The Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa

Michael R. Mahoney

THE OTHER ZULUS

THE SPREAD OF ZULU ETHNICITY IN COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICA
The Other Zulus
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To Molly
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MAGISTERIAL DIVISIONS IN NATAL COLONY
In 1879, the British colony of Natal went to war against the neighboring Zulu kingdom. Large numbers of Natal Africans fought on the British side in this war, enabling the British victory over and ultimately the annexation of the Zulu kingdom. One of my objectives is to explain why Natal Africans would do this. My other primary objective is to explain why, twenty-seven years later, many of those same Natal Africans, or their children or grandchildren, rebelled against the British in the name of the Zulu king. The reason, I maintain, is that in the intervening period Natal Africans became Zulus, whereas they had not been before. Ethnic groups, so important in the past and present of Africa and indeed the entire world, are not unchanging givens. Rather, they are phenomena with histories that help us to understand them and their effects, such as ethnic conflict and traditionalist politics, extremely important issues in a continent still living under the shadow of the Rwandan genocide and similar, albeit far more restrained, episodes in other countries. And, it must be added, these issues are by no means limited to Africa, but are truly global.

But this is only the first of three main arguments that I wish to make. The second argument is that it was not elites, whether whites or Africans, who played the leading role in the process of what might be called “Zulu-ization,” but rather ordinary Africans, the bulk of Natal’s population. The insight that “traditions” could be “invented” and that “tribes” could be “created” is not a new one, least of all in Africa. Ethnicity is an abstraction that gets its reality and its significance when people assert ethnic self-identification or are assigned ethnic identity by others. People have to do the work of naming an ethnic group, defining its characteristics (history, culture, language, ances-

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try), and identifying who is a member and who is not. Somebody also has to persuade others that ethnicity is important and has to try to mobilize ethnic constituencies in the promotion of certain political ends. In Africa and elsewhere, much scholarly attention has focused on the influence that the most powerful people have had in these processes. Government officials have promoted ethnic identification through censuses, identification cards, education, and the like, sometimes to promote ethnic homogeneity (as in nineteenth-century France) and sometimes quite explicitly to divide and rule subject populations (as in white-rulled Africa).

In Africa, white missionaries have also been important in this process, especially by defining different ethnic groups that must be served by different languages in school and in the liturgy. But social construction has not just been the business of white elites. The emerging African Christian middle class has used ethnicity to legitimize its position and mobilize support from traditionalists. At the same time, the African traditional elite of chiefs and headmen used ethnicity to shore up their power as it was being undermined by colonialism, capitalism, and other forces of modernity.

Within South Africa, no African ethnic group has been as large or as assertive of its own ethnic self-identification as the Zulus. This fact acquired particular significance when, in 2009, Jacob Zuma became the first Zulu president of South Africa. Zuma has used his Zulu ethnicity and his traditionalism to develop a particularly enthusiastic following among other Zulus, but his support extends far beyond that ethnic group. Much more divisive has been the conflict between Zuma’s African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha movement that emerged in the 1970s under the leadership of Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, since 1968 chief minister to the Zulu king Goodwill Zwedelini. Inkatha attracted a much more conservative and traditionalist constituency than did the ANC, and Buthelezi was willing to work within the apartheid system to bring about change, as opposed to the ANC, which preferred peaceful mass protest and armed struggle. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, supporters of the ANC and Inkatha fought a low-level civil war, mostly in Natal province, but also to some extent in the Johannesburg area. In Natal in particular, this was not a conflict between ethnic groups (there were large numbers of Zulus in the ANC), but rather within the Zulu ethnic group. Many different groups of people used their ANC or Inkatha ties to attract and mobilize followers in local struggles that often had very little to do with national politics. The white South African
government was also accused of covertly supporting Inkatha, even militarily, in order to divide the opposition. Thousands died in the low-level war between the ANC and Inkatha. When South Africa’s first free, multiracial election took place in 1994, Natal was renamed KwaZulu-Natal partly in order to placate Inkatha, which gained control of the provincial government, one of only two provincial governments that were not under the control of the ANC. Thereafter, Inkatha’s support declined, and they lost the provincial government to the ANC in the 2004 elections.

During Inkatha’s heyday, historians such as Shula Marks and Nicholas Cope demonstrated that Inkatha’s key supporters were the urban, Christian middle class and the rural, traditional elite, as well as some influential whites in both government and business. More important, these historians also showed that this alliance could be traced back to the 1920s, and that it had historically served the interests of the wealthier classes of Natal, both black and white. Members of the black and white elite had founded various organizations, some of which were also called “inkatha,” a reference to the large grass coil kept by the Zulu king as a symbol of the unity of the nation. These organizations tended to preach obedience to authority: subjects to chiefs, women to men, youths to elders, workers to bosses, tenants to landlords, and even blacks to whites. They discouraged their members from joining unions or political parties that promoted equality and mass protest. Zulu ethnicity and the Zulu king were the linchpins of the ideology of the movements led by the conservative elite. Whether in the 1980s–90s or the 1920s–30s, Zulu nationalist organizations like Inkatha and its predecessors used not only pride in Zulu ethnicity, but also the privileges of gender and generation to attract not only the elite, but also men and women of modest means who derived what little power they had from their positions as heads of households.

Already in the 1990s, however, some scholars began to express dissatisfaction with the limitations of explanatory frameworks that emphasized both the elite dominance and the supposedly uncontested politics of Zulu nationalism and, by extension, ethnic and nationalist movements in other cases as well. For example, the sociologist Ari Sitas called on scholars “to depart from naïve beliefs about the ‘captive’ nature of the audience” toward which Inkatha has directed its message, and to break the “unproblematic link between ‘Zulu-ness’ and Inkatha,” a break made not only by scholars, but also by Zulus who felt betrayed by Inkatha. The historian Paul La
Hausse argued, “Particular ethnicities in South Africa, whilst they have been structured by the state, have also been actively shaped by the experience and vocabulary of ordinary people. . . . [N]either the historical strength of Zulu ethnic nationalist sentiment nor, paradoxically, the innovative, contested and contradictory nature of politicised Zulu ethnicity have been adequately recognised or explored by historians.” La Hausse has demonstrated how, in the early twentieth century, the groundwork for the more elite and conservative Zulu nationalism of the 1920s and beyond was laid by Christian intellectuals of lower-middle-class origins. They often had very different views than did either the traditional or modern Zulu elites on various issues of the day, such as the proper relationship between rich and poor, chief and subject, Christian and traditionalist, and black and white. The lectures, sermons, and writings of these lower-middle-class Zulu nationalists also spawned further debate about these issues among Zulus in the press, the churches, and all manner of public and private spaces. And where historians like Marks and Cope demonstrated how white and Zulu elites used Zulu nationalism to contain the threat posed by the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the 1920s and 1930s, La Hausse and Helen Bradford showed how the ICU’s members themselves used Zulu nationalism to challenge those same elites.

This broader, more internally contentious picture of Zulu ethnic politics could emerge as scholars produced more fine-grained and localized histories, and extended the history of Zulu ethnicity back further in time. Histories situated at the level of an entire province or nation have tended to exaggerate the power of the elites who dominate such large-scale units and the documents they produce. Local histories, on the other hand, can highlight the difference between rhetoric and practice, as well as the complex micropolitics that unfold at the community level. Meanwhile, histories with greater time-depth can show how contingent and changeable any given social order can be.

The history that I am presenting tries to negotiate a path between geographical localization and chronological specificity on the one hand and a geographically and chronologically broad synthesis on the other. Thus I extend the narrative of Zulu history back before the twentieth century to the nineteenth, and I look at the history not of the Zulu people as a whole, but rather of particular segments. Others have written extensively on the Zulu royal family and the Zulu kingdom during the nineteenth century, and in the
process demonstrated precisely how much contention there was within it. Members of the royal family vied with one another for the Zulu crown and often challenged the authority of the person who won it. Conquered chiefs and royal officials were likewise prone to acting independently. Low-level civil wars broke out on numerous occasions, and the kingdom fragmented into little bits quite quickly after both the Boer invasion of 1837 and the British invasion of 1879, fragmentation that these invading Europeans did their best to promote. Clearly it would be very difficult to speak of a strong sense of Zulu ethnicity in the Zulu kingdom of the nineteenth century.

But my focus is not on the Zulu royal family or the Zulu kingdom proper, but rather on Natal, which was politically distinct from the Zulu kingdom across the Thukela River from the late 1830s—when the Boers conquered Natal, which was at that time part of the Zulu kingdom—until 1897—when the British, who had taken Natal from the Boers in the 1840s, completed the process of annexation of Zululand that had begun with the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. During this period, Natal was a British-ruled colony, while Zululand continued to be an independent African kingdom. Even before the Boer invasion, Zulu rule had been weaker in Natal, and the British found in Natal large numbers of Africans willing to fight against the Zulu kingdom in 1879. Zulu ethnicity was far weaker in Natal than it was in Zululand, which contained the heartland of the Zulu people and the graves of its kings. Thus, the spread of Zulu ethnicity in colonial Natal was more dramatic. My effort to tell this history is indebted to the work of other historians of KwaZulu-Natal, who I will cite throughout. I weave together their various arguments, as well as my own extensive primary source research, into a coherent whole that aims to tell the history of Zulu ethnicity during the colonial period, a history that has not been examined this thoroughly before.

One thing that quickly becomes apparent from such a study is that the Zulu ethnic identity of virtually the entire African population of Natal was itself not a given; it had to be established. The historians John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton have done the most to show that the creation of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka (d. 1828) in the early 1800s did not lead to the assimilation of the peoples of the various conquered chiefdoms into one Zulu ethnicity. Indeed, the kingdom’s elite made a point of identifying some of these people as *not* Zulu, and even many of those that they tried to assimilate fully resisted, sometimes violently.

The chiefdom that will serve as a case study throughout this book, the
Qwabe, was one of the latter. Indeed, a close examination of this particular chiefdom’s history reveals an extremely close but also extremely antagonistic relationship with the Zulu, from its origin stories well into the nineteenth century. This makes it doubly surprising that the Qwabe chiefdom saw more of its members participate in the 1906 rebellion than did any other chiefdom. One might conclude that the Qwabe became Zulu during the colonial period as a result of the colonial “creation of tribalism” that occurred throughout Africa. But as late as the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, forty years after the white conquest of Natal (at that point part of the Zulu kingdom), the Qwabe were still so antagonistic toward the Zulu as to fight alongside the British against them. And while the colonial government of Natal did engage in the “creation of tribalism,” for officials there this meant bolstering local chiefdom identification and doing whatever they could to prevent the emergence of a broader identity such as Zulu ethnicity represented. The colonizers succeeded in this for most of the nineteenth century, but the 1906 rebellion clearly demonstrated that most Natal Africans—including those who did not rebel—considered themselves to be Zulus.11

My own work in this book could be seen as an attempt to fill the gap between the story of precolonial Zulu ethnicity told by Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright and the story of twentieth-century Zulu ethnicity told by Shula Marks, Nicholas Cope, Paul La Hausse, Helen Bradford, Gerhard Maré, and others. I would like to find out how Zulu ethnicity went from a category that excluded many Natal Africans and was resisted by many others, to a category that united a very diverse assortment of people: Zululanders and Natalians, traditionalists and Christians, men and women, elders and youths, chiefs and subjects, rich and poor, members of different chiefdoms. How does an examination of Zulu ethnicity affect our understanding of the social transformations that took place during this period, the era of British colonial rule in Natal (1840s–1910)?

ZULU ETHNICITY, CONFLICT, AND COHESION WITHIN ZULU SOCIETY

This takes us back to the arguments that I started to enumerate at the beginning of this introduction: that Natal Africans’ ethnic self-identification changed, and that this change resulted from the initiative of the lower classes and not the elites of Natal African society. Following from these two points is
my third, and most important, argument, which tries to answer the question “Why did this happen?” I maintain that young men in particular cultivated this new, broader conception of Zulu ethnicity in order to foster social cohesion in a Natal African society that was characterized by intense internal conflict, especially in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This internal conflict was of two sorts: between chiefdoms and within chiefdoms. Between chiefdoms, violent feuding over land and other issues was particularly frequent during this period. Within chiefdoms, on the other hand, conflict between chiefs and subjects, and between elders and youths, was peaking in intensity. Certain long-standing hegemonic ideas, such as patriarchy and chiefship, that had provided a degree of social cohesion were under severe stress, while the relatively new Zulu ethnicity was emerging to provide even broader-based unity. How to account for the coexistence of conflict and consensus that seems to have characterized all societies at every point in each of their histories is one of the most important questions in African studies, and indeed in the study of human society in general.

Shula Marks, John Lambert, Benedict Carton, and Jeff Guy have all examined the conflicts in colonial Natal between classes, generations, and chiefdoms, and the reasons for them. My own work owes a great deal to their efforts, which I hope to build on by considering the relationship between these conflicts and the spread of Zulu ethnicity. I am indebted to these historians for having done so much to draw attention to these conflicts and to show how they shaped African responses to white racial domination as well as interethnic relations among Africans themselves. However, these historians have emphasized conflict so much that it is sometimes difficult to understand how Africans could ever have acted in concert, as they did in the 1906 rebellion. Carton, for example, focuses on generational conflict, which was certainly a major issue in Natal during this period. But generational conflict does not help to explain the two most violent manifestations of conflict within colonial Natal: the 1906 rebellion, and the endemic feuding between African chiefdoms that has plagued Natal from the 1800s to the present day. The rebellion, after all, saw young African men organize themselves under the leadership of their chiefs and elders. And the feuding pitted young African men from different chiefdoms against each other, in the name of their respective chiefs. Intergenerational conflict cannot be considered without also examining the investment in both chiefship and patriarchy that young men shared with their elders. Young men did
indeed change the balance of power between themselves and their elders somewhat, but not entirely: chiefs and elders still ruled the roost. The difference was that youths now had more say in how society functioned. This is not surprising considering the fact that, though generations separated young men and elders, they all benefited from male privilege, and young men could look forward to becoming elders themselves.

Greater power and influence for youths was just one change in late-colonial Natal African society. Growing interchiefdom unity and the closely related spread of Zulu ethnicity to the area were others. It is precisely these transformations that Marks fails to take into account in some of her overarching arguments about the 1906 rebellion. Marks asserts that the various conflicts among Africans helped to determine who would rebel, who would fight on the side of the colonial state, and who would sit on the sidelines: “At the level of final commitment to armed rebellion, it was the minutiae of local-level politics which seemed to tip the balance.” No wonder that she attributes so much of the failure of the rebellion to what she calls “the continuing validity of the earlier moral universe of the peasantry.” But, ironically, my own close examination of “the minutiae of local-level politics” shows how irrelevant they were in 1906, how bitter enemies could become allies overnight, although perhaps not permanently. I will also show that, despite the appearance of continuity in the institutions of chiefship and patriarchy, “the earlier moral universe of the peasantry” had in fact changed substantially. The new Zulu ethnicity was a tool that did not eliminate conflict, but rather channeled it so as not to undermine unity.

The coexistence of conflict and cohesion, resistance and collaboration, in virtually all social and political orders is a paradox that has perennially puzzled social scientists. This paradox is particularly apparent in Zulu history. The Zulus’ bitter anticolonial resistance in 1838, 1879, and 1906 made them a symbol of black pride and resistance worldwide, but that history stands alongside a history of unusually close collaboration with whites and the Zulus’ long-standing role as the black soldiers, policemen, and security guards of white society. The Zulus’ strong sense of ethnic identity contrasts with the high levels of interchiefdom feuding among them. The history of Zulu youths and women contains episodes of both gross insubordination against and the most enthusiastic compliance with the demands of elder Zulu men.

It is therefore no coincidence that the first researcher specializing in
Africa to examine in depth the ambiguities and ideological bases of the relationship between rulers and ruled in Africa was also the foremost specialist in Zulu anthropology from the 1930s to the 1970s, Max Gluckman. Gluckman distinguished between social conflict that produced revolutionary social change and that which produced mere rebellion and superficial change. Social conflict was a constant and a given, but only on rare occasions did it lead to true revolution. Gluckman highlighted two instances of such revolutionary change in Zulu history: the rise of King Shaka in the 1810s and 1820s, and the European conquest of the Zulu kingdom during the decades that followed. At other times, social conflict led to rebellions against constituted authority that merely exchanged one king or chief for another without calling into question the very institution of kingship or chiefship. Indeed, kingship or chiefship disputes have been extremely common in KwaZulu-Natal from earliest times down to the present day.

However, I intend to demonstrate that social conflict led to real change more often than Gluckman allowed, that superficial continuities masked—and in fact facilitated—major shifts in the balance of power in Zulu society. Specifically, youths became stronger at the expense of their chiefs and elders. But this was no Manichean struggle between sharply delineated and clearly opposed sides. Rather, youths succeeded precisely because they worked within existing structures of chiefship and patriarchy. This change was connected with the other main change in African society during the colonial era in Natal: the spread of Zulu ethnicity. In one sense Zulu ethnicity was well established; certainly, it had been around for at least decades before it spread throughout Natal in the 1890s and 1900s. But the ideas associated with it during this latter period—greater power for youths, rebellion against colonial authority—were new.

The Zulu ethnicity that is the subject of this book was new in several senses. First, it was new to the Natal Africans who started adopting it in the late 1800s but had not considered themselves Zulus up to that point. Second, it was new in the sense that its promoters were not the Zulu kings and their states, but rather young men. Third, it was new in that these young men used it to challenge, but not overturn, patriarchal authority and to try to end colonial rule. The content of this new Zulu identity was explicit self-identification by Natal Africans as Zulus, and the use of various symbols to indicate this Zulu self-identification: professions of allegiance to the Zulu king, and the use of his war badges, war cries, and war medicine. The
content also consisted of the many stories that Natal Africans told to each other and to Natal Europeans from the 1890s onward that expressed all these ideas. The people who used the symbols and spread these stories were mainly young men, and their message was that Dinuzulu, and neither their chiefs nor the British monarch, was their king. The youths gained power by being the conduits for Dinuzulu’s orders, which had precedence over the orders of the youths’ own parents and chiefs and reflected the youths’ desire for things that they wanted more than their elders did, most notably anti-colonial rebellion. But the youths’ own versions of Dinuzulu’s orders also kept chiefs and elders in leadership positions over youths, and the youths sought out and accepted that leadership, as long as it involved a more confrontational stance toward the colonial state.

The very ambiguity of the new Zulu ethnicity—serving youths’ interests while reassuring elders of their continued authority—was what made it so popular in the 1890s and 1900s, and today. In this sense, Zulu ethnicity is not unlike similar ideas that from all over the world and throughout history have bound communities together and legitimated authority while at the same time providing space for dissent, debate, and change. Some scholars call such ideas “moral economies,” because they distribute goods on the basis of shared notions of rights and obligations, rather than on the basis of supply, demand, and price. Moral economies usually permit, and even legitimate, some inequality among members of the community, but they also create obligations for the powerful to help the less powerful, and mechanisms for the less powerful to call the more powerful to task for failing to fulfill those obligations. Moral economies create what the Italian sociologist Antonio Gramsci called “hegemony”: legitimacy for the ruling classes, common acceptance of ideas that support that legitimacy, but also some space for dissent. Hegemony grants power and constrains power at the same time. Indeed, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, power that accepts constraints is actually increased because those constraints minimize people’s resistance to the exercise of that power.17

Ethnicity can serve as the basis on which membership in a moral economy is defined, and within which its nature is debated. John Lonsdale, a historian of Kenya, has developed the notion of moral ethnicity by way of analogy with moral economy. Lonsdale shows how ethnicity does not necessarily have inherent political implications. Rather, it can serve as an arena of contention. Ethnicity does not preclude debate; it facilitates it. Different
assertions of ethnicity are often associated with different visions of the way things should be within that ethnic group. These different visions are in debate with one another, explicitly or implicitly. Ethnicity determines who may participate in the debate, who is affected by it, and by what rules that debate is to proceed. Different sides in the debate may also use ethnicity to legitimate their arguments. Historians, such as Paul La Hausse, who deal with the contested nature of Zulu ethnicity show how such ideas are relevant to the Zulu case. My own research demonstrates that Zulu ethnicity was an arena for late-colonial debates over generational power, chiefly authority, interchiefdom conflict, and the proper response to colonialism.

Zulu ethnicity emerged as the basis for a moral economy in late colonial Natal that existed alongside two other moral economies. One was based on African ideas of chiefship and patriarchy. The other was a colonial moral economy, based in part on European notions of government, but also in part on the African moral economy. The fortunes of these alternative moral economies determined the attractiveness of Zulu ethnicity to Natal Africans. As long as the colonial moral economy and the African moral economy were robust, most Natal Africans would continue to reject Zulu ethnicity. But when those other moral economies came into crisis between the 1880s and the 1900s, Zulu ethnicity became more popular.

By speaking of a colonial moral economy, I do not mean to suggest that colonialism was legitimate and accepted in Natal Africans’ eyes. Rather, I argue that colonizers tried to legitimate their rule and not rely on force alone, and the colonizers’ quest for legitimacy enabled the colonized to have some say in the shape of colonial society and government, and to insist that the colonizers fulfill certain obligations to them. This was how the colonizers created a sort of hegemony, in the Gramscian sense. Some historians have argued that while the colonizers may have tried to create hegemony, they failed. Such arguments depend on very narrow definitions of hegemony in two respects: first, they see hegemony only as operating through the sorts of European idioms and institutions that Gramsci discussed; second, they see hegemony as little different from legitimacy. For example, Shula Marks and Dagmar Engels make the absolutely valid point that European ideas and institutions were weakly implemented or ignored in colonial Africa and Asia. However, from this they conclude that the colonizers were thus incapable of achieving hegemony outside of the small minority of colonized subjects who assimilated most to European culture and even converted to
Christianity. Marks and Engels prefer to talk of the colonizers’ hegemonic projects, which usually failed, leaving the colonizers to rely much more on coercion and working through political structures inherited from the pre-colonial era. But it was precisely in these indigenous political structures that the colonizers managed to achieve hegemony. Similarly, the Indian historian Ranajit Guha characterizes British colonial rule in India as “dominance without hegemony.” But the failed hegemonic projects that Guha discusses have to do with the creation of a “civilized” class of indigenous collaborators who asserted some authority through British-style parliaments, courts, and bureaucracies. He does not examine the “princely states” of colonial India, where indigenous modes of governance were yoked to the British colonial state.

The colonial state pursued two different types of hegemonic projects. One, the civilizing mission, was premised on the assimilation of the colonized through European ideas and institutions, such as Christianity, Western medicine, Western education, capitalism, urban planning, and so on. Marks, Engels, and Guha are correct when they say that such hegemonic projects failed to impact more than a tiny, assimilated minority. But they neglect the other colonial hegemonic project, namely indirect rule, or rule through indigenous modes of governance. To a very large extent, the European colonial moral economy in Natal depended on the African moral economy. Chiefship and patriarchy were yoked to the colonial project through the colonial recognition of chiefs, customary law, and communal land tenure in African reserves. Natal Africans were more cooperative with colonial officials when the latter comported themselves like African chiefs and used African political idioms. Following Karen Fields, a historian of Zambia, I will show that the colonial state was essentially a parasite, living off the legitimacy produced by the precolonial political structures it had conquered but not eliminated.

The civilizing mission has received far more attention than it deserves, and indirect rule far less. European cities, transportation networks, trading systems, medical clinics, schools, and churches only ever covered a small portion of colonial society in Africa and Asia. The number of European colonial officials, missionaries, traders, and settlers was extremely small, especially in rural areas. In both respects, the European presence in colonial Africa and Asia was weak, especially compared with European culture’s far greater impact in the colonial Americas, north and south. Some scholars of
colonialism have gotten around this by suggesting that the power of symbolic representation, especially in the worlds of written documents and the visual arts, greatly enhanced the impact of the civilizing mission. All too often, scholars have failed to demonstrate how, or even whether, the representations that they discuss (and attribute so much power to) reached the bulk of colonial society. For most of the colonized, the ideological, symbolic, and cultural struggles that mattered most to them took place in their own idioms and indigenous social structures.≤≥

The tradition of fine-grained, localized social history in Natal that I have discussed, and of which I consider my own work a part, is thus a necessary counterweight to histories of colonialism that have focused on the power of colonizers to represent, categorize, and legislate for Africans. This is true even of works that have focused more on indirect rule than on the civilizing mission. Take, for example, two books that have garnered a fair amount of attention in the field of colonial studies: Carolyn Hamilton’s Terrific Majesty and Mahmood Mamdani’s Citizen and Subject. Hamilton’s book examines how the Zulu king Shaka in particular and the Zulu in general were represented by British colonizers in explorers’ and traders’ accounts, literature, amateur ethnography, and, most crucially, government documents and actions. She makes the compelling argument that this power to represent was constrained by the reality of Zulu life: the power of these representations of Zulu tradition risked losing their effectiveness if their “creation” or “invention” was too obvious. Mamdani, on the other hand, sees the colonial state as having been far more powerful. Through indirect rule, the identification and delineation of “tribes,” the recognition of chiefs and other “native authorities,” and the incorporation of customary law into colonial law, the colonial government created the ethnic divisiveness and the undemocratic local government structures that plague Africa to this day. Crucially, Mamdani identifies colonial Natal as the birthplace of this system, which was then reproduced throughout South Africa, British-ruled Africa, and in some ways even in the African colonies of other European powers.≤∂ As much as both books have contributed to our understanding of this history, they are both “big picture” books that have much to say about the grand actions of the colonizers, but much less, indeed far too little, to say about the day-to-day interactions between colonial officials, chiefs, and their subjects. This latter history is important because it was how colonialism was experienced by the colonized, but also because it allows us to test how effective the
colonizers were in translating their elaborate schemes and guiding principles into effective action. The power of colonial texts, policies, and laws must not be assumed; it must be proven. Indeed, there was often a large gap between colonial policy and colonial practice.

A close examination of the government of colonial Natal, and in particular its interactions with chiefdoms like the Qwabe, reveals just how dependent the colonial state was on African chiefship and patriarchy. The colonial moral economy was liable to fall apart directly because of the colonizers’ own excesses, and indirectly because of how those excesses undermined the authority of chiefs and homestead heads over young men in particular. The colonial state’s claims to be merely an extension of precolonial African government, and its efforts to bolster the flagging authority of chiefs and homestead heads, shaped Africans’ responses to colonialism. When a “Great White Chief” of colonialism or a local African chief crossed a line, young Natal African men found another chief to replace him: the Zulu king. If the Great White Chief had to be ousted, and the African chiefs were too oppressive, compromised, or divided (owing to feuds) to lead the effort to do so, the Zulu king was the perfect alternative. It helped that the Zulu king was weak and his image in Natal Africans’ minds had little to do with his real nature: Natal Africans were free to conjure up the sort of Zulu king they desired. The spread of Zulu ethnicity in Natal was thus intimately connected with colonialism, generational conflict, and the travails of chiefs.

**Sources of the Zulu Past and the Debates About Them**

Before we examine this history more closely, we first have to consider the available evidence. Written sources from the precolonial era were composed entirely by Europeans. At worst these sources suffer from the racist biases of their authors; at best they suffer from their authors’ status as newly arrived foreigners thoroughly unfamiliar with the intricacies of African culture. Since the 1960s, African historians working in other parts of the continent have tried to address the lack of sources written by Africans by collecting vast numbers of African oral traditions. Armed with two years of formal Zulu instruction at the university level and aided by native Zulu-speaking translators and interpreters, I have taken some steps in this direction myself. However, oral traditions collected in the present about events that occurred almost two hundred years ago raise more questions than they answer. Most
obviously, the passage of time inevitably leads to distortions and a lack of detail relative to older accounts. Moreover, the sources for many of these oral traditions now include schoolbooks, radio programs, and even made-for-television movies. As a result, I have found, these oral traditions reveal far more about the present than they do about the past. I have therefore decided to focus on them in another book, where I can deal with these issues at greater length. I do, however, refer to them occasionally in the argument that follows.

By any measure, the best available source for the history of precolonial KwaZulu-Natal is the James Stuart Archive, a compendium of oral traditions collected from Africans by the British colonial official James Stuart between the 1890s and the 1920s. It is far larger and more detailed than any other source, and the informants were indigenous Africans who were alive during the precolonial era, or whose parents or grandparents had been. Nevertheless, it has been criticized, most notably by the historian Julian Cobbing, for two reasons in particular: the first being, as Cobbing maintains, that James Stuart was a racist; the second being, as Cobbing argues, that Stuart may have forged much or all of the archive, or at least may have been biased in the questions he chose to ask and the evidence he chose to include, in order to legitimate white racial domination in the region.

Another historian, Carolyn Hamilton, has thoroughly refuted Cobbing’s criticisms of the James Stuart Archive. First, while Stuart did believe in white racial domination, he was also favorably impressed by Zulu culture and critical of many aspects of white rule in Natal. He was born and raised on a white-owned farm with numerous African tenants and laborers, and was a fluent Zulu speaker. He vigorously opposed calls from other Natal Europeans for the abolition of African chiefship, customary law, and communal land tenure. Second, Stuart never published, nor intended to publish, his archive, so he would have had no reason to forge it. Indeed, Stuart was meticulous and scrupulous in his oral research. Every interview was written out word for word, sometimes in Zulu and sometimes in English. Stuart also provided the date and location of each interview, as well as the names, ages, and biographical information for each interviewee. Stuart seems to have been particularly interested in collecting numerous versions of different oral traditions, even (perhaps especially) if those versions contradicted one another. Many of the views expressed in the archive also contradict Stuart’s own published views on various subjects.
An examination of the actual recorded testimony of Stuart’s informants does not support Cobbing’s contention that it uniformly depicts the Zulu kings—especially Shaka (ruled c. 1816–28) and Dingane (ruled c. 1828–40)—in a negative light, or that it provides an apologia for colonialism. What we have instead are debates. Take, for example, attitudes toward the Zulu kings. Many of the informants were critical of Shaka. One, Baleka, was a woman from the Qwabe chiefdom who was about sixty-three years of age when Stuart interviewed her in 1919. She called Shaka a “madman.” Dinya was about seventy-eight years old when Stuart interviewed him in 1905. Dinya belonged to the Cele chiefdom and now lived on a Christian mission station. His father had fought in Shaka’s army and died in battle. Dinya said, “We do not care for the Tshaka regime. We were all killed off there.” Lunguza, about eighty-six or eighty-seven years old when Stuart interviewed him in 1909, was a member of the Thembu chiefdom, which was conquered by Shaka, and later served in the Zulu army under Dingane. He said that under Shaka and Dingane, an oft-heard prayer was “Would that some other king might reign!” and that some people had paid with their lives when the kings heard they had said such a thing. But other informants had more positive things to say about Shaka. Mayinga, about sixty-six when Stuart interviewed him in 1905, was a member of the Gaza chiefdom conquered by Shaka. In 1856, when he was about seventeen, he fought in a short-lived succession dispute between rivals for the Zulu kingship. He said of Shaka and Dingane, “The old regime was good, even though they killed off frequently.” Ndukwana, who Stuart interviewed more extensively than any other person, was a fifty-seven-year-old member of the Thembu chiefdom, yet another of Shaka’s conquests, when Stuart started interviewing him in 1897. Ndukwana said, “Tshaka did not scatter the nations; he unified them. . . . People will forget their old customs and find Tshaka’s government good.”

Stuart also recorded extensive African and European criticisms of colonialism. A careful examination of the testimony of Stuart’s informants demonstrates that it could hardly be read as one extended apologia for colonialism. It is true that some excerpts could be read this way. For example, Qalizwe was one of Stuart’s servants, and his father, Dlozi, had worked for Stuart’s family. Qalizwe’s chiefdom was the Chunu. He said, “Living under British rule is more preferable than living under the Zulu regime when people were killed for the slightest offence.” At the same time, however, Stuart’s informants also suggested that the turn to the British had
more to do with the shortcomings of the Zulu kings than with the supposed blessings of British civilization. Qalizwe’s own father, Dlozi, for example, said, “At first Europeans were regarded as saviours from the oppressions of the Zulus, but now they are looked on as more tyrannical and oppressive than Tshaka’s wildest schemes.” If Natal Africans still seemed to be contented with European rule, this was because, as Dlozi put it, “to Europeans’ faces they pretend to be satisfied, whereas amongst themselves they speak discontentedly.” Similar testimony came from Sijewana, a devout Christian convert in his late seventies who had fought in the Zulu army under Dingane and his successors. Sijewana was of two minds. On the one hand, he said, “Natives appreciate English rule because of the security of life and property under it. They are not killed off indiscriminately as under Tshaka without any trial being held.” But Sijewana also complained that Africans “are not allowed a voice in the making of laws which concern their own welfare,” and that “the system of taxation and collection of taxes [under the British] is a real hardship on the people, and there is much severe suffering in consequence.” Stuart’s informant Lunguza felt the same way. At one point he said, “We are better off now that the whites have come. People are permitted to die natural deaths, a far more preferable system of government.” And yet Lunguza felt that this peace came at a cost, for people were inclined to crime as a result: “The misbehaviour of nowadays is due to its being impossible to kill off people as formerly. For people are confident that nothing, or very little, can happen, for there is a great chief [the colonial government] who will stand up for them even though they have done wrong.” Even one of Stuart’s European informants, the judge and former Natal secretary for native affairs John Shepstone, argued that Natal Europeans had generally misinterpreted African quiescence: “If Natives were wanting protection or anything, they appreciated our protection. They wanted protection whilst the Zulu menace lasted. They never asked for or desired our rule.”

Ambivalence toward Shaka is not limited to Stuart’s informants, but rather is characteristic of both African oral traditions and contemporary popular opinion. My own interviews among Zulu speakers in the late 1990s confirmed that memories of the depredations of the Zulu kings in the early 1800s were alive and well. In 1925, the South African writer Thomas Mofolo wrote a novel about Shaka based on southern Sotho oral traditions, and the picture he paints is also somewhat negative. Two decades earlier, Magema
Fuze, a middle-class Christian with close ties to missionaries who had been publicly critical of British colonial policies toward Africans, wrote the first Zulu-language book. In it, he both praised and criticized Shaka and Dingane, and also had some bad things to say about Europeans’ actions in the region. What is important from my standpoint is not whether Shaka and his successors were indeed bad, but simply that many Africans, including Zulus, voiced severe criticisms of the Zulu kings and acted in ways that demonstrated opposition to the Zulu kings.

When it comes to the colonial period, the focus of this book, the bulk of the sources that I use come from the official colonial archive. These sources suffer from many of the same problems as do the sources for precolonial history: they were overwhelmingly written by European colonialists and thus reflect their biases or even misunderstandings and ignorance of African culture. What little there is in the way of African testimony is also potentially distorted by the severe imbalance in colonial power relations. Africans said what they thought the European colonial officials wanted to hear, and had reason to fear the consequences if they were to say the wrong thing, regardless of whether it was true or not.

In practice, however, it is not difficult to correct for the biases of colonial sources. Numerous historians, studying southern Africa and other regions, have come to the conclusion that elite sources can nevertheless yield accurate histories of the masses who could not write for themselves. In her history of African work culture in colonial Natal, Keletso Atkins reads colonialist sources against the grain, giving more sympathetic interpretations of African behavior in the events colonialists describe. Ranajit Guha does the same thing for colonial India, arguing that the colonial state had a vested interest in the accuracy of the “official eavesdropping” by its intelligence network. Carlo Ginzburg maintains that even a “hostile chronicle” could not entirely transform or suppress the reality of what it was hostile to. Allen Isaacman concludes that “careful readings” of such written sources have produced “much of the best work on the social history of rural South Africa” and elsewhere, if only insofar as such work has kept an eye open to “differing peasant perspectives.”

Colonial officials were inclined to see colonialism as a good thing and to see Africans as inferior to Europeans, but these are value judgments and interpretations that historians can easily identify and dismiss because they are so obvious and so general. At the level of particularities and specifics—
what happened when, who said what—there is little room for these biases to distort facts. After all, the highest priority for colonial officials was to prevent African resistance and to squelch it when it did occur. They were torn by a tendency to see “their” Africans as grateful colonial subjects on the one hand and potential rebels who could strike at any moment on the other hand. These tendencies created countervailing biases that had a way of canceling each other out, especially as officials debated among themselves. The resulting debates had extremely important implications for the documents that Natal Europeans produced: opposing sides criticized each other’s arguments and the evidence on which those arguments were based, much like lawyers or even historians would. Nobody was calling for an end to European rule, but there were some who called for limiting or even ending European immigration into Natal, for liberalizing racially discriminatory legislation, and, like Stuart, for preserving African chiefship, customary law, and land tenure. There were many who argued that if Africans resisted or even rebelled, Natal Europeans only had themselves to blame. Some Natal Europeans went so far as to call themselves “friends of the Native,” and some had grown up among Zulu speakers, spoke Zulu fluently themselves, and had a thorough familiarity with Zulu culture. I do not want to push this argument too far, but certainly it would be wrong to argue that Natal European society was so uniformly and unremittingly hostile toward and ignorant about Natal Africans that colonial documents can tell us nothing about the realities of African life.

There is voluminous testimony from Africans in the colonial archive, mainly in the form of testimony in various official proceedings, but also including reports from government informants and requests for government action, the latter often involving implicit or explicit criticism of colonialism. In many cases Africans were quite able to tell European colonial officials what they did not want to hear. In many other cases, it was not even clear what it was that the Europeans wanted to hear in the first place. Did the Europeans want to hear about African loyalty or African disloyalty? When disputes emerged between Africans—and a large portion of the colonial archive is devoted to documenting such disputes—what did the Europeans want to hear? It is true that the African voices recorded by colonial officials were overwhelmingly elder and male, but they were often complaining about women and youths whose actions and motivations can be discerned by historians, even when reported by others. When I looked at
these colonial sources, I was trying to determine the level of conflict or cooperation among Africans, as well as the level of conflict and cooperation between Africans and Europeans. Europeans were not predisposed to see either conflict or cooperation, and the Africans who talked to them were not predisposed in this way either.

Still, the limitations of the colonial archive are to some extent insuperable. The perspectives of the white authors of the various source documents are hard to escape, and indeed must be included considering that the development of Zulu ethnicity was a dialogic process with the development of colonialism. More important, we cannot go to the Natal Africans of the colonial era and interview them about their ethnic self-identification or their attitudes toward their fathers, chiefs, colonial officials, or the Zulu king. Ethnicity is an aspect of one’s consciousness, and it is difficult enough to find out what other people today, or even we ourselves, are truly thinking, let alone people from another a culture a century or two in the past, whose history has been transmitted to us by people alien to that culture. There are some explicit declarations, but for the most part the historian must rely on the implicit testimony of collective actions. Similarly, with such indirect and usually anecdotal evidence, it is impossible to generalize. Some Natal Africans may always have considered themselves Zulus. Indeed, some of them were refugees from the Zulu royal family itself and became chiefs in Natal. Conversely, even after the rebellion there may still have been some Natal Africans who did not consider themselves Zulus. Many Zululanders may very well have always been ambivalent about Zulu ethnicity, and one must also acknowledge, alongside the wars and flights of refugees between Zululand and Natal, substantial peaceful interaction between the peoples on both sides of the Thukela River. Like some vastly larger and far more significant epistemic shifts, such as the industrial and scientific revolutions, the spread of Zulu ethnicity to Natal was probably neither instantaneous nor complete, but the exceptions and ambiguities should not blind us to the reality of the changes in any of these cases.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

3 For a large collection of short articles by numerous authors representing the broad scope of existing research on Zulu identity, see Carton, Laband, and Sithole, Zulu Identities.
4 Mzala, Gatsha Buthelezi; Maré and Hamilton, An Appetite for Power; Maré, Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa.
5 Marks, “Patriotism, Patriarchy, and Purity”; Marks, “Natal, the Zulu Royal Family, and the Ideology of Segregation”; Marks, The Ambiguities of Dependence; Cope, To Bind the Nation.
7 La Hausse, Restless Identities, 6–7.
9 For the history of the nineteenth-century Zulu kingdom before and after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, see Jeff Guy’s historical trilogy: The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom; The Heretic; and The View across the River. More influential in my own conceptualization of the issues involved has been Guy, “Analysing the Pre-Capitalist Societies in Southern Africa.” For more on internal disunity within the Zulu kingdom, see Laband, Rope of Sand; Laband, “The Cohesion of the Zulu Polity under the Impact of the Anglo-Zulu War.”
11 Marks, Reluctant Rebellion.
13 Marks, “Class, Ideology, and the Bambatha Rebellion,” 358. See also Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, 313–14.
15 Marks, “Patriotism, Patriarchy, and Purity”; Carton, Blood from Your Children; McClendon, Genders and Generations Apart; Bonnin, “Claiming Spaces, Changing Places”; Hassim, “Family, Motherhood, and Zulu Nationalism.”
16 See the following works by Gluckman: Analysis of a Social System in Modern Zululand; “The Kingdom of the Zulu in South Africa”; Custom and Conflict in Africa; Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa; and Politics, Law, and Ritual in Tribal Society. Similar ideas were developed by Victor Turner, who relied mainly on evidence from central Africa, as for example in The Ritual Process. In Terror and Resistance, a very interesting, though deeply flawed, analysis of the precolonial Zulu kingdom, E. V. Walter went so far as to argue that this was one case where high levels of both state violence and state legitimacy could coexist.
17 Wrong, Power; Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power; Gramsci, The Antonio Gramsci Reader, esp. 190–209; Simon, Gramsci’s Political Thought; Crehan, Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology; Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 81–102.
19 Marks and Engels, Contesting Colonial Hegemony.
20 Guha, Dominance without Hegemony.
21 The academic literature on colonizers’ attempts to rule through the civilizing mission was particularly popular and influential during the 1980s and 1990s. Notable examples include Dirks, Colonialism and Culture; Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution; Hunt, A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo; T. Mitchell, Colonising Egypt; Conklin, A Mission to Civilize; Rabinow, French Modern; G. Wright, The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism; Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire; Burke, Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women.
22 Fields, Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa, chaps. 1–2.
23 Cooper, “Conflict and Connection”; Larson, “‘Capacities and Modes of Thinking.’”
24 Hamilton, Terrific Majesty; Mamdani, Citizen and Subject.
25 Mahoney, The Zulu Past in the Present.
26 Cobbing, “A Tainted Well.”
29 Ibid., 2:248; 4:326, 364.
30 Ibid., 5:228.
31 Ibid., 1:93.
Notes to Chapter One

32 Ibid., 5:331.
33 Ibid., 1:331.
34 Ibid., 5:307.
35 Interviews with Jethros Gumede (18 August 1996), Mboneni Gumede (27 July 1997), and Tom Ntuli (27 July 1997), all conducted in Mapumulo district, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa, with Thuthukani Cele as translator and interpreter.
36 Mofolo, Chaka.
37 Fuze, The Black People and Whence They Came. The book was first written in 1905 and first published in Zulu in 1922.

1 FAILURE OF ZULU ETHNIC INTEGRATION

1 For some examples, see Webb and Wright, The James Stuart Archive, 1:208; 2:255; 3:195.
2 See, for example, Kcal Zulu Tribal History Essay Competition, Reginald Dludla, “The Qwabe Tribe.” This essay was submitted for a competition in 1950.
3 Interview with Mboneni Gumede, with Thuthukani Cele as translator and interpreter, Mapumulo Magistracy, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 27 July 1997. Gumede served as an authority on Qwabe history for Reggie Khumalo, who produced literature and radio programs on Zulu history. Nevertheless, Gumede took issue with some of Khumalo’s accounts.
6 See the entries for all these English and Zulu terms in Doke et al., English-Zulu Zulu-English Dictionary.
7 For more on the distinction between chieftdom and lineage, see Hammond-Tooke, “In Search of the Lineage: The Cape Nguni Case,” “Descent Groups, Chieftdoms and South African Historiography,” “Who Worships Whom: Agnates and Ancestors among Nguni,” and “Kinship Authority and Political Authority in Pre-colonial South Africa.”
8 See the entries for uhlanga, inkosi, and khonza in Doke et al., English-Zulu Zulu-English Dictionary.
9 For just some examples among many from the precolonial era, see Webb and Wright, The James Stuart Archive, 2:112, 203, 251, 267.
10 Gluckman, Analysis of a Social System in Modern Zululand; “The Kingdom of