Résumé

P. La Hausse — Nationalisme, collaboration et « picaresque » au Natal : à propos de la vie d'Elias Kuzwayo.
Bien que le point de départ de cet article ait trait à la carrière relativement obscure d'Elias Kuzwayo — criminel de petite envergure et escroc —, son objet principal est relatif aux questions plus larges que son existence soulève. On tente de montrer que la notion de « picaresque », lorsqu'elle est soutenue par des données historiques suffisantes, peut non seulement aider à éclairer les points nœuds de la présentation publique que Kuzwayo donne de lui-même, mais sert également à définir des personnages analogues ainsi que les crises historiques auxquelles ils ont été confrontés. On suggère également que l'ambiguïté morale que Kuzwayo élabore de façon picaresque, non seulement nous informe sur l'émergence de certains styles de leadership african après 1940 mais attire également l'attention sur les sources culturelles de l'autorité politique populiste et sur certaines formes de collaboration entretenues par des membres de l'élite colonisée africaine avec l'état de l'Apartheid. À cet égard, la notion de « picaresque » fournit un mode d'accès au domaine largement inexploré du nationalisme ethnique et conservateur zoulou dans les années 1940 et 1950.

Citer ce document / Cite this document :


Document généré le 02/06/2016
So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo? Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal

There can be little question that the economic identification of the African “middle classes”, at least in the pre-Apartheid period, yields a small and fractured social grouping. At the same time, however, it seems clear that the complex and contradictory penetration of the mental and cultural categories of the colonizer went deeper than head counts on the basis of Congress leadership or attenuated lists of successful African entrepreneurs, professionals and capitalist farmers might suggest. While a number of pioneering historical studies have drawn out in particularly vivid ways the complex forms of ideology and politics which the contradictory class location of the African middle classes generated, we still

1. Interview with C. Khumalo speaking of Zulu leaders in post-1930 Durban, and A. Tshabalala, Durban, 28 Aug. 1986.
2. Lyrics of a ndlamu song recorded in Durban during the 1940s, see TRACEY 1948: 36.
3. Founded in 1912, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC)—later the African National Congress (ANC), embodied the “ideals of the new African elite or ‘middle class’, striving for personal and national advancement” in a racially repressive society. See WAISHE 1971: 36. For a sensitive portrayal of the middle class tastes and western values of this black elite, see WILLAN 1977. In Natal, section of the Congress movement retained a relatively discrete identity from that of the national body. Their retention of the name Natal Native Congress until well into the 1930s was a symbolic acknowledgement of this fact.
4. See for example, BRADFORD 1987; BONNER 1982; and MARKS 1986b.

lack a fuller grasp of the cultural worlds which these individuals inhabited, fashioned and moved between.

Indeed, if Natal ANC Youth Leaguer, Jordan Ngubane called the prominent African *kholwa* landowners of Natal “custodians of Gracco-Romano-Hebraic morality amongst the Zulus” there was a range of indigenous social categories which describe in cultural terms processes of social differentiation in the region. *Amare spectables*, “Black Englishmen”, *izentiti* (those who had gained exemption), *izifundiswa* (the educated in general) and even *amabhuka* (“traitors”), were all terms to describe groups of individuals who embraced the new world of the colonizer in a similar, but not precisely the same, way. Like those interstitial groups of *amagxagxa* and *abuqaphi* (neither Christian nor traditionalist) or *amabhina* (traditionalists) and *uquqaba olungafundile* (the uneducated masses), these terms define forms of cultural identity which cannot simply be reduced to class.

In a situation where the literature has described sections of the “middling strata” variously as “petty bourgeois”, “aspirant petty bourgeois”, “lower middle class” and “upper working class” it is perhaps little wonder that in the case of the pioneering study of Shula Marks (1986b) on class and nationalism in Natal, a metaphor (“the mask”) and the notion of moral ambiguity should come to serve as central explanatory ideas. In Natal the deep “class instincts” of the *kholwa* were simultaneously attached, but in a different ways at different times, to both “traditionalist” and progressive Christian (capitalist) forms of identity, the historical constitution of which were related to changing structural conditions. At the risk of overstating this contention it might be said that the *kholwa* in Natal—the small armies of landowners, clergymen, lawyers, clerks, messengers, interpreters, teachers, traders and artisans—were born into two worlds. As “civilised”, “progressive” and, most importantly, “respectable” members of colonial society who had left the “backward” cultural and social organisation of pre-capitalist Zulu society behind them, the *kholwa* faithfully believed in the “promise of Queen Victoria”.

The starting point of this article is an exploration of the fragmented record of the life of one man for whom the promise of Victorian liberalism was denied: a petty criminal, failed populist and confidence-trickster named Elias Kuzwayo, an outline of whose career follows below. This article tentatively suggests that the idea of the “picaresque”, explored in both literary criticism and symbolic anthropology, when provided with sufficient historical content may help to illuminate some of the central

---

7. See discussion below.
features of Kuzwayo’s career and serve to identify other historical figures like him. It is argued that Kuzwayo’s career, even in the sparse form which we have it, represents an especially vivid example of a picaresque elaboration of the broad terrain of ambiguity and structural contradiction occupied by members of Natal’s fractured African “middle classes”. Moreover, a close reading of Kuzwayo’s career and the particular form which his elaboration of moral ambiguity took might be able to alert us to the emergence of certain styles of African political leadership and to the popular cultural sources of political authority during a period of massive social and economic transformation. Finally, if Kuzwayo’s career viewed through the lens of the “picaresque” serves to raise such questions, it also begins to illuminate particular kinds of collaboration engaged in by Zulu intellectuals with the Apartheid state after 1948. While in general terms, the phenomenon of the picaresque is closely related to that of collaboration, an emerging policy of Apartheid offered new space for the development of the picaresque in certain collaborationist directions.

The Pilgrim’s Progress

If nothing else Elias R. G. Kuzwayo possessed a febrile, desperate imagination and a shrewd grasp of historical process. Although the details of his early life remain, somehow appropriately, obscure, it is likely that he was born in the late nineteenth century in one of the kholwa communities in Pietermaritzburg’s hinterland, possibly at New Scotland, or at Georges-town near Hammarsdale.\(^8\) Certainly, by 1918 he was based in the Natal midlands town, and more particularly in the Burger Street Gaol where between 1918 and 1926 he spent at least five years of his life after thrice being convicted of house breaking and theft. In 1926, having completed a sentence for assaulting policemen he emerged from gaol into a rapidly changing world. The Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) had begun to capture the imagination of urban and rural Blacks in Natal. By 1927 Elias Kuzwayo was receiving qualitatively different attention from the local police, this time from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) who opened a file on him and labelled it “Native Agitator No. 221”. Kuzwayo had become General Secretary of the Pietermaritzburg Branch of the ICU.

The ICU Branch in Natal’s second largest town seems to have been a rather ramshackle affair. Rent by internal conflict from the start and subject to periodic invasions from uniformed ICU militias sent from

---

8. For this period of Kuzwayo’s activities see “Confidential Criminal Investigation Department report by E. Ndhlovu, 11 Dec. 1928”, Central Archives Depot (Pretoria), Native Affairs Department (henceforth CAD-NTS) 7215, 58/326.
Durban to wrest control from local union activists, the Pietermaritzburg Branch struggled to register any real gains. Where Kuzwayo did make some progress, however, was in the establishment of a Union dancehall, which attracted workers to performances ranging from ragtime to dances set to the percussive rhythms beaten on the seats of Globe chairs. Yet Kuzwayo’s rise to local prominence proved short-lived. Sometime in 1927 he was dismissed from office for alleged peculation. His immediate response was to establish the South African Economic Union, a local variant of the ICU which proved similarly short-lived. Thrown onto his own resources Kuzwayo left Pietermaritzburg. In rapid succession he gained and lost a job as a school teacher in Muden (“as his character was not considered above reproach”) and then briefly acted as an agent for the Lazarus Native Labour Agency.

By the end of 1928 he had returned to Pietermaritzburg and the possibilities opened up by self-employment. At the end of that year, together with a number of other ex-ICU activists reportedly “of the quiet type”, he established the Vuk Africa Union. Kuzwayo claimed that the Union was “purely a Social Club, mainly for Dancing” which had “no connection with any political affairs” or “seditious speeches”. Its elaborate Constitution and Rules (published and sold for Is) however, outlined a somewhat more ambitious project. The Vuk Africa Union (VAU) sought the “betterment of conditions pertaining to the following African Workers: Teachers, Clerks, Domestic and Factory Workers and Industrial and General Workers”, “irrespective of sex”. Kuzwayo hoped to provide sick, unemployment, old age and death benefits and publish literature that might “be deemed necessary for the spiritual and material welfare of members”. But the Constitution devoted most attention to the proposed finances and management of the VAU. It empowered an Executive Committee “to carry on such trades as may be deemed necessary to advance the interests of the Union” and elaborated upon the establishment of a scheme to allow shareholding in the Union.

It comes as little surprise to discover that beyond its Constitution the Vuk Afrika Union enjoyed an extremely brief existence. Although he can be traced to Durban in late 1930 addressing Natal ICU meetings in the town on the eve of the Communist Party inspired pass-burning campaign, Kuzwayo began to turn his mind to other projects. Sometime during 1930 he re-invented himself as Dr E. R. G. Kuzwayo (DTh). Struggling to find a language appropriate to his new found position as

---

11. “Det. R. H. Arnold to Officer in Charge, Criminal Investigation Department, Durban, 24 Nov. 1930”, CAD, Department of Justice (JUS), 923, 1/18/26, Part 28.
superintendent of the Universal National Christian Union, he wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner of Natal:

"I have the honour to request that I may be granted a permission of holding meetings in the Locations as I have been appointed an organiser and the Lecturer in Agricultural subjects among our people who are residing at the Isolated areas. I would also beg to inform you that the Universal National Christian Union have nothing to do with the Industrial and the politically disputes [. . .] we are trying our best to uplift our people. I have also been instructed by the Executive Council to get in touch with prominent teachers so as to propagate the policy of our Society [. . .] I will try my best to educate the natives how to plough their fields in modern methods as I am holding the first class Diploma in Agriculture. I will call the meetings of Chiefs and their men to give them proper training".12

The refusal of officialdom to countenance this request elicited a less than diplomatic response from Kuzwayo: "you will remember", he wrote,

". . . that Rev'd B. Huss of St Francis T. College13 had been allowed to enter various Native Locations for the same purpose and I am awfully surprised to find out that because our organisation is composed of Black men is to be prejudiced even by the Department of Justice [. . .] I shall carry on with our policy, for it is not our intention to allow the present Government to interfere with our free liberties".

In Kuzwayo's case a deep sensitivity to the wider injustices of society may well have been combined with a certain moral myopia as far as his domestic life was concerned for in June 1931 he apparently deserted his Edendale-born wife Ivy and their two children forever.14 By 1932 Kuzwayo, now based at Pinetown and ignoring the official prohibition on his activities, claimed to be addressing "mass-meetings" in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith "on spiritual and Religious matters".

Yet, possibly sensing the imminent failure of his latest scheme, by 1931 Kuzwayo had already begun to lay the groundwork for his next enterprise. As a "qualified Hospital Orderly having successfully passed an examination conducted by the Transvaal Medical Officers' Association and also passed the 'First Aid' of the South African Red Cross Society" he applied for a licence to sell "all Native medicines and herbs". Ever sensitive to the world of the white colonizer, Kuzwayo's stated intention was to also build a "dressing house" in which patients could be housed and if necessary examined by a "European Doctor or any qualified

12. "E. R. G. Kuzwayo to Chief Native Commissioner, 12 Aug. 1930", Natal Archives (NA), Chief Native Commissioner's Files, Pietermaritzburg (hereafter CNC/PMB), 92, 64/9, N1/14/3(3).
13. For the ideas of Huss and his formative influence on the Natal Cooperative movement, see BROUCKAERT 1985.
14. See HANGA lase NATAL, 26 June 1937. Six years after her "malicious desertion" by Elias, Ivy Kuzwayo applied for a divorce.
medical practitioner".\textsuperscript{15} There can be little doubt that Kuzwayo’s request failed to receive the favourable attention of the Native Affairs Department. Clearly, this did not deter Kuzwayo for, after 1931, he began accumulating criminal convictions for offences which included, amongst others, contravening Section 34(a) of Act No. 13 of 1928, in other words practicing as an unlicensed herbalist.

During 1935 Kuzwayo coupled these activities with those of the Qwabe General Cooperative Society or Movement Ltd of which he had become General Secretary. Whether Kuzwayo was the prime mover in this scheme is unclear but by April 1935, armed with an alias (E. R. Gumede), he began calling meetings in Durban in the name of Qwabe Chief Shadrack M. Gumede kaMeseni. The Society’s central aims were to buy land, open cooperative stores and raise a scholarship fund for its members. The mid-thirties then found Kuzwayo as the Society’s broker feverishly despatching letters to the Prime Minister, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) and Durban’s Mayor in order to gain official sanction for its activities. In his missives to officials Kuzwayo claimed, in words which by now had become something of a refrain in his correspondence, that the Society was in “no way connected with any Native political organisation in any shape or form whatsoever”.\textsuperscript{16} Almost needless to say barely a month later Kuzwayo was attempting, much to the chagrin of Chief Gumede, to gain patronage and advice from A. W. G. Champion, General Secretary of the ICU in Natal.\textsuperscript{17} Kuzwayo’s efforts did, however, meet with some success, for between September 1935 and November 1936 the Qwabe General Cooperative Society or Movement Ltd held a number of meetings at Durban’s Bantu Social Centre, the first of which was opened by the Mayor.\textsuperscript{18} Shortly afterwards though, the Society seems to have suffered a decline and disbanded around 1937.

Kuzwayo for his part was, as always, irrepressible. Despite having at least five further criminal convictions to his name (making more than twelve in all) he rapidly acquired a couple of university degrees and in 1938 as Dr E. R. Gumede BA, BSc. announced the formation of the Bantu Medical Union Club of South Africa with temporary headquarters in Mooi River. According to Kuzwayo the aim of the Bantu Medical Union was to preserve “South African Native Medical rights in terms of

\textsuperscript{15} “E. G. Kuzwayo to Secretary of Native Affairs, 3 July 1931; and 3 Aug. 1931”, CAD. NTS. 9032. 2/376. Part I.

\textsuperscript{16} “E. R. Gumede to Secretary, Prime Minister’s Office, 18 Apr. 1935; and to Minister of Native Affairs, 21 May 1935”, CAD. NTS. 7242. 168/326/2. See also “E. R. Gumede to Town Clerk, 10 March 1935”, NA. Durban Town Clerk’s Files (henceforth 3/DBN), 4/1/3/1696, 467C.

\textsuperscript{17} “E. R. Gumede to A. W. G. Champion, 24 and 28 June 1935”, University of South Africa (Pretoria), Champion Papers, Box 2. 3.1.21.

proclamation 168 Section 119 of Natal Native Code as amended in 1932. Quite simply Kuzwayo intended to open branches throughout the Province and enrol members (adults 2/6, children 1/6) and provide subscribers with free medicines upon production of membership cards to the Union's "District Qualified and Registered Nurse". In correspondence to the Native Affairs and Health Departments (in which the Chief Native Commissioner was addressed as "the Supreme Ruler" and Health officials as "Right Reverend Doctors") Kuzwayo was again at pains to state that his Medical Union was "non-political", and just in case this was subject to ambiguous interpretation, he denied that the Bantu Medical Society had any "connection with the Communist Party or any other Native organization" which could "create ill-feeling between Black and Whites". Kuzwayo managed to constitute an Executive Committee of eight officials whose number included prominent Salvation Army and Roman Catholic teachers based at Mooi River. The Rules and Constitution of the Union were a bricolage of all those ambitious and altruistic goals authored by Kuzwayo in the name of various voluntary associations over a ten year period: meticulous procedures for book-keeping, regulations for the holding of dances, concerts and night-schools, and rules for the purchase of land all found elaborate expression in the Bantu Medical Union's constitution. State proscription and the collapse of the Union were to follow shortly. With official investigations into the new organisation underway and the threat of police action looming, Kuzwayo, as he had done so many times before, appears to have simply disappeared.

In a relatively short period between 1927 and 1940 Kuzwayo tried his hand at a range of occupations which reads like a kind of job prospectus for a member of Natal's fractured African elite in the decades after 1920: trade union activist, cultural entrepreneur, cooperative society spokesman, teacher, improving agricultural demonstrator, independent churchman, medical practitioner, labour agent and petty capitalist—vocations which even the opportunistic Zulu populist and entrepreneur A. W. G. Champion would have been hard-pressed to match. It seems apposite that Champion himself, who shared more in common with Kuzwayo than he probably would have been prepared to admit, should have

19. "E. R. Gumede to Native Commissioner, Estcourt, 2 June 1938. CAD, NTS, 9031, Part III.
21. After 1918, apart from more or less continual involvement in trade union and political organisation, Champion's various occupations and enterprises included: clerk, policeman, butcher, general shopkeeper, cooperative society founder, manager of a shoe-repairing business, land speculator, mail-order herbalist, farmer and general broker.
offered a judgement of the man. According to Champion, Kuzwayo was “an unreliable Native having spent much time in Gaol”.22

But who was Elias Kuzwayo and what sense can we make of his curious career? One might safely concede that Kuzwayo was first and foremost a petty criminal and confidence man. In a recent critical discussion of the utility of European derived notions of social banditry in the African context, Ralph Austen (1986: 98-101) has suggested one category of “heroic criminal” as being present throughout colonial Africa—the pica\-\-\-r or “confidence man living by his wits rather than by violence”. Such folkloric dimensions of social and political struggles have also been invoked by Shula Marks in a rather different context.23

The tale of the trickster, pica\-\-\-r or rogue “is one of the oldest and most persistent cultural patterns of negation and one of the oldest narrative forms” (Babcock-Abrahams 1975: 158). As a literary genre the pica\-\-\-resque describes episodic open-ended narratives in which lower-class protagonists sustain themselves by means of cleverness, cunning and adaptability during an extended journey through space, time and variously corrupt social milieux. The pica\-\-\-r lives on the boundaries between worlds, which he must constantly cross. In an inhospitable world he is initially the victim of deception. But through time, he becomes the deceiver and thereafter sets out to live by his wits in a peripatetic career of dishonesty. The pica\-\-\-r is usually based in a hierarchical urban social order which allows mobility for “those who can practice the proper duplicity” (Austen 1986: 98). He is also master of the mask—his persona is subject to constant Protean changes and is thus deprived of its intrinsic essence. Although he has relatively obscure social origins, in principle he is upwardly mobile—a parvenu in the making. Although he has few redeeming social qualities (indeed, he is largely anti-social) his mock-epic career of cunning and petty crime serves to expose the corruption of the society he struggles against, usually provoking laughter and not moral outrage.24

Austen has suggested that despite the ubiquitous presence of the trickster in colonial Africa, he is not often seen there in his own terms and made a hero. Indeed, at least in African literature, the pica\-\-\-r-
trickster\textsuperscript{25} does not inspire laughter. Rather, he appears as a betrayer, the ‘fountain pen’ agent of truly dangerous forces” (Austen 1986: 99-100), although in the South African case one can find the picaresque used not only “as a practical weapon to survive in this society, but also as a device for retaining spiritual freedom while holding absolutely no illusions about the grim surrounding reality”.\textsuperscript{26} My concern here is less with questions of social banditry per se than with exploring the idea of the picaresque in relation to the career of Elias Kuzwayo viewed within the wider context of African society in Natal after 1920 and the first decade of Apartheid in particular. For the social and economic space occupied, manipulated and exploited by Elias Kuzwayo is precisely that space which in historical terms has been shared by an African elite in South Africa: a world of economic and symbolic brokers—mediators between chiefly and other forms of authority, brokers between literate and oral forms of knowledge and interpreters of modernism in a world of traditionalism.\textsuperscript{27} At one level, then, the peripatetic and fraudulent career of E. R. G. Kuzwayo presents us with a remarkable study in failure. Yet at another level, Kuzwayo’s life holds a mirror up to his times and the aspirations of members of Natal’s fractured African middle-classes.

**Economic Nationalism and Zulu Ethnic Identity before 1940**

There was little fortuitous or arbitrary about the roles in which Kuzwayo cast himself, the projects which he set himself and the powers which he sought to appropriate. They were rooted both in popular cultural assumptions and in the shared historical experience of the amakholwa in Natal. The long and demoralising story of how the political aspirations and economic enterprise of Natal’s progressive Christian African elite were undermined by the colonial state is now well established in the literature.\textsuperscript{28} Yet what remains to be adequately explored by historians is how, in the face of broken promises and shattered economic expectation, these

---

\textsuperscript{25} Of course the picaro is related closely to the archetypal myth of the trickster—the, at once, deeply anti-social and richly creative figure, widely celebrated in folklore. Following BARCOCK-ABRAHAMS (1975) I have chosen to use the term picaresque rather than trickster.

\textsuperscript{26} AUSTEN (1986: 100) refers to Dugmore BOUTH'S (1984). Perhaps a more fascinating example of this might be found in MOLOI 1987: 1.

\textsuperscript{27} It is, of course, not my intention here to establish false polarities between modernism and traditionalism or between the literate and the oral. Indeed, the simultaneous and active re-working of tradition and modernity and the appropriation of the spoken word in terms of the written are a central feature of the imaginative terrain of the picaro. As STOCK (1983: 527) has argued in relation to literacy in Europe: “texts gradually acquired the capacity to shape experience itself and to operate as intermediaries between orally transmitted ideas and social change”. This was the case in Africa as much as in Europe.

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, ETHERINGTON 1978; LAMBERT 1986; MEINTJIES 1988.
people not only sought to create an identity for themselves which took account of the viscissitudes of modernity, but also desperately attempted to secure cultural assurance of a resolution of their contradictory position within the colonial political economy. This process came to rely on the elaboration of forms of economic self-organisation which were increasingly closely bound up with Zulu ethnic identity.

In Natal the beginnings of a process which was to produce the “Gospel of Self-Help” and the Cooperative Society movement in the 1930s and 1940s, can be traced back to the 1890s. Schemes such as that of Joseph Booth which sought to create “a semi-benevolent joint stock company for the commercial occupation of Africa”, captured the imagination of Natal’s African elite.29 Similarly, the rapid spread of independent African churches after 1898, together with the proliferation of itinerant preachers roaming Natal before and after the Bambatha rebellion proclaiming the message of “Africa for the Africans”, suggested the outlines of subsequent regional forms of “self-help”.30 Indeed, one need look no further than the establishment of The Elephant Trading Company, the Zulu Industrial Improvement Company and the Isivivane Society before 1910 to grasp the emerging content of economic nationalism in Natal. All were initiated by prominent, second generation African landowners, Congress intellectuals and entrepreneurs, and each sought to accumulate capital on the basis of an ideology of Zulu ethnic self-help. After 1912 many of the ideas underlying these initiatives were advanced within the South African Native National Congress by its relatively prosperous rural Christian leadership representing a political hinterland constituted by, amongst others, court interpreters, clerks, humble artisans, messengers and petty traders whose experiences of economic marginality in a racially oppressive society were cause for frequent complaint in petitions.31

By the late 1910s these embryonic ideas of self-help and early experiments in cooperation found much clearer definition in numerous cooperative societies, both in Natal and on the Rand, which comprised networks of the Zulu elite. The Zulu National Association, for example, predated the first Inkatha of 1921 (itself first and foremost a self-help association largely modelled on earlier such organisations) by several years and was probably the first elite ethnic association of its kind to be formed. While the aim of the Association was to “promote a sentiment of a cooperative nationality” and “grant assistance to any member in case of any unavoidable adversity, such as taking or defending actions at law, burials, claiming compensation and paying debts” it also sought: “To establish and conduct

29 The Christian Express, 1 Oct, 1903.
30 “Notes on Statement submitted by leaders”, n.d., CAD, NTS, 1433, 49/214; and “Secretary of Native Affairs to Magistrate, Estcourt, 28 Feb, 1910”, NA, SNA, 453, 4209/09.
31 See for example correspondence in NA, CNC, 62, 338/1912.
clubs, stores for dealing in all classes of commodities, hotels, restaurants and Native eating houses and many other business whatsoever on ordinary business lines for members and their dependents only”.

Needless to say it comprised a number of prominent Zulu landowners, entrepreneurs and political figures, including A. W. G. Champion. Not unlike the Abantu General Agency and AmaZulu Trading Company, the prime purpose of the United Native National Association of Commerce and Industry was “to teach our brothers the value of business, to encourage our people to support their own enterprises”. The appeal to prospective shareholders ran: “How long have we placed ourselves under slavery, working for other nations which come from across the seas”.

In Natal during the course of the 1920s this idea of “Building the Nation”, having already found elaboration in some of the earliest vernacular texts by Zulu writers, manifested itself in a number of institutional forms through which a wider popular Zulu constituency began to be mobilised and an elite Zulu identity constructed. On the one hand there were those such as the African Economical Organisation. Established by Inkatha leaders and businessmen W. F. Bhulose and S. I. J. Bhengu in 1927, this organisation was little more than a store at the Point in Durban which operated on the basis of bulk buying from white merchants. On the other hand there were the cooperative schemes started under the auspices of the ICU, the most notable of which was A. W. G. Champion’s All African Cooperative Society Limited and the Workers Cooperative Society described by one ICU activist as the “greatest step to economic emancipation of African Workers” (La Hausse 1989: 28). Such ventures were an integral part of the Zulu populism which the ICU succeeded in moulding and, unlike the more self-consciously elitist cooperative societies, they certainly captured the imagination of workers if only for a brief moment. It also comes as little surprise to find within the ranks of aspirant cooperative society visionaries dubious figures such as Dr Wellington Butelezi, millenarian leader and consummate expression of the “motley”, whose Garveyist-inspired Negro Improvement Association briefly opened offices in central Durban during 1927. For the most part, however, the history of an embryonic self-help movement until 1930 was largely one of failure. Most enjoyed a brief life and many disappeared almost as rapidly as they were founded. Undercapitalisation, lax book-keeping, legal snares, state repression, a tendency towards peculation by officials and

32. CAD. Government Native Labour Bureau (GNLB). 313, 134/19/110.
33. CAD. GNLB. 314, 175/19/110.
34. The most important texts were Petros Lamula’s (1921) and and John Dube’s (1922).
most significantly, a failure to deliver the promised wealth to their members, all took their toll. It is clear, though, that by 1930 the groundwork had been laid for the remarkable spread of the cooperative movement in the subsequent two decades.

The cooperative societies of the 1930s, variously called trading, business, thrift, self-help, cooperative or farmers' associations, shared similar principles. The most notable of these was the Bantu Welfare Society established by William Mseleku—the architect of the 1940s Nabatukop cooperative movement—in 1934. Before it collapsed in financial chaos it had ten branches on mission stations in Natal and aimed “to establish and foster cooperative agricultural effort, to solve social and economic problems peculiar to Natives, and to encourage thrift”.37 The Bantu Welfare Society was emblematic of numerous other self-help societies at this time. The African Vuka U Zake Society of Ndwedwe, for example, called itself a “farmers’ association” but its objects were to “encourage the social welfare and advancement and self reliance amongst the Zulu Race”.38 According to one observer the main unstated aim of the African Cooperative Trading Society Ltd was “to provide a career for educated natives”. Although couched in an opaque language of philanthropy and cooperation. The Bantu Cooperative (Business) Society founded in Estcourt in 1938 probably had similar objects. It is hardly surprising to discover in these societies the seeds of a more exclusivist Zulu nationalism, for it was during this period that the Zulu Society was busy constructing an elite Zulu identity which brought Christian respectability together with Zulu traditionalism on the basis of a particular reworking of the Zulu past. Significantly, however, these ideas began to percolate into the ranks of ordinary people. for by the later 1930s thrift societies began to flourish amongst workers in Durban. The massive proliferation of cooperative societies during the 1940s—by 1946 over hundred cooperatives (mostly buying clubs) were affiliated to the Natal Bantu Cooperative Advisory Council (Nabantukop)—was thus based on a longer historical tradition of self-help. It was a tradition of which someone like Elias Kuzwayo would have been acutely aware.

A crucial legacy of the pre-1940 cooperative movement was the way in which it had laid one basis for the interpretation of the African “nation” in Natal in ethnic terms. In mobilising a popular constituency through economic nationalism, the self-help movement began to provide a theatre for the institutional elaboration of a popular rhetoric of anti-Indianism expressed in terms of a language of Zulu communalism and mutuality. It was precisely this language which found further development amongst the cohorts of Natal’s herbalists and independent church leaders. In many

37. See “Report on the Bantu Welfare Society, 7 July 1937”, N.A. CNC/PMB, 94, 64/18, N.1/14/3(45).
ways the itinerant herbalist in Natal was a uniquely powerful (and remarkably ignored) ideologue of the labouring poor—a popular intellectual in whose figure both secular and other-worldly mediating powers found articulate simultaneous expression. The Congress movement in Natal had long championed the cause of Zulu herbalists in Natal, viewing the control of the trade much in the same light as the proscription of beer brewing—the unjust appropriation of a national, "traditional" right (La Hausse 1992). Of course there were other reasons for what rapidly became a defence of "Zulu customary rights". The herbalist trade, not least because of the space which the Natal Native Code allowed for its practice, developed into one of the key sites of capital accumulation for frustrated African entrepreneurs. Not surprisingly eminent "respectable" figures such as Inkatha ideologue J. R. Msimang, American-educated intellectual, Rev. O. Cele and businessman brother of John Dube, Charles Dube, were at the forefront of struggles to defend the skills of the inyanga zokwelapa ("medicine man") and inyanga zemiti ("herbalist") in the 1930s and 1940s.

Little wonder, too, that the vocation of herbalist fell on the ears of a more obscure range of individuals whom members of the African elite and white officials often dismissed as charlatans "exploiting [people] for their own selfish ends". Perhaps in this category one could find the peripatetic "Doctors of Medical Electricity" armed with batteries, wires and stethoscopes diagnosing a wide variety of illnesses. Here, too, were the pedlars of bottled fat of white men, fat of utokoloshe and medicines for winning at cards and finding buried treasure. The financial rewards of this occupation (particularly when conducted through the mail-order system) could be great. It is unlikely that Kuzwayo would have missed the possibilities for self-improvement which were attached to the office of herbalist. Nor could he have overlooked the transcendent powers accompanying the position of independent church leader. In a situation where there was a great deal of overlap between herbalists and independent churchmen—the eight Zulu ministers in the Christian Church Saturday, for example, were all at one time unlicensed medical men—Kuzwayo's brief move into office of churchman contained a certain logic. Of course Kuzwayo would not have been unaware of the larger regional independent African

39. It is not possible to elaborate upon this here but for some background on Natal's herbalist trade, see N.A., CNC/PMB, 50, 43/25, N.1/12/8(x).
41. It is interesting that one of the first guises of Wellington Buthelezi, was as this kind of medical doctor. He was arrested in New Hanover in the early twenties for practicing as an unlicensed herbalist. See "R. D. Lyle to Chief Native Commissioner, 30 Jan. 1928", NA, CNC, 348, 1/29/7.
42. Utokoloshe, a fabulous water-sprite resembling a hairy dwarf.
43. "Estcourt to Chief Native Commissioner, 30 April 1940", CAD, NTS, 1471, 645/214, Add. N.C.
churches such as the Zulu Congregational Church, the African Congregational Church and Isaiah Shembe’s Nazareth Baptist Church which not only attracted substantial followings based, to varying degrees, on richly creative synthesis of various traditional beliefs and Christian theology, but also accumulated wealth much of which was invested in land and business enterprises. As a founder of his own church Kuzwayo became, if rather briefly, part of a small army of individuals who marshalled their modest education to pen elaborate church constitutions and who appropriated notions of chiefly authority and developed styles of prophetic leadership in order to secure followers in the towns and countryside of Natal.

This broadly defined Zulu self-help movement thus had roots extending back into the late nineteenth century. It was this historical experience which was mobilised by Zulu intellectuals in the 1940s when rapid economic growth, urbanisation and rising popular militancy regenerated Zulu economic nationalist initiatives on an unprecedented scale. It was also this context which opened up novel possibilities for frustrated sections of Natal’s African elite, accustomed to “broken ground running”, to elaborate innovative forms of self-help. It is to Durban and the picaresque manipulation of social, economic and political space in the 1940s that the attention of this article now turns.

Pardoners of the New Africa: Capital and the Millennium

During the course of the 1940s the contours of African life in the towns and countryside of Natal were dramatically transformed. In Durban this period witnessed the rapid expansion of secondary industry. Industrial change precipitated by the outbreak of war brought with it a massive new demand for unskilled labour. In response to this Durban’s African population in the ten year period after 1936 soared from 70,531 to 113,612. Although the period until 1946-47 witnessed the rise of real wages paid to African workers, this was accompanied by high job-turnover which was itself a function of fluctuating demands for unskilled labour, wage discrepancies between different sectors of the unskilled labour market and the position of unskilled Africans at the most exploitable end of the labour market. By the later 1940s Durban was home to thousands of first generation urban dwellers who had abandoned the hope of subsisting in the countryside in the wake of evictions and large-scale cattle losses in parts of rural Natal after 1945. In a growing “black belt” of informal settlements around the city the struggle to secure adequate incomes to support families became a constant feature of people’s lives. Then, after

44. Colin Bundy used this term in an earlier discussion of this article.

In his study of African social and political movements in Durban during this period Iain Edwards (1989) has provided us with fascinating insights into African popular struggles. While the ANC atrophied, Edwards argues, "new proletarian populist movements" which "the proletariat saw as being able to provide them with greater control over their own lives", flourished. At the heart of these movements was a proletarian interpretation of the "New African" which sought to "celebrate the dignity of the ordinary African" and which gave expression to "forms of messianic populism", "internationalism" and a "militant concept of revenge". A transformed cooperative movement with militant and idealist objectives became the vehicle for the development of a grassroots critique of local power structures. The thrust behind this movement was essentially proletarian and its operations were governed by particular codes of morality.

If one important and growing response of workers to the constricted economic opportunities provided in Durban during the 1940s was strike action, another more pervasive one was continually shifting employment patterns and job mobility in order to secure higher wages. Yet for some this was also a world in which cultural skills could be used to occupy and prise open the smallest of economic spaces in a racially repressive environment, as the case of herbalists vividly suggests. Under these conditions "living by one's wits", frequently at the expense of both local institutions of oppression and ordinary people, could be honed into a fine art—a weapon of survival.

During 1948 reports of the emergence of what became known as umholiswano (or People's Banks) came to the attention of government officials in Natal. Under other circumstances this might not have been of great import, for the 1940s had witnessed the spectacular extension of the earlier cooperative society movement, the formation of Nabantukop by William Mseleku and the creation by the movement of a "National Cultural" magazine called Ukubambisana. Yet, where the more formalised Cooperative Societies of Nabantukop promised its members that "We make profits for you. Others make profits from you" under the slogan Mazibuye Emasisweni ("Let our cattle and wealth return"), the promises of the umholiswano were even more captivating. The idea of these banks or clubs, also known as ilink, was to get rich very fast. Members would pay a contribution of, say, 12/6s to the organiser (who would in turn take a cut for purposes of running the "Bank") which was pooled

45. Or mahulisana—originally a savings system whereby a group agreed to pool contributions every week, with the total amount being given to each member in rotation. See also below.
together with other contributions. The subscriber was then given a number, a receipt and his name entered in a book in numerical order. Usually the first individual to join would be paid out £10, for example, as soon as twenty others had joined. The next on the list would receive his £10 when a further twenty members had joined. Each member would be encouraged to reinvest as soon as he had received payment. Member number 500, of course, could look forward to riches when the Club had enrolled ten thousand members.

The fatal flaw in this scheme was immediately obvious to more worldly-wise observers, including, no doubt, some of the bankers themselves. Yet for thousands of increasingly impoverished rural and urban workers in the late 1940s, ilink was transformed into a vehicle for their millennial dreams. During the first half of 1948 the umholiswano spread like wildfire through the townships and sprawling shack settlements of Durban, the communities in Pietermaritzburg’s Edendale area and, then, through Natal as a whole. In the Durban region the freehold township of Clermont became one the first centres to witness the dramatic birth of the “banks”. Here “banks” even had formal constitutions such as that of the Rapid Cash Society, one of a number of “banks” which were established in the township. Drained of the philanthropic pretensions of many of the Credit or Trading cooperative societies, the Society simply aimed to “continue and carry on money link” and, somewhat inscrutably, “to create from time to time classes of money tables or formulas to be followed”. “First come first served” was the governing principle and no member (would) lose his money.

Numerous less-formalised operations were started by individuals in back rooms or in the offices of local African notables. In Pietermaritzburg where at least eleven known such banks sprang up, bankers, at least one of whom reportedly employed twelve typists and fifteen assistants, could be found in semi-derelict houses offering £27 for investments of £1.2s.6d. In small rural towns bankers were reported to have “banked” hundreds of pounds in several days, while in Cato Manor itself numerous banks were established. Local authority watched these developments with some anxiety. While they had no legal authority to shut down ilink, the police did nonetheless intervene. In the early stages of the banks white policemen were met with fierce popular resistance with participants claiming “now we have a chance to make money, you police insist on stopping us”. Not surprisingly by the middle of 1948 thousands had lost money. Hostility to constituted authority was rapidly redirected at the bankers themselves. Enraged subscribers who had lost their money

46. Cutting from the Sunday Tribune, 29 Feb. 1948, CAD, NTS, 9747 891/400.
besieged courtrooms in search of bankers charged with fraud, thronged lawyers' offices, demonstrated in the streets, sought to lynch "bankers" and burned and looted their homes. Desperate workers in at least one compound in Durban came close to hanging "the promoters of their local benefit fund",\(^49\) while in Pietermaritzburg, where an estimated £60,000 had been invested in the schemes, Chief Mini was called in to placate over three thousand angry investors. In the face of popular outrage scores of "bankers" fled for their lives.

In Durban the Zulu press published numerous letters warning people against the banks. Acting Zulu Paramount Mshiyeni appealed: "My people, I do not suggest that the Nation should not uplift itself by means of money, seeing that money is the source of life, but not in the manner adopted here—people flooding the whole town [ . . . ] it destroys many things due to us to help us develop ourselves".\(^50\)

Others pointed to the origins of some bankers: "Zulus! Satan has entered and this thing \([Umholiswano]\) is now everywhere! [ . . . ] What makes it more regrettable is that Ministers of religion are involved". Most correspondents like S. J. Kunene appealed for people to stay with more well-established cooperative societies and "Native Banks" in "the hands of men of good standing". On a more disturbing and apocalyptic note one local trader, who sought to defend the principles of "proper" banks, announced: "Thou, 1948 hast come! Thou slayer of orphans and the wealthy, has come! Thou crucifier of the distinguished and clever. You have made them suffer for others' sins. What will you be like in 1949?" It might be, of course, that i\(\text{link}\) represented little more than a brief abberation of the more idealist, grassroots cooperative movement. Certainly, prospective operators of the \(umholiswano\) found it difficult to operate after the collapse of the schemes. In a variety of ways, however, these "people's banks" represented an extension of the cooperative ideals of the Nabantu Kop movement particularly in one of its popular manifestations: the Cooperative Credit Society or loan bank the members of which were able to secure loans on the basis of an initial membership and thereafter monthly subscription fees.\(^51\) Yet most obviously it represented a dramatic elaboration of that well-established institution of black working-class life: the \(isistokofela\), rotating credit systems or mutual benefit societies which had deep historical roots amongst Africans in Durban and other towns in South Africa. While many of the "people's bankers" clearly did genuinely believe that economic salvation lay through the "doors" of the "Rich Quick Native Banks", and failed to

\(^{49}\) Cutting from \textit{Sunday Times}, 7 March 1948. CAD, NTS, 9747, 891/400.

\(^{50}\) \textit{Hänga lase Natal}, 3 Apr. 1948.

\(^{51}\) For the widespread presence of Credit Cooperative Societies in Natal at this time see, for example, \textit{Ukubambisana}. Vol. I. No.1. June 1946.
see the impending disaster, others were more ruthlessly parasitic in their designs.

Either way the distance between _ilink_ and the cooperative movement on the ground was often blurred. Attempts by “respectable” cooperative society spokesmen to distance their movement from the discredited operators of the _unholiswana_ (“persons . . . [who] no one knows where they come from and who they are”), were not free from ambiguity. Evidence suggests that, for example, a member of the prominent Kuzwayo family of Clermont was involved in the Banks. Alfred Kuzwayo, the leading figure in this family had been head of the Zulu Society’s Economic Desk, was a prominent entrepreneur and one of Durban’s first African bus owners. Similarly both M. A. Bhengu and J. S. Mkwanazi, local ANC leaders and operators of Credit Cooperatives were in touch with the _ilink_ bankers of Cato Manor. Congress Youth League leader M. B. Yengwa was the struggling Durban-based book-keeper of the Pumosizini Bus Company—as also known as the Zabazomuzi Buying Club. Run by Christian Zulu of Nseleni in Zululand the Company succeeded in attracting contributions for the purchase of busses but by 1948 could only account for just over half of its capital. At a time when the proliferation of bogus collecting agencies was being reported, Native Affairs Department officials pushed for the prosecution of individuals such as Zulu. Yet the foundering of such schemes on the reefs of undercapitalisation, uneven entrepreneurial experience and a maze of repressive state laws had been a persistent feature of elite economic initiatives for decades. William Mseleku himself had come close to being charged in 1934 after the collapse of his Bantu Welfare Society. While the state tended to see fraud lurking in the litany of financial irregularities which these enterprises often left in their wake, the reality as has been suggested, was usually rather more complex. What is significant, however, is that such economic enterprises and the forms of cultural identity to which they gave expression provided the basis for the elaboration of more self-consciously fraudulent schemes.

Indeed, the trickery of individuals such as Enoch Sithole was of a rather different order. Sometime in 1948 or 1949 Sithole was responsible for establishing the International Bantu Progress Society—as also known as the Bantu Association for Economic Advancement—in Durban. The objects of the Society were, amongst numerous other things: “to glorify and worship God”, “to work for fairplay and justice for all people”, “to use only constitutional methods”, “to advance Bantu cultural development”, “to encourage all Bantu people to make a special study each of his

52. “E. A. P. Mrabbitshana to Editor, _Ilanga lase Natal_, 3 March 1948”, CAD, NTS, 9747, 891/400.
own Native tongue" and "to assist Bantu housing".\textsuperscript{54} In late 1940s Durban, the meaning of this Constitution, betraying as it did a certain sensitivity to the ideology of mission-educated Africans as well as an awareness of an emerging language of Apartheid, came to mean something rather different. By 1949 the Bantu Association for Economic Advancement had merged imperceptibly with the International Ethiopian Council for Study and Report of South Africa (Lion of Judah–King of Kings Constitution) whose coterie of "Egyptian" priests set about providing, at an appropriate fee, newly-arrived African workseekers with fake passes and registration certificates. This involved enrolling vulnerable migrants as members of the Church "Under the Protection of Almighty God, Ham and Kushes Princess [who] shall come out of Egypt".\textsuperscript{55} The extent of such predatory activities in Natal during this period remains to be fully explored, although present evidence does suggest that they might have been fairly widespread.

It is certainly revealing that the narrative of C. L. S. Nyembezi's popular Zulu novel \textit{Inkinsela YaseMgungundlovu} ("The important gentleman from Pietermaritzburg"). 1961 concerns the exploits of C. C. Ndebenkulu Esq., a picaresque figure clearly moulded on the form of the trickster of Zulu folklore. It is possible to summarise the story as follows: Ndebenkulu (lit. "big lips") writes from Pietermaritzburg to a respected member of the Nyanyadu community in Dundee district, suggesting that he has a scheme to make people rich.\textsuperscript{56} This involves the selling of people's cattle for high prices on the basis of a "cooperative" society scheme. The uneducated Mkhwanazi invites him to Nyanyadu to explain his scheme. The overweening Ndebenkulu makes his appearance—a strange front tooth jutting from his mouth, hands kept firmly in his pockets, wearing glasses and a walking-stick under his arm. Despite or perhaps even because of his bullying arrogance—he says Nyanyadu people are backward, they cannot keep time, do not treat strangers well or know how to hold meetings—Ndebenkulu makes a deep impression on the uneducated members of the community. The fake cheques which he produces as evidence of his ability to make people rich, the mention of his contact's with prominent whites, his veneer of education and his title, do not, however, impress Mkhwanazi's son Themba and his friend Diliza, who between themselves share education and working experience in town. Their scepticism is confirmed when Themba finds an article on confidence tricksters in \textit{Ilanga}. The point at which Ndebenkulu is about to negotiate the

\textsuperscript{54} "Constitution of the International Bantu Society", NA, 2/DBN, 3/1/2, 2/12/2, 2/56/2/15.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Rex versus Enoch Sithole and others, Case J 6249/1949"}, CAD, NTS, 7273, 512/326.

\textsuperscript{56} I am indebted to Mangisi Gule for sharing his insights into Nyembezi's novel with me.
“sale” of some of the community’s cattle, he is ensnared in a police trap. For Diliza has called Detective Mpungose from Ladysmith who has been investigating a case in which a trickster has deprived a widow of her cattle. The widow, who is present at the denouement at Nyanyadu, identifies Ndebenkulu in the following terms: Na li leliqola!57 (“Here is the trickster!”).

The evidence suggests that part of Nyembezi’s novel was based on the experience of many Zulu-speakers in the post-1940 period. Certainly the idea of selling off cattle to raise liquid capital for business investment had been mooted by A. H. Ngidi—one of the Zulu Society’s ideologues on economic affairs—in 1943, and found a resonance in state schemes to cull cattle in overstocked areas of Natal during the same period.58 Yet rural people lost their cattle in other ways, such as selling them off to participate in fraudulent sweeps (Edwards 1989: 77) and, quite likely, through the confidence trickery of individuals such as the fictional C. C. Ndebenkulu. But more than this the presentation of Ndebenkulu is intriguing and invites further attention. He appears in the novel as a man of obscure origins (there is no such Zulu name as “Ndebenkulu”), and to a largely illiterate rural audience he bears the power and impress of the white man’s world. His title, dress, style of speech and educated manner all point to a man who moves with the confidence of an individual well-versed in the ways of the colonizer. That most of these attributes have the depth of a mask is lost on a desperate and naive audience. Just as the picaro was originally rooted in a social type, so too might Nyembezi’s trickster.

“I am the Gate”: Some Zulu Collaborators in the Apartheid Era

A central feature of Elias Kuzwayo’s self-presentation to authority after his brief foray into formal African oppositional politics, was to clothe his operations in a “public language of conformity” (Scott 1985: 289). The Constitutions of most cooperative societies, similarly inscribed within their charters their independence from any political organisation or movement. G. F. Khumalo, of Pietermaritzburg, was no exception. During the course of 1939 he attempted to form The Bantu Cooperative Union

57. *Iqola* is literally a fiscal shrike, the smallest bird of prey. Ndenbenkulu’s end might be taken to demonstrate the Zulu proverb *Akukho qili izikhohlwi emhlane* (lit. “There is no cunning person who has ever licked his own back”). See *Njwiziz* 1974: 173.
58. See “A. H. Ngidi to Sec. Zulu Society, 17 Sept. 1943”, N.A. Zulu Society Papers, A1381, III/1/7. Ngidi called for “the uneducated ringed Zulu man” to “change [cattle] into money and teach him how to trade and negotiate this capital instead of keeping the unprofitable and unwieldy cattle-bank”.
in order to develop [the Bantu] into a self supporting, progressive, well-governed and happy race”—a project to be sustained by “mutual understanding and cooperation between the Government and the Bantu”. No matter that this grandiose project would ostensibly be realised through the establishment of a trading store for black farmers at Bulwer. Where Khumalo perhaps parted company with some of his fellow travellers in the cooperative society movement was his more energetic embracing of a public language of conformity. For, by the mid-1950s, he can be found writing to government officials in Pretoria claiming that it was almost three years since he, as an “Apostle of the Bantu Cooperative Movement”, had “started to work for the government, by making my people understand and appreciate what the government is trying to do for them through the Bantu Authorities, Group Areas, and other acts making provision for Bantu national self government”.

As a self-appointed employee of the state who drew no salary and who had, by his own account, suffered for his beliefs, Khumalo was in fact an ex-teacher who refused to accept a transfer for poor conduct, had served briefly on Pietermaritzburg’s Sobantu Native Advisory Board, stood accused of libel and of whose geslepenheid (“cunning”) Apartheid government officials seemed fully aware. Whether his project for 1955—the establishment of the Zulu National Organisation of which he claimed to be “Sponsor”—was ever realised seems doubtful.

But what does one make of individuals such as Khumalo? The easy answer could be captured in three words: unambiguous opportunist collaboration. If, as Shula Marks (1986b: 1) has claimed, “the working of the ‘colonial misunderstanding’” involves the wearing of the mask of deference by the colonized in a situation where “words and actions of individuals are both deliberately and accidentally ambiguous”, and also if “dissimulation is the characteristic and necessary pose of subordinate classes everywhere most of the time” (Scott 1985: 284), then in the case of Khumalo, and others like him, the mask seems to have become the whole reality. It does seem though that the idea of the picaresque and the story of Elias Kuzwayo might provide a starting point for understanding Khumalo and other collaborators like him.

It has recently been convincingly argued that the early years of Apartheid rule were characterised by a high degree of pragmatism on the part of a government faced with equivocal electoral support and intense debates within the ruling party over the nature of Apartheid (Lazar 1987, Posel 1987). One of the immediate tasks of the new government was to deal with the growing threat of ANC-inspired mass political protest. After 1951 there are clear signs that influential figures within government such

as W. M. M. Eiselen and H. F. Verwoerd, together with the Broederbond, sought to both publically and privately undermine oppositional political organisation through actively courting Africans who might not only assist in these aims but also act as propagandists for an emerging policy of Apartheid and the principles embodied in particular laws such as the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Bantu Authorities Act (1951). G. F. Khumalo, whose role as self appointed prophet of Apartheid has already been alluded to, was clearly viewed as a possible candidate for Broederbond-sponsored activism. Similarly, the Supreme Council, established on the Rand in the mid-1950s, was a Broederbond sponsored scheme to draw members of a *tstotsi* ("young gangster") sub-culture in the Western Areas of Johannesburg into an organisation which would disrupt potential opposition to the Sophiatown removals. It seems quite likely that in some ways, the often disorganised nature of mass-based African politics in the early 1950s created a propitious climate for a state bent on smashing opposition to its policies. In a revealing speech in 1953 Nelson Mandela lamented (1977: 113): "In Congress there are still many shady characters, political clowns, place-seekers, saboteurs, provocateurs, informers and policemen who masquerade as progressives but who are in fact the bitterest enemies of our organisation. Outside appearances are highly deceptive and we cannot classify these men by looking at their faces or by listening to their sweet tongues...".

While the emerging form of state policy in the period after the rise to power of the National Party government in 1948 therefore presaged the development of a fiercely repressive regime of control governing the lives of black South Africans, for some members of a fractured black elite possessed of a particular combination of personal ambition, entrepreneurial drive and political opportunism, Apartheid offered new scope for upward mobility and self-improvement. Moreover, for certain Zulu intellectuals in Natal the idea of "separate development" resonated with a particular articulation of a regional economic nationalism with sustained historical attempts to forge a Zulu ethnic identity on the basis of secessionist politics. S. S. Bhengu, H. C. Sibisi, W. Dimba and V. L. D. Maillie, for example, are all relatively unknown political figures, not least perhaps because each was involved—much like G. F. Khumalo—in elaborating conservative ethnic nationalist organisations largely in their own names after 1948.

Simon Sampson Bhengu appears to have had *kholwa* origins probably in the Vryheid district of Northern Natal. It was his uneven education and subsequent vocation as a healer of sorts which led some Natal members of the Congress Youth League to deride him as "a semi-literate witch-doctor". During the 1920s he appears to have spent much time roaming parts of Natal’s Midlands and Northern districts practising as a herbalist before opening a herbalist shop in Durban in the late 1920s. Then in the early 1930s he established the Bantu Medical Dispensary in
Pietermaritzburg and in 1935 was serving as Registrar of the Natal Native Medical Council (NNMC). During 1937 he sought to diversify his business interests by investing capital from the medicines trade in a rural Fresh Produce Dealer’s business near Bulwer and establishing the Bhengu Medicine Shop in Church Street Vryheid.61 (It was during this period that his life briefly intersected with that of E. R. G. Kuzwayo who had recently committed himself more seriously to the herbalist trade. In 1938 Kuzwayo became Vice-President of Bhengu’s NNMC). Bhengu’s profile as a public figure was further enhanced in the 1940s during the course of an acrimonious dispute with South Africa’s wealthiest African businessmen—the Durban herbalist, Israel Alexander. In 1946 Bhengu apparently bought out Alexander’s lucrative business for the astounding sum of £100,000 to be paid on the basis of monthly installments of £200.62 The deal, however, went awry, and by 1948 Bhengu had re-located his business to Ladysmith where he founded the Native Medical Council.

According to one local herbalist, Bhengu’s Council enrolled members for a fee of £5 but failed to give an account of what was done with subscriptions and called no meetings.63 Indeed Bhengu was devoting himself to a greater calling. A petition which he sent to the Governor-General in early 1952 provides some clues as to his new vocation. “The Natal Native Medical Council”, Bhengu wrote, “submits to Your Excellency that such African National Congress acceptance of Indian collaboration [ . . . ] do not represent the actual views and feelings of the Native masses in this province”. The petition went on to denounce the proposed Passive Resistance campaign and in particular the activities of “Indians in their coup d’Etat to drag the Natives to fight the Government and to treat government laws with contempt”. Bhengu also explained the entry of a herbalists “organisation” into politics in the following terms: “The reason of the Native Medical Council’s intervening in this matter is that, although it is not a political or governmental body, the medicine-man is, by virtue of his profession, the backbone and pillar of his race. The Native Medical Council is in close contact with the pulse of the whole race [ . . . ] and the aspirations of the masses of natives in all parts of the country, urban and rural”.64

Much of this grandiloquence was rooted in more meanly mundane matters, for the petition concluded with an appeal to remove Indians from

61. “S. Bhengu to Secretary of Native Affairs, 3 July 1931”, CAD, NTS, 9032, 2/376, Part I; and “Chief Native Commissioner to Secretary of Native Affairs, 19 March 1937”, NTS, 1066, 230/160; and Ilanga lase Natal, 22 Feb. 1935.
the Waschbank area of Natal where there were a number of African freehold farms, and to draw attention to the “havoc” which Indian traders and bus owners had caused in the Ladysmith area. Unsurprisingly it was during this period that Bhengu’s estate was sequestrated and he was involved in continual litigation with local Indian entrepreneurs.

Bhengu seems to have made an uncomplicated transition (with the Apartheid state’s backing) from the Native Medical Council to something called the Bantu National Congress (BNC). The Congress, which was generally viewed as “purely a private creation of Bhengu’s”, set itself up in direct opposition to the rejuvenated Natal ANC and to its leader, Albert Lutuli.65 In a widely-circulated document the Bantu National Congress made its position clear:

“... being the cunning and wily people they are [... ] the Indians are striving to make the Natives their political cat’s-paw, and as in the proverbial story, “to pull the monkeynuts out of the Government fire with the Native’s hand for the benefit of cunning Mr. Monkey’ [... ] [they] are evidently attempting to set the Natives into armed clashes with the Government after which the Government would blame the Paramount Chief [... ] Such an affair has its parallel in the story of Bhambatha, Son of Mancinza, for which Dinizulu, king of the Zulus was deposed [... ] we warn any Native quisling who conspires with the Indians to betray his own race, that he will earn the everlasting curse of our God [... ] [during the 1949 riots] which were a spontaneous outburst of the Indian-exploited and oppressed Natives to break free from Indian enslavement and exploitation, it was only the Natives that were shot by the Marines [... ] Indian landlords suck the Natives dry with high house rentals [... ] Let us part company residentially with our parasite [... ] from polluting your daughter [... ] The truth is that all new laws enacted by the Government have worthy aims and motives for the eventual benefit of the Natives themselves. Let the Indians fight their own battles”.66

Apparently Bhengu intended to visit the United Nations to demand the repatriation of Indians and in a cable to the United Nations claimed that the Defiance Campaign did not originate in “hearts of millions of Bantu whom we represent, but out of the distorted ideas of the so-called leaders who have been bought by rich Indians and are afraid of the Group Areas Act”.67 Both D. F. Malan and the Afrikaans press made quick public use of the BNC, the latter claiming that the organisation had 400,000 followers in Natal. The ANC, and Lutuli in particular, watched Bhengu’s activities and the uses to which they were being put with growing concern. Perhaps this anxiety was justified for, although the archival record is largely silent on this point, S. S. Bhengu’s brother was none

65. Also spelt Luthuli; for his deep concern about Bhengu, see LUTHULI 1962: 133-134.
other than S. I. J. Bhengu, one of the most remarkable figures in Natal regional politics during this period. Apparently resented by Chief Buthelezi in the 1950s for being an interloper in Zulu royal affairs, S. I. J. Bhengu was a founder member of the first Inkatha in the 1920s, secretary to the Zulu king Solomon in the late 1920s, executive member of the Natal ANC (Justice Department) in the late 1940s and architect of attempts to revive Inkatha in the early 1950s. Like his brother he was also involved in the herbalist trade.68

A special committee spearheaded by Congress Youth Leaguers J. Ngubane and H. I. E. Dhlomo set to work trying to confront the state on its own terms. Congress-inspired investigations facilitated Bhengu's fall. They discovered that Bhengu's "real" name was Ngcemu and that he had served at least one jail term for fraud. In 1953 he appeared in the Pietermaritzburg Regional Court on nine charges of theft (including one for stealing £2,810 from an African bus company), seven charges of fraud (relating to the unauthorised issuing and selling of herbalist's registration certificates), one of forgery and one of "fake representations". For the state, however, the key charge against Bhengu clearly related to the fact that he proved to be a less than obedient or reliable servant. As President of the BNC, Bhengu approached R. W. C. Meyer, aspirant Native Senator of Middledrift, claiming the support of a large number of African electors, and induced the gullible white politician to appoint him as his election agent and to pay him £329 for services which were never rendered.69 In 1954 Bhengu was sentenced to five years and nine months in prison.

The opportunism of Bhengu was probably matched, but not entirely in the same way, by H. C. Sibisi.70 Born of poor labour tenants in Northern Natal in 1904, Sibisi attended local schools before moving to Adams Mission where he obtained a qualification as an agricultural demonstrator. It was as a demonstrator in Swaziland and then in Natal's Ndwedwe district, that he acquired his first entrepreneurial appetites for he was instrumental in establishing several trading stores. By the 1940s he had settled in Clermont township where he rapidly came into contact with prominent political figures such as Champion, Dr Seme and ANC Youth Leaguers, a period during which he moved between the occupations of lay preacher and herbalist. By 1948 he was elected Chairman of the local Isolomuzi (Vigilance Committee). It was also during the 1940s that he established the Clermont Bantu Bus Co. (which sought to raise shares from local residents for the purchase of buses), The Clermont Bantu Improvement Co. (for the purposes of buying up land in Clermont) and The Vukuzake

68. S. I. J. Bhengu is the subject of a separate study in which I am currently engaged.
69. Advance, 12 Nov. 1953.
70. See Edwards 1988 (I am grateful to Iain Edwards for allowing me to quote this paper and for drawing my attention to Sibisi). See also interview with H. C. Sibisi, Patane, 29 June 1990.
Clermont Co. (designed for women residents in market gardening and home crafts). None of these schemes flourished. In fact Sibisi abandoned Clermont for Cato Manor when residents began to complain that their money had disappeared.

In Cato Manor Sibisi became involved in various less than legal activities, including fraudulent sweepstakes and selling shares in non-existent companies. Ever aware of economic space Sibisi was also a mediator for the deeply conservative, anti-Indian Zulu Hlanganani Cooperative Buying Club based in Cato Manor. Sibisi, it seems, never really succeeded in accumulating much capital. During the 1950s, in addition to being a “bush lawyer”, he became closely involved in passing information about ANC activities in Durban on to the South African Police and local municipal Native Affairs Department. It was from this base during the 1950s that he became involved in one of a number of initiatives to revive the Inkatha organisation of the early 1920s. For Sibisi, something of a Zulu populist philosopher, the erosion of the power of the Zulu king held great dangers. It had led to a situation where: “... any ordinary man claims to be a leader. The public wants a leader and will follow any one claiming this right, only to find out very late that the man concerned was not a leader he was just a ‘misleader’”.

Despite his own efforts as a self-appointed broker for the Zulu monarchy Sibisi’s project foundered not least due to the different agendas of the Zulu king and Chief Buthelezi.

Unlike Sibisi, Walter Dimba came from an established kholwa family on the Groutville Mission. He was born in 1893 and by 1913 was engaged as a teacher of printing at John Dube’s Ohlange Industrial School. In the early 1910s he can be traced in the columns of Ilanga offering readers lengthy reflections on the importance of the referee to football. When Gardiner Mvuyana (also of Groutville) seceded from the American Board Mission and established the African Congregational Church in 1917, Dimba was rapidly drawn into its orbit. Then between 1926 and 1931 he went to study at Anderson College, Indiana, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Theology. His return to South Africa was dramatic. He discovered that his Church had floated itself into a limited liability company and was now the African Congregational Church Co. Ltd. Angry, not so much because the Church had extended its horizons, but rather because he was absent when the decision to do so had been made, Dimba became embroiled in a violent dispute with other Zulu church leaders based in Johannesburg which nearly cost him his life. Against this backdrop Dimba formed his own Gardiner Mvuyana African Congregational Church and issued an appeal: “We let the Zulu know that here is his

71. Confidential interview.
home now. Gardiner Mvuyana is risen from the dead. Hurrah!"\(^73\) Two years later he was forced to leave his own church and he disappeared either to America or East Africa.\(^74\) Back in South Africa, in 1943 he organised a Federation of Bantu Churches which claimed a probably exaggerated membership of sixty churches. During the course of the 1950s he was reputed to run classes for pastors. Lessons comprised chiefly the study of bookkeeping and the intricacies of banking church collections. Living in the shadow of a much larger white business world Dimba was also given to changing his name to "Dimbar".\(^75\)

By the 1950s Dimba had begun to carve for himself and his Federation a self-created position as mediator between the state and unrecognised independent African churches in urban locations. Dimba, according to his own account, claimed that he was "in favour of all the Government policies, etc.". There was, however, one problem. His Federation, he claimed, "blames the government for not having had first created a body of trustworthy men among the Africans to interpret the Government's laws as they should have been explained to these poor unfortunate creatures". At public meetings Dimba was given to booming out the words "I am the Gate [...] [to the Pretoria government]" (Sundkler 1976: 299). Yet despite drawing up constitutions for churches and issuing ordination certificates Dimba never really succeeded in capturing the membership of wealthy churches. This may have precipitated a new career trajectory for he managed to insinuate himself into the ranks of the growing body of Africanists hostile to the ANC and, in April 1959, found himself addressing the inaugural conference of the Pan Africanist Congress at Orlando as the principal clergyman invited to speak (Karis & Carter, 1973-77, III: 314). Swaggering, it seems, from one dark night of the soul to the next, Dimba re-appears in the early 1960s in a somewhat different role. Together with Lloyd Ndaba he established the African Foundation of South Africa—an organisation which "aimed at propagating ideas on territorial separate development which must lead to ethnic autonomous republics of Southern Africa". *Africa South*, the mouthpiece of the Foundation, appropriately sharing its name with the liberal/left-wing journal of the same period, announced: "Whenever Africans (Negroes) are living side by side with any other racial group, be it Europeans or Indians or Arabs, racial strife ensues. There must be a biological or generic anthropological reason for this strange phenomenon".\(^76\)

---

73. Sundkler 1976: 296. For an account of these conflicts see CAD, GNLB, 410, 73/37; and also CAD, NTS, 1444, 54/214, Part I.
74. For a wonderful account of Dimba's later career, see Sundkler 1976: 295-300.
75. Sundkler 1976: 296. Much like the head of another independent church who changed his name in 1944 from Malinga to Mallinger. See CAD, NTS, 1471, 668/214.
With this in mind Dimba, together with Ndaba, formed the Zulu Bantustan Policy, also known as the Zulu National Party. “I want to make it clear”, Dimba claimed, “that we are not stooges”. In fact reliable evidence suggests that not only was Dimba a “stooge” but that he was, like Bhengu and Sibisi, at some stage on the payroll of the state. Apparently, Dimba’s partner, Lloyd Ndaba, derived part of his income from the Bureau of State Security.77

But perhaps it is the figure of Victor Maillie who, more than any other, combines the elusive essence of these collaborating figures in the early Apartheid era. And in apparent confirmation of the complexities of his public presentation of self, the figure of Maillie has been recently used to define the militant and oppositional character of the “New Africa” in Durban in the 1940s (Edwards 1989: 85-86). Like Elias Kuzwayo in an earlier period, Maillie evidenced a certain imaginative grasp of self in relation to the travails of life in the “New Africa”. Although it remains difficult to pin down exactly who V. L. D. Maillie was—his alias’s included Sibindi Dlomo, Mkonto and Morris—we do know that he established the African Central Welfare and Industrial Society in 1946. Failing to obtain official recognition for this society he attempted, unsuccessfully, to register at least three further societies: the African Welfare Orphan’s Society, the African Central Industrial Society and the African Welfare Industrial Training Centre, between 1946 and 1952. The aims of these societies were broadly similar—each sought to obtain employment for members, provide orphans with education and health care, purchase land for agriculture and, revealingly, to defend African females from the “sexual menace” of Indian men. In March 1950 Maillie wrote to the Minister of Labour complaining that the government had “failed to carry out its ‘Apartheid’ policy efficiently”. Four months later he was writing to the Prime Minister claiming that: “The members of my Society have welcomed the Group Areas Act and the Apartheid policy general and it is our earnest hope that these measures will be carried out with justice to all sections of the community”.78

While he was seeking Native Trust loans to the sum of £100,000, calling for a return of the power and land of Zulu chiefs, writing apocalyptic letters to the local press and inviting the Zulu Paramount Chief to speak in Durban, it also emerged that Maillie had three previous convictions for theft, one for fraud and one for assault. Oral historical research also recalls Maillie in the role of independent churchman and herbalist in Natal and the Transkei.79 White officials called him someone “of doubtful reputation and a notorious exploiter of his people”. Acting Paramount

77. Confidential interview. 2. For Ndaba’s career see Tilmus 1976; Mzala 1988: 89-93.
78. “V. Maillie to Dr D. F. Malan, 12 July 1950”, CAD, NTS, 7259, 338/326.
79. Confidential interview, 2.
Chief Mshiyeni called Maillie “rubbish”, members of his own societies called him a “scandalous and dangerous dictator” who was responsible for “enriching himself with public monies”. By contrast, S. S. L. Mtolo, prominent Durban trade unionist and ANC Youth Leaguer recalled that he “was respected by all”—a man who “would often tell Champion a thing or two”. Moreover, Maillie has been reclaimed as the embodiment of the militant, idealist and proletarian “New Africa”. According to Iain Edwards, Maillie attracted widespread worker-support for his initiatives which “contrast favourably” with those self-help schemes which “aimed only at advancing the fortunes of the African entrepreneurs who ran them” (Edwards 1989: 86-87). Could it be, paradoxically, that both interpretations are right?

If so, then perhaps Bhengu, Sibisi, Dimba and Maillie were not simply stooges. And anyway, the intention here is not to locate their forms of collaboration along a continuum running from imaginative opportunism to mean parasitism even if, indeed, this were possible. What is important for the moment is that their lives, each in their own way, represent particular but related forms of individual resolution of much deeper dilemmas rooted in historical processes. Their attempts to cope with frustrated economic and social ambition found expression in their creation of roles for themselves as mediators between colonizer and colonized—roles in which they invested much cultural energy. For these individuals the era of Apartheid brought the promise of their differential accommodation within relations of domination and subordination. In this context their articulation of a characteristically utilitarian form of ethnic nationalism (of which anti-Indianism was the obverse expression) represented one way of resolving their position at a particular historical moment. As much manipulated as manipulating it is not coincidental that the single most important thread which binds the collaborationist careers of these individuals together is their articulation of a particular form of Zulu ethnicity focussed on the symbolic power of the Zulu king. That state officials came to focus their attentions on individuals such as Bhengu speaks eloquently not only of the limits of an official sociological imagination but also, paradoxically, of a deep insecurity and fear about cultivating alliances with African political figures who actually might have possessed real constituencies. It is little wonder, too, that someone like Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, already intimately involved in the affairs of the Zulu royal house in the early 1950s, was regarded throughout this period as a potentially dangerous individual ensconced within traditional authority structures. At the same time, however, it should be recognised that the terrain of Zulu ethnic politics was not solely mapped out by men such as Bhengu. The conservative old-guard of the ANC in Natal recasted their nationalist politics in a more self-consciously ethnic mould after Chief Lutuli ousted A. W. G. Champion as President of the ANC in Natal in 1950. In the same year, for example, veteran ANC politician Selby Msimang was busy
establishing the Zulu Development Corporation. In a variety of complex and as yet unexplored ways the world of the opportunist Zulu collaborator intersected with, and indeed was rooted in a resilient (and poorly understood) conservative tradition of ethnic nationalism in Natal.

Kuzwayo, Collaborators and the New African

This all seems very different from the response of the “New African” to racially oppressive society in the 1940s and 1950s. According to H. I. E. Dhlomo the “New African” was: “Proud, patriotic sensitive, alive, and sure of himself and his ideas and ideals. the New African is anti-nobody, unless it be anti-muddled politics, antiquated ideologies, false theories of race and vested interests”. The idea of the New African stood in opposition to what Dhlomo called the “Neither-Nor” African, those “who pander to, and propitiate their overlords”. Members of Natal’s old kholwa elite were seen to be peculiarly representative of this group—this was the individual who was: “... not as sure of himself, proud of his racial identities and affiliations, his indigenous institutions and cultural heritage [... ] caught in the maelstrom of industrialisation and evangelisation [... ] he admires the new and tries to be capitalistic and Christian, cultured and progressive”.

Yet such individuals, when “disillusioned”, degenerated into violent extremists. The purest expression of the New African was to be found amongst “organised urban workers [... ] awakening to [... ] the power of organised intelligently-led mass action and of progressive thinking African intellectuals”.

In fact, as Couzens has suggested. Dhlomo’s idea represented a re-working of the “progressive individualism” of Natal’s older kholwa elite. As a representative, par excellence of “progressive thinking African intellectuals” Dhlomo found a political home in the ANC Youth League along with men such as Yengwa, and Ngubane. For the most part they comprised a well-educated, younger generation familiar with the world of Natal’s respectable African Christian families. Their critique focussed on these older, tightly-constituted networks of Natal’s izemtiti who, by and large, still retained a grip on local and regional politics. But perhaps their greatest criticism was reserved for A. W. G. Champion and his lieutenants, whose conservative hold on the regional ANC until 1950 was a source of deep frustration to this small intellectual elite. At the level of everyday political struggles the contours defining the world of the New

80. See correspondence in CAD, NTS, 7270, 440/326.
81. See COUZENS’S seminal discussion of Dhlomo’s ideas (1985: 32-37). The following quotations are taken from this source.
African were rather more blurred, not least because the Africanist intellectual was still, in many ways, too much part of the world he was criticising. Yet, the ideas elaborated by Dhlomo did find expression in African politics and intellectual life and, as Edwards has suggested, in grassroots struggles in the 1940s (Edwards 1989).

In between the moral ambiguities reflected in the relatively discrete but intersecting worlds of both the conservative izemtiti and the militant New African on the one hand, and the more opportunistic collaborator on the other, appears to lie a more intractable reality represented by Elias Kuzwayo. In the confines of one life Kuzwayo captures, combines and serves to define elements of each of these intersecting worlds in ways which might well be emblematic of one more widespread, but unrecognised, response of a particular stratum of Africans to their experience of marginality and colonisation during a period of particularly rapid social and economic change. The amazing number of occupations at which Kuzwayo tried his hand as has already been suggested, was shared, even if not in precisely the same way, by many other members of Natal’s African elite. It was a response to and a result of diminishing economic horizons in an increasingly racially repressive society. As individuals who were frequently intermediaries and brokers between white rulers and the majority of the labouring population they were equipped with some of the skills necessary for securing a differential economic niche for themselves in a labour-coercive society. In Kuzwayo’s case criminality constructed around a career of brokerage, was the outcome of his inability to effect a transition to relative economic security. This seems particularly appropriate given that, in the African context, the “vocabulary of deviance” may be expressed as “the relatively static communal social order vs the appropriation of powers which allows individuals to transcend the community” —powers which might be called “magico-religious” (Austen 1986: 102). It is not coincidental that Kuzwayo should have attempted to cast himself in the roles of herbalist, independent churchman, or even for that matter, cooperative society spokesman. His appropriation of such roles, and the powers with which they were associated, represented acts which bore peculiarly deep historical and popular cultural meaning within Zulu society. In a society where the individual experience of disease, social disruption and economic deprivation, was symptomatic of a wider landscape of collective suffering, the suitably endowed mediator, whether in the the form of the minister, herbalist or cooperative society architect, found himself in a potentially powerful position. Nor is it surprising that the roles of herbalist, cooperative society spokesman and independent churchman should have attracted numerous pockets of picaresque figures such as Kuzwayo: curious “anti-societies of rogues” in search of secure cultural and economic locations within wider relations of dependency.

But for the picaresque figure the energy which is channelled into the construction of particular identities is also devoted to the transformation
PAUL LA HAUSSE

of these identities through time—role playing being the central motif in
his Protean career. Kuzwayo lived on the boundaries between worlds—
"betwixt and between all fixed points of classification"—someone of the
margins yet somehow also of the centre. In being compelled to move be-
tween these worlds his identity became little more than an integument
subject to transformation as the situation demanded. Unlike the liminality
of the ritual subject which was experienced as a temporary period of exile
prior to a return to society on a novel and improved basis, Kuzwayo
attempted to exploit the possibilities opened up by his more or less per-
manent state of outsiderhood.82 For a picaresque figure like Kuzwayo, as
indeed for his mythic counterpart, the trickster, this involved "living by
his wits", climbing the social ladder not through the hard work and
reward so highly regarded by members of Natal's established kholwa
elite, but through trickery and deception. It meant manipulating notions
of Christian respectability, inverting a work ethic and reworking the
"myth of the ladder" in order to make his way in the world.

Possibly Kuzwayo's deeper picaresque elaboration of moral ambiguity
might be able to provide us with some insights into the forms and styles of
certain popular leaders in Natal between the 1920s and the 1950s. Speak-
ing of H. C. Sibisi (whose career bears many striking similarities with that
of Kuzwayo) as being representative of some other local leaders who pro-
vided a focus for widely felt grievances in Durban during the 1940s.
Edwards (1989: 14) has suggested that as people with obscure rural ori-
gins fighting to avoid full proletarianisation, such men had "no real au-
thority except their own created images". It is an insightful observation
which captures the obscure origins and peculiar populist self-presentation
of such individuals. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, however, we
might be able to advance this point. It seems that a key to understanding
Kuzwayo, Sibisi and similar individuals resides precisely in a recogni-
tion of how their appropriation of particular roles and the creation of certain
kinds of self-imagery derived in important ways from popular culture
itself. As interstitial figures of the most extreme kind they possessed a
keen sense of "plebeian culture" and seem to have headed almost unerr-
ingly to particular kinds of mediatory roles which were political in the
broadest sense and could provide the basis for the articulation of innova-
tive forms of populist leadership. But significantly too, these roles
also represented ways of coping with shattered economic expectation
and social marginality. When such individuals appeared in the public
domain it was pre-eminently as "new men" whose former relative social
obscurity was a positive asset. Having appropriated the powers

82. See discussion in Turner 1974: 234 sq.; also Pilton 1980: 3; and Barcock 1978:
104-105.
associated with roles which were frequently of a transcendent, magico-religious nature, their political style was characteristically undemocratic. While some could sustain a populist appeal over time, the careers of others were brief and transient. Their undoing lay in their self-conscious opportunism which under particular conditions even a strongly undemocratic popular political culture proved ill-equipped to accommodate. For in an attempt to resolve their deeply-felt social and economic dilemmas such individuals could be drawn, not only to particularly self-interested forms of collaboration with the state, but also to the financial attractions of various forms of “sharp practice”. The conditions of the 1940s and 1950s were conducive to the emergence of what one ANC activist and close associate of Congress leader, chief Albert Lutuli referred to as “audacious”, “instant leaders”—men who “... had zeal more than anything [...] who lacked capital and lived by their wits. The situation was turning up genuine—I would not say false [pause]—quasi-leaders. You have capital to run a shop and suddenly you are a leader”.83

This then was the world which provided the conditions for the emergence of picaresque leadership and its further and not infrequent collaborationist elaboration.

Such strategies of survival and self-advancement had their attendant dangers as both Kuzwayo and the operators of the umholiswano discovered. After 1948 “living by one’s wits”, when supplemented by possibly injudicious kinds of state employment, could prove fatal as the case of Rev. T. W. S. Mthembu suggests. Born around 1915 Mthembu became a Lutheran pastor before seceding from his church. During the course of the 1940s he secured a position as an intermediary between the Native Affairs Department and the Zulu independent churches. He had an astounding array of contacts in both town and countryside in Natal which ranged from teachers and African politicians to prophets and important chiefs. During the 1950s, whilst searching for employment, he appears to have been attracted to the intelligence section of the Native Affairs Department and, by 1954, could be found preaching the benefits of the Bantu Authorities Act. He rapidly moved into the swirling political waters surrounding state attempts to gain the Paramount Chief’s support for Bantu Authorities. In 1959 Mthembu was found hanging from a tree in Durban’s Sydenham area, murdered for allegedly being a government informer. Perhaps needless to say Mthembu, in addition to working in the African Gospel Church, had spent the latter period of his life working as an itinerant herbalist. He was one of those men who “could tell you everything [...] he was so mobile”.84

83. Confidential interview. 3. This is an observation which finds fascinating further elaboration in Edwards 1989.
It might well be that further research would yield numerous other such individuals, the antinomies of whose careers might have constituted an important, if unrecognised, feature of the terrain of African social movements and popular politics in Natal, at least until the 1950s. Perhaps too, the idea of the picaresque, although characteristic of more obscure marginal figures, might offer insights into the lives of prominent individuals such as A. W. G. Champion. For how does one do justice to a figure such as Champion—the self-made man and populist predator *par excellence*—without a grasp not only of his economic position, but also of the popular cultural roots of his authority? If this article raises more questions than it answers, what it has attempted to do is draw attention to the idea of the picaresque and its further development in more overtly collaborationist ways, as one possibly important way in which members of a fractured African middle class attempted to resolve their structurally dependent position within a repressive political economy. There are a range of issues which have been raised here but which require further exploration. These include, firstly, the nature of the relationship between leaders and led, and the popular cultural roots of forms of leadership and authority both transient and enduring, and both predatory and democratic; secondly, the changing nature of economic and other forms of patronage mobilised and dispensed by African leadership; thirdly, the changing relationship between the state and Zulu ethnic politics in the decades after 1948; fourthly, a more careful exploration of the African collaborationist response to the historical experience of colonisation in general, together with the forms and motivations which they took in the post-Apartheid period; and finally, a critical examination of different African political traditions in Natal which takes sufficient account of the complex historical constructions of identity and nationalism in the region. No doubt the idea of the picaresque, much like that of "ambiguity", has distinct explanatory limitations and, to be of any analytical utility, would need to be more carefully rooted in historical processes of change and issues of social biography. In one sense perhaps, my use of the picaresque is a form of shorthand acknowledgement that the history of the making of South Africa’s African middle classes has yet to be written.

It does seem important, however, that the picaresque as a literary genre emerged at a particular moment in the development of European society which witnessed the disintegration of traditional value systems, the rise of capitalist ideology and the increasing difficulty of reconciling aspirations for upward social mobility with psychological needs for economic security and self-respect in a dehumanising society. The
picaresque draws attention to “the interaction between self and society at a moment when traditional concepts of self were being questioned, defended and redefined” (Bjornson 1977: 19). In the local South African context then, the picaresque seems to have been a largely unrecognised but identifiable historical response of particular groups of individuals during a period characterised by massive social change, economic repression and intense re-negotiation of identity. It might well be that when the New African in either his elite intellectual or proletarian populist manifestation appeared on the historical stage, in his wake came the motley herbalist bearing his nostrums, the independent churchmen peddling apocalyptic visions, the cooperative society spokesman selling shares in the millennium. And perhaps some of these individuals had an acute sense of the cultural roots of populist authority which in their own cases usually broke up on reefs of personal economic and political opportunism. They were, in their own way, peculiarly representative figures of the New Africa in the early years of Apartheid.

University of the Witwatersrand,  

REFERENCES

1. Archives

Central Archives Depot (Pretoria) — henceforth CAD.  
Native Affairs Department — NTS.  
Department of Justice — JUS.  
Government Native Labour Bureau — GNLB.  
Natal Archives, Secretary of Native Affairs — NA, SNA.  
Chief Native Commissioner — NA, CNC.  
Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg — NA, CNC/PMB.

2. Bibliography

AUSTEN, R.  

BABCOCK, B.  
Babcock, B., ed.

Babcock-Abrahams, B.

Bjornson, R.
1977 The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction (Madison: Wisconsin University Press).

Boethie, D.
1984 Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost. Ed. by B. Simon (London: Arena).

Bonner, P.

Bradford, H.

Broekaert, L.

Burrows, J. R.

Couzens, T.

Crumley, D., ed.

Dube, J.

Edwards, I.

Etherington, N.

Karis, T. & Carter, G. M., eds

La Hausse, P.


Lambert, J.

Lamula, P.
[1921] *Ukuzaka Kwa Bantu* (Durban).

Lazar, J.

Luhull, A.

Mandela, N.

Marks, S.


Maylam, P.

Meintjes, S. M.
MOLO, G.

MZALA

NUTTALL, T.

NYEMBEZI, C. L. S.

PARKER, A. A.

PELTON, R. D.

POSEL, D.

SCOTT, J. C.

SIEBER, H.

STOCK, B.

SUNDKLER, B.
1976 *Zulu Zion* (Uppsala: Gleerups).

TEMKIN, B.

TRACEY, H.
1948 "*Lalela Zulu": 100 Zulu Lyrics* (Johannesburg: African Music Society).

TURNER, V.

TURNER, V., ed.
WALSHE, P.


WILLAN, B.