebele traditional leaders represented by the chiefs and the royal family had its own interesting internal contradictions and dynamics. Scarcity of land first felt by the chiefs and the royal family as the owners of large herds of cattle that needed large grazing lands. Hence they were among the first people to move to the reserves. For instance, between 1898 and 1920 a number of aristocratic Ndebele chiefs as well as sons of Lobengula moved with their cattle to the reserves. Lobengula’s son Tshakalisa was the first royal Ndebele to make his home in the Shangani Reserve, and he was followed by Madliwa in 1900, Sivalo in 1906, Sikhobokhobo in 1910, Tshugulu in 1912, Dakamela in 1913 and Nkalakatha in 1920. These people quickly felt the impact of land expropriation by whites.

Nyamanda refused to move to the reserves, especially to Gwai and Shangani Reserves, arguing that the areas were wild forests, disease-ridden, and too far from Bulawayo and the mainstream of the Ndebele society. Nyamanda, despite being a salaried chief in the Native Department, personally experienced eviction from white farms with his large herd of cattle. Other Ndebele chiefs with large herds of cattle were the first victims of eviction as the white settlers began to keep their own cattle and to practice commercial farming. Ndebele people without large herds of cattle could remain in white farms providing the desperately needed labour. Hence Ndebele senior chiefs and Nyamanda formed the first articulate critique of the settler state’s treatment of the Ndebele and its failure to respect Rhodes’ promises. This articulate critique emerged with dimensions of both “traditionalist” and “progressive” ideas, as the
missionaries and their African converts also deplored the harsh treatment of the Ndebele.\textsuperscript{45}

It was the grievance related to land that gave birth to the National Home Movement led by Nyamanda but bringing together into coalition, the radical Ndebele chiefs, the urban Ndebele “progressives” as well as Ndebele Christians in a struggle for Ndebele land which was being monopolized by the white settlers at the expense of the Ndebele.\textsuperscript{46}

Nyamanda became a leading intellectual entrepreneur together with some Ndebele chiefs and Ndebele Christians in the creation of Ndebele protest in the aftermath of the Ndebele state.\textsuperscript{47} Ndebele protest emerged mainly as a response to eviction and the rural as well as urban people were active in its formulation to the extent that it becomes incorrect to argue that both “ethnicity and nationalism in Matabeleland had more to do with peasants and workers than with chiefs and warriors.”\textsuperscript{48} Nyamanda for instance, was part of what one can call “the warriors” because of the active part he played in the rising of 1896.

The Ndebele protest movements had no clear cut ideological underpinnings in the period 1898 to 1934 and remained largely ambiguous and contradictory as the Ndebele grappled with the various interventions of the colonial state at various levels. For instance, the pre-colonial doctrines of political legitimacy, entitlement and inheritance derived from receding traditional Ndebele religion were used by the members of the royal family to agitate for lost royal privileges
and rights even at the expense of other Ndebele people. For instance, Nyamanda attempted to inherit Lozikheyi (senior wife of Lobengula)’s cattle after her death at the expense of Sidambe, a daughter of Lozikheyi. Nyamanda also claimed all the cattle that were distributed to the Ndebele chiefs, especially to the former “loyalists” like Gampu Sithole, Faku Ndiweni, and others as his father’s cattle. In a meeting with the colonial Administrator in 1915, Nyamanda demanded the return of his father’s cattle held by Ndebele chiefs. He stated that:

I wish to complain of poverty and hunger. I am the son of the late king Lobengula whose indunas I see are living in affluence while I am poor and hungry. I see my father’s dogs in enjoyment of his herds of cattle while I have nothing. I want my father’s indunas to be told to give me my cattle; among other indunas I have Gambo in my mind, who possess large herds of my father’s cattle.

Thus pre-colonial Ndebele culture’s doctrines of legitimacy and entitlement were now appropriated and used by Nyamanda to claim property even from his own fellow Ndebele who were also experiencing varieties of deprivations under colonial rule.

Nyamanda was using the pre-colonial Ndebele notions of cattle ownership, which theoretically bestowed the ownership of communal cattle in the hands of the king as grounds to demand cattle from the Ndebele chiefs after the fall of the Ndebele state. The demands of the royal family constituted an important contradiction and ambiguity in the Ndebele struggles in the period 1898 to 1934, did not receive attention from previous studies of the Ndebele.
Nyamanda and his other brothers, Njube, Nguboyenja, Albert and Rhodes, after him, fought for the lost pre-colonial royal house privileges as well as the common Ndebele land rights.

Nyamanda and his brothers tried at one level to pressure the settler government to grant them land as personal property. At one time the government’s refusal to concede to the royal family’s demands forced Nyamanda’s young brother, Nguboyenja to ask the C.N.C. whether he did not enjoy “any difference in standing between myself and other people.”

The sons of Lobengula still manifested royal arrogance and superiority above the ordinary Ndebele people to the extent that Nyamanda could describe other Ndebele chiefs as “my father’s dogs”, and this arrogance led the sons of Lobengula to at times champion personal and family grievances within the wider Ndebele protest project against early colonial rule. At times, the return of Ndebele cattle was championed by the sons of Lobengula as property of the royal family rather than as national Ndebele property. This parochialism of the sons of Lobengula not only annoyed the former “loyalist” chiefs, but it even baffled some Ndebele aristocratic chiefs who owned large herds of cattle as personal property.

Ndebele oral tradition has it that some Ndebele chiefs said of the royal family in the 1930s: “That is a bad family. We no longer want them [Njube or Nguboyenja]. It is better for you Europeans to rule us. We have our own cattle.” This was indeed an instance of simmering struggles within a struggle,
especially revolving around the issue of cattle ownership among the Ndebele themselves. The demand by Lobengula’s sons for Ndebele cattle as their father’s property was partly based on the pre-colonial Ndebele notions of property ownership where the king played a central role.

However, in spite of the fact that the sons of Lobengula at times protested on strictly personal than representative capacity, they remained a natural focus of Ndebele aspirations for a restoration of the monarchy. Moreover, the Ndebele royal family, especially Nyamanda was intimately involved in the common Ndebele struggle for an Ndebele homeland. Nyamanda was a versatile political figure that ably appropriated diverse sources such as traditional Ndebele religion, Christianity, South African influences as well as modern organized urban protest, and grievances of the royal family into a single common Ndebele struggle for land and restoration of the Ndebele monarchy. Nyamanda interacted with a wide range of people like the South African lawyer Alfred Mangena, Rev. M.D. Mgkatho of the Ethiopian independent church as well as Martha Ngano of the RBVA, demonstrating beyond doubt a superb ability to blend various traditions into a single common goal in the aftermath of the Ndebele state until his death in 1929. He was also able to blend individual grievances with collective or national ones for a common cause.

Nyamanda was also able to use various means of pressure ranging from deputation, letters, petitions, and meetings not only on the Rhodesian settler government but also on Britain as a colonial power in pursuit of Ndebele
struggle for humane treatment, social justice, personal betterment, and dignity in a colonial environment. When the colonial government offered him a big area in the reserves to meet his personal needs warning him not to further agitate for the Ndebele homeland, Nyamanda did not give up his ideal of securing a big Ndebele homeland where every Ndebele had adequate land to live on.

R.S. Roberts noted that the other sons of Lobengula were never given a chance to play a role in their people’s struggle to survive, to adapt, and assert their rights. Instead theirs was not a part of “the African Voice in Southern Rhodesia,” but rather they remained prisoners of a private limbo designed by Cecil John Rhodes. This private limbo related to the separation of Lobengula’s sons from the main stream of the Ndebele society as well as the attempts to inculcate western culture on them through education.

Roberts concluded that the story of the other sons of Lobengula, especially Nguboyenja was not of great importance politically but was rather a personal tragedy that highlighted the ways in which the process of conquest and modernization of one society by another can affect an individual. Indeed Roberts never failed to point out, however, that the focus of the Ndebele on the other sons of Lobengula after the death of Nyamanda and the formation of the Matebele Home Society (M.H.S) as a successor to Nyamanda’s National Home Movement (N.H.M) in 1929 threw sidelights on the cohesiveness of the Khumalo family in which the educated and the non-educated, the so-called
collaborators, and rebels of 1896 held together despite their increasing irrelevance to the real problems facing the Ndebele society.\textsuperscript{58} One only needs to link this with Ranger's argument that Ndebele ethnic identity symbolized by the formation of M.H.S was not necessarily "irrelevant" to the problems facing the Ndebele society as it was not necessarily opposite to Zimbabwean nationalism. Indeed some of the most articulate and imaginative creators of Ndebele identity became articulate creators of nationalism at the sametime.\textsuperscript{59}

Nyamanda surpassed his other brothers in remaining an intellectual entrepreneur of both Ndebele identity and protest because he escaped Rhodes "private limbo" that saw other sons of Lobengula being taken to South Africa. Nyamanda remained suffering with his people and witnessing the entrenchment of colonial rule closely until his death in 1929.

\textbf{7.4 Ndebele Christian Politics}

Christian symbols provided the \textit{lingua franca} through which the hierarchical articulation of colonizer and the colonized was accomplished. At the same time, the Christian enterprise created a new basis for challenge and resistance. For instance, where the colonial state coercion stifled manifest political expression, the polysemic metaphors of the Old and New Testaments offered a haven for the critical imagination.

Christian missionary enterprise tried to project itself as a critique to some of the blatant iniquities of the colonial settler state in the wake of the fall of the
Ndebele state and as such it attracted many Ndebele converts. However, mission Christianity was to founder on its own inherent contradictions. For instance, it failed dismally to mitigate the strains of the colonial predicament and to account for the manifest inequalities that dominated the colonial social order. Thus, although the church continued to serve as an accessible source of signs and organizational forms, these became elements of a syncretistic bricolage, deployed to carry a message of protest and resistance, and to address the exigencies of a runaway world. This resistance and its expression were embodied in the rise of independent African denominations. Their ideological articulation was more directly aimed at the culture and institutions of white dominated churches, but their subtle metaphors bespoke a rejection of domination in all its aspects. In reality Christianity was merely the edge of the colonial wedge.

However, the Christian missionaries deplored some of the brutal methods of the settler state on the Ndebele, especially the evictions of the Ndebele to the remote Gwai and Shangani Reserves.\textsuperscript{60} On top of this, the Christian missionaries, in general preached an attractive doctrine of equality of all human beings before God to the colonized Ndebele who were desperately in need of an emancipatory ideology. Missionaries claimed to bring liberation so that Christian men and women had come to realize that God had given them control of nature and that they owed no obedience to their ancestors but were themselves individually accountable before God.\textsuperscript{61} While the white missionaries did not really intend to honour the promises offered by the of
Christian ideology of freedom and equality in Rhodesia, some white missionaries like the Methodist, John White openly criticized the violence of the colonial state in terms of its professed ideologies of “Civilization and Christianity”. White showed a rare determination to turn the rhetoric of “Christian Civilizing Mission” into reality.\(^6^2\)

White Christians like John White made Christianity attractive to Africans in general and to the Ndebele in particular. Moreover, the failure of the Ndebele rising of 1896 made some Ndebele people to lose confidence in pre-colonial religious institutions as a source of salvation in the face of colonialism. They became forward looking to Christianity as a new way of achieving human rights and democracy.\(^6^3\) However, by the early years of colonial rule, it was becoming clear that the promises of “Christian Civilization” could not be fulfilled and that the Europeans and Africans were not equal before the Christian God. It became clear that white Christian missionaries were culturally arrogant and deliberately blind to the positive dimensions of Ndebele culture as they exercised an almost medieval ecclesiastical discipline over their African converts. Added to this, African clergy and teachers were subordinated to young and arrogant white missionaries.\(^6^4\)

The arrogance of white Christian practitioners led some Ndebele who had imbibe Christian doctrines of human rights and democracy to appropriate these doctrines to challenge both the “white church” and the colonial settler state. In other words, the establishment of Christianity in Matabeleland during the
aftermath of the Ndebele state produced Ndebele Christianity comprising of men and women who were able to use the “Christian solution” to condemn the Rhodesian colonial regime in terms of its own professed ideologies. The emergent Ndebele Christians repudiated the orthodoxy white church together with the spirit of colonial capitalism. This evangelical onslaught gave rise to many and varied Zionist sects that pervaded the theological landscape in Matebeleland. It introduced a mode of practice that interacted with indigenous cultural forms to yield a Christianity that stood in vivid contrast to colonial orthodoxy. For instance, a Christian Rev. M.D. Makgatho used the Christian message to establish his own African Methodist Episcopal Church as a breakaway from the American Episcopal Church (AMEC) and his teachings emphasized education for Africans, self-reliance and asserted an African leadership independent of white tutelage and control.65

The emergent religious spectrum with its internal cleavages between mission, independent, and sectarian churches marked out in an elaborate order of signs and oppositions-came no merely to objectify the stark lines of differentiation within the modern context. It also opened up a general discourse about estrangement and reclamation, and domination and resistance. The Ndebele made serious efforts to incorporate the mission on indigenous terms, seeking to appropriate its resources to their own interests and to minimize its challenge to internal authority.
While Makgatho’s independent church did not rise directly from the situation in Matabeleland, by 1904 it was firmly established in Bulawayo enthusiastically accepted by Ndebele. It also extended to Fort Victoria where it successfully competed with the white dominated Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). By 1921 more and more Ndebele broke away from mainstream white run churches and identified themselves with Makgatho’s separatist church.\textsuperscript{66} The ideology of Makgatho’s church was derived from Black-American’s struggles against racism in America and it emphasized the autonomy of the black races which were languishing under the yoke of colonialism.

Debates have raged on whether African independent churches should be seen as forms of political expression or mere religious manifestations. M.L. Daneel interpreted them as part of an inherent need on the part of the African activating a positive effort to interpret Christianity according to African insights.\textsuperscript{67} However, the realization of the inadequacies of the “Christian elite solution” under white tutelage and patronage explains the existence of African independent churches in Matabeleland as part of the Ndebele quest for human rights and freedom in the colonialist Christian dispensation of the post-rising period. Ali A. Mazrui saw independent churches as a distinct phase of African nationalism in search of a “political kingdom” rather than a heavenly one.\textsuperscript{68}

The Rhodesian settler regime did not doubt the political message from the independent African churches. For instance, Makgatho’s Church was castigated as “confusing political propaganda with religious teaching.”\textsuperscript{69} Nyamanda
became a close friend of Makgatho and he sent one of his sons to be educated in the African Methodist Episcopal Church School in South Africa.\textsuperscript{70}

Another independent church leader was P.S. Ngwenya who worked in South Africa where he learnt the politics of independent African churches. He founded his own church, the African Mission Home Church (A.M.H.C) whose ministers were working in Matabeleland by 1914.\textsuperscript{71} Rev. P.M. Mabiletsa’s Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion based in Johannesburg attracted Ndebele migrants like Joyi Mabhena and Petrus Ndebele who came back to preach, baptize and lay hands in the Insiza district. As Zionist prophets, Mabhena and Ndebele emphasized Holy Spirit possession, healing and prophecy, aspects which were considered politically dangerous by the settler state as it was possible that under the cloak of possession Zionist men and women could spread propaganda.\textsuperscript{72} While the independent churches in Matabelaland were brought into being on the backs of migrants from Nyasaland and South Africa, they readily found supporters in Matabeleland where some sections of the Ndebele Christians were already disillusioned by the “Christian solution” under white patronage and tutelage and were easily integrated into the wider Ndebele protest against the early colonial state. What needs to be said is that Christian ideas and beliefs had considerable influence on Ndebele protest movements and Christianity became an important source of self-identification and was intimately tied up with ideas about equality and freedom.\textsuperscript{73}
The other point which needs to be mentioned is that not only Christianity was important in the Ndebele emancipatory struggle, but older Ndebele cultural and religious traditions including the Nevana medium in Northern Matabeleland and Njelele shrine in Matabeleland South, played an important role in this early phase of Ndebele history after the fall of the Ndebele state. They provided wider cultural cohesion to the diverse people of Matabeleland in the absence of a monarch. The grave of Mzilikazi in the Matopos was also visited as a source of inspiration, to the extent that the Ndebele protest while led by modernizing Christians it also incorporated Ndebele cultural and religious traditions. The Nevana medium and Matopos shrine priests both denounced the evictions and evoked traditional and cultural doctrines of political legitimacy, entitlement to land and a relationship to environment and these notions blended well with the Christian theories of divinely ordained individual rights which were transformed by Ndebele Christian leaders into theories of divinely-ordained “national rights” to lands, leadership of their own people and sovereignty.

An understanding of Ndebele Christian politics of the early colonial period must take into account the fact that it was the outcome of a process of simultaneous reproduction and transformation, a process set in motion by the engagement of a particular indigenous system and a specific extension of European colonialism. Ndebele Christianity must be properly described as “dissenting Christianity” that offered a return to lost values and a meaning to the alienated. It offered a middle ground between a displaced traditional Ndebele order and a new world whose vitality was both elusive and estranging.
The realpolitik of oppression, domination, and exploitation dictated that resistance be veiled and expressed in domains seemingly apolitical. Independent churches provided that apolitical environment for the safe expression of resistance. Ndebele Christianity, particularly its coded forms did not manifest a mere apolitical escapism but an attempt, under pitifully restrained circumstances, to address and redress experiential conflict. Religion was very significant to the oppressed and peripherised Ndebele, as it served as a “cradle” of social links and moral dissent. In the final analysis, far from Ndebele Christian politics being a liminal figure, it was integral part of the culture of the wider social community, drawing upon a common stock of symbols, commenting upon relations of inequality both local and more global, and communicating its message of defiance beyond its own limited confines.

7.5 Ndebele and Liberal Politics

It is true that any struggle for emancipation must emerge from the oppressed people’s consciousness of their oppression and that its roots must be deep-rooted in the socio-economic and political reality of the oppressed people’s situation rather than being an imposition or importation from some distant places or countries. Moreover, local socio-economic and political situation and factors must of necessity influence the character of protest as well as its pace. However, in the case of Ndebele protest in the aftermath of the Ndebele state, it is hard to down play the role played by the South Africa influence especially in the transformation of the discreet associations into modern forms of political organizations. Ranger noted that the immigrants from South Africa added a
missing element to Ndebele politics after 1918 and helped to produce new forms of political protest and pressure. This does not mean that the immigrants from South Africa and Nyasaland inculcated awareness of oppression on the Ndebele or that the Ndebele struggle was a product of this external influence, it only means that these immigrants came with superior organizational skills into already agitated people ready for the struggle as the ideology of protest was already generated by the Ndebele themselves based on their socio-economic and political environment in Rhodesia in the aftermath of the Ndebele state.

By the 1890s, independent churches were already underway as a protest against the limitations of the “Christian solution” under white control in South Africa. African voters in the Cape Province under John Tengo Jabavu were already making organized use of their vote and a vernacular press was flourishing as part of their emancipatory struggle for human rights and democracy. Hence black settlers of Fingo stock like Garner Sojini and John Hlazo brought with them their commitment to the Christian, western way of life and its economic manifestations as well as ideas sharply critical of the sincerity of the white intention to Christianize and modernize African colonies for the benefit of Africans as well. This explains why “Ethiopianism” and militant Christian independency made a very early appearance among the Ndebele being carried by people like Makgatho and Ngwenya who once worked in South Africa.
At another level, Ndebele migrant labourers who worked in South Africa were able to tap South African ideas and traditions of independent churches, trade unionism and modern political organization and carried these ideas back to Matabeleland where they were infused into and blended with the already volatile Ndebele protest politics. John Tengo Jabavu’s Cape traditions emphasized participation in the political process, the power of African vote and combined action.79 The strategy of participation as championed Jabavu by was admired by an Anglican teacher, Abraham Twala who carried Jabavu’s ideas into Matebeleland. Twala campaigned for a territorial organization composed of all existing political associations of Matebeleland as he considered the Ndebele to be more modern compared to the Shona whom he considered to be conservative and not ready to participate in modern politics.80

The Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association (RBVA) was a brainchild of Twala’s campaigns and it was the first modern political association born out of various smaller Matebeleland as well as Mashonaland associations, on 20 January 1923.81 The RBVA comprised of a bizarre mixture of political traditions such as those of the Fingo politics, Bulawayo township tradition, Matebele Home Movement as well as the traditions of Ethiopianism. The RBVA was also the first organization that took the issue of gender seriously into its programme of action. Special interests of African women was to be undertaken by a Native Women’s League whose terms of reference were the upliftment of African women socially, morally, educationally and “advise on all matters affecting the sex”. 82 This was indeed a radical and modern idea, which was hitherto not
mentioned. The association was even later led by a woman, Martha Ngano who proved to be a determined politician and representative of her people during the early colonial period. The RBVA was able to open branches by July 1924 in Plumtree, Mzingwane, Mguza, Nyamandlovu and other places in Matebeleland where Martha Ngano was very active in the late 1920s. Martha Ngano tried hard to transform the RBVA from being a small association of those people who were eligible to vote into a mass association through a vigorous recruitment drive in rural Matabeleland which saw her addressing meetings in far away places as Gwanda.

Martha Ngano was a determined fighter for African rights, who blended rural grievances with urban ones. She was able to talk forcibly about evictions, dipping fees, education, as well as wages in the urban areas, and this broad outlook of the RBVA under Ngano forced the colonial government to observe that RBVA was seeking to become a mass nationalist party, “to break down tribal barriers and thus to create a common sense of nationality among all Bantu people”. The RBVA was indeed able to draw on the existing traditions of the Ndebele kingship movement with its combination of traditional and modern, and thus reach the discontent of the Ndebele rural areas. Thus why it was popularly known as “IVOTI” by rural peasants.

RBVA as a representative body of a wide spectrum of African people gave evidence to the Morris Carter Commission of 1924 and Martha Ngano in particular made proposals that were really meant to protect African interests.
For instance, she suggested restriction of white purchasing power over the land unlike other members of RBVA who confined their proposals to the interests of the elite Africans and who went to the extent of accepting segregation principle. 88

Another modern organization that was formed in the late 1920s was Rhodesia Industrial Commercial Workers Union (RICU) which took its inspiration from Clements Kadilie’s Industrial Commercial Workers’ Union of South Africa. 89 Like other associations that emerged in the 1920s, the RICU called for unity and expressed disillusionment with the failure of the colonial state and white missionaries to live up to their professed ideology of “Christian Civilization,” and demanded higher wages. RICU like the RBVA did not confine itself to urban politics but it blended its “worker” politics with Ndebele grievances. 90 This was necessitated by the fact that there were no permanent “workers” in the 1920s as Africans constantly moved between the urban centre and the rural areas making it possible and easy to blend rural and urban grievances into one common protest movement.

What needs to be said is that the Ndebele in the period 1898 to 1934 attempted to escape the dominant colonial order without leaving it. The Ndebele tried to seize colonial symbols, to question their authority and integrity, and to reconstruct them in their own image. The case study of the colonial encounter with the Ndebele also prove that to break with past structures of power and perception is never as complete as some theorists of liberation would have us
believe. It is no wonder, therefore, that even the established modes of Ndebele protest were articulated in ambiguous tones ringing Christian and terms like civil liberties, civil rights, freedom of conscience, as well as traditional language of entitlement to land, royal privileges, communal ownership of property, and revival of kingship. The ambiguity of the situation was compounded by the ambiguous and contradictory operations of the colonial state, which made it to deploy authoritarian, paternalistic, brutal, racist tendencies as well as democracy propaganda, human rights rhetoric, efforts of revival of some traditional Ndebele institutions as it grappled with the Ndebele. The Ndebele responses to early colonial Rhodesian state became equally ambiguous and contradictory, deploying a conservative affinity to the revival of their lost political institutions, appropriating Christian options, blending rural and urban grievances, seizing spaces created by fissures and cleavages within the early colonial society to their advantage as well as accepting South African influences into their protest movements.

All this was a manifestation of historical anthropology of cultural confrontation-of domination and reaction, struggle and innovation. It was a product of a colonial encounter that was dialectical in its engagement with the long-term effect of altering everyone and everything involved.
Endnotes


5. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, p 20.
10. Ibid.
17. C. Summers, From Civilization to Segregation: Social Ideals and Control in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1934, (Ohio University Press, Athens,

18. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. File NB6/5/2/2, N. C. Annual Report, Bubi, 1897.

24. Ibid.

25. File NB6/5/2/2, Val Gielgud’s Report, 8 January 1898.


27. Ibid.


29. Ibid.


33. Rhodes’ indabas are discussed in Ranger’s Revolt, see S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The First Chimurenga, 1896-1897: Considerations of Ndebele Military Strategy and Tactics,” (unpublished B.A. Honours thesis, Department of History, University of Zimbabwe, 1992), where the promises of Rhodes to the Ndebele were spelt out clearly, see also File L05/6/3, Grey to Goodenough, 28 August 1896, for a details on the amnesty for the Ndebele and its conditions.


35. After 1900, the whites began to push the Ndebele out of the areas around Bulawayo to the Gwai and Shangani Reserves and some families of chiefs with large herds of cattle tried to avoid paying grazing and dipping fees by moving to these Reserves, see Files N3/19/3, Memorandum by CNC, 17 August 1914, File L2/2/11/43, Correspondence About Sivalo, 1906 and a book by R. Palmer, *Land and

36. File N3/19/4, CNC Correspondence on Lobengula, His Descendants and Family, November 1916, see R.S. Roberts, “The End of the Ndebele Royal Family,” (unpublished History Seminar Paper, Department of History, University of Zimbabwe, 1988), where details on the sons of Lobengula are provided.

37. Ranger discussed the history of Matabeleland after the Risings in his, The African Voice, and emphasized the South African influence as bringing about sophisticated ideas of organizing Matabeleland protest associations into modern and radical territorial organizations.


39. For a general discussion of chiefs in Southern Rhodesia, see A.K.H. Weinrich, Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia: Transition from Patriarchal to Bureaucratic Power, (Heinemann, London, 1971), see also file N3/19/3, NC (Inyathi) to Superintendent of Natives (Bulawayo), 29 July 1919.

40. The leading “loyalist” chief Gampu Sithole owned a lot of cattle after the Ndebele rising as he was thanked for keeping to route for white reinforcements open in 1896. The route passed through Sithole’s Amagogo constituency connecting Bulawayo to Mafeking.

41. File N3/19/3, Memorandum by CNC, 17 August 1914, see also File L2/2/11/43.

42. File N3/19/4, Interview with Nyamanda, 1926.

43. File A3/18/1, Interview between Nyamanda and Administrator, 11 October 1915.


47. The word “intellectual entrepreneur” was borrowed from S. Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania, (University of Wisconsin press, Madison, 1990). Ranger used this term in his presentation entitled, “Rural Nationalism” (Unpublished Nationalism and Human Rights seminar paper, IDS, 1999). Ranger presented a series of four short papers in succession in his quest to revise notions on African
Nationalism in Zimbabwe and he concentrated on the dynamics of rural nationalism in Matabeleland.


50. File A3/18/18/1, Interview between Nyanda and Administrator, 11 October 1915.

51. File N3/16/19, White to Cripps enclosed in Cripps to colonial Secretary, 12 April 1923.

52. File AOH/69, Oral history interviews: S Masotsha Ndlovu, Bulawayo Archives.

53. Files A3/18/6 and N3/19/4, Nyamanda’s letters and File N3/19/4, C.N.C (Salisbury) to Secretary, 10 March 1919 – 1 April 1920.

54. Ibid.


57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. T.O. Ranger, “Ethnicity and Nationalism”, p 1. He stated that Ndebele ethnic identity was not necessarily opposite to Zimbabwean nationalism.


Ibid.


File A3/18/18/6, Southern Rhodesia: Departmental Reports of Native Affairs, 1900-1923.

T.O. Ranger, “The Early History of Independency.”

File A3/18/18/6, Southern Rhodesia: Departmental Reports of Native Affairs, 1900-1923.


J Alexander et al, Violence and Memory, where the Christians acted as the leading spokespersons of those people that were forced to live in Shangani Reserve. The first leading nationalists in Rhodesia were Christians like Thompson Samkange whose career as a politician and church leader is meticulously treated in Ranger’s, Are we Not Also Men? Recent studies on Christianity and nationalism include D. Maxwell’s Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe: A Social History of the Hwesa People C.1870s – 1990s, (Edinburgh, IAI, 1999) and R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds), Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History, (James Currey, Oxford, 1997).

The role of traditional religion in Ndebele nationalism is well treated in Ranger’s Voices from the Rocks.


Paul T. Zeleza, Manufacturing African Studies and Crises, (CODESRIA Book Series, Dakar, 1997) where a “materialist” approach to the democracy and human rights is adopted, see also Ranger’s revisionist presentations on Zimbabwean nationalism of April and May 1999 at IDS, University of Zimbabwe where he emphasised the dynamics of rural nationalism and its local stimulation.


Ibid, pp 45-6


The Herald, 3 March 1922, See also File ZAH1/1/1, Evidence of Abraham Twala to the Morris Carter Commission of 1924.

File S84/A/260, Twala to Boggie and Jonas, 15 January 1923.
82. File S84/A/260, Ernest Dube to Superintendent of Natives (Gwelo), 14 July 1923.
83. It was rare in those days for African women to be active in politics worse still to lead a protest movement. African patriarchy combined with colonial capitalist patriarchy tended to domesticate women, see E. Schmidt’s Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939. (James Currey, London, 1992) where she discusses what she termed the “unholy alliance between patriarchy and capitalism.”
85. File S84/A/300, District Superintendent, BSAP to NC (Gwanda), 23 October 1929.
86. File S84/A/260, Superintendent of Natives (Bulawayo) to CNC, 2 September 1924.
87. Oral interview with Jeremiah Ndlovu-Gatsheni, he fondly remembered the days of Martha Ngano and her gospel of the vote in Gwanda.
88. File ZAHI/1/2, Evidence of Martha Ngano to the Morris Carter Commission, pp 603-7
89. It was indeed C Kadiile who influenced the Rhodesian Africans to form proto-trade union in the late 1920s, see File S84/A/300, Report on ICU meeting in Bulawayo, 5 January 1930, see also B. Raftopoulos and I. Phimister, (eds), Keep On Knocking: A History of the Labour Movement in Zimbabwe, (Baobab Books, Harare, 1997).
The Ndebele state has been portrayed as a unique state on the Zimbabwean plateau. It was described as a state that was organized on military lines. As a unique state, it was not studied together with other pre-colonial Zimbabwean states such as Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe, Munhumutapa, and Rozvi states. It was characterized as a militaristic Mfecane state. This depiction of the Ndebele state led previous scholars to over-emphasis violence as a means of governing the Ndebele state. This thesis has successfully destroyed this one-sided approach to Ndebele history. The constitution and institutions that were deployed by the Ndebele state were not very different from those of other pre-colonial Zimbabwean state that existed before it and that were not described as militaristic.

The Ndebele state must indeed be fully understood within the framework of other pre-colonial African state systems. Tom McCaskie, has shown that pre-colonial Asante deployed complex ideologies of governance that were predicated on a delicate balancing of consent and coercion.¹ It would, therefore, be indeed simplistic to portray the Ndebele state system of governance as solely based on deployment and unleashing of violence on dissenting voices. One poignant issue is that the Ndebele state like all other pre-colonial societies simply lacked the infrastructure and technology to command society solely by coercive force. Many studies of state systems have shown that violence was never enough as an instrument of government. This observation explains why
the pre-colonial leaders consistently sought means of legitimizing their power and gaining the consent of the governed.

Coercion, therefore, was in itself a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective implementation of hegemony. Religion was employed as a means to achieve consent. Political power was conceptualized in religious terms, and the ruling houses aspired to a dominant role in ritual and religion. This is an area in Ndebele history that has not been adequately studied. It is clear that even during the early nineteenth century competitions for political dominance, opportunities to seize and enhance power were more than military. Nor did political control exclude ritual control. Mzilikazi and Lobengula used ritual means as well as violence to overcome their rivals. Their aim was to incorporate groups who were recognized as ritually powerful.

Therefore, a study of democracy and human rights in pre-colonial Africa must of necessity grapple with the pertinent subject of establishment of hegemony. This means understanding the hidden and complex connections between power and culture, ideology and consciousness. Hegemony relates to the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group. In the case of Ndebele history, the Khumalo clan represented this fundamental group that sought to impose its worldview on the Ndebele population. This was not achieved by violence as the previous scholars thought. It was achieved through ideological means. Ideology making involved the assertion of control over
various models of symbolic production: over such things as educational and ritual processes, patterns of socialization, political and legal procedures, canons of style and self-representation as well as public communication.

It is clear from the Ndebele case study that the seeds of hegemony were not scattered on barren ground. The Khumalo clan worked very hard to form alliances with some powerful Nguni houses, while at the same time trying to establish themselves at the expense of prior forms. When they were still in South Africa they grappled with powerful Sotho and Nguni groups that had established themselves in the highveld. On the Zimbabwean plateau, they confronted resilient Shona formations, which had their own ideologies. The Ndebele task was to gain ascendancy over the rival Shona social formations. The process included learning about the bases of power of the previous formations and attempts to reverse and to totally supplant what was there before. Thus a study of democracy and human rights in the Ndebele state must begin with how Ndebele hegemony was made, what threatened it, how the Ndebele ruling elite became highly evangelical in seeking to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order, and how the encounter with colonial rule unmade and supplanted Ndebele hegemony that was created over the decades by the Khumalo royal family.

Since hegemony is invariably unstable and is never total, it is no wonder, therefore, that the systems of governance that emerged in pre-colonial Africa were underpinned by complex ideologies involving an intricate interplay of
authoritarianism, militarism, populism, egalitarianism, patriarchal and aristocratic tendencies, kinship, as well as communalism. The articulation of democracy and human rights was in varied idioms, languages, and institutions, which were all permeated and mediated by crucial ambiguities and contradictions. This was so because effective hegemony depended on cultural imperialism-on the ceaseless effort to forge alliances and on the consistent attempt to convert sectarian ideas into universal truths.

In recent years, historians of many areas and periods have tried to tackle the problem of relating cultural practice and its representation to the historically revealed structurations of social reality. The distinguished historian of Central Africa, Jan Vansina, has taken the lead. His research has emphasized the specific nature of African traditions of governance and rights. He has concluded that African traditions consisted of a changing, inherited, collective body of cognitive and physical representations shared by the community. According to him, there was a complex dialectic between the idea of equality and the idea of the dominance of the big men, which in turn produced all varying tendencies of popular autonomy and the responsibilities and rights of the state. This interplay of hegemonic as well as equalitarian ideologies led to the emergence of the so-called ritual kings in some parts of Central Africa as well as clusters of the so-called big men in Southern Africa. The Ndebele inkosi (king) and izinduna (chiefs) in Ndebele state constituted the big men and also solidified their dominance by claiming ritual power as well.
Vansina clearly stated that the development of African political institutions during the pre-colonial era was one of the most impressive illustrations of the power of tradition in shaping its future. He noted with specific reference to Equatorial Africa and the Southern Savannas, that right from the onset, two ideologies co-existed; one that extolled and explained the success of big men and one that stressed equality of all. Thus the exhibition of contradictory and ambiguous ideologies co-existing at the same time was not peculiar to the Ndebele state. The crucial ambiguities and contradictions were part and parcel of the dynamics of democracy and human rights among various pre-colonial state systems spread over the whole continent.

Another historian, John Lonsdale meticulously examined the dialectic between equality and achievement in the same manner as Vansina but with specific reference to the Kikuyu political culture in Kenya. He emphasized the interaction between reciprocity and accumulation, and noted that African power was stored in unequal human relations that were underwritten by an ideology of lineage seniority and kinship. He noted that pre-colonial African men’s future capacity to produce food was banked in their wives, in cattle loans and in grants of rights to land as payment for labour. This was similar to what obtained in the Ndebele state where cattle played a fundamental role and where human beings especially women and youth were accumulated as part of the wealth of the state. Cattle loans indeed sustained client-patron relations of reciprocity as well as exploitation in the Ndebele state just like among the Kikuyu of Kenya. As noted by Lonsdale, African systems of governance were an intimately political
capital, working face to face, not hidden in complex and impersonal institutions, and they demanded constant attention to its reciprocal undertakings for positive returns. The Ndebele institutions of governance were no exception to this scenario.

Kings M. Phiri in an article entitled; *Pre-Colonial States of Central Africa: Embodiments of Despotic Culture* sought to measure the kind of hegemony which the states of Central Africa exercised, the amount of control over subjects and resources their rulers enjoyed, and the extent to which there were opportunities for ordinary people to influence decision-making or to play a meaningful political role. What he discovered is similar to what this thesis has to say about the system of governance among the Ndebele. Phiri discovered that political arrangements involved subtle but intricate checks on the power of the king by other royals, chiefs, clan-heads or aristocratic big men, as well as by the autochthonous priests and mediums who “retained mastery and control of rituals through which the land and the people and animals subsisting on it, could be made productive.” In the Ndebele state powerful aristocracy as well as influential religious practitioners shared power with the king and checked on his excesses. Thus Phiri’s conclusion that “pre-colonial states of Central Africa were neither essentially despotic nor democratic” is directly true for the Ndebele as well.

Zimbabwean historians, however, have shown little interest in studying pre-colonial ideologies of governance as well as state hegemonic ideologies that
have come to characterize some of the most classic recent studies of West African pre-colonial history. For instance, D. N. Beach whose contribution to Shona history of Zimbabwe remains unsurpassed did not write about the question of pre-colonial ideologies of governance before his untimely death in 1999. However, Dr Stan Mudenge remains one Zimbabwean historian who produced by far the most impressive treatment of a pre-colonial Zimbabwean polity.

Despite the fact that Mudenge’s study of the Munhumutapa state draws mainly from Portuguese archival sources rather than Shona oral testimonies, his opening chapter provides a convincing hierarchy of rights and responsibilities running from the nuclear family (musha) right through to the nyika (chiefdom). Mudenge’s analysis is very close to Vansina in that it presents the dialectic between egalitarianism and the glorification of the big men.

What Mudenge finds at the nuclear family (musha) in the Munhumutapa state is similar to what this thesis uncovered at the umuzi (family) level in the Ndebele state. Mudenge found communalism, mutual assistance and the all-embracing ideology of kinship. However, Mudenge’s study, especially its conclusion tended to fall neatly within the nationalist problematic when he stated that “the Mutapa state throughout its history was never a militaristic one, nor were the powers of the Mutapas excessively oppressive” as though the Mutapa state was not riddled by crucial ambiguities, cleavages and contradictions that
permitted militarism, authoritarianism, hegemonism, co-existing with populism, democracy and egalitarianism.¹²

One of the major challenges posed by the present study to the debate on democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general is that pre-colonial polities like that of the Ndebele and their complicated systems of governance do not offer any justifications for non-accountable styles of governance and neglect or violation of people’s rights displayed by some contemporary autocratic regimes in Africa. There are indeed attempts by the ruling regimes in Africa, including Zimbabwe to justify some of their actions through recourse to pre-colonial past. For instance, long presidential incumbency, which has become a major stumbling block to democracy in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general, is sometimes explained in terms of the ideas of hereditary and life kingship/chieftainship that obtained in pre-colonial Africa.

The ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has made ceaseless efforts to present itself to the electorate as fulfilling the aspirations of pre-colonial religious figures like Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi. The liberation war of the 1970s was presented as a continuation of resistance that was started by the Mutapas against the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and the Ndebele and the Shona in 1896-7. This is indeed a revealing observation in terms of the fact that even modern regimes are consistently seeking consent of the masses through reversion to pre-colonial
past. The hegemony of ZANU-PF is built upon the liberation struggle and selective memory of pre-colonial past. There is indeed an attempt by the ruling elite to ritualize itself by claiming inspiration from pre-colonial spirit mediums like Nehanda.

The leading ZANU-PF ideologists like Tafataona Mahoso have even tried to justify lack of democracy in Zimbabwe in terms of history. Democracy is said to be a foreign ideology that has no precedents in pre-colonial past. Opposition is dismissed as unAfrican. All this demonstrates how pre-colonial history has been appropriated by ruling regimes to justify their stay on power.

The significance of this study, therefore, emanates from the realization that without sound academic understanding of pre-colonial past, many people could be wood winked by power-hungry elements into believing that what their leaders are doing is concomitant with pre-colonial systems of governance. It is clear from the case study of the Ndebele that violence was not the order of governance. Pre-colonial leaders sought non-violent means of legitimizing their power including resorting to ritualisation of kingships. However, it is clear that many post-colonial ruling regimes have failed to ritualize themselves and to gain spontaneous consent from the masses, and this explains why they resort to violence.

The main schools for violence were colonial rule and nationalist liberation struggles rather than pre-colonial societies. Colonial rule was indeed
entrenched through violence, after it failed to peacefully supplant the existing African social order. Tribalism and ethnic violence is also a post-colonial phenomenon. The case study of the Ndebele state indicated that once a group of people was assimilated into the Ndebele society, it was protected from discrimination and violation of their rights. One is tempted even to argue that pre-colonial leaders were more successful in creating unity within the state than the African nationalists of the post-colonial period. There were no cases of ethnic cleansing in the Ndebele state. What stands out clearly is the case of successful incorporation of the Sotho, Tswana, and Shona groups into the Ndebele society. The post-colonial scenario contradicts this picture, where the Ndebele suffered from ethnic inspired violence between 1980 and 1987. The violence of the 1980s in Zimbabwe was part and parcel of the establishment of ZANU-PF hegemony over PF-ZAPU. ZANU-PF was dominated by the Shona, and sought to establish Shona hegemony and a one party state after 1980. PF-ZAPU was dominated by the Ndebele, and was seen as a stumbling block to ZANU-PF hegemony.

The Ndebele hegemonic project was backed by a delicate balancing of coercion and consent, unlike the ZANU-PF domination that is largely maintained by overt violence. *Amabutho* in the Ndebele state were more of a unit of production rather than an instrument of state violence. The present day ZANU-PF Youth Brigades are more of an instrument of violence than a unit of production.
Abuse of people’s rights cannot be justified on the cultural relativist argument that Africans had their own notions of rights, different from those of the West. The cultural relativist argument is dangerous, because African dictators to justify denial of human rights to their people can easily appropriate it. The study of the Ndebele has shown that the universal criteria of rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 can be easily applied to the pre-colonial past as well as the colonial and post-colonial periods. On issues like provision of security in terms of food and material resources such as land and cattle, the pre-colonial society surpassed the colonial and post-colonial states.

However, during the pre-colonial era the right to marry and found a family was affected by the operations of the law of celibacy. On the political front, it is clear that the pre-colonial societies were not open to political competition in the form of elections. Consent and legitimacy was not derived from free and fair elections. Heredity was the order of the day. However, pre-colonial rulers still tried to be accountable to their people through distribution of such sources as land and cattle. The ritualization of the kingship was an effort to base power and legitimacy on a non-violent instrument like religion.

Thus the dominant theme in this thesis is that of hegemony as articulated by Antonio Gramsci. The central issue is that of the problem of the relation between coercion and consent during different phases of Ndebele history. There is need for further research into this issue in relation to the colonial and post-colonial history of Zimbabwe. The theoretical position is very relevant to the
understanding of problems of democratization, human rights, and violence of the state in Zimbabwe today. The violence that engulfed Matebebeleland and the Midlands in the early 1980s falls neatly within the framework of construction of hegemonic projects by the post-colonial state of Zimbabwe.

Violence rather than consent has dominated post-colonial hegemonic projects in Africa. Ruling regimes are failing to gain the spontaneous consent of the governed. The democratic forces that are trying to remove dictatorial regimes from power are facing a mammoth task in coming up with alternative ideological frameworks that far transcends the nationalist paradigm. Their difficulties are compounded by the fact that theirs is a long battle for possession of salient signs and symbols, a bitter and drawn out contest of conscience and consciousness. This study of the establishment and consolidation of state hegemonic projects has shown that the seeds of hegemony are never scattered on barren ground. The task involves the complex process of trying to transcend prior forms. It has proven that it is indeed extremely difficult to totally supplant what was there before. Ruling regimes are not resting on their material laurels to the extent that even the most repressive tend to be highly evangelical, constantly seeking to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order.
Endnotes


3. Ibid.


7. Tom McCaskie’s *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, remains one of the most rigorous analysis of West African state hegemonic ideologies.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NDEBELE CATTLE LOOTED BY WHITE SETTLERS IN 1895*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>TAKEN BY WHITES</th>
<th>RESERVED FOR RATIONS</th>
<th>LEFT WITH THE NDEBELE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulilima</td>
<td>9 450</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11 450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bubi</td>
<td>4 120</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5 030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwelo</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belingwe</td>
<td>6 975</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8 245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwanda</td>
<td>4 150</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mzingwane</td>
<td>4 000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
<td>4175</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRAND TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>32 870</strong></td>
<td><strong>700</strong></td>
<td><strong>40 930</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* It must be noted that the looting and seizure of Ndebele cattle started simultaneously with the invasion of the Ndebele state in October 1893 and progressed unabated up to the end of the Ndebele uprising in 1896. This implies that the above figures are only reflective of the ferocity of the looting for the period 1895 only. Individual whites also looted and seized cattle without official notice. This means that the actual figures of looted cattle even trebled the ones above. Cattle looting and seizure was one of the effective methods used by the whites to destroy the material base of the Ndebele state and to dispossess the Ndebele in the period 1893 to 1897. There is need to realize that prior to conquest cattle were very important in social, economic, political and spiritual being of the Ndebele. Hence massive looting of Ndebele cattle by whites actually quickened the collapse of the Ndebele state. Cattle had sustained the client-patron relationships and their strategic distribution by the king had helped to legitimize the power of the king. The rich through the system of cattle loaning cushioned the poor in society. Hence cattle were indeed important in the Ndebele state. The chieftaincies (izigaba) were also sustained by the cattle, which were distributed by the king from the centre. The institution of amabutho and the marriage system were also sustained by cattle as a source of food and as a means of exchange. The religious system of the Ndebele used cattle for sacrifice and as tribute to the religious cults. Thus, taking Ndebele cattle was indeed a blow to the whole Ndebele socio-economic and political systems.
## APPENDIX B

### KNOWN NDEBELE CHIEFTAINCIES AND LEADERS DURING MZILIKAZI’S REIGN

#### IN MATEBELELAND

### 1. MAKHANDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHIEFTAINCY</th>
<th>CHIEF (1&lt;sup&gt;ST&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensingweni (INsingo)</td>
<td>Dlunduluza Dlodlo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inxa</td>
<td>Ntshamane Khanye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indinana [ENdinaneni]</td>
<td>Mfangilele Matshazi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inzwananzi</td>
<td>Mpiliwa Magutshwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensindeni</td>
<td>Tshuwe Gwebu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EmaZizini</td>
<td>Mhlambi Mzizi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INqobo [ENqotsheni]</td>
<td>MthiniMphoko Ndlovu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IziNkondo [EziNkondweni]</td>
<td>Xukuthwayo Mguni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmaKhwatha [EmaKhwatheni]</td>
<td>Sangulwana Mthimkhulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umhlanjwana [EMhlanjwaneni]</td>
<td>Manyoba Ndiweni</td>
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2. AMHLOPHE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>KoMhalahlandlela [EmGadla]</td>
<td>Gwabalandina Mathe</td>
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<tr>
<td>KweSincinyane</td>
<td>Qaqa Ndiweni</td>
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<td>Ihlathi</td>
<td>Magibidwane Hlabangana</td>
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<td>EmaDibenii</td>
<td>Mqendana Ndiweni</td>
</tr>
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<td>AmaMbambo [EmaMbanjeni]</td>
<td>Lukhezo Mbambo</td>
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<td>Iliba</td>
<td>Lugobe Mlotshwa</td>
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<td>Elangenii</td>
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<td>Imfakuceba</td>
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<td>Mnengeza Fuyane</td>
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<td>Udibinhlangu</td>
<td>Nungu Thebe</td>
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<td>Mkhanyeli Masuku</td>
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<td>Emsizini</td>
<td>Mcetshwa Masuku</td>
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<td>Enkanini</td>
<td>Magobela Mkhwananzi</td>
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<tr>
<td>AmaGoloza</td>
<td>Dlekezela Thebe</td>
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<tr>
<td>AmaHlokohloko</td>
<td>Mbambele Ndiweni</td>
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<tr>
<td>AmaThwala</td>
<td>Gwadi Mlotshwa</td>
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### 3. AMNYAMA

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<td>Uzinyathini</td>
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<td>AmaBhukudwana</td>
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<td>KoGodlwayo</td>
<td>Dambisamahubo Mafu</td>
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<td>Intekelo [Entekelweni]</td>
<td>Magazi Tshili</td>
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<td>Intunta</td>
<td>Mhabahaba Mkhwanazi</td>
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<td>Isiphezi</td>
<td>Ngwabi Sigola</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imbelesi</td>
<td>Mfanembuzi Mzizi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intshamathe</td>
<td>Ntolwane Xaba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uyengo [Oyengweni]</td>
<td>Mlotha Khumalo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhlambane</td>
<td>Thambo Ndiweni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intemba</td>
<td>Njotsho Mlotshwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amatshetshe</td>
<td>Sifo Masuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inyathi [KoLoziba]</td>
<td>Ntabeni Gwebu</td>
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### 4. IGAPHA

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<td>Maqhekeni Sithole</td>
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<td>Inyanda</td>
<td>Mlagela Khumalo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Umnocwazi</td>
<td>Mtotobi Mlilo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indutshwa</td>
<td>Mabulana Ndlovu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubabambeni</td>
<td>Masokana N ngu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoZwangendaba</td>
<td>Mbi ko Masuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KweZiminyama</td>
<td>Mtshamayi Ndiweni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enyamayendlovu</td>
<td>Mkhokhi Masuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usaba [Osabeni]</td>
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<td>Amatshova</td>
<td>Ngubo Sithole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ululwane</td>
<td>Mfokazana Gurnede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inqama</td>
<td>Somhlolo Mathema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induba [Endutsheni]</td>
<td>Lotshe Hlabangana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ujinga [Ojingeni]</td>
<td>Mletshe Ndiweni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingobo</td>
<td>Mazwi Gurnede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoMbuyazwe</td>
<td>Mhliphi Ndiweni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empandeni</td>
<td>Sindisa Mpofu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umnquna [Emnqunyeni]</td>
<td>Maphungo Mabhena</td>
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<tr>
<td>KoNdiweni [EziNaleni]</td>
<td>Mabuyana Ndiweni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usaba</td>
<td>Mpukane Ndiweni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emangubeni [Ingubandlovu]</td>
<td>Khisi Khumalo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inhlangano KaMalinga</td>
<td>Sikhwamalala Dlodlo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eguqeni</td>
<td>Khwabithi Sitsha</td>
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### APPENDIX C

**NAMES OF MZILIKAZI AND LOBENGULA’S DAUGHTERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MZILIKAZI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batayi</td>
<td>Banyayi</td>
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<td>Vuvu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fakubi</td>
<td>Sidambe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temutemu</td>
<td>Mubi</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sixubhuzelo</td>
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<td>Sihuhumba</td>
<td>Temutemu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitshi</td>
<td>Mhlumela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nediana</td>
<td>Mfikephi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nyakamubi</td>
<td>Siphi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibili</td>
<td>Losikhulume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nkanyezi</td>
<td>Lopila</td>
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<td>Klibhi</td>
<td>Sigombe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mcengence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Ntela</td>
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<td>Hlaleleni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathomba</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lomahawu</td>
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<td>Makhwa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zinkabi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lomadlozi</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong> = 20</td>
<td><strong>= 12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Only 20 daughters of Mzilikazi are known by their names whereas for Lobengula only 12 are known. There is a high likelihood that other names are no longer remembered. The Ndebele state was a male dominated society where women were considered to be minors. As such names of women were not prominent in history and they could easily be forgotten. Like in other pre-colonial African societies, in the Ndebele state women were largely “invisible” compared to males. Hence the importance of capturing these names for Mzilikazi and Lobengula’s daughters.*
## APPENDIX D

### SOME KNOWN NAMES OF WIVES OF MZILIKAZI AND LOBENGULA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MZILIKAZI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mwaka Nxumalo</td>
<td>Mbhida Mkhwananzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nompethu Nxumalo</td>
<td>Mfaziwajaha Mkhwananzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulatha Tshabalala</td>
<td>Lozikheyi Dlodlo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loziba Thebe</td>
<td>Mpoliyana Ndiweni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kwakhiwe [surname unknown]</td>
<td>Xhwalile Mzila</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luphale Masuku</td>
<td>Ngotsha Dlodlo</td>
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<td>Phakaphaka [surname unknown]</td>
<td>Sitshwapha Ndiweni</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mhlanganyana [surname unknown]</td>
<td>Lomalongwe Thebe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nyembezana [surname unknown]</td>
<td>Ncence Fuzwayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makhwelu Matshazi</td>
<td>Moho [surname unknown]</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cithi [surname unknown]</td>
<td>Maphiphilisa [surname unknown]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lomagazi Masuku</td>
<td>Famona [surname unknown]</td>
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<td>Nyamazana Dlamini</td>
<td>Phithiphithi Gumede</td>
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<td>Tshetshe [surname unknown]</td>
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<td>Nqindi [surname unknown]</td>
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<td>Lutshana [surname unknown]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sinama [surname unknown]</td>
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<td>Wabayi Khanye</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thana [surname unknown]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Losikhuma [surname unknown]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Longwana [surname unknown]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total = 13                                                Total = 29


*Very little is known about the wives of Ndebele kings compared to even their sons. They were “invisible” like their daughters in the exception of a few like Lozikheyi who was the most loved one of Lobengula and who stayed in the capital. Others’ surnames are not even recorded but the majority belonged to the families of leading chiefs as Lobengula and Mzilikazi married from the chiefly families. The “invisibility” of these women explains a lot about the patriarchal nature of the Ndebele society. Both Lobengula and Mzilikazi are said to have had hundreds of wives but their names are not even recorded. For instance, here I only recorded 13 for Mzilikazi and 29 for Lobengula and the rest are not known even by mere name.*
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abafuyiweyo - captives who were already distributed to the provinces of the Ndebele state and were placed under guardianship of specific Ndebele people. These people’s rights were limited although they were practically considered to be members of the families to which they were distributed. However, after serving a sort of probation involving learning Ndebele language and culture, these people were then assimilated to the Ndebele structures and allowed to own property, to start personal homesteads and to marry.

Abathunjiweyo - newly captured people not yet distributed to the provinces. These were closely watched as some of them tended to desert to their original homes. Their rights were therefore strictly limited at this stage until they were distributed to different Ndebele homesteads.

Abesintwana - Ndebele collective name for women, that likened them to children.

Imbovane - few selected captives that remained in the capital to render various services to the royal house. Some assisted royal women as servants. However, these were afforded a very high status and they enjoyed wide-ranging rights to the extent that they became fanatical supporters of the king and the royal house.

Inceku - Captives that performed the role of servants in the Ndebele homesteads.

Indlovukazi - Ndebele term loaded with respect for the senior wife of the Ndebele king. The senior wife enjoyed considerable reflected authority from her husband (the king).

Isigqii - Ndebele term equivalent to slave. However, slavery was not a practice in the Ndebele state. Slavery was discouraged by the king who wanted all people to be his subjects with dignity. But individual Ndebele people were able to ill-treat the captives to the extent that they appeared like slaves. Captives who were treated like slaves were taken by the king to live in the capital where they enjoyed royal protection from abuse.
Izihlabamkhosi zenkosi – A Ndebele collective term for homes under lesser chiefs, which were located at the borders of the Ndebele, state that acted as “eyes” of the king on strangers and enemies that entered the Ndebele state. They acted as an alarm that swiftly alerted the centre. Hwadalala and his Birwa performed this task in the extreme south of the state.

Uxolo - term for pardoning of an accused person by the king.

Umqamelo wenkosi – a term referring to the most trusted and senior chief that advised the king and who could even act on behalf of the king.

*The terms that are defined in this glossary have a direct implication for democracy and human rights as conceived by the Ndebele.
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<td>Mpopoma (Byo) – 10/3/99</td>
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<tr>
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