

# **Re-inventing Zuluness: From Ethnic Separatism to Democratic Multiculturalism**

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## Abstract

I argue in this dissertation that Zulu ethnicity, far from being a homogeneous entity with a seamless link to the past, is in fact a site of cultural struggle, open to diverse interpretations, and reconstructed in relation to contemporary dilemmas.

I focus on some of the key sites where Zuluness has been re-interpreted, and the challenge these re-inventions pose to the idea of a single Zulu history as a high culture built around the symbols of the Zulu nation, with its implicit assumption of a male subject. Instead, these alternative claims to Zuluness, often coming from those marginalised by the hegemonic history of the Zulu nation, draw on the diverse popular cultural history of the Zulu people. In the case of the people of KwaXimba it is a history of unwilling incorporation into the Zulu nation and resistance to colonialism; for the worker poets the move to the urban areas has created a distance from the system of chiefs, where they have been drawn into the politics of an organised working class, and for rural Zulu women their marginalisation from a male dominated public space has allowed them to develop an alternative discourse of the self.

A key element of ethnic identification is the use of the past to legitimate the present. The re-inventions of Zuluness I focus on question the imperative that the past must dictate the terms of the present: instead they stress a transformative politics in which 'trust' is located in the present, and the past is seen as open to critical questioning. Zulu ethnicity, with its orientation to the past, thrived in the brutal conditions of apartheid modernity, when the

present failed to provide a stable psychic foothold to Africans - and in fact Africans were consciously encouraged to assume ethnic identities in order to legitimate their exclusion from a common citizenship. The transformative approaches to Zuluness that I focus on have consciously refused to accept ethnic identities under such conditions. Instead they have identified with the national liberation struggle and its assertion of the claims of all South Africans to a place in the present and future. As that vision materialises with the first democratic elections in April 1994, I suggest that Zuluness will increasingly be experienced not in terms of fixity to past traditions, but as a way of being open to the present and future.

## **Contents**

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1. The Struggle over the Meaning of Shaka Day .....	15
Chapter 2. Popular Praises and the Worker Poets .....	42
Chapter 3. Women in the Margins of ethnicity and nationalism .....	67
Conclusion .....	86
Notes .....	89
Bibliography	

## Introduction

I believed then, as I do now, that an authentic, comprehensive South African culture will grow in its own way.....

We were thoroughly aware of the meeting of the cultures, African and European, and of the disorganisation of both.... as a result. We did not have the desire of the Nationalists that we should return to the primitive. But we did have an intense wish to preserve what is valuable in our heritage while discarding the inappropriate and outmoded. Our people were ill-equipped to withstand the impact of a twentieth century industrial society. Our task seemed to consist in relating the past coherently to the present and future. (Luthuli, in Marks, "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity" 224)

Luthuli's focus on the challenge of "relating the past coherently to the present and future" is central to an understanding of the struggle around Zulu identity. I will argue in this dissertation that Zulu ethnicity, far from being a homogeneous entity with a seamless link to the past, is in fact a site of cultural struggle, open to diverse interpretations, and reconstructed in relation to contemporary dilemmas.

Until recently there was an implicit assumption within the national liberation movement that ethnicity was simply a construction of apartheid, and it was largely dismissed in favour of the demand for a unitary, non-racial and democratic nation-state. However, this assurance has been severely tested by the resurgence of ethnic nationalism, most notably Zulu

nationalism, which has been able to muster considerable grassroots support behind it. In this dissertation I explore the reasons for the resurgence of Zulu nationalism, and the various ways in which the national liberation movement has responded to this. In particular I will focus on the cultural struggles that have taken place over the symbols of Zulu nationalism, and the ways in which these symbols have been re-interpreted from within the national liberation movement. The ANC in Natal has been widely criticised for what has been interpreted as a misguided intervention into the field of Zulu nationalism, an intervention guided primarily by the aim of winning support away from Inkatha, rather than on the basis of a coherent response of its own to ethnic nationalism. Certainly Zulu nationalism has been a powerful force in the region, pulling the ANC into its thorny and complex politics, as for example in the surprising new role of the ANC in defending the institution of kingship against Inkatha. I will argue in this thesis that underlying these apparently crude attempts to muster Zulu support, the national liberation movement has had a far more complex engagement with Zulu nationalism. The attempt to negotiate a national identity that is sensitive to the complexities of identity within the emerging South African nation is a question that has challenged the national liberation movement throughout its history, a challenge that has been felt most intensely in Natal.

What is perhaps most remarkable in the statement by Luthuli with which this chapter opens is his optimism, his belief in the capacity of African people to adapt and survive despite his recognition of the "disorganisation" of both African and European cultures as a result of this "meeting of cultures". He hints at a democratic and inclusive resolution of this crisis: "I

believed then, as I do now, that an authentic, comprehensive South African culture will grow in its own way." Luthuli had the fortune to be placed in between worlds, as a chief with a firm grasp of traditional rural politics and consciousness, but also playing a key role in the emerging politics of resistance of the ANC. The banning of the ANC in 1960, however, broke this tenuous link that was being forged between past and future. When the national liberation movement re-emerged in the 1980's, Inkatha and the KwaZulu homeland had succeeded in consolidating an existing alliance between disaffected elements of the black petit bourgeoisie, the remnants of the Zulu royalists and the Natal administration, around the symbols of the Zulu nation. Unlike the ANC of the 1950's, the national liberation movement of the eighties was essentially an urban movement, intensifying the ideological gap between traditional rural Zulus steeped in a strongly patriarchal society, and a radicalised urban youth.

In order to understand the intense attachment that is felt for ethnic identities, one must explore the nature of the "disorganisation" Luthuli sees as caused by the "meeting of cultures". Giddens describes modernity as having a more far-reaching impact on human society and modes of being-in-the-world than any previous changes in human society<sup>1</sup>. His description of the nature of that change can help us to understand why it has had such a disorienting effect, particularly for colonised countries that have had modernity thrust upon them by an external and powerful colonising culture, that has always sought to interpret modernity to legitimate an exploitative relationship between coloniser and colonised.



Giddens talks of some key processes associated with modernity, that set traditional and modern societies distinctly apart from each other: whereas in traditional societies one's experience of time and event is directly related to place, to a specific locality, bound within kinship ties and a localised community, modernity ruptures that relationship, replacing it with abstract forms such as a globalised clock time, which make possible other abstractions such as the commodification of labour. As a result, much of one's sense of being-in-the-world is dependent on abstract specialised knowledge that is outside the bounds of the individual to control, and on abstract relations with a vast number of people who are not known in their entirety. According to Giddens these 'dis-embedding' processes are the basis of enlightenment rationality, since once people are 'dis-embedded' from traditional and ritualised forms of knowing and behaving, they become involved in a process of reflexivity whereby all forms of thinking are open to question.

A broadly based ethnic identity is only possible for a people who have already been 'dis-embedded' from more localised forms of identity associated with traditional societies. Such identities are products of a modern world where dominant elites can gain access to abstract institutions such as schools, the mass media, and control over the use of violence to a degree that was unthinkable in pre-modern societies. These institutions of modernity can be used as a means of 're-embedding' 'dis-embedded' subjects who are unable to gain any stable psychic foothold in the environment of modernity. Appeals are made to an imagined past whose absence is felt in a world where traditional forms of 'trust', which Giddens sees as giving human subjects their sense of ontological security, have been lost, while the abstract

systems of 'trust' that operate in the modern world have not fully come into being - in the South African context this process has often been denied to the black majority by deliberately restricting access to education and other forms of 're-embedding' mechanisms associated with modernity. In this context ethnic identification, albeit manufactured through the abstract systems of modernity, provides some sort of relief from the alienating effects of modernity, and thus ironically serves to 're-embed' 'dis-embedded' subjects in the modern world.

Enlightenment ideology was seized by the emergent capitalist class in Europe as they sought to throw off the shackles of traditional forms of authority. It was believed that reason would provide the core to a more just and durable form of human society, but this view did not count on how unsettling an effect reflexivity would have in casting human thought away from any imagined centre, as even reason itself became open to its own reflexivity. Thus Giddens argues that post-modernity is simply modernity coming to know itself. The resurgence of ethnic identification in the modern world has been seen as a response to the nihilism and despair resulting from this anti-foundationalist tendency of modernity. Potentially, though, modernity's reflexivity has a more positive contribution to make as a tool of anti-colonial resistance, since any claims by the West to being the centre against which other cultures must be judged can ultimately be undermined by modernity's own logic. Western concepts of history and of progress based on the centrality of the West can no longer be sustained by rational thought, an awareness that is most profoundly felt as the colonised begin to assert their 'otherness'.

For the colonised, the response to enlightenment individualism was always more ambivalent, for while at an abstract level it promised the fruits of human agency and of moral individualism, in particular through the churches' 'civilising mission', at a concrete level it was experienced in the form of colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation. The contradiction between an ideology of enlightenment individualism and the materiality of capitalist greed was never experienced as extremely as in the colonial situation, a contradiction that once grasped by the newly colonised, was to prove the spur to liberation movements there, as it had to the working classes in the metropolis. Such a transition depended on the assimilation of the colonised into modernity, a process that happened unevenly in South Africa, in part because of colonial ambivalence as to whether colonial exploitation would be better achieved by assimilating the colonised into enlightenment culture, or whether exploitation could be more legitimately and effectively carried out by asserting the difference of the colonised, a difference that legitimated levels of brutality and exploitation the enlightenment professed to have left behind in the age of barbarism. This colonial ambivalence created in turn an ambivalent response in the emerging African petit bourgeoisie, as Tim Couzens points out in his discussion of black culture in the 1920's: "the Scylla and Charybdis for blacks at the time (and the dilemma continues to this day) was the traditionalist argument with its tendency to segregationism on the one hand, and the assimilationist argument with its potential destruction of 'African culture' on the other." (Couzens, T. The New African 54)

One of the consequences of colonial ambivalence towards the colonised was the extremely

uneven development of black South Africans, with sections being assimilated into modernity through the churches and mission schools, while others were exploited by indirect rule through the tribal chiefs, whereby considerable elements of a traditional consciousness remained intact. Black South Africans were thus being exposed to two competing ways of knowing: a traditional and a modern, and two competing sources of social control. H.I.E. Dhlomo reveals how aware black intellectuals were of the problems this created for them in trying to develop a unified African point of view:

There are differences.... between an African in the Orange Free State who is kicked and bullied and told frankly and frequently that he is a kaffir, and a Natal African who is assured that his chiefs, customs and laws are wonderful and is encouraged to stay tribal; who when he comes to town is allowed, nay, encouraged to address and in turn be addressed by his boss in Zulu; permitted to board public vehicles (albeit segregated and confined to the upper deck), and encouraged to dance his old tribal dances amid cheering and jeering crowds of the 'superior race'. It would be superfluous to state which of these two Africans lives under a more complete system of enslavement; who is a ready, if unconscious collaborator with his masters; and who of them will soon discover himself and fight desperately for his freedom. (35)

Dhlomo implies here that Zulu ethnicity is largely a construct of the particular form of British colonial rule in the province. While to an extent this is true, British colonial policy developed in a situation where the administration lacked the financial and military capability

to defeat the powerful Zulu nation. In this situation Theophilus Shepstone, First Secretary of Natal Native Affairs, developed an approach to Zuluness which sought to assimilate it into a colonial world view. Shepstone was impressed by the level of organisation achieved by the Shakan kingdom, and saw in it the possibilities for an inexpensive model of colonial domination in which social order could be ensured through the despotic and arbitrary use of violence. This totalitarian system could be justified on the grounds of its 'authenticity' as an African system of governance. However, this project was only partially satisfactory for the Natal administration, since the interests of the Zulu kingdom often overrode the interests of the colonialists. By 1879 the British were determined to subdue the Zulu kingdom, but the particular relationship that developed between the Zulu kingdom and the Natal administration had its impact on Zulu consciousness, for while in the rest of South Africa, Africans increasingly turned to Christianity as pre-colonial political organisation and belief systems were shattered, in KwaZulu, Africans remained unmoved by the call of the missionary's 'civilising mission'. In "Mofolo's Chaka and the Bambatha Rebellion", David Attwell argues that Mofolo's novel captures the cultural gap that had developed between Zulus and other black South Africans by the beginning of the nineteenth century. A Basotho Christian convert, Mofolo was concerned by the reticence of Zulus in heeding Christianity, and paints the Zulu kingdom in terms of a biblical fallen world. Attwell argues that it was only after the final defeat of Zulu resistance in the Bambatha rebellion of 1906-7 that the missionaries had a flood of Zulu converts, revealing how well Africans understood the link between the churches 'civilising mission' and the inevitability of coming to terms with modernity. He argues that the Bambatha rebellion marks the final turning point in the

history of African resistance as the last of the colonial wars gave way to an acceptance of the 'settled system', and the struggle for national liberation and democratic rights within that system. In Natal, retreat into a proud past represented by the Zulu kingdom has always been a greater possibility than for Africans in the rest of South Africa, who have been readier to accept that liberation will come out of a transformation of the present, rather than retreat into an imagined past.

The Zulu Kingdom has remained a contradictory symbol, both of resistance to domination and as an instrument of colonial rule. As segregationist, and later apartheid, policy began to unfold in the twentieth century, and while the black petit bourgeoisie in the rest of South Africa was moving towards an alliance with an increasingly organised working class, in Natal a more conservative alliance was being forged between the *amakholwa*, or christianised elite, the remnants of the Zulu monarchy and chiefs, and the Natal Native Administration, around the symbols of Zulu ethnicity and the Zulu nation. As Shula Marks argues in "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity", this alliance was attractive to the colonial administration as it fitted with their policy of racial segregation, which was seen as a bastion against the more militant working class politics emerging in the townships. She quotes Heaton Nicholls, Secretary of Natal Native Affairs, as saying, "If we do not get back to communalism we will most certainly arrive very soon at communism." (Marks, S. "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity", 217). This view was echoed by John Dube, a key figure in Natal politics, and initially in South Africa as the first President of the South African Native National Congress (the forerunner of the ANC), with which he broke when he found it becoming too radical. Dube

saw in a return to tradition a bulwark against the leaders of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union(ICU) with their "misleading propaganda, their absurd promises, their international socialistic inclinations and communism." (222)

But while the class nature of this alliance has been recognised, what is perhaps less well known is its basis in the defence of patriarchy, in both the traditional system of chiefs and in the emerging industrial capitalism. Marks refers to the increasing assertiveness of black women as they took advantage of the freedoms opening up to them with the break-up of older tribal structures and their migration to the urban centres, as I explore in more detail in Chapter 3. Hence, calls for a return to Zulu traditionalism often mask a desire for a return of patriarchal authority.<sup>2</sup>

While this alliance between sections of the black petit bourgeoisie, remnants of the Zulu monarchy and chiefs, and the Natal administration was to provide the basis for the dominant version of Zulu ethnic nationalism, it is not as if this was the only historical development open to Zuluness. Neither can it claim historical legitimacy as the resurgence of an unchanged Zulu identity, for even at the height of the Zulu Kingdom, there was only a limited concept of Zulu ethnic identity amongst Africans in KwaZulu-Natal. In fact, the Zulu Kingdom was not built on a notion of a common shared ethnic identity, since as Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright argue<sup>3</sup>, only the Zulu elite and the *amabutho* regiments were identified as Zulu, while those living South of the Tugela were commonly referred to during the time of the Zulu Kingdom as *amalala* or dogs. As Chief Mlaba's account of the

history of the people of KwaXimba in Chapter 1 shows, there has always been a lively resistance to hegemonic notions of Zuluness, and the hold of the Zulu Kingdom on its subjects was always tenuous. Hamilton and Wright argue that a common identity as Zulus among Africans living in Natal only emerged after the break-up of the Zulu Kingdom. The term "Zulu" was initially used by colonialists with the formation of the Natal Colony by the British in 1897, as part of their imperialist mission to classify those whom they had conquered according to imperial ideologies of generic races, and because of the administrative convenience of naming blacks within the colony according to a single ethnic category. A common Zulu identity among Africans in Natal only came about later, possibly as a result of migrancy to the Vaal and the confrontation with both black and white people from other linguistic and cultural groups. A more recent example of this development of ethnic sentiment can be seen in Mhlongo's praise poem in Chapter 2, where he talks of his traumatic experience as a migrant worker of the confrontation with 'other nations'.

In the midst of this complex and contradictory situation in which Zulu ethnicity emerges, how is Zuluness to be reclaimed, not as a legitimization for ethnic separatism and retreat into a past tradition, but as an aspect of a broader South African culture? In the following chapters I explore the cultural struggles that have been waged in the field of Zulu ethnicity to reclaim Zuluness as an integral part of the national liberation struggle for a non-racial, democratic South Africa.

In chapter 1, I look at the struggle by the ANC to reclaim Shaka Day by hosting their own



festival in rural Natal. In so doing the ANC opened up the question of Zulu nationalism to different interpretations, and was at the same time exposed to alternative versions of Zuluness negotiated by the Ximba chief and the people living at KwaXimba.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the way the worker poets have drawn on a popular tradition of praise poetry in their attempt to redefine Zulu culture within a tradition of worker struggle for a non-racial socialist democracy. I explore the way in which they draw on popular Zulu imagery in the process of reclaiming an alienated present and asserting the right of African workers to a place in the future. The past is seen not as a fixed set of rules placing limitations on the present, but rather as a rich source from which to draw in the process of transforming and humanising the present.

Chapter 3 looks at the way women are placed within the hegemonic tradition of Zuluness and women's self-definition within this tradition. I address the impact of the modern nation-space on women's social position, and the relative merits of women's more autonomous, but powerless position in traditional culture, as opposed to the opportunities opened up by the nation-space for women to enter the more powerful fields of public discourse from which they are excluded in traditional Zulu society.

I would like to conclude this introduction by outlining the difficulties faced in pursuing an interdisciplinary project such as this. Firstly, there is the difficulty of deciding against which body of scholarship one should measure oneself. Most of the work thus far in the field of

Zulu ethnicity and identity has come out of the considerable body of historical scholarship, and to a lesser extent in the field of political science. However, both these fields of scholarship seemed inadequate to my concern in the trade of stories: the field of discourses through which people struggle to negotiate an identity for themselves. Interestingly, historians in Natal, most notable among them Carolyn Hamilton, are beginning to shift away from the pursuit of verifiable fact towards a pursuit of the history of the idea of Zuluness, as in Hamilton's PhD Thesis "Authoring Shaka : Models, Metaphors and Historiography", which traces the historical trade in ideas around Shaka. It is the work of Natal's historians that I have found most valuable in providing a background to this project. However, the areas of concern in historical studies are somewhat different to the concerns of this thesis, which draws broadly from the field of post-colonial studies and cultural studies. As yet, no such body of scholarship has explored Zulu ethnicity and identity, which creates certain difficulties in grounding this project. While there are few secondary sources to draw on, the primary sources for this enquiry are almost wholly in Zulu. As a student of English, with no working knowledge of the Zulu language, this posed considerable difficulties. The limited time available for this project exacerbated the difficulties in the time consuming process of collecting primary source material. Ideally, I would have liked to gather cultural material for the chapters on praise poetry and the challenges women pose to hegemonic versions of Zuluness directly from the Ximba community, and from those who have left KwaXimba for town. This would have added more weight to the supposition in Chapter 1 that it is not simply the KwaXimha chief, but also a substantial section of the people of KwaXimba that have been involved in negotiating a unique relationship with their Zuluness. However,

without access to a translator, and given the limited time and resources available this was not possible. These substantial hurdles notwithstanding, I hope that this project will open up space for other students of post-colonial studies to develop this important area of study.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Struggle over the Meaning of Shaka Day**

To reach KwaXimha you take the Cato Ridge turn off the N3 highway connecting Durban to Johannesburg, a journey familiar to the migrant workers of rural Natal. You drive across an empty plateau until you come to a minor road which curves steeply down to open out on The Valley of a Thousand Hills. As its name suggests, it combines the picturesque with poverty: its hills range as far as the eye can see, as densely populated as any township, but with mud and corrugated iron structures built haphazardly on the slopes rather than the grid-like layout of the matchbox structures in the townships. I later discovered two reasons for the densely crowded population: the empty plain we drove across had once been home to some of the people of Ximba, who were forcibly removed from this more fertile land in 1960; I also came to understand the overcrowding as a sign of support for Chief Mlaba whose leadership based on democracy and development had attracted many people to live within the boundaries of his tribal authority.

A western eye is trained to see with concern the poverty, overcrowding and soil erosion, but my colleague, Phumelele Ntombela, pointed out the taps, electric cables and telephone wires connecting nearly every shack in Chief Mlaba's district. He had worked directly with the Umgeni Water Board and Eskom after Chief Buthelezi had blocked his access to KwaZulu government funds as punishment for the refusal of the community to toe the Inkatha(IFP)

line. In this rural development in KwaXimba, Ntombela sees the ANC's practical vision of progress for rural Natal, as opposed to the regressive tribalism mobilised, as she sees it, by the IFP. Like many ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) intellectuals, Ntombela has made the journey from a childhood of rural poverty to town and from there the more rare break into the professional and intellectual establishment. The possibility of negotiating a positive relationship with progress may be less apparent to those trapped in the cycle of rural unemployment and migrancy. Somewhere between Ntombela's interpretation of the ANC's practical vision formalised nationally as the Reconstruction and Development Programme, and Inkatha's projection of a defeated Zulu nation struggling to reassert itself, the residents of KwaXimba live their day to day lives, much talked about, planned around, and described as having this or that consciousness of their situation.

In exploring the celebration of Shaka Day by the people of KwaXimba I will show the possibilities for a response to Zulu ethnicity that is neither an absolute refusal of its significance, nor acceptance on the narrow terms on which Zulu nationalism has been presented. While one cannot read the consciousness of the community as a whole through the celebration on Shaka Day, it does reveal the possibilities for reinterpreting history and the meaning of Zuluness in ways that challenge the hegemonic claims of Inkatha to be the sole representative of rural Zulus. }

In September 1993 the ANC had decided to celebrate Shaka Day in KwaXimba as one of the few areas in rural Natal that solidly supports the ANC. Although the movement had }

been considering it for some time, this was one of its first uncertain steps to actually engage with Zulu ethnicity, an issue that had been so muddled by its mobilisation in the name of apartheid separate development that it had largely been condemned by the ANC in favour of the national democratic struggle for a non-racial, pluralist society. However, with the ANC's transition from an opposition movement to a government-in-waiting, with the task of healing a divided nation, it faced the challenge of reaching out to those groups which had not identified with the national liberation movement. In Natal its democratic non-racialism had run adrift in the seas of Zulu ethnic nationalism (and elsewhere in South Africa on other nationalisms, in particular Afrikaner nationalism, but also forms of "Coloured" and Indian self-consciousness). It was becoming clear that the ANC would have to accommodate Inkatha in particular - but also Afrikaner nationalism - or else face the prospect of intractable civil war. With the moves towards a negotiated settlement it was becoming clear that the ANC would have to come to some accommodation with the demands for federalism by giving considerable powers to the regions. This regional compromise would make Zulu ethnicity a key issue in KwaZulu-Natal.

Political thinking in South Africa was also influenced by the world situation in which the polar oppositions of capitalism and communism had given way to a more complex picture of ethnic nationalist struggles. It was becoming apparent how resilient and intractable ethnic mobilisation could become, particularly in Africa where the newly emergent nations have struggled with the borders left to them by the colonisers. These national borders were decided far away in Europe as a way of avoiding confrontation between the colonial nations,

paying scant attention to the ethnic territorial groupings already established in Africa. This had been the case with South Africa which had never existed as a nation prior to colonialism, and was brought together for the first time in the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Increasingly, as the nation state came within its grasp, the ANC discovered the resilience of ethnic identities, which, far from simply pre-dating colonialism, had been encouraged and exploited in the interests of white minority power. The question remained though, as to how the ANC was to reconcile itself to those ethnic identities: they were clearly much more complex and contradictory than they were represented to be by those wishing to wield ethnicity as a tool of political power; and if this was so, on what terms could those same communities be incorporated into the new South Africa? Even more problematic for the ANC was the growing awareness of the genuine popular appeal of ethnicity among sections of the black working class, for such sentiments challenged the ANC's assumption of the legitimacy of its call for a unitary nation state. It was becoming apparent that the transformation from a localised, ethnically based consciousness to an African nationalist consciousness of resistance to white minority rule had not been as complete among Africans as the ANC had assumed, an unevenness that had been consciously encouraged by the British colonialists in Natal, and later more formally through the apartheid policy of encouraging ethnically based 'homelands'. How would this acknowledgment of the disparate nature of African identity affect the conceptualising of the new democratic South African nation, since it could lay no claim to being formed on the basis of a shared cultural heritage,

besides the rather dubious claim of having lived unhappily together in a society torn apart by that particular form of ethnic nationalism known as apartheid? What the ANC brought to the debate over national identity was its strong commitment to non-racialism and a democratic tradition forged in the process of struggle against apartheid. However, this tradition stood in diametrical opposition to the ethnically based state structures developed under a policy of apartheid separate development.

In celebrating Shaka Day the ANC was showing its recognition of the increasing political significance of the symbols of Zulu ethnic nationalism, while contesting Inkatha's assertion of its sole right to those symbols. For Inkatha, Shaka Day symbolised the link Buthelezi sought to establish between the KwaZulu homeland, the state structure established under apartheid as the 'homeland' for those of Zulu ethnic origin, and the founding of the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka. Inkatha's intention was to give legitimacy to the KwaZulu homeland, to trace its history in the minds of Zulu people to the period before apartheid and to the memory of heroic resistance of the Zulu nation to colonial oppression, but also to the legacy of Shaka as a leader who compromised with the early colonialists in the interests of protecting the Zulu nation. According to this logic little difference could be drawn between the National Party and the ANC, who could both be projected as threatening outsiders to the Zulu 'nation', except that while the National Party at least recognised Zulu interests in the form of the KwaZulu homeland, the ANC sought to dismantle all existing state structures. Resistance to the national democratic struggle was justified in the name of the freedom of the Zulus and the survival of the Zulu nation. The intense divisions between



urban Zulus and rural Zulus, the class, gender and generational differences were all erased in a call for the unity of the Zulu people under the banner of the IFP.

Buthelezi held his own Shaka Day celebrations, as always, at Umlazi and at Shaka's Tomb in Stanger. The immediate context of Shaka Day in September 1993 was the refusal of Chief Buthelezi to participate in the Transitional Executive Council (TEC), and the ominous threats of civil war to be waged with the support of Afrikaner nationalists, who had become increasingly supportive of Chief Buthelezi's resistance to a negotiated settlement for a unitary South Africa. An alliance with Afrikaner extremists troubled Buthelezi less than the fear of being absorbed by the TEC, for at Umlazi he said that allowing the TEC to administer KwaZulu was akin to "allowing foreigners to rule us....we must be prepared to fight for our freedom and the right to rule over ourselves." ("Saturday News", 25 September 1993) Freedom here means the freedom of Zulus from South Africa, as opposed to its use by the liberation movement as the freedom of black people from apartheid domination. This straddling of the discourses of liberation and Zulu nationalism is typical of the speeches of Buthelezi, and to an extent accounts for the resilience of Inkatha as a political force, particularly through the years of the ANC's exile. Later, at the Shaka Day rally in Stanger, Buthelezi argued: "It is not my intention to be aggressive or to start a war.....but they are all against the Zulus" ("New Nation", 26 September 1993). In this context, 'they' become all those who do not align themselves behind the banner of Chief Buthelezi as the present representative of Zulus and the 'Zulu nation', in this case referring to both the ANC and the National Party, and indeed any non-Zulus.

However, behind these threats picked up by the media, Buthelezi's printed Shaka Day speeches reveal a much more subtle understanding of the role ethnic mobilisation might play in what Giddens refers to in The Consequences of Modernity as 're-embedding' a people whose sense of history and identity had developed under apartheid's particularly brutal and divisive mode of modernity. While liberal historians have seen the resurgence of ethnic identification in apartheid South Africa as a resurgence of pre-enlightenment thinking, ethnicity has increasingly come to be seen as a manifestation of the enlightenment's own ambivalence: in the colonial context the tension between enlightenment ideals of an egalitarian and participatory nation state and the need to preserve the privileges of a colonial elite was resolved by encouraging racial and cultural difference. At an institutional level this involved borrowing from a European conception of the nation-state with its principle of territorial and cultural integrity in one country, an ideological foundation that served to legitimize the 'homelands' system which entrenched gross racial inequalities of land, wealth and opportunity. For a colonised people, set adrift from traditional and localised forms of 'trust' and denied access to full citizenship, ethnic identification becomes a powerful means of 're-embedding' dislocated subjects in the apartheid nation state. Zulu identity is presented as a continuous tradition and a source of dignity: "It is on occasions such as this, that Zulus can stand together as one...that we can remember the past and for the future." (Buthelezi, "Shaka Day Speech", 25 September 1993) Buthelezi goes on to argue the case for a federal solution to South Africa's future: "We are both Zulus and Africans....If we do not achieve federalism then we face becoming a people without a face, a people which is just one amongst many, a people without a future. Because we are proud

✓ of our Zulu past the IFP cannot allow this to happen. As Zulus we are respected and held in high esteem by friend and foe alike."

The continuity between the past dignity of the Zulu nation and the present resurgence of ethnic identity is embodied by King Goodwill Zwelithini, heir to the royal house of Shaka: "Every Zulu knows that even today before he can move his home, his ancestors have to be appeased and there is great pleading with them to relocate themselves with the relocation of the family." ("Shaka Day Speech", 25 September 1992) He went on to stress the symbolic significance of KwaZulu in eliding the difference between an independent Zulu nation and the present KwaZulu homeland: "KwaZulu is KwaZulu, and our souls are captive in it. If KwaZulu is torn apart and we are scattered, we will lose our souls." The assertion of Zulu unity is made in opposition to a hostile political order that resists the continued recreation of the past. But Shaka Day is as much concerned with the promise of progress as with the past, for Shaka is widely recognised as a modernising force in Zulu history as the founder of the Zulu nation. Shaka becomes significant in his prophetic capacity to foresee the conditions that would face his people in the future, even the mystery of his vision of "great iron birds flying through the air", a prophetic capacity that familiarises the present and promises the integration of Zulus into its vision of progress:

"King Shaka who died here in this place was the greatest visionary of his time. It was his vision which made him set aside the whole of Durban Bay as a place where Whites could feel safe as they settled in his kingdom. The King with his deep sense

of vision, started something that we must finish. There is unfinished business in Zulul seeing to it that Black and White live together to bring the great advantages of the union that King Shaka saw at the beginning of the nineteenth century.....I reign in circumstances which my own ancestors envisaged." ("Shaka Day Speech" 25 September 1992)

The motif of prophecy is associated with African nationalist writing as a means of reconciling a pre-colonial mode of understanding with the impact of colonialism and enlightenment modernity. Prophecy was central to pre-colonial forms of story telling, when the present could be predicted on the basis of the past, and the eldest were wisest because they had the greatest knowledge of the present through their experience of a similar past. Modernity, on the other hand is characterised by a continual process of transformation, where prophecy loses its power to predict, and the old become redundant as their knowledge is superseded. In African nationalist writing the motif of prophecy has thus formed a bridge between old ways of thinking and the new, as a way of humanising the present and ensuring a place for Africans in the modern world. Thus in Sol Plaatje's Mhudi, the first English-language novel on the African sub-continent, the cyclic return of Halley's Comet is used to suggest that the 'settled system' will be superseded by an all-inclusive alliance of the African people.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is important to distinguish between the social psychological importance of ethnic nationalism in 're-embedding' dislocated subjects in the present, and its mobilisation within

a specific political context in the interests of a particular class, in this case primarily a class of black bureaucrats who had benefitted from the homeland system, and stood to lose a great deal of power and access to financial resources if these structures were dismantled. Before and after Shaka Day, while other parties were struggling to stem the wave of violence and reach a negotiated settlement, Inkatha was standing on the edges of the process making threatening noises about the warlike capacity of the Zulus. At the Shaka Day rally Buthelezi called on all Inkatha members to donate five rands to finance armed units to 'protect' Zulu migrant workers in the hostels on the Reef ("The Sunday Tribune", September 26 1993). This aggression by Inkatha had already problematised the accommodation of Zulus within the emerging South African nation.

To understand why it was possible for Inkatha to build a coherent Zulu ethnic nationalist movement in KwaZulu-Natal around the institutions of an apartheid bantustan, when other bantustan leaders simply crumbled with the apartheid state, one must delve into the specific history of the region. The Zulu Kingdom had shown itself to be remarkably resistant, and was finally broken up only in the aftermath of the defeat of King Cetshwayo in 1879. Until this point, the British were unwilling to engage the Zulu kingdom militarily as they lacked the resources to colonise Natal, but a considerable amount of ideological labour was invested in ensuring that the kingdom served the purposes of the colonial administration. The first Secretary for Native Affairs, Theophilus Shepstone, took on this project with great zeal, legitimating the colonial administration by modelling it on the Shakan military system. Far from seeing Shaka as a barbaric and lawless savage, Shepstone saw in the Shakan

kingdom an inexpensive model for colonial domination. Colonial violence could be justified on the grounds of its 'authenticity' as an African system of governance. The value of the Zulu kingdom to the colonialists was that it had already established a centralised relationship between the King and the chiefs based on the King's extraction of surplus production for the maintenance of his army. This expropriation could be imitated by a cash-strapped colonial government, with the surplus being re-directed into the coffers of the Natal administration. Such colonial engagement with Zulu tradition reached its height when Shepstone stood in 'as Shaka' at the inauguration of King Cetshwayo<sup>5</sup>. However, while the Zulu kingdom remained intact this was an uneasy project, in which the interests of the Zulu kingdom often overrode the interests of the colonialists. A new set of political imperatives in the latter half of the nineteenth century demanded the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, and so after Cetshwayo's defeat the kingdom was divided into several chieftaincies, and the King sent into exile. In this later phase Shaka's memory resurfaced ambivalently from time to time as both a bloodthirsty tyrant and a hero of nation-building. But a pattern of collaboration had been established between the Zulu kingdom and the colonialists, based on an interpretation of Zuluness as assimilable within a colonial world view - a pattern that has periodically been revived.

The Zulu Kingdom has remained a contradictory symbol, both of resistance and as an instrument of colonial rule. As I argue in the introduction, while the black petit bourgeoisie in the rest of South Africa began moving towards an alliance with an increasingly organised working class, a more conservative alliance was being forged in Natal between the remnants

of the Zulu monarchy, an emerging Christianised black petit bourgeoisie, whose avenues to social advancement were being increasingly restricted and channelled into ethnic 'own affairs', and a Native administration concerned to contain the increasingly militant demands of the working class. As Shula Marks has argued in "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity", these forces were bound by their common interest in restricting black women's growing assertiveness of their right to freedom from patriarchal authority. It is this dominant history of the emergence of contemporary Zulu nationalism that provides the context in which to understand the different relationship the Ximba clan sought to create between Zulu tradition and the process of modernisation.

According to Chief Mlaba, the primary reason for the support of the Ximba people for the ANC can be traced to their long history of resistance to colonialism - the Mlaba chiefs had always resisted laws which sought to control the powers of chiefs. Mlaba's grandfather, Bhekamatshe, was prominent in the ANC in the 1920's, as was his father in the 1950's. It is the colonial administration that he identifies as responsible for tearing the chiefs apart, and he holds that the Mlaba chiefs refused to enter any alliances with the colonial authorities. They stood apart from the early alliance between the monarchists, the chiefs and the colonial administration which provided the basis for the first Inkatha movement in the 1920's and the Zulu Cultural Movement in the 30's, forerunners of the present Inkatha movement formed in 1976. They had belonged to the ANC since its inception in 1912 and saw it as the legitimate organisation of resistance to colonialism in KwaZulu-Natal, while Inkatha was viewed as a renegade organisation which had been created by the apartheid

state to counter the ANC. This view of Inkatha was prevalent among chiefs in Natal in the early years of its formation in the 70's and early 80's, but increasingly Inkatha managed to gain a hegemonic position as the heir of Zulu nationalism, through Buthelezi's control over the state apparatus of the KwaZulu homeland and his hold over King Goodwill Zwelithini.<sup>6</sup> Chief Mlaba sees the resistance of the Mlaba clan to KwaZulu not as resistance to Zulu ethnicity or the Zulu monarchy, but rather to the particular form it took in Inkatha as an arm of apartheid and separate development.<sup>7</sup>

The tensions between the KwaZulu government and the Ximba chiefs reached their peak in the late 1980's when Zibuse Mlaba's brother, Msinga, who was then chief, refused to co-operate with Inkatha's recruitment drive through the system of chiefs, who were told that as members of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly they must sign up their communities as members of Inkatha. In 1988 he was assassinated for this stand against Inkatha, and the present chief took his place. In order to avoid the fate of his brother, Chief Mlaba called on the KwaZulu government to come to KwaXimba and hear from the people themselves that the resistance of the Mlaba clan to Inkatha could not be overcome by the elimination of the Mlaba chiefs. Some high ranking officials of the KwaZulu government arrived in full force with a convoy of armoured vehicles in an attempt to intimidate the community into changing their minds. Instead the community told them not to come again because they were not Inkatha members, and Inkatha was not welcome because they had killed their chief for opposing Inkatha's policies. They also told Chief Mlaba that if he decided to go back to the KwaZulu government in Ulundi he must not return to Ximba because he would be



'selling them' and his dead brother. They promised that if he did exactly what the people wanted they would look after him. According to Chief Mlaba he was happy to do this because he was himself a supporter of the UDF (the ANC aligned United Democratic Front). While this was not simply a spontaneous response of the community and is an incident seen through the eyes of the chief, it reveals a relationship between the chief and the people that has developed through the process of struggle against the KwaZulu government. While most chiefs remained dependent on salaries from the homeland, and thus indirectly from the apartheid state, Chief Mlaba has always depended on his community to protect and support him, a mutual dependence that has created a very different dynamic in the community.

After this meeting Inkatha started to work through the adjoining Mdluli chief, and from September to December 1989 used this as a base to attack the Ximba clan, joined by black and white police and men bussed in from other areas. Hundreds died in the fighting, until Chief Mlaba set up secret meetings with the Mdluli Chief to persuade him that he was being used, and that they were both victims, since the fighting was destroying their children and creating criminals among both communities. Early in 1990 a peace pact was signed. Ironically, though, the same chief was soon after persuaded to host an attack on his other ANC supporting neighbour, Chief Maphumulo, who was at this time assassinated, creating a flood of refugees from Table Mountain, some of whom have yet to return home. This history provides an insight into the modern politics underlying an incident of 'faction fighting' which is projected in the media as a return of historic tribal rivalries, the endemic

'black on black' violence that has so horrified whites in South Africa and the West.

Due to an element of luck, and the skilful negotiations by their chief, the Mlaba clan have a happier story to tell than their neighbours in Table Mountain. Since the peace pact with Chief Mdluli both communities have worked together on development projects, although most development has occurred in KwaXimba where residents now have electricity, water, telephones and a thriving community centre where dozens of community organisations meet, ranging from stokvels and funeral societies to civics and political parties<sup>8</sup>. The living quality of democracy in KwaXimba can be seen in the way the community responded to a request from the International Center for Research on Women to carry out a participatory research project into perceptions of AIDS in Natal. Chief Mlaba facilitated meetings with all the organisations in the community, a process that spread over three months, and culminated in an imibizo, or community meeting, at which every family in the area was asked to be represented by at least one member. Mlaba interprets his role broadly: "People come to me for help, for advice. About everything. Divorce, family quarrels, land disputes, educational problems, jobs. I also chair the monthly Tribal Court meetings. I try to find a progressive solution to problems. I try to be neutral, objective - so even people not ANC can come to me. I try to help everybody." (Interview, Chief Mlaba, Ikhwezi) Mlaba's vision offers a fusion of the democratic principles forged in the liberation struggle with traditional concepts of democracy. This differs sharply from the prevailing system of chieftainship where tradition has been brought into the service of the apartheid state, and the enforcement of strict loyalties has in many cases created irreparable schisms between chiefs and their

communities.

Because of its history of a people's struggle against the might of the KwaZulu homeland, and Chief Mlaba's position as deputy chairperson of the Midlands Regional Executive of the ANC, KwaXimba was the obvious choice as the place from which to launch the ANC's entry into the traditional Inkatha territory of Zulu nationalism. By naming it Heroes Day, rather than the traditional Shaka Day, the ANC sought to redefine the day as a multicultural event celebrating not just the Zulu King Shaka but also the Xhosa King Hintsa, the Basutho King Moshoeshoe and Ghandi, among other heroes of the people including Olive Schreiner. The people in this context were seen as defined by the national liberation movement as South Africans struggling to overthrow apartheid. For the Northern Natal Chiefs this mixing up of Shaka with the heroes of other ethnic groups "like coffee and tea" ("The Natal Mercury", 22 September 1993) was taken as an insult to Zulus. ANC Natal Midlands Chairperson, Harry Gwala, did nothing to allay this feeling as he responded through the press: "Could it be that apartheid ideology is so ingratiated in their bones that they cannot see beyond the confines of bantustans?" ("The Natal Witness" 24 September 1993). This insensitivity on the part of the ANC towards this arguably legitimate ethnic sentiment probably only reinforced the fears of many rural Zulus who perceived the ANC as hostile to Zulu custom and tradition. Rather than alleviating the anxieties and insecurities of the chiefs about their ability to cope with the modern world, Gwala re-asserted the superior, progressive world view of the ANC: "We are not going to reduce ourselves to the level of tribal chiefs who neither understand history nor geography. To them tribalism and ethnicity are things that

are imposed by God above and are not governed by the laws of development in society" ("The Natal Witness", 24 September 1994).

However, there was also a more immediate strategic intention to the ANC's penetration of a rural terrain, which was seen as the unchallenged ground of the IFP, which perhaps explains the hostility of the exchange between Gwala and the Northern Natal chiefs. As Gwala said, the ANC would use the day to "Fire the first volley for next years general election" ("The Daily News", 18 September 1993). This threat to their hegemony in rural Natal was not lost on the Northern Natal chiefs: "Mlaba's meeting will surely fan the flames of violence as the Zulus will not accept traditional functions to be dragged into cheap political propaganda by political fanatics such as Zibuse Mlaba" ("The Natal Mercury", 22 September, 1993). The threat of violence was no empty gesture in the volatile conditions of KwaZulu Natal, where political violence had already claimed hundreds of lives. What was at stake was the hegemony of Inkatha as the 'natural' inheritor of Zulu tradition, a tradition based on the supposed unity of all Zulus, while the ANC's challenge in that domain was seen by the Northern Natal chiefs as "cheap political propaganda by political fanatics", despite the overtly political nature of the Shaka Day rallies organised by Inkatha.

Behind this aggressive posturing, however, there was considerable uncertainty in the ANC as to how it should approach Shaka Day. While the ANC clearly wanted to give to Zulu ethnicity a different content to that given it by Inkatha, there were limits to the ability of the discourse of Zulu ethnicity to be changed from its role under colonialism and apartheid.

These complex issues led to an unresolved debate within the Regional Executive Committee of the Natal Midlands ANC as to whether multiculturalism inevitably implied diluting Shaka Day into a day for all heroes of South Africa, or whether it should not be legitimate for the ANC to support a day celebrating the Zulu nation builder alone. Did multi-culturalism mean diluting the different cultures within South Africa, or did it mean that the various groups ought to identify with and accept the specific cultural heritages that make up the nation? One view held that it was important to acknowledge the specific Shakan heritage, while emphasising those aspects, such as the idea of nation-building and of resistance to apartheid domination, which could most easily be reconciled with the politics of the ANC. Further, if the ANC was serious about reconciling itself with its Zulu traditionalist rural constituency, it had to take their ethnic identity seriously and accommodate it, without seeking to dilute it to a homogeneous national culture. Others within the ANC felt uneasy with the negative implications of Shaka Day, with its stress on the rebuilding of the Zulu nation alone, around the symbols of military might and the Zulu royal family. Such symbols, it was felt, were too closely associated with the political programme of the IFP of hanging onto an autonomous KwaZulu homeland, and could not easily be reconciled with the ANC vision of a democratic unitary state. Ethnic identities are not formed in a vacuum, but in the context of historical circumstance and political power, and as such it was not going to be easy for the ANC to retrieve an 'authentic' Zulu ethnicity which could be comfortably reconciled with the ANC slogan of "One nation; many cultures".<sup>9</sup>

It was also possible to detect within the ANC an underlying ambivalence in celebrating

Shaka Day because of the enormous psychological distance between their rationalist, materialist, progressive world view and the traditionalism bound up in Zulu ethnic consciousness. This ambivalence has led many ANC members to veer between a position that refuses to acknowledge that Zulu nationalism has any significance to rural Zulus, seeing it as purely a construct of the IFP, and on the other hand a rejection of the backwardness that is associated with Zulu traditionalism. This rift between an essentially urban and a rural consciousness, between the younger generation and the elders, had been exacerbated by the violent confrontation between Inkatha and the UDF.

However, as all politicians know, this was not an issue that could be decided in theory alone, but would to an extent be decided in the practice of political struggle. In the event, the people of Ximba placed their own stamp on the meaning of the event, and the rather crude projection by the ANC in the media of a multi-ethnic Heroes Day gave way on the day to a recognition of the specific localised identity of the Ximba community itself. When asked what the day was celebrating, many of those gathered said it was to show support for Chief Mlaba. The heroes mentioned in the opening praise song were neither Ghandi, nor Shaka, but instead the heroes of the Ximba clan, both their forefathers and the more recent victims of the violence. Rather than a broad multi-ethnic identity, or even a Zulu identity, for the people involved the day represented an assertion of a more local Ximba identity. However, one can see in the history of the Ximba community the way in which a link had been forged between local struggles and national politics such that there was no jarring dissonance between the opening march by Umkhonto we Sizwe and the amabutho dancers in traditional

Zulu dress. What the day had made possible was a space in which a new form could be given to Zulu identity, based on a notion of the struggle of the people against colonialism and apartheid, the links between rural Zulu's and other rural South Africans, and between rural communities and those from the townships.

Heroes Day at KwaXimba was different enough from the township rallies of the ANC to be something of a surprise to those who had come from town to celebrate the day with the Ximba community. The majority of the ten thousand gathered at the rally were from KwaXimba, and many were in traditional Zulu dress. Chief Mlaba's links to other chiefs through his involvement in CONTRALESA (Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa) had brought chiefs from Kwandebele and the Transkei together with people from their areas. Busses and private cars brought ANC members from other parts of Natal, a very few of the faces white and Indian. While it may not have been the multi-cultural event projected in the media by the ANC leadership, it was nevertheless a Shaka Day with a difference, opening up space for a celebration of the heterogeneity of Zulu cultural identity, as traditional dancers in full Shaka Day dress took turns with church choirs, the men in Sunday suits and the women in long black dresses, interspersed with youth choirs in ANC colours. The programme also included popular national poet Mzwakhe Mbuli and a number of popular national musicians and singers. There were the usual stalls you find at any ANC rally: COSATU selling copies of the Communist Party's "Umsebenzi", and the women's magazine "Speak", as well as badges, key rings and t-shirts with pictures of Mandela, the words of the national anthem or other slogans emerging from the liberation struggle. But

it was not the stalls with their exchange of information that were the focus of the day's energies, or even the many speeches, but rather the slaughtering of the fifteen bulls at the opening of the festivities and the *ngoma* dancing that managed to involve both dancers and audience in an atmosphere of communal engagement.

Essentially it was a celebration of Zulu tradition by a community which had pitted itself against the party claiming to be the sole representative of Zulu tradition. Mlaba described the day as the realisation of a dream, as the successful culmination of the struggle of the people of Ximba to negotiate their own Zulu identity in the face of attempts by the KwaZulu government to subordinate them to the politics of Inkatha. Mlaba himself represented this refracted sense of tradition: after appearing in full ethnic regalia on the first day, he returned to a well-worn suit and open-necked shirt on the second, so that people had difficulty in identifying him sitting quietly on wooden benches provided for his guests. This unchiefly manner once saved his life: at the height of the violence, security forces came to him asking for Chief Mlaba. He replied, "He's gone into hiding", at which they departed, leaving the message, "Tell him we'll get him." (Interview, Chief Mlaba, Ikhwezi)

In his opening speech at the festival Mlaba argued his case not within the terms of democracy and development, but in the terms of history and tradition. However, it was a tradition at odds with the dominant Zulu history, of a community whose tradition of resistance had begun with the defeat of Mlaba's earliest remembered ancestor, Mabhoyi, at



the hands of Shaka's armies, when the Ximba people had been brought from Lesotho to KwaZulu as captives. Later, when the Zulu army was diverted, the Ximba community started to make their way back to Lesotho. During this exodus they met up with Chief Langalibalele and the Hlubi people who were in flight from Shepstone's colonial army. The two communities separated just before the tragic massacre of the Hlubi people in the 1873. In Mlaba's speech Shepstone and British colonialism follow Shaka as the enemy of the Ximba people, an ironic consequence of Shepstone's adoption of 'Shakan' methods in controlling rebellious tribes. According to Mlaba, the Ximba people had become known as troublemakers by the colonial authorities, and they were excluded from the overtures by Shepstone to accommodate Zulu nationalism within a colonial world view. Mlaba traced this history of resistance to the involvement of the Mlaba chiefs in the ANC from its inception in 1912, picking it up again in their active involvement in the 1959 demonstrations against cattle culling and the imposition of passes on women, a campaign that involved about twenty thousand women, mostly from rural Natal.

This tradition of democratic resistance, in which women have played a key role, seems to have had an effect on gender relations in the community: Mlaba speaks of the right of women to call the men to address them at public meetings, and of women's right to stand for office in the elected tribal authority. In addition, the AIDS research project revealed that while final authority for decision-making rested with the male head of household, consultation within families was widespread and crossed gender boundaries. However, while the history of the Ximba community is one that differs from the dominant patriarchal

version of Zulu history, Mlaba's entry into the field of Zulu tradition and history imposes its own discursive limits. When interviewed in August 1994, one year after the Heroes Day rally, Mlaba asserted that he and his community are 'proper Zulus', despite the Sotho, Zulu and Xhosa origins of the Ximba community. Such claims are made in response to Buthelezi's argument that the reason for Ximba disloyalty to the KwaZulu government was that they were not proper Zulus, and the growing awareness in the ANC that any appeal to tradition in Natal will have to reach an accommodation with dominant versions of Zulu tradition.

Zulu tradition - and indeed chiefly tradition throughout South Africa - has become synonymous with a return to patriarchal values, which are seen to be threatened by the urban, modernising forces with which the ANC is associated. Mlaba asserts that for his community, custom and culture are more important than party politics, a claim that is supported by the enthusiasm elicited by the slaughtering of the bulls and the *ngoma* dancing at the festival. But when asked what aspects of custom and culture the chief thought were most important, his spontaneous response was to say the right to polygamy. Many of the older men canvassed in the AIDS project believed that the disease was caused by the breakdown of the lobola system, which had encouraged men to take responsibility for sexual activity by insisting that if a woman fell pregnant the man had to pay lobola and marry her. Younger men gave a more negative inflection to the impact of patriarchal tradition, arguing that their desire for several girlfriends arose from the popularity and status gained by the older men who had several wives. The majority of women, on the other hand, saw the

primary cause of AIDS as their lack of control over their own sexuality and their economic dependence on men, since the terms on which intercourse was conducted were largely male. However necessary an accommodation with Zulu tradition might be in facilitating a reconciliation of generational differences, or in lessening ANC-Inkatha opposition, it could be at the expense of the dominant Ximba tradition of democratic resistance in which women have participated.

While Zulu nationalism has tended to develop along conservative lines, speeches by CONTRALESA and ANC leaders at the rally revealed the space for progressive interpretations of Zuluness (ANC Video, "KwaXimba Heroes Week"). It was argued that the ANC was not against traditional culture as Inkatha had projected them to be, but that the ANC and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, belonged to the people and had been formed by the people in their struggle against apartheid. It was not presented by the ANC as a struggle between Zuluness and multiculturalism, but as an 'authentic' tradition of the people against an authority imposed upon the people from Ulundi. This 'authentic' tradition of the people was defined not in terms of Zuluness but in terms of the struggle of the people to overthrow apartheid and to reclaim the land, a struggle that united rural South Africans around concrete demands. This tradition was represented by the relation Chief Mlaba had established with his people, in which his responsibility for the development of his community came before allegiance to Ulundi, and the moral authority he carried with his people because of this. Thus a link was established between the opening praise songs that said the people loved the chief, and the argument that since the chief had dedicated

himself to the struggle, the people must identify with the chief and also dedicate themselves to the struggle. This call to the people to unite behind the chief, however, even as a symbol of the struggle for democracy, puts the ANC in a problematic relationship to the community. Is the chief to be revered as chief in a hierarchical social and symbolic system, or as a grassroots leader who has allowed democracy to flourish? What is the ANC's long-term aim in rural Natal: is it simply to win a victory for the ANC - perhaps by persuading chiefs to cajole their people into voting ANC - or should this be seen as a means towards the more important task of establishing democracy in rural Natal?

Much has happened since September 1993 as both the ANC and Inkatha adapt to the changing situation in the country. In South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994, while gaining an overwhelming victory nationally, the ANC lost to Inkatha in KwaZulu-Natal. The key to Inkatha's success rested on its hold over the chiefs and the densely populated rural areas of Zululand. Despite widespread allegations of fraud, and the reluctance of the ANC leadership in KwaZulu-Natal in accepting the poll, the region was eventually conceded to Inkatha in the interests of stability. At a national level the ANC hoped that Inkatha's control of the region would encourage them to accept the transition and so avert the very real possibility of civil war. Ironically, Inkatha's victory has had the effect of loosening its ties to the king since Inkatha feels more confident in its electoral power and is no longer dependent on the revival of the Zulu kingdom for its power base. For King Zwelithini the changing balance of power has encouraged him to break free of Buthelezi and seek an independent position for the royal house above party politics. The

regional ANC, for their part, have been keen to encourage this so as to break the stranglehold Inkatha has over the *amakhosi* and the exclusion of the ANC from rural Natal.

In 1994, the ANC intended to celebrate Shaka Day not in KwaXimba but in Msinga, the heartland of the original Zulu kingdom, with the support and presence of King Zwelithini. This was the result of intense negotiations out of which Chief Mlaba promised to visit the king's palace with an offering of bulls which would be slaughtered to appease the ancestors for his failure to seek the king's permission for the Heroes Day festival in KwaXimba. In return the king would apologise for allying himself with one section of his people, making it impossible for Mlaba to approach him as his subject to seek permission. National president, Nelson Mandela, was invited to the Msinga festival to give it a legitimacy above party politics, and he expressed his desire to attend both that and the Inkatha Shaka Day festival. Buthelezi, however, refused to sanction Mandela's wishes, threatening that it would provoke violence in the region. Mandela accepted Buthelezi's right to a final veto, which meant in turn that the regional ANC leadership was obliged to call off the event in Msinga. The king, for his part, was left high and dry, his attempts to establish himself as a unifying force above party politics in tatters. Unprepared to return to his position as a captive pawn of Inkatha, and amidst the stoning of his palace by Inkatha supporters, he made a reckless call on his people not to attend any Shaka Day celebrations at all, a call which did not prevent Inkatha holding its own rallies to a substantial audience. But Inkatha was left in the awkward position of celebrating the founder of the Zulu kingdom against the wishes of the present Zulu king, with its hegemony over the symbols of Zulu nationalism broken.

While the king's support for the ANC demonstrates its success in opening itself to Zulu nationalism, the confusion surrounding Shaka Day had revealed an impasse in the ANC's policy. While a section of the regional ANC would like to embrace Zulu nationalism as part of a strategy to defeat Inkatha at the next elections, Mandela, together with a more moderate grouping sees accommodation of Zulu nationalism as involving a degree of acceptance of the power structures which have sustained it. How does one balance the need for reconciliation with the longer term objective of establishing democracy in the region and reclaiming Zuluness for the ANC? The risks of affirming Zulu nationalism in its present form were made visible when Buthelezi, with a team of armed bodyguards, stormed a live SATV studio in Durban to confront Prince Clement Zulu who, as spokesperson for the royal house, was questioning Buthelezi's self-appointment as the traditional prime minister of the Zulu kingdom.

The resurgence of Zulu ethnic nationalism has posed severe challenges to the non-racialism of the national liberation movement as it has sought to implement its vision of a unitary and inclusive South African state. However, the people of KwaXimba have shown that acknowledging ethnic consciousness does not inevitably imply the acceptance of a narrow, hegemonic version of Zulu ethnicity. Through their resistance they have shown that it is possible to re-invent Zuluness on their own terms. They have done this by refusing to accept the inevitability of history: instead they have made history bear the burden of their own experience, forging new relations between the past, present and future.<sup>10</sup>

## Chapter 2

### Popular Praises and the Worker Poets

Praise poetry lies at the heart of the cultural struggle over the meaning of Zulu identity in Natal. Until the mid-eighties, Inkatha asserted an uncontested claim to Zulu *Izibongo* as the inheritor of Zulu cultural identity. *Izibongo* were defined as a restricted genre, focusing on the praises of the Zulu royal house, and those of the chiefs and their lineages, which were recited at established events such as the annual Shaka Day celebrations. This tradition was fixed as an official Zulu cultural heritage which was disseminated in scripted form through the KwaZulu school system in its programme of *Ubuntu Botho*, as Buthelezi sought to establish the legitimacy of the KwaZulu bantustan as the inheritor of the mantle of the once powerful Zulu nation. In this process of scripting, praises lost their essence as part of a dynamic folk culture that had allowed for a degree of democratic engagement by ordinary people in negotiating their relationship with traditional structures of authority. The authoritarian thrust of Inkatha's appropriation of Zulu culture is reminiscent of Gellner's description of the rise of cultural nationalism in Nations and Nationalism, which he argues is not a resurgence of pre-modern forms of consciousness, but is integrally connected to the formation of modern states with their centralised bureaucracies.

This narrow definition of Zulu *izibongo* had been encouraged by European colonialists from the 19th Century onwards, who collected the praises of the Zulu royal family at the expense

of the broadly based popular tradition of praises recited throughout Natal at unofficial gatherings, community events and weddings. This assertion of a high Zulu culture must have fitted well with the attempt to assimilate the Zulu nation into the authoritarian and patriarchal world vision of the colonialists, a response to Zuluness first developed by Theophilus Shepstone, First Secretary of Natal Native Affairs.

However, the struggle over the limits to the genre of praise poetry appears to be a more widespread phenomenon in Southern Africa, bound to its important social function in traditional African society as a mediator between society and the individual, and more specifically between traditional authority and the people, a relationship that is captured in the well known phrase, "*Inkosi, bekwa ngabantu*" (a chief is given his position by the people). Coplan identifies a similar struggle over genre boundaries in Lesotho in his paper, "The Power of Oral Poetry", where praise poetry's working class migrant adaptation, *lifela*, as well as a vibrant tradition of female oratory, is denied status by the dominant chiefly tradition of praise poetry. Coplan links the instability of praise poetry to the ambivalent status of the *imbongi*, part 'cultural hero' affirming the status quo, and part 'trickster', whose immunity as *imbongi* allows him to challenge and criticise the social order. Such a powerful form of expression is likely to be at the centre of intense cultural struggle.

A challenge to the canonised Zulu cultural tradition occurred in Natal in the mid-eighties with the emergence of the worker poets at the height of FOSATU's (Federation of South African Trade Unions) mobilisation. First came Alfred Qabula, a migrant worker from



Pondoland who had played a key role in the struggle for union recognition at Durban's Dunlop factory. Dressed like a strange bird in streams of colourful material, his presence at worker gatherings suggested the hybrid influences on his art from rural inyanga to christian missionary influence, with a brief interlude as a migrant worker on the mines, where he would have come across the vibrant adaptations of traditional praise poetry by migrant workers<sup>11</sup>. Despite his lack of Zulu origins, his performances claimed an immediate response from the audience of uneducated Zulu migrant and recently urbanised workers, suggesting their mutual engagement in a common Nguni cultural tradition, as opposed to Inkatha's claims to a specifically Zulu ethnic cultural base, belonging to the Zulu elite. However, the identity they shared was not simply an ethnic identity based on a shared cultural past, but was an identity built through a common experience of oppression and exploitation as a black working class. This shared urban experience encouraged a shift from an ethnic identity to an African national identity. However, this was not an simply an abstract, universal African identity, but specific localised cultures formed out of particular events and cultural mixtures - a reassertion of the importance of people in the face of capitalist alienation. A common cultural heritage of popular praise poetry had become a vehicle to express the experience of black working class life "cruel beyond belief"<sup>12</sup>, and the desire of the black working class to claim a place for themselves in the future South Africa. I will return to Qabula later in the chapter in order to deal more fully with the textuality of his poetry.

Zuluness as manifested in praise poetry, far from being a discrete, coherent culture which

could be captured by one political party, had shown itself to be an unstable phenomenon, open to shifting interpretations. The process of rewriting Zulu ethnic cultural boundaries into an anti-colonial African nationalism can be seen in the Northern Natal worker poet, Jeffrey Vilane, who was initially exposed to the royal Zulu praises through his school books. However, he has adapted these scripted praises from their original educational purpose in promoting loyalty to the KwaZulu bantustan, claiming as his hero Cetshwayo:

not because he was a chief or a chief of the Zulu people, but he was a hero in the struggle against colonialism, he was detained, sent over into exile, he suffered so that his people would not be exploited and their land would not be taken over by foreigners. (Sitas, A. "Traditions of Poetry in Natal" 152)

Cetshwayo's heroism becomes a vehicle to inspire the workers to appreciate the heroism of their own struggle. The working class is seen as 'the child of a brilliant snake'(153) which digs paths under Natal, surfacing suddenly to create panic among the oppressors, or as 'the black buffalo which routed the *amabutho* who came to castrate it, to stop the spread of its seed'(153). Zulu imagery and folklore is thus mobilised in a counter movement to Inkatha's *amabutho* who legitimate their violence through their descent from Shaka's army. Vilane's rewriting of the official script has led to accusations from Ulundi that he is a 'foreigner', and a 'Shangaan' from Ingwavuma, as Buthelezi sought to establish Zuluness in terms of allegiance to Inkatha. In 1986 Vilane was shot at, and since then has spent lengthy periods in detention, the high price extracted by Inkatha and the apartheid government for resisting

the hegemonic interpretations of Zulu cultural nationalism.

Why is it that in Natal praise poetry has become so central in the struggle over cultural identity? To answer this requires an understanding of its cultural roots in oral societies in the absence of a written memory or other forms of communication in speaking the individual into the community and providing a link with one's lineage. Giddens argues in The Consequences of Modernity that in traditional societies ontological trust and social stability are established through kinship relations, which are located within a particular community and rooted to a specific place. The past forms a model on which the present can be built, a linkage between past and present that is captured in the repetitive tropes of oral praises where one generation borrows freely from the praises of their ancestors. Praise poetry as an expression of identity can be understood as expressing just such a notion of the self within traditional relations of 'trust'. However, with the impact of modernity, the link to the past is ruptured, and abstract systems of 'trust' replace specific localised relationships. Contemporary praise poetry registers this rupture, and the ideological struggle to claim a legitimate link to the past, as the inheritors of the hearts and minds of the people in the present. Mi Hlatshwayo expresses the sense of loss experienced by African workers in response to the particularly harsh manner in which modernity was experienced through colonialism, and later apartheid:

Africa, our mother

Now stands distanced from us

We are confused

We lament and plead

Arise real Africa!

Real Africa arise.

("Worker's Lamentation for Ancient Africa", Black Mamba Rising, 37)

In response to this alienation he appeals to the ancestors, "A culture/ Handed down to us by past generations"(35), but these ancestors are no longer known ancestors of a particular lineage as in traditional praise poetry, or even the ancestors of a particular ethnic group that Inkatha claims, but rather the ancestors of an African continent that must be retrieved from its colonial definition as an "uncivilised" and "underdeveloped" continent ....Oh! Africa/ Your images infuriate us"(36). The Africa Hlatshwayo appeals to is both a lost past and a hoped-for future: "Your vastness Africa/ Is not known to us/ We long for it"(35). Africa provides a sense of continuity that is more abstract than the known past of an ancestral lineage, but more familiar than the "society of cities" of "Rands and Dollars" in which workers are "the cursed class"(35). Rather than being bound to a past history, Hlatshwayo says "We Shall be your history"(37). The poem culminates in a more concretely re-imagined contemporary Africa:

Real Africa arise

From: the mudpacks of our imijondolo

From: the miners' sweat in the bowels

Of the earth

From: our crowded dawn trains

From: the yawning queues of the unemployed (37)

The poems in Black Mamba Rising were mostly written between 1984 and 1985, after which period the rivalry between Inkatha and the worker movement intensified considerably, with the formation of COSATU in 1985 which aligned itself openly to the UDF. Hlatshwayo's attempt in his poetry to define for workers a particular relationship to African nationalism thus emerges more out of a response to the brutalising conditions of the workplace than in opposition to the forms of Zulu nationalism mobilised by Inkatha. However, Hlatshwayo's expression of a worker consciousness, with its sense of a broader national community and its emphasis on participatory democracy foreshadows the political divisions that were to intensify between Inkatha and the democratic movement. The democratic and worker-oriented politics of FOSATU that are verbalised in Hlatshwayo's poetry were to play an important role in clarifying the differences between progressive and conservative versions of Zulu nationalism, that were to inform the politics of the UDF.

Both Inkatha and the worker poets claim to draw on a tradition of Zulu praise poetry, and yet they interpret this tradition in very different ways. The possibility for these different interpretations arises partly from the dual role of praise poetry in Zulu society, both as a form of popular expression and as an instrument of nation building. Gunner and Gwala suggest that the co-option of praise poetry into the service of Zulu nationalism and Shaka's

amabutho regiments could have "driven underground the broader biographical and autobiographical thrusts of *izibongo*"(7). As they show, however, even when co-opted to promote this warrior tradition, praises can conjure up the person concerned with considerable accuracy, as in Chief Buthelezi's opening praise: "Stinging Nettle Tangler that entangled men, and kept them sleepless at night"(89). In essence praise poetry is concerned with naming and thus giving substance to a person. This naming acts, as B.W. Vilakazi says, as a kind of "emotional shorthand" in which symbols and figures of speech embody "a certain complex emotional experience" (Coplan, D. "The Power of Oral Poetry", 29). They serve to "catch and hold lives and personalities" (Gunner and Gwala, *Musho!*, 11), in the absence of written forms acting as a collective memory. They are "a combination of shrewd revelations on an individual's life and personality, social comment and compressed narrative" (9).

In his article, "The Power of Oral Poetry", Coplan links Basotho praises to coming of age ceremonies, where young men learn the art of praise poetry from the *inyanga*, and come back from their initiation with their praise name of manhood. He argues that the migrants' journey to the cities marks a similar "rite of passage" which is assimilated through the composition of *lifela*. One must therefore be wary of drawing too deep a distinction between an unchanging traditional past and a modern present based on reflexivity and change, since praise poetry often contains the trope of the journey, and traditionally serves to negotiate a changed present in relation to the past, as in the praise poem of the famous Dingiswayo of the late 18th to early 19th Century, remembered by a well known *inyanga*,

Zizwezonke Mthethwa: "Trail Blazer like the vulture along the path; he is red; with the blood of men./ Inventor; overcoming other chiefs; through his fresh devising" (Gunner and Gwala, *Musho!*, 159). The first half of this praise suggests a warrior tradition of conquest, such as that on which the Zulu nation was built, while the second half seems to appropriate a modern consciousness based on invention and progress. It is impossible to know whether this is a revisionist adaptation seeking to claim modernity as a characteristic of Zulu society, or whether the Zulu nation had begun to bring about those 'dis-embedding' mechanisms by which inventiveness and an orientation towards change would have begun to emerge. Gunner and Gwala argue that the traveller trope could have its roots in the movement of the Nguni southwards, and that negotiating change is not specific to the modern period, but is built into Nguni cultural life through praise poetry (22).

However, the shock of confrontation with urbanisation and migrant labour is clearly in a different category of change to that of previous changes which are assimilable into an existing world view. Migrancy is registered in some of the praises collected by Gunner and Gwala as provoking extreme alienation, that is almost unassimilable into the praise poem. Swidinonkamfela Mhlongo, the tantalising "Sweet-tied-tight-in-the-middle./ The Sought-after Bachelor"(185), describes himself as "the Smeller Out,/ because he smelt out those of other nations./ The Strange Noise of the Whites "tokking Ingleesh"(185)." 'Smelling out' is related to witch finding, so that Mhlongo associates whites with witches, as dangerous outsiders who threaten the stability of traditional communal life, as well as threatening his own psychic stability:

I was without Mother and without Father, whom did I have?

And when I returned home I was sick at heart.

And then I went....(he pauses)

Then I thought the mountains were tumbling down because..(he tails off)

It was then that I found maize still to be had in our own place of KwaDlangezwa

And I ate.

Then once more I spoke and I said, "It is I, I have come back",

Sweet-tied-tight-in-the-middle.

Bachelor-among-bachelors. (186)

His praise poem registers both his psychological collapse, which threatens his capacity to tell his story, and his re-integration on his return to the community. Mhlongo re-inscribes himself in an identity based on a specific localised place, as one who belongs to KwaDlangezwa, but a transition has taken place in his 'voyage out' to see himself as belonging to a broader 'nation' in contrast to the "strange noise of whites "tokking Ingleesh", a nation that could be appropriated either as an African nation opposed to whites and the system of apartheid exploitation they represent, or possibly a Zulu nation opposed to non-Zulus. In the context of the praise poem neither transition has effectively taken place: his identity is re-inscribed in the particular localised concerns of a traditional rural consciousness, based on his own fertility and the fertility of the land: "I am He-who-stands-with-his-legs-wide-apart and out come the young girls and maidens...It is I Maize-please-blossom so we can eat the ripe fruit"(186). Poems such as these register the complex ground



on which rural Zulus negotiate their response to urbanisation and progress. Sometimes the experience of migrant work is simply assimilated as a new source of imagery, as in the praise of Thambolini, son of Simpampa: "Stalker like the cat/ Drill of the chain machine"(131), or as the source of incidents of migrant life: "Shiner and they say "Take yourself back into the bright light." These brawls will kill me! The drunkards sleep at the canteen"(133)

Gunner and Gwala's collection of praises is fascinating, as it reveals the popular base out of which Zulu high culture has been picked, relocating it in a broadly based popular tradition, which refuses Inkatha's claims to a definitive Zulu culture. As Gunner and Gwala argue, these popular praises constantly threaten to escape the boundaries set by Inkatha's Zulu nationalism:

What needs to be remembered is that the textuality of *izibongo* allows for wholly disparate elements to come together both in the performance of praises, and how they are remembered, and that these constitute a discourse of the self that may be partly dissident or subversive of the dominant or official ideology.(37)

But while praise poetry might have the potential for dissidence from the official ideology, the actual dissidence of the popular praises they have collected is questionable: Northern Zululand, where most of these poems were collected, was the area Inkatha gained its most significant electoral victories. Rather than a site of subversion, these popular praises reveal the human ground out of which an appeal to a Zulu tradition of macho warriors and to the

past glory of the Zulu nation claims its success.

The use of praise poetry to assert a proud Zulu history can be seen in the Buthelezi chiefly lineage with its reference to Shaka's grief after the death of his mother, when he refused to let his subjects plough the fields: "The Cry-Crying Bird that cried for the Zulu people/ on the day when the Zulu nation couldn't plough at our place of Bulawayo/ but had gone to plough with the iron that devours men"(113). Ngqengelele was the 'Bird' that implored with Shaka to allow his subjects to plough the fields again. These references to official historical occurrences lie alongside incidents of a much more personal quality, which are not easily contained by any ideological perspective. The Mthethwa *imbongi* recited these lines of his own praise poem at a wedding: "He who is amazing to behold dressed in leather skins over there at Matholanjeni"(141), referring to an incident where he saved himself during a skirmish by dressing in women's clothes. The particular incident could be lost over generations, but would probably continue to evoke the enmity that existed with the neighbouring Matholanjeni. However, even such tropes of clan hostilities are readily mobilised in the name of broader ethnic hostilities creating a volatile ground for battles in the multi-ethnic townships and hostels.

Much of the popular praise poetry collected by Gunner and Gwala suggests the continued existence of forms of identity that seem to be immune to the ravages of modernity registered in many contemporary adaptations of praise poetry. The segregationist policy so assiduously pursued in Natal has had the effect of insulating pockets of traditional consciousness in parts

of Zululand, a traditional consciousness that is distinct from Zulu nationalism, which I have argued is associated with the abstract institutions of modernity. Praise poems are full of compelling images, such as Sihubela, son of Njingili who "became the Beautiful Eating Man on the hills of the Ngoye" (143), or the *Inyanga*, Zizwezonke Mthethwa: "The Fabulous Water-snake that casts its eye towards the mountains; and they are covered in cloud./ It casts its eye towards the mountains; and they poured down water"(165), a reference to his supernatural powers over the elements. Such praise poetry registers a traditional mode of being, in which, as Giddens argues in The Consequences of Modernity, 'trust' is located in a particular local community and place, and legitimacy is derived from a past inherited through one's ancestors. Many of the urban adaptations of traditional praise poetry, both the worker poetry and poetry praising Inkatha, arise out of the anxiety of adjusting to a modernised social space, which has been thrust upon Africans through the alienating forms of colonialism and apartheid. Such poems express a consciousness that has become 'dis-embedded' from traditional forms of 'trust', and is striving to 're-embed' itself in the forms of trust associated with modernity. However, C.D.S. Mbutho's "Praise Poem to Inkatha"(Video, "Zulu and Xhosa Oral Poetry" 2-7) differs considerably from the worker poetry in the way it seeks to 're-embed' Africans in new forms of 'trust', which continue to draw their inspiration from the past. Mbutho's praise poem was written in an inspirational moment reminiscent of an imhongi's performance: "One day I suddenly experienced an unusual calmness in my head and felt the joy of living again after that terrible nervous affliction that had plagued me for almost a year making my life completely unbearable"(Video, "Zulu and Xhosa Oral Poetry"). This explanation of the process of

composition draws attention to the stress out of which much contemporary praise poetry emerges, and its role as a 're-embedding' mechanism for Africans who have been 'dis-embedded' from traditional forms of 'trust'. A teacher for 20 years, after which he set up a dry-cleaning business, Mbutho traces his inspiration in writing the poem to John Dube, founder both of the South African Native National Congress in 1912, and of the first Inkatha movement in the 1920's, which perhaps suggests Mbutho's own identity with the petit bourgeois amakholwa origins of Inkatha, rather than with the Zulu traditionalists. This seems to be borne out by his concerns in the poem, as he makes his own bid for a Shakan legacy of foresight on behalf of non-violence and progress through education - an exchange of the spear for the pen:

That would be the fulfilment of the wishes,  
 Of his grandfather "Maphumzana" (King Solomon),  
 Who died having warned his people that,  
 No more should his warriors fight on the battlefields,  
 But if only they could learn to read and write,  
 Only then would they be able to face their enemies.(7)

Here too, as in Zwelithini's call upon a Shakan legacy<sup>13</sup>, the prophetic mode serves to humanise the present for Africans, ensuring them a place in the modern world. Mbutho calls upon Shaka to resolve the present crisis, and in particular the violent confrontation between black and black: "Great Lion who founded and ruled the Zulu nation,/ We say rise and

confront this horrible "Dilemma" " (5). The thrust of the poem is to embrace Zulu nationalism as a means of uniting blacks in response to the social crisis they have been thrown into by colonial defeat. However, this call for black unity suggests that his Zulu nationalism could easily be re-absorbed into a broader African nationalism. He draws his inspiration from the praises of Shaka and the other official praises of the Zulu royal lineage. However, the poem cannot simply be interpreted as a vehicle for Inkatha's propaganda; even in a self consciously pro-Inkatha praise poem the *imbongi* is free to insert his own interpretation of the Shakan legacy in the need for non-violence and black unity through education. This remarkable flexibility in the different appropriations of the Shakan legacy in praise poetry was also apparent in Chief Luthuli's *izibongo* recited at his funeral in 1967, which included some of Shaka's praises as a means of asserting a past of victory and power in times of present defeat, not just of Zulus, but of Africans as a whole. The gap between Zulu nationalism and African nationalism is not as inevitable or as wide as Inkatha would wish it to be: Zulu tradition is capable of being mobilised in the name of an inclusive African nationalism, just as it has in the more recent past been mobilised in the name of Zulu ethnic separatism.

But in the context of the more radical and urbanised national liberation struggle of the eighties, which was seen as a challenge to the patriarchal, hierarchical structures of traditional Zulu society, a greater gap emerged between a conservative Zulu nationalism and a progressive African nationalism. Mi Hlatshwayo captures the ambivalence of workers towards the challenge to traditional, patriarchal modes of authority implicit in their

identification with the worker movement, with its links to socialism and to the militancy of the township youth:

I want to be a man. A proper man. I want to respect my chief. I want others to respect me. But there are opposite forces working inside of me. On the one hand I am an organised worker, on the other I am a captive of this Zulu propaganda. Despite my respect for these figureheads I am politically challenged by the forces of revolution in the townships, I am surrounded by conflict, and the capitalist system is hammering me, I am being knocked in, I am harassed.....then the obedience and the children are saying that all this respect is fokall. The whole thing is being torn apart....we do not have any alternative, another invention. We are not saying, no man, forget about Shaka we are giving you this instead. We are creating a different type of movement which is developing through crisis, as the forces of revolution are tearing things up.(Sitas, A. "Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal's Black Working Class" 263)

What is interesting is that Hlatshwayo claims he is not saying "forget about Shaka, we are giving you this instead", but in the next breath says, "we are creating a different type of movement which is developing through crisis, as the forces of revolution are tearing things up". This captures the way in which Hlatshwayo both inhabits Zulu tradition and myth, and uses it to create something different. In his poem "Tears of the Creator", Hlatshwayo appropriates the traditional power of the ancestors to call upon "our ancestors in

struggle"(Black Mamba Rising 53), who are no longer the male ancestors of a lineage, or the Zulu ethnic group that Inkatha appeals to, or even a race, as Ray Alexander and Gana Makhabeni are called upon in the same breath. Past myths are called on to create something for the future: "the mammoth creature/ You dreamed of/ You wanted to create/ The one you hoped for"(53), an imagined power that is captured both as a humble image: "It is made up of old wagons/ Repaired and patched up ox-carts/ Rolling on the road again"(53), but also embracing the mythical power of "The tornado-snake - Inkhanyamba with its floods!"(54), the monster that sleeps in the forests of Nkandla or Impendle that occasionally wakes and creates havoc. He sees the tornado-snake as having been "Poisoned throughout the years/ By ethnicity and tribalism"(54). Hlatshwayo is thus critical of the Zulu history that Inkatha appeals to, and calls for the questioning of inherited attitudes: "a lot of it is a history of feuds, division and power-mongering.....we must learn not to have a false sense of superiority about our Zuluness"(Sitas, A. "A Black Mamba Rising" 56). He appeals in his poetry not to an unchanged past, but rather to a potential which has been unleashed in the present through the struggles of workers: "We have rebuilt its head/ We lathed its teeth on our machines"(Black Mamba Rising 54). In his "Review of Black Mamba Rising", Kelwyn Sole points out the thin line that divides the populism of Inkatha's mobilisation of Zulu tradition and the popular democratic intentions of the worker poets. He sees the former as mobilising the past uncritically to legitimate the present, as opposed to the worker poets' re-evaluation of the past on the basis of the democratic principles of the worker movement. While recognising the generally self-critical appropriation of past imagery by Qabula and Hlatshwayo, he questions their description of the employers as "sorcerers" in

"The Tears of a Creator", which he argues is an inadequate explanation for the failure of the ICU in the 30's, a form of explanation that encourages the kind of uncritical populism which he argues should be fought against within the worker's cultural movement. There may be some legitimacy in questioning the re-appropriation of ideas about the supernatural that do not necessarily further a critical understanding of the present (an appropriation noted earlier in Mhlongo's reference to himself as the "smeller-out" of the whites), but Hlatshwayo and Qabula's appropriation of Zulu myth should be located within the broader project of the workers' cultural movement of humanising the present for workers by creating a psychic link to the past, while at the same time opening up that past to question.

The freedom with which the worker poets slip between traditional myth and the popular politics of the worker movement is partly the consequence of their particular location as migrant or recently urbanised workers, who still have links to a popular oral tradition, and yet it is a tradition that has already been transformed from its familiar context as it moves into the environment of urban struggles. None of the worker poets come from rural Zululand, and they have been cut adrift from the traditional power relations of the system of chiefs<sup>14</sup>. Qahula's rural experience in Pondoland was of a community where the chiefs had become discredited in the eyes of the people, and as a child he was exposed to an ANC culture of guerrilla resistance (Qahula, A. A Working Life, Cruel Beyond Belief). Hlatshwayo was the illegitimate child of a working class family in Cato Manor, a squatter settlement on the edges of Durban where many rural migrants gained their first foothold in the urban areas. He says that the key influence on his work came from his involvement



in St. John's Apostolic Church, one of the African independent churches for the poor. The African independent churches of Natal are a hybrid mixture of African communal forms and christianity, and it is from this base, Sitas describes as the "fiery and emotional gatherings, where ordinary people hurled their problems, anxieties and superstitions to all, seeking for help, that he got his baptism in words of fire" (Sitas, A. "A Black Mamha Rising" 52). Much of Hlatshwayo's imagery was gathered from this source, as in the opening to his first major poem, "The Black Mamba Rises", which evokes the powerful and unpredictable activities of the newly emerging trade union movement:

The victor of wars  
 But then retreat  
 The Builder of Nests,  
 But then like an ant-eater  
 You then desert.  
 Heavy are your blows,  
 They leave the employers  
 Unnerved (Black Mamba Rising, 29)

Compare this to the lines from the *izibongo* of Isiah Shembe, a leader of the African independent churches:

Anteater which digs a hole, never for itself to lie in.

Its young stayed behind and slept there,  
 whereas it set out for the hillocks and mountains where its children live.  
 He said, "My people, remain here".  
 He said, "I am still on the move, I still have others to fetch  
 (Musho!, 69)

While imagery such as that of the anteater as a source of paradoxical movement, and the link between the growth of a church and the growth of a union movement are clearly sources for Hlatshwayo's work, the sense of vibrant restlessness evoked by the forward-backward movement of his staccato lines seems to stem from his immediate involvement in the energy unleashed by the emergent union movement, and from the restless instability of urban life. As Sitas says, his style "undermines the traditional imbongi form" as it disrupts "the calm authority of a wholesome world - a world where 'meanings' were unambiguous" (Sitas, A. "A Black Mamba Rising" 58). Sitas says that Hlatshwayo's involvement in the church, with its stress on a non-hierarchical and brotherly unity, did spur him on to get involved in community activity in Claremont, but it was the Dunlop strike that pushed him into cultural activism. In Hlatshwayo's poetry, the churches' 'civilising mission', with its emphasis on human perfectibility, has been appropriated to assert a liberatory politics, as can be seen in his evocation of a future Africa in "We Workers are a Worried Lot":

The Eden of nations

The pillar of the universe

Shall now lead the world

From its hunger

From poverty

- Of minerals

- Of morals

- And of love

(Black Mamba Rising, 40)

Christian images of redemption are invoked to describe the suffering of the workers, as in "Tears of a Creator"(49-56), where the working class replaces Christ as the creator, a title earned as the "maker of all things"(49). The image of Christ as the buffalo in the African independent churches, becomes for Hlatshwayo an image of a union movement capable of interrupting the language of the oppressors:

The buffalo that turns the

Foreigners' language into

Confusion,

Today you're called a Bantu

Tomorrow you're called a Communist

Sometimes you're called a Native

Today again you're called a foreigner,

Today again you're called a Terrorist,

Sometimes you're called a Plural,

Sometimes you're called an

Urban PURS ("The Black Mamba Rises", Black Mamba Rising 32)

This capacity to use language to ridicule apartheid linguistic categories can also be seen in Qabula's "Praise Poem to FOSATU", in his imitation of a bosses conversation with an impimpi in fanagolo:

"Yah, yab; What is the mvukuzane my boy, tell me,

What is it?

Is it one of FOSATU's unions?

You are a good muntu

Mina bilda wena 6 room house

Lapha lohomeland kawena.

Thatha lo-machine gun, vala logates

Skhathi wena buka lo-union (11)

Again the association of homeland structures with counter-revolution puts a political distance between Inkatha's appeal to traditionalism and the 'authentic' vision of a future Africa that worker poetry strives for. As Sitas says, the worker poets are "consciously transforming tradition propelled by a future (they) long for as opposed to the *izimbongi* of KwaZulu that are attempting to preserve social hierarchy by linking it to the past." (Sitas,

A. "A Black Mamba Rising" 55) This transformation of tradition can be seen in Qabula's poetry, in which he assumes the traditional wisdom and authority of the Sangoma: "Chakijana! Wake up and wear your clothes/ Of power and wisdom"(9) His "Praise Poem to FOSATU" starts with a moving evocation of FOSATU as a forest in which the workers can take refuge:

"Worker, about what is that cry Maye?  
 You are crying, but who is hassling you?"  
 Escape into that forest,  
 The black forest that the employers saw and  
 ran for safety  
 The workers saw it too  
 "It belongs to us", they said  
 Let us take refuge in it to be safe from  
 Our hunters"  
 Deep in the forest they hid themselves and  
 When they came out they were free from fear (9)

Thus the sea of heads of the workers as seen by the employers is likened to a forest. The imagery of the forest as a place of refuge runs deep in Qabula's own history, when during the Pondoland rebellion the rebels escaped to the forest for protection. It had deep symbolic meaning in Qabula's childhood as a place of magic powers, and folk tales tell of the forest

protecting those who respect it and look after it. To the mainly Zulu audience the notion of the forest would have called up similar symbolism of the Nkandla and Mpendle forests which are sacred shrines, and forests as places of ambush, retreat and resistance from Shakan times to the Bambatha rebellion of 1906-7. It also represents Africans' historical link to the land, as opposed to the illegitimate ownership of the land by colonial settlers.

Qabula's "Praise Poem To FOSATU" is significant for the stand it takes in warning FOSATU of the potential pitfalls surrounding it, and of the many failures that preceded it, where leaders who were trusted: "After we had appointed them, we placed them on the/ Top of the mountain,/ And they turned against us." (12) As *imbongi*, Qabula defines a very specific relationship between FOSATU and its members dependent not on past glories, but on its actual practice as representative of the workers, a legitimacy that is earned, not given:

I say this because you teach a worker to know

What his duties are in his organisation,

And what he is in the community

Lead us FOSATU to where we are eager to go. (14)

Sitas compares this popular democratic political tradition to the authoritarian populist politics of Inkatha, which depends for its legitimacy on recalling its links to the past authority of the Zulu nation, rather than being a conditional representation of its members negotiated in the present (Sitas, A. "Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal's Black Working Class"

257-273). Such a distinction marks a shift from a traditional notion of 'trust' in which present power relations are legitimated on the basis of the past, to a modern environment of reflexivity, which opens authority up to questioning.

I have argued that the primary difference between Inkatha's appropriation of the tradition of praise poetry and its appropriation by the worker poets, is that while Inkatha appealed to the idea of a fixed tradition of high Zulu culture, the worker poets kept alive the essence of the oral tradition as a dynamic interaction with the present, while at the same time transforming it as they consciously worked to create a future South Africa. The most significant creative output of worker poetry was from 1984-89, coinciding with the most energetic period of worker activity. Its tailing off since then re-enforces the proposition that it fed off the excess of cultural energy unleashed during that period of mobilisation. Such re-inventions of popular tradition are possible when the present opens itself up to allow Africans to 're-embed' themselves in the modern world. Conversely, the resurgence of ethnicity comes about at times when the present refuses to offer any stable foothold to marginalised groups, which can only be gained by retreat into the security of the past. As the new South Africa imagined by the worker poets begins to unfold, it may be that many who have felt the need to retreat into the security of an ethnic identity will become confident enough to invest their 'trust' in the present and future.

## Chapter 3

### Women in the Margins of Ethnicity and Nationhood

On 28 July 1937, John Dube addressed a meeting of Chiefs and "other representative natives" in Eshowe, complaining that the magistrates were "too lenient in dealing with their womenfolk", and asking "that punishments might be more severe as leniency leads to demoralisation"(Marks, S. "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity" 227). He appealed to the government to take even more ["drastic steps to prevent the migration of women to the towns"(227)]. This was in response to the growing number of rural women who were voting with their feet in favour of the uncertainties of urban life as opposed to the certain hardships and oppression of rural tribal life for women. ] As Sibusisiwe Makhanya remarked while giving evidence in the 1930-32 Native Economic Commission:

There is a keen desire for independence in the women and a keen desire for ownership. I am thinking of one or two cases where the girls have actually left their homes and have gone to the urban areas where they are working and providing for themselves, whereas in former times, 10 or 15 years ago, that would not have taken place, where the brother would have gone to the town and fetched the girls back to the kraal. ]

And today the girls would resist this kind of thing? - Yes, they would and when thinking of these things, one can say that the men are becoming



powerless in that respect.

Now would you say that the change in the attitude of women is becoming general, is it becoming widespread? - Yes, it is becoming more and more so..... (227)

Dube's address to the chiefs in Eshowe is significant, as it reveals the convergence of interests that were to play a significant role in Natal politics, in particular that the defence of patriarchal values was central to the emergent form of Zulu ethnic nationalism. Dube had been the first president of the South African Native National Congress in 1912 (forerunner of the ANC), but had retreated to his Natal base when ousted in 1917 by a new leadership, which was allying itself with the radical working class politics unfolding in the urban areas. He found a new political base in an alliance with the remnants of the Zulu monarchy and tribal chiefs, which was formalised in the first Inkatha movement in 1924, to which Dube was elected as co-chairman. However, there was no easy identity between the black petit bourgeoisie - the christianised *amakholwa*, commonly referred to as the "amarespectables", from which Dube emerged - and the Zulu monarchists, whose aim was primarily the restoration of the dismantled Zulu kingdom.

As Shula Marks argues, the restoration of patriarchal authority over women was a significant element in the bonding of these disparate forces with the Natal Native Administration. The increasing migration of women to the cities was placing a considerable financial burden on the Natal Native Administration, who were keen to keep the families of black workers tied

to the rural areas, and so keep the costs of labour to a minimum. Colonial legislation had re-enforced women's subjection in the Natal Code of 1887 which established women as minors, and in the 1923 Urban Areas Act which stated that no African women could enter the urban areas without the permission of their male guardian. However, as Sibusisiwe Makhanya pointed out, these laws failed to stem the migration of rural black women to the cities. The powerful resistance of women to the imposition of the pass laws on women in 1959, particularly in Natal, where 20,000 women were involved in activities across the province, revealed the continuing determination of Zulu women not to be pushed back into the bantustans.

However, the 1959 demonstrations displayed a considerable ambivalence on the part of women: on the one hand they were resisting restrictions on their mobility to the towns, but on the other hand women were acting in defence of an eroded way of life in resisting the cattle culling and betterment schemes that threatened their fragile rural existence. One frequently articulated complaint against passes was that women had to remove their headscarves for the photograph to be taken, which was traditionally only allowed by the husband. Women's ambiguous attitude towards change is captured vividly in this comment: "They forced us to take off our headdocks. It was against our custom but we had to do it.....The light got into our brains. We woke up and saw the light. And women have been demonstrating ever since"(Walker, C. Women and Resistance in South Africa 234). This ambivalence between embracing the new and defending the old is understandable, since it is not as if urbanisation offered women any easy route to the fruits of 'progress'. The cities

were places of considerable hardship for women, and the breakdown of traditional codes on male as well as female behaviour left women vulnerable to the burdens of raising children for whom men were no longer bound by traditional lobola customs, and outside of the more cohesive rural structures of communal support.

There was a considerable difference, however, between the way women sought an accommodation of the past and present, and the way men perceived women's position between tradition and modernity. In 1939 the Regent Mshiyeni raised his concerns about the spread of syphilis in the rural areas with the Native Representative Council, concluding that "Successful therapy requires the establishment of African rural communities based on a stable family life"(Marks, S. "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity" 229). Similar concerns to those of the Regent were expressed by King Goodwill Zwelithini in his speech at the National Zulu Dancing competition in August 1992:

Our (Zulu) unity keeps us strong - were we to lose those characteristics which mark us out, then South Africa would be the poorer..... We see this tragically in the numbers of unmarried mothers. The rules which prevented single parent families in the past, which forced fathers to honour their commitments, are not obeyed as much as in the past. That means that the protection which our culture traditionally offered the mothers and children, is weakening. Women must take greater care today than ever before against the menfolk, because city life and migrant work has lessened the respect between people which is so much a part of our culture."

Zulu ethnic identification, and the revival of Zulu cultural norms become a bastion against the destructive effects of urbanisation on the black population. Women are mobilised as a sign of stability, as that which must be protected in Zulu people from the ravages of urbanisation. Such sentiments also struck a chord with Natal's *amakholwa* in the 1930's, whose concern with moral 'purity' easily translated into prevalent notions of 'race pride', and concerns with the future of the 'Zulu race'.

In response to these urban crises women, too, found themselves thrown back upon the dominant ideals and organisations of Zulu ethnic nationalism. Even a woman like Sibusisiwe Makhanya, who had deliberately defied African convention by choosing not to marry, and instead pursued a career as a social worker, became in 1936 Adviser to the Zulu Society, which in its charter noted that:

Owing to a falling away of custom, women and girls are losing their wholesome respect which was to their credit and which their presence inspired in family life. This causes a slackening of solidarity and the sacredness of the whole Home Life of a man, which is to be found there before, and in this manner, Home Life is being desecrated and disintegrated and good manners abandoned. (Marks, S. "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity" 230)

Such ambivalence in the public positions assumed by Zulu women reveals the difficulties they faced in trying to find a public voice through which to speak their own location between

traditionalism and modernity, and ethnicity and nationalism, which were defined by coalitions of interests to which women were marginal.

Beneath the official voices speaking on behalf of Zulus lie the subterranean voices of Natal's urban and rural working class women, felt occasionally as they impact upon those with access to the language of power, as those authorities respond with calls to control or protect women's wayward movements. Liz Gunner's work in rural Zululand collecting primarily the praise poems of ordinary women (with a small number from women of the Zulu royal house) provides one of the few insights into expressions of the consciousness of rural women as they seek to define themselves in response to the daily hardships of their lives. Women's popular praises are a neglected form of cultural expression: the only recorded praises of women prior to Liz Gunner's fieldwork in the 1980's were those of women belonging to the Zulu royal family, and as Liz Gunner points out, even these have been misread, as Vilakazi does, as dealing with "something beautiful and praiseworthy" (Gunner, L. "Songs of Innocence and Experience" 12). Such sentiments dovetail well with the mobilisations of Zulu womanhood as the sign of Zulu purity that must be protected within Zulu ethnic nationalism, and influenced by the christian sentiments of the *amakholwa*. It is hard to believe that anyone hearing women's praises could have sincerely held such a view about women like Manchoboza: "Thou glutton/ Who swallowest groundnuts unpeeled." or Mnkabayi: "Cunning one of the Hoshoba people,/ Who devours a person tempting him with a story;../ Norass of Menzi,/ That caught people and finished them off" (12). In fact women's praise poems are generally composed over the years by the woman herself as a means of asserting her

identity, in a language that is earthy, humorous and often bawdy, as in the *izibongo* of MaHlabisa of Hlabisa: "Dig! As fiercely as a furnace!/ Red bird that ploughs up everything and scratches up men for food,/ And I plough for myself as well./ Knock it back, you're outdrinking the Madondo crowd,/ You're outdrinking those from Nsindwana" (22) Such praises become a vehicle for counter-hegemonic assertions of female Zulu identity that question the assumption of women's inferior status. However, the marginal status of women's praises, and the public silence of women in traditional rural society makes such counter-hegemonic assertions difficult, and makes it easy for misreadings like Vilakazi's to perpetuate the silence of Zulu women in the present.

The ordinary praises of married women in Liz Gunner's collection are performed only for women, as they gather together in their leisure time to drink home brewed beer, and do not have the same public status as the praises of men. This segregation of women's praises has had both positive and negative effects on the tradition. On the one hand it has provided a space where women can name themselves in relation to a group of sympathetic women, with no need to censor what they say for the sake of a male audience. The drawback of occupying a marginal space is that there is no access to an arena in which to challenge the hegemonic discourses on women that have developed within the ideology of Zulu ethnicity, and it is easy for men to ignore what the women have to say. The praises tend to be domestic in content, asserting resilience and humour in the face of acute hardship, as well as affording women the opportunity to make bitter complaints within the privileged space of praise poetry.

The richness of the language, couched in metaphor, provides a unique texture to the experience of rural women, as in a single line from the praise of MaMpanza of Hlabisa: "She is the shawl that goes up and down the Mantaba mountain" (26). Women's praises give substance to the lives of rural women, as in a previous line from MaMpanza's *izibongo*: "Perseverer on the lonely road pointing to the sky" (26), thus identifying the qualities necessary to survive rural life. But she is also "The Red Hoe" and "Mrs Little Tin who dances at Nongoma", conjuring up both the liveliness of MaMpanza, and the rootedness of her identity in a particular localised environment. Her cheekiness also comes through in two more lines of her praise poem: "Vi Violet! She doesn't wee, she whooshes./ Splasher of the Ngcobo's chamber pot" (26). These lines refer to her indiscretion in a particular unspecified incident of a personal nature in relation to the Ngcobo's, her neighbours. Some of the women present would know the particular incident concerned, while others would guess at the nature of the incident.

The praise of MaZulu of Hlabisa, which was received with much laughter, speaks of women's humour in the face of a struggle with rural poverty, played out in a struggle between the ants at her feet and the cockroaches in her roof:

The ants want her down (to feed on her)

The cockroaches refuse, they say, 'Oh, royal madam,

What will we eat when we're left alone? When you say 'I've finished',

Then take your spoon and stick it up in the rafters

Then we cockroaches can have a lick.' (24)

One could also read this praise as referring to the human relations of exploitation in which women are embedded, with the ants and the cockroaches standing in for the men and children who take women's position as providers for granted. Rather than being relations that are challenged in the praise poem, such oppression takes on the inevitability of the natural world of ants and cockroaches.

Many praises sound a more painful note, speaking directly of ill-treatment at the hands of others, most commonly in-laws, or co-wives. Praises composed by mothers for their infants often speak of the intense hardships women suffer within the family of their in-laws, both among 'commoners' and women of the royal house, as can be seen in this extract from the richly metaphorical infant praise poem of Gatsha Buthelezi, composed by his mother, Princess Magogo, in which she tells of her hostility with her co-wife:

Married life would be sweet, son of Shenge,

If only I were not married in the company of The Wicked one. I felt as I was sleeping that an otter squirted me.

I was pursued by another long trailing thing that would not remain in the cursed forest of Sondaba.

It was like a mamba there in the wilderness of Sondaba,

The one that lies in the freshly-burnt veldt, where the mielie-leaf does not disturb it.



And I felt as I walked that it bit my hand,  
It bit my foot as I set it down. (31)

One can feel the claustrophobia women experience in the traditional extended polygamous family, and the limited avenues through which women can express their anguish at the inevitable hostilities that arise between competing wives. Rather than attacking the institution of polygamy, Princess Magogo resorts to asserting her superiority over the 'wicked' co-wife who is simply "a commoners daughter". In contrast she claims her identity with her father's lineage: "I don't care in the least/ Because I compete with nothing,/ I have my own ancient inheritance." (31) Here the location of Princess Magogo within the royal house acts to deflect her from challenging the institution of polygamous marriage, because of her own identification with the broader kinship structures that sustain polygamy. However, it is not as if the praises of ordinary women are therefore free to challenge the institution of polygamy, which is taken as an inevitable and natural state in the other praises in Gunner's collection. The 'complaint' mode of *izibongo* does not in this context involve the self-reflexive questioning that would allow women to challenge the institution of polygamous marriage.

Many of the praise of men speak of an aggressive sexuality, such as the young Mjadu man, "One whose penis-head has medals of honour"(Gunner L. and Gwala M. Musho! 199), revealing the link between a tradition of warrior conquest and the sexual conquest of women. Men's praises also hint at the chauvinism that lies behind the call for a return to

'traditional' values: "Bull-shitter of a girl - full of uppity talk;/ It's girls who are Believers who are the haughty ones" (199). Women's praises mark both their resistance to male aggression and their entrapment within these relations: MaMhlalise Mkhwanazi finishes her praise with anger towards her unfaithful husband, "I am what kind of bull is it/ that mounts outside its own kraal/ but is useless at home./ Hah! What do you say to that you old Khandememvu fellow!"(205) One gets a sense of the way women's sexuality is experienced as the bane of their lives: "The Mimosa Bush with thorns for keeping out/ those wretched vaginas of their mothers!" (205) This praise was met with a burst of laughter from the other women present, suggesting they shared her sentiments. Women's praises speak of a refusal to simply accept a position of helpless victimisation as with MaMhlongo, "the Wild Staff Shaker/ the caller of the shots", who calls "You go and ask that wretched little private parts of her mother/ because I myself am afraid of the ill-feeling."(207) Such praises speak of the ambivalence of female resistance, that can be openly expressed in the company of other women, but cannot be easily taken into the broader society.

Only the praises of women diviners seem to escape completely the world of domesticity, and make an impact in the acknowledged fields of public power, listing their professional successes, and public status. The praises of diviners in Gunner's collection were recited by the husband and son of the diviner, expressing their pride in her status, and evoking her strength and authority: "Elephant that devours the witnesses./ Heavy treader in her sandals."

There is a tension between the value of a private female space where women are freer to

express themselves, and the need for access to a public discourse if women are to claim their place within the broader nation-space. However, women's marginalisation as subjects in Zulu society has also given them the freedom to explore the more personal aspects of life that are constrained in the Zulu praises of men, who have been more fully interpolated into a warrior tradition of Zulu masculinity. Gunner and Gwala argue that the praises of Zulu men were drawn in to serve the needs of the amabutho regiments formed by Shaka, while women's praises were ignored, and so allowed to develop more freely (Gunner and Gwala Musho! 50). This seems to be a case of Lacanian 'jouissance' which he sees as the advantage for women of being overlooked in the social construction of identity in a phallogentric society (Silverman, K. The Subject of Semiotics 188). However, it is a freedom of the socially powerless.

There has been very little research into the question of what happens to Zulu women's culture when it moves from the rural areas to the urban centres. The dearth of Zulu women performers suggests the difficulties experienced by rural Zulu women in establishing cultural spaces in the urban areas. The popular praise poetry Liz Gunner explores depends on women's access to a separate cultural space, which may not be easily recreated in the urban areas. In addition, popular praise poetry is most prevalent amongst traditional Zulus. For many Zulu women the adoption of Christianity and the mission school values that accompanied this must have seemed a more appropriate set of values for survival in the cities, with its stress on morality, hard work and progress, and its access to a Eurocentric value system, all of which would ease the route to social advancement. Women's praises

have tended to be marginalised by Christian converts who reject them as *inhlamba* or filth, together with the gatherings where they are performed which are looked down on as the gatherings of drunken women.

Among Zulu men, the tradition of praise poetry resurfaced most strongly in the union movement. Nisa Malange, the only woman to make a powerful impact as a worker poet, came to Natal from the Cape as an adult, and her poetry does not deal with the question of re-inventing Zulu tradition. However, the fact that Malange has been accepted as one of the worker poets suggests that within the union movement there has been a shift away from the traditional segregation of women from the exclusively male domain of public political discourse. The fact that there are so few women worker poets is probably due to the marginalisation of women because of their overburdened lives carrying the major responsibility in the home, as well as in the workplace, together with men's hostility to women's participation in politics - a field traditionally dominated by men. However, the national liberation movement, with its emphasis on democracy, and the recognition - at least in formal terms - of women's demands as a part of that struggle, has opened up many new possibilities for women. More research needs to be carried out into women's cultural activities in urban communities in times of resistance. An area like Cato Manor, with its high concentration of newly arrived migrants, and its strong tradition of resistance, as in the cattle culling and anti-pass law campaigns of the late 50's, is likely to have some interesting adaptations of women's praise poetry. Cheryl Walker captures the mood of humorous resistance of the women involved in the women's demonstrations in Natal in 1959, that is

reminiscent of the style of popular praise poetry: "Said an irate mother, when reproached that African women should now be carrying sticks: "It is true that African women never carried sticks before. But then they never carried passes before, either!" (Walker, C. Women and Resistance in South Africa 234) Such statements suggest that women recognised the possibilities for claiming subjecthood that were opening up in the new nation-space.

While little research has been carried out related specifically to the transformation of Zulu women's culture, some interesting work has been done by Deborah James on the female migrant performance of Sotho speakers from the Northern Transvaal, as it enters the traditionally male domain of *kiba* (James, D. "Female Migrant Performance from the Northern Transvaal"). Similar processes could be taking place in the oral performance genres of Zulu migrant women. Like Zulu women's popular *izibongo*, *kiba* also emerges from rural performance genres outside of the dominant chiefly traditions, tracing its origins to the 'games' performed at popular events like weddings. It is such popular performance genres, existing outside the hegemonic chiefly traditions, that lend themselves most readily to transformations in the urban centres. James argues that once in Johannesburg, Sotho women used the blurring of traditional genre and gender boundaries to call their performance *kiba*, the exclusively male genre, as a means of increasing the status and audience for the women's performance. The situation in Lesotho is similar to that in Zululand, where women's *izibongo* occupies a segregated and inferior status to that of men, so that rural women's cultural traditions are unable to impact upon hegemonic assumptions about the 'proper' role of women. James goes even further to argue that : "Based on and

simultaneously confirming a division of labour, such divisions also confirm and entrench the differential rights of women and men to exercise public power"(James, D. "Female Migrant Performance from the Northern Transvaal" 104).

However, it is not as if women can easily enter a genre traditionally occupied by men: such genres have been defined according to male identities - in the case of *kiba* by a warrior tradition that asserts male physical prowess. James explores the transformations that take place as women redefine the genre, as they both participate in the heroic tradition of *kiba* and subtly subvert it. Unlike the men they have no emotional commitment to an idealised warrior past in which women appear as the spoils of war, or the reward for bravery; women's *kiba* is essentially concerned with contemporary experience, but through a continuous process of adaptation of traditional concerns and cultural forms.

*Kiba*, as it is performed in rural areas, reveals both the possibilities and limitations of gaining access to a public platform. A song performed for the local chief must veil its criticism in the traditional language of respect: "Our own lord, even if you say bad things about him/ Our own lord, even in Pretoria they greet him"(96). The women performers insisted that this song would be understood by all the listeners as a criticism of the chief for selling out to the apartheid state, while still couched in the language of respect. It is difficult to balance the relative merits of the often brilliant self assertions of women in the segregated space of women's oral poetry with this more muted form of public expression. In the urban areas *kiba* can speak more openly about women's experience of self-identity,

often by writing themselves into existing male scripts: "Women have now joined the soldiers/ They are getting passes just like men"(98). This was explained as a reference to women's new identity as 'soldiers' who, like migrant men, have created disciplined social units, as represented in the solidarity of the *kiba* group. The discipline of women's solidarity, previously seen as the domain of men, is contrasted to the irresponsible actions of a young man who has murdered his uncle, a story borrowed from another popular song and given a new meaning within women's *kiba*. Women's ambivalence towards city life is shown through the concern in the song with the degradation of urban life, but which at the same time offers women opportunities for transforming their marginal status through the loosening of the strict gender boundaries of traditional societies.

However, it is not as if the new nation-space of the metropolitan centres is an unmapped territory waiting for women to proclaim their new identities there. Chitauo, Dube and Gunner talk of several colliding discourses in the urban areas, which have allowed women to play "a more active part in their self definition"(Story, Song and Nation" 114) as performers in Zimbabwe's post-independence nation space. But as in South Africa, Zimbabwean women have had to fight for their right to remain in the urban areas against the interests of both the colonial administration and traditional patriarchal authorities. In Zimbabwe's urban areas women have been defined as 'loose' or as prostitutes, confirming the dominant perception of their illegitimacy in urban space. This has been particularly marked for performing artists who are seen to have stepped outside the male-controlled spaces of mother, wife or daughter. Chitauo, Gunner and Dube argue that the only

legitimate position for women in post-independence Zimbabwe has been as 'mother of the nation', which has cast women as symbols of the nation rather than as its subjects, a symbolism strongly reminiscent of the projection of women in Zulu ethnic nationalism, where women have been mobilised in the name of the defence of the Zulu nation. In contrast to this, Nisa Malange, who identifies herself within the national liberation movement, enters a genderless space in her poems, assuming the voice of "I, the Unemployed" (Black Mamba Rising 59), identifying herself as a comrade, and even speaking with the traditionally male voice of the warrior: "If I had strength enough I would go and avenge your blood/ Our blood/ I would carry a bazooka and go straight for the murderers" ("Dedication to Brother Andries Raditsela", Black Mamba Rising 63). In these early poems the only gendered reference to herself is her repeated concern with "Our babies and children"(65), but this is distinct from the role of women within aspects of both Zulu and Zimbabwean nationalist discourses, as 'mother of the nation'. In Zimbabwe, Stella Chiweshe also sought a genderless space, calling on the one public space available to women in traditional society as diviner or spirit medium. As Chitauro, Dube and Gunner argue: "She is more priestess or prophetess and comes from the liminal area beyond sexuality and fertility" ("Story, Song and Nation" 133). However, this movement into mainstream discourses raises the question of whether women have to step outside of gender categories in order to enter the public spaces opening up in the urban environment, or if it is possible for gendered issues to write themselves into the nation. At times women have been able to utilise some of the strengths of women's traditional oral discourses to bring gendered issues into public space. In Zimbabwe, Susan Mapfumo composed lyrics about women's domestic



struggles:

Father of my child what's wrong?

You bring half of your pay

Do you think this is enough?

For me and the kids?

For clothing and food? (129)

However, Chituaro, Dube and Gunner trace her demise in the early 1980's to the increasingly macho interpretation of Zimbabwean nationalism, as the masculine image of the guerrilla fighter came to the forefront in post-independence Zimbabwe.

In South Africa it is around the question of women's participation that the inclusive and democratic ideals of the new nation are most severely tested. In 1993 Anne McClintock, writing on gender and nationalism in South Africa, said: "Excluded as national citizens women are subsumed only symbolically into the body politic. Nationalism is thus constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power"(Story, Song and Nation" 112). However, this blanket criticism of nationalist discourse overlooks the different forms that nationalism can take, and the significant spaces opening up for women in the new South African nation. The exploration of women's cultural expression in this chapter reveals that urbanisation, and in particular the liberatory politics of the national liberation movement has begun to erode the gendered divisions of discursive

space that were entrenched in traditional societies. The more complex modern environment has also created the possibilities for a more self-reflexive questioning of the 'naturally' subordinate position of women. But while it is now easier for women to gain access to a public platform, this has sometimes been at the expense of the forthright gendered discursive space available to women in traditional society. The challenge will be to see whether women's - and in particular black women's - increasing visibility in public life will also bring gendered concerns into public discourse. The experience of post-independence Zimbabwe serves as a reminder of how easily women's gains with national liberation can be swept away.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation I have focused on re-inventions of Zuluness that question the assertion of a single Zulu history and culture built around the symbols of Zulu ethnicity and the Zulu nation. These re-inventions question the imperative that the past must dictate the terms of the present: instead they stress a transformative politics in which 'trust' is located in the present, and the past is seen to be open to critical questioning.

Zulu ethnicity, with its orientation to past tradition, thrived in the brutal conditions of modernity, when the present failed to provide a stable psychic foothold to Africans - and in fact Africans were consciously encouraged to assume ethnic identities in order to legitimate their exclusion from a common citizenship.

The transformative approaches to Zuluness I have focused on have consciously refused to accept ethnic identities as they have developed under apartheid. Instead they have identified with the national liberation struggle and its assertion of the claims of all South Africans to a place in the present and the future.

I would like to conclude this dissertation by questioning the extent to which these re-inventions of Zuluness have the potential for offering a viable alternative to a narrow Zulu ethnicity. One of the distinctive features of the re-inventions I have focused on is their marginality from mainstream Zulu ethnicity: the community of KwaXimba had always been

marginal to the Zulu nation, and their resistance to colonialism developed out of their resistance to Zulu expansionism; none of the worker poets come from rural Zululand - their sense of tradition has been refracted by their migration to the cities; and rural women have traditionally been marginalised from Zulu society - their *izibongo* have developed outside traditional public discourse.

Does this mean, then, that these re-inventions represent a marginal perspective that can never replace the dominant Zulu ethnic identity, or do they represent an emergent discourse of Zuluness that will increasingly replace Zulu ethnicity as the new South African nation unfolds? As I have argued, ethnicity has thrived in a situation where the present has failed to open itself up to Africans. With the first democratic elections in April 1994, this situation has changed, as all South Africans now share a common citizenship. However, at the moment this citizenship is still largely formal: there are still vast differences in education and living standards between rural Africans and the urbanised South African elite. In such conditions a desire to assert pride in one's difference as Zulus will continue to be a powerful force.

Besides the problem of the marginality from rural Zulu society of the re-inventions of Zuluness explored in this dissertation, there are also the problems of the limited extent of Zulu women's cultural expression in the urban areas, and the tailing off of worker poetry in the nineties. Both of these problems raise questions about the extent to which the new South African nation is able in practice to realise its democratic, inclusive politics. Perhaps

the answer to these problems lies in the relationship that was eventually established in KwaXimba between the ANC leadership and the people of KwaXimba. While initially the ANC sought to impose a view of Zuluness on the community, in the end the people themselves interpreted Zuluness on their own terms from their localised perspective. It is out of such a relationship of engagement between the ANC leadership and South Africa's newly included citizens, that a vibrant and diverse South African culture will emerge, in which people are able to forge new relations between the past and the present as they reconstruct the future.

1. The terms 're-embedding', 'dis-embedding' and 'trust' are taken from Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity

2. This account of the development of hegemonic versions of Zuluness is foreshortened, and hence offers a simplified version of this complex issue.

3. This argument is made in Hamilton, C. and Wright, J. "Ethnicity, History and the Limits of Imagination", and in Wright, J. "Ethnicity and History: Towards a Discussion of the Zulu Case."

4. The reference to Plaatjie is made by David Attwell in the joint version of this chapter completed for publication

5. See Hamilton and Wright, "Ethnicity, History and the Limits of Imagination".

6. Interview with John Wright, History Department, University of Natal, August 1994

7. Much of this information comes from interviews with Chief Mlaba in August and September 1994

8. Information about development in the area was gathered from a development worker at the Institute of Natural Resources, who has been involved in the provision of sanitation in both Chief Mdluli's and Chief Mlaba's areas. Unaware of the political affiliations of Chief Mlaba and his maverick status within the Zulu chieftainship, she described him as "a shining example of what the system of chieftainship can achieve", comparing him favourably with her other experiences of working through chiefs in Natal. Her impression was that he was well liked and respected by those in the community with whom she worked, and that he played a helpful and unintrusive role in liaising between the development worker and the community. What had impressed her most was the egalitarian relationship he appeared to have with the people she worked with, with none of what she described as "the usual 'hlonipa-ing' that chiefs so often expect from the people."

9. Interviews with Midlands REC representative Yunus Carrim, August 1994.

10. This argument is indebted to David Attwell in the joint version of this chapter completed for publication

11. These biographical details are drawn from Ari Sitas, "A.T. Qabula: A Working Class Poet".

12. The term comes from the title of Alfred Qabula's autobiography, A Working Life, Cruel Beyond Belief

13. See page 23 of this dissertation

14. In fact Nise Malange, the most well known woman worker poet, comes from Cape Town, and only came to Natal as an adult. I have not addressed her work in this section, as it does not directly bear upon the issue of relating Zulu traditionalism to the culture of the Mass Democratic Movement.

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