DITHAKONG AND THE 'MFECANE': A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will aim to explore the relationship between the battle of Dithakong and 'mfecane' theory in connection with the growing critique led by Julian Cobbing. Essentially, it will be argued that certain aspects of 'mfecane' theory appear in fact tenable, with particular reference to the upheavals west of the Drakensberg in the years 1822-4, as the thesis seeks to establish the original version of events at Dithakong.

Ever since Cobbing has questioned the fundamental tenets of 'mfecane' theory and suggested rather that the destabilizations within black society during the 1820's sprang from European penetration, there have been efforts to give his ideas academic credibility. Dithakong is one key event within the 'mfecane' diaspora that has been attempted to be explained without reference to African agency. Julian Cobbing, Jurg Richner and Jan-Bart Gewald have presented these alternative analyses which, although similar in broader intention, are distinct in detailed explanation.

Whereas in the past, Dithakong has been viewed as a defensive battle against the threatening advance of a numerous and destitute 'mfecane' migratory group, the latest versions interpret the events in terms of a raid on an unprovoked and unaggressive people. Although noting the advances made by Cobbing and others, it will be argued that with regard to Dithakong their analyses are forced and suited to meet the respective demands of their larger suppositions, which ultimately brings their singular Eurocentric theory of violence into question. To this end, certain elements within 'mfecane' theory require to be reconsidered.

The opening chapters of the thesis will focus on Dithakong itself. All the revisionist analyses show extreme scepticism towards the eyewitness narratives of the events and pay little attention to the reports about the 'Mantatee horde.' It will be suggested that such an approach is unwarranted and that a correct understanding of the 'Mantatee' would validate the original accounts.

The closing chapter will address the broader implications of Dithakong, with particular reference to the upheavals west of the Drakensberg. The thesis does not propose a complete return to the traditional 'mfecane' model, but rather offers a synthesis approach whereby the conflicts are viewed as a complex interplay of 'European' and Afrocentric forces. It is hoped that such an approach would provide a more adequate framework for further historical research in this area.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents whose moral, financial and spiritual provisions have equipped and sustained me in such an undertaking.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the dominant theoretical model used to explain developments in the interior of early nineteenth-century southern Africa has been a cluster of ideas centred around the 'mfecane'. This 'mfecane' theory, the creation of a number of historians, describes an era of history, particularly the 1820's, when vast regions of the interior of southern Africa were thrust into immense upheaval, characterised by numerous conflicts and population migrations. In essence, 'mfecane' theory has proposed an Afrocentric interpretation of the events. Earliest writers emphasized the cataclysmic black-on-black destructive nature of the period that was, in the end, the result of the 'Zulu-centric' revolution under Shaka.[1]

Over time, the concept of the 'mfecane' has steadily grown in dimension and content, so that today it constitutes a macro-theory around which the history of the early nineteenth-century interior has been written. Since the intervention of J.D. Omer-Cooper in the 1960's, 'mfecane' theory has come to encompass a massive process of revolutionary socio-political change amongst black society, which began from a single centre and affected extensive areas of south-central

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[1]See for example: G.M. Theal, History of South Africa, Cape Town reprint, 1964, 5, pp.428-456; G.E. Cory, The Rise of South Africa, Cape Town reprint, 1965, 2, pp.230-239; G.W. Stow, The Native Races of South Africa, London, 1905, pp.460-487 (Although Theal, Stow and Cory do not use the term 'mfecane', their view of the upheavals is similar to those who later referred to the concept); D.F. Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, London, 1912, pp.137-236; W. Macmillan, Bantu, Boer, and Briton, London, 1929, pp.14-18; E. Walker, A History of South Africa, 3rd. edition, London, 1964, pp.175,176.

Africa.[2] Present 'mfecane' theory has been developed to such a degree that it has been regarded as established fact of southern African history. A number of dominant common features may be identified in the way 'mfecane' theory has recently been expressed. Firstly, the initial motors of violence have been described in terms of an internally self-generated revolution amongst the northern Nguni, with particular reference to the rise of the Zulu nation under Shaka. Forces behind the processes of socio-political transformation and consolidation have been explained in terms of environmental influences, overpopulation and the possibilities of ivory trading. Secondly, the aggression of Shaka and the Zulu is seen to have brought the displacement of neighbouring African communities, who, in turn, themselves dislocated other communities in a period of intensive deprivation and formidable strife. It is believed that these violent reactions affected much of sub-continental Africa. Thirdly, not only did this period of immense upheaval cause the depopulation of the interior, but, positively, it is considered to have brought the consolidation and state formation of a number of African societies at the time of the arrival of the Europeans into the region.[3]

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[2]J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, London, 1966.

[3]See for example: J. Guy, 'Ecological factors in the rise of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom', in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, London, 1980, pp.102-119; A.K. Smith, 'Delagoa Bay and the trade of south-eastern Africa', in R. Gray and D. Birmingham (eds.), Pre-Colonial African Trade, London, 1970, pp.265-289; P. Bonner, Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires, Cambridge, 1983, ch.2; J.B. Peires (ed.), Before and After Shaka, Grahamstown, 1979; W.F. Lye, 'The Difaqane: The Mfecane in the Southern Sotho Area, 1822-24', Journal of African History, 8, 1967, pp.107-131.

Over the last decade, Julian Cobbing has presented a number of papers re-examining the fundamental tenets of 'mfecane' theory.[4] Cobbing questions whether the 'mfecane' ever occurred in this sense, and has offered the polemic that the 'destabilizations and transformations within black society rather sprang from the synchronous and converging impact of European penetration at Delagoa Bay, the Cape, north of the Orange and Natal.'[5] Cobbing argues that the 'mfecane' has been invented as myth and as alibi to conceal 'European' atrocities in the seizure of land and labour. The expansion of European capitalism, he suggests, in terms of Portugese slavers from Delagoa Bay, colonial forces from the eastern frontier, and renegade European and Griqua slavers in the Orange River region, was the primary causative factor of violence.

Ever since Cobbing has challenged the prevailing notions, there have been efforts both by himself and his students to establish his thesis and give his ideas academic credibility. Key events within the 'mfecane' diaspora have been identified and explained in terms of the larger suppositions of 'European' expansionism and labour demands, and without reference to African agents involved in a process of violent chain reactions and population migrations precipitated by Zulu

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[4]J. Cobbing, 'The case against the mfecane', unpubl. seminar paper, University of Cape Town, 1983; 'The case against the mfecane', unpubl. paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1984; 'The myth of the mfecane', unpubl. paper, University of Durban-Westville, 1987; 'Jettisoning the mfecane (with perestroika)', University of the Witwatersrand, 1988; 'The mfecane as alibi: thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', Journal of African History, 29, 1988, pp.487-519.

[5]Cobbing, 'Jettisoning the mfecane (with perestroika)', p.1.

expansionism in the east.

Cobbing has rightly criticised the pervading Afrocentricism of 'mfecane' theory to the extent of denying attention to 'European' aggression, and his critique has initiated the possibilities for an exciting re-examination of early nineteenth-century southern African history. However, his determination to replace 'mfecane' theory with his counter-paradigm of 'European' penetration as basis, has provided a corresponding barrier with respect to the historiography of the era. Ultimately, his view of the creation of the 'mfecane' has become as Eurocentric as 'mfecane' theory is Afrocentric.

By focusing on the events at Dithakong on 25-27 June 1823, the thesis will aim to expose the poverty of Cobbing's singular Eurocentric theory of violence, as it seeks to contribute a more suitable framework for research in the area. Dithakong is one such case study that stands at a critical juncture for Cobbing's ideas with particular respect to the chains of violence west of the Drakensberg and, consequently, there have been a range of interpretations of Dithakong that display these similar broader intentions.[6]

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[6]Julian Cobbing began this re-examination in 'The mfecane as alibi'. Further critiques have been forwarded by students who at some time have worked under Cobbing. See J. Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane": or a change of paradigm', unpubl. B.A. Hons. essay, Rhodes University, 1988, pp.7-10; J.B. Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees: a critical reassessment of events leading up to the battle of Dithakong', M.A. thesis, Rijks Universiteit Leiden, 1990.

In the past, the Vaal-Caledon region, west of the Drakensberg, has been described as having been devastated by numerous African 'hordes', who themselves were generated westwards by African agents east of the Drakensberg, in the years 1822-3. These 'hordes', in turn, dislocated whole communities in the Vaal-Caledon region, displacing a number of societies onto the highveld, some as far afield as Lake Victoria. Since few literate reporters had penetrated this area by 1823, there were few eyewitness accounts recorded with respect to the nature of the events at the moment of the upheavals. However, the occurrences at Dithakong stand as one key exception with the eyewitness narratives of three Europeans. Situated on the highveld, on the western fringe of the Vaal-Caledon region of what has been termed the 'blank unknown space' of the early nineteenth-century interior, Dithakong constitutes a locality of surer empirical ground and provides an important source towards unlocking the nature of the chains of violence west of the Drakensberg.

Up until the present, Dithakong has been viewed as a defensive battle against the threatening advance of a vast and destitute 'mfecane' migratory group. However, the latest versions interpret the events in terms of a slave and cattle raid on an unprovoked and unaggressive people. These analyses have obviously not been arrived at independently or in isolation, but need to be considered as a whole in relation to the Cobbing thesis. By describing the events in terms of a penetrative raid, the revisionists attempt to situate Dithakong in terms of the labour demands of the colony and within the destabilizations integral to the Transorangian region

itself, unrelated to African agency from the east. The forces of change, which supposedly caused the destruction of African communities, as is alleged was the case at Dithakong, are identified as renegade European and Griqua slavers, the forerunners of European capitalism in the area to the north of the Orange River.

In essence, the thesis aims to reveal the contrived nature of the revisionist analysis of Dithakong. The work primarily involves a critical evaluation of their methodology, which necessitates a close historiographical review of the available contemporary sources. Since the empirical evidence for the period is exceedingly limited, few new resources have been uncovered to contribute to the debate, so that the battle over Dithakong becomes a contest on methodological and historiographical grounds. By applying a rigorous methodology, it will be argued that with regard to Dithakong the revisionist versions have been forced to meet the demands of their larger suppositions, which ultimately brings their singular Eurocentric theory of violence into question, with particular regard to the nature of the conflict west of the Drakensberg. Without completely returning to the traditional 'mfecane' model, a synthesis approach will be proposed whereby the conflicts are viewed as a complex interplay of 'European' and Afrocentric forces. In this way, the thesis aims to contribute a more reliable methodological and historiographical framework with respect to the history of the early nineteenth-century southern African interior.

2. THE REPORTERS OF DITHAKONG

Robert Moffat, the missionary at Kuruman, John Melvill, the government agent at Griqua Town, and George Thompson, a Cape Town merchant, constitute the main literate reporters of the events at Dithakong.[1] They described Dithakong as a defensive battle against the 'Mantatee', a desperate migratory group that had come from the east. For many months prior to this confrontation, there had been numerous rumours concerning the approach of this 'Goth-like army', which was reported to have destroyed many communities in its advance. The 'horde' was depicted as 'hungry wolves' whose object appeared 'not so much to war, as to devour the produce of the land of which they [got] possession.'[2] Believing these reports to have little foundation, Robert Moffat, who resided amongst the Tlhaping, a group of Tswana living to the north of the Orange River at Kuruman (also known as Lattakoo) beyond the north-western frontier of the colony, continued to carry out his intentions to journey northwards to the Ngwaketse, another Tswana group, in the hope of establishing amicable relations. Before reaching his destination, however, Moffat became convinced of the 'Mantatee'

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[1]For Moffat's account, see his letters and journal in I. Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship at Kuruman, London, 1951, pp.73-111, see also R. Moffat, Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa, London, 1842, ch.21-22; for Melvill's, see G. Thompson, Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa, Cape Town reprint, 1962, (originally London, 1827), pp. 174-185; for Thompson's, see ibid., pp.87-129. For further sources of the events, see The South African Commercial Advertiser, 7 Jan. 1824, reprinted in G.M. Theal, Records of the Cape Colony, 34 vols., London, 1902-05, 16, pp.497-505; R.L. Cope (ed.), The Journals of the Rev. T.L. Hodgson, Johannesburg, 1977, pp.180-182.

[2]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, pp.77,78.

presence and made a hurried return to Kuruman, fearing for the safety of the place, since the 'Mantatee' were advancing southwards (see map 1).

A meeting was held amongst the leaders of the Tlhaping to consider what line of action to adopt. It was decided to seek the aid of the Griqua, who resided to the south and whose possession of firearms could save Kuruman from possible destruction. After Moffat had failed to reach an agreement of peace with the 'Mantatee', the Griqua and Tlhaping entered into battle for their very lives on 26 June 1823 at Dithakong. Eight hours later, the 'Mantatee' had been dispelled, and Kuruman had been saved.[3]

The narratives of the original reporters agree well with one another in both sequence and occurrence, and appear unlikely to be attempts at collusion. They are all emphatic about the 'Mantatee' threat. However, the revisionists show extreme scepticism towards the eyewitness narratives. 165 years later, they suggest that the original accounts have been accepted uncritically. In the final analysis, with a few exceptions, they present the reporters as outrageous liars who deliberately deceived the public as to their real intentions.

Both Cobbing and Richner attempt to situate Dithakong in terms of colonial demands for labour. Cobbing argues that an in depth reading of the evidence

[3]For the above events, see ibid., pp.73-95.

reveals the battle of Dithakong was no more than a slave raid organized by Moffat and Melvill to meet the colony's labour problem. The 'Mantatee' threat was a mere alibi for the raid.[4]

Richner has clearly struggled to reconcile the integrity and compassion of Moffat with the appellation of slave trader. He has continued to present Dithakong as a raid but without implicating Moffat. In what he ingeniously calls the Tlhaping 'commercial jealousy scare', Richner argues that the trade monopoly of the Tlhaping was in danger of being undermined when Moffat ventured to the Ngwaketse. In order to prevent Moffat from reaching the Ngwaketse, the Tlhaping chief, Mothibi, used the 'Mantatee' scare and fed him messages about 'Mantatee' movements that were able to frighten Moffat into turning home. By this stage, Moffat completely believed the 'Mantatee scare' and made a hurried journey to Griqua Town to seek Griqua support. Mothibi's new 'commercial jealousy scare' had now developed a momentum of its own. Fearing the Griqua would take his cattle if there was no 'horde', Mothibi was forced to designate a victim people which unfortunately comprised the inhabitants of Dithakong. Richner believes Melvill used the opportunity to seize slaves for distribution in the colony. Once again, then, Dithakong was a raid for cattle and slaves that took place under the cover of the 'Mantatee' myth.[5]

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[4]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.492,493.

[5]Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', pp.7-8.

Gewald continues in the genre of Dithakong-as-raid. He treats the slaving aspect as a side issue, but his thesis is also an explicit attempt to explain the events without reference to African agents involved in a knock-on process from the east. He argues that Dithakong resulted from a 'complex of factors' related to 'tensions internal to and between, the Orange river outlaws, the Tlhaping polity, the Griqua polity and the missionaries.' He suggests the 'raid' constituted the logical conclusion of the development of events in Transorangian history, which particularly involved the quest for socio-economic-political stabilization on the part of the Tlhaping, Griqua and missionaries.[6]

This chapter will aim to expose the manipulated nature of the revisionist critiques, which comprise an assault on the very historical process itself. They fail, particularly, to consider all known relevant facts, and to engage themselves in the continuous dialectical process of moulding their facts to the interpretation and their interpretation to the facts.[7] They accept as much of the reporters' accounts as they find convenient, then ignore or repudiate other parts of the same documents which contradict their notions. Their selection of what is 'authentic' and what is 'unauthentic' in the accounts is often quite arbitrary based on a preconceived bias, and supported by previous arbitrary conclusions.

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[6]Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.1, p.7, ch.7, pp.1-2.

[7]E.H. Carr, What is History?, London, 1961, p.29.

Their tendency is to dwell upon certain incidental details, which has caused them to question the historical reliability of the narratives. They give a central position to these incidental historical details and attempt to seize hints of 'suppressed evidence'. However, it will be argued that the eyewitness accounts have yet to be proved inconsistent. Such small unsolved problems do not necessarily constitute errors, but are often the result of ignorance or lack of information. For this reason, the authors ought to be given the benefit as possessing great advantage with respect to small details, in relation to researches writing centuries later. The literary critic, therefore, should continue to follow Aristotle's dictum, that 'the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself and not arrogated by the critic to himself', until such a time the author disqualifies himself by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies.[8]

By examining each reporter's frame of reference and basic presuppositions about life, it will be argued that what they state is consistent with their character. The revisionists' criticisms are not adequate enough to overturn the reliability of their accounts. If, indeed, the reporters had been lying, in each case they would have been displaying complete incompatibility with what is known about the rest of their lives.

[8]Aristotle, Art of Poetry, (De Arte Poetica), pp.14606-16.

Robert Moffat

Robert Moffat has long been upheld as one of the more prominent conservative, evangelical figures of missionary enterprise of the nineteenth-century.[9] As a member of the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.), his labours in southern Africa, predominantly at Kuruman over a period of fifty-four years, have been viewed in a positive and respectable light. At present, however, his integrity is under attack in what appears to be a reversion to the Majeke thesis of the 1950's.[10] Particularly in the Cobbing critique, Moffat is characterized as a colonial collaborator, acting as an agent of imperial conquest. At Dithakong, it is claimed that he was 'consciously engrossed' in collecting slaves to meet the labour demands of the colony. Cobbing believes that in Moffat, 'we have to wade through a surreal, self-exculpatory version of events, in which the missionaries are depicted as restraining their brutal Griqua and Tlhaping allies, solicitously protecting the women and children, wringing their hands at the bestiality of

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[9]See his biographical portrayals, D. Deanne, Robert Moffat: The Missionary Hero of Kuruman, London; C. Field, Heroes of Missionary Enterprise, London, 1908; C. Northcott, Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa, London, 1961; J.S. Moffat, The Lives of Robert and Mary Moffat, London, 1885; E.W. Smith, Robert Moffat: One of God's Gardeners, London, 1925; W. Walters, Life and Labours of Robert Moffat, London, 1882.

[10]N. Majeke (pseudonym of Dora Taylor), The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest, Johannesburg, 1953. The thesis argues that the primary role of the missionaries was to assist the colonial government in the subjugation of the African and herald a capitalist Christian civilization.

man.'[11]

Clearly the very nature of missionary activity and its motives is under assault. This section of the chapter will attempt to exonerate Moffat from the accusation that he was a slave trader and colonial agent by exploring the impact of his conservative, evangelical assumptions, which fundamentally conditioned his distinctive worldview. To this end, Moffat will be placed within the changing social and religious climate of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British society. He will then be situated in the southern African context, where it will be considered whether his views and actions were transformed, or whether he remained consistent to his conditioning in Britain.

His early life

Robert Moffat was born in Ormiston, Scotland 1795. Little is known of his father's origins. During Robert's early years, his father worked in the Custom's Office. His mother, Ann Gardiner, came from a family who had lived for many years at Ormiston 'in a lowly walk of life, their only distinction having been a steady and unobtrusive piety.'[12] Both his parents were strict Calvinists, who

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[11]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp. 492,493. As noted, Richner exonerates Moffat. Gewald is not explicit on Moffat. He suggests that either Moffat was deceived or that he deliberately attempted to assert his authority in the region. Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.6, p.8, ch.7, p.2.

[12]Moffat, Lives, p.1.

feared the awesome wrath of God. Such 'a sternness of religious belief bordering on gloomy vindictiveness'[13] was common to Scottish society of the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century.

This distinctively rigid form of Calvinism had been introduced by John Knox, the Scottish reformer, and over the years had entrenched itself as the dominant theology. It was a particularly sombre theology aimed at placating the wrathful vengeance of the great High God.[14] Robert's father epitomized the results of such a theology. He was a grim man embracing upright principles for fear of judgement. His mother was characterized by her loving tenderness. She would advance positive instruction with regard to her religion. She would read to her children the Holy Scriptures and inform them about the progress of the gospel. For example, she would tell them about the labours of the Moravian Brethren in Greenland and the East Indies.

Robert had little formal teaching. In 1806, the family moved to Carron Shore where he attended a parish school. Here, once again, he was confronted with the grave form of religion to which he had been introduced through his parents. The school was directed by a stern minister, Wully Mitchell, who in his first lessons was already facing the class with such questions as 'What is the chief end of

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[13]Ibid., p.4.

[14]See A. Drummond and J. Bulloch, The Scottish Church 1688-1843, Edinburgh, 1973; J. Watson, The Scot of the Eighteenth Century, London, 1907.

man?', and answering them with rigid doctrinal precision.[15] Robert did not remain at the school for long. His desire was to study botany and horticulture, and he was soon apprenticed as a gardener.

In 1813, he was appointed to manage gardens at High Leigh, Cheshire. It was here that his life would be radically transformed through his association with a group of Wesleyan Methodists. Up to this point, though, Robert had not taken religion seriously. He only read the Bible as a duty to his mother. He was well acquainted with the gospels but had never paid particular attention to them. The religion to which he had become accustomed merely comprised an ethical code to be followed and a cultural necessity not to be questioned.

Rationalistic thought had exerted an important influence on the Christian belief system during the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century in both Scotland and England. On the one hand, it had resulted in the growth of Moderatism, a school of thought which reduced the Christian religion to a system of morality, to the detriment of the doctrine of experiential Christianity. It was generally believed that Christianity was untrue, but useful to society. On the other hand, the threat of rationalistic thought had initiated the retreat of Christianity into a system of

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[15]Moffat, Lives, p.2. Robert recalled this event to one of his sons in a letter written fifty years later.

austere, traditional religious convictions beyond the realm of inquiry.[16]

The rise of Methodism, however, in the 1740's returned to Christianity its historic, biblical, conservative and evangelical doctrines from which it derived its dynamism. It was presented as a complete worldview encompassing absolute truth centred on the authority and reliability of the Bible, and the redeeming work of Jesus Christ in history. An emphasis on the personal experience, the work of the Holy Spirit, and true spirituality as both an inward and outward holiness within a whole personal and social context was therefore restored. Methodism also stressed reconciliation of the relationship with the loving God as opposed to the grim, austere religion of the day.[17]

This was the version of Christianity which influenced Moffat so strongly during his residence at Cheshire. Moffat was confronted with the reality of the implications of the Christian beliefs, particularly with the personal ramifications for his very own soul. His association with the Wesleyan Methodists brought an initial period of uncertainty and restlessness, as he struggled with the ultimate meaning of life. It was a time of doubt, hesitation and harbouring of suspicions,

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[16]For further discussion, see W.H. Fitchett, Wesley and his Century, New York, 1925; H. McLeod, Religion and the Working Class in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1984, p.17.

[17]For an in depth analysis of Methodism, see W.H. Fitchett, Wesley and his Century; E. Halevy, The Birth of Methodism in England, Chicago, 1971; W.J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution, New York, 1930; F. Whaling (ed.), John and Charles Wesley: selected writings and hymns, London, 1981.

yet fundamentally he knew he was faced with the question, 'What think ye of Christ?' His response at this stage was, 'I dared not answer.'[18]

Eventually, although having read the Bible on many previous occasions, its central dogmas began to penetrate his being. In his own words, he perceived 'what God had done for the sinner, and what was required of the sinner to obtain the Divine favour and the assurance of eternal life'. He came to appreciate the doctrine of justification by faith and, from this point onwards, he spoke of being at peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.[19]

The impact of his personal conversion and undivided commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour is imperative in situating Moffat. His conversional experience would transform and reshape the direction of his future altogether. For the rest of his life, he would work from a conservative, evangelical, Christian basis. This set of presuppositions would fundamentally shape his worldview and radically alter his perceptions and activities.

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[18]Moffat, Lives, Robert Moffat's own narrative, p.12.

[19]Ibid., narrative by Robert Moffat, p.14.

Moffat now preoccupied himself with the pursuits of his Methodist friends with strong intensity of resolve. It did not matter that they were viewed with the 'severest approach',[20] and as fanatics by the Established Church. He vigorously defended his faith in correspondence with his father and, when opportunities arose, he was quick to convince others of the biblical truth of personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He spent his leisure time in long hours of study of the Bible.

However, Moffat now became restless and impatient. Life at Cheshire was exceedingly dull. Believing absolute truth, purpose and meaning to have gained hold of his very soul, he required to seek dynamic means of expressing these energies. He began to daydream and imagine a noble, determined future. It was in this mood whilst walking to Warrington admiring God's creation, thinking of his aimless past, pondering the present ('How little I could do')[21] and visualising a brighter future, that he viewed a poster that was to give clarity of expression to his new-found beliefs. The poster announced a talk by the rev. William Roby of the L.M.S. on the missionary cause. A vision stirred in Moffat's mind that corresponded to the evangelical doctrines by which he was convinced. He was

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[20]Ibid., p.14.

[21]Ibid., p.16.

fired with the resolve to become a messenger of salvation to some 'benighted' part of the world.[22] Not even a lucrative job offer would change his resolve.

Moffat soon visited Roby to discuss the prospects of a missionary life. Roby secured a job for Moffat in the nursery garden of Mr. Smith in Dukinfield, Manchester in order to have close contact for instruction from the L.M.S. Here, he would meet his future wife, Mary, daughter of Mr. Smith, who was also passionately concerned for missionary work. She would strongly encourage Moffat in his missionary zeal and strengthen him in his basic convictions.[23]

Roby gave to Moffat the only theological training he would ever receive. Roby had been born into the Church of England, yet had later become a Congregationalist minister. He preached basic conservative, evangelical Christianity, and was one of the founder members of the L.M.S., of which he was later made a director. A close relationship would develop between the two men, bonded by their passionate burden for missionary activity. Moffat related that Roby's kindness 'like that of a father, will not be easily obliterated from my mind.'[24]

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[22]For Moffat's own narrative of the events, see ibid., pp.16,17.

[23]For the most comprehensive account of Mary Moffat, see M. Dickson, Beloved Partner: Mary Moffat of Kuruman, London, 1976. See also, Moffat, Lives, pp.48-61.

[24]Deanne, Robert Moffat: The Missionary Hero of Kuruman, p.26.

Roby's 'System of Divinity', which consisted of eighty lectures, formed the basis of Moffat's perception of his religious position.[25] This system of theology became deeply engrained in the very person of Moffat, and would serve as his frame of reference for his many years in southern Africa.[26] The particular form of orthodox theology provided Moffat with the authority and impetus for his calling. This resembled thought-forms of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, which were central to the ideology of the protestant missionary movement, and key to the formation of Moffat's worldview.

The lectures taught that the objective of missionary enterprise involved the restoration of humankind to a right relationship to its creator, through the realisation of the lordship of Christ over the kingdoms of this world. It was believed that much of humanity was in overt rebellion against the governance of God, and that proof of that rebellion was 'heathen idolatry'. All religions apart from evangelical Christianity were categorized as idolatrous. The further human groups migrated from Babel, the more corrupt and idolatrous became their religion from the original biblical state of pure revealed religion. Following Romans 1:18-32, this regression to idolatry meant increasing moral degeneration, as God gave people over to the consequences of their own rejection of him.

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[25]Northcott, Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa, pp.22,23. Notice how diligently and industriously Moffat copied out, in more than 460 pages, the content of these lectures, reflecting the high value with which he considered his tutoring.

[26]For reference to Roby's teaching, see for example, Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.270-275.

The perceived depraved nature of idolatrous people led to the belief in the eternal perdition of the 'heathen'. Unless they believed in Christ, they were lost for all eternity. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 specified support that no idolater would inherit the kingdom of God. Many Christians, including Moffat, were haunted by the vision of vast numbers who were being lost. Moffat's conception of the 'degraded, despised, yet beloved mortals' perishing abroad, imparted within him a sense of absolute urgency and priority, to preach Christ and the words of eternal life, besides which any political considerations were insignificant.[27] He was concerned more than anything else with the business of saving souls. His relationship to political forces must be viewed as a matter of inconsequential importance.

On 31 October 1816, Moffat set sail for the Cape of Good Hope. He left behind his parents, which was a particularly painful experience considering that to venture abroad meant virtually the equivalent of saying goodbye forever. His intention of pursuing his vision under such circumstances confirms the extent to which he was convicted of his historic, evangelical assumptions. He was burdened with weighted responsibility and sincere commitment to those 'perishing' abroad. Although only twenty when ordained as a missionary, he has been described as

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[27]Moffat, Lives, Robert Moffat to parents, 23 Sept. 1816, p.26. Note the weight of Moffat's concern, 'Oh that I had a thousand lives, and a thousand bodies: all of them should be devoted to no other employment but to preach Christ to these degraded, despised yet beloved mortals.'

a man mature in self-possession and in Christian faith.[28] The delineation of his evangelical worldview had largely been shaped by the time he arrived in southern Africa, and it would sustain him for the next fifty years.

Moffat in southern Africa

It is important to consider whether Moffat's version of the truth about total reality would stand the demands of a new cultural context. To what extent would his worldview define his practice and, conversely, to what extent would his experiences dictate the boundaries of his broader assumptions? It will be argued that far from changing his beliefs, his African experiences ratified the outline of his worldview, as he remained consistent to the ideas gained within British society.

Namaqualand

Moffat arrived in Cape Town, January 1817. He was first assigned to the Namaqualand mission in the sparse and barren northern Cape. If ever there was to be a trial with regard to the obstinance and durability of Moffat's beliefs, it would involve his year of 'apprenticeship' in Namaqualand under the harsh realities of the African world. He was soon confronted with what he described as

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[28]Walters, Life and Labours, p.28.

the 'brutish degradation'[29] of those around him, and was quick to reject the concept of the 'noble savage'. His encounters with the indigenous people confirmed for him the grave moral consequences of idolatry in departure from pure revealed religion. He described how the baneful influence of their beliefs extended to all aspects of their culture. The people were 'despised', 'fallen', 'choosing darkness rather than light'.

Interestingly, then, the hard reality of the new environment served to confirm the fundamental tenets of Moffat's worldview, which encouraged him further. Rather than repel him, his resolve was quickened and his heart stirred. In his own words:

> In the midst of these hardships I felt, as I do at this moment, that I desire to suffer anything, even death itself, if but Christ is glorified in the salvation of the poor heathen.[30]
>
> After all that I have suffered, I am not tired but strengthened, and feel myself more a missionary than I ever was before in my life.[31]

His experiences rooted him more deeply in his Lord's cause with desperate concern for the lost. For him to envisage immortal souls dying for lack of knowledge was a bad dream - 'How can we be faint or weary'[32]- he would say. Not only was his missionary zeal hastened, but the reality of Moffat's enduring

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[29]Moffat, Lives, p.39.

[30]Ibid., Robert Moffat to parents, 15 Dec. 1818, p.40.

[31]Ibid., Robert Moffat to father, 16 April 1819, p.46.

[32]Ibid., Robert Moffat to parents, 15 Dec. 1818, p.41.

relationship with his God was enriched and intensified. He related: 'although greatly cast down of late, but have at the same time been enabled to love and confide in Him who sticketh closer than a brother, and have been more than ever led to see the mutability of every earthly comfort'.[33]

Moffat laboured in Namaqualand for a year amongst the subjects of Afrikaner, an Oorlam originally from the colony. He formed a close relationship with Afrikaner, who was once a raiding outlaw and since 1817-8, a Christian convert. It was Moffat's joy to teach Afrikaner the gospel of peacefulness and reconciliation. Moffat viewed him as a brother, which emphasizes an important distinction with respect to Moffat's perception of the 'heathen'. Although the 'heathen' were 'degraded', 'despised' and 'fallen', yet they were created in the image of God and were thus all equal in the eyes of God as possessing worth and dignity as individuals. They were still 'fellow-creatures' and 'beloved mortals'.[34] Therefore, it was fundamental to treat a fellow human being with the utmost respect and love. This would characterise Moffat's high view of humankind throughout his residence in southern Africa.

Moffat's conciliatory teaching had important effects on Afrikaner, which led to a

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[33]Ibid., p.42.

[34]Ibid., Robert Moffat to parents, 23 Sept. 1816, p.26. See also the incident when Moffat admonished a wealthy farmer for not allowing his servants to be present at a service. This was premised on the idea that all of humankind is equal before God and therefore all should hear. See ibid., pp.32,33.

meeting with a previous bitter raiding enemy, whereby their friendship was restored.[35] It is in this context of reconciliation that Moffat's journey to Cape Town, along with Afrikaner, needs to be interpreted. Afrikaner was still ruled an outlaw with a price on his head for the incursions he had previously committed on the colony. Moffat believed it was imperative to make peace with the governor and reveal to him the changed nature of Afrikaner. The intention of the journey was the result of Christian reconciliation, and did not involve the conscious imperial act of preparing the road by disarming the chiefs with the message of God's peace.[36]

This centres upon the important relationship of the missionary's role in relation to the colonial state. Moffat's attitude to this question was straightforward. He, unequivocally, considered a distinct separation between the role of the missionary and that of the government agent. He believed the involvement of the missionary in political affairs was dangerous and ultimately detrimental to the central task of preaching the Word. For this reason, whilst in Cape Town with Afrikaner, Moffat strictly refused an offer from the colonial office to act as government missionary in 'Kaffirland'.[37] Instead, he was assigned by the London Missionary Society to Lattakoo, beyond the north-western frontier of the colony, where he would spend the remainder of his years in southern Africa.

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[35]Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.174,175.

[36]Ibid., pp.173-180.

[37]Moffat, Lives, Robert Moffat to parents, 1820, p.77.

Lattakoo

Moffat remained consistent with regards to this question of church/state affairs right up to Dithakong. On his journey northwards to Lattakoo, whilst at Griqua Town during a time of major social upheaval, it was requested that he seize political control and restore order. He refused, saying, 'I should use every possible means to sweep state affairs entirely out of the Church and Mission, and convince the Griquas that the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world.'[38] Moffat was convinced the merging of both posts had no scriptural basis and that practical experience had demonstrated this to be true. Moffat cited Brownlee whose resignation as political missionary had resulted on the grounds of the two posts being incompatible.[39]

Having settled amongst the Tlhaping at Lattakoo, Moffat was satisfied that his station exhibited no political link with the Cape government, as he would say, a fact 'which Lord Charles [Somerset, the colonial governor] knows too well to be my sentiment to make any proposals.'[40] Moffat's relationship with Dr. Philip, superintendent of the London Missionary Society in southern Africa, further confirms Moffat's views on this point. Moffat questioned his overtly political

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[38]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 20 August 1822, p.61. See also ibid., Robert Moffat to Philip, 19 Sept. 1820, p.7.

[39]Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.206-208.

[40]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 20 August 1822, pp.62,63.

stance (as well as his dictatorial style), which he believed on occasions evoked serious harm upon the society's central evangelical function.[41] That Moffat should be depicted as colonial collaborator is not an easy position to maintain. It is very difficult to demonstrate a close governmental link with Moffat. Cobbing's arguments originate from silence as he fails to expose correspondence signifying the association.

Living beyond the frontier, Moffat was in the easier and less affected position of being able to insist upon the separation of missionary from the political affairs of the colony. But, although there existed no strong political relationship with the colonial government at his station, this did not mean Moffat's attitudes towards the colonial state were so distinct and straightforward. It is important to note that Moffat never lost his deference to colonial and British authority. Moffat believed Britain had been uniquely commissioned by God to bring the gospel to the world, which explains to a large extent why missionaries accepted the process of imperialism uncritically.[42] His views to this end were also shaped by the biblical unction of obedience to the state. However, even if there was correspondence from the colonial government ordering Moffat to secure labour for the colony (which there is not), this would not have necessarily led to a deferential attitude

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[41]See, for example, their differing approaches when Philip planned to settle a series of political disputes amongst the Griqua in ibid., Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 15 Nov. 1825, p. 205. See also ibid., introduction, pp.xxvii,xxviii.

[42]For this conviction, see Moffat's dedication in his Missionary Labours, pp.i-iv.

to the command. Gospel imperatives remained the final authority. The Bible taught obedience to the state, but this did not mean autonomy for the state. God had ordained the state as a delegated authority to administer justice and to protect the good in society. Whenever it did the reverse, however, and its commands were contrary to the Word of God, it ought not to be obeyed. Living amongst the Tswana where he taught the people to obey their leaders, Moffat was always quick to make a stand when a chief's decision overstepped the mark of biblical law.[43] For this reason, had there been a command of such a nature from the colony, following the mandate of his moral and spiritual responsibilities, Moffat would never have complied.

For similar reasons, Moffat questioned the involvement of the missionary in trading. He believed the engagement in trading could, too, prove detrimental to the 'grand object' of propagating the gospel. To this end, he was strongly condemnatory of his predecessors at Lattakoo, Edwards and Kok, for their self-interested bartering with the indigenous people, which he believed caused their downfall. For them, trading became a lucrative auxiliary. It led to Edwards later forsaking his faith and retiring a wealthy man in the colony. Kok was murdered by Tswana over renumeration for a trip to the colony.[44] Moffat was also sharply

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[43]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 3 July 1822, p.52; Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.208.

[44]Ibid., pp.216,217; R. Beck, 'Bibles and Beads: missionaries as traders in southern Africa in the early nineteenth century', Journal of African History, 30, 1989, p.214.

judgemental of the missionaries, Goeman and Read, for their attempts to win converts through supplying them with abundant gifts and services.[45]

Although Moffat encouraged trade, he was not an active participant. He did however present Mothibi, chief of the Tlhaping, with gifts which had become the established custom of respect.[46] He also did, on occasion, distribute beads and the odd piece of tobacco amongst the indigenous people. He aimed to keep the people favourably disposed towards him, therefore presenting them amenable to the gospel. In this way, his practice differed from his castigation of Goeman and Read, whom he believed had won converts purely on material grounds. Moffat's concern was for true converts who revealed a real change of heart.[47] He did not view his role as simply alleviating the living conditions of the people and making their lives more comfortable. On many occasions, he would withhold his services of social benefit and refuse handouts to demonstrate this point. Certainly, however, Moffat did not remain unfeeling and apathetic, but rather displayed his humanity and benevolence repeatedly. To be sure, the few handouts he did

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[45]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 20 July 1821, pp.19,20; ibid., Robert Moffat to Philip, 19 Sept. 1820, p.7; ibid., Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 9 Dec. 1822, p.66. Legassick, however, suggests the judgement upon Read was unjust. See M. Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries, 1780-1840: the politics of a frontier zone', Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, 1969, p.267.

[46]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to Philip, 19 Sept. 1820, p.10; Beck, 'Bibles and Beads', p.222.

[47]For his integrity for true conversions, see Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 6 Jan. 1822, pp.40,41; ibid., Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 20 August 1822, p.64.

apportion cannot serve as precedent for a lucrative and self-interested trade in cattle and slaves.

Moffat's whole mindset, therefore, was geared to functioning in both word and deed towards displaying the truth of the saving grace of the gospel. His understanding of true spirituality was set within a total social context. True spirituality did not involve simply an inward holiness of heart, but had necessarily to find fruit in outward works and social involvement. All aspects of life required to accord with the tenor of the gospel. His deep sense of humanity and compassion is continually manifest. He tended to the sick and offered his skills learnt abroad as carpenter, blacksmith and gardener. His confrontation with a number of San, about to bury two living children along with their dead mother, is a particularly relevant indication of the man's spirit. Moffat pleaded for the children's mercy. His petition was consented to and he brought the children under his care and protection.[48] It is important to view this episode in terms of Moffat's compassion, in line with his basic presuppositions regarding the sanctity of life. It would be naive to interpret the events as a pre-determined soliciting of slaves.

In fact, it is very difficult to situate Moffat as a slaver. He, himself, openly

[48]Moffat, Lives, p.106. See also Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.134,135,325.

disapproved of slavery[49] and was always quick to expose the evils of inter-African slavery, and the illegal conduct of renegade European and Bergenaar slave raids.[50] Moffat, along with a number of British protestant missionaries, was profoundly influenced by the philosophy of 'Commerce and Christianity', which itself was an anti-slavery ideology. It was believed that the missionary was called to propagate the imagined benefits of western civilization alongside the Christian message. Part of the imagined benefits included legitimate and lawful commerce, which was considered to be the best means of cutting off the slave trade. To this end, the philosophy developed out of ideas from British liberalism, the free market ideology and the humanitarian anti-slavery movements.[51] Moffat adhered to these views.[52] He did, however, follow the gospel-first approach believing that an orderly pattern of life and a settled civilization were the primary fruits of Christian mission. Although not himself an active participant in trading, for reasons enumerated above, he nevertheless encouraged it. Along with the presuppositions of his evangelical worldview, then, which were sensitive to the claims of liberty and stressed the moral equality of all people, slavery went against his very being.

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[49]See his views on slavery at the synod of 1817 in Northcott, Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa, p.36.

[50]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 30 July 1824, p.131.

[51]For further discussion on the impact of these ideologies, see the section on Thompson in this chapter.

[52]For Moffat's commitment to civilization in Africa, see Moffat, Missionary Labours, dedication, p.ii, ibid., pp.502-508; Moffat, Lives, pp.372,373.

Moffat would labour at Lattakoo for nine years before the first conversions were made. Despite the many trials - mockery, thievery, an attempt on his very life[53] - he continued in his resolve to see the reconciliation of individuals with the loving personal God of the Bible. He continued to read the Word of God, kept praying for the 'heathen' around him and, with longing passion, looked beyond what he called, 'the gloomy hills of darkness',[54] to the conversions of a new day. He yearned for the moment when the Tswana would engage themselves in a spirit of religious enquiry and judge Christianity for themselves. At that time, when he attempted to introduce religious topics in conversation, it was usually a signal for the Tswana to depart.[55]

Their attitude only served to ratify the biblical unction that their 'hearts were hardened' and further convinced Moffat of his Christian assumptions. His methodological approach towards evangelism reflects the extent to which he had come to believe in the intellectual veracity of his faith. He believed it was imperative, in his own words, 'to become all things to all men.'[56] It was essential to step into their shoes and understand their system of thinking, in order to reveal the deficiencies in their position and so lead them to the gospel. Because the Christian faith presented itself as verifiable absolute truth to total reality, Moffat

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[53]Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.328,329.

[54]Ibid., p.291.

[55]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 21 May 1827, p.253.

[56]Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.301.

believed it could withstand any system by exposing the poverty of its tenets.[57]

Moffat continued, then, to instruct on both religious and secular matters with the Bible being his primary objective point of reference. He persistently challenged traditional attitudes and values with immeasurable patience. He was not silent when circumstances conflicted with biblical standards. He often argued with Mothibi about the evil of the commando system, saying that it was just and right to punish evildoers as according to God's Laws, but that it was wrong to destroy the innocent with the guilty.[58] He once prevented a chief from killing an innocent subject which, by the ten commandments, constituted unlawful murder.[59] He was not afraid to purge his little community on account of their incestuous conduct.[60] Finally, in an important occurrence for his role at Dithakong, when offered many cattle by Tshosa to assist him in leading a commando against his father, Makaba, chief of the Ngwaketse, with whom he had seriously clashed, Moffat, true to his convictions responded, 'that such conduct was contrary to the Laws of God, and as the servants of God it was impossible for us to accept the invitation, no, not for all the cattle in Africa.'[61]

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[57]For discussion on this approach, see ibid., pp.300-302. See also, Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 21 April 1827, p.249; ibid., 6 May 1827, p.251.

[58]Ibid., Robert Moffat, journal, 3 July 1822, p.52.

[59]Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.208.

[60]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 20 August 1822, p.64; Deanne, Robert Moffat: The Missionary Hero of Kuruman, p.58.

[61]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 12 Jan. 1822, p.42.

It should be clear that Moffat remained remarkably consistent with respect to his conservative, evangelical assumptions formed abroad. If anything, his experiences in southern Africa further convinced him of his Christian presuppositions as he languished for the 'lost' and attempted to function so that his whole life, in every sphere, centred around revealing the truth of the gospel. Yet at Dithakong, according to Cobbing, Moffat uncharacteristically metamorphoses into a slave and cattle raider, collaborating as an agent of conquest to meet the demands of the colony's labour problem. Such an accusation strikes in complete opposition to the very core of Moffat's view of the world and is incompatible with what is known about the rest of his life.

Dithakong

As noted, Cobbing believes that in Moffat 'we have to wade through a surreal, self-exculpatory version of events' that provides the alibi for a heinous crime.[62] However, Moffat's narrative and activities at Dithakong agree closely with his basic presuppositions and are consistent with respect to his character.

His efforts to save Kuruman adhere to his concern for the well-being of the people amongst whom he was living. His attempts for a peace treaty with the numerous, foreign group concur with his high view of humankind and with his

[62]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.492,493.

fear of the disastrous effects of war. Being a pacifist, Moffat did not participate in the ensuing battle. However, whilst the Griqua were putting the 'Mantatee' to flight, the Tlhaping had set about slaying the defenceless women and children left on the battlefield, as Moffat related, 'for the sake of a few rings, or of being able to boast that they had killed some Mantatee.'[63] In conformity with his Christian views concerning the dignity and worth of every individual human being, Moffat displayed his fierce disapproval of the unnecessary bloodshed by riding in amongst the Tlhaping and preventing them from killing the innocent. Finally, with the women and children left alone and destitute on the battlefield, and prey to the depredations of the Tswana, Moffat collected a number of them to provide them with protection and took them to Kuruman. These endeavours to help a broken and disbanded people corresponded with his Godly compassion and humanity.[64]

Cobbing's analysis of Moffat rests on pure speculation. By reading between the lines, to quote a phrase, he claims 'to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.'[65] For Cobbing to label Moffat a slave trader in these events, it is required of him to demonstrate a number of points. He must

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[63]Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.361.

[64]For a detailed account of these events, see: Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, pp.95-100; Thompson, Travels, ch.16, headed: 'Mr. Melvill's Narration of Transactions after the Battle, and of His Excursion to Rescue the Women and Children of the Invaders', pp.174-185.

[65]C.S. Lewis, Fernseed and Elephants, London, 1975, p.155. Cobbing's ideas about the production of history are sweeping, monolithic, simplistic and overly Eurocentric, see C. Hamilton, '"The character and objects of Chaka" and their many representations in the 1820's: The Cobbing Thesis Reconsidered', Africa Seminar, 29 May 1991, pp.3,4.

substantiate that Moffat did not in fact possess a high view of humankind, that human beings in his eyes were indeed expendable for the schemes and programs of the more powerful. He must show that Moffat was a proponent of the intrinsic relationship of the missionary's involvement in trade and state affairs. Ultimately, he must confirm that Moffat's conservative, evangelical assumptions played an insignificant role in his life. At this point, the onus is upon Cobbing to substantiate his surmising. For the present, the existing evidence points to the authenticity of Moffat's account.

The role of the missionary reconsidered

Cobbing's critique arises out of a highly charged and polarized ideological context. His appraisal of Moffat and his role as missionary reflects the strong anti-colonial climate of the day. His analysis is a revision of the Majeke thesis of the 1950's. Inflamed by the resistance struggles of that period, Majeke argued that the missionaries acted as agents of 'divide and rule' politics. Their primary task was to assist the government in the subjugation of the African and herald a capitalist Christian civilization.[66]

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[66]Majeke, The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest. Interestingly, Moffat escapes fierce criticism in relation to attacks upon other missionaries in her sweeping and reductionist critique. Moffat is presented as 'a man of upright character.' He is, however, conceived as acting as 'an excellent ambassador for the British', and as playing an important role in paving the way northwards, particularly through his relationship with Mzilikazi. See pp.89,116-119.

A number of studies have been advanced that have corrected and refined this position.[67] Certainly along with the task of proclaiming the gospel, missionaries believed that they were also called to propagate the imagined benefits of western civilization and commercialism. These were features inherent to British imperial colonialist expansion, which did not bear any necessary relationship to conservative, evangelical Christianity, and which suggests missionaries did have imperial interests at heart. However, although the missionaries were prone to transmit these values, their prime motivation remained the promotion of Christianity. That they brought in values to transform African society was not so much a process parallel to the proclamation of the gospel, as its necessary and inevitable consequence. It was believed that African societies were in need of comprehensive regeneration, and that the gospel itself would bring about this transformation. The fact that the gospel became married with socio-economic values of British culture in this process is what ought to be considered.

The evangelical understanding of the doctrine of divine providence in the early nineteenth-century goes a long way in explaining why most missionaries accepted these cultural trappings. Enlightenment thought played an important part in fashioning the evolution of this biblical doctrine. It was believed that Britain had

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[67]J.R. Cochrane, Servants of Power: the role of English-speaking Churches in South Africa: 1903-1930, Johannesburg, 1987, ch.2; A.J. Dachs, 'Missionary History - A Conflict of Interpretation', Southern African Research in progress. Collected papers.,2; B. Stanley, The Bible and the Flag, Leicester, 1990; M. Wilson, 'Missionaries: Conquerors or Servants of God?', an address given on the occasion of the official opening of the South African Missionary Museum, January, 1976.

been uniquely commissioned by God to bring the gospel to the world. Britain was the archetype of a Christian nation, constituting a model of Christian culture and society. Therefore, it was the missionary's task to introduce to African society similar features of Britain's economic, political and cultural experience. In this way, the gospel became linked with British national interests.

Clearly the missionaries were not conscious enough of the need to be distinctive from the cultural assumptions of their own social heritage. Stirred by national pride, they failed to apply the ethical standards of the Bible as strictly to their own nation as they did to the societies amongst which they laboured. At the same time, it is a difficult task to propagate a culture -free gospel. Since religion and culture are inextricably linked, it is well nigh impossible to promote the Christian message unadulterated from cultural influences.[68]

In the case of Moffat, whatever his cultural wrappings and personal limitations, it is certainly difficult to view his missionary zeal in terms of British imperialism. Instead, he needs to be placed within the theological context of the evangelical revival and his conversion. In the southern African situation, his evangelical objectives remained his central concern. He certainly did attempt to transfer perceived benefits of his British cultural and societal experience, which he believed were the civilizing results of the gospel in the first place, into the

[68]For probably the most convincing and helpful study of the above issues, see Stanley, The Bible and the Flag.

southern African context. However, imperialist goals were by no means his intention. As the Africans themselves would later say, although at first they had thought that he might represent the colonial governor, as they came to understand him they were fully convinced that he was a messenger of the church of God.[69]

John Melvill

John Melvill was appointed government agent at Griqua Town on 21 March 1822. His strong religious convictions drove him to consider the position. In the past, his integrity as government agent for peace and stability, in accordance with his religious nature, has been acknowledged. He consistently crushed lawlessness, and strongly condemned the evils of raids and a trade in human beings.

However, Cobbing believes it is clear from the account of Melvill, who was present at the battle, that he was one of 'the instigators and organizers both of the raid and the disposal of the prisoners.' Along with Richner, he believes Melvill was sending slaves into the colony under the cover of the 'Mantatee threat.'[70] Cobbing suggests that Melvill received payment in ammunition for the 'slaves',

[69]Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.236.

[70]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.492,493. See also Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.8. Gewald suggests that Melvill's involvement derived from a predetermined attempt to consolidate his position amongst the Griqua, perhaps coupled with a self-interested preoccupation with trading. Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.5, p.11, ch.7, p.2.

and that he gained thirty-three cattle from the raid. The fact that Melvill supposedly received a similar amount of cattle after an attack on Sefunela's Rolong in 1824, Cobbing believes gives credence to his hypothesis.[71] By placing Melvill within the background of his ambitions and ideals, and by contextualising the above events, this section of the chapter will attempt to establish the reliability of his account.

Melvill's goals and aspirations

Melvill arrived at the Cape in 1799. He was trained in surveying, and by 1821 he was receiving the handsome sum of 7000 rix-dollars per annum as government inspector of public buildings. A deeply religious man, Melvill had long displayed sympathy for the cause of missions. In 1819, he had offered himself as a lay assistant to the L.M.S. Later, in 1827, having resigned his government post at Griqua Town, he would become a missionary linked with the L.M.S., and would continue to reside amongst the Griqua.[72]

The post of government agent had first been suggested to Melvill by the former missionary at Griqua Town, Anderson. Griqua Town still remained beyond the

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[71]For the supposed benefits, see Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.493. For the supposed raid of 1824, see ibid., p.497.

[72]For his background, see: Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', p.296; Thompson, Travels, p.82; C.J. Beyers (chief ed.), Dictionary of South African Biography, Durban, 1981, 4, p.357.

borders of the Cape Colony, and it appears that the colonial government wished for some continued colonial presence there at minimum expense. Having journeyed into the region inquiring into their affairs, he resolved to forsake his position as inspector of buildings for the government agency at a salary of only 1000 rix-dollars.[73]He had been deeply disturbed by the unfortunate conditions of the Griqua, and had determined to help them by attempting to convert them to Christianity, and by aiming to bring to them the benefits of western civilisation.[74]Thompson alludes to the integrity of Melvill's honest intentions when he noted that 'his praiseworthy motives and generous self-devotion' could not for a moment be in doubt.[75] The missionaries, John Philip, Broadbent and Moffat, also held Melvill in high regard, noting his sincerity and good intentions.[76]

However, although noting the 'benevolent purposes' and 'honourable objectives'

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[73]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', p.296.

[74]Thompson, Travels, p.82. Interestingly, since Melvill intended to further missionary operations at Griqua Town, Moffat in line with his insistence upon the separation of church and state was wholly against Melvill's appointment. See Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 20 August 1822, pp.61,62.

[75]Thompson, Travels, p.82.

[76]J. Philip, Researches in South Africa, 2 vols., London, 1828, ii, p.79; S. Broadbent, A Narrative of the first introduction of Christianity amongst the Barolong tribe of Bechuanas, South Africa, London, 1865, p.132; Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants of Southern Africa Within the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope or Beyond the Frontier of That Colony, part 1, London, 1835, Evidence before Government Commission, April 1824, p.128. The fact that Moffat opposed Melvill's appointment did not detract from his friendship or respect for the man.

of Melvill, both Thompson and Moffat believed he did not possess the necessary qualifications to deal with the political affairs of such a divided and unstable polity. He was described as being not 'terribly discerning', and his disinterested and ineffectual nature seemed to have restricted him from a clear analysis of Griqua affairs.[77]

By the end of 1822, the Griqua had essentially divided into three factions - the agricultural faction under Andries Waterboer at Griqua Town, the pastoral elite under the old 'kapteyns', Adam Kok II and Barend Barends at Campbell and Daniel's Kuil respectively, and the Bergenaars, a breakaway renegade group residing in the vicinity of the Modder River.[78] Originally, the Griqua polity had been established around Griqua Town in 1804. However, over the years, the foundation of this socio-economic order had been undermined. Melvill attempted to stabilize the situation by supporting the newly-appointed Waterboer. He was an ardent backer of Waterboer, usually unquestioningly conforming to his 'better' judgement. This undisputed allegiance served to alienate Melvill from the old 'kapteyns'. Waterboer's rule was often characterized by impetuous and immature decisions. To this end, Melvill's role as government agent ought to be questioned as much of his interference into the affairs of the Griqua led to further conflict

[77]See ibid., p.128; Thompson, Travels, p.82.

[78]For a more detailed discussion, see ch.3, the section on the Griqua.

and dissension.[79]

However, Melvill continued in the sincere belief that he was acting for the good of the Griqua, and he was not beyond offering some contribution. According with his religious nature, he sought peace and stability in the region by consistently crushing lawlessness. His efforts to enforce regulations even led to the departure of lawless elements from Griqua Town, who would augment the growing, unruly Bergenaar community. In the future, the Bergenaars would provoke much disorder by raiding for both cattle and human beings to trade illegally with colonial frontiersmen. Melvill condemned their activities vehemently, and was quick to expose the immoral conduct of both the Bergenaars and the white settlers.[80] For Melvill to be engaged in illegal slave trading that he everywhere else condemned is hardly consistent. Such objectives would not be compatible with his original goals and aspirations. That the 'raid' was intended to reassert his authority amongst the Griqua and strengthen the position of his protege Waterboer, as Gewald suggests, similarly negates his primary motivations and

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[79]For an in depth discussion on Melvill's involvement in Griqua affairs, see: Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.298-306; M. Kinsman, 'Populists and Patriarchs: The Transformation of the Captaincy at Griqua Town, 1804-1822', in A. Mabin (ed.), Organisation and Economic Change, Southern African Studies, 5, Johannesburg, 1989, pp.10,11.

[80]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, Extract from a report by Melvill relative to the state of the Griqua, Dec. 1824, pp.214-219. See also E.A. Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, ca.1800-1830 - The "mfecane" reconsidered', paper prepared for The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991, pp.32-34.

impulses.

There is no correspondence of collusion with the colonial government to suggest a predetermined raid. Again, such arguments originate from silence. Melvill, in fact, received little government support. Stockenstrom, for example, Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet and responsible for the middle Orange, tended to support the old 'kapteyns', Kok and Barends, who were his old friends, as opposed to Waterboer and Melvill.[81] By this time, colonial authorities appear to have given little attention to affairs in Griqualand.[82]

The aftermath of the battle

Probably the major reason for both Cobbing and Richner's extreme scepticism relates to Melvill's role in the events surrounding the aftermath of the battle. Without refuting his interpretations given to the events, they completely ignore and reject his internal testimony. Instead, they accuse him as being 'consciously engrossed' in the collection and disposal of slaves and cattle. However, the fact that cattle and prisoners were taken and distributed by Melvill does not necessarily imply a raid, but can be more rationally explained in terms of the

[81]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.306,316,317,322,323. See also Philip, Researches, ii, pp.292-307.

[82]For an in depth discussion on colonial policies towards Griqualand, see: Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', chs.iii,vi.

inevitable aftermath of a victorious, defensive battle. His actions were a by-product of the battle and not its cause.

It has already been identified that following the retreat of the 'Mantatee', a number of women and children were left on the battlefield destitute and famished. Having wandered across the interior for many months, they now appeared exhausted, broken and distressed with hunger.[83] Alone on the battlefield, they were prey to the depredations of the Tswana, who during the battle had only too clearly shown their intentions by slaying the defenceless women and children.[84] Out of compassion, the defenceless were offered protection and a number were taken to Kuruman.[85] Many others, however, chose to remain on the battlefield and were later murdered by revengeful Tswana as they sought to return to their defeated peoples.[86] This was the realisation of the well-founded fears that had induced both Melvill and Moffat to provide sanctuary to them.

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[83]See Eldredge's response to Cobbing's assertion that the women and children could not have been starving, Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa', p.30.

[84]Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.361.

[85]For Melvill's account of these events, see: Thompson, Travels, ch.16, headed: 'Mr. Melvill's Narrative of Transactions after the Battle, and of His Excursion to Rescue the Women and Children of the Invaders', pp.174-185. See also Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, pp.95-100.

[86]Ibid., Robert Moffat to Mary Moffat, 13 August 1823, p.107; ibid., Mary Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 1 Sept. 1823, p.109; Cope (ed.), Journals, p.190.

It was considered that the refugees might best be provided for under the supervision of the Griqua. However, since the Griqua seemed more concerned with the cattle they had gained than the people, Melvill applied for a share of the captured cattle, perceiving that the task of providing food might rest exclusively on him. Melvill was allotted thirty-three head of cattle[87] and Hodgson, a Methodist missionary on visiting Griqua Town in July 1823, alludes to them being used for the said purpose when he relates, 'Mr. Melvill sent off this morning to Graaf-Reinet fifteen females, some of whom I saw most eagerly eating the dung of the oxen killed for their support.'[88]

Melvill is similarly unjustly charged of taking 'his customary cut of thirty cattle' in a 'raid' against Sefunela's Rolong in 1824.[89] Cobbing's account is based on conjecture and misrepresents the contextual evidence. Melvill neither took the thirty cattle, nor can the events be construed as a raid.[90]

With regard to the 'Mantatee' sent to Graaf-Reinet, it was claimed by Melvill that this was done with the prisoners' best interests in mind. The Griqua were finding

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[87]Thompson, Travels, pp.176,177.

[88]Cope (ed.), Journals, p.182.

[89]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.497.

[90]For detail on the whole episode, see: Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, pp.145-154,198-200,206; S. Broadbent, Narrative, pp.130-133,158,173; Cope (ed.), Journals, pp.9,246,322; Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, p.167; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp. 307-310,338.

it difficult to accommodate them in the face of a severe drought and dire food shortage. For some, there were just too many of them for whom to provide. On account of the harsh material conditions, but also fundamentally as a result of the indifferent and uncaring attitude of the Griqua, it would appear that the initial scheme for the 'Mantatee's' provision seemed to be thwarted. Melvill seriously believed, then, that they would be looked after best in the houses of the colonists. He wrote accordingly to the Landdrost at Graaf-Reinet, noting how 'badly off' the 'Mantatee' were amongst the Griqua.[91] At the same time, Melvill understood the advantages of the refugees being used as labour in the colony.[92] However, he never intended them as a slave labour supply. His attempt to relocate the women and children in the Cape was a by-product and pragmatic end to the battle, and not its cause. Similarly, Moffat was at great pains to ensure that the six women and the boy he distributed in the colony - that is, the supposed 'slaves' that were the fruits of the 'raid' for Moffat[93] - were well-cared for and that their freedom was guaranteed. He left two of the women in the care of the fervent humanitarian, Dr. John Philip.[94]

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[91]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, Melvill to the Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet, 31 July 1823, p.226. See also Somerset to the Commissioners of Inquiry, p.227; Government Archives, Cape Town (hereafter CT): CO 1/GR 16/12 Stockenstrom to Bird, 16 Oct. 1823.

[92]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, Melvill to the Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet, 31 July 1823, p.226.

[93]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.493.

[94]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, p.129.

It is interesting that the government was slow to respond to Melvill's pleas for the relief of the majority of the refugees. Such an influx of black refugees was hardly encouraged. Before Dithakong, a number of refugees had entered the colony, and had been forced to return beyond the limits of the frontier. Later, they were sent to mission stations, and it was only when the arrival of refugees became pressing, that a system of apprenticeship was introduced.[95] It was under pressure from Melvill, who related their starved condition and poor treatment by the Griqua, that the Governor conceded to the entry of the 'Mantatee' refugees.[96] Given the nature of their former frontier policies, it is difficult to suggest that both the colonial authorities and Melvill corresponded in the language of 'double talk', providing a smoke screen for their underlying slave deals. Once the system of apprenticeship was in place, however, it is possible that colonists, to an extent, used the cover of humanitarian aid for the 'Mantatee' to procure African labour illicitly from either Bergenaars or white frontiersmen. The fact that the refugee apprenticed was usually situated in the hands of the person who delivered him/her, allowed for the abuse of the system and illegal seizures, similar to the practical workings of the San system of apprenticeship.[97] In this context, the

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[95]CT:CO 1/GR 16/12 Stockenstrom to Fiervogel, 10 April 1823; ibid., Stockenstrom to Bird, 25 June 1823; 1/GR 8/12 Bird to Hallbeck, 24 April 1823; 1/GR 8/11 Bird to Stockenstrom, 4 Dec. 1822; Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, Colonial Secretary to Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet, 27 August 1823, p.226; ibid., Somerset to the Commissioners of Inquiry, 4 Sept. 1823., p.226.

[96]CT:CO 1/GR 16/12 Stockenstrom to Melvill, 12 Sept. 1823; ibid., Stockenstrom to Bird, 16 Oct. 1823.

[97]For the practical workings of the system, see the indenture forms in CT:CO 1/GR 15/66-72.

colonial government had little means of preventing such seizures from occurring. At the same time, it is important to take push factors into account as well, in consideration of the ravages of the Bergenaars from about 1824.[98] But, although the first 'Mantatee' into the colony may be described as genuine refugees, it is possible that many later arrivals were not.

Further, the ammunition Melvill received need not be interpreted as payment for the refugees. Below is a portion of the letter from the Colonial Secretary to the Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet that alludes to the ammunition:

> Sir,- I have had the honour of submitting your letter of the 11th Instant with its enclosure from Mr. Melville to His Excellency the Governor. It appears to be desirable that Mr. Melville should be supplied with a larger portion of ammunition, than what had been sent to him at the period of your letter, and His Excellency does not imagine there will be any difficulty in so doing, now that it is understood that you can receive adequate supplies at Graham's Town.[99]

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[98]Much of the influx of southern-Sotho and Tswana from about 1824 must be ascribed to this source, rather than to the 'mfecane' and African agents from the east as held, for example, by R. Elphick and V.C. Malherbe, 'The Khoisan to 1828', in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, 2nd edition, Cape Town, 1989, p.43. It was invariably described in the indenture forms that the refugees had been beaten by Bastards rather than by other Africans. Of course, this may be interpreted in other ways.

[99]Theal, Records of the Cape Colony, 16, Bird to Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet, 27 Aug. 1823, p.223.

Cobbing fails to mention the fact that Melvill was the government agent at Griqua Town. It is clear from this letter and from the instructions on his appointment as government agent that ammunition would be forwarded from the colony for the necessary administration of the territory.[100] Bearing in mind that the supply of gunpowder had been exhausted since its distribution to the Griqua before the battle, it is understandable that more ammunition was needed for the protection of the area, especially in the face of further threatened raids from the 'Mantatee', as well as from the Bergenaars, who continued to assert themselves in the ongoing civil war.[101] On receiving the intelligence about the 'Mantatee' threat from Thompson and Melvill, the colonial authorities were quick to respond with the ammunition supply, as they were deeply distressed about the stability of the frontier region and feared that the colony would be overrun.[102] To conclude that the acquisition of ammunition compounded a business transaction for the sale of slaves, is unwarranted and remains at best conjectural.

As Eldredge argues, that Melvill should have implicated himself in the events at all by mentioning his acquiring of cattle and the distribution of the refugees, when he could have avoided any such discussion, seems to point towards the veracity

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[100]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, Instructions to Melvill, 21 March 1822, p.212; ibid., report by Melvill, p.212. Ammunition was forwarded to give authority and ensure loyalty. See Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp. 183, 305.

[101]M. Kinsman, 'Populists and Patriarchs', p.11.

[102]CT:CO 1/GR 16/12 Stockenstrom to Bird, 2 July 1823; ibid., Stockenstrom to Melvill, 12 Sept. 1823; Thompson, Travels, p.161.

of his account.[103] In agreement with Moffat, Melvill's narrative on Dithakong commends itself trustworthy. The integrity of Melvill remains intact.

George Thompson

George Thompson was a Cape Town merchant, who was strongly influenced by 'liberal' notions. As an energetic proponent of free market ideology, Thompson continually called for the annihilation of slavery. His liberal commitment, along with the influence of Christian principles, meant that slavery went against his very being. However, according to the revisionists, at Dithakong, Thompson is implicated in the 'raid' for 'slaves' by acting as the spy seeking out the positions of the enemy[104] and by handing over the gunpowder.[105]

Thompson had undertaken a journey into the interior, and happened to arrive at Griqua Town shortly before Moffat's hurried appeal there. He did not remain for the battle, but returned to the colony to give 'speedy information' with respect to the 'Mantatee' threat. The importance of Thompson's account lies in the fact that he established the reports about the existence of the 'Mantatee' by being an

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[103]See Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa', p.29.

[104]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.492.

[105]Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.6,p.11. Gewald, however, is not explicit on Thompson. Either he deliberately planned the raid or was deceived. See ibid., ch.6, pp.8-11. Richner is not certain about Thompson's role and offers little explanation. Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.8.

eyewitness to their advance. Whilst war preparations were being made at Kuruman, he proceeded to Dithakong hoping to gain direct information about the numerous group. Finding Dithakong deserted, he pushed cautiously onwards before confronting the immense group in a valley below. He watched their advance on the old Dithakong site, before hurriedly returning to Kuruman, where he narrated what he had witnessed. Again, by situating Thompson within the confines of the ideologies that affected him, and by contextualising the above events, this section of the chapter will aim to present the dependability of Thompson's account.

His ideological background

Thompson arrived in southern Africa from England in 1818. Little is known of his English past. He opened a branch of a London mercantile house, and throughout his forty year stay in Cape Town was associated with the London firm, in which A.Borradaile was a partner. From incoming ships, his business sold European, Indian and Chinese goods of every description - merchandise, manufactured goods, staple goods, hats, shoes, dresses and so on.[106] By 1822, Thompson had already travelled extensively through much of the colony in search of new business

[106]The Cape Town Gazette, and African Advertiser, vol. xvii, 5 Jan. 1822, no.834; 2 Feb. 1822, no.838; 27 Sept. 1823, no.924. For Thompson's background, see: W.J. de Kock and D.W. Kruger (chief eds.), Dictionary of South African Biography, 2, Cape Town, 1972, pp.745,746.

prospects.[107]

Thompson may be termed a 'liberal'. He was involved in the circle of society that supported the ardent libertarians, Fairbairn and Pringle, and was engaged in many 'liberal' pursuits. For example, he often petitioned for a free press and was a founder member of the Cape of Good Hope Temperance Society.[108]

R.L. Watson describes liberalism in its classic form as involving several related concerns that mainly stem from the Enlightenment and the English Industrial Revolution. This included, 'the pursuit of individual freedom: the free dissemination of ideas through speech and publication, representative assemblies to check arbitrary political power, and free trade and the sanctity of private property.'[109] This was the ideology by which Thompson was strongly influenced, and which he along with many British immigrants brought to the Cape. His ideas about individual freedom and a free market, which were establishing their hegemony over British society, are of particular importance for our purposes, for they bear largely on the way in which his views towards slavery would be shaped.

The free market ideology strongly reflected nineteenth-century British liberalism

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[107]Thompson, Travels, pp.vii,viii.

[108]H.C. Botha, John Fairbairn in South Africa, Cape Town, 1985, pp.36,141.

[109]R.L. Watson, 'Slavery and Ideology: The South African case', International Journal of African Historical Studies, 20, 1987, p.29.

and the demands of industrial capital. The conventional wisdom of Britain's commercial ruling classes followed the line of Adam Smith in his Wealth of Nations by affirming the superiority of free labour. It was believed that a coerced and immobile body of workers was economically irrational.[110] Slave labour was too expensive and uninventive. Rather, a free labour force encouraged to work by the incentive of wages was the path forward for the world's premier capitalist-industrialising nation. Being a believer in laissez-faire principles, Thompson was a firm proponent of these ideals. He continually called for the annihilation of slavery, since he was convinced that a free labour force was both cheaper and more efficient.[111]

The call for the abolition of slavery was not merely economically motivated, but also inspired by British humanitarian anti-slavery movements, which were themselves strongly influenced by non-conformist Christianity. The goal of ending slavery was not only a liberal and economically rational objective, then, but also a humane and moral one. Fundamentally, humanitarianism stressed the moral equality of all people. Abolitionists such as Wilberforce, Clarkson and Buxton, conveyed the principle that 'blacks were men and brothers', which itself derived from the Christian doctrine that all people possessed dignity and worth, and were

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[110]J.C. Armstrong and N. Worden, 'The slaves, 1652-1834', in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, 2nd edition, Cape Town, 1989, p.164.

[111]Thompson, Travels, pp.327,353,369.

equal before God by being created in His image.[112] The evangelical worldview, therefore, nurtured sensitivity to the claims of liberty and to the call of benevolent measures. It fostered a spirit of responsibility and concern for the welfare of others.[113]

Thompson was no less affected by these ideologies. He was strongly influenced by Christian notions, and saw the indigenous peoples as fellow-men.[114] Clearly, the possibility of trading slaves was furthest from Thompson's mind. However, Cobbing appears to insinuate that such anti-slavery ideologies would not have precluded the 'fetching out' of 'free labour' beyond the frontier.[115] For Thompson, such a position is not easy to sustain.

Although Thompson recognized the advantages of using African labour, he argued that they should be allowed to enter the colony voluntarily.[116] The free market ideology, based on voluntary submission, worked against the 'smash-and-grab'

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[112]J. Walvin, England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838, London, 1986, p.24.

[113]For further discussion on the inseparability of these ideologies, see: S. Drescher, Capitalism and Antislavery, New York, 1987; A. du Toit and H. Giliomee, Afrikaner Political Thought: Analysis and Documents, Cape Town, 1983, ch.1; J. Gratus, The Great White Lie, London, 1973; Walvin, England, Slaves and Freedom; Watson, 'Slavery and Ideology'.

[114]Thompson, Travels, pp.42,108,109,221-223,304,305.

[115]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.501,502.

[116]Thompson, Travels, pp.410,411.

policy of primitive accumulation that Cobbing proposes.[117] Morally, the extraction of 'free labour', forcibly gained through armed conduct, could scarcely have existed on Thompson's agenda. Christian morality deeply instilled in him a humane and philanthropic spirit, so fundamental to the anti-slavery crusade. While in the Roggeveld in 1824, Thompson was informed of the many commandoes made whereby numerous San were killed and their children forcibly taken into the colony as labour. Thompson was abhorred by what he described as 'these massacres', and by the coercive extraction of the children into servitude.[118] A year earlier, he was also strongly condemnatory of the Boer commando at Tarka that had shot thirty San. He responded thus, 'This is certainly lamentable work, whatever be the cause of it, - that we should be under the necessity of hunting down our fellow-men like the wild beasts of the field'[119] (my emphasis).

The inseparability of his commitment to anti-slavery economic and moral objectives precluded Thompson from involvement in the forceable extraction of 'free labour'. An examination of the 'positive' policy of the abolitionists' campaign further confirms this. Wilberforce, Clarkson and others saw the anti-slavery

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[117]See J.B. Peires, 'Matiwane's Road to Mbholompho: A Reprieve for the Mfecane?', paper prepared for The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of the Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991, pp.26-30.

[118]Thompson, Travels, pp.221-223. For further instances of these notions, see ibid., pp. 327, 369.

[119]Ibid., p.42.

movement as both 'negative' and 'positive'. The 'negative' policy was simply directed at terminating the slave trade by persuading nations to cease the traffic. The 'positive' policy aimed at cutting off the trade at its source within Africa by promoting Christianity and legitimate commerce in Africa.[120] It was believed that the British nation had been divinely sanctioned to bring to the 'heathen blacks', in their 'massive cultural deprivation', the imagined benefits of white Christian morality and civilization. By advocating legitimate commerce and Christianity, it was supposed that slavery would naturally be eliminated. The belief in the inherent superiority of white Christian civilization formed the basis of the 'positive' policy. This policy not only explains Thompson's openness concerning the commercial objects of his journeys, as he sought to establish legitimate routes of commerce with the indigenous peoples, but further precludes him from 'fetching out free labour'. Albeit condescending, he sincerely believed it to be the task of the English to teach the African the arts of civilization, commerce and Christianity. He considered this task 'noble and worthy', to be taught by example.[121] His involvement in an armed raid would fundamentally militate against his beliefs in such a task.

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[120]Gratus, The Great White Lie, p.16.

[121]Thompson, Travels, pp.108,109,221,304,305.

His role in connection with Dithakong

Thompson's journey of April-July 1823 to the eastern frontier and then to the neighbourhood of Kuruman was yet another pursuit that originated, in his own words, 'partly from motives of business, partly from the impulse of curiosity'.[122] Thompson was certainly not secretive about the objects of his travels and documented his experiences in Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa.

That he was able to proceed beyond the frontier into the Transorangian region at all was the result of timely and favourable circumstances. Thompson understood that only 'should circumstances admit of it' would he be able to penetrate into the countries beyond the frontier. The Sneeuberg Mountains presented an insurmountable obstacle during the winter season, when the majority of farmers abandoned their homesteads for more accessible and warmer regions. Fortunately, Thompson's liberal acquaintance, Stockenstrom, Landdrost of Graaf-Reinet, was about to proceed through this area accompanied by a land surveyor, a member of the Heemraden, and several wagons with tents and provisions, for the sake of inspecting lands to be granted to the boers. Thompson was offered a place in the party without whose assistance, he perceived, he could not have journeyed further.[123]

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[122]Ibid., preface, p.vi. See also pp.v,1,2.

[123]Ibid., pp.1,45.

Thompson's arrival at Griqua Town, therefore, can hardly be said to have been prearranged to coincide with Moffat's return from his shortened journey to the Ngwaketse. It was mere chance he proceeded at all. Nor was Kuruman the predetermined final destination of his exploration. The news about the 'Mantatee' prevented Thompson from further progress into the interior. It appears his intention was to continue through to Delagoa Bay. Arend, a runaway slave who suggested he knew the route, stated that he would have accompanied Thompson but for the presence of the 'Mantatee'.[124]

Whilst in the eastern Cape, having heard much about the upheavals in the interior from refugees in the Cradock area,[125] Thompson was anxious to gain specific information about the 'Mantatee' and so, whilst war preparations were being made, he set out for Dithakong.[126] Gewald suggests that in his sighting of the 'Mantatee' a few miles on from Dithakong, Thompson mistakenly identified a local community for the foreign group. His justification is a prime example of the way in which the revisionists exploit and deceive the non-specialist reader.[127]

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[124]Ibid., pp.89,117.

[125]Ibid., p.38. These upheavals were not necessarily the result of the 'Mantatee' at Dithakong. The refugees into the Cradock area themselves remarked that their land, to the north of the Tembu, had been overrun by 'a numerous and fierce nation' originating in the north and east.

[126]For the following events surrounding Thompson's undertaking to Dithakong, see: ibid., pp.116-126; Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, p.90.

[127]Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.6, pp.10,11.

He argues that it was not unusual for Dithakong to be found deserted. Campbell had been confronted with not a single person to be seen in any direction on his arrival in 1813. The reader is to infer that Thompson assumed incorrectly that Dithakong had been hastily abandoned, resulting in his later mistaken identification. Gewald, however, fails to inform the reader that although Campbell on his arrival thought Dithakong was deserted, he discovered the community gathered in a certain division of the town.[128] Thompson, on the other hand, found Dithakong completely empty.[129]

Gewald further fails to disclose that Thompson watched, from a distance, the foreign group advance on the old Dithakong site, situated some kilometres from the existing town, from where he observed them 'rushing' into the few remaining houses like 'hungry wolves'. They soon detected Thompson's presence and, in order to escape their attempts to capture him, he made a hurried retreat to Kuruman.[130] To be consistent, it seems plain that either Thompson was lying about everything he narrates, as Cobbing suggests, or he was stating the truth.

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[128]See J. Campbell, Travels in South Africa, Cape Town reprint, 1974, (originally London, 1815), p.180.

[129]Thompson, Travels, pp.121,122. Having searched a number of huts, Thompson even fired a shot which usually brought a response, since the existence of a rifle meant the possibility of an animal kill and food. On this occasion, however, the sound of the gun brought no response.

[130]Ibid., p.124. Note the illustration pertaining to Thompson's route, which makes for a realistic reading of the events, p.122.

Thompson never stayed for the battle. Having handed over his ten pounds of gunpowder to bring the collected amount to fifty pounds, which was believed to be dreadfully insufficient,[131] he departed for the colony to warn the authorities, so that precautionary measures might be taken, lest the 'Mantatee' advance into the colony.[132] Leaving empty-handed, it remains to be demonstrated in what way Thompson benefited from the 'raid'.

Cobbing's conspiracy theory regarding Thompson, again, originates from silence. He fails to root his hypothesis in sound evidence. He does not demonstrate a scheming link with either Moffat, Melvill or the colonial authorities. Instead Thompson's account conforms to the ideological contours that shaped his character, and being in agreement with Moffat and Melvill, presents itself reliable.

Ultimately, the distinctive outworkings of each of the reporters' commitment to their specific evangelical and liberal *Weltanschauungen* make for their presentation as slavers and outrageous liars no easy assignment. Their

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[131]Ibid., pp.90,135.

[132]Ibid., pp.134,135.

involvement in an armed raid would fundamentally militate against their adherence to the basic moral responsibilities of their worldviews, to which they held with remarkable consistency in both words and deeds for the rest of what has hitherto been known about their lives. Rather, their consistency of character, in line with their basic presuppositions, suggests the authenticity of their accounts on Dithakong.

3. THE ACTORS AT DITHAKONG

In order to sustain further the accounts of the original reporters, this chapter will centre upon the major actors, and examine their identity and motives for engagement. The 'Mantatee', the Griqua and the Tlhaping constitute the major participants. In the past, the 'Mantatee' have been described as the desperate protagonists, and the role of the Griqua and Tlhaping has been depicted as defensive and protective. The revisionists, however, tend to contrive identities and motives for the actors that are compatible with Dithakong-as-raid, but their methodology to this end remains highly suspect.

They marshall the evidence to suit their own purposes. Statements are made that are often founded upon a very tenuous basis, under which circumstances it should be incumbent on the historian to discuss the quality of the evidence and its context. Sources that contradict their claims are withheld and ignored. A preoccupation with white agency and white sources results in the failure to consider African oral traditions. Generalisations characterize their work, with little sensitivity to detail. Reflection upon contextualisation is uncareful. Periodisation is often loose, as they project later evidence backwards to account for earlier times. The evidence documented tends to be circumstantial rather than direct. In all, their practice presents itself as highly questionable.

This chapter will further attempt to reveal the methodological incongruities of the

revisionist critiques by closely contextualising the nature, identity and motives of the participants, and by examining evidence external to the accounts of the original reporters, in order to establish the traditional version of events.

The 'Mantatee'

The nature and identity of the 'Mantatee' is crucial to the present debate on Dithakong. The revisionists tend to suppose that the 'Mantatee' were 'mythical beings' invented as an alibi for the raid. Indeed, according to them, it was the local community at Dithakong, who were the unfortunate and innocent people attacked. The original reporters, however, were certainly emphatic about the existence of a foreign and threatening people. Moffat, for example, noticed how distinctively they contrasted with the Tswana of his area in dress, ornaments, weapons and behaviour. This section of the chapter will aim to establish their reports about the foreign group.

The original accounts

For many months prior to the confrontation at Dithakong, there had been numerous rumours concerning the advance of a vast and destitute migratory group, which had destroyed many communities in its path. The foreign group had come from the east and its fighting men were depicted as 'long-breathed and strong runners, [who] use no spears and guns, but fight with a knob-stick, and use

a weapon like a sickle.' They were described as not being adapted to war, but were more like 'hungry wolves', whose object appeared 'not so much to war, as to devour the produce of the land of which they [got] possession.'[1]

Moffat, however, was not convinced by the reports and continued with his intended journey to the Ngwaketse.[2] But he soon hastily returned to Kuruman, convinced about the threatening advance of the foreign group.[3] What accounts for his sudden change of attitude? Cobbing believes Moffat turned back on the basis of 'unsubstantiated rumours.'[4] But he fails to disclose that, en route, Moffat continually ignored advice not to pursue his journey for fear of being destroyed by the 'Mantatee'. In the initial stages of his journey, Moffat was not persuaded by the rumours and remained sceptical. Many of the accounts were monstrous, and Moffat perceived the Tswana to be prone to lies and exaggerated reporting.[5]

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[1]Moffat, Missionary Labours, p.340; Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 12 April 1823, p.73; ibid, Robert Moffat, journal, 16 May 1823, p.77; ibid, 17 May 1823, p.78.

[2]For reasons for his journey, see: ibid., Robert Moffat, journal, 14 May 1823, pp.75,76; Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.340,341.

[3]For Moffat's account of his journey, see: Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 14 May 1823 - 3 June 1823, pp.75-87.

[4]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.492.

[5]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 16 May 1823, pp.77,78; 17 May 1823, p.78; 20 May 1823, p.80.

However, as he drew closer to the sources of conflict, he became increasingly affected by the convergence of informants' accounts from a range of different groups. It was confirmed that the 'Mantatee' had originated in the south-east and firstly attacked the 'Goya'. They had then proceeded northwards and defeated many towns east of Kaditshwene, including Sefunela's Seleka-Rolong at Thabeng and Kgasane's Kwena-Modimosana. Advancing westwards, they had driven Makaba's Ngwaketse from their town, but they had counterattacked and forced the 'Mantatee' to retreat. The foreign group had since taken a southern route, and attacked the Ratlou and Tshidi sections of the Rolong, under Gonntse and Tawana respectively.[6] Finally, at Nokaneng, having heard the eyewitness accounts of three Rolong deputies, who had but recently been engaged in battle at Khunwana, Moffat became convinced of their ominous presence. Although he had not witnessed the foreign group at first hand, he believed, through the convergence of historical probability, with particular respect to the eyewitness reports of the Rolong deputies, that their existence was established beyond doubt.[7] (see map 1)

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[6]For information from the inhabitants of Dithakong, Mahumoapelo, the Maidi chief at Nokaneng, the Kgalagadi, servants of the Rolong at Mosita, and the Rolong deputies at Nokaneng respectively, see: ibid., 16 May 1823, pp.77,78; ibid., 17 May 1823, p.78; ibid., 26 May 1823, pp.83,84; ibid., 31 May 1823, pp.85,86.

[7]Moffat would report to the Tlhaping that the 'Mantatee' presence was 'well-authenticated', ibid., 5 June 1823, p.87. Similarly, although he had been previously sceptical, on hearing the first-hand accounts of the Rolong deputies, Mahumoapelo, too, became convinced of the 'Mantatee' threat and sought advice from Moffat in the face of danger, ibid., 17 May 1823, p.78; 31 May 1823, pp.85,86.

Having returned to Kuruman, reports continued to monitor the advance of the 'Mantatee'. After Khunwana, they were described to have moved onward to Nokaneng, from where Moffat had but recently fled. It was reported that Mahumoapelo's Maidi had hastily abandoned the town.[8] During this time of anxious anticipation, Kuruman was a hive of activity marked by chaos and pandemonium. Preparations for battle were made, cattle were collected, valuables were buried and wagons were prepared to flee.[9] Moffat certainly went to great lengths to embellish his narrative if his account was a concoction and there was, in fact, no foreign group to fear. It was in this context of suspense and uncertainty that Thompson made his journey to Dithakong, the vicinity in which he observed the numerous group advance from Nokaneng. Having been an eyewitness to their approach on Dithakong, Thompson hurriedly fled to Kuruman.

In order to prevent scenes of bloodshed and destruction at Kuruman, it was considered best to confront the 'Mantatee' at a distance from the homes of their wives and children.[10] Arriving at Dithakong on 25 June 1823, the war party sighted the foreign group, a vast aggregation estimated at forty to fifty thousand, as compared to the local population of Dithakong, which was estimated at six to

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[8]Thompson, Travels, pp.107,114.

[9]Ibid., pp.115,116.

[10]Moffat, Missionary Labours, pp.346,347,352.

eight thousand.[11] Concerned to ascertain the identity of the people, Moffat approached a woman in a ravine, from whom he discovered that they had come from a distant country. Fearing the disastrous effects of war, Moffat attempted to secure a peace treaty, but was rushed upon, and forced to retreat by the aggressive and desperate foreigners. With the hopes of peace frustrated, on 26 June 1823, the combined Griqua/Tlhaping party advanced to within 150 yards of the foreigners, from where they were descended upon, and the hostilities began.[12]

Both Moffat and Melvill described the nature and appearance of the 'Mantatee' as contrasting sharply with the Tswana of their region. Their dress, ornaments, and weapons were distinctive from the Tswana. They wore black ostrich feathers on their heads and large copper rings around their necks, arms, legs and ears. Their shields were large and oval, and they possessed spears, javelins, battle-axes, clubs, and something like a sickle, as had been reported. Moffat depicted them as 'a much more barbarous people ..... rude and savage in the extreme.'[13] Clearly the original reporters were convinced amongst themselves about the existence of a vast, foreign and threatening group at Dithakong on 26 June 1823. Certainly,

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[11]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 26 June 1823, p.95; Thompson, Travels, p.121.

[12]For the events, see: Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 25,26 May 1823, pp.91,92.

[13]Ibid., Robert Moffat, journal, 26 June 1823, p.95; Thompson, Travels, pp.165,170-172.

by this date, the rumours of the 'Mantatee' presence had been substantiated for them.

The recent accounts

The revisionists agree amongst themselves that there existed no vast and destitute 'mfecane' migratory group at Dithakong. The 'Mantatee' were 'invented beings' created as cover for the raid.[14] Rather the local community at Dithakong were the innocent victims of the hostilities. Cobbing is uncertain as to the precise identification of those at Dithakong. The fact that the place had been a Maidi residence, prior to 1823, suggests to him that they were the ones attacked, but Moffat mentions Hurutse women amongst the prisoners as well, which indicates to Cobbing that they, too, were victims. For Richner, the innocent involved included the Maidi, Hurutse and Kwena. For Gewald, it was the Maidi and Rolong-Mariba.[15]

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[14]Cobbing and Richner certainly suggest this. See Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.514; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.9. With little basis, Gewald suggests the 'Mantatee' might have been the Bergenaars, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.8, p.4.

[15]See: Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.514; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.8; Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.7, p.1.

Reasons for their non-existence

Alternative forces

A number of factors have led to these conclusions. Firstly, it is believed that the upheavals to the north-east of Kuruman, in the months leading up to Dithakong, can be explained without reference to the existence of the foreign group. For Cobbing, this is demonstrated in terms of Koranna-Taung-Griqua attacks.[16] Gewald seems to hold the Bergenaars responsible.[17] Cobbing attempts to show continuity of such dislocations caused before and after Dithakong. However, this interpretation reveals critical shortcomings in periodisation. The majority of examples are drawn from the post-Dithakong period, the impact and extent of which are well established. However, in the years prior to Dithakong, there is evidence only of occasional deprivations in this region by certain Griqua and frontier ruffians that were sporadic and transitory.

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[16]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.496-498. Richner, on the other hand, argues that such forces as the Griqua, Bergenaars and Koranna did not reach this region of the Rolong, Hurutse and Ngwaketse until after mid-1824. See Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', pp.5,6.

[17]Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.8, pp.2-4. The fact that the earliest rumours reported people of yellow complexion amongst the 'Mantatee' suggests to Gewald that the 'Mantatee' were indeed Bergenaars. In his latest articles, Cobbing, on the other hand, uses such tenuous evidence to suggest that the Portugese were raiding to the north of Dithakong in the early 1820's. Neither of these conflicting conclusions is the most reasonable to draw. For a full discussion, see note 60 of this section on the 'Mantatee'. See also J. Cobbing, 'Ousting the Mfecane: Reply to Elizabeth Eldredge', pp.29-30; 'Rethinking the Roots of Violence in southern Africa, c.1790-1840', pp.12-13, papers prepared for The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of the Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991.

In the months prior to Dithakong, when the first reports about the devastations of the 'Mantatee' were being received, Cobbing can only produce one example of a Koranna-Taung-Griqua attack, which lacks little substance in itself. The example involves the Koranna raiding the Hurutse at Kaditshwene in 1822-3. Nowhere in his footnotes is their given explicit reference to this attack.[18] Similarly, Gewald, whose analysis is largely idiosyncratic, fails to give strong validation to his suggestions.[19] The revisionists have yet to demonstrate their opinions convincingly.

The composition of the grouping

The second reason for their conclusions relates to the great confusion surrounding the composition of the 'Mantatee'. Since Moffat, Melvill and Thompson referred to the vast 'horde' as the 'Mantatee', many have identified MaNtatisi's Tlokwa of the Vaal-Caledon region as the group at Dithakong. Earliest writers of African history such as Theal, Stow and Ellenberger, all succumbed to this interpretation.[20] However, Marian How has since

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[18]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.497,514, notes 54 and 141.

[19]Many of Gewald's assertions concerning the role of the Bergenaars in this period and region are inferred, and introduced in his concluding chapter. His evidence is circumstantial. See Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.8, pp.3,4.

[20]Theal, History of South Africa, p.442. Theal did, however, recognise that the 'Mantatee horde' was composed of many different groups, which included the Tlokwa. Stow, The Native Races of South Africa, p.460; Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.136-139.

convincingly shown that the Tlokwa never crossed west of the Vaal.[21] Cobbing and Richner have therefore tended to draw the neat conclusion that there was no massive group west of the Vaal.[22] The 'Mantatee' were merely 'invented beings.'

Curiously, this was neither the conclusion of How nor subsequent historians such as Lye, Omer-Cooper, Schapera and Legassick.[23] On the testimony of the original reporters, these historians determined that Dithakong was in fact overrun by a foreign migratory group, who were not in the first place 'Mantatee'. Moffat, for example, wrote on the testimony of the prisoners that they themselves disclaimed the appellation of 'Mantatee' given to them. Instead, he was informed that they consisted of a mixture of peoples, comprising essentially the 'Maputee' and the 'Batclaquan', under the chiefs 'Chaane' and 'Carrahanye' respectively.[24] Thompson was similarly informed. On his return to Cape Town, he confronted a

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[21]M. How, 'An alibi for Mantatisi.', African Studies, 13, 2, 1954, pp.65-76.

[22]Gewald entirely avoids these questions.

[23]Lye, 'The Difaqane', pp.107-131; Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, pp.86-98; Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, p. xxiv; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp. 328-341.

[24]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat, journal, 21 July 1823, pp. 102,103. All of the references in Schapera used in this thesis have been checked from copies of originals in the National Archives of Zimbabwe located at the U.C.T. Archives - BCS 36 D75/55, BZA 80/87-80/90 - to counter Gewald's argument that Moffat's original documents have been significantly altered with regard to 'mfecane'-related passages. Schapera's transcriptions used here can be relied upon, who also directly noted differences between the original documents and later versions. Gewald's example of an important alteration derives from the Matabele Journals of Moffat, Salisbury, 1976, edited by Wallis, who did not consider differences between the originals and published forms. See Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, p.75; Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.6, p.8.

Rolong refugee at Griqua Town, who had fled the interior. The man had been driven from his territory by invaders he called 'Batcloqueene', under chiefs 'Malahanye' and another he could not recall.[25]

Whereas Gewald just ignores this evidence, Cobbing and Richner are quick to dismiss it. How and subsequent historians have translated Moffat and Thompson's references as the Phuthing of Tsuane and the Hlakoana of Nkharahanye. This was substantiated on the basis of Ellenberger's independent identification of these groups under the said leaders in his History of the Basuto, long considered the main source of Sotho oral tradition.[26] In a short footnote, without explanation, Cobbing proposes that such a conclusion is 'extremely dubious' and 'unwarranted'.[27] Both Cobbing and Richner believe Ellenberger's information to be derived from Moffat's sources. Richner goes so far as to say that since there is little other independent evidence for the existence of such groups, they can be safely rejected.[28] But, conforming to the consensus of the day, Ellenberger placed MaNtatisi's Tlokwa at Dithakong. Surely if he had obtained his information from Moffat's sources, he would rather have identified the Phuthing and Hlakoana at Dithakong? Clearly, he had been informed by old men of the

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[25]Thompson, Travels, p.137.

[26]Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.34-37, 70-72, 121, 351. Although many of his evidences derive from oral traditions, Ellenberger also used documentary sources. He did not always note his sources, which makes it difficult, at times, to critique his work.

[27]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.516, note 154.

[28]Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.9.

groups about the existence of the Phuthing and Hlakoana under Tsuane and Nkharahanye respectively, but had not been specifically told that they were represented at Dithakong. Interestingly, on the testimony of Setaki, son of Nkharahanye, he placed the Phuthing and Hlakoana across the Vaal at this time, where they suffered a great defeat.[29]

Ellenberger, himself, harboured grave doubts whether the Tlokwa had ever crossed the Vaal, and became convinced that the Phuthing and Hlakoana were at Dithakong. Regrettably, he did not have the opportunity to pursue further sources in order to corroborate his own opinions, and, thereby, contradict historians of the day such as Theal.[30] Of course, had Ellenberger had access to Moffat's private journals, he would have been provided with the ideal and necessary proof.[31]

Interestingly, in his latest article, Cobbing has since found it necessary to refute Ellenberger's identifications in an exhaustive critique, where his arguments take

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[29]Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, p.139.

[30]How, 'An alibi for Mantatisi', p.75.

[31]Although the relevant sections of Moffat's private journals were printed in a London Missionary Society publication, Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions, 3, London, 1829, and his public memoirs, published in Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa of 1842, mentioned the chiefs though not the names of the foreign groups at Dithakong, it appears that Ellenberger had either no access to them or overlooked the references to prove his ideas. It was only through the publication of Moffat's private journals and letters in Schapera's Apprenticeship at Kuruman of 1951 that the consensus of the day changed, as to who was represented at Dithakong.

a more definitive shape.[32] For the reason that this thesis primarily constitutes a response to Cobbing's 'The mfecane as alibi', his latest re-examination will not be dealt with in depth. Many of his arguments hinge on the same assumption that Ellenberger derived his information from Moffat. He recognises the existence of the 'shadowy' groups, the Phuthing and Hlakoana, yet maintains that on the basis of Moffat's sources, believing the 'Maputee' to be his Phuthing and the 'Batclaquan' to be his Hlakoana, Ellenberger fictionally inserted the leaders Chaane and Carrahanye (polished up into Tsuane and Nkharahanye respectively), and placed the groups in the fictional passages dealing with the northern Cape region. Cobbing argues the fact that no chief Tsuane or Nkharahanye appears in Ellenberger's genealogies, suggests their fictional nature. Further, that Ellenberger did not mention the presence of the Hlakoana and Phuthing west of the Vaal in the sections that centred on the groups, and only in passages related to the northern Cape, indicates to Cobbing that the groups were fictionally inserted in the latter sections.

Of course, the question remains why Ellenberger did not place the Phuthing and Hlakoana at Dithakong if he was deriving his sources from Moffat. The following remarks can also be made in response to Cobbing's latest arguments. Firstly, Ellenberger explicitly stated that Tsuane was not a chief of the Phuthing, but

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[32]Since Eldredge made similar observations concerning the identification of the 'Mantatee' by the original reporters and subsequent historians, Cobbing no longer suppresses this evidence, which has led to his exhaustive critique. See Cobbing, 'Ousting the Mfecane', pp.26-31.

rather a powerful uncle of the chief, Ratsebe. For this reason, he does not appear in the Phuthing genealogy. Tsuane appears to have gained a strong following by absorbing Nkharahanye's section of the Hlakoana.[33] Further, Nkharahanye does not appear in Ellenberger's Hlakoana genealogy, for the reason that his section of the Hlakoana was a minority group that had seceded, later to be absorbed by the Phuthing. Ellenberger remarked that several chiefs had been omitted from the Hlakoana genealogy as a result of the group being so divided.[34] As a leader of a minority group, perhaps later to lose its identity, it is not unreasonable that Nkharahanye does not appear.

Secondly, apart from the fact that Ellenberger explicitly stated that he received information about the advance of the Phuthing and Hlakoana west of the Vaal from oral sources, the reason for not alluding to this in the sections that dealt with the groups themselves, relates to the divisions into which Ellenberger arranged his book. He divided his book into three sections, the first of which concerned the ancient history of the Sotho up to approximately 1822. The second period described the 'Lifaqane Wars' which Ellenberger had beginning around

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[33]Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.36,71. Ellenberger also identifies the chief 'Motsoane' in his Phuthing genealogy as the father of Ratsebe. On the basis of oral tradition, MacGregor makes similar references. Whether 'Motsoane', the father of Ratsebe, and Tsuane, the uncle of Ratsebe, are the same person is difficult to know. Although Ellenberger places the rule of 'Motsoane' from 1780-1800, it is possible that his reign extended over a later period. Ellenberger was only too aware of the inaccuracy of his dates, as he constructed them on a partially artificial basis. See ibid., pp.333,350,351; J.C. MacGregor, Basuto Traditions, Cape Town, 1905, p.43.

[34]Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.71,385,386.

1822. Ellenberger situated the Phuthing and Hlakoana sections in the first period, which only dealt with their history up to 1822, at the time when they resided in the Vaal-Caledon region. Considering that they only moved west of the Vaal in 1822-3, for this reason, Ellenberger did not mention them in the northern Cape until the second section on the 'Lifaqane Wars'.[35]

It would seem that Ellenberger arrived at his information independently and from oral sources. Indeed, in agreement with Cobbing, the existence of the Phuthing and Hlakoana cannot be denied. Today their descendants dwell in Lesotho.[36] A number of further oral testimonies point to their involvement at Dithakong. From old men of the Phuthing at Leribe, D.F. Ellenberger's son, Rene, confirmed that 'Tsooane, chief of the Maphuthing, was killed by Makulukama (Coloured people, Griquas) in a fearful fight beyond the Vaal River.'[37] Rev. Daumas, writing on behalf of Moletsane, chief of the Taung in the 1820's, documented that Tsuane and his people were defeated near Dithakong by the Griqua.[38] Breutz in the

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[35]Ibid.,pp.viii,34-37,70-72,139. See also Cobbing, 'Ousting the Mfecane', pp.28,30 (Concerning his final reference in note 186, one can hardly expect mention of their advance westwards here. This involves one section of the Hlakoana under Lepheana focusing on specific events in a narrow period of time.).

[36]Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa', p.26.

[37]How, 'An alibi for Mantatisi', p.68.

[38]G.M. Theal, Basutoland Records, vol.1, Cape Town, 1883, p.517. Notice Daumas writes, 'Tsuane, Chief of the Bafokeng (who were improperly confounded with the Mantatis).' R. Ellenberger thought that Daumas either misunderstood Moletsane, for he knew little Basuto history, or he cut Moletsane short. Instead of speaking of the Fokeng of Sebetwane and the Phuthing of Tsuane, he joined them. R. Ellenberger was led to this conclusion for there has never existed a Fokeng chief called Tsuane. See How, 'An alibi

1940's indicated from Kwena-Modimosana oral traditions that they remembered the 'BaTlhakwane' war of 1823-4.[39] The Hurutse also recalled the advance of the 'BaTlhakwane' through their territory.[40] In addition, on 3 October 1857, on a visit to Mzilikazi, Moffat was introduced to a foreigner who, on enquiry, was found to be one of 'Chuane's people' defeated at Dithakong. The man mentioned that three great chiefs had fallen that day, namely, 'Chuane, Kharaganye and another.'[41] That Moffat was securing his alibi created thirty-four years previously, certainly requires a stretch of the imagination.

The only other recorded material by inhabitants of the zone of conflict during this period was that of Hodgson and Broadbent, pioneer missionaries into the upper-Vaal region.[42] Lye has shown that their accounts, taken from a different perspective, dovetail favourably with Moffats' with respect to the approach and retreat of the numerous and desperate group.[43] Journeying up the Vaal towards the beginning of 1823 with the purpose of settling a mission amongst Sefunela's Rolong, they encountered Koranna and Rolong fleeing from wars, reportedly

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for Mantatisi', p.75.

[39]P.L. Breutz, The Tribes of Rustenburg and Pilansberg Districts, 28, Pretoria, 1953, p.430.

[40]P.L. Breutz, The Tribes of Marico District, 31, Pretoria, 1953, p.7.

[41]J.P.R. Wallis (ed.), The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, 2, London, 1945, p.81.

[42]Cope (ed.), Journals, pp.101-190; Broadbent, Narrative, pp. 20-77; W. Shaw (ed.), Memoirs of Mrs. A. Hodgson, London, 1836, ch.7.

[43]Lye, 'The Difaqane', pp.112,123-129.

raging furiously amongst the Tswana. It was related that a 'Caffres commando' (or 'Naked Caffres'), very numerous and ferocious, was in motion against the Tswana, coming from an area beyond the 'Goyas' up the Vet River.[44]

Interestingly, at the end of January, Hodgson and Broadbent encountered a number of armed men whom they believed were part of the 'Caffres commando'. They observed them wearing black ostrich feathers on their heads and as having large, oval shields, which were distinct from that of the Rolong, whose were square and hollowed on both sides. Moffat and Melvill described the 'Mantatee' at Dithakong in a similar way.[45] After February, little was seen or heard about the 'Caffres commando', until June when reports filtered in again.[46]

Towards the end of July, substantive reports arrived about the approach of the 'Caffres commando', this time from a westerly direction. Sefunela fled with his people from Matlwase, arguing that 'it would be madness to hazard a battle, they are too strong for us.'[47] Clearly the foreign group remained vast in retreat, and indicates that they were no local community driven into flight from Dithakong. In reviewing their origin, Sefunela could not learn from what nation they had

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[44]Cope (ed.), Journals, pp.98,101,102,108.

[45]Ibid., pp.120,121; Broadbent, Narrative, pp.34,35. See also note 13 of this section on the 'Mantatee'.

[46]Cope (ed.), Journals, pp.175,179.

[47]Broadbent, Narrative, pp.64,65.

come. They were an unknown entity to him.[48] Hodgson, Sefunela and his son, Moroko, also reported seeing small parties of stragglers in a desperate plight, even feeding upon their own dead.[49] On 9 August, Sefunela returned to Matlwase satisfied that the 'Caffres commando' had retreated up the Vaal (see map 1).

The earliest reports, received independently by Moffat, also described the advance of the 'Mantatee' towards the 'Goya', before proceeding northwards. During the months March to May, when Hodgson and Broadbent heard little about the 'Caffres commando', Moffat had the 'Mantatee' moving in a north-westerly direction before having them continue southwards, when reports were received at Matlwase once more. Finally, his depiction of their retreat to the Vaal during July and early August,[50] confirms Sefunela's removal from Matlwase. Interestingly, on learning about the battle at Dithakong from both Moffat, Melvill and the refugees, Hodgson immediately associated all that he knew about the 'Caffres commando' with the 'Mantatee'.[51] This seemed a reasonable elision to make given the timing of their parallel movements, their size, and their foreign

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[48]Cope (ed.), Journals, p.179. They were neither Koranna nor Taung, for he had knowledge about these communities, often referring to them as distinct entities.

[49]Ibid., pp.184,189; Broadbent, Narrative, p.67.

[50]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to Mary Moffat, 13 August 1823, pp.106,107; ibid., Mary Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 1 Sept. 1823, pp.108,109.

[51]Cope (ed.), Journals, p.179. Similarly, when Broadbent came to write his book, he associated the 'Caffres commando' with the 'Mantatee'. See Broadbent, Narrative, pp.27,31,34, etc.

and plundering nature. Although a number of historians have perhaps been a little too quick to identify the precise nature of movement and composition of the 'Caffres commando' prior to Dithakong,[52] it seems difficult to deny, at least, the existence of the vast foreign group in retreat from Dithakong eastwards towards Matlwase.

The contemporary evidence appears to confirm the existence of the foreign group,[53] consisting primarily of the Phuthing and Hlakoana. Although the

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[52]See for example, M. Kinsman, 'The Impact of the Difaqane on Southern Tswana Communities, with special reference to the Rolong', History Workshop, 1984, p.7. At the same time, some of the conclusions by certain revisionists are just as emphatic and unjustified. For example, Gewald and Lambourne argue, on a very tenuous basis, that the Rolong were not fleeing the 'Caffres commando' at Thabeng early in 1823, but rather the Bergenaars. Their piece of evidence is limited, indirect and open to many different readings. It involves a small section of Rolong under Sefunela's brother, Tshabidira, who, having removed from Thabeng, had since heard the sound of guns at one of the places where they had later encamped. This suggests to Gewald and Lambourne that the Bergenaars moved the Rolong. But the Bergenaars were not the only group with firearms. Both the Koranna and Rolong possessed a few guns. It is difficult to know to whom the guns belonged, since it is not stated. The reference could even have related to a minor conflict between Tshabidira and the Koranna with whom he was connected. By no means does this necessarily negate the existence of the 'Caffres commando'. This event would appear to have occurred after the major retreat of the Rolong from Thabeng, which the Rolong explicitly stated was the result of the advance of the 'Caffres commando'. See Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatee', ch.6, p.3, ch.8, pp.3,4; B. Lambourne, 'A Chip off the Old Block: Early Ghoya History and the Emergence of Moletsane's Taung', paper prepared for The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of the Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991, p.7, note 41; Cope (ed.), Journals, pp.108-111,147,152,154,163.

[53]Note that Griqua oral tradition also recounts uniform reference to a foreign group that came and warred over the African nations of their quarter. See Evidence Taken at Bloemhof Before the Commission Appointed to Investigate the Claims of the South African Republic, Captain N. Waterboer, Chief of West Griqualand, and Certain Other Native Chiefs, to Portions of the Territory on the Vaal River, Now Known As the Diamond Fields, Cape Town, 1871, evidence of Kruger, pp.4,7,8; evidence of Jansen,

original reporters do not mention them, there does exist a small amount of evidence to suggest Sebetwane's Fokeng of Patsa was also represented at Dithakong. Livingstone learnt from Sebetwane, shortly before the latter's death, that his people had been part of the vast group driven back by the Griqua from Kuruman in 1824.[54] The reference would appear to relate to Dithakong, but is open to interpretation. Ellenberger also situated the Fokeng of Patsa in the neighbourhood of Dithakong.[55] Perhaps Sebetwane was the forgotten third chief? It is difficult to know with any certainty.[56] Moffat did, however, note that

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p.12.

[54]D. Livingstone, Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa, London, 1857, p.84.

[55]Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, p.137. Ellenberger even describes a battle involving the Patsa at Dithakong a few days before 26 June. In this case, it is difficult to know from where he derived his information. He does, however, relate that the Fokeng chief, Ramabusetsa, joined Sebetwane and was present at Dithakong, and the vernacular history, Dico tsa Secwana, does also mention that Makaba was attacked at Tlhorong by Ramabusetsa early in 1823. See E.W. Smith, 'Sebetwane and the Makololo', African Studies, 15, 2, 1956, p.58.

[56]Much concerning the Patsa is open to speculation. In his latest articles, Cobbing argues that the 'known facts' about the Patsa migration path rule against them being near Dithakong. He relates that they first fled eastwards, 'probably' from the Griqua or 'perhaps' the Taung. They then came into contact with Portugese slavers, 'perhaps somewhere' in the modern Fouriesberg-Bethlehem area. From there the survivors crossed the southern, central and western Transvaal towards the Molepolole area via an 'unknown migration path'. The very language Cobbing uses, suggests that his 'known facts' are not well established. It is difficult to demonstrate that either the Griqua or the Taung moved the Patsa groups eastwards from their homelands near modern Virginia. There is mention of the Fokeng chiefs, Sebetwane and Ramabusetsa, coming into contact with slavers, but the evidence suggests that the Patsa fled north-east for the east coast, where they were confronted by the slavers somewhere between Port Natal and Delagoa Bay. The reference derives from oral tradition, a rare case that Cobbing uses such evidence, and is open to many different readings regarding timing and the nature of the participants. Since it stands alone, it cannot be strongly trusted. Certainly the movement of the Patsa, prior to their arrival in the Molepolole area in 1824, remains open to

the 'Mantatee' at Dithakong also included Hurutse refugees, who had been absorbed into the conquering 'horde' as it made its way through the interior.[57]The earliest reports received also referred that there existed white men with long hair and beards amongst the advancing 'Mantatee'.[58] The foreign group at Dithakong, however, was perfectly black.[59] These reports appear to relate to certain pressures involved in the initial motors of violence to the east.[60]

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speculation, leaving the remote possibility that they were at Dithakong. See Cobbing, 'Ousting the Mfecane', pp.14,31; 'Rethinking the Roots', pp.11-12.

[57]See examples of incorporation in Thompson, Travels, pp.107, 108. For the Hurutse refugees, see Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 21 July 1823, p.102.

[58]Ibid., R. Moffat, journal, 23 June 1823, p.90; Thompson, Travels, pp.87,88.

[59]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 26 June 1823, p.93.

[60]It has been noted that Cobbing and Gewald use such references to suggest that the 'Mantatee' were Portugese and Bergenaar raiders respectively. Such conclusions cannot be strongly maintained. Their examples of Portugese/Bergenaar raiders operating to the north of Dithakong are spurious and date after Dithakong. It is interesting that they use such tenuous rumours as authoritative evidence when in support of their views, yet they dismiss other parts of the same rumours, without motivation, when in contradiction of their claims. A letter from Pringle clarifies these references about white men to some degree. He related that a foreign group, threatening the southern Nguni in the eastern Cape in 1825, had emigrated from a region far to the north-east. They had been driven from their homelands by a stronger nation, 'among whom were people of the colour of Hottentots, and with large beards and long hair.' Such uniform allusions to 'whites' amongst the invaders suggests something of their existence. Pringle's assertions indicate that they were part of initial motors of violence to the east, effecting chains that displaced the 'Mantatee' and others. Thompson understood these references either to mean bastard Portugese or the shipwrecked descendants of Europeans on the east coast. The former explanation would appear more tenable. The earliest rumours, therefore, do seem to relate to the Portugese, but neither as being the 'Mantatee' nor as operating north of Dithakong before 1823. Rather these references suggest that they played some part in the initial upheavals begun in the east, where the extent of their penetration and role is open to speculation. See Thompson, Travels, pp.137,214.

The etymology of 'Mantatee'

The third reason for the conclusions of the revisionists involves the etymology of the term, 'Mantatee'. Richner believes the word derived from the misheard 'Matabele', whereas Cobbing understands it to be coined simply as a euphemism for forced labour. The elision between the 'Mantatee' and MaNtatisi was developed years later, and had not previously existed.[61] Neither explanation deals with the word's etymology adequately.

From the earliest reports, it is especially clear that the word did indeed refer to MaNtatisi and her Tlokwa. The first messages Moffat received depicted the vast group as 'Mantateesa' and always spoke of her in the feminine.[62] Later the word 'Mantatee' became more frequently heard, and the original references never again appeared in European accounts. The very word 'Mantatee' that was adopted and used broadly by Moffat, Thompson and others, has also inextricable links with MaNtatisi's Tlokwa. When the first literate European observers entered the Vaal-Caledon region, they discovered that the Tlokwa indeed identified themselves as the 'Mantatee'. They did not make the 'Mantatee'-MaNtatisi elision as Cobbing

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[61]Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.9; Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.493,515. Richner even suggests, without a corresponding footnote, that the word derived from oral accounts of a sixteenth-century Kikuyu warrior queen (!).

[62]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 16 May 1823, p.77.

suggests.[63] It was already in place. Andrew Smith, for example, stated explicitly that their principal name was the Tlokwa 'though at different times it has been called after some of its more remarkable chiefs upon the same principal as it has lately been styled Mantatees, or in other words, the people of Mantatee.'[64] With reference to the Tlokwa/Mantatees, Smith described in 1836 how this had occurred:

> any remarkable instance of prosperity, or any occurrence which is calculated to raise a tribe in the estimation of the others around it, is sometimes considered by the tribe itself as best to be recorded by the adoption of a new name, and on such occasions the name assumed is generally made to refer either to the occurrence or to the ruler under whose government it happened. The other means by which changes are produced, namely, the influence of strangers, operate principally during warlike movements, when bodies come in contact who are unacquainted with each others previous designations. On such occasions the one speaks of the other as the people of such and such a chief, and by perseverance in that system often eventually succeed, at least to a certain extent, in establishing

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[63]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.515.

[64]W.F. Lye (ed.), Andrew Smith's journal of his expedition into the interior of South Africa: 1834-36, Cape Town, 1975, p.92. See also, T. Arbousset and F. Daumas, Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North-East of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Town reprint, 1968, p.31.

names hitherto unknown in the country.[65]

Through a combination of these two processes, then, the Tlokwa had come to be known as the 'Mantatee'. It would appear MaNtatisi had gained infamy as the leader of a warlike group and, given the extent of her power, her name became the epithet by which other warlike bands such as the Phuthing and Hlakoana were characterized. This interpretation seems to be placed beyond doubt when Moffat writes:

> The prisoners also inform us that they are not the Mantatees; but that numerous and powerful tribes bearing that name are also, according to report, infesting the interior, plundering, etc.[66]

Indeed, the earliest reports of the advancing, foreign group did also refer to them as 'Matabele'.[67] However, Moffat learnt from the refugees themselves that they were not in fact 'Matabele'. Rather the word applied to those people who had driven them from their countries in the east.[68] Therefore, although the words 'Mantatee' and 'Matabele' were at times used interchangeably, they were by no

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[65]G.M. Theal, Basutoland Records, 1, Extracts from the report of the expedition for exploring Central Africa from the Cape of Good Hope, under the superintendence of Dr. A. Smith, p.13.

[66]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 21 July 1823, p.103.

[67]Ibid., journal, 26 May 1823, p.84; ibid., 31 May 1823, p.85.

[68]Ibid., journal, 21 July 1823, p.101.

means synonyms as Richner suggests.[69]

The fact that Moffat continued to use the term 'Mantatee' to denote peoples he knew were not in actuality the 'Mantatee', seems to have been the cause of much of the confusion in the past. Moffat used the word in a similar way to the Tswana for whom it signified 'invader' or 'marauder', describing wandering foreigners stemming from the east.[70] As was the practice, then, Moffat applied the word to foreign invaders other than those at Dithakong as well.[71] Similarly, the word acquired a generic meaning within the Cape Colony, by which refugees of the interior were designated, including groups of Tswana.[72] Over time, Moffat's initial identifications became obscured and later writers, removed from the events in both space and time, uncritically made the Tlokwa/Mantatee elision with the 'Mantatee' of Dithakong.

Clearly the revisionists have failed to demythologise the contemporary evidence that supports the very existence of the 'Mantatee' as a vast and destitute foreign group, uprooted in the east as a community, and forced to plunder the interior in

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[69]Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"'. Cobbing suggests this also in 'Ousting the Mfecane', p.30.

[70]Thompson, Travels, p.204. See also evidence of this in the vernacular histories, Dico tsa Secwana and Ditirafalo tsa merafe ya BaTswana, cited in Smith, 'Sebetwane and the Makololo', p.53, note 1.

[71]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, pp. 132-133, 144-152.

[72]CT:CO 1/GR 15/71 Graaf-Reinet Register 1826-7: 'Apprentices of the Mantatee Nation'. See also, Lye, 'The Difaqane', p.122, note 94.

times of desperate want. Eldredge describes the significant environmental deterioration and persistent drought at the time in the region that marked the gravity of their situation.[73] Their large numbers do not appear unreasonable[74] and, given their presence at Dithakong, they posed a serious threat to the security of communities both in the Kuruman and Griqua Town region, against which necessary action had to be taken.

The Griqua

Cobbing and Richner suggest that Griqua raids for slaves and cattle 'had been going on for years', and, therefore, Dithakong should be placed in continuity with these raids.[75] Since the Griqua rounded up over 1000 cattle after the battle and collected many prisoners, who would later either become their servants or be sent into the colony, they believe that the objectives of the Griqua in joining the expedition were primarily for cattle and slaves.[76] It will be argued that the revisionists' portrayal of the nature and character of the Griqua is reductionist and simplistic, and will aim to establish the motive of the Griqua as defensive.

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[73]Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa', pp.45-49.

[74]Ibid., pp.47,48; Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.36,72.

[75]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.496; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.8.

[76]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.492,493; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.8. Gewald treats the slaving aspect as a side issue and rather focuses upon a range of socio-economic and political motives for the involvement of the Griqua in the 'raid'. See '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.3, ch.7, p.2.

Again, the fact that refugees and cattle were taken was a by-product of the battle and not its cause.

The nature and character of the Griqua

Griqua expansion[77]

The portrayal of the Griqua before 1823 as slave and cattle raiders, whose attacks 'had been going on for years', cannot be easily sustained. By examining the expansive nature of Griqua society prior to Dithakong, it will be argued that this accusation is particularly unjustified in the case of the Griqua involved at Dithakong under Andries Waterboer, Adam Kok II and Barend Barends.

Cobbing and Richner tend to deal with the Griqua as a uniform raiding group. However, the Griqua were far from constituting a homogenous raiding community. Consisting initially of Bastards and Oorlams, they had come to settle around Griqua Town by 1805. Through the eighteenth-century, they had advanced eastwards along the Orange, hunting, trading and often raiding. Raids were specifically directed against one another. The region has been described as an open frontier zone where little authority existed, being relatively autonomous from both a colonial or indigenous social system, although dependent on both. In

[77]For a detailed account of Griqua expansionism, see: Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', ch.1-9; M. Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to 1820: The emergence of the Griqua people', in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1820, Cape Town, 1979.

this context, lawlessness thrived and, by the end of the eighteenth-century, certain leading Bastard families were intent on escaping the region in order to establish more stable relations of existence.[78]

The Kok and Barends families retreated higher up the Orange River, and from the early 1800's attempted to close the frontier zone by normalizing relationships. The missionaries played an important part in regularising relations by settling the early Griqua around Klaarwater (later Griqua Town), and by controlling trade routes with the colony.[79] One of the important reasons for the northward migration of the Koks and Barends centred upon the ivory trade. With the decline of the number of elephants in the Orange River Valley, they were forced to look towards the north-east trade routes. The Tlhaping effectively controlled these routes, and, therefore, it was in their interests to establish trading relations with them. From the early 1800's Bastard-Tlhaping relations became firmly institutionalised in the hands of the Koks and Barends, who profited much.[80] In order to protect these relations, the Koks and Barends asserted claims to territory and political authority, and were able to establish centres of stable settlement to ensure control. The early Griqua centred around these leading families within a patriarchal structure of society, and, under such circumstances, using their patriarchal powers, the leading families were able to institutionalize stable

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[78]Ibid., pp.255-264.

[79]Ibid., pp.264,265.

[80]Ibid., p.258.

relations for many years.[81]

In such a context, it is difficult to portray the Griqua as a homogenous, invading force free from restraint. Missionary influence geared towards regularising relations was considerable, and it was in the interests of the leading Bastard ivory traders to maintain a stable society. For many years they sought to prevent firearms entering the hands of Koranna, Tswana and small autonomous bands of Griqua, and were successful in this to a certain degree.

Occasional violence did occur, particularly with hunter-gatherers over water-rights. The process of dispossession of their lands also provoked confrontation, but the accompanying process of acquiring labour cannot be seen in terms of enslavement. Kinsman explains that many local bands whose grounds were usurped, 'became tied to Griqua households as what would become bonded labour. But in so absorbing local groupings, the Griqua imitated the system of bonded or client labour used by indigenous Tswana and Koranna groups. Although the resulting labourers were tied to Griqua households, they were by no means "enslaved"'.[82] Some bands joined the leading Griqua families for protection. Others became willing dependents for ecological reasons. Still others

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[81]Ibid., pp.259-263; M. Kinsman, 'Populists and Patriarchs', pp.2,3.

[82]M. Kinsman, 'Re-Sketching the "Mfecane": The Impact of Violence on Rolong Life, 1823-36', paper prepared for The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991, p.25, note 4.

became servants paid in wages.[83] The fact that they used intermittent labour suggests that there was a large pool of retainers from which to draw. They did not need to seek African labour, as is supposed was the case at Dithakong. It is, therefore, not surprising that the original reporters wrote that the Griqua were not interested in the refugees collected after the battle. They had enough retainers in their immediate vicinity. If they really had wanted slaves for themselves, or to trade with the colony, they could even have plundered these independent local bands.[84]

Most of the raiding that did occur was illegal and involved small, autonomous bands of Griqua, who often aligned themselves with unruly frontiersmen such as Bezuidenhout, Coetzee and de Buys. They raided for cattle and usually seized hunter-gatherer 'apprentices'. Breakaway groups such as the Hartenaars and Bergenaars also reverted to illegal trading and raiding patterns, which the leading Griqua vigorously condemned.[85] The evidential support for slaving prior to 1823 even by the breakaway groups is extremely scanty and can only be estimated at a very limited amount.[86] But especially for the participants at Dithakong, namely

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[83]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.171,172,176,177,179.

[84]Kinsman, 'Populists and Patriarchs', p.6.

[85]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.298-300; Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to 1820', pp.258-259, 271-272.

[86]A review of Cobbing and Richner's evidences suggest this. The majority of their examples involving a trade in slaves with certain colonial frontiersmen stem from 1824. See also Kinsman, 'Re-Sketching the "Mfecane"', p.2; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-

Kok, Barends and Waterboer, there is no long history of raids for cattle and slaves.

Griqua leadership and composition

By June 1823, sharp divisions existed in Griqua leadership. Waterboer had ascended to power and the traditional 'kapteyns', Kok and Barends, considered this a kind of usurpation. The fact that they would join forces and submit to the leadership of Waterboer at Dithakong, however, points to a very real common threat for which temporary unification was necessary.

Kinsman has traced Waterboer's ascendence, which she argues was the result of the growth of the agricultural faction amongst the Griqua. Until the 1820's, Griqua political authority had centred around alliances between the two leading families and heads of otherwise autonomous groups in their following. The authority of the traditional 'kapteyns', Kok and Barends, was primarily pastorally based. Having moved to Campbell and Daniel's Kuil respectively, Kok and Barends largely neglected the needs of the expanding agricultural community at Griqua Town, so that they were ultimately rejected. The poorer cultivators sought new structures suited to their circumstances, and so promoted one of their own, namely Waterboer, to the position of 'kapteyn' in order to redirect the

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Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.353-355.

administration.[87]

As a man of relative poverty and San origins, Waterboer's ascendence was viewed with much bitterness and considered a usurpation of power by the hereditary 'kapteyns'. Further, that the colonial government confirmed Waterboer in office and appointed Melvill as government agent at Griqua Town, only exacerbated the situation. Waterboer aimed to use this link to establish his leadership. The traditional 'kapteyns' regarded this as an attempt to control them. It was related that they regarded this 'as a sort of usurpation or infringement of their privileges, not to be tolerated, and to which they accordingly, resolved not to submit.' Waterboer's efforts to subordinate the followers of the old 'kapteyns' brought further dissatisfaction. Considering his rule 'upstart' and 'tyrannical', a number of them withdrew from the Griqua Town area, and settled along the Modder River. They later became known as the Bergenaars, and were the cause of much disorder in the future. Kinsman concludes, then, that the old 'kapteyns' and the Radicals were finding a common cause, and that Waterboer and his followers at Griqua Town were increasingly viewed as 'a community separate and opposed to the interests of the others.'[88]

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[87]See Kinsman's article, 'Populists and Patriarchs'.

[88]Ibid., p.11.

In such a context, for Kok and Barends to unify with Waterboer and submit to his leadership, would have required an exceptional set of circumstances to develop. The great common danger of the advancing 'Mantatee', about which they appear to have heard threatening reports beforehand,[89] provides the necessary explanation. That they set aside their differences, and agreed so cordially and unanimously to assist each other, suggests their temporary unification was motivated by security reasons in defence of their distinctive communities.

Concerned to place the events within the flow of Griqua history, Gewald makes a much closer analysis of Griqua motives. He finds the slaving aspect to be a side issue. Rather he focuses upon the splits within the Griqua polity and the weakening socio-economic conditions. He argues that the raid on Dithakong allowed for the reassertion of their authority over their own adherents and the Tlhaping, and the opportunity to sample the illegal benefits of cattle and slaves which, he suggests, were already being gained by the Bergenaars.[90]Gewald's evidence is circumstantial. It is difficult to demonstrate that these were the intentions of Waterboer, Kok and Barends. Given the established existence of the numerous and foreign group at Dithakong, some of these motives might have been secondary intentions or even benefits unrecognised at the time. However, alone, they fail to explain the coming together of the Griqua leaders. Attempts

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[89]See Thompson, Travels, p.87.

[90]Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.3, ch.7, p.2, ch.8, p.2.

for conciliation had been unsuccessful and, by June 1823, they were still bitterly divided.[91]Their unity was reactive to an external threat, and not internally contrived to assert their authority. There is no direct evidence for Waterboer, Kok and Barends convening on such grounds. It remains an argument from silence. The fact that a decision was arrived at so promptly and unanimously, after an urgent council of war held on the very day of Moffat's arrival in Griqua Town suggests, as they themselves stated, that their motive was in response to a great common danger,[92]as opposed to something internally contrived that would have taken long deliberation, convincing and reflection, to consider the benefits of unity for such causes that Gewald proposes.

The aftermath of the battle

Cobbing argues that armed Griqua were used to round up the women and children, and that Griqua guns decided where the prisoners should be disposed.[93] Such a reading suggests their slaving intentions, but is based upon sheer speculation. The original reporters narrate an entirely different set of

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[91]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.302-304,333; Thompson, Travels, pp.78-80. It is important to note that too much support for the Bergenaars worked against Kok and Barends. They were already losing a number of adherents to the Bergenaars, and neither lawlessness nor another autonomous centre of authority was in their interests. For this reason, attempts at unity were made, but they proved unsuccessful.

[92]Thompson, Travels, p.90.

[93]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.493.

circumstances which exonerates the Griqua, under Waterboer, Kok and Barends, from slaving.

The Griqua were hardly interested in the women and children left on the battlefield, and played little part in rounding them up. They were singularly concerned with the cattle that had been taken. If it had not been for the compassionate response of Moffat and Melvill, the weak and wounded would have been abandoned on the battlefield, left to the depredations of the revengeful Tswana. Moffat chastised them for being 'destitute of sympathy', and for manifesting 'the utmost indifference toward collecting the prisoners', calling them 'heathens still'. It was left, then, to Moffat and Melvill to collect the refugees. Considering that many of the refugees were exceedingly weak, it was with the utmost difficulty that they urged them onwards. A number, being exhausted, could not continue and were left behind. Moffat and Melvill were assisted by only two Griqua in bringing the refugees forward.[94]

Later, the Tlhaping were to secure a number of the refugees for themselves. Concerned that they had merely been taken to parade as victory trophies, thereafter only to be murdered or left to starve, Moffat and Melvill urged the Griqua to persuade the Tlhaping to hand over the women and children. They considered that the refugees might best be cared for by the Griqua. Their fears

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[94]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 26 June 1823, pp.95,96.

were only too well-founded, given the brutality of the Tlhaping towards the defenceless women and children during the battle. When Mothibi received the message that the refugees should be delivered over, in a rage he knocked down a woman with a large stone, and one of his attendants stabbed a male prisoner in the heart. For this reason, the Griqua on behalf of Moffat and Melvill induced the Tlhaping to surrender the refugees. Ultimately, they were not interested in the refugees and were only acting upon the sympathetic request of Moffat and Melvill.[95]

Further, at a later stage, Moffat hoped that Waterboer and his Griqua would aid a number of refugees, who were still in the vicinity of Dithakong and Nokaneng, by collecting them and providing them with protection.[96]Moffat's pleas would gain no response. Even those refugees who did enter the homes of the Griqua were treated with indifference and neglect, so that Melvill sought new schemes for their provision.Both Moffat and Melvill were bitterly critical of the unsympathetic and uncaring attitude of the Griqua towards the refugees.

Clearly the primary motives of the Griqua involved at Dithakong were not geared towards slavery. That prisoners and cattle were taken does not necessarily imply

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[95]See Thompson, Travels, pp.174,175.

[96]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to Mary Moffat, 13 August 1823, p.107.

a raid, but can be more rationally explained in terms of the aftermath of a victorious defensive battle. In essence, as they themselves stated after the urgent council of war, the principal motive of the Griqua leaders was defensive for the security of their distinctive communities.

The Tlhaping

Considering Dithakong to be an attack on the local inhabitants, the revisionists suggest that the involvement of the Tlhaping was centred around their own self-gain. For Richner, an appreciation of the Tlhaping 'commercial jealousy scare' is crucial to their role. Gewald views their participation, at least, as part of their general hostility towards the inhabitants of Dithakong. Since the Tlhaping gained neither cattle nor refugees from the battle, Cobbing takes a wide berth and offers no explanation for their involvement.[97] This section of the chapter will aim to expose the poverty of the differing critiques of the Tlhaping, and establish their primary motive, also, as defensive and protective.

Richner's critique

For Richner, the concept of the Tlhaping 'commercial jealousy scare' is central to the examination of Dithakong. He argues that the Tlhaping had, for a long

[97]This is true for 'The mfecane as alibi', but he moves closer to the explanations of Gewald and Richner in 'Ousting the mfecane', pp.26,27.

time, used the Ngwaketse as a 'mercantile jealousy scare', in order to prevent traders from undermining their monopoly by visiting other chiefdoms. Makaba, therefore, was made out to be a robber and murderer, with the cunning of the devil. However, when Moffat defied the old 'commercial jealousy scare' by setting out for the Ngwaketse, Mothibi was forced to take new measures in order to preserve his trade monopoly. By feeding Moffat messages about 'Mantatee' movements, Mothibi was able to use the 'Mantatee scare' to frighten Moffat into turning home. Richner suggests that Moffat completely believed the 'Mantatee scare', and thus made a hurried journey to Griqua Town to seek Griqua support. Mothibi's new 'commercial jealousy scare' had now developed a momentum of its own. Fearing the Griqua would take his cattle if there was no 'horde', Mothibi was forced to designate a victim people, which comprised the inhabitants of Dithakong, who were old adversaries. In this way, then, the Tlhaping trade monopoly was secured and one of their major rivals, the Maidi, were defeated.[98]

In the light of what has already been discussed, the failings of this analysis should be obvious. Tlhaping commercial jealousy certainly played a role in the attempt to prevent Moffat from venturing northwards. Moffat wrote that Mothibi had held back helpers to lead his oxen, for fear that his journey to Makaba would lose him a few rolls of tobacco or some beads.[99] However, Richner has exaggerated such

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[98]Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', pp.7,8.

[99]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 14 May 1823, p.76.

interests out of proportion. A few points should suffice in response.

Firstly, it is difficult to suggest that Mothibi orchestrated the feeding of messages about 'Mantatee' movements to Moffat. Moffat received his information from a host of different sources, including Mahumoapelo, the Kgalagadi, the Rolong, and even the supposed victims of Dithakong.[100] Further, the reports seem to have gained in consistency as Moffat drew closer to the sources of conflict. Such manipulation of the information would have been overly intricate for Mothibi to plot. Secondly, unless Mothibi was intent on defeating his old adversaries at Dithakong, he might even have prevented his new 'commercial jealousy scare' from gathering momentum, by persuading Moffat not to seek the armed support of the Griqua, since it had already achieved its purpose in frightening him home. However, having convened a meeting to consider the 'Mantatee' threat, Mothibi rather looked to Moffat for advice in the face of danger.[101]

Probably the major shortcoming of Richner's critique concerns the position of Moffat. In his efforts to exonerate Moffat from the raid, he portrays him as utterly deluded and misled in the extreme. Richner suggests that Moffat mistakenly identified the local Dithakong community for the supposed 'Mantatee'. However, that he should have recognised the six to eight thousand residents of Dithakong

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[100]See note 6 of this chapter, the section on the 'Mantatee'.

[101]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 5 June 1823, p.87

for an aggressive fifty thousand strong group of foreigners, is difficult to accept. In his descriptions of the 'Mantatee', Moffat noted that they contrasted sharply with the Tswana of his area in dress, ornaments, weapons and behaviour. Further, Moffat had met with the inhabitants of Dithakong on previous occasions.[102] To be consistent, either Moffat was lying or stating the truth. He could not have been deceived.

Gewald's critique

Again, concerned in this case to place the events within the flow of Tlhaping history, Gewald traces the long-standing rivalry between the inhabitants of Dithakong and the secessionist Tlhaping, firstly under Molehabangwe and then Mothibi. He argues that by 1823 Mothibi's authority was crumbling. He was beset by divisions and economic failure. His involvement at Dithakong, therefore, was aimed at liquidating an old adversary once and for all; regaining control of trade routes and reasserting his authority. In this way, he intended to imitate Molehabangwe's triumphant return to Dithakong.[103]Again, Gewald's evidence is at best circumstantial. No direct evidence is produced displaying such motives of Mothibi. Rather, at a 'pitso' (a meeting) held a few days before the battle, the Tlhaping were emphatic in their speeches, recorded by Thompson through the

[102]Ibid., R. Moffat, journal, 24 May 1821, p.18; ibid., 16 May 1823, p.77; ibid., 2-3 June 1823, p.87.

[103]Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.4, ch.7, pp.1-2, ch.8, p.2.

assistance of an interpreter, about the need to oppose a foreign and threatening people.[104]Given that the inhabitants of Dithakong had deserted their town, later to be occupied by the established existence of the 'Mantatee', the contrived nature of this critique should be obvious. Gewald altogether ignores reports about the foreign group.

Clearly the speeches of the Tlhaping convincingly demonstrate uniform consciousness of the need to confront a foreign invading force. Like the Griqua, the involvement of the Tlhaping at Dithakong was protective, and motivated by the need to preserve their very existence as a people.

It has been the purpose of these two chapters on Dithakong to expose the manipulative nature of the revisionist critiques, in order to meet the respective demands of their larger suppositions. The revisionists' ideas about the production of history are sweeping, selective, monolithic, simplistic and overly Eurocentric. By arguing that the original reporters invented the 'Mantatee' myth as alibi for the raid, they assume the production of history was manufactured independently of Africans whose witness they neglect. Many of their arguments, rather, stem from silence or are based on tenuous evidence open to different readings.

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[104]For the recorded speeches, see: Thompson, Travels, pp.99-107.

For Dithakong to be a raid, the conspiracy at work snowballs beyond the battle itself and becomes too massive to sustain. However much the revisionists have forced a more critical appraisal of Dithakong, the original accounts still stand. Having attempted to establish the original version of events, this thesis must necessarily bring the revisionists' singular Eurocentric theory of violence into question.

4. DITHAKONG AND THE CHAIN OF VIOLENCE WEST OF THE DRAKENSBERG

With the results of the study on Dithakong regarded as validated, this chapter will work outwards and reconsider the broader explanations for the origins of the upheavals, with particular respect to the devastations west of the Drakensberg around 1822-4. It will be argued that the initial chains of violence on the highveld cannot be singularly explained in terms of 'European' forces stemming from the west, so that the traditional explanations, that emphasize the important catastrophic origins of African agents from the east, need to be re-examined. Without proposing the re-establishment of the 'mfecane' model, a synthesis will be forwarded with respect to the nature of the chains of violence west of the Drakensberg in the 1820's.

The Chain of Violence in the West - The Transorangian Region

Given that there did indeed exist a numerous and destitute migratory group at Dithakong, it becomes necessary to reconsider the revisionist explanations for the upheavals in the interior. The revisionists attempt to establish the chains of violence in the Transorangian region in terms of forces stemming from that zone itself. For Cobbing and Richner, this is rooted in the Cape colony's demand for labour and cattle, whereas for Gewald it is the natural result of internal contextual dynamics integral to the region itself. The raiders are identified as

Griqua, Bergenaars, Koranna, Xhosa-offshoots and renegade Europeans, who caused the destruction of African communities, as is alleged was the case at Dithakong. These groups, particularly the Griqua, are recognised as the advance guard of Anglo-Boer expansion. Their raids, allegedly, originated in the south and the dominant flow of violence was from west to east or south-west to north-east.[1] This section of the chapter will aim to show that the empirical evidence for such raids cannot conclusively demonstrate their singular, decisive impact in the upheavals.

Problems of periodisation

By projecting later evidence backwards to account for earlier periods, Cobbing and Richner give the impression that Griqua-Koranna-renegade European raiding does indeed explain the roots of the upheavals and the destruction of African communities in the west. In this way, in their convincing style, they suggest continuity in the nature and impact of such raids before the battle of Dithakong on June 1823, and afterwards. A close review of their evidences certainly does indicate that Griqua-Koranna-renegade European raiding played an important

[1]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.498,499; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.3; Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.8, pp.3-5. Gewald identifies the Bergenaars primarily. In his latest papers, 'Ousting the Mfecane' and 'Rethinking the Roots of Violence in southern Africa', Cobbing does identify forces of overlap from the east in the form of Portugese raiders. It has been noted that the extent of their penetration, as far as the region north of Dithakong before 1823-4, cannot be strongly held.

role in the conflicts from late 1823 onwards, but cannot be easily maintained for the period prior to Dithakong. The empirical evidence for this time remains shaky.[2] By examining, in turn, the nature and impact of each identified raiding community prior-to and post-1823, it is the intention to expose the groundlessness of both Cobbing and Richner's conclusions.

The Griqua

It has already been indicated that the portrayal of the Griqua before 1823 as slave and cattle raiders, whose attacks 'had been going on for years', is difficult to validate. For the leading Bastard ivory traders, it was in their interests to maintain a stable society, and missionary influence helped play an important role in regularising relations. The majority of Griqua were, therefore, restrained to a large extent from engaging upon careers of illegal raiding. The examples Cobbing and Richner forward involve small, autonomous bands of Griqua who often aligned themselves with exceptional, unruly frontiersmen such as Coenraad Bezuidenhout, Cobus Vry, Gerrit Coetzee and Coenraad de Buys. Their impact, however, was sporadic and transitory, and did not seriously disrupt local black communities. The extent of Buys-led raids, for example, on the Kwena, Lete and

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[2]For a review of Cobbing and Richner's evidences, see especially: Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.496-498, notes 49-59; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', pp.2-7. Since Gewald's thesis deals more specifically with Dithakong, he is not as concerned with a close review of these broader movements, although necessarily he is suggestive of some of them. See Gewald, '"Mountaineers" as Mantatees', ch.8, pp.3,4.

Ngwaketse, hardly affected the collapse of these polities.[3]

Breakaway groups such as the Hartenaars and Bergenaars played a more significant role. Under pressure to submit to colonial demands, a number deserted the Griqua polity for the Harts River, where they reverted to illegal raiding and trading. Their influence was again transitory, because many returned to Griqua Town by the middle of 1817, as a result of promises that their positions would be strengthened within the polity. But they had set the pattern for disaffected groups, of which the Bergenaars would be the most prominent and destructive.[4]

With the ascendence of Waterboer and his efforts to extend his authority, a number - many of them former Hartenaars - withdrew from the Griqua Town area and settled along the Modder River on the western fringe of Southern-Sotho settlements (see map 1). They later became known as the Bergenaars, and were the cause of much devastation in the future. Gert Goeyman was the first to settle in the region in early 1822, and by around February 1823, there were

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[3]See Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to 1820', pp.259,261,262; Theal, Records of the Cape Colony, 11, p.254; 12, pp.34,35; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.245-247; R.G. Wagner, 'Coenraad De Buys in Transorangia', University of London Institute of Commonwealth Studies, collected seminar papers, no.17, vol.4, pp.3,4. Some of these evidences are obscure and cannot be strongly relied upon to determine the extent of this raiding in this period. See for example, C.W. Hutton (ed.), The Autobiography of the late Sir Andries Stockenstrom, vol.1, Cape Town, 1964, p.177.

[4]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.200-209; Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to 1820', pp.271,272.

approximately 10-15 of them.[5] They appear to have focused much of their energies on Griqua Town at this time,[6] but it is possible that they began raiding the Sotho-Tswana. There is little evidence for their raiding until the end of 1823, from when their activities appear to have gained momentum and are well documented. It would appear, given their small numbers and initial disorganisation, that they only became effective raiders towards the end of 1823. It can only be speculated what the extent of their role was before Dithakong.[7]

Towards the end of 1823, a number of forces were unleashed that favoured the possibility of raids upon the Sotho-Tswana. Firstly, by this time, the Bergenaars had grown considerably in numbers, augmented by more Griqua and Koranna bands. Melvill wrote that they now became bold and began plundering, bringing away an immense number of cattle.[8] Secondly, following the unsuccessful

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[5]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, report by Melvill to the colonial secretary, Dec. 1824, p.214; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', p.300. Legassick suggests that their numbers might have been larger by being augmented by Koranna and San at this time. His evidences, however, refer to a later date.

[6]Ibid., p.300.

[7]See for example: Philip, Researches in South Africa, 2, pp.81-91; Thompson, Travels, pp.293-295; Hutton (ed.), Autobiography, p.213; Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, pp.213-215; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.342,343. See also other evidences in Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.497, notes 50-52; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', especially pp.4,5.

[8]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, report by Melvill to the colonial secretary, Dec. 1824, pp.214,215; Philip, Researches in South Africa, 2, pp.79,80; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.342-344.

attempts of the 'kapteyns' against them, the Bergenaars were free from ordered society with room to manoeuvre. For their own particular reasons, the 'kapteyns' had been divided as to what course of action to take. By failing to reach any consensus and colonial support, they allowed the Bergenaars to act without restraint.[9] Thirdly, from about 1824, access to arms and ammunition was more easily obtainable. Legassick argues that in the early stages of the Bergenaar revolt, the rebels were forced to travel to Graaf-Reinet, the Khamiesberg or Little Namaqualand, in order to acquire ammunition. By 1824, however, 'Bushmanland', which had separated colonial society from the Griqua, had been penetrated and the possibilities of illegal trading were more certain.[10] Fourthly, the advance of the colonial frontier together with the eagerness of certain colonists to gain labour, now made the prospects of a trade in captives more practicable.[11] The dislocation on the highveld caused by the 'Mantatee' further fostered raiding opportunities. Trade relations between the Bergenaars and colonial frontiersmen concerning captives were entrenched after Dithakong, when news about numerous, destitute 'Mantatee' wandering to the north, prompted them to apply to the Bergenaars in order to procure these people for them.[12] Given the already dislocated state of the region, then, and a ready 'market', it is from this period

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[9]Ibid., pp.301-304.

[10]Ibid., pp.347,348.

[11]Ibid., pp.354,355.

[12]Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants, Lord C.H. Somerset to the commissioners of inquiry, p.227.

that evidences of a clandestine Bergenaar trade in Sotho-Tswana captives are dated.

The extent of Bergenaar raiding reached dreadful proportions from this time. Initially, they attacked the southern Sotho. By mid-1824, they had taken hundreds of cattle and many captives, and had reduced a number of peoples to the point of starvation. In an effort to end such depredations, Waterboer led a commando in July 1824, dispersing the Bergenaars and depriving them of their acquired cattle. Many of the captured cattle were restored to some hundreds of Sotho refugees, who sought the protection of Waterboer and the newly appointed 'kapteyn', Cornelius Kok II.[13] The intended outcome of Waterboer's commando, however, proved a failure and only caused further disruption in the long term. Deprived of their major exchangeable goods, the Bergenaars could not remain inactive and so directed their attentions northwards towards the Tlhaping and Tlharo. From 1824, they proved a formidable scourge to these Tswana. Many were scattered and impoverished, and their numbers were greatly reduced.[14]

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[13]Ibid., report by Melvill to the colonial secretary, Dec. 1824, pp.216,217; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.310,311.

[14]Ibid., pp.343-345; Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, Robert Moffat to rev. R. Miles, 5 Dec. 1827, pp.272,276,277.

Cobbing and Richner have well illuminated the nature and impact of these raids from this period. Yet they have failed to show, decisively, continuity between this later raiding and earlier Griqua-Bergenaar raiding prior to 1823.

The Koranna

Similarly, the examples for the intensified impact of Koranna raiding date from 1824. Although occasional raiding did take place, there is little evidence to suggest that they were the major perpetrators of violence in either the Transorangian or Vaal-Caledon regions before this time.[15]

The Koranna have been described as Khoi peoples encountered along the Orange, who had retreated before white settlement from the south, and who added to an already existent Khoi population to the north.[16] During the early 1800's, many Koranna were absorbed into the Griqua state, but by 1823, certain bands, determined not to be incorporated, had settled along the Vaal-Harts river junction. The extent of their raids prior to 1823 is difficult to demonstrate on

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[15]See for example: Arbousset and Daumas, Narrative, pp.228,229; C. Murray and W. Lye, Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho, Cape Town, 1980, pp.39-44; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.355-360. Again, some of the earlier examples are vague and cannot be strongly relied upon to determine the extent of Koranna raiding for the earlier period. See Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, p.213; Kirby (ed.), Diary, p.368. See also other evidences in Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.497, note 54; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.368.

[16]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', p.39.

evidential grounds, but they certainly cannot be portrayed as an homogenous, invading force.

Legassick argues that after 1823, pressured by the Bergenaars from the south and unsettled African groups, the Koranna could no longer escape the frontier zone. They either had to arm themselves or be exterminated. In this way, the Koranna were transformed from pre-frontier pastoralists into frontiersmen under military-style leaders. The advance of the colonial market and the subsequent increase in guns; the dislocation caused by the 'Mantatee' coupled with the threats of the Bergenaars; all fostered this transformation. Many Koranna either joined the Bergenaars or formed their own autonomous bands.[17]

Xhosa-offshoots

These groups originated in the eastern districts of the colony. They had acquired firearms and are identified by Cobbing as having joined the Griqua in bolstering their raids.[18] However, they were hardly allies of the Griqua, but rather were set up against them. To be sure they did, at times, join frontier ruffians and raid Koranna, Sotho-Tswana and Griqua groups. Little is known about them. They

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[17]Ibid., p.355; Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to c.1840: The rise and decline of the Griqua people' in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), The Shaping of South African Society, 2nd edition, Cape Town, 1989, p.391.

[18]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', Africa seminar, 1988, p.10. In the journal article, Cobbing does change this and relates that they vied with the Griqua. See p.497.

were relatively few in size and number. Their impact was transitory and by no means catastrophic. The onus is upon Cobbing and Richner to establish otherwise.[19]

The role of the Bergenaars and Koranna reconsidered

The extent of the role of these groups before late 1823 remains highly questionable. It has already been shown that the revisionists fail to explain the upheavals to the north-east of Kuruman on the highveld in the months leading up to Dithakong, without reference to the existence of the foreign group, and that these disruptions must be attributed, at least, to the Phuthing and Hlakoana. Could it be possible, however, that Bergenaar-Koranna attacks began the chain that effected the ousting of groups like the Phuthing and Hlakoana, who later recoiled from their homelands on the Wilge River west of the Drakensberg and advanced on Dithakong?

Considering that the Phuthing and Hlakoana had already been set in motion by 1822, this does not allow much time for the massive impact the Bergenaars and Koranna would have had to exert hundreds of kilometres from their domain in the west, to uproot these communities as a whole in the east. Certainly the

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[19]See for example: Lye (ed.), Andrew Smith's journal, pp.48-50; Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.248-250. See also other evidences in Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', p.497, note 53; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', especially p.5.

Bergenaars did not penetrate this region by this stage,[20] and there is little evidence to suggest that the Koranna had advanced so far with raiding intentions. Neither has it been evidentially ascertained that their attacks set in motion other groups closer to their home base, who in turn devastated areas further afield by this time.[21] The first Sotho refugees into Griqualand, to which Waterboer and Cornelius Kok II offered protection, only arrived towards the middle of 1824. It might also be asked why, given the supposed cataclysmic, disruptive effect on the Sotho, the Tswana polities such as the Tlhaping and Rolong with whom the Koranna had most of their contact among the black communities, should have remained unbroken and intact. Periodisation is crucial. A number of Sotho testified that they were first attacked by the 'Caffres' and then by the Bergenaars.[22] It remains an over-ambitious task to suggest that Bergenaar-Koranna raiding constituted the motor of violence that began the movement, which resulted in the displacement of the Phuthing and Hlakoana.

Cobbing and Richner have well demonstrated the important role of Bergenaar and Koranna raids upon the Sotho-Tswana from late 1823 onwards, which has

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[20]Cobbing, himself, recognizes that by the mid-1820's the Bergenaar reach was no further than Matiwane's Ngwane in the Caledon Valley. See Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.9,10; he suggests this less directly in the journal article, pp.496,497. Richner states that they had penetrated as far as the Caledon and Wilge Rivers by 1822, but this is based on conjecture. Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.5.

[21]See, for example, Cobbing's evidences for the impact of the Taung by this period. As yet, they do not provide strong support. Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.497,498. See also Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', pp.5,6.

[22]Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries', pp.342,343.

often been simplistically explained in terms of Afrocentric and 'mfecane' forces. To be sure, much of the conflicts must be attributed to these groups from this time. However, their thesis lacks evidential support before this period. Certainly these pressures must have played some role in the initial conflicts. It is not the intention of this chapter to undermine the necessity for further research in this area. Detailed case studies of each raiding community are desperately required, which will no doubt establish a more prominent place for the Bergenaars and Koranna. However, to suggest that they singularly caused the chains of violence in the Transorangian region lacks sufficient support. Such a thesis contravenes the existing evidence and requires stronger backing before it can be taken up vigorously. It, therefore, becomes necessary to reconsider the traditional interpretations, which attest that the devastations originated in the east.

The Chain of Violence in the East - The Vaal-Caledon Region

Based largely on oral reports, it has been traditionally argued that the arrival of the Nguni invaders across the Drakensberg began a great cataclysmic event amongst the Sotho, sending the Tlokwa, Phuthing, Hlakoana and others into careers of violence. Cobbing and Richner downplay this evidence. It will be argued that in the light of their failure to incorporate the initial motors of violence within the Transorangian region itself, and following the findings on Dithakong, the traditional interpretations require reconsideration.

The traditional interpretations

The first European travellers into the Vaal-Caledon region gave uniform report, on the basis of their African informants, that it was Matiwane's Ngwane and Mpangazita's Hlubi, who began a desperate time of turmoil. Lye has collated this evidence from a range of African and European sources in his article, 'The Difaqane: The Mfecane in the Southern Sotho Area, 1822-24'. He regarded his findings as 'tentatively substantiated', yet clear with respect to the identity of those involved. He was cautious to corroborate the oral traditions with other oral and documentary evidence, and noted the differences in these traditions when they conflicted.[23]

Lye argued that because of the segmentary nature of Sotho societies, they were unable to unite in a dynamic polity, which could resist the advanced military and political system of the Nguni invaders. In the face of the invaders, they rather separated into a number of antagonistic communities in a period of immense destruction.[24] The Hlubi were the first Nguni group to arrive between the upper Caledon and the Vaal at the beginning of 1822 (see map 1). They fell upon MaNtatisi's Tlokwa along the Elands River who, unwilling to ally with Letlale,

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[23]Lye, 'The Difaqane', p.131.

[24]Ibid., pp.115,117; W.F. Lye, 'The distribution of the Sotho peoples after the Difaqane' in L. Thompson (ed.), African Societies in Southern Africa, London, 1969, p.191.

chief of the Sia, retreated down the Caledon Valley, where she followed the example of the invaders, and sustained her dispossessed adherents by raiding weaker communities. In this way, the highveld was left disunited against the militant Nguni. Lye traced the raids of MaNtatisi in the Vaal-Caledon region that gained her her infamous reputation. She did not venture beyond the Vaal, as had previously erroneously been suspected, but he suggested her escapades in the Vaal-Caledon appeared just as devastating as those of the Phuthing and Hlakoana beyond it.[25]

The Phuthing and Hlakoana were also uprooted as a community, and were forced to move from their homelands along the Wilge River. They crossed the Vaal in a north-westerly direction, eventually moving southwards towards Kuruman. Robbed of their cattle and forced to abandon their sown fields, they resembled the extreme deprivation of many communities in this two year period of intense turmoil. The degree of desperation was overwhelming. The Phuthing and Hlakoana were referred to as 'hungry wolves' by the Tswana. A severe famine only intensified the destitution, so that even cannibalism began to manifest itself.[26] Lye, assuredly, painted a grim picture of the impact of the Nguni invaders in the years 1822-4.

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[25]Lye, 'The Difaqane', pp.117-119.

[26]Ibid., pp.123-127.

The response of the revisionists

There is no disagreement pertaining to the arrival of the Ngwane and Hlubi in the Vaal-Caledon region by the early 1820's. However, both Cobbing and Richner assert that the scale of the violence between these groups and the established residents of the Vaal-Caledon has been grossly exaggerated. They argue the fact that by 1824-5 the Tlokwa, Hlubi and Ngwane were living relatively close together, and had sought out flat-topped mountains for defence, suggests that they were not mortal enemies, but, rather, had made local accommodations in response to exterior menaces to them all. These exterior menaces are identified as Griqua-Bergenaar-Koranna raiders.[27]

The revisionists deal briefly with the traditionally alleged severity of the Nguni/Sotho conflicts around 1822-4. They notice, correctly, that the evidences for the activities of these groups are derived primarily from oral traditions. Few literate reporters had penetrated this region by 1823. It was only later that the traditional histories were documented. Cobbing and Richner believe that these traditions, when recorded years later, have been fundamentally tainted, and cannot be relied upon for determining original reality. Richner, for example, argues:

> Informants and interpreters sometimes consciously misinformed the

[27]Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi', pp.507,508; Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', p.10.

> recipient. Owing to their 'settler mentality', Europeans often took information purely literally. Their ignorance of the 'rules of the game' made it difficult to interpret such information and this led to misinterpretations. There was also ignorance of the language and the incompetence of interpreters. All this made the decoding of reality hazardous.[28]

For this reason, the revisionists wholly dismiss African versions of the past. Oral traditions are totally neglected, described as being overly generalised, dramatised, embellished and exaggerated.

A response to the revisionists

Certainly the need for a highly critical review of African responses, which have too often been accepted at face value, is urgently required. The decoding of oral traditions poses no easy task, involving a whole deconstruction of their own histories. The researcher would do well to follow Vansina's seminal points, aiming to examine the circumstances under which the traditions came to be transcribed, and to establish the background, interests and experiences of both the informant and the transcriber.[29] It is beyond the boundaries of this thesis to make such an industrious critique, but the necessity for a critical reassessment of the African

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[28]Ibid., p.3.

[29]See J. Vansina, Oral Tradition as History, London, 1985.

responses recorded by the first Europeans into the region is strongly promoted.

The approach of the revisionists, however, to dismiss wholly African oral sources is both unhelpful and unwarranted. Many of the African responses derive from survivors of that period of the 'blank unknown space', that require close scrutiny, rather than outright rejection. Although the difficulties in decoding African sources are noted and respected,[30] Cobbing and Richner are arguing the monolithic case that whites completely controlled the production of history, independent of the historical consciousness of the Africans. It is difficult to suggest that nothing of African intellectual history from this period has reached the present.

Before serious revision of African responses is pursued, the following points related to the findings on Dithakong suggest, in the meantime, at least the partial authentication of these oral traditions. The fact that the 'Mantatee' prisoners related that they had been driven from their countries in the east by the 'Matabele', gives these sources strong credibility. From the descriptions given, it was believed by Moffat and others that the Matabele either referred to the southern or northern Nguni.[31] This agrees with Ellenberger who, on oral

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[30]Certainly there is a place for embellishment and exaggeration. See for example: Arbousset and Daumas, Narrative, p.297.

[31]Schapera (ed.), Apprenticeship, R. Moffat, journal, 21 July 1823, p.101. See also Cope (ed.), Journals, p.182.

evidence, noted the following about the derivation of the word:

> It was during this period [the Lifaqane] that the designation Matabele was given to the Kaffirs of Natal by the Basuto. It is a derivative of the verb ho tebele, 'to drive away', and means 'the destroyers'.....the Basuto designated all those to the east of it [the Drakensberg] by the term Matabele, which includes the Zulus, Swazis, Hlubi, Amangwane, and many others.[32]

Refugees from lands north of the Tembu, who began filtering into the eastern districts of the colony as early as 1822-3, a number of months before Dithakong, also stated that they were fleeing the commotions of a numerous nation, who pressed upon them from the north and east, bringing unprecedented times of upheaval.[33]

The nature of the uprooted 'Mantatee' communities at Dithakong - numerous, destitute and desperate - reflects something of the heightened scale of violence in the Vaal-Caledon region, originating in the east, and the corresponding destructive character of the fleeing communities forced into careers of violence. The very reference to 'Mantatee', which those at Dithakong themselves denied

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[32]Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, p.120. See also Arbousset and Daumas, Narrative, p.134.

[33]Thompson, Travels, p.38. It would appear that these were refugees fleeing African sources of violence, as opposed to later refugees into the Graaf-Reinet, Beaufort and Albany districts, from about 1824, who either took flight from Bergenaar ravages or were seized.

and insisted applied to numerous other powerful groups invading the interior, suggests that a number of other peoples in the Vaal-Caledon suffered similar fates. Considering that the word specifically applied to MaNtatisi's Tlokwa and became the epithet by which other invading groups were known, indicates that the Tlokwa, having been displaced by forces from the east similar to the Phuthing and Hlakoana, became engaged in a series of attacks as devastating in the Vaal-Caledon as those of the Phuthing and Hlakoana beyond the Vaal.

It would appear the African oral reports need to be taken more seriously and cannot be dismissed lightly. The dislocation of whole communities from east to west in a period of intensive deprivation and formidable strife, stemming from Nguni forces in the east and sustained by continued inter Sotho-Tswana attacks, particularly around 1822-3, cannot easily be disregarded. It has been suggested that these forces constituted the primary motors of violence for this period.

A Synthesis

It might be questioned, at this point, whether this study serves to ratify the traditional 'mfecane' model. Without completely returning to this model, which has hitherto provided the bedrock concept for the history of southern Africa in the first half of the nineteenth-century, this section of the chapter will aim to propose a synthesis with regard to the nature of the conflicts, in so far as it pertains to the violence west of the Drakensberg. It is hoped that such an

approach will contribute a more adequate framework for further detailed research in this area.

The traditional 'mfecane' model and the revisionist critiques

Past histories of this period of upheaval written within the 'mfecane' paradigm have emphasized the Afrocentric nature of the turmoil.[34] 'Mfecane' theory postulates that Zulu expansionism precipitated the chain reactions of violence and population migrations that thrust the interior into immense destabilization. The concept of the 'mfecane' has become so broad and multiple over the decades as to deserve presently any continued analytical usefulness. Today, the 'mfecane' can refer, in its broadest sense, to the Zulucentric diaspora, which affected vast regions of south-central Africa as far away as Lake Victoria, and which encompassed an era of history beginning at the end of the eighteenth-century to the end of the nineteenth-century.

Cobbing has rightly demonstrated the many myths that constitute this macro-theory, by revealing errors of fact, problems of periodisation and the theory's

[34]See for example: Theal, History of South Africa, pp.428-456; Stow, The Native Races of South Africa, pp.460-487; Cory, The Rise of South Africa, pp.230-239 (It needs to be repeated that although Theal, Stow and Cory do not use the term 'mfecane', their view of the Zulu wars and its effects are similar to those who later referred to the concept.); Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.137-236; MacGregor, Basuto Traditions; Macmillan, Bantu, Boer, and Briton, pp.14-18; Walker, A History of South Africa, pp.175,176; Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath; Murray and Lye, Transformations on the Highveld, pp.28-39.

pervading Afrocentricism.[35] The challenge has become to deconstruct the development of the 'mfecane' as macro-myth. Probably the major failing of the 'mfecane' model has been to separate developments in southern African history which were closely allied. Attention to 'European' aggression has been denied, resulting in the concealment of many of these atrocities. Complex interconnected processes have often rather been simplistically explained in terms of Zulu or African agency. In the words of Cobbing, the model has served to evade 'an analysis of the nineteenth-century confrontation in South Africa between black and white races and of the consequences for African societies of white expansionism.'[36] Later Afrikaner historians and apartheid apologists have, in time, used the 'mfecane' explanation for the depeopling of the interior to justify Afrikaner expansionism, white occupation of land, the ideology of separate development and the continuation of white rule. Certainly 'mfecane' theory has separated the inseparable. The revisionists are correct to expose and establish the role of 'European' agency as a causative factor of violence for this region and period.

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[35]See in particular, Cobbing, 'The case against the mfecane'.

[36]Ibid., p.16. This is not to suggest that 'mfecane' theory deliberately aimed to serve such a purpose from the beginning. This thesis argues against the 'mfecane' being a massive conspiracy created by Europeans. See also Hamilton, '"The character and objects of Chaka"', pp.2-4. Saunders has also shown that the early settler voice and the voice of the liberal historians did not completely separate colonial history from the 'mfecane', and that they cannot be associated with the later apartheid apologists, who gave the ideological purpose to the 'mfecane' of justifying the racially unequal division of land. See C. Saunders, 'Cobbing, the Mfecane and (Some) Historians', paper prepared for The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of the Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991.

In terms of the role of Griqua-Bergenaar-Koranna raiding, Cobbing and Richner have rightly relocated the extent of their attacks after 1823-4. Although 'mfecane' writers included these forces in the 'mfecane' wars, they failed to address their nature and impact in a cohesive and analytical way.[37] Cobbing and Richner have begun this process of revision. Indeed, the magnitude of their attacks has yet to be fully realised. Their raids were especially destructive, given their ready access to arms and ammunition. Both Sotho-Tswana and Nguni communities suffered greatly. Mzilikazi's Ndebele faced many frontal assaults, just as it appears Griqua-Bergenaar attacks played an important part in driving the Ngwane southward from the Caledon Valley.[38]

The counter-paradigm with critique

Cobbing and Richner, however, have carried their critique further to the extent of denying an effective place for African agency. Intent on demolishing virtually every aspect of 'mfecane' theory, they have inextricably linked their re-examination with their counter-paradigm of 'European' penetration as basis. By attempting to explain the upheavals of the interior primarily within the supposition of 'European' expansion for labour, they make the very same mistake

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[37]See Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.212-216; Cory, The Rise of South Africa, 2, p.230; Stow, The Native Races of South Africa, p.485; Macmillan, Bantu, Boer, and Briton, p.15; Murray and Lye, Transformations on the Highveld, pp.39-44.

[38]See Richner, 'The withering away of the "lifaqane"', ch.5,6; Cobbing, 'The mfecane as alibi' p.508. Peires, however, disputes this in 'Matiwane's Road to Mbholompho'.

for which they criticize 'mfecane' theorists. Their error is to shift the pendulum to the other extreme by only emphasizing the 'Eurocentric' nature of the violence. Their view of the creation of the 'mfecane' myth becomes as Eurocentric as 'mfecane' theory is Afrocentric. Their efforts to root the initial chains of violence west of the Drakensberg in terms of Griqua-Bergenaar-Koranna attacks fails in periodisation and cannot be strongly maintained. These shortcomings, together with their legitimate concerns regarding 'mfecane' theory, suggest the necessity for a new framework to be considered.

A third way

This study has suggested that the initial chains of devastation around 1822-3 west/north-west of the Drakensberg appear, in essence, African. Certainly some place in the upheavals must be attributed to pressures from the west, but they appear secondary during this period. From 1823-4, they played a more dominant part. This is the synthesis approach proposed, whereby the conflicts in the West need to be viewed as a complex interplay of 'European' and African forces, initially essentially African in character in the years 1822-3, stemming from the arrival of the northern Nguni west of the Drakensberg, with 'European' forces from the west increasingly coming to play after 1823-4.

It would seem, then, that this study affirms in a limited way certain elements of 'mfecane' theory. A review of the earlier 'mfecane' writers shows that they did not

mean the word in the macro-sense.[39] In fact, the first writers, who rather used the term 'lifaqane' or 'difaqane', referred the word primarily to the Transorangian disruptions amongst the Sotho west of the Drakensberg, covering a relatively short period 1820-1828. Although they also over-elaborated upon the Afrocentric nature of the turmoil, they emphasized little the self-generated internal revolution of Shaka and rather focused upon the displacements of chiefdoms west of the Drakensberg.[40] For this reason, the chains of violence west of the Drakensberg have been referred, more strictly, as the 'lifaqane' or 'difaqane', as opposed to the later, broader less tenable Zulucentric 'mfecane'.

The very word 'mfecane' appears to have derived from the term 'fetcane', used in the eastern Cape to relate ultimately to the northern Nguni, which itself derived from the Sotho 'lifaqane'. The Sotho west of the Drakensberg were the first to use the term, by alluding to the northern Nguni as the 'Bakoni' or 'Lifakoni, that is to say, those who hew down, or cut their enemies in pieces with the chake, their formidable battle axe'.[41] Over time, the word appears to have

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[39]See for example: Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.137-236; MacGregor, Basuto Traditions; Cory, The Rise of South Africa, 2, pp.230-239; Stow, The Native Races of South Africa, pp.460-487; Theal, History of South Africa, pp.428-456; Macmillan, Bantu, Boer, and Briton, pp.14-18; Walker, A History of South Africa, pp.175,176. This is also true for recent writers such as Murray and Lye in Transformations on the Highveld, pp.28-39. It was only through Omer-Cooper in The Zulu Aftermath of the 1960's that the term assumed its broader meaning.

[40]See Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, pp.137-236; MacGregor, Basuto Traditions.

[41]Arbousset and Daumas, Narrative, p.134. This relates to Lye's translation of 'difaqane' as hammering which is rendered in Sotho orthography: Lye, 'The Difaqane', p.107. Mabille and Dieterlen in their Southern Sotho English Dictionary, Morija, 1961,

gained a broader meaning amongst the Sotho signifying a period of wars 'waged by nomadic tribes accompanied on the warpath by their women, children and property, as distinct from the ordinary kind of war between settled tribes where only the fighting men go out'.[42] Its initial rendering, however, seems to relate to the coming of the Nguni, who brought with them a distinctive time of trouble. Clearly, if there exists any truth within the concept of the 'mfecane', it must surely relate to the 'difaqane' and the initial chains of violence caused by the Nguni invaders in the Vaal-Caledon region around 1822-3, that were largely over by 1823-4.

As a route to a new framework, this study suggests the need for the recognition of two macro-myths - one 'Eurocentric' and the other Afrocentric - both of which require to be dismantled. They have both in their own ways created a barrier with respect to the historiography of the early nineteenth-century southern Africa interior. The challenge has become to deconstruct the development of both theories, carefully considering the aspects which should be retained and those that should be rejected as myth.

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refer 'kone (Mokone, Bakone, Dikone)' to a member of the Nguni. It does not appear tenable that the word 'fetcane' had its ultimate origins in the eastern Cape as Cobbing proposes in 'The case against the mfecane', p.14.

[42]MacGregor, Basuto Traditions, p.8. See also Ellenberger, History of the Basuto, p.117.

Final remarks

Certainly the precise functioning of the socio-economic-political processes behind the initial African motors of violence and subsequent chain reactions remains unresolved. To what extent were eastern 'European' forces involved behind the coming of the Nguni? What part did African economic and environmental factors, together with their effects upon the internal dynamics within African polities, play? These are questions that lie beyond the boundaries of the thesis. So far as Dithakong has any bearing, it has been suggested that Portugese slaving played some part in the initial upheavals in the east.[43] To argue that the chains of disruption east of the Drakensberg were the singular result of Portugese based slaving at Delagoa Bay, however, continues to be far from established. It seems unhelpful to deny the important place of other considerations in search of a simple monocausal replacement explanation.[44]

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[43]See ch.3, p.83, note 60.

[44]For the latest debates considering the causative factors east, north-east of the Drakensberg, see for example: Cobbing, 'Rethinking the Roots'; Cobbing, 'Ousting the Mfecane'; Cobbing, 'Grasping the Nettle: The Slave Trade and the Early Zulu', paper presented to the workshop on Natal and Zululand in the Colonial and Precolonial periods, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1990; Hamilton, '"The character and objects of Chaka"'; Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa'; J. Wright, 'Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's "Mfecane"', Africa seminar, April 1989; and the following papers presented at The 'Mfecane' Aftermath: towards a new paradigm, University of Witwatersrand, 6-9 Sept. 1991: C. Gorham, 'Port Natal: a "Blind" Darkness. Speculation, trade, the creation of a vortex of violence and the "mfecane"'; J. Gump, 'Origins of the Mfecane: an Ecological Perspective'; J. Wright, 'Political Transformations in Natal in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries'.

5. CONCLUSION

The battle of Dithakong has shown itself to be at the very heart of the latest debates with respect to the early nineteenth-century history of the southern African interior. It has revealed both the poverty of the revisionists' singular Eurocentric theory of violence and their methodology, posing questions for other areas of their work. To be sure, Dithakong remains more than just an historical battle site of the 1820's, but is a critical location for the very future of nineteenth-century southern African historiography of the interior.

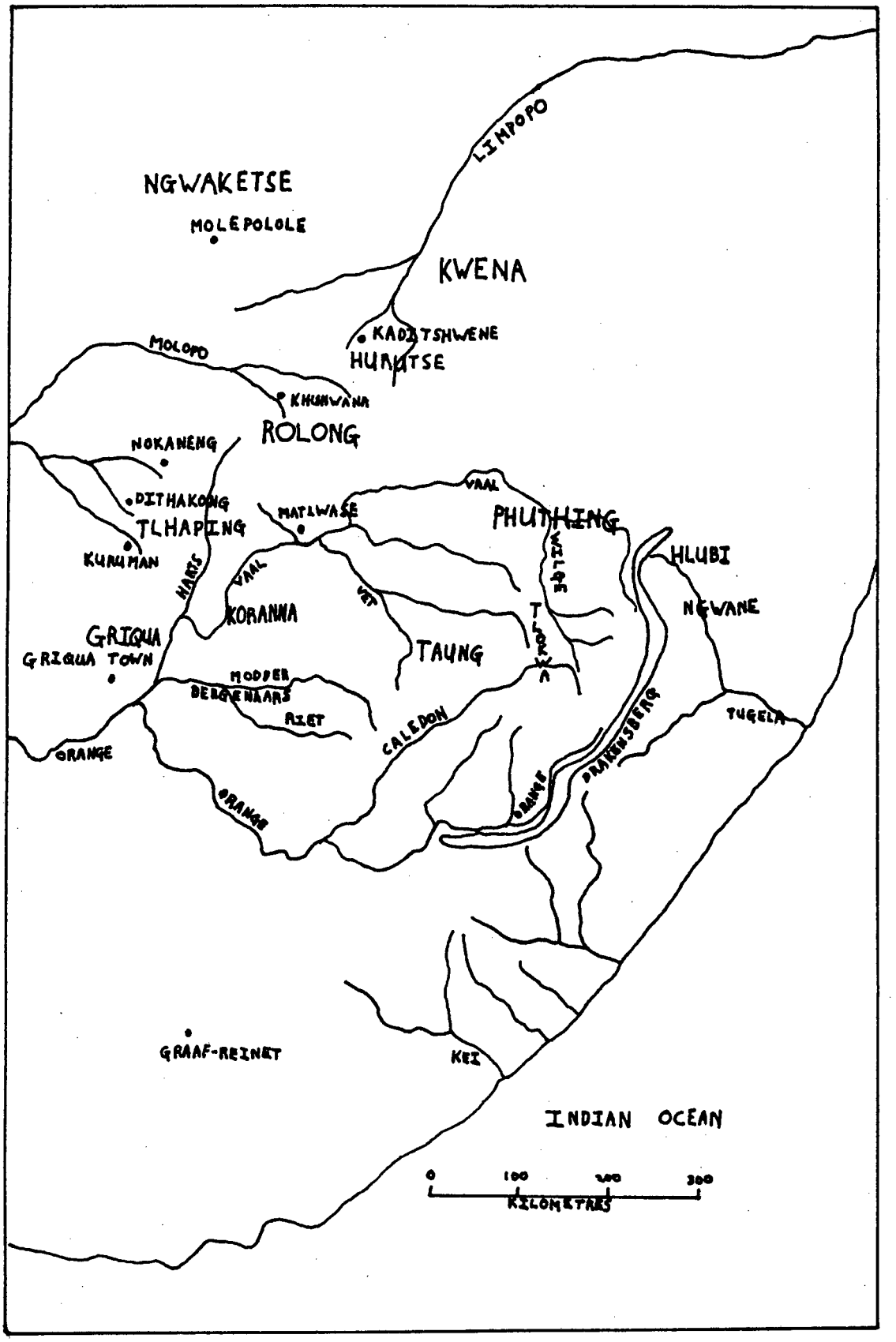
The revisionist versions present a number of challenges both positive and negative for the future. Firstly, on the negative side, the fact that their methodology is dictated by their broader suppositions, provides a stumbling block for further study. Secondly, their preoccupation with white, 'European' agency leads to an overstated Eurocentric account of events. This is not merely exaggerated in terms of the role of Europeans within the chains of violence, but also in terms of the manipulation of the production of history by whites. To suggest that whites 'invented' the battle of Dithakong and the 'mfecane' myth, independently of the historical consciousness of the Africans, is just as problematic. Thirdly, a related criticism is that such a preoccupation with white agency allows little place for dynamic internal forces generating change within African societies. African agency cannot be completely ignored. African explanations of a self-generated revolution need to be reconsidered, and at the same time deconstructed of their mythical

elements. Similarly, the revisionists' preoccupation with the supposed manipulation of white sources leads to the neglect of the search for African responses and an African voice of the past. Oral traditions and etymologies of words of African origin fail to be pursued.

Firstly, on the positive side, the revisionists' accusations have forced a highly critical methodology, especially in those areas where the empirical grounds are not so sure. For too long, historians have been far too content with the convenient, but often overly simplistic assumptions they have held. Historians have been alerted to the need for a closer analysis of the production of documents and an instructive deconstruction of oral traditions. Secondly, a place for the role of white, 'European' agency as a causative factor of violence, often hitherto ascribed to Africans, has been made certain. At the same time, the mythical aspects of African agency require to be refined.

It has been the intention of this thesis to expose the inadequate foundation upon which the revisionists' Eurocentric theory of the chains of violence west of the Drakensberg is built. It is hoped that the synthesis approach proposed will provide a more suitable framework for further research in the area.

APPENDIX: Map 1



The highveld in the early 1820's

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