

# CITIES AND THE ORIGINS OF CAPITALISM IN NATAL

THE ROLE OF CITIES AND TOWNS IN THE INCORPORATION  
OF NATAL IN THE CAPITALIST WORLD-SYSTEM (1837-1899)

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation looks at the role cities and towns played in the incorporation of Natal into the capitalist world-system. It looks at which urban network came into existence and how this interacted with the development of the economy. It also looks at the cities themselves and how these were the locus of important class and racial struggles. The period that was researched is the second half of the nineteenth century, more concretely from 1837, the year that the voortrekkers crossed the Drakensberg into Natal, to 1899, the year that the Boer War started.

The main economic activity in Natal for most of this period was the transit trade. This was also at least partly by default, as commercial settler agriculture was not very successful. This resulted in a pattern of settlement that was characterised by two primate cities, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and very little urban development in most of the countryside. The pattern of settlement also followed the main trade route. The nature of railway development entrenched this pattern by not fostering agricultural development as the railways were mainly built to serve the trade. The dominance of the commercial elites led to policies that were rather beneficial for the merchants than for the settler farmers, the labour and 'native' policy and the railway development illustrate this. By the end of this period things however started to change, the settler elite became more influential and the pattern of settlement started changing.

The urban history of colonial Natal also shows that things do not just turn out as they are planned by governments, elites or 'capital'. The ideal of the white city turned out to be impossible to achieve and also providing a large docile, dependent and cheap black labour force was not a straightforward task. The cities offered Africans and Indians plenty of opportunities to eke out an independent existence in or on the fringes of town, which put them in a strong bargaining position. This led the administration to use a wide range of techniques of social engineering, which in the twentieth century evolved into almost complete urban segregation.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

## **Introduction**

### ***Phrasing the question***

This study will address the long-term changes in the society of the Colony of Natal during the second half of the nineteenth century. It is going to look at this from an economic perspective, more precisely by looking at the process of incorporation of this area into the capitalist world-system. In other words, the transition to capitalism in Natal is the object of study in this dissertation. This process, roughly speaking, took place during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The main question in this study is however not how this process took place, but rather what the role of the newly created urban network was in this process. 'What was the role of cities and towns in the incorporation of Natal in the capitalist world-system' is the central question of this study. Are colonial cities centres of political and military control, or transportation nodes, or both? Are some cities the former and others the latter? How do these cities and towns interact with their hinterlands? Is Natal characterised by two different urban systems; one serving the settler economy and one more resembling the extractive economic system of most non-settler colonies and servicing the overberg trade<sup>1</sup>? Which interests strive for which spatial structures and how do they do that?

And above all: how do ideal-type visions and planning translate into real life? It is one thing to pursue certain policies and envisage certain spatial structures, but these are of course not uncontested and cannot simply sweep away already existing structures. Therefore, the text will come down from structures and models to the conflicts and struggles of the day-to-day reality.

These are some of the issues to be dealt with. In the following paragraphs these questions will be elaborated upon and a theoretical and conceptual basis will be articulated.

### ***Some conceptual issues***

Cities, urbanism, urbanisation, et cetera are frequently used, but therefore no unproblematic concepts. Many definitions of a city or of urbanisation as a process exist. These can, for example, be spatial, referring to the concentration of a population within certain geographical limits; or cultural, referring to the diffusion of an urban culture, in other words a number of values, attitudes, and behaviours. In economic definitions, this urban culture often gets

equated with an industrial mode of production. As such it is contrasted with the rural, agricultural mode of production.<sup>2</sup> Other definitions use a more political approach and define cities by their political and administrative functions.<sup>3</sup> All these conceptualisations of the city have merits and limitations. Cities are more than just concentrations of population or a cultural entity. They existed before the industrial revolution and can therefore not solely be characterised or defined by an industrial mode of production and the role of a city in societies is more than just a political-administrative one. Cities, therefore, are not just concrete entities with well-defined characteristics; they are also social constructs and the results of concrete historical circumstances.

All of these definitions can be useful but only to study certain aspects of urbanisation. For geographic studies a spatial definition will work perfectly, but for studies of the urban culture this will not offer much of a conceptual foothold. Considering the many faces of the object of interest of this study, no attempt shall be made to do the impossible, to give an all-encompassing definition of the city or of urbanisation. Instead, conceptualisations suited for this study will be used. As this paper will look at the role of cities in economic change and in the penetration of capitalism in the colony of Natal, definitions will have to be used that will make it possible to highlight, firstly, the role of cities in the accumulation of capital and, secondly, the functional differentiation and interdependence of city and countryside.

Looking at the role of cities in the accumulation of capital starts with questioning how capital is accumulated. It is not necessary, nor possible within the constraints of this introduction, to reiterate the bulk of Marxist theory here. A short recapitulation of some of the basics should be sufficient to show the links between urbanisation and capitalism. Capitalist society reproduces itself through a continuous process of circulation of capital in which the accumulation of more capital is the primary goal. Through this process of accumulation the capitalist class reproduces itself and its dominance over labour and ensures in this way the continuation of capitalism. In the basic form of this process, capital is converted into commodities, which are the basis of the production of new commodities. These new commodities can be converted into capital again. In this process a certain surplus value can be earned.<sup>4</sup> The circulation of capital can be schematised as follows:

$$M \rightarrow C (LP + MP) \rightarrow P \rightarrow C' \rightarrow M + \Delta M \rightarrow \text{etc.}$$

With capital (money, M) you can acquire ( $\rightarrow$ ) commodities (C), for example the means of production (MP) and labour power (LP), which can be used in the production process (P) to

create new commodities ( $C'$ ). These new commodities can be sold ( $\rightarrow$ ) again. After the sale (ideally), more money ( $M + \Delta M$ ) will be returned, the extra capital ( $\Delta M$ ) being the surplus value. This capital can be reinvested. The arrows show the process in the phase of commodity exchange. This is where the spatial dimension becomes important. In the circulation of commodities it is possible to separate purchase and sale in space and time, thanks to the existence of money.<sup>5</sup> This makes spatial and functional specialisation possible. Mabogunje notes that specialisation and the existence of a food surplus are necessary but not sufficient conditions to make urban growth possible. Other conditions are the existence of a class of traders and merchants and of a small group of people with the power to guarantee the supply of food.<sup>6</sup> This provides the inhabitants of cities with the possibility to specialise themselves in other things than the production of food; urbanisation and greater functional and social differentiation are two sides of the same coin.<sup>7</sup> Therefore urban growth and the rise in tertiary activities also go hand in hand.<sup>8</sup> Economic specialisation has made urbanisation possible, but therefore not necessary. It does *not* explain this process.

The existence of money and the revolutions in transport and finances made specialisation, and therefore urbanisation, possible by relaxing spatial and temporal constraints.<sup>9</sup> These constraints are however not eliminated. In the process of circulation of commodities, the phase in the circulation of capital that takes place in the market, there are a number of not directly productive costs, for example storage and bookkeeping, and transport and communication require a lot of fixed capital. This fixed capital is however not completely unproductive, it lowers the costs of transport and communications and therefore the costs of operating in the market. The increasing market activities bring a new problem, namely the long turnover time of capital. If you have to wait until your goods have travelled halfway around the globe before you can reinvest your capital, you are not using your money in the most efficient way.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, trading can still be quite expensive.

One way to deal with this problem is to de-link the circulation of money from the circulation of commodities. This is possible thanks to the existence of a credit system.<sup>11</sup> Another option is of course to minimise the turnover time of commodities by organising space in such a way that the volume of idle capital can be kept to a minimum. Harvey calls this the 'annihilation of space by time'.<sup>12</sup> Space as an obstacle is eliminated by organising transport and communications (space). This organising of space is the driving force behind urbanisation,<sup>13</sup> as it will be conceptualised in this study. The annihilation of space is not something that can only be done in the sphere of exchange of commodities; industrial

capitalists can also reduce their turnover time and circulation costs. They can establish their places of production where there is abundant and cheap labour or close to their main markets (in other words, in places with high concentrations of population). Within their companies they can use the factory system and the conveyor belt.<sup>14</sup> Both the city and the factory are tools the industrial capitalist can use to eliminate the obstacle of space. By conquering space, time has become the fundamental dimension of human affairs.<sup>15</sup>

To come back to the outline of the circulation of capital: acquiring  $\Delta M$  is the object of circulating capital.  $\Delta M$  is what the capitalist gets more as return than what was invested; it is the profit. This surplus value can again be invested, again made to circulate, in order to acquire even more surplus value, even more capital. This is not a stable system, it is prone to conflict. Capitalism is essentially anarchic, because actors are led by self-interest. This interest is not necessarily the same as the class interest. The interest of the individual capitalist is to make as much profit as possible. The interest of the labourer is to get a job; but when they are all looking for one, they might very well depress the wages, which is not in their class interest.<sup>16</sup> And when all the capitalists try to maximise their profits, they will try to minimise their costs – for example through technological innovation that limits the number of labourers and the skills needed – and maximise their output. The results are periodic crises of overaccumulation, i.e. situations in which surpluses of both capital and labour cannot be invested profitably anymore, due to overproduction.<sup>17</sup>

The absorption of these surpluses is an important recurring theme in the history of capitalism. To explain how these crises can be resolved, one has to look at the structure of the flows of capital. Capital operates in three circuits.<sup>18</sup> In the primary circuit of capital, surplus value gets appropriated directly from labour.<sup>19</sup> When an overaccumulation crisis takes place in this circuit, the surplus capital and labour can be invested in fixed assets, the secondary circuit.<sup>20</sup> These can be investments directly in the production process, in machines for example, or in the framework for production and consumption – the built environment – for example roads, railways, houses, power plants, etc. These investments are not directly in the production process and give no direct profits, but they are still productive as they make further accumulation possible. As building roads or water works is usually too expensive for the individual capitalist, the role of the capital market and the state in investments in this circuit of capital is important.<sup>21</sup>

When even these investments become unproductive, there is a tertiary circuit in which investment can take place, viz. in science and technology and in social expenditures. These

investments have even less direct effect on the appropriation of surplus value, but by improving the quality of the labour force and by pacifying the masses, these are still productive in the long run.<sup>22</sup> In other words, investing in the secondary and tertiary circuits *can* expand the basis for the production of surplus value. Doing this is however only a temporary solution, as investments in these circuits do not take away the possibility of overaccumulation. On the contrary, the capital invested in these circuits is productive because it makes more accumulation possible; doing this it also sets the scene for new crises.<sup>23</sup> When further investments in certain goods become unproductive, the value of the capital tied up in these goods devalues and the fixed assets become free goods, which provide the basis for a new cycle of accumulation.<sup>24</sup> Another fix to overaccumulation is redirecting investments to other places, outside the core of the capitalist system.<sup>25</sup>

In this way, fixed investments accumulate and the built environment for production and consumption is constructed. This is the framework of spatial organisation that gave rise to the capitalist city. Cities in the capitalist world-system therefore represent places where this fixed capital is accumulated.<sup>26</sup> This leads to one of the contradictions of capitalist urban development. The amortisation time – the time in which the full potential of the investment gets used – of fixed capital in the built environment is very long. On the other hand, it increases the productivity of capital in the first circuit and therefore expedites overaccumulation and thus it becomes more likely that investments in new and more productive fixed capital will have to be made before the old capital is amortised. The value of that old capital is then devalued.<sup>27</sup> The geographic structures are also immobile, which means that each new cycle of investments has to take into account the old fixed assets.<sup>28</sup> The streets in a medieval inner city might be too narrow to cope with the traffic of the twenty-first century, but broadening them can be too expensive as it could be necessary to tear down half the city. Therefore investments in for example transport or communication always have some negative aspects too: they are unlikely to be used to their full potential and they organise space in a way that may not be the most useful one for future and unforeseeable developments.

It has already been explained that capitalism is not a stable system that has been the same throughout history. It is no ahistoric entity. And just as capitalism has been transforming itself, so have cities. First of all, capitalism has not been around forever and has only started to encompass the whole world fairly recently. Pre-capitalist towns were fundamentally different entities than capitalist towns. A Roman town was a consumer town, surplus was not

created in the towns but extracted through tribute, conquest and the use of slave labour, according to Timberlake. In capitalist towns on the other hand, surplus is created through market trade and commodity production based on free labour.<sup>29</sup> Capitalism has also changed throughout history. Gordon discerns three stages of capitalist accumulation: commercial, industrial, and corporate accumulation. The cities have transformed accordingly.<sup>30</sup>

During the phase of commercial accumulation, merchant capitalists acquired profits through operating in the market. They bought and sold commodities but intervened only marginally or even not at all in the production process.<sup>31</sup> The city had four functions in this phase. First it all, it was the political capital, the seat of the government. Secondly, it was a commercial metropolis, the place where essential activities in support of the commercial exchange took place, examples being credit lending and accounting. Thirdly, the city was a transport node, a place where commodities were collected and distributed. In this role, it serves as organising element in the geographical space. Finally, wealthy merchants also consumed luxury goods, therefore the city was also a craft-manufacturing centre.<sup>32</sup>

In industrial capitalism, the way in which goods are produced does get altered. Industrial accumulation depends on two important factors: the deskilling and homogenisation of the labour process and the existence of a reserve army of cheap labourers. The homogenisation of labour minimises costs and makes more efficient disciplining of labour possible.<sup>33</sup> This can be done by rationally organising the production in space.<sup>34</sup> This form of capitalism is characterised by factory production in the city, where the labourers are.<sup>35</sup> The third phase of capitalist accumulation, corporate accumulation, is not relevant for this study and shall therefore not be discussed here.

The world-economy with which urbanisation is so closely functionally interlinked is however not only an economic process, it is an interaction of economic and political processes. Economy is never free of politics.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, urbanisation is not only influenced by economy, politics also play an important role in this process. It is indeed important to conceptualise cities as spatial manifestations of the capitalist accumulation logic, as 'nodal points of coordination, command, control, and management of global capitalist production and/or trade.'<sup>37</sup> There are however other aspects of urbanisation that should also be taken into account. Apart from an economic logic, a geopolitical logic also influences the process. Two important aspects of this logic are the military strategies and the symbolic strategies.<sup>38</sup> Mabogunje, additionally, discerns the following aspects of life that are influenced

by urbanisation: economy, demography, social and physical conditions in the towns and administration.<sup>39</sup>

An issue that has not yet been discussed in this section is the role of cities and the form urbanisation takes in the non-Western world. It could be said that the modern capitalist city is a European (or at least Western) creation that has been exported together with the spread of capitalism.<sup>40</sup> Do city networks have the same characteristics in the colonies as in the metropolis? Can the process of urbanisation in Africa be treated without looking at the European society? According to McGee, colonial cities serve as nerve centres for colonial exploitation.<sup>41</sup> They are instruments in the expansion of the capitalist world-economy; they organise their hinterland, organise political control and the creation and expropriation of surplus. Therefore it could be argued that all cities are colonial; they all fulfil the same functions for their respective hinterlands.<sup>42</sup> The colonial powers were usually not very interested in the cities themselves, but only in the produce from the countryside. Urbanisation was seen as a necessary evil,<sup>43</sup> especially in Africa, where this resulted in policies that discouraged or prohibited 'natives' to settle in urban areas.<sup>44</sup> Despite being seen as necessary evils, colonial cities were very important for the (under-) development of the colonies. De Bruijne expresses this:

History is the means through which a culture accounts for its past. This is especially true of studies of colonial cities as expressions of the spatial and territorial configuration by which Western countries have penetrated other regions and cultures.<sup>45</sup>

As colonial cities are designed to serve the interests of the colonising power, they are unlikely to play the same role in economic development as they do in the core countries. The Argentinean economic structure of livestock haciendas for example made (and still makes) the development of a local city network on the pampas and the expansion of the internal economy very difficult. The growth of internal economic linkages is not fostered by this system that is geared towards export; this economic activity has little or no multiplier effect.<sup>46</sup> Such a society is characterised by a countryside almost completely devoid of urban settlements, with a few big dominant cities instead of a dense urban network. These dominant cities, or primate cities, are often harbours and/or centres of administration. Christopher illustrates these features of a typical import-export urban hierarchy with the example of Southern Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe): there are little or no small villages, there are no cities at all in large parts of the country and the two main cities are clearly much bigger than the third city (high primacy). The Orange Free State on the other hand was a typical settler

colony and the urban hierarchy was very different, better-developed internal economic linkages fostered a more elaborate urban pattern and lower primacy.<sup>47</sup> (See figure 1) Foreign investment does not change much to this state of affairs. Foreign capital is usually used to reinforce the same patterns, for example by investing in railways to the main export ports, in mines and in plantations.<sup>48</sup> According to Timberlake, it is reasonable to expect that the city systems in peripheral regions will be less well integrated internally than in the core.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Some different views on urbanisation***

The city is often seen as the vanguard, the motor, of development and industrialisation, as the paragon of modernity. The traditional-modern dichotomy gets mirrored in the rural-urban duality. In this dual-economy view the city is considered to be an island of progress in a sea of backwardness.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, in modernisation theory, the path to economic growth is thought to run along the route of urban industrialisation.<sup>51</sup> This line of thought resulted in programs of urban industrialisation as implemented in the 1950s and 1960s by the Economic Commission for Latin America or by Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. Free labour in the cities would stimulate investments and education and urban life would stimulate modern, economically sound, behaviour.<sup>52</sup>

These theories, however, were not substantiated by reality. Urbanisation in the non-Western world was not backed by economic development and industrialisation. Instead of industrial cities, the Third World ended up with cities without industries or jobs. These societies did not become modern through urbanisation, but had to cope with problems of so-called overurbanisation, in Slater's words.<sup>53</sup> The cities in the periphery are not imbedded in a local process of industrialisation, but rather in a process of dependent development, dependent on the industrialisation of the West. This process influences both rural and urban social and economic structures in the Third World.<sup>54</sup> Arn, for example, stresses that the urban history of Accra can only be understood in relation to the origins of capitalism in rural Ghana.<sup>55</sup> Urbanisation in the periphery cannot be seen as independent from urbanisation and industrialisation in the core or from change in the rural areas. The problem of this modernisation perspective is threefold: it is eurocentric, it does not see the capitalist world-system as an international, border-crossing phenomenon, and it offers no sufficient explanatory framework for conceptualising city-countryside relations.<sup>56</sup>

Bairoch illustrates why eurocentric views offer a distorted understanding by evaluating these aspects in which cities play positive roles in the West for Third World cities. The most

important positive role the city plays in the West is, according to him, that of diffusing and encouraging technological innovation. Cities in the periphery tend to do the opposite: they impede this diffusion. This is because these cities are not places of production, but places of consumption, more precisely consumption of products of the metropolis. Instead of making industrial products themselves, they import them much cheaper than they can be made locally. Of the positive impact of cities on agriculture he is not really convinced either. He calls the possibility to import cheap grain a potential explanation for this absence of positive effects.<sup>57</sup>

In many ways the inverse of modernisation theory is dependency theory. According to this view, cities in the periphery cannot play their progressive economic role because they are rooted in a process of what Castells calls dependent urbanisation.<sup>58</sup> This line of thought is often the opposite of modernisation thinking; a pessimistic version of it. While the first ignores the possible negative aspects of Western influence, dependency theory only looks at these external factors and paints a static image of external capitalist dominance; it ignores the role of local circumstances and therefore lacks concreteness.<sup>59</sup> Analytically it is more useful to look at the interaction of external influences and local factors. Colonial cities are not only formed through the actions of the colonists, but also by local circumstances and local actors. Local elites, for example, are often more interested in an export-oriented economy than in the development of local industries through protectionism and can therefore be allies of the colonising powers. In every link in the global commodity chains there has to be someone who has motives for keeping that system running.<sup>60</sup> The externally oriented economy is not only externally imposed and maintained, but also needs local support and will of course encounter local resistance. This economic system gives rise to parasitic instead of generative cities, following Hoselitz.<sup>61</sup> The city system in such an economy only serves export and is characterised by a few very big (primate) cities, which serve as transport nodes, and little or no mid-sized towns. This is a consequence of the lack of local demand and local industry, in other words, the lack of local exchange.<sup>62</sup>

A third view of the role of cities in economic development is one from the perspective of historical materialism. In this Marxist approach both town and countryside are subjected to the same process, which is the accumulation of capital.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Edel argues, urbanism has to be interpreted in the light of specific aspects of the accumulation process: surplus extraction from wage labour, reproduction of the labour force and the circulation of capital.<sup>64</sup> Harvey sees in urbanisation the process of altering physical and social structures to meet the spatial requirements of capitalism.<sup>65</sup> More concretely, the changes in the spatial structure of

capitalist society serve to eliminate space as an obstacle to further capitalist accumulation.<sup>66</sup> (As above) Another aspect of urbanisation is the drive to control and discipline labour. The urban order not only eliminates space for the circulation of capital, but also tries to find equilibrium between control over labour, keeping the price of it down, and the reproduction of a stable labour force.<sup>67</sup> Semi-proletarian labour can be cheap as it unlinks production and reproduction, but it is hard to control and discipline.<sup>68</sup> A well-paid, suburban workforce on the other hand is expensive but also stable and easy to control.<sup>69</sup> This requires planning, but is also influenced by resistance; it is the result of class struggles.<sup>70</sup> There is the plan of the colonial city, but there also is the reality in which the people contest the structures and try to use them for their own advantage.<sup>71</sup> Urbanisation is not simply a top-down process.

A fourth perspective is related to both dependency theory and historical materialism. World-systems analysis is a neomarxist approach that strives to be holistic and essentially historicizing. According to this view the capitalist world-system can only be studied as a whole and the driving force behind this system is the process of unequal exchange. This divides the world into three zones: the core, the periphery and the semi-periphery.<sup>72</sup> Since the nation-state is not recognised as a meaningful unit of analysis, this framework for interpretation lends itself very well to conceptualising cities as nodes on the commodity chains along which the unequal exchange takes place.<sup>73</sup> The most important contribution is that it allows us to link local and global processes.<sup>74</sup> The world-systems perspective has however been subject to quite a bit of criticism. The two most important criticisms are that it ignores the important role of class conflict in the development of capitalism and that it conceptualises the state as little more than an instrument in the hands of the dominant economic groups.<sup>75</sup> Brenner argues that Wallerstein, who epitomises world-systems analysis, and others who see trade and not class struggle as the driving force of the capitalist system cannot give a qualitative explanation of changing productivity of labour and changes in the modes of production.<sup>76</sup> The second criticism argues that world-systems theory tends to reduce political action to little more than an expression of market interests.<sup>77</sup>

Some characteristics that many contemporary urban studies, irrespective of the chosen approach, seem to have in common are those that Aiken and Castells have already discerned in 1977: '(1) examining the larger social, economic, and political context of cities; (2) using an historical perspective to study urban problems and phenomena, meaning a strong emphasis on the process of social change over time in urban systems; and (3) exploring the critical role of the economic system in shaping the nature of urban systems.'<sup>78</sup>

### ***Methodology: the framework for analysis***

In order to be able to use the previous theoretical and conceptual considerations as a basis for a case study, it is necessary to draw up a framework for analysis. More concretely, a number of questions must be put forward, the answers for which will be sought in the sources. In other words: what are the data that will be looked for? This framework can be split into two groups of questions. Firstly, what is the function of different cities in the whole of the colonial empire, the world-system, the region, and the colony? Secondly, what are the physical, social, political, and economic structures on the different levels of spatial organisation that make the urban system into what it is?

For De Bruijne the role colonial cities perform is twofold: they are both centres of control and intermediary nodes in the networks of exchange of colonial and other commodities: points of collection, diffusion, trade, and transport.<sup>79</sup> The economic function can also be broadened: they are centres of economic integration in general.<sup>80</sup> The control function of the colonial city is also a double one: political and military. As a centre of political control it is the seat of the colonial government and administration<sup>81</sup> and often the place of residence of the political and social elites or at least the place where they live their social lives.<sup>82</sup> In the role of centre of military control, colonial cities are the places where the garrisons are quartered<sup>83</sup> and are often the places where forts and other military-strategic structures are erected.<sup>84</sup>

The economic function of the urban network in the colonised world is that of an instrument in the expansion of the world-economy. These cities, just as non-colonial cities, are necessary to organise their hinterland and ensure the creation and expropriation of surplus.<sup>85</sup> This reorganisation of the economic and other structures of the colony is of course not a one-way process. The pre-existing structures cannot just be put aside and local actors cannot just be ignored. A dialectic process of interaction between old and new and between different actors always takes place. The new system articulates with the old one, this can happen in three ways (in which the European society is dominant). The first type is colonial domination, in this system affirmation of political power and the direct and intensive exploitation of resources are the essential elements. In capitalist-commercial domination there is no direct, forced extraction of raw materials, but the exploitation of the resources of the (former) colony happens through unequal exchange on the world-market instead. In this system economic dominance partly replaces political power. The third form of domination is the imperialist industrial and financial domination, here the dependence of the Third World is

a consequence of the overwhelming economic dominance of Western business concerns.<sup>86</sup> The shift in type of articulation is in other words a shift from political dominance to economic dominance.

Two distinct types of colonial settlements characterise these two different forms of domination. The first is the colonial-type settlement, which serves above all administrative functions; this is mainly a centre of control. These towns tend to reproduce the urban structures of the mother country and usually maintain very close relations with 'home', often closer than with the surrounding areas. The archetypical examples of this sort of settlements are the Spanish towns in America. The second colonial urban variant is the business centre. These are gateway cities, which serve as nodes in the transport systems of the colonial powers on the one hand and as commercial centres for the hinterland on the other. This is the place where local traders meet the metropolitan business elites. These are of course centres of economic control and dominance.<sup>87</sup>

It is important to note that the functions that are discussed here do not refer to the implementation of a certain model by some sort of all-powerful state or other actor. The function is not the translation of some sort of will; it is not the unambiguous result of careful planning or conversion into reality of all-defining economic interests. The process of urbanisation is much more complex than this and a functionalist or instrumental analysis would not do it justice. With the function of a city as it will be studied here is meant the role this city plays in a concrete historical urban system.

The second group of questions relate to the concrete structural changes on the different levels of the urban system. How did the process of capitalist urbanisation shape and reshape the spatial organisation? King identifies six different levels on which urban systems can be studied. The first level is that of the city in relation to the colonised territory. The city serves on this level as a 'spearhead of economic, political, and cultural penetration, following which the structural organisation, or reorganisation, of the colonised society or territory takes place.'<sup>88</sup> The changes the colonial urbanisation brings along are plentiful and diverse. First of all, new spatial structures come into existence. The locations of settlements usually encourage an export-import economy.<sup>89</sup> Most of the important Third World cities are located on the coast or at the mouth of a river.<sup>90</sup> Transport networks do the same thing: while in the industrialised countries they take the form of spider's webs (well internally connected), they take the form of funnels ending in the ports in the periphery. In this context there is little or no development of internal economic linkages,<sup>91</sup> which there is in the Wakefieldian system of

systematic colonisation used in the United States.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the first railway lines and roads are often the basis of the further development of the transport network. Therefore colonial development can have a lasting impact.<sup>93</sup> Saueressig-Schreuder concludes that it is very difficult to restructure an economy that has been organised in this way.<sup>94</sup> The immobility of the geographic structures is hard to conquer. Other changes take place in the social, economic, political, and cultural structures of society. New occupations emerge and give rise to new social stratifications; new elites create new bases of power. Financial networks come into place. The economy gets converted into an externally oriented one and a labour market is created. This affects both town and countryside: migration and the breaking up of kinship and tribal structures are just some of the most visible results.<sup>95</sup>

The second level of analysis is the relation between the city and the metropolitan power. Investments of London-based capitalists in the colonies are directed through their agents in the colonial cities, people migrate to the colonies, metropolitan policies influence the politics in the colonies, financial networks in the colonies rely on those in the metropole... Each colonial empire has a distinct city system with different characteristics. The relations between the city and the wider region are often determined by trading relations, rivalries between the different colonial powers and by the creation and control of the labour market, which cannot be confined to one colony. The colonial cities are also part of the economic, political, social, and cultural whole that the empire is and do not only relate to the metropolitan cities, but also to the rest of the empire. A fifth level of analysis is that of the city in the world-system. The colonial cities do not only trade and interact otherwise with their respective mother countries. This level can be more or less analysed in the same terms as used in the second level. These four levels of interaction all deal with the outward linkages of the colonial city and will therefore be treated as one. The last level is that of the colonial city *per se*, the analysis of the internal dynamics of the city itself. How do the different cultures interact, what are the power structures, how are the economic and residential relations between the different strata of the population?<sup>96</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is the trade with the interior republics.
- <sup>2</sup> M. CASTELLS, The Urban Question. A Marxist Approach, London, Edward Arnold, 1977, p. 9.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>4</sup> D. HARVEY, The Urbanization of Capital (Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization 2), Oxford, Blackwell, 1985, p. 35.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 186.
- <sup>6</sup> A.L. MABOGUNJE, Urbanization in Nigeria, London, University of London Press, 1968, p. 35.
- <sup>7</sup> M. CASTELLS, op. cit., p. 10.
- <sup>8</sup> A.L. MABOGUNJE, "Urbanization in Nigeria. A Constraint on Economic Development" in: Economic Development and Cultural Change, XIII, 1965, 4, p. 421.
- <sup>9</sup> D. HARVEY, op. cit., p. 186.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 38.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>13</sup> M. CASTELLS, op. cit., p. 21.
- <sup>14</sup> D. HARVEY, op. cit., pp. 39-41.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> M. SAEY, Wereld-systeemanalyse. Een antwoord op 1968. Een inleiding op de traditie van een nieuw verhaal, Brussel, IMAVO, s.a., pp. 93-94.
- <sup>18</sup> T.G. MCGEE, "Circuits and Networks of Capital: The Internationalisation of the World Economy and National Urbanisation" in: D. DRAKAKIS-SMITH (ed.), Urbanisation in the Developing World, Beckenham, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 27.
- <sup>19</sup> D. HARVEY, op. cit., p. 5.
- <sup>20</sup> T.G. MCGEE, op. cit., p. 27.
- <sup>21</sup> D. HARVEY, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-12.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 23.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 56.
- <sup>26</sup> A.L. MABOGUNJE, Urbanization in Nigeria, p. 22.
- <sup>27</sup> D. HARVEY, op. cit., p. 24.
- <sup>28</sup> A.L. MABOGUNJE, Urbanization in Nigeria, p. 22.
- <sup>29</sup> M. TIMBERLAKE, "The World-System Perspective and Urbanization" in: M. TIMBERLAKE (ed.), Urbanization in the World-Economy (Studies in Social Discontinuity), London, Academic Press, 1985, p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup> D.M. GORDON, "Capitalist Development and the History of American Cities" in: W.K. TABB, L. SAWERS (eds.), Marxism and the Metropolis. New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy (Second Edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 22-23.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 23.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 24.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 30.
- <sup>34</sup> D. HARVEY, op. cit., p. 40.
- <sup>35</sup> D.M. GORDON, op. cit., p. 30.
- <sup>36</sup> J. KENTOR, "Economic Development and the World Division of Labor" in: M. TIMBERLAKE (ed.), Urbanization in the World-Economy (Studies in Social Discontinuity), London, Academic Press, 1985, p. 30.
- <sup>37</sup> R. GROSFOGUEL, "World Cities in the Caribbean. The Rise of Miami and San Juan" in: Review: a journal of the Fernand Braudel center, vol. XVII, 1994, no. 3, p. 353.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 353-354.
- <sup>39</sup> A.L. MABOGUNJE, "Urbanization in Nigeria", pp. 422-423.
- <sup>40</sup> A.D. KING, Urbanism, Colonialism and the World-Economy. Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System (The International Library of Sociology), London and New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>41</sup> As cited in: ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

- <sup>43</sup> R. ROSS, G.J. TELKAMP, "Introduction" in: R. ROSS, G.J. TELKAMP, Colonial Cities. Essays on Urbanism in a Colonial Context, Dordrecht, Nijhoff, 1985, p. 1.
- <sup>44</sup> G.J. TELKAMP, Urban history and European expansion: a review of recent literature concerning colonial cities and a preliminary bibliography (Intercontinenta 1), Leiden, Centre for the History of European Expansion, 1978, p. 28.
- <sup>45</sup> G.A. DE BRUIJNE, "The Colonial City and the Post-Colonial World" in: R. ROSS, G.J. TELKAMP, Colonial Cities. Essays on Urbanism in a Colonial Context, Dordrecht, Nijhoff, 1985, p. 231.
- <sup>46</sup> B. ROBERTS, Cities of Peasants (Explorations in Urban Analysis), London, Edward Arnold, 1978, pp. 46-48.
- <sup>47</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The British Empire at its Zenith, London, Croom Helm, 1988, p. 93.
- <sup>48</sup> B. ROBERTS, op.cit., p. 48.
- <sup>49</sup> M. TIMBERLAKE, "The World-System Perspective and Urbanization", p. 16.
- <sup>50</sup> D. SLATER, "Capitalism and Urbanisation at the Periphery: Problems of Interpretation and Analysis with Reference to Latin America" in: D. DRAKAKIS-SMITH (ed.), Urbanisation in the Developing World, Beckenham, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 9.
- <sup>51</sup> B. ROBERTS, op.cit., p. 9.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>53</sup> D. SLATER, op.cit., p. 9.
- <sup>54</sup> M. CASTELLS, op.cit., pp. 45-47.
- <sup>55</sup> J. ARN, "Third World Urbanization and the Creation of a Relative Surplus Population. A History of Accra, Ghana to 1980" in: Review: a journal of the Fernand Braudel center, vol. XIX, 1996, no. 4, p. 441.
- <sup>56</sup> D. SLATER, op.cit., p. 10.
- <sup>57</sup> P. BAIROCH, Cities and Economic Development. From the Dawn of History to the Present, London, Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988, pp. 481-483.
- <sup>58</sup> M. CASTELLS, op.cit., p. 43.
- <sup>59</sup> D. SLATER, op.cit., p. 11.
- <sup>60</sup> B. ROBERTS, op.cit., p. 14.
- <sup>61</sup> As cited in: M. CASTELLS, op.cit., p. 41.
- <sup>62</sup> B. ROBERTS, op.cit., pp. 28-29.
- <sup>63</sup> D. SLATER, op.cit., p. 14.
- <sup>64</sup> As cited in: M. TIMBERLAKE, "The World-System Perspective and Urbanization", p. 8.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 9.
- <sup>66</sup> D. HARVEY, op.cit., p. 37.
- <sup>67</sup> F. COOPER, "Introduction" in: F. COOPER (ed.), Struggle for the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa (SAGE Series on African Modernization and Development), Beverly Hills, SAGE Publications, 1983, p. 8.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 22.
- <sup>69</sup> C. VAN ONSELEN, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914 (volume 1, New Babylon), Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982, pp. 163-164; D.P. SMIT, The Political Economy of Urban and Regional Planning in South Africa: 1900 to 1988. Towards Theory to Guide Progressive Practice, Durban, University of Natal, 1989, p. 51. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-18.
- <sup>72</sup> M. SAEY, op.cit., p. 92.
- <sup>73</sup> T.G. MCGEE, op.cit., p. 23.
- <sup>74</sup> M. TIMBERLAKE, "Preface" in: M. TIMBERLAKE (ed.), Urbanization in the World-Economy (Studies in Social Discontinuity), London, Academic Press, 1985, p. xiii.
- <sup>75</sup> M. TIMBERLAKE, "World-System Theory and the Study of Comparative Urbanization" in: M.P. SMITH, J.R. FEAGIN (eds.), The Capitalist City. Global Restructuring and Community Politics (Ideas), Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, p. 40.
- <sup>76</sup> R. BRENNER, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique" in: New Left Review, 1977, no. 104, pp. 31-33.
- <sup>77</sup> M. TIMBERLAKE, "World-System Theory and the Study of Comparative Urbanization", p. 55.
- <sup>78</sup> M. AIKEN, M. CASTELLS, "New trends in urban studies" in: Comparative Urban Research, vol. IV, 1977, no. 2-3, p. 7.
- <sup>79</sup> G.A. DE BRUIJNE, op.cit., p. 233.
- <sup>80</sup> M. CASTELLS, op.cit., p. 44.

- <sup>81</sup> R. ROSS, G.J. TELKAMP, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>82</sup> A.D. KING, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- <sup>83</sup> R. ROSS, G.J. TELKAMP, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>84</sup> One example of this is Cape Town, Jack Arn lists some other examples along the coast of Ghana. J. ARN, *op. cit.*, p. 419.
- <sup>85</sup> A.D. KING, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- <sup>86</sup> M. CASTELLS, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>88</sup> A.D. KING, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>90</sup> P. BAIROCH, *op. cit.*, p. 481.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 508.
- <sup>92</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *The Crown Lands of British South Africa, 1853-1914*, Kingston (Canada), The Limestone Press, 1984, p. 11.
- <sup>93</sup> E.J. TAAFFE, R.L. MORRILL, P.R. GOULD, "Transport expansion in underdeveloped countries: a comparative analysis" in: *Geographical Review*, vol. LIII, 1963, no. 4, pp. 509-510.
- <sup>94</sup> Y. SAUERESSIG-SCHREUDER, "The Impact of British Colonial Rule on the Urban Hierarchy of Burma" in: *Review: a journal of the Fernand Braudel center*, vol. X, 1986, no. 2, pp. 275-276.
- <sup>95</sup> A.D. KING, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **EARLY EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT**

## **1 Early European settlement**

[...] to show that almost from the beginning of authentic history, the English and Dutch have stood shoulder to shoulder in that grand struggle of civilisation against barbarism which has culminated in the firm establishment of the Colony as it stands to-day.

J.F. Ingram, (ca.) 1897<sup>1</sup>

To make it easier for the reader to follow the argument in this dissertation, this first chapter will give a broad outline of the history of the earliest European settlement in what would later become the Colony of Natal. We will go back to this 'beginning of authentic history' in order to start our story from there. This is not intended to minimise the importance of what preceded this settlement. On the contrary, this chapter will also illustrate that the society of these early European traders underwent profound influence from Nguni society.

There is however another reason to start the dissertation here. It might be a bit premature to talk about urban networks in this context, but it is important to discuss this period as several structural elements and tendencies that influenced Natal's development throughout most of the nineteenth century found their origins in these early times. And as discussed in the introduction, once these structures are in place it can be difficult to change them. This was also the time in which the first planning of towns took place; unplanned and more or less temporary settlement was quickly replaced by planning with the clear intention of establishing permanent townships. The two important characteristics that found their origins here can be summarised as predominance of commercial accumulation and high primacy. The first European settlement in Natal came into existence in order to establish trade relations and the very limited production of the voortrekkers who arrived a little more than a decade later did not change much to this predominance of trade over production in the colony. The liberal land policies of the republic combined with the lack of productive capital impeded the development of intensive agriculture and substantial settlement in the rural areas. This limited progress in the countryside had as a result that there was little incentive for the development of dense urban patterns and the growth of extensive internal economic linkages. The Cape Dutch tradition of semi-self-sufficient homesteads and dorps did little to change this. Thus the scene was set for a pattern of settlement with very limited development of towns in the countryside and high primacy for those few towns that played a role in the trade networks.

## **1.1 King Shaka and the settlement at Port Natal**

If we conveniently forget about some early encounters of short duration and without lasting influences between 1497 – when the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama discovered the Bay of Natal allegedly on Christmas Day – and the nineteenth century, we can trace the history of European settlement in Natal back to the arrival at Port Natal of Lieutenant Farewell, Henry Francis Fynn and Lieutenant King in 1824.<sup>2</sup> These agents of Cape merchants and their small party of ‘frontier adventurers, traders and hunters’ were looking to turn Port Natal into an alternative outlet to Delagoa Bay for the Zulu trade in ivory, skins and hides.<sup>3</sup>

Lt. Farewell described his purpose in coming to this place as ‘commercial pursuits and a wish to obtain a knowledge of this country [...] and the benefit to be derived from my present grant of land, with the power of preserving some branches of the trade in my own hands, [...]’.<sup>4</sup> This paints the image of a frontier trader-cum-adventurer, in more or less unknown terrain and beyond British protection. Their vulnerability and the refusal of Lord Somerset, the Governor of the Cape Colony, to offer protection led the traders to establish quasi-diplomatic relations with the Zulu king.<sup>5</sup> The power of king Shaka was so great that it led Farewell to note that he ranks ‘far above any chiefs I believe at present known in South Africa’ and the Zulu nation was so different from any nation he knows ‘as to astonish and please us.’<sup>6</sup> The need to be in Shaka’s grace was clear; he was undoubtedly the regional potentate.<sup>7</sup> John Laband noted that ‘without the desired intervention of the British government, the traders had to accept Shaka’s overlordship and abide by his terms.’<sup>8</sup> The diplomacy worked and Lt. Farewell was granted land stretching ten miles south, twenty-five miles north and one hundred miles inland from the Bay of Natal.<sup>9</sup> This meant that the traders became tributaries to the Zulu kingdom, just like other client-chiefs. The Europeans at Port Natal accepted the subordination to Zulu power and were therefore tolerated, as opposed to the later voortrekkers.<sup>10</sup> As subordinate chiefdom the party also had to adopt the local African laws and customs.<sup>11</sup> From 1826 on Shaka also desired them to become involved in politics and warfare, mainly because they had firearms.<sup>12</sup>

The handful of traders at this settlement in the 1820s were not only very much dependent on the goodwill of the Zulu rulers, but also on the people who lived in the vicinity of the settlement and who were to a large extent uprooted Nguni refugees, these Africans also accepted the Europeans as their chiefs.<sup>13</sup> The Europeans had to rely on them for supplies, as they did not engage in production themselves, and – given the scarcity or even total absence

of European women – wives. Consequently they also married according to the African traditions.<sup>14</sup>

Shaka seems to have been rather happy to have traders at the periphery of his kingdom; Farewell even writes that he ‘seemed particularly pleased at hearing my intention in coming to Natal was that of remaining there.’<sup>15</sup> The relationship between the settlement and the Zulu kingdom however changed after the death of king Shaka in 1828. Under the rule of his brother and successor Dingane, more people fled the kingdom and many of those found a safe haven around Port Natal, which negatively influenced mutual relations.<sup>16</sup> Other reasons for tension were the increase in the number of traders in the 1830s, the greater drive of the Europeans to achieve some sort of independence from the Zulu monarchs and their monopoly on ivory trade and the wish of Dingane to receive firearms from the traders.<sup>17</sup> As the number of explorers, traders, missionaries and hunters in the vicinity of Port Natal rose, the pressure on London to annex the area mounted. In 1833 one hundred and ninety people, ‘merchants and others’, petitioned the king. They referred among other things to the purchase by the Dutch East India Company of the land in 1689, to the dangers the traders were in and to the appealing influence a colony might have on the Eastern Cape frontier by stopping the Zulu raids. They also painted a picture of a virgin land on which a settler colony could be established.<sup>18</sup> London was not (yet) interested in Natal and refused to annex it in 1835.<sup>19</sup> The European population of Port Natal at this time was estimated at thirty to forty male residents.<sup>20</sup>

The year 1835 was also the year in which Captain Gardiner, a Royal Navy officer, arrived overland in Natal. He came to establish a mission in Zululand, but did not manage to get permission from king Dingane for this. He then moved on to Port Natal and established the township of D’Urban. He named it after Sir Benjamin D’Urban, Governor of the Cape Colony, in the hope of winning his sympathy and with it some form of protection.<sup>21</sup> He also made up a town plan, but a later one by G.C. Cato would eventually be used.<sup>22</sup> (See Figure 2) This was the first step for Port Natal from being characterised by unplanned and more or less temporary settlement to planned settlement with the clear intention of establishing a permanent township. King Dingane, who of course had to be consulted, demanded that the settlers at Port Natal send back any new refugees arriving in that area. The traders refused to do this, which added to the already existing tensions.<sup>23</sup>

This is the situation in which the trekkers who arrived from 1837 on found the country: a tiny white trade settlement increasingly at odds with the Zulu kingdom and limited

to the direct vicinity of the Bay. The hinterland seemed completely 'empty', an impression Farewell already aired in 1824, estimating the number of inhabitants of the grant of land he received at no more three or four hundred.<sup>24</sup> In reality the population of the area was uprooted as a result of the Mfecane of the 1820s.<sup>25</sup> When stability returned, the African population came back to Natal and out of their hiding places.<sup>26</sup> The idea of an empty colony however made it easy for the settlers to consider the African population as intruders or refugees and consequently deny them the right to any secure title to land.<sup>27</sup>

## **1.2 The Republic of Natalia**

The voortrekkers moved on, beyond the Eastern Cape frontier, for a number of reasons. This move was a continuation and acceleration of an expansive movement that had been going on for a century.<sup>28</sup> It was a search for new lands, since the pressure on the land was increasing in the Eastern Cape.<sup>29</sup> But it was also the refusal to accept changes in the society. The abolition of slavery, the abandonment of the province of Queen Adelaide and the introduction of a new land tenure system were for them the symptoms of a government and a society they could not accept. It was the closure of the Eastern Cape frontier combined with the greater control of the government over the population that limited their liberty to assert themselves and defend their interest; their hands were now tied.<sup>30</sup>

These rather small groups of people arrived in Natal during the years 1837 and 1838.<sup>31</sup> They tried to recreate the pastoral economy they had known and practiced in the Cape Colony. This economy was more or less based on self-sufficiency and not on production for or consumption from external markets.<sup>32</sup> Agriculture was not their main activity, the keeping of cattle and hunting were. To add to this, they exchanged cattle for African produce. Cattle being their capital meant that this led to capital depletion, which was occasionally checked by forms of primitive accumulation, the plunder of produce, cattle, and labour.<sup>33</sup> These pastoralists were not very interested in the low-lying coastal lands that were more suited for tropical agriculture.<sup>34</sup> Their interest in the first place went out to the inland grazing areas in what would later become the counties of Weenen and Pietermaritzburg.<sup>35</sup> (See Figure 3) Complete self-sufficiency, however, was not possible or desirable. The leaders of the voortrekkers wanted access to a harbour. The path the parties followed led directly from the Drakensberg to Port Natal.<sup>36</sup> This harbour had to ensure their political and economic independence from the British.<sup>37</sup> Even though the pastoral economy of the Boers was only marginally integrated in the world-system, it was certainly not completely disconnected. The

trekkers too needed access to essential goods such as ironmongery, firearms and ammunition and a pastoral economy too has some products it can sell.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the influx of voortrekkers, the European population of Natal remained very small. Between 1838 and 1840, the newly founded Republic of Natalia granted 254 plots of farmland, but only forty-nine families occupied their land in person.<sup>39</sup> The estimated rural population in 1843 was 412 families.<sup>40</sup> The shortage of land that was clearly felt in the Cape Colony was not experienced here. Therefore the Cape Dutch land system, which was based on large and free quitrent grants, could still be used. The size of these grants was about 3000 morgen or just over 6000 acres. In the republic the early settlers were entitled to two such farms and one erf in one of the newly established townships.<sup>41</sup> Later settlers only got one farm and one erf.<sup>42</sup> The form of tenure was perpetual quitrent.<sup>43</sup> The system was however not called this, all 'the lands are given in "full and free property," but remain subject to all the provisions of the before mentioned general law regulating the "right of burghership."'<sup>44</sup> For this right of burghership a sum of twelve rixdollars or eighteen shillings must be paid in return for protection. This 'is but another name for perpetual quitrent, – the name of which they appear to have been anxious to avoid, in consequence of the unpopularity of this land tax throughout the Eastern Provinces,'<sup>45</sup> Special Commissioner Cloete noted.

This system of large and cheap grants, in an economy based on high levels of self-sufficiency, gave rise to a highly dispersed pattern of settlement, with isolated farmsteads as characterising elements.<sup>46</sup> This left the Dutch settlers vulnerable to attacks.<sup>47</sup> Added to this was the fact that no surveys were carried out, which meant that many farms were actually substantially larger than 3000 morgen.<sup>48</sup> This very liberal and rather chaotic land settlement left a certain imprint on the future economy of Natal.<sup>49</sup> Many years later the land system was still a hotly debated topic, in 1888 a former Mayor of Durban, W.M. Hartley, would for example write a number of pamphlets and letters to criticize the consequences of this land policy.<sup>50</sup> It would however be the chaos and policies of the 1840s that left the lasting impression. We will return in more detail to this discussion later.

The republican government was very weak and had only limited control over the African population. This also meant that this government found it very hard to guarantee a sufficient labour supply.<sup>51</sup> In Natal, just as in the rest of Southern Africa, the 'labour question' has been a major theme throughout its history, and the use of changing forms of force was the leitmotiv. Slavery had been abolished, but that did not mean that force was not used to attain labour from the African population. The apprentice system was very often nothing else than

the enslavement of children.<sup>52</sup> Under this system the children of African servants also worked for the master, without being paid. The master paid for raising the children until the age of eight and in return, the child had to work for that master until the age of eighteen. Another version of this often-used alternative to slavery was the registering of orphans as apprentices.<sup>53</sup> Not only did this system resemble slavery – Captain Smith mentioned in a letter to Sir George Napier, Governor of the Cape Colony, ‘that it appeared to me very like slavery, compelling a boy to serve so many years without remuneration’<sup>54</sup> – improper use was also regularly made of it.<sup>55</sup> Captain Smith concluded: ‘As for the system of apprenticeship, it is a mere farce, being solely contrived to hide the real state of the case from observation, as the Boers well know slavery is a word repugnant to English ears.’<sup>56</sup>

The voortrekkers however did not only live in isolated farmsteads. Every settler was entitled to two farms and one erf in one of the townships. When the British, after annexation, reviewed the land claims made under republican rule, they found that very few Boers actually occupied their farms continuously. In the chaos of republican Natal, many actually lived in townships or laagers.<sup>57</sup> The first townships that were established followed the pattern of the Trek in Natal, a more or less straight line from the Drakensberg to Port Natal, and the pattern of white settlement in the Republic of Natalia. The first areas of settlement were the grazing lands of what would later become the county of Weenen, with as anticipated centre the township of Weenen. Most, however, went further towards the coast and chose to live in the Midlands.<sup>58</sup> Here, allegedly, Pieter Retief himself selected the site for Pietermaritzburg.<sup>59</sup> A third area where the voortrekkers settled was along the Natal coast and between the current cities of Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Here the environment was however not conducive for cattle farming and no attempt was made to adapt to the subtropical circumstances. Settlement in this area remained limited.<sup>60</sup> Yet, having access to a harbour independent from the British did interest at least some of the Boers.<sup>61</sup> Consequently a number of them established themselves around the Bay in three laagers. One of those would evolve into the village of Congella.<sup>62</sup>

Just as the voortrekkers continued the old Cape Dutch land system, they also stuck to the Dutch-Afrikaner conceptions of villages (dorps) and their role within a rural community.<sup>63</sup> This was a tradition of small, scattered dorps, which served the spiritual and a limited range of commercial needs of the farming community.<sup>64</sup> This pattern of villages was prevalent in all of South Africa in the middle of the nineteenth century. These dorps were nucleated agricultural communities, typically developed as a single row of houses in front of irrigated agricultural

erven.<sup>65</sup> The republican townships were meant to be more or less self-sufficient, just as the farmsteads were. This led to towns with substantial amounts of agricultural land within their boundaries and locations with sufficient supply of water were selected. Pietermaritzburg is a good example of this careful selection.<sup>66</sup> The need for irrigation of these lots made strict planning necessary and straight lines were used for this.<sup>67</sup> This careful planning resulted in early formal town plans. Durban was laid out as early as 1835, even though a later plan by G.C. Cato was eventually used. The town plans of Pietermaritzburg and Weenen were drawn up in 1838.<sup>68</sup> Many of these plans of early towns in Natal were so generous in land that in most cases no extensions of the original grid were needed till some time in the twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> Consistent with spiritual function of the Dutch-Afrikaner dorps, the voortrekker church was one of the first buildings erected in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>70</sup> In Durban on the other hand the Market Square, and not the church, was the central focus of the town grid, reflecting its role as a trade centre.<sup>71</sup>

After the establishment of Congella, the little village on the shore of the Bay of Natal, the Boers moved into the already existing township of Durban. This settlement certainly was quite important for this society, despite the drive towards self-sufficiency and the fact that the city later became identified with the British section of South African white society. For a while the Volksraad even gathered there, until the British temporarily occupied the city in 1838-1839. In the end Pietermaritzburg became the capital and those two towns were, and still are, the important settlements in Natal.<sup>72</sup> Weenen has never really known the same development as the other two; even as late as 1859, a traveller counted no more than fourteen houses.<sup>73</sup> Two reasons for this stagnation are the fact that the village was located at the fringes of agricultural settlement and that the main transport route moved towards the West for better pastures.<sup>74</sup>

The town of Pietermaritzburg on the other hand grew quite quickly. In January 1838 Andries Pretorius wrote that about 400 wagons were on their way to the site that had been selected for the town on one day's journey from the Bay. By July there was a laager formed at the site and by November an irrigation system would already have been in place.<sup>75</sup> By March of the next year 'A large, pleasant, and well-watered town, Pietermaritzburg, begins daily to raise its head above the surrounding hillocks; 300 beautiful erven have already been given out, surveyed, and partly planted.'<sup>76</sup> A month earlier the town that would – according to nineteenth-century historian Ingram – become the 'mother City of South-eastern Africa' had officially been named Pieter Maritzburg.<sup>77</sup> Not everybody was equally impressed as Pretorius

by the early development of this town, one visitor in November 1839 described it as 'no more than a camp, ill-constructed of palisades and simply a heap of ill-formed huts, made of wood and rushes and plastered with the manure of cattle.'<sup>78</sup> Two years later however there were already some eighty houses, some of which of permanent character.<sup>79</sup>

A lot was happening in Durban too and contrary to Pietermaritzburg that town did not start from scratch. The formal laying out of the town happened in 1840 according to a plan by the British merchant G.C. Cato; this is still the basis of the central grid of the city today.<sup>80</sup> The township entered a new phase, due to the fact that its hinterland started, still rather slowly, to develop. Trade-activity consequently increased and the need for transport grew.<sup>81</sup> Four rudimentary tracks – which would later evolve into the main arterial routes of the city – developed, two along the coast towards the North and the South, respectively towards the Umgeni and Umbilo rivers, one towards the Point and one into the interior.<sup>82</sup>

At the time of the annexation, Pietermaritzburg was by far the biggest town of the republic, although 'big' might be an exaggeration, as it had a European population of 259 and there were 132 buildings. Weenen only counted seventy-two Europeans and around the Bay of Natal thirty-nine town lots were sold.<sup>83</sup>

### **1.3 Annexation**

The trekboers were less welcome in Zulu territory than the traders at Port Natal once were. There were more of them and they claimed a lot of land, while the mere handful of traders hardly needed any. The trekkers were also not really planning to submit to Zulu authority, which the earlier settlers did do out of necessity.<sup>84</sup> However, the traders too were hoping to cast off the yoke of Zulu power, as the mutual relations had been under strain for some time. An alliance between trekkers and traders came into being and in 1838 the hostility erupted into violence. The Europeans at Port Natal struck twice before being attacked by a Zulu expedition. Owing largely to the reinforcement by the Pretorius party, Dingane was defeated at Blood River in December of that year. This also undermined the position of Dingane within the Zulu monarchy and Mpande came to the forefront.<sup>85</sup> All this warfare alarmed the British authorities at the Cape. They decided to send a small force of one hundred soldiers for the temporary occupation of Port Natal and for restoring the peace.<sup>86</sup> This occupation lasted one year, until December 1839.<sup>87</sup> They would, however, be back only a few years later. The Volksraad accepted British sovereignty two months later after the battle of Congella and the arrival of the frigate *Southampton* in 1842.<sup>88</sup>

London seemed reluctant to take this measure, the British government had refused annexation of Natal before, but this time was different for a number of reasons. First of all there were of course Britain's strategic interests. They had already annexed the Cape Colony before in order to secure the route to India and a new 'European' power along this route did not fit their conception of geopolitics. They did not really mind the Boers founding new states in the interior of Southern Africa, as long as they were economically and politically dependent on the British colonies and harbours by their landlocked position. The importance of Natal was accentuated by the dearth of good harbours in the region.<sup>89</sup> A second strategic consideration was the pressure this republic was causing on the Eastern Cape frontier, due to the heightened instability and its hunger for land. The pacification of the relations between Africans and Boers in Natal was considered necessary to keep this frontier stable.<sup>90</sup> The plan of the Volksraad to deport all excess African population beyond the southern borders of the republic must certainly have made some people in London and Cape Town very nervous.<sup>91</sup> And the vulnerability of the widely dispersed settlers was not likely to put their minds at ease.<sup>92</sup> Thirdly, there were humanitarian reasons. People in London were concerned about the way the Boers interacted with the African population.<sup>93</sup> Charges of slavery and slave dealings might have been part of the considerations that led the Colonial Office to sanction the annexation in 1843.<sup>94</sup> The next year Natal became an autonomous district of the Cape Colony with a European population of probably less than a thousand families.<sup>95</sup>

## **1.4 Conclusion**

In these early days it is a bit premature to speak about an urban network. Some settlements came into being, but the development of these was still very limited. The history of permanent European settlement<sup>96</sup> in Natal started with the arrival of a group of 'frontier adventurers, traders and hunters'<sup>97</sup> at the Bay of Natal. Their reason for being there was to capture a share of the Zulu trade that was going through Delagoa Bay. The settlement at Port Natal was little more than a small trading post. Due to their vulnerability and the limited scope of their settlement they were highly dependent on Africans; on the Zulu monarchs for their safety and on the Africans living in the vicinity of the Bay for a number of necessities. These traders were certainly not unwanted by king Shaka. Under the rule of his brother and successor Dingane the mutual tension however increased.

The strain on the relations between the kingdom and the Europeans increased when the voortrekkers started to arrive from over the Drakensberg. For their pastoral economy they

appropriated a lot of land. Their farms were more or less self-sufficient and thus gave little incentive for the development of markets and towns. A few new townships did however come into existence. This certainly had a lot to do with defensive strategies and with the unsettled state of the republic. The settlement at Port Natal did know some sort of a start of development; some increase in trade accompanied the start of the development of a pastoral economy.

The little voortrekker villages were very much dorps in the Cape Dutch tradition. They were nucleated settlements serving religious and commercial functions in a rural community. The commercial function in this stage was however limited. The pastoral farmers had few commercial needs and towns had no real consuming class, they were semi-self-sufficient. They were, in other words, not the market towns that characterised early modern Britain.<sup>98</sup> Also, improvements in the transport infrastructure remained minimal, as there was little trade and thus little need for transport. Only in the immediate vicinity of the township of Durban and along the trunk route towards the Drakensberg a number of rudimentary tracks developed.

The land system of this voortrekker society was based on very extensive use and the granting of land happened in a very liberal fashion. In fact, this system was so liberal that the British authorities felt compelled to review all these claims after the annexation. Eventually the claims on about 3.3 million acres were confirmed. These claims were 585 in total.<sup>99</sup> The consequences of this liberal settlement will be discussed in later chapters.

In short, one could say that the economy of the Europeans in Natal in this period was more or less a subsistence economy. The main activities were hunting and cattle herding, other needs were mainly satisfied by bartering cattle for African produce. The capital depletion that this caused was sometimes checked through direct appropriation – plunder – of produce, cattle or labour. Primitive accumulation – the acquiring of labour, land, produce, cattle, etc. by force instead of by economic means – played an important role in this society. Towns were still in nascence, but were none-the-less critical. Despite their semi-self-sufficiency Boers still had some essential commercial needs. Towns fulfilled these needs, together with defensive, political and religious needs. This society needed laagers, churches and a Volksraad.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *Natalia: A Condensed History of the Exploration and Colonisation of Natal and Zululand*, London, Harvey, Greenacre & co., (ca.) 1897, p. ix.
- <sup>2</sup> C. BALLARD, "Traders, Trekkers and colonists" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, p. 117.
- <sup>3</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 117; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban: urban history and race policy in South Africa, 1830-1930*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Harvard University, 1964, pp. 46-49. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
- <sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Farewell, 6 September 1824, published in: J. BIRD, *The Annals of Natal. 1495 to 1845* (Volume I), Pietermaritzburg, P. Davis & Sons, 1888, pp. 191-193.
- <sup>5</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 118; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 51.
- <sup>6</sup> Lieutenant Farewell, 6 September 1824.
- <sup>7</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 59-60.
- <sup>8</sup> J. LABAND, *Rope of Sand: the rise and fall of the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century*, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995, p. 32.
- <sup>9</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 51.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-57.
- <sup>11</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- <sup>12</sup> J. LABAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.
- <sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Farewell, 6 September 1824.
- <sup>16</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.
- <sup>17</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 65-67; pp. 89-90.
- <sup>18</sup> "Petition Of Merchants and Others for a Settlement at Port Natal," published in: J. BIRD, *The Annals of Natal* (Volume I), pp. 253-255.
- <sup>19</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 87.
- <sup>20</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 118; M.A.H. SMOUT, *Natal Towns. A study in Comparative Urban Geography*, Durban, University of Natal, 1966, p. 12. (Unpublished M.Sc. dissertation)
- <sup>21</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 88.
- <sup>22</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>23</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.
- <sup>24</sup> Lieutenant Farewell, 6 September 1824.
- <sup>25</sup> A.J CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern in Natal, 1837-1848" in: *Journal for Geography*, vol. III, 1968, no. 2, p. 167.
- <sup>26</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa* (Studies in Historical Geography), Folkestone (UK), Dawson, 1976, p. 84.
- <sup>27</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic*, Natal, South Africa, 1845-1900 (Social History of Africa), Portsmouth (US), Heinemann, 1993, p. 47.
- <sup>28</sup> C.W. DE KIEWIET, *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic*, London, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 53.
- <sup>29</sup> A.J CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 167.
- <sup>30</sup> H. GILIOME, "The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812" in: R. ELPHICK (ed.), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1989, p. 449.
- <sup>31</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- <sup>32</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "Land speculation in colonial Natal, 1843-1910" in: *Historia*, June 1971, p. 102.
- <sup>33</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal: the Natal Land and Colonisation Company, 1860-1948" in: *Journal of African History*, vol. XVI, 1975, no. 2, p. 258.
- <sup>34</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 84.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- <sup>36</sup> A.J CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 171.
- <sup>37</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 111-112.
- <sup>38</sup> W.G. MARTIN, "Incorporation of Southern Africa, 1870-1920" in: *Review: a journal of the Fernand Braudel center*, vol. X, 1987, no. 5/6, p. 860.
- <sup>39</sup> A.J CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 168.

- <sup>40</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- <sup>41</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Story of an African City*, Pietermaritzburg, C. Coester, 1898, p. 28; A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 167.
- <sup>42</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 167.
- <sup>43</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "Land speculation", p. 102.
- <sup>44</sup> Mr. H. Cloete, 30 November 1843, published in: J. BIRD, *The Annals of Natal* (Volume II), Pietermaritzburg, P. Davis & Sons, 1888, pp. 321-327.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Natal: A Study in Colonial Land Settlement*, Durban, University of Natal, 1969, p. 355. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
- <sup>47</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "Land speculation", p. 102.
- <sup>48</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 168; p. 173.
- <sup>49</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 110.
- <sup>50</sup> W.M. HARTLEY, *Natal: Land and Immigration*, Durban, Robinson, Vause & Co., 1888, 20 p.
- <sup>51</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 257.
- <sup>52</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- <sup>53</sup> A. HEPPLER, *South Africa: A Political and Economic History*, London, Pall Mall Press, 1966, pp. 180-181.
- <sup>54</sup> Captain Smith, 29 September 1842, published in: J. BIRD, *The Annals of Natal* (Volume II), pp. 117-119.
- <sup>55</sup> Children were for example often captives instead of orphans, raiding villages for this form of labour was not unusual. Freely interpreting when the kids become 'of age' was another form of abuse of the system. See: A. HEPPLER, *op. cit.*, p. 180; K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Captain Smith, 29 September 1842.
- <sup>56</sup> Captain Smith, 29 September 1842.
- <sup>57</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 169.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- <sup>59</sup> R.F. HASWELL, "The Voortrekker Dorps of Natal" in: *Natalia*, vol. X, 1980, no. 1, p. 26.
- <sup>60</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 173.
- <sup>61</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 111.
- <sup>62</sup> R.F. HASWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>64</sup> D. WELSH, "The Growth of Towns" in: M. WILSON, L. THOMPSON (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa* (II: 1870-1966), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 172.
- <sup>65</sup> R.F. HASWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- <sup>66</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, pp. 109-111.
- <sup>67</sup> R.F. HASWELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.
- <sup>68</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- <sup>70</sup> A.F. HATTERSLEY, *Pietermaritzburg Panorama: A Survey of One Hundred Years of an African City*, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1938, p. 21.
- <sup>71</sup> R.J. DAVIES, "The Growth of the Durban Metropolitan Area" in: *South African Geographical Journal*, vol. XLV, 1963, p. 20.
- <sup>72</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 111-112.
- <sup>73</sup> As quoted in: R.F. HASWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
- <sup>74</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 112.
- <sup>75</sup> R.F. HASWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- <sup>76</sup> A.W.J. Pretorius, 31 March 1839, published in: J. BIRD, *The Annals of Natal* (Volume I), pp. 520-522.
- <sup>77</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Story of an African City*, pp. 1-2; p. 23.
- <sup>78</sup> Delegorgue, as quoted in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- <sup>80</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>81</sup> R.J. DAVIES, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>83</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>84</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- <sup>87</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 112.

<sup>88</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 123; A.J CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 169.

<sup>89</sup> C.W. DE KIEWIET, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>90</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 113.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>92</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "Land speculation", pp. 102-103.

<sup>93</sup> C.W. DE KIEWIET, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>94</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 16; C.W. DE KIEWIET, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> C. de B. WEBB, et al, *Webb's Guide to the official records of the Colony of Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1984, p. xviii; E.S. METCALF, *The Towns of Natal*, Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1928, p. 8. (Unpublished M.Sc. dissertation)

<sup>96</sup> Whether there was a history of towns before the arrival of the Europeans would depend on your definition. There were a number of more extensive settlements, but there was certainly no history of pre-colonial urbanisation in the same sense as there was one in for example West Africa.

<sup>97</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 49.

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of these market towns, see: P. GLENNIE, I. WHYTE, "Towns in an agrarian economy, 1540-1700" in: P. CLARK (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Volume II), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 167-193.

<sup>99</sup> A.J CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 171.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE BRITISH TAKE OVER**

## **2 The British take over**

A tide of progressionary impulse seems to have set in, the noise of whose waters are rousing the World from the slumbers of indifference, in which it has been buried by ignorance, superstition, and custom.

*Natal Witness*, 1846<sup>1</sup>

A lot did indeed change after the annexation of Natal by the British. The new administration for example founded several new towns and in the late 1840s thousands of immigrants made their way to the colony. This was however not a complete break with the past. It was far from certain that the British wanted to develop Natal as a settler colony and thus whether the dominant position of trade over production would be challenged and despite the influx of settlers agricultural production did not really become very successful; white commercial farmers found it very hard to compete with the African peasantry. The towns established by the government mainly served defensive and administrative functions, but other townships came into existence too. The organisers of settlement schemes provided for townships to serve the markets that would come into existence, based on the ideal-type of the British market towns. But as settler agriculture proved to be profitable for very few farmers, most of these schemes failed and thus the townships did not flourish.

Trade, and more precisely the overberg trade, remained the dominant economic activity in the colony and in the urban pattern the two towns that were important in this trade had a commanding position: Durban, the port city, and Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the colony and the service centre and break of bulk point of the overberg trade. The social and political scenes of these towns, and of the colony, were dominated by a merchant elite.

### **2.1 Is Natal to be a settler colony?**

When the British took control of Natal, it was far from certain that they were going to develop it as a settler colony. There were certainly some people who believed it had a future as a 'white colony'. Captain Smith, for example, wrote that 'the more I see of this country, the more convinced am I of its being admirably adapted for the purposes of colonization.'<sup>2</sup> He further added that cotton grows remarkably well, that native labour is not difficult to obtain and that sugar cane is a viable crop. He also mentioned the availability of coal in the interior.<sup>3</sup> But certainly not everybody in London and Cape Town thought that colonisation by means of a white settler population would be a good idea. Many British officials were mainly

concerned about stability, which was after all an important reason for annexation, and considered the future role of this new colony more as being a gateway to the interior of Africa or as a region for peasant cash cropping and mining; they were interested in making it into an import-export economy with a limited white population.<sup>4</sup> The question whether Natal would be a 'white' or a 'black' colony would influence the future pattern of settlement. Would Natal have an elaborate pattern of urban places, with low primacy, or would it be more or less devoid of urban settlements and have a high primacy. The first pattern is more characteristic of settler economies, the second of import-export economies.<sup>5</sup> (As above) This choice also had repercussions for the labour and 'native policy', as will be discussed later in this section.

The problem was that settlers were already living in Natal and that the British authorities were confronted with a *fait accompli*.<sup>6</sup> Special Commissioner Cloete, however, was not planning to accept the chaotic and all too liberal Boer land system. The British did not acknowledge the legality of the land grants of the Volksraad and started reviewing all claims. The condition for recognising a claim was effective occupation of the land for at least twelve months before the annexation.<sup>7</sup> Of the more than 250 farms granted in the first two years of the existence of the republic, however, less than fifty were occupied by their owners.<sup>8</sup> This problem was exacerbated by the chaos during the last years of the republic, when many people chose to live in laagers. Only 198 out of 1780 claims satisfied the conditions.<sup>9</sup> For the voortrekkers this meant that the British had broken faith, not only could they not accept the questioning of the legality of the republican land grants, the dissolution of the Volksraad and the unwillingness or inability to provide an African workforce were equally unacceptable.<sup>10</sup> In the first years of British rule a few hundred voortrekker families left. It could be that by 1847 as few as sixty families were left in Natal.<sup>11</sup> This was considered highly problematic as it checked the ability of the government to exert control over and defend the colony. In an attempt to stop the emigration of voortrekkers to the interior, a new and again more liberal land system was introduced. Well-established claims would be entitled to 6000 acres at the price of a yearly quitrent of £4 or in freehold if fifteen years were paid in advance. Other claimants were entitled to 2000 acres. Since this failed to check the exodus, all 'fair and reasonable' claims were invited in 1848. Each accepted claim would get 6000 acres.<sup>12</sup> The slowness of the surveying however meant that there was a long period of insecurity; numerous claims were insecure for ten years.<sup>13</sup> The *Natal Witness* demanded as late as 1851 'Let all doubts be instantly removed.'<sup>14</sup>

The long-lasting insecurity did not create the right conditions to check the emigration. The continued exodus made land prices plummet, which created the conditions for speculators to accumulate large acreages of farmland throughout the colony. The trekkers were also willing to sell at low prices because they did not invest much in the land. These speculators were to a large extent Cape Town merchants and London financiers, but not exclusively; already before the annexation the speculative accumulation of lands was on its way and the settler elite too played its role in this process.<sup>15</sup> Of the 3.3 million acres of land that were accepted as claims, about one million ended up in the hands of speculators. The Boers that were leaving the colony were however mostly up-country farmers. Along the coast a different process was already starting to take shape. In 1844 new land regulations came into being in the Cape Colony, of which Natal was still a part. These regulations were along the lines of the Imperial system of auctioning the land at an upset price of 2s. per acre. In 1846 the first of these auctions in Natal were held. The Surveyor-General put six lots of one hundred acres on the Umgeni River up for sale for cotton plantations. As this land was considered more valuable than the pastoral lands of the Cape, the upset price was 4s. The sale was a success and an average price of 5s. 5d. was reached. This success led the colonial government to continue sales at 4s., mainly along the coast North of Durban. In 1849 no less than ninety-three lots were sold. The interest in these small plots can be explained by the fact that this land was suitable for more intensive cultivation, for tropical plantation agriculture.<sup>16</sup>

While the government alienated forty per cent of the best land of Natal to European farmers and speculators, somebody had to make sure that the African population accepted this and that the peace was ensured. This was the job of the 'Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes of Natal', Theophilus Shepstone. His first concern, and that of the 1847 Locations Commission he presided, was to keep the Africans pacified and to avoid anarchy.<sup>17</sup> This had to happen at the lowest possible cost because the Imperial Government refused to bankroll the new colony.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the original idea of 'civilising' the populations in reserves, directly administered by a white bureaucracy and with villages and schools for agricultural and industrial training had to be abandoned.<sup>19</sup> Another problem was that this view got some serious opposition, mostly from the side of the settler farmers. Two conflicting conceptions of the future of Natal were at the origins of this. If Natal would develop into a settler colony, then an African peasantry was not only competition to be eliminated, but also a brake on the labour supply. If the colony on the other hand were going to rely on African peasant production, with European merchants marketing the produce, then a peasantry should be

promoted. The latter was the idea of many officials, missionaries, merchants and absentee landlords – who could extract rent payments from the peasantry – and would typically result in a pattern of settlement as in the Rhodesian example. The former was the conception of the settler farmers and would be more likely to result in a settler pattern, as in Christopher's example.<sup>20</sup> The question at hand was in other words how surplus would be extracted from the black population, would this happen by extracting rent from them and marketing their produce or by using their labour power on farms? The lack of resources might have made the ambitious plans of the Locations Commission unfeasible, one thing remained unchanged: the need to ensure for the African population sufficient land to avoid unrest and chaos. The official Locations did however in no way suffice to sustain the entire black population of Natal, but unrest was avoided by the fact that there were still plenty of opportunities to live on Crown Lands or on unoccupied farms.<sup>21</sup>

The large African majority was in theory constrained to relatively little space (even though many settlers still thought it was too much) but effectively used a lot more. The tiny European population on the other hand owned most of the land, but used very little of it. Even as late as 1888, when W.M. Hartley bundled a number of pamphlets and letters on land and immigration, only one-third of the land contributed substantially to the revenues of the colony. The other two-thirds only raised £3000 per year, which was about half-a-per cent of the total revenue.<sup>22</sup> Many of these lands were not occupied, or better: not occupied by commercial white farmers, and did therefore not contribute to the wealth of the colony, in the view of the author.<sup>23</sup> Immigrants could however not be given the best lands, because these had already been handed out before the massive emigration from Britain began.<sup>24</sup> This could be part of the reason why only few emigrants had settled in Natal by 1860.<sup>25</sup> There are however several other possible reasons, which will be discussed later. Both W.M. Hartley in 1888 and the *Natal Witness* more than forty years earlier were however clear on what the colony needed for prosperity: more settlers. Hartley put it this way: 'A large European population will solve most of our difficulties. We do not want rich men with money, but men rich in perseverance and self-reliance and muscular strength.'<sup>26</sup> The *Natal Witness* wrote about 'the necessity that exists for the adoption of measures to secure the gradual influx of intelligent, *sober*, and industrious emigrants.'<sup>27</sup>

The idea that Natal needed emigrants certainly gained momentum quickly in the late 1840s and remained an important theme in Natal's colonial history for a long time after that. The British government however remained hesitant for a long time; London was caught

between its reluctance to develop Natal as a settler colony and the need to counter the emigration of Boers to the interior.<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding this reticence from the part of the government, some emigrants from Great Britain and elsewhere started to arrive. As early as 1846 the *Natal Witness* reported the arrival of a number of immigrants, two people with previous experience in settler colonies, a 'practical agriculturalist' and a tradesman, and one young farmer without experience.<sup>29</sup> Two years later the same newspaper wrote about a special meeting held in Manchester, singing the praise of Natal, its suitability for cotton cultivation and migration.<sup>30</sup> And in 1849 it reported on the plans of J. Bergtheil<sup>31</sup> to settle emigrants on farms he bought for that purpose.<sup>32</sup> From 1848 to 1851 fifty-seven vessels arrived at the Point with immigrants on board. Some of these had one or two new settlers on board, others more than 250.<sup>33</sup>

Through a number of different private schemes some 5000 immigrants arrived in the late 1840s and the early 1850s. The basic principles behind these settlement schemes were the same as in most other places in the Empire. The basic building block was the family farm in freehold or otherwise inheritable and (ideally) sufficiently big to sustain a family and possibly labourers.<sup>34</sup> Attempts were also regularly made to have the settlers living in villages. Comparatively few of those village schemes succeeded.<sup>35</sup> The best known of these schemes in Natal was the Byrne scheme. The first of the Byrne settlers arrived in 1850. The villages of Richmond, Verulam and Howick were founded by and for these immigrants.<sup>36</sup> In these townships they received small lots of 1/4 acre, with the possibility to buy three-quarters more. This was in addition to their larger rural land grants. In September 1850 the Government Immigration Agent counted twelve to fifteen acres of land under cultivation in Verulam and he was rather positive about the chances of these settlers succeeding, even though most of them had not started working on their rural farms yet.<sup>37</sup> The towns were different from the earlier voortrekker towns and different from the towns planned by the government; their main function was not necessarily to aid administration or defence and they were not supposed to be self-sufficient as the inhabitants had their own rural lots. Consequently, there were less extensive town lands.<sup>38</sup> These towns were meant to be an essential part of the agricultural society that these schemes tried to create and would have to accommodate the markets that settlement would create.<sup>39</sup> The village was also the place where the commons were located<sup>40</sup> and where the social lives the immigrants were accustomed to could take place.<sup>41</sup>

## **2.2 New settlements**

On the twenty-first of June 1850 the *Natal Witness* reported the intention of Lieutenant-Governor Pine to found a new town in the county of Klip River.<sup>42</sup> In doing this, the new official continued the policy of his predecessor, who considered the provision of towns in Natal to be inadequate and set up a commission to advise on this matter in 1847.<sup>43</sup> A more extensive network of towns had to serve several functions. The first important reason to establish towns would be to aid settlement and retain the Boer population. Towns make local self-government easier to organise and make defence possible; many Natal towns find their origins in military posts.<sup>44</sup> The organisers of settlement schemes deemed towns important for settlement too and provided their settlements with central villages. Despite the fact that most of these towns never really flourished (most of the schemes failed anyway) towns like Verulam, Pinetown and New Germany have their origins in these schemes.<sup>45</sup> The fact that these towns did grow should however be attributed to their favourable locations rather than mainly to their role in settlement schemes.<sup>46</sup> Another function of the towns was the tightening of the administration.<sup>47</sup> The 1847 commission recommended dividing the colony in six counties with each a town, as seat of the magistracy, and a number of villages.<sup>48</sup> These towns could be extremely small; it was the function rather than the population that defined them as towns.<sup>49</sup> Ladysmith in 1849 consisted of four houses of wattle and daub, but it had a British magistrate, a constable and a Natal Police force.<sup>50</sup> The administrative function in many of these places preceded the formation of a town as such.<sup>51</sup>

Ladysmith was one of the towns that were established on recommendation of the 1847 commission. Sites were selected at river fording points on the main routes to the interior or along the coast. The standard town plan, as devised by the commission, included a cattle enclosure, a market place, a church, a school and a magistrate's office. From the voortrekker tradition of town planning the principle of semi-self-contained towns was adopted.<sup>52</sup> This distinguished these towns from the towns in immigration schemes. A third type of settlement was the mission station; these too were designed to be self-sufficient.<sup>53</sup> This planned nature of the first settlements in Natal had a relatively even distribution of towns as a result, at least in this early phase.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from the administrative function, towns fulfilled some other functions. There was a social function as the places where schools, churches and post offices were located. Some post offices even preceded the towns. The towns were points of contact between the rural population and the rest of the world.<sup>55</sup> Commercially too, the towns ensured this contact.

There were market places, even though most of them hardly had a substantial consuming class; these markets were the places where the farmers met the produce merchants – people who buy the produce from the farmers – or produce agents – agents who find a market for the farmer's produce in Durban or Pietermaritzburg. The general stores in the towns distributed mostly imported manufactured goods and towns along the main trunk road towards the interior served the forwarding trade.<sup>56</sup> The overberg trade was so important for Natal's economy that Cecil John Rhodes labelled Natal in 1855 as a 'forwarding agency in the midst of a Kaffir location.'<sup>57</sup> The role of cities as centres of manufacturing was at this time rather limited, some wagons, crude furniture and candles were made, but many manufactured goods were imported and the main exports were raw materials.<sup>58</sup>

The enormous importance of the overberg trade was also reflected in the location of the main towns. The most important settlements were always along the main trunk route. In the first phase these were Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Weenen.<sup>59</sup> Later Weenen declined in importance as a result of the shifting of the main route in search of better pastures.<sup>60</sup> Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Estcourt, Ladysmith and Newcastle would eventually form the main axis of towns in Natal, along the routes of the overberg trade.<sup>61</sup> Trade in Natal preceded the development of towns, local markets and even local production.<sup>62</sup> Other factors in the location of towns were physical boundaries, the 'native locations' and the existence of European settlement.<sup>63</sup> Not by accident were the members of the commission for the formation of towns the same people as the members of the Locations Commission. The selection of the sites for the locations and the selection of sites for towns were two aspects of the same job.<sup>64</sup>

The extensive planning accompanying the foundation of towns and townships in Natal stems at least partly from an ideal-type conception of towns and their roles in society. As administrators wanted towns to stabilise the population and serve administrative and social functions, these were planned meticulously and the planners seem to have had a very clear idea of what these towns had to be like. Others sought to recreate the British market towns.<sup>65</sup> W.M. Hartley's recommendation to establish one central township for every 200 farms in one district to serve the markets that will follow settlement can be considered an attempt to imitate these market towns.<sup>66</sup> The towns in the immigration schemes seem to have been equally influenced by the model British towns.<sup>67</sup>

In reality though, things would not completely work out as planned. In October 1850 the Government Immigration Agent wrote a report on the first results of the Byrne scheme. He stated that the people on the first five vessels refused the land that was offered to them and

he considered about a tenth of the land fit for profitable cultivation, and even then only for bare subsistence. Nevertheless, he still believed that the scheme would be successful in the end.<sup>68</sup> William Palmer, a Byrne immigrant, expressed the disappointment of the immigrants:

Those who were farmers thought of conducting their farming on the lines their fathers had taught them in the old country, and this, of course, led to failure and sad disappointment. There was no back door, no steamers leaving weekly to take away the discontented and disheartened. [...] There was no manna every morning, and in a sense the emigrants had a worse prospect than the Hebrews in the wilderness.<sup>69</sup>

The *Natal Witness* wrote in 1850:

We are anxious to hear of the happy settlement of the companies that are now so frequently arriving. As a general rule, there is little that is favourable to report. All the schemers – reverend and irreverend – have all fallen into the false and pernicious practice of over coloring.<sup>70</sup>

The failure of most of these schemes did not mean that all the settlers were condemned to abject poverty or left the colony. Most of the Byrne immigrants actually did succeed in making a living, but usually not along the lines originally intended. Many of them flocked into the towns in order to find a viable economic pursuit.<sup>71</sup> Some became wage-labourers, some became active in the trade with the interior, which resulted in a rapid expansion of the commercial network, and others with capital tried their luck in the emerging plantation economy.<sup>72</sup> This led to an early flight from the countryside and consequently early urbanisation in Natal.<sup>73</sup> In 1852 already thirty-seven per cent of the European population of Natal lived in the cities and towns.<sup>74</sup> William Palmer too ended up working in Durban.<sup>75</sup> Durban would also have some 900 black inhabitants by 1852.<sup>76</sup> Natal's towns were not designed to have a large African population, but the European inhabitants were not going to do all the labour themselves, especially not in Port Natal.<sup>77</sup> The 'Native Town' scheme and other ways in which the administration has tried to deal with this dilemma will be discussed in more detail later, it is however important to note that the ideal of white towns was never feasible.

The reasons for the failures of the settler schemes are of course a complex whole, but a number of problems can cover most of the explanation. First of all, a lot of the best land had already been alienated.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the land the settlers ended up on was often too far from the markets, too small and of poor quality.<sup>79</sup> By giving the settlers only small plots the organisers of the schemes hoped to entice them to buy more land on the open market. Few of the settlers however had the required capital for this.<sup>80</sup> Donald Moodie summarises some of these problems in his criticism of the Byrne scheme: 'the allotments are too frequently

altogether unfit for cultivation,' and, 'if the agricultural emigrants are unprovided with the means of buying land, [...], much privation and distress which this government possesses no means of alleviating, must be the consequence.'<sup>81</sup> A lot of people who emigrated in private schemes like the Byrne scheme also were people who could not emigrate in the regular government schemes, consequently a lot of emigrants to Natal were not farmers and many were never even planning to stay on the land.<sup>82</sup> Labour too did not come in the copious amounts and as cheaply as the settlers were hoping for. Finally, the collapse of the cotton bubble was yet another factor contributing to the failure of the settlement schemes.<sup>83</sup>

### **2.3 Pietermaritzburg as capital**

Until the incorporation of Durban in 1854, Pietermaritzburg was the only municipal body in Natal.<sup>84</sup> It would remain the most important city of the colony for quite some time; only in the early to mid-1870s did Durban become more populous than the capital.<sup>85</sup> When the British took control, they held on to Pietermaritzburg as capital and the arrival of a modest British administration in the city led to a small building boom.<sup>86</sup> In 1844 *De Natalier*<sup>87</sup> estimated the number of houses in brick or stone at no less than 132. With the arrival of the British a number of substantial buildings were built, for example the house that would later become Government House.<sup>88</sup> In Reverend Holden's account of the city in 1855, the importance of the administrative function was very clear: 'It is the seat of government, the officers of which reside there; and is also the headquarters of the Forty-fifth Regiment [...] Of public buildings there are the colonial offices, the court-house, and a prison, with a hospital in contemplation.'<sup>89</sup> But apart from the administrative role the capital was also an important commercial centre, mainly serving the overberg trade.<sup>90</sup> The importance of Pietermaritzburg for this forwarding trade was a consequence of the nature of transport in Natal. Everything was transported by ox-wagon and the availability and price of transport was therefore highly dependent on the condition of the pastures. Prices in the dry winter season could be double the prices in summer. Between Durban and Pietermaritzburg there was however sufficient grass throughout the year, as there are more months with rain. In combination with the fact that the capital was the place where the routes start dispersing it became a place where the bulk was broken and goods were stored until it became profitable to transport them further inland.<sup>91</sup> The city also played an important role as social centre, shaped by the example of British towns. Schools, churches, sporting clubs, libraries, etc. all served the social and religious needs of the population of the county and tried to recreate the old country.<sup>92</sup> Related to this is

the fact that Pietermaritzburg was the place where the first newspapers of Natal were published. In 1844 *De Natalier* became the first newspaper in the colony.<sup>93</sup> The *Natal Witness* was published for the first time in 1846 and Durban's *Natal Mercury* only came into existence six years later, one year after Durban's first newspapers, the *Natal Times* and the *D'Urban Advocate*.<sup>94</sup>

The capital as centre of the administration has been discussed, but it is also important to note that a lot of this political control was exerted indirectly. Expediency and a lack of resources made Shepstone and the Locations Commission opt for a dual legal system and indirect rule. The government was dependent on chiefs for the rule of the African majority, which also gave the chiefs the power to use the government to their advantage.<sup>95</sup> The use of force, of course, was something that was not outsourced; the military aspects of control were monopolised by the coloniser. Here too, Pietermaritzburg was an important centre. The first small British force to arrive in 1843, under command of Major Smith, quartered in the city.<sup>96</sup> Fort Napier, 'armed [...] and commands the city of Pietermaritzburg,'<sup>97</sup> was one of the first and most important permanent military posts in the colony.<sup>98</sup>

## **2.4 The state of the economy of Natal in the late 1840s**

The British annexation and the start of immigration some six years later sparked tremendous changes in the colony of Natal. Even though things did not change as quickly and profoundly as some hoped for or predicted, things certainly did change. The development of agriculture, even in a very hesitant manner, broadened the economic basis of the colony. Agricultural experiments with tropical crops were undertaken during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Cotton, coffee, sugar cane, tea and arrowroot had all been tried with varying success.<sup>99</sup> The *Natal Mercury* mentioned the cultivation of sugar cane, coffee and arrowroot along the coast in 1854.<sup>100</sup> For most, agriculture did however not turn out to be lucrative and many tried their luck in other sectors, trade being a very important one. Trade in the early days was still spasmodic and the absence of local markets and consuming classes offered lucrative opportunities for middlemen. That these traders did not have a very good reputation among the farming community can be learned from the nickname 'Boer-vernuckers', which could be roughly translated as somebody who 'deceives' Boers.<sup>101</sup> The move from rural to urban pursuits also resulted in a relatively early urbanisation of the colony, the population of Durban rose from a few hundred at most to 1135 Europeans and some 900 Africans by 1852, Pietermaritzburg had some 1500 European inhabitants by that time and counted more than

sixty retail stores.<sup>102</sup> These early cities were dominated by the merchant elites. G.C. Cato, the first mayor of Durban, for example was one of the most important traders and the wealthiest property-owner in the town – who bought plenty of advertisement space on the first page of one of the first issues of the *Natal Witness*<sup>103</sup> – became Lloyd's shipping agent in Port Natal and was in positions of power in several other capacities.<sup>104</sup> The first Durban Town Council consisted of three merchants, two shopkeepers, one physician and G.C. Cato. In other words, seven out of the eight council members were part of this commercial elite.<sup>105</sup> These usual suspects could be found everywhere throughout the century: in commissions to promote sugar cultivation, in the management of the harbour, in the 'Kafir Commission', etc.<sup>106</sup>

All this did not mean that Natal was on the fast track to prosperity and that it encountered no serious problems in its economic development. Apart from the land policy and the lack of immigrants the supply of labour and the difficulties of transportation were at this time often-discussed problems.<sup>107</sup> Where Shepstone saw in the Africans a potential cause of chaos, many settlers saw an indispensable source of labour, which they needed so badly.<sup>108</sup> They wanted a different 'native policy', not one that kept the two Natals as much separate as possible, but one that ensured a steady and cheap supply of African labourers. Not everyone was however convinced that this was the right policy, landowners and speculators came to the conclusion that they could earn more from extracting rents from an African peasantry than by investing heavily in the land themselves or by simply waiting for the land prices to go up. Merchants and missionaries were certainly not always on the side of the settlers on this issue either.<sup>109</sup>

Transport too was a serious problem in Natal and it started already when you first entered the colony. Due to the bar at the entrance of the Bay only small coasters could enter at any time in the tidal cycle for most of the nineteenth century. Other vessels had to stay in outer anchorage, which had the name of being a graveyard for ships, with sixty-six ships blown ashore between 1845 and 1885.<sup>110</sup> As early as 1846 newspapers hinted at the need of a steam tug, manned by an experienced pilot.<sup>111</sup> Things did not improve much on land; a Byrne immigrant noted that the sand on the road between the Point and Durban was 'wellnigh "knee-deep,"'<sup>112</sup> and the road to Pietermaritzburg was not in a great state either.<sup>113</sup>

One important last remark in this chapter is that this history cannot be reduced to conscious actions by the government or to a simple consequence of the interests of the dominant strata of colonial society, whether settlers or merchants; this will become clear in later chapters too. London was not very keen on making Natal into a settler colony, but the

circumstances made things work out differently; towns that were meant to be 'white' nevertheless acquired substantial African populations; neither new land regulation nor settlement schemes could prevent that extensive speculation took place and large tracts of land were not used for settler agriculture; several planned towns never really flourished; a lack of sources and support made the original plans of the Locations Commission unfeasible and chiefs managed to use the weakness of the colonial administration for their own interest. Theory and planning do not simply translate into a corresponding reality. Resistance, previous realities and the way people react to the changes that are taking place and maybe turn these into their advantage are as important in explaining the course of history as the role of the state, planners and elites.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Natal Witness, 15 May 1846, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> Captain Smith, 20 August 1842, published in: J. BIRD, The Annals of Natal (Volume II), pp. 78-80.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> N. ETHERINGTON, "The 'Shepstone system' in the Colony of Natal and beyond the borders" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, p. 176.
- <sup>5</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The British Empire at its Zenith, p. 93.
- <sup>6</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Urban Factor in Natal Native Policy, 1843-1873" in: Journal of Natal and Zulu History, vol. III, 1980, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 169.
- <sup>8</sup> H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships in rural Natal, 1838-1914" in: S. MARKS, A. ATMORE (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, London, Longman, 1980, p. 152.
- <sup>9</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 169.
- <sup>10</sup> J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, p. 36; H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", pp. 258-259.
- <sup>11</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 259.
- <sup>12</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", pp. 169-171.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 170-171; A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The Crown Lands of British Southern Africa, p. 22.
- <sup>14</sup> Natal Witness, 8 August 1951, p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "Land speculation", p. 103; H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships", p. 152.
- <sup>16</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The Crown Lands of British Southern Africa, p. 23.
- <sup>17</sup> N. ETHERINGTON, op. cit., pp. 170-171.
- <sup>18</sup> J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, p. 37.
- <sup>19</sup> J. LAMBERT, "Chiefship in early colonial Natal, 1843-1879" in: Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. XXI, 1995, no. 2, p. 272.
- <sup>20</sup> H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships", pp. 157-158.
- <sup>21</sup> N. ETHERINGTON, op. cit., p. 172.
- <sup>22</sup> W.M. HARTLEY, op. cit., p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 177.
- <sup>25</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The closer-settlement movement in Natal, 1875-1910" in: Journal for Geography, vol. III, 1970, no. 6, p. 569.
- <sup>26</sup> W.M. HARTLEY, op. cit., p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Natal Witness, 15 May 1846, p. 2. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>28</sup> M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, pp. 118-119.
- <sup>29</sup> Natal Witness, 9 October 1846, p. 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Natal Witness, 2 June 1848, p. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Bergtheil was co-founder of the Natal Land and Colonisation Company, see: J.J.A. EDLEY, The Natal Land and Colonisation Company in Colonial Natal, Durban, University of Natal, 1991, p. 17. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
- <sup>32</sup> Natal Witness, 21 December 1849, p. 1.
- <sup>33</sup> J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, pp. 85-86.
- <sup>34</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The British Empire at its Zenith, p. 190.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 194.
- <sup>36</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>37</sup> G. Macleroy, 25 October 1850, published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, More Annals of Natal with Historical Introductions and Notes, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1936, pp. 59-62.
- <sup>38</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, Southern Africa, p. 113.
- <sup>39</sup> E.S. METCALF, op. cit., p. 14.
- <sup>40</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The closer-settlement movement in Natal", p. 571.
- <sup>41</sup> E.S. METCALF, op. cit., p. 14.
- <sup>42</sup> Natal Witness, 21 June 1850, p. 2.
- <sup>43</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, Southern Africa, p. 112; M.A.H. SMOUT, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
- <sup>44</sup> E.S. METCALF, op. cit., pp. 8-12.

- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>46</sup> Pinetown and New Germany are near Durban and Verulam is in the midst of the sugar belt and was from the late 1870s on the last stop on the North Coast line.
- <sup>47</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- <sup>48</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 112.
- <sup>49</sup> Cf. the early modern British towns: '[...] very many much smaller places were unambiguously regarded as towns by contemporaries for whom function, rather than population, provided 'urban' attributes.' In: P. GLENNIE, I. WHYTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.
- <sup>50</sup> W. Allerston, "Reminiscences", published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, *More Annals of Natal*, pp. 156-157.
- <sup>51</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- <sup>52</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, pp. 112-113.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.
- <sup>54</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- <sup>55</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-23.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-28.
- <sup>57</sup> As quoted in: M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- <sup>58</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>59</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The initial European farm pattern", p. 171.
- <sup>60</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 112.
- <sup>61</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- <sup>62</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- <sup>64</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- <sup>65</sup> P. GLENNIE, I. WHYTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-193.
- <sup>66</sup> W.M. HARTLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
- <sup>67</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 113.
- <sup>68</sup> G. Macleroy, 25 October 1850.
- <sup>69</sup> W. Palmer, "Reminiscences", published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, *More Annals of Natal*, pp. 85-92.
- <sup>70</sup> *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1850, p. 2.
- <sup>71</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- <sup>72</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 19; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 122; C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
- <sup>73</sup> Many however kept farming as an extra source of income, see: M.W. SWANSON, "The Urban Factor in Natal Native Policy", p. 2.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>75</sup> W. Palmer, "Reminiscences".
- <sup>76</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 131.
- <sup>77</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.
- <sup>78</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, "The Complex Nature of Agriculture in Colonial Natal: 1860-1909" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, p. 123.
- <sup>79</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *The Crown Lands of British Southern Africa*, pp. 24-25.
- <sup>80</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", pp. 262-263.
- <sup>81</sup> D. Moodie, 14 March 1850, published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, *More Annals of Natal*, pp. 28-29.
- <sup>82</sup> J. Moreland, 7 March 1852, published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, *The Natalians: Further Annals of Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1940, pp. 68-73; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 128.
- <sup>83</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 121.
- <sup>84</sup> *Natal Witness*, 22 February 1850, p. 3; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 139.
- <sup>85</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 461.
- <sup>86</sup> A.F. HATTERSLEY, *Pietermaritzburg Panorama*, p. 30.
- <sup>87</sup> Natal's first newspaper.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24; p. 30.
- <sup>89</sup> As quoted in: E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
- <sup>90</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.
- <sup>91</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-30.
- <sup>92</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

- <sup>93</sup> A.F. HATTERSLEY, Pietermaritzburg Panorama, p. 24.
- <sup>94</sup> C. BALLARD, op. cit., p. 129; M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, p. 132.
- <sup>95</sup> C. de B. WEBB, et al, op. cit., p. xviii; J. LAMBERT, op. cit., p. 270.
- <sup>96</sup> A.F. HATTERSLEY, Pietermaritzburg Panorama, p. 29.
- <sup>97</sup> Natal Blue Book 1855, as quoted in: E.S. METCALF, op. cit., p. 12.
- <sup>98</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, op. cit., p. 14.
- <sup>99</sup> C. BALLARD, op. cit., p. 133.
- <sup>100</sup> Natal Mercury, 13 September 1854, p. 3.
- <sup>101</sup> J.F. INGRAM, The Story of an African City, pp. 171-172. Another example of settler hostility towards the merchants is 'The Merchant of Natal. A farce in one act', a satirical short play published in the Natal Witness in which a trader called Bounce – from the firm 'Bounce, Bombast, Bragg, and Co.' – is portrayed as an untrustworthy and lying money-grubber. See: Natal Witness, 17 October 1856, p. 3.
- <sup>102</sup> M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, p. 131.
- <sup>103</sup> Natal Witness, 6 March 1846, p. 1.
- <sup>104</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, Durban 1824-1910: The Formation of a Settler Elite and its Role in the Development of a Colonial City, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1994, p. 16; p. 49; p. 410. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
- <sup>105</sup> B. FREUND, "City Hall and the Direction of Development" in: B. FREUND, V. PADAYACHEE (eds.), (D)urban Vortex: South African City in Transition, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002, p. 12.
- <sup>106</sup> Natal Mercury, 6 January 1853, p. 3; A.C. BJORVIG, op. cit., p. 208; Natal Witness, 24 September 1858, p. 2.
- <sup>107</sup> Cf: Natal Mercury, 13 September 1854, p. 3; Natal Witness, 9 October 1846, p. 2.
- <sup>108</sup> N. ETHERINGTON, op. cit., p. 171.
- <sup>109</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", pp. 263-264.
- <sup>110</sup> L. HEYDENRYCH, "Port Natal harbour, c. 1850-1897" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, pp. 18-19.
- <sup>111</sup> Natal Witness, 9 October 1846, p. 2.
- <sup>112</sup> G.H. Mason, "Life with the Zulus of Natal", 1855, published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, More Annals of Natal, pp. 81-84.
- <sup>113</sup> Natal Witness, 9 October 1846, p. 2.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE 1850S AND 1860S**

### **3 The 1850s and 1860s**

The trade going through Port Natal increased significantly during the 1850s. This was however not in the first place a proof of development of agriculture and production in the colony, as much of what was traded was not meant for consumption in the colony and was not produced there. Natal was in other words still very much dependent on the transit trade with the interior republics. The colony was caught between growing pains and the promise of a prosperous future. Durban was a booming town and Pietermaritzburg as centre of the transit trade even more, but in most of the colony there was still only little to be buoyant about. With trade being more important than production, there was much attention for the state of the transport infrastructure and the necessity of a railway line to the interior became clear very early.

The growth of Durban and Pietermaritzburg also brought with it a substantial problem. These towns were built to be white, but the labour needs made this ideal impossible. Thus the Europeans had to find ways to deal with this reality: to try to create a docile, subservient and dependent black workforce, to control the time and space the Africans in the city lived in. This was of course not a one-way process, it was a process that was continually also influenced by the actions of the Africans. The high wages in the towns also made it even more difficult for the settler farmers to get sufficient cheap labour. These started to raise their voice and demanded a different 'native policy' and were heard in the new Native Affairs Commission. The merchant elite was however still more influential than the settlers and in 1860 it were their interests that were acknowledged with the start of the indentured labour program.

#### **3.1 Durban as a port city**

A lot has been written on the role of ports and port cities in economic development. The aim of these paragraphs is not to offer an extensive review of all this literature; it is however useful to touch upon the matter briefly in order to assess the position of Durban and its harbour in a somewhat wider framework. In the economy of Africa, ports, just as the rest of the transport infrastructure, mainly work to facilitate the efficient evacuation of minerals, agricultural commodities and other export products and the import of mainly manufactured goods. The transport network that came into place in these extractive economies is not particularly suited to stimulate the development of internal markets and an internal economy.

In their influential 1963 article on transport expansion in underdeveloped countries, Taaffe, Morrill and Gould schematised this transport system as funnels ending in ports.<sup>1</sup> Although this model has been developed with special reference to West Africa, Bairoch expanded its validity to the rest of the third world and contrasted it with the spider's webs in the developed world.<sup>2</sup> This also corresponds with the difference Christopher noted above between the urban patterns of settler and extractive colonies; settler colonies have apart from more elaborate urban patterns also more integrated transport networks. (See also Figure 1: the lines represent railways) As nodal points on the transportation networks, ports could be centres of the 'islands of development', the zones of primary production for the world market, or directly connected to these islands.<sup>3</sup> As centres of these zones of primary production, they are often catalysers of regional economic development and they promote production and trade in their hinterlands.<sup>4</sup> When the port is however just the closest outlet to the oceans for another 'island of development', it does not necessarily promote any significant development of the local economy. As central elements in commercial networks, these cities also tended to be dominated by merchant elites.<sup>5</sup>

The activity in Port Natal increased quickly after the start of the immigration to Natal. In the second half of the 1840s average imports through the harbour amounted to £44,500 per year and exports to £12,600. In 1850 goods for a total value of £111,000 entered the port and exports were valued at £17,000.<sup>6</sup> By 1860 the total traffic (imports and exports) had risen to £495,000 and exports alone reached the value of £380,000 in 1870, more than 280 times more than in 1843.<sup>7</sup> This large increase in trade was of course closely linked to the development of the immediate hinterland, but there was more to it than that. A lot of the trade going through Port Natal did not come from or was not destined for Natal. Due to the hesitant development of the agricultural economy Natal tended to rely heavily on its commercial function, the overberg trade was a very important part of all the trade going through the port.<sup>8</sup> Port Natal was also very much a British harbour; of the eighty-one vessels entering the harbour in 1870, sixty-four were British and more than three-quarters of all trade was with Great Britain.<sup>9</sup> This British dominance remained and even increased throughout the century.<sup>10</sup> Not only the high percentage of British trade made Durban into a very British port, there were other similarities with the typical British port cities as well.<sup>11</sup> Here too a merchant elite, very much an in-group of *British* Protestants who networked amongst themselves through a limited number of social and business institutions, dominated the town.<sup>12</sup> An important example of these institutions was the Natal Chamber of Commerce, which was established by thirty-nine traders in 1856.<sup>13</sup>

Intermarriage within this elite too was not uncommon; of the thirty-five Mayors Bjorvig included in her prosopographical study of the Durban settler elite, thirty-four married within their own British social circle; the only exception was somebody who did not marry at all.<sup>14</sup>

The success of its harbour made Durban into a booming town, despite ups and downs; the number of houses doubled between 1860 and 1865, the population rose by twenty to twenty-five per cent and by the early 1870s the borough had a total population of more than 5500 people.<sup>15</sup> In 1862 a property on West Street, one of the central streets in Durban, was offered for rent at £800 per year, which was a huge amount of money.<sup>16</sup> The revenues and expenses of the Corporation also boomed, under Mayor Hartley (1859-1860) the Corporation spent £940; in 1865 it spent £25,000.<sup>17</sup>

Despite its success, there were some problems with the harbour too. Transport facilities needed to be improved and this was naturally one of the main concerns of the merchant elite.<sup>18</sup> Throughout most of the nineteenth century only small vessels could enter the harbour at all times. A bar across the entrance of the bay made it dangerous, and for large vessels impossible, to enter. Anchorage outside the bay offered little or no protection; Durban's South Beach was a graveyard for ships.<sup>19</sup> Delays too were a common occurrence due to the bar.<sup>20</sup> The height of the bar differed and sometimes the situation was so bad that 'the bar seems almost silted up to the surface.'<sup>21</sup> The small vessels that could enter the harbour were not fit to sail directly to Great Britain and therefore almost everything had to be transhipped in Cape Town, which lengthened the travel time and doubled the duties.<sup>22</sup> In combination with the shortage of return cargo, due to the limited production in Durban's hinterland, this meant that the shipping charges from Cape Town to Durban were sometimes higher than from London to Cape Town.<sup>23</sup> This was of course a serious commercial handicap. Considering the fact that the harbour was the centre of the economic life of the city, it is not hard to imagine that the bar was a regular concern for many Durbanites and that a long spell of impassable seas could cause great commotion.<sup>24</sup> Only in the late nineteenth century was a lasting solution for this problem found.<sup>25</sup> Despite the fact that the bar was obviously the main problem, other improvements were needed too. Proper inner-harbour facilities were provided in several phases. The development of these was slow until the early 1880s, but speeded up after that and culminated in the early twentieth century with the development of the Congella bayfront.<sup>26</sup>

The connection of Port Natal with its hinterland was another important aspect of the physical improvement of the harbour. The first thing that had to happen for this was the

connection of the harbour itself with its market centre, the Market Square of Durban, because port cities are not only the places where ships are loaded and unloaded, they are also commercial centres.<sup>27</sup> Point Road (See Figure 4) was insufficient to accommodate the traffic between the two places and a more efficient way to quickly clear the limited wharfage at the Point was needed. Merchants from Durban and Pietermaritzburg joined forces to accomplish this and incorporated the Natal Railway Company (NRC) on 31 January 1859.<sup>28</sup> This enterprise resulted in the opening on 26 June 1860 of the first railway line in southern Africa, connecting the Point with the terminus adjacent to the Market Square.<sup>29</sup> It was of course not enough to connect the harbour to town, the connections of the town with its hinterland also had to improve; the most important project for this was the construction of Berea Road (See Figure 4), which provided a more direct road inland and was the biggest expense of the Durban Corporation in the mid-1860s.<sup>30</sup>

A port city does however not only need infrastructure, it also needs labour. Characteristic for labour in a port city is that it is irregular. During the dry winter months the overberg trade came to a halt, most export commodities were seasonal products and the shipping activity tended to be erratic; maintaining a large and stable workforce throughout the year was therefore unremunerative.<sup>31</sup> Port Natal had a long tradition of casual labour. This tradition of *togt*<sup>32</sup> labour, casual labour by the day, probably dated back to the early days of trade on the shores of the Bay.<sup>33</sup> The irregular labour needs of the merchants and the shippers was complementary with the irregular working habits of the African population, which was interwoven with the agricultural calendar, and their new yet sporadic needs and wants.<sup>34</sup> Wage labour in this case was very often a conscious decision by the labourer that had more to do with taking advantage of existing opportunities than with simply succumbing to the powers of the emerging capitalist system.<sup>35</sup> The higher wages in towns and the better bargaining position when you sell your labour by the day made *togt* labour into a very attractive opportunity for Africans.<sup>36</sup> The compensation for one day of *togt* labour averaged 2s. 6d., while the remuneration under long-term contracts could be as low as 10s. per month in town or even half of that on the farms.<sup>37</sup>

The shaping of the labour market is always the result of a struggle; Durban and Natal were of course no exception to this. Two important and recurring themes in this conflict are time and space. Time has to be turned into a commodity as capital tries to discipline the labour force and engineer the conception of time.<sup>38</sup> In Durban and Natal this struggle largely centred on *togt* labour. While Africans liked selling their labour as much as possible by the

day, most employers wanted a cheaper and more stable workforce.<sup>39</sup> Time disputes were also a common cause of conflict between employers and labourers.<sup>40</sup> Getting the Africans to work according to the time conceptions of commercial agriculture and urban enterprises was no easy task. Space too is an important theme in the creation of a labour market.<sup>41</sup> Three of Natal's seven 'native locations', as set out by the 1847 Locations Commission, were located within walking distance of one of the two major towns – the Umlazi and Inanda locations near Durban and the Zwartkop location near Pietermaritzburg.<sup>42</sup> This had the obvious advantage that it provided these towns with plentiful labour, but this did not mean that the white population liked this. Special Commissioner Cloete for example thought that the locations should be kept away from 'the contaminating influence of the Chief Town or Port.'<sup>43</sup> The attitude of the white population towards working Africans tended to be ambiguous. On the one hand work meant civilisation and the dissolution of the threat of the Zulu Warrior; it meant discipline. But on the other hand it could also mean contact, association, competition and independence, and then the work did not civilise, but corrupt the 'native'. A 'good Kafir' was a simple, untutored, cheerful and obedient African, not an independent African.<sup>44</sup> The high wages and the plentiful other opportunities to eke out a living on the fringes of town put the Africans in a good bargaining position that offered a lot of independence and a certain prospect of wealth.<sup>45</sup> This was not the 'good Kafir' as the Europeans saw it, yet they were very much dependent on these 'unimproved savages' for their washing, housework, other labour needs and for the provisioning of food. An overview of some other aspects of the labour issues in Natal in this period will follow later in this chapter.

### **3.2 The overberg trade**

'We hear that wagons are coming down from the interior; indeed one or two have already made their appearance.'<sup>46</sup> This was the first line of an editorial in the *Natal Mercury* from Pietermaritzburg<sup>47</sup> on 15 March 1865; the article went on to bemoan the fact that the wagons could have been there weeks earlier if only bridges had been built. The importance of this fact, the arrival of the ox-wagons, cannot be overstated.<sup>48</sup> Trade did not only precede production in Natal, it also remained much more important for a long time.<sup>49</sup> In 1883 somebody under the name 'Bumpkin' wrote to the *Natal Witness*: 'Natal is but a hanger-on of the Free State and the Transvaal. Obliterate the two and then see where we would be!'<sup>50</sup> In 1862 no less than 7,762 ox-wagons left Durban for the interior, with about 12,500 tons of goods in total. At any point in time about eighty-eight wagons were on their way between the

port city and the capital.<sup>51</sup> In this pre-railway era, it was particularly Pietermaritzburg that was important for this trade with the interior. It was the break of bulk point, the service centre of the forwarding industry and the place where the goods were stored till the ox-wagons could make their way to the Drakensberg, as is explained earlier.<sup>52</sup> The capital therefore counted more merchants than Durban and as service centre it also had more manufacturing business.<sup>53</sup> This dependence on the overberg trade also meant that many Natalians anxiously kept an eye on what was happening in the interior. The 'Natal Almanac and Yearly Register' of 1866 reported worriedly that 'Owing to a variety of causes, the trade of the colony has been seriously embarrassed during the last year. The Free State and Basuto contentions pretty completely closed the overberg trade.'<sup>54</sup> The newspapers too wrote frequently about, for example, the Free State-Basuto war and the diamond discoveries. And when traces of gold were found in Transvaal already in the late 1860s, the *Natal Witness* immediately wondered what this would mean for Natal.<sup>55</sup>

Natalians followed events in the interior with fascination, but if there was one thing that concerned them even more than what was happening in the Boer Republics, it was the state of the transport infrastructure in Natal. Bringing goods from the coast to Pietermaritzburg was often more expensive than bringing them from England to Durban.<sup>56</sup> Transport by ox-wagons was not only expensive, it was also slow and came to a halt during winter in most of the colony, as there was not enough grass along the roads to the interior.<sup>57</sup> Add to this a lack of bridges over the deeply cut river valleys and badly maintained roads and it becomes clear why many Natalians felt that the colony needed to improve its transport facilities urgently.<sup>58</sup> As early as 1845 it was suggested that a railway should be built.<sup>59</sup> Together with the unpredictability of transport, communications by mail too were sometimes irregular and a cause of much irritation.<sup>60</sup>

In this context the railway question became a 'hot issue' and when the first very short line was opened in June 1860 there could be little doubt for the *Natal Witness* that new lines would soon follow:

[...] the startling success of our coast farmers – the rapid rise in the value of land – the increasing demand for upland timber, and produce of every description – the steady influx of European talent, industry, and capital – the increasing Overberg commerce, – all speak in one voice of confidence of our progress – not future, but present progress. [...] We must, and we will have a railway, [...]<sup>61</sup>

A few years later the same newspaper however had to admit that the railway question was not as much the topic of the day as they expected it would be.<sup>62</sup> When the economy

picked up again in the second half of the 1860s they could however 'notice with satisfaction the interest excited in the revival of the Railway Question.'<sup>63</sup> The next year, 1867, increased copper and coal diggings in the interior and the expectation that gold too might be found made the editor very confident about the future prosperity of the colony, and again it was clear what was needed: 'Railroads! Railroads! Railroads!'<sup>64</sup> And it were not only the newspapers that could not think about anything else, investors too were all too keen on having their shot at building railways. Between 1863 and 1874 the Legislative Council had no less than seven different railway schemes to discuss, most of them asking for large concessions.<sup>65</sup> Many however felt that having a railway was worth these extensive concessions; the Legislative Council thought so too and – despite stern warnings from London – chose in 1871 to give Mr. Welborne a yearly subsidy of £40,000 (about a quarter of the colony's total revenue in 1870<sup>66</sup>) and a grant of 2.5 million acres of land for building an extensive railway network.<sup>67</sup> The construction of railways in Natal would however only really come into its stride after 1886, when large gold reserves were discovered in Transvaal.<sup>68</sup> This shall be discussed further in the next chapter.

### **3.3 Pastoralists and agriculturalists**

In its 'Plan of Assisted Emigration and Land-Settlement' the Natal Land and Colonisation Company (NLCC), a land company that came into existence when some of the largest landowners of the colony decided to pool their assets,<sup>69</sup> listed a number of the most important agricultural products of the colony. This list included: sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton, arrowroot, wheat, Indian corn, kafir corn, oats, barley, beans, buckwheat, potatoes and sweet potatoes. Just after that list was added that the colony also exported 1,465,000 lbs. of wool in 1864. The livestock at the end of that year numbered more than 600,000.<sup>70</sup> This shows that farming in Natal was a very varied activity: there were tropical plantation crops, temperate agricultural crops and pastoral products. The types of farming can be linked to the different regions of Natal. In the coastal lowlands tropical plantation agriculture was the norm. Sugar was the most successful tropical crop. The Midlands were characterised by maize, dairy farming and extensive grazing and in the northern districts the keeping of sheep and cattle was the dominant activity.<sup>71</sup> In its settlement-plan the NLCC suggested mixed farming in the Midlands.<sup>72</sup> The company substantiated this with the example of a 'thrifty and industrious settler' near Pietermaritzburg with a small mixed farm and £500 to invest. After this investment he managed to earn £285 back in the first year with only £48 of expenses.<sup>73</sup>

It was of course not because the settler population wanted Natal to be a colony of white settlement that things also turned out this way. Africans heavily outnumbered the European population and despite the fact that this minority owned the vast majority of the land (and certainly of the good land) it only effectively worked a small portion of it. The truth was that Africans produced a very substantial amount of food and that the European farmers could often not compete with them. The problem of the quasi-monopolisation of the land by Europeans could be sidestepped due to the fact that much of this land was in the hands of people who were not working it.<sup>74</sup> Most of these absentee landowners did not mind Africans living on their land and most even saw a nice opportunity in it to earn money from their land by charging hut rents.<sup>75</sup> Living on Crown Lands was usually also a viable option, even though most of that land was not of the best quality. This large concentration of land in the hands of absentee landowners was a result of the liberal land policies of the republic and later the British, combined with the exodus of about half the Boers and the failure of most settlement schemes, which resulted in even more land up for grabs.<sup>76</sup> The crisis of the mid-1860s too brought more land in fewer hands due to the bankruptcy of many farmers.<sup>77</sup> By far the most important and controversial of these land-speculators was the NLCC.<sup>78</sup>

Having the opportunity to squat on land of absentee landlords and to sell surpluses, as many Europeans were dependent on this peasantry for agricultural produce and as several locations were in walking distance of one of the main towns, these small-scale agriculturalists tended to be rather competitive.<sup>79</sup> Especially in staple crops the settlers were no match for the black peasantry for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Some reasons for this were the low consumption needs, the use of family labour and better local knowledge. On the other hand many of the immigrants were completely unfamiliar with the land, were often not even farmers and had little or no capital.<sup>81</sup> By the turn of the century the peasant surplus, however, turned into a deficit, something that had at least as much to do with government intervention as with market forces.<sup>82</sup>

The Boer pastoral economy in the Northern districts was predominantly based on the keeping of cattle. This changed however with the lungsickness plague of 1855, which 'cured' the farmers from their cattle obsession: 'Formerly the enormous herds paralysed their efforts, and threw them into a comas [sic] of inactivity, if not something worse. The lung sickness has, however, waked them up somewhat, and the result is that sheep are filling the vacancy that has occurred.'<sup>83</sup> In 1858 the first wool fair was held in Pietermaritzburg and in the same year the 'Natal Association for the Introduction of Woolled Sheep' and the 'Natal Wool

Gathering Company' were called into being.<sup>84</sup> Wool quickly became Natal's main export commodity, which it would remain until 1914.<sup>85</sup> The export of wool was worth £120,778 in 1870, or more than thirty per cent of the total export; seven years later wool earned sixty per cent of all foreign currency.<sup>86</sup>

Agriculture in the Midlands was predominantly based on maize production, mostly on mixed farms, combined with dairy farming and on the less good lands extensive grazing.<sup>87</sup> A lot of the production of food crops remained the business of the African peasantry.<sup>88</sup> The closer to the cities, which were of course the markets, the more valuable the lands were and the more intensive the agriculture was. In 1862 a farm of 871 acres, four miles from Pietermaritzburg, was publicised at £3 per acre.<sup>89</sup> Lots – 'suitable for Market Gardens and Pineries, and Cows kept for the supply of milk to D'Urban'<sup>90</sup> – in the projected village of Clairmont, at a stone's throw from Durban, were publicised at £30 in 1852, despite the fact that they were only just over one acre.<sup>91</sup> These prices were very high when compared to the prices for Crown Lands, which under the imperial system were sold by auction at upset prices of 4s. per acre.<sup>92</sup>

It was however neither wool nor food crops that captured the imagination of the people; it was sugar that nobody could stop talking about. The newspapers were full of reports of how well sugar cultivators were doing and how big the sugar industry could become in the future.<sup>93</sup> Particularly Edmund Morewood was very active in promoting sugar as a viable plantation crop for the coastal areas of Natal.<sup>94</sup> Sugar was one of the most important tropical commodities in the nineteenth century and the consumption of it in the UK rose from nineteen pound per person per year in 1830 to more than seventy pounds in 1890.<sup>95</sup> The export of sugar rose quickly, but it would remain the second currency earner after wool. The export of sugar was worth more than £76,000 in 1865.<sup>96</sup> This was despite a dip in sugar prices in the mid-1860s.<sup>97</sup> The capital-intensive nature of plantation farming<sup>98</sup> combined with the reluctance of banks to provide capital for sugar cultivation<sup>99</sup> made the role of the merchant elite in this enterprise important.<sup>100</sup> The *Natal Mercury* noted that they had the 'high satisfaction of making public the [illegible word] steps taken by a numerous body of *most respectable inhabitants of Durban*, for prosecuting this vital enterprise in the immediate vicinity of the port.'<sup>101</sup> A class of urban merchant-planters came to dominate the sugar industry in Natal.

Sugar cultivation was however not only a much discussed subject due to its success, but also due to its labour needs, always a hot issue in nineteenth century South Africa. Finding enough labourers was not necessarily the problem as sugar plantations mainly needed

a lot of labour outside the fieldwork season of the Zulus. Finding people who were willing to work before sunrise and after sunset was more problematic.<sup>102</sup> Sugar cane has to be processed as soon as possible after the harvesting otherwise the quality would suffer.<sup>103</sup> Therefore the mills should work as much of the day as possible during harvest time, but Zulu beliefs did not allow them to leave the house when it was still dark outside. This belief combined with the fact that harvest time for sugar cane is in winter severely limited the time the mills could operate.<sup>104</sup> The problem, in other words, was not just to find labour, but also to have the Africans accept the industrial time the millers wanted to introduce. And since a lot of the plantation owners also had urban businesses, they did not want the plantations to compete for their urban labour either, or vice-versa. The government in its turn did not want to increase the pressure on the African population by forcing them to provide too much labour, in order to keep the peace. Therefore both government and the class of merchant-planters rallied in favour of imported labour,<sup>105</sup> an idea that was launched as early as 1855.<sup>106</sup>

Not only the plantations and the cities needed labour of course, settler farms needed the services of the Africans too. Working on white owned farms was however one of the least popular options to chose from, as the wages were low and the work hard and lonely.<sup>107</sup> As long as the Africans had other options, settler farmers found it very hard to find labourers.<sup>108</sup> The continued survival of African pastoralists and peasantry did not only mean labour shortage for the commercial farmers but also competition.<sup>109</sup> The discontent of the settlers with this state of affairs was expressed in the 1852-1853 Natal Native Affairs Commission, which was a counterweight for the more liberal 1847 Locations Commission. This new commission proposed measures to underdevelop the peasantry<sup>110</sup> and thus represented a fundamentally different idea on how to extract surplus from the African population, directly through labour instead of through rents and marketing its produce. In practice however the peasantry continued to produce surpluses until at least the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup>

### **3.4 Indentured labour**

In February 1858 the *Natal Mercury* reported once more on the importance of sugar for the colonial economy. The editor stated that at least £60,000 per year could be earned with it. This was however subject to one condition: a sufficient supply of labour.<sup>112</sup> By that time the possibility of importing indentured labour was already a frequent topic of discussion.<sup>113</sup> On the same page the newspaper reported that the Umzinto Sugar Company had privately brought

Chinese and Malay labourers over from Java, the editor hailed this with 'unfeigned satisfaction' as it would 'operate most beneficially as an example upon our own natives.'<sup>114</sup> There were a number of advantages in bringing in indentured labour from India. First of all it provided labour without increasing the pressure on the African population, therefore it did not bring about a heightened risk of instability and the need for a large Imperial Garrison was kept down.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, the important class of merchant-planters could resolve a paradox in this way: the labour they needed for their urban pursuits did not draw labourers away from their plantations anymore, they did not have to compete for labour with themselves.<sup>116</sup> The passage of the 'Coolie Law' of 1859 was the confirmation of what Swanson called 'a political alliance between the government and merchant-planter interests centred at Durban who traded the importation of Indian labour for support of the Shepstonian system against up-country demands for control of native policy and funds.'<sup>117</sup> A third advantage was that the possibilities of the labourers to resist or to flee were much more restricted, which gave the employers much more control over the workforce.<sup>118</sup> The big disadvantage of imported labour is that the labourers are around all year; they cannot just be discarded when not needed anymore; they have to be provided with housing and food during the whole year; while most farmers could not continually sustain a workforce and usually had no continuous need for labour.<sup>119</sup> It was, in other words, a stable solution that avoided conflict, but also an expensive one that did not fulfil the labour needs of all employers. From the Indian side the system was made possible by overpopulation, poverty, a very exploitative and oppressive social system and ubiquitous indebtedness of the rural population, according to Freund.<sup>120</sup>

The first 'batches of Coolies' arrived in Durban in 1860 and more than 150,000 indentured workers would enter Natal before the end of the program in 1911.<sup>121</sup> The system quickly became popular, especially among the sugar planters, and more 'coolies' became sought after with eagerness.<sup>122</sup> The depression and complaints to the Protector of Emigrants in Madras however halted this first phase in 1866. A second phase started in 1874 after a 'Coolie Commission', to investigate the living and working conditions of the Indians, was called into existence two years earlier. In the first phase the indentured labourers signed a contract for five years and could extend it for five more years and then return or stay and receive a grant of Crown Land. In the second phase there were no land grants anymore.<sup>123</sup> Most of the Indian labourers ended up working in agriculture, mostly on the sugar estates, but in the second phase more and more other employers used indentured labour too.<sup>124</sup> Until the introduction of a £3 tax to stay in Natal in 1895, most indentured Indians stayed after completing their

contracts. In 1885 only seven per cent had returned and two-thirds of the Indian population of Natal was free.<sup>125</sup> By 1911, when the indenture program was stopped, the Indian population was larger than the European population; this also included Indians who entered the colony by their own means.<sup>126</sup>

Despite substantial support for the indenture program, there were also a number of problems. In 1865 the *Natal Mercury* urged employers to treat their Indian labourers correctly, because the Indian Government would find out about ill-treatment sooner or later.<sup>127</sup> In reality, the power of the Protector of Indians in Natal was checked by the biased position of courts and police, which often made complaining about treatment pointless.<sup>128</sup> The warning of the *Natal Mercury* did however turn out to be prophetic and in 1866 the indenture program was halted after complaints in Madras by returning Indians. In Natal there was little organised resistance, despite the class homogeneity based on their powerful common experience.<sup>129</sup> Worker consciousness was however limited as a result of the fact that their contracts were only for five years and in the closed world of the indentured labourers possible leaders were easily singled out.<sup>130</sup> (This remark only has relevance for the Indians in indenture; the politics of free and passenger Indians will be discussed in the next chapter.) A second problem was that the support among the European population for the import of labour was far from universal. To many settlers it was a capitulation on 'native policy', giving up on the attempts to turn the African population into a large and cheap labour force.<sup>131</sup> The indenture program not only did not suit their needs, it also took away some of the pressure on the government to ensure a sufficient supply of labour. Others saw the Indians as a threat; Freund notes: 'Just as the American small farmers and other producers before the Civil War wanted free soil and free labour and became more and more hostile to slavery, their South African equivalents felt frightened of the competition, not only of unfree labour, but also of free labour that might undercut their own position.'<sup>132</sup> This hostility too shall be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

### **3.5 Natal between growing pains and a silver lining**

Natal's economic development before the diamond discoveries in the late 1860s was characterised by some serious growing pains. Emigrants were very often not impressed by the colony: 'The place is one monster sand heap with here and there a small piece of tolerable land about equal in quality to the barren hills of England and Scotland. The roads are abominable,' one wrote to an English newspaper and he added that: 'Work is abundant but no

money to be got when the work is done.’<sup>133</sup> There was certainly some truth in his words; cotton cultivation did not turn into the lucrative enterprise many hoped for and apart from wool and sugar production, agriculture did not really ‘take off’. Natal’s economy was to an extreme extent dependent on the overberg trade and labour remained hard to obtain as the African population retained to a large extent its capacity to control its own destiny.

There was however a silver lining; certain progress had also been made. Despite the bad physical state of the harbour the traffic through Port Natal increased significantly and the colony could boast the first railway line in Southern Africa. Trade with the Boer republics was profitable and stimulated the growth of the capital. The export of sugar and wool increased significantly and indentured labour offered some relief of the labour needs. The large share of the population that was living in the towns also created markets for agricultural produce and land prices around the cities increased. Optimism about the future of the colony was not unusual and Collins wrote maybe a bit too enthusiastically: ‘Natal, though very much younger than some other settled portions of South Africa, was already, in 1861, in the ‘van’ as regards material progress, and was becoming an ‘object lesson’ to its older neighbour, – the Cape Colony, – in the enterprise and ‘go’ manifested by its people.’<sup>134</sup> The *Natal Witness* spoke of ‘silver linings’ shining through in the form of prospects for a railway, improved roads and closer-settlement.<sup>135</sup>

But where was this development going? The transport infrastructure was still in its infancy and it was not yet clear whether Natal would acquire an extensive transport network that would foster the development of a local economy or a funnel-like network better suited to extract resources from the mining regions in the interior without significant local development. The importance of the overberg trade did make of Pietermaritzburg and Durban, the cities serving this trade, two very dominant towns with large primacy while there was little proof of the development of local towns and markets elsewhere in the colony. These spatial elements, combined with the dominance of merchant capital, would justify the conclusion that Natal was turning into an extractive economy. Trade and plantation agriculture using Indian labour seemed to be the likely future for this colony; strong local markets and a well-developed local economy were not a part of this model. There was however also another tendency presenting itself; merchants were the dominant faction of the colonial society, but settlers were definitely raising their voices. They demanded labour for their farms and the elimination of the competition of the African peasantry and they did not only want good transport infrastructure to the interior, but all over the colony. The approval of

the Welborne scheme and the replacement of the Locations Commission by the Native Affairs Commission show that these demands certainly did not completely fall on deaf ears. The Africans in the meanwhile adjusted to the circumstances and took advantage of the many opportunities to retain their relative independence. Their bargaining position was often not too bad: there were still a number of options open to make a living and the Europeans often needed their labour and produce more than that they needed wages. The limited resources for 'native administration' put the African elites in a powerful position as they were indispensable for indirect rule. Natal was certainly not the typical settler colony many hoped it would be.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> E.J. TAAFFE, R.L. MORRILL, P.R. GOULD, *op. cit.*
- <sup>2</sup> P. BAIROCH, *op. cit.*, p. 508.
- <sup>3</sup> I. WALLERSTEIN, "The Three Stages of African Involvement in the World-Economy" in: P.C.W. GUTKIND, I. WALLERSTEIN (eds.), *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa* (SAGE Series on African Modernization and Development), Beverly Hills, SAGE Publications, 1976, pp. 46-47.
- <sup>4</sup> M. MORRIS, J. BARNES, N. DUNNE, "From Import Substituting Industrialisation to Globalised International Competitiveness" in: B. FREUND, V. PADAYACHEE (eds.), *(D)urban Vortex: South African City in Transition*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002, p. 108.
- <sup>5</sup> G. JACKSON, "Ports, 1700-1840" in: P. CLARK (ed.), P. CLARK (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Volume II), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 706; pp. 723-724.
- <sup>6</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 455.
- <sup>7</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 105; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 455.
- <sup>8</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 155.
- <sup>9</sup> *Blue Book for the Colony of Natal*, 1870, V2; W6.
- <sup>10</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- <sup>11</sup> A concise description of these can be found in: G. JACKSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 705-731.
- <sup>12</sup> G. JACKSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 706-707; B. FREUND, "City Hall and the Direction of Development", pp. 12-13.
- <sup>13</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Later this would become the Durban Chamber of Commerce.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- <sup>15</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 179; J. ROBINSON (ed.), *Notes on Natal: An Old Colonists Book for New Settlers*, Durban, Robinson & Vause, 1872, p. xii.
- <sup>16</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 20 May 1862, p. 3.
- <sup>17</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 180.
- <sup>18</sup> B. FREUND, "City Hall and the Direction of Development", p. 12.
- <sup>19</sup> L. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>21</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 10 February 1870, p. 2.
- <sup>22</sup> L. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21; *Natal Mercury*, 16 June 1853, p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> See for example: *Natal Mercury*, 10 February 1870, p. 2.
- <sup>25</sup> L. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
- <sup>26</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-221.
- <sup>27</sup> G. JACKSON, *op. cit.*, p. 706.
- <sup>28</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, "Railway Development in Natal to 1895" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, pp. 48-49; E.D. CAMPBELL, *The Birth and Development of the Natal Railways*, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1951, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>29</sup> *Natal Witness*, 29 June 1860, p. 2; E.D. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3.
- <sup>30</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 456.
- <sup>31</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>32</sup> Named after the 'togt' or journey to town the labourers make each day that they work.
- <sup>33</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79; p. 83; p. 92; p. 108.
- <sup>35</sup> Cf. F. COOPER, "Introduction", p. 15.
- <sup>36</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-107.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79; M.W. SWANSON, "The Urban Factor in Natal Native Policy", p. 7.
- <sup>38</sup> F. COOPER, "Introduction", pp. 18-19.
- <sup>39</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>41</sup> F. COOPER, "Introduction", p. 23.
- <sup>42</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 231.
- <sup>43</sup> As quoted in: M.W. SWANSON, "The Urban Factor in Natal Native Policy", p. 6.
- <sup>44</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 236-237.
- <sup>45</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109; M.W. SWANSON, "The Urban Factor in Natal Native Policy", p. 7.

- <sup>46</sup> The Natal Mercury (Pietermaritzburg), 15 March 1865, p. 2.
- <sup>47</sup> This is not the same newspaper as The Natal Mercury that was published in Durban. This newspaper existed only a short time under this name. Whenever The Natal Mercury is mentioned without further information, the paper from Durban is meant.
- <sup>48</sup> It is however hard to quantify the importance of the overberg trade as the official statistics did not differentiate between transit trade and other, but the above-mentioned statement of C.J. Rhodes gives a good indication of its importance. Cf. M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, pp. 157-158.
- <sup>49</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, op. cit., p. 47.
- <sup>50</sup> 'Bumpkin' as quoted in: Ibid., p. 47.
- <sup>51</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, Southern Africa, p. 173.
- <sup>52</sup> M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, p. 160; E.S. METCALF, op. cit., pp. 28-30.
- <sup>53</sup> M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, p. 160; Blue Book, 1865, Y.
- <sup>54</sup> The Natal Almanac and Yearly Register 1866, published in: D.H. HOUGHTON, J. DAGUT, Source Material on the South African Economy: 1860-1970 (Volume I: 1860-1899), Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 28.
- <sup>55</sup> Natal Witness, 4 February 1868, p. 2.
- <sup>56</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, op. cit., p. 52.
- <sup>57</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, Southern Africa, p. 173; E.S. METCALF, op. cit., pp. 28-30.
- <sup>58</sup> Natal Mercury (Pietermaritzburg), 5 March 1865, p. 2; Natal Mercury, 23 March 1875, p. 5.
- <sup>59</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, Southern Africa, p. 175.
- <sup>60</sup> Natal Mercury (Pietermaritzburg), 19 July 1865, p. 2.
- <sup>61</sup> Natal Witness, 29 June 1860, p. 2.
- <sup>62</sup> Natal Witness, 24 April 1863, p. 3.
- <sup>63</sup> Natal Witness, 14 April 1866, p. 3.
- <sup>64</sup> Natal Witness, 13 August 1867, p. 2.
- <sup>65</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, op. cit., p. 52.
- <sup>66</sup> Blue Book, 1870, C53.
- <sup>67</sup> Natal Witness, 10 June 1873, p. 2; H. HEYDENRYCH, op. cit., p. 53.
- <sup>68</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, op. cit., p. 48.
- <sup>69</sup> The NLCC was active in land speculation, but also in borrowing capital in London and lending it in Natal, in colonisation schemes and in agency business. The company acquired a bad reputation as it – as the biggest landowner in the colony – became the symbol of detrimental land speculation. An extensive and nuanced account of the history of this company can be found in: J.J.A. EDLEY, op. cit.
- <sup>70</sup> NLCC, Plan of Assisted Emigration and Land-Settlement of the Natal Land and Colonization Company (Limited), London, Jarrold and Sons, (ca.) 1866, p. 10.
- <sup>71</sup> C. BALLARD, op. cit., pp. 133-135.
- <sup>72</sup> NLCC, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 21ff.
- <sup>74</sup> C. BUNDY, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry, Cape Town, David Philip, 1988, p. 168.
- <sup>75</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 263.
- <sup>76</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "Land speculation", pp. 103-104.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 107.
- <sup>78</sup> Traditionally this land company, incorporated in 1860, has been looked upon as one of the causes of the slow development of the settler economy, as it had some of the best lands in the colony, and vast acreages of it, but would not sell it to farmers until the price had gone up sufficiently. In the meanwhile the company survived from the income it creamed from the African peasantry. Another way to look at it is that it did not sell its lands because nobody could or would buy it and that the core activity of the NLCC was importing capital into Natal on the security of its lands, in this view the company did not halt progress by not selling its land, but could not sell its land as a result of the lack of economic development. See: J.J.A. EDLEY, op. cit., pp. 7-10.
- <sup>79</sup> H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships", pp. 156-157.
- <sup>80</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, op. cit., p. 128.
- <sup>81</sup> C. BUNDY, The Rise and Fall, p. 168; pp. 177-178.
- <sup>82</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, op. cit., p. 136; H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships", p. 149.
- <sup>83</sup> Natal Witness, 24 September 1858, p. 2.

- <sup>84</sup> J.M. SELLERS, "The Origin and Development of the Woolled Sheep Industry in the Natal Midlands in the 1850s and 1860s" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, pp. 157-158; *Natal Witness*, 24 September 1858, p. 2.
- <sup>85</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 131.
- <sup>86</sup> *Blue Book*, 1870, V2; V41; 1877, Y2; Y47. It should however be noted that the Blue Books give no indication of how much of this wool comes from the interior states.
- <sup>87</sup> C. BALLARD, *op. cit.*, p. 135; NLCC, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- <sup>88</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
- <sup>89</sup> *Natal Witness*, 17 January 1862, p. 1.
- <sup>90</sup> *Natal Witness*, 3 September 1852, p. 2.
- <sup>91</sup> *Natal Witness*, 3 September 1852, p. 2.
- <sup>92</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *The Crown Lands of British Southern Africa*, p. 75.
- <sup>93</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 6 January 1853, p. 3; 27 January 1853, p. 3; 10 March 1853, p. 3; 13 September 1854, p. 3; *Natal Witness*, 14 January 1853, p. 3.
- <sup>94</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 6 January 1853, p. 3; 27 January 1853, p. 3; *Natal Witness*, 14 January 1853, p. 3.
- <sup>95</sup> P. RICHARDSON, "The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905: an interpretative essay" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, p. 181.
- <sup>96</sup> *Blue Book*, 1865, V63.
- <sup>97</sup> This happened when beetroot was promoted as alternative to sugar cane in continental Europe to limit the dependence on sugar cane from the British Empire. See: J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- <sup>98</sup> There were alternatives to the plantation system and two were tried but discarded in Natal. There was the central mill system in which the agricultural and industrial process were split out and which was discarded after the failure of the Umzinto Sugar Company, due to capital shortage and poor infrastructure, and there was the option of production by an African peasantry, this peasantry was however more interested in maize and livestock. See: P. RICHARDSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.
- <sup>99</sup> The Natal Bank was too small to supply the large required capital and the Standard Bank refused to lend money to plantations as long as the future of the sugar industry in Natal was not secure. See: R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, "Banking, Credit and Capital in Colonial Natal" in: G. AUSTIN, K. SUGIHARA (eds.), *Local Suppliers of Credit in the Third World, 1750-1960*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993, p. 192.
- <sup>100</sup> P. RICHARDSON, *op. cit.*, p. 185; p. 189.
- <sup>101</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 6 January 1853, p. 3. Emphasis added.
- <sup>102</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- <sup>103</sup> A.J. MOORE, *The Role of Infrastructure in the Development of the Natal Colonial Sugar Industry, 1859-1910*, Durban, University of Natal, 1985, p. 25. (Unpublished BA (Honours) dissertation)
- <sup>104</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- <sup>105</sup> Rather than for corvée labour, which was suggested by a number of newspaper editors, cf.: *Natal Mercury*, 13 September 1854, p. 3; *Natal Witness*, 20 January 1874, p. 2.
- <sup>106</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 244; p. 255.
- <sup>107</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101; H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships", pp. 156-157.
- <sup>109</sup> H. SLATER, "The changing pattern of economic relationships", p. 158.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.
- This does not necessarily mean that these communities were prosperous, but it does show that there was a certain ability to withstand the pressures. See: C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-139.
- <sup>112</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 11 February 1858, p. 3.
- M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 245. For an example see: *Natal Witness*, 10 April 1857, p. 2.
- <sup>114</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 11 February 1858, p. 3.
- B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban, 1910-1990 (Social History of Africa)*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1995, p. 1; J. BRAIN, "Indentured and free Indians in the economy of colonial Natal" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, p. 202.
- <sup>116</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Urban Factor in Natal Native Policy", p. 10.

- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>118</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>119</sup> J. BRAIN, "Indentured and free Indians", p. 202; K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>120</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 2.
- <sup>121</sup> J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians, 1860-1910" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, p. 251; B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 3.
- <sup>122</sup> *Natal Witness*, 29 January 1864, p. 3.
- <sup>123</sup> J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians", p. 251.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252; B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>125</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 7.
- <sup>126</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 465.
- <sup>127</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 21 November 1865, p. 2.
- <sup>128</sup> J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians", p. 255.
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255; B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. xiv.
- <sup>130</sup> J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians", p. 255.
- <sup>131</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 247.
- <sup>132</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 5.
- <sup>133</sup> As quoted in: *Natal Mercury*, 19 April 1862, p. 3.
- <sup>134</sup> W.W. Collins, "Free Statia", published in: D.H. HOUGHTON, J. DAGUT, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- <sup>135</sup> *Natal Witness*, 30 March 1866, p.2.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE 1870S AND 1880S**

## 4 The 1870s and 1880s

In chemistry the diamond, being pure carbon, is one of the most common of elements. Yet it is fashioned by nature into a magnificent crystal with the most dramatic history of all the gems. It takes pride of place in the tales of Scheherazade, of Aladdin, and of Sheba's 'great store of precious stones'. None of the chosen jewels in the Bible, 'the sardius, topaz, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle', can equal in truth or legend the multifaceted Great Mogul, the blood-stained Orloff, and the fabulous Koh-i-noor. Harder than any other gem, it is also more brilliant and more varied in form and colour. Its natural colour can be black or pink, blue or yellow, or as pure as a drop of distilled water. It sparkles with both the brilliance of reflected light and the red, blue, and violet flashes of refracted light.

C.W. De Kiewiet, 1941<sup>1</sup>

When the prominent liberal historian of South Africa De Kiewiet introduced his chapter on the advent of the mining industries, the poet in him took over. In this paragraph diamond is not just a commodity, it is the heart and soul of South Africa. For both contemporaries and later scholars diamonds (and somewhat later gold) were the light at the end of a long tunnel, the gem that would change South Africa forever. A rough measure of the impact of the diamond discoveries can be given by pointing to the significant increase in trade through the ports of the Cape Colony and Natal. In 1868, the year before the discovery of the Star of South Africa, the total trade through Natal was worth just under £590,000; five years later this was more than £1.6 million.<sup>2</sup> For the Cape Colony a similar pattern can be discerned, in 1865 the trade through its harbours was valued at £2.2 million, ten years later this was £5.7 million.<sup>3</sup>

There is a rich literature describing the changes South Africa went through after the discovery of minerals in the interior and there is little reason to discuss this here in any great extent. In this chapter the focus will rather be on a number of specific consequences for the spatial structures and economic development in Natal in the 1870s and 1880s. The railway question will be reviewed briefly, as railway lines in the non-Western world – according to the ideal-typical model – are usually linked to the extraction of minerals.<sup>4</sup> De Kiewiet again stresses the importance of diamonds: 'Diamond mining carried forward what wool had begun but had been unable to carry to completion. It provided a greater incentive and more substantial means for the modernization of the lumbering transport system.'<sup>5</sup> A second aspect he hints at is the influx of capital; the financial sector shall thus be the second focus of this

chapter. A third facet of the economy of Natal that will be discussed is not directly linked to the diamond and gold discoveries, but rather to the immigration of Indians, this chapter will look at how the free and passenger Indians managed to find themselves a place in the colonial economy.

The influx of capital and settlers not only led to increased prosperity and revenues for the colony, it also brought with it the prospect of structural changes in the economy. More immigrants made closer-settlement possible and more financial resources potentially meant more means to invest in the future of commercial settler agriculture. The future of Natal as a white settler colony looked more likely than ever before, this did however not mean that this was a certain future. The new mining industries did attract foreign capital and did foster railway development, but the main drive of both was still commercial. The railways were built to reach the interior as quickly as possible and not to advance agricultural development; imperial banks were more interested in financing trade than in investing in the uncertain future of production in Natal. Trade, for now, kept dominating over production in Natal. Not only did the railway development fail to promote the development of the rural areas and thus of denser settlement, it also slowed down or even reversed the growth of the towns along the trunk route towards the republics. In this period Durban became more and more the primate city of the colony, as – once the trunk line was completed – it was the only place that was still important in the transit trade. The promise of a new spatial structure, one more characteristic of settler colonies, was not yet to be fulfilled, development of towns and villages did not take place to any great extent and the urban network was increasingly dominated by one city. This was clearly the spatial pattern of a mercantile colony.

Meanwhile Durban increasingly became a multiracial city. On the fringes of town Africans and Indians alike tried to eke out a living and to retain their independence. Market gardeners, togt labourers, fishermen and tradesmen found a space there where they could escape control of the authorities and multiracial Ward IV, the western part of the central town grid, became a true Indian Central Business District. The ideal of the white city was further away than ever.

#### **4.1 Railways, coal and diamonds**

That the Natalians felt the need for railroads already long before the discoveries of large mineral deposits in the interior has been discussed in the previous chapter. There were the bad roads and the importance of the overberg trade to account for this. The discovery of diamonds

and more importantly of gold in 1886 gave to the railway question a new sense of urgency, as the trade with the interior increased significantly.<sup>6</sup> The first concern was to reach the interior as soon as possible and only later (mostly in the twentieth century) a branched railway network was built. 'The Natal Railways differ from all others in being designed, not for the development of agricultural settlement throughout the Colony, but to secure to the local merchants an import trade of goods principally not to be consumed within the colony,' an official in the Colonial Office in London wrote in 1881.<sup>7</sup> The Natal railways were in other words built for the transit trade and this trade became, after the diamond and gold discoveries, more and more dominated by the mining sectors. Less than ten per cent of all products transported by the Natal railways were produced in the colony, in the Cape that was about half of all transported goods.<sup>8</sup> And, as the official noted, it were mainly the merchants who gained from it and among the most ardent promoters of the extension of the railways to the interior several leading figures of Natal's merchant elite could thus be found.<sup>9</sup> Earlier it were already Durban and Pietermaritzburg merchants who were the driving force behind Natal's first small stretch of railway from the Point to Durban.<sup>10</sup> Even the important 'sugar belt' had to wait until the trunk route to the interior was finished before railway extensions beyond Isipingo<sup>11</sup> and Verulam<sup>12</sup> were constructed. This lack of railways along the coast was set off by the increase of coastal navigation from the late 1870s on.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason to believe in the close link between mineral exploitation and the development of railways in Natal is the role coal played. As early as 1838 the coal resources in northern Natal were known; the coalfields were however too far inland to be profitable.<sup>14</sup> Two wars at the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s provided a real market for the first time, which increased activity and gave rise to three townships, of which only Dundee survived as a separate entity.<sup>15</sup> These townships were laid out by private landowners and quickly grew to contain a few dozen houses and a couple of general stores. By 1902 Dundee had a total population of 2280.<sup>16</sup> The coalfields were known to be rich and to contain coal of reasonable quality.<sup>17</sup> However, at a transport rate of £3 per ton by ox-wagon from Newcastle to Howick, the coal was too expensive in most of the colony.<sup>18</sup> Early on, there were plans to link coal extraction to railway development. In the early 1860s there were two railway schemes with close links to plans of coal extraction. The NLCC wanted to build railways in the first place to increase the value of its lands,<sup>19</sup> but also wanted to be active in coal mining.<sup>20</sup> The 1864 plan of the Natal Central Railway Company to build a line from Durban to Pietermaritzburg and then further to the coalfields too was clearly inspired by the

possibility of making coal extraction remunerative, as the company had close affiliations with the Natal Coal Company.<sup>21</sup> Later, when the Natal Government Railways (NGR) were formed and were making their way to the interior, the mutually beneficial relationship between coal mining and railway operations would become clear. As the railway lines came closer to the coalfields not only marketing became cheaper, but the NGR also became a huge customer keen on large amounts of cheap coal. Mining and railway development were clearly interdependent.<sup>22</sup> By 1886 the first loads of colonial coal made their way by train to Durban and four years later a first record-load of 170 tons made the *Natal Mercury* rejoice in what 'promises to become almost the backbone industry of the colony.'<sup>23</sup>

After the failure of the Natal Central Railway Company and the NLCC schemes, railway development went more or less quiet during the commercial crisis. But together with the revival of the economy and the discovery of diamonds, the railway question became a hotly debated issue again in the late 1860s and the early 1870s. In 1870 no less than three private railway schemes were discussed: one by Mr. Welborne, one by Sir Alfred Slade and the Natal Central Railway Company resuscitated its plan.<sup>24</sup> The Legislative Council opted for the very extensive Welborne scheme, which had popular support, despite the fact that it was also very expensive. Welborne asked for a very large subsidy and substantial land grants.<sup>25</sup> The acceptance of his conditions reflected the stance of the Legislative Council and others that a railway network was worth very large concessions.<sup>26</sup> The *Natal Witness* mirrored this feeling by dismissing criticism of the scheme with the question whether 'a smaller subsidy or grant of land will be accepted by a substantial company,' and adding that 'the colony demands prompt action.'<sup>27</sup> In early 1874 something happened that put a spoke in Welborne's wheels: chief Langalibalele led a revolt. The revolt was minor, but it left a deep impression as it showed that Natal was not ready to defend itself. The new Conservative Party government<sup>28</sup> in London therefore wanted to have more control over the affairs of the colony. The new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Carnarvon, was concerned that Natal had conceded too much, that it would mean financial ruin for the colony to commit itself to a £40,000 yearly subsidy and that granting 2.5 million acres of land could distort the lives of many Africans and thus create more unrest. He therefore decided to retract the acceptance of the scheme by his predecessor.<sup>29</sup> This did not make him very popular in Natal and the *Natal Mercury* called his actions 'only subversive and destructive.'<sup>30</sup>

Lord Carnarvon however had no interest in antagonising Natal, as he needed the support of the colony for his plans for confederation in South Africa. He therefore suggested

that the colonial government would construct the railway and offered an imperial guarantee; bribing colonies with imperial guarantees was a strategy that had worked before in the confederations of Canada and New Zealand.<sup>31</sup> Act No. 4 of 1875 provided for three railway lines to begin with, from Durban to Pietermaritzburg, to Verulam and to Isipingo. The work started on the first of January 1876.<sup>32</sup>

The first of December 1880 was an important day for Pietermaritzburg and Natal, as the first stage of the line to the interior was opened.<sup>33</sup> It was however never the intention that this would be the terminus of the railway; in that case it would rather have been a burden than a source of revenue, according to the resident engineer.<sup>34</sup> Reaching Ladysmith in 1886 was a major breakthrough, the border with the Free State was only thirty miles away, Transvaal eighty miles and the nearest coal deposits less than ten miles.<sup>35</sup> Travelling to Ladysmith from Durban only took sixteen hours, compared with four days for simply reaching the capital from the port by ox-wagon or six to seven hours by coach before the railway was built.<sup>36</sup> Passenger traffic also became remarkably more comfortable; in 1879 a lady remarked after describing the horribly uncomfortable trip by omnibus from Durban to Maritzburg<sup>37</sup>: 'The railway now in progress ought to be finished in two years and a merciful boon it will be for the inhabitants of Maritzburg.'<sup>38</sup> And not only transport time, but transport charges too plummet when railways are built.<sup>39</sup> The *Natal Mercury* concluded in its review of 1886 that Natal has now a railway network 'for which the colony may well be thankful.'<sup>40</sup> The network consisted of three lines: Durban (Point) to Ladysmith was the main line, the North Coast line ran to Verulam and the South Coast line to Isipingo; 218 miles in total.<sup>41</sup> By mid-1890s the network had expanded to just over 375 miles with extensions to Charlestown on the border with Transvaal, to Van Reenen on the border with the Free State and to Dundee.<sup>42</sup> (See Figure 5) In December 1895 the push for the Rand had been completed with the connection of Johannesburg and Durban by rail.<sup>43</sup> Cheap transport to the interior was now ensured.

The total cost of building this railway network amounted to £6 million.<sup>44</sup> This accounted for three-quarters of the total debt of the colony.<sup>45</sup> One way to assess the success of this large investment is by looking at the statistics. In the first year of operation of the NGR, 1877, the revenues amounted to £16,665 19s. 6d.; less than ten years later, in 1886, the railways earned the colony more than £250,000.<sup>46</sup> In the week ending on Christmas Day 1886 the NGR earned £4353 17s. 8d., which was over two-and-a-half times more than in the same week the year before.<sup>47</sup> A few years later, in the week ending on the eighth of February 1890, the weekly revenue amounted to more than £18,000.<sup>48</sup> In 1884 the NGR transported 464,496

passengers and 215,706 tons of goods, fifteen years later more than 1.4 million passengers used the trains and almost one million tons of goods were transported.<sup>49</sup>

That the railway would be so successful was however not a foregone conclusion. In 1885 the NGR recorded a loss of £23,602. The ox-wagons remained competitive as these needed little capital and the road between Durban and Pietermaritzburg had good grazing opportunities.<sup>50</sup> To keep the support of the merchant elite in these difficult times the rates were lowered from 3s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. per hundredweight for transport to the capital.<sup>51</sup> This strategy was repeated in 1884, which increased the market share of the railways, but not the revenues.<sup>52</sup> The railway rates were very much determined by politics, some strong interests managed to obtain favourable rates and in order to promote export and prevent empty trains the rates were also lower to Durban than inland.<sup>53</sup>

When the railway reached Maritzburg, the importance of the city as centre of the forwarding trade was pivotal, and this did not change (yet). A new Golden Age started for the capital in the 1880s, as the trade to Pietermaritzburg increased and all goods, of which three-quarters came by train, had to be loaded onto ox-wagons and if necessary stored until the dry winter season was over.<sup>54</sup> The total population of the city almost doubled between 1877 and 1887, it rose from 8037 to 15,767.<sup>55</sup> The population of Natal only increased by fifty per cent in the same period.<sup>56</sup> The railhead was the place where the break of bulk took place and the service centre for the forwarding trade. This of course also meant that when the railway was extended these activities disappeared from the town. After that the trains only passed through, without giving rise to any significant economic activity.<sup>57</sup> When the railways were extended along the coast small harbours for coastal navigation, such as Scottburgh and Umkomaas, lost their importance too together with Verulam and Isipingo, the old railheads.<sup>58</sup> Already in 1887 it was noted that Pietermaritzburg was no longer the centre of transit trade in the colony and that headquarters had moved. The same happened later with Ladysmith, Newcastle and Charlestown. The only place that remained important for the overberg trade was Durban.<sup>59</sup>

This commercially oriented railway network gave little incentive for the development of local markets and towns. For the commercial farmers of Natal the NGR did not help much, as only very few had easy access to the railways in the almost total absence of feeder-lines. (See Figure 5) It was even detrimental for them, as the large food-exporting countries that now turned to South Africa could reach the Rand often cheaper than the local producers.<sup>60</sup> This pattern of settlement with an increasingly dominant port city, a railway network that mainly served the mining regions in the interior and relatively few smaller cities and towns resembled

the extractive model as described by Christopher much more than the dense settler pattern. (As above) It also served the needs of the commercial elites much more than the needs of the settlers; trade still dominated production in Natal.

## **4.2 Capital in Natal**

Just as in many colonies, capital in Natal was scarce during much of the nineteenth century. Trade was facilitated through credit extension, which was at the core of financial activity in the colony rather than the supply of loanable capital. This dominance of credit over money lending and capital formation can be explained by referring to the dominance of trade over production. Capital did not mainly serve to invest in productive means, but rather to facilitate trade. This financial sector was one of merchant capitalists, who were not so much interested in making productive investments but rather in profit through trade.

The amount of coin in circulation was estimated at no more than £100,000 in 1870 and the amount of paper currency, which was issued by banks, only added up to £5250.<sup>61</sup> Twenty years later these amounts had risen to £750,000 for coin and £100,000 for paper currency; by then South Africa had known a large influx of capital mainly as a result of the gold discoveries.<sup>62</sup> The capital shortage was certainly not remedied by the balance of trade, which was highly negative throughout the century.<sup>63</sup> One way to deal with this shortage and the shortage of currency suited for small expenditures was by privately producing copper tokens and printed 'Good Fors' for small change, as the Durban Club and several stores did in the early 1860s. With Indian migration rupees too were used in Natal, at the value of 2s., but since banks and the government refused to accept these they disappeared by 1880.<sup>64</sup>

The capital shortage and trade deficit that characterised most colonies was however counterbalanced by the fact that Great Britain exported a lot of its surplus capital. Between 1870 and 1913 Britain invested 5.2 per cent of its GNP overseas. Forty-one per cent of this was spent on railways, a rule to which Natal did not seem to be an exception.<sup>65</sup> The British Joint Stock Companies Act facilitated these overseas investments. This act increased the role of large-scale enterprises in the colonial economies.<sup>66</sup> In Natal, just as in the rest of South Africa, the import of foreign capital increased significantly with the development of the gold mining industry in the Witwatersrand.<sup>67</sup> One of the Joint Stock Companies importing capital into Natal was the NLCC. The object of this company was to copy the formula for success of the Canada Land Company by importing capital with its large landholdings as security and so promoting immigration and increasing the value of its land.<sup>68</sup> Its Loan Department was

responsible for organising this capital import by providing loans; profit was made from the difference in lending rates between London and Natal.<sup>69</sup> In Britain the NLCC borrowed at six per cent and in Natal it could invest this money at twelve per cent, which was still a good rate and resulted in a large demand for loans from the NLCC.<sup>70</sup> This land company was however somehow the odd one out in the financial sector, imperial financial institutions in the nineteenth century were generally much less interested in investing in productive activities – what the NLCC did by providing loanable funds to settlers – than in trade and the extractive economy.<sup>71</sup> Roberts notes that foreign investments usually perpetuated extractive economical structures<sup>72</sup> and Denoon remarks that imperial banks were ‘commercial rather than developmental.’<sup>73</sup>

In these cash-strapped circumstances trade was made possible through the extension of credit mostly along informal commercial networks.<sup>74</sup> Traders extended credit to their customers in order to overcome the shortage of cash. The role of Indians in these credit networks was important; one of the reasons for this being that they were mostly excluded from the formal banking sector, another one being that the Indian merchants were included in a network of Indian trade and finances with a long history along the shores of the Indian Ocean.<sup>75</sup> Credit could be extended through deferred payment, bill discounting and through ‘hundi’, a sort of cheque originating in India.<sup>76</sup> These networks of trade, credit extension and money-lending linked large merchant houses both to one another and to small traders and linked shopkeepers to their customers. These links could be inter-racial; Indians tended to borrow from Indian merchants, but not exclusively, and Indian shopkeepers would sometimes extend credit to African and European customers too.<sup>77</sup> Both banks and merchant houses also lent money but as the opportunities for productive investment were limited this was not a very important activity.<sup>78</sup>

The crisis that started in 1865 was predominantly a commercial crisis, caused by the collapse of the credit network that was based on unbacked promissory notes, which banks discounted very easily.<sup>79</sup> This system came under severe strain when droughts hit South Africa and the overberg trade came to an almost complete standstill as a result of the Free State-Basuto War.<sup>80</sup> The failure of the leading merchant firm Raw & Wilkinson, which affected many enterprises in Natal, was the trigger.<sup>81</sup> This was a typical example of nineteenth century financial chaos caused by overspeculation and was aggravated in 1866 when a financial crisis hit Britain, which had repercussions in Natal too through the close financial links of London with the colonies. The colony recorded a deficit for the first time in its

existence.<sup>82</sup> The banks that had been very generous in discounting credit now encountered severe difficulties and by the end of the 1860s only two banks remained, the imperial Standard Bank and the local Natal Bank.<sup>83</sup>

These two banks had clearly different political and economic bases and the Natal Bank was the one with a longer history of operation in Natal, as it was incorporated in Natal on the first of April 1854. The Standard Bank opened its first branch in Natal in the early 1860s.<sup>84</sup> The conflict between both banks was the same conflict as between the local elites and large-scale imperial enterprises in other colonies. Jones lists some issues concerning the role of imperial banks: 'To whom should banks lend money? Was their business simply to finance long-distance trade, or ought they also to lend to rural entrepreneurs or to government, to assist in industrial development and infrastructure projects, or, at the very least, desist from interfering with those local banks which were prepared to undertake such tasks?'<sup>85</sup> The financial and commercial sectors in the colonies in the mid-nineteenth century were usually dominated by private merchants who moved into other sectors than trade, such as landowning, politics and banking. The Natal Bank was very much an example of an enterprise dominated by this merchant elite and two of its founders, Cato and Ferreira, were among the most prominent members of this in-group.<sup>86</sup> The Standard Bank on the other hand was the Goliath from London.

For the settler population the competition between these two banks was very important, as a local bank was perceived to be a guarantee for financial independence from the metropole.<sup>87</sup> The future of the Natal Bank was pretty much linked to the future of the colony; for the Standard Bank on the other hand Natal was just another region, it had little reason to play a developmental role and invest its profits in the uncertain future of this rather marginal colony. The Standard Bank was a commercial rather than a developmental bank.<sup>88</sup> In its predominantly commercial role the imperial bank could afford not to take many risks, it could use conservative strategies and leave uncertain investments into the productive sectors to the Natal Bank.<sup>89</sup> The Natal Bank had therefore much more interesting conditions for local settlers, but it took more risks with that.<sup>90</sup> The reticence of imperial capital to actively invest in the economic future of Natal led – just as in many other places – to some hostility.<sup>91</sup> The Natal Bank was saved twice by intervention of the government and it was continuously the one to hold the government account, which was one of the very few substantial accounts.<sup>92</sup> This different role of foreign (commercial) and local (developmental) banks expressed itself also in the total liabilities of the branch offices of the bank. The biggest branch for the Natal

Bank was clearly the one in the capital and the biggest branch for the Standard Bank was as clearly the Durban branch. The three other imperial banks that started operating in Natal by the end of the nineteenth century centred their activity overwhelmingly on Durban.<sup>93</sup> That the commercial interests (represented by the imperial banks) left Pietermaritzburg is consonant with its demise as an important commercial centre. Durban was increasingly becoming the only commercial hub of the colony while settler interests increasingly dominated the capital.

### **4.3 *Indians in Natal's economy***

The first 'coolies' came to Natal under the indenture system in November 1860. When they had completed their contract they had the right to remain in the colony and to receive a grant of Crown Land (before 1866).<sup>94</sup> As most of the indentured labourers fled overpopulation, poverty, debts and an oppressive social system in India, they were quite willing to try to start their lives free and anew in Natal.<sup>95</sup> Before the introduction of a £3 tax in 1895 only those who were destitute and had little or no prospects for a new life returned.<sup>96</sup> The labourers who had fulfilled their contract and stayed were usually labelled 'free' Indians. A third group comprised those Indians who paid for their own passage and were usually engaged in trade, they were 'passenger' Indians, or 'Arabs' in colonial terminology.<sup>97</sup> These mostly Gujarati-speaking 'Arab' traders originally came to Natal to seize upon the opportunities the emerging market of Indian consumers offered (a market mainly for rice, but also for spices, some other food items and clothing<sup>98</sup>) while the economic prospects in India, Eastern Africa and Mauritius declined. Most of them had experience in wholesale networks along the Indian Ocean, brought capital, and were imbedded in larger Indian Ocean trading networks.<sup>99</sup> This Indian merchant elite, with prominent and often closely inter-related families such as the Amods, Adoms and Camroodeens, was supplemented by a class of small-scale rural Indian retailers or dukawallahs, formerly indentured labourers or passenger Indians with insufficient capital and connections to compete in Durban. Most of those dukawallahs were highly dependent on the support of the Indian merchant elite.<sup>100</sup> The role these traders have played in the creation of the commercial network in the colony has been discussed in the previous section. Not surprisingly, this Indian elite also developed close commercial links with the European merchants.<sup>101</sup>

Free Indians also tried to cash in on the opportunities this new environment offered them, albeit on a different scale. They became peasants, market gardeners, fishermen, tradesmen, hawkers, traders or wage-labourers. As opposed to the very urban Indian

community in Natal today, most Indians in the late nineteenth century eked out a living in the countryside or on the urban-rural fringes. Indian cultivators could be identified as two different groups, a peasantry much like the African peasantry and market gardeners who settled close to Durban, for example in Clairmont<sup>102</sup> – the village that was described as suitable for market gardens, pineries and supplying milk for Durban (as above). Both groups were important in supplying the city (the market gardeners) and the important sugar region (the Indian peasantry) with cheap produce and occasionally with temporary labour.<sup>103</sup> In this function they largely supplanted the African producers. Access to capital through the channels of the Indian merchant networks and more familiarity with the money economy were the important factors in this process. By 1900 Indians had a virtual monopoly on the cultivation of beans, mealies, vegetables and tobacco in the Durban area.<sup>104</sup> This made some accumulation possible, but – just as with the African peasantry – the ‘success’ of the Indian cultivators in supplying the markets was not a sign of prosperity.<sup>105</sup> It could be said that this success was based on a high degree of ‘self-exploitation’.<sup>106</sup> Another way to supply food and make a living was as fishermen. Possibly as early as the 1860s there was a predominantly Tamil fishermen-village on Salisbury Island with a population of 187 in 1886.<sup>107</sup> The mineral revolution also created opportunities on the labour market, which was still undersupplied, and as tradesmen and hawkers.<sup>108</sup> Others moved into trade and during the 1870s the number of stores owned by free Indians in Durban increased significantly.<sup>109</sup> In 1870 there were two such stores in Durban, ten in 1875 and in 1880 thirty. By 1875 the first ‘Arab’ had however also established a shop in the city and with their better experience, capital resources and connections with merchants in India, they would soon outshine the free Indians. By 1885 there were forty ‘Arab’ stores in Durban and only twenty-six stores owned by ex-indentured labourers. Half of all these ‘Arab’ stores were located on West Street.<sup>110</sup> The Indian traders who were not able to compete in Durban moved into the rural ‘Kaffir trade’ in search for their own niche.<sup>111</sup> One trader noted that ‘in those days there were [Indian] shops throughout the country; if you went every 10-12 miles there was a country store. [...] the traders went into the country to serve the African people.’<sup>112</sup>

By 1866 there were 5041 Indians living in Natal, 16,963 Europeans and 170,855 Africans. The census of 1891 recorded 41,142 Indians, 46,788 Europeans and 483,690 Africans.<sup>113</sup> By the turn of the century there were more Indians living in the colony than Europeans.<sup>114</sup> In 1901 the non-white population of the city of Durban was larger than the white population.<sup>115</sup> But in spite of the existence of an Indian merchant elite, the large number

of Indians in Durban was not reflected in a large share of the wealth. At the end of the nineteenth century the Indians represented twenty-eight per cent of the population of Durban but owned only 3.9 per cent of all property.<sup>116</sup> Despite this, many whites regarded them as an economic and social threat and Indian storekeepers were often considered to be 'money-grubbers'.<sup>117</sup> Especially poor whites that had to compete for jobs with the Indians and small (rural) European traders were hostile towards the 'coolies'.<sup>118</sup> Between Africans and Indians there was quite a bit of resentment too. Not only were the Indian traders – those Indians with whom Africans have most contact – seen as exploiters, resentment is typically more easily expressed towards a powerless minority. Indians were usually not free of prejudices against Africans either.<sup>119</sup>

Durban was, and still is, the centre of the Indian community in Natal. Especially Ward IV, which is at the Western end of the central grid, was a highly racially mixed area with a strong Indian presence.<sup>120</sup> It was however especially on the edge of town that the Indian presence was very strong.<sup>121</sup> Patterns of white suburbanisation skipped this space and Europeans went on to live further out of town, on the Berea Ridge.<sup>122</sup> Officials and a large part of the urban electorate, which exerted pressure on the local government to ensure continued white dominance in the city, perceived the large Indian population in and around Durban as problematic.<sup>123</sup> In the last three decades of the nineteenth century officials were possibly more concerned with Indians than with Africans, as Africans were considered to be mainly a passive threat and Indians were rather regarded as a sophisticated and active menace.<sup>124</sup> Pathological images, based on the fear of a white population trying to cope with the reality of a multiracial city, dominated the discourse which racialised socio-economic issues. Struggles largely took place over the question whether measures should be based on race or class: are Indians all 'coolies' or are respectable Indian merchants not just 'coolies'? Neither the Indian merchants nor the imperial government would however accept any attack on the privileges of the 'British' Indians. London could not accept race as a criterion for citizen rights.<sup>125</sup> The strongest weapon at disposal was therefore appeal in London, which was exactly what the newly founded – by Gandhi and others – Natal Indian Congress (NIC) did to protest against the 1894 Disfranchisement Bill.<sup>126</sup> Four years earlier prominent merchants had formed the Durban Indian Committee (DIC) and the NIC was more or less the continuation of this. Both organisations had as most important goal protecting the interests of the Indian merchants and were profoundly elitist. The strategy of protecting their privileged economic status, made them emphasise their distance to both the Indian underclasses and the

Africans.<sup>127</sup> The Indian elite wanted to be treated as an elite and liked to point out that they were not just 'coolies'.<sup>128</sup> Gandhi would later try to unite all Indians through the NIC and his passive resistance movement and there are reasons to believe that the merchants were not entirely happy with this strategy.<sup>129</sup>

#### **4.4 Natal and the mineral revolution**

The discovery of diamonds in the interior meant renewed optimism in all of South Africa after a period of crisis. The advantages for Natal were however not very direct, there were no substantial deposits of precious minerals (coal mining would only become substantial in the late 1880s) and it were the Cape railways that connected the diamond fields to the sea in 1885.<sup>130</sup> Indirectly, however, all of South Africa fared well with the mineral revolution. Despite its distance, a new and hungry market for Natal's producers was created; high prices were paid on the diamond field, which made the long trip pay off.<sup>131</sup> With the discoveries, the interest in South Africa also increased and capital and immigrants increasingly came to the subcontinent, also to Natal. This led to an increase in trade.<sup>132</sup> In 1865 the sum of imports and exports of the colony was £665,460, three years later it was a little lower, due to the crisis, but by 1870 the total trade amounted to £812,506 and another three years later to £1,662,493. In 1880 trade was worth more than £3 million and from July 1890 to June 1891 almost £5 million.<sup>133</sup> The population also increased significantly, from less than 200,000 in 1866 to more than 400,000 in 1880 and more than half-a-million in 1891. The white population went up from 16,963 in 1866 to 46,788 in 1891.<sup>134</sup>

This prosperity was expressed in the growth of the cities; both Pietermaritzburg and Durban grew significantly in this period. It was however Durban's growth that was most spectacular. Between the 1870s and the beginning of the twentieth century the population of the port city doubled every decade, while the rest of the colony only grew at half this speed.<sup>135</sup> By the early to mid-1870s Durban became more populous than the capital for the first time and by 1883 Durban had 16,217 inhabitants, while Pietermaritzburg only had 10,168.<sup>136</sup> This trend would continue and in 1936 sixty per cent of the urban population of Natal lived in Durban and only twelve per cent in Maritzburg.<sup>137</sup> With the arrival of the railway, and especially with the extension of the railway beyond the capital, Pietermaritzburg lost its importance as a service centre for the forwarding trade and thus much of its commercial function; it became a city with mainly a social and administrative function.<sup>138</sup> The same thing happened to the other cities that were all once railheads. The nature of the railway

development also did not stimulate the development of agriculture or local markets, as it was built for the sole purpose of facilitating the overberg trade. Consequently the urban pattern that was developing was not characterised by market towns; it was relatively devoid of towns. The dominance of trade over commercial production was reflected in the pattern of settlement and transport infrastructure. The same balance of power was also reflected in the stronger position of the Standard Bank (certainly in Durban) and in the more important role of credit extension than the supply of loanable capital.

While Pietermaritzburg lost its commercial importance, it did not waste away; it was still the capital and it therefore became the locus of the political elite rather than the commercial elite. Durban on the other hand kept growing with the increasing trade through its port and became an important commercial centre in southern Africa. But while becoming a big and important city, more and more dominating the urban network of the colony on its own, it also proved to be very difficult to keep the city 'white'. By 1901 the non-European population of Durban was larger than the white population and especially the fringes of the city became spaces that to a large extent escaped control by the authorities where non-whites managed to live a relatively independent, but therefore not prosperous, life. The reaction to this phenomenon shall be discussed in the next chapter. With the growth of the cities there was also a certain growth of manufacturing, but the nature of manufacturing remained more or less unchanged: almost exclusively production for local consumption (soap, candles, bricks, wagons, alcohol...) and milling (for sawing and for the processing of agricultural produce like sugar, corn, arrowroot...).<sup>139</sup>

With the growth of the cities, the population, trade, revenues, the railways and capital resources, communications improved too. By 1880 fourteen telegraph stations were operational in the colony and sending a telegram was possible for as little as one shilling.<sup>140</sup> And by January 1877 no less than four steamers per month connected Durban to Cape Town and England, which made mail-communications much easier and faster.<sup>141</sup> This did however not mean that communications were henceforth completely trouble-free. Newspapers kept receiving numerous letters from readers with complaints about mail and telegraph services: overland mail was delayed in Pietermaritzburg; when the bar was in a bad state, there was no overseas mail or only with a delay and the telegraph department could not cope with the demands made upon it.<sup>142</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> C.W. DE KIEWIET, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88; *Blue Book*, 1868, V3; 1873, V2.
- <sup>3</sup> R. CALLEBERT, *De incorporatie van Zuid-Afrika in de moderne wereld-systeem*, Gent, Universiteit Gent, 2005, p. 32. (Unpublished Master dissertation)
- <sup>4</sup> E.J. TAAFFE, R.L. MORRILL, P.R. GOULD, *op. cit.*, p. 506; A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 178.
- <sup>5</sup> C.W. DE KIEWIET, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
- <sup>6</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *Southern Africa*, p. 177; A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *The British Empire at its Zenith*, pp. 57-58; B. GUEST, "The new economy" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, p. 307.
- <sup>7</sup> As quoted in: H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- <sup>8</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
- <sup>9</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 254.
- <sup>10</sup> E.D. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>11</sup> About seven miles South of the South Coast Junction in Durban.
- <sup>12</sup> About twenty miles North of Durban.
- <sup>13</sup> A.J. MOORE, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38.
- <sup>14</sup> Small quantities were however used by local farming communities.
- <sup>15</sup> R. EDGECOMBE, B. GUEST, "An introduction to the pre-union Natal coal industry" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, pp. 309-311.
- <sup>16</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.
- <sup>17</sup> R. EDGECOMBE, B. GUEST, *op. cit.*, p. 310.
- <sup>18</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
- <sup>19</sup> Economic development of the colony would be good for the company in general, but the railways would also cross many of the company lands.
- <sup>20</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.
- <sup>21</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-239.
- <sup>22</sup> R. EDGECOMBE, B. GUEST, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-314; H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- <sup>23</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 1 April 1890, supplement, p. 1.
- <sup>24</sup> *Natal Witness*, 31 May 1870, p. 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Land grants that would have him surpass the NLCC as largest landowner in the colony. See: J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91; p. 99.
- <sup>26</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
- <sup>27</sup> *Natal Witness*, 10 June 1873, p. 2.
- <sup>28</sup> With Benjamin Disraeli as Prime Minister.
- <sup>29</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-101.
- <sup>30</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 9 February 1875, p. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.
- <sup>32</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- <sup>33</sup> E.D. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54; *Natal Mercury*, 6 January 1887, p. 2.
- <sup>37</sup> Short for Pietermaritzburg.
- <sup>38</sup> R. Pender, "No Telegraph", 1879, published in: A.F. HATTERSLEY, *Later Annals of Natal*, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1938, pp. 56-60.
- <sup>39</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *The British Empire at its Zenith*, p. 51.
- <sup>40</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 6 January 1887, p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Colony of Natal: An Official Illustrated Handbook and Railway Guide*, London, Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, 1895, p. 47.
- <sup>43</sup> E.D. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- <sup>44</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Colony of Natal*, p. 47.
- <sup>45</sup> *Statistical Year Book of the colony of Natal*, 1896, A2; B. GUEST, "The new economy", p. 308.

- <sup>46</sup> Blue Book, 1877, Q2; 1887, Q4.
- <sup>47</sup> Natal Mercury, 6 January 1887, p. 3.
- <sup>48</sup> Natal Mercury, 1 April 1890, supplement, p. 1.
- <sup>49</sup> Statistical Year Book, 1899, published in: D.H. HOUGHTON, J. DAGUT, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.
- <sup>50</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58; W.J. BUSSCHAU, "Some Aspects of Railway Development in Natal" in: South African Journal of Economics, vol. I, 1933, no. 4, p. 412.
- <sup>51</sup> Natal Mercury, 8 June 1881, p. 3.
- <sup>52</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- <sup>53</sup> W.J. BUSSCHAU, *op. cit.*, p. 412; p. 418.
- <sup>54</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32; W.J. BUSSCHAU, *op. cit.*, p. 412.
- <sup>55</sup> Blue Book, 1877, V4; 1887, T4-T5.
- <sup>56</sup> M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, p. 467.
- <sup>57</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, p. 30; M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- <sup>58</sup> M.A.H. SMOUT, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- <sup>59</sup> E.S. METCALF, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>60</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- <sup>61</sup> Blue Book, 1870, U3.
- <sup>62</sup> Blue Book, 1890-1891, V2; R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
- <sup>63</sup> Blue Book, 1865 to 1892-1893. It is however hard to estimate how large the deficit exactly was, as the statistics do not show how much of the imports were destined for the Boer republics, some statistics on transit trade in the 1890s do however show that the overberg trade – though very important – did clearly not compensate for this entire trade deficit. Blue Book, 1892-1893, W32; Statistical Year Book, 1896, E20-E21.
- <sup>64</sup> E.H.D. ARNDT, Banking and Currency Development in South Africa, 1652-1927, Cape Town, Juta, 1928, p. 69.
- <sup>65</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The British Empire at its Zenith, p. 67.
- <sup>66</sup> C.A. JONES, "British overseas investment in the later nineteenth century: Argentina and South Africa" in: Collected seminar papers on the societies of Southern Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Volume XIII), London, University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, s.a., p. 43; A.J. CHRISTOPHER, The British Empire at its Zenith, p. 66.
- <sup>67</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.
- <sup>68</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", pp. 265-266.
- <sup>69</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- <sup>70</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 269.
- <sup>71</sup> It could also be argued that the NLCC did not so much represent imperial capital, but was rather a local company incorporated by large local landowners in order to raise capital in London.
- <sup>72</sup> Most of these investments in the late nineteenth century were in railways to the main ports, mines and plantations. See: B. ROBERTS, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
- <sup>73</sup> D. DENOON, Settler Capitalism: The dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 148.
- <sup>74</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
- <sup>75</sup> V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, "Indian merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal economy, c1875-1914" in: Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. XVII, 1991, no. 1, pp. 72-73; p. 76.
- <sup>76</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 164; V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.
- <sup>77</sup> V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, p. 84; p. 87; p. 89; p. 93.
- <sup>78</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
- <sup>79</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- <sup>80</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 50; H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 269.
- <sup>81</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 269.
- <sup>82</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>83</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
- <sup>84</sup> E.H.D. ARNDT, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-298.
- <sup>85</sup> C.A. JONES, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- <sup>86</sup> E.H.D. ARNDT, *op. cit.*, p. 298; A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- <sup>87</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

- <sup>89</sup> D. DENOON, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
- <sup>90</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- <sup>91</sup> C.A. JONES, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- <sup>92</sup> R. MORRELL, V. PADAYACHEE, S. VAWDA, *op. cit.*, p. 172; p. 177.
- <sup>93</sup> Statistical Year Book, 1899, published in: D.H. HOUGHTON, J. DAGUT, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-352.
- <sup>94</sup> J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians", pp. 249-251.
- <sup>95</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 2; p. 11.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- <sup>97</sup> J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians", p. 250.
- <sup>98</sup> S. BHANA, "Indian trade and trader in colonial Natal" in: B. GUEST, J.M. SELLERS (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, pp. 235-236.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 238-241; V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
- <sup>100</sup> V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.
- <sup>101</sup> As opposed to many other parts of Africa, Indians did however not play an important role in financing white-owned businesses. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- <sup>102</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, pp. 12-13; J. BRAIN, "Indentured and free Indians", p. 212.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>104</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-143.
- <sup>105</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, pp. 16-18.
- <sup>106</sup> In his analysis of the peasant economy Chayanov introduces the concept of self-exploitation. He argued that the peasant economy could not be analysed with the 'regular' economic theories, as labour and profits in a peasant family cannot be monetarised. The peasantry adjusts its labour-consumption balance according to needs and opportunities, the cultivator will only exploit his or her own labour to a larger degree if there is a need for it and if it is believed that the extra work will be outweighed by the increase in output. A high degree of self-exploitation would in other words be characterised by low consumption and a high labour input. See: D. THORNER, "Chayanov's Concept of Peasant Economy" in: D. THORNER, B. KERBLAY, R. SMITH (eds.), *A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986, pp. xi-xxiii.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; J. BRAIN, "Natal's Indians", p. 257.
- <sup>109</sup> S. BHANA, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- <sup>111</sup> V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
- <sup>112</sup> Y.I. Moolla, as quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- <sup>113</sup> *Statistical Year Book*, 1896, A2.
- <sup>114</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 465.
- <sup>115</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "'The Durban System': Roots of Urban Apartheid in Colonial Natal" in: *African Studies*, vol. XXXV, 1976, no. 3-4, p. 161.
- <sup>116</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "'The Asiatic Menace': Creating Segregation in Durban, 1870-1900" in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. XVI, 1983, no. 3, p. 418.
- <sup>117</sup> J.H.F. PURCELL, *Durban, South Africa: Local Politics in a Plural Society*, Los Angeles, University of California, 1974, pp. 58-59. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
- <sup>118</sup> J. BRAIN, "Indentured and free Indians", p. 218; S. BHANA, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
- <sup>119</sup> J.H.F. PURCELL, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- <sup>120</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", p. 418.
- <sup>121</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 33.
- <sup>122</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", p. 418.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401; M.W. SWANSON, "The Durban System", pp. 161-162.
- <sup>124</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", pp. 403-404.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 409-410.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414; S. BHANA, *op. cit.*, p. 251.
- <sup>127</sup> V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80; M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", pp. 409-410.
- <sup>129</sup> V. PADAYACHEE, R. MORRELL, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- <sup>130</sup> R. CALLEBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

- <sup>131</sup> Natal Witness, 14 October 1873, extra, p. 1.
- <sup>132</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, op. cit., pp. 84-85.
- <sup>133</sup> Blue Book, 1865, V3; 1868, V3; 1870, V2; 1873, V2; 1880, Z2; 1890-1891, W3-W4.
- <sup>134</sup> Statistical Year Book, 1896, A2.
- <sup>135</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Durban System", p. 161.
- <sup>136</sup> Blue Book, 1773, R4-R5; 1883, T4-T5.
- <sup>137</sup> T.J.D. FAIR, "Durban – Its sphere of influence as a regional capital" in: South African Geographical Journal, vol. XXXI, 1949, p. 79.
- <sup>138</sup> E.S. METCALF, op. cit., p. 67.
- <sup>139</sup> For some examples, see: The Natal Almanac and Yearly Register 1864, 1866, 1869, Blue Book 1871, all published in: D.H. HOUGHTON, J. DAGUT, op. cit., p. 91; pp. 96-100.
- <sup>140</sup> E.D. CAMPBELL, op. cit., p. 95.
- <sup>141</sup> Natal Mercury, 2 January 1877, p. 2.
- <sup>142</sup> For example: Natal Mercury, 18 December 1877, p. 6; 13 September 1883, p. 2; Natal Witness, 12 January 1889, p. 3.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE END OF THE CENTURY**

## **5 The end of the century**

In the last decade of the twentieth century things started to change in Natal. The closer-settlement movement started to have effect and the number of settlers coming to the colony increased. A new form of government gave these settlers more political leverage and thus new labour, 'native' and other policies became more geared towards the development of commercial settler agriculture and once the Rand was connected to Natal's railway network the building of a more integrated transport network could start. The end of the boom in Transvaal trade also 'freed' the colony somewhat from its dependence on the transit trade and thus gave renewed incentive to promote agricultural development. These were the first signs of change in the direction of development, no longer was the trade with the interior the only economic *raison d'être* of the colony. Trade no longer completely dominated production. This was also reflected in changing spatial structures, even though these changes were only starting to take shape. Agricultural development and more integrated transport infrastructure changed the nature of the countryside. Markets came into existence and the urban patterns were changed. Natal would no longer be the typical commercial colony with hardly any urban places in the countryside and only one or two primate cities which served to extract resources without fostering local development, Natal started to look more like a settler colony, as in Christopher's example of the Free State. This does however not mean that the commercial nature of the colony suddenly disappeared. Trade with the Rand and the harbour of Durban remained central features in Natal's economy, but the colony no longer had only commercial interests.

The new responsible government also was more receptive for the hostility of large parts of the white population towards non-white entrepreneurs; African and Indian peasants and toget labourers, shopkeepers, market gardeners and even Indian merchants increasingly had to deal with repressive measures. The colonial authorities became more and more vigorous in enforcing residential segregation and commercial and political exclusion.

### **5.1 'Hopeful'**

Natal may be destined to become a great and wealthy manufacturing country within the space of a few years. She possesses an almost unlimited supply of good coal – or, at all events, good as colonial coal goes – in addition to which there are extensive beds of ironstone located in the neighbourhood of Newcastle. It would not pay to ship the ore to Europe for smelting purposes; but it is believed that iron and steel works could be

carried on profitably in Natal. At all events it is stated that a leading Sheffield firm has sent out an expert to make thorough investigations, and should his report be favourable, a company will probably be formed in England to start a manufactory in the sister colony. Should the enterprise turn out a success, Natal will have no need to fight for the Transvaal trade for a living, for prosperity from the development of internal resources will be assured to her. – *P.E. Telegraph*

Reprinted from the *Port Elizabeth Telegraph* in the *Natal Mercury* under the headline 'Hopeful', 1892<sup>1</sup>

The author of this article was hopeful that Natal would develop its own industry and this would free the colony from its dependence on the overberg trade and especially from its dependence on Transvaal. This dependence was certainly a reality. The actual revenue of Natal more than doubled between 1886 and 1889 and exports rose by sixty per cent, total railway receipts – by now the colony's largest source of revenue – tripled.<sup>2</sup> The largest rise in exports – £360,912 – took place between 1887 and 1888; the rise in gold-exports accounted for nearly seventy per cent of the increase.<sup>3</sup> This important trade reinforced Durban's position as prime commercial centre of the colony. When the government railways reached the border by 1891 and Johannesburg by 1895, the towns along the trunk route to the interior had lost their importance in the forwarding trade. It also put the city on the map as a major African port.<sup>4</sup>

This dependence became all the more clear when the Cape railways reached the Rand more than three years before the NGR had a direct connection.<sup>5</sup> Colonial revenues and railway receipts dropped significantly and total trade dropped from almost £5 million in 1891-1892 to £3.3 million two years later. Only when Natal's railway network was connected to the Rand too were the values of trade and revenues restored to the previous levels.<sup>6</sup> With the railway network completely designed for the transit trade, losing share of this trade was a serious problem.<sup>7</sup> Having lower custom tariffs than the Cape-Free State customs union however made the editor of the *Natal Witness* confident that there was a good chance to continue competing with the Cape railways.<sup>8</sup> In 1894 the Durban Chamber of Commerce asked the government to lower the tariffs for transit trade even more in order to regain the colony's share in this business.<sup>9</sup> In Transvaal too they realised how much Natal needed the trade with the Rand and they used this power, forcing Natal to make great concessions.<sup>10</sup> The colony's Prime Minister, Sir John Robinson, steered a clear pro-Transvaal course. This put him at odds with the imperial government and with a large majority of Natal's population, certainly after the Jameson Raid when imperialistic feelings were rife. He did however retain

the support of Durban merchant elite and the Natal Afrikaners. The end of the boom of the Transvaal trade in July 1897, the rising tensions in the run-up to the war and a new Prime Minister, Sir Harry Escombe, changed Natal's policy.<sup>11</sup> The need to diversify its trade and reach more markets with its own production made Natal join the South African Customs Union, which led to a renewed rise in trade and revenues.<sup>12</sup>

This move was a break with the past as it meant an end to the almost complete dominance of trade over production. This of course did not mean that trade became unimportant, but the overberg trade was less the only concern of politicians and elites. One of the reasons for this shift was the new constitutional status of the colony. In July 1893 representative government was replaced by responsible government and 'the dauntless champion of the new form of government,'<sup>13</sup> Sir John Robinson, became the first Prime Minister.<sup>14</sup> This happened after a very long discussion and was in line with the changes in the rest of the empire;<sup>15</sup> as early as 1848 the *Natal Witness* reported about the popular demand for responsible government.<sup>16</sup> The main argument against this constitutional change was that the small European minority in Natal was not ready to take responsibility for its own internal and external security amidst an overwhelming majority of Africans both within and outside its borders.<sup>17</sup> A certain E. Jennings Taylor expressed this feeling in a letter to the *Natal Witness* arguing that compulsory military service would be necessary if Natal became responsible for its own defence.<sup>18</sup> As a sort of compromise Natal managed to get a £10,000 contribution from London for its 'native policy' and the imperial garrison would stay a bit longer.<sup>19</sup>

With their voice being heard in the legislative assembly (the lower house of Natal's bicameral parliament<sup>20</sup>) the role of the settlers in politics gained importance relative to the commercial faction.<sup>21</sup> In the sphere of customs and transport policy, the first cabinet was however very much limited by the *de facto* dependence of the colony on trade, certainly before the end of the boom in Transvaal trade. In other aspects of policy the new government could do more. For example, it was in the late 1890s that the first railway lines not directly geared towards the transit trade, but rather as a part of the agricultural policy, were built.<sup>22</sup> A more integrated transport network had to lead to the development of commercial agriculture and the creation of local markets. Together with the increase in immigration and closer-settlement in the early twentieth century, circumstances were increasingly conducive for a denser pattern of settlement.<sup>23</sup> A pattern more like that of the Free State than that of Southern Rhodesia in Christopher's example. (As above) The hostility of the small-scale white traders against Indian traders too was acknowledged by politicians in Pietermaritzburg, which led to

acts restricting Indian immigration and business.<sup>24</sup> Some of the most fundamental changes would however take place in the agrarian sector, which is the subject of the next section. These changes were also made possible by an influx of capital and immigrants.<sup>25</sup>

## **5.2 The changing nature of agriculture in Natal**

In 1879 the government renewed its efforts to attract immigrants to the colony. For this it established the 'Land and Immigration Board', which would buy land to settle migrants on. The board offered free passage to Natal, one hundred acres of land per family and 2000 acres of commons per fifty families. The goal was clearly to create a pattern of land settlement that was less characterised by isolated farmsteads and more by a higher concentration of villages and small towns and more settlers were needed for this. The price of the land was 7s. 6d. per acre per year for twelve years after which a freehold title was issued. One hundred acres was however not very generous and Natal was therefore not very successful in competing with other colonies for British emigrants. Thus the board looked for candidates in Germany and Norway too. Between 1878 and 1891 just over 7000 settlers entered the colony through this program.<sup>26</sup> This was considerably less than was hoped for, but still substantial compared to a white population of less than 50,000.<sup>27</sup> At the same time the colony's largest landowner, the NLCC, tried to introduce migrants too.<sup>28</sup> The company lands were of better quality, but also pricier. This scheme was not very successful.<sup>29</sup> By the mid-1890s the amount of land under cultivation by European settlers was still very limited, 81,274 acres according to nineteenth century historian Ingram. Three-quarters of what these settlers produced was destined for export: sugar, tea and the tannin-rich wattle bark being the main export crops.<sup>30</sup> Especially tea was a fast growing sector in that decade; in 1893 the *Natal Mercury* signalled a very good crop of 600,000 lbs.<sup>31</sup> Some years later the yield was 800,000 lbs., by then it was the third crop in the colony after maize and sugar.<sup>32</sup> Staple crops were not the business of the European population, as the peasant competition was too strong in this sector. The mainly African peasantry cultivated 238,726 acres of mainly maize, 'in a desultory and spasmodic fashion', as Ingram called it.<sup>33</sup>

This peasantry was in the long run however not able to keep competing with the settler farmers. The reasons for this have been much discussed, but this is not the place to reiterate the whole discussion. Here only a couple of processes that took place during this period of 'underdevelopment' will be discussed.<sup>34</sup> Ballard and Lenta consider responsible government and the development of gold mining to be the main determinants of this decline.<sup>35</sup> The gold

rush for Transvaal however was not immediately beneficial for white farmers and landowners. The early exodus to the Rand led to a slump in land values and the falling transport prices were at first more beneficial to the more efficient American farmers.<sup>36</sup> The general upturn of the South African economy was however felt in Natal too, and as there was an influx of capital and migrants the land prices quickly went up again and investments in agriculture became both more profitable and more feasible.<sup>37</sup> It also became more profitable for absentee landlords to invest in and work the land themselves or sell (or lease) it to people who can invest in it. The sales of Crown Lands went up too. Evictions of squatters therefore took place more often, which limited the options of the peasantry.<sup>38</sup> The fencing of land became increasingly common, to prevent it from being 'overrun by kafirs'. This did not really make the life of the squatters any easier either.<sup>39</sup>

The introduction of responsible government did not exactly help the case of the peasantry. While the 'native policy' before was characterised by a constant struggle on how to extract surplus from the African population – through rents and the marketing of their produce or through labour, by the principles of the Locations Commission or by the principles of the Native Affairs Commission – the answer to this question could only be through labour when the leverage of the settler farmers increased in this new political setting. The dependence on the peasantry as cheap suppliers of the markets also declined when settler agriculture became more capitalised and thus more capable of supplying the markets cheaply. Making labour available and limiting the competition of the peasantry more than ever became policy objectives.<sup>40</sup> The government did this not only by making it harder for Africans to sustain themselves as a peasantry, but also by offering different sorts of support to the white commercial farmers, support of which non-whites were deprived.<sup>41</sup> Other factors of course played a part too. The 1890s were years of droughts, locusts, epidemics and increasing land shortage for the peasantry. The importance of cattle and those crops that are particularly vulnerable to locusts in the subsistence strategies of the peasantry and their limited access to veterinary medicines, other technological breakthroughs and capital to overcome setbacks, exacerbated the difficulties the peasantry were facing.<sup>42</sup> The stratification within the class of African cultivators also meant that, despite the moderate success of some producers, the majority was even more prone to proletarianisation.<sup>43</sup> The finishing up of this process however largely took place in the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> More than half of the African population stayed as tenants on white-owned land, but the conditions changed dramatically,<sup>45</sup> they became effectively serfs.<sup>46</sup>

Those African and Indian cultivators with sufficient means reacted to these challenges by buying land in order to attain some security. Africans mainly started buying land in the 1880s and the Indians somewhat later, in the 1890s.<sup>47</sup> Only few however had the financial resources for this and the rising land values of course only made it harder to retain independence.<sup>48</sup> For those without the means for this, the situation became increasingly unbearable and the increasing taxation brought many to the brink of desperation. The 1906 Bhambatha rebellion could be seen as manifestation of this.<sup>49</sup> For those with some access to credit (almost all Indians) market gardening offered a way out: there were quick cash returns, access to the market was fairly easy and it could generally be combined with other activities.<sup>50</sup> In 1900 – and for a long time into the twentieth century – there was still a fairly large Indian peasantry, especially in the coastal areas.<sup>51</sup> The part of the African peasantry on the other hand was quickly played out after the turn of the century.<sup>52</sup>

The changes that took place in the last decade of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century somehow changed the nature of the colony. Natal became more like the settler colony some always wanted it to be. The commercial white farming sector took off and the role of the African peasantry and the absentee landlords diminished quickly. The Indian peasantry managed to withstand the pressures somewhat longer, but their successes too should be qualified. This did however not mean that the mercantile interests had to play second fiddle. Owing to the trade with the goldfields, Durban managed to become one of the major African port cities. Railways too played an important role and reflected the same changes. Once the Rand was reached, branch lines made Natal's transport infrastructure into a more integrated one, agricultural areas were opened up. Agricultural development became for the first time a conscious objective of Natal's railway policy.<sup>53</sup> This policy was not only to serve areas of settler agriculture with branch lines, but also not to serve areas of African peasant agriculture.<sup>54</sup> Natal would, for the settlers, no longer be just a 'forwarding agency in the midst of a Kaffir location,' but also a colony in which white settlers produced commodities.

### **5.3 Durban and Pietermaritzburg**

Both Durban and Pietermaritzburg were fast growing cities during the last years of the twentieth century, but it was especially the port city that was flourishing. In 1885 Durban already had a larger population than the capital, it was however in the decade and a half after that that the difference became marked.<sup>55</sup> Between 1870 and 1911 the population of Durban

increased thirteen-fold, while that of the colony as a whole only increased five-fold. The property valuation increased twenty-nine-fold, import through the port nineteen-fold and exports ten-fold.<sup>56</sup> In 1870 eighty-one vessels entered the Port Natal harbour, in 1896 not less than 740 ships called in at the Bay.<sup>57</sup> In the mid-1890s Durban's rateable value of property stood at £2,812,170 and that of Maritzburg only at half of that.<sup>58</sup> The value of these urban properties was inflated by the fact that the construction sector could not keep up with the growth.<sup>59</sup> The third city at that time was Ladysmith with a total population of less than 5000.<sup>60</sup> The other towns in Natal were all very small: Verulam had a population of 800, Pinetown 350 and Greytown and Estcourt each about 300.<sup>61</sup> (See Figures 3 and 5) The urban network in Natal was thus dominated by two cities or even, increasingly, by one, Durban. The port city had become the only commercial centre of the colony and was characterised by mercantile activity and infant industries, mainly related to sugar and shipping facilities; Pietermaritzburg averted oblivion after the disappearance of the forwarding trade due to the fact that it was the seat of the colonial government.<sup>62</sup> When Ingram described the capital at the end of the century in his book on its history, he devoted a complete chapter to public and government buildings.<sup>63</sup>

Cities are an important locus of class struggle. The will to control the labour force and keep labour cheap constantly contradicts with the need for reproduction of the labour force.<sup>64</sup> The growth of the cities gave the African and later also the Indian population several possibilities to sustain themselves without having to succumb to the demand for disciplined and cheap labour. There was for example the possibility to supply the urban markets with food, which offered subsistence to African and Indian peasants, fishermen, market gardeners, (mostly female) home-brewers, shebeen-owners, etc. eking out a living on the fringes of town,<sup>65</sup> in what Freund described as 'an uncontrolled peripheral space on the outskirts of the city where activities which were outside the law flourished and involved people of all colours.'<sup>66</sup> Other needs that offered some people the possibility of economic independence were the need for firewood and laundry services, as white housewives deplored doing laundry. Kitchen boys (African domestic servants) could do both but not every household could afford a servant and laundry results were often uncertain if done by somebody without experience.<sup>67</sup> Both being a fuel merchant and a laundryman were prestigious and lucrative activities, which were reserved for older Zulu men; being a togit labourer too was something that was the privilege of older men. Only young men accepted non-prestigious and low-paying jobs – conforming to the age hierarchy of Zulu society.<sup>68</sup> The strong bargaining

position to the labourers who have been discussed earlier. The rapid growth of Durban and its harbour also resulted in rising labour needs, which only heightened the dependence of white employers on these black casual labourers. The competition for labour still improved this strong position.<sup>69</sup>

Most of the history of Pietermaritzburg and Durban has been characterised by attempts at social engineering. The goal was to create a cheap, stable and subordinate workforce, to undermine the independence of the African and Indian population and at the same time to keep them at a distance. One of the first attempts to come to a coherent approach to the problems of Africans in the towns and labour supply was the 1847 'Native Town' scheme. According to this scheme each township should have a little native location to supply labour, control the population and counteract the demoralising influences of the city. The plan was to set aside a thousand acres at about two to three miles from the centre and of this fifty one-acre plots would be granted to the most 'intelligent and advanced natives', who would have to serve as role models for the rest of the population. Lack of funds, the fear of having a large number of Africans so close to the towns and the objection that the native towns and the high wages in the city would drain labour away from the farms, made the scheme fail.<sup>70</sup> The idea of 'native locations' near the cities did however stay. But in 1894, in a survey by Durban's Sanitary Commission, it became clear that the mercantile firms opposed this idea. The general feeling among the merchants seems to have been that it would limit their freedom as employers.<sup>71</sup> Durban did issue some squatter licences and there were several illegal squatter settlements, the periodical clearings of which usually caused the employers to complain.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout most of the second half of the nineteenth century the struggle concentrated on two themes: controlling the togt labourers and residential segregation. The rationale of the planners and the burgess was also twofold: the need for a stable, cheap and subservient labour force on the one hand and fear on the other. Political exclusion and commercial suppression were logical accompanying measures.<sup>73</sup> In both logics the *independent* Africans and Indians in the city were the real problem.<sup>74</sup> It were not the black servants who were unwanted, but those blacks and Indians who had control over their conditions of labour and had no master were not welcome. In Swanson's words the goal was a system of 'restriction and exclusion from all but a subordinate and passive economic association for the African with European society.'<sup>75</sup> In the late 1860s, a scare over 'Kafir outrages' upon European women gave a new sense of urgency to the debate.<sup>76</sup> In Durban this resulted in the 1874 togt laws, which introduced a badge for jobbers for which a licence fee of 2s. 6d. had to be paid every month.

All Africans who did not own property in the city, had no permanent employment, and did not have a badge were banned from the city. Fixed wages for jobs were also introduced and everybody with a badge had to accept any offer at these rates.<sup>77</sup> The day these measures became effective there were hardly any togt labourers to be found, they boycotted the new system. Soon they however started coming back, as they discovered that the badge could also be used as a tax shelter and that due to the continuing competition for labour, employers were still paying higher wages than those stipulated.<sup>78</sup> The laws did not really achieve their goals. With the revenues of the licences barracks were built in an attempt to make closer policing of the jobbers possible.<sup>79</sup> In April 1892 barracks offering accommodation to 450 people were opened,<sup>80</sup> which was half of the planned number of places due to soaring costs and it was also far less than the number of togt labourers in Durban. The barracks also were not very popular and three months later only 140 people stayed there.<sup>81</sup> Therefore it was proposed to make residence in the barracks compulsory on sanitary grounds. This idea was shot down, as it was feared that it would be considered a prison.<sup>82</sup>

Segregation and a more complete supervision of the African and Indian population were mainly promoted by police and health officials.<sup>83</sup> Especially R. Jameson, chairman of the Sanitary Committee, and Superintendent R.C. Alexander were ardent promoters of this.<sup>84</sup> Some of the earliest measures to this end were a curfew and a vagrancy law, of which 'respectable Indians, Coolies, Natives or other coloured persons' were exempt in order to conciliate London.<sup>85</sup> During the time of political stress and commercial depression in the early 1890s the political climate turned even more hostile towards non-whites and with a new form of government that was more open to the popular demands of the white population,<sup>86</sup> residential segregation and social control were no longer considered sufficient. Political and commercial exclusion now became the next goals.<sup>87</sup> Effectively removing all non-whites from the city would however have been an expensive solution to the labour control problem, as it poses a transport problem or removes the labour resources from the city.<sup>88</sup> Segregation therefore was also *de facto* made possible by the whites fleeing the city, by white suburbanisation. The residential patterns of the European population skipped Ward IV in Durban and other racially mixed areas and extended onto the Berea Ridge instead.<sup>89</sup> (See Figure 6) This was made possible by the introduction of the tramways in 1880.<sup>90</sup> This not only kept white and non-white working classes separated, which impeded interracial class formation, it also hampered white class formation.<sup>91</sup> Van Onselen describes for Johannesburg how suburbanisation created a 'more socially stabilised proletariat in which the working class

reproduced itself on the Rand through the agency of the nuclear family.<sup>92</sup> White suburbanisation hampered class formation by heightening social control, by separating work and residence and by preventing the concentration of masses of labourers.<sup>93</sup>

Just as the Indians devised their ways of protest and resistance, so did the Africans. A beginning African class consciousness in the towns of Natal originated in the quarters of the kitchen boys. These servants demanded the right to receive visitors and often being able to stay there was part of the deal for toggt labourers or laundrymen. Denying this right would make finding a servant more or less impossible.<sup>94</sup> This socialising in the servants' quarters was the basis of the Kitchen Associations, which did not only serve social needs. For people in a strange environment it was important to seek the company of clan members in order to keep in touch with the home ground and to prevent isolation. The Kitchen Associations were also some sorts of early trade unions, places where current affairs were discussed and information about employers was shared. Price agreements were probably also made.<sup>95</sup> The 'kitchen bards' played an important role, these ambulant poets spread the word about working conditions and other issues discussed in the kitchen association; they kept the informal communication networks alive.<sup>96</sup>

As mentioned above, the Zulu laundrymen managed to exploit the need for laundry services and base a fair degree of independence on that. They also protected their interest by forming a guild, the amaWasha.<sup>97</sup> Being economically independent and – in line with their standing – often the informal leaders of the kitchen associations, they personified the 'evils of toggt'. Consequently, and in line with the idea that independent Africans were the real pest of the cities, ending the dependence on them was considered very important.<sup>98</sup> The first attempt in Durban to break their monopoly was the establishment of the Umgeni Washing Company in 1867, which was operated by renegade amaWasha members.<sup>99</sup> In 1880 a steam laundry opened in Pietermaritzburg with the same goal, but the costs for the machines and the wages were too high to keep the enterprise alive. Two other challenges the amaWasha had to deal with were the waterworks, which offered the possibility of a water tap in every house, and the Indian 'dhoby'<sup>100</sup> taking advantage of the waterworks to eke out a living in the laundry business. The white population was however still outraged, as the Indian laundrymen often lived in unsanitary slum-like conditions, which made them the object of a crusade by the inspector of nuisances. A third element in the breaking of the amaWasha was the operating of a commercial laundry by the women from the Inanda mission station<sup>101</sup> from 1889 on.<sup>102</sup>

This range of different methods of social engineering and segregation eventually resulted in the Durban System, the blue print of urban segregation in South Africa, in the twentieth century.<sup>103</sup> The port city established a system of urban segregation and social control, dealing with the perceived alcohol problem by monopolising beer brewing and sales, using these revenues to pay for 'native administration'. Compulsory residence in barracks, compounds, and hostels was also a part of this system.<sup>104</sup> This not only made the African labourers pay for their own oppression, it also robbed many people on the fringes of the towns of their livelihoods, especially women, as brewing was a women's job.<sup>105</sup> This of course could not be implemented without conflict and when the Durban Corporation wanted to build a new beerhall in an area with a lot of shebeens, male consumers and female brewers found each other in a boycott of and protest against the brewing monopoly.<sup>106</sup>

#### **5.4 *The end of the century***

During the last decade of the nineteenth century a lot changed. The gold discoveries in Transvaal spurred extensive investments in infrastructure, which led to the finalisation of the railway line to the interior, but roads and telegraph lines were being constructed too. By the middle of the decade there were 4000 miles of roads and more than 2000 miles of telegraph wire in the colony, apart from more than 370 miles of railways.<sup>107</sup> Trade was also facilitated by harbour improvements and by 1897 the entrance of the harbour had a depth of more than six metres.<sup>108</sup> With trade with the interior being so important and the forwarding trade having left the cities and towns along the trunk railway line, Durban became very much the dominating city of the colony, with the capital clearly second to it.

The introduction of responsible government and the end of the boom in Transvaal trade however changed a couple of things. The merchant elite was economically still very dominant, but politically it now had to share the power with the settlers. This resulted in policies clearly promoting commercial farming and supporting the settlers, who were once more migrating to Natal. The construction of branch railway lines started, non-white commercial competition was actively checked and there was extensive support in a variety of other ways. This resulted in the advent of a large-scale and more highly capitalised nature of agriculture, and maybe more importantly in white-dominated commercial agriculture. The dominance of trade over production was no longer absolute. The most fundamental changes would however only take place in the early twentieth century.

While the countryside was starting to look more like what settlers hoped it would look like, the cities, and Durban in particular, did not. The growth offered non-whites a number of opportunities to secure a more or less sustainable livelihood without adapting to the colonial ideal of a dependent, cheap and subservient African labourer. The consequences of the mineral revolution made the dream of a white city with only a docile black labour force unattainable. Durban – just like Cape Town<sup>109</sup> – became *de facto* a multiracial city; and the white population was frantically looking for ways to deal with this. The labour market that was created by urbanisation had to be supplied, but nobody wanted to deal with the consequences of this. As Swanson puts it: ‘the underlying question is one of overall social control: how to organize society to provide for the mutual access of black labourers and white employers in the coming industrial age without having to pay the heavy social costs of urbanization or losing the dominance of white over black.’<sup>110</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Natal Mercury, 11 October 1892, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Statistical Year Book, 1896, A2.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1896, A2; S.W. Silver and Co., "Handbook to South Africa", published in: D.H. HOUGHTON, J. DAGUT, op. cit., pp. 273-274.
- <sup>4</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, op. cit., p. 212.
- <sup>5</sup> H. HEYDENRYCH, op. cit., p. 61.
- <sup>6</sup> Statistical Year Book, 1896, A2.
- <sup>7</sup> Natal Witness, 1 September 1888, p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup> Natal Witness, 9 February 1892, p. 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Natal Witness, 24 March 1894, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> R. OVENDALE, "The politics of dependence, 1893-1899" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, pp. 325-326.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 327-329.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 332; B. GUEST, "the new economy", p. 316.
- <sup>13</sup> J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, p. 63.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-65.
- <sup>15</sup> B. GUEST, "Colonists, confederation and constitutional change" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, p. 146.
- <sup>16</sup> Natal Witness, 11 August 1848, p. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> B. GUEST, "Colonists, confederation and constitutional change", p. 147.
- <sup>18</sup> Natal Witness, 7 February 1880, p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> M.W. SWANSON, The rise of multiracial Durban, pp. 262-263.
- <sup>20</sup> J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, p. 64.
- <sup>21</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 275.
- <sup>22</sup> Except for the two short stretches along the coast North and South from Durban, which were built in the 1870s. B. GUEST, "The new economy", p. 306.
- <sup>23</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The closer-settlement movement in Natal", p. 575.
- <sup>24</sup> S. BHANA, op. cit., p. 246.
- <sup>25</sup> B. GUEST, "The new economy", p. 303.
- <sup>26</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The closer-settlement movement in Natal", pp. 570-572.
- <sup>27</sup> Statistical Year Book, 1896, A2.
- <sup>28</sup> See: NLCC, op. cit.
- <sup>29</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The closer-settlement movement in Natal", pp. 574-575.
- <sup>30</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, op. cit., p. 128; J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, pp. 77-78.
- <sup>31</sup> Natal Mercury, 6 February 1893, p. 3.
- <sup>32</sup> J.F. INGRAM, Natalia, p. 78.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 77.
- <sup>34</sup> It was Colin Bundy who set the milestone in this debate by challenging the liberal/conservative 'dual economy' model of South African agriculture in his book 'The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry'. Bundy showed that – contrary to the idea of a backwards peasantry – for a considerable period of time there was an innovative and dynamic peasantry in South Africa. He attributed this to their responsiveness to the newly created markets for food crops. The reasons for the fall of the peasantry were the capitalisation of settler agriculture, a government that repressed non-white cultivators and gave a lot of support to the white farmers and the labour-hunger of the goldmines. Even though this work has been recognised as a landmark by most scholars, it has also been much criticised. Some of the main criticisms are that Bundy has a deterministic conception of the market; that he overstates the general prosperity of the peasantry – in other words he mistakes a large output with prosperity – and that his thesis is functionalistic. Despite these criticisms the thesis remains important and influential. See: C. BUNDY, The Rise and Fall; some reviews of this thesis: F. COOPER, "Peasants, Capitalists and Historians: A Review Article" in: Journal of Southern African studies, vol. VII, 1981, no. 2, pp. 284-314; J. LEWIS, "The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment" in: Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. XI, 1984, no. 1, pp. 1-24.
- <sup>35</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, op. cit., p. 140.

- <sup>36</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 213; B. GUEST, "The new economy", p. 314.
- <sup>37</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 212; H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 275.
- <sup>38</sup> C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 188-189.
- <sup>39</sup> W.M. HARTLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>40</sup> H. SLATER, "Land, Labour and Capital in Natal", p. 275.
- <sup>41</sup> C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 184-186.
- <sup>42</sup> C. BALARD, G. LENTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141; C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 188.
- <sup>43</sup> R. CALLEBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- <sup>44</sup> A.J. CHRISTOPHER, "The closer-settlement movement in Natal", p. 575; C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 137.
- <sup>45</sup> C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 190.
- <sup>46</sup> This illustrates M. Morris's parallel with the Prussian path to agricultural capitalism, which stresses the repressive nature of rural labour relations in South Africa. M. MORRIS, "The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Countryside" in: *Economy and Society*, vol. V, 1976, pp. 293-343.
- <sup>47</sup> C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 181; B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 15.
- <sup>48</sup> C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 182.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.
- <sup>50</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 24.
- <sup>51</sup> C. BALLARD, G. LENTA, *op. cit.*, p. 143; B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>52</sup> C. BUNDY, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 191.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- <sup>54</sup> C. BUNDY, "The Transkei Peasantry, c.1890-1914: 'Passing through a Period of Stress'" in: R. PALMER, N. PARSONS (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, London, Heinemann, 1977, p. 215.
- <sup>55</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 461.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- <sup>57</sup> *Blue Book*, 1870, W6; *Statistical Year Book*, 1896, E14.
- <sup>58</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Colony of Natal*, p. 93; p. 187.
- <sup>59</sup> J.J.A. EDLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
- <sup>60</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Colony of Natal*, pp. 231-232.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132; p. 153; p. 199; p. 223.
- <sup>62</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 271.
- <sup>63</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Story of an African City*, pp. 73-82.
- <sup>64</sup> F. COOPER, "Introduction", p. 8.
- <sup>65</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109; B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, pp. 34-35; H. BRADFORD, "'We Women Will Show Them': Beer Protests in the Natal Countryside, 1929" in: J. CRUSH, C. AMBLER (eds.), *Liquor and labor in southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1992, pp. 210-211.
- <sup>66</sup> B. FREUND, *Insiders and Outsiders*, p. 34.
- <sup>67</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 111ff.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- <sup>69</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 328.
- <sup>70</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.
- <sup>71</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 367-369.
- <sup>72</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.
- <sup>75</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "Urban Origins of Separate Development" in: *Race*, vol. X, 1968, no. 1, p. 39.
- <sup>76</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- <sup>79</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 318.
- <sup>80</sup> These were not the first barracks for jobbers in Durban.
- <sup>81</sup> M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, p. 350; p. 366.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- <sup>83</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", p. 408.

- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411; M.W. SWANSON, *The rise of multiracial Durban*, pp. 348-349.
- <sup>85</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", pp. 409-410.
- <sup>86</sup> This does certainly not mean that earlier governments were not susceptible to these demands.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 413-414.
- <sup>88</sup> D.P. SMIT, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- <sup>89</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", p. 418.
- <sup>90</sup> A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
- <sup>91</sup> D.P. SMIT, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
- <sup>92</sup> C. VAN ONSELEN, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164; A.C. BJORVIG, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
- <sup>94</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 107; p. 113; pp. 127-128.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122ff.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129; M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace", p. 406.
- <sup>99</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- <sup>100</sup> Hindi for laundryman.
- <sup>101</sup> Near Durban.
- <sup>102</sup> K.E. ATKINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-139.
- <sup>103</sup> B. FREUND, "City Hall and the Direction of Development", p. 18.
- <sup>104</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Durban System", pp. 173-175.
- <sup>105</sup> H. BRADFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 211.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- <sup>107</sup> J.F. INGRAM, *The Colony of Natal*, p. 34; p. 47.
- <sup>108</sup> L. HEYDENRYCH, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40; B. GUEST, "The new economy", p. 310.
- <sup>109</sup> N. WORDEN, E. VAN HEYNINGEN, V. BICKFORD-SMITH, *Cape Town, The Making of a City*, Cape Town, David Philip Publishers, 1998, pp. 211-213.
- <sup>110</sup> M.W. SWANSON, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909" in: *The Journal of African History*, vol. XVIII, 1977, no. 3, p. 394.

## CONCLUSION

## **Conclusion**

The history of European settlement in what would later become the colony of Natal started with a small trade-settlement on the shores of the Bay of Natal. In 1824 a handful of traders-cum-adventurers, sponsored by Cape merchants, set up camp in Port Natal in the hope of capturing a share of the Zulu trade in ivory, skins and hides that was going through Delagoa Bay. Their involvement with the hinterland was rather limited; they did not use much land, as they did not engage in any substantial production of goods. The interaction between the Zulu kingdom and the Europeans was predominantly a commercial one, even though the traders had to fulfil the role of loyal client chiefs of the Zulu king. During the 1830s more and more Europeans and African refugees came to live in Port Natal and this gave the traders the confidence to behave in a less subservient manner. They did not accept the agreement Captain Gardiner made with king Dingane and tensions between the Europeans and the Zulu kingdom rose.

This was the time when the voortrekkers arrived in these presumably empty lands. The incorrect idea that Natal was uninhabited made it easy to claim all the land for white pastoral farming and to deny Africans any secure title; to claim Natal as a white colony. The trekboers continued using the land system that they had known in the Eastern Cape before the British reformed it. This liberal land settlement particularly suited their pastoral economy and was characterised by isolated farmsteads. The small number of trekboers, the very extensive and isolated farms and the very limited integration of Boer society into the world-market would have given little incentive to the development of towns, but due to the fact that every burgher had the right to an erf in one of the township and especially due to the chaos in the voortrekker republic many chose to live in laagers or in one of the townships. These dorps were no market towns but rather villages in the Cape Dutch tradition. They were planned to be semi-self-sufficient, with extensive town lands, and although they also served some commercial needs, these needs were very limited in republican Natal, these mainly catered to social and religious needs. These were examples of the colonial-type settlement as discussed in the introduction and were rather centres of political control than of economic control and integration. Much of the land alienated to the white population remained unused and speculators were already starting to take advantage of this fact. When Natal became British even more concentration of landownership took place, as many trekboers decided to leave the colony and try their luck in the interior republics. As a result of the immobility of spatial

structures, being accumulated fixed capital, these characteristics influenced the development of Natal for a long time.

The new British administrators were not convinced that developing Natal as a settler colony would be a good idea. Concerned about the stability of the region, which was a major reason for the annexation, some saw the future of Natal as being a gateway to the interior of Africa in the first place and also as a potential region for cash cropping by an African peasantry and possibly for mining. The problem was however that there was already a small Boer settler population. Administering and defending the colony would also be easier and cheaper if there was a white settler population. In an attempt to stop the emigration of trekboers to the interior the policy of reversing the republican land settlement that was considered too liberal was abolished. The long period of insecurity however negated the possible positive effects this could have had and this did thus not check the emigration. As these pastoralists leaving for the interior had not invested much in the land they were more than happy to sell it at very low prices and this way even more land ended up in the hands of speculators. Schemes to introduce new settlers to the colony were not very successful either and those who did come to Natal often did not stay on their lands, this had as a consequence that a relatively large portion of the white population ended up living in towns early on. This also brought even more land on a land market dominated by buyers who wanted the land mainly for speculative purposes. These landowners did not actively invest in their own land but rather tried to sell it at higher prices or simply waited until the land prices went up. They would also discover that extracting rents from African peasants working and living on their lands was a good source of revenues, as this peasantry was often more successful than the white farmers. Natal was more on its way to become a commercial import-export economy, an extractive economy, than to become a typical settler colony and this also influenced the spatial patterns, as Christopher illustrated by comparing Southern Rhodesia and the Orange Free State.

Not only the absentee landlords did not turn their land into profitable commercial farms, few settler farmers actually managed to do that successfully at first and many of them decided to try their luck in the towns instead. Restricted markets, lack of capital and labour, a successfully competing peasantry – which is not the same as a prosperous peasantry – and the poor quality of infrastructure and land are some of the reasons for the limited success of settler farming in early colonial Natal. The development of towns cannot be seen as separate from these processes in the countryside. With the production of the European population

being limited and with Durban being one of the scarce good harbours in the region, the colony and its population turned towards trade with the interior republics. Commerce was more important than production and this was so at least partially as a consequence of the lack of success of the productive activities; the overberg trade was almost the *raison d'être* of the colony. The early pattern of establishment of towns reflected this; almost all townships were founded along the trunk route towards the interior. This was also where most of the white settlement was located; this was an axis of white settlers. Two towns dominated this pattern of settlement: Pietermaritzburg and Durban, these were primate cities typical for extractive economies. Durban was important as the port through which all the import and export took place, but Maritzburg was even more important for the forwarding trade. The capital was the place where the bulk was broken, where goods were stored until the dry winter season was over and where wagon-makers and blacksmith serviced the trade. Consequently, Maritzburg counted more merchants and more manufacturing businesses than the port city. In absence of the development of production, markets and towns in the countryside, Natal was truly a 'forwarding agency in the midst of a Kaffir location.'

Just as trade dominated the colonial economy, a merchant elite dominated the colonial society. Particularly in the cities their dominance was marked and people like G.C. Cato, B.W. Greenacre, W.M. Hartley and J. Millar could be found in several positions of influence: in the harbour board, in the Native Affairs Commission or as agents of important London-based enterprises. These strong mercantile interests favoured certain spatial patterns, but it would be too simple to say that they simply wanted to develop Natal as a gateway to the interior of Africa and extract surplus from the African population through rents and the marketing of their produce. Merchants too were often in favour of closer settlement of European immigrants and W.M. Hartley for example argued in favour of renewed efforts to introduce settlers in 1888. The first concerns of politicians, administrators and elites alike were however other things; immigration and labour were always important themes but in early colonial Natal the priorities were somewhere else.

The merchants did however engage in the production of one important export crop that dominated the trade networks of the British Empire for much of the nineteenth century: sugar cane. Plantations are capital intensive, imperial banks were reluctant to invest in the uncertain future of this enterprise and local banks did not have the resources for it; consequently some of the 'most respectable inhabitants' of Durban managed to buy themselves in. This paved the

way for the rise of the merchant-planter. Other commodities were also grown on the plantations, but to a lesser extent.

One of the issues that had precedence over other things was transport. As the economical fortunes of the colony were mainly dependent on the forwarding trade, the state of the transport infrastructure was a constant concern. Merchants were the initiators of the Point-railway in 1860 and were amongst the most ardent promoters of further extensions of the railways towards the interior. The shape the network took was typical for infrastructure that was built with mercantile interests and minerals in mind. It is not the case that other railway plans were never on the table or that other voices were not heard, and a fundamentally different plan was even chosen at first, but the plan that was carried out in the end was arguably the most feasible and realistic way to get a connection to the interior as quickly as possible. Only when Durban was connected to the Rand, branch lines with the purpose of advancing agricultural development could be considered. These new lines were however still largely limited to a few axes of white settlement and purposely missed the vast areas where African peasant agriculture took place.

The urban merchant elite was at odds with the rural settler elites on the subjects of 'native' and labour policy too. Their first concern was often stability in order not to disturb the trade, the marketing of the produce of the African peasantry was profitable and their cheap supplies kept the cost of life and labour in the cities down. Absentee landlords too were more than happy to let peasants work and live on their lands and pay rents. Settlers however needed cheap labour and wanted to have the African competition curtailed; their voices were heard in the Native Affairs Commission, but a lot of the suggestions of this commission would remain dead letter or at best ineffective for a very long time. The merchant elite dealt with their own labour needs in another way. By using indentured Indian labour they managed to avoid increasing pressures on the African population, and thus the risk of instability, and to fulfil the labour needs on the plantations without having to compete with their urban businesses for labour. This was however a rather expensive solution that did not fulfil the needs of many other employers, mostly settler farmers, and took away some of the pressures on the government to guarantee the supply of labour. Certainly in the first phase, indentured labour was mainly used on sugar plantations.

The commercial function of the towns of Natal was an important one, certainly for the towns along the trunk route to the interior, but it was not the only one. When Lieutenant-Governor West ordered a commission to look into the provision of towns in the colony in

1847, he was not so much concerned about the role of towns in commercial networks; he wanted more towns in order to facilitate administration and control. Towns had a political and military function too. For several towns the establishment of administration or military structures actually preceded the formation of towns as such; at the end of the 1840s there was very little in Ladysmith except for a magistrate, a constable and a small police force. Pietermaritzburg also managed to avoid a sharp decline after the forwarding trade moved on owing to the fact that it was the political capital of the colony. Towns and villages were also founded in order to facilitate settlement and immigration, trying to copy settlement patterns in the old country. Most of these wasted away fairly quickly, largely due to the lack of success of the settlement-schemes. Market towns as in Britain were not a feature of the settlement pattern of Natal, since there were only very limited rural markets and the success of settler agriculture failed to appear. A last function of the towns and townships that has to be mentioned was facilitating communications and social life. Here too it can be noted that several towns found their origins in a post office.

It were however mainly the towns that played an important role in the commercial network that flourished, these were Durban and Pietermaritzburg and to a lesser extent Ladysmith, the third town in the colony. Durban had the extra advantage in that it was the port city and that it was the only town that could not lose its importance in the overberg trade with the advent of the railways. The port of Durban was however completely geared towards trade with the interior and to a lesser extent towards the sugar industry in the immediate vicinity of the city. Later bunkering of coal mined in the North of the colony also became an important activity. The port did not play any important role in the early development of agricultural enterprise in the Natal countryside, this it could only do when the transport infrastructure became more integrated during the last years of the nineteenth century and mostly in the twentieth century. These towns clearly fulfilled the four functions Gordon discerned for a city in the phase of commercial accumulation: political control, commercial metropolis, transport node and craft-manufacturing centre. These were already different settlements than the Afrikaner dorps, more business centres and places of economic control and integration than the more administrative and political colonial-type settlements.

One of the defining events in South African history was the discovery of diamonds and later of gold in the interior. Despite the fact that there were few deposits found in Natal, except for coal which only became a serious enterprise by the end of the century, the colony benefited from the mineral revolution too. The trade with the interior increased significantly,

at first making Natal even more dependent on it, and there was an influx of capital and new settlers into all of South Africa. Especially the development of gold mining in the Rand gave to the railway question a new sense of urgency, reaching the gold field as soon as possible became pivotal to the colony and its mercantile elite. Losing its share in this rapidly increasing trade would mean commercial doom for the colony and its merchants. The NGR and the colonial authorities also engaged in a tariff war with the Cape and its railway network to enlarge its share in this trade. In this way Natal did manage to have the largest share of the traffic, but the revenues earned with it were very small. The Natal railway network did not generate any significant multiplier effect either, as it hardly transported any locally produced goods and did not serve any agricultural areas. The NGR network was a typical example of railways built to evacuate commodities as quickly and efficiently as possible, not to foster local development. Durban and its mercantile elite did however benefit considerably from the mineral revolution. The booming trade going through the harbour made the port city into a booming and prosperous town. The capital and other towns along the route to the interior did however not flourish as much; once the railways were built the forwarding business left those cities. The goods just passed the towns in the trains and did no longer generate any further activity anymore. Durban thus became increasingly the only city dominating the urban pattern of the colony. It was also the commercial metropolis, the place where the banks and merchant firms were located, of the colony and the transport node; it was a typical commercial centre.

The influx of capital from London, as a spatial fix to overaccumulation in the core which makes further productive investment of surplus capital possible, was substantial and tended to reproduce this dominance of trade over production. Imperial capital was mainly commercial capital, London-based banks had little reason to invest in the uncertain future of production in this rather marginal colony and to play a developmental role, for them Natal was just another region. The future of local banks on the other hand was closely linked to the economic future of the colony and thus they were forced to invest in its economic development. The dominance of the imperial banks in the sphere of commercial banking also forced them to play the more risky developmental role. The Natal Bank needed help from the government twice to survive, as the settlers considered the local bank to be their guarantee of economic and financial independence from the metropole. Much of the trade was also facilitated through informal credit networks in which the Indian merchant elite, which had no access to formal banking, played an important role. Not accidentally were the branches of the

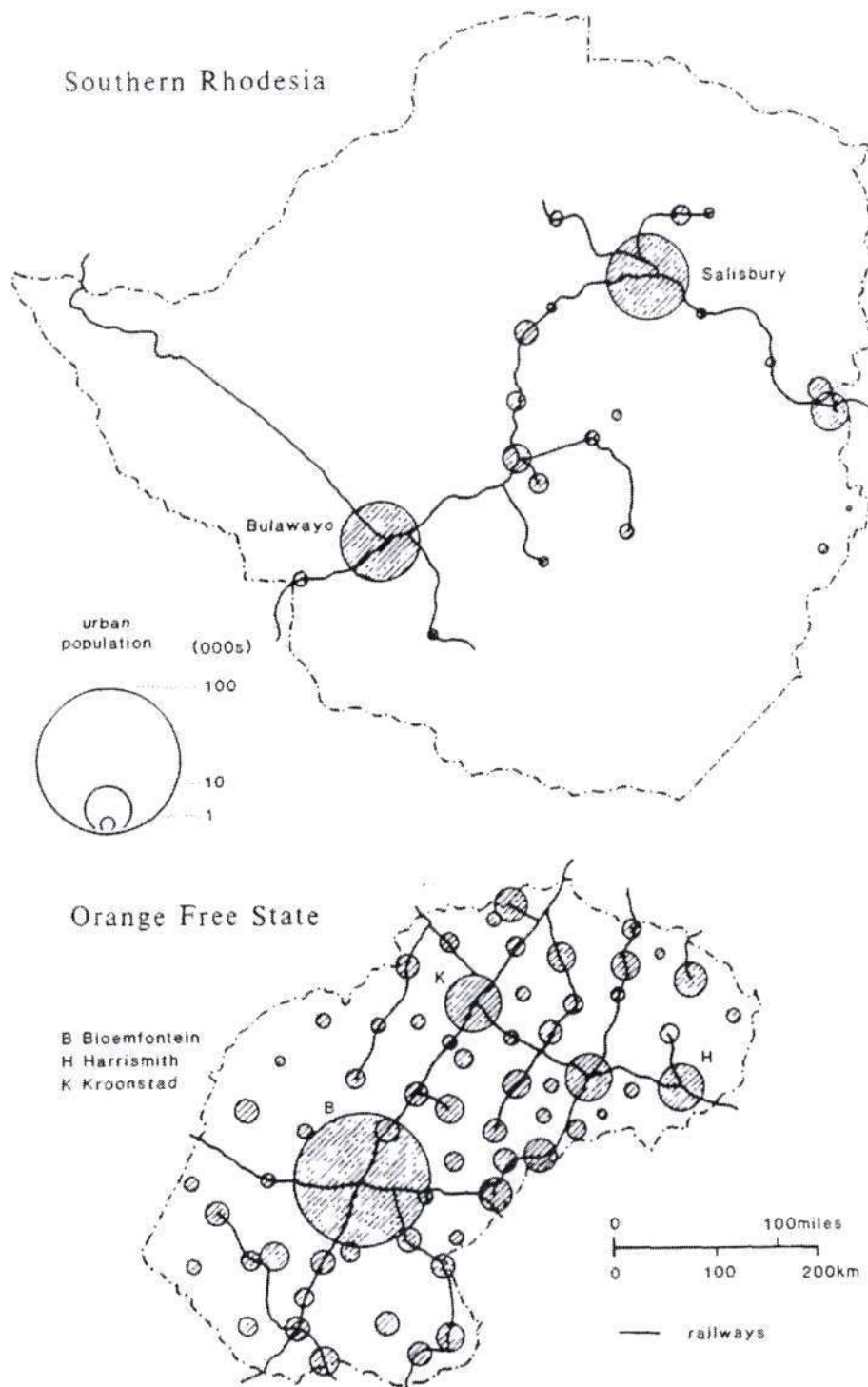
imperial banks bigger in Durban and those of the local bank in Pietermaritzburg, reflecting the relative importance of merchant and settler capital in both cities.

A second important event was the change in constitutional status of the colony in 1893. Representative government was replaced by responsible government, which gave the settler population more political power than it had before. Their voice was heard more than before and they demanded policies to transform Natal into a more typical settler colony, like the Free State in Christopher's example that was repeatedly referred to in this study. These demands were the same as before, but the extra leverage of the settlers made sure that they were now met to a larger extent than before. Promoting commercial white farming was the goal of the new measures. The influx of capital after the mineral discoveries did influence the capitalisation of settler agriculture to a certain extent, but it were especially the breaking of the peasant competition, the provision of sufficient supplies of cheap labour and the creation of a more elaborate railway network that made the difference. These measures only became unambiguous policy choices in the last few years of the nineteenth century and they were a clear change from the earlier policies influenced by mercantile interests. The question whether surplus would be extracted through labour or through rents and marketing the peasant produce, could only be answered in one way in this new political context: through labour. The end of the boom in Transvaal trade in 1897 also made it possible to change custom politics and shift the focus from trying to get as much of the trade with the interior to providing markets for Natal's producers.

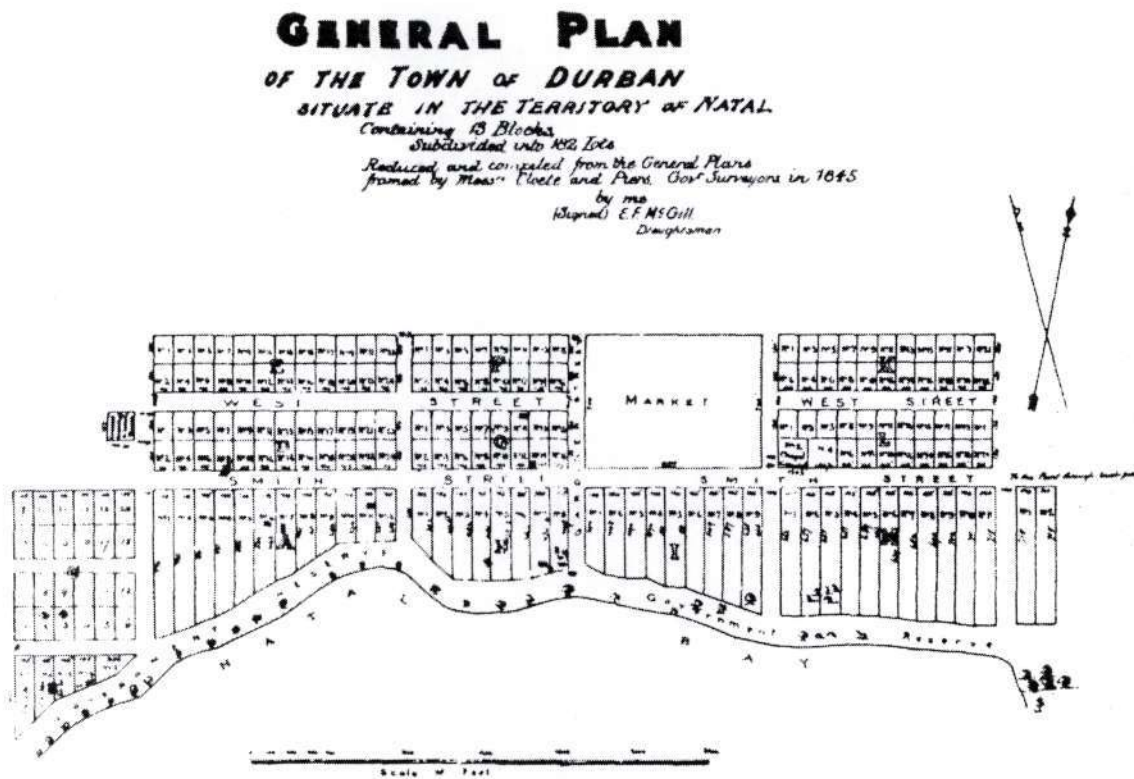
The growth of the cities in the colony and the newly gained prosperity was not only giving white settlers new chances, it also gave opportunities to the black and Indian population. First African peasants and later mostly Indian peasants and market gardeners were successful in supplying the markets in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere with food. Labour shortage resulted in high wages and a certain extent of economic independence for non-whites in the cities. Especially togt labourers were in strong bargaining positions and epitomised the 'evil' of the independent African in the city. The plans of a white city with only a docile, dependent and cheap black workforce could not just be turned into a reality. Natal's towns and cities, and Durban in particular, were *de facto* multiracial. Ward IV was some sort of Indian Central Business District and on the fringes of town Africans and Indians managed to eke out a living as market gardeners, fishermen, laundrymen, hawkers, tradesmen, home-brewers or casual labourers. One of the main focusses of urban policy was to try to bring these uncontrolled peripheral spaces under control. This was done in many ways: by

trying to control the movements of the togt labourers and to enforce residential segregation, by promoting white suburbanisation and by commercial and political exclusion. At the heart of these attempts were however contradictions: the ideal was to have white cities but at the same time black and Indian labourers were needed and their produce kept living in the cities affordable; semi-proletarian labour can be cheap but hard to control and discipline, while a well-paid suburban workforce is stable and easy to control, but expensive. Cities are thus also important in the drive to control and discipline labour and to create a cheap and stable labour force, as the Marxist approach stresses, and not only in the elimination of space as nodes on the commodity chains, which is more the focus of the world-systems approach. In the twentieth century new and more repressive ways to deal with this issue would result in ever more total urban segregation and social control as South African cities tried to come to terms with the labour needs of cities in an industrialising world. These cities do not only play a role in commercial accumulation anymore; they also fulfil a role in the new phase of industrial accumulation, in which the creation of a large and cheap labour force is more important.

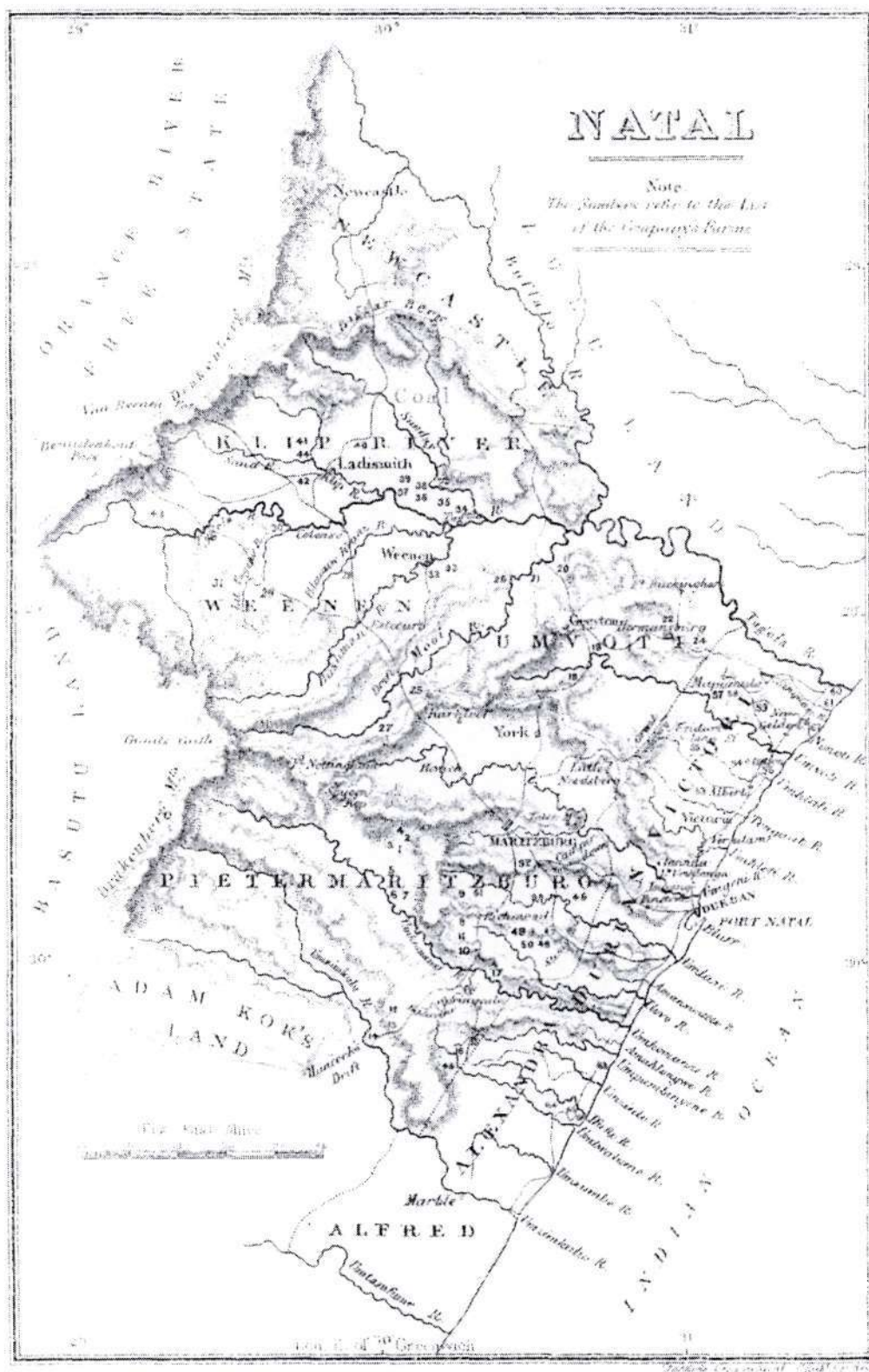
## Figures



**Figure 1:** Urban networks in Southern Rhodesia and the Orange Free State in 1936. Source: A.J. CHRISTOPHER, *The British Empire at its Zenith*, London, Croom Helm, 1988, p. 92.



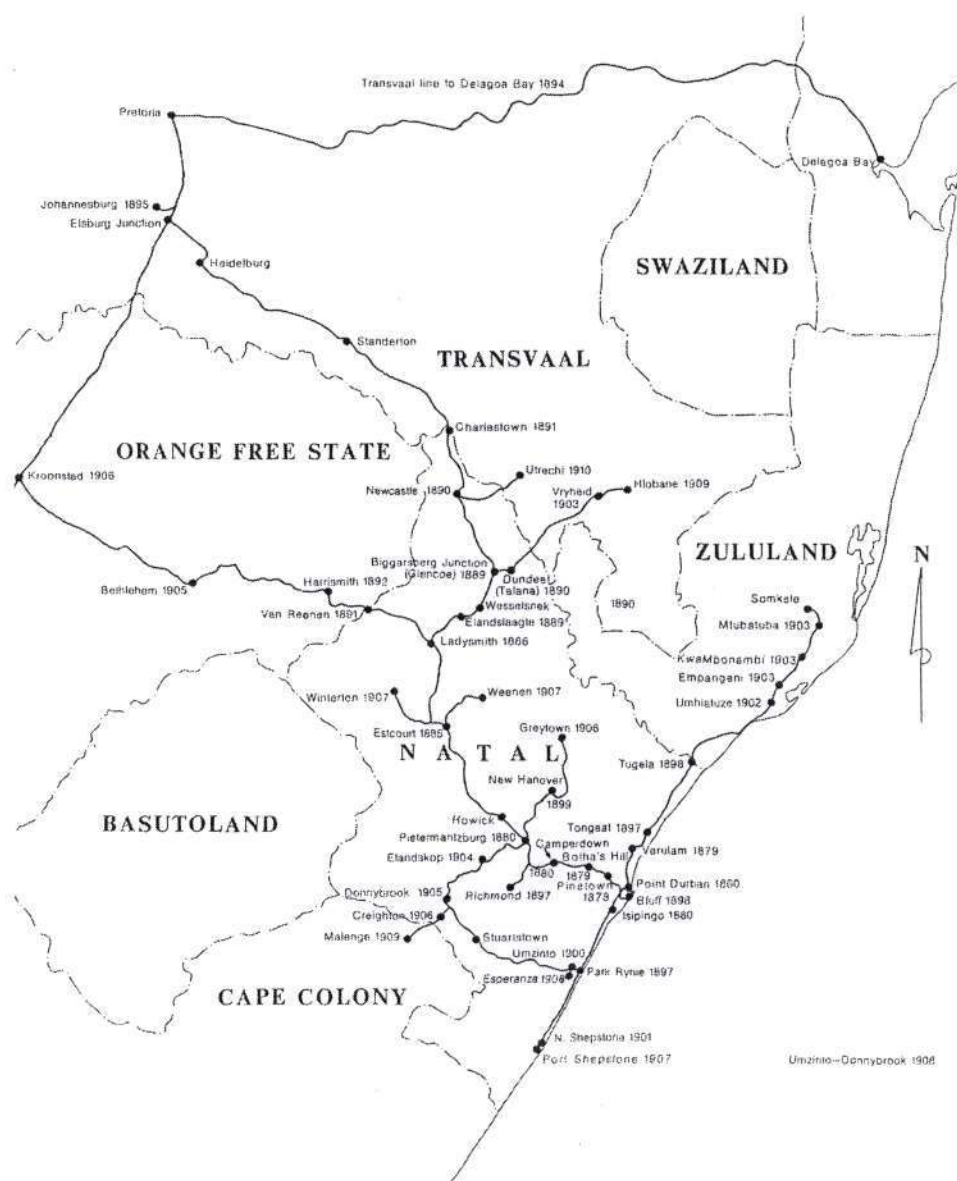
**Figure 2:** Town plan of Durban. Source: R.F. HASWELL, "The Voortrekker Dorps of Natal" in: *Natalia*, vol. X, 1980, no. 1, p. 28.



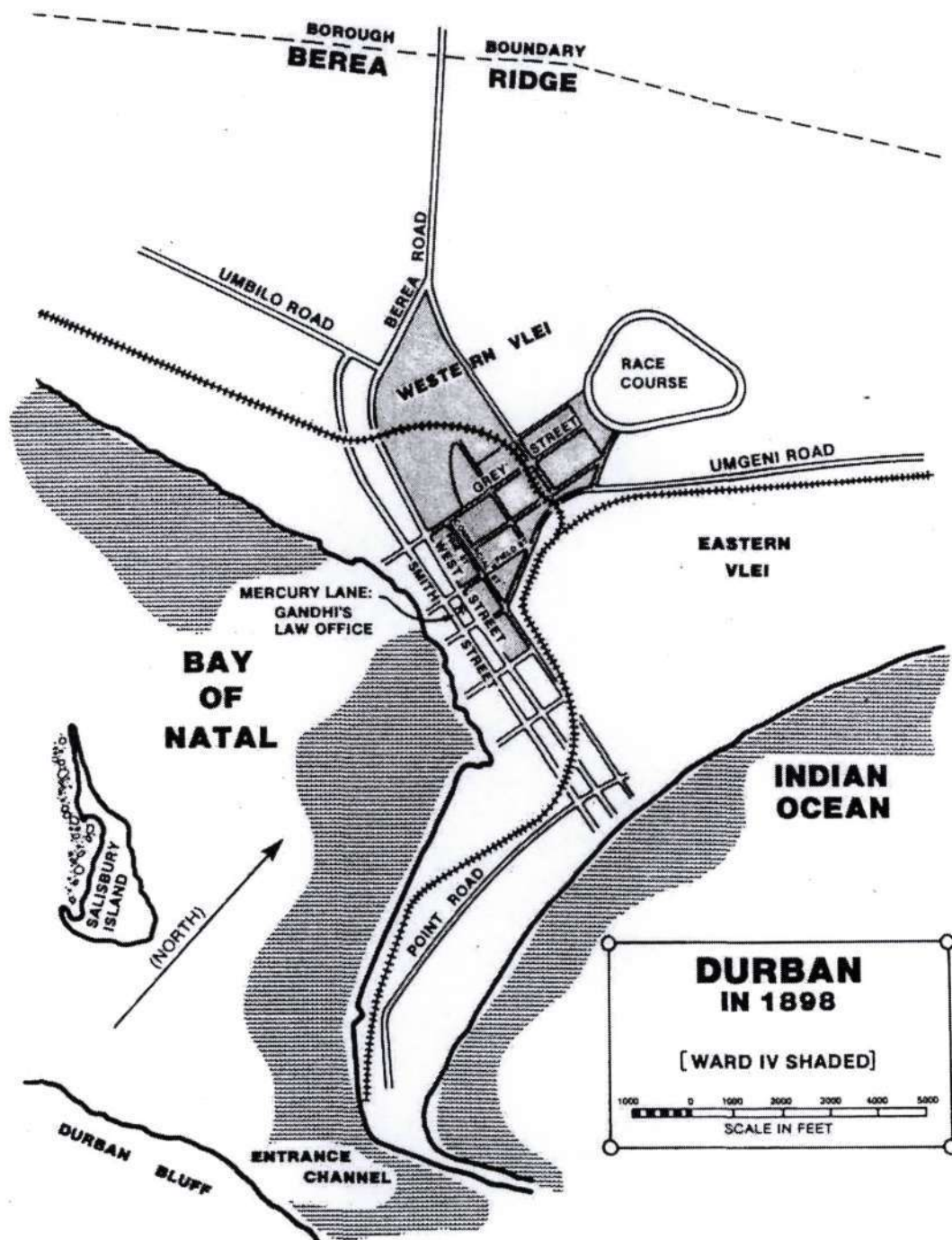
**Figure 3:** Map of colonial Natal, ca. 1866. Source: NLCC, Plan of Assisted Emigration and Land-Settlement of the Natal Land and Colonization Company (Limited), London, Jarrold and Sons, ca. 1866, s.p.



**Figure 4:** Map showing some of the most important roads in Durban. Source: R.J. DAVIES, "The Growth of the Durban Metropolitan Area" in: South African Geographical Journal, vol. XLV, 1963, p. 29.



**Figure 5:** Map of the railway expansion in Natal with the respective years of opening, especially note the lines constructed until 1895. Source: B. GUEST, "The new economy" in: A. DUMINY, B. GUEST (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, p. 306.



**Figure 6:** Multiracial Durban: the racially mixed Ward IV. Source: M.W. SWANSON, "The Asiatic Menace": Creating Segregation in Durban, 1870-1900" in: *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. XVI, 1983, no. 3, p. 402.

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