

“The Next Best Substitute”?
Vundlazi, ruler of the Izinkumbi, gender and political control in southernmost
Natal,
1840–1890

¹ I would like to thank Jeff Guy for much help, useful discussion, and lucky finds of indispensable sources used here, Julie Parle for opening up important questions and helping to bring vividness to individual historical subjects, and Catherine Burns for making obvious those things of immense interest that I had managed to ignore.

Positioning of chapter on Vundlazi within this thesis

This is one of several chapters that focus on individual women who lived in Natal between 1840 and 1890 and whose lives are notable for several reasons. Firstly, almost all of them were widows of chiefs – or, if not, were daughters of chiefs; secondly, reasonable amounts of historical material survive on all of them because in one way or another their actions were remarkable to their own people and to the colonial government and/or to missionaries.

In one sense the thesis brings together apparently disparate individuals: the woman this chapter deals with, named Vundlazi, reigned as paramount chieftainess of the *Izinkumbi* polity in southern Natal from about 1839 until 1865 and remained politically active and influential until her death in 1890. Two women who invoked great censure and opposition when they took their children and left their communities for mission stations were Mbalasi Makhanya and Dalida Dube, grandmothers respectively to the second black doctor in South Africa, John Nembula, and to John Langalibabele Dube.² Finally Hetshepi kaPakatwayo, a woman who, though she was the only direct heir to the Qwabe throne in the 1840s, designated her male cousin Musi the Qwabe ruler.

What links these women are the categories primarily of royalty but also of widowhood (in all cases but Hetshepi's), which arguably provided a platform of sorts for the actions they took; in certain respects giving rise to these actions, and also causing their actions to be remarked and recorded. They were united by the particular material and social pressures of life in early colonial Natal, and the sorts of ideological pressures to which these gave rise. Some of the many things that distinguish these figures from one another as historical subjects: their varying prestige and status within their contrasting communities, their varying ages, the symbolic roles they were ascribed or took on, their feelings about missionaries, their relationships with the dominant colonial state, the discourses brought to bear upon their choices.

The last two decades have seen a vigorous scholarly debate around different ways of understanding women's position/s in precolonial southern African societies, and especially in precolonial Zulu society. This debate has frequently come to focus upon possibilities and limitations for women's political life at the

² I have recently found material on a similar case in Inanda, of Monica uZiginisela Mguni, the widow of chief Mguni of the amaShangase, who in 1887 at the age of 50 took her two daughters to the Oakford mission station run by Louis Mathieu, a Roman Catholic priest. Her and her daughters' battle for exemption from Native Law elicited discussions within the colonial administration about whether or not widows could in fact be exempted from Native Law, speaking directly to the case of Dalida Dube (see Eva Jackson " 'Wife of the former Chief': the agency of widows in 1840s Natal". Paper presented to the 22nd Biennial Conference of the Southern African Historical Society, June 2009) and to the issues of widowhood, respectability, and women's ownership of property raised by Vukile Khumalo in recounting the upheavals brought to Groutville mission station by a widow named Nozingqwazi: "Political Rights, Land Ownership and Contending Forms of Representation in Colonial Natal, 1860–1900". *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*. Vol. 22, 2004. pp. 109–148.

level of the ordinary, the personal and productive -- and at the level of political leadership.

Jeff Guy's materialist emphasis, upon the basic separateness of male and female worlds of labour, male control of female labour, and male accumulation (through cattle) of the means to appropriate more female labour in a manner essentially repressive along gender lines, has generated consensus (from such as Cheryl Walker) and critique.³ Responding to this position, Jennifer Weir, Sean Hanretta, and Sifiso Ndlovu via very different arguments and theoretical starting points, have been the most vocal in recent years to begin in earnest the excavation of women's leadership in precolonial southern African societies.⁴

This thesis hopes to extend the discussion of "royal women", which has become a focus of the above debate, to colonial southeast Africa. It takes as a starting point Sean Hanretta's call for an understanding of women's roles in precolonial society as multiple, and his acknowledgement that there existed certain possibilities for female status in society, and aims to fill in to some extent the transition from the kind of precolonial past Weir for example presents, to a Natal which has been portrayed as largely bare of opportunities for female leadership. These individual cases are to be read against a crucial analysis: the idea that an accommodation of patriarchs – a confluence of African and white colonial male views of women's right place – came together in progressively limiting the possibilities for women's legal and political recourse.⁵ To a large extent my conclusions about how my subjects' lives fitted or did not fit into this posited process, are still emerging through research.

This draft chapter details the life of a female chief whose fascinating life has been largely overlooked by scholars, and asks how gender was imbricated in the chiefship of the Izinkumbi of southern Natal from 1830 to 1890, as a means to eventually link up with larger questions: What did colonial rule do to women's

³ Guy, "Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies, In Cheryl Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990) 33-47; Guy, J. *Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies in Southern Africa*", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Oct, 1987) 18-37. Cheryl Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c. 1850 – 1930: An Overview', in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*.

⁴ Sean Hanretta, "Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women's Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century", *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 39 (1998), No. 3, pp. 389-415 (Cambridge University Press) 389-415. Weir J. (2006), "Chiefly women and women's leadership in pre-colonial southern Africa". In Nomboniso Gasa (ed.), *Women in South African History: Basus'imbokodo, Bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. [Online] accessed from: http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/full_title_info.asp?id=2186 on Oct 16 2008. Sifiso Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power in the Zulu Kingdom", in *Zulu Identities*. Also Norman Etherington's discussion of MaNthathi of the Tlokwa: Etherington, *The Great Treks: the transformation of southern Africa, 1815-1854*, (Longman, 2001) Chapter 4
See also Carolyn Hamilton, 'Ideology, oral traditions and the struggle for power in the early Zulu kingdom', (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985).

⁵

leadership? What has its impact in this regard been, in other colonial contexts in Africa and elsewhere?

Related to this, we can ask the question - can the study of these “royal” women tell us just about “royal” women? This thesis will aim to constructively link Natal findings with existing debates on southeastern Africa’s precolonial and colonial gender relations more generally. Research that shows that there existed, for example, many women chiefs in precolonial southern Africa, and enumerates these, may certainly alter our sense of women’s scope for power. However perhaps detailing such female leaders’ lives – and the grounds of their political legitimacy – *as well as* the lives of the several women in this study who were *not* chiefs, but were close to the chiefship – is crucial if we are to raise and hopefully answer a general question: What light can the lives of “women of status”, shed on women’s status? What could these cases reveal about social controls, about the scope for women’s property ownership in colonial Natal, about the “customary” rights and perceptions of women at different stages of their lives in this region – that we may not already know?

Needless to say, when, in 1824, the first European settlers reached Natal, they found no White-skinned ladies whose hands to seek. So they sought the black-skinned hands of Native damsels, as the next best substitute. Among those whose charms captivated the heart of pioneer H. F. Fynn (*Umbulazi weTeku*), was one, Vundlase, a daughter of [the] Zelemus. Having duly wedded her, he elevated her to the rank of Great Wife; and, after he had returned to the Cape, she was left as independent Queen over his *izinKumbi* (Wanderers) tribe, settled between the umZembe and iFafa rivers, an omnium-gatherum of all such homeless waifs and strays as cared to join.⁶

As one might expect, this light-hearted, glancing but vivid evocation is in a few respects something of an assault on the truth.

Lost in the above tale of succession is Frank Fynn, Henry's brother, Vundlazi's actual husband, who ruled the Izinkumbi briefly after Henry left Natal to pursue a career in the Cape colonial service. Vundlazi came to power as Frank's widow and her relation to his better-known brother was not that of a gloriously-ensconced (albeit abandoned) former wife and queen – but was complex and at some points mutually antagonistic. Also, the idea that the earliest white traders' marriages, each to several African wives, were simply exotic and default romantic arrangements, obscures the crucial security these particular homesteads provided for the traders.

It was widely known in Cape and Natal settler society that from 1824 to 1834 Henry Fynn had had multiple African wives in Natal, and had lived with them in what were essentially several traditional homesteads. His attempts to make the transition to white colonial respectability were frustrated by settler society's refusal to forget: Fynn had freely traversed what Jennifer Weir and Norman Etherington refer to "the permeable sexual borderland that white men (but never women) could inhabit between the constraints of respectable colonial society and the freedom that beckoned across the frontier"⁷ and was powerfully judged for this. Did settler society, through salacious gossip and speculation, sexualize what was essentially a productive relationship? This paper does not enter into this discussion, but it must be noted that colonial discourses surrounding these relationships and living arrangements were multilayered and certainly seemed to emphasise sexuality. Fynn was censured both for having traversed this sexual borderland, and for having abandoned the children he fathered in Natal when he came to the Cape in 1834. That his African wives, at some point after his departure, formed relationships with African men was also noted by white commentators; reflecting, perhaps, a colonial view that a polity founded above

⁶ A. T. Bryant. *Olden times in Zululand and Natal: containing earlier political history of the Eastern-Nguni clans*. 1929, Longmans, Green and Co. (London, New York [etc.] 373

⁷ Jennifer Weir and Norman Etherington. "Shepstone in Love: The other Victorian in an African colonial administrator". Chapter 2 in *Orb and Sceptre: Studies on British Imperialism and its Legacies, in Honour of Norman Etherington*, edited by Peter Limb 2008. (electronic version: Monash University ePress; paperback version: Sydney University Press.)

all on sexual liaisons, was disintegrating along lines of new sexual liaison – again to the detriment of Fynn’s children. And, as will be seen below, Vundlazi’s chaste widowhood after Frank Fynn’s death, and the protective role she played during her long rule were seen, by the traveler Robert Garden and Henry Fynn, at least, as a counterpoint to these supposed trends.

Julie Pridmore discusses the way in which H. F. Fynn’s well-known liaisons with African women hampered his attempts to get ahead in the colonial administration, and refers to the links he maintained with the Izinkumbi, mainly in an official capacity. However her main emphasis is upon portrayals, over time, of this individual man. Perhaps it is important that such carefully bounded narratives of his attempts to make his way in 1820s Natal, and later to reach for settler respectability, should more fully incorporate or acknowledge the complex and persistent relationship he (and his white family) had with the Natal polity made up of his African children and one-time adherents.⁸ The only comprehensive research on Vundlazi herself and on her children has been done by Shelagh Spencer, establishing essential information on the lives of the Fynns and their families.⁹

Shirron Bramdeow’s 1988 study of Fynn’s career in the colonial administration, and of the “distinct mixed ethnic community” he founded along the south coast of Natal, embarks on an integrative narrative; making a considerable contribution to knowledge of the nineteenth century history of Fynn’s and his brother Frank’s black families and their descendants, as well as describing their increasing physical and political marginalization over the course of the twentieth century.¹⁰ However the study fails to grapple with the nature of the nineteenth century relationship between the “Fynns” and the “Izinkumbi”, or to acknowledge the presence or importance of the over 30 distinct clans that claimed protection from and temporarily gained a sort of unity under Henry and Frank Fynn and their successors.¹¹ That is, she focuses on this ethnically mixed community of Fynn descendants largely to the exclusion of the complex, even uneasy network of early political alliances, of which this group was initially an

⁸ Weir and Norman Etherington. “Shepstone in Love” and Julie Pridmore’s thesis on H. F. Fynn state variously that Vundlazi was H. F. Fynn’s wife (Pridmore 32; 110; Weir and Etherington) and that she bore him children. Shelagh Spencer’s research on Vundlazi, and archival evidence, is conclusive on the point that Vundlazi was Frank Fynn’s wife and that he was the father of her children, though it is possible that she was first intended as Henry’s wife and became Frank’s wife, as recounted below.

⁹ Spencer’s account has been indispensable in the research for this paper, pointing to many sources and clarifying many important points. Shelagh Spencer. *British settlers in Natal 1824–1857: A Biographical Register (Eagle–Fyvie)*. (UKZN Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Shirron Bramdeow, *Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community in Natal, 1824-1988* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1988).

¹¹ This chapter draft only works a little way toward identifying the actual positioning of the Fynn’s African families in relation to the wider group of chiefships that owed the Fynns, and then Vundlazi, their allegiance, but an attempt is made here to open up this discussion.

important part. The below outlines the arrival and activities of the group of white men who arrived in Natal in the 1820s, and how this relates to the rise of the Izinkumbi, a loose conglomeration of clans that for 25 years was headed by a woman.

This chapter, accordingly, attempts to bring together existing research on the Fynns and on the Izinkumbi, with a close appraisal of archival sources to present Vundlazi's 40 years of close involvement in the political leadership, of the Izinkumbi, meaning "the locusts".

Henry Francis and Frank Fynn came from a family at the Cape. Henry had begun trading at Delagoa Bay as early as 1822 and had been the trader who purposely established a connection with Shaka, the Zulu king. Frank joined him in Natal by 1829. Other early traders whom Henry had known from his first years in Natal were Lieutenant Francis G. Farewell of the Royal Navy, and King, trading from Port Natal, Nathaniel Isaacs, Henry Ogle, and John Cane. From the late 1820s, all of these men except for Farewell were no longer just embarking on trading and hunting expeditions for ivory, cattle, and other goods, and relying on the material protection Shaka could provide. They had their own homesteads, and in the case of Henry Fynn, Shaka reputedly "gave" him nine wives. As this paper shows, several of the Fynns' children married Ogles. Henry Fynn's first homestead was established at the Mzimkulu river, with Shaka's permission. His people called themselves the Nsimbini, and the wider group of Fynn followers were referred to as the Izinkumbi. Even after Henry Fynn's departure for the Cape and Frank's homestead presumably becoming more of a centre, the "Nsimbini" seems to have remained understood as an integral component of the Izinkumbi, but distinct to some extent because of the specific area the Nsimbi occupied, and their origins and related identity.¹²

Controversy has swirled since the 1980s about the appropriate terms to refer to the serious political upheavals, movements of people, and material depredations of the late 1820s and 1830s – about the causes and extent of this, about what it meant to be a "refugee" from the Zulu kingdom, about the extent to which both colonial and African accounts of this time came to overdetermine the "ravages" of and savagery of Shaka and of Dingane and conflate military forays in a way that, over time, cumulatively distorted and coloured understandings of what was happening in Natal.¹³ This draft of this paper does not go into depth about the specific groups that composed the Izinkumbi and the mightily complex accounts of their histories which intersect with these important debates and will inform later drafts. This paper is largely confined to a discussion of the nature of Vundlazi's leadership. For the moment it can be said that those gathering around the Fynns were people very much in need of some neutral unity within which they would be secure, and were in need of the Fynns.

¹² The different allegiances and connotations of these two terms, however, need to be gone into and have not been discussed here.

¹³ N. Etherington, *The great treks: The transformation of southern Africa, 1815-1854* (Longman Pub Group, 2001).

Spencer neatly encapsulates the different accounts of how Vundlazi herself came to join the Izinkumbi:

It is generally stated that Vundlase was one of the wives presented to Henry Fynn by Shaka, and then given to Frank. Chief Duka Fynn's evidence, however, would seem to give a more correct account of her origins. He names her as the daughter of a Zulu named Senca Mzela. She rejected the suit of one Msekelo Mqadi, and eventually had to flee Zululand to escape his intentions. Msekelo and his men pursued her and she sought the protection of Henry Fynn who, with some of his hunters, ... was at the Umgeni river hunting 'sea cows'. Msekelo's men attacked Fynn's party and three of Msekelo's followers were badly wounded. Three of Fynn's hunters were also injured – nevertheless Fynn launched a counter-attack and Msekelo and his people fled. Duka dates Vundlase's flight as being after Shaka's forces had attacked the Mpondo (viz. Winter 1828) and states that she was allotted to Frank Fynn before the Fynns fled to the Mpondo country (June 1831). Other versions of Vundlase's history are that she was of the Zelemu people (A. T. Bryant) or that she was a captive from a Zulu campaign in the Delagoa Bay region, and was light-skinned, having either Arab or European blood.¹⁴

Of the groups that joined the Fynns in the 1830s and claimed their protection or simply association, the experience of the amaDunge people is illustrative. This grouping and their principal men featured prominently in the workings of the Izinkumbi polity for over sixty years, and their presence is a thread running through several different events.¹⁵

In the early 1830s, three nobles of the Amadunge came from Zululand each with their own followings, to the area of the Umzinto. They were Donsela, "Nkani", and "Tezwayo". Tezwayo moved inland into what became Upper Umkomazi District under British government, and in 1876 became Ixopo Division. Donsela and unKani remained closer to the coast, claiming the protection of Frank Fynn in this "time of scarcity". They were allotted land by Frank Fynn, and they, their families and adherents settled and began planting.¹⁶ The amaDunge, then, were among the "refugee agriculturalists" who took up farming, especially of maize, in these small but ever-growing polities.¹⁷

In March 1838 the Izinkumbi joined with the followings of other white traders, making up 2100 marching men, to capture cattle owned by the Zulu. The

¹⁴ Shelagh Spencer. *British settlers in Natal 1824–1857: A Biographical Register* (Eagle–Fyvie). (UKZN Press, 1992). P. 222

¹⁵ Subsequent drafts will grapple more with understanding the specific groups that came under the Izinkumbi, and how and when each one seceded from the leadership of the Fynns.

¹⁶ Statement of Mvuyana to James McLaurin, Resident Magistrate Alexandra, 21 November 1890, in SNA I/1/132, 1205/1890.

¹⁷ Shirron Bramdeow, *Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community in Natal, 1824-1988* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1988) 36.

Izinkumbi force was 450 strong and led by the amaDunge chief Donsela.¹⁸ Many other amaDunge, including Mpofo an induna of Nkani, were also in the party.¹⁹ Frank Fynn's Izinkumbi claimed 300 of the cattle that were seized.²⁰

He himself did not take part in the second expedition very shortly after the first, which was defeated and its leaders killed.²¹ The two raids were huge acts of provocation; traders and Natal Africans going and taking Zulu cattle, women and children at a time when the Zulu men were busy in conflict with the Boers; hearing of this defeat, by early April 1838 Frank moved over the Umzimkulu into Pondoland, to protect his cattle and those of his closest followers from the expected Zulu reprisal. As a witness of the events said, "Frank Fynn bolted, and went over the Umzimkulu River and was never seen on this side of it again."²² He died by December of the same year, on the south side of the Mzimkhulu. It was suspected that he had died of poisoning, possibly by a jealous wife.

Vundlazi came to power as successor to Frank Fynn. Exactly how, is important for understanding gendered approaches to leadership, and Vundlazi and the polity's relationship to colonial power. But there is ambiguity and conflict between sources around how she took the Izinkumbi leadership.

After Frank Fynn's death, men he had known for a decade in Natal began haggling over his property, and an old friend and fellow trader, D. C. Toohey, apparently stepped in to prevent this seizing of Frank's property. Robert Garden wrote that "when Poban [*Phobana*, Frank's isiZulu name] died Ogle and others tried to get all his cattle into their hands, but this was prevented by Toohey, who being a heavy creditor of Poban desired Uvunthlazi to keep all the cattle for the children and not to give up any and should they be demanded to say that they belonged to Mr. Toohey, who held a first mortgage upon the property. Mr Toohey himself purchased up all the debts against the [day] in order to insure some property to the children."²³

Vundlazi's rule, then, was established in this context: it was felt that the families and children of Frank and Henry Fynn, and of their inheritance (including hundreds of cattle that were at this point probably being kept south of the Mzimkulu), needed safeguarding. Theophilus Shepstone was also involved in

¹⁸ Evidence of D. C. Toohey, Harding Commission 1852

¹⁹

²⁰ Garden Papers, Vol II, KCAL.

²¹ Re this second expedition: See Spencer: Rev. Daniel Lindley's letter of 5th April 1838 confirms that 'Fynn...with many of his people' (this must refer to Frank) 'left [for Pondoland] as soon as he heard of the Natal defeat and by this step saved his cattle.' But Mvuyana's reminiscences (SNA I/1/132) state the Izinkumbi did participate in this second expedition – considering both sources, it seems possible that some of the Izinkumbi did go with on the disastrous second trip, Frank and others staying behind.

²² Statement of Mvuyana, 21 November 1890, SNA I/1/132; 1205/1890

²³ Garden Papers, Vol II, KCAL.

the negotiations around the disposal of Frank's property.²⁴ In relation specifically to Henry Fynn's children, Bramdeow states that Vundlazi was placed over Henry Fynn's family, by Shepstone.

In the above account of succession, it is notable that what was being dealt with was Vundlazi's control over and protection of the Fynn *family*. Yet this position was linked to a much wider and more elevated claim to authority – over all of the immediate adherents of the Fynns, as well as clans and their chiefs and indunas that owed them allegiance. The connections between the two roles are at this stage hard to understand and interesting. What were the grounds of her authority at this wider level? What is certain is that any view of her as simply an early colonial appointee along with many others, would struggle to account for the clear authority she commanded with a very many people throughout her difficult reign and into her old age, as this paper indicates.

What do we know about the nature of this wider political authority? The recollection of an old member of the amaDunge, suggests that Vundlazi's was a very natural ascension to power; that her personal authority and the appropriacy of her ascension was widely recognized. "His Wife Vundhlazi came back to take Charge of the tribe but not till peace had been returned in the Country. On the return of Vundhlazi she sent to UnKani and Udonsela, telling them that she had arrived. They sent her food at once. At that time Frank Fynn was dead. They had recognized Frank Fynn as their protector when they came into the country, and so when Vundlazi came they recognized her in the same manner; they looked upon her as their Chief. Other Chiefs, Undelu, the father of Sonsukwana, Umtugukeli father of Kidu, and others received Vundlazi in the same manner."²⁵

A crucial statement regarding the grounds of Vundlazi's authority is Robert Garden's description of meeting her in 1851, in the company of Henry Fynn, who then held the position of Resident Agent with Faku, chief of the Mpondo. Fynn was presumably visiting the Izinkumbi in order to get Vundlazi's support for the "Zulu Contingent" discussed in this paper.

On our arrival which had been expected for some days Umbulaz [Henry Fynn] was greeted by a number of his own tribe. Amongst those I noticed an old man with long matted grey hair or rather wool and was informed that his name was Umfinjella [Umvinjelwa] and that he was a famous War-Doctor. At first we were ushered into a house of one room built in imitation of the European style by Chaka as the eldest of the Queen's children by Poban [sic., Charles was the eldest]. I seated myself upon a comfortable high backed cane bottomed chair which had been washed up some years ago by the sea. After being there a little time we adjourned to the Queen's hut, which is the largest and best I have ever seen, although only second rate as I was informed. The interior diameter was about twenty-five feet, and about 6 ft. high. It would hold easily one hundred persons. It might have been a great deal larger. I did not measure it. I found the Queen there, she is a very nice

²⁴ Spencer cites Shepstone's diary for December 1838. Haven't seen this

²⁵ Statement of Mvuyana, 21 November 1890, SNA I/1/132; 1205/1890

clean lady-like Caffir woman. She is decidedly [A1!] and deserving of every respect for her constancy and fidelity to the memory of the departed Lord. When Poban the Father of her children died in August 1839 [sic] she vowed that she would never marry again, and she may be considered as almost the only instance. There is one thing to be said; she could not retain the Sovereignty did she take a husband. At present she is Inkosikazi or Queen of the Umtwalumi.²⁶

This account, with snippets of information clearly coming from Fynn, is valuable for its intimations about the roles widowhood and chastity may have played in Vundlazi's political legitimacy, and its vivid description of the Izinkumbi royal homestead. We can infer from this and from the birthdates of her children that Vundlazi was probably in her thirties when she became head of the Izinkumbi. Garden's responses to and opinions of Vundlazi, her people, and Duka Fynn over the Mzimkulu and his followers, over his several entries dealing with them, ranged from the above kind of somewhat flippant approbation to bitter disparagement and accusations of laziness when his journey was not going smoothly. His descriptions of Vundlazi often focused on what he claimed was her excessive beer intake and its effect on her health.

Vundlazi returned to the neighbourhood of the Umtwalume once Natal had become safe again. When she claimed the chiefship, the system of protection which had existed for the previous decade, in which various petty chiefdoms sought protection under the paramount leadership of the Izinkumbi, could continue.

While this paper does not give a detailed account of the different polities Vundlazi ruled as "paramount chieftainess" between the Mtwalume and the Mzimkulu rivers, the below details several important events in Vundlazi's reign (and afterwards) that reflect her compliance with and objections to various demands and actions of the colonial state, and the ways in which the history of the Fynn family in Natal shaped this relationship between the Izinkumbi leadership and the colonial government. Some of the story of her reign is told through her statements, made in person and through messengers, to that state; from a period from which few women's voices survive.

In the first half of 1849, the amaHlongwa at the mouth of the Mzimkulu river, right on the southern boundary of the colony, offered the Colonial Government some form of strong resistance. Exactly how and why is not clear. However in Shepstone's ongoing maneuvering to keep one step ahead of any polity and leader that vocally opposed colonial authority, this was of real concern. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

While in the Klip River division it became necessary to reduce a refractory tribe (the Amahlongwa) at the mouth of the Umzimkulu, whose disobedience had already been brought to the notice of his Honor the Lieutenant-Governor previous to my leaving; and who upon my representation had approved of the superior chief enforcing compliance. In pursuance of this, the chieftainess Mhlase proceeded to seize their cattle, and during my absence brought them 200

²⁶ Garden Papers, Vol. 1, Diary entry 28 June 1851.

in number to this place [Pietermaritzburg], to be disposed of by the government. The tribe used many threats, but did not proceed to open resistance, as their force was too small for any chance of success, and the principal of the refractory party accompanied the cattle in order to acknowledge their error. On my return, finding that the heads of government were absent and the difficulty of feeding so many persons very great, I took upon myself, on their expression of contrition (but much against the wish of the superior chief, who is a determined woman) to return to the delinquents in the name of the government one hundred head of their cattle and to reward forty as a remuneration to the chieftainess and her followers, thus enabling them to return to their homes, which are about 100 miles south of this place, and leaving sixty head at the disposal of the government. Although these measures were directed when I was unavoidably absent on other duties and at a distance of 200 miles from the scene of operations, I am happy to report that no violence occasioning loss of life occurred, and I trust the Executive Government will approve and confirm the measures I have felt it my duty under the circumstances to adopt.²⁷

That “at least no-one died” might have been of some small consolation to Vundlazi in this case. Though the precise grounds of her objections aren’t given, Shepstone’s dispatch suggests that she had complied with the colonial order, driven the cattle a full hundred miles to Pietermaritzburg only to find that there was no immediate use planned for them; she may have been concerned that their return to the tip of the colony following this show of authority for an absent or somewhat irresolute colonial government, could reflect badly on her. Alternatively, it may be that she simply wished no cattle at all to be returned to the amaHlongwa.

Lambert sees this order of Shepstone’s to Vundlazi as part of a process of policing, “summon[ing] levies from chiefdoms to deal with unrest,” which especially for smaller southern chiefdoms, was in exchange for the government’s “protection from overweening neighbours.”²⁸ There had been an emphatic change in the conditions and possibilities for political alliance in southern Natal, from the time when the frontier was “open.” The kind of protection the Fynns had offered their adherents and subordinate clans in the 1830s was, perhaps, rather different from the kind of protection and sources of protection that Vundlazi offered them by 1849. [break this down further]

The next test of Vundlazi’s “loyalty” to came two years later. She was one of the 13 chiefs and indunas who supplied troops for what Sir Harry Smith, Governor of the Cape, called a “Zulu contingent”, to help the British in the Cape frontier war. This plan was controversial, was seen as inadvisable by Shepstone, and most of those in chiefdoms that had been ordered to supply troops were deeply suspicious about its actual purpose.

Matiyana gave a memorable reply when Shepstone’s messengers came to inform him of the need for troops. “Matyana unhesitatingly refused in the presence of the principal men of his tribe to furnish his force for the expedition,

²⁷ *Natal Executive Council Records* Volume 3, Report by Shepstone, 20 May 1849, pp. 98–101.

²⁸ John Lambert. Chiefship in Early Colonial Natal, 1843–1879, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), p. 269–285, p. 275.

saying, ‘They did not know how to fight, they were women, they left the Zulu country because they feared firearms, and they would not be where they were if they were not women.’”²⁹ Shepstone saw this ostensible profession of cowardice as an “evasion”, and one that should be met with firm suppression.

By contrast, Vundhlase’s reply to the call for soldiers strongly suggests that complying with the order had long-lasting consequences for her political sway: “The reply from Vumhlase, a chieftainess formerly connected with a white man and now the head of a powerful combination of tribes, is as follows: ‘I am personally glad of the opportunity of assisting my country, and I shall do my utmost, but I cannot conceal from you that ever since the order has been given for the expedition my eyes and those of my chiefs under me have not met’”³⁰ She nevertheless sent 115 men from the “Izinkimbini”, and 12 other chiefs and indunas sent warriors, altogether making up Smith’s “Zulu Contingent” of roughly 1500 that gathered south of the Umkomanzi in May.³¹ But the group was riven with division and by the end of that month had been disbanded because tensions were so strong among the troops.³² We can safely assume this incident contributed to the splintering of the Izinkumbi over the next two decades.

Over the course of the 1850s, the Izinkumbi shrank. Vundlazi herself claimed that from before the Boers arrived (1837) her people had “occupied the territory between the Ifafa and the Umzimkulu.” Henry Fynn stated in 1852 that she ruled the area between the Umzumbe and Ifafa rivers, while Robert Garden wrote in the same year that her territory extended “from the Umtwalume to the Mzimkhulu.” At that point, the Izinkumbi comprised “at least thirty-two tribes, nearly all of which were inhabiting the Natal district before the Zulu wars ... and number[ed] ninety-two kraal”³³

At this point the section of Natal south of the Umkomanzi river had been left out of the 1847 planning for Locations; there were none beyond the Umlazi location of which the Umkomanzi was the southern boundary. In addition, no magistrates had been appointed over the about 80 mile stretch from Umlazi river to the Umzimkhulu. “The only authorities they have ever yet seen in the greater portion of that division have been those who have collected the native tax.” “The tribes dwelling south of the Umlazi location have never been located by the Government. They all admit that they have been released and protected from the despotic rule of the Zulu chief, and they think that the tax they pay to

²⁹ Natal Executive Council Records, Vol. 3, Report by Shepstone, 28 January 1851, pp. 264–267.

³⁰ Natal Executive Council Records, Vol. 3, Report by Shepstone, 28 January 1851, pp. 264–267.

³¹ Fynn Papers, KCAL, Vol. 3. Copy of letter written 19th May 1851 at “Camp Umtumvula”

³² Fynn Papers, KCAL, Vol. 3. Copy of Fynn to Harry Smith, 29th May 1851, Umlazi river

³³ Evidence of H. F. Fynn, Harding Commission 1852.

Government is for that protection.”³⁴ This assessment of Fynn’s touches on the long-term underdevelopment of this southern area, which was nevertheless milked for hut tax, and labour for government works (*isibhalo*), largely during Vundlazi’s reign. When Henry Francis Fynn left his posting with Faku to return to Natal, and by 1854 became Assistant Resident Magistrate for the Lower Umkomanzi Division, he, Shepstone, the then Lieutenant-Governor John Scott, and the Rev Wilder were some of the main proponents of a plan to introduce cotton farming to that area.³⁵

Fynn’s arrival saw a reshuffling of Vundlazi’s chiefdom. In 1854, he simply removed five minor chiefdoms from Vundlazi’s jurisdiction, in his capacity as Assistant Resident Magistrate of the southern part of the “Division of Umkomaas”/ “Lower Umkomanzi”.³⁶ His given reason was that she was unable to keep these in order. He mentioned the chiefs of these groups as “Umgon”; “Umkalipi”; “Maiza”; “Gomani”; and “Umabiya.” He also maintained that he did not consider she could keep her own followers in order.³⁷ The changes he decided to make appear to have had something to do with plans for development in the area. Fynn stated that when reserves had been authorized for Lower Umkomanzi Division in the mid 1850s he had decided to divide the “remnant” of Vundlazi’s tribe into three sections, to occupy separate reserves: one at Umtwalume where she lived; and the second and third groups acknowledging her chiefship or not, as circumstances required. Fynn was evidently formulating a plan with Wilder for the third section of the Izinkumbi, on Wilder’s Mtwalume mission station (who already grew the “largest and best cotton fields”) to be guaranteed land there and perhaps become the centre of a cotton industry.³⁸ Some sources state that Vundlazi powerfully disliked Henry Fynn. For some of his time as Magistrate over her district, (July 1853 to early 1860) she may in fact have moved back south, across the Mzimkulu, to avoid him.³⁹ Spencer describes some of the difficulties and tension involved in Fynn’s magistracy over the area of the Izinkumbi and Nsimbini.⁴⁰ It is not clear that Fynn’s plans for these three “sections” of the Izinkumbi were ever fully realized. Probably in the early part of 1860, he was replaced as magistrate by Captain George Lucas, who was frequently brutal in his dealings with the people in his Division, and who over the course of a few months contributed to a seething political crisis.

³⁴ Evidence of H. F. Fynn, Harding Commission 1852. p. 77

³⁵ This draft does not go into the details of their intentions, of cotton growing, and of the Izinkumbi’s involvement in development plans for southern Natal.

³⁶ I have not yet located Spencer’s source for this which should reveal dynamics of Vundlazi’s leadership and her relations with Henry Fynn. (only specifies – Fynn’s late 1850s writing.)

³⁷ Spencer cites a letter from Fynn, late 1850s. Not yet seen.

³⁸ H. F. Fynn. Report to the Government on the tribes of the Lower Umkomanzi Division.

³⁹

⁴⁰

In September of 1860 Vundlazi's messengers traveled to Pietermaritzburg, where her complaint, about the tyranny of a group of her former indunas, was taken down by J. Brickhill, the Interpreter of the Supreme Court:⁴¹

Vunhlase has sent us to complain of the conduct of certain of her people, named Landa, Umqwazi, Nongoko (Madubane), Wisa, Kwa[y]jeka, Zomba, Najiya, Nduzane, Antoni and Mpofu. This she does at the request of her Tribe, which is writhing under the tyrannical acts of these men who though formerly dependants of her own, now take upon themselves the Government of her people, usurping her power and lessening her dignity in every possible way, addressing her in the most undignified manner calling her a three-penny bit and they do this under the pretense of being appointed over her by this Government. She further says that her people warned her that unless these men are not removed they will feel themselves necessitated for their own safety to kill the whole of them. The consequences of such an act they do not fear as the[y] would immediately cross the southern Boundary and leave the Colony. She further states that this party with Landa (formerly one of her chief Izinduna) at their head went in a body to meet Capt Lucas on his arrival to enter upon his duties as Magistrate and poured their own tale into his ears and prejudiced him against her people.

She however wishes to lay no blame on Capt Lucas as she believes it was through ignorance that he allowed himself to be talked round by these men so as to send an army against her people without her knowledge, and that he was induced by no other cause than by their misrepresentations.

She says that this usurper (Landa) and his party, no longer permit her to join in the settlement of disputes amongst her people, but take upon themselves these settlements always exasperating the people by giving judgement contrary to all justice and levying heavy fines of best milch cows upon them. And even when Vunhlase has decided cases the loser of the case runs to Landa who takes the case to Dr Struthers and there gives his version of the case, aided by the misinterpretation of Antoni, who was always chosen, even while the Interpreter Mr Moodie was there, under the plea that Mr M did not understand the language, thus leaving matters entirely in the hands of this party, so to pervert facts as best to suit their own interests and purposes.

She says that her people are ruined and never again expect justice while Landa's party is left in power, and earnestly requests that the matter be enquired into and that they be removed, lest her people in some fit of desperation should fall upon them and cause bloodshed amongst British subjects and on British soil, and she be blamed for not restraining them....Vunhlase also asks the Government whether they have authorized Dr Struthers [the acting Resident Magistrate in Sept 1860] to adjudicate in any cases. She says she always acknowledges the appointments of this Government, but of Dr Struthers' appointment she has never had any intimation and therefore does not recognize his right to review cases already tried by her, and reverse her decisions.

This state of affairs has caused and is causing many to leave the Colony so that Vunhlase's tribe is greatly diminished and consequently the Hut Tax collection in that quarter will now be much smaller and will continue to decrease unless this dangerous party now in power as policemen, be removed from the Division.⁴²

⁴¹ SNA I/1/10.

⁴² Statement of Bili and Umhlubukelwa messengers sent to the Colonial Government by Vunhlase chieftess of the Izinkumbi tribe. 23 September 1860. SNA I/1/10, 93/1860.

This “unusual message” alarmed government. The chieftainess’s statement alleged, specifically, that these policemen required so many bribes that taking one’s case to them never brought actual redress, and that on one memorable occasion Landa’s men had gotten the Magistrate to assist them in seizing cattle supposedly in violation of a prohibition against driving cattle from No Man’s Land into Natal, and had taken these cattle for themselves. These allegations, but perhaps more so what was read as Vundlazi’s veiled threat of violence, prompted the Lieutenant-Governor immediately to send Shepstone to Lower Umkomanzi District to resolve the problem.

Landa had been the most important induna serving under Fynn. At least one of the men with him had been among the very earliest adherents of the Izinkumbi; Mpofu, who had marched north with the Izinkumbi to seize Zulu cattle in 1838, and was a prominent homestead head in this section in 1852. How they came to be appointed as policemen is unclear. Michael Mahoney has found that “Natal’s first rural police had to be disbanded in 1851, after only three years of existence, because of budgetary concerns. Natal was then without a rural police force until 1874, relying in the meantime on irregular levies of African soldiers.”⁴³ It appears that Henry Fynn may have placed these izinduna near the southern boundary of Natal and given them appointments as policemen primarily to enforce his regulation about movement of cattle across this border. Soon after his departure Landa took advantage of Lucas’ lack of knowledge about this issue in order to seize cattle for himself, and generally aggressively undermined Vundlazi’s rule.

The meeting with Shepstone to hear accounts of the situation took place in the chapel of Wilder’s Mtwalume mission station; Vundlazi, the main izinduna of the Izinkumbi, and “petty chiefs” under the chieftom all attended, and all of the policemen accused of corruption came, except for Landa who arrived later on. Shepstone stated that he was commencing an investigation, that “they had made very serious allegations and allowed themselves to be betrayed into the use of improper and insubordinate language containing threats, the expression of which rendered them liable to punishment.” He said that moving over the Mzimkulu after any civil strife would be no defense against punishment, and that he was prepared to look into their serious complaints. According to Shepstone,

Vunhlasi immediately reiterated all the complaints alluded to in her message, but with minuter detail and her statement was fully corroborated and earnestly supported by all the petty Chiefs and principal men present. She denied any intention of holding out threats, either on her part or that of the people of her Tribe who had come to her and spoken as they had done. She and they saw the inevitable tendency of the unauthorized course pursued by the Police, with Landa at their head, and gave the information she did, in the hope that a remedy might be applied which would prevent the exciting of such ill feeling as then existed. She complained that although she and the other petty Chiefs in that part of the Country, has ever since the establishment of British Rule in Natal, been recognized as the heads of their respective Tribes, for some time past the Police,

⁴³ Michael R. Mahoney. Forthcoming (Duke): *The Other Zulus: The spread of Zulu ethnicity in colonial South Africa*. p. 86

all of whom were formerly members of her Tribe and especially Landa, had practically and systematically refused to recognize their position, that they arrogated themselves the right of deciding cases between her people, and this they did to such an extent and in such a manner, as to set her authority aside altogether and to cause great dissatisfaction among the people themselves...she said the people were so wearied by such systematic and gross perversion of all justice and such avaricious conduct by these through whom alone they could reach the ears of the Magistrate and who therefore must be propitiated to secure any consideration at all; that they had become reckless of consequences and it was not until she and her principal men saw the effect that was being produced, that they determined to make an appeal to the Government, who they felt sure would not permit such oppression to be practiced upon any of its subjects. She did not do so with the view of forwarding any threat, but with the view of relieving herself of the responsibility of the consequences. She said, her people did not wish to leave the protection and control of the British Government by abandoning the Colony, but under such circumstances, they would prefer the chances of a wild life across the border, to the certainty of systematic injustice from their own equals here.⁴⁴

Shepstone did what was asked to set right the Police force's greatest offence; the seizing of 45 cattle and unfair imposition of fines; and suggested that Landa should no longer be employed as an induna for the Alexandra Magistrate.⁴⁵

Vundlazi's authority was challenged once again in 1865, on an entirely different front; around the demarcation of territory. It appears that any firm setting-aside of land for the Izinkumbi and their neighbours that Fynn had proposed in the 1850s had not been implemented. The Rev. Wilder's attempt to secure freehold rights for his congregants in the face of increasing white demand for land in southern Natal deeply angered Vundlazi, and prompted her to travel to Pietermaritzburg in person to state her case, and to remind the SNA and Governor of a time when, by virtue of the refuge she was able to offer, land was hers to allocate:⁴⁶

Statement of Vundhlase Chieftess of the Izinkumbi

I come to His Excellency to express my dissatisfaction at a course of proceeding recently adopted by the Rev. H. A. Wilder of Umtwalume, who about 5 weeks ago called a meeting of my people without regard to me, and advised them to become individual purchasers of the land on which they were located, and they might pay the purchase money to him – My principal men answered him that they thought their Chieftess (myself) should have been informed of this meeting that she might have been present at the consideration of so important a subject, and one so nearly affecting her – He told them that he was no enemy to me, but wished that the

⁴⁴ Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs in reference to the Message sent by Vunhlazi. SNA I/1/10, 94/1860.

⁴⁵ Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs in reference to the Message sent by Vunhlazi. SNA I/1/10, 94/1860.

⁴⁶ Statement through messenger, to Sir Theophilus Shepstone, Secretary for Native Affairs. Made before J Brickhill, Magistrate of the Supreme Court, 4 May 1865

natives might hold their land by such a right as that of purchase, so as to prevent the encroachment of Whites.

Two days after receiving this information I went to Mr. Wilder and received from him a similar account of the meeting. I asked how he proposed bringing about his new [measure], since he had commenced it entirely regardless of the principal of the tribe. He answered that he was in no way opposed to me, but that the Amakolwa of the station had pointed to several different lands which their fathers had lived on and said that they intended buying them, and that he wanted to prevent the rising of any disputes or ill feeling between the Amakolwa and the heathen around them in consequence of the land – I told him that no measure however good in itself would be recognized by my people unless sanctioned by me, and that while I perfectly agreed with his object I could not but express my dissatisfaction at his mode of action – I asked him where the money was to be paid - He said he would receive it. I told him that the Amakolwa who had talked of buying the land formerly occupied by their fathers, had no right to it, as I had picked the fathers up and afforded them protection and sustenance when they were in a starving state, and I did not think that my act of kindness to them gave them a right over my property as Chieftess of the Izinkumbi.

Since before the time of the war with the Boers I have constantly with my people occupied the coast land between Ifafa and Umzimkulu, and though the number of my adherents was at first small yet they increased and still continue to increase. I am but a woman, and the task of ruling a people is no enviable one. Yet I trust I have properly controlled my people and taught them strict obedience to the British Government.

I have always welcomed the arrival of missionaries among my people. But when I see any attempt on their part to hold lightly my position as Chieftess by acting exclusive of me, I feel the pleasure of their presence greatly diminished.

I trust that His Excellency will protect my tribe from being at the mercy of White settlers, and from being driven off by Amakolwa by reserving for them the country in which they have lived before the colony was a colony.

Another matter I wish His Excellency's instructions upon – When orders are sent me by the Magistrate to provide so many men for Government works, I go immediately to collect them. It not unfrequently happens that those who have not worked for some time, immediately take fright and go into the service of any of the neighbouring Whites and then under the plea "I am working for a White man" set me at defiance and reduce my supply of men. What is the remedy?

Amidst highlighted gestures of allegiance to the colonial government, the statement's strategic choices, pacing, directness and areas of subtext convey the fullest sense of chiefly entitlement. Vundlazi's message of affront, perhaps lent a certain iciness by the formulations of the translation, suggests that she was an intimidating leader, certainly subjecting her people to heavy participation in the system of *isibhalo*. Also Vundlazi, like for instance the Qadi chiefs of Inanda, was prepared to accommodate the missionary presence as long as she felt her authority was respected.

"I am but a woman" practically recalls Elizabeth I's "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king." Except that, in addition to excusing her femaleness, Vundlazi was required to speak her subjection and her sovereignty in one breath.

Vundlazi may have made this statement very shortly before she gave over power to George Fynn (who was Frank Fynn's son by a different wife, Mutubazi). There is some uncertainty over when and why she ceded power to George (in the 1860s, or in 1882). At some stage after giving up the chiefship, Vundlazi seems to have moved over the Mzimkhulu to live with her son Charlie, in the area south of the Mzimkulu, called "No Man's Land" which in 1866 was annexed to Natal and renamed "Alfred County." By late 1880, she had moved north again and was living in the section of the Izinkumbi at the Mtwalume mission station, where Wilder was still the resident missionary. Her name came up repeatedly in the long-running struggle of the amaDunge clan to secede from the Izinkumbi and have their own chief recognized by the government, in the amaDunge's references to promises made years ago, and to beasts they had given to the Izinkumbi chiefs. But Vundlazi did not recede into a calm mission station life. Her very presence was political. George Fynn found that many in the mission station section of the Izinkumbi were recognizing her authority rather than his and complained to the Resident Magistrate that he feared rebellion would break out:

I have the honour to bring to your notice that a Native woman named "Vundhlasi" formerly Chieftainess of the Izinkumbini Tribe in this County is now living on the Umtwalumi Mission Reserve Lands, among Chief George Fynn's Tribe – She has never reported herself at this office and complaints have been made to me by Fynn that she has been treated by several of his tribe as Chieftainess and he very naturally objects to such conduct – I think something should be done in the matter as great disaffection and trouble may be the result of the action taken by this woman and her followers and therefore as it is a peculiar case I ask for special instructions in the matter – I am informed that the woman Vundhlasi has been residing in P.M. Burg for some time back.⁴⁷

The SNA did nothing to resolve this and in 1881 the Magistrate approached Government again and described a situation of rising tension: "Many of the tribe refuse to obey Fynn and great dissatisfaction and ill feeling seems to exist in the tribe."

When the acting SNA, Henrique Shepstone, wrote that "This woman cannot be recognized as Chieftainess. Could it not be arranged that a few head of cattle be given her so as to enable her to live," the Magistrate responded that it was not a matter of keeping Vundlazi happy, but a question of support accreting around her:

As I do not see any probability of quietness being maintained in the Izinkumbi Tribe as long as uVundhlase resides in it and as she came into this County from Alfred Co.y without permission and so far as I know without leave from the R.M. Harding, I have thought it best to order her to quit this County within 14 days. I have also ordered [George] Fynn to help & assist her to remove and induced him to give her [two or ten] head of cattle.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ RM Alexandra to SNA, 23 December 1880, SNA I/1/44; ref. 1881/76

⁴⁸ RM Alexandra to SNA, 25 March 1881, SNA I/1/44; ref. 1881/76. This stirring up of political allegiances came at a time when the Fynns' descendants were being allocated plots of land by the government; locations intended for these groups. There were four of these: Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10 in the Mzimkulu and Mtwalume areas.

After this, Vundlazi returned to Alfred County to live with Charlie Fynn. Thirteen months later, George Fynn died. Lucas, still the Resident Magistrate, stated that George had “apparently wished to trust entirely to the judgement of the Supreme Chief” in the matter of political succession, and the magistrate proposed that George’s widow Maria, a daughter of Henry Ogle, should rule as regent for a few years until her eldest son was of age.

Maria and George Ogle had been married by Christian rites and he had purchased a farm, Campania, of 103 acres in 1880, which she inherited on his death. In addition to looking after their 10 children she was to take over chiefly duties. It is important to note that Lucas viewed it as necessary for her to be “assisted” by a respected man, by then the head of the amaDunge section of the Izinkumbi. “I should venture to suggest for His Excellency’s consideration that Mrs Fynn the Inkosikazi be appointed to take charge of the Tribe and have associated with her Mpolase. Mrs Fynn is a clever woman with much character and always had considerable influence for good in the tribe. Mpolase is the most influential man in the Izinkumbini and both are respected by the people.” Lucas failed to realize that Mpolase had for several years and possibly as long as twenty, been trying to break free from the Izinkumbi; and had tried repeatedly to get Vundlazi’s and George Fynn’s permission to rule his people independently of them. Maria agreed to take charge, though with hesitation about the scope of the task. The SNA recommended this temporary arrangement to the Governor, suggesting that “To be governed by a woman will not be a new feature with the people of this tribe as the Chieftainess “Vunhlase” who abdicated ruled them for many years.”

Maria Ogle’s chiefship, however, lasted seven months, in which time a section of the clan that supported her teenaged son Harry’s right to take the chiefship, and Harry himself, advanced his interests as “rightful heir” and may have undermined her rule by mocking her when she made judgments as chief; and by November Maria came to Lucas, “accompanied by her sons, the head men living in and about the neighbourhood of the Chief[‘]s[‘] residence, (Bangibizo they call themselves) Umpolasi formerly of Amadunge tribe, and Ngangaza, (belonging to the Xoloxolo section)” to ask that Harry be made chief. The head men present supported this proposal, while Mpolase simply refused to participate in the matter of the Izinkumbi succession and during the meeting reiterated that “I and my people who belong to the Madungi tribe, only came into the Izinkumbi tribe temporarily with no intention of remaining or being incorporated with it, Stress of circumstances in the time of Shaka’s inroad into this part of Natal caused the temporary adhesion of my father Nkani to the Izinkumbi tribe. We now wish to separate from the tribe.”⁴⁹

Lucas complained about the disintegration of this arrangement:

Had Harry Fynn and his brothers loyally supported the authority of the Inkosikazi, matters would have gone smoothly enough but unfortunately I fear the contrary is the fact.

⁴⁹ Mpolase quoted in G Lucas to SNA, 9 November 1882, SNA I/1/60, ref. 1883/189

The history of the Tribe, is that of others in this County – The Zulu King having raided this part of what is now Natal, killed many and scattered the rest; returned to the Zulu country, then the remnants of tribes joined their fortunes with such men as Henry Fynn (Umbulazi) Dumisa and others. So long as these men lived, their heterogenous collections from tribes held together. When Dumisa died, his tribe broke into three sections – George Fynn so long as he abstained from drink, was respected and kept his tribe together, but from the date of his illness his influence waned, until before his death things were getting from bad to worse. I had hoped that Mrs Fynn would have kept the tribe together until Harry had learnt wisdom. I greatly regret to be obliged to say that my anticipation has not been realized neither [sic] as to her power, or any prospect of her son learning wisdom.⁵⁰

In Lucas' view, Vundlazi was little more than an inconvenience, and her role in the unity or disintegration of the Izinkumbi polity of little consequence. When the SNA suggested that Charlie Fynn be asked to move from Alfred County to Alexandra division to take over chiefship of the Izinkumbi, instead of the "young and unsuitable" Harry Fynn, Lucas asked that that "C Fynn be told that his mother Vundhlasi must not interfere. She caused trouble in the tribe as you are aware, before."⁵¹

In fact it is clear that by July 1887, to some extent at least, Vundlazi was ruling jointly with her son Charlie, in Alexandra County. In that year a sometime Government surveyor, A. C. Nurden, apparently pretended to be drawing an official boundary line between the territory of the Izinkumbi, and that of Soncekwana, chief of the Ndelu that had separated from the Izinkumbi paramountcy many years previously; and divided the territory in favour of Soncekwana, in exchange for one head of cattle. This incident highlighted both the Izinkumbi's shortage of land and their tense relationships with clans like the Ndelu that were immediate neighbours and had once been subject to the Izinkumbi chiefs. The messengers sent in the name of "Charlie Fynn and his mother Vundhlasi" stated that:

Formerly the following tribes formed part of the Izinkumbi, viz the Amandelu, the Amahlongwa, the Amadhala, and the [Uluk/hyaba]. These tribes were allowed to sever their connection with ours and it now appears, from the representations of the Chiefs or head men in charge of them, that they have sufficient Location land for their people, and that ours has not. We complain principally of the [?Amandelu?] Tribe under the Chief Usonsekwana – which joins our tribe on the South... In consequence of the reasons I have given above we are now sent to the Government by Charlie Fynn and Vundhlasi to represent to the Government the hardship [t]his tribe is subjected to and request that more Land may be marked off and granted to our Tribe as a Location. As I state, what makes the matter harder to bear, is the fact that certain tribes which are really Offshoots of ours have sufficient Location Land to live on and we have not.⁵²

⁵⁰ RM Alexandra to SNA, 9 November 1882, SNA I/1/60, ref. 1883/189

⁵¹ RM Alexandra to SNA, 1 December 1882, SNA I/1/60, ref. 1883/189

Vundlazi also made a statement to the Magistrate complaining that her own homestead was positioned on Crown Land and asking that the location's boundary line be moved to accommodate her. The SNA responded respectfully, but with a very different ideology; that people should conform to territorial boundaries, not the other way around: "her remedy is to move her kraal into the Location."⁵³

Exactly where she lived at this stage is not clear. In what would have been a major shift in her approach to, and positioning in relation to, the missionary Wilder, some oral sources collected in the 1950s stated that Vundlazi eventually converted to Christianity. If true, she might have taken this step whilst living on the Mtwalume mission station in 1880 and 1881, or perhaps in the time, from about 1883 until late 1890, when she was once again in Alexandra County and Charlie was recognized as Chief.⁵⁴

In the 1880s Vundlazi was clearly recognized as an authority on the past of Alexandra County.⁵⁵ In 1890 she was still alive, and the amaDunge struggle to secede under Mpolase was still in progress. Those giving evidence in the dispute advised the Magistrate to consult her on the amaDunge's history. In 1883 William Bazley took Vundlazi to show him Frank Fynn's grave at "Sugarbush cutting" near the south bank of the Mzimkulu. Vundlazi may have died in the year 1890.⁵⁶

Assessments of Vundlazi's authority:

Vundlazi appears to have been the only female chief to rule for so long in colonial Natal. My research so far agrees, essentially, with Michael Mahoney's assessment that female chiefship in Natal died with her by the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ However it is not clear that it was so very rare in the first two decades of colonial rule of Natal. Perhaps as late as the early 1860s, a woman named Macibise headed the Abakwamacibise; Makosikazi led the "Wasemacindaneni"; Mamtunzini led the Abalumbi.⁵⁸ Outside the southern boundary of the colony,

⁵² Statement of Vikinduko and Unkonyana messengers from Charlie Fynn and his mother Vundhlasi, the former being in charge of the Izinkumbi tribe in Alexandra County. 29 July 1887, SNA vol. I/1/101; ref. 1887/668

⁵³ SNA to RM Alexandra, 1 August 1887, SNA vol. I/1/101; ref. 1887/668. Vundlazi's own statement is missing from this Minute.

⁵⁴ Spencer refers to this source which I have not yet seen, containing many informants' accounts of Vundlazi. Fynn Papers KCL, letter C H Karlson to KC 13 August 1952. Letter from C.H Karlsen about Henry and Frank Fynn;s descendants. Extract from the Fynn Papers.

⁵⁵

⁵⁶ Spencer p. 222 gives this approximate date.

⁵⁷ Michael R. Mahoney. Forthcoming (Duke): *The Other Zulus: The spread of Zulu ethnicity in colonial South Africa*. p. 80

Mamjucu, widow of the Bhaca chief Ncapai, ruled at the Umzimvubu.⁵⁹ Later, In 1884 there may have been a woman chief in Klip River magistracy.⁶⁰

But crucially for this paper, it is striking that there were as many as three instances of leadership by widows in chiefdoms that had been established by early intermarrying white traders, in southernmost Natal. As has been discussed, as late as 1884 Vundlazi's successor George Fynn was briefly succeeded as chief of the Izinkumbi after his death by his widow Maria Ogle, in an ill-fated colonial appointment. And, in addition to this, in the 1850s a woman named Bekuni who was one of the widows of Henry Ogle, had taken leadership of his family and followers.⁶¹

Was Vundlazi being used as a colonial pawn, and what did this have to do with her gender? The person presented in this chapter would seem to both accept and refuse this analysis. It hardly needs pointing out that Vundlazi and George Fynn positioned themselves as unquestioningly compliant, and claimed protection from, rather than resisting, colonial power. Indeed, in 1851 even before the "Zulu contingent" debacle, when Garden passed through the Umtwalume area in the company of Henry Francis Fynn, he stated that the Izinkumbi "has been acknowledged to be the most loyal of the Natal Chiefdoms."⁶² Vundlazi emphasized British subjecthood in her communications with the colonial administration. This compliance was strategic as well as based in questions of identity; it was bound up in complex ways with the process by which the Izinkumbi had come to exist. It is also important to note that there were points on which Vundlazi would not compromise; aspects of her authority she expected to be respected; and times when the disjuncture between, for example, her views about chiefly rights over land, and colonial and missionary projects of demarcation and development, became obvious.

What is uncertain from the sources discussed here is the actual nature of discourses within her own chiefdom, about the right by which Vundlazi ruled. It was Henry Fynn's perception, plainly, that this woman's widowhood and chastity were the basis of her right to rule (suggesting that in 1852 she was at an age where a woman might usually have been expected to remarry and have more children). He may have been correct, but it is also possible that this, and Garden's praise for Vundlazi's "loyalty" to the memory of Frank Fynn, tell us

⁵⁸ See Natal Legislative Council No. 22 (1890: NLC printing for general information, the "Report of the Select Committee (No. 7, 1862) appointed to consider message No. 8, 1862, from His Excellency Lieutenant-Governor Scott, on the subject of granting to Natives Documentary Tribal Titles to Land."). Shepstone drew much of this information from Lewis Grout's Evidence before the Harding Commission 1852-3. See J Wright Phd. It is possible that some of these women were not in fact chiefs by the early 1860s, as Shepstone's 1862 Report drew on older sources of information from the 1850s. Subsequent drafts will include more information on these female chiefs.

⁵⁹ Fynn Papers, Vol.

⁶⁰ SNA I/1/78

⁶¹ Garden Papers, Vol. 2, 1851 – 1853, KCAL

⁶² Garden Papers, Vol. 1, Diary entry Saturday 28 June 1851.

more about their own preoccupations surrounding the Izinkumbi, than about the politics and gendered politics of that chiefdom. In characterizing her rule, there is a parallel of roles to be recognized; Vundlazi was the guardian of all the children of Frank and Henry Fynn by their African wives, and she played a protective role in unifying and to some extent looking after the interests of the petty chiefdoms falling under the Izinkumbi polity. That protection became less necessary, over time allegiance to the Izinkumbi came to be far more disadvantageous than beneficial, and support was lost – largely due, it would seem, to Vundlazi’s frequent compliance with colonial orders. This included her 1849 seizure of the amaHlongwa cattle for Shepstone; her provision of troops for the 1851 Zulu contingent that, even if only temporarily, alienated her from her subordinate chiefs; crucially, her regular supplying of men as labourers on the much despised government works; and finally her apparently routine gathering of the Hut Tax. By the 1880s many that had sought the Fynns out in the 1830s had petitioned for and achieved recognition as independent chiefs.

Duka Fynn, one of Henry Fynn’s sons and chief of Henry Fynn’s Nsimbini clan just south of the Mzimkulu, stated that Vundlazi was known for her “ability beyond that of ordinary men in the government of her people and in cases tried before her.”⁶³ This, surely, speaks volumes. Vundlazi weathered considerable opposition within the Izinkumbi, and retained a fiercely loyal following even as her rule saw the Izinkumbi disintegrate from the strange nation it had been.

⁶³ Spencer – no citation.