Settler security, insecurity and solidarity in colonial Natal with particular reference to the South Coast 1850-1910

Duncan Du Bois
University of KwaZulu-Natal
dubois@axxess.co.za

Abstract

Although British settlers enjoyed political and military control, there were factors which rendered them vulnerable. These included their proximity to the reserves set aside by Shepstone exclusively for African residence and the fear of unrest or even attack emanating from those reserves. As a safeguard, settler volunteer groups or rifle associations were established across the Colony. A spirit of community and settler solidarity was the corollary of those associations. But vexing the situation was settler dependence on African labour and the role of Africans up until the late 1880s in the provision of certain basic foodstuffs.

The importing of indentured Indian labour provided relief for settler enterprise on the one hand but created a new challenge on the other, namely, the social presence and commercial competition which the Indian posed as a settler. A battery of discriminatory legislation aimed at removing those insecurities proved fruitless.

Despite official awareness of the vulnerabilities to which the tiny settler population was exposed, ironically a policy of frugality resulted in the placement of token-strength police contingents in the various counties. The Anglo-Zulu War and the unrest of 1906 which culminated in the Bhambatha rebellion were the two most serious threats to settler safety and security. As such they produced a surge in settler solidarity. Yet in both cases settlers were neither threatened nor harmed. The earlier Langalibalele affair also triggered a settler response of solidarity with Governor Pine for his handling of it.

Isolated and sparsely populated, the South Coast as a frontier region was subject to the same insecurities as other parts of the Colony. The solidarity which its settler population always displayed in respect of those insecurities proved additional to the solidarity that already existed as a result of the region's long struggle for infrastructure development. Although never endangered by unrest, South Coast colonists were no different from those elsewhere in Natal in favouring discriminatory legislation against Africans and Indians. They also solidly endorsed the union dispensation as the best guarantee of future security.

Keywords: Shepstone; Locations; Labour; Native policy; Frontier; Volunteers; Food; Indians; Pondoland; Unrest; Union.

Introduction

Throughout the colonial dispensation, a sense of vulnerability pervaded white settler communities in Natal. This happened not only because they constituted a racial minority which was never greater than eight percent of the total population,[1] but also because of their dependence on local African labour and their proximity to the tracts of land set aside by Theophilus Shepstone as locations for Africans. Settlers were also dependent on Africans and later on Indian settlers for much of their food supply. This article seeks to track that sense of insecurity by focusing on a particular region, namely, the South Coast. However, before embarking on that review it is necessary to provide a contextual outline.

The settler mind-set which prevailed in the 1850s and beyond was the product of experiences which included frontier wars in the Eastern Cape and the atrocities against settlers there; also the murder of Piet Retief and his party. Cape Governor Sir Benjamin D'Urban had referred to the Xhosa as "irreclaimable savages".[2] As such, there was a determination to establish settler domination and supremacy which, as Niall Ferguson points out with regard to the 1857 mutiny in India, the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 and the Boer challenge in South Africa 1899-1902, "the British response was brutal".[3] Moreover, the pervasive political imperialism of the Victorian age was such that "nearly every nineteenth-century writer was extraordinarily aware of the fact of empire," as Edward Said has stated.[4]

Shepstone was directly responsible for African administration in Natal from 1846 to 1876. His location system as Norman Etherington depicted on a map,[5] – a patchwork of ten reserves set aside for exclusive occupation by Africans as recommended by the Locations Commission in March 1847 – triggered a debate over land which persisted throughout the colonial period and beyond. As Jeff Guy, has explained, the contradictions between Natal's settler ideology and economic reality "were no more vividly revealed than in

1 *Colony of Natal Statistical Year Book,* 1907, p. 3.

2 A Lester, "'Otherness' and the frontiers of empire: The Eastern Cape colony 1806-1850", *Journal of Historical Geography,* 24, 1 January 1998, pp. 9-13.

3 N Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain made the modern world* (Penguin Group, Melbourne, 2008), p. xxii.

4 EW Said, *Orientalism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978), p. 14. Arising from his tour of South Africa in 1877, Anthony Trollope, a prolific novelist of the Victorian era, published a two volume work in which he supported the idea of white supremacy on the basis that it was necessary to "civilise" the indigenous African. JH Davidson (ed.), *Trollope's South Africa* (A Balkema, Cape Town, 1973), p. 455.

5 N Etherington, *Preachers, peasants and politics in SE Africa: African Christian communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand* (Royal Historical Institute, London, 1978), p. 7.

the debate over land". By 1877, although Africans, who numbered 290,000, had only two million acres reserved for them; six million acres were reserved for white settlers whose numbers scarcely exceeded 22,000 at that time while the remaining four million acres of the Colony were left unoccupied and uncultivated.[6] But, as Guy emphasizes, that was not the only reality of the skewed land allocation: in 1851 Shepstone estimated that two-thirds of the African population lived outside the reserves allocated to them. They dwelled on private land or Crown land.[7]

As a region for European settlement, Alexandra County was particularly fragmented due to the presence of several African and mission reserves. These included the Amahlongwa, which occupied 7,464 acres; Ifafa (7,500 acres), Mtwalumi (13,407 acres), Mzumbe (8,000 acres); and Equeefa College (3,000 acres).[8] The proximity and presence of those reserves to white settlements and farms induced a sense of vulnerability for settlers. That was inevitable given the vast disparity in numbers between the settler population and the indigenous Africans.[9] In addition to those reserves, there was the land of Mnini and the Thuli people, which were given to them as compensation when they were relocated from the Bluff peninsula. This extended from the Lovu River southwards to the Mkomanzi River. In 1859 Robert Mann described Mnini's lands as "composed of green hills and wooded valleys, interspersed with kraals of beehive-like huts and mealie grounds".[10] But territorially Mnini's land reserve isolated white settlement south of the Mkomanzi from the rest of the colony. In that respect, white settlement on the South Coast was unique. There was also a geographical dimension to the region's isolation and separation: it was traversed by more than twenty rivers which were not bridged until the arrival of the railway from 1897. Travel and transportation to and from the South Coast was, therefore, very slow and expensive.[11]

6 J Lambert, *Betrayed trust: Africans and the state in colonial Natal* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1995), p. 77, notes that when Crown lands were opened up for sale between 1878 and 1890, land-owning by Africans increased from 17,366 to 67,077 acres.

7 J Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the forging of Natal* (UKZN Press, Scottsville, 2013), pp. 463-464; C Bundy, *The rise and fall of the South African peasantry* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1988), p. 170; *Colony of Natal Statistical Year Book,* 1907, p. 3.

8 *Natal Mercury,* 8 August 1871.

9 In 1864 the number of Africans in the area between the Mkomanzi and the Mzimkulu rivers – known as Alexandra County from 1865 – was put at 12,000. The white population was just 361. PAR CSO 214, No 144, 18 January 1865. By 1885 that disparity was even greater: 26,580 Africans; 628 whites. *Natal Blue Book,* 1885, p. T4.

10 R Mann, *The Colony of Natal* (Jarrold & Sons, London, 1859), p. 79.

11 In 1860 it was stated that the cost of transport from Durban to Umzinto was nearly three times more expensive than from Durban to Pietermaritzburg even though the distances were almost the same. *Natal Mercury,* 5 April 1860.

Volunteer corps

Given the fact that the military garrison was confined to Pietermaritzburg and that the numbers of men attached to the Natal Mounted Police, which was founded only in 1873, were quite inadequate for the vast areas they had to cover. In 1887 they numbered only 180 men.[12] The formation of local defence units, therefore, was recognized as essential to settler security. Ordinance 11 of 1855 promoted the establishment of Volunteer Corps amongst settler communities particularly where settler communities were small and isolated and situated in close proximity to African reserves.

Before Crown land grants were made in the area south of the Mkomanzi River, the Isipingo district constituted the southern frontier of the settler presence in Natal. Mindful of their proximity to the Mnini and Mlazi African reserves and their relative isolation from the village of Durban, in 1856 settlers formed an informal rifle club. Although their safety and security was never threatened, in 1861 they petitioned the Acting Governor, Major Williamson, for Government assistance to erect a fort for their cattle "to prevent them being stolen by natives". Their request was ignored.[13]

A wave of insecurity spread through the Colony in July 1861 when it was reported that Cetshwayo's impis were massing along the Thukela border with Natal and that an invasion was imminent.[14] Although by August it was clear that no Zulu attack was going to take place and in any case Isipingo was remote from any such threat, Isipingo settlers nonetheless made formal application in terms of Ordinance 11 of 1855 for the formation of a Volunteer Corps.[15] On 19 November 1861, Governor Scott proclaimed the founding of the Isipingo Rifle Corps. Dick King was appointed Captain.[16]

The first Volunteer Corps established south of Isipingo were at Umkomaas and Umzinto early in 1860.[17] Described as a "beautiful wilderness",[18] the territory south of the Mkomanzi River was a sparsely settled, remote frontier area. By 1865 the two rifle clubs had amalgamated to form the Alexandra Mounted Rifles.[19]In December 1864 the settler defence line was extended to

12 EH Brookes and C de B Webb, *A history of Natal* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1965), pp. 22, 166.
13 *Natal Star,* 26 January 1861; PAR CSO 129, 260, 15 February 1861.
14 J Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone...,* pp. 284-285.
15 *Natal Mercury,* 23 July 1861.
16 Natal Colony, *Government Notice,* 139, 1861.
17 *Natal Mercury,* 16 February 1860.
18 *Natal Almanac and Yearly Register,* 1863, p. 42.
19 *Natal Government Gazette,* 17(971), 12 September 1865.

the Mzimkulu River, then the southern boundary of Natal, with the formation of the Ifafa Mounted Rifles.[20] These associations also provided social cohesion amongst settlers and shooting competitions were also convivial occasions. At the inter-club shooting contest between Isipingo and Lower Mkomanzi on Canonby estate in July 1864, post-competition festivities flourished late into the night.[21] The shooting skills of the men also went on show at what were called "annual amusements" held at Park Rynie over a weekend in July. Along with horse races and athletic events, these family occasions were first held in 1863 and proved the social highlight of the South Coast for many years.[22]

Involvement was taken very seriously. With a membership of 57 in 1866, it included almost every able-bodied male settler in Alexandra County.[23] Regular monthly drilling exercises were held often lasting two days.[24] In May 1868, for example, a five-day camp was held which included "skirmishing" on foot and target shooting.[25] The ready acceptance of the need for an organization such as the Alexandra Mounted Rifles and the enthusiasm displayed for its activities would seem to indicate a mind-set which recognized the vulnerability of settlers to possible uprisings or unrest on the part of the indigenous population. In any event, the volunteer corps promoted settler solidarity which, in the case of the South Coast, enjoyed a sustained existence as a result of the region's long struggle with the colonial Government for infrastructure development.[26]

Solidarity

Governor Scott had noted a "coercive disposition" by colonists towards the African population.[27] Although incidents of confrontation between settlers and members of the local African population seem to have been rare, there was

20 *Natal Government Gazette,* XVI(932), 20 December 1864.

21 *Natal Mercury,* 12 July 1864. See also: *Natal Mercury,* 10 July 1863.When the Buffalo Border Guard assembled for its annual shooting competition in 1878 in the Dundee area of Northern Natal, the large number of spectators who were present turned the occasion into a social one. JPC Laband, PS Thompson with S Henderson, *The Buffalo Border 1879: The Anglo-Zulu War in Northern Natal* (Research Monograph No. 6, University of Natal, Durban, 1983), p. 103.

22 *Natal Mercury,* 5 July 1866; 9 July 1867; 11 July 1868.

23 PAR CSO 264, 43, 28 February 1867.

24 *Diary of David Chalmers Aiken* (Old House Museum, Aliwal St, Durban, Ref. 581), 5 August 1867.

25 *Aiken diary*, May 1868, p. 24.

26 Thirty seven years elapsed before the first bridge over the Mkomanzi River was opened to rail traffic in September 1897.

27 *Natal Mercury,* 22 March 1864.

one which aroused settler solidarity against Dunbar Moodie, the Alexandra County Resident Magistrate. William Joyner and his son Murdo were fined £4 and £1 respectively in October 1862 by Moodie for provocation and assault on a group of Africans. Joyner claimed that the Africans were trespassing on his property and had been carrying assegais. Moodie fined the Africans £2 each for "aggression".[28]

However, Moodie's attempt to carry out his duties without fear or favour and to uphold justice and fairness produced a backlash amongst South Coast settlers. Primarily this arose from his refusal to allow Joyner the right to appeal his sentence and Moodie's statement that his verdict was based on "my law". Joyner appealed for justice by publicising his case in the *Natal Mercury.* The response was an overwhelming demonstration of settler solidarity with Joyner: two petitions were compiled, one containing 54 signatures from Isipingo settlers; the second one was signed by 44 settlers in the Umzinto district. The Isipingo petition requested the Governor to reverse the verdict against Moodie on the grounds that it was "unjust and dangerous in its tendencies."[29] The Umzinto one called for Moodie to be removed as Magistrate.[30] In addition, two public meetings (Isipingo and Umzinto) were held, strong editorial backing for Moodie was provided by the *Mercury* and a residents' association was formed in the Umzinto district "for the conservation of the rights of private property." Specifically, the new association demanded clarity from the Government on the rights of property owners as regards trespassing, hunting and grass-burning by Africans.[31]

In a leader article published on 11 November 1862, the *Mercury* asserted that Joyner was guilty only of "maintaining the inviolability of his property and resisting unlawful intrusion." In sarcastic vein it stated that the saying about "the Englishman's house being his castle" appeared no longer applicable in Natal as "settlers had no right to obstruct armed kaffirs whenever they choose to traverse."[32] Responding to the furore, Colonial Secretary David Erskine said "it would be manifestly unjust to Mr Moodie were his Excellency to express any want of confidence in the officer before proof is afforded that he has committed an error and proved his inability to administer the laws of the

28 *Natal Mercury,* 24 October 1862.
29 *Natal Mercury*, 7 November 1862.
30 *Natal Mercury,* 14 November 1862; PAR CSO 161, 2032, 8 November 1862.
31 *Natal Mercury,* 25 November 1862.
32 Whether John Robinson, as editor of the *Mercury,* would have written such an editorial is a matter of conjecture. But what is certain is that he did not pen this particular editorial as he was overseas at the time. T Wilks, *For the love of Natal: The life and times of the Natal Mercury* (Robinson and Co., Pinetown, 1977), pp. 44-45.

Colony".[33] However, the strident nature of the issue and the settler solidarity expressed with Joyner was not sustained and quietly died away. Nothing further was heard from the property rights association in Umzinto. There was no new surge of support for Joyner when on 9 December 1862, Magistrate Moodie fined him £10 for obstructing the passage of cattle belonging to Africans and for intending to seize five head of cattle by force.[34]

The Joyner case demonstrated the existence of settler cohesion. It also highlighted their inherently ethnocentric mind-set and their perceived need to preserve the "alienness of the ruling group," as Tim Keegan and Partha Chatterjee have remarked in their respective studies of colonial times.[35] Nonetheless, the Joyner's confrontational conduct was exceptional as far as the South Coast region was concerned, and would seem to negate Robert Morrell's contention that frontier settlers were a law unto themselves.[36] Indeed, settler relations with the local African population in Alexandra County were harmonious. David Aiken's diary which covered the years from 1867 to 1870 suggests that a good rapport existed between settlers and local African homesteads in the Umzinto area. The frequent social visits Aiken made after dark to his neighbours, often several miles from his home, would appear to indicate that a general sense of safety and security prevailed. That rapport extended to trade links with African homesteads. Aiken frequently purchased oxen or sacks of maize from them or exchanged a horse for a bull.

Minimal security

Notwithstanding the continued disparity in numbers between settler and indigenous populations, Governor Robert Keate's decision in 1868 to seek the disbanding of the volunteer corps was meant as a temporary measure. The severe economic downturn of the mid-1860s compelled the adoption of austerity measures. In trimming Government expenditure all round, Keate argued for "the discontinuance for the present, as far as possible, of all outlay connected with the volunteer corps".[37]

33 PAR CSO, 161(2037), 27 November 1862; *Natal Mercury,* 16 December 1862.

34 *Natal Star,* 8 January 1863.

35 T Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the origins of the racial order* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1996), p. 281; P Chatterjee, *The Nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993), p. 18.

36 R Morrell, *From boys to gentlemen: Settler masculinity in Colonial Natal 1880-1920* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2001), p. 14.

37 *Natal Government Gazette,* 20(1121), 18 June 1868.

Following the migration of settlers south of the Mkomanzi in 1858, Isipingo ceased to be the southern frontier of settler presence. That factor along with the negative effects of the economic downturn was probably influential in the decision of Isipingo settlers to disband their volunteer corps in 1868.[38] In Alexandra County, however, no such thinking pervaded the Alexandra Mounted Rifles[39] which continued to exist until it was incorporated into the Border Mounted Rifles in the late 1890s.

The annexation of Alfred County came about after a protracted exchange of correspondence between Natal, the British High Commissioner in Cape Town and the Colonial Office in London. Ongoing unrest in the territory south of the Mzimkulu river known as "Nomansland," motivated Governor Scott to urge the British Government to annex it to Natal so that a British presence in the area would put an end to what the *Natal Mercury* somewhat exaggeratedly described as "a refuge for the destitute where crime, licence and vice in all its forms find a fit and safe sanctuary".[40]

Style rather than substance characterised Britain's formal annexation of Alfred County on 1 January 1866. Acting Lieutenant Governor Colonel John Jarvis Bisset together with members of the Colonial Executive assembled on the banks of the Mtamvuna River while a contingent of 20 men from the Royal Artillery and the 99th Regiment delivered a 21-gun salute in the presence of Griqua chief Adam Kok who was accompanied by 200 mounted men.[41] *Mercury* editor, John Robinson claimed that the deployment of this British military force provided an appropriate signal of British intentions in respect of the maintenance of law and order.[42] Yet once Bisset's little force had withdrawn, the means which the new Resident Magistrate, Lieutenant HK Wilson, had at his disposal to enforce British authority was laughable: just two white constables whom he described as "perfectly useless".[43] By 1872 that "force" comprised one white constable assisted by eight Africans[44] to police an area of 1,544 square miles.[45] It is of note, however, that small police

38 Natal Colony, *Government Notice,* 72, 1868.
39 When Major Dunbar Moodie resigned as Commanding Officer of the AMR in 1868, Lewis Reynolds was appointed in his place. *Natal Mercury,* 7 November 1868.
40 *Natal Mercury,* 22 April 1865.
41 Select document, No. 25, presented to the Natal Legislative Council, 6 July 1866. Bisset to Cardwell 16 January 1866, pp. 89-91.
42 J Robinson, *A life time in South Africa: Being the recollections of the first premier of Natal* (Smith, Elder & Co. London, 1900), p. 226.
43 PAR CSO 253, 1419, 24 June 1866.
44 PAR CSO 409, 798, 22 April 1872.
45 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Book,* 1886, p. T2.

contingents were a feature of colonial administration. Umsinga magisterial district, with an African population of 32,000 in 1885, had only "a paltry few native police".[46]

Despite the frugality of the Natal Government in establishing an official presence in Alfred County – further illustrated by its refusal to appoint a Justice of the Peace to assist Magistrate Wilson[47] - there was little crime in the County.[48] Settler security prevailed inexpensively without even the formation of a volunteer corps until early in 1884 when the Umzimkulu Mounted Rifles was established.[49] Although Alfred County constituted the southern frontier of settler presence, it enjoyed stability until 1885 when stock theft from settler farms in the vicinity of the Pondo border became an issue.[50]

The Anglo-Zulu War

Although settler security was not threatened by the Langalibalele affair of 1873-1874, certainly not on the South Coast, the matter served to demonstrate settler solidarity regarding the Government's actions. In April 1874 a petition signed by almost every male settler in Alexandra County was submitted in support of Governor Benjamin Pine's prosecution of the Langalibalele case.[51]

However, no other event in the annals of colonial Natal exposed the insecurity of settlers to the same extent as the Anglo-Zulu War whilst simultaneously uniting them in solidarity against the perceived threat of Cetshwayo. Panic gripped the settler community across the Colony in the wake of the 22 January 1879 Isandlwana disaster when the British army lost 1,329 men in its greatest military catastrophe since the Crimean War (1853-1856). In Pietermaritzburg colonists were reported "plunged into the deepest mourning;" in Durban all shipping bound for the Cape was "crammed with women and children".[52]

46 J Giles (Resident Magistrate), *Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal* (Killie Campbell Library, Durban, 1885), p. B40.

47 PAR CSO 268, 14 and 27 March 1867.

48 PAR CSO 337, No. 1778, 27 August 1869; PAR CSO 340 No. 2072, 29 September 1869.

49 PAR CSO 922, No. 3307, 19 August 1883. HT Bru-de-Wold enquired about forming a rifle association. He was confirmed as Captain of the Umzimkulu Mounted Rifles in February 1884. *Natal Mercury,* 28 February 1884.

50 HF Fynn jnr. (Resident Magistrate), *Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal* (Killie Campbell Library, Durban, 1885), p. B56.

51 *Natal Mercury,* 9 April 1874. The daily reports of the Resident Magistrate for Alexandra County invariably described the situation as "perfectly quiet.'" PAR CSO 454, No. 2696, 25 November 1873-10 January 1874.

52 A Duminy and C Ballard (eds.), *The Anglo-Zulu War: New perspectives* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1981), p. 65; J Laband and PS Thompson, *Field guide to the war in Zululand and the defence of Natal, 1879,* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1983), p. 57.

In advance of the outbreak of the war, defence matters had become the foremost concern of the Government. In terms of a Proclamation issued on 26 November 1878, Natal was divided up into seven defensive districts.[53] A defence laager was built at Umzinto, as the chief settlement on the South Coast.[54] A Colony-wide review of arms found that Umzinto had the only weapons stock south of Durban – a collection of just 50 carbines. The North Coast was hardly better off: Verulam was found to have only 100 Enfield rifles.[55] Despite the great distance of Alexandra County from Zululand, the local Commander of Home Defence Corps, Stephen Bent, expressed alarm at the inadequate preparation of the South Coast to withstand an attack or an uprising.[56]

Whilst Bent measured defence in terms of the availability of arms, the real vulnerability of areas such as the South Coast was a result of the deployment of settlers to "the front". Thirty members of the Alexandra Mounted Rifles were away for ten months on war duty.[57] As John Robinson later wrote, the towns and villages of Natal were "practically defenceless… all the available forces were across the (Zululand) border." The vulnerability of the Colony, he noted, was illustrated by the fact that "there was no British garrison elsewhere in South Africa to draw help from. No ocean cable existed to bear the tidings of a menaced Colony's extremity".[58] Robinson's observation together with the general sense of alarm that pervaded colonial society underlined an awareness amongst colonists that, no matter how distant they were from Cetshwayo's impis, their small, scattered settlements rendered them vulnerable to possible attack. That outlook or mind-set stemmed from the widely-held view, expressed by Walter Peace, the Natal Government Emigration Agent, in his book *Our colony of Natal*, published in 1883: "The kaffirs are termed savages. I apply that word more particularly to denote the absence of civilization or religion or the recognition of any authority except what comes before them through the exhibition or exercise of might".[59]

53 J Laband and PS Thompson, *Kingdom and colony at war* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1990), p. 230.
54 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Book,* 1879, p. JJ15.
55 PAR CSO 685, 8, 7 December 1878.
56 PAR CSO 684, 621, 29 January 1879.
57 Natal Colony, *Natal Government Gazette,* 31(1794), 25 November 1879: Return of colonials.
58 J Robinson, *A life time in South Africa,* p. 132.
59 W Peace, *Our colony of Natal* (Edward Stanford, London, 1883), p. 53.The title page of the book bears the words: "Published by permission of the Natal Government", thereby indicating official endorsement of its contents.

But despite that insecurity, settler safety was not endangered. That, as Governor Henry Bulwer remarked in his address opening the Legislative Council on 6 November 1879, was due to the "most loyal behaviour of our Native population (and) the unbroken good order maintained throughout the Colony".[60] Bulwer's remarks indicate that whatever the demands and restrictions to which the African population was subject, such as hut tax and the prohibition of the sale of liquor, their existence was not one of oppression. Had that been the case they may well have exploited the vulnerability of settler communities to stage uprisings or to exact vengeance.

Nonetheless, the experience of the Anglo-Zulu War was that the security of districts could not be compromised. As the Colonial Commandant of the Volunteers, Major John George Dartnell told the Alexandra Mounted Rifles in 1881, "... every able-bodied man would have to bear arms".[61] As already noted, the potential vulnerability of settlers on the South Coast to possible attacks or threats from the African population was considerable given the fragmented nature of the area as a result of the presence of several mission reserves. It was the subject of settler criticism over the decades. In 1861, *Mercury* editor John Robinson criticised what he called the "ban" on white settlement in the reserves on the grounds of their potential "for scores of prosperous sugar estates".[62] Criticisms were also made in submissions to the Select Committee on European Immigration in 1876.[63] As late as 1890, the idea of permitting European occupation of the African locations on the South Coast was debated in the Legislative Council but nothing came of the proposal despite pressure from settlers.[64] But apart from settler covetousness of that territory for economic reasons, its proximity to them did not prove a threat to their safety and security.

The proposed return of Cetshwayo from exile served to demonstrate simultaneously the settlers' sense of vulnerability and solidarity in such matters. In August 1882, 100 Alexandra County residents endorsed a petition against Cetshwayo's return. John Kirkman, a prominent sugar planter and member of the Alexandra County Association, denounced the return of Cetshwayo as "inimical to the peace" in that local Africans would perceive it as an act of weakness by the colonial authority. As such, the proposed return

60 PAR CSO 728, 5190, Encl. 3.
61 *Natal Mercury,* 22 August 1881.
62 *Natal Mercury,* 25 April 1861.
63 Natal Colony, *Natal Government Gazette,* 28(1613), 17 October 1876.
64 Natal Colony, *Debates of the Legislative Council,* XIV, 1890, pp. 329-331.

was "fraught with danger". The Colonial Secretary subsequently confirmed that the Alexandra petition was dispatched to the Secretary of State for Colonies on 8 November 1882.[65] Following the British defeat at Isandlwana, fear and loathing of Cetshwayo was deeply entrenched in the psyche of the Natal settler community. Petitions were also recorded from other parts of the Colony, including Durban residents, opposing Cetshwayo's return.[66]

Flogging

Indicative of settler preference for harsh punishment for African offenders was a series of petitions presented to the Legislative Council in1883 calling for magistrates to be empowered to order whipping as a punishment for recalcitrant Africans. Two of the petitions were from settlers in Weenen County. The third petition was submitted by Charles Reynolds and 52 others of Alexandra County.[67] At that time magistrates had to seek the Governor's assent for flogging as a punishment. In motivating the petitions, Thomas Reynolds, South Coast Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), said that to do away with flogging was to" show ignorance" in how white people needed to deal with the "native races." Significantly John Robinson and James Liege Hulett were among the prominent politicians of the day who favoured flogging. Only Harry Escombe, a solicitor by profession, disagreed.[68] As S Pete and A Devenish have stated: "White settlers in colonial Natal seemed to possess an almost blind faith in the power of corporal punishment to control black offenders".[69] Not only do the remarks of Thomas Reynolds endorse that statement; they also reflect the ideology of white supremacy as supported by novelist Anthony Trollope.[70]

Food security

One of the ironies of settler society was that despite its domination of the indigenous Africans, it depended on them for labour and certain foodstuffs.

65 PAR CSO 871, 3375, 24 August 1882.
66 PAR CSO 877, 3964, 16 October 1882; PAR CSO 892, 338, 24 January 1883; *Natal Mercury,* 2 September 1882.
67 Natal Colony, Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings,* XXXIV, 1883, pp. 298, 311-312.
68 Natal Colony, *Debates of the Legislative Council,* VI, 1883, pp. 31-36.
69 S Pete and A Devenish, "Flogging, food and fear: Punishment and race in colonial Natal", *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 31(1), March 2005, p. 5.
70 JH Davidson, *Trollope's South Africa...,* p. 455.

Indeed, as John Lambert has pointed out, white agriculture in most of Natal "until the late 1880s remained backward and unproductive and the Colony's towns were to a large extent dependent on produce grown by African cultivators".[71] In the 1870s and 1880s the food economy of Alexandra and Alfred Counties was dominated by Africans. This was especially apparent as regards the cultivation and production of maize. In Alexandra County, Africans cultivated 4,300 acres of maize in 1875 and realised a harvest of 15,500 muids. White farmers cultivated only 483 acres and produced 2,477 muids. In Alfred County, Africans produced 52,000 muids of maize while settlers produced only 456 muids.[72] The ready market for their produce meant that few Africans were dependent on cash wages by toiling in the fields of white settlers.[73] As Alexander Brander, Field Cornet of Alexandra County, stated in 1875 with regard to the need for African labour, "the native population has almost entirely failed us".[74]

That situation began to change by the late 1880s when Africans were increasingly drawn to the Public Works Department to labour on railway construction or developments in Durban harbour where wages were much higher than those offered by white farmers. In 1889, AH Bisset of Lower Umzimkulu complained that his district was being "denuded of its African labour chiefly onto the railway extension and harbour works".[75] In the mid-1890s the locust and rinderpest plagues drastically reversed flourishing African agriculture and contributed to the process of labour migration.[76] In 1897 the Commissioner for Agriculture, CB Lloyd, estimated stock losses for Africans as a result of rinderpest at 90%.[77]

The Indian presence and role

The introduction of indentured Indian immigrants from 1860 was the result of the oscillating availability of African labour. Increasingly white farmers came to rely on indentured Indian labour both on the coast and inland. In 1881,

71 J Lambert, "The undermining of the homestead economy in colonial Natal," *South African Historical Journal,* 23, December 1990, p. 61.
72 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Books,* 1875, X2-7; 1878, AA4-AA7; 1884, pp. X2-X7. A muid was equivalent to a large sack in capacity.
73 C Bundy, *The rise and fall of the South African peasantry...,* p. 112.
74 *Natal Mercury,* 3 August 1875.
75 PAR SNA 1/1/120, 1207, 7 and 11 November 1889; SNA 1/1/121, 1260, 18 and 22 November 1889.
76 J Lambert, *Betrayed trust...,* pp. 18, 159; C Bundy, *The rise and fall of the South African peasantry...,* p. 184.
77 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Book,* 1897, p. H162.

for example, in the Pietermaritzburg area there were 71 different employers of Indian labour.[78] From the 1880s, in terms of cash crops in Alexandra County, contract-expired or free Indians played a significant role in the cultivation of beans, rice, maize and tobacco.[79] In 1895 there were 10,000 acres under maize in Alexandra County of which Indians were the largest producers. [80]In Durban when the daily market opened in 1876, the *Mercury* acknowledged that Indians were "the principal vendors".[81] Sir Garnet Wolseley, Natal's Administrator in 1875 summed up the role of Indians in the Colony when he stated that "without them the commerce of Natal would languish and its revenue would be seriously reduced".[82]

The commercial intrusion of Indians into what was hitherto an exclusive settler domain caused resentment amongst small white storeowners particularly as the number of Indian-owned stores increased across the Colony and were underselling whites and cornering the African market.[83] By 1894, of the 32 stores in Alexandra County, twenty were Indian-owned.[84] This trend added to the sense of insecurity felt by white settlers and came to be known as the "coolie curse" or "Indian Question" which resulted in the appointment of a commission in 1885 known as the Wragg Commission to enquire into Indian immigration laws and regulations with a view to devising means of bringing the Indian population under more effective control.[85]

Regarding the Indian Question, settlers found themselves in a vexed position: while settler resentment was reaching new levels of intensity simultaneously the need for Indian labour was reaching new levels of necessity. This was particularly the case in the sugar industry. In 1895, Reynolds Bros with 752 Indian employees, was the largest employer of indentured labour on the South Coast.[86] The Indian presence thus posed a dual challenge to white settlers. The less affluent section of the white community was dependent upon Indians for their daily food supplies delivered by Indian hawkers and itinerant traders

78 Natal Colony, *Government Notice,* 422, 1881.
79 GA Lucas (Resident Magistrate), *Supplements to the Blue Books for the colony of Natal* (Killie Campbell Library, Durban) 1886, p. B12; 1888, p. B9.
80 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Book,* 1894-1895, p. B43.
81 *Natal Mercury,* 8 January 1876.
82 RA Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa: British imperialism and the Indian question 1860-1914* (Cornell University Press, London, 1971), p. 33.
83 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Book,* 1883, GG45; *Supplement to the Blue Book for the colony of Natal...,* 1885, p. B62.
84 J McLaurin (Resident Magistrate), *Supplement to the Blue Book for the colony of Natal* (Killie Campbell Library, Durban) 1893-1894, p. B53.
85 Natal Colony, *Debates of the legislative council of the colony of Natal,* VII, 1884, p. 277.
86 Natal Colony, *Natal Government Gazette,* 48(2736), 21 May 1895.

known as *dukawallahs.*[87] Alexandra County senior Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Robert Archibald, laid the blame for the proliferation of Indian traders in the towns and villages on "the working men (meaning whites) who daily live out of baskets brought round by the Indians".[88] A rift developed between sugar planters and small white business interests on the one hand and the white working class on the other. Yet they all opposed the idea of settler status for Indians.[89] Arising out of that insecurity and the fact that the Indian population, as a result of ongoing immigration, was increasing at a far more rapid rate than the white population,[90] the settler Parliament resorted to a battery of discriminatory legislative measures intended to discourage Indian settlement. But their attempts to legislate security from the "coolie curse" failed to deter Indian immigration and settlement.[91] Ironically, it was the need of the sugar industry in particular which fuelled the ongoing arrival of indentured Indian labour. As Robert Archibald stated in evidence to the Clayton Commission in 1909, "stoppage of indenture would mean absolute ruin" for the sugar industry.[92]

Socially ostracized, the only threat Indians posed to white settler society was an economic one. This was aptly expressed by the *Natal Advertiser* as early as 1 December 1883 when it stated in an editorial: "Has it ever seriously entered the minds of the inhabitants of Natal that they are being egged out, ousted, browbeaten and defeated in the labour and trading market by the dark-skinned immigrants from India's coral strands?" Besides the obvious fear on which that statement was premised, lay an ideological principle which Edward Said has adduced as follows: "The major component in European culture is the idea of (it) as a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures".[93] Nonetheless, if there was one white settler on the South Coast whose view of Indians was at odds with the ideology of his time, it was Edwin

87 V Padayachee and R Morrell, "Indian merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal economy 1875-1914,"*Journal of Southern African Studies,* 17(1), March 1991, pp. 12, 20.

88 Natal Colony, *Debates of the legislative assembly,* 28, 1899, pp. 553-554.

89 D Du Bois, "The 'coolie curse': The evolution of white colonial attitudes towards the Indian question 1860-1900," *Historia,* 57(2), November 2012, pp. 50-51.

90 In 1880 the Indian population was 18,877 to 25,271 whites. In 1897 there were 53,370 Indians to 50,241 whites. By 1907 the Indian population had reached 115,807 while the white population stood at 92,485. *Colony of Natal Statistical Year Book,* 1907, p. 3.

91 These measures denied Indians the franchise, taxed those who declined to return to India at the conclusion of their indenture contracts, tightened regulations relating to quarantine for immigrants and sought to curb the granting of trading licences. None of them was effective, a factor proven by the continued increase in the Indian population. D Du Bois, *Labourer or settler? Colonial Natal's Indian dilemma* (Just Done Productions, Durban, 2011), pp. 127-148, 171-79.

92 PAR CSO 1878, 5276, pp. 59-60.

93 EW Said, *Orientalism...,* p. 7.

Camp, a Port Shepst*ø*ne resident who was Secretary in the Lower Umzimkulu Chamber of Commerce. He also had a regular column in the *Natal Mercury* titled 'Ideas from Port Shepstone'. In his column published on 11 July 1900 he stated: "I confess I see no help for this but by accepting the coolie as a citizen and giving him the help of that position. One thing is certain, whether we like it or not, he is, and will become even more so an important factor in our population".

Pondoland border

Although the southern border of Alfred County was a frontier area, it did not experience the unrest and hostility which characterised the Cape's eastern frontier or the "long-standing Zulu difficulty," as the Resident Magistrate for Umvoti County stated in a report or what his counterpart for Weenen County described in 1878 as an "unsettled state".[94] However, a cause for concern and insecurity was the "indiscriminate sale of firearms" to Africans which occurred following the discovery of diamonds in the Northern Cape and which attracted African labour. The thought of Africans returning home armed evidently alarmed some settlers, unnecessarily as it turned out.[95]

But in May 1882 Alfred County Resident Magistrate James Giles, in a confidential letter to the Colonial Secretary stated that there was a "revival lately of gun-running" into Pondoland.[96] Nothing further came of that issue as attention then shifted to stock theft. Early in 1885 Giles reported that stock losses were being incurred by both African and settler farmers with as many as 50 sheep at a time being plundered and taken across the border into Pondoland. This persisted into the 1890s when John Rethman MLC for Alfred County, complained about the "wholesale" theft of livestock by Pondos.[97]

Insecurity on the Pondoland border worsened from 1890 as a result of faction fighting between Paramount Chief Sigcau and Mhlangaso, the Pondo chief whose people lived near the Alfred County border. As a result the contingent of Natal Mounted Police was increased from fifteen to fifty.[98] By March 1891

94 Natal Colony, Magistrates' Reports, *Natal Blue Book,* 1878, pp. JJ14; JJ16.
95 PAR CSO 461, 152, 12 November 1873.
96 PAR CSO Confidential Minute Papers, 2555C/15/82, 20 and 27 May 1882.
97 PAR SNA 1/1/162, 1165, 19 October 1892; SNA 1/1/147, 1166, 8 October 1891.
98 PAR CSO 1268, 4613, 24 and 29 July 1890; *Natal Mercury,* 12 December 1890.

the situation was described as having gone from "bad to worse".[99] Addressing the newly-elected Legislative Assembly in October 1893, Governor Hely-Hutchinson expressed concern at the state of Natal's southern boundary arising from inter-tribal disturbances in Pondoland.[100] Essentially, as William Beinart points out, "the civil war in Pondoland was a struggle for power between a new paramount and the dominant councillor of old, a struggle over policy towards the colonial power".[101] Hostilities between the two continued until 1894 when the Cape annexed Pondoland.

Anglo-Boer War

The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War was on 11 October 1899 and affected all parts of Natal in terms of settler manpower and resources. The Border Mounted Rifles (the BMR was an amalgamation of the Alexandra Mounted Rifles and the Umzimkulu Mounted Rifles) contributed 286 men to the Colony's war effort.[102] As Alexandra County Resident Magistrate, James McLaurin remarked, the war meant that "a good many of the leading residents had to desert their farms for the front." Their absence, he noted with relief, did not engender unrest amongst Africans whom he praised for their "thorough loyalty to the Crown".[103]

Following the capture of the Boer capitals by June 1900 and the change in the nature of the war, the task of the colonial militia was over. By October 1900 the BMR volunteers returned to their South Coast homes.[104] As a region, the Anglo-Boer War posed no threat to its safety and security. As was the case during the Anglo- Zulu War, the African population did not exploit the vulnerability of settler farms and families as a result of the absence of many of the settler men on military duty elsewhere in the Colony.

One factor which would seem to indicate the extent to which settlers were consistently aware of their vulnerability was their involvement in the Rifle Associations. No other civic organization was as prolific as the Rifle Associations. Despite the vanquishing of the Zulu threat, by 1904 the

99 *Natal Mercury,* 9 March 1891.
100 Natal Colony, *Natal Government Gazette,* 45(2642), 19 October 1893. In a report on 10 August 1893, the *Natal Witness* referred to Natal's southern border as 'the most unsettled in the whole of Natal'.
101 W Beinart, *The political economy of Pondoland 1860-1930* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982), p. 34.
102 EH Brookes and C de B Webb, *A history of Natal...,* p. 202.
103 Natal Colony, *Natal Blue Book,* Departmental Report, 1899 p. B91.
104 *Natal Mercury,* 31 October 1900.

number of Rifle Associations on record had grown to 62. They submitted regular reports and many had balance sheets which reflected considerable privately generated funding.[105] Given the relative safety which the scattered settler communities enjoyed throughout the colonial period, with particular reference to the South Coast region, suggests that the settler fears as regards possible African unrest, were exaggerated.

The African unrest of 1906 and the union issue

The backlash from the African community in 1906 against the new £1 poll tax, which culminated in the Bhambatha rebellion, posed the greatest threat to settler safety and security since the Anglo-Zulu War. Imposed in addition to the existing hut and dog taxes, increased rents and debts, the restrictive pass laws, police aggression and unsympathetic courts, as Jeff Guy argues, the poll tax exacerbated an already tense situation in which Africans perceived themselves to be effectively under colonial siege.[106]

Collection of the new tax began in January 1906. Resentment of it coincided with confrontation. In February two white police officers were stabbed to death near Richmond in a clash with an armed impi. The month before, a white farmer was murdered in the Camperdown district. As a result, settler women and children in the districts of Richmond, Ixopo, Highflats, St Faiths and Bulwer were quartered in laagers (buildings encircled with barbed wire and trenches).[107]

The response of the colonial militia to the unrest was highhanded. From 12 February Colonel Duncan McKenzie's Field Force carved a swathe of destruction as it headed southward towards Umzinto in Alexandra County, burning kraals and seizing livestock on the grounds that the owners may have been involved in the killing of the police officers near Richmond. At Umzinto McKenzie confronted Charlie Fynn and his indunas over their refusal to pay poll tax. After imposing a fine of 1,200 head of cattle, sentencing 38 of Fynn's men to fines, floggings and gaol sentences and imposing the death sentence on

105 Natal Colony, Natal legislative assembly, *Votes and proceedings,* LXII, 1904, pp. xiv-xvi, xix.

106 J Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion: The Zulu uprising of 1906* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2006), p. 23. The poll tax was imposed as part of the austerity measures the Natal Government took to increase revenue in the face of economic recession. It was also intended to compel Africans to seek employment on the mines and in the towns.

107 J Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion...,* p. 50.

five of them, McKenzie withdrew his force.[108] Despite McKenzie's excessive use of force and his provocative and peremptory approach, no further unrest occurred in the South Coast region. A report in the *Mercury* on 17 March noted that peace and quiet had returned to Alexandra County. Subsequent reports confirmed that trend and remarked that "good humoured" Africans were paying their taxes.[109]

That situation was sustained despite the execution of twelve Africans in Richmond on 2 April convicted by a military court for their part in the killing of the two white policemen in January. It was also sustained in the wake of the massacre by colonial troops of an estimated 600 supporters of Bhambatha in the Mome gorge in the Nkandhla forest on 10 June and the subsequent destruction of 7,000 huts in the Maphumalo district and the overall loss of some 3,500 African lives.[110] The extent to which settlers were vulnerable to an African uprising as a result of events in 1906 weighed heavily on their thinking in the years that followed and proved critical in Natal's decision to join the union of South African colonies in 1909. Militarily a united South Africa promised greater security for settlers and would deter uprisings such as Natal experienced in 1906.

Conclusion

Although it is not possible to quantify to what extent the military factor influenced Natal voters to endorse union with the other three colonies in the June 1909 referendum,[111] what is significant is that the country districts were more supportive of it than the urban communities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The relative isolation of the country districts and the scare that the unrest of 1906 produced, arguably, may have been more conclusive in promoting the view that a union dispensation ensured future security. Alfred and Alexandra Counties, for example, returned resounding votes in support of union – 83% and 86% respectively.[112] That vote expressed the historic solidarity which South Coast settlers and other rural, settler communities had

108 J Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion...,* pp. 50, 55. The Governor did not impose the death sentences.
109 *Natal Mercury,* 10 April and 8 June 1906.
110 J Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion...,* pp. 44, 170.
111 A union dispensation offered strong central government. Those opposed to it, such as Percy Arthur Silburn, who represented Alfred County in the Natal Legislative Assembly, believed it would result in Afrikaner domination. They prioritised culture and local autonomy ahead of the mutual security of union.
112 *Natal Mercury,* 14 June 1909. Coastal counties. S O'Byrne Spencer, *British settlers in Natal – A biographical register* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1983), p. 123.

consistently manifested for safety and security.

Ultimately, however, the shield behind which settlers sheltered for security and applied systematically down the years was that of discriminatory legislation.[113] Although it failed in respect of the Indians and the civic and commercial challenges which they posed to the dominant white minority, politically that shield empowered and sustained white supremacy which, as Anthony Trollope espoused, was the ideology of the time and in the decades which followed 1910. Economic factors such as the development of the mining industry, railway construction and port development also played a significant part in dispersing the African population and thereby reducing the potential for African unrest. For the South Coast, a new dependence manifested itself. The Pondo, who had earlier posed a threat to Alfred County's southern border, ironically, became the mainstay of labour in the cane fields displacing Indian labour after the ending of indentured immigration in 1911.[114]

113 Between 1893 and 1910, 48 laws affecting Africans were passed by the Natal Parliament. J Lambert and R Morrell, "Domination and subordination in Natal 1890-1920," R Morrell (ed.), *Political economy and identities in KwaZulu-Natal* (Indicator Press, Durban, 1996), p. 69.

114 PM Dickinson , "The South African Sugar Industry 1910-1940", B Guest and JM Sellers (eds.), *Receded tides of empire* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994), pp. 168, 171.