

Zulu Identities interrogates assumptions about identity and extends revisionist scholarship on Zulu history and identity. Divided into six overlapping sections and comprising over fifty chapters with contributions by as many authors, the book 'explores the cultural alchemy of *ubuZulu bethu*, an idiom ... that captures the shared narratives, hybrid expressions and contradictory meanings of "our Zuluness"' (4). Although historians outnumber other contributors, the editors have deliberately sought an inter-disciplinary approach that explores Zuluness in a variety of sites, both the obvious and the obscure. Equally important, the editors targeted isiZulu-speaking intellectuals for their insiders' insights. As Jabulani Sithole, an historian and one of the editors, notes in the preface the intention was to encourage debate and inquiry on a subject that has until recently been neglected for various intellectual and political reasons.

The volume is informed by a broad post-colonial approach which foregrounds culture as an analytical tool as well as class analysis. To varying degrees, the book challenges 'hoary assumptions of "Zulucentrism", which reified Shaka kaSenzangakhona and his legacies ...' (4). In this view, rather than fixed or primordial, identities are historically constructed and subject to intense contestation. Although some of the work and contributors would already be familiar to most readers and the quality of the chapters varies, its collection in a single volume is a significant and timely contribution to ongoing debates about identity. As some contributors have noted, in spite of a growing body of academic work suggesting otherwise, dislodging popular notions about Zulu identity will require as much labour as, if not more labour than, the hard ideological work invested in constructing and nurturing them.

In Chapter 2 Mbongiseni Buthelezi, a post-colonial critic, grapples with the meanings of Zulu identity by challenging Shaka's legacy and the Inkatha Freedom Party's ethnic nationalism. Relying on literary criticism and revisionist historical scholarship, Buthelezi teases from 'the fragments of Phungashe's *izibongo*' the muted voices and suppressed memories of clans forcibly incorporated into the Zulu kingdom (27). Rather than simply relying on his insider's supposed advantages, Buthelezi confronts the intellectual challenges of producing competing narratives that do not simply reproduce the histories and identities they seek to question. By interrogating Shaka's *izibongo* and legacy, Buthelezi is far from dismissing the importance of Zulu identity. Instead he suggests that we adopt a more critical examination of its meaning. Indeed, both Dingani Mthethwa and Cherryl Walker show similar dynamics to those highlighted in Buthelezi's chapter. Rather than a collective Zulu identity, both authors stress local, clan identities and histories in the lives of Tembe and Bhangazi people in post-apartheid South Africa.

In Chapter 3 John Wright, a leading revisionist historian, reviews the growing scholarship of the last three decades challenging conventional notions of Zulu identity. Against the popular view of a fixed and primordial Zulu identity traceable to the formation of the Zulu kingdom, Wright suggests a more recent and historical process. And once formed this identity has continued to change and has been subject to contestation over time. Wright's contribution provides the context within which to understand Buthelezi's take on the debate. Taken together, these authors provide a broad framework to contextualise the remainder of the book.

In the subsequent sections and chapters, contributors have extended the debate on Zulu identity over time. In the second section, for instance, contributors consider the foundations of Zulu identities from the earliest times to the 1800s. Archaeologist Gavin Whitelaw surveys the identities of precolonial farmers in the region over a period of 1600 years and explores how these provided the 'cultural package' for Nguni farmers in subsequent years.

Several chapters consider stereotypes and myths and their implications for Zulu identity. In Chapter 6 John Wright updates a critique of the mfecane by deconstructing 'the making of the stereotype of Shaka and his Zulu warriors as destroyers of southern Africa' (69). What is especially valuable about Wright's contribution is his insistence on the importance of 'interplay between black and white observers' rather than on 'separate, racially defined origins' in the creation of images of Shaka (69). Dan Wylie, Jeremy Martens and John Laband focus on the construction of varieties of white colonial myths of Shaka and the Zulu more generally. In spite of their differences, these authors suggest that these stereotypes are fundamental to understanding the construction of fixed Zulu identity.

The gender relations of societies preceding the Zulu kingdom are critical for any understanding of subsequent identities as a growing body of scholarship attests. In Chapter 10 historian Sifiso Ndlovu largely rejects the 'gender contestation' or 'women's oppression' models advanced by feminist scholarship, because they misrepresent the realities of Zulu society. Based on the experiences of prominent women, and especially Regent Queen Mnkabayi kaJama, Ndlovu argues instead that a 'gender co-operation model' is more appropriate. He concludes that Zulu women were not excluded from 'traditional networks of authority' (111). While valuable, Ndlovu's conception of 'women's power' appears an intellectual dead-end. It is not clear that the Regent Queen is representative of all royals, much less the experiences of ordinary and non-Zulu women. Is the participation in authority the same thing as gender relations and their attendant ideologies? Moreover, even if it is not an academic construction, surely the 'gender co-operation model' is a construction that requires some understanding beyond its self-generated conception.

In the remaining sections of the book, other contributors explore the meanings of Zuluness in several ways. Sifiso Ndlovu analyses how intellectuals like B.W. Vilakazi and S. Nyembezi rehabilitated Dingane's image from a variety of 'disparaging historical stereotypes'. Jabulani Sithole explores competing perspectives of the Battle of Ncome and the legacy of King Dingane both within

the African National Congress and in relation to Inkatha. Nsizwa Dlamini examines Inkatha's strategic rehabilitation of Dingane after years of neglect and dismissal in relation to a bid to stop the proposed Ingwavuma land deal and post-apartheid efforts to celebrate Dingane's legacy. In the contestations of Dingane's legacy, these authors suggest that identities were being constructed.

A number of contributors analyse Zulu identities in the context of British imperialism and colonial rule more generally. Historian Jeff Guy traces the changing meaning of *iziqu* from its imperial appropriation by Baden Powell and its use in the Boy Scouts. The different experiences of the *amakholwa* feature prominently in the analysis of Zulu identities. Paul la Hausse de Lalouvière, for example, focuses on how *amakholwa* intellectuals of the Zulu Institute in Johannesburg constructed a cosmopolitan identity that in turn re-imagined the Zulu nation and the attendant nationalist politics in early industrial South Africa. While Zulu identity was central to these urban *khulwa* males, Thomas McClendon argues that, by contrast, gender and generation and other 'localized identities of lineage and chieftdom were more central to rural dynamics than issues of Zuluness' (281). These contributions again challenge the notion of singular or fixed 'Zulu' identity, emphasising instead the ever-changing and contested nature of identity formation.

The Inkatha Freedom Party's version of nationalism and its future prospects provide other avenues to explore and understand Zulu identities. Thembisa Waetjen, an historian, and Gerard Maré, a sociologist, for example, declare the death of Inkatha's version of Zulu nationalism. Similarly, Laurence Piper, a political scientist, writes the obituary of Zulu nationalism based on local and national election results between 1994 and 2000. Instead of the centrality of ethnicity in politics, Piper stresses the rural–urban split to explain political developments in KwaZulu-Natal. For Waetjen and Maré the cause of death is the transformative effects of international events, while for Piper it is Inkatha's failure to build popular nationalism. In this regard, historians Philip Bonner and Vusi Ndima dismiss the role of ethnicity as an explanation for the East Rand violence of the 1990s. They stress increasing levels of poverty, rising stock theft, trade union rivalries and the taxi violence rather than the conventional ethnic explanations.

Other chapters explore Zulu identities in different contexts through culture, preservation, healing, music, heritage, HIV/AIDS and socialisation. Geographer Shirley Brooks, for instance, shows how white rangers and tourists relied on essentialist notions of Zulu identity and 'Shaka's royal hunting grounds' to advance preservation, while excluding isiZulu-speaking guards. Jonny Steinberg, political scientist and award-winning writer, dismisses Alan Paton's 'romantic Zulu tribalism' in *Cry, the Beloved Country* and offers a contrasting picture featuring more complex histories devoid of a fixed 'traditional culture' (464). In an essay on heritage, Nsizwa Dlamini looks at the public resistance the *Sisonke* exhibition encountered in trying to confront local and international stereotypes of a homogeneous Zulu identity.

Socialisation is another avenue for the exploration of identities. Thenjiwe Magwaza explores from a gender studies perspective the socialisation of young

women through *umemulo* and suggests that in spite of colonial disruptions, urbanisation and industrialisation, its core features remain 'traditional'. By contrast, Tessa Marcus argues that contemporary virginity testing is a shallow and reinvented custom in the wake of the HIV/AIDS plague and social breakdown. These two chapters in particular reveal the potential for explicit dialogue and debate that could have taken place but sadly did not in spite of the editors' wishes. Mxolisi Mchunu, educational and research officer, suggests that domestic service and 'the kitchen suit' have replaced initiation rituals and *amabutho* as markers of modern Zulu manhood in the wake of the erosion of Zulu independence.

Although the book largely succeeds in its stated goals, a few things are noteworthy. While valuable, Peter Alegi's account of football among the *amakholwa* appears to reproduce a version of the Zulu warrior stereotype. This is but one example. There are instances where the term 'traditional' is used as if it is fixed or unchanging. In the absence of any explanations in these cases, there is a missed opportunity to interrogate Zuluness in the context of wider South African or continental African identities. Unless we do this, we are likely to reinforce the popular views about Zulu identity and burden it with an exceptionalism it hardly needs.

My few reservations aside, it should be clear that I regard Carton, Laband and Sithole's *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* as a highly significant book. For the specialist it provides a refreshing review of recent scholarship. For the non-specialist, it is a good introduction to a vibrant literature. It will surely initiate further debate and deepen our understanding of the complexity of Zulu identities.

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