

‘ I TOLD HIM I WAS LENNOX NJOKWENI ’:
HONOR AND RACIAL ETIQUETTE IN
SOUTHERN RHODESIA*

BY ALLISON K. SHUTT

Hendrix College

ABSTRACT: This article focuses on a single episode of racial interaction in 1931 in order to highlight competing notions of honor and respectability in a shared colonial society. This story elucidates how Africans and whites unraveled and rebuilt ‘racial etiquette’, the tacit code that guided individual encounters between blacks and whites and that were so vital to the expression of colonial power. In moments of transition, such as the early 1930s in Southern Rhodesia, the minutiae of racial etiquette were confusing, and this allowed for some dialogue between Africans and whites about what constituted proper behavior. As this story makes clear, Africans were as much a part of composing racial etiquette as whites, despite – indeed, because of – the latter’s political power.

KEY WORDS: Zimbabwe, class, clothes, colonialism, race.

ACROSS the colonial world politically dominated peoples fought against regimes that stripped them of their land, deposed their leaders, demanded their labor, and, perhaps most of all, injured their sense of personal dignity and collective honor. The quest for honor was so important, in fact, that the historian John Iliffe calls it ‘the chief ideological motivation of African behavior’.¹ According to Iliffe this was true for the entirety of African societies and their histories, but as colonial domination undermined African ideas of honor, the quest for honor became more acute and the paths to it narrower.² He provides several compelling examples of nationalist men who swore their opposition to colonial and settler rule because of their personal humiliation at the hands of whites. For example, ‘Henry Chipembere, struck by a Rhodesian official for not removing his hat, “resolved that I was to dedicate my life to the destruction of white domination”’.³ The restoration of ‘honor’ was a goal of decolonization.

Honor is difficult to define except for the fact that it is something that everyone wants.⁴ At its most basic and abstract, honor is a ‘right to respect’, though, as Iliffe notes, many scholars also evoke ‘prestige’ as a synonym for

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¹ J. Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge, 2005), 1.

² Iliffe titles the second part of his book ‘Fragmentation and Mutation’.

³ Iliffe, *Honour*, 307.

⁴ Which is precisely Martin Klein’s critique of Iliffe’s book, ‘Review of John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)’, April 2006, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11644> (accessed 5 November 2010).

respect.⁵ Individuals can claim the ‘right to respect’ but groups defend those rights and make them real. Robert Ross’s study of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Cape society captures the ‘tragedy’ of this: just as individuals attained a respectable status that whites could not ignore, they could only realize respect (via voting rights) through membership in a group.⁶ Honor is further complicated by the fact that it has meaning across cohorts – ‘horizontal honour’ – and between groups – ‘vertical honour’.⁷ The honor realized in one group is heightened by its utter denial in another group.

Respectability begins where respect ends.⁸ Historical subjects and scholars alike have used the concept of ‘respectability’ to describe a strategy by which African people displayed the attributes necessary for respect through clothing, housing, education, hygiene, good manners, and so on.⁹ Scholars have written extensively about the politics of respectability to demonstrate how people devised a meaning of respect that consciously excluded the judgments of hostile whites.¹⁰ In all, respectability is both the name of a strategy and a description of behavior to realize the aim of that strategy, respect. To borrow an idea from Frederick Cooper, honor and respectability are ‘indigenous’ categories. Yet scholars also use the language of honor and respectability to analyze how people presented themselves as worthy persons.¹¹ Thus, they are real ideas but they are also slippery concepts.

This article offers a ‘micropolitics of a colonial situation’¹² by focusing on one story of racial interaction in Southern Rhodesia in 1931 in order to elucidate and understand competing notions of honor and respectability in a shared colonial society.¹³ Historians of the American South have used the phrase ‘racial etiquette’ to refer to the tacit code that guided individual behavior as blacks and whites encountered one another on sidewalks, in

⁵ Iliffe, *Honour*, 4–5.

⁶ R. Ross, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750–1870: A Tragedy of Manners* (Cambridge, 1999).

⁷ Iliffe, *Honour*, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.* 246.

⁹ As in the ‘AmaRespectables’ cited in *Ibid.* 246. Among the works that have influenced my thinking are Ross, *Status and Respectability*; and M. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington, 2002). T. Barnes’s notion of ‘righteousness’ points to the lively debates among people over who and what was respectable: ‘*We Women Worked So Hard*’: *Gender, Urbanization and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930–1956* (Portsmouth, NH, 1999), especially ch. 4. Historians of South Africa have explored the malleability of respectability by considering how it was engaged by working-class people and deployed in gendered debates. See S. Marks, ‘Patriotism, patriarchy and purity: Natal and the politics of Zulu ethnic consciousness’, in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley, 1991), 215–40; D. Goodhew, ‘Working-class respectability: the example of the western areas of Johannesburg, 1930–55’, *Journal of African History*, 41:2 (2000), 241–66; L. Thomas, ‘The modern girl and racial respectability in 1930s South Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 47:3 (2006), 461–90.

¹⁰ The vital source is West, *Rise*.

¹¹ F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Los Angeles, 2005), 7. Chapter 3, on ‘identity’, is a vivid example of the confusion between indigenous and analytical terms.

¹² Cooper’s description of Max Gluckman’s analysis of a bridge-building exercise in South Africa: *Colonialism*, 36.

¹³ Ross’s work, *Status and Respectability*, is exemplary.

homes, at work, and so on.¹⁴ In the abstract, this rule was very clear: blacks should defer to whites. Racial etiquette therefore reproduced colonial hierarchies through everyday practice. At the same time, however, the fact that individuals had to apply an abstract rule to specific situations meant that each encounter had at least the potential for missteps and novel interpretations that could upset the demonstration of white power that the code of racial etiquette was meant to ensure.¹⁵ To give one example, Mr Janhi, a court interpreter in Salisbury during the 1940s, had a talent and flair for courtroom drama that helped him censure racist whites and stay well within the boundaries of racial etiquette:

White men who tried to put on superior airs in court were acidly told that they were in the sphere of law and not in the streets or out on their farms. Terms such as 'this native', 'this boy', rattled Janhi and he ordered this or that settler to use the accepted legal phraseology, such as 'the accused' or 'this witness'.¹⁶

Deft Africans could – and did – alter the code of racial etiquette through their creative interpretation of abstract rules in particular places and situations.¹⁷

Racial etiquette was an essential but tricky and fragile way for Southern Rhodesian whites to express power. They knew this: they were forever demanding that everyone behave better, especially Africans, but whites also. Whites worried that African audiences critically noted every move they made. When their sense of racial etiquette failed them, they often fell back on a violent imposition of their superiority even though this behavior further undermined their insistence that they had, by default, the more civilized manners and therefore the right to rule. To listen to nervous whites, Africans had only to observe one moment of weakness and the edifice of rule tottered. A favorite explanation for white violence went something like this: 'This conduct was absolutely forced upon me as if I had not done so the Natives who heard me abused would have ceased to respect me & my authority & the prestige of the Department would have suffered greatly'.¹⁸ Whites insisted that they were center-stage for all Africans – that is why manners were so important to them and why they so often reacted violently to perceived rudeness. It was in the interest of Africans to follow the code of racial etiquette in order to avoid white violence.¹⁹ But, as the example of Mr Janhi suggests, Africans also wanted to walk away from their encounters with whites with their own sense of honor intact (and, if they were as skilled as Mr Janhi, perhaps enhanced). The everyday interpretation of racial etiquette by whites

¹⁴ I have been influenced by J. Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 5–6, 240–1, n. 6.

¹⁶ L. Vambe, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, with an Introduction by Judith Acton (Pittsburgh, 1976), 167. Vambe does not provide a firm date, but it appears from the context of his discussion that Janhi worked in the 1940s.

¹⁷ On 'improvisation' see Ritterhouse, *Growing Up*, 5.

¹⁸ National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare, (NAZ), N3/1/20, Acting Native Commissioner (NC), Ft. Victoria to Chief Native Commissioner, 22 Dec. 1899. In a twist of a usual story, in this case the NC used these words to explain why he dragged an offensive settler off his horse and beat him.

¹⁹ As in the American South, Ritterhouse, *Growing Up*, 4 and ch. 2.

and Africans alike produced small but vital encounters that affirmed or undermined people's status and tested their sense of honor – the battleground of colonial history. It was *possible* in these struggles for incompetent whites to lose honor, while skilled Africans had opportunities to gain dignity. With all this as a backdrop, it is time to tell Lennox Njokweni's story of dignity 'found and lost'.²⁰

A SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The story begins on the morning of 25 February 1931, when Lennox Njokweni, a clerk at the Inyati Boy's Industrial and Agricultural School, traveled into town with the school's students and a colleague to renew official documents required by the government for all African men. Njokweni was an urbane man. His visits to town gave him the opportunity to demonstrate and celebrate his educated and sophisticated status. As a material sign of his distinction, Njokweni wore a hat. Another significant sign of merit was that he knew the native commissioner (NC) well enough to walk into the NC's office to extend his greetings and explain why he was in town. That same morning, Robert Tapson, the assistant native commissioner (ANC), was busy demonstrating his authority over the African people of the area. As he crossed the courtyard of the NC's office, African messengers saluted him by standing up and taking off their hats. Throughout the morning, it seems, Njokweni and Tapson crossed paths. By the afternoon Njokweni was ready to leave with the students, but before he left he wanted to say good-bye and give 'our thanks' to the NC. 'I stood between the Post Office and the ... stoep', Njokweni explained, 'doubting whether or not the Native Commissioner had returned, and also thinking whether or not I should go up the stoep and see if he was in his office or not'.²¹ At that very same moment, Tapson turned the corner of the NC's office and saw Njokweni blocking his way. 'After a very obvious pause during which I had time to notice that every native and Native Messenger present was watching to see what would happen', reported Tapson, 'he moved aside with his hat on'.²² When Njokweni simply 'smiled and ignored' him, Tapson 'grabbed' Njokweni's hat and 'threw it right over the Post Office hut, and it fell on the stones beyond'.²³

Shocked, bewildered, and humiliated – we can only imagine the depth of Njokweni's shame. We do know that the wounded Njokweni wrote a letter of complaint to his employer, the Reverend W. G. Brown. Angry that Tapson could have so mistreated a polite employee from his school, Brown in his turn protested to Tapson's superior, the native commissioner.²⁴ Brown did not stop there. He also sent letters to the superintendent of natives, Bulawayo, the chief native commissioner, and the director of native development.²⁵ Furthermore, he sent a letter and a copy of Njokweni's complaint

²⁰ The chapter title for the period 1934–48 in West's *Rise*.

²¹ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, Lennox Njokweni to the Principal, 25 Feb. 1931. West provides a neat summary of Njokweni's case in *Rise*, 21–3.

²² NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, R. Tapson, assistant native commissioner (ANC), to (NC), Inyati, 3 March 1931.

²³ *Ibid.*; Njokweni to the Principal, 25 Feb. 1931.

²⁴ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, W. G. Brown to the NC, Inyati, 16 Feb. 1931.

²⁵ All this correspondence is in NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31.

to the premier of Southern Rhodesia, whom Brown counted as a friend. Ultimately, the premier demanded that Tapson write an official letter of apology to him for 'lowering the status and dignity of a highly placed official of the Native Department'.²⁶ We do not know what Njokweni made of the outcome of this 'piece of settler-colonial theatrics',²⁷ but we can be sure that he tested the limits of racial etiquette in Southern Rhodesia the day he encountered Tapson.

Njokweni's story is remarkable both because the key actors recorded the event in such detail and because it scaled the hierarchy of colonial society, from Njokweni to the premier. His story is not unique, however. Every day, Africans and settlers battled over the degree of respect due to them in colonial society. Njokweni's poignant letter recounts in painful detail the 'endless nightmare' of the 'slights, indignities, and rejections that appeared interminable' to African people in Southern Rhodesia.²⁸ His story is illuminating in other ways, too. His humiliation reveals just how tricky it was for Africans to appear respectable before multiple constituencies – subordinates, peers, and self-appointed superiors – each of which required different registers of respect and deference.²⁹ Tapson's violent reaction to Njokweni's manner suggests just how problematic it was to rely on Africans to play their part in colonial society.

Moreover, African people like Njokweni used whites to express their status – whites provided the stage and were players in a drama of competing claims for recognition and respect. The cast of characters is significant in this regard: an elite African male, a missionary at a school in crisis, a new ANC, an NC with conflicting relations with Njokweni, a premier with close ties to the missionary establishment, and a chief native commissioner (CNC) known for his disciplinary ways but also unsure of how officials should treat men such as Njokweni.

This story magnifies how Africans and whites unraveled and rebuilt the tacit rules of acceptable behavior that were so vital to the expression of colonial power. In moments of transition, such as the early 1930s in Southern Rhodesia, the minutiae of racial etiquette were confusing, and this allowed for some dialogue between Africans and whites about what constituted proper behavior.³⁰ Importantly, as Njokweni's story makes clear, Africans were as much a part of composing racial etiquette as whites, despite – indeed, because of – the latter's political power.

THE BACKSTORY

Tapson's humiliation of Njokweni came at an important time of political, legislative, and legal transition for the colony. Only a few years earlier, Native Department officials met at their annual conference and urged the

²⁶ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, H. U. Moffat, the premier, 'A. N. C. Tapson & Complaint from Native', 23 March 1931. ²⁷ West, *Rise*, 22. ²⁸ *Ibid.* 23.

²⁹ On split-second decisions to avoid violence, see Ritterhouse, *Growing Up*, 47–8.

³⁰ For other moments of transition in racial etiquette see A. K. Shutt and T. King, 'Imperial Rhodesians: the 1953 Rhodes Centenary Exhibition in Southern Rhodesia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31:2 (June 2005), 357–79; C. Hamilton (on the resort 'Shakaland'), *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

passage of a new set of ‘native regulations’ meant to protect NCs and other officials from status-upsetting behavior by Africans. The subsequent legislation, the 1927 Native Affairs Act (NAA), included a section that in effect criminalized under the rubric of ‘insolence’ behavior that NCs and other government officials believed mocked, defied, or embarrassed them.³¹ The heads of the Native Affairs Department were anxious to demonstrate that NCs and ANC were capable of administering justice – an assumption that the Law Department had questioned during debates about the NAA – and, as a result, there was particularly close supervision of NCs who used the new legislation to fine or imprison supposedly insolent Africans. Regardless of such oversight, there was a rough transition from the personal rule of NCs in isolated districts to the rule of law. NCs applied the NAA clause for insolence incorrectly or too broadly, and in fact many NCs sought legal refuge for their personal rule in the NAA whenever any Africans refused to obey a command, annoyed them, or appeared defiant. In other cases, such as Tapson’s, officers resorted to violence to discipline ‘insolent’ Africans instead of using the powers of the NAA. Despite a legal apparatus meant to enshrine law not coercion in African affairs, extra-legal coercion was not completely eliminated, nor, perhaps, could it be.³²

The early 1930s were a bridge linking the rank paternalism of H. U. Moffat’s government – with its emphasis on so-called native education – and Godfrey Huggins’s arch-segregationist regime that came into power in 1933. There were important continuities also. In 1925, just two years after winning ‘responsible government’ within the British empire, Moffat appointed the Morris Carter Commission, which recommended the territorial segregation of the colony. The resulting legislation, the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) of 1930, was the foundational legislation for the territory,³³ and became the lodestar for all subsequent legislation aimed at implementing segregation throughout the colony. African peoples had already been losing their lands to colonial intruders before 1930, but the LAA accelerated this process considerably. If these tensions were not enough, the worldwide depression translated into shortages and poor prices, and more attempts by the state to squeeze Africans farmers for the benefit of struggling white farmers.

Political assimilation did not necessarily follow land appropriation. Any number of independent societies and unions sprang from the African soil. In the areas around Inyati, the Matabele Home Society attracted men who hoped to restore royal rule. The populist Independent Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (IICU) and its platform of land and freedom informed the politics of the area still further.³⁴ In Insiza, Chief Maduna Mafu, the main African authority in the area, exercised important independence from the settler regime by refusing to cooperate with the state’s labor

³¹ A. K. Shutt, “‘The natives are getting out of control’: legislating manners, insolence and contemptuous behavior in Southern Rhodesia, c. 1910–1963’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33:3 (September 2007), 653–72.

³² Shutt, “‘The natives’”, 666–7, 671–2.

³³ R. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (Los Angeles, 1977).

³⁴ J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893–2003* (Athens, OH, 2006), 27, 28; West, *Rise*, 134–8.

recruitment drives and by supporting the IICU.³⁵ Adding to the heterogeneity of the area's politics were people whom the state called 'Fingo', whose expert knowledge of their legal rights made them tiresome to white officials.³⁶ From walking on sidewalks to enjoying the sights and sounds of the city, Africans in town troubled whites perhaps even more, especially when they created a 'disturbance', as when so-called 'faction fights' rocked the townships of Bulawayo in 1929.³⁷

As people settled in urban areas and mingled with new people in novel settings, they battled over the definition of correct behavior.³⁸ Perhaps no group was more vocal and influential in translating moral behavior for colonial authorities than the aspiring middle-class men who had the literacy and manners to capture the attention of whites. Indeed, Njokweni and others like him were hard at work carving out visible spaces in public places where they could demonstrate their social style, class, and authority over others. They did this by forming associations that, in addition to economic and political pleas, petitioned government officials for the courteous treatment due a respectable class of people. But none of this mattered unless individuals could express their 'self-understanding' of their place in society as, in this case, people with bourgeois manners and sensibilities.³⁹

As Michael West writes, the late 1920s and early 1930s in Southern Rhodesia were 'a period of sustained critique of the colonial project'.⁴⁰ In this struggle, the personal was political. In 1931, then, racial etiquette reflected the period's tension and turmoil. Inevitably, the violence of white rule came down on whomever NCs, housewives, and employers deemed insolent, lazy, or lacking in respect for settlers.⁴¹ That said, however, it is equally true that, for elite, educated, and urbane people such as Njokweni, the evolving code of racial etiquette (which took into account both a rising class of African urban residents and the consolidation of settler rule) allowed some room for self-expression. But one had to be socially 'agile'.⁴²

THE PLAYERS AND SCENERY

Perhaps the defining difference between the Moffat and Huggins regimes was their policies towards African education and its meaning for institutional

³⁵ Alexander, *Unsettled State*, 27–8.

³⁶ On threats of law suits from Africans, see NAZ, S138/43, 1928–31, Chief Mkotame Kona to the NC, Inyati, 18 Jan. 1930; chief headman of Fingo location, Mkotame Kona to Messrs. Webb & Law, Attorney, 26 Jan. 1930.

³⁷ E. Msindo, 'Ethnicity and nationalism in urban colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950 to 1963', *Journal of African History*, 48:2 (2007), 270–3; T. Ranger, 'The meaning of urban violence in Africa: Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1960', *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), 193–228.

³⁸ Barnes, 'We Women', 55, ch. 4–5.

³⁹ Cooper, *Colonialism*, 73–5; West, *Rise*.

⁴⁰ West, *Rise*, 140.

⁴¹ T. Ranger, 'Tales of the "Wild West": gold-diggers and rustlers in south-west Zimbabwe, 1898–1940: an essay in the use of criminal court records for social history', *South African Historical Journal*, 28 (1993), 40–62.

⁴² I borrow this notion from D. Jeater, (*Law, Language, and Science: The Invention of the 'Native Mind' in Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1930* (Portsmouth, NH, 2007), 234), who, in turn, credits a personal communication with Julie Livingston.

and personal authority. Under Moffat, African education fell under the Native Education Department and, importantly, under the purview of administrators drawn from outside the ranks of NCs. Missionaries and their embrace of the ideology of a civilizing mission held sway. This did not mean, necessarily, that African peoples flourished under missionary education. Far from it, but mission schools were a fount of upwardly mobile and politically conscious Africans, however limited the scope of economic opportunities open to them.

The Inyati school was a model of missionary education. The London Missionary Society founded the institution in 1921, and within a couple of years it was the most prestigious school in what was called Matabeleland.⁴³ An 'industrial' school, Inyati was based on the philosophy of so-called practical skills, not 'book learning'. Even so, and despite grave financial constraints, Inyati attracted pupils eager for the opportunity to take advantage of the small opening to gain the skills of the respectable class in an otherwise closed settler society. For many eager students, Inyati was synonymous with prestige.

Before becoming the principal at Inyati, W. G. Brown had been a builder in London. By the time he left London to run the Inyati Institution, he had a prosperous business and employed some sixty men.⁴⁴ Carol Summers suggests that, coupled with his ordination as a minister, Brown's aptitude for the building vocation 'fit well with the government's emphasis on practical training'.⁴⁵ Under Brown's direction the school flourished, enrollment increased, and the London Missionary Society even made a small profit. At the time of Lennox Njokweni's encounter with Robert Tapson, however, Inyati was on the decline. The effects of the depression and a drought ate away at the school's budget and food supplies, and when the maize harvest was far less than Brown expected, he reacted by reducing the quality and quantity of the students' meals. The students responded with a strike in February 1931.⁴⁶ Brown reportedly told the striking students

that it was not their place to tell him what he had to do. He added that he did not wish to see any remnants about in the pot or on the plates, and that he did not intend to fatten them up like pigs.⁴⁷

Although short-lived, the strike was serious enough for Brown to ask the police to restore order.⁴⁸

Tapson's lapse in judgment therefore became Brown's headache. 'There is no need for me to emphasize to you what such incidents do among our progressive Natives', wrote Brown to the chief native commissioner. 'Such actions', he continued, 'will never establish that sense of goodwill and loyalty which are so desirable for the progress of both White and Black, and the

⁴³ C. Summers, *From Civilization to Segregation: Social Ideals and Social Control in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1934* (Athens, OH, 1994), 189; C. Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans' Education in Southern Rhodesia, 1918-1940* (Portsmouth, NH, 2002), 31.

⁴⁴ Summers, *Colonial Lessons*, 30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 32. A strike in 1932 was much more serious and resulted in the resignation of Brown.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.* 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 33.

sooner this type of thing ends the better.⁴⁹ Brown's accusation against Tapson – that he purposefully attacked Njokweni – underlined tensions between the Native Department and missionaries, and accentuated his problems at Inyati. In his letter to the NC, Brown wrote, 'Such an action as that of your A. N. C. can only be calculated to stir up undesirable feelings between the White and Black races as I have already seen in my staff this morning'.⁵⁰ And so, in February 1931, Brown faced turmoil at his school and the protest of one of his most valuable members of staff. The turbulence at Inyati helps explain the eagerness with which Brown took up Njokweni's complaint.

Njokweni was a good match for such an elite institution as Inyati. South African by birth, he was well educated and spoke and wrote English fluently. Njokweni was, as Brown put it, 'a well educated Native'.⁵¹ This grossly understated Njokweni's achievements, in fact. He had graduated from Tiger Kloof Native Institution and had passed the 'J. C.' exam – about as much mission education as an African could hope for in the late 1920s.⁵² As a clerk, Njokweni enjoyed the prestige that went with literacy. His credentials were impressive, and established him at the pinnacle of African success within colonial institutions.

Njokweni was also among a select group of African men who traveled easily throughout the region without forfeiting their elite status. Everywhere in colonial Africa, African people used clothing, including hats and shoes, to express their status. Other than his famous hat we do not know what Njokweni wore that day. Nevertheless, we may imagine that he wore dress well suited to a cosmopolitan man. Lennox Njokweni traveled to the NC's compound as a sophisticated man secure in his status.

Finally, Robert Tapson, the ANC and Njokweni's nemesis, was just as distinctive as Njokweni. A South African also, he was a severe and doctrinaire man. He had joined the Native Affairs Department in 1917 and his first evaluations were good; a confidential report on Tapson's performance noted that he 'knows how to manage natives and is learning'.⁵³ However much Tapson first impressed his employers, he quickly became known as a tactless and harsh officer. In 1929, and again in 1930, his superiors chastised him for excessive sentences under the Native Affairs Act. One of these sentences was so poorly adjudicated that the premier was 'uneasy'.⁵⁴ Subsequently, Tapson's decision was overturned as 'incompetent'.⁵⁵ A few years later, writing in response to a complaint from a disgruntled settler farmer, the CNC concluded that Tapson was tactless and undignified even in his

⁴⁹ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, W. G. Brown to the chief native commissioner (CNC), 26 Feb. 1931.

⁵⁰ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, W. G. Brown to the NC, Inyati, 26 Feb. 1931.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, Brown to the NC, Inyati, 16 Feb. 1931. On education standards, see Summers, *Colonial Lessons*, 30.

⁵³ NAZ, NVA 1/2/1, Confidential report on staff, Robert Ross Tapson, superintendent of natives (SoN), Victoria, 28 June 1917.

⁵⁴ NAZ, S138/43, 1928–31, H. U. Moffat to the secretary, 18 Feb. 1930, attached to the Private Secretary to the CNC, *Rex v Nyashano*, 19 Feb. 1930.

⁵⁵ NAZ, S138/43, 1928–31, NC, Inyati to the SoN, Matabeleland, 28 Feb. 1930.

dealings with the settler public.⁵⁶ Even by the standards of the white community, he was a difficult and severe man.

‘WHERE THE ACTION IS’:⁵⁷ THE STAGE

Njokweni and Tapson each wrote detailed letters about their encounter with the other. They agreed that Tapson knocked Njokweni’s hat off, but not about much else. Indeed, their accounts did not simply contradict one another; they were different readings altogether.⁵⁸ As such, it may be more useful to think of Njokweni’s and Tapson’s accounts not as literal renderings, though each presented their stories in this way, but rather as tales that called upon collective histories that made their stories believable. And, oddly enough, Njokweni’s story proved the more persuasive.

Njokweni begins his story at the offices of the native commissioner. No colonial space was more significant than the offices where NCs and their minions audited tax returns, tabulated cattle numbers, held court cases, and stamped the pass documents required of every adult male in the colony. As a tangible place, as well as a symbol of settler rule, the NC’s compound was where the production of colonial life unfolded for all to see. The place was suffused with racial ritual. Within its bounds, racial etiquette was closely enacted and observed. Indeed, one of the very first cases of Africans convicted of ‘insolence’ involved two young men who did not immediately go to the pass office window when called.⁵⁹ The High Court confirmed the NC’s charge that the men’s delay in going to the office window was insubordination, not simply a result of ordinary demeanor. The point was clear: government offices were places of compelling power. Traveling to the NC’s offices required an acute sense of racial etiquette – it was easy to be insolent in this space.

Each step, every movement, was choreographed to ensure the deference and demeanor demanded by authorities. Njokweni greeted, deferred, obeyed, and even removed his cap. He displayed the type of patience that whites regarded as polite behavior. In his letter to Brown, Njokweni carefully noted the numerous steps it took him to renew his pass and, by implication, his acceptance of the NC’s power over him. At each and every office – regardless of the distance – there was a ritual passing of Njokweni’s

⁵⁶ NAZ, S1542/C15/2, CNC, Carbutt to the SoN, Matabeleland, 4 Jan. 1935; Tapson, ANC, Filibusi to the NC, Filibusi, stamped 20 Dec. 1934; J. R. Perrins to the CNC, 1 Dec. 1934.

⁵⁷ E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York, 1967), title on 149.

⁵⁸ In writing about an 1883 race riot, Jane Dailey suggests that the participants offered ‘multiple, contradictory, and fundamentally incompatible versions of the riot’, which turned on debates about ‘manners, honor, and status, and questions about who controlled public space’. Jane Dailey, ‘Deference and violence in the postbellum urban south: manners and massacres in Danville, Virginia’, *Journal of Southern History*, 18:3 (1997), 575. See also C. Summers, “‘Subterranean evil’ and “‘tumultuous riot’” in Buganda: authority and alienation at King’s College, Budo, 1942’, *Journal of African History*, 47:1 (2006), 93–113.

⁵⁹ *High Court Decisions*, 1912, *Rex v Guthrie and Rex v Isaac*, 10–14; Shutt, “‘The Natives’”, 662.

documents from one official hand to another. And so Njokweni arrived at the compound where a 'Native Police' 'directed' him to the NC's office, wherein he handed his letter to the NC, who handed it to the police sergeant, who handed it to Njokweni, who handed it to the pass officer, who handed the documents to the 'Native Clerk' and back, presumably, to Njokweni. In return, Njokweni assured Brown, 'The Native Commissioner answered politely to my greeting'.⁶⁰

After outlining in detail his ritual deference to authorities, Njokweni shifts scenes and highlights his high status at Inyati and among Africans. He tells Brown that he and his colleague, James Motaung, a carpentry instructor at the school, got their passes before the 'boys' of the school (whom we can imagine really were boys). After all the boys obtained their passes, Njokweni ordered the group 'to dismiss, and Mr. Motaung took the lead'. Njokweni presented himself as appropriately, comfortably, and firmly situated as the person in command of the group from the elite Inyati school. According to him, everything was going as planned and according to script: he recognized the authority of the NC and, in turn, the NC and other officials acknowledged him with polite greetings.⁶¹

Njokweni portrays himself as being so polite that for a moment he lost his sense of what was correct behavior:

Before leaving I had the intention of going to the Native Commissioner again and inform him that we were then going away, and also give him our thanks. But when I was between the Post office hut and the stoep leading to the Native Commissioner's office I remembered that I had seen the Native Commissioner coming out of his office. I stood between the Post office and the above said stoep, doubting whether or not the Native Commissioner had returned, and also thinking whether or not I should go up the stoep and see if he was in his office or not.

At the very moment that Tapson turned the corner, Njokweni was, according to his letter, 'doubting' and 'thinking' about the next right thing to do. What to do next depended upon the status of the other person.

When I was about to go away a man came out of a motor car which was then arriving and I did not know who he was. This man came round to the spot where I was standing, and just as when I was making a turn to go he passed near me and asked who I was. I told him that I am Lennox Njokweni.

Tapson was a 'man', not an ANC, who by that honorific alone required deference. Finally, at the end of Njokweni's letter, was a note from James Motaung, who wrote in longhand, 'I the undersigned, was near at the time of the incident above mentioned and I saw the man take my friend's hat from his head and throw it away.' Motaung affirmed his relationship with Njokweni and corroborated his account.⁶²

AFTER THE DRAMA: WHAT'S IN A HAT?

Brown's determination to tell everyone in authority how angry he was greatly influenced how Tapson's superiors reacted to his dealings with Njokweni, which explains, in part at least, why Njokweni's complaint became serious

⁶⁰ NAZ, S138/41, 1926-31, Lennox Njokweni to the principal, 25 Feb. 1931.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

enough that the premier intervened. In correspondence between officials – which came at such a pace that letters ‘crossed’ paths – they tried to think of ways to satisfy Brown and get his letters off their desks.⁶³ Significantly, Brown picked up on Njokweni’s subtle critique of Tapson, who was a ‘man’ who ‘passed’ by Njokweni perhaps more closely than the rules of racial etiquette allowed.⁶⁴ As Brown saw it, the problem was the etiquette of hat-wearing, not Njokweni’s disregard for Tapson. Taking his cue from Njokweni, Brown argued, ‘when outside in the openair, in the Sun, I am not aware of any system of reasonable conduct or law, which demands that any man shall remove his hat when being passed by an ordinary man’. Njokweni’s identification of Tapson as an anonymous ‘this man’ became in Brown’s letter an ‘ordinary man’.

The next lines that Brown lifts from Njokweni have to do with his exacting politeness and status. Brown established from the first paragraph a parallel comparison between Njokweni and Tapson. Brown calls Njokweni ‘my clerk’, ‘Lennox Njokweni’, ‘a well educated Native’, and ‘a very courteous and well behaved young man’. In contrast, the principal identifies Tapson as ‘one of your staff’. In the second and third paragraphs of his letter, Brown notes again that Njokweni was ‘one of my staff’ and adds that Njokweni is one of a group of ‘men in a position of authority’. Brown then identifies Tapson as ‘your A. N. C.’, ‘a tall man’, ‘a senior official in the Native Department’, ‘such a man’, indeed, an ‘ordinary man’.

In and of themselves, these tags are unremarkable. Taken together and put in the context of the letter, Brown’s language and logic are significant.⁶⁵ The parallel between Njokweni as a member of Brown’s staff and Tapson as a member of Greer’s staff is clear: an educated, courteous, well-behaved man of authority as against a tall, ordinary man, indeed, a ‘least courteous man’ who had ‘forgotten himself’, and who also happened to be in the Native Affairs Department.⁶⁶ In short, Njokweni was a proxy for Brown and Tapson was a proxy for the NC and the Department of Native Affairs. An attack on Njokweni was an attack on Brown and his competence as an employer. As he put it, ‘so far I have never had complaints of misbehavior by my staff or students, when away from here’. As a result, Brown could assert, ‘In my opinion this constitutes an indignity to my staff, and a grave assault, and the least that a courteous gentleman would do, who had so far forgotten himself, would be to apologise for such conduct.’

In a rambling sentence that reflected his own sense of anxiety, Brown implored the NC, Greer, to restore order:

Further for Government Officials to belittle in this way, in the presence of our students, men in a position of authority in an Institution like this, which has over 150 boarders, mostly young men, can only undermine the authority now obtaining,

⁶³ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, NC, Inyati to the SoN, Bulawayo, 16 March 1931, marginal note at the bottom dated 18 March 1931.

⁶⁴ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, W. G. Brown to the NC, Inyati, 26 Feb. 1931. The remainder of this paragraph and the next are from this letter.

⁶⁵ Richard Boyer, ‘Respect and identity: horizontal and vertical reference points in speech acts’, *The Americas* 54:4 (1998), 491–509.

⁶⁶ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, W. G. Brown to the NC, Inyati, 26 Feb. 1931.

and make our position a difficult one and go a long way to destroy the sense of respect and courtesy to all Governing Officials which we are trying to instill into our students.⁶⁷

Brown's authority was shaky. He needed the support of men such as Njokweni; upset them and the whole institution tottered. When added to the student's strike, Tapson's attack on Njokweni was magnified and therefore dangerous. Even so, Njokweni's altercation with Tapson was a godsend for Brown, who took full advantage of Njokweni's wounded pride to reassert his standing in Inyati and at the school. Brown walked a fine line between acting as a stand-in for Njokweni's honor and adhering to the requirements of settler society: by taking up Njokweni's complaint, Brown became his ally; by insisting that Njokweni's wounded pride hurt him, Brown was well within the settler hierarchy. As Brown told the CNC, 'Needless to say that when I presented it to the N. C. he received my letter very sympathetically'.⁶⁸

Greer asked Tapson to explain his behavior. Based on the latter's efforts to refute Njokweni's account line by line, it appears that he read Brown's letter and Njokweni's complaint. Unlike Njokweni, who locates the tensions as beginning with his humiliation at the hands of 'a man', Tapson begins his story with his first encounter with Njokweni in the morning. The shift in scenes and lines begins with Tapson's misidentification of Lennox Njokweni as 'Albert Njokweni', an error he made throughout all of his correspondence, and one that no-one thought to correct. As he put it in his memo to Greer, Njokweni's name 'conveyed nothing to me'. Tapson also recounts that he had trouble placing Njokweni in the hierarchy of Southern Rhodesia's African population:

On returning to the office after lunch on Wednesday 25th., I noticed a number of natives sitting outside the office. As I passed the Messengers stood and those natives who had on their hats removed them with one exception. This native, whom I now know to be the Albert Njokweni, paid no respect other than a sneer. Thinking it was some ignorant store boy I made no remark.

Later in the letter Tapson writes,

Judging by his behavior I took him to be an ill-mannered town native. Had I known of his education I would have called him to my office and severely drawn [notice (penciled in)] to his insolence; as it was I did not know until I read the letter from Rev. Brown that I had offended the susceptibilities of an educated, if ill mannered native.

If we are to believe Tapson, what separated a mere 'store boy' and an 'ill-mannered town native' from an 'educated, if ill mannered, native' was the use of violence that all officials could support.⁶⁹

For Tapson, knocking Njokweni's hat off was the culmination of a day-long battle over racial etiquette. In the morning, Njokweni 'sneered'

⁶⁷ NAZ, S138/43, 1928-31, W. G. Brown to the NC, Inyati, 26 Feb. 1931.

⁶⁸ NAZ, S138/43, 1928-31, W. G. Brown to the CNC, 26 Feb. 1931.

⁶⁹ NAZ, S138/41, 1926-31, R. Tapson, ANC, to the NC, Inyati, 3 March 1931.

when all the messengers rose and took off their hats out of respect for Tapson. The ANC continued,

During the course of the afternoon I had several occasions to go to other offices and on each occasion passed within a few feet of Albert Njokweni, and could not help noticing, though apparently ignoring, his amusement at the various methods in which the other natives showed their respect.

Tapson admits that he was uncomfortable enough to try to diffuse the situation so that Njokweni would notice that he was violating the norms of racial etiquette and correct his behavior. He addressed Njokweni ‘very civilly in Sindebele’ and also identified himself as an official. Still, Njokweni did not defer. Instead, said Tapson,

He merely smiled and ignored me. I repeated my question in English and was again ignored. So I repeated my question. “Well Albert don’t you ever take off your hat to an official?” and was again ignored except for a mutter which was impossible to understand.

His point was that he tried everything that Greer could reasonably expect him to do in the face of an obstinate African.⁷⁰

Tapson’s main argument is that Njokweni should have known he was an official:

Albert Njokweni’s suggestion that he did not know I was an official is a surprising untruth. He had during the whole afternoon seen me dealing with natives, seen me leave and return to my office, seen the respect given me by the other natives. But, viceversa, I did not know who he was.

In a society that divided peoples into two broad groups – Africans and whites – the focus on individual recognition is striking. Tellingly, each man cited his status as a reason to recognize who he was: Njokweni was in line with a number of boys (whom we may presume were in the school’s uniform), which should have indicated his elite status, while Tapson remarks that the deference shown to him by other Africans indicated his official status. Both Njokweni and Tapson defended their behavior as appropriate.

The key line in Tapson’s letter was this: ‘After a very obvious pause during which I had time to notice that every Native Messenger present was watching to see what would happen, he moved aside still with his hat on.’⁷¹ Tapson was certain that Njokweni had been deliberately provocative, just as Njokweni claimed he was simply going about his business in town. The ‘very obvious pause’ was the place where Africans and whites fought over their right to just recognition. Tapson believed that he and other officials were always center-stage for Africans, which, however, was nerve-wracking and made politeness an essential tool of governance. Njokweni’s letter tells the story of someone well versed in the racial etiquette of his society. He had the right to self-expression as someone of status and, by his account, every man whom he encountered gave him the respect he expected – except Tapson, of course.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

With Tapson's letter in hand, Greer picked up the argument where Brown left off. In a mid-March letter to the Superintendent of Natives (SoN), Bulawayo, the NC confirmed that Njokweni had removed his hat while in the office but kept it on while outside. Greer noted only that he had not seen 'the complainant [Njokweni] since the incident complained of', and that no 'European witnesses' had seen the altercation. Unlike other officials, Greer did not clearly state whether or not he thought Njokweni was inappropriate or rude, perhaps because his intervention was by way of an investigation.⁷²

It is impossible to know what kind of relationship Greer had with Tapson; however, his memo to the SoN was not a ringing endorsement of the ANC, who was transferred shortly after the investigation into his conduct. Greer was the closest official to Brown and he was the one who had to communicate with this angry and nervous man, who counted him as an ally. Perhaps even more significantly, Greer had just helped Brown restore order at Inyati: he understood the troubles that elite African men could cause.

Njokweni's framing of the event as confusion over the protocols of politeness rather than a breach of authority remained the essential premise of all further correspondence between officials, even as other parts of his story of excellent behavior began to fade away. After stating that he had seen Brown, who agreed 'he was somewhat hasty' in writing so many letters of protest to so many officials, the SoN adds, 'While Mr. Tapson undoubtedly shewed great lack of tact, I do not think the native teacher was altogether blameless'. He then advises Carbutt, the CNC, that 'This has been a lesson for Mr. Tapson and I feel that censure from yourself would meet the case'.⁷³

Carbutt was the linchpin in interpreting Njokweni's complaint and Tapson's explanation. A firm believer in the morality of segregation, the CNC recommended that all Africans in Southern Rhodesia be relocated to some other territory altogether.⁷⁴ Segregation was an easier solution to the problems of dealing with men such as Njokweni than relying on racial etiquette alone. But if Carbutt could not wish away African people, he and his subordinates had to find some way to deal with them, and most especially with people whom they regarded as educated and urbane. The proper etiquette to use with such persons was a matter of debate and correspondence, in fact. For example, NCs were confused about when, where, and by whom the wearing of shoes was proper. In response to complaints about prison clothing from the Native Vigilance Society, an association of African men from South Africa, Carbutt's predecessor wrote:

As the Native advances he wears the trappings of civilisation, trousers, boots and so on. My point is, is there any reason why the wearing of boots would be particularly regarded as objectionable in a Native as yet unconvicted of committing an offensive. I presume a Native Priest or minister would be excepted, but where would the line be drawn?⁷⁵

⁷² NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, NC, Inyati to SoN, Bulawayo, 16 March 1931.

⁷³ NAZ, S138/43, 1928–31, SoN, Bulawayo to CNC, 14 March 1931.

⁷⁴ Summers, *From Civilization*, 185.

⁷⁵ NAZ, S138/22, 1927–28, CNC to the magistrate, Salisbury, 26 Jan. 1928. See also the correspondence over rank and clothing in N3/21/10. Carbutt became CNC in 1930.

In other words, officials recognized that the evolving racial etiquette was not yet clear to everybody. And such clarification was important. As the premier put it in his letter to Carbutt, 'The future of both Native and European depends on the handling of the Native at the present time and one of the main factors in the position is the Native Department and its officials.'⁷⁶

Carbutt criticized Tapson most of all for ignoring the Native Affairs Act and simply hitting Njokweni's hat instead. NCs had the power to arrest Africans for insolence but sometimes refrained from using this power, either because they used violence instead, as in the case of Tapson, or because they were uncertain about the definition of insolence. Indeed, from reading Carbutt's letter to the premier, it seems that he wanted to sanction Tapson for not using the insolence clause of the NAA. After supporting Tapson's claim that Njokweni must have known Tapson was an official, Carbutt writes this:

However that may be the Assistant Native Commissioner's conduct was ill advised. If he considered Njokweni's manner was insolent, he had legal redress under the Native Affairs Act. I think Mr. Tapson should be censured for his action and, if Mr. Brown, the Principal of Inyati Mission is informed of this, and that Njokweni's manners were not at all that could be desired, he will I think be satisfied.⁷⁷

Tapson was 'ill advised' for not using all the legislative power at his disposal. Carbutt took a personal interest in this. He mused:

I was frequently – and quite unavoidably – being driven to do things which were illegal, and in doing so to be more aggressive and self assertive than became the case (or there was occasion to be) after we were all clothed with the necessary power [i.e. the NAA]. The attitude of the natives – as soon as they became aware of my status – changed, and so did mine towards them, and this changed attitude has endured to this day.⁷⁸

Carbutt did not abandon Tapson altogether. He supported Tapson's assertion that Njokweni must have known Tapson simply because Africans should be able to discern officials from others. Carbutt also sided with Tapson in pointing out Njokweni's poor manners. By the time Carbutt summarized the complaint for the premier, Njokweni had 'treated' the NC 'with the same scant respect he showed the Asst. Native Commissioner'.⁷⁹

The premier knew about Tapson's various efforts to defend his prestige. He accepted that Njokweni 'greatly provoked' Tapson; however, he concluded that Tapson's 'conduct in knocking off the boy's hat was reprehensible and a lowering of the status and dignity of a highly placed official of the Native Department'. Here was the trick of racial etiquette in Southern Rhodesia: 'The outward forms of respect are probably advisable and very properly required from the native to the officials of the Government, but they must be required with discretion and judgment'. This

⁷⁶ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, H. U. Moffat, 'A. N. C. Tapson & Complaint from Native', 23 March 1931.

⁷⁷ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, CNC to the secretary to the premier, 20 March 1931.

⁷⁸ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, SoN, Matabeleland to CNC, 9 Sept. 1929.

⁷⁹ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, CNC to the secretary to the premier, 20 March 1931.

entailed a fine sense of racial etiquette by everyone: act too deferential and both lost honor; act too proud and one faced humiliation or censure; act too boorish and one upset smug ideas about superiority. It was easy to stumble and cause a scene.⁸⁰

By the time that Njokweni's complaint reached the desk of the premier, he had been reduced to a 'native'.⁸¹ But this designation was the result of incremental changes in language – a man of status to a native – that in turn reflected changing relationships and concerns among officials and their prior debates about racial etiquette – from appeasing Brown and his anger to the proper application of authority by officials. Tapson's status moved in the opposite direction from Njokweni's. He was elevated from 'one of your staff', a 'tall man', 'a man' in Brown's letter to 'a highly placed official of the Native Department' in the premier's. This move – from 'one of your staff' to a 'highly placed official' – allowed the premier to demand a letter of apology from Tapson and to ignore the wounded pride of Njokweni. Njokweni became ordinary while Tapson became the face of the department. In tandem with this move, Njokweni's behavior became less and less civil. In fact, as Njokweni's behavior became more like that of a 'native', the higher became the expectations for Tapson's behavior. Njokweni's rudeness did not erase so much as emphasize Tapson's lack of self-restraint. As the premier put it, 'Self control in the every day dealings with the Natives is essential.'⁸²

In the end, Moffat rejected Carbutt's suggestion that Tapson be punished, since it 'may mean a "Black Mark" against' him and because there were 'extenuating circumstances'.⁸³ Tapson was censured, however. When Carbutt wrote to Brown in June, at the official conclusion of this drama, he noted that 'Tapson's attention has been called to his reprehensible action, and he has expressed regret for it'. Carbutt says nothing of Njokweni's manners. He then informs Brown that 'Mr. Tapson, as you are aware, was transferred to the Shangani Reserve, and this caused a delay in my investigations into the matter.'⁸⁴ Tapson was a difficult colleague who was better suited, perhaps, to not dealing with men such as Njokweni, whose sense of racial etiquette he dismissed as that of a 'sneering', 'arrogant', 'store-boy', 'town native', 'educated if ill mannered' African.

Tapson presumably did as he was instructed and wrote a letter of apology to the premier. Apparently, the NC was not satisfied with Tapson's effort and ordered him to write another one. In mid-May, Tapson complied with a terse note:

I regret the inadequacy of my expression of regret and now word it more explicitly. I regret having knocked off Albert Njokweni's hat.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–1931, H. U. Moffat, 'A. N. C. Tapson & Complaint from Native', 23 March 1931.

⁸¹ As noted by West, *The Rise*, 22–23. This paragraph draws on the correspondence between Brown, Greer, and the premier in NAZ, S138/41, 1926–1931.

⁸² NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, H. U. Moffat, 'A. N. C. Tapson & Complaint from Native', 23 March 1931.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, CNC to the principal, London Mission, Inyati, 4 June 1931.

⁸⁵ NAZ, S138/41, 1926–31, ANC, Shangani Reserve to NC, Inyati, 14 May 1931.

To the end, the unrepentant Tapson insisted on calling Lennox Njokweni 'Albert'. More than that, he was unable, perhaps even disinclined, to acknowledge elite men in public spaces. Seventeen years after his encounter with Njokweni, Tapson once again embroiled himself in controversy by knocking the hat off one Zenzo. The native appeals court overturned Zenzo's conviction of insolence and made a clearer line between what officials considered poor manners and insolence:

Necessary as it is for the Native Population to show respect to Government officials – even as a European schoolboy shows his respect to his schoolmaster – there is a vast difference between a breach of good manners and 'insolent or contemptuous' behavior, and under no circumstances should the Native Affairs Act be invoked to impose criminal sanctions for bad manners.⁸⁶

By 1948 racial etiquette was clearer regarding hats: Africans wearing hats in the presence of officials were rude, but 'under no circumstances' were they criminals, nor could they, presumably, be assaulted.

Tapson makes his last appearance in the archival record in 1950. As a ranking member of the Native Affairs Department, he contributed to the writing of the department's annual exam for NC candidates. Cranky as ever, he was angry when the CNC informed him that his questions were too difficult and, frankly, out of touch with the department's principles. 'My first impulse on receiving your paper and letter was to send a wire asking to be replaced by someone else as an examiner', he fumed. 'My views on the relative importance of "Administration" as opposed to "custom" have grown with years and are now fixed', he stated. NCs needed administrative knowledge to deal with such issues as 'Native trade unionism, restrictive legislation, mass education and other relative matters' that are 'being freely discussed amongst all the younger classes of natives today...'. The real key to Tapson's thinking in 1950 (and arguably in 1931) was his conviction that 'the whole of social and economic progress of this Country rests squarely on our shoulders – Missionaries and other visionaries notwithstanding'.⁸⁷ Administrators such as he understood that 'the off shoot of a race only about 150 years old does not acquire the folklore and traditions of a nation settled for hundreds of years in one country', as evident in the history of 'Grecian [*sic*] and Roman Civilisation'. Tapson was not interested in what his colleagues thought of the 'Native mind'; he was an administrator guiding Africans to civilization.⁸⁸ Even within that tradition of administration, he stuck out for his inflexibility – he had absolutely no room for men such as Njokweni.

' I TOLD HIM I WAS LENNOX NJOKWENI '

In her study of the segregated American South, Jennifer Ritterhouse argues that racial etiquette was not simply part of the segregationist culture of the

⁸⁶ *Review Cases*, vol. III, Part III, 1948: *Rex v Zenzo*, 22 July 1948, 27–8.

⁸⁷ NAZ, MS 665/1, R. Tapson to Dear Turton [the CNC], 6 June 1950.

⁸⁸ Jeater, *Law*.

Jim Crow South – ‘it *helped* to make it’.⁸⁹ As in the American South, whites in Southern Rhodesia desired the affirmation that came with the performance of racial etiquette; when Africans deferred to them, whites felt reassured in their belief that Africans accepted their authority. As we have seen, racial etiquette was far more dynamic and far more unpredictable than the white ideal of racial deference. In fact, the story of Tapson and Njokweni’s encounter reveals how much work it took for whites to cajole Africans into respecting them.⁹⁰ Tapson lacked the social skills required to make racial etiquette appear effortless – he was too rigid in his interpretation, too wooden in his delivery, and too ready to resort to violence to prove his point. In contrast, socially sophisticated people such as Njokweni could shake up whites’ conception of racial etiquette by being exceptionally proper and by pointing out how whites failed to adhere to the basic rules of etiquette by which they said they lived. Njokweni’s story of polite deference to authorities, including Brown, fit the evolving ideal of racial etiquette far better than Tapson’s explanation for his violence. It is true that, in the end, officials reduced Njokweni to an anonymous ‘native’ who ‘greatly provoked’ a white man, but they could only come to this conclusion by acknowledging Tapson’s shocking behavior.

In the context of this history, what can we say about *Lennox Njokweni*? It is difficult to ignore Njokweni’s unmistakable assertion of self: ‘I told him I was Lennox Njokweni’, he declared. The danger of narrating Njokweni’s story as either resistance to white racism or the ascendant and secure power of white Rhodesians is that it risks making Njokweni the man unremarkable – exactly what he wanted to challenge. If we listen carefully to Njokweni, we can hear the story of an individual who took pleasure in exhibiting his personality and status for all to see. In this sense, Njokweni demonstrated a robust ‘self-identification’ as an urbane man with a sophisticated sense of style and manners.⁹¹ He understood where and how he fit into colonial society, and, given his status, he was prepared to defend himself against any unjust attack on his character. When Njokweni protested Tapson’s abuse, he defined a new limit in Southern Rhodesia’s evolving code of racial etiquette, a boundary that others would extend through further struggle.

⁸⁹ J. Ritterhouse, ‘The etiquette of race relations in the Jim Crow South’, in Ted Ownby (ed.), *Manners and Southern History* (Jackson, MS, 2007), 23.

⁹⁰ Ritterhouse, *Growing Up*, 13.

⁹¹ Cooper, *Colonialism*, 73.