

ones? The question takes on a new significance in the light of the Russian reaction to the most recent Angolan incursion which carried the clear warning that South Africa could go so far in its raids into and occupation of Southern Angola but that any attempt to topple the Angolan government would provoke a much greater Russian commitment to that country. This commitment might not be militarily significant for the moment but could have important long-term consequences for the whole Southern African area.

If South Africa's aim is simply to eliminate ANC and other bases from near its borders then it has achieved considerable success this past year. Lesotho has been obliged to get rid of many of its South African exiles and in Swaziland the palace coup has brought to power a group which is not likely to provide a haven for cross-border raiders. The first indication of whether it is "terrorist bases" or "unfriendly regimes" which are the South African target should come as the motive behind the recent Angolan moves becomes clearer and as the talks between Pretoria and Maputo develop. For however much **tourism** may be on the Maputo agenda, **tourism** and **terrorism** just don't mix, and we can surely take it for granted that what both sides will really be talking about will be the threat to their security. If South Africa agreed to withdraw its rumoured sponsorship of the MNR in return for Samora Machel agreeing to close down bases for armed attacks on South Africa, even though neither admitted to it publicly, the

setback to those involved in carrying the "armed struggle" into South Africa would be enormous. It is highly unlikely that Zimbabwe would provide alternative bases, and Botswana has never shown any inclination to do so. Only Angola would remain committed to supporting armed attacks on South Africa and even there recent events suggest (not for the first time, of course) that some sort of accommodation may be coming closer, and this commitment withdrawn.

It is possible then that South Africa's military power may soon achieve for it a buffer zone around its borders through which raiders from outside will find it increasingly difficult to penetrate. If hand-in-hand with that goes an increase in trade and a boost to the economies of countries like Mozambique, South Africa may have won for itself a respite from armed attack which could last quite a long time.

But will it last for ever? Surely not, unless whatever time is won is used quickly to create conditions here which will satisfy the reasonable aspirations of most of our people. We have a very long way to go in an entirely new direction before we will do that. And if the real aim of South African policy is to topple unfriendly regimes and the recent moves over Angola and Maputo are just an elaborate ploy to silence some of President Reagan's critics as he seeks re-election, then you can be sure that there will never be peace on our borders. □

reviewed by CAROLYN HAMILTON

RETRIEVING THE PRE-COLONIAL PAST

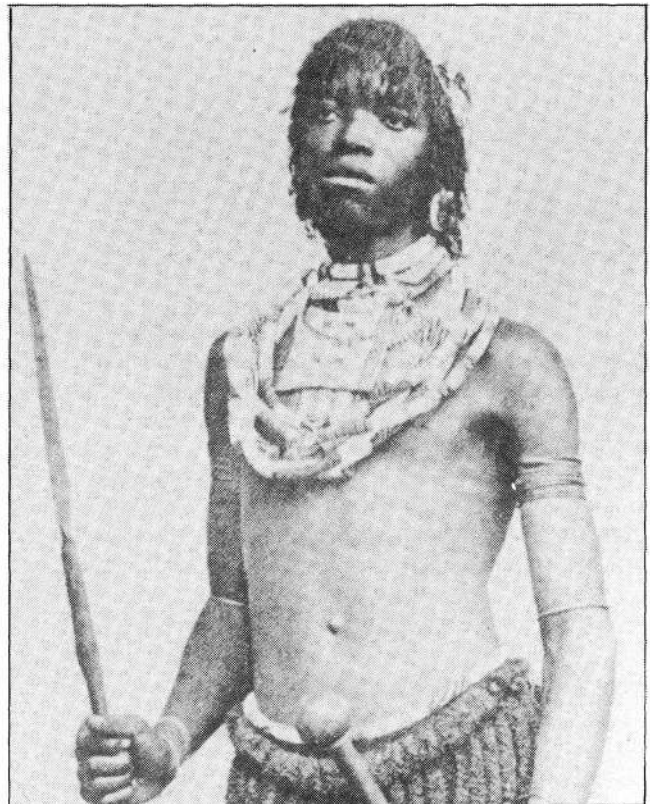
THE HLUBI CHIEFDOM IN ZULULAND-NATAL

John Wright and Andrew Manson
Ladysmith Historical Society
1983
Tugela Press, Ladysmith
R6,00

This slim history (only 99 pages) of the Hlubi chiefdom of Zululand-Natal was first commissioned in 1974 to illuminate the 'Hlubi side' of the Langalibalele 'rebellion' of 1873. In the course of research its scope has been considerably broadened. Wright and Manson have both extended their account back in time to examine the genesis of the chiefdom, and have situated the events of 1873 within a historical analysis of the changing material conditions of the Hlubi people over time.

The account illuminates the uniqueness and significance of the Hlubi experience, within the wider context of events in Zululand and Natal. This balance is achieved by integrating a systematic exposition of intra-Hlubi relations with an account of the chiefdom's external relations with the Zulu kingdom, the colonial state and the settlers.

In the early chapters, Wright traces the evolution of the chiefdom from its earliest origins over two centuries ago.



A Hlubi youth with his hair done in the iziyendane style.

He chronicles its migration from the Lubombo mountains into northern Natal and the steady rise in the fortunes of the group under successive chiefs. This process culminated in the reign of the renowned Bhungane, of whom it was said

Nselo was a great king, yet far mightier and better was his son Bhungane. (pg. 4)

The rigorous, if demanding account which results provides a fascinating glimpse of the very remote past of southern African society, and an exciting taste of the peculiar craft of the precolonial historian.



Chief Langelibalele and seven of his sons in captivity in Pietermaritzburg in 1874.

In the ensuing chapters, attention is turned to the tensions underlying the eventual dissolution of Bhungane's chiefdom, the rivalry between the various factions contending his succession, and the final blow of the *izwekufa* - the breaking up of the nation and the dislocation of much of Zululand and Natal - which accompanied Shaka's rise to power. The fortunes of the various Hlubi fragments are followed in some detail. The chiefdom's revival under Dingane and events leading up to the flight of the Hlubi into Natal in search of colonial protection are then traced.

Settlers fears

With the entry of the Hlubi into the complex web of colonial politics, the authors develop a familiar theme, that of the attempted dislocation and removal of peasant communities in response to settler fears, their land and labour needs, and their concern over African market production. At first, this was effectively resisted by the

Hlubi, who grew and prospered in upland Natal. By the 1870's however, the authorities were obliged by mounting settler antagonism to act decisively to dismantle the chiefdom. As Shepstone, then Secretary for Native Affairs remarked,

The whole tribe, it seems to me, must be removed, from where it is and dispersed among the farmers. (pg. 65)

The authors suggest that Shepstone's eventual success in 1873 must also in part, be ascribed to the surfacing of tensions within Hlubi society itself. Old forms of authority were altered and undermined by changes in the material conditions of Hlubi life generated by colonial legislation and Hlubi involvement in the wider capitalist economy of South Africa.

Casum belli

In a compelling account, events leading to the confrontation of 1873 are vividly recounted. The chief thrust of this section is to question the legitimacy of the *casum belli* employed by the authorities: the charge of treason levelled at the Hlubi chief, Langelibalele. Wright and Manson suggest that the chief was manoeuvred into a situation in which confrontation was inevitable.

The special place of the Langelibalele 'rebellion' in white settler mythology derives from the death of three white volunteers at the top of the Bushman's Nek Pass.

The news sent a shock of fear and rage through the camp, and, as it burst upon the colony, through the whole settler community. For the first time in the colony's history, whites had been killed in war with blacks. (pg. 66)

A short description follows of the travesty of justice which was Langelibalele's trial, his imprisonment on Robben Island and the eventual succession of his son and heir, Siyephu. The final pages comprise a chilling account of the ultimate fate of the leaderless Hlubi. It was a stunning success for the colonial authorities

... it had allowed the interests of the government and the colonists of Natal to triumph over those of the Hlubi chiefly house and its adherents and a prosperous emerging peasantry to be destroyed. (pg. 80)

Through their firm focus on an African society set in the framework of materialist analysis, Wright and Manson provide a much needed alternative to earlier albocentric settler and liberal historiography, and to the maudlin parochialism of earlier local histories. Their study demonstrates the viability of retrieving the precolonial past of a specific group such as the Hlubi, and its importance for the proper understanding of the colonial experience of such a group. This type of local study which distinguishes between the particular historical experiences of different groups in Zululand-Natal is necessary now (more than ever before), so as to counter the prevailing notion - imposed by the South African state and currently reinforced by the Kwa-Zulu authorities - of a monolithic history and a homogeneous Zulu ethnic identity. □