

'To live on the face of the earth':

Fodo kaNombewu and the politics of southern KwaZulu-Natal

by Milner Snell

Fodo kaNombewu was the leader of a section of the Nhlanguwini chiefdom in southern KwaZulu-Natal from the 1820s to the 1860s.¹ In his role as *inkosi* he had to navigate the complex political dynamics of south-east Africa during a time of far-reaching and rapid social and economic change. Through judicious, but often ambiguous, relationships with the Zulu, white traders at Port Natal and trekkers, he was able in the 1830s and early 1840s to build a chiefdom, weakened by conflict and migrations, into the most influential polity in the middle reaches of the Mkhomazi and Mzimkhulu rivers. An armed confrontation, however, with the newly established British administration in Natal in 1847 divided and greatly weakened the chiefdom. In an attempt to distance himself from officials in Pietermaritzburg, Fodo moved beyond the boundary of the Colony and settled in Nomansland. Here, he faced internal challenges to his authority and destructive conflicts with the Bhaca. He attempted to reinforce his position by appealing, with limited success, for assistance from the Natal colonial government. It was only by becoming an ally with the Griqua in 1863 that Fodo was able to ensure some stability for the chiefdom before his death.

From the Thukela to the Mzimvubu: Fodo's childhood and youth

At the time of Fodo's birth in the early 1800s, the Nhlanguwini chiefdom, divided between Nombewu kaGaza and Baleni kaNongcama, inhabited the middle reaches of the Thukela River, above its confluence with the Mzinyathi. In the late 1810s and early 1820s the chiefdom was caught up in the increasing political conflict developing in the region. In the early 1800s the Ndwandwe, who had been the dominant power north of the Thukela for almost seventy years, was broken up by the emerging Zulu kingdom under Shaka kaSenzangakhona. By the late 1810s, the Zulu dominated the area between the Thukela and Mkhuze rivers. Shaka extended Zulu rule south of the Thukela by setting up

or recognising semi-autonomous proxy chiefdoms, including Zihlandlo kaGcwabe of the Mkhize.²

The pressure from the Zulu and Mkhize resulted in groups living in the Thukela region moving southwards. The process was complex and involved numerous chiefdoms but can be simplified into two phases involving two major migrations. The Thembu and the Chunu, two sizeable chiefdoms that inhabited the upper reaches of the Thukela, initially moved a short distance away from the conflict in the 1815 to 1817 period.³ The Thembu crossed the Thukela and the Chunu moved to the upper Mvoti. In about 1822, the Chunu under Macingwane and Ngoza's Thembu migrated over a much greater distance towards the Mzimkhulu River. Shortly after the migrations of the Chunu and Thembu, the Nhlanguwini and the Memela, under Mdingi, probably facing increasing pressure from Mkhize raids, also moved south.⁴ Mahaya kaNongqabana informed James Stuart in 1905 that 'it was Nombewu, Baleni, and Mdingi *who were the first to be an imfacane*, i.e. an *impi* that goes along with its women and children in a fighting manner, attacking here and there and passing on.'⁵ According to Mqayikana kaYenge, another of Stuart's informants, 'these men combined together when fleeing' and fought their way through the Chunu, Thembu and Bhaca chiefdoms.⁶ Theophilus Shepstone referred to the alliance between the Nhlanguwini and Memela as a 'confederacy'.⁷ The alliance was probably not very strong but it did enable the fleeing chiefdoms to defeat the Bhaca under Madikane on the uLovu River.

Eventually the Nhlanguwini crossed the Mzimkhulu River and settled on the southern bank of the Mzimvubu River near Ntabankulu. This was on the periphery of the Mpondo paramountcy and a number of groups who had migrated into the area from KwaZulu-Natal were competing for dominance. These included the Nhlanguwini's ally the Memela and the Bhaca under Madikane. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Madikane had gathered the Zelemu-Wushe and remnants of numerous other chiefdoms around him and amalgamated

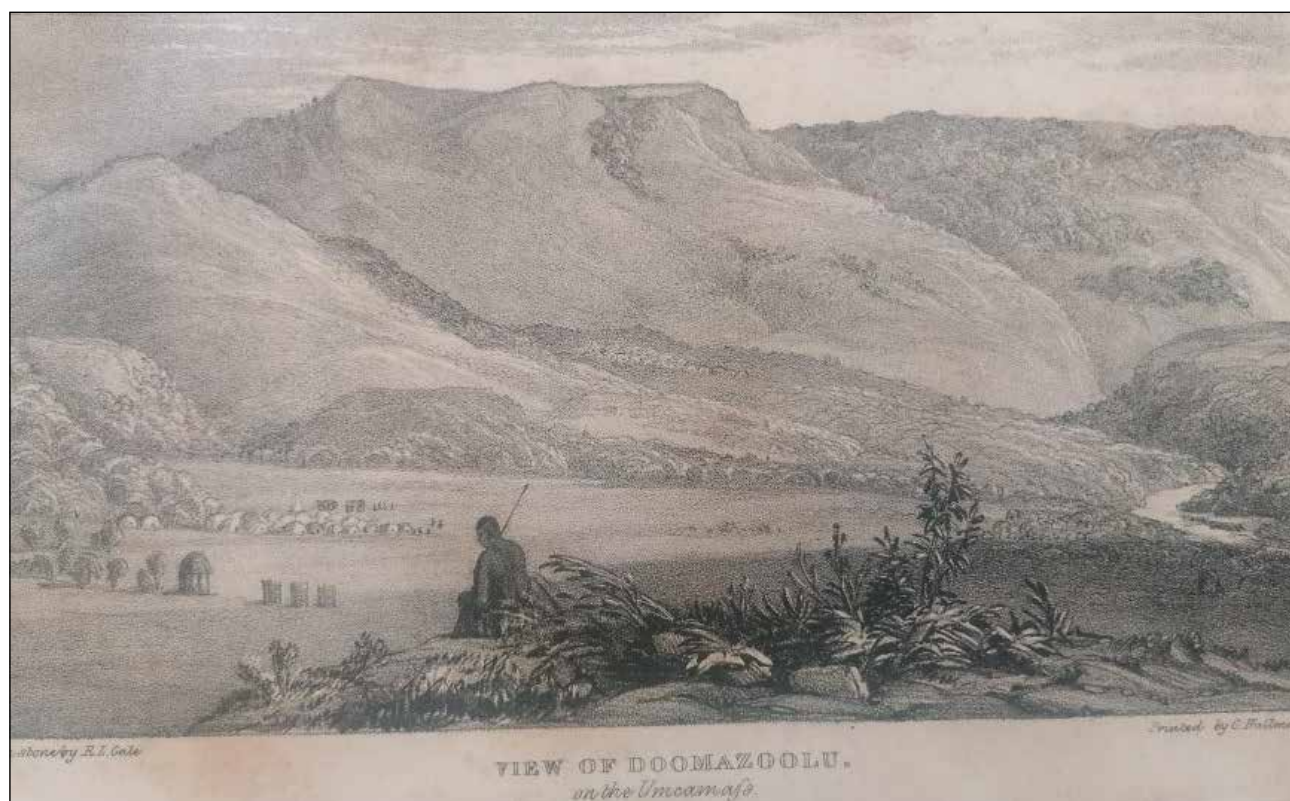
them into a new cultural and political group, which would become known as the Bhaca. After their conflict with the Nhangwini and Memela on the uLovu River, the Bhaca had themselves moved southwards, finally settling in what is now the Mount Frere district. In about 1820, Madikane's heir, Sonyangwe, was killed in a conflict with Mdingi's Memela. There are numerous accounts, often contradictory, about the role of the Nhangwini in the attack. Mqayikana insisted that the attack was carried out by the Memela who implicated the Nhangwini by calling 'to one another by names of people of Nombewu's tribe' and 'by shouting out some such words as *Wentani?* (or *Wenzani?*) in order to give the impression that the people attacking were of Nombewu's tribe; whereas they were Mdingi's.'⁸ Madzikane was killed in 1824 and the leadership of the chieftdom fell upon his son Ncaphayi who acted as regent for Mdutyana. Ncaphayi held both Mdingi and Nombewu responsible for the killing of Sonyangwe and attacked them to avenge his brother's death. Initially the Memela and Nhangwini, supported by a group of Hlubi, managed to repulse the Bhaca. However, the Bhaca counter-attacked in about 1827 and on this occasion defeated the Memela and Nhangwini, killing Nombewu in the process.

'To eat their *amabele* but not to kill them': re-establishing the chieftdom in Natal

Fodo became *inkosi* on the death of his father in about 1827. We do not know how old he was at the time, but he must have been quite young as there are references in one of his praise poems to him being a 'small he-goat' who was 'still an amateur in sexual life.'⁹ In accounts left of him, he is described as restless and assertive. In the same praise poem, it is mentioned that he 'habitually crosses flooded rivers', including 'the river that was used by Shaka for bathing.'¹⁰ Mqayikana's description of Fodo emphasised his forceful personality:

*He was left-handed; he held assegais and all else in the left. He was quite short, and bewhiskered, and he wore a plume in the middle of his forehead; he had very thin arms about the wrist. He was very fond of making war. He always wanted to fight: he was always talking of war with his men.*¹¹

To put distance between themselves and the Bhaca, Fodo and his adherents moved north in 1828, settling 'where the Ifafa enters the Mkomazi'.¹² The area was on the periphery of the Zulu sphere of interest, which gave the Nhangwini a degree of independence. In rugged and broken, but well-watered and fertile, country Fodo erected his Dumezulu homestead. The missionary



Distant view of Doomazoolu [Dumezulu] (from Allen Gardiner, Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country, 1836)

Allen Gardiner visited Dumezulu ('where the heavens thunder') in 1835 and recorded:

The villages of the Inthlangwain, which had been for some time visible, could only be approached by a wagon, on account of the ruggedness of the ground, by a very circuitous route; that belonging to Foortu, the ruling chief, and at which we arrived soon after noon, is situated on the skirt of the narrow valley at the foot of the mountain; the remainder are generally on higher grounds, and have a pretty effect backed by the dark precipices beyond. In this favoured spot vegetation is prolific; some large trees occupy the ravines, both wood and water are convenient, and corn is produced in abundance.¹³

Gardiner goes on to write that the death of Nombewu

obliged them to seek their present asylum, which, after enduring many hardships, several of their people dying from actual starvation, they effected. They describe themselves as having been formerly a powerful nation, the only remains of which at present consist of twenty-five villages, – ten here, ten more on this side of the Umgani, and five on the other, all under the control of Foortu, and may probably amount to between 7,000 and 8,000 souls.¹⁴

In the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Ntlangwini were 'formerly a powerful nation' that had been greatly weakened by their conflict with the Bhaca and their migration from the Mzimvubu back to what would become Natal. Yet, by the mid-1840s they were the dominant chiefdom in the middle reaches of the Mkhomazi and Mzimkhulu. How did this change take place in just over a decade? Fodo needed to ensure that there was economic and social stability so that the chiefdom could grow and prosper. This required access to land in order to erect homesteads, establish gardens and build up cattle herds. To achieve this, Fodo was careful to forge a good relationship with the leader of the most powerful polity in the region and paid tribute to Dingane by providing '*genet skins, blue-monkey skins, and crane feathers*', which were used by the Zulu army.¹⁵ Hunting, as Jeff Guy shows, became increasingly important, especially as the Ntlangwini inhabited the more mountainous areas of Natal, in the chiefdom's economy and was the basis of their interactions with surrounding groups.¹⁶

After 'frequent' visits to Dingane,¹⁷ the king made Fodo responsible for persuading the people of southern Natal still in hiding to resettle and work the land in order to provide food for the Zulu army on their return from long-distance campaigns.¹⁸ According to Mqayikana, 'Fodo received instructions from Dingana to encourage the re-populating of Natal. He was directed

to assign land to those who came back to live here and to tell them to start *cultivating* again. Fodo accordingly gave out the land.'¹⁹ He went on to say:

Fodo was told to encourage agriculture in Natal because Dingana had it in mind to attack the Pondos as Tshaka had done and get cattle there. What Dingana wanted to provide against was this. When his armies were on their return from attacking the Pondos he did not want them to return in a starving state, hence Fodo was to encourage planting of crops and to caution the people not to be afraid if they saw the Zulu army, for all the army wanted was to eat their *amabele* but not to kill them. Dingana said Tshaka's *impis* had come back in a famished state owing to Tshaka having cleared the population out of Natal.²⁰

Guy points out that this was 'an attempt to answer the overwhelming challenge that confronted African state structures in the region – control versus distance.'²¹

Recognising proxy chiefdoms that administered an area on their behalf was a strategy used by the Zulu leaders from the 1810s. There were great benefits for those chiefdoms that fulfilled this role; Fodo and the Ntlangwini now controlled access to land in the inland region on the southern periphery of the kingdom and could re-establish the homestead economy. The evidence indicates that Fodo allocated land on behalf of the Zulu from around what is now Pietermaritzburg and inland across the Mkhomazi and on to the Mzimkhulu. Fodo gave land to Nobanda (an *inkosi* of the Mpumuza and an off-shoot of the Zondi) at what would later become the Zwartkop location.²² The Zondi claimed distant kinship to the Dlamini, although they had separated at some point.²³ The Fuze under Madlenyana were assigned land by Fodo at Elandskop.²⁴

At some point Fodo moved his section of the Ntlangwini chiefdom from the mid-Mkhomazi to the Mzimkhulu River and settled at Mbekabantu in what is now the Highflats area. The exact date of the move is unknown, but it was probably in about 1836 or 1837. Mqayikana recalled that when they arrived at the Mzimkhulu the first harvest was destroyed by locusts. Some people returned to their old garden sites at the Mkhomazi for food and seed. The seed was planted 'and when those *amabele* were *red* the *impi* of *Wohlo* and of *Mbuyazi* went against the Zulu.'²⁵ This referred to cattle raids made by groups led by Port Natal traders in March and April of 1838, which would place the move to Mbekabantu a year or two before that date. Mqayikana described the move as follows:

Whilst living there, Baleni, father of Sidoyi and 'brother' of Fodo, came to Fodo to ask for land to live

on, for Fodo had been appointed by Dingane to *assign land to the people*. Upon this Fodo said to his tribe that he would give the district he was then living on to his brother Baleni and go and live at the Mzimkulu, where stated. It was upon this that all of us who belonged to Fodo left to live at the Mzimkulu ... His wish was to occupy the very boundary of the Zulu kingdom, as by so doing he would better obey the king's instructions.²⁶

Dingane made it clear that Fodo was 'not to cross the Umzimkulu and occupy land there, for the land south of the river belonged to Faku, the Pondo king. Fodo was directed to regard the Mzimkulu as the most southern boundary of the Zulu kingdom.'²⁷

Fodo's move towards the Mzimkhulu was probably not simply motivated by a desire to give land to Baleni or to better carry out Dingane's instructions. By placing a trusted kinsman on the Mkhomazi and moving to the Mzimkhulu, Fodo ensured that his influence extended over the entire region. Baleni's followers were not the only members of the Dlamini clan to live in the area. The Khuze, kin to the Nhlanguwini, settled in the 1820s on the southern bank of the middle Mkhomazi River. Thus, by the late 1830s chiefdoms of the Dlamini clan dominated the inland area from the Mkhomazi to the Mzimkhulu. There is some evidence that the chiefdom was strengthened by people who did not consider themselves Nhlanguwini, and whose loyalty lay with another chief, seeking the protection of Fodo and living under his authority. Members of the Zondi clan went to *khonza* Fodo as they considered it safer to live at the Mzimkhulu where they were out of range of Zulu raids.²⁸ In 1847, there were men who were not Fodo's people, 'although they lived under him'.²⁹

'To fix them firmly in our interest': the ivory trade with Fynn and Isaacs

Despite acting as a client-chief to Dingane, Fodo also formed alliances with the white traders and hunters who had established a permanent settlement at Port Natal in 1824.³⁰ These men acted as agents for Cape merchants who wanted to obtain ivory from the chiefdoms of the region. Although small in number, the traders soon began to assert their influence. Within months of their arrival, refugees from the Zulu kingdom accepted the authority of individual traders who established homesteads and villages around the Bay. Through polygamous marriages to local women, the use of firearms and the establishment of trade agreements with local chiefdoms, the traders were soon playing a significant role in the political dynamics of the region.

In 1830, Henry Francis Fynn and Nathaniel Isaacs

entered into an agreement with Fodo to obtain ivory from the Nhlanguwini who were experts in using poison to hunt elephant. According to Gardiner, they 'acquired the method of poisoning the assegais which they use in killing the elephant and other wild animals, from a party of wandering Bushmen with whom they were occasionally associated during their residence on the Umzimvoobo'.³¹ The Nhlanguwini were often referred to by the traders as the Botwas, from the word *abathwa*, a term used for the Bushmen.³² Isaacs described the Botwas as 'people whose sole occupation is elephant hunting; they have no fixed settlement, but move as circumstances render it necessary, in search of the elephant'.³³ The description is not completely accurate. The Nhlanguwini had built permanent homesteads, although groups of men would go on extended hunting trips along four distinct routes between the Mngeni and Mzimvubu rivers.³⁴

In early June 1830, Fynn sent messengers to Fodo with presents of beads, cloth and cattle to open up discussions about a potential trading relationship.³⁵ The messengers returned with two men from the chief with a present of ivory and Fynn accompanied them to meet with Fodo at Dumezulu. Fynn only returned to Port Natal on 13 August. Isaacs recorded:

My friend Mr. Fynn returned to-day from his journey to the Botwas. He had purchased a large quantity of ivory from them, entered into a friendly alliance, and made such arrangements with them for the future as to fix them firmly in our interest. We had no cattle nor beads at this time, but they had such confidence in us that they agreed to collect all their ivory and send to us, we undertaking to pay them for it on the arrival of our vessel. They had large quantities lying scattered in various places between the Umcamas and Bloody Rivers, which they were anxious to dispose of, and we agreed to receive it all.³⁶

Dumisa kaMvenya often acted as the middleman between the Nhlanguwini and the men at Port Natal in their hunting and trading activities.³⁷ In the mid-nineteenth century Dumisa became the leader of a miscellaneous group of adherents he had gathered around him and who became known as the abakwaDumisa or the Duma. According to Bryant, he had first made contact with the Nhlanguwini while they were living at the Mzimvubu.³⁸ He often hunted elephant with a band of Bushmen roaming between Giant's Castle and Bushman's Nek.³⁹ Like Fodo, Dumisa's influence in southern Natal was a result of the ivory trade with whites at Port Natal. He was well acquainted with Fynn who attended 'social occasions at his homesteads'.⁴⁰

There was intense rivalry among traders at Port Natal to

secure ivory from African chiefdoms and the Nhangwini were drawn into the competition. In 1830, John Biddulph and James Collis arrived at the Bay after an overland journey from the Cape Colony. They were on their way to Dingane, but had heard about the Nhangwini's skill at hunting elephant and wanted to trade with them. The ever-alert Isaacs noted:

I saw their articles for barter, principally beads; and ascertained by a sort of side wind that they were in search of the Botwas, the identical people who had sent for Mr. Fynn two months before to trade with them. Mr. Fynn was at that time about to proceed to their country for that purpose; they promised to reward us for the trouble we had taken in seeking for them.⁴¹

When Isaacs later heard incorrectly that Fodo was trading with Biddulph and Collis, he 'sent messengers to demand the cattle of Fodo which we had paid him, as a contract that they should not trade with anyone without our permission.'⁴² There is a hint in Isaacs's writing that at times the traders tried to intimidate the Nhangwini into trading exclusively with them. Isaacs recorded in December 1830:

To-day we collected all our people to dance, to show the Botwas, who had arrived, our strength. Dumeser [Dumisa], the chief of that tribe, with whom we had had some traffic, was astounded at our power, not being aware of our numerous force. My people were gone to recover one of my musket party, who had refused to obey orders. They brought him back, and I reprimanded him severely. I took the musket from him, and allowed him to return whence my people had brought him.⁴³

There are no records of exactly how much ivory Fynn obtained from the Nhangwini, but it seemed a substantial amount. Isaacs recorded that the Nhangwini traded eighteen tusks for corn on 30 August and eleven on 5 September 1830.⁴⁴ In May 1831, Fynn obtained 'about a ton' of ivory from the Nhangwini 'and sent them in pursuit of more'.⁴⁵ Trade with Fynn and his cohorts ensured a steady supply of maize, tobacco, beads and cattle, all of which contributed to the economic recovery and prosperity of the chiefdom. Fynn and the other traders obtained the cattle and maize they traded with the Nhangwini as tribute from their own adherents. A local political economy centred at Port Natal and involving chiefdoms further inland was developing at this time. The trade in cattle was of particular importance and allowed the Nhangwini to build up the herds needed for food, milk, *ukulobola* and cultural and spiritual rituals vital to the health of the chiefdom.

From the early 1830s, Zulu leaders began to view the settlement at Port Natal as a threat to the kingdom.

The steady flow of deserters to the Bay undermined Dingane's position and chiefs placed pressure on him to use force to deal with the situation. The king wanted the goods, especially firearms, that the men provided and initially tried to compel the traders themselves to stop the flow of deserters, and for a while after 1835 worked with the missionary Allen Gardiner in that regard.

The locusts: interactions with the traders and trekkers

The arrival of a group of trekkers from the Cape in 1837 changed the political dynamics of the KwaZulu-Natal region. Dingane and the Zulu leaders became increasingly alarmed by the demands being made by this large, well-armed group of men. Concerned by the threat they posed, the king ordered the killing of their leader, Piet Retief, and members of his party on 7 February 1838. With the death of Retief, the traders sided with the trekkers to challenge the Zulu.

The Nhangwini found themselves in a precarious situation. Their political and economic relations with the Zulu had contributed to their recovery and prosperity. However, with the dynamics rapidly changing, they aligned themselves with the trekkers and traders. In March 1838, while Dingane's army was fighting the trekkers in the north, Fodo provided a substantial number of men for a force used by the traders at Port Natal to raid the southern portions of the Zulu kingdom.⁴⁶ The force, over 2 000 strong, consisted overwhelmingly of men who had fled the authority of the Zulu kings and were now clients of white traders and hunters.⁴⁷ Fodo provided, according to one account, 600 men.⁴⁸ Providing manpower to the traders was an important way in which Fodo ensured the influence of the chiefdom. On 13 March, John Cane and John Stubbs led the men against Zulu homesteads in the middle reaches of the Thukela. There was a disagreement, which led to a physical altercation and about fifty injuries, between the followers of John Cane and those of Henry Ogle about who should lead the Army of Natal.⁴⁹ Cane's people won the day and towards the end of March the force attacked the *imizi* belonging to *inkosi* Nombanga kaNgidli at Ntunjambili. Most of Nombanga's men of fighting age had been summoned towards eThaleni where the king's spies had informed him the trekkers would attack.⁵⁰ The traders were, thus, almost unopposed and captured 4 000 head of cattle, including royal cattle which were being pastured with Nombanga. On the return journey there was a disagreement over the distribution of the stolen cattle and Cane shot a man to quell the conflict. Although the raid was very successful,

John Laband points out that the traders were concerned about 'what retribution Dingane was likely to exact'.⁵¹

In April, the traders at Port Natal launched a second raid against the Zulu. Neither Fodo nor Fynn provided men on this occasion.⁵² Fodo had become closely associated with Fynn and there is an indication that the Nhangwini made up a portion of Fynn's adherents, the IziNkumbi (locusts).⁵³ Although the force sent out in April was larger than that of the Ntunjambili raid and many men had firearms, the traders suffered a severe defeat by a Zulu regiment near Ndondakusuka. Many of the traders and their men were killed and the Zulu force continued on to occupy Port Natal which they ransacked before leaving. There is no evidence to show why Fodo and Fynn did not provide men for this raid, but most probably they were both aware that a confrontation with the Zulu army, albeit weakened by conflict with the trekkers, was far more dangerous than an attack against unguarded homesteads on the periphery of the kingdom.

After the losses of the April campaign, the trekkers were able to consolidate their power and delivered a crushing defeat in December 1838 against the Zulu army. They then set up their own state, called the Republic of Natalia, which existed from about 1839 to 1842. The leaders of the republic attempted to control Africans living in Natal by allocating a limited number of labourers to each trekker farm and then proposed removing the remaining population to an area between the Mtamvuma and Mzimvubu rivers. The Nhangwini fell into the latter category, although the republic ended before any removals could be enforced. Fodo initially became an ally to the trekkers. The defeat of the Zulu army by the trekkers made it clear they were the new dominant military and political power in the region. The chiefdom could not move south, as it had earlier in its history, to escape the presence of the trekkers, as this would bring them into conflict with the Bhaca who were expanding their influence on the Mzimvubu River. In these circumstances Fodo attempted to ensure the prosperity and influence of the chiefdom through a beneficial, although ambiguous and potentially problematic, relationship with the trekkers.

Fodo participated with the trekkers in a raid in December 1840 into Mpondo territory to retrieve cattle allegedly stolen by the Bhaca. Shortly after becoming Bhaca regent, Ncaphayi had moved with his adherents into the domain of the Mpondo paramount Faku to whom he paid tribute. The Bhaca, and their Bushmen allies, were implicated in thefts of cattle from Natal, which eventually led to action by the trekkers. Fodo's exact involvement in the campaign is subject to debate.

Mqayikana insisted it was Fodo who 'induced the Boers to go and *attack* Ncapati'.⁵⁴ A successful campaign against the Bhaca would have ensured a blow against an old foe, loot in the form of cattle and the winning over of a new ally for the Nhangwini. Fodo, as he had done in the past, provided manpower for the campaign. His knowledge of the Mzimkhulu area and the border of the Mpondo territory aided the trekkers. The force of about 260 men, under Andries Pretorius and accompanied by Fodo's brother Nondabula, left Pietermaritzburg on 24 November and made its way westward via the present areas of Creighton and Kokstad to the Ingeli Mountains. They were accompanied by a few traders from Port Natal, including Dick King and Henry Ogle. Fodo and some of his men joined the campaign at the Ingeli and pushed on into the territory of the Mpondo towards Palmerton where Ncaphayi had his great place. The attack took place on 19 December and left 150 men, women and children dead. The trekkers took 3 000 head of cattle and 2 000 sheep and goats.⁵⁵ A number of children whose parents had allegedly been killed were brought back to Natal to serve as apprentices, opening up the trekkers to allegations of slavery.⁵⁶

On the return journey to Natal, conflict arose between the trekkers and the Nhangwini. According to King's wagon driver, Ndongeni kaXoki, the trekkers accused Fodo of stealing goats after they found a number of skins near the encampment.⁵⁷ Fodo's men began deserting, at times taking cattle with them. The trekkers handcuffed Fodo and flogged some of his men, hoping that this would deter them from deserting. Fodo managed, after three or four days of captivity, to get out of the handcuffs and escape. The raid against the Bhaca had not ended in Fodo and the Nhangwini's favour. Instead of gaining revenge against the Bhaca and augmenting the Nhangwini cattle herds, it ended with Fodo alienating potential allies.

Following the raid, there was much acrimony between the trekkers and Wesleyan missionaries on the Cape frontier. The trekkers argued that they were the victims of cattle raids from the Bhaca and only took action after Ncaphayi rejected an attempt to reach an 'amicable arrangement'.⁵⁸ They insisted that they only took as many cattle as needed to repay those people who had been robbed and that among the cattle taken from Ncaphayi some had been identified by the owners. The Wesleyan missionaries rejected this argument, insisting that the attack was 'unprovoked' and resulted in the capture of nearly half of the chiefdom's cattle 'and the slaughter of a great number of the people of the tribe'.⁵⁹

The actions of the trekkers in Natal worried British

officials in the Cape. Charles Ballard points out that they were concerned that a foreign power might take advantage of the weakness and chaos of the republic to occupy Port Natal and so threaten Britain's trade route to India.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the conflict with the Zulu had resulted in thousands of people moving from north of the Thukela into Natal contributing to competition over land with the trekkers. The raid against Ncaphayi's Bhaca, and the proposal to resettle large numbers of people around the Mzimvubu, could potentially create instability on the Cape's eastern frontier.⁶¹ A British force was sent from Mngazi in Faku's territory to Port Natal and on 4 May 1842 the Union Jack was raised over what would become known as Durban.

Defeat and division: confrontation with the colonial government

Natal was formally annexed in 1844 as a district of the Cape and so began a far-reaching political and economic transformation of the region. In 1846, Theophilus Shepstone, the 29-year-old son of a frontier missionary in the eastern Cape, was appointed diplomatic agent (later secretary for native affairs) and instructed 'to deal with the large native population' in the Colony.⁶² Shepstone spent his first decade in office focusing on asserting colonial authority by establishing locations for African occupation and enforcing indirect rule through existing chiefs.⁶³ Within months of his appointment, conflict developed between Shepstone and Fodo, when at the end of 1846 the chief launched an attack on his old enemy the Bhaca. The Bhaca regent, Ncaphayi, had been killed in 1845 in conflict with his former allies the Mpondo and Madikane's grandson, Mduyana, had assumed the chieftainship. As conflict between the Bhaca and the Mpondo worsened, he decided to flee to Natal and request that his supporters be accepted as colonial subjects. While Mduyana dealt with the removal of the chieftain's cattle, Ncaphayi's brother, Mfinyeli, led the migration to Natal. The Bhaca were stopped for a few days at the Mzimkhulu as the river was full. Once the level of the water subsided, a portion of the party, including Mfinyeli, crossed the river and built rudimentary shelters while they waited for the rest of the party to join them. Here they were attacked by Fodo's men, who killed a number of people and made off with women and children and hundreds of head of cattle.

Shepstone interviewed a number of survivors and used their testimonies to build a case to justify taking action against the Nhlanguwini. There were graphic and

moving descriptions of the death of Bhaca women and children, which, in part, motivated the colonial government to act. However, Shepstone in his reports to the lieutenant-governor emphasised that the attack on the Bhaca, and the subsequent actions by the Nhlanguwini, was a deliberate and violent defiance of colonial authority. A deposition by Mfinyeli on 4 January 1847 to Shepstone in Pietermaritzburg was used as the basis for this argument. According to Mfinyeli, his son had confronted some of Fodo's men and demanded to know why the Bhaca merited such treatment. They replied:

'We eat you up because you pass by Fodo to go to the white government. Fodo is a chief in his own right and independent of the government.' My son replied, 'You will never enjoy them, for we will complain to the white chiefs.' They replied, 'You may complain. No letter from the white chiefs ever did or ever will recover cattle taken here. Did you ever hear of Fodo's visiting the white chiefs to make his submission?'⁶⁴

This idea appeared in numerous other testimonies collected by Shepstone of men who were at the Mzimkhulu. The initial attack was not to defy the colonial government, but to assert the Nhlanguwini's authority against the Bhaca. Southern Natal had been the domain of the Nhlanguwini since the 1830s and they were not going to allow the arrival of a large number of people, especially old enemies, who threatened their interests to go unchecked. However, the action against the Bhaca was a miscalculation by Fodo and his advisers. They underestimated how forcefully the colonial administration would respond. The precipitous Mkhomazi valley, and the river that ran through it, acted as a natural barrier between the small colonial establishment in Pietermaritzburg and the Nhlanguwini in the south, and probably lulled Fodo into a certain complacency about the reach of the new government. The fairly young diplomatic agent was at this point an unknown entity to the African population of the Colony.

Shepstone used the attack on the Bhaca to react vigorously and assert his and the colonial government's authority over an *inkosi* who had a reputation of being a strong and independent leader.⁶⁵ His campaign against the Nhlanguwini was the first major action against an African chieftain in Natal and he would use the same tactics in the years to come against other chieftaincies he considered baulking at colonial authority. He augmented the small force of regular white soldiers stationed at Fort Napier with African troops who were rewarded with cattle and land. By burning down homesteads, destroying crops and carrying off livestock,

he forced the Nhangwini to accept his authority. The scattered settlement patterns of homesteads offered little protection to the population and made them vulnerable to the colonial campaign.

Shepstone issued a warrant on 6 January 1847 demanding return of the stolen cattle and the arrest of those guilty of murder and robbery. On the same day the lieutenant-governor, based on Mfinyeli's deposition, informed Shepstone he should forthwith proceed to Fodo's homestead to carry out the warrant.⁶⁶ Shepstone led a contingent of 220 African troops, supported by a detachment of fifty men of the 45th Regiment, against the Nhangwini. Colonial troops reached the Mkhomazi on 9 January and finding the river in full spate sent for a boat or two, caskets and rope from Port Natal. Two days later Fodo, according to Shepstone, appeared on the opposite bank of the river with the intention of attacking 'the tribe living in this neighbourhood, with which the remnant of Capai's people had taken refuge.'⁶⁷ He changed his mind when he saw the size of the colonial force. Shepstone's messenger, Mkhizwana, and thirteen other men managed to cross the river on 12 January and proceeded to Fodo's homestead to demand the restitution of all prisoners and cattle. Shepstone and a detachment of men went ahead of the main body and had set up camp on the outskirts of Fodo's domain by 25 January. Fodo sent a message saying he refused to meet Shepstone at the camp but would do so at his homestead. Shepstone rejected this and insisted Fodo come to the camp the next day. He sent out messengers to inform Fodo's followers that he had not come to make war but to investigate an allegation against Fodo and they would be unharmed if they returned and accepted colonial authority. A group of elderly men who were not Fodo's people, although they lived under him, took up Shepstone's offer. Shepstone pushed on to Fodo's homestead, which was deserted, save his messengers with 140 head of cattle. The colonial forces stayed in the area for some weeks, making numerous unsuccessful attempts to apprehend Fodo. In February, Shepstone deposed Fodo and appointed his uncle Zungwana as the new ruler of the chiefdom.⁶⁸ Colonial troops, driving hundreds of cattle, sheep and goats, returned to the capital. There was so much looted livestock that it was referred to the Milking Campaign.⁶⁹

Once the campaign had begun, there is no evidence that Fodo planned to seriously resist colonial troops.⁷⁰ There are numerous examples, given by Shepstone himself, showing that Fodo hoped to avoid conflict. On 23 January, two of Fodo's messengers arrived at

Shepstone's camp with a gift of an ox, two elephant tusks and a tiger skin, to inform him that the *inkosi* 'had never viewed himself in any other light than that of a subject' and that he was collecting the cattle.⁷¹ Although there were skirmishes among Fodo's homesteads they were probably provoked by the presence of Shepstone's troops rather than planned resistance.⁷²

'That precious thing of yours': conflict in the amaXameni country

Fodo eventually did surrender and appeared before the lieutenant-governor in August 1847, asking not for the restoration of his position as chief but to be allowed 'to live on the face of the earth'.⁷³ The warrant was eventually lifted and Fodo, probably in an attempt to put distance between himself and Shepstone in Pietermaritzburg, moved further south and crossed the colonial boundary, settling at Gugwini, near to the junction of the iBisi and Mzimkhulu rivers. (Despite his conflict with the colonial government, Fodo could not, as we shall see, abandon Natal completely.) According to one Nhangwini account, as he left those who remained behind uttered, '*Hamba Fodo uye egugwini lakho lelo*' (Fodo, go away to that precious thing of yours).⁷⁴ The area, now in the Mzimkhulu magisterial district, was referred to by white officials as Nomansland and some Zulu speakers as the amaXameni country.⁷⁵ Mqayikana told Stuart, 'The name *amaXama* means *people who kill one another; who do not yet have any laws*.'⁷⁶

From late 1847 until 1863, Fodo faced two serious challenges as a leader: he had to fend off serious internal challenges to his authority and fight off repeated attacks by the Bhaca chiefdom. His conflict with the Bhaca was exacerbated and complicated by the arrival of a group of people of mixed descent under the leadership of Smith Pommer who settled in the area.

The move to Gugwini split the chiefdom. Fodo's followers who remained within the Colony were divided, recognising the authority of numerous members of the family. Mqhakama, son of Fodo's favourite wife, MaSosibo, became the chief, with his father's permission, of the Nhangwini who remained at Mbekabantu. Other members of the chiefdom recognised the authority of two of Fodo's uncles, while two of his brothers were also vying to be recognised as chiefs. This led to conflicts within the chiefdom, particularly between the followers of Fodo and those of his uncle Zungwana who had been appointed by the colonial government as chief.⁷⁷ At Mzimkhulu, Fodo's brother Nondabula, a renowned hunter, had settled with many supporters

in the Cabane valley and increasingly challenged his brother's position as *inkosi*.

The splitting of the chiefdom, loss of cattle in the conflict with the colonial government and internal divisions greatly weakened the Nhangwini and made them vulnerable to the Bhaca. When the Bhaca left Pondoland in 1847, they settled on either side of the Mzimkhulu River, which was the southern boundary of the Colony. Some members of the chiefdom settled in southern Natal, while others made what is now the Mzimkhulu magisterial district their home. In 1854, Mdutyana's followers had come into conflict with the colonial government and many of them left Natal to join their kinsmen at Mzimkhulu. After Mdutyana's death, his brother Thiba, a strong and forceful personality, became regent. Soon, conflict developed between the Nhangwini and Bhaca and skirmishes that varied in intensity and scale increased. The conflicts were exacerbated after 1856 with the arrival of a group of so-called Hottentots in the area. In the mid-1850s, people of mixed descent began moving into Nomansland. In 1851, after an uprising at the Kat River and a mutiny in the ranks of the Cape Mounted Rifles, a number of groups settled in the Transkei. Although they were small in number, they were mounted and well armed and by forming alliances with Africans made their presence felt in Nomansland. The most prominent of these new arrivals was Smith Pommer, who with his followers had settled in about 1856 at a mission station called Pearsetown at the iBisi. Fodo's younger kinsman, Sidoyi, formed a friendship and alliance with Pommer who became involved in the conflicts between the two chiefdoms. From 1856 until the early 1860s, cattle raids and skirmishes occurred between the two groups.

Fodo and Thiba both regularly sent messages to the magistrate of the Upper Mkhomazi, and at times the lieutenant-governor and diplomatic agent, informing them about events and requesting assistance. They were careful to portray themselves as the victims, responding to cattle thefts and attacks on their homesteads. In 1856, a Bhaca force stole cattle from the Nhangwini and Fodo alleged that the stolen cattle were at homesteads of Mdutyana's followers in Natal.⁷⁸ The magistrate spent December investigating and concluded that 'large numbers of cattle' seized from various Nhangwini homesteads were in Natal.⁷⁹ In October 1857, the Nhangwini reported that cattle had been stolen in Natal and taken across the Mzimkhulu and that a man in search of the cattle was killed.⁸⁰ In August 1861, Thiba complained that Fodo was always the aggressor and

when confronted took refuge with his cattle in Natal. In about June 1861, there was a complaint that Fodo's men had stolen 32 head of cattle in Natal and taken them across the Mzimkhulu.⁸¹

Fodo sent a desperate message in early September 1861, after a particularly violent encounter between the Bhaca and Nhangwini, to the lieutenant-governor informing him that

the Amabaca have conquered him entirely having recently attacked him and destroyed the last hope of defence, viz the Hottentots, men, women and children, they have burned his kraals and taken away his food, so that he is compelled to live in the Bush on the Southern bank of Umzimkulu. His people have left him and he is in a state of starvation.⁸²

He asked to be taken 'under the wing of the Government' and 'to return into Natal.'⁸³ He also appealed on behalf of Sidoyi who if left in Nomansland would be killed by the Bhaca. Thiba sent his own messenger blaming Fodo for instigating the violence by stealing his people's cattle. While admitting many of Pommer's followers were killed, he pointed out that 25 of his men lost their lives and fifty were wounded in the conflict. The reply from the lieutenant-governor was unsympathetic. He informed Fodo 'had he taken the advice he had so frequently given him to live in peace and prevent his people from interfering with matters which do not concern them, he would not now be in the condition which he describes.'⁸⁴ He did inform him, however, 'that the Bhaca will for the future abstain from any further attack' as long as the Nhangwini stopped stealing cattle from them.⁸⁵ He refused to 'entertain any application on behalf of Sidoyi until he had surrendered himself at Pietermaritzburg.'⁸⁶ Matters seemed to settle for the next two years.

Fodo was able to reinforce his position by forming a judicious alliance, as he had done before in Natal in the 1830s and 1840s, with a larger and more powerful group. On this occasion it was the Griqua who settled in Nomansland in 1863. The Griqua, who descend from Khoikhoi, San, slaves, Bantu-speakers and white frontiersmen, 'emerged' on the northern frontier of the Cape Colony in the eighteenth century where these various groups came into contact with each other.⁸⁷ By the 1850s, the Griqua were under increasing pressure from Boers who were encroaching onto their land. In 1861, as the situation between the Griqua and Boers became untenable, a group of Griqua under the leadership of Adam Kok III undertook an epic trek to Nomansland in an effort to retain their independence.

The Griqua did not move into a political vacuum and had to assert their authority over the Bhaca and Nhangwini at Mzimkhulu. By forming alliances with the Nhangwini and playing on divisions that developed within the Bhaca chiefdom in the 1860s and 1870s, the Griqua asserted their authority relatively easily over the Mzimkhulu region. The Griqua helped Fodo defeat a challenge from his brother Nondabula.⁸⁸ Moreover, after the lean years of the 1850s, the Nhangwini from the mid-1860s onwards, through their alliance with the Griqua government, asserted themselves more strongly against the Bhaca.

'Where will we find protection now that the chief is dead?': Fodo's death

By the early 1860s Fodo was an old man and it was Sidoyi who would play a prominent role in the politics of Mzimkhulu in the years to come. Fodo lived in relative stability and peace at Gugwini until his death in about 1864. Mqayikana was visiting Gugwini when Fodo died. His evocative description of how Fodo's followers reacted after his death reveals the central role he had played in the chiefdom and the insecurity felt by the Nhangwini on his passing:

I was present when the *mourning ceremony* was held. It began instantly, the same afternoon of the death occurring. The grave was dug at once in the cattle kraal and the body was interred the same evening. At the same time messengers were sent out in all directions to say the chief was dead. Upon this, all the Nhangwini people gathered at the chief's kraal, eGugwini, or Kwa Nomgobo, and all were fully armed with shields and assegais, for there was great fear lest, being so close to their enemies, the Pondos, they should be attacked.⁸⁹ That is why the body was so quickly disposed of. No sooner did death occur than loud lamentations were started by all members of the tribe ... Next day a body of men from Sidoyi came in sight, accompanied by girls, whereupon the lamentations, which had died down, were started afresh in a very loud way, although this was after the funeral ... In these lamentations the words were, *'Maye babo! Maye babo! Where will we find protection now that the chief is dead?'*⁹⁰

Conclusion

For 36 years Fodo led the Nhangwini through a period of fundamental economic and political change in KwaZulu-Natal. In his youth he had fled the consequences of the emergence of the Zulu kingdom and settled on the periphery of the Mpondo paramountcy. In the late 1820s the Nhangwini, greatly weakened by conflicts with the Bhaca, settled along the middle

reaches of the Mkhomazi. Fodo rebuilt the prosperity and influence of the chiefdom through administering land on behalf of the Zulu on the southern periphery of the kingdom. This gave the Nhangwini access to land, allowing them to re-establish the homestead economy. From 1830, Fodo's followers began providing ivory to the traders at Port Natal in return for a steady supply of maize, tobacco, beads and cattle, all of which contributed to the economic recovery of the chiefdom. After 1837, Fodo aligned the chiefdom with the trekkers and traders and provided manpower for their raids against the Zulu and Bhaca. At the end of 1846, in order to protect their influence in southern Natal, the Nhangwini attacked members of the Bhaca chiefdom moving into the Colony from the Mpondo paramountcy. Fodo and his councillors miscalculated how the colonial administration would respond. Viewing the attack as a challenge to their authority, white officials, using African allies, attacked the Nhangwini, deposing Fodo and greatly weakening the chiefdom by looting cattle and destroying homesteads and crops. After conflict with the colonial government, Fodo settled in Nomansland. An alliance with the Griqua in the early 1860s, allowed Fodo to fend off internal challenges to his authority and resist repeated attacks by the Bhaca chiefdom.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank John Wright for commenting on a draft of this article.
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- 4 *ibid*: 285.
- 5 Statement by Mahaya kaNongqabana in Colin de B. Webb and John B. Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive, Volume 2* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; Durban: Killie Campbell Library, 1979): 113–114.
- 6 Statement by Mqayikana kaYenge in Colin de B. Webb and John B. Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive, Volume 4* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; Durban: Killie Campbell Library, 1986): 9.
- 7 Wylie, *Myth of Iron*: 285.
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- 12 *ibid*: 8.
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- 15 Statement by Mqayikana kaYenge in Webb and Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive, Volume 4*: 8.
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- 18 Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*: 86.
- 19 Statement by Mqayikana kaYenge in Webb and Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive, Volume 4*: 7.
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- 21 Guy, *T. Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*: 86.
- 22 Statement by Mqayikana kaYenge in Webb and Wright (eds), *The James Stuart Archive, Volume 4*: 8 and 31.
- 23 *ibid*: 1.
- 24 *ibid*: 8 and 31.
- 25 *ibid*: 18.
- 26 *ibid*: 8.
- 27 *ibid*: 7.
- 28 *ibid*.
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- 36 *ibid*: 70.
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- 42 *ibid*: 88.
- 43 *ibid*: 184–185.
- 44 *ibid*: 74 and 76.
- 45 *ibid*: 248.
- 46 Evidence of D.C. Toohey in John Bird (ed.), *The Annals of Natal, 1495 to 1845, Volume 1* (Pietermaritzburg: P. Davis, 1888): 551.
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- 79 PAR, 1/RMD/3/1/1/1, Magistrate to Lt. Gov. 24 December 1856.
- 80 PAR, 1/RMD/3/1/1/1, Hawkins to Secretary for Native Affairs, 13 October 1857.
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