

Response to Colonial encroachment / invasion:

British Penetration:

Central Africa:

NDEBELE STATE

During the 19th Century European penetration into Central Africa had taken the form of individual hunter – explorer for example F. C. Selous, small traders like Webtebeach and missionaries who had followed Livingstone. There was no serious consideration of large – scale European settlements and colonial expansion until the 1880s.

The reason behind this was that the area was occupied by the Ndebele, the Rozvi and Shona chieftaincies. However in the 1880s, within the context of the atmosphere of the Scramble, renewed European interests gradually began to gain momentum.

Countries showing interest here were Portugal, Britain, and the Boers of the Transvaal.

The Concession Seekers:

The wake of mineral discoveries in South Africa also inspired by the reports of hunter – explorers, individual fortune hunters and prospectors entered the area seeking concessions especially from Lobengula and Khama.

The rumour grew rapidly that they must be a Second Rand in the area between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers. Among the later concession seekers, there were government officials from Germany and the Transvaal Boers as well as agents of very rich capitalists who also had imperialist aims (for example capitalists like Rhodes, Alfred Maguire and Rudd). The capitalist urged Britain to colonise the Transvaal so that Britain could be in a position to take over the gold fields.

They urged Britain to annex Bechuanaland. These people were not just individuals. They were agents of imperialism. Lobengula, for as long as he could, avoided granting any concessions whatsoever, but as pressure mounted, he was forced into coming to terms with the imperialists.

In 1887, the agent of the Transvaal Boers, Pett Grobler claimed that Lobengula had signed a treaty of friendship with the Transvaal Republic. This greatly alarmed Cecil John Rhodes and the South Africa British mining capitalist.

Cecil John Rhodes and Fellow Capitalists:

He wanted to invest money since one of the features of imperialism is the security of investment. He was both a capitalist and politician. He made a fortune in Kimberly. As an imperialist he believed in extending British imperialism throughout Africa.

Historians have tended to emphasise the imperialist aspect that is the fact that Rhodes used his private fortune to extend the British Empire. Recent research displays that Rhodes with imperialist leanings saw the element of empire building as a means of creating new investment opportunities for himself and his colleagues. For instance, he invested much of his diamond profits in a company, the Gold Fields of South Africa.

In the 1880s, the company proved to be a fiasco. As a result, Rhodes and his friend Rudd began to look north of the Limpopo as a possible way of compensating for their loss. They believed that the type of capitalist development they wanted was impossible without bringing the area under British rule. Consequently, he tried to persuade the British government to colonise Central Africa using both economic and imperialist arguments, but the British government refused.

Britain had no proof, whatsoever, that there were actual rich diamonds and gold beyond the Limpopo. British aim at the time was to maintain a strong Ndebele State to repel other European powers and hence British trading interests carried out. This was to be followed by concession with Lobengula if there was a threat from other European powers.

The Moffat Treaty:

In 1887, the British governor at the Cape learnt about the Grobler Treaty. In 1889, encouraged by Rhodes and his partners he sent John Smith Moffat, a missionary to Matebeleland to persuade Lobengula to renounce the Grobler Treaty and undertake not to sign any other treaties without British permission. Moffat took advantage of the special trust that Lobengula had in

him to deceive the King into signing the Moffat Treaty, in this treaty, it is believed that Lobengula agreed to what Moffat proposed.

The Moffat Treaty was a fraud. Lobengula could not read and Moffat's interpretation was not what was written hence Lobengula refused to recognize it. Rhodes used the treaty to have the region under Lobengula's jurisdiction as a British sphere of influence.

The British government was satisfied with this but Rhodes was not. While Moffat was still in Matebeleland, Rhodes sent his agents Rudd, Maguire and Thompson. It is possible that a treaty with Britain would have led to the exclusion of the European powers. Lobengula may have signed the Treaty for his own interest, but not at the cost of giving up a right of an independent foreign policy.

Rudd concession:

Rhodes's agents were able to get the support of Senior British officials in Southern Africa. They also got the support of missionaries like Reverend Charles Helm. They were even able to bribe senior indunas like Lotshe to speak in their favour.

A combination of these factors pressurized Lobengula to grant a concession to Rhodes's agents rather than other concession seekers waiting at the capital. This was done with the consultation with the councilors and Umphakathi. The King signed the treaty and yet again he had been tricked. Lobengula might have been acting in the interest of his state but again not at the expense of signing away actually all his authority.

Terms of the Treaty:

Lobengula was promised £100 per month, a steam gun boat to operate along the Zambezi, 1 000 rifles and 100 000 rounds of ammunition.

They were to be granted in return for Lobengula's giving Rhodes and friends the complete and exclusive right to all minerals of the state together with the power of procure the same (minerals) by means they deemed necessary. Furthermore, they were also granted permission to do anything to exclude all other concession seekers.

All in all therefore, Lobengula effectively signed away all minerals and lots of his own power to the Whites.

What then did Lobengula agree to do?

It seems from various reports that Lobengula had agreed only to allow ten men to mine for a limited period of time. These reports assert that Britain was therefore going to agree to stop other concession seekers from worrying him.

Lobengula immediately denied the Rudd Concession. Consequently, he sent two Indunas to London so as to complain about the concept of the concession and also sent a repudiation letter to Queen Victoria. Rhodes, being what he was, made sure that the letter was not delivered on time. He delayed the Indunas until it was too late.

Rhodes and some powerful friends for example, Beit a millionaire and Charles Rudd joined forces to form the British South Africa Company (B.S.A.C.) in 1889. The last two were members of Parliament (in South Africa) at the Cape. The powerful supporters of the B.S.A.C. persuaded the British government to grant a Royal Charter. The British interests were best served through Rhodes and B.S.A.C.

Lobengula's protests were ignored and the Charter was even more than the Rudd Concession had contained. The Chartered Company was a device which enabled the colonial power to claim a colony and exploit its resources with a mineral commitment to the mother country. If the colony was a success, it could be formally taken over and if a fiasco the government could wash itself off the whole affair without any loss to the tax powers. "If the results are good, then Rhodesian could become a property for the state, if it fails, it would be the company's look out."

The Invasion of Mashonaland in 1890:

The Pioneer Column:

It was ironic since there was no actual fighting but they were camps and settlements set up. The pioneers were well armed expecting an armed resistance but were not attacked and only attacked 3 – 5 years later.

The entourage was composed of a group of 400 fully armed men. Within this context we can regard it as an invasion (force). Even though there was no physical fight, Rhodes ultimate aim was destroy the Ndebele State and gain control over the whole of Central Africa. They would not be done by simple confrontation.

They first occupied areas inhabited by less powerful societies. In 1890 they occupied Mashonaland. There 200 British South Africa Police. The settlers had each been promised 15 gold claims and 1200 hectors of land.

How did Lobengula react to the Invasion?

Quite a number historians agree that Lobengula was able to restrain his more militant Indunas and regiments (especially the amajaha) with a lot of difficulty. He clearly understood the danger of allowing invaders free passage to settle near his place. The area in which they settled was not directly under Ndebele rule. Lobengula wanted to avoid the risk of a war with Britain at most but not at any cost. He is reported to have told his militants that they were trying to drive him into the mouth of a lion (oral tradition.)

The Settlers:

What they did when they settled:

During their first year of arrival, they spread throughout the area that they had been granted permission of pegging claims. In less than a month some of the 300 settlers had pegged about 500 gold claims but they did not find any surface gold. All the gold had been dug out by the Shona.

The BSACO was taking about 50% of all the mining profits. Rhodes at this time was confident of the success having survived the threat of the Ndebele.

The Shona:

Most of the Shona regarded the invaders as temporary visitors. Shona farmers responded to the new market opportunities, by selling their agricultural products. A considerable proportion of them entered into temporary service. Furthermore, the settlers at this juncture totally depended on the Shona for their food.

The Second Rand was not found. Gold reefs were poor and most surface gold area was supposed to have been removed by Shona miners. The BSAC was bankrupt and its debts increased. It was therefore forced to give more power to the settlers to do what they wanted.

As a result, many settlers changed from mining to farming and began to take over large areas of land. The BSACo. Administration anxious to develop any profitable economic activities supported the settlers in their grabbing land and execution of forced labour from the local Shona communities. The settlers behaved as conquerors and began to tax the Shona people.

Other societies resisted taxation and forced labour. The resistance was sporadic or disunited while on the other had the settlers supported by the BSAC constituted a small but powerful united force. Relations between the two (2) deteriorated and ultimately culminated in the great uprising of 1896 – 97.

The Destruction of the Ndebele State:

For settler capitalism to flourish, it was inevitable for them to destroy the Ndebele State.

The reasons of Sudan change:

- (i) It was the failure to find gold in Mashonaland which made the majority of settlers to think that there were rich gold fields in Matabeleland.
- (ii) They believed that in an independent and powerful State, the settlers could not get cheap labour for mines and farms.

Rhodes and his friends organized a private army. There were volunteers who were promised 2 400 hectares of land and 20 gold claims each if the Ndebele were defeated.

Lender Starr Jameson organized a frontier incident. He deliberately decided to castigate a Ndebele reprisal on Shona community as excuse for an invasion of the state. Rhodes and Jameson manufactured and reported to Britain that Lobengula was planning to invade the Shona.

Lobengula did not want war. Nevertheless he was beginning to realize the planned invasion and hence mobilized his army. By September 1893 Jameson had organized an army of over 1000 forces assisted by black mercenaries from South Africa. He sent a final report that the Ndebele had attacked his soldiers. Though false, it achieved what was hoped, for Britain agreed to the invasion and was prepared to supply forces from Bechuanaland (Botswana).

The Inevitability of the Destruction of the Ndebele State:

- (1) The exploitation of the mineral deposits sandwiched between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers by South African imperialists.
- (2) Climatic conditions conducive to settler capitalism and their aspect further enhanced by the comparatively fertile soils for agriculture.
- (3) The place on which the Ndebele State was found was directly on the path of European expansion from the South into the interior of Central Africa.
- (4) The militancy of the Ndebele Society made it also inevitable for them to resist physically against expansion by Europeans.

Rhodes was prepared to use force if the Ndebele refused his entry into their territory as evidenced by the agreement between Rhodes and Jameson. This agreement enshrined the provision of sudden onslaught on the part of the Ndebele by a force of 400 whites and another from Khama. This force was designed to break up the Ndebele power once and for all.

The BSA Company:

The secretary of the company is believed to have stated that, "If Lobengula attacks us, the original plan will be carried out later. He must expect no mercy and none will be given him. If he attacks us, he is doomed, ---- the desired result is the disappearance forever of the Matabele as a power.

The Initial Reaction of Lobengula:

Available historical evidence suggests that Lobengula did everything within his capacity to avoid any clash with any of these competing imperialists especially, the threat posed by the British.

It was however the discovery of Gold in 1886 in Transvaal which considerably increased European prospectors within the confines of the Ndebele territory. In this rather unprecedented change of events, Lobengula found himself in rather demanding situation. His position was made worse because of the Amabutho were not willing to strike a compromise with the whites but to drive them away by force.

However Lobengula was consciously aware of the military superiority of the Whites. He correctly believed that any military confrontation will ultimately lead to the defeat of the Ndebele. In reaction to this predicament, he pursued a policy which advocated for the granting of sufficient concessions to the Whites.

This was designed to accommodate their imperialistic desires and simultaneously to preserve the integrity of his state. However the granting of the concessions was not to be done at the expense of him having tight grip over his state since this might have led to internal instability. However, such a policy led to his undoing.

Rhodes used deceitful and treacherous means to gain official support to expand into the interior. He suggested to the High Commissioners that the English – speaking community on which British imperialism was centered was not prepared to save interests of British colonial expansion.

Lobengula:

His diplomacy was characterized by his delays in coming to terms with imperialists. Furthermore, the nature of diplomacy was accentuated by free offers. This was meant basically for buying more time.

He was fully aware of the impact of the Maxim gun, the breech – loading rifles. The British power was supported by the South African railway and the telegraph systems. Such diplomatic manoeuvre was designed to at least delay the inevitable destruction of the Ndebele by playing one European power against the other.

The Ndebele believed they had nothing to benefit by involvement with Europeans. Their aim was to live in self – imposed isolation. The prevailing state of affairs was overwhelming against such an attitude. The leader of

settler capitalism epitomized by Rhodes, thus Rhodes not only outplayed him but outwitted him.

Can Lobengula Be Blamed for the downfall of the Empire?

Mineral rights given to A. Baines of the Limpopo consolidated Gold Mines resulted in activities there, though not substantially successful opened the area to other prospectors.

The 1887 Groot River Treaty was initially a friendship treaty which turned into a military alliance. This treaty stimulated quick reaction as already shown earlier. Transvaal pursued its interest against the British for example in Khama's Bechuanaland.

Lobengula was therefore used as an instrument of repulsion for the Boers. Lobengula signed the treaty when he was told of circumstances surrounding him that is the British in Bechuanaland, therefore considering the prevailing situation; Lobengula can not be blamed for he was acting under fear and interest of his people.

NB: Acting under fear of circumstances explained to him, Lobengula readily accepted this concession genuinely with the interest of his people and state at heart. But he was conscious of the truthfulness of circumstances. He never suspected the impact the concession would make on other European rivals.

The 1888 Moffat Treaty was a written agreement which meant that Lobengula accepted the position of vassalage to Britain. In this case Lobengula should be blamed for the downfall of the empire because he ceded his power to the British voluntarily.

However, there is doubt over the existence of the treaty because, if Moffat had clearly explained the document, he could not have signed the treaty and also there were no advantages for the Ndebele who were proud of their empire. Moffat who made a single convert and who communicated with others could have only explained the treaty of the Boers not the terms of the treaty.

However on the other hand, Lobengula could have signed the treaty because he and Moffat had been friends. If the treaty existed, it was never explained to Lobengula as it appeared written, so whatever the King was not to be

blamed, but if he is to be blamed he can only be blamed for befriending a white man.

The Rudd Concession was the most controversial as it constituted the death warranty of Lobengula. It is believed that what was agreed upon verbally did not appear on the written agreement and Lobengula focused on the verbal one. The evidence in support of this is the protest form Lobengula later. His protest although unsuccessful shows that the King had discovered the difference between the two agreements. So if this is the case he cannot be blamed for his downfall.

The 1890 PIONEER COLUMN:

Lobengula did try to protest when the Europeans assembled at Macloutisie River in large impis, he asked them a question – “Have you lost something ...” and the reply was – “coming to look for gold.” In Fort Victoria the same protest met the same response. In short it can be said that he allowed these people to come under protest.

He accepted the threat looking at it objectively. Lobengula was responsible for his downfall for his impis tried to protest but he refused. In 1890 had Lobengula been bold enough, he would have managed to drive out the pioneers as Europeans were afraid to directly confront Lobengula and that their treachery had been discovered. Lobengula however, was concerned with welfare of his people and his reaction is explained by his fear that is, the superiority of the guns of the Whites.

Did Lobengula want or was he drawn into the 1893 war:

When Charles Rudd left Lobengula, Thompson and Maguire remained behind to ensure that Lobengula did not change his mind. Since rival concession seekers were trying to persuade him to withdraw the Rudd Concession through their influence, Lobengula came to doubt whether the great White Queen ever existed.

The conflicting concession seekers were attempting to convince Lobengula that she did not exist. As a result of E.M. Maund Lobengula sent two (2) envoys. Mutshethe and another accompanied by Maund to England. They were treated well and the Queen wrote back to Lobengula advising him that

the King does not give a stranger his whole herd of cattle but an ox. She advised Lobengula not to grant land concessions to settlers.

The latter terrified Lobengula and in the correspondence between him and the Queen he tried to deny the ties existing in the Rudd concession as well as having understood its context. Consequently, after a rather bitter meeting with this council, Lobengula executed one of his chief Infuan Logtshe for having been influenced in persuading him to deal with the British Reverend Helm who also had been influential was forced to evacuate Matebeleland. (This was before the Pioneer Column.)

The 1893 War:

Despite deterioration relations, armed with the Royal Charter, Rhodes started to assemble his men in 1890 to carry out effective occupation 1890 January. They assembled at Macloutsie and set off by June Fort Tuli was constructed to protect the rear in the event of an attack by the Ndebele. This clearly symbolized that Rhodes understood that war with the Ndebele was inevitable.

Meanwhile in Matebeleland, reports circulated that a war like preparation was being made. Large number of shields and sandals were made. In the regimented barracks, the Young Amajaha became very unsettled when they heard that the Pioneers were in the country. Lobengula found it difficulty in controlling them. 3 days from Macloutsie a letter was received from Lobengula asking why the whitemen had sent an impi in the country to that Jameson replied that they were merely going to Mashonaland as agreed in the Rudd Concession. They proceeded towards Fort Victoria. When they arrived at Lundi (Runde River) a second note was received from Lobengula to Jameson protesting against the Colum"s advance.

Colonel Penefeather replied that he was carrying out orders and there was no going back. There was really a threat of attack, there as the Pioneers advanced the Amajaha consequently threatened to attack. It is said that Lobengula did not want the war because he knew very well of the power of the machine guns, but the Young Amajaha were overzealous to defeat whites against the wishes of Lobengula and his council of seniors. That being the case, the Amajaha forced Lobengula into the war. If he kept on resisting them they were going to rebel against him.

