

BEYOND THE “ZULU AFTERMATH”: RESCRAMBLING SOUTHERN AFRICA’S MFEKANE MIGRATIONS

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The “mfecane” was a notion that existed virtually unchallenged in the imaginations of large numbers of people, including virtually all academic historians of southern Africa, from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. It had three main components: first, that a chain reaction of wars and population movements had swept over much of the eastern half of southern Africa in the 1820s and 1830s; second, that the chain reaction had originally been set in motion by the supposedly explosive expansion of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka; and third, that from these upheavals had emerged a number of new, enlarged states which played a central role in the history of the subcontinent through the rest of the nineteenth century. These ideas had a history that went back to the times of Shaka himself and they had long since achieved the status of unquestioned fact, but they were not elaborated into a coherent book-length account until as recently as 1966. This was in John Omer-Cooper’s well-known *The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa*, in which, among other things, the plural “wars of Shaka” were relabelled as the singular “mfecane”, and so were rendered into the kind of named “event” that could the more easily be fitted into grand narratives by historians of South Africa.

Over the next twenty years *The Zulu Aftermath* became a very widely influential work of reference. Its basic tenets remained virtually unchallenged until they were confronted head-on in a critique mounted by Rhodes University historian Julian Cobbing (1988). The often fierce “mfecane debates” touched off by Cobbing’s intervention are well known and will not be rehearsed here: their main upshot was that the second of the three components identified above – that the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s had been caused primarily by the expansion of the Zulu kingdom – came to be queried by many historians, including most of those working in the field of Zulu history (Hamilton: 1995). Critical engagement with the notion of the mfecane was further stimulated by the publication from the late 1990s onward of path-breaking studies in the iconography of Shaka by Carolyn Hamilton (1998) and Dan Wylie (2000; 2006). In its place there gradually emerged the notion that the deep causes of the upheavals, and of the processes of “state-formation” which they set in train,

needed to be looked for in the interactions, from at least the mid-eighteenth century onwards, between African communities and groups of Boer, Kora, Griqua, British and Portuguese traders, raiders and settlers from the Cape and from the subcontinent's eastern coastlands (Etherington 2001; Wright in press).

The first of the component ideas mentioned above – that the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s constituted a series of “chain reactions” – has, however, proved to be more durable. In part, at least, this is because revisionist research since the late 1980s has tended to focus on rethinking the history and influence of the early Zulu kingdom, and on envisioning alternatives to Zulu expansion as a motor of political change. Rethinking the wider picture of the mfecane as grand narrative has received less attention. The arrows which generations of historians have loved to draw on maps of southern Africa, symbolizing “hordes” of refugees from “the wars of Shaka” sweeping southward to the eastern Cape, westward into the far interior, and northward across the Zambezi, still conjure up powerful images in the minds of students of the period. They continue to suggest that there was a basic Zulu agency behind these migrations, and that this agency remained a factor in them however long they might have taken and whatever distance from the Zulu kingdom they might have covered. In the minds of many people, the chain-reactions of wars and migrations, though weakened by the mfecane debates, are not yet broken. The main aim of this paper is positively to break them. I first briefly outline a history of how and when the notion of a chain-reaction set in motion by Shaka took root in the literature. I focus on three important ‘moments’ in this history, constituted by the publication of certain of G.M. Theal’s histories at the end of the nineteenth century, of A.T. Bryant’s *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* in 1929, and John Omer-Cooper’s *The Zulu Aftermath* in 1966. I then go on briefly to examine the stereotype of each of the five major sets of migrations embedded in the notion of the mfecane, and to demonstrate that, if the Zulu had any role at all in initiating them, it was only one in a complex of factors, and that after their initial stages the migrations ceased to connect with the history of the Zulu kingdom. I argue that the connected-up histories which make up the mfecane narrative need to be taken apart and the migrations rescrambled into their constituent parts. The long-established notion that the history of African societies in southern Africa in the nineteenth century can be understood in terms of a ‘Zulu aftermath’ needs to be dropped *tout court*.

At one level, working towards this aim is a relatively straightforward exercise. It involves little more than pointing to the findings of recent research, and arguing conclusions that in some cases are so obvious that they would be banal if it were not for the fact that very little has so far been done to put them into print and subject them to academic debate. But at another level the exercise becomes more complex. Our knowledge of the migrations is in the end based on the testimonies of black informants

who, like generations of white writers, almost all take as a given that the population movements they talk about were set in train primarily by the aggressions of Shaka and the Zulu. Their view of history seems to run directly counter to that being argued for by revisionist critics of the mfecane. The role of white writers in the making of stereotypes about the wars of Shaka has been studied in some detail over the last two decades or so (Golan 1994; Hamilton 1992; Sévry 1991; Wright 1989; Wright 1991; Wylie 2000; Wylie 2006): the role of black agents, by contrast, has drawn much less attention, though Carolyn Hamilton has recently made a path-breaking and highly suggestive study in this field (Hamilton 1998). A second aim of this paper is to put forward some proposals as to how and why “the wars of Shaka” feature so strongly in the explanations put forward by black informants on the causes of certain of the migrations discussed, and to demonstrate that these explanations are not in fact incompatible with the critique of the mfecane developed here.

Forging the chains

The notion that “the wars of Shaka” affected the whole of the eastern half of southern Africa and beyond into Central Africa did not spring into being fully fledged. It began in a very small way, and grew broadly in tandem with the expansion of the geographical horizons of British and settler imperialism in the subcontinent. In the 1820s and 1830s British traders from the Cape colony who had established themselves within the Zulu domains at Port Natal reported – misleadingly - that the territories round about had largely been depopulated and, on the basis of information provided by black informants, that this had been done a few years before by Shaka’s forces. By the late 1820s officials and missionaries in the Cape were beginning to blame Shaka for having impelled large numbers of refugees into the colony’s eastern frontier regions. In the 1830s, as traders and missionaries from the Cape moved in greater numbers into the interior, they reported statements from black informants which seemed to indicate that Shaka had been one of a number of chiefs responsible for devastating the region a decade before. By the 1840s the idea was firming up in the literature that Shaka and the Zulu lay behind an explosion of violence which had swept across a swathe of territory extending from the eastern Cape through Natal and the interior as far north as the Limpopo. Other marauding chiefs, especially Mzilikazi of the Ndebele and Matiwane of the amaNgwane, were also allotted destructive roles, but the main force behind them was more and more being identified as the aggressive expansion of the Zulu kingdom (Wright 2002: Richner 2005:35-69).

Over the next three or four decades, as white settlers from the Cape spread northwards towards the Limpopo, a generalized history of the wars of Shaka became established in settler writings as a

contrasting backdrop to the expansion of European peace-keeping and civilizing in the region. Geographical coverage of the wars remained uneven, with the main focus falling on events in the eastern Cape, Natal and the Zulu kingdom, and the Caledon valley. Narratives were usually brief, and often comprised little more than sweeping and lurid generalizations about the devastation caused by Shaka (Richner 2005:71-105). Distinctions between the destruction caused by Zulu armies on the one hand and the peoples they displaced on the other were not always clear. From the 1880s, in keeping with the contemporary expansion of British imperial ambitions in southern Africa, local perspectives on Shaka's wars began to be subsumed into subcontinental ones. The chief architect of this development was George Theal, the so-called father of South African history. Theal's writings on Shaka provide an illuminating illustration of how, in an expanding colonial society, history followed the flag into the interior. In 1890, Theal still saw Shaka's wars as having extended no further north than the Limpopo (Theal 1890:251-252). By 1896 he could write (Theal 1902:v):

A very few years ago ... the expression "South Africa" meant Africa south of the Limpopo. Mainly through the ability of one man – the Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes – that expression today means Africa south of the Zambezi.

In the interim, of course, Rhodes's minions had seized much of what was to become the colony of Southern Rhodesia, and were well on the way to seizing Northern Rhodesia as well. By 1901, Theal's treatment of "the wars of Shaka" had correspondingly extended to include the flight of Soshangane to southern and central Mozambique, of the Ngoni through what are now Mozambique and Zimbabwe across the Zambezi into Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi, and of the Kololo to the upper Zambezi (Theal 1901: 169-181). This enlarged perspective was rapidly taken up by other writers in the early twentieth century.

In writing about these migrations, Theal was drawing on an idea that was becoming increasingly popular among European writers – that movements of savage, marauding "hordes" across the landscape had been common in the history of Africa. This is a trope that has not yet received much attention in the developing critique of the mfecane and its antecedent ideas. The notion that the campaigns of Shaka and his armies had been the main driving force behind the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s was one thing, but also feeding into accounts of these upheavals were stereotypes about rootless bands of people – men, women and children – roving about, pillaging and killing and, as often as not, becoming cannibals. It is no accident that at the same time that Theal was filling out the notion of the wars of Shaka for southern Africa in the early nineteenth century, he was also elaborating a history, based on a Portuguese source, of the destructive migrations of "Zimba" hordes along the Zambezi and into East Africa in the late sixteenth century. In the process, he made explicit comparisons between the career of the Zimba and that of the horde under MaNthatisi on the southern

African highveld in the 1820s (Theal 1902:268-273; Theal 1907:352-60). The maraudings of the Zimba was a theme subsequently taken up by Walker in his *A History of South Africa* (Walker 1928:20), and it would no doubt have surfaced in the works of later academic historians as a kind of preface to the wars of Shaka if they had not narrowed their geographical focus to define precolonial South Africa in a way that largely excluded the Portuguese sphere of influence on the east coast, and if they had not generally disregarded Portuguese sources. (Theal, by contrast, acquired a wide first-hand knowledge of them, as did Eric Axelson later on, but in this they were exceptional among their contemporaries.)

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rapid extension of missionary activity into British Central Africa and the establishment there of more or less effective colonial administrations. One of the consequences was an increase in the number of publications bearing on local tribal histories. In the same period, authorities, both white and black, on tribal history in South Africa were producing the first book-length histories in this field (Ayliff and Whiteside 1912; Ellenberger 1912; Fuze 1922; Gibson 1903; Lagden 1909). Drawing on these published sources and on his own researches into Zulu oral testimonies, missionary Alfred Bryant (1929) published in *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* what was by far the most detailed account of the wars of Shaka to have appeared in print up to that time. He devoted separate chapters to the devastation of Natal south of the Thukela river, the 'flights', 'careers' and 'migrations' of the Fingoes to the eastern Cape, the Hlubi and the Ngwane onto the southern highveld, the Gaza to southern and central Mozambique, the Ngoni across the Zambezi, and the Ndebele beyond the Limpopo. His account went beyond Theal's in giving numerous details of persons, places and dates, in listing his published sources, and in using the testimonies of black informants (though he mostly left them unnamed); in consequence, it appeared to be all the more authoritative. *Olden Times* remained the standard source of reference on the wars of Shaka until the 1960s, and is still used today alongside more recent publications.

In the decades after the appearance of *Olden Times*, accounts of tribal history which bore on the wars of Shaka continued to be produced by missionaries and native affairs administrators and by a handful of black writers. In addition, numbers of the administrative tribes which were being set up across southern Africa became the subject of detailed monographs written by academically trained anthropologists. Further source material on the wars of Shaka became available in edited and annotated publications of original historical documents and of reprints of colonial travel accounts put out by a number of South African publishers. In 1966, against the background of decolonisation in Africa north of the Zambezi, this enlarged body of source material was used by John Omer-Cooper to develop the comprehensive account of "the wars of Shaka", now renamed the "mfecane", which

he published in *The Zulu Aftermath*. As commentators have noted many times, this book was researched and written when academic historians inside and outside Africa were for the first time beginning to take a sustained interest in the history of African as distinct from white settler societies. It was part of a corpus of academic histories whose broad aim, we can see with hindsight, was to lend support to the process of building new, modern nations in the continent. To this end it sought to turn the wars of Shaka to a completely new purpose. Previously, white settler historians had produced accounts of these wars which essentially sought to legitimise European colonial expansion and domination by denigrating Shaka. Intellectuals in precolonial African communities had often produced accounts which sought to mobilize and justify resistance to colonial subjugation by presenting Shaka as a heroic warrior and founder-figure. Now liberal Africanist historians of the 1960s and after, such as Omer-Cooper, produced accounts which sought to cast the wars of Shaka as part of a positive process of precolonial nation-building. Paradoxically, in seeking to lend support to an anti-colonial cause they helped to entrench colonial-era stereotypes of Shaka and his times more deeply than ever (Wright 2002).

In fairness to Omer-Cooper the point should be made that in writing on the wars of Shaka, he, like other academic historians of his generation, was deeply concerned to demonstrate that African history, like other histories, had patterns to it, at a time, we need to remember, when metropolitan historians like Hugh Trevor-Roper could dismissively assert the opposite. But Omer-Cooper was uncritical about the template that he used to give shape to his narrative, and under the name “mfecane” (or “difaqane” in its Sotho form), the wars of Shaka took on a new lease of life. In the 1970s and 1980s a number of more critical academic historians began producing accounts of the emergence of the Zulu kingdom which in many ways broke decisively with the dominant settlerist accounts, but it was not until the 1990s, after Cobbing’s decisive, if controversially argued, challenge to the mfecane, that the notion that the wars of Shaka had been the driving force behind a series of long-distance migrations began to be discarded (Wright 2002). In the next section of the paper I examine the implications of this development for the way we see the history of these population movements. For each of the five sets of migrations discussed, I briefly outline the common stereotype as depicted in Omer-Cooper and in the major sources that he used. I then go on to comment on it in the light of more recent research, and consider how far the history of the migrations can be seen as part of a “Zulu aftermath”.

Breaking the chains

i) The flight of the Fingoes to the eastern Cape

In his account of the Fingo migration, which he derived largely from the work of Whiteside (Ayliff and Whiteside 1912), Omer-Cooper (1966:156-167) has Shaka attack certain chiefdoms to the west and south of the Zulu polity in a very early stage of its expansion. Fragments of them flee southwards, in the process devastating much of the territory between the Thukela and Mzimkhulu rivers. Shaka follows up with frequent raids into the region, which is soon virtually depopulated. Large numbers of people are wiped out; others seek refuge in the chiefdoms of the Mpondo, Thembu and Xhosa in what is now the Eastern Cape. Particularly among the Gcaleka Xhosa under Hintsu, they are heavily oppressed and are kept in a state of poverty and near-slavery. The war of 1834-35 between the Xhosa and the British gives them the opportunity to escape from the Gcaleka and seek protection from the British. Accompanied by a Wesleyan missionary, John Ayliff, they make a mass exodus from Gcaleka country and are settled by British officials in a number of locations along the Cape frontier. They are quick to acquire mission education, and many become prosperous farmers and traders and loyal fighters on the side of the British in later wars against the Xhosa. On the basis of their common history as refugees from Shaka and as victims of Gcaleka oppression, and at the behest of their missionaries, they take on a collective identity as Fingoes (or, in isiXhosa, amaMfengu, literally “the destitutes”).

My own researches into the early history of the Zulu kingdom cast doubt on the initial elements of this story (Wright 1995b). The first groups to move away from the region north of the Thukela in the late 1810s or early 1820s were almost certainly seeking to escape particularly fierce attacks from the dominant Ndwandwe kingdom rather than from the still relatively small and unconsolidated polity under Shaka. A little later, Zulu attacks were instrumental in driving the Chunu and Thembu southward; these two groups, together with sections of Nhangwini and Memela which moved away from the western borderlands of the expanding Zulu kingdom of their own accord, were primarily responsible for disruption of chiefdoms south of the Thukela. These territories were not “depopulated”: people abandoned some areas and clustered in others where there was relatively more security. Groups attacked others not to “massacre” them but to seize their stocks of cattle and grain. Zulu forces seem to have made at least two raids into the region, but, as far as the evidence goes, did not make regular forays through it.

As in fact Omer-Cooper’s own work reveals (Omer-Cooper 1966:157-161), although he does not explicitly make the point himself, there was no mass exodus of refugees from Natal directly to Xhosa country. Most refugee groups from north of the Mzimkhulu sought to establish themselves in the area between that river and the Mzimvubu, either independently or under the authority of the dominant regional chief, Faku of the Mpondo. From the early 1820s to at least the early 1830s, this

region became a major zone of conflict. Mostly overlooked in the stereotype is the impact of incursions made into it in the late 1820s and early 1830s first by Ngwane and later by Sotho from the highveld, and by a large force of British troops in 1828. Some of the contending groups ended up by shifting away southwards and giving their allegiance to Thembu and Xhosa chiefs. Others remained under the authority of Faku, or of Madikane and Ngcaphayi, successive heads of the emerging Bhaca chiefdom. Still others made their way back northward to give allegiance to Shaka. The history of all these groups is much more complex than the stereotype makes out; it belongs to the history of the eastern Cape and of the highveld as much as, or more than, it belongs to the history of the Zulu kingdom. There was no chain reaction of conflicts and migrations which necessarily linked it to the expansion of the Zulu under Shaka.

ii) The flight of the Hlubi and the Ngwane onto the highveld

Omer-Cooper's account is drawn largely from Ellenberger (1912) and Bryant (1929). Even before the flight of the Fingoes, the Ngwane under Matiwane on the upper Mfolozi are attacked by the Ndwandwe. The Ngwane then fall on the neighbouring Hlubi. A section of the latter flees westward over the Drakensberg onto the highveld. Soon afterwards the Ngwane are attacked by Shaka and driven over the mountains in the wake of the Hlubi. The irruption of the Hlubi and Ngwane inaugurates a violent chain-reaction of wars and population movements over much of the interior north of the Orange river. Together with the Tlokwa people under their famous woman chief MmaNthatisi, the Hlubi and Ngwane range over the southern highveld, fighting one another and destroying smaller chiefdoms. Great numbers of people are killed, or starve to death; cannibalism becomes rife. In about 1825 the Ngwane defeat and disperse the Hlubi and become the dominant power in the Caledon valley. They suffer raids from the Ndebele of Mzilikazi north of the Vaal river, and possibly from the Zulu, and are beaten off in a raid on the nearby Sotho under Moshweshwe. In 1828 Matiwane leads a new migration south-eastward over the Orange river and the Drakensberg mountains into the country of the Thembu. To protect the frontiers of the Cape colony, a strong British force advances from Grahamstown and, aided by large numbers of Xhosa and Thembu, attacks and breaks up the Ngwane. Matiwane escapes and makes his way back to the Zulu kingdom where he is put to death by the new king, Dingane. The removal of the Ngwane leaves the way open for the expansion of the Sotho under the enlightened leadership of Moshweshwe. He welcomes the missionaries who arrive in his kingdom from 1833 onward.

Recent research confirms that it was the Ndwandwe rather than the Zulu who initially attacked the Ngwane (Wright 1990). The subsequent attack, which pushed the Ngwane onto the highveld, was

made by the Zulu. Thereafter, as far as can be known, the emerging Zulu power played no direct role in the politics of the highveld chiefdoms. The history of the region in the 1820s needs a thorough overhaul. Etherington (2004) has queried the level of violence and depopulation which supposedly took place, and it is now quite clear that, whatever the roles of the Hlubi, Ngwane and Tlokwa might have been, they were operating in a zone which had already been heavily destabilized by several decades of raiding for cattle and slaves by Boer, Kora and Griqua graziers and bandits from the middle Orange region (Eldredge 1994; Etherington 2001:45-60; Wright in press). The events of the period need to be seen against this background. Matiwane's decision to move out of the Caledon valley had nothing to do with pressure from the Zulu kingdom: it seems to have been a response to internal tensions in his chiefdom following raids and threats of raids from the Ndebele to the north, Kora and Griqua to the west, and Boers to the south-west. The British attack on Matiwane's people in 1828 was mounted less to "stabilize the frontier", as the official line had it, than to make a major show of force in Xhosa and Thembu territories. For the accompanying parties of Boers, Xhosa and Thembu it provided a golden opportunity to seize cattle and captives, which they duly did (Wright 1995a:113-116). In sum, the history of the highveld and Caledon valley in the period under discussion is much more closely linked to that of the Cape than to that of the Zulu kingdom: the notion that it can form part of a 'Zulu aftermath' is highly misleading.

iii) The migration of the Kololo to the upper Zambezi

As indicated above, this particular movement did not feature in accounts of the wars of Shaka until Theal's time. Bryant (1929) paid it no attention, presumably because he did not see it as fitting into an account of Zulu history. It was, by contrast, taken up by Omer-Cooper (1966:115-126), who had at his disposal passages on Kololo history published by the missionary David Livingstone (1857), a chapter that had been worked up largely from Livingstone's work by Ellenberger (1912) (which Omer-Cooper did not cite), and a long article, also largely based on Livingstone, written by Edwin Smith (1956), a missionary who had worked in Central Africa in the twentieth century. In these sources, which are all ultimately based on information provided to Livingstone by the Kololo chief Sebetwane in 1851, the flight of the Kololo is seen primarily as an offshoot of the violence which was taking place on the highveld in the early 1820s. At this time Sebetwane was the young chief of a section of the Fokeng who lived south of the Vaal river. In the common account he is attacked by the Tlokwa, driven northward, and becomes leader of a large raiding group in southern Tswana country. After being attacked and defeated by Mzilikazi's Ndebele, he and his following make off further north, only to be defeated by the Ngwaketse with the aid of a party of British traders. The Kololo, as they are now coming to be called, pursue a career of raiding, moving by degrees to what is now

north-western Botswana, and then north-eastward across the Zambezi river. They are again attacked by the Ndebele, who by this time have made their own move northward into what is now south-western Zimbabwe, and retreat further up the Zambezi into the country of the Lozi. After several years of fighting, the Kololo subdue the Lozi, and establish themselves as a ruling aristocracy. After the death of Sebetwane in 1851 (in the course of Livingstone's visit), the domination of the Kololo ruling house weakens. In 1864 the leaders of the Lozi succeed in organizing a rebellion, massacre large numbers of Kololo, drive out the rest, and re-establish a strong Lozi state.

It is significant that even Omer-Cooper makes no mention of the Zulu in his brief chapter on the Kololo migration. The migration makes its way into his account by virtue of the initial attack made on the Fokeng by the Tlokwa, who, it will be remembered, had previously been attacked by the Hlubi and the Ngwane, who themselves had moved over the Drakensberg after the Ngwane had been attacked by Shaka. The attacks subsequently made on the Kololo by the Ndebele, who were also the product of a chain of violence supposedly emanating from the Zulu kingdom, may have been another factor in Omer-Cooper's decision to include the history of the Kololo as part of the Zulu aftermath. Also playing a role in his decision may have been the fact that Livingstone had described Sebetwane in highly favourable terms; for liberal Africanist historians here perhaps was another chief who could be set alongside Moshweshwe of the Sotho as an example of a successful African nation-builder who was apparently not a bloody despot like Shaka, Mzilikazi and others. But there is nothing in Omer-Cooper's register of the successive moves made by the Kololo over a period of twenty years or more to suggest that any part of their migration had anything to do with Zulu influences. In general Omer-Cooper is more interested in setting up his protagonist chiefs as state-builders than in explaining in any detail how and why they and their adherents ended up in the territories where they did. He tells us very little about why precisely chiefs decide to move when they do, why they decide to move in a particular direction rather than another, and why they decide to settle in particular localities. We are left, as in the case of the Kololo, with an arrow on the map, but no clear notion of how it came to be there.

Also missing from Omer-Cooper's account is an appreciation of the fact that in migrating into the northern Botswana-upper Zambezi region the Kololo were moving into a zone that had for some decades seen increasing activity on the part of traders in ivory and slaves from the Portuguese sphere of influence in the west in what is now Angola, and from the Lunda and neighbouring kingdoms of what is now the southern DRC (Birmingham 1976; Miller 1988:146, 264; Morton 1994:228; Wilmsen 2003:83, 89). Trading networks may also have linked the region to the Portuguese sphere of influence on the lower Zambezi, and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, possibly to the

Omani Arab sphere of influence which was expanding from Tanganyika into Central Africa (Alpers: 1975; Reefe 1983:197; Roberts 1976:117-20). Admittedly, few academic studies of these themes had yet been produced at the time when Omer-Cooper was writing *The Zulu Aftermath*, but it was nevertheless typical of his approach that he was concerned to link the latter stages of the Kololo migration to the history of events that had taken place 1000 kilometres away and twenty and more years before rather than to the contemporary history of Central Africa.

iv) The flight of the Gaza and the Ngoni

For his two chapters on this theme, Omer-Cooper (1966:57-85) drew mainly on a range of accounts that had been published by missionaries and officials who had worked in Central Africa. The common thread is the story of how, in about 1820, the Ndwandwe kingdom is overcome by Shaka and breaks up into several sections. To escape from Shaka's rule, they all move away. The main house under Zwide migrates a short distance to the north-west. A cluster of groups which had previously been subordinate to Zwide makes off to the north-east into eastern Swaziland and southern Mozambique. Respectively they are under the leadership of Soshangane of the Ndwandwe chiefly house, Zwangendaba of the Jele (Jere) people, and Nxaba of the related Msane people. They raid widely among the Tsonga-speaking chiefdoms of southern and central Mozambique, fight with one another and with the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay and Inhambane, and absorb numbers of displaced people into what become three powerful predatory hordes. In 1828 Soshangane beats off a Zulu raid, and in the early 1830s defeats the other two groups and drives them further west and north. In the territory extending from the lower Limpopo northwards, he consolidates what becomes known as the Gaza kingdom. His forces raid over an area extending from Delagoa Bay in the south to the Zambezi river in the north. The Gaza kingdom holds together after his death in 1858, and remains powerful until it is defeated by the Portuguese in 1895.

After their defeat at the hands of Soshangane's adherents, Zwangendaba and his following head into what is now Zimbabwe. A few years later they move north across the Zambezi (an event conventionally dated by an eclipse of the sun to 1835), and make their way in stages into what is now northern Zambia, raiding and subjugating local chiefdoms, and absorbing large numbers of people into the polity which they rule. In the mid- or late 1840s Zwangendaba dies. His following splits into several groups, which in turn throw off further offshoots, so that within a few years there are several distinct groups, now called Ngoni, moving and raiding across eastern Zambia, Malawi, southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique. Other groups of Ngoni emerge in the same region under the domination of adherents of Ngwane, leader of the Maseko people who had previously been

subservient to Nxaba. (Nxaba himself meets his end in an attack on the Kololo far to the west.) Numbers of Ngoni maintain their cohesion as the ruling aristocracies of predatory states until they come under British, Portuguese and German colonial rule at the end of the century.

The idea that the Zulu under Shaka defeated and broke up the Ndwandwe at the beginning of his reign is, as one might expect, strongly entrenched in Zulu tradition, but analysis of the existing evidence suggests that after the Zulu had beaten off a major Ndwandwe raid Zwide's kingdom broke up because of tensions within the chiefly house (Wright in press). In this scenario, the groups under Soshangane, Zwangendaba and Nxaba moved off as much to put a distance between themselves and the main house under Zwide as to escape from Shaka. One of the factors behind their respective moves to southern Mozambique may have been the desire to establish control over as slices of the fluctuating trade in ivory and the rapidly growing trade in slaves at Delagoa Bay. Certainly Soshangane's polity became deeply involved in the slave trade from the 1820s onward (for different perspectives see Cobbing: 1988; Eldredge 1994:133-143; Harries: 1981). The stereotype tells us virtually nothing about the politics of the region, so we do not know how and why Soshangane was able to overcome Zwangendaba and Nxaba, nor why the latter two decided to move off to the north and west. The Gaza state did not grow in a political vacuum. To begin with, it had as neighbours Zwide's reconsolidating Ndwandwe kingdom to the west, the Zulu kingdom and the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay to the south, and the Portuguese at Inhambane to the east. By the 1830s Zwide's polity had finally broken up (with many of his adherents coming to give their allegiance to Soshangane), and the Ndebele kingdom was emerging to the south-west of the Gaza. By the 1840s Boers from the Cape had pushed the Ndebele north of the Limpopo and were settling in what became the Transvaal, other Boers had defeated the Zulu under Dingane and were settling in the region south of the Thukela river, the Swazi and Pedi kingdoms were emerging on the south-western borders of the Gaza kingdom, and the Gaza themselves were raiding into the Portuguese zones of influence round Sofala on the east coast and in the lower Zambezi valley a long way to the north (Liesegang 1967:53, 68-9). The political history of the region in the nineteenth century needs its own integrated study: it is not going to be understood in terms of a "Zulu aftermath".

By the same token, as historians of Central Africa have long since realized, the histories of the various Ngoni groups that emerged north of the Zambezi from the 1840s onwards are better served by delinking them from the history of the Zulu kingdom far to the south in the 1820s, and integrating them into the quite separate history of eastern Zambezia. Omer-Cooper is not insensitive to this point, but given his depiction of the states formed by the various Ngoni leaders essentially as offshoots of the Zulu state formed by Shaka, it is not surprising that he tells us very little of Central

Africa's regional political dynamics. Stories about the migrations of some Ngoni groups as far as the shores of Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria, 3000 kilometres from the Zulu country, may make for dramatic reading, but unless they are fitted first and foremost into their local contexts they will remain highly misleading.

v) *The migrations of the Ndebele across the Limpopo*

Omer-Cooper's account draws heavily on two main published sources – the *Matabele Journals* of missionary Robert Moffat (Wallis 1945) and the *Diary* of Cape official Andrew Smith (Kirby 1939-40). The Ndebele are seen as another group which had its origins in a flight from Shaka in the early 1820s. Under their leader Mzilikazi, a section of Khumalo heads off north-westwards from the Zulu kingdom and settles for a while near the upper Vaal river. In the late 1820s Mzilikazi and his adherents, who are now becoming known as Ndebele, move further west to get away from the Zulu, and settle near the site of what later became Pretoria. They raid widely for cattle, break up numerous chiefdoms, and consolidate subjected peoples into a powerful predatory state. They beat off attacks from the Zulu kingdom to the south-east and from bands of Kora and Griqua to the south-west. In 1832, mainly to escape the Zulu, they move further west and settle in the Marico region. From this nuclear area they devastate the Sotho and Tswana chiefdoms on the highveld and on the edges of the Kalahari desert. In 1836-37 they come into conflict with the Boer trekkers from the Cape who are spreading out over the interior, and, after suffering two defeats at the hands of the Boers, decide to move away to northward. After several years of wandering in the deserts of northern Botswana, they settle near what is now Bulawayo in south-western Zimbabwe and re-establish a powerful state. Mzilikazi dies in 1868; his kingdom lives on until it is destroyed by white colonizers from South Africa in the 1890s.

As in the cases of Matiwane, Soshangane, Zwangendaba, and Nxaba, it is likely that Mzilikazi's first move was made to get away from the Ndwandwe rather than the Zulu. How far his subsequent shifts to the west in the 1820s and 1830s were due to fear of the Zulu, and how far due to the expansion of the slave trade at Delagoa Bay and in the Gaza kingdom, and to raiding by Kora and Griqua from the middle Orange region, has become a matter for debate (Etherington, 2001:161-163; Rasmussen 1978:27-57). What is beyond debate is the point that Mzilikazi's move to the north in the late 1830s was due primarily to his defeat at the hands of the Boers. The earlier movements of the Ndebele may have been influenced by fear of the Zulu, among other factors; their later movements are linked much more closely to the history of the Boers and thus to the northward expansion of the Cape

frontier of settlement. By the same token, their history in the region north of the Limpopo after 1840 has nothing to do with that of the Zulu kingdom and a great deal to do with that of the Boers, Kololo, northern Tswana, Venda, Pedi, Gaza, Shona, Portuguese in Mozambique, Portuguese in Angola, and ultimately the British in the Cape (Cobbing 1976).

It does not take much analysis to show that the series of migrations which constituted Omer-Cooper's "Zulu aftermath" are all narrated according to a simple formula. It has five elements. First, a particular group is driven away by the Zulu under Shaka or else by another body of people that has previously been driven away by the Zulu. Second, it goes through years of wandering, punctuated by periods of settlement, fighting, uprooting, and further wandering, until the group is either destroyed (as in the case of the Hlubi, the Ngwane, and the Kololo), or until it finds a land where it can finally settle. Third, in its new home the group reconsolidates its strength and prosperity, usually as head of a strong following (the Gaza, various Ngoni groups, the Ndebele). Fourth, the story culminates with the advent of European colonial rule. The Fingoes (for a time) make good; the Gaza kingdom is destroyed; some Ngoni groups make good, others are destroyed; the Ndebele kingdom is destroyed. Fifth and finally, as a kind of coda, decolonisation in the 1960s encourages numbers of descendant communities to re-assert their historical links with the great states of the precolonial past.

It is a measure of the strength of the colonial legacy in southern Africa that ideas about the wars of Shaka which were gelling as far back as the 1840s should have lived on in full force until the 1980s and beyond. In South Africa, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, some academic historians still find it difficult to let go of the idea of the Zulu aftermath. On this point, it is illuminating to contrast the recent academic historiography of African societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in South Africa with that of Central Africa. The former, produced in a region for long dominated by European settlers and their descendants, is characterized by the revitalizing of the idea of the wars of Shaka in the heyday of apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s, and then by an often angry reaction against it as apartheid was collapsing in the late 1980s and 1990s. The latter, produced in a region which was throwing off European colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s, and where European officials, businessmen, and missionaries had often been more influential than settlers, has much more to say about the growth and impact of long-distance trade from the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. The expansion of African states, which is a central theme in the historiography of Central Africa, as it is in that of South Africa, is written more round the growth of trade than it is round the disruptions caused by migrant groups, important at times though these were. These differences no doubt in part reflect differences in history as it happened 'on the ground'; they also reflect the differences between a historiography heavily influenced, even today, by colonial nightmares about the ravages committed

by marauding African hordes and one influenced more by metropolitan ideas about the powers of commerce as a historical propellant.

African identities and “the wars of Shaka”

Developing a critique of settler ideas and of academic ideas about the wars of Shaka is one thing, but how does such a critique square with assertions made by generations of Africans, as reported in the literature, to the effect that the forebears of the Fingoes, the Ngwane, the Ngoni the Ndebele, and many other smaller groupings, were driven away by the Zulu during the wars of Shaka? In the end, though it is a point which has not yet been sufficiently recognized in the critical literature, the whole edifice of the “Zulu aftermath” rests on statements of this kind made by Africans to other Africans, and ultimately to those literate Europeans and Africans who rendered their statements into written form. The critical literature on the historiography of Shaka has so far mostly focussed on ‘white writing’; very little has so far been done on the potentially vast topic of ‘black writing’ and black oral narrating in this field, nor on how white and black views might have influenced one another over time (Wright and Hamilton: 2001). Carolyn Hamilton’s seminal study of the making of ideas about Shaka has begun to open up discussion of this topic (Hamilton 1998). She argues that the notion of Shaka as having been an exceptionally powerful and despotic ruler (the notion of Shaka the Mighty, as I have called it (Wright 2004)), while having its roots in his own times, began to firm up in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, some time after his death. In these years, leading figures in the Zulu kingdom were becoming increasingly concerned about the growing threats to the order over which they presided posed by the expansion of British and Boer power in southern Africa. Among their ideological responses was an increased emphasis on Shaka, the first Zulu king, as having been a ruler of great power and a bringer of law, order, and stability. These ideas influenced, and were influenced by, the ideas of colonial administrators like Theophilus Shepstone, Diplomatic Agent and Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal from 1845 to 1876, who sought to present his paternalistic and frequently authoritarian ways of ruling Africans as similar to those of Shaka. They spread rapidly in the literature in the period after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

Here I would like to make some suggestions as to why Shaka and his wars became a basic theme in the oral historiographies of a number of other, non-Zulu peoples. In doing so, I draw on recent developments in the understanding of how and why oral histories are made in African societies. Students of African ‘oral tradition’ have long recognized that oral histories are subject to constant change as they are transmitted from one generation to the next, and that they are subject to constant alteration by their narrators according the circumstances in which the narrating took place. Since the 1960s, when African oral histories first began to be taken seriously by academic historians as

potential sources of reliable historical information, the argument has been that by critically assessing contradictory traditions against one another it is possible to extract from them a core of “truth” about the past. Some scholars, though, are now moving to the view that the value of oral histories as sources lies less in their “factual” content about the past than in what they might indicate about views of the past held by the narrators and their communities in the present. The focus of these scholars is less on trying to find the truth in a story than in trying to find out why the narrator is telling the story in a particular way (Cohen 1994; Hamilton 2002; Hofmeyr 1993). This approach allows us to move on from simply taking statements to the effect that “We were driven out by Shaka” as either right or wrong to assessing their connotations for the persons who make them by asking the questions: Who precisely are the ‘we’ who make this claim about the past? And why do the people concerned want to make this particular claim at this particular time? Potentially illuminating answers to these questions can be found in recent case-studies of historical research into the making of ethnic identities in Africa (Vail 1989). Suggestive studies relevant to this paper have been done in the cases of the Fingo and the Ngoni. They will be discussed here in turn.

As we have seen, the conventional view is that the Fingoes of the eastern Cape are the descendants of disparate groups which had moved out of the Natal region in 1820s in order to escape from Shaka, and had taken refuge among the Thembu and Xhosa before seeking protection from the British. These groups had had the common tribal identity of ‘Fingo’ imposed on them by British officials and missionaries after 1835. Over time they had come to accept it as a way of distinguishing themselves from the Xhosa. In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers began to question this view. Alan Webster (1995) showed up Whiteside’s widely influential account of Fingo history as “a book full of contradictions, exaggeration and myth”, and the writings of the missionary John Ayliff on which it was based as largely unreliable (Webster 1995: 254-255). He argued that the Fingoes comprised not only refugees from Natal but also large numbers of Xhosa who had been impoverished by the war of 1834-35 and who had moved to the Cape colony to find work, and also other Xhosa who had been brought into the colony as forced labourers by British forces (Webster 1995:255-272). To be able to control these disparate groups more effectively, British officials imposed a set of parvenu chiefs on them, and labelled them all as Fingoes. Under the influence of missionaries, the people came to accept this as a new identity (Webster 1995: 272-274). Tim Stapleton provides evidence along the same lines that in subsequent years many more Xhosa were prepared to take on an identity as ‘Fingoes’ in order to be allowed to work in the colony, or settle in various tracts of land which British officials had set up for Fingo occupation. He too sees Fingo identity essentially as having been imposed on the people concerned by British officials (Stapleton 1995; 1996:233-50).

Webster's and Stapleton's researches have served to open up the whole question of identity-making on the Cape frontier, but in arguing that the 'Fingo' identity was one created by colonial officials and missionaries and imposed from above they inhibit understanding of the long-term historical processes in which this identity took form. Their approach is one that leaves little room for African agency in the creation of modern 'tribal' identities, and their arguments are in fact contradicted by evidence which they themselves put forward as to the preparedness of numbers of Xhosa to take on an identity as Fingo as a means of acquiring advantage in the search for work, land, mission education, and favours from the colonial authorities.

A more nuanced approach is taken by Clifton Crais, who suggests that Fingo identity and the history that went with it were the product of a complex process of interaction between ordinary African people, African intellectuals, white missionaries and white officials. In outlining a history of these interactions, he identifies four important moments: the mid-nineteenth century, when taking on a Fingo identity was as much anything else a means of acquiring access to scarce land; the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the mining revolution, the impoverishment of the rural reserves, and the rise of migrant labour were pushing people all over southern Africa into the kind of competitive situations where political mobilization along ethnic lines was reinforced; the period of retribalization under Hertzog in the 1920s and 1930s, when the segregationist state was seeking to revitalize ethnic identities and traditions; and the 1950s and 1960s, when the apartheid state was seeking to set up homelands based on traditional tribes under traditional chiefs (Crais 1992:99-126). In a later article, Stapleton (1997) shifts to a not dissimilar view.

In this view, the group of people who called themselves Fingoes, and who thus claimed origins from forebears who had been driven out of Natal by Shaka, did not come into existence overnight in 1830s: it grew over a period of many decades. The implications of this are that in the 1830s, in the very earliest stages of the formation of Fingo identity, there was no large group of people in the eastern Cape who had a personal stake in propagating the idea that Shaka and the Zulu were important in their collective history. Later, as a Fingo ethnic identity began to firm up, and as the size and influence of the group which claimed this identity expanded, so this idea would have become more widespread and more entrenched, both among the Fingo and the non-Fingo over and against whom they defined themselves. The wars of Shaka became more widely important in people's minds, not because these wars had necessarily been of great consequence, but because stories about them, whether 'true' or not, helped provide people with an explanation of where their own forebears had come from, and thus with the kind of historical charter which is central to the formation of all collective identities. In the early twentieth century, these ideas about Shaka, as well as those

articulated earlier by writers like John Ayliff, fed into Whiteside's book on Fingo history, which in turn fed them into later productions of Fingo history, both oral and written.

A similar kind of argument can be made in the case of the Ngoni in Central Africa. There is no clear indication as to when an Ngoni identity first began developing, but scholars who have written on the question argue that it would have become well entrenched as a designation for the ruling aristocracies as stratified Ngoni states began emerging in Central Africa from the mid-nineteenth century onward. To be 'Ngoni' meant, among other things, to be directly descended from forebears who had migrated from the Ndwandwe-Zulu-Swazi region years before to escape from Shaka's armies (Read:1936; 1956:4-10; Barnes:1954:4-28). Ideas to the effect that the wars of Shaka had been of great significance seem in time to have circulated not only among the Ngoni aristocracies but also among the peoples over whom they ruled and the peoples with whom they came into contact. If the Ngoni aristocracies had been destroyed by the imposition of colonial rule in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in the 1890s and early 1900s, the resonance of these ideas might well have diminished (as seems to have happened in central Mozambique when the Gaza ruling house was deliberately broken up by the Portuguese in the late 1890s (Liesegang 1981:181-182, 202)). But several of these aristocracies survived and for reasons that have been outlined by Vail and White (1981:160-163), an Ngoni ethnic identity took firm root in Nyasaland in the early years of the twentieth century, and with it the idea that Ngoni history went back to the times of Shaka. Ngoni ethnicity was revitalized in the 1930s and after; in the process, Ngoni ideas about the significance of the wars of Shaka were widely spread by Ngoni writers like Yesuya Chibambo and by anthropologists like Margaret Read (1936; 1956; Vail 1981:230-233; Vail and White 1989:160, 182) and J.A. Barnes (1954).

Ideas about the central role of Shaka and the Zulu spread not only among the descendants of groups like the Fingoes and the Ngoni that traced their origins to migrations from the Zulu region but also among other peoples who could claim to have been severely affected by the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s. Of the groups in the Caledon valley, the Sotho under Moshweshwe seem to have been developing ideas of this sort early on: certainly they were expressed by Moshweshwe himself in 1845 (Theal 1883 v.2:83). As indicated above, Etherington (2004) has put forward the argument that the Sotho ruling house and the French missionaries who worked among the Sotho had a joint interest in exaggerating the degree of violence that had taken place in the Caledon valley in the 1820s and 1830s. It enabled both to make the claim that they had been instrumental in restoring stability to a devastated land, and thus to underpin the ruling house's claims to rule its subject groups legitimately, and the missionaries' claims that they were bringing to the land the benefits of civilization. In

addition, Etherington argues, it helped Moshweshwe to assert the legitimacy of his own succession to the chiefship, a point which was contested by certain other members of the ruling house. To this I would add that, to be more widely believable, claims of this kind would have needed to develop a coherent narrative of the upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s, one that included a plausible explanation of their causes. In processes that are now lost to view, the idea that the wars had been caused by Shaka and the Zulu came to the fore. Whether this idea was objectively 'true' or not is beside the point: the significant issue is that it carried enough resonance with enough people for it to become incorporated as a central element in the founding history of the Sotho royal house and, in due course, of the Sotho 'nation' as a whole.

Similar arguments could probably be made in the case of the Swazi, the Ndebele, the Mpondo, the Bhaca, and other peoples of eastern southern Africa. One would expect to find that from about the middle of the nineteenth century, for a range of different reasons, the aggressions of Shaka and the Zulu were coming to be seen by many Africans as the prime motor of the wars earlier in the century which they saw as having given rise to the political order in which they lived. Their ideas about Shaka and his wars were congruent with notions which, for very different reasons, were taking shape at much the same time among white colonists in southern Africa. From the start, ideas fed back and forth between black and white lineages of thought in this field. The historical processes involved have hardly begun to be investigated; they will need to become the focus of a major research effort if we are to understand in depth the provenance of the ideas which went into the making of the 'Zulu aftermath'. In the meantime, those of us who are working to rescramble its constituent migrations would do well to remember that we are engaging not merely with the stereotypes which served the interests of white colonizers and their descendants but with notions which remain deeply rooted in the grounding histories of many present-day African communities.

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