Breathing life into dry bones:
The Dingiswayo-Mthethwa myth and the teaching of contemporary oral history in the South African secondary syllabus

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In response to the crisis of history teaching in South African schools, a History/Archaeology Panel reported to the Education Minister on 14 December 2000; it referred to an earlier report to the Minister (by the Working Group on Values in Education, also 2000) titled ‘Values, Education and Democracy’, which argued that the richness of history has "a larger capacity than any other discipline (to) promote reconciliation and reciprocal respect of a meaningful kind, because it encourages a knowledge of the other, the unknown and the different". The Panel chair, novelist and UCT vice-chancellor Njabulo Ndebele in his speech announcing the Report, quoted from it that "In conditions of flux, historical study of a probing kind is a vital aid against amnesia, and a warning against any triumphalism of the present" (Ndebele).

This is a clear call for the nation-building potential of a revised history that breaks with the dominant mode of historiography, to draw on ‘other’ traditions of memory - among them contemporary oral history. The Report states that the study of history "enables us to listen to formerly subjugated voices and to redress the invisibility of the formerly marginalised. In our country it is self-evident that oral history, both formal and informal, is of great importance in recovering suppressed or neglected voices". It then recommends, under ‘Skills promotion’ (p24) that "History methodology should also incorporate the acquisition of related wider skills, such as the establishment of community archives and school archives, particularly in rural settlements where there are no such repositories". Accordingly in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education’s current teacher briefing notes for Senior Phase of the Human & Social Sciences Learning Area (under the revolutionary new OBE (Outcomes-Based Education) approach), we find one ‘Strategic Outcome’ to be a ‘critical understanding of how South African society has changed and developed’, with one of seven criteria of assessment being ‘identification of the sources from which a knowledge of South African society is constructed’ - which shall include "developing awareness of the wide range of sources available, with special reference to oral sources. At this level oral histories and traditions from school, family and community must be accessed and discussed" (KZN DEC notes).

This paper is concerned with the latter term or stage in this directive - the *discussion of* whatever findings emerge from fieldwork. Implicit in such a call from educationists - for the formal embrace and sifting of *all* local memory - is that since it doesn’t itself specify the parameters for discussion of this memory (the criteria, say, for ‘authentication’ of a given collected text - ultimately, its acceptance or rejection), this task falls by default to historians and

historical anthropologists. How are they to proceed, given that the terms ‘other’ and ‘suppressed or neglected voices’ must, *de rigueur*, apply to alternates and alternatives to all centrally devised syllabi - those of both the colonial and the new African-nationalist syllabus designers? Patrick Hutton tells us "history has been dissolved into a plethora of ways to publicize the collective memories of the many groups that claim a right to be heard" (22), and my argument from our data addresses one significant difficulty for policy (on syllabus and more broadly) that so magnanimous an approach is likely to present: Might such inclusivity, in the quest to achieve balance by ‘filling the gaps’, not result in a slew of strident challenges to the new univocal narrative of nation desired by the new elite, all issuing from a multitude of submerged or marginalized local voices and narratives which in their demands to be heard, and their mix of personal and group agendas, own the potential to interrupt and destabilize the projected dominant/ unitary narrative, fracturing what brittle coherence it may have achieved, in the name of ‘representative history’?

Compounding this difficulty for historians is the question of how they can proceed as ‘sifters / evaluators’ where often enough little to no written evidence will be found either in support or contradiction of these voices’ claims - a lack which may convenience the more sectarian and divisive agendas by valorizing them as authentic alternative sources for the new teaching of school history[1]. To repeat - these questions become keener when recent levels of research funding for IKS (Indigenous Knowledge Systems) suggest that as an expression of post-apartheid cultural politics, there exists a strong centralist will to affirm and celebrate precolonial memory practices. Critically minded archive-oriented researchers might find little support at present, that is, for excluding from the syllabus *any* material emerging from fieldwork among oral communities.

Moreover - if all such materials, collected and formalized, are in principle eventually to be integrated into the OBE teaching of South African history, under the principle of the absolute parity of all memory practices, then assuredly in a province as notoriously divided as KwaZulu-Natal, the critical question moves directly from being historiographical - how to filter or ‘prove’ this material - to the downright political: At the level of regions, strongly authoritarian traditions tend to commandeer conflicting testimonies into a quasi-‘official’ story. After all, as one writer on southern African chieftaincy has found concerning its ‘complex rivalries, contesting authorities, and centrifugal processes’:

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[1]I hope to show below that the subject of this paper, the Dingiswayo-Mthethwa history of KwaZulu-Natal, while it might appear a case in point here, is in fact an exception to ‘familism’ that allows the paper’s affirmative conclusion. Only a single oral record from this marginalized senior lineage of the Mthethwa ever entered a colonial archive (Mashwili, in James Stuart), pointing up the strangely telling paradox that though white writers have consistently idealized Dingiswayo, their Mthethwa history informants have invariably been few, and members of upstart junior lineages at that. Carolyn Hamilton has called for further and more detailed research into the background of informants and the history of these traditions (see Hamilton: 105, 107-9).

> "there is deep historical precedent for consensualizing discourses in the local political tradition and its forms of cultural memory... To caulk the seams and provide ballast for the emerging chiefly ship of state, it was necessary to lend ultimate and publicly unquestioned authority to the 'official stories' of chiefs and their designated councillors and spokesmen" (Coplan 139).

This imperative has now moved to the level of the post-colonial national state while persisting at both the chiefly and 'paramount' levels where it arose. In short, is an ethnoscape like Reconciliation-era South Africa politically ready for such 'total reassessment of history' (Panel Report p11) - given that 'nation' (ethnic as well as supra-ethnic) is only imagined community, from which dissent will break out routinely in a province with a history as turbulent as KwaZulu-Natal's.

Might 'oral history', therefore, defined in its broadest sense, in short order come to be perceived by the new state as too potentially subversive of its imagining project, since at both local and regional level, the authority of, say, the Struggle or Shaka Zulu narratives comes up for interrogation and 'undermining'? As a result of this, might the rich outcomes of the currently prescribed democratic inclusivity become an embarrassment, and in due course inadmissible, so that syllabus designers are left rote-performing only the *principle* of diversity of sources, while ignoring the labours of ethnographers and historians?

This paper tests this question using interview material arising from our engagement[2] with one prominent dissenting constituency - KwaZulu-Natal's leading *inyanga* the doctor-diviner Zizwezonke Mthethwa ('Khekhekhe'), great-great-grandson of Dingiswayo, whose career/ calling launched in southern Zululand around 1950, to become today's widely-consulted diagnostic practice, training centre and dispensary half an hour's drive above Mandeni. Born 1919, he is now 83 years old, but works a six-day week, and every February opens his home for a spectacular commemoration of his ancestors. Such is Khekhekhe's reputation that his event has become an annual staple of cultural reportage in the black popular press, as well as a reliable fixture on the province's 'cultural tourism' calendar, for which journalists, TV crews & small groups of foreign visitors are taken up by Eshowe-based tour operators to witness the 'snake sangoma' perform, in the exotic atmosphere of an African doctor-diviner's 'great place'[3].

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[2]Ethekwini Heritage Department Local History Museums in collaboration with the TropenMuseum Amsterdam, to exhibit three generations in nine South African families and their histories over two centuries. The exhibition opens in Amsterdam in October 2002; a catalogue is in press.

[3]In a recent *Sowetan Sunday World* article (3 March 2002, p10) titled 'Mamba Power', Khekhekhe is reported as saying "I see no problem with allowing visitors to participate, as long as it doesn't become a circus act just for tourists".

Dingiswayo's great-great-grandson and the truncation of ethical monarchy

Khekhekhe's early divination calling turned into a mission (as we shall hear) sometime in the 1940s, when he began uncoiling his serpents for crowds of work-seekers on the verandah of the Durban site museum where I work - quite the (culturally unprecedented phenomenon of) 'snake diviner'[4] (see photo). Today at his *isikhumbuzo* ancestor remembrance ceremony the serpents are centrepiece, their heads held nonchalantly between his teeth, and it becomes clear in due course that they are central metaphor (autochthony) in the drama that Khekhekhe has scripted, and that he performs toward a very solemn end: On the face of it a challenge to the textbook version of one of Africa's best-known and most mythologized regional histories, at another, deeper level it is something more in the nature of a 'civilizational talkback'.

Over several interviews Khekhekhe will give a history of his area - Ngudwini - that moves swiftly to embrace the whole KwaZulu-Natal region, in what amounts to not only a major dissension from the conventional narrative of Zulu history, but a radical traditionalist critique of postcolonial African modernity itself - of the fallout from the Christian mission, current political leadership and public morality, and the developmentalist anarchy being induced endemically in the sub-Saharan world and elsewhere 'by remote control'. His society, Khekhekhe seems fully aware, is among the hundreds that James Fernandez characterises as "living disadvantageously along the expanding fire front of the Western political-industrial-commercial imperium, first in the dependency of the colonial order and then in the dependencies of the post-colonial third-world)first-world order" (25).

It may seem borderline seditious therefore that Khekhekhe conducts his commemoration at the precise time of the Zulu monarch holding his First Fruits festival. But given the sheer scale of disputed succession in KwaZulu-Natal's institutionalized fissiparous chieftaincy, charges that mystical or divine right has been violated by the reigning dynasty are probably not uncommon or unduly disturbing. And after all, the prerogative of convening this regionally unifying ceremony, which has symbolized the Zulu power since the time of Shaka, before 1818 (his accession) did rest with Khekhekhe's own descent-group and lineage - specifically with its great luminary, his great-great-grandfather Dingiswayo. Nonetheless the real 'provocation' here remains one of constructing out of early white writers' accounts a quasi-mythical 'good king' to the

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[4]Though enough to stir some skepticism in the ethnographically informed, the fact that snake-handling finds no mention in the colonial or later ethnography is unlikely to bother spectators at Gilubuhle. When asked about it Khekhekhe himself - its single exponent in KwaZulu-Natal - grows very opaque:

> "I started handling snakes from age 17 or 18; they can't harm me because they are part of me. If you do things according to the laws of nature, you can eat poison and handle snakes and still survive. I always tell people that what gives me powers to handle poisonous snakes and to heal sick people is the power of my god, Mvelinqangi" [the Zulu 'First Cause'] (26 May 01).

bloodstained tyrant of his successor - the statutory national founder, Shaka Zulu[5].

Briefly, Dingiswayo's story has been presented by these writers as follows: Many years after dispatching most of his older sons for challenging his chiefship, Jobe of the Mthethwa - paramount of KwaZulu-Natal's middle coastland chiefdoms - chose as his heir a son from a junior house. Years later one of the elder sons who escaped returned from exile on horseback, with a gun, and reclaimed his right. Legitimacy was restored, but this returnee Dingiswayo, having over a short decade become unifier of the region, himself fell victim to intensifying power struggles for regional supremacy: His victories had united into a form of confederacy the various small hunting-trading chiefdoms of the seaboard, in order to better withstand and manage an increasing pressure of change as European trade began to impinge on a lately closed world. But his eclipse was inevitable, from a failure to develop sophisticated enough structures and institutions for a tightly-knit state - in particular, the ideological forms of integration which subsequently characterized the Zulu state (Hamilton: 137, 105).

Dingiswayo's overthrow involved his death, and - importantly for Khekhekhe's critique - one account makes this the result of a 'great betrayal' by a Shaka whom Dingiswayo had only recently elevated to the Zulu chieftaincy: In Dingiswayo's hour of greatest battle need, Shaka was appointed to rendezvous, but in a cynical manoeuvre deliberately withheld his force, with the result that Dingiswayo was captured and put to death. Historians now consider this account to be a fabrication by Henry Fynn, for ulterior motives (a Cape traders' lobby requisitioned a pretext for British occupation, producing Shaka-the-monster in Fynn's tracts); but, given what Shaka then proceeded to do - transfer the Mthethwa paramountcy to a junior lineage - it seems obvious why Khekhekhe would prefer this 'betrayal' account of the demise of Dingiswayo to the other (also Fynn's), which merely has him overcome in battle (Wylie: 130n2). Though he does not mention it directly in interview, certainly Khekhekhe cannot have remained unaware of this serviceable version, for it presents an opportunity for subversion of the image of a leader whom may, after all, legitimately be criticized as also responsible for allowing the whites in: "When the whites appeared he did not kill them, but instead brought them into the country" (26 May)[6]. It

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[5]Khekhekhe was not questioned on his sources, whether he has read much, or draws purely on oral traditions. In interview he will call to witness worn personal copies of English-language books on Zulu history that attest the illustrious ancestor's role and textbook status, but it seems likely that if anything he will have drawn on secondary Zulu-language histories that essentially reproduce the Dingiswayo of the early white writers. Academic research on the wider global-historical dynamics that preceded Shaka's rise began only in the 1970s.

[6] Khekhekhe's implicit construction of Shaka places a quite different spin on William Worger's observation that 'his illegitimacy forms, and becomes an emblem of, the man' (:147). However rather than directly demonizing Shaka, a politic Khekhekhe simply appropriates him for the Mthethwa: "As far as I am concerned Dingane [Shaka's successor] was the first Zulu king (because he) had no connection with the Mthethwa. Shaka ruled on behalf of Dingiswayo. In fact we still regard Shaka as Mthethwa because the Zulu, Elangeni and Qwabe never helped him. It was the Mthethwa who raised him to be a strong man. He is only Zulu because his biological

seems likely that Khekhekhe may extrapolate from this unquestionable blameworthiness - whether the outcome of naivete, dullness or avarice - exactly the backstab described by Fynn: betrayal of his noble patron and mentor to the common enemy. Such duplicity is consistent with a character constructed as lacking in exactly the virtues - *honest dealing*, and *foresight/ future sight* - that are foregrounded in the myth of Dingiswayo that Khekhekhe then elaborates.

Dingiswayo represents the forces of right (or, civilization, *ubulunga*), for which this primal deed of treachery and usurpation constitutes the crushing blow from which they have yet to recover: Down to the present, all has been conflict and decline for the indigenous people of the region that Dingiswayo had so presciently and ably unified (as risen and justified priest-king), in preparation for just the colonial onslaught and civil strife it must now endure, under dynastic leadership that suffers fatal flaws from the taint of the founder's prototypic perfidy. The celebrated Shaka, therefore, is in truth where the rot begins for KwaZulu-Natal, whose history of endemic conflict and violence may be traced to this moment of a disastrous loss of integrity - *ubuhle* ('the good/ beautiful') - in an explosive moral rupture with the original/ pre-19thcentury order represented by Dingiswayo and the Mthethwa[7].

Khekhekhe has given his Ngudwini establishment the significant name Gilubuhle - 'Attempt the good'- to position himself beyond the status of simply the legitimate Mthethwa heir; that is, as custodian of an ancient contract and political ethic all but forgotten in a world gone badly wrong. The province's present condition of social anomie is traceable to the seismic historical fault-line that appears with Shaka's overthrow of Dingiswayo, marking a fateful divorce between spirit & power - between shamanistic or prophetic foresight, such as Khekhekhe claims his renowned forebear possessed ("It was important among the Mthethwa that in order to be king you must be *isangoma*, a prophet of the nation"), and worldly rule, which Dingiswayo accordingly exercised so wisely as unifier. Today we see only pretenders, impostors and usurpers. All Africa's present ailments are attributable to this estrangement between politics and religion, with the senior Mthethwa house (henceforward here, the Dingiswayo-Mthethwa) alone immune - indeed, for having been its first casualties.

Rebellions & conversions: two faces of adversity

While Shaka's treason is thus Khekhekhe's point of departure in his inversion of the conventional regional history, his total critique gains full coherence only when he articulates the subsequent fate of his lineage. And the region's harrowing history may indeed be read in small in the fortunes of the Dingiswayo-Mthethwa: From losing the hereditary descent-group leadership

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father was Zulu. In fact the person he referred to as father was Dingiswayo, and not Senzangakhona" (8 May).

[7]Khekhekhe's claim of Mthethwa aboriginality is heard clearly in a mention of "connections with the Bushmen who came from the south" (26 May 01).

to an upstart junior lineage, they proceed to two further traumas - both in encounter with the colonial power.

With Zulu appointees ruling in the northerly Mthethwa heartland between the Mfolozi rivers, the refuge of Dingiswayo's house becomes the southernmost reaches of their old confederacy lands abutting the Thukela. Khekhekhe's Gilubuhle is located just north over the river from the area once ruled by his grand-uncle Mashwili, Dingiswayo's grandson - at least until the Wolseley settlement elevated an exiled Zulu prince over him. No doubt this is partly what drives Mashwili to lead the stiffest resistance of the whole second phase of the 1906 uprising which loses him his life along with hundreds of his men. Khekhekhe points out with satisfaction that "the Mthethwa-Shangane people [the upstart lineage] were on the side of the colonial authorities - just like some of Mpande's children. The people who fought were Mthethwa, Qwabe, Zondi, Magwaza and many others" (26 May)[8].

The Mashwili story - easily corroborated from written sources - makes for compelling evidence of Dingiswayo-Mthethwa mettle and leadership prowess: while the Zulu royal house, mired in conflict, was unable to provide anti-colonial leadership (with the exception of the exiled chiefs Ndlovu kaThimuni and Ngobizembe), the rightful heirs of the regional paramountcy showed the meaning of resistance fortitude and self-sacrifice.

But the Dingiswayo-Mthethwa were to suffer a second reverse, worse in some ways than 1906 for transpiring 'within the gate':- Following Mashwili's beheading, the chiefship passed to Khekhekhe's grandfather, who soon died, leaving it to his son, Khekhekhe's father,

> "a very irresponsible person. He was influenced by the Lutherans who were converting the Mthethwa here at Oyengweni. Being Christian and 'modernised', he refused to succeed, and that is how we lost chiefship of this area. He was not interested in history, had only one wife, abandoned all Mthethwa traditions and customs, and worked as a domestic servant for white people.
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> "I grew up in that environment. However, the spirit inside me was too strong and I dreamt of my ancestors urging me to salvage what was left of the Mthethwa. The Lutherans saw me as possessed by a demon. I was getting sick every time I went to church. My parents also did not like to see me changing to old ways of life. I began my strong communication with my ancestors at the age of 18. I respected my ancestors and followed what they were saying. I then went through the training as a sangoma. I never looked back after that although my parents still hated me for abandoning Christianity and

[8] Although Khekhekhe did not mention it to us, he is no doubt aware that during the civil war of the 1880s, the same usurper lineage raised up by Shaka - the Mthethwa-Shangane - joined not with Shaka's descendants (the Usuthu), but with the challenging collateral house (the Mandlakazi) (Hamilton: 109).

> reverting to what they called a heathen life. What I can tell you is that all those who turned to Christianity and joined the Lutherans did not live long, for abandoning African ways". (8 May)

This rejection is informed by Khekhekhe's quest to restore to his people the recollection of their pre-colonization *status quo ante* - their distinctive humanity and its unique 'rightness', or, civilization (*ubulunga*). Such restoration, or revitalizing discourse, impacts not merely his own lineage, nor only the Mthethwa descent, but local senses of wellbeing throughout the northern southeast seaboard African peoples rallied in the modern 'Zulu' nation - by (not Shaka but) Dingiswayo...

Certainly here the traditionalist/ 'retraditionalizer' like Khekhekhe confronts the foremost difficulty inherent in any reckoning with a violent past: the fact of the modern present's overarching moral frame being formally Christian[9]. As suggested, he seems to counterpose a precolonial African frame that is largely *tabula rasa*, on which can be inscribed an idealized Dingiswayo in manichaean opposition to tyrant Shaka - much as the early white writers had done, and similarly again, for reasons arising in the present's exigencies[10]. As Hobsbawn & Ranger famously showed, we represent the past in images that are useful to us in the present, and reflect our bias and current concerns (1-14, 263-307); Khekhekhe's work Coplan would call 'popular history' - "the performative reconstruction of the past in light of the valuations, instrumentalities, and identifications of the present" (126). It is also 'tradition', which is "history as drama, evaluation, and judgement: history with the metaphysics included" (Vail & White - in Coplan 137).

The present for Khekhekhe is beleaguered under a barrage of unprecedented social maladies that have 'killed our nation': "There are many evil things happening: cholera, rabies, malaria, HIV/Aids" - the latter "a curse, not a disease"; urban dwellers "are weak and grow old quickly" due to bad diet; children are sent to school only to return "with painted mouths and

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[9]Khekhekhe clearly belongs in the first of the two categories of revitalizer mentioned by Fernandez (24): the one reinvigorating "a spiritual world lost or abandoned during colonial and post-colonial hegemonies, (the other renewing) the discovery and entry into the new spiritual world trumpeted but inhibited by the double-bind of missionary evangelization". But about his grievances hangs a biblical pall heavily inflected with protestant sulfur ("Jehovah is angry with us").

[10]This paper has of course taken a Halbwachsian position on the nature of oral memory - i.e. memory is not retrieved out of the experience of our past, but rather is reconstituted by the social groups in which we presently participate ('We think memory is about reminiscence, in fact it is about social power'). In particular our material illustrates well the contention that 'As venerable traditions weaken, the desire to incorporate the values they idealize into the present grows stronger' (Hutton: 19).

fingernails", no longer wanting to work the soil (26 May)[11]. And he makes clear the revulsion he felt when, during KwaZulu-Natal's low-intensity civil war in the late-1980s, the NNA (National Nyangas Association) became a coven, he claims, that used human body parts for the war medicines they enriched themselves selling. And beneath all, of course, there simmers the unavoidable issue of white alienation of the land: "If you take something by force it's bound to create complications in the future. No negotiations took place when the land was taken. The descendants of the dispossessed are angry, and that's why they also want to use force to get their land back" (3 November).

From this we may extrapolate Khekhekhe's vision of postcolonial Africa, and much of the wider world, as going to the dogs of war, with already the hell-hounds of unbridled commerce from a triumphant capitalism glutting on the near-corpses of small southern civilizations once healthy, virtuous and happy. However the grand malady, of which these are only late symptoms, lies within: At the heart of the heroic narrative of southern Africa's best-known instance of resistance to colonization - the Zulu kingdom - lurk two dark and obscured facts: - a failure of leadership arising from the divorce between religion and politics (or, spirit and power), amounting to a *betrayal* of an original precolonial African charter for rule; and, repeated treasons against the anticolonial cause (collaborations, conversions to the foreign faith).

The critical issue is one of legitimacy/ right, and its corollary - the restoration of what was usurped: Speaking of the current national impasse over the powers of traditional leaders, Khekhekhe says "Even this issue of chiefs is part of evil things. People without powers are called *amakhosi.* They do not have the power of dreaming. They don't have enlightenment from God" (26 May).

Certainly at one level Khekhekhe's censure and his call to revitalization may be read straightforwardly, as - big man's personal project to enunciate an imagined historical right to genealogical eminence. The enormity of its claims will surely have many researchers suspecting some entrepreneurialistic fabrication here, in the pursuit of that pedigree and influence unachievable by talent or wealth. However while Khekhekhe apparently patently builds on the myth of 'good king Dingiswayo' to further his own claims to chiefship, perhaps at another level he may be understood as somewhat otherwise preoccupied - with accounting for massive damage and loss, in an apologetics that calls for unflinching interrogation of the sorry record of power struggle and infighting when invaders stood at the very gate; and, for speaking truth to illicit power in the voice of a legitimacy that is impeccable for coming directly out of an experience of profound status dispossession. In this he anticipates by a half-century the growing attention in the

[11]"Children are being taught to be work-seekers and ask for jobs from white people. When I was growing up things were different because cultivation was important at home. There was no hunger. The soil was our employer. The land was the key".

post-apartheid history academy to the subject of collaboration.

To us Khekhekhe seems to be doing much more than merely seeking advantageous self-positioning, or restoration to the family name of its imagined dues: Unsparing scrutiny of the nation's moral record is precondition of an exorcism of the national memory's fixation on defeat and eclipse. From a fulcrum outside the African/white (Zulu/British) polarization, but one that nonetheless is patriotically Afrocentric, Khekhekhe challenges both official histories - the liberal-progressivist ('the Western advent began significant history'), and the African nationalist ('Shaka our great founder-hero'). Both are opposed, exposed and overturned by his iteration of the Dingiswayo myth (parable?), of an enlightened and visionary prophet-king representing an endogenous integrity long predating colonization.

To be sure Dingiswayo's praises (Gunner & Gwala: 158-161; Cope, *Izibongo*: 122-27) reflect a record that is far from unstained ("Trail-blazer, like the vulture along the path; he is red, with the blood of men")[12]; indeed as Hamilton says, there are grounds for believing that Dingiswayo had Shaka's father murdered (132; also 129), and to erase this evidence from the portrait of Dingiswayo would be to mimic Ballard's project of lionizing Shaka by making him assume Zulu chiefship as his birthright, rather than by murder (1988: 15-16). But according to the latest consensus of historians, conflict in the region was increasing for a half-century before the early 19thcentury, and since then the principal victim of the irruption of pervasive megalomania and naked realpolitik - the first sacrifice to it, one might say - has been Khekhekhe's house. His vantage should therefore probably be accepted as privileged inasmuch as it is this epoch-making injustice that compels him, as direct descendant of the last representative of ethical monarchy, to raise the several weighty and chastening themes that do preoccupy other major descent-groups, but remain unaddressed by them, due to their lesser historical eminence: Loyalty to nation / the anti-colonial struggle; historical accountability for its betrayal; and, the resulting moral turmoil of a decadent and disapproved present, explained as *rooted in this moral history*, with consistent demonstrable effects over two centuries. (The fact that treasonable falling-away occurred within his own lineage (his father's conversion by Lutherans) lends added edge to his self-arrogation with the duty of a 'fundamentalist' critique).

Concluding: To teach the historical talkback

Our finding from the (very partial) recording of the Dingiswayo-Mthethwa lineage history has been that the claims of 'big men' in their invented 'resistance oratures', while at first blush they appear purely self-promotive, may upon analysis be understood as offering cogent moral

[12]Evidence of the Zulu view of the Mthethwa as morally tainted appears in evidence from a veteran of Dingane's Kokoti regiment: when it went to collect Mnkabayi's pots after her death, Mthethwa were excluded "on the grounds that Shaka had learned the evil pursuit of killing people from them" (James Stuart Archive 5:374).

critiques of power in history, with keen relevance for today's pedagogical task of inculcating democratic values. Khekhekhe represents a talkback to, a censure of, unbalanced power that should as a matter of urgency inform all history teaching in the new democracy. If such critiques are at root religious, then what James Fernandez says of the truly creative leaders of African religious movements is relevant here too: their challenge was the discredited conventions - colonial/postcolonial *and* traditional - associated with social disorganization and culture denial or loss (25). The urgent recurring human need to escape the deadening hand of convention makes the Dingiswayo-Mthethwa history seem essential learning for a democracy committed to the principle of the desirability of having multiple versions of historical truth, and an idea that African oral genres encode an alterna/tiv/e historiography.

'Revitalizing discourse' (Fernandez 24) such as Khekhekhe's may also carry important and verifiable additions to historical fact and event, which it only lightly 'obscures' by its generic exuberance. Coplan cites Robert Harms on how historians who work with oral traditions

> have recognized that many were symbolic statements of political and social ideology, but have held that their symbolic formulation does not preclude their basis in historical events. Indeed, scholars have argued that, if the symbols and ideologies were themselves seen as historical phenomena, the oral traditions could be used to uncover aspects of social and intellectual history (135-6).

So - rhetorical extravagance, for instance, should not be grounds for parenthesizing the teaching of contemporary oral history derived from the critical/ oppositional discourse and diatribe of modern traditionalist historians, and self-made bardic bricoleurs like Khekhekhe. Pedagogy will need to remind the learner that the 'delivery style' of a history, its *modus declarandi*, is always a matter of cultural register and episteme. These demand respect, even as the mediatocracy continuously re-validates the qualities of difference within a 'world history' paradigm that is nonetheless, and remains, strongly Eurocentred and logocentric.

If contemporary oral history is to be taught in the secondary school syllabus, whose version is to receive endorsement where there is contestation? By what process decide this, employing whose epistemological traditions and memory systems? In many cases, sheer numbers of rival versions may make a given history unfeasibly complex and confusing to learners. And where the established written record is challenged or rejected outright, the researcher's problem of how to evaluate the claims of contending versions will be mirrored in students' inevitable discovery of the numerous inevitable conflicts between parallel but equally privileged accounts. The need for a contextualizing master narrative may be keenly felt here, but this is surely the moment of necessary decentring or destabilization of traditional ethnocentred narrative - 'the Zulu, the Boers' - by way of the postmodern idea of history as open book.

In this way secondary students can be posed the central questions outright - What is the nature of any felt need to 'reconcile' contending claims - for example those that will inevitably arise within the current ferment of descent groups recovering memory and inscribing their official histories[13]? And ultimately - Is a master-narrative necessary, or even healthy, for democratic culture? Pupils need not to be apprised too late of Andre Brink's neat formulation, "the representations of history repeat, in almost every detail, the processes of fiction". For KZN, Dan Wylie's tilt at the sources for the white story of Shaka Zulu (2000) has divested the country's most florid written record of its scarlet mask, to show well enough how the written record can be as suspect as any oral. It should become a classroom commonplace before Senior Phase that much orthodox history too is demonstrably 'factitious', and primary sources themselves are no oracles - no longer sacrosanct.

With a process of grassroots-history recovery / production going on apace in KwaZulu-Natal now, these preliminaries have become matters of some urgency: Learners need to grasp early on that history *is* 'made', though not by great men, events, movements or epidemics, but by records; and then also that in re/construction/ invention of tradition we can recognise our "pervasive human capacity to escape and revitalize convention" (Fernandez). This is a liberatory teaching about human agency and creativity, about how newness is always entering the world - whether by *discovery* (largely the domain of science) or *invention*, also the realm of the arts, not least the verbal - ritual, theatre, history - where it is as essential as rote repetition in the healthy perpetuation of cultural traditions (Rosaldo *et al* 1993).

As per the Panel Report's recommendation, the first step toward this educational end - affirmation of the universality of human inventiveness - by means of the history syllabus at Senior Phase, is indeed formal recognition of the numerous contemporary lineage and descent group oral histories, in the form of their recording and textual incorporation into narratives of

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[13]This ferment is at present strongly grassroots /non-literate, with larger families - Khumalo, Ntuli - concerting their efforts to 'recover'/ institute family records - that is, reconcile into a unitary narrative the stories of the branches of their various sibs, which over the 20th century's rupture with the land, have often become so separated and distanced as to be barely mutually recognisant. Literate churchmen are collaborating with, and drawing on, the work of these oral groups; for example, one Dean Mthethwa is reported to be writing up the history of Empangeni area's Mthethwa-Shangane (the 'upstart lineage').

This process can be set in motion by some matter of urgency requiring the presence and participation of the 'whole family' in order to have its mystical effect: Usually it is the healing of some lineage trauma to which is attributed present persistent ill-fortune or sudden affliction. Groups whose leading houses have affiliation to cultural nationalist independent churches such as Shembe's are bringing their 'cases' before the healer-prophet. For example, on 28/1/2001 at Shembe's citadel Ebuhleni, members of the Khumalo descent had put up a large tent to confer with a view to approaching Shembe for advice on what Church member Fano Khumalo told me about the next day: that members of many Khumalo lineages are all experiencing the same dream, in which their famous forebear the Ndebele founder Mzilikazi warns them of 'confusion of names' (unwitting violation of the exogamy rule).

nation. If educators have already in their classroom practice begun advocating the principle of 'the democracy-building properties of multivocality', then professional historical research needs to grasp the many nettles that spring from a fertile soil, and sensitize itself anew to the phenomenon it has designated (and may have depreciated as) 'invented tradition'. Documentation of *umlando* narrations by eminent professing traditionalists and bricoleurs cannot be left out of local oral history research projects[14].

Given the largely fragmentary and uneven colonial archive of oral history, we might argue that only through a combination of its resources with those coming from 'insider voices' will formal history pedagogy be able to fruitfully engage with the envisioned IKS component in national education, and thereby succeed in holding the attention of pupils who, having internalized 'family history' in their pre-school home environment, might otherwise find in their textbooks - in view of the evident wide perspectival discrepancies - an alienatingly colonialist (or elite-nationalist) and therefore implausible version of events.

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[14]As preliminary to the resulting new inclusive histories entering the syllabus, the new history curriculum due in January 2003 could integrate modules on 'Oral and written history: similarities and differences', that present impartially the character, merits and weaknesses of each. Class exercises could be set in comprehension and comparison of sample accounts in the respective modes.
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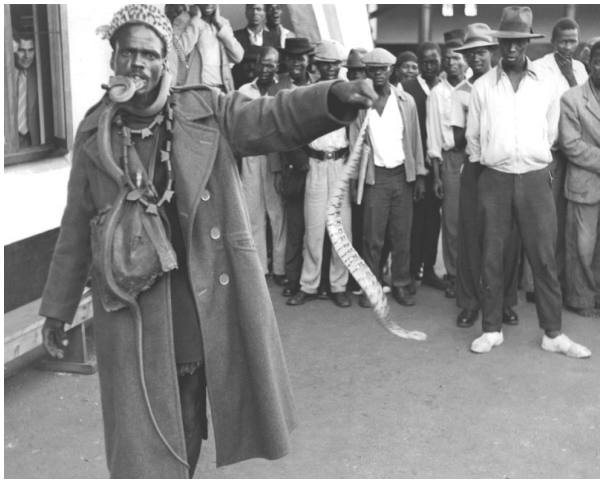

Khekhekhe at KwaMuhle, 1950s (pic. SB Bourquin, Local History Museums collection)