

**Umlando, ukuqamba and the stating their own views:  
recalibrating the history of intellectual thought in the KwaZulu-Natal region**

Carolyn Hamilton (2019)  
carolyn.hamilton@uct.ac.za

### **Introduction**

In the now considerable literature that deals with public intellectual activity in South Africa<sup>1</sup> there is a tacit understanding that a defining feature of intellectualism is sustained reading and writing. The literature shares this feature with European understandings of public intellectual activity, and has not, to my knowledge, actively considered the possibility of intellectual life in settings without writing. There is further implicit agreement that “public” in the phrase “public intellectual” refers to the public of “the public sphere” that is one of the social imaginaries of a modern democracy. It is the public called into being by the wide circulation of printed texts, the public that must read, consider and debate its options and make political choices then realised through the ballot box.<sup>2</sup>

These assumptions about public intellectualism combine in South Africa with deeply entrenched ideas about pre-colonial societies as practicing timeless tribal culture and relaying oral traditions, the combination thereby precluding any exploration of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Vale, Lawrence Hamilton and Estelle Prinsloo (eds.), *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa. Ideas, Individuals and Institutions* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014); Mcebisi Ndletyana (ed.), *African Intellectuals in 19th and Early 20th Century South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008); William Gumede and Leslie Dikeni (eds.), *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009); Jane Poyner (ed.), *J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2006). See also the two-part symposium on “Exceeding Public Spheres I”, *Social Dynamics* 35(2) (2009) and 36(1) (2010), produced under the auspices of the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Project, Wits University.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Hamilton and Lesley Cowling, ‘Rethinking Public Engagement’ in Lesley Cowling and Carolyn Hamilton (eds.), *Babel Abroad: Rage, Reason and Rethinking Public Engagement* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, in press)

pre-colonial intellectual currents and activities. Still more specifically, the combination forecloses any investigation of how intellectual engagements and deliberative activities in oral forms sought to persuade people and to shape political futures, both deep within the eras before colonialism and persisting well into the colonial era. It obscures how such modes of debate and discussion overlapped and intersected with, shaped and were shaped by, early literate forms of public intellectual activity.

In this paper my primary purpose is to challenge the assumptions and academic axioms that position thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who expressed their ideas orally and who did not write, as atavistic relayers of oral tradition, and their literate counterparts - often their very own kin - as modern thinkers engaged in public intellectual life. Members of both of these seemingly distinct categories, I argue, were deeply cognizant of the immense changes of their times and both attempted to reconcile the past with the present. My argument is that people from both categories were critically concerned with the navigation of change and the nature of the brokering of the past into the present that each saw as necessary to navigate that change. The navigation of change involved drawing on banks of knowledge, recovering aspects of the past, reconciling the old with the new, arguing for one case and course of action over another, advocating change, testing ideas and deliberating in multiple settings. All of these activities required intellectual work. It was intellectual work focussed in the first instance most pressingly on the important political questions of the day, things like the nature of sovereignty, the rights and responsibilities of rulership, gender and inter-generational relationships, and ideas about identity. Underlying these kinds of questions were understandings of how the past shaped the present and what it meant for the present, as well as how all of that stacked up in influencing what the future might be.

It is a further purpose of the paper to show that deliberative activity, focussed on these kinds of questions, occurred in the southern African region not only with the advent of European colonialism. It was a feature of life in earlier eras, where it

shows up in the historical record wherever significant change had to be navigated. For too long, colonialism and literacy have been allowed to constitute the effective beginning of South African history, with whatever cognitive activity went before consigned to 'tradition' and explored in the academy largely through the lenses of anthropology. Where what went before is historicised at all it is, at best, only ever a background chapter to the rest of history or situated in the field of archaeology which in turn draws heavily on the anthropology to interpret its findings.<sup>3</sup> However, it is more than possible to begin to undertake research into political praxis in the eras before colonialism and to follow currents of political thought changing in response to changing circumstances within the pre-colonial world and across the pre-colonial/colonial divide. It is possible to watch ideas travel across oral forms, from oral forms into written ones and into ones with the oral and written inextricably entangled. It is possible to track cross-textual references, to see texts operating in interlinked discursive fields, and to follow the course of debates, discussions and deliberative activity across time. To do this the pervasive assumed distinction between literate, modern, hybrid and synthesizing intellectuals and illiterate, authentic tribal informants relaying handed-down tradition requires robust interrogation.

In the rest of this paper I attempt such an interrogation in relation to one region of southern Africa -that of KwaZulu Natal - where sufficient research already exists that makes it possible to pursue these issues across the resolutely-upheld pre-colonial/colonial temporal boundary. Focus on this region offers a further affordance in that the era immediately before colonialism saw the rapid rise of new power in the area, the kingdom under Shaka (c.1816-1828), and the associated demand on the inhabitants of the region to navigate the changes that this entailed. Shaka's reign was short lived and ended with a palace coup that saw a dramatic shift of power away from his closest allies, to supporters of the new incumbent, his brother, Dingane. These changes and realignments in the late independent era required political and intellectual agility which has left discernible traces in the historical

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<sup>3</sup> Historical studies are not entirely absent, but they are very much the minority.

record that allow us to research the matter of how change was navigated in the late independent period and across the pre-colonial - colonial divide

My interrogation proceeds in four steps. First I consider the now substantial scholarly work on the early black intellectuals of this region who were writing and publishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My argument draws liberally on literature that explores the contexts, motivations and the writings of two prominent intellectuals, Magesa Fuze and John Dube. I pay attention to how, in their texts in isiZulu<sup>4</sup> in particular, they were both referencing the past and using existing, and presumably long-standing, concepts - about, among other things, the nature of rule, government, domination, and nation, as well as gender roles - to talk about how things were in the past, as well as to discuss present changes and to imagine new futures. It is not my purpose in this paper to explore how they used these concepts. That is a weighty project in its own right. Instead my aim is to highlight the extent to which the use that they make of such concepts was rooted in earlier, pre-colonial currents political thought and an inherited conceptual language that they were able to invoke or where, necessary, to refurbish to meet new needs.

I then consider a range of other places where such discussions were going on, also in isiZulu, about the same and related topics, but which happened orally, and which were written down by people other than those doing the speaking. The point of this is to register the existence of a wide and rich discursive environment in which Zulu speakers were thinking actively about the changing world in which they were living, were deliberating about the key questions of the day and, like the literate intellectuals, were exploring a variety of ways of brokering the past into the present, but doing so orally. These points are not well-established in the relevant literature. I thus lay out in some detail what these speakers' contexts and motivations were and what they said. I then focus in some detail on one contemporary of Fuze and Dube, Ndlovu kaThimuni, chief of the Nodungu section of the Zulu royal house.

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<sup>4</sup> Because I consider the noun class significant I use the suffix plus noun stem, isiZulu, as the noun for the Zulu language *and* associated conceptual world, but use the anglicised adjectival form, as in "Zulu language".

The third step sets out an argument for recognising that what these speakers offered was not relayed, formulaic oral tradition as it is often characterised, but thoughtful disquisitions on the past. These disquisitions sometimes engaged the past in its own right, but in many instances, the past was engaged for the intellectual resources and insights it offered for navigating contemporary changes and envisaging the future.

It is the burden of my argument that what both the writers and the speakers had to say was rooted in longer-standing currents of political thought. Thus, the fourth step in my argument is to show that both the written and oral political discourses, and the intellectual activity that they involved, which drew thoughtfully on the past, was not a new feature of life in the region in the late nineteenth century. There are clear indications, as we would surely expect, of similar debates and forms of brokering of the past into the present in the eras before colonialism, especially in circumstances of dramatic political changes. Currents of political thought and historical accounts from these eras were drawn on in later eras, in a variety of both more and less creative ways, to navigate changing conditions.

### **The Writings of the Modern Intellectuals**

There is now considerable scholarly work on early black intellectuals writing in both isiZulu and English, that offers rich insights into the multiple ways in which they navigated the enormous changes that came with colonialism. Their activity in public intellectual life of the time is well-attested to.

The work of Vukile Khumalo explores the thinking and writing of what he termed "the class of 1856", some of the earliest mission-educated converts who became the extraordinary cohort of young thinkers initially clustered around Bishop Colenso at the Ekukhanyeni school, at Bishopstowe. Khumalo tracks and analyses the epistolary networks in which they were involved in, notably in the 1890s and introduces us to the ways in which they debated and discussed the pressing

questions of the time.<sup>5</sup> Hlonipha Mokoena's *Magama Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual* (2011) offers a detailed examination of the thinking and writings of one of these converts, Magema Fuze.

The community at Bishopstowe followed politics closely and it was in his role as an associate of Bishop Colenso that Fuze first became actively involved in royal Zulu and chiefly politics. He had studied at Ekukhanyeni alongside King Cetshwayo's brother, Mkhungo, who was also being educated there and, in 1859, Fuze accompanied Colenso on a visit to the Zulu king, Mpande.<sup>6</sup> From then on he was involved over a long period with Colenso in representing African causes in colonial Natal.<sup>7</sup> This included giving testimony in the defence of the Hlubi chief, Langalibalele, who was tried in 1873 for rebellion and treason. In 1878, with war looming, Fuze again travelled in the Zulu kingdom and met with King Cetshwayo, publishing an account of this in *Macmillan's Magazine* in the same year. In the civil conflict that followed the war, Fuze was involved in printing all the commentary on political affairs emanating from Bishopstowe. In 1885 after the death of Cetshwayo, Fuze again visited what was soon to be annexed as Zululand, reporting on the state of affairs there. In 1887, when the young king, Dinuzulu, and his uncles went on trial refusing to recognise the colonial authorities, Fuze was part of the defence preparation and through the trial stayed with the trialists, teaching them to read and write and, presumably, engaging in intensive discussion on pressing current affairs. In 1896 he joined them in exile at St Helena as tutor to King Dinuzulu's children, returning in 1898. While Fuze was distinctively a product of a mission education, he operated in close proximity to Zulu royalty over a long period and during his sojourn at St. Helena he developed a cosmopolitan and pan-African consciousness. Central to his work across some fifty years was an engagement with questions of

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<sup>5</sup> Vukile Khumalo, 'The Class of 1856 and the Politics of Cultural Production(s) in the Emergence of Ekukhanyeni, 1855-1910' in Jonathan A. Draper (ed.), *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications).

<sup>6</sup> Fuze wrote up an account of the trip that was published as 'Indaba Ka'Magama' and 'Magama's Story' in John William Colenso, *Three Native Accounts of the Visit of the Bishop of Natal in September and October, 1859, to Umpande, King of the Zulus* (1860), 1-13, 107-121.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Guy, *The View across the River: Harriette Colenso and the Zulu Struggle against Imperialism* (University of Virginia Press, 2002), 43.

sovereignty, the rights, responsibilities and reach of king- and chiefship, and how their forms in previous eras would be reconfigured under colonialism.<sup>8</sup>

Diverse political and intellectual networks shaped his thought and writing, much of it expressed in isiZulu, in letters, articles in the British and local press (*Macmillan's Magazine*, *Ipepa lo Hlanga*, *Inkanyiso*, and *Ilanga lase Natal*) and in his book on the history and origins of the black inhabitants of the region, *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona*.<sup>9</sup> His words were published locally and abroad. Mokoena argues that the picture of his thinking and writing that emerges is of a bricoleur, combining strands of thought drawn from diverse places - Christian, indigenous, Darwinian, scientific -and employing a collage of ideas and arguments, in which the history of the region loomed large.<sup>10</sup> Not only did he have much to say about the nature of the Zulu kingship and questions of sovereignty, he also tackled numerous other aspects of what has been termed "custom" including its misappropriations under colonialism, and did so in a manner that fostered a knowledge and appreciation of the past.<sup>11</sup> As Mokoena puts it, the Christianised educated elite, or amakholwa, were paradoxically "champions of modernity's enlightenment, while at the same time rejecting its colonial form". Her argument is that the rejection took the form of a reach into the past: "Fuze's notion of history as discourse was based on the assumption that reviving the past was the first step in the construction of Africanist knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

By the 1890s a new generation of young literate intellectuals was making their presence felt in Natal, among whom John Langalibalele Dube was to become a leading figure. A Congregationalist clergyman, Dube is probably best-known as the

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<sup>8</sup> In this paper I follow the English language convention that uses a title, and then the name proper (typically in English, "Queen Elizabeth" and "Elizabeth") which formally implies a singularity that requires no further qualification, hence, King Cetshwayo and "Cetshwayo." Of course, the English term "king" imposes on indigenous forms of rulership the concepts and thinking of Europe and may well efface or obscure distinctive features of indigenous rulership. The matter of the correct title for King Shaka's father, Senzangakhona, presents further difficulties as in his lifetime he was subject to the overlordship of Dingiswayo, king of the Mthethwa. These are all matters for critical reflection in their own right.

<sup>9</sup> Magema Fuze, *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* (Privately published, 1922).

<sup>10</sup> Hlonipha Mokoena, *Magema Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011), 154, 160, 164.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

founding president of the African National Congress, but arguably his greatest legacy lies in the dynamism he brought into African intellectual life. He was responsible for the establishment of Ohlange, which was to become the leading school for Africans in the region, and in 1903 he established the newspaper *Ilanga laseNatal* which engaged in pressing debates of the day about, among other things, citizenship, discrimination, and government policies. Heather Hughes' biography tracks his life and work in detail.<sup>13</sup>

Dube was the author of a number of historical texts, ranging from his 1890 pamphlet published in English in the USA, "A talk upon my native land" that included discussion of the rise of Shaka and the massacre of the Qadi people under Shaka's successor, Dingane, to what is most often referred to as the first novel in isiZulu, set in the reign of Shaka, *Insila kaShaka*, published in 1930. Dube was himself a writer of letters to prominent people, amongst them the Zulu king, and to newspapers, which included *Inkanyiso* and the *Missionary Review of the World*. He also solicited letters and opinion for his newspaper. As editor of *Ilanga*, he would have had a significant say in what was reported in the paper- such as the trials of the rebels involved in the anti-poll tax uprising of 1906, and the subsequent trial of the then Zulu king, Dinuzulu, and in how the trials were discussed.

More squarely still than Magera Fuze, the younger man was a thoroughly modern figure, but Dube too operated in the complex and hybrid field of Natal colonial politics. It was a field shaped by the concerns of not only the educated intelligentsia whose interests Dube promoted, but also Zulu royals, local chiefs including kholwa<sup>14</sup> chiefs, missionaries, governors and native administrators, large and small-scale farmers and many others. As with Fuze, historical consciousness was a locus of his critique of the particular form that colonial modernity took. Like Fuze, Dube was active in navigating the enormous changes of the time, engaging pressing questions, and brokering the past into the present. Most notably in the pages of

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<sup>13</sup> Heather Hughes, *The First President: A Life of John Dube* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Kholwa (singular noun: ikholwa, pl. amakholwa): term used for the early generations of mission-educated christian Africans in Natal. I have elected not to italicise Zulu words which today have a well-recognised usage in South African English.



*Ilanga*, Dube provided opportunities and a forum for others to contribute to the deliberative processes that this entailed.

In the course of all this, Dube had reason to reflect on and discuss the nature of the Zulu kingship and the nature of colonial government. As is well-known, the early decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of a form of nationalism centred on the Zulu kingship. Such nationalist impulses underlay the various ways in which thinkers and writers like Dube interacted with the Zulu royal house and engaged the long history of the region.<sup>15</sup> That new nationalism, and its critique of imperial and later Union rule, is central to understanding how intellectuals thought at this time about a large range of questions concerning nation, rule, government, domination, governmental and civil responsibilities, hegemony, and indeed, history itself. Support for the Zulu royal house was far from automatic for people like Fuze and Dube whose families had previously suffered under royal Zulu rule and who had been forced to accommodate themselves to colonial Natal politics.

While so much scholarly attention has focussed on kholwa thinking and writing as being concerned with ideas of modernity and progress, what close examination of Fuze and Dube writings reveals is their depth of interest in how to think about, and value, the pre-kholwa past, the world described variously in the twentieth century as traditional and tribal, as well as the role and nature of the Zulu kingship, and identities and connections inherited from the distant past.<sup>16</sup> The bricolage and cobbling from multiple sources that a scholar like Mokoena sees as the distinctive feature of Fuze's 1921 book, were also present in the writings of someone like Dube. We can see him reaching in many places into the world of so-called tradition,

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<sup>15</sup> Shula Marks, 'The ambiguities of dependence: John L. Dube of Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 1, No.2 (1975), 162-180; Nicholas Cope, 'The Zulu Petit Bourgeoisie and Zulu Nationalism in the 1920s: Origins of Inkatha', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No.3 (September 1990), 431-451; Paul La Hausse de Lalouviere, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c. 1991-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-c.1936)* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2000); Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole, *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Mokoena notes that the terms in which amakholwa expressed their political aspirations, whether in public arenas or published books, were almost always borrowed from the political vocabulary of the colonial order. It seems to me that her point has obvious application to their writings in English. I am less certain about how this happened in their isiZulu texts. See Mokoena, *Fuze*, 21.

and indeed, late in life, in 1936, he even became a founding member of the rather arcane Zulu Society focussed on preserving Zulu heritage and customs.

Of course, these writers were also prominent speakers whose words were often recorded, with varying degrees of faithfulness, by other writers. Fuze often acted as an envoy and delivered testimony of many kinds. Dube gave numerous lectures and countless political speeches that were reported on. In the wake of the 1906 rebellion, he was one of the witnesses who appeared before the 1907 Natal Native Affairs Commission, where, despite his superb command of English, he elected to speak in isiZulu, and did so at length. (When the *Minutes of Evidence* appeared, he noted that the English translation was poor!) Dube also addressed international visiting delegations as diverse as the Anthropology-heavy visiting British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1905 and the Empire Press Union in 1935. Fuze and Dube were continually in spoken debate and discussion in a wide variety of settings, from the most ostensibly modern to that of what seemed to be atavistically tribal.

Fuze and Dube are but the best known and most studied of the early generations of Zulu-speaking literate intellectuals. Research is increasingly introducing us to other writers, their writings and their speeches.

### **Discoursing Orally**

There were numerous other situations at this time where the kinds of issues engaged with by the literate intellectuals were taken up by people who only discoursed orally, speaking in one or another variant of what later became standardised isiZulu. In certain instances their words were then recorded in writing, with degrees of faithfulness, with spoken isiZulu sometimes translated by either home-language isiZulu or home-language English translators and then written down by either home-language English or home-language isiZulu recorders, with all of these variations affecting how the spoken words entered the record.

These instances include, for example, two documents in circulation in public life, and one item of high-profile official correspondence, all from the 1880s, and published in 1978 in a compilation edited by Colin Webb and John Wright.<sup>17</sup> Positioned as recording the words of the Zulu king, Cetshwayo kaMpande, they were presented at the time as forms of dictation, recorded while he was a prisoner in exile, first at the Castle in Cape Town and later living in civil custody on the Cape farm, Oude Molen. The first document, described as a "narrative...taken down from the lips of Cetywayo, by Captain J. Ruscombe Poole... [that] contains nothing that has not been received direct from Cetywayo.." was published in English in *Macmillan's Magazine* in February 1880.<sup>18</sup> It was generated over a number of weeks while Cetshwayo was in the Castle, with translation by W. K. Longcast, who had been a British military interpreter in the Anglo-Zulu War. At the time, Cetshwayo was in the custody of Captain J. Ruscombe Poole, who appears to have been the facilitator, and possibly a co-author of a kind, of the publication. It offers a survey of the course of Zulu history and of the events leading to the war of 1879. The second document is a letter from the King to Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of the Cape Colony, written in 1881, giving King Cetshwayo's version of the war and subsequent events. It was part of a corpus of correspondence with a wide group of influential people and government in the Cape and in Britain which was generated by the King and his "amanuensis," R. C. A. Samuelson, the fluent Zulu-speaking son of a missionary, who was appointed as his interpreter after Longcast. The third comprised statements about the law and customs of the Zulu kingdom "elicited from Cetshwayo under interrogation" by the Cape Government Commission at Oude Molen over two days in 1881 in a question and answer format. Samuelson was responsible for the translation which was recorded by an unnamed minute-taker. The minutes were then read back to Samuelson, and through him to Cetshwayo, and amended. As published in 1978 the three texts comprise some 48 pages.

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<sup>17</sup> This was not the first recording of King Cetshwayo's words. Many documents claimed to report on his speech, including Fuze's published account of his 1877 visit to Cetshwayo which included details of conversations he had with the Zulu king. Magma Fuze, "A Visit to King Ketshwayo", *MacMillan's Magazine*, 1878.

<sup>18</sup> Colin Webb and John Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks. Statements made by Cetshwayo kaMpande on the history and customs of his people* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1978), 1.

These texts were substantially mediated by their particular circumstances of recording as well as by the orientations, concerns and abilities of the translators and recorders.<sup>19</sup> They were also the product of what the King chose to place on record, how he engaged the key questions of the day, the kinds of political thought he drew on, and the ways in which he brokered the past in the present. It is hardly a surprise that matters of kingship, sovereignty and the nature of rule were uppermost in his mind.

The period with which we are concerned saw many other instances of speaking in isiZulu - by Zulu royals, prominent officials, chiefs, people appearing in courts and before commissions, as well as statements made to magistrates and input rendered to experts of various stripes who were out and about collecting information. These were then set down in writing, sometimes in isiZulu and sometimes in English, by other people in many different ways and many were presented as being accurate recordings. The instances include consultation processes around the succession following Cetshwayo's death, the trials and exile of his successor, King Dinuzulu, the 1906 anti-colonial uprising in Natal and the trials that followed, information presented to members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science deputation which visited Natal in 1905, reports of spoken statements that were published in the press and elsewhere, many of which cogitated on the questions of the day and offered views of the long past.

Increasingly we know more and more about the circumstances under which these various records that purport to render spoken speech came into being. Jeff Guy, for example, offers a close reading of the evidence of key leaders in the 1906 uprising that reveals much about their astute grasp of the complexity of the political discourses of the time and in particular the ways in which they drew into their defence notions of chiefly responsibility and its limits.<sup>20</sup> The biography of Pixley

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<sup>19</sup> Webb and Wright mention the processes involved in transforming the King's statements into written documents, noting that many "errors" crept in, and recording their editorial decision to reproduce the documents with any defects uncorrected. Webb and Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks*, xxxi.

<sup>20</sup> Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 165-214.

kaSeme, by Bongani Ngqulunga, offers indications of how the generation of pioneering black lawyers wrote, petitioned and deposed for their black clients, who originally offered the spoken evidence and appeals that the lawyers then shaped into evidence.<sup>21</sup> We also have glimpses of the way in which a lawyer like W.P. Schreiner, the ex-Prime Minister of the Cape who represented King Dinuzulu in the 1908 trial, led witnesses and how this was covered in the press, both in isiZulu and in English.<sup>22</sup>

Spoken discussions that referenced the past that were never recorded, but that went on in daily life, would have happened in situations too countless to list, but a sense of the range and extent of this may be productive to keep in mind. The long-ago past would have been referenced not only in addressing ancestors at rural grave sites, significant ritual settings, and in fireside story-telling. This was time of rapid urbanisation and it would also have been referenced in libations in the new beerhalls and in conversations at trade union and church meetings in the growing town of Durban. Many undocumented discussions of political import would have taken place in chiefly courts and amabandla of many kinds, as well as on journeys to colonial courts, in commentary on contested outcomes of justice processes, and in response to proclamations and changes in governmental policy. Some of these discussions would have taken place under circumstances that the participants considered, one way or another, significant, that is, more than mere conversation. When we begin to think like this about all the places that political issues were being discussed, carefully picked over and debated; where past ways of doing things were being reviewed; and change was being interrogated; we begin to grasp something of the extent of the richly discursive environment in which Zulu speakers were participating in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

One of the places where this was happening was in the many conversations that a range of people were having, mostly in isiZulu, with the colonial official, James

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<sup>21</sup> Bongani Ngqulunga, *The Man Who Founded the ANC. A Biography of Pixley ka Isaka Seme* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *The First President*, 137.

Stuart, the recorded notes of which are widely described as a vast body of recorded oral tradition.

### **Oral tradition, ukuqamba, ukupendula, and stating their own views**

Between 1897 and 1921 the Natal administrator, James Stuart, held discussions with some two hundred people whom he regarded as well informed on what he thought of as Zulu history and custom. He was especially interested in the nature of rule in the time of the Zulu king, Shaka, which he considered to be a useful model for colonial governance, and he steered many of the conversations onto this subject.<sup>23</sup> Stuart was a fluent Zulu speaker and he took detailed notes of the conversations. In certain instances he was concerned to record the particular narrative flow and the exact words in isiZulu of his interlocutors. Indeed, his corpus of notes is considered to be one of the richest bodies of what is often described as "oral tradition" in southern Africa. As oral traditions recorded from what are seen by scholars as authentic tribal informants, these accounts are typically treated as narratives handed down across generations, more or less faithfully.<sup>24</sup>

However, close reading of the recorded texts and research into the contexts, lives and networks of these informants, of the kind that has been done by scholars who have worked on Fuze and Dube, throws light on their political concerns and intellectual processes in a manner that invites radical re-assessment of them as "informants" and relayers of oral tradition. In this chapter I discuss in detail one of Stuart's interlocutors, Ndlovu kaThimuni,<sup>25</sup> in order to demonstrate this point.

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<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka and the Limits of Historical Intervention* (Harvard University Press, 1998), chapter 4.

<sup>24</sup> For a recent instance pertinent to this region see Elizabeth A. Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom, 1815-1828. War, Shaka, and the Consolidation of Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 13, 21, 23.

<sup>25</sup> In his notes Stuart used a form of the orthography of the day in rendering Ndlovu's name as "Ndhlovu". As I have no indication of how Ndlovu would have elected to render his name during his life, I follow the convention of a default to modern orthography for the name of the person rather than defaulting to the colonial recorder's choice. However, when I refer to the "title" of the 1986 published text of the Ndlovu conversation, I reproduce without alteration the published title's elected orthography, viz. "Ndhlovu ka Timuni."

In two sessions across some 11 days in 1902 and 1903 Stuart held sustained discussions with Ndlovu kaThimuni. Ndlovu,<sup>26</sup> at that time a head-ringed man in his mid-forties, was a prominent figure in Natal chiefly politics. He was a grandson of Mudli kaNkwelo kaNdaba, a senior figure during the reign of Shaka's father, Senzangakhona (also a grandson of Ndaba). Mudli had been actively involved in the accession of his kinsman, Shaka, to the Zulu chieftaincy and had later been killed by Shaka. In 1902 when these discussions began Ndlovu was chief of the Nodungu<sup>27</sup> side of the Zulu royal house, living in the Natal division of Maphumulo. According to Ndlovu, Thimuni had been forced by Shaka's assassin and successor, King Dingane, to leave the Zulu country and settle to the south in what was to become the colony of Natal.<sup>28</sup> At some point Thimuni approached Mkhonto Ntuli, the chief in what became the Maphumulo area, and obtained marginally arable land on which to settle. Relations with the main Zulu royal house were tense in this period. Over the ensuing decades boundary disputes with neighbouring chiefs and white land encroachments forced Thimuni and his followers into an ever smaller

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<sup>26</sup> In the period discussed in this chapter, literate black intellectuals were adopting the convention of a first name and surname. Where there is evidence of such choices, I have followed standard practice of giving full names on first mention in full (as in "Magema Magwaza Fuze"), thereafter referring to these authors by their surnames (as in "Fuze"). I have refrained from imposing this convention on the recordings of the statements of people who did not, in their lifetimes make use of a surname. Instead I employ the formal "Ndlovu kaThimuni" (indicating that Ndlovu was a son of Thimuni) on first mention and use Ndlovu thereafter. However, this feels inappropriately familiar, even casual. I am not satisfied that this form of naming establishes, authorially, the sense of equivalence between the written and oral disquisitions that I am positing. The use of izithakazelo, or address names, would confer a status that offers a formality similar to the use of the surname for authors in English. However, it proves confusing when the account features numerous people with shared izithakazelo.

<sup>27</sup> Stuart noted that Ndukwana kaMbengwana, also present when the conversation happened, described Ndlovu's branch of the royal family as the left-hand or ikohlo, side of the royal house, a status that would exclude them from the royal succession. ("Ndhlovu ka Timuni" in Colin B. Webb and John B. Wright (eds.), *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*, Volume 3 (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1982) 198. In the discussion that follows I mostly reference the published account, edited by Webb and Wright. However, I worked with copies of the original handwritten text in hand, constantly consulting the latter to grasp as fully as possible how the original notes have been altered through the editing and publication process. I paid close attention also to how text recorded in isiZulu was translated by the editors.

<sup>28</sup> Ndlovu noted that his father was forced to leave the Zulu kingdom during the reign of King Dingane and for a while lived practically independently of the Zulu royal house in Natal though he did not dare to hold royal rituals for fear of reprisal from the Zulu royal house. ("Ndhlovu ka Timuni," 207). However, Thembinkosi Ntokozo Madlala references a 1973 file from the Chief Minister's Office, Ulundi (N1113(44)7) to support a claim that Thimuni crossed into Natal later, after the battle of Ndondakusuka in 1856, having supported the unsuccessful Mbuyazi in his attempt to succeed King Mpande (himself the successor to Dingane). (Thembinkosi Ntokozo Madlala, 'The Role of Prince Thimuni kaMudli kaJama in Zulu History with special reference to the activities of his sons, Ndlovu and Chakijana, and their descendants, 1842-1980' (MA University of Zululand, 1997) 1-2.

area, subjecting them to a colonial magistrate's authority and increasingly onerous forms of colonial taxation and labour demands. By then Ndlovu and his father Thimuni had between them some fifty years of experience in colonial Natal politics. While largely co-operative relations prevailed between Ndlovu and Magistrate W. R. Gordon in the 1890s, by the time Ndlovu met with Stuart, relations with the magistrate's replacement at Maphumulo were severely strained.<sup>29</sup>

Stuart first met with Ndlovu on Friday 7th of November, 1902, probably at Stuart's place of work in the colonial administration as Assistant Magistrate in Durban.<sup>30</sup> Stuart recorded that Ndlovu "called on me today with another, being referred to me by my old friend, Mkando".<sup>31</sup> The formulation "called on me" with its tones of Victorian social nicety, indicates that the connection was initiated by Ndlovu, without prior arrangement but with a certain formality. In what Stuart indicates was an initial three-quarter hour conversation, the men touched on aspects of the reigns of Shaka, Dingane and Mpande, and host of other things. They then arranged to meet the next day, Saturday, at Stuart's home. Ndlovu accordingly arrived with "Bunu and two or three other followers"<sup>32</sup> - Bunu being a young man and at least one of the others, an elderly man<sup>33</sup> - and stayed the night. Stuart's induna,<sup>34</sup> Ndukwana kaMbengwana, was present.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, the Saturday conversation was not so much about the past as the present. It was dominated by an initial three and half hour conversation "on the native question in its general aspect."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Madlala, 'The Role of Prince Thimuni kaMudli kaJama' chapter 3.

<sup>30</sup> I take it that the first encounter was at Stuart's workplace because Stuart refers to his induna, Ndukwana kaMbengwana, as not being present at this first meeting, noting that the latter was obliged to remain at home as Stuart was in the process of moving house, an activity in which Ndukwana, as Stuart's induna, would have played an important role. Stuart's comments in the notes of his conversations with Ndlovu. "Ndhlovu ka Timuni," 198.

<sup>31</sup> The reference is probably to Mkando kaDhlova, a man of the Luthuli clan, also from the Maphumulo district, whom Stuart met with, and recorded the notes of the conversation, across some twenty-six days in July and August, 1902. "Mkando ka Dhlova" in Webb and Wright, *JSA* Vol.3, 145-189.

<sup>32</sup> "Ndhlovu ka Timuni," 199-200.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>34</sup> Induna: (singular noun: induna, pl.izinduna): term used for an appointed official with authority.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed account of who Ndukwana was and his relationship with Stuart see John Wright, "Ndukwana kaMbengwana as an Interlocutor on the History of the Zulu Kingdom, 1897-1903", *History in Africa*, 38 (2011), 343-68

<sup>36</sup> "Ndhlovu ka Timuni," 200.



In the course of the conversation, Ndukwana intervened often, registering and discussing multiple contemporary problems. As did Ndlovu.

Ndhlovu says everyone would hail with delight the holding of native public meetings in Pietermaritzburg from time to time. That is what is truly needed. he was of the opinion the last generation had failed in not educating native children. he considers that *ko/was* and others are corrupted by new-comers from England and elsewhere who know nothing of the native. It is not mere education that alienates the young men etc. But he was prepared to retract these words when I advocated the governing in accordance with old laws and customs. He approves the policy of 'repression'...he says people feel the laws as a great burden, and are unable to find the means of meeting the various calls on them by the government etc. They do not understand our laws - taxes reasonable and may reasonably be exacted. They cannot think where our king is, seeing he does not use his influence and ameliorate their condition.<sup>37</sup>

A reader familiar with the wider corpus of Stuart papers, and with the particular policies that Stuart was advocating at this time for native administration in Natal, can immediately confirm what the first-time reader probably senses, that this statement is as much a reflection of Stuart's thinking as anything that Ndlovu had to say. Stuart was advocate of regular consultations and is many times on record commenting on the general lack of knowledge on native customs relevant to indigenous governance among the new generation of native administrators,

What Ndlovu and the men with him actually had to say on Saturday afternoon cannot be recovered from these notes, at least not at face value, since they are the product of what Stuart chose to note down. What the notes do attest to upfront is that both parties, Stuart and his visitors, were deeply interested in, and concerned about, contemporary issues, and were choosing to meet and to discuss them. They were also deliberating, with ideas, opinions and, as the corpus makes clear, historical references, going backwards and forwards. Discussion probably continued that night amongst Ndlovu and his entourage, perhaps with Ndukwana who would have been responsible for hosting them. On the Sunday, Ndlovu began by saying that he had considered Stuart's remarks of the previous day about

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<sup>37</sup> "Ndhlovu ka Timuni," 201. Italics in this and other quoted text from the published version of the conversations indicates that the word was rendered in isiZulu in the original handwritten notes of the conversation.

Africans being allowed their own parliament and managing their own affairs according to their own laws and customs. Stuart captured his words thus:

He said the present state of affairs has turned them into mice. if such a policy of allowing them to manage their own affairs were conceded, the people would be able to bear any burden, however great it might be, seeing they would then have a full knowledge of what they were doing. Things have greatly altered from what they used to be...formerly men of note were known by the European authorities, and treated accordingly; now everyone is on a par with others and all are nobodies. Men should not continue to be *izigubu* (dummies), and not be allowed to *state their own views (pendula)*. Natives have become *izamuku* (mutes); we cannot make ourselves heard.<sup>38</sup>

Ndlovu had no hesitancy in asserting his criticisms: "*Umteto u isiqwaga*" which Stuart glossed in his notes as "the law is a tyrant (no respecter of persons)". The comments that follow, in a mix of English and isiZulu in Stuart's notes, probably reflect Ndlovu's sentiments: "A law is passed by the European and it is forcibly applied straight away. There ought to be councils among the natives for no man can *make laws* alone,"<sup>39</sup> If Mkando, the man who referred Ndlovu to Stuart, had given Ndlovu any indication of what he, Mkando, had discussed with Stuart - and we can infer that this was the reason why Ndlovu took the time out first to call on Stuart and then arrange to stay over, and invest in days of conversation - Mkando would have included reference to the discussions he had with Stuart about the onerousness of the Natal colonial government's forced labour demands, especially for road building, and Stuart's acknowledgement of Mkando's frustrations about government failures. Stuart's conversation notes with Mkando are filled with indications of their intensive discussion of a host of these kinds of contemporary grievances and concerns.<sup>40</sup> What Stuart referred to as Zulu history and custom was also the subject of these conversations. Presumably, Mkando would have mentioned that too to Ndlovu. After close perusal of the many pages of notes of the conversations in which Mkando and then with Ndlovu and his companions were involved (and indeed the notes of conversations with many others), it is hard to imagine that any of the participants in the conversation could have been in doubt

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<sup>38</sup> "Ndhlovu ka Timuni", 207 ("state their own views" is the editors' translation of "pendula"). The translation of *izigubu* and *izamuka* were Stuart's.

<sup>39</sup> "Ndhlovu ka Timuni", 207.

<sup>40</sup> "Mkando ka Dhlova" 153, 155, 156, 157.

that the forays into the past were undertaken in order to explore their significance for contemporary governance.

When he was again on a visit to Durban, Ndlovu, in the company of Luboza kaNombanda,<sup>41</sup> chose to resume the conversation with Stuart, this time on New Year's day, 1903. In the intervening period Ndlovu -probably in response to Stuart's interest and following from the previous conversation- had sent Luboza to see one Jiyana, an elderly man, to obtain information on the origin of the Zulu.<sup>42</sup> While Jiyana refused "on the ground that he no longer had any heart in anything,"<sup>43</sup> it seems that all the parties who gathered in Durban - their numbers included Stuart's induna, Ndukwana kaMbengwana, himself a contributor to the discussion - did have the heart for the engagement. And indeed, Stuart, Ndukwana and Ndlovu met again on the 11th of January, this time with Ndlovu's brother Mhuyi kaThimuni present and again in March.

The first point that I wish to draw attention to is that these conversations were not seen by the participating parties as recording sessions of established historical narratives (although as I shall show in due course, there were quite separate occasions when the recording of narratives was the purpose.) While these conversations sometimes involved digressions and moments of engaging the past with no obvious purpose, they were, for the most part, deliberative occasions in their own right. Stuart commented on Ndlovu's explicitly intellectual stance, his intelligence and his "keen interest in larger questions,"<sup>44</sup> noting that "Ndlovu quite agreed about the necessity of their giving us information in regard of themselves, and is himself very frank and open and, what is more, causes others to be so."<sup>45</sup> The discussions referenced the past in numerous ways, illuminating points, supporting lines of thought, and critically considering alternatives in the present and for the future. In one instance, Stuart recorded in his notes a discussion that he had

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<sup>41</sup> "Ndhlovu ka Timuni", 212.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 200. See also 206.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

with Ndukwana, after Ndlovu left, in which Ndukwana criticised, and refuted aspects of, Ndlovu's account of the birth of Shaka.<sup>46</sup> The debates were ongoing.

My second point is that even when Ndlovu offered a lengthy accounts of events in the past, he did not do so simply as a relayer of an established, stable story or tradition, but actively crafted his own account, drawing on multiple sources to establish the points he wished to make. Ndlovu indicated that one of his sources of information was his father, Thimuni kaMudli.<sup>47</sup> On the face of it, it would seem that Ndlovu as the son of Thimuni who was himself the son of Mudli, was relaying what his grandfather told his father who then told him. But Stuart also interviewed a brother of Ndlovu's, Mhuyi kaThimuni. The accounts offered by the brothers differ significantly, with Ndlovu offering far greater historical detail, and with the two accounts diverging on important issues. It is possible that Mhuyi, who had much less contact with his father Thimuni than Ndlovu did, heard less, was less interested in the past and failed to remember a family story or, and none of these points are mutually exclusive, that Ndlovu was a more active historian, making use of a larger variety of historical resources. Comparison of the accounts offered by Ndlovu and Mhuyi reveals however that they diverged to a degree and in a form that went beyond what might be attributed to lack of interest, poor memory, or faulty transmission in a chain of testimony. The essential difference concerned the critical question of Shaka's status as son of Senzangakhona. Ndlovu stated that Shaka was illegitimate. Mhuyi said he was not, and each account contained narrative details supporting its claim. One crucial differentiating factor was that Ndlovu noted to Stuart that he also owed much of his knowledge of Shaka to Sipika, a man of Sengakhona's Mnkangala ibutho,<sup>48</sup> who was actively involved in the events leading up to death of Senzangakhona and the accession of Shaka. All this suggests strongly that Ndlovu was not only was more exposed than Mhuyi to what Thimuni had to say, but that he also actively took up details provided by at least one other person than his father, Thimuni, namely, Sipika, braiding the accounts together for himself.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 200; also see Stuart's comments about how Ndukwana developed his understanding of history, 206.

<sup>48</sup> Ibutho: (singular noun: ibutho, pl. amabutho): term used for an age-based 'regiment'.

If we now turn to a consideration of what we know about Thimuni kaMduli, we discover that he too did not simply participate in a generational relay of tradition. To establish this point, we must diverge for a moment from our discussion of Ndlovu and Thimuni, to introduce someone in Ndlovu's network. In his discussions with Stuart and Ndukwana, Ndlovu offered to send to them Jantshi kaNongila whom he recommended for his skills as a praise poet.<sup>49</sup> In the next month Ndukwana accordingly arranged to fetch Jantshi, by then a man in his fifties, from Maphumulo, and Jantshi, in turn, was ensconced at Stuart's home for a set of conversations spread over about ten days. The notes indicate that Ndukwana participated in these conversations too and that again an active exchange of information ensued. The notes make it clear that Ndukwana and Jantshi argued over a variety of historical details.<sup>50</sup> In short, while the animated discussions of contemporary politics that characterised Ndlovu and his party's exchanges with Stuart were not a feature of the conversations with Jantshi, the conversations with Jantshi were not simply recordings of formulaic narratives. In this case the notes indicate that Jantshi was, for the most part, responding to lines of enquiry put forward by Stuart. Indeed in one instance Stuart presented Jantshi with information given by Mhuyi and Jantshi responded that he knew nothing about the matter.<sup>51</sup>

I have elsewhere discussed at length how Jantshi garnered the information which he drew on in his discussions with Stuart and Ndukwana, concluding that he relied heavily on what his father, Nongila,<sup>52</sup> an intelligence specialist under successive Zulu kings who was an expert in marshalling information, told him. Jantshi claimed Ndlovu's father, Thimuni, also derived his knowledge of history from Nongila, and indeed Jantshi and Ndlovu's accounts overlap in significant ways. The point of this digression into what Jantshi had to say is that it brings into view the networks of information, discussion flows and processes of the accrual of information that not

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<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>50</sup> See Colin Webb and John Wright, *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*. Volume 1 (Pietermaritzburg & Durban: University of Natal Press and Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1976), "Jantshi ka Nongila", 190, 194, 197.

<sup>51</sup>"Jantshi ka Nongila", 191.

<sup>52</sup> At the time of writing I do not have any further genealogical information about Nongila.

only Ndlovu and Jantshi were engaged in, but also those of their fathers Nongila and Thimuni. Significantly, in Nongila and Thimuni's time, politics was scarcely less turbulent than in 1902-3. Nongila and Thimuni were themselves navigating rapid political change. We have already noted that Thimuni took refuge in Natal, while Jantshi commented, somewhat obliquely, that Nongila crossed into Natal in Mpande's reign "being then tired of the duties of a spy".<sup>53</sup> They both seemingly fled the Zulu kingdom into what became the colony of Natal, with all the adjustments that entailed.<sup>54</sup> Through all of this histories mattered politically and were assiduously monitored, augmented, reconsidered and revised. In the earlier eras they were centrally as much a part of political discourse as they were revealed to be when Ndlovu, his followers, Ndukwana and Stuart sat down together

What emerges from this line of investigation is a picture of a complex series of syntheses across time drawn on thoughtfully by Ndlovu. We can track the processes of Ndlovu's take up of ideas, including historical information, not least noting his own explicit observation that people "qambela"<sup>55</sup> stories about Shaka.<sup>56</sup> Translated in this context as "concoct" by the editors of the published, the verb ukuqamba is of interest here, open as it is to refer to composing poetry, for example, or to telling lies. In this instance, Ndlovu was dismissing sensational stories about Shaka, suggesting that "concocting" was exactly what he was getting at. But very possibly the tellers of alternative versions would have thought much the same about Ndlovu's version. Here my substantive point is that when we give Ndlovu kaThimuni's accounts as much attention as we give those of writers like Magma Fuze or John Dube, we find similar processes of historical crafting, the bringing together of information and arguments from various sources, and the signs of animated intellectual activity.

In the case of Magma Fuze, the intellectual biographer is on relatively familiar research ground, even if she must, as Mokoena does, do much that is innovative to

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<sup>53</sup> "Jantshi ka Nongila", 174.

<sup>54</sup> Madlala, 'Thimuni'.

<sup>55</sup> See Killie Campbell Africana Library, Stuart Papers, file 57 nbk 10, p.14, for original term in isiZulu.

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 59-64.

overturn racialised habits of thinking about who is and who is not an intellectual, to enable us to hear what Fuze has to say, as well as to track little known networks, foreground the contents of vernacular accounts, explore the nature of their forms and the manners of their mediation. Any attempt to track the intellectual biography of someone like Ndlovu kaThimuni must, in its turn, overturn habits of thinking that position him as a tribal informant, reconstruct the circumstances of the making of records concerning him as well as of the resources that he drew on, read for the signs of his thinking embedded in the notes of others, and foreground his words and concepts wherever they can be found in the record.

But the matter does not rest there, as there is another habit of thinking that requires critical review and that is the idea that the literate intellectuals were political thinkers with a wide range of connections while the so-called informants were insular tribesmen. The factors and experiences that shaped Ndlovu's thinking speak to the scope and range of the networks of ideas that Ndlovu was involved with. In 1903 when Ndlovu was talking to Stuart, these were far from self-contained Natal networks of rural tribal informants. For one thing Ndlovu was well-travelled. Not only had he journeyed north into Thonga country,<sup>57</sup> but he had also worked for a time in the Kimberly Diamond Fields. Eventually, like Fuze, he was to end up on St. Helena. This was a result of the central role he played in 1906 rebellion against the poll tax, the so-called Bambatha rebellion. That role turned him into a central figure in Natal politics. As Guy put it in his account of Ndlovu's involvement in the uprising, Ndlovu had invested in understanding and analysing how colonialism had been established, not through conquest but by negotiation and stealth, and his analysis pointed to colonial maladministration, against which he finally decided to fight. Ndlovu featured prominently in the highly publicised trial that followed the rebellion. The court record reveals much about Ndlovu's abilities to operate publicly in this showcase trial and to present his version of the events of the uprising in the face of a prosecution bent on depicting him as bloodthirsty, barbaric and devious. Ndlovu emerged as a "canny leader of undoubted ability."<sup>58</sup> He was at the center of a complex network of

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<sup>57</sup> "Ndlovu ka Timuni", 201.

<sup>58</sup> Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*, 45-47.

communication and strategising amongst the rebels prior to the trial, and afterwards with an even wider network of people in strategising the post-rebellion situation, and may well have been working with King Dinuzulu. These networks included many of the writerly intellectuals we have been referring to.

The trial was of pressing concern for people like Fuze and Dube, who were themselves advising King Dinuzulu at the time. It was actively discussed in the black and white press. It is hard to imagine that prominent figures like John Dube and Ndlovu kaThimuni, whose home bases were in proximity to each other, did not actually know each other and never talked in person. If they did not, they most certainly knew a great deal about each other and the kind of thinking and activity that the other was engaged in. Their networks were far from sealed off from each other. Both were involved in local chiefly matters - Ndlovu as a chief himself and Dube in the chiefly politics of the Qadi with which the Dube family was historically connected.<sup>59</sup> From the time of King Dinuzulu's return from exile in 1898, both Ndlovu and Dube were involved with the Zulu royal house. At the time of the trial, and again at the time of Ndlovu's own return from exile that was the result of the 1906 trial, there can be no doubt that *both* Ndlovu and Dube were thinking deeply about the order of things in the past and how it was changing. And, of course, both were providers of accounts of the reign of Shaka.

The lives of the supposedly authentic tribal informants were thus intertwined with those of their abutting kholwa neighbours and kin - both immediate and distant - in Natal, as well as with a variety of other literate political allies. There is much more evidence that can be elucidated about these parties shared concerns about the matters of nation, rule, government, domination, governmental and civil responsibilities and hegemony, and their thinking about the significance of what those things were like in the past and in the presence. These were, after all, the pressing questions of the day, for the apparently tribal informants as much as the kholwa literati.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5.



Stuart again interviewed Ndlovu in 1919 across three days, this time clearly making a specific effort to record his spoken words verbatim in isiZulu. The notes covered some fifty-four pages spread across two notebooks. Stuart homed in on Ndlovu's account of the birth and key events in life of Shaka. It seems that Stuart's purpose on this occasion was to get Ndlovu to cover in detail many of the stories about Shaka first raised under very different circumstances in 1902 and 1903. The reason he took down Ndlovu's words with such precision in 1919 was because he planned to use it in a Zulu language school reader. In 1924, the recorded account was published in the original isiZulu in *uBaxoxele*<sup>60</sup> to be read by a generation of school children, as were accounts by others that were recorded by Stuart for reproduction in isiZulu in the readers.<sup>61</sup> The discussion of contemporary political developments that characterised the earlier discussions is nowhere present in this set of notes. By 1919 both Stuart and Ndlovu were all too well aware that the kinds of consultative processes that in 1902-3 they had agreed were desirable were not to be. Things had moved on dramatically.

Ndlovu kaThimuni, Mhuyi kaThimuni, Jantshi kaNongila, Ndukwana kaMbengwana and many others were involved in the special efforts (and sometimes chance encounters) that resulted in them talking to Stuart in isiZulu, under circumstances very much of Stuart's making but, as we are able to see in certain instances, in circumstances the making of which involved dynamics that exceeded Stuart's agendas.<sup>62</sup> Of course, many other people in region were also both talking and writing in isiZulu, on a wide range of topics including the long past.

### **Thinking the past in the present with an eye to the future.**

In all sorts of ways the concerns of a significant component of the writings by the literate intellectuals overlapped with the foci of the Stuart notes, shaped as the

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<sup>60</sup> James Stuart, *UBaxoxela: incwadi yezindaba za Bantu ba kwa Zulu, na ba seNatala* (London: Longman, 1924) 59-80.

<sup>61</sup> Wright, 'Socwatsha'.

<sup>62</sup> See John Wright, "Thununu kaNonjiya Gcabashe visits James Stuart in the Big Smoke to talk about history", *Natalia*, (submitted).

notes were by the congruence of interest of Stuart and many of his interlocutors in indigenous governance, practices of rule and the reign of Shaka. They also overlapped with other subjects that feature more incidentally in the Stuart corpus. We can see that the writers were interested not merely in the modern present - and the agenda of progress and change - but were actively assessing the meaning and possibilities of the past in their new present. There can be no doubt that the oral discourses too were profoundly aware of the need to navigate a changing world. The Stuart notes abound in explicit statements on this. Unlike the interest which the Stuart notes have attracted for the detail that they offer on the reigns of Shaka and Dingane, the notes have not been much explored for what they have to say about political thought, discursive activity and the navigation of change, though where they have, much is revealed.<sup>63</sup>

How researchers read the texts of the writerly intellectuals, has often been a result of notions about the writerly intellectuals as acculturated<sup>64</sup> and having imbibed questionable ideas of European thinkers about topics like Bantu migrations and racial origins. These ideas are then regarded as having been cobbled together with fragments of oral traditions only poorly known because of the kholwa distance from tribal situations and history. The results are judged to be either "imperfect historical sources" with "faults of style and errors of fact" such as Fuze's *Abantu Abamnyama*,<sup>65</sup> or positioned as literary works of fiction, like Dube's *Insila kaShaka*. Many of the written works on historical subjects are read as Zulu, or African, nationalist tracts of comparatively little historical substance.<sup>66</sup>

Narrators like Stuart's interlocutors, are, in turn, regarded as not doing synthesizing intellectual work in order to make sense of the world they live in, but as relaying, more or less uncontaminated oral tradition from bygone years. This persists, in the face of growing body of work that reveals them to be as active, and as adept in

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<sup>63</sup> See for example, Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 62-71 and more recently Hamilton, C. and Wright, J. 'Moving Beyond Ethnic Framing: Political Differentiation in the Chiefdoms of the KwaZulu-Natal Region before 1830', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2017, Vol. 43, No. 4, 663-679.

<sup>64</sup> See discussion in Mokoena, *Fuze*, 49-54.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>66</sup> La Hausse de Lalouvier, *Restless Identities*.

mobilising history to resource their thinking and to navigate change at the time of recording, as their literate counterparts. We can see much the same kind of bricolage and cobbling that Mokoena sees in Fuze's writings, and that characterises the writings of Dube, at work in the recorded words of someone like Ndlovu kaThimuni, who has long been regarded as offering pure and authentic oral tradition. And still more importantly, there is growing body of research that indicates that historical discourse was continually being reworked in the generations that preceded those of Stuart's interlocutors, in order to cope with complex and rapidly changing political circumstances then.

What these accounts, written and oral, share is an understanding and treatment of history as something to be deliberated over, as manifestly a subject of debate. Much overt discussion of this kind took place in the pages of Dube's newspaper, *Ilanga*. Mokoena shows us that debate was actively solicited by Fuze when he wrote columns and letters for newspapers, and when he responded to his argumentative readers.<sup>67</sup> Much spoken word that was recorded as historical evidence was delivered in situations where conflict of interpretation were understood by the participants as the very condition of the offering of historical knowledge, nowhere more so than in the contested setting of the courtrooms and before commissions. And, as we have seen from this brief engagement of the encounters that resulted in the corpus of notes made by Stuart recording the words of Ndlovu kaThimuni, history as contested, debated and debatable, and subject to assessment and revision, was present both in the content and form of the discussions at Stuart's home in Durban.

## **Conclusion**

This paper makes the argument that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intellectual activity was not the preserve of literates. People like Ndlovu kaThimuni were just as engaged in navigating thoughtfully the changes of the time as were the writerly intellectuals. Like them, Ndlovu drew on the past to address the concerns of the present. Like them he braided together strands of information in

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<sup>67</sup>Mokoena, *Fuze*, 42, 199.

ways that helped in making sense of the past and that enabled thinking about the future. He paid attention to the ideas of others and exerted his critical faculties at every turn. He mobilised networks and drew on banks of knowledge in the making of important decisions and in the defence of disputed actions. He was concerned to place the past on record and was active in brokering the past into the present. These were all things that the writerly intellectuals of his time were doing. Mokoena describes Fuze as disquieted by the "revelation that the oral past was silent on the issue of how its inheritors should react to modernity".<sup>68</sup> A point that I wish to draw out here is that there are abundant signs in Ndlovu's accounts and in his own practice that "the oral past" as Mokoena terms it, was full of resources and strategies for how to navigate change.

In explicating the intellectual activity of Ndlovu kaThimuni, this paper draws attention to currents of political thought with roots in the eras before colonialism. It does this in a way that reminds us that these currents were not timeless products but thought in motion, even then responding to political change. The paper further draws attention to another kind of legacy about being a public figure and speaking out on the questions of the day, and not being, as Ndlovu put it, a "nobody" or "izamuka (mutes)". Ndlovu clearly appreciated the value of debate and advocated for gatherings for public discussion and debate. He chose to engage and confront colonial thinking.

A further implication of the arguments made in this paper concerns the nature of the archive that these writings and recorded notes collectively comprise. Mokoena makes the point that Fuze and the readers of his columns regularly argued about the meaning of Zulu words and sought to develop both a linguistically correct secular vocabulary and a religious one.<sup>69</sup> Discussions about the meanings of words are also to be found throughout the Stuart corpus. In all the texts concerned - the writings by Fuze and Dube, and their many respondents and fellow literate intellectuals, and in the hundreds of pages of Stuart notes, in Cetshwayo's various

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<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 217-235.

statements, and in many instances that I have not had the space here to mention - words were set up to do work in sentences. The kinds of work they did was historically contingent but in all cases a more or less shared inherited vocabulary was being used by all of these writers and speakers to navigate change, to say things about the past, the present and the future. How the words did their work was not merely contingent but also informed by legacies of thought about the nature of rule and power and many other things, indeed, the very order of things. There is a vast amount recorded text in isiZulu that says these things, coming from multiple positions, generated under a wide variety of circumstances. The archive that this paper delineates is a register of the navigation of change. The inherited concepts that were available in the period when the archive was laid down were not, of course, frozen time travellers into the period. They were concepts with long histories of being put to work in past discourses, with changing inflections across time. Collectively they constitute a complex and colossal archive awaiting exploration.

The burden of my argument here is that inherited concepts were in motion in the thinking of Ndlovu kaThimuni as much as they were in that of Fuze and Dube, and furthermore they were also in motion in the thinking and articulations, in turn, of Thimuni kaMudli, something we glimpse through what Ndlovu, Mhuyi and Jantshi have to say about Thimuni and his knowledge of the past. We can only imagine what the case regarding concepts in motion would have been for Thimuni's father, Mudli, who oversaw the accession of Shaka within the small Zulu chiefdom and who participated in the massive changes in the political landscape that accompanied the rapid expansion of the Zulu king's control over the wider KwaZulu-Natal region. Researchers who might be interested in what nation, rule, government, domination, governmental and civil responsibilities and hegemony might have meant and how they might have operated in Shakan or earlier times, not to mention kingship, the role of women, the expertise of izinyanga and a million other questions, have a vast array of texts produced under a variety of circumstances at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century, all concerned with these questions, with what they meant in the

past, what they meant at the time, and what they might mean in the future, with much of it expressed in isiZulu. Some texts may well offer us important details about historical events, central places and important figures. But arguably just as significantly, the texts offer us a well-populated field of conceptual usage at a particular time, by a large range of people, in a variety of formats and mediums with all kinds of registers of communication, modes of address, pressures and allures of cultural translation and brokerage, and conventions of rendering into text.

Just as I have argued that the written texts are as much of an archive as the recorded oral ones, so too have I sought to show that the recorded oral texts are as much thoughtful syntheses and acts of brokerage as the written ones. In the face of this extended archive it is no longer possible, if it ever was, to rely on the ethnographies of the same period for insight into the conceptual world of that time of Zulu speakers, and to assume people in previous eras had much the same "worldview". Scholars can no longer valorise the brokerage and syntheses of the ethnographers at the expense of paying attention to the brokerage and syntheses that we can see in these texts. To make these points is not to wish simply to supplant the ethnographic texts with these ones. Rather it is to recognise that each of these kinds of text -ethnographic as much as the literary or recorded oral - is a particular production that is worth investigating *as a production*.

The paper has engaged critically with the way in which history produced by black intellectuals, typically operating in urban settings, was consigned out of the field of historiography as literature and politics, while the oral productions of history by black thinkers, typically in rural settings, were in turn, positioned as sources. This double manoeuvre not only denied historical authority to both of these forms of history production, but favoured the narratives of the rural informant as historically more authentic than the writings of the urban intellectual, thereby lancing both forms of historical production of their discursive potency. The paper offers thus an historical perspective on the pressures on the academies today to grapple with the limits of the existing disciplines and the weight of what Bheki Petersen, speaking in 2017, termed the Black Humanities developed over the last century by intellectuals and thinkers outside those disciplines.

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