# *'Do you fancy, saying, there is no assegai in the Zulu country?'*[1] *…: Writing, Literacy and the Making of South African Subjects, Sovereigns and Sovereignty; a preliminary reading of Colenso's Three Native Accounts and Fuze's The Black People and Whence They Came.* [*]

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## *Introduction*

Having being instructed by Bishop Colenso to 'keep journals of their daily doings', Magema Fuze, William Ngidi and Ndiane[2], reported quite randomly on the various conversations, encounters, activities and episodes that occurred during their 1859 journey. The 'randomness' of their reports, collected in Colenso's *Three Native Accounts*, is evident in the fact that the above comment on the 'assegai in the Zulu country' appears only in Magema's narrative. This cryptic question, posed, by two white men, to the Bishop's companions, was chosen for its lack of context and elaboration; even in the original Zulu the question is rather obscure. Magema does not provide an explanatory context within which to interpret this snippet of conversation: were the white men warning the travellers of a 'war' in the Zulu country? were they sarcastically implying that the travellers were running away from the 'assegai' in Natal because they fancied that there was 'no assegai in the Zulu country'? or were they just being typical colonial whites 'fancying' that they could question itinerant Africans whenever they thought they should? However, the obscurity of the reported conversation should not diminish its relevance as an example of and commentary on the ambiguities of colonial 'encounters'. Notwithstanding the absence of contextualisation, this statement, and the narratives that accompany it, provides an illuminating point of departure for an analysis of not only colonial opinion concerning Africans, but also of the relationship between colonial Natal and the independent Zulu kingdom.

That this connection, or lack thereof, between colonial Natal and the Zulu kingdom becomes a topic or problematic in the journals of the young[3] literate Zulu converts, is an entry point into the question posed by this paper, namely, the place of literacy in the making of South African sovereigns and subjects. In order to give detailed attention to, and exposition of, a possible theoretical approach to these issues, the paper will focus on two textualised events: first, Colenso's *Three Native Accounts* ( first published in 1860) and secondly, the 'rebellion' and trial of Langalibalele as it appears in Colenso's *Langalibalele and the Amahlubi Tribe* (1874)[4]. The 'subject' of this analysis is not the events in themselves but Magema Fuze as the literate Zulu-speaker who at various times assumed the position of student, scribe, printer, witness and advisor on Zulu linguistics. As textual events, the converts' trip to the 'Zulu country', and their eventual entanglement in the controversies and travesty of the 1873-1874 Langalibalele rebellion and trial, provide a historical basis from which one can examine the effects of literacy on the colonial practices of making (and unmaking) subjects and sovereigns. However, the selection of these two events does not imply that they are historically decisive moments in this 'making'. Rather, they should be seen as slivers, piece-meal portions of a larger process of colonisation, conflict and the eventual demise of the Zulu kingdom. The underlying assumption of this selection and the use of the categories of 'subject' and 'sovereign', is that at the time of their occurrence, none of the agents of these events could control or predict the impact of their actions or classify themselves as either 'subjects' or 'sovereigns'. In other words, the fact that colonial Natal existed side by side with the independent Zulu kingdom, until the kingdom's incorporation into Natal in 1897, meant that the very notions of sovereignty and subjectivity remained unresolved and contested. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how these contests about and between sovereigns and their subjects were reflected, incorporated, mingled and actualised in the lives of Colenso's converts, Magema Fuze especially.

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More specifically, the objectives of the paper can be understood as comprising four questions: first, how did literacy, as both an individual skill and social practice emerge, among the African population, in Natal and the Zulu kingdom? Second, what was the impact of this emergence of literacy on the relationship between African sovereigns, their subjects, and other African sovereigns as well as that between African sovereigns, their subjects and the colonial administration, colonists and the imperial government? Third, what was the effect of Christian conversion on the above two? Lastly, what role did literacy and writing play in the establishment of 'modern' modes of thought and action and the extension of the presence and reach of colonial discourses? In particular, since these 'modern' modes of thought and action were not limited to Christianity, how did literacy and the discourses of subjectivity and sovereign affect the emergence of literature, history and historiography, biography and anti-colonial discourses, notably 'nationalism'?

Organisationally, the paper is divided into three sections. Theoretical approaches to literacy, writing, subjectivity and sovereignty will form the first section. The analysis of Magema Fuze's 'subjectivity' as exemplified in his and others' contribution to Colenso's *Three Native Accounts* and his own work *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* (trans.*The Black People and Whence They Came*), will be the second section. The final section will focus on notions of sovereignty as they were contested in the above texts and in Colenso's *Langalibalele and the Amahlubi*.

## *From Technologizing the Word to the Colonisation of Consciousness: Theory and the Problematic of Literacy, Writing and Colonial Practice*

As one of *the* seminal works on orality and literacy, Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* provides a useful comparative yardstick by which to assess, debate and theorise not only the work of subsequent scholars but also the selected primary texts. Ong centres his discussion on orality rather than literacy: he attempts to achieve what is seemingly impossible, namely a description of *pre*-literate society from the inside or, in his words, an enumeration of the 'psychodynamics of orality' (1982: 31). However, by his own admission Ong observes that this project of understanding oral cultures from the inside is impeded by our own literacy, and thus he posits that the subject of his book is 'first, thought and its verbal expression in oral culture, which is strange and at times bizarre to us, and, second, literate thought and expression in terms of their emergence from and relation to orality.' (1982: 1). The centrality of orality in Ong's position however comes at a cost. Since Ong does not examine a specific oral culture, the result is that he *generalises* orality and literacy as merely different modes of thought and expression. Thus, in his view literacy is a neutral technology potentially available in various degrees to all cultures and at all times. Although this is not necessarily a critical flaw in his theory, for the purposes of this essay, it leaves unquestioned the colonising encounters that disseminate literacy across cultures. Thus, the choice of the 'corrective' opposing theory of the 'Colonization of Consciousness' as offered by the Comaroffs. Although the intention is not to set up a bipolar opposition between the Ongian and Comarovian views on literacy, it is sufficient to point out, in part as a defence of Ong, that both he and the Comaroffs are actually contesting the same terrain namely 'consciousness'. But, what is this 'consciousness' being contested?

Both the Comaroffs and Ong offer definitions of 'consciousness'. For the Comaroffs, 'consciousness' is a catchword, which 'as a fashionable synonym for 'culture', 'ideology', 'thought', or an ill-defined blend of all three…is seldom scrutinized.' Their method, they argue, is to 'examine the nature of consciousness in the making' (1989a: 269). This commitment to the 'historicity' (their term) of consciousness leads them to examine three arenas in which the consciousness of the Tswana (their subjects) was contested namely, the 'politics of water', the 'politics of production' and the 'politics of language' (1989a: 271). If the Comaroffs are too detailed in defining the subject effects of the missionary literacy endeavour by describing it as 'politics' of consciousness, Ong is by contrast matter-of-fact and universalistic in his closing assertion on consciousness, namely that:

> **The interaction between the orality that all human beings are born into and the technology of writing, which no one is born into, touches the depths of the psyche…it is the oral word that illuminates consciousness with articulate language, that first divides subject and predicate and then relates them to one another, and that ties human beings to one another in society. Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising. (1982: 179).**

Ironically, it is Ong and not the Comaroffs, as one might have expected, who anthropologises the orality-literacy divide by positing that it is not a divide at all, but a graduation, a process of creation of self and *others*.
Rather than focus on the anthropology of natural resources, tools and social expression (the Comaroffs' 'politics of…') Ong presents an anthropology of the Word, both oral and written, that defines the human psyche as both creator and creature of society. Every society is, according to this view, potentially literate and its members potentially self-conscious, not only of themselves, but also of their power to make or create others.

If Ong's definition of consciousness and subjectivity seems to elide the power relations inherent in practices of 'consciousness-raising', then Gaurav Desai (2001) provides, in his notion of 'African self-fashioning', a way to acknowledge the neutrality of literacy as a technology while recognising its potency as a tool of subject and consciousness formation, especially within the colonial context. Desai's strategy is to define colonisation in two ways: first, he argues that colonial encounters were a form of 'critical (mis)understanding' between cultures (2001: 3). Secondly, he describes how these '(mis)understandings' were presented in what he calls the colonial library or archive. For Desai (2001: 3) the 'critical' in 'critical (mis)understanding', concerning for example supposed practices of 'human sacrifices' among the Asante, denotes three aspects of colonialism:

> **"critical" as necessary or essential (since without such "mis-understanding" the project of colonialism would lose some of its legitimation); "critical" as incorporating the potential of critique…; and finally "critical" in the sense of crises-ridden. Critical (mis)understanding in all these three senses becomes the very motor of colonial growth, and the trajectory of its functioning can be discerned at various moments in the colonial archive.**

From this standpoint of colonialism as 'critical (mis)understanding', one would expect that both the oral and written colonial exchanges shape and are entangled in this triadic nexus of legitimation, critique and crises. Indeed, within this schema the colonial library, that body of texts through which this triad is represented, is simultaneously a form of legitimation, a practice of critique and a bedlam of crises. In short, the African colonial library is itself a contest about not only the 'invention' of Africa 'as a locus of difference and alterity', but its own existence is both cause and effect of the colonial struggle between the coloniser and the colonised (Desai, 2001: 4). Desai's definition of colonialism, as a practice fraught with misunderstanding and a system of knowledge contained in a contested body of texts, allows for a double-reading of colonial encounters. It allows one, maybe too readily, to separate the practice from the text, the fact from the legitimating narrative or fiction of colonialism. However, since the focus here is on texts, such liberties maybe permissible only if they allow us to endow our 'subject' Magema Fuze with a consciousness that is both constrained by the practice of colonialism while being an agent of literacy and writing. For Desai the struggle between colonial structure and African agency determined *colonial* rather than *post*colonial African texts and it is, according to him, only our contemporary misconceived divide between 'the colonial and postcolonial moment that leads us to falsely equate the colonial moment with the oral and the postcolonial with the written.' (2001: 9).

Restoring this kind of agency to colonial African writers functions as a response to the Comarovian perspective that the 'ideological onslaught' led by Christian missionaries only consisted of one-sided attempts to *convert* the Tswana and was accompanied by subtle efforts to *reform* their 'consciousness' through the 'inculcation of the hegemonic forms, the taken-for-granted signs and practices, of the colonizing culture.' (1989a: 289). While the Comaroffs' African subjects seem to be merely recipients or victims of such onslaughts, Desai's subjects engage in acts and positions of mimicry and 'sly civility' (2001: 71) which are at once explicit evidence of the reach of the colonising culture, and subtle rejections and inversions of the same. Borrowed from Homi Bhabha, the notion of mimicry appears in Desai's discussion of the controversy surrounding anthropology's supposed complicity in the colonial project. Rather than use the concept to laud Bhabha's contribution to postcolonial theory, Desai uses it to highlight early Africanist anthropological debates, on the African's 'Westernization', espoused by South African anthropologists especially Bernard Magubane and Archie Mafeje[5] (2001: 70-71). Although the debate cannot be detailed here, it is sufficient to point to Desai's emphasis on Mafeje's response to Magubane's argument that anthropology's concern, exemplified in the work of A.L. Epstein and J. Clyde Mitchell, with the 'acculturation' of Africans was an implicit validation of the colonial 'civilizing mission' (2001: 70-71). Mafeje's response was to argue that the real subject of critique should not be anthropology or individual

anthropologists but the 'ontology of its categories' and that these categories exist and form the foundation of other social sciences. Thus, Mafeje posited that the African anthropologists' position in relation to her European predecessors was not a binary opposition between colonial agent and anticolonial resistance but that these predecessors were 'progressive insofar as they created grounds for their own negation' (quoted in Desai, 2001: 73). The implication of the Magubane-Mafeje debate is that although the colonised may first appear as merely objects in colonial or anthropological texts, when they begin to participate in these discourses, their presence and contribution allows for more that just an 'acculturation' or simple mimicry; it is a potential negation of these texts. In this way, the 'mimicry' observed by the anthropologist becomes a mode of critique of the very foundations of the social sciences through which the African is scrutinised.

To return to the Comaroff's 'politics of…', their retort may very well be that Desai and Mafeje's sites of negation are undermined by the fact that the coloniser and colonised do not speak the same language. Not only that, but the Comaroffs' study demonstrates that often the only conversation in which the colonising missionaries displayed an interest in the culture of the colonised was the conversation of conversion: and, conversion here implied not just the conversion of African into Christian subjects, but also the conversion of African languages into languages of religious belief. The result, accordingly, was that the bible was 'transposed', 'into a cultural register true to neither, a hybrid creation born of the colonial encounter itself.' (Comaroff, 1989a: 283). In writing of this hybridisation of the biblical Word, the Comaroffs implicitly seem to argue that African culture did not contain such processes. Even though they indicate the possible content of speech and speech acts in the pre-colonial context, in for example their observation that among Tswana wordsmiths, 'utterances were given their relative weight by personal status' (1989a: 286), the Comaroffs do not outline the extent to which the Tswana were themselves aware and openly exploited the power of speech to create Tswana and precolonial hybridity. Referring to a different set of issues, Landau (1995: xxi-xxii) posits that the Comaroffs, by presenting an opposition between a 'systematic' Christian faith and a socially extensive Tswana 'cosmology', do not acknowledge that the BaTswana generated their own internal conflicts. In the case of Christianity he posits that just as the social scientist can give the name and bring into being the notion of 'cosmology', 'other configurations of power allowed Africans themselves to give a name to aspects of their faith and at times to the whole of it.' (Landau, 1995: xxii). Thus, for Landau the simplified opposition between precolonial cosmology and colonial Christian conversion and faith cannot be sustained as a starting point for understanding the impact of mission colonialism on the language, practice and expression of African beliefs. More specifically, just as the word 'religion' is a problematic signifier for the Western scholar, the notion of an African 'cosmology' raises questions about the possibility of ever translating the meaning of African beliefs to African themselves. Or, as Landau puts it:

> **Historians, as opposed to theologians, must avoid treating religious beings as transcultural universals: the "high God" is the questioner's God, the "Spirit" the questioner's Spirit": they are ready-made decisions of translation, not evidence. (1995:xx)**

This stricture against transcultural universalism also applies to other spheres of the social sciences. To anticipate a later argument – since colonial law was ostensibly concerned with being true to not only African views of 'justice' but also African notions of judicial process, one can begin to test the extent and limits of this commitment. Thus, in Fuze's evidence to the Resident Magistrate, Mr. John Bird, concerning a petition drafted on behalf of Langalibalele, one finds a distinction between the judicial, 'to go to law' (*ukumangala*), and the poetic but deferential act of making a 'plaint' (*ukukhala)*. Such acts of colonial translation relied on a presumed affinity with precolonial practices and were important not only in constructing the basis for 'native law' but also exposed its inherent contradictions and limits. Acknowledging that the act of translation, whether done by the social scientist or the colonial agent, is fraught with imperious presumptions of transcultural universalism, opens the possibility that when we study texts produced by colonial Africans, we do not simply note, as the Comaroffs do, that these mission-educated intellectuals 'had internalized the lessons of linguistic colonialism and bourgeois ideology that lay silently behind it, concealed in such genres as narrative history and individual biography, in such percepts as moral universalism and semantic transparency.' (1989a: 285).

If we are to understand the preoccupation of the mission-educated intellectual with 'narrative history and individual biography', perhaps it would be useful to shift focus towards the social milieu in which these 'genres' were conceived. In particular, one may pose the question: what was the relationship between the

African colonial subject, intellectual and otherwise, and those other ubiquitous colonial categories of 'Chief' and 'Tribe'? For the sake of brevity, the discussion will be limited to colonial discourses of chiefs, chiefdoms and African sovereignty. The use, in the title of this paper, of the term 'sovereign' represents this discourse. This choice of terms is in fact the conclusion to an argument that has not been made, namely that colonial discourses about African 'chiefs' and 'tribes' were simultaneously about colonial sovereignty since these discourses also prescribed the positions of those Europeans who aspired to African sovereignty. In other words, colonial discourses on 'chiefs' created both an archetypal African sovereign, and left open the possibility that Europeans, whether colonists or administrators, could also assume these positions and become African sovereigns. Thus, the terms 'sovereign' and 'sovereignty' are used to refer to the contests, between African sovereigns, their subjects, colonists, colonial and imperial officials, about who would be king and who would make kings. To elucidate the import of this position it may be useful to begin with anecdotal evidence. In the novel, *My Chief and I*, Atherton Wylde (pseudonym of Frances Colenso) writes of his\her encounter with a certain 'Minister of Native Affairs':

> **My mind was certainly unfavourably impressed by my first experience of the official method of managing native matters in Natal. It seemed to me that I was in the midst of an assemblage of savages only, whose modes of thought and ideas were different from anything to which I had been accustomed. I could hardly believe that I saw before me the man who has for so many years controlled, in England's name, the destinies of the native races of Natal. I felt, rather, that I saw the Zulu despot in the midst of his savage retainers, and to me it has long been inconceivable that England's honour should have been entrusted, since the birth of this her colony, to one who at heart was but a Zulu chief. At last it was over, and the ruler of the blacks departed with his retainers. I looked up at my Chief and thought I saw relief painted upon his countenance. (Colenso, 1994:29).**

Her Natal contemporaries would not have missed the target of this pointed description in Frances Colenso's roman á clef. As daughter of the then infamous Bishop Colenso, Frances knew Theophilus Shepstone, who had been, before the Langalibalele debacle, a friend of the family. The irony in her description is however neither the hint about the failed friendship between her father and Shepstone nor about her secret love for Col. A.W. Durnford, in whose honour the book is published (see Daymond, 1994: 18-23). The central irony rests on the juxtaposition of the image of Sheptone as a 'Zulu despot' with that of Durnford as 'my Chief'. Although anecdotal and fictional, Frances Colenso's ironic use of the terms 'chief', 'despot' and 'ruler' is evidence that Theophilus Shepstone was perceived as an 'African despot', or at least as someone who aspired to such a position. The perception was not based in the official texts of colonial edicts but in the popular imagination, colonial and African. Regardless of the letter of the law, Shepstone *was* an African sovereign because in performing his everyday functions, he acted, was perceived and treated as such. This conclusion is important to our understanding not only of the longevity of Shepstone's influence in 'native affairs' but also of the two events selected for analysis, namely Colenso's visit to Mpande and the Langalibalele affair.

To map a historical connection between the making of African sovereigns and the making of African subjects is an arduous task and the comments made here are therefore not in any way exhaustive. Nonetheless, it is important to describe the discursive processes that sustained the existence of the colonial categories of 'chief' and 'tribe'. In the same way that colonial discourse construed and constructed the presence of a 'native mind' or the 'consciousness' discussed above, it is important that we pose the question, was the same done for African sovereigns? Did colonial discourses attempt to frame their subjectivity and consciousness in terms of the 'linguistic colonialism' of the Comaroffs?

The Comarovian view, especially of the missionaries' attitudes to southern African rulers, is based on two premises, namely that the literacy introduced by the mission paved the way for later forms of colonialism; and secondly, they posit that initially these missionaries prevaricated in their attitude to 'indigenous secular authority' (Comaroff, 1989b: 674). The first premise, on the relationship between literacy and imperial colonisation, follows their discussion of the 'colonisation of consciousness'. However, it is the second premise, on the missionaries' attitudes to 'indigenous secular authority', that is of interest. As part of his discussion of the three models of colonialism, John Comaroff posits that the civilising colonialism of the mission had to deal with a tension between the nonconformist's commitment to the separation of church and state, their promise not to interfere in 'tribal' government and politics and their fight for the 'religious freedom' of their converts (1989b: 674). Taken together these premises imply that the missionaries and African rulers stood in opposition to each other and that, as John Comaroff puts it, the ideal solution to this opposition was the Christian conversion of these rulers; replacing 'the benighted rule of heathenism with a

new Christian sovereignty.' (1989b: 674). This type of conclusion ignores at least two salient features of mission establishment in southern Africa, namely that before missionaries could establish their missions they often had to ask the supposed 'heathen' ruler for permission to do so and secondly that in certain instances some aspects of Christianity were actually *conducive* and not contrary to the establishment of African 'heathen' and independent kingdoms. If these missionaries had to seek permission before they could establish their missions then two questions arise: what was the nature of this negotiation and secondly, if permission had to be negotiated then what does that reveal about the nature of and perceptions of African sovereignty at this time?

Bishop Colenso's 1859 sojourn into the 'Zulu country' illustrates the relevance of these questions. In the company of his Zulu converts, Colenso travelled to the *independent* Zulu kingdom to ask for permission, from Mpande, to build a mission there. To add to the complexity of the analysis, by the time Colenso travelled to kwaZulu, he was already guardian of the young son of Mpande, Mkhungo, whose possible succession to the throne was already a matter of popular intrigue. Although more will be said about this in later parts, it is important to point out that not only was Colenso, by his very act of asking for permission, acknowledging the independence and sovereignty of the Zulu monarch, but his guardianship of Mkhungo, living and being educated at Colenso's mission school in colonial Natal, made him partisan to the succession disputes and Zulu 'king making' that would eventually ensure that Mkhungo did not in fact become king. Such relationships of reciprocal subject- and sovereign-making seem to have been more common then the Comarovian argument allows. As Landau (1995: xvi-ii) argues, the creation of Botswana's Ngwato kingdom from the 1850s onwards, was as much a result of missionary conversion efforts as it was the result of explicit harnessing of the Christian Word by Ngwato nobility, clergy and women. As part of an argument that needs to be done more justice Landau (1995: xvi) states:

> **…an originally tiny "Ngwato" polity wrested a form of ecclesiastic statehood from the expressions and habits propounded by a missionary society, expanded it own tenuous loyalties into a kingdom, and flourished for decades in the environment of British imperialism. Missionaries wished to control the meaning of being a Christian without having to articulate its built-in contradictions…In GammaNgwato, the Ngwato king harnessed this feature of Christianity and expanded the kingdom through it.**

Although this comment is apt, 'ecclesiastic statehood' did not become the foundations of the Zulu kingdom. By the time Colenso visited Mpande in 1859, the Zulu kingdom was already extensive and was legitimated by the secular authority deriving from the legacy of Shaka Zulu and not Christian statehood. Any missionary endeavour on behalf of Zulu kingship could thus only contribute to its stagnation and unravelling, not expansion. Therefore, it could be posited that the Zulu kingdom imploded[6], beginning with the civil war of the 1880s, by not harnessing the contradictions *between* Christian and imperial ideology. This implosion is partly explained by the fact that, instead of adopting the accoutrement of Christian imperialism, or what Parsons (1998: xiv) calls 'subimperialism', Zulu kings and their literate supporters engaged with the legal code of empire by appealing to notions of 'English justice'. They thus lost their struggle because such justice did not in fact exist.

Landau's argument is however still relevant. In his analysis, the 'success', of the Ngwato kingdom's legitimation and expansion, derived from its ability to engage with and broadcast *thuto* (learning) and its attendant institutions and associations (1995:xvii). In the case of Zulu sovereignty, the equivalent to the Ngwato's *thuto*, is of course the *kholwa* (Christian believer) ideology embodied by Magema Fuze and other mission-educated Zulu intellectuals. The challenge is to assess whether a connection existed between the presence of the *kholwa* intellectual and the functioning or dysfunction of the Zulu kingdom. Recalling the Comaroffs' arguments, the ideology of Christian learning (and language) focussed, in their view, on translating the biblical Word, but what of the legal and social word? Did the missionaries engage their sovereign would-be converts in weighty philosophical discussion of civil liberties, justice and politics? How did the missionaries' themselves, reconcile on a daily basis their imported understanding of political notions such as 'sovereignty' and 'liberty', with the reality of living in societies where monarchical authority was still the ruling principle. If, as John Comaroff argues there was a tension between the missionaries' commitment to the separation of church and state and their co-existence with 'tribal' government and politics, then what attitude did they impart to their converts? Besides promises of citizenship in the hereafter, did mission-education attempt to make 'citizens' out of its students? If so, which society were they to be citizens of, their traditional society, with its patriarchal and monarchical forms of authority or the colonial society which was founded on rights, civil liberties and economic

sovereignty from which these converts were essentially excluded? Nowhere are these tensions more prominent then in the bureaucratic and legal arena. Here, literacy competed with oral forms of 'legislation' and adjudication and in turn brought to the fore the tensions between traditional authority and political modernity. From the Comarovian analysis, it is easy to conclude that this tension could only be resolved in favour of political modernity, that oral jurisprudence eventually gave way to the written canon. However, as Hofmeyr (1995: 37) argues, there are no automatic consequences that follow from the introduction of literacy. In the sphere of colonial administration, officials struggled, in the inter-war years, to introduce textual propriety in the face of chiefs' attempts to 'oralise' the institutions of colonial bureaucracy. The result was that Native Commissioners failed to impose the depersonalised control of a 'centralised, purposive bureaucracy', and had to resort to ruling through 'a combination of personal audience, public meeting and oral messenger, or, in other words, the cornerstones of oral government.' (1995: 37-38). Although Hofmeyr's study is of a different period and geographical region, her observations provide a view of literacy that does not ascribe total control to the literate bureaucrat, but allows that illiterate sovereigns and subjects often understood the power of the text and attempted to harness it to their own purposes or to contravene its orders. The implication is that in negotiating questions of citizenship and sovereignty, African sovereigns did not merely assert their authority by oral government alone, written texts both challenged and supported select aspects of their rule. More importantly, this often meant that a new type of relationship was forged between illiterate African sovereigns and their literate subjects, whose self-assertive notions of civil rights was contrary to the traditional authority they represented. When Magema Fuze, William Ngidi and Ndiane travelled to the 'Zulu country' they were on their way to forge exactly such a relationship, with its all concomitant contradictions and conflicts.

Before examining the nature of this forged alliance between illiterate sovereigns and their literate subjects, it may be useful to review some of the definitions and theories of 'subjectivity' and 'consciousness'. Central to the above discussion has been the suggestion that 'consciousness' is essentially a question of agency versus structure, individual self-fashioning versus social determination, transcultural universalism versus local specificity, and political modernity versus traditional authority. The literate Zulu intellectual is the representative subject of these tensions since her position is never wholly self-determined or wholly pre-determined. The African sovereign on the other hand, often represents and is presented as representing all that is supposedly pre-determined, structured and unchanging. Yet, as the discussion has demonstrated, colonialism never quite managed to make the categories of 'subject' and 'sovereign' strict ones. In the colonial context of nineteenth-century Natal and KwaZulu, subjects could become sovereigns and sovereign subjects. If as Ong suggests writing is 'consciousness-raising', then the position presented above is that agents of writing and their students could never wholly determine the direction that this raised consciousness took. The next two sections will explore how these struggles, over African agency and colonial structure, especially in the 'realm of the word' (see Landau, 1995: xvii), made their mark on the life of Magema Fuze and the sovereigns on whose behalf he began to act.

## *'I am not going to grow up here at home…'[7]: Biography, Writing and the Making of Colonial Subjects*

If we accept the Comarovian view that the writing of mission intellectuals reflected the 'linguistic colonialism' of their missionary tutors, then the writing of Colenso's converts becomes a fertile source from which to test this hypothesis. More specifically, the Comaroffs suggest that when these intellectuals present their 'individual biography' or 'narrative history', these are also tinged by the ideology of their educators. In the case of Colenso's converts, the *Three Native Accounts*, read comparatively, is the perfect site on which to subject the Comarovian view to the test. Since Magema Fuze also went on to write his own book independent of direct 'Bishopstowe' influence, this is also an opportunity to trace the trajectory of the supposedly mission-inspired conceptions of biography and narrative history. Thus, the first objective of the analysis is to read the *Three Native Accounts* as a collection of travel journals, which it was only partly intended to be, of three of Colenso's converts. The caveat, 'which it was only partly intended to be', is because Colenso also presented the book, in his introduction to the 1860 edition, as a Zulu reader on the basis that since 'these narratives are written in simple idiomatic Zulu, they are particularly well adapted for any who are beginning to study the language' (1901: Introduction). Although this fusion of travelogue and language lesson needs further discussion, the priority here is to examine the *Three Native Accounts* as a collection of travel journals through closely comparing how Magema Fuze, William Ngidi and Ndiane

reported on their journey[8]. The second objective is to find, within these travel narratives, and Magema Fuze's later work, notions of subjectivity and consciousness as discussed in the previous section. The aim is to investigate the manner in which Colenso's converts utilised literacy to report, criticise, name and engage not only with their own positions as literates in an illiterate culture, but also their manoeuvres within a colonial society and bureaucracy that was sceptical of and often derided their literacy. The focal texts of the analysis will be the *Three Native Accounts* and Magema Fuze's *The Black People and Whence They Came*.

The circumstances that led Bishop Colenso to travel in person to the 'Zulu country' are testimony to the acrimonious and equivocal way in which the missionary project often emanated from political motives, personal rivalry and political and religious expediency[9]. Colenso's enthusiasm, for the establishment of an Anglican Zulu mission, was partly motivated by his desire not to be outflanked by the bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray who also wanted to establish a 'Zulu mission' but under the auspices of the Cape Town See. At the same time, Colenso was embroiled in a fray with the Natal clergy, which led to his accusing some of his colleagues and charges of insubordination. However, the visit to Mpande is equally significant in the trajectory of Zulu history because it was partly organised, at the height of their friendship, by Theophilus Shepstone. Colenso and Shepstone shared, at least from the bishop's perspective, a similar concern for the humane governance and tutelage of the Zulu people. In the light of their future acrimony, their alliance was, in 1859, based on a naïve patriarchal spirit and camaraderie, at least as far as Zulu affairs were concerned. In his initial visit to Natal and the Zulu kingdom in 1854, Colenso was audience to and took seriously Shepstone's plan to migrate, with thousands of Africans to an area south of Natal, and to establish, under his rule, a 'Black Kingdom' (Guy 1983: 49 & 84-86). As late as his 1859 visit to Mpande, Colenso still thought such an idea viable, despite the fact that it had been vetoed by Shepstone's superiors. As evidence of Shepstone's impersonation of an African sovereign, these naively idealistic aspirations were not however, fully in the control of their initiators. As Guy (1983: 85) argues, Shepstone's expansionists plans came to naught because he often failed to comprehend the extent to which he was being 'manipulated by his counterparts in African societies who wanted to bring the colonial factor into play perhaps as counter to a different external threat, in a bid for power, to promote a faction, or for personal gain.' Colenso for his part seems to have been driven by a desire to construct and maintain a missionary and Christian ethos that was sensitive to the values of the culture whose people it was attempting to convert. This does not however mean that he was unencumbered by the patriarchal implications of his relativistic ethos, since its ultimate aim, was to Christianise and 'civilise' all those whose lives it touched[10]. Thus, as two representatives of 'benevolent despotism' (Guy, 1983: 85), both Colenso and Shepstone were eventually involved, through their shared patriarchal practice, in determining the course of nineteenth-century Zulu politics, even as their views diverged.

If Colenso perceived his role in paternalistic terms, how did his converts understand their participation in his endeavours? As a first attempt at travel writing, which is in itself a 'colonial' genre, one would expect that Magema Fuze, and the other converts' contribution to Colenso's *Three Native Accounts*, would be a formulaic, repetitive and simplistic collection of journal notes reflecting the demands of the teacher[11]. On the contrary, the three narratives are so dissimilar to each other that any description of them as formulaic and repetitive would be too hasty. This does not mean that Magema, William and Ndiane did not use repetitive language, but their selection of themes, observations and events to report .is so varied that these themes and observations are worth singular examination. As they set off on their journey, only Ndiane chose to note their purpose in going to kwaZulu. Thus, his story opens with the following lines:

> **The book of the day we set out from home, we part company with our people, we going to Umpande, the King of another land, according to that which we have been ordered about in the holy Book, namely, 'Go ye, go into all the world, and tell all the nations that which you have been given through the Mercy of your Father who is in Heaven.' (1901: 122)[12]**

This explicit expression of a missionary purpose of the journey contrasts with the silence of Magema and William on the same. Perhaps the purpose of the journey was already self-evident to them and they therefore did not see the need to explicitly state it. On the other hand, the fact that Ndiane describes Mpande as 'the King of another land', is an example of how, as literate Zulus living and being educated in colonial Natal, the 'Zulu country' was in many ways already 'foreign' to Colenso's young converts. This act of distancing the Zulu king from their own identity is only one of the examples of how this threesome struggled not only with their identity as Zulu-speakers but also with the general protocol of authority and

audience which surrounded the Zulu king and his nobles. Thus, in William's story, three 'Inkosi' (king) personalities appear, when he writes of his visit to the then prince Cetshwayo:

> **I took off my hat, I made obeisance, I said 'Ndabezita!' I sat, I saw him well; it was not according to the saying of people, to wit, 'He does not laugh.' … I related, I said, 'It's nothing Ndabezita; I am sent by the Inkos'… He asked and said, 'Which is that Inkos'? Somseu?' I said, 'No, Ndabezita! Sobantu.' He said, 'Does he come from the other side?' I said, 'No! he comes far away from Maritzburg.' He said, 'There to be sure.' I said, 'O! I was thinking you mean by the other side, at England.' He said, 'Well but we say it is on the other side just there, because it is on the other side of the Tukela.' (1901: 147)**[13]

Not only does Ngidi need to be reminded of the 'realm' of Cetshwayo's future domain, namely that his power's boundary is the Thukela River, but both Colenso (Sobantu) and Shepstone (Somseu) appear as sovereigns competing for recognition in the same realm. Thus, to William and Ndiane, the Zulu kingdom is 'foreign': for Ndiane, it is evangelically 'another land' and William momentarily forgets the geopolitical significance of the Thukela. Such protocol mistakes underscore the converts' ambiguous relationship to the identity indices that defined their lives and relationship to 'traditional' Zulu society, namely, their identities as 'Christians' (or *amakholwa*), 'Zulu-speakers', and 'literates'[14].

Cetshwayo's quizzical response to the use of the title of 'Inkosi' to introduce Colenso also highlights the fact that he was probably anxious about or at least aware of the succession implications of the presence of either Shepstone or Colenso. As Colenso and his converts well knew, Cetshwayo had already eliminated, in 1856, some of his rivals to the throne, especially Mbulazi. Thus, the presence of either the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA), Theophilus Shepstone or Mkhungo's guardian, the Bishop of Natal, John W. Colenso was bound to alarm the future king. However, this issue of succession was a conglomerate of other issues that emerge in the converts' narratives. First, was the actual 1856 Battle of Ndodakusuka: Mbulazi and his followers, the *iziGqoza* (Fuze, 1979: 102), were attempting to cross the Thukela into Natal when Cetshwayo's army attacked and killed Mbulazi and most of his brothers[15]. Mkhungo was one of the survivors and he and his mother, Monase, fled to Natal (Fuze, 1979:60). The battle of Ndodakusuka is also a central event in the emergence of Zulu historiography and historical consciousness reflected in the later work of Fuze, *Abantu Abamnyama*. In this work, Fuze describes how the internecine conflict between Cetshwayo and his brothers was partly about who was the rightful inheritor of the Shakan legacy. Monase, Mbulazi and Mkhungo's mother, had been part of Shaka's household and when she became pregnant, she was given to Mpande as a wife. Historical interpretation comes into the fore on such issues as, was she pregnant with Shaka's heir and would this heir then be entitled to Zulu kingship? Thus, Fuze notes how, despite the fact that Mpande had, as part of the deal with the Boers who installed him, nominated Cetshwayo as his heir, he began to talk of Mbulazi as Shaka's son and therefore the rightful heir to the Zulu kingship (Fuze, 1979: 61). However, what is of interest is that in their 1859 travelogues, the battle of Ndodakusuka appears in its gruesome aftermath, with Colenso showing his companions the skulls of the dead: 'Sobantu made us see the skull of a man, who died on the day when there (fight) fought the sons of Umpande, Cetshwayo and Umbulazi, disputing in a family quarrel.' (Colenso, 1901: 111). This encounter with the macabre was probably reinforced by the conversation these travellers had had with the white men, who warned them about the 'assegai in the Zulu country'.

This theme of war and decay appears again in the journals of Magema, William and Ndiane as the second aspect of the Zulu succession quarrel, namely, the relationship between the ageing Mpande, the ambitious Cetshwayo and his surviving potential rival Mkhungo. As Mkhungo's peers, Magema, William and Ndiane were well aware of his royal heritage and importance. Because of the order of seniority, it seems that it was only William, together with Colenso, who had the real audience with the king, Mpande and therefore heard and reported the conversation between Mpande and Colenso about Mkhungo. Magema, was interestingly called so the king could visualise how much Mkhungo had grown (Colenso, 1901: 116 & 132). In terms of the converts' own relationship to Zulu kingship and authority, two aspects of Mkhungo's appearance within their narratives are worth noting. First is Mpande's responses and interpretation of his education and Colenso's guardianship of him and secondly, how other Zulu denizens interpreted the relationship between Colenso, his converts, Mkhungo and the *iziGqoza* refugees living in Natal. From William's report of the conversation between Colenso and Mpande it seems that Colenso had plans to send Mkhungo to Cape Town and England, to study with the children of other kings (Colenso, 1901: 158). Mpande did not however share Colenso's ideal of an educated African aristocracy, as represented by the sons of other

sovereigns who were being educated at Zonnebloem College[16], and therefore vetoed these plans. However, in his refusal one also finds, amongst other things, Mpande's own struggles with the literate world:

> **'As to writing now, I too once actually wrote, I too: to write now, is it anything, eh?' Said Umpande, 'Let him just learn there on the spot with you. A! no, as to the other side of the water!' That affair ended. (Colenso, 1901: 159)[17]**

Interestingly, in the Zulu version Mpande's speaks in the present, as in 'I too write' instead of 'I too once actually wrote' and this suggests that his struggles with writing were a continual dilemma rather than a past event that no longer had significance for him.

In contrast to Mpande's reminiscences about his son, Mkhungo, some of his subjects saw the presence of Colenso and his converts as an opportunity to seek refuge in Natal. For them Mkhungo represented not only the residual threat of a repeat of the bloodletting of Ndodakusuka but also freedom from the authority and obligations of Zulu society. Thus, Ndiane reports that,

> **The sisters of Umkungo came, and said, 'Au! do you put us too into the wagons here, (that) we may go with you, and go to the white people.' We refused for our part, and said, 'No! you are bringing blame on us.' They said, 'No! there is no blame to you; we are greatly troubled by the indunas. Besides the whole Zulu people was actually spending the night at the Imfolozi, on the watch for Sobantu, for they said, he is coming with a force, and thousands of horses.' They just accompanied us, but they returned. (Colenso, 1901: 132-133)[18]**

In William's journal, the situation of the princesses is described in even more pitiful terms:

> **Well, but I saw a great sorrow, the children of Umpande crying, and saying, 'Now we shall die, we, since you see it is said, 'Inasmuch as ye trust, saying, there is that thing there, well, I will certainly sweep away all this which is here.'' They cried saying, 'Alas! that you were a louse of William's blanket, that you might hide yourself in him, and go and come out among the white people!' They asked me also, they said, 'If we follow now, William, and go and overtake you on the plains far away, how would it be?' I said, 'O, no! it would be very bad, both here and among our people, and it would be said, Sobantu went to the Zulus, he went to steal the people of Umpande, and by that it would be very bad.' Nokwenda assented, saying, 'O, Yes!' So they cried, saying, 'Well but that child too (Umkungo), we shall come to see him when?' I said, 'O! no! I don't say, to-wit, you will see him, since he will not come here.' They beat their hands. (Colenso, 1901: 166-167)[19]**

If Colenso still supported the idea of establishing a Zulu mission, a 'Black Kingdom' under the temporal governance of Shepstone and his spiritual guidance, then one can only imagine how such pleas for colonial refuge could advance his cause both in South Africa and in England. The image of Natal as a place of refuge, for Zulu people fleeing the 'tyranny' of their Zulu kings, became the commonplace of textbook South African history. From the perspective of Magema, William and Ndiane the kwaZulu-Natal divide had an immediate presence. By their very arrival in the 'Zulu country', they seem to have symbolised a kind of temporal 'salvation' quite independent from Colenso's missionary one. Popular memory still recalled the significance of Ndodakusuka, but for the converts, especially William, warfare had taken on a new meaning. While both Magema and Ndiane merely note the grim remains of the battle, William in his closing remarks inserts an anti-war and modernist message. If writing is consciousness-raising then William's 'Book of Peace' is an attempt to harness and 'Africanise' this power of writing. In his closing entry in the journal, William writes,

> **Yes, indeed, my brothers, the weapons of war should be beaten into ploughs for cultivating the ground, and war-shields be sewed into garments of clothing, and peace be proclaimed, on the north and on the south. And on both sides, through the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Unkulunkulu, who ever liveth, and all evil become peace, I mean become goodness. (Colenso, 1901: 167)[20]**

No doubt, like the plight of Mkhungo's sisters, William's exhortations and later hymn, would have found favour with Colenso's ideals and enthusiasm for a Zulu mission. But, unlike Ndiane's opening summary of their purpose in visiting a 'King of another land', William's articulation of a Christian salvation is modernist because it merges elements of Christian doctrine with an Africanised progressive ethos. This is especially evident in this verse:

> **Our soldiers be they gathered**
> **For those who others harm,**
> **The men who live in peace, -**
> **Gathered to make the highways**
> **That go from land to land,**
> **Till every tribe shall utter,**
> **'He is, indeed, our Lord![21] (Colenso, 1901: 171)**

Although it is not clear how much time had lapsed between William's journal entry and the composition of this hymn, it is undeniable that, whether as a simple exhortation or as a hymn, William's summation of the situation in Zululand is a prototype of similar discourses emerging in the writing of other literate Christians[22]. The irony is that, although it was William who, in 1859, expressed an awareness of potentially 'nationalist' Christian imagery, it was Magema Fuze who brought the project to fruition in his *Abantu Abamnyama*. Although the reasons for this cannot be speculated on here, it is nonetheless noteworthy that William Ngidi's cousin, Mbiana Ngidi, broke away, in the 1880s from the American Zulu Mission and founded his own Zulu Mbiana Congregational Church (Etherington, 1997: 100). It would be too hasty to conclude that William was involved in this 'Ethiopian' breakaway, but it is possible to read into his hymn a potential sympathy and inspiration for those who would want to establish African churches, independent of the censure and control of missionary and orthodox churches[23].

If subjectivity and consciousness are defined only in terms of a Western modernity or 'linguistic colonialism' being imposed on an unsuspecting African traditionalism or orality, then it becomes difficult to explain the content of literate Africans' texts. Although the *Three Native Accounts* provides no chronological biography of its authors, it provides ample evidence of their distinctive and varying articulation of Christianity, Zuluness, literacy and their understanding of Zulu and colonial political protocol. Colenso's travels to the 'Zulu country' in the company of his converts has been used here as an exemplar of how his students perceived not only their positions in relation to Zulu society, but also how they understood the political climate in kwaZulu and its implication for them and the denizens of the kingdom. The kwaZulu-Natal divide is the pivot around which these identity 'crises' circled and it was demonstrated that in 1859, the Mkhungo-Cetshwayo rivalry aggravated the converts' dilemma. As colonial subjects, Wiliam, Magema and Ndiane found themselves caught between the sovereignty of the Zulu king, Mpande, the ambitions of Cetshwayo and the promise of Mkhungo. Thus, in their interaction with others, one perceives not only errors of protocol and Zulu etiquette but also a succession of difficult tightropes, which they had to walk in order that they may not bring 'blame' on themselves. The image of Natal as a refuge was the most difficult of these tightropes, and in the next section, this dilemma will be examined through the Langalibalele affair, and Colenso and his converts' response to it.

## *Langalibalele's Rebellion, British Justice and the emergence of African Discourses on Sovereigns and Sovereignty*

That African kings and their authority became a central theme in Desai's 'critical (mis)understandings' (2001: 3) is an uncontroversial observation. As the last section demonstrated African kingship was often the common topic around which various colonial dilemmas, whether those of the missionary, colonial administrator or colonial subject, were articulated. One of the reasons that such misunderstandings underscored the colonial encounter is that in many cases both the colonised and the colonisers were 'subjects' of 'undemocratic' sovereigns. The term 'undemocratic' here does not mark a standard of governance but is used to suggest that on both sides these subjects tended to be ruled by autocratice sovereigns who did not rely on the popular vote for their authority. One of the important consequences of this co-incidence was that there were shared moments of recognition between the coloniser and the colonised. Thus, in their ethnographic accounts, settlers, travellers and administrators would describe the African sovereigns they met as 'kings', representing the power structures of these alien societies in familiar hierarchical terms. African sovereigns were also not immune to the idea that the travellers and settlers they encountered were emissaries of hereditary rulers not unlike themselves. Although this moment of recognition was not universal or innocent, it was central to the discourses on sovereignty that were to characterise the kwaZulu-Natal and other South African contestations of power and authority. The Langalibalele affair represents one such 'misunderstanding' and moment of shared recognition. On the one hand, colonial officials and colonists mistook Langalibalele's flight as rebellion, but once his trial was concluded, it was Colenso and his converts, Magema Fuze and William Ngidi who fought for the 'recognition' of Langalibalele as a legitimate sovereign. For our purposes this legal struggle over Langalibalele's sovereignty will be analysed in its textual representation, specifically Colenso's *Langalibalele and the Amahlubi Tribe*.

As was the case with Colenso's visit to Mpande in 1859, the circumstances and events around the Langalibalele rebellion in 1873 consist as much in colonial misunderstanding as they do in personal rivalry,

incompetence, unchecked sanguinary excess and looting, and deception. Of all the evidence given during Langalibalele's trial, the contest over two fragments of such evidence is particularly important. First, is the role of the 'Matshana affair' in shaping Langalibalele's decision to flee the colony. Second, is the evidence of Shepstone's messenger, Mahoyiza, on how he was treated by Langalibalele. Langalibalele's decision to flee with members of his 'tribe', the Amahlubi, was precipitated by a series of decisions and miscalculations on both his and the colonial administration's part. As a result, it is difficult to know where to begin the historical narrative[24]: does one mention the fact that Langalibalele and his people were settled at the foot of the Drakensberg to act as 'buffer' between the colony and 'Bushmen' cattle-raiders or that Shepstone's sons, working on the diamonds diggings often paid Africans, including some Hlubi, who worked for them in guns (Herd, 1976: 14n), the central issue of contention? When instructed by the Resident Magistrate, John Macfarlane, to register, according to an 1872 government order, all the guns in the possession of his subjects, Langalibalele is said to have asked how one can 'count the maggots in a piece of beef?' (Herd, 1976: 10 and Guy, 1983: 199). This was not the first time that Langalibalele had dared to defy the logic and authority of colonial administration. As early as 1859 Macfarlane had reported that the chief made him uneasy because while he never refused to obey instructions he 'more frequently sullenly acquiesced than cheerfully obeyed.' (quoted in Guy, 1983: 198). Thus, when Langalibalele procrastinated in his response to these orders, he was summoned to Pietermaritzburg to appear before Shepstone, the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA). Despite his promise to appear before the SNA, Langalibalele did not go to Pietermaritzburg. Also, at this time, Shepstone was preoccupied with preparations for the inauguration of Cetshwayo in KwaZulu and so the tensions were left to brew until his return in November. Meanwhile, on 30 October 1873, after Langalibalele had received a second summons and warning, a colonial corps of volunteers, regular British troops and African levies moved towards the Hlubi location. Alarmed, Hlubi men began to move towards the Drakensberg with their cattle, while the women, children and the elderly sought shelter in caves and hideouts. However, for Shepstone, the real turning point was the report he received from his messengers; Mahoyiza, the chief messenger, told the SNA that he had been stripped, insulted, threatened with death and told by Langalibalele that he would rather flee than submit to Shepstone. On 2 November 1873, Shepstone issued a proclamation giving the Hlubi twenty-four hours to surrender to the Natal force or face the consequences of 'rebellion'. The plan was to prevent the Hlubi from crossing over to Basutoland (Lesotho) and Frances Colenso's beau, Major Anthony Durnford, was one of the engineers sent to block the Hlubi's passage over the Drakensberg. Disaster followed disaster, and on 4 November the Natal Carbineers came face to face with the fleeing Hlubi; Durnford instructed his group to retreat, and in the panic the Hlubi opened fire killing three colonists and one Mosotho. Meanwhile, in the Hlubi location, martial law was declared, Langalibalele deposed and the Hlubi were to be 'broken up'. It is here that the sanguinary and rapacious acts of the colonists, African levies and regular soldiers were most in evidence. Not only were women, children and elderly 'smoked out' of their hideouts and killed, it was proposed that survivors be sold-off to colonists as 'apprentices'; property and cattle were seized or destroyed, and the Hlubi's neighbours, the Ingwe, were devastated despite their non-participation in the rebellion.

When the trial of Langalibalele began on 16 January 1874, Bishop Colenso proclaimed that it would be based on the 'basic principles of English justice' (Guy, 1983: 205). He thus objected, in a newspaper article, to some of the colonists' conclusion that Langalibalele's guilt was a *fait accompli*. But he was also anxious to understand the role of his friend, Theophilus Shepstone in the suppression of the rebellion. Contrary to Colenso's expectations, the whole trial was a travesty of the 'English justice' he espoused: the trial was constituted as both a judicial trial and a court of inquiry. Two of the sixteen assessors were the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Benjamin Pine, sitting as Supreme Chief and the SNA, Theophilus Shepstone. Langalibalele was made to plead, but not allowed counsel, and all the witnesses were selected by the prosecution and not cross-examined (Guy, 1983: 206-207). Above all, customary and colonial law was applied as circumstances suited, and it is here that the 'Matshana' affair becomes a central piece of evidence that was contested in and out of the courtroom.

The factual events of the 'Matshana affair' demonstrate the ironic twist that African participation in colonial 'king-making' could take. In 1858, some of Langalibalele's men had participated in an attempt to seize an unyielding chief, Matshana kaMondise. In what was meant to be a peaceful meeting, John Shepstone, Theophilus' brother, produced a concealed gun; in the ensuing fracas Matshana escaped while thirty of his men were killed (Guy, 1983: 197 and Brookes & Webb, 1965: 114). The 'Matshana affair'

exposes the contradictions and precariousness of the Shepstonian practice of 'king-making'. Not only does it demonstrate the omnipresence of the 'Shepstone' name, but the fact that it became something of an 'urban legend' and oracle, despite the fact that John Shepstone's role in the affair was never fully made public. As a piece of evidence the 'Matshana affair' was a disputed explanation of Mahoyiza's supposed stripping and Langalibalele's flight. It is this contest that is of particular interest. In the first instance, Colenso brought to Shepstone's attention the relevance to the trial of John Shepstone's concealed weapon, only after hearing the version of this and the Mahoyiza story from Magema Fuze and other Bishopstowe residents. However, in the admixture of colonial and customary law such evidence was bound to constitute a 'critical misunderstanding'. When the trial began, Pine, as Supreme Chief, auspiciously declared, in his opening address, that Langalibalele should consider the trial an act of mercy. 'We are assembled here today', he said,

> **to try a person, Langalibalele, formerly a chief, for the greatest crime that a human being can commit against society, –We are to try him for high treason – for rebellion against the authority of Her Majesty the Queen, as represented by her Representative in this Colony. Rebellion is the greatest crime that can be committed, because it involves all other crimes – murder, robbery, and every other possible crime are committed under the cloak of rebellion. Langalibalele and the chiefs are perfectly aware that, under their own law, if strictly administered, the prisoner would not be alive now. (Quoted in Guy, 1983: 206-07).**

In this way, Langalibalele's guilt was presented as a foregone conclusion in terms of 'customary law'; the trial was therefore an act of mercy compared to the strict application of such indigenous law. The fact that Langalibalele's authority was itself a colonial rather customary creation and that he had actually *fled* the colony, leaving both the colonial and its version of customary law behind, is not mentioned by Pine. In particular, the manner in which the Matshana affair was treated as evidence shows the colonial government's failure to grasp the extent to which their colonial subjects understood the colonial predicament of being caught between customary and colonial law. Although, it was only in August 1875 that a court of inquiry was constituted to investigate the 'charge' that John Shepstone had produced a concealed weapon at his meeting with Matshana, it is noteworthy that in rejecting the evidence of witnesses, Colonel Colley observed that,

> **among a people where everything is handed down by oral tradition, and the memory consequently trained to wonderful perfection, a story which may, originally, have had many different versions soon crystallizes into an accepted form, which is learnt and repeated with an accuracy and minuteness of detail which will stand the test of almost any cross-examination. (Quoted in Guy, 1983: 245).**

For Colley, and for the colonists who celebrated John Shepstone's exoneration, the Matshana affair was a contest between a literate and 'oral' tradition, colonial and customary law. They failed to appreciate that the story was so accurately retold because it was part of the popular memory of colonial deception and not an effect of a precolonial oral tradition. For the witnesses and Colenso's converts, the contest over the validity of the 'Matshana affair' and Mahoyiza's testimony were modern legal performances that challenged their own understanding of the divide between customary and colonial law, literate and oral tradition.

That Colenso's defence of Langalibalele was based on exploiting this legal ambiguity is evident in the petition, dated 1 March 1874 and signed by Magema Fuze, William Ngidi, and two Hlubi elders, Ngwadla and Mnyengeza. In the petition, the two elders appeal to Sir Benjamin Pine as Supreme Chief, for a retrial of Langalibalele on the grounds,

> **That their late Chief, Langalibalele, has been tried under Kafir Law, by a Court presided over by Your Excellency, and convicted of certain crimes, and sentenced to banishment for life from the Colony of Natal…**
>
> **That the tribe having been broken-up, and their late Chief being in prison, Your Petitioners are unable to obtain the assent of the Indunas and other headmen of the tribe, and of the prisoner himself, to this Petition, and they therefore pray Your Excellency to regard them as representing the tribe and the prisoner.**
>
> **That your Petitioners pray that Your Excellency will be pleased to allow to their said Chief the right of appeal to which he is entitled under the Ordinance No.3 of 1849, and to permit free access for Counsel to the prisoner for the purpose of preparing his appeal, and conducting it before the Court of appeal. (Colenso, 1874: 284-285).**

Colenso then cites the entire Ordinance to demonstrate how the colonial version of 'native law' permits an appeal to the Lieutenant-Governor in his capacity as Supreme Chief. Since the colonial version of customary law permitted appeals, this has the effect of contradicting Pine's statement, in his opening address at the trial, that Langalibalele would already have been executed if customary law was strictly

applied. Also, the petition lays bare the other contradiction, namely that Langalibalele's trial and the 'breaking up' of the Hlubi evidently destroyed the foundations of customary law, namely the 'chief' and 'tribe'. The Hlubi were now in effect *personae non grata*, with neither Zulu nor colonial citizenship or, by implication, legal status and protection.

The oral and literate worlds soon collided over the validity of this petition. Shepstone led the way by summoning Ngwadla and Mnyengeza, on 4 March 1874 and interrogating them about the petition. In his attack, Shepstone exploited the two elderly men's illiteracy by re-interpreting the spirit of the petition and presenting the two elders as upstarts, falsely claiming to represent the Hlubi. Thus, Magema reports that Shepstone questioned Ngwadla 'severely' saying that he had requested the appeal because 'forsooth, you are such a great man, you surpass all the rest of the amaHlubi tribe! Is it so?' Even when Ngwadla protested saying 'there is no such word in the paper as that…' Shepstone insisted that 'It is written here in the paper. It is not we who say so, it is your paper.' (Colenso, 1874: 286). However, as it becomes evident in William and Magema's testimony on the same petition, Shepstone was not merely testing the integrity of the two men's petition or exploiting their illiteracy, he was also attempting to present the petition as an affront to his own authority. As suggested by Frances Colenso's description of a certain 'Minister of Native Affairs', Shepstone understood his own authority in terms of African practices of sovereignty. His actions reinforced the allure of indigenous power and authority and exerted a profound impact on the modes of governance imposed on colonised Africans in southern Africa. In the case of Natal, Hamilton (1994: 4) investigates how certain ideals of social order, derived from the precolonial Zulu state, were incorporated into Natal's colonial discourse and practice, especially the practices of the Natal Native Administration. In this regard, Shepstone is an example of a sovereign who derived his power from avoiding the restrictions of literate decision-making in favour of orality. In the first place, as a fluent Xhosa and Zulu speaker, Shepstone preferred to exercise his power using the gestures of the oral world:

> **…speaking in Zulu, using the verbal message, the public meeting, the indaba, where the rituals of oral communication and debate were followed, and where no written record was kept which might attract the legalistic mind of the colonial official or the meticulous calculations of the accountant. (Guy, 1994a: 21)**

Consequently, Shepstone appears in the oral record, not so much as a manipulative colonial official but as the sovereign-patriarch 'Somtsewu kaSonzica', whose 'desire [was] to speak with all people' (quoted in Guy, 1997: 5). Ngwadla and Mnyengeza's petition was therefore a challenge to this 'oralisation' of factual and legal evidence and to Shepstone's own duplicitous interpretation of the written word. In Magema and William Ngidi's testimonies on this petition, Shepstone's attempt to confuse the oral and the written is clearly visible. Magema reports that not only were the two elders told that the paper said they surpassed the others in importance but that, as Ngwadla says 'I have gone to law with the Supreme Chief and Somtseu (Mr. Shepstone), and that I shall be put in prison' (Colenso, 1874: 287). Thus, emerges the distinction introduced by Shepstone, and repeated by the Resident Magistrate, John Bird, between 'going to law' (*ukumangala*) and 'making a plaint' (*ukukhala*). On being asked what the petition meant, Magema responded,

> ***M.* [Magema] The old men were lamenting themselves very much about the ruin of their House, and bewailing their Chief.**
> ***Mr. B.* [John Bird]. Did they go to the Bishop himself to make a plaint (*kala*) about that? …**
>
> ***M.* Sir, the old men also desired that the cause of their Chief should be heard again, making a plaint with their hearts.**
> ***Mr B.* Don't you mean that they *complained* (*mangala*, go to law) to the Bishop?**
> ***M.* No, Sir, I don't know that they complained.**
> ***Mr. B.* Don't fence with me, Magema, tell me the truth. Do you say that they made a plaint only? (Colenso, 1874: 287-288)**

William Ngidi brings this legal fencing to its climatic contradiction, when in his testimony he poses the question,

> **Why, is not going to law paying 5*s*. to the Magistrate, that another may be summoned? I am certain that they merely lamented to the Inkos'. (Colenso, 1874: 290)**

By pointing out that justice for colonial Africans came at the price of 5s., William exposes the duplicity inherent in the supposed distinction between *ukukhala* and *ukumangala*. For William Ngidi both concepts belong to the colonial order and not to some 'traditional' notion of justice. The irony in his observation is exactly that in terms of colonial/customary law one had to pay 5s before they could 'go to law', but in this situation this contradicts the political and didactic purpose the trial of Langalibalele was meant to serve.

From Bird's questioning of the two, it is as if the right of appeal was a novelty, whereas in fact it was a right entrenched in Ordinance No.3 of 1849, as pointed out by Colenso. This obvious contradiction between the contingency of colonial practices and its legal foundations was central to questions of African sovereignty as demonstrated by the Langalibalele affair. When the Bishop and his converts tested Mahoyiza's testimony in the same manner, the whole legal edifice and facade of the trial was undermined.

Across the Thukela, in the Zulu kingdom, the newly crowned Cetshwayo noted the lessons of the Langalibalele affair, especially the participation of Theophilus Shepstone. As yet another example of Shepstone's embroilment in African rituals of power, the 1873 crowning of Cetshwayo occurred amidst the unravelling of the Langalibalele saga. In fact, evidence suggests that Shepstone delayed dealing with Langalibalele until his return from kwaZulu (Guy, 1983: 200). The reasons for Shepstone's invitation to officiate at Cetshwayo's coronation are complex and involve both Shepstone and Cetshwayo's ambitions. However, as Hamilton (1998: 11) demonstrates, Shepstone's invitation bears the mark of the Shakan legacy. As part of his 'treaty' with James King, Shaka had in 1828 sent two emissaries to be presented by King, to the English monarch, King George. These ambassadors were however turned away at Port Elizabeth and so the first attempt by a Zulu sovereign to meet imperial power on an equal footing was aborted (see Wilson & Thompson, 1969: 349 and Guy, 1994a: 8). Shaka was to reappear in Cetshwayo's narrative, when in 1873 Shepstone vicariously presided over his coronation and was understood to do so by the councillors who invited him 'as Chaka' (Hamilton, 1994: 11). Following this coronation, Shepstone drafted a report[25], a copy of which, bound in red, embossed in gold and placed in a leather case, was sent to the Norwegian missionary Hans Schreuder to be delivered to the Zulu king (Guy, 1994a; 23-24). The contents of this document were central to the justifications and counter-arguments concerning the January 1879 invasion of Zululand and the defensive Battle of Isandlwana. At the time of the Langalibalele affair, Cetshwayo commented on the mendacity of Shepstone's instructions as contained in the ornately decorated report. He is said to have noted that, despite Shepstone's instructions to him 'not to shed blood', Shepstone had gone back to Natal and proceeded to deal with Langalibalele by shedding blood. Thus, Cetshwayo asked,

> **'Why should my Father, after coming to warn me not to kill, leave me and proceed straightaway to kill the old man who is my 'father'? He should allow Langalibalele to come to me and not to be driven into exile.' (Fuze, 1979: 104).**

Again, the contest here is about customary practice versus the legal paraphernalia concerning the independence of Zulu sovereigns. It is noteworthy that despite his acquiescence in the intrigue to have Shepstone install him, Cetshwayo still viewed himself as independent of the SNA, and therefore entitled to provide refuge for Langalibalele.

For Cetshwayo, the Langalibalele affair marked the beginning of his and the Zulu kingdom's undoing, at the hands of Theophilus Shepstone. However, since the 'destruction of the Zulu kingdom' is not the main concern here, it is important to review the implications of the above analyses. In particular, it is important to understand that although the above events are all relevant to our analysis of the colonial debates about sovereignty, such events have to be located within a broader context. There are least three ways to contextualise these debates. First, one can examine the general trajectory of European, especially British, imperialism in the nineteenth century, so as to better understand the relationship between, for example, the Colonial Office and Theophilus Shepstone, the centre and the periphery. Secondly, one can examine other southern African debates on sovereignty and assess the extent to which the Langalibalele controversy was the 'norm' or exception to the general conduct of southern African colonialism. Third, one can examine, often with great linguistic and cultural difficulty, the nature of African discourses on sovereignty. So far, this paper has suggested the second approach by comparing, briefly, the case of the BaNgwato kingdom and the 1895 deputation of Tswana chiefs that travelled to England for an audience with the Queen. The first and third approaches have only been of passing concern. While the general trajectory of colonial policy in Africa is undeniably important for understanding the emergence of the 'benevolent despotism' that underpinned 'native' policy, the work done by for example Mahmood Mamdani, in his *Citizen and Subject* seems to be sufficient, for our purpose. The aim here is not to suggest an alternative to Mamdani's notion of 'decentralised despotism' (1996: 37-). Instead, the above analysis has attempted to focus on the everyday functioning of this despotism. More specifically, the aim has been to understand the divide between colonial Natal and the Zulu kingdom in terms of the lived experiences of Bishop Colenso's converts, Magema Fuze, William Ngidi and Ndiane. In order to demonstrate how such an approach

illuminates a general study of colonialism, the paper will now turn to Magema Fuze's *The Black People and Whence They Came* to ascertain the existence of an African or even Zulu discourse on sovereignty (or 'despotism'). The general aim of this commentary is to show that discourses on the nature and extent of sovereign power and authority were not limited to the literate world of colonialism and imperialism.

The earlier discussion of Colenso's 1859 trip to the 'Zulu country' suggested that the presence of the Zulu converts conjured up and revived memories of the 1856 battle of Ndodakusuka since they were associated with the survivor, Mkhungo, and the Shakan legacy which he symbolised. Thus, it is useful to begin by assessing Magema Fuze's understanding of this legacy and its import for the construction of an African discourse of sovereignty. As an ideal of social order and discipline, the Shakan model of government appears, not only in colonial discourses on succession and succession disputes, but also in recorded oral traditions, albeit in ambiguous terms. As Hamilton (1994: 6-12) argues, various African informants depicted the Shakan state in terms of the order within and the chaos without. In their evidence, the legitimacy of Shaka's rule rested not on hereditary entitlement but on his achievements, namely his military organisation and its effective establishment of law and order. Since Hamilton's hypothesis relies on the *oral* evidence collected by James Stuart, it would be interesting briefly to compare it with Magema Fuze's *written* assessment of Shaka's rule. Although Fuze's narrative on the rule of various Zulu kings deserves a more thorough exposition, the emphasis here will be on two aspects of his assessment, namely his explicit admiration of Shaka and his declarations on the legitimation of all kings. First, Fuze while giving credence to both the oral and written evidence of Shaka's cruelty chooses to focus on his intelligence in dealing with the 'whites'. Thus, in comparing him to Dingane, Fuze writes:

> **Even though we may condemn Shaka for having a lust for killing people, we can say with conviction that he was a clever man who liked to act intelligently. He wished to co-operate with the white people, having seen the products of their knowledge. I feel sure that had he not been killed, our life would have been different for us, because he ardently desired to associate himself with the white people in respect of all their works of wisdom. (1979: 85)**

Thus, in Fuze's view the Shakan state was a modernising state; keen to acquire the technology of Europeans and to use it for the benefit of its subjects. Fuze's emphasis on Shaka's goodwill towards Europeans should however not be interpreted as a naïve 'invention' of Zulu modernity; Fuze was aware and writes of how Shaka *created* the sovereign power, in the form of 'chiefdoms', of the very Europeans with whom he was co-operating. In other words, Fuze is aware that Shaka, while extending the power of Zulu sovereignty to include European 'chiefs', did not concede his own sovereignty. In Fuze's narrative, and this links to the second aspect of his account, Shaka's demise was divine and not secular or colonial, because he forgot that he was ruling the Zulu people on behalf of his kingly ancestors and *uNkulunkulu*. He notes:

> **…it is right to remember that all kings are supported by God, and it is He who appoints and supports them. If sovereignty is not supported by Him, it is dead, and authority non-existent. Also if a king rules without the realisation that he is a servant, a mere headman to represent his people to God, his kingship is non-existent and dead, because God will soon bring it to an end.**
>
> **Shaka, who moulded the sovereignty *[ubukhosi]* of the Zulu nation, ruled for only ten years. For when he defied the Owner of all people for whom he ruled his people, his rule was terminated and God roused his brothers to kill him…(1979:97)**

Although this excerpt suggests, as argued by Draper (1998: 23), a biblical and millenarian legitimation of Zulu kingship, Fuze (1979: 146) also proposes that Zulu rule failed because Shaka discarded 'the old ways of Senzangakhona and his forebears'. In the Zulu version of the above extract, Fuze (1922: 170) uses the term *uNkulunkulu* to suggest that He is the foundation of all kingship, and as Draper (1998: 21) notes, this indigenous name for God can refer to 'the ancestral spirit of all mankind' and therefore imply continuity with traditional African understandings of divinity, and in this case sovereignty. However, from Landau's discussion, such assumptions of 'transcultural universalism' can be self-defeating if one uncritically uses them to suggest that pre-modern and pre-literate societies had 'religion' or that they understood 'sovereignty' in the same way that the social scientist understands and uses such terms.

As a way to avoid this transcultural universalism, it may be useful to elucidate the innovation in Fuze's syncretic legitimation of Zulu sovereignty, by comparing it to other South African models of sovereignty. This comparison relies on making a distinction between 'open' and 'closed' frontier processes of state formation[26]. For our purposes, the kwaZulu-Natal divide represents an 'open' frontier because it was only after 1897 that the complete machinery of colonial bureaucracy was imposed and the apparatus of

'decentralised despotism' erected in the then Zulu kingdom. The comparison between Fuze's and other models of sovereignty is therefore based on the argument that the openness of the Zulu kingdom's frontiers permitted reciprocal relations between African sovereigns, adventurers, colonists, missionaries, and other African sovereigns. It is with this view in mind that one can refer, for example, to the purely biblical model of sovereignty offered by Piet Retief in his letters to Dingane. As one of the 'pioneer' trekkers, Retief's relations with colonial officials, Africans and fellow settlers is a study all on its own. To understand his interaction with Dingane it may be useful to point to some of the events that may have influenced his approach to indigenous sovereigns and peoples. Working backwards, one can begin by extracting from the February 1837 trekker 'Manifesto', signed by Retief, in which the trekkers promised that on reaching the interior:

> **We will not molest any people, nor deprive them of the smallest property; but, if attacked, we shall consider ourselves fully justified in defending our persons and effects, to the utmost of our ability, against every enemy. (quoted in Chase, 1968: 84)**

Coming, as it were, at the heels of the Cape Punishment Bill[27], this manifesto gives the impression that Retief and his company were willing to comply with the letter of the Bill. However, in view of Retief's career, as Field-Commandant of a frontier commando, and his altercations with Andries Stockenstrom, Lieutenant Governor of the Eastern Districts, Retief could not have sincerely intended to comply with the spirit of the Bill. On issues of law and order, especially questions of stock theft and raiding, Retief seems to have continued, even while on the trek, the frontier practices of retaliation and seizure of cattle. Dingane understood the effectiveness of this power; one of his first requests to Retief was for him to recover cattle supposedly stolen by Sikonyela, a Sotho chief. As one of the events, that preceded Retief's murder at the hands of Dingane, this application of a frontier code of law and order is one example of the mutually beneficial reciprocity between African sovereigns and colonists and may even suggest the trekboers' willingness to pay 'tribute' to indigenous sovereigns. It is in one of these exchanges that Retief expresses the inflated view that the hand of God guided the trekker-led destruction of Mzilikazi. In this letter of November 8 1837, Retief posits that:

> **From God's great Book we learn, that kings who do such things as Matselikatse has done are severely punished, and not suffered long to live and reign; and if you wish to hear more fully of how God treats such wicked kings, you can enquire of all the missionaries in you country. You can believe what these teachers tell you concerning God and his government over the world. In regard to these things I must advise you frequently to speak with those gentlemen, who wish to teach you God's Word; for they will inform you with what great power God has governed and still governs all earthly kings. (quoted in Chase, 1968: 132-133)**

Obviously, Retief intended that these admonitions should frame Dingane's sovereignty in terms of the trekker's own Christian notions of kingship, sovereignty, and perhaps their own 'Calvinist' notions of predestination. However, such statements also contained the paradox that by insinuating that Zulu sovereigns were part of a universal discourse on the nature of divine justice and appointment of kings, they by implication validated the notion of the sovereignty and autonomy of African rulers. Like other adventurous settlers, Retief was attracted to the indigenous power represented by African sovereigns and his actions belie an attempt to arrogate this power to himself and his company. Although this may not be *the* explanation for the Great Trek, the attractions of frontier justice and unregulated alliances and conflicts with African sovereigns and subjects seems to have motivated some of the trekkers' actions. It is, however, crucial to understand that these practices of reciprocity, their successes and failures, depended on literacy or the absence thereof. In actualising such alliances and infusing African kingships with a discourse of power and sovereignty, African sovereigns and their settler partners, relied on literacy as a mode of communication.

If Retief and his trekkers represented a settler notion of African sovereignty, derived from *written* biblical injunctions, then Shepstone's 'native' policy represents an *oral* and secular notion, which derived its legitimacy from the Shakan legacy. Whereas Retief and the trekkers depicted a divine order against the 'wickedness' of kings, Shepstone was able to present, to his literate readers, a reconciliation between the binaries of despotism versus law and order. He suggested that the observed 'despotism' of Zulu power was in fact an efficient system of government that could be modified to match colonial order. By appealing to the precedent of a centralised 'Shakan' state, Shepstone was able to 'circumvent the liberal principles of government increasingly entrenched in Britain' and therefore present the various tenets of his administration as 'features of Shakan times and as appropriate to the government of ex-subjects of Shaka'

(Hamilton, 1994: 15-16). Thus, unlike the trekkers, Shepstone comprehended all too well the limits of writing when dealing with questions of African sovereignty. It is therefore not surprising that his attempts to create a social order based on the interpolation of oral practices often precluded the authority and legality of written documents. However, Shepstone was not merely a purveyor of Zulu oral practices of power; he also understood the power of a centralised and sovereign Zulu state from a realist perspective since his aim was to co-opt it for the colonial order. This he did by usurping traditional practices and symbols of power, and exploiting the potency of his patriarchal title of 'Somtsewu kaSonzica'. This usurpation of traditional modes of decision-making did not however go unchallenged. In this regard, the emergence of Zulu intellectuals like Magema Fuze and John Dube was instrumental in the process of historicising Zulu sovereignty and detaching it from Shepstonian and other colonial conceptions. This does not imply that these intellectuals agreed with each other on the question of African independence from imperial power. On the contrary, Fuze is part of a tradition that precipitated the emergence of two contradictory forces, namely African nationalism and Zulu ethnic consciousness. What is relevant about this tradition is that while sovereignty could be understood from a traditional and sometimes biblical perspective, it was also re-defined in terms of the modern requirements of nation building and state formation. Thus, past and present Zulu sovereigns were recast in modern terms of 'progress', enlightenment and national liberation.

This recasting of Zulu sovereignty was however also structured by a third model of sovereignty, namely the imperial model. The dilemma, for the colonial African subject, was that as a model of sovereignty, British imperialism promised individual Africans civil rights, and therefore contradicted their own assertions of Zulu identity or citizenship. Legally, the origin of such 'rights' for Natal's Africans can be dated to the 1843 'Queen Victoria Act', which together with other imperial commissions and instruments would in later years be cited by Africans to highlight the betrayal of imperial promises (La Hausse, 2000: 192). As part of the annexation of Natal and the appointment of Henry Cloete as Her Majesty's Commissioner, it was proclaimed that the 'emigrants' would enjoy the benefits of 'settled government under British protection', if they adhered, amongst other things, to the three conditions that:

> **Ist. There shall not in the eye of the law be any distinction of persons or disqualification, founded on mere distinction of colour, origin, language, or creed; but that the protection of the law, in letter and in substance, shall be extended impartially to all alike.**
> **2nd. That no aggression shall be sanctioned upon the natives residing beyond the limits of the colony, under any plea whatever, by any private person or any body of men, unless acting under the immediate authority and orders of the Government.**
> **3rd. That slavery in any shape or under any modification is absolutely unlawful, as in every other portion of Her Majesty's dominions. (quoted in Bird, 1965: 166-167)**

Although this Act created the colony of Natal and made British subjects of the Africans living within the colony's boundaries, it nevertheless retained the assumptions of the Cape Punishment Bill, namely that peoples beyond the colony were sovereign but that crimes committed by British emigrants against them would be prosecuted as if they had been committed within the colonies of Natal and the Cape of Good Hope. In view of the discussion so far, it was consistent with this Act that the Zulu kingdom be recognised as sovereign, and its subjects remain Zulu rather than imperial subjects. However, as both La Hausse (2000) and Guy (2001) demonstrate, African subjects and sovereigns began, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to appeal to the Crown in their efforts to win rights of citizenship and recognition of their autonomous polities. Interestingly, La Hausse and Guy deal with these movements separately, with La Hausse focusing on the emergence of Zulu 'British subjects' and Guy concentrating on the loss of autonomy suffered by Zulu kings. It is however possible to imagine that the two are part of the same process, since for Africans to assert that they had rights as British subjects implied that at least two conceptual shifts had occurred. First, either these Africans had abandoned or at least re-defined their relationship with indigenous sovereigns, or the nature of African sovereignty had itself been so massively altered that being a subject of one of these sovereigns began to lose meaning. Secondly, one can also discern the emergence of an 'individualist' and 'modern' African identity, which could not be easily reconciled to the supposedly pre-colonial and communal rule of African sovereigns. In the case of Natal and the Zulu kingdom, La Hausse (2000: 10) defines this emerging identity by labelling it '*kholwa* ideology' since it was associated with the *amakholwa*, the African Christian converts.

The term *kholwa* ideology, as used by La Hausse, refers to a specific set of ideals that became part of the discourse of African Christians and to some extent African nationalists. The world of the *kholwa* was a

paradoxical one. On the one hand, the ideas that formed the basis of *kholwa* ideology were infused with beliefs in the

> **practical efficacy of Christianity, the importance of unencumbered individual access to freehold land and its commercial exploitation, and the right to legal and political equality in common with other colonial subjects of Queen Victoria. (La Hausse, 2000: 10)**

Yet, the Christian convert's position within both colonial society and traditional society often meant that none of these ideals could be actualised in their entirety. This marginality meant that although these converts were assertive in declaring their 'collective distance' from pre-colonial society, the nature of colonial society was such that they remained without the political and legal rights required to defend their increasing economic prosperity (La Hausse, 2000: 10). Literacy played a major role in making the *kholwa* collectivity prosperous and socially mobile. That their emerging colonial identities depended on their literate skills is evident, as has been demonstrated, in Magema Fuze, William Ngidi and Ndiane's praticipation in not only Colenso's studies of the Zulu language, his visit to Mpande but also in his defence of Langalibalele. However, this *kholwa* proficiency with both the literate and the oral worlds meant that this literate Africans had to face at a later stage the reality that as colonial rule expanded its purview, their personal narratives were incorporated into colonial bureaucratic practices, in for example, the exemption application. For the literate, the exemption application became the quintessential administrative instrument that while it exemplified the promise of social mobility also 'served to fix *kholwa* biographical narratives in the most profound way.' (La Hausse, 2000: 12). Thus, in their exemption applications, literate Africans often expressed allegiance to the Queen as when D. Nyawo stated that he sought 'to bring himself more in direct loyalty to the Queen' (La Hausse, 2000: 11). They also had to demonstrate that they were of independent financial means. In the latter case, it was often the African *mabhalane* (clerk or secretary) or the prosperous African landowner who had easy proof of independent means. Others, like the black Norwegian pastors in La Hausse (2000: 43) were reduced to listing their ownership of fowls, ducks, and goats in order to improve their exemption prospects.

Thus, one way to understand Fuze's use of the term *ubukhosi* and its relationship to divinity, without falling into the trap of a naïve universalism, is to compare it with three other available ideals of sovereignty, namely the British imperial model, the adventurer/settler model of Piet Retief and the Shepstone re-conception of the Shakan state. The contest between these models defined the limits of Fuze's own conception of Zulu and African sovereignty and autonomy. By describing Zulu kings in terms of religious ordination and political and social modernity, Fuze reconciled the shortcomings of a purely biblical model, implied by his own conversion to Christianity, the anachronism of the Shepstonian-type model and the unfulfilled promises of the imperial promise of civil rights. Although such a thesis needs further development, it does offer an explanation and description of the dilemma faced by nineteenth-century Zulu intellectuals in terms of other South African discourses on sovereignty and subjectivity.

## *Conclusion*

To summarise, the foregoing discussions has attempted to describe the manner in which constitutional debates on colonial and African sovereigns and subjects were conducted through the media of the oral and written word. That these discussions took place should not be interpreted as meaning that there was agreement on either the colonial or the African side about the meaning of sovereignty or subjection. On the contrary, the discussion has suggested that there were both sites of 'critical misunderstanding' and moments of recognition within these discourses and practices. Literacy, as both an individual skill and a social tool of subject formation, underpinned these processes. This paper has emphasised two moments in the use or abuse of literacy to construct discourses on sovereignty and subjection. The first was how Magema Fuze, William Ngidi and Ndiane were implicated, as Colenso's protégés and literate Zulu speakers, in the succession or 'king-making' disputes of the Zulu kingdom. The emphasis was on how the converts' narratives, contained in Colenso's *Three Native Accounts*, reflected and sustained their dilemma of being at once Christian converts, 'Zulu' citizens and being perceived as sources of refuge because of their residence in colonial Natal and Bishopstowe. The second moment concerned the same converts' involvement in the Langalibalele controversy. In this regard, the controversy was depicted as one of many contests over the autonomy of other African sovereigns.

With regards to the theoretical relationship between the ideas developed here and the general theories of colonialism, at least three other historical and discursive events need further research and elucidation. First,

one needs to assess the extent to which earlier ethnographic descriptions written by literate travellers and settlers became a historical source of constitutional debates about the status of African sovereigns and subjects. In particular, one needs to examine how such ethnographic studies often concealed the fact that these same ethnographers had themselves been part of the creation or destruction of African sovereigns rather than just objective observers. Secondly, an explanation needs to be given of the contradiction between the fact that early nineteenth-century imperial legal documents often defined African sovereigns as autonomous and yet because of their 'illiteracy' the indigenous people often could not access these discourses and actualise the autonomy and sovereignty they were described as enjoying. Thirdly, and this is related to the last point, one needs to assess the extent to which African exclusion from the literate and legal discourses of sovereignty was often the consequence of a deliberate attempt to confound the norms and practices of the oral with those of the literate world. From the 'treaties' signed, by earlier adventurers, with African sovereigns to Theophilus Shepstone's eloquence in oral codes, the oral and literate worlds often collided to create certain ideals of sovereignty and subjection and the challenge is to examine the relationship between these oral practices, legal and written treaties and assumptions about the nature of both the oral and the literate worlds.

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## *Endnotes*

[1] This sentence is an extract from a reported conversation between Bishop Colenso's party, travelling in 1859 to visit the Zulu king Mpande in 'KwaZulu' and it is rendered here in its translated form, from Magema Fuze's narrative of the journey, with the translation being Colenso's. The reported conversation reads:

> **"We met with two white-men; they enquired and said, 'Where are you going to?' Said Jojo, 'We are going to the Zulu country.' Said they, 'Do you fancy, saying, there is no assegai in the Zulu country?' Said Jojo, 'Well, but how have you come back?' 'Do you think,' said they, 'we too are black?'" (Colenso, 1901: 110).**

[2] I have been unable to find further reference to Ndiane. In Colenso's 'Glossary' in the *Three Native Accounts*, he is described as 'son of Zatshuke, senior lad of the Institution at Ekukhanyeni.' (1901: 69). It may be relevant that Zatshuke was one of Theophilus Sheptone's 'indunas' (see Fuze, 1979: 102) and was later involved in the prosecution of Langalibalele which will be discussed in the later parts of the paper.

[3] Fuze (1979: ii) writes that he first met Bishop John William Colenso, when he was, according to the Bishop's estimates twelve years old. Thus, if he was twelve in c.1855, he was sixteen years of age when he travellled to the 'Zulu country' in the company of Colenso and his entourage. Ndiane and William Ngidi were probably of the same age, although Ngidi was in the Bishop's words already a 'young man' (Introduction, 1901: n.p).

[4] The full title of this text is *Langalibalele and the Amahlubi Tribe: Being Remarks upon the Official Record of the Trials of the Chief, his Sons and Induna, and Other Members of the Amahlubi Tribe.* As a record of the events around the supposed rebellion and trial of Langalibalele the Bishop's 'remarks' eventually became part of the official record, viz. the British Parliamentary Papers (C.-1141)(see Guy, 1983: 362).

[5] The articles referred to in Desai (2001: 70) are, Magubane, Bernard.1971. 'A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa', *Current Anthropology*, Vol.12, No.4-5 and Mafeje, Archie. 1976. 'The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective: An Inquiry into the Growth of the Social Sciences', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2..

[6] This observation telescopes events because the period under analysis is between 1855 and 1874, and the 'destruction of the Zulu kingdom', as dated by Guy (1984 & 2001), occurred between 1879 and 1884. My argument here is based on Parsons' comparison of the visit, to Great Britain, of King Cetshwayo, the last Zulu king in Guy's chronology, and the visit of the Tswana chiefs, Bathoen, Sebele and Khama in 1895. That the imagination of the British public was captivated by the presence of these exotic sovereigns and contributed to a sense of British 'cosmopolitanism' is well captured in an 1895 *Morning Advertiser* article on the arrival of the Tswana chiefs. The article stated:

> **Black kings and princes are no longer the *rarae aves* that they were when his swarthy Majesty King Cetewayo first dawned upon an astounded London drawing room. Now an African of noble birth is to be met with at most fashionable receptions during the season, and black bishops talk theology with British deans at garden parties.**
>
> **All roads, even that from Africa, lead to London. Any day you can hardly walk down Piccadilly without rubbing shoulders with an Afghan, a Zulu, a Hottentot, or a foreigner of some kind. (quoted in Parsons, 1998: 28).**

Reference to the precedence set by Cetshwayo suggests that the Victorian imperialism of the late nineteenth century was of a different tone to that of earlier times. In fact, the relationship between the presence of the Tswana chiefs and the Zulu cause is more than speculative. In 1895, Harriette Colenso was also in Britain to protest and plead on behalf of Dinuzulu, son of Cetshwayo, who was exiled on the island of St. Helena. Harriette knew Khama's secretary and interpreter, Simeon Seisa, because she had once helped him at Bishopstowe. Despite this connection, it seems that the missionaries accompanying this Tswana deputation did not want to be associated with the Zulu cause (Guy, 2001: 398-99). The explanation for this aloofness perhaps lies in understanding the changes that had occurred in the conduct of British imperialism. In Britain, the ascendancy of Joseph Chamberlain to the position of Secretary of State for the Colonies signalled a turn towards a 'program of popular imperialism' (Parsons, 1998: 23). However, his relationship with Cecil Rhodes, the British South Africa Company and the1896 Jameson tested the extent of the popularity of the Empire. In the case of the Tswana, Chamberlain managed to present an image of

consistency; in 1884 and 1885 he had defended Tswana autonomy against attempts by Boers from the Transvaal Republic to take over 'southern Bechuanaland' (Parsons, 1998: 22). In 1895, he again defended this autonomy, albeit against the invasions of the British South African (BSA) Company; and his defence was boosted by the unpopularity of the Company's 1893 war against the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. In short, the radical political economy changes that had been brought about by the southern African mineral revolution meant that the imperial government re-defined its interests and now focused on how it could tap into this new found wealth. My argument here is that the Zulu cause, because of its secular rather than ecclesiastic foundation, had no such advantage and did not therefore warrant the immediacy accorded the plight of the Ndebele or Tswana

[7] Fuze (1979: ii). The context of this assertion is Fuze's description of how, as a child he had 'premonitions' about his future and how his parents, as a result of these premonitions began to call him 'Skelemu' instead of 'Manawami'. The text reads,

In his conversation with the other children he used to say, 'I am not going to grow up here at home. A white man of high rank will be coming here from across the sea; he is the one for whom I will work, and who will call me by the name of Skelemu.

The original Zulu text reads,

> **Amazwi abe ekulunywa ng'uManawami lapa ekuluma nezinye izikundhlwane wabe eti, "Mina angiyikukulela lapa ekaya. Kuyakufika umlungu omkulu oy'inkosi, oyakufika lapa epuma petsheya; nguye engiyakuya ngisebenze kuye, angibize ngegama lokuti nging'uSkelemu. (1922; iv)**

[8] Travel writing is also a colonial genre, separate from issues of conversion and subjectivity. Thus, it is important to give it the attention it deserves. Examples of studies that deal with travel writing include, Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991) and Pratt, M.L. 1985. 'Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen', in Critical Inquiry, 12, Autumn.

[9] This historical section is based on Guy (1983) and Etherington (1997).

[10] Colenso's views were elaborated in his ethnographic and linguistic study of Zulu society and the Zulu language, exemplified by the publication, after his 1854 visit, of *Ten Weeks in Natal. A Journal of a First Tour of Visitation Among the Colonists and Zulu Kafirs of Natal*. Although this text cannot be analysed here, it is potentially a rich source of comparative material especially of Colenso and other 'travel writers' or Colenso and the narratives of his converts.

[11] In his discussion of primary orality, Ong (1982: 36-50) lists repetitiveness or redundancy, conservatism, an agonistic tone and situational and life world focus as some of the characteristics of orally based thought and expression. This discussion of the *Three Native Accounts* is in a sense a response to Ong's categorisation.

[12] The Zulu version reads:

> **Inncwadi yamhla sipuma ekaya, s'ahlukana nabantu bakiti, siya ku'Mpande, inkosi yezwe elinye, njengaloko esikuyalelweyo enncwadini engcwele, ukuti, 'Hambani, niye emhlabeni wonke, nitshele izizwe zonke loko enikupiweyo ngomusa ka'Yihlo wenu os'ezulwini.' (1901: 14)**

[13] The Zulu version reads:

> **Ng'etula isigqoko, ngakuleka, ngati, 'Ndabezita!'… Ngalanda ngati: 'Amanga, Ndabezita! ngitunywa inkosi; iti, angizokuyitsho… Wabuza wati, 'Iy'ipi yona leyo'nkosi? USomseu?' Ngati, 'Qa, Ndabezita! USobantu.'…Wati, 'Uvela ngapetsheya?' Ngati, 'Qa! Uvela le emGungundlhlovu.' Wati yena, 'Kona kambe.' Ngati mina, 'O! bengiti utsho ngapetsheya, eEngland.' Wati yena, 'Pela tina siti kugna petsheya konalapo, ngoba kungapetsheya kwoTukela.' (1901: 34-35).**

[14] Gender is also a relevant category that is implied not only in concepts such as 'sovereignty' and 'subjectivity' but also in the emerging Zulu historiography of which Fuze forms a part. The kind of attention being given here to Fuze may also be given to the narrative of Paulina Dlamini (see, Bourquin, S. (ed.). 1986. *Paulina Dlamini: Servant of Two Kings*. Killie Campbell Africana Library and University of Natal Press).

[15] This reconstruction is based on Brookes & Webb's *A History of Natal* and Magema Fuze's *The Black People and Whence They Came*.

[16] On Zonnebloem College, see Hodgson (1997) and Attwell (1999).

[17] The Zulu version reads:

**'Ukuloba pela, nami ngike ngilobe nje nami: ukuloba pela ku'luto, y'ini? Wati uMpande, 'Kafunde nje konalapo kuwena. O! qa, ngapetsheya kwamanzi!' Yapela leyo'ndaba. (Colenso, 1901: 44).**

[18] The Zulu version reads:

**B'eza odade wabo ka'Mkhungo, bati, 'Au1 nati sifakeni ezinnqoleni lapa, sihambe nani, siye esilungwini.' S'enqaba tina, sati, 'Ai! Nisirolela icala.' Bati, 'Ai! Aliko icala kinina; siyahlupeka kakulu izinduna. Futi uZulu wonke way'es'elala emFolozi, ehlomele uSobantu, ngokuba beti, uza nempi namahashi ay'izinkulungwane.' Basipelekezela nje; kodwa babuya.**

[19] The Zulu version reads:

**Kepa-ke ngawubona umrau onkulu [sic], abantwana bakaMpande bekala beti, 'Sesizakufa tina, lokupela kutiwa, Loku nikutemba niti, 'Kukona lokuya.' Bakala beti, 'We! ube inntwala yengubo ka'Velemu, uziti tshu kuyena, uye upume esilungwini!' Babuza futi kumi, bati, 'Inxa silandela-ke, Velemu, siye sinifumane ematafeni le, kungaba njani?' Ngati mina, 'O! qa! Kungaba kubi kakulu, nalapa nakiti, kutiwe, uSobantu uye kwa'Zulu, waya'kweba abantu baka'Mpande, ngaloko kube kubi kakulu.' Wavuma uNokwenda, wati, 'O! yebo! Bakala-ke, bati, 'Po! Nomntwana lo, soza simbone nini?' Ngati mina, 'O! qa! Angitsho ukuti niyakumbona, loku engayikuza lapa.' Batshay'izandhla.**

[20] The Zulu version reads:

**EHE! Nembala, bafo wetu, izikali zokulwa ngazikandwa amageja okulima umhlabati, izihlangu zitungwe inzingubo zokwembata, kumenyezwe ukutula, ngenhla na ngenzansi na s'emacaleni omabili, ngoYise wenKosi yetu, uJesu-Kristo, uNkulunkulu ohleziyo, buti ububi bonke bube ukutula, ngitsho bube buhle. (Colenso, 1901: 51)**

[21] The Zulu version reads:

**Amabuto abutelwe**
**Abahlup'abanye,**
**Labo abazakuqala**
**Abatulileyo.**
**Abutelwe izindhlela**
**Zokuhambelana,**
**Zize zit'izizwe zonke,**
**'Uy'inKosi yetu!**

[22] David Attwell's (1999) article provides an excellent summary and discussion of this emerging proto-nationalist discourse. Attwell aptly describes the common thread in these narratives as a 'desperate struggle with a sense of accelerated time.' (1999: n.p).

[23] William Ngidi left Bishopstowe in 1869, but continued to correspond with Magema Fuze (Guy, 2001: 43). Information on his activities after his departure from Bishopstowe is scant, even one of his descendants, Bhekizifundiswa kaMzikayise Ngidi, who has created a website in his memory (http://my.cybersoup.com/vusezakithi/ngidi.html) neglects to provide information on William's life after Bishopstowe.

[24] For a historian's historical narrative of the events preceding the 'rebellion', see Guy (1983: 196-213) and Herd (1976: 1-15). This paragraph is based on both Guy (1983) and Herd (1979).

[25] According to Guy (1994a; 22-23) this document, entitled *Report of the expedition sent by the Government of Natal to install Cetewayo as King of the Zulus, in succession of his deceased father, Panda*, was addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and published as British Parliamentary Paper C1137.

[26] For a fuller exposition of the 'open' and 'closed' frontier explanations of colonial state formation see the different articles by Du Toit and Giliomee cited in the bibliography.

[27] Due to various 'Exeter Hall' and other philanthropic pressure the imperial government established in 1836, to the consternation of South African colonists, a House of Commons' select committee, the Aborigines Committee, to investigate the conditions and treatment of indigenes in all the colonies of the British Empire. This select committee's investigations, exposed the divergence of views on the meaning of the British constitution, and was tested in the subsequent drafting and enactment of the Cape of Good Hope Punishment Bill. The target, of these two imperial instruments, was essentially frontier notions of law and order, and this is evident in the Bill's preamble, which states:

> **Whereas the Inhabitants of the Territories adjacent to the Colony of the *Cape of Good Hope*, to the Southward of the Twenty-fifth Degree of South Latitude, being in an uncivilized state, *Offences against the Person and Property of such Inhabitants and others are frequently committed by His Majesty's Subjects within such Territory with impunity*; for Remedy thereof, be it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That the Laws which are now or which shall heafte be in force in the Colony of the *Cape of Good Hope*, for the Punishment of Crimes therein committed, shall be, and the same are hereby extended and declared applicable to all His Majesty's Subjects within any such Territory adjacent to the said Colony, and being to the *Southward of the Twenty-fifth Degree of South Latitude*, and that every Crime or Offence, committed by any of His Majesty's Subjects within any such Territory in contravention of any such Laws, shall be cognizable in any such Courts, and shall be inquired of, tried, and prosecuted, and on conviction punished in such and the same manner as if the same had been committed within the said Colony. (quoted in Chase, 1968: 48; italics probably Chase's)**

Considering that the territory southward of the 25° latitude line encompasses most of southern Africa, south of the Limpopo, the jurisdiction of the above law was extensive and from the beginning unrealistic. However, this should not undermine the potentially anti-colonial principles that were being enacted. In the first place, the Bill presented the indigenous inhabitants as the *victims* of colonial criminality and not the other way round. In view of the fact that the Bill was enacted in the aftermath of the Sixth Frontier War (1834-35), colonial apologists would not have missed its implicit judgement of their actions during this war. Secondly, although the Bill describes the indigenes as 'uncivilised', it nonetheless brings them within the protective parameters of English constitutionalism without subjecting them to British rule. This point is emphasised by the fact that Clause IV of the Bill clearly states that the enacted law should not be construed as extending the claim of the British crown to these territories, and that this law does not 'derogate from the Rights of the Tribes or People inhabiting such Territories, or of Chiefs or Rulers, to such Sovereignty or Dominion' (quoted in Chase, 1968: 49). In maintaining that African 'chiefs' and 'rulers' were sovereign, this Bill placed a constitutional check on the territorial, trade and other ambitions of the colonists. However, since these written discourses, legal and otherwise, were only accessible to the literate, the African sovereigns, whom such laws could empower did not have access to these defining moments in the constitution of their autonomy.