

**RE-THINKING THE GREAT TREK: A STUDY OF THE NATURE
AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOER COMMUNITY IN THE
OHRIGSTAD/LYDENBURG AREA, 1845-1877**

by

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Abstract

From the late 1830s Boer settlers conquered and settled vast new lands outside the Cape Colony. Although they more than doubled the area of European domination, historians have categorised Boer society outside the British colonies as primitive and dismissed the Boer conquests as an aberration from the broader process of European expansion. Such a distinction is no longer tenable. This study, which focuses on the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area, shows that the Boers were an integral part of European expansion in southern Africa. Settler expansion did not occur in a vacuum. Booming demand for commodities sparked economic growth across the sub-continent; the Boers were part of this process and consistently strove to produce for the region's expanding markets. In tandem with the expanding regional system, the Boer economy grew constantly. This was reflected in the centralisation of power in the Z.A.R. as Boer producers created formal political and administrative structures to further their economic interests. (A parallel process culminated in the Cape with colonists receiving representative government in March 1853.) This correlation between political and economic development was evident in the creation of a coercive labour system by the Boer state. Through their control of state structures, the Boers employed measures ranging from brute force to punitive taxation, legally enforceable contracts and pass laws to procure and control workers. It is important to note that the creation of a coercive labour system by the Boers paralleled similar developments in the Cape Colony. The speed with which the Boer economy expanded in comparison to the Cape, however, meant that stages in the development of an unfree labour force which had been chronologically distinct in the Cape coexisted within the Boer coercive system. Boer dependence on coerced labour made conflict with African groups inevitable. African groups in the eastern Transvaal had already been partly moulded by predatory economic forces emanating from the Portuguese settlements on the east coast since at least the 1750s. The arrival of the Boers in the 1840s greatly accelerated this process. Some groups were crushed, but others were able to obtain the

means to resist Boer rule by interfacing with the settler economy. The economic forces which drove Boer settlement were thus not confined to the white settlers: Boer expansion was paralleled by the rise of African survivor states. The Dlamini, for example, built the powerful Swazi state by exchanging captives, ivory and cattle for guns and horses. Similarly, the Pedi, through the large scale export of migrant labour, were able to acquire the means to challenge Boer authority in the late 1870s. Clearly then, the Boers were not only representative of the wider settler social and economic order, but were acting in response to the same circumstances as the British settlers, Portuguese traders and African survivor states. It is thus impossible to continue to classify them as retrogressive and distinct from other groups in the region.

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Glossary

Commandant	Military head of a district or group of districts. For most of its history the Z.A.R. had four: Lydenburg, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg and Zoutpansburg.
Commandant-generaal	Commander-in-chief of all Boer forces.
Commando	Official Boer expedition, usually military but also invoked for trade, diplomatic or reconnaissance purposes.
Inboekseling	Apprentice.
Krygsraad	Military council.
Heemraad	Official local committee of citizens.
Landrost	Paid district official. Z.A.R equivalent of a magistrate. (Note: many authors use the spelling Landros. This is the present day Afrikaans spelling and not the contemporary Dutch version.)
Smous	Itinerant trader.
Staats Sekretaris	Secretary of State.
Trekker	Participant in the Great Trek, a specific historical construct which sees Boer settlement as a flight from the Cape Colony.
Uitvoerende Raad	Executive Council.
Veldcornet	Administrative and military head of a ward.
Veldcornetcy	Jurisdiction of veldcornet.
Volksraad	Republican Parliament
Wyk	Ward of district. (Note: wyk and veldcornetcy can be used interchangeably, depending on the context. Each wyk having a veldcornet.)

Abbreviations

O.F.S.	Orange Free State
Z.A.R.	Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek/South African Republic.
V.O.C.	Dutch East India Company.

Notes on currency

Units of currency have not been standardised in this work as an accurate rate of exchange between pounds sterling (£) and rixdollars (Rds) has not been established and the types of currency have been used as cited in the original sources. Between 1810 and 1840 the rixdollar and the pound sterling (consisting of twenty shillings) co-existed at the Cape. In 1810 the rixdollar was valued at four shillings. By 1825 the rixdollar had devalued to one shilling and sixpence. The rixdollar was abolished as legal tender in the Cape on 31 March 1831. Although the Boers outside the Cape continued to use rixdollars alongside pounds sterling, any attempt to establish a general exchange rate would be misleading. The value of the currencies was strongly affected by regional conditions as well as by the attitude of the parties to the transactions in which the different currencies were used.

Introduction

The most frequent response of those discovering that my research concerns Boer settlement outside the Cape colony is one of incredulity. Most people believe there is little more to be learned about the Boer emigration from the Cape Colony, commonly known as the Great Trek. Ironically, in spite of this professed knowledge, Boer settlement outside the Cape Colony remains profoundly misunderstood. The Boer settlers rapidly expanded the area of European domination, incorporated these new lands into the regional economy and introduced an administrative system that entrenched the use of unfree labour, underpinned private property and facilitated trade; yet Boer society is still dismissed as primitive. Certainly the Boer state, lacking the financial and coercive power provided by the Cape's imperial links, was at times weak and disorganised. However this should not obscure the fact that in less than four decades the Boers established an effective modern state. In light of this achievement, I was from the outset critical of the view that the Boers were primitives and at odds with an increasingly modern colonial order. The purpose of this study is thus to cast new light on Boer settlement outside the Cape Colony by contextualising the development of a single Boer community in the broader process of European-led conquest and commerce in the region.

The focus of the work is the Boer community at Ohrigstad/Lydenburg in the eastern Transvaal. This group was chosen for several reasons. During the late 1840s the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers were the economically and politically dominant settler group north of the Vaal River, but this position was usurped within a few years by the ascendant Potchefstroom and Rustenburg communities. The shift in power away from Ohrigstad/Lydenburg provides a useful insight into the wider political and economic development of the Z.A.R..

The Boer economy in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area is also interesting. While not as prosperous as their peers to the south, the district's Boer settlers engaged in a wide range of commercial activities. The settlement began its life as a hunter/raider community but soon moved on to the production of beef and then wool. As the size of the internal market grew, especially after the

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discovery of gold at Pilgrimsrest, arable farming became viable. Non-productive commercial activities such as land speculation and transport riding were also well represented. This economic diversity furnishes a useful picture of the many ways in which European settlers brought new lands into the regional economy.

Ohrigstad/Lydenburg was also adjacent to several large African societies and the Boer relationship with these groups is especially fascinating. Africans elsewhere in the Transvaal were rapidly crushed by the advancing settlers but the eastern Transvaal was different for two reasons. Firstly, the mountainous terrain allowed those Africans able to obtain firearms to fortify themselves, forcing attackers to bear the expense of a protracted siege or risk heavy casualties storming well-defended citadels. Secondly, Africans in the area had long been subjected to disruptive intrusions emanating from the Portuguese trading settlements, such as those at Delagoa Bay, Inhambane, Tete, and Sofala. The societies best able to cope with these incursions were those able to interface with commercial forces emanating from the bay. When the Boers accelerated the process of economic intrusion into the area these societies had already developed the structures with which to respond to the Boer threat. Ohrigstad/Lydenburg thus provides a rare opportunity to examine the African response to European economic intrusions.

Having decided to use Ohrigstad/Lydenburg as the prism with which to view Boer society, the district's borders had to be established. This presented a considerable problem as long distances separated Ohrigstad/Lydenburg from other centres of Boer occupation. During the early years, large parts of this territory were unmapped and unoccupied by the settlers and so, for much of its history, Ohrigstad/Lydenburg's boundaries were fluid and undefined. The yardstick I have used to define the district is the jurisdiction of the Lydenburg *Landrost*, but even this often changed. For example, Lydenburg's cession from the Z.A.R. in 1857, the incorporation of Utrecht in 1858 and Lydenburg's eventual reincorporation into the Z.A.R. in 1860 all affected the jurisdiction of the *Landrost*. Also, as population density grew, areas previously part of Lydenburg were made districts in their own right; Heidelberg received its own *Landrost* in 1866 and Middelburg in 1872. Unavoidably then, Ohrigstad/Lydenburg as a definable geographic unit must at different

times mean different things. However a broad indication of the district's changing borders is provided by Map C.

Simpler than defining the district's limits was deciding on a time-frame within which to situate the study with the years 1845-77 as the obvious choice. Ohrigstad was established in 1845 and the first phase of independent Boer rule was ended by the British occupation of 1877. The period 1845-77 also accords well with the objectives of the work. Historians who believe the Boers were in flight from the Cape Colony suffer great difficulty establishing the date at which the Great Trek (to use their term) ended and broader settler expansion resumed. This study, which is highly critical of the central premise of the Great Trek concept (that the Boers should be treated separately from the broader process of European expansion and conquest at work in the region), faces no such problems. Because it seeks to contextualise rather than differentiate, this work does not have to establish an arbitrary cut-off point - the first period of Boer rule provides more than enough material for an assessment to be made.

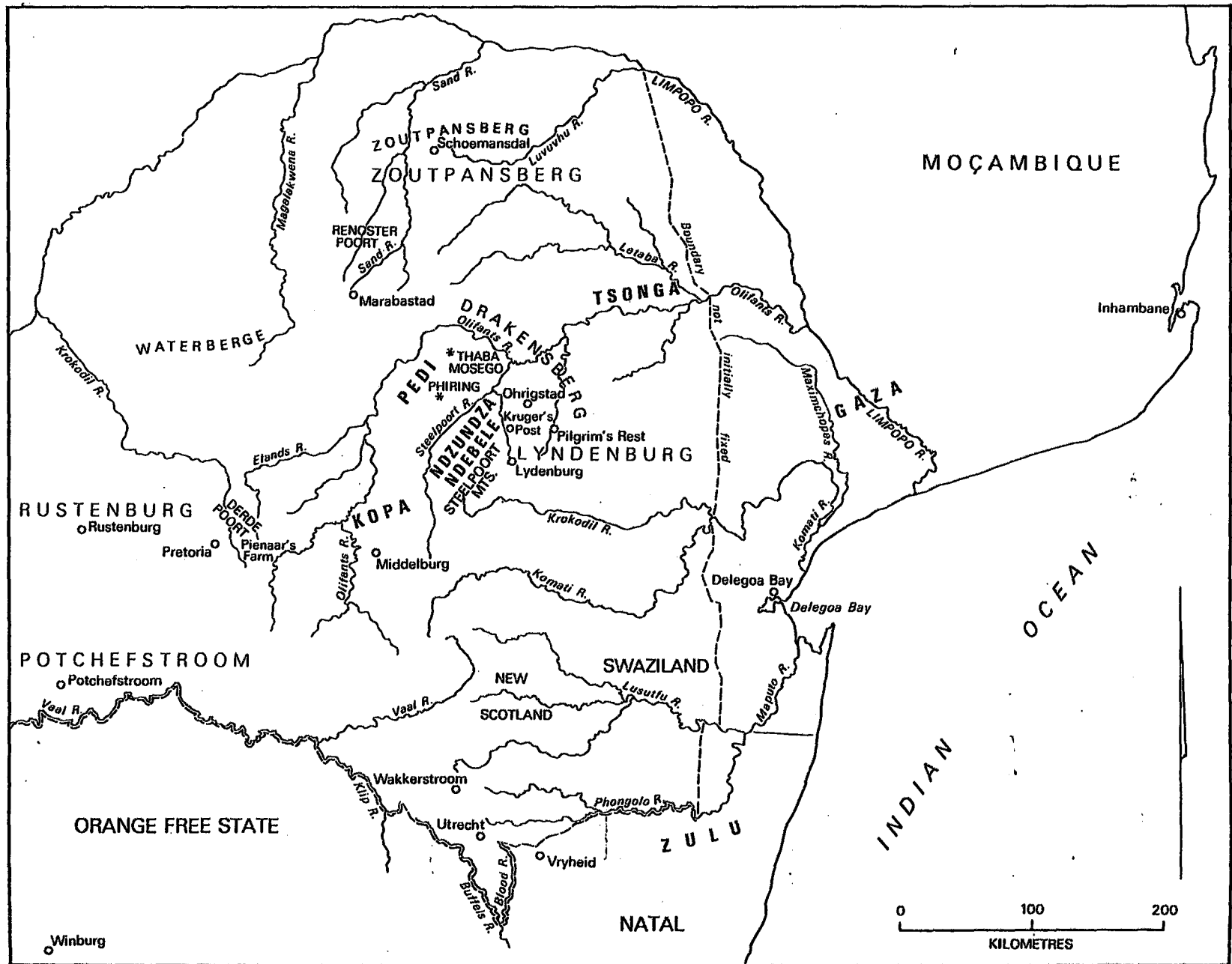
The primary research was done at the Transvaal archives in Pretoria and consisted predominantly of the official records of the Boer state. While a rich store of information is contained in these documents, several lacunae do exist which caused me some frustration. In particular, the *Volksraad* minutes often express Boer intentions rather than describe actual actions. This problem is most serious in regard to Africans where *Volksraad* decisions were often unenforced. An often more useful source were the records of the Lydenburg *Landrost*. Consisting largely of correspondence between the *Landrost* and ordinary citizens in the district, these volumes provide a better picture of the local situation. Another glaring omission from the Boer records is the absence of any mention of women. Only the occasional reference to widows and orphans gives any indication that the Boer settlers were not an exclusively male society. Thus, if this research seems male centred, it is not voluntarily so but rather echoes the sexism of Boer society as reflected in the available sources. The voice of Africans in the eastern Transvaal is also muted in this work. The Boer records are by definition one-sided with regard to Africans and are often in need of corroboration. Other perspectives on events could have been obtained from the

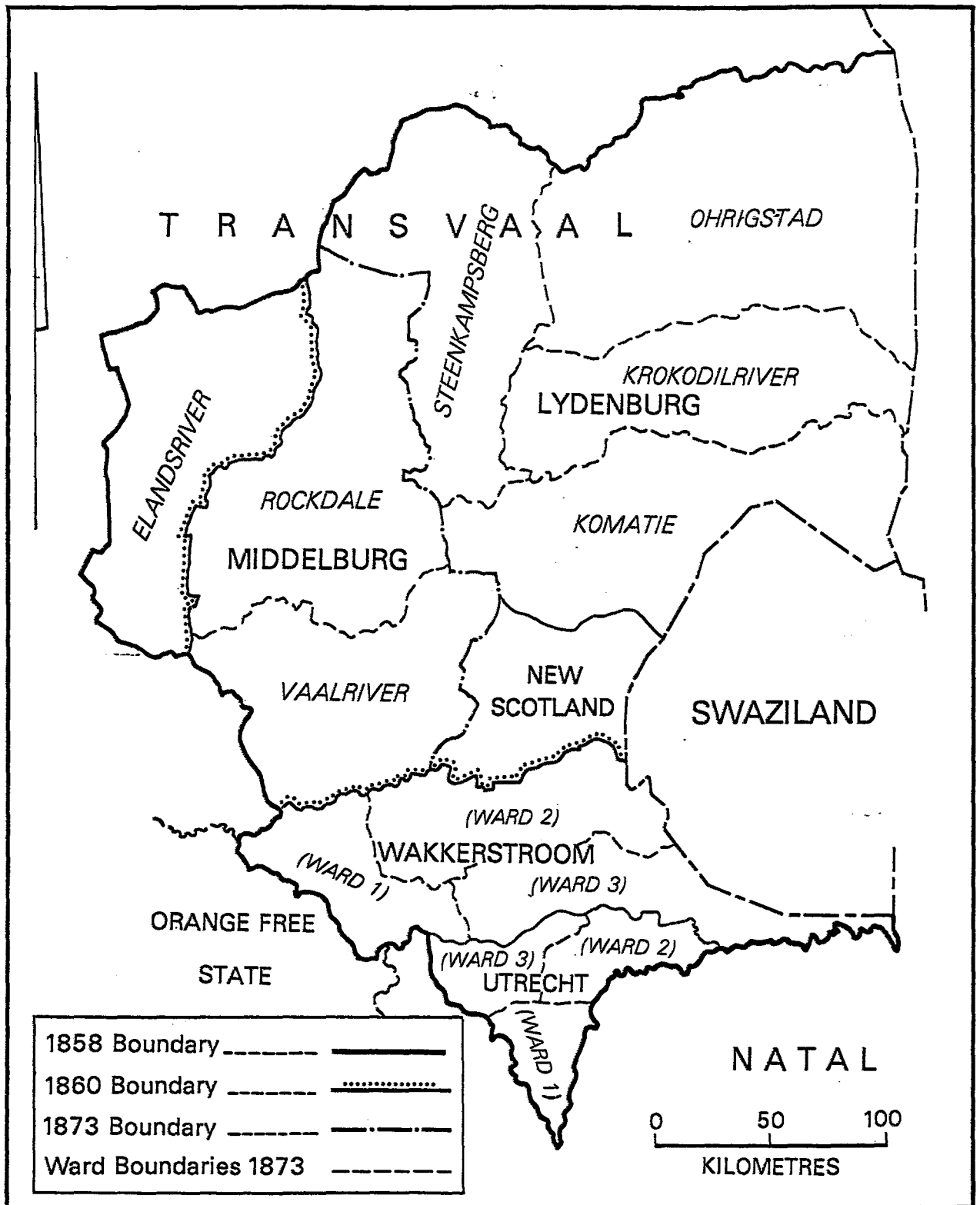
records of the Berlin Missionary Society (mainly held in Berlin, Germany) or by gathering oral evidence. Unfortunately, linguistic and logistical difficulties denied me access to these sources. Their omission was partly overcome by drawing on the work of authors in related fields, such as Philip Bonner and Peter Delius, who have utilised these sources.

As the subjects of this study were Dutch speaking, mention should be made of the use of non-English words in the text. Where possible I have translated, but as a rule titles held by officers of the Boer state have been retained as have the names of places and people. (A glossary has been provided to assist non-Dutch speakers.) The retention of some Dutch was not without its problems. Especially during the early years, spelling in the documentary records was far from constant and had to be standardised. Some non-standard spellings have been retained where they occur in a direct quote or the title of a book.

Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge those individuals whose assistance made this study possible. Dr. Julian Cobbing supervised the work and his interest and willingness to exchange ideas was an inspiration. Oakley West of the Rhodes University Geography Department kindly undertook the production of the maps. Special thanks to my parents whose confidence and support made this work possible. I would also like to thank my wife Gillian for her encouragement and assistance in preparing the text.

Map A: The Transvaal





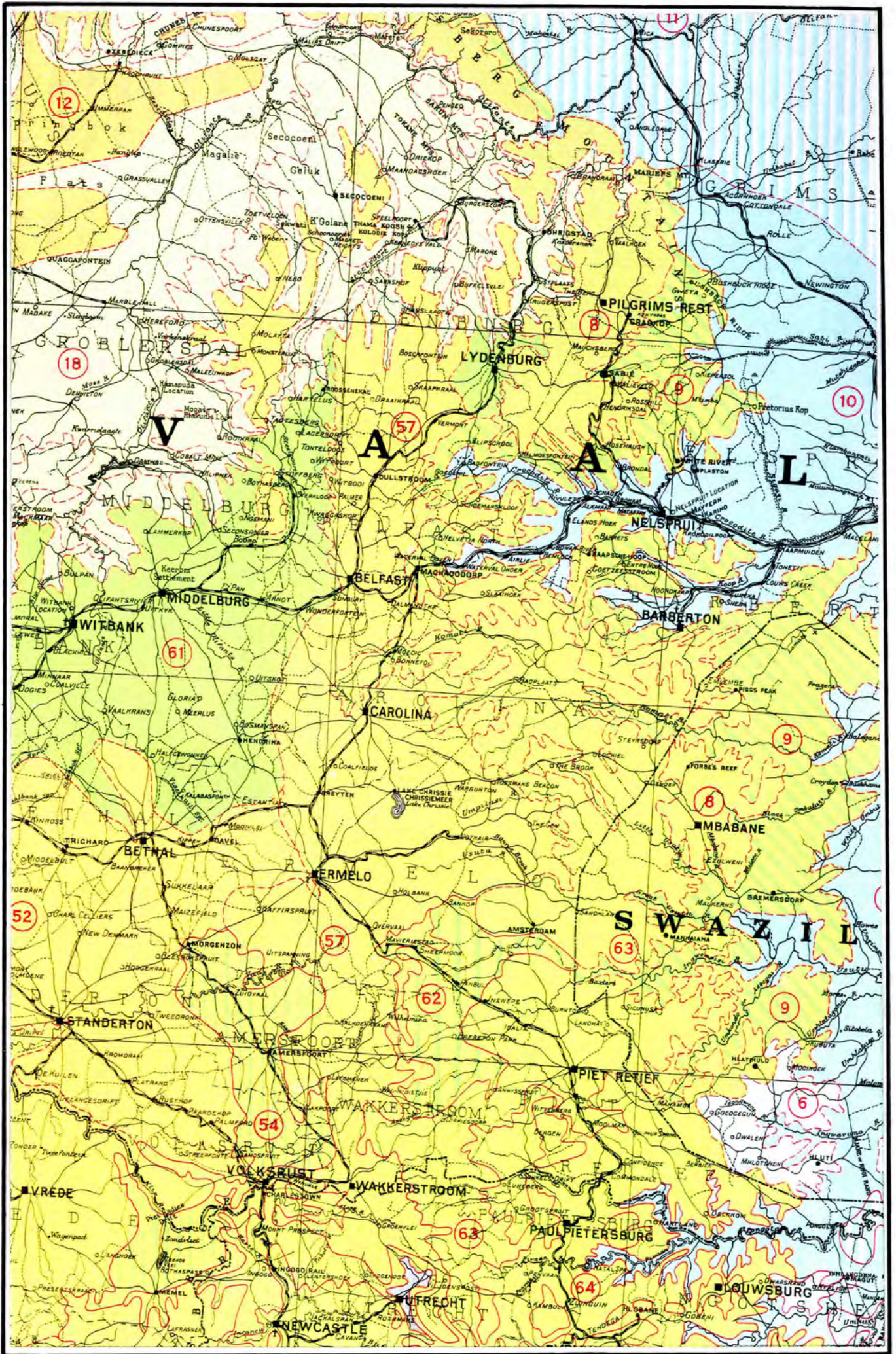
Map C: The Ohrigstad/Lydenburg district

KEY TO VELDTYPES :

- 6 Zululand Thornveld
- 8 North-Eastern Mountain Sourveld
- 9 Lowveld Sour Bushveld
- 10 Lowveld
- 11 Arid Lowveld
- 12 Springbok Flats Turf Thornveld
- 18 Mixed Bushveld
- 23 Valley Bushveld
- 48 *Cymbopogon-Themeda* Veld (sandy)
- 52 *Themeda* Veld (Turf Highveld)
- 53 *Themeda* Veld *Cymbopogon-Themeda* Veld Transition (patchy)
- 54 *Themeda* Veld to Highveld Sourveld Transition
- 57 North-Eastern Sandy Highveld
- 61 Bankenveld
- 62 Bankenveld to Sour Sandveld Transition
- 63 Piet Retief Sourveld
- 64 Northern Tall Grassveld (Transition between Piet Retief Sourveld
and Southern Tall Grassveld)
- 67 Pietersburg Plateau Grassland

Map D:

Extract of map veld types of South Africa by J.P.H. Acocks MSc. Scale 1:1500 000



Chapter 1

Reconsidering the causes of accelerated Boer conquest outside the Cape Colony after 1836.

'I might have soothed Retief and his associates with the promise that the slaves would not be free - that Ordinance 50 would be repealed - that Caffraria would be divided amongst the colonists - the missionaries hanged, and the blacks extirpated. I should most likely have been overwhelmed with flattering responses in return, but the emigration would not have been checked for all that.'¹

Beginning in the late 1830s, some 15 000 mainly Dutch speaking colonists left the Cape Colony and seized vast new lands in the southern African interior. This has become known as the Great Trek. Most historians have agreed on the causes of this movement. The Dutch colonists are presumed to have been primitive subsistence farmers forced from the Cape colony by an advance of the modern world brought about by changes to British policy in the fields of labour, land tenure and local government.² The ending of forced labour with the passing of Ordinance 50 in 1828 and the emancipation of the slaves between 1834 and 1838 is held to have caused a severe labour crisis among Dutch colonists. The implementation of quit rent after 1813 supposedly precipitated a chronic land shortage, while changes made to the system of local government in 1827-8 are assumed to have further restricted the access of Dutch colonists to land and labour.³ The concept of a Great Trek thus specifically refers to the claim that the Boers were primitives fleeing an increasingly modern colonial order.

Such a view can be effectively questioned on two levels. Firstly, the negative effects of changes to British policy must be challenged. A study of the policy changes will show that far from abolishing forced labour the practice was rephrased, refined and expanded during the 1820s and 1830s. The Boers were also not driven from the colony by the introduction of quit rent. Not

¹ Stockenstrom to D'Urban, 11 July 1837, in C.F.J. Muller, Die Britse Owerheid en die Groot Trek (Cape Town, 1947), p. 231.

² J.B. Peires, 'The British and the Cape, 1814-1834', in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840 (Cape Town, 1989), pp. 499-511.

³ Ibid., p. 504.

only did the colonial land crisis pre-date the introduction of quit rent but the slow issue of quit rent title was a major grievance among Boer farmers. Secondly, the presumption that the Dutch colonists were backward and economically irrational does not bear scrutiny. Production by Dutch colonists was firmly market oriented and they were part of a colonial economy that displayed constant growth. From at least 1700 all sectors of the Cape economy grew steadily and a strong correlation between the rate at which production increased and the market expanded was clearly evident.⁴

Given the failure of its basic claims, the concept of a Great Trek must be abandoned and a new explanation attempted. This can be done by situating Boer expansion within the broader processes at work in the region. The 1820s and 1830s saw a dramatic growth of the global economy. The annexation of the Cape by Britain provided access to these expanding world markets and the colony's economy entered a period of unprecedented expansion.⁵ Economic forces linked to the Cape and world economies began to operate on the colonial periphery. Griqua bands raided extensively in the Transoranje and profited from a trade in seized cattle and captives.⁶ From the east coast, Portuguese, Indian, French, British and Americans traders exported gold and ivory and increasing numbers of slaves.⁷ Cape colonists rapidly joined in the conquest of the interior. The eastern frontier was expanded as large areas of Xhosa territory were seized. Hunters, raiders and traders operated deep in the interior while, perhaps most importantly, colonial traders based at Port Natal exported large quantities of ivory to the Cape

⁴ The vibrancy of the Cape economy during the eighteenth century is only beginning to be recognised. A beginning was made by Daniel Neumark in his excellent but empirically flawed work: Economic Influences on the South African Frontier 1652-1836 (Stanford, 1957). More recently the work of Susan Newton-King has considerably advanced knowledge of the period. For the most recent work see: P. Van Duin and R. Ross, 'The Economy of the Cape Colony in the Eighteenth century', Intercontinental, 7 (1987).

⁵ Norman Etherington, 'The Great Trek in Relation to the Mfecane: A Reassessment', South African Historical Journal, 25 (1991), pp. 19-21.

⁶ Julian Cobbing, 'Rethinking the Roots of Violence in South Africa', paper presented to 'The "Mfecane" Aftermath Conference', University of the Witwatersrand, 1991, pp. 10-14.

⁷ M.V. Jackson-Haight, European Power and South East Africa (London, 1942), pp. 218-257.

and world markets.⁸ It is in this process of commercial expansion that the Boer conquests, a parallel invasion of the interior, must be situated.

The aims of this chapter are thus two-fold. The accepted causes of Boer emigrations will be questioned by re-examining the effects of the shift in British policy. Once the paucity of conventional accounts has been established, those factors operating within the colony and on its periphery which indicate that Boer conquest was more than a flight from the Cape will be highlighted.

1. Why changing British policy does not explain Boer settlement outside the Cape.

1.1. Labour

Since the first arrival of European settlers the basic unit of production at the Cape had been the large owner-operated farm worked by unfree labour. This model was taken with the colonists as they expanded into the interior.⁹ During the economic boom of the 1780s the use of forced labour was entrenched and expanded as more and more people were seized to meet increased production demands.¹⁰ Forced labour was compatible with British interests when they reoccupied the Cape in 1806, but its control by private individuals was unacceptable. Due to its weakness, the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.) had been able to exert very little control over the interior districts and consequently the seizure and control of labour was left largely in private hands. The isolation of those in the interior, coupled with Roman Dutch law which tended to favour the master, gave colonists almost absolute control over their labourers. The new administration moved rapidly to vest authority in the government. The Caledon Code of

⁸ Cathy Gorham, 'Port Natal: A Blind Darkness, Speculation, Trade, the Creation of a Vortex of Violence and the "Mfecane"', paper presented to 'The "Mfecane" Aftermath Conference', University of the Witwatersrand, 1991, p. 23; H. Slater, 'Transitions in the Political Economy of Southern Africa before 1840', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Sussex, 1976), chapter eleven.

⁹ R. Ross, 'The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture at the Cape: A survey', in W. Beinart, P. Delius and S. Trapido (eds.), Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930 (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 58.

¹⁰ C.C. Crais, The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865 (Johannesburg, 1992), p. 47; S. Newton-King, 'Some Thoughts about the Political Economy of Graaff-Reinet in the Late Eighteenth Century', paper presented to the 'History Workshop Conference', University of the Witwatersrand, 1981, pp. 1-5.

1809 and the regulation of apprenticed children in 1812 were not only aimed at increasing the colonial labour supply, but should also be seen in the light of the new government's attempts to increase and consolidate its powers.¹¹

Given the willingness of the new administration in Cape Town to accept and even extend the system of forced labour, the question that must be asked is: why were attempts made in the 1820s to replace coercion with free labour and why were these efforts unsuccessful?

Much of the answer lies in the fact that the impetus for change lay outside the colony; it was an imposition by the centre of the British empire. The early nineteenth century saw great changes of attitude in Britain towards slavery. The abolitionist movement demanded that slavery and forced labour be ended in both British colonies and the rest of the world. The causes of the abolitionist movement are still the subject of some debate but, whether attributed to moral conviction or the rise of industrial capitalism, the idea of what constituted a proper relationship between master and servant had changed. Everyone was still to be forced to work - but by moral compunction and economic reality, not the legal bonds of slavery.¹² In the Cape this meant the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the passing of Ordinance 50 in 1828 and the emancipation of the slaves in 1834. However, because such changes did not stem from class forces within the colony, any challenge to forced labour was bound to be difficult.

The first attempt by London to establish free labour at the Cape was the introduction of the 1820 settlers to the colony. Although not the primary motive for organising the immigration, the settlement scheme provided an opportunity to restructure the colony's labour system. The settlement was to be centred around the leaders of the various parties who were to form a sort of landed gentry that would employ free white labour.¹³ Free labour, however, is seldom an effective system when new lands are being developed. In such situations most people prefer to take advantage of the many opportunities for profit by producing in their own right. Chronic labour shortages occurred during the development of both the United States and Australia, and the eastern Cape was no exception.¹⁴ Many of the 'free labourers' rebelled against their

¹¹ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, pp. 55-63.

¹² Ross, 'Origins', pp. 79-86.

¹³ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, pp. 87-95.

¹⁴ Slater, 'Transitions', p. 360.

masters while still on the boat and few remained in service long after disembarking. Faced with the loss of their servants, many settler notables turned to African labour. Jeff Peires has argued that the Xhosa responded eagerly to these offers of employment and that Ordinance 49, which in 1828 legalised the presence of foreign Africans in the Cape Colony, merely legitimised the status quo.¹⁵ However the ongoing labour shortage (especially after the post-1825 economic upswing), as well as increasing settler impatience at their inability to obtain sufficient labour, indicate that the Xhosa were as reluctant to enter employment as their white counterparts.¹⁶ Faced with a situation where the shortage of labour was 'the cause of all our troubles', it rapidly became clear to most colonists that forced labour would have to be retained if they were to survive economically.¹⁷

The acceptance of forced labour placed the colonists at odds with the policies of the imperial government which favoured the use of free labour throughout the empire. The developing economy demanded the retention and expansion of forced labour but pressure from the centre of the empire made this increasingly difficult. Prior to 1807 captives had simply been seized from over the colonial boundary, but the abolition of the slave trade and imperial refusal to allow Africans in the colony made this practice illegal. A covert trade in captives supplied by bands of Griqua and colonial slavers had begun by 1810 and escalated during the early 1820s but supply could not meet escalating demand.¹⁸ The Khoikhoi, the traditional mainstay of the labour force, had been decimated by years of disease and dispossession. For example, in the Graaff-Reinet district Europeans outnumbered those considered to be 'Hottentot' by 5 296 to 3 707.¹⁹

¹⁵ J.B. Peires, The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence (Johannesburg, 1981), pp. 104-105.

¹⁶ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, pp. 92-94, 128-130.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 87-95; Graham's Town Journal, 14 Feb. 1833.

¹⁸ For the illegal labour market in the Cape Colony see amongst others: Julian Cobbing, 'The "Mfecane" as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', Journal of African History, 29 (1988); E. T. Maloka, 'The Creation and Significance of the Myth of the "Mantatees" and "Fetcani" 1823-1828', draft chapter of M.A. thesis, (University of Cape Town, 1989); S. Newton-King, 'The Labour Market of the Cape Colony, 1807-28', in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (London, 1982), pp. 171-200.

¹⁹ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, p. 67.

By 1824 the labour crisis had become so severe that Bathurst had no African servants. By 1833 the town and its environs still had just 140 Khoi and 'mantatee' (enslaved foreign Africans brought into the colony on the pretext that they were refugees from the 'mfecane') to provide labour for over 900 Europeans. Population figures for the late 1820s show only 43 non-whites to every 100 whites in the eastern Cape compared to a ratio of 134:100 in the Western Cape.²⁰ By 1825 the labour shortage was having such an impact on the economy of the eastern districts that Somerset was moved to write that: 'the principal drawback to the prosperity of the British settlers [is] the want of labourers'²¹

Confronted by a deepening labour crisis the colonists, supported by much of the colonial administration, fought to neutralise the effect of imperial policy and retain control of their labour.²² However a reimposition of the crude coercion of the past was not desired. Not only would philanthropic resistance be too great, but the rapidly developing Cape economy was also no longer suited to such a primitive system. New sectors of the economy, such as the expanding towns, demanded their share of labour. Closely controlled labour remained essential to the colonial economy but the legal institution of slavery or the blatant cruelty of the previous century was controversial and inefficient. In 1828 the colonists restructured labour procurement in the colony by passing Ordinances 49 and 50. Ordinance 50 repealed the Caledon Code and ended the compulsory indenture of the Khoisan while Ordinance 49 legalised the importation of African labour from outside the Cape colony. The abolition of compulsory indenture and the official sanctioning of the use of African labour did not mean the colonists had any intention of introducing free labour. As will be seen below, the language of control was merely rephrased. The seizure of labour was euphemistically phrased in terms of security and/or humanitarian concerns and the control of labour within the colony took the form of a struggle over vagrancy.

Few of the Khoisan 'liberated' by Ordinance 50 of 1828 were able to achieve freedom.

²⁰ A. Webster, 'Unmasking the Fingo: The War of 1835 Revisited', paper presented to 'The "Mfecane" Aftermath Conference', University of the Witwatersrand, 1991, p. 17.

²¹ Somerset to Bathurst, 31 March 1825, in Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, p. 129.

²² The colonial administration generally supported the colonists in their efforts to resist imperial attempts to impose free labour. Lt Governor Bouke was, however, the exception to this rule.

Colonists had at their disposal an arsenal of devices to maintain control of their workers. Most farmers paid their labourers in stock and allowed the use of pasturage to build up small herds. By refusing to allow labourers to leave with their stock, farmers created a powerful bond to the farm. Magistrates commonly assisted farmers in the use of debt bondage to control their labour. Alcohol addiction was another widespread ploy to keep workers pliable.²³ These measures were so successful that Robert Ross has calculated that up to 80 percent of labourers remained on their masters' farms after the passing of Ordinance 50 and the emancipation of the slaves.²⁴

Besides making it difficult to leave the farms, the colonists increasingly threatened the ability of freed labourers to earn an independent livelihood. One avenue of escape, the mission stations, were not only able to absorb very few of the newly free, but were themselves under great pressure from the colonists. During the first one and a half decades of the nineteenth century the mission stations were self-sufficient and even managed to sell a small surplus.²⁵ By the mid-1820s many mission station inhabitants were very poor and lived largely by labouring on farms. Regulations aimed at undermining the independence of mission station inhabitants were rigorously enforced. From about 1820 the state began levying taxes (from strictly enforced quit rent to dog taxes) regulating access to land and formulating hunting regulations. Further pressure was exerted as land around the stations, much of which had been cultivated by the inhabitants for decades, was sold to white colonists. On occasion entire villages were destroyed along with their crops.²⁶ Ironically, in the case of the mission stations, the freeing of labour in 1828 worked in the colonists' favour. Those who managed to avoid the colonial labour net and reach the mission only aggravated existing pressures by causing overcrowding. By the mid-1830s the mission stations were no longer viable refuges. For example: of 1 120 registered inhabitants of the Hankey station in 1836, only seven hundred were resident there. The rest worked on colonial farms.²⁷ The situation at other stations was just as gloomy.

The colony's rapidly developing towns provided freed labourers with another potential refuge;

²³ Ross, 'Origins', p. 83.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-86.

²⁵ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, pp. 75, 152-153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

however the colonists moved rapidly to block this avenue of escape. Although not yet able to control government policy as completely as in the 1840s and 1850s, the colonists enjoyed absolute control over the municipalities from the outset. Established in 1834-6, the municipalities not only gave the farmers (who as lay officials controlled local institutions) a powerful mechanism with which to resist London's unpopular policies, but also provided them with an additional weapon in their attempts to create and control a dependant class. Regulations limiting the amount of stock an African could own, rules defining the type of house that could be built, taxes, rent, and even dress codes were passed by the municipalities to force Africans into the colonial system.²⁸

After 1834-5 the level of control over urban locations was sharply increased. This is significant when seen in the context of the war of 1835 which resulted in the introduction of large numbers of Fingo captives into the colony as labourers. The Fingo had to be both controlled and distributed.²⁹ Control over towns which served as centres of distribution was thus crucial.

As the effects of Ordinance 50 were undermined by pressure on the missions, control of locations, the eviction of squatters and the conversion of the countryside into privately owned land, colonists attempted to further strengthen their hand with the introduction of a vagrancy law. Proposed in 1834 by the newly established Legislative Council (an advisory body formed by the British), the law would have had the effect of making all unemployed subject to arrest.³⁰ In spite of the law being vetoed by the Colonial Office, its general acceptance in the colony is indicative of how the continuing labour shortage resulted in increasingly coercive attitudes among the colonial establishment.

Although the imposition of the vagrancy ordinance was vetoed by the imperial government in 1834, it was effectively introduced in 1837. Prompted by the fear that the colony's burgeoning labour force would slip the employment net, Ordinance 2 was passed. The law further attacked

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-154.

²⁹ Cobbing, 'The "Mfecane" as Alibi', p. 157; A. Webster, 'Land Expropriation and Labour Extraction under Cape Colonial Rule: The war of 1835 and the Emancipation of the Fingo', unpublished M.A. thesis (Rhodes University, 1991), pp. 142-144, 158-161.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140; J.M. Bowker, Speeches, Letters and Selections from Important Papers (Grahamstown, 1864), p. 129.

the ability of Africans to live and move freely. Unauthorised 'native locations' (effectively any independent settlement) were outlawed. Building on Ordinance 49, Ordinance 2 allowed for the arrest of 'native foreigners' found in the colony without a pass. The new law also introduced livestock pounds which rapidly became an effective way of dominating communities which, for the time being, remained beyond colonial control.³¹

The introduction in 1841 of the Masters and Servants Ordinance provided the last regulation necessary for the complete domination of the colonial labour force. The new law did not seek to provide colonists with more labourers but rather to reinforce their servile status. By targeting colonial citizens (Ordinance 49 already provided an effective means to control labourers from outside the colony, see below), the new law affected both those who had been 'freed' by Ordinance 50 as well as the newly introduced Fingo. The major difference was that, unlike the Caledon Codes, the new law was phrased in terms of class and not race. The importance of the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1841 cannot be over emphasised. With a few variations introduced in 1856, it was to regulate master and servant relations until 1974!³²

Parallel to colonial efforts to retain control of labourers within the colony was the seizure of Africans from outside its borders. The expanding economy had made the provision of additional labour a matter of survival to the white colonists. Labour had long been seized covertly beyond the colonial boundary and a steady supply of captive labour had been entering the colony since at least 1820. Griqua and Begenaar commandos in the Transoranje raided as far east as the Caledon valley for captives and cattle. Because the slave trade was illegal and Africans were banned from the colony (prior to 1828), it was claimed that the captives were 'mantatee' refugees from the ever convenient 'mfecane'.³³ Again coercion and brutality wore a humanitarian mask.

³¹ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, pp. 151, 157.

³² In spite of the increasingly effective coercion exercised by colonists, some of those liberated by Ordinance 50 did for a time become at least partially free. The Transoranje provided a refuge for those hardy individuals able to overcome the obstacles. Others managed to exist in the towns selling fire wood and doing odd jobs. Still others were able to live for a time on waste land and other inaccessible areas from where they engaged in temporary labour. But the free and partially free were a minority - most never gained their freedom and by the 1840s all hope of liberty was removed.

³³ See above.

But 'mantatee' labour was at best a stop gap measure. Only once the restriction prohibiting Africans from entering the colony was repealed could a serious start be made to slaking the colony's burgeoning labour demands. The legal space necessary for the wholesale utilisation of African labour was created by the passing of Ordinance 49 of 1828. Preceding Ordinance 50 by a few days, the ordinance was geared to both the control and provision of labour. It repealed the Proclamations of 1797, 1812, 1817 and 1820 banning Africans from the colony.³⁴ Besides bringing labour into the colony, it also provided powerful mechanisms for the control of labour. While Ordinance 50 abolished passes for the Khoi, Ordinance 49 introduced a pass system for foreign Africans.³⁵ It is significant that the officials largely responsible for the administration of pass controls were the *veldcornets* of the district.³⁶ Because the *veldcornets* were farmers acting as officials on a part-time basis and generally representing farming interests, the potential for abuse was enormous. Ordinance 49 also provided for contracts between master and servant. Contracts of up to one month did not require official sanction, while those of up to seven years (the maximum) had to be witnessed by an official. Once again the official on the spot was the *veldcornet* and the possibility of abuse was vast. Ordinance 49 also continued the tradition of exploiting children. Abandoned or orphaned children could be apprenticed up to the age of sixteen years for girls and eighteen years for boys.³⁷

With the passing of Ordinance 49 the traditional colonial labour raid could now be supplemented by larger and more organised expeditions - such as the combined British/colonial attack on the Ngwane in 1828 when modern weapons were used to seize over a hundred captives.³⁸

While such activities were a promising start to solving the labour crisis, they were eclipsed in

³⁴ The use of this freedom to procure Fingo and 'mantatee' labour will be dealt with below.

³⁵ Crais, *Making of the Colonial Order*, pp. 114-115.

³⁶ Although the *Landroste* and *Heemraden* were abolished after 1828, the office of veldcornet remained intact until the end of the nineteenth century. See F.A. Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet en sy Aandeel in die Opbou van Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek tot 1870', in *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 1950, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1950), 2, p. 204.

³⁷ Crais, *Making of the Colonial Order*, pp. 131-132.

³⁸ Cobbing, 'Rethinking', p. 19.

scale by the war of 1835. After decades of colonial raids, the Rharhabe reacted to their gradual dispossession by attacking colonial farmers in the Koonap district and south Albany. Recognising a good opportunity, the colonial administration assembled a huge force that attacked Xhosa territory, burning and killing as it went. Huge numbers of cattle and people were captured.³⁹ This campaign completely inverted the labour situation in the colony. In 1828 there had been forty three non-whites (potential labourers) to every hundred whites in the eastern districts. By 1838 there were 141 non-whites to every hundred whites.⁴⁰ For the first time there were ample labourers in the colony.

The retention, refinement and expansion of forced labour was a substantial achievement for the white colonists. While the second British occupation had accelerated economic development, an inadequate labour supply had threatened this growth. The triumph of colonial interests over imperial efforts to replace forced with free labour both consolidated existing growth and cleared the way for the further expansion of the colonial economy.

In the light of the improved labour situation in the colony, Ordinance 50 and the emancipation of the slaves could not have driven the Boers from the colony. Not only did the labour crisis precede the attempted implementation of imperial policy but resistance by the colonists ensured that, as a move toward free labour, Ordinance 50 and the emancipations were ineffective. A transformation did take place but the change was from the crude coercion of the eighteenth century to a more sophisticated form of control better suited to the emerging world order. By the time the Boers left the colony in the late 1830s, labour seizures, Ordinance 49 and the other measures that followed had been used to solve the colony's labour problems. Had a labour shortage driven the Boers from the Cape, they would have left the colony around 1825 - not the late 1830s.

³⁹ Webster, 'Land Expropriation', chapter three.

⁴⁰ Webster, 'Unmasking the Fingo', p. 17.

1.2. Land

As early as 1821 eighty two percent of (mostly Dutch) loan farm holders had applied for conversion to quit rent.⁴¹ This is an important statistic as, alongside the revolution in labour relations, a revolution in land tenure which turned land from a free gift of nature into a taxable and marketable asset was supposed to have driven the Boers from the colony.⁴² In other words, the conversion of land into a commodity through the implementation of quit rent caused such a severe land shortage among the cash strapped Dutch colonists that they were forced to flee into the interior. Such a view ignores several crucial points. Land had been treated as a commodity since the days of the first free burghers and had always been in short supply in the established districts. The established colonial response to land shortages was to claim new land just over the colonial border and when the land shortage intensified in the 1830s this found expression in expansion into the Transoranje - not in the more dramatic Boer conquests in the Transvaal and Natal. Finally, land speculation was one of the foremost items on the agenda of Boer settlers in both Natal and the Transvaal. Rather than being repugnant to the Boers, the idea that land was a commodity was central to their actions.

Since the first pastoralist crossed the mountains around Cape Town, the colony had expanded continuously. Demographic pressure, extensive farming practices, climate, the tradition that each son should farm in his own right and a steadily expanding market pushed the colonial boundary ever further into the interior. Expansion was assisted by the loan farm system which allowed any colonist to farm vacant land for a nominal annual rent.⁴³ The ease with which farms could be obtained has clouded some historians' understanding of the value of land. The fact that land was freely available only on the fringes of the colony has been overlooked. New settlements were usually pioneered by hunters and traders who established a presence in the area. Closer settlement would follow as increasing numbers of colonists claimed farms. Suitable land soon reached a premium and land values would rise correspondingly. Farms now had to be purchased rather than claimed. Although loan farms could not officially be sold, the *opstals* or

⁴¹ L.C. Duly, British Land Policy at the Cape, 1795-1844: A Study in the Administrative Procedures of the Empire (Durham, 1968), p. 68.

⁴² Peires, 'The British and the Cape', pp. 502-505.

⁴³ Duly, British Land Policy, pp. 159-177; L. Guelke, 'Frontier Settlement in early Dutch South Africa', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 27 (1976), p. 42; Ross, 'Origins', pp. 63, 70; Van Duin and Ross, 'Economy', pp. 1-7.

improvements could and these soon came to represent the actual value of the farm. Trade in land was so brisk that many colonists began to use land speculation as a means to build up capital. Poor but enterprising individuals claimed land in periphery areas in order to sell at a profit when closer settlement pushed up land values.⁴⁴ As access to land was limited by growing demand, the now established area became the springboard for the next wave of expansion by landless colonists. That land was both a commodity and in short supply well before the enforcement of quit rent is clearly illustrated by the existence of this land market in which the better established a district was, the more access to land was limited by rising prices.

The colonial shortage of land became far more acute during the 1820s and 1830s. Accelerated economic growth and an expanding European population (which increased from approximately twenty five thousand in the 1790s to around ninety thousand in the 1830s) led to rising land prices. By 1832 it had become difficult for even a prosperous farmer such as Karel Landman to obtain a new grant.⁴⁵ The effects of the land shortage were aggravated by a series of natural disasters which hit farm incomes after 1820. Severe droughts occurred in the colony's northern and north eastern districts between 1824-6 and again from 1829-32.⁴⁶ Districts such as Graaff-Reinet and Sneeuwberg were also ravaged by swarms of locusts. 'For the space of ten miles on each side of the Seacow river, an area of sixteen or eighteen hundred square miles, the whole surface might be said to be covered with them.'⁴⁷ Exacerbated by acts of nature, the land shortage reached such proportions that by 1827 one petition from the Graaff-Reinet district alone contained the names of 225 farmers who did not have any land.⁴⁸

Faced with growing competition for farms in the colony, many farmers followed the long established practice of seizing land over the border. As early as the 1820s farmers were already settling over the colonial boundary in the Stormberg and Transoranje. By 1832 colonial officials

⁴⁴ P.J. Van Der Merwe, Trek: Studies oor die Mobiliteit van die Pioniersbevolking aan die Kaap (Cape Town, 1945), chapter four.

⁴⁵ Peires, 'The British and the Cape', p. 504.

⁴⁶ P.J. Van Der Merwe, Die Noordwaardse Beweging van die Boere voor die Groot Trek, 1770-1842 (The Hague, 1937), chapters six, seven and nine.

⁴⁷ J. Barrow, Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa, 2 vols. (London, 1806), 2, p. 257.

⁴⁸ Van Der Merwe, Noordwaartse Beweging, chapters six, seven and p. 328.

estimated that around 1 300 families were settled permanently outside the colony. This figure does not include those farmers who made annual migrations to the Transoranje, migrations that were so extensive that by 1832 some *veldcornetcies* were almost completely denuded of people.⁴⁹

The abundance of cheap, good land and the brisk trade that developed with both the colony and the Griqua provided the ex-colonists with a living that was in many cases better than that of their fellows in the colony.⁵⁰ Clearly by the early 1820s the Transoranje was functioning as the colony's safety valve with the poor, the opportunistic, the disgruntled and the enterprising able to settle in circumstances to their liking. The area continued to fulfil this role for many years and farmers overflowing the colony continued to claim land there until well into the 1850s.⁵¹

But the Boer conquests in Natal and the Transvaal were a very different phenomenon to the natural expansion of farmers just over the colonial border. Here settlers sought more than better farms. Land was important, but the pursuit of profit through a range of activities linked to the expanding world economy had a higher priority. The Boers who settled in Natal and the eastern Transvaal ignored the vast, rich and available highveld, preferring proximity to the east coasts with better access to global markets.⁵² Interestingly, many colonists in the Transoranje gave land shortages as their reason for emigrating, but a careful study in Natal of Boer settlers who originated from the overcrowded lower Bushmansriver area does not reveal land shortages as a reason for their leaving the Cape.⁵³

The view that the enforcement of quit rent caused a land shortage which drove the Boers from the Cape is further belied by their actions outside the colony. From Natal to Zoutpansburg the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, chapters seven and nine.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 301-304 and chapter ten.

⁵¹ Ross, 'Origins', p. 70; Van Der Merwe, *Noordwaartse Beweging*, pp. 361-365.

⁵² *Ibid.*, chapter twelve; D.W. Kruger, 'Die Weg na die See in Boerebeleid voor 1877', in *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 1938, 2 vols. (Pretoria, 1938), 1, pp. 52-53.

⁵³ C.F.J. Muller, *Die Oorsprong van die Groot Trek* (Cape Town, 1974), p. 184.

demarcation, acquisition and sale of land was foremost on the settler agenda. In Natal the *Volksraad*, led by Boshoff, worked hard at 'regularising the land laws and pushing on with settlement the closer the better'.⁵⁴ Vast tracts of land marked out by ill-defined beacons as in the V.O.C. period were not allowed. Farms and town plots could be claimed and provisional titles granted, but only after the land had been surveyed by a government land commission could formal title be granted.⁵⁵ A striking feature of land claims in both Natal and the Transvaal is the high number of petitions requesting visits by the government land surveyors.⁵⁶ Such a lively trade in farms and town plots existed that at one time Potchefstroom had two competing registrars of deeds.⁵⁷ Few were satisfied with one 6 000 acre farm per family. All available land was claimed, two to three farms per family, the rest by unattached men.

'The keeping of records may have been haphazard, the resources of the administration inadequate and the officials inept, but in all the new republics dealing in land was fundamental to the enterprise of settlement'.⁵⁸

1.3. Local Administration

After 1826 the traditional system of *Heemraden* and *Landroste* was replaced with British magistrates and civil commissioners. Some historians have concluded that this drove the Dutch colonists from the Cape by denying them the 'capacity to exploit the machinery of administration in the service of their own interests'.⁵⁹ Jeff Peires, in particular, has argued that what the Dutch missed about the old system was that they had lost 'control of the determinants of their material prosperity: control of labour, allocation of land and the assessment of taxes'.⁶⁰ Such a view, however, overstates the importance of the *Landroste* and *Heemraden*.

⁵⁴ E.A. Walker, *The Great Trek* (London, 1934), p. 154; Etherington, 'The Great Trek', p. 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁶ Such requests are too numerous to mention here but for many excellent examples see the correspondence of Landrost C. Potgieter of Lydenburg.

⁵⁷ Etherington, 'The Great Trek', p. 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21.

⁵⁹ Peires, 'The British and the Cape', pp. 499, 504-505.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

Although during the V.O.C. period these officials played an important role in the control of labour, there is little evidence to show that the introduction of magistrates and civil commissioners affected access of Dutch colonists to labour. As was seen above, when changed imperial policy threatened the system of forced labour, colonists (with the cooperation of the new magistrates and civil commissioners!) responded by rephrasing the practice in a more sophisticated form. Laws such as Ordinance 49, Ordinance 2 and the Masters and Servants Ordinance not only entrenched the power of white masters over their employees but also greatly expanded the number of African workers in the colony. Given that under the auspices of British magistrates and civil commissioners the position of white employers was substantially improved, it is difficult to see what negative effects the replacement of the *Landroste* and *Heemraden* could have had.

Similarly, the claim that British magistrates and civil commissioners forced Dutch colonists to pay unpopular quit rents is unfounded. The Dutch colonists were not at odds with the open commercialisation of land brought about by the introduction of quit rent tenure. As noted above, the Boers were eager for the more efficient implementation of quit rent.⁶¹ Furthermore, the British administrators were no more efficient than their predecessors at collecting rents. The extreme incompetence of the Inspector General's Office allowed the accumulation of huge rent arrears. The situation only began to gradually improve after 1836 with the appointment of the Second Land Board, too late to have an impact on Boer emigration.⁶²

Only as regards the use of official monies could the abolition of the *Landroste* and *Heemraden* have negatively affected certain colonists. Peires has correctly noted that the administration inherited from the V.O.C. was permeated by fraudulent activities. District Boards 'loaned' money to their friends, connived at the evasion of responsibility by select debtors and assessed taxes and calculated quit rent subjectively.⁶³ But it would be overstating the case to argue that the beneficiaries of the corruption were more than a select clique. The loss of privilege by these few, well-placed colonists is unlikely to have produced such dissatisfaction as to have caused a mass emigration.

⁶¹ Duly, *British Land Policy*, p. 68.

⁶² *Ibid.*, chapter eight.

⁶³ Peires, 'The British and the Cape', p. 493.

2. The Cape's burgeoning economic and military power: springboard for accelerated conquest.

The conquests of new lands and seizure of labour by the Boer invaders who burst from the Cape Colony in the late 1830s was not unprecedented; it was the speed and extent of their conquests that was unique. Since the arrival of the first free-burghers, new lands had been seized and brought into commercial production by white colonists. But the fact that Cape Town was the colony's only major market slowed expansion. A journey to the capital from the remote districts was costly and could take up to three months each way. Stock could be driven to market (although the rigours of the journey adversely affected their condition), but items such as butter and soap had to be transported by wagon. Poor roads meant a wagon seldom lasted more than four trips before having to be replaced at the cost of several hundred rix dollars.⁶⁴

The logistical problems experienced by frontier producers were partially overcome by dealing with itinerant traders, but dependence on such individuals placed those in the interior in a difficult position. Traders had to recoup their high transport costs by paying low prices for frontier produce and were forced by the irregularity of imports to the Cape to place huge mark-ups on their stock.⁶⁵ Colonists dependent on these traders for essentials such as arms, coffee, cloth, iron and various utensils were forced to pay the inflated prices. Trapped in a cycle of low income and high costs for essentials, many in the interior districts fell deeply into debt.⁶⁶

The position of frontier producers began to improve rapidly in the nineteenth century. After the Napoleonic wars better communications, soaring demand for agricultural produce, rapid population growth and improvements in transportation and storage resulted in global economic expansion. From the U.S.A. to Siberia and Australasia, colonists responded to opportunities presented by the developing global economy by seizing land from its indigenous owners and engaging in commodity production for the new world markets.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Guelke, 'Frontier Settlement', pp. 34-42.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Newton-King, 'Commerce and Material Culture on the Eastern Cape Frontier 1784-1812', Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Series, 14 (1988). This article is to date the best synopsis of the terms of trade within which the frontier producers operated.

⁶⁷ Etherington, 'The Great Trek', p. 19.

Britain's annexation of the Cape in 1806 gave the colony access to this global economic boom. Increased trade opportunities combined with the actions of the new colonial administration to remove the restrictions that had previously curbed full economic development. Preferential tariffs were granted on Cape wines in order to stimulate production. Local trade was promoted by an improved postal service and the establishment of new roads. The system of *pachts* that had reinforced the favourable position of merchants over producers was abolished in 1827 and 1828, while the trade monopolies enjoyed by the British East India Company were revoked in 1813 and 1832.⁶⁸ In response the economy, especially in the eastern districts, grew rapidly, freeing frontier producers from dependence on the Cape Town market and laying the foundation for accelerated European conquest and commerce.

Coastal trade which began to develop after about 1810 played an important role in stimulating commerce in the interior districts. As ships began to put into harbours such as Knysna, Mossel Bay, Port Alfred and Algoa Bay (Port Elizabeth after 1820), the distance from Cape Town declined as a factor inhibiting economic growth. Sea freight not only brought the busy Cape Town market closer to the eastern districts but also allowed the development of an export trade. St. Helena was an important market for Cape goods between 1815 and 1821, while exports to Mauritius and Reunion developed steadily well into the 1830s.⁶⁹ Salted beef was exported in such quantities from Port Elizabeth after 1810 that in 1812 the Commission of Circuit predicted a meat shortage in the colony.⁷⁰ The early 1820s saw very high butter prices as well as an expansion in the market for hides and skins. In response to the favourable conditions, butter, tobacco, hides, skins, ostrich feathers and ivory were collected on the Grahamstown market and shipped to Cape Town via Port Elizabeth.⁷¹ By 1821 trade with the eastern districts was so profitable that a vessel of fifty tons was built solely to service the run from Cape Town to Port

⁶⁸ Peires, 'The British and the Cape', pp. 475-480.

⁶⁹ Neumark, Economic Influences, pp. 137-140.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 62, 125-132; G.M. Theal, Records of the Cape Colony, 36 vols. (Cape Town, 1897-1905), 9, pp. 98-90.

⁷¹ W.W. Bird, State of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822 (London, 1823), p. 121; Neumark, Economic Influences, pp. 140-144; Ross, 'Origins', p. 65; Andrew Steedman, Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of Southern Africa 2 vols. (London, 1835), 1, p. 169, 184; George Thompson, Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa (London, 1827), pp. 11-12.

Alfred and back.⁷²

The intensification of trade in the eastern districts was reflected in the growth of urban centres. Towns sprang up as heightened economic activity by both Dutch and British settlers created a need for local markets. Graaff-Reinet provides an excellent example of this growth. Described in 1800 as a collection of mud huts housing about twelve families, the town had three to four hundred well built houses by 1830. In 1815 Graaff-Reinet had twenty shops, by 1820 the number had increased to fifty seven and by 1824 to 119. Graaff-Reinet was not an isolated example. Grahamstown, established in 1812 as a military post, was an important trading centre by 1822. Cradock doubled in size between 1823 and 1830. Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred developed as points for the shipping of produce while, by 1830, Colesburg had become an important trading centre for the northern districts and the Transoranje.⁷³

The growth of towns was crucial to the development of the interior districts. Farming became increasingly profitable as markets became more accessible and consequently land values, especially in the eastern districts, rose steadily during the 1820s and 1830s. Increased population density (boosted by the 1820 settlement) made trade specialisation viable and the numbers of artisans and professionals such as doctors and lawyers increased. Merchant houses, some with links to Cape Town and London, established themselves in the new urban centres and sent out agents deep into the interior. The numbers of itinerant traders also increased and many of these individuals soon built up businesses that rivalled the established firms.⁷⁴

An important fact overlooked by many historians is that the merchant firms were not exclusively British. Historians seeking to show that Dutch colonists were at odds with the evolving colonial

⁷² Theal, Records, 14, p. 189.

⁷³ Barrow, Travels, pp. 64-65; W. J. Burchell, Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, 2 vols. (London, 1824), 2, p. 145; Neumark, Economic Influences, pp. 140-44; Steedman, Wanderings and Adventures, p. 124.

⁷⁴ Excellent examples of itinerant traders who made the transition to established merchants are Maximillian Thalwitzer and the Mosenthal brothers. During the 1840s these men built large commercial empires which came to dominate the export of wool to Europe. See Tony Kirk, 'Some notes on the financial state of the Eastern Cape, 1840-1850, and the fate of the Kat River Settlement', in Institute for Commonwealth Studies Seminar Series, 3 (1973), p. 15; R. Ross, 'The Cape and the World Economy, 1652-1835', in Elphick and Giliomee, Shaping, pp. 266-267; Slater, 'Transitions', chapter eleven.

order tend to gloss over the fact that much of the developing trade was in Dutch hands. The salted beef industry at Algoa Bay was developed by a Dutchman, Fredrick Korsten. By 1820 he had diversified into sealing and whaling and still later into large scale sheep farming. Some British merchants made strategic marriages with established Dutch families. In this way men like Josef Barry, who with both his nephews married into the wealthy Van Reenen family, were able to establish extensive business concerns.⁷⁵ In the north and north east the flourishing Transoranje trade was monopolised by Dutch interests.⁷⁶ Although British traders, especially in the more English districts such as Albany, used their superior access to cash to trade successfully, this does not mean they were at odds with their Dutch peers. Trading opportunities were not only plentiful in the expanding economy, but a good living could also be made from entering new professions such as transport riding or by concentrating more fully on commercial production.

Clearly by the late 1830s the Cape economy was maturing rapidly. Accelerated production, population increases and the establishment of permanent and growing urban centres had resulted in economic specialisation. Artisans, merchants, bankers and a variety of other specialists established themselves in the interior. As the economy became more sophisticated, crude forced labour proved too limited and inflexible to meet the needs of increased production. Rapid economic development gave rise to demands for labour from new sectors of the economy. Consequently the old system, which hindered the distribution of the work force by tying labour to a specific farm, was inefficient. Instead a network of legislation, phrased in terms of class rather than race, forced Africans to labour by attacking their ability to move freely and produce independently. Monopolies were revoked in the interests of internal free trade (although duties on imports and exports remained). The loan farm system of land tenure which did not recognise land as a commodity and was unsuited to the colony's brisk land market was replaced by the more appropriate quit rent system.

The changes involved in the development of an increasingly sophisticated economic order are usually held to have driven the Boers from the colony. An examination of the changes to the system of labour and land tenure, the most significant areas of transformation, has shown this

⁷⁵ Ross, 'Origins', pp. 65-69.

⁷⁶ Van Der Merwe, Noordwaartse Beweging, chapter eleven.

was not the case. It was rather the accelerated development of the Cape economy which provided the basis for the wholesale invasion of most of the sub-continent. By the 1820s economic forces based in the Cape colony were already seizing resources outside the colony. It is in this process of economic expansion that the explanation for the Boer conquests is to be found.

3. European expansion and Boer conquest.

As economic activity intensified in the Cape Colony it is not surprising that ambitious colonists began to covet the wealth of the interior. A large and expanding internal market provided an anchor for expansion while the increasing export orientation of the Cape economy ensured access to the growing demand of world markets for raw materials. The seizure of resources outside the colony was encouraged by a series of settler victories over their African neighbours. The Zuurveld Gqunukhwebe were crushed in 1811-2. In 1819 the Rharhabe were attacked and territory up to the Keiskamma River seized. The colony's greatest military triumph occurred between December 1834 and August 1835 when a counter attack by the Rharhabe provided an excuse for the wholesale looting of Xhosa territory. A combined British/colonial force armed with modern firearms rapidly crushed both the Rharhabe and the Gcaleka.⁷⁷ These victories led to the realisation in colonial minds that no African state was powerful enough to successfully resist the firepower of the colonial forces. Economic growth and military might provided colonists with the motive and means for commercial conquest.

Territorial expansion by Cape colonists was also encouraged by the example of other participants in the world economy. The Portuguese settlement at Delagoa Bay had long exported large quantities of gold and ivory. From about 1810 the shipment of slaves began to dominate this trade. Demand for labour by the plantations of Brazil ensured that the slave trade expanded dramatically, peaking in the 1840s and continuing well into the 1870s. The Portuguese were not alone in recognising the potential of the east coast and slavers and traders from several nations began to visit the area in increasing numbers since at least the mid-eighteenth century.⁷⁸ The increasingly obvious economic potential of the east coast awakened much interest in the Cape

⁷⁷ Julian Cobbing, 'The Growth of the Colonial Economy, Accentuated European Impact c. 1810-35, The Expansion of White Colonialism', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1993, pp. 918-922.

⁷⁸ Jackson-Haight, *European Powers*, chapter seven.

Colony and an expedition under W.F.W Owen was dispatched in 1823 to visit the Portuguese settlements and map the seaboard. As a result of this, a trading concern led by F. Farewell established its presence at Port Natal. Backed by merchant capital in Cape Town and London, a lucrative trade was soon established. Other traders, also with backing from Cape Town and London, soon established themselves at Port Natal.⁷⁹

Commercial interests in the eastern Cape were not far behind those in Cape Town and London in recognising the potential of the east coast. Within five years of the establishment of the settlement at Port Natal an overland route between it and the principal centres in the eastern Cape had been established.⁸⁰ The overland trade, led by firms such as Maynards of Grahamstown, was so profitable that by 1834 Andrew Smith was able to record that:

‘Several of the individuals of the original party, who yet reside in the vicinity of the Bay [of Natal], as well as a number of persons who have lately directed their attention to trade in that quarter, have in the last two years transversed the country between Grahamstown and the Zulu territory in all directions, and have on several occasions conveyed to the colony considerable quantities of ivory etc., without the slightest interruption’.⁸¹

The successful overland trade was soon supplemented by a growing coastal trade from Port Natal to Port Elizabeth and by the mid-1830s commercial interests based in the eastern Cape had established a strong presence in Natal.⁸²

British traders and merchants were not the only colonists to become aware of the potential of the interior. Influential members of the Cape Dutch establishment also began to respond to opportunities beyond the colonial boundary. Paralleling W.F. Owen’s 1823 mission to the Portuguese ports, several reconnaissance expeditions were dispatched to the interior by prominent Dutch colonists in 1834. Although knowledge of the interior had exploded after 1800 and information from newspapers, magazines, travel books and personal accounts of the many

⁷⁹ Gorham, ‘Natal A Blind Darkness’, pp. 3-4, 12; Slater, ‘Transitions’, chapter eleven.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; Muller, *Oorsprong*, pp. 232-235, 238-240.

⁸¹ H.F. Fynn, *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn, 1803-1861*, J. Stuart and D. Malcolm (eds.), (Pietermaritzburg, 1950), pp. 216-217.

⁸² Slater, ‘Transitions’, pp. 378-380.

hunters, traders and explorers who ranged the interior was easily accessible, the 1834 expeditions required more precise details of the commercial viability of emigration. Three expeditions, all funded and led by wealthy Dutch colonists, left the Cape. One under J. Uys, S. Maritz and G. Rudolf headed for Natal where they thoroughly explored the area and held extensive negotiations with the Port Natal British after which the British traders declared they would welcome the Boers as all aspects of trade would be considerably expanded. Another expedition under W.J. Pretorius travelled to the north eastern Transvaal in the direction of Delagoa Bay, while a third proceeded north west to the present day Namibia.⁸³

In spite of the available information (or perhaps because of it) there was considerable disagreement among the emigrants as to their destinations. One group, led by A.H. Potgieter, wished to settle near Delagoa Bay. However the majority, led by Retief and Maritz, favoured the Port Natal hinterland as its proximity to the Cape would facilitate trade with the colony.⁸⁴ The wish of most Boer settlers to retain links with the colony was highlighted when the Republic of Natalia offered Britain preferential trading tariffs. In spite of the offer being rejected, trade flourished. In 1838 goods to the value of £2 000 were exported from Natal to the Cape. By 1839 this figure had risen to £4 800. Natal imports from the Cape rose just as sharply - from £5 900 in 1838 to £14 700 in 1839 and £17 000 in 1840.⁸⁵ Cultural ties were also maintained and many Natal Boers still baptised their children in the colony, visited relatives and remained subject to the Cape Dutch Reformed Church.⁸⁶

It is important to emphasise that the serious groundwork for the Boer conquests was laid by wealthy, established colonists. Usually either merchants or commercial farmers, these men undertook planning, provided leadership and determined the direction of the invasions. Many rank and file emigrants were poor but the leadership was comprised of successful men prominent

⁸³ Muller, *Oorsprong*, pp. 228-246.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 228-246.

⁸⁵ C.F.J. Muller, 'The Period of the Great Trek, 1834-1854', in C.F.J. Muller (ed.), *500 Years: A History of South Africa* (Pretoria and Cape Town, 1981), p. 168.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

in the eastern Cape economy and it was they who were the driving force behind the conquests.⁸⁷ In the words of one eastern Cape lawyer, the departure of:

'Retief, Uys and Maritz; of Potgieter, Landman and Du Plessis; and of Zietsman, Otto and Boshoff - must ever be viewed as producing a serious national calamity upon any country: that the departure of such men taking with them their entire families and properties, has tended very seriously to affect and impair the strength of the eastern province of the Cape Colony.'⁸⁸

Many of the Cape Dutch notables who initiated the seizure of lands outside the Cape Colony did not actually participate personally, risking their capital but not their lives. Money from the colony was especially forthcoming in financing the Boer attack on the Zulu during the Bloodriver campaign.⁸⁹ Many of these wealthy investors only journeyed to Natal once the situation had stabilised. They then dominated the *Volksraad*, engaged in land speculation, rack renting to Africans, large scale farming and other more or less capitalist operations. Leading members of the Natal establishment such as J.N. and J.C. Boshoff and Paul Zietsman fall into this category.⁹⁰ It is interesting that such individuals were not the exception as a large proportion of the Republic of Natalia's burghers reached Natal only after the arrival of the original parties. Most of these late arrivals were townsmen who arrived mainly by sea and consisted largely of medical doctors, lawyers, salesmen, land speculators and scientists.⁹¹

Finally, mention should be made of the ways by which ordinary Boers leaving the colony acquired the capital necessary for emigration. Provisions such as lead and powder required a significant outlay and most prospective emigrants also purchased a large stock of trade goods. Although not all colonists had easy access to large amounts of capital, several ways to raise cash

⁸⁷ The prominent social and financial status of the higher ranking Boer settler leaders such as Piet Retief, Gert Maritz and Karel Landman is well known. It is not such common knowledge that even leaders of intermediate and minor status were usually affluent men. Not much work has been done on leaders of this level, but for a beginning see B.J. Visagie, 'Minder Bekende Voortrekkerleiers', *Historia*, 35 (1990).

⁸⁸ H. Cloete, *The History of the Great Boer Trek* (London, 1899), p. 2.

⁸⁹ Slater, 'Transitions', p. 403; Cloete, *Trek*, pp. 107-108.

⁹⁰ Slater, 'Transitions', p. 403.

⁹¹ Muller, 'Period' of the Great Trek', p. 168.

did exist. Firstly, many wealthy colonists, such as P.A.R. Otto, were prepared to invest in the enterprise of others.⁹² Secondly, it is ironic that the emancipation of the slaves - generally believed to have been a disaster for Dutch colonists - may have assisted emigration by providing many former slave owners with a cash windfall. Compensation money provided colonists with cash to the tune of £1,5-million. Although the market value of the colony's slaves was around £3-million, it should be kept in mind the majority of slaves in the east were born into slavery rather than purchased, yet their owners were still compensated. This money could have been used to finance the emigration.⁹³ Thirdly, far from driving the Boers from the colony, the intensification of commerce and the attendant development of credit links between the eastern Cape, Cape Town and London created the structural conditions required for emigration by allowing colonists to obtain the necessary working capital from the speculative sale of their farms.⁹⁴ For example, prior to emigrating Daniel Jacobs Sr. sold four farms in a single day to the well-known merchant and speculator Francis Collison. The remainder of his possessions were disposed of over the next three days, including a further eight farms, 10 000 breeding sheep, 1 000 cross breed ewes, 1 000 pedigreed *Blinkhaarskape*, a hundred horses and a large amount of farm implements and furniture.⁹⁵ Collison was not the only member of the Cape establishment to purchase farms and other goods from the departing Boers; many merchants such

⁹² Slater, 'Transitions', p. 403. The activities of those who funded the Boer conquests is a crucial field which has scarcely been studied. Some knowledge of those who invested from afar but only later left the colony is available. However, to focus only on such individuals would be misleading. Susan Newton-King has shown that less well off Dutch colonists frequently borrowed money from wealthy members of their community and it is likely that individuals seeking to move to the Transvaal or Natal would have taken advantage of these informal credit networks. J.C. Visagie has demonstrated that most Boers left the colony in large extended family groups (including other individuals such as close friends and hangers on) of around thirty to forty people. These parties were headed by a wealthy patriarch and it is probable that such leaders made extensive but informal financial arrangements with poorer members of their parties. Unfortunately the dearth of studies renders such a view speculative, but for a brief overview of the wealth and status of minor Trek leaders see Visagie, 'Minder Bekende Voortrekker Leiers'.

⁹³ Muller, *Oorsprong*, p. 186.

⁹⁴ Slater, 'Transitions', p. 402.

⁹⁵ *Graham's Town Journal*, 3 Aug. 1837; Transfer Duties received, 28 Feb. 1838, in Visagie, 'Minder Bekende Voortrekker Leiers', p. 11.

as H.F. Fynn made use of the opportunity to acquire a considerable amount of property.⁹⁶

The dominant role of prominent figures in the eastern Cape mercantile establishment and the strong emphasis on gaining access to and expanding regional and international trade indicate that, like other participants in the Cape economy at the time, the Boers who invaded Natal and the Transvaal were responding to opportunities offered by the seizure of new lands within the context of an expanding world economy.

'The Trekkers were not the peripatic subsistence-orientated pastoralists of popular account. They were the products of a society at the Cape that had been partially formed under the dominance of merchant capital. Their early history in the Transvaal was shaped by their attempts to forge independent links with the world economy, not to escape from it'.⁹⁷

Changes to the systems of labour, land tenure and local administration did not undermine the position of the Dutch colonists. The Boers were not driven from the Cape Colony. Far from turning their backs on the modern world, the Boers were eager to profit from expanding their international connections. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the Boers were responsible for the establishment and extension of capitalist production in the lands they seized. Goods produced were sold on the regional markets. Increasingly sophisticated administrative structures were created and used to create the structural conditions (especially in the recruitment and control of labour) necessary for sustained economic growth. These were not the actions of a backward people.

⁹⁶ Somerset Quitrents, 21 Nov. 1831, p. 80; in Visagie, 'Minder Bekende Voortrekker Leiers', p. 7.

⁹⁷ P. Delius, The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth Century Transvaal, (Johannesburg 1983), p. 33.

Chapter 2

The administrative development of Ohrigstad/Lydenburg: from independent community to district.

1. Introduction.

When the emigrant Boers left the Cape Colony in the late 1830s, they rapidly expanded the sphere of European dominance. In less than forty years a vast part of southern Africa had been conquered, settled by Europeans and incorporated into the regional economy.

Essential to the successful conquest of the new territories was the development of the state institutions that underpinned the activities of the white settlers. Effective commerce required effective government. Labour had to be supplied, controlled and regulated, and land claims registered and inspected. A legal system which enshrined private property rights, settled disputes and imposed the will of the new rulers had to be put in place. However the establishment of effective government among the settlers was not simple. The various settler groups were largely independent of each other, engaged in different economic activities, concerned with their own agendas and highly resistant to the authority of others. The development of a central authority was consequently marked by conflict as different factions vied for dominance.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area, the focus of this study. During the 1840s a bitter power struggle occurred among the Ohrigstad Boers between supporters of the civilian *Volksraad* and those who preferred rule by an autocratic military ruler. By 1848 the *Volksraad* had out-manoeuvred the *Hoof-commandant*, but political peace and administrative coherence remained a chimera as other Boer groups increasingly vied with Ohrigstad/Lydenburg for political and economic power. Even after the Treaty of Derdepoort formally united the Boer communities in 1849, the *Volksraad* remained solidly Lydenburg-based and was very reluctant to share power equally. A regional power struggle ensued as other Boer communities resisted Lydenburg's control of the *Volksraad*. Potchefstroom and Rustenburg, in particular, vied with Lydenburg for administrative control and gradually managed to shift the locus of power south west. Faced with rule by a body it no longer controlled and unwilling to surrender its autonomy, Lydenburg declared itself independent from the other Boer communities in 1856. Close trade links with the rest of the Transvaal, however, made independence

impractical and in 1860 Lydenburg rejoined the South African Republic (Z.A.R.) Nevertheless, Lydenburg retained a degree of autonomy during the early 1860s. Between 1860 and 1864, the central government was hamstrung by the Transvaal civil war and effective authority remained vested in the local administration of *landroste* and *veldcornets*. By the end of the decade, however, Lydenburg was firmly controlled by Pretoria as the Boer state recovered from the civil upheavals and the central government was able to curtail regional autonomy.

An account of Lydenburg's transition from independent community to district can contribute much to our understanding of Boer settlement of the Transvaal as it highlights the relationship between administrative and economic development north of the Vaal. The growth of a central political authority revealed the extent to which the settler communities north of the Vaal became integrated economically - just as the 1877 British annexation of the Transvaal reflected regional economic interdependence. Similarly, the earlier struggle between the *Hoof-commandant* and the *Volksraad* was indicative of the conflicting needs of those who were purely hunter/raiders and those who had a more conventional economic orientation. Finally, the south west shift in political power during the 1850s showed the extent to which the Transvaal's economic hub had moved towards Potchefstroom and Rustenburg as these economies were boosted by trade with the Orange Free State (O.F.S.) and the British colonies.

2. Early Political Structures among the Settlers.

2.1. Constitutional dispute and political division in the Transoranje.

When the Boer settlers began to leave the Cape Colony in 1836, they did so in small independent parties. On their arrival in the Transoranje there was consensus that a broader government structure should be formed but there was considerable dispute over the form this should take. This debate broadly corresponded to differences in economic emphasis among the settlers.

The first parties to arrive in the Transoranje were organised along military lines under the autocratic leadership of *Hoof-commandant* A.H. Potgieter and his *Krygsraad* (military council). Such an undifferentiated system where both legislative and administrative power were vested in a military commander suited Potgieter's followers who were essentially a permanent raiding party. As their primary economic activities were the extraction of tribute and the sale of captives, ivory and hides, specialised government structures were unnecessary. Military rule

meant the various raiding parties could be effectively coordinated. The *Hoof-commandant* was personally responsible for opening new trade links and for regulating relations with African groups. He was thus best placed to judge where military action would be most profitable and was in a position to invoke it quickly and effectively. Boer military effectiveness was well demonstrated in 1836 when Potgieter, at the head of a combined Boer/Griqua commando of 114 men, attacked and routed Mzilikazi's Ndebele, seizing several thousand head of cattle.¹

The militaristic social order favoured by Potgieter's followers was challenged in November 1836 by the arrival at the Boer *laagers* in the Transoranje of Gert Maritz, a wealthy cattle rancher who had been prominent in local politics while resident in the eastern Cape. In an effort to establish a single governing body, the two factions held an open meeting on 2 December and chose by ballot a *Burgerraad* (citizens council) of seven with Maritz as President and Potgieter as *Legercommandant* (military commander). The *Raad*, whose members were called *Regters* (judges), was to be a combined policy making, law making and law enforcing body.²

The first *Burgerraad* did not last long before dissent rendered it ineffectual. Although Maritz supported raiding as both profitable and essential to the provision of labour, he realised that long-term economic prosperity had to rest on the production of commodities rather than just their seizure. Raiding could not be an end in itself; rather military force would be used to secure access to land and labour for the emerging Boer producers. Consequently Maritz favoured a more democratic government headed by a civilian parliament which would direct an accountable military leadership to secure its needs. Potgieter, however, vehemently opposed subordination to civilian authority and the failure of the parties to reach agreement left the Boers rudderless for the next four months.³

Fresh direction was injected in April 1837 by the arrival of Maritz's political ally, Piet Retief.

¹ G.D.J. Duvenhage, *Die Groot Trek: Die Eerste Drie Jaar, Deel 1 1836 Vegkop* (Johannesburg, 1986), pp. 82-96; F.A.F. Wichman, 'Die Wordingsgeskiedenis van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1838-1860', in *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 1941, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1941), 1, pp. 7-9. For Boer hunting, raiding and slaving activities see chapter three.

² H.S. Pretorius and D.W. Kruger (eds.), *Voortrekker- argiefstukke 1829-1849* (Pretoria, 1937), adR/36, minutes of meeting.

³ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', p. 12.

An election for a new *Burgerraad* was held and the Retief/Maritz bloc was able to oust Potgieter. Retief was elected Governor and Maritz Deputy Governor and Judge President of the Policy Council. Retief also replaced Potgieter, who did not even gain a seat on the *Raad*, as military commander. Potgieter's defeat was further entrenched when the 'Nine Articles' were adopted at Winburg on 6 June 1837. These articles proclaimed a 'Free Province of New Holland in South East Africa' of which Retief was made Overseer.⁴

The political marginalisation of Potgieter resulted in his separation from the main body of settlers. Refusing to acknowledge the authority of the *Burgerraad*, the Potgieter faction moved north across the Vaal River to the present day Potchefstroom.⁵ From here, the *Hoofcommandant* and his followers ranged over a vast area in pursuit of ivory and slaves.⁶ The bulk of the Boers favoured settlement in Natal.⁷ Good access to world markets could be secured via Port Natal and the land routes to the Cape and Delagoa Bay, while the large African population presented a vast pool of potential labourers. Led by Retief, the first parties crossed the Drakensburg in mid-1837 and reached Port Natal on 19 October.⁸

2.2. The conquest of Natal and the establishment of parliamentary rule.

The immediate concern of the Natal settlers was to secure title to the land and Retief immediately led a party to the Zulu capital of Umgungundlovu to demand the acquisition of a huge tract of land. Dingane, realising the threat posed by the Boers, had Retief and his party killed on 6 February 1838. He followed this action with surprise attacks on the settler encampments at Weenen and Blaaukrantz, engagements which saw over five hundred Boers killed and most of their livestock seized. The situation was reversed, however, with the arrival from Graaff-Reinet of A. Pretorius at the head of a *vegcommando* (war commando) of 470 men. Exploiting a good defensive position and utilising the safety of a fortified laager, the mobility

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

⁵ G.S. Preller (ed.), *Voortrekkermense*, 6 vols. (Cape Town, 1922), 3, p. 6, recollections of A.H. Potgieter and W.J. Potgieter.

⁶ See pp. 68-76 below.

⁷ The official borders (as in 1840) of the Republic of Natal were the Black Umfolosi River in the north, the Umzimvubu River in the south and the Drakensburg in the east.

⁸ Preller, *Voortrekkermense*, 2, p. 46, diary of Erasmus Smit, 14 Jan. 1838.

of the horse and the firepower of the musket and cannon, Pretorius was able to smash Zulu power on 16 December 1838 at the Battle of Bloodriver. Pretorius' force killed three thousand Zulu as opposed to three lightly wounded Boers.⁹

The defeat of Dingane opened the way for unimpeded Boer settlement in Natal. Attacks on African groups were not only aimed at the acquisition of land; groups both resident in and adjacent to the Boer domain also had to be forced to supply the invaders with labour. Two categories of labour, apprenticed and 'free' contract workers, were established. As had been the case in the Cape Colony, women and children were apprenticed to Boer farmers and large numbers of captives were taken both in private raids and official campaigns. Boers on commando were entitled to four captives each. Several hundred captives were taken in the Bloodriver campaign while the 1840 attacks on Mpande and then the Bhaca netted over forty two thousand cattle and one thousand children.¹⁰

Indentured labour alone could not meet Boer labour requirements and settler domination had to be established over Africans resident within the Boer domain if an adequate workforce was to be created. Of crucial importance was the fact that the Boer invaders did not return to the pre-Ordinance 50 status quo in the organisation of their labour supply. The Boers had learned from their experience in the Cape and, as the British had done with the Fingos, they assigned Africans to locations from where labour could be distributed. An important difference, however, was that in the Cape the African labour had to be imported while in Natal and later the Transvaal it was already in place and just had to be subjugated. Echoing the role of the eastern Cape military establishment, the locations were under the control of the *Commandant-generaal* who was authorised to attack recalcitrant communities. A pass system administered by the *veldcornet* of each *wyk* (ward) was introduced to control movement. All Africans within the Boer domain had

⁹ South African Archival Records, Natal 1, pp. 270-271, report of A.W.J. Pretorius, 23 Dec. 1838 (Hereafter South Africans Archival Records will be abbreviated as S.A.A.R. The provincial series being referred to will be indicated by the name of the province concerned and will be followed by the volume number, for example Transvaal 1.); *ibid.*, pp. 273-282, report of Baintjies, Nov. and Dec. 1838; *ibid.*, pp. 282-285, report of A.W.J. Pretorius, 31 Dec. 1838; G.S. Preller, Andries Pretorius: Lewensbeskrywing van die Voortrekker Kommandant-generaal, (Johannesburg, 1937), pp. 39-46.

¹⁰ J. Richner, 'Eastern Frontier Slaving and its Extension into the Transoranje and Natal, 1770-1843', paper presented to 'The "Mfecane" Aftermath Conference', University of the Witwatersrand, 1991, pp. 22-24.

to carry a document issued by their employers stating their name, age, distinguishing marks, place of residence and the number of their cattle, wives and children.¹¹ Although the Boers lacked the large police force necessary to consistently implement these measures and had to rely on punitive raids (often blurred with simple plundering), early Boer labour policy in Natal was important as it both betrayed the invaders' links with the Cape Colony and foreshadowed the future policy of the Z.A.R..

Access to land and labour provided the foundation for economic growth and a diverse range of commercial activities were soon evident. As in the Cape, hunting provided ivory, skins and horns for export, and cattle and apprentices were seized from the surrounding peoples. Commercial farming operations were soon established and livestock, butter and salted meat was exported in increasing quantities. During the first year that harbour fees were levied, exports via Port Natal generated £700 and it was calculated that this would rise to over £7 000 within three years. Belying the idea that the Boer settlers were opposed to placing commercial value on land, land speculation was vigorously engaged in and, as Norman Etherington has pointed out, the regulation of land laws was one of the *Volksraad's* priorities. Taking advantage of rising production levels, a merchant and professional class soon established itself and, in an effort to improve its access to the Cape market, the *Volksraad* pushed for a customs agreement with Britain.¹²

As the Republic's economy grew more complex, a more sophisticated government structure than the *Burgerraad* was needed and a new constitution was drafted in March 1839. A *Volksraad* of twenty four members elected annually by white males over the age of fifteen was established. The *Volksraad* met in January, April, July and October. A President was elected at each sitting but he had no executive powers and his authority lapsed at the end of each session. In order to ensure access to the *Volksraad*, any male citizen could present petitions or memoranda to a *Raad*

¹¹ J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, The Native Policy of the Voortrekkers: An essay in the history of the interior of the South African interior, 1836-1858 (Cape Town, 1928), pp. 37, 39, 43-44, 197.

¹² Cape Archives, 48/223 No 150, Napier to Stanley 9 Aug. 1842, Cloete to Napier 5 Aug. 1842, Ogle to Napier 28 July 1842, in Kruger, 'Weg', p. 80; Muller 'Period of the Great Trek', p. 168; Etherington, 'The Great Trek', pp. 18-19; Walker, Great Trek, pp. 154, 220, 248, 247, 249.

member who was obliged to table it.¹³ The *Volksraad* claimed both legislative and executive powers but, as it met only quarterly, most day to day matters were controlled by the *Landrost*. This official was appointed by the *Volksraad* and was responsible for tasks such as hearing civil and criminal matters, the registration of land claims and the indenture of labourers. An important role was also played by the local civil/military official, the *veldcornet*. Although *veldcornets* were elected, their appointment had to be ratified by the *Volksraad*. The *veldcornets* were responsible for enforcing the law in their wards, settling minor disputes, regulating labour supply, dealing with less serious military matters and could also indenture children.¹⁴ But although these officials provided a permanent administrative presence, the growing economy made increasing demands on the state and in 1842 the *Volksraad* was forced to appoint a *Kommissieraad* (caretaker council) of five to provide the *Raad* with a legislative and executive presence between sittings of the full *Volksraad*. While the *Kommissieraad* was limited in that its decisions had to be ratified at the next sitting of the full *Volksraad*, this body would by 1858 have evolved into an official executive body in the Transvaal.¹⁵

In line with its policy of fostering commerce and production, the *Volksraad* acted to ensure the military carried out the agenda of Natal's growing number of commercial farmers and merchants. Military matters were to be handled by a *Commandant-generaal* who presided over a *Krygsraad* assisted by *veldcornets*, but these structures were kept subservient to the *Volksraad*.¹⁶ The *Commandant-generaal* was appointed by the *Volksraad* for the duration of specific campaigns and his activities were controlled by strict *Raad* instructions. Furthermore, military officials were forbidden membership of the *Volksraad*.¹⁷

Promising as these developments were for the fledgling republic, actions by Britain were to

¹³ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 18-19; T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History* (Bergville, 1987), pp. 78-80; E.F.W. Gey Van Pittius, *Staatsopvatting van die Voortrekkers en die Boere* (Pretoria, 1941), pp. 19-22.

¹⁴ Gey Van Pittius, *Staatsopvatting*, pp. 25-28, 45-46, 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ J. Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal 1495-1845*, 2 vols. (Pietermaritzburg, 1888), 2, p. 207; Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis' pp. 18-19.

¹⁷ Davenport, *Modern History*, p. 79; Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 25-27.

prevent their fruition. Even prior to the Boer occupation of Natal, powerful commercial interests in Grahamstown, Cape Town and London had lobbied for the British annexation of Natal.¹⁸ The foreign office opposed annexation on the basis that imperial finances could not stand the expense. Governor Napier had, however, kept his options open by maintaining that emigrants were British citizens subject to the jurisdiction of the Cape of Good Hope Punishment Act. From the British point of view, annexation had several advantages: the demands of the commercial lobby would be satisfied, British strategic interests would be protected and it was felt a military force to the north of the Xhosa would reduce expenditure on the eastern frontier.¹⁹

In spite of Britain's wish to avoid costly entanglements, pressure for the annexation of Natal continued to mount. Visits to Port Natal by foreign trading ships such as the American brig *Levant* and the Dutch slaver *Brazilie*²⁰ raised the prospect of foreign competition in the profitable Natal trade, causing consternation in Cape commercial circles and intensified lobbying for annexation. By the early 1840s all that was required for action to be taken was a catalyst. The pretext for annexation was eventually provided when continued Boer raiding for cattle and labour was combined with criticism over the emigrants' continued use of apprenticed child labour. Those in the Cape Colony with an interest in Natal hypocritically demanded that the 'natives be protected'.²¹ Governor Napier responded to these requests and, in 1842, dispatched a military force to Natal which broke Boer resistance after a few minor battles.²²

2.3. The Potchefstroom raiding state and military rule north of the Vaal River.

When Potgieter left the Free State laagers for the Transvaal, his followers were initially politically autonomous of the Natal *Volksraad*. They nevertheless retained important trade links with Port Natal: ivory and hides were brought to the port for export and there are records that

¹⁸ Slater, 'Transitions', pp. 372-381.

¹⁹ Muller, 'Period of the Great Trek', pp. 170, 172.

²⁰ The growing presence of vessels such as the *Brazilie* which travelled between Delagoa Bay and Port Natal, as well as the existence of an overland route between Port Natal and the Portuguese slaving port (Carolus Trichardt is known to have made the overland journey), raises strong suspicions that slaves were being traded in Natal.

²¹ S.A.A.R., Natal 1, pp. 152-155, Volksraad minutes, 29 April 1842.

²² Muller, 'Period of the Great Trek', pp. 171-172.

on several occasions children were brought to Natal for indenture.²³ In 1840 economic ties between the rival Boer communities were given political expression when, after some negotiation, the area controlled by Potgieter was nominally incorporated into the Republic of Natalia.²⁴ Potgieter was to preside over an *Adjunct Raad* (deputy Raad) responsible to the full *Volksraad*.²⁵ In practice, however, the *Hoof-commandant* remained firmly in control.²⁶ After the collapse of the Republic Natalia and the resulting disarray among supporters of the *Volksraad*, the balance of power shifted back to Potgieter and his followers at Potchefstroom. On 7 August 1843 the *Adjunct Raad* declared itself independent of the Natal *Volksraad* and drew up a new constitution. The *Commandant-generaal* was once again the dominant political figure among the Boer settlers.²⁷

The shift in power was more than a personal boost for Potgieter; it also meant hunting and raiding once again became the dominant Boer economic activity. From their base at Potchefstroom, the Transvaal Boers had hunted, slaved and raided over a huge area north of the Vaal. In 1842, for example, they undertook a collaborative raid with Doris Buys against the Ndebele.²⁸ Goods acquired from these activities were sold on the region's markets. The British colonies provided an outlet for captives and animal products, but this market was rapidly dwarfed by the booming ivory and slave centre at Delagoa Bay. During the first half of the nineteenth century sugar production in Brazil grew rapidly and vast numbers of slaves were required by the plantations. In response to this demand, the volume of slaves exported from the Bay rose sharply. Linked to the growing slave trade was the export of ivory. Slaving parties

²³ Agar-Hamilton, *Native Policy*, p. 160.

²⁴ G.S. Preller (ed.), *Voortrekker Wetgewing: Notule van die Natalse Volksraad, 1839-1845* (Pretoria, 1924), p. 77, Volksraad decision, 28 Aug. 1840.

²⁵ Preller, *Voortrekkermense*, 3, p. 29, recollections of A.H. Potgieter; *S.A.A.R.*, Natal 1, pp. 67-68, Volksraad minutes, 16 Nov. 1840; *Ibid*, Bylaag 28 of 1840.

²⁶ Wichmann, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 27-29.

²⁷ Preller, *Wetgewing*, p. 230, Adjunct Raad decision, 2 Jan. 1843; , Pretorius and Kruger, *Voortrekker-argiefstukke*, pp. 258-259, minutes of meeting.

²⁸ Bird, *Annals*, 2, p. 62; Correspondence with the British Commissioner relative to the slave trade, Class A, pp. 85-87, in Agar Hamilton, *Native Policy*, p. 178; Potgieter and Theunissen, *Hendrik Potgieter*, pp. 125-128.

routinely hunted elephants as part of their wider operations and then used their captives to transport the tusks to market.²⁹

Potgieter and his hunter/raider followers were well placed to profit from the lucrative slave and ivory trade at Delagoa Bay, and it was to the north east that the *Hoof-commandant* increasingly turned his attention. While on an expedition north of the Limpopo River as early as 1836, Potgieter had encountered Portuguese traders (probably the mulatto Portuguese slaving community on the shores of Lake Nyasa) who urged him to establish commercial links with Delagoa Bay.³⁰ Closer ties with the Portuguese settlement were also advocated by Louis Trichardt's son Carolus. Carolus Trichardt had travelled the coast extensively while employed as an agent for Portuguese merchants at Delagoa Bay and must have been aware of the profitability of the commercial networks in the area. Unfortunately details of Trichardt's activities as an agent cannot be provided as no record of his actions have survived. But as the ivory and slave trade dominated Delagoa Bay commerce and coastal merchants routinely employed agents to secure these commodities, the nature of his activities seems self-evident.³¹ Potgieter also personally visited Delagoa Bay in 1840 and many of his followers traded in the area.³²

Potgieter made the final decision to move to the Portuguese sphere in 1843 when he led a 'well armed and mounted' commando, accompanied by three hundred slaves and a large quantity of ivory, to Delagoa Bay.³³ Here he met the Dutch trader Smellenkamp who advised him to settle in the Delagoa Bay hinterland with the proviso that the Boers remain north of the twenty sixth parallel so as to escape the jurisdiction of the Cape of Good Hope Punishment Act. An

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 97; Jackson-Haight, *European Powers*, pp. 62-103; it is possible that slaves seized by Potgieter's followers also reached the Cape Colony via Potgieter's contacts with the Griqua, but more research is needed.

³⁰ Preller, *Dagboek*, Bylaag 3, p. 383.

³¹ Potgieter and Theunissen, *Hendrick Potgieter*, pp. 117-118, 136; Preller, *Voortrekkermense*, 2, pp 22-23, recollections of Carolus Trichardt.

³² Potgieter and Theunissen, *Hendrik Potgieter*, pp. 117, 137.

³³ d'Abreu de Lima to Minister of State and Colonies, 31 Aug. 1844, in Jackson-Haight, *European Powers*, Appendix 2, p. 316.

agreement was also reached with the Portuguese Governor who encouraged Potgieter to settle between the tenth and twenty-sixth parallels, four days journey inland from the bay.³⁴

Convinced of the profitability of the Delagoa Bay trade, Potgieter returned to Potchefstroom to begin preparations for the move to the eastern Transvaal. It was declared that the seat of government would no longer be Potchefstroom, a public meeting was held to confirm that Potgieter would be both *Hoof-commandant* as well as *bestierder* (manager) of the new settlement, and Adam Kok was visited on unspecified business.³⁵ The move began in May 1845 and by June the main body of Boers was camped along what was named the Ohrigstad River.³⁶

3. The establishment of Ohrigstad and the Potgieter/Volksraad conflict.

The new settlement, named Ohrigstad, was established on the lowveld, one day's journey west of the Kaspersnek pass and three days by wagon from Delagoa Bay.³⁷ The settlement was adjacent to the Pedi in the west and the Swazi in the south east. Included in the new Boer domain were several smaller African societies, the most notable of which were the Kopa and the Ndzundza Ndebele. Significantly, Ohrigstad also straddled two important and established trade routes between Delagoa Bay and the interior.³⁸

The site chosen for the new settlement reinforces the view that the community's initial economic emphasis was towards hunting and raiding. Situated in the lowveld with its tsetse fly problem,

³⁴ Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 92-93; Potgieter and Theunissen, Hendrick Potgieter, p. 135.

³⁵ Pretorius and Kruger, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, R. 118i/46, A.H. Potgieter to G.J.Kruger; ibid., R. 120/47, Proclamation; Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 43-45; A.P. Van der Merwe, 'Voorgeskiedenis van die Republiek Lydenburg', unpublished M.A. thesis (University of Pretoria, 1940) p. 19.

³⁶ Preller, Voortrekkermense, 3, p. 7, recollections of A.H. and W.J.Potgieter.

³⁷ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 16-19, Volksraad minutes, 20 Aug 1845; ibid., pp. 16-19, Kommiesieraad minutes, 16 May 1846; Delius, Land, pp. 30-32.

³⁸ A.P. Van der Merwe, 'Die Beskawing Kom na Die Oos-Transvaal', in Lydenburgse Eeufeesgedenksboek (Pretoria, 1945), pp. 18-19.

the area was unsuited to ranching.³⁹ Still, the lowveld was rich in game and hunting was an important activity. Ohrigstad was also close to several major African societies, sources of tribute and slaves, but above all the settlement was close to Delagoa Bay.

Attracted by these factors, over three hundred families had settled in Ohrigstad by the end of 1845. Hunting and raiding parties began to operate and trade with the coast was launched immediately. By 8 October 1845 sufficient plunder had been generated for an expedition of twenty five wagons loaded with hides and ivory to be dispatched to Delagoa Bay under Carolus Trichardt. Although the Boer records do not mention captives among the cargo, they do note that once at the bay the expedition traded in children. Once again, however, details are unavailable and there is no record of the number of captives involved or of the parties to the transactions.⁴⁰ This was to be the first of many official and private trading expeditions to the Portuguese settlements.⁴¹ The initiative to trade was not confined to the Boers. Ohrigstad was immediately visited by Portuguese traders, several of whom opened trading stores in the town.⁴² In spite of difficulties created by poor roads and tsetse fly, commerce was established between Ohrigstad and Delagoa Bay. Wagon-loads of ivory and hides were conveyed to the bay by wagon during the tsetse fly free winter months and by African porters in summer.⁴³ Ohrigstad was also visited by British traders (some from as far afield as Grahamstown) in such numbers that in 1848 Governor Da Silva complained to the *Volksraad* that Portuguese interests were being jeopardised.⁴⁴

38 B.H. Dicke, 'The Tsetse's influence on South African History', The South African Journal of Science, 29, (1932). This short article is the only work on the impact of the tsetse fly on South African history.

⁴⁰ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 24-25, Volksraad minutes, 14 Oct. 1845; Preller, Voortrekkermense, 2, p. 24, recollections of Carolus Trichardt.

⁴¹ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, p. 89, Volksraad minutes, 6 Dec. 1848.

⁴² Kruger, 'Weg', p. 97; Van der Merwe, 'Voorgeskiedenis', pp. 62-63.

⁴³ J.B. De Waal, 'Die Rol van Jao Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal', in Archives Year Book for South African History, 2 vols. (Elsies River, 1953), 1, pp 8-12; The Friend of the Sovereignty, 5 Aug. 1850; Pretorius and Kruger, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, R118i/46, Potgieter to Kruger. The use of porters was complementary to hunting, raiding and trading as slaves being transported to the coast could be used to transport the products of hunting and raiding.

⁴⁴ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 248-249, Da Silva to Volksraad, 24 Jan. 1848.

The prominence of hunting and raiding in the activities of the Boers placed the military leader, *Hoof-commandant* Potgieter, in a very powerful position and he kept close control over the affairs of the settlers from the outset. All settlers were subject to the authority of their *veldcornet* who reported to the *Krygsraad* which in turn reported to Potgieter personally. The settlers were not allowed to leave the encampment at Ohrigstad without the permission of their *veldcornet*.⁴⁵ As military leader, Potgieter could control the activities of the many private hunting and raiding parties. He was also responsible for invoking the official plundering expeditions launched by the Boers and traders entering the area required Potgieter's sanction. Crucially, because of his control of the settlers' coercive apparatus, the *Hoof-commandant* was the conduit through which the Boers made demands on African groups and this allowed him to dominate the distribution of labour and tribute.⁴⁶

The autocratic rule of the *Hoof-commandant*, however, was soon challenged by those who favoured a civilian *Volksraad*. The *Volksraad* had been constituted on 30 June 1845 and immediately demanded that Potgieter acknowledge its authority but the number of *Raad* supporters were limited and the *Hoof-commandant* remained in control.⁴⁷ The balance of power turned against Potgieter as an increasing number of settlers arrived in the district from Natal. When Natal was occupied by the British in 1842 most Boers had accepted the new authorities but the British decision in 1845 not to recognise land claims made during the Republic of Natalia drove many settlers from the new colony. A number of them settled at Ohrigstad where they threw their weight behind the *Volksraad*.⁴⁸

On the surface, rivalry between Potgieter and the *Volksraad* concerned contending systems of government but, as had been the case in the Transoranje, the root of the dispute lay in different economic priorities. The *Volksraad* was the political vehicle of those focused on the commercial production of commodities. This group sought more comprehensive settlement than did the

⁴⁵ Van Der Merwe, 'Voorgeskiedenis', p. 27.

⁴⁶ P. Bonner, Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-century Swazi State (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 53.

⁴⁷ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 48-50.

⁴⁸ B. Naidoo, 'David Dale Buchanan as Editor of the Natal Witness', in Archives Year Book for South African History, 2 vols. (Pretoria, 1977), 1, pp. 156-165; Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 98-99.

followers of Potgieter. Potgieter's insistence that the settlers remain in compact groups for heightened military effectiveness was at odds with both pastoral and arable production which required dispersed settlement. His policy towards Africans was also found to be unacceptable. Potgieter was content to allow a large degree of autonomy to African groups who paid the required tribute, furnished auxiliaries for Boer plundering expeditions and provided seasonal labour. In contrast, the pastoral and arable producers required closer control of Africans if sufficient labour was to be procured and the *Volksraad* worked hard to replace Potgieter's personalised style of land allocations to Africans with a system of clearly designated loan farms that allowed much closer control of Africans.⁴⁹

The *Volksraad's* challenge to Potgieter's rule focused on his control of essential areas of the economy. It first moved to end Potgieter's control over African groups. Central to this effort was the question of title to land occupied by the Boers. The Boer territory had been personally granted to Potgieter by the Pedi in 1845.⁵⁰ The *Volksraad* rejected this agreement and in July 1846 secured an alternate title to the land from the Swazi.⁵¹ The motive for negotiating the cession from the Swazi was more than just the wish to ensure more respectable title than Potgieter's. As the Boers justified their rule of African groups in terms of ownership of land, obtaining fresh title allowed the *Volksraad* to undermine the *Commandant-generaal's* control of the settlers' African subjects. Also crucial to the establishment of the *Volksraad's* authority was the need to end Potgieter's ability to regulate the community's trading relations with both the Portuguese and the British. British merchants known to be associated with Potgieter were accused of gunrunning and barred from the district. In 1847 a close associate of Potgieter, Joseph McCabe of Grahamstown, was even arrested and his goods impounded.⁵² Potgieter's

⁴⁹ Transvaal Archives, L 5, Uitvoerende Raadsbesluit, art. 27, 17 Dec. 1859 (Hereafter Transvaal Archives will be indicated as T.A.); W.A. Stals, 'Die Kwessie van Naturelle-eiedomsreg op Grond in Transvaal, 1838-1884', in Archive Year Book for South History, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1975), 1, pp. 4-5. Boer attempts to formalise and extend their authority over their African subjects is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

⁵⁰ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 50-51; T.S. Van Rooyen, 'Die Verhouding tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882', in Archives Year Book for South African History, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1951), 1, pp. 4-5. For more on the Swazi land cession see chapter five.

⁵¹ Pretorius and Kruger, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, R 117/46, text of Treaty.

⁵² S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 61-62, Volksraad minutes, 12 March 1847.

role as the pivot in the trade with the Portuguese was also challenged. The *Volksraad* sent commissions to both Delagoa Bay and Inhambane and as a result of these efforts the Portuguese Governor Da Silva began to deal with the *Volksraad* instead of the *Hoof-commandant* in early 1848.⁵³

As the *Volksraad* undermined his position, Potgieter was forced to take desperate action. On 22 September 1846 he introduced a new constitution of 32 articles which, making no mention of the *Volksraad*, provided for rule by an autocratic *Hoof-commandant* presiding over a hierarchy of *commandants* and *veldcornets* and assisted by an advisory council termed the *Jurierraad*. Ohrigstad now had two conflicting forms of government. Tension rose rapidly between the groups and civil war was only averted by a compromise which allowed the competing systems to co-exist independently of each other and each settler to choose which authority to acknowledge.⁵⁴

In spite of his efforts to consolidate his position, Potgieter steadily lost ground to the *Volksraad*. This was largely due to the shifting economic focus of the district. After 1846-7 cattle ranching steadily became established in the district's western and south western wards (see maps one and two) and increasing numbers of ranchers supported the *Volksraad*. Equally important was that as elephant numbers became depleted through intensive hunting (the ivory of up to 350 adult elephants was required to make up a single consignment), the hunter/raider frontier had moved further and further north drawing with it increasing numbers of Potgieter's followers.⁵⁵ The eagerness of traders from the ivory and slave port of Inhambane to forge links with the Boers added to the attraction of the north.⁵⁶ Faced with a growing challenge to his authority in Ohrigstad and lured by opportunities well suited to his proclivity for hunting and plunder, Potgieter and his remaining followers moved north in 1848 to establish the new town of Schoemansdal in the Zoutpansburg.⁵⁷ The Zoutpansburg Boers prospered from trade links with

⁵³ Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 104-105.

⁵⁴ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 60-63.

⁵⁵ See chapter three for more detail on the economic development of the Lydenburg district.

⁵⁶ De Waal, 'Jao Albasini', chapter five.

⁵⁷ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 62-64.

Inhambane and Sofala. Kruger describes one Portuguese delegation to the Boers as consisting of two government officials, a few 'mohammedan' traders, a Russian, several slave traders and a large number of porters.⁵⁸

Victory for the *Volksraad* meant the end of Ohrigstad. For a compact raiding community, Ohrigstad had been well-situated but its location became less suitable as ranching rather than raiding came to dominate the settler economy. Malaria, tsetse fly and stock diseases threatened man and animal and Ohrigstad's geographic location made access to the centre awkward for dispersed stock farmers. Consequently, on 19 September 1849, the *Volksraad* decided to abandon Ohrigstad and establish a new town - to be named Lydenburg - some 150 kilometres south west of Ohrigstad.⁵⁹ This would place the new centre on the highveld just beyond the tsetse fly and malaria belt and provide easier access for stock farmers on the higher lying areas. The decision to vacate Ohrigstad is often mistakenly seen as evidence of its collapse but the move should rather be seen in the context of a restructuring necessary to suit the needs of a growing number of cattle ranchers.

4. The incorporation of the Boer communities north of the Vaal River into a single administrative unit and the struggle for control of the Volksraad.

4.1. Formal unity is established at the Treaty of Derdepoort.

By 1848-9 the Boers north of the Vaal were still divided into four largely autonomous groups - at Lydenburg, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg and Schoemansdal. The *Volksraad* held sway in Lydenburg, the *Hoof-commandant* still held sway at Schoemansdal, while Potchefstroom and Rustenburg were administered by an ill-defined combination of *Landrost*, local *Commandant* and *veldcornets*.

Although politically autonomous, the settler communities were linked economically. For example, ivory from the north was sold in Potchefstroom and Rustenburg, beef from Lydenburg was disposed of on the Potchefstroom market, and traders from the south supplied Lydenburg

⁵⁸ Kruger, 'Weg', p. 141.

⁵⁹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 99-103, *Volksraad* minutes, 20 Sept. 1849. It is interesting that the abandonment of Ohrigstad coincided with the beginning of the decline of the Delagoa Bay slave trade.

and Schoemansdal with goods that could not be produced locally.⁶⁰ This trade was, however, hampered by the lack of administrative continuity. Contracts and property rights were difficult to enforce in other communities, infrastructures were haphazard and the lack of a central system for the issue of trade licences meant the southern districts could monopolise revenue from incoming merchants. Economic interaction made the establishment of a single governing body essential.

Most settlers in the Transvaal regarded the *Volksraad* as the legitimate vehicle of political power but, after Potgieter's retreat to the Zoutpansburg, the *Raad* was dominated by the Lydenburg Boers. Lydenburg's control of the *Volksraad* was resisted by other Boer communities. Potchefstroom and Rustenburg were especially vocal and, led by A. Pretorius, called a meeting at Heckpoort on 9 February 1849 to demand representation on the *Volksraad*.⁶¹ Although the Lydenburg *Volksraad* declined to attend the Heckpoort conference, they held a meeting in April 1849 to consider Potchefstroom and Rustenburg's demands. At this meeting it was agreed that delegates from other Boer settlements be incorporated - but on Lydenburg's terms. Half of the new body's delegates had to be from Lydenburg and, although meetings of the *Volksraad* would be rotated between the various settlements, two thirds of the meetings had to be held in Lydenburg - a crucial factor as other Boer centres were several days journey from Lydenburg. Lydenburg was also to be the seat of government, ensuring preferential access for Lydenburg to government machinery. These conditions were agreed to by the other parties at Derdepoort on 23 May 1849 and, for the first time, the Boer settlers were formally united under a single political body.⁶²

4.2. The struggle for control of the *Volksraad*.

Although formal political unity was established at Derdepoort in 1849, it was some time before an effective central administration was established. Lydenburg's continued control of the *Volksraad* was resented by the other settler communities and a bitter political struggle ensued, impeding the effective exercise of power. Efforts by Potchefstroom and Rustenburg, in

⁶⁰ See below pages 76-88.

⁶¹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, p. 272, minutes of meeting, 22 April 1849; *ibid.*, p. 272, letter from deputation, 3 April 1849.

⁶² *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, p. 97, proclamation of committee, 3 April 1849; Pretorius and Kruger, *Voortrekker-Argiefstukke*, R173/49, report of J.J. Burger, 19 April 1849.

particular, lessened Lydenburg's hold on the *Volksraad* over the following seven years. The shift in political power to the south west did not happen in a vacuum, however, and was underpinned by a shift in the balance of economic power.

During the heyday of its hunter/raider phase, Ohrigstad had been the economic hub of the Transvaal. But the decline in elephant numbers in the late 1840s and the subsequent departure of the hunter/raiders to Zoutpansburg meant trade in captives and ivory moved north. Beef production had allowed the district's economy to continue to develop after the departure of the hunter/raiders in 1848 but the considerable distance which cattle had to be driven to market meant growth was initially slower than in the previous three years.⁶³

The Portuguese ports of Delagoa Bay and Inhambane were the markets initially favoured by the Lydenburg cattle ranchers and, during the years 1850-60, at least seven trade delegations were dispatched to improve links with the coast.⁶⁴ But the export of beef via the Portuguese ports did not flourish. Trade had prospered when based on portable, high value commodities such as ivory, but the transition to beef exports was hampered by the tsetse fly belt separating Lydenburg from the coast. Coastal merchants were also uninterested in beef while Potgieter's followers in the Zoutpansburg could still supply ivory, hides (and probably slaves) in large numbers.⁶⁵

The failure of the Lydenburg ranchers to secure an outlet for their products on the Portuguese coast meant they were forced to export their cattle over long distances to the Cape and Natal, bringing them into direct competition with Potchefstroom and Rustenburg which were geographically better positioned to tap the British markets.⁶⁶ Potchefstroom, in particular,

⁶³ See chapter three.

⁶⁴ For a listing of these attempts see: Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 125-148.

⁶⁵ De Waal, 'Jao Albasini', chapters three, four, five and seven; P. Naude, 'Die Gesiedenis van Zoutpansburg', unpublished M.A. thesis (University of South Africa, n.d.), pp. 62-73; R. Wagner, 'Zoutpansburg: Some Notes on the Dynamics of a Hunting Frontier', in Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Series, 6 (1976) p. 32.

⁶⁶ F.J. Potgieter, 'Die Vestiging van die Blanke in Transvaal (1837-1886)', in Archives Year Book for South African History, 2 vols. (Cape Town/Pretoria, 1958), 2, pp. 36-38; P. Naude, 'Boerdery in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek, 1858-1899', unpublished D.Litt thesis (University of South Africa, 1954), pp 106-112; T. Keegan, Rural Transformations

exploited its southern location to become the conduit for trade between other parts of the Transvaal and the British colonies and, by the late 1840s, had become an important trading centre.⁶⁷ The first regulations for the Potchefstroom market, which operated weekdays between eight and ten in the mornings and three to four in the afternoons, were passed in 1850. By 1858 business was so brisk that 124 wagons visited the market in the month of November alone and in six months of that year goods to the value of Rds 54 131 were sold.⁶⁸

The more populous and prosperous centres of Potchefstroom and Rustenburg were therefore well placed to erode Lydenburg's hold on power. The southern centres used various farming and military emergencies as an excuse not to attend those *Raad* sessions which did not suit them, denying the *Volksraad* a quorum.⁶⁹ In the absence of regular *Volksraad* sessions, a device known as the *Kommiesieraad* (first conceived of as the caretaker council of Natal *Volksraad*) was employed. This council consisted of members drawn from the settlement where the meeting was to be held and was empowered to make decisions on condition these were ratified by the full *Volksraad* at a 'later date'.⁷⁰ Potchefstroom and Rustenburg's economic and demographic clout meant a *Kommiesieraad* invoked in these areas carried more weight than one held in

in Industrialising South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914 (London, 1987), pp. 1-2.

⁶⁷ As early as 5 August 1850, the *Friend of the Sovereignty* noted that since the establishment of several British merchant houses at Harrismith in the Orange River Sovereignty trade with the Potchefstroom area began to increase steeply. Goods sold included: butter, hides, fire wood, oats, 'kaffir corn', 'boere meal', corn, mielie meal, maize, leather thongs, whips, *stroppe*, leather shoes, fat, rope, wool, *gars*, bones, brandy, ostrich feathers, cattle, poultry, chalk, potatoes, peaches, tobacco, horses, pigs, eggs, apricots and pumpkins. See list in A.N. Pelzer, *Die Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek*, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1950), 1, pp. 177-178.

⁶⁸ Notule van die Volksraad, Potchefstroom, 23 Jan. 1850, art. 44; Landrost records, Potchefstroom, No. 154; Government Gazette 24 Dec. 1858. All cited in G.D.J. Duvenhage, 'Die Republiek Lydenburg in Suid Afrika: Agtergrond, Ontstaan en Einde', unpublished D.Litt thesis (University of South Africa, 1966), pp. 109-110.

⁶⁹ While the various crises presented as excuses for not attending the Volksraad sittings were grounded in fact, their importance was exaggerated and used to serve political ends. An excellent example of this is when the western Transvaal delegates were unable to attend the sitting of the Volksraad in Lydenburg in May 1851, but were nevertheless in the same month able to attend a Kommiesieraad meeting at De Kruis in the Magaliesburg; see *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, p. 33, Kommiesieraad minutes, 30 May 1851.

⁷⁰ Duvenhage, 'Die Republic Lydenburg', pp. 107-109.

Lydenburg and gradually the southern *Kommieseraade* assumed the position of effective rule.

The ability of Potchefstroom and Rustenburg to usurp the authority of the *Volksraad* was clearly illustrated by their attempts to gain official British recognition of Transvaal independence. After the Lydenburg *Raad* began negotiations with the British in 1851 the Western Transvaal *Krygsraad*, led by A. Pretorius, issued a proclamation in September 1851 forbidding the Lydenburg *Raad* from entering negotiations with any external or internal body, or taking any decision on behalf of Potchefstroom or Rustenburg.⁷¹ Pretorius then entered into negotiations with the British himself and, in January 1852, attended the Sand River Convention where British recognition of Transvaal independence was secured. The treaty signalled the end of Lydenburg's political dominance of the Transvaal. Officially Pretorius was merely one of four *commandants* responsible to the *Volksraad*; yet his support base in the south and west was so strong he was not only able to independently establish the Z.A.R. as an internationally recognised political unit, but also to secure the political centre stage for himself.⁷²

Andries Pretorius died on 23 July 1853 and was succeeded by his son M.W. Pretorius as *Commandant* of Potchefstroom and political leader of the southern Boer centres.⁷³ M.W. Pretorius continued his father's policy of re-making the *Volksraad* to reflect the economic prominence of the south and worked consistently to loosen Lydenburg's hold on the *Raad*. *Volksraad* sittings in Lydenburg remained unattended by Potchefstroom and Rustenburg and the decisions of the Lydenburg *Raad* remained unrecognised.⁷⁴

In September 1853 the Pretorius faction were able to further isolate Lydenburg when, at a sitting of the *Volksraad* (not attended by Lydenburg), it was decided to secede from the Cape synod of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* and to appoint a Ds. Van der Hoff as head of the church in the Transvaal. This move was opposed by the Lydenburg *Raad* and Potchefstroom/Rustenburg used this as an excuse to expel the Lydenburg representatives from the next sitting of the

⁷¹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, pp. 232-234, *Krygsraad* minutes, 8 Sept. 1851.

⁷² *Ibid.*; *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, p. 51, *Kommieseraad* minutes, 10 Jan. 1852.

⁷³ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', p. 127.

⁷⁴ Duvenhage, 'Die Republiek Lydenburg', pp. 107-109.

The expulsion of Lydenburg's delegates from the *Volksraad* signalled the end of its position as the politically dominant settler community in the Transvaal. All that remained for Pretorius was to formalise the situation. On 19 September 1855 a commission (on which Lydenburg was not represented) was appointed to draw up a new constitution reflecting the changed distribution of power in the Transvaal. Lydenburg's right to appoint more representatives than other districts to the *Raad* was ended. In future the *Volksraad* would consist of twelve members, three from each major centre. The position of the southern and western communities was also strengthened by the creation of an executive. Henceforth a president would be elected by a ballot of all adult male settlers - a clause which benefited the more populous south and west. The president was to be assisted by an *Uitvoerende Raad* (executive council). Provision was also made for the creation of a single and permanent legislative and administrative capital, Pretoria, on the Apies River.⁷⁶

Although the supporters of the new constitution were acting in the name of the united *Volksraad*, they were in effect proposing a completely new structure. The authority of the old *Raad* had been undermined, its dominant group sidelined and a new locus of power established to the south west. That Potchefstroom and Rustenburg had re-invented the *Volksraad* to suit themselves was abundantly clear to the Lydenburg *Raad* and it responded angrily on 27 November 1855 when it declared that Potchefstroom and Rustenburg had carried out an act of secession and destroyed the 'unity created at Derdepoort in 1849'.⁷⁷

The implementation of the new constitution entered its final phase when delegates from Potchefstroom and Rustenburg refused to attend the *Volksraad* meeting scheduled for May 1856 in Lydenburg. Instead, a rival *Raad* was constituted at Pretoria where the new constitution was

⁷⁵ The Transvaal's theological crisis has been extensively documented elsewhere and need not be dealt with here.

⁷⁶ Duvenhage, 'Republiek Lydenburg', pp. 201-204 the site of the capital was important as the public had a profound influence on the outcome of *Volksraad* meetings and a significant political advantage could be achieved by placing the capital within your sphere of influence.

⁷⁷ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, pp. 319-326, Kommiesieraad minutes, 27 Nov. 1855.

discussed and instructions sent to the *Landrost* of Lydenburg ordering him to proclaim its contents in every *veldcornetcy*.⁷⁸ This was the last straw for the Lydenburg *Raad* which, realising its inability to stem the flow of political and economic power southwards, decided to secede from the Z.A.R.. On Wednesday 16 December 1856 Lydenburg declared itself an independent Republic.⁷⁹

5. The Republic of Lydenburg.

On declaring its independence, Lydenburg worked hard to re-establish itself as the focus of power in the Transvaal and made a concerted effort to consolidate and improve the Republic's position both internally and externally.

Essential to the new Republic's survival was the creation of a more stable domestic environment. Until 1856, both legislative and executive powers were vested in the *Volksraad*. However, as this body met quarterly even in ideal conditions, the responsibility of day to day government was shouldered by the *Landrost* and *veldcornets*. The absence of effective central government and the devolution of power to districts meant communities frequently embarked on courses of action that, while suited to local conditions, had destabilising consequences in the wider context. An excellent example of this was when, even at the height of Lydenburg's conflict with the Ndzundza Ndebele in 1861-2, some burghers collaborated with the Ndebele to raid Pedi migrants for guns.⁸⁰ Consequently, in order that central authority be more effectively exercised, legislative and executive power was split in 1857. The *Volksraad* continued to make laws but an *Uitvoerende Raad* (executive council) was constituted to exercise executive authority.⁸¹

The establishment of the *Uitvoerende Raad* by Lydenburg is important. Several authors have claimed that the establishment of an executive authority in the constitution proposed by Potchefstroom and Rustenburg had been a major factor in the cession of Lydenburg. This was

⁷⁸ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 3, pp. 134-144, Kommiesieraad minutes, 1 Oct. 1856.

⁷⁹ TA, L 1, Volksraad decision, 16 Dec. 1856.

⁸⁰ Delius, *Land*, p. 66.

⁸¹ Duvenhage, 'Die Republiek Lydenburg', p. 190.

not so. Like the other Boer communities, Lydenburg realised the importance of the effective exercise of power; what they objected to was not controlling the executive body.

In tandem with an overhaul of government machinery, the Republic of Lydenburg sought to improve its position in the regional, political and economic balance of power. Central to Lydenburg's ambitions was the creation of a union of the eastern and northern Boer communities to rival the Potchefstroom/Rustenburg bloc.

Overtures were made to Utrecht and in February 1858 this community of south eastern cattle ranchers agreed to incorporation with Lydenburg.⁸² During the course of 1857-8, several proposals for unification were also directed towards Zoutpansburg. Fusion with the militarised and wealthy north would improve both Lydenburg's coercive power and financial situation. Like Lydenburg, Zoutpansburg had resented the increasing dominance of the Potchefstroom/Rustenburg bloc and had seceded from the Z.A.R. in 1857.⁸³ However, union with Lydenburg was prevented when, from 1858, growing conflict with its African subjects began to disrupt Zoutpansburg's trade with Delagoa Bay and Inhambane.⁸⁴ Consequently the northerners came to depend increasingly on the Cape and Natal for the sale of their ivory - most of which passed through the Potchefstroom market.⁸⁵ Unable to sever ties with the commercially ascendant southern communities, the Zoutpansburg Boers were forced to rejoin the Z.A.R. in 1858, weakening Lydenburg's challenge to the Z.A.R..

The attempt to establish a power bloc to rival Potchefstroom/Rustenburg was further undermined by Lydenburg's failure to gain foreign recognition of its independence. The Netherlands ignored Lydenburg's pleas for recognition while Britain recognised the Z.A.R.'s legitimacy. Only the O.F.S., whose President Boshoff was a political rival of M.V. Pretorius, was at all supportive of Lydenburg. In spite of this, the O.F.S. eventually threw its weight behind the Z.A.R. in

⁸² Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 223-227.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸⁴ TA, SS 40, R4298/61, Albasini to Schoeman, 2 March 1861; R4322/61, Albasini to Schoeman, 29 March 1861; R4903/61, Albasini to Schoeman, 11 May 1861; De Waal, 'Albasini', pp. 57-63.

⁸⁵ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 86.

September 1857.⁸⁶

Lydenburg's attempt at political independence from the Z.A.R. was put under further pressure by heightened regional economic growth which underlined their economic interdependence. Increasing volumes of beef were being exported from Lydenburg's western *wyke* such as Steenkampsberg to Potchefstroom and Natal. The beginnings of a wool producing industry, which exported its produce via Potchefstroom and Natal, had been established in the southern *wyke* such as Matieland. Even the sale of arable products, mostly to the O.F.S., picked up in spite of the cost involved in marketing them.⁸⁷ Economic integration made a mockery of political separation and in 1859 the large western *veldcornetcy*, Elandsrivier, elected to rejoin the Z.A.R..⁸⁸ There was also a strong lobby in Utrecht calling for reintegration. It is striking that when proposals for reunification with the Z.A.R. were put to the *veldcornetcies* for discussion in 1859 no objections were received from the south and west, areas which had the closest economic ties with the Z.A.R., O.F.S. and British colonies. Several of the northern *veldcornetcies*, however, sought amendments.⁸⁹

As increasing numbers of Lydenburg residents realised separation from the Z.A.R. did not make economic sense, the movement for re-integration gathered momentum. Unsurprisingly, the movement for union with the Z.A.R. was led by the commercial elite who had most to gain. In 1859 the prominent trader, agent and land speculator, H.T. Buhrmann, declared: 'it is no longer possible to continue living in this dissent and division'. On 26 February 1859 a commission from Lydenburg, led by Buhrmann and *Landrost* C. Potgieter, met a delegation from the Z.A.R. to negotiate Lydenburg's incorporation. It was agreed the Z.A.R. would respect land transactions made by Lydenburg; that Lydenburg would not be responsible for debts incurred by the Z.A.R. prior to reincorporation; and that Lydenburg could establish a district council to run local affairs. With minor amendments, these conditions were approved by the Lydenburg *Volksraad* on 6 June 1859 and, on 4 December 1859, Lydenburg once again became

⁸⁶ Duvenhage, 'Republiek Lydenburg', pp. 150-160; Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', pp. 196-198.

⁸⁷ See chapter three.

⁸⁸ Duvenhage, 'Republiek Lydenburg', p. 205.

⁸⁹ TA, L 1, reports of veldcornets, December 1859.

part of the Z.A.R..⁹⁰

6. The Lydenburg district and the Z.A.R., 1860-1877.

Lydenburg's re-incorporation into the Z.A.R. was not an even process. Economically, Lydenburg had never been separate from the rest of the region and the commercial unity of the different Boer communities and British colonies continued to increase.⁹¹ Commodities such as flour, maize meal and tobacco were exported in increasing quantities to the O.F.S and the British colonies. Wool production in the southern wards continued to rise - for example, wool exports (mostly from Lydenburg) via the Potchefstroom market rose by seventy five percent between November 1859 and April 1860.⁹² The growth of the wool industry led to the establishment of Middelburg on 29 March 1860. By 1872, Middelburg had grown to such an extent it could be separated from Lydenburg and declared a separate district.⁹³ Land values rose due to the demand among burghers on the highveld for winter farms in the lowveld and the increasing number of speculative land purchases by British commercial interests.⁹⁴ The integrated nature of the regional economy was illustrated in 1866 when the Natal Mercury declared: 'We have got into looking at the vast states of the interior as being almost part of ourselves. They rank among the mainstays of our prosperity'.⁹⁵

Administratively, however, Lydenburg's reincorporation into the Z.A.R. was not as smooth. The effective administration of the Lydenburg district was important to the well-being of the Z.A.R.. The financial tight-rope walked by the Z.A.R. is well known. One of the major causes of the Republic's fiscal difficulties was the need to transport most imports and exports via the British colonies which levied taxes on all the goods. The Z.A.R.'s best hope of evading British taxes was to trade via Delagoa Bay, but this entailed the consolidation of Z.A.R. authority in

⁹⁰ TA, L 2, Volksraad minutes, art. 7, 26 March 1860.

⁹¹ Lydenburg's ties to the regional economy will be examined in chapter three.

⁹² Pelzer, Geskiedenis, p. 181; Naude, Boerdery, pp 134-140.

⁹³ TA, LL 194, S. Swart to Landrost, 17 Oct. 1872.

⁹⁴ TA, LL 73, register of owners of farms; Naude, Boerdery, p. 32.

⁹⁵ The Natal Mercury, 24 Oct. 1866, cited in C.W. De Kiewiet, British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics, 1848-1872 (London, 1929), pp. 257-258.

the eastern Transvaal through which the Z.A.R.'s road to the sea would run.⁹⁶

Lydenburg's strategic importance to the Z.A.R. was further accentuated by the fact that African migrant labourers, especially the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele, from the Lydenburg area were employed throughout the Z.A.R. and the British colonies.⁹⁷ Central authority had to be effective if this was to be regulated. The discovery of gold at Pilgrimsrest in 1871 also made the effective application of central authority essential if revenue was to be collected efficiently, labour supplied and infrastructure improved.⁹⁸

But while the establishment of central control over Lydenburg's local administration was essential, the extension of Pretoria's authority was not easy. Not only had years of weak central authority made Lydenburg resistant to outside control, but the outbreak of the Transvaal civil war in 1862 prevented any concerted action being taken against regional autonomy for several years.

In 1860, Z.A.R. President M. Pretorius accepted the office of President of the O.F.S.. As a precaution against intervention by the British who were opposed to Pretorius holding both offices, the *Volksraad* suspended Pretorius. This sparked a power struggle in the Transvaal. The senior member of the *Volksraad*, S. Schoeman, should have been appointed Acting President, but the *Raad* preferred to install J.H. Grobler. Grobler, however, resigned when it became clear he did not have popular support. Schoeman, at the head of an armed force, then installed himself as President and W.J. Janse Van Rensburg as *Commandant-generaal*.⁹⁹

Opposition to the Schoeman coup mounted quickly and in 1862 the *Volksraad* declared Van Rensburg President and T.J. Snyman *Commandant-generaal*. Martial law was declared. Schoeman made a stand at Potchefstroom but Snyman forced him to flee to the O.F.S..

⁹⁶ M.S. Appelgryn, *Thomas Francois Burgers* (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 77-98; Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 197-199.

⁹⁷ N.A. Etherington, 'Labour Supply and the Genesis of the South African Confederation in the 1870s', *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979), pp. 235-253.

⁹⁸ TA, LL 19, Landrost to veldcornets, 14 Feb. 1870; EVR 220, petition of Erasmus and 23 others, 26 April 1873.

⁹⁹ Davenport, *Modern History*, p. 88.

Schoeman returned in 1863 and occupied Pretoria but was soon expelled by a force led by Paul Kruger. New presidential elections were held and Van Rensburg narrowly defeated Pretorius. The Schoemanites continued to resist until January 1864 when they were forced to sue for peace. Presidential elections were held again and this time Pretorius, who had surrendered the O.F.S. presidency, was re-elected. He held office for the next seven years and the Z.A.R. entered a period of stability that would allow the central state to consolidate its domestic authority.¹⁰⁰

The most pressing task faced by the newly stabilised Pretorius government regarding Lydenburg was to establish fiscal control over the district. The Z.A.R. had always been plagued by a lack of revenue because of inefficient tax collection with the northern and eastern Boer communities especially unwilling to contribute to state coffers. Structures for the collection of revenue were in place, freehold farms were taxed Rds 40 annually, quit rent was collected, trading licences sold, fines levied and Africans subjected to hut and poll tax; but little of this accrued to the central government.¹⁰¹ Tax evasion was widespread and practices such as claiming only half or quarter ownership of farms to lessen tax liabilities were commonplace.¹⁰² Furthermore, until 1856 each community was liable for its own expenses and, after incorporation into the Z.A.R., Lydenburg's local officials remained reluctant to part with the revenue they had collected.¹⁰³ Finally, taxes on Africans were an ineffective way to generate revenue. Hut and poll tax on Africans were primarily a means to recruit labour and many local officials preferred to accept labour in lieu of payment.¹⁰⁴

Pretoria began its efforts to end Lydenburg's fiscal autonomy by ordering a financial census of the district in June 1864.¹⁰⁵ Having established the size of the Lydenburg tax base, the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

¹⁰¹ F.A. Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', pp. 262-263, 253; TA, L 17, list of monies received from veldcornetries.

¹⁰² TA, L 20, complaint of J Van Dyk, 20 Nov. 1856; *ibid.*, Landrost to Joubert and Combrink, 7 Oct. 1856; LL 4, State President to Landrost, 1 Feb. 1873.

¹⁰³ I.D. Bosman, L.I. Coertze, H.G. Viljoen and P.C. Coetzee (eds.), Voortrekker-Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria (Pretoria, 1938), p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 3, Bylaag 38 of 1859; *ibid.*, Bylaag 27 of 1860; *ibid.*, Transvaal 5, Bylaag 101 of 1864.

¹⁰⁵ TA, LL 3, Uitvoerende Raad to Landrost, 6 June 1864.

Auditor-General and the *Uitvoerende Raad* repeatedly exhorted the *Landrost* to collect taxes more diligently and to keep proper record of incoming revenue. By 1869 the tax returns were showing a marked improvement.¹⁰⁶

Monitoring of Lydenburg officials was not limited to overseeing tax collection and the *Uitvoerende Raad* exercised increasing control over the *Landrost's* office. A striking feature of the Lydenburg *Landrost's* correspondence after 1864 is the extent to which it was dominated by instructions from the central government. Prior to the mid-1860s most correspondence to the *Landrost* came from residents in the district but from the middle of the decade most incoming correspondence consisted of instructions from the *Uitvoerende Raad* concerning matters ranging from general policy to the collection of fines, farm boundaries and land inspections.

The administrative integration of Lydenburg into the Z.A.R. was also effected by greater central government involvement in both the appointment of local officials and the definition of their duties. In 1863 a public prosecutor was appointed for Lydenburg.¹⁰⁷ P.J. Coetzee was installed Justice of the Peace the following year and in 1864 J.M. De Beer was appointed diplomatic agent to the Pedi, Swazi and Ndzundza Ndebele - a function traditionally fulfilled by the *Landrost*.¹⁰⁸ Central government intervention continued in 1867 when a huge tract of land was given to Alexander McCorkindale for sale to Scottish immigrants.¹⁰⁹ Named New Scotland, the area was made a ward of Lydenburg. McCorkindale was appointed *veldcornet* and, with his access to the President's office due to his prominence in the Z.A.R.'s plans to establish a land corridor to the east coast, had influence in the district out of proportion to his office.¹¹⁰ In 1870, the *Landrost* was also required to keep a record of all inhabitants of the district as well as to immediately notify the *Raad* of the election of any new *veldcornets*

¹⁰⁶ TA, LL 19, Landrost to veldcornets, 29 Jan 1869; LL 4, Uitvoerende Raad to Landrost, September 1870; *ibid.*, Auditor General to Landrost, October 1870; SS. R135/71, taxation returns for 1869, 1 Feb. 1871.

¹⁰⁷ TA, SS 50, R576/63, Landrost to Uitvoerende Raad, 17 Oct. 1863.

¹⁰⁸ Delius, *Land*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 174-184.

¹¹⁰ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 23.

or appointment of their deputies.¹¹¹ Another centrally appointed official was added to the local administration in 1873 when M. Diedericks was appointed police chief of the district.¹¹² The powers of the *Landrost* were further restricted in 1873 when his power to issue permits for the sale of weapons was withdrawn.¹¹³ The punishment of criminals was also placed in the hands of the central government, as was the granting of permission to missionaries to operate in the area.¹¹⁴

By the 1870s Lydenburg was administratively no different from any other part of the Z.A.R.. The central government now carried out many functions previously performed by the local administration, centrally appointed officials were increasingly prominent in the district and the duties of local officials were clearly defined by Pretoria. The extension of central control over local administration was graphically demonstrated by the appointment of H.W.A. Cooper as *Landrost* of Lydenburg. Cooper was a personal friend of President Burgers (who had succeeded Pretorius in 1872) and worked hard to further the interests of the Z.A.R.. His office collaborated closely with the President and, during Burgers's absence in Holland, with Acting President P. Joubert.

7. Conclusion.

The Boer settlers who emigrated from the Cape Colony in the 1830s and 1840s did not seek to divorce themselves from the modern world. Profitable commercial links with world markets were forged via the Cape, Natal and Delagoa Bay. Rapid economic and demographic growth followed. As settler society became increasingly complex and sophisticated, coherent administration became essential. The study of the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg district has shown how rapidly a central political and administrative authority developed north of the Vaal.

It is striking that the settlers did not simply re-create V.O.C. or British administrative structures. Certainly some features were retained. The *landroste*, *veldcornets* and commando system were

¹¹¹ TA, LL 4, Uitvoerende Raad to Landrost, September 1870.

¹¹² TA, LL 4, State Secretary to Landrost, 18 July 1873.

¹¹³ TA, LL 4, State Secretary to Landrost, 17 June 1873.

¹¹⁴ TA, LL 4, State Secretary to Landrost, 3 July 1873; *ibid.*, State Secretary to Landrost, 17 July 1873.

relics of the colony; but an elected parliament with full legislative powers supported by an executive body and specialised departments were also created - before similar structures emerged in either the Cape or Natal.

Certainly the emerging state faced considerable obstacles which at times impaired its functioning. Constitutional disagreement, political dissent and a cash shortage were all in evidence. Much has been made of these difficulties by historians, but it is forgotten that from nothing the foundations of a modern state were laid in less than forty years. This can be compared to the Cape which, after almost three hundred years of colonial rule, finally received representative government in 1853. The creation of the Boer state was a substantial achievement by a modern people aware of their needs and innovative enough to devise the administrative structures to address them.

Chapter 3

The development of the Boer economy in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area, 1844-1877.

'It would appear to an impartial investigator to be little less than miraculous how a people, fresh from their wanderings, had succeeded in so few years, not only in planting the features of a successful civilisation over 130 000 square miles of country [the Transvaal], but in wringing from the land the wherewithal to pay for the cloths, arms and imported articles consumed by them during their periods of "trek" and settlement, as well as for the materials and utensils of comfort and necessity which they have gathered around them or used for the ornamentation of their houses.'¹

Studies of the conquest of the southern African interior by Boers from the Cape Colony after 1836 have assumed a commercial/non-commercial dichotomy in their treatment of economic development. Boer settlers outside the Cape Colony have generally been seen as economically irrational. To Macmillan, Boer production was subsistence orientated, had degenerated into 'mere habit' and was plagued by 'inexpertness and a backwardness'.² Morris reproduces this picture of a backward and 'undifferentiated Boer population' living in 'quasi-feudal states' until the economic revolution caused by the mineral discoveries in the late 1860s and 1870s.³ Such a view is not borne out by an examination of the Boer economy in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area. The eastern Transvaal Boers worked hard at expanding their links with the world economy and, like the contemporaneous invasions by European settlers in the U.S.A., Australia and Siberia, their conquests were at all times commercially orientated. While the degree and form of Boer commercial activity was necessarily affected by the circumstances and difficulties involved in seizing and developing new lands, the rationale behind settlement was a desire to

¹ A. Aylward, The Transvaal of Today: War, Witchcraft, Sport and Spoils in South Africa (London, 1878), p. 21.

² W.M. Macmillan, The South African Agrarian Problem and its Historical Background (Johannesburg, 1919), pp. 38-40.

³ M. Morris, 'The State and the Development of Capitalist Social Relations in the South African Countryside: A Process of Class Struggle', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Sussex, 1981), pp. 1-15.

profit by the selling or exchanging of goods and services.

The nature of Boer settlement in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area is best illustrated by the activities in which they engaged: the marking out of land for sale or lease and the accumulation of commodities for sale to merchants in the British and Portuguese colonies. This chapter will examine the economic activities engaged in by the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers in an effort to demonstrate the commercial nature of their conquests. The extent to which the Boers accorded land a commodity value will be examined and the degree to which the accumulation and production of commodities was linked to the market will be assessed. A diverse range of accumulative activities will be investigated. Activities such as hunting, raiding, slaving and the extraction of tribute which were prominent during the early days of the settlement will be investigated. The development of the production of arable goods such as wheat and tobacco, as well as pastoral commodities such as beef and wool, will be traced. Mention will also be made of those Boers who were engaged in non-productive economic activities.

1. Land.

A frequent explanation for the emigration of Boers from the Cape Colony is that Dutch colonists objected to British land policy as it 'gave land a commercial value'. Such an explanation was shown to be incorrect in chapter one which argued that land had been given a commercial value since the earliest days of white settlement. The idea that the emigrants regarded land as some 'free gift of nature' is further belied by the fact that one of the defining features of the Boer conquests was their treatment of land as a commodity.

From the earliest days in Natal the acquisition and sale of land had been a priority among the Boers and the settlers who established themselves at Ohrigstad/Lydenburg were no exception.⁴ One of the first acts of the Ohrigstad *Volksraad* was to draw up regulations governing the claiming and sale of land. In terms of their *burgerregte* (citizens' rights), all adult (Boer) males were entitled to two farms.⁵ A claimant would provide a description of the property and its boundaries to the local *Landrost* who would record them and issue a receipt as a temporary title. When a sufficient number of farms had been claimed in a locality, an inspection commission

⁴ Walker, *Great Trek*, pp. 220, 347, 248.

⁵ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp 14-16, Volksraad minutes, 2 Aug. 1845.

would visit the area and inspect the proposed claims. If title was confirmed, final transfer could take place and the deeds would be issued. Farms were not to be larger than three thousand morgan and, as in the Cape, were issued in freehold.⁶

Many ambitious settlers were not satisfied with only two farms and, either to increase the scale of their farming operations or simply to speculate in land, many began to acquire additional holdings. By 1846 town plots in Ohrigstad were being auctioned at a starting price of Rds 40 and by 1847 farms were changing hands for around Rds 900.⁷ Central to the trade in land was the quick registration of title deeds. Registration through the *Landrost's* office often caused delays in the final transfer of land as land commissions were frequently tardy in inspecting claims. In response to the need for the rapid issue of formal title, C. Rabie (in a move reminiscent of the private land companies that played a significant role in parcelling out land in the U.S.A.) in 1846 set himself in competition with the *Landrost* as a registrar of deeds at Ohrigstad. His activities were however short-lived as the *Volksraad*, eschewing competition, declared his enterprise illegal.⁸ Although Rabie's activities were ended, land continued to be traded before it was formally inspected and a considerable trade developed in the initial claim receipts (*uitreksels*). Land sales in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area received a considerable boost in 1848 when the epicentre of commercial hunting and raiding shifted north to the Zoutpansberg.⁹ Due to the nature of their activities, the hunter/raiders were not dependent on the possession of land for their existence and consequently many were willing to dispose of their *burgerregte*. This allowed ambitious settlers with a little capital to acquire more land and build the foundation of what for many would in later years develop into substantial speculative land holdings.¹⁰

⁶ T.S. Van Rooyen, 'Die Verhouding Tussen die Boere, Engelse en die Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882', in Archives Year Book for South African History, 2 vol. (Cape Town, 1951), 1, pp. 21-22.

⁷ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 73, Volksraad minutes, 4 Nov. 1847.

⁸ Ibid., Bylaag 17 of 1846.

⁹ See pp. 68-76 below.

¹⁰ Delius, Land, pp. 127-128; Naude, Boerdery, pp. 61-105; R. Cornwall, 'Land and politics in the Transvaal in the 1880's', in Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Series, 4 (1973), pp. 31-33; Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', p. 249.

The acquisition and sale of land continued throughout the 1850s. As cattle ranching and wool production developed, settlement spread to the south and west and the highveld areas of the district were rapidly divided and parcelled out as privately owned units.¹¹ Some farms in the new areas were claimed in terms of *burgerregte*, but Boers who had already claimed farms elsewhere had to purchase their land (many of those who had settled in the northern wards such as Ohrigstad moved south as beef and wool production took off). A Rds 500 fine was imposed on those who exceeded their *burgerregte*.¹² The price paid for farms could differ widely depending on the situation of the property, the number of improvements and access to water. In 1850 the established cattle ranch of Deelkraal was sold for Rds 5 000 while in November 1851 an undeveloped farm in the arable region along the Stads River was purchased by Joao Albasini for only Rds 700.¹³ By the time of the British occupation, however, the combination of the establishment of gold diggings at Pilgrimsrest in 1873 and an escalating land shortage in the district meant that on average farms were changing hands at between Rds 6 000 and Rds 7 000.¹⁴ The southward expansion of settlement also led to increased demand for urban plots in the new town of Lydenburg and, as early as 1850, plots in the town were changing hands for £1.¹⁵

An appreciation of the commodity value of land was not limited to private individuals. Many of the running costs of administering the district came from the sale of land. In 1852, the *Volksraad* authorised the Lydenburg local authorities to supplement the district's existing income from the issue of licences and the collection of fines with the sale of land. State land was divided into farms and auctioned on a strictly cash basis to supplement state revenue. Officials were also frequently paid for their services in land, for example the issue to *Landrost C.*

¹¹ See pp. 76-88 below.

¹² Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 22.

¹³ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, pp. 17-18, Volksraad minutes, 15 Jan. 1851; *Ibid.*, pp. 47-51, Volksraad minutes, Nov. 1851.

¹⁴ T. Baines, Journal of Residence in Africa 1842-1853, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1964), 1, p. 146.

¹⁵ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 3, pp. 3-5, Volksraad minutes, 5 Jan. 1854; *ibid.*, pp. 73, Volksraad minutes, 15 June 1855; *ibid.*, pp. 54-56, Volksraad minutes, 19 March 1852.

Potgieter in 1852 of a farm along the Oliphants River.¹⁶ In a move similar to the allocation of land by private speculators during the colonisation of Virginia in the American west, the *Volksraad* in 1864 sold a Scot, Alexander McCorkindale, a block of two hundred farms in the Lydenburg district for £8 000. These were then to be resold by him to prospective emigrants.¹⁷

The sale of land at state auctions as well as the practice of auctioning off deceased estates promoted the speculative purchase of land by the wealthier settlers. Land speculation was also accelerated by the willingness of many Boers to become *bywoners* (tenants) of their wealthier fellows. Poorer settlers with few resources often used their *burgerregte* as a means to accumulate capital. Land could be claimed then sold and the proceeds used to purchase stock which would be run on land hired from others in terms of a *bywoner's* agreement.¹⁸

The speculative accumulation of land received a considerable boost in the late 1850s. In 1858 the *Volksraad* declared all vacant land to be state property. The following year the *Volksraad* passed an act that read much like a speculators' charter. In addition to their freehold properties, individuals would be allowed to claim one or more quit rent farms at the cost of 30 shillings per annum. This allowed some individuals, frequently state officials who were in a position to ensure their land claims were verified, to acquire huge land holdings. Perhaps the best known example of this is that of Johan Vos, the *Landrost's* clerk at Marthinus Wesselstroom, who by 1866 had managed to acquire 120 quit rent properties.¹⁹ The Lydenburg district was no exception to this trend. During the 1860s there was a marked upswing in the number of farms claimed, as well as escalating demands for the inspection of farms for which *uitreksels* had been issued. By 1869 several prominent Boers in the district had substantial holdings, the largest being J. de Clerq with eighteen farms and H. F. Buhrmann with seventeen.²⁰

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-67, *Volksraad* minutes, 1852.

¹⁷ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 23; Mitchell, 'The Commercial Nature of Frontier Settlement in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 1 (1969), pp. 109-113.

¹⁸ See footnote nine above.

¹⁹ Naude, 'Boerdery', pp. 67-68.

²⁰ TA, LL 78, Land book of Landrost.

Land speculation in the Lydenburg district was not confined to the Boers resident there; as commercial links between Lydenburg and the rest of the sub-continent developed, increasing amounts of land in the district fell into the hands of outsiders. The *Volksraad* frequently received complaints that foreigners were purchasing land in competition with residents of the district.²¹ The purchase of land by outsiders occurred in several ways. Many of the traders operating in the area either bought land rights or accepted them as payment of debts. Land also passed into the hands of foreigners through the activities of specialist Boer land speculators who 'exported' land by securing title and then auctioning the deeds at one of the commercial centres springing up across the region.²² Some foreign speculators also employed local Boers (L. Biccard was prominent in this respect) as their agents to either claim or purchase land on their behalf.²³ While land in the Lydenburg area passed into the hands of individuals and companies in the Cape, O.F.S., as well as other parts of the Transvaal, the major land purchasers were based in Natal. By 1869 A. Devenish and E. Button owned twenty and seventeen farms respectively while the Durban-based Harmony Company owned twenty one. (By 1877 the Harmony Company had expanded its holdings to forty farms). Other large land holders in the district were David Benyman and the Marine Insurance Trust, also of Natal.²⁴

It is significant that the acquisition of land by both the Boers and foreigners was not checked by prior occupation of the land by Africans. The Boers believed their defeat of the Ndebele and their agreements with the Pedi in 1845 and the Swazi in 1846 had secured ownership of the entire area. The land originally settled around Ohrigstad contained numerous African societies including the Ndzundza Ndebele and the Kopa.²⁵ Even the more powerful African states were affected and as early as 1845 farms had been claimed well within Pedi territory.²⁶ The *Volksraad's* 1868 decision to close land claims sparked a last rush for land and even land which

²¹ See for example: TA, SS 160, R1580/73, Petition of Jansen and 91 others, 12 Sept. 1873.

²² *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, Bylaag 1 of 1850; Delius, *Land*, pp. 129-130.

²³ TA, LL 3, Biccard to Landrost, 9 May 1869.

²⁴ TA, LL 4, Biccard to Landrost, n.d.; LL 70. Land book of Landrost; LL 73, Register of farms.

²⁵ Bonner, *Kings*, p. 69.

²⁶ Delius, *Land*, p. 133.

could not be taken possession of was claimed. The land books show a marked upswing in land claims in areas such as the Pedi heartland during the late 1860s.²⁷ There were significant advantages to be gained by claiming land occupied by Africans. Not only was such land likely to be fertile and well watered, but the presence of Africans ensured a supply of labour.²⁸ Furthermore, some property owners began to profit from letting land to Africans, a harbinger of the widespread practice of 'kaffir farming' which would become such a feature of rural South African life. This was already illustrated in 1859 when W.J. Grobber, negotiating the sale of his farm to the government, commented that the purchase price should take into account that 'like in Natal, the farm could be hired to Africans for a good profit'.²⁹

By the time of British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 there was very little land left in the Lydenburg area to which Europeans did not have title. In just thirty two years all available land in the district had been converted into privately owned units and accorded a market value which dictated the terms under which transfer of ownership took place. The placing of a monetary value on land was not something that came about abruptly in the late 1860s. Land had been accorded a commercial value since the earliest days of Boer settlement in the Lydenburg district. Both the state as well as private individuals and organisations had profited from dealing in land. The use of Roman Dutch law which enshrined property rights and the proclamations of the *Volksraad* facilitated the acquisition, sale and speculation in land. Far from being some anathema that drove them from the Cape, the accordance of a commercial value to land was a central feature of Boer settlement in the Transvaal. The Boers were hardly the people whom Jeff Peires claims were vehemently opposed to the conversion of land from a 'free gift of nature into a taxable and marketable commodity'.³⁰

2. The accumulation, production and sale of commodities.

In order to grasp the nature of the diverse economic activities practised by the Boers, it is essential it is interpreted within the context of the phases of economic development evident during the European colonisation of the broader southern African region. The basic stages of

²⁷ TA, LL 65-70, Register of farms.

²⁸ This theme is elaborated on in chapter four.

²⁹ TA, L 12, Inkomende Stuk, 27 Dec. 1859.

³⁰ Peires, 'The British and the Cape', p. 502.

economic development during the conquest of new lands had been established in the Cape Colony. When Europeans first entered a new area, commercial activities centered on accumulation of commodities through pursuits such as hunting, raiding and slaving. In time, however, the accumulation of goods was replaced by more conventional production. Depending on climate, terrain, demand and distance from the market, the European settlers established operations producing agricultural goods, meat and wool. During both periods the commercial viability of European conquest depended on the invaders' capacity to dominate African groups. But, as the production of goods supplanted their seizure, the purpose of the subjugation of Africans changed; instead of seeking to plunder people and products, African societies were subjugated in order to create the pool of servile labour upon which European agricultural and pastoral production depended.³¹

As colonists expanded into new lands on the peripheries of the Cape Colony, the seizure of resources and the production of agricultural and pastoral commodities formed largely distinct periods with the transition from one period to another occurring over a fairly long time. However, the speed with which new lands were seized and brought into production by the Boers meant not only was there considerable overlap between these two phases but that the formal production of goods occurred more rapidly than had been the case in the Cape.

Nowhere was the ellision of the usual sequence of economic development more evident than in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area. Although most of the first Boers to arrive in the area were engaged in hunting and raiding, efforts were immediately made to produce and export agricultural produce (particularly wheat which grew very well in the district's northern reaches) via Delagoa Bay. For reasons discussed below, the export of agricultural goods via Delagoa Bay and the hunting/raiding/slaving economy were superseded in importance during the 1850s by cattle ranching and in the 1860s by wool production. In spite of this rise to economic prominence of pastoral production in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg district, some Boers remained wedded to the hunting/raiding economy while others continued to produce agricultural goods, especially when demand was boosted by wars or mineral discoveries.

³¹ Boer efforts to create a servile African labour force in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area will be discussed in chapter four.

2.1. Hunting, raiding and slaving by the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers.

The most prominent branch of the Boer economy during the first years of settlement, hunting, has been fairly well documented elsewhere.³² Boer hunting exploited the area's teeming elephant herds, generating large volumes of ivory which were exported to both the Portuguese territories and the British colonies. However, while the importance of hunting to the Boers has been recognised, other equally important branches of the Boer economy have unfortunately been obscured. Boer hunting parties were more like commandos than informal groups. Including several hunters, a large number of African auxiliaries and supporting wagon trains, Boer hunting parties could mobilise a substantial amount of firepower and were as geared to raiding as they were to the slaughter of elephants.³³

Hunting parties from Ohrigstad are known to have raided African peoples as far north as Lake Ngami, seizing mainly cattle and 'orphans.' These raids wrought such destruction that even powerful leaders such as Soshangane were forced to send tribute to Ohrigstad.³⁴ The power of Boer raiding parties to demand tribute was further illustrated in 1847 when the *Volksraad* launched an investigation into Doris Buys's activities as a tribute collector on behalf of A.H. Potgieter. The commission found that by merely invoking the threat of a commando, Buys had been able to demand and receive, from Makwati: sixty six oxen, two goats, two sheep and an unspecified number of female captives; from Matale: twenty two oxen, one cow, forty *hamels* and sixteen goats; from Maraba: fifty cattle and ten sheep; and from Mapela: 102 oxen, a hundred *hamels* and one ivory tusk.³⁵ Ivory and cattle were favourite items of tribute but the Boers also demanded increasing numbers of children. Captives received as tribute were apprenticed by the *Volksraad* to private burghers on the payment of an apprenticeship tax of Rds 50.³⁶

³² Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 92-94, 127, 140, 194; Potgieter, 'Vestiging', pp. 53, 60, 84-87, 95, 145.

³³ De Waal, 'Joao Albasini', p. 14; Delius, *Land*, p. 35.

³⁴ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 89-90, *Volksraad* minutes, 6 June 1848.

³⁵ Krynau and Pretorius, *Transvaalse-argiefstukke*, R 119/47, Report of Commission, January 1847.

³⁶ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 22-23, *Volksraad* minutes, 26 Sept. 1845.; *ibid.*, pp. 85-87, *Volksraad* minutes, 7 Oct. 1848; Pretorius and Kruger, *Voortrekker-argiefstukke*, R119/47, Report of Grobler, 14 May 1847.

In a similar vein to the activities of the private hunting parties were the numerous small scale semi-official raids. Organised at a local level by the *veldcornet* in his capacity as military leader of his ward, these raids (like that of *veldcornet* H. Potgieter who led a band of 119 raiders against the chief Ramagalabotla in 1853) were euphemistically referred to as 'patrols' and performed numerous coercive functions ranging from simple plunder to the provision of labour.³⁷ Most Boers preferred to cloak their raiding activities in the guise of hunting parties or 'patrols' but some were brazen enough to operate openly as raiding parties. In 1855 one such group, while returning from a larger commando against Mankopane, attacked a small kraal killing forty and seizing twenty five cattle and fourteen children.³⁸

In tandem with the various smaller raids, the Ohrigstad Boers each year also launched one or two large scale official offensives against the more powerful African groups. Malietsie was attacked in 1845, the Ndzundza Ndebele in 1846, Mzilikazi's Ndebele and Kgatla in 1847, the Kopa in 1848 and the Ndzundza again in 1849.³⁹ Ivory, guns and cash seized during official raids had to be given to the state treasury but cattle and any other booty could be divided equally among the members of the commando. The profitability of these operations is well illustrated by the 1847 attack on Mzilikazi's Ndebele; the commando consisting of 228 men captured was able to seize 'many thousands of cattle'.⁴⁰

³⁷ TA, SS 4, R2523/53, Moll to Botha, 3 July 1858; R541/53, Krygsraad meeting; SS 6-9, R633/54, Report of Veldcornet Van Staaden.

³⁸ D.C. McGill, 'A History of the Transvaal (1853-1864) with a New Interpretation of the Transvaal-Zulu Relations which Culminated in the Zulu War of 1879', unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of Cape Town, 1943), pp. 326-327.

³⁹ The 1847 raid on the Ndebele raises the question as to why the Ndebele and not the much closer Shona groups were attacked. The likely answer is that Potgieter, who led the raid, intended to dispose of the plunder through the Portuguese traders at Inhambane with whom he is known to have had contact. It is significant that within months of this raid Potgieter and his followers moved to Zoutpansburg and established flourishing commercial links with the Inhambane traders.

⁴⁰ Potgieter and Theunissen, *Hendrik Potgieter*, p. 177; *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 104-105, Volksraad minutes, 20 Sept. 1849; *ibid.*, pp. 48-50, Volksraad minutes, 4 May 1846; *ibid.*, pp. 21-22, Volksraad minutes, 26 Sept. 1845; Delius, *Land*, pp. 36-37. Although it is likely that captives were taken, the Boer records do not mention this.

The Boer raiding activities were not undertaken without assistance.⁴¹ Major raids were usually supported by either Pedi, Ndzundza Ndebele or Swazi regiments while African mercenaries were routinely utilised to carry out many of the invaders' day to day coercive functions. *Swart skuts* (African marksmen) were ostensibly employed to hunt ivory but also to raid on Boer behalf. During the time of the Republic of Lydenburg, *swart skuts* were even used to hunt for the state treasury.⁴² Like the Portuguese *prazeros* and the early Natal traders, some Boers were able to expand the African mercenaries in their employ into more permanent followings. Throughout his stay at Ohrigstad, A.H. Potgieter was assisted in his raiding activities by the Amaplwenga clan (possibly the Hlengwe). Similarly, Joao Albasini had an entourage of many hundred dependants. Prominent among them was a chief by the name of Makashula who gained official attention in 1849 when he raided an unnamed small tribe and seized a number of cattle and fifty three children. Numerous raids were also undertaken in the low country by the half-caste Doris Buys to enforce Boer demands for labour and tribute.⁴³

Although engaging African mercenaries to hunt and raid on their behalf was very profitable for the invaders, the arming of Africans had dangerous long term implications for Boer power.⁴⁴ Employment in Boer hunting and raiding parties allowed many Africans to gain access to firearms. This undermined the basis of Boer power and, as early as 1846, the *Volksraad* repeatedly acted to limit access to arms and ammunition to Africans.⁴⁵ But while historians have been quick to point to the embargo on the sale of arms, horses and wagons to Africans as an attempt by the Boers to maintain their coercive capacity, the economic component of the legislation has been neglected. The munitions of war were also the tools of the hunt and the independent use of these by Africans challenged Boer prosperity. For example an attack on the

⁴¹ The Swazi in particular carried out many coercive functions on behalf of the Boers (see chapter five).

⁴² A.N. Pelzer, *Die Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek 1. Wordingsjare* (Cape Town, 1950), p. 87; Wagner, 'Zoutpansburg', pp. 251-255.

⁴³ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 23 of 1849; Agar-Hamilton, *Native Policy*, pp. 86, 89, 189; E.H. Brookes, *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day* (Pretoria, 1927), p. 186; Delius, *Land*, pp. 37, 97; Wagner, 'Zoutpansburg', p. 32.

⁴⁴ The impact of the regional economy on the African groups with whom it interfaced will be discussed in chapter five.

⁴⁵ See for example: TA, SS, R155A/48, Public notice, 6 Oct. 1848.

Kopa in October 1848, in which twenty four guns, fifty six cattle and three horses were seized, seems to have been inspired as much by the fact that the Kopa were using the guns and horses to undertake hunting expeditions and were trading ivory with an unnamed English merchant as it was by security or labour considerations.⁴⁶

While the hunting and, perhaps to a lesser extent, raiding activities of the Boers have been recognised, the third leg of the Boer economy in the early years - slaving - has remained largely submerged and consequently deserves special mention.⁴⁷ Since the earliest days of the Boer invasions, dealing in slaves had been an important aspect of the Boer economy. Slaves had been seized and sold in Natal to farmers desperate to begin producing for the Natal export market. But it was the followers of Potgieter who, from their base at Potchefstroom, were most active in this trade. The Portuguese archives show that in 1844 Potgieter and a commando of twenty five men arrived at Delagoa Bay with three hundred slaves. It is also significant that after each of his attacks on the Ndebele, Potgieter dispatched a 'trading' expedition to the Portuguese slaving port.⁴⁸

Although the illicit nature of the slave trade makes details of the traffic between Ohrigstad and Delagoa Bay scarce, it is certain that captives seized in raids and received as tribute were sold to the Portuguese. In 1844 the Swedish naturalist, Wahlburg, reported to the British government that the Portuguese had been soliciting Boer aid for their slaving operations, while in December 1844 the British Commissioner relative to the slave trade reported to his superiors that the Ohrigstad Boers were 'dealing in slaves with inhabitants of the Portuguese settlement at Delagoa Bay'.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the *Landrost* of Pietermaritzburg, on learning of reports in *De Zuid Afrikaan* that Potgieter was selling slaves at Delagoa Bay, was moved to comment that

⁴⁶ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 22 of 1849.

⁴⁷ This section is concerned with dealing in slaves; for the use of slaves and other forms of coerced labour see chapter four.

⁴⁸ Potgieter and Theunissen, *Hendrick Potgieter*, pp. 133-144; d'Abreu de Lima to Minister of State and Colonies, 31 Aug. 1844, quoted in Jackson-Haight, *European Powers*, Appendix 2, p. 316.

⁴⁹ Maitland to Secretary of State, 10 Dec. 1844, quoted in Bird, *Annals*, 2, p. 447; Correspondence of the British High Commissioner relative to the Slave Trade, Class A, pp. 85-87, quoted in Agar-Hamilton, *Native Policy*, p. 178.

'Potgieter, when separated from us, I believe, committed such a crime'.⁵⁰

Although little information is available about the sale of slaves to the Portuguese, slightly more evidence is obtainable on the supply of slaves to the internal market. Apprenticed labour was widely used throughout the region and many Boers in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area responded to this demand and became involved in the trade in African children (or 'black ivory' as they were known).⁵¹ During the 1840s the area controlled by Soshangane seems to have been the Ohrigstad Boers' favourite source of captives. Slaves were also purchased at Delagoa Bay, possibly with the proceeds from ivory sales, and transported back to the Boer domain. This was the case with the 1845 commission that transported several wagon-loads of tusks to the Portuguese settlement and returned with a number of African children purchased there (unfortunately there is no record of either the number of captives purchased or their final destination).⁵²

In 1847, S. Van Breda felt confident enough to request the *Volksraad*'s permission to transport a number of '*jonge negers*' he had purchased at Delagoa Bay through the Ohrigstad area to Potchefstroom, and when a certain Jubert was accused of illegally obtaining children in 1848 a *Volksraad* tribunal restored them to him.⁵³ The Portuguese traders based in Ohrigstad were also involved in the slave trade and the British merchant Tredoux reported that he had met Jao Albasini on his way back from the coast with two wagon-loads of trade goods and a number of slaves which Albasini offered him for £15 a head.⁵⁴

Although the Ohrigstad *Volksraad* did not formally tolerate the slave trade (anti-slavery laws had been passed in 1845 and dealing in slaves further west than the Stads River prohibited), little

⁵⁰ Bird, *Annals*, 2, p. 62.

⁵¹ Lauts collection, 13, number 132, Extract from De Zuid Afrikaan.

⁵² *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 89-91, *Volksraad* minutes, 6 Dec. 1848; *ibid.*; pp. 25-26, *Volksraad* minutes, 11 Dec. 1845.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 24, *Volksraad* minutes, 15 Dec. 1847; *ibid.*, pp. 89-90, *Volksraad* minutes, 6 Dec. 1848.

⁵⁴ Agar-Hamilton, *Native Policy*, p. 191.

was done to stop it.⁵⁵ The openness with which the traffic in slaves was conducted led to newspaper reports such as those in *De Zuid Afrikaan*, *De Republikaan* and the *Friend of the Sovereignty* that 'slaves were being hawked about the country by the wagon-load'.⁵⁶ In response to the fear that the slave trade might provide an excuse for annexation by the British, the *Volksraad* reinforced existing anti-slavery legislation by passing a law that banned the export of 'apprentices beyond our borders', contravention of which would be punished by a fine of Rds 500.⁵⁷ As with previous proclamations, the new law did not have much affect and action was only twice taken in terms of it: when a hunting party captured thirteen *Vaalpens* children and when a German by the name of Carl Schmidt tried to export fifty African children via Potchefstroom.⁵⁸ The frequency with which this and other prohibitions on slave trading were reiterated - in 1845, 1852, 1855, 1857 and 1858 - is probably indicative of the frequency with which the law was flouted.⁵⁹

The *Volksraad* was in no way exceptional in passing laws against the slave trade while at the same time allowing its citizens to profit from the sale of slaves. Examples of this disjuncture between statute and practice occurred frequently when new lands were conquered by Europeans. Locally, the slaving networks between the Griqua and the Cape colonists were a case in point, while internationally the seizure of Kanaka islanders and their sale to the owners of the Queensland sugar plantations provide an excellent example.

The hunting and raiding activities of the Ohrigstad Boers did not occur in isolation. Ivory, hides and captives commanded high prices on the regional markets and the district's Boers were immediately able to establish profitable commercial links with the outside world. Since 1845 British traders from as far afield as Grahamstown visited Ohrigstad in increasing numbers,

⁵⁵ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 25-26, *Volksraad* minutes, 11 Dec. 1845.

⁵⁶ Reply of High Commissioner H. Barkley to President Burgers's Denial of Slavery, *South African Pamphlets* (Pamphlets of the Transvaal), 114, p. 19; Bird, *Annals*, 2, p. 62.

⁵⁷ *Volksraad* decision cited in De Waal, 'Joao Albasini', p. 19.

⁵⁸ W. Kirstner, 'Beweerde Slawehandel in die Transvaal 1852-1868', unpublished M.A. thesis (University of Pretoria, 1945), pp. 49-54, 56-59.

⁵⁹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 25-26, *Volksraad* minutes, 11 Dec. 1845; *ibid.*, Transvaal 2, pp. 96-113, *Volksraad* minutes, 14 March 1853; *ibid.*, pp. 121-123, *Volksraad* minutes, 16 June 1852; *ibid.*, Transvaal 3, pp. 57-63, *Volksraad* minutes, 13 June 1855.

importing loads of arms, ammunition, cloth, clothes, tea, coffee, shoes, needles, cotton, medicine, wine and brandy to the district.⁶⁰ These goods were sometimes paid for in cash, sometimes in ivory and - judging by the frequent reports of children being offered for sale to traders - captives.⁶¹

While British traders were a common sight in Ohrigstad, it was Portuguese merchants from Delagoa Bay who dominated trade with the settlement. As early as July 1845 a group of traders from the bay arrived in Ohrigstad with several wagon-loads of trade goods.⁶² This was the beginning of more established contact and two merchants, Joao Albasini and Cassimir Simoes, joined Antonie Fick in establishing trading stores in the new town.⁶³ Other Portuguese merchants operating in the area included Dionisio da Silva, Avelino de Menezes and an individual known only as Gouvia. In spite of the poor roads and the tsetse fly, commerce became established between Ohrigstad and the bay. Wagons loaded with gun powder, lead and consumer articles such as cloth reached Ohrigstad. Ivory and hides were exported via Delagoa Bay and captives were sold on both the internal and external markets.⁶⁴ Commerce with the Boers showed such potential that the Portuguese authorities at both Delagoa Bay and Inhambane proposed its expansion.⁶⁵

Despite its profitability, the activities of Ohrigstad's hunter/raiders were in decline by 1847-8. The slaughter of elephant and other game could not continue indefinitely. Although the precise volume of ivory generated by the Boer hunters and their surrogates has not been recorded, the quantities were substantial. Portuguese and British traders were in the district at all times, some

⁶⁰ D.F. Das Neves, Report on the State of the Boers (Lourenco Marques, 1 March 1863), cited in De Waal, Albasini, p. 15.

⁶¹ Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, p. 191.

⁶² Kruger, 'Weg', p. 97.

⁶³ Van De Merwe, 'Die Voorgeskiedenis van die Republiek Lydenburg', unpublished M.A. thesis (University of Pretoria, 1941), pp. 62-63.

⁶⁴ De Waal, 'Jao Albasini', chapter two; The Friend of the Sovereignty, 5 Aug. 1850; Pretorious and Kruger, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, R 118i/46.; for the sale of captives see below.

⁶⁵ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 248-249, Da Silva to Volksraad, 24 Jan. 1848.

exporting hundreds of tusks.⁶⁶ The gestation period of an elephant cow is eighteen months and the tremendous rate at which they were shot meant reproduction was impossible. The African ecological crisis which would see entire species decimated had reached the eastern Transvaal. (The parallel between the Boer hunters and their counterparts in the U.S.A. who came close to wiping out the American Bison is inescapable.)

Although the Ohrigstad Boers tried to protect their most valuable exchange commodity by banning foreign hunters from the area on pain of a Rds 500 fine (a reward of Rds 250 was offered to anybody apprehending a foreign hunter), elephant numbers declined rapidly. As the large herds retreated north towards the Zoutpansberg, many of Ohrigstad's inhabitants left the area in pursuit. The largest single group to depart was that led by A.H. Potgieter in 1848.⁶⁷ As the elephant hunters were also those most actively engaged in raiding and slaving, so these activities declined correspondingly. It should be noted, however, that while they declined, hunting, raiding and slaving did not disappear. These activities remained in evidence throughout the period under study but as an adjunct to the more formal production of commodities.

2.2. The development of conventional production.

Although the economic emphasis of the initial emigrants to settle in the Ohrigstad area was towards hunting and raiding, it did not mean pastoralism and agriculture had been abandoned. British reluctance to recognise land claims made during the Republic of Natalia caused many Boers to leave Natal, a number of whom settled in the Ohrigstad area.⁶⁸ These new arrivals were oriented towards the production of commodities such as meat, butter, grain and vegetable crops - the same range of produce which had fed the expanding Cape markets - and had no intention of severing commercial links with the market. Prior to their departure from Natal, a commission of Natal Boers visited Delagoa Bay to ascertain the commercial prospects of relocation to the eastern Transvaal. Enthusiastic discussions in which products such as grain, flax, tobacco and cotton were mentioned were held with the Portuguese governor who urged the

⁶⁶ De Waal, 'Jao Albasini', p. 7; Potgieter, 'Vestiging', pp. 85-87.

⁶⁷ Potgieter and Theunissen, Hendrick Potgieter, pp. 154-182.

⁶⁸ Naidoo, 'David Dale Buchanan', pp. 156-165; Wichmann, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', p. 53; Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 98-99.

Boers to settle in the area as soon as possible.⁶⁹

In anticipation of trade with Delagoa Bay, those Boers arriving from Natal chose farms as close as possible to the Bay. During 1845-6 farms were claimed between Ohrigstad and the Lebombo mountains along the route to Delagoa Bay, most being selected in the Ohrigstad ward itself and in the Krokodil River valley.⁷⁰ In October 1845 the *Volksraad* went so far as to instruct an expedition leaving for Delagoa Bay to claim farms on the Portuguese side of the mountains. The claiming of farms by Boers in Portuguese territory was only stopped after angry protests from the Portuguese governor.⁷¹

As the area close to the Portuguese markets was largely in the lowveld it was unsuited to stock farming and so agriculture was seen as the basis of emigrant production. By 1846, tobacco, wheat, maize, several types of beans, peas, sundry vegetables, watermelons and *spanspekke* were being produced by the Ohrigstad Boers. A vineyard of two thousand feet was planted and a water mill erected.⁷²

Although there was a limited market at Delagoa Bay for vegetable oil, nuts, honey, rubber, gum and grains, the anticipated trade in these goods did not flourish.⁷³ Bulky agricultural produce was always expensive to transport and the Boers' failure to find a route to the coast completely free of tsetse fly escalated costs prohibitively. The viability of agricultural production was also undermined by competition from the products of the hunt and raid which commanded higher prices and were cheaper to transport. The export of agricultural goods via Delagoa Bay only began to make headway after 1873 when the gold diggings at Pilgrimsrest increased traffic between the centres. From July 1874 groups of wagons began to regularly travel between

⁶⁹ Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 86-87; Preller, *Voortrekkermense*, 3, pp. 84-85, 108-109, recollections of J. Breytenbach and S.W. Kruger.

⁷⁰ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 9 of 1845.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, *Volksraad* minutes, 11 Dec. 1845.

⁷² F.J. Potgieter, 'Die Vestiging van die Blanke in Transvaal (1837-1886) met Speciale Verwysing na die Verhouding Tussen die Mens en die Omgewing', in *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 2 vols. (Cape Town 1958), 2, pp. 39-41; Aylward, *Transvaal Today*, pp. 14-15, 123; Pelzer, *Wordingsjare*, p. 133; De Waal, 'Jao Albasini', p. 10.

⁷³ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', pp. 38-44.

Lydenburg and Delagoa Bay.⁷⁴ This commerce was greatly assisted by a decline in the tsetse fly and by 1882 only two percent of draught oxen were being lost.⁷⁵

The production of agricultural goods did not cease in spite of insipid demand at Delagoa Bay prior to 1873. Farmers continued to produce wheat for sale on the Natal market and by 1851 most of the commercial activity in the Lydenburg area was with the British colonies, especially Natal. When cattle ranching and wool production began to develop in the 1850s and 1860s, a limited internal market for agricultural products was created within the district. Grain, dried fruit, tobacco and coffee produced in the northern wards were sold to the stock farmers to the south. Mini-booms in the agricultural sector also occurred periodically when wars or the discovery of minerals - such as during the Pilgrimsrest gold rush in May 1873 and later the Barberton diggings - boosted demand. An important effect of the mineral discoveries was that the district's arable farmers switched from their mainstay of wheat and began to produce the maize that was preferred by the large number of African labourers at the diggings.⁷⁶

The expenses involved in transporting agricultural produce to either Delagoa Bay or the distant British colonies meant the arable producers in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area faced similar logistical problems as they had in the Cape Colony when Cape Town was the only market. To be able to purchase the necessities of life, commodities had to be produced for the market yet transport costs cut sharply into profits. As they had in the Cape, the Lydenburg Boers responded by switching to cattle ranching. The growth of urban centres in the British territories meant there was a demand for meat and, in country where all goods had to be transported by wagon, draught oxen commanded consistently high prices. Markets were also accessible as cattle could be driven to market.

The rise to prominence of ranching spelled the end of Ohrigstad. The population of Ohrigstad and its surrounding wards was already depleted by the move of most of the commercial hunters to Schoemansdal. Ohrigstad was also inconveniently situated for the district's growing number

⁷⁴ De Volksstem, 12 July 1874.

⁷⁵ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 124.

⁷⁶ Naude, 'Boerdery', pp. 145-146, 115-116; Aylward, Transvaal Today, pp. 19-20; Potgieter, 'Vestiging', pp. 79-80.

of cattle ranchers. The lower lying areas around Ohrigstad were unsuited to stock farming and the cattle ranchers established themselves on the higher lying areas to the south west of Ohrigstad. In 1848 alone, sixty one farms were allocated along the Salons River in the west of the district and between 1849 and 1851 a further seventy five farms were allocated in cattle farming areas.⁷⁷ Ohrigstad was also plagued by malaria and stock diseases which threatened the life of man and animal. Consequently, on 19 September 1849, the *Volksraad* made the decision to abandon Ohrigstad and establish a new centre - to be named Lydenburg - better able to serve the needs of the ranching community, 150 kilometres to the south west of Ohrigstad.⁷⁸

The district's growing number of ranching operations were not haphazard subsistence affairs. Rather, the ranchers focused on the market and produced slaughter cattle and draught oxen which could be marketed. The type of cattle preferred were a cross between the Afrikaner and the Zoeloeras, a hybrid species preferred because it produced especially hardy draught oxen. During calving season the herds were not milked at all and cows and calves were left in the veld so the calves could grow at the maximum possible rate. Dairy production was largely ignored as milk and butter were perishable and expensive to transport and so only viable for those close to the market. In general, the Friesland breed with their high milk yields were not kept in large numbers.⁷⁹

During the 1850s many thousands of head of cattle were annually exported from the Transvaal to the Cape and O.F.S. 'The export of cattle to Natal and the Cape Colony forms one of the principal items in the export trade, thousands of head yearly cross the Vaal to be in the territories beyond...'⁸⁰ Other than Lydenburg, the areas most involved in the export of cattle were Marico, Swartruggens, Rustenburg and Pretoria. Lydenburg's importance to this commerce was boosted by cattle ranchers' dependence on transhumance. During winter, frosts destroyed the grazing on the high-lying areas and cattle ranchers from across the highveld sought winter

⁷⁷ Van Der Merwe, 'Die Trek na die Ooste', p. 29-30.

⁷⁸ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 99-103, Volksraad minutes, 20 Sept. 1849.

⁷⁹ Naude, 'Boerdery', pp. 24-28.

⁸⁰ Transvaal Argus, 29 May 1866. This reference does not only refer to Lydenburg but rather to beef production in the Transvaal generally.

grazing in the Lydenburg bushveld.⁸¹ In 1875 De Volksstem noted that parts of the Potchefstroom district were all but deserted because all the inhabitants had left with their stock for the Lydenburg bushveld.⁸²

The precise numbers of cattle exported during the 1850s have not been recorded but it was estimated that in 1864 the Transvaal shipped around six thousand head valued at £36 000 to the O.F.S., the Cape and Natal. (The records do not give the proportion from the eastern Transvaal).⁸³ By the 1860s the increasing population in the region, the development of urban areas (especially the commercial centre at Potchefstroom), the establishment of a permanent formal market at Lydenburg and the development of specialised farming had created a limited internal market for the by-products of stock farming. As was the case with arable farming, the mineral discoveries of the 1870s also provided the district's cattle ranchers with a substantial boost. The size of the internal market increased enormously. The Lydenburg district's European population alone rose by fifteen hundred in 1873-4 and the price of both beef and draught oxen soared correspondingly. The price of oxen, for example, quadrupled from £3 to £12 a head.⁸⁴ Increased population also meant that perishable goods became more profitable and, as had been their practice in the Cape, the Boer farmers responded to this development by supplementing the sale of livestock with the manufacture of limited quantities of butter and cheese, thongs, leather, whips and strops.⁸⁵ Another important adjunct to stock farming was hunting. The annual journey to the warmer northern areas provided cattle farmers with the opportunity to supplement their incomes with hunting as ivory and hides continued to find a ready market.⁸⁶

Stock farming among the Lydenburg Boers was not confined to ranching cattle and from the late

⁸¹ Naude, 'Boerdery', p. 79.

⁸² De Volksstem, 31 July 1875.

⁸³ Naude, Boerdery, pp. 24-28.

⁸⁴ De Volksstem, 22 Aug. 1873; Naude, 'Boerdery', p. 137.

⁸⁵ J. Macqueen, 'Journey from Inhambane to Zoutpansburg by Joachim de Santa Rita Montanha', Journal of the Royal Geographic Society, 32 (1962), p. 67; Naude, 'Boerdery', pp. 26-27.

⁸⁶ Peter Delius, 'Abel Erasmus: Power and Profit in the Eastern Transvaal', in William Beinart, Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido (eds.), Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930 (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 179.

1850s wool production assumed an increasing importance. When the Boers began their conquests, wool production was in its infancy with annual exports from the Cape hovering around 250 000 lbs per annum. Consequently few Boers kept large numbers of sheep and on arrival in the eastern Transvaal ignored the southern environs of the district which were cold, lacked firewood and were unsuited to agriculture and cattle but favourable to sheep. However from the mid-1840s, in response to spiralling demand for raw wool by Britain's burgeoning textile industry, wool production grew rapidly in the eastern Cape and began to spread to the O.F.S.. By 1851 wool exports to Britain from the Cape alone had topped the £5,5-million mark.⁸⁷ Lydenburg farmers responded rapidly to this growing market and from the mid-1850s began to import sheep from the O.F.S., usually paying for them with agricultural products grown in the area such as wheat, tobacco and dried fruit. As in the Cape, the type of sheep imported were the woolled Merino and the traditional *vetstert* was abandoned as farmers sought to produce wool rather than mutton. The major outlet point for wool produced in the Lydenburg area during the 1850s was Potchefstroom and 16 455 pounds of wool was exported via the Potchefstroom market between November 1858 and April 1859. By April of the following year a further 28 795 pounds had been exported - an increase of seventy five percent. Wool production was very attractive to the Lydenburg Boers as it was easier to transport than agricultural produce. Also important was that it could be exported in high volumes to the international market.⁸⁸

As in the eastern Cape where profits from wool production had given rise to a class of rural capitalists, the development of stock farming brought Boer producers such tangible economic benefits that the commentator 'Een Hollander' was prompted to remark in 1862 that cattle ranching and wool production had brought about a substantial improvement to the houses of the Boers.⁸⁹

The establishment of a wool producing industry strongly encouraged the development of urban centres in the Lydenburg district (as it had done in the eastern Cape). Initially much of the

⁸⁷ Crais, Making of the Colonial Order, pp. 134-135; Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 79.

⁸⁸ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 4, Bylaag 2 of 1860; Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 79-80; Transvaal Argus, 5 June 1866; Naude, 'Boerdery', pp. 28-37; Pelzer, 'Wordingsjare', p. 182.

⁸⁹ Een Hollander, Toen en Tans: Mededelingen en Beschouwingen ontrent der Twee Republieken in Zuid Africa (Cape Town, 1898), p. 150.

district's wool had been purchased by visiting *smouse* but by the early 1860s, as volumes and profitability increased, these traders began to settle permanently in the district.⁹⁰ As production expanded, a demand arose for a centre closer to the wool producers and in 1860 the new town of Middelburg was proclaimed in the southern portion of the district. Many merchants established businesses in the area and Middelburg was a major conduit for the export of wool during the 1860s.⁹¹ Although Middelburg was proclaimed both a town and a district, it continued to be administrated from Lydenburg until May 1872.⁹²

Wool production had additional advantages for the Lydenburg district. Farms were established in the underpopulated southern environs of the district and throughout the 1860s requests streamed into the *Landrost's* office for the inspection of farms in the sheep farming areas.⁹³ From the early 1860s there was a brisk inspection of farms near the sources of the Vaal and Oliphants rivers, in the ward Komati and westward toward the new town of Middelburg.⁹⁴ The extent to which sheep farming galvanised the rate of settlement is indicated by the fact that in 1866, just six years after its establishment, Middelburg was sub-divided and the new district of Heidelberg created.⁹⁵ Also, like the cattle ranchers, the wool producers were forced to practice transhumance. When winter frosts killed the grass on the highveld, sheep farmers had to move stock to winter grazing in the lowveld (malaria and stock diseases were not a threat in winter) and this had a positive affect on land prices in the lower lying areas in the north of the district. Finally, wool production stimulated local demand for other commodities produced in the district and farmers to the north were able to market loads of wheat, maize (which grew especially well in the Ohrigstad area), pumpkins and other agricultural produce among the wool

⁹⁰ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, p. 44, Volksraad minutes, 3 Sept. 1851; Naude, 'Boerdery', p. 107.

⁹¹ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 26; Naude, 'Boerdery', p. 128.

⁹² TA, LL 383, State Secretary to Landrost, 30 March 1871; LL 95, State Secretary to Landrost, 22 May 1875.

⁹³ See index of government gazettes for years concerned.

⁹⁴ TA, LL 78, Register of Farms.

⁹⁵ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 5, p. 135, Volksraad minutes, 28 March 1866.

producers.⁹⁶

The development of cattle and wool production steadily increased the volume of trade between Lydenburg and the outside world. The itinerant traders that had bought ivory and hides at Ohristad continued to operate in the area. *Smouse* bought what ivory they could but increasingly cattle and wool were moved south. The first British merchant to permanently establish himself at Lydenburg was A. Levinson in 1851 and the town grew steadily throughout the 1850s.⁹⁷ In 1853 the weights and measures used by traders were standardised.⁹⁸ Lydenburg got its first permanent market in 1860 and sales of vegetables, fruit poultry and other market products were held on Mondays and Saturdays.⁹⁹ By 1864 goods worth £10 800 were being imported annually to Lydenburg.¹⁰⁰ The number of traders entering the Lydenburg district were further increased by the establishment of the New Scotland settlement and in 1869 the *Landrost* was instructed to render them assistance where necessary.¹⁰¹ The escalating level of trade was highlighted by the remark of contemporary Boer author F.L. Cachet that in 1868 Wakkerstroom, situated on Lydenburg's southern border, was not a Boer town but a centre for British and German traders.¹⁰² In 1870 licences for the establishment of eighteen shops, two timbermen, one *smous*, one bottlestore and one butcher were granted in Lydenburg.¹⁰³ Commerce was boosted even further when gold was discovered at Pilgrimsrest in May 1873 and in January 1874 sixty wagons arrived in Lydenburg from Natal alone.¹⁰⁴ Another important source of income from the gold diggings were the rentals received by Lydenburg farmers from

⁹⁶ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 79.

⁹⁷ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 7; S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, p. 44, Volksraad minutes, 3 May 1851.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 130, Volksraad minutes, 20 June 1853.

⁹⁹ TA, LL 331, Lydenburg market regulations, 28 Aug. 1862; Government Gazette, 13 Aug. 1858.

¹⁰⁰ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 96.

¹⁰¹ TA, LL 3, Pienaar to Landrost, 8 March 1869.

¹⁰² F.L. Cachet, De Worstelstrijd der Transvaalers aan het Volk van Nederland Verhaald (Amsterdam, 1898), p. 360.

¹⁰³ Government Gazettes of the Z.A.R., 28 July 1870, 30 Aug 1870 and 21 Jan. 1871.

¹⁰⁴ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 133.

claims on their property. Claims were thirty feet square and rent was fixed at £1 per month (Rix Dollars were not accepted), half of which went to the owner of the land.¹⁰⁵

Although during this period ranching and to a lesser extent arable production eclipsed hunting and raiding in providing commodities for the market, Lydenburg continued to benefit from the commercial networks linking Mozambique with the Zoutpansburg hunting and slaving community. The trade route between Schoemansdal and Delagoa Bay crossed the Lydenburg district and those Boers that continued to undertake hunting expeditions benefited from the presence of Portuguese traders. Even after 1860 the commerce was sufficiently profitable for Portuguese merchants to send ten or more wagon-loads of trade goods at a time to Lydenburg (a substantial amount bearing in mind that transportation costs were Rds 150 per wagon-load) and for Cassimir Simoes to own two trading stores in the Lydenburg area, at Lydenburg and Renosterpoort.¹⁰⁶

Involvement in trade by the Lydenburg Boers was not confined to that of producers marketing goods to incoming merchants; much of the trade was in the hands of the Boers themselves. Residents in the Lydenburg district undertook trading journeys to Natal, the O.F.S. and other parts of the Transvaal. Some were producers seeking to sell their produce directly without the expense of a middleman. Such individuals would often attempt to extend the profit made by the sale of their produce by purchasing consumer goods for sale on their return home. Few records exist of these trips, but the large number of notices to the *Volksraad* from burghers stating that they were undertaking long journeys and requesting their farms not be awarded to others during their absence seems to indicate that extended trading trips were a fact of life in the settlement.¹⁰⁷

Other Boers were involved in trading on a more professional basis. For example H.T. Buhrmann, the Secretary of the *Volksraad* who in 1852 took over the business interests of Joao

¹⁰⁵ Z.A.R. Government Gazette no. 458 of 1873.

¹⁰⁶ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, p. 67, Volksraad minutes, 5 May 1852; F. Das Neves, A Hunting Expedition to the Transvaal (London, 1879), pp. 138-139; T.H. Wangermann, Maleo en Sekoekoeni (Cape Town, 1957), p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Een Hollander, Toen en Tans, p. 120; S.A.A.R. Transvaal 1, pp. 84-85, Volksraad minutes, 6 Oct. 1848.

Albasini in the Lydenburg district, employed representatives to trade among his fellow Boers, African societies and in the British colonies.¹⁰⁸ By 1860 Buhrmann was able to appoint several agents to trade on his behalf in Natal.¹⁰⁹ An important commodity secured by Buhrmann's agents in Natal was ammunition which was sold for large profits in Lydenburg.¹¹⁰ Buhrmann was not the exception and many other Boer notables, such as J. De Clerq, W. Neetling and J.P. Maree, ran similar enterprises. Competition was, however, strong from the British traders who were entering the district in such numbers by 1846 that a permanent official had to be stationed on the wagon road near the Oliphants River to intercept incoming merchants and issue them the necessary trading permits.¹¹¹ In 1848, in an effort to compensate local merchants for this competition by foreigners, the *Volksraad* decided that local traders only had to pay an annual licence fee of Rds 40 and citizens importing goods worth less than Rds 100 did not have to pay a fee. Licence fees levied on foreign traders was increased to Rds 500 with additional taxes levied on the importation of alcohol.¹¹²

Many of the central figures in the Boer trading networks served the additional function of acting as local agents for outside business interests in the district. These could be of a legal nature, such as when H.T. Buhrmann representing J.H.L. De Kok had a debtor, an unnamed British resident of Lydenburg, declared insolvent and his property (Lydenburg erf number five) seized as compensation. Local entrepreneurs also purchased ivory, cattle and agricultural products for outside merchants. More significantly, they frequently purchased land on behalf of foreigners or undertook the registration of properties. This greatly facilitated speculative land purchases by foreigners in the district (see section one above).¹¹³ A further and very profitable function

¹⁰⁸ Whether Buhrmann also traded in slaves is not known.

¹⁰⁹ TA, LL 15, Uitgaande Stuk, 24 Nov. 1861; SS 2, R218/50, Inkomende stuk (SS refers to the archives of the Secretary of State); *ibid.*, R225/50, Inkomende Stuk.

¹¹⁰ TA, LL 15, Inkomende Stuk, 4 Jan. 1862.

¹¹¹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 28-33, Volksraad minutes, 21 Jan. 1846.

¹¹² *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 78-79, Volksraad minutes, 3 Feb. 1848. *ibid.*, pp. 112-22, Volksraad minutes, 22 Jan. 1850.

¹¹³ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, p. 67, Kommiesie Raad minutes, 5 May 1852; *ibid.*, pp. 89-91, Volksraad minutes, 15 Nov 1852; *ibid.*, pp. 96-113, Volksraad minutes, 11 March 1853; *ibid.*, Transvaal 3, pp. 8-19, Volksraad minutes, 23 June 1854; *ibid.*, p. 64, Volksraad minutes, 15 May 1855; TA, LL 3, Biccard to Landrost, 9 May 1869.

of these agents was to act as the masters of deceased estates. To dispose of a deceased estate the agent would have to have an auction licence which cost Rds 40 per annum, a considerable amount in view of the fact that the commission for disposing of an estate ranged from Rds 5 to Rds 15. The real attraction of such activities were the opportunities it offered the agent for speculative purchases. Agents such as H.T. Buhrmann were able to purchase properties and household goods very cheaply from the deceased estates.¹¹⁴

Commercial activity in the eastern Transvaal was not confined to the production of agricultural commodities and the practice of trade. Even before the Pilgrimsrest and Barberton gold rushes, there was a limited exploitation of natural resources in the district. Much of the Transvaal was virtually treeless and the thickly wooded north and north east supplied the rest of the Transvaal with timber. Although the Zoutpansburg area dominated the wood trade, timber from the Lydenburg district also found its way to market.¹¹⁵ Mining also occurred on a very limited scale. From the 1860s, small amounts of coal were produced by open cast mining in the south east of the district, mainly for domestic use and in blacksmiths' shops. After the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley, these operations were expanded and several small mines began to produce coal commercially which was sold at between £9 and £10 per ton.¹¹⁶ In 1875 a company was formed to mine cobalt discovered on the farm Kruisriver in the Lydenburg district and, between 1876 and 1879, 67,5 tons worth £10 890 were exported via Durban.¹¹⁷

In the Cape Colony after 1820 increasing levels of trade had gone hand in hand with the development of the infrastructure. A similar situation prevailed in the Transvaal. Since the 1840s African labour had been conscripted to build roads and during the 1850s and 1860s infrastructure improved rapidly which made further commercial developments possible. In 1860 a regular weekly postal service between Lydenburg and Pretoria, for which there had been a demand since 1853, was established. As in the American west, the post was transported by passenger coach and the route, which went via Middelburg, took seventy two hours to

¹¹⁴ TA, LL 2, Transfer from Widow of Owner, n.d..

¹¹⁵ S. Hofmeyer, Twintig Jaren in Zoutpansburg - Een Verhaal van Twintig Jaaren Arbeid onder de Heiden in die Transvaal (Cape Town, 1890), p. 26.

¹¹⁶ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', p. 150.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 153; Government Gazette 24 July 1875.

complete.¹¹⁸ So rapidly did communications develop that in 1874 De Volkstem wrote that: 'Few of even the most sanguine or far seeing could have dreamt a year ago that Cape Town would be brought fourteen days journey from Lydenburg'.¹¹⁹ Three years later Aylward wrote: 'there are roads everywhere, and good roads'.¹²⁰

Parallel to the developing infrastructure was the growth of urban centres. By the time of the British occupation in 1877 the Lydenburg district included the towns of Lydenburg, Ohristad (which was partially reoccupied) and Pilgrimsrest. Two other districts - Middelburg and Heidelberg - which had formerly been part of the Lydenburg district, had developed sufficiently for them to become independent of Lydenburg. By 1873 these districts supported urban populations of 213 and 209 respectively. In the same year Lydenburg, which at the beginning of the 1850s had consisted of only twelve houses, had expanded to 210 permanent inhabitants. By 1880 Lydenburg's population had risen to well over three hundred. Two years later, in 1882, a hundred houses were counted in Lydenburg. It is also significant to note that a large percentage of residents were merchants serving the surrounding farming population. This can be inferred from the number of licences issued to open shops in the town; thirteen were issued in 1870 and by 1886 fifteen licences per annum were still being dispensed.¹²¹

3. Conclusion.

It should thus be clear that in the thirty two years between the arrival of the first Boers in 1845 and the British occupation in 1877, the Boer economy in the Lydenburg district not only made considerable strides but its development was closely tied to the wider regional economy. Commercial links based on the sale of ivory, hides and captives were established with both British and Portuguese traders. Beef and wool were exported to the British colonies. In spite of initial difficulties, arable production increased steadily as the size of the internal market increased, boosting demand for beef and arable products such as fruit and grains. Land was divided into privately owned units and traded for profit. Many foreign companies invested in the district while several prominent Boer entrepreneurs established strong commercial links with

¹¹⁸ TA, LL 256, Letter of Van Dijk, 21 May 1861; Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudige', p. 20.

¹¹⁹ De Volksstem 3 Jan. 1874.

¹²⁰ Aylward, Transvaal Today, p. 20.

¹²¹ Potgieter, 'Vestiging', pp. 43, 137; Z.A.R. Government Gazette, 28 July 1870, 30 Aug. 1870 and 21 Feb. 1870. A breakdown of the sort of shops that were being opened would be invaluable but unfortunately the Boer records do not contain this information.

both the British colonies and other Boer communities. In short, the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg economy encompassed a wide range of economic activities, grew increasingly complex in a very short space of time and was linked to the regional capitalist economy from the outset.

The most striking feature of the manner in which the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg district's economy developed is the extent to which, in a chronologically condensed form, it mirrored the economic evolution of the Cape Colony. Prior to the nineteenth century the Cape had expanded slowly. Parties of hunters and raiders had gradually pushed over the colonial border followed shortly behind by pastoralists who established a more permanent presence in the new areas. Although tied to the market economy, the pastoralists had to travel great distances to Cape Town to market their goods. Consequently the economy of the frontier districts remained uncomplicated and based on the sale of pastoral products. Only in the 1820s, when the expanding global economy had created new markets for the Cape's producers, did economic development quicken. Free of the old restrictions, exports climbed, the internal market grew and towns were established, trade and credit networks were established, land values rose, production diversified and the economy became increasingly complex.

The Boer economy in the eastern Transvaal differed from that of the Cape Colony in that it existed in the context of global economic growth from the outset. Even in the Lydenburg district, not the most prosperous Boer community, heightened economic opportunity fused sequences of development that had been distinct in the Cape. Hunting, raiding, the trade in beef and draught animals, arable production, the export of wool, trade in land, and a range of commercial services now co-existed in a single composite economy.

Thus by engaging the expanding global economy, the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers were able in just thirty two years to transform the eastern Transvaal from an area free of a European presence into a component of the regional capitalist network. The speed of this transformation was dramatic, easily eclipsing the two hundred years or so that the Cape Colony took to reach a similar point of development. In the light of this it is absurd to claim, as Macmillan and Peires have done, that the Boers were economically irrational and innocent of any desire to profit from the invasion of the interior. The Boer conquests took place in the context of heightened economic opportunity. The Boers were acutely aware of this and actively sought to profit from their conquests. In a very short space of time they created a complex, modern and rapidly expanding economy.

Chapter 4

The nature and development of the Boer labour force in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area.

'It was in this moment of revulsion against native interests that the Transvaal was born'.¹

1. Introduction.

In the above quotation De Kiewiet bemoans the signing of the Sandriver Convention in 1852 as a lost opportunity to impose enlightened British authority on the Transvaal in order to 'save' the 'helpless native' from the 'barbaric' Boers. This is the conventional wisdom; Boer policy towards Africans, and more specifically their labour policy, is regarded as primitive, barbaric and in stark contrast to the 'enlightened policies of the British'. Taken further, this view sees the later development of apartheid as rooted in Boer labour policy which unfortunately triumphed over the liberal and free policies of the British.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The most striking feature of Boer labour policy is the extent to which it reflected strategies adopted by colonists in the Cape and Natal to procure and control labour. Free labour is seldom an effective policy during the conquest of new lands and a severe labour crisis was only overcome in the Cape Colony by the use of forced labour. A slave and indentured labour system had been instituted early in the V.O.C. period. After the second British occupation unfree labour had been entrenched by the Caledon Code of 1809 and the regulation of apprenticed children in 1812. Although this use of forced labour was crucial to the Cape's economic growth after 1810, changing circumstances necessitated the recasting of forced labour in new terms in the late 1820s. Not only was the imperial government in favour of free labour, but the expanding economy demanded a more flexible distribution of labour than was possible under the rigid system of slavery and apprenticeship. The freedom of Africans and Khoi in the colony was now limited by laws such as Ordinance 3 of 1848 and Acts 23 and 27 of 1857 which introduced pass systems and the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1841 and Act of 1857 which tied servants to their masters. Other measures - such as Ordinance 2 of 1837

¹ De Kiewiet, British Colonial Policy, p. 49.

which limited the right of non-whites to occupy land, the use of livestock pounds and the rigid enforcement of taxes such as quit-rent - were designed to undermine the independence of those Khoi and Africans who had managed to avoid the colonial employment net.

Like the Cape colonists, the Boers who seized lands in the eastern Transvaal had to force an unwilling African population to meet their labour requirements and in their efforts to recruit sufficient labourers drew heavily on their experience in the Cape Colony. But just as the manner in which the Boer economy developed reflected the sequences evident in the Cape in a chronologically condensed form, strategies to procure and control labour evident in separate phases in the Cape coexisted in the Transvaal. As had been the case in the eighteenth century Cape, the Boers used apprenticed and conscripted labour extensively but, like the post-Caledon Code era, the use of indentured and *corvée* labour was regulated and controlled by the state. The Boer state also used more sophisticated ways of procuring and controlling labourers. African access to land was limited and punitive taxes such as the poll tax of 1866 and hut tax of 1870 were imposed. (Hut tax was imposed for the first time in Africa in the late 1840s in British Kaffraria and Natal.) Africans' freedom of movement was limited by a succession of pass laws and the position of white employers strengthened by the use of legally enforceable contracts.

This chapter will examine the different categories of labour used by the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers, the chronology, the means by which Africans were recruited, and how control was retained over the different types of African worker. Because much of the Boer labour policy was formulated by the central government, aspects of this discussion must be general in scope. Specific reference will, however, be made to the application of this policy in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg area.

2. The transition from individual coercion to a state controlled forced labour system.

The period 1845-7 in the eastern Transvaal closely resembled the situation in the Cape Colony during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Like the Khoi in the Cape, Africans were expected to provide the conquerors with labour but little attempt was made to formally structure these exactions. Both individuals and the Boer state simply conscripted African labour according to need. The Boer hunter/raider bands that marauded across the eastern Transvaal commandeered the gun bearers, porters, wagon drivers and guides they required from African communities on

whose land they hunted or from where they set out.² Arable farmers demanded whatever workers they needed to plant, weed or harvest their crops from the nearest African settlement.³ As early as 1845 a minor chief, Mattjawa, complained that parties of Boers demanded he send workers to their farms whenever their fields needed weeding. In an appeal for help to the Pedi paramount, Sekwati, he was quoted as saying that 'the people have come to ask him for men and he does not want to do that'.⁴ (Help was not forthcoming as the Pedi, like the Kopa and Ndzundza Ndebele, were themselves under intense pressure from the Boers.)⁵

Like its citizens, the Boer state also merely seized African labour whenever it needed it. Conscripted labour was used in the construction of public buildings at both Ohrigstad and Lydenburg - the church at Lydenburg being one example.⁶ The construction of roads, especially to Delagoa Bay, was a priority among the Ohrigstad Boers and the *veldcornets* were instructed to demand the necessary labour from African chiefs.⁷ African labourers were also used to transport post and official documents between Ohrigstad and other centres of Boer settlement, as well as to provide auxiliary support for Boer commandos and for service in a type of militia charged with securing African prisoners.⁸

No effort was made to justify these exactions in any terms other than military power. African societies within the Boer domain, the largest of whom were the Ndzundza Ndebele and the Kopa, were given the ultimatum of either submitting to Boer demands or being attacked and

² Delius, Land, p. 35.

³ Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, p. 201; Naude, Boerdery, p. 191; see chapter two above.

⁴ Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, p. 198.

⁵ A.F. Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Ndzundza-Ndebele en die Blankes in Transvaal 1845-1883', unpublished M.A. thesis (Rhodes University, 1985), pp. 35-50; the response of Africans to Boer demands for labour as well as other exactions by the invaders will be examined in the following chapter.

⁶ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, Kommissie Raad minutes, 15 Feb. 1851.

⁷ Pretorius and Kruger, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, AdR 169/49, Public Announcement, art 1, Ohrigstad, 8 March 1849; Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, p. 198.

⁸ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, p. 84, Volksraad decision, 20 Sept. 1848; TA, LL 115, missive of S.S. Swart, 17 July 1873.

destroyed. Most were in no position to refuse. Only the followers of Maraba refused to accept Boer suzerainty and in 1845 they were attacked and dispersed by a Boer commando.⁹

Such a disordered situation could not be tolerated for long. By the late 1840s hunting and raiding were being supplanted by more labour intensive activities. From the end of the decade beef production around the town of Lydenburg had been established and the district began to export slaughter stock and draught oxen to the O.F.S., Natal and the Cape. Wool exports from the southern highveld grew rapidly from the late 1850s while by the 1860s reduced transport costs meant the expansion of arable production. These activities required a more formal and institutionalised labour system than the haphazard demands of the hunter/raiders who were content to vest legal authority in the barrel of their muskets.

In the Cape, when the economy had begun to accelerate around 1810 and the uncoordinated and at times conflicting demands of individual masters had become untenable, the colonial administration had responded by transferring authority over servants from the individual to the state. Similarly, by 1847 the *Volksraad* had begun to consolidate and regulate the ad hoc demands for labour by individual Boers. The indenture of women and children was reaffirmed and placed under the auspices of the *Landrost*; a system of officially registered, legally enforceable contracts introduced; and the casual conscription of labour codified into a formal labour tax that was used to supplement other categories of labour during periods of peak demand.

2.1. The provision of short term labour - the labour tax

As early as 1847 the *Volksraad* began to shift responsibility for extracting labour from private individuals to the state. In that year African chiefs subject to Boer authority were summoned before the Ohrigstad *Volksraad* and informed they were required to provide labourers 'for the use by the immigrants'.¹⁰ Africans were now formally obliged to provide the Boers with labour, but it was made clear that this obligation was to the Boer state. In 1849 the *Volksraad* banned tributary relations between African groups and private individuals, decreeing that no individual could 'own a kraal here or over the Berg'. A few months later, in 1850, the period

⁹ Potgieter and Theunissen, Hendrik Potgieter, p. 177.

¹⁰ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, p. 73, *Volksraad* minutes, 4 Nov. 1847; Kruger and Pretorius, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, R129b/47, public announcement.

of service for which all Africans were liable was fixed at fourteen days unpaid labour per year.¹¹

It was one thing to declare all Africans liable for service but quite another to ensure the labour was efficiently extracted and distributed. To achieve this, in 1851 all Africans were placed under the authority of the *veldcornet* within whose jurisdiction they fell (just as the Fingo brought to the eastern Cape were placed under military supervision).¹² To facilitate control and distribution, *veldcornets* were required to keep records of all Africans resident within their jurisdiction.¹³ For example, in 1864 *veldcornet* J.H. du Plessis was able to report from Lydenburg to the Secretary of State that, according to his records, ten sub-chiefs with a total of 723 followers had provided labour in his ward.¹⁴ Requests for labour had to be levied through the *veldcornet* who was then able to demand the necessary workers from Africans within his jurisdiction and distribute them as needed. In cases where Africans were reluctant to provide the required labour the local military official, the *veldcornet*, was authorised to take punitive action against recalcitrant groups.¹⁵ This situation, where Europeans conquered a new area and set about administering the resident African population instead of expelling them across a boundary, was very new and closely paralleled events in Natal in the latter part of the 1840s and in British Kaffraria after 1847.

After 1852, Boer demands that Africans provide them with labour were reinforced by the formal allocation of land to Africans. Africans were no longer just obliged to reside in a specific *wyk* but had to occupy land designated by the Boer state. The Ndzundza Ndebele, for example, were provided with four farms: Vlakfontein, Vluchtkraal, Jakkalsvlij and Legerplaats.¹⁶ Crucially,

¹¹ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 101-109, Volksraad minutes, 19 Sept. 1849; *ibid.*, Transvaal 1, p. 117, Volksraad minutes, 22 Jan. 1850.

¹² Webster, 'Unmasking', pp. 18-21.

¹³ F. Jeppe and J.G. Kotze (eds.), De Locale Wetten der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1849-1885 (Pretoria, 1887), Veld-cornet instructions of 1858, art 58.

¹⁴ TA, SS, R521/58, 1 Aug. 1864.

¹⁵ Jeppe and Kotze, Locale Wetten, Veldcornets Instructions of 1858, art 57.

¹⁶ TA, L 12, Van Kraayenburg to Uitvoerende Raad, 30 Dec. 1859; L 5, Uitvoerende Raad decision, arts 4, 5 and 6, Nov. 1860; L 4, Uitvoerende Raad decision, arts 21, 29 March 1860.

Africans did not gain title to the land they occupied and were banned from owning land in the Z.A.R..¹⁷ The labour tax could now be justified in terms of claims to ownership of the land occupied by Africans and Potgieter felt able to declare that, 'we make the people work for us, in consideration for allowing them to live in our country'.¹⁸ (Boer land claims were in general based on the defeat of the Ndebele. In the eastern Transvaal more specific but equally dubious claims were based on the 1845 agreement with the Pedi and the July 1846 treaty with the Swazi. See chapter five section 5.3.)

The importance of the allocation of land but the refusal of title to Africans cannot be overstated. Not only was continued occupation of the land made conditional on their 'good behaviour' (i.e. their willingness to provide labour) but Africans were expected to pay tax as they were on 'Boer land'. (Over the years a barrage of taxes was added to the original labour tax, see below.) As Boer production levels rose and their labour requirements escalated correspondingly, the right to tax and where necessary evict Africans became a crucial weapon in the Boer campaign to extend their labour supply (see section 3.2. below).

3. The creation of a standing labour force: apprenticed and contracted labour

By the beginning of the 1850s, the fourteen day labour tax could no longer satisfy Boer labour needs. The rise of beef production was drawing a growing number of cattle ranchers to the district and these individuals demanded their share of the labour supply. The Boer response to their rising labour requirements was two-fold. On the one hand, the Cape practice (endorsed by the apprenticeship laws of 1812) of apprenticing children was transferred to the eastern Transvaal. On the other, mounting pressure was put on African groups to enter into legally enforceable service contracts. Both these practices were underpinned by a system of passes and residence permits limiting Africans' freedom to live and move freely.

3.1. Apprenticed labour.

The years 1850-66 saw a dramatic escalation in the number of children (and to a lesser extent women) indentured by the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers. It is striking that demand for children began to intensify as ranching operations were established in the late 1840s and continued to rise

¹⁷ Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, p. 77.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

throughout the 1850s as the production of slaughter and draught cattle expanded. The number of children apprenticed into the Boer labour force rose sharply again in the early 1860s as wool production developed in the southern wards of the district. The use of apprenticed labour peaked in the late 1860s after which a complex set of factors (discussed at the end of this section) led to the decline of the institution and the increasing use of closely controlled contract labour.

This sequence is interesting as once again events in the eastern Transvaal echoed the Cape experience. By the second decade of the nineteenth century the Cape Colony stood on the brink of rapid economic growth. The formal institutionalisation and extension of forced labour in 1809 and 1812 made the rapid expansion of production possible but by the late 1820s the economy's needs were changing and coercion was rephrased in other terms. Similarly, in 1850 the Lydenburg economy was on the threshold of rapid expansion. Demand for commodities was good and the use of apprentices allowed the district's beef and later wool and arable producers to meet the needs of a growing market. But, like the Cape three decades earlier, by the mid-1860s the Boer economy needed labourers to be supplied in greater numbers and more efficiently distributed than was possible by simple indenture.

The Boers justified the apprenticeship of women and children in humanitarian terms. Just as Cape colonists (before Ordinance 49 of 1828 legalised the employment of Africans) had claimed their 'mantatee' labourers were refugees from the ever convenient 'mfecane', the Boers usually claimed that their apprentices were orphans or refugees and much was made of 'civilising' apprentices. But in practice apprentices were only acculturated enough to make their reassimilation into African society difficult in the event of escape.

The actual procedure for the apprenticing or *inboeking* of an African child was simple. Any person who received an African child as a 'free gift' or in 'any other lawful way' was required to notify the *Landrost* or *veldcornet* within eight days. This official would then enter the child's name and age in a contract which bound the *inboekseling* (apprentice) to the master until maturity - twenty one years for females and twenty five years for males.¹⁹ This was slightly longer than in the Cape where the apprentice was supposed to be freed on his or her eighteenth birthday.

¹⁹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, pp. 29-32, Volksraad minutes, 9 May 1851; Agar-Hamilton, *Native Policy*, pp. 172-173 and 180.

The potential for abuse of this system was enormous. Firstly, most apprenticeships were done through the *veldcornets*, an elected official sensitive to the interests of the inhabitants of his ward, who seldom notified the *Landrost* of the indenture of children. The Lydenburg indenture register shows that 430 children were apprenticed between 1851 and 1866, a number Bonner has shown to be woefully inaccurate. The failure to properly record apprenticeships not only protected the master from awkward questions concerning the child's origin, but also meant there was no established mechanism for ensuring the *inboekselings* would be released on maturity. Secondly, as it was the master's duty to enter the child's age in the apprenticeship contract, the age of *inboekselings* were likely to be underestimated. Ross has noted how few apprentices actually received their freedom in the Cape and Delius has quoted Nachtigal as observing that in the Lydenburg district some *inboekselings* 'appear to remain young forever'. Finally, there was agreement among the Boers that when maturity was eventually acknowledged, the *inboekseling* should receive some remuneration for his or her services but he or she had no right to leave the Boer service. Mature *inboekselings* sometimes tried to settle with neighbouring African societies but, in 1859, the *Volksraad* of the Republic of Lydenburg passed a law forbidding this practice.²⁰ Judging by the number of complaints to the Lydenburg *Landrost* concerning former servants settling among the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele, however, the practice was not stopped.

Inboekselings were acquired by the Lydenburg Boers from a variety of sources. The diverse origins of *inboekselings* in the Lydenburg district was illustrated in 1860 when, at a school for *inboekselings*, the missionaries Grutzner and Merensky were surprised by a number of 'Bushmen, Hottentots, Swazi, Zulus, Betjoeanas and *Knopneuse*'.²¹ Children were either captured by the Boers themselves (included in this category are children given as tribute to avoid the attentions of a Boer commando) or purchased from African or European traders.

The capture of children by the Boers themselves was especially widespread during the period of initial settlement. During the first three years of their history, the Ohrigstad Boers were essentially a community of hunter/raiders. The bands which ranged over vast areas of the

²⁰ TA, L 19, Landrost's Order, 12 Dec. 1860; LL 1, Van Niekerk to Landrost, 20 May 1861; LL 179, Landrost to veldcornets, 30 June 1866; LL 172, Indenture book of Landrost; Delius, *Land*, p. 145; Bonner, *Kings*, pp. 81-84.

²¹ T. Wangermann, *Maleo en Sekukuni*, (Cape Town, 1957), p. 33.

Transvaal and present day Mozambique were well placed to seize apprentices for trade to the growing number of pastoral and arable producers in the area. Some years later, High Commissioner Barkley alleged that the Boers had made a practice of sending their African servants to Delagoa Bay to purchase children on their behalf.²² Although I have not found more references to this practice, it would seem very plausible in light of the widespread use of *swart skuts* (discussed in the previous chapter) by the Ohrigstad Boers.

Unfortunately little is known of the precise volume of the trade in children to and from Ohrigstad. Not only was the commerce illegal, but the Ohrigstad indenture book (for the period 1845-9) which may have provided some indication, however inaccurate, has been lost. Only one undated page of this document remains but this shows the indenture of thirteen children in a single day. That the Ohrigstad Boers traded in children cannot be contested. Within a few months of the establishment of Ohrigstad, charges were being levelled by the British authorities in the Cape and Natal that children were being bought and sold by the Boers. Numerous accusations by traders and travellers within the Boer sphere of operations, such as the British explorer Freeman and the Swedish naturalist Wahlburg, have been documented.²³ Even the *Volksraad* records acknowledge the capture of children - notably by Potgieter and his followers - as well as the importation of children from Delagoa Bay.²⁴

However, the sale of children by the Ohrigstad Boers did not remain prevalent for long. The establishment of cattle ranching operations in the late 1840s meant the Ohrigstad Boers became users rather than suppliers of apprenticed labourers. Also, the move to Schoemansdal by Potgieter and the bulk of the hunter/raiding community in 1848 meant the Zoutpansburg area superseded Ohrigstad not only as the premier producer of ivory but also as the major supplier of children. Fortunately there is a little more evidence concerning the seizure and sale of apprentices from Zoutpansburg than there is from Ohrigstad. In 1854 Hermanus Potgieter led a raid against an African group under Maglabotla and kidnapped the women and children (the

²² High Commissioner Barkley to Burgers, Pamphlets of the Transvaal, 114.

²³ J.J. Freeman, A Tour in South Africa, with Notices of Natal, Mauritius, Madagascar, Ceylon and Palestine (London, 1951), pp. 274-275; Bird, Annals, 1, p. 447, Report of Wahlburg.

²⁴ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 88-89, Volksraad minutes, 6 Dec 1848; ibid., p. 74, Volksraad minutes, 15 Dec. 1847; Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, p. 187.

number of whom were not recorded). In 1856 H. Austin wrote to his debtor J. Ardendorf that the debt could be settled with an ox and a child. In 1865 G.J. Steyn wrote to Sir Philip Wodehouse complaining that the trade in children remained 'extensive'. The report was to no avail, however, as three years later military commander S. Schoeman seized seventy nine children in a raid on Majatjie.²⁵

The Potgieter group's move north did not mean that the capture of children by the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers ceased. Although the number of raids by individual Boers declined, the Boer state (like the Cape authorities who in 1828 organised the labour raids against the Ngwane) continued to seize African children on behalf of its citizens. The Lydenburg Boers retained a considerable military capacity and African groups were forced to meet Boer demands for children in order to avoid attack by a commando. Delius has shown that children were frequently demanded from the Pedi during the late 1840s. Similarly, children were received by the Boers from the Swazi as early as 1847 in return for help during the Zulu invasion of Swaziland in that year.²⁶ Children received as tribute were retained by the officials concerned and disposed of to the burghers at quarterly sales held for that purpose by the *Landrost*. A group of children received as tribute from the Gaza, for example, were sold at Ohrigstad in 1848 by *Landrost* De Clerq at a price of 'Rds 30 for the youngest pair and Rds 50 for the others'.²⁷ Official raiding also occurred on a smaller scale and, in the name of combatting stock theft, *Landrosts* routinely invoked commandos and attacked those regarded as 'Bushmen'.²⁸ Like in the Orange River Sovereignty and the Cape until the 1850s, 'Bushmen' could be shot on sight. In 1861, *veldcornets* T. Van Niekerk and C.D. Pretorius reported that they had led raids and managed to kill ten and seven 'Bushmen' respectively.²⁹ The 'orphans' which survived the murder of their parents could then be apprenticed under the pretext of humanitarian concern.

The use of apprenticed labour reached its final stage of development in the late 1850s when

²⁵ TA, SS 6, R633/54, W Boshoff to State Secretary, 14 May 1854; Friend of the Sovereignty, 3 March 1866.

²⁶ Bonner, Kings, p. 81; Delius, Land, p. 138-139.

²⁷ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, p 86, Volksraad minutes, 7 Oct. 1848.

²⁸ TA, SS 17, R1834/57, Letter from Government Secretary, 2 Oct. 1857.

²⁹ TA, LL 1, T van Niekerk to Landrost, 10 March 1861.

wool production increased the labour needs of the Lydenburg Boers. Economic development, however, mitigated against military adventurism. Long periods spent on commando interfered with production and the district's producers increasingly found it more convenient to employ surrogates to perform their coercive tasks. Consequently a brisk trade developed with groups and individuals who chose to specialise in the procurement of children.³⁰

Two major sources of children were available to the Lydenburg Boers: the Zoutpansburg raiding community and the emerging Swazi state. The elephant hunters in the Zoutpansburg had traded in children from the outset. When the profitability of the ivory trade declined in the 1860s, the sale of children (or *swart ivoor*) became increasingly important to the Zoutpansburg economy and some individuals such as Commandant S. Schoeman seemed to specialise in the seizure of children.³¹ The individual most well known and probably most active in the seizure of children was the Superintendent of Africans, Jao Albasini. Albasini's African mercenaries raided widely seizing, for example, four hundred children in a single attack on Modjadji (in the Zoutpansburg district) in 1861.³² (As is usual no record was kept of the fate of these captives.)

That children seized in these raids were sold was noted by several contemporary commentators such as the author L. Cachet who accused traders in the Zoutpansburg area (especially the Portuguese resident there) of smuggling children from the district for sale elsewhere.³³ 'Een Hollander' was more specific, stating that: 'In the Northern Transvaal there lives a Portuguese trader (his name is well known) where it is possible to buy small slaves for between £3 and £8'.³⁴ One can only speculate to whom 'Hollander' is referring as several Portuguese traders including Jao Albasini, Casimir Simoes, Bras Piedade, L. Nunez, H.B. Pinto, Jacob de Couto, Augusto de Carvalho and M.M. de Gama lived in the district. Several of these individuals had

³⁰ The manner in which military action was replaced by economic strength has led some authors to misinterpret the power relationship between the Boers and their African neighbours. This theme will be expanded on in the following chapter.

³¹ TA, SS, R179/68, Schoeman to Uitvoerende Raad, 1868.

³² De Waal, 'Jao Albasini', p. 125.

³³ Cachet, Worstelstryd, pp. 461-462.

³⁴ Een Hollander, Toen en Tans, p. 11. Hollander does not mention to what years he is referring but accompanying discussion implies he is referring to the late 1850s or early 1860s.

trade links with the Lydenburg area and it is likely that they controlled the flow of children between the centres. For example, the trader Gouveira had a shop at Krugerspost on the Schoemansdal-Delagoa Bay trade route and was a known associate of Albasini's.³⁵ Cassimir Simoes also had a shop in the district, at Ohrigstad, and the notorious Albasini had a farm, Makashulaskraal, to the north west of Lydenburg on the Sabie river enroute to Delagoa Bay.³⁶ (Albasini's headquarters was the farm Goedgewensch in the Zoutpansburg but he garrisoned Makashulaskraal with his African followers.)

While evidence is scanty for the importation of children from Zoutpansburg, Lydenburg's trade links to its main source of captives - the emerging Swazi state - are much better documented.³⁷ The reason for Swazi prominence in the *inboekseling* trade must be sought in the impact of the expanding regional and world economies on African societies. The incorporation of the eastern Transvaal into the world economy had been begun by the Portuguese, but this process was gradual until the arrival of the Boers. Within a few years the Boers, formed in the crucible of Cape commerce, had galvanised the level of economic activity in the area.³⁸ The Dlamini were well placed to benefit from these developments. Although their trade links with the Portuguese were well established and had been central to the extension of Dlamini authority during the reign of Sobhusa, their position remained precarious. Not only was the kingdom under threat from the Zulu, but Dlamini power still had to be imposed on the large number of semi-autonomous sub-chieftaincies. Rising Boer labour needs provided the Dlamini, now under Mswati, with the opportunity to consolidate their power. The mid-1850s saw an unprecedented Dlamini assault on the autonomy of the sub-chieftaincies. The disposal of the survivors of these raids (and of ivory also generated by the raiding parties) to the Boers ensured a flow of valuable commodities into Dlamini hands which was essential to the maintenance of the age-regiments upon which royal power was based. Swazi power was thus closely tied to trade with the Boers and as Boer labour requirements began to climb sharply from

³⁵ TA, SS 200, R436/75, Nachtigal to State President, 11 Feb. 1875; *ibid.*, R3032/75, Nachtigal to State President, 10 Feb. 1875; Delius, *Land*, p 139.

³⁶ De Waal, 'Albasini', p. 128.

³⁷ Attention was first drawn to the extent and chronology of the Boer-Swazi captive trade by Philip Bonner. See Bonner, *Kings*, pp. 80-84.

³⁸ See previous chapter.

the late 1850s, Swazi regiments ranged far into the lowveld and southern Mozambique to secure ivory and captives which would be sold for cattle, hunting dogs, blankets, horses and guns.³⁹

Just as the Swazi began to specialise in the seizure of captives, some Lydenburg Boers - D.J.G. Coetzee is an excellent example - began to specialise in the purchase of captives from the Swazi for resale to the broader Boer community. These individuals were frequently officers of state. Officials, in particular the *landroste* and *veldcornets* who had frequent dealings with African societies, were well placed to trade in children. *Landrost* H.F. Buhrmann is known to have received sixteen children and his successor, C. Potgieter, seven. J.M. de Beer, who was appointed diplomatic agent in 1864, also traded children from the Swazi and on at least one occasion sent captives to President M. Pretorius. Pretorius, it seems, was a frequent purchaser of children and in 1867 he addressed a letter to P. Vercueil, a trader in neighbouring Zoutpansberg, requesting that: 'If you get some little Kaffirs be so good as to buy six for me and send them when you can and write me what it will cost to procure three girls and three boys'.⁴⁰

As the Boer economy accelerated during the 1860s, the symbiosis between Boer purchasing power and Swazi military activity grew proportionately. The peak of the trade was perhaps reached in 1864 when the Swazi, at Boer behest, destroyed the Kopa seizing many hundreds of captives, the bulk of which were sold to the Lydenburg Boers.⁴¹

For a number of reasons, however, the volume of the trade began to decline by the late 1860s. Firstly, the lull in Swazi military activity following Mswati's death in 1865, as well as the escalating price demanded for captives, reduced the supply of captives from the Swazi kingdom. Secondly, the purchase of captives from Zoutpansburg traders was interrupted by the collapse of Schoemansdal in 1867. Finally, the Z.A.R. state, which was recovering from the civil war of 1864, began to make more vigorous efforts to curb the open trade in children (as the Cape

³⁹ Delius, *Land*, pp. 62-79; P. Bonner, 'The Rise, Consolidation and Disintegration of Dhlamini Power in Swaziland between 1820 and 1899', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1977), pp. 153-185.

⁴⁰ Delius, *Land*, p. 139; Agar-Hamilton, *Native Policy*, Appendix 2, p. 218.

⁴¹ Bonner, *Kings*, p. 82.

had done during the 1820s, especially during the administration of Governor Bourke).⁴² State efforts to restrict the trade in children stemmed from twin imperatives. As the regional economy grew, commercial interests in Britain, Natal and the Cape increasingly invested in the Transvaal. This growing British economic commitment to the Transvaal led to calls for the annexation of the Boer state. As these demands were frequently justified by accusations of slavery the Z.A.R., fearing for its sovereignty, moved against the trade in children.⁴³ It would, however, be a mistake to see the decline in the use of *inboekselings* only in terms of shrinking sources of supply (new suppliers could have been found) or the fear of British annexation. In the Cape, Ordinances 49 and 50 of 1828 were passed because the rapidly developing economy required a more sophisticated system of labour procurement (see chapter one, section 1.1). A similar situation developed in the Z.A.R. during the 1860s. Rapid economic development meant the Transvaal economy was increasingly unsuited to such a primitive system. New sectors of the economy, such as the towns and mines, demanded their share of labour. Closely controlled labour remained essential but slavery, whether open or disguised as apprenticeship, which bound labourers to a specific master indefinitely had become controversial and inefficient. Consequently the Transvaal Boers, as the Cape colonists had done after 1828, turned to contract labour as the means to refine and expand their unfree labour force.

3.2. Contract labour

Legally enforceable labour contracts were introduced to the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg district as early as 1850 and by the mid to late 1860s were becoming the most important means of controlling labour in the Lydenburg district. The rise to prominence of contracts as a means to control workers was not without precedent. Contracted labour had been successfully utilised in the Cape Colony since 1828 when Ordinance 49 introduced contracts as a means of controlling 'foreign' Africans employed in the Cape. The use of contracts to control labour was expanded by the the Masters and Servants Act of 1856 which, although nominally included white workers,

⁴² TA, LL 18, Regulations for the Trade in Orphans, 1 May 1867; Delius, Land, pp. 147-148; W. Kirstner, 'The Anti-Slavery Agitation against the Transvaal Republic, 1852-1868', in Archives Year Book for South African History, 2 vols. (Cape Town, 1952), 1, pp. 223-227, 232-239.

⁴³ TA, LL 3, Uitvoerende Raad to Landrost, 5 May 1866; C 4141, Correspondence re. the alleged kidnapping and enslaving of young Africans by the people of the Transvaal Republic, 1868, XL II.

was aimed predominantly at African and Khoi colonial 'citizens'. The use of contracts to control 'foreign' Africans was refined by the Kaffir Employment Act of 1857. Workers were now tied to legally enforceable five year contracts, providing for severe punishments for desertion, disobedience or laziness.⁴⁴

In 1850 the *Volksraad* introduced contracts for periods of service exceeding fourteen days. After this period service had to be governed by a labour contract which stipulated both the period of employment and the remuneration agreed on.⁴⁵ Contracts usually bound the labourer to his or her employer for a period of three to twelve months and payment was normally made in stock, blankets and occasionally money.⁴⁶ These contracts were legally binding and, like in the Cape, severe punishment could be invoked to ensure servants' adherence to the terms (these sanctions will be discussed at the end of the section).

As was the case in the Cape Colony, independent African producers were reluctant to enter into these contracts and coercive tactics had to be employed for the necessary number of labourers to be recruited. Central to Boer efforts to recruit contract labourers was the establishment of labour pools in every ward of the district. In the early 1850s the right of African communities to occupy land in the Boer domain had been restricted and only specifically designated areas could be occupied.⁴⁷ This consolidated the African population into what were effectively labour reserves throughout the Boer domain. These labour pools were a hybrid encapsulating elements of both the creation of Fingo labour pools in the eastern Cape after 1835, the Shepstone policy in Natal and a squatter situation. Africans were permitted to govern themselves within the land allocated to them, yet they were also expected to pay tax to the Boer state - an obligation usually met by the provision of labour.

⁴⁴ Crais, *Making of the Colonial Order*, pp. 114, 131-132, 140, 142-143, 157, 174, 177, 194, 196, 203.

⁴⁵ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, p. 117, *Volksraad* minutes, 22 Jan. 1850.

⁴⁶ Jeppe and Kotze, *Locale Wetten*, Veldcornet's instructions of 1858, arts 39, 40, 56 and 57; Naude, *Boerdery*, p. 190.

⁴⁷ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, pp. 3-9, 15 Jan. 1851; *ibid.*, Bylaag 103 of 1853; W. A. Stals, 'Die Kwessie van die Naturelle Eiendomsreg op Grond in die Transvaal, 1838-1884', unpublished M.A. thesis (University of Pretoria, 1970), p. 5; Delius, *Land*, p. 131.

Control over African settlements was placed in the hands of the *veldcornets* and these officials were expressly required by the *Volksraad* to use their position to ensure a sufficient supply of contract labourers in their ward.⁴⁸ This instruction exposed the hypocrisy of the Boer contract system. Officially, Africans were liable to provide just fourteen days labour per year. But if they showed reluctance to enter Boer employment the *veldcornets* were authorised to apply the full force of the state's coercive apparatus.

The *veldcornets* not only regulated the labour of Africans already under their jurisdiction; if insufficient labour was available they were empowered to add to their ward's labour reserves by importing Africans from outside the Boer domain. In the Cape Colony after 1828 the colonists exploited the legal space created by Ordinance 49 to seize large numbers of Africans over the colonial border. For example, the Ngwane were attacked in 1828 and over one hundred captives taken.⁴⁹ Similarly, in 1861 *veldcornet* A.P. Van der Walt of Pretoria was authorised to capture '*Vaalpens kaffers*' (probably the scattered Koni groups) in the Lydenburg bushveld for use as labourers in his ward.⁵⁰ In Zoutpansburg, *veldcornet* C.J.H. Coetzee reported that he had 'negotiated' with tribes who wished to be subjected to the laws of the Z.A.R. and in the Lydenburg district *veldcornet* J. Van de Schyf reported that the followers of 'Manlapies' were now resident in his ward.⁵¹

All recruitment of labour had to be done through the *veldcornet*. Recruitment by private individuals was declared illegal as it could result in an uneven distribution of labour. Similarly, the distribution of Fingo brought into the Cape Colony after 1835 was largely controlled by the eastern Cape military establishment. Requests for labourers had to be made to the *veldcornet* who would then recruit and distribute the necessary number from African societies under his control.⁵² That contract labour was widely used in the Lydenburg district is clear from the

⁴⁸ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 117-122, *Volksraad* minutes, 22 Jan. 1850; Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', pp. 273-275.

⁴⁹ Cobbing, 'Mfecane as Alibi', pp. 502-503.

⁵⁰ TA, SS 39, R4310/61, *Memorie of Van der Walt*, 14 March 1861; *ibid.*, R4397/61, *Government Secretary to Van der Walt*, 13 May 1861.

⁵¹ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 4, *Bylaag* 1 of 1860.

⁵² Jeppe and Kotze, Locale Wetten, *Veldcornet's instructions of 1858*, arts 39 and 40.

reports of *veldcornets* to the *Landrost* which show that by the end of the 1850s the issue of contracts was just about a daily task for them.⁵³ Other aspects of the contract labour system were also under the control of the *veldcornet*. The *veldcornet* could break up and resettle African societies within his jurisdiction if this would improve the distribution of labourers in his ward. He was also responsible for securing the return of servants who absconded before the completion of their labour contracts, as well as for punishing recalcitrant servants. Punishment of servants for 'offences' such as laziness, insolence or desertion by private individuals was illegal and in 1852 the Lydenburg notable Joachim Espach was fined Rds 26 for whipping two of his apprentices to the extent that he broke their skin.⁵⁴

During the 1850s, demands were made on Africans through their chiefs. All African groups within the Boer domain were headed by a recognised chief whom the *veldcornets* held responsible for ensuring their demands for labourers were met. Chiefly cooperation had an important advantage in that it ensured the compliance of the labourers. Chiefs were not only expected to select the required number of their subjects for service on Boer farms, but also to return to the Boers any of their subjects who fled before the completion of their contracts.⁵⁵

The required level of compliance by the chiefs was secured by violence. The *veldcornet* frequently administered whippings to chiefs who resisted demands for labour.⁵⁶ In the case of more determined resistance, the *veldcornet* (who was also the military head of each ward) could invoke armed reprisals. Patrols were used against the smaller communities while full-scale commandos were launched against larger groupings. Such actions were commonly justified by accusations of stock theft and African communities which withheld their labour were liable to be attacked in the name of recovering stolen animals. The case of the Ndzundza Ndebele is instructive in this regard. From the late 1840s the highveld regions of the Lydenburg district -

⁵³ See for example TA, L 12, Diary of Landrost, Report of veldcornet T. Van Niekerk, Oct. 1860-March 1861.

⁵⁴ Krynauw and Pretorius, *Transvaalse-argiefstukke*, R446b/52, 3 Nov. 1852; Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', p. 275.

⁵⁵ TA, L 13, Agreement with Sekwati, 17 Nov. 1857; *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 20 of 1849; Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', pp. 274-275.

⁵⁶ Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', p.212; Naude, 'Boerdery', pp.190-191; Delius, *Land*, p.35.

primarily the western portions of the wards Krokodilrivier and Komati and the southern portion of Steenkampberg - were settled by cattle ranchers.⁵⁷ The Ndzundza who were resident in that area were expected to supply the increasing number of beef producers with labour - something they were reluctant to do. Consequently by 1848 complaints of labour shortages underpinned by accusations of cattle theft were reaching the *Volksraad*.⁵⁸ In response, commandos were launched against the Ndzundza in 1849 and again in January 1852.⁵⁹ Although no details of the outcome of these actions are given in either the *Volksraad* or *Landrost's* records, they seem to have been successful. Complaints about Ndzundza declined until the 1860s when, following the rapid development of wool production, the Ndzundza were subjected to additional demands for labour.

Pressure on Africans to enter Boer service intensified from the mid-1860s. The growing wool industry in the south of the district and the increase in both pastoral and arable production following the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1867 and gold at Pilgrimsrest in 1873 created a labour shortage. Additional labourers had to be found if growth was to be sustained. Consequently the integrity of African groups was attacked in an effort to more fully transform Africans into a labouring class.

The intensification of pressure on African societies began in earnest in 1864. In this year the *veldcornets* received instruction to more diligently use their existing powers against Africans within their jurisdiction.⁶⁰ But even the more effective application of existing measures could not meet the escalating demands of the growing economy and, from the mid-1860s, the Boer state increasingly sought to undermine African groups by attacking their economic independence.

In 1866 the existing labour tax was reinforced when a poll tax openly geared to providing labour was proclaimed. All male Africans over the age of sixteen years were subjected to an annual

⁵⁷ Beef production was established in the late 1840's and grew steadily throughout the 1850's. See previous chapter.

⁵⁸ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 16 of 1849; *ibid.*, Bylaag 20 of 1849.

⁵⁹ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, p. 106, *Volksraad* decision, 20 Sept. 1849; *ibid.*, Transvaal 2, p. 48, *Kommiesieraad* decision, 28 Nov. 1851; H.C.M. Fourie, *AmaNdebele van Fene Mahlangu en hun religieus-sociaal leven* (Zwollwe, 1921), pp. 39-40.

⁶⁰ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 5, Bylaag 70 of 1864.

levy of Rds 1-5-2 if employed and Rds 6-5-2 if not in service.⁶¹ In 1870 a hut tax, comparable to measures introduced in British Kaffraria and Natal in 1849, was introduced. Africans in the employ of whites and resident on their farms were liable for a tax of Rds 2-6 per hut per year. For those in the employ of whites but not resident on their farms, the tax was five shillings per hut per year. Africans who were fortunate enough to escape the employment net were taxed a punitive ten shillings per hut per year.⁶² Some disjuncture between statute and practice existed in the application of these taxes. Theoretically, all Africans in the area to which the Boers laid claim were liable for the taxes. In practice, however, the Ndzundza Ndebele refused to pay. There was also a grey area of authority along the border with the Pedi, with both sides claiming hegemony. The Boers were determined to press their demands in both this area and against the Ndzundza Ndebele, a course of action that would greatly contribute to the rising Boer-African conflict in the 1870s.

Further pressure was applied to African communities in 1876 when amendments were made to the hut tax of 1870. African groups of diverse size were subject to Boer authority. The new law recognised that it was more difficult to extract labourers from the larger African settlements and they became liable for an annual tax of ten shillings per hut while smaller communities and those in the employ of whites were liable for only five shillings per hut. (I have not been able to ascertain what definition the Boers used to categorise African groups. It is likely that the *veldcornets* had discretion about where to apply maximum pressure.) In addition to the new hut tax, Africans above twenty years of age and not in the employ of whites were liable for an additional poll tax of ten shillings per annum.⁶³

The Boer state also attacked the capacity of Africans within their domain to earn an independent livelihood by restricting their ability to keep stock and hunt game. The first formal stock pounds were established in the Lydenburg district in 1860. Any animal not on its owner's land could be seized and impounded. The *veldcornets* also had the power to assess damage caused by unattended stock and levy the necessary reparations. At a time when fences were unheard of, these regulations gave unscrupulous officials the opportunity to place great pressure on African

⁶¹ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 6, pp. 41-42, Volksraad minutes, 12 Oct. 1860.

⁶² Jeppe and Kotze, Locale Wetten, Law No. 9 of 1870.

⁶³ EVR 12, Volksraad minutes, art 143, 9 June 1876.

communities.⁶⁴ African access to the large herds of game in the bushveld which provided both Boers and Africans with a valuable supply of food and exchange commodities was limited by requiring Africans to obtain written permission from their *veldcornet* before undertaking hunting trips.⁶⁵

The inevitable problem counterpointing the provision of an adequate labour supply is that of retaining control over newly acquired workers. The need to control labourers closely was especially keen in the Lydenburg district due to the proximity of independent African societies, such as the Pedi, who were eager to increase their numbers by offering sanctuary to refugees from the Boer domain. While the co-option of chiefly authority provided Boer producers with some leverage against their employees, this mechanism alone did not provide sufficient control. In the Cape Colony, the use of pass laws was proving extremely effective in curbing the liberty of workers.⁶⁶ Similarly, the Transvaal Boers introduced a pass system which the *Uitvoerende Raad* openly admitted was intended to facilitate the control of masters over their servants.⁶⁷ As early as 1841, *veldcornets* in the Mooi River area were instructed to see that no Africans moved about in their wards without permission.⁶⁸ All Africans were required to carry a pass signed by either the *veldcornet* of their ward or by an employer.⁶⁹ Africans found without a pass were to be given a beating by the *veldcornet* followed by compulsory indenture.⁷⁰

The effectiveness of the pass laws was greatly enhanced by their potential for abuse. After the completion of a labour contract it was the responsibility of the master to issue his former employee with a pass. Many simply refused to do this. Former servants in this position were then forced to choose between agreeing to an extension of their contracts or of running the

⁶⁴ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, pp. 149-170, Volksraad decision, 19 Sept. 1953; T.A., LL 2, Report of H.J. Viljoen, July 1853; Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 16.

⁶⁵ Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', p. 277.

⁶⁶ See chapter one.

⁶⁷ Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', pp. 277-278.

⁶⁸ Wichman, 'Wordingsgeskiedenis', p. 29.

⁶⁹ Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Veldkornet', p. 277.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

gauntlet of travelling in the Boer domain without a pass. Furthermore, as records of passes issued were only kept after 1870, burghers had merely to destroy the pass of any African encountered and take them to the *veldcornet* for compulsory indenture.⁷¹

The effectiveness of these pass regulations has been underestimated by many authors.⁷² Two points have been neglected. Firstly, while it is true that many Africans were able to avoid the restrictions imposed by the pass regulations, this exercise was fraught with danger and the high number of passes issued during the period under study indicates that a large number of Africans chose to conform to the system rather than risk arrest. Secondly, much of the evidence of Africans' flouting of the pass regulations concerns large groups of migrants which were far more difficult to control than individuals.

Reinforcing the formal pass system, a range of informal methods were also utilised to retain the services of labourers whose contracts had expired. As in the Cape, alcohol was used to keep labourers pliant. Delius has noted the case of Plaatjie who, after being liberally plied with brandy, was tricked into renewing his contract for a further ten years.⁷³ Another common Cape practice, that of seizing the stock of workers whose contracts had expired, was widely practiced in the eastern Transvaal. Labourers were often paid with stock and by refusing to release these animals the labourer could be tied to the farm. It is significant that complaints of workers absconding from labour contracts were frequently coupled with complaints of stock theft.⁷⁴

The Boer need to deepen control over Africans' freedom of movement became more acute in the mid-1860s. Not only was burgeoning production creating a labour shortage in the Transvaal but producers in the Z.A.R. also found themselves in competition for labour with their counterparts in the British colonies. In the eastern Transvaal the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele had dispatched migrants to the British colonies since at least 1852 (migrants from the eastern

⁷¹ Z.A.R. Government Gazette, 9 July 1870.

⁷² See for example Delius, *Land*, pp. 147-152.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

Transvaal found employment as far afield as Port Elizabeth).⁷⁵ This situation became even more serious after the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley as increasing numbers of migrants were attracted to the diggings by the availability of firearms.

The Boers were very concerned to stem this flow, and as soon as migrancy began to take off in the early 1850s they sought to prevent Africans selling their labour elsewhere in the region by declaring that no African could cross the Z.A.R.'s borders without special permission from a *veldcorner*.⁷⁶ The practice was, however, difficult to stop as migrants travelled in large groups (sometimes whole age-regiments) and were frequently armed. In 1865 the Government Secretary in Pretoria wrote to the Lydenburg *Landrost* instructing him to warn the district's labourers that if they left their masters' service without the required pass they would be 'shot dead'.⁷⁷ This drastic measure (the previous sanction was a flogging) was indicative of the Boer need to retain their labour. Further action was taken in July of the same year when the Lydenburg *Landrost* received instructions to apply the pass regulations to the letter.⁷⁸ In spite of the severe penalties, migrancy was not checked and consequently the pass system was made more stringent in 1872; henceforth passes were to cost £1 and could only be issued on production of a service contract. This legislation meant all Africans within the Boer domain were compelled to be in service to whites.⁷⁹ The very high cost of the passes may have been counter-productive, compelling Africans to risk fleeing beyond Boer territory rather than being forced into service. In 1873, the pass laws were again amended; passes were now to be issued free of charge, but a certificate of employment still had to be produced.⁸⁰

African societies did not respond passively to Boer efforts to force them into service and heightened conflict resulted throughout the Z.A.R. In the Lydenburg district, conflict occurred with the Ndzundza Ndebele in 1864-5 and the Pedi in 1876. Although some groups won limited

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64, 68.

⁷⁶ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 32 of 1852.

⁷⁷ TA, LL 240, Missive from Government Secretary, 22 June 1865.

⁷⁸ TA, LL 3, Uitvoerende Raad to Landrost, 25 July 1865.

⁷⁹ Jeppe and Kotze, *Locale Wetten*, Law No. 3 of 1872.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Article 9 of Law No. 4 of 1873; TA, LL 4. State Secretary to Landrost, 26 March 1873.

respite, the reprieve was short lived. The Pedi were defeated in 1879 and the Ndzundza in 1883.⁸¹ The ability of some African groups to resist Boer authority until the late 1870s has caused considerable confusion among historians seeking to explain the evolution of the balance of power in the area. Too often the focus has been placed only on the military relationship between specific groups. Rather, changes such as differing emphasis on military activity should be seen in the context of the assumption of new roles by societies in the area as they were incorporated into an expanding world economic system largely but not exclusively represented by the Boers. This process has not been investigated by historians, consequently many nuances of power have been ignored and a distorted picture has been painted. This theme will be expanded on in the following chapter.

4. Conclusion.

Across the southern African continent European invaders, intent on the commercial production of commodities, seized new lands and brought them into production. All faced the problem of transforming a reluctant African population into compliant labourers in order to survive economically. Throughout the region the initial response to this problem was the use of slave and indentured labour. Crude slavery and indenture were extremely useful during the initial stages of economic growth as producers were assured of some labour. However as production levels rose a more flexible system was required; not only did much larger numbers of workers have to be controlled but they also had to be efficiently distributed. As slavery and indenture became inappropriate, European producers devised new ways to control and procure labour. Without exception they developed systems that on the one hand forced Africans to enter the employ of whites and on the other compelled them to remain in the service of their employers.

Although the basic aims of European colonists were the same throughout the region, the specific tactics adopted varied as local circumstances differed. For example Boer producers in the eastern Transvaal were supported by a less powerful colonial state than were their counterparts in the eastern Cape. Crucially, the Lydenburg Boers also had to contend with African groups that had for some time been exposed to hostile European incursions from the Portuguese settlements.

⁸¹. For the use of state pressure on African communities in the Lydenburg district in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century see: Peter Delius, 'Abel Erasmus'. A valuable study on these lines for the earlier period awaits an enterprising researcher. Veldcornets T. Van Niekerk and D.J.G. Coetzee or the Secretary of the Volksraad H.T. Buhrmann would prove excellent candidates.

Those societies that had survived the Portuguese threat had a capacity for resistance that could be expanded to meet the dangers posed by the Boer invaders. Because of these factors the balance of power in the eastern Transvaal was more complex than in some parts of the region and the Lydenburg Boers had to adopt innovative tactics (such as the Boer-Swazi axis that was formed in the late 1850s and early 1860s) to achieve their goals.

In spite of some regional variation, the basic tactics adopted by the eastern Transvaal Boers to procure and control labour were remarkably similar to those of European invaders throughout the region. As was being done to the Xhosa and Cape Khoi, Africans in the eastern Transvaal were forced into service by a barrage of legislative pressures which attacked their ability to produce independently. Restrictions on land ownership, the creation of labour pools, punitive taxation, and the introduction of stock pounds all undermined the economic integrity of African groups. When the domestic supply was insufficient, the Boers - in a move reminiscent of the seizure of 'Bushmen', Fingo and 'Mantatee' labour by Cape colonists - captured Africans from outside their domain for incorporation into the labour force as either apprenticed or contracted labour. To control their new servants, the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers again adopted strategies that paralleled the colonial experience and a system of pass regulations, legally enforceable labour contracts, as well as informal methods such as the use of alcohol, were employed to dominate the African workforce.

In the light of the obvious parallels between the systems of labour procurement and control in the eastern Transvaal and those adopted elsewhere in the region, it is absurd to make a fundamental distinction between Boer and British labour policy as authors such as De Kiewiet have done. The tactics adopted by the Boers and their British counterparts were remarkably similar and equally coercive. A far more useful approach than seeking to make a fundamental Boer-British distinction would be to develop the concept of a settler/invader policy. The tactics adopted by European invaders may have been adapted to suit local circumstances, but it should not be forgotten that these were differences of detail and not of principle. Apologists of British colonialism would do well to remember that it was the Cape Colony's Master and Servants Act of 1857 that, with only minor changes, governed the conditions of employment of Africans in South Africa until 1976!

Chapter 5

The relationship between the Boers and the major autonomous African groups in the eastern Transvaal: the Swazi, Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele

1. Introduction

Several accounts have been given of the relationship between the Boers and their African neighbours. Parts of some are extremely useful but none is completely satisfactory as all misunderstand the broader process of economic development that underpinned the development of both the Boers and their African counterparts. The objective of the Boer settlers was to trade commodities on the regional markets. To do this they instituted a system of production that required the subjugation of African communities.¹ Consequently, as production levels rose, the autonomy of African groups was increasingly threatened by the Boers. But economic growth also boosted the position of African communities which were able to furnish marketable commodities for trade. Several groups reacted to this opportunity and grew very powerful by supplying either products of the hunt, captives or labour to the regional markets. Economic development thus spawned contradictory processes. Boer pressure on African societies increased as rising production levels drove the Boers to seize additional land and labour. But by engaging in the system that sought to conquer them, Africans were able to acquire the means to resist threats to their autonomy.

This chapter will interpret the relationship between the Boers and their African neighbours in terms of these contending imperatives. The impact of trade on African societies prior to the arrival of the Boers will be briefly traced. The processes of growth and conflict unleashed by the arrival of the Boers will be documented from the arrival of the first Boer parties until the 1870s when co-existence became impossible and the Boer state moved to finally eradicate African autonomy.

¹ See chapters three and four.

2. Early European invasions and their impact on the development of African states prior to the arrival of the Boers.

The arrival of the first parties of Boers at Ohrigstad in 1845 was not unheralded. Europeans and their surrogates had been making incursions into the area since at least 1750, exporting cattle, slaves, ivory and gold via Delagoa Bay. As demand for these commodities escalated, dominant groups within affected African societies sought to intensify their control over the labour power of their subjects in order to generate greater volumes of these goods. From the middle of the eighteenth century (the same years that European traders made their presence felt) existing hunting and raiding formations took on a more institutionalised and expanded form in the shape of proto-age regiments under the control of the chiefs.²

Bonner has argued that these novel social formations represented a new mode of production in which an aristocratic class centred around the king exercised increasing control over the labour of their subjects in order to dominate market related production. But while Bonner acknowledges the role of trade in initiating these developments, he denies the process contained sufficient impetus to reach its conclusion. Instead he argues that while a new mode of production was emerging 'it would require the exogenous crisis of the Madlatule famine to fix it in place'.³ The claim that drought-induced famine fixed in place developing social structures is highly doubtful as there was no marked decrease in rainfall during the crucial years 1802-22. Cobbing has argued that it was the take-off of the slave trade from 1805 and not drought which drove events in the region and has pointed out: 'It [drought] did not create the demand for slaves nor initiate capital outlay on American sugar plantations'.⁴

By the second decade of the nineteenth century the sale of slaves had come to dominate exports from Delagoa Bay. In particular, the Ndwandwe, Mthethwa and Gaza became involved in the pursuit of slaves. Also active in the area were bands of Portuguese, Arab and Goan Indian

² D.W. Hedges, 'Trade and Politics in Southern Mozambique and Zululand in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1978), pp. 122-123, 127-134, 141-142, 145-153, 189-190, 193-199.

³ Bonner, *Kings*, pp. 22-23; Hedges, 'Trade and Politics', pp. 12, 145-152; Delius, *Land*, p. 19.

⁴ Cobbing, 'Grasping the Nettle: The Slave Trade and the Early Zulu', in D.R. Edgecombe, J.P.C. Laband and P.S. Thompson, *Debate on Zulu Origins: A Selection of Papers on the Zulu Kingdom and early Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1992), p. 17.

slavers who sometimes acted in concert with groups such as the Ndwandwe and sometimes independently. To the south and west of the Portuguese slaving networks was the colonial system spearheaded by bands of Griqua and Koranna raiders who ranged across the highveld seizing captives for the Cape labour market.⁵

Though under researched, the devastation caused by the slave trade was almost certainly extensive and large-scale dislocations occurred as African groups fled from its ravages. Some of these groups were able to establish themselves in niches on the periphery of the slaving sphere where they engaged in a process of defensive state building. Cobbing has noted that successful defensive states had to fulfill the triple function of: 'defending existing populations; attracting or seizing additional people, particularly women and children; and adapting reproductive systems and social customs associated with these so as to enhance the birthrate'.⁶ To achieve these goals defensive states underwent political and economic centralisation, became increasingly expansionist and, where possible, boosted their position by engaging in trade. Some, such as the Swazi and probably the Zulu, would even trade slaves (see below). During the first three decades of the nineteenth century several emerging formations fitted this description: the Pedi near the Steelpoort river; the Swazi on the eastern escarpment; the Sotho between the Caledon and Maluti mountains; the Ndebele on the Vaal headwaters; and the Zulu near the Tugela valley. However it is the Pedi and Swazi who would confront the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Boers who must be the focus of our attention.

The creation of what from the mid-1840s was to develop into the Swazi state began around 1820 when, under the leadership of Sobhusa, the Dlamini fled repeated raids by the Ndwandwe slavers and established themselves in the defensible Ezulwini valley. From this base, Sobhusa began to cautiously consolidate his position. Other groupings resident in the area that was to become Swaziland, such as the Magagula and the Mcina, were attacked.⁷ Raids were also launched against the Tsonga groups which, in the eighteenth century, had been forced into the lowveld and onto the escarpment by the expansion of trade, as well as the Koni, Pai, Pulani and

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷ Bonner, 'Rise', pp. 35-42.

Kutswe groups settled in the area.⁸

Although Sobhusa, at times assisted by the Portuguese, achieved some limited military success, the position of the Dlamini was still insecure and they were forced to remain ensconced in fortified villages. Groups such as the Mgazi were still far from subdued and resented any extension of Dlamini power. The Dlamini were threatened by an advance of the slaving frontier in Natal. British traders based at Port Natal supported the Zulu in raiding to the north, attacking amongst others the Ndwandwe in 1826 and the Khumalo in 1827. These raids reached the Swazi in 1827 and continued intermittently for the next ten years. For example in 1836, the year before the Zulu were crushed by the Boers, a combined force of Zulu and Natal British raided Sobhusa and seized a large number of cattle.⁹

The destructive forces that had driven the Dlamini to seek sanctuary in the Ezulwini valley reached the Maroteng in the years 1825-7. During the eighteenth century the Maroteng, from their base in the Steelpoort Valley, had been able to expand their power by exploiting the fact that the chiefdom straddled the east-west trade route between the Portuguese settlements and the interior.¹⁰ In the latter part of the 1820s the Maroteng were, however, repeatedly attacked by Ndwandwe raiders and in 1826 or 1827 by the Ndebele.¹¹ The focus of the raids on the Maroteng is important to note. Although the Maroteng were overcome by raiders, other groups in the area such as the Masemolo and Matlala survived largely intact. This suggests the Maroteng were victims of selective raiding rather than the all-encompassing waves of destruction suggested by 'mfecane' theory.

The Ndebele and Ndwandwe attacks forced the partial dispersal of the Maroteng. The most important group to leave the Steelpoort area was led by Sekwati who fled north across the Oliphants River. In spite of continued clashes with the Ndebele, Sekwati was able to gradually

⁸ Delius, Land, p. 29; Bonner, 'Rise', pp. 34-42 and 47.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 41-42; Bird, Annals, 1, pp. 377-378.

¹⁰ Delius, Land, pp. 18-19.

¹¹ J.R. Cobbing, 'The Ndebele under the Khumalos, 1820-1896', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Lancaster, 1976), pp. 15-20; Delius, Land, p. 22.

consolidate his position north of the Oliphants River by engaging in raids on small groups such as the Hanawa and the Lobedu.¹² These raids are only recalled in the oral traditions of the people concerned and no mention is made of their purpose. However, as several raids were undertaken in conjunction with Doris Buys, it is an educated guess that Sekwati was raiding for captives. Buys was a known slaver and, in the 1840s, raided extensively for cattle and captives on behalf of A.H. Potgieter.¹³ Buys also, for example, accompanied Potgieter on his 1847 raid on the Ndebele.¹⁴ Furthermore, during the 1850s Buys left the Lydenburg district and aligned himself with the raiding community at Zoutpansberg.¹⁵

In 1827 or 1828 Sekwati returned to the Steelpoort area with an enlarged following and considerably richer in cattle. From his new base he set about further strengthening his position by incorporating new subjects into the Maroteng state. Delius noted that on his return Sekwati began to raid many of the small groups that dotted the area, taking them captive and allocating them subordinate positions in the Maroteng state.¹⁶ This was a crucial development as the seizure and incorporation of captives by Sekwati undermined the existing social and political Maroteng institutions, allowing the centralisation of power essential to a defensive state.

In spite of the gradual consolidation achieved by Sekwati, the position of the Maroteng, like the Dlamini to the south east, remained fragile. Portuguese slavers continued to operate in the area and the developing threat posed by the alliance of Dingane's Zulu and the Port Natal British became evident when the Zulu-British force that attacked the Swazi in 1827 also undertook raids in the Steelpoort area.¹⁷ Finally, the Maroteng was not the only group in the Steelpoort area around which a defensive state could coalesce. The Masemola, Magakala, Mphahlele and, to the south, the Ndzundza Ndebele all offered viable alternatives to the Maroteng, and Sekwati had to overcome considerable opposition from these groups to the centralisation of power in his

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹³ Krynau and Pretorius, *Voortrekker-argiefstukke*, R 119/47, Report of Commission, Jan. 1847.

¹⁴ Potgieter and Theunissen, *Hendrik Potgieter*, p. 97.

¹⁵ De Waal, 'Albasini', p. 126.

¹⁶ Delius, *Land*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁷ Bird, *Annals*, 1, pp. 377-378, statement of William Wood.

hands.¹⁸

Thus, while both the Dlamini and the Maroteng had begun a process of defensive state building, neither of their futures were ensured. Their maturation into the Swazi and Pedi states was, however, greatly hastened by the emigration of the Boers from the Cape Colony in the late 1830s.¹⁹ As the Boers invaded new lands, first in Natal and then in the Transvaal, the process of economic intrusion begun by the Portuguese was radically accelerated. Those African groups which had survived the first phase of European intervention in the form of the Delagoa Bay slave trade were now confronted by a voracious new wave of European invaders. Many groups were immediately destroyed and dispersed by the Boers. Others such as the Kopa were subjugated later (in 1864). However a few weathered the storm, built on the foundations laid during the phase of Portuguese-led slaving, centralised their political and economic power, attracted or seized new people and expanded their military capacity. Tempered in the furnace of Boer violence, the Dlamini, Maroteng and - to a lesser extent - the Ndzundza Ndebele transformed themselves into states possessing a degree of power unprecedented among African groups on the sub-continent.²⁰ For a time these states posed a serious threat to Boer authority.

3. The Boer invasions and the escalation of violence.

The first Boer parties which burst into the eastern Transvaal in 1845 presented the area's Africans with a force more formidable than anything previously encountered. When the Boer leader A.H. Potgieter demanded cession of a huge tract of land from the Maroteng, Sekwati was in no position to refuse.²¹ (It is ironic that the Maroteng, who had yet to fully establish their authority on the Steelpoort area, had no right to cede the land to the Boers.) Boer demands did not stop at land and the Ohrigstad Boers also demanded auxiliaries for military operations such as the raid on the Kgatla in 1847. The Maroteng were expected to provide the invaders with

¹⁸ Delius, Land, p. 24.

¹⁹ A very useful study could be undertaken comparing the development of defensive states in the eastern Transvaal such as the Pedi and Swazi with the Sotho east of the Caledon who underwent a similar process over a similar time.

²⁰ This is not to imply that Swazi and the Pedi were the only groups to react in this way. Other African societies affected by the economic intrusions responded in a similar way. The Zulu and Sotho are cases in point.

²¹ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, pp. 16-19, Volksraad minutes, 20 Aug. 1865.

cattle, ivory and increasing numbers of children as well.²² Africans were expected to serve the Boers as labourers and the invaders frequently embarked on punitive raids to ensure compliance.²³ The Ndzundza were attacked in 1846 and in 1847 Sekwati was taken hostage to ensure the cooperation of his followers. Later in the same year the Kopa were attacked when they defied Boer demands for labour.²⁴

After the establishment of beef production in the western reaches of the district, Boer demands for labour became even more oppressive. African groups such as the Ndzundza Ndebele in or adjacent to the new cattle farming area were placed in the invidious position of having survived the first phase of European-led incursions emanating from Delagoa Bay only to face the prospect of being engulfed by the Boer invasion. This was not lost on the Boers and, in 1851, *Landroost De Clerq* wrote that the Ndzundza resented white rule 'because their subjects had been given to the Boers as labourers'. Left with little choice, these societies began to resist Boer demands despite the odds. In keeping with these developments, Mapog and Sekwati began to be described in Boer records as 'brutal' and 'disobedient'.²⁵

Predictably, the failure to meet Boer demands for labour and other forms of tribute invited retribution from the invaders. In 1851-2 commandos were launched against the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele in order to force 'them to fulfil their duties'.²⁶ The first of these struck the Ndzundza Ndebele in November 1851. Although the outcome of the commando has not been recorded, the action seems to have been successful as complaints against Mapog declined immediately. The Maroteng were attacked the following year and their capital, Phiring, was

²² Pretorius and Kruger, *Voortrekker-argiefstukke*, R119/47, report of Grobler, 14 May 1847; Delius, *Land*, p. 37.

²³ See chapter four.

²⁴ *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, pp. 104-105, Volksraad minutes, art 4, 20 Sept. 1849; *ibid.*, pp 48-50: Volksraad minutes, 4 May 1846; *ibid.*, pp 22-23, Volksraad minutes, 26 Sept. 1845; Pretorius and Kruger, *Voortrekker-argiefstukke*, R119/47, Report of Grobler, 14 May 1847.

²⁵ TA, LL 60, Register of Farms; *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 16 of 1849; *ibid.*, Bylaag 20 of 1849.

²⁶ Krynau and Pretorius (eds.), *Transvaalse-argiefstukke*, R280/51, J. de Clerq to A.W.J. Pretorius, 16 May 1849; *ibid.*, R216/50, Complaint of Espach, 3 July 1850; *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 2, p 48, Kommiesieraad minutes, 28 Nov. 1851; *ibid.*, pp 145-153, Volksraad minutes, 5 May 1851; *S.A.A.R.*, Transvaal 1, Bylaag 20 of 1849.

besieged by a Boer commando under *Commandant Nel*.²⁷ This engagement is one the most misunderstood of the entire decade. The conventional wisdom is that because the Boers did not succeed in storming Phiring, the engagement was a failure.²⁸ It is forgotten that at little cost to themselves, the Boers seized five thousand cattle, six thousand smaller stock and a number of children. These losses must have damaged the Maroteng productive capacity and consequently weakened the polity. The extent to which this engagement shook the Maroteng was reflected in Sekwati's decision to abandon Phiring and, as he had done in the 1820s, retreat north - this time establishing a capital at Thaba Mosego 120 kilometres to the north east, well away from the epicentre of Boer exactions.²⁹ However, while asserting Boer power, the attacks on the Maroteng and the Ndzundza Ndebele did not put an end to the processes that underlay the conflict. Boer demand for labour grew unabated and as the Maroteng and Ndzundza Ndebele first recoiled and then regrouped to face the Boer threat processes of centralisation and expansion were initiated that would culminate in their transformation into the mature Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele states.

In contrast to Boer-Maroteng and Boer-Ndzundza relations which rapidly developed into open conflict, the Boer-Dlamini relationship prior to 1865 was more complex and embodied both conflict and cooperation (the nature of this relationship will be expanded on below). The Dlamini heartland was situated further from the area of Boer occupation than were the Maroteng and Ndzundza Ndebele who, rather than the Dlamini, consequently bore the brunt of Boer labour demands. This emphasis was heightened as cattle ranching developed in the district's western reaches, moving the epicentre of Boer occupation still closer to the Ndzundza Ndebele, Maroteng and Kopa.³⁰

This is not to suggest the Boers did not make demands on the Dlamini. In 1846 the Dlamini

²⁷ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, Bylaag 10 of 1853; Krynau and Pretorius, Transvaalse-argiefstukke, R435/52, Report of De Clerq, 2 Oct. 1852; ibid., R439/52, Report of Potgieter, 16 Oct. 1852.

²⁸ See as an example of this view Delius, Land, p. 38.

²⁹ See footnote twenty-six above; Delius, Land, pp. 38-39.

³⁰ See chapter three for the development of ranching.

were forced to 'grant' the Boers title to land around Ohrigstad and Lydenburg.³¹ It is, however, important not to exaggerate the 1847 land cession. The Dlamini, like the Maroteng in 1845, had no right to cede the land to the Boers and consequently neither side actually gained or lost much in the transaction. A more tangible loss was suffered by the Dlamini in 1855 when the Boers demanded and received the valuable Komati area which they needed as winter grazing.³² Of far greater long term importance than the transfer of land were the increasing number of captives the Boers demanded from the Dlamini.³³ The Boer-Dlamini captive trade was crucial as, paradoxically, it underpinned the extension of Dlamini power which led to the creation of the defensive Swazi state. It also secured the apprenticed labour crucial to the economic development of the Boers during the 1850s and early 1860s.

While the seizure and sale of captives by the Dlamini reached new heights after 1845, the practice preceded the arrival of the Boers. Details are scanty but it is known that captives were taken during Sobhusa's early attempts to establish Dlamini dominance, for example in raids against the Magoboyi and Mkhize.³⁴ As Sobhusa was assisted in at least some of these operations by the Portuguese with whom he had commercial and diplomatic ties, it can be inferred that Sobhusa was trading slaves. Little is known of the specifics of this trade but in 1823 a caravan of over a thousand porters arrived in Delagoa Bay from the west which could only have meant it originated in, or at the very least travelled through, Dlamini territory.³⁵

The Portuguese role in the early extension of Dlamini power began to be supplanted by the Boers in 1837. After the graphic demonstration of Boer power at the Battle of Bloodriver, the Sobhusa sent envoys to the Boers to seek an alliance.³⁶ Mswati, Sobhusa's successor, was just

³¹ Pretorius and Kruger, Voortrekker-argiefstukke, R117/46, Copy of purchase agreement, 25 July 1846.

³² Bonner, Kings, p. 74.

³³ De Waal, 'Albasini', pp. 7-8; Bonner Kings, p. 80.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 31-33.

³⁵ A.M. Miller, Swaziland: The California of South Africa (Johannesburg, 1907), pp. 10-11; G. Preller, Dagboek van Louis Trichardt (1836-1838) (Bloemfontein, 1917), p. 359.

³⁶ Bird, Annals, 1, pp. 375, 579, 580-581; Preller, Voortrekkermense, 2, p. 17-19; ibid., 3, p. 105; ibid., 5, p. 134-135.

as aware of Boer power as his predecessor and secured the services of four Boer mercenaries as early as 1845.³⁷ Unfortunately the activities of these mercenaries have not been recorded. Bonner, citing Mpande's protests at Boer assistance to the Swazi, infers they were used against the Zulu. This is unlikely as the next Swazi-Zulu engagement occurred two years later and when hostilities did break out Mswati, by giving captives, was able to secure the support of the Boer state and did not need the assistance of private individuals. Rather, it is probable that the mercenaries were active in the numerous small engagements that were part of Mswati's efforts to centralise power in the 1840s.³⁸

Boer allegiance was, however, fickle and when Mswati's position was challenged by his uncle Somcuba in the late 1840s, the Boers exploited the rift in a manner reminiscent of the way the Portuguese fuelled conflict in the Delagoa bay hinterland in order to generate a supply of captives. Both parties received encouragement from Lydenburg and when Mswati eventually defeated Somcuba in 1849 the Boers granted Somcuba sanctuary and allowed him to recruit local Pai, Sotho and Mapulana in his campaign against Mswati.³⁹

From his base in the Lydenburg district Somcuba was able to harry Mswati, prompting angry protests from Mswati to reach Lydenburg.⁴⁰ Bonner has explained the Boer decision to harbour Somcuba in terms of a desire to incorporate his five hundred or so followers into their labour force.⁴¹ He refers to the use of Somcuba's followers as auxiliaries in Boer commandos. However I have not been able to find a single reference to Somcuba's followers entering into labour contracts with Boer producers. It seems more possible that Somcuba was expected to raid on behalf of the Boers much as Doris Buys had done until 1850. It should be remembered that by the 1850s the Lydenburg Boers were increasingly concerned with the production of beef. Long periods on commando were disruptive to the increasing number of Boer cattle ranchers and they found it more convenient to employ surrogates to perform their coercive functions.

³⁷ Bonner, Kings, p. 53.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 52-53; Kruger, 'Weg', p. 100.

³⁹ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 1, p. 289, W.F. Versveld to Volksraad, 27 Dec. 1849; TA, Souter collection, packet 6, no. 2, 285, Resolution of Krygsraad, 5 Nov. 1853.

⁴⁰ S.A.A.R., Transvaal 2, p. 418, G.J. Joubert to Volksraad, 11 June 1853.

⁴¹ Bonner, Kings, pp. 67-72.

(Mswati himself would within a few years adopt a similar role. See below.)

Somcuba, however, rapidly outlived his usefulness to the Boers. The growing demand for labour among the Lydenburg Boers resulted in heightened pressure against the Maroteng and the Ndzundza Ndebele and greatly boosted demand for apprentices. It soon became clear to the Lydenburg authorities that Mswati was in a position to supply far greater numbers of captives than Somcuba and, from the beginning of the 1850s, an increasing number of the children obtained by the Lydenburg Boers were from Swaziland.⁴² Boer demand for captives converged with Mswati's need to extend and centralise Dlamini power. As was noted above, Sobhusa had been only partially successful in imposing Dlamini authority on other groups in the vicinity of the Ezulwini valley. From the early 1850s, Dlamini attacks on the autonomy of sub-chieftaincies which Sobhusa had not fully subdued reached new heights.⁴³ These attacks not only removed opposition to Dlamini authority but provided the means for further expansion. Fresh recruits were generated for Mswati's regiments and the seizure of ivory, cattle and captives for sale on the regional markets enriched the ruling group and enhanced its power. The labour and ivory hungry Boers were the obvious market for Swazi plunder and by 1853 captives taken by Mswati's regiments were being sold openly to the Lydenburg Boers.⁴⁴

It is in this context of growing commercial ties between Mswati and the Lydenburg Boers that the withdrawal of Boer support for Somcuba must be seen. As the number of captives reaching the Boers from Mswati grew, Mswati was rapidly eclipsing Somcuba in usefulness to the Boers. It is not surprising Somcuba was abandoned in favour of his more effective rival. Bonner offers a different explanation. He believes the Boer rejection of Somcuba was a secret condition of the cession to the Boers of the Komati area in 1855.⁴⁵ This is unlikely as loss of the Komati does not seem to have been voluntary. Mswati never accepted the Boer occupation of the Komati

⁴² TA, LL 172, indenture book of Landrost.

⁴³ Bonner, *Kings*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ TA, LL 1, Buhrmann to Landrost, 17 Oct. 1853. This document is important as the author does not use the euphemism that 'orphans' were being apprenticed but speaks openly of the sale of children.

⁴⁵ Bonner, *Kings*, p. 75.

valley and from 1858 began to reoccupy the area.⁴⁶

In spite of a few remaining points of friction (such as the disputed Komati area) converging commercial interests had by 1855 tied the Swazi and the Boers into a strategic and economic alliance which lasted until the mid-1860s. This alliance assumed particular importance when, at the end of the decade, internal political wrangling weakened Boer coercive capacity, profiting the Swazi who assumed many of these functions. The Swazi-Boer axis enabled the Boers to sustain economic expansion in spite of the political upheavals of the late 1850s and early 1860s while the accelerated raiding for captives facilitated a process of centralisation which transformed the Dlamini kingdom into the mature Swazi state.

By 1855 the Lydenburg Boers were in a fairly secure position relative to their African neighbours and subjects. In the west and north-west, the Pedi and the Ndzundza Ndebele, while not destroyed, had been chastened. To the south-east a profitable trade and a useful political relationship had been established with the Swazi.

This favourable position was further enhanced by the Boer-Pedi Treaty of 1857 which established the Steelpoort River as the boundary between the Boer and Pedi spheres of influence. Sekwati promised to return labourers absconding from Boer service as well as any stolen cattle. He further undertook not to allow his subjects to carry arms south of the Steelpoort River. The creation of a boundary meant Pedi claims to suzerainty over groups within the Boer domain, such as the Ndzundza Ndebele, were formally renounced. Crucially, the treaty stopped short of recognising any Pedi territorial claims, a step which the many Boers with deeds to land north of the Steelpoort would not have tolerated.⁴⁷

4. The Swazi, Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele challenge Boer authority.

In spite of their secure position during the early and mid-1850s, the ability of the Lydenburg Boers to dominate the major African groups declined for a time. Between roughly 1856 and 1865 the Boer communities in the Transvaal entered a period of political crisis and the ensuing

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁷ TA, L 13, report on the negotiations with Sekwati, 19 Nov. 1857; *ibid.*, Text of agreement 17 Nov. 1857.

disunity compromised Boer coercive capacity.⁴⁸ As political conflict was not matched by a corresponding decline in economic activity, a climate conducive to further growth of African societies was created. Over the next ten years the Ndzundza Ndebele, Swazi and the Pedi power grew considerably through their ability to engage the regional economy as suppliers of ivory, slaves, cattle or labour. This is not to imply the Lydenburg Boers' military effectiveness, demonstrated at the Makopan incident in 1854, had suddenly dissipated.⁴⁹ It should also be remembered that the Boers were the economic hub from which other forces in the district radiated - an inherently powerful position. Nevertheless, the retraction of the Boers' coercive capacity, together with opportunities presented by incorporation of the area into the regional economy, allowed African groups to resist Boer demands.

Disunity which had always been evident among the Boers had grown worse during the 1850s and in 1856 led to the secession of Lydenburg from the Z.A.R.. Although the loss of support from other Boer communities lessened the Lydenburg Boers' military strength, this did not immediately affect their relationship with African groups. Neither Sekwati nor Mapog had any desire to provoke the Boers unless forced to react by extended Boer exactions and at this time increased use of apprentices could meet Boer needs. Consequently the only challenge to Boer authority in the last years of the 1850s was the Swazi reoccupation of the western part of the Komati valley.⁵⁰

The fairly stable situation of the late 1850s was ended by conflict that accompanied the accelerated economic activity of the early 1860s. Greater demand for beef, arable exports to the O.F.S. and, above all, the rapidly developing wool sector quickened the district's economic pulse.⁵¹ Economic growth translated into heightened Boer demands for labour and in 1860 the Boers moved to tighten their grip on Africans within their domain. The focus of this campaign were groups such as the Ndzundza Ndebele and Kopa. In 1859 both Mapog and Maleo were made to sign documents in which they agreed to pay a land tax before the September harvest each year. In all probability the Boers were simply enforcing the 1852 decision that all land

⁴⁸ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', pp. 106, 233-235, De Waal, 'Albasini', pp. 65-104.

⁴⁹ Agar-Hamilton, Native Policy, pp. 163-164.

⁵⁰ See footnote forty-five above; Naude, 'Boerdery', p. 32.

⁵¹ See pp. 77-88 above.

occupied by Africans was the property of the Boer state and tax would be levied on it.⁵² The basic unit of African production, the homestead, was attacked by making all married men liable for an annual tax of Rds 1-5-2.⁵³

These agreements were aimed at pressurising the Ndzundza Ndebele and Kopa into providing the Boers with more labour. This predictably provoked resistance from Mapog and Maleo. In July 1860, a bare three months after signing the agreement with the Boers, Mapog informed *Commandant-generaal* Van Dyk that he no longer 'acknowledged any authority north of the Vaal River but his own'.⁵⁴ Mapog immediately began preparing for war. Food was stockpiled and other groups within the Boer domain were encouraged to defy the Boers by seeking sanctuary with the Ndzundza. Initially resistance took the form of stock theft, the established means of protesting Boer exactions. Occurring as they did in the context of Boer disunity, however, this resistance soon developed into full-scale revolt such as the raiding of farms.⁵⁵

The Boer response was to call out a commando in June 1861. Before the combatants could be assembled, however, political dissension among the Boer communities reached such a level that the Lydenburgers were denied support from elsewhere and had to cancel the commando. Mapog capitalised on this delay by suing for peace in February 1862. He made promises to return stolen cattle and to pay taxes, but kept neither. In spite of the transparency of Mapog's ploy, the Boers were not in a position to act and in May 1862 the *Uitvoerende Raad* acknowledged that while an attack on the Ndzundza remained essential, political strife made it unable to muster a military force. Furthermore, the *Raad* felt that what forces were available should be used against the

⁵² See chapter four for the use of tax a means of pressurising African groups into providing labour.

⁵³ The original agreement with the Ndzundza Ndebele no longer exists but a copy of the document was submitted to the court during the 1883 trial of Nyabela. See TA, SS 852, R4898/83, Government versus 'Niabel', 21 Sept. 1883; also A. Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Ndzundza-Ndebele en die Blankes in Transvaal 1859-1882', unpublished M.A. thesis (Rhodes University, 1985), pp. 67-68. The agreement with Maleo has survived; see TA, SS 30, R3339/59, Agreement with 'Maleeuw', 13 Dec. 1859.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Ndzundza', p. 76.

⁵⁵ TA, SS 34, R3953/60, P Nel to J Van Dyk, Aug, 1860; LL 1, Holtshauzen to Landrost, 29 July 1861; L 19, Diary of Landrost, 29 July 1861; SS 42, R237/62, J. Van Dyk to Uitvoerende Raad, 19 May 1862.

more serious threat to Boer dominance posed by rebellious Venda groups in the Zoutpansberg.⁵⁶

The Ndzundza took advantage of the Boers' inability to act by relaunching their resistance campaign. However, in spite of the Boers' weakened state, the Ndzundza did not have the capacity to successfully launch a direct attack against them. Instead, resistance centred on cattle rustling and the burning of grazing and farmhouses. For example in 1863 *veldcornet* van Dyk reported that all the farmhouses in the Witpoort area had been burnt down and the crops destroyed.⁵⁷ During the next year the conflict simmered with both sides engaged in small scale raids and counter raids; but in November 1863 the hostilities entered a new phase when the Boers, bolstered by Pedi support, attacked the Ndzundza capital Erholweni. Fortunately for the defenders, Erholweni - perched on top of sheer rock faces and enjoying a plentiful water supply - proved impregnable. The attack failed and the Pedi forces abandoned the field while the Boers shifted their focus to isolating Mapog by attacking his allies. Successful assaults were launched against two Ndzundza Ndebele sub-chieftaincies led by Malgas and Kehesha but the campaign was abandoned when the outbreak of the Schoeman rebellion in Pretoria resulted in a munitions shortage.⁵⁸

The November 1863 campaign was the last large-scale Boer assault on the Ndzundza Ndebele during the 1860s as the ongoing civil war continued to hinder concerted action by Boer forces. A commando against Mapog had been planned in February 1865 shortly after the end of the civil conflict but, before the force could gather, rumours that Schoeman's followers were regrouping began to circulate. All *commandants* and *veldcornets* were summoned to defend the capital, once again forcing the abandonment of action. This delay was the last straw for those Boers near to the Ndzundza heartland and, in spite of opposition from the *Volksraad* and *Landrost*, they reached their own settlement with Mapog by paying forty cattle to end

⁵⁶ TA, SS 45, Supl135/62, Buhrmann to Olivier, 12 Feb. 1862; UR 1, Uitvoerende Raadsbesluit, article 4, 19 May 1862.

⁵⁷ TA, SS 8614, R924/63, J. van Dyk to State President, 16 Dec. 1863.

⁵⁸ TA, SS 52, Supl146/83, Buhrmann to Landrost, 9 Nov. 1863; SS 8614, BB57/63, Van der Linden to Van Dyk, 1 Dec. 1863; Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Ndzundza', pp. 98-99, 101-104.

hostilities.⁵⁹

Contrary to the usual accounts, the settlement between the Lydenburg Boers and the Ndzundza Ndebele was not merely the consequence of the Boers' inability to successfully prosecute the campaign. Certainly, the Transvaal civil war meant the Boers had not been able to break Ndzundza power, but the peace was the result of far more complex processes than mere war weariness.

Firstly, continued hostilities with the Ndzundza were not in the economic interest of many prominent Boers.⁶⁰ In spite of the conflict, many Boers continued to engage in a profitable cattle trade with the Ndzundza.⁶¹ (Unfortunately the document which is the source of this information is concerned with how to stop the trade which was felt to be undermining the war effort. No mention is made of the individuals or prices involved.) Furthermore, combatants from both sides frequently put aside their differences to raid parties of returning Pedi migrants.⁶² It also seems that those Boers who retained a cordial relationship with the Ndzundza were able to secure adequate labour and so did not have much motive for continuing the war. The position of those who had friendly relations with the Ndzundza was illustrated a few years later by Tobias Van Niekerk who farmed very close to the Ndzundza heartland. Van Niekerk stated that 'unlike [his] neighbours' who were at odds with the Ndzundza he had 'more than enough labour'.⁶³

Secondly, the rise of wool production in the southern reaches of the district resulted in a population shift towards the wool producing areas. In practice this meant many Boers were drawn from the Steenkampsberg - the epicentre of conflict with the Ndzundza - to the wool producing wards such as Komati, further diminishing the numbers of those with an interest in continuing the conflict.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 116-120.

⁶⁰ TA, LL 2, Nel to Landrost, 1865 (month unclear).

⁶¹ TA, SS 59, R818/64, P. Nel to State President, Uitvoerende Raad and Commandant-General, 19 Oct. 1864.

⁶² Delius, *Land*, p 67.

⁶³ TA, SS 139, Supl99/71, Declaration of Tobias Van Niekerk, about April 1871.

Finally, an increase in the number of captives reaching the Boers from the Swazi made the total destruction of Ndzundza sovereignty unnecessary for the time being. The Boer-Ndzundza conflict had been sparked in the first place by Boer demands for additional labourers, but the growing number of captives reaching the Boers from their Swazi associates made the application of additional pressure on the Ndzundza needless.⁶⁴ Judging by the Lydenburg *Landrost's* admittedly incomplete indenture book, the number of captives received from the Swazi peaked in 1864, the year conflict with the Ndzundza ended.⁶⁵

The Swazi ability to meet increased Boer requirements was made possible by the extension of their hunting/raiding activities in the Delagoa Bay hinterland. Following the death in 1858 of the Gaza king, Soshangane (Manukosi), a succession dispute broke out between the main contenders, Mzila and Mawewe. Mawewe initially enjoyed the upper hand and Mzila sought refuge with Jao Albasini in Zoutpansburg. Interestingly, De Waal cites a statement by Albasini's chief mercenary, Monene, that Albasini received captives (no number specified) in return for helping Mzila.⁶⁶ However, when other factions in the Boer community began to side with Mawewe, Mzila fled to Delagoa Bay. With Portuguese support Mzila was able in 1861 to inflict heavy losses on Mawewe, forcing him to flee to Mswati. In support of Mawewe, the Swazi launched attacks into the area between Delagoa Bay and the Save River in the early 1860s. Although the Mawewe/Swazi alliance was unable to dislodge Mzila from the area north of the Limpopo River, Mswati's overall objective was not affected as it rapidly became clear the purpose of the Swazi armies was to seize captives and not merely to settle the Gaza succession dispute. From 1863 the scope of Swazi operations moved south and for the remainder of his reign Mswati sent his armies to ravage the area between the Krokodil and Limpopo rivers. Having established dominance in the Delagoa Bay hinterland, Mswati broadened the focus of Swazi raiding and began to plunder Shangaan, Sotho and Venda groups to the north and west of Swaziland.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ TA, LL 177, Landrost to Commandant Joubert, 24 July 1862; *ibid.*, Botha to Landrost, 19 June 1863; *ibid.*, Landrost to veldcornets, 3 Jan. 1863; LL 177, H. De Villiers to Landrost, 22 Nov. 1864; *ibid.*, Stals to Landrost, 25 March 1862.

⁶⁵ TA, LL 172, indenture book of Landrost.

⁶⁶ De Waal, 'Albasini', p. 125.

⁶⁷ Bonner, *Kings*, pp. 81-84, 94-102.

Clearly the Boer-led invasions were transforming the face of the eastern Transvaal. Those African groups that survived the initial onslaught (most did not) regrouped, began to expand their power, centralise political power and seize or recruit new followers. Interaction with the capitalist economy through migrant labour and the sale of captives and ivory enabled African states to acquire modern weapons, both eroding the Boer monopoly on the technology of destruction and providing survivor groups with the capacity for further expansion. African states were increasingly able to defy Boer authority. Their challenge was accelerated when the Transvaal civil war for a time diminished Boer coercive capacity without checking the growth of the African survivor groups. But while the outcome of the Boer/African confrontation hung in the balance during the early 1860s, the situation began to change after 1865.

5. The hardening of Boer expansionism.

From the mid-1860s the Z.A.R. began to recover from the disruptions of the civil conflict and the Boer invaders were able to begin consolidating their position. The most important consequence of the political settlement was that the bureaucracy began to function more effectively. Closer control was exercised over the districts and resources could be more effectively marshalled. A striking feature of the Lydenburg *Landrost's* records is the increasingly frequent, complex and detailed flow of reports and instructions between Lydenburg and the executive in Pretoria. (The extension of central control in the Lydenburg district is dealt with above.) Underpinning the political and administrative recovery was the Z.A.R.'s increasingly rapid economic growth (see above). The Boers now had not only the motive but increasingly the means to subjugate African communities. Long simmering tensions were coming to a head, fuelling conflict that would within a decade and a half result in the destruction of all the major African groupings in the area.

The expansion of economic activity in the Lydenburg area, which was especially rapid after 1860, has been dealt with elsewhere in this work. Nevertheless it is necessary for the purposes of this chapter to reiterate the main trends. It was these trends which had always moulded the relationship between the Boers and African groups and it was continually rising production levels that made African autonomy intolerable to European settlers in the region.

The Boers strove to expand their links with the regional/world economy from the outset. During the 1840s and 1850s the export of first slaves and products of the hunt and later beef had

resulted in steady, if undramatic, economic growth. From the end of the 1850s increasing volumes of pastoral and arable goods were flowing south to the O.F.S., Natal and the Cape Colony. Wool production, established in the district's southern reaches in the early 1860s, considerably boosted the district's economy as did increasing foreign investment in the area. The speculative purchase of land was noted in chapter three but many investors also made more concrete outlays. In the latter half of the 1860s, for example, the Glasgow and South Africa Company alone spent £30 000 on livestock and buildings in the Lydenburg district.⁶⁸ Production was further extended when the size of the internal market was considerably boosted by the discovery of diamonds at Griqualand west in 1867 and gold at Pilgrimsrest in 1871. The Lydenburg district exported growing volumes of beef, draught oxen, fruit, tobacco, wood and a variety of grains to the southern Transvaal (especially Potchefstroom), the O.F.S., Kimberley and Pilgrimsrest.⁶⁹

Accelerated economic growth during this period led to intensified competition for labour, fueling conflict as the Boers sought to expand their workforce. In the Lydenburg district this began at local level with the establishment of wool production on the thinly populated highveld. (The highveld had been an area of overlap between the Portuguese and colonial slaving spheres and its population would have been especially hard hit by the raids.)⁷⁰ The wool producers in the south competed for a share of the labour force with the cattle ranchers to the north. The labour source targeted by the wool producers were the Ndzundza Ndebele who were closer to the economic epicentre than the more northern Pedi. But, as we have seen, the Ndzundza were reluctant to meet Boer demands for labourers and a stream of complaints reached the Lydenburg *Landrost* protesting that the Ndzundza remained concealed in their 'forts'.⁷¹ Attempts were made to pressure the Ndzundza with taxation but, as will be recalled, the Ndzundza had by the mid-1860s developed into a powerful formation and Boer demands for the payment of tax were only fully met when their power was finally broken in 1883. The labour shortage was

⁶⁸ TA, SS 127, R133/70, Bell to State Secretary, 20 Nov. 1870.

⁶⁹ For the development of the Boer economy in the Lydenburg area see chapter three. Much useful empirical data can also be found in Naude, 'Boerdery', and Potgieter, 'Vestiging'.

⁷⁰ For the development of the Portuguese and colonial slaving spheres see, Cobbing, 'Grasping the Nettle', pp. 8-16.

⁷¹ TA, SS 139, Supl100/71, Statement of I.C. Holtshausen, about April 1871.

exacerbated by the growing class distinctions evident in the Lydenburg community. As competition for labour mounted, the wealthy were able to secure labourers at the expense of their poorer neighbours by offering better conditions of service.⁷²

Besides competition arising from the emergence of additional economic sectors within their own district, the Lydenburg Boers had to compete for labourers with the Cape Colony and Natal. There are recorded instances of Pedi migrants reaching as far afield as Port Elizabeth, but it was the plantations of Natal that made especially heavy use of migrants from the eastern Transvaal.⁷³

Rivalry for labour, both locally among the Lydenburg Boers and more generally between the community and other sectors of the regional economy, was made more acute by the mineral discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in the 1860s and gold at Pilgrimsrest in 1871.⁷⁴ Work on the diggings, which was better paid and for shorter periods than employment on the farms, offered Africans an attractive alternative to service with the Boers. The labour pool of Boer producers was further restricted by the effect of the diggings on the labour needs of the state. Following the mineral discoveries, roads had to be built and porters provided to service the gold fields. In response, the *Landrost* of Lydenburg demanded increasing numbers of Africans from *veldcornets* to perform these tasks.⁷⁵ Boer producers were thus placed in a paradoxical position. The mineral discoveries greatly expanded the market for their goods. To meet this demand they had to extend their workforce. Yet the recruitment of more labour was hampered by growing competition from fellow Boer producers, the British colonies, the diggings and the Boer state.

⁷² TA, SS 139, Supl98/71, Statement of T Van Niekerk, about April 1871; Naude, 'Boerdery', pp 28-37;

⁷³ Etherington, 'Labour supply', pp. 235-253; Delius, *Land*, p. 64; A. Atmore and P. Sanders, 'Sotho arms and ammunition in the nineteenth century', *Journal of African History*, 13, 4 (1972) p. 538.

⁷⁴ Delius, *Land*, p. 69.

⁷⁵ TA, LL 19, Landrost to veldcornets, 14 Feb. 1870; EVR, 220 Petition of Erasmus and 23 others, 26 April 1873 (EVR. refers to the unpublished records of the first Volksraad of the Z.A.R.); P. Delius, 'The Pedi Polity under Sekwati and Sekukune, 1828-1880', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1980), p. 209; Naude, *Boerdery*, pp. 197-203.

The final element in the conundrum facing Boer producers needing to expand their workforce was the rising ability of African communities such as the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele to resist Boer demands. The rise of Pedi and Ndzundza power was directly linked to the pressures and possibilities presented by the expanding capitalist order. On the one hand the seizure of land, labour and other resources by the European invaders created the need for defense which could only be achieved by the incorporation of new people and resources. On the other, the demand among the invaders for captives, ivory and labour presented African groups with the opportunity to generate the wealth and purchase the modern weapons necessary for expansion and defence. Heightened economic activity thus not only made it imperative for Africans to resist Boer authority but also provided them with the means to do so.

Faced with the reality of a labour shortage putting a brake on production, hostility began to mount among the Lydenburg Boers towards continued Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele autonomy. If economic growth was to be sustained, additional labour would have to be found. The Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele were the obvious source of supply. Only once Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele resistance was broken would the labour required by the expanding economy become available. Reflecting the expansionist mood of the district's producers were the increasing number of petitions reaching the *Volksraad* demanding that military action be used to force Africans to 'do their duty'.⁷⁶

In tandem with the need to extend the supply of African workers, a growing land shortage fueled conflict in the Lydenburg district as land-hungry Boers pushed for dispossession of African groups. Since the late 1850s closer settlement and the need for stock farmers on the frost-prone highveld to secure winter grazing meant vacant land in the area was in short supply. For example Wakkerstroom, which had been unoccupied in 1853, supported a sufficient population in 1859 for it to qualify for consideration as a separate district.⁷⁷ Aggravating the effects of closer settlement was the tendency for land to be owned by a wealthy few, often foreign companies. A striking feature of the land books for this period is the extent to which

⁷⁶ TA, SS 139, Supl100/71, Statement of I.C. Holtshausen, about April 1871 (one in a series of 26); EVR 220, Petition of Erasmus and 27 other, 26 April 1873.

⁷⁷ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', pp. 44-46, 78; Potgieter, 'Vestiging', pp. 65-67.

land was held in blocs, some of up to forty farms.⁷⁸

A second group with an interest in territorial expansion were those who had claimed, but not occupied, land in areas of African settlement. By the late 1860s there was very little available land in the Lydenburg district and when the *Volksraad* decided to close claims in terms of *burgerregte* in 1868 there had been a rush to secure title to as much land as possible (see chapter three). During these years, demand for land was such that the local administration could not keep up with the flood of claims and several petitions demanding the appointment of additional inspection teams were drawn up.⁷⁹ Delius noted that a large proportion of the land claimed was in the Pedi heartland and quoted Southey as saying that: 'Most of the hundred farms offered for sale (at Kimberley) are in Sequati's country'.⁸⁰ As regards the Ndzundza Ndebele, it should be remembered that all the land occupied by them had been claimed and inspected during the 1840s and 1850s and was, in the eyes of the government, legitimately owned by its citizens. The existence of a powerful lobby with title to land in African areas, especially when the discovery of gold and extended production pushed up land values, fuelled conflict in the district as only conquest of the remaining autonomous African groups would allow them to realise a profit on their investments.

The central point to emerge from the foregoing discussion is that rising production levels, growing investment, an expanding white population and more effective white settlement relentlessly drove the Z.A.R. to encroach on its African neighbours. The growing shortage of land and labour meant independent African settlement and production, which withheld these commodities from the regional economy, could no longer be tolerated. Consequently the Boer state, better equipped with the necessary human and material resources, moved to more thoroughly dispossess Africans within and adjacent to its domain. This did not mean the Boers could yet easily crush societies such as the Pedi which had grown into considerable forces. The

⁷⁸ TA, LL 70, land book of Landrost.

⁷⁹ TA, LL 2, J.H. Jacobs to Landrost, 27 Feb. 1869; LL 3, Gert Viljoen and three others to Landrost, 6 Nov. 1869; *ibid.*, Uitvoerende Raad to Landrost, 16 Nov. 1869; *ibid.*, W.J. Van den Hoosen and eleven others to Landrost, January 1869; *ibid.*, J.J. Joubert and twenty-three others to Landrost, January 1869; *ibid.*, G.J. Scheepers and forty-four others to Landrost, January 1869.

⁸⁰ Delius, *Land*, p. 134.

machinery of the Boer state was prone to break down and its resources, while more plentiful than in previous years, were still limited. Nevertheless, the capacity of the Z.A.R. to assert itself was recovering from the setbacks of the civil war and the Boer state was willing to back its demands with action.

The first society to be affected by the Boer recovery was the Swazi. The end of the civil war and the decline of apprenticed labour meant a strategic alliance with the Swazi was of diminishing importance.⁸¹ While changing strategic imperatives facilitated conflict, the root of the Boer-Swazi dissent was land. The Swazi had reoccupied the western part of the Komati valley and this was essential winter grazing for Boer stock farmers on the highveld. Boer land hunger was not just confined to the disputed border areas; Swaziland itself began to be coveted. Swaziland not only offered excellent grazing but offered the landlocked Z.A.R. access to the east coast.

Pressure was first applied against the Swazi in the disputed border areas around Wakkerstroom, New Scotland and lower Komati. Rising land prices and closer white settlement had been especially noticeable in Lydenburg's southern wards such as Komati where wool production was growing rapidly.⁸² The Boers took action in June 1866 when a delegation visited the Swazi. At the negotiations the border was demarcated and the Swazi were forced to recognise the Z.A.R.'s claim to the disputed territory.⁸³

The Z.A.R.'s ambitions did not stop at the adjustment of the border. Access to a sea port had always been a priority among the Boers and Swaziland was one avenue to the coast. Delagoa Bay to the north was also a viable option but in the late 1860s Britain began to challenge Portuguese title to the Bay. (Portuguese ownership was only confirmed by the MacMahon award of June 1875.) If the British claims were successful the Z.A.R. would face the same high tariffs as were imposed on it in the Cape and Natal. A harbour to the south of Delagoa Bay which could be claimed as Boer territory was thus an attractive prospect. Swaziland was attractive to

⁸¹ Concerning the decline in apprenticed labour see for example, TA, LL 2, Merensky to Landrost, 22 July 1866; *ibid.*, M. Pretorius to Landrost, 16 June 1866.

⁸² TA, LL 3, Proes to Landrost, 27 Dec. 1870.

⁸³ Bonner, *Kings*, p. 110.

the Boer stock farmers as it had far better grazing than the lowveld to the north. Swaziland also offered the southern wool producers best access to the coast. In 1866 the Z.A.R. commissioned David Forbes to search for suitable harbours on the east coast adjacent to Swaziland.⁸⁴ Boer intentions became clearer when a large tract of land was granted to Alexander McCorkindale for him to establish the New Scotland settlement scheme. Part of McCorkindale's motivation to the Z.A.R. was that he would open communications with the sea and he badgered the Swazi to cede him a land corridor between New Scotland and the coast - a prospect which appalled the Swazi.⁸⁵ Although McCorkindale's settlement scheme was only partly successful, the Z.A.R. continued to pursue its policy of encroachment on Swaziland in the late 1860s and early 1870s. In 1867 a decision was taken to levy customs on the Maputu River once New Scotland was established. The Z.A.R.'s ambitions were signalled most clearly in 1868 when a proclamation was issued in the Government Gazette announcing the annexation of Swaziland.⁸⁶

Throughout 1871 and 1872 the Z.A.R. kept up a barrage of demands that the Swazi accept Boer rule.⁸⁷ In 1875 the Boer demands were backed by armed force when a powerful commando was mobilised and dispatched to Swaziland. On arrival at the Swazi capital the Boers immediately organised a display of cannon and other firepower, considerably demoralising their hosts. The Swazi regents (Mswati had died in August 1865 and his successor Ludvongo was still a minor) were then informed that the Boers wished to negotiate a new treaty. The Swazi were forced to accept the status of Z.A.R. subjects and to agree to the appointment of a Boer supervising official if the Z.A.R. thought it necessary. Furthermore, they had to undertake to promote commerce and keep trade routes and roads open and in good repair, as well as agree to the construction of a railway through their territory. Finally, they had to provide the Boers with military support when required to do so and undertake not to engage in any wars without Boer permission.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 149-169; Bonner, Kings, p. 118.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

⁸⁶ TA, LL 57, Directive from Secretary of State, 17 May 1870; Government Gazette, Proclamation, 29 May 1868; Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', p. 23; Kruger, 'Weg', pp. 170-191.

⁸⁷ Bonner, Kings, p. 122.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 135-137; W.J. Leyds, The Transvaal Surrounded: A Continuation of 'The First Annexation of the Transvaal' (London, 1919), pp. 507-508, translation of the treaty between the representatives of the Z.A.R. and Swaziland, 1 July 1875.

The treaty was potentially devastating to Swazi independence but they were saved from its full implementation by the rising Boer-Pedi conflict. Hostilities with the Pedi not only meant the Boers had to commit their resources elsewhere, but they were also not in a position to alienate the Swazi whose regiments were important for the successful prosecution of the war. Nevertheless, the importance of the 1875 treaty cannot be overstated. An independent Swazi state had withheld much valuable land and resources (from the expanding capitalist economy of which the Z.A.R. was part) and the Boer actions in 1875 were attempts to take control of this. The Boer/Pedi conflict gave the Swazi a short reprieve but in the last decades of the century the seizure of Swaziland by capitalist commercial interests proceeded unabated, without the Swazi being able to do anything about it.⁸⁹

The same forces that drove the Boers to encroach on Swazi autonomy also aggravated conflict with the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele. During the mid-1860s the relationship between the Boers and these groups, while not cordial, stopped short of open conflict. Following the Boer-Ndzundza war, both sides entered a relationship which Van Jaarsveld describes as 'neither peace nor war'.⁹⁰ Similarly, for most of the 1860s, the relationship between the Boers and the Pedi was one of mutual distrust but not open hostility. During the Transvaal civil war the Boers had been reluctant to clash with the Pedi while the death of Sekwati in 1861 prevented the Pedi from challenging the Boers. Sekukune's succession had been challenged by his brother Mampuru and one of Sekukune's major concerns in the early years of his rule was that Lydenburg Boers would intervene north of the Steelpoort River while the succession dispute rendered the Pedi vulnerable. The joint desire to avoid conflict was given formal substance when the 1857 treaty, which amongst other things confirmed the Steelpoort river as the Border between Lydenburg and the Pedi state, was confirmed by an exchange of letters between the Lydenburg *Landrost* and Sekukune in 1861.⁹¹

This uneasy peace began to crack in the last years of the 1860s as the Boer expansionists again turned their attention to Lydenburg's northern wards closer to the Pedi and Ndzundza. When hunting and raiding had been dominant in the Lydenburg district, economic activity was focused

⁸⁹ See Bonner, *Kings*, chapters nine and ten.

⁹⁰ Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Ndzundza', p. 124.

⁹¹ Delius, *Land*, pp. 94-95.

in the far north - the area closest to Delagoa Bay. However the rise of cattle ranching saw the economic epicentre move south-west while the advent of wool production dragged it further south still. During the 1860s demand for land and labour, the causes of Boer expansionism, were thus greatest in the southern wards such as Komati. As these wards were closest to Swaziland it is not surprising pressure was applied here first. However, by the final years of the decade, improved demand for arable goods such as wheat, maize, fruit and tobacco boosted the labour needs of the northern wards of the district such as Ohrigstad which produced these products.⁹² As these areas were near to the Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele, conflict with these groups began to escalate.

Due to their more southern location, the Ndzundza Ndebele were affected by the renewed Boer expansionism before the Pedi. As early as 1867 the Lydenburg *Landrost* sent a message to the Ndzundza paramount, Cornelius, demanding the return of forty cattle given to the Ndzundza to end hostilities in 1865. The Ndzundza refused both this and demands that they supply the Boers with more labour. By the end of the decade matters were becoming more serious. Patrols were stepped up in 1869 and in 1871 twenty six farmers submitted memoranda to the President and *Uitvoerende Raad* demanding further action against the Ndzundza.⁹³ When this was not forthcoming they took matters into their own hands and migrants returning to the Ndzundza domain were attacked by vigilantes who seized their goods and forced them into labour.⁹⁴ State pressure was increased shortly thereafter and in 1873 the *Landrost* of Middelburg provoked a display of armed force by the Ndzundza when he was dispatched to convince them to pay their taxes.⁹⁵

In spite of growing tension between the Boers and the Ndzundza Ndebele, open conflict was temporarily averted in 1876 when expediency led them to form a common alliance against the Pedi. During the 1870s the adoption of an expansionist foreign policy by the Pedi lent extra

⁹² See pp. 77-88 above.

⁹³ TA, SS 88, R608/67, Landrost to State President, 11 June 1868; SS 139, Supl100/71, Statement of I.C. Holtshausen, about April 1871 (one of a series of twenty six). LL 2, L. Steyn to Landrost, 9 March 1869.

⁹⁴ TA, SS 154, R264/73, F.J Joubert to State President, 14 Feb 1873.

⁹⁵ TA, SS 158, R990/73, Landrost Middelburg to State President, 27 June 1873.

urgency to the need of the Lydenburg Boers to destroy the polity as an autonomous political and economic unit. The extension of Maroteng rule withheld bitterly needed land and labour from the Boers and openly threatened that which they already possessed.⁹⁶

By the 1870s the Pedi were a formidable group. The export of migrant labour had allowed the Maroteng to achieve what the Dlamini and others had accomplished through the sale of commodities. By 1852 the Pedi had begun exporting migrants as far afield as Port Elizabeth. Pedi migrancy was not haphazard but was a coordinated effort by the Maroteng rulers to accumulate firearms. Large groups, sometimes entire age-regiments, were dispatched with instructions to return as soon as enough money had been accumulated to purchase a weapon.⁹⁷ By 1862 the Pedi army numbered twelve thousand, over a third of whom were armed with muskets. Accelerated economic development in the 1860s galvanised this process. Increased demand for labour meant employment was better paid and closer at hand and firearms were more available than in the past. In response to these favourable conditions, the Pedi had fully equipped their army with firearms by 1876 and phased out the obsolete muskets in favour of modern breech-loading rifles.⁹⁸

Improved military capacity enabled the Maroteng to extend their authority by incorporating new subjects.⁹⁹ As Delius has shown, the emergence of the Pedi allowed some African groups chaffing under Boer rule (such as the followers of Msutu, the son of Somcuba) to reject Boer authority in favour of the Maroteng.¹⁰⁰ Not all groups joined the Pedi of their own free will and the Maroteng were not averse to using their military might to impose their will on dissenters within their domain as well as to forcibly incorporate new subjects.¹⁰¹ In the 1870s the Pedi launched frequent raids on the numerous small Africans grouping in the Steelpoort and Waterval

⁹⁶ For examples of hostile acts by Sekukune see, TA, LL 3, P. De Villiers to Landrost, 24 March 1871; *ibid.*, Nachtigal to Landrost, 12 March 1872.

⁹⁷ For an overview of Pedi migrancy see Delius, *Land*, chapter three.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 62.

⁹⁹ TA, LL 2, De Villiers to Landrost, 3 Nov. 1866; *ibid.*, De Villiers to Landrost, 28 May 1866.

¹⁰⁰ Delius, *Land*, pp. 187-190.

¹⁰¹ TA, LL 22, Merensky to Landrost, 11 Feb. 1865.

river areas and set about establishing a more permanent presence in the area. Raiding gave way to occupation as Sekukune settled groups of his followers south of the Steelpoort. In 1873 a group under Mkoto was sent to occupy land on the right hand side of the Oliphants River, another under Mokomotoane was placed in the Noupootberg area while Moteme occupied land between the Waterval and the Oliphants rivers and Marobele was established next to the Dwars River.¹⁰²

The coercive side of Pedi expansionism was further demonstrated by their relationship with the Ndzundza Ndebele. Prior to 1845 the Ndzundza had been Pedi tributaries but the extension of Boer authority had ended this. When the Transvaal civil war allowed the Ndzundza to terminate direct Boer rule they did not re-establish their relationship with the Pedi. On the contrary, the Ndzundza - like the Pedi - were undergoing a process of expansion which allowed them to resist a renewal of Maroteng authority. The rejection of Pedi authority by the Ndzundza led to strained relations between the groups and by the 1870s a low intensity war with reciprocal raiding had developed. Attempts to dominate the Ndzundza Ndebele, however, backfired on Sekukune when, after a Pedi attack in June 1876, the Ndzundza lent the Boers active support in their campaign against Sekukune.¹⁰³

Driven by the need to acquire more land and labour and spurred on by the growing Pedi challenge, the Lydenburg Boers had by 1874 openly begun to prepare for war. Tension had been building since 1870 when renewed attempts to make the Pedi pay tax were resisted.¹⁰⁴ Friction increased when Pedi travelling through the Z.A.R. were raided by the Boers.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the 1870s the clamour for the destruction of Pedi independence became increasingly vocal and when H.W.A. Cooper was appointed *Landrost* of Lydenburg in July 1874, the expansionists were provided with a sympathetic ear at the head of local government. Cooper was a recent arrival in the Z.A.R. and had set himself up as a lawyer at Lydenburg however the bulk

¹⁰² Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', pp. 230-231.

¹⁰³ Van Jaarsveld, 'Die Ndzundza', p 138.

¹⁰⁴ TA, LL 19, De Villiers to Landrost, 25 Nov. 1870; *ibid.*, Government Secretary to Landrost, 27 March 1870.

¹⁰⁵ TA, LL 3, Merensky to Landrost, 13 Dec. 1871.

of his activities seem to have been as a land agent.¹⁰⁶ As a land agent, the new *Landrost* had considerable interest in the opening of new territory which the conquest of the Pedi would result in. Cooper argued quite openly that the prosperity of the Lydenburg district depended on the defeat of the Pedi and led the Lydenburg authorities on a policy of confrontation with Sekukune. In 1875 messages were sent to Sekukune warning him to keep his subjects north of the Steelpoort River or face the risk of war. The Lydenburg authorities also negotiated with the Swazi and the pretender to the Pedi throne, Mampuru, for support in the coming conflict. Matters were taken another step forward in September when Cooper's assistant, C. Schultze, visited Sekukune's younger brother, Johannes Dinkwanyane, who was resident south of the Steelpoort to demand he submit to Z.A.R. authority and pay his taxes. Then, on 13 March 1876, a settler named Jancowitz was prevented by followers of Johannes Dinkwanyane from taking possession of a farm he had purchased. The district was brought to the brink of war and central government was inundated with demands that an attack be launched on the Pedi. The final spark was lit in May 1876 when a missionary named Bauling reported that some of Dinkwanyane's followers had kidnapped his congregation. In spite of being in possession of information that the 'kidnap' had been engineered by the congregation themselves, the Boer state used the incident as an excuse to declare war.¹⁰⁷

The campaign commenced in July 1876 when a force of two thousand Boers and three thousand Swazi, Ndzundza Ndebele and Tsonga auxiliaries were dispatched against Sekukune and his supporters.¹⁰⁸ Successful attacks were launched on the strongholds of Mathebi and Johannes Dinkwanyane, killing Dinkwanyane in the process. The Boer advance was slowed, however, by the huge cost in munitions and lives paid by forces attacking the mountain top fortresses which were defended with firearms. The Swazi deserted their Boer allies after the attack on Dinkwanyane and, after a desultory attack, the Boer commando balked at storming the

¹⁰⁶ TA, SS 206, R662/76, Cooper to Secretary of State, 21 March 1876; LL 20, Landrost to Cooper, 6 April 1874; (Delius also gives the following as examples of Coopers qualifications and career, but I have been unable to trace these documents: SS R2069/73, R2989/75, R4441/77)

¹⁰⁷ Delius, *Land*, pp. 195-204.

¹⁰⁸ The ability of the Lydenburg Boers to muster such a large number of African auxiliaries is indicative of the success with which the Boers were able to foster animosity between African states, effectively preventing them from developing a united front against the Boer invasion.

strategically situated, highly fortified and heavily defended Pedi capital, Thaba Mosego. The Boers were then faced with the prospect of a protracted siege on the Pedi capital, an action made difficult by political developments within the Z.A.R.. As several authors have pointed out, the Boers were notoriously reluctant to become involved in conflicts far from home unless they enjoyed the prospect of some personal profit. The reluctance of Boers from elsewhere to campaign in the eastern Transvaal was aggravated by the unpopularity of President Burgers. Burgers had never enjoyed the support of many Transvaal citizens and his religious views in particular were regarded as too 'radical'. Burgers, who was personally leading the Pedi campaign, therefore did not enjoy the support of a large part of his troops and, when faced with the prospect of a long campaign with high casualties, the disaffected elements refused to continue the conflict.¹⁰⁹

The dispersal of the Boer army marked the end of the first phase of a campaign which, in spite of some early successes, failed in its major objective of inflicting a decisive defeat on Sekukune. It would be a mistake, however, to regard the campaign as a complete failure. When the Boer army did withdraw, this was largely a defeat for the Burgers administration rather than for the Boer military. In fact, the campaign had begun to seriously damage Maroteng power before its dissolution. Firstly, several important Pedi sub-chieftaincies had been crushed. Secondly, it must have sounded a warning to Africans in the area that the Boer force had fared considerably better than the much feared Swazi whom the Pedi had decisively routed in 1869.

The difficulties created for the Pedi during the first phase of the campaign were exacerbated when the Boers switched their tactics and engaged in an effective guerrilla war with the objective of disrupting the Pedi productive cycle. To maintain pressure on Sekukune, two forts were built in the Pedi domain in 1876: Fort Burgers at the confluence of the Steelpoort and Spekboom rivers and Fort Weeber which cut the Pedi off from the rich grazing lands west of the Leolu mountains. In addition, an irregular force - the Lydenburg Volunteers led by C.H. Von Schlikkeman and then by Alfred Aylward - was formed. This force burned crops, seized large numbers of cattle and kept the Pedi confined to their strongholds.¹¹⁰ The continued

¹⁰⁹ Government Gazette, Report of President Burgers, 15 Nov. 1876; Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', pp. 254-264; S.P. Engelbrecht, Thomas Francois Burgers, 'n Lewenskets (Pretoria, 1933), pp. 137-143, 147-154, 171-174, 189-91.

¹¹⁰ Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', pp. 264-274; Aylward, The Transvaal, pp. 44-95,

Boer actions placed great pressure on the Pedi as their cattle were either seized by the Boers or eaten by the besieged communities, crops could not be planted and the flow of migrants was drastically reduced which meant lost grain, cattle and ammunition could not be replaced. The retraction of Pedi power in the face of Boer operations was vividly illustrated when several subchieftaincies, including important groups led by Mphaphlele and Maserumule, Tisana and Marishane, accepted Boer rule. The Masomola even went so far as to provide the Boers with military support.¹¹¹ These developments were of utmost importance when it is remembered that control over the land and labour of these groups was one of the major causes of the war.

In the face of this erosion of his political authority and economic capacity, Sekukune sued for peace in December 1876.¹¹² Although it was clear the peace initiative was little more than a ploy by Sekukune to gain some respite in which to consolidate his fragmenting political authority and to plant crops (the Pedi were on the brink of starvation), the Z.A.R. accepted the idea of a cessation of the war. There were two reasons for this. The cost of maintaining troops in the field put considerable strain on the Z.A.R.'s limited resources. But more pressing were moves by Britain to annex the Boer territories. The motives behind the confederation plans hatched in the Cape and especially Natal, like the Boer reasons for attacking the Pedi, centred on the threat posed by the ability of autonomous African communities to control large supplies of land and labour. Concern had been raised in the Cape and Natal when the Boers tried to redirect the flow of migrants from the British colonies and onto their own farms. It was felt a more efficient system of labour distribution was needed if all sectors of the regional economy were to be supplied with workers, and the extension of British authority over both Boer and African was thought to be the best means to achieve this. British concern over the labour shortage turned to consternation as African communities such as the Pedi were increasingly able to withhold their labour and the Boer failure to rapidly crush the Pedi was seen as a serious threat to the region's labour supply.¹¹³ Furthermore it was felt that the failure to quickly subdue the Pedi threatened British investments, especially in land, in the Z.A.R.. As De Kiewiet pointed out, for many 'the British annexation was a welcome event...Through the annexation

¹¹¹ Delius, *Land*, p. 69; Van Rooyen, 'Verhoudinge', pp. 254-264.

¹¹² Delius, *Land*, p. 210.

¹¹³ Etherington, 'Labour Supply', p. 244.

many a worthless title deed was elevated to the status of negotiable certificate of possession, many farms were occupied for the first time, and the frontier commenced again to march against the weakening of resistance of independent native settlement'.¹¹⁴

If the treaty, which was signed on 7 February 1877, was meant to allay British concerns, it was a failure. The treaty was clearly a sham which neither side intended to honour and within weeks hostilities were set to resume. But before this could occur the British took matters into their own hands and annexed the Transvaal in April 1877, bringing to an end the first phase of Boer rule north of the Vaal River.

6. Conclusion.

The 1870s were a crucial decade in South African history. Capitalist intrusion into the region, begun in the mid-1750s and escalated by the Boer invasions after 1836, reached new heights after the mineral discoveries in the late 1860s and early 1870s. The European-led capitalist economy had been consistently at odds with African autonomy. During the 1870s this conflict reached a head and a bitter struggle ensued from which the European invaders emerged victorious. Within a few years Swazi power was undermined and the Pedi, Ndzundza Ndebele and Zulu were coerced into submission by forces representing the rising capitalist order.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the Lydenburg district. Destructive economic forces had operated in the area since at least 1750. From the 1800s the violence reached new heights with the increase in slave exports from Delagoa Bay. In an effort to survive some groups situated themselves on the edge of the slaving sphere and engaged in a process of defensive state building. Central to the survival of these defensive structures was the accumulation of people and resources, paradoxically often through raiding and the sale of plunder on the regional economy.

The arrival of the Boers in 1845 dramatically accelerated the process of economic intrusion. Although some Boer-African cooperation existed, the Boers represented a system that was ultimately incompatible with African autonomy and conflict was inevitable. Many African groups were destroyed by the invaders but some such as the Swazi, Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Delius, *Land*, p. 224.

met the Boer threat by becoming increasingly centralised, militarised and expansionist. The advent of societies such as the Pedi and Swazi was unprecedented in the region. Their genesis in the 1770s was a reaction to the arrival of a predatory economic system (of which the slave trade was an increasingly central part) on the east coast, but their maturation was a defensive response to the Boer-led invasions. As such their growth paralleled the rapid development of the Boer state. By 1865 even this hostile coexistence had become impossible. Accelerated economic development in the 1860s which heightened Boer demand for land and labour made the final destruction of their African rivals a matter of economic survival to the Lydenburg Boers and their associates elsewhere in the region. This led to the steady encroachment on the Swazi in the 1860s and necessitated the all-out onslaught on the Pedi in 1876 and the Ndzundza Ndebele in 1883.

The final point to be made is that while the developing Boer state sometimes lacked the resources to successfully carry out its African policy, its relationship with African groups should be judged in terms of the objectives of the settlers rather than the effectiveness with which they carried them out. Certainly the annexation by Britain in 1876 strengthened the hand of the Transvaal settlers in general, and of the Lydenburg Boers in particular, against their African neighbours. But it should be remembered this was because the Boers and the British were inextricably linked economically and consequently shared common goals regarding African autonomy. The Boers represented a wider system whose impact on their fluctuating fortunes did not alter.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The broad objective of this study, which has been concerned with the Boer community at Ohrigstad/Lydenburg, is to better understand the seizure of new land by Boer invaders during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The context of heightened capitalist intrusion into the southern African region in which the Boer invasions occurred was sketched. Lydenburg's ties to the regional economy were highlighted and the strong parallels between the Boer political economy and the British colonies stressed. Emphasis was also placed on how the Boers, as representatives of the regional economy, impacted on the development of autonomous African groups in the eastern Transvaal. From these investigations it emerged that the Boers were a modern people who were part of a wider process of European-led capitalist intrusion. The narrow concept of a Boer flight from an advance of the modern world at the Cape must therefore be abandoned. Little mention was, however, made of the consequences of re-thinking the idea of a Great Trek - both for the historiography of the nineteenth century and for the ideology of white South Africans.

A central theme in the historiography of the nineteenth century has been that 'the development of the mining industry marked a fundamental turning point in South African history. Here first emerged capitalist production on a large scale'.¹ Most historians now also accept Robert Ross's arguments that the origins of capitalism in the region must be sought in the agrarian western Cape.² However the continuity between these phases of capitalist development has not been recognised as the continued assumption of Boer backwardness during the middle years of the century has inhibited understanding of how the race-based Cape power structures were spread to the interior. The Boer republics during the middle years of the nineteenth century are still seen as primitive aberrations from the broader process of capitalist growth. For example, Beinart, Delius and Trapido state that by the late 1860s, 'some of these settlers were indeed as

¹ Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara and Siphon Dlamini (eds.), The Struggle for South Africa: A reference guide to movements, organisations and institutions, 2 vols. (London and New Jersey, 1984), 1, p. 7.

² See for example, Ross, 'Capitalist Agriculture', pp. 56-101.

commercially minded as merchants and traders who *increasingly impinged on their world*.³

This study has shown that there was no window period of Boer backwardness between 1836 and the late 1860s. The Boer invaders were not only inextricably linked to the regional capitalist economy but like their counterparts in the Cape, Natal and O.F.S. were, especially in the field of labour, dynamically involved in creating the structural conditions necessary for the extension of capitalist production. The extent to which Boer tactics to procure and control labour reflected measures employed in the Cape is striking. In the same spirit as the Cape's Ordinance 2 of 1837 which had limited the right of Africans to occupy land, African landownership in the Z.A.R. was restricted in 1852. Apprenticeship laws which closely resembled the Caledon Code of 1809 were passed. Indirectly ruled labour pools which paralleled similar tactics in British Kaffraria and Natal were established throughout the Z.A.R.. A system of legally enforceable labour contracts resembling the Master and Servants Ordinance of 1841 and the Master and Servants Act of 1856 was instituted. Reinforcing the system of labour contracts were pass laws which limited the ability of Africans to move freely and a range of coercive measures such as a hut tax were aimed at forcing Africans to provide the invaders with labour. If we are to understand South Africa's unique system of racial capitalism, we should look to the large owner-operated farm in the Cape for its origins and for the accelerated capitalist expansions of the 1830s (of which the Boers were a part) for its spread across the sub-continent.

One of the most striking historical phenomena of the nineteenth century was the development of powerful African states such as the Swazi and Zulu. During the middle years of the nineteenth century some African groups managed to develop a degree of power unprecedented in the region. The reasons for this have been the subject of some debate. Some historians have vehemently resisted the claim that the rise of these large African states could have been the result of anything but internal class forces. This position has not been borne out by this study's investigation of the eastern Transvaal. Here, the African state building seems to be best explained as a defensive reaction to the escalating European threat.

The first Europeans to establish a presence in the eastern Transvaal were Portuguese traders based on the east coast at places such as Delagoa Bay, Inhambane and Sofala. From the 1750s

³. W. Beinart and P. Delius, 'Introduction: Approaches to South African Agrarian History', in Beinart, et al, Putting a Plough to the Ground, p. 24; my emphasis.

the Portuguese and their surrogates raided and traded for ivory, cattle, gold and captives. The effects of these activities were extremely destabilising. Some African groups grew powerful from the trade and began to subordinate their neighbours. Others were simply attacked and destroyed by forces linked to the Portuguese trading networks. When in 1805 the export of slaves began to dominate the Delagoa Bay trade, levels of destruction rose sharply. Many African groups were completely destroyed by the accentuated destabilisation but others were able to survive by beginning a process of defensive state building. These formations would form the nuclei of the structures developed to meet the Boer threat.

The arrival of the Boers in the eastern Transvaal in 1845 greatly aggravated the unstable conditions already threatening many African groups. Not only did the Boers raid for captives, ivory and cattle but their productive capacity depended on their ability to seize land and labour from their African subjects. Africans did not respond passively to Boer demands. Although some groups were crushed by the invaders, others were able to build on the defensive foundations laid against the Portuguese slavers and began to challenge the Boers. Central to the ability of groups such as the Pedi and Swazi to meet the Boer threat was the ability to purchase the firearms necessary for defence and the incorporation of new subjects. By the late 1840s these groups were engaging the regional economy as suppliers of captives, ivory or labour.

This combination of factors which allowed Africans to create innovative new structures to meet the European-led invasion is essential to an understanding of the transformation of small groups such as the Dlamini and Maroteng into the mature Pedi and Swazi states. The expanding capitalist economy had resulted in the Boer invasion of the eastern Transvaal. The arrival of the Boers posed a serious threat to the survival of African groups yet by engaging the economy that drove the Boer intrusion African groups were able to acquire the means to considerably expand their power and meet the Boer threat.

The chronology of the conflict between the Boers and their African rivals is important. During the earliest years of Boer conquest the scales of power were tipped decisively in favour of the Boers. As Africans were able to purchase firearms and munitions necessary for defence, however, the Boer monopoly on power was eroded. The position of Africans resisting Boer rule was boosted during the first years of the 1860s when the Transvaal civil war weakened the coercive capacity of the Boers. As the Boers' diminished military capacity was not matched by

a slowing of economic growth, a climate favourable to the further expansion of defensive African formations were created. During this period the Ndzundza Ndebele shook off Boer rule, the Pedi further expanded their military capacity, and Swazi raiding activity in the lowveld and Delagoa Bay hinterland reached new heights. When assessing the ability of Africans to resist Boer rule in the Lydenburg area it is however important to remember that (as historians, such as Bonner and Delius, who stress the ability of Africans to resist Boer rule overlook) until the 1860s the Boer population in the Lydenburg district remained fairly small. It would be unrealistic to expect a group of invaders a few thousand strong to completely dominate a subject population of several hundred thousand. In the light of this obvious point the level of domination achieved by the Boers was substantial.

Although the ability of African survivor groups to protect and extend their autonomy during the 1850s and early 1860s was due largely to their improved military capacity, a degree of African political and economic independence was not always at odds with Boer interests. Mutually profitable economic relationships were at times formed. The Boer-Swazi captive trade and the Boer-Ndzundza raids on Pedi migrants are examples of this. Allowing Africans some freedom of choice enabled Boer notables who could offer better conditions of service to monopolise local labour supplies. Furthermore, rent tenancy offered landowners an easy way to generate revenue on farms held for speculative purposes.

From the mid-1860s the level of conflict in the Lydenburg area escalated sharply. The temporary weakening of Boer coercion during the first years of the decade had allowed defensive African states to consolidate and expand their positions. Counterpointing the deepening of African power was the expanding Boer economy that demanded that African autonomy be extinguished. As has been noted, increased beef exports, the growing profitability of arable farming and development of wool production boosted demand for land and labour among the Lydenburg Boers. Faced with the need to secure greater volumes of these commodities, the Boer state moved to destroy African autonomy. From the late 1860s the Swazi were forced to withdraw from the Komati and the winterveld, demands for tax and/or labour were pressed against the Ndzundza Ndebele and in 1876 a vicious war was launched against the Pedi.

Although African resistance to capitalist intrusion was crushed, the Boer victory was not predetermined. The struggle could have ended very differently had the Boers been unable to

sustain economic growth - particularly if the mineral discoveries had not expanded and diversified the southern African economy. The Boer-African conflict hung in the balance as late as the 1860s and it is conceivable the Boers could have been driven from the eastern Transvaal. But economic growth did occur and pressure on African autonomy mounted. The crisis came to a head during the 1870s and within a few years African groups were swamped by a predatory economic system whose resources they could no longer match. It is important to note that the final destruction of states such as the Swazi and the Zulu which stood in the way of the regional capitalist economy was undertaken on a non-ethnic basis by both Boer and British forces.

The ability of the Boers to sustain capitalist development also calls into question the reasons for the South African War of 1899-1904. The view that Britain went to war against the Z.A.R. because Kruger's Republic was backward and unable to address the needs of the Transvaal gold mining industry is no longer sustainable.⁴ In a recent article, Ian Phimister has drawn attention to the ability of the Z.A.R. to meet the needs of the Transvaal's emerging gold mining industry.⁵ Phimister observes that the Boer state 'demonstrated an impressive ability to address the mine owners' grievances across the board'.⁶ For example, he cites Harries in showing that in 1897 the Z.A.R. was capable of concluding a labour agreement with the Portuguese which so increased the supply of African labour on the Rand that wages could be reduced by almost thirty percent.⁷

Recognition of the Kruger administration's sophistication accords well with this study which has shown that the Boers who seized land outside the Cape worked hard to create the conditions necessary for capitalist production. Few historians have recognised this, preferring to focus on the difficulties faced by the Z.A.R. such as marketing problems, lack of a stable currency, punitive tariffs at British ports and mounting African resistance to Boer rule. It is forgotten that in less than forty years the Boers achieved a level of economic development comparable to that

⁴ S. Marks and S Trapido, 'Lord Milner and the South African State', History Workshop, 8 (1979).

⁵ Ian Phimister, 'Unscrambling the Scramble for Southern Africa: The Jameson Raid and the South African War Revisited', South African Historical Journal, 28 (1993), pp. 203-220.

⁶ Ibid., p. 216.

⁷ Ibid.; P. Harries, 'Capital, State and labour on the 19th Century Witwatersrand: A Reassessment', South African Historical Journal, 18 (1986).

of the Cape. One of the few historians who did recognise the strategic implications of Boer economic strength was C.J. Uys who argued that the British annexed Natal in 1844 because the increasing prosperity of the Boer republic was threatening British economic and strategic interests in the region.⁸ Uys's contention is at least in part borne out by Britain's concern that the Z.A.R. be prevented from gaining independent access to a harbour which would allow the Boer republic to escape the system of tariffs used to ensure that it did not threaten British interests.

A similar case can be made for the war of 1899. The Z.A.R.'s economy had been commercially orientated since its inception and when gold was discovered the Boer state was able to build on this platform to achieve a growth rate that threatened to make it the dominant power in the region. The northward shift of the epicentre of capitalist activity in southern Africa to the Z.A.R. was demonstrated as early as 1881 when import tariffs were imposed on goods entering the Transvaal (certain goods produced in the O.F.S. were exempted). In 1890 import tariffs were raised to five percent and in 1892 to seven and a half percent.⁹

The position of the Z.A.R. was further strengthened when the MacMahon Award of June 1875 thwarted Britain's claim to Delagoa Bay, ensuring the Z.A.R. of access to the sea. An increasing amount of Boer commerce was directed to the Portuguese port and in 1894 work was completed on a railway to the Bay. The Pretoria-Delagoa Bay line had serious consequences for the Cape colony. Prior to 1894 the Cape Railways had enjoyed a near monopoly on transporting goods to Johannesburg. Of the Cape Colony's annual total income of £5 390 000, the railway generated £2 713 000 - most of it from the transportation of goods to the goldfields. After the completion of the Delagoa Bay line, the Cape's share of the traffic to the Transvaal fell by two thirds.¹⁰ The Z.A.R. also had rich natural resources, a rapidly expanding European population, an increasingly effective administration and a modernising army equipped with

⁸ C.J. Uys, In the Era of Sir Theophilus Shepstone: Thirty-five years of British expansion in South Africa 1842-1877, (Lovedale Press, 1932), pp 13-24.

⁹ M.C. Van Zyl, 'States and Colonies in South Africa, 1854-1902', in Muller, Five Hundred Years, pp. 314, 316.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 316-317.

sophisticated weapons.¹¹ The British colonies could not match this and could in time have easily been drawn by the Z.A.R. into a kind of United States of Africa. In 1897 the Z.A.R. forged a political alliance with the O.F.S. while in the Cape the Afrikaner Bond was pushing for closer ties with the Z.A.R.. By the late 1890s, a South African federation led by the strongest regional group, the Z.A.R., was increasingly possible.¹² Such a prospect would have shut Britain out of the sub-continent and must have been a powerful motive for invasion.

By undermining several bastions of nineteenth century historiography, this revision of the context and causation of the Great Trek brings down some the ideological pillars of many white South Africans. One of the most surprising aspects of the research for this study was the differing reactions of English and Afrikaans speakers to the idea that the concept of a Great Trek be abandoned. Afrikaans speakers were far more receptive to the re-conceptualisation of Boer expansion than their English counterparts were. This was surprising at first but on reflection it became clear the reason for this was that the idea of a Great Trek has lost its usefulness to Afrikaans speakers. This has occurred on two levels.

With the end to Afrikaner political dominance, a new vocabulary is being developed to protect the interests of the former ruling class. Few talk these days of Afrikaner nationalism; the catch words of minority interest are now human rights, property rights, reconciliation and Christian values. With its inherent ethnic chauvinism, the idea of a Great Trek is not just an awkward reminder of past crimes but also undermines the broad humanism in which many Afrikaners now seek refuge.

The passing of minority rule has also ended the need for group cohesion among Afrikaners. One of the great misconceptions among South Africans is that apartheid was a purely race-based system. A substantial Afrikaner underclass exists. Lost in the platteland, forgotten in decrepit working class neighbourhoods and abandoned in squatter camps, this group had the potential to destroy the group cohesion essential to the existence of the Afrikaner ruling class. On a practical level, the disruptive potential of the Afrikaner poor was kept in check by a policy of

¹¹ G. Tylden, 'The Development of the Commando System in South Africa, 1715-1922', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 33 (1945), pp. 303-310; Phimister, 'Unscrambling', pp. 216-219.

¹² Van Zyl, 'States and colonies', p. 328.

paternalistic state employment. But on a more profound level it was the Great Trek that plastered over the cracks in the apartheid monolith. The Great Trek painted a picture of a glorious past of a persecuted group which in its quest for freedom crossed the African frontier, hunted the abundant game and tamed the brutal savage. This legendary land has ceased to be. Many of the beneficiaries of apartheid now face an uncertain economic future and ideological collapse. Few still wish to accept the Anglo-centric and racist vision of a flight of primitives from the Cape Colony, now that the concept has lost its political utility.

The cynical manipulation of the idea of a Great Trek has not been confined to Afrikaans speakers. The first to exploit the idea of a Boer exodus from the Cape for political gain were the British settlers who hoped to accelerate imperial expansion on the eastern frontier in the 1830s by claiming that the uncertain situation was driving away the colony's 'best citizens'. However, as the profitability of Boer conquests became established, settler expansionists recast the Boers in a new light. By the 1840s they were no longer the model citizens of previous years. Boer settlers outside the Cape were portrayed as brutal savages and imperial expansion was advised in order to 'protect the natives'. More recently, 'liberal' English speakers have used the theme of a flight of primitives to excuse themselves from complicity in the creation of apartheid (while still enjoying its fruits). The backward 'trekkers' are held responsible for the spread of racial segregation in South Africa. In the words of W.M. Macmillan 'the Great Trek' was 'the great disaster of South African history'.¹³ The English Cape is seen as a bastion of liberalism and justice that was only breached by the political rise of the Afrikaner after 1910 and eventually destroyed by the final re-imposition in 1948 of the social order created by the 'backward trekkers'.¹⁴ This attitude, that 'British colonialism stood for civilisation, it is the Boer and the Bantu that have destroyed South Africa', remains prevalent.¹⁵ Ironically, the same forces that have caused many Afrikaners to turn their backs on their ideological past have driven some English speakers to cling more tightly to theirs.

In conclusion, rethinking the Great Trek has meant abandoning the terms 'Great Trek' and

¹³ W.M. Macmillan, The Cape Colour Question (London, 1927), p. 247.

¹⁴ For an example of this attitude see Davenport, A Modern History, pp. 119-120, 258, 309-315.

¹⁵ The Star, 18 Jan. 1995.

'Trekker' as narrow, derogatory and misleading. Throughout this work reference has rather been made to 'the Boer invasions' or to 'Boer conquests'. But perhaps it is now appropriate to modify even this position. The term 'Boer invasions' refers to only part of a process. As has been stressed, the Boers were one part of the wider capitalist intrusion into southern Africa. Britons, Portuguese, Arabs, Indians, Germans, Dutch and Irishmen (to name a few) were also involved. It is time to strip the European invasions (and related phenomena such as the growth of African defensive states) of their narrow, ethnic trappings and qualify even a term such as 'the Boer invasions' as a single aspect of the wider process of capitalist intrusion.

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