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“The Battlefields of KwaZulu Natal and the
Revision of South African History.”

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The Battlefields of KwaZulu-Natal and the Revision of South African History

James von Geldern

Blacks, British, Boers . . . and blood; the history of our troubled country is steeped in the stuff, as Africans fought one another, the Boers fought the British, and both fought the Africans. There are, sadly, few moments in our past of which we can be jointly proud as a nation.¹

*T*hus begins *The Reader's Digest History of South Africa: The Real Story* (1989), the first and most widely read revision of South African history to appear under apartheid. Lamenting the absence of moments of shared pride, the editors of the volume saw their contribution to be a revision of the past to provide such moments. Yet first they had to rediscover history, to write history where the slate had been intentionally wiped clean. Just as the 19th century Boer pioneers, the *voortrekkers*, pushed their way into the present KwaZulu-Natal, claiming it to be empty of man and civilization, the apartheid history of South Africa had been written on a blank and seemingly virgin tablet. Though subject to contestation within the white community, the narrative served to legitimize and reinforce white rule. It told of enlightened intervention in a dark and benighted hinterland, the inscription of civilization over savagery and unsettled lands. Driven by the British imperialists and led forward into the hinterland by God, the Boers came upon the rich veld inhabited by naught but the cruel Zulu, who succumbed to the superior arms and strategies of the Europeans. This narrative, passed along in oral histories, recorded in school textbooks, and frozen in the white marble of the Voortrekker Monument, survived many generations and retellings. It served as a myth of origin and mission for the Afrikaans-speaking white population and was, in fact, the sole history of the South African republic.

There is, of course, some debate over how much revision the voortrekker legend needs. The most radical suggestion, made in the months after the changeover of power and bandied about in the conversations of white residents of KwaZulu-Natal, was to melt down the sixty-four bronze wagons of the famous Blood River Monument. This,

too, would have left a gap in history. More effective strategies questioned how history was told, and how it legitimized the presence of the settlers in the interior of South Africa. In particular, revisionists examined the ways in which the African populations of the country were marginalized from their own history, and how their own struggles and battles during the 19th century were narrated in apartheid historiography.

The present essay will look at two conflicts at the heart of South African history. The first is the famous Battle of Blood River, which took place outside the present town of Dundee in western KwaZulu-Natal in 1838. This was one of the first military encounters between Africans and the Boer pioneers moving into the interior, which ended in total victory for the white settlers. The deeply religious Boers ascribed the victory not to their superior weaponry but to the agency of God, which reinforced their determination to dominate the African peoples. The second bloody if less decisive encounter took place much later, during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, on the slopes of Isandlwana, where a contingent of 20,000 Zulu warriors surprised and destroyed an encampment of British soldiers. Few of the British soldiers survived. Yet African soldiers of the Natal Native Contingent succeeded in evading their pursuers and reached the reinforced mission church at Rorke's Drift ten miles away, which was successfully defended that same evening against a large detachment of the same Zulu formation.

These battles force themselves onto the attention of anyone narrating South African history, and are particularly demanding of those today who seek a pan-South African consciousness based on reconciliation. They offer stories of conflict and dominance, not of reconciliation; and the voices telling the tales often refuse to acknowledge the presence of others in the formative moments of the country. Yet there is no South African narrative of origin without them. These great battles brought South Africa into being as a political and social entity. There is little way to speak of the formation of South African state and society, or to narrate the relations between races and ethnic groups, without referring back to the events. Before the Boers intruded into the interior, there was no South Africa—neither a proto-African entity nor an appendage of the British Empire. Any history to be at the heart of

the nation-building program must deal with this impediment to reconciliation.

The settler myth in South Africa is founded, as it is in the United States, on the notion of an uncivilized frontier, which is imagined to be at once peopled and unpeopled. The unspoiled frontier imbued the settlers with a sense of divine intervention; and yet the confrontation with the peoples there gave them a sense of legitimacy won in struggle. As the voortrekkers moved into the interior in the year 1838, they encountered native resistance in a series of battles. The culmination of these skirmishes was the famous Battle of Blood River, fought in December and resulting in total victory for the settlers. From that moment on, whites were able to advance into the interior with greatly diminished resistance. Few moments in South African history are so encrusted with mythology. White and black would agree on the centrality of the event to the history, though not on its reading. Different though the recountings of the battle are, more different still are the contexts in which the battle is framed. This concerns most of all the nature of the untouched interior space.

The history of the interior in its apartheid telling allowed for a double erasure of the veld space, for the removal of two cultures from the future frontier in preparation for the arrival of white Europeans. The thrust of the apartheid narrative was to delegitimize the cultures that preceded white settlement. The first culture to be removed was the most savage of all, the cannibal culture that according to some tellings was a permanent fixture of the region, in fact, even a representative culture. Local historical societies are prominent in telling this tale. The renowned Talana Museum in Dundee is a museum of local culture, meaning the culture of the Natal region. Located on a turn-of-the-century homestead, it has extensive exhibits on the Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer Wars; white domestic culture of the late 19th century; and mining culture and history up until the present. It has mannequin exhibits of two African cultures, the Bushmen of the Cape peninsula and the Zulu, complete with domestic and military implements. Alongside them is an extensive explanation of the cannibal cultures discovered and destroyed by the early 18th century Zulu incursion. Local farmers, encouraged by the supposed discovery of cannibal remains in a cave in 1961, organize private "cannibal hikes" on their property.² Removed from historical context (in particular the exceptionally severe droughts of 1807 to 1810 and 1820 to 1823), cannibalism becomes an inherent feature of local African culture.³

More central to the tale and more problematic for African accounts, above all to the Zulu, is the so-called *mfecane*. European pioneers arriving in the interior found a devastated human geography, with signs of large-scale killing and migration. If they felt that this was a territory open to new settlement, it was only because some mysterious hand had cleared the previous inhabitants out. This mysterious hand, as became evident, belonged to the Zulu, led by their chief Shaka. As did so many European colonizers, the Boers experienced and understood their native encounters in an ahistorical framework. Customs and circumstances that were historically determined, and often of recent origin, were described by their first white observers as eternal attributes of unchanging clan formations. This left the Boer settlers unprepared for their encounter with the Zulu, since they came into the region at a moment of intense historical development.

The decades prior to white settlement had seen the consolidation of what would be called the Zulu kingdom under the leadership of Shaka. Once disparate tribes that had been driven into proximity by population pressures were conquered and united under the Zulu aegis, and a new system of military training spurred the growth of a large army. Their power expanded to the south and west, where new groups were encountered, including the amaHlubi, the amaNgwane, who came to rest beneath the mountains upcountry, the amaChunu and the abaThembu, who settled along the middle Thukela, and the amaQadi at the coast. Some of these populations were incorporated into the growing political body while others fled. The path of flight went through other populated areas, leading to a chain of armed conflicts between fugitive and settled populations. If the Zulu accounting is rare, it is because the *mfecane* places them in the uncomfortable role of imperial conqueror precisely at the advent of their own conquest by the whites. Thus, it has been left to the white South Africans to narrate this story. The context of cannibalism and the *mfecane* makes the voortrekkers into two seemingly contrary, but equally positive historical agents. First, it introduces them into virgin territory that was open, rich, and beautiful. Second, it makes them only the last of the conquerors of the territory, distinguished by their enlightenment and mildness.

Blood River was the last of a series of battles that took place throughout 1838, as the voortrekkers turned west and into the interior. Each skirmish, as the telling goes, found an embattled *laager* of Europeans staving off the brutal and seemingly unjustified attacks of the

Zulu. The final conflict of the year, decisive not only in securing the lives and lands of the early voortrekker bands but in setting the future tone of relations, took place at Blood River on December 16, 1838. In the most celebratory versions, whites have told a tale of African barbarity and perfidy, and the ultimate triumph of European power by dint of perseverance and the grace of God.

The apartheid narration of the story, whether frozen in the marbles of the Voortrekker Monument, filmed in such classics of South African cinema as *Die Voortrekkers (Winning a Continent)* (1916),⁴ or reenacted in the rituals of the Day of the Vow (December 16), features not only the victory of arms, but the Zulu perfidy preceding it. In this narrative, Dingaan, chief of the Zulu, signed a pact with the Boer leader Piet Retief that granted land to the settlers. Yet this was only a ruse, for at the conclusion of the signing, Dingaan ordered his warriors to slaughter the Boer delegation. A fictional version, told in *Marie*, H. Rider Haggard's famous Allan Quatermain novel, goes thus:

For some time—ten minutes, I dare say—the dancing and beer-drinking went on. Then Dingaan rose from his chair and shook the hand of Retief warmly, bidding him “Hamba gachle,” that is, Depart gently, or in peace. He retreated towards the gate of the labyrinth, and as he went the Boers took off their hats, waving them in the air and cheering him. He was almost through it, and I began to breathe again.

Doubtless I was mistaken. After all, no treachery was intended.

In the very opening of the gate Dingaan turned, however, and said two words in Zulu which mean: “Seize them!”

Instantly the warriors, who had now danced quite close and were waiting for these words, rushed upon the Boers.⁵

Andries Pretorius, another voortrekker called upon to lead the pioneers and avenge the murder, claimed to possess a copy of the pact, which served as a banner for his commando unit. The almost six hundred man band marched for the Zulu capital, Umgungundlovu, in late November. On arriving in Waschbank in mid-December, the commandos pledged that if God granted them victory, they would consecrate the day and keep it holy. They made contact with groups of Zulu warriors and on the fourteenth of December, came to the site of what is today Blood River, ideally situated to stand and face the Zulu army. The voortrekkers awaited the Zulu attack, which began on December

16, 1838. Their cannons were loaded with pieces of metal that cut to pieces the Zulu regiments, who then took shelter in the riverbed, where they were slaughtered. Some 3,000 Zulus were killed; the voortrekkers suffered three wounded. The pact between the Boers and Zulu, so treacherously broken, served as mirror to the Vow, sworn upon the plain of the Blood River.

The flight of the Boers to the interior and their search for freedom from the British had given them fifty years of relative independence from the Empire. This came to an end with the discovery of vast mineral and metal resources, which attracted the attention of the British Empire. As had so often been true in the past, the Empire advanced slowly, forming alliances with native factions, pitting them against one another, and then betraying erstwhile allies once they had served their purpose. What made the telling of the story so piquant in South Africa was the white tellers who controlled public discourse for so long. If the reigning account of the conflicts of 1838 cast the Zulu in the role of the base savage, incapable of civilized sentiments such as honor and dignity, the tale of 1879 cast the Zulu as the noble native, incapable of withstanding the foul machinations of the empire. That the Boers themselves would be attacked by these same forces within a year, a trauma repeated two decades later in the Anglo-Boer War, made the rhetoric all the more important. Preceding immediately the bitter conflict between British and the Boers — the so-called First War of Independence — the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 placed the old antagonists, the Boer and the Zulu, in a position of odd equivalence. Conquerors were now in the position of the colonized.

British interest in the interior rose in the late 1870s, drawn by the discovery of vast diamond resources and a desire to consolidate imperial dominion. Tensions culminated in the 1877 annexation of the South African Republic by the British Empire. The Boer population found itself once again threatened, and would soon embark upon twenty years of war. Yet the first armed encounters of the Empire were against the Zulu, who represented a diminished but still significant military force. Magnifying a series of border incidents into a Zulu threat, the British issued an ultimatum to the Zulu King Cetshwayo in December 1878, prelude to the invasion of January 1879. Three British columns under the overall command of Lord Chelmsford advanced rapidly into Zulu territory, so that by January 22, military forces in several locations were in close proximity to the Zulu. The first encounter took place by the rock pinnacle of Isandlwana, resulting in the annihili-

lation of the British detachment of twelve hundred men. As the tale was told by South African historians and relayed through popular culture by a variety of mediators, the savage fury of the concentrated Zulu impi swept aside the brave British. There were many tales of British heroism to be told; in fact, the defeat resulted in one of the most lavish awardings of Victoria Crosses known to the British Army. Most heroic of all were the men who managed to flee and warn the British outpost at Rorke's Drift. Although the Battle of Isandlwana resulted in a defeat that shook the British Empire and lodged itself in South African mythology, equally important battles, including the battle at Khambula, resulted in the defeat and demoralization of the Zulu forces. The campaign was very quickly over. The mission at Rorke's Drift is still a tourist site, yet Khambula can scarcely be found on a tourist map, nor mention heard in South African retellings of the story.

Historical revision is a constant process, instigated by the discovery of new facts, and by the development of new agendas for storytellers. The end of apartheid in South Africa and the advent of black rule in the country has provoked a critical reexamination of the past, yet it has proven that some moments are more resistant than others to revision. Certainly, this has been the case with the Battle of Blood River, with its uncontested narrative of white supremacy. The site still stands as a monument, with sixty-four bronze wagons circled in the commando laager, and a stone tablet in the middle still announcing the sacred vow. Some say that if the site once symbolized Boer grit and perseverance. It now represents stubbornness in the face of historical reality. Even more powerful a testament to the historical moment is the massive Voortrekker Monument, built outside Pretoria in 1949, and standing untouched to this day. Set high above the city, the monument narrates the seizure of the interior lands in the way that most fully legitimates white rule. It holds the history of God's will frozen in marble around the interior. The famous friezes tell the story of the trek, starting with the model Boer community that made it, the cruel setbacks that the pioneers endured, and the savage Zulu who attacked the pioneers unprovoked and massacred them. Highlights of the panorama include the first encounters of Boer and Zulu; tour guides relate the savage customs of the tribe, embodied in the frieze by the servant of the king whose cupped hands served as spittoon. Battle scenes feature the wild Zulu hordes throwing themselves on the entrenched Boer positions, helpless in the face of European cool-headedness and technology. Tour guides pause with particular relish

before the frieze showing Boer women calmly shooting a chain of Zulu warriors fording the river.

The monument is bound to the Blood River complex by its moment of origin, the vow sworn by the embattled pioneers on December 16, 1838, and commemorated every December 16th since. The tomb of Pretorius, deep in the bowels of the monument, is illuminated by a ray of sun once a year on that day. These are all anchors fixed in the past. Even in post-apartheid days, that ray of sun still illuminates Pretorius, and the monument still seems to hold the same meaning it did for many of its visitors. The day of the covenant and the places that it sanctified are still the focal point of the monument, even now that December 16 has been declared the Day of Reconciliation. The massive stone monument and its marble narrative are inert in the face of revision, a non-dialogic tale built of friezes. Blood River is still a site where resolute Boer nationalists of the Volksfront or even the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging can gather for their celebrations.⁶ All the divisions inherent in the site and its history were evident in 1998, when the Inkatha Freedom Party-led government of KwaZulu-Natal unveiled its "counter-monument" across the river from the site. Opened on December 16, the day featured two entirely separate celebrations. Although the Afrikaners had no objections to the monument, the chair of the Foundation for Blood River expressed the sentiments of many when he said that because of the different histories, there was no way a single function could be held to mark December 16. "Two different cultures are involved." ANC officials protested as well, claiming that the new monument was being used for sectarian purposes.⁷

The myth of Blood River has survived the undermining of its factual foundation. Many historians doubt that the putative pact between Retief and Dingaan ever existed, the violation of which justified the cruelty of the vengeance. Others point out that the sacred vow may well never have taken place. Yet others question whether it was the savage nature of the Zulu that caused the disastrous relationship between Boer and native, when the Europeans had similar dealings with other very different native groups, such as the Khosa peoples.

Things stand very differently with the narrative of Isandlwana. The tale has always been more open to retelling, and always the site of many voices long before 1994, and it continues to be long after. A visit

to the battle site gives no indication of the contestation. Deep in the heart of the Zulu Reserve, accessible by miles of dirt road, the rocky field at the foot of Black's Koppie still bears the same British monuments erected early in the century celebrating the heroism of the British dead. Several monuments stand on the site, but most eloquent are the white stone cairns strewn about the battlefield where the British made their stand and fell. None of these monuments has been touched now that the historical preserve has passed to the control of the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government. In fact, nothing has been added, perhaps because the meager monuments are so overwhelmed by the vast landscape surrounding them.

The revision has taken place in the retelling of the story, and what is surprising is the degree to which revisions coming from various parts of South African society concur in their strategies. Three versions of the tale of Isandlwana, each in its own way representing a prominent voice in society, bear examination. The first will be the *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa* (1989), the most prominent and controversial revision of history to be published in apartheid South Africa. The second will be the contemporary musical ZULU! (full title: *The Zulu: The Battle of Isandlwana: The Epic Story of King Cetshwayo ka Mpande*), written and directed by Mbongeni Ngema, performed in the Johannesburg Market Square Theater, and soon to tour the world. Finally, we will listen to the story in the words of Steve Rattray, a local historical guide based at the Fugitive's Drift Lodge, a site involved in the Battle of Isandlwana. Rattray is a white South African born and raised in the territory around Dundee, whose clientele at the lodge is predominantly white and wealthy. Although most of the guests at the lodge are foreigners, his work is well known to local whites, and he is regarded by them to be the leading teller of the tale.

Isandlwana represents all the interpretative dynamics of the South African narrative, few of which are present in the story of Blood River. There are stories of bravery and treachery on both sides. Blunders and stratagems were devised by the leaders of both, and the tale allows for the Zulu and white tellers of the tale to imagine themselves as the victims of imperial onslaught, ignoring for the moment their own colonizing histories. The treatment of Isandlwana in the *Reader's Digest History* suggests why the battle was a more suitable candidate for revision. Blood River, as the history pointed out and questioned, was based on two myths fundamental to apartheid:

the popular view of Bible-clutching Boers taking their righteous revenge against the Zulu who had wickedly murdered one of their leaders, Piet Retief, after ceding to him vast areas of their land in a document that modern researchers believe never existed. Even if it had, could the Zulu King Dingane, reared in a society based on community ownership of land, really have understood what he was signing?

Yet another version of the same historical attitude would have us believe that the land claimed by the Voortrekkers, particularly on the highveld, was empty, having been depopulated during years of warfare as the Zulu kingdom struggled to assert itself in what is now Natal.⁸

Isandlwana brings to the fore a different set of villains—the British, in particular the commander of the campaign, Lord Chelmsford. The absolute confidence that Chelmsford brought to his encounters with the Zulu and Boer embodied the arrogance of the British Empire, and Chelmsford has devolved into a buffoon figure in many South African accounts of the campaign. In the production of *ZULU!*, Chelmsford alone came in for an exclusively unsympathetic account, played with particular relish by a black actor in high comic style. Oddly enough, Chelmsford is usually contrasted to the positive figure of Major Anthony Durnford, commander at Isandlwana, who fought bravely to the end, and is credited with the famous final command to his men: “Fix bayonets and die like British soldiers do.”

The narrative tradition of apartheid South Africa devoted a great deal of attention to British strategies and maneuvers at Isandlwana, and very little to the Zulu. Savage customs, such as tearing open the bodies of the enemy, receive considerably more attention.⁹ Revisionist versions use Chelmsford’s folly to represent the Zulu as a strategically deployed military force. The howling savages of the Voortrekker Monument, who dumbly throw themselves on the modern weaponry of the Europeans regardless of their own horrible losses, are replaced by wise and deliberate military planners. In *ZULU!*, the ghost of the king Ceteshwayo is placed center stage over the scene of the conflict, surveying it from an objective distance and explaining the course of the battle. The figure explains to the audience the “buffalo horns” pincer movement devised first by Shaka, and deployed successfully at Isandlwana. Thus, the distance embodied by the stage placement of the figure and by his narrative of the battle afford the Zulu leader a rational discourse unavailable to the buffoon figure Chelmsford. The revisionist strategy is made explicit by the local guide Rattray, who begins his

narration of the battle with the phrase “In this age of reconciliation it is time for us to acknowledge . . .,” going on to describe the Zulu battle strategy in great detail, and making it the source of the Zulu victory.¹⁰

The narrative stance of South African tellers of the Isandlwana tale suggests much of its power. In the Market Square production of ZULU!, there is a revisionist fervor, an unjustified insistence that this story has been neglected that suggests how the battle has been narrated through the prism of the present. In fact, Isandlwana has always been given a prominence in tellings of the Anglo-Zulu War that goes beyond its actual significance. When the white South African Rattray tells the story, it is as a rich source of local lore mined from both white and Zulu sources. Rattray’s story devotes considerable time to establishing his rights to the folkloric voice. As is often the case for Natal whites of his generation, Rattray grew up alongside the Zulu boys of his district, speaking their language. Referring to long conversations with Zulu elders conducted in their language, and often citing those elders in their own language before he provides the English, Rattray weaves a variety of voices into his narrative. Ignoring the implications of appropriating the Zulu voice, he cuts back and forth between Zulu and English accounts. This allows him to demonstrate the full power of the Zulu strategy, the folly of Chelmsford’s invasion plan, and the heroism of warriors on both sides. It also bolsters the frequent plea heard throughout the telling to use Isandlwana as a source of common cause rather than division.

If Isandlwana offers a crossing of identities, this is no more evident than in the use of crossover figures to tell the story. An interesting aspect of ZULU! is the use of transitional figures and intermediaries to tell the tale. The traditional focus of the story is relegated to the background, and instead it highlights the voice of Nomguqo (played by the company’s leading actress, Leleti Khumalo-Ngema), a Zulu princess who assumed a position between the cultures by her acceptance of Christianity. Even more interesting is the role of the Natal Native Contingent in the battle. The NNC, manned by black troops and white officers, fought against the Zulu for the British, and represent the liminality of the situation for both sides. Many of these men hailed from the tribes routed from the region by the *mfecane*. Both Ngema and Rattray feature their voices in the narrative, and the convergence is so strong that many of the same quotes are used. One voice that stands out in the narrative belongs to Sergeant-Major Simeon Kambule, who survived the battle and provided one of the leading accounts. His

words are used by both Ngema and Rattray in ways that highlight the place in between two cultures occupied by the NNC.¹¹

The debate, then, as it is conducted through the revision of the battle tales, concerns the origins of the South African state and republic, and, perhaps more importantly, the origins of South Africanism. The latter term is most problematic. For a population as diverse as the southern African, the notions of nation and nationalism are too far off to serve as sources of unity. Neither is there any moment of unity in the distant past, even the mythic past. European South Africans, the creators of the political entity of South Africa and, moreover, the carriers of the geographic consciousness that could designate the land South Africa, arrived already as colonizer and seizer of land.

One of the many oddities of South African history is that its point of origin, the events of the year 1838, came long after the arrival of Europeans and a significant stretch of time before South Africa was formed out of its disparate territories. It was formed precisely in the bloody confrontation between Boer and Zulu. The confrontation took place when the Boers were in flight from the British Empire, and on land abandoned by people in flight from the Zulu. Thus, the moment allowed the Boers to define themselves as the colonized *other*, and their Zulu attackers as the colonizer. That very same moment allows the Zulu to conceive of themselves as victims of colonial incursion. The war of 1879 heightened the sense of historical embattlement, and, by its odd identification of Boer and Zulu, allowed the Boer historical imagination a place within the Zulu framework.

Unique among the formative events of South African history, the Anglo-Zulu War accommodates a revision in line with the imperatives of post-apartheid society. If the conflict of 1838, embodied in the bronze of the Blood River Monument and the cold stone of the Voortrekker Monument, offers little revision and none that will accommodate other peoples within its framework of identification, the Anglo-Zulu War offers many. In fact, even during apartheid days, the story was told with that potential evident. Thus, although the moments of antagonism differ some, the tale of Isandlwana is told in remarkably similar ways in the Market Theater of Johannesburg and by Steve Rattray to his white clients and neighbors in KwaZulu-Natal.

For all the spirit of reconciliation — to echo a contemporary term used so consciously by many of the tellers—offered by the battle saga, there are also aspects that harbor greater peril for South African democracy. The first is that the tale, perhaps by its very foundations, reinforces and perhaps amplifies the understanding of the basic agent of history to be the *ethnos*. In all these versions, ethnicities and tribes become indistinguishable, and they serve as undifferentiated units of cultural, social, and historical identity. The historicity of the actors, which is the element that most undermines foundational claims to territory, seems to disappear by common assent. White European and black Zulu clash upon the battlefields of KwaZulu-Natal as if they represent eternal, aboriginal principles—black and white, as it were.

The reduction of the saga to the clash of two peoples, two types, though an effective narrative device, serves to remove other groups from the narrative of origin. Perhaps most striking is the absence of the many peoples driven out of the Natal territory by the *mfecane*, many of them Sotho-speaking, whose role in South African history is major, but whose voice is absent. Without this historical background, liminal figures such as the Natal Native Contingent lose their acute historical significance. Even more politically sensitive is the absence of the Khosa peoples from this narrative of South Africa. During the same historical period, the Khosa were subject to similar colonial pressures, and found themselves deprived of their territorial and political integrity. Their lives were deeply affected by the migrations instigated by the *mfecane*. Yet they are absent from the tale of origin. The contemporary politics of this occlusion are glaring. Though justified by tradition, they serve white cultural politics by leaving the voortrekkers at the center of the story, and Zulu cultural politics as well. The battlefields are presently administered by the IFP-controlled provincial government. If their policies toward the monuments are acceptable to white residents of the province, and anger only the ANC, this might well be why.

Thus, a story that seems on one hand to highlight a relationship between peoples — Boer and Zulu — actually serves to exclude many participants. If the Khosa have other ways of asserting their role in South African history, this is not true of others. What of the Sotho-speaking peoples, swept aside first by the Zulu, robbed by the voortrekkers, and then marginalized when they came to Khosa lands? Their voice is absent from this tale, as it is in the contemporary politics of South Africa. This reading of the historical narrative of South Africa

can be even more divisive than the original reading, and as dangerous for the new South Africa. ●

Notes

1. *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: the Real Story* (Pleasantville, N.Y.: Reader's Digest Association, 1989), 5.
2. Dr. Alex Coutts, "The Cannibals of KwaZulu-Natal: Fact or Fable?" <http://www.battlefields.co.za/history/cannibals/index.htm>. This is the home site of the KwaZulu-Natal tourist board.
3. On the drought, see Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 81.
4. See Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1996), 128–135.
5. H. Rider Haggard, *Marie: an Episode in the Life of the Late Allan Quatermain* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), Chapter 21.
6. "AWB and CP Leaders to Address the Day of the Vow Services," *ANC Daily Newsbriefings* (14 December 1993).
7. "Chiara Carter, No Unity on Day of Reconciliation," *Weekly Mail & Guardian*. Johannesburg, South Africa. (4 December 1998).
8. G.A. Chadwick, "The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift," *Military History Journal*, no. 4 (Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereeniging, December 1978, Zulu War Centenary Issue).
9. Rattray's narrative of the battlegrounds outside Dundee has recently been recorded on audiotape under the title *Day of the Dead Moon*. Extensive segments of these tapes are available over the Internet in Real Audio format at <http://www.web-marketing.co.uk/fugitives-drift/> and <http://www.web-marketing.co.uk/anglozuluwar/>.
10. For a recent work of local history on the Natal Native Contingent, see P.S. Thompson, *The Natal Native Contingent in the Anglo-Zulu War, 1879* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 1997).