

FOUR WOMEN, FOUR CHIEFSHIPS: CASE STUDIES IN THE
DIVERGENT CHOICES AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH POWER OF
AMAKHOSIKAZI IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATAL

by

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Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in History (Society and Social Change Cluster, School of Social Sciences), University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I, Eva Aletta Jackson, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
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Eva Jackson

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Abstract

Although women's status, roles and leadership opportunities in precolonial southern Africa, including within the Zulu kingdom, have been contested amongst historians for several decades, this study focuses specifically on these issues in chiefdoms that by the early colonial period were situated in the Natal region; an empirical gap. While largely focusing on four women who lived in early colonial Natal – Heshepi kaPhakathwayo, Mbalasi Makhanya, Dalida Dube, and Vundlazi MaSenca (of the Qwabe, Makhanya, Qadi and Izinkumbi chiefdoms respectively) – it also considers the experiences of numerous other women in these and other chiefly families (*amakhosikazi*). Detailing their different contexts and personal experiences, the study also locates them as female members of chiefly *elites* (whether of large or small chiefdoms) attempting in various ways to re-establish or sustain polities in the difficult context of early colonial Natal. Several of the women considered in the study had migrated southward following military clashes with the Zulu kingdom and the deaths of their husbands and/or fathers, and the chapters consider how the status of widow had vastly different implications across their different contexts. It draws preliminary conclusions regarding thematic threads in these case studies: the (exceptional) opportunities for specific women to own cattle; chiefly women's opportunities for political influence including through strategic alliances with their sons and daughters; some chiefly women's experience of simultaneous social prominence and social marginality; and (a previously unresearched area) the few women who became chiefs themselves in and near Natal in this time period. The study therefore provides the first conclusive evidence that Vundlazi was one of at least eight women in and near Natal who took up their deceased husbands' chiefships (ranging from leadership of a large paramountcy to very small polities). An outline is suggested of the trajectory (and disappearance) of female chiefship in nineteenth-century Natal; and of conflicted colonial stances towards female chiefs within a context of patriarchal hierarchy and indirect rule in Natal. The thesis considers how these case studies relate to debate on precolonial gender relations, and contribute to the ongoing process of understanding how codified customary law was experienced from the 1870s onward.

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Conclusion

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Through discussions with Troy Meyer and Chief Morris Fynn it was possible to understand better how the Fynn chiefs have viewed their leadership over time, the importance of Vundlazi in Izinkumbi history, and how experiences during her rule relate to the difficulties of some of the Fynn descendants today, especially in laying claim to land. Thanks are due to both of them and I hope that this research will be meaningful for them too.

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Previous presentations and publications: An early version of Chapter One was presented to the HASS at UKZN. A previous draft of Chapter Two was presented to the 2009 conference of the Southern African Historical Society (SAHS), and naming practices within the Nembula family, as well as a brief discussion of Mbalasi's conversion, are addressed in Meghan Elisabeth Healy and Eva Jackson, "Practices of Naming and the Possibilities of Home on American Zulu Mission Stations in Colonial Natal", in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. 29, 2011. Mbalasi is briefly mentioned in Jackson, Eva. "The Economic Experimentation of Nembula Duze/ Ira Adams Nembula, 1845–1886." *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* Vol. 28 (2010) which provides a narrative of her son Nembula's entrepreneurship. Although these papers and my honours thesis consider archival evidence on Mbalasi, the biography presented in Chapter Two of this study constitutes the first fully detailed investigation into her life and contributes additional research and readings of evidence. Chapter Three in a different form was presented to the 2012 SAHS, and Chapter Three has also been previously published in *Ekbaya: The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal* edited by Meghan Healy-Clancy and Jason Hickel (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2014). Although it received editorial input, the research, writing and conclusions are my own.

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List of Abbreviations

AZM	American Zulu Mission
ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (or American Board)
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
KC	Killie Campbell Collections, UKZN
PAR	Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository
SNA	Secretary for Native Affairs
SGO	Surveyor General's Office
ANC	African National Congress
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party

Glossary¹

ibutho (pl. *amabutho*) – a regiment

ikhanda (pl. *amakhanda*) – (in this context) military homestead for a regiment

ukulobola – the transferring of cattle from a man's homestead, on or following his marriage, to the homestead of his wife's father or guardian

ilobolo – the cattle transferred through *ukulobola*

ikhohwa (pl. *amakhohwa*) – a believer, a Christian

induna (pl. *izinduna*) – a headman – a man with important, official status in a polity especially as a political advisor

inkosi (pl. *amakhosi*) – a chief of a polity

ukungena – the process of levirate marriage: a woman marrying her deceased husband's brother

amantungwa – people who were part of the political heartland of the Zulu kingdom from the early nineteenth century, 'insiders'

amalala – people who were (or became) peripheral to the political heartland of the Zulu kingdom, 'outsiders'

inyanga (pl. *izinyanga*) – a healer, particularly through the use of herbal medicines

isangoma (pl. *izangoma*) – a healer, particularly through divination or intercession with ancestors to ascertain causes of and solutions to personal and political problems. This could include detecting witches and arranging to have them and their 'pollution' removed from society

inkosikazi (pl. *amakhosikazi*) – could refer in different contexts to a senior or other wife of a chief, a female political leader, or a respected female relative of a chief with senior status in the royal family²

inkosazane (pl. *amakhosazane*) – daughter of a chief

isibalo – forced labour on government works

umndlunkulu – daughters of client chiefs to the Zulu kings, sent by their fathers to be part of the *isigodlo* – either to wait on members of the royal family, or as concubines of the king. The king could subsequently marry *umndlunkulu* to noblemen in the kingdom.

¹ Some definitions above draw on the Glossaries in Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013) ix; Thomas V. Genders and *Generations Apart: Labour Tenants and Customary Law in Segregation-Era South Africa, 1920s to 1940s* (Social History of Africa Series, Heinemann/James Currey/David Philip: 2002) xxi–xxii.

² Jennifer Weir further distinguishes, particularly for the Zulu royal family, the term *inkosazane/amakhosazane* to refer to the daughter of a king.

isigodlo – an enclosure within the royal homestead of Zulu kings (and possibly also within some *amakhanda*) accommodating women associated with the king including for example *umndlunkulu*, servant girls, wives of the king, and other female relatives of the king; accessible only to the women occupying the enclosure, and the king himself.

isigqila (pl. *izigqila*) – a woman captured by Zulu forces during military campaigns and forced to join a chiefly or common homestead in a role similar to that of a slave

umnumzane (pl. *abanumzane*) – a male head of a homestead

*Dramatis Personae: Biographical Notes*³

Izinkumbi (Chapter Three)

Henry Francis Fynn (1803 – 1861) – An English settler and trader in 1820s Natal who became a polygamous chief from approximately 1827, left Natal to become a colonial official in the Cape Colony, and subsequently returned to Natal as magistrate over his black former family members and adherents.

Frank Fynn/Phobana (c. 1808 – 1838) – A settler, trader and brother to Henry Francis Fynn, whom he joined in 1820s Natal. Frank too established a polygamous chiefly homestead, and took over leadership of the Fynns' adherents (the Izinkumbi) from 1834.

Vundlazi MaSenca⁴ (c. 1810 – c. 1890) – A woman possibly from the Zelemu clan, who joined the Izinkumbi and married Frank Fynn by 1831. After his death she took over the chiefly homestead and ruled the Izinkumbi until at least 1865, remaining highly influential within the polity into the late 1880s.

Charles Fynn (born c. 1831) – Son of Frank Fynn and Vundlazi MaSenca, became chief of the Izinkumbi by 1887, ruling jointly and issuing statements with Vundlazi.

Eliza/Nomanga Clothier (c. 1830 – 1891) – Henry Francis Fynn's daughter and eldest child; a senior figure among the Fynns' descendants in Natal.

Maria Ogle (born c. 1840) – Briefly became chief of the Izinkumbi in 1881–1882 following the death of the chief, her husband George Fynn. Maria was the daughter of Henry Ogle, another polygamous white trader in Natal; and had married into the Fynn family.

³ Please note that this list shows only people who are mentioned in this thesis and does not include all members of these families.

⁴ Vundlazi MaSenca's name appears in archival sources in different forms, including Vundlazi, Mhlase, Vumhlase, Vunhlase, Vunhlasi, Vundhlase, Umuthlazi, and Vuntklaz. Guy and Mahoney in their brief references to her spell her name (respectively) as Vundlase and Mhlazi (See Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013); Michael R. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: the Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012)). After extensive consideration of archival sources, 'Vundlazi' has been chosen here as the spelling that appears to best capture the pronunciation suggested by the most common nineteenth century spellings of the chief's name. It is Duka Fynn, Henry Francis Fynn's son who knew Vundlazi personally, who indicated she was known as Vundlazi MaSenca, as according to him her father was named Senca Mzela.

Makhanya (Chapter Two)

Duze kaMnengwa (died c. 1827) – *Inkosi* of the Makhanya chiefdom situated in northern Natal by the mid 1820s, and a subject chief to Shaka Senzangakhona.

Mbalasi/Somgciza Makhanya⁵ (born c. 1796 – died post 1851) – A wife of Duze who after his death and by the mid 1830s moved to southern Natal and in 1846 became the first person to convert to Christianity through the American Board’s mission in Natal.

Nembula kaDuze/Ira Adams Nembula (born c. 1825) – Mbalasi’s son, a junior Makhanya prince, who grew up on an American Board mission station from the age of eleven, was baptised as a Christian in 1847, and ultimately became a preacher and pioneering sugarcane farmer.

Makhutha kaDuze – Duze’s son by his senior wife, and Nembula’s half brother, who was chief of the Makhanya in Natal by 1836.

Qadi (Chapter Two)

Dube – *Inkosi* of the Qadi until his death in 1837.

Mayembe/Dalida Dube⁶ – A junior wife of Dube, who following the Qadi migration accumulated a herd of cattle in Natal and left the Qadi for an American Congregationalist mission station to avoid a forced marriage, becoming a Christian in 1849.

Ukakonina kaDube / James Dube – Dalida’s son, a junior Qadi prince, who became a Christian, a preacher and a transport rider, and father to John Langalibalele Dube, one of the founders of the African National Congress.

Dabeka kaDube (d. 1838) – As Dube’s son by his senior wife, succeeded his father as *inkosi* of the Makhanya in 1837 shortly before his own death in 1838.

Mahlukana kaDube – Another son of Dube, who became regent after Dabeka’s death and before Mqhawe, the next Qadi chief, assumed power. Mahlukana seemingly remained leader of a section of the Qadi in the Inanda location.

⁵ Mbalasi Makhanya, it would seem, did not take a baptismal name and continued to be called Mbalasi, the name she is referred to by in this thesis. There is evidence that she was also known by the name Somgciza.

⁶ Dalida Dube’s name is spelt in missionary records, colonial records and John Dube’s writings variously as Dalida, Dalita, Dalitha, Talita, and Talitha. John L. Dube referred to his grandmother as Dalida and Heather Hughes follows this usage but refers to her primarily by her pre-baptismal name Mayembe. In this thesis, except for sections explaining her life before her confirmation, I use the name Dalida as the one used in most of the archival sources I have found on her.

Qwabe (Chapter Two)

Khondlo – *Inkosi* of the Qwabe chiefdom in the 1820s.

Phakatwayo – One of Khondlo's many sons, heir to the senior chiefly line. Phakatwayo had become chief of the Qwabe and was deceased by the late 1830s.

Godolozi – Son of Khondlo, also killed by the end of the 1830s.

Zigqila kaKhondlo⁷ – Daughter of Khondlo, who reclaimed her lobola cattle after her father's death and the dissolution of the Qwabe royal homestead, and was an important member of the reconstituted Qwabe elite in Natal in the 1840s.

Ziyendani kaKhondlo – Another daughter of Khondlo, who like Zigqila reclaimed her lobola cattle after her father's death and the dissolution of the Qwabe royal homestead, and was prominent within the Qwabe elite in Natal in the 1840s.

Heshepi kaPhakathwayo⁸ (b. circa 1825) – Daughter of Phakatwayo and most senior surviving member of the main Qwabe chiefly line in 1840s, who also formed part of the reconstituted Qwabe elite in Natal and seemingly approved Musi's accession as chief.

Musi kaGodolozi (circa 1827 – 1891) – A son of Godolozi who, despite not belonging to the senior Qwabe chiefly line, became chief of the Qwabe in the 1840s in Natal.

Masimai – One of Musi's wives who may have lobbied for her son to be recognised as Musi's rightful successor.

Meseni kaMusi – Son of Musi and Masimai, a political rival to his father and other contenders for the Qwabe chiefship, and ultimately recognised by the colonial administration as ruler of the Qwabe in 1893.

Other polities

Mantoto – Female chief of the small *Amambotwe* polity in southern Natal, who took up the chiefship as widow of the previous chief. Mantoto resigned as chief in 1867.

⁷ Zigqila kaKondhlo is also referred to once in the available archival sources as Zigqili. I have used Zigqila as the most frequent usage in these records. As I could not locate any other names used by Heshepi and her Qwabe aunts, I have included the appellations by which *izinduna* described them in archival sources, denoting their descent from Phakatwayo and Kondhlo.

⁸ Heshepi kaPhakathwayo is referred to in archival sources variously as Hetshepi or Heshepi. I have followed Jeff Guy's orthography and spelt her name as Heshepi. See Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 25.

Mamtunzini – Female chief of the *Abalumbi* in 1852 or 1860.

Makosikazi – Female chief of the *Wasemacindaneni* in 1852 or 1860.

Macibise – Female chief of the *Abakwamacibise* in 1852 or 1860.

Mamjucu – Female chief of a section of the *Bhaca* after succeeding her husband the chief Ncapayi, at the Umzimvubu River south of Natal, likely between 1835 and 1860.

Colonial officials and settlers

Theophilus Shepstone (1817 – 1893) After an early colonial official career as a translator and clerk in the Cape Colony, by 1846 was appointed Diplomatic Agent to Native Tribes in Natal and subsequently Secretary for Native Affairs, a post he held until 1876; instituting a system of colonial administration via 'indirect rule'.

Lloyd Evans Mesham – Resident Magistrate of Inanda location from August 1850, answerable to Theophilus Shepstone. In 1851 Mesham mediated between Dalida and Mahlukana.

Henry Francis Fynn and **Frank Fynn** (see above)

Robert Garden – An English traveller, diarist and artist whose journeys in southern Natal (in the company of Henry Francis Fynn) passed through Vundlazi's chiefdom in the early 1850s and who described these travels in his diary.

Missionaries

Newton Adams (c. 1806 – 1851) – American medical doctor and Congregationalist missionary with the ABCFM who from 1835 in Natal established the Umlazi and then Amanzimtoti mission stations and baptised Mbalasi Makhanya.

Daniel Lindley (1801 – 1880) – Missionary with the ABCFM who established the Umvoti/Groutville mission station at Inanda in Natal and officiated at the baptism of Dalida Dube.

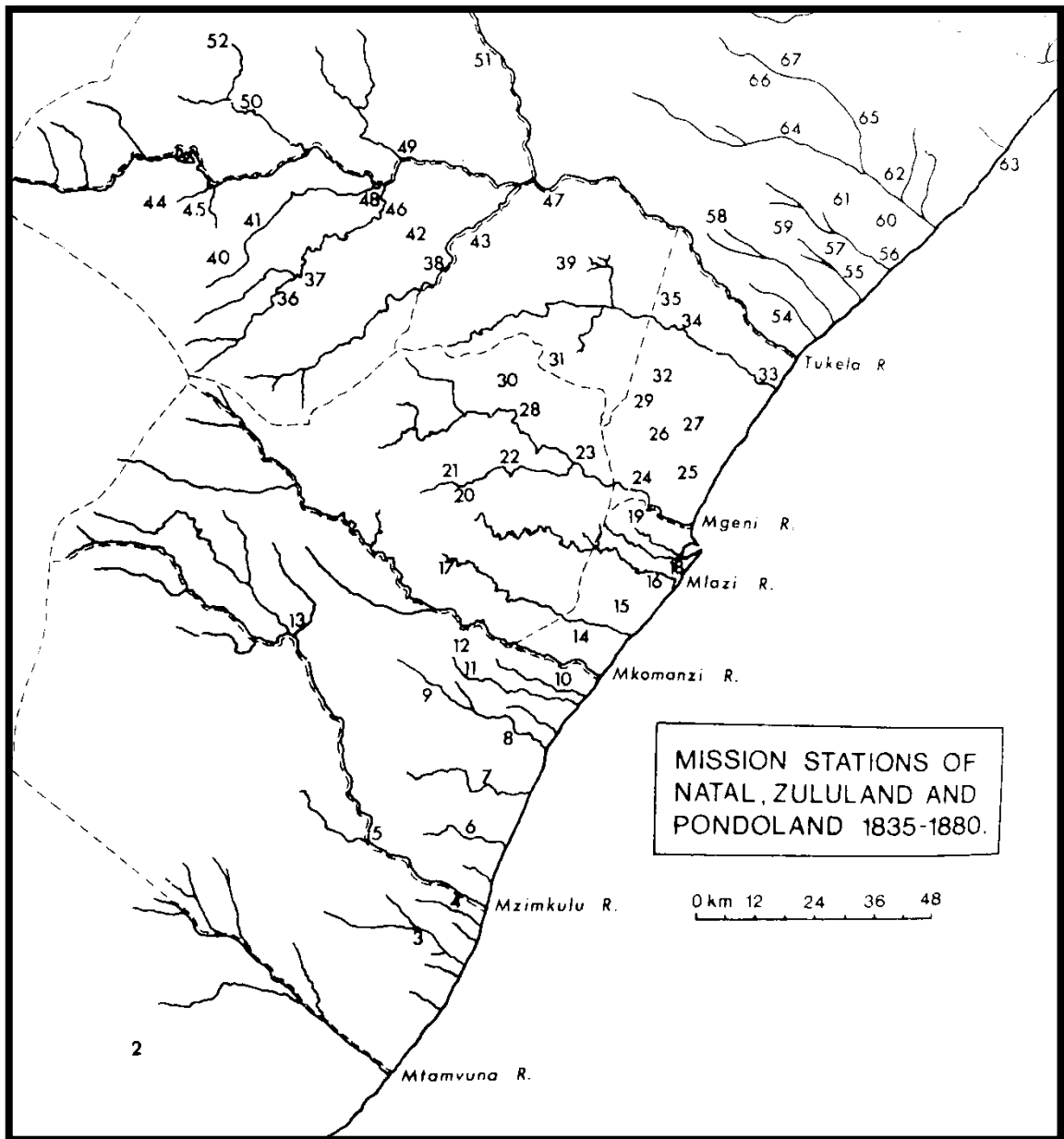
Hyman Wilder – ABCFM missionary at the Umthwalume mission station in southern Natal from 1851 into the late 1880s, whose relationship with Vundlazi seemingly fluctuated over this time.

Map 1: Magisterial Divisions in the Natal Colony⁹



⁹ This map is a detail from that in Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, xiii.

Map 2: Position of the Umlazi, Umvoti and Umthwalume American mission stations, 1835 – 1880¹⁰

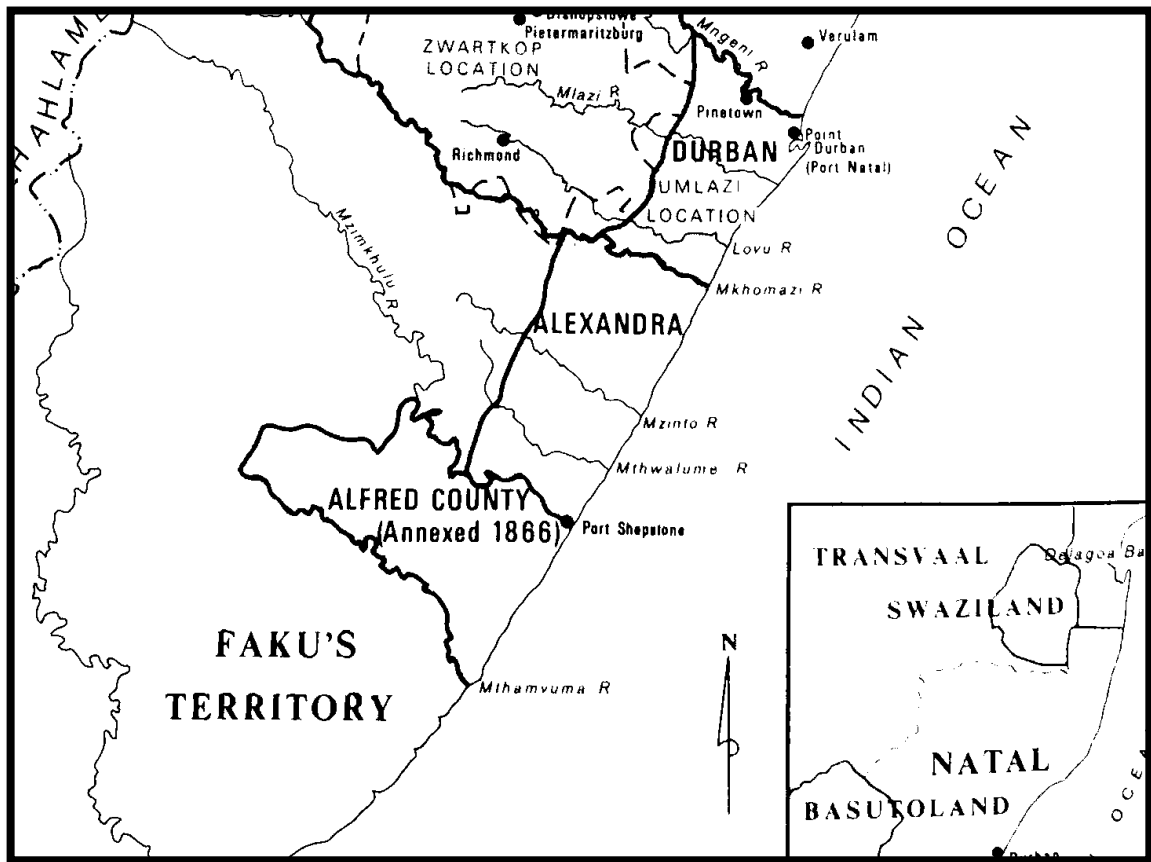


Key to Map 2:

- 7. Umthwalume mission station, ABCFM, established 1851 by Hyman Wilder
- 15. Umlazi mission station, ABCFM, established 1837 by Newton Adams
- 33. Umvoti mission station, ABCFM, established 1844 by Daniel Lindley

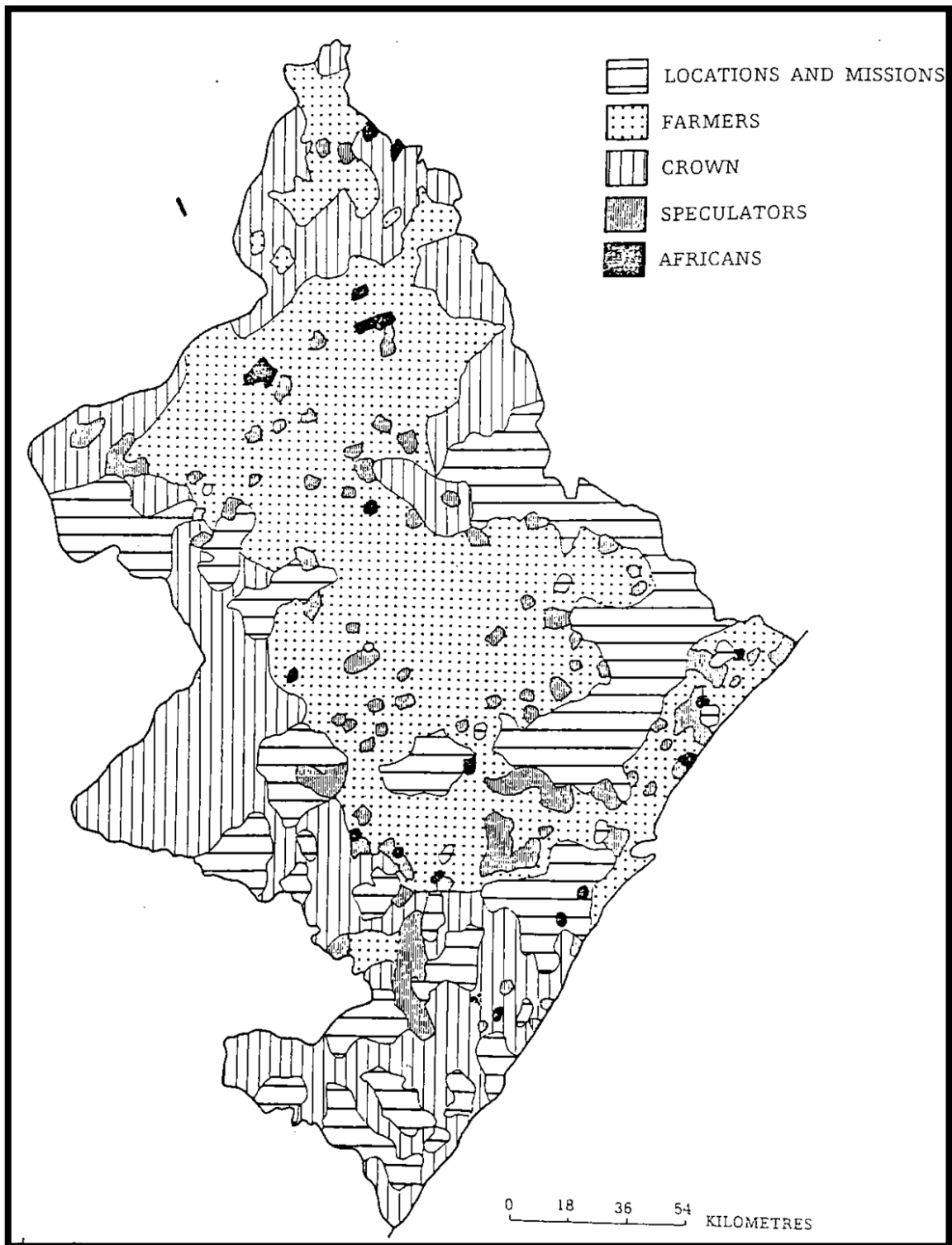
¹⁰ This map, and information in the key, are a detail from “Map 3: Mission Stations of Natal, Zululand and Pondoland, 1835–1880” and key in Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in southeast Africa, 1835–1880* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978) 26–27.

Map 3: Position of Alfred County in relation to other features in southern Natal by 1866¹¹



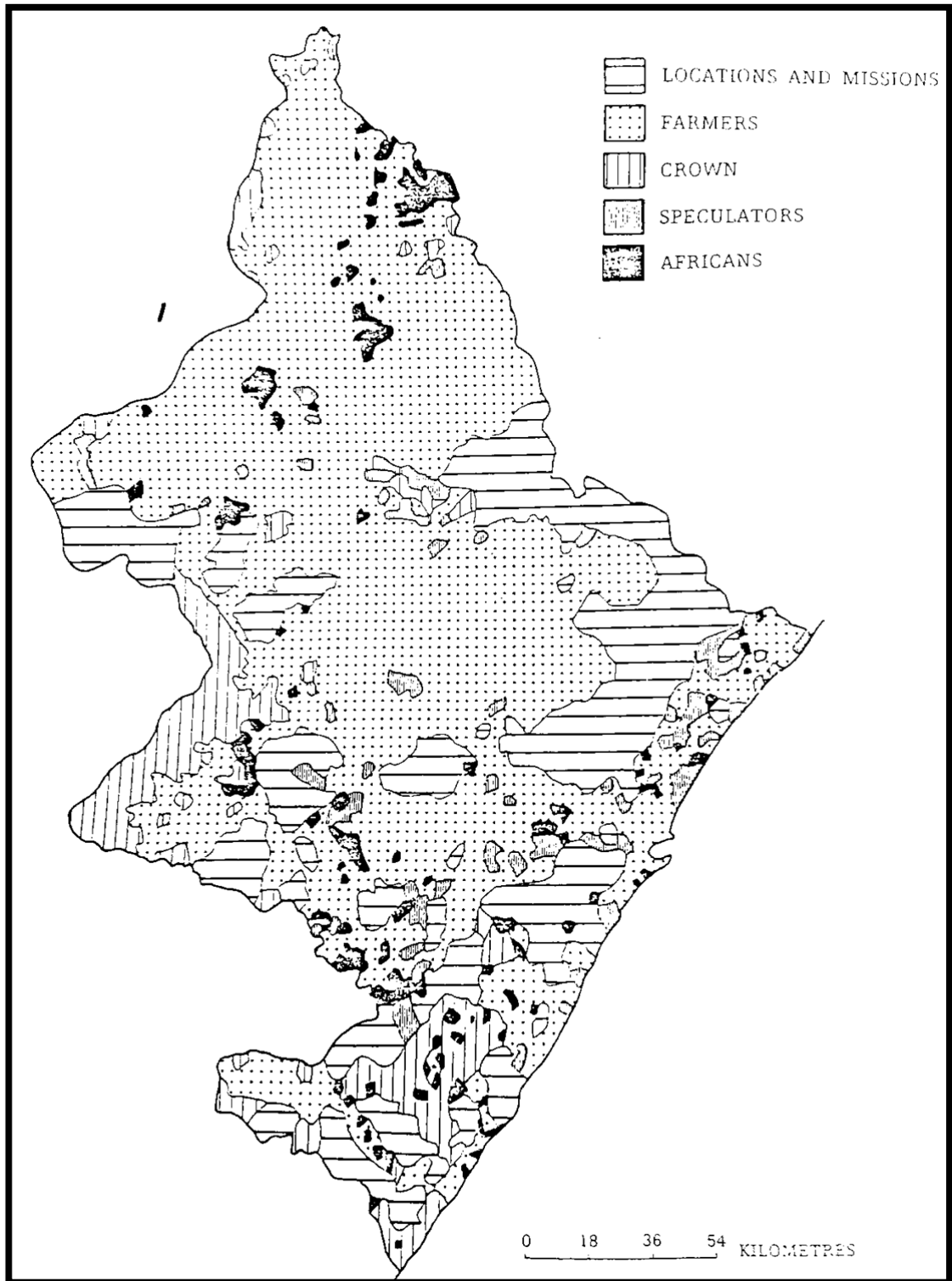
¹¹ This map is a detail from "Natal's Geographic History" in Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money! The Cultural Origins of a South African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1993) xvi.

Map 4: Land ownership in Natal in 1880¹²



¹² Map from John Lambert, "Africans in Natal, 1880–1899: Continuity, change and crisis in a rural society" (PHD diss., Pretoria : University of South Africa, 1986), Appendix 5, "Landownership in 1880", based on Natal Government Gazette, supplement, March 1881; A. J. Christopher, "Natal, A study in colonial land settlement" (PHD diss., University of Natal, Durban, 1969) 219.

Map 5: Land ownership in Natal in 1900¹³



¹³ Map from John Lambert, "Africans in Natal, 1880–1899: Continuity, change and crisis in a rural society" (PHD diss., Pretoria : University of South Africa, 1986), Appendix 6, "Landownership in 1900", based on Map of the Colony of Natal, SGO office, 1904; Christopher, "Natal, A study in colonial land settlement" 281.

Introduction

Framing the project, framing theory, and considering prominent and chiefly women in the southern Africa region 1780 – 1950

*She is...deserving of every respect for her constancy and fidelity to the memory of the departed Lord...There is one thing to be said; she could not retain the Sovereignty did she take a husband.*¹⁴

~ The traveller Robert Garden referring to Vundlazi, ruler of the Izinkumbi, June 1851

*A man named Faku residing I believe on your mission station applied to me some time ago for permission to marry "Talita" formerly the "Inkosikaꝑi" of the Amaqadi tribe ... I accordingly summoned Mablukana (the chief who now represents the Amaqadi tribe) and Talita to appear before me ... Certain conditions were drawn up and distinctly understood and agreed to by them both in my presence—One of the conditions agreed to was that Talita should deliver over [her] cattle to Mablukana—This, Mablukana has just sent over to inform me, she has refused to do.*¹⁵

~ L. Mesham, Resident Magistrate of Inanda, writing about Dalida Dube, a widow of the Qadi chief Dube, in April 1851

*When Musi came to the Emthandeni, Heshepi said, pointing to Musi, "He is my own self and he is the one to stand in my place as the heir of Pakatwayo". The men to whom this was said expressed their satisfaction and consent.*¹⁶

~ Fokazi kaGondolozu giving evidence in the Qwabe succession dispute in 1893 regarding Heshepi kaPakatwayo, a Qwabe princess and cousin to the Qwabe chief Musi kaGodolozu

¹⁴ Killie Campbell Collections (KC), *Garden Papers*, Volume 1, Diary entry 28 June 1851.

¹⁵ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) 1/3/1, L. Mesham, Resident Magistrate, Inanda, to Rev. Daniel Lindley, 16 April 1851.

¹⁶ PAR, SNA 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozu, 20 February 1893, 121–122.

Drawn from archived documentary fragments of the lives of a number of African women who lived in the region of south-eastern Africa that today is known as KwaZulu-Natal, this thesis primarily aims to contribute to filling an important gap in both Natal's history and its historiography.¹⁷ While hitherto debate on and investigation into precolonial gender relations has often focussed upon individual socially prominent women in southeast Africa, the literature on the status of African women under *colonial* rule has so far only glancingly addressed issues such as female chiefship in Natal¹⁸ and women's forms of influence (or, alternatively, political marginality) within chiefly elites. Moreover, while the impact of codified customary law upon women's opportunities to own and inherit property has certainly been noted,¹⁹ much further empirical research remains to be done to establish a firmer sense of the range of women's and men's roles and practices, including those that were 'exceptional', which were later precluded by this rigid codified law. This thesis discusses, specifically, 'exceptional' opportunities that were available to certain women in chiefly families in nineteenth century colonial Natal. It shows that some of these individuals were able to demonstrate a measure of independent authority in the early colonial period, as evidenced by their ownership of the most important social signifiers of wealth and autonomy: cattle. These were often well-recognised rights for specific women, as this thesis will show – but these rights were also contested within some African societies long before they were erased by codified customary law.

¹⁷ 'Natal' refers to the land in southeast Africa with its shoreline in the east on the Indian Ocean, bordered on the northeast by the Tugela and Buffalo rivers, and in the west by the Drakensberg mountain range. The southern boundary of the British colony of Natal was the Umzimkhulu river from 1843 up until 1866, with the area immediately south of that river called 'No Man's Land'. In 1866 No Man's Land was annexed to Natal and renamed Alfred County. While the area south of the Thukela was considered by the Zulu kings to be under their domain, the river was seen as an important boundary, with the 'heartland' of Zulu authority to its north. Colonial settlers, too, referred to the area north of the Thukela as Zululand. In 1897 following the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, this territory was also annexed to Natal.

¹⁸ Michael R. Mahoney makes reference to the fragmentary archival evidence on women chiefs in Natal after it was proclaimed a British colony in 1843. However with the exception of Mahoney, historians have not attempted to address the question of female chiefs in and near colonial Natal. See Michael R. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: the Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 55.

¹⁹ See particularly David Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Colonial Natal (1845–1910)*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971). Chapter One below discusses the key scholarship on the development and impact of, and responses to, customary law in colonial Natal.

In addition, women had, on rare occasions, become chiefs in various precolonial southern African societies. The thesis considers evidence that clearly demonstrates that some women occupied positions of chiefly authority in the region of Natal immediately before and after the establishing of a colonial administration – and unearths evidence that can contribute to our understanding of the trajectory of female chiefship in Natal over the course of the nineteenth century. This is a complex issue, and warrants further investigation in subsequent work, but what is shown in this study is a significant opening up of an as yet under-researched aspect of relations of power and gender in the region. For instance, on the one hand, there is evidence of representatives of Natal’s colonial government *supporting* the accession of a female chief on at least one occasion. On the other, colonial attitudes towards women chiefs, and the codification of a rigid understanding of ‘customary law’, seem to have played a role in substantially eroding the space for women to become chiefs. Some of the women considered here (whether chiefs themselves or prominent members of chiefly families) were deeply invested in protecting and furthering the interests of the politics and elites to which they belonged, while other elite women apparently flouted these interests. This thesis, thus, through a limited number of case studies, aims to highlight lived experiences of a number of women during the nineteenth century, when official colonial and chiefly interests in regard to women conflicted and yet also at times converged.

The biographical sketches detailed in the course of this thesis indicate many avenues for future research. The following chapters discuss Mbalasi Makhanya (c. 1796 – post 1851),²⁰ Dalida Dube (c. 1815 – c. 1890), Vundlazi MaSenca (c. 1810 – c. 1890), and Heshepi kaPhakathwayo (born c. 1825) and her Qwabe aunts notably Ziyendani and Zigqili (dates unknown).²¹ Others mentioned in the chapters, whose experiences are also related to the above issues, include Maria Fynn (nee Ogle) (born c. 1840), and Nomanga (also known as Eliza) Clothier (born c. 1830), and several others. The extant sources concerning these last named women are not fully discussed, but specific incidents in their lives are considered as supporting examples for the four individuals on whom this thesis is most explicitly focused. A series of brief biographical outlines follow below, as well as a discussion of methodology and source material, and the scope and structure of the study. Finally, this

²⁰ Mbalasi was described by missionary Newton Adams in 1842 as being “advanced in years” compared to others who were learning to read on the mission station, and her only child Nembula was 21 in 1847. Based on this, 1796 is suggested as a very rough estimate of her year of birth. Since it is challenging to establish even basic facts such as dates of birth and death, the difficulties are clear for recovering accurate narratives of her and Nembula’s lives.

²¹ As explored in Chapter Two, the dates for Heshepi and for her aunts are also difficult to ascertain.

introductory chapter discusses the existing literature and theoretical framings that relate to women's status and forms of power, in precolonial Africa and southern Africa; and highlights the specific circumstances under which women became rulers in precolonial and colonial southern Africa, in order to provide some context for the chapters that follow.

Before providing basic outlines of biographies below, an initial clarification is needed as to who is included here under the broad category of *amakbosikazi*, “royal” or “chiefly” women. The colonial ethnographer and historian Alfred T. Bryant described the specific isiZulu term *amakbosikazi* as comprising women who were senior in relation to the Zulu king Shaka: the group of “divers mothers, half-mothers, grandmothers, aunts, half-aunts, great-aunts [of Shaka] and the like [sic]”.²² The definition used in this thesis, referring more widely to chiefdoms in Zululand and Natal, would extend this to also include the wives and widows of chiefs, as well as female chiefs who, as has been pointed out, were typically widows of chiefs, in southern Africa. Especially in the context of Zululand and Natal, a “chief” is seen in this thesis as not necessarily a wealthy ruler of a large chiefdom, but also, for example, the head of a petty chiefdom, or a chiefdom that had previously been wealthier and much larger.

Mbalasi Makhanya (c. 1796 – post 1851)²³

Mbalasi, also known as Somegeza, was a widow of the Makhanya chief Duze (who was reputedly killed by Shaka in 1827 or 1828). By 1836 she was most likely near the age of 40, and was living under the chief Makhutha of the Makhanya – her deceased husband's successor – in the neighbourhood of present-day Amanzimtoti and of the later township known today as KwaMakhutha (‘Makhutha's place’). As she had been a junior wife of Duze, her son, Nembula (about eleven years old in 1836) was not in the direct line for the chiefship himself. Mbalasi in 1836 decided to send Nembula to live on the mission station run by Newton Adams and his wife Sarah Adams, of the Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (henceforth ABCFM) – and soon thereafter she moved to the mission station too. Her baptism in 1846 after a full ten years living on the station made her the first person to be converted through the ABCFM's mission in

²² Alfred T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1929), 574.

²³ The brief biographical outlines in this Introduction serve only to provide an opening perspective on the chapters and narratives that follow, and thus references are not included for all information given here. Full secondary and primary source references are provided in the relevant chapters.

Natal, and was observed by a huge crowd of people from the surrounding areas. Following her baptism, her son and others who were living on and near the mission station also renounced polygyny and were baptised. While Newton Adams suggested that Mbalasi's social status and influence among the Makhanya as a royal widow meant that she drove the spread of Christianity in the area, there are indications that her social standing was not very secure – she may have experienced persecution, and material difficulty whilst living among the Makhanya in the early 1830s. Her son Nembula was (together with James Dube) among the first black preachers ordained within the American Board Mission, and his son John Mavuma Nembula, after gaining his medical qualifications in Michigan in the United States of America, returned to Natal as the second black biomedical doctor in Southern Africa and moved in some of the same circles as John L. Dube. Indeed the parallels and divergences between the experiences of the Makhanya/Nembulas and Dubes are striking, trajectories begun by the related experiences of Mbalasi Makhanya and Dalida Dube.

Dalida Dube (c. 1815 – c. 1890)

In the late 1840s, a woman named Mayembe lived amongst the Qadi at the Umvoti River, in Natal. She was one of the three widows of a former Qadi chief, Dube, and had three children who were not in the direct chiefly line (similarly to Nembula above). She held eight head of cattle; five that she had accumulated through growing and selling sorghum (*amabele*); and a further three intended for her son Ukakonina, once he came of age, that had been left to him by his deceased father.²⁴

When an *ukungena* or levirate marriage to a brother of her deceased husband was planned for her in 1849, Mayembe took her children and the eight head of cattle, and left the Qadi settlement for the Inanda mission station run by the Reverend Daniel Lindley of the ABCFM. Her arrival, given her social status, prompted Lindley to constitute a formal church of which the small group of existing converts were members. When baptised (three years after Mbalasi), Mayembe was given the name Dalida Dube – by which she is primarily referred to in this study. Her son Ukakonina was also baptised, with the name James Dube. Dalida's defection to the mission station was highly socially disruptive – eliciting anger and objection among the Qadi and possibly even resulting in attempts to assassinate her. Two years afterwards, Dalida was unable to remarry because she still refused to give up her cattle to the Qadi chiefs. While James, and his son John Langalibabele Dube, (born to

²⁴ Heather Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2011), 2.

James and Elizabeth Dube in 1871), maintained a relationship with the Qadi elite, Dalida's actions nevertheless continued to rankle and the Qadi leadership over decades sought compensation for the loss of Dalida's cattle.²⁵

John L. Dube would go on to become the founding president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, which in 1923 was renamed the African National Congress. As a young man of twenty, in 1891, whilst studying at Oberlin College in the United States of America, he reflected on and wrote of his grandmother's choices as having been central to his family's experiences and identity and his own as Christian nationalist.

Heshepi kaPhakathwayo (b. circa 1825)

Heshepi was a princess of the Qwabe chiefdom, and by the early 1840s she was the only surviving child of the senior Qwabe chiefly line and was likely in her twenties. By that time her father – the former chief Phakathwayo – as well as his two younger brothers (who had been in line for the chiefship) had been killed in conflicts between the Qwabe and the Zulu kings, Shaka and then Dingane. Heshepi was living with a section of the amaQwabe in Zululand. In 1841, she was brought to Natal through the efforts of a group of Qwabe *izinduna*, and likely with the support of Heshepi's royal aunts and great-aunts from the Qwabe royal house (including Ziyendani and Zigqili), who were in Natal. When it was discovered that he was alive in Zululand, they also ensured that Heshepi's younger cousin, Musi, was brought to Natal, in 1846. Soon after his arrival Heshepi, the patrilineal descendant of the senior chiefly line, albeit a woman, apparently publically designated Musi the right person to “stand in my [Heshepi's] place” as the Qwabe ruler.²⁶ This legitimisation of Musi's rule was the beginning of the process of *ukuvusa*, the purposeful and symbolic resuscitation or awakening of an ‘extinct’ chiefly line (Phakatwayo's line), which then took place, with Musi chosen as the new heir of Phakatwayo's line.

The cattle held by royal widows such as Ziyendani and Zigqila were important in the careful process of *ukuvusa*, through which the Qwabe chiefdom in Natal then regained its material wealth and prestige.²⁷ The cattle were given up to Musi to ensure that he could

²⁵ John L. Dube, *A Familiar Talk Upon My Native Land* (New York: R.M. Swinburne & Co, 1891), 16.

²⁶ PAR, SNA 1/1/277, Evidence of Fokazi kaGodolozu, 20 February 1893, 122–123.

²⁷ This process of the Qwabe *ukuvusa* has been detailed in Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising, War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 37–41; and Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 25–27.

marry, transfer *lobola* to the fathers of his wives, and grow his homestead. These royal cattle were used for his first marriages, after which his subjects supplied the *lobola* for his sixth wife. When Heshepi married, her *lobola* cattle were also added to the wealth of Musi's royal homestead. The story of the Qwabe 'resurrection' points to the influence chiefly women could wield in succession politics, as well as the limits of chiefly women's power among the Qwabe. The process can also deepen our understanding of the circumstances under which socially prominent women could hold cattle, particularly in the wake of warfare.

Vundlazi MaSenca (c. 1810 – c. 1890)

Although little known today, as paramount chief of the Izinkumbi polity at Umtwalume in southernmost Natal for at least 29 years from 1838, Vundlazi MaSenca was the longest-ruling woman chief in colonial Natal. The Izinkumbi chiefdom was constituted when the white trader and hunter Henry Francis Fynn and his brother Frank Fynn established themselves from the late 1820s, initially under Shaka's patronage, as polygynous chiefs in Natal, marrying African women and gathering followers from various smaller fragmented groups. Possibly (according to Henry's son Duka), Vundlazi joined the Izinkumbi after leaving Zululand to flee an unwanted marriage, from which Henry Francis Fynn saved her. By 1831, she had joined Frank's homestead as one of his three wives. She had three children with him – Thomas, Robert and Charles Fynn. Her brother-in-law Henry Francis Fynn left the Izinkumbi in 1834, and Frank became paramount chief, but died unexpectedly in 1838. Vundlazi then took over the chiefship, and began a long rule. She was officially chief from 1838 until at least 1867, and remained politically influential within the Izinkumbi into the 1880s, after stepping down as chief. She died in approximately 1890.

During her time in charge of the Izinkumbi, she ruled in cases brought before her; withstood the frustration and indignity caused by Henry Francis Fynn, who, on returning to the district as Resident Magistrate, circumvented her authority; weathered a subsequent political crisis in 1860 when local policemen used the then Resident Magistrate's court to undermine her rulings; appealed to the Secretary for Native Affairs to secure sufficient land for the Izinkumbi; and witnessed the shrinkage of that polity as groups that had previously been under her paramountcy broke away. At various points, her sons with Frank Fynn, and also the sons of Henry Francis Fynn, were chiefs over smaller sections of the Izinkumbi. She was succeeded by George Fynn, Frank's son by another wife, and George in turn was

briefly succeeded on his death for a few months by his widow, Maria Ogle, also the daughter of a polygynous white trader and an African woman. Charles Fynn, Vundlazi's son, was the next chief. Vundlazi, by that time in her old age, ruled jointly with him until her death in 1890.

The following chapters offer narrative accounts of the lives of Mbalasi Makhanya, Dalida Dube, Vundlazi MaSenca, Heshepi kaPakatwayo, and the other women referred to above, and focus in particular on key moments in their lives that add to our understanding of gender relations in early to mid-colonial Natal. For while the last forty years have seen a vigorous historical debate on the nature of women's status and 'power' in precolonial Southern Africa – a discussion that has included some research on the lives of 'prominent' women, and 'royal' women – we still know very little about politically prominent African women in mid-nineteenth century colonial Natal, where the historiographical emphasis has often (though not always) been upon the views and interests of male chiefs in regard to 'women' as a relatively homogenous group.

Analysing a historiographical period whilst omitting women's actual roles in events, as Helen Bradford has demonstrated powerfully, does not only leave gaps in our knowledge.²⁸ It results in a distorted understanding of events. Arguably, the historiography of colonial Natal is somewhat 'lop-sided' as a result of the assumption that has accreted over time, that there were no socially prominent women or that women did not have an impact in political affairs. This thesis aims to remedy this, and refocus a discussion particularly of the early colonial era upon specific women's experiences. The exceptionality and generalisability of these experiences are considered and discussed throughout the thesis.

²⁸ Helen Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c. 1806–70," *The Journal of African History* 37:3 (November 1996), 351–370.

Chapter structure

Building upon this Introduction's broad discussion of gender relations and women's forms of power in Africa and in southern Africa, Chapter One (entitled "Exceptions that Prove the Rule? Situating prominent women in precolonial and colonial Zululand and Natal") focuses on the historiographical debate on precolonial gender relations and 'prominent' women in Zululand specifically. Moving on, the chapter positions the chiefdoms from the four case studies in terms of broad events that shaped Natal from the 1830s, and examines the scholarly literature on the impacts upon indigenous gender relations brought about by early colonial administration, and the later codification of "customary law".

Chapter Two (entitled "'Wife of the Former Chief: the agency of widowed chiefly women among the Makhanya, Qwabe and Qadi, 1836–1860"')²⁹ explores the actions taken in the 1840s by Mbalasi Makhanya, Dalida Dube, Heshepi kaPakatwayo, and Heshepi's aunts notably the royal Qwabe widows Ziyendani and Zigqili. It examines the indications of both social prominence and of social marginality in Dalida and Mbalasi's cases, and the striking parallels and divergences between their circumstances. It considers what the cases of Dalida Dube and the Qwabe royal women indicate about certain women's opportunities to own cattle and the choices they made regarding these cattle. Finally it looks at royal Qwabe women's roles in legitimating Musi's chiefship in the 1840s, and the challenges of understanding women's political influence in Qwabe succession struggles.

Chapter Three ("Women as Chiefs in Colonial Natal: Vundlazi MaSenca and traces of her contemporaries, 1838–1890") discusses in detail the rule of Vundlazi MaSenca, from her succession in 1838 as a widowed female chief through to her role as an "influential mother" advising her son Charlie as chief, in the 1880s. It describes the complex evidence regarding the circumstances surrounding her succession to the chiefship, and explores a number of key moments in her rule; in 1851, 1854–1855, 1860 and 1865. It highlights that Vundlazi's political authority, initially based on her status as a widow of an Africanised white homestead head, correlates with a long southern African historical precedent of chiefs' widows (albeit on rare occasions) becoming regents.

²⁹ Some of the evidence and ideas discussed in Chapter 2 were first raised in Eva Jackson "'Wife of the former Chief': the agency of widows in 1840s Natal", paper presented at the 22nd Biennial Conference of the Southern African Historical Society, held at the University of South Africa (UNISA), in Pretoria, June 2009.

The chapter also provides the first substantive research on female chiefship in Natal more broadly, considering archival evidence that strongly suggests that no fewer than five other women became chiefs, during the time immediately before the colonial period until possibly as late as the 1860s, within and south of Natal. They were also widows of chiefs of very small chiefdoms, and one was the widow, like Vundlazi, of a white trader. The chapter explores the possible implications of this for thinking about gender relations in contexts of social dislocation and under colonialism.

Finally the chapter contrasts Vundlazi's experiences with those of two other chiefly women who also lived in the Izinkumbi in the 1880s. The first was Maria Fynn (nee Ogle), who in 1882 succeeded her husband George Fynn as chief after his death through an apparent colonial appointment. She was, after Vundlazi, the second female chief to lead the Izinkumbi (albeit only for a few months). The second was Nomanga (also known as Eliza) Clothier, the eldest child of Henry Francis Fynn. The chapter argues that their experiences reveal the contradictions inherent in the government's attempts to apply increasingly constrictive categories of race and custom upon a descent group first started by white traders in the 1820s; a process that impacted in uneven ways on the opportunities that different women had at the time within the Izinkumbi, including the chance to inherit land. Further, it is suggested that gender relations and women's opportunities for leadership within the Izinkumbi and other polities bear further investigation.³⁰

Situating the sources and reading the patriarchal archive

A full discussion of all the sources used, per chapter, can be found in the Appendix. In outline, however: the narratives in this thesis are constructed on the basis of a mixture of primary and secondary sources. Chapters Two and Three make original contributions to primary research on the women who form the focus of this thesis. Chapter Two, in addition to other contextual sources, draws together the fragmentary archival evidence on Mbalasi found in uncatalogued manuscripts of the Nembula family and missionary records of the ABCFM into a broad biographical outline. The discussion of Dalida Dube

³⁰ The archival evidence presented in Chapter Three on Vundlazi MaSenca, Maria Fynn and Nomanga/Eliza Clothier indicates the need for a full investigation drawing on oral knowledge about gender relations, matriarchy and women's leadership among the Fynns and Izinkumbi and in Natal generally. Shirron Bramdeow's work, extensively drawn on for this thesis, is informed by her oral research. Shirron Bramdeow, "Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community in Natal, 1824–1988," (MA diss., University of Natal, 1988).

supplements existing research on her (notably by Heather Hughes) with a re-reading of the relevant primary evidence and in particular presents previously unseen archival information from the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA) regarding Dalida's attempt to remarry in 1851. Similarly, in discussing Heshepi and her Qwabe aunts, the chapter has as an entry point the extensive research of Jeff Guy and Michael Mahoney on the Qwabe. Mahoney brilliantly conveys the legal process of the Qwabe succession dispute in 1892-3 and its implications for indirect rule and legislation in Natal – and Guy through a close reading of the 1893 testimony provides inspiration for this project by vividly evoking the resurrection of the chieftdom in the 1840s, and noting how royal women's cattle were used in this process. However these investigations have not had the actual roles of the Qwabe *amakbosikazi* as a particular lens. This study revisits the testimonies recorded in 1892–3, to emphasise this aspect of the process and relate the evidence to the other debates on women in politics, highlighted in this thesis.

In Chapter Three, extensive archival primary evidence concerning Vundlazi is, to my knowledge, explored for the first time, although the chapter also draws on Sheelagh Spencer's research that establishes key facts about Vundlazi. Employing primarily the records of the SNA, the *Garden Papers* (the transcripts of the diary of the traveller and artist Robert Garden), and the *Fynn Papers* (transcripts of Henry Francis Fynn's diary entries, correspondence and other materials), it pieces together a portrait of Vundlazi, who was by the 1850s still 'Queen of the Umthwalume'; and also discusses for the first time other women chiefs of small clans who were her contemporaries.

This research, then, draws largely on an archive generated through the machinery and filter of a colonial administration and this raises challenges for the historian of how to engage with this material. Ann Laura Stoler, focusing on the records of colonial governance in the nineteenth-century Dutch East Indies, advances Edward Said's colonial discourse analysis and emphasises the need to consider the colony's archive as being *itself* an ethnographic subject; that one should read "along" its grain before and in addition to reading "against" it.³¹ For Stoler, colonial archives must be seen "not as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production, as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography."³² Michel-Rolph Trouillot's analysis, too, has direct relevance here – of "the many ways in

³¹ Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance" *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 87–109

³² Stoler, "Colonial Archives," 90.

which the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production.”³³ Even so, for Stoler and others, rather than merely rejecting “colonial archives” as being irredeemably tainted and without value for critical scholarship, they continue to present us with opportunities for critical insights and analysis that are simply unavailable through other sources. Nor are oral testimonies or oral traditions without significant methodological and analytical challenges. Bearing these caveats in mind, the approach in this study is perhaps best described as reading against the archival grain.³⁴ It focuses on establishing and contextualising fundamental facts and events regarding the lives of Mbalasi Makhanya, Dalida Dube, Heshepi kaPhakathwayo, Vundlazi MaSenca and others, attempting to strongly emphasise their words and actions where these are available, and allowing constantly for alternative (silenced) versions of events of which some signs may still be glimpsed.

These appear within an archive dominated by various white males’ framing of events. These were in particular some missionaries, travellers, officials, the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) Theophilus Shepstone, and others. Colonial officials working under Shepstone, and Shepstone himself, are the filters through which we must read about Dalida’s actions in 1851. Vundlazi’s long career as chief is described primarily through the observations of the SNA, magistrates, Robert Garden, and Henry Fynn – although some contemporary oral evidence is also available from her sons. This research, therefore, tries constantly to engage in analysing how knowledge about specific events was produced. Chapter Three, for example, includes a critical reading of colonial archival sources and knowledge production processes surrounding Vundlazi’s accession as “Queen of the Umthwalume” in approximately 1838. Like the 1892 SNA evidence from Qwabe *izinduna* regarding the 1840s, the evidence of prominent men throughout the *James Stuart Archive* can both serve to obscure, and also hint at and strongly reveal, women’s considerable roles in political processes.³⁵

³³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix. Trouillot theorises and instantiates with case studies the “stages” in which historical narratives are produced – from the production of knowledge during and after an event, to the constituting of the archive and historians’ work in reading and interpreting that archival record.

³⁴ This project does not focus in great depth on the archive as a ‘monument’ to particular discourses and affective worlds.

³⁵ Carolyn Hamilton, Sean Hanretta, Jennifer Weir and Sifiso Ndlovu as Chapter One explores, have done most to examine the *James Stuart Archive* for signs of women’s political roles.

Unlike most of the women examined in this thesis, something close to Vundlazi's own actual words have survived. She sent messages to colonial officials via her emissaries, which were apparently given verbally to the officials (in what language is not clear), who then transcribed and possibly also translated them. Vundlazi was able to send men subject to her to do her bidding; yet the colonial context and the way in which its archive was constructed meant that her own 'voice' is not necessarily always detectable even while her determination and strategic interests are palpable in her messages. Similarly, Mantoto chief of the Amambotwe, appeared directly before the Resident Magistrate for Alfred in 1867 and her statement requesting permission to resign as chief was translated and transcribed at the time.

The thesis, then, aims to respond even if in a limited way to Helen Bradford's injunction to re-insert and integrate women and gender into southern African historical narratives.³⁶ The focus here is primarily upon the women identified as key subjects; but the aim is to position them as fully as possible in their political and social contexts rather than "conceptually segregating women and 'the family unit' from the 'important' domains of men."³⁷ More specifically this study also responds to a call made in an article published in 1997 by Julie Pridmore (Henry Francis Fynn's biographer) in which she pointed to Vundlazi and to Henry Fynn's wives, Ann and Christina Brown, as examples of individuals whose experiences had hitherto been effectively concealed or "silenced" in significant part through uneven treatment of men and women in historical production. Pridmore highlighted that, while Henry Francis Fynn himself had been extensively discussed on the basis of rich archival evidence, the women in his family, both in the making of the archive and in historians' use of it, had frequently been reduced to mere "mentions".³⁸ Though Pridmore did not have access to the sources of information that Shirron Bramdeow (1988) and Shelagh Spencer had drawn on regarding Vundlazi, this was an important point.

This thesis therefore provides key archival information on Vundlazi's long career, and

³⁶ Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism," 352.

³⁷ Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism," 352.

³⁸ Julie Pridmore, "The Wives of Henry Fynn: 'Unwritten but Potentially Transfiguring Texts'? The Untold Biographies of Vundhlazi of the Zelemu and Christina Brown," *Alternation* 4:1 (1997), 73–83. Pridmore's study does not address archival sources on or expand in much detail on Vundlazi, but does draw attention to the need for an examination of her life, which this thesis aims to provide. As explored in Chapter Three, Pridmore and many others have incorrectly thought Vundlazi to have been the wife of Henry Francis Fynn. While Vundlazi may have had some kind of liaison with Henry Fynn on first joining the Izinkumbi, by 1834 she was married to his brother Frank Fynn or Phobana.

indeed the surviving evidence regarding her perspective on Henry Francis Fynn. While it does not extend to a full discussion of the relation between Vundlazi and, say, Fynn's white wife Christina Brown, it uses the experiences of other women in the Fynn family to speak about the application of constricting categories of race to the descent group begun by the Fynns and their African wives.

The scarcity of information on women in the precolonial past means that, in some instances, the only information surviving on individuals is that about highly 'prominent' women. This leaves historians with the challenging task of reconciling individual 'heroines' and female political leaders' stories with the indications that other women's roles in any given society may have been far more constrained. This gives rise to historiographical debates on women's societal status such as that described in Chapter One. Such debates are additionally challenged by the fact that, even where such information on 'prominent' or 'exceptional' people survives, it is still usually scant. Nonetheless, Norman Etherington emphasises the usefulness of a narrative technique he calls the "significant anecdote", as a means to recover the agency (including that which we might call 'power') of people, including women, in the distant past and in the face of a very thin archive. This involves evocatively foregrounding the story of a particular individual with the understanding that their experience may represent a trope.³⁹ This study at times follows the same approach (for example for Mbalasi and Dalida), but where there is much more evidence available (for example regarding Vundlazi) is able to go beyond a "significant anecdote".

Scope of the research

This study provides scope to extend research in several directions that could not be followed here. Two interviews conducted for a wider project have fed into this thesis: a 2007 discussion with Njabulo Makhanya (a descendant of Mbalasi), and a 2010 interview with the current Fynn chief, Morris Fynn. These have informed my understanding of what Mbalasi and Vundlazi mean to their descendants in the present. They are not specifically quoted in this thesis, which draws largely on colonially-generated nineteenth-century sources and reading them critically to ascertain certain events and choices made by chiefly women. As noted above, however, some crucial information also comes from the oral historical information belonging to the families in the four main case studies, transcribed and then archived at various points in the twentieth century. Nor do these narratives draw

³⁹ Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815–1854* (London and New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), xix.

on isiZulu praise-names, folklore, or related sources that could deepen our understanding of the status and experiences of chiefly women. This could be addressed in subsequent studies.

The final section of this Introduction gives a brief overview of women's forms of power in Africa and southern Africa, and Chapter One builds on this, specifically looking at the precolonial and colonial Zulu Kingdom and Natal. However, these studies do not focus on comparing these cases more broadly with other women in Africa or globally although there is scope for a deeper comparative approach in future studies. Further, subsequent research might look in more depth at the differences and parallels between these 'prominent' women's experiences, and women in colonial Natal who were not part of chiefly families.

During the research for this thesis, evidence was found of a number of women petty chiefs living in and near Natal by and before mid-century. All of them are alluded to in the following chapters and this evidence contributes to the arguments made here. However it was not possible to investigate all of their stories more fully and it is anticipated that this holds out potential for more extensive research into the lives of such 'exceptional' women.⁴⁰

Amongst others, Jo Beall (in 1982) and Nafisa Essop-Sheik (more than two decades later) have emphasised the problematically "segregated" nature of Natal historiography, and gender historiography more specifically – and have attempted to remedy this through their work.⁴¹ The work of Karen Flint and Julie Parle, on systems of healing across different

⁴⁰ One instance is the case of Monica uZiginisela Mnguni, in many respects paralleling aspects of Dalida and Mbalasi's experiences (PAR, SNA I/1/101, 787/1887). Her story also in several ways relates to that of Nozingqwazi in Vukile Khumalo, "Political Rights, Land Ownership, and Contending Forms of Representation in Colonial Natal, 1860–1900," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 22 (2004): 109–148. Nozingqwazi was a widow who wrote a petition in 1891 to secure her land on an American Board mission station.

⁴¹ Josephine D. Beall, "Class, Race and Gender: The Political Economy of Women in Colonial Natal" (MA dissertation, University of Natal, 1982); Nafisa Essop Sheik, "Labouring Under the Law: Gender and the Legal Administration of Indian Immigrants Under Indenture in Colonial Natal, 1860-1907," (MA diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2005); Nafisa Essop Sheik, "Colonial Rites: Custom, Marriage Law and the Making of Difference in Natal, 1830s–c.1910" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012). See also Nafisa Essop Sheik, "Illiberal interventions: African marriage regulation and the remaking of gendered authority in colonial Natal, 1843–1875" Forthcoming in *African Studies Review* (September 2014). Beall, from a Marxist feminist position, considers forms of exploitation experienced by African, white, and Indian women in nineteenth century Natal and emphasises the need to move away from racial silos in investigating gender history. Essop Sheik focuses in her MA on the gender and racial discourses colonial officials applied to indentured Indian women in Natal (establishing a basis for comparative studies). Her

cultural groups, has also made these connections in a historiography markedly bare of efforts towards comparison.⁴² This thesis, while it focuses on African chiefly women primarily, aims to question narrative and conceptual segregation through the discussion on the Izinkumbi and the Fynns in particular – and the ways in which the colonial administration unevenly applied racial categorisation to prominent women within the Izinkumbi, starting in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, while the thesis engages questions around women’s precolonial and early colonial social status in southeast Africa, within the scope of this project it was not possible to focus in any depth on the ethnographic or anthropological literature on the region. However, Chapter One’s summation of debates on precolonial gender relations outlines the arguments of historians drawing on anthropologists’ works. Chapter One suggests that a comprehensive review is needed of all the scholarship and evidence relating to precolonial gender relations, including the evidence and arguments of anthropologists which have shaped the debate.

In addition, this study opens up some important questions whose answers outside of its chronological boundaries. It considers the period beginning in the mid-1830s in order to encompass key events in the lives of Mbalasi, Dalida, Heshepi and Vundlazi that led to critical decisions they took in the 1840s – and ends in 1890, an approximate date of Vundlazi’s death. Maria Ogle, who was briefly appointed chief of the Izinkumbi by the SNA in 1883, may have been the last woman to serve as a chief under the colonial government.⁴³ It is possible that women who were not identified in this thesis became chiefs during this time-span. However, if this is so, they have appeared neither in the archival material covered during my research nor, to my knowledge, in the secondary literature on Natal. This thesis, then, raises the key question – of how, and when, women chiefs began to appear again in Natal (which after 1879 also included the territory that had

PHD compares the construction of racialised legal regimes defining marriage law for Africans, Indians, and whites in colonial Natal.

⁴² Julie Parle, “States of Mind: Mental Illness and the Quest for Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868-1918” (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 2004); Karen Flint, “Negotiating a Hybrid Medical Culture: African Healers in Southeastern Africa from the 1820s to the 1940s” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001). Tyrone H. Tallie Jr. provides a detailed, compelling review and analysis of “segregated” narratives in Natal historiography since the 1970s, and hones in particularly upon the work of Parle and Essop Sheik as providing methodological solutions towards a more integrated approach to historical narratives. Tyrone H. Tallie Jr., “Limits of Settlement: Racialized Masculinity, Sovereignty, and the Imperial Project in Colonial Natal, 1850–1897” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014), 5–8.

⁴³ See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of Maria’s accession and brief rule.

been called Zululand). It raises the question, too, of how Vundlazi's experience relates to that of twentieth- and twenty-first century women chiefs in South Africa. These are crucial issues.

This study considers evidence (from the available historiography and from my own primary research) of women's opportunities for property ownership before the codification of customary law, which is an under-researched area. It also highlights the need for empirical research into the impacts of this system of law, which on paper at least precluded such opportunities for women. Given the selected time period and number of case studies, this was not extensively pursued. However, the following chapters are still able to make some suggestive arguments; and emphasize the importance of pursuing individual case studies.

Finally, the selected case studies and contextual positioning focus primarily on women in 'chiefly' families, their roles in maintaining or challenging productive and reproductive roles, and their interactions with systems of chiefly and colonial authority. The thesis frequently notes, but does not extensively explore, the full range of roles in which women have often been able to wield influence or power, such as through being diviners or other ritually and spiritually significant individuals. This of course begs the question as to how 'power' and 'influence' are defined more broadly, and experienced. This cannot be satisfactorily answered in a thesis of this scope, but, it is hoped, can be probed, even if only somewhat indirectly. As a foundation for Chapter One's more confined regional focus, a brief introduction is provided below to the relevant historiography for Africa and southern Africa.

Women's power in Africa and in Southern Africa: theory and historiography

A broad outline follows below of how women's status and forms of 'power' in Africa and southern Africa have been conceptualised by historians since the 1970s. This is followed by a discussion of some of the key historical research on prominent women in chiefly families in southern Africa; providing some context for Chapter One's specific focus on Zululand and Natal.

In a key article published in 2003, Iris Berger, a leading authority on African, comparative women's history, and the history of South Africa, periodised the historiography then available on African women. According to Berger, in the 1970s research focused on precolonial and colonial African women as "forgotten heroines"; in the 1980s and early

1990s honed in on them as “underclass actors”; and from the 1990s began to emphasise women as “gendered subjects”.⁴⁴ Berger writes that those who were part of the 1970s trend:

Like many other early second-wave feminist scholars...focused especially on prominent women then neglected in historical literature – queen mothers, merchant princesses, spirit mediums, and participants in resistance and nationalist movements and in revolutionary struggles. A key argument implicit and explicit in much of this writing...was that colonial rule had undermined precolonial institutions and ideologies that had underpinned key political and economic roles for women.⁴⁵

Berger points in particular to Judith van Allen’s 1976 work as emblematic of this trend and this type of argument. The Igbo Women’s War of 1929, Van Allen argued, was a form of resistance to the diminishing status of women under colonialism; and yet at the same time showed women making use of institutional, precolonial methods of resistance.⁴⁶

This leads us to the question of how women’s precolonial status and ‘power’ in different African societies been described. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch’s foundational 1997 work, *African Women: A Modern History*, devotes a section to “Powerful Women,” locating African women’s “power” in the “procreative capacity and motherhood...[with] female identity linked to fertility.” She states that “In [African] subsistence societies, where women's role was a key to survival, men certainly asserted their political supremacy, but women always retained opportunities for power.”⁴⁷ Thus Coquery-Vidrovitch emphasises the now generally accepted link between women's production and reproduction within the homestead, and the pattern of men's need to maintain overt control at a homestead level and at a wider political level (which is also key to Jeff Guy’s arguments outlined in Chapter One). Coquery-Vidrovitch describes how these opportunities for power differed between matrilineal and patrilineal African societies and identifies a wide range of African female political leaders from the 1500s to the twentieth century – referring to many as having wielded ‘real’ power, or ‘active’ political power”,⁴⁸ suggesting that “The important role played by queen mothers or their equivalents, whether in a matrilineal or patrilineal society, is *the clear sign of real female power*” (added emphasis).⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Iris Berger, “African Women's History,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4.1 (2003), 5.

⁴⁵ Berger, “African Women's History,” 5–6.

⁴⁶ Judith Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots’ or Igbo ‘Women’s War’? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, ed. Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁴⁷ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women*, 34, 36.

⁴⁹ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women*, 37.

This raises the question of what would *constitute* an example of women's 'real' or 'direct' power in a given society; and whether or not various forms of political influence should be considered 'power'. Alternately, as with Jennifer Weir's work on precolonial Zululand, some scholars emphasise women's 'symbolic power'.⁵⁰ It is argued here that it is problematic to attempt to find a single framework to discuss forms of power generalised over the African continent. This thesis chooses rather to emphasise the fact that *a specific set of roles has been identified* by scholars of African history, in which it is clear (from the evidence, both documentary and oral) that while there were wide varieties across time and place certain women have been able to wield significant political influence and leadership in some African societies, including in the southern African region in the 1800s, and before. Discussion of the degree to which such influence and leadership was 'independent' and 'real' becomes rapidly subjective and cannot be generalised in any case. Yet, we can, I would argue, now state with a degree of certainty that women's societal status and access to political power both waxed and waned in different African societies across the 1800s for a multitude of reasons, and historiography on Africa shows that, broadly speaking, African women's institutions of leadership *declined* under the impact of colonialism.

Keeping in mind that women's "institutions" have taken numerous forms in different African societies, we might consider (to provide some context for the following chapters) what scholars have established about ways in which women in African societies have taken up visibly political roles. While her focus of study is the Buganda specifically in the nineteenth century, Holly Hanson in a 2002 essay states that a historiographical review shows that the two main roles in which women wielded political power in precolonial African societies were as "autonomous queens", and "influential queen mothers."⁵¹ Hanson points out that women have, historically, held these positions within a "gendered system of political power" in which certain aspects of governance were understood as men's "appropriate responsibility", while other aspects were women's preserve (varying across different contexts).⁵² In the Buganda case, a mother's actions, of "supporting, advising, defending, protecting, punishing, and nurturing" her son, "translated into a queen mother's

⁵⁰ Jennifer Weir, "I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule": The Power of 'Royal' Zulu Women in Pre-Colonial Zululand," *South African Historical Journal*, 43:1 (2000).

⁵¹ Holly Hanson, "Queen Mothers and Good Governments in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi (Indiana University Press, 2002), 219–220.

⁵² Hanson, "Queen Mothers," 220.

responsibilities for the nation”. Thus, as with politically powerful women elsewhere in the world, “autonomous queens” and “influential mothers” have historically led, or influenced political outcomes, by virtue of their biological or marital connection to male leaders, living or dead.

The case studies in this thesis consider women in positions of influence, ‘royal’ significance, and in positions of political leadership. Whilst the evidence explored here shows ways in which ‘royal’ women could on occasion claim rights that were commonly reserved for men, there is little evidence for my case studies regarding how they enacted their gender and how this was responded to. Crucially, although structural aspects of gender relations can be identified in any given society, it is important to remember that gender categories and roles have always been socially constructed, widely varied and non-static. Scholars who have notably demonstrated this for African societies include Ifi Amadiume, Nancy Rose Hunt, Oyeronke Oyewumi and Eugenia Herbert.⁵³

Oyewumi, for instance, emphasised how important age and seniority were for the precolonial Yoruba, in determining a person’s societal status. For Oyewumi, the considerable significance the Yoruba accorded to age and the way in which it could supercede questions of gender undermines the conventional ‘Western feminist’ assumption that gender division is necessarily a universal and crucial axis (in terms of lived experience and how we then analyse it). She thus questions whether gender as an analytic lens (so influential in early women’s history) should be applied in a very general way to Africa’s societies, past and present.⁵⁴

Ifi Amadiume’s anthropological work published in 1987 on “male daughters and female husbands” showed that in precolonial Nigeria gender categories were malleable; some Igbo women were able to take on male roles and rights, including inheritance rights, and an economic relationship that was seen as constituting a ‘marriage’ could be formed between a wealthy and influential woman and her ‘wives’ in Igbo society. In an example from

⁵³ Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society* (London: Zed Press, 1987); Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Berger points out that texts foundational to this trend have included Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91: 5 (1986); Joan W. Scott, “Deconstructing Equality-versus-difference: or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism”; Nancy Rose Hunt, “Placing African Women’s History and Locating Gender,” *Social History* 14:3 (October 1989).

⁵⁴ It is not within the scope of the paper to include a discussion of all of the important roles in which women could wield political influence (for example as *izangoma* and prophetesses).

southern Africa, among the Basotho, as explored in more detail below, although women chiefs often claimed male epithets and claimed to “*be male*”, female chiefship was also an important recognised institution in itself and some men favoured female rulers over male rulers.

Two issues are worth noting here: firstly, Amadiume’s findings correlate with Cherryl Walker’s 1990 analysis for the southern African region, and Marc Epprecht’s findings for colonial Basotho societies: that certain powerful women apparently became “men in social terms”. Walker states that this confirms the “association of economic and political power with social maleness.”⁵⁵ Yet this very enactment of a male identity may also be seen as indicating the considerable fluidity to gender identity and gender relations, provided that conventionally defined gender roles were acknowledged (through this kind of performance). Chapter One considers this in relation to the precolonial Zulu kingdom, and highlights the need for careful analysis of women leaders ostensibly assuming male social roles.

Secondly, the fluidity of gender roles diminished in many African societies under colonialism and capitalism and especially Christianity as these overlapping systems sought in various ways to redefine and/or confine sex–gender identities and relations in fixed, normative moulds. One powerful demonstration of this is found in Marc Epprecht’s 2002 work *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. His book demonstrates not only the existence prior to colonialism of a range of non-heteronormative sexual expressions in southern Africa, but also shows conclusively that “dogmatic revulsion against same-sex behaviours, acts, relationships, and thoughts (that is, homophobia) was introduced into the region by European colonialists and preachers” and that “Africans were encouraged through these discourses to equate homophobic constructions of sexuality with civilization and progress.”⁵⁶

Thus it has been well established that colonial systems of administration and ideological frameworks were associated with significant shifts in gender relations, understandings of ‘custom’, and attitudes regarding gender identity and sexual orientation in many African

⁵⁵ Cherryl Walker, “Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945: An Overview,” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (London: James Currey, 1990), 29. See below for a more extensive discussion of Epprecht’s findings.

⁵⁶ Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 225.

societies. Marc Epprecht, Natasha Erlank, and Robert Morrell among others have conducted important research regarding these changes in southern Africa.⁵⁷ Colonial impacts upon customary gender relations and responses to this are discussed throughout the following chapters.

The scarcity of evidence on women's precolonial lives in general, and the fact that female political leadership has been the exception in most southern African societies, result in logical and theoretical difficulties in how to interpret 'exceptional' women. There were, historically, certain circumstances under which women assumed leadership roles in southern Africa. According to Norman Etherington, in the precolonial past, widows of chiefs with minor sons had "often" assumed the chiefship in southern Africa, even if women leaders still remained exceptions.⁵⁸ A number of key examples follow below.

Among the Tlokwa – north-west of present KwaZulu-Natal – a powerful woman ruler was MaNthatsi (c. 1781 – c. 1836),⁵⁹ and many baTlokwa still trace their lineages to her and to her son Sekonyela. MaNthatsi took up the Tlokwa chieftainship as a regent following her husband Mokotcho's death soon after 1815 (Weir suggests 1817), while her son, the heir to the chiefship, was a minor.⁶⁰ She led and protected the Tlokwa after they were 'routed' by the Hlubi in the early 1800s, and had to move in bands avoiding marauders (often Nguni raiding from the south) until they settled at Khoro-e-Betlwa, a flat-topped mountain fortress. While some colonial commentators considered her 'evil', she was popular amongst her followers who in turn were known as 'Manthatsi', (or 'Mantatees' to white settlers). She was also referred to by her adherents as 'Mosayane' (the little one).⁶¹ While other chiefdoms lost followers and independence during the 'Difaqane' (the term in seSotho and seTswana for the 'Mfecane', the depredations and conflict affecting southeast Africa in the first

⁵⁷ See for example Natasha Erlank, "Gendering Commonality: African Men and the 1883 Commission on Native Law and Custom," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29:4 (2003); Natasha Erlank, "Sexual Misconduct and Church Power on a Scottish Mission Stations in Xhosaland, South Africa in the 1840s Xhosaland," *Gender & History* 15:1 (2003), 69–84; Natasha Erlank, "Gendered Reactions to Social Dislocation and Missionary Activity in Xhosaland, 1830-1847," *African Studies* 59 (2000), 205–227; Marc Epprecht, *This Matter of Women*; Robert Morrell, ed., *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press/London: Zed Books, 2001).

⁵⁸ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 77.

⁵⁹ See in particular Etherington, *The Great Treks*, Chapter 4; Elizabeth Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Lesotho*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131–2.

⁶⁰ See Weir, "I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule," 6.

⁶¹ "The Aftermath of the Mfecane: Manthatsi and Sekonyela of the Tlokwa," accessed on 22 October 2013 at 15:50 from <http://newhistory.co.za/part-2-chapter-4-the-aftermath-of-the-mfecane-manthatsi-and-sekonyela-of-the-tlokwa/>

quarter of the nineteenth century) MaNthatisi managed to keep the baTlokwa together. She “safeguard[ed] her chieftainship during a landmark period in Southern African history” – approximately 1813 to approximately 1822.⁶²

As ruler during the consolidation of the Zulu kingdom and the related upheavals of the early 1800s she protected her people from raiders, in turn led raids for cattle, and provided refuge for thousands of her neighbours at the peak of her polity's strength.⁶³ Sekonyela, her son, took up the chiefship some time before 1833. Once he was chief, MaNthatisi played an important role alongside him as an ‘influential mother’, including arranging strategic marriages with the daughters of neighbouring chiefs. Etherington considers MaNthatisi and another early Tlokwa political figure, MaThulare, as “legendary mother[s]” and points also to the story that Zwide's mother, Ntombazi, goaded him into executing Dingiswayo. Etherington argues that “This underscores the point ... about MaNthatisi: in this era women played central roles in chiefly politics.”⁶⁴ Strategic political pairings of “influential mothers” and their sons are also significant in the history of the Zulu and neighbouring kingdoms, as further explored in the following chapters. Among the case studies in this thesis, the potential political impact of such a pairing comes through most strongly for Dalida Dube and her son James or Ukakonina, and for Vundlazi who in the 1880s was co-ruling with her son Charlie, even though her own period of autonomous chiefship had ended.

In a famous instance of female rule in Southern Africa, the area that today forms part of the northern Limpopo Province has for 400 years been home to the Rain Queen, hereditary ruler over the Balobedu people. The incumbent queen, known as the ‘Modjadji’, inherits the throne through matrilineal descent, remains unmarried but has ‘wives’ (whose role is like that of ladies in waiting, and most of whom are sent from the households of her subject chiefs).

Crucially, these young women sent to the Modjadji “for rain or personal or political favours” are customarily then reallocated to her “relatives or clients” – and this practice by 1974 had become “a basic integrating factor in the political system”.⁶⁵ (The tradition of

⁶² Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 80.

⁶³ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 80.

⁶⁴ Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 82.

⁶⁵ Eileen Krige, “Woman-marriage, with special reference to the Lovedu: Its significance for the definition of marriage,” *Africa* 44:1 (1974): 16. Quoted and discussed in Jennifer Weir, “Chiefly

locating the power to cement political alliances in the kingdom centrally – i.e. with the ruler – is similar to the Zulu kings’ nineteenth-century use of the institution of the *isigodhlo*, further explored in the next Chapter). Additionally, in her following, the Modjadji has male advisors who constitute a ‘Royal Council’ and who, among other roles, are responsible for selecting her official mates (to ensure the dynastic succession of rain queens). She furthermore has a male proxy (known as the ‘Moetapele Wa Modjadji’) who may act as regent after her death. Due to the queen’s enormous symbolic importance and reputed power among the Lovedu to bring or withhold rain, the rain queens have lived in relative seclusion and do not attend public events, and their communication with their subjects has been through male councillors.⁶⁶ There have been six rain queens since 1800.

Further evidence strongly suggests that in Lesotho, female chiefship has historically been much more common than elsewhere in southern Africa. Marc Epprecht, in his extensive 2000 study of gender in colonial Lesotho, for instance, discusses (among other aspects of gender in the colonial encounter) the *mafumabali* – women who had since precolonial times been ‘regents’, ‘caretakers’ or ‘chieftainesses’ and who made up a persistent minority of chiefs and ‘head men’. Although there were always fewer female than male chiefs, the customary space nevertheless existed in Basutoland enabling women to act as regents. Like Vundlazi, almost all of the *mafumabali* were widows of chiefs and became regents following their husbands’ death or in their absence, and while their sons (heirs to the chiefship) were too young to rule.⁶⁷ Also, in Lesotho, Epprecht states that, “women chiefs were ‘men’ in social terms” – that is, they were often accorded the status of “honorary males” with the epithet ‘*bo-ntate*’; and indeed at times claimed to be men.⁶⁸ Further, this was not reserved for senior women; it was also possible for a woman to be “young and sexually active” while occupying the role of chief,⁶⁹ which seemingly could also be the case in colonial Natal. Identifying the roles and numbers of *mafumabali* in Lesotho in the twentieth century, Epprecht finds there was an increase in the number of women chiefs under colonial rule, that their presence was often a source of consternation to colonial officials, and that these

women and women’s leadership in pre-colonial southern Africa,” in *Women in South African history: they remove boulders and cross rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), 3–20.

⁶⁶ Eileen Krige and Jacob Daniel, *Realm of a Rain-queen: a study of the pattern of Lovedu society* (New York: AMS Publishers, 1943; 1978)

⁶⁷ Epprecht, “*This Matter of Women*,” 24; Elizabeth Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Lesotho* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131–139.

⁶⁸ Epprecht, “*This Matter of Women*,” 192.

⁶⁹ Epprecht, “*This Matter of Women*,” 110.

officials were more opposed to the idea of women in leadership than were the male Basotho chiefs at the time.

A key figure in mid-twentieth century Lesotho was Amelia 'Mantsebo Seeiso, paramount chief regent of the Basotho from 1941 and retiring by the late 1950s. 'Mantsebo's reign as a female paramount chief grappling with British colonialism, albeit in a different territory and century, has interesting parallels and divergences with that of Vundlazi in nineteenth century Natal. Epprecht pieces together 'Mantsebo's story largely from the batches of recorded correspondence between colonial government officials, and the chief and her emissaries – as these are the richest contemporary sources available on her life.⁷⁰ 'Mantsebo (who had succeeded her husband Seeiso Griffith when he died in 1941) was a thorn in the side of the British colonial administration throughout the 1940s, and is contrasted with Vundlazi in Chapter Three.

More recently, in 2010, Pathisa Nyathi and Marieke Faber Clarke have related the life of the Ndebele Queen Lozikeyi Dlodlo (d. 1919), relying primarily on oral histories to do so.⁷¹ Lozikeyi was the senior wife of King Lobhengula of the Ndebele. According to surviving and widely accepted oral history, after his disappearance in 1893 she took up the regency (albeit covertly from the British colonial authorities, at first) and was involved in planning the 1896 Revolt and distributing arms for the Ndebele soldiers from the armoury; she also gave the royal blessing to the activity of the London Missionary Society from 1909.

As is clear from the above, any discussion on politically prominent women in the region is fundamentally connected to questions of the social and gender impacts of colonialism. This thesis considers the trajectory and apparent disappearance of female chiefship in colonial Natal during the nineteenth century, which may be contrasted with the case of the Basotho described above, for whom the numbers of female chiefs briefly rose under the colonial administration.

Conclusion

This project explores different but interrelated experiences of widowhood, motherhood

⁷⁰ Epprecht, "This Matter of Women," 110–116.

⁷¹ Marieke Faber Clarke with Pathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo, Queen of the Ndebele: "A very dangerous and intriguing woman,"* (Bulawayo: Amagugu, 2010).

and chiefhood for women in chiefly families the region of early colonial and immediately pre-colonial Natal, based particularly around individuals' decisive actions in the chiefdoms of the Izinkumbi, Qwabe, Makhanya and Qadi but also touching on many other smaller polities. It is argued that these women were neither irrelevant exceptions, nor, necessarily, all models that other women could emulate.

The thesis now moves more deeply into providing a contextual frame for the detailed narratives provided in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter One reviews in full for the first time the vigorous, decades-long historiographical debate regarding gender relations in early nineteenth century Zululand and Natal; and thus seeks to make an original contribution to the historiography of the region. It grapples in particular with how several historians have viewed "exceptional" female figures in positions of power in relation to their societies; and outlines important aspects of life in colonial Natal that have a bearing on the narratives to follow.

CHAPTER ONE

‘Exceptions that Prove the Rule’?

Situating prominent women in precolonial and colonial Zululand and Natal

This contextual chapter aims to amplify and to geographically focus (in Zululand and Natal) the Introduction’s wider framing of precolonial African gender relations and forms of women’s power; and to provide context for the following, more empirically detailed, chapters. It considers in some depth the historiographical debate regarding precolonial gender relations in Natal and Zululand. Arguably, this is in itself an original contribution to the existing historiography, as the scholarship dealing with this issue has previously been only glancingly summarised. This historiographical and theoretical contextualisation is important for the analysis that follows in Chapters 2 and 3 of particular women. Secondly, the chapter outlines key events in and around the Natal region immediately before, during and after the 1843 establishment of a British colonial administration. These events directly shaped the lives of Mbalasi Makhanya (b. circa 1790), Dalida Dube (c.1815 – c.1890), Vundlazi MaSenca (c.1810 – c.1890), Hetshepi kaPakatwayo (b. circa 1825) and her aunts, and their respective chiefdoms. Finally, the chapter discusses the existing secondary literature on how colonial administration and law impacted gender relations in African societies in nineteenth-century southeast Africa after 1843, specifically how customary law was codified over the nineteenth century to narrowly define African women’s customary roles. The subsequent chapters offer research on individuals’ experiences, particularly to mid-century, that were exceptions to this narrow definition of customary law. It is suggested that such early colonial experiences should be researched as one important aspect of the challenging work to understand both precolonial gender relations, and how these have shifted within a colonial context.

The Introduction to this thesis has demonstrated that female political leaders in precolonial and colonial southern Africa were (at the beginnings of their reigns at least) most often regents rather than ‘heirs’ in their own right, and tended to fill a gap in male succession, most often as chiefs’ widows. It has also shown that in *some* polities the opportunities for women to become regents may have increased as a result of warfare, when chiefs and prospective male heirs and regents were killed. This thesis, in Chapter Three, will demonstrate that a few women became petty chiefs in and around Natal in the immediate precolonial and early

colonial period in particularly socially unsettled circumstances. Although we cannot be certain that there was a direct correlation between female leadership and warfare or dislocation, this chapter describes at some length the social and economic context in mid-nineteenth century Natal, including factors contributing to social fragmentation and responses to this. This serves to situate not only the female political leaders in this thesis, but also other women discussed in these chapters who played important roles in shoring up, or, threatening, the coherence, authority and autonomy of the chiefdoms in which they lived.

“Taking Exception”: Contestations around precolonial gender relations in southeast Africa

It is necessary first to consider the different theoretical and methodological lenses various historians have brought to bear on the discussion of women’s *precolonial* status within, and on the periphery of, the Zulu kingdom; as well as recent insights on women’s various roles in the kingdom. This must provide an important background for any discussion of gender relations in chiefdoms in early colonial Natal, and the impact of colonial administration and customary law from mid-century. I do so under the following structure: “Structuralist arguments and critique,” “Revising perspectives on prominent women,” “Gender and division of labour,” “Royal women’s roles in politics and state institutions”, “other women’s roles and institutions in the Zulu state,” and “Royal sons, influential mothers and women healers’ authority”.

Structuralist arguments and critique

Iris Berger, as we have seen, shows that African gender history in the 1970s focussed primarily on precolonial and colonial African women as “forgotten heroines”; how, in the 1980s and early 1990s scholars emphasised women as “underclass actors”; and then from the 1990s construed women increasingly as “gendered subjects”.⁷² South African historians, however, have been part of a slightly different trajectory to that which Berger describes.

Most notably, and reflecting trends in South African historiography more generally, especially with regards to the “liberal-radical debate”, from the late 1970s, a historical materialist or Marxist-oriented view (most notably represented in the work of Jeff Guy, John Wright and Cheryl Walker) has strongly informed scholarly views on women in precolonial southern African societies. This view was that precolonial southern African gender relations were structurally oppressive of women. Guy’s precocious 1978 article “Production and exchange in the Zulu Kingdom” stated that the extraction and control of women’s labour by men was an

⁷² Iris Berger, “African Women’s History,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4:1 (2003): 5.

essential feature specifically of the Zulu precolonial mode of production.⁷³ In this respect, Guy's work helped to inaugurate and propel a turn towards feminist scholarship in South Africa that gained momentum in the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1979, John Wright too put forward evidence and analysis on women's roles in production in the Zulu kingdom. Their analyses drew variously on the works of anthropologists on southern Africa, including Max Gluckman, Eleanor Preston-Whyte, and various ethnographic writings collected by Eileen Krige; as well as the writings of A.T. Bryant, the ethnographer-historian-missionary.⁷⁴

Despite differences in their arguments, Guy and Wright both posited that in the precolonial Zulu kingdom there was a clear and rigid gender division of labour and of female and male "spheres" of work (that agricultural work was performed by women, and cattle herding and warfare were "the preserve of men"); that men controlled the agricultural surplus which women produced (particularly grain, which could be stored); that men exclusively owned cattle, which constituted alienable "private property" – and finally that men dominated political processes, with marriage negotiations, jurisdiction, most religious rituals, and political matters all handled by men exclusively. Women, Guy and Wright argued, did have some degree of autonomy over their own food production and distribution, but remained always "wards" of men (first their fathers and then their husbands) and under "perpetual male tutelage". They emphasised that this subordination of women was ideologically reinforced through avoidance practices (*isiblonipha*) and taboos.

Guy went on to further develop and restate this argument, first in a 1987 article,⁷⁵ and then in Cheryl Walker's landmark 1990 edited volume, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, which presented diverse social histories of women with a strong emphasis on women as "underclass actors."⁷⁶ From 1987 Guy extended his analysis to include not only the Zulu kingdom but "southern Africa's precapitalist societies" south of the Limpopo River, drawing upon the available twentieth-century anthropological works on the region. In Walker's 1990

⁷³ Jeff Guy, "Production and exchange in the Zulu kingdom," *Mobloni* 2 (1978): 96–106. Reprinted in Jeff B. Peires, ed., *Before and After Shaka: Papers in Nguni History* (Grahamstown: Institution of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, 1981), 33–48.

⁷⁴ John Wright, "Women and Production in the Zulu Kingdom," paper presented to the workshop on the history of pre-colonial Nguni societies, Rhodes University, 1979; and Wright, "Control of Women's Labour in the Zulu Kingdom," in Jeff B. Peires, ed., *Before and After Shaka, Papers in Nguni History* (Grahamstown: Institution of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, 1981).

⁷⁵ Jeff Guy, "Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies in Southern Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14:1 (1987): 18–37.

⁷⁶ Jeff Guy, "Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Cheryl Walker (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 33–47.

volume, Guy emphasised and elaborated the idea of the *gender* divide in southern Africa as a *class* divide with control of labour as the organising principal of these societies. He argued that male and female worlds of labour were essentially separate, that female labour (and also the labour of children and young unmarried adults) was controlled by male homestead heads, and that when men accumulated cattle in order to pay *ilobola*, they were essentially accumulating the means to appropriate more labour.

In this analysis *ukulobola* “was in fact the transfer of cattle against the productive and reproductive capacity of women” and can be seen as a transfer of labour power.⁷⁷ Based on the available evidence, Guy argued, women could not own cattle; a husband would only pay *ilobola* if his wife then carried out productive responsibilities for the household, bore children and remained faithful; and if she did not fulfill these expectations, her father (or other male guardian) would not have the right to ask for *ilobola* to be paid in full or else would have to return the cattle to her husband.⁷⁸ This, he concluded, constituted repression along gender lines, and constrained women within certain productive and reproductive roles.

Importantly, Guy acknowledged that exceptions could be found to all of these generalisations, and indeed noted some, but emphasised that his analysis aimed to identify structural underpinnings of southern African societies; and that one should not “make too much of” exceptions to these broad rules, such as politically powerful women.⁷⁹ The distinction between married male homestead heads, who “appropriate[d]...surplus labour” – and those whose labour was *being* appropriated – was in essence a class divide. Male children made a transition from one class to the other, on their marriage when they came of age. In determining one’s position in this class structure, “individual chronology was of central significance, and thus the emphasis in the historical records on age, youth, young men, the rights of the aged and the obligations of the young.”⁸⁰ Guy stressed that a *man’s* age was important in determining his positioning in terms of this class divide but did not discuss in any detail how a woman’s age might affect her social position.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Guy, “Gender Oppression,” 40.

⁷⁸ Guy, “Gender Oppression,” 39.

⁷⁹ Guy, “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies,” 24 n13

⁸⁰ Guy, “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies,” 21, 34.

⁸¹ The following chapters do not include a comprehensive discussion of how age and gender connected to social standing in southeast Africa and the anthropological literature on this. Again this discussion could be part of more extensive subsequent research.

Guy and Wright's analysis of women's precolonial social status diverged from post-independence literature on gender that was being produced elsewhere in Africa in the 1970s, which focussed primarily on individual precolonial women as "forgotten heroines". However it coincided with a broader turn in historiography on Africa, from the late 1970s to early 1990s, in that it was Marxist-oriented, and concerned with the relation between gender and class and between reproduction and production.⁸² Their work informed Josephine Beall's analysis of precolonial gender relations, in her 1982 Masters thesis. From a Marxist feminist perspective, her work considered Indian, African (specifically "Nguni")⁸³ and white women's status and involvement in colonial Natal's political economy, and how they were respectively affected by gender ideology, and categories of class and race. Beall's dissertation is still among the few works to attempt an "unsegregated" overview of women's experiences in colonial Natal. Her thesis, however, suggested that despite being subordinated to men generally, "Nguni" women in the precolonial context were to some extent "compensated" due to a social system that provided them with security in terms of lineage alliances "whatever their marital status":⁸⁴

Although women were subordinate and oppressed, they did have definite and inalienable rights and a guarantee of social and economic security which, in the light of their subsequent fate, proved to be a fair measure of compensation for an inferior status. Due to their important productive role, women could not be subjected to exclusion – the most common way of enforcing and entrenching social inequality in any society. Instead, African women were maintained in a position subordinate to men by an intricate network of ideological conditioning. Although their status was inferior vis-a-vis that of men...they shared the class position of their husband or his family, by virtue of the significance of kinship for the lineage mode of production.⁸⁵

Guy's historical materialist analysis still represents a major intervention and enduring contribution, and served to focus historians' attention upon questions of gender in precolonial societies with a compelling explanatory heft. Further, its very general description of women's social subordination, broad division of labour and older men's general dominance is accepted even by critics.⁸⁶ However since the 1980s this theoretical and methodological approach has too been critiqued, and several researchers have surfaced evidence of notably significant

⁸² Berger, "African Women's History," 5.

⁸³ Josephine D. Beall, "Class, Race and Gender: The Political Economy of Women in Colonial Natal," (MA diss., University of Natal, 1982), 58.

⁸⁴ Beall, "Class, Race and Gender," 69–70.

⁸⁵ Beall, "Class, Race and Gender," 69.

⁸⁶ Thomas V. McClendon, "Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28:3 (1995): 534.

exceptions to the “broad” patterns proposed by the historical materialist analysis. A fundamental question in this debate is whether or not it is always useful to seek out and emphasise very broad and relatively static structural patterns as this may become distortive, for example if it entails dismissing exceptions to rules, variations across societies, and change in gender relations over time.⁸⁷

Those questioning the premises of the “gender oppression school” have mainly focussed on evidence on the precolonial Zulu kingdom, but have also considered evidence from other societies in the region. Comment has included the need to give a fuller account of the wide range of women’s experiences; and of women as autonomous actors.⁸⁸ Drawing in particular on the *James Stuart Archive*, scholars have pointed to instances of divergence from “strict” gender division of labour, and instances of women owning property, being involved in political processes and wielding political authority – all of which are discussed in more detail below.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Iris Berger has suggested that the interrelation between “biological sex and cultural gender” was far more flexible than the historical materialist analysis allows.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Works in addition to those mentioned above that comment on precolonial gender relations and are relevant to this debate include Carolyn Hamilton, “A Fragment of the Jigsaw: Authority and Labour Control Amongst the Early 19th century Northern Nguni,” (Hons diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1980); Carolyn Hamilton, “Ideology, Oral Traditions and the Struggle for Power in the Early Zulu Kingdom,” (MA diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1986); Simon J. Maphalala, *Aspects of Zulu Rural Life During the Nineteenth Century* (KwaDlangezwa: University of Zululand, 1985); Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money! The Cultural Origins of a South African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993); Sean Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State: Women’s Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 39.3 (1998); Thomas V. McClendon, *Genders and Generations Apart: Labour Tenants and Customary Law in Segregation-Era South Africa, 1920s to 1940s* (Social History of Africa Series, Heinemann: 2002); Jennifer Weir, “‘I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule’: The Power of ‘Royal’ Zulu Women in Pre-Colonial Zululand,” *South African Historical Journal* 43.1 (2000); Jennifer Weir, “Chiefly women and women’s leadership in pre-colonial southern Africa,” in *Women in South African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006); Sifiso Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (University of Natal Press: 2008).

⁸⁸ McClendon, *Genders and Generations Apart*, 13.

⁸⁹ The *James Stuart Archive*, edited by Colin de B. Webb and John E. Wright, currently spans 6 volumes (Volume 1: 1976; Volume 2: 1979; Volume 3: 1982; Volume 4: 1986; Volume 5: 2001). It consists of documented interviews with hundreds of mostly African informants, conducted and recorded by James Stuart, a Natal colonial official, in the 1890s and in the first years of the twentieth century. The vast majority of these informants were men. Stuart’s notes are preserved in the Killie Campbell Collections. The edited volumes present these meticulous interviews in accessible form, annotated with key contextual information.

⁹⁰ Iris Berger, “‘Beasts of Burden’ Revisited: Interpretations of Women and Gender in Southern African Societies,” in *Paths Toward the Past: African Historical Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina*, ed. Robert W. Harms et al (Atlanta: ASA Press, 1994), 137.

Finally it has been argued that its broad framing of gender relations is “somewhat static.”⁹¹ Jabulani Sithole suggested in 2008 that South African liberal and Marxist historians, despite their disagreements, shared “a common belief in the ‘static’ nature of precolonial social relations.”⁹²

As Sean Hanretta notes, from the 1980s the debate regarding precolonial gender relations reflected the different ideological positions taken in South Africa’s shifting political context; with Zulu nationalist historian Jabulani Simon Maphalala for example contending that the “gender oppression” analysis undermined contemporary Zulu nationalism by overemphasising repression and conflict within the state.⁹³ Maphalala argued that, although social controls did delineate women's social place as subordinate, this “did not cause any dissatisfaction among them” and that women “accepted their position and were contented.”⁹⁴ In Maphalala’s view, in highlighting gender oppression the Marxist feminist reading ignored many collaborative and mutually complementary aspects of social life. In addition, Sifiso Ndlovu has also argued more recently that gender relations were characterised by co-operation in the interests of social cohesion, or an “everyday collaboration between the sexes” (rather than by gender contestation).⁹⁵ Arguably, however, analyses emphasising social co-operation to the exclusion of other considerations, *and* those that focus primarily upon the theme of gender oppression, run the risk of reifying precolonial gender relations and imposing broad interpretations upon a shifting historical reality. With these debates in mind, the case studies in this thesis emphasise the importance of “exceptional” examples within broad forms of social and gender relations.

⁹¹ Hanretta, “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State,” 389.

⁹² Jabulani Sithole, “Preface: Zuluness in South Africa: From ‘Struggle’ Debate to Democratic Transformation,” in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Cartion, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), xiii.

⁹³ See Hanretta, “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State,” 389–390.

⁹⁴ Maphalala, *Aspects of Zulu Rural Life*, 11.

⁹⁵ Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power,” 111. In southern African scholarship, analyses of women’s precolonial status are divided by the extent to which they emphasise on the one hand women’s structural subordination as patriarchal oppression – and on the other ‘tradeoffs’ that accompanied structural subordination such as security and rights within kinship networks (see Jo Beall’s and Sifiso Ndlovu’s arguments outlined in this chapter.) S.M Molema, an early commentator on southern Tswana culture, made a very similar point to Beall’s in S. M. Molema, *The Bantu Past and Present* (Edinburgh: W Green and Sons, 1920). The anthropologist Margaret Kinsman in 1983 argued that his was simply an “apologist” stance, and that Molema “rationalized the patriarchal order by focusing on the benefits – the openness of material giving and the continued supports of the extended family – which were offered to women in the place of equality.” (Margaret Kinsman, “‘Beasts of Burden’: The Subordination of Southern Tswana Women, ca. 1800-1840,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 10, 1 (1983): 1. Jeff Guy drew upon Kinsman’s arguments in “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies,” 29. In 1994 Iris Berger aimed to refute this picture of primarily oppressive Tswana gender relations.

Revising perspectives on 'prominent women'

The historical materialist picture of precolonial gender oppression and firmly delineated gender roles raises the problem of how to interpret and account for exceptions to the general patterns it describes, short of simply dismissing them. Most notably, the documented existence of female owners of property, female chiefs, and female executors of state authority fall outside of these general principles. Guy and Walker suggested that socially prominent women were “exceptions that prove[d] the rule [of general female subordination].” Guy did note instances of female homestead heads, who sometimes were married to women as part of a productive relationship.⁹⁶ However the overall assessment was that “independently powerful” women such as women chiefs were “exceptional rather than representative figures, often honorary males in effect, whose personal achievements did not subvert the association of economic and political power with social maleness.”⁹⁷

In this early analysis, in Guy’s understanding, female heads of homesteads were “*aristocratic, infertile, women, appointed by men it should be noted*” (emphasis added).⁹⁸ Guy thus seemed to suggest that women could only occupy such roles if it was biologically impossible for them to play a conventional reproductive role within a homestead, and if their class status distanced them from the immediate productive demands that determined most women’s roles. Guy also argued that instances of women having more independence could indeed be noted, but that these were in geographic areas that were “climatically unsuited to high cattle populations” (without specifying the polities referred to).⁹⁹ This important claim remains over twenty years later to be further explored and proven or disproven – that in southern Africa under circumstances where intensive pastoralism was possible, there was less likelihood of opportunities for women to operate “independently” of productive and reproductive roles in the homestead. Guy’s statement would seem to suggest that where cattle were less plentiful, bridewealth was less central to social, political and economic relations and this meant more opportunities for women to take up roles independently of production and reproduction within the homestead.

⁹⁶ Guy, “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies,” 32.

⁹⁷ Walker, “Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945: An Overview,” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Cheryl Walker (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 29.

⁹⁸ Guy, “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies,” 24 n13.

⁹⁹ Guy, “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies,” 24 n13.

In the light of newer research, it is certainly clear that women who led polities across southern Africa were indeed exceptions. Chiefship, and the role of homestead head, were primarily the preserve of men.¹⁰⁰ Importantly, however, while female chiefs and owners of cattle were generally aristocratic, they were neither necessarily “infertile”, nor beyond an age at which they could biologically reproduce. Further, female chiefs, female homestead heads, and female owners of property cannot be characterised in a homogenous manner. The argument that women leaders were without much agency in being “appointed by men”, can also be questioned. Nor is there presently conclusive evidence that women who took up regencies, in general, exercised less purpose in this process than male chiefs who assumed power.

The Introduction to this thesis has already pointed to a number of instances of women apparently pro-actively assuming chiefly roles, including MaNthathisi and Lozikeyi Dlodlo. Chapter Two discusses how Musi kaGodolozu may have had his chiefship legitimated by his female cousin Heshepi as a key part of him becoming ruler of the Qwabe in colonial Natal. This arguably is one instance of a young man being “appointed” with the involvement of male elders but also with crucial support from his female relatives.¹⁰¹ Musi’s agency in his succession can be questioned as can that of any female leader.¹⁰² Ascertaining whether a given chief (whether a man or woman) was “appointed by” others, or wielded agency in the process her or himself, is not straightforward.

Keeping in mind, then, the challenge of how to deal logically with ‘exceptions’, the following sections each consider a specific important aspect of precolonial social and political life with particular reference to Zululand, including gendered social practices and women’s institutions. Each is important for how we view precolonial gender relations, and there has been scholarly contestation around several of these. These contestations often reveal different approaches to interpreting evidence, particularly that in the *James Stuart Archive*. It is suggested here that a comprehensive, empirically-focussed reassessment of the various evidence and arguments that have been put forward is now needed and until this is provided, this debate continues to circle to a great extent around hypotheses and theoretically framed arguments, or pre-determined

¹⁰⁰ Historians who have responded to Guy and Walker’s assessment of prominent women (most notably including Carolyn Hamilton, Jennifer Weir, Sifiso Ndlovu, and Sean Hanretta), have not contested this.

¹⁰¹ Michael R. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: the Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Duke University Press, 2012), 54–55; Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 25–27.

¹⁰² ‘Agency’ is defined here as an individual’s capacity to make choices and take actions according to their wishes.

ideological fulcrums, rather than around the evidence that we do have access to. This continues to frustrate our efforts towards understanding shifts in gender relations that occurred in the colonial context.¹⁰³

Gender and division of labour

Guy and Wright, again, contended that the evidence points clearly to women in precolonial southern Africa having been firmly associated with agricultural work, domestic tasks such as preparing and serving food, collecting water for households' needs, looking after children, "manufacturing household items such as pottery and thatching huts."¹⁰⁴ Men however were described as dominating pastoral work, preparing land for agricultural use, constructing homes, manufacturing "wooden and iron tools", and engaging in war.¹⁰⁵

Carolyn Hamilton's 1980 Honours thesis, responding to the wide generalisations made by Guy and Wright in the late 1970s, found – particularly in the accounts of informants reproduced in the *James Stuart Archive* – evidence of exceptions to the arguments that a gendered division of labour was firmly delineated;¹⁰⁶ and that men exclusively controlled the agricultural surplus women produced.¹⁰⁷ Sifiso Ndlovu has more recently noted "[w]hile many of these activities generally capture elements of everyday Zulu life, they also present static portraits that conceal a range of cross-cutting gender obligations."¹⁰⁸ Thus while the *general* form of precolonial gender division of labour described by the "gender oppression school" is accepted, Ndlovu emphasises that these general rules also existed within a wider possible "range" of activities by women and men and children. To substantiate this Ndlovu points to the statements of informants in the *James Stuart Archive* – such as Baleni kaSilwana (speaking in 1918), Ndukwana kaMbengwana (speaking in 1897), and others. These accounts describe young Zulu women looking after cattle during "some important communal ceremonies", and men doing the bulk of the cooking for the royal house, as well as instances of water-carrying, being done by male "*izinceku*...or attendants". Ndukwana's account shows that, in "commoner

¹⁰³ Cheryl Walker expresses powerfully the questions to be asked regarding this transition, many of which still remain to be answered. See Cheryl Walker, "Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945: An overview," 4. See also Thomas McClendon, "Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom," 533; McClendon, *Gender and Generations Apart*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 112.

¹⁰⁵ Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 112.

¹⁰⁶ Hamilton, "A Fragment of the Jigsaw," 12.

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton, "A Fragment of the Jigsaw," 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 112.

homesteads boys and girls performed interchangeable tasks.”¹⁰⁹ This raises the question, too, of how gender division of labour might have changed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A closer and more comprehensive revisiting of nineteenth century informants’ accounts, and other evidence, is needed regarding gender division of labour and related issues. The above scholarship has identified important exceptions to strict gender division of labour. As this thesis will go on to show, evidence of women owning cattle in precolonial and early colonial Natal (as in Dalida Dube’s case and others) would also seem to point to a slightly more complex and shifting division of rights and related labour than is perhaps allowed by the ‘strict gender division of labour’ argument. It is thus suggested here that although broadly speaking gendered labour division in keeping with Guy and Wright’s arguments was the precolonial reality in southern and southeast Africa (as elsewhere), variations in gender ideology, class, social dislocation, and other factors could bring about numerous exceptions and shifts in these broad patterns.

Royal women’s roles in politics and state institutions

Historians notably including Carolyn Hamilton, Jennifer Weir, and Sifiso Ndlovu have highlighted the widely known, considerably powerful women in the Zulu royal family as proof that women were not excluded from political affairs. Hamilton’s 1980 Honors thesis, again, pointed to the *James Stuart Archive* to show that women were not in every instance excluded “from formal decision-making, and ... from important rituals.”¹¹⁰ The roles of elite women particularly (in the context of the Zulu kingdom known as the *amakhosikazi*, Shaka’s elder female relatives) and how their lives and power related to gender relations within the kingdom more broadly have provided ground for rich scholarly hypotheses and disagreement. What is clear is that they were enormously influential and powerful individuals within the Zulu kingdom. Even so, more careful reconsideration of all the sources and arguments put forward by contributors to this debate thus far is still needed. Scholars differ for example on whether all the *amakhosikazi* had children or not, were post-menopausal or not, and had to take on the status of “honorary males” in order to lead *amabutbo* or not.

Informants’ accounts in the *James Stuart Archive* are the richest source of information on the

¹⁰⁹ Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power,” 112.

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, “A Fragment of the Jigsaw,” 12–13.

roles that the *amakhosikazi* played within the institutions of Zulu state centralisation.¹¹¹ Under Shaka, male age-regiments, or *amabutho* (singular: *ibutho*), which had existed under chiefs before Shaka took power, became a key instrument of Zulu state control and militarisation across the territory controlled by the Zulu. Each *ibutho* was made up of approximately 800–1000 men accommodated within a military homestead, or *ikanda*. Each of these military homesteads was headed by a direct representative of Shaka, and as Sean Hanretta shows, “at least part” of the need for loyal representatives was met by the *amakhosikazi*, who represented the king.¹¹²

We know that Langazana (the fourth wife of Senzangakhona, Shaka’s father); Songiya (a wife of Senzangakhona); Nomcoba (Senzangakhona’s daughter and Shaka’s sister); and the especially powerful Mnkabayi kaJama (Senzangakhona’s sister, and aunt to Shaka, Dingane and Mpande), all headed military homesteads. In Langazana’s case, she was the head of several. Of these women in the Zulu royal family, the famous Mnkabayi (c. 1760–c. 1840) acted as regent after her father, Jama, had died and while her brother, the heir, Senzangakhona, was a minor.¹¹³ Notably, Trevor Cope suggested in 1968 that these positions of power could indeed only be held by women associated with the patrilineal royal line.¹¹⁴ Sisana Rachel Mdluli in her 2013 investigation of twentieth century succession politics among the Swazi royals finds the same pattern.

A rich summation of the roles played by “Queen Mnkabayi” and the *amakhosikazi* can be found in Sifiso Ndlovu’s chapter in the 2012 volume *Zulu Identities*. Ndlovu returns to Carolyn Hamilton’s 1980 Honours research on prominent women in the kingdom, which seems to have been neglected in the intervening decades,¹¹⁵ and progresses these investigations by drawing particularly upon the published *James Stuart Archive* material and James Stuart’s original notebooks and interweaves his discussion on Mnkabayi and other *amakhosikazi* with reference to the early twentieth-century arguments of Zulu-speaking intellectuals, notably Bambatha “Wallet” Vilakazi (6 January 1906 – 26 October 1947) including his 1945 unpublished PhD

¹¹¹ See in particular Hamilton, “A Fragment”; Hamilton, “Ideology, Oral Traditions”; Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State”; Weir, “I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule”; Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power.”

¹¹² Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State,” 398.

¹¹³ Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power,” 117.

¹¹⁴ See Trevor Cope, ed., *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 19; Sisana Rachel Mdluli, “A Reflective Perspective of Women Leadership in Nguni Oral Poetic Forms” (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2013)

¹¹⁵ Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power.” Ndlovu cites particularly Hamilton, “A Fragment of the Jigsaw”

dissertation.¹¹⁶ This layered approach highlights key evidence on the *amakhosikazi*. Ndlovu argues that these women were not “barred from exercising real political authority in the Zulu kingdom” and argues, highlighting evidence from the *James Stuart Archive* as well as Vilakazi’s twentieth-century interpretations of this evidence, that certain *amakhosikazi* can indeed be seen as “handlers” of Dingane himself, including Mnkabayi, who appears in the James Stuart Archive evidence as almost a “puppetmaster” and “kingmaker” – an interpretation that has been amplified in literary accounts of her in the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ Jennifer Weir, too, has provided a detailed but contrasting view of Mnkabayi, also drawing on the James Stuart Archive as well as Bryant.¹¹⁸

As we have seen, Guy and Walkers’ earlier analysis suggested that politically powerful women were simply “exceptions that proved the rule” of male dominance of political processes; and were themselves “honorary males”, though this was not substantiated by them. Ndlovu suggests an alternative, perhaps more nuanced, interpretation. He first points to suggestive testimony given to James Stuart in 1903 by Socwatsha kaPhaphu that when, for instance, “[t]he question of (Dingane’s) succession was referred to Mnkabayi...She dressed as a man, [so] her identity could not be detected...She had a white shield with a black spot, assegais...[and] she *dondoloza* [walked with a stick like an old man].”¹¹⁹ In addition, Mnkabayi, at the opening of her *izibongi* (praise poem about her), was given the epithet “*uSoqili!*” – meaning “Father of guile!”¹²⁰ Ndlovu then however discourages interpretations of Mnkabayi and other *amakhosikazi* as simply “honorary males”, necessarily categorised as men in order to lead. He comments:

One should not necessarily assume that a male *imbongi* [praise poet] called Queen Mnkabayi a ‘man’ in order to revel publically in her notable accomplishments

¹¹⁶ Ndlovu cites B.W. Vilakazi, “Oral and Written Literature in Nguni,” (PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1945). Vilakazi in investigating *izibongo*, consulted the testimony of Stuart’s informants, as well as other important oral sources. Ndlovu emphasises that South Africa has experienced a segregated (and therefore less rich) approach to writing history; as oral sources, and historians and cultural commentators writing in isiZulu have focussed on such prominent women since the colonial era; and their findings and reflections have been neglected in the recent historiographical debate.

¹¹⁷ See Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power,” 115–119; Sifiso Ndlovu, “Zulu Nationalist Literary Representations of King Dingane,” in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 103–104.

¹¹⁸ Weir, “I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule,” 7–9.

¹¹⁹ Killie Campbell (KC) 24220, James Stuart Archive (JSA), File 58, Evidence of Socwatsha kaPhaphu, as quoted in Ndlovu, “Zulu Nationalist Literary Representations,” 103.

¹²⁰ Ndlovu cites KC 23478, JSA, “Izibongo zikaMnkabayi”. See also Noleen Sheila Turner “Oral Strategies for Conflict Expression and Articulation of Criticism in Zulu Social Discourse” (PhD diss., University of Durban-Westville, 2003), 211.

without upsetting a Zulu patriarchal order, though there is compelling testimony from...Socwatsha kaPhapu, which suggests that she enjoyed breaching certain gender boundaries when called before the Zulu court to discuss matters of state.¹²¹

Ndlovu's reading highlights that there are multiple ways of interpreting this scene. For instance, Mnkabayi's enactment of a male identity at a particular time (apparently before the Zulu court), could be seen as a highly ambiguous action, that may have been disruptive, strategic, or perhaps in part an intentionally humorous comment on the magnitude of the political decisions being taken. Concluding that she was an 'honorary male' and that this only serves to confirm male political dominance is simply one interpretation of unclear evidence.

For example the initial use of a male epithet to refer to Mnkabayi in her *izibongo*, and Socwatsha kaPhaphu's testimony, may be seen as pointing to the flexibility of gender identity under certain circumstances – as much as they reference male dominance of political spaces. In this discussion on whether or not these women were simply "honorary males" in order to wield power, it is likely as this was the case in many societies around the world that their *age and positioning as royals* already accorded them respect and elevated these women to a certain level of influence, which was far beyond non-elite men and women.

Jennifer Weir's important and provocative contributions to research on the *amakhosikazi* are relevant to a discussion on prominent women's marriage status, sexuality, fertility, and public gender identity in precolonial Zululand. She argues that some but not all of these *amakhosikazi* were beyond childbearing age – contrary to the position of Guy, Walker, Hanretta and Ndlovu (Ndlovu argues, drawing on Hamilton's 1980 research and the James Stuart Archive, that the *amakhosikazi* were childless, had passed through menopause, and therefore "possess[ed] the customary authority to cross into both male and female domains).¹²² Weir, by contrast, drawing on both A.T. Bryant and testimonies preserved in the *James Stuart Archive*, provides compelling evidence that at the time they served the state, each of these women was "symbolically celibate" – which Weir defines as "the absence of formally recognised marriage or children while holding particular office or status."¹²³ Symbolic celibacy "involved either not marrying at all, marrying for a short period, not remarrying, not having a child, or not being

¹²¹ Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 116.

¹²² Weir, "I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule," 9.

¹²³ For a detailed discussion, see Weir, "I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule," 15–21. Weir defines symbolic celibacy as "the absence of formally recognised marriage or children while holding particular office or status." Weir, "Chiefly Women," 15, 18.

recognised as having a child for a particular period.”¹²⁴ This meant that, while prominent women in the Zulu royal family could have lovers and even bear children whilst serving the state, they were not considered to be formally tied to a man through *marriage*.¹²⁵

There is thus a considerable divergence between foregoing analyses and that of Weir, over crucial details that determine how one views the role of the *amakhosikazi* – scholars have interpreted the available sometimes contradictory sources in various ways. Nonetheless, both Weir and Ndlovu emphasise the necessity of the *amakhosikazi* as being seen as located outside of conventional gender roles, in order to wield power, play multiple roles as leaders of *amakhanda*, and pose no threat to the king. Chapter Three in this thesis considers related evidence that Vundlazi’s continued chiefship may have been premised on a symbolic celibacy, in Natal in that she could not take a husband and still maintain control of her paramouncy.

Interestingly, whilst admittedly based on slim evidence – a single entry in Henry Francis Fynn’s diary – it is possible that the Zulu kings Dingiswayo and later Shaka publically enacted a symbolic (though not regular) ‘menstruation’, on which occasions “numerous cattle were slaughtered and many people killed.”¹²⁶ Weir draws upon on this mention, anthropologists’ assessments of the spiritual significance of menstruation, and Harriet Ngubane’s 1977 assertions that a man crossing into activities associated with women such as divination, had to “become... a transvestite, as he is playing the role of a daughter.”¹²⁷ Based on these considerations Weir proposes that the *amakhosikazi* and Shaka (and before him, Dingiswayo) were involved in interconnected aspects of a highly public, symbolically loaded, ‘performance’ of gender. Kings mimicking menstruation, according to Weir, was part of their ongoing appropriation of the ‘symbolic’ power of women including the *amakhosikazi*.¹²⁸

Ndlovu and Weir’s studies have provided insights into women’s opportunities for political influence, and represent a historiographically important shift in focusing particularly on “prominent” women. They do not aim to address certain structural questions such as how these “exceptional” individuals’ experiences related to the experiences of women of commoner homesteads, and even other royal women in chiefly families subject to the Zulu

¹²⁴ Weir, “I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule,” 15.

¹²⁵ Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 15–16.

¹²⁶ James Stuart and Malcolm D McKinnon, ed., *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1969), 30.

¹²⁷ Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (London; New York: Academic Press), 142.

¹²⁸ Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 16; Weir, “I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule,” 15.

kings.¹²⁹ This issue has however been more fully addressed by Carolyn Hamilton, John Wright, and Sean Hanretta. In 1989, Hamilton and Wright, for instance, argued that there in fact came to be an inverse relationship between the status of the Zulu *amakhosikazi*, and the status of commoner women:

Though some women of the Zulu aristocracy were able to attain very high status and accumulate considerable political power as heads of *amakhanda*, in general the emergence of a highly centralised and stratified social order [by the 1820s] was accompanied by a decline in the already inferior social status of women.¹³⁰

.....

Thus, according to Hamilton and Wright, by the time the Zulu state had become centralised under Shaka, the majority of women were generally experiencing greatly intensified subordination both to political authorities and to homestead heads. Women's status, they suggested, also diminished as a consequence of increased state militarization, and women taking over some of the labour that had previously been performed by young men who had left for *amabutho*. The growing political importance of cattle enhanced the "social superiority" of men; and since it was men who herded cattle, there was a decrease in the status of women's agricultural work. The rise of the *amakhosikazi* as powerful representatives of Zulu royal might, then, was simultaneous with a decline in women's status more generally. Hamilton and Wright base this in information from Hamilton's 1985 Masters thesis,¹³¹ and Jeff Guy's 1980 arguments regarding the ecological factors underlying Zulu state increased power and centralisation.

As Liz Gunner, a noted scholar of Nguni language and culture, has pointed out, it is clear from the above that "(h)istorians have found it difficult to fit powerful women figures such as Mnkabayi into their analysis of the Zulu military state,"¹³² and also that blanket statements about women's status *cannot* be made predicated on the power of the Zulu *amakhosikazi*. A distinction must be drawn between the importance and influence of women in the Zulu royal family, and the position of other women in the Zulu kingdom who did not have access to this kind of political participation and influence. In addition, there is a need to more deeply

¹²⁹ Ndlovu does note that as part of the Zulu royal family itself the *amakhosikazi* enjoyed a social status and level of political influence far superior to that of other women who were subjects within the Zulu state. Weir too acknowledges the exceptional status of the chiefly women she describes.

¹³⁰ Wright and Hamilton, "Traditions and Transformations: the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries," in *Natal and Zululand from the Earliest Times to 1910*, ed. A. Duminy and B. Guest (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989), 70.

¹³¹ Hamilton, "Ideology, Oral Traditions," 446–451.

¹³² Liz Gunner, "Mnkabayi," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 254.

consider and add to Hamilton and Wrights' claims regarding shifts over time in the construction of women's social status.

Since Hamilton and Wright's intervention, the scholar who has done most to position the Zulu *amakhosikazi* in relation to broader social trends and gender relations, and consider the experiences of women at vastly different levels of status within the kingdom, is Sean Hanretta. Building largely upon Hamilton's 1985 Masters research with evidence from A.T. Bryant and the *James Stuart Archive*, Hanretta's provocative 1995 research on the social "stratification" of the Zulu state and women's changing positions in this process of centralisation, is noted below.

.....

Other women's institutions and roles in the Zulu state

In addition to the *amabutho* or military kraals that prominent women oversaw, a second institution which had existed before Shaka, but which greatly increased in importance during his reign, was the *isigodblo* (plural *izigodblo*), which roughly translates as 'seraglio.'¹³³ Women of the royal household lived within this enclosed living space located in the king's own royal kraal. Their number included both the *amakhosikazi* (female members of the Zulu royal family itself) and women who were known as *umNdlunkulu*. According to Hanretta there was also a small *isigodlo* within each of the military kraals, comprising the particular *iNkosikazi* in charge of that kraal; and perhaps other *amakhosikazi*, as well as a group of *umNdlunkulu*.¹³⁴

Hamilton, Wright, and Ndlovu argue that *izigodblo* were "far more than harems of the king; they were focal points and sources of royal patronage."¹³⁵ *UmNdlunkulu* were sent to the king by their fathers, client chiefs of the Zulu state, in a form of tribute called *etula* – adding to the prestige of their home chiefdoms. The king did not give their fathers lobola in exchange for them sending their daughters to him, but he subsequently married the *umNdlunkulu* to subject chiefs in exchange for a large number of cattle in lobola. By thus superceding "lineage links between elites" and fathers' right to say whom their daughters might marry, the king added to his own wealth, and cemented his symbolic role as "father of the nation".¹³⁶

.....

¹³³ Ndlovu "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 114.

¹³⁴ Hanretta, "Women and the Zulu State," 399.

¹³⁵ Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 114. Hamilton and Wright, "The Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region," 70.

¹³⁶ Hanretta, "Women and the Zulu State," 400. See also Guy, "Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies," 28–29: "Chiefly power, that is political power, in Southern Africa's pre-capitalist societies, together

The father of an *umNdlunkulu* could afterward expect that the king would grant him favours and special requests: in other words a chief sending his daughter to the king also cemented a tie of favour and obligation between the woman's father, and the king. Under Shaka, the number of *umNdlunkulu* in the Zulu kingdom increased noticeably, and may have numbered 800–1000 or 1200 at most.¹³⁷

Women's age regiments or *amabutho* also existed, but unlike male age regiments, they did not require women to gather together physically in one place. The female *amabutho* could however be ordered by the king to marry, en masse, members of a chosen male *ibutho*.¹³⁸ Different Zulu kings, at different times, had varying degrees of control over these regiments when ordering them to marry. For example, Hanretta notes an 1873 instance of Qwabe women from one regiment defying Cetshwayo's order to marry and eloping with their lovers: and then, after being recaptured, being executed en masse by Cetshwayo. This 1873 act of rebellion by Qwabe women – on the southern reaches of the Zulu kingdom and not fully incorporated into it – is in Hanretta's view an indication that “female age regiments did not serve to unify all women of a given age or to transcend chiefdom, lineage or even house divisions. Rather, local patterns of organisation dominated this ‘national’ institution, again in sharp distinction to *umNdlunkulu*.”¹³⁹ Thus, Hanretta suggests that “[a]lthough the creation of women's *amabutho* did not significantly affect the ways in which men and women related on a cultural or social level, it could exert oppressive authority over women's powers at times [for example preventing women from marrying their chosen suitors]”.¹⁴⁰

.....

with what is characterised as tribute, was in fact based on massive, ingenious extensions and improvisations on the principles derived from the social laws of motion within the homestead...the genius of the political authorities could only lie in the manner in which they were able to extend the same basic principles.”

¹³⁷ See Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State,” 400 n40, n41. The number 800 to 1000 is Hanretta's estimation based on a report in Webb and Wright, *Stuart Archive*, Vol. 4, 371, that *umndlunkulu* made up the equivalent of one *ibutho*. The number 1200 comes from Bryant, *Olden Times*, 50–1, 575, and 636; Bryant, *A Zulu-English Dictionary with Notes on Pronunciation: A Revised Orthography* (Pinetown: Marianhill Mission Press, 1905), 106–7. Bryant was informed that there were as many *umndlunkulu* as there were large households in the kingdom – approximately 1200.

¹³⁸ See Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State,” 405; and Sean Hanretta, “Gender relations among Zulu in the early nineteenth century,” (MA diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997), 405–406. Hanretta relies here on evidence from the *James Stuart Archive* and A.T. Bryant; and does not explain possible reasons for the mass marriages.

¹³⁹ Hanretta, “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State,” 408. Hanretta finds evidence of Qwabe women flouting Zulu authority in Webb and Wright, ed., *James Stuart Archive*, Vol. IV, 132–6. Hanretta also relates this to the point made by anthropologist Adam Kuper; that national male age-regiments did not necessarily “transcend” existing identities and divisions of chiefdom or family.

¹⁴⁰ Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State,” 408.

.....
Within the Zulu kingdom, another distinct group of women were known as *iziGqila*, on whom unfortunately little information is available. They were women who had been captured during warfare; or women “whose husbands or fathers had been executed by the Zulu king as punishment.”¹⁴¹ Mkando, an informant of James Stuart, considered the figure of the *isiGqila* to be the closest thing he could think of to Stuart’s description of a slave.¹⁴² Hanretta describes the tenuousness of such a woman’s position: she might be incorporated into an *isigodlo* and eventually transition to the status of *uNdlunkulu* and marry, attaining much greater status and security. However, alternatively, an *isiGqila* might be ordered to join the household of a commoner, in which case, until she married, her social status was especially “precarious” given her lack of family ties. She might be required to perform extra labour, and could be required to have sexual relations with the homestead head.

The social categories of the *iziGqila*, and of the *umNdlunkulu*, may have some relevance for the case studies explored in this thesis: Hanretta suggests that some *iziGqila* could have come from royal houses subject to the Zulu kings but that had offered some form of opposition to Zulu authority. He speculates that it was wives of prominent men in the kingdom (chiefs of client chiefdoms) who were

the women most susceptible to incorporation into state institutions [such as the *iziGodhlo*, as *umNdlunkulu*], with the increase in state control over their lives that implied. Their households would have been under the most direct surveillance by the king, their agricultural economy would have been most subject to interference, and they would have stood to lose the most were their husbands or fathers to end up on the wrong side of a dispute with the state [here Hanretta implies they would have become *iziGqila* if their husbands had been killed]. At the same time, they were the women most likely to benefit from the increasing opportunities for power and status available to those who did become affiliated with the state. Yet not everyone [not every woman in the kingdom] could have entered these new prestigious positions. *The class of ‘semi-elite’ women may very well have been beset by a disparity between rising expectations and an actual decline in autonomy.*¹⁴³ (emphasis added).

These inferences may be somewhat overconfident. It seems more reasonable to suggest that there was some *possibility* that women in chiefly families subject to the Zulu kings were afforded opportunities for social advancement through state centralisation; but were seemingly

¹⁴¹ Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State,” 409; and Hanretta, “Gender relations among Zulu,” 40–9. Hanretta’s discussion on the *izigqila* is based on the evidence provided by Mkando in multiple volumes of Webb and Wright, *James Stuart Archive*. Vol. III, 162–164; Vol. I, 32, 45; Vol. IV, 44; and A.T. Bryant, *Olden Times*, 52.

¹⁴² Webb and Wright, ed., *James Stuart Archive*, Vol. III, Evidence of Mkando, 162–164.

¹⁴³ Hanretta, “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State,” 412.

not among the women able to wield power as military homestead heads. Heshepi kaPakatwayo and her aunts, and Dalida Dube and Mbalasi Makhanya, were all women in chiefly families that had varying degrees of proximity to and importance to the ‘core’ of the Zulu state in the 1820s–1830s, but were all living in Natal by the late 1830s after having moved south from Zululand or nearby. As women from chiefdoms that had previously paid tribute to the Zulu it is conceivable that some of them had at some point been part of institutions of the Zulu state described above, in which case military conflict with the Zulu kings and southward migration would have meant that their and their relatives’ lives were no longer linked to these institutions. Provided such women’s politics avoided further conflict and they avoided capture, they would not become members of the *izigqila*, the strongly subordinated category of women evoked by Hanretta.

Royal sons, influential mothers and women healers’ authority

Within the Zulu kingdom and in neighbouring chiefdoms, women in chiefly families could on occasion enter into strategic political alliances with their sons, and this political pairing could be important in instances of contested or uncertain succession and leadership.¹⁴⁴ This mutually beneficial relationship is relevant to the case studies explored in this thesis. Two key examples of this strategic alliance are that of the Zulu king, Shaka, (c. 1787 – c. 22 September 1828) and his mother Nandi; and of his contemporary, Zwide (chief of the Ndwandwe/Nxumalo from approximately 1805 to approximately 1820) and his mother Ntombazi, who was also reputedly an *isangoma*. This key role of ‘influential mother’ (as coined by Hanson) has also been emphasised by Weir, Hanretta, Ndlovu, and Hamilton in their comments on women in royalty politics in southeast Africa. Hanretta suggests that, as familial relationships between members of the Zulu royal house took on an amplified, broader political use within the Zulu kingdom:

....especially among high-ranking families, a wife could use her lineage alliances, in addition to her own status in relation to other wives, to affect the outcome of succession disputes. A woman’s power as advocate for her son could, and did, threaten a husband’s control over the reproduction of the homestead.¹⁴⁵

A passage in the missionary Heinrich Filter’s rewriting of Paulina Dlamini’s reminiscences (of her girlhood from entering Cetshwayo’s *isigodlo* in approximately 1871) attests to this. Here Filter had reworded Paulina’s own account (which she had related to Filter) into a hypothetical conversation between her father and the head of their clan, Maboya Buthelezi. In this

¹⁴⁴ There is clear scope here, perhaps in subsequent research, for wider comparisons with politically influential mother–son pairings elsewhere in the world.

¹⁴⁵ Hanretta, “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State,” 391.

conversation her father the conflict between Cetshwayo and his brother Mbuyazwe as contenders for the kingship:

No doubt this war between brothers resulted from the jealousies and intrigues of certain royal wives...They all assailed the weak and indecisive Mpande with demands that he should nominate their sons as his successor. These women even agitated amongst the people for support of their individual claims, leading to the formation of the two mighty factions, the Izigqoza supporting prince Mbuyazwe and his followers, and the great Usuthu party backing Cetshwayo.¹⁴⁶

This is Filter's most permissive reframing of Dlamini's reminiscences (nowhere else in his compiling did he create a hypothetical conversation in order to frame information she conveyed). However it constitutes meaningful evidence that mothers of princes and prospective kings played (and were acknowledged to play), major roles in succession and political manouvering in 1860s Zululand.

As we will see, in Natal too, such mother–son alliances could constitute a threat to the incumbent chief, and the role of 'royal mother' and 'royal widow' could carry considerable political influence. Hanretta's point is significant for understanding the Qwabe succession dispute between Musi and his son Meseni in the 1890s.

It has also been argued that some women could wield power and authority in the Zulu kingdom and in Natal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as healers, particularly as diviners (*izangoma*).¹⁴⁷ The distinction between *izangoma* on the one hand, who played a key role in identifying and protecting people from *abathakathi* (witches or evildoers) – and *izinyanga* (herbalists) on the other – however apparently became far more segregated on gender lines from the mid-to-late 1800s onwards, with men becoming primarily identified as *izinyanga*.¹⁴⁸

This important realm of women's identity and influence is not explored in detail in this thesis, and seemingly none of the women considered here were *izangoma* or *izinyanga*, although

¹⁴⁶ H. Filter, compiler, and S. Bourguin, trans. and ed., *Paulina Dlamini: Servant of Two Kings* (Durban: Killie Campbell Library of Africana; Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1986), 18.

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of the political and judicial role of *izangoma* and the close ties of support between chiefs and healers, from the precolonial into the colonial era, see Karen Flint and Julie Parle, "Healing and Harming: Medicine, Madness, Witchcraft and Tradition," in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (University of Natal Press, 2008), 314–315.

¹⁴⁸ Atkins, *The Moon is Dead*, 57–8; Hanretta, "Women, Marginality and the Zulu State," 410–412. Some of Hanretta's arguments regarding manifestations of women's "symbolic" power may be overly speculative. He also directly equates the spiritual calling to be a diviner (*uthmasa*) with the affliction known as *indiki* – a conflation that Julie Parle has questioned; see Julie Parle, "Witchcraft or Madness? The Amandiki of Zululand, 1894–1914," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29.1 (March 2003): 17 n73.

Vundlazi's reliance on healers as important sources of support is considered in Chapter Three. It is important to note that female diviners and herbalists were amongst those women who were able (on occasion) to own property in cattle, and were arguably more autonomous and influential in the political and economic realms.

Gender in Natal chiefdoms from 1830 to 1891

The research and debate on women's status and roles the Zulu kingdom described above is surely significant for understanding gender relations and, for example, the experiences of elite women in colonial Natal. Yet so too are the migrations that brought chiefdoms into Natal, the backgrounds of individual chiefdoms, and the colonial settlement that began in the late 1820s and culminated in British colonial annexation and administration on Natal from 1843. The following section goes on to broadly describe the context of Natal chiefdoms, and their relationships with the Zulu kingdom and colonial state, in order to further position the women caught up in the military upheavals that largely resulted in what has been described as a 'phenomenon' of widowhood in Natal by the 1840s and crucially interlinks many of this study's subjects.

Migrations, fragmentations, and colonial arrivals

A period of conflict, political uncertainty, colonial arrivals and material difficulty in Natal from the late 1820s to the early 1840s lays an important basis from which to understand the lives of Mbalasi, Dalida, Heshepi and her Qwabe aunts, and Vundlazi in the 1840s. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, people living in chiefdoms within and near Natal had experienced and responded to the regional set of conflicts known as the Mfecane¹⁴⁹ and the

¹⁴⁹ A substantial body of scholarship and debate has built up since the 1980s on the 'Mfecane' (or 'Difaqane' in seSotho and seTswana), a term that has been applied to the political upheavals, movements of people, and material depredations of southeastern Africa and inland, in the last half of the eighteenth century (from its very earliest beginnings) and the first quarter of the nineteenth century. There is disagreement amongst scholars regarding the causes and extent of these conflicts and upheavals – especially the extent to which both colonial and African accounts (which frequently ascribed the regional instability exclusively to the 'ravages' of Shaka and Dingane) may have overlooked other forces and aggressors, including colonial incursions. It is now accepted that the Zulu state was not the only cause of warfare in the region. However growing historiography is largely still uncritical of colonial sources ascribing the conflict exclusively to the Zulu state. John Wright summarises this debate in John Wright, "Revisiting the stereotype of Shaka's 'Devastations'", in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Cartion, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008). This debate has implications for any discussion of the background of Natal chiefdoms in the nineteenth century; although it is not within the scope of this study to discuss this debate in much detail. It was the case that the Qwabe, Qadi and Makhanya chiefdoms, or sections of them, became refugees from Zululand in the 1830s. However the narratives in these chapters proceed mindful of this debate especially when examining sources (including the testimony of Henry Francis Fynn) that describe the experiences and movements of these four chiefdoms in the early nineteenth century.

consolidation (and continuing expansion and assertion) of the Zulu state's power: Trekboers arriving in Natal and appropriating land and even seizing grain and livestock;¹⁵⁰ British military campaigns against the Boers and the beginning of British colonial and settler capitalist aspirations in Natal; and the establishment of mission stations in Natal under the American Board's "American Zulu Mission" and numerous other Christian denominations. In the 1820s and 1830s, groups from Zululand and from elsewhere in Natal had carried out raids south of the Tugela for cattle, at times travelling as far south as Pondoland. As a consequence of all these factors, life for those in chiefdoms (or their fragments) in Natal by the middle decades of the century was in many cases characterised by famine, and land and cattle shortages.¹⁵¹

'Client' chiefdoms south of the Thukela and north of the Mkhuze rivers, on the periphery of the Zulu state – were seen by those within the heartland of the Zulu state as 'outsiders', referred to as *amalala* by the 1820s. By contrast, 'insiders' of the kingdom were known as *amantungwa*.¹⁵² The people focused upon in this thesis, either before or after they moved into Natal, were considered by the Zulu state as *amalala* and, in the case of the Qadi at least, after they fled Zululand in the 1830s, also identified themselves as *amalala*.¹⁵³ There were a number of reasons for and backgrounds to various clans' and chiefdoms' presence in Natal by 1843.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ In 1838 the Trekkers had annexed the territory south of the Tugela and all the way south to the Umzimvubu (a territory formerly under Zulu control) as the Republic of Natalia (after arriving on the highveld from the Cape, and following two violent clashes with the Zulu armies). They established a governing body for the Republic – a 'Volksraad' – in Pietermaritzburg. In 1840 the Trekkers entered into an alliance with Mpande, Dingane's brother, to unseat the king by force and enthrone Mpande.

¹⁵¹ Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 40.

¹⁵² For information on how people living in Natal came over time to lay claim to Zulu ethnic identity rather than disassociate themselves from it, and useful encapsulations of the full historiography on this, see for example Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*; John Wright, "Reflections on the Politics of Being 'Zulu,'" in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (eds) (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 35–43.

¹⁵³ See Hughes, *First President*, 9–10 for a discussion on what this meant for the Qadi.

¹⁵⁴ Whites and specifically trekkers used what Guy calls a "founding myth" to justify their own settlement and land claims in Natal. The trekboers' version of events was that Natal had been emptied of inhabitants due to fear of Zulu military campaigns – and that the African inhabitants of Natal of whom the Trekkers were by the 1840s "becoming increasingly aware", were only refugees from Zululand and elsewhere with no 'native' claim to the land, and had entered the area because white arrivals had made Natal safe to live in. While the Qwabe, Qadi and Makhanya discussed in this study did leave Zululand in the 1830s, the background to most Africans' presence in Natal by 1840 was much more complex; Guy indicates that "with the defeat of Dingane a large number of Africans gained the confidence to return to Natal and establish themselves on the land. This number increased with the re-organisation of Zulu power within the kingdom, and again after 1840 when ... Mpande ... assumed the Zulu throne. Having said this, there is also no doubt that the majority of Africans in Natal in, say, 1843 were people who had never left their land or who had

In addition, some Africans who entered Natal by the 1840s travelling in small groups or in ‘fragments’ of clans, joined chiefdoms they found already established in Natal. Some polities, indeed, were composed almost entirely of such ‘fragments’ coming together for protection, and grew rapidly in size. Dumisa’s *amaDuma* and Henry Francis Fynns’ *izinKumbi* over which Vundlazi became ruler, were, for example, among these heterogenous new chiefdoms. Joining such large, secure polities was especially important given the potential threats posed by the Trekkers, Zulu kingdom, and competition for land by the early 1840s. Even as increasing numbers of Africans entered Natal by 1840–1841, and built homesteads, the Boers’ many chaotically administered land claims overlapped with each other, swallowing up territories of 6000 acres at a time and even extended north of the Tugela.¹⁵⁵ On many an occasion, they seized the grain from African homesteads in Natal, and raided for cattle, raising British fears that their activities would cause unrest on the Cape’s frontier. At the same time, due to increasing numbers of both Boers and Africans in Natal the Boers believed that their unhindered access to land (and their security) would be threatened. In 1841, as the Volksraad proposed to remove Natal’s African occupants en masse to the area between the Mthamvuna and Mzimvubu rivers, British soldiers were dispatched to Port Natal (later, Durban) and ultimately defeated Boer opposition in June 1842. In 1844, Natal was formally annexed as a District of the Cape under British authority.

Against this backdrop, encounters were also taking place from the late 1830s between the subjects of Natal chiefdoms, and missionaries of the ABCFM – the first of many missionary societies to begin working in Natal (in 1836), and hereafter referred to as the American Board. As Norman Etherington has pointed out, “[n]o other quarter of nineteenth-century Africa was so thickly invested with Christian evangelists.”¹⁵⁶ When the American Board (the missionary society specifically dealt with in these chapters) arrived in southeast Africa in 1835, they had initially hoped to convert the Zulu kingdom in its entirety. Amidst the violence of the Trekker arrivals in which their mission stations were destroyed and had to be rebuilt, and other discouragements, they considered withdrawing but stayed under the newly-established British

continued to work their land while living in defensive positions or in hiding, either from the Zulu or from the trekkers themselves. Others had been placed on land by the Zulu kings, or were returning to their land, as they had done throughout the reigns of the Zulu kings, and often under their instructions.” (Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 40.)

¹⁵⁵ Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835–1880* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), 4.

government, hoping to “raise up” independent “African Congregational communities.”¹⁵⁷ Rather than chipping away at a massive state, they would work among “small, independent tribes living near whites”, such as the Qadi and the Makhanya to which Dalida and Mbalasi belonged.¹⁵⁸ Vundlazi, as described in Chapter Three, had the station of the American Board missionary Hyman Wilder ten miles from her; and competed with him for land and adherents between 1840 and 1880, yet ultimately chose to live on the mission station in her old age.

In 1849–1850, the first hut tax was imposed upon homesteads in Natal. In this early stage Shepstone as Diplomatic Agent initially collected the tax himself, travelling through Natal and interacting with chiefs and *izinduna*. The tax was to be paid by each homestead head, calculated based on the number of “huts” – that is, the number of wives – each man had. This (and subsequent taxes) were not only a source of colonial revenue but a means of gradually forcing African men into wage labour, and relegating women to ‘locations’. Chiefs were paid by the state and were also responsible for collecting men for *isibhalo* (forced labour on government public works). At the same time they were also political leaders, resulting in tensions that John Lambert and Jeff Guy have particularly honed in on.¹⁵⁹ Vundlazi’s rule outlined in Chapter Three well illustrates these tensions, as she both carried out various routine orders for, *and* offered resistance to, the colonial administration.

Widowhood as a social phenomenon, and the political significance and influence of royal mothers

Mbalasi, Dalida, Heshepi, Vundlazi, and most of the other women in this study are linked by the fact that each was a member of a chiefly family that experienced fragmentation (or, in the case of the *Izinkumbi*, came to exist) as a result of the Mfecane discussed above, and in particular the expansion of the Zulu state. Also, Mbalasi, Dalida, and Heshepi’s aunts were widowed in the process of conflict with the Zulu kings, and despite the major differences between them and between their respective chiefdoms, most of the women researched here

¹⁵⁷ Norman Etherington, “Kingdoms of This World and the Next: Christian Beginnings among Zulu and Swazi,” in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social & Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 92; For a detailed summation of this process see Vukile Khumalo, “Politics, Power and Production: An historical investigation of African Sugar Cane Production at Umvoti mission Reserve 1844–1905,” (MA Thesis, University of Natal, 1997), Chapter One.

¹⁵⁸ Myra Dinnerstein, “The American Board Mission to the Zulu, 1835–1910,” (Columbia University, 1971), 34.

¹⁵⁹ John Lambert, “Chiefship in Early Colonial Natal, 1843–1879,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21:2 (June 1995); Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*.

were widows when they took the actions that resulted in events in their lives being passed on orally to their descendants and written down in colonial sources.¹⁶⁰

Though the question of widowhood in colonial Natal has not attracted much scholarly interest to date, Keletso Atkins has gone a significant way towards outlining its significance in her book *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, 1843–1900*. She highlights a social phenomenon thus: “One of the inevitable after-effects of the political and military calamities that wracked Zululand was that a class of dislocated widows was thrown upon the resettlement communities.”¹⁶¹ She suggests too that gender relations in 1840s Natal were shaped by responses to this social dislocation and flux, and famine. The severe cattle and land shortages described above especially impacted marriage and social life in general, both for families of status and commoners.¹⁶² Atkins argues that these effects can be seen in the archival evidence of chiefs and homestead heads arranging for widows to remarry, often to young men.

This was one aspect of the broader project of maintaining social production and reproduction in Natal and ensuring that cattle continued to be exchanged and connections between families continued to be cemented.¹⁶³ “Among commoners”, she notes, these widowed women who remarried had a lower status than other wives – even if she had been the first wife married, a widow would typically not be the senior wife in a homestead.¹⁶⁴ Chapter Two shows evidence of one and possibly two ukungena marriages being planned for (and in these cases rejected by) widows within chiefly families years after their husbands’ deaths. The subsequent chapters suggest that widowhood for elite women specifically, could convey special forms of autonomy and rights to property ownership, yet also could mean tenuous positioning within kinship structures and less security for a woman in material and social terms.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation. Dalida’s husband, Dube chief of the Qadi, was likely killed in Dingane’s military campaign in 1837. Mbalasi Makhanya’s husband, the chief Duze of the Makhanya, was reputedly killed in conflicts with Shaka in either 1827 or 1828. Heshepi kaPakatwayo’s aunts (including Ziyendani and Ziggili), whose actions and possessions in cattle enabled the Qwabe chiefdom to regain wealth and power, were also widows. Vundlazi’s husband Frank Fynn, chief of the Izinkumbi, died in 1838 not in conflict but through either illness or poisoning and she assumed the chiefship as his widow. Indeed, all of the female chiefs discussed in Chapter Three were, like Vundlazi, widows.

¹⁶¹ Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of a South African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993), 40.

¹⁶² Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, Chapter 2.

¹⁶³ Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 40.

¹⁶⁴ Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 56.

However both widowed and married women from chiefly elites stood to bolster their future security and power by supporting the political aspirations of their sons or younger male relatives. As noted earlier in this chapter, alliances between royal mothers and sons were politically key in the Zulu kingdom. This was, too, a crucial aspect of social life in nineteenth century Natal, as Jeff Guy, for instance, highlighted in his 2005 book *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion*. There, Guy suggests that in this context that some mothers supported their sons' right to succeed to the chiefship, and women's more general involvement was crucial in the legitimating of male rule and indeed in ensuring that the chiefship existed on a solid material foundation. He notes that in 1840s, Natal many chiefdoms had lost followers, wealth, and leaders; and points out that, under these conditions: these "related but scattered groups" worked to re-establish homesteads and polities, in the midst of frequent disagreements over chiefly succession.¹⁶⁵ As royal houses reconstituted themselves in a new place, members of royal lineages argued their greater claim to chiefly legitimacy by invoking bridewealth transactions that had taken place many years and even decades before; and the sons of deceased chiefs claimed their fathers' positions, often with their mothers' support, as well as with that of the "commoners that coalesced around them."¹⁶⁶ To some extent the pattern of women supporting their sons politically, and exerting political influence through their sons, also interlinks the case studies explored here; subsequent chapters aim to provide in depth discussions of strategic political alliances between chiefly women and their sons in colonial Natal.

Gender, customary law and women's property rights in colonial Natal

Most of the narratives presented in the following chapters focus on the 1830s-1860s. Though located in the early colonial context, they nonetheless strongly suggest that a range of realities and rights had been possible for women (even if exceptional) in the precolonial context – possibilities which then became increasingly precluded by rigid, codified 'native law' towards the end of the nineteenth century. Further, some of the cases look also at the uneven and contradictory ways in which codified customary law was applied after 1870 – showing what Nafisa Essop Sheik calls "the historical making of gender ideology and practice, in particular how the legal machinations of colonial state-making in 19th and early 20th century Natal relate

¹⁶⁵ Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 36. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 27.

¹⁶⁶ Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*, 36. Guy notes this as a general precolonial and colonial pattern defining succession disputes.

to the imagining of a colonial order differentiated by race and gender.”¹⁶⁷ Below, I outline some of the scholarship on how ‘native law’ became codified and narrowly interpreted precolonial practices in a manner that ignored the possibility of flexible gender relations within patriarchal social systems. This is highly relevant for this thesis because official colonial responses to the women who form the subjects of this thesis were strongly shaped by – and yet in some cases seemingly went against – the prescriptions of codified customary law.

After Natal's boundaries had been defined under Special Commissioner Henry Cloete in 1843–1844, Ordinance 3 of 1849 recognised the authority of African chiefs, under colonial officials; a Diplomatic Agent (Theophilus Shepstone); and Lieutenant Governor (the first was Martin West). This Ordinance empowered the Lieutenant Governor, as “Supreme Chief”, to introduce a system of customary law, though in fact it was Shepstone as Diplomatic Agent who embarked on this ‘task’.¹⁶⁸ However customary law was not officially codified for another twenty years. In the early period of British colonial administration which this thesis focuses primarily upon, before customary law was codified, Shepstone personally officiated at the settlement of disputes in Natal and many of these cases concerned old and new lobola disputes, and men's rights to control the lobola cattle, children and person of a woman. These disputes, as Jeff Guy has shown, were usually settled so as to maintain a status quo of men's control over women.¹⁶⁹

Law 1 of 1869, which was enacted in response to settler pressure, established a separate Native Law and legally recognised customary polygyny. Particularly after 1873, and the end of a deep economic depression, white settlers in Natal were growing in number and in economic and political influence. Their priorities were at odds with Shepstone’s intention of preserving

¹⁶⁷ Nafisa Essop Sheik, “Colonial Rites: Custom, Marriage Law and the Making of Difference in Natal, 1830s–c.1910” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012), ix. Essop Sheik’s doctoral research, which crosses lines of historical segregation by looking at the imbrication of African, Indian and white experiences in this process of gendered, racialised state-making with a particular focus on marriage law, finds “more crossover and complexity in the making of custom and common law in this region than is acknowledged by the existing historiography. In particular...a commonality of customary practice [applied] to the lives of all those who found themselves in mid-19th century Natal, and the contingent circumstances of colonial and imperial respectability out of which aspects of this colony’s civil law was wrought.” Essop Sheik, “Colonial Rites,” 16.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas V McClendon, “From Aboriginal to Zulu: Ethnicities, ‘Customary Law’ and the Natal Code in the Segregation Era,” paper presented to the conference on Ethnicity, Society and Conflict in Natal, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 14–16 September 1992.

¹⁶⁹ Jeff Guy, “An Accommodation of Patriarchs: Theophilus Shepstone and the system of Native Administration in Natal,” paper presented to the *History and African Studies Seminar Series, University of Natal* (1997), 9–10.

some forms of African independence.¹⁷⁰ The settlers became even more adamant that Shepstone should no longer be allowed to determine from his own perspective what constituted “correct” custom.¹⁷¹ Subsequently, in 1876–8, ‘Native Law’ was codified for the first time, “as then administered.” The Preamble to the 1878 Natal Code of Native Law stated the following:

- The Main elements of Native Law hinge upon a few leading principles.
- The subjections of the female sex to the male, and of children to their father or other head of their family
 - Primogeniture among males as the general rule for succession
 - The incapacity generally speaking of women to own property
 - Polygamy on the male side, with its accompanying lines of demarcation according to “houses” in parts of the polygamist’s property
 - Adoption or guardianship or other conventional or hypothetical fatherhood.¹⁷²

The Code, given the above basic principles, specified in codified law that women’s property ownership was possible only as an exception. While women’s property ownership was indeed seemingly exceptional, the code defined it as a deviation from an acceptable norm and provided a rigid, static framework premised on women’s uniform subjection. When this code was revised to produce the 1891 Code of Native Law, it specified that women could not own property independently, or inherit or bequeath property.

On the question of how codified law compared to pre-existing customs in Natal, David Welsh strongly argued in 1971 that:

The [1891] Code contained a serious misstatement of traditional law in its provisions regarding the property rights of women. Section 94 stated that women were always considered minors without independent power. (Provision was made in section 78, however, for women to be vested with ‘the powers and privileges of a kraal head’ [i.e. head of a family] in the discretion of the Native High Court.) As minors women were bound to hand over their earnings to the head of the family; they could acquire and hold property for the use of their respective ‘houses’ (i.e. the units in the extended

¹⁷⁰ Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation*, 36. For an extensive exploration of the literature and evidence on this, see Tyrone H. Tallie Jr. “Limits of Settlement: Racialized Masculinity, Sovereignty, and the Imperial Project in Colonial Natal, 1850–1897,” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014), Chapter 2.

¹⁷¹ Tallie, “Limits of Settlement,” 38.

¹⁷² Ordinances and Laws of Natal, Vol. II, 1870–1878, Code of Native Law as at Present (1876–1878) Administered (1878 Code)

family created by each wife) but they could neither inherit nor bequeath property (Sections 138 and 143).¹⁷³

In addition to evidence that Welsh provides, this thesis shows that, even if these practices remained exceptional, flexibility certainly existed in certain precolonial and early colonial societies with regards to women's rights to own, inherit and bequeath property in cattle – particularly women in chiefly families. Rigid 'native law' as it became codified under a colonial government precluded such opportunities for women.

Indeed, archival evidence including individual testimonies since the 1850s points to women having occasionally owned cattle in Natal and perhaps in Zululand. The *Proceedings of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Past and Present State of the Kafir in the District of Natal, 1852–1853* (to give the Commission its full, formal title – hereafter referred to as the Harding Commission) which investigated the circumstances of Africans in Natal, listed certain, *exceptional* (my emphasis) conditions under which women were found (and permitted) to own cattle. The person who provided this evidence was Henry Francis Fynn. He stated that this was possible, "in terms of custom":

1st When the chieftainship is in the hands of a female

2nd [For] The elder female relations of a chief, by the permission of the chief.

3rd [For] A female 'isanusi', or witch doctor [sic: isangoma]...that is one who is believed to hold intercourse with the spiritual world.

4th When a female, perhaps an only daughter, has received from her deceased relations the knowledge of any valuable medicinal plant, which is supposed to be retained in the family.¹⁷⁴

This is important information, though it must also be qualified. Fynn did not mention from which specific chiefdoms he drew these observations, and it is not clear how far back in time they can be projected. Fynn had however been living in southeast Africa since the mid-1820s, and had some familiarity with customary practices in both Natal and Zululand. Based on his statement it would seem that, among at least some groups living in Natal by the 1850s, and/or in terms of Fynn's understanding of custom, it was socially acceptable for a woman to own

¹⁷³ Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation*, 169.

¹⁷⁴ *Proceedings of the Commission appointed to enquire into the past and present state of the kafir in the district of Natal, and to report upon their future government, and to suggest such arrangements as will tend to secure the peace and welfare of the district, 1852–1853* (henceforth the *Harding Commission*), Evidence of H. F. Fynn, 1852, 77. This important evidence is noted by Weir and McClendon: Weir, "Chiefly women", 5-6. It is interesting that Fynn did not refer to women with medicinal knowledge as *izinyanga* or healers per se. Rather, his evidence implies that a woman inherited medicinal knowledge and cattle only when these things could not be passed down to a son yet still had to be kept within the family.

cattle if she was a chief herself, was a chief's older relative, or had special spiritual, religious, and/or medicinal knowledge. However Fynn's 'categories' need to be investigated, tested and described in more detail on the basis of other evidence which points more definitively to further (albeit still exceptional) circumstances under which women could own cattle in both precolonial Zululand and colonial Natal.

For instance, David Welsh in 1971, and Keletso Atkins in 1990, cited the story of Nozinja or Nozidiya, the mother of Qwabe and Zulu and wife of Malandela.¹⁷⁵ In Atkins' version of Bryant's retelling of this legend:

After the death of her husband, Malandela, we are told, the widow Nozinja found consolation in industrious work and thrift. The sale of surplus sorghum (*amabele*) brought her a goat, and before long the goats became a cow, which eventually increased to a herd of all white kine. The covetous Qwabe, Malandela's principal son, sought to wheedle them from out of his mother but was sharply rebuffed: "No!" was her reply. "And you the heir to all your father's cattle! What then is my child, Zulu, to receive?" Her refusal to yield to Qwabe's pressure apparently produced a rupture that ultimately forced Nozinja to move away to establish an independent kraal near her father's home, together with her son and a man-servant. Zulu, the youngest son for whom Nozinja labored to build an inheritance, was none other than the progenitor of the Zulu people.¹⁷⁶

However it may have been embellished over time, and by Mankulumana kaSomapunga who spoke to Stuart, and by Bryant's unnamed informant, the fact remains that a widowed chiefly woman accumulating her own cattle in precolonial Zululand, reserving the right to bequeath them as she saw fit, and warding off attempts to appropriate them, is enshrined as one of the pieces of oral history memorialising the basis for Zulu statehood. Chapter Two will explore how Dalida Dube and aristocratic women within the Qwabe, all of whom were widowed and members of chiefly families, also laid claim to cattle to some degree.

Provocatively, as early as 1971, Welsh argued that to "...English-speaking colonists ...it was unquestionable that African women were exploited drudges and slaves, and that marriages were forced sales, but they ignored the fact that Zulu women [in the mid-nineteenth century] had property rights which women in Victorian England lacked."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, specific nineteenth and twentieth century testimony, including from Zulu political leaders, noted that

¹⁷⁵ Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 44; Bryant, *Olden Times*, Part 1, 19–20; and Evidence of Mankulumana kaSomapunga, *Stuart Archive*, Vol. 2, 226.

¹⁷⁶ Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 44; Atkins' lively retelling draws upon Bryant, *Olden Times*, Part 1, 19–20; and Webb and Wright, ed., *James Stuart Archive Volume 2*, Evidence of Mankulumana kaSomapunga, 226.

¹⁷⁷ Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation*, 36, 169–70.

codified customary law was a significant deviation from precolonial tradition, especially in regard to women's recognised rights. For instance, the Zulu king Cetshwayo, giving evidence in 1883 before the Cape Commission on Native Laws, took issue with Natal's customary law (as administered under the 1878 Code) and indicated that previously “unmarried and married women could acquire and hold property independently of their fathers or husbands.”¹⁷⁸

In addition, and as Thomas McClendon notes, the prominent social worker and community activist Sibusisiwe Makhanya (1894–1971), who albeit over 100 years later than the women in this study, in 1931 claimed that “Under the tribal system 50 years ago women would not submit to whatever the men wanted...they were not entirely suppressed at any time under the old tribal system; they always had something to say.”¹⁷⁹ Welsh, further, cites the impassioned testimony of Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, recorded in 1961 and nearly 80 years later, after Cetshwayo’s objections to the Cape Commission on Native Laws. There are clear difficulties with projecting a precolonial ‘reality’ from twentieth century accounts.¹⁸⁰ By this same token it is also necessary to be circumspect other twentieth century accounts, including those of Makhanya and Buthelezi.

With the above caveats in mind, Buthelezi’s claims are included below. In several respects his account clearly echoes the legend of Nozinja; in terms of women accumulating stock through their own work, and also highlights that women *izangoma* had the right to own property:

Before our Law was codified there is not the slightest doubt that women did and still do own property. This is not only my view but is also a view held by my Mother and some elderly members of the Tribe. There were for instance women *Inyangas*...and *Izangomas*...who acquired and owned property. Diligent women also weaved mats and other handicrafts and accumulated first goats and with goats, cattle and that became their own property. Another diligent woman might till her land so well that she uses the surplus to acquire sheep, goats, and cattle, and all these become her property without any question...the Code dealt a heavy blow to Native Law as practised before the advent of the White man and women feel bitter about this interference on the part of those who codified such wrongs as ‘native law’. There are several instances...where a woman gives

¹⁷⁸ Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation*, 169. Welsh cites the Evidence of Cetshwayo, 1883 Commission, ii, 527.

¹⁷⁹ McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle,” 536.

¹⁸⁰ Indeed McClendon has argued that Natal’s historiography came to accept the idea that women could not own property in precolonial Zululand due largely to early over-reliance on two sources: A.T. Bryant’s *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929), and Eileen Krige’s 1936 anthropological work *The Social System of the Zulus*, both of which confidently projected backwards in time – based on their contemporary observations, claiming to describe precolonial social systems. See McClendon, *Gender and Generations Apart*, 13; McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom,” 534 n. 27.

a loan of cattle to a man to *lobola* a wife. I know of cases where a woman makes love to [likely in the sense of woos] another [woman] for and on behalf of her husband, and uses her cattle as acquired above, to pay her *lobolo*. It is a definite fallacy that women had no property in Zulu society. A father could give property to his daughter and that became her property. There are instances where a husband also bequeaths cattle and other property to his childless wife.¹⁸¹

Notwithstanding concerns about projecting back in time on the basis of twentieth century accounts it is argued here that – considered together – Cetshwayo’s 1883 evidence, Fynn’s 1852 evidence, the cases of the Qwabe widows, Dalida Dube, and Vundlazi considered in this study, and the 1961 testimony of Buthelezi and his elderly relatives – in some clans at least, and to some extent, it was socially acceptable for women to own property in Natal before the Codes of 1878 and 1891 – and perhaps in some places remained so despite being marginalised by codified customary law.

The evidence from the broader regional perspective can assist here: Jennifer Weir’s research into chiefly women in southern Africa clearly bears out the point that certain women could own cattle in the nineteenth century, identifying royal women who reputedly owned cattle in their own right.¹⁸² These included the Mulena Mokwae, or chief princess of the Barotsi (as noted by a missionary in 1897), and the Ndebele queens (even though she emphasises that women inheriting cattle among the Ndebele was rare) – such as MaKhumalo who received from Lobhengula (King of the Matabele from 1868 until the mid-1890s) 10 head of cattle each year and passed these on to her daughters, and Queen Lozikeyi Dhlodhlo of present day Zimbabwe (d. 1919), described in the Introduction to this thesis. Lozikeyi, according to Marieke Clarke, had 879 cattle by the time she died – of which she bequeathed 130 to her daughter Sidambe, who in turn inherited 11 head of cattle on her father’s death.¹⁸³

All of these instances would seem to suggest that many of the women who owned cattle in precolonial southern Africa were aristocratic, and were widows. Weir proposes that the

¹⁸¹ Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation*, 169. Welsh excerpts this from his personal communication with Buthelezi. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!* 44 also refers to Buthelezi’s words.

¹⁸² For Jennifer Weir’s important discussion of women’s cattle ownership in southern Africa, see Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 5–8.

¹⁸³ See Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 6; Marieke Faber Clarke with Pathisa Nyathi, *Lozikeyi Dlodlo, Queen of the Ndebele: “A very dangerous and intriguing woman,”* (Bulawayo: Amagugu, 2010). In addition it is worth mentioning that Mawa, Mnkabayi’s twin sister and Shaka’s aunt, famously fled across the Tugela River in 1843 in order to get away from the new Zulu king Mpande, with thousands of followers and a great number of cattle, many of which were then siezed by clans living in Natal such as the Qadi.

“dominant class of married and homestead heads” that Guy describes, “could perhaps be expanded to include the dominant class of elite women” who were “exceptions in terms of ownership of cattle.”¹⁸⁴ This point is well taken – that elite status could confer men’s rights upon certain women. Indeed some of these ‘exceptional’ women, as members of chiefly families, may have enjoyed a higher social status than most male homestead heads in their societies – as did the Zulu *amakhosikaḻi*. However this correlation between women’s elite status and their opportunities for cattle ownership needs to be researched further. (As Fynn, Cetshwayo’s and perhaps Buthelezi’s testimonies would seem to suggest, it is also possible that some widows who were not from chiefly families occasionally held cattle). Further empirical research is required to understand how, for individuals, the homogenising and static understanding of “custom” enshrined in the 1891 Code of Native Law cemented gender inequality and hierarchy and undermined, if it did not entirely erase, the possibilities for African women to own property including cattle, during the nineteenth century. The following chapters will aim to detail some of the forms of ownership that were possible for women before being constricted by codified customary law and the mechanisms of indirect rule.

Conclusion

As seen above, there are strong indications that codified customary law differed markedly from, and attempted to exclude the possibility, of a range of precolonial practices – including instances of women’s property ownership. Harold Jack Simons, in his seminal 1968 work on gender and law in southern Africa in regard to African women, described the Code’s 1891 amended and expanded form as “stereotyping a concept of feminine inferiority unknown to the traditional society”.¹⁸⁵ Further, as Cherryl Walker states, increasingly from colonial government to Union to the Apartheid government, “the patriarchal nature of the chieftaincy was also strengthened.”¹⁸⁶ How, then, and why did this come about? Jeff Guy has argued that in the colonial era, due to their respective (though often overlapping) concepts of masculinity, rooted in two different contexts, chiefs and colonial officials found some common cause in the (coerced) formulation of Natal’s indirect rule, its political system and hierarchy – in an “accommodation of patriarchs”:

¹⁸⁴ Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 8.

¹⁸⁵ Harold Jack Simons, *African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 26.

¹⁸⁶ Cherryl Walker, “Women, 'tradition', and reconstruction,” *Review of African Political Economy* 21:61 (September 1994): 350.

[M]uch of the common ground upon which Theophilus Shepstone...and leading Africans, negotiated their claims to political authority was their masculinity. To be more specific...it was upon their masculinity manifested as power over women and subordinate men, that is, as patriarchy, that an accommodation between white and black authorities was reached.¹⁸⁷

McClendon too has argued that colonial officials and chiefs were “allies” in the formulation of “native law”¹⁸⁸ and adds the very important observation that codified law ignored existing differences in custom between groups living in Natal in the late 1800s:

in a sense, the inventors of customary law in Natal drew on the totalitarian image of the...Zulu state...but in another sense the early Codes [of 1878 and 1891] seem to be an attempt to form a general statement of ‘native’ law, without reference to the supposedly minor variations among the ‘tribes’ that inhabited Natal.¹⁸⁹

Thus under colonialism a “general statement” of custom was developed for Natal and more broadly, which elided differences in custom and gender ideology that may have existed between chiefdoms. This further highlights the need to investigate differences in custom and gender relations between Natal chiefdoms in the early colonial era – to counteract the homogenising view propagated by colonial legal definitions. The narratives in the following chapters aim to compare experiences of women in individual chiefdoms in more detail, in the period before the customary law was codified, and tentatively identify differences in gender ideology between them.

The important historical materialist analysis introduced from the late 1970s, which characterised precolonial gender relations in southern Africa as repressive class relations, has seen compelling responses and some critique in the last thirty years. These critiques indicate that structuralist arguments regarding women’s circumscribed roles and status in southern Africa’s precolonial societies should find ways in which to properly consider exceptions to those broad rules and variations between polities, and represent the fluidity of gender relations

¹⁸⁷ Guy, “An Accommodation of Patriarchs”; Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*.

¹⁸⁸ McClendon, “From Aboriginal to Zulu,” 2. Elsewhere McClendon describes customary law in Natal as “...created through the interaction of white colonial officials and African chiefs and elders. The resulting system emphasized the rights and authority of males and elders while it also emphasized the powerlessness and deference of women and juniors. Customary law was based on a conception of tradition and custom as unchanging in a region that had already been subject to major social change as a result of centralization, militarization, and warfare. The intrusion of white colonists and officials who made demands for labor and taxes, and of missionaries pressing Western values in the guise of Christianity, ensured the acceleration of conflict and change.” Thomas V. McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle,” 531–2.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas V. McClendon, “From Aboriginal to Zulu,” 4.

as well as their restrictive character. This study takes the view that, although women chiefs for example were clearly exceptions to the rule of male chiefship, such exceptions should not be dismissed and might indicate a patriarchal social structure that was ‘porous’.¹⁹⁰

There is still a lack of an extensive empirical study that brings together and more carefully scrutinises sources of evidence supporting arguments on precolonial gender relations. This chapter has proposed a number of specific areas where there is direct contradiction, or simply scope for more research. While reliance on sources from the early colonial era to form arguments about gender in the precolonial era is indeed problematic, there is no choice but to consider them. This ongoing discussion and empirical reassessment must remain constantly mindful of the speculative nature of the process and the problems with many of the sources, whilst emphasising the importance of oral accounts with strong roots in particular precolonial societies, such as those in the *James Stuart Archive*. Few commentaries to date have acknowledged the speculative nature of this discussion and the circumspection needed for interpreting the relevant sources.

It has been argued here that, in addition to factors shaping life in nineteenth century Natal, which provide the broad context for the following case studies, certain institutions in the precolonial Zulu kingdom could have had significance for many women who had come to live in Natal chiefdoms by the 1840s. Just as each subject chiefdom’s relationships with the Zulu kings waxed and waned, so in some instances moving out of the heartland of Zulu authority could mean individual women in chiefly and commoner families, like men, were no longer subject to mechanisms of Zulu state centralisation via such institutions, that had affected their lives. However becoming *amalala*, conflict with the Zulu state, and widespread social fragmentation in Natal, could also of course be associated with new vulnerabilities for individuals and the polities to which they belonged. One aspect of such conflict was the increase in the number of widows in Natal by the 1840s, which has been noted by historians. The social and gender consequences of this bear further investigation, and the theme of widowhood crucially interlinks the subjects in the following chapters.

Despite the scanty nature of the archive, there are a number of specific, recorded instances of

¹⁹⁰ The idea of contemporary Zulu patriarchy as a ‘porous’ patriarchy was coined by Benedict Carton, “Why is the ‘100% Zulu Boy’ so popular?,” November 2009, accessed March 2010 <http://concernedafricascholars.org/why-is-the-100-percent-zulu-boy-so-popular/>. This term, given this study’s concern with the treatment of ‘exceptions’, is seen as useful for considering precolonial and colonial realities as well.

women in southern Africa, most of whom were from elite families and many of whom were widows, owning cattle in the precolonial context as well as in the early colonial context. It must be emphasised that this appears to have been an exceptional practice, but is still highly significant.¹⁹¹ Jennifer Weir has suggested that such ‘exceptional’ women may be seen as having belonged to the “dominant class” which comprised homestead heads and married men.¹⁹² Research also remains to be done on exceptional instances of non-elite women owning cattle.

Scholarly contestations about the form of gender relations in precolonial southeast Africa naturally pose challenges for understanding how gender relations were remoulded, shifted and persisted within the colonial context. The following chapters in this thesis will focus mainly on African women’s ‘exceptional’ experiences in the late 1830s to 1860s, the period before customary law was codified and imposed.¹⁹³ There is currently something of a gap in research on gender relations in Natal in this specific period (although the literature on gender and missions offers rich insights) and it is suggested that focusing more on this early colonial period can in fact help to shed light on the precolonial context. At the same time it can add to understanding the reshaping of custom under indirect rule; and the reasons why, even as a static interpretation of custom was constructed between colonial officials and African patriarchs, this process was also contested by women and men, commoners and chiefly elites.

The following chapters, then, go on to consider detailed evidence from individual women’s lives in colonial Natal. Chapter Two presents case studies of women in the Makhanya, Qadi and Qwabe chiefly elites in Natal from the 1840s, that reveal “flexible” aspects of gender relations in the context of politics resettling in Natal at this time – aspects that over the course of the nineteenth century were threatened by a rigid, codified delineation of women’s legal, customary roles and rights and by the expansion of a colonial administration premised on an uncomfortable accommodation between chiefs and colonial administration. Many of the women mentioned in the following chapter, further, were connected by their status as elite widows, and the possible permutations of this status across different contexts is explored.

¹⁹¹ Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!* 44.

¹⁹² Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 8. Weir proposes to “extend” the definition of the dominant class described by Guy in “Analysing Pre-Capitalist Societies” and “Gender Oppression.”

¹⁹³ Chapter Three, however, pursues evidence on gender and women’s leadership within the Izinkumbi until after 1880, in order to consider the uneven application of customary law to the ‘mixed-race’ descendants of the Fynns and their African wives.

CHAPTER TWO

‘Wife of the Former Chief’

The agency of widowed chiefly women in Natal among the Makhanya, Qwabe and Qadi, 1836–1860

Mbalasi Makhanya (b. circa 1796 – d. post 1851) ‘The First Zulu Christian’

In the mid-1830s, Mbalasi Makhanya was travelling within southern Natal. Mbalasi, who was also known by the name Somgciza or Somgeza,¹⁹⁴ was then about forty years old.¹⁹⁵ She was one of many royal widows of Duze, the previous chief of the Makhanya – a former client chiefdom of Shaka in Natal, and originally descended from the Qwabe chiefs.¹⁹⁶ According to a 1903 account, Duze had been killed on the order of the Zulu king, Shaka, in about 1827, and many Makhanya may then have been placed under the authority of the Cele.¹⁹⁷ Indeed,

¹⁹⁴ Killie Campbell Collections (KC), *Nembula Papers* (Uncat. Manuscript), “Indaba NgoMbalasi,” Letter from Mbalasi’s grandson Ephraim Silas Henry Nembula to Killie Campbell, c. 1940, translated by Nonkululeko Nzama, December 2006; KC, *Nembula Papers*, P. Lawrence Khanyile to Killie Campbell, 13 September, 1957.

¹⁹⁵ Mbalasi was described by missionary Newton Adams in 1842 as being “advanced in years” compared to others who were learning to read on the mission station, though this was not a clear indication of her age. Her son Nembula was approximately 21 in 1847 and he was thus born in approximately 1825. She also may have had an older daughter married to a Cele chief. Based on this, 1796 is suggested as a rough estimate of Mbalasi’s date of birth.

¹⁹⁶ Ephraim Nembula’s account situates Mbalasi as “the mother of Nembula the son of Duze, son of Mnengwa, son of Makanya, son of Khondlo, son of Pakatwayo some of Qwabe son of Malandela.” Possibly the order was scrambled in transcription c. 1940. For example, according to Reader’s extensive ethnography, Makhanya was not fathered by Kondlo; and Phakatwayo was Khondlo’s son. Regardless this shows that Mbalasi’s Christian grandson and her son Nembula kaDuze, from a junior princely line of the Makhanya chiefdom, laid claim to descent from Qwabe royalty.

¹⁹⁷ See Colin de B. Webb and John Wright, *James Stuart Archive*, Vol. 1, Evidence of Dinya, 116. Dinya’s 1908 account suggests that Shaka made a journey south of the Tugela to his homestead at kwaDukuza, ostensibly in order to mediate when a succession dispute in Natal between two Cele princes threatened to erupt into civil war. Shaka summoned the Cele royals to kwaDukuza as well as other client chiefs south of the Tugela who paid Shaka tribute, including chiefs of the Qadi, Qwabe, and Duze of the Makhanya. However, having heard evidence from the warring parties, Shaka announced his intention to destroy one Cele prince as a political threat to him, and form an alliance with the other whom he favoured. Shaka intended to kill the other Cele prince and also Duze of the Makhanya, and give their entire “followings” to the prince he supported. Whether at kwaDukuza or at his own homestead, according to this account, Duze, was put to death. His

Mbalasi in addition to her son Nembula may have had a daughter who had married a Cele chief, Gcabashe.¹⁹⁸ After Shaka's death, the Makhanya may have reconstituted themselves as a separate clan under Duze's son, Makhutha, and it was under his leadership that they travelled further south to try and find a secure place to settle where conflict with the new Zulu king, Dingane, could be avoided.¹⁹⁹ It is not clear from surviving archival sources whether Mbalasi travelled with Nembula or with a larger group of Makhanya during this long journey, but the latter seems likely. Food was scarce and would have included game hunted on the way, and Mbalasi and Nembula, according to family lore, mainly subsisted on "Koti (fresh ground mielies mixed with roasted Hippopotamus' liver packed in a container, also known as isiQobongo" to sustain their strength.²⁰⁰

By 1836, Mbalasi was living under the authority of Makhutha in the area that is today called "KwaMakhutha" ("Makhutha's place"). This new settlement was in an area occupied by some Mbo people but with enough space for the Makhanya to claim land, east of Umbumbulu and not far from present day Amanzimtoti on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal.²⁰¹ Today, the township that surrounds Adams Mission is named KwaMakhutha after this settlement and chief. Some other women, also widows of Duze, were also living near or with her, and Mbalasi might have been experiencing persecution from them, though what sort is not clear.²⁰² Mbalasi's son Nembula, who was about 11 years old in 1836, was of the chiefly family but as Mbalasi was not the senior wife he was not directly in line for the chiefship; he was the half-brother of the chief, Makhutha.²⁰³ There is some evidence that Mbalasi may have been looking

Makhanya followers were temporarily subjected to the Cele until they reformed as a separate polity under Makhutha some time after Shaka's death.

¹⁹⁸ KC, *Nembula Papers*, "Indaba NgoMbalasi."

¹⁹⁹ On the movements of the Makhanya in the nineteenth century see D.H. Reader (Reader's sources were Bryant and twentieth-century Makhanya informants), and the above transcribed oral account in the James Stuart Archive. The Makhanya under Makhutha travelled south at the same time as the Qwabe under Nqetho (see the section on Dalida Dube below). D.H. Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition: the Makhanya of southern Natal*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 23–24; Alfred T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1929), 187; Webb and Wright, *James Stuart Archive*, Vol. 1, Evidence of Dinya, p. 116.

²⁰⁰ KC, *Nembula Papers*, "Indaba NgoMbalasi."

²⁰¹ Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition*, 24. The Makhanya seemingly settled between the Umbogintwini and Illovo rivers.

²⁰² This appears to have become family oral history, and is suggested by the 1957 written testimony of Mbalasi's descendant Paul Lawrence Ira Khanyile. KC, *Nembula Papers*, P. Lawrence Khanyile to Killie Campbell, 13 September, 1957.

²⁰³ The archival record and D.H. Reader's work indicate that, while it is not possible to be sure of Mbalasi's exact standing amongst Duze's widows, she was not in fact his senior wife and Nembula was not immediately in line to be chief. Makutha was chief already when the Makhanyas settled in southern Natal. However some descendants of relatives have at times considered that Nembula gave up the chiefship by converting (Interview with N. Makhanya, Weds 28th November 2007,

for the Cele chief Gcabashe, her son-in-law, in the area – and presumably also her daughter.²⁰⁴ Soon after the Makhanya settled, Makhutha began to rebuild the essential institutions of the chiefship; he re-established the Makhanya age-regiments into which he ordered the young men under his authority.²⁰⁵ The polity, then, was in the process of putting down roots in Natal; but Mbalasi's status within this family and polity, still hard to ascertain, seemingly was not secure.

At approximately the same time that the Makhanya were settling here at or a little earlier, and a little way to the north of the Makhanya at Umlazi, an American Congregationalist missionary, Newton Adams, was establishing his mission station (see Map 2). Adams was one of the missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (the ABCFM, or, the 'American Board') to first set up mission stations along the coastal strip that had been allocated to them in the mid-1830s.²⁰⁶ Large crowds came to listen to Adams' sermon on Sundays from the surrounding area, and a small group of people had also chosen to move onto the mission station land. In 1836 Mbalasi also sent Nembula, then eleven years old, to live on the station. Nembula may have been ill, and Adams was a doctor as well as a missionary.²⁰⁷ Although the sermons saw weekly attendance and a few people had moved to the station, no one had yet converted. There was widespread dismissal of what he said, and Mbalasi's grandson suggests that at this time the surrounding Makhanya and others considered that Adams' preaching "was all tales of the white people."²⁰⁸

Years were to elapse with this same dynamic. Adams established what he called the "family system" on the station. This was a missionary approach that was to be taken up more broadly across missions of the ABCFM: people living on the station (who, again, had not converted)

11:40).

²⁰⁴ KC, *Nembula Papers*, "Indaba NgoMbalasi."

²⁰⁵ Different versions of the names of these regiments are given in Reader, and in KC, Uncatalogued Manuscript in "Steel Drawers", 25796, "The Makhanya clan: A description of how the chiefs of this clan governed". This manuscript, written in isiZulu, was translated in 2007 by N. Zondi, of the isiZulu Studies department, University of KwaZulu-Natal. It shows that the Makhanya maintained their identity as a branch of the Qwabe and describes a dramatic series of events in 1906 when the Makhanya nearly joined the "Maphumulo Uprising" precipitated by Bhambatha kaMancinza.

²⁰⁶ Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition*, 341. The station was later moved to Amanzimtoti and came to be called Adams Mission.

²⁰⁷ Myra Dinnerstein, "The American Board Mission to the Zulu," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1971), 41.

²⁰⁸ On early opposition to missionary work, see Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in southeast Africa, 1835–1880* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), 47–9. See also KC, *Nembula Papers*, "Indaba NgoMbalasi."

carried out various forms of labour in return for living on the land. They also were, according to Adams, “allowed to attend daily prayers in the Native language with the other members of the family”;²⁰⁹ and learned to read and recite Bible verses. Further, Adams extended patronage by offering to provide cattle for the young men who joined the station, when they came of age. Thus Mbalasi may have seen life on the mission station as the best option for Nembula and a means to secure some kind of inheritance for him; in a context where cattle were scarce and in great demand; Nembula was promised he would receive one head of cattle when he turned twenty-one.

Soon after she sent Nembula to Adams, Mbalasi decided she would also join the group on the mission station. The reasons behind her decision have been speculated upon for over a hundred years, and sources on this include rich written accounts from Mbalasi’s descendants most relevant to this study, as well as a highly novelistic and problematic missionary account which also draws upon the evidence from Mbalasi’s relatives. Interestingly, this story, in different versions, also became part of family and mission station lore.²¹⁰ Ephraim Nembula’s narrative of circa 1940, for example, suggests that she lived with the Cele chief Gcabashe and was “sent” to work for Adams when he needed someone to assist him on the station, “even in ploughing”.²¹¹ Yet a 1957 account from one of her great-grandsons indicated that Mbalasi, as one of the wives of the chief, “because of her persecution by other chiefs’ wives had to flee to Adams Mission for protection.”²¹² In another narrative, Amanzimtoti residents interviewed in 1970, over 130 years after these events, generally believed that Mbalasi had been escaping from an *ukungena* marriage that was being arranged for her (a levirate marriage, to one of her deceased husband’s brothers).²¹³

Adams’ letter describing her arrival, likely written in the 1840s, reads as follows:

When we arrived here [in 1836] she was living with her friends about five miles from the station. A few months later her only son, then about eight years old [it

²⁰⁹ Letter from Newton Adams, archival location and date unspecified, quoted in Arthur Christofersen, *Adventuring With God: The Story of the American Board Mission in South Africa* (Durban: Julia Rau Christofersen, 1967), 27– 28.

²¹⁰ See Viola Ridgway, “Umbulasi: The First Convert to Christianity in Natal,” in *Stories from Zulu History / Izindaba ZaKwaZulu*, ed. Viola Ridgway (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1946), 99–105. Manuscript: KC, Nembula Papers, Uncatalogued Manuscript in “Steel Drawers”, 25796, “The Story of Mbalasi” by Viola Ridgway. Ridgway’s retelling of Mbalasi’s story is strikingly romanticised, reductive, and indeed offensive, and also contains many factual inaccuracies.

²¹¹ KC, *Nembula Papers*, Ephraim Silas Henry Nembula to Killie Campbell, c. 1940.

²¹² KC, *Nembula Papers*, P. Lawrence Khanyile to Killie Campbell, 13 September, 1957.

²¹³ Dinnerstein, “The American Board Mission to the Zulu,” 41.

is more likely that Nembula was 11 years old], came to live in our home, and not long afterwards, she came and desired to live with us. Her appearance, thin, clad in her filthy native attire, anything but pleasant and agreeable. We felt constrained to receive her under the circumstances, and she became one of our family, and was allowed to attend daily prayers in the Native language with the other members of the family.²¹⁴

Adams provided no sense of the reasons for her arrival; only that the missionaries accepted Mbalasi into the “family”, and his description suggests that when she very first arrived she did so on her own, unannounced, and the Adamses were not aware of her royal status.

Mbalasi lived on the mission station for ten years. One of her main roles was seemingly that of cook for the missionary family, the image of which was vivid in her grandson’s memory; she ground maize, made steam bread from the maize on the ashes of a fire, and sour milk or *amasi* which Adams reputedly ate with “the traditional wooden spoon”; and when tea ran out, she made an infusion from a particular tree.²¹⁵ She learned to read, studied the gospel, and lived within the missionaries’ home.

During her first ten years on the mission station, however, she did so without formally breaking with the spiritual and cultural world she had known among the Makhanya through being baptised. The same applied to all the other residents on the mission station. Daily prayers were held in isiZulu and attended by all on the station, and a day school was run, which Nembula attended. Yet no conversion took place during all these years, which has been repeatedly noted and variously explained in different missionary accounts.²¹⁶ This was a result partly of a lack of interest in conversion and the Christian concept of salvation, and partly of the American missionaries’ approach; as Norman Etherington indicates, the American Congregationalists were among the denominations that “demanded a prolonged probationary period before granting church membership.” – i.e. baptism.²¹⁷ Non-Christians were able to reside on the station. No-one on the station professed a wish to convert, and no-one in these ten years demonstrated the very particular outward manifestations of spiritual faith that

²¹⁴ Letter from Newton Adams, archival location and date unspecified, quoted in Christofersen, *Adventuring With God*, 27-28.

²¹⁵ See KC, *Nembula Papers*, Ephraim Nembula, “Indaba Ngombalasi”; and Ephraim Nembula, quoted in Ridgway, “Umbulasi”.

²¹⁶ See for example Christofersen, *Adventuring With God*; Ridgway, “Umbalasi.”

²¹⁷ Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics*, 88.

Adams expected of a convert: they were not “anxiously asking after the way of life and salvation.”²¹⁸

For missionaries operating in colonial Natal, “spiritual transformations” were “dependent upon observable physical changes – most notably in dress, domestic inhabitation, and family organization that signalled [in the opinion of the missionaries] a move towards civilization.”²¹⁹ Adams, who barely ever mentioned specific residents on the mission station by name or described them in any detail at all, mentioned Mbalasi in an 1842 letter to the Secretary of the American Board in Boston, Rufus Anderson, six years after Mbalasi had moved to the mission station. By this time he had grasped her royal background:

She was the wife of a chief of considerable consequence, head of the Amaquabi tribe, and she is a person of considerable influence with the remnant of her nation living in this vicinity. Though advanced in years, she is much interested in learning to read, and has made good progress. As she lives in our family, we have had a good opportunity of observing her conduct, and to us she appears to be a humble and devoted child of God.²²⁰

Mbalasi, then, had maintained connections with the Makhanya in the area over these six years. Adams mistakenly confused the Makhanya with the greater paramountcy of the Qwabe, and did not further explain or illustrate her influence. However her status, seemingly, was still recognised by at least some within the chieftdom. What Adams meant by “advanced in years” is also unclear. This account also shows that Mbalasi was by 1842 living in the missionary home and was the person on the mission station Adams most hoped might be baptised. Significantly, she had a degree of social status that Adams hoped would assist the missionary enterprise. In an undated letter, Adams opined that between 1836 and 1846

As her knowledge of divine truth increased her interest became greater, indeed she appeared from the first to receive and acquiesce in the truth as fast as she comprehended it....It was long, however, before she expressed to me the hope that her sins were forgiven and of her acceptance of Christ, while her exemplary walk and circumspection left no doubt in our minds that she was truly born of the Spirit.²²¹

²¹⁸ KC, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) 15.4, Vol. 2, Newton Adams to Rufus Anderson, 20 September 1842.

²¹⁹ Tyrone H. Tallie, Jr., “Limits of Settlement: Racialized Masculinity, Sovereignty, and the Imperial Project in Colonial Natal, 1850–1897,” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014), 27.

²²⁰ KC, ABCFM 15.4, Vol. 2, Newton Adams to Rufus Anderson, 20 September 1842.

²²¹ Letter from Newton Adams, archival location and date unspecified, quoted in Christofersen, *Adventuring With God*, 27–28.

Thus Mbalasi showed the specific outward manifestations of faith that the missionary sought, which Adams identified in her comportment (her “exemplary walk” was seen as proof of Christian virtue). In 1846, ten years after her arrival on the mission station, she also explicitly stated that she wished to become a Christian. She did not take a baptismal name and continued to be called “Mbalasi” and “Somgciza”.²²² The baptism was arranged on the 26 June 1846, taking place in front of a large “assembly” of “500 or more” African people from the surrounding areas. They were perceptibly moved – or in an alternate reading of Adams’ account, disturbed – to witness this ceremony.²²³ The crowd very likely included many of the Makhanya who were Mbalasi’s relatives and former neighbours. Adams’ undated account of her baptism, sent to the American Board, gives only hints of the massive social import of this moment. It read as follows:

Early in 1846 she expressed a desire to confess Christ before men, and was baptized in June (the 26th) of that year, when she sat at the table of the Lord to commemorate with us his undying love. The occasion was one of delightful intent to us and the scene made a powerful impression on the assembly which witnessed it. She was the first fruits of this mission, the first who came out from her dark and degraded countrymen to profess Christ and join herself to his people. We feel we have in this woman an able and efficient helper. She has a naturally strong mind, now well stored with divine truth, and she possesses good judgement, considerable intelligence, and a kind and friendly disposition. These qualities and the fact that she is an important personage in her tribe give her a great deal of influence, which she faithfully exerts in the cause of Christ. She is loved and respected by all who know her.²²⁴

On 26 June 1846, then, Mbalasi Makhanya became the first person to be baptised a Christian through the American Board’s mission in Natal. Adams’ letter provides a contemporary source suggesting that she was kind, strong-minded, socially influential among the Makhanya and generally well regarded. It was also filtered through his focus (this being a letter to Anderson) on how she exhibited the characteristics of the ideal convert. What Adams meant by the scene making a “powerful impression” on onlookers is never specified – the force and complexity both of her baptism, Mbalasi’s interiority and personhood, and the fuller details of her social positioning, are concealed or barely hinted at in the missionary’s account.

222 KC, *Nembula Papers*, P. Lawrence Khanyile to Killie Campbell, 13 September, 1957.

223 Newton Adams quoted in Amy Bridgman Cowles, *Talk for the centenary of the American Zulu Mission*. Photocopy of typescript, April 1934, 23 (Original archival location unknown).

224 Letter from Newton Adams quoted in Christofersen, *Adventuring With God*, 27–28.

As mentioned above, missionaries required also a reorganisation of family life and the renunciation of practices such as polygamy and lobola. In 1846, the year of her baptism, Mbalasi's son, Nembula, was a polygamist; and though a very young man of about 20, he had two wives.²²⁵ A short two months after Mbalasi's baptism, Nembula and one of these wives, a young woman called Mfazimuni (the daughter of George Champion, from a nearby station), came to the missionary church at Amanzimtoti to be married in a Christian ceremony. His other wife, with whom he had also been living at Amanzimtoti, was to be 'put aside.' On the same day, another man did the same along with Nembula: remarrying, by Christian rites, only one of his two wives. Adams explained that he played a role in comforting the two women who were left without husbands by this remarriage.²²⁶ A further nine months later, in May 1847, Mfazimuni and Nembula came to Adams' church once more, this time to be baptised – making them the second and third converts to Christianity on the station.²²⁷ After this, other people living around the mission station also decided to be baptised. In a Nembula family account, Mbalasi is credited with propelling not only this series of conversions, but the economic changes that were soon to come in the area, her son's education as a minister in Cape Town, and his return to Amanzimtoti as a pioneering sugar-cane farmer.²²⁸ Mbalasi passed away some time after 1851.

Contradictions between sources as to Mbalasi's social standing and her motivations in moving to the mission station, pose a challenge to historians attempting to identify aspects of elite women's experiences in colonial Natal. Accounts of Mbalasi's life tend to emphasise only her role of servant and then helpmeet and preaching assistant to the missionary, as well as "first convert" and spiritual paragon; "her work was to cook and preach to the other women" – mentioning briefly her status as widow of a chief.²²⁹ However family oral histories of her

²²⁵ Ross Shiels, "Newton Adams, 1835–1851," (Hons diss., University of Natal, 1963), 29; ABCFM 15.4, Vol. 4, Newton Adams to Rufus Anderson, 1 October 1847.

²²⁶ ABCFM 15.4, Vol. 4, Newton Adams to Rufus Anderson, 1 October 1847.

²²⁷ They changed their names for new baptismal names – though in practice, as archival records show, they themselves also continued to use their own names. Nembula Makhanya was 'renamed' Ira Adams Nembula and his wife Laura. These were not just Christian names but were in fact the names of Newton Adams' brother and sister, who lived in New York – and would never meet Nembula or Mfazimuni. This and related instances of naming practices on American Board mission stations are explored in Meghan Elisabeth Healy and Eva Jackson, "Practices of Naming and the Possibilities of Home on American Zulu Mission Stations in Colonial Natal," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 29 (2011): 1–19.

²²⁸ KC, *Nembula papers*, Ephraim Nembula, "Indaba ngoMbalasi"

²²⁹ KC, *Nembula papers*, Ephraim Nembula, "Indaba ngoMbalasi". For a critique of historical narrative that focuses on women primarily as helpmeets, see Helen Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c. 1806–70," *The Journal of African History* 37:3 (November 1996): 352.

immediate descendants transcribed more than 100 years after her arrival on the mission station evoke something too of her life before joining the mission. Three key aspects of her narrative come through particularly from these family sources: first, she made a transition to a new life in southern Natal with her son, after the Makhanya clan's politically tempestuous decade and her husband's death; second, she was under pressure to make strategic choices to benefit her son and ensure security and an inheritance for him without material resources; and thirdly, she may have been experiencing specific pressures related to her own ambiguous position in the polity as one of many widows of a former chief – accorded status perhaps, but also vulnerable to forms of marginalisation.

The different ways in which the “indaba ngoMbalasi” has been told point to the complexity of her status in making a transition between two very different contexts. One was a newly-established settlement in Natal where her and her sons' fates within the small chiefdom were seemingly uncertain. The other was a mission station, where her own and her son's labour and participation in the missionary's “family system” could guarantee a measure of material security, particularly for Nembula, a prince apparently without an inheritance. Before he gave up polygyny in 1846, Nembula as a junior prince of the Makhanya was already working towards building his homestead; but gave this up.²³⁰ His Christian marriage and baptism, in 1846 and 1847, immediately after his mother's baptism, may be seen as indicating the influence she had, a close familial bond between them, and strategic reasons for following her in making such significant changes, or perhaps all of these.

Nembula did not however renounce his chiefly status; in 1856, ten years after his baptism, by which time he had become a lay preacher, he signed a petition not with his baptismal name, Ira Adams Nembula, but as “Nembula kaDuze”; referring to his father. This powerfully echoes the way in which his contemporary, Ukakonina, or James Dube (John Langalibalele Dube's father), negotiated dual chiefly familial and missionary identities, as considered below. In both cases, they bridged these divides as a consequence of major decisions made by their mothers in the 1840s. This balancing of chiefly status and Christian identity continues today to have significance for *amakholwa* families whose trajectories were shaped by Mbalasi.²³¹

²³⁰ An unanswered question is whether Nembula was able to use the one cow Adams had promised him, for paying lobola before 1846 although the practice was frowned upon by missionaries.

²³¹ The missionary William Ireland, writing on the occasion of the 1885 Jubilee celebrations of the American Zulu Mission, referred to the royal connections of both Dube and Nembula, both of whom lived in the same area as their half-brothers who had become chiefs of their respective clans. William Ireland, *Jubilee of the American Mission in Natal* (Horne, 1886), 41. For more detailed

Dalida Dube (c. 1815 – c. 1890), “Inkosikazi of the Amaqadi tribe”

Mayembe Dube lived in the Qadi chiefdom (under the Ngcobo paramountcy) in the north of the Zulu state, in the early 1830s. She was one of three wives of the Qadi chief, Dube. By 1837 Dube had a number of children, possibly five: his heir Dabeka (the child of his senior wife, heir to the chiefship); Mahlukana whose mother's name is also unknown; and he and Mayembe had three children: a son Ukakonina (meaning “his mother's boy”, “because he was so like her,”), a daughter and another child.²³² Mayembe's children – like Nembula kaDuze – were, therefore, of the chiefly family but not in the direct chiefly line; they were half-siblings of the future chief Dabeka, and would-be aunts and uncles to his heirs.²³³

Although the Qadi had been incorporated into the Zulu state early in its formation and Dube may have been a close ally of Shaka,²³⁴ as Heather Hughes vividly relates, nine years after Dingane became king “in the autumn of 1837, the [Qadi] polity (including Dube himself) was crushed between Dingane's 'upper and nether grindstones’”.²³⁵ After Dube's death the Qadi quickly moved south of the Tugela River, led by his heir, Dabeka. By May 1837, they had arrived close to Port Natal “in coastal forest on the northern banks of the Mngeni River near to its mouth.”²³⁶ However life for the Qadi in Natal was shaped by severe shortage of cattle. Without this form of wealth, life was seriously disrupted; lobola transactions had to be deferred, and most marriages took place on the basis of promised cattle.²³⁷ In addition to all the other implications of cattle shortages, it was more difficult for established homestead

discussion of Nembula's career in farming, see Eva Jackson, “The Economic Experimentation of Nembula kaDuze/ Ira Adams Nembula, 1845 – 1886,” *Journal of Natal and Zulu History: History and Heritage: A special issue on former American Board mission stations in southern KwaZulu-Natal* 28 (2010): 8–22.

²³² Edwin W. Smith, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley, 1801–1880* (London: Epworth Press, 1949; New York: Library Publishers, 1952), 401–2.

²³³ Smith, *Lindley*, 401–2.

²³⁴ Heather Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2011), 3–4.

²³⁵ Heather Hughes, “Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27:3, Special Issue for Shula Marks (September 2001): 450. Dingane did not have the same strong diplomatic link with and trust in the Qadi that his brother and predecessor Shaka had cultivated; and he arranged the ambush of Qadi warriors, then the killing of Dube himself.

²³⁶ Hughes, *First President*, 4. Hughes highlights that, because the Qadi arrived in Natal before the British took control in 1842 and British annexation in 1844, they were considered ‘indigenous’ and not ‘refugees’; and this later assisted them in securing land.

²³⁷ See Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money! The Cultural Origins of a South African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1993), 28–30. Some cattle were likely distributed among the Qadi from the first raid into Zululand in March 1838, but still the chiefdom had little wealth or security in Natal until 1843.

heads to expand their homesteads by marrying, or receive cattle from their daughters' suitors; young women and men could not easily marry; the herds that embodied security, wealth, and the potential to re-establish the prestige of the Qadi were hard to come by.

Attempts were made from the late 1830s to seize or in other ways accumulate herds. In 1838, Dabeka and a group of Qadi, in alliance with other Natal clans and white militiamen from Port Natal, ventured out on the second of two raids against Dingane to seize Zulu cattle. Dabeka was killed during the raid, after only one year as chief.²³⁸ (As Chapter Three relates, Vundlazi's husband Frank Fynn also led a ragtag party in the first and more successful of these two raids).²³⁹ After Dabeka's death, his (and Ukakonina's) brother Mahlukana became regent. Thus, in quick succession, the Qadi had lost two chiefs (Mayembe's husband Dube, and then Dabeka). The cattle shortage was eased by a piece of fortune in 1843; Mawa (the powerful aunt of the new Zulu king Mpande, yet who was also allied with his political rival) left Zululand with the large number of 2000–3000 followers and hundreds of Zulu royal cattle. When she crossed the Tugela, however, she lost most of these herds to raiding by Natal's inhabitants,²⁴⁰ and the Qadi acquired some.

By 1844, the Qadi settled in the Umzinyathi River valley, where greater security and reestablishment of the polity was once again possible, supported by agriculture, pastoralism and hunting for game along the river's banks. Women, including Mayembe, also grew and sold maize which could then be substituted for lobola cattle and exchanged "to build up herds."²⁴¹ After five years of living in the valley, by January 1849, Mayembe herself had accumulated five cattle by growing and selling sorghum wheat, *amabele*. She also held another three cattle that Dube had given their son Ukakonina in Zululand.²⁴² Mayembe, then, was

²³⁸ This raid was in order to seize Zulu cattle. See Hughes, "Doubly Elite," 450; Magesa M. Fuze, *The Black People and Whence they Came*, (Pietermaritzburg and Durban: University of Natal Press, 1979), 76, 170; *Smith*, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley*, 401-2. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis for an instance of the impact of this expedition.

²³⁹ Hughes, "Doubly Elite," 450; Fuze, *The Black People and Whence they Came*, 76, 170; *Smith*, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley*. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis for an instance of the impact of this expedition.

²⁴⁰ Hughes quotes Qadi noble Madikane Cele, whose words were recorded by James Stuart: "It is with those cattle that we had established ourselves, we of the white men's country" (Webb and Wright, ed., *James Stuart Archive* Volume 2, Evidence of Madikane, 56).

²⁴¹ Hughes, *Politics and society in Inanda*, 82. Hughes, *First President*, 6. Maize was an important commodity in Natal, as Hughes notes, and fetched high prices from the 1840s until the late 1860s. Note that this connects to Buthelezi's emphasis in 1961 upon the importance of women participating in attaining lobola cattle to build herds and expand homesteads.

²⁴² Hughes, *Politics and Society*

able for a period of at least five years, to own cattle. Although it is hard to ascertain and compare this with the social acceptability of women owning cattle in the Qadi in a precolonial setting in Zululand, it is conceivable that in Natal it was her status as a chiefly widow that gave her the right to personally protect her son's inheritance as well as the right to accumulate more beasts. This may also be seen as the extension of a woman's customary rights over the produce of her own home within a royal homestead, in her husband's absence. As the events following from 1849 showed, however, the Qadi elite did not believe that she had the right to remove her children from the Qadi polity; or indeed the right to do with the cattle as she wished.

Indeed, and significantly for Mayembe's experiences that followed, the above migrations, privations and the deaths in quick succession of the two chiefs Dube and Dabeka may have increased and intensified the importance for the Qadi of keeping the political elite intact. Hughes describes the senior leadership of the Qadi chiefdom in Natal in the 1840s as having been "acutely aware of the forces of destruction and opportunity that had shaped their destiny"; "[t]hey articulated this understanding in numerous ways, from the declamation of chiefly praises to the elaboration of strategies for future Qadi survival."²⁴³

The beginning of 1849 saw two significant developments in Mayembe's life, which were most likely interconnected. Having been exposed to the Sunday services of the American missionaries – 46 year old Daniel and his wife Lucy Lindley on their nearby mission station, set up by 1847 (see Map 2, page xviii) – she became aware of the possibility of becoming a Christian, and of moving to the station. Secondly, her deceased husband's family decided that she should (through an *ukungena*, or levirate, marriage) become his brother's wife. Strikingly, this decision was taken a full twelve years after her husband's death. Hughes has suggested that the Qadi elite arranged her *ukungena* marriage in order to bring in cattle for her son's inheritance. However, it is argued here that the then heir of the chiefly family, Mahlukana, in fact intended that at least some of the very cattle Mayembe held would constitute her own lobola and would be transferred to him when she married.²⁴⁴ This, then, may in fact have been a bid to appropriate her cattle.

243 Hughes, "Doubly Elite", 450.

244 This would be in keeping with Mahlukana's later actions in 1851.

But, Mayembe resisted the marriage. In January of 1849, together with Ukakonina (then not more than sixteen or seventeen years old) and possibly with her youngest child, she promptly took the eight cattle and moved to the Lindleys' mission station, claiming their protection. She left behind her daughter, who would later join them on the station. This move caused upset and controversy among the Qadi, according to Daniel Lindley.²⁴⁵ Her departure from the royal family represented a challenge to the status quo and indeed the ideological and material strength and security of the Qadi. Mayembe was apparently threatened with death for this defection: in 1930 John L. Dube recalled, in relating the story of his grandmother's move, that: "many times they [who is unspecified] tried to kill my Grandmother, many nights she was forced to sleep out in the bushes out of the way of her would-be assassins."²⁴⁶ Dube also wrote that "Because [My father] was the leader of his people, a great protest went up from the Dube tribe against my Grandmother, because she had allowed him to come into contact with this new religion and be drawn away from the practices of his people."²⁴⁷

The consternation caused by and significance of Mayembe's actions were noted in his own letter back to Boston, in which Lindley notes his own excitement at Mayembe's arrival:

We have recently had quite a stir in our neighbourhood. The Inkosikazi...has left her kraal, & says she has renounced the hidden works of darkness. While in her kraal she was persecuted with great malignity of tongue, but no violence was done her – much, however, was threatened. Last Saturday morning she sent me word that she had been summoned to the Chief's place, where a large company was to be collected to deliberate on her conduct in becoming a Christian. I sent her word not to go and she came to our house, where she is now stopping. I went to the Chief's myself, & told them all, in the plainest manner, what I thought of their doing.²⁴⁸

Mayembe was baptised soon after she moved to the mission station; her baptismal name was Dalida Dube (by which she is referred to in archival sources).²⁴⁹ There had previously been a

²⁴⁵ Hughes, *First President*, 1.

²⁴⁶ Marable Manning, "African Nationalist. The Life of John Langelibalele Dube," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland 1976), 26; Oberlin College Archive (OCA), Student file (John L. Dube), Zulu's Appeal for Light, c. 1930, Box 72.

²⁴⁷ Oberlin College Archive (OCA), Student file (John L. Dube), Zulu's Appeal for Light, c. 1930, Box 72.

²⁴⁸ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), Accessions A608, A/2/27, File 1849, Daniel Lindley to Newton Adams, 15 January 1849. Cited in Hughes, *Politics and Society*, 171. Lindley was a more observant and engaged observer than Adams, but remains a challenging source through which to access a sense of the people they wrote about, usually so briefly.

²⁴⁹ Mayembe is referred to as Dalida for the remainder of this study, as this appears to be the name that she used most based on archival sources. The first students at Inanda Seminary, an American Board institution founded in 1869, included Talitha Hawes and Dalita Isaac. They came

small collection of converts around the Lindleys. However like Mbalasi, Dalida was a “rare convert among the rare,” whose arrival on the mission must grant it much greater prestige in the eyes of Africans in the area;²⁵⁰ thus it was in that year, within days of her baptism, that a formal church for Inanda was first constituted, with nine charter members; a small community comprising converts from the Inanda area.²⁵¹

What has not been mentioned previously in secondary references to Dalida Dube is the primary evidence from the early Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) records that show that she intended to marry a Christian man in 1851, two years after having rejected the *ukungena* marriage and converting to Christianity; and the controversy this once again caused between the Qadi and the mission station.²⁵² In addition, the SNA records reveal that her removal of both royal children and cattle from the Qadi land caused what became long-standing tensions that only her sons’ and grandsons’ closer relationships with the Qadi would mitigate by the 1860s.

The records show that early in 1851, a man named Faku, also living on the station at Inanda, spoke to Lloyd Mesham, the newly appointed first Resident Magistrate of Inanda (see Map 1, page xvii) stating that he planned to marry Dalida.²⁵³ The Qadi elite, and Mahlukana in particular, were strongly against the intended marriage. One factor in this was that the contracting of Christian marriage between the two would mean no lobola cattle being paid to

from two of the oldest ikholwa families linked to the American Board. Both are referred to in various ways in different sources, as "Talitha", Dalita" and "Dalida". It is possible that one or both women were named with Dalida Dube in mind. It may also be that missionaries were popularising the use of this name, which comes from a biblical passage, Mark 5:41 in which Jesus says “Little girl arise” or “Talita kumi” to raise Jarius's daughter from death. Variants of the names “Dalida” “Talitha” “Talita” “Dalita” were popular in different racial groups in nineteenth-century South Africa and hundreds of women were apparently named “Talitha Kumi” or a variant, based on database searches of the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository. On the experiences of Dalita Isaac and Talitha Hawes and their dealings with the American Board, see Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 47–51.

²⁵⁰ See Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics*, 89.

²⁵¹ The new church comprised Dalida and Ukakonina (who on his baptism was renamed James Dube, but who also retained the name Ukakonina, at least in all his dealings with the Qadi); John Mavuma (a former warrior in Shaka’s army); Joel Hawes; Nancy Damon; Patayi (who was to be baptised as George Champion); Jonas Mfeka; and the missionaries Daniel and Lucy Lindley.

²⁵² Hughes is correct in stating that Dalida never actually did remarry. Hughes, “Doubly Elite”, 449.

²⁵³ Faku's request to marry Dalida was probably made earlier that year (1851), when Mesham and three other magistrates were first placed over Natal “locations”.

Mahlukana; thus he demanded that Dalida's own cattle be turned over to him, as a precondition for the marriage to go ahead.

Perhaps due to the explosiveness of a case in which the Qadi patriarchs felt their rights circumvented, and the prominence of those involved in the case, Theophilus Shepstone (then Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes, and not yet Secretary for Native Affairs) monitored the dispute via Mesham, sending him instructions on how to mediate between Dalida and Mahlukana.²⁵⁴ Shepstone wrote to Mesham on the 20th March 1851 with instructions (now lost) and Mesham replied that

I have the honour to receive yrs of the 20th inst. regarding the marriage of Talita the 'Inkosikazi' of the 'Amaqadi' tribe with Faku—and in reply beg to inform you that I have desired 'Mahlukana' together with 'Talita' to appear before me on Thursday next to make the necessary arrangements prior to the marriage, and doing which, your instructions shall be strictly observed.²⁵⁵

Dalida, Mesham and Mahlukana, on meeting, agreed that she would marry Faku, but on certain conditions subject to Shepstone's approval. Firstly, on her marriage, in lieu of lobola being paid, Dalida would give Mahlukana (the new patriarch of the Qadi royal family) all the cattle she held. Secondly, she would be the only one to bring up her children – they were “to remain unmolested with her” until they came of age; and neither Mahlukana “nor any person or persons” were to be expected to support the three children whilst they were minors. However, when her daughter by Dube (or daughters, if her third child was a girl) married, the *lobola* cattle paid by the suitor would be given to whomever was then the heir of the Dube family. Finally it was “distinctly understood that the Tribe shall have no claim to any child or children that may hereafter be borne by 'Talita' in Wedlock.”²⁵⁶ Thus Dalida was required to give up her hard-earned cattle and those bequeathed to Ukakonina (as well as her daughter's

254 I have not been able to find Shepstone's initial letter. Mesham described the negotiations in the SNA Minute Papers, providing insights into how chiefs and early colonial officials viewed the autonomy and rights of women and of juniors. Although Shepstone's initial instructions have been lost, they are partly reflected in Mesham's letters.

255 PAR, Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) 1/3/1, L. Mesham to T. Shepstone, 29 March 1851.

Drawing on Absolom Vilakazi's *Zulu Transformations: A study of the dynamics of social change*, (University of Natal Press, 1965), Heather Hughes says that Mqhawe “became chief sometime in the 1840s” and that soon after this happened “Madlukana and his followers moved into Nyuswa country in the Inanda location.” (Hughes, *Politics and society in Inanda*, 86). However, Mesham's 1851 letter refers to Mahlukana as *the* chief the Qadi in that year. It is also possible Mahlukana was ruling jointly with Mqhawe at this stage, that Mesham was confused about Mahlukana's role in 1851, or that Dalida was interacting only with the Nyuswa section of the Qadi under Mahlukana.

256 PAR SNA 1/3/1, L. Mesham to T. Shepstone, 3 April 1851.

future lobola). However, she could raise her children by Dube during their minority, and the Dube family would not be able to claim lobola or any other customary obligations, in relation to her children with Faku.

Yet, this arrangement was not ultimately palatable to Dalida and Ukakonina. Less than two weeks after the compromise had been struck, Mahlukana's messenger complained to Mesham that Dalida now refused to give up the cattle, and that Ukakonina had said the magistrate had identified them as rightfully his. Mesham wrote immediately to the Reverend Daniel Lindley, saying that because Dalida had not fulfilled her side of the bargain, Lindley was forbidden to conduct the wedding ceremony, though he had made it known publically on Sundays for the two weeks prior, that the marriage was to happen. Mesham's letter to Lindley read as follows:

A man named Faku residing I believe on your mission station applied to me some time ago for permission to marry 'Talita' formerly the 'Inkosikazi' of the Amaqadi tribe —This application I forwarded to the Diplomatic Agent, and received that Officer's reply thereto, together with certain instructions which I was desired to see carried out before the marriage occurs. I accordingly summoned Mahlukana (the chief who now represents the Amaqadi tribe) and Talita to appear before me to make the necessary arrangements according to my instructions – Certain conditions were drawn up and distinctly understood and agreed to by them both in my presence – One of the conditions agreed to was that Talita should deliver over the cattle to Mahlukana. This, Mahlukana has just sent over to inform me, she has refused to do, notwithstanding he has applied twice to her, as well as to her son 'Kakonina', the latter alleging that I had told him that the cattle belonged to him and not to Mahlukana. If Kakonina said this (and I have no reason to doubt Mahlukana's messenger), he gave utterance to a direct falsehood, for I distinctly told him that the cattle must be delivered to Mahlukana, that 'Talita' could not marry unless they were given up, and that he could not claim them now, he being an "Umfana". Having also been informed that the Banns of marriage [the public announcement of the impending marriage] between Faku and the said "Talita" have been already published by you two successive Sundays I have the honour to request that you will be pleased not to consummate the marriage between above named parties until you hear further from me on the subject.²⁵⁷

Thus Dalida (perhaps after discussing the compromise further with Ukakonina) chose to retain her property in cattle, which also constituted her son's inheritance – even though this meant it would be more difficult, or impossible, for her to marry Faku. Ukakonina had not yet come of age and would lose his inheritance unless his mother found a way to keep the herd. No final agreement, then, had been struck. The Qadi elite did not simply relinquish their claim

257 PAR SNA 1/3/1, L. Mesham to D. Lindley, 16 April 1851.

over Dalida's cattle, over her children, or over the cattle that would be received in lobola when her daughter or daughters married. This much is clear from this 1851 incident, and the evidence that the Dube family also tried to maintain a hold on Ukakonina's sister, Dalida's daughter (name unknown).

Ukakonina, baptised James Dube, was the father of the famous African nationalist politician and ANC founder John Langalibabele Dube. In 1891, John L. Dube, in describing his family's dramatic transition from royal homestead to mission station, stated that: "his [James/Ukakonina's] sister, by the customs of the country, belonged to his brother [Mahlukana], so he [James] gave up all he had to buy her so she would not have a heathen marriage. His chief aim was that she too might have a chance of becoming a Christian."²⁵⁸ This suggests that at some point, James did in fact give some or all of his inheritance to Mahlukana to close the matter and compensate him, so that James' sister would not be pressured into a customary marriage. However, the tensions created by Dalida's defection were still not dispelled. After James' death in 1877, Mqhawe – Dabeka's son and the chief of the Qadi after Mahlukana's regency – tried once more to gain compensation for the cattle Dalida had taken with her almost thirty years before.²⁵⁹

Dalida's decisions, then, resulted in decades of complex contestations. From the available evidence, she did not remarry. It is not clear precisely when she passed away; but she was still alive in 1884,²⁶⁰ and Hughes puts her date of death in the late 1890s.²⁶¹ The schism and

258 J. L. Dube, "A familiar talk upon my Native Land and things found there" (Rochester, NY 1891), 16. Dube's words thus reveal that in the context in which he gave this speech, he understood or chose to portray *ukulobola* as sale, rather than a socially integral means of cementing relationships and ensuring continued production and reproduction. As Thomas McClendon comments, by 1891 this understanding of *ukulobola* was not just a stereotype existing in the eyes of mission communities: in general, by this time, McClendon argues that gender roles had "hardened under the impact of migrant labor and bridewealth was inflated and took on connotations of purchase". (Thomas V. McClendon, "Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal," in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28:3 (1995), 527-561, 534); See John Lambert, "Undermining the Homestead Economy", *Southern African Historical Journal*, 23 (1990).

259 This decades-long dispute over the royal cattle and children culminated, however, in Mqhawe taking in James' children after his death, illustrating the complex relationship and persistent though shifting ties between the Qadi leadership and the Dubes of Inanda mission station – and agreeing not to accept lobola for them as they were Christians. Natal Native Commission (NNC), Evidence of Mqhawe kaDabuka, 229; Heather Hughes, "Doubly Elite", 454.

260 Dube, "A familiar talk" quotes an article by Rev. S.C. Pixley's in the *Missionary Herald* (undated), mentioning that Dalida Dube still lived on the station at Pixley's time of writing, and that Cetshwayo had just died: putting the year at about 1884.

261 Hughes, *First President*, 10–11. Joel Hawes and John Mavuma John Mavuma (who lived at Inanda) was the namesake of Mbalasi's grandson John Mavuma Nembula, who became the second black

possibilities created by her determined actions also profoundly shaped the fate of her descendants, and indeed that of the country; her mission-educated grandson John L. Dube played a fundamental role in the formation of the African National Congress.

When the shaky compromise was struck between Mahlukana and Dalida in 1851, ‘native law’ was nearly thirty years away from being codified. Disputes over cattle ownership and marriage in which Shepstone was involved were mediated according to his strategic concerns and understanding of custom, and his relationship with each chiefdom. In Dalida’s case, the early colonial administration supported Mahlukana’s claim to not only Dalida’s and James’ cattle but also to the lobola from her daughter’s future marriage. Shepstone was aware of the political sensitivity of Dalida's actions: she had already flouted patriarchal authority in 1849 and now again resisted Mahlukana in her planned marriage to Faku in 1851, and in so doing she had once again subverted a chief’s rights both *as* a chief and as the heir to the Dube homestead. This would seem to be another concrete demonstration of the argument made by Guy: that an "accommodation of patriarchs" – based not only on diplomatic expediency but also on shared views of male homestead heads’ rights – was fundamental to the working of Shepstone's administration.²⁶²

What is of significance too for this thesis with its aims of describing instances of elite women’s property ownership, their opportunities for political influence, and their choices in relation to their children and chiefdoms – is that Dalida both held the cattle that constituted her son’s inheritance, and accumulated further cattle at a time when many Qwabe women, including non-royal women, were also working to increase the numbers of cattle available to their sons and to homestead heads. Perhaps, like Dalida, these non-elite women could also hold these cattle themselves for a time. Dalida, however, was being pressured into an unwanted levirate marriage that in addition to being against her wishes, might well have meant Ukakonina losing several of the cattle intended as his inheritance. Conversion and a life on the mission station represented a clear, but dramatic, solution to both problems. Dalida removed herself and her children from the immediate world of the Qadi, causing enormous social fallout. She viewed

doctor in southern Africa. Information on the phenomenal life of John Mavuma, who fought in Shaka’s army and executed men on Dingane’s orders, before himself fleeing to Natal, can be found in Hughes, *First President*, 11. See also Healy and Jackson, “Practices of Naming and the Possibilities of Home.”

262 Jeff Guy, “An Accommodation of Patriarchs: Theophilus Shepstone and the system of Native Administration in Natal”, paper presented to the History and African Studies Seminar Series (University of Natal) 1997.

the cattle she held as hers to make decisions about, and her taking them to the mission station effectively removed them from the (to the Qadi elite) all-important cycle of expanding Qadi homesteads and prosperity. Mhlukana and the Qadi elite clearly did not recognise her claim to them.

Dalida's approach to her cattle ownership and to chiefly authority stood in stark contrast to the Qwabe women further south in Natal – who, like Dalida and Mbalasi, were living among the other surviving members of their royal house in the 1830s–1840s. The political support and the cattle of women in the Qwabe royal family were crucial prerequisites for a process that had begun by the early 1840s – the 'raising up', from its remnants, of the once-great Qwabe chiefdom. The next section of this chapter goes on to describe these events.

Heshepi kaPhakathwayo and the political roles of chiefly Qwabe women

In the late 1830s the Qwabe chief Khondlo was dead, and several of his sons – his heir Phakathwayo, Nomo, then Nqetho – had also been killed either through internal succession disputes or as a result of conflict with the Zulu kingdom. Many of their followers were living in Natal by this time, but Qwabe were spread from Pondoland in the south to Zululand in the north.²⁶³ There was not at this point a single, strong Qwabe royal house (of which Mbalasi's smaller Makhanya chieftaincy was a branch). The Qwabe chiefdom had, as Michael Mahoney notes, "an extremely close but also extremely antagonistic relationship with the Zulu, from its origin stories well into the nineteenth century."²⁶⁴ Indeed, this is highlighted by the legend of Nozinja recounted in Chapter One, and her two sons Zulu and Qwabe who became the progenitors of the two chiefdoms. On the eve of a colonial administration annexing Natal, the Qwabe chiefs had largely been decimated by the Zulu kingdom, and the remaining members of the Qwabe royal house (and its wealth) was dispersed.²⁶⁵

Phakathwayo had been the designated Qwabe heir. His only child still living, his daughter Heshepi, was still in Zululand in the late 1830s. So were her aunts; who were daughters of Kondhlo and sisters to Phakathwayo: among them, Ziyendani and Ziggqila.²⁶⁶ Given that her father's brothers were all dead, Heshepi – though a woman – was technically the only surviving heir to the main chiefly line.

²⁶³ Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, 108.

²⁶⁴ Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, 6.

²⁶⁵ Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, p. 6.

²⁶⁶ PAR, SNA 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozzi, 20 February 1893, 122-123.

The first step towards re-establishing the Qwabe royal house in Natal, as Jeff Guy has vividly described, once Qwabe authority in Zululand had been broken up, was taken by an induna named Nkonyiapi, who by the early 1840s had established a new homestead, situated at Amanzimtoti.²⁶⁷ He named it after Phakathwayo's old homestead in Zululand: eMthandeni. With the help of several other Qwabe *izinduna* living nearby, he managed to bring Heshepi and her surviving aunts to Natal from Zululand, with the aim of reconstituting the royal house. In addition, the widows held cattle that would be crucial for re-establishing the Qwabe. It was then discovered that Musi, a son of Gondolozzi, had emerged from hiding and was also still alive in Zululand. In the events that followed, according to Fokazi kaGondolozzi (another Qwabe prince), Heshepi played an important authoritative role in installing Musi as chief, but because she was a woman was not considered a contender to take up the chiefship herself.

The detailed archival evidence of the 1893 succession dispute over the Qwabe chiefship, including transcribed oral testimony from members of the Qwabe chiefly elite, gives us something of a sense of Qwabe chiefly women's roles in political leadership, and in production and reproduction in colonial Natal. As Fokazi stated in 1893:

Heshepi asked the men to go to Zululand to bring in Musi because she was a woman and could not succeed [to the Qwabe throne] and Musi was the one to succeed in that case. Several of the headmen of the Amaqwabe tribe had already settled down round the Emthandeni kraal [in addition to] Nkonyiaphi. ...Musi [was fetched and] returned with these four men from Zululand²⁶⁸—he was then only a boy. When Musi came to the Emthandeni Heshepi said, pointing to Musi, "*He is my own self and he is the one to stand in my place as the heir of Pakatwayo*". The men to whom this was said expressed their satisfaction and consent.²⁶⁹ (added emphasis)

According to this account, then, Heshepi not only arranged for Musi to be brought to Natal, but then publically *designated* him as the next chief, the proxy for herself and her deceased father Phakathwayo. This was apparently witnessed and agreed to by a group of influential men. Even if Fokazi's account was somewhat embellished (fifty years after the events it described) it indicates that, at the very least, Heshepi due to her royalty and direct descent

²⁶⁷ See *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 37–41; Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 25–27.

²⁶⁸ In Fokazi's account, contradicted by others, these men were Gamfe, Nkonyiapi, Tshika, Mdhladhhlana.

²⁶⁹ PAR, SNA, 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozzi, 20 February 1893, 121-122.

from Phakatwayo, played a leadership role of some sort and was viewed as having provided an important seal of legitimacy to Musi's rule.²⁷⁰

Mahoney notes that the Qwabe case has parallels with several other chiefdoms that reconstituted themselves in 1840s Natal: it was one of at least three instances in which a minor from the chiefly family was selected as the new chief after the deaths of "all possible adult successors."²⁷¹ Musi's minority, then, is also important in the above event. As established in the Introduction and Chapter One, prominent chiefly women could on rare occasions become regents in southern Africa, specifically in the absence of an adult male heir, and also had influencing roles to play in succession. In the Qwabe case, however, a female chief was ideologically unacceptable and would have meant the material process of raising the kingdom up again through expansion of the royal homestead, was not possible.²⁷² Seemingly, Heshepi both publically voiced this and played a role in installing Musi, a very young man, as the new chief.

Fokazi's account after describing Heshepi's role in Musi's accession, went on to state that:

Musi brought no property with him at all, there were some cattle in the Emthandeni kraal received for three of Kondhlo's daughters and these became his property – this was the first property he came into possessing. Heshepi married when Musi was there and Musi received the cattle. Musi on his arrival at once took his position as chief of those men of the tribe who were about the Amanzimtoti.²⁷³

Musi, then, arrived in Natal as a young man without an inheritance (again as Guy has described in *The Maphumulo Uprising* and *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*). His first cattle, which enabled him to give lobola when marrying his first four wives, were provided by the surviving Qwabe elite. These were cattle symbolically associated with his aunts, the Qwabe princesses including Ziyandani and Zigqila – cattle that had first arrived in the Qwabe chiefly homestead, north of the Tugela, when these women had married and their suitors had given these lobola cattle to Kondhlo. These cattle, with the surviving members of the Qwabe royal family, had been transported south by the 1840s; and were then placed in the kraal of the 'new' eMthandeni for Musi. As the new patriarch of the chiefly family and of the Qwabe more

²⁷⁰ As noted in Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*

²⁷¹ Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, 108.

²⁷² For an explanation of the essential productive and reproductive process through which homesteads and chiefdoms were generally reestablished in Natal, see Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprisings*, 35–36.

²⁷³ PAR, SNA 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozzi, 20 February 1893, 121–122.

broadly, it was to Musi that Heshepi's suitor gave the lobola cattle when she later married (when is not clear), and in addition his people provided cattle in tribute.

This process of installing Musi as Phakatwayo's symbolic heir even though he was not in fact his direct heir – and thus resuscitating an “extinct” chiefly line which remained of huge symbolic importance to the Qwabe – was called *ukwusa*. This required not only recognition of Musi as chief, but the provision of cattle as above to ensure that he had the resources of a chief in this new setting in Natal; the means in cattle to expand his own royal homestead by marrying, enhance its power and prestige, have daughters whose marriages would bring further cattle to the royal homestead, and sons who could be heirs. As Guy describes this, the process of expansion of Musi's homestead was rapid and dramatic and saw the Qwabe chiefdom regaining its wealth in Natal.²⁷⁴

It would seem that at least temporarily, widowed Qwabe princesses in the direct patrilineal line had the right to hold cattle – as Guy notes, the 1893 evidence shows that they were able to own these cattle “in the name of” their brothers and father. After the death of their husbands and fathers, these women had seemingly each taken the cattle that had originally been their own lobola cattle, and gave them up again when they were required for Musi's kraal. The above evidence shows that the support of royal women, including Heshepi and Kondhlo's daughters, and the cattle linked to them were important in providing this material basis for Musi's power. However, what is not clear from the sources is what exact roles these women and male *izinduna* played in arranging for these cattle to be given to Musi's new kraal; and the evidence raises questions around *how* Kondhlo's daughter's “held” these cattle; the nature of this ownership, and how it was understood by the Qwabe and by these elite women.²⁷⁵

The active political roles played by women in the heated Qwabe succession disputes that took place at multiple points in the nineteenth century are hinted at in the testimonies given in

²⁷⁴ See Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*, 37–41; and Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 25–27. In addition Theophilus Shepstone recognised Musi as the rightful chief when the Qwabe brought him to Shepstone in about 1846. Guy points out that in Shepstone's view this established a “crucial precedent”; that, his hereditary claims aside, Musi was chief through recognition by the colonial state. Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 26. Mahoney goes on to expand on the complex evolution of this relation between customary hereditary rights, and recognition by colonial authorities, across nineteenth century Qwabe succession disputes.

²⁷⁵ For discussion of the different ways in which people managed to smuggle their cattle south from Zululand into Natal, see Atkins, *The Moon is Dead!*, 28. This gestures to the scope for additional research into these royal Qwabe women, and the members and supporters of the royal family who travelled south with them.

1892. This warrants further investigation. Musi's evidence in the 1893 succession dispute indicates that, among other gestures undermining his father's authority, Meseni at one stage went to live with another chief for a short period, taking his mother and sisters with him, and there formed a separate homestead – possibly around 1869. Further, he “acquired and used the cattle from his sister's lobola”²⁷⁶ Thus the dispute over which of Musi's wives was the senior wife and mother of the heir, and Meseni's political ambitions, resulted in a schism: Masimai, and those of Meseni's sisters who viewed her as the rightful senior wife, also viewed Meseni as the rightful heir to the chiefship. Due to Masimai's political support and that of his sisters, Meseni was able to accumulate his own cattle, circumventing his father's patriarchal right to receive these lobola cattle.²⁷⁷

This event was a source of indignation and distress for Musi, indicated Musi's diminishing control as homestead head and chief, and arguably – and of particular note for the arguments put forward in this thesis – indicated his wife Masimai's bid for greater influence for her son and for herself as much as of Meseni's own ambitions. This coheres with a broader southern African pattern explored in Chapter One, in which some women of status could wield considerable influence in determining chiefly succession. This, then, is another instantiation of this pattern; as indicated in Chapter One, strategic alliances of mothers and their sons and “commoners that coalesced around them” were highly important not only in the precolonial context, but also in colonial Natal.²⁷⁸ Yet a number of questions are of course not addressed in the testimonies of these prominent men, and also due to no women having been questioned by the SNA's office in 1892. These questions, for instance, revolve around whether or not these women in his family went along with Meseni primarily at his behest; their own role in directing this split; Masimai's influence, and even the degree to which his sisters had decision-making power in this, or were coerced by Masimai or Meseni, or both. Thus as with the other events highlighted above, the 1892 records concerning Meseni's defection from Musi's authority point to a significant role in these disputes for royal women, but veil the exact nature of these roles.

²⁷⁶ PAR. SNA, 1/1/277, Musi kaGondolozu, 114.

²⁷⁷ Meseni does not note this evidence but highlights other ways in which Meseni usurped his father's chiefly role in 1869, by collecting taxes and men to labour on government works. See Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, 108.

²⁷⁸ Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*, 36.

Another significant point is that the respective male supporters of Meseni and his rivals used arguments about the specific cattle obtained from women in the direct Qwabe patrilineal line (including Ziyandani, Zigqila, and Heshepi) as ideological leverage in their succession dispute. To provide a brief summary of complex evidence: these cattle were seen as highly important – as carrying or representing the symbolic power of the Qwabe royal line.²⁷⁹ They had been received as lobola when Zigqila and Ziyendani, Khondlo’s daughters, married; they were placed in Khondlo’s kraal, and then on his death passed to his son and direct heir Phakathwayo. Even after these Qwabe princesses offered up these same cattle to Musi’s new kraal in Natal, these cattle were said to be "of Phakathwayo's estate".²⁸⁰ The same applied to the cattle Meseni received on Heshepi’s marriage – because she was Phakathwayo’s daughter, they too were said to be "of Phakathwayo's estate".

Some *izinduna* argued in 1893 that these particular symbolically important cattle had then been given as lobola when Musi married Masimai, Meseni’s mother. This, they argued, conferred true royalty upon Meseni as her eldest son. Because his mother’s lobola came directly from Phakathwayo’s own estate, they argued, Meseni had been “born for Phakathwayo” – he was not really Musi’s son but was Phakathwayo's true heir and had more claim to the chiefship than his father – Meseni, then, was the true realisation of the process of *ukwusa*.²⁸¹ These *izinduna* contrasted him with his father, Musi, who had been, they claimed, nothing but a proxy, a functional necessity or stepping stone in the symbolic revival of this chiefly line, a "bull" simply meant to "raise up" sons *for* Phakathwayo.²⁸²

This is relevant to a focus on Qwabe gender relations because it helps to demonstrate the tie between women in the chiefly family, and the ideological power of the Qwabe chiefs. Royal

²⁷⁹ In addition to evidence from the 1893 Qwabe succession dispute, see Webb and Wright, ed., *James Stuart Archive*, Volume 1, Evidence of Dinya, 115.

²⁸⁰ PAR, SNA 1/1/277, Fokazi kaGodolozzi, 20 February 1893, 126-127

²⁸¹ For example see in particular PAR, SNA 1/1/277, Paqa, 20 February 1893, 141. Paqa who also supported Meseni, argued that the cattle Musi had paid for Masimai were the same cattle previously held by the Qwabe princess Zigqila and before that held in Phakathwayo’s kraal. These, he said, had come to the family when Zigqila had married, (which she had then presumably taken back after her father’s death). Again, it was argued that this conferred the status of senior wife upon Masimai and the legitimate chiefship upon Meseni as her eldest child. The order of those in line for the chiefship was determined by whose mother had been designated ‘chief wife’ by Musi. Like other leaders before him, to prevent one heir rapidly usurping his position, Musi over time may have given shifting indications of who he considered his chief wife. This is suggested by the hot contestation of those giving oral testimony in 1893. In addition, see Webb and Wright, ed., *James Stuart Archive*, Volume 1, Evidence of Dinya, 115 regarding the Cele; if a particular wife’s lobola was paid using “tribal cattle”, this was seen as a symbolic gesture among other gestures, that identified her as the inkosikazi or senior wife – whose son would be the rightful heir.

²⁸² Mahoney also notes this: Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, 108.

women, the cattle their marriages brought to the chief, and this process of exchange itself, were symbolic of rightful chiefly power. Thus Meseni's supporters were able to argue that cattle that had entered the royal kraal in the first instance through the marriages of Qwabe princesses in the direct patrilineal line, and had then been given as lobola when Musi married Masimai, conferred this symbolic importance upon her and her son. The symbolic importance of cattle associated with elite Qwabe women is interesting given Trevor Cope's assertion in 1968 that women of the Zulu chiefly family by patrilineal descent had particular, exceptional power and influence; and Jennifer Weir's argument that in the case of the Zulu kingdom, the king made ritual efforts to "appropriate" women's symbolic power.²⁸³ These arguments, perhaps, point to a dynamic that relates also to the Qwabe case.

Based on all of the above, in the absence of more detailed evidence, and depending on one's theoretical position, the Qwabe royal women may be viewed in two ways: as important individuals in the polity, and power brokers; or, alternatively, as complying with processes and outcomes planned and controlled by prominent men in which women's symbolic importance became a form of currency in the struggle for male power. It is argued here that their roles could have been a combination of both. Royal women could be made by men to take positions and actions in political processes; but legitimating and supporting, in ideological and material ways, a particular male leader (including one's own son) could further a royal woman's own level of influence as well as her polity's collective interest. In addition, the evidence that Heshepi arranged Musi's travel to Natal and designated him heir suggests that in some cases particular women's symbolic importance and influence within the Qwabe was openly and publically recognised. However, the evidence of the 1893 dispute contains only men's testimony – another limitation upon our ability to fully understand the Qwabe *ukunisa* and women's role in it, in detail.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown just how profoundly divergent the experiences, choices and material and ideological contexts of Mbalasi Makhanya, Dalida Dube, and the Qwabe princesses were in the 1840s. At the same time, this discussion has found important factors in common between them. These cases are illuminating in terms of chiefly women's opportunities to own cattle in early colonial Natal. Mbalasi, a junior wife who had become one of many widows in a comparatively small chiefdom, did not own any cattle. However Dalida, one of only three

²⁸³ See Cope, *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems*, 19; Weir, "I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule," 3.

wives of a dead Qadi chief who had headed a much larger polity, held three cattle as her son's inheritance from his father, and accumulated five more through growing her own crops and bartering. Heshepi's widowed aunts, in the direct patrilineal line as daughters of a great Qwabe chief, following the deaths of their male kin and the crushing of their powerful chiefdom and its royal homestead and kraal, temporarily reclaimed "in the name of" their fathers and brothers, the lobola cattle that their husbands had once transferred to their fathers. As Chapter One established, some women did own cattle in the precolonial and early colonial era. This chapter then has aimed to highlight evocative instances of this in colonial Natal, and points to the possibility that deaths of male royals in conflict in Zululand might have increased instances of widows owning cattle previously held by their fathers or husbands.

These accounts have also explored what royal women chose to *do* with the cattle they held. In the Makhanya, Qadi and Qwabe cases described above, cattle were in short supply in 1830s–1840s Natal even for chiefly families, despite being hugely materially and socially important. The three accounts demonstrate that widowed royal women (depending on the specific demands of their chiefdoms and their own circumstances) made very different kinds of efforts to secure inheritances in cattle for their sons (or in the Qwabe case, for Musi the young male heir to the Qwabe chiefship). At the same time, these efforts were tied to these women's views on what would be in their own best interests. Mbalasi seemingly sent her son to a mission station as a boy due perhaps partly to the missionary's promise of one head of cattle when he came of age, and soon moved to the mission station herself for reasons that are now somewhat unclear. Dalida Dube, apparently in large part because she wished to flee a levirate marriage and keep all of the cattle that were her property and which she intended for her son's inheritance, also moved to an American Congregationalist mission station, thus keeping these cattle away from the heir of the Qadi family. In direct contrast, the Qwabe princesses in the 1840s transferred to Musi the cattle they held and which had once been the property of the old Qwabe homestead, as he was the new heir to this homestead in its "resuscitated" form in Natal.

Thus, there were limits to these chiefly women's "ownership" of cattle at this time in Natal. The Qadi response to Dalida's action, establishing a tension that erupted repeatedly over the course of three decades, demonstrated that her right to the cattle, and her autonomy as a chiefly widow, had clear limitations from the perspective of the Qadi elite (and in particular from the perspective of the Qadi heir Mahlukana who would otherwise have received these cattle). Similarly the Qwabe widows, whether they were asked to or did so voluntarily, gave up

the cattle they held into Musi's new homestead. For the above royal women to own cattle was socially acceptable, but seemingly this was also understood by at least some in their polities to be temporary. The claims of men, and of chiefs, to these cattle were asserted in order to grow their own homesteads. Dalida repudiated this male claim, while the Qwabe princesses seemingly embraced it as a path to Qwabe resurrection. As with the legend of Nozinja described in Chapter One, a customary space existed for prominent women to own cattle; but this sat in complex tension with men's needs to expand their own homesteads. Such women's exceptional accumulation of cattle could be short-lived. This complex, precolonial, customary space for certain women's cattle ownership was severely undermined by the 1878 and more so the 1891 "Natal Code of Native Law" which entrenched a much more inflexibly patriarchal set of rules in which women, as perpetual minors, could not autonomously own cattle.

This chapter, then, has aimed to provide complex portraits attesting to the precolonial and early colonial rights of women described by Cetshwayo kaMpande in 1883 and Mangosothu Gatsha Buthelezi in 1961²⁸⁴ – rights which, even if they were in some instances already "exceptional", were constrained and in many cases obliterated by the imposition of the codified customary law in a process that still remains to be further detailed and understood.

With particular reference to the Qwabe chiefdom but with relevance for the Makhanya and Qadi cases too, this chapter has pointed to evidentiary gaps that conceal women's own roles in influencing political processes. Just as fragmentary evidence on Dalida and Mbalasi's persecution within their own polities gestures towards but does not address the role of other royal women as well as men in their supposed persecution, so the 1893 evidence on the Qwabe succession dispute, lacking any testimonies from women, gestures towards but cannot elucidate women's exact roles and agency in either the process of *ukwusa* from the 1840s, or the subsequent succession battle between Musi and his son Meseni. It has been argued here that, despite evidentiary gaps, one may identify from the available evidence a broad lens to frame the Qwabe case; women in this particular royal family could be powerful advocates and motivators driving succession struggles (particularly relevant to mothers of claimants to chiefly power), as well as being married off strategically to bring cattle to these claimants. They could in the early 1840s hold cattle themselves but could not keep them from the chief. They could

²⁸⁴ See Chapter One of this thesis. Evidence of Cetshwayo, 1883 Commission, ii, 527; Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation*, 169.

crucially legitimate chiefly power and in this way stood to gain much themselves, but clearly could not become chiefs.

While this chapter has mostly discussed actions taken by widowed women in chiefly families with a particular focus upon the 1840s–1850s, the following chapter draws upon a more detailed archival record to examine the life of Vundlazi MaSenca, queen of the *Izinkumbi* up until the early 1880s. It follows the available evidence of Vundlazi’s many confrontations and compromises with a colonial state and her negotiation of her role as chief and later as an ‘influential mother’ ruling together with her son. In addition, the chapter considers some of her female relatives’ experiences, and a group of women who led “petty” chiefdoms in and south of Natal. The aim is to show key linkages and differences between their experiences, and provide an initial outline to guide future research into women’s rare opportunities to directly wield chiefly power during the forty years following the onset of colonial rule. The chapter raises questions around the trajectory of female chiefship under colonial rule, considers the deep contradictions that seemingly characterised official colonial attitudes and actions towards women chiefs, and highlights the contradictory application of racialised legal frameworks to women leaders within the *Izinkumbi* polity in particular.

CHAPTER THREE

Women as Chiefs in Colonial Natal:

Vundlazi MaSenca and traces of her contemporaries, 1838–1890

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, female chiefship was more socially acceptable (and therefore a more frequent phenomenon) in some southern African societies than in others. This chapter presents further evidence of the previously unresearched area of women's political leadership in and near immediately precolonial and colonial Natal, addressing the circumstances under which certain women could become chiefs, and how female chiefship was impacted within the colonial context. In particular, it does so by exploring the life of the most prominent female chief to rule in Natal in the nineteenth century: Vundlazi, who was 'Queen of the Umtwalume' from 1838 and stepped down as chief before 1880, yet remained politically influential up until her death in approximately 1890. It builds also on previous scholarship that has only cursorily addressed the matter of female chiefship in colonial Natal, demonstrating that there were several women chiefs other than Vundlazi in and south of Natal; although the durations of their reigns are not clear, they were all chiefs at some point between 1840 and 1860. In addition, at least one woman (Maria Ogle) became chief of the Izinkumbi very briefly, *after* Vundlazi had abdicated via a colonial appointment.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, and via the discussion on Vundlazi and the Izinkumbi, the chapter moves to consider how prominent women within the Izinkumbi were unevenly treated by a colonial administration: which protected the inheritance rights of a woman identified as falling under European law (Maria Ogle, ironically also a female chief), whilst denying the inheritance rights of a Fynn descendant, Nomanga/Eliza Clothier, considered to fall under customary law.

Vundlazi MaSenca was likely in her twenties or early thirties when she became the authority figure presiding over not only an extended family, but also over the groups who had come to them looking for protection. She was one of three wives of Francis, known as Frank, Fynn – who along with his better-known brother Henry Francis Fynn was among the earliest British traders to settle in Natal from the mid 1820s onward. Like several other white traders, the

²⁸⁵ This study therefore is able to provide key information on an under-researched topic. The most detailed exploration of this topic prior to this study has been Michael Mahoney's, who states that "The Hlongwa chief Mhlazi [Vundlazi, who ruled the Izinkumbi paramountcy that included Amahlongwa people] was the only woman to serve as chief after the European conquest, and the phenomenon of female chiefship in Natal died with her. Nevertheless, though there were two other female chiefs in the immediate pre-conquest era in Natal, female chiefship was rare even then." Michael R. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: the Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa*, (Duke University Press, 2012), 55–6.

Fynns became chiefs of a polity comprising their families with the African women they married, and political adherents who joined them. In the case of the Fynns, their polity gained the name Izinkumbi; which according to the Reverend Francis Owen meant ‘locusts’, and according to A.T. Bryant meant ‘wanderers’.²⁸⁶ Vundlazi herself may have come to join the Izinkumbi in the first instance either as one of the nine women who were reputedly ‘given’ to Henry Fynn by Shaka (which is the most common explanation for her arrival); or in the course of escaping from a forced marriage – which may be the more reliable version, given that it comes from the recorded oral evidence of Duka Fynn, Henry Francis Fynn’s son who knew Vundlazi personally and who provided one of the most accurate contemporary sources on the Izinkumbi’s history.²⁸⁷

According to Duka’s version of events, Vundlazi was the daughter of a Zulu named Senca Mzela and her full name was Vundlazi MaSenca. In this account, she had refused the marriage proposal of one Msekelo Mqadi, perhaps in the late 1820s, and ultimately had to leave Zululand to escape him. However he and his men pursued her and she claimed the protection of Henry Fynn who was hunting hippopotami at the Umgeni River, with some of his men. In a battle between the two parties, Fynn succeeded in driving off Msekelo and his followers. Vundlazi then joined the Izinkumbi.

The question of how she came to live with the Fynns aside, it is certain that she was a wife of Frank Fynn – also known by his isiZulu name Phobana – by June of 1831.²⁸⁸ There is a recurring misconception in Natal historiography that Vundlazi was the wife of Henry Francis Fynn. While she may have had a relationship with Henry Fynn immediately after she joined

²⁸⁶ Alfred T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), 561; Sir George E. Cory (ed.), *The diary of Rev. Francis Owen, MA, missionary with Dingaan in 1837–38* (Cape Town: van Riebeeck Society, 1926), Diary entry 11 March 1838.

²⁸⁷ See Duka Fynn’s oral evidence collected in KC, Extract from the Fynn Papers no. 10, Letter from C.H. Karlson to Killie Campbell, 13 August 1952; Spencer, *British Settlers*, 238; Shirron Bramdeow, “Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community in Natal, 1824–1988,” (MA diss., University of Natal, 1988), 100. The Nsimbini were Henry Francis Fynn’s family and immediate adherents, and resided in sections at Port Shepstone and Harding (in Alfred County, called No Man’s Land before its annexation to Natal in 1866), and Pondoland. Chiefs over different sections of the Nsimbini included Henry’s sons Duka and James. The Izinkumbi comprised Frank Fynn’s family and adherents, and lived both in Lower Umkomanzi Division (which was renamed Alexandra County in 1866) and south of the Umzimkhulu River, with a number of different homesteads inside and outside of Natal. Vundlazi during her rule presided over the section in Alexandra County, which seems to have been viewed as the seat of the ‘main’ or paramount Izinkumbi chiefship; and her sons Charlie and Tom Fynn led two sections of the Izinkumbi south of the Umzimkhulu River.

²⁸⁸ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 222. Spencer cites Duka Fynn’s oral evidence in KC, Extract from the Fynn Papers no. 10, Letter from C.H. Karlson to Killie Campbell, 13 August 1952; and C.H. Karlson, “Southern Africa 100 years ago,” *Southern Review* 1, nos. 6–7 (1952), indicating that Vundlazi had been ‘allotted’ to Frank by June 1831. Spencer, *British Settlers*, 222.

the Izinkumbi, the oral testimony of her contemporaries transcribed and preserved in the SNA records amply show that Vundlazi was known as Frank Fynn's wife. There are no contemporary sources that say in detail how she looked, and there are differing accounts of Vundlazi's origins. A.T. Bryant indicated she came from the Zelemu people; while oral evidence from members of the Fynn family in the 1950s described her as having been captured by the Zulu near Delagoa Bay, and having light skin and some Arab or European ancestry.²⁸⁹ As a figure who steered a family and a chiefdom for decades, even several generations later, Vundlazi remains very important to some Fynn descendants who recall growing up hearing about her, and she is known today as 'MaVundlazi.' Morris Fynn, who lives in Umbumbulu south of Durban today and is descended from the Fynn chiefs, views her as a champion who assiduously protected the interests of the Izinkumbi.²⁹⁰

This chapter considers her words as preserved in the archival sources: they illustrate exactly how complex it was to perform this role. It argues that, while Vundlazi's political authority was initially predicated on her status as a widow of an Africanised white homestead head, she earned and retained for some considerable time political legitimacy at the helm of a royal homestead and was able to mediate between the interests of the Izinkumbi and an expanding colonial state. She can be viewed as having been an 'autonomous queen' (albeit a queen who on many an occasion had to both appease and resist the government), and as eventually becoming, in her old age, an 'influential queen mother' – the two 'most obvious' roles in which women have wielded political power in Africa.²⁹¹

Vundlazi's reign, and the years after her chiefship in which she continued to exercise political influence, can provide insights into the relation between family formation, indigenous politics and colonial authority in the region. Ultimately, the early colonial period, and Vundlazi's reign, are contrasted with the significant experiences of two other women in the Izinkumbi in the 1880s. This first shows how the colonial government appointed in 1882 a second woman chief to lead the Izinkumbi, namely Maria Fynn (nee Ogle) who was the widow of George Fynn (Vundlazi's successor) suggesting that in promoting her short reign the Resident Magistrate's actions articulated, albeit in an artificial manner, with a much older pattern of widows' succession to chiefship in the region. At the same time Nomanga — or Eliza Clothier, by which name she was also known — the eldest child of Henry Francis Fynn, was dispossessed

²⁸⁹ Bryant, *Olden Times*, 373; Spencer cites KC, Extract from the Fynn Papers no. 10, Letter from C.H. Karlson to Killie Campbell, 13 August 1952.

²⁹⁰ Eva Jackson and Troy Meyers, Interview with Chief Morris Fynn, Umbumbulu, August 2010.

²⁹¹ See Introduction.

by 1887 of land she might have inherited. After the annexation of the land she was born on, colonial officials allocated small plots to her male relations yet because she was a woman considered to be ‘under native law’, she was not given her own plot.

Together with the other members of Frank’s and Henry Fynn’s families, Vundlazi left Natal in 1831 to avoid Shaka’s successor Dingane who greatly distrusted the white traders to whom his brother had extended patronage, and who sent an *impi* to attack them at the Mbilanhlola River on their way south, possibly killing one of Vundlazi’s two co-wives. While the other Fynns returned to Natal, Frank Fynn and his family may have spent about six years in Pondoland, returning to Natal by 1837. (This was typical of their itinerant life, with several homesteads or *imiz*i over time: including one in Pondoland south and outside of the Natal colony, one at the Umzimkhulu, one at the Umzinto River, and Vundlazi’s chiefly homestead on the south side of the Umfazazane River).²⁹²

Henry Francis Fynn, however, never went back to live in Natal. By 1836, he was serving as the British government’s diplomatic agent to Chief Faku of the Amampondo – and in 1837 he married a woman named Ann Brown, formerly a resident of Grahamstown, having left his African wives and children who were still living in and south of Natal. Following Ann’s death soon after they were married, Henry Fynn remarried Christina Brown, who was unrelated to Ann. Their son Henry Francis was born in 1846.²⁹³ In what follows, I touch on the complex politics of the Izinkumbi’s relationship with Henry Fynn and his white settler wife and child after he returned with them to Natal in the 1850s. As the new Resident Magistrate who had official authority over Vundlazi’s chiefly territory, he also worked in the vicinity of his own family members whom he had left in 1834. Settler attitudes towards Fynn’s former polygynous life, and the racialised and gendered politics that his notoriety surfaced in settler society, are examined in detail by Julie Pridmore, Shirron Bramdeow, and Norman Etherington and Jennifer Weir, but cannot be discussed in detail in this thesis.²⁹⁴

²⁹² See Spencer, *British Settlers*, 224.

²⁹³ See Julie Pridmore, “Henry Francis Fynn: an assessment of his career and an analysis of the written and visual portrayals of his role in the history of the Natal region,” (Ph.D diss., University of Natal, 1996), 53.

²⁹⁴ Pridmore, “Henry Francis Fynn”; and Bramdeow, “Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community.” Jennifer Weir and Norman Etherington vividly discuss the possible personal intrigues in 1836 of Henry Fynn and the young Theophilus Shepstone on the basis of a letter exchanged between them; and consider how respectability-obsessed white settler society, within which the two men moved, viewed Henry Fynn. Jennifer Weir and Norman Etherington, “Shepstone in Love: The Other Victorian in an African Colonial Administrator,” in *Orb and Sceptre: Studies on British Imperialism and its Legacies, in Honour of Norman Etherington*, ed. Peter Limb (Monash University Press, 2008), Chapter 2.

In March 1838, an army made up of contingents led by the white traders Frank Fynn, John Cane and Henry Ogle took advantage of the conflict between the Zulu and the Voortrekkers and marched north to raid Zulu homesteads, capturing women, children and cattle; followed by a second raid in April without Frank Fynn's Izinkumbi.²⁹⁵ Anticipating a Zulu reprisal, the Fynn family and their followers moved back again to the southern side of the Umzimkhulu River and re-established their chiefly homestead. The herds claimed by Frank's party in the first raid were also taken south of the Umzimkhulu. His family, by the time of this second move south, was made up of Vundlazi, another wife who may have been named Mutubazi, and their six or seven children. These were: Vundlazi's eldest son, Charles (born in about 1831); her sons Thomas Henry (Tom) and Robert Matthew Fynn (who were born in 1833 and 1834 respectively); and her youngest son, who was given the Zulu name of Frank Fynn's old friend and a fellow trader in Natal, D. C. Toohey: 'Singcungu'.²⁹⁶ The children of Frank's other two wives were also with them: George (who would eventually succeed Vundlazi as chief by 1880); Dingiswayo; and possibly also the child of Frank's third wife, who had died in the early 1830s.²⁹⁷

Immediately after the family had migrated south, before end of 1838, Frank Fynn died suddenly. Captain Robert Garden, a traveller and sometime artist who moved about Natal in the 1850s with the help of Henry Fynn, related in his diary a rumour that Frank had been killed by one of his wives administering poison via his snuff, because she was jealous of his attachment to another wife, who was her sister. Garden did not give any more information about the supposed murder and this is the only reference made to it, or to the possibility that Vundlazi's co-wife was her sister.²⁹⁸ Garden did also note in 1851, although without giving her name, that a half-sister of Vundlazi's was living near her homestead.²⁹⁹

The question of exactly how Vundlazi's succession took place, and the dynamics and events of this transfer of power, are important for understanding the degree of support for and acceptance of women's political leadership in the colonial context – especially given the

²⁹⁵ The Izinkumbi contingent under Frank Fynn was described in the Rev. Francis Owen's diary as ". . . a large troop of native warriors headed by a white man, some with guns, others with spears. The word "Izinkumbi", locusts, was marked on the flag, as they moved forward, they sang a war song" Sir George E. Cory, ed., *The Diary of Rev. Francis Owen, MA, Missionary with Dingaan in 1837–38* (Cape Town, van Riebeeck society, 1926), diary entry 11 March 1838.

²⁹⁶ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 225.

²⁹⁷ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 221–22.

²⁹⁸ Killie Campbell Collections (KC), *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, diary entry 28 June 1851. Garden's two main informants, either one of whom could have told him this story, were D.C. Toohey, and Henry Francis Fynn.

²⁹⁹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, diary entry 30 June 1851.

complex relationship that the Izinkumbi had with colonial power by virtue of the chiefdom's origins. There are a series of questions raised by the increasing store of information on women leaders in precolonial and colonial southeast Africa. This includes the question of whether or not Vundlazi, like Mnkabayi of the Zulu, or the *majumabali* of present-day Lesotho, became a 'man in social terms', even claiming male epithets; or, like the many royal women Jennifer Weir discusses, performed a 'symbolic celibacy' (which included remaining unmarried, though some women still took lovers and kept their authority) thus avoiding being considered subject to any man.³⁰⁰ This chapter addresses some of these questions for Vundlazi, though there is as yet only scant evidence with which to ascertain these facts.

From Wife to Widow, From Homestead Head to Chief

At the time of his death, Frank Fynn owed money to various debtors, including the white traders he knew, at least one of whom wanted to recoup the debt by claiming his cattle. The future of the chiefship – and its wealth – was therefore hanging in the balance. Theophilus Shepstone's diary entry of 19 December 1838, cited by Shelagh Spencer, mentions Shepstone's attempt to mediate between Frank's old friend, Toohey, and Henry Ogle, in their argument about how Frank's estate should be administered. Toohey was apparently arguing against Frank's property being seized. Robert Garden (likely reflecting Toohey's version of these events) wrote that:

. . . when Poban [Phobana, Frank Fynn] died Ogle and others tried to get all his cattle into their hands, but this was prevented by Toohey, who being a heavy creditor of Poban desired Uvunthlazi to keep all the cattle for the children and not to give up any and should they be demanded to say that they belonged to Mr. Toohey, who held a first mortgage upon the property. Mr Toohey himself purchased up all the debts against the [day] in order to insure some property to the children.³⁰¹

It would appear that Vundlazi was viewed by Toohey as being the appropriate guardian of the children and of their inheritance, which included hundreds of cattle that were probably at that point being kept south of the Umzimkhulu River (including the 450 cattle that Frank had taken in the raid on the Zulu).³⁰² This was also a moment of vulnerability for the Fynn family and for the Fynn chiefship because the two possible male heirs were too young to rule: Frank and Vundlazi's eldest son Charles was only six. Though the relationship between Frank Fynn's Izinkumbi and the Nsimbini (the group comprised of Henry Fynn's family and former adherents, who lived in different sections south of the Umzimkulu River) bears investigation

³⁰⁰ See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of Weir's argument.

³⁰¹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol II, List of 'Early Natal Settlers 1823', undated entry.

³⁰² KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. II.

in the future, it seems from the subsequent history of succession in the Izinkumbi that the two groups were politically distinct. Henry Fynn's son, Duka, probably would not have been considered a potential heir to the Izinkumbi chiefship; and indeed in 1838 was too young to become chief, being approximately fourteen years old.

Fynn family members related oral evidence in 1925 that Theophilus Shepstone put Henry Fynn's children under Vundlazi's protection after their mothers – Henry Fynn's former wives – had remarried and the children were being neglected; and that Vundlazi had a new homestead, called Nsimbini, constituted for them near her own at the Umthwalume.³⁰³ As explored below, it seems that she may still have been looking after some of Henry Fynn's children in 1851. Theophilus Shepstone also indicated that he 'placed' Vundlazi as the protector of the children of both Frank and Henry Francis Fynn, to ensure that their inheritance would be protected.³⁰⁴

While Toohey and Shepstone appear to have played an important role in preventing the traders from taking Frank Fynn's cattle, and identified Vundlazi as the appropriate person to safeguard the family, this does not necessarily indicate either that Shepstone was the only person to consider her the appropriate 'head' of the Fynn chiefly family, or that Shepstone 'created' her authority over the wider Izinkumbi polity. It must be remembered that Shepstone and Toohey's analysis and actions would have been simultaneous with discussions about succession taking place among the immediate followers of the Fynns. Although the events of the succession are not completely clear, and as we have already seen, there existed a long-standing precedent in southern Africa for widows of chiefs becoming the new heads of chiefly homesteads, often when the next male heir was too young to assume the chiefship.³⁰⁵ It seems likely that given the evidence that she retained considerable political support into her old age in the 1880s Vundlazi's own capacity for leadership as a female regent was acknowledged within the chiefdom.

A perspective from inside the Izinkumbi on her succession is provided by oral history preserved in the records of the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA). When he was asked in

³⁰³ Spencer cites KC, Extracts from the Fynn Papers no. 10, G.V. Essery, "Mbuyasi We Teku," May 1953 (Spencer, *British Settlers*, 238).

³⁰⁴ In addition to the Fynns' oral evidence from 1925, Spencer refers to a diary entry which I have not been able to locate despite attempts (Shepstone's diary entry for December 1838).

³⁰⁵ See Introduction and Chapter One

1890 to describe the history of the amaDunge clan who were subject to the Izinkumbi chiefs, Mvuyana (an old member of the amaDunge) recalled that:

His [Frank Fynn's] Wife Vundhlazi came back to take Charge of the tribe but not till peace had been returned in the Country. On the return of Vundhlazi she sent to UnKani and Udonsela [the two leaders of the amaDunge], telling them that she had arrived. They sent her food at once. At that time Frank Fynn was dead. They had recognized Frank Fynn as their protector when they came into the country, and so when Vundhlazi came they recognized her in the same manner; they looked upon her as their Chief. Other Chiefs, Undelu, the father of Sonsukwana, Umtugukeli father of Kidu, and others received Vundhlazi in the same manner.³⁰⁶

Mvuyana's story highlights that Vundhlazi emerged as chief following a dangerous and tumultuous moment for the Izinkumbi and for others in Natal. It places agency in Vundhlazi's hands and also suggests that she ascended to power automatically and without resistance; that her personal authority and the appropriacy of her taking the helm were recognised by the small chiefdoms that made up the paramountcy. Mvuyana's account also shows how the position of head of the chiefly household translated directly into leadership of the Izinkumbi as a corollary. From Mvuyana's account, it seems that other chiefs did not resist the prospect of a female paramount chief; or at least, that if they did their resistance has not become part of this oral history. Once Natal had become 'safe' again, Vundhlazi returned to the neighbourhood near the Umthwalume River and claimed the chiefship, and the immediate future of the Izinkumbi paramountcy was secured.

Though Vundhlazi was a woman, she was thus able to step into a role that was usually (though apparently not exclusively) reserved for men. As had occasionally been the case for other women in southern Africa, she did so because there was a gap in the male succession, but also because (as suggested by Mvuyana's description, demonstrated by her subsequent messages to the colonial government, and attested to by Duka) leadership came to her naturally. At one level of authority she was a guardian, in control of and protecting the Fynn *family*. Yet this position was linked to a much wider and more elevated claim to authority – over all of the immediate adherents of the Fynns, as well as clans, and their chiefs and *izinduna* that owed the Izinkumbi allegiance. As will be explored, this allegiance was impacted by Vundhlazi's initial 'loyalty' to the colonial government in the 1840s and early 1850s, and also by the actions of colonial officials in her jurisdiction.

³⁰⁶ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA), I/1/132, 1205/1890, Statement of Mvuyana, 21 November 1890.

The Izinkumbi paramountcy and the royal umuzi at ‘the Umthwalume’

In 1865 Vundlazi described her territory as covering the southern quarter of the colony of Natal: “Since before the time of the war with the Boers [1837] I have constantly with my people occupied the coast land between Ifafa and Umzimkulu, and though the number of my adherents was at first small yet they increased and still continue to increase.”³⁰⁷ Indeed, James Perrin, Vundlazi’s neighbour in 1852, commented that the Undelu people living south of the Umthwalume River (near the Ifafa River and approximately 87 kilometres south of Durban), “whilst they acknowledge Uvunthlazi as their Chief are of many different tribes”.³⁰⁸ Moreover, the American Congregationalist missionary Lewis Grout at around the same time identified Vundlazi’s Izinkumbi (and to the north of them, Dumisa’s amaDuma), as being made up of people from clans that were “greatly scattered and reduced or nearly extinct”.³⁰⁹ Henry Fynn had also stated in 1852 that Vundlazi ruled the area between the Umzumbe and Ifafa rivers, while Robert Garden wrote in the same year that her territory extended “from the Umtwalume to the Mzimkhulu”.³¹⁰

According to Henry Fynn, in 1852, the Izinkumbi comprised “at least thirty-two tribes, nearly all of which had inhabited the Natal district before the Zulu wars ... and number[ed] ninety-two kraal”, though this may have been a slight underestimate.³¹¹ Those under the Izinkumbi paramountcy included people who identified themselves as amaNdelu, amaHlubi, amaWangqana, amaBombo, amaHlongwa, amaDlala, uLukyaba, amaDunge or amaNdunge, and many other smaller groups.³¹² While Vundlazi also spent time at the Umzimkhulu, near her sons Tom and Charlie Fynn who ruled over small sections of the Izinkumbi that were

³⁰⁷ PAR, SNA 1/6/5, Statement of Vundlazi (through a messenger) to Sir Theophilus Shepstone, 4 May 1865.

³⁰⁸ KC, *Fynn Papers*, Vol. II, Letter from Sergeant James Perrin to Robert Garden, Umthwalume, 6 May 1852.

³⁰⁹ *Proceedings of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Past and Present State of the Kafir in the District of Natal and to report upon their future government, and to suggest such arrangements as will tend to secure the peace and welfare of the district*, J. Archbell and Son, Pietermaritzburg, 1853, Evidence of Lewis Grout. This Commission is henceforth referred to as the Harding Commission.

³¹⁰ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, diary entry 23 April 1852.

³¹¹ *Harding Commission* 1852, Evidence of H. F. Fynn, 77. James Perrin counted Vundlazi’s subjects and informed Robert Garden in 1852 that she ruled over 33 tribes making up the Izinkumbi, with 108 homesteads in total. KC, *Fynn Papers*, Vol. II, Letter from Sergeant James Perrin to Robert Garden, Umthwalume, 6 May 1852.

³¹² See Perrin in KC, *Fynn Papers*, Vol. III; *Harding Commission*; Evidence of Lewis Grout; and Natal Legislative Council No. 22 (1890: NLC printing for general information, the ‘Report of the Select Committee (No. 7, 1862) appointed to consider message No. 8, 1862, from His Excellency Lieutenant-Governor Scott, on the subject of granting to Natives Documentary Tribal Titles to Land.’).

located there, the seat of her authority was at Enkumbini, situated on Nyangwini hill, at ‘the Umthwalume’ – a blanket term for the area around and south of that river, as the Enkumbini homestead itself was on the smaller Umfazazane River a few miles away.³¹³

What descriptions survive of the physical world of ‘the Umtwalume’ and Vundlazi’s court? While there is virtually no evidence of what Vundlazi looked like, the account of Robert Garden evokes something of her home life and the people and possessions with which she surrounded herself. He described meeting her in June of 1851, accompanied by Henry Francis Fynn. At the time, Fynn held the position of Diplomatic Agent to Faku, chief of the Mpondo, and his attempt to help the government recruit a ‘Zulu Contingent’, an army from Natal to join the British frontier war on the Amampondo, had just failed (as discussed below, the few groups that had been gathered had broken up the month before). This journey through Natal included some of Fynn’s first encounters with his and his deceased brother’s Natal families, since he had previously left the region in 1834.

Robert Garden’s responses to and opinions of Vundlazi and her people, and of Duka Fynn and his followers just over the Umzimkhulu River, cover several diary entries dealing with them as he moved north and south in 1852–3, varied widely from expressions of flippant approbation, to bitter disparagement when his journey was not going smoothly. Although his guide and companion, Fynn, was Vundlazi’s former brother-in-law, he seems to have given Garden only trivial information regarding Vundlazi herself: we are not left with any meaningful sense of her demeanour or her personality. Some of the only close detail Garden provided about Vundlazi on his journeys through her territory was to mention occasionally that this powerful woman had a taste for *utshwala* or traditional Zulu beer, and according to him she suffered from bad health as a result of drinking it.

On the evening of 28 June 1851, Garden and Fynn stopped at Vundlazi’s royal homestead: above the Umfazazane River “at a picturesque and romantic drift we at sunset came to Izekombine . . . The kraal of Vuntklaz the Inkosi-kazi or Queen of the Umtwalume district.” From this vantage point the surrounding country could be seen for a great distance. In his diary entry he gave a vivid picture of her large royal dwelling and the important figures at her court, if not a very strong impression of Vundlazi herself.

On our arrival which had been expected for some days Umbulaz [Henry Fynn] was greeted by a number of his own tribe. Amongst those I noticed an old man with long matted grey hair or rather wool and was informed that his name was

³¹³ See Spencer, *British Settlers*, 224.

Umfinjella [Umvinjelwa] and that he was a famous War-Doctor. At first we were ushered into a house of one room built in imitation of the European style by Chaka as the eldest of the Queen's children by Poban [Frank] [sic., Charles was the eldest child]. I seated myself upon a comfortable high backed cane bottomed chair which had been washed up some years ago by the sea. After being there a little time we adjourned to the Queen's hut, which is the largest and best I have ever seen, although only second rate as I was informed. The interior diameter was about twenty-five feet, and about 6 ft. high. It would hold easily one hundred persons. It might have been a great deal larger. I did not measure it. I found the Queen there, she is a very nice clean lady-like Caffir woman. She is decidedly A1! and deserving of every respect for her constancy and fidelity to the memory of the departed Lord. When Poban [Phobana / Frank] the Father of her children died in August 1839 [sic] *she vowed that she would never marry again, and she may be considered as almost the only instance [among Frank's widows and Henry's former wives of one who did not remarry]. There is one thing to be said; she could not retain the Sovereignty did she take a husband.* At present she is Inkosikazi or Queen of the Umtwalumi.³¹⁴ (added emphasis)

The war-doctor (Umvinjelwa) in close attendance at her court, had fled to her after serving the great Amapondo chief, Faku, since 1836, and was considered extremely powerful. Garden further recorded that when Faku had tried between wars to reclaim the cattle he had paid to Umvinjelwa, the war-doctor had moved north and settled with Vundlazi, despite Faku's offer to pay him 200 more cattle if he returned.³¹⁵

Vundlazi, we see in the above, maintained a one roomed 'European' style structure alongside her much bigger, more impressive royal dwelling. The practice had been started by Henry and Frank Fynn of building both kinds of structures, neighbouring each other, so that if European visitors came they could stay in or be briefly hosted in this building, however dilapidated it was. Garden could only make sense of the existence side by side of the two kinds of physical structures, as a form of 'imitation.' Yet keeping these two types of buildings, pointing as they did to two very different social worlds and models of home, can be seen as a purposeful action that made a statement about the Izinkumbi's multiple forms of belonging and the polity's early history. Indeed their and other experiences resist simplistic, 'either/or' versions of history or of cultural change and assimilation. And, although Henry Fynn claimed Vundlazi's imposing chiefly hut was 'second rate', Garden later discovered Henry Fynn himself, in comparison, was living in "one of the most wretched [abodes] I ever put up at" in

³¹⁴ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entry 28 June 1851. It is interesting that despite Garden's awe on seeing Vundlazi's hut, Fynn made this disparaging comment about its size. Garden had previously seen head men's huts about 30 feet in diameter and 10 feet in height, so Vundlazi's was likely larger than these: see KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entry 25 June 1851.

³¹⁵ On the political role of war-doctors see Ivar Axel Berglund, "Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism (Indiana: Indiana University Press: 1989); and multiple entries in Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*.

his capacity as Diplomatic Agent. In an inversion of Vundlazi's homestead, Fynn's home constituted three rectangular buildings with two round huts that were broken down and draughty.³¹⁶

The entry also gives a key observation regarding the grounds of Vundlazi's authority; that her status as a widow who decided not to remarry was central to her continued political legitimacy. Garden emphasised that the former wives of all the white traders had remarried "upon the death or departure of their European Lords. This strict respect for the memory of her deceased husband has obtained for her the reward she so justly merits for she has ever since been the Queen of the Umtwalumi district."³¹⁷ Garden, and possibly Fynn too (the distinction is hard to make as Fynn clearly imparted some of this information to Garden, and Garden often repeated Fynn's analyses) seem to have understood this in terms of a Victorian concept of a chaste widow remaining 'constant to a memory', and Vundlazi's chiefship being in some sense a reward for her "virtue".

However if Vundlazi remained unmarried, her choice can be seen as being congruent with the pattern well established, as we have seen, by the historiography on female regents in southern Africa: women who succeeded their deceased husbands as political leaders typically remained unmarried. To recap an argument pointed to earlier in this thesis, this has been shown, for instance in a 2000 article by scholar Jennifer Weir, who argues that a 'symbolic celibacy' was practiced by politically powerful women in the Zulu royal family under Shaka's rule. Women such as Mnkabayi, Shaka's aunt, did not formally link themselves to a man through marriage but this did not preclude their having lovers and children.³¹⁸ It is possible, even probable, that Vundlazi, had she had chosen to remarry, would have shifted herself out of the very specific, autonomous role she occupied as regent. Significantly, there is no indication from this that Vundlazi was considered an 'honorary male'.

Three years after this encounter, however, in 1854, Henry Francis Fynn had become a Magistrate presiding over the Izinkumbi. The Fynn family members' 1950s oral histories point to a change in circumstances, suggesting that Vundlazi (who according to these accounts disliked whites in general and her former brother-in-law, Henry Francis Fynn in particular) left the colony, moving to 'Noman's land' – later Alfred County (see page xix, Map 3) – so as to

³¹⁶ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entry 13 July 1851.

³¹⁷ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entry 28 June 1851.

³¹⁸ See Weir, "I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule": The Power of 'Royal' Zulu Women in Pre-Colonial Zululand," *South African Historical Journal* 43.1 (2000); Sifiso Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power in the Zulu Kingdom," in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (Durban: University of Natal Press, 2008).

avoid him during his magistracy. He, in the meantime, took advantage of this and took it upon himself to remodel her chieftdom.

However at the time of his visit to her homestead in 1851, the queen was still welcoming: she arranged for “men, women and children” (including Vundlazi’s half sister whom, without mentioning her name, Garden noted was very beautiful), to bring Fynn and Garden gifts of *utshwala* (traditional beer), “thick milk” (*amasi*) and maize. Vundlazi also sent a group of young girls to sing, who were shy. After they had left, she stayed on with the visitors and drank *utshwala* with them. Garden opined in his characteristically dismissive fashion that she drank a “great deal” of beer, and that he did not see her eat much else.³¹⁹ The visitors stayed for four nights and then continued south, and Vundlazi sent a group of young women on ahead of them, who met them at the Umzumbe River and gave them maize and other food.³²⁰

At this time she was balancing the role of heading the royal homestead and the chieftdom with a ‘protector’ role, over six children living with her, of whom two were her own sons; Charles, a soft-spoken man then approximately twenty years old, and Singcungu, who would have been at least thirteen years old. Her other two sons (Thomas and Robert Fynn) were “out in service in the Natal Colony”, possibly meaning they had been sent to the government works or *isibhalo*; and four other children who were not her own were also under her care: these may have been Henry Fynn’s children. Dingiswayo, one of Frank’s sons by another wife, was living with Toohey.³²¹

We can visualise from the above the impressive chiefly hut and the tumbledown European-style building nearby, but there is not much sense given of the other aspects of the Izinkumbi royal homestead, or the economic activity surrounding this chiefly seat at ‘the Umthwalume’. There are hints here and in Garden’s other entries during his journeys north and south in the area as to the activities that framed the everyday lives of men, women, youth and children among the Izinkumbi under Vundlazi, and what her own days contained. Vundlazi herself was encountered by Garden on different occasions resting in her hut, or holding a public gathering; and often making journeys on foot, whether to engage in trade for beads and cloth, or as Garden guessed on one occasion, to visit her *inyanga* or herbalist.³²²

³¹⁹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entries 28 and 30 June 1851.

³²⁰ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry 2 July 1851.

³²¹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Notes: authority D.C. Toohey.

³²² KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry 23 April 1852.

We know little about how *imizji* and the activities sustaining them – the place and importance of lobola, the division of labour according to gender and age, whether or not the Izinkumbi actively retained *amabutho* (age regiments) – were transforming amongst the many different groups who made up Vundlazi’s people, or exactly what Vundlazi’s role was in ordering these activities. These are all significant avenues for future research. We do know that the people living in the small subject chiefdoms under her continued to refer to themselves by their many different original clan identities, even where their new allegiances supposedly subsumed these identities (as in the case of the Amandelu ruled by the chief Undelu and under the paramount chieftaincy of Vundlazi, a collection of ‘fragments’ of different clans which comprised 24 homesteads and included people who called themselves Amacele, Amakanyao, Amahlungele, Amatuli, Amazelemu among many other names).³²³ Given this complex situation of fragmentation, and the evidence for the retention of old identities alongside new ones, we could perhaps question Fynn’s claim relayed by Garden that these people’s respective political and cultural identities had melded into one and that “their present peculiarities are produced by that of their Chieftainness.” Garden, informed by Fynn, noted that “They are generally industrious, some of them ingenious in native arts. By no means remarkable as warriors, they are easily governed and have little desire to enjoy themselves in colonial service [*isibhalo* or conscripted service on government works].”³²⁴

These words and other entries evoke a picture of people who may not have had active *amabutho*, and who farmed successfully enough that they frequently had extra food to share with visitors. Bramdeow highlights that the Izinkumbi in the Mzimkhulwana area were “independent peasant farmers”.³²⁵ Yet there was not much suitable, unbroken land for farming in the coastal districts and consequently, as Lambert notes, there existed a lower population by comparison with the north coast.³²⁶ By the mid-1850s, cotton was being grown by smallholders in the district, in particular on the Umthwalume mission station, in large part encouraged by Fynn as magistrate who contemplated economic development for the area based around cotton growing, which was ultimately unsuccessful. As people did in all of the chiefdoms in Natal, the Izinkumbi despised the system of *isibhalo* introduced in 1848 and tried to avoid being recruited via their chiefs for labour on the government works. Trade was also important in the area. By the 1870s, the male descendants of the Fynns who became chiefs over the

³²³ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry 28 June 1851.

³²⁴ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry 29 June 1851.

³²⁵ Bramdeow, “Henry Francis Fynn,” 110.

³²⁶ Lambert, “Africans in Natal, 1880-1899: Continuity, change and crisis in a rural society,” (PhD diss., Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1986), 6–7.

various sections of the Izinkumbi and Nsimbini (including Charlie, Thomas, George, and Duka) were also farmers and/or transport riders. Bramdeow relates that they were generally shunned by white colonists with whom their contact was primarily economic through trading; and as chiefs they were under Native Law (except for Vundlazi's son, Robert, who was not a chief and who secured an exemption from native law), although until after 1910 they were included on the Voters' Roll.

Vundlazi apparently invested some effort into finding remedies for an illness she was suffering in the 1850s, and there are a few indications in Garden's diary entries that she may have been a heavy drinker. When Garden encountered her again in 1851 he noticed that she looked unwell.³²⁷ By this time Vundlazi may have been in her early forties. Perhaps it was around this time that she asked the American missionary Hyman Wilder (of the Umthwalume mission station, about ten miles from her homestead) for medicine, and he sent her some and also suggested she stop drinking alcohol. She partly followed his instructions and told Fynn and others that her health was improved.³²⁸

In 1852, Garden returned to her area without Fynn, and accompanied instead by James Perrin. Vundlazi visited the two men and traded with Garden for beads, brass wire and blue calico. Two days later they rested at her royal homestead and found her "holding a sort of levee" – meaning presumably a public gathering of significant men in the Izinkumbi. On getting ready to leave, Garden noticed "five poles stretching away from her [Vundlazi's] hut towards the entrance of the kraal [in which Garden and Perrin had been accommodated] and on top of these a long rope". Vundlazi's son Singcungu, when asked, told them that the construction had been put up by "the Inyanga or witchdoctor," and that his mother was ill.

We both looked at one another, Perrin and myself, and burst out laughing. The boy looked amazed...the rope I suppose was presumed to have the power of attracting the malady with which the Queen was afflicted and of conveying it to our kraal, but though the lines hung over both extreme poles, yet it had no connection at all with the hut the Inkosikazi lived in. I thought perhaps the Doctor might have gained some irregular information respecting the powers of the electric wire and attempted to make use of it in his spells.³²⁹

Vundlazi's construction may conceivably have been based on the concept of the telegraph. Though 1852 seems too early for Vundlazi or her advisors to have seen telegraph poles in Natal, especially given the poor state of communications in the colony even by 1880, it is

³²⁷ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry

³²⁸ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry 17 April 1852.

³²⁹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I. Diary entry 17 April 1852.

nevertheless quite possible that news of the technology had spread to her following its invention in the 1830s and 1840s by Samuel Morse, ahead of the first telegraph system being established in the Cape in 1860.³³⁰ Garden went on to cast aspersions upon the, to him, ridiculous and “impudent” plan of the *inyanga* – a man named Utyampela who was diviner-healer to many other people in the area, lived at the mouth of the Umthwalume river, and reputedly shunned whites. Perrin recalled that the poles had already been up when he had last stayed there with Henry Francis Fynn – suggesting that this conductor cord (if indeed that is what it was) might have been erected in the first place with Henry Francis Fynn in mind.³³¹

Whether it was meant to conduct Vundlazi’s considerable physical pain away from her, inflict it on Fynn, or even convey towards herself something – influence, luck or vitality – that Fynn (or another person who had stayed in that space) owned, is unknown. Given that she was often ill and it would seem Utyampela was a healer, Vundlazi’s purpose was likely one of relief rather than revenge. However the conductor cord could possibly also be seen as an indicator of concerns she felt about the relative power wielded by herself and by Fynn – and this power battle was to manifest fully when Fynn was placed as Resident Magistrate over her people. Indeed, her reliance on healers or diviners for aspects of personal and political support seems to have been a characteristic of Vundlazi’s reign. As Julie Parle and Karen Flint have discussed, chiefs prior to and under colonial rule often had a close relationship with *izangoma* who played an important judicial and social role. The support *izangoma* provided to indigenous systems of governance was in fact considered a threat to colonial administration; and by the mid-1860s *izangoma* were increasingly outlawed.³³²

Compromise and Control: Interactions with the Colonial State 1840–1865

The record of female chiefship in colonial southeast Africa (and other parts of Africa) demonstrates that, in certain instances, colonial officials’ dismissive and patriarchal presumptions about female chiefs contrasted with those held by the headmen and communities under these women leaders. In the case of the paramount chief Amelia

³³⁰ See Lambert, “Africans in Natal,” 3; Franco Frescura, “Colonial Post and Telegraph Diary of the Cape of Good Hope”, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/franco/postal-history-colonial-post-diary.htm> accessed 20 August 2014; <http://www.history.com/topics/inventions/telegraph> On the role of the telegraph in communications between the Cape and Griqualand West by the 1880s, see Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa* (New York: Public Affairs TM, 2007), 148.

³³¹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entries 17 and 22 April 1852.

³³² Karen Flint and Julie Parle, “Healing and Harming: Medicine, Madness, Witchcraft and Tradition,” in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole (Pietermaritzburg: Univeristy of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 314–315.

'Mantsebo Seeiso in Lesotho in the 1940s, for example, the British administration assumed she would be "a mere figurehead, and that they would continue to deal primarily with her male advisors", and were surprised and infuriated when she obstructed them.³³³ Almost a century earlier, Theophilus Shepstone had not appeared to dismiss Vundlazi on the grounds of her gender, however. He noted in the 1840s that she was a "determined woman". In his 1851 visit to her royal homestead, Garden noted that the Izinkumbi under Vundlazi, "has been acknowledged to be the most loyal of the Natal Chiefdoms".³³⁴ It is highly possible that, at that moment, what was most important in Shepstone's eyes was that Vundlazi was among the chiefs 'loyal' to the colonial administration in the 1840s.³³⁵

Reading the extant archival evidence, it can be seen that Vundlazi initially cultivated this collaborative relationship with the colonial state: but, like other chiefs, she frequently (and increasingly, with time) found the allegiance inconvenient and compromising. As noted above, oral evidence from Duka Fynn (recorded in the twentieth century) indicates that, in the 1850s when her former brother-in-law Henry Francis Fynn became the first Resident Magistrate over her district, she reacted by leaving the colony. It is possible that this constituted a willing deferral to his authority, but, alternatively, her angry statements to the government when she was disrespected in 1865 would seem to suggest that she did not see her own authority as something to be trifled with. By 1860 Vundlazi was trying to ignore the presence of George Lucas, the Magistrate who had replaced Fynn, and whose court created an alternate centre of judicial power to her own. This struggle between chiefs' and magistrates' jurisdictions was shared by many other chiefs, as the historian John Lambert explains in his foundational text *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal*.³³⁶ Fighting the increasing constriction of land for her people by 1865 in the face of the settlers' expansion, she also competed for space with the *amakhotha* on Wilder's Umthwalume mission station. Indeed she indicated in 1865 (after 27 years of rule), that she wished to step down as chief. Whether or not she in fact stepped down at this stage, she had certainly done so by 1880. In the early 1880s, the subsequent chief of the Izinkumbi, George Fynn (son of Henry and therefore Vundlazi's nephew by marriage) continued to feel threatened by the political support collecting still around her in the Umthwalume area, and the Resident Magistrate ultimately asked George to give Vundlazi a gift of cattle and to leave the County so as to prevent conflict within the

³³³ Epprecht, 'This matter of women is getting very bad', 110–11.

³³⁴ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entry 28 June 1851.

³³⁶ John Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal* (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 1995), 60.

Izinkumbi, a further striking indication that Vundlazi, a woman in an exceptional customary role, could own cattle in the view of the colonial administration.

Returning to the evidence available to us concerning her long period of rule and her relationship with the colonial state, Lambert has observed that, at that time, in exchange for the government's "protection from overweening neighbours," Shepstone "summon[ed] [military] levies" to "deal with unrest" from certain chiefs. He asked Vundlazi to assist him, for example, when in 1849 the section of the Amahlongwa under her paramountcy "proved refractory". Shepstone asked her to move against them and take their cattle, which she did.³³⁷ In 1851, she was also one of the thirteen chiefs and *izinduna* who supplied troops for what Sir Harry Smith, Governor of the Cape, called a 'Zulu contingent,' an army that was intended to help the British in the Cape frontier war. The Natal chiefs and their people who had been ordered by the government to supply troops were suspicious about the actual purpose of the Contingent; and Shepstone and Fynn – who were tasked with trying to gather support for it – considered the project inadvisable.

Shepstone's report on the Contingent indicates that the chief Matyana of the Sithole refused to supply troops through a deft diplomatic evasion, and related that: "Vumhlase, a chieftainess formerly connected with a white man and now the head of a powerful combination of tribes", replied to the call for soldiers with these words: "I am personally glad of the opportunity of assisting my country, and I shall do my utmost, but I cannot conceal from you that ever since the order has been given for the expedition my eyes and those of my chiefs under me have not met."³³⁸ This suggests that, in complying with the order, she had risked her political support and sway. Nonetheless, she sent 115 men from the 'Izinkimbini,' and twelve other chiefs and *izinduna* also sent warriors, altogether making up Smith's 'Zulu Contingent' of roughly 1500 men who gathered south of the Umkhomazi River in May 1851.³³⁹ But the Contingent was riven with tensions between its sections, and by the end of that month had been disbanded.³⁴⁰ Thus, at the time Fynn visited Vundlazi in June 1851, this failed recruitment for an unpopular venture had already impacted both of their political credibility in and south of Natal. Just as Vundlazi described the disconnection that it had brought between her and her subject chiefs, Fynn, on more than one occasion, called public gatherings to speak

³³⁷ John Lambert, "Chiefship in Early Colonial Natal, 1843–1879," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21: 2 (June 1995): 275; Natal Executive Council Records (NEC), Vol. 3, Report by Shepstone, 20 May 1849, 98–101.

³³⁸ NEC, Vol. 3, Report by Shepstone, 28 January 1851, 264–67.

³³⁹ KC, *Fynn Papers*, Vol. III, Copy of letter written at 'Camp Umtumvula,' 19 May 1851.

³⁴⁰ KC, *Fynn Papers*, Vol. III, Copy of letter from Fynn to Harry Smith, 29th May 1851, Umlazi River.

to chiefs he encountered south of the Umzimkulu, discussing the events of the previous months and trying to regain some ground on what Garden considered a “sore point” with him.³⁴¹

The first indications that the Izinkumbi paramountcy was losing its coherence and also losing territory appear during and subsequent to Henry Francis Fynn’s time as Magistrate in Lower Umkomanzi Division (1854–1860).³⁴² It was a bizarre and ironic turn of events that Fynn, having left his African wives in 1834 for a career in the colonial administration in the Cape and Pondoland, returned to Natal with his white family (Christina and their son Henry Francis Fynn junior), without having gained the material and career success he had hoped for, and then presided as the very first Magistrate over the newly-defined district where Vundlazi and many members of his and his brother Frank’s family members still lived.

He was made Assistant Resident Magistrate in Durban County and in Lower Umkomanzi Division in 1854, and in 1855 was promoted to Resident Magistrate of Lower Umkomanzi Division. Spencer, citing the Fynn descendants’ oral evidence collected in the 1950s, indicates the possibility that Vundlazi “had a very low opinion of whites in general...did not like Henry Fynn, and when he became magistrate of Lower Umkomanzi Division, ..moved south beyond the Umzimkulu to join her sons, returning only when he had retired”.³⁴³ Fynn’s own writings show that immediately after he arrived in his former district in his official capacity, he precipitated a reshuffling of her chiefdom. In 1854, he simply removed five minor chiefdoms from Vundlazi’s jurisdiction. The reason he gave was that she was unable to keep her followers in order.³⁴⁴ He mentioned the names of these chiefs as “Umgon”; “Umkalipi”; “Maiza”; “Gomani”; and “Umabiya.”

Though Vundlazi’s sway with these chiefs might have diminished, it is possible too that Fynn’s primary reason for taking this action was in fact to undermine her control over the Izinkumbi and secure his authority as Magistrate. It is not clear what Fynn meant by her ‘lack of control’. It is conceivable that Fynn dismissed her simply because he saw her female right to rule as inferior to his own authority over the Izinkumbi. Whilst on the one hand it is

³⁴¹ KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. I, Diary entry 4 July 1851.

³⁴² This Division, in the southern section of the colony, was named after a river in this area (modern spellings include Umkhomazi). It was later renamed Alexandra County.

³⁴³ Spencer cites KC, Extract from the Fynn Papers no. 10, Letter from C.H. Karlson to Killie Campbell, 13 August 1952.

³⁴⁴ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 220. I have not located Spencer’s source for this which should reveal dynamics of Vundlazi’s leadership and her relations with Henry Fynn. (Spencer specifies that this comes from Fynn’s writing in the late 1850s.)

possible that Vundlazi, seemingly a heavy drinker, sixteen years into her chiefship and in her mid or late 40s, was experiencing a decline in her political sway, it must be noted that Fynn's assessment contrasted markedly with Duka Fynn's retrospective view of her abilities as ruler. Duka in the early twentieth century noted that she had an "ability beyond that of ordinary men in the government of her people and in cases tried before her."³⁴⁵

Fynn also had plans to develop the district where he had once been a chief, and was now Magistrate. In particular he had hopes of agricultural projects (including growing cotton) and expanding mission education in the area. When reserves were authorised for Lower Umkomanzi Division in the mid 1850s, Fynn stated in a report to the government, that he had decided to divide what remained of the Izinkumbi into three sections, who would live on separate reserves. One section would remain at the Umthwalume where Vundlazi was, "with the second and third groups acknowledging her chiefship or not, as circumstances required".³⁴⁶ The third section, *amakholwa* who lived on Wilder's mission station and who were successfully growing cotton, were to be guaranteed land there and Fynn envisioned them becoming the centre of a successful cotton industry. In the early part of 1860, when Fynn resigned, it was partly because he felt his request for a plot of crown land from the government was being denied due to his being a Magistrate. He was replaced as Magistrate by Captain George Lucas.

Fynn's dismissive view of Vundlazi as a leader can be questioned in light of the events of 1860 in southern Natal, which demonstrate that although she did indeed face serious political opposition, she also still held considerable sway over some chiefs within her paramountcy. The records of the SNA, for instance, show that over the course of a few months in 1860, former *izinduna* of Vundlazi's who had been appointed as policemen under the Resident Magistrate used the Magistrate's court to shake her hold on power. The Magistrates' rulings, informed by the official Court Interpreter's formulation of events, undermined Vundlazi's own rulings, and this contributed to a political crisis. Lucas, and his acting magistrates in that year, did not have much regard for Vundlazi, and had little contact with and awareness of her authority; it appears she wished to keep herself and her court autonomous and separate from the magistrates as far as was possible.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 220.

³⁴⁶ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 223. I have not located this report of Fynn's cited by Spencer.

³⁴⁷ PAR, SNA I/1/10, 93/1860, Statement of Bili and Umhlabukelwa messengers sent to the Colonial Government by Vunhlase chieftess of the Izinkumbi tribe, 23 September 1860.

Yet after Henry Fynn's death in 1861 – of dysentery, still poor, landless and in debt – and despite Vundlazi's apparently poor relationship with him and with the other magistrates who had undermined her rule in her district, she chose to establish a link with Fynn's white son. It is possible that the symbolic significance of Henry and Frank Fynn as the first chiefs of the Izinkumbi persisted for the Izinkumbi, and that Vundlazi chose to acknowledge this. Henry Francis Fynn Junior (Henry's son by Christiana Brown, and Vundlazi's nephew) claimed that Vundlazi requested in 1863 that he, then about 17 years old, be taken to the Division in the south, and shown to the Izinkumbi and the Nsimbini to be "acknowledged".³⁴⁸ The implication would seem to be that the young Henry Fynn Junior (who was known as Gwalagwala in Natal) was being presented as the eventual future (or, like his father, the 'virtual') chief of the Izinkumbi and Nsimbini.

In 1865, when Vundlazi was likely in her fifties, her authority was challenged once again. However this time she was threatened not by a rival political faction, but by the American missionary Hyman Wilder who was trying to secure freehold rights for his congregants on the Umthwalume mission station. Wilder, taking steps to protect the mission station residents against the white demand for land in southern Natal, was trying to find a solution for the same problem that plagued Vundlazi and other chiefs and their subjects. Henry Francis Fynn had proposed in the 1850s that land should be set aside for the Izinkumbi and their neighbours, but apparently this plan had not been implemented. As land for Africans to live on became more and more scarce, the basis of chiefly authority was also constricted (see Maps 4 and 5 for how this process had advanced by 1880 and to 1900). The missionary's attempts to secure land prompted Vundlazi to send a messenger to remind the SNA of an earlier time, when she had the right as chief to allocate land and to offer refuge. She sent the following statement to the SNA; the most direct and sustained evidence we have of this woman chief's own voice:

. . . Since before the time of the war with the Boers I have constantly with my people occupied the coast land between Ifafa and Umzimkulu, and though the number of my adherents was at first small yet they increased and still continue to increase.

I am but a woman, and the task of ruling a people is no enviable one. Yet I trust I have properly controlled my people and taught them strict obedience to the British Government.

I have always welcomed the arrival of missionaries among my people. But when I see any attempt on their part to hold lightly my position as Chieftess by acting exclusive of me, I feel the pleasure of their presence greatly diminished.

I trust that His Excellency will protect my tribe from being at the mercy of White settlers, and from being driven off by Amakolwa by reserving for them the country in which they have lived before the colony was a colony.

³⁴⁸ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 223.

Another matter I wish His Excellency's instructions upon – When orders are sent me by the Magistrate to provide so many men for Government works, I go immediately to collect them. It not unfrequently happens that those who have not worked for some time, immediately take fright and go into the service of any of the neighbouring Whites and then under the plea “I am working for a White man” set me at defiance and reduce my supply of men. What is the remedy?³⁴⁹

Amidst highlighted gestures of allegiance to the colonial government, the statement's strategic choices, pacing, directness and areas of subtext convey the fullest sense of chiefly entitlement.

Vundlazi's message of affront was, it appears, dictated by a messenger and translated and written down by someone at the Office of the Secretary for Native Affairs who made a perceptible attempt to preserve and transmit into English the message's strategic and forceful formulations. ‘Her’ words, then, filtered though they may be suggest that she could have been an intimidating leader in person. She was prepared to accommodate the missionary presence as long as she felt her authority was respected; but refused to be sidelined. The message reflects her anger at those who she saw as flouting her authority and forgetting her patronage (and by extension the patronage of the Fynns) from decades before; her concern at the possibility of her own people being “driven off by Amakolwa”; and the sense that the repeated process of sending men to the government works (*isibhalo*) was taking its toll on her authority. Her concerns, including the shrinking of available land and conflict with the occupants of the neighbouring mission station, were common to many other chiefs in Natal at the time.³⁵⁰

This is the only instance in the available evidence of Vundlazi speaking directly about her gender – this was also not a particular point of comment in the colonial minutes during her life. In this 1865 statement, she touched on the idea of femaleness as disarticulated from might and ability: ‘I am but a woman’ – but again the strident, forceful framing of her statement belie this. Her words in this sense recall England's Elizabeth I's purported statement, ‘I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king’ – except that, as well as excusing her femaleness, as a chief in Natal Vundlazi was required to speak her colonial subjection and her sovereignty in one breath. The message reflects the contradictions and the challenges of her rule.

In 1865, the Resident Magistrate of Alexandra County, W. J. Dunbar Moodie, under whose jurisdiction the *Izinkumbi* fell at that time (see Map 1, on page xvii), wrote in a report to

³⁴⁹ PAR, SNA 1/6/005, Statement of Vundlazi through messenger to Sir Theophilus Shepstone, 4 May 1865.

³⁵⁰ Lambert, *Betrayed Trust*, 34.

Shepstone that Vundlazi had expressed a wish to resign as Inkosikazi of the Izinkumbi.³⁵¹ Despite extensive archival searches, unfortunately, I have not been able to locate this report or any subsequent correspondence to ascertain when exactly she formally resigned and had her resignation accepted. The *ikholwa* George Fynn – Henry Fynn’s son – certainly succeeded her as chief, and Vundlazi had given the chiefship over to him by 1880 at the latest.³⁵² It is likely that Vundlazi stepped down, if not in 1865, then at some point between 1866 and 1875. (Duka Fynn’s evidence indicates that George was deputed as chief because Charlie was the next in line for the chiefship of the Izinkumbi in Alexandra County but was south of the Umzimkhulu when Vundlazi stepped down.³⁵³ Spencer cites sources indicating that Charlie was outside of Natal between 1866 and 1875. Cumulatively this evidence suggests that Vundlazi stepped down at some point during that period).³⁵⁴

Vundlazi as ‘influential queen mother’, and the regency of Maria Fynn (nee Ogle)

Vundlazi, after she retired, went to the Alfred Country (Harding) south of the Umzimkhulu, likely staying there with Charles, who from at least 1873 had been the chief of the section of the Izinkumbi living there. However by late 1880, she had moved back into southern Natal once again, and this time (despite her conflict with Wilder and the *amakholwa* in 1865) she came to live with the section of the Izinkumbi who occupied the Umthwalume mission station, where Hyman Wilder was still the resident missionary. As an old woman and former chief, Vundlazi’s very presence in the Umthwalume area had political significance and she certainly did not subside into a quiet life on the mission station. Instead she became the centre of a new political grouping within the Izinkumbi.

George Fynn, who made his living in transport-riding and farming, was himself a Christian or *ikholwa*. On becoming leader of the Izinkumbi, he had become known as an abusive chief

³⁵¹ W. J. Dunbar Moodie is quoted in Weir and Etherington, ‘Shepstone in Love’”, though I have not located the archival reference.

³⁵² PAR, SNA I/1/44, 1881/76, RM Alexandra to SNA, 23 December 1880. The archival evidence available on George Fynn indicates Duka’s account is the more reliable, and the sources suggesting Vundlazi gave up the chiefship to Charlie in 1882 appear to have omitted George’s chiefship and confused dates of succession.

³⁵³ KC, Extract from the Fynn Papers no. 10, Letter from C.H. Karlson to Killie Campbell, 13 August 1952.

³⁵⁴ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 225. Spencer suggests that Charlie was probably “obliged to move south because of his illegal activities” – including seizing cattle from, and attacking, the Hlubi in Natal.

who flogged his men, and in fact many left the Izinkumbi because of him.³⁵⁵ He found soon after Vundlazi's return to the area that some people in the section of the Izinkumbi living on the Umthwalume mission station preferred to recognise her authority rather than his, and he complained to the Resident Magistrate, saying he feared a rebellion would break out.³⁵⁶ The SNA, however, did nothing to resolve this situation and in 1881 the Magistrate approached the government again and described the rising tension: "Many of the tribe refuse to obey [George] Fynn and great dissatisfaction and ill feeling seems to exist in the tribe". The acting SNA, Henrique Shepstone, responded saying, "This woman cannot be recognized as Chieftainess. Could it not be arranged that a few head of cattle be given her so as to enable her to live[?]" The SNA may have been suggesting that she be given enough cattle to start her own household elsewhere – or that if she had some cattle in the Umthwalume area, she might be more content and less likely to create political opposition. The Magistrate wrote again to the SNA indicating that the problem was serious, and support was accreting around her so she would have to leave the area:

As I do not see any probability of quietness being maintained in the Izinkumbi Tribe as long as uVundhlase resides in it and as she came into this County from Alfred [Alfred County, formerly 'No Man's Land', south of Natal] without permission and so far as I know without leave from the R.M. Harding, I have thought it best to order her to quit this County within 14 days. I have also ordered [George] Fynn to help & assist her to remove and induced him to give her [illegible: either two or ten] head of cattle.³⁵⁷

Vundlazi returned south with these cattle to Alfred County to live with Charlie once again. The correspondence in the colonial Minutes the SNA demonstrated that while Vundlazi was a relatively well-known chief to Shepstone's administration in the first years of colonial rule, and was included among the names of the other chiefs in the Evidence of the 1852 Harding Commission, by 1881 she was simply referred to by officials as 'this woman', and seen as a nuisance to be dispatched.

Vundlazi was not, however, the last female chief in Natal. After Vundlazi had departed Alexandra County leaving George's chiefship uncontested, George died in 1882 and a new woman leader was to briefly take control of the Izinkumbi. George's widow, Maria, a daughter

³⁵⁵ See Lambert, *Betrayed Trust* (Lambert cites PAR, SNA I/1/16, Shuter to SNA, 11 Oct 1866; SNA I/1/36, 54/80, Magistrate, Umgeni to SNA, 26 Jan 1880; SNA I/1/45, 176/81, Magistrate, Alexandra to SNA, 29 March 1881).

³⁵⁶ PAR, SNA I/1/44, 1881/76, RM Alexandra to SNA, 23 December 1880.

³⁵⁷ PAR, SNA I/1/44, 1881/76, RM Alexandra to SNA, 25 March 1881. This conflict over the leadership of the Izinkumbi occurred at a time when the descendants of the Fynns were being allocated plots of land or 'locations', by the government. There were four of these plots: Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10 in the Umzimkhulu and Umthwalume areas.

of Henry Ogle (another white trader and polygynous chief) was immediately ‘sent for’ by Captain Lucas, the Resident Magistrate of Alexandra County who referred to her as “Mrs Fynn the Inkosikazi”, and advised her “and the Head men of the tribe... that I should lose no time in reporting her husband’s death to His Excellency and that in the mean time pending the orders of the Supreme Chief [the Governor of Natal] she will take charge of the Tribe.”³⁵⁸

Lucas proposed that Maria should rule as regent for a few years until her eldest son, Harry, was of age, and noted that George had not identified a successor: “It is reported to me that the Chief made no arrangements nor expressed any wish. As to his successor he apparently wished to trust entirely to the judgement of the Supreme Chief”.³⁵⁹ He suggested that Maria, whilst in charge, should “have associated with her Mpolase. Mrs Fynn is a clever woman with much character and always had considerable influence for good in the tribe. Mpolase is the most influential man in the Izinkumbini and both are respected by the people.”³⁶⁰ Ironically, Lucas and the SNA were not aware, or did not consider it important, that in fact, Mpolase had for about twenty years been trying to break free from the Izinkumbi, and had tried repeatedly to get Vundlazi’s and George Fynn’s permission to rule his people independently of the Fynn chiefs. Maria agreed to take charge. The SNA in turn recommended this temporary arrangement to the Governor, suggesting that “[t]o be governed by a woman will not be a new feature with the people of this tribe as the Chieftainess ‘Vunhlase’ who abdicated ruled them for many years”.

Also after George’s death, Maria inherited the 103-acre farm, *Compania* that he had purchased freehold in 1866. The farm was near Vundlazi’s old Ezinkumbini homestead and positioned in what became Location No. 3.³⁶¹ Spencer notes that because George and Maria had been married by Christian rites, “and had English parents on the father’s side, the Master of the Supreme Court believed he [George] had the status of a European, and that his intestate estate should be dealt with according to colonial law [and not customary law].”³⁶² Maria therefore inherited *Compania* and lived on the farm until she died.

In a strange set of colonial contradictions or accommodations, Maria (apparently due to the government’s recognition of her as Christianised) was able to inherit land when other women in the Fynn family and African women generally in Natal were not – but at the same time was

³⁵⁸ PAR, SNA I/1/60, 1883/189, G Lucas to Acting SNA, 12 April 1882.

³⁵⁹ PAR, SNA I/1/60, 1883/189, G Lucas to Acting SNA, 12 April 1882.

³⁶⁰ PAR, SNA I/1/60, 1883/189, G Lucas to Acting SNA, 12 April 1882.

³⁶¹ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 225.

³⁶² Spencer, *British Settlers*, 225.

given a ‘customary’ position over the Izinkumbi. This reveals the complex nature of colonial perceptions of the Fynns at this time. This was a striking decision: the colonial administration, in claiming to ‘appoint’ the widow of a chief as regent, apparently articulated onto the historical pattern of occasional female leadership in southern Africa.

The brevity of and conflict occasioned by Maria’s time as chief would seem to suggest that this was indeed an ‘appointment’ without much support within the Izinkumbi. Yet, on the other hand, it is also possible that Maria did have some political support to begin with among members of the Izinkumbi who wanted her to be regent, and that Lucas in ‘selecting’ her was proffering this as his idea – or had little choice except to do so – for official approval by the SNA.

In either case, Maria’s chiefship proved temporary, lasting just seven months, in which time a section of the clan supported her teenaged son Harry’s right to take the chiefship, and Harry himself, advanced his interests as ‘rightful heir’, and then mocked her when she made judgments as chief. This demonstrates a striking point, perhaps; that just as mothers in elite families in southern Africa could ally with and ‘make’ their sons and younger male relatives as chiefs; sons could also break mothers as chiefs, and male opposition could violently and effectively undermine female rulers. By November 1882 Maria came to Lucas, “accompanied by her sons, the headmen living in and about the neighbourhood of the Chief[']s residence, (Bangibizo they call themselves) Umpolasi formerly of Amadunge tribe, and Ngangaza, (belonging to the Xoloxolo section)” – to ask that Harry be made chief. The *izinduna* present supported her proposal, while Mpolase simply refused to participate in the matter of the Izinkumbi succession and during the meeting reiterated that “I and my people who belong to the Madungi [amaDunge] tribe, only came into the Izinkumbi tribe temporarily with no intention of remaining or being incorporated with it. Stress of circumstances in the time of Shaka’s inroad into this part of Natal caused the temporary adhesion of my father Nkani to the Izinkumbi tribe. We now wish to separate from the tribe.”³⁶³ It is thus clear that by the 1880s, the only thing holding Mpolase’s section of the amaDunge to the Fynn chiefs and the Izinkumbi polity was the colonial government’s belief that they should remain a part of that group.

Charles or ‘Charlie’ Fynn, who had been chief of the section of the Izinkumbi located in Harding as early as 1873, took over the ‘main’ chiefship in Alexandra County by 1887, with

³⁶³ PAR, SNA I/1/60, 1883/189, Mpolase quoted in G Lucas to SNA, 9 November 1882.

Vundlazi's other son, Tom, likely replacing him as chief in Alfred County.³⁶⁴ Vundlazi would by this time have been in her seventies or her early eighties, and despite her advanced age was apparently once again in a position of leadership, essentially ruling jointly with her son. As an old woman, then, she was an 'influential queen mother' and was clearly still a political force in southern Natal. Duka Fynn claimed, indeed, that she had been the person who 'moved' Charlie to take up the chiefship in Alexandra County.³⁶⁵ Their messengers sent to the government announced that they represented "Charlie Fynn and his mother Vundhlasi, the former being in charge of the Izinkumbi tribe in Alexandra County." Her name was repeatedly invoked, too, in the colonial Minutes relating the long-running application of Mpolase's section of the amaDunge clan to secede from the Izinkumbi and have their own chief recognised by the government – she was described as having promised them autonomy many years ago, and as having received, jointly with Charlie, cattle as a tribute from the amaDunge on the understanding that she would allow them to secede.

The last extant message from Vundlazi and Charlie, sent through an emissary to the SNA, was delivered and transcribed in 1887. In that year a surveyor who occasionally did work for the government, A.C. Nurden, had fraudulently claimed to be drawing a boundary line between the territories of the Izinkumbi and the neighbouring amaNdelu, led by Soncekwana (the amaNdelu had separated from the Izinkumbi years before). Nurden 'divided' the territory in favour of Soncekwana, in exchange for one head of cattle. This incident once again highlighted the Izinkumbi's shortage of land and their tense relationships with clans like the amaNdelu that were immediate neighbours who had once been subject to the Izinkumbi paramount chiefs. Charlie and Vundlazi's messengers relayed the following message to the SNA:

Formerly the following tribes formed part of the Izinkumbi, viz the Amandelu, the Amahlongwa, the Amadhlala, and the [Uluk/hyaba]. These tribes were allowed to sever their connection with ours and it now appears, from the representations of the Chiefs or head men in charge of them, that they have sufficient Location land for their people, and that ours has not. We complain principally of the [Amandelu] Tribe under the Chief Usonsekwana – which joins our tribe on the South...In consequence of the reasons I have given above we are now sent to the Government by Charlie Fynn and Vundhlasi to represent to the Government the hardship [t]his tribe is subjected to and request that more Land may be marked off and granted to our Tribe as a Location. As I state, what

³⁶⁴ Spencer indicates that the estimate in hut tax records suggested there were about 1116 people in the section of the Izinkumbi in Harding in 1875: Spencer, *British Settlers*, 225.

³⁶⁵ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 223.

makes the matter harder to bear, is the fact that certain tribes which are really Offshoots of ours have sufficient Location Land to live on and we have not.³⁶⁶

Vundlazi also conveyed a separate statement to the Magistrate complaining that her own homestead was positioned on Crown Land. She insisted that the location's boundary line be moved to accommodate her home. The SNA responded with relative respect, but with a very different ideology: that people should move and shape themselves to conform with government-imposed territorial boundaries, rather than the other way around, saying that "her remedy is to move her kraal into the Location."³⁶⁷ (This kind of interaction was very common between colonial state officials and the different groups living on tribal land in Natal in the nineteenth century and early 1900s, as is evidenced by Nokuthula Cele's extensive study of the KwaMachi chiefdom from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and Percival Ngonyama's 2012 Masters thesis considering the implementation of the ward system in Natal).³⁶⁸

Vundlazi, according to the Fynns' oral histories collected in the 1950s, died in 1890.³⁶⁹ The same sources suggest that she had become a Christian just before her death – which would cohere with her gradual change in attitude towards the mission station at Umthwalume and its inhabitants: having vied for land with *amakholwa* in 1865, yet by 1880 in her old age living on the mission station itself and viewed as a queen in the area.

Connections with Other Women Chiefs in Early Colonial Natal

Natal and the areas adjoining it, in the early colonial period, contained many small groups that were 'fragments' of bigger chiefdoms, highly mobile and highly vulnerable, often 'decapitated' by the death or absence of the chief. As we have seen, in precolonial southern Africa when a chief died, the need for the protection of a trusted leader who could still embody the status of the royal household and act as regent (and who perhaps already had visibility through other

³⁶⁶ PAR, SNA I/1/101, 1887/668, Statement of Vikinduko and Unkonyana messengers from Charlie Fynn and his mother Vundhlasi, the former being in charge of the Izinkumbi tribe in Alexandra County, 29 July 1887.

³⁶⁷ PAR, SNA I/1/101, 1887/668, SNA to RM Alexandra, 1 August 1887. Vundlazi's own statement is missing from this Minute, and it is unclear exactly where she was living at this stage.

³⁶⁸ Nokuthula Peace Cele, "Building a community on the Zulu frontier: The history of the Machi chieftaincy from the early 19th century to 1948" (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 2006), See Chapter 2 and Chapter 5; Percival 'Percy' Mduduzi Ngonyama "Redefining *amakholwa* authority from 'personal to territorial': an historical analysis of the limitations of colonial boundaries on African socio-political relations in Natal's Maphumulo/Lower Thukela region, 1890 to 1910" (MA diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2012)

³⁶⁹ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 222.

forms of political influence and leadership) could at times supersede the requirement or ‘rule’ of male chiefship. In southern Africa into the colonial period, too, the devolution of power to a woman was an illustration of men and women’s ability or willingness to put aside, under particular circumstances, and temporarily, their investment in the idea of male political succession. This ability or willingness, and the conditions it also conferred on women rulers’ conduct, could vary and depended on context. In some cases, such as among the Basotho, women chiefs were indeed common.

In the case of Natal, while Vundlazi was the longest reigning and presided over the largest polity, there were a few female chiefs in the first two decades of colonial rule in Natal, and just outside of it. Possibly as late as the 1860s, though likely earlier, a woman named Macibise headed the ‘Abakwamacibise’; Makosikazi led the ‘Wasemacindaneni’; and Mamtunzini led the ‘Abalumbi’.³⁷⁰ Outside the southern boundary of the colony, Mamjucu, widow of the Bhaca chief Ncapai, ruled one section of this clan as regent, at the Umzimvubu.³⁷¹ In Alfred County up until 1867, Mamtoto ruled the tiny Abalumbi (see below). The exact periods of their rule are not clear.

In addition to these instances of female leadership, there were apparently three instances where chiefdoms that had been established by early white traders were at some point ruled by their widows, in southernmost Natal and just outside the colony (around the Umzimkhulu River). Two have been extensively addressed in this chapter – the cases of Vundlazi, and of Maria Fynn’s brief rule described above. The third instance is of a woman related to Maria, named Bekuni; who was one of the widows of Henry Ogle (Maria’s father). Bekuni had taken up leadership of his family and followers in the 1850s, heading what Robert Garden called this ‘Germ’ of a tribe ‘on the Imbizane just below Umadigizela’. In a similar manner to Vundlazi but on a far smaller scale, she was a homestead head with concomitant authority over non-family members who were attached to the Ogles.³⁷² Women’s chiefship in and around colonial Natal was by no means confined to women who had been the wives of white traders: however

³⁷⁰ See Natal Legislative Council No. 22 (1890: NLC printing for general information, the ‘Report of the Select Committee (No. 7, 1862) appointed to consider message No. 8, 1862, from His Excellency Lieutenant-Governor Scott, on the subject of granting to Natives Documentary Tribal Titles to Land.’). It is possible that some of these women were no longer chiefs by the early 1860s, as Shepstone’s 1862 Report drew on older sources of information from the 1850s, such as Lewis Grout’s evidence to the Harding Commission of 1852–3. See also KC, *Fynn Papers*, Vol. I. Macibise, Vundlazi (spelled ‘Mhlase’) and Mamtunzini are also named in Weir “‘I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule’”, 6.

³⁷¹ KC, *Fynn Papers*, Letters Vol. I, 1835–60, Undated and unsigned letter from Henry Francis Fynn.

³⁷² KC, *Garden Papers*, Vol. II, 1851–1853, List of ‘Frontier tribes: Dwelling between the Umzimkulwana and Ibis, and the Umtamvuna.’

it is interesting that in the early colonial period polities formed by white traders accepted their widows as chiefs, articulating onto an older regional pattern of widow regents, and the reasons for this also warrant further research.

Finally, archival fragments regarding Mantoto, chief of the Amambotwe, both shed light on her specific experience and help to illustrate colonial perspectives on female leaders in Natal. Mantoto ruled the Amambotwe in Alfred County (in southernmost Natal) up until about July of 1867, as the widow of the former Amambotwe chief 'N'ciya'. This was a very small polity, of 114 people (26 men, 34 women, and 54 children). The magistrate's count was of 37 huts. On the 17th of June 1867, Mantoto came in person into the Resident Magistrate's office to state that she could no longer serve the small chiefdom and was resigning with immediate effect. Her statement suggested that as a woman who had married into the clan from elsewhere, she felt socially isolated despite some headmen's respect for her leadership. Indeed it seems possible that carrying out her role as chief made it more difficult to find support and strong relationships within the Amambotwe, which she needed at this time given the death of some of her children and the illness of others. She had decided instead to return to her parents' home. After giving her statement she signed it with her mark, a cross:

I have come to report to the Resident Magistrate that, I have decided upon leaving my Tribe and joining my friends in the Upper Umkomanzi Division – I have come to this decision because my husband "Nciya" is long dead and I have no relatives where I am, several of my children have died and some are sick, therefore, I wish to be with my parents who can assist me, some of my head men are opposed to my going, but I have made up my mind, and cannot stay longer, for the reasons I have given.³⁷³

Wilson asked Mantoto to wait until her resignation was accepted by Shepstone, and suggested the route of assembling the Amambotwe either to choose "a head man in her stead" or to "place the Amambotwe – a very small tribe – under another chief."³⁷⁴ Within ten days Shepstone replied "I see no reason for objecting to the woman's removal as she deserves it and women are generally poor rulers over any Tribe. The magistrate might use his own discretion as to the person to succeed after he has consulted the people concerned – he should then report the result for the confirmation of His Excy."³⁷⁵

³⁷³ PAR SNA I/3/17, Statement of 'Mamtoto' Chieftess of the Amambotwe Tribe, 17 June 1867. Her statement was translated and transcribed by G.M. Shepstone, and witnessed by the magistrate.

³⁷⁴ PAR SNA I/3/17, H.C. Wilson, Resident Magistrate Alfred County, to SNA, 17 June 1867.

³⁷⁵ PAR SNA I/3/17, T. Shepstone to H.C. Wilson, Resident Magistrate, Alfred County, 27 June 1867.

In 1867, twenty years after the definitive moment when Musi was presented to Shepstone as the new Qwabe chief, indirect rule was fully established – and Mantoto, though the leader of a very small clan, like other chiefs notified the SNA when she stepped down from her role. By this time, Shepstone had seemingly formed a dismissive opinion of female chiefs. As we have seen, in the 1840s and early 1850s, the Izinkumbi led by Vundlazi had been strategically important to Shepstone as this was one of the chiefdoms ‘loyal’ to the early colonial government. His reasons for finding women poor rulers are unclear, but in at least two instances conflicted with the opinions of the headmen led by women chiefs whom he disparaged.

Research remains to be done upon the ways in which Natal’s rare instances of female leadership were impacted and viewed by chiefs and colonial officials more broadly, before and after 1867 and as a legal framework was constructed that defined women as perpetual minors and thus would seem to have precluded chiefly roles for them. The following section however briefly gestures towards how another relative of Henry Francis Fynn – his daughter, Nomanga, or Eliza – assumed a key leadership role within her family after her father’s departure only to be denied the right to inherit land in the 1880s. This is contrasted with the case of Maria Ogle who was able to inherit an entire farm in the early 1880s since she was viewed as being under European law.

Nomanga Clothier: “for she was born in this country, and would have been an heiress if the government had not taken over the country”³⁷⁶

Henry Francis Fynn’s eldest daughter and eldest surviving child was Nomanga (or Eliza) Fynn, also known as Eliza. After her father left Natal in 1834, she presumably lived with her siblings in the Nsimbini homestead that Vundlazi built for them. Though Spencer shows she was likely too young in 1834 to have taken care of her younger brother Duka, at some point she assumed a guardian role over her siblings in the family, and was accorded respect as one of the most senior members of the family. Indeed Duka considered Nomanga to rank as head of the whole family.³⁷⁷

In 1867 she married a Thomas Clothier of Pietermaritzburg. The previous year, No Man’s Land was annexed to Natal by General Bisset, the Acting Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, and

³⁷⁶ PAR, SNA 1/1/103, 1887 /1123

³⁷⁷ Spencer, *British Settlers*, 239. The political relationship between the Nsimbini descended from Henry Francis Fynn and the broader Izinkumbi paramountcy is confusing, but Nomanga seems to have been recognised as an important figure in the family throughout Vundlazi’s reign.

renamed Alfred County. Ten locations were established in the county to be occupied by Africans, with Crown land in between these. Maps 3 and 4 on pages xix and xx indicate the extent to which southern Natal was taken up by Crown land, and of the incursion by 1900 of white farmers into the area.³⁷⁸ In 1880, Charlie and Tom Fynn (Frank and Vundlazi's sons), and Duka and James (Henry Fynn's sons) were individually allocated the small Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10 in trust from the government. The SNA emphasised that they were being given the land not due to their chiefly status but because of "the positions their fathers had held prior to the territory's annexation by Great Britain".³⁷⁹ Nomanga's status in the family was not recognised by the administration, and nor was she was given her own Lot of land.

At the same time that Vundlazi and Charlie Fynn were writing to the government complaining of the unbearable constriction of the Izinkumbi territory, alongside the neighbouring (formerly subject) groups with whom they now had to compete for space, Nomanga in Alfred County was writing to the state, interestingly, with the support of the Resident Magistrate, and trying to lay claim to land as an heir of Henry Francis Fynn. Shirron Bramdeow, the historian of the Fynn family, describes Nomanga's situation and appeal:

In 1887 Nomanga Clothier, daughter of Henry Fynn, requested land from the Government stating that although she was the eldest child of Henry Francis Fynn she was not only neglected when grants of land were made to the Fynn family and consideration was given to Charles and Tom who were only nephews of Henry Francis Fynn, but the land on which she was born was taken possession of by General Bisset. The grant made to Duka comprised land intended for Nomanga. She refused to accept land from his acreage as Duka [had] twelve children and the farm of 760 acres granted to him [was] too small for his family alone. Duka had to accommodate other members of the Fynn family, namely Phineas whose family comprised fourteen members, Dick four, Mary one and Nomanga five, making the land insufficient. According to Nomanga 'If the farm granted to Duka was split up say into five portions, only no one could possibly live and keep a small number of cattle on a lot of that size.' An expanding population and the increase in cultivation and livestock created much pressure on the land. The Resident Magistrate of Alfred County wrote of Nomanga's plight to the Secretary of Native Affairs: 'I trust you may be able to do something for her as she was born in this country, *and would have been an heiress if the government had not taken over the country. She was left by her father in charge of the tribe as guardian to her brother Duka when her father went to the old country.*'³⁸⁰ (emphasis added)

³⁷⁸ See also John Lambert, "Africans in Natal," 7.

³⁷⁹ PAR, Surveyor General's Office (SGO), 111/1/45, R-SG 1210 /1879, Secretary for Native Affairs, 31 December 1879.

³⁸⁰ Bramdeow, "Henry Francis Fynn," 109. Bramdeow cites PAR, SNA 1/1/103, 1887 /1123.

Thus the Magistrate and Nomanga's argument was that she would ordinarily have expected to inherit land in Alfred County. Arguably, the government's view that the Fynns could not be allocated land on the basis of *chiefly* status was one indication of an increasing hardening of racial categories in Natal. Indeed, by 1961, the Fynns were also no longer recognised by the government as chiefs and Bramdeow shows how this marked "the beginning of a period of intensified racial and class stratification" in which racial classification as coloured "meant relinquishing their chiefly status and the security that went with it for a life determined for them by the various Apartheid institutions".³⁸¹

Of particular interest to this thesis however is that the racial hardening taking place by the late 1800s coincided with a delimitation of the possibilities for women in Natal to inherit property under 'native law', and with women's confirmation as perpetual dependents. Nomanga found herself relegated to an extremely small sub-division of her brother Duka's land in Harding (Lot 8) which she said she would not take because the arrangement did not even allow Duka enough space for his own family. Nomanga's claims had little or no weight in terms of the recently enacted Natal Code of 1878, let alone the later 1891 Code, both of which enshrined in law an inflexible official understanding of 'customary' gender relations – a "colonial patriarchy".³⁸² A woman, even a woman from a chiefly family within which she was considered a legitimate heiress, could not under Native Law become a homestead head or inherit a plot of land in her own right.

This contrasts strikingly with the experience of Maria Ogle in 1882: where a member of the Fynn family was considered as falling under colonial rather than native law, the colonial state did endorse female inheritance of land. At the same time, Maria was appointed by the colonial state as an interim chief for the Izinkumbi. As Bramdeow has emphasised, then, the hardening of racial categories was not a straightforward process. The government's approach to racial identity amongst the Fynns, and the views of the Fynns themselves and the people living in chiefdoms formerly subject to the Izinkumbi, following Bramdeow's important intervention, provide ground for further study. Ultimately the contrasted experiences of Vundlazi, Maria and Nomanga demonstrate the extension of state control, over the course of fifty years, over land, chiefs, and women's already rare and by the 1880s ever more shrinking opportunities to inherit property.

³⁸¹ Bramdeow, "Henry Francis Fynn," 11.

³⁸² See Jeff Guy, 'From Autonomous Imizi to the "Kraal Family System": Colonial Transformations in the Home' in *The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal*, ed. Meghan Healy-Clancy and Jason Hickel, (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2014), Chapter 1.

Conclusion

Vundlazi MaSenca was the recognised inheritor of the authority of her husband the settler, trader and polygynous chief Frank Fynn, and that of his brother Henry Francis Fynn; and to ensure the polity's survival she mediated between the interests of the colonial state (from which the Izinkumbi claimed protection) and the interests of the groups making up the Izinkumbi. She was not merely seen as the appropriate guardian for a chiefly household left without a male head, but also became the acknowledged leader of, by 1852, over 30 small subject chiefdoms. One aspect of her role as a woman chief and homestead head involved protecting her own children by Frank, as well as Henry Fynn's mixed-race children; but her leadership role extended beyond this to include key chiefly actions such as directing labour, allocating land, and adjudicating disputes. Yet as chief from 1838 to at least 1865 she withstood a great deal: the political impact of her cooperation with colonial authorities; her own illness; the Resident Magistrates' jurisdiction over her territory; and the rigours of political opposition within the Izinkumbi.

There is some evidence that Shepstone had played a role in installing Vundlazi as chief of the Izinkumbi, in the same way that he claimed the right as representative of the "supreme chief" to confer chiefly status on individual men. In this case as the "protector" of the Fynns' children and property, she was also the authority figure inheriting the wider paramount chiefship. However she may well have been recognised as an appropriate leader by the Izinkumbi before being recognised by Shepstone and the administration. What is clear is that she became one of the chiefs loyal (perhaps expediently) to the government in early colonial Natal. This may be seen as unsurprising given that the Izinkumbi polity had been established by white traders as a refuge for various disparate groups and, for example, Henry Fynn used his influence within the chiefdom in 1851 to get the Izinkumbi to assist the colonial state. There are indications that Vundlazi's subsequent difficulties as chief had largely to do with a power struggle between herself and Fynn, especially after he returned to Natal in 1854 as a magistrate over what had once been his and his brother's polity, and was now hers, and presumed to re-order the chiefdom. Government-appointed policemen undermined her authority in 1860 but she weathered this, using the threat that she would leave the colony if nothing was done about them.

Increasing land shortage and the secession of small former subject chiefdoms diminished her territory by the 1860s. Fynn's magistracy and the unwelcome requirements and privations of indirect rule seem to have soured her initial collaborative relationship with the colonial government, but her rule was still seen as a precedent; years after Vundlazi's resignation, and when the Izinkumbi were once again leaderless in the early 1880s, Shepstone designated Maria Ogle as chief, the widow of the previous chief George Fynn. In the 1880s, after she had resigned as chief, Vundlazi continued to be important to the Izinkumbi: both as a leader in her own right and as the 'influential mother' who helped to steer Charlie Fynn's chiefship.

It would seem from the available evidence that Vundlazi's gender was not overtly made much of in the colonial records, in the oral history regarding her, by her adherents, or even by herself. However the archive does reveal some people's views on her gender. Duka Fynn considered that her identity as a woman and leader made her better at judging cases than a man would have been.³⁸³ Robert Garden and Henry Francis Fynn believed that she held the chiefship by virtue of her status as a 'faithful widow' – while the Fynns' other wives remarried. Resonating with this, Jennifer Weir has argued that prominent women in the Zulu kingdom assumed a 'symbolic celibacy' in order to lead military homesteads.

In addition to Vundlazi, this chapter has identified no less than seven other women chiefs in early colonial Natal and outside its then southern border, six of whom Theophilus Shepstone was seemingly aware. While Shepstone in 1849 described Vundlazi as "the superior chief [of the Izinkumbi], who is a determined woman,"³⁸⁴ by 1865, Vundlazi felt a need to refer to and 'excuse' her gender in her message to the government whilst at the same time insisting that her authority be respected by the local missionary. Quite whom was manipulating notions of female inadequacy to rule is unclear; but by 1867 the situation had become less malleable. In that year, when two female chiefs, the same Vundlazi, and Mantoto of the Amambotwe, indicated they wished to resign, Shepstone summarily dismissed women's abilities as leaders. While there is clearly scope to detail and understand this process better, it seems it can be confidently said that over the course of the 1860s and 1870s, the environment of indirect rule simply became one that was not conducive to female chiefship.

³⁸³ Duka Fynn's oral evidence in KC, Extract from the Fynn Papers no. 10, Letter from C.H. Karlson to Killie Campbell, 13 August 1952.

³⁸⁴ NEC, Vol. 3, Report by Shepstone, 20 May 1849, 98–101.

After the 1840s as the reconstitution of polities in Natal continued, the initial reliance on a scattering of women regents in a context of dislocation, perhaps, gave way to uniform male succession. The colonial administration became more entrenched, premised on a troubled “accommodation” between male colonial officials and male chiefs, and women’s structural subordination as perpetual minors became encoded in customary law; little opportunity or room was left for women to ascend to chiefship and remain there. However this was also a contradictory, uneven process. Towards Vundlazi’s old age in the 1880s long after her formal abdication, many of the Izinkumbi still continued to recognise her leadership; and colonial officials seemingly became increasingly dismissive of her, or considered her continued political support dangerous. Yet in 1882, the Shepstone and Lucas agreed to install Maria Ogle, the previous chief’s widow, as chief of the Izinkumbi; who had so little political support that she was unable to prevent her son undermining her rule and ultimately stepped down within seven months. Maria may have been the last female chief for decades.

The late nineteenth century experiences of Maria Ogle and Nomanga Clothier, prominent women among the Fynns, indicate too how the fortunes of women within this family were affected by what body of racialised law they fell under. Though she did not remain chief for long, Maria was able to inherit her husband’s farm because, ironically, his estate was administered under colonial and not native law. When considered against the experience of Nomanga Clothier – described by Duka as ranking as head of the whole family – it is striking to see the set of contradictions that emerge. The same administration that had promoted Maria’s chiefship and ownership of land simultaneously eroded the right of Nomanga, a woman related to her, of the Fynn ‘chiefly’ line but who fell under native law, to inherit her own plot of land and therefore to wield any real power. The Resident Magistrate indicated that, if the colonial state had not been appropriating and allocating land, Nomanga would have been heiress to a plot within Alfred County. The story of the Fynns and the Izinkumbi shows how, increasingly over the nineteenth century, contradictory, constrictive racial and gender categories were applied to a descent group first started by white traders, which had existed since the 1820s.

Of the eight women chiefs identified in this chapter, who remain to be researched in greater detail, three (Bekuni of the Bhaca, Vundlazi and Maria) were heads of chiefly homesteads begun by white traders. In addition, Nomanga or Eliza Clothier, Henry Francis Fynn’s eldest daughter, seems to have been viewed by her family members as a very important individual and a rightful heiress to at least some of Henry Fynn’s land. There is scope to examine why

this was in the Izinkumbi particularly. The gender ideology, view of chiefship and women's leadership, and patterns of inheritance within the Izinkumbi, would have been constituted not only of ways of life advocated to some extent by the Fynns, but a complex mesh of views and traditions that resonated with the different groups that made up this wider polity. It was in this context that women's leadership roles emerged in the first instance. How the Izinkumbi's approach to these issues coincided with and diverged with the ideas of neighbouring chiefdoms in Natal bears further investigation. Certainly, the histories of particular women amongst the Fynns and in Natal generally can, as Iris Berger has highlighted, "challenge static categories of individual and collective identity (race, class, gender, ethnicity) as well as dualistic definitions of such concepts as precolonial and colonial, resistance and collaboration, and public and private."³⁸⁵

In general, investigating the lives of female chiefs can help to elucidate what Benedict Carton, referring to present-day Zulu society, has called a "porous" patriarchy.³⁸⁶ It is hoped that Vundlazi's life and the other individuals highlighted here will open up discussion around these other 'exceptions' and contribute to a mapping out of women's opportunities for wielding power – as well as the ways in which patriarchy and the colonial state eroded these possibilities – in southern Africa.

³⁸⁵ Iris Berger, "African Women's History: Themes and Perspectives," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4:1 (2003): 20.

³⁸⁶ Benedict Carton, "Why is the 100% Zulu Boy so popular?" *Concerned African Scholars* 84 "The Politics of Jacob Zuma," ed. Sean Jacobs (Winter 2010): 36.

CONCLUSION

In all of these case studies, it is demonstrated that the actions of royal and other elite women could, on the one hand, fundamentally challenge, yet on the other hand crucially legitimate and maintain, structures of chiefly authority. Early colonial Natal saw the “resettlement” of a wide range of different clans and their “fragments” many of whom had experienced migrations and conflict. In this turbulent context chiefly elites and the commoners who supported them responded to a variety of imperatives: to secure leadership and succession, to grow chiefly homesteads, to secure and allocate land, and to re-accumulate cattle; and this both impacted upon and opened opportunities for women in these chiefly elites as they took part in this process. These case studies also point to a hypothesis that the impacts of colonialism seriously eroded women’s – including chiefly women’s – precolonial institutions and forms of autonomy and power, yet some women were also at times able to evade patriarchal strictures, by accessing new forms of colonial authority. Finally, they have shown that, in rare instances over nearly half a century, representatives of the colonial administration recognised, and even in one case articulated onto, the longstanding precolonial precedent of chiefs’ widows in southern Africa becoming chiefs as regents under particular circumstances.

The story of female chiefship in Natal is therefore contradictory, and needs to be further investigated.³⁸⁷ On the basis of this small but significant number of cases, and the literature reviewed in these chapters, it can however conclusively be said that an ‘exceptional’ customary space had existed in many precolonial southern African societies, primarily for chiefs’ widows, generally in the absence of a male heir, to take up the role of chief.

In the case of the Natal region from the 1830s, migrations and the deaths of chiefs created opportunities for some women to become the heads of chiefly homesteads and thus chiefs. However this could only take place where this solution was politically and ideologically acceptable for a particular polity. In some of the chiefdoms left without male adult heirs, particularly those like the Qwabe that had previously been very large and powerful and intended to realise their former glory again by building up herds and royal homesteads premised on the chief’s role as patriarch, female chiefship was not considered as a viable

³⁸⁷ This narrative has not addressed what became of influential women in Zulu politics up to and after 1879, which would form a crucial part of subsequent more comprehensive research.

option. In other instances, women were able to become leaders – either of the small “germ” of a clan comprising an extended chiefly homestead and a few followers, or in one case leader of a large paramountcy. When a colonial administration was first established in the early 1840s, there were in fact several female chiefs in and near Natal, and by 1865 these had possibly dwindled to two; the long-reigning “Queen of the uMthwalume” Vundlazi, and Mantoto the ruler of a much smaller polity, both of whom for different reasons indicated they wished to resign from their roles.

Seemingly, colonial officials did not always treat female chiefs vastly differently to male chiefs, except that they were more dismissive of their capabilities and more prone perhaps to ignore their chiefly jurisdiction.³⁸⁸ However on a larger scale the profoundly patriarchal nature of the system of indirect rule, and in particular the rigid codified system of customary law by the late nineteenth century, increasingly precluded these opportunities for women. Yet this process by which women chiefs ‘disappeared’ was uneven and contradictory; in 1882 colonial officials appointed a female chief over the Izinkumbi as a matter, they thought, of expedience, after her husband had died. It is possible that she, Maria Ogle, chief for seven months before she gave up the role due to her son’s attempts to usurp it, was the last woman to serve as chief in the region in the nineteenth century.

This issue raises wider comparisons that cannot be pursued fully here – for example there is the question of how female chiefship and its reception in colonial Natal compared with other colonies in terms of the attitudes of officials and Africans, and colonial administration. In Lesotho, as Marc Epprecht has shown, there was an increase in the numbers of women chiefs under colonial rule despite colonial officials’ objections to them. However female chiefship appears to have diminished over time in Natal. One reason for the difference is that female chiefs were, to some extent, a precolonial *institution* among the Basotho – and, into the twentieth century, the “*marena* [Basotho hereditary chiefs] held a remarkably fluid concept of custom which offered women opportunities denied by British expectations.”³⁸⁹ The Basotho *mafumabali* (the term by which these women were known)

³⁸⁸ Significantly, Marc Epprecht notes that colonial opposition to the institution of female chiefship after 1940 in Lesotho often manifested simply in colonial officials ignoring all propositions from Basotho chiefs that would secure the position and interests of the female chiefs or *mafumabali*. Colonial chauvinism regarding women leaders did also manifest in outright statements by officials – but there were less direct, more routine ways in which they expressed their disapprobation. See Marc Epprecht, *This Matter of Women is Getting Very Bad!: Gender, Development and Politics in Colonial Lesotho* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000), 189–195

³⁸⁹ Epprecht, *This Matter of Women*, 116.

and those men who supported them, were thus able to drive forward their interests and indeed widen the customary space for women to succeed to chiefly roles, even in the face of colonial officials who believed that women were not equal to the task of leadership.³⁹⁰ Africans located in Natal by the 1830s and 1840s had experienced a series of conflicts and migrations, and seemingly had a range of attitudes towards female leadership, demonstrated by the case studies in this thesis. It can be said that in early colonial Natal female chiefs, as probably in precolonial times, were not only accepted as leaders on some exceptional occasions after a chief's death, meeting an urgent need for leadership, but were in some instances strongly supported by their followers for decades. As this did not constitute an 'institution', however, female chiefship in Natal declined as polities reestablished themselves, female chiefs resigned, and an invasive system of indirect rule and codified law predicated on patriarchal hierarchy and women's perpetual minority impacted gender relations, particularly by the late nineteenth century.

This study's scope has not extended to investigating twentieth-century women's chiefship. However it provides an initial basis for further research into the trajectory of female chiefship and leadership in Natal. An important issue here is how African people in Natal, of different chiefdoms, have over time viewed women's political leadership, within patriarchal indirect rule and under Apartheid.

*If female chiefship did in fact disappear by 1882, where this study's narrative concludes, then Sibongile Zungu was indeed "the first female Zulu chief in more than a century."*³⁹¹ Zungu in 1991 at the age of 28 became chief over the KwaZulu-Natal district of Ngwelezana, after working at a nearby hospital. She was the widow of the district's previous chief and was chosen to succeed him by his parents instead of his half-brother who still attempted to both claim the chiefship and marry Zungu, via the levirate (*ukungena*). Despite this and stout opposition and indifference to a female chief in the

³⁹⁰ Epprecht, *This Matter of Women*, 109–120 and 189–195. Epprecht's emphasises the very wide variety of attitudes regarding gender among the *marena*, with some chiefs disapproving of female leaders, others seeing this as an important tradition that should be protected, and still others insisting that although women were inferior to men their leadership could be accepted because of their administrative capacity as chiefs.

³⁹¹ Liz Sly, "Female Zulu Chief Creates Oasis of Peace," *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1994, accessed July 29 2014, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-04-05/news/9404050328_1_zulu-inkatha-freedom-party-tolerance. For an account of Singobile Mabhena, a woman chief in 1990s Zimbabwe and the political opposition she faced, see Bjorn Lindgren, "Men Rule, but Blood Speaks: Gender, Identity and Kinship at the Installation of a Female Chief in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe" in *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, edited by Robert Morrell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001) 177–194.

district, Zungu reputedly won trust and managed to create a comparative peace and neutrality in Ngwelezana on the eve of the 1994 elections, when violence between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was at its height in surrounding districts. At present, an estimated 99% of chiefs in South Africa are men.³⁹² The number of female chiefs has increased since the early 1990s, but, it is reported that some live in fear of violent attacks from those who do not accept their authority and particularly their male rivals for the chiefship.³⁹³ It is hoped that this study, together with the rich scholarship to date on twentieth century chiefship under segregation and Apartheid, and southern African masculinities, can contribute to understanding the realities that have shaped women's leadership in the region from the 1830s to the present.

As noted, from the precolonial era, women who did so primarily assumed political leadership not initially in their own right or name, but as widows of chiefs. For many widowed women living in Natal by the 1840s, however, their status could be especially tenuous, particularly in the absence of kinship connections. Thus the opportunities and risks conveyed by widowhood varied greatly according to context. Depending on the circumstances of her chieftom, and the social standing of an individual woman, widowhood could imply a range of possibilities: ascension to the role of homestead head (in very exceptional cases), being married to a younger man (by the 1850s and 1860s) or entering into an *ukungena* marriage to one's deceased husband's brother (which Dalida Dube rejected in favour of mission station life).³⁹⁴ The available sources on Mbalasi and Dalida in particular suggest that royal widowhood in early colonial Natal could be a complex social category, embodying status and influence, and yet powerful social pressures and aspects of vulnerability. Evidence of the experiences of a number of individuals who connect to the studies in this thesis have emerged during research – especially in its closing stages – but could not be pursued. These point to the need for a social history of widowhood in Natal that considers in more detail for example customary legal frameworks and exemption from them.

A number of instances in which widows in colonial Natal took “exceptional” actions have been identified through this research but not expanded upon in this thesis. Such cases point

³⁹² “‘Extraordinary’ powers for chiefs” *City Press* January 21 2012, accessed July 29 2014, <http://www.citypress.co.za/news/extraordinary-powers-for-chiefs-20120121/>

³⁹³ Claire L. Bell, “South Africa’s Female Tribal Chiefs Often Rule in Fear,” *Time*, June 7, 2010. Accessed on 30 July 2014 <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1994210,00.html>

³⁹⁴ See discussion in Chapters 1 and 2.

to the potential for wider study of widowhood in Natal. For example, historian Vukile Khumalo, in his 2004 article discusses the upheavals brought to the American Board's Groutville mission station in the 1890s by a widow named Nozingqwazi who authored a petition to secure her land from sale.³⁹⁵

In addition, one example from the records of the SNA is that of Monica uZiginisela Mguni, the widow of chief Mguni of the Shangase who, in 1887 at the age of 50, took her two daughters – Bonisa Agnes and Lydia Nozicogo – to Oakford, the Roman Catholic mission station run at Inanda by Louis Mathieu, and attempted to get herself, Bonisa, and Lydia, exempted from “native law”. At the same time, her husband's brother, her legal Guardian, argued against this so as to ensure he would not lose his claim to their lobola cattle. Monica Mguni's actions led colonial officials to debate amongst themselves whether or not the terminology in the amended Law 11 of 1854 (intended to allow young women to gain exemption from “native law” so as to avoid being forced into unwanted marriages) could also allow for widows to be exempted from “native law” and avoid the control of customary male guardians.

Whether or not women could own cattle in their own right, as Chapter One explores, has been a point of contention in discussions of precolonial gender relations. Within this sample of cases, this study has drawn attention to specific instances of women owning cattle in early colonial Natal. These are concrete instantiations of the patterns of women's property ownership, noted in key nineteenth century sources for Natal and Zululand, which scholars have repeatedly pointed to.³⁹⁶ These cases also cumulatively support twentieth century arguments such as Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi's in 1961, attesting to some women's opportunities to own and inherit property prior to colonialism and prior to the imposition of codified customary law. It seems likely that instances both of society accepting women accumulating their own property in stock (for example as Dalida did), *and* instances of women's cattle being coveted (and claimed) by their male relatives, go as far back as Nozinja's time – the wife of Malandela and mother of Qwabe and Zulu.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ Vukile Khumalo, “Political Rights, Land Ownership and Contending Forms of Representation in Colonial Natal, 1860–1900,” *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 22 (2004): 109–148.

³⁹⁶ See Chapter One for a summation; David Welsh, Thomas McClendon, Keletso Atkins, and Jennifer Weir in particular have all pointed to one or more of the following: Henry Francis Fynn's 1852 evidence, Cetshwayo kaMpande's 1883 evidence, evidence from A.T. Bryant, and from the *James Stuart Archive*.

³⁹⁷ See Chapter One for a discussion of Nozinja, and the “founding myth” of the Zulu kingdom.

This study has considered only women who were able to hold property as members of chiefly families (Dalida, the royal Qwabe widows, and Vundlazi). It has not investigated other circumstances under which women could own or control cattle, even if only temporarily. Fynn's 1852 and Buthelezi's 1961 evidence indicate for example that it could also be socially accepted for a woman to own cattle if she had special medicinal or divining knowledge. This study has aimed, however, even with a limited number of examples, to develop a more detailed understanding than has hitherto appeared in the historiographical literature of *how* "chiefly" women could own property in colonial Natal, and the apparent limitations of cattle ownership for these women.

For instance, Dalida Dube, was able to 'hold' the cattle her husband (a chief) had left to their son after his death in 1837, and also add to this number another five cattle through growing and selling sorghum. However the then heir of the chiefly family, Mahlukana regent of the Qadi, proposed in 1849 that Dalida, of whom he was now customary guardian enter into an *ukungena* marriage and thereafter she moved to the mission station at least in part to avoid this. It was proposed in Chapter Two that both in 1849 and again in 1851 Mahlukana's aim was to have Dalida's cattle (which also comprised her own lobola) transferred to him. Dalida and her son, Ukakonina, subsequently worked to retain these cattle as Ukakonina's rightful inheritance. As evidence from the SNA archive revealed, this dispute re-emerged at multiple points in the mid-nineteenth century, until as late as 1877.

Regarding Mbalasi Makhanya, widow of the Makhanya chief Duze, it is suggested that one of her reasons for moving to the mission station of Newton Adams in 1836 was to secure an inheritance for her son Nembula. In another contrasting scenario, which Jeff Guy has described, the resuscitation of a shattered Qwabe royal house was possible in Natal partly through the cattle held by widowed Qwabe women that provided the new chief Musi, son of a junior chiefly house, with an inheritance, and, crucially, a means of marrying.³⁹⁸ A rereading of the SNA documents with a focus upon these and other prominent women in the Qwabe royal family surfaces important issues that the available evidence conceals, yet also points to: these are questions regarding the exact process by which women reclaimed these cattle after their husbands', father's and brothers' deaths; how the cattle were brought south by the early 1840s; and the respective involvement of both these *amakhosikazi* and

³⁹⁸ See Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising, War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 37–41; and Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 25–27.

the Qwabe *izinduna* in the decision to reconstitute the royal kraal – to which the cattle were returned. Ultimately, Dalida’s case may be contrasted with that of the Qwabe royal widows in the sense that the latter apparently gave up their cattle with a view to growing the homestead and prestige of the new Qwabe heir, while Dalida removed her cattle from the hands of the then Qadi heir, presumably at least partly in the interests of retaining the full inheritance for her own princely son.

During 1880–1881, when Vundlazi the former chief of the Izinkumbi polity had returned to the area of her former seat of authority and supporters were gathering around her again and rejecting the authority of the incumbent chief, George Fynn, the colonial Magistrate arranged for Fynn to give her possibly as many as ten cattle as a basis of wealth so that she would move south to Alfred County once again. Due to her political support, Vundlazi, it could be argued, was capable of holding chiefly authority to ransom in the Umthwalume area. At this time the 1878 Code of Native Law was in place which, though it defined women as perpetual minors, did provide for them to own property under exceptional circumstances.³⁹⁹ It seems that Vundlazi was treated as just such an exceptional case, and was able to return to Alfred County with a small herd. Vundlazi’s rule as a relatively independently influential and powerful female chief in her own right since she ruled for such a long period of time may be contrasted with that of the Qwabe royal widows and that of Dalida in the 1840s, where the primacy of male inheritance and cattle ownership was asserted. Notably, in Dalida’s case, Theophilus Shepstone supported this principle.⁴⁰⁰

In addition to cases of female chiefship, this study has focussed on other ways in which women in chiefly families could exert political influence, through, and in relation to, their sons or to younger male relatives in line for the chiefship. Heshepi kaPhakathwayo, Musi’s female cousin and technically senior to him in the chiefly line, for instance, seemingly put a seal of legitimation on his instalment as chief in the early 1840s. The actions of Meseni in subsequent decades, rebelling against his father Musi, would seem to point to his mother (Masimai) and sisters giving him key political support. Masimai and Meseni’s strategic alliance provides an instantiation in colonial Natal of the same pattern that Sean Hanretta notes for nineteenth-century Zulu society, that:

³⁹⁹ As the divergent experiences of Nomanga and Maria show, this work also raises questions regarding the creation and application of a legal framework for African women compared with that for white and Indian women. See Nafisa Essop Sheik “Colonial Rites: Custom, Marriage Law and the Making of Difference in Natal, 1830s–c.1910” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012) This is however not pursued further within the scope of this study.

⁴⁰⁰ See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion.

especially among high-ranking families, a wife could use her lineage alliances, in addition to her own status in relation to other wives, to affect the outcome of succession disputes. A woman's power as advocate for her son could, and did, threaten a husband's control over the reproduction of the homestead.⁴⁰¹

The Introduction and Chapter One noted several instances in which chiefly women in the broader southern Africa region (some of whom had previously been regents themselves) ultimately advised or ruled jointly with their sons. Chapter Three has detailed Vundlazi's role by the late 1880s as just such an "influential queen mother". Once more, it is suggested therefore that women's roles in processes of political succession in both precolonial and colonial contexts warrant more investigation. For example both the Qwabe case and evidence in the *James Stuart Archive* regarding succession struggles among the Cele under Shaka demonstrate that these struggles among sons often originated in disputes over, or were framed in terms of, which wife had been designated senior wife by the chief and therefore mother of the rightful heir.⁴⁰²

Chapter One demonstrated that historical research focusing on prominent women as "forgotten heroines" (which was typical of post-independence scholarship elsewhere in Africa) emerged in South African formal historiography only from the 1980s and has regained more ground since the 1990s.⁴⁰³ At present, women's roles in royalty politics are increasingly attracting scholars' attention from a range of different theoretical starting points. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni noted in 2005, for instance, the developing historiographic trend of research focussing on elite individuals ("notable, exceptional, heroic women,") which this thesis has summarised, and cautioned against writing only "elitist" histories.⁴⁰⁴

Indeed – despite the fact that most of the women discussed here were members of chiefly families, some of whom had opportunities for political influence and leadership, or ownership of property that other women (and some men) in their societies were denied –

⁴⁰¹ Hanretta, "Women and the Zulu State," 391, note 9. Hanretta considers that women's roles in chiefly succession struggles are an under-addressed area in literature on women's precolonial status.

⁴⁰² See Chapter One.

⁴⁰³ As explored in Chapter One, Sifiso Ndlovu has resurfaced the twentieth century contributions of isiZulu-speaking "nationalist" historians and intellectuals on prominent women, and highlights how discussion on such women has previously been "segregated." At present, as in the 1980s, discussions about prominent women and women's status in precolonial southeast Africa are fundamentally informed by many ideological currents including resurgent politicised ethnicity.

⁴⁰⁴ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Can Women's Voices be recovered from the Past? Grappling with the Absence of Women's Voices in Pre-Colonial History of Zimbabwe," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*, No. 2, (1), (Summer 2005), 1–16.

this thesis has also tried to point to experiences of marginality that could simultaneously extend to ‘royal’ women. Such women could still be subject to persecution and coercion by for example their families, and certainly by the colonial order. Ultimately, it is necessary to transcend the binaries and simplistic categories and distinctions that plague portrayals of prominent individuals – historically prominent or exceptional women have frequently been cast either as the ‘heroine’ or ‘victim’.⁴⁰⁵

Undoubtedly, the historiographical importance of histories of prominent women has become clearly established in the most recent interventions and explorations in the field. Most recently, in 2014, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, for example, has hailed Marieke Faber Clark and Pathisa Nyathi’s life of the Ndebele queen Lozikeyi Dlodlo, as “ground-breaking in the sense that it brings to light the neglected theme of gender in Ndebele historiography... it is the first book to conclusively establish the significance of gender within a society that has been studied as a military autocracy by many scholars.”⁴⁰⁶ Such works, and it is hoped to some extent this study, shift the historiographical perspective on chiefship and political processes to take women’s influential roles into account.⁴⁰⁷

Cherryl Walker acknowledged in 1990 that “to suggest women were oppressed in precolonial society takes one into [a] highly emotional debate on political priorities and research credentials.”⁴⁰⁸ The debate regarding women’s precolonial status does not presently have the highly politicised character it did in the 1980s and early 1990s,⁴⁰⁹ but neither has it been resolved. Chapter One has provided a detailed review of most of the key contributions to date on this issue; a decisive materialist understanding of southern African gender relations was advanced from the late 1970s, which posited that as a general rule women in southern Africa were (and are) structurally oppressed and subordinated as part of the structural control of their labour. This line of analysis has given way to a range of rich challenges and responses in the last ten years, many of which have emphasised

⁴⁰⁵ For a work that transcends this dichotomy, see Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington, In, Indiana University Press, 2011)

⁴⁰⁶ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Lozikeyi Dlodlo Queen Of The Ndebele: ‘A Very Dangerous And Intriguing Woman’”, review of *Lozikeyi Dlodlo Queen Of The Ndebele: ‘A Very Dangerous And Intriguing Woman’*, by Marieke Faber Clarke with Pathisa Nyathi, *South African Historical Journal* 66:1 (2014): 196.

⁴⁰⁷ See Helen Bradford’s outline of the need for this shift in narrative, still much needed: Helen Bradford, “Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c. 1806–70,” *The Journal of African History*, Volume 37, Issue 03, (November 1996), 351–370.

⁴⁰⁸ Walker, “Women and Gender,” 28.

⁴⁰⁹ See Hanretta, “Women and the Zulu State”, 390.

gender roles and relations as more malleable, variable, shifting over time, and socially constructed.

In the midst of this debate, scholars remain divided on what conclusions may reasonably be drawn from the available evidence, on issues relevant to this debate. There is disagreement for example on the rigidity, fluidity or historical construction of the gendered division of labour; as well as on whether or not the Zulu *amakhosikazi* in particular were all necessarily childless and beyond the age of having children when they held power. It has been argued here that the historiographical debate on women's precolonial status awaits comprehensive more empirical studies that can consider in detail the evidentiary base and the theoretical lenses of the contributions thus far, and, indeed, go beyond these.

This debate on gender relations often revolves fundamentally around how to think about apparent 'exceptions' to very broad patterns of gender roles and the degree of importance and attention historians should give to such 'exceptions'. Women leaders and socially prominent women, it has been argued here, cannot simply be dismissed as "exceptions that prove the rule [of female subjugation]"; they are illustrative of aspects of their societies, and arguably of the flexibility of gender ideology. Yet at the same time these were certainly not models other women could easily or freely emulate; women's broader experience and women's 'power' cannot be generalised based purely on the lives of elite women. Such exceptions indicate the "porousness" of patriarchy and men's social dominance, and point to the need for deeper, more complex understandings of their societies: Benedict Carton recently wrote "Zulu patriarchy [does not] confine all women to well-worn paths of marginalization. Rather, it is a porous institution embodying gender partnerships as well as contested negotiations between the sexes and generations."⁴¹⁰ Carton's statement refers to the present. However it may also be useful as a framework for understanding gender in the past, including in nineteenth and early twentieth century southern Africa. .

Despite the important beginnings that have been made from various theoretical positions, the lack of extensive empirical research regarding precolonial gender relations continues to raise serious challenges too for analysing gender politics in colonial Natal. Ultimately, there is a need to more closely examine events within different chiefdoms in Natal in the early colonial period, as one fruitful way to add to investigations of precolonial gender relations

⁴¹⁰ Benedict Carton, "Why is the '100% Zulu Boy' so popular?" November 2009, accessed March 2010 <http://concernedafricascholars.org/why-is-the-100-percent-zulu-boy-so-popular/>

and consider colonial impacts upon gender relations. This includes how women exiting the Zulu kingdom from the 1820s onwards experienced this process. This would require exploring sources in imaginative ways and also allow for a history more sensitive to the possible range in indigenous precolonial gender relations, as well as differences and similarities in gender relations between chiefdoms, and possible contestation and negotiation around gender relations within a given chiefdom. While chiefly women's roles in politics in the nineteenth century are attracting greater attention, there is a need to situate the social acceptability of individual women's rule in terms of their own polities, rather than simply connecting such women to generalisations about women's status in the region.

Many of the cases explored here, in different ways, illustrate the pressure placed upon structures of kinship, upon chiefly succession, and the material and ideological difficulties of living in Natal in the 1840s and 1850s; and how these were experienced by women in chiefly families. There is still not only scope, but a need for research that explores the past experiences and lives of women in southern Africa. For, as Elizabeth Eldredge pointed out twenty years ago, "It will be impossible for scholars to derive accurate theories and generalizations about women in African history until there have been many more case studies of African women."⁴¹¹ Though the gendered history of this region has grown greatly since then, this statement is in many respects still true. It is hoped therefore that this thesis will contribute to a sense of both the possibilities and the limitations that existed in Natal for individual women before, during and after the imposition of colonial rule.

⁴¹¹ Elizabeth A. Eldredge, "Women in Production: The Economic Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho," *Signs* 16:4 (Summer, 1991), 707–731, 711.

Appendix

Detailed note on the primary and secondary sources used in the study

My exploration of the lives of the women on whom the thesis focuses, especially Mbalasi, Dalida, and the Qwabe princesses, has been drawn from both secondary sources (some read in new ways) and those located within the archival collections of the (Killie) Campbell Collections, and the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository.

Works drawn on to contextualise the archival information are discussed further below. However among other sources referred to throughout the thesis the work of Jeff Guy, John Lambert, and Michael Mahoney on colonial Natal have particularly informed the contextual framing of the events in each case study.⁴¹²

Regarding Mbalasi, D.H. Reader's seminal anthropological work on the Makhanya dating from 1966, and Magema M. Fuze's *The Black People: and Whence They Came*, originally published in 1922, assist in positioning Mbalasi and her son within the chiefly family, and in identifying the movements of the Makhanya.⁴¹³ Ross Shiels' 1963 Honours thesis, *Newton Adams, 1835–1851*, provides key context as well as information on Mbalasi and Nembula.⁴¹⁴

My primary research on Mbalasi and Nembula draws on the 'Nembula Papers', a manuscript collection housed at the Campbell Collections in Durban. This includes a letter from Mbalasi's grandson, Ephraim Silas Henry Nembula, to Killie Campbell, written c. 1940; an account of Mbalasi's life sent to collector Killie Campbell from Mbalasi's descendant, P. Lawrence Khanyile in 1957; and Nembula's own evidence before the *Natal Native Commission* in 1882 is also considered.

⁴¹² Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005); Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013); Michael R. Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: the Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012); John Lambert, "Chiefship in Early Colonial Natal, 1843–1879," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21:2 (June 1995): 269–85; John Lambert, "Africans in Natal, 1880–1899: Continuity, change and crisis in a rural society," (PhD diss., Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1986); John Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal* (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 1995).

⁴¹³ D.H. Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition: the Makhanya of southern Natal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966)

⁴¹⁴ Ross Shiels, "Newton Adams, 1835–1851" (Hons diss., University of Natal, 1963); Myra Dinnerstein, "The American Board Mission to the Zulu, 1835–1900" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1971).

The missionary correspondence relating to Mbalasi and Nembula is located in the records of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) volume 15.4, on microfilm, at the Campbell Collections; and quoted in Arthur Christofersen's 1967 history of the ABCFM, *Adventuring with God: the Story of the American Board Mission in South Africa*. The Nembulas' links through marriage to other mission station families were ascertained by considering "The Missionary Herald" for May 1847; and Maynard. W. Swanson's 1982 compiling of *The Views of Mablathi: Writings of A. W. G. Champion, a Black South African, with a Biography of A. W. G. Champion by R. R. R. Dblomo*. There is unfortunately very little direct information on Mbalasi herself. The most immediate contemporary sources on her life (Newton Adams' letters to the ABCFM) provide some basic observations about her. Her descendants' twentieth-century written accounts of her provide key information such as the name she was known by within her family (Somgeza), and the suggestion that she (like Dalida Dube) originally lived near a number of Duze's other widows and experienced some form of social persecution. This sits in an interesting tension with Newton Adams' contemporary statements regarding her social prominence and influence.

Chapter Two's discussion of Dalida Dube is especially indebted to the work of Heather Hughes and Shula Marks.⁴¹⁵ Heather Hughes' 2011 biography of John L. Dube, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC*, provides a vivid and definitive account of the formation of the Dubes as a Christian family through Dalida's choices and actions. Marks (1975) and Hughes discuss Dalida's decision to move to the mission station in relation to James Dube's important diplomatic role in the relationship between the Qadi and the mission station. My chapter places Dalida at the centre of this narrative, revisiting evidence explored by Hughes, including missionary Stephen Pixley's communication to the Acting SNA in 1877; and John Langilabalele Dube's 1891 publication, *A Familiar Talk upon my Native Land and Things Found There*.

The chapter then adds to Hughes' work with my own original research in the records in the

⁴¹⁵ Shula Marks, "The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L. Dube of Natal," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, No. 2 (April 1975); Heather Hughes, "Politics and society in Inanda, Natal: the Qadi under Chief Mqhawwe, c. 1840-1906," (PhD diss., University of London, 1995); Heather Hughes, "Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, No. 3, Special Issue for Shula Marks (September 2001); Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2011).

SNA, looking at the communications of L. Mesham (Resident Magistrate Alexandra County) with Theophilus Shepstone to 1851, regarding Dalida's intention to remarry a Christian man on the mission station, Qadi chiefly objections to this; and the positions taken in the ensuing negotiations by Dalida, the Qadi regent Mahlukana, the missionary, the magistrate, and the SNA. The chapter draws also on Mqhawe kaDabeka's evidence before the Natal Native Commission in 1882; and the brief history of the AZM contained in the missionary pamphlet, William Ireland's 1886 *Jubilee of the American Mission in Natal*.

Exploration of the events of the 1840s in which Hetshepi kaPhakathwayo and her Qwabe aunts were involved, draws on the work of Michael R. Mahoney and Jeff Guy, supplemented with evidence drawn directly from the records of the SNA regarding the 1892 succession dispute between Musi and his son Meseni. The 1892 testimonies give insight into Musi's succession as chief in the 1840s, and the role of royal Qwabe women in the process of *ukwvusa*.⁴¹⁶ This study is able to raise additional questions around royal women's roles in succession, and their ownership of cattle in the 1840s, reading the SNA evidence through a gender lens.

For the period up to her becoming chief in 1838, Chapter Three's discussion of Vundlazi MaSenca relies mainly on the invaluable research of Shirron Bramdeow, Shelagh Spencer and Julie Pridmore.⁴¹⁷ However the bulk of this chapter, considering the period from 1838 to 1890, contributes original research on Vundlazi. This includes archival material from the records of the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) in Pietermaritzburg, which include Vundlazi's statements to the colonial government conveyed verbally through her emissaries, and apparently translated and transcribed by officials; the recorded oral testimony of an *induna* (Mvuyana of the amaNdunge, which was a subject chiefship of the Izinkumbi); and various Resident Magistrates' communications over 1880–1883 with the SNA concerning Maria Fynn (nee Ogle), the Fynn chiefs' succession, and the accretion of political support around Vundlazi in 1881.

Information on the size and location of the Izinkumbi subject chiefdoms and homesteads is

⁴¹⁶ Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*, 37–41; Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*, 25–27.

⁴¹⁷ Shelagh Spencer, *British Settlers in Natal 1824–1857: A Biographical Register (Eagle–Fynivie)*, (Durban: University of Natal Press, 1992); Shirron Bramdeow, "Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community in Natal, 1824–1988," (MA diss., University of Natal, 1988). Bramdeow's thesis provides a rich narrative, drawing especially on oral evidence from the Fynn family collected in the 1980s, and includes information on Vundlazi.

located in volumes II and III of the *Fynn Papers* manuscripts located in the Killie Campbell Collections,⁴¹⁸ and in the evidence of both the missionary Lewis Grout and of Henry Francis Fynn given in 1852 in the *Proceedings of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Past and Present State of the Kafir in the District of Natal, 1852–1853*. More immediate physical descriptions of Vundlazi and her court are drawn from volumes I – III of the *Garden Papers*, also stored in the Killie Campbell Collections – the manuscript diary of the traveller and sketch artist Robert Garden who moved through Natal in the early 1850s in the company of Henry Francis Fynn, and who stayed with Vundlazi. The Izinkumbi and Vundlazi’s involvement in the collection of troops for the 1851 “Zulu Contingent” (discussed in Chapter 3) is found in Volume III of the Fynn Papers, and in the Natal Executive Council records (Blue Book) for that year.

The same chapter draws also on published contemporary sources such as A.T. Bryant’s *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, and Sir George E. Cory (ed.), *The Diary of Rev. Francis Owen, MA, Missionary with Dingaan in 1837–38*. Evidence concerning the other female chiefs mentioned in the chapter is located in the 1890 Natal Legislative Council’s *Correspondence Relating to Granting to Natives in Natal of Documentary Tribal Titles to Land* (containing information gathered by the early 1860s on chiefdoms and their leaders in and outside of Natal), the Fynn Papers, and the Garden Papers. Information on Nomanga (also known as Eliza) Clothier is from Spencer, and from Bramdeow, who cites an unspecified SNA source.

As noted in the thesis, far more research lies ahead for historians interested in the issues and personalities raised here.

⁴¹⁸ The Fynn Papers volumes I considered were typescripts stored at the Killie Campbell Collections, and included Fynn’s correspondence over 1851–1852.

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1/6/5

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VII. INTERVIEWS

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