

Controlling the Past in the Museums of Natal and KwaZulu*

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History and Ideology

The basic premise of this paper is that history is not a set of facts about the past but, rather, a set of ideas about the past held in the present. If this is a truism, it is not one that is widely reflected in the discourse and practice of professional historians, and for that reason it is worth elaborating. Ideas about history are based on 'evidence', whether in the form of written documents, recorded oral evidence, or archaeological remains, which survives from the past, but they derive their particular form very much from the set of ideas which the producer of history, i.e. the historian or the archaeologist, carries in his or her mind in the present. These ideas in turn are to a large extent the product of the society in which the historian lives and operates, and, more particularly, of the social conflicts within that society.

At one level, the historian's ways of 'knowing the past' are, like

** This article is based on a paper with the same title which was presented to the Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal, University of Natal, Durban, January 1988.*

other forms of knowledge, shaped by the nature of the social and political milieu within which they are developed. At another level, the past itself is the subject of special attention on the part of social groups engaged in the struggle to impose domination on, or resist domination by, other groups. Every social group finds part of its identity in the shared experience, or, more accurately, the perceived shared experience, of its members. In addition, every social group seeks to legitimize its policies and practices in the present by finding precedent for them in the past. History becomes for each group a reference point in the process of trying to establish internal cohesion, of identifying opposing groups, and of finding moral justification for its actions. In attempting to impose or to resist domination, groups will seek to project their own collectively held views of the past as credible, and those of their opponents as discreditable. History is always a site of struggle between dominant and dominated groups, and producers of history are always in a sense producers of ideas with political import.

Contending groups will seek to 'fix' their views of the past through the media of print, of the spoken word, and of visual imagery. In contemporary societies, museums, both public and private, play an important role in providing secular temples where the dominant group's, or 'official', version of the past can be visually symbolized in a standardized and simplified way in the form of displays intended for popular consumption.¹ The museum is not, and cannot be, what museum personnel often claim it to be, an ideologically neutral institution given simply to 'informative' displays. In a pointed, if reductionist, formulation, Meltzer has argued that public museums constitute what Althusser has called ideological state apparatuses. These 'are identified as state institutions by their function; all serve the maintenance and reproduction of the relations of production. All represent the ruling class ideology, and are unified by political class identity'².

As a functionalist statement this effectively reinforces the view, one which receives very little attention in the museological literature, that the social role of museums needs to be analyzed in terms of a perspective which takes relations of power into account. But this kind of formulation does not provide space for the analysis of the historical forces which produce museums in the first place, and which shape the nature of museum policies and practices. It does not allow for the notion that museums may not unproblematically 'represent the ruling class ideology', and that their policies and

practices are the product of historically situated political struggles in the course of which the ideas of the dominant group come into conflict with those of subordinate groups. This leads us into a brief excursus on what is meant by the notion of ideology.

Conventionally the term ideology is often used in a neutral sense to mean a system of political beliefs and assumptions. In non-marxist thinking, particular ideologies are often seen as 'belonging', in a way that is not usually spelt out, to whole eras or to whole societies. In some kinds of structuralist marxist thinking, ideologies are also conceptualized as characteristic of whole societies, in that they are seen as imposed uniformly by the dominant class on subordinate classes. Other strands of structuralist marxism make more of the contradictions that exist between different social classes, with different classes 'having' different and conflicting ideologies. But in this kind of thinking, too, particular ideologies are to a greater or lesser extent tied to particular social bases, in that they are seen as 'reflections' of class interests.

From a historian's perspective there is a major problem with notions of this kind. In conceiving of ideologies as 'systems' of ideas, they take as given the very ideas whose formation needs to be explained. Such notions are in their essence ahistorical, and thus of limited value in explaining the origins of ideologies, their functions at specific points in time, and changes in their content and functions. In ascribing particular ideologies to particular social groups, whether these are 'societies' or 'classes', they tend to present ideology as ready-made, and leave little space for the notion of ideology as historically created.

More useful in analyzing the nature and function of ideology are notions which focus on the processes involved in its production and reproduction. Of particular interest for our purposes is the approach to ideology articulated by J B Thompson.³ He explicitly eschews the 'neutral' notion of ideology as a system of ideas, and seeks to reformulate a critical conception which 'preserves the negative connotation which has been conveyed by the term throughout most of its history'.⁴ Ideology, as he sees it, has to do essentially with 'the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination'.⁵ Consequently one of the main tasks of a theory of ideology is 'to study the ways in which legitimacy is claimed for institutional arrangements which embody systematically asymmetrical relations of power ...'⁶

The strengths of this approach are that it is necessarily

grounded in historical analysis, and that it places concrete relations of power at the centre of its focus. 'The study of ideology,' Thompson writes, 'is inseparable from the socio-historical analysis of the forms of domination which meaning serves to sustain'.⁷ Ideology can thus be conceived of as a product of political processes rather than as a ready-made structure. In opposition to the notion of ideology, Thompson seems to set the notion of discourse conducted in the name of reasoned discourse. Influenced, by his own account, by Habermas, he sees reason as deriving not from 'the authority bestowed by an institution' but from discourse as it would be if conducted in conditions which included 'the suspension of systematically asymmetrical relations of power'⁸ — in other words, from ideally democratic practice.

Thompson's concern is mainly with the relationship between ideology and language, for 'it is primarily within language that meaning is mobilized in the interests of particular individuals and groups'.⁹ But it seems to us that his approach can usefully be applied to symbols other than verbal and linguistic ones. In this paper we apply it to visual symbols, more specifically, to an analysis of the role played by the historical (and purportedly historical) displays to be found in the museums of Natal and KwaZulu in 'mobilizing meaning' to sustain relations of domination. Our specific aim is to reveal the ways in which these displays provide an ideological underpinning for the profoundly undemocratic regimes which dominate the two territories. Our argument is based on a survey of 28 public museums and monuments which we conducted in March-April 1987 (see Table 1).¹⁰ For reasons which will emerge as the discussion unfolds, the museums which fall under one or other public authority in white-dominated Natal on the one hand, and under the KwaZulu government on the other, reflect quite different facets of the region's past. They will therefore be considered separately.

History in the Museums of Natal

A glance at Table 1 will clearly indicate that by far the commonest aspect of history featured in displays in the museums of Natal is the history of European settlement in the region. With two exceptions, every museum which we visited features a display of some kind on settler history. In a substantial number of these the focus is exclusively on this history; in the remainder, settler history predominates in the amount of space and detail devoted to it.

Examination of the specific themes displayed reveals a clear

pattern. In most museums the emphasis is on the initial period of European settlement in each locality, from the mid-19th century onward. Maps, photographs and models record in varying degrees of detail the location, date of occupation, and occupants of the first farms and the first villages. Captions to objects surviving from the period of settlement record the vicissitudes endured by the first settlers. Many displays go on to record the consolidation of settler occupation and the march of 'progress' as seen by themselves and their descendants: the establishment of the magistracy and of the post office; the building of the farmers' hall; the arrival of the railway; the establishment of local government; the exhibition of produce and livestock at the Royal Show; the establishment of sports and recreational clubs. Then, in about the 1920s, with settler 'success' firmly achieved, history comes to an end. Of the period since, the displays say virtually nothing.

The 'absences' in these displays are as significant as the 'presences'. The most glaring is the virtually complete neglect of the history of African people, whether before or after the arrival of Europeans in Natal. In many museums there are no displays whatever to indicate that human history in the Natal region goes back over a million years before the establishment of European settlement. In those museums which do feature exhibits on the pre-European period, coverage is random, and usually completely uninformed by a sense of history. Exhibits often consist of jumbled, meagre and badly displayed collections of artefacts variously attributed to the 'Stone Age', or the 'Bushmen', sometimes with no indication as to date. These exhibits, together with those on the 'Zulus', which are virtually always undated (see below for further discussion), minimize the historical significance of the pre-European period. Several curators to whom we spoke had difficulty in understanding what we meant by 'precolonial' history. The pervasive idea that pre-European societies were 'static' is reinforced in two or three cases by the location of displays on 'Bushmen' and 'Zulus' alongside natural history exhibits.

Sufficient information exists on the pre-European period of Natal history to warrant the production of museum displays on at least five major themes. First, there is the evolution of the human species in southern Africa; second, the history of the gatherer-hunter communities which were the sole human occupants of Natal for more than ninety-nine per cent of its history; third, the content and social function of the rock paintings, commonly attributed to

San artists, which are to be found in great profusion in the foothills of the Drakensberg; fourth, the history of the African farming communities which progressively occupied most of Natal from AD200-300 onwards; and fifth, the history of the centralized states, the last and best known of which was the Zulu kingdom, which were emerging in the region from the late 18th century onwards. The history of 'Natal' and 'Zululand' have been inextricably linked since the 1820s, but there is very little in the museums of Natal (or, for that matter, of KwaZulu) to indicate this. Where 'Zulus' feature at all, it is usually in segregated ethnographic displays (see below) or, as in KwaZulu, in entirely separate museums.

Though the few displays that deal with the period of Boer settlement in the late 1830s and 1840s indicate that occupation of the land was contested with a 'Zulu' population, the many more that deal with the British settlement of the late 1840s and onwards entirely avoid the issue of who occupied the land before the arrival of European settlers. That the whole region had previously been in the possession of African communities does not feature. Similarly, in display after display purporting to cover the colonial period, the African people who formed the vast majority of the colony's population are invisible. Of the African farmers who produced much of the food staples consumed by the white settlers until late in the 19th century, and of the African workers through whose labours settler prosperity was largely built, there is virtually nothing. Nor, for that matter, is there anything significant on settler failures: white settlement is seen almost entirely as a success story.

What are the reasons for this overwhelming neglect of the history of African people? Many museum personnel would argue that it is because there is simply very little to exhibit in displays in the first place. In fact, for the precolonial period the range of surviving original objects is greater than is commonly thought. In any case, we would dispute the argument that exhibition themes have to be formulated round the collections of original objects which museums happen to hold. As we observed in the course of our survey, effective use has been made of maps, diagrams, models, photographs and reproductions in depicting colonial history. The same techniques could equally be used to convey information about the precolonial past.

The neglect of precolonial history in local museums is partly a function of the dearth of academic research that has been done on the period. But over the last dozen years or so a not inconsiderable

body of documentation and analysis has emerged on the various themes itemized above. That this information has not generally come to be reflected in museum displays is no doubt to some extent due to the inertia both of academics and of museum personnel. But far more important, in our view, is the influence, however subtly and unconsciously it makes itself felt, of the ideologies of the politically dominant group in Natal in the shaping of 'official' and public attitudes to the past, and hence of museum display policies and practices. Whatever the overt or immediate motives behind the mounting of displays, their primary ideological function is starkly clear. They register white settler occupation of land assumed to be empty of inhabitants. They serve to legitimise private ownership of that land by a small group of families. They serve to make the history of white settler communities synonymous with the history of 'progress', and thus to justify continued white domination of blacks. They shut out the history of an African 'peasant' class and of an African working class, and serve to deny the claims of African people in the present to more land and to a greater share in the products of their own labour.

In effect, the displays of history in the museums of Natal celebrate the rise of a white colonial landed gentry and, to a lesser extent, of a white colonial merchant class. With their dominance firmly established, the need for history comes to an end. To continue the story of the European settlers and their descendants after the 1920s would be to move into the period covered by living memory, when the control of the past exercised by the museums could be challenged by historical actors, black and white, whose remembered experience of the past might be sharply at odds with the kinds of experience recorded in the displays. To avoid this scenario, the simplest and most effective strategy for museum managements is to disregard the recent past altogether on the grounds that it is not 'history'.

If there is no room for African people in the colonial history of Natal, then there can be no recognition that the region has a precolonial history. To admit the existence of precolonial history is to admit the existence of precolonial African population, and to raise a host of uncomfortable questions about what happened to it in the colonial period. Better, then, to exclude African people from history altogether, and, since their existence can hardly be denied, push them off into separate ethnic rooms and into separate museums.

As can be seen from Table 1, there is a large number of 'Zulu

ethnic' displays in the museums of Natal. Many of them are well mounted, and interesting in their own right, but it cannot be over-emphasized that 'static' ethnological displays are not a substitute for displays of history. Such displays serve to block recognition of the fact that African people have a history at all, that blacks and whites have been indissolubly linked by history in this region for century and a half, and that these links have overwhelmingly been those of master and servant, boss and worker.

In addition, by presenting material culture in a fixed and standardized form, they block appreciation of two other concepts fundamental to an understanding of the region's history. First, that African communities in the past were not culturally and politically homogeneous entities, and that the notion of a unified 'Zulu culture' is to a large extent an invention of missionaries and ethnographers in the 19th century, and anthropologists and politicians in the 20th century. Second, that ethnic identities are not primordial immutable, but variables subject to change over time according to social and political circumstances. The ideas which inform modern-day ethnological displays derive, in the first place, from the British tradition of Africanist anthropology, which played an important ideological role in underpinning the divide-and-rule policies of colonial administrations; and in the second place, from the ideologies of ethnic separatism which have long been officially proclaimed in South Africa. They are not rooted in the history of the societies which they purport to represent.

History in the Museums of KwaZulu

Three museums, all of them in Ulundi, have so far been established by the KwaZulu government. These are the KwaZulu Cultural Museum, the Ondini Site Museum, and the Nodwengu Museum. The last-named was empty at the time of the survey. The displays in the other two cover a narrow range of themes, nearly all of them relating to the history and culture of the 'Zulu people' or their antecedents. The main displays are on the archaeology of the Iron Age, on aspects of the history of the 19th-century Zulu kingdom, with the emphasis on the history of the royal house, and on features of 'traditional Zulu' material culture. Notable absences from the exhibits are the role of white people—traders, missionaries, soldiers, officials—in Zulu history; the history of 'Zululand' since the destruction of the Zulu kingdom in the 1880s; and the historical experiences of Zulu common people.

Here too the ideological functions of the displays are clear. They operate firstly to assert the legitimacy of KwaZulu as a political entity, and secondly to assert the legitimacy of the present KwaZulu leadership. The first of these functions is performed mainly through displays which seek to portray the KwaZulu polity as the 'natural' successor state of the Zulu kingdom. This is done most explicitly in a display in the Ondini Site Museum entitled 'KwaZulu 1800-1983'. Eight maps illustrate the succession of changes in the boundaries of 'Zulu' territory, with only the barest amount of information to indicate the nature of the historical forces which made for those changes. Present-day KwaZulu, which forms the subject of the final map in the series, is thus seen as the lineal descendant of the Zulu kingdom. There is nothing to indicate that it is the offspring of apartheid and bantustan policy.

A similar legitimizing effect is produced in both museums by displays on Iron Age archaeology which implicitly link the history of KwaZulu to the distant past. The Iron Age display in the KwaZulu Cultural Museum forms part of a larger exhibit entitled 'Archaeology in KwaZulu', the implication being that the hotch-potch of territorial fragments which constitutes KwaZulu forms a natural archaeological and therefore historical unit.

The legitimacy of the current KwaZulu leadership is asserted in two ways. In the first place, the Zulu royal house is portrayed as deriving its authority unproblematically from its hereditary position rather than from the fiat of the South African state. The present king, Goodwill Zwelithini, is portrayed as the natural successor of a line of kings that goes back to Shaka in the early 19th century. There is nothing to indicate that after the overthrow of the Zulu monarchy by the British in 1879, successive 'kings' were not recognized as such by either the British imperial authorities, the Natal colonial state, or, after 1910, the South African state. That the kingship was eventually revived by the South African government in 1951 for its own political purposes does not feature in the displays. Nor, understandably, does the fact that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries large numbers of 'Zulu' people and their leaders repudiated the authority of the Zulu royal house. For the KwaZulu leadership it is obviously of the greatest importance that the king and the royal house should be seen, by Zulu people and by others, as deriving their authority from their Zulu heritage and not from powers devolved by the apartheid state.

In the second place, many displays have been mounted with the

prime aim of portraying the Chief Minister of KwaZulu, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as one of the 'natural' leaders of the 'Zulu people' by virtue of his close association with, and genealogical relationship to, the royal house. Numerous photographs conspicuously feature Buthelezi — and Buthelezi alone — in the company of the king at various ceremonies: the tenth anniversary of the king's coronation in 1981; a function to raise funds for the building of the Nodwengu Museum; the opening of this museum in 1983; the opening of the Ondini Site Museum on the same day.

Another exhibit of photographs depicts Buthelezi at the unveiling of the gravestone of Nobhiyana Madondo, a diviner of Shaka's time. In one photograph the inscription on the stone is shown. It reads:

A memorial to Nobhiyana Madondo, the celebrated diviner of King Shaka's days. This memorial was unveiled by the Honourable Prince Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu, President of Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe and Patron of the Bureau for Zulu Language and Culture, on 12 November 1983.

Buthelezi's concern to link himself closely to the royal house in the public mind is even more graphically revealed in the inscription on King Mpande's gravestone at Nodwengu. The money for the king's gravestone was obtained, readers are told, in a fund-raising drive led

by one of his descendants and great great grandson, Prince Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, the son of Princess Magogo S'bilile, the daughter of King Dinuzulu, the full sister to King Solomon, and her husband and Prime Minister of the Zulu during the reign of King Solomon, Mathole Buthelezi. This was constructed during the reign of King Mpande's heir and descendant, and successor, his Majesty King Zwelithini Mbongi Goodwill ka Bhekuzulu.

Historical symbols which at once proclaim Buthelezi's connections with Zulu royalty and assert his personality cult are also to be found at the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly, a monumental edifice on a rise overlooking Ulundi. On a wall inside the building is hung a diagrammatic representation of the genealogy of the royal house, with Buthelezi's name occupying the most prominent position. Outside the building stands a statue of Shaka which, the plaque in-

forms viewers, was opened by the king and commissioned by Chief Buthelezi.

In the light of the emphases in the displays, the significance of the absences identified above is revealed more clearly. The role of white people in the history of the Zulu kingdom must be minimized so that Zulu 'achievements' during its existence can be more easily romanticized and glorified. The civil wars of the 1880s, and the subsequent quarrels between the Zulu royal house and other important families, including the Buthelezi, clearly need to be glossed over if the notion of a historical Zulu unity is to be proclaimed effectively by the KwaZulu leadership. And if the common people, now and in the past, are to be shown as loyal supporters of the royal house, then their historical experiences must be played right down. Otherwise the attractions exerted over the years by alternative focuses of loyalty would have to be mentioned: the anti-royalist chiefs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the ICU in the 1920s; the ANC in the 1950s; the UDF and COSATU in the 1980s.

So far as the common people are allowed to feature in the displays, it is implicitly as the makers and bearers of 'traditional Zulu culture', which gets a showing in both museums. But even in this sphere they are required to know their place. Thus the caption to a diagram of a 'typical' Zulu homestead in the Ondini Site Museum reads, 'In the home each member of the family understands where all the different activities take place and what their own position is in these activities'. In this kind of timeless ethnographic reading there is no room for notions of struggles of juniors against seniors, of women against men, of younger people against older: the emphasis is on social discipline and order. As in the displays in the museums of Natal, the underclasses are largely invisible: where they are allowed to emerge they are kept firmly in line.

The Displays in Historical Context

In that they clearly serve to sustain relations of domination, the displays discussed in this paper can be said to perform an ideological function. At one level of analysis they could be said to 'reflect' the interests of the politically dominant groups in Natal and KwaZulu. But this kind of structural analysis does not specify the historical nature of the functions which the displays perform. It says nothing about the nature of the processes which have produced the displays, and for that matter, the museums themselves, at specific moments in time in order to meet specific ideological needs. In this final sec-

tion of the paper we argue that the production of most of the displays in the museums in Natal and KwaZulu needs to be understood against the background of recent political developments in the region.

First, the museums in Natal. When the dates at which the exhibits were mounted are considered, a clear pattern emerges. Displays produced before the mid-1970s often consist of collections of colonial and ethnographic bric-a-brac, haphazardly organized and poorly displayed. The messages which they are intended to convey are muddled by the sheer detail of the exhibition. By contrast, displays produced since the mid-1970s are technically much more sophisticated. They are simpler, less cluttered, often imaginative in conception, and well mounted. As a result their messages come across much more clearly and effectively.

These differences can be attributed largely to the establishment of the Natal Provincial Museum Service in 1973. Ostensibly it was set up to provide financial and technical aid to existing local museums, to assist in establishing new ones, and to co-ordinate administration and policy making.¹¹ But a glance at contemporary political developments suggests a more profound explanation as to why the service was established at that time, and provides a clearer understanding of the nature of the forces which have shaped public museum policy in Natal over the last fifteen years.

The critical political developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we would argue, hinged round the South African government's moves to implement its bantustan policies more actively. Of central importance for the dynamics of public affairs in Natal was the establishment of the Zulu Territorial Authority (ZTA) in 1970, and of KwaZulu in 1972. Quite suddenly the political scene in Natal was transformed, with an aggressive, self-proclaimed Zulu ethnic leadership beginning to challenge in some spheres the dominance exercised in Natal politics by English-speaking settler descendants organized into the by-then-otiose United Party. For the first time since the outbreak of popular resistance to apartheid in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the political complacency of white Natal was shaken.

An issue that became of particular sensitivity in the early 1970s was that of land. The South African government was committed to making more land available to the bantustans, and also, in the case of KwaZulu, to consolidating its numerous bits and pieces of territory into administratively more manageable blocks.¹² Organized

white agriculture in Natal was firmly opposed to consolidation in so far as it meant giving up productive white-owned farming land to KwaZulu.¹³ In 1970 the issue became yet further charged when, in his inaugural speech as Chief Executive Officer of the ZTA, Chief Buthelezi demanded more land for the 'Zulu nation' from the South African government.¹⁴ By 1972 the Transkei was also laying claim to white-owned land in East Griqualand on the southern borders of Natal.¹⁵ The issue came to a head in mid-1972, when the South African government released its draft plans for the consolidation of KwaZulu. Overnight, the future status of large areas of white-owned farmland and of a number of white-dominated country towns was placed in limbo. Strong opposition to the plans were voiced by the great majority of white farmers' associations in Natal, the Sugar Association, the Natal Chamber of Industries, and by the United Party-dominated Natal Provincial Council, primarily on the grounds that valuable agricultural land would be going to waste. The proposals were also rejected by KwaZulu, on the grounds that they did not go nearly far enough.¹⁶

Landed interests in Natal were thus being threatened from two sides — on the one hand by KwaZulu's demands for more land, and on the other by the Pretoria government's consolidation plans. The government's revision of its proposals in 1973 and again in 1975 served to augment growing uncertainty about the future among white people in many country districts in Natal and Zululand.¹⁷ Although they may not always have articulated the issue in historical terms, from their perspective the heritage of over a hundred years of enterprise and endeavour was being undermined in order to satisfy the land-hunger of hordes of 'Zulus' who could be trusted to do little with good land except ruin it.

It is against this background that the proposals made in the Natal Provincial Council in 1973 for a more co-ordinated and dynamic museums policy must be seen. It seems likely to us that there was some link, however indirect, between the development of a major challenge to the tenure of land exercised by whites, and their reassertion, through the medium of local museums, of what they felt to be their historical claims to that land. The rapid rise of more militant black resistance to white rule in South Africa from the mid-1970s onwards further stimulated white Natalians' recourse to the past for legitimation of their claims to land, and for justification of their presence in southern Africa at all. The production of the historical displays described above in the museums of

Natal was an aspect of this appeal to history.

If the connection between political change and the mobilization of the past in the museums of Natal was indirect and complex, it was much more direct in the museums of KwaZulu. Of central significance is the fact that the displays and monuments which we discuss in this paper were all opened in the first half of the 1980s. The KwaZulu Monuments Council was established in 1980. Archaeological excavation of Ondini, King Cetshwayo's residence in the 1870s, was begun in October 1981. The king unveiled Mpande's gravestone in August 1981, and laid the foundation stone of the KwaZulu Cultural Museum and opened the Nodwengu Museum in August 1983. Buthelezi unveiled Madondo's gravestone in November 1983, and the king opened the KwaZulu Cultural Museum in April 1985. The ideological importance of these events needs to be appreciated against the background of contemporary political developments in KwaZulu, particularly as they centred round the ambitions of Chief Buthelezi and the fortunes of the Inkatha movement.¹⁸

From early in his political career, one of Buthelezi's main concerns has been to establish and maintain a strong regional political base in Natal. To this end he has consistently sought to mobilize support among working-class Zulu people through appeals to a common Zulu heritage. In the late 1960s and 1970s he engaged in an ultimately successful struggle with the royal house to establish himself as the chief interpreter of what this heritage was. Central elements in his rendering of it were, and still are, the historical unity of the Zulu people, their undivided loyalty to the royal house, and the close historical links between the royal house and the Buthelezi clan.

By 1975, after five years as head of the ZTA and then the KwaZulu government, Buthelezi had won enough popular support from a Zulu ethnic constituency to be able to launch Inkatha as a vehicle for mobilizing a mass following under his personal leadership. At the same time he was gaining a certain amount of support from black people outside Natal by claiming to be operating in the pre-1960 nationalist tradition, and by maintaining good relations with the ANC. But as support for the more militant and nationally-based anti-apartheid stance of the ANC began to increase after the revolts of 1976, the wider popular appeal of local, bantustan-based organizations like Inkatha began to fade. The rapid growth of the independent trade union movement in the early 1980s and the

formation of the UDF in 1983 began to threaten Inkatha's hold on popular support in Natal itself.

By the early 1980s Buthelezi was facing a situation where he had failed to find powerful allies in the black community outside Natal, and where his support base in Natal was being undermined. His response was to look for new allies among the capitalist interests in Natal that had been making overtures to him since the mid-1970s, and to try to consolidate his constituency in Natal-KwaZulu by vigorously propounding Zulu ethnicity. As well as continuing to make effective verbal appeals to the 'traditional' Zulu past through the medium of public speeches, Buthelezi seems to have become concerned to fix his interpretation of that past in the form of concrete and publicly visible symbols. It is no accident that this period saw the establishment of KwaZulu's first historical museums.

Viewed in conjunction, the historical displays in the museums of Natal and KwaZulu reflect the *modus vivendi* which the dominant groups in the two territories have been working towards, if often uneasily, since the mid-1970s. In the face of mounting popular resistance to racial domination and capitalist exploitation, white capitalist interests in Natal and black aspirant capitalist interests in KwaZulu have edged towards a tentative political alliance, with the South African state as a third possible partner. A fundamental aspect of this emerging relationship has been the maintenance of racially and ethnically separate political constituencies. This is reflected in the propagation of segregated public histories in the museums of Natal and KwaZulu. The former assert the legitimacy of the white presence and of white domination in Natal; the latter assert the legitimacy of KwaZulu itself and of its leadership. Agreement on how to maintain joint control of the region's past is worked out in bodies such as the recently formed Natal-KwaZulu Heritage Liaison Committee.

Following recent changes in top-level personnel in the administration of the Natal museum service, there are signs that the service is beginning to adopt more enlightened policies. But the most that can be expected is that these policies will embrace some of the ideas of 'reconciliation' between racially and ethnically defined elites that emanate from the state's current efforts to co-opt black leaders with a degree of popular support into backing its restructuring of the institutions of apartheid. In KwaZulu, the Inkatha regime is inescapably tied to propagating Zulu ethnicity in order to mobilize popular support. So long as it survives, the museums of KwaZulu

will continue to have as their prime purpose the propounding of Zulu traditionalism. Under the existing order, neither administration can be expected to allow the museums under its control to challenge the roots of class privilege and ethnic segregation, or to promote the history of the region's underclasses.

Acknowledgement

Our thanks go to the University of Natal Research Fund for financial assistance

TABLE 1
Themes Displayed and Themes Omitted in the
Museums Visited

	Evolution of Human Species	'Stone age'	Rock Paintings	'Bush-man Ethnic' Display	'Iron Age'	Zulu Kingdom	'Zulu Ethnic' Display	Pre-colonial African-European Contacts	European Settler History
Colenso	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Dundee	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	x
Durban									
Killie Campbell	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	x
Local History	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	x
Natural History	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	-
Eshowe	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	x
Estcourt	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	x
Giants Castle	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x
Greytown	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	-	x
Himeville	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Kokstad	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ladysmith	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Magungundlovu									
Dingaansdal Miss.	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	x
Mngung/site	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Newcastle	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Pmb									
Macrorie House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Natal Museum	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	x
Voortrekker Mus.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Pinetown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Richmond									
Richmond	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Spioenkop	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	x
Stanger									
Shaka Monument	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	-
Stander Mus.	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	xx
Ulundi									
KwaZulu Cultural	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-
Nodwengu	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Ondini Site	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	-	-
Vryheid	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Weenen	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x

Notes and References

- 1 The notion that museums operate to uphold the dominant social order receives little attention in the literature on museums and museology. Exceptions are Wallace, M. 1981: 'Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States', *Radical History Review*. Vol 25, pp63-96: and Horne, D. 1984: *The Museum*. London & Sydney, esp. pp1-23; 249-52.
- 2 Meltzer, DJ. 1981: 'Ideology and Material Culture' in Gould, RA. and Schiffer, MB.(eds.): *Modern Material Culture: The Archeology of Us*. New York, p115.
- 3 Thompson, JB. 1984: *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. London. Our thanks go to Anton van der Hoven and Jill Arnot for extended discussions of Thompson's ideas.
- 4 *Ibid.* p4.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.* p63.
- 7 *Ibid.* p35.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp70-1, 140-5.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p73.
- 10 The next section of the paper draws heavily in parts on another paper, entitled 'Bastions of Ideology: the Depiction of Precolonial History in the Museums in Natal and KwaZulu', which we presented to the conference of the Southern African Museums Association held in Pietermaritzburg in May 1987. A slightly modified version of the earlier paper is to be found in *Southern African Museums Association Bulletin*, Vol 17 Nos 7 & 8, 1987.
- 11 *Debates and Proceedings of The Provincial Council, Third Council, Fourth Session, Vol 4, 19-22 November 1973, pp43-6.*
- 12 *Surplus Peoples Project (SPP) 1983: Forced Removals in South Africa, Vol 4 Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg, pp56, 143.*
- 13 *Ibid.* pp39-41, 48-9.
- 14 *Ibid.* p143; SA Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), 1971: *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1970*. Johannesburg, p143.
- 15 SAIRR, 1973: *A Survey of Race Relations in SA 1972*. Johannesburg, pp34-5.
- 16 *Ibid.* p171; SAIRR 1974: *A Survey of Race Relations in SA 1973*. Johannesburg, pp148-151; SPP, op cit. pp56, 143, 145.
- 17 *Ibid.* pp 145, 147-8.
- 18 The paragraphs that follow draw on a range of published and unpublished secondary sources. See particularly Southall, R. 1981: 'Buthelezi, Inkatha and the Politics of Compromise', *African Affairs*, Vol 80, pp453-81; Brewer, J D. 1986: *After Soweto: an Unfinished Journey*. Oxford, Ch 6; Sitas, A. 1986: 'Inanda August 1985: Where Wealth and Power and Blood Reign Worshipped Gods', *SA Labour Bulletin*, Vol 11 No 4, pp85-121; Beall, J. et al. 1986: *The Natal Option: Regional*

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