REMEMBERING ALBASINI

Teresa Ann van Ryneveld

Submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the M.A. degree in History
at the University of Cape Town.

February 1998

ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses the historical figure of João Albasini to explore some historiographical issues related to how people commemorate their past. João Albasini was a Portuguese trader who operated through the port of Delagoa Bay for a large part of the 19th Century. He was based in Portuguese East Africa in the 1830's and early 1840's, and moved into what would become the Transvaal in the late 1840's, becoming a powerful political force in the region.

This thesis looks at the strikingly different ways in which Albasini has been remembered by different individuals and groups. Part 1 deals with his South African family's memories of him, focusing in particular on the portrayal of Albasini in a celebration held in 1988 to commemorate the centenary of his death. This is compared with fragments of earlier family memories, in particular, with the testimony of his second daughter recorded in newspaper articles, letters and notes. This comparison is used to argue that the memories of Albasini are being shaped both by a changing social context, and by the influence of different literary genres.

Part 2 looks at a doctoral thesis on Albasini written by J. B. de Vaal in the 1940's. This is placed in the context of a tradition of professional Afrikaner academic writing, that combined the conventions and claims of Rankean scientific history with the concerns of an Afrikaner *Volksgeskiedenis*, and which became powerful in a number of South African Universities in the early decades of this century. The text of de Vaal's thesis is examined in detail with a view to focusing on the extent to which it was shaped by this tradition.

Part 3 looks at a group of oral histories collected from the former Gazankulu Homeland between 1979 and 1991, and focuses on the way in which a memory of Albasini has been used in the construction of the idea of a Tsonga/Shangaan ethnic group. One oral tradition is examined in detail, and used to argue for an approach to oral history that attempts to focus on the structure and commentary of oral history, instead of simply using it as a source of empirical fact.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to a number of people who assisted with this thesis. My supervisor, Professor Patrick Harries, gave direction to the thesis, and remained interested for far longer than he might have expected to have to. Alan Kirkaldy found and translated all the German mission references, translated or checked my translations of the Afrikaans quotations, engaged in an extended bout of child-minding in the last months of the thesis, and took responsibility for all applications of computer technology in the final weeks.

Vuketi Maboko interpreted for me with interest and enthusiasm in my initial interviews, while Onica Dederen translated the Siweya tradition directly from tape, and provided an ongoing commentary on details of translation and interpretation. A number of people helped me solve the problem of obtaining secondary sources in Louis Trichardt, amongst whom Professor Fanie Olivier particularly deserves mention for spending a recent Saturday morning chasing obscure references in Pretoria. Thanks are also due to Mr Felix Malunga for help in this regard.

A number of people assisted by enabling me to spend time on the thesis. My parents offered financial assistance when the cost of writing a thesis instead of earning a living threatened to become overwhelming. Both they and my parents-in-law assisted with baby-sitting in Cape Town. Finally, thanks are due to Mrs Lettie Nengudza, on whose ongoing ability to distract small children the eventual completion of this thesis directly rests.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MAPS

FIGURES

INTRODUCTORY

DISCUSSION OF SOURCE MATERIAL

Albasini first caught my attention in the Potgietersrus Museum in 1983. I was an undergraduate student, on a field trip to collect oral history in what was then the Northern Transvaal. In amongst a display of Voortrekker history, in a museum which boasted an ox-wagon at its entrance, was a picture of João Albasini. It was accompanied by a short paragraph, describing him in terms which emphasised his official positions, as Portuguese vice-consul and "Superintendent of Kaffir tribes" in the Transvaal, and said little else. Patrick Harries, who was in charge of the trip, told us a bit more about the aspects that were excluded from the description, about the fact that he was a slave trader, that he had been recognised by the Transvaal government as a chief, and that he had had a black Mozambican family, who had become well-known members of the Lourenço Marques elite. What caught my imagination was the way in which his story appeared to undermine the white, nationalist stereotypes of the official display.

When, some years later, I decided to focus on Albasini as the subject of a Master's thesis, I was disappointed to discover that he was already the subject of a Doctoral thesis by J.B. de Vaal.[1] However, it appeared at first glance to be confined to the same nationalist terms as the Museum display. It was written in Afrikaans in a dense, detailed style, with an emphasis on "events". The term *kaffer* was liberally used, Albasini's Mozambican family was not mentioned, and a large amount of attention was given to Voortrekker history. I imagined using Mozambican sources and oral traditions collected from black people in the area to produce a narrative which would challenge the version which associated Albasini almost entirely with Voortrekker political history and which presented his story as "white". I saw my imagined use of oral history in terms of listening to the voices from below to challenge the dominant, racist, official version.

I also intended using a different approach to the genre of biography. De Vaal's thesis appears to emerge from a biographical tradition that focuses on the role played by individuals in providing leadership or in shaping their times.[2] This

---

1 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal*, Archives Yearbook for South African History, Part I, 1953.

2 In fact, examination of de Vaal's original thesis before publication indicated that de Vaal was himself far more interested in using a study of Albasini to provide insight into the lives of ordinary Boer settlers. This is discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

biographical tradition played a disproportionately large role in Afrikaner historical writing about the Great Trek, with at least one biographical monograph, sometimes several, devoted to each of the Voortrekker leaders.[3] I was influenced by an approach associated with the Annales school, that initially dismissed biography as a type of narrative history that was hampered by its obsession with "great men", but later returned partially to the use of biography, developing an approach that focused on how far individuals were representative of, and shaped by, their community and times.[4] I was particularly impressed by J. Guy's use of this approach in his study of Bishop Colenso.[5]

Once I started doing research, it became apparent that my imagined project was unrealistic. Firstly, enquiries about material in the Mozambican archives revealed that they contained little material on Albasini. While the archives in Portugal may have had more, Portugal was financially out of reach for a Masters degree. I did succeed in getting microfilms from the Oporto Archives, but these were fragmentary, and the Archives in Lisbon did not respond to my letters. As far as collecting oral history was concerned, I found a great-granddaughter of Albasini, still living in Louis Trichardt, who was able to tell me a great deal. However my interviews with black people in the area were less successful. While I found that there was a memory of "Juwawa", very few people had any detailed knowledge.

There was one notable exception to this pattern of fragmentary memories. At Ndengeza village, the clerks at the "tribal authority" office sent us to an elderly man, D. Siweya, who, they said "knew the history". Mr Siweya's account was impressive. He provided a detailed, confident, dramatically narrated oral tradition, which he had learnt from his father. His narrative, which lasted without interruption for well over half an hour, incorporated elements that nobody else had included. For example, he took the narrative right back to Portuguese East Africa, he mentioned slavery, he associated Albasini strongly with his access to weapons, and his narrative contrasted strongly with those of other informants in its approach to ethnicity. On the other hand, the tradition included magical

---

[3] F.A. Van Jaarsveld, "The Awakening of the Afrikaner to an Awareness of his history" in F. A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, Cape Town, 1964. pages 72 -73.

[4] For a discussion on the Annales approach to biography see P. Carrard, *Poetics of the New History; French Historical Discourse from Braudel to Chartier*, Baltimore and London, 1992, pages 66 - 72.

[5] J. Guy, *The Heretic; A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1844 - 1883*, Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg, 1983.

elements, obvious anachronisms, and was, in terms of the "facts" that I already knew, incorrect at many points. In retrospect, my questions were obvious, and usually unsuccessful, attempts to find points in the narrative through which I could "pin down" and explain the story. Although David Siweya "knew the history", he did not know it in terms to which I could easily relate.

My final problem was that closer reading of de Vaal's thesis changed my ideas about his treatment of the topic. There were obvious problems with his silence about Albasini's Mozambican family, his racist terminology, and the repeated emphasis on history as a science. At the same time, however, he had meticulously gone through most of the available sources, to present a detailed and impressive narrative of what had happened.

I found myself with strikingly varied images of Albasini: an image from my fairly sparse Portuguese and Mozambican sources, the image from my interviews with Albasini's great-granddaughter and the centenary celebration she organised, different images from the oral sources collected from black informants, the image portrayed by de Vaal's thesis, and the image in more popular articles and books relying on sources such as the reminiscences of game rangers. According to my original more "traditional" approach, I should have looked critically at my sources and then organised what I found to be reliable into a coherent narrative, organised thematically or chronologically. There were a number of problems that mitigated against doing that. Many of my sources drew on collective memories that would not stand up to conventions of what was verifiable historical evidence, and would have to be abandoned. Once I had done that, I would not only lose that sense of varied images, but, in view of the paucity of oral evidence, and Mozambican sources, I would find it difficult to substantially challenge or elaborate on de Vaal's thesis. This was the point at which I either had to abandon Albasini, or think differently about the thesis. I started to shift my focus to more historiographical questions.

The problem of "different perspectives" is central to a discussion of how academic discourse has tended to gloss over different points of view to produce one omniscient version of reality, or "master narrative".[6] The idea of there being a single, true version of the past has been undermined by the proliferation of

---

[6] E. Abelson, D. Abraham and M. Murphy, "Interview with Joan Scott", in *Radical History Review*, 45, 1989, page 49.

alternative histories such as women's histories, regional histories or working class histories, that challenge many traditional narratives of the past, and draw attention to the way in which these narratives reflect relations of power.[7] At the same time, the idea of a single common-sense reality that can be accurately represented has been called into question. The idea of an author being able to discover or narrate "the truth" about people or societies, without recognising that they, too, operate within a culturally constituted version of reality has been thoroughly undermined.[8]

The challenge as I saw it was how to construct a narrative which in some way retained a consciousness of different voices. I decided to move away from using my sources to construct a factual narrative of Albasini, and turned instead to looking at how different individuals and groups remembered Albasini. The thesis has, therefore, become less about Albasini than about how people commemorate the past. It draws on the idea that we can only imagine the past, or, in fact, the present, through narratives. As L. Passerini puts it, in reviewing Isabel Hofmeyr's *"We Spend our Years as a Tale that is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*:

> on the one hand historical narratives mediate an understanding of the past through their very form, while on the other hand the stories and their tellers are shaped by time and its changing circumstances.[9]

The differences in my types of sources and the way in which they represented Albasini, provided a way of looking at some of the ways in which different forms as well as different contexts shape commemoration.

There are three central issues or discussions that run throughout the dissertation. The first of these is a discussion of the relationship between oral and written history, the second is the relationship between history and literature, and the last is the important role played by history in constructing nationalist and ethnic identities.

---

7 N. Wachtel, "Introduction", in *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 2, Part 2, October, 1986, Special edition entitled "Between Memory and History", pages 217 - 218 and E. Abelson *et al.*, "Interview with Joan Scott", pages 50-51.

8 P. Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge and Oxford, 1991, page 3.

9 L. Passerini, Book review of I. Hofmeyr, *"We Spend our Years as a Tale that is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Kingdom*, Johannesburg, 1993, in *African Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 1996, page 146.

What emerges strongly from the thesis is the extent to which the boundaries of orality and literacy are blurred. In this I would support Isabel Hofmeyr's assertion that "if there is one principle that [the] discussion of orality and literacy establishes, it is that the two areas can never be neatly separated."[10] For example, in the chapter dealing with the South African family's portrayal of Albasini, I used the memories of one of Albasini's daughters, that had been recorded in newspaper articles, letters, and in the notes taken by J.B. de Vaal from an interview with her. Her accounts were partly based on personal experience as a child, and partly based on stories that were a generation removed from her own experience. Albasini's great-granddaughter, Marie Eyssel, describes her knowledge as having been passed on orally. She told me that she had spent much of her life living with old people, and listening to their stories. However, while these memories purport to be oral, they are told by literate people, using very literate tools, such as photocopies, newspaper articles, letters and notes. The centenary celebration organised by the family, and discussed in chapter 1 was a performance, with speeches, dances, songs and a dramatic sketch, yet it was also a performance saturated in literacy, with a printed programme, notes for the speeches, a script for the dramatic sketch, and a printed booklet on Albasini on sale. In a sense, the centenary celebration was an example of literacy being put to the service of an avowedly oral memory.

I found that I moved away from an earlier idea of comparing oral and written histories of Albasini, partly because I did not find any memories that I could classify as purely oral or literate. De Vaal's thesis is in one sense an extreme example of formal literacy, yet it draws on oral testimony of family members and black informants, and, as I argue in the chapter 2, his interest in Albasini and image of Albasini grew as much out of the informal oral memories of his childhood as out of his academic career. In collecting oral evidence in the former homeland of Gazankulu, I relied heavily on the advice of Mr F.M. Maboko, a retired educationalist and a historian on who to interview and which areas to visit. Once I arrived in the areas, I found myself being directed to local schoolteachers or shop-owners as much as to chiefs and headmen and the elders that I had imagined as the "repositories of oral knowledge".[11] The interview with D. Siweya

---

[10] I. Hofmeyr, *We spend our years*, page 12.

[11] See I. Hofmeyr, "'Wailing for Purity', Oral Studies in Southern African Studies", in *African Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 1995, pages 16 - 31 for a discussion of the extent to which researchers have tended to look for "pure"

which I discuss in detail in the final chapter was explicitly passed on orally, but it shows signs of drawing on stories from published Swiss mission sources. I therefore find Fentress and Wickham's idea of memory being structured through a dialect between written and oral narrative very useful.[12]

Some of my ideas about the characteristics of oral narrative have been drawn from the debate over Parry and Lord's work on the Homeric tradition.[13] Parry challenged the idea of the Homeric epics being the work of a single author, and passed on in much the same form, and developed instead the idea of the oral poet composing during performance, drawing on a stock of verbal formulas. Parry and Lord's work was then used by writers such as Ong and Goody who developed the idea of there being a divide between oral and literate societies, seeing orality and literacy as structuring the way in which people see the world. While I would agree with writers who have attacked this as being little more than a new way of defining reified boundaries between people, the debate is useful in that it draws attention to the role of mnemonic techniques in oral narratives. It also draws attention to the fact that the idea of orally transmitting traditions which are word-for-word copies makes little sense in societies without literacy, as there is no original text to offer as a basis for comparison.[14] I found these ideas useful in attempting to make sense of David Siweya's oral narrative.

A second theme running through the dissertation is the relationship between history and literature. The establishment of boundaries between history and literature was an important component of the professionalisation of history in the nineteenth century, where the teaching of history and the training of historians

---

oral sources, uncontaminated by "outside" written sources.

12 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory*, Oxford and Cambridge, 1992, page 97.

13 See especially M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected papers of Milman Parry*, Edited by Adam Parry, Oxford, 1971; A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, Mass., 1960 and A.B. Lord "Perspectives on recent work in Oral Literature", in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 10, 1974, pages 187 - 210.

14 See J. L. Vail and L. White, *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History*, Charlottesville and London, 1991, pages 15 - 25 for a discussion of Parry and Lord's work and the debate that followed it. For the debate over orality and literacy, see in particular W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, New York, 1982; J. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge, 1968; J. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge, 1987 and R. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, Oxford, 1988.

became institutionalised in new European Universities, and the new professional historians greatly extended their influence. These historians developed commonly accepted standards of inquiry and verification, and used these standards to validate their enterprise and substantiate a claim to scientific status. The model of scientific knowledge on which they drew was one which saw science as being based on direct observation, unmediated by language. Science was presented as antithetical to language, and so part of the claim to scientific status entailed emphasising the separation between history and literature and asserting the historians allegiance to matters of factual accuracy rather than matters of literary style.[15]

The challenge to the idea of an opposition between history and literature is most commonly associated with H. White and D. LaCapra, who draw attention to the important role played by language, imagery and imagination in the creation and description of historical reality.[16] They also draw attention to the role played by conventions of history writing that were developed in the nineteenth century, and which were established as a mark of professionalism in the positivist paradigm. For example, Langlois and Seignobos' *Introduction aux études historiques*, which played an influential role in outlining a positivist methodology gives detailed advice on how to write history. They state that the most natural and logical way to structure text is chronologically, as that is the way in which we know the facts occurred. They warn against moving away from chronology for "literary effects" such as the creation of suspense. They emphasise the need to be objective and avoid all forms of authorial intrusion or intervention, and stress again that "literary effects" are incompatible with the sobriety that should characterise historical writing.[17]

G. Pomana discusses the roots of these conventions in the writings of the French Romantic Historian, Augustin Thierry in the early nineteenth century. Thierry wrote the following explanation of his choice of narrative in history writing:

---

15 G. Pomata, "Versions of Narrative: Overt and Covert Narrators in Nineteenth Century Historiography", in *History Workshop Journal*, Spring, 1989, pages 11-14; T Appleby, L. Hunt and M. Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, New York and London, 1994, page 72 and P. Carrard, *op cit.* pages 4-7.

16 L.S. Kramer, "Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra" in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, California, 1989, pages 97 - 128, see especially pages 98 - 101.

17 P. Carrard, *op.cit.* pages 3 - 8.

> In matters historical, the method of exposition is always the surest, and the subtleties of logical argument are never introduced without imperilling the truth ... I believed I would best succeed by giving up the form of the dissertation in favour of a narrative, by making myself disappear from my story, and by letting the facts speak for themselves.[18]

For Thierry, narrative was contrasted with commentary. As he saw it:

> In commentary, the historian's analysis imposes an external pattern of events, distorting the true picture of the past by altering its original colour. Narrative instead ... is the medium of clear undistorted vision. Its immediacy and freshness contrasts with the artificiality of commentary. The power of narrative is the power of naked, unadorned truth.[19]

Thierry's comments about his choice of style clearly point to the connection between these narrative conventions and the claims of the later positivist professional historians in the late nineteenth century to be practising an objective science. While organising information chronologically is a convenient way of organising material derived from documents, it denies the role of the historian as author,[20] and creates a powerful "reality effect" giving the impression of history moving forward independently on the page.[21]

The discussion about the relationship between literature and fiction in oral history has been far more central to discussions of oral history, but it has tended to be separated from a discussion on the literary and textual aspects of written history. Vansina's pioneering work on oral tradition, published in 1961 and translated into English in 1965,[22] established a methodology for the gathering, transcribing and interpretation of oral traditions to be used in constructing a new version of the

---

18 G. Pomana, *op cit.* page 2.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Much of the impetus for a focus on issues of textualization and the links between ways of constructing a text and epistemological claims has come from anthropology, and is particularly associated with the work of Clifford Geertz. See especially, C. Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Stanford, 1988; R. Rosaldo, "From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor", in J. Clifford and G.M. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, London, 1986, pages 77 - 97 and A. Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond", in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, California, 1989, pages 72 - 96.

21 P. Carrard, *op cit.* page 11 and L.S. Kramer, *op cit.* pages 117 -118.

22 J. Vansina *Oral Tradition*, Harmondsworth, 1965.

African past, which did not simply rely on the point of view of official colonial sources. Since the nineteen sixties there has been a enormous increase in the use and acceptance of oral history, which has been closely associated with an attempt to challenge a dominant version of the past. The increasing use of oral history has been part of the different focus associated with the move away from an elitist, generally political history, to a social history, with far greatest emphasis on ordinary people, and an attempt to discover, and represent popular experience. In South Africa, collections of oral history have focused particularly on attempting to recover the popular experience of social change.[23]

Yet, as Fentress and Wickham point out, discussion on oral history, while claiming to rewrite history from the bottom up, has often remained confined to traditional historiographical issues and perspectives. They argue that there has been little discussion of the special nature of memory as a source, and instead, the tendency has been to "treat memory as a set of documents that happen to be in people's heads" rather than focusing on the specific nature of memory as a source.[24]

They draw on models of how memory works that emphasise the active, reconstructive aspects of remembering. Because memory does not rely on traces in the past, but instead relies on continual reconstruction, our memories of the past are structured and ordered by ideas in the present mind, and these ideas are both individual and social.[25]

Drawing on a number of experiments conducted in the 1930's, they argue that memory, and the transmission of that memory, requires conceptualisation or patterning, because completely unconnected or meaningless information is extremely difficult to remember, and even more difficult to transmit. They argue that "making sense" of perceptions is an integral part of remembering, and that memories tend to be remembered and transmitted in terms of intelligible visual images or stories. "A story", they continue, "is a sort of natural container for memory; a way of sequencing images, through logical and semantic connections, into a shape which is, itself, easy to retain in memory."[26]

---

23 P. La Hausse, "Oral History and Historians" in *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7, 1990, pages 346 - 356.

24 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 2. See also N. Wachtel, *op cit.* page 210.

25 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 24.

26 *Ibid.* page 50.

Once information has been remembered in the form of a story or visual image, it can remain remarkably stable. I draw a great deal on this idea of the importance of stories in shaping and "containing" memories in my discussion on oral memories of Albasini. This focus on the way in which stories and genres structure memory is not new. It was discussed in some detail as part of Vansina's methodology in *Oral Tradition as History*, the reworked edition of his original book.[27] Yet for Vansina, the discussion is part of a methodology that attempts to overcome these "problems" in order to arrive at a kernel of accurate empirical fact. As he puts it: "Literary forms are subject to conventions, a knowledge of which is essential in order to understand the true meaning of the piece."[28] For writers like Fentress and Wickham, the problem with this approach is that there is no way of knowing whether "the kernel" is actually true. They argue, and Vansina makes the same point, that the way in which different groups regard certain genres as true and others as fictional is culture bound, and does not necessarily reflect where "fact" actually lies.[29] They, therefore, focus not on attempting to extract empirical information, but on looking at the tradition as a whole. They argue that:

> The violent amputations that ethnohistorians occasionally inflict on oral tradition are often undertaken in the belief that these traditions can only be used by historians as the repositories of historical fact. What this notion ignores, however, is that the process of transmission and diffusion of oral tradition is itself historical. It is historical, moreover, regardless of whether the information it contains consists of kernels of true fact, or merely folk motifs.[30]

The third theme running through the dissertation is the discussion of the role played by appeals to a shared and often heroic past in the construction of ethnic identities. The mobilisation of an Afrikaner ethnicity in the early decades of the twentieth century played an important role in structuring Albasini's daughter's

---

27 J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, London, 1985. See, for example, pages 19 - 21 for a discussion of how a particular story becomes conventionalised.

28 J. Vansina, "Oral tradition and its Methodology" in J. Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *Methodology and African Prehistory, Unesco General History of Africa*, Vol. 1, London and Berkeley, California, 1981, page 146 (Thanks to Patrick Harries for this reference). The type of conventions he is referring to include the choice of terms, expressions, unusual prefixes, various types of poetic licences, words or expressions that have many different reverberations, key terms closely connected with social structure, the conceptions of the world.

29 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 78 and J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, page 83.

30 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 85.

accounts of Albasini in the 1920's and 1930's and in shaping the way de Vaal presented him in his thesis, written in the 1940's. Similarly, ideas of Tsonga ethnicity played an important role in structuring many of the oral histories collected between the late 1970's and the early 1990's.

In discussing the construction of ethnic identities, I am drawing on the idea of ethnicity as a social construct of the twentieth century, rather than a product of the awakened consciousness of a bounded, primordial group.[31]

In looking at the creation of an Afrikaner consciousness, I rely a good deal on the work of Isabel Hofmeyr, who has focused both on the manufacture of an Afrikaans literary culture, as well as the role played by the development and dissemination of an idea of a heroic Afrikaner past in the construction of an Afrikaner ethnic consciousness. I. Hofmeyr focuses her work on the first decades of the twentieth century, although she acknowledges that these movements sometimes draw on developments that occurred earlier. She differs from van Jaarsveld, who argues that an Afrikaner consciousness started to emerge in the late nineteenth century in response to the threat posed by the British to the independence of the Boer Republics, and points out that it was in this period that the first historical writing in Dutch appeared.[32] For the purposes of the thesis, the period in which an Afrikaner consciousness first developed is not important. What is important is that there is agreement that the process was at its height in the 1930's, culminating in the Great Trek centenary celebrations of 1938.[33] In

---

31 L. Vail, "Introduction" in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989, pages 1-19; J. Sharp, "Ethnic group and nation: The apartheid vision in South Africa", in E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.), *South African Keywords: The uses and Abuses of Political Concepts*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988, page 80 and I. Hofmeyr, "Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902 - 1924", in S. Marks and S. Trapido, *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth-century South Africa*, London and New York, 1987, page 95.

32 The first history written in Afrikaans was *Die Geskiedenis van ons land in die Taal van ons Volk*, published in 1877. See F.A. Van Jaarsveld, "The Awakening of the Afrikaner to an Awareness of his history" in F. A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, Cape Town, 1964.

33 For a discussion of the enormous response to these celebrations, and the reasons for it, see A. Grundlingh and S. Sapire, "From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industializing South Africa, 1938 - 1988", in *South African Historical Journal*,

looking at the construction of a sense of Tsonga ethnicity, I draw on P. Harries' work which sees a Tsonga ethnicity as arising out of the politicisation of what was essentially simply a classification that did not refer to any objectively existing group. This classification of a group of people as Tsonga arose out of the missionary anthropologists' attempts to categorise people, and the need for a standardised language for mission work. He argues that an ethnic group consciousness developed with the emergence of a mission educated petty bourgeoisie with a vision that extended beyond the unit of the chiefdom, as well as from the experience of workers on the mines. The division of people along ethnic lines was nurtured by struggles over land and competition for very scarce resources.[34] An important point to make is that to argue that ethnicity is a construction is not to deny its grassroots appeal.

What I attempt to show in this thesis is that discussion of issues such as the complex relationship between narrative form and the memory it shapes and contains, cuts across divisions between oral and written, or informal and professional history. I have divided the thesis into three parts. Part 1 deals with the South African family memories of Albasini, focusing in particular on the family's portrayal of Albasini in a celebration held in 1988 to commemorate the centenary of his death. I compare this with fragments of earlier family memories, in particular, with the testimony of his second daughter recorded in newspaper articles, letters and the notes from J. B. de Vaal's interview with her, and argue that the two sets of memories are being reconstructed in terms that can be related to different genres. While the memories from the early decades of the century are structured by popular narratives of the Great Trek, the stereotypes and imagery of the 1988 memories resonate strongly with a tradition of best-selling adventure writing.

In Part 2, I look at J. B. de Vaal's thesis and place it within the context of a tradition of professional Afrikaner academic writing, that became powerful in a number of South African Universities in the period from the 1920's. This tradition, which I see as essentially a literary genre, combined the conventions of the scientific historical tradition developed in Europe in the late nineteenth

---

21, 1989, pages 19 - 37.

34 P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa", in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London, Berkely and Los Angeles, 1989, pages 82 - 117.

century, with the concerns of the popular *volksgeskiedenis* of the first decades of the twentieth century.[35] I examine the text and editing of de Vaal's thesis in detail in order to discuss the extent to which it was shaped by the nationalist tradition. I suggest that this process was a complex one, and that contradictions and ambivalences emerge in the thesis that can be related both to de Vaal's topic, and his commitment to accurately reflect his sources.

In Part 3, I look at a group of oral histories collected from the former Gazankulu Homeland between 1979 and 1991. I begin by focusing on the participation of an official Gazankulu delegation in the 1988 Centenary Celebration organised by Albasini's family. The image of Albasini that emerges from a song composed for the occasion corresponds closely to the image propagated by the Albasini family. Both the song and the family focus strongly on the idea of Albasini as chief of a united Tsonga/Shangaan ethnic group. I argue that this convergence arises both out of the interaction between family memories and "Gazankulu memories", as well out of the part played by this idea in the assertion of a common ethnic past. A comparison between this official song and a number of oral histories collected since 1979 indicates that, while there is evidence that memories of Albasini are being reconstructed in similar, ethnic terms, there appears to be little emphasis on Albasini as chief. In the second chapter of this section, I focus on one tradition, which included far more detail, as well as far more fictional, mythological elements than any of the others. I use this as an example to argue in favour of an approach that does not attempt to extract empirical fact, but instead looks at the tradition as a whole.

Two omission in the thesis need some explanation. The first of these is the omission of a section on the Mozambican image of Albasini. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, although there is a fairly large Portuguese literature on Albasini, it tends to rely to a large extent on South African secondary sources, except for some of the details about his early life. A discussion with Jeanne Penvenne in 1995 indicated that, after independence, many of the Mozambican Albasini's had settled in Portugal, which was out of reach, and that they knew very little about the family history. Lastly, my sketchy knowledge of Portuguese, and non-existent knowledge of Portuguese historiography, meant that it would be very

---

35 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems of a Profession: Afrikaner Historians and their Discipline, c. 1920 - c. 1965", in *Perspectives in Education*, 1990, Vol. 12, No. 1, pages 1 - 19.

difficult to attempt to analyse Mozambican sources in the way in which I had looked at the South African ones.

A second omission relates to the papers of the late historian, Mabel Jackson-Haight, which were donated to the University of Venda in 1995. These papers included an unfinished manuscript on Albasini. In some ways, Mabel Jackson-Haight's view of Albasini differed from my own. She appeared to see his significance in terms of a challenge to the Apartheid ideology of separation between the races, introducing him as follows:

> Albasini's life has been chosen as a theme for a number of reasons. Undoubtedly, he was aware that two-thirds of the world population consists of black, brown and yellow people. But, as a white man educated in a hard school, he knew he had to fit in with other people no matter what their so-called race, creed or colour. Particularly during his early years, he seems to have sensed rather than to have understood or seen clearly, that the future of the white man in southern Africa required co-operation with the black, brown and yellow men of the world. All were interdependent. He conformed to the bidding of his white superiors, but all his life he maintained a close association with African peoples, especially with those who adopted him as their tribal chief and whose descendants still praise and fear his name.[36]

Her acceptance of the idea of tribe, and her tendency to accept uncritically the idea of Albasini as chief and interpret it as a sign of inter-racial harmony is different from my own approach. Yet in many ways, Mabel Jackson-Haight's unfinished manuscript is very similar to what my original thesis would have been. She clearly intended to look at Albasini within the context of Portuguese trade, and her collection of Colonial Office records indicates that she intended to look carefully at the slave trade. She draws on work on precolonial African polities, trying to set Albasini within the context of the complex politics in the region.

I found it very difficult to analyse Mabel Jackson-Haight's manuscript in the way I did de Vaal's for two reasons. Firstly, only twelve chapters had been completed in draft, out of what appears to have been a proposed twenty-five chapters,[37] and this makes it very difficult to discuss Mabel Jackson-Haight's view of Albasini. Secondly, I found it almost impossible to analyse the images and assumptions

---

[36] M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished, incomplete manuscript, Dr. Mabel Jackson-Haight Papers, Special Collections, University of Venda, Mabel I/1.

[37] The existing chapters are numbered and the final one is Chapter XXV.

shaping the manuscript because I share so many of them. For this reason, I have not included analytical sections on the Mozambican sources and the Jackson-Haight manuscript, but have instead used them as secondary sources in the discussion of Albasini, the region and his times which follows.

ALBASINI, THE REGION AND HIS TIMES

João Albasini was born in Portugal, in Lisbon, on 26 May 1812.[1] His father was Antonio Albasini, a ship's captain who was born and baptised in a parish in Coura in Italy, but had fled from there for unknown reasons. His mother was Maria de Purificacao, the second wife of Antonio Albasini, born in the same Lisbon parish, although she was possibly of Spanish origin.[2] Very little is known about Albasini, until he and his father arrived at the Portuguese settlement of Delagoa Bay in 1831, in order to participate in the export trade from Southern Mozambique.[3]

For much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Portuguese presence along the southern Mozambique coast was precarious. They faced competition both from other European powers, and from African chiefdoms in southern Mozambique and further south, for control over the coast and the trade.[4] The

---

1 Note that many of Albasini's personal details are contested, and this date contradicts the widely accepted date of 1 May, 1813, which appears in de Vaal's thesis, all the South African family pamphlets, most of the Mozambican sources and even on his gravestone. In fact, Elizabeth Eldredge has commented that all biographical information about Albasini has been collected from himself or from his descendants, and suggests the possibility that Albasini fabricated his past, possibly to conceal mixed European and African ancestry. [E.A. Eldredge, "Delagoa Bay and the Hinterland in the Early Nineteenth Century: Politics, slaves and Slave Raiding", in E.A. Eldredge and F. Morton (eds.), Slavery in South Africa, Pietermaritzburg, 1994, pages 163 - 164, footnote 122.] However, the date used here is the date given by Ilidio Roche, who bases it on the parish records of the *Igreja Paroqual de São Lorenço*, the parish in Lisbon in which his parents were married and were living, and in which João Albasini was baptised. [I. Roche (ed.), *Das Terras do Império Vátua às Praças da República Boer*, Lisbon, 1987, pages 195 - 196, see especially notes 61 - 64.] Although Albasini's general lack of accuracy about his own personal details is puzzling, because of the fact that he uses Albasini's baptismal record, I am inclined to accept Ilidio Roche's information.

2 I. Roche *op cit.* pages 195 - 196. The information about his parents comes from the registers recording their marriage.

3 I. Roche, *op cit.* page 197; F. Santana, *op cit.* page 216; M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished, incomplete manuscript, Mabel Jackson-Haight Papers, University of Venda, IV/12 and Letter from J. Albasini to T.M. Bissone, 18.1.1859, Porto Archives, Serie Africa, Cod. 1299 a Doc. 2.

4 A. Smith, "The Struggle for the Control of Southern Moçambique, 1720 - 1835", PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1970, page xii. The standard texts dealing with the competition between European powers over the Southern Mozambican coast are M.V. Jackson-Haight, *European Powers and South-East Africa, A study of International Relations on the South-East coast of Africa, 1796 - 1856*, London, 1967, and E. Axelson, *Portugal and the*

two harbours which were considered the best along the coast were those at Delagoa Bay, and at Inhambane. At Inhambane the harbour was fairly small and narrow, and ships using it needed a pilot fully acquainted with the entrance. This sometimes hampered communication with their own settlement, but it also tended to protect Portuguese interests as it deterred ships from other European nations from attempting to enter. Delagoa Bay possessed a safer, and more easily accessible harbour, which made it more open to competition from foreign trading vessels. Both Inhambane and Delagoa Bay drew their exports from southern Mozambique and the interior, so traders at the two ports were potentially competitors. This made it advantageous to trade at both ports. Both ports were low-lying, flat and marshy, and as a result were perfect breeding grounds for the anophalese mosquito, carrier of malaria. This meant that there was an extremely high mortality rate amongst the inhabitants of the two ports.[5] [See Map 1.]

The administrative centre of Portuguese activity in East Africa was the island of Mozambique, some 1 600 kilometres to the north of Delagoa Bay. All imports and exports were required to be taken here first where duties were levied, but the distance meant that such regulations could hardly be enforced.[6]

At the time of Albasini's arrival, Lourenço Marques was "little more than a fortified trading post."[7] The Portuguese maintained a small garrison there, whose main function was to prevent other European powers from taking the Bay. The export trade consisted of goods such as ivory, slaves, hippopotamus teeth and rhinoceros horns, which were exchanged for goods such as cloth, beads, mirrors, knives and tinderboxes. Local traders traded these goods along centuries-old trade routes into the interior, which ran through the lowveld into the eastern Transvaal, the Zoutpansberg, and present day Zimbabwe.[8]

Scramble for Africa, Johannesburg, 1967.

5 M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, II/7 and A. Smith, *op cit.* pages 2 - 7.

6 A. Smith, *op cit.* page 3 and M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, II/5 and II/11.

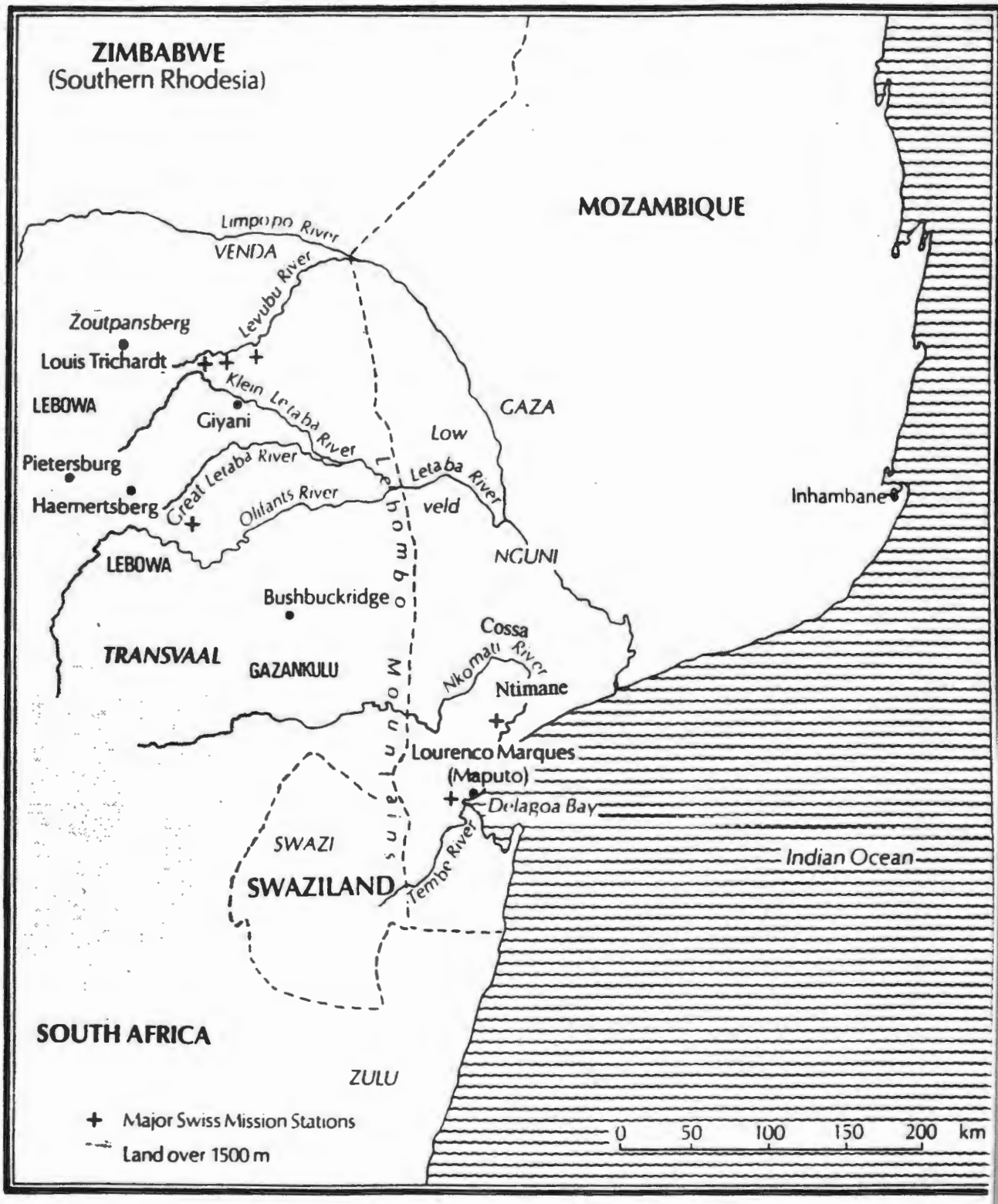
7 G. Liesegang, "Dingane's attack on Lourenço Marques in 1833, in *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. X, No. 4, 1969, page 567.

8 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 1 - 2; J. B. de Vaal, "Old trade routes between Delagoa Bay, Inhambane and the interior", unpublished paper, no date, de Vaal papers, University of Venda; M. Jackson-Haight, Unpublished manuscript, II/13 and R. Wagner, "Zoutpansberg: the dynamics of a hunting frontier, 1848 - 67", in S. Marks and A. Atmore, *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, London, 1980, page 324.

MAP 1

The Eastern Transvaal, Swaziland and southern Mozambique

[Source: L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London, 1989, page XVII.]



In the early 1830's, João Albasini and his father travelled by boat up the Nkomati river and established a trading depot at Taninga, through which ivory coming from the Gaza kingdom, the country of Cossa, and the Sabi region flowed.[9] It was in this period that Albasini began to live with a woman identified only as "a black Cossa woman of Magude".[10] Magude is on the Nkomati River bend. They had two sons, Antonio and Francisco João. Antonio had two daughters, Isabel and Joaquina,[11] and died in 1874. Francisco João married the daughter of Chief

---

9 I. Roche (ed.), *op cit.* page 197; C.T. da Mota, *Presenças Portuguesas na Africa do Sul e no Transval durante os séculos XVIII*, Lisbon, 1989, page 41; F. Martins "João Albasini and the Colony of S. Luis", unpublished translation of F. Martins, *João Albasini e a Cólonia de S. Luis; Subsidio para a Historia da Província de Moçambique e das suas Relações com o Transvaal*, Lisbon, 1957, in João Albasini Collection, Acc 53, Unisa, fol. 4.

10 I. Roche, *op cit.* page 198 and J. Penvenne, "João dos Santos Albasini (1876-1922), The Contradictions of Politics and Identity in Colonial Mozambique", unpublished paper presented at the international conference "From the Zoutpansberg to the Sea" held at the University of Venda, 16 - 18 September 1995, page 8, and page 35, footnote 28. Again, there are different versions of where exactly she came from, and no secondary sources mention her name. It would nevertheless appear that it may have been Joaquina. The Maputo archives contain a public document of donation in which Albasini records in 1842 that he has given to his "housekeeper by the name of Joaquina, a black woman of the Landim [a word used by the Portuguese to distinguish local groups from Nguni invaders] tribe" goods, including "one house with two tanks, which he possess[ed] in this garrison town, with all the grass huts that there are in its yard, and all the other farming requirements on it; five cows, one small black boy named Joaquin, one black man by the name of Mandlhai, one son of the latter named Mototoo, one black woman named Cathrina..." [A.H. Moc. Lourenço Marques, Corpo Notorial, Codice no. 5, Docão de João Albazini a sua caseira Joaquina, fol. 36v - 37.] M. Jackson-Haight assumes that this refers to Albasini's first common-law wife, as does da Mota. [See M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, V/6 and C.T. da Mota, *op cit.* page 47. Da Mota does not use footnotes, but his description of the goods left to her indicate that the same document is directly or indirectly his source.] J. Penvenne does not refer to the document, but in an article includes a quotation commenting that "the common form of social organisation at the time [in Lourenço Marques was] one of a manor type house managed by a housekeeper, a capable Negro or mulatto woman and common law wife. The housekeepers of Lourenço Marques...were the native wives of the whites..." [A. Lobato quoted in J. Penvenne, "'We are all Portuguese!' Challenging the Political Economy of Assimilation: Lourenço Marques, 1870 - 1933", in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, page 260.]

11 Letter from João dos Santos Albasini to G.S. Gouws, 14 July 1913, Mabel Jackson-Haight Papers, University of Venda. This appears to provide further evidence that Albasini's wife was named Joaquina. Note that some sources say

Maxaquene, who was the leader of one of the groups whose lands occupied the heart of the developing town of Lourenço Marques.[12] [See Map 1.]

Slaves had been exported from both Inhambane and Delagoa Bay in the eighteenth century, and Inhambane was known internationally for the large numbers and quality of its slave exports. In 1807, the British slave trade was abolished, and Anglo-Portuguese treaties in 1815 and 1817 officially limited the Portuguese slave trade to the south of the equator. By the 1820's and 1830's, large numbers of slaves were exported every year from Inhambane and Delagoa Bay.[13] There is at present debate over when this upsurge in the export of slaves through southern Mozambique started. In an article published in 1981, P. Harries saw the increase in demand for slaves as dating from the Napoleonic Wars, when French warships pushed the Portuguese Brazilian slavers operating on the Mozambican coast southwards, and argued that the 1815 and 1817 agreements led West African slavers to turn their attention to the Southern Mozambican coast. This dating is important for Julian Cobbing's thesis that it was Portuguese slaving that was the motor for the disturbances described as the Mfecane.[14] The dating is challenged by E. Eldredge, who dates the increase to around 1823.[15] For the purposes of this thesis, what is relevant is the fact that there is agreement that the trade in slaves in southern Mozambique was at its height in the 1820's and 1830's, when João Albasini arrived in Delagoa Bay. The slaves were supposed to go via the island of Mozambique to Portuguese Brazil, but this restriction had little impact. Some slavers working in southern Mozambique escaped customs duties and the need to bribe officials by operating from rivers in the bays and along the coast between the two ports. In 1836, all slave exports from Mozambique were

---

that he died without known descendants.

12 J. Penvenne, "João dos Santos Albasini", page 8. Francisco João had four children, João dos Santos, Jose Francisco, Maria Isabel and Antonio Paulinho. João dos Santos and Jose Francisco became leading members of "a social group and political lobby called the *Gremio Africano*," and both were centrally involved in the group's newspaper, *O Africano*, followed by *O Brado Africano*. [*Ibid.* page 2. See also J. Penvenne, ""We are all Portuguese", pages 255 - 288.

13 P. Harries, "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus extraction; the nature of free and unfree labour in South-East Africa", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 22, 1981, page 316. Harries estimates that well over 1 000 slaves were exported from each port in the late 1820's and early 1830's.

14 See, J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, 1988, pages 487 - 519.

15 E.A. Eldredge, *op cit.* page 137.

prohibited. In 1842, the Portuguese agreed to allow the British to search ships, and after 1847 British cruisers were allowed to enter Mozambique harbours and rivers. The effectiveness of the British anti-slavery squadron, caused an oversupply of slaves and a drop in the price, although this was less important at Lourenço Marques where slavers could sell to the Boers in Ohrigstad. Slaves continued to be exported in lesser numbers until the closure of the Brazilian market in 1853, and the Cuban market in 1866.[16]

The garrison at Delagoa Bay was badly and irregularly paid and its only source of steady income was its access to trade, particularly the trade in slaves and ivory.[17] Because the Portuguese lacked the military capacity to support their claims to authority, they depended on a system of shifting alliances with local chiefdoms for the very limited authority that they were able to yield.[18]

In the early nineteenth century the people who occupied the area of Mozambique south of the Sabi river, except for the area around the coastal port of Inhambane, were people who would later be classified Tsonga-speakers. They were disparate groups, with no cultural unity and as P. Harries points out, "Even to use the term 'Tsonga speaking' with reference to the nineteenth century is misleading as it invokes an erroneous linguistic unity."[19] The main political unit was the chiefdom. Each chiefdom was dominated by one specific clan, whose members shared a common *shibongo*. Sharing this common patronymic expressed the belief that all members of the clan were related, and the chief was believed to be the direct descendant of the founding ancestors. Although the identity of the group was expressed in terms of kinship, there were strong incentives to incorporate outsiders, as the chief's position was directly related to his ability to attract manpower. An immigrating outsider could subjugate himself to a chief through the payment of taxes, in return for access to a means of production. This meant

---

16 P. Harries, "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus Extraction", pages 313 - 317.

17 P. Harries, "Labour Migration from Mozambique to South Africa, With special reference to the Delagoa Bay Hinterland, c. 1862-97" Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1983, page 158 and G. Liesegang, "Dingane's attack", page 567.

18 P. Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires, The evolution and dissolution of the nineteenth-century Swazi state*, Johannesburg, 1983, page 98 and A. Smith, *op cit.* page 242.

19 P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa" in L. Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London, 1989, page 85.

that the social formation was characterised by geographical mobility and consequent cultural adaptation.[20]

During the 1820's, a number of Nguni groups moving northwards from Natal moved through Southern Mozambique. One of these groups was led by Soshangane, also known as Manukosi, who in the early twenties settled in the fertile Bilene area on the lower Limpopo, where he established what became known as the Gaza kingdom. In 1825 he moved south across the Nkomati river and settled in the Ntimane area for about a year.

In the same year, a Commercial Company was established at Lourenço Marques. The company bore the costs of establishing a civilian presence, which the Portuguese authorities needed in order to protect themselves against British designs on Delagoa Bay. In return, the Company was given monopoly rights over the purchase of ivory and slaves. This led to enormous tension between the state officials and the company, as it removed the main source of income for the garrison.[21]

This tension became particularly severe with the appointment in 1829 of a new governor, Dinisio Ribeiro. Ribeiro used his position and control over the garrison to expand the territories held by Portugal around the Bay and to extort slaves and ivory from these chiefdoms who were the Company's trading partners around Delagoa Bay. Ribeiro's position depended on his access to stocks of government powder, troops and visiting ships. With these resources, he was able to maintain an alliance with Manukosi, which enhanced his position with respect to other chiefdoms in the area. This growth of Gaza power in alliance with the garrison seems to have been the reason for a Zulu invasion of Delagoa Bay in 1833. Not only did the activities of the garrison threaten the established Zulu trade with the Commercial Company, but the existence of a strong Nguni state immediately to the north could pose a threat to Dingane's Zulu state. The army of about 6 000 men, led by a Zulu group, and augmented by allied chiefdoms from the Delagoa Bay area appeared before Lourenço Marques, in October of 1833. They sacked the town and executed Ribeiro, and some members of the garrison, while leaving company employees unharmed. Shortly after the sacking of Lourenço Marques

---

20 P. Harries, "Labour Migration", pages 148 - 150 and H.A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, New York, 1962, pages 356 - 367.

21 P. Harries, "Labour Migration", page 158 and G. Liesegang, "Dingane's attack", page 567.

the Gaza suffered a defeat in their attack on the Matolla allies of the Zulu, and this defeat, as well as the defeat of the Portuguese garrison and their Mafumo allies, led to Manukosi's decision to move northwards in 1834, where, after sacking Inhambane, he crossed the Save river to settle in Mosapa.[22]

At this point, both Antonio and João Albasini were employees of the company. In an affidavit made by A.J. Nobre, the agent of the company who was accused of conspiring to murder the governor, Antonio Albasini was recorded as "the fiscal of the Commercial Company", while João was described as an "employee in the offices of the Commercial Company"[23] This attack and the way in which it has been remembered by the family and de Vaal, will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

After the attack, the Zulu remained the dominant force in the Delagoa Bay hinterland until their defeat by the Trekkers in 1838. This left the way clear for Manukosi again to move south to the fertile Bilene area, which he did in late 1838 or 1839, with a following reinforced by people speaking Tsonga dialects from the north as well as Shona speakers from Mosapa.[24] He established hegemony over most of the chiefdoms in the area north of Delagoa Bay, as well as incorporating, both politically and culturally many of the people speaking what would later be classified as Tsonga dialects into his Gaza state. The chiefdoms south of Delagoa Bay were dominated by the Zulu, while those to the West of the Bay were influenced by the Swazi.[25]

For decades, people from the east coast had tended to migrate westwards along the trade routes and colonise the lowveld.[26] The establishment of Gaza domination and the dislocation which resulted from more than a decade of insecurity and turmoil in the Delagoa Bay hinterland, gave impetus to this movement, with groups of refugees travelling inland along already established

---

22 P. Harries, "History, Ethnicity and the Ingwavuma Land Deal: the Zulu Northern Frontier in the Nineteenth Century" in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, No. V1, 1983, pages 1 - 27; P. Harries, "Labour Migration", pages 158 - 160 and G. Liesegang, "Dingane's attack", pages 565 - 579.

23 F. Santana, *Documentação Avulsa Moçambicana do Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, 1, (Maços 1 A 10)*, Sumarição, Lisbon, 1964, page 216, translation by the writer.

24 P. Harries, "Labour Migration", page 161.

25 P. Harries, "Exclusion", page 83.

26 R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 325.

trading routes. One of the first major waves of refugees was associated with Manukosi's return south to the Bilene area in the late 1830's. A second major wave occurred in the period between 1852 - 62. This was a period of civil war as a result of the succession struggle between two of Soshangane's sons, Mawewe and Mzila, and their respective Swazi and Portuguese allies, which will be discussed in more detail below. The effects of the civil war were compounded by a series of ecological disasters. These immigrants moved as individuals or as groups, settling independently or under chiefs living in what would become the Transvaal. It was from amongst these fragmented groups that Albasini was able to build up a following that he was able to use as a military force, and that recognised him as a chief. The last major wave of East Coast immigrants occurred in 1897 after the second Gaza-Luso war. The Portuguese succeeded in breaking the power of the Gaza kingdom under Ngungunyane, which led to several thousand Gaza Nguni establishing themselves in the northern and eastern Transvaal.[27]

In the late 1830's, the Portuguese settlement at Delagoa Bay became aware of the proximity of the first Voortrekkers moving into the Transvaal. The Voortrekker groups moving north, under the leadership of Louis Trichardt, van Rensburg and, later, Andries Potgieter had crossed the Vaal river in 1836. They were concerned to find a new harbour on the Indian Ocean through Portuguese territory, in order to remove themselves as far as was possible from English influence. The van Rensburg party was killed, probably by the forces of Chief Shinhambane Maluleke Hlekane of a Maluleke clan in what would become the Northern Transvaal. Louis Trichardt's party eventually reached Lourenço Marques, where the majority of them, including Louis Trichardt, died of malaria. The survivors were shipped back to Natal.[28] The establishment of Ohrigstad in 1845, under the leadership of Potgieter, was directly related to the attempt to link up with Delagoa Bay.

During the following year (1846), Albasini moved and established himself between the Nkomati and the Sabi rivers, building a solid three-roomed brick house. He

---

27 P. Harries, "Exclusion", pages 83 - 84.

28 B.H. Dicke, *The Northern Transvaal Voortrekkers*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1941,pages 81, and 138; M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, V/9 and T.S. van Rooyen, *Die Verhouding tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882*, in Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1951, page 1.

bought the land from Chief Makaxule for 22 head of cattle.[29] Albasini referred to this area as Makashulaskraal, although it was also known as Ngomeni. It was on one of the trading routes from Delagoa Bay into the interior, and placed him in an good position to trade with the Settlement at Ohrigstad. His use of porters was central to his trading operations as the road to Delagoa Bay passed through a tsetse fly zone.[30] At Makashulaskraal, Albasini had a number of black people with him, who were hunters, porters and provided a military force.[31] [See Map 2.]

---

29 M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, VII/1.

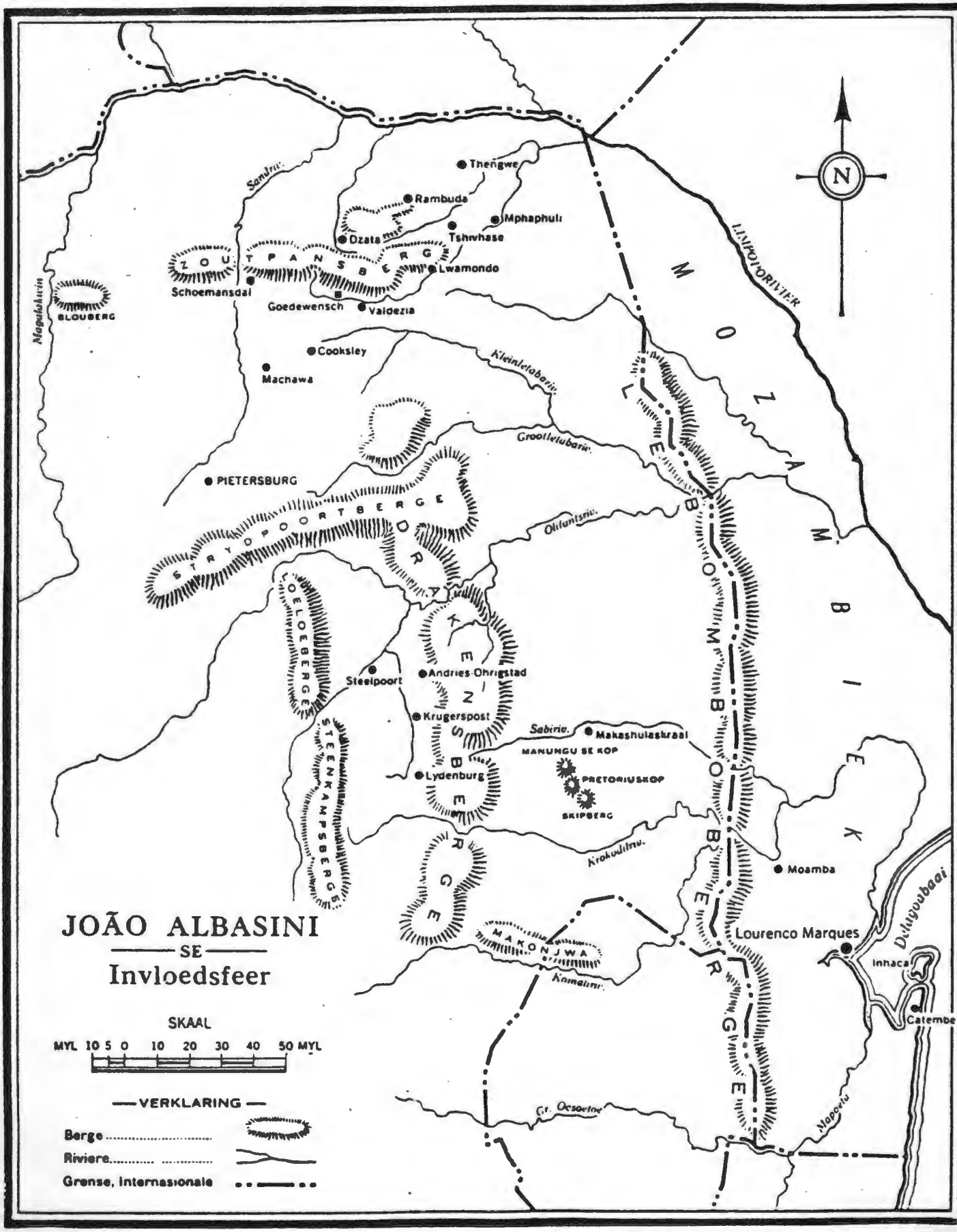
30 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 7.

31 It is not clear exactly what the nature of his relationship with them was, or when exactly this group of adherents started to develop. De Vaal states that it was at Ntimane that Albasini began to collect adherents around him, providing guns and offering protection in return for service as porters and hunters. [J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 5.] De Vaal does not footnote this information. In a chapter entitled "Albasini becomes chief Juwawa", Mabel Jackson-Haight also describes Albasini as offering protection to those who fled from Manukosi and Mzilikazi while based in the Ntimane area, but also does not source this comment, although she relies on de Vaal for much of the discussion on Albasini becoming chief. De Vaal says that most of his black following accompanied him from the east coast to Makashulaskraal. Here for his portrayal of Albasini as a chief, he relies extensively on an article that appeared in the *Star* in 1925. This article says it is based on an interview with an elderly woman who spent most of her life in Albasini's household, and who herself had been captured as a child by Swazi raiders and sold to Albasini. According to the article, Albasini was the recognised chief of a "Basutho tribe" called the Magwenas, "situated close to the old transport road from the goldfields of Pilgrim's Rest to Delagoa Bay" and used to raid other clans for cattle. According to this, when he needed porters to travel to the coast he would issue an order to "some tribe" and porters would be supplied. [*Star*, 20.6.1925. There is a copy of this article in the de Vaal Papers, Department of Anthropology, University of Venda.] A number of Portuguese sources rely extensively on the *Star* article, establishing the idea that Albasini was recognised as a chief here with a misleading certainty. [See, for example, the chapter on Albasini in F. Quintinha and J. Toscano , *A Derrocado Do Império Vátua e Mousinho De Albuquerque*, Lisbon, 1930; and F. Martins *op cit.*] There is also some evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of Albasini's adherents from his period in Portuguese East Africa were slaves. De Vaal comments that when Albasini first came into contact with the Boers he was not aware of their laws against slavery, and openly described "his blacks" at Makashulaskraal as slaves. [J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 125.]

MAP 2

João Albasini's sphere of influence

[Source: J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1953, facing page 130.]



In 1847, Albasini moved to Ohrigstad, where he established a shop. While at Ohrigstad, he married Gertina van Rensburg, the niece of the van Rensburg who led one of the initial groups into the Transvaal.[32] [See Map 2.]

The settlement at Ohrigstad was not a success for a number of reasons. Not only did the route to Delagoa Bay pass through the fly zone, making the use of ox-wagons for the transport of trading goods impossible, but it also passed through land controlled by the Gaza kingdom. It's location was unhealthy, being rife with malaria, and there was serious division amongst the Boers at the settlement. The main division was between Potgieter and his supporters who wished to emphasise the role of individual military leaders in government, and his opponents, many of them later arrivals from Natal, who supported a concept of government where authority was vested in a civilian and democratically elected *Volksraad*, although divisions found expression in a number of ways. The *Volksraad* party coalesced around the person of Andries Pretorius, who together with a number of the later immigrants from Natal, based himself in the Potchefstroom area. In 1847, a group under Potgieter, moved to the Zoutpansberg where they established the settlement that would later be known as Schoemansdal, and which was intended to be linked with the port of Inhambane. Soon afterwards, the remaining inhabitants at Ohrigstad moved further south to establish a settlement at Lydenburg in the period around 1850. Albasini joined them and, in 1850, set up a shop in partnership with a Goan Portuguese trader, Casimiro Simoes.[33]

The political and social fragmentation and division of the Ohrigstad communities were symptomatic of the Transvaal communities as a whole. Van Rooyen introduces his thesis by pointing out that the settlers were faced with the task of developing a form of government and administration from scratch, but that this was made extremely difficult by the fact that the setters were inexperienced, often almost illiterate, as well as by the great distances and dispersed settlement patterns and the lack of a postal service or a printing press. All these problems, together with the different approaches of the leaders, led to conflicts that further impeded the formation of an accepted state structure or any sense of political unity.[34]

---

32 Albasini, himself, wrote that he married in 1847. [Letter from J. Albasini to T.M. Bissone, 18.1.1859, Porto Archives, Serie Africa, Cod. 1299 a Doc. 2.] However, de Vaal uses the Lydenburg Marriage register to date the wedding to 1850. [J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 16.]

33 T.S. van Rooyen, *op cit.* pages 6-7 and J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 12.

34 T.S. van Rooyen, *op cit.* page ix.

The South African Republic was recognised by Britain in 1852. In 1853, the *Volksraad*, which was the only state institution the geographically isolated settlements had in common, bought two farms in order to establish a central capital in Pretoria. Attempts to draw up a constitution were plagued by divisions. A *Volksraad* meeting held at Rustenburg in 1856 to draft a constitution dissolved in disorder and conflict, and later that year, Lydenburg declared itself independent. Zoutpansberg, under Schoeman, who had succeeded Andries Potgieter and his son Piet Potgieter as Commandant General in 1854, also expressed opposition to the constitution. Zoutpansberg remained technically independent until 1858, when they accepted the authority of state structures, and Schoeman took up the position of Commandant-General of the Republic. Agreement on the constitution was eventually reached in 1860. This, however, was followed by four years of civil war, which was essentially fought over the issue of who should occupy the official positions. Schoeman was a central figure in the civil war, as he attempted to establish himself as President of the Republic. As Wagner put it, the republic north of the Vaal was "more properly an association of three district Boer colonies, Potchefstroom, Lydenburg and Zoutpansberg, separated by nature and on occasion as profoundly by man."[35]

A second important point made by Wagner was that in the third quarter of the nineteenth century the dominion of the South African Republic over the black communities was by no means a foregone conclusion.[36] Both the eastern Transvaal and the Northern Transvaal Boers had a number of powerful African polities as neighbours. The Ohrigstad and Lydenburg settlements bordered on the Swazi state in the south-east, the Pedi in the north-west, and as has already been discussed, the Gaza to the north east. The Zoutpansberg settlement had to come to terms with the Ndebele kingdom beyond the Limpopo fly zone to the north, the Pedi to the south-east, and the Gaza on the east coast, as well as the smaller groups in the Zoutpansberg itself.

---

35 R. Wagner, *op. cit.* pages 318 - 320 and D.H. Heydenrych, "The Boer Republics, 1852-1881", in T. Cameron and S.B. Spies, *An illustrated History of South Africa*, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria, 1986 pages 151-152. See Chapters 5 and 6 of O.J.O. Ferreira, *Stormvöel van die Noorde, Stephanus Schoeman in Transvaal*, Pretoria, 1978 for a detailed account of the civil war.

36 R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 318.

Before establishing the settlement at Ohrigstad, Potgieter had concluded agreements with both the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay and the Pedi.[37] The Pedi polity had its roots in a process where one Kgatla group established hegemony over a number of groups of diverse origin, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This existing diversity was compounded by the movement of refugees into the area in the early nineteenth century. By the 1830's and 1840's, authority was relatively firmly in the hands of Sekwati.[38] In terms of the agreement between Potgieter and Sekwati, Potgieter secured cession of the land for himself, in return for the promise of Boer assistance against future Swazi attacks on the Pedi.[39] P. Bonner argues that this agreement lent support to Potgieter's position at a time when he was increasingly being challenged by opponents within the Ohrigstad community. The *Volksraad* party attempted to renegotiate the agreement with Sekwati in the name of the whole community, but they were rebuffed. They succeeded, however, in concluding an agreement with Mswati, who also laid claim to Swazi sovereignty over the area.[40] Mswati, in these early years of his reign, had not yet firmly established his hold on the kingship, and the agreement of the royal party with a faction of the Ohrigstad Boers appears to have been intended to obtain assistance in the face of a threat to his position by his brother, Malambule, who had secured the support of the Zulu under Mpande.[41] By the late 1950's, Mswati's position was far more established. In addition, the Gaza civil war in the late 1850's and early 1860's and the Civil conflict in the South African Republic weakened the major rivals to Swazi power in the region. The Gaza civil war allowed the Swazi to make raids over huge areas of the lowveld in eastern Transvaal and southern Mozambique, and through this to emerge as the principal captive-trading state in the region, selling many of the captive children as "apprentices" to the Boers.[42]

---

37 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 6 and T.S. van Rooyen, *op cit.* page 3.

38 P. Delius, "Migrant labour and the Pedi, 1840 - 80" in S. Marks and A. Atmore, *Economy and Society in Pre-Industial South Africa*, London, 1980, pages 294 - 295.

39 P. Bonner, *op cit.* page 52.

40 P. Bonner, *op cit.* pages 54 - 56 and T.S. van Rooyen, *op cit.* page 3 - 5.

41 For an account of the increasingly complex manoeuvring of the different parties, see P. Bonner, *op cit.* pages 56 - 64.

42 P. Bonner, *op cit.* pages 79 - 84. For discussion on apprentices, see also, J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton *The Native Policy of the Voortrekkers, 1836-1858*, Cape Town, 1928, pages 169 - 196; J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, particularly chapters II and XVI, and J.C.A. Boeyens, "Black Ivory": The Indenture system and Slavery in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1869", in E.A. Eldredge and F. Morton, *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier*,

The point that Bonner makes about relations between the Boer and African communities is that any attempt to see Boers and African groups as separate or monolithic groups is completely inaccurate. He argues that it is more accurate to see their relationship in terms of political interdependence, with a pattern of different factions within the Boer communities competing amongst themselves for African support, while competing factions within African communities attempted to manipulate those divisions for their own sectional ends.[43] This approach is even more pertinent to the situation in the Zoutpansberg, where Albasini moved in 1853.[44] He originally settled in Schoemansdal but later moved to a farm approximately forty-eight kilometres east of Schoemansdal, named Goedewensch, which became a centre for trade in ivory.[45] [See Map 2.] In the Zoutpansberg, the Boer community eventually foundered on the shifting alliances and factional politics of both Boer and African communities.

The Zoutpansbergers appear to have had few relations with the Pedi after an initial clash in 1852, and concluded a peace treaty with the Ndebele kingdom in 1853 after which relations remained peaceful. However, their relationship with the Gaza deteriorated seriously from 1859, and the consequences of this played a part in the eventual decision to abandon Schoemansdal in 1867. Within the Zoutpansberg were a number of smaller groupings. There were a number of smaller Sotho chiefdoms dominated by three spheres of political power: Modjadji, the rain queen, was based in the East, where her hegemony was cultural rather than political. Controlling the crucial Makapanspoort gateway to the north was Mapela, chief of the Langa section of the Transvaal Ndebele, who had established his dominance over the Ndebele and Sotho groups around him. Lastly, controlling the Zoutpansberg range was a series of Venda chiefdoms. The Venda groups were not part of a single polity, but consisted of a number of chiefdoms that were generally independent of one another, although some of the smaller chiefdoms paid tribute to some of the larger ones. The three most important groups were those of Tshivase, Mphaphuli and Ramabulana.[46] As with Mapela, the strength of

---

Pietermaritzburg, 1994, pages 187 - 214.

43 P. Bonner, *op cit.* pages 67 - 72.

44 On the journey north, Albasini was shot at by Sekwati's forces. He sent a messenger to Sekwati, with a blanket, some beads and a knife to state that he was a traveller, and had no malign intentions. This incident will be discussed in chapters 1 and 3. [J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 20.]

45 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 35.

46 *Mitteilungen des Vereins „Heidenfreund"*, Nr. 18, 1 Juli 1887, V Jahrgang, no

the Venda chiefdoms was largely strategic, as they were protected by their mountain positions and they controlled access to the most important elephant grounds in the tsetse region of the Limpopo basin.[47] [See Map 3.]

Access to the elephant hunting grounds was crucial to the survival of the Zoutpansberg colony, as the economy was based firmly on the export of ivory. Ivory was the single major export item of the Transvaal before the discovery of gold, and the Zoutpansberg settlement dominated this trade for the almost twenty years of its existence. Most of the ivory was exported through the English port of Natal. For example, between June and December of 1864, ivory to the value of about 30 000 pounds was exported from the South African Republic. This consisted of about one-fifth of the total value of exports, and approximately two-thirds of the ivory came from the Zoutpansberg.[48] The Portuguese traders provided an alternative port, but they did not succeed in seriously challenging the control of English merchants over the trade.

The Boer settlement in the Zoutpansberg did not introduce the ivory trade, but they did transform the existing trade. Ivory from the area had reached Delagoa Bay and Inhambane since at least the early eighteenth century. The traders from the Southern Mozambican coast had not only traded the ivory, but had developed into commercial hunters in their own right. What was new was the introduction of

---

page (page 2); *Bawenda-Freund*, Nr. 23, Oktober 1888, VI Jahrgang, page 67 and Nr. 42, Juli 1893, 11 Jahrgang, page 161; *Berliner Missions-Berichte*, Nr. 21 u 22, 1878, page 490; R. Wessmann, *Philippus Thai, ein Treuer Nationalhelfer im Bawendalande*, Missionsschriften für Kinder Nr. 46, Berlin, no date (1902), page 1; J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die konflik tussen die Venda en die Blankes in Transvaal, 1864 - 1869*, in Archives Yearbook for South African History, Part II, Pretoria, 1990, page 1; J. B. de Vaal, Die Rol, page 3; A. Kirkaldy, "'Images of savagery': Ritual cannibalism, Ritual Killing and the power of *Mahosi* in Vendaland until 1930", unpublished paper presented to the Forschungskolloquium, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 13 May 1996, pages 52 - 53; A. Kirkaldy "Makoarele's return to the 'darkness of heathenism': *Khosi* Makwarela Mphaphuli and the Berlin Missionaries in Vendaland, c.1876-1897", unpublished paper presented to the Second CSSALL Inter-Disciplinary Conference, University of Durban-Westville, 26 September 1997, pages 3 - 4 and G.P. Lestrade "Some Notes on the Ethnic history of the Vhavenda and their Rhodesian Affinities", in N.J. van Warmelo (ed.), *Contributions towards Venda history, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, Volume III, Union of South Africa, Pretoria, 1932, page XXVII.

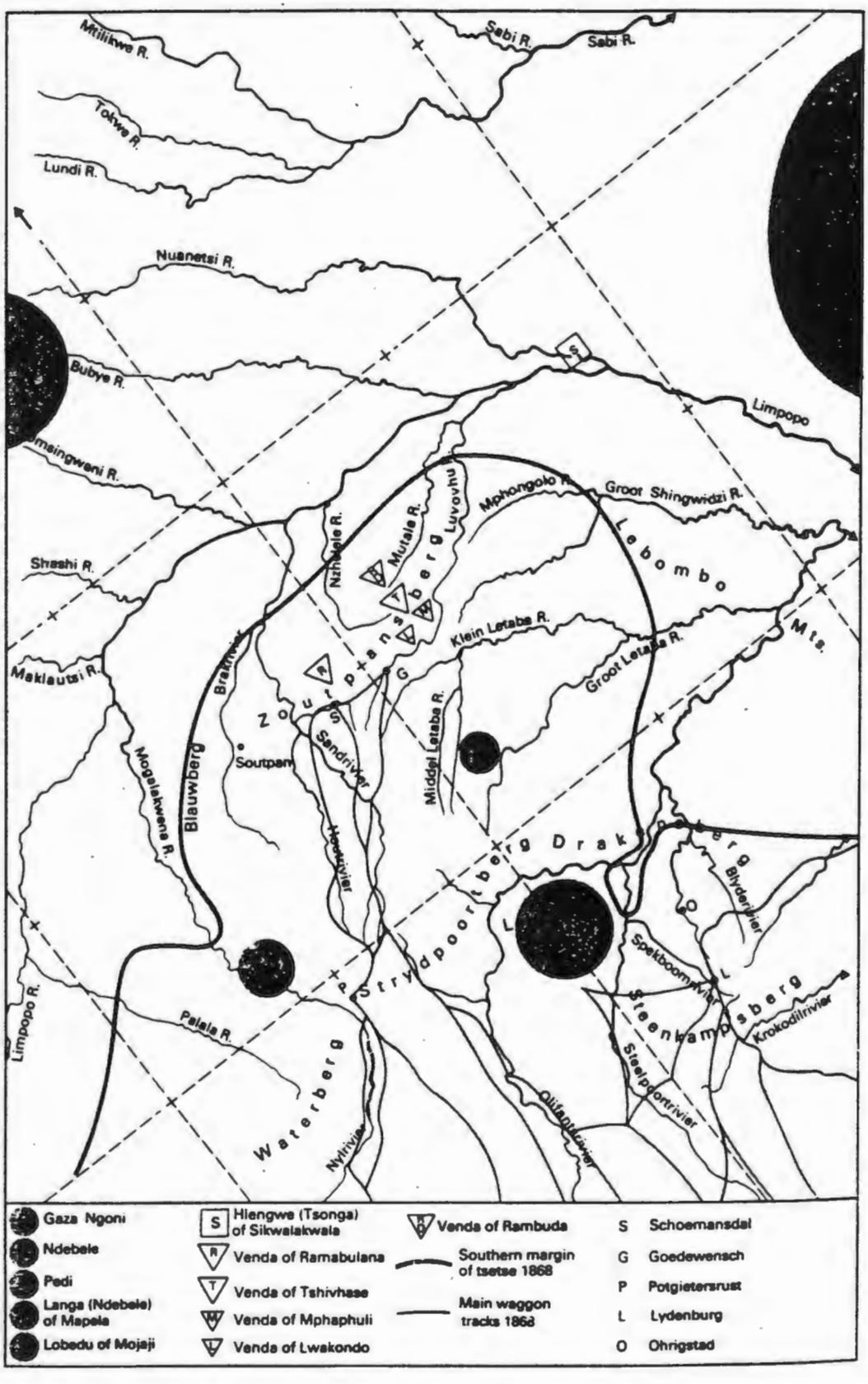
47 R. Wagner, *op cit.* pages 322 - 323.

48 J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die konflik*, page 1 and R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 315.

MAP 3

Zoutpansberg, 1848-75

[Source: S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, London, 1980, page 314.]



horses and guns into the trade, which in turn meant a large increase in the numbers of elephant shot. Initially, the Boer hunters hunted from horseback, going into the veld in large parties, often with considerable numbers of African followers. However, as the elephants within the Zoutpansberg were shot out, they were forced to move further afield, into the tsetse fly zone. This meant abandoning their horses and oxen, hunting on foot, and relying on porters for the transport of ivory. This also meant that the hunting grounds moved further into the areas controlled by the Gaza.[49]

A second development was the gradual adoption of the use of black *skuts*, or marksmen. This system was initially developed by the Lourenço Marques traders at the coast. Professional hunters, known as *amapisi*, were contracted by the traders and provided with elephant guns and ammunition on credit, in return for a certain amount of ivory to be provided by a certain date. They would be paid a certain proportion of the value of the hunting produce in gunpowder or trade goods.[50] There is also evidence that Albasini used slaves as professional hunters.[51] The use of professional black hunters became common amongst the Boer community, especially after the elephant hunting grounds were pushed back into the tsetse fly zone, and the use of horses for hunting had to be abandoned. As at the coast, the *skuts* amongst the Boers were armed with guns and ammunition, as well as with trading goods such as cloth, brass wire and grass beads, and would be given a number of carriers. They would receive a percentage of the ivory brought back.[52] This system was prohibited by the *Jagwet* of 1858, which stated not only that blacks hunters could only be armed if they were accompanied by

---

49 R. Wagner, *op cit.* pages 323 - 324.

50 P. Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity; Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa*, c. 1860-1910, Johannesburg, Portsmouth, London, 1994, pages 260 - 262 and R. Wagner, *op cit.* pages 324-325.

51 The Maputo archives contain a document referring to the registration of a "Entrepreneur's Company" in 1841. This company was set up by ten associates, of which Albasini was one, for the purpose of using slaves to hunt elephants. Each associate was to contribute five slaves or an appropriate amount of cash. The slaves were to be employed solely in hunting elephants for the company, but they would remain in the possession of their individual owners. The document specified that this was in order to retain their friendship and good service. [A.H Moç. Lourenço Marques, Corpo Notorial, Codice no 5, Registo do Estabeleçimento da Soçiedade Hemprehendedora, fol 28-30. This document, with an Afrikaans translation, is in the de Vaal papers, University of Venda.]

52 R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 331.

whites, but limited the numbers of armed black hunters accompanying a white hunter to two. That this law was generally ignored is testified to by the fact that a major element of the conflict with the Venda was the ability of the *skuts* to retain these guns and use them in cases of conflict with the Boers.[53]

There were a number of sources of conflict between the Boers and the Venda. Firstly, a number of Boer farms were established in land claimed by Venda chiefs. This particularly affected chiefs who acknowledged the sovereignty of Ramabulana's house of Nzhelele. A second potential source of conflict was the Boers demand for labour from a number of Venda chiefs. These workers were used either on Boer farms or became *skuts*. Makhado, himself was a *skut* in his youth. A third source of conflict was the demand of the Boer community that the Venda chiefs who did not supply labour should pay *opgaaf*.[54]

In 1859, Albasini made an arrangement with Schoeman in terms of which he took responsibility for collecting *opgaaf* in the south-east, north-east and east of Schoemansdal. His ability to do this was dependent on his ability to mobilise a military force from amongst his adherents. This arrangement was given official confirmation in 1863 when the Executive Council of the South African Republic appointed Albasini as *Superintendent van Kafferstammen* (Superintendent of Kaffir Tribes).[55] At the same time, Albasini held the position of Portuguese Vice-Consul in the South African Republic. His responsibilities included reporting to the Governor of Lourenço Marques on all matters affecting trade, helping Portuguese subjects when assistance was needed and generally furthering good relations with the Republic.

A number of campaigns against chiefs were conducted because of non-payment of tax. There was some conflict over the way in which Albasini carried out this responsibility, and on more than one occasion he was accused of corruption and unfairness. Official investigations did not support the accusations, although these

---

53 R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 331 - 332 and J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die konflik*, pages 3 and 48.

54 J.C.A. Boyens, *Die konflik*, pages 1- 3.

55 The title is distinct from the position of *Superintendent van Naturellen* (Superintendent of Natives), which dated from the British annexation of the South African Republic of 1877 - 81, when a central Department of Native Affairs for the Transvaal was first created. [J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die konflik*, page 4 and R. Wagner, *op cit.* pages 320 - 321.]

tax collecting raids played a large part in the developing tension in the Zoutpansberg.[56]

The tension came to a head, however, over two conflicts within the African communities in the region. The first of these was a succession dispute that developed in the Gaza kingdom after the death of Manukosi in 1858. The two main contenders to the throne were Mawewe and Mzila. Their respective support bases drew on the underlying tension between the Nguni aristocracy, who supported Mawewe and the tributary Tsonga population, who generally supported Mzila. Mawewe antagonised many in the Zoutpansberg, by attempting to bypass the Portuguese traders and instead open up more remunerative avenues of trade with the Natal traders. Mzila initially suffered a defeat, and in 1859 took refuge with the Zoutpansberg Boers, who placed him under Albasini's authority. Albasini attempted to gain support for a plan which would ally the Schoemansdal Boers and the Portuguese at Lourenço Marques with Mzila, and place him on the throne, although he gained little support for this. There were also accusations that Albasini had tried to come to an agreement with Mawewe, being given a quantity of ivory in return for putting Mzila to death. According to these accounts the fact that Mzila remained alive in spite of the ivory being paid, incensed Mawewe.[57]

In 1860, in what appears to have been a deliberate act of provocation, Albasini collected tribute from Sikwalakwala, a chief in the area of the trans-Limpopo hunting grounds who in fact was tributary to Mawewe. Mawewe responded by closing the hunting grounds to the Zoutpansberg, and by 1860 his forces were threatening to cross the Limpopo into the Zoutpansberg. This was a serious blow to the Schoemansdal economy. In the meantime, a rival faction within the Zoutpansberg entered into negotiations with Mawewe for the return of Mzila. However, in 1861, Mzila returned to the coast without Boer assistance, and successfully ousted Mawewe with the support of the traders of Lourenço Marques, who provided large quantities of arms. Mawewe took refuge with the Swazi, from where he launched a number of attacks on Mzila, with the assistance of the Swazi. From Mswati's point of view, this offered a chance to expand to the north, to undermine the Portuguese as well as to capture cattle and children, for which there was a growing demand amongst the Boers. Mawewe managed to inflict a serious defeat of Mzila in 1862, causing him to flee north, sustaining huge

---

56 J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die Konflik*, pages 4-5.

57 P. Bonner, *op cit.* pages 96 - 97; J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 57 - 58 and R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 326.

causing the levels of conflict to rise considerably.[62] It was at this point that the conflict with Mzila, converged with a second major conflict in the area.

In 1863, Ramabulana, the chief based on the Western end of the mountains above Schoemansdal, died and a succession conflict emerged between the eldest son of the great house of Ramabulana, Davhana, and a younger son, Makhado. Although his claims appeared to have been weaker, Makhado had greater support than Davhana, most notably from the *makhadzi*, the sister of the chief, and Madzhie, the *khotsimunene* or father's brother, both of whom play an important role in nominating a successor. Amongst the Boers different factions supported different claimants. Davhana was placed under Albasini's protection at Goedewench, where his presence was a serious source of conflict. He was included in the force sent to pursue Munene, and during these operations the *makhadzi* who had opposed his claims was killed.[63]

By the time of this attack there was very little chance of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The Venda chiefdoms then blocked access to the remaining hunting grounds north of the Zoutpansberg, thus completely destroying the basis of the Schoemansdal economy. From this period in April 1865, the Zoutpansberg community was forced to remain almost entirely in laager. Their problem was partially military, in that the Venda were in possession of large numbers of guns, retained by the *skuts*, and partially economic, in that the blocked access to the both major hunting grounds had destroyed the basis of the Schoemansdal economy. They remained in laager, and in a state of war, until 1867.

During this period, a number of attempts were made to negotiate a peaceful settlement. Attempts were also made to call up a commando from other districts to assist the Schoemansdal community, but these attempts failed, largely because of the unwillingness of those liable for commando duty. This unwillingness stemmed from fears of conflicts in other districts, fears of malaria in the Zoutpansberg in summer, and a general feeling that the Zoutpansbergers had given guns to blacks (for hunting) in contravention of the law, and that they were not

---

62 R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 328; J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die konflik*, pages 10-12 and J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 82 - 83.

63 C.J. Conerly, "The surrendering of the lands in the northern Transvaal of Mahosi Davhana, Makhado, Mphephu and Sinthumule", B.A. Honours dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1990, pages 18-22; J.C. A. Boeyens, *Die konflik*, pages 10 and 18; J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 75 - 76 and R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 329.

prepared to face those guns. Men were also opposed to periods of long, unpaid commando duty.

In June 1867, a commando under Paul Kruger eventually reached Schoemansdal, hampered by small numbers and a shortage of ammunition. They made one unsuccessful attack on Madzhie. The commando was accompanied by a commission which was to investigate the extent to which the inhabitants of the district were responsible for the situation. A number of officials, including Albasini, were charged, and had to appear before a High Court that had been sent to Schoemansdal. The charges included murder, manslaughter, child theft, theft, and improper procedure, with most of the charges arising out of the campaign to recapture Munene. Two of the officials were found guilty, and sentenced to being fined, but a group of angry spectators stormed the court, chased out the court officials and freed the accused, preventing the later cases from being heard. Shortly afterwards, the decision was taken to withdraw and abandon Schoemansdal, retreating southwards. Albasini remained in the district and his fort provided a focal point for the small group of remaining white families in the area. A new town, Marabastad, was established in the south of the Zoutpansberg district.[64]

After the retreat from Schoemansdal, a number of attempts were made to subjugate the Venda chiefdoms. In August 1867, a volunteer force led by Stephanus Schoeman, and accompanied by a number of African auxiliaries, attempted to subdue the Venda chiefdoms. This force did not attempt to attack Makhado or Madzhie because of the strength of their positions, but instead attacked a number of smaller chiefs, including chiefs that Albasini had indicated had not paid *opgaaf*. They were accused of having attacked chiefs who had peaceful relations with the Republic.

During the course of the following year, a number of complaints were made against Albasini, including complaints from the *Landdrost* van Nispen, and a petition from a number of inhabitants of Zoutpansberg, which was publicised in the press. Their main accusations were that he had hampered attempts to subjugate the Venda chiefdoms through his unreliable use of the force under him, and turned peaceful chiefs into enemies through his cruel and unfair ways of

---

64 R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 328; J.C.A. Boyens, *Die konflik*, pages 66-82 and J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, chapter XIII.

working. As a result of these complaints, he was removed from his position as *Superintendent* in April, and instructed to hand authority over his military force to Schoeman. Attempts to do this led to splits within the force over those who supported Albasini, and those who acknowledged Schoeman's authority.

In the meantime, Schoeman was instructed by the Executive Council to obtain assistance from Mzila and the Swazi. Attempts to gain assistance from Mzila not only were delayed by a power struggle between Albasini and Schoeman but were finally unsuccessful, as Mzila's forces attacked a number of Venda chiefdoms who were not in conflict with the South African Republic. They did not attack either Makhado or Madzhie, considered the major players in the conflict. In 1869, a large Swazi force attacked Makhado and some of his allies. Although a number of chiefdoms suffered serious losses, they were not dislodged from their mountain strongholds. Nevertheless, in 1869 a number of Tsonga and Venda chiefs approached the Executive Council requesting the opening of peace negotiations. A commission under Paul Kruger was sent which succeeded in concluding agreements with most of the chiefdoms, who agreed to recognise the authority of the Republic. Makhado, nevertheless refused to acknowledge the authority of the Transvaal government, and continued to rule as an independent chief north of the Doorn and Levubu rivers. His successor, Mphephu was finally defeated during the Mpephu War of 1898.[65]

The new centre for administration in the district became Marabastad, just north of what is now Pietersburg. From 1868, the Republican government attempted to attract settlers to the district by offering occupation farms, although new settlement was initially very slow. Some settlement, based on agriculture, rather than hunting, developed around the villages of Marabastad and Potgietersrus. White settlement increased gradually, and in 1886 Pietersburg was founded, and the district headquarters were transferred from Marabastad to the new town. By this stage it was clear that the hunting frontier had been closed, and the main focus of Boer settlement had moved permanently southwards.[66]

In the meantime, Albasini's position in the Zoutpansberg was not strong. As early as 1866, he had resigned as Portuguese Vice-Consul, complaining that despite his

---

65 C.J. Conerly, *op cit.* pages 29 - 31; J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die Konflik*, pages 93 - 101; J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 105 - 124 and O.J.O. Ferreira, *op cit.* pages 334 - 371.

66 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 142 - 143 and R. Wagner, *op cit.* page 316.

efforts to carry out his duties, at considerable expense to himself, he had received little response. In the same year, he wrote to the Governor-General stating that conditions in the Zoutpansberg were miserable and that since the closing of the hunting grounds trade was at a standstill and the inhabitants of the district lacked all essentials. He proposed the founding of a new settlement between Inhambane and Delagoa Bay near the Limpopo River, under Portuguese jurisdiction.[67]

The plan never came to fruition. In 1868, Albasini attempted to follow up his proposal. He suggested that the new settlement should be at Makashulaskraal, which would be a strategic point between the Republic and Delagoa Bay. In order to facilitate these plans, he donated his land at Makashulaskraal to the Portuguese government.[68]

However, when a border between Portuguese territory and the South African Republic was negotiated between A. Duprat, the Consul General at the Cape, and the Republic in 1869, Makashulaskraal fell into the South African Republic. This treaty enraged Albasini, both because he had not been consulted, and because it awarded territory to the Republic that had been claimed by Portugal. Finally, it destroyed his plans to establish a settlement under Portuguese authority.[69]

In 1870, Albasini was appointed Resident Justice of the Peace. This was intended to solve the problem of the distance to the nearest *Landdrost*, who was based at Marabastad. A year later, the Governor of Lourenço Marques suggested that Albasini should settle in the area of Makashulaskraal even though this now fell within the South African Republic. They wanted his assistance in negotiating over the proposed route of a road from the Republic to the harbour. Albasini was prepared to move, but was not given permission by the Executive Council, who argued that they needed his services in the north. He requested a salary explaining that he had fallen into poverty as a result of the war. This was granted, though seldom paid.[70]

In 1875, Albasini concluded a contract to provide workers for the new diamond diggings at Kimberley. He travelled to Kimberley with a few hundred workers

---

67 M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, XXII/5 - XXII/7.
68 *Ibid.* XXII/7 - 8 and J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 129.
69 M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, XXII/9 - 10 and J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 130 - 136.
70 J.B. de Vaal *Die Rol*, pages 138 - 140.

from the Zoutpansberg. Although they were hired, he was not paid for their recruitment. He spent nearly two years at the diggings, living off the proceeds from a small shop and his son's earnings, before moving to stay on a farm of a friend.[71] He returned to the Zoutpansberg in 1877, the year in which the Transvaal was annexed by Britain. He was recognised by the British authorities as a chief, and appointed as Native Commissioner for the north east section of the Zoutpansberg,[72] with responsibilities that were similar to his earlier responsibilities as *Superintendent*, revolving largely around tax collection. He remained in the Zoutpansberg until his death in 1888.[73]

---

71 *Ibid.* page 141.

72 See M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, XXV/2 - 4 for a discussion of some of the wrangling over this appointment.

73 J.B. de Vaal *Die Rol*, pages 142 - 144.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE
THE SOUTH AFRICAN FAMILY'S IMAGES OF ALBASINI

Albasini's great-granddaughter, Marie Eyssel, is an elderly woman, living at present in the Old Age Home in Louis Trichardt. In 1988, she organised a celebration to commemorate the centenary of João Albasini's death. The event was held at the site of his grave. Marie Eyssel tracked down descendants from all over South Africa, to send them invitations. Family members travelled from as far as the Cape to attend,[1] while the Gazankulu Homeland sent Drum Majorettes, dancers, a choir and Professor Hudson Ntsan'wisi, who was the Chief Minister at the time. The day was a festival, with speeches, choral singing, "traditional" dancing, the laying of wreaths and plaques, and a *braai*, as well as a historical drama. A printed booklet, entitled "João Albasini, 1813-1888" was available for visitors.[2]

Through this festival, a version of Albasini's history, celebrating him as a significant historical figure and hero, was disseminated to members of the family and interested members of the local public. The image of Albasini presented at the celebration is summarised in the dramatic sketch:

In this sketch, he is introduced as a young man, dropped off in Mozambique to make his way as a trader, who becomes an elephant hunter and master shot. He moves into the Transvaal, and marries Gertina van Rensburg. There are three main themes in the sketch. The central theme is that of Albasini remaining in the Zoutpansberg, fighting the Venda, when the rest of the Schoemansdal community abandoned the village of Schoemansdal and retreated south in 1867. Albasini's main defining achievement is, therefore, that by remaining he "preserved the Soutpansberg for civilization". Secondary to this is the theme of Albasini as chief of the Shangaans who "bound them together as a nation." This theme is elaborated on at some length.

The third theme introduces a shift to the present. On the one hand, it introduces the family, dealing with Albasini's marriage and the birth of his grandson, and heir

---

1 Visitors book signed at the Albasini Centenary celebration, 1988, in the possession of the Schoemansdal Museum.

2 João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888", pamphlet produced by the Albasini family and printed by Leach printers, Louis Trichardt, no date (1988). I was given a copy of this pamphlet by Helga Giesekke of Louis Trichardt.

to the chieftainship, leading from this to a reference to the Albasini family in the Transvaal, scattered throughout the country, but now gathered at the celebration. As far as "the Shangaans" are concerned, they are given, at Albasini's request, a location around Elim, now part of Gazankulu, and represented by Chief Ntsan'wisi, and the choirs and dances and warriors scripted as shouting "Bayete" at regular intervals throughout the festival.[3]

FIGURE 1
Albasini's family: the Mozambican side

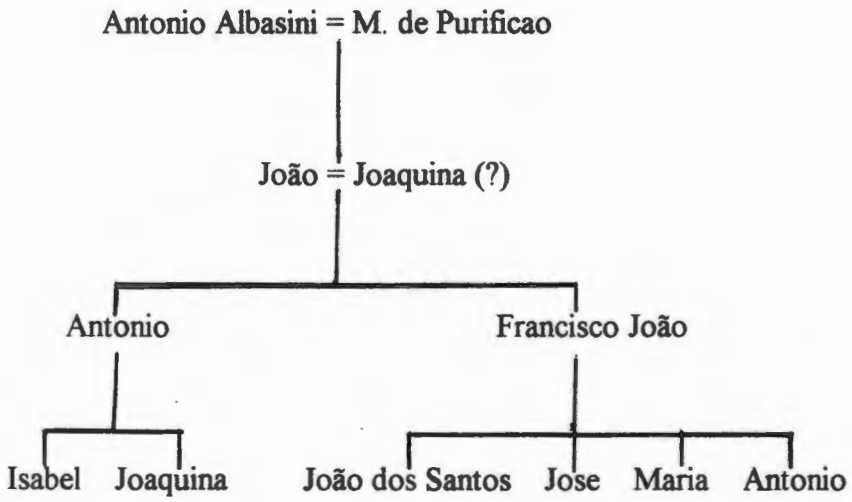
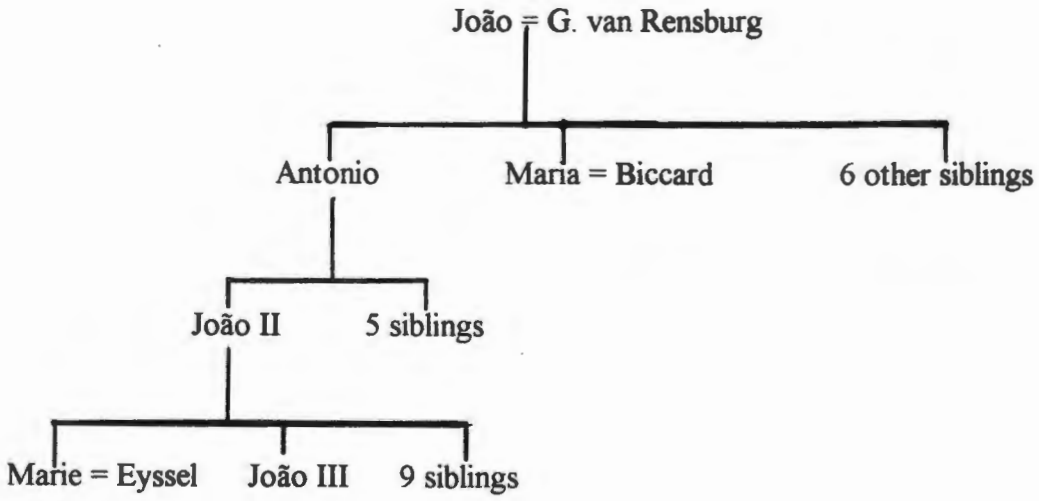


FIGURE 2
Albasini's family: The South African side



---

[3] Script for dramatic sketch, Marie Eyssel papers.

No mention of the Mozambican Albasini's is made in the dramatic sketch or the printed booklet . In fact, when M. Jackson-Haight interviewed surviving members of the Transvaal Albasini's, she commented that many of them were unaware of the Mozambican Albasini's.[4] While this may have been true with respect to some of the family, it is also true that knowledge of the Mozambican family appears to have been consciously suppressed. For example, De Vaal mentions in a lecture he gave in 1983 that a trunk full of Albasini's documents was burnt by Albasini's daughter-in-law, Mrs Aletta Albasini, who didn't realise the historic value of the papers.[5] Marie Eyssel denies this vehemently, claiming that it was one of Albasini's daughters, Gertina Pittendrigh, who made a pile of a whole box-full of Albasini's papers, and set them alight in order to destroy any evidence of his Mozambican descendants.[6]

In 1966, another Albasini descendant, Beryl Page wrote to João Albasini III, the author of the Centenary booklet, suggesting that they collaborate on a film or novel of Albasini's life. She was apparently unaware that a novel of Albasini's life already existed, written in German by a Martin Jäckel, a missionary of the German Mission Society.[7] She added a postscript to her letter saying:

> Marie has told me about João's first family still living in LM, & I hope to contact them, although I believe the family has already done so![8]

The reference to a visit to Mozambique probably refers to a visit that was made by João Albasini (II) in which he met members of the Mozambican family. According to Marie Eyssel, who was his daughter, the visit was related to attempts to find information relating to the Estate of Antonio Albasini, whom the South African

---

4 J. Penvenne, "João dos Santos Albasini", page 36, footnote 32.

5 J.B de Vaal, *João Albasini (1813-1888)*, Camoes Annual Lectures, No 3, Ernest Oppenheimer Institute for Portuguese Studies, Johannesburg, 1983, page 3.

6 Interview with M. Eyssel, 8.5.1993.

7 The novel is entitled *Juwwawa, Roman aus der Pionierzeit der Buren*, which translates as "Juwwawa, A Novel from the Pioneering Times of the Boers". Martin Jäckel was based at the Berlin Mission station of Blaauwberg in the Zoutpansberg for a period from 1914. He was interned at Pietersburg for the duration of the First World War, but returned to Blaauwberg for a few years afterwards. His novel on Albasini was published around 1954, although the exact date is uncertain as it did not appear in the book. [Personal communication, Dr U. Kistner and M. Jäckel, *Juwwawa, Roman aus der Pionierzeit der Buren*, Basel, no date (1954?).

8 Letter from B. Page to J. Albasini, 16.8.1966, Marie Eyssel papers.

Albasini's believed to have been a very wealthy man. Marie Eyssel, however, knew no details, as the visit had been supposed to have been kept a secret from the children.[9] Her comments are supported, however, by copies of a translation of a correspondence between the Mozambican João dos Santos Albasini and G.S. Gouws, a South African grandson, that took place in 1913. João dos Santos wrote as follows:

> One year ago I wrote you a letter and, as I have received no reply, I take the liberty of repeating hereby the particulars I had given in that letter, no doubt mislaid.
>
> Through His Excellency the British Consul you had made an enquiry to ascertain the existence of the descendants of João Albasini who towards 1830 arrived here from Portugal.

The letter continued with the comment that when the news of the grandfather's death came, they were informed that the surviving family was large, and as they were then living relatively wealthily and "without ambition", they ceded all rights to the legitimate sons.[10]

G.S. Gouws replied immediately saying:

> I beg to thank you for your letter of the 14th instant in regard to my enquiry for João Albasini, your letter of a year ago has probably been lost, I never received it.
>
> I must say that it came to us as a great surprise that my grandfather João Albasini had any other children besides my mother her sisters and brothers, my mother who is the oldest of his children says he never spoke a word about it either to them or to his wife. However as the fact is there we will say no more about it, we hope you will do your best to aid us in our efforts to discover, if there is any truth in the rumour that the said João Albasini's father died a wealthy man and left a considerable fortune to his Son or his descendants.[11]

---

[9] Interview with M. Eyssel, 8.5.1993.

[10] Copy of letter from J Albasini to G.S. Gouws, 14 July, 1913, M. Jackson-Haight papers; Although the translation is not very coherent, the meaning is clear.

[11] Letter from G.S. Gouws to J. Albasini, 23 July, 1913, M. Jackson-Haight collection; The erratic punctuation reflects the punctuation of the copy.

My impression is, therefore, that knowledge of Albasini's Mozambican family was common amongst the South African family, but where it was passed on, it was passed on as a secret, as the underside of the family tradition.

In her notes for the centenary celebration, Marie Eyssel comments:

> These stories may not be historically correct, but they were passed on by Ouma Gerrie, João's wife, Ouma Lettie, João's daughter-in-law and Oom Koos Grobler, an old Schoemansdaller[12]

Marie Eyssel spent much of her childhood staying with her grandmother, "Ouma Lettie", who was the widow of João's eldest son, Antonio. She describes her knowledge as having been gained orally from listening to old people's stories.[13] Her own idea is that she is simply passing on a tale that was told to her, and my initial response was to see this as the dominant South African family image of Albasini. However, there are some earlier family versions recorded from João's second daughter, Maria Biccard, that portray a strikingly different image of Albasini. A comparison of the two sets of memories suggests that the centenary celebration is constructed in a far more complex way than is suggested by Marie Eyssel's own idea that she is simply passing on a tale that was told to her.

Maria Biccard's accounts come from the papers of J.B. de Vaal, which are in the possession of the University of Venda. Maria Biccard was born in 1856 and grew up at Goedewensch, Albasini's base in the Zoutpansberg. She married F.G.L. Biccard, a dominee of the Hervormde Kerk, who was instrumental in the founding of the town of Pietersburg.[14] Mrs Biccard's accounts are contained in three main sources, which date from between 1925 and 1938. The first account was an article based on an interview with Mrs Biccard, which appeared in the *Star* in 1925.[15] It was the second of a two-part series. The next record of Mrs Biccard consists of notes taken by de Vaal, labelled "Memories of the widow, Mrs. M.M. Biccard. Told to me in 1935."[16] There is, therefore, no indication of whether these were the notes from a number of conversations or from a formal interviews. Thirdly, there is a letter written by Mrs Biccard to her nephew, João Albasini, in

---

12 Notes for centenary celebration, Marie Eyssel papers.
13 Interview with M. Eyssel, 8.5.1993.
14 W.L. Maree, *Lig in Soutpansberg*, Pretoria, 1962, page 147.
15 *Star*, 27.6.1925, J.B. de Vaal papers, University of Venda.
16 Notes from interview, J.B. de Vaal papers.

1938. This letter appears to be the response to a request for information for a speech that João was preparing to give on his grandfather.[17]

The first two accounts are not "direct" but are obviously mediated by the way in which they have been recorded. Nevertheless, it is possible to see a general theme in them. The accounts contain a large degree of overlap, revolving around a few anecdotes, with particular emphasis on one story, that is related to the theme of the siege of Makapansgat. The siege of Makapansgat was the episode where a Boer commando and African auxiliary forces laid siege to the Kekana under Mokopane, who had taken refuge in a series of caves, near what is today Potgietersrus. In South African historical writing, the siege is widely seen as having been in retaliation for the killing and mutilation of twenty-eight Boers in three separate incidents.[18]

In the first account, that of the *Star* article, two central stories are included, subtitled "The Massacre at Delagoa" and "The Wagon Tragedy". The "Massacre at Delagoa" deals with Albasini's presence during the attack on the fort at Lourenço Marques in 1833, although it is mistakenly dated to 1836. According to this, Albasini was "carried away by natives", and was the only one of the prisoners who survived. The article continues:

> The others ... were murdered before his eyes, being done to death by having wooden spikes driven through them. Albasini at this dreadful spectacle stole away into the bush and made good his escape.

The article says that after some time he managed to return to Lourenço Marques where he "rendered prominent service" assisting the new governor and his troops in successfully beating off a second attack.[19]

In fact, as has been discussed in the introduction, the attack was directed specifically at the governor and the garrison, who had been extorting slaves and

---

17 The letter, dated 10.12.1938, was pinned to a copy of the speech, and the text of the speech uses information from the letter. The date of the letter, four days before the Day of the Covenant on 16.12.1938, suggests that the speech was intended for the Great Trek Centenary Celebrations, which culminated in festivities on the Day of the Covenant; J.B. de Vaal papers.

18 See I. Hofmeyer, *We Spend our Years*, pages 109 - 111 for an account of the siege.

19 *Star*, 27.6.1925.

ivory from a number of chiefdoms who were the Company's slaving partners. It was not, therefore, directed at the Commercial Company, in whose employ both Antonio and João were. In fact, Nobre, the agent of the company, was implicated in the killing, although he was not convicted. According to his own testimony, a deserter from the garrison had told the governor that there was an understanding between Machacana, one of the attacking chiefs, and the personnel of the Commercial Company. On the 16th August, in the presence of the governor, the troops and the inhabitants, Nobre and the two Albasini's refused to sign a statement that the governor had ordered drawn up with respect to the accusation.[20] It emerges from Nobre's testimony that he fraternised freely with the attackers, and at his request they delayed the attack on Shefina Island, where the inhabitants of the Delagoa Fort had taken refuge, to allow company employees to leave the island before the attack. He wrote a letter and sent it to Antonio Albazini (*sic.*); telling him of the planned attack, and advising him to flee, saving as many slaves as the boat could carry. He suggested that if the governor didn't want to allow him to leave, he should leave in secret, at night. The account only mentions that Antonio succeeded in leaving the island, but in the event only the governor and three of his men were killed.[21]

The garrison at Lourenço Marques was again attacked in 1843 by forces of the Chiefs Magaia and Moamba, but this time the attackers were repelled by forces under the new governor, Major Antonio Joaquim Texeira. According to I. Roche, Albasini rendered important assistance in fending off the attack.[22] This is presumably the second attack referred to in the article, although it occurred a decade later. The *Star* account has joined this episode of cut-throat intrigue to the later episode, thus turning them into a story of unprovoked black attack, followed by black atrocities, and successful white reprisals.

The "Wagon Tragedy" is a story related to the killing of the Bezuidenhout family which was one of the incidents leading to the siege of Makapansgat. According to this account, Albasini was trekking north-westwards to Schoemansdal, carrying with him seven wagons of trading and household goods. This was the cause of

---

20 F. Santana, *op cit.*, pages 218-219. Note that Santana's account is a summary of the original document, which is in the Archives in Lisbon. Attempts to get a microfilm of the more detailed original were unsuccessful.

21 *Ibid.* pages 221-223.

22 I. Roche, *op cit.* page 199.

serious trouble with the people of "Mogwambana", who had orders to murder anyone with more than 3 wagons:

> A most threatening demonstration was made, the armed kafirs even entering the wagon in which Mrs Albasini was travelling, flourishing their assegais and shields.[23]

Albasini sent a messenger (N'wa-Manungu[24]) with blankets and beads to interview the chief, explain that he was a trader, and find out why he was being threatened. The chief sent one of his sons, who escorted them through and across the Nylstroom river at what subsequently became known as Moorddrift. They then continued on their way to Schoemansdal, where they met two men with their families who were planning to take the same route south. They warned them not to continue, but they ignored the warnings and were killed. A white man on horseback got away, and reached Schoemansdal with the news. The district commando was at once called and Albasini, who had conducted similar commandos in the Sabi area, volunteered to accompany it at the head of a detachment of African auxiliaries.[25]

This story, given in greater, and more bloody, detail, takes up a large proportion of de Vaal's notes from his conversations with Mrs Biccard. More details are given of the killings of the Bezuidenhouts, with women tied to wagon wheels, watching their children being cut up and cooked. In these notes, the siege of Makapan is included in detail, rather than simply being mentioned. After this, a bloodied baby's bonnet, given to one of the women by Mrs Albasini, is found. Another addition is a story which takes up most of the remaining notes. This is a description of a battle between Davhana, and Makhado, which she witnessed as a child at Goedewensch. The attack occurred early in the morning on a New Year's Day. Mrs Biccard ran together with her father to the one battery of the fort. Manungu went to the other and they fired. She was too frightened to run back, so she had to stay with her father. The attack was beaten off. Later that day the children on their way to a friend for tea, witnessed a scene where they:

> saw kaffir doctors with the bodies of two dead people placed between them. They also slaughtered a heifer, which had been wounded that day at Davhana's village. The two corpses had reeds

---

23 *Star*, 27.6.1925.

24 He appears in sources as Manungu and Wamanungu but the orthography most in keeping with present Tsonga orthography is N'wa-Manungu.

25 *Ibid.*

> pushed through their spinal cords and were later carried by the kaffirs on their shoulders. The flesh was cut into small pieces and cooked [together with the flesh of the heifer], while the legs were thrown into beer pots and made into soup.
>
> That night, the great victory feast would be held at Davhana's kraal. The kaffirs all sat in rows, with the witchdoctor with them. The flesh[26] was dished out in a kaffir basket lid. With an assegai, the point of which had been bent into a hook, the witchdoctor pulled the kaffir basket lid in front of the kaffirs, while they each took a piece and ate it. Thereafter, a beast's tail, which had been attached to a stick, was dipped into the soup and sprinkled over the armed soldiers. "You were brave", said the witchdoctor, "may you become even braver!"[27]

Finally, the letter to her nephew brings in her mother's family, the van Rensburgs. She tells a story about a the Zulu attack on a Boer lager at Bloukrans. This refers to the attack made by Dingane's forces on a Boer party, immediately after the killing of Piet Retief. The story is claimed to have been told by her mother, and involves waves of Zulu attackers being fended off by a small group of brave Boers, with scenes of individual heroism saving the day, as when a certain Oosthuizen volunteered to leave the lager to obtain fresh supplies of ammunition. She then moves straight on, once again to the story of the trip up to Schoemansdal, and the siege of Makapan. One new account is added here. This is the story of Albasini remaining behind in 1867, when the decision was taken to retreat from Schoemansdal:

> He was busy night and day trying to stop the abandoning of Schoemansdal, but there was no stopping it ... Only the poor who could not afford to trek stayed. At last it was decided that João Albasini would do all he could to keep the country and that the government would reimburse him for the cost involved.

She describes the arming of Goedewensch and talks in detail about how difficult life was in the fort, with the difficulty of feeding and clothing the remaining group.

All these accounts are structured by a common theme of white survival in the face of the barbarism of Darkest Africa. Blacks are presented as one-dimensional figures, moving in hordes, brutally murdering babies and women, and eating each

---

26 This was the mixture of the flesh of the slain enemies and the heifer.

27 Notes from interview, 1935, J.B. de Vaal papers. For the (almost identical) published version, see J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 76.

other in macabre and superstitious rites of war. Her accounts are littered with white corpses and bloodied baby's bonnets, followed by white heroism and military triumphs.

However, Mrs Biccard's corpses and triumphs are not arbitrary. The van Rensburgs, the Bezuidenhouts, and, in particular, the siege of Makapan, are some of the icons of narratives of the Great Trek. This means that her accounts go much further than simply claiming Albasini as a hero. Instead, they are implicitly claiming him as one of the heroes of the Great Trek. Her nephew, João Albasini II, made this explicit in the speech he based on Mrs Biccard's letter, saying, "We Albasini's are descendants of Voortrekkers from both our parents."[28] The climax of the speech is the period where Albasini remained in the Zoutpansberg, cut off from other whites, and fighting a number of Venda groups. He ends off by saying:

> The old Transvaal Government promised him compensation which he never received, and because of this his descendants and those of the heroes who stood by him are today in poverty. However that may be, he did his duty for his adopted country and finished the good work that Potgieter had begun. As I see it, he and that small group of people rendered national service just as the other Voortrekkers did, even though it doesn't appear in History and Festivals and is completely forgotten."[29]

This comment, of course, provides the motivation for Marie Eyssel's efforts to celebrate Albasini, in street names and centenary festivals.

The only episode that Mrs Biccard's versions and the centenary versions have in common is the episode where Albasini remains in the Zoutpansberg in 1867. However, their presentation differs strongly. In Mrs Biccard's accounts, this is the final episode in a list of episodes following the pattern of Albasini fighting for white, "civilized" survival in the face of unprovoked black attack. The vividness of her account is reserved for the atrocities of black barbarism and for her description of the family's suffering and financial ruin. This, picked up by her nephew in his

---

28 Speech of João Albasini, J.B. de Vaal papers. This comment is particularly striking when set against the determination of Albasini to defend Portuguese territorial claims against the South African Republic and the very frequent references he made in his letters to "the nation to which I belong". See, for example, Albasini's letter of 4.10.1860, Serie 1860, No. 5 (State Archives, Pretoria) in which he refers to "the Portuguese Nation to which I have the honour of belonging".

29 Speech of João Albasini, J.B. de Vaal papers.

speech deals obliquely with the accusations that Albasini enriched himself through his tax collecting, and through the economic ruin of Schoemansdal, and accounts for the reversal in the family's fortunes.

In the centenary version, this episode is no longer dealt with as an episode of suffering and poverty, but as a triumphant proof of Albasini's courage and determination to make a stand against huge odds, when other weaker people (the Boers of Schoemansdal) have given in. As the dramatic sketch has it:

> Late in the afternoon, after the town had been evacuated and burned by the Venda's, João and Antonio (his son) stood in the garden of their home and looked around them. Antonio said: "Dad, you know, from here for the next 90 miles we are only 27 white men against hordes of enemy blacks" and Albasini answered, "Don't worry, son. We will survive."

Despite the wording, survival is no longer the issue here. The issue is heroism.

A comparison of these two versions indicates not a single family tradition, but a continual process of reconstruction of memories. Most of the Biccard stories were available to the Festival organisers, although often in different form. Yet completely different stories were selected, and a completely different image was presented. Partly, these differences could be explained with reference to the differences in personal histories. Mrs Biccard, born in 1856, would have grown up at Goedewensch in a turbulent period where the Boer presence in the far north was extremely tenuous. She lived through the period from 1865-1867, a period which Albasini described as "almost constant war", witnessed first hand armed conflict, and would have been eleven years old in 1867, the year of the abandoning of Schoemansdal. A period of poverty, uncertainly, and physical danger followed, and for much of her youth, survival would have been a real issue. In contrast, Marie Eyssel was born in 1913, into a Transvaal supported by the Union and the British Empire, where there was little remaining of black independence, and blacks were legally, if not in practice, confined into government defined reserves. It is, therefore, not surprising that Albasini's presence in the Northern Transvaal has become a matter of adventure rather than survival.

However, the way in which the traditions have been transformed reflects more than simply the differences in isolated individual memories or individual personalities, but clearly has a social dimension. What is striking is that in both the Biccard and the 1988 festival versions, the stereotypes used and the selection

and significance of different episodes correspond closely to different literary traditions or genres. Whereas Mrs Biccard understands Albasini within a genre of heroic historical narratives of the Great Trek, the centenary celebration presents Albasini in terms that resonate strongly with a stereotype of heroism found in a tradition of best-selling colonial adventure fiction, represented by the writings of people such as Kingsley, Buchan, Ballantyne, Kipling, Marryat, Henty, and particularly importantly in this case, Rider Haggard.[30] Although much of the discussion on this genre focuses on the period of its production in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and links it specifically to the ideology of Empire, it continued to have influence far beyond this period, and many of the stereotypes are represented in the writings of contemporary adventure writers such as Wilbur Smith,[31] as well as being reminiscent of the televised treatment of other historical subjects such as Shaka Zulu[32] and John Ross.[33] This tradition, combining a highly conventionalised view of heroism in a rigidly stereotypical Africa with the needs of entertainment, was particularly appropriate for the celebration.

Mrs Biccard's focus on the Great Trek took place in the context of a growing mobilisation of history for Afrikaner nationalist purposes in the early twentieth century. From the first decade of the nineteenth century, a number of Afrikaans historical texts emerged, often of a popular nature, appearing in newspapers and magazines. By the 1930's this *volksgeskiedenis* (national history) was central to the project of Afrikaner ethnic mobilisation, and had became well established in

---

30 For discussion of Imperial Literature, see P. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness, British Literature and Imperialism, 1830 - 1914*, Ithaca and London, 1988; G. Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism*, London and New York, 1996; W.R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A critical study of British imperial fiction*, Cambridge, 1987; B.V. Street, *The savage in Literature: Representations of "primitive" society in English fiction 1858 - 1920*, London and Boston, 1975 and A. White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and deconstructing the imperial subject*, Cambridge, 1993.

31 See G.C. Lilford, "A Hunter's Ideology: Hunting and the use of political violence in the writings of Wilbur Smith and F.C. Selous", unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Sussex, 1991 for an analyses of three of Wilbur Smith's novels, which are compared with the memoirs of Frederick Courtney Selous, who was a famous hunter in the Victorian period.

32 See D. Golan, *Inventing Shaka, Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism*, London, 1994, pages 102 - 110, for a discussion on the South African Broadcasting Corporation's series on Shaka-Zulu.

33 See especially "Introduction" in C.R. Maclean, *The Natal Papers of "John Ross"*, Edited by S. Gray, Durban, 1992.

the popular imagination. Interest in, and emotional responses to, a heroic Voortrekker history reached it's height with the Great Trek Centenary celebrations of 1938, which produced a huge popular response.[34] Mrs Biccard's accounts date from the 1920's and 1930's, right in this period of historical production. Her letter to João Albasini was written on 12 December, 1938, four days before the climax of the Great Trek centenary celebrations on the Day of the Covenant.

A central figure in the development of the Great Trek as the key image of Afrikaner nationalism was Gustav Preller. He was the first to create what Isabel Hofmeyr terms "a full-scale Trekker industry"[35] Gustav Preller (1875-43) was a journalist who has been described as "one of the most important South African historical writers in the first four decades of the twentieth century."[36] Preller started a newspapers series on Piet Retief in *Die Volkstem* ("The Voice of the People") in 1905, creating a cult of personality around him and other Trekker leaders. His articles were later serialised in other papers and his book on Retief went into ten editions, selling around 15,000 copies. The success of Preller's work soon led to similar works on other Afrikaner heroes. Isabel Hofmeyr points out that "together these works established a semiotics of Afrikaner history involving key events of 'black barbarism' and 'British perfidy', personified in great, strong men whose names could be invoked like talismans."[37]

The importance Mrs Biccard places on the Makapansgat-connected stories parallels the importance that Makapansgat was gaining in Preller's Great Trek narratives from the 1910's onwards. Preller's earlier work was based on the Natal Trekkers, in particular on Retief, Dingane and the battle of Blood River - an event which, in his interpretation, came to stand for the Boer victory over the Zulu empire. By the 1910's, he had turned to the Makapansgat story, producing his account of the siege which appeared in *Die Brandwag* ("The Sentinel") in 1914/15. Isabel Hofmeyr argues that Preller was consciously trying to build up a Transvaal equivalent of his Blood River, and that in his treatment of Makapansgat,

---

34 F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation*, particularly pages 33 - 45; K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, Johannesburg, 1988, page 58; I. Hofmeyr, "Building a nation from words", pages 95 - 123 and A. Grundlingh and H. Sapire, "From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual?", pages 19 - 37.

35 I. Hofmeyr, "Building a nation from words", page 109.

36 K. Smith, *op cit.* page 66.

37 I. Hofmeyr, "Building a nation from words", pages 109 - 110. See also, K. Smith, *op cit.* page 68.

he relied heavily on the image that he had created of Blood River. She points to a number of similarities in the storyline and to virtually identical "atrocity scenes". For example, in his account of Blood River, the Zulu invite the Boers into their midst and then kill them, in an episode of unprovoked violence and betrayed hospitality. The Boers in retribution rout the Zulu's at the Battle of Blood River. In Preller's account of the Makapansgat episode, Mankopane invites Hermanus Potgieter into his midst and then kills him, while Mokopane's warriors invite the Boers to trade and then slaughter them in cold blood, before being in turn defeated at Makapansgat.[38]

Central to Preller's account of Makapansgat are descriptions of the killing of different Boer groups and the discovery of their mutilated bodies. I. Hofmeyr argues that almost all of Preller's texts read as a list of atrocities which develop into core clichés expressing the essence of the story.[39] In the case of Makapansgat, these accounts are based on slim evidence. The only written accounts of the siege and the events surrounding it were several military despatches left by Pretorius. The details of the two parties of Boers who were killed in the vicinity of Moorddrift were central to his account, and Pretorius describes their mutilation in some detail. However, Pretorius only arrived a month after the killings, and while in some accounts, he claimed to have seen the bodies himself, in others he did not do so.[40] What Preller managed to do was create an institutionalised version, based on much later oral testimonies, and on Pretorius' supposed "eyewitness account".

After Preller, other accounts continued to establish Makapansgat as a key event in Transvaal history. Kruger claimed to have played a heroic role in the siege of Makapansgat, and his reminiscences (based largely on fantasy) formed the basis for one of the carvings on the base of his statue, which after much travelling was installed in Church Square in Pretoria, again becoming part of the established version of the past. At Moorddrift itself, a monument was unveiled in 1912 to commemorate the killings that had occurred there. In 1940, the site became a national monument.[41] By this time, the events had been summarised into an institutionalised version that saw the unprovoked and savage killing of the Boers leading directly to the siege of Makapansgat, and the destruction of Ndebele

---

38 I. Hofmeyr, *We Spend our Years*, pages 150 - 152.
39 *Ibid.* pages 141 and 152.
40 *Ibid.* pages 140 - 141.
41 *Ibid.* pages 144 - 149.

power in the Transvaal.[42] This ignores evidence that they were a response to increasing Boer incursions and slave and cattle raiding, and were probably an attempt to frighten the Boers out of the Transvaal. It also ignores evidence that Ndebele independence lasted well into the 1890's.

Although Mrs Biccard's accounts read as if they are almost first-hand family chronicles, examination of them suggests that she is in fact remembering and constructing her accounts through the lens of an institutionalised narrative of the siege of Makapansgat.

Firstly, from a report submitted by Albasini to the *Landdrost* of Zoutpansberg, and quoted at length in J.B. de Vaal's thesis, it appears that while it was true that Albasini was attacked on his journey to the Zoutpansberg, it was by the forces of Sekwati rather than Mokopane. They were not threatened with assegais, but, rather, shot at. Despite these differences, the details of the report indicate that it is the same episode that is being referred to. Albasini's report also mentions sending a messenger with beads and a blanket, and says that the chief sent his son to escort them.[43] Mrs Biccard has, therefore, incorporated an entirely separate incident into the Makapansgat legend. In altering the nature of the attack from being shot at to being threatened at close range with assegais, she is drawing on a conventionalised image of military encounters between Boers and blacks.

Secondly, Mrs Biccard's details of the killings, such as the detail that the blacks invited the Boers to trade fat sheep and that the children were cut into pieces and cooked, are details that, on the one hand, could not have been part of first hand family knowledge, and, on the other hand, correspond to the images popularised by Preller's accounts. One detail that she includes is that her mother, João's wife, gave a baby's bonnet to Mrs Bezuidenhout for her daughter. Mrs Bezuidenhout was one of the Boer party that were killed. In the version told to de Vaal, Mrs Biccard says that when entering the caves after the siege of Makapansgat Albasini found "the little baby's bonnet that had been lent to Mrs Breed for the baby ... with a tear and the blood still on it."[44] This detail again locks into one of Preller's recurring atrocity images - that of battered baby's skulls - which occur both in his accounts of Blood River and the Makapansgat story.[45] In this context, it is a

---

[42] *Ibid.* page 149
[43] J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 20.
[44] Notes from interview, J.B. de Vaal papers.
[45] I. Hofmeyr, "We Spend our Years", page 152.

minor detail that has the effect of linking the Albasini part of the account into the institutionalised version, and so validating it, as well as confirming Albasini's identity as a hero in the Voortrekker mould. In claiming Albasini to be part of the Voortrekker tradition, she is also confirming her own identity and right to be seen as part of the tradition.

By the time of the 1988 Festival version, the association of Albasini with Voortrekker heroism had been completely dropped. The Makapansgat story was not included in the dramatic sketch, although it appeared in the booklet in a very different form which will be discussed below. Instead, the focus had shifted to Albasini as the heroic explorer-adventurer. Instead of Albasini the Voortrekker, we have Albasini, the fighter, hunter and chief, who penetrated Africa and remained in the Zoutpansberg when the rest of the inhabitants of Schoemansdal retreated. Albasini's heroism is set against their cowardice.

For example, the festival drama introduces Albasini as follows:

> In 1831, as an 18 year old boy, he was dropped off in Mocambique by his father, Antonio d'Albasini,[46] and his older brother, also an Antonio, to open a trading post.
>
> And his mother? What of her? Maria Purificau was a lady-in-waiting at the Spanish Royal Court. Being used to a sheltered and refined way of life it was inconceivable to her that her favourite son should be taken to a wild, barbaric country, but with his adventurous spirit, he could not be restrained, and Maria had to submit.
>
> It is said that on their way back to Portugal the ship carrying the two Antonio's was lost at sea and that she lost her husband and both sons.[47]

This opening establishes João Albasini in a number of ways, drawing on a number of images. It draws on an image of Africa as "wild and barbaric", and sets this against the "sheltered and refined background". The family's noble birth is established, (both with Maria de Purifacao and with the d'Albasini), but "sheltered and refined" are seen as feminine values, in opposition to the "adventurous spirit",

---

[46] Note that the family thought that Albasini was from a noble family, and the addition of a d' before the name indicates this. I have not found any other references to "d'Albasini".

[47] Script for dramatic sketch, Marie Eyssel papers.

with it's associations of manliness. It is this "adventurous spirit" which provides the motivation for going to Africa. The issue of commercial gain is ignored. Because his father and brother are shipwrecked, João will have to survive and succeed through his own initiatives.

The extent to which this places Albasini squarely within the adventure tradition is indicated by a general description of Imperial adventure literature which was included in a volume entitled *The Literature and the Art of Empire*. This was published in 1924 as part of a multi-volume work on the British Empire. The author describes books of this genre as:

> entrancing reminiscences or records of men who went forth from these islands as Pioneers to brave the perils of uncharted seas and the dangers of unknown lands, inspired more by the spirit of adventure inherent in the race, than by any calculated design for personal gain or lust for the acquisition of new territories.[48]

The resonances are obvious. Equally, the refusal of Albasini to be "restrained" and remain in his "sheltered and refined background" strongly echoes Rider Haggard's character, Allan Quatermain, who chafes at having to "coop himself in this prim English country, with its stiff formal manners, and it's well dressed crowds." He begins to "long .... for the keen breath of the desert air; he dreams of the sight of Zulu impis breaking on their foes like surf upon the rocks."[49]

The fact that Albasini is supposed to have made his way alone draws on the convention of the independent and self reliant hero who proves himself through his ability to survive in the bush, beyond the reaches of "civilization". This implies that his success is related to his inherent qualities rather than to his position within a social system. It expresses the idea that some men were natural leaders who would inevitably get to the top.[50] This is remarkably similar to the way in which the legend of John Ross was developed. According to the popular story, depicted in a television serial, John Ross was a runaway, who stowed away on a ship, and went on to achieve greatness in the South African popular imagination. Stephen Gray, however, points out that his father was Lieutenant Francis MacLean, of the

---

48 H. Gunn, *The Literature and the Art of the British Empire*, quoted in A. White, *op cit.*. page 4.

49 H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, London, 1995 (First published, London 1887), page 3. This is also quoted in W.R. Katz, *op cit.* page 31.

50 B.V. Street, *op cit.*. pages 132 - 133.

Royal Navy. He argues that he was well-educated and that the "notion that he pulled himself up by his bootstraps is untenable."[51]

This image of Albasini presented in the script relies on heroic language, the use of conventionalised imagery, and a number of oppositions. In order to sustain the image, a number of minor details have been forgotten. For example, both João Albasini and his father were employees of the Commercial Company at the time of the attack on Delagoa Bay, two years after their arrival in Africa. A comment made by Maria Biccard in her interview suggests that João's brother remained alive for rather longer than the dramatic sketch suggests: "João Albasini and his brother were two traders, the sons of a ship's captain, that had trading posts everywhere. The one brother was stationed in Mocambique, and João had the trading headquarters at Delagoa Bay."[52] These are very minor inaccuracies, yet they demonstrate the way in which memory appears to have been shaped by the conventionalised images of the hero. An eighteen-year-old alone in Africa is a hero in the way that a member of a family business, or a company employee, particularly one who is involved in schemes to attack the garrison, is not.

Once in Africa, according to the tradition, Albasini became known:

> not just as a good trader, but as a master marksman. Because he shot elephants for their ivory, hundreds of black people followed him on account of the meat.[53]

This paragraph is not necessarily factually inaccurate. Albasini did make his living from hunting and trading and there is no evidence that he wasn't a good marksman, but the sentence locks very directly into a popular image of the Great White hunter. As G. Lilford points out:

> A popular figure in the Southern African white male fantasy is that of the hunter. He is hiding in a tree or a kopje, accompanied by is faithful, though never trustworthy black companion ... He speaks fluently to his companion in an African language, usually an Nguni one, and his companion tells him little snippets of folk wisdom about killing elephants. Together they look out over a virgin African landscape, populated by huge herds of animals, no people. ... his real interest is the vanishing wildlife ... Here is individualism and competition at its purest ... He is depressed at the way people

---

51 S. Gray, "Introduction", in C.R. Maclean *op cit.* page 5.
52 Interview with Mrs Biccard, 1835, J.B de Vaal papers.
53 Script for dramatic sketch, Marie Eyssel papers.

> and progress have depleted his hunting fields and that weakness and negotiation have replaced his struggle for survival against mighty elephants and against the black people who refuse to accept his way of life.[54]

This image of the hunter had very little to do with hunting as an economic activity at the coast or in the Zoutpansberg at the time. For example, a contemporary of Albasini's, D. Fernandes das Neves, wrote a description of a hunting expedition to the Transvaal that he undertook in 1860. The expedition consisted of:

> 120 carriers, with bales of goods for trading with the Dutch; thirty with the merchandise proper for bartering for provender and provisions; three captains or guides for the carriers, seventeen hunters, sixty-eight negroes for transporting the necessary materials for the hunt, five carriers for my personal baggage, four servants, a second and third lieutenant in command, and four carriers for their separate use, in all mustering 253 men.[55]

In the course of the account, das Neves does not, himself, fire a single shot at an elephant, though he establishes his credentials as a marksman by felling a charging buffalo with a bullet between the eyes.[56] The actual shooting of elephants was done by the seventeen hunters, hired and armed by das Neves. Hunting was a business, not a sport.

Certainly, Albasini's hunting was run as a business, using professional commercial hunters that he had armed, with guns and ammunition. In the 1840's he was part of a entrepreneurial hunting company that used slaves as professional hunters.[57] In the early 1860's, in the Transvaal, a visitor estimated that Albasini maintained a force of about 700 hunters and over 100 guns.[58]

Having claimed Albasini as a hunter hero, the next major claim the 1988 Festival version makes is that he was chief of the Shangaans:

> João organized the Shangaans into a regiment and trained them in the art of warfare. As they were leaderless they requested that he

---

54 G. Lilford, *op cit.* page 5.

55 D. F. das Neves, *A Hunting Expedition to the Transvaal*, Pretoria, 1987, page 19.

56 *Ibid.* page 231.

57 A.H. Moç. Lourenço Marques, Corpo Notorial, Codice no. 5, Registo do Estabeleçimento da Soçiedade Hemrehendedora, fol. 28-30, J.B. de Vaal papers.

58 A.K. Murray in *De Zuid Afrikaan*, 28.1.1864, J. B. de Vaal papers.

> become their chief. Hence the inscription on his gravestone: In leven kaptein der Knopnosen.[59]

At this point, according to one version of the script: "10 or 12 Shangaans in their war regalia charge on stage and perform a brief war dance with shouts of Bayete! or something similar."

Later in the script, a similar point is repeated by a Shangaan voice:

> João is a legend amongst the Shangaans because he was the father of the Shangaans in the Transvaal. He was our great chief who made of us a nation. He would tolerate no cowardice and taught us to be trustworthy and disciplined.

Finally, in the three-voice finale, a Shangaan voice says: "We honour João Albasini because he bound us together as a nation."

These quotations consist of a web of interwoven images and assumptions, which, while stereotypical and racist, are very different from those of Maria Biccard's accounts. There are a number of issues here. Firstly, this is a very clear example of a belief in primordial ethnicity. In describing the Shangaans as "leaderless", this version implies that they are already a coherent group, short of a leader. This view sees ethnic groups as existing naturally, regardless of whether they have any political organisation or cultural coherence. If they don't have any coherence, then they are seen as a group that is scattered, that need a leader to restore them to their natural state as a "nation." While it was accurate that João was able to attract and maintain a following about him, this view imposes a false ethnic coherence on a group that had no linguistic unity and certainly no political unity. It also ignores the fact that he associated with only a small fraction of the people who would later be seen as a Tsonga/Shangaan ethnic group.[60]

The second issue is the claim that Albasini provided that leadership, but not simply as any leader, but as a chief. This is expanded on, both in the dramatic sketch and in the booklet. In the dramatic sketch the issue of his heir is developed:

> Antonio's first two children were girls and everybody was hoping that the third child would be a son (a successor to his son, Antonio).

---

[59] "In life, chief of the Shangaans."

[60] P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", pages 82 - 90.

> While Lettie, Antonio's wife, was in labour, all the Induna's sat in front of the house, enduring the suspense with João, who was pacing up and down the verandah. When the midwife called out to say that it was a son, João rushed into the room, grabbed the baby, wrapped him in a towel and showed him at the window. "When the head is not here anymore, who will then be your captain.[61]
>
> In answer all the Induna's shouted: "We see him! We see him!" With this they jumped up, threw their knobkerries in the air and gave the royal salute. In the hand of the little boy, as token of his succession, João put a brooch made from the first gold nugget found in Barberton and the first diamond from Kimberley brought to him by a Shangaan.[62]

In a slightly different version of the story, the symbolism of the first diamond and gold nugget is stressed:

> When any diamond or piece of gold was found by anyone, it had to go to the chief, so Albasini had a beautiful diamond from one of his Shangaans. He had had it made into a tie pin. He took the baby outside and put the tie pin in his hand and said to the Shangaans that were waiting outside, "When this head is gone, who will be your king?" and they went down on the ground, covered their faces, and said "We see him! We see him! Bayete!" This baby was João."[63]

Despite the differences in the two versions, both make the same point. They stress the point that the chieftainship should be inherited. What is striking here is that they make a strong attempt to do so in terms of an indigenous idiom.[64] This could not have been accommodated within the Biccard opposition between civilization and savagery. There, any portrayal of Albasini trying to use an indigenous idiom would have been interpreted as having degenerated into savagery, or "gone native".[65] This idea is pre-empted in the centenary booklet in the following description:

> He was not above using conjuring tricks and sleight of hand to impress the ignorant natives. Permanganate of Potash turned

---

61 An earlier version of the script used the word, chief. This is possibly a literal translation from the Afrikaans, *kaptein*.

62 Script of dramatic sketch.

63 Interview with M. Eyssel, 8.5.1993.

64 Note, also, that sections of the dramatic sketch were to be said in Shangaan.

65 See P. Brantlinger, op cit. pages 229-230 for a discussion of the theme of "white degeneration into savagery" in later Imperial fiction.

> water to blood at his touch. Throwing bones was beneath his dignity, and Shamukwanga, the witch doctor, was always on hand to predict and give Juwawa a lead in any difficult decisions.
>
> The little plant known as the "Kruidjie-roer-my-niet" by the Voortrekkers drew many a confession from a suspect, as this plant wilts when touched. The suspect was told that if innocent, the plant would remain healthy, whereas when touched by a man with guilt, it would wither. So great was their fear of this test that the mere mention of the "Kruidjie-roer-my-niet" precipitated a confession. No wonder, then, that Juwawa was venerated as a God and treated as one with supernatural powers.[66]

This use of "scientific knowledge" to advantage is a common theme in adventure literature. For example, in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, the white men's knowledge of a forthcoming eclipse of the sun convinces their enemies that they have supernatural powers, thus enabling them to escape.[67] Here, it allows Albasini to operate within an indigenous idiom, while remaining set apart as "rational" and "scientific".

The idea of the white chief in Africa had clearly captured the popular imagination. Numerous white men became chief in adventure literature. In Rider Haggard's novel *Heart of the World*, a white stranger and hero, Strickland, is accepted and asked to be ruler. The same happens to the hero, Curtis, in Zu-Vendiland in *Allan Quatermain*.[68] These examples reflect a myth of white travellers who would be accepted as kings or gods among "savages". Thus the three boys in *The Coral Island* by Ballantyne, expect to take over control of the native inhabitants, since "white men always do in savage countries".[69]

E.A. Ritter explains this in the following terms:

> One outstanding fact ... emerges and stands forth like a shining beacon above the haze of time and controversy, and that is that the White men had some dominant quality even when in rags which compelled the black man to regard them as superior ... It had nothing to do with sky-rockets or horses or fire-arms ... No! the root of the Europeans' superiority lay in his possession of *ubu-kosi*

---

66 João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813-1888", page 11.

67 H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, London, 1994 (First published, London, 1885), pages 157 - 173.

68 B.V. Street, *op cit.* page 45.

69 Quoted in B. Street, *op cit.* page 45.

> - the quality and air of chieftainship - for which only the Zulu language has a single word.[70]

Whites are depicted as inherently superior and therefore, naturally suited to rule. The value of this idea in justifying and normalising Imperialism is clear. Here, however, there is an unresolved conflict between the idea of Albasini becoming chief because of his innate superiority, and the idea of chieftainship presented in the story of João II's birth, which stresses that it is something that is inherited. The conflict appears to lie in the tension between trying to present Albasini as a "traditional" chief and seeing him as a chief in terms of the adventure tradition.

A third point that emerges from a comparison of the Biccard accounts with the centenary celebration ones is the fact that there has been a fundamental shift in the way in which blacks are represented. They are no longer savage hordes of barbarians, but are now loyal and disciplined, although needing a leader to make them so. This emphasis on drilling and discipline is strongly echoed in the centenary booklet. For example, the booklet states that:

> João was a strict disciplinarian ... and would not allow any haphazard raiding and looting. First of all he organized his hunters and safaris on strict military lines under Wamanungu, who was a member of the Shangaan Royal clan. [71]

This links in to a point made by C. Hamilton with reference to the portrayal of Shaka reflected in the writings of Theophilus Shepstone and Rider Haggard. She argues that Shepstone did not build up his narratives in terms of an opposition between the West, signifying "civilization", and "the Other", signifying "barbarism", but instead saw the Zulu kingdom under Shaka as representing order, in opposition to chaos, in Natal.[72] She argues that his interest in the idea of Shaka as representing a legitimate, strong central authority grew out of his attempts to understand and harness indigenous ideas of power and sovereignty for his own needs. In this context, his major concern was to develop an effective form of colonial administration that did not rely on either direct coercion or an extensive budget.[73] Shepstone's idea of the desirability of a strong, centralised authority,

---

[70] Quoted in D. Wylie, "A Dangerous Admiration: E.A. Ritter's Shaka Zulu", in *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, 1993, page 104, footnote 22.

[71] João Albasini III, João Albasini, 1813 - 1888", page 6.

[72] C. Hamilton, "Theophilus Shepstone and the making of Rider Haggard's Shaka", unpublished paper presented to the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 27 September 1995, page 3.

[73] *Ibid.* pages 1 - 2.

and his association of Shakan rule with discipline and order fed into the popular imagination through the works of Rider Haggard, who both admired, and was closely associated with Shepstone.[74] On the one hand, the Albasini family assert that it is Albasini who provides the discipline and order. On the other hand, the fact that they attempt to present this in terms of an indigenous idiom, suggests that they are also drawing on a more positive idea of chiefly rule. Here it appears that this relatively positive representation of chiefly rule that was developed with reference to a powerful Zulu Royal clan in a centralised kingdom, is being utilised in the representation of the fragmented and heterogeneous population of the Spelonken. Albasini's refugees have been reconstructed in terms of a popular image of "Zuluness".

There is, in fact, a strong tendency in these family representations to emphasise the idea of "Zuluness". For example, the frequent use of "Bayete" suggests an attempt to utilise an indigenous form, which at the same time has strong Zulu associations. Junod describes the word "Bayete" as being of Zulu origin, and refers to it as being used to extol the power of a chief as well as to express allegiance to him. He also mentions that there was a modern tendency to use the term more generally, and describes it as being used in addressing whites, or in acknowledging a gift from a superior.[75] The term is commonly used in the praises of Tsonga or Shangaan chiefs, particularly in the Mhala area,[76] where the Nguni influence is far stronger than in what was Albasini's Spelonken area. In the Spelonken area the majority of immigrants from the coastal region came from Northern clans, amongst whom the Nguni influence was far less strong.[77] While it is certainly possible that the term was used with reference to Albasini, its repeated use in the centenary celebration clearly brought a number of associations with it. Its use as part of the signature tune in the television version of Shaka Zulu, released in 1986, just two years before the celebration, meant not only that it would be immediately familiar to the majority of the audience, but that it would carry with it visual images of massed warriors and a powerful Zulu chief.

---

74 *Ibid.* especially pages 2 - 3.

75 H. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, Volume I, New York, 1962, page 373.

76 S.J. Malungana, "Vuphato: Praise poems in Tsonga", PhD thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1994, see especially pages 63 - 64, 144 - 145, 149 - 150, 153 - 155, 158 - 171 and 175 - 177.

77 Personal communication, Mr W.W.X. Nkuna, 31.5.1995.

The family also develops the links with "Zuluness" in the depiction of N'wa-Manungu, who forms a central figure in the booklet:

> A colourful figure during these years of battle and strife was Juwawa's Chief Battle Induna, Wamanungu wa Ndengeza. Although a younger son of Ngungunyane, and therefore in line for the throne, Wamanungu preferred to follow Juwawa's entourage with his cousin Pataka and many followers. The Zulu blood of his ancestors flowed freely in his veins and his impetuousness and bloodthirstiness caused Juwawa many a headache. Wamanungu just could not grasp that anybody could, and preferred to be, peace-loving. Fighting and raiding was the spice of life, and the peaceful Bapedis and lackadaisical Venda were women as far as he was concerned. Although a very poor strategist in war, Wamanungu's personal courage and ferocity compensated for this defect, and he became the ideal man to carry out Juwawa's strategies against the Venda and Pedis. Many a story, now a legend with the Shangaan, is told about this fiery warrior.[78]

This introduction of N'wa-Manungu is followed by six stories of military episodes in which N'wa-Manungu plays a central heroic role, and in which his exceptional courage and prowess in battle, as well as his devotion to João, are stressed.[79] The last of these is a story entitled "Makapaan's caves". This draws on a very similar sequence to the one used by Maria Biccard in her construction of "The siege of Makapansgat". It begins with Albasini sending N'wa-Manungu to Mokopane[80] to ascertain what is happening, as he feels the unrest in the area. Unlike in Mrs Biccard's version, he is not actually attacked. Mokopane is gloating over the murder of a group of whites at a river crossing. He notices N'wa-Manungu who does not appear impressed, and challenges him, asking him if it is true that he has forsaken the way of his fathers to follow one of the hated white men. N'wa-Manungu agrees, but argues that the white man is his accepted "Lord and Master" and a "King amongst Kings". Mokopane then challenges N'wa-Manungu to fight one of his warriors. N'wa-Manungu, instead fights and defeats three of his best fighters at once, thus enabling Albasini to be allowed to continue his journey in peace. This story is then sequelled by an account of the siege of Makapansgat, in which N'wa-Manungu retrieves Potgieter's body.[81]

---

78 João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888", page 12.

79 This structure has similarities to the one used in the oral tradition that deals with N'wa-Manungu discussed in the last chapter, but it is difficult to find other points of comparison.

80 Mokopane appears in the text as "Makapaan".

81 João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888", pages 23 - 25.

There are a number of points to make about this depiction of N'wa-Manungu. Firstly, the description of N'wa-Manungu as a son of Ngungunyane bears no correspondence to the accounts of N'wa-Manungu's descendants, which describe N'wa-Manungu as the son of a subsidiary chief, who offers allegiance to Manukosi, the Gaza king of two generations before Ngungunyana. These accounts suggest that N'wa-Manungu joined Albasini's household while Albasini was at Makashulaskraal in the 1840's.[82] The confusion over chronology with reference to Ngungunyana is repeated in a chapter entitled "The Shangaans", in which it is stated that Ngungunyana surrendered to the Portuguese in 1852 and that "the majority of the Shangaan tribe followed Juwawa to the Transvaal to seek protection against the Portuguese as well as to escape from the ravages of a land with no fixed government."[83] In fact, the Gaza kingdom was only defeated after 1897, and the movement of this group of refugees into the Transvaal occurred nearly a decade after his death. Here, the confusion in chronology allows this group to have acknowledged Albasini, allowing him to be portrayed as chief of all "the Shangaans". This group of refugees had adopted aspects of Gaza Nguni material culture to a far greater extent than the earlier immigrants. This emphasised the association with "Zuluness" again. This stress on the association of Albasini with Zulu offshoots has to be seen in the context of the position the Zulu held in the popular imagination as "the finest and bravest race in South Africa."[84]

Secondly, de Vaal refers to three outstanding personalities who were leaders under Albasini. According to him, N'wa-Manungu was often used as a messenger, and was a well-known hunter. De Vaal claims that it was Munene who led Albasini's military force, and associates him far more strongly than N'wa-Manungu with the Gaza, although he does refer to N'wa-Manungu's role in the Makapansgat campaign. The third person was called Josekulu and de Vaal refers to him and to N'wa-Manungu as being responsible for Albasini's cattle posts.[85]

---

82 Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.S. Siweya, place not given, 16.4.1979 and Interview with D. Siweya, at Ndengeza, 28.1.1991; see chapter 5.

83 João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888", page 6.

84 The description was used by Queen Victoria, quoted in C. Hamilton, "Theophilus Shepstone", page 11.

85 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 7 - 8.

It is not surprising that the family do not celebrate Munene in the memories, given his role in the conflicts with Albasini. Nevertheless, what appears to have happened here is that different personalities have become subsumed into the single stereotypical figure of the exceptional, trustworthy servant, who often serves as a critical foil for demoralised European society. The best known example of this stereotype is the character of Umslopogaas who occurs in a number of Rider Haggard novels. The resonances between the portrayal of N'wa-Manungu and Umslopogaas are striking. Umslopogaas is, like N'wa-Manungu: Royal, but does not wish to rule, Zulu, a warrior, exceptionally brave and exceptionally strong, devoted and trustworthy, and forced to leave matters of strategy to whites.[86]

This process of fictionalisation of Albasini and N'wa-Manungu needs to be seen in terms of the very blurred boundary between history and fiction within the genre itself. A. White argues that adventure fiction was so closely allied with the "factual" genre of travel writing that it came to be seen as a special case, with greater credibility than other fiction. It was not seen simply as entertainment, but as "part of the informational machinery of the day". Often, this idea was supported by the inclusion of footnotes, maps, explanatory prefaces and purported facsimile copies of documents in strange or "ancient" tongues and typescripts.[87] C. Hamilton points to the complex relationship between Haggard's experience as a colonial official in South Africa and his fiction. He himself commented with reference to *King Solomon's* Mines that: "It would be impossible for me to define where fact ends and fiction begins in the work, as the two are very much mixed up together." He pointed out that many readers took books like *King Solomon's Mines* to be true accounts.[88] In fact, an interesting slant on the intertwining of fact and fiction is given by the fact that it is very likely that Rider Haggard had heard of Albasini, and had possibly even met him. When Theophilus Shepstone, accompanied by Rider Haggard, annexed the South African Republic in 1877, he called on Albasini to meet him in Pretoria. Albasini did this, bringing with him a number of headmen and representatives of chiefs, who were instructed by Shepstone to regard Albasini as their chief.[89] While I argue that the family use many of the stereotypes of Rider Haggard's fiction in their representation of

---

[86] C. Hamilton, "Theophilus Shepstone", page 15 - 17 and W. Katz, *op cit.* pages 9 and 141.

[87] A. White, *op cit.* pages 41 - 42. See, for example, H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, pages 21, 22 and 240 and H. Rider Haggard, *She*, London, 1994 (First published, London, 1887), pages 38 - 51 and 174 .

[88] C. Hamilton, "Theophilus Shepstone", Pages 18 - 19, quotation page 19.

[89] M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, XXV/2.

Albasini, it is not impossible that Haggard used some of the "facts" of Albasini's story in his representation of his fictional characters.[90]

A number of points emerge from a comparison of the Biccard portrayal of Albasini with the Centenary celebration portrayal. Firstly, it is clear that the idea of a "tradition" being passed on different generations cannot be sustained. The idea of these accounts being memories structured through the social concerns and conventions of the time appears to be far more useful. Although they appear to share a body of stories, the selection and interpretation of these stories are different. However, while the content of their respective memories is very different, the process of remembering and forgetting appears to be very similar. Thus although Mrs Biccard was much closer to the time of the narrated events, and her reminiscences even include one first-hand account, her memories have been reconstructed within a social framework in the same way that the later "traditions" have.

Secondly, it is striking that this process of reconstructing memories continues in spite of the fact that the family members are literate, and have access to a body of written material, including an authoritative thesis whose author participated in the celebrations. The centenary celebration booklet contradicts de Vaal's thesis on a number of points. For example, the account of the events presented as leading to the Siege of Makapan appear in both the thesis and the booklet in contradictory form. There are two points that could account for this. One point made by Fentress and Wickham is that people use books as only one out of many sources for their representation of the past. They argue that while writing can be seen at one level to transform memory by fixing it, it often does not do so, and that this can be explained by the fact that shared memory tends to be communicated in the arena of the oral, through anecdote and gossip, with narrative patterns that can owe as much to oral as to literate tradition.[91]

It is also true that an academic study such as de Vaal's thesis does not necessarily have the authority outside the academic tradition that it would claim for itself. This is suggested by a polite disagreement that emerged at the centenary celebration. When thanking de Vaal and his brother for the contribution made by their research, Marie Eyssel took issue with a comment in de Vaal's thesis that the

---

90 Katz, *op cit.* page 67.
91 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 97.

inhabitants of Schoemansdal that stayed behind when the village was abandoned did so because they were too poor to have wagons, and therefore were unable to join the trek southwards. For Marie Eyssel this is important, for on it hangs the assertion that the group that stayed were heroes, who "preserved the Zoutpansberg for civilization", rather than simply people who lacked transport.[92] While the disagreement was presented in polite and tactful terms, it indicates that the thesis's authority is not seen as absolute. Marie Eyssel was clearly prepared to challenge it with her own knowledge of family stories. Her status as a member of the family, and her knowledge of these stories from her grandmother, confers an alternative authority to her oral knowledge.

Finally, arguing that the two sets of versions were structured by different genres begs the question of why those different genres were used. Here, my suggestions are largely speculative. Firstly, as I have already discussed, the differences in their personal circumstances may have made some genres more appropriate than others. Secondly, the different genres were not equally available in these two periods. While Mrs Biccard's accounts were recorded at the height of the period of construction and mobilisation of Afrikaner nationalist narratives of the Great Trek, the Centenary celebration took place in the 1980's when these narratives and images had far less symbolic power, except for the groups on the extreme Right.[93]

Conversely, the fact that both Marie Eyssel and João Albasini III were born in the second decade of the twentieth century and attended school in Pietersburg meant that it was likely that novels of the adventure tradition would have constituted a large proportion of their available reading material as children. Mrs Biccard, who was born in 1856 and educated at home by a Dutch tutor,[94] would have been extremely unlikely to have encountered even early examples of the British adventure tradition in her childhood.

Finally, although my stress on the differences between the two traditions has suggested that they exist in opposition to each other, this may be misleading. There are a number of immediately noticeable similarities. One of these is the

---

92 Notes for the centenary celebration, Marie Eyssel papers.

93 For a discussion of the lack-lustre nature of the official celebrations of the 150th Anniversary of the Great Trek in 1988, and the reasons for it, see A. Grundlingh and H Sapire, "From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual", pages 27 - 37.

94 Interview with Mrs Biccard, J.B. de Vaal papers.

opposition between individualised white heroes and largely homogenised black masses.[95] Another is the opposition between Civilization/Light and Darkness/Barbarism that occurs both in both Preller's narratives and much Imperial travel writing and adventure fiction. These similarities pose the interesting question, which lies outside the scope of this thesis, of the extent to which Preller drew on existing conventions of Colonial fiction in developing his own narratives.

---

[95] See A. White, *op cit.* page 40 for a discussion of the presentation of the "homogenized, dehistoricized Other"; See also D Golan, *op cit.* page 104, for her comments on how, with the exception of royalty, blacks are always depicted in groups or masses.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 2
J.B. DE VAAL AND THE NATIONALIST TRADITION

In 1947 J.B. de Vaal completed his PhD thesis on Albasini. He received his doctorate with distinction in 1950 and three years later the thesis was published in the *Archives Yearbook for South African History*. The thesis's acceptance and publication takes the memory of Albasini out of the realm of stories and family memories. It gives de Vaal's image of Albasini status as Professionally established fact, and turns Albasini into an historical figure of note in the history of the Transvaal.

De Vaal's thesis is thorough and detailed, written in Afrikaans in an objective, measured academic style. Entitled *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal*, it focuses on the period when Albasini was living in the Transvaal, touching only briefly on the period he spent in Mozambique and making no mention of his Mozambican family. Through the thesis, de Vaal successfully established a predominantly positive image of Albasini as a historical figure. At the same time, he succeeded in placing him within an already established narrative of Voortrekker Transvaal history. Opposite the title page of the published thesis is a photograph of Albasini, sitting stiffly upright in the uniform of an officer of the Portuguese navy. [See Illustration.] This picture shows Albasini as white, dignified, serious, far-sighted and official. Through de Vaal, it has become part of Voortrekker history in the Transvaal. It appears, for example, in the Schoemansdal Museum near Louis Trichardt as part of the display on Schoemansdal, the northernmost Voortrekker *dorp*, as well as in the display in the Pietersburg Museum. It seems that De Vaal's thesis has successfully created Albasini as a Voortrekker by association.

The extent to which this image was de Vaal's creation becomes clear when it is compared to the published material on Albasini that existed before de Vaal's work. A survey of de Vaal's bibliography indicates that most of the information on Albasini available before de Vaal's thesis occurred not in academic work, but in more popular publications such as books or articles dealing with the reminiscences of local personalities or histories of the area. These include, for example, J. Stevenson-Hamilton's, *The Low-veld: Its wild life and its people* and Harry Wolhunter's *Memories of a Game Ranger*.[1] An entire article on Albasini by the

---

[1] J. Stevenson-Hamilton, *The Low-veld: Its wild life and its people*, London, 1929 (Second Edition, 1934) and H. Wolhunter, *Memoirs of a Game Ranger*,

journalist, Harry Klein, appeared in *Die Brandwag*[2] ("The Sentinel") and B.H. Dicke devotes a large part of a chapter of *The Bush Speaks* to him and to the struggle of his family to retain the chieftainship.[3]

ILLUSTRATION
João Albasini
[Source: J.B. de Vaal *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1953, opposite title page.]

Johannesburg, 1948.

2 H. Klein, "Die Wit Opperhoof Van die Sjangaans" in *Die Brandwag*, 8 July 1938, pages 8, 9 and 43.

3 B.H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks, Border Life in the Old Transvaal*, Second Edition, Pietermaritzburg, 1937, pages 19 - 40.

journalist, Harry Klein, appeared in *Die Brandwag*[2] ("The Sentinel") and B.H. Dicke devotes a large part of a chapter of *The Bush Speaks* to him and to the struggle of his family to retain the chieftainship.[3]

ILLUSTRATION
João Albasini
[Source: J.B. de Vaal *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1953, opposite title page.]

Johannesburg, 1948.

2 H. Klein, "Die Wit Opperhoof Van die Sjangaans" in *Die Brandwag*, 8 July 1938, pages 8, 9 and 43.

3 B.H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks, Border Life in the Old Transvaal*, Second Edition, Pietermaritzburg, 1937, pages 19 - 40.

These books focus on the history of the area in terms that are strikingly reminiscent of the adventure tradition. They are interested in Albasini primarily as a "colourful character". In fact, Harry Wolhunter introduces Albasini in the following terms:

> The natives informed me that "Jowawa" became chief over a large following, whom he assisted and protected against the Swazi raiders; and he was evidently a type who might easily have walked out of the colourful and adventurous pages of some of the late Sir Rider Haggard's African Romances.[4]

Wolhunter also appears to be the author of the two-part *Star* article discussed in the previous chapter. Both the article and the book refer to an interview with an elderly women, Lya, who had been captured as a child, sold to Albasini and had grown up in his household.[5]

Stevenson-Hamilton introduces Albasini as a hunter, as the first white man to live in the Lowveld, and as a chief, all expressed in a fairly exaggerated form. For, example, he says that it is probable that Albasini and his hunters are to blame for the "final extinction" of the elephant and white rhinoceros from the Lowveld south of the Olifants River, which would become the future Sabi game reserve.[6] He describes his "irrigated fields" and "substantial brick house" in the eastern Transvaal in terms that present an image of Albasini "taming" the bush, and describes him as chief over "a large group of refugees".[7]

Dicke, who was a local trader, farmer and historian, who contributed to journals such as the South African Journal of Science,[8] and had work published in the *Archives Year Book for South African History*[9] as well as writing his more popular *The Bush Speaks*, provides by far the most detail. He places Albasini in the context of the existing trade routes to the coast, giving some detail of how these routes operated. He then presents Albasini as a chief, seeing it as resulting from the need to protect and organise the trade and making explicit the

---

4 H. Wolhunter, *op cit.* page 247.
5 *Ibid.* page 248.
6 J. Stevenson-Hamilton, *op cit.* pages 61 - 62.
7 *Ibid.* page 175.
8 See, for example, B.H. Dicke, "The first Voortrekkers to the Northern Transvaal and the Massacre of the van Rensburg Trek", in *South African Journal of Science*, Vol XXIII, pages 1006 - 1021.
9 B.H. Dicke, *The Northern Transvaal Voortrekkers.*

assumptions that are implicit in the "white man as chief" theme of the adventure tradition:

> It stands to reason that where a white man was interested he would, due to his greater resourcefulness and courage, soon acquire the lead. Troubles existing or brewing would be reported to him and his help or advice would be sought. Before long he would be given, and would assume, the position of a commander-in-chief. He would, as a matter of fact, become a chief.[10]

He says that Albasini's influence increased steadily as more people sought his protection, but argues that once he became native commissioner he deliberately used his position to extend his influence aspiring "to the paramount-chieftainship of all the Magwamba living in the Northern Transvaal."[11] He then discusses in some detail the fact that a number of chiefs resisted Albasini's attempts to assert authority over them. This is by far the most detailed and interesting treatment of the Albasini-as-chief theme in these sources.

Dicke dismisses the accusations that Albasini cheated on his tax accounting:

> The old Transvaal government had not been quite satisfied with the amount of monies received from Albasini for taxes collected from the natives (there always were those at court, in Pretoria, who envied other people's positions, positions which they could not have created themselves, and who kept on hinting at this or that with the object of causing trouble and fishing in muddy waters). Never was any proof advanced that Albasini diverted any government money to his own use, or that he did not fully account for what he had collected. On the contrary, if João Albasini had possessed a better knowledge of bookkeeping he could easily have shown that the government was heavily indebted to him. For more than twenty years he had fought the government's battles in the North, had kept the country in order as well as the circumstances permitted.[12]

Finally, he deals with the struggle between Schiel and the Albasini family over what became of Albasini's chieftainship in terms that support Albasini's family and present Schiel as manipulative and dishonest. He implies, that corruption played a

---

[10] B.H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks*, page 22.
[11] *Ibid.* page 24.
[12] *Ibid.* page 26.

major role in the outcome of this struggle.[13] This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Finally, in 1838, Harry Klein published an article entitled "The White Chief of the Shangaans" in *Die Brandwag*. This article contains an insert stating that all facts and sources in the article have been substantiated in the state archives in Pretoria. This is an unlikely assertion as much of the article appears to be based on the information included in Stevenson-Hamilton and Wolhunter's books, even to the comment that the story of his life seems more like one of Rider Haggard or John Buchan's stories than a story of the difficulties and trials of frontier life.[14] Klein describes meeting João Albasini (II) one evening when travelling through the Lowveld and it seems clear that the rest of the article is based on family traditions, as it closely follows many of the themes that would be developed in the centenary celebration. It makes much of the idea that Albasini's father was forced to flee from Italy, resulting in João being born in Portugal, introducing João Albasini in the following terms:

> Little did the father know as he looked at the baby in his arms, that his son, as a result of his [Antonio's] flight to Portugal and the contacts that he established with the Portuguese, would one day be the chief of a war-like kaffer tribe in far away Africa.[15]

The article asserts that he was an officer in the Portuguese navy and that he was shipwrecked off the east coast of Africa. According to this, he and the other survivors made their way to Lourenço Marques, where he became a trader. He moved into the Lowveld where he was not only the first white man to settle, but also better known than anybody since. He comments that there is no truth in the stories that he moved into the Transvaal with a following of hundreds of slaves. These are the two themes that structure the account: Firstly, João is the white chief of a warrior tribe, built up from the refugees from "Manukosi's Zulu hordes who had laid to waste anything that lay in the path of their plundering."[16] Secondly, he is the white pioneer in Africa.

In general, therefore, this body of literature focuses strongly on the aspects of Albasini's story that resonate with the themes of the adventure tradition: he is a

---

13 Ibid. pages 29 - 38.
14 H. Klein, *op cit.* page 8.
15 *Ibid.*
16 *Ibid.*

white chief, a trader and hunter, and a pioneer into the African bush. With the exception of Harry Klein's denial, there is no mention of slavery. This is in contrast to the "serious histories" which associate Albasini strongly with the slave trade, and which place him within the narrative of the withdrawal of the Boer community from the Zoutpansberg.

Theal deals in some detail with Albasini in his *History of South Africa*. Although he does not make any very clear specific accusations, he associates him strongly with the idea of an anarchic, lawless frontier. For example, he describes the Zoutpansberg community in these terms:

> In 1864 the white inhabitants of the district of Zoutpansberg were the most lawless of their colour in all South Africa. There were indeed many respectable well-behaved people residing on farms, but on the frontier there had assembled a large number of fugitives from justice, of almost every European nationality, as well as degraded offshoots of old colonial families. These men, whose manner of living was in many respects even more savage than that of the blacks, were Professedly traders and hunters but did not scruple to follow the calling of robbers when there was any plunder within reach.[17]

He introduces Albasini as having control over several clans of Magwamba, as engaged in the ivory trade, Vice Consul of Portugal and Superintendent of all the blacks in the district of Zoutpansberg. He gives an account of the events surrounding the succession dispute between Davhana and Makhado, with Davhana claiming protection from Albasini, as well as of the events surrounding Mzila's demand for the return of Munene, his escape and the attempts to recapture him. He refers to Munene as "giving a great deal of trouble by his turbulent conduct",[18] which means that Albasini's image is not seriously tarnished by his conflict with Munene, and the accusations that came out of it. He does refer to atrocities committed by Albasini's forces in the search for Munene, but does not really attribute blame to Albasini in this, as it is implied that Albasini did not accompany them.[19] He refers to the court case in which three Zoutpansberg officials were found guilty of misconduct, but where the court proceedings were interrupted by an angry crowd, and implies that it was the anarchy prevailing in Zoutpansberg that led Kruger to withdraw from the Zoutpansberg, but he appears not to realise

---

17 G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, Volume 8 (facsimile), Cape Town, 1964, page 476.

18 *Ibid.* page 480.

19 *Ibid.* page 483.

that Albasini was one of the accused in this case. He makes two directly negative statements about Albasini. The first is that when Schoeman was given authority over people who had previously been subject to Albasini, they "expressed much gratification".[20] The second statement is to the effect that when, in 1868, the government caused Albasini and the *Landdrost*, Vercueil to be prosecuted for the part he had played in the war, the case was thoroughly examined, but the defendants escaped punishment "through some technical defects".[21] This is the most damaging statement, with its clear implication of guilt, but it is not made clear exactly what he was guilty of. It comes at the end of the account of events, which means that it concludes the account with a strongly negative image of Albasini.

In the 1928 edition of *A History of South Africa*, Eric Walker, who held the Cape Town chair of history, follows Theal closely in his association of Albasini with frontier lawlessness. He writes:

> Meanwhile in the Zoutpansberg, some Europeans lived as savagely as the tribes; the half-breed sons of the notorious Coenraad Buis ruled Baramapulana clans in the mountains which were fast filling with natives fleeing from the Matabele, and João Albasini combined the offices of trader, chief of a Knobnose clan, blackbirder, Portuguese consul and general mischief-maker. These men and others sent out elephant-hunting parties of blacks from Schoemansdal, and naturally the blacks became good shots and kept their guns.[22]

He deals with the accusations of slavery against the Transvaal Republic, and discusses the fact that the Slave Trade Commissioner acquitted the Boers as a body, but that they argued that it did exist in the Zoutpansberg where the Boers were in touch with "the slave-trading Portuguese". His account of the events leading to the retreat from Schoemansdal follows Theal fairly closely. Like Theal, he ends his account with the dismissal of Albasini, and the investigation into the charges against him stating that "black stories came out but the charges broke down on exceptions".[23]

---

[20] *Ibid.* page 489.
[21] *Ibid.* page 491.
[22] E. Walker, *A History of South Africa*, London, 1928, page 287.
[23] *Ibid.* page 325.

In the same year as Walker's *History*, Agar-Hamilton, a lecturer at the Transvaal University College, brought out his *The Native Policy of the Voortrekkers 1836 - 1858*, in which he strongly associates Albasini with slavery. Firstly, he introduces Albasini as chief in a fairly dismissive sentence:

> It was not unusual in the early days of expansion in South Africa for a white man to place himself at the head of a few native families and to be acknowledged as their chief. The establishments of Biggar and Dunn at Port Natal were of this nature, as were those of Albassini and the Buijs family in the interior ...
>
> The "country beyond the Berg", the "Low Country" of the present day, still contains a large native population, whose ancestors were harried by Buijs, Albassini and the Portuguese Slave dealers.[24]

In the chapter where he discusses the Apprenticeship question and the extent to which it represented slavery, Albasini is mentioned a number of times. Firstly he is mentioned in connection with a report that "Chief Makashoel", described as one of Albasini's dependants, raided a small group and carried off fifty-three children as well as a number of cattle.[25] He quotes the evidence of a farmer who described meeting Albasini on the way to Ohrigstad. "he had two wagons with merchandise, powder and lead ... He has a black interpreter and a few slaves - young boys - I cannot say how many." Tredoux said that he had heard from many of the Boers that they dealt in slaves with the Portuguese, and that Albasini had offered him a slave for 15 pounds.[26]

His argument is that the South African Republic genuinely attempted to prevent a system of slavery, and to control the apprenticeship system so that it didn't develop into slavery, but that it was nevertheless easy for unscrupulous people like Albasini to evade the law. In his appendix, he gives prominence to a long quotation from a pamphlet, *To Ophir Direct*, by "Bamangwato", probably a trader, Hartley, in which Albasini is accused of double dealing, manipulating events to lead to the closure of the hunting grounds to the Boers, while continuing to secretly trade through Delagoa Bay, himself. Agar-Hamilton's own evaluation of Albasini is that there is other evidence to confirm that "Albasini's policy was deliberately contrary to the interests of the Boer population." The other evidence referred to is based on the evidence of F.W. Chesson in *The Dutch Boers and*

---

24 J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, *op cit.* pages 75-76.
25 *Ibid.* page 183.
26 *Ibid.* page 191.

Slavery in the Transvaal Republic. This was a pamphlet written in the form of a letter to the Treasurer of the Aborigines' Protection Society, which de Vaal dismisses as being inaccurate and having been written for the purposes of discrediting the Boers.[27]

While these English language publications give a negative picture of Albasini, the references in the Afrikaans published histories are simply fragmentary. For example, Preller's *Voortrekkermense*, III and IV includes a single paragraph on Albasini, who is described as a trader in Ohrigstad who married a van Rensburg and moved to Schoemansdal where he laid out a farm near Piesanghoek. He was "mixed up" with the Magwamba in Mozambique and later collected them together in the Zoutpansberg. Finally, he is described as a "Portuguese consular representative, who made the Knobnoses pay *opgaaf* to himself and provided himself with a glittering uniform, with gold and silver trimmings."[28]

D.W. Krüger's *Die Weg na die See*, in the first Archives Year Book for South African History,[29] mentions Albasini briefly, introducing him as one of the Portuguese traders, who would later become well-known.[30] He mentions him with in connection with the attempts of the Ohrigstad community to find a safe route to Delagoa Bay, and refers to the fact that he often translated correspondence with Delagoa Bay for the Boer community,[31] but he makes no attempts to give any information about him that does not directly impinge upon the Boer community.

T.S. van Rooyen's thesis, on the relationship between Boers, English and blacks in the Eastern Transvaal, which might have been expected to refer to Albasini, mentions him only once, in connection with the post of Superintendent, which he held in the Zoutpansberg.[32]

This lack of interest in Albasini can partially be explained by the fact that he appears to have been seen as an outsider, and therefore not relevant to the general narrative. However, more importantly it appears that the lack of material on

---

27 *Ibid.* page 216 and J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 149.
28 G.S. Preller, *Voortrekkermense* III and IV, Melville, 1988 (facsimile), page 11.
29 D.W. Krüger, *Die Weg na die See*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Volume 1, Part I, Pretoria, 1938.
30 *Ibid.* page 96.
31 *Ibid.* pages 102 and 104, for example.
32 T.S. van Rooyen, *op cit.* page 192.

Albasini is related to the general lack of attention paid to the Zoutpansberg by historians. The lack of heroism in the history of the Zoutpansberg appears to have made it unattractive to researchers, and by the time of de Vaal's research, there was no thesis equivalent to van Rooyen's on the Zoutpansberg.

In researching Albasini and the events surrounding the retreat from the Zoutpansberg, therefore, de Vaal was breaking new ground. His close association of Albasini with the Voortrekkers was completely new, and, as mentioned above, was very successful. Yet, in many respects, the thesis contains contradictions. While Albasini is closely associated with the Voortrekkers on the one hand,[33] on the other hand, his involvement in slaving is explained away because he was Portuguese, and slaving was still an acceptable practice amongst the Portuguese.[34] Blacks are alternatively depicted as faceless hordes of barbarians[35] or as political actors,[36] with de Vaal drawing on a variety of sources, including oral traditions, to understand Albasini in a context both black and white. Even in his notes of thanks at the beginning of the thesis, there are contradictions. Here De Vaal acknowledges his debt to both his promoter, C.J. Uys and his first history lecturer, Professor Engelbrecht, two men who were, academically at least, not on speaking terms with each other.[37]

What this chapter looks at is the way in which de Vaal's thesis creates an image of Albasini in an academic context. To do this, I start by looking in detail at the introduction of the published thesis, in which de Vaal spells out his understanding of Albasini's significance as a historical figure, as well as his own aims in doing the study. I then look at the context of the study, focusing in more detail at de Vaal himself, his interest in Albasini, his sources, his topic, and the context in which he was writing.

---

33 See, for example, the introduction, which is discussed below.

34 See Chapter XVI, pages 125 and 128.

35 See the introduction, the description of the attack on Delagoa Bay on page 5, the description of the Swazi slave raid on page 8, the van Rensburg and the laager episode on page 17, the Makapansgat description on page 21, descriptions of Mawewe on pages 58 - 59 and the description of ritual cannibalism on page 75.

36 See, for example, Chapter IX.

37 Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk Archives (NHKA), Pretoria: S.P. Engelbrecht Collection, File 2/7 Uys. This file consists mainly of correspondence between Uys and Engelbrecht.

There are two elements that emerge strongly in the introduction of the published thesis. The first of these is the way in which the sketch of Albasini places him within an already established narrative of Voortrekker history. The second theme that is woven through the introduction is the claim to scientific status, both in his emphasis on primary documentary sources and his claims to objectivity.

The introduction opens with the following paragraph:

> When the Transvaal pioneers[38] were still in their infancy, without access to a harbour on the coast, a young Portuguese trader and big-game hunter carried a torch in amongst them and caused the light of the outside world to fall upon them, with the aim of wresting them from the British economic stranglehold. With the exception of Paul Kruger, the illustrious last President of the South African Republic, nobody made more strenuous efforts than the bold[39] Portuguese Vice-Consul João Albasini to break the political and economic noose around the Boer state, so that it could achieve a worthy place in the list of independent states.[40]

This sets the scene: a fledgling *Boerestaat* is fighting to escape the grip of British imperialism. Albasini is a key player in this struggle, prefiguring Paul Kruger, the prominent Afrikaner folk hero.

The paragraph continues:

> Alas, he lived too soon - he was too far ahead of his time. He himself would not reap or enjoy the fruits of his labour - later generations would experience the benefits.[41]

This imbues Albasini's life with an element of heroic tragedy: he was far-sighted and too far ahead of his time. It provides a way of seeing him which elevates him above the political wrangling and accusations against him that de Vaal describes in detail in the later chapters of the thesis.

De Vaal and his study are then introduced:

---

38 The word used in the original Afrikaans text was *Baanbrekers*, which could also be translated as "trail-blazers".

39 The Afrikaans word *kranige* may be translated as bold, dashing, smart or crack.

40 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page not numbered (Introduction).

41 *Ibid.*

> and, if his voluminous letter-book had not recently been discovered, the romantic figure of Albasini would have disappeared into oblivion.[42]

The letter book, which is presented here as the key to de Vaal's study, was a ledger of copies of all the correspondence that Albasini had written in his capacity as Portuguese Vice-consul. In 1935 this was in the possession of Mrs Biccard, one of Albasini's surviving daughters. Several historians before de Vaal had tried unsuccessfully to borrow the book.[43] In 1946, however, she agreed to give de Vaal, who was connected with the family, access to it. According to Marie Eyssel, this was on condition he agreed not to mention Albasini's Mozambican family.[44] With some difficulty, de Vaal raised the money to get the Portuguese letters (about two-thirds of the book) translated.[45] He was undoubtedly proud of his achievement. It meant that his thesis was based not only on original research, but on previously inaccessible documentary sources.

The introduction continues, with a new paragraph:

> From his letters, from archival sources, and from the mouths of relatives and several elderly Knobnose-Kaffirs[46] whose fathers served under him, João Albasini could come to light as a heroic figure in the emerging history of the Transvaal.[47]

This sentence is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the phrase describing Albasini as "a heroic figure in the emerging history of the Transvaal" is perhaps the most cogent summary of the image that the introduction is presenting. Secondly, the metaphor of Albasini as a hero coming directly from the sources expresses the ideal of the objective historian. It is not de Vaal's interpretation that declares him a hero, but the sources themselves. This is central to de Vaal's presentation of himself as an objective, Professional historian, whose skill lies in uncovering the facts and allowing them to speak for themselves. Lastly, the fact that de Vaal

---

42 *Ibid.*

43 J.B. de Vaal, *João Albasini (1813-1888)*, page 2.

44 Interview with M. Eyssel, 8.5.1993.

45 Copy of letter, written by J.B. de Vaal, describing the discovery of the letter book, De Vaal papers, University of Venda. The copy is undated, and no record of the receiver is included.

46 I have decided to translate *kaffers* as "kaffirs". De Vaal's use of this term needs to be seen in the context of his times.

47 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page not numbered (Introduction).

acknowledges his use not only of oral sources, but of the oral testimony of black people, introduces a jarring note, that will be discussed further below.

De Vaal then very briefly mentions that Albasini was important historically as a "link" between the Portuguese, the Boers and the British, that his correspondence throws light on the "ethnic history of the Bantu tribes in the Northern Transvaal and in Portuguese East Africa" and that he was the first Portuguese to trade with the Boers of Andries Ohrigstad. He continues:

> Through his marriage with a daughter of the Voortrekkers and his settling among the Boers, he became a Transvaler who identified himself with their interests.[48]

Here he is explicitly making Albasini "a Transvaler". He then reaches what is the climax of his summary:

> When Schoemansdal was eventually evacuated and fell prey to the barbarians, Albasini protected about twenty people in the fort [*skans*] on his farm *Goedewensch* and prevented the almost depopulated area from being lost to the whites.[49]

For de Vaal, as for Albasini's South African family, this is the key to Albasini's story. It is the image that establishes him as a hero. His achievement is presented in terms of the survival of a small group of whites, in the face of overwhelming numbers of hostile blacks. The conflict is presented in terms of an historical genre which contrasts white civilization and black barbarism. Albasini's battles from his fortress are presented as a heroic episode in the establishment of white civilization in the interior.

However, this had not been recognised. De Vaal continues:

> Yet, his work was misjudged by his contemporaries and, until now, even by historians. In this study, no conscious effort is made to place him in a favourable light. The information now made available frees Albasini from many accusations, although he does not always appear in a spotless light.[50]

The metaphor of the sources directly declaring Albasini not guilty is continued. De Vaal is presenting his study as being based on objective scrutiny of the sources.

---

48 *Ibid.*
49 *Ibid.*
50 *Ibid.*

In this, as well as in his objective, measured style of writing, de Vaal is claiming not simply to have rescued Albasini from obscurity and misrepresentation, but to have done so as a Professional.

He concludes the paragraph: "He was upright in his dealings with the Transvaal government and, in all his work, attempted to look after their interests."[51]

This is another crucial conclusion, as it is a way of seeing Albasini, which can gloss over the bitter divisions and in-fighting between him and members of the Schoemansdal community. The Voortrekkers are represented not by the Schoemansdallers, but by the Transvaal authorities, who will be repeatedly portrayed by de Vaal as continuing to put their trust in Albasini.

The introduction then changes pace and focus as De Vaal returns to the theme of Mrs Biccard and the letter book:

> In the light of all the untruths about Albasini that have been made in the past - he has even been labelled as a *baster* [half-caste] - the researcher can sympathise with his daughter, the widow Mrs Bickard of Pietersburg, who has resolutely refused to supply information about her father.[52]

What follows is a lengthy quotation from Mrs Biccard in which she complains that she does not wish to talk about the past as her father had made great sacrifices, and had been repaid with ingratitude, and that if the truth were known, few would believe it. Nevertheless, she eventually told him "many interesting facts".[53]

Finally, in ending off, de Vaal explains that, as the thesis deals with: "a person who did not dominate his times but gave [them] tone and directions", he has given attention to people and events around Albasini, including the: "native tribes with whom both Albasini and the Voortrekkers came into contact", particularly in the earlier chapters, rather than focusing on Albasini alone.[54]

He ends off the introduction with the following paragraph:

---

51 *Ibid.*
52 *Ibid.*
53 *Ibid.*
54 *Ibid.*

> It is undoubtedly a gap in our historiography that the lives and aspirations of the ordinary citizen enjoy so little attention - history is only too eagerly sought in the parliamentary buildings, on the battle-fields and in handsome royal palaces. Through Albasini, the life of the ordinary *boer*[55] and pioneer in this stormy period is represented.[56]

It is slightly jarring to see de Vaal describe Albasini as "an ordinary *boer* and pioneer" in view of the rather more heroic language and imagery of the first part of the introduction. The use of the word *pioneer* is important, echoing the use of *Baanbrekers* in the opening paragraph. The Voortrekkers were pioneers. The term Voortrekker is exclusive, however, whereas to describe them as pioneers encompasses Albasini much more easily.

The concluding paragraph ends with the words:

> It is not a grand subject, but it should, in a limited way, contribute towards the understanding of the genesis and growth of the South African Republic and the cultural history of the Afrikaner.[57]

De Vaal's stated intention is, therefore to place Albasini within a wider narrative, that of the "genesis and growth of the South African Republic and the cultural history of the Afrikaner." This was a narrative that, by the thirties and forties had already been established, with its own sequence, its own key images, and meanings, both within and without the universities.

The *volksgeskiedenis* that was discussed in the previous chapter had not only been established in the popular imagination by the 1930's and 1940's but had also gained a strong hold in the Universities. As well as producing an enthusiastic popular response, the Great Trek Centenary Celebrations resulted in a rush of postgraduate studies dealing with minute details of the Great Trek in the Universities.[58]

Grundlingh argues that this marriage of a popular *volksgeskiedenis* with a claim to scientific status was central to the Afrikaner academic historical tradition which

---

55 The term is used here in a way that implies "Boer farmer".

56 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page not numbered (Introduction).

57 *Ibid.*

58 K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, Johannesburg, 1988, page 70.

developed from the early part of the century, and which gained its impetus largely from Stellenbosch.[59] This needs to be seen in the context of the professionalisation of history in South Africa in the early part of the twentieth century. This was closely tied to the creation and development of higher education in the country. By the turn of the century, three University colleges existed, namely, the South African College in Cape Town, Victoria College in Stellenbosch and the University of South Africa. In the first decade of the century, a number of institutions throughout the country began to offer some form of tertiary education. These included, for example, the Rhodes University College, which was founded in 1904; the Transvaal University College, which developed out of the School of Mines; and a Theological College which was moved to Potchefstroom in 1905. In 1910 the Natal University College was founded, at the same time as the Grey University College in Bloemfontein.[60]

History was not initially established as an independent discipline at all these tertiary institutions. The first two Institutions to establish separate chairs of History were the South African College and Victoria College. The Prince of Wales Chair of History was established at the South African College in 1902, "because of the concern expressed during the South African War that the study of history be put on a sound footing at a time when Theal's work was criticised as pro-Boer." The first generation of historians thus had a very pro-British approach.[61] At Stellenbosch, a chair in History was first established in 1904, when a Stellenbosch family donated enough money for its establishment. Previously, history had been taught under the Department of Classics and under the department of Modern Languages.[62]

In 1916, provision was made in the Statutes for three Universities in the country. The South African College would become the University of Cape Town, the Victoria College would become the University of Stellenbosch (in 1918), and the University of South Africa, would become an examining body incorporating the remaining University Colleges and the School of Mines. In the period up until the

---

59 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 1.

60 F.A. van Jaarsveld, "Geskiedenis van die Departement Geskiedenis, Universiteit van Stellenbosch, 1866 - 1979", in F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaner se Groot Trek na die Stede en ander opstelle*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1982, pages 228 - 231.

61 C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major historians on race and class*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988, page 42.

62 F.A. van Jaarsveld, "Geskiedenis van die Departement Geskiedenis", page 233.

1950's, the University Colleges gradually gained status as independent Universities; a process that, in the case of the Transvaal University College and the University College of the Orange Free State, was closely tied to their struggle to transform themselves into Afrikaner institutions.[63] In attempting to do this, Stellenbosch was seen as the model. It had been an Afrikaans University from the time of its establishment as an autonomous University in 1918. Its Council represented the Afrikaans community, and from this early period it attempted to promote "Afrikaner ideals and culture". Stellenbosch played an enormously important role in establishing an Afrikaner Academic historical tradition. The first generation of academics to staff its history department were drawn from overseas.

The first generation of University academics at Stellenbosch were generally drawn from the Netherlands and Belgium. In 1904, the Chair of History was given to a Dutch historian, Prof. E.C. Godée Molsbergen, who had studied in Leiden under P.J Blok, who had worked extensively on the social history of the Dutch Nation [*volk*].[64] Molsbergen returned to Holland at the end of 1910 and was succeeded in the following year by Blommaert, a Belgian historian who had studied under Henri Pirenne, the famous Medieval historian who emphasised a social and economic viewpoint, and had written a national history of Belgium. Blommaert was offered a chair in history at the University of Gent, but chose instead to come to Stellenbosch in order to involve himself in the Afrikaners language struggle.[65] According to van Jaarsveld:

> The foundations of the writing of scientific history in Afrikaans were thus laid by two foreign historians of similar extraction who both drew on a tradition of realistic social or *volksgeskiedenis*.[66]

Many of the second generation of historians who would staff the Universities in the 1930's and 1940's spent their undergraduate years at Stellenbosch, but spent at least some of their years of postgraduate study in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany. They were strongly influenced by Rankean ideas of "the principles of scientific history", and, they in turn, returned as "Professionals" ready to inculcate these ideas into their students. From Stellenbosch, their influence spread, both in the sense that Stellenbosch became an model for other

---

63 *Ibid.* page 230.
64 *Ibid.* pages 229 and 233 - 235.
65 *Ibid.* page 235.
66 *Ibid.* page 229.

aspirant Afrikaner universities to emulate, and in the sense that Stellenbosch graduates would play an important role in staffing other Afrikaans Universities.[67]

Stellenbosch was proud of having laid the foundations of a "new tradition in South Africa of thorough archival research and objective, critical judgement of the facts."[68] In general, the emphasis was on empirical and documentary history, and from the time of the Public Archives Act of 1922, which did a lot towards improving the organisation and classification of archival material, student dissertations now had to be based on archival material.[69]

The emphasis on scientific history and methodology needs to be seen, therefore, both in terms of the strong influence of a European Rankean historical tradition in South Africa, and in terms of the need to establish Professional status and in the need to define boundaries between academic Professions in the first part of the twentieth century. This process closely followed the pattern that occurred in Europe in the late nineteenth century. In spite of their efforts to set themselves apart from popular historiography, however, there was little difference between the topics of men like Preller and the topics researched by academic historians, and academics were expected to popularise their work through magazines like *Die Huisgenoot* and *Die Brandwag*. Both were part of a wider process of Afrikaner ethnic mobilisation.[70]

De Vaal's introduction, in drawing both on the themes of *volksgeskiedenis* and the metaphor of scientific history seems to place the thesis unequivocally within this genre of mainstream Afrikaner academic history. However, a comparison of de Vaal's original thesis[71] and the published version,[72] shows that much of the confident assertion of Albasini's part in this tradition in the introduction, came not from de Vaal's original thesis, but from the editing process. De Vaal's original introduction suggests that he (de Vaal) was in a far more ambivalent position in relation to the mainstream than his published introduction would suggest.

---

67 *Ibid.* pages 251 - 252 and K. Smith, *op cit.* page 69.

68 D. Kotze (ed.), *Professor H.B. Thom*, Stellenbosch, 1969, page 17, translated and quoted in A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 7.

69 K. Smith, *op cit.* page 70.

70 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 1.

71 J.B. de Vaal, "Vise-Konsul João Albasini (1813-1888)", PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 1947, page i.

72 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol.*

For example, the published opening paragraph, which depicts Albasini in heroic language, places him directly into the theme of the struggle of the Transvaal for independence, and introduces the "discovery" of his letter book as the key to the study, appears not to have been written by de Vaal at all, but by his promoter, C.J. Uys. De Vaal's papers include a paper labelled "Example of introduction to dissertation in the handwriting of Prof. C.J. Uys"[73] which is reproduced verbatim in the published book, but did not occur in the original thesis. It replaced the following paragraph in the thesis:

> A study of Schoemansdal and its history led to my interest in the Portuguese Voortrekker-contemporary João Albasini, while my staying on his old farm *Goedewensch* (later named *Goedehoop*) in Zoutpansberg, further provided me with the opportunity to draw a lot on Bantu-tradition, which was filled in with sources in the Pretoria Archives."[74]

This opening paragraph includes three important elements which were played down or edited out in the published version. Firstly, whereas the published version constructs Albasini as almost-a-Voortrekker, de Vaal's description of him as a "Portuguese Voortrekker-contemporary" is far weaker. Secondly, de Vaal introduces himself, his interest in Albasini and his connection with him, through his having lived at Goedewensch. De Vaal allows himself to be "seen" a number of times in the introduction, but nearly all instances of this have been edited out: For example, the comment that "The information now made available frees Albasini from many accusations, although he does not always appear in a spotless light" replaced the comment: "All complaints that were brought against him are discussed in detail. Still, I could not, with the available facts, come to a similar conclusion."[75] De Vaal, the researcher, has been edited out in the interests of letting the facts speak for themselves and thus presenting a "scientific" study. In a similar vein, de Vaal includes the story of how João's daughter-in-law made a pile of João's official correspondence and burnt it after her husband's death, thinking it was a useless pile of rubbish. De Vaal points out that this meant that the family lacked the proof they needed to claim compensation from the Z.A.R. for the financial burden carried by Albasini during the wars of the 1860's and 70's. It also meant that a mine of useful historical information was lost.[76] Not only does this

---

73 "Example of introduction to dissertation in the handwriting of Prof C.J. Uys", J. B. de Vaal papers.

74 J.B. de Vaal, "Vise-Konsul João Albasini (1813-1888)", page i.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.* page ii.

story challenge the idea of history as being neutral - instead it is shown to have consequences in the present in terms of the family fortunes - but it means that the letter book is presented as only a partial record of Albasini's correspondence, rather than the definitive documentary source. This story has been edited out of the introduction to the published version. Again, this editing tends towards presenting the study as a definitive, objective account, which stands scientifically independent of present concerns.

The third element in de Vaal's original opening paragraph is perhaps the most important. Instead of presenting the letter book as the key to the study, he acknowledges firstly "Bantu-tradition", which was "filled in" with archival sources. The extent to which de Vaal was on dangerous ground in doing this is illustrated by the following letter to him written by Van Hoepen, Director of the National Museum in Bloemfontein, who was a close associate of C.J. Uys. De Vaal was corresponding with van Hoepen over his work on an archaeological site near Schoemansdal, and it appears that van Hoepen took offence when de Vaal told him that he had been invited to deliver a paper on the site to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science. He writes:

> What do you really know about Archaeology? ... You are studying a ruin. In the letter to Prof. Uys, you talk of a Zimbabwe ruin. Have you then already seen and studied Zimbabwe so that you can hatch this opinion? When you see a stone-wall, how can you determine the nation of the builder? Do you know the criteria and have you analysed them critically? If you pick up a potsherd at the ruins, can you understand what the potsherd is saying to you if you do not understand the potsherd's language? No, you write in your letter to Prof. Uys about what a kaffir of 103 to 108 years of age told to you. There is a prominent man in the Free State who dragged his name through the mud[77] through his faith in the gossip of a kaffir of "royal descent" to such an extent that he no longer will dare to do anything in the field of archaeology. Must this be your path?[78]

It appears that de Vaal had unwittingly stepped on a hornet's nest. He was deeply interested in archaeology and, while teaching at a farm school in the late 1930's, had been shown an archaeological site by one of his pupils. He would remain involved with this site, Matshema, for most of the rest of his life. This was at much the same time that the initial results of the Mapungubwe excavations were

---

77 "... *wat sy naam so stinkend gemaak het* ..."

78 Letter from Van Hoepen to de Vaal, 22.6.1942, J.B. de Vaal papers.

published, under the editorship of the Witwatersrand University historian Leo Fouché. It appears that de Vaal wrote to Fouché about the site, and his letter was passed on to van Riet Lowe, Director of the Bureau of Archaeology at the University of the Witwatersrand.[79] This led to a correspondence between Van Riet Lowe and Malan of the Bureau of Archaeology, in which they expressed a keen interest in de Vaal's work, commenting on his finds, offering him advice and references relating to his methodology, and finally inviting him to deliver a paper at a conference of the South African Association of the Advancement of Science.[80] It is not clear when de Vaal first contacted van Hoepen, but at the time of the letter he was acting as a referee for de Vaal in his application to do postgraduate work at the University College of the Orange Free State.[81] However, the publication of the initial results of the Mapungubwe site led to a controversy that "turned on conflicts between cultural and physical anthropologists, between indigenous and diffusionist explanations, and, in the long run, between Afrikaans and English-speaking archaeologists."[82] Van Riet Lowe and van Hoepen were on opposing sides of the debate. Van Riet Lowe had suggested that de Vaal contact J.F. Schofield, who was strongly associated with the group that advanced indigenous explanations, and who was entirely dismissive of van Hoepen's approach.[83] Added to this, the South African Association for the Advancement of Science was English -dominated, and van Hoepen insisted that de Vaal should instead publicise his work through the Afrikaans Journal *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, which had been set up to promote Afrikaans academic productivity.[84]

---

79 Letter from B.W. Malan to J.B. de Vaal, 22.8.1941, J.B. de Vaal papers.

80 See correspondence between J.B. de Vaal and the Bureau of Archaeology, particularly between 22.8.1941 and 23. 6. 1942, although their correspondence continued beyond that, in J.B. de Vaal papers.

81 Letter from Van Hoepen to de Vaal, 20.5.1942, J.B. de Vaal papers.

82 S. Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, Cambridge and Johannesburg, 1995, page 96.

83 S. Dubow, *op cit.* page 98. See also a later letter from J.F. Schofield to J.B. de Vaal in which he writes: "The idea that some races are stone-builders, some wood-builders, some clay builders is sheer nonsense. Van Hoepen in the work you quote refers to the Zulu as never building in stone. I told him that these poor benighted people never read anthropological literature, and therefore had remained in complete ignorance of this important fact." [Letter from J.F. Schofield to J.B. de Vaal, 5.2.1944, de Vaal papers.]

84 Letter from Van Hoepen to de Vaal, 22.6.1942, J.B. de Vaal papers.

The vehemence of his response thus has to be seen in the context of fierce divisions over academic approaches, and particularly in the context of the attempts to develop a specifically Afrikaner academic institutions. This struggle for the Afrikanerization of academia, would be a central theme throughout de Vaal's academic career, and will be discussed more below. Although van Hoepen's dismissal of oral sources here is expressed in the context of archaeological "debate", his comment is underlined by an attitude which opposes Professional, scientific (white) knowledge to other kinds of knowledge, and this attitude was paralleled in "scientific history". In fact, de Vaal did acknowledge one of his black informants, simply "Kamanjan", as a source in his bibliography. He was "a Knobnose that lived on *Goedewensch* (now *Goedehoop* 362) and who died there in 1941."[85] At no time in the text, however, does he specifically acknowledge Kamanjan, or any other oral evidence collected by himself as a specific source for any information. It appears that for de Vaal, the techniques of footnoting, which were a sign of Professionalism and science, simply did not apply to the oral traditions of black informants. Where black oral tradition is footnoted, it is from published sources, in particular from the collections of van Warmelo, the government ethnologist, which imbued the traditions with the stamp of science. De Vaal included a striking photograph of "Kamanjan" in his thesis, but this was omitted in the published version.

Not only was de Vaal's use of the testimony of black informants considered "unscientific", but his topic itself threatened to straddle the divide between black and white. For example, de Vaal's original comment, referring to his use of oral history "from the mouths of ... several elderly Knobnose-Kaffirs, whose fathers fought under him against the vhaVenda"[86] was changed to "from the mouths of ... several elderly Knobnose-Kaffirs, whose fathers served under him".[87] The original description, with its hint of Albasini as a military leader of black soldiers, has been subsumed in the more acceptable language of master and servant.

Lastly, in his original introduction, de Vaal gives far more weight to the idea that through Albasini he wished to portray the ordinary *boer* and pioneer:

> This biography is written as a protest against the hero-worship that reigns supreme in our historical writing. Through Albasini, I

---

85 J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 154.
86 J.B. de Vaal, "Vise-Konsul João Albasini" page i.
87 J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page not numbered (Introduction).

> wanted to represent the life of the ordinary *boer* and pioneer in this stormy period.[88]

This draws on the strand of social history that had been introduced into the Afrikaner academic tradition by people like Blommaert and Molsbergen. In the published version, the reference to protest and hero-worship was omitted. It is not clear why it was edited. Two quotations were also removed, and rephrased as de Vaal's own words. The result is a short paragraph which, while it reads far more easily and confidently, is much weaker, and is thoroughly undermined by the heroic language and imagery used in introducing Albasini in the opening paragraphs of the introduction. In the interests of presenting Albasini as a significant figure in the historical tradition of Transvaal history, de Vaal's own aims in doing the study have been glossed over.

The editing of the introduction has shaped de Vaal's Albasini in terms of the dominant academic tradition, with his ambiguities largely edited out. While the records don't indicate the exact process of editing, and who did it, the reader who was given the task of evaluating the thesis for publication for the Archives Yearbook was H.B. Thom.[89] Thom was one of the most respected Professional Nationalist historians. Grundlingh describes him as "weaving a seamless web between the *volk* and academe and investing it with all the authority of science".[90] Thom had obtained his Masters degree from Stellenbosch, under Blommaert, after which he spent two years at the University of Berlin. During this period, he also had the opportunity to attend the Sorbonne classes on historical methodology run by Seignobos, co-author of *Introduction aux études historiques*, which played an influential role in spelling out a positivist methodology.[91] Thom's own biography of Retief was published in 1947, to considerable acclaim, and was later described by van Jaarsveld as "the work of a scholar and to my mind the finest product to date of scientifically written history and biography in Afrikaans."[92] Thom was the head of the department of History at Stellenbosch from 1937 to 1953, after which he became Rector of the University. From 1952 to 1960, he was also chairman of

---

88 J. B. de Vaal, "Vise-Konsul, João Albasini", page iv.

89 ART, Vol 151 (old 170), Records of the Archives Yearbook, ref. P.A. 10/2/1, State Archives, Pretoria.

90 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 2.

91 See discussion on the *Introduction* on page 7. See also, F.A. van Jaarsveld, "Geskiedenis van die Departement Geskiedenis", page 252.

92 F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, page 87.

the Afrikaner Broederbond. He was enormously influential in the development of a Professional Afrikaner historical tradition and a powerful academic broker.[93]

Thom believed that historians "should keep pure the great goal of history, namely to honestly search for the truth in the past", but he believed "that they should do it in the midst of the *volk*."[94] The fact that he considered de Vaal's thesis worthy of publication unequivocally established the thesis, both in terms of its scientific status and it's contribution to specifically Afrikaner history. The fact that it was published in the *Archives Yearbook*, which was set up as "a showcase for the best the historical Profession had to offer",[95] and which produced it's contributions in an impressively Professional looking gold-embossed hardcover, only served to increase its status.

Yet, as the editing of his introduction indicates, de Vaal's relationship to the mainstream academic tradition was not without ambivalence. In the next part of this chapter, I look at some of the roots of that ambivalence, focusing on de Vaal himself, and the context in which he was writing.

De Vaal's thesis was the result of a long standing interest which arose partly from his family connections with the Albasini family. De Vaal's mother's sister was married to João Albasini (II), the first of João's grandsons. In 1927, when de Vaal was 13, his father bought part of the old Albasini farm from Captain João Albasini, and the family moved onto it. On the part of the farm where his uncle, aunt and cousins lived, the remains of Albasini's *skans* could still be seen, though it had been blown up during the South African War by British troops. In a lecture delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1983, he explained his interest:

> The road from our farm to Louis Trichardt went past the ruins. In 1930, one Friday evening in the moonlight, when I was in Standard VIII, a friend of mine Willie McKeckie and I rode home from school by bicycle for the weekend. When we passed the ruins I told Willie that the first João Albasini had lived there, and went on to express the wish that one day I would like to write his biography. This is how it all began.[96]

---

93 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", pages 2 - 3.
94 Quoted in F.A. van Jaarsveld, "Geskiedenis van die Departement Geskiedenis", page 265.
95 A.Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 11.
96 J.B. de Vaal, *João Albasini (1813-1888)*, page 1.

The point was that de Vaal's fascination with Albasini did not emerge from his academic path and thus from the mainstream academic tradition, but from his local interests and the stories he heard as a schoolboy. It is not possible now to know what it was about Albasini that caught de Vaal's imagination so strongly at this time, but it is unlikely to have been the role he played in finding a way to the sea for the Boer Republic. De Vaal had developed his own image of Albasini long before he started his academic research. This led to some tensions in the thesis for the reason that as a topic within the Afrikaner nationalist tradition, Albasini is in many ways problematic. Quite simply, Albasini was not a Voortrekker and the evacuation of Schoemansdal was not a heroic Voortrekker episode. If Albasini is accepted as a hero, and his heroism lies in holding the north for "white civilization" when the Schoemansdallers retreated, the popular image of the intrepid Boers is thoroughly undermined.

De Vaal then explained in his lecture that once he had decided to write on Albasini as a schoolboy he "started questioning relatives and old Black people who had known João and whose parents had come with him from Lourenço Marques. He mentions the "Kamanjan" whose picture was edited out of his thesis, in particular:

> One old man, Kamanjan, who lived on our farm, was a wonderful source of information. He remembered Albasini very well and often accompanied him as a carrier on elephant hunting expeditions.[97]

De Vaal's early view of Albasini and the Zoutpansberg area was therefore shaped by family histories and the oral traditions collected from black farm workers. What this meant was that his historical knowledge of the area and his image of Albasini was not nearly as "white" as would have been appropriate in the nationalist context.

It was to be a long struggle before De Vaal would be able to write his biography of Albasini. He finished school in 1932, with a first class matric, but family finances and the onset of the depression made it impossible for him to continue with further education. Instead, he spent a year as an unqualified teacher at a government-aided farm school. The following year, he obtained a bursary which enabled him to register at the Pretoria Normal College to study for a teacher's diploma. The requirements for the diploma included completing one year at the

---

[97] *Ibid.* page 2.

Transvaal University College, before completing two years of Professional training at the Normal college.[98]

At the Transvaal University College, an often bitter struggle for "Afrikanerization" was raging. Despite including a large proportion of Afrikaans students, the College was initially strongly English-orientated, with lectures taking place only in English until 1918. In the 1920's, the Afrikaner nationalist group were content with fighting for recognition of Afrikaans on an equal footing with English. This was known as the 50/50 policy, and it would be adopted by the Smuts and Hertzog United Party government in the 1930's and 1940's. By ensuring equality for English and Afrikaans, the intention was to create a united white South African nation rather than an exclusive Afrikaner one.[99]

At the Transvaal University College, the position of the Afrikaner group was strengthening throughout the twenties, as they gained control of the Senate. With the National Party in power from 1924, the number of nationalists appointed to Council increased. In 1929, after a long and unsuccessful struggle to find a candidate acceptable to all parties, Council confirmed the appointment as rector of A.E. du Toit, "a prominent nationalist and advocate of Afrikanerization".[100] The following year, the college attained recognition as an autonomous University, and became officially known as Pretoria University. In the same year, the 50/50 policy was accepted by Senate and Council. This policy would last for only two years. The Afrikaner nationalist grouping argued that the English grouping was unable to accept Afrikaans on a basis of equality. In 1931, for example, the official figures showed that although 65% of the students were Afrikaans-speaking, only 32% of the lectures were given in Afrikaans. Nearly a quarter of the lecturers could not speak Afrikaans.[101] Nothing less than an exclusive Afrikaner institution, on the Stellenbosch model was acceptable. As one proponent of Afrikanerization in the

---

98 A.J.J. Jordaan, "Jacobus Bernardus de Vaal as Suid-Afrikaanse Historikus (1914 - 1989)", in *Historia*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1994, pages 7 - 8.

99 F.A. Mouton, "Professor Leo Fouché, the History Department and the Afrikanerization of the University of Pretoria", in *Historia*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1993, page 55 and A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 3.

100 F.A. Mouton, *op cit.* page 55 and University of Pretoria, *Ad Destinatum: Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, Johannesburg, 1960, pages 30 - 35.

101 University of Pretoria, *Ad Destinatum*, page 58.

forties argued: "The Afrikaans University cannot and dare not be satisfied with a bit of patchwork reform - it has to be transformed totally."[102]

This goal was achieved in 1932 when Senate and Council adopted the policy "that the services of the university be instituted primarily to meet the needs of the Afrikaans-speaking section of the community, and that the language of the university be Afrikaans." According to *Trek*, a student magazine, the university was now to be regarded as in the service of the *volk* and its mission was to promote the ideals of the Voortrekkers.[103]

The special role of history in the creation of a sense of an Afrikaner identity and the development of a nationalist ideology meant that the history departments were inevitably at the centre of this struggle for Afrikanerization. At Pretoria, a battle developed around the person of Leo Fouché, who had headed the history department at Pretoria since its creation in 1909. Fouché was from an Afrikaans family and, at the time of his appointment, had the support of those who felt an Afrikaans appointee would be better able to lecture national history than an English one. [104] During the First World War, Smuts requested his services as private secretary, and it was during this period that he was asked to compile a report on the causes of the 1914 rebellion. It was this report that led to his estrangement from many Afrikaners, as it condemned the rebels without seriously attempting to explain what had led to rebellion, and was seen as an apology for Smut's government. Added to this, his own emphasis lay strongly on the idea of scientific history, which he did not see as compatible with a strong Nationalist emphasis. He did not support the Afrikanerization of the University, although he was one of the first lecturers to use Afrikaans for lecturing. It appears that he did not want to align himself with the Nationalist cause, and as polarisation on the campus became greater, his opposition to the cause of Afrikanerization became stronger. He came to be seen by the nationalist group as a traitor, and completely unsuitable for the task of teaching Afrikaner students their history.[105]

---

102 T. Hugo, *Die Afrikaanse Universiteit en sy Taak in die Volkslewe*, Cape Town, 1941, page 113-114, quoted in A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 4.

103 *Trek*, November, 1932, page 7, quoted in F.A Mouton, *op cit.* page 58.

104 F.A. Mouton, *op cit.* page 53.

105 *Ibid.* pages 54 - 55 and 59.

As the Afrikaner Nationalists strengthened their position at the University, Fouché faced increasing harassment in a number of ways. The final straw for Fouché was when the Senate of the University decided to "strengthen" the history department by reorganising it, with Fouché as the only non-nationalist member. This was to be done by placing two Nationalists from other departments into it. Prof. M. Bokhorst, of the department of Netherlands cultural history, would teach European history with an emphasis on relations between South Africa and the Netherlands. Prof. S.P. Engelbrecht, Dean of the faculty of Theology, and one of the central figures in the struggle for Afrikanerization, would teach South African History, including a new compulsory course on the Trekker states. Fouché would be left with British constitutional and colonial history, and Agar-Hamilton, a history lecturer who lectured only in English, was to be retrenched.[106] In fact, the plan to retrench Agar-Hamilton was leaked to the press and caused such an outcry that it was dropped. Nevertheless, Fouché was forced to accept the two additional lecturers, who would be in his department but would remain autonomous. He explained the position in the following terms:

> I don't want to say too much, but two notorious firebrands have been pitchforked into my department "to strengthen it", and to teach History according to a new principle laid down officially: History is not a neutral science![107]

At this point, he applied for the Chair of History at the University of the Witwatersrand, which had fallen vacant with the resignation of Macmillan. His appointment there was also controversial. Margaret Hodgson, Macmillan's assistant was amongst the applicants, as was Macmillan's student, de Kiewiet. The appointment of Fouché over these applicants was seen as a conservative choice and a set-back for liberal scholarship, and it was rumoured that the appointment had been due to intervention by Smuts.[108] At Pretoria, the chair was taken by I.D. Bosman, a teacher who had obtained his Doctorate on the historian, Theal, under Brugmans in Amsterdam. He was seen to be appropriate for the post because of

---

106 In fact, Agar-Hamilton's research centred on the Trekker states, and was based on archival research, so he must have been able to read Dutch and Afrikaans. In 1928, he had published a book on The Native Policy of the Voortrekker, 1836 - 1858, with a critical approach that would have been unacceptable to the Nationalists.

107 L. Fouché to M Hodgson, 19.2.1934, quoted in F.A. Mouton, *op cit.* page 61.

108 B.K. Murray, *Wits, the early years*, Johannesburg, 1982, page 270 and C. Saunders, *op cit.* page 59.

"his scientific education and genuine *Boere-Nationalisme*" (Boer, or Afrikaner, Nationalism).[109] He did not do any major research before his early death in 1947, and his contribution to the University was largely in administration. In terms of history, his contribution was in terms of the type of *volksgskiedenis* represented by his editorship of the *Voortrekker Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, which was produced to commemorate the 1938 Centenary Celebration, and which referred to the University of Pretoria as "the University for the descendants of the Voortrekkers".[110]

It was at this point that de Vaal arrived for his first year of study. His papers give no direct indication of how he viewed the upheavals in the history department. Nevertheless, he did very well under S.P. Engelbrecht. Engelbrecht introduced him to the Pretoria Archives, where he spent afternoons, Saturdays and holidays copying documents relating to the history of the Zoutpansberg district, and to Albasini in particular. As a result of his excellent results in his first year of history at Pretoria University, Engelbrecht tried to persuade him to complete his degree, with the objective of continuing with postgraduate work. He assured him that he would then be able to assist him to obtain a bursary to complete his Doctorate in Holland. De Vaal was unable to accept this offer, for financial reasons. He could not afford to delay the time when he could start earning, as his earnings were needed to help support and educate his younger siblings.[111] What this indicates, however, is that de Vaal spent his first year of study obviously thriving, in an Afrikaner Nationalist history department at its moment of victory. This, however would be the last time that he was so unambiguously within this tradition that was rapidly becoming the mainstream of Afrikaner history.

De Vaal completed his diploma as planned, while continuing with his B.A. through UNISA. In 1937, he started work as a teacher at the Happy Rest Farm School, near Louis Trichardt. It was during this period that he became very interested in the archaeological remains in the area, and "discovered" the Matshema site. He continued to do his degree through UNISA, although his own papers indicate that he found this period of study difficult. At the farm school he was responsible not

---

109 A.N. Pelzer, "I.D. Bosman, 1897-1947", in *Historiese Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, June 1947, page 7.

110 *Ibid.* pages 7 - 12 and I. Bosman (ed.), *Voortrekker Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, Pretoria, 1938, preface by the rector.

111 J.B. de Vaal, "Prof. C.J. Uys, 'n weldoener in my lewe", in J.B. de Vaal papers and J.B. de Vaal, *João Albasini (1813-1888)*, page 2.

only for teaching, but also for hostel and farming duties. As a result, there was little opportunity for study, and when he wrote his final examinations in 1938, he failed both his majors, history and geography. He tried again two years later, and this time was successful. He realised, though, that for his Masters, it would be better for him to take study leave and base himself at a University.[112] By 1942, he had about a terms study leave due to him, and he applied to do an Masters degree at the University of Pretoria, Potchefstroom University College and the University College of the Orange Free State. The first two refused to admit him unless he could attend for the 18 months needed to complete the coursework component of the degree. C.J. Uys at Bloemfontein agreed to accommodate him, arranging for him to attend lectures in holidays and during his study leave. Uys was a former student of Leo Fouché's. He had obtained his doctorate through the University of Pretoria, but had spent time affiliated to King's College, doing research in the Public Records Office in London. His thesis, *In the Era of Shepstone. Being a History of British Expansion in South Africa (1842-1877)*, was published by Lovedale Press, and was based partly on previously unexploited Shepstone Papers.[113] In 1961, F.A. van Jaarsveld was able to praise it, for having attempted to place the annexation of the Transvaal into a framework of world politics, but at the time it received a mixed reception, and was hardly acceptable as *volksgeskiedenis*.[114]

At the University College of the Orange Free State, processes of transformation similar to those at Pretoria were taking place, but Uys was not seen as a supporter of that process. The demand for Afrikanerization succeeded slightly later than at Pretoria, possibly because of rectors that were less strongly supportive of the Afrikaner cause. It was only in 1938 that the college formally accepted a policy of equality for English and Afrikaans.[115] By this time, the institution, and particularly the hierarchy, was divided between those in favour of the 50/50 policy and those who wished to move the College into a "positive Christian and pure Afrikaans direction." The student body campaigned vociferously through protest marches and class boycotts for a "pure Afrikaans institution".[116] As at Pretoria,

---

112 J.B. de Vaal, "C.J. Uys", page 2.

113 C. Saunders, *op cit.* page 86.

114 F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, page 136. See, also the comments of Engelbrecht below.

115 G van N. Viljoen, "The Afrikaans Universities and Particularism", in H.W. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds.), *The Future of the University in Southern Africa*, Cape Town, 1977, page 181.

116 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 4.

history and the control of the history department were seen as being of crucial importance. When the chair of history fell vacant in 1939, the political divisions at the University were reflected in support for two different candidates. The nationalists supported the appointment of P.J. van der Merwe from Stellenbosch, while Uys was the choice of the 50\50 faction. He won the majority of votes by a narrow margin. Despite this set-back for the Afrikanerization cause, pressure for transformation continued. In 1943, the Council gave way to student and public pressure and decided "that the instruction of the students shall take place in accordance with the religious outlook on life and the tradition of the people of the O.F.S",[117] thus turning it into a *volksuniversiteit* in rather vaguer terms than in the case of Pretoria. The College became increasingly Afrikanerized with the appointment of a rector sympathetic to the cause in 1946, and the principle that it should be a *volksuniversiteit* was enshrined in the Acts conferring full University status on the University in 1950.[118]

In 1942, De Vaal took his paid and unpaid study leave, and arrived at Bloemfontein. He was met by C.J. Uys at the station. The latter pointed out that as a result of the war there was very little accommodation available. As a solution, he proposed that de Vaal should board with him and his wife, although he warned him that this was on condition that there were no problems. De Vaal writes of this time:

> It was not necessary for Prof. and Mrs. Uys to chase me away. On the contrary, we always discussed history. When we sat at the table, when, on Sundays, we walked to church or perhaps went to wander in the veld, the conversation was always about some historical topic.[119]

De Vaal passed the coursework necessary for a Masters degree. He wrote his thesis while teaching, now at Sonop Primary School where he had more free time available. It was on the first part of Albasini's life. In submitting it, de Vaal indicated that he wished to complete the study for a Doctorate. He received the Masters degree with distinction, and the UNISA examiners approved his plan to complete the study for his Doctoral thesis. His Doctoral thesis incorporated his Masters thesis, unchanged, as the first six chapters.[120] He used his next study

---

117 G. van N. Viljoen, *op cit.* page 181.

118 A. Grundlingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 5; G. van N. Viljoen, *op cit.* page 181.

119 J.B. de Vaal, "C.J. Uys", page 3.

120 J.B. de Vaal, "João Albasini (1813-1888); Die Rol wat hy in die Geskiedenis

leave in 1947 to write this, again with C.J. Uys as Promoter. He completed the thesis in a term, typing it with two fingers on his parents-in-law's farm near Bethlehem.[121]

The thesis was accepted in 1948, although he had to wait until 1950 to receive the degree. This was because of Unisa regulations which specified the minimum lapse of time between receiving a Masters degree and a Doctorate. His examining report commented: "The past is approached soberly and from a new standpoint." As a result, the degree was awarded with distinction.[122] This was the first doctorate to be produced at the University College of the Orange Free State.

De Vaal was very grateful to Uys. As he saw it, Uys personally had made it possible for him to continue his education, and realize his ambition to write about Albasini. On Uys's part, it appears that he did not hesitate to draw on this sense of gratitude. For example, in the incident discussed earlier, when van Hoepen took offence at de Vaal's intention to deliver a paper to the S.A. Association for the Advancement of Science, Uys backed him, and added an angry letter to de Vaal, berating him for ingratitude for taking "the fruit of his research" to Johannesburg, and pointing out that there was a good Historical Research Society at the University College of the Orange Free State, where he could deliver his paper. He added the comment: "Naturally, you know that, now that you are registered as a student here, you may not reveal your findings to another institution without permission."[123]

Here, it is surprising that Uys should have backed van Hoepen's clearly Nationalist concerns. His readiness to do so may have been related to the fact that he was closely involved with the Historical Association, which had been formed the previous year, and which he described to de Vaal in grandiose terms.[124] Another example occurs in a letter written by Uys in 1946, shortly after de Vaal had completed his Masters and returned to teaching. In this, Uys complains bitterly about an attack made on him *Die Huisgenoot*. He feels that it is the "duty" of members of the Historical Society to write to repudiate the letter, and that de Vaal

---

van Noord-Oostelike Transvaal gespeel het, Deel 1", M.A. thesis, University College of the Orange Free State, 1945.

121 J.B. de Vaal, "C.J. Uys", page 4.

122 *Ibid.* page 4.

123 Letter from C.J. Uys to J.B. de Vaal, 18.6.1942, J.B. de Vaal papers.

124 *Ibid.*

would be the appropriate person to do this. He then dictates a two page letter for de Vaal to "write".[125]

Uys's demand for a high degree of personal loyalty from de Vaal meant that de Vaal would inevitably be seen as his protégé. However, this close association with Uys placed him outside the mainstream nationalist tradition. What this meant is that from the time De Vaal arrived in Pretoria in the early 1930's to the time he submitted his thesis, he had come under the influence of two men who represented different sides of the transformation debate, as well as having spent time continuing his studies in comparative isolation. Although relations between Uys and Engelbrecht had been fairly cordial in the past, even ingratiating on Uys' part, by the time de Vaal started his studies, they were fiercely critical of one another. In 1934, Engelbrecht wrote of Uys: "He looks at our history through English eyes [*vanuit 'n Engelse bril*], searching for his material mainly in London ..." He was scathing about the length of time Uys spent in the Pretoria archives, and added: "How, for example, would a historical description of the Second War of Independence [*Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*] and what preceded it look if one used only the 'Milner papers' and the items in the Colonial Office in London as sources!"[126] Uys, on his side, implied that Engelbrecht was misusing history, writing to him in the same year: "Dr Preller thinks that a historian must not bring out the mistakes of his own people, because this does not make anybody happy. I do not know if you are of the same opinion."[127]

It is difficult to know how exactly de Vaal's position between these two antagonists influenced his approach to history. He obviously managed to retain links with Engelbrecht, as he acknowledged him as well as Uys in his thesis, thanking him for his continuing interest in the project, as well as for photographs. Engelbrecht certainly could not have accused de Vaal of seeing history through English eyes or of not paying enough attention to the Pretoria archives. It was he who had first introduced de Vaal to them, and the thesis was the result of many hours of painstaking reading and note-taking. It is likely to have been out of Engelbrecht's compulsory courses on the Trekker states at the University of Pretoria that de Vaal's image of the Voortrekker context of Albasini was built.

---

125 Letter from C.J. Uys to J.B. de Vaal, 6.5.1946, J.B. de Vaal papers.

126 Engelbrecht to Viljoen (Editor of *Die Huisgenoot*), 3.6.1934, in S.P. Engelbrecht Collection, File 2/7 Uys, Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk Archives (NHKA), Pretoria.

127 Uys to Engelbrecht, 26.10.1934, in S.P. Engelbrecht Collection, File 2/7 Uys.

Being supervised by Uys may have allowed him greater space for the areas where Albasini and de Vaal's image of him did not fit into the nationalist tradition, and it may account for de Vaal's readiness to carefully catalogue the accusations, defeats and blunders, as well as the successes of Albasini, the Schoemansdallers and the Transvaal government.

From the perspective of the nineties, though, the two academics had fewer differences than they had in common, and can perhaps more usefully be seen as representing different strands of the same tradition than as different traditions. They both subscribed to the idea of history as a science. It was Uys who wrote the opening to de Vaal's introduction, which draws so strongly on nationalist themes. Uys own approach to history as a science clearly owed a great deal to his supervisor, Fouché, whom he described as one of the founders of a tradition of scientific research.[128] Yet, in contrast to Fouché, Uys appears to have adapted to the language of the Nationalists. In 1950, he wrote an article on the history of the University of the Orange Free State, which is structured almost entirely by the "language struggle", although he clearly places this within the tradition of Hertzog.[129] While Uys wrote his doctoral thesis in English focusing on Shepstone, his second (and only other) book was on Paul Kruger and was written in Afrikaans. Grundlingh describes Uys as "chipping away at the nationalist paradigm, but often in a rather trivial and idiosyncratic way such as disputing the exact date of Paul Kruger's birth or the precise location where the Voortrekkers pledged the vow of 1838."[130] This, however, is very different from ignoring it, or denying its values. Unlike Fouché, Uys survived the process of Afrikanerization, remaining at the University until his retirement in 1963. What his readiness to use the language of Afrikanerdom may reflect is the extent to which the Nationalist tradition had gained hegemony within Afrikaner history, not in the sense of providing a single dominant accepted narrative, but in the sense of defining the issues that were seen to be significant, setting the parameters of what was considered academic history, and gaining control over the history departments of the Afrikaans academic institutions.

---

128 C.J. Uys, "Die Huidige Stand van die Geskiedskrywing in Suid-Afrika", Paper delivered to the Historical Society of Pretoria, 5, October, 1956, in *Historia*, 1957, pages 130 - 136.

129 C.J. Uys, "Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1854 - 1949, in G.J. Beukes (ed.), *Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat*, Bloemfontein, 1950, pages 34 - 44.

130 A.Grunglingh, "Politics, Principles and Problems", page 5.

CHAPTER 3
DIE ROL VAN JOÃO ALBASINI IN DIE GESKIEDENIS VAN DIE TRANSVAAL: A DISCUSSION

This chapter looks at the extent to which the Nationalist tradition can be seen to have shaped the text of de Vaal's thesis, and focuses on the extent to which the image of Albasini presented in the published version of the introduction is sustained throughout the book.

De Vaal begins his thesis with an introduction to South East Africa at the time of Albasini's arrival in Delagoa Bay in 1831. This chapter introduces the main contradiction that runs through the thesis, that is the contradictory ways in which blacks are portrayed. The chapter opens with a brief description of the Portuguese presence in South East Africa. He gives a vivid portrayal of the tenuous nature of the Portuguese settlement, describing their hopeless struggle against malaria and using an extended quote from das Neves, describing Delagoa Bay as "nothing more than an ordinary kaffir-village" with "perhaps two or three Europeans who lived in huts, just like the natives."[1] He completes this description with the following paragraph:

> Because there were no white women, the Portuguese married kaffir-girls and, as a result of contact with a lower race, degenerated even further. Almost totally isolated from Mozambique and surrounded by thousands of barbarians, their authority over the environs of the Bay did not extend much further than their artillery could shoot.[2]

As S. Dubow points out, the hierarchical ranking of South African races, based in an evolutionist racial paradigm, was an integral part of the academic tradition represented and disseminated by Theal, and was commonly used by Afrikaner nationalist writers from the 1930's.[3] Here, de Vaal bases his comments on Theal and D.W. Krüger's thesis, *Die Weg na die See*. These ideas were not restricted to the Nationalist tradition, however. For example, Eric Axelson wrote similarly that

---

1 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 1. The description given in the 1879 English translation of das Neves, which was produced as a facsimile edition with a new preface by de Vaal by the State Library in 1987, reads: "In those days, Lourenço Marques was no better than a common negro village" and "two or three Europeans, who lived in *palhotas*, like the native population." [D.F. das Neves *op cit.* page 172.]

2 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 1.

3 S. Dubow, *op cit.* pages 66 - 73.

in Portuguese East Africa "Miscegenation made it impossible to maintain the standards of civilization"[4] and Fouché attributed Willem Adriaan van der Stel's deficiencies to his mixed blood.[5] Images of higher and lower races, Portuguese degeneration as a result of racial mixing, and the recurring image of whites surrounded by black hordes were part of the cultural resources available to de Vaal for understanding the "facts" he uncovered. Here, they had the added status of established academic "fact."

In the next few paragraphs, however, de Vaal's imagery changes. Firstly, the hordes of barbarians surrounding Delagoa Bay are now described in the language of ethnicity. Here, he uses one of van Warmelo's collections of oral tradition as a source:

> The vaTonga, who live in present-day Portuguese East Africa, were of mixed race without any tribal unity. For this reason, they could not make common cause against the whites.[6]

The barbarians then metamorphisize into dynamic traders: "The Portuguese success in trade depended largely on the goodwill of the vaTonga."[7]

He describes the inland trade from the coast, giving fairly vivid details about what goods were traded and what routes were used. He uses an extensive quotation from Dicke to describe in detail how the traders operated along such routes, and how they protected themselves. Albasini is presented as locking into an already established and vibrant trade into the interior. The traders are active participants in history.[8] This is a representation that resonates far more with the history emerging from the English universities in the seventies than with the nationalist tradition of the fifties. It is completely at odds with the stereotype of whites bringing civilization and progress into a barbaric Africa.

In the original thesis, De Vaal then goes on to use Bryant's collection of oral traditions to deal with the flight of Manukozi and the establishment of the Gaza kingdom on the east coast which destroyed and incorporated many of the clans living on the coast. Others fled to what would become the northern Transvaal,

---

4 E. Axelson, *The Portuguese in South-East Africa*, Johannesburg, 1960, page 193.
5 B.K. Murray, *op cit.* page 270.
6 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 1.
7 *Ibid.*
8 *Ibid.* page 2.

where they would come into contact with Albasini in the 1850's. De Vaal then turns to the Venda:

> The vhaVenda or Bawenda,[9] against whom Albasini and his Knobnose-soldiers would fight bloody battles in the Zoutpansberg, originally came from the north. They are an amalgamated race, who gradually amalgamated to form a compact whole in the area where they now live. The tribe consists of groups of unrelated strains who, under various conditions and in various regions, came into contact with a homogenous core and became identified with this. The ethnographic origins of this core are still uncertain.[10]

Again, de Vaal is using the language of the ethnography of the forties: ethnological roots, and homogeneous cores, all which build up to a view which sees the ethnic group as the appropriate unit of study for blacks. He draws on ethnographers like van Warmelo and Stayt, as well as German missionary works, to give a three page sketch of Venda history, drawn originally from oral tradition. He brings this up to the arrival of Louis Trichardt, who arrived at a time of a succession struggle, in which Ramabulana was successful: "Now Ramabulana, or Ravele, was the great chief of the vhaVenda, with various smaller chieftains under him, who lived spread out all over the district." He gives a short description of how these groups used the mountainous terrain for protection against attacks, and ends with a rough description of the geographic location of the main chiefs at the time of Albasini's arrival in the Zoutpansberg.[11]

De Vaal's chapter is based on extensive anthropological sources, which in turn are based on oral tradition, but he is presenting this oral tradition as history, rather than "ethnography". This was long before South African historians came to accept oral tradition and testimony as a legitimate source. The extent to which this view could not be accommodated within the historical tradition is demonstrated by the extensive editing done on this chapter. It is particularly striking, as, with the exception of the introduction and this chapter, the thesis was left almost entirely untouched in the editing process.

The chapter was considerably shortened. The main direction of the editing was simply to remove much of the black history, unless it fairly directly impinged on the narrative of white history. Some of the detail about Shoshangane, where he

---

[9] This is the Berlin Misson spelling of Bavenda. The correct term is Vhavenda.
[10] J.B. de Vaal, "Vise-Konsul João Albasini, page 5.
[11] *Ibid.* pages 5 - 8.

came from, his move north, and the growth of his empire was cut out. Three pages of Venda history were removed. Besides the removal of chunks of information, minor editing changes were done, which subtly, or less subtly, change the meaning of what de Vaal had written. For example, in de Vaal's original thesis it is completely clear that Albasini participated in a well-established trade. De Vaal introduces the "vaTonga trade" and explains: "Because João Albasini would use many of these trade routes, their direction may be briefly traced: ..."[12] The edited version reads simply" "The trade routes which Albasini followed moved from the coast through the [area] later [called] Prilgrimsrest."[13] While the edited version reads more smoothly, it leaves it slightly unclear as to whether these were new routes or already established ones and whether Albasini used them all or not.

In another example, De Vaal originally wrote that:

> It was at this time, between the years 1835 and 1840, that a number of Tonga clans, namely the Nkuna, baLoyi, MaVundja, Maluleke and Hlenge, who did not want to submit to Manukosi's authority, fled to the Transvaal. For them, it was no unknown area, because their traders had already crossed this area for many years. Before the great exodus, many of the traders had already attached themselves to the Venda chiefs, remaining there and never returning to the Portuguese area. The Maluleke and Hlengwe were under the command of an extremely able leader, Shimhambane Maluleke Hlekane, who had his chief kraal between the Levuvhu and the Limpopo.[14]

This has been shortened to the following:

> It was at this time, between the years 1835 and 1840, that a number of small Tonga tribes, who did not want to submit to Manukosi's authority, fled to the Transvaal. For them, it was no unknown area, because their traders had already crossed this area for many years. They were under the command of an extremely able leader, Shimhambane Maluleke Hlekane, who had his chief kraal between the Levuvhu and the Limpopo.[15]

---

12 *Ibid.* page 2.
13 J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol* page 2.
14 J.B. de Vaal, "Vise-Konsul João Albasini", page 5.
15 J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 2.

The editing has transformed specific clans into an nameless, and therefore, faceless, "number of small Tonga tribes", who have all been firmly placed under their own ethnic chief.

In the first example, the thesis contradicts the stereotype that civilization is derived from whites alone, and that whites brought rational economic activity into Africa. Here the editing has simply served to blur the contradiction. In the second example, the complexity and fluidity of relationships between people has been removed, and the stereotype of faceless blacks under ethnic chiefs upheld. I would argue that it is highly unlikely that this stereotyping was deliberately thought out. It is much more likely that the editing was simply intended to make the chapter read more smoothly, and to remove "unnecessary" detail. In a tradition which placed a high value on detailed "fact" this in itself was significant. What this demonstrates is the way that the established stereotypes and narrative traditions interact with the editor's sense of clarity and aesthetics. The stereotypes seem to be strong enough to condition the editor's vision in the face of contradictory written "facts".

The second chapter is entitled "Kontak met die boere" ("Contact with the boers"). This combined two chapters of the original thesis, "Albasini aan die Ooskus" ("Albasini on the East Coast") and "Albasini en die Voortrekkers" ("Albasini and the Voortrekkers"). This chapter contributes most strikingly to the association of Albasini with the Voortrekkers by what it omits, rather than by what it says. By the almost complete lack of information on Albasini's early life and the approximately 14 years he spent based in Portuguese East Africa, there is nothing to offset the impression given that Albasini's significance is closely tied to that of the Voortrekkers. This is how de Vaal conceptualised the study, and, therefore he had no reason to do much research into this period. However, he gives a brief background sketch mentioning Albasini's family, background and arrival in South East Africa with his father and brother. His sources here are fairly scanty and it appears that much of the information is based on family traditions, which are not always specifically footnoted, and which draw far more on the image of Albasini as white adventurer in Africa than on the nationalist tradition.

De Vaal mentions that Albasini was involved in slave trading and describes it as an acceptable practice amongst the Portuguese on the East Coast. He then says that Albasini's father returned to Lisbon where both parents died, and that he never heard from his brother again. This brother, who apparently died of malaria, was

edited out of the published thesis. This background sketch does little else except to introduce Albasini in terms which resonate strongly with the traditions of Albasini as an adventure hero, forging his way alone in Africa. De Vaal spells this out very clearly:

> As a boy of eighteen years of age, and alone, he now had to tackle the great adventure of his life. Under such circumstances, a weakling would have gone under. But Albasini, with his strong personality, sharp intellect and perseverance, was determined to make his career a success.[16]

This chapter presents difficulties for de Vaal with respect to the portrayal of the relationship between black and white. There are three areas where Albasini's relationship with blacks is dealt with in this chapter. The first is an account of the attack on the Portuguese garrison at Delagoa Bay in 1833.[17] This account takes up almost half of the very short section devoted to Albasini before his contact with the Boers. It is the same incident that Mrs Biccard presented in the Prellerian terms of beleaguered whites surrounded by barbaric blacks. Although the basic terms of the account here are similar, de Vaal's version has added in Albasini's cleverness, knowledge of blacks and consequent ability to play on "black superstition" to escape. In de Vaal's account, it is Manukozi's men who attack the fort at Delagoa Bay, forcing the small group of Portuguese to flee to the island of Shefina. The fort is attacked and destroyed, after which the island is attacked and all the whites taken prisoner:

> They were taken to the coast and forced to dance right through the night, to the amusement of the barbarians. It is told that Albasini thought of the plan of acting in an extraordinary manner. While the dancing was going on, he began to walk on his hands and knees and shriek like a jackal. This gave the young natives so much pleasure that they threw pieces of meat to him, which he had to pick up from the ground with his mouth.[18]

The account continues with more details of Albasini pretending to be a jackal, going through various ordeals, such as having to attempt to break open a door with his head, and having to fight a vicious dog. De Vaal concludes that:

> Because Albasini could speak the kaffir language so well, and because he could teach them so much, he was the only white man whose life was spared. His other companions were killed in front

---

16 *Ibid.* page 4.
17 *Ibid.* pages 22 - 23 and 47 -48.
18 *Ibid.* page 5.

> of his eyes in an extremely cruel manner, by having wooden stakes driven into their bodies. He was led away by the murderers.[19]

He remained with them for six months before escaping with the help of two black traders, which whom he returned to Delagoa Bay, where there was already a new governor. He was left with no possessions and had to make a new beginning.[20]

De Vaal footnotes this story it to oral evidence collected from Sarel Eloff, an inhabitant of Zoutpansberg by a Mev. Philip Oelofse, a writer who made her notes available to de Vaal. He also footnotes it to the article in the *Star*, based on the interview with Mrs Biccard and discussed in chapter 1. The *Star* has nothing about Albasini pretending to be a jackal,[21] so the jackal elements appear to have come from Sarel Eloff's oral tradition. They are the centre of Marie Eyssel's account of the incident. It is clearly a story that has been put together from a number of oral accounts. From the perspective of the nineties, with a different way of conceptualising the historical relationships between people, the story looks completely unconvincing, and it is difficult to see how de Vaal could have included it in his "scientific" thesis, even acknowledging it as hearsay. Yet it successfully draws on both the cruel barbarian imagery of the nationalist tradition, and the "adventure hero versus superstitious natives" theme in the family traditions, and must have seemed convincing to de Vaal.

After his treatment of the Lourenço Marques attack, de Vaal turns to the issue of Albasini-as-chief. This is the first time that it is mentioned in the thesis, which is striking when compared to the central role the issue plays in the centenary celebration and the secondary literature. The problem with Albasini-as-chief is that it blurs the separation between black and white, and the traditional roles where blacks and whites are presented as antagonists or the servants in a master and servant relationship. Focusing strongly on Albasini as chief, as the family traditions do, would have made it more difficult for Albasini to be absorbed into a respectable Afrikaner historical tradition. This makes the wording de Vaal uses especially telling. He has described Albasini as a "hero and leader" amongst blacks earlier on the page. Now he says:

> Albasini began to live like a medieval feudal lord. Natives who had fallen into disfavour with their chiefs fled to him. In exchange

---

19 *Ibid.*
20 *Ibid.*
21 *Star*, 27.6.1925.

> for the protection he gave them, they served him as carriers and hunters. His disposition was extremely militaristic and, in this time of raids and tribal feuds, he organised the able-bodied into a force which had to be taken into account. His followers recognised him as their chief [*opperhoof*][22] and gave him the name "Jiwawa", which was a distortion of his European name.[23]

The description of Albasini as living like a feudal lord appears both in the *Star* article[24] and in one of the books that appears in de Vaal's bibliography, *A Derrocada do Império Vátua e Mousinho De Albuquerque*.[25] De Vaal does not footnote the description here, but he has footnoted information about Albasini's movements in Mozambique in the previous paragraph to the book. The reason it is significant that de Vaal uses this is that the chapter on Albasini talks in some detail of Albasini's Mozambican family, and includes pictures of, amongst others, both his oldest South African and his Mozambican grandsons.[26] De Vaal's use of the book demonstrates that he knew about Albasini's Mozambican family, not simply as a half-suppressed family secret, but in some detail.

After introducing Albasini as a feudal lord or chief, de Vaal moves onto the issue of contact with the Voortrekkers. The Voortrekkers and their settlements are not introduced when they first appear. Even specific people, such as Louis Trichardt, Carel Trichardt and "*hoofkommandant* Andries Hendrik Potgieter" are introduced into the narrative with no explanation of where they came from or who they were.[27] Clearly, in terms of the tradition in which de Vaal sees himself, any introduction would be unnecessary.

De Vaal describes how Albasini used carriers in order to get trade goods to and from Delagoa Bay. This solved the problem of tsetse fly, which prevented the Boers, using wagons, from moving easily to and from the coast. The Boers, who by this time had established a settlement at Ohrigstad, were keen to find a route to the sea that they could use themselves. It is in terms of this issue that de Vaal introduces the divisions in the Ohrigstad community, describing Potgieter's supporters as having loyalty to people rather than principles, opposing this to the group that were more democratically inclined. Here de Vaal includes his only

---

22 This word may also be translated as "paramount chief".
23 J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 5.
24 *Star*, 27.6.1925.
25 F. Quintinha and J. Toscano, *op cit.* pages 93 - 94.
26 *Ibid.* pages 80 and 97.
27 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 6.

direct comment on contemporary issues in the thesis when he says: "A house that is divided against itself cannot hope to stand - a lesson that the Afrikaners have not yet learned to this day!"[28]

De Vaal's next chapter is a chapter on the establishment of Zoutpansbergdorp, which later became known as Schoemansdal. In this chapter, de Vaal was able to achieve his aim of depicting the lives of the ordinary boer and pioneer. After the tensions of the first two chapters, this chapter, where Albasini is not mentioned at all, is one where de Vaal fits most comfortably with the established tradition. Blacks are mentioned only in passing, for example, when the group arrives at the chosen site they immediately build a laager "in order to be protected against vermin and barbarians."[29] De Vaal does portray a glimpse of interaction with the surrounding people, where he mentions that the Boers knew about the copper mines worked by blacks at Messina, and that they traded for iron hoes with the Venda group who mined iron in the eastern part of the district. This is footnoted to two articles that de Vaal has written, so he is obviously drawing here on his own considerable local knowledge and archaeological research. Generally, however, this is a "white" chapter, with Schoemansdal presented as a white settlement, and with the chapter boundaries separating it from its context.

In this chapter, de Vaal describes how as soon as they arrived at the site of Schoemansdal the men immediately organised to bring water to irrigate the fertile soil. They immediately planted the seeds, plants and cuttings that they had brought with them. Soon each one had a vegetable garden and corn growing. He then looks at the houses they built and the layout of the town, before going on to talk about church and education. Finally, the economy of the settlement is dealt with, as he notes that "For the Zoutpansbergers, the hunting industry was the greatest source of income."[30] He describes some of the problems of hunting, including the fact that tsetse fly forced hunters to go on foot, and that many were accompanied by black hunters and by carriers, although he does not here undermine the image of the white hunter by discussing the use of independent *skuts*. He then deals in detail with trade and trade articles, before ending the chapter with Potgieter's death.

---

28 *Ibid.* page 9.
29 *Ibid.* page 12
30 *Ibid.* page 14.

The chapter is a chapter dealing with social history, looking at the everyday lives of the white inhabitants of Schoemansdal. The way the chapter is structured presents an image of the community that resonates strongly with the popularised view of the Voortrekkers. For example, although de Vaal states that the economy was based on hunting, the first description of the Schoemansdallers after their arrival shows them planting and irrigating. Isabel Hofmeyr points out when discussing the image of the Voortrekkers that Preller created, that presenting the Voortrekkers as agriculturalists, and the blacks as hunters, was an inversion that naturalised the Boers right to the land.[31] Here de Vaal presents an image of the Schoemansdallers carving out a civilized, ordered, agricultural community in the wilds, represented by "vermin and barbarians". He does not deal with the issue of who actually owned the land on which they settled. The fact that he discusses religion and the details of building a church and education before discussing the economy has the effect of defining the community first in terms of the church. This contributes to the image of the Voortrekkers as religious and "God-fearing".

The focus on the social history of the Boer community is one of the strongest themes running through de Vaal's thesis, particularly in the first part. The Boers, and details of their lives, are repeatedly seen through the descriptions of visitors and outsiders. In Chapter 2, de Vaal reproduces almost verbatim Albasini's long reply to a list of questions about the Boers that was sent to him by the governor at Lourenço Marques.[32] In Chapter 5, de Vaal deals in detail with the visit by a Portuguese commission sent from Inhambane in 1855 to try to establish trade links between the Boers and that port, and uses this visit to give descriptions of the life of the Voortrekkers. In Chapter VII, where he deals with aspects of Albasini's trading, he draws extensively on the visit of a Portuguese trader, das Neves, to focus on the social history of the Boer community.

This emphasis on social history draws on one strand of the academic tradition, as well as on the popular tradition. In the case of the academic tradition, it draws on the type of social and economic history brought to Stellenbosch by people such as Godée Molsbergen and Blommaert, who combined a social and economic perspective with a concern for *volksgeskiedenis*. One of the most famous Afrikaner historians to write in this tradition was P.J. van der Merwe, who had studied under Blommaert before completing his doctorate at Leiden, and who

---

31 I. Hofmeyr, "Popularizing History", page 533.
32 J.B de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 10 - 11.

focused on the movements of the frontier Trekboers.[33] In the popular tradition, it was again Preller who developed the links between social history and *volksgeskiedenis*, in his creation of a detailed image of the everyday life of the Voortrekkers. One of the ways he created this image was through the extensive use of oral history, in which he laid a great emphasis on personal experience. To one of his fieldworkers he sent the following suggestions:

> [Ask about] things close to life ... that lie more deeply embedded in memory: to be more specific, I mean personal reminiscences, the small things of history, anecdotes, which describe life, personal adventures and such like thing, and then, naturally the family as well ... When discussing any big event I ask: What was the first that you personally saw and heard of it, and so you keep their thoughts on a personal track ... weddings, confirmations and such things of which they can give you details, even down to what they wore.[34]

What Preller was creating was not simply a narrative of key events of Voortrekker history, but also a vivid picture of a Voortrekker way of life. This needs to be seen in the context of the ethnic mobilisation of the thirties and forties. Isabel Hofmeyr points out that one of the secrets of nationalism's success is its ability to appropriate and assign significance to everyday life.[35] For example, she comments that:

> The pages of *Die Brandwag* and *Die Huisgenoot* carried articles, advertisements, pictures and stories which took every imaginable phenomena of people's worlds and then repackaged these as "Afrikaans." A brief list would include food, architecture, interior decoration, dress, etiquette, health, humour, landscape, monuments, the plastic arts, music, handicrafts, transport, agriculture, nature study and so on.[36]

Preller's social history contributed to this in that he had created an image of a traditional Afrikaner way of life, which was rural, agricultural and self-reliant.

The extent to which everyday activities like soap-making or shoeing a horse could come to have emotional significance for people as part of a heritage which defines their identity is demonstrated by de Vaal himself. His papers included a collection of articles, which it appears he intended to publish as a group. Some were

---

33 K. Smith, *op cit.* page 77.
34 Quoted in I. Hofmeyr, "Popularizing history", page 521.
35 I. Hofmeyr, "Building a nation from words", page 530.
36 *Ibid.* page 111.

published individually in newspapers. The collection included short pieces on a variety of subjects, which de Vaal had marked geographical, personal, archaeological or historical. Two of the articles, which he described as cultural history, were entitled: "Seepkook op die plaas" ("Making soap on the farm") and "My oorlede Pa se aambeeld" ("My late father's anvil"). In both these articles he establishes emotive links between his own experiences growing up on a farm, and the Voortrekker past. So for example, in "My oorlede Pa se aambeeld" he says:

> Every farmer, and especially the Voortrekkers, had to have an anvil handy at all times, because if they were short of a wagon-wheel, or if horse-shoes had been broken, they had to fix it themselves.[37]

He goes on to talk about Louis Trichardt's anvil, before describing himself as a child watching his father shoe mules. The anvil was given to a neighbour, but much later, when he was in his fifties he returned, asked for it back and mended it. He ends his article by saying that he now keeps it as a priceless treasure for his son and grandson, which has their father, grandfather and great-grandfather's name on it.[38]

The soap-making article describes how historically the *boervrou* had to be self-sufficient, growing her own fruit and vegetables, making jam, drying fruit, etc. Making soap was part of this, and again, de Vaal remembers his mother making soap.[39] For de Vaal, these details of everyday life of the past clearly contributed to his sense of his own identity. His wish to contribute to the cultural history of the Afrikaners was part of this sense of an ethnic identity.

Chapter 4 is entitled "Albasini word 'n Transvaler" (Albasini becomes a Transvaler"). In this chapter, de Vaal deals literally with Albasini becoming a Transvaler as he deals with his move to settle in the Ohrigstad community, his marriage to Gertina van Rensburg, and his move to the Zoutpansberg. In another sense, this is the chapter where de Vaal creates Albasini as a Transvaler, by associating him with established key events of Voortrekker history. This use of association is very similar to that of Mrs Biccard's in the family histories, and in fact, in this chapter, de Vaal draws very heavily on Mrs Biccard's testimonies. For example, Albasini introduces Gertina van Rensburg, and then includes a long

---

37 J.B. de Vaal, "My oorlede Pa se aambeeld", J.B. de Vaal papers.
38 *Ibid.*
39 J.B. de Vaal, "Seepkook op die plaas", J.B. de Vaal papers.

quotation, from Mrs Biccard about her mother's experience in a laager at Bloukrans, in Natal. This extended quotation has little to do with the narrative. It refers to another place and a different period, but it serves to emphasise the van Rensburg's Voortrekker credentials.

De Vaal, then deals with Albasini's journey up to the Zoutpansberg, in which he was shot at by forces of Sekwati. As was discussed in Chapter 1, this story plays a major part in the family traditions, but in these traditions, Sekwati has become "Makapan", and the story has become the introductory part of the story of the "siege of Makapangat". In Mrs Biccard's version, Albasini was attacked by Mokopane, but escaped, and got through safely. He warned the Boers travelling southwards not to continue their journey because Mokopane was dangerous. They ignored the warning, were cruelly murdered and mutilated, but were avenged by the Boers at the "siege of Makapan". De Vaal includes a long quotation from Albasini's report on the attack, so his "Makapan" is, correctly, Sekwati. He then has three short paragraphs which deal with Albasini's arrival in Zoutpansberg, his initial decision to stay in the town, and then his decision to move, with his group of adherents to Goedewensch. He follows this by saying that, shortly after Albasini's arrival there was a group of people intending to move south to Lydenburg. Albasini warned them that the blacks were hostile and advised them not to go. They ignored his warning and travelled south, where they were cruelly murdered and mutilated by Mokopane's people. Albasini then accompanied the Boers and played an important role in the "siege of Makapan". Although de Vaal is tied to "the documentary facts", the structure and the logic of his story is almost identical to the structure and logic of Mrs Biccard's. Like Mrs Biccard's account, de Vaal's chapter draws Albasini into the popular Afrikaner tradition.

The next four chapters deal with varied themes. They do not introduce very much that is new in terms of the way de Vaal sees Albasini and the Voortrekkers, and are not, therefore, discussed here. Chapters V and VIII deal with the respective visits of a commission from Inhambane sent to try and establish trading links with the Boers, and the visit of a Portuguese trader, D.F das Neves, and, as has already been mentioned, de Vaal uses these sources to focus on the everyday life of the Boer community. Chapter VI deals with the establishment of Goedewensch, which, like the description of Schoemansdal, is presented in terms of the establishment of an island of agricultural civilization in the bush, while Chapter VII deals in great detail with Albasini's appointment as Portuguese Vice-Consul.

The next chapter, "Verlore kanse" ("Lost chances"), is the chapter where de Vaal deviates perhaps the most from the stereotypes of separate black and white histories in the nationalist historical tradition. In this chapter, he deals in detail with the succession struggle that emerged in the Gaza kingdom after the death of Manukozi. As in his introductory chapter, de Vaal deals with African history as history, but here the editors left it alone, perhaps because of de Vaal's rather apologetic comment that:

> Seeing that this succession directly affected the Republic and Albasini, and had far-reaching consequences on the course of events in the Zoutpansberg and on the east-coast, it is desirable to examine it in detail.[40]

De Vaal explains that the two main contenders to the throne were Mawewe and Mzila, that Mzila initially suffered a defeat, and that he took refuge with the Boers, who placed him under Albasini's authority. Because of this:

> Mawewe viewed the Boers as his enemy and put all kinds of schemes in operation to paralyse communication with Delagoa Bay, to obstruct elephant hunting and to invade the Republic.[41]

De Vaal follows his sources (including Albasini) in depicting Mawewe as a cruel despot, but Mzila is presented as an astute political player. He acts in secret (through the Portuguese trader, das Neves) to get the support of both the Boers and the Portuguese in an attack against Mawewe. As de Vaal points out:

> Both Albasini and the government of the Republic were absolutely committed to supply the requested help, because this would have been the easiest way to get rid of an enemy who had completely hindered trade, elephant hunting and access through to the coast. With an eye to the future, friendship with Muzila would also mean the freedom to hunt elephants in his area.[42]

In the event, de Vaal says that the Boers were unable to help, although he does not explain why. Mzila, however, gained Portuguese support to eventually completely break Mawewe's power, and establish himself as the Gaza ruler, although with new obligations towards the Portuguese who had provided men, guns and ammunition. What de Vaal does in this chapter is to portray the shifting alliances between the Boers, Mzila and the Portuguese, as each of the players tried

---

40 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 56.
41 *Ibid.* page 58.
42 *Ibid.* pages 60 - 61.

to manipulate events to their own advantage, in a situation where no group had established dominance since the death of Manukozi.

Chapters X to XVI are the chapters that deal with the events leading to the retreat from Schoemansdal, the retreat itself, and the unsuccessful attempts to re-establish some control over the area. These are the chapters where any heroic Voortrekker stereotype is seriously undermined as the chapters read as a catalogue of dissent, accusations, incompetence and defeat. It is in these chapters that de Vaal's determination to present even the "mistakes" of the past" becomes most apparent. These chapters consist of detailed accounts of the events leading up to the retreat from Schoemansdal, presented in the measured style of the Rankean historian. In spite of this barrage of detail, certain themes and images emerge which provide a way of seeing these events which allows Albasini to remain relatively untarnished.

It is in these chapters that de Vaal first has to deal with divisions between Albasini and the Schoemansdal community, and with accusations made against Albasini. Firstly, Albasini makes himself unpopular when the Schoemansdallers, with the support of the *Landdrost* demanded that the *opgaaf* collected should remain in the area, rather than be paid over to the central government. Albasini refused to support this plan. Three times in Chapter X, he is accused by a number of inhabitants of the area of misconduct, in particular, in his collection of *opgaaf*. Twice, he attempts to resign the position of *Superintendent*, and these attempts to resign are not accepted by the central government. Although de Vaal does include what details are available of the accusations against Albasini, he does not seriously allow the reader to entertain the idea that there may be any truth in them. Firstly, he has already stated at the beginning of the chapter that: "Albasini was an extremely honourable and diligent man, and carried out the task that had been given to him in the finest detail."[43]

Secondly, de Vaal emphasises that the central government continued to dissuade Albasini from resigning, and states that this obviously meant that his work was acceptable to the authorities. In Chapter XII, a number of accusations are made against Albasini by Munene, including that he had secretly brought him children from various battles and that he routinely cheated on his accounts of tax collecting. He is also accused of having secretly had dealings with Mzila that contributed to the closing of the hunting grounds. Munene's hearing led to

---

[43] *Ibid.* page 65.

Albasini being instructed by the local court to have no further involvement with the black affairs. He refused to recognise their authority, referring to the fact that he was accountable only to the *Uitvoerende Raad*. The *Uitvoerende Raad* overturned the decision, and restored Albasini to his position as *Superintendent*. Again, de Vaal points out:

> From the proceedings of the Executive Council, and also the *Volksraad*, we may conclude that not only did Albasini enjoy their full confidence but also that they were very satisfied with his work.[44]

De Vaal conscientiously documents the accusations made against Albasini, but never discusses them in any detail. He seldom has any evidence to refute the numerous charges made against Albasini, except to reiterate the fact that the central authorities continued to trust him. What he sets up in these chapters is a triangle, with Albasini being supported by the central authorities, while being mistrusted and criticised by the Zoutpansbergers. The conflict around Albasini could easily have been presented as a conflict between Albasini and the Schoemansdal community, undermining the attempt to associate Albasini positively with the Voortrekkers. By repeatedly stressing that Albasini had the trust of the Transvaal authorities, de Vaal not only strongly implies that Albasini was innocent of the accusations made against him, but also continues to associate him positively with the Great Trek tradition. His accusers in the Zoutpansberg do not represent the heroic tradition of the Voortrekkers, but only a small, often lawless and irresponsible, group of local officials. Thus, these chapters of conflict and accusations can be reflected by the following comment in de Vaal's introduction:

> He was honest in his dealings with the Transvaal authorities and structured everything in his work to look after their interests.[45]

Chapter XIII deals with the attempts to get military help from the rest of the Transvaal, the continued saga of accusations and recriminations and the decision to abandon Schoemansdal. De Vaal's details the difficulty that the central government had in calling up the Boers from other areas to do commando duty to assist the Schoemansdallers. This again seriously undermines the stereotype of a united and heroic Transvaal Boer community. Finally, he deals with the commando under Kruger that was successfully called up and sent to assist the

---

[44] *Ibid.* page 79.
[45] *Ibid.* page not numbered (Introduction).

community at Schoemansdal. It was accompanied by a court that was instructed to investigate how far the problems in the Zoutpansberg rose out of the unlawful actions of the white inhabitants. De Vaal deals with the incident in which the court was stormed and the accused freed, and points out that Albasini's case was not heard.

De Vaal deals with this incident by discussing Albasini's view, and the views of some others, who felt that sending the court was a serious blunder. They felt that the court was one-sided, and that the authorities should have been concentrating on fighting the enemy, rather than investigating officials. De Vaal's detailing of the criticisms of the court suggest that this was, in fact, his opinion. At this point, the lack of food and ammunition, death of horses and oxen and the half-heartedness and disunity amongst the commando, led Paul Kruger to suggest that the commando be sent back, and that a small group of armed men would remain to protect Schoemansdal. The idea of abandoning the town came originally from the commando, and was opposed by a number of the inhabitants of Schoemansdal, who drew up a petition against the suggestion. A counter-petition was then led by one of the officials, who had been found guilty by the court, and this is attributed to the negative effect of the court case. The actual departure is dealt with in detail in emotional terms, with Kruger, for example, leaving the town with tears in his eyes. De Vaal ends the chapter with the following two paragraphs. Firstly, he says:

> So ends the tragic history of the formerly-prosperous small Voortrekker village of Schoemansdal, the old ivory centre of the Transvaal. Many reasons may be offered for the abandonment of the Boer settlement. However, all are bound up in the logic of history, the elephant-hunting period was largely something of the past and ultimately had to give way to agriculture, which would follow it with a great deal of struggle.[46]

Here de Vaal is the professional historian, looking back at the past with hindsight. The detailed narrative of the previous chapters has suggested a number of reasons for the abandoning of Schoemansdal: bad administration, unwise decisions, disunity, the unhealthiness of Schoemansdal, etc. It has almost completely avoided the issue of military weakness or defeat by the Venda groups. De Vaal, nevertheless, manages to close the chapter on a positive note. It is the logic of history, rather than defeat that led to the abandoning of Schoemansdal. It is

---

[46] *Ibid.* page 104.

presented as only a setback in the positive process of establishing "civilization" in the interior.

The last paragraph deals with Albasini:

> Surrounded by thousands of hostile barbarians, Albasini and his handful of people in the fort [*skans*] at Goedewensch were now the only whites who attempted to retain the northern Zoutpansberg for white civilization.[47]

The charges against Albasini, that were not heard due to the actions of a rioting crowd, have been submerged by the detailed narrative of events leading the retreat from Schoemansdal. The possible connections between these actions and the war have been glossed over, in discussion about the lack of wisdom of sending a court to try officials in a time of war. Instead, this chapter ends on a heroic note, with De Vaal's key image of Albasini, drawn directly from the stereotypes of nationalist narratives of the Great Trek. This is the climax of de Vaal's thesis.

The following chapter deals with Schoeman's abortive attempts to use a group of volunteers to defeat the Venda groups, and regain Schoemansdal. Schoeman is treated in unenthusiastic terms:

> If we take into consideration [the fact] that one of his most outstanding characteristics was the lusting after power, and that the only village that was named after him stood in danger of never again being inhabited, it is easy to understand why he was so zealous.[48]

This description sets him up for the conflict between him and Albasini in Chapter XV, where, partly as a result of Schoeman's reports, Albasini was removed from his post as *Superintendent*, and the position of *Superintendent* was abolished. The chapter also deals with the abortive attempts to get Mzila and the Swazi's to break the power of the Venda groupings. Schoeman was recalled and a commission under Paul Kruger was sent up:

> In contrast to Stephanus Schoeman's mission, the work of the Kruger Commission was characterised by cool-headed and tactful conduct.[49]

---

[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.* page 105.
[49] *Ibid.* page 122.

Paul Kruger based himself at Goedewensch with Albasini, whose advice he regularly sought. He reinstated Albasini as chief of the Shangaan groups. As de Vaal comments:

> Albasini was restored to honour, not only among his followers but also with the government which, after all the complaints which had been brought against him, demonstrated their faith in him anew.[50]

Once again, the triangle has been set up: Albasini has the support of Paul Kruger, representative of the Central authorities and the best in leadership the nationalist tradition has to offer, against Schoeman. Despite de Vaal's continued use of the moderate, objective tone of the professional historian, his view of Schoeman as incompetent, abrasive and dishonest is clear.

At this point, de Vaal's narrative of the story comes to an end, as he uses the last four chapters tie up loose ends. Chapter XVI deals with the issue of slavery. De Vaal begins this chapter by saying:

> It has already been shown in previous chapters that João Albasini traded in kaffir children on the east coast and during the existence of Ohrigstad. One of the main reasons for this was that he was a Portuguese, who came from Delagoa Bay where slavery was not only practised but where it was also allowed in law. Also, in the early days of his contact with the Boers he was not yet familiar with their laws and opinions about slavery. Consequently, he openly described his kaffirs at Makashulaskraal as slaves.[51]

This opening sums up the way in which de Vaal treats the issue of slavery. Most of the thesis deals with Albasini as he is associated with the Boers, and with Voortrekker issues. Yet with slavery, Albasini is dissociated from the Boers. Slavery is a Portuguese issue. That Albasini was a slave trader is first mentioned in the section on Albasini at the East coast. In the chapter where Albasini moves into the Eastern Transvaal, his slaving is mentioned again, but de Vaal is more concerned to demonstrate that the system of apprenticeship was not slavery, and that the Transvaal authorities made every attempt to prevent slavery. He describes the apprenticeship system, in the following terms:

> It is nevertheless known from the kaffir wars of these days that the natives took no precautionary measures for the protection of their wives and children. The result was that there were always a

---

50 *Ibid.* page 124.
51 *Ibid.* page 125.

> number of women [*meide*] and children left behind on the battlefield, who either faced death by hunger or were in danger of being torn apart by wild animals. It was thus a deliverance to them to be taken along by the commandos and, following a practice which may be dated to the English administration of the Cape Colony, apprenticed to a white master, the boys [*kaffertjies*] to their twenty-fifth year and the girls [*meidtjies*] to their twenty-first. From that moment onwards, these poor creatures were saved from certain death through starvation.[52]

The approach to apprenticeship was an emotive issue, and serves in some ways as a barometer of the way the writer is conceptualising the Boers. If the writer is conceptualising the Boers as intruders and oppressors, the apprenticeship system is seen as part of the oppression of the original inhabitants, and part of a history of coerced labour. From the nationalist perspective, where the Voortrekkers are God-fearing bearers of civilization the apprenticeship system was a humane system, designed not only to save orphans from starvation, but also as part of the Boers' civilizing mission, as apprentices would be Christianized and civilized. Here, it is completely divorced from the issue of labour needs. The accusations of slavery are seen simply as an attempt by British Imperialists to justify their imperialist designs on the independent Boer Republics.

It is in these terms that de Vaal presents apprenticeship. In his text, however, he repeatedly mentions the women and children that were captured in attacks on black chiefs, and there are instances where the women and children are fairly clearly presented as loot. For example, he mentions that in the wars against Makhado and "Katlagter" (Madzhie):

> For the encouragement of the Knobnoses, all women [*meide*] coming out of the battle who were too old to be apprenticed to the white people were to be given to them.[53]

De Vaal points out that it is a well-established fact that some black children came into Albasini's possession. He then moves on to discuss whether Albasini was still exporting slaves to the east coast:

> That Albasini, in as far as the situation of his farm Goedewensch was concerned, was in a favourable position to carry out a trade in slaves with the Portuguese settlements on the east coast leaves no doubt. Goedewensch was situated in the furthest eastern corner of

---

52 *Ibid.* page 126.
53 *Ibid.* page 85.

> the Zoutpansberg and no other whites that could lay charges against him lived between this place and the coast. Nevertheless, nowhere in his Portuguese correspondence, of which he kept copies and which was not accessible to the Boers, is reference made to slave trading. Thus, if he continued his practice of the east coast days in the Zoutpansberg, he must have done it in such a secretive manner that it is not possible to uncover it.[54]

The separation is clear. The Boers were not slavers. The Portuguese were, but in the absence of documents, the issue cannot be explored. What de Vaal has successfully done is to completely ignore the question of whether Albasini was trading black children within the Boer community, rather than exporting them to the coast.

Chapter XVII deals with the issue of the drawing up of the border between the Portuguese colony and the Transvaal Republic, and Albasini's plans to found a colony at Makashulaskraal, which he saw as the interior of the Portuguese colony. His hopes were dashed, when the boundary agreement put Makashulaskraal into the Transvaal. Albasini's attempts to found this colony were already in motion at the time of the Boers retreat from Schoemansdal. By discussing them here, as a separate issue, de Vaal avoids undermining his key image of Albasini, ensconced in

his fort, defending the north for civilization, while lesser people retreated. Chapter XVIII deals with the impoverishment of Albasini, and with the fact that he was appointed *Resident-Vrederegter* (Resident Justice of the Peace) by the government, indicating that the authorities still retained their earlier trust in him. At the end of the chapter, he deals in less than a page with Albasini's two-year visit to Kimberley and his attempt to make a living out of providing labour to the mines. For de Vaal, this is not part of the narrative of Transvaal history, and he makes no attempt to explore this period in Albasini's life.

Chapter XIX is the final chapter, and the conclusion. De Vaal concludes the thesis in much the same terms as he introduced it. His final paragraph begins like this:

> João Albasini did not leave many earthly possessions behind. It was also not necessary because his legacy to posterity was the fertile Zoutpansberg district, for which he had offered blood, sweat and tears [*goed en bloed*]. Together with Andries Hendrik Potgieter, his son Piet and the other rugged Boer leaders of the North, João Albasini's name will live on as one of the architects of

---

54 *Ibid.* page 128.

> white civilization in the Zoutpansberg, and as somebody who attempted to bring the Boers into contact with the sea.[55]

The numerous accusations against Albasini, the unheard trials, and the dissent and defeat are glossed over. Once again, Albasini is unequivocally presented as a hero, and placed into the Voortrekker tradition.

As in the introduction, the conclusion presents an image of Albasini that is created as much by the way he is fitted into the established narrative of Voortrekker history as by what de Vaal has said. The academic tradition provided de Vaal with it's own set of stereotypes, for example, the opposition between black and white, the Voortrekkers as bearers of civilization into the interior, the Transvaal struggling against British Imperialism, the significance of their finding an independent way to the sea, the Voortrekkers as self-reliant and upright ancestors of the Afrikaner. It provided de Vaal with ways of understanding Albasini's significance, and with a language and imagery that he could draw on in conceptualising, understanding and presenting his accounts. It also provided him with narrative conventions that shaped his presentation of Albasini. With its emphasis on documentary sources and scientific objectivity, it set de Vaal standards of what could be accepted as scientific truth, and gave him an ideal to aim for of presenting a detailed account of "what actually happened".

It is clear that de Vaal does, repeatedly, undermine the stereotypes of the nationalist tradition, in particular in his depiction of the relationships between blacks and whites, but also in his depiction of the Voortrekkers. From the perspective of the nineties, these are the areas where the thesis is the most interesting. What is not clear is to what extent the subversive elements in de Vaal's thesis came from his commitment to thoroughly reflecting what was in his sources, and to what extent they came from the personal interests and circumstances which placed him in an ambiguous position with regards to the mainstream academic tradition, and which led him to choose an unusual topic. Certainly, the potential antagonism between the stereotypes of the tradition and his commitment to his sources would not have been as strong if de Vaal had chosen a less controversial hero, and a more heroic episode in Transvaal history. Yet de Vaal clearly did not intend to challenge the established Voortrekker narrative. Rather, he intended to place Albasini within it. I would argue that his rather unorthodox historical background and topic enabled him to "see" elements

---

[55] *Ibid.* page 144.

in his sources that some of his contemporaries would not have. He was able, for example, to "see" blacks, sometimes, as political actors. However, it was his broad commitment to that Voortrekker narrative, and his obvious commitment to reflecting "the scientific truth" that enabled him to bring those elements into the mainstream. Where the elements jarred too strongly, they were edited out.

PART THREE

CHAPTER 4
THE GAZANKULU IMAGE OF ALBASINI

In 1988, when members of the Albasini family organised the centenary commemoration of Albasini, they made arrangements for extensive Shangaan participation in the event. This boiled down to issuing an official invitation to the government of Gazankulu, the bantustan for "the Shangaans". The invitation was accepted. Professor Ntsan'wisi, the then Chief Minister, arrived with an escort of drum majorettes, unveiled a plaque donated by Gazankulu, and made a speech. The programme included the singing of a song which was composed for the occasion by Mr S.J. Khosa of the Gazankulu Department of Education. This was sung by the Giyani Adult Choir. The programme also included dancing by the Baloyi tribal warriors, the Jiwawa group of Women Dancers and the Gazankulu Youth group, and "the Paying of Last Respects" by "Shangaan Warriors". The occasion ended with the singing of a hymn, (Now thank we all our God), and the Gazankulu National Anthem.[1]

The role assigned to the Shangaan visitors in the programme and the dramatic sketch constructs them in terms of a timeless tribalism. Although Professor Ntsan'wisi made a speech, their participation was in all other respects restricted to singing and "tribal dancing". The dramatic sketch provided by the family scripted warriors rushing on and off stage at various moments, shouting "Bayethe!" It is apparent that in the view of the organisers of the centenary celebration, Shangaans have "traditions" rather than history. These traditions are seen as unchanging, and include a fierce loyalty to Albasini as "a tribal chief".

The ability of the family to commemorate Albasini in this way depended to a large extent on the existence of a Gazankulu bantustan, which claimed to represent a Shangaan ethnic group, as well as the willingness of the Gazankulu delegation to participate. On one level, it simply meant that there was a structure which could be approached and invited by the family. At another level, it meant that the paraphernalia needed to express this sense of ethnic tradition existed, or could be easily put together: there were already youth groups, dance groups and choirs constituted in terms of an ethnic identity, and a Gazankulu National Anthem which could be sung.

---

[1] Albasini Centenary Programme, no date (1988), Marie Eyssel papers.

There was some indication that the Gazankulu delegation did not wholeheartedly accept the role assigned to them. Helga Giesekke, a descendent of German missionaries in the area and a local historian, who was entirely unsympathetic to the family portrayal of Albasini, commented that the celebration had no life and that it was obvious that "the whites had organised it all without consulting the blacks".[2] Professor Ntsan'wisi arrived "hours late" and his attitude led Marie Eyssel to comment that he was "jealous because of course he is not really a chief."[3] It also appears that the Drum Majorettes were considerably slicker than the "tribal dancers", whose costumes included cardboard shields, and who led Marie Eyssel to note: "Those warriors made me weep!! Some dressed like circus clowns! Where are the warriors that danced for my Dad by the thousand when I was a child?"[4] Despite this evidence that there was some tension, overall the Gazankulu participation was extensive and involved a considerable amount of effort, particularly on the part of Mr Khosa, who had composed the song. This song constituted the one item where the Gazankulu visitors had the opportunity to express their ideas about Albasini. The song goes like this:

JOÃO ALBASINI
Hi S.J. Khosa

João Albasini, João Albasini,
João, João, João,
Muhloti watindlopfu,
Muhloti watimhelembe,
João, João, João, João Albasini;

Hosi ya Magwamba,
Hosi ya VaGaza,
Hosi ya Tsonga,
Hosi ya Machangana;

Munyimeri wa wa Mfumo wa Pitori
Ni Mfumo wa Phutukezi,
João, João, João,
Nhenha ya Mumaji,

---

[2] Interview with H. Giesekke, 7.12.1997.
[3] Interview with M. Eyssel, 8.5.1993.
[4] This comment was written on a scrap of paper in Marie Eyssel's file of papers relating to the celebration. It appears to be the rough copy of a letter she was writing. She repeated essentially the same thing, when she showed me photographs, pointing out the cardboard shields and remarking on how badly they were dressed.

Ye, João, João, João;

Namuntlha, namuntlha
hinwi tsundzukahiku khensa,
Yena Musirheleri wa Vatsonga
e ka valala va vona.

Murhangeri lo nkulu João.[5]

The following English translation appeared in the programme:

JOÃO ALBASINI
by S.J. Khosa

João Albasini,
Elephant hunter
Rhinoceros hunter,
João Albasini;

Chief of the Gwambas,
Chief of the Tsongas,
Chief of the Gazas
Chief of the Shangaans:

Representative of the Pretoria
And the Portuguese governments,
João, the Portuguese hero.

Today we remember him
With thanks-giving,
He, defender of the Tsongas
Against their enemies.

João Albasini,
A great leader.

The song presents an image of Albasini that is similar in many ways to the image portrayed by the family at the centenary celebration. He is introduced as a hunter of elephants and rhinoceros. As with the family contribution, Albasini's dependence on the economic activity of organising the killing of elephants for the ivory trade, has been transformed into a more generalised image of the big game hunter.

---

[5] Taken from a copy of the score given to me by the composer, Mr S.J. Khosa.

Central to the song, and the portrayal of Albasini is the idea of him as a chief expressed in the second verse. This verse refers to him as a chief of the Gwambas, chief of the Tsongas, chief of the Gaza's and chief of the Shangaans. These terms have all been applied with varying degrees of vagueness to refer to the descendants of the Gaza immigrants who entered South Africa after the Portuguese victories over Gungunyana and his general Maguigane in 1895 - 1897. The descendants of these immigrants, who would later be classified as Tsonga/ Shangaan, were disparate groups, with no cultural unity, who moved as individuals or as groups, settling independently or under existing chiefs in what would become the Transvaal.[6] In the Transvaal, the immigrants were given several general labels. The whites often referred to East Coast immigrants as "Knobnoses" because of the nasal cicatrization practised by some of the immigrants. The term "Gwamba" was used by local Africans in the Zoutpansberg and Spelonken areas, again to refer to immigrants. This term was originally derived from the name of a chief near Inhambane whose followers had traded in the Northern Transvaal, but was applied much more generally to immigrants from the East Coast. It was used by the Swiss missionaries in the Spelonken in the 1880's and 1890's when they reduced the various dialects of the people amongst whom they worked into a single written form, which they labelled Gwamba. This term was abandoned by the mission in the late nineteenth century as it was employed only in the Spelonken and was not used on the coast, to which the Swiss Mission had spread in the 1880s. By 1907, they referred to the written language they used as the Thonga/Shangaan language.[7]

In general usage, in the South African context, the term Tsonga is used to refer to the immigrants who entered the Transvaal in the early part of the nineteenth century or at the time of the civil war between Mzila and Mawewe in the 1860's. Many of these groups were never under Gaza rule. The term Tsonga is used to distinguish them from the descendants of the immigrants who generally entered South Africa later after the defeat of the Gaza under Ngungunyane by the Portuguese in 1897 and who had adopted the material culture of the Gaza Nguni to a far greater extent. The descendants of these immigrants are classified Shangaan. Neither term is precise, or used precisely, and neither term refers to any bounded group. The term Shangaan was also used loosely to refer to East

---

[6] P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", pages 83 - 87.

[7] *Ibid.*

Coasters on the mines, and is still used in this far more loose sense in the Transvaal to refer to people who are classified Tsonga or Shangaan.[8]

Albasini was associated with only a section of the East coast immigrants. It was mainly the heterogeneous population in the Spelonken hills, living under minor headmen, who accepted his overlordship. In the 1860's there were a number of immigrant groups who remained independent of him. An estimate of able bodied men by Oscar Dahl in 1879 put the number of "Magwamba" fighting men as around 10 000, living under about 30 independent chiefs. Dahl listed "Knobnoses" living under all the major chiefs in the Zoutpansberg, with their numbers ranging rather vaguely from "a few Knobnoses" to "a large number of Knobnoses".[9] Significantly, Oscar Dahl did not attempt to classify these chiefs as Venda or North Sotho. His list, however, including all the major Venda chiefs, Modjadji, the Lobedu chief, and a few North Sotho chiefs, undermines the picture of Albasini as chief over a homogeneous Tsonga group. The groups associated with Albasini were those under the "approximately 30 independent chiefs" referred to. Again, not all of these groups recognised Albasini's overlordship. For example, there were a number of groups, predominantly of the Maluleke clan, who were settled along the middle and lower Letaba River and who perennially recognised Gaza overlordship.[10] Lastly, those immigrants who entered the Transvaal after the defeat of Ngungunyane, did so only after Albasini's death.

By using the different "ethnic" terms in the second verse, it appears that Mr Khosa is giving some recognition to the diverse origins of the people who would be classified as part of a Tsonga/Shangaan ethnic group. However, by using terms such as "the Tsonga" or "the Magwamba" he is implying that these terms described coherent subgroups, rather than that these were imprecise, and often interchangeable terms to describe heterogeneous groups of immigrants. By describing Albasini, with glaring inaccuracy, as chief of all these "groups", the song presents Albasini as a unifying force. It expresses an idea almost identical to the one expressed by the family: that Albasini, as "Paramount chief" welded the different groups into one nation.

---

[8] *Ibid.* page 86.

[9] TA/SN 1: A, Oscar Dahl, "Estimate of able-bodied armed men in the Zoutpansberg, 1879".

[10] TA/SN 1: A, Oscar Dahl, "Estimate of able-bodied armed men"; P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", page 84 and B.H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks*, pages 24 - 26.

The third verse deals with Albasini's official positions as representative of the Portuguese and the Pretoria governments. It is not surprising that an official (homeland) government delegation should emphasise official positions, especially in view of the fact that João Albasini, the great-grandson of the first João, had held the official position of "superintendent" at Giyani. According to an article in *Bantu* this was "in recognition of the fact that his forbears played an important role in Machangana history.[11] Here the reference to Albasini as "representative of the Pretoria government" refers to his position as "Superintendent of Native Tribes". Importantly, this is separated from the issue of him as a chief, which has the effect of presenting his chieftainship as something independent of his role as a government administrator. This point is discussed in more detail below. This verse also refers to him as "a Portuguese hero". This stress on his Portuguese identity allows a "Tsonga" group to be closely associated with Albasini, but at the same time to be disassociated with the Voortrekkers, and through association, the white, nationalist government.

The fourth and last verses repeat and summarise the idea of Albasini as a leader and as a somebody closely associated with a "Tsonga" ethnic group. The ideas propagated by the family, and the song are very similar. There is a practical reason for this. Mr S.J. Khosa was a musician working in the Education department of the Homeland administration at Giyani. He is a musician, rather than a historian and he would have needed to find information on Albasini in order to write the song. This information was readily available in the official Gazankulu archives at Giyani, in the form of a pamphlet or booklet, entitled "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888." The copy of the pamphlet in these archives was signed by Mr F.M. Maboko, and dated 1973, but the pamphlet was not written by Mr Maboko. It forms the basis of the printed booklet distributed by the family, and it is attributed by them to "João Albasini III", the government official at Giyani.[12] The most easily accessible and coherent information about Albasini within the official homeland structure, therefore, came directly from the Albasini family.

What this points to is the extent to which the family versions and the Gazankulu song have fed into each other. The family versions have clearly fed into official Gazankulu history, and have spread beyond the archives. The song sung at the

---

11 *Bantu*, August, 1972, name of writer not given, article entitled "Juwawa of the Magwamba", pages 29 - 32.

12 João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888".

centenary celebration, for example, had been heard by a number of my informants. A copy of the pamphlet in the archives was shown to me at Ndengeza's village, where I was interviewing an elderly relation of the chief. Marie Eyssel was invited to the occasion where Ndengeza was inaugurated as a chief, and she delivered a speech, partly in Shangaan, as a representative of the Albasini family.

The influence was not necessarily all in one direction, however. In the 1970's, João Albasini III conducted a series of oral interviews in the bantustan with a view to codifying "Tsonga custom and Law". The Tsonga transcripts of these interviews are held at UNISA. A project that aims to codify Tsonga custom and law was obviously part of the process of reifying the idea of "Tsonga culture" and creating the idea of a bounded ethnic group. At the same time, it meant that João Albasini's own view of his great-grandfather was partly influenced by oral traditions. His booklet distributed by the family at the centenary celebration explicitly claims to be based on oral traditions.

The two areas where the family traditions and the song converge is around the idea of Albasini as a chief, and around the idea of a Shangaan ethnic group. This is not surprising, given that Gazankulu's existence was predicated on the idea of ethnicity. The Homeland authorities tried to foster ethnic unity in a number of ways. These included adopting the myth of origin of one clan as a "traditional" symbol for all "Tsongas", introducing a Gazankulu radio service and newspaper, as well as adopting a Gazankulu flag and encouraging associations such as the Masshangana Urban Movement and the nationalist cultural association, known as *Ximoko*.[13] While the Gazankulu delegation to the centenary celebration might not have shared the family's portrayal of them as mindlessly devoted to Albasini and helplessly tied to "tradition", the idea of João as a Shangaan chief welding different groups into one is an important resource in giving historical depth to a constructed ethnic identity.

The main question which I look at in this chapter is the extent to which this idea is reflected or challenged in a group of oral histories collected in the Northern Province from the late 1970's until the early 1990's. The first group of interviews dates from 1979. These interviews were conducted by David Killick on behalf of Patrick Harries who had at the time been barred from entering the homeland of Gazankulu by the Bantu Affairs Department. I have also drawn from a second

---

[13] P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", page 109.

group of interviews from a number of field trips, where Patrick Harries brought groups of history students from the University of Cape Town to collect oral history in the Northern Transvaal. The third group of interviews were those that I conducted on a short field trip in 1991. Only this last group of interviews was specifically on Albasini.

The fact that the majority of these interviews were conducted within the Gazankulu bantustan, had a direct bearing on my research. In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act made provision for the Establishment of tribal, regional and territorial authorities for blacks, and for the gradual delegation to these authorities of certain executive and administrative powers. The Tribal authority generally consisted of a chief, or a group of headmen under a chairman, and was the first administrative level. At this stage the Regional authorities were constituted geographically, rather than ethnically. The Vhembe regional authority, for example, included a number of Tsonga-speaking chiefs, of which Chief Mhinga was the most powerful, as well as Venda and some North Sotho-speaking chiefs. This was opposed by some of the Tsonga members led by Chief Mhinga, who objected to the numerical superiority (and, therefore, the greater voting powers) of the Venda chiefs. Their opposition only bore fruit in 1959 with the passing of the Bantu Self-Governing Act. This Act stated that "the Bantu people of South Africa do not constitute a homogeneous people but form separate national units on the basis of language and culture", and declared the Tsonga/Shangaan a national unit. New Regional authorities, dominated by Tsonga speakers were formed, and joined under the chairmanship first of Chief Mhinga, and later of Professor Hudson Ntsan'wisi.

In 1969 the Matshangana territorial authority was constituted, and in 1971, the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act provided for the replacement of territorial authorities with legislative assemblies. In 1973, this Matshangana territorial authority was declared the self-governing territory of Gazankulu, with the seat of government in Giyani and Tsonga was recognised as an additional official language. The Legislative Assembly consisted of 68 members, of whom 26 were elected and 42 consisted of chiefs, or of individuals designated by the regional authorities. The Chief Minister would be elected by the Assembly and would appoint five other Cabinet members of whom not less than two, or more than three should be chiefs.[14]

---

[14] P. Harries, ""A Forgotten Corner of the Transvaal": Reconstructing the

Gazankulu was therefore constituted within ethnic terms, and laid great emphasis on the use of "traditional leaders" in legislation and administration. This emphasis on the role of chiefs, however, was not new. A reliance on tribal authorities as a basis for control had been an important element in "Native Administration" long before the development of the Bantustan system.[15] Rich argues that the general thrust of government policy from the 1920's was "to delegate power to tribal chiefs and exclude the African petty bourgeoisie from any effective consultation."[16] This was in a context when the authority of chiefs was being seriously eroded by the increasing limitation on the chief's ability to distribute land which formed the main source of his political power, as well as by the rising African petty bourgeoisie.[17] What was new in the homeland structure was the way in which an alliance was formed between chiefs and the petty bourgeoisie, which could be expressed within the rhetoric of ethnicity.[18]

The constitution of the Homeland in ethnic terms led to a programme of extensive forced removals in the name of ethnic consolidation. A Surplus Peoples Project Report in 1983 estimated that over 68 000 people had been moved to Gazankulu in terms of ethnic consolidation.[19] Related to this was an upsurge of ethnic animosity, which emerged out of bitter conflicts over local resources. These conflicts often related to issues such as the implementation of ethnic borders, the imposition of Venda chiefs over Tsonga-speakers in areas declared Venda, and the

---

History of a Relocated Community through Oral Testimony and Song", in B. Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, Johannesburg, 1987, page 106; M. Horrel (S.A. Institute of Race Relations), *The African Reserves of South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1969, pages 1 - 9 and M. Horrel (S.A. Institute of Race Relations), *The African Homelands of South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1973, page 60.

15 P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", pages 97 - 99 and P. Rich, "The origins of Apartheid Ideology: The Case of Ernest Stubbs and Transvaal Native Administration, c. 1902-1932", in *African Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 315, April 1980.

16 P. Rich, *op cit.* page 190.

17 P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", page 99, and P. Rich, *op cit.* page 189.

18 P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", page 108.

19 Surplus Peoples Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, Project Report, Vol. 5, 1983, pages 133-135. This figure was extrapolated from a table, but note that the report stresses that all figures are estimates.

conflict over the languages used in schools. These conflicts could all further the mobilisation of people along ethnic lines.[20]

My focus on whether Albasini was regarded as "chief" of "the Shangaan" meant that I was working with two loaded, contested concepts, that were central to existence of Gazankulu, and which meant that in a number of ways the existence of Gazankulu was central to my research. Firstly, it was only when I was writing this chapter that I became aware of how extensively ideas of ethnicity had structured my own research. I arrived in the Northern Transvaal firmly convinced by my supervisor's work which challenged the ideas of a primordial, historical Tsonga ethnicity, and looked instead at the way in which an arbitrary classificatory ethnicity became reified and politicised, and used as a way of mobilising people in the twentieth century.[21] On the other hand, doing research in an ethnic bantustan, with a Tsonga interpreter, visiting "Tsonga settlements", and in the face of an extensive secondary literature which refers to "the Tsonga", it is difficult not to reify this idea and extrapolate it back into the nineteenth century, particularly when many informants are doing so.

One important factor in all the interviews, was the influence of Mr F.M. Maboko. In 1991 Mr Maboko was living in his retirement on his farm at Mambedi. Mambedi was part of a Swiss mission farm, that had been divided up into freehold farms and sold to congregants by the Swiss Mission in 1923.[22] Mr Maboko had worked closely with João Albasini III on the collection of Tsonga law and custom, and, as mentioned above, he had signed the pamphlet written by Albasini in the Giyani archives. In what capacity he did this is unclear. He acted as a translator for Dave Killick in 1979, who at the time wrote a description of him, which suggests that he had a high level of commitment to the idea of the Tsonga people:

> Maboko is excellent. He is 69 and partially crippled by a stroke to the extent that he can't drive and can barely write, but is extremely enthusiastic and intelligent with a well-trained perception that presumably derives from his survey of Tsonga law. He is also quite remarkable in other ways. He lives very modestly, and has used his money to build and equip a library in Giyani (the only one in

---

[20] P. Harries, "A Forgotten Corner", pages 106 -107; P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", pages 106 - 107 and Surplus Peoples Project, *op cit.* pages 33 - 37.

[21] P. Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism".

[22] Interview with F.M. Maboko, 13.7.1984.

> Gazankulu) which he donated to the Tsonga people and of which he is the librarian.[23]

Mr Maboko translated repeatedly for the University of Cape Town field trips, and where he was not able to personally translate for all the interviews, it was he who obtained assistants. When I arrived freshly in the Northern Province to collect oral evidence in 1991, he was my "point of entry". At the time he had suffered a stroke and was not able to accompany me. Nevertheless, it was his daughter, Patricia Vuketi Maboko, who acted as my interpreter, and we proceeded on advice from Mr Maboko on where to go and who to interview. In this way, Mr Maboko's view of Albasini was crucial in shaping my own. One aspect of this, that only struck me after collecting interviews, was that we almost entirely interviewed Tsonga informants.

A second way in which the Gazankulu context structured my research was related to the dynamics of finding informants. We (Vuketi Maboko and I) were directed to some informants directly by Mr Maboko. This applied particularly to the informants living on the various mission farms. Generally, however, arriving in an area as strangers, our first step would be to visit the office of the Tribal authority. From this office we would be directed to informants. Sometimes we were directed to chiefs or to elderly men who were known to be knowledgeable, and whose knowledge derived mainly from traditions that had been passed on to them. However, the clerks at the Tribal Offices as often directed us to retired teachers, or the owners of trading stores. This way of working meant that my stereotype of discrete oral knowledge was thoroughly undermined. It also meant that the process of finding informants was structured through the chiefs or headman that constituted the Homeland administration. It meant that my chances of finding any views that very seriously opposed what I have described as the official view, were undermined. Another implication was that in the same way that Albasini could be a historical resource in the attempt to define a Shangaan identity, he could also be a historical resource for individual chiefs, or aspirant chiefs, who tied their claims to chiefly status within the homeland structure to the fact that he had allocated land to them and made them chiefs. One example of this is discussed in the next chapter.

---

[23] Letter from D. Killick to P. Harries (in the possession of Patrick Harries), 3.4.1979.

Another factor that is relevant to the question of whether Albasini was regarded as a chief is related to the fact that even the term "chief" is problematic. The word "chief" is not easily translated into Shangaan (*Xichangani*). The translation of "king" is *hosi*, and this was the word that Mr Khosa used in his song for the centenary celebration. The word *hosi*, however, can be used far more vaguely to mean something like "My lord" or "sir". It is also the word used for "God". An alternative word in Shangaan that has Nguni roots is *Mnumzana*. Its literal translation is "owner of the homestead" but it can be used figuratively as a term or respect, such as "Sir". It does not refer to any institutional status.[24] What this problem demonstrates is the extent to which the term "chief", is bound up with colonial ideas of how African societies worked. For example, Section 147 of the South Africa Act, 1909 and Section 1 of the Bantu Administration Act of 1927, as amended, refers to the State President as "Supreme Chief of all Africans in the Republic"[25] The term here is obviously meaningless except as an expression of white ideas about the appropriate political system for blacks.

To a certain extent, there appears to be an element of this usage of chief in the official recognition of Albasini as a chief by the Transvaal government. According to a report published in 1905 for the War Office, Albasini, as a result of :

> having great influence with the natives, was appointed to the Native Commissionership of the district by the Boer Government. He soon built up a regular chieftainship for himself, and having persuaded a number of the down-trodden Bathonga in Portuguese territory to come across the border and live under his protection, was before long the absolute ruler of a large and powerful tribe.[26]

According to this report the Transvaal Government always considered the Native Commissioner of the Spelonken the chief of the Shangaans *ex officio*, and as a result they had no regular chiefs, instead being ruled by Indunas.[27] What this description points to is the tension between the interpretation of Albasini as a chief where this is an administrative expedient with his authority deriving from his official position under the Transvaal government, and the interpretation of Albasini as a chief which sees him as having built up his own position independently of his official status. These different interpretations appear to have been contested even

---

24 W.W.X. Nkuna, personal communication. See also H. Junod *op cit.* page 328.
25 M. Horrel, *The African Reserves*, page 1.
26 R.H. Massie (comp.) *The Native Tribes of the Transvaal*, London, 1905, page 64.
27 *Ibid.* page 65.

and argue its common application in Southern Africa. I would speculate, that these songs sung in the context of missionary education may be attempting to draw on that convention.

Neither of the two songs give any information about Albasini. He is simply a reference point for a past idealised age. This use of Albasini simply as an abstract historical marker is also a fairly common feature in the interviews. One example of this was the testimony given by Chief Xigalo who started his narrative by saying:

> They came with Juwawa. They came in the year of 1800 and something. When the war ended he placed us somewhere at Mpeni.[56]

He continued with the narrative, detailing where the group around Chief Xigalo had been settled, and detailing a number of removals, up until the present. Albasini was not mentioned again until this narrative was finished, and I started asking questions. Chief Xigalo was able to answer briefly a question about hunting, remembering that Albasini had provided the guns to hunt elephants but knew almost nothing else about Albasini.

Whereas the songs used Albasini to represent a past time, here he is mainly a starting point for the narrative, and his significance is simply that he "placed" the group. In what capacity he did this is not mentioned, and the relationship between Albasini and the group is not explored. The narrative is confined to the movements of a group of people defined by their allegiance to the leadership of Chief Xigalo. Although this is a fairly extreme example, it is clear from the interviews in general that by 1991 Albasini is primarily remembered for whom he "placed" where. In the 1979 interviews the allocation of land is mentioned frequently.[57] However, in these interviews it was generally only one aspect of what was discussed. Most informants remembered some details about trading, hunting and specific wars, and gave a far more nuanced general picture of the politics of the area. By 1991, much of this detail had been forgotten. For example, Mr Mukhari, the grandson of Njakanjaka, who in a 1979 interview was described

---

[56] Interview with Chief Xigalo, 26.1.1991.

[57] For example, it was mentioned in interviews with E. Mabyalane, 30.3.1979; Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, exact date not given; Ndengeza N'wa-Manungu, 2.4.1979, who stated it was N'wa-Manungu under Albasini who allocated land; Headman Maswanganyi, 8.4.1979 and an informant at Xikumba, 8.4.1979.

as a *mpisa* or great hunter, hunting elephants because "the tusks and bones of elephant represent wealth"[58] appeared to have very little knowledge of this, claiming that Njakanjaka had been killing elephants without a gun, and stating emphatically that only whites had had guns.[59] Mr Mpombo, when asked about hunting, referred rather vaguely to the hunting of Bushbuck, wild pigs and springbok, although he did remember that the hunting of elephants took place in Portuguese East Africa.[60] In the 1991 interviews, where much of the detail had been lost, the discussion of who was placed by Albasini took on a far greater importance. For instance, in the interview with J.M. Mukhari and S. Springs, it took up a large proportion of the interview, and it was at least mentioned in all of the interviews.

A striking feature of this memory is that as in the interview with Chief Xigalo, there was almost no discussion about in what capacity Albasini had allocated land. Out of all the interviews discussed, both in 1979 and 1991, only one informant appears to spontaneously mention Albasini as a chief. This was Chief Njakanjaka, who early in the interview states: "What brought us from Mozambique to here was Chief Juwawa." In response to a question about which Shangaan chiefs were with Juwawa, he answers, "The chiefs you are referring to, I don't understand; the chief was Juwawa."[61] At Xhikumba, one informant commented "They (the interviewers) want to know who was the big man of the chiefs? It is Albasini... Juwawa. Before I was born the one who placed the chiefs was Juwawa."[62] In 1991, Mr M.J. Maluleke, Acting Chief Hlaneki, described Albasini as a chief, but not with any conviction: "Probably he was even regarded as their senior because they used to take him ... took him as their sort of a chief ..."[63] One interpretation of why Chief Njakanjaka laid such stress on Albasini as the chief, could be related to his own position as somebody who claimed chieftainship, but did not gain recognition as a chief within the Homeland structure. Chief Njakanjaka related his claim to chieftainship to the fact that he had been placed in a position of authority by Albasini. A stress on the authority of Albasini over the Shangaan chiefs can only strengthen his claim.[64]

---

58 Interview with Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, exact date not given.
59 Interview with J.M. Mukhari and S. Springs, 6.2.1991.
60 Interview with B. Mpombo, 25.1.1991.
61 Interview with Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, exact date not given.
62 Interview with informant at Xikumba, 8.4.1979.
63 Interview with M.J. Maluleke, 28.1.1991.
64 Interview with Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, exact date not given; see also the interview with J. Mukhari and S. Springs, 6.2.1991, where they discuss their

The interviews do not directly challenge the idea of Albasini as chief. It could be argued that in describing him as somebody who allocated land, it is implied that he is a chief. It is clear, however, that with the exception of Chief Njakanjaka in 1979, and in direct contrast to the stress on chieftainship in the centenary song, this aspect is allowed little importance. One interpretation of this is that there is little memory of Albasini as chief, because his relationship with the East Coast immigrants was far more ambivalent than his family, or the Gazankulu song allow for. A different interpretation would be that Albasini's relationship with the East Coast immigrants is being reinterpreted in the context of a level of racial segregation, which is unable to support the idea of a "white" chief. One point, that would mitigate against this argument, however, is that very few of the informants mention Albasini as white.

In fact, another generally striking element in the oral interviews, particularly when it is seen in comparison with de Vaal's thesis, is the way in which Albasini is dissociated from the Boers. Albasini's marriage into a Boer family is only mentioned once in response to a question about why Albasini helped the Boers.[65] Mr Abel Mpapele mentioned that when in Lydenberg Albasini sent his African wives back to Mozambique, with food and clothing, and married "a European".[66] More centrally, the role played by the armed force under Albasini in collecting tax as Superintendent of Native Tribes for the Boers, and later in attempting to subdue the Venda chiefs after the evacuation of Schoemansdal has been largely forgotten. Thus, for example, de Vaal talks about the arrangement that Albasini made with Schoeman to use the "government troops", which he explains refers to "the Knobnose force under Albasini" for the safety of the land and people.[67] He mentions that Albasini's "Knobnose followers who lived around Goedewensch" were exempted from military service and were known as Government people.[68]

This association through Albasini with the Boers is mentioned in some of the more detailed 1979 interviews, but very sketchily. For example, in 1979, Mr E. Mabyalane mentioned that the Tsonga under N'wa-Manungu helped the Boers to

---

attempt to have a young chief elect recognised by the Homeland government. By 1991, they had not yet had a response to their application.

65 Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.

66 Interview with A. Mpapele, 3.3.1979.

67 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 58.

68 *Ibid.* page 66.

fight the Venda, but knew no detail.[69] Chief Ndengeza, a descendant of N'wa-Manungu, explicitly denied this, saying that N'wa-Manungu never fought alongside the Boers. The Chief argued that he fought alongside Albasini and with the English, and gave this as the reason why the Boers "are against" N'wa-Manungu's descendants.[70] Chief Njakanjaka mentioned simply that Njakanjaka had helped the Dutch in the Makhado war.[71] Mr A. Mpapele referred to the Tsongas having aided Piet Joubert and the Boers, and was able to refer to some specific chiefs that they fought.[72] Thomas Masuluke referred to the fact that Albasini's forces fought against the Vendas with the Boers, but presented this in a way that stressed the idea of him as an independent player, rather than a strong ally of the Boers, explaining that Albasini supported the Boers in the hope that they would recognise him as the ruler of the Tsonga.[73] Headman Maswanganyi said that the Shangaans assisted Joubert against the Vendas, and said that he did not know why Albasini helped Joubert, but the Shangaans were fighting for a place to stay.[74] I will come back to this idea below.

By the time of my 1991 interviews, no informant mentioned helping the Boers, even in response to questions.[75] Although all the informants mentioned wars, these are now much more vaguely referred to as wars between the Vendas and Shangaans. Mr J. Ash, for example, said that: "Vendas used to fight with Shangaans ... Shangaans were supported by Albasini."[76] Mr Makuleke, Acting Chief Hlaneki, said that he was not clear who he (Albasini) fought. He knew that Albasini had fought the Ndebeles near Potgietersrus, and he thought that he had fought some of the Venda chiefs "this side."[77] Chief Xigalo simply referred to the wars of the Shangaans but did not specify who they were against.[78] Mr Springs and Mr Mukhari said that Albasini went to Venda and started fighting the Venda.[79] Besides the fact that the 1979 informants had some memory of assisting

---

69 Interview with E. Mabyalane, 30.3.1979.
70 Interview with Chief Ndengeza, 2.4.1979.
71 Interview with Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, exact date not given.
72 Interview with A. Mpapele, 3.3.1979.
73 Interview with T. Masuluke, 7.4.1979.
74 Interview with Headman Maswanganyi, 8.4.1979.
75 See for example, Chief Xigalo, 26.1.1991, who said in response to my question that he knew nothing about wars with the Boers and M.J. Maluleke, 28.1.1991, who said he hadn't heard anything about that.
76 Interview with J. Ash, 29.1.1991.
77 Interview with M.J. Makuleke, 28.1.1991.
78 Interview with Chief Xigalo, 26.1.1991.
79 Interview with J.M. Mukhari and S. Springs, 6.2.1991.

the Boers, their memory of the wars tended to be far more specific. For example, Mr Masuluke specifically mentioned campaigns against Mashau and Magoro[80] while a number of informants referred to a campaign against Lwamondo, in which Mzila was involved.[81]

There was also a tendency in 1991 for these wars to be described as conflicts over land. This shift is expressed very clearly in one interview which took place at the mission farm of Valdesia. Mr Mpombo told that Albasini suggested to people that they "go and fight for the country":

> He (Albasini) started talking to people ... Then he had an understanding with those people he was talking to ... that ... we must go and fight. And fight for the country ... That will be ours ... I mean its our inheritance ... Some of them did agree ... some of them didn't go ... Those who went with him to go and fight for the country ... he came back with them ... gave them pieces ... pieces of country.[82]

This interview takes two memories of Albasini, that he was involved in wars, and that he "placed people" giving them land, and conflates them, so that Albasini becomes the person who led his followers to fight for the land. Mr Marhanele gave an almost identical interpretation:

> The Tsongas also wanted land. There were Vendas here already. So Juwawa helped fight the Vendas. Many headmen were given places by him. At first they were all at Rionde, but it was too congested, so he placed them.[83]

This association of the wars and the access to land occurs repeatedly in the interviews, particularly in the 1991 interviews, although not always with the explicitness of Mr Mpombo. Chief Xigalo, for example, started his account by saying that: "When the war ended he placed us somewhere at Mpeni..."[84] Headman Maswanganyi expressed a similar, though slightly more nuanced idea when he followed up his comment that he didn't know why Albasini had assisted Joubert, but the Shangaans were fighting for a place to stay:

---

80 Interview with T. Masuluke, 7.4.1979.
81 See, for example, interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979 and Headman Maswanganyi, 8.4.1979.
82 Interview with B. Mpombo, 25.1.1991.
83 Interview with R.J. Marhanele, 26.1.1991.
84 Interview with Chief Xigalo, 26.1.1991.

> When the wars were over they (the Shangaan chiefs) were asked: "How do you want things settled? They said: "We don't want to move the Vendas, but we want to have a place where we can all be together. "

P. Harries points out that Tsonga-speakers laboured under a real threat that, as immigrants into the area, they did not have a secure historical claim to land. From the time of the earliest land commissions, access to land was expressed in ethnic terms. For example, in addressing the Eastern Transvaal Natives' Land Commission in 1916, a Venda headman commented:

> You must take no notice of these Shangaans. They are no good. We are Bawendas here. These Shangaans came to the country .... You must remove the Shangaans. There will not be enough room [for us both]. Take the Shangaans away.[85]

This link between ethnic identity and the land reached a crescendo with the ethnic consolidation removals of the later twentieth century.

Headman Maswanganyi added that at one time the Maswanganyi people were summoned to Tzaneen where Mhlaba was, but his father wouldn't accept the proposal of the commissioner (that he settle there) because "Mhlaba bought his ground. He didn't fight for it."[86]

Headman Maswanganyi appears to be expressing the idea that fighting for land has greater legitimacy than buying it. The same idea is repeated by F.L. Siweya in 1979 when he claimed that Cetwayo (Schiel) sold land to people and issued certificates to the buyers telling them to "tell the white administrators that they had fought for their country."[87] This means that linking the wars with access to land appears to be used to legitimise the claims to the land of people who are relatively recent immigrants. It is easy to see how the timing of the demarcation of locations could have led to this interpretation. A "Knobnose" location was delineated in 1892, a few years after Albasini's death. This was in recognition of the services rendered to the state by Albasini's Government Auxiliaries. The reserve, however, was unhealthy and lacked sufficient water, and the majority of people chose rather

---

[85] Evidence of Takilane [Takalani], one of Chief Sibasa's headmen, before the Natives' Lands Commission (UG 22-1916), page 70, quoted in P. Harries "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism", page 101.

[86] Interview with Headman Maswanganyi, 8.4.1979.

[87] Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.

to squat on white-owned farms. Despite its name, those that did move onto the reserve included both Venda and Tsonga speaking chiefs and commoners.[88]

In a number of interviews the Tsonga and the Venda are presented as clear and separate groupings, with the Tsonga only as having been associated with Albasini. For example, Chief Xigalo answered my question about whether there had been any Vendas with Albasini with a clear negative.[89] Mr Makulele answered the same question with the comment that it couldn't have been possible because they came from different areas.[90]

Only one of my 1991 informants, remembered Davhana, Makhado's brother who took refuge with Albasini, although he knew very little of him. In his account, he was a Venda who was fleeing Mphephu, "because of some difficulties". He crossed the Levubu taking refuge with Njakanjaka (in this version). Mphephu wanted to follow him, but Njakanjaka told him that he was not allowed to cross the river "to come and collect people this side." According to this narrative, Mphephu acknowledged that this was correct, and gave three of his daughters in marriage to Njakanjaka as acknowledgement that he was wrong. While this acknowledges that at least one Venda group was associated with Albasini, (through Njakanjaka in this version), it also presents a picture of Shangaans and Vendas being clearly divided into rigidly demarcated separate areas, with the boundary being the Levubu river.[91] That this is misleading is testified to by the number of forced removals in the name of Homeland consolidation that have occurred since the sixties, as well as by a map of the area which shows Albasini and Goedewensch on the "Venda side" of the river, and the chiefs Mashao, Masia and Luvhola, all of whom are today classified Venda on the "Tsonga side".[92]

There are a number of possible reasons for the differences between the 1979 interviews and the 1991 interviews. The 1979 interviews included two very detailed interviews from informants who had both died by 1991.[93] None of my informants came near to approaching the detailed knowledge of these two informants. It is also possible that the activity around commemorating Albasini

---

88 P. Harries, "Exclusion", page 92.
89 Interview with Chief Xigalo, 26.1.1991.
90 Interview with M.J. Makuleke, 28.1.1991.
91 Interview with J.M. Mukhari and S. Springs, 6.2.1991.
92 J.C.A. Boeyens, *Die konflik*, opposite page 1.
93 See interviews with A. Mpapele, 31.3.1979 and E. Mabyalane, 30.3.1979.

officially in 1988 has had an influence on informants in 1991. However, there is no reason to suppose that informants would simply accept the portrayal at the celebration unless it coincided with their own knowledge, and the fact that there was so little emphasis on Albasini as chief suggests that the centenary celebration had had little impact. I would argue simply that the increasing distance from Albasini's period has meant that more and more detail has been forgotten.

This process of forgetting appears to have been structured through ideas of Tsonga ethnicity. As in the centenary song, Albasini is associated with a reified Tsonga ethnic group. A central question relating to oral history is the question of how far it is possible for oral evidence to challenge dominant ideas in the present. In this chapter I am working with an idea of ethnicity that sees it as essentially a construct of the twentieth century, and argues that it was furthered by the competition for resources within the Homeland system. The question is whether it is possible for informants who see themselves (in some contexts at least) in ethnic terms to articulate a view of the past that challenges its assumptions. I would argue that in these interviews, there were some elements that did challenge an idea of a primordial ethnicity. For example, Rev D.C. Marivate responded to a question about the Mashangana Urban National Movement by saying:

> I have heard of it. I think they are trying to organise themselves to find their identity, try to advise each other how to live, when they're out in towns. Yes, there's a certain chap called Mawawushi. He is Inspector of schools. He is one of the people trying to encourage Shangaans to come together, advise one another how to go about life because life these days in quite different from what it was years ago.[94]

Some informants referred to attempts to foster an ethnic unity within Gazankulu. For example, Chief Xigalo said that he had been introduced to Albasini's grandson in around 1961 or 1962 "during the time when Shangaans were supposed to meet and know each other.."[95]

A second way in which the oral evidence challenges ethnicity could be found not in what it said, but in how it was structured. A number of the narratives, particularly those of informants who were chiefs or associated with chiefs, were structured as the memories and movements of a specific group of people, defined through their allegiance to a particular chief. For example, Chief Xigalo's

---

94 Interview with Rev D.C. Marivate, 11.7.1984.
95 Interview with Chief Xigalo, 26.1.1991.

narrative dealt almost entirely with the movements of the Xigalo people,[96] Mr Maluleke, who was Acting Chief Hlaneki, dealt almost entirely with the Makuleke's movements.[97] This was a very common pattern, that would suggest that even while informants are referring to themselves in ethnic terms, they define their own identity and history in more varied ways than the emphasis on ethnicity would suggest.

However, I would argue that a far stronger challenge to ethnicity came from my interview with Mr D. Siweya. As mentioned in the introduction, D. Siweya's narrative stood out as different from the majority of interviews. On the one hand, it was my most impressive and detailed narrative, while on the other it was my most obviously mythological one. Because of the issues that it raises in relation to the use of oral history, I will discuss it in some detail in the final chapter.

---

96 Interview with Chief Xigalo 26.1.1991.
97 Interview with M.J. Maluleke, 28.1.1991.

CHAPTER 5
JUWAWA AND N'WA-MANUNGU: DISCUSSION OF AN ORAL TRADITION

Mr David Siweya was an elderly member of the family of Chief Ndengeza. Chief Ndengeza is a descendent of N'wa-Manungu. [See Figure 3.] We were directed to Mr Siweya by the clerks at Chief Ndengeza's tribal office, who said that he was very knowledgeable about history. He described his knowledge as having come from his father, explaining that:

> My father didn't want me to go and look after the cattle. He wanted me to sit next to him relating how they came with N'wa-Manungu until such time as N'wa-Manungu started ruling this country. So I've kept it in heart, so that now, those who are coming, the young generation, I'm teaching them. Even the chief himself is being taught these things.[1]

In 1979 Dave Killick also interviewed two members of the Siweya family. He interviewed N. Daniel Siweya, the son of the previous Ndengeza, and Faster Lucas Siweya, who was then about 18 years old. In 1979 he was described as the chief elect, whereas by 1991 he was the chief. The two interviews were conducted slightly differently. In 1979, the interview was structured by questions, and interpreted after each sentence. When I interviewed Mr D. Siweya, the interview was rather more of a performance, as he launched into a narrative of about 30 minutes without stopping for translation or questions, until he had ended it with a praise. Nevertheless, as I will discuss below, there was some overlap between the two interviews.

Mr David Siweya's narrative was a story about Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu. It starts by saying that the Siweyas are from Lourenço Marques, at an area called Nkomati.[2] The first part of the narrative describes how two brothers and a sister, the children of Siweyas' great grandfather Mavhungwani came to be taken as servants to Juwawa's father's house. One of the brothers and a sister ran away, but one remained, and grew up with Juwawa. This was N'wa-Manungu. The rest of the narrative deals with the journey made by Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu to Venda. The narrative described the use of guns, in hunting elephants, but had an interlude in which they decided the guns were not good enough. They went back

---

[1] Interview with D. Siweya, 28.1.1991.

[2] Note that, as Nkomati is further inland, here, Lourenço Marques appears to be used to refer to Portuguese East Africa in general.

and bought a cannon for 50 pounds from Juwawa's grandparents. They then took "the Rustenburg route" and reached Mahsishini (this refers to Ohrighstad) where they were lucky enough to find a herd of elephants. Juwawa shot and killed a few and asked people from Ohrighstad to butcher them. He sold the ivory to get money for food.

They continued with the journey, passing through Bobbay, and Barberton where they didn't stop. At Springs, they learnt that there was a war between the English and Afrikaners, and were warned that the Johannesburg route would be suicidal, but they continued undaunted, fighting their way through to Potgietersrus. A battle is described in much detail as taking place at Kamunugwambane, near Potgietersrus, in which N'wa-Manungu defeated the Ndebeles[3] and they took captives and cattle and continued their journey to Venda. Another detailed fighting episode took place at "Mphephu", where the Vendas were defeated by N'wa-Manungu, and again Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu took captives and cattle.

This pattern of battles, followed by the capture of cattle and captives is then summarised, with a list of chiefs who were defeated. After the fighting, N'wa-Manungu asked Juwawa for a place to stay, and was settled at Luonde. He decided to go back home to get his father to be king. His father refused as he was too old, and eventually he returned with his nephew, Ndengeza. Juwawa told N'wa-Manungu and Ndengeza that they would have to fight Magoro to get the land for Ndengeza to rule. They defeated Magoro and Mabidi, and the narrative ends with a feast and a praise.[4]

The praise was not intelligible. Mr Siweya could not explain it, as he said that it was in a language that he did not know, and that he had learnt it by heart. Later he referred to it as being in Zulu. Attempts to find somebody who was able to translate the song indicated that it consisted of fragments of Shangaan, interspersed with fragments that were not recognisably Zulu or Siswati.[5] In his study of Tsonga folk-tales, Marivate points to the presence of the Ndau and Zulu languages in Tsonga folk-tales, particularly in lyrics to songs. He sees this as a result of the intermingling of Tsonga, Ndau and Zulu cultures and explains that the Gaza, after subjugating the Tsonga groups in Southern Mozambique, occasionally

---

[3] This refers to Transvaal Ndebele.

[4] Interview with D. Siweya, 25.1.1991.

[5] Attempts to see if the praise was in a form of Siswati were related to the fact that the Siweyas' narrative describes them as coming from Komati.

crossed the Save River in the North to raid for slaves from amongst Nguni-speaking groups.[6] This phenomenon is also found in some Venda praise-songs and in the chanting of those possessed by ancestral spirits in the *malombo* dance. It may be argued that the inclusion of "Shona" fragments in these praises and chants is a means of giving historical "weight" and attributing authenticity to the tradition or the demands made by the ancestors.[7] Here the fact that Mr Siweya and my interpreter described the "foreign fragments" as Zulu has interesting parallels with the emphasis that the family made on the Zulu origins of the people who were associated with Albasini.

As a source of empirical information this tradition is obviously problematic. As a journey, it makes no geographical sense and there are numerous anachronisms, and obvious inaccuracies and mythologized incidents. At first glance it appears that the story is simply fictional. On the other hand, it was clearly presented as an authoritative, historical account, and there are numerous points in the story that can be connected to "real" incidents, as they appear in written sources.

Instead of trying to extract empirical information from the narrative, I decided to focus on what the narrative was saying. Even this, however, was not immediately apparent. For me, the text became far more accessible once I realised that I was assuming that, as a historical narrative, it was structured chronologically. I was assuming that the journey referred to was the "real" journey made by Albasini into the Zoutpansberg. However, once I moved away from attempting to fit the narrative into my existing chronological framework, and moved to thinking of the journey as a structuring and mnemonic device rather than a real journey, much of the narrative made far more sense. For example, in the story, N'wa-Manungu and Juwawa travelled to the Zoutpansberg via Johannesburg and Pretoria, and encountered the South African War. This makes no sense geographically, or chronologically, particularly if it is supposed to refer to Albasini's journey to the Zoutpansberg in the 1850's, before Johannesburg existed. However, Albasini would have had to travel through that area on his way to and from the diamond fields in the 1870's. Albasini returned to the Zoutpansberg from the diamond fields area in 1877, the year in which Shepstone invaded the Transvaal, although no fighting took place. Also, in the same year, Albasini travelled to Pretoria with

---

6 C.T.D. Marivate, "Tsonga Folktales: Form, Content and Delivery" (Vol. I), M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1973, pages xii - xiii.

7 J.M. Dederen, personal communication and H.A. Stayt, *The Bavenda*, London, 1931, page 302.

a number of his headmen to meet with Shepstone. This could very plausibly be the origin of the Johannesburg and Pretoria incidents in the narrative.

The opening episode of the narrative establishes how N'wa-Manungu came to live with Juwawa:

> A white man called Emmanuel (Juwawa's father) sent one of his workers (a white man also) to Nkomati to look for people to work for him. He actually wanted to hire two boys and a girl. The messenger reached the Mawelele family and asked my great grandfather Mavhungwani where he could get three people to work for Emmanuel - two boys N'wa-Mavhungu and N'wa-Manungu and a girl, N'wa-Thavhina. Natashu, (the white messenger) took the two brothers and sister to Emmanuel's house at Richbok. At Emmanuel's house the three were given different jobs to perform. N'wa-Mavhungu looked after the cattle, N'wa-Manungu worked in the kitchen and N'wa-Thavhina looked after Emmanuel's son Juwawa. Leah (Emmanuel's wife) ill-treated N'wa-Mavhungu and N'wa-Thavhina. When N'wa-Mavhungu could not tolerate this bad treatment, he decided to confide in his brother N'wa-Manungu and his sister N'wa-Thavhina. N'wa-Thavhina then told her brothers that Leah constantly beat her, especially when the baby cried. N'wa-Thavhina was blamed for it. N'wa-Mavhungu indicated to the other two that it would be better if they ran away. N'wa-Manungu refused to go back home. He said, "Why should I go home, I am happy here, I get enough food - Leah never lays her hands on me. If you two want to run away, you can do so, but I'm not coming."[8] [See Figure 3.]

The second part of the episode, i.e. the story of the three children, and their reasons for staying or leaving, is almost identical in the 1979 interview. Here, however, the children are clearly slaves, although there was some disagreement between the two informants in 1979 over how this came about. The younger informant, Faster Lucas Siweya told a story which had Mavhungwani, the children's father, selling the children for their own protection as he feared an attack from Manukozi. The older man disagreed saying that the children were not sold, but were captured, and placed in a small ferry-boat; and didn't know where they were going.[9]

The episode, in both versions, is puzzling in that it contradicts easily verifiable facts. Albasini's father was Antonio, not Emmanuel, and Albasini came to

---

[8] Interview with D. Siweya, 25.1.1991.
[9] Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.S. Siweya, 16.4.1979.

Portuguese East Africa when he was around 18 or 19 years old.[10] He almost certainly did not, therefore, grow up in Africa. However, once again, it is possible to make connections between this narrative and other sources. In 1981 Patrick Harries interviewed some of the descendants of a Portuguese trader, Manuel da Gama, at Buysdorp, the community of descendants of Coenraad Buys.[11] Rosie Buys said that Manuel da Gama had been shipwrecked off the coast of Lourenço Marques and had lived with Albasini. Later he had moved to Kurulen where he died.[12] That Manuel da Gama was closely associated with Albasini is also suggested by the fact that two of his four sons were João and Antonio, both Albasini family names.[13] Da Gama traded in slaves, amongst other things. Vincent da Gama at Kurulen, had in his possession the accounts book of Manuel da Gama for the period from April 1860 to December 1863. This contained a number of entries which referred to the sale of children.[14]

The evidence is too sketchy to allow for assertions about exactly how N'wa-Manungu became part of Albasini's household, but the close association between Manuel da Gama and Albasini does give a plausible explanation of how the confusion might have arisen. I would argue, however, that the confusion is not simply random, but that it also plays a literary function. The narrative is presented as a story of two protagonists who go on a journey, and experience a number of adventures together. This is the common form of a folk tale. Making Emmanuel the slave owner, or employer, allows for Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu to be presented as contemporaries and equals, and plays down the master/servant

---

10 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 4 and I. Roche, *Das Terras do Império Vátua às Praças da República Boer*, Lisbon, 1987, pages 196 - 197.

11 Coenraad Buys is generally quoted as the first white man to settle in the Zoutpansberg area. He, his black wife, and their children entered the area some time between 1810 and 1820 and were given land by Khosi Mpofu. His sons were also provided with wives from the royal homestead. One of his sons, Michael Buys played the role of tax collector for the Schoemansdal community before Albasini was appointed. He continued to be responsible for tax collection in the area west of Schoemansdal when Albasini was appointed to collect tax in the area to the east, south-east and north-east of Schoemansdal. See de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 64, and A. Kirkaldy, ""Images of Savagery": Ritual Cannibalism, Ritual Killing and the Power of *Mahosi* in Vendaland until 1930", unpublished paper presented to the Forschungskolloquium, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 13 May 1996.

12 Rosie Buys, notes from interview, 1981, exact date not given.

13 Interview with Joaquim da Gama, 19.2.1981.

14 Accounts book in possession of Mr V. da Gama, Kurulen, photocopy in possession of P. Harries, University of Cape Town.

element of their relationship. The way in which this works becomes even more apparent when it is contrasted to Marie Eyssel's account of the origin of their relationship:

> A young boy between 8-10 years is hiding and crying behind a bush when a white hunter and his bearers find him. The white man speaks kindly to him, and gives him food and water whereon he tells them that there had been a terrible battle where his family and the rest of his community had been killed, when he had managed to run away and hide.
>
> The boy was Wamanungu and the hunter Jowawa (*sic*) between whom a lifelong friendship was formed.
>
> Wamanungu grew up to be João's handman (*sic*) and bodyguard, and later, chief officer of his well trained army. This was somewhere in 1840 or so.[15]

While the Ndengeza narrative allows for Albasini and N'wa-Manungu to be equal protagonists, Marie Eyssel clearly presents N'wa-Manungu as "the white man's trusty servant" placing him squarely within the hunting adventure genre.

The battle at Kamugwambane near Potgietersrus, almost certainly refers to the "siege of Makapansgat". Kamugwambane can be translated as "the place of Mugwambane", and Mugwambane is a corruption of Mokopane, or Makapan.[16] This took place in 1854, shortly after Albasini had settled in the Zoutpansberg. De Vaal mentions that Albasini played a useful role in this siege in that he joined the battle with a division of black marksmen and mentions that N'wa-Manungu was one of his two captains.[17] N'wa-Manungu is presented as the hero of this episode in the family traditions where it is claimed he rescued Piet Potgieter's body.[18] In this narrative he is also presented as the hero, although the details of this account have little connection with other accounts of the siege of Makapansgat.

D. Siweya describes the episode as follows:

---

15 Handwritten story in file, Marie Eyssel collection.
16 Personal communication, Mr W.F. Malunga.
17 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 21.
18 This was the same body that Paul Kruger is supposed to have rescued. See I. Hofmeyr, *We spend our Years as a Tale That is Told*, Johannesburg, 1993, pages 145 - 146.

> The hero of this battle was N'wa-Manungu. N'wa-Manungu was asked by Juwawa to go and cut wood. He took his axe and his gun and went up the mountain. He didn't know that there was an initiation school going on. When the initiates saw N'wa-Manungu they picked up stones and threw them at him. Because N'wa-Manungu didn't know anything about initiation schools, he armed himself with his gun and fired shots at the initiates. They ran to the village to call the Ndebele warriors. The warriors took their bows and arrows and approached N'wa-Manungu. N'wa-Manungu saw them crossing the river. He aimed and fired, killing many of them. Those that he missed (most of them had fallen in the river) he took to Juwawa. Juwawa took them as his captives. They cut trees, made carts and then joined him on his journey to Venda. Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu took all the Ndebeles' cattle.[19]

This narrative makes a number of very interesting points, particularly when seen in conjunction with the episodes that follow it. Firstly, the fact that N'wa-Manungu did not know about the initiation school is stressed. This means that the encounter is presented in terms of cultural difference. Secondly, by stressing that the Ndebele used bows and arrows, the episode sets "traditional weapons" against guns, and shows that N'wa-Manungu's military success is crucially tied up with his access to firepower. Thirdly, Albasini takes the surviving men as captives.

The narrative then continues:

> Juwawa and his captives moved on until they reached a place called Mphephu at the mountain. N'wa-Manungu was surprised when he saw Venda men and women wearing *tsindi*.[20] These people played drums and danced the *tshikona*.[21] The noise from the drums attracted Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu. N'wa-Manungu was asked to go to the mountain to find out what was happening. That was when he found them half naked and dancing to the tune of the drums. When the Vendas saw N'wa-Manungu carrying a gun, they were surprised and asked one another who he was. Some said he was a *libunyu*.[22] The Vendas then ran to their houses to get their bows and arrows. N'wa-Manungu did not say much. He fired and

---

19 Interview with D. Siweya, 25.1.1991.

20 Loin-cloth worn by Venda men.

21 This refers to a type of Venda music and dancing. The music is played on pipes, with a drum accompaniment. The music and dance is associated with important functions.

22 Literally, "naked one", a term used to refer to mainly Nguni soldiers, referring to the fact that they didn't wear much in battle. The Boers referred to *Kaalkaffers*.

> killed a few. He then went back to the camp to report to Juwawa. Juwawa organised a Ndebele army and then sent it to the mountain to fight the Vendas. By the time the army reached the mountain, the Vendas had already dug trenches so that when the Ndebele army stepped in them, they would fall in and the Vendas would have a chance of killing them or burying them alive. N'wa-Manungu soon realised that there was a trap for them. He started shooting before he reached the trenches. The Vendas started running and in the process fell in the trenches they had dug, making it easy for the Ndebeles to stab them with their spears. Many Vendas died during this battle and those who survived were captured and their herds of cattle were also taken to Ngomeni.[23]

Once again the details of the battle are not verifiable. Once again, however, the encounter is presented strongly in terms of an encounter between people with cultural differences. Again, military victory is related to the use of a gun, and the survivors are captured. What is crucial, too, is the fact that it is the captives of the previous episode that are fighting for Albasini.

The narrative continues:

> N'wa-Manungu and his army then moved from one place to the other, killing people, capturing survivors. He defeated Mabidi, Ndavana, Tomu, Mudavhula, Nkondo, Ndandazi, Bondola. Nkomo surrendered before the battle. N'wa-Manungu then reached Khashani where he fought with the Vendas and Shangaans. They, too, were defeated. N'wa-Manungu then went back to Juwawa to report his victory. N'wa-Manungu asked Juwawa if he [N'wa-Manungu] could be given his own place where he could settle. Juwawa told N'wa-Manungu that he could settle at Luonde.[24]

The pattern of military victory and the capture of survivors continues. In his article on the indenture system and slavery in the Zoutpansberg, Boeyens points out that Albasini's Tsonga were often sent on their own commandos against African groups resisting white authority.[25] What is worth noting here, is that both Nkomo and Nkondo are Tsonga chiefs, so this challenges the image portrayed in the other sources of conflict being simply between Tsonga and Venda. Davana (Dhavane) was not attacked by Albasini, but did seek refuge with him. What this

---

23 Interview with D. Siweya, 25.1.1991.

24 *Ibid.*

25 J.C.A. Boeyens, "'Black Ivory': The Indenture System and Slavery in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1869", in E. Eldredge and F. Morton, *Slavery in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, 1994, page 201.

suggests is that the list of chiefs refers to chiefs who accepted Albasini's authority, whether after a defeat or not. Again, as in so many of the other oral accounts, right to land is related to victory in battle.

What is also unusual in this narrative is that Siweya has adult men being captured and then has them being used as part of the military force. There is repeated evidence of Albasini's forces capturing women and children. This is briefly discussed in de Vaal's thesis[26] and mentioned in some of the oral interviews.[27] Finally, Boeyens discusses a number of cases where women and children were captured. He says that as a rule women were handed over to the Boer's African auxiliaries while children were directly indentured or traded as "apprentices".[28] He comments that little information on African children of Zoutpansberg after their indenture to whites is available in the sources, but makes the point that children indentured by the Boers, referred to as *oorlams*, underwent an acculturation process that tended to separate them from their cultures of origin. The longer that apprentices were detached from their origins, the more they tended to bond with their masters. He uses N'wa-Manungu, described as an "apprentice", as an example of how indentured servants could be incorporated into Boer society, serving in positions of trust and prominence.[29]

The Siweya tradition may be making a reference to this process of the incorporation of captured children into Albasini's following and finally into his fighting force. Yet the narrative does very clearly focus on the capture of adult men. The account has an interesting connection with a comment made by de Vaal in his thesis. De Vaal points out that when Albasini first had contact with the Boers, he was not aware of their laws regarding slavery, and openly described "his blacks" at Makashulaskraal as slaves.[30] What this suggests, is that the core of his following who came with him from Makashulaskraal came as slaves. As slaves captured or bought in Portuguese East Africa, where slavery was openly carried out, the slaves would not necessarily have been captured or bought as young children, as in the Transvaal.

---

26 J. B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 125 - 126.

27 See, for example, the interview with J. Ash, 29.1.1991, and the interview with Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, exact date not known.

28 J.C.A. Boeyens, "Black Ivory", page 211, footnote 74.

29 J.C.A. Boeyens, "Black Ivory", page 206.

30 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 125.

This is speculative, yet it has interesting implications. Firstly, if the core of Albasini's following, or labour force, were slaves when Albasini moved into the Transvaal, Albasini would have faced the problem of the prohibition of slavery in the Transvaal Boer communities. Secondly, Boeyens' comments about the incorporation of apprentices, raises the question of social control in a context where the slaves were not necessarily captured as children, and where the numbers involved were too large for them to develop face to face bonds with Albasini. Both these points are suggestive of why Albasini, initially at least, chose to cast the relationship between himself and those "under his protection" in the idiom of chieftainship.

The last part of the narrative has N'wa-Manungu going home to fetch his father to be king:

> N'wa-Manungu decided to go back home to get his father to be king at Luonde. The father refused. He said he was too old to move. The father suggested that the elder brother, N'wa-Mavhungu take the throne. N'wa-Mavhungu also refused. He said he could not leave the old man alone. N'wa-Mavhungu suggested that N'wa-Manungu take his [N'wa-Mavhungu's] eldest son, Ndengeza to go and be king at Luonde. N'wa-Manungu went back home (to Luonde). On his arrival he told Juwawa his father and his brother refused to come, so he had brought his nephew. Juwawa asked N'wa-Manungu if Ndengeza would be able to rule. N'wa-Manungu agreed. Juwawa told N'wa-Manungu that he, N'wa-Manungu, and Ndengeza should go and fight Magoro (who was settled at Luonde) so that they could get the land for Ndengeza to rule. N'wa-Manungu gave Ndengeza his own gun, and he took Juwawa's gun. The army got ready for the battle, but before they could leave, N'wa-Manungu put a "crown" and an ostrich egg on his nephew's head, and told Ndengeza he was going to shoot the ostrich egg that was on his head to see if Ndengeza was brave enough to join in the battle. N'wa-Manungu aimed and shot the egg. The contents of the egg spilled all over Ndengeza's body. N'wa-Manungu then told Ndengeza it was his turn to shoot his uncle. Ndengeza aimed at his uncle's chest and fired. The bullet just bounced on his uncle's chest and shattered into small pieces.[31]

After this, both Magoro and Mabidi, at Magoebaskloof, were defeated and captives were taken. When they returned:

---

[31] Interview with D. Siweya, 25.1.1991.

> Juwawa slaughtered cows for the army. The army was summonsed (using trumpets) and was given meat to eat. N'wa-Manungu ate a whole cow alone. While he was eating, nobody was allowed to look at him. If they did, they were punished.[32]

This final section of the narrative does two things. Firstly it asserts N'wa-Manungu's bravery and his role as the invincible warrior hero of the story. At the same time, however, it asserts Ndengeza's right to land, his bravery, and thus his suitability to rule what N'wa-Manungu has won. This is done through an episode that follows a similar narrative development to the Swiss tale of William Tell. It also seems possible that this is an example of feed-back from written to oral sources as Swiss missionaries played an important role in education in the area, and in producing school readers. This would appear to support Isabel Hofmeyr where she comments that oral historical narrative can draw on a range of forms, and includes school texts books as one example of this.[33] The rationale for bringing Ndengeza, as well as N'wa-Manungu into the story needs to be found outside the narrative.

The *Star* article of 20 June 1925 that was discussed in Chapter 1 was based on an interview with "Lya", an old woman who "spent the greater part of her existence in Jowawa's household." According to this article, Lya "became the wife of his head induna and chief hunter, a native named Manungu; they had one child, which died."[34] Although it is possible that N'wa-Manungu was polygamous, and had other children, this suggestion that he was childless would explain the need to bring a nephew to rule. The second reason for stressing the theme of Ndengeza as a suitable candidate for the chieftainship can be found in the context, and timing of the interview. I interviewed D. Siweya in 1991. Before 1990, Ndengeza had had the status of a headman, and had been grouped together with another headman, Msengi into a single tribal authority, known as eHihluvukile.[35] In 1990, Chief Ndengeza had successfully challenged this and had had his status upgraded to that of a full chief. This was done on the basis of an oral historical presentation by the Siweyas, in which David Siweya played an important part.[36] Besides the status

---

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] I. Hofmeyr, *We spend our years*, page 15.

[34] *Star*, 20.6.1925, de Vaal papers, University of Venda.

[35] Interview with Ndengeza N'wa-Manungu, 2.4.1979.

[36] Personal communication with Ms T. Shikwambana, the Government Ethnologist who compiled the report recommending that Ndengeza should be recognised as a full chief. Unfortunately, she was unable to provide me with a

this brought him, it also meant that he was entitled to a seat in the Gazankulu legislature, with the salary that this brought, and it gave him access to ministerial positions within the Homeland.[37] In this context, the history of Ndengeza as a chief is obviously a resource in the present, and this is one explanation for why the Ndengeza tradition stood apart from the other interviews in terms of detail, presentation and general impressiveness. Whereas oral historical narrative may generally be a passive tradition, in this case, the oral historian would have been likely to have had both the incentive and opportunity to tell the history. It would also explain why, in the 1979 version, this entire episode is not included. Instead, the informants include a story about why Ndengeza is no longer a chief:

> Cetwayo[38] invited all the men to buy land from him and he issued certificates to the buyers and told them to tell the administrators that they had fought for their country. When he had collected that money he ran away. Wamanungu had no paper and thus he did not get a chieftainship. But still the people respected Wamanungu because he had the guns, but when the English people arrived those with certificates produced them and said, "We are the chiefs".[39]

This would also explain why, in contrast to the expected pattern, the 1991 narrative was more detailed and coherent than the 1979 one. The two cannot easily be directly compared. The 1979 interview was structured by questions and the story of N'wa-Manungu and Juwawa was not of central interest. Nevertheless, an outline of the same narrative forms part of the interview. Fairly early on in the interview, the interviewer said: "You talk about Albasini and Siweya.[40] They started to go hunting from Mphumo?"[41]

This leads the two informants to begin the story of how N'wa-Manungu, his brother and his sister, became slaves in the Albasini household. As mentioned before, while the memory of slavery had been dropped in the later interview, the story about the three children and their experiences in the Albasini household had been retained. The fact that slavery had been forgotten is consistent with a general

---

copy of the report.

37 P. Harries, "A Forgotten Corner", page 122.

38 This refers to Schiel. Dicke claims that he took this name himself, when coming to the Transvaal, while Antonio Albasini referred to him as *Fisikolo*, the man who came yesterday. See B.H. Dicke, *op cit.* page 37.

39 Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.

40 This is not reflected in the transcript.

41 Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.

lack of information about slavery in the oral interviews. As slavery was illegal, few written references to slaving exist, and I had hoped that the oral interviews would fill that gap. On the contrary, I found even fewer references in the oral accounts than in the written accounts. As mentioned above, a few informants mentioned the capture of women in war. Only one informant made what appears to be a reference to the trade in slaves when he mentions in passing that "Indians were hiding the children of the Venda. The Venda became angry and fought with the Indians. The Dutch came to help the Indians". The reference to Indians would refer to the fact that the majority of Portuguese traders originated from Goa.[42] Julian Cobbing estimates that slavery led to a loss of between 25% and 50% of the adult male population of the Delagoa Bay hinterland, and writes that: "Whole peoples fled up the Limpopo, Olifants and Levubu River systems into the eastern Transvaal, where some of them were absorbed by the Maroteng and by white war lords such as Albasini."[43] However, without exception, informants gave the reason for leaving Portuguese East Africa as war.

One possible explanation of this is that slaving was not as extensive as Julian Cobbing suggests. However, the way in which slavery slipped out of the Ndengeza tradition suggests another possibility. I would argue that in a rural area, in the context of exploitative labour conditions and extremely low wages, as well as the situation where a tiny minority of people have any alternative to wage labour, the exact definition of chattel slavery, where a person can be bought or sold, is fairly academic. In the Ndengeza tradition the idea of slavery has been forgotten, but the story that deals with the experience of service, setting up the negative experience of exploitation and ill-treatment against the positive aspect of "eating well" has been retained almost identically. The memory of slavery has been subsumed into a more general discussion about the experience of service. Boeyens points out that the abduction of women and children took place during internecine conflicts in pre-ZAR days.[44] It is possible that the memory of slavery, including the memory of slave raids, has here been subsumed under a more generalised memory of war.

The 1979 Ndengeza narrative follows the story about the children in the Albasini household with the comment that: "Wamanungu had become a close friend of

---

42 Interview with Headman Maswanganyi, 8.4.1979.

43 J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo" in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, 1988, page 506.

44 J.C.A. Boyens, "Black Ivory", page 214, note 114.

Juwawa's; they were of the same age and they grew up together. They became shooting companions."[45] This is very similar to the later narrative. However, in contrast to the later version where they set off on a journey to Venda, here they simply leave looking for a place to stay.

The journey in this interview is far shorter, containing only two episodes. The first refers to an incident which took place at Magigele, described as at Mphumo (Delagoa Bay), where Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu find decapitated heads on sticks, and a ladder which allows people to climb up and place the heads on sticks. Juwawa and N'wa-Manungu use a gun to frighten away the people and they attack and defeat Magigele. D. Siweya refers to this as the incident when Albasini and N'wa-Manungu shot the "cannibals".[46] This comment suggests one possible cross reference for this. The chief who ceded an area of land on the upper Sabi to Albasini, was Chief Makashule. This was the land on which Albasini was based in the mid-1840's and which he later donated to the Portuguese government. Mabel Jackson-Haight describes Chief Makashule as one of the Sotho speaking chiefs of the Kutswe people, amongst whom Albasini lived, and who enlarged his ranks. She refers to the defeat by the Kutswe of the Pulana or Mapulana, "said to be a cannibal tribe".[47] I will come back to this below.

The second episode is referred to as having taken place at Potgietersrus, but it is not the same as the episode which occurs near Potgietersrus in the 1991 version:

> And then they proceeded towards Potgietersrus and found a kind of kraal (made by Ndebeles). When they got there they parked their wagon. They had captured many cattle on the way. They saw that inside the kraal were planted many castor-oil plants. Then Wamanungu said, "how shall we attack these people? Let us stop our wagon here and place our guns over there at the camping ground in the kraal. In the evening Wamanungu took one gun and was instructed by Juwawa to go and kill them. The other gun was not used; it was placed facing the camp only to frighten the people. Then Wamanungu jumped over the fence and fell down inside. Then they said, "Wamanungu is dead". But when they came closer, he opened fire and killed many of them. There were some holes round the camp and the survivors fled and hid in these.

---

45 Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.

46 *Ibid.*

47 M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript, VII/2-5. The reference to the cannibal tribe comes from N.J. van Warmelo.

> Those that could, took the thatch roofs off the huts and covered the holes with them so that they could hide from the attackers. Wamanungu's followers saw them there and fired the roofs of their huts, burning them there.[48]

Neither of these two episodes occur in the later version, although in the 1991 version the account of the battle with Magoro includes very similar elements. In this, Magoro, hides in a cave in the mountain, and the army finds the people digging trenches to hide in. N'wa-Manungu collects wood and lights fires at both ends of the trenches. The people who are hiding come out and are killed. Magoro is asked to come out of his cave, and is also killed.[49]

The story of people hiding in holes and being killed or forced out through fires being lit, has some resonances with written accounts of the siege of Makapansgat, where the people of Mokopane took refuge in caves, and the Boer and African forces are said to have lit fires at the entrance. I would argue, very speculatively, that the shift of this incident to the battle with Magoro might not have been random.

If one looks at the 1991 version as a whole, it is striking that whereas Juwawa takes the primary role as hero in the early part of the story, the focus switches to N'wa-Manungu as hero from the incident at Potgietersrus. The family traditions lay great stress on N'wa-Manungu as the hero of Makapansgat. De Vaal describes N'wa-Manungu, not as a soldier, but as an elephant hunter who was so fast and trustworthy that he was often used as a messenger,[50] but mentions that he was one of Albasini's captains at Makapansgat.[51] What this tends to suggest is that the campaign at Makapansgat played a role in establishing N'wa-Manungu's military reputation. Shifting the episode to the battle with Magoro, where Ndengeza is said to have established himself militarily, makes sense in a version which has the legitimisation of Ndengeza as part of its function.

After the Potgietersrus episode, the 1979 version tails away and becomes disjointed:

---

48 Interview with N.D.Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.
49 Interview with D. Siyewa, 25.1.1991.
50 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, page 7.
51 *Ibid.* page 21.

> From there they left and travelled up to the place now called Goedewench and they camped there. When they lived there, there were wars against those who lived at Rionde. There they fought against the Sotho and the Venda. It was Wamanungu and Juwawa fighting against these people. There was another man called Mukavundezi who used to prey on travellers and rob them of their property. He was killed by Wamanungu because he used to worry travellers. Wamanungu brought his cattle and his followers to Rionde. Wamanungu was the leader of the war.
>
> The second war of the Dutch people ... No, the second Dutch war is late, it is just yesterday. But before we come to that, when Mukavundzi was murdering people, and when we were going to Kimberley to look for treasure, Wamanungu and Juwawa were hunting animals, particularly elephants and brought home a lot of tusks.[52]

At this point, the interviewer asks a question about hunting, and the rest of the interview is structured by questions, except for the story about Cetwayo discussed above which was volunteered at the end of the interview.

The one consistent theme in the 1979 version is the stress on the importance of access to guns. As in the later version, N'wa-Manungu's access to guns, as well as his bravery and cunning, lead to his victory. Generally, however, this story doesn't appear to have the detail or the coherence of the 1991 narrative. There are a number of possible reasons for this. One is that the informants might have been hampered by the format of the interview. Another is that Faster Lucas Siweya, who did most of the narration of the story in 1979 appears to be an apprentice historian. He was about 18, and there are a number of indications that he was still learning. For example, after discussion over whether N'wa-Manungu and his siblings were sold or captured he said, presumably to the old man, "Am I saying the right thing?". When he told the story of N'wa-Manungu and his siblings at the Albasini household, N. Daniel Siweya appeared to prompt him, asking, "Who worked in the kitchen?" Later the young man asked, "When they left, they went to get guns. Where did they go?"[53] Lastly, the fact that the 1991 interview took place around the time of Ndengeza's inauguration as chief, meant that Mr David Siweya was likely to have far more incentive and opportunity to practice.

---

52 Interview with N.D. Siweya and F.L. Siweya, 16.4.1979.
53 *Ibid.*

It might be argued that the greater coherence of the later version is misleading, as it is a coherence that makes it a better fictional story. I would argue that this sets up a dichotomy between empirical fact and fiction, and that it is precisely the way in which the narrative challenges this dichotomy that makes it interesting. In this tradition, the history is embedded in a story that is, in many ways, similar to a folk-tale, just as the family traditions have become an adventure story, although both are presented as and believed to be truth.[54]

As has been discussed in the section on source material, the idea that history exists in opposition to literature is an idea that has its roots in the particular model of scientific history developed in the late 19th Century. To apply that opposition indiscriminately to oral narrative is not necessarily helpful. In fact, while I am arguing that this narrative is memory embedded in a folk tale, I discovered a story in a collection of folk tales collected from the Maputo area, that appears to contain fragments of memory of Albasini.[55] This story is presented in the form of a folk tale, with a stylised opening that indicates that that is what it is. Entitled "The magic mirror" by its transcriber, it begins by introducing three brothers, Jizere, Juwawa and Antonio. These three brothers choose to become respectively a farmer, somebody whose job is to wake up, wash and stroll around the village, and a hunter. The story follows the fortunes of the hunter, Antonio, who helps a black mamba by mistake and is rewarded with a magic mirror, which will give him anything he asks for. One of the things he asks for is a double-storey house. Eventually, the mirror is stolen, Antonio is imprisoned, but he regains the mirror with the help of some rats, escapes, and is given a district to administer. There are

---

54 Junod describes tales based on actual facts as categories of folk-tales, but points out that these are regarded as imaginary. [H.A. Junod *op cit.* Vol. II, page 214.] In his discussion of Tsonga folk-tales, Marivate does not discuss tales based on fact. Nevertheless, some of his comments could be applied to this story. For example, he describes Tsonga folk-tales as being structured into units or incidents which he labels motifemes. He argues that these tend to group themselves into patterns, giving the folk-tale its motif. [C.T.D. Marivate, "Tsonga Folktales", page xiv.] I would argue that this is very much how the Siweya (Ndengeza) tradition is structured. Equally, Marivate describes a common narrative structure as one which begins with a state of disequilibrium. This causes characters to embark on some course of action to restore the state of equilibrium. [*Ibid.* pages 82 - 84.] The disequilibrium in the Siweya tradition could be seen as the separation of the children from their homes and the death of Juwawa's parents. A new equilibrium is established when N'wa-Manungu brings a member of his family to rule.

55 E.J.M. Baumbach and C.T.D. Marivate, *Xironga Folk-tales*, Pretoria, 1973, pages 145 - 160.

some cross references that are suggestive. Obviously the names are suggestive, given that João had both a father and a brother named Antonio. The double story house could be a fragmentary reference to the impressive house that João built on the Sabi. The point this makes is not that it is possible to use this as a source on Albasini, but that memory is not only contained in what is described as historical, but can be embedded in many different forms. The fact that we might find certain genres more historical, or more plausible than others, does not, in fact, demonstrate that they are able to recall a true picture of the past.[56]

Although I do not accept Siweya's story as empirical fact, I do argue that the narrative gives a coherent historical commentary. For example, much of the narrative strongly challenges the ethnic assumptions of the majority of other sources. In stark contrast to the idea of Albasini as "chief of the Tsonga", it presents Albasini's following as an amalgamation of people described in terms of their cultural difference, who are forcibly incorporated into his following. My approach has been not to try and extract the kernel of empirical fact from the story, but to focus on what the story appears to be saying about the past. This often has an impact on how other sources are evaluated and interpreted. Fentress and Wickham argue that:

> the process of conceptualisation [for example, into a story] which so often disqualifies social memory as an empirical source, is also a process that ensures the stability of a set of collectively held ideas, and enables these ideas to be diffused and transmitted.[57]

In terms of this argument it is precisely because the historical memories have become embedded in a story that they have survived and are able to challenge the ethnic stereotypes through which Albasini is interpreted in so many of the other interviews.

This does not mean, however, that the story is a fixed text. The differences in the two versions would clearly challenge this idea. Rather there seems to be a general form (the idea of the journey and of N'wa-Manungu and Juwawa as dual protagonists) and a set of episodes that can be drawn from. These episodes, however, do not appear to be able to be drawn on randomly. They appear to be located, not in time, but according to place. This raises the question of what function the places that are simply listed play. A number of cross references

---

[56] J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 80.
[57] *Ibid.* page 59.

suggest that these might be places that located an episode that was part of the story, but that has been forgotten, or not selected. For example, Barberton is one of the places simply mentioned. The Mapulana, who I mentioned above as possibly being the "cannibal tribe" of the 1979 tradition came from the Barberton area. In the 1991 narrative the "cannibal" incident is omitted, but Barberton is listed as one of the places on their journey. The Kutswe who defeated the Mapulana are said to have come from the Rustenburg district.[58] Rustenburg is another of the places simply listed in the 1991 narrative. These cross references make it plausible that the place names act as markers that may have once had significance in the story.

I would argue, in summary, that the story is a way of transmitting historical memory. While the fact that it is embedded in a story tends to give it some stability, it is not a rigid text, but is constantly being reformulated and reinterpreted by the individual skilled, or less skilled, narrators. There is, therefore a constant tension between the stability of the form, and the constant reconstruction of memory in a social context.

Like de Vaal, and Albasini's family, David Siweya aimed to tell the truth about Albasini. In doing so, he drew on the cultural resources available to him, in the form of ideas, language, imagery and literary forms and conventions, in the same way as they did. While his account would not be seen as authoritative in, for example, a university, in the context of power struggles in the former Gazankulu, it had enough authority to substantially contribute to having Ndengeza upgraded to a chief. I would argue that this is closely linked to his skill in using the resources available to him to reconstruct memory in a social context.

---

[58] M. Jackson-Haight, unpublished manuscript.

during Albasini's lifetime. For example, in 1868, when Albasini was removed from his post as *Superintendent* by the Executive Council of the Transvaal Republic, he was instructed to hand over his command of "the Knobnoses" to Schoeman. De Vaal regarded this as a misunderstanding of the true position, that was set right when Albasini was reinstated as chief by Kruger in 1869.[28] After his death, these differing interpretations continued to be the subject of disputes between the Department of Native Affairs and the Albasini family, who wished to claim the chieftainship as a hereditary position.

By 1888, when João Albasini was sick, his son, Antonio was acting as Native Commissioner. After his father's death, the offices of Native Commissioner and chief, which João had held jointly, were separated. The Native Commissioner's position was given to Adolf Schiel.[29] It appears that Antonio Albasini made the position as difficult as possible for Schiel. One of the missionaries reported from the Berlin Mission station at Tshakhuma[30] that at the end of 1889 that:

> coloured people from the Boer Laager at the base of Makchato's [Makhado's] mountain [reported that] the former Government Commissioner Albasini (junior) was still leading them to believe that he was the real commissioner and that they were not to obey the new Mr. Schiel.[31]

According to this report the Berlin missionary, Swellnus had sent an urgent report to Makhado to explain the position to him. Albasini had also sent a messenger to Chief Tshivase, with the order that "he was not to turn to Mr Schiel." Schiel had this messenger "bound and transported to Schewasse [Tshivase] to punish him there."[32] In a letter to the Swiss Missionaries, Schiel complained that Antonio Albasini had sent a message to Makhado, saying that all messages should be sent to him (Albasini) rather than to the Commissioner. Schiel added that it would be necessary to explain to Makhado the difference between the position of chief of the "Knobnoses", and the Commissioner, and that he should have nothing to do with the former.[33] At this stage, therefore, Antonio's status as chief, independently of being Native Commissioner, appears to have been uncontested.

---

28 J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol*, pages 112 - 113 and page 123.

29 B.H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks*, pages 29 - 30 and *Berliner Missions-Berichte*, Nr. 17 u 18, 1890, pages 391 - 392.

30 At this stage, the Berlin missionaries wrote this as Tschakoma.

31 *Berliner Missions-Berichte*, Nr. 21 u 22, 1890, pages 464 - 465.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Schiel to Berthoud, 30.9.1889, Creux and Berthoud file, Unisa, Acc 249.

What is also interesting about Schiel's comment is that he describes Albasini as chief over "the Knobnoses" in general. As Native Commissioner Albasini would, at least officially, have jurisdiction over all Africans in the Spelonken. Dicke's interpretation was that Albasini was recognised as chief by a number of East Coast immigrants because of his ability to provide protection, but that when he became Native Commissioner, he exerted pressure over all the "Magwamba" in the area to recognise him.[34] To try and separate out authority which derived from an official position, from personal authority in the Zoutpansberg in the late 1800's is meaningless, as both types of authority" were predicated on Albasini's ability to mobilise the fighting force under him. The reason the distinction is important, however, is that it suggests that the description of Albasini as "Chief of the Shangaans" in the family and centenary song derives not only from their emphasis on ethnicity, but also from the lack of clarity over the basis for, and extent of, his authority at the time.

In 1890, after the death of Antonio, a meeting was called of "the Knobnoses" by the *Superintendent* to see whether they wanted Albasini's younger son, Lucas, to be chief. Antonio's son, João was too young to be considered.[35] Lucas did not get the support of the majority of headmen, who instead voted that the Native Commissioner, *ex-officio* should be chief.[36] This meant that the term "chief" here has become simply an administrative expedient, and that the Albasini family's political role had been neutralised. Dicke argues that Schiel used his position as Native Commissioner to create new "indunas", at a fee, who would support him in the election, and that he also approached the indunas living under Modjadji to vote for him. In this version, the majority of headmen who supported Schiel represented a minority of the people who had recognised Albasini.[37]

Antonio's son, João tried on more then one occasion to regain the chieftainship, with the support of factions amongst Tsonga headmen. For example, in 1907, the Native Commissioner for the Spelonken, Stubbs, was accepted by the "Tshangaan indunas" as chief. However, a faction amongst these "indunas", supported by a

---

2.20.5.

34 B. H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks*, pages 22 - 26.

35 Schiel to Creux, 17.2.1890, Creux and Berthoud Collection, Unisa, Acc 249, 2.20.6.

36 B.H. Dicke, *The Bush Speaks*, pages 37 - 38 and *Berliner Missions-Berichte*, Nr. 17 u 18, 1891, page 450.

37 Dicke, *The Bush Speaks*, pages 37 - 38.

former Native Commissioner, Barnard Vorster favoured the appointment of João Albasini. At the time, João was working as a clerk in the Sub-Native Commissioner's office in Groot Spelonken. The Minister of Native Affairs, Rissik, refused to recognise Albasini's appointment unless an official representation was made through District Officers of the Native Affairs Department. Stubbs called a meeting of "Tsonga indunas and people" in April 1918. At this meeting of approximately 600 people, Stubbs' title of "chief" was confirmed.[38]

By this time the title of chief had become largely an administrative title. Nevertheless, to set up a dichotomy between "real" chiefs and administrative appointments does not necessarily have much meaning in the context of Gazankulu where the term "chief" refers as much to an administrative homeland official, with the power to allocate "a stand" and to collect a variety of taxes, as it does to a traditional leader.

I would argue that the most serious challenge to the portrayal of Albasini as an important Tsonga chief who welded together the Tsonga as an ethnic group was simply the extent to which he had been forgotten. By the time I interviewed informants in 1991, memories of Albasini were largely fragmentary, although the interviews conducted in 1979 gave some more detail. One exception to this pattern was the interview with D. Siweya which is discussed in detail in the final chapter.

The earliest mention of Albasini that I have come across was in a song, *Khale ka Jiwawa*, that was composed by the composer, Rev. D.C. Marivate in about 1930 or 1931.[39] Reverend Marivate was a well known and successful singer and composer, whose songs were recorded both in Johannesburg and London. They were also regularly performed at Eisteddfords.[40] This song was widely remembered in 1991. When I asked about whether informants remembered songs mentioning Albasini, it was the song that was by far the most commonly mentioned and remembered. It was sung to me by three women on Valdezia, including a daughter-in-law of Rev. Marivate. These three women remembered learning it for singing in choirs when they were at school. The singing of the song was preceded by discussion between themselves as they tried to recall the words.

---

38 P. Rich, *op cit.* pages 178 - 179.
39 Interview with Mrs Marivate, Mrs Makandule and Mrs Ndou, 24.1.1991.
40 Interview with Rev. D.C. Marivate, 11.7.1984.

It is, therefore, clearly seen as a song with a fixed text.[41] It is a memory that merges the oral and the written in that while it was originally a written composition of the 1930's, it is also a widely remembered memory in the 1990's. In two interviews in 1984, Reverend Marivate clearly distinguished between the songs of Christianised Shangaans, and songs of the those who are not Christians. When questioned in more detail about what those differences were he specifically pointed to the issue of whether songs were written down:

> They are different (the songs of educated and non-educated Shangaans). These songs composed and sung by Shangaan are folk songs that are not easily written in books. They are just sung impulsively. ..I am used to writing it down and putting music to it, because of schooling. Those who don't go to school make up their own songs and remember them, I don't know how they manage that.[42]

My informants sang and translated *Khale ka Juwawa* [In the olden days of Jiwawa] for me like this:

> Khale ka Jiwawa
> tiko ra he etlele,
> A hi dya vulombe, hi nwa na wo ntowamba.
> Mdimu a yi tele
> hi dya na mihandu.
> Ndlala ku ri hava, hi dya hi tiphina
> Tora kuri hava hi dya hi tsakile!
>
> In the olden days of Jiwawa
> When the world was still asleep,
> We used to eat honey, we used to drink milk, too.
> There was plenty of place to plough,
> We used to eat fruit
> There was no starvation, we enjoyed eating.
> There was no thirst,
> We ate and got happy![43]

The song very clearly sees Albasini as an abstract figure representing an idealised golden age, expressed through the Christian imagery of the land of milk and honey. By implication the song is a criticism of the present as a time of hunger and limited access to resources. As this was written in the early 1930's, it should

---

41 Interview with Mrs Marivate, Mrs Makandule and Mrs Ndou, 24.1.1991.
42 Interview with Rev. D.C. Marivate, 14. 7. 1984.
43 Translation by O. Dederen.

be seen in the context of the rapid extension of white land settlement in the Zoutpansberg in the 1920's, which led to pressure for smaller designated African locations, as well as greater pressure on people living on white owned farms to provide labour.[44] In the interview Rev. Marivate gave in 1984 he described this song as:

> a song about this place before white people came - a long time ago - João was an Italian who came with Shangaans, acting for the Portuguese from Portuguese East Africa. They came here to Albasini Dam and settled there with groups of Shangaans right up to the mountain. The song is about the life of the Shangaan people when they stayed in this area ... [He continues in response to a question] ... Happiness, freedom, no establishment, plenty of water, plenty of food, no farmers and people could stay where they liked with their cattle. Never knew of starvation; plenty of grass and wood, area was fertile.[45]

In contrast to de Vaal and the family histories which present Albasini as the representative of "white civilization", Marivate sees him as representing a idealised pre-colonial age. Fentress and Wickham point out that peasant memories very commonly include a point of reference in the past which can be regarded as a time of justice.[46] While neither Reverend Marivate, not the landless inhabitants of rural bantustans could accurately be described as peasants, it points to the idea that an idealised past is less a reflection of historical reality, than what Patrick Harries describes as "a sustaining and guiding myth" that can be contrasted with the struggle for survival in the present. It's function is to provide a model in the present of how society should be.[47]

A song that uses Albasini in a similar way was sung to me by Mr and Mrs Marhanele. Mr Marhanele was a retired principal of Akani High School at Tiani[48] and an elected Member of the Gazankulu legislature. As with *Khale ka Juwawa*, which they also remembered, he and his wife remembered the song from their school days. This would mean that the songs were roughly contemporary with each other. Mr and Mrs Marhanele sang the song for me as follows:

---

[44] P. Rich, *op cit.* page 189.
[45] Interview with Rev D.C. Marivate, 11.7.1984.
[46] J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *op cit.* page 107.
[47] P. Harries," "A Forgotten Corner", page 111.
[48] Tiani is near Majosi, in the southern part of the former Gazankulu bantustan.

Tiko Leri khale ka rona
Loko Jiwawa a ha fuma
Vanhu a va nga tivi nchumu
Vari munyameni

Swakhale swa hundza
Ku nghena leswi ntshwa
A mi tsama mi vona byana yi
humesa ndzuko.[49]

The literal translation of this song is:

This country in its olden days
when Juwawa was still ruling,
People didn't know much,
they were in darkness.

Old things pass, new things come in,
Have you ever seen a dog popping out taxes?[50]

Again Albasini represents a past age, described as a time of ignorance. That this is said ironically is clear from the way it is set against the present, seen as a time of relentless demands for taxes, which can be seen as a metaphor for general exploitation. It is fairly ironic, that Albasini, whose position as Superintendent of Native Tribes basically entailed tax collecting, should be associated with a past that is set against contemporary demands for tax.

The song expresses its message in metaphor and by implied oppositions and thus lends itself to different interpretations in different contexts. For example, I have mentioned earlier that the 1920's and 1930's the Native Affairs departments were attempting to bolster the power of chiefs, in the context of the erosion of chiefly power. The 1936 Land Act gave chiefs the power to levy special taxes on their followers for the purchase of "tribal land".[51] If emphasis in the interpretation was laid on the position of Juwawa as a leader, it would set him in opposition to the leadership at the time, thus associating them with demands for tax. In this interpretation, the song could be seen as a criticism of the role of chiefs. In another interpretation, the song could be seen as a criticism of the missionaries. If emphasis is laid in the first verse on the imagery of the time of darkness and

---

49 Interview with Mr and Mrs Marhanele, 26.1.1991.

50 In other words: "Have you ever seen a dog paying taxes?" Translation by O. Dederen.

51 P. Harries, "Exclusion", page 99.

ignorance, using missionary imagery to refer to the period before the beginning of missionary work, then, by the process of opposition, it is the missionaries that are associated with the demands for tax. This association of the missionaries with demands for tax was made explicitly in one of the 1991 interviews where in answer to my question about whether Juwawa collected tax, Mr Mpombo answered that "it was with the Swiss mission that all this collection started."[52]

The song was presented to me simply as an amusing song which mentioned Juwawa. What was interesting, however, was the translation I was given by Mr Marhanele. This was as follows:

> When Juwawa was the leader of the Shangaan/Tsonga people in this part of the country, people were ignorant (in darkness).
>
> But now things have changed, for even poor dogs pay taxes.[53]

The literal translation does not mention the Shangaan/Tsonga people. This has been added in the translation. What appears to be happening is that the song is being reinterpreted in the light of a contemporary idea of ethnicity, expressed by an informant, who as a Member of the Gazankulu parliament has clearly "bought into" this idea. My argument is that it is because songs are generally not explicit, that they are particularly open to this constant process of reinterpretation.[54]

Another point that is striking about these two songs is the fact that both were remembered as having been learnt at school. It is slightly difficult to reconcile the critical nature of the songs, particularly the second one, with the institutional discipline of school choirs, although the criticism is partially hidden in the first song by the golden age metaphor and in the second by the use of irony. Vail and White make the point that many authors writing about sub-Saharan Africa have noted that various forms of oral poetry "are licenced by a freedom of expression which violates normal conventions."[55] They label this convention "poetic license"

---

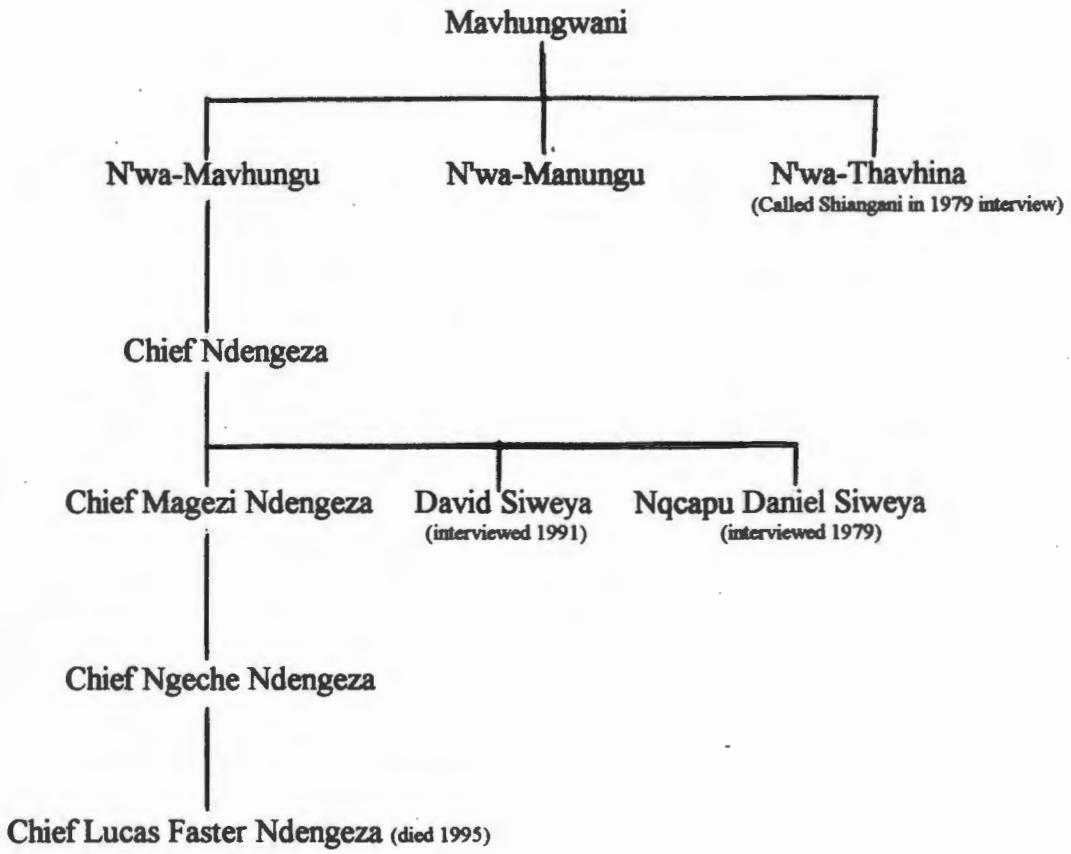
52 Interview with B. Mpombo, 25.1.1991.

53 Interview with Mr and Mrs Marhanele, 26.1.1991, written translation supplied to me by Mr Marhanele.

54 For a discussion on the way in which the praises of Moshoeshoe and Shaka collected at different times can be seen to have selected certain metaphors from a stock of metaphors, and reinterpreted them in the light of contemporary concerns, see L. Vail and L. White, *Power and the Praise Poem, Southern African Voices in History*, Charlottesville and London, 1991, pages 58 - 71. This is a recurring theme in the entire book.

55 L. Vail and L. White, *op cit.* page 43.

FIGURE 3
Ndengeza Genealogy[59]



---

[59] Genealogical information from Mr H.T. Siweya, a lecturer in the Department of Mathematics at the University of the North and brother of the present Acting Chief Ndengeza, personal communication, 6.2.1998.

CONCLUSION

In introducing this thesis, I focused on the problem of the omniscient author reducing different perspectives into one narrative, written in a style which asserts that it represents reality. I set out to think about ways of looking at the issue of different points of view, at the same time as consciously presenting the dissertation as a discussion of different interpretations rather than as a narrative of what happened.

In the course of writing the thesis, two points became apparent to me. The first point is that there is a world of difference between presenting different interpretations as true, and presenting different interpretations with a focus on how they work and why they interpret Albasini as they do. In this case, the focus of the thesis has been changed from Albasini to the process of commemoration, but the relationship between "author" and informant, or source, has not been radically reworked. There is still an author, who claims to explain.

The second point was that I came to realize not how different my approach was to de Vaal's, but how similar. On the one hand, I was able to analyse de Vaal's work as I did, because the approximately fifty years between us, and his commitment to the dominant academic tradition of his time and place, established a distance between us. I found it far more difficult to analyse the workings of stereotypes and conventions in Mabel Jackson-Haight's work, not because they don't exist, but because I share so many of them.

On the other hand, I found myself repeatedly referring back to de Vaal's thesis for chronology, following up his footnotes for information, and cross-checking the assertions of other informants against his "facts." In attempting to argue clearly and convincingly, I drew on the same conventions of chronology, the use of footnoted primary and secondary written sources to support my arguments, and, repeatedly, narrative of what actually happened.

My own conclusion, therefore, is far less radical than I set out for it to be. I would argue that it is important to understand that these conventions are not universal, but are part of a specific historical tradition. I would also argue that it is important to refrain from using them to claim a monopoly on "objective truth". Nevertheless, my own conclusion is that the conventions of traditional nineteenth century historiography, of narration, chronology, evidence, impartiality and "fact" remain indispensable tools for a discussion of the past.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

DE VAAL PAPERS, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

J.B. de Vaal's papers are held by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Venda. Archaeology is presently a sub-department of this department. The papers were donated by his widow, largely because most of them related to his archaeological work in the area. Much of the collection is unsorted, although some of the files were organised and catalogued by de Vaal. The collection includes an unpublished manuscript on de Vaal's archaeological work, numerous articles (both published and unpublished), notes, newspaper and magazine cuttings, some correspondence and other miscellaneous papers.

MARIE EYSSEL PAPERS, LOUIS TRICHARDT

This is Marie Eyssel's private collection of information concerning João Albasini. The collection includes articles, newspaper clippings, letters, photographs, the script and programme of the centenary celebration, and other pamphlets.

DR. MABEL JACKSON-HAIGHT PAPERS, UNIVERSITY OF VENDA SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Mabel Jackson-Haight was a historian who worked mainly on Mozambique. She started work on a book on Albasini in the 1970's, but died before completing it. The collection consists of the unpublished manuscript, some photocopied and microfilmed primary sources - including Colonial office records, Swiss mission records, Portuguese official records and South African archival records - as well as secondary sources and some correspondence. The collection is at present unsorted, but will be sorted before being placed in the University of Venda Library special collections division in 1998.

MISCELLANEOUS PRIVATE PAPERS

Accounts book in possession of Mr V. da Gama, Kurulen, photocopy in possession of P. Harries, University of Cape Town.

João Albasini III, "João Albasini, 1813 - 1888", pamphlet produced by the Albasini family and printed by Leach printers, Louis Trichardt, no date (1988?). I was given a copy of this pamphlet by Helga Giesekke of Louis Trichardt.

"João Albasini", copy of the score of the a song given to me by the composer, Mr S.J. Khosa, Gazankulu Department of Education.

de Vaal, J.B. "Geloftedagtoespraak oor die geskiedenis van Zoutpansbergdorp (1848 tot Okt.1858); Schoemansdal (Nov.1858 tot 1867)", unpublished paper in the possession of the de Vaal family, Louis Trichardt no date.

Letter from D. Killick to P. Harries, 3.4.1979, in the possession of Patrick Harries, University of Cape Town.

Visitors book signed at the Albasini Centenary celebration, 1988, in the possession of the Schoemansdal Museum.

Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk Archives (NHKA), Pretoria

S.P. Engelbrecht Collection, File 2/7 Uys. (This file consists mainly of correspondence between Uys and Engelbrecht.)

PORTO ARCHIVES, PORTUGAL

Letter from J. Albasini to T.M. Bissone, 18.1.1859, Serie Africa, Cod. 1299 a Doc. 2.

STATE ARCHIVES, PRETORIA

A248 Albasini Letterbooks. Correspondência Official do Consulado Portuguez em a Republica Africana do Sul Transvaalsch. Volume 1, 14 April 1858 - 7 April 1862; Volume 2, 12 June 1862 - 8 June 1866; Volume 3, 8 June 1866 - 15 October 1872. (Afrikaans translation of Portuguese letters available).

A.18 B.H. Dicke "The Development of the Northern Transvaal: Historical stepping Stones and Reminiscences" June 1925.

ART, Vol 151 (old 170), Records of the Archives Yearbook, ref. P.A. 10/2/1.

TA/SN 1: A, Oscar Dahl, "Estimate of able-bodied armed men in the Zoutpansberg, 1879".

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Creux and Berthoud Collection, Acc 249. 2.20.5: Schiel to Berthoud, 30.9.1889.

Creux and Berthoud Collection, Acc 249, 2.20.6: Schiel to Creux, 17.2.1890.

João Albasini Collection, Acc 53, fol. 4: F. Martins, "João Albasini and the Colony of S. Luis, unpublished translation of J. Martins *João Albasini e a Colónia de S. Luís: Subsídio para a História da*

Província de Moçambique e das suas Relações com o Transval, Lisbon, 1957.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Mr J.M. Dederen, Department of Anthropology, University of Venda.

Dr U. Kistner, Department of Comparative Literature, University of the Witwatersrand.

Mr W.F. Malunga, Head of Department, Department of History, University of Venda.

Mr W.W.X. Nkuna, Regional Director of Education, Northern Province Department of Education (Giyani), formerly Senior Lecturer and Acting Head of Department, Department of History, University of Venda.

Ms T. Shikwambana, Government Ethnologist who compiled the report recommending that Ndengeza should be recognised as a full chief, Pietersburg, 1.2.1988.

Mr H.J. Siweya, Lecturer in the Department of Mathematics at the University of the North and brother of Acting Chief Ndengeza.

ORAL EVIDENCE

Interviews (in the possession of Patrick Harries, University of Cape Town) by David Killick with:

Rev E. Mabyalane, Kurulen, 30.3.1979.

Chief Magoro, place not given, 13.4.1979.

Mr T. Masuluke, Mtiti, 7.4.1979.

Headman Maswanganyi, place not given, 8.4.1979.

Mr A. Mpapele, Elim, 3.3.1979.

Ndengeza N'wa-Manungu (Chief Ndengeza), place not given, 2.4.1979.

Chief Njakanjaka, 1979, place and exact date not given.

N.D. Siweya and F.S. Siweya, place not given, 16.4.1979.

informant at Xikumba, name not given, 8.4.1979.

Interviews by Patrick Harries with:

Rosie Buys, Buysdorp, 1981, exact date not given.

Joaquim da Gama, Buysdorp, 19.2.1981.

Interviews (in the possession of Patrick Harries) by unidentified U.C.T. students with:

Mr F.M. Maboko, Valdezia, 13.7.1984.

Rev D.C. Marivate, Valdezia 11.7.1984 and 14. 7. 1984.

Interviews by the author with:

Mr J. Ash, at Chief Nkomi's, 29.1.1991.

Mrs M. Eyssel, Louis Trichardt, 8.5.1993.

Ms H. Giesekke, Louis Trichardt, 7.12.1997.

Mr M.J. Maluleke, Acting Chief Hlaneki, Gndlanani, 28.1.1991.

Mr and Mrs Marhanele, Xigalo, 26.1.1991.

Mrs Marivate, Mrs Makandule and Mrs Ndou, Valdezia, 24.1.1991.

Mr B. Mpombo, Valdezia, 25.1.1991.

Mr J.M. Mukhari and Mr S. Springs, Elim, 6.2.1991.

Mr D. Siweya, Ndengeza, 28.1.1991.

Chief Xigalo, Olifantshoek, 26.1.1991.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AIDS

Dictionary of South African Biography.

MISSIONARY PUBLICATIONS

Bawenda-Freund, Nr. 23, Oktober 1888, VI Jahrgang, page 67 and Nr. 42, Juli 1893, 11 Jahrgang, page 161.

Berliner Missions-Berichte, Nr. 21 u 22, 1878, page 490; Nr. 17 u 18, 1890, pages 391 - 392; Nr. 21 u 22, 1890, pages 464 - 465 and Nr. 17 u 18, 1891, page 450.

Bulletin Missionaire adresse par la Commission des Missions de l'eglise evangelique libre du canton de Vaud, No. 10, Lausanne, 1874 and No. 49, Lausanne, 1883.

Mitteilungen des Vereins „Heidenfreund", Nr. 18, 1 Juli 1887, V Jahrgang, no page (page 2).

Wessmann, R. *Philippus Thai, ein Treuer Nationalhelfer im Bawendalande*, Missionsschriften für Kinder Nr. 46, Berlin, no date (1902).

BOOKS

Agar-Hamilton, J.A.I. *The Native policy of the Voortrekkers, 1835 - 1858*, Cape Town, 1928.

Appleby, T., Hunt, L. and Jacob, M. *Telling the Truth about History*, New York and London, 1994.

Axelson. E. *The Portuguese in South-East Africa*, Johannesburg, 1960.

Axelson, E. *Portugal and the Scramble for Africa*, Johannesburg, 1967.

Baumbach, E.J.M. and Marivate, C.T.D. *Xironga Folk-tales*, Pretoria, 1973.

Beukes, G.J. (ed.) *Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat*, Bloemfontein, 1950.

Boeyens, J.C.A. *Die konflik tussen die Venda en die Blankes in Transvaal, 1864 - 1869*, Archives Yearbook for South African History, Part II, Pretoria, 1990.

Bonner, P. *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaries, The evolution and dissolution of the nineteenth-century Swazi state*, Johannesburg, 1983.

Boonzaier, E. and Sharp, J. (eds) *South African Keywords, The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988.

Bosman, I. (ed.) *Voortrekker Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, Pretoria, 1938.

Bozzoli, B. (ed) *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, Johannesburg, 1987.

Brantlinger, P. *Rule of Darkness, British Literature and Imperialism, 1830 - 1914*, Ithaca and London, 1988.

Burke, E.E. (ed.) *The Journals of Carl Mauch, His travels in the Transvaal and Rhodesia 1869 - 1872*, Salisbury, 1969.

Burke, P. (ed.) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge and Oxford, 1991.

Cameron, T. and Spies, S.B. (eds.) *A New Illustrated History of South Africa*, Second Edition, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1991.

Carrard, P. *Poetics of the New History; French Historical Discourse from Braudel to Chartier*, Baltimore and London, 1992.

Ching-Liang Low, G. *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism*, London and New York, 1996.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.M. (eds.) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, London, 1986.

da Mota, C.T. *Prescenças Portugesas na Africa do Sul e no Transval durante os séculos XVIII*, Lisbon, 1989.

das Neves, D.F. *A Hunting Expedition to the Transvaal*, Pretoria, 1987.

de Vaal, J.B. *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1953.

de Vaal, J.D. *João Albasini (1813 - 1888)*, Camoes Annual Lectures No 3, Johannesburg, 1983.

Dicke, B.H. *The Bush Speaks, Border Life in Old Transvaal*, Second Edition, Pietermaritzburg, 1937.

Dicke, B.H. *The Northern Transvaal Voortrekkers*, Archives Year Book for South African History, 1941, Part I, Pretoria, 1941.

Dubow, S. *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, Cambridge and Johannesburg, 1995.

Eldredge, E.A. and Morton, F. *Slavery in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, 1994.

Fentress, J. and Wickham, C. *Social Memory*, Oxford and Cambridge, 1992.

Ferreira, O.J.O. *Stormvöel van die Noorde, Stephanus Schoeman in Transvaal*, Pretoria, 1978.

Finnegan, R. *Literacy and Orality*, Oxford, 1988.

Geertz, C. *Works and Lives; The Anthropologist as Author*, Stanford, 1988.

Golan, D. *Inventing Shaka, Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism*, London, 1994.

Goody, J. (ed.) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge, 1968.

Goody, J. *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge, 1987.

Guy, J. *The Heretic; A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1844 - 1883*, Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg, 1983.

Harries, P. *Work, Culture and Identity, Migrant laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910*, Johannesburg, Portsmouth and London, 1994.

Herzfeld, M. *Anthropology through the looking-glass, Critical ethnography in the margins of Europe*, Cambridge, 1987.

Hofmeyr, I. *"We spend our Years as a Tale That is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom"*, Johannesburg, 1993.

Horrel, M. (S.A. Institute of Race Relations) *The African Reserves of South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1969.

Horrel, M. (S.A. Institute of Race Relations) *The African Homelands of South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1973.

Horton, R. and Finnegan, R. (eds.) *Modes of Thought*, London, 1973.

Hunt, L. (ed.) *The New Cultural History*, California, 1989.

Jäckel, M. *Juwwawa, Roman aus der Pionierzeit der Buren*, Basel, no date (1954?).

Jackson-Haight, M.V. *European Powers and South-East Africa, A study of International Relations on the South-East coast of Africa, 1796 - 1856*, London, 1967.

Junod, H.A. *The Life of a South African Tribe* (Two Volumes), New York, 1962.

Katz, W.R. *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A critical study of British imperial fiction*, Cambridge, 1987.

Krüger, D.W. *Die Weg na die See*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Volume 1, Part I, Pretoria, 1938.

Le Goff, I.J. *History and Memory*, New York, Oxford, 1992.

Lord, A.B. *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, Mass., 1960.

Maclean, C.R. *The Natal Papers of "John Ross"*, Edited by S. Gray, Durban, 1992.

Maree, W.L. *Lig in Soutpansberg*, Pretoria, 1962.

Marks, S. and Atmore, A. (eds.) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, London, 1980.

Marks, S. and S. Trapido, S. *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth-century South Africa*, London and New York, 1987.

Massie, R.H. (comp.) *The Native Tribes of the Transvaal*, London, 1905 (Official Publication, War Office).

Murray, B.K. *Wits, the early years*, Johannesburg, 1982.

Ong, W. *Orality and Literacy*, New York, 1982.

Parry, M. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected papers of Milman Parry*, Edited by A. Parry, Oxford, 1971.

Peires, J.B. (ed.) *Before and After Shaka, Papers in Nguni History*, Grahamstown, 1981.

Preller, G.S. *Voortrekkermense* III and IV, Melville, 1988 (facsimile).

Quintinha, F. and Toscano, J. *A Derrocado Do Império Vátua e Mousinho De Albuquerque*, Lisbon, 1930.

Rider Haggard, H. *Allan Quatermain*, London, 1995 (First published, London 1887).

Rider Haggard, H. *King Solomon's Mines*, London, 1994 (First published, London, 1885).

Rider Haggard, H. *She*, London, 1994 (First published, London, 1887).

Roche, I. *Das Terras do Império Vátua às Praças da República Boer*, Lisbon, 1987.

Santana, F. *Documentação Avulsa Moçambicana do Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*, 1, (Maços 1 A 10), Sumarição (Summary), Lisbon, 1964.

Saunders, C. *The Making of the South African Past, Major historians on race and class*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988, page 42.

Smith, K. *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, Johannesburg, 1988.

Stayt, H.A. *The Bavenda*, London, 1931.

Stevenson-Hamilton, J. *The Low-veld: Its wild life and its people*, London, 1929 (Second Edition, 1934).

Street, B.V. *The savage in Literature: Representations of "primitive" society in English fiction 1858 - 1920*, London and Boston, 1975.

Surplus Peoples Project *Forced Removals in South Africa*, Project Report, Vol. 5, 1983.

Theal, G.M. *History of South Africa since 1795*, Volume 8 (facsimile), Cape Town, 1964.

University of Pretoria *Ad Destinatum: Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, Johannesburg, 1960.

Vail, L. (ed.) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London, 1989.

Vail, L. and White, L. *Power and the Praise Poem, Southern African Voices in History*, Charlottesville and London, 1991.

van der Merwe, H.W. and Welsh, D. (eds.) *The Future of the University in Southern Africa*, Cape Town, 1977.

van Jaarsveld, F.A. *Die Afrikaners se Groot Trek na die Stede en ander opstelle*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1982.

van Jaarsveld, F.A. *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, Cape Town, 1964.

van Rooyen, T.S. *Die Verhouding tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882*, Archives Year Book for South African History, Part I, Pretoria, 1951.

Vansina, J. *Oral Tradition*, Harmondsworth, 1965.

Vansina, J. *Oral Tradition as History*, London, 1985.

van Warmelo, N.J. (ed.) *Contributions Towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, Volume III, Pretoria, 1932 (Official Publication).

Walker, E. *A History of South Africa*, London, 1928.

White, A. *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and deconstructing the imperial subject*, Cambridge, 1993.

Wolhunter, H. *Memoirs of a Game Ranger*, Johannesburg, 1948.

ARTICLES

Abelson, E., Abraham, D. and Murphy, M. "Interview with Joan Scott", in *Radical History Review*, 45, 1989, pages 41 - 59.

Biersack, A. "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond", in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, pages 72 - 96.

Boeyens, J.C.A. "'Black Ivory': The Indenture System and Slavery in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1869", in E. Eldredge and F. Morton, *Slavery in South Africa*, pages 187 - 214.

Cobbing, J. "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, 1988, pages 487 - 519.

Delius, P. "Migrant labour and the Pedi, 1840 - 80", in S. Marks and A. Atmore, *Economy and Society in pre-industrial South Africa*, pages 293 - 312.

Dicke, B.H. "The first Voortrekkers to the Northern Transvaal and the Massacre of the van Rensburg Trek", in *South African Journal of Science*, Vol XXIII, pages 1006 - 1021.

Eldredge, E.A. "Delagoa Bay and the Hinterland in the Early Nineteenth Century: Politics, Slaves and Slave raiding", in E.A. Eldredge and F. Morton (eds.) *Slavery in South Africa*, pages 127 - 165.

Fischer, A.T. "Whose development? The politics of development and the development of politics in South Africa", in E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.), *South African Keywords*, pages 122 - 135.

Grundlingh, A. "Politics, Principles and Problems of a Profession: Afrikaner Historians and their Discipline, c. 1920 - c. 1965", in *Perspectives in Education*, 1990, Vol. 12, No. 1, pages 1 - 19.

Grundlingh, A. and Sapire, H. "From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrializing South Africa, 1939-1988", in *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 21, 1989, pages 19 - 37.

Hamilton, C.A. "The Character and Objects of Chaka': A Reconsideration of the Making of Shaka as 'Mfecane' Motor", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 33, 1992, pages 37 - 63.

Harries, P. "'A Forgotten Corner of the Transvaal': Reconstructing the History of a Relocated Community through Oral Testimony and Song" in B. Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict, South African Perspectives*, pages 93 - 134.

Harries, P. "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa", in L. Vail (ed.) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, pages 82 - 117.

Harries, P. "History, Ethnicity and the Ingwavuma Land Deal: the Zulu Northern Frontier in the Nineteenth Century", in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, No. VI, 1983, pages 1 - 27.

Harries, P. "Slavery, Social Incorporation and Surplus extraction; the nature of free and unfree labour in South-East Africa", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 22, 1981, pages 309 - 330.

Heydenrych, D.H. "The Boer Republics, 1852-1881", in T. Cameron and S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, pages 143 - 160.

Hofmeyr, I. "Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902 - 1924", in S. Marks and S. Trapido, *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth-century South Africa*, London and New York, 1987, pages 95 - 123.

Hofmeyr, I. "Popularizing History: The case of Gustav Preller", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, 1988, pages 521 - 535.

Hofmeyr, I. "'Wailing for Purity', Oral Studies in Southern African Studies", in *African Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 1995, pages 16 - 31.

Jordaan, A.J.J. "Jacobus Bernardus de Vaal as Suid-Afrikaanse Historikus (1914 - 1989)", in *Historia*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1994, pages 6 - 18.

Klein, H. "Die Wit Opperhoof Van die Sjangaans" in *Die Brandwag*, 8 July 1938, pages 8, 9 and 43.

Kramer, L.S. "Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra" in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, pages 97 - 128.

La Hausse, P. "Oral History and Historians" in *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7, 1990, pages 346 - 356.

Lestrade, G.P. "Some Notes on the Ethnic History of the Vhavenda and their Rhodesian Affinities", in N.J. van Warmelo (ed) *Contributions towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual*, pages XX - XXVIII. [Reprinted from *South African Journal of Science*, Vol. XXIV, pages 486 - 495.]

Liesegang, G. "Dingane's attack on Lourenço Marques in 1833", in *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. X, No. 4, 1969, pages 565 - 579.

Liesegang, G. "Notes on the Internal Structure of the Gaza Kingdom of Southern Mozambique, 1840 - 1895" in J.B. Peires (ed.), *Before and After Shaka*, pages 178 - 209.

Lord, A.B. "Perspectives on recent work in Oral Literature", in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 10, 1974, pages 187 - 210.

Miller, S.M. and Tempelhoff, J.W.N. "Die romantiek van 'n grensterrein", in *Fauna and Flora*, Transvaalse Direktoraat Natuur- en Omgewingsbewaring, No.47, 1990, pages 32 - 39.

Mouton, F.A. "Professor Leo Fouché, the History Department and the Afrikanerization of the University of Pretoria", in *Historia*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1993, pages 51 - 63.

Passerini, L. Book review of I. Hofmeyr, *"We Spend our Years as a Tale that is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Kingdom*, Johannesburg, 1993, in *African Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 1996, pages 146 - 147.

Pelzer, A.N. "I.D. Bosman, 1897-1947", in *Historiese Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, June 1947, pages 3 - 12.

Penvenne, J. "'We are all Portuguese!' Challenging the Political Economy of Assimilation: Lourenço Marques, 1870 - 1933", in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, pages 255 - 288.

Pomata, G. "Versions of Narrative: Overt and Covert Narrators in Nineteenth Century Historiography", in *History Workshop Journal*, Spring, 1989, pages 1 - 17.

Rich, P. "The origins of Apartheid Ideology: The Case of Ernest Stubbs and Transvaal Native Administration, c. 1902-1932" in *African Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 315, April 1980, pages 171 - 194.

Rosaldo, R. "From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor", in J. Clifford and G.M. Marcus (eds.) *Writing Culture*, pages 77 - 97.

Sharp, J. "Ethnic group and nation: The apartheid vision in South Africa", in E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.), *South African Keywords*, pages 79 - 99.

Uys, C.J. "Die Huidige Stand van die Geskiedskrywing in Suid-Afrika", Paper delivered to the Historical Society of Pretoria, 5, October, 1956, in *Historia*, 1957, pages 130 - 136.

Uys, C.J. "Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1854 - 1949, in G.J. Beukes (ed.), *Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat*, pages 34 - 44.

van Jaarsveld, F.A. "Geskiedenis van die Departement Geskiedenis, Universiteit van Stellenbosch, 1866-1979", in F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaner se Groot Trek na die Stede*, pages 226 - 295.

Vansina, J. "Oral Tradition and its Methodology", in J. Ki-Zerbo (ed.) *Methodology and African Prehistory, UNESCO General History of Africa*, Vol. 1, London, Berkley and California, 1981, page 146. (Thanks to Patrick Harries for this reference.)

Viljoen, G van N. "The Afrikaans Universities and Particularism", in H.W. van der Merwe and D. Welsh, *The Future of the University in Southern Africa*, pages 172 - 187.

Wachtel, N. "Introduction", in *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 2, Part 2, October, 1986, Special edition entitled "Between Memory and History", pages 217 - 218.

Wagner, R. "Zoutpansberg: the dynamics of a hunting frontier, 1848-67", in S. Marks and A. Atmore *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, pp.313-349.

Wylie, D. "A Dangerous Admiration: E.A. Ritter's Shaka Zulu", in *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, 1993, pages 98 - 118.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Bantu, August, 1972, name of writer not given, article entitled "Juwawa of the Magwamba", pages 29 - 32.

Die Brandwag, 8 July 1938.

Fauna & Flora, No.47, 1990. (Issue devoted to the Zoutpansberg.)

Star, 20.6.1925 and 27.6.1925, J.B.de Vaal papers, University of Venda.

De Zuid Afrikaan, 28.1.1864, J. B. de Vaal papers, University of Venda.

UNPUBLISHED THESES, PAPERS AND MANUSCRIPTS

Conerly, C.J. "The surrendering of the lands in the Northern Transvaal of Mahosi Davhana, Makhado, Mpephu and Sinthumule", B.A. Honours dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1990.

de Vaal, J.B. "João Albasini (1813-1888); Die Rol wat hy in die Geskiedenis van Noord-Oostelike Transvaal gespeel het, Deel 1", M.A. thesis, University College of the Orange Free State, 1945.

de Vaal, J.B. "Vise-Konsul João Albasini (1813-1888)", PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 1947. [An edited version of this work was subsequently published as J.B. de Vaal, *Die Rol van João Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal.*]

de Vaal, J.B. "Geloftedagtoespraak oor die geskiedenis van Zoutpansbergdorp (1848 tot Okt.1858); Schoemansdal (Nov.1858 tot 1867)", unpublished paper in the possession of the de Vaal family, Louis Trichardt no date.

de Vaal, J.B. "Old trade routes between Delagoa Bay, Inhambane and the interior", unpublished paper, no date, de Vaal papers, University of Venda.

Hamilton, C. "Theophilus Shepstone and the making of Rider Haggard's Shaka", unpublished paper presented to the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 27 September 1995.

Harries, P. "Labour migration from Mozambique to South Africa; With Special Reference to the Delagoa Bay Hinterland, c.1862-97", PhD thesis, University of London, 1983.

Kirkaldy, A. "'Images of Savagery': Ritual Cannibalism, Ritual Killing and the Power of *Mahosi* in Vendaland until 1930", unpublished paper presented to the Forschungskolloquium, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 13 May 1996.

Kirkaldy, A. "Makoarele's return to the 'darkness of heathenism': *Khosi* Makwarela and the Berlin Missionaries in Vendaland, c.1876-1897", unpublished paper presented to the Second CSSALL Inter-Disciplinary Conference, university of Durban-Westville, 26 September 1997.

Lilford, G.C. "A Hunters's ideology: Hunting and the use of political violence in the writings of Wilbur Smith and F.C. Selous", M.A. dissertation, University of Sussex, 1991.

Malungana, S.J. "*Vuphato*: Praise Poems in Tsonga", PhD thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1994.

Marivate, C.T.D. "Tsonga Foktales: Form, Content and Delivery" (Vol. I.), M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1973.

Penvenne, J. "João dos Santos Albasini (1876-1922), The Contradictions of Politics and Identity in Colonial Mozambique", unpublished paper presented at the international conference "From the Zoutpansberg to the Sea" held at the University of Venda, 16 - 18 September 1995.

Smith, A. "The Struggle for the Control of Southern Moçambique, 1720 - 1835", PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1970.