

“Where to touch them?”
Representing the Ndebele in Rhodesian Fiction

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[Lobengula] had no wish for any more intimate relations with the British Govt.
No desire for larger trade. Was doubtful about gold being in the Mashona
country. Indeed put me to wits end to know where to touch him
short of direct threats ... [Captain Robert Patterson to
Theophilus Shepstone, 1878].¹

For nearly fifty years before the British South Africa Company's invasion of Mashonaland, the Ndebele served different and even contradictory functions in the British imagination. Their reputation for bloodthirsty savagery was widely reported, but it was qualified by an admiration for the splendid despotism of the Khumalo kings and the organisation of their army that provided an order that set them apart from other societies in the far interior. The regimental displays at the annual Great Dance exhilarated European travellers who equated national worth with militarism and aroused an enthusiasm that seems more heartfelt than any distress at the effects of subsequent raids. A colonised people can be allowed a past nobility when their history is written as a consistent refusal to compromise with the West. The Ndebele had conscientiously rejected the offerings of the London Missionary Society's agents and the Jesuits of the Zambesi Mission, thrown themselves against the Company's Maxims in 1893, and in 1896 capitulated to Rhodes after a decent interval of three months' rebellion. Hayden White has remarked that the notion of noble savage emerges only "after the conflict between the Europeans and the natives [had] already been decided and when, therefore, it [can] no longer hamper the exploitation of the latter by the former".² This is of course true of defeated people all over Africa, but the noble savage is also an allegorical figure that recalls Western readers to fundamental values that

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1. Quoted in T. Couzens, "A Tale of Two Mysteries. The Patterson Embassy to Lobengula". *Brenthurst Archive*, 2, 1 (Brenthurst, Johannesburg, 1995), p 36.
2. H. White, *Tropics of Discourse Essays in Cultural Criticism* (University of Maryland, Baltimore, 1978), p 186.

contemporary civilisation has obscured within themselves. If, as Michael Lieven observes, savage signifies “immutable difference”, the noble savage emphasises correspondence.³ Before a people are defeated, savage nobility is never literally experienced, but only imagined, and can exist as a trope in travel memoirs or fictions that mediate the exotic for those readers to whom savagery is unfamiliar, but whose cultural nostalgia discovers traces of nobility in their remote pasts. The noble savage cannot be present in any literal representation of life in an interior that is beyond colonial control. Nobility is unwelcome in people serving or refusing to serve as porters and guides for an adventurer, or converts for a missionary. Noble savages are literally exotic as they are made remote by time and place, by memory or distance. In nineteenth-century southern Africa, only colonised people whose armies had resisted colonialism or people who lived too far beyond colonial frontiers to feed a settler-hunger for land and labour qualified to be both savage and noble.

The northward migrations of the Ndebele were attempts to move beyond the shifting alliances and agendas of white colonists and the Zulus, but invariably wherever they moved, they were soon written into southern African politics. Depending on the role whites demanded of them in any decade, they were admired, feared, used, overcome and discarded, although they were always allegorised. Derek Attridge observes that “To allegorise is to translate the temporal and sequential into the schematic: a set of truths, a familiar historical scene”.⁴ However, although the nineteenth-century Ndebele travelled further north, they soon were caught up in times and sequences over which they had little control. In the nearly seventy years from their constitution as a people, they underwent rapid shifts in representation by novelists and other commentators who, as my epigraph implies, struggled to find a discourse that would adequately account for them and make them as tangible to the reader as they were to the men and women who had visited the Khumalo courts. Only when the invasion of Matabeleland provided a closure to their history as an independent people and Rhodesia attributed meanings to them within its own discourses, could the Ndebele become noble savages fixed within a colonial allegory.

This article does not attempt to establish the truth behind these various representations which tell us more about their authors than they do about the people they claim to describe. Julian Cobbing’s

3. M. Lieven, “Contested Empire: Bertram Mitford and the Imperial Adventure Story”, *Paradigm*, 25, May 1998, pp 16-25.

4. D. Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading (Literature in the Event)* (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Scottsville, 2005), p 46.

monumental history of the Ndebele to 1896 is unsurpassed and subsequent scholars have done little more than alter various emphases in his account to explain the subsequent history of the Ndebele after the suppression of the Rising.⁵ As Cobbing has never published his thesis, Terence Ranger has had a disproportionate influence on the way in which the “real” Ndebele are known. Ranger distinguishes between the Ndebele state that was destroyed in 1896 and a Ndebele ethnicity that he argues is a colonial invention.⁶ “Political identity,” Ranger claims, “was necessarily ‘Ndebele’ since the whites had made war on the Ndebele state, had made peace with the Ndebele *indunas*, and had made promise of land to all the Ndebele” and different constituencies within the former state developed “different imaginations of Ndebele identity”.⁷ Cobbing described the mechanisms by which the Khumalo state incorporated various ethnicities and observed that as early as 1829 the Nguni population were a minority among the Ndebele long before Ranger’s more famous account of the state as a “machine for multi-ethnic assimilation of peoples”.⁸ Björn Lindgren who worked in Umzingwane in Southern Matabeleland in the 1990s is sceptical of Ranger’s claim that “nothing could be sillier” than to see the 1980 massacres in Matabeleland as “the ‘Shona’ killing the ‘Ndebele’ or vice versa” and that people in the Matobo area of Matabeleland “condemned dissidents and the Zimbabwean forces equally”.⁹ Lindgren found that people regardless of their nineteenth-century origins saw themselves as Ndebele and that they believed that during the government-initiated atrocities against civilians in the 1980s it was as Ndebele “they had been harassed, mutilated and killed by Shona soldiers of the Fifth Brigade”.¹⁰ Lindgren confirms what Cobbing believed was true of the pre-colonial state. People can be both

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5. J. Cobbing, “The Ndebele under the Khumalos 1820-1896.” PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1976.
 6. T. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Baobab, Harare; Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis; James Currey, Oxford, 1999), p 100.
 7. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks*, pp 102-103.
 8. Cobbing, “The Ndebele”, pp 32-33, 115-125; T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe*, (Mambo, Gweru, 1985), p 5.
 9. Quoted in B. Lindgren, *The Politics of Ndebele Ethnicity Origins, Nationality and Gender in Southern Zimbabwe* (Uppsala University, Uppsala, 2002), p 122. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks*, p 246, from which the second quote comes, describes him being saluted by an agent of the Central Intelligence Organisation after producing a letter from a ZANUPF Minister saying: “Professor Ranger is a fellow freedom fighter”. Two months after the 1988 Amnesty and within forty kilometres of several mass graves from the massacres, it is astonishing that he found anyone in the Matopos to criticise “the Zimbabwean forces”.
 10. Lindgren, *The Politics of Ndebele Ethnicity*, p 123.

Ndebele and recognise their discrete ancestral origins. The Zanzi were descendants of the original Nguni, the Enhla were originally Sotho or Tswana and the Lozwi were Shona who could be more pejoratively referred to as Holi. Cobbing argues that these “were terms denoting geographical origin not caste” and it was “the obsession of the British conquerors with class” that reimagined these as class divisions and for the purposes of this paper indicative of nobility or the absence thereof.¹¹

British readers first learnt of Mzilikazi from Cornwallis Harris after he had visited the king north of the Vaal. Harris was the first of many writers to use language that registered a king who possessed qualities of leadership that were familiar to both him and his British readers. Harris found the Khumalo king a man of “dignified and reserved manners ... capable of ruling the wild and sanguinary spirits with which he is surrounded”.¹² Robert Moffat, in one of the most widely read of all missionary narratives, described the Ndebele in terms that seem to remove them from an African context altogether. Mzilikazi’s warriors, for example, according to him formed “into ranks with as much order as if they had been accustomed to European tactics” and he used the vocabulary of the oriental exotic that is typical of travellers’ descriptions of the domestic arrangement of Zulu rulers: Mzilikazi’s wives became his “harem”, his indunas “satraps”, and he a “potentate”.¹³ Later travellers extended similar admiration to Lobengula and the next generation of Ndebele now settled north of the Limpopo. After watching the annual regimental parades, one of the Jesuits wrote of Lobengula’s soldiers as “the flower of the Amandebele ... A finer set of men I never saw together ... their beautiful war headdress and shields did not lessen the effect”.¹⁴ Lionel Declé recalled that with the exception of Tsar Alexander, Lobengula was the most inspiring ruler of men he had ever seen.¹⁵

The missionaries in particular soon realised that this military culture created havoc wherever the Ndebele settled and accordingly modified their enthusiasm. After his last visit to the Ndebele in 1860,

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11. Cobbing, “The Ndebele”, p 117.
 12. W. Cornwallis Harris, *The Wild Sports of Southern Africa* ... (Pelham Richardson, London, 1839), p 123.
 13. R. Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (John Snow, London, 1842), pp 531, 534-535. D. Wylie, *Myth of Iron Shaka in History* (University of Kwazulu-Natal, Scottsville, 2006), pp 321-325, discusses the use by whites of “harem” and “seraglio” in describing Zulu wives.
 14. M. Gelfand (ed), *Gubuluwayo and Beyond* ... (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1968), p 181.
 15. L. Declé, *Three Years in Savage Africa* (Methuen, London, 1900), p 142.

Moffat wrote in his report to the secretary of the London Missionary Society that Mzilikazi, “has grown grey in a government revolting to humanity”.¹⁶ Coillard, who witnessed a Ndebele raid on Chivi concluded that the Ndebele state and its tributaries were “immense catacombs, which we cannot think of without shuddering ” and “only a great black stain can adequately represent [them] on the map of Africa”.¹⁷ More significantly for the fate of the nation was the missionaries’ recognition that as long as the Ndebele state remained confident of its own invincibility, there was little chance of converts. Moffat’s son, John, wrote perceptively that “where the political organization is most perfect and the social system still in its aboriginal vigour ... the missionary has least chance of making an impression”.¹⁸ Some years later Father Prestage of the Zambesi Mission agreed. “They must be well beaten first by some superior force,” he wrote, “and then they may take to the white man’s teaching.”¹⁹

When the first reports of gold in Lobengula’s kingdom started to circulate in the south, the concession seekers and hunters saw Ndebele power as something to be challenged. In 1869, Thomas Baines delivered a letter to Lobengula from Shepstone that included a passage of sinister presage for the continuing sovereignty of the Ndebele kingdom. “If gold exists where it is said to exist,” wrote the British administrator, “no power can stop the stream of those who seek it ... and it is the way of a wise man to guide what he cannot prevent.”²⁰ Eight years later, Shepstone justified the annexation of the South African Republic by imagining the Boer state ringed by the Zulus and the settlements of the Nguni diaspora who, if they combined, had the will and capacity to obliterate the republicans. Shepstone reminded Carnarvon that the Ndebele in particular were only biding their time to avenge their earlier defeats at the hands of the Boers.²¹ The High Commissioner to South Africa, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, translated Shepstone’s identification of possible points of conflict into a “general and simultaneous rising of Kaffirdom against white civilisation” because savagery revelled in its “idle, sensuous

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16. J. Wallis (ed), *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat 1829-1860* II (Chatto & Windus, London, 1945), p 270.
 17. F. Coillard [edited and translated by C. MacIntosh], *On the Threshold of Central Africa ...* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1897), p 44.
 18. J. Wallis (ed), *The Matabele Mission ... of John and Emily Moffat 1829-1860* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1945), p 70.
 19. Gelfand, *Gubuluwayo*, p 449.
 20. J. Wallis (ed), *The Northern Goldfield Diaries of Thomas Baines* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1946), p 48.
 21. R. Cope, *Ploughshare of War The Origins of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879* (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1999), p 130.

Elysium” which settler enterprise had destroyed.²² Noble savages are admired at a respectful distance; pure savages because their difference require a combination of military defeat and absorption into the colonial economy to obliterate that separate identity and replace it with one that emphasises that, however subordinate, the colonised live in some relationship to their colonial masters.

Shepstone’s curious relationship with the Ndebele is well known.²³ He believed that his groom Kanda was Nkulumane, Lobengula’s elder brother, and therefore Mzilikazi’s successor.²⁴ One of Shepstone’s first acts as Administrator in Pretoria in 1877 was to send an embassy to Lobengula to negotiate for a permanent British consul to be attached to the Khumalo court, who would be able to monitor possible alliances between the Ndebele and Boers unhappy at the annexation. Captain Patterson who led the embassy reported to Shepstone that he had warned the king that Nkulumane might find allies among the disaffected in the Transvaal. At the mention of Nkulumane’s name, Patterson wrote, Lobengula “became all anxiety to treat [him] as a friend ... evidently knowing the dangerous ground on which he stands as regards Kuruman”.²⁵ Patterson had misread the king’s response. Two weeks later, he, his companion Sargeant and Evan Thomas (the son of one of the original London Mission Society missionaries) were killed almost certainly on the king’s instructions. Long after Lobengula’s presumed death in 1894, Haggard, who was only prevented by pressure of work from accompanying the Patterson embassy, recalled their deaths as evidence of the king’s barbarity.²⁶

Britain’s defeat and withdrawal from the Transvaal in 1881 had little effect on her determination to contain the South African Republic. The Boers had to be prevented from expanding northward or creating an alliance with Germany on the west coast and the Ndebele remained as important in this scheme of containment as they had been before the

22. Quoted in Cope, *Ploughshare of War*, p 206.

23. Cobbing, “The Ndebele”, pp 265-281; Couzens, *A Tale of Two Mysteries*.

24. Cobbing, “The Ndebele”, p 266, argues that Kanda was one of Mzilikazi’s many sons and that Shepstone saw in his relationship with the prince an opportunity to influence Ndebele politics at the expense of the Transvaal.

25. Quoted in Couzens, *A Tale of Two Mysteries*, p 36.

26. Only on his first visit to Rhodesia in 1914 did Haggard modify his hostility to the old king. He wrote in his diary: “Doubtless this poor savage king deserved his fate, yet it is difficult not to feel sorry for him, especially as he protected the white traders to the very last”. S. Coan (ed), *Diary of an African Journey The Return of Rider Haggard* (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg; New York University Press, New York, 2000), p 145.

annexation. The Warren Expedition of 1884 and the declaration of British Bechuanaland as a colony in 1885 ensured that Britain had kept open a road to the interior that one day Britain would control. Bringing Matabeleland into the British sphere of influence was more than an opportunity to spite the Transvaal. E.A. Maund who had been on Warren's staff and worked as a propagandist for the British South Africa Company, posed the question that Rhodes was in the process of answering in 1890. Why, Maund asked "[should] a land so long reputed to be rich in gold, of which Baines wrote twenty years ago as being the land of Ophir, ... until now have baffled our colonizing instincts"?²⁷ In the late 1880s publication after publication began to argue that only the undefeated Ndebele stood between Britain and Ophir. Rhodes knew that the Company required moral as well as economic justification to command support in London and he used his agents not only to publicise the wealth of the country, but also to record the devastation that the Ndebele caused to their neighbours.²⁸ As the preparations for the occupation of Mashonaland began, Company propaganda began to register the savagery of the Ndebele with greater insistence.

There were other ways of qualifying the nobility of the Ndebele than by recounting the horrors of the raids against their neighbours. In the latter half of the century, the British were becoming increasingly anxious at the consequences to themselves of racial intermixing and they found in "miscegenation" as good a way as any to denigrate a people as not only savage, but bastardised into the bargain. Consequently, the diverse origins of the people who made up the nation were used against them and it was frequently claimed of the Ndebele that intermarriage with Enhla and Holi had diluted their Zulu heritage. In 1886, Maund attributed the decay of Ndebele military prowess to the incorporation of "maholi" elements into the warrior ranks.²⁹ Sir Sidney Shippard, who shared Rhodes' ambitions to take possession of Mashonaland and who visited Lobengula to give official sanction to the Moffat treaty, added another detail to the consequences of the bastardised Ndebele. The true Zulus, the so-called Zanzi, he reported, wanted peace with England. It was the young men who longed for war. They were tainted with the

27. E. Maund, "Zambesia, the new British possession in Central Africa", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 12, 1890, p 654.

28. See for example Great Britain Colonial Office Command Papers, C4643, *Transvaal. Further correspondence respecting the affairs of the Transvaal and adjacent territories* (1886), "Report on Matibililand" by C. Haynes, p 123.

29. Great Britain Colonial Office Command Papers, C4643, "Matibililand" by E. Maund, p 117.

blood of “inferior tribes” and had learnt only arrogance from the Ndebele and none of their political astuteness.³⁰

The first fictional reference to the Ndebele shows no signs of these later anxieties and on the contrary, interracial sex accounts for Zulu superiority. Hugh Mulleneux Walmsley’s *The Ruined Cities of Zululand* (1869) claimed that Mzilikazi and his people stood out because they were Zulus and the Zulus “sprang from the fusion of Pharaoh’s seamen with the cultivators of the soil” which gave them a genetic advantage denied any other of South Africa’s indigenous people.³¹ The Mzilikazi of the novel with “his hair thrown back, his broad forehead ... encircled with a fillet of ostrich feathers, terminating in a single plume” exhibited in his face an “air of thought and command” and he and his people were described as a force for order and authority amidst the chaos of the interior.³²

Not until 1885 did another novel use the Ndebele and then they were disguised as the Kukuana of *King Solomon’s Mines*.³³ Whether Haggard knew that Shepstone believed that Kanda was Nkulumane is impossible to know, although the parallels between Kanda and the fictional Umbopa are striking. Shepstone saw Lobengula as a usurping tyrant and Kanda as the rightful heir. Their fictional counterparts are the monstrous Twala and Umbopa who was to reveal himself as Ignosi. Absent in the novel, however, is Shepstone’s expectation that he would have influenced Ndebele affairs through a grateful king whom he had helped to the throne. In *King Solomon’s Mines*, Quatermain, Good and Sir Henry Curtiss are driven by disinterested benevolence and even the

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30. Great Britain Colonial Office Command Papers, C5918, *Bechuanaland Further correspondence respecting the affairs of Bechuanaland and adjacent territories* (1890), Shippard to Sir Hercules Robinson, 16 October 1888, pp 122-125.
 31. H. Mulleneux Walmsley, *The Ruined Cities of Zulu land I* (Chapman & Hall, London, 1869), pp 55-56. Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, pp 13-16, mocks the idea of “pure Nguni” and “pure Zulu”. R.J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (Routledge, London & New York, 1995), pp 126-133, discusses mid-century theories that Egyptians were Caucasians.
 32. Walmsley, *The Ruined Cities I*, p 48.
 33. Haggard was invariably resentful of people who identified the originals behind his fictional places or characters. See for example Coan, *Diary of an African Journey*, p 158. In a letter to *The Times*, 28 December 1893, he denied that Nkulumane was the original of Umbopa, the rightful heir to the Kukuana throne. In 1906, however, in “The Real King Solomon’s Mines”, *Cassell’s Magazine*, 44, 1907, p 146, he speaks “of the Matabele who in the tale are named the Kukuanas”.

diamonds of the mines become an accidental recompense for their journey. In all his African novels, Haggard showed an anxiety that commercialism might have compromised the idealism of empire.³⁴ If the Kukuana thought that Sir Henry Curtiss and his companions were interested only in the diamonds, they “mistake ... an Englishman,” Sir Henry explains. “Wealth is good, and if it comes our way we will take it; but a gentleman does not sell himself for wealth.”³⁵

In the introduction to the 1888 edition of *Cetywayo and his White Neighbours*, Haggard observed that there was “no superiority so great in ourselves to authorise us, by right divine as it were, to destroy the coloured man and take his lands”.³⁶ That version of Britain’s imperial restraint in *King Solomon’s Mines* becomes respect for the Kukuana who were uncontaminated by contact with the commercial life of the colonies and had retained a nobility from which England and the colonial English had much to learn. At the beginning of his story, Allan Quatermain scratched out the word “niggers” from his manuscript because he knew “natives who *are* gentlemen” and whites who are not.³⁷ As an Englishman who had spent most of his life in South Africa, however, Allan became uneasy when Umbopa claimed equality between himself and the whites. “How dost thou know that I am not the equal of the Inkosi that I serve?” Umbopa asked and Allan was indignant at his presumption. “I am not accustomed to be talked to in that way by Kaffirs,” he told the reader.³⁸ Sir Henry Curtiss by contrast was indifferent to colonial constructions of race. When Allan first saw Sir Henry, his appearance reminded the hunter of ancient Danes who “were a kind of white Zulus”. Sir Henry without comment accepted Umbopa’s recognition that they were equals. “[W]e are men, you and I,” Umbopa said as the two men took the measure of one another.³⁹ In *Allan Quatermain*, Allan reminded us that “Civilisation is only savagery silver guilt ... It is on the savage that we fall back in emergencies” and in

34. Despite Haggard’s undoubted idealism about empire, his brother Alfred blackmailed Rhodes with the threat of exposing the fraudulence of the Rudd concession and was one of several dubious holders of concessions from Lobengula that Rhodes paid off. V. Manthorpe, *Children of Empire The Victorian Haggards* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1996), p 161, argues that “Rhodes feared not Alfred’s rumour-mongering in the Cape, annoying though it was, but Rider’s pen which might have undermined his plans”.

35. Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines*, p 127.

36. H. Rider Haggard, *Cetywayo and his White Neighbours* (Trubner, London 1882), p iii.

37. Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines*, p 12.

38. Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines*, pp 57-58

39. Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines*, pp 14, 44.

King Solomon's Mines the whites survived because they were able to access an atavistic and savage nobility beneath the accretions of nineteenth-century refinement.⁴⁰ Armed with an axe and wearing a coat of ancient chain armour, Sir Henry was not unfairly advantaged with modern weapons in his combat with Twala. Instead, nobility confronted and overcame a savagery that deserves to be exterminated. The noble savage, on the other hand, has a dignity that should be preserved. When Umbopa had been restored to his throne as Ignosi, he was determined to keep his kingdom uncorrupted by the agents of Europe's colonialism. "[T]raders with their guns and gin" would be refused entry to the land and "no praying men [would be allowed] to put fear of death into men's hearts, to stir them up against [their king], and make a pathway for the white men who follow to run on". With the Zulu wars a recent memory and the invasion of Matabeleland a prospect even then, Haggard could still approve Ignosi's proud independence: "If a white man comes to my gates, I will push him back; if an army comes, I will make war on them with all my strength, and they shall not prevail against me."⁴¹

Kukuanaland is a land of romance where different imperatives operate to those that operated in fact in the British wars against the Zulus and the Ndebele. In his discussion of the Shakan myths, Dan Wylie offers the paradox that "Romance tends not to challenge the *status quo*, but rather, by accepting its values even as it presents its antitheses, to entrench it."⁴² Wylie quotes Roland Barthes' observations that myth retains "just sufficient correlation with 'what-happens' to continually reconfirm itself – 'its function is to distort, not to make disappear'".⁴³ Because Lobengula is not Ignosi and the Kukuana are neither Zulus nor Ndebele, the novel does not question Britain's colonising strategies in southern Africa. Ignosi may have vowed to repel whites and we are expected to admire his determination, but his resistance belongs to the myth that Britain's march against the Zulus or their later plot to destroy the Ndebele state were morally necessary actions. Ignosi is the noble and ideal distortion of Cetshwayo or Lobengula as Quartermain, Good and Curtiss idealise and distort the British imperialists from Shepstone to Rhodes, or indeed Haggard himself.

When the British South Africa Company occupied Mashonaland in 1890, the anticipated Ndebele attack on the Company's men never

40. H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (Longmans, London, 1887), p 16.

41. Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, p 245.

42. D. Wylie, *Savage Delight White Myths of Shaka* (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2000), p 34.

43. Wylie, *Savage Delights*, p 6.

materialised and the most pressing political issue confronting Jameson and Colquhoun was to extract a concession from Gungunyana that could be used if the Portuguese pressed their claims to Gazaland.⁴⁴ In Ernest Glanville's *The Fossicker* (1891), the Ndebele are given equal status with the Gaza Nguni and both compare to advantage with the troops supporting the Portuguese who are a "half[-]caste" rabble.⁴⁵ The Ndebele have all the characteristics conventionally attributed to the Zulus. As "aristocrats of the native tribes, they are lithe and well-formed with the stamp of war upon their faces".⁴⁶ They were on a raid and when they attacked the Gaza Nguni, the intervention of an Englishman was required to remind the warriors that their real enemies were the Portuguese. "You are brothers," the British hero called out, "the Portuguese have fled" and peace is duly restored.⁴⁷ Few scenes could embody more succinctly what the Company hoped would happen in 1890. British, Gaza Nguni, Ndebele and Portuguese had played their parts to perfection.

Once Jameson had decided to invade Matabeleland early in 1893, the Company began once again to circulate more hostile images of the Ndebele. The introduction to *The Downfall of Lobengula*, a collection of essays that both described and justified the invasion and which was published early in 1894, argued that the war "originated in the manful determination to deliver at all costs the Mashonas, over whom the white man's arm had been extended, from the assegais of the Matabele majagha."⁴⁸ The invasion had been on behalf of "the subject races of Mashonaland and Matabeleland" and no longer would "[o]ld men and boys, mothers and the babes at the their breasts ... crimson the virgin assegais."⁴⁹ A few years before, the absorption of "subject races" into the Ndebele nation had been used to explain its decadence from its pure Zulu origins. A shift in discourse had made these same inferior people the subjects of the Company's heroic philanthropy and this changed

44. E.P. Mathers added a chapter on the Gazaland concessions and the border dispute with the Portuguese to his 1891 *Zambesia England's El Dorado in Africa*, pp 416-426, to update *Zambesia* which had been published as a special issue of *South Africa*, 14 March 1891. See R.S. Roberts, "Foreword to the Reprint Edition", in E.P. Mathers, *Zambesia England's El Dorado in Africa* (Books of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, 1977).

45. E. Glanville, *The Fossicker A Romance of Mashonaland* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1891), p 187.

46. Glanville, *The Fossicker*, p 195.

47. Glanville, *The Fossicker*, p 201.

48. W.A. Wills and L. Collingridge (eds), *The Downfall of Lobengula ...* (The African Review, London, 1894), p 22.

49. Wills & Collingridge (eds), *The Downfall*, p 22.

perception was soon reproduced in the novels. In Grant Allen's *An Army Doctor's Romance* (1893), the Ndebele attacked the Company's troops in 1890, raided the fragile white settlements in Mashonaland and were a more threatening presence than they in fact were. This novel was written before Lobengula's flight northwards and as the Company's enemy, the king was denied the stature that both fictional and non-fictional accounts conventionally accorded him. When Oliver Cameron, the doctor of the title, was captured and taken before Lobengula "[h]e found the mighty god-king, before whom all his subjects grovelled abjectly in the dust, just a fat old black man ... muddled with kaffir beer."⁵⁰ This denigration of the king soon served its purpose and once the Khumalo kingdom had been invaded and the king had fled, he was given a stature that enhanced rather than compromised the gallantry of the Company's men. For the editors of *The Downfall of Lobengula*, the king had a nobility that distinguished him from his warriors. He was described as "chivalrous and humane" confirming reports of his being "every inch a king", a rational man, who, realising the benefits of the British presence, had given "full permission ... for the advance of the pioneer force into Mashonaland."⁵¹

It is this latter version of Lobengula that Edward Marwick used in *The City of Gold* (1896), one of many novels to use Haggard's formula of lost cities where the descendants of ancient colonisers are invested by savages. Marwick distinguished between a benevolent Lobengula leading a noble people eager for peace with the whites and a war faction led by Katquilla that had stepped outside Lobengula's ineffectual control. The "whole philosophy of life" of these Ndebele is "summed up in the greater or lesser capacity for the slaughter of their enemies."⁵² Katquilla's raiding party was marching to attack Tamim, a lost city peopled by whites, the remnants of a failed and ancient colony. "[T]he triumph of Katquilla would indeed be a triumph of savagery over civilisation," Captain Vincent reflected.⁵³ Civilisation and savagery are not simple oppositions in the novel and a decadent civilisation may well be inferior to a noble savagery. If "the intellectual and moral force of ... civilisation is ... impaired by idleness and luxury", "[t]he brute force of savagery" will defeat it, Vincent reflected.⁵⁴ While the Tamim may have been unlike the British, they acknowledged no moral obligation to influence

50. G. Allen, *An Army Doctor's Romance* (Raphael Tuck, London, [1894]), p 93.

51. Wills & Collingridge, *The Downfall*, pp 22, 36.

52. E. Marwick, *The City of Gold A Tale of Sport, Travel and Adventure in the Heart of the Dark Continent* (Tower, London, 1896), p 44.

53. Marwick, *The City of Gold*, p 109.

54. Marwick, *The City of Gold*, p 151.

the savagery around them and this was one reason for their fatal stagnation: “The civilisation which hath no power to expand and subject inferior races to its sway is foredoomed to extinction,” Vincent explained.⁵⁵ By the end of the novel, both the Tamîm and Katquilla’s Ndebele had been destroyed and the novel suggests that this is the historically inevitable destiny of decadent whites and savage blacks. The British Empire is a force that expands for universal moral good and the British merit respect not only for their military might but also for their moral superiority. The nobility of Lobengula’s Ndebele is demonstrated not in their capacity to resist white invasions, but in their willingness to submit to a superior moral order represented by the British South Africa Company.

A more conventional recovery of the Ndebele reputation as noble savages was provided by Bertram Mitford. The first two novels of a quartet of novels which has an induna, Untuswa, as its narrator, celebrate the epic dimensions of Mzilikazi’s northward march out of which the new nation was forged. A postscript to *The White Shield* (1895), the second title in the series, explained Bertram’s intention. He was recounting the “stirring epic” of the foundation of the Ndebele nation in order to rebuke “the boundless stupidity of certain Britons of the denser sort” who could live among the Ndebele and think of them as no more than “a lot of ‘blacks’ who wore precious little clothing and were not eager to learn the arts of ‘civilisation’”.⁵⁶ In both this and the first novel of the series, *The King’s Assegai* (1894), Mitford celebrated the people’s love of conquest, fearlessness before death and unswerving loyalty to the king. He admiringly delineated the order of the Ndebele hierarchies that were based on military prowess and revelled in the strong men of a strong nation. A British-Ndebele alliance against the Boers was predicated on the contempt with which Untuswa referred to the latter. The attacks on Trekkers before the defeat of the Ndebele at Vegkop were explained when Mzilikazi said, “these *Amabuna* are as a devastating plague of locusts in whatsoever land they appear” and instructed that they be struck and none be spared.⁵⁷ The Ndebele instinctively recognised that a child that they had captured was “not of the *Amabuna* at all, but of a far greater race.”⁵⁸ Her superiority was confirmed when she and the other children

55. Marwick, *The City of Gold*, p 219.

56. B. Mitford, *The White Shield* (Cassell, London, 1895), pp 362, 364.

57. Mitford, *The White Shield*, p 70.

58. Mitford, *The White Shield*, p 232. There was a widespread belief that one of the Liebenberg children who survived a Ndebele attack became in effect a foster mother of Lobengula. See for example H. Marshall Hole, *Lobengula* (Philip Allan, London, 1929), pp 70-71. That an English child was captured is Mitford’s invention.

played together and “those with whom she played she would somehow cause to *konza* to her, even in their games as if she were born to rule.”⁵⁹ Not surprisingly she was called Kwelanga, “of the sun”, a celestial echo of the lords of the stars, the title the Kukuana conferred on Quatermain and his party. A prophet warned that Kwelanga’s voice had to be listened to “lest a nation be a nation no more,” an oracular utterance that with the hindsight of 1895 referred to the defeat of Lobengula’s armies at Bembezi two years previously.⁶⁰ As he grew older, Mitford grew more sceptical of the benefits of empire to the Zulus and the Ndebele, but in 1895, he was able to anticipate the end of an independent Ndebele nation with equanimity. Through Untuswa’s narrative, however, he allowed the Ndebele a nobility that British conquest had merely confirmed. For seventy years, a stable nation centred on the king drew scattered peoples into a new allegiance; now empire with the queen at its heart had drawn them into an even greater order.

After the Ndebele defeat in 1893, they could be re-imagined as Britain’s natural allies on the southern Zambezi plateau. When they rose against Company rule in July 1896, this comforting construction of the relationship was no longer possible.⁶¹ They had turned against their putative allies and with organisation thought to have been impossible without the king, in under a week had killed a tenth of Matabeleland’s settlers both black and white. Selous’ *Sunshine and Storm* which was the first monograph published about the Rising made it an event that was as predictable as a stage in any natural process. “[W]herever a savage race, entirely unaccustomed to order and restraint, has been conquered by a highly civilised people,” Selous argued, a rebellion has resulted.⁶² There may have been abuses by the Company administration, especially in the distribution of looted cattle, but this was trivial in comparison with the aristocracy’s resentment at the loss of its cruel privileges.⁶³ All the published accounts claimed that the arcane Mlimo cult had a part in instigating the fighting and managing its progress so that the Rising became the expression of some savage and mysterious ritual that

59. Mitford, *The White Shield*, p 202. Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, p 49, glosses *khonza* as “swore allegiance to”.

60. Mitford, *The White Shield*, p 260.

61. Untuswa returns to KwazuluNatal in *The White Shield* and the last two titles in the series *The Induna’s Wife* (White, London, 1898) and *The Word of the Sorceress* (Hutchinson, London, 1902) are set in the south.

62. F. Courtenay Selous, *Sunshine and Storm in Rhodesia ...* (Rowland Ward, London, 1896), p xi.

63. Selous, *Sunshine and Storm*, p xiv.

displaced more rational motives.⁶⁴ Baden-Powell, for example, recognised that Company rule had destroyed the economy of a raiding state and predations on neighbouring peoples could no longer compensate for the losses from drought and cattle disease.⁶⁵ These economic motives which would allow the Rising to be a comprehensible political strategy were however insufficient in themselves and the events of 1896 became the actions of a primitive people unable to comprehend the rational constraints of the colonial state. “[T]he native mind” found the shooting of Ndebele cattle to contain the spread of rinderpest incomprehensible and regarded the killings as a plot “to starve him to death”.⁶⁶

J. Chalmer’s *Fighting the Matabele* (1898) was the first novel that reproduced accounts of the Rising by men who had helped to suppress it. Details from Selous’ and Baden-Powell’s books, as well as Tyrie Laing’s *The Matabele Rebellion* are slotted into the story of a treasure-hunt, a rich reef which lay at the end of rocky labyrinth leading into a natural amphitheatre where the Ndebele hordes congregated to hear the Mlimo’s voice. In this romantic landscape, the Ndebele were as much spirit as flesh, but this is only one version of Matabeleland. There is also a description of a looted farmstead, its inhabitants murdered, which resembles the Cunningham house described by Selous and Tyrie Laing.⁶⁷ Chalmers responded to the murdered settlers with a plea for imperial expansion. A successful campaign against “the dark places of Africa”

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64. British South Africa Company, *Reports on the Native Disturbances in Rhodesia 1896-1897* (The Company, London, 1898), p 39; F.W. Sykes, *With Plumer in Matabeleland ...* (Archibald Constable, Westminster, 1897), pp 5-8; R. Baden-Powell, *The Matabele Campaign 1896* (Methuen, London, 1897), p 289. T. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-1897* (Heinemann, London, 1967), pp 136-161, accepted the centrality that the whites gave to the Mlimo in organising the Rising, but saw it as the local extension of the Shona Mwari cult and made it the basis for a future nationalism in that it transcended divisions of ethnicity and region. J. Cobbing, “The Ndebele”, pp 387-445, argued that the Rising was organised by the institutions of the Ndebele state that had remained intact after the 1893 invasion and found no reason to attribute its organisation to the Mwari priesthood. See also J. Cobbing, “The Absent Priesthood: Another Look at the Rhodesian Risings of 1896/7”, *Journal of African History*, 17, 1977, pp 61-84. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks*, p 28, describes Cobbing’s latter critique as “very effective criticisms of [his] account”. In all Ranger’s more recent work, Mwari replaces Mwari in naming the divinity of the Matabeleland cult which as the Ndebele version of Mwari continues to give the divinity a national dimension.
65. Baden-Powell, *The Matabele Campaign*, pp 31-32.
66. Baden-Powell, *The Matabele Campaign*, p 29.
67. Selous, *Sunshine and Storm*, pp 35-37; T. Laing, *The Matabele Rebellion, 1896 With the Belingwe Field Force* (Dean, London, 1897), pp 250-253.

would result in a “general gain to human progress”.⁶⁸ What romantic glamour accrued to the Ndebele congregated in their mountain fastnesses was forfeited by their rising against the British.

The effect of the Rising on an individual author can be seen in Fred Wishaw’s second Rhodesian novel, *The White Witch of the Matabele* (1897). In Wishaw’s *Lost in African Jungles* (1896), which was published before the Rising, the Ndebele were noble savages who marched to save whites endangered by “kaffirs” and “Hottentots”.⁶⁹ The later novel transformed Lobengula into a greasy buffoon whose absurdity was only heightened by the praise names lavished on him. The witch of Wishaw’s title was a white boy raised among the Ndebele and who, because he was white, was regarded as a god. During the invasion of Matabeleland “some mysterious British love of fair play” kept him from abandoning his former friends.⁷⁰ After the Rising such loyalty was inappropriate. During the three years of Company occupation, Umkopa had learnt that though he was a god among the Ndebele, he was “the humble equal of the lowest of white people”.⁷¹ When the Ndebele rose, Umkopa had learnt his lesson well: “Rather be an unappreciated nonentity among the whites than a king and a god among these perspiring contemptible savages.”⁷² Two years previously Wishaw had celebrated the horror and glories of the Ndebele at war. The Rising had reduced them to people who could be dismissed in that scornful phrase.

Only a culture that claims foundations in noble traditions and ideals is able to recognise nobility in savages. In Bertram Mitford’s first Ndebele novel after the Rising, *John Ames: Native Commissioner* (1900), Ames, a British public-school man, joined with Ndebele aristocrats in recognising the decadence of the younger generation. These had intermarried with the Holi, were influenced by the Kalanga priests, and gained little from their contact with lower-class British settlers. By the 1920s, it was settler orthodoxy that the Ndebele aristocrats had behaved honourably in the Rising. Vere Stent maintained that “one class did the fighting and the other murdering. The Matibili faced the rifles and machine guns; the Maholi and the Mashona killed the women and children.” Rhodes himself, according to Stent, recognised the Ndebele aristocrat “with his Zulu blood and his clean military antecedents” as a

68. J. Chalmers, *Fighting the Matabele* (Blackie, London, 1898), p 75.

69. F. Wishaw, *Lost in African Jungles* (Frederick Warne, London, 1896).

70. F. Wishaw, *The White Witch of the Matabele* (Griffith & Farran, London, [1897]), p 197.

71. Wishaw, *The White Witch*, p 225.

72. Wishaw, *The White Witch*, p 306.

“fine upstanding man.”⁷³ In fact when the Rising began, Selous hoped that it “would be confined ... to the Abenzantsi ... and ... the more numerous and useful section of the nation, of Makalaka and Mashuna descent, might be kept quiet.”⁷⁴ That the Company’s officials shared Selous’ anxieties is shown in the Company’s official report on the Rising that recognised that it had been led by the Zanzi aristocracy.⁷⁵ *John Ames* opens by contrasting the old and the new Ndebele. Chief Madúla’s “tall erect frame destitute of clothing save the *mutya* – of adornment save for a string of symbolical wooden beads ... showed to immeasurable advantage as contrasted with the cheap swagger of the drilled and uniformed convert to the new civilisation.”⁷⁶ The black sergeant was “a native of no class,” and the class differences among the Ndebele were reflections of similar divisions within the settlers.⁷⁷ Ames who was a public-school man, identified with the Zanzi; Inglefield, the white policeman who was from the English lower-middle classes, identified with his men all of whom had been recruited from the Holi. Inglefield “thought that the force under his command could do no wrong; Ames knew that it could and frequently did.”⁷⁸ Conscious of hierarchies and the habit of command of the older rulers, Ames as a gentleman treated a society that drew its authority from noble customs and usages with respect.

John Ames rang other changes of white accounts of the Rising. The Ndebele aristocracy turned to the Mlimo “out of three fourth’s political motive to a fourth superstition.” With the king dead and the Company firmly in charge, “the shadowy sayings of the Umlimo began to be sought out eagerly by the conquered race and a rosy time seemed likely to set in for the myrmidons of the Abstraction”.⁷⁹ These to a man were “Amaholi”, a term which Mitford glossed as “the slave caste” and Shiminya, their representative, showed in his physical inferiority “no

73. V. Stent, *A personal Record of Some Incidents in the Life of Cecil Rhodes* (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, [1924]), p 29.

74. Selous, *Sunshine and Storm*, p 26.

75. British South Africa Company, *Reports on the Native Disturbances*, p 5.

76. B. Mitford, *John Ames, Native Commissioner a Romance of the Matabele Rising* (F.V. White, London, 1900), p 5.

77. Mitford, *John Ames*, p 2.

78. Mitford, *John Ames*, p 15. Lieven, “Contested Empire”, p 17, notes how Mitford frequently registers “conflict between humane, progressive and liberal attitudes to Empire and an overtly racist, and therefore unacceptable, attitude typical of one type of gentleman hero.” Lieven works principally with Mitford’s South African stories; in the Rhodesian stories a racist contempt for blacks is invariably the prerogative of the English lower-middle classes and something that no English gentleman would be guilty of.

79. Mitford, *John Ames*, p 20.

strain of the warrior race” and had attained rank in the defeated nation only because in “both old and new civilisations, Mind is bound to tell”⁸⁰. Mitford used part of his novel to debate whether the Rising was organised by Ndebele aristocrats manipulating the Mlimo cult or by the Kalanga priests using the remaining structures of the Ndebele state to serve their ambitions. Frank Sykes had recorded the contempt with which the Ndebele induna Faku regarded the cult and how he spoke to one of its priests with the scorn appropriate to a Zanzi speaking to a Holi slave.⁸¹ Similarly, Mitford’s fictional Zazwe “loathed the whole Umlimo hierarchy as a pack of rank impostors, but it suited him now to cultivate them, for he was a rank schemer and would fain see every white man in the country cut to pieces”.⁸² With the secular power destroyed, Zazwe had to affect respect for the spiritual. A vast assembly of warriors was led through a rocky passage in the Matopos into a natural amphitheatre to hear the voice of the “Great Abstraction” and Shiminya standing before the cave asked when “the nation’s new birth” would begin. “[T]he voice rolled from the black cavern mouth in a very thunder that reverberated among the mighty granite walls in a shock that struck the entranced auditors speechless. ‘The time, Children of Matyobani? The time? Before the next moon is dead.’”⁸³ The descendants of Mzilikazi for all their proud distaste for the cult had clearly lost control of this particular event, especially as the Mlimo was neither Kalanga nor Ndebele, but a mad white man who attributed his wife’s death to the wrongs of the British government and in revenge had organised resistance to British rule throughout southern Africa. In a novelist less sympathetic to the Ndebele, a white Mlimo would be a version of the belief that blacks are so incapable of co-ordinated action that the sinister hand of a dissident white can be discerned in any black resistance to settler rule. Missionaries, the World Council of Churches, or the Comintern and its successors all perform this function in later novels. In *John Ames*, the white Mlimo served another purpose. If a conspiracy of Kalanga priests of singular bestiality and a crazed white man could be held responsible for the Rising, the Ndebele were exonerated of the worst excesses. They, at least, were driven by rational political motives and the Rising was only one of several strategies to ensure the nation’s survival.

Mitford’s next Ndebele novel, *The Triumph of Hilary Blachland* (1901), is set in the period between the occupation of Mashonaland and the invasion of the Matabeleland. A striking feature of this novel is the

80. Mitford, *John Ames*, p 20.

81. Sykes, *With Plumer in Matabeleland*, p 258.

82. Mitford, *John Ames*, pp 28-29

83. Mitford, *John Ames*, p 68.

way in which Mitford transformed standard accounts of the brutality of Lobengula's court into savage rituals. He retold the old story of a man whose eyes were gouged out, ears, nose and lips cut off for some offence against the king, a punishment that an improbable number of whites claimed to have witnessed.⁸⁴ This choice example of Ndebele barbarity in the novel becomes a ritual and rhythmic chants testify to its sacred character. A sample reads: "'So,' said the Great One: 'They had ears, but their ears heard what it was not lawful they should hear, so they must hear no more!' Is he not wise? Au! The wisdom of the calf of Matyobane!" As Mitford draws his readers nearer to the king, order replaces the turbulence of the people away from the court:

The great crescent of dark bodies, and parti-coloured shields, and fantastic headgear, swaying to the rhythmic chant; the sparkle and gleam of assegais; the entirely savage note of anticipation conveyed by nearly two thousand excited voices, constituted a spectacle as imposing as it was indisputably awe-inspiring.⁸⁵

When the king made his entry, "his attitude haughty and majestic to the last degree ... [was] calculated to strike awe into the white beholders" and "a more majestic-looking savage it would be hard to imagine".⁸⁶ A romantic nostalgia that is always present in the more sympathetic accounts of the Ndebele both explains and reconciles the oxymoronic awe-inspiring savages and their majestic but savage king. The savage is still in contact with the fundamentals of our humanity that national prosperity and its acquisitive habits have obliterated.

In all of his Ndebele novels, Mitford recognised that empire was the next and necessary stage through which the Ndebele had to pass although, as with Haggard, Mitford's empire was no democracy, but rather a hierarchy where nobility of spirit and courage on the battlefield singled out the leaders. The hatred that the Ndebele soldiers felt in 1891 for the whites was justified with the hindsight of 1901, but the same hindsight allowed it to be unthreatening:

84. J. Cooper-Chadwick, *Three Years with Lobengula ...* (Cassell, London, 1894), pp 103-104, has an almost identical incident to the one described in *Hilary Blachland*. For other examples see A.A. Anderson, *Twenty-five Years in a Waggon Sport and Travel in South Africa* (Chapman & Hall, London, 1888) p 184; Coillard, *On the Threshold of Central Africa*, p 35; H. Vaughan-Williams, *A Visit to Lobengula in 1889* (H. Vaughan-Williams, Glasgow, 1947); Gelfand, *Gubulawayo*, p 121.

85. B. Mitford, *The Triumph of Hilary Blachland* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1901), p 24.

86. Mitford, *The Triumph of Hilary Blachland*, p 29.

Who were these whites? Chanted the warriors [sic]. It were better to make an end of them. They were the advance guard of many more – swarms upon swarms of them – even as the few locusts who constituted the advance-guard of swarms upon swarms of that real locust, the devourer. The locusts had settled and were devouring everything. Let them be stamped out.

In his first Ndebele books, Mitford described the founding of the Ndebele nation as epic. Here the voices of the warriors had a choric quality, anticipating the tragedy that had befallen the nation.

Very few novels have anything to say about the victims of Ndebele raids and the subject people of the Ndebele state. H. Majors' *In Search of Gold* (1900) is an exception and despite its date is a work of propaganda for the Company's occupation of Mashonaland. In the novel the Holi are slaves and in Matabeleland there are two slaves to every warrior. Major mentioned whispers of a slave revolt as the presence of the whites in Mashonland had given the Holi the hope of liberation. The white men "will be a shield between us and the Matabele assegais," they said,⁸⁷ but when the invasion of Matabeleland commenced, the Ndebele past and the social tensions in Matabeleland were forgotten. The Shona were "a poor feeble folk" who compared dismally with a Ndebele prisoner who "had a splendid build and bust, and looked as fit as one of the Company's troopers".⁸⁸ When similarity rather than difference between coloniser and colonised is emphasised in a colonial discourse, the colonised are no longer perceived as threatening. If a shared masculinity lessens the difference between a Ndebele warrior and a company trooper, the latter becomes an appropriate agent of the new power that was succeeding the Khumalo kings as rulers of the plateau.

Mitford's preoccupation with class and caste is signalled in an incident that opened his 1904 Ndebele novel *In the Whirl of the Rising*. Piers Lamont refused to rescue an urchin who had fallen through the ice of a lake in the park of an English country house and he explained that there was no moral obligation for him to risk his life to save "a gallows' brat" whose face showed "the characteristics of the worst phase of guttersnipe – low, cunning, predatoriness, and aggressive brutality".⁸⁹ In Matabeleland, similar distinctions of class could be discerned in the different physical characteristics of Ndebele and Kalanga and the villainy

87. H. Majors, *In Search of Gold or Our Adventures in Matabeleland* (Newman, London, 1900), pp 183-184.

88. Majors, *In Search of Gold*, pp 249-250.

89. B. Mitford, *In the Whirl of the Rising* (Methuen, London, [1904]), pp 3, 9.

of “two, evil-looking Makalaka” was confirmed by “their smooth shaven heads and broad noses and glistening eyeballs”.⁹⁰ In each of Mitford’s novels about the Risings, the Mlimo assumed a very different form. In *In the Whirl of the Rising*, when Lamont met one of the cult’s priests, he was astonished to find instead of the “lean, crafty, evil-faced Makalaka” he had expected, “a stout, comfortable and well-bred looking Matabele” ringed and genial.⁹¹ By the end of the novel, however, the aristocracy had realised that their allegiance with the “Makalaka” had been a mistake and a confusion between ruling and subject classes could only serve to corrupt the rulers: “The fighting men had been brought into contact with [the sorcerers], to the detriment of their prestige”.⁹² Once proper class distinctions had been restored, peace negotiations could commence and the Ndebele were only too willing to acknowledge the British as their masters and conquerors. When the Ndebele were attacking whites, they could be written as “devils” and “unsparing savage warriors, trained all their lives in battle and bloodshed and deeds of pitiless ferocity”,⁹³ but Mitford never wrote entirely within the discourse within which such savagery is constructed. The nostalgia that imagines the noble savage informs a paragraph describing an attack on a store where whites have formed a laager. Many of the soldiers “had been herders or mine boys for the settlers and prospectors”, but they had now “discarded their tattered shirts and trousers, or ragged hats, and their bronze bodies were bedecked with feathers and bead adornments, and cow-tails, and monkey skins, and teeth necklaces”. This represented “a distinct improvement” and “assuredly the sight was a martial and inspiring one”.⁹⁴ As the whites in the store were in imminent danger of being massacred, it was hardly they who were inspired by the Ndebele in warrior garb. Mitford’s distaste for colonised blacks clinging to the fringes of the settler economy, a proletariat in formation, allowed him momentarily to see the Ndebele as they probably saw themselves and certainly as he chose to remember them.

In Haggard’s novel *Benita* (1906), a qualified nobility is accorded the Kalanga as opposed to the Ndebele.⁹⁵ The former were “tall spare

90. Mitford, *In the Whirl of the Rising*, p 14.

91. Mitford, *In the Whirl of the Rising*, p 93.

92. Mitford, *In the Whirl of the Rising*, p 285.

93. Mitford, *In the Whirl of the Rising*, pp 176, 195.

94. Mitford, *In the Whirl of the Rising*, p 242.

95. Haggard knew J. Theodore Bent’s claim based on the Zulu word for sun in *The Ruined Cities of Mashonaland: Being a Record of Excavations and Explorations on 1891* (Longmans Green, London, 1896), p 62, that the Kalanga were the “People of the Sun” and descended from some sun-worshipping people.

men, light-coloured, with refined mobile features. Here was no negro blood, but rather that of some ancient people such as Egyptians or Phoenicians".⁹⁶ The Ndebele in the novel could reveal no such distinguished genealogy. They were "bastard Zulu" and Lobengula "the usurper".⁹⁷ The Kalanga Mambo, the Mlimo of Bambatse, another change rung on Mlimo, responded timidly to the arrogant Ndebele envoys. Only when he fell into a trance, did an ancient and occult wisdom allow him to see the fate of the Ndebele nation and its king, and he spoke with something of the authority that once was his by right. He saw Lobengula "hunted like a wounded hyena" and lying in an unmarked grave. He saw "the white man take [the king's] lands and all his wealth; to them and to no son of his shall his people give the *Bayete*, the royal salute". Only "a name accursed from generation to generation" would remain to him and peace would descend on the land.⁹⁸ Haggard was still pursuing his old vendetta against the dead king, but this was not done at the expense of the new colony. The Company and its settlers would guarantee the Kalanga a peace that Lobengula and his Ndebele denied them.

Bertram Mitford's last novel set in Matabeleland, *A Legacy of the Granite Hills* (1909), invites the reader to share the pain of the defeated nation through the memories and actions of an old man who had been part of Mzilikazi's glorious northward march. When he plotted the Rising, Mitford observed that "treason the conquering race would have called [his schemes], the conquered patriotism" and the white heroine who knew the old king spoke of his having been provoked into war by the Company.⁹⁹ In this novel, the Mlimo becomes a deliverer to a "distintegrated and conquered nation",¹⁰⁰ but these were also Ndebele who understood that political power in a world made anew by the Company had its foundations in money and the latest weapons, and they were very different from the Ndebele who believed that their own military traditions were sufficient to ensure their sovereignty. *A Legacy of the Granite Hills* anticipated the now commonplace distinctions between primary and secondary anti-colonial resistance, the one drawing on an old and increasingly irrelevant order and the other using the weapons of modernity to oppose the colony. These Ndebele leaders

96. H. Rider Haggard, *Benita an African Romance* (Cassell, London, 1906), p 92.

97. Haggard, *Benita*, pp 93, 103.

98. Haggard, *Benita*, p 102.

99. B. Mitford, *The Legacy of the Granite Hills* (John Long, London, 1909), pp 37, 45.

100. Mitford, *The Legacy of the Granite Hills*, p 165.

knew that they would regain their land only when they had turned against their conquerors, the Maxims that defeated them.

Among the novelists, only Stanley Portall Hyatt was more contemptuous than Mitford of the manner in which the whites sacrificed the old king. Hyatt is one of several early writers who constructed Rhodesia within a romantic anti-capitalist discourse and he invariably represented the Company as a force of corruption for both the Shona and the Ndebele. *The Makers of Mischief* (1911), Hyatt's only novel, set entirely in Matabeleland, represented Lobengula as a noble and tragic figure precisely because he lacked the necessary weapons to oppose the capitalists who were behind Rudd and his fellow concession hunters. Hyatt wanted no truck with a "latter-day civilisation ... the product of an alliance between the Stock Exchange and the missionary societies" which "is a wholly commercial matter, and Lobengula was essential uncommercial, being honourable". Though he was a "savage", he proved himself in the end to be "a high-souled gentleman, the exact opposite of those who jockeyed him out of his kingdom, and drove him to an unknown grave somewhere on the banks of the Zambesi". The end of this confrontation between mammon and nobility was that "Cecil Rhodes became a great national hero ... Lobengula ... the villain of the piece".¹⁰¹ That, as we have seen, is not true. Except for Haggard with his memories of the Patterson embassy, a conquered Lobengula served a more valuable function as savage and noble king in the white Rhodesian imagination than he would have done, had he remained a villain.

Nearly all later Rhodesian novels co-opted the fictional Ndebele as imagined allies of the whites in the latter's confident consolidation of their power. In Fred McIver's *An Imperial Adventure* (1910), one of the Company's pioneers remarked that "niggers" rather than the Dutch would be the "insoluble race-problem up in Mashonaland" and received the comforting reply that "the Matabele have pretty well wiped them out".¹⁰² Not that the Ndebele could be left to their own devices. The men were struck by the dignity and fidelity of a Ndebele servant that one of the pioneers acquired and he explained that he "tamed him ... by saving his life one day and kicking him the next. If you want to rule these rascals you must know when to strike."¹⁰³ This is more than brutal bullying: the knowledge of when to strike defines the masculine power of the pioneers.

101. S. Portal Hyatt, *The Makers of Mischief* (T. Werner Laurie, London, [1911]), pp 174-175.

102. I. McIver [A.I. Pritchard], *An Imperial Adventure* (William Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1910), p 123.

103. McIver, *An Imperial Adventure*, p 144.

By this date, not only had the political authority of the Khumalo kings passed to the Company, but the romantic aura of that savage authority had been transmuted with it. Cynthia Stockley, who was in Fort Victoria during the invasion of Matabeleland, in *The Claw* recalled Jameson justifying the invasion by referring to the country under Lobengula as “the shambles of a bloody butcher” and the “necropolis of the wretched Mashona nation.” He was making it what it should be, “a white man’s country”.¹⁰⁴ In Stockley’s early and best-selling novels, Rhodesians were liberated from the conventions of England and experienced life with the passionate intensity that the dangers of the frontier provoke. With the old king dead, the country would no longer witness “[s]cenes of barbaric glory and ferocity,” of bodies “black as ebony” bedecked in leopard-skins and “bangles of brass” and of the ground in Lobengula’s palace “stained with hot gushing life blood, and strewn with dead men”.¹⁰⁵ However, the vitality in the blood is more memorable in that description than stains or corpses, and in Stockley’s novels it sometimes seems as if that vitality cleansed of barbarism and ferocity had passed to white Rhodesians, although in justice to her realism, her Rhodesians were as likely to be feckless drunks as the noble men and women on a new frontier.

In 1893, the Company claimed to have marched on Bulawayo to save the Shona, but later novels did not see much in the Shona that was worth saving. As early as 1907, in Cullen Gouldsbury’s *Circe’s Garden*, a character remarked, “I don’t funk a Mashona much! If it were a Matabele – well, that would be a different matter.”¹⁰⁶ Thirty years later, Jane England, whose novels are crowded with new risings in the 1930s and 1940s, repeated the contempt for the Shona as fighters. In *The Flowering Veld* (1940), a character draws comfort from the fact that “[t]here would be no direct attack on the laager. These were Mashonas not Zulus.”¹⁰⁷ Gertrude Page’s *The Pathway* (1914) distanced the Shona through the gaze of the Angoni manservant of the hero: “To the northern tribes [the Shona] represented merely a people who were overcome yearly by the Matabele, and had their few warriors killed and their young women and children raided”.¹⁰⁸

Sometimes the function of the whites is to recall the Ndebele to their martial past. In John Lambourne’s *Trooper in Charge* (1939), Christians had provoked their heathen neighbours into attacking them and

104. C. Stockley, *The Claw* (Hurst & Blackett, London, 1911), pp 138-139.

105. Stockley, *The Claw*, pp 202-203.

106. C. Gouldsbury, *Circe’s Garden* (Eveleigh Nash, London, 1907), p 208.

107. J. England, *The Flowering Veld* (Hurst & Blackett, London, 1940), p 202.

108. G. Page, *The Pathway*, (Ward, Locke, London, 1914), p 149.

the police had to intervene to protect the new converts. Christianity offered little to inspire the Ndebele to defend themselves and a trooper who also was the Earl of Maldon, inspired them with an atavistic militarism. “‘Come,’ he shouted, ‘Come on you sons of Zulu warriors. At ’em again!’ They turned and looked at him. The hunted animal look left their eyes. The tall white man was going to lead them”.¹⁰⁹ If the nostalgia of white Southern Africans located the ideal type of noble savage in Zulus, the latter’s Ndebele cousins could discover their nobility only when an English aristocrat who was a trooper in the British South Africa Police, prodded their memory and restored to them, debased by the dubious gift of Christianity, something of the nobility that once had been theirs. A brutal colonial authority controlled even that memory, however, and black constables used sjamboks on any converts who tried to flee from the fighting.¹¹⁰

The idea that the Ndebele are the natural allies of the whites was sometimes expressed in the later novels through a loyal Ndebele servant or a Ndebele companion of a white hero. Sheila Macdonald’s *Mr Crusoe’s Young Woman* (1934) has “an ancient Matabele retainer to whose unswerving loyalty during the native uprising of ‘96” the Childerstone’s owed their lives. “‘M’holi’ (Slaves) [sic] he would spit out at his Mashona fellow servants, and with bony fingers proudly indicate the leather circle denoting his pure Zulu descent.”¹¹¹ His continuing loyalty manifested itself in reporting the adulterous relationship of one of the Childerstone wives: “the woman is the woman of my own *n’kosi* – my baba. Was it not these old arms that sheltered him when the *M’holi* would have speared him with assegais or cracked his skull ...?”, he asks.¹¹² Vere Stent’s claim that only the Holi killed white women and children expressed what had become an accepted part of settler mythologies about the Risings.

In later novels the friendship of strong men transcended differences of race. John Gordon Davis’ *Hold My Hand I’m Dying* (1967) shows the bond between Assistant Native Commissioner Joseph Mahoney who was irresistible to white women and Samson Ndhlovu who took black women as his right. When a woman with whom he had been sexually involved warned that her lover was approaching, Ndhlovu said, “He is a Batonka, I am a Matabele. The Batonka always paid tribute to the Matabele before

109. J. Lambourne, *Trooper in Charge* (Robert Hale, London, 1939), p 251.

110. Lambourne, *Trooper in Charge*, p 253.

111. S. Macdonald, *Mr Crusoe’s Young Woman* (Cassell, London, 1934), p 36.

112. Macdonald, *Mr Crusoe’s Young Woman*, p 215.

the white man came.”¹¹³ These homosocial bondings are repeated in Daniel Carney’s *The Whispering Death* (1969). A policeman, Terrick, was a loner until he met Katchemu, “a giant of a man” who recognised “no man as his superior regardless of rank or colour”.¹¹⁴ He and Terrick were involved in a brawl breaking up a beer drink and when Katchemu said, “It was a good fight”, he and Terrick “just seemed to drift together”.¹¹⁵ Not that the distance between black and white is ever totally obscured. The drums at a beer drink awoke instincts in Katchemu that in the past only raiding would have satisfied. “‘Fight,’ they said, ‘Blood,’ they said, ‘Red flowing blood ... Dance the dance of a warrior like your grandfather did.’”¹¹⁶ Both Katchemu and Ndhlovu died fighting invading guerrillas and protecting the men with whom they had bonded.

It is nearly the last phase of the noble Ndebele savage. Nobility is now set in opposition to the new authors of disorder armed with AK rifles and Marxist-Leninist ideologies.¹¹⁷ Rather than signifying a person untouched by corrupting civilisation, the noble savage has become anachronistic in a different way. In Rhodesia, his nobility belonged to a past when the Khumalos still ruled the nation and nostalgia was allowed him as long as he acknowledged that he had been defeated by a worthy ally. He and the whites shared the same memories that informed the Rhodesian nation. The new nationalists remember the past differently and in their memories there is no place for Mzilikazi, Lobengula, Rhodes and Rhodesia’s rulers, except as invaders and oppressors. There were however several novelists who, when the Liberation War began, laid their hopes on Ndebele memories of their former dominance. In Peter Smith’s *The Rain Goddess* (1973), a future guerrilla commander reacts indignantly to a remark that the whites stole land from the Shona. “‘They won it in battle from Lobengula,’ he says. ‘It was Matabele land and they fought for it.’” When he is reminded that he is in Mashonaland, he answers, “The Mashonas might have lived here, but no Mashona ever moved without the approval of the Matabele”.¹¹⁸ After September 1976, when South Africa withdrew financial and military backing from the

113. J. Gordon Davis, *Hold My Hand I’m Dying* (Michael Joseph, London, 1967), p 11.

114. D. Carney, *The Whispering Death* (College Press, Salisbury, 1969), p 13.

115. Carney, *The Whispering Death*, p 15.

116. Carney, *The Whispering Death*, p 35.

117. For an account of how Rhodesian novelists interpreted the Liberation War, see A. Chennells, “Rhodesian Discourse, Rhodesian Novels and the Zimbabwe Liberation War,” in N. Bhebhe and T. Ranger (eds), *Society in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War* (University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare; Heinemann, Portsmouth [New Haven]; James Currey, London, 1995), pp 102-129.

118. P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* (Jacaranda Press, Salisbury, 1973), pp 26-27.

Smith regime and hastened the end of Rhodesia, the novelists eagerly anticipated a future Ndebele-Shona civil war. Zanzi and Holi made a brief reappearance in Robert Early's *A Time of Madness* (1977), although they were not named as such. In the novel ZAPU is a purely Ndebele party and Magaba, one of its senior leaders, "dreams of a Matabele-dominated society with the Shona subjugated to the role of second-class citizens and servants". Whites, he regarded with indifference: "They existed merely as a stumbling block to his dreams of a Matabele empire".¹¹⁹ An empire distinguishes Magaba's future political order from the socialist republic envisaged by ordinary guerrillas in the novel whether Shona or Ndebele and the last trace of the nobility that Early's predecessors accorded the Ndebele is in Magaba's dreams of their becoming the ruling class of a restored empire.

What were the effects over the years of these fictional reproductions of the Ndebele as savages or noble savages, of these processes of allegorising? Whites may have perceived the Ndebele as different from the Shona, but in fact they were treated no differently from other blacks within the colonial state and, after the heartland of the Ndebele kingdom had been settled by whites, the land reserved for the Ndebele was even more agriculturally marginal than much reserve land in the north, central and eastern parts of Rhodesia. The concession that the Company used to seek a royal charter for had derived its authority from the claim that the Khumalos ruled most of what was to become Southern Rhodesia. When the Company destroyed the Ndebele state, the colonial state created another minority that ruled a huge underclass. If Rhodesia claimed that justice now replaced injustice, order savagery and progress stasis, the arrogant racism of many white Rhodesians could perhaps be read and justified as a new version of the old nobility.

Abstract

Early missionaries and travellers who encountered Mzilikazi's Ndebele invariably represented them as superior to other people in the far interior. Only when they were seen as standing between Britain and Mashonaland, did more hostile representations prevail and then they were reported not as noble, but as simple savages whose brutal raids destabilised the areas surrounding the Khumalo kingdom. The most influential fictional representation of an idealised Ndebele were the Kukuana of Haggard's

119. R. Early, *A Time of Madness* (Graham, Salisbury, 1977), p 238.

King Solomon's Mines, who while being savages, showed a capacity for nobility from which the whites could learn. The Kukuana anticipated many subsequent fictional depictions of the Ndebele. Later novels often reproduced British South Africa Company propaganda and the changing representation of the Ndebele depended on whether the Company were in the process of invading Mashonaland, and later Matabeleland, or whether the Ndebele appeared to have submitted to the Company's authority, or had rebelled against it. Some novelists represented the Ndebele as victims of the Company's greed and misgovernment and in later Rhodesian novels they were shown as worthy allies of the new rulers of the southern Zambesian plateau who exercised the authority that had formerly been the prerogative of the Khumalo kings.

Opsomming

"Where to touch them?"

Voorstellings van die Ndebele in Rhodesiese Fiksie

Vroeë sendelinge en reisigers wat Mzilikazi se Ndebele teëgekom het, het laasgenoemde sonder uitsondering as meerderwaardig teenoor ander mense in die verre binneland uitgebeeld. Eers toe hulle tussen Brittanje en Masjonaland te staan gekom het, het meer vyandige voorstellings van hulle die lig gesien. In daardie stadium is hulle allermens as edel beskryf, maar eerder as eenvoudige barbare wie se gewelddadige strooptogte die gebied om die Khumalo-koninkryk gedestabiliseer het. Die invloedrykste fiktiewe voorstelling van die geïdealiseerde Ndebele is dié van die Kukuana in Haggard se *King Solomon's Mines* wat, hoewel hulle barbare was, tog 'n neiging tot edelheid openbaar het waaruit die blankes kon leer. Die Kukuana het talle latere fiktiewe uitbeeldings van die Ndebele voorafgegaan. Latere romans het dikwels propaganda vir die British South Africa Company (BSAC) verteenwoordig. Veranderende voorstellings van die Ndebele het dus afgehang daarvan of die BSAC besig was om Masjonaland, en later Matabeleland, in te val, en of dit gelyk het asof die Ndebele hulle aan die gesag van die BSAC onderwerp, of daarteen gerebelleer het. Sommige romanskrywers het die Ndebele as slagoffers van die BSAC se gierigheid en wanadministrasie uitgebeeld. In latere Rhodesiese romans is hulle selfs as waardige bondgenote van die nuwe regeerdes van die suidelike Zambesiese plato beskryf wat die gesag uitgeoefen het wat voorheen die prerogatief van die Khumalo-konings was.

Key words

Bertram Mitford; colonial allegories; Lobengula; Mzilikazi; Ndebele; noble savage; Rhodesian fiction; Rider Haggard; savage; Zimbabwean fiction.

Sleutelwoorde

Barbaar; Bertram Mitford; edele barbaar; koloniale allegorieë; Lobengula; Mzilikazi; Ndebele; Rhodesiese fiksie; Rider Haggard; Zimbabwiese fiksie.