

**Mdluli Backstories and Biographies:
Shaka Zulu and the Persistence of amalala Identities**

*Jill E. Kelly*¹

Abstract

The multiple accounts of Nomsimekwana Mdluli of Mkhambathini from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provide an opportunity to examine how a small polity in central Natal confronted the position of King Shaka Zulu in accounts of their past. Nomsimekwana kaMcoseli experienced the centralisation of polities east of the Drakensberg Mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that disturbed life at Mkhambathini, near the confluence of the Msunduze and Mngeni rivers. Forced to pledge their allegiance to other polities or come under attack, Mcoseli, his heir Nomsimekwana, and their followers affiliated themselves first with the Ngwane, later the Mkhize, then the Zulu, and eventually the British. Their associations waned and shifted as the threats changed – armies, hunger, marauders cast as amazimu, and Boer settlers – before Nomsimekwana Mdluli finally returned home to re-establish a chiefdom from the remnants who survived the transformation of the region. I flesh out the biographies and backstories of those involved in the creation and afterlives of these oral accounts of the Mdluli past. These accounts stress marginality and the impact of state consolidation on an amalala polity of Natal, as well as the persistence of amalala identities into the mid-twentieth century.

Keywords: Oral accounts; traditional authority; Shaka Zulu; Zulu Kingdom; amalala; Zulu Society; KwaZulu-Natal.

Isifinyezo

Ziningi izindaba zikaNomsimekwana Mdluli waseMkhambathini ngeminyaka yekhulu-nyaka lezinkulungwane ezingamashumi ayisishiyagalombili kanye nelesishiyagalolunye zinikeza ithuba lokubukisisa kahle ukuthi ubukhosi obuncane

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1. Jill E. Kelly (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8108-794X>) is Associate Professor of History at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, USA and Honorary Research Associate with Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative, University of Cape Town. She is the author of *To Swim with Crocodiles: Land, Violence and Belonging in South Africa* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press and University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2018). jillk@smu.edu.

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maphakathi neNatali babhekana kanjani nesimo seSilo uShaka kaSenzangakhona Zulu emibhalweni yangaphambilini. UNomsimekwana kaMcoseli wabagalelo nokuqoqela ndawonye izicagogwana zemibuso engasempumalanga wolungelunge lwezintaba zoKhahlamba ngeminyaka yekhulu-nyaka lezinkulungwane ezingamashumi ayisishiyagalombili kanye nelesishiyagalolunye ukuthi kwayiphazamisa kanjani inhlalo yaseMkhambathini, eduze kwalapho kuhlangukhona imifula uMsunduze noMngeni. Bephoqekele ukuba bakhonze ngaphansi kwminyane imibuso imi noma babhekane nokuhlaselwa, uMcoseli, Indlalifa yakhe uNomsimekwana, kanye nabalandeli ababengaphansi kwabo bakhonza okokuqala ngaphansi kwamaNgwane, emuva kwalokho ngaphansi kukaMkhize, emuva kwalokho ngaphansi kweLembe, uShaka kaSenzangakhona, ekugcineni ngaphansi kombuso wamaNgisi. Ukubumbana kwabo kwashabalala futhi kwashintsha ngokuguquka kwezinsongo zezimpi, indlala, izigilamkhuba ezazizenza amazimuzimu, kanye nezifikanamthwalo amaBhunu, ngapahambi kokuba uNomsimekwana Mdluli abuyele ekhaya ngokuphelele ukuvuselela kabusha umbuso wokuKhosi ngokwasala ezinguqukweni ezanzeka endaweni. Ngiveza impilo-mlando nezindaba zasemandulo ebucikweni bomlomo ngomlando wobukhosi bakwaMdluli. Umlando oxoxwayo ugcizelela ukushaywa indiva kanye namandla okulwa ekubumbeni nokuhlangukhona ubukhosi bamalala eNatali, kanjalo nokuphikelela kokuziqgaja kwamalala maphakathi nekhulu-nyaka lezinkulungwane ezingamashumi amabili.

Amagama ezihloko: Ubuciko bomlomo; ubukhosi; Shaka Zulu; Umbuso wamaZulu; amalala; Zulu Society; KwaZulu-Natal.

The multiple accounts of Nomsimekwana Mdluli from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provide an opportunity to examine how a small polity in central Natal confronted the position of King Shaka Zulu in accounts of their past.² Nomsimekwana kaMcoseli experienced the centralisation of polities east of the Drakensberg in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that disturbed life at his home at Mkhambathini.³ Forced to pledge their allegiance to stronger polities or come under attack, Mcoseli, his son Nomsimekwana, and their followers affiliated themselves first with the Ngwane of Matiwane, later the Mkhize of Zihlandlo, then the Zulu of Shaka, and eventually the British. Their associations waned and shifted as the threats

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2. Thank you to the anonymous reviewers and to the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative community at the University of Cape Town. I started to flesh out these backstories and biographies for my first book project at a 2015 APC workshop and refined them for the initiative's 2023 workshop in Carolyn Hamilton's honour.
 3. Mkhambathini means 'place of the acacia tree' and is the local name for the flat-topped mountain and the surrounding region at the confluence of the Msunduze River and Mngeni River. Mkhambathini is also now the isiZulu name for the local municipality formerly known as the Camperdown district. The mountain and region are also known as Table Mountain.

changed – armies, hunger, marauders cast as amazimu and later called ‘cannibals,’ and Boer settlers – before Nomsimekwana kaMcoseli finally returned to Mkhambathini to re-establish a polity subject to the Zulu king from the remnants who survived the transformation of the region.⁴ These accounts include one from 1863, shared by Mdluli adherent, Nombiba, with the Secretary for Native Affairs for Natal, Theophilus Shepstone, and a second from 1939, given by Inkosi Somquba Mdluli to the Zulu Society. Both of these oral accounts were solicited as part of recording the past of Natal and Zululand and have since entered the archive as source material. They document the marginality, in relation to King Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom, of people who were identified by others or identified themselves as amalala.

The appellation of amalala came to demarcate people south of the Thukela River with different dialects and a status distinct from the royal family and those with access to the Zulu king. While Zulu conquerors utilised amalala as an insult, others could wield these distinctions for their own purposes in accounts of the past with African and colonial interlocutors. Benedict Carton, John Laband, and Jabulani Sithole have positioned Zuluness as a malleable construct.⁵ Lalaness can similarly be understood as a useful, socio-political construct with related identities that were made and re-made.⁶ This differentiation between the amalala and those at the heart of the Zulu Kingdom began to fall away with the gradual development of Zulu nationalism after the 1880s.⁷ Even as it began to fade, characteristics of amalala continued to be wielded by Mdluli leaders in accounts of their past as late as 1939.

Mdluli elders in the 1860s and 1930s, as well as those who existed on the margins of the Zulu Kingdom considered by Carolyn Hamilton in *Terrific Majesty*, recognised Shaka as a destructive force. Hamilton shows how ‘Lala accounts often

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4. The appellations of this polity across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—amaCoseni, abakwaMdluli, abaseNyavini, and amaNyavu, all of which reference ancestral leaders who would be surnamed Mdluli under colonialism – are products of historical processes and themselves are worthy of investigation. J. Wright, ‘Making Identities in the Thukela-Mzimvubu Region c. 1770-c.1940’, in *Tribing and Untribing the Archive: Identity and the Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods*, ed. C. Hamilton and N. Leibhammer (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2016), 183–215; P. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400-1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). I use Mdluli to stress adherence to the chiefly line so critical to accounts of Nomsimekwana Mdluli.
 5. B. Carton, J. Laband and J. Sithole, eds, *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008).
 6. C. Hamilton and J. Wright, ‘Moving Beyond Ethnic Framing: Political Differentiation in the Chiefdoms of the KwaZulu-Natal Region before 1830’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 4 (2017), 663–79.
 7. J. Wright, ‘Reflections on the Politics of Being “Zulu”’, in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. B. Carton, J. Laband, and J. Sithole (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 35–43.

depict him as a marauder, a destroyer, and a “madman”, although those who supported him confirmed his violence.⁸ This is an image of the king nearly extinct among the Mdluli in the twenty-first century, a shift begun with more unifying identities in the first half of the twentieth century and furthered with the Zulu nationalism of Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe from the 1970s.

I flesh out the biographies and backstories of those involved in the creation and afterlives of these two accounts of the Mdluli past. I reconstruct who the interlocutors were, how they came by their information, and the factors that may have shaped or re-shaped the material shared and spurred its archiving.⁹ African attempts to maintain rights to land after the arrival of European settlers certainly shaped the motivations of Nombiba and Somquba in their narrations of Nomsimekwana’s life and history.¹⁰ For Nombiba and the Mdluli in 1863, distancing themselves from Shaka and his kingdom may have served to demonstrate their openness to a relationship with British officials in the first decades of the Natal Colony. What did remembering and sharing this antagonistic relationship with the Zulu king, and the status of amalala, with the Zulu Society do for the elder Somquba Mdluli and his people in 1939? I thus document and begin an exploration of the persistence of amalala identity into the interwar era in one of Natal’s chiefdoms and point to avenues for further investigation.

Backstories, biographies, and the role of Shaka kaSenzagakhona

Historical processes invested Shaka kaSenzagakhona with a powerful legacy still mobilised today. The work of Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright charts an approach to sources that recognises these historical processes, positioning oral accounts as ‘evidence of the past’ as well as a ‘force in the present time of narration’.¹¹ Their move away from ‘recorded oral tradition’ alerts the field of the need to interrogate not only the particularities of each account about Shaka in the James Stuart Archive (JSA) and similarly recorded materials but also the ongoing conditions of production beyond an account’s archiving. Hamilton opened this approach to oral sources with studies of the varied accounts of Shaka in the JSA. Wright and Cynthia Kros furthered the work in studies of several other JSA interlocutors.¹²

8. C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 50.

9. C. Hamilton, ‘Backstory, Biography, and the Life of the James Stuart Archive’, *History in Africa*, 38, 1 (2011), 319–341.

10. See the early chapters of J. Kelly, *To Swim with Crocodiles: Land, Violence, and Belonging in South Africa, 1800–1996* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018).

11. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 52.

12. C. Hamilton, ‘Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the Voices “From Below”’, *History in Africa*, 14 (1987), 67–86; Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*; Hamilton, ‘Backstory, Biography, and the Life of the James Stuart Archive’; C. Hamilton, ‘Recalibrating the

The significance of these methodological interventions arose as scholars grappled with the nature of Shaka's rise to power. Decolonisation across the African continent inspired new histories of Africa and its leaders that worked against western claims that Africans had no past. J.D. Omer-Cooper's early study of the rise of Shaka in the late 1810s and 1820s was thus a powerful, strong-man history, paving the way for serious scholarship on the leader and a historiographical debate on what became known as the mfecane to which the reliability of source material was critical.¹³ From the 1970s, scholars began to think about not only the changing internal dynamics of the kingdom but also other new states in the region.¹⁴ Hamilton and Wright, in their own theses and subsequent oeuvre individually and jointly, drew on the notes of Stuart's conversations with his interlocutors and read both those and other sources in new ways that demonstrated the making of socio-political categories such as abenguni, amantungwa, abambo, and amalala within the new Zulu Kingdom. As Shaka's authority grew, the Zulu royal house restructured relationships and used these categories to facilitate distinctions within the new polity.¹⁵

Deep History of Intellectual Thought in the KwaZulu-Natal Region', in *Public Intellectuals in South Africa: Critical Voices from the Past*, ed. C. Broodryk (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021), 21–43; J. Wright, 'Ndukwana kaMbengwana as an Interlocutor on the History of the Zulu Kingdom, 1897–1903', *History in Africa*, 38, 1 (2011), 343–68; J. Wright, 'Socwatsha kaPhaphu, James Stuart, and Their Conversations on the Past, 1897–1922', *Kronos*, 41, 1 (2015), 142–65; J. Wright, 'Thununu kaNonjiya Gcabashe Visits James Stuart in the Big Smoke to Talk about History', *Natalia*, 49 (2019), 1–12; J. Wright and C. Kros, 'Izithunguthu', in *Changing Theory*, ed. D. Menon (India: Routledge, 2022).

13. J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (London: Longman Group, 1966); J. Cobbing, 'The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', *The Journal of African History*, 29, 3 (1988): 487–519; E. Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, c. 1800–30: The Mfecane Reconsidered', *Journal of African History*, 33, 1 (1992), 1–35; C. Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995); D. Wylie, *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).
14. H. Slater, 'Transitions in the Political Economy of South-East Africa Before 1840' (PhD, University of Sussex, 1976); D. Hedges, 'Trade and Politics in Southern Mozambique and Zululand in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries' (PhD, University of London, 1978); P. Bonner, *Kings, Commoners, and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
15. C. Hamilton, 'Ideology, Oral Traditions and the Struggle for Power in the Early Zulu Kingdom' (MA thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1985); Hamilton, 'Ideology and Oral Traditions'; J. Wright and C. Hamilton, 'Traditions and Transformations: The Phongolo-Mzimkhulu Region in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries', in *Natal and Zululand: From Earliest Times to 1910*, ed. A. Duminy and B. Guest (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, Shuter & Shooter, 1989), 49–82; J. Wright, 'The Dynamics of Power and Conflict in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu Region in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries: A Critical Reconstruction' (PhD, Witwatersrand University, 1989); C. Hamilton and J. Wright, 'The Making of the AmaLala: Ethnicity, Ideology and Relations of Subordination in a Precolonial Context', *South African Historical Journal*, 22 (1990): 3–23; C. Hamilton, 'Restructuring within the Zulu Royal House: Clan Splitting and the

Shaka's consolidation of power thus situated contributes to the recognition that his rise did not immediately produce a unified sense of Zuluness or a shared understanding of the past in either Zululand or Natal. As Hamilton shows most clearly in *Terrific Majesty*, 'what the early travellers, missionaries, and colonial administrators found in the area that is today KwaZulu-Natal was not a clearly articulated and bounded culture, nor a singular identity, and was bolstered by no unargued Zulu history.' As migrant labourers, African Christians, the Zulu royal family, and segregationist ideologues alike turned to Shaka to forge a Zulu identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'the figure of the first Zulu king was already the product of a long and complex process of reworking'.¹⁶ European traders arrived in Natal at a moment when great inequalities existed within a heterogenous kingdom and disputes within the royal family raged. Resistance to Shakan rule, and that of his successor, contributed to diverse images of the first Zulu king.

Of particular interest here is the way that those who occupied the category of amalala on the margins of the Zulu Kingdom describe the rule of Shaka in their accounts of the Mdluli past. A.T. Bryant treated the amalala as a group of related tribes in a family-tree like structure, but there is little evidence of amalala as such before Bryant's time.¹⁷ While Hamilton and Wright originally posited amalala as an ethnic category – ethnicity was then a major field of analysis as scholars worked against the tribalisation of apartheid policies – they have more recently argued amalala and amantungwa as socio-political categories with identities situated and shaped in specific historical circumstances. The dominant political discourse framing the past was 'about the nature of relationships, rights and obligations in the present, conceived in terms of long-established concepts about layered occupation of the landscape'.¹⁸ Peoples identified as amalala were adherents of the Zulu king, socially located on the peripheries of the kingdom.

There is more evidence – though comparatively little due to colonial attention to the Zulu – of an amalala identity based on location, language, and custom that became widespread after the rise of Shaka Zulu. Stuart recorded statements on the

Consolidation of Zulu Royal Power', in *Culture and the Commonplace: Anthropological Essays in Honour of David Hammond-Tooke*, ed. P.A. McAllister (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), 85–113.

16. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 4–6.

17. J. Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and the Lala', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 2 (2012): 355–368.

18. Hamilton and Wright, 'Moving Beyond Ethnic Framing', 2; Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and the Lala'. For the older scholarship on the amalala, see Hamilton and Wright, 'The Making of the AmaLala'; H. Hughes, 'Politics and Society in Inanda, Natal: The Qadi under Chief Mqhawe, C1840-1906' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1995); H. Hughes, *First President: A Life of John Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2011), chap. 1.

meaning and term of amalala from several dozen interlocutors, especially between 1902-1905. Based on these, Wright outlines several of the broad characteristics of those who identified as amalala, which mostly indicate language and location. They lived mainly south of the Thukela and north of the Mkhomazi, from the coast and its hinterland. These were not always distinguishable from the amabhaca, amadebe, or amazoha, amampempe, and amaxamu. They spoke a variant of the tekeza dialect distinct from the isiZulu north of the Thukela River. The term amalala could be used to describe those who smelted and forged metal. While Zulu conquerors derided amalala as a marker of low social status and some sought to change their practices to avoid such associations, one missionary cited by Wright described these dialects as a source of 'pride in using and perpetuating these clannish distinctions' for the speakers.¹⁹

Amalala identities eroded as a sense of Zuluness grew across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰ Ordinary young African men in the late nineteenth century spread Zulu identities beyond the inner circle of the royal family in colonial Natal and the goldfields, via migrant labour and in the impi yamkhanda of 1906.²¹ In the early twentieth century, African Christians known as amakholwa (believers) moved away from narrower identities and towards the Zulu monarch as a means of asserting political rights. Then, in the 1920s, isiZulu-speaking Christian businessmen and community leaders formed a cultural movement connected to the Zulu king, Inkata kaZulu, as a means to facilitate their economic goals, access land, and resist white consolidation of power.²² At times, these Zulu ethnic associations hindered class-based organisation and fractured national movements.²³ For others, such as Christian intelligentsia and Natal ANC leaders M.B. Yengwa, Zamindlela Conco, and Albert Luthuli, the celebration of Zulu heritage was part and parcel of what became their inclusive African nationalism from the 1950s forward. Even as fierce debates raged between King Zwelithini and Chief Buthelezi during the transition to democracy, they agreed that King Shaka served as a unifying force in KwaZulu-Natal.²⁴

19. Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and the Lala'.

20. Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and the Lala', 367.

21. M. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: The Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

22. This Inkata is to be distinguished from the latter day Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe. P. La Hausse, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity, and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c. 1881-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-c. 1936)* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000); N. Cope, *To Bind the Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism, 1913-1933* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993); S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

23. S. Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness', in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. L. Vail (Currey: University of California Press, 1989), 216.

24. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*; G. Maré and G. Hamilton, *Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's*

While scholars have demonstrated this construction of a Zulu consciousness, other work shows the persistence of subsumed identities that continue to overlap, intersect, and challenge the dominance of Zuluness into the twenty-first century. Ndwandwe and Hlubi identities continue despite significant social pressure and lack of national recognition. Mbongiseni Buthelezi shows how those Ndwandwe who explore their past must navigate the powerful mythology of King Shaka and the contemporary power of the Zulu Kingdom. They recall Ndwandwe ancestors in a manner that can mark them as being Zulu.²⁵ Jochen Arndt considers how the Hlubi, in the wake of their failure to have their leader recognised by the post-apartheid state as king, promote isiHlubi language initiatives.²⁶ Analysis here turns to evidence for the persistence of markers of amalala identity into the interwar period, one without the storied past of Hlubi or Ndwandwe kings and one marked out by its antagonism to the armies and violence of Shaka Zulu.

Nombiba, Theophilus Shepstone and James Stuart

In September 1863, Nombiba, an elder adherent of Nomsimekwana Mdluli, sat down with the Secretary for Native Affairs for the Natal Colony, Theophilus Shepstone. The British had annexed the region two decades earlier and begun, piecemeal, to establish a system of colonial administration of the region's indigenous populations.²⁷ Nombiba's conversation with Shepstone, the architect of the developing administration, is the earliest known oral account of Nomsimekwana documented in writing. It is an account that describes the perils of state growth in southeastern Africa for smaller polities and elaborates the Mdluli's social and political marginality as tributaries to the Zulu king.

Shepstone solicited historical accounts as part of research undertaken at the behest of Natal colonial officials to provide the government with a picture of the historical basis of African claims to land in Natal. Nombiba met with Shepstone over the course of four days. He was one of eleven known men whose accounts Shepstone

Inkatha and South Africa (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); G. Maré, *Brothers Born of Warrior Blood: Politics and Ethnicity in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1992); D. Golan, *Inventing Shaka: Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism* (Boulder: L. Rienner, 1994); T. Waetjen, *Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

25. M. Buthelezi, 'Sifuna Umlando Wethu (We Are Looking for Our History): Oral Literature and the Meanings of the Past in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (PhD, Columbia University, 2012).
26. J. Arndt, 'Struggles of Land, Language, and Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Case of the Hlubi', *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 9, 1 (2018), 1–26.
27. D. Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845-1910* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1971); T. McClendon, *White Chief, Black Lords: Shepstone and the Colonial State in Natal, South Africa, 1845-1878* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010); J. Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal: African Autonomy and Settler Colonialism in the Making of Traditional Authority* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

documented, one of fourteen African men present on these occasions. We do not know how Shepstone selected his interlocutors. At least one of them is described as ‘Chief,’ so he may have sought information from among leaders he believed to have been locally resident prior to the arrival of Europeans. Shepstone elsewhere attested to speaking directly with Nomsimekwana Mdluli, but it is unclear whether that was in the course of regular government business or specifically to hear of his past and if that predates his conversation with Nombiba. His knowledge of the leader may have prompted him to seek out information about the Mdluli past.²⁸ We also do not know the extent to which his questioning may have led the direction of their accounts, though we should assume the colonial official’s prompts encouraged discussion of chiefs and geography given the nature of the investigation.

From Nombiba and these ten other men, Shepstone drafted ‘Inhabitants of the Territory’, an account that he submitted to Lieutenant-Governor Scott, and via Scott, to the Secretary of State in London in 1864. Shepstone claims to have written down the contents of these historical outlines ‘from the lips of the narrators, and, as near as possible, in their words’.²⁹ This assurance was not part of his handwritten draft and was surely included in his submission to Scott to convince the recipients of African rights to land in Natal. Scott stressed them as abridged on account of the purpose of their documentation.

While Shepstone would have had available to him at least one other possible source, if not three, from Natal missionaries and officials to learn from, Wright suggests that Shepstone did not draw on these. Shepstone was part of the 1852 Harding Commission before which some of this evidence was presented. Reverend Lewis Grout outlined the polities reduced, ended, and those that remained in Natal despite the disturbances of state consolidation. Grout based his testimony on ‘some thirty or forty natives’. He makes no reference to Nomsimekwana or Mdluli, although he documents several supposedly extinct polities from the region around Mkhambathini. It thus seems unlikely that his account would have augmented anything shared by Nombiba in Shepstone’s research regarding the Mdluli. Reverend J.L. Dohne, at the same commission, who was then living among the Mdluli at Mkhambathini, spoke highly of Nomsimekwana’s character and his father’s death at the hands of Shaka’s armies. Henry Fynn’s list of chiefdoms includes ‘Simikwana’, of the AbakwaMcosene.³⁰

28. Theophilus Shepstone, ‘Historic Sketch of the Tribes Anciently Inhabiting the Colony of Natal – as at Present Bounded – and Zululand, in *Report and Proceedings of the Government Commission on Native Laws and Customs*, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book G.4-’83, Part 2 (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1968 [original 1883]).

29. Theophilus Shepstone, ‘Inhabitants of the Territory (Now the Colony of Natal), During the Time of Jobe, Father of Dingizwayo, Before the Extermination of Native Tribes by Chaka’, Enclosure No. 1 in Lieutenant-Governor Scott’s Dispatch No. 12, February 26, 1864, in J. Bird, *The Annals of Natal, 1495-1845*, vol. 1 (Pietermaritzburg: P. Davis & Sons, 1888), 153.

30. Grout does reference an Amanyamvu, but this is not the Nyavu of Nomsimekwana

John Bird later selected Shepstone's 'Inhabitants' for publication – alongside letters and reports – for its perceived historical significance in his two-volume *The Annals of Natal: 1495-1845* (1888).³¹ Shepstone's handwritten version was eventually archived with his papers in Pietermaritzburg.

An isiZulu version of the Nombiba-Shepstone account of Nomsimekwana appears as one among izifundo (lessons) in *uVusezakiti*, the last of five isiZulu readers published between 1923 and 1926 for use in isiZulu-speaking schools in Natal.³² Former British colonial official John Stuart translated the Nombiba-Shepstone account as it had been printed in Bird's *Annals*, as 'uNomsimekwana u banjwa amazimu'. The text of many of the lessons in the readers were chosen from Stuart's meticulous notes of his conversations with African interlocutors. Across his career, Stuart sought to inform himself of nineteenth-century Zulu governance to best govern Africans in the British colony. Later in life, challenged by violent rebellion, he sought to record 'traditional Zulu' culture before it disappeared.³³

However, little is known about why Stuart chose particular izifundo, including the account of Nomsimekwana, or organised them as he did in his post-retirement readers. The title of the book in which Nomsimekwana's story was published suggests Stuart may have recognised the account's literary value. *uVusezakiti*, 'Reviver of Our Own Stories,' for Std 3 (Grade 5) posits the manuscript as recovering tales nearly lost. As a translation of the Nombiba-Shepstone account in 'Inhabitants,' Stuart's isiZulu version is shorter (drawing on two of the three pages) and covers only Nomsimekwana's escape from amazimu – the so-called cannibals, raiders who acquired the cattle, crops, and people of those outside of centralised authority. The exciting travails of Nomsimekwana operate as epic tale of a chiefly leader surviving on the margins of the expanding Zulu Kingdom.

But Nomsimekwana's tale is not just a gripping story. Stuart was compiling the readers at a historical moment in which Zulu nationalism was growing south of the Thukela. Officials in Natal were reconsidering the ways in which the most senior Zulu royals might be used in governance. Wright, in his exploration of the provenance

Mdluli. *Proceedings of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Past and Present State of the Kafir in the District of Natal*, vol. IV (Pietermaritzburg: J. Archbell and Son, 1853). Thus, the Mdluli do not appear in the 1857 Shooter publication either. I have not had the opportunity to check the James Perrin notes in the Garden Papers. Wright, 'The Dynamics of Power and Conflict', 104–105.

31. Bird, *The Annals of Natal, 1495-1845*. For more on the role of Bird's collection, see H. Fagan, 'The Wider KwaZulu-Natal Region circa 1700 to the Onset of Colonialism: A Critical Essay on Sources and Historiography' (MA, University of Cape Town, 2020).
32. Killie Campbell Africana Library (hereafter KCAL), 'uNomsimekwana u banjwa amazimu', in *UVusezakithi* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1926).
33. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*; J. Wright, 'Tracking Down the Sources of James Stuart's Readers', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 34, 1 (2021): 36–55.

of Stuart's readers, asked how 'ideas of these different kinds fed into local education system'.³⁴ We can only imagine if Stuart remembered, as he translated the text, his meeting with Nomsimekwana's son, Ngangezwe, in 1899 when the latter spoke with him regarding a dispute at the American Zulu Mission Station at Mkhambathini.³⁵ A.T. Bryant also relied heavily on Shepstone's presentation of a four wave theory of the mfecane in his own interpretation that was popularised in *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929). This makes Nombiba the main informant for this much-critiqued interpretation of Natal's past.³⁶

That some of Nomsimekwana's descendants might have read some version of this account is possible. In 2011, Thandeka Majola and I met with Mfungelwa Mdluli, whom Inkosi Sikhosphi Mdluli called the chiefdom's historian. Mfungelwa was born in 1928 into a family of Christian converts. His uncle studied at Adams College and became the first teacher at the Table Mountain Mission Reserve. Mfungelwa was indeed a treasure trove who had kept important files of the chiefdom tucked away in his home. He knew of a book featuring Nomsimekwana: 'There was a book we were reading in my grade 1, but it is not available in libraries. I looked for it until I got tired.'³⁷ It seems highly feasible that he read 'uNomsimekwana u banjwa amazimu' in Stuart's *uVusazakithi* in school. Regardless of the exact title that he read, it did not overly determine his account of Nomsimekwana. Significant differences exist from the earlier documented versions, including the place of Shaka in local history. He later referenced his father as 'the one who gave me our history', so a school text was not his only history lesson.

The Nombiba-Shepstone account has thus influenced generations of histories of the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom and the experience of smaller polities in Natal; yet we still know so little about this elder of the Mdluli. Shepstone estimated Nombiba was then about 55 years old – making him a youth during the events he described (b. ~1808) and thus around the age of Nomsimekwana kaMcoseli. It is unclear, in Shepstone's notes, exactly how much of Nomsimekwana's travails that Nombiba experienced himself, as the account notes him at one point as 'having been for some time with another tribe on the Mooi River' before he went to visit his 'old tribe' and found their country recently abandoned after an attack by marauders. He had firsthand experience of the turmoil and may or may not have experienced some of it with Nomsimekwana. If not with him, he could have heard Nomsimekwana's account directly from the source.

34. Wright, 'Tracking Down the Sources of James Stuart's Readers',

35. Ngangezwe was recognised as chief in 1895, but due to his father's advanced age he had already been more or less governing for several years before the recognition (SNA 1/1/199 302/1895). Ngangezwe kaNomsimekwana, J. Wright, ed., *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*, vol. 5 (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001), 24.

36. J. Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and 'The Wars of Shaka'', *History in Africa* 18 (1991): 415–419.

37. Mfungelwa Mdluli, with T. Majola and author, 7 August 2011, KwaNyavu.

Nombiba – his family, if not himself – likely occupied a place of importance among the Mdluli. There is a possibility that Nombiba was a Majola. His son Gxwala kaNombiba appeared in a later account given by Nomsimekwana's grandson, Somquba. Somquba's account also documents the role of two Majola men, Idi and Sojuba, in ensuring the safety of the Mdluli chiefly line. Majola men appear in the Native Affairs records of the chiefdom as izinduna across the twentieth century. In an exchange with Inkosi Sikhosiphi Mdluli in 2013, he referred to Nomsimekwana's trusted induna Nombili Majola.³⁸ It is difficult not to wonder if Nombili, in his account, is Nombiba. Mankantsolo Majola, in 2014, recalled his ancestors – Mxhakaza and Sojuba – as resident in the region before Mdluli chiefs.³⁹ The naming of non-chiefly actors in the account may attest to the significance of these families in both the historical and contemporary Mdluli polity.

Compared to Shepstone's other interlocutors, Nombiba's knowledge appears expansive. He informed the accounts of some seventeen polities, vastly more than any other of the interlocutors. He may also be the source for several of the unattributed histories – for instance, numbers 59-61 that refer back to the account of the Inyamywini for which Nombiba was the sole source. He was also, likely, a gifted narrator, as his account of Nomseimkwana's travails is one of the longest accounts among those collected by Shepstone. There are others that refer to amazimu but none with the detail and length of Nombiba's.

Nombiba's account to Shepstone, drawn on in *uVusezakiti* and *Olden Times*, describes Shaka's armies as the attackers. In the first assault, Mcoseli's people could maintain some of their cattle and their position on account of mountainous landscape. The Mdluli rebuffed demands that they pledge allegiance to Macingwane, but consented to Matiwane's. While under the authority of Matiwane, another of Shaka's armies attacked Matiwane's Ngwane. Nombiba described the nature of Shakan warfare as unprecedented and its effects more devastating than previous battles. 'Before his wars, tribes used to fight with each other, perhaps for a day, and all would be over: prisoners were not killed, but ransomed by their friends; and women and children were not destroyed. But afterwards, as Shaka's wars extended, tribes became exterminated, not so much by his armies as by other tribes to whom they fled, and by starvation. More died from hunger than by the assegai.' The Mdluli felt this most keenly in attacks by marauders and thus sought security with Zihlandlo's Mkhize, then a tributary of Shaka, during which time a number of Mdluli adherents were sent by the Zulu king to their deaths in the kukulela ngoqo impi campaign, an extraordinary mobilisation, north of Delagoa Bay in 1828. After Dingane killed both Shaka and Zihlandlo, Nomsimekwana returned home to Mkhambathini. A number of his father's adherents began to return after Mpande rebelled against Dingane.⁴⁰

38. Sikhosiphi Mdluli, with T. Majola and author, 17 July 2013, KwaNyavu.

39. Mankantsolo Mdluli, with T. Majola and author, 6 June 2014, KwaNyavu.

40. Pietermaritzburg Archival Repository (hereafter PAR), Theophilus Shepstone Papers 89,

As his account was sketched out by Shepstone, there is no direct reference to amalala because the term still carried a derogatory connotation. But the past shared is one that marks out the Mdluli as amalala – geographically distant from the center of the Zulu Kingdom and with chiefly houses excluded from full participation in public affairs of the kingdom. Even as Nombiba recognised the direct causes of his people's deaths and distress as non-Zulu, he attributed the origins as Shaka's consolidation of power. He describes their encounters with amazimu while outside of the centralised authority of the kingdom and their conscription into low levels of the Zulu armies once made tributary. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Shepstone's attention to Shaka may have influenced the account documented, though we do know that Shepstone downplayed non-Zulu sources for turmoil in Natal.⁴¹ Nombiba certainly understood the significance of land in his exchange with Shepstone, as he claimed the Mdluli leaders had an 'ancient residence' at Mkhambathini and took care to describe Nomsimekwana's departure from and return to the storied mountain. But Nombiba's account also offers evidence of the Mdluli's marginalised position within the expanding Zulu Kingdom, reason enough for his positioning of the Zulu king as destroyer of peace and plenty.

By the time of Shaka's death in 1828, Mdluli adherents had been incorporated into the tiered Zulu Kingdom as members of its lowest status, the amalala. After their return to Mkhambathini, the arrival of the Boers represented a new threat to Nomsimekwana; British annexation of the region in 1843 offered an alternative and Shepstone's attention to land an opportunity. Nombiba's account in 1863 of amazimu and Shaka's consolidation of power contrasted the tribulations experienced by his people on the periphery with those closer to the heart of the Zulu royal family and kingdom.

Somquba Mdluli and the Zulu Society

Eighty years after Nombiba spoke to Shepstone about the Mdluli, in 1939, Nomsimekwana's grandson shared Mdluli history with the Zulu Society. The society interviewed him as part of their mission to preserve Zulu culture and custom during a time in which the identity of 'Zulu' was becoming widespread among both white and black leaders, even as old identities of gender, generation, and clan and new identities of worker or African also circulated. Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog's 'Native Bills', introduced a decade earlier, became law in 1936. White liberals used the decade between the bills' first introduction and their passage to soften some of the impact as African leaders found themselves forced to compromise on political rights for access to land. The Native Bills included the 1936 Land Act, which furthered the

Tribal Histories: Tribes which occupied the territory now forming the Colony of Natal during the time of Dingiswayo's father, Jobe, and before they were broken up by Chaka's wars, No. 29 AmaNyamvu, Nombiba to Shepstone; Bird, *The Annals of Natal, 1495-1845*, 1:137-139.

41. Wright, 'A.T. Bryant and "The Wars of Shaka"', 415-419.

spatial segregation envisioned by the 1913 Land Act.⁴² Somquba Mdluli's oral account of Nomsimekwana with the Zulu Society in 1939 features the power of Shaka Zulu but it is a history of a chiefdom historically *not* Zulu, a polity that still saw the rising king as the source of their troubles. In sharing the account of his grandfather with the Zulu Society for an archive, Somquba continued to mark out differences of his people from those at the heart of the Zulu Kingdom while also contributing to a Zulu-ification of the Mdluli at a historical moment in which many were turning to the Zulu king to further or resist segregation.

The Zulu Society sought to construct Zulu ethnic identity around the symbols of the Zulu monarch and preserve Zulu tradition and custom. Albert Luthuli – then an instructor at Adams College – founded the Zulu Society as an offshoot of the Bantu Teachers Association in 1937. The society organised conferences and commemorations, documented historical accounts, and collected newspaper clippings that documented 'prevailing representations of black people at the time, as well as the rising disciplining of the black body'.⁴³ It must be seen as having an eye towards the creation of an archive. It was representative of the ambiguities of a Zulu nationalism both rooted in the past and African Christian hopes for the future.⁴⁴

The organisation emerged at a moment in Natal's history marked by what Shula Marks called a 'relative vacuum left by the disintegration of formal political activities'. The decline of Inkatha kaZulu after 1930 and divisions between the Natal Native Congress, the Natal African Congress, and the ANC Natal Branch and within the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) plagued efforts to respond to the social dislocations of the era. The Union's Native Affairs Department (NAD) funded the Zulu Society for nearly ten years; one of its most notable patrons was Natal's Commissioner for Native Affairs, H.C. Lugg. The Zulu Society aimed to see the Zulu king recognised as Paramount by the white government. Its white supporters hoped the royal family and the heritage it represented would serve as a bulwark against progressive forces.⁴⁵ By 1946, a number of its more prominent figures, including Luthuli, had left the body on account of this closeness with the NAD. Complex politics swirled as Somquba sat down to document the past.

We do not know for certain how the Zulu Society found Somquba, but there are some strong possibilities. Society secretary, Charles Mpanza, may have known of the account. Mpanza worked for the NAD, his salary paid at the suggestion of Heaton

42. S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

43. T. Mhlambi, 'The Zulu Society Archive', Archive & Public Culture Research Initiative, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://humanities.uct.ac.za/apc/zulu-society-archive>.

44. Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity', 224.

45. Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity',

Nicholls.⁴⁶ His family came from the Eshowe district, descending from a Zulu chief as well as a prominent Norwegian Missionary Society-educated family. His brother was the Reverend M.J. Mpanza, who worked in Zululand and later the Milne Street Lutheran Church, Emapulangweni.⁴⁷ He would go on to launch isiZulu language radio broadcasts in the 1940s. His status as a member of the Zulu intelligentsia meant that he was often asked for recommendations on Zulu textbooks and he may have known of Nomsimekwana's tale from *uVusezakiti*. Thokozani Mhlambi described Mpanza as a man with 'an overwhelming desire for change' and 'an architect of an entire movement for mobilising critical thinking on cultural matters in the province of Natal, and South Africa at large'.⁴⁸ He may also have known of Nomsimekwana's tale from his work in the NAD office.

It is also possible that then (1933-1941) Chief Native Commissioner in Natal, H.C. Lugg, who was a supporter of the organisation and later himself wrote about Nomsimekwana and amazimu, connected Somquba with the group. Lugg also may have learned of the story via *uVusezakithi*.⁴⁹ Both Lugg and his clerk, Carl Faye,⁵⁰ offered support for the society's efforts to collect folklore and tradition. Lugg later visited in 1947, with his brother Cyril, the Bishopstowe pool in which Nomsimekwana supposedly swam to escape amazimu as part of his research for *Historic Natal and Zululand* (published in 1949). Late in his life he recalled hearing the story from Ngangezwe (who had died in 1931), but in *Historic Natal and Zululand* he cites Nomsimekwana's grandson Baningi Mdluli as source – alongside A.T. Bryant and John Bird.⁵¹ Ngangezwe had eight wives; Baningi is not listed among those sons often cited in discussion of the chief's possible heirs, but may be a son of lesser discussed wives (those not under consideration as chief wife) and their children. Regardless of exactly when and with whom the engagement took place, this was certainly after the recording of the Zulu Society account.

Somquba kaNgangezwe kaNomsimekwana was born at the time of the floods before isithabathaba, the 1869 proclamation by Shepstone that limited the number

46. Marks.

47. La Hausse, *Restless Identities*, 128–29, 144–45.

48. Mhlambi, 'The Zulu Society Archive'; T. Mhlambi, 'Sound in Urban Public Space: Loudspeaker Broadcasts in Johannesburg and Durban in South Africa, 1940s', *Cultural Studies* 34, 6 (2020): 959–78.

49. H.C. Lugg, *Life under a Zulu Shield* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1975).

50. Robert Papini described Faye as a 'Government workhorse, too committed to daily duties to indulge fully his penchant for recording witness to local history Like the evolutionist missionary [Bryant] and the ethnohistorian magistrate [Stuart], however, he took his passion beyond the call of duty and into retirement, in dogged subliminal devotion to that ideological fundament of Shepstonist indirect rule: conjuring and culturing 'tradition' when and as the need arose', R. Papini, 'Carl Faye's Transcript of Isaiah Shembe's Testimony of His Early Life and Calling', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 29, 3 (1999): 243–84.

51. Lugg, *Life under a Zulu Shield*, 42; H.C. Lugg, *Historic Natal and Zululand, Containing a Series of Short Sketches of the Historical Spots* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1949), 46.

of cattle demanded for ilobolo. His ibutho was Mbokodwebomvu, an age-grade regiment formed in 1886 by King Dinuzulu of youths born in 1861-1865.⁵² His age makes it highly unlikely that he would have engaged with any of Stuart's readers (and his level of education is unknown). There is some evidence that his father, Ngangezwe, was loyal to the British authorities during impi yamakhandu and the arrest of Dinuzulu.⁵³ Somquba kaNgangezwe became chief of the Mdluli in 1930 when Ngangezwe insisted upon relinquishing his position due to old age, as his father had done before him. Ngangezwe made it clear that Somquba was his choice as heir. Somquba was then already of a 'mature age' and had been more or less governing on behalf of his father for some time. He was nominally a Christian,⁵⁴ but was the subject, late in his life, of complaints by the American Board Mission affiliates who managed the mission reserve within the Inanda location on which Somquba resided. According to correspondence addressed to the native commissioner in 1939:

There are several on the Mission Station who give evidence that his wife Mamdhlamini is an isanusi [a diviner] and that the chief himself at a public meeting made mention of the fact. It is also very emphatically denied by some that all his children attend school.⁵⁵

Like his father, Somquba would grapple with land disputes as well as so-called faction fighting within the Mdluli and with neighbours.

Somquba suffered from rheumatism during his rule and did not frequently make his own trips to the magistrate's courts or NAD offices.⁵⁶ Aware of his own sickly condition, Somquba met with the magistrate and chief native commissioner to discuss the appointment of his heir, which was finalised in mid-1938. The only son of Somquba's first and late chief wife, MaNene (okaMkosana), died in his 20s. Somquba hoped to marry again to affiliate the new wife to okaMkosana but was unable to do so on account of his illness. He thus named Nongalaza, his eldest son with his third wife MaDlamini (okaJazi), as his heir.⁵⁷

52. J. Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 17–18.

53. Mfungelwa Mdluli; Kelly, *To Swim with Crocodiles*, ch 3.

54. Bryant claimed that Nomsimekwana died a baptised Christian, but that detail is not documented in the original Shepstone account or the published Bird account, so it is unclear the source and therefore the accuracy. Reverend J.L. Dohne, American Board missionary at Table Mountain Mission Reserve, described Nomsimekwana in 1852 as 'not yet a civilised or Christianised man'. Mfungelwa Mdluli puts the construction of the first church at Mkhambathini during Ngangezwe's time. *1852 Commission*, IV:13; A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal, Containing Earlier Political History of the Eastern-Nguni Clans* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), 560–561.

55. PAR, 2/PMB, 3/1/1/2/4, 2/14/1920, H.A. Stick, American Board Mission in South Africa, to Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg, 22 September 1939.

56. See correspondence regarding his health, PAR, 2/PMB, 3/1/1/2/4, 2/14/1920, Mdhului tribe, Chief Somquba Mdhului.

57. PAR, 2/PMB, 3/1/1/2/4, 2/14/1920, Mdhului tribe, Chief Somquba Mdhului.

The limited presence of Somquba in Pietermaritzburg in the last years of his life suggests his visit to town to speak with the Zulu Society in 1939 was an exception. The archived version puts him in the provincial capital less than a year before his death: ‘This story was given by the grandson of Nomsimekwana, the grandfather of the [Chief] Mdluli today at Mkhambathini, Somquba kaNgangezwe on the date 12 October 1939 recorded by the Zulu Society in Pietermaritzburg.’ It also describes a photo of Somquba with the two sticks with which he supported himself to walk.⁵⁸ He died on 10 May 1940, at his homestead, Emzizini.⁵⁹

We do not know the name of the recorder, though it was likely Mpanza. We do not know if he took notes as Somquba spoke or wrote them down afterwards. In the Zulu Society archive there are two documents, each with one half of the story, in separate folders. One is typewritten, in isiZulu, and follows Nomsimekwana from his youth at Mkhambathini to the end of his time in Zululand.⁶⁰ The other is handwritten, in isiZulu, and picks up where the first left off, with Nomsimekwana’s harassment by cowherds in Zululand. This one concludes, after notes from the recorder, with Nomsimekwana’s izibongo. There is evidence in both pieces of the oral nature of the account, suggesting the recorder transcribed the account as Somquba told it. We can speculate why one half is typewritten and not the second. Among other unorganised Zulu Society files is a table of contents for a planned publication (it never came to fruition) that lists the story of Nomsimekwana, so it seems likely the first half may have been typewritten in preparation for this endeavour. No evidence can be found of referenced photographs.

Somquba, in his 70s in 1939, knew his grandfather in person. He told the recorder, ‘[Nomsimekwana] was just an ordinary man, with an ample forehead.’ Born in the 1860s, there is a strong possibility that Somquba heard of the protagonist’s experiences directly from Nomsimekwana (who lived until 1901), and if not Nomsimekwana, then his father Ngangezwe kaNomsimekwana, who we know shared an account of the Mdluli past in a statement to the Under Secretary for Native Affairs, Robert Samuelson, in 1894 during a land dispute with neighbours.⁶¹ During the 1930s, Somquba continued the quest of his father and grandfather to have the contested land – on which they argued their ancestors had dwelled – included within the Mdluli’s boundaries. Each of these versions of Nomsimekwana’s survival make geographical reference as part of Mdluli claims to land.

The Local History Museums in Durban published an English translation, by Sicelo Majola and Christopher Mchunu, of this account in 1999. This publication

58. PAR, A1381, IV/6/1, Zulu Society, Handwritten Documents, Miscellaneous.

59. PAR, 2/PMB, 3/1/1/2/4, 2/14/1920, Mdhluli tribe, Chief Somquba Mdhluli.

60. PAR, A1381, IV/5/1, Zulu Society Documents, Miscellaneous.

61. PAR, SNA 1/1/180, Petition of Ngangezwe kaNomsimekwana, 9 January 1894.

brings together the two archived documents but excludes the commentary regarding photos and Nomsimekwana's izibongo. Following the translation, Robert Papini includes his own analysis – setting the account in a global and local context and comparing its content to other published accounts such as A.T. Bryant's *Olden Times*.⁶² This is not the only effort that Papini made to make archived accounts accessible. He also worked to have Isaiah Shembe's 1929 testimony with Carl Faye, then reconsidering the relationship between the prophet's church and the Union government, published for scholarly audiences in isiZulu and English in the *Journal of African Religion*. Like the Nomsimekwana publication, it is accompanied by his scholarly analysis.⁶³ The Nomsimekwana account appeared as a small, short pamphlet and it is unclear whether its distribution went beyond the museums.⁶⁴

Somquba's account is the longest of those about Nomsimekwana Mdluli. Like Nombiba's, it begins with Mdluli's residence at Mkhambathini. It extends chronologically beyond Nombiba, covering Nomsimekwana's experience with the earliest Boer settlers in Natal, which may not have been of interest to Shepstone. Somquba describes the initial disturbance in the region as 'Shaka's attack'. His account lacks some of Nombiba's elaboration of this assault and offers no information on the death of Nomsimekwana's father as Nombiba did. Somquba's account offers extensive evidence of the Mdluli's marginality and traits that marked them as amalala. It expands upon the Mdluli experience of amazimu with engaging narration of Nomsimekwana's narrow escapes and more attention to Mdluli women and Majola actors.

Somquba notes this socio-political distinction in terms of status in the kingdom, labour, and linguistics when he describes Nomsimekwana's capture by Zihlandlo's soldiers. Zihlandlo had submitted to the Zulu without resistance. He thus continued to wield considerable power, but the Mkhize remained outside of the inner circle of Shaka's kingdom. Mkhize men joined Shaka's regiments as porters rather than warriors.⁶⁵ The Mkhize may have themselves been tributary to Shaka, but they made it clear to the Mdluli that they were subordinates to the Mkhize. Somquba explained this subservience:

62. R. Papini, ed., *Nomsimekwana of Emkambathini (Table Mountain, Kwazulu)*, Durban Local History Museums Educational Pamphlet Series 2 (Durban: Durban Local History Museums, 1999).

63. Papini, 'Carl Faye's Transcript of Isaiah Shembe's Testimony'.

64. A former museum employee recalls boxes of the pamphlet in a warehouse. Worldcat documents four copies at international libraries including Michigan State University, Stellenbosch University, Yale University, and East Freedom Library.

65. Wright, 'The Dynamics of Power and Conflict', 314–16; Hamilton, 'Ideology, Oral Traditions and the Struggle', 260–70; Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 195; J. Arndt, 'The Emergence of a Language-Based Discourse of Social Identity in Southeast Africa, 1817-1828' (Southern African Historical Society Biennial Conference, Stellenbosch, 2015).

The work for all the prisoners was to be domestic bondsmen. This was the time they came to know that these who had captured them were from Embo [a reference to the abambo name used to distinguish the Mkhize from their tributaries and from the Zulu inner circles]. They said ‘Zihango!’ to make an oath in the Lala tongue – they avoided mentioning Zihlandlo, he of Gcwabe of the Mkhize. As they were now menials, their duty was to look after the children left at home while the householders were away at work. They also had to tend the cooking pots in the home, and look after the calabashes of sweetmilk left in the sun to clot.⁶⁶

The Zulu Society documented Somquba’s reference to Zihlandlo in multiple places as ‘Zihango’. When the Mdluli crossed the Thukela, they were surrounded by soldiers who shouted oaths to Zihlandlo as ‘Zihango! Zihango!’ (amabutho akhuluma kungathi ayafunga athi: ‘Zihango! Zihango!’) He attested to Nomsimekwana and his companions giving of the oath as ‘bathi: “Zihango’ nje lapho befunga bakhuluma isilala.”⁶⁷ When Sicelo Majola and Christopher Mchunu translated Somquba’s original isiZulu for the museum, they changed that which the soldiers spoke to ‘Zihanyo’, but kept the oath of Nomsimekwana and his companions as ‘Zihango’ to distinguish the ‘isilala’ that Somquba used. Majola and Mchunu seem to suggest that Somquba used ‘Zihango’ in both instances because he still spoke in isilala. They made a change in translation to denote such.⁶⁸ These tekeza dialects varied according to the polity.⁶⁹ When Somquba gave the account in 1939, he not only spoke with isilala dialect, but still differentiated between the language of his amalala ancestors and those closer to the Zulu royal family. He noted their menial status vis-à-vis the Mkhize and therefore the Zulu.

As before, Somquba also distinguished the practices of his people from those of the Mkhize when he described the warning of a Mkhize induna to Nomsimekwana to flee. ‘You are all going to be killed, and you, Debendini (nizakubulawa nonke - nawe Debendini)’, Somquba explained the induna’s name for Nomsimekwana; it resulted from the scars on Nomsimekwana’s cheeks (umgcabo) that where the practice of his people.⁷⁰ This facial scarification was prevalent not only with the Mdluli, but those other ‘Debe’ peoples that populated central Natal in the early nineteenth century.

66. Majola and Mchunu translation.

67. PAR, A1381, IV/5/1, Zulu Society, Documents, Miscellaneous.

68. Papini, *Nomsimekwana*, 8–9. I am still endeavouring to locate Majola and Mchunu for a conversation about their translation.

69. Arndt, ‘The Emergence of a Language-Based Discourse of Social Identity’, 23; J. Arndt, *Divided by the Word: Colonial Encounters and the Remaking of Zulu and Xhosa Identities* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022), 166-169.

70. PAR, A1381, IV/6/1, Zulu Society, Documents, Miscellaneous Handwritten. On *impimilisa*, see A.T. Bryant, *A Zulu-English Dictionary* (Pinetown: The Mariannhill Mission Press, 1905), 17; E. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1988), 375. On *umgcabo*, see H. Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 25; F. Jolles and S. Jolles, ‘Zulu Ritual Immunisation in Perspective’, *Africa*, 70, 2 (2000), 229–248.

Somquba Mdluli sat down with the kholwa intelligentsia to document the past, but he seems to have had different motives. He may have been Christian, but complaints from Table Mountain mission station suggest he was nominally one, one that adhered still to practices that made his missionary neighbours uncomfortable. While Mpanza and his Zulu Society colleagues looked to the Zulu monarch to unify, Somquba still insisted on the destructiveness of the Zulu king. He highlighted differences of his peoples from those north of the Thukela. While his immediate interlocutor may have been Mpanza, his presence in Pietermaritzburg, possibly in the offices of the NAD, suggest he may have still intended as Nombiba did, of demonstrating his engagement with the government officials that paid Mpanza's salary. His grandfather and father had allied themselves with the British for security from the Boers and in the midst of impi yamakhandu. The extent to which he may have been aware of the NAD's reconsideration of the position of the Zulu monarch in governing is unclear. Wielding his people's amalala past – their distance from the Zulu king and closeness with the British in Natal – he may have hoped that documenting Mdluli historical ties to the land at Mkhambathini in the heart of the European settler capital would protect his rights to land.

Conclusion: Documenting amalala Identities

Even as a sense of Zuluness grew across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mdluli leaders at Mkhambathini continued to recount their past in ways that marked them as distinct from those at the heart of the Zulu Kingdom. Both Nombiba, in 1863, and Somquba, in 1939, told of a past in which King Shaka was a source of division, rather than unity. They noted their subordinate status within the kingdom. These accounts of their marginality and victimisation tie them to the land at the confluence of the Msunduze and Mgeni rivers. The markers of amalala identity continued to be remembered and shared well into the interwar period. Fleshing out the backstories and biographies enables us to see the forces which shaped the documenting and archiving of these oral accounts.

Much research remains to be done on the persistence and overlap with Zuluness of identities such as that of the amalala suggested here and the Hlubi and Ndwandwe documented by Arndt and Buthelezi. The Zulu Society Archive may be one avenue for this, as would the collections of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg. Eliciting the backstories and biographies of the interlocutors who documented the past in these oral accounts of Nomsimekwana Mdluli from 1863 and 1939 enable us to probe this perseverance into the interwar period – even as Zulu identities grew. This article shows just how much can be uncovered about some of these individuals who contributed to the making of archives and histories of the diverse peoples incorporated into the Zulu Kingdom in the nineteenth century and into a Zulu ethnic consciousness in the late twentieth century.

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