

Although Bolliger does not answer all these questions, his work sets an agenda for scholars looking to challenge the assumptions, geographical parameters, and perhaps periodization of conflict in Namibia, Angola, and South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. He paints a vivid picture of the ‘vast and uneven “middle ground”’ of colonialism, engaging the historiography of African intermediaries by showing that there were not just two sides — African and colonial — but many.⁸ Given the historical divides that Bolliger identifies between northern Namibia and the rest of the country, future studies might examine the experiences of Black former soldiers from central and southern Namibia. Still, by centering the experiences of Black former members of apartheid South Africa’s security forces, Bolliger underscores the evidentiary flimsiness of the region’s official histories and opens the way for further examination of what Southern Africa’s unevenly ‘un-national’ conflicts entailed for their diverse actors.

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Queering Colonialism

Queering Colonial Natal: Indigeneity and the Violence of Belonging in Southern Africa

By T. J. Tallie. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. Pp. 240. \$100, hardcover (ISBN: 9781517905170); \$25.00, paperback (ISBN: 9781517905187).

Gibson Ncube 

Stellenbosch University

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As the historian T. J. Tallie explains in a 2016 article, in the British colony of Natal in Southern Africa during the nineteenth century, the ‘mission field served as the front line in cultural transformation, as missionaries attempted to reorient indigenous Africans toward new religions, economic, and social systems. Yet these spaces were anything but “settled”, rather they remained a site of negotiation and reinterpretation as converts, clergy, and colonists sought to link the internal processes of Christian conversion to visible signs of acculturative change’.¹ His recent work expands that intervention and argues that colonial Natal was indeed far from being ‘settled’, and it was instead ‘an anxious colonial state’ (3) in which attempts to create a settler majority that would secure ‘the political and social future of Europeans within the colony’ (152) were virtually impossible because the ‘indigenous peoples outnumbered them eight to one’ (88). In *Queering Colonial*

Katangese gendarmes and Central-Southern Africa’s forty years war, 1960–99’, in N. Arielli and B. Collins (eds.), *Transnational Soldiers: Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era* (New York, 2013); D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁸The ‘middle ground’ idea comes from Richard White and, later, Luise White. R. White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991); L. White, ‘Students, ZAPU, and Special Branch in Francistown, 1964–1972’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:6 (2014).

¹T. J. Tallie, ‘Sartorial settlement: the mission field and transformation in colonial Natal, 1850–1897’, *Journal of World History*, 27:3 (2016), 389.

Natal Tallie uncovers with exceptional lucidity how through 'everyday interactions, settlers and Africans created ideas of race, gender, and sexuality that the legal apparatus of the colonial law attempted to domesticate and control' (17).

To make sense of social relations in nineteenth century Natal, Tallie adopts two theoretical approaches. First, he draws on an indigenous studies-centred approach which according to him 'allows room for reading forms of resistance and challenge while foregrounding the significant power disparities that operated in European settler relations with indigenous Africans (as well as Indian migrants) in Natal' (6). This framework is brought into constructive conversation with a queer theoretical approach which offers 'an exploration of how lines of assumed order are skewed by ideas, actions, or formations' (7). Arguing for the importance of a queer reading, Tallie contends that if settler colonialism itself is presented as a form of orientation, 'of making a recognisable and inhabitable home space for European arrivals on indigenous land, then native peoples and their continued resistance can serve to "queer" these attempted forms of order' (7). European settlers asserted their belonging in Natal by classifying and marking their behaviour as normal and their ways of being as correct. By declaring such forms of being as normative, settlers projected a certain vision of the future. To achieve this, however, settlers needed to characterise the lives and practices of the colony's indigenous people as deviant, backward, and requiring the civilisational assistance of the settlers.

Working with and through a rich and eclectic archive of primary sources, including missionary and official archives, and print sources such as *Ikwezi*, an early isiZulu newspaper, Tallie interweaves an intriguing account of how settler legislation policed bodies and corporeal practices and experiences through its racist and heteropatriarchal order. Tallie demonstrates that race, gender, and sexuality could not be detached from broader economic and political structures. In the first chapter, for instance, he examines the indigenous marital practices of *ilobolo* (bride price) and *isithembu* (polygynous marriage). The arrival of Europeans rendered *ilobolo* and *isithembu* 'sites of intense contestation where settlers could make civilisational claims of advancement against improper native formulations' (15). Obviously, since African people considered their own practices to be normative, they thus resisted European attempts to impose Western mores on them. For the indigenous populations, *ilobolo* and *isithembu* were pivotal to their 'homestead-based agricultural/pastoral economy' (19). However, the colonial settlers found these to be a threat in that they instigated competition for cheap labour which was a requirement for their success and survival. As a result, settler colonial spaces were contoured by an everyday and violent Eurocentrism, which imposed and presumed its superiority. As was the case with the 'management' of indigenous practices, white settlers also controlled access to education, alcohol, and how African bodies were clothed. These different sites became standards 'for measuring the distinct and privileged status of European settlers, and jealously guarded social and imperial prerogatives as a means of consolidating the power of a white minority' (153). Although some indigenous people resisted Western mores, some converted to Christianity. These converts were called *amakholwa* and many of them found strategic usefulness in embracing Christian ways of being. The way Western missionaries related to *amakholwa* had a profound impact on the social order in Natal and Zululand. For instance, Tallie argues that educational institutions provided a space in which African could be retrained in gendered forms of labour. As Tallie contends, 'rather than perform the ostensible drudgery of agricultural labour, African women were to be retrained in domestic arts, which involved profound transformations in relation to dress, household work, and child rearing' (177). These efforts at retraining *amakholwa* sought to ensure that the hold of *imizi* (homesteads) was weakened and that of the colonial administration concretised.

Tallie resists the inclination to understand the histories of Africans, South Asians, and Europeans in colonial Natal as distinct and not interconnected. He demonstrates, quite convincingly, how the histories and identities of these different groups were 'co-created in relation to each other' (185). Despite this important point on relationality, I found that Tallie's argument underplays the voices

and agency of women in colonial Natal, regardless of their race. Tallie could have shown how, for example, within the practices of *ilibolo* and *isithembu*, although African women's roles were reduced to their reproductive capabilities as well as functions as manual labourers, they were still able to exercise their agency. The same can be said about Indian women, who are not framed as autonomous as is the case with Indian men. For example, Jo Beall's study offers a more nuanced consideration of how Indian women accommodated and resisted different heteropatriarchal norms and practices.²

Tallie's Conclusion, 'Refracting futures in Natal and beyond', is a fascinating read, in how it shifts in time to focus on contemporary KwaZulu-Natal. Tallie argues that although 'South Africa has transformed considerably (as the now-named province of KwaZulu-Natal can attest), it still retains many of the mechanisms of a state that secured power for a select few at the expense of a majority of its citizens' (188). Tallie contends that contemporary Zulu efforts to take advantage of a discourse based on notions of tradition, as was certainly the case with the settlers a century before, has rebuffed 'the queering of their social formations can result in a blatant appeal to heteropatriarchy. These discursive attempts mirror earlier settler formulations of defining a sexual other outside of conceived normativity' (189). Tallie demonstrates that postapartheid South Africa has inherited many of the colonial legacies of the settler state. Engaging with queer theorists like Neville Hoad, Tallie shows that efforts to evoke 'tradition' against sexual diversity actually reinforce and reproduce colonial patriarchal categories: 'African rejections of homosexuality, particularly in a Zulu context, while undoubtedly perpetuating reprehensible justifications for violence against people who engage in nonheteronormative sexual activity, also potentially challenge the underlying assumptions of universal subjects produced through colonial violence' (190). What is striking about Tallie's innovation is how he applies queer theory to Natal's colonial history, and conversely, applies history to contemporary queer theory. This approach enriches queer theory by drawing connections between the past and contemporary practices, which makes it possible to see how the past feeds into the present and how the present cannot be understood without evoking the past. A historical approach, as Tallie eloquently show in *Queering Colonial Natal*, has a way of unsettling and shedding new light on contemporary practices. At the same time, history as a field is enriched by queer theory because, as Tallie states, it has a 'destabilising potential' which seeks 'to understand just how the norms that underpin structures of power are created, and to peer beyond the claims of hegemonic groups to see how these norms are made and unmade through daily actions' (4). This innovative praxis that brings history and queer theory into productive conversation offers a fresh take of diverse inter-related issues such as attempted hegemony, resistance, collaboration, and compromise.

Queering Colonial Natal is a timely and important book. Its ingenious theoretical underpinning is invaluable to understanding how Eurocentric normativities and settler colonisation have come to shape the contemporary African world. Tallie proffers a very distinctive and worthwhile contribution to the study and understanding of Natal. More than that, this book is genuinely invaluable to diverse fields such as history, African queer studies, anthropology, and many other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

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²J. Beall, 'Women under indentured labour in colonial Natal, 1860-1911', in C. Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990), 146-67.