

# The Historical Origins of the Transkei's boundaries

by Robert Ross

In the negotiations between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the leaders of the Transkei over the past few years, probably the single most important topic has been the Land Question. At least, this has been the topic on which there has been most disagreement. Essentially, Kaiser Matanzima's government has been demanding that various portions of what is now 'white' (and to a small extent so-called 'coloured') land should be added to the area under his jurisdiction and thus opened up for African occupation. The areas concerned consist of the small enclave around Port St. Johns, on the coast, the districts of Elliot and Maclear to the west and, to the north, Mount Currie (Kokstad) district and those parts of Matatiele and Umzimkulu not already part of the homeland.<sup>1)</sup> These demands have been largely refused, although Port St. Johns and a few small areas in other districts are to be made over. The South African Government has declared itself to be bound by the stipulations of the 1936 Bantu Trust and Lands Act, although it is likely to have considered that the political consequences of any other policy would have been unacceptable.<sup>2)</sup> Moreover, once they realised that their demands were not going to be met, the Transkeian authorities retreated, and are now to accept independence, in October 1976, on the basis of their present territory. Nevertheless, in view of this exchange, it would seem apposite to describe how the Transkei came to be what it was, and to describe the historical process whereby the two territorial blocks which make up the Transkei came to be delineated as they are.

In legal terms, this delineation is based on two Acts, the Native Lands Act of 1913 and the Bantu Lands and Trusts Act of 1936. These defined the areas of South Africa which could be owned by Africans, which consisted either of the scheduled reserves or of 'quota' land which individual Africans or the South African Bantu Trust could purchase, generally adjoining the existing Reserves. In all, the African areas of the Republic cover just under 13% of its surface, and the Transkei, which contains by far the largest single block of African land, contains rather over fourteen thousand square miles, about a quarter of the total 'African' land in the Republic. Of this, the greatest proportion consists of land scheduled as reserve in 1936, except in Umzimkulu district where there have been quite large purchases of quota land.<sup>3)</sup>

Description of the schedules of the various Land Acts does not, however, provide a satisfactory explanation for the initial problem, since, in fact, the Acts did little more than enact the status quo as the law of the land. It is notable that when, in 1972, Matanzima made his demands, he claimed that their acceptance would restore the position that existed before 1884.<sup>4)</sup> Rather, in this paper, I

<sup>1)</sup> Horrell, M. (compiled by), 1973, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa*, 1972. Johannesburg, 33-5.

<sup>2)</sup> *ibid.* See also *Star Weekly*, 6 March 1976

<sup>3)</sup> Horrell, M. (compiled by), 1971, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa*, 1970. Johannesburg, p. 130.

<sup>4)</sup> Horrell, M., 1972, p. 34.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA  
LOCATION OF THE TRANSKEI

Botswana TRANSVAAL NAMIBIA MOZAMBIQUE

PRETORIA JOHANNESBURG MAPUTO

ORANGE FREE STATE NATAL

BLOEMFONTEIN MASERU DURBAN

CAPE PROVINCE

QUENSTON TUGELA RIVER PORT ST JOHNS

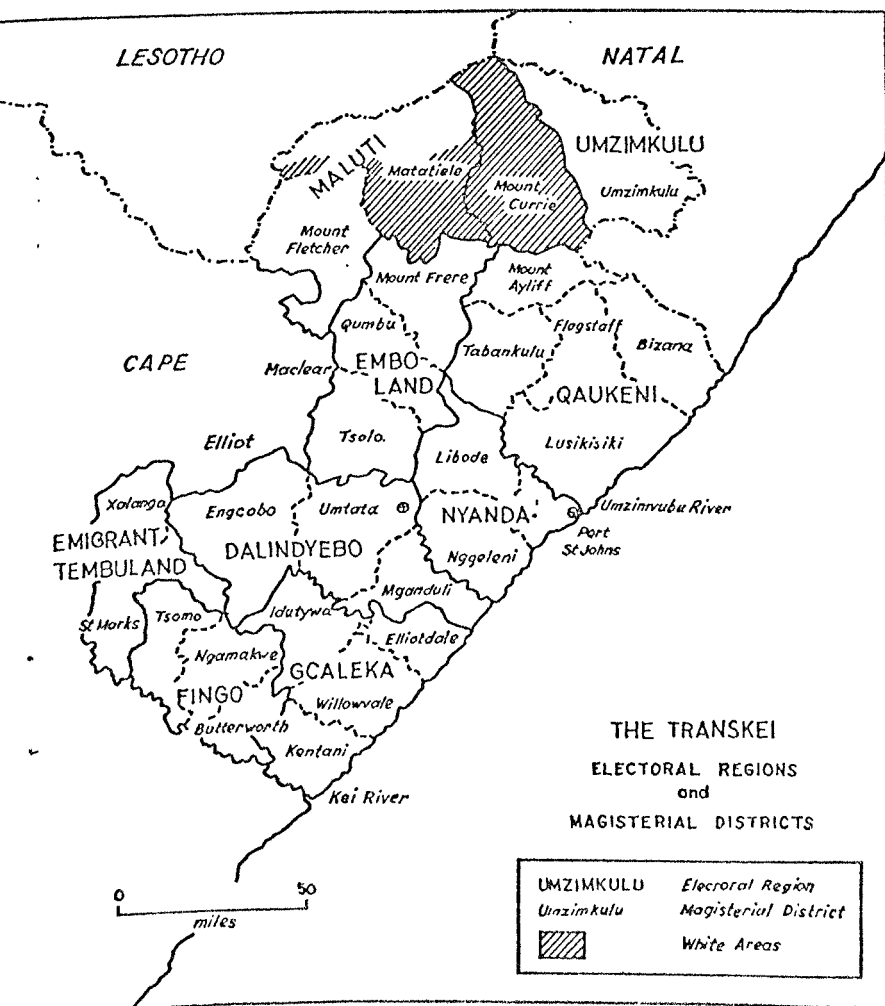
Great Fish River Orange River

PORT ELIZABETH EAST LONDON

CAPE TOWN

THE TRANSKEI  
CISKEI  
Lesotho  
SWAZILAND

0 200  
Miles



intend to sketch the processes whereby those lands were defined, essentially during the latter half of the last century.

## THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

To a certain extent the problem arises because the definition of the Transkei is double. On the one hand, in the modern legal sense, the Transkei is that area controlled by the Government of the Transkei, that is to say that area which used to be Reserve and, later, Bantustan. On the other hand, the term is a geographical one, referring to that area of South Africa bounded by the Kei River, the Indian Ocean, the south-west boundary of the Province of Natal and the scarp of the Drakensberg range, which also is in part the border between South Africa and Lesotho. In general, these boundaries are quite clear, and can be related to evident, if not always suitable, geographical features. The situation is otherwise only in the western corner of the area, as the scarp of the Drakensberg is here much less distinct than further to the north-east and the Kei river has yet to unite a single stream in its course to the coast. It is not surprising that it is over this area, in the district of Elliot and Maclear, that much of the recent discussion has centred.

It should not be thought, however, that the Transkei - at least geographically defined - is a purely artificial unit in human terms. Virtually all its inhabitants speak dialects of the same language, Cape Nguni or Xhosa. Only right under the mountains in Matatiele and Mount Fletcher are there Sotho-speaking groups. In the past, of course, all Xhosa-speakers did not live under a single political unit. Nor did - or do - they all live east of the Kei. Rather they were organised in several dozen chiefdoms, of varying size and extremely fissile, which were descended, so the theory has it, from around a dozen core units, so that it is normal to speak of clusters of chiefdoms, the Xhosa (proper), the Mpondo, the Mpondomise, the Thembu, the Xesibe, the Bomvana, the Hlangweni, and so on.<sup>5)</sup> Individual chiefs acknowledged the seniority of the paramount of their particular cluster, a position that was determined by his genealogical position. Whether or not this entailed subordination in matters of jurisdiction was always a matter of contention, as the allocation of the profits of war and justice depended on it. In addition, the continual threat of secession and the influence of his councillors tended to limit the monarchical power of the chief.

Like all Nguni, the people of the Transkei lived in homesteads dispersed over the hillsides, rather than in large, nucleated villages. Rights to land, or rather to the use of land, were theoretically vested in exogamous, patrilineal clans, although in fact these clans could and did incorporate persons not born into them. These clans were subordinated to the various chiefdoms, which therefore had real and recognized, if not always precise, boundaries. In the early nineteenth century, the population of the chiefdoms varied from around a thousand, for the smallest independent Xhosa or Thembu groups, up to perhaps 50,000 for the Mpondo chiefdom, the largest single unit until it split in 1867.

<sup>5)</sup> See Hammond-Tooke, W. D., 1965, Segmentation and Fission in Cape Nguni Political Units, *Africa*, 35, 143-60. For a critique of Hammond-Tooke's idea, see Peires, J. B., 1975, The Rise of the Right-Hand House in the History and Historiography of the Xhosa, *History in Africa*, 2, 113-26.

This general pattern held good from the Fish river to the Umzimkulu. Prior to the early nineteenth century, the Nguni north of the latter river, in modern Natal, seem to have lived in rather smaller political units. Thereafter, they were much more effected by the explosion in northern Natal during the first third of the century, which resulted in the establishment of the Zulu empire, a state qualitatively larger than any previously existing in the area, and in the destruction of many of the tribes in southern Natal.<sup>6)</sup> The Mpondo and the Xesibe, in north-east of the Transkei, were the first tribes not to be completely ravaged, although they did lose almost all their cattle to the Zulu armies. This explosion, generally known as the *Mfecane*, also led to the settlement of large number of refugees, known as *Mfengu*, in the Transkei and further west, but including at least one group, the Bhaca, which was able to maintain its identity and to become a distinct chiefdom cluster within the Transkei, with a somewhat different, though basically congruent structure to the others.<sup>7)</sup>

## THE WESTERN BOUNDARY

Of the modern boundaries of the Transkei, the western is the oldest and, in many ways, the least natural. The Kei River became a significant political border in 1835, in the aftermath of one of the many episodes in the Hundred Years War fought between the whites and the Xhosa on what was known as the Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony. This struggle began in earnest in 1779, when a breakdown occurred in the rather fragile relationships along the Fish River (150 km. west of the Kei) between the most westerly Nguni (mainly Xhosa, but also Gqunukwebe, a group whose traditional relationship to the Xhosa chiefs is uncertain) and the Boers, those Dutch-speaking white pastoralists who had thinly settled a very large area of South-western Africa over the course of the previous century or so. It was to last until well into the 1880s, and included ten more or less major wars and a variety of minor incidents. Above all, it was over land, or, to be precise, over grazing and farms. It was not, as has sometimes been claimed one-sided, as right up to the end the fighting was difficult, dangerous and expensive for the whites. Indeed, until the British army intervened in 1812, the Xhosa were clearly in the ascendant,<sup>8)</sup> and thereafter it was the Imperial troops who bore the brunt of the battles, with colonial levies generally being little more than cattle raiders, gathering up the spoils at the end of the campaign.

In 1834, one of the major sections of the Xhosa cluster, known as the Gcaleka, lived east of the Kei, while to the west lived the Ngika, the Ndlambe and a variety of smaller groups. In the frontier war of that year, it was these latter sections who were most concerned, not altogether surprisingly as they were under the greatest pressure from the whites. Nevertheless it was not for that reason that, after the Xhosa had been defeated, the British proclaimed their sovereignty up to the Kei river. They believed that the Gcaleka had been implicated in the war and indeed, Hintza, the Gcaleka chief who, by virtue of his genealogical position was also Xhosa paramount, was shot dead following a meeting with Harry Smith, commander of the British forces. Rather the Kei was chosen as a boundary for purely mi-

6) Still the best description of these events is Omer-Cooper, J. D., 1966, *The Zulu Aftermath*. London.

7) On the Bhaca, see Hammond-Tooke, W. D., 1956, *The Tribes of Mount Frere District*. Pretoria, and *Bhaca Society*, 1962. Cape Town.

8) Gilliomee, H. B., *The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812*, (in press). This paper will appear in a collection of essays to be edited by Dr. Gilliomee.

litary reasons. Previous borderlines to the west had proved not to serve their purpose, because the British could not defend them easily. The Fish and the Keiskamma run through thick bush, through which bands of Africans could easily slip to attack colonial positions and farms. In contrast, the Kei runs through open country, so that, the British thought, it could be easily watched. Thus it was that, on 10 May 1835, the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, proclaimed British sovereignty up to the Kei.<sup>9)</sup>

In fact, this annexation was soon rescinded. The Government in Britain took a different view of the requisites for the smooth running of the relations between whites and Africans in South Africa to that of the local officials. It therefore required that the land that had just been annexed, between the Kei and the Keiskamma rivers, be handed back to the Xhosa chiefs, with whom treaties were to be made. Nevertheless, the retreat was temporary, and the concept of a border on the Kei permanent. Following the next Frontier war - that known as the War of the Axe some dozen years later - the area up to the Kei was once more annexed and, after a while as an independently administered territory,<sup>10)</sup> became an integral part of the Cape Colony. However, large parts of it remained African reserves, which in the following century became the Ciskei 'homeland'. What is rather more remarkable is that white settlement, as distinct from annexation, never encroached to any large extent beyond the Kei. It was not for lack of opportunity. Even before the country was annexed the Government in Cape Town was little loath to arrange matters to the east of the Kei as it saw fit. It was particularly active after the great millenarian outburst among the Xhosa in 1857, known as the Cattle Killing, when the Xhosa destroyed over 150,000 head of cattle and most of their grain in the hope that this would bring them much wealth, rejuvenate the old, bring the dead back to life and drive the whites into the sea in a great wind.

When this hope failed and the Xhosa were in great distress - some twenty thousand people are estimated to have died, and half as many again moved into the Cape Colony as vagabonds and farm labourers - the whites believed, clearly erroneously, that the whole business had been a plot stir up the tribes to attack the Colony.<sup>11)</sup> They therefore ordered that those they held responsible, primarily the Gcaleka followers of Sarili, should be expelled from their old homes and driven further west over the Mbashe river, an injunction which the Gcaleka were in no state to resist. What is remarkable is that the land from which they were expelled was not parcelled up for European farms, but rather was occupied by Thembu, including the chief Matanzima, great-grandfather of the present Prime Minister of the Transkei, with his followers,<sup>12)</sup> by various groups of Mfengu and, after a few years, even in part by the Gcaleka under Sarili again. To some extent this remarkable aberration in the general course of South African history stemmed from the general unsettledness of the area. Over the course of years, moreover, Sarili and the Gcaleka regained some of their old strength and became

<sup>9)</sup> For analysis of these events, see Galbraith, J. S., 1963, *Reluctant Empire; British Policy on the South African Frontier*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 98-151.

<sup>10)</sup> *ibid.*, 210-42.

<sup>11)</sup> This whole episode badly needs a full analysis. For the best short description, see Wilson, M., Co-operation and Conflict: The Eastern Cape Frontier, in Wilson, M. and L. M. Thompson (eds.), 1968, *Oxford History of South Africa*, Oxford, 256-60.

<sup>12)</sup> Saunders, C. C., 1972, *The Annexation of the Transkeian Territories*. Unpubl. D. Phil. Thesis. Oxford. I am grateful to Dr. Saunders for allowing me to consult this work.

too formidable to be antagonised. On the other hand, it is clear that the land shortage in several parts of the Ciskei was already recognised, so that this newly empty land was used as an, albeit temporary, safety valve.<sup>13)</sup> At all events, the Kei river remained the border, even after the land immediately to the east was finally annexed to the Cape in 1858.

## THE EASTERN BOUNDARY

The evolution of the eastern border of the Transkei is, if anything, an even more complicated process, although there was not the same long attrition of wars along the Umzimkulu as there was on and to the west of the Kei. To a certain extent, the boundary on the Umzimkulu was fixed by the power of the Zulu armies of Shaka and Dingane in the 1820s and 30s. They had been able, or prepared, to sweep through the valleys and hills as far south as that river, but had not established any sort of control, or even succeeded in breaking up the tribes to the south of it. When the Voortrekkers arrived in Natal in 1838 and, after the Battle of Blood River, were able to set up the short lived Boer Republic there, they inherited this.

There were many Africans living in what is now Natal, and many more were to filter back from places of refuge in Zululand proper or in the Transkei, but there were very few well established and organised groups, except for the Hlangweni who straddled the upper reaches of the Umzimkulu. In contrast, to the south of that river, the Mpondo, the Xesibe and the Bhaca were - relatively - formidable groups, too powerful for Boer rule to be established over them without great difficulty. This was shown in particular in December 1840, when the Boers were impelled to send a full-scale commando against the Bhaca, under Ncapayi, mainly because they had become involved in the long-running quarrel between that tribe and the Hlangweni.<sup>14)</sup> Because it was this raid which was one of the immediate precipitants of the British takeover of Natal eighteen months later, the southern boundary of Natal became fixed so that it included none of the larger more powerful tribes of what was to be the Transkei.

This position was formalised in 1844 when the British Government made a treaty with Faku, the chief of the Mpondo, recognising him in possession of all the land between the Umzimkulu and the Umtata Rivers and between the Drakensberg and the sea, in return for assurances that he would behave as a friendly neighbour, would restore stolen cattle and would not countenance warlike moves against the British.<sup>15)</sup> The treaty formed part of a concerted policy initiated under Sir George Napier, the Cape Governor, to safeguard the frontiers of the British possessions by means of treaties with and support for select independent chiefs. Thus, at about the same time, treaties were signed with Adam Kok III of

<sup>13)</sup> *ibid.* Ch. III, *passim*. For an opposite point of view, see Theal, G. Mc. C., 1910, *History of South Africa since September, 1795*, 2nd. ed. London, 44-60.

<sup>14)</sup> On the commando against Ncapayi, see *South African Archival Records, Natal, I*, p. 312, 368-72, 388-90, and Welsh, D., 1971, *The Roots of Segregation*. Cape Town, 8-10. The quarrel between the Bhaca and the Hlangweni lasted on into the 1890s; see Ross, R., 1975, The Griqua in the Politics of the Eastern Transkei, in Saunders, C. C. and R. Derricourt (eds.), *Beyond the Cape Frontier; Studies in the History of the Transkei and Ciskei*. Cape Town, 130-1; and van Onselen, Ch., 1972, Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa, 1896-7, *Journal of African History*, 13, p. 479.

<sup>15)</sup> This treaty is printed in Brownlee, Fr., 1923, *The Transkeian Native Territories: Historical Records*, Lovedale, 92-5.

the Philippolis Griquas, with Moshoeshoe of the Sotho and, rather earlier, with a number of Xhosa and Thembu chiefs on the Eastern Frontier. Like them, the treaty with Faku did not serve its purpose and led to more trouble than it resolved, even though the British were never drawn to make war on the Mpondo. Rather problems were caused by the fact that, as was recognised in 1844, Faku did not exercise authority over anything like the extent of territory for which the treaty made him responsible.

Thus, after a series of raids on Natal from the roots of the mountains, the area known as Nomansland, carried out, apparently, by San (bushmen) in association with the Bhaca and a group of so-called 'coloured' frontiersmen under Hans Locherenberg,<sup>16)</sup> Faku ceded the area between the Umtamvuna and the Umzimkulu rivers, at the coastal end of the border with Natal.<sup>17)</sup> He also expressed a wish to be rid of the troubled area under the mountains. As it happens, neither of these offers were fully taken up by Natal. Sir Harry Smith, by now British High Commissioner in South Africa, refused to confirm the annexation and the matter went into abeyance for more than a decade, as Natal's colonists were not yet suffering from land shortage - even in their own eyes - and the raids ceased, for a while, for reasons completely unconnected with the Mpondo. But the cession remained on the file and would be resuscitated.

## GRIQUALAND EAST

However, it was not until the 1860s that Natal would again take a great interest in events beyond its southern border. By then the situation had been complicated by immigration into the northern part of the Transkei, that area known as Nomansland and consisting of the modern districts of Umzimkulu, Mount Currie, Matatiele, Mout Fletcher and Maclear. This wide sward of country along the foothills of the Drakensberg had always been largely unoccupied and suffered from Zulu and other raiders during the Mfecane some thirty-five years previously.<sup>18)</sup> Although superficially attractive, at least to European eyes - it is green, rolling well-watered country - the nature of its vegetation allows grazing for only a limited portion of the year, so that pressure on land elsewhere had to be acute before African settlement on any major scale would occur. By 1860 this was beginning to be the case. In 1858, Sekhonyana, alias Nehemiah Moshoeshoe, one of the eldest sons of the great Sotho king, moved down from southern Lesotho to, roughly, Matatiele, with a few followers. His aim was, apparently, to carve out a semi-independent chiefdom for himself in Nomansland, as he was excluded by the accident of his birth - his mother was only Moshoeshoe's third wife - from high office in his father's kingdom.<sup>19)</sup>

<sup>16)</sup> On this whole episode, see Wright, J. B., 1971, *Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg, 1840-1870*. Pietermaritzburg, 114-32.

<sup>17)</sup> *ibid.* and Le Cordeur, B., 1965, The Relations between the Cape and Natal, 1846-1879, *Archives Year Book for South African History*, I, 70-1; and Cragg, D. G. L., 1959, *The Relations of the Amapondo and the Colonial Authorities, 1830-1886*, Unpubl. D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford, 193-223.

<sup>18)</sup> It is very difficult to be certain what the pre-Mfecane situation in the area actually was, but see Wilson, M., 1959, The Early History of the Transkei and Ciskei, *African Studies*, 18.

<sup>19)</sup> On Sekhonyana, see his own, A Little Light from Basutoland, 1880, *Cape Monthly Magazine*, II, 3rd. Series. For the general situation in Lesotho, see the two recent biographies of Moshoeshoe, Sanders, P. B., 1975, *Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho*, London; and Thompson, L. M., 1975, *Survival in Two Worlds*. Oxford.

Sekhonyana's occupation of Matatiele is of importance primarily as the first major indication that Sotho and other tribesmen north and west of the Drakensberg would find relief for their overcrowding in Nomansland. It did not last long, however. When, in 1865, war between Lesotho and the Orange Free State deprived him of the unspoken but assured backing of the mountain chiefs of southern Lesotho, he was sent scuttling back over the berg by the most important immigrants to Nomansland, the Griquas, from whom the area takes its modern name of Griqualand East. Since they were largely responsible for the patchwork pattern of land holding in the northern Transkei, it is worth examining the fairly brief period of their rule in some detail.<sup>20</sup>) Descendants of every component part of South Africa's population (and hence, in modern terminology, so-called 'coloured'), they had come during the second quarter of the nineteenth century to control, and to be substantial farmers in a wide area of what is now the southern Orange Free State. Viewing land in very much the same way as the Boers, they parcelled it out in great farms, averaging well over a thousand hectares each, and treated it as private property. By the end of the 1850s, they had lost so much of this land through a combination of improvident selling and swindling by the British and Boer governments that their position was no longer tenable, and they had to seek another place to live and to rebuild their rapidly disintegrating community. Because he believed that the British were in their debt, incurred in the process leading to establishment of the Orange Free State in 1854 and because he thought they would be a stabilising influence in a turbulent region, the Governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey at this stage, allowed them to trek over the mountains and found a new Captaincy centred on what was to become Kokstad, the Griqua Capital named after their Captain, Adam Kok III.<sup>21</sup>) Admittedly, it is hard to see how Sir George could have stopped them after they had decided to move and the Griquas themselves attempted always to minimise the role the British had played to the creation of their new state.

The Griqua settlement in Nomansland had, among its other results, the effect of limiting the southward advance of Natal. Natalians had long been certain that they came into possession of much of the area, which had indeed been ceded to them by Faku. During the early 1860s there were in fact long negotiations between the Cape, Natal and the Griquas as to the precise location of that boundary. Essentially the Cape Government agreed that they should take possession of the entire area west of the Umzimkulu and north of the Mpondo and the Xesibe settlements. Natal's only advance was thus along the coast, with the annexation of Alfred district, consisting of the area east of the Umtamvuna, in 1866.<sup>22</sup>) By this stage the area was largely inhabited by clans subject to the Mpondo, but, despite his anger at the situation, the treaty which Faku has signed a decade and a half earlier meant that he could not effectively resist its take-over, and the districts has remained part of Natal ever since.

During the twelve years of their independence in Griqualand East, the Griquas largely determined the pattern of land settlement in the area, that is to say in the northern Transkei. That pattern still exists, although all the Griquas' farms bar half a dozen or so have been sold out of the community in the century since

<sup>20</sup>) For more information on the Griquas, see Ross, R., 1976, *Adam Kok's Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa*. Cambridge.

<sup>21</sup>) This event is analysed in Ross, R., 1976, chapter 7 and, from a different point of view, in Le Cordeur, 1965, *ibid*, 94-102.

<sup>22</sup>) Le Cordeur, 1965, *ibid*, 103-4.



the take-over of the area by the British in 1874. Particularly in the 1880s and 1890s those whites who were in the area and who had access to the credit which was generally denied to the former subjects of Adam Kok bought up the great majority of Griqua farms. Thus, to give one example, the estate of G. C. Brisley, a leading white trader who had been secretary of the Griqua Government, was estimated in 1897 to be worth £20.000, all in land.<sup>23)</sup> This was a substantial amount at a time of agricultural depression, following the great Rinderpest epidemic.

The areas where the Griquas farmed themselves and which, in consequence, have subsequently become 'white', were mainly in the area round Kokstad itself, west to around Matatiele, north to the foot of the mountains and in a few areas to the east, in the direction of Riet Vlei, that is to say over the whole of present Mount Currie district and in the eastern half of Matatiele, along the Umzimvubu river. It was an area of good, if sour, farming land - and anyway, to a people who were used to turgid deserts of the Orange Free State it must have looked like the land of milk and honey - and it was scarcely settled at the time by African tribesmen. This was in contrast to the area further east, along the Umzimkulu river, which already contained considerable numbers of, in particular, Hlangweni.

The consequence was that the Griquas had to deal with a resident African population, which they did in two major ways, at least as regards land. First, somewhat to the chagrin of many of the Griqua burghers, the Griqua government refused to hand out the more thickly populated areas, but left them as 'reserves', merely imposing a hut tax and beginning, in a rather more gentle way than British officials elsewhere in the Transkei, the elimination of witchcraft.<sup>24)</sup> Secondly, many Griquas operated in a similar way to white settlers in contemporaneous Natal and elsewhere by extracting rent from Africans living on their farms. In many cases, what was officially Griqua - and later white - land has never actually been farmed by anyone other than Africans. This was particularly the case in Umzimkulu district, where, in addition, a number of Griqua farms were later purchased by Africans, acting alone or in clan groups.<sup>25)</sup> Thus it was that a large part of Umzimkulu district has never been farmed under white management, so that, in recent decades, it has proved relatively easy to consolidate the reserves into a single block. On the other hand, the former Griqua farms have remained in white hands, from which, despite Matanzima's protests, it has been considered inexpedient to remove them, which accounts for the separation of the Umzimkulu areas from the main block of the Transkei.

The settlement of the area to the west of Griqualand occurred in two separate stages. The first was in the late 1860s, and formed part of the process by which matters pertaining to the British annexation of Basutoland in 1869, the British High Commissioner, Sir Philip Wodehouse, was confronted by the problem of

<sup>23)</sup> Register of Wills, Cape Archives.

<sup>24)</sup> Evidence of Brisley, G. C., 1883, *Report of the Commission on Native Laws and Customs*, Cape Parliamentary Paper, G-4, p. 511.

<sup>25)</sup> On this process, see Bundy, C., 1972, *The Emergence and Decline of a South African peasantry. African Affairs*. Those buying land included many of the remarkable group known as the Abalondolize, men without other tribal affiliation who gathered under Donald Strachan, a long established trader at the Umzimkulu drift who was, at one time or another, virtually an African chief, a Griqua magistrate, a Cape Government Commissioner and a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly.

overcrowding in various parts of southern Basutoland and, above all, in the Witteberg Reserve, in what is now Herschel district in the North-East part of the Cape Colony. He therefore managed to secure Griqua approval for the removal of many tribesmen into western Nomansland, into what is now Mount Fletcher and Matatiele districts. The most important of the groups concerned were the Tlhokwa under Lehana, the son of Moshoeshoe's old enemy, Sekonyela, Hlubi under Zibi, and Sotho under Lebenya and Makwai, whose old fortress-capital Maboloka, had been captured by the Free State commandos in 1867.<sup>26)</sup> All of them were thus refugees even before the move across the Drakensberg, as the Hlubi were originally from Natal while the Tlhokwa had lived further north, on the upper reaches of the Caledon River. It is of interest that these groups became, in time, the most consistently successful peasant farmers in the Transkei until overpopulation and the distance of their new homes from the major transport routes made this style of life impossible in the early years of the present century. The slackening of the power of the chiefs which these successive removals had produced and the greater atrophy of tribal institutions which, at least in Mount Fletcher could scarcely be hallowed with great ancestral significance, meant that these communities were more open to the more familial based way of life of the peasant and, later, to the messianic movements of the 1920s.<sup>27)</sup>

## THE NORTH-EAST

This did not develop until after 1880, however, as Wodehouse's settlements were far from permanent. The area was brought under Cape rule in 1873 and formally annexed in 1879, along with the Mpondomise and Bhaca districts, which had never been under Griqua control, unlike the areas settled by Wodehouse over which the Grikwas had a very loose claim. Following the annexation, rebellion broke out throughout the northern Transkei, in part in connection with the Gun war in Basutoland.<sup>28)</sup> Not all the chiefs joined the uprising. Almost to a man the Sotho rose, joining their compatriots across the Drakensberg. Many Hlubi, Mpondomise and Tlhokwa also took up arms. In the eyes of the colonial government they had, by this action, forfeited their right to land. After the rebellion was defeated, the Sotho of Matatiele were therefore forced back north of the mountains and the location of the Sotho under Lebenya was broken up, as many of his followers had joined the revolt, if only under compulsion.<sup>29)</sup> In 1883, therefore, a commission was set up by the Cape Government to allot land to those whose recent conduct had led to their 'deserving' it, and generally to confirm the pattern of land settlement throughout the northern Transkei.

<sup>26)</sup> Theal, G. Mc. G., 1910, *History of South Africa* . . , vol. 5, p. 68; J. M. Orpen's Memoranda, 1873, *Report of the Select Commission on Native Affairs*, Cape Parliamentary Papers, S. C. 12, 4-12. On Makwai, see Atmore, A. E., *The Passing of Sotho Independence, 1865-70*, in Thompson, L. M. (ed.) 1969, *African Societies in Southern Africa*. London, p. 285.

<sup>27)</sup> Bundy, C., 1972, *Emergence and Decline* . . ; and Edgar, B., 1976, *Garveyism in Africa: Dr. Wellington and the 'American Movement' in the Transkei, 1925-40*, *Collected Seminar Papers No. 20*, Univ. of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, 100-10.

<sup>28)</sup> In this see the marvellously evocative chapter 7 of de Kiewiet, C. W., 1937, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa: A Study in Politics and Economics*. Cambridge. See also the rather more prosaic but detailed narrative of Saunders, C. C., 1972, *Annexation* . . , chapter 8.

<sup>29)</sup> Saunders, C. C. 1972, chapter 9.

The Vacant Lands Commission, as this body was known, did not introduce very great changes in the overall distribution of land between black and white, however. The Sotho under Makwai and Lebenya were replaced by others under George and Tsita Moshoeshoe, who had remained 'loyal' - as the British, if not the Sotho, saw it - during the Gun war. One or two Mfengu clans moved up from the Ciskei into the vacated areas, and others came from Maclear district. Part of Lehana's location in western Mount Fletcher was to be made available for European colonisation, but, in fact, never was, as the area filled up with Tlhokwa and Hlubi kraals.<sup>30)</sup> In fact it may be doubted if very many of tribesmen actually ever moved. Chiefs, being conspicuous, might be forced to leave but, one suspects, their followers were more prepared to change chiefs than lands. South African tribal loyalties were never as fixed as the British liked to think and rebellious tribesmen would often persuade the commissioners, whose knowledge of the groups was perforce limited to the chiefs and their immediate entourage, that they were, and always had been, loyal subjects of a loyal chief.

The one concrete decision of the Vacant Lands Commission was the confirmation of Maclear as European land, a confirmation which has remained despite Matanzima's recent protests. This area consists of high rolling land, very similar to most of the rest of the northern marches of the Transkei. However, it was not settled by Africans during the 1860s and 1870s, except for a few small groups of Mfengu beginning the short cycle of peasant prosperity and degradation. Rather, at this stage, it contained a scattering of so-called 'coloureds', descendants of slaves and of Khoikhoi from the eastern frontier of the Cape. There were also a number of Griquas who had moved there as individuals, although in 1869 Adam Kok was forced to relinquish his rather half-hearted attempt to impose his suzerainty over the area. Rather, these people formed a short-lived and rather amorphous *Raad* of Freemansland, as they called their 'area, under a certain Esau du Plooy, but they seem to have welcomed the assertion of British sovereignty throughout the northern Transkei.<sup>31)</sup> Those who had been living under du Plooy were confirmed in their land, some of which their descendants still possess, and certain areas were reserved for Mfengu, although the Commission put pressure on them to move into Mount Fletcher and other Transkeian districts. For the rest, the district came into white hands, although there were indeed a number of white farms already there before 1880. As it was, the area was quickly filled up, as the South African tradition of vast holdings meant that even a relatively large territory could satisfy only a limited number of farmers.

One of the further consequences of the rebellion was the removal of what is now Elliot district in northern Thembuland from African to white control. This area, which adjoins Maclear on the west, was occupied by a variety of small groups who were, in the main, subject to the Thembu paramount, Gangeliswe, but not closely under his control. Many of them were, indeed, moderately recent Xhosa immigrants from the Ciskei. During the rebellion, the Thembu maintained their traditional policy of alliance with the British - throughout the nineteenth century, it was the Xhosa who bore the brunt of the fighting with the colonists, as other tribal clusters less immediately threatened, generally saw the value of remaining on good terms with the British and, consequently, on their land.

<sup>30)</sup> *ibid.*, see also Theal, G. Mc. G., 1910, *History* . . . , 5, 200-1, and *Report of the Griqualand East Land Commission*, 1884, Cape Parliamentary Paper, G2.

<sup>31)</sup> See Memorandum of Orpen, 1873, Cape Parliamentary Paper, S. C. 12, p. 13; and Griffiths, C. D., J. Ayliff, and J. M. Grant to Colonial Secretary, 18 May, in *ibid.*, p. 125.

However, some of the smaller tribes took up arms, especially in the north of Thembuland. The revolt was quickly put down, the rebellious tribesmen driven from their land, in the subsequent arrangement, the 'white' district of Xalanga, later Elliot. There had, indeed, been a certain amount of European occupation in the area since the foundation in 1861 of what, with the normal white inability to pronounce 'clicks', was known as the Slang River settlement. This arrangement marked the final delineation of the northern boundary of African land in the Transkei.<sup>32)</sup>

## THE COAST

So far this paper has dealt with the processes whereby the landward boundaries of the Transkei were defined. The fourth boundary, on the Indian ocean, was, for fairly obvious reasons, far less subject to incursions. Only one small stretch of the coast between the Kei and the Umzimhlava passed out of African hands. This was at the mouth of the Umzimvubu river, which is known as Port St. John's and constitutes the only feasible harbour on what is correctly termed by sailors the Wild Coast. During the 1870s, it remained a free port, and was much used by illicit traders running guns and ammunition into the Transkei and the South African interior, to the evident chagrin of white governments, whether in the Cape, Natal or the Boer republics. In addition, it was feared by men who had only looked at a map of the area and had failed to appreciate the severity of the routes over the southern Drakensberg, that the port would form the entrepôt for the Diamond Fields around Kimberley, which opened up in 1868 and very quickly became the centre of the South African economy. In his more extravagant moments President Brand even talked of extending the Orange Free State through Basutoland and the Transkei to gain an outlet to the sea at St. John's.<sup>33)</sup> Although the Cape had long been concerned to make sure no such eventuality occurred, and to suppress the arms trade, it was only in 1879 that they were able to gain the secession of the west bank of the river, by working on the split within the Mpondo state at the time. To make that cession effective, the British also unilaterally proclaimed their sovereignty over the east bank. A fort and a customs post was then set up, and the port, now anaesthetized, quickly lost such commercial importance as it once possessed, although a few coasters continued to put in there. During this century is has become largely a holiday resort for whites, and it has recently been handed over to the Transkeian government, who plan to develop it again as an international harbour.

Given the nature of this paper, it has stressed the way in which areas of land were taken away from African control during the later nineteenth century. It should, however, not be overlooked that this process was far less complete in the Transkei than anywhere else in South Africa. That is why the Transkei consists of only two blocks, as opposed to the two dozen portions into which KwaZulu is divided.

And this is the reason why the Transkei has always been governed as a single unit, which has had a governing council since the 1920s, and thus could be the first of the 'homelands' to become 'independent'.

<sup>32)</sup> Theal, G. Mc. C., 1910, 5, 177-9, and *Report and Proceedings of the Tembuland Commission*, 1883, G66.

<sup>33)</sup> de Kiewiet, C. W., 1929, *British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics, 1848-1872*. London, 166-7; Campell, W. B., 1959, *The South African Frontier, 1865-1885: A Study in Expansion*, *Archives Year Book for South Africa*, 2, 146-50; and Le Cordeur, 1965, *ibid*, p. 136, 213-7.