Ndau enter the strong currents driven by 1830s Nguni empire-making do we see how a peculiarly Ndau identity evolved under Gaza over-rule – that, especially for men, 'the act of becoming Ndau occurred after the Gaza Nguni occupation' (p. 10) – and, soon thereafter, a nascent industrial capitalism. Thus *Crafting Identity* raises crucial broader questions of how Gaza exploitation, if not quite colonial, may have shared some characteristics of European colonialism as a motor force for Ndau identity-formation. These questions ought to shape future lines of research, as might one elder's claims of dual ethnic identity: 'we are Ndau and Shangaans at the same time' (p. 98).

MacGonagle alludes to the Ndau reputation of wielding great spiritual power and to the belief among Ndau-speakers in Zimbabwe that 'pure' Ndau is spoken in Mozambique (pp. 87, 110, 109). Readers need more of an explanation for the reputation, and for the provocative suggestion of an uncorrupted wellspring of authenticity and power that seemingly divides speakers of a mostly common language. Such ideas may well be of colonial and postcolonial production, but they may also be found in a *longue durée* account. The issues discussed in this review do not detract from what MacGonagle has accomplished in *Crafting Identity*. She presents a fresh look at documentary sources that, blended with other evidence, should inform a historical ethnography with promise for other regions.

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AFRICAN AGENCY WITHIN THE COLONIAL ORDER IN LESOTHO

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Power in Colonial Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870–1960. By ELIZABETH A. ELDREDGE. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 275. £44.50 (ISBN 978-0-299-22370-0).

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Much has been written of the colonial discourses imposed on Africans. For Elizabeth A. Eldredge, colonial discourses were the verbal and nonverbal languages, strategies and actions that colonial officials, Sotho chiefs and occasionally commoners employed to enhance and secure their power. Such colonial discourses did not simply come to dominate the Sotho: the 'colonization of consciousness', as John and Jean Comaroff put it, did not happen. Instead, the Sotho selectively employed colonial discourses to secure their political objectives: '[I]t was the "precolonial 'order'" or "discursive 'system'" ... that subverted and absorbed new elements of the Western world to keep the new, intrusive "other" from subverting it' (p. 11).

The history of colonial Lesotho is particularly helpful in making an argument for African agency within the colonial order. In the aftermath of the consolidation of the Zulu kingdom and the encroachment of Europeans, the first Sotho king, Moshoeshoe, negotiated British 'protection', which secured the integrity of his kingdom from land-hungry Europeans. Moshoeshoe's heirs continued to employ what Eldredge terms 'dissembling' and 'disguise' as a basis for the diplomatic maneuvers that helped them to maintain a degree of autonomy, even at the height of southern Africa's colonial period. In the major section of the book, Eldredge explores the precedents, execution and outcomes of the Gun War of 1880–1. During the Gun War, according to Eldredge, the Paramount Letsie proclaimed loyalty to the British while secretly encouraging (or refusing to intervene in) a

rebellion against attempts to collect guns that would leave the Sotho vulnerable to European settlers. By doing so, Letsie ensured that Lesotho was disannexed from the Cape Colony and resumed its status as a British colonial protectorate. The Sotho not only kept their guns but prevented European settlement on their lands. The skill with which Eldredge uses archival and oral evidence to make an argument for Letsie's Janus-faced role demonstrates a seasoned historian at work, adept at working with oral and archival sources. Letsie's successor, Lerotholi, was similarly able to maintain, and even strengthen, his paramountcy, even when he was forced to act against the rebel Masopha in 1898. Colonial intentions were often weakened or compromised in favor of the Sotho chiefs and paramount.

In the 1930s, the colonial government reformed colonial Lesotho's political institutions in line with other African colonial territories, which thereby limited the local authority of chiefs through the 1940s. A succession crisis further compromised the autonomy of the chiefs and the paramountcy. Insecurity in colonial Lesotho is examined through an account of 'medicine murders' during the reign of Paramount 'Mantsebo. Eldredge places the blame for the 'medicine murders' on ambitious chiefs, and perhaps the paramount, increasingly beset by the contradictions of late colonial rule. Even while the colonial administration had some evidence to implicate the chiefs and royal family, they seemed reluctant to act against them; eventually they embarked on a policy of political decentralization, recommended by the Cambridge anthropologist G. I. Jones. This weakened the power of the paramount and minimized her ability to do harm. The growing influence of the Basutholand National Council further guided Lesotho towards independence in 1966, which held the potential to restore what Eldredge contends were precolonial democratic political traditions. However, Eldredge does not reflect on the failure to consolidate these democratic traditions in the postcolonial period.

Emphasis on those aspects of cultural and political discourse that initiated change – for example Christianity – would weaken Eldredge's argument against the 'colonization of consciousness' (Eldredge does not discuss whether Christianity was a colonial discourse). Moreover, political institutions did change in the colonial period. As Eldredge knows, the paramountcy was only a fledgling and tenuous institution at the time of British colonialism – hardly a stable precolonial order that could survive colonial rule untarnished. In Lesotho, colonialism may have seemed less invasive and alliances less one-sided. Certain Sotho had agency: their rulers presented a more unified strategy to deal with the colonists than the cacophony of competing 'chiefs' in other colonial territories. Many Sotho chiefs and royals also recognized the need for some form of colonial allegiance while their nation existed precariously in the shadow of South Africa. Colonialism in Lesotho did matter; it transformed – or at least solidified – certain political institutions and compromised others, even while Sotho were agents in this process.

Instead of far-reaching abstractions about the nature of colonial hegemony or African resistance, Elizabeth Eldredge's history delights with copious references to the many evidentiary traces left by those who exercised power. While Eldredge's broader history of colonial Lesotho will be familiar to experts, her skilful treatment of the evidence still holds surprises. And she is surely correct in insisting that Sotho acquiescence to colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not a surrender but a strategic maneuver to protect their social, cultural and political integrity. *Power in Colonial Africa* is a refreshing, readable and lucid account of one in an array of compositions of power during colonialism in southern Africa.

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