

THEY Poured THEMSELVES INTO THE MILK: ZULU POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY UNDER SHAKA*

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ABSTRACT: This article synthesizes metaphors and practices surrounding human and bovine milk and semen appearing in the *James Stuart Archive* of Zulu oral history. The King's control of the flow of milk in society was the source of his power and the mechanism by which he controlled the state. A fluent understanding of this Zulu political philosophy in the *Stuart Archive* opens up a rich and underutilized source of historical information for Zulu history that adds significantly to prior studies. Parallels to these images in the Great Lakes region suggest a 'milk complex' rather than the common perception of a 'cattle complex'.

KEY WORDS: Precolonial South Africa, political culture, oral narratives, social organization.

She was so thirsty that she drank and drank until she was full and had to sit down. The water was delicious. It tasted like milk. She could not know that it belonged to the Gungu-Kubantwana, the Mother of the Animals.
Zulu Myth¹

IN reading the *James Stuart Archive* and hearing the voices of Stuart's informants filtering through the translation and the editing, one is seduced into sympathy with the analysis of these old men.² And this is the most valuable thing about the archive: their voices start to make sense. With a minimum of interpretive gloss, their startling metaphors and their reassuring casualness concerning what seems now to be the unfamiliar culture of nineteenth-century Zulu country provide access to a Zulu worldview. Within this worldview suddenly emerges a multiplicity of patterns that insert a sense of drama into the proceedings as they suggest what was going on in the minds of the suddenly lively historical actors. As one begins to imagine the petty disputes and obsessive practices surrounding milk, a glimmer of recognition begins to shine. Boys spent their most impressionable years as

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¹ Jan Knappert, *Bantu Myths and Other Tales* (Leiden, 1977), 41. Rev. Canon Callaway recorded stories with similar tropes in the 1860s. 'Ugunqu-Kubantwana was so called because she was the mother of all animals ... the rivers which were in her the animals did not like to drink, for they were like common water; that pool at which they drank was, at [sic] it were, milk'. Canon Callaway, *Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus in their Own Words with a Translation into English and Notes* (Westport CT, 1970 [1868]), 161–76, 349–50.

² C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright (eds.), *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighboring Peoples* (5 vols.) (Pietermaritzburg, 1976–2001) (hereafter JSA in the footnotes and *Stuart Archive* in the text).

young adolescents drinking twice a day from the udders of the royal cows. They were drinking of life, administered by the king. The king's control of the flow of milk in Zulu society was the source of his power and the mechanism by which he controlled the state. Understanding this Zulu philosophy of political power allows more fluent understandings of the historical analyses of Stuart's informants, opening up a rich and underutilized source of historical information for the Zulu state.³ Where Carolyn Hamilton and others elucidate the lens of colonial logic through which we receive these testimonies, this essay attempts to do the same for Stuart's informants by identifying some re-occurring images in the *Stuart Archive* and trying to map out some relationships between them.⁴

THE JAMES STUART ARCHIVE AND THE ZULU STATE

Carolyn Hamilton has argued that the distinctly mythological historiography surrounding Shaka arose from the unique political needs of South African society. Drawing on Mbongeni Malaba's pathbreaking study, Hamilton saw both white and black South Africans promulgating an interpretation of Shaka as a point of departure for theories of the state in South Africa.⁵ Shaka, presented as both violently unrestrained and disciplined as a leader, became a metaphor to discuss the relationship between order and chaos.

A primary figure among white South African experts was James Stuart, the colonial historian and administrator who spent 25 years collecting Zulu oral history from over 200 sources, now compiled in Webb and Wright's the *James Stuart Archive*. Building on Julian Cobbing's incisive review, Hamilton argued that while Stuart's personal history and contemporary political priorities shade the entirety of the *Stuart Archive*, 'to dismiss the writings of Stuart [and others] as examples of "colonial discourse" is to close off the possibilities of recovering material about Africa's precolonial past, and ultimately revert to a denial of that history'.⁶

David Chanaiwa, in keeping with John Omer-Cooper's seminal study, portrayed the nineteenth-century Zulu kingdom under Shaka and his successors as a 'revolutionary process of state formation in a pastoralist

³ James Wright once mentioned to me his disappointment in how little the Stuart Archive is referenced by scholars. Similarly, Jan Vansina lamented that his archive of 900 Rwandan historical stories has been 'completely ignored by scholars working after 1960'. A similar project to unpack the symbolism of those stories might make them more accessible. Jan Vansina, 'Historical tales (*Ibitekerezo*) and the history of Rwanda', *History in Africa*, 27 (2000), 375–414.

⁴ Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge MA, 1998); Dan Wylie, *Savage Delight: White Myths of Shaka* (Pietermaritzburg, 2000). Dapha Golan, *Inventing Shaka: Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism* (Boulder, 1994).

⁵ Mbongeni Zikhethale Malaba, 'Shaka as a literary theme' (Ph.D. thesis, University of York, 1986).

⁶ Cobbing's colorful metaphor seems apt: '[For Stuart,] the historical detail ... remained disposable slag from which the pigs of structural information could be lifted. Only fortuitously has that rich slag survived for reinspection'. Julian Cobbing, 'A tainted well: the objectives, historical fantasies, and working methods of James Stuart, with counter-argument', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 11 (1988), 124. See also John Wright, 'Making the James Stuart Archive', *History in Africa*, 23 (1996), 333–50.

society'. What began as 'essentially an intraelite changing of the palace guards', when Shaka betrayed his mentor Dingiswayo, turned into a comprehensive transformation of a dispersed and decentralized Nguni society.⁷ Shaka and his successors formed a broad Zulu empire through military conquest and intensive incorporation of conquered people into the new polity. While Zulu institutions such as *amabutho* age-sets linked to scattered royal homesteads brought youth together from around the kingdom and socialized them into a new cosmopolitan Zulu identity, it remains unclear how people in Shaka's kingdom conceived and theorized this dramatic political transformation.

Probing the *Stuart Archive* for clues, something beyond Hamilton's project to reconstruct Stuart's 'cross-examination' is necessary to fully escape Stuart's priorities and hear the historical analyses contested by these Zulu elders. One must translate the symbolic imagery of these testimonies into a form useful to twenty-first-century historians. Ian Knight began this process in his detailed history of the Zulu military. The *inkatha* coil, 'the drinking of the king's milk', and the coded colors of the shields helped organize Zulu understandings of power relationships.⁸ While twentieth-century anthropologists noted a variety of symbolic meanings surrounding milk, an analysis of conceptual relationships evident in nineteenth-century records provides a key to Zulu political philosophy.⁹

THE POWER OF MILK

Milk is a constant topic of conversation in the *Stuart Archive*, and not simply as a food: 'Before milking into the *pail*, one was obliged to milk a little onto

⁷ David Shingirai Chanaiwa, 'The Zulu revolution: state formation in a pastoralist society', *African Studies Review*, 23 (Dec. 1980), 1–20; John Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath* (Evanston, 1969). An important collection of historical approaches to the Zulu state, including Omer-Cooper's defense of his original thesis, can be found in Carolyn Hamilton (ed.), *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Johannesburg, 1995). According to Henry Fynn, Shaka betrayed Dingiswayo's position in a battle with the Swazi under Zuedi. Dingiswayo was killed and Shaka, who had already killed the heir apparent, took control of the Zulu kingship. Henry Fynn, 'Occurrences among the natives (from the papers left by Mr. Henry Fynn)', in John Bird (ed.), *The Annals of Natal, 1495 to 1845* (2 vols.) (Pietermaritzburg, 1888), 1, 65. Bird dated this document to 1839, 'since the destruction of Cane and his party is spoken of as recent' (60fn).

⁸ Ian Knight's perceptive observations about the power of symbol and ritual in military organization provided an essential inspiration for this article. Ian Knight, *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army from Shaka to Cetshwayo: 1818–1879* (Mechanicsburg, 1995). Milk and cattle are examples of 'how certain metaphors, created at a particular historical juncture, come to stand as the bearers of history and remain in the cultures concerned as evaluative precedents'. Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History* (Charlottesville, 1991) 71; Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985).

⁹ Jan Vansina, 'Out of sight, but kept in mind: ethnography and African history' (Paper delivered at University of Wisconsin–Madison, 12 Mar. 2005). I have cited three anthropologists extensively where their observations accord with my interpretation. All three were raised in twentieth-century Zulu society. They include Absalom Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations: A Study of the Dynamics of Social Change* (Pietermaritzburg, 1962); Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Cape Town, 1976); Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (New York, 1977).

the ground, i.e. the first-coming milk. This was the constant or invariable practice ... *It is the practice of kings*'.¹⁰ 'The practice of kings' – this was a political act. The above passage comes from Stuart's notes on his conversation with Baleni ka Silwana over the course of about a week in May of 1914. Baleni described himself as being of the Mpungose tribe, his father having died in the ongoing struggle between Shaka's successors, Mpande and Dingane, as the kingdom ruptured in the late 1830s. Bryant suggested that Baleni's father Silwana had sided with Mpande who appointed him chief over parts of his realm, including parts of Qwabe country.¹¹ Baleni said he was a young boy when his father died, suggesting that he was among the younger sons born in the mid-1830s a few years before his father died at the battle of Maqongqo in 1840. Baleni came of age in one of Mpande's royal homesteads, or *amakhandas*. Baleni provided a detailed testimony from which some basic theses about the power of milk might be proposed.

'I *kleza*'d at Ndabakawombe ... I grew up there. We were cadets of the Dhloko regiment known as the Inyati'. During this time, Baleni told Stuart, 'We used to *drink milk from the udders of the king's cows*'.¹² The significance of the Zulu word denoting this act was such that Stuart simply left it untranslated in his notes as *kleza*. Figuratively it meant to live as an adolescent in an *ibutho* under the authority of the king. Sometime after his father's death, Baleni was placed under the authority of one of Mpande's wives in the Dhloko *ibutho*, named after an aggressive type of snake. Every day at midday and again at sunset, they drove the cattle into the central kraal. The cattle to be used for the king and the compound reserved for royal wives and female kin, or *isigodhlo*, were separated from the others, and after a time the calves would be separated. An *inceku*, a person specially assigned to collect the king's milk, would fill the king's milk pail from the special cows of the king. While he collected the king's milk, the 'cadets' would line up to drink from their assigned cows.

After being initiated a few years later at Gqikazi, Baleni distinguished himself enough to be assigned to be a royal officer or *induna*. It seems that Mpande honored the memory of Baleni's father by promoting his sons to positions of leadership; Baleni's brothers were royal milkers or *izinceku*, and Baleni himself was later given the same honor, 'The king saw me with others of my regiment and said, "Come, you will milk my cows". I gave praise'.¹³

Baleni then moved to Nodwengu and took up the duties of an *inceku*.¹⁴ At milking time he would take the royal milk bucket from the *isigodhlo*. The 18-inch high bucket had an ornate cover and traveled with forty head of

¹⁰ Baleni ka Silwana, JSA, 1, 36. Stuart apparently wrote down his notes rapidly, quickly translating and paraphrasing as he went. He was fluent in Zulu and often mixed English and Zulu in the same passage, even the same sentence. The editors of JSA have used italic script in the volumes to show when Stuart was using Zulu, and where they have done the translation. In passages quoted from JSA here, the italic script has been preserved and represents Webb and Wright's translation of Stuart's notes in Zulu.

¹¹ A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (New York, 1929), 29.

¹² The italicized phrase represents Webb and Wright's translation of the word *kleza* appearing in Stuart's notes. Baleni ka Silwana, JSA, 1, 33.

¹³ Baleni ka Silwana, JSA, 1, 35.

¹⁴ He mentioned that he gave an ox to the king to show his thanks for receiving this position; it is unclear where a boy without a father would have obtained the ox.

milk cows wherever the king went.¹⁵ As he began milking, he squirted the first coming milk on to the ground, but after this it was a grave error to spill any of the milk, an offense for which the offender would pay a fine of an ox. With the royal pail full of milk, Baleni carried it 'at arm's length above the head, so as not to come into contact with any filth or impurity'. If lightning threatened, there was no milking lest the lightning should get into the milk.¹⁶ The *izinceku* could neither drink of the king's milk nor eat his food since doing so would prevent them from taking part in war. When the king died, the *izinceku* were forbidden to help dig the grave.

In addition to the milking, the *izinceku* also tended to the king's oxen and fetched water for the king in gourds. The *izinceku* would then give drink to the king, in a manner evocative of drinking milk from the cows, by pouring from the calabash directly into the king's mouth.¹⁷ The king would occasionally call the *izinceku* in to his hut to talk during the long winter nights. The *izinceku* were confidants of the king, and among the few males allowed into the *isigodhlo*. Where other men would enter the *isigodhlo* on all fours, the *izinceku* only stooped until they arrived at where they were meant to sit. When girls went out of the *isigodhlo* to cultivate gardens, they were accompanied by *izinceku*. The *izinceku* supplied milk to the *isigodhlo*, pouring it from their workaday containers into pots kept by the women of the *isigodhlo* which were in turn poured into gourds by the mothers of the king's wives.¹⁸ An *inceku* would also carry the king's snuffbox, and sit beside him at the men's assembly. The royal milkers were obviously young men being trained for high-status positions of leadership by being closely associated with the king and witnessing his thoughts and activities. 'That was a splendid mode of government', Baleni told Stuart in reference to his years as an *inceku*.¹⁹

The king's cattle, according to Baleni, were kept in careful ritual isolation from the others. If a commoner's bull mounted one of the king's heifers, it would be castrated. In addition, there were different words for heifers kept for beef and those kept for milk, and they were kept in separate kraals.²⁰ It was taboo for a bull to mount any heifer (not just the king's) kept for meat; the semen was seen as contaminating to the meat.²¹ Such a bull would be slaughtered. Baleni suggested that the extreme implications of this rule were tempered by the king's *izinceku*: 'Should a man's bull get among the *king's beef heifers and mount them*, the king would not be told because he would then order the whole of that man's stock to be seized'. The king reserved the right to eat the udder of heifers slaughtered for meat. Baleni claimed that all these practices were true under Shaka and Dingane as well.

¹⁵ See also 'First interview with Dingane. February 1835. (From the works of Captain Gardiner, R. N.)', in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, 1, 306.

¹⁶ See also Josiah Tyler, *Forty Years among the Zulus* (Chicago, 1891), 104.

¹⁷ Baleni does not mention doing this with milk; this was the practice for water. I could find no reference to how the king drank his milk. But it is significant, as we shall see, that rain was equated with semen. See Berglund, *Zulu Thought*, 62, 338.

¹⁸ Nungu ka Matshobana, JSA, v, 214. See also Berglund, *Zulu Thought*, 200.

¹⁹ Baleni ka Silwana, JSA, 1, 46. See also Lunguza ka Mpukane, JSA, 1, 328.

²⁰ The phrases for heifers kept for beef and those kept for milk appear as separate italicized terms in the *Stuart Archive*, suggesting separate Zulu terms for them.

²¹ See also Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 94-6.

One can only speculate as to the effect the symbolism and activity surrounding milk must have had on Zulu boys as they grew up.²² Boys, not many years weaned from their mothers, spent at least as many years, perhaps more, nursing at the teats of the king's cattle. The most ambitious among them hoped one day to milk the king's cows and to enact a sort of nursing ritual pouring drink directly into the king's mouth. Even without drawing on Lévi-Strauss to analyze these activities, as Adam Kuper does with great insight, the affective power and coherence of these rituals seem far from arbitrary. Milk in the Zulu state was not merely a medium of royal symbolism, it was a bearer of royal power. Eating the udder was a privilege reserved for the king, because he was consuming the productive essence of power in the Zulu kingdom.

The king's cattle, like the women of the *isigodhlo*, were given in tribute to the king from every homestead in the realm. The best of these were preserved for royal consumption. Thus in his daily repast, he bound the strength of the entire kingdom unto himself, centralizing and controlling its power. He then distributed this concentration of power, in a controlled manner, among his warriors and warriors-in-training, themselves drawn from all over the kingdom. Through his heifers, the king then became mother to countless warriors who suckled at his teats. His own unique royal status was maintained by reserving the best young warriors, and the best milk, for royal consumption – and they, as the distilled essence of the Zulu state, then nursed him. Messengers who delivered a gift of cattle to Mpande from Dingane before their rift told him, '*Take them, Prince! Your brother, the king gives them to you. He says "Drink from the udders with your mother"*'.²³ The state, in a ritual sense, was the king's mother – evoking an intimate relationship of mutual obligation between the king and the homestead heads, i.e. the citizens of the Zulu state.

Milk was a magical substance in Zulu country in the eighteenth century, imbued with instrumental efficacy. Another of Stuart's sources, Mabonsa ka Sidhlayi, was about the same age as Baleni, but grew up as a Hlubi under Zulu domination.²⁴ Mabonsa told Stuart that Dingiswayo came to the Hlubi chief Bungane accompanied by Shaka 'to ask about chieftainship'. '*When you overcame the nations, how did you do it?*'²⁵ Bungane treated Dingiswayo with various medicines, and then sent him to gather milk and a piece of hair

²² Knight, *Anatomy*, 60.

²³ Mangati ka Godide, JSA, 11, 201. N. N. Canonici's commentary on milk symbolism in the story quoted at the beginning of this essay emphasizes this point. Generally sharing the milk of the same cow was tantamount to sharing the milk of the same mother, and implied a sibling relationship, but 'all may partake of milk products at the chief's place, because he is considered the father of all his people'. N. N. Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions* (Durban, 1996) 204; also Chanaiwa, 'Zulu revolution', 6–7.

²⁴ The Hlubi did not move toward the *amabutho* system in the early nineteenth century like other chiefdoms, mitigating economic pressures on their society through expansion. They only came under Zulu control after asking Shaka to help them defend themselves against the Ngwane under Matiwane. Yet the oral tradition suggests that milk was central to the transition that brought them under the Shakan system, and that causative act happened before Shaka's rise to power. See J. Gump, 'Ecological change and pre-Shakan state formation', *African Economic History*, 18 (1989), 62; Jeff Peires, 'Matiwane's road to Mibholompo: a reprieve for the Mfecane?' in Hamilton (ed.), *Mfecane Aftermath*.

²⁵ Mabonsa ka Sidhlayi, JSA, 11, 12.

from a lioness.²⁶ Mabonsa then mentioned that ‘the Hlubis blame themselves now for having educated Dingiswayo’, as if to suggest that this milk-medicine, recklessly taught to Dingiswayo, was the root of Zulu power and ultimately the reason for Shaka’s rise to dominance.

Mahaya ka Nongqabana, who described himself as Sotho, claimed that the Cunu people practiced a similar magic with cow milk. ‘The milking of a beast in this way, and the doctoring of the liquid, was to enable the chief to *overcome other chiefs*’.²⁷ Again, as was the practice under Mpande, the first milk received special treatment. The logic suggested here is that the first milk was peculiarly potent and thus needed to be treated carefully. In Jan Knappert’s collections of Southern African myth, milk is understood to be the life-giving expression of a female deity – the River Goddess or the Mother of All Animals – suggesting that the spraying of the first milk on the ground was an offering to the creator goddess.²⁸ On the other hand, a tale of Shaka’s youth portrayed him complaining about being given the first milk which was the ‘*inferior milk*’, the second milk being ‘richer, purer and cooler’.²⁹ In the case of the everyday practice under Mpande it would suggest that the first milk was spilled to the ground either because its potency would be too much for normal consumption even by the chief or because it was not of a quality fit for the chief. Either way we find the king classifying and controlling the flow of the milk, with Shaka insisting on this even as an adolescent in an *ibutho* with a rival for chiefly power, Makadema, who eventually died at Shaka’s hands. More broadly, another understanding seems to be at play here, a dynamic that is evident in testimony of another of Stuart’s informants, Magojela ka Mfanawendhlela. Also discussing the eating habits of chiefly rivals as children, Magojela interpreted the anomaly of the younger Zungu becoming a chief over his elder brother Makoba in terms of how they drank their milk curds.

Makoba ate up all that was put in his hand, whereas Zungu would take one mouthful and throw the rest away, or let the rest fall through his hands on the ground. This was then interpreted to mean that Makoba was a glutton and would be mean, whereas Zungu would be content with a little and leave some for others; hence it was right he should become the *chief* notwithstanding Makoba’s seniority.³⁰

In this context, the offering of the first milk to the ground appears to be a ritual act of generosity or prudence appropriate to a chiefly character, but it was more than that. Magojela’s reminiscence was, in a sense, of ‘the last milk’, that which is allowed to trickle through after being consumed.

²⁶ See also Berglund, *Zulu Thought*, 208, 354; Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 155.

²⁷ Mahaya ka Nongqabana, JSA, II, 117.

²⁸ Jan Knappert, *Myths and Legends of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland* (Leiden, 1985); *idem*, *Bantu Myths*.

²⁹ Ngidi ka Mcikaziswa, JSA, v, 60. Berglund, in *Zulu Thought*, sees a similar act by mothers as an offering intended to bring more milk, 339. Ngubane, on the other hand, suggests that discarding the first coming milk is a method of removing pollution, see *Body and Mind*, 79.

³⁰ Magojela ka Mfanawendhlela, JSA, II, 105. Bryant explained that Makoba was of a mean and ungenerous disposition and thus was unacceptable as a chief. Bryant, *Olden Times*, 176.

An enigmatic note in Stuart's conversation with Nungu ka Matshobana hints at how this understanding was expressed in day-to-day practice. 'Do not eat with children but leave food for them to eat afterwards – *pour on the ground* and so on'.³¹ In this understanding, a possible interpretation of the flow of milk through the society starts with releasing the first milk back to the earth, the second milk going to the chief and trickling down among his attendants, wives, and officers, and the rest carried out into the society through the cattle, first to the boys of the *amabutho* and the rest into the homesteads where finally, whatever children leave behind is left to soak back into the earth.³² Such a design gives a ritualized vision of a highly centralized society with the chief at the pinnacle of a pyramidal distribution of power flowing in the milk. Shaka conferred a royal blessing upon a loyal subject by saying, '*you will live to drink milk*'.³³

POWER IN THE ZULU STATE

Milk was more than a metaphor for power, or even a specific ritual symbol of power. Power in Zulu society had physical form – milk. This is analogous to how we accord wealth a physical form today – money. Wealth is a certain type of abstraction that in today's society is treated differently from political power, even if they are closely related. What is meant by the analogy between wealth and milk is that both societies had concrete expressions of essentially abstract concepts, and that the concrete expressions were taken to be the essence of the abstract concept – power or wealth – itself. One can hear the struggle to translate these concepts in the voice of one of Stuart's sources: 'Our great bank is cattle'. Mbovu ka Mtshumayeli, a child of Mpande's *amabutho*, made an analogy between cattle and banks as storehouses of wealth. This suggests that money and milk (that which was stored) were analogous substances in Mbovu's mind, the flow of which described the structure of the society. He continued with the analogy: 'Let *pieces of paper* be with Europeans ... The [colonial] Government *built the country* with money ... The Government resembles Tshaka, for he never got tired. *Its army is money*'.³⁴ Every attribute of the power of milk is present in Mbovu's translated concept of European money: its almost magical instrumental power, its physicality, its ability to aid political expansion, its nourishing capacity and its military efficacy.³⁵ So if milk, like money in Mbovu's mind,

³¹ Nungu ka Matshobana, JSA, v, 212. The division suggested here between the immature habits of children and the proper behavior of adults contributes to the illegitimate character of the Imbulu imposter in 'The story of Untombi-yaphansi (Girl-of-the-Below)', in Callaway, *Nursery Tales*, 296–316. See also W. D. Hammond-Tooke, 'Levi-Strauss in a garden of millet: the structural analysis of a Zulu folktale', *Man*, New Series, 12 (Apr. 1977), 76–86.

³² Kambi ka Matshobana, JSA, 1, 209. '[Mamfongonyana] was, for instance, made an *inceku responsible for milking* and had to extend both hands, like an inferior, to receive curds'.

³³ Mbulo ka Mlahla, JSA, III, 52.

³⁴ Mbovu ka Mtshumayeli, JSA, III, 28–9.

³⁵ Vilakazi explains that for Zulu people 'Money is the newest form of property. People say of it that it is slippery (*iyashelela*) and because of this quality, it is never equated in importance to cattle or any other form of livestock'. This supports Mbovu's idea of cattle as stores of wealth. They are valued because they are countable and transferable, and self-reproducing stores of milk, which like money is slippery. But money is seen as vulgar compared to milk's sacred quality. Milk was never offered for sale. Vilakazi, *Zulu*

was a physical manifestation of power, there must be some means by which it is preserved over time, transferred, recycled or reproduced.

Most fundamentally, the means for reproducing power was evidently cattle breeding, supplemented by cattle rustling. This would explain the taboos surrounding the king's cattle; the goal was not simply to produce as many cattle as possible, but to control and guide that reproduction in the interest of local theories of power. Just as the chief's milk was of a special quality, so also the chief's cows, and to breed them haphazardly would threaten the social structure by disrupting the controlled flow of power in the state. Improperly bred cattle would produce improper forms of power.

Shaka's reputed illegitimate birth illustrates the 'taken for granted' quality of this line of thought: power was reproduced through certain physical reproduction patterns that were held to be as true for humans as they were for cattle. But Shaka's illegitimate birth illustrates something else – he gained power by disrupting its harmonious flow. While there is no unanimity concerning the legitimacy of Shaka's birth, there remains a general consensus among Stuart's informants that Shaka was in some other way an improper sort of king: 'Tshaka was called "the wrong-doer who knows no law"'.³⁶ Were it desirable to portray Shaka as a proper king in a traditional manner, it would not have been difficult for an oral tradition to 'legitimize' his birth through any number of plot twists that would have made Shaka a legitimate first son of Senzagakona; and some people conceded his legitimate birth.³⁷ But in the *Stuart Archive*, Shaka remains resolutely illegitimate throughout – yet exceptionally powerful. If that is so, then power in Zulu society was a distinct transferable substance that could be acquired through human agency, and was not something solely determined by natural inheritance.

This concept of the flow of power throughout the society in transfers of milk is carried in the metaphors of social interaction, especially state action. Upon return from a successful battle, 'the cattle were shared out ... They were "poured out" to the amakhanda'.³⁸ Shaka's unifying power is elsewhere described explicitly as being tied to the *kleza* ritual: 'Did they not have Dingana's cattle? Did not Tshaka leave the cattle for them to *kleza* with? Did he not "bind" the people by letting them *kleza*?'.³⁹ In binding the youth into the *amabutho*, stationed at various *amakhanda* around the kingdom, Shaka was thus able to shift manpower from place to place by 'pouring' them into each other. The verb to '*tela*' (to pour) or '*telwa*' (to be poured) is used by Stuart's sources to 'describe the amalgamating, temporarily or permanently, of *amabutho* or sections of *amabutho*'.⁴⁰ These institutions were understood quite literally as liquid – bearers of milk.

Transformations, 114–15. 'Chiefs and wealthy commoners actually could rid themselves of manual labor altogether by using milk as wages'. Chanaiwa, 'Zulu revolution', 7.

³⁶ Magidigidi ka Nobebe, JSA, II, 96.

³⁷ Mayinga ka Mbekuzana reported that Shaka's father Senzagakona paid bridewealth for Shaka's mother, making him legitimate, but that Shaka later 'became something of a wrong-doer (*itshinga*)', and his father banished him. JSA, II, 246. Mruyi ka Timuni also saw Shaka as being legitimate, JSA, IV, 38.

³⁹ Mtshayankomo ka Magolwana, JSA, IV, 109.

⁴⁰ Ngidi ka Mcikaziwa, JSA, V, 34fn (n. 56). See also A. T. Bryant, *An Abridged English-Zulu Word-Book* (Marianhill, 1940), 279.

Mkebeni ka Dabulamanzi portrayed Dingiswayo, upon discovering Shaka's chiefly parentage, as immediately making him an *inceku*: 'He milked the cows from which Dingiswayo got milk'. Dingiswayo here still seemed to relate power to parentage, but also found it important to invite Shaka into contact with power and royal milk. Shaka's parentage was not enough, the overlay of power in terms of the state philosophy of milk was necessary to express Shaka's destiny to rule. In contact with Dingiswayo's milk, Shaka rose in status and with a peculiarly sinister and willful sense of power. But the next stage in the story greatly deepens our understanding of Zulu power. Where does power go after it is consumed?

Mabonsa's account of Dingiswayo's visit with the Hlubi chief Bungane and the milking of the lioness is followed in the *Stuart Archive* by a version of an oft-repeated archetypal tale of using magic to gain power. In Mabonsa's testimony, the tale is how the Hlubi chief Mtimkulu was killed and the Hlubi nation scattered as a result of magic in which the chief's semen was the main ingredient.⁴¹ This story appears several times in the *Stuart Archive* with Dingiswayo as the defeated chief. Dingiswayo had been in conflict with the Ndwendwe Chief Zwide for some time. He seems to have been interested in forming some sort of truce, so when visiting Zwide he arranged to marry one of Zwide's daughters. Other accounts show Zwide as sending a daughter to entertain Dingiswayo sexually, and steal some of his semen. 'Zwide then "doctored" Dingiswayo and said, "O, now I have overcome him"'.⁴²

This story parallels, in both the magical technique and its effect, the story of Dingiswayo's visit with Bungane and the milking of the lioness, bringing the milk back with him in a snuffbox.⁴³ The link between semen and milk suggests an interpretation of Shaka's lifelong distaste for the first coming milk and warm milk or curds. Both are seen as excessively powerful and dangerous.⁴⁴ The story of Zwide's daughter, in light of the discussion of milk, and particularly in relation to the story of the Hlubi country milking of the lioness raises the possibility that sexual intercourse was seen as a form of 'milking' a man.⁴⁵ If so, this would close the circle around the circulation of power in the Zulu state.

Political ambition was understood to be a function of milk circulation. Shaka, after being made an *inceku* for Dingiswayo, led a successful battle, and

⁴¹ Mabonsa ka Sidhlayi, JSA, II, 13.

⁴² Jantshi ka Nogila, JSA, I, 183. According to Ndlovu ka Timuni, Dingiswayo's death, significantly, came when Zwide 'caused cattle to trample him'. JSA, IV, 230.

⁴³ Dingiswayo's daughter also carried Zwide's stolen semen in a snuffbox. Baleni mentioned that one *inceku* was responsible for holding the chief's snuffbox during meetings with the men's assembly. How closely the snuffbox was related to elder male power is difficult to gather from the *Stuart Archive*, but certainly it was a significant accessory.

⁴⁴ Ngubane states that the color white, particularly in relation to milk and semen, 'which represents what is good, can be used to represent excessive goodness or excessive power which is abnormal'. Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 96, 155.

⁴⁵ The threat of such an act to male virility might be extrapolated from Ngubane's explanation that 'semen is equated with potency' thus 'it makes sense that men should abstain from activities which entail a loss of semen' before male activities such as hunting, blacksmithing and war. An aspect of male power was 'control of reproductive fluids. While a woman menstruates involuntarily, a man usually ejaculates semen when he voluntarily has sexual intercourse'. Thus to remove semen from a man without his informed consent, like milk from a cow (or a baby at the breast) would upset this aspect of control linked to semen. Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 93.

afterwards could not milk for the chief for several days. He returned to his milking duties 'with the feeling in his heart that he could overcome all the *Mtetwa*'.⁴⁶ Upon returning, Shaka began to agitate for power by disrupting Dingiswayo's entourage of *izinceku*. With political power and milking duties so closely linked, there was good reason to keep 'hot' (and thus dangerous) returning warriors at a distance. Dingiswayo had likewise begun his climb to power by drawing the attention of a neighboring chief while occupied as a milker for a prominent family.⁴⁷ The ambitions of a younger generation for political power were naturalized into theories of milk. Warriors returning from battle and boys who had a nocturnal emission were understood to be full of dangerous 'hot' first-coming milk.⁴⁸ After having a nocturnal emission, a boy was not allowed to milk the king's cows for a few days.⁴⁹ Shaka was said to have killed Makadema, the rival of his youth, after he poured hot curds into Shaka's hands.⁵⁰

The practices relating to the breeding of the king's cattle paralleled the practices regarding sexual intercourse with the king's women in the *isigodhlo*. Any man entering the *isigodhlo* without permission was to be executed, as was any *isigodhlo* woman who had engaged in sexual activity.⁵¹ Just as the breeding of cattle was essential to the proper flow of power in the society, so also the breeding of people. Just as cattle were understood explicitly as storehouses of life-giving power, so women were understood as analogous to cattle – not as beasts of burden but as stores of the essential creative power of life – and thus the imperative to control them and their reproductive capacities lest the flow of power in the society be disrupted.⁵² Ngabiyana ka Biji, of Cetshwayo's generation, described husbands frustrated by independent-minded wives attending missionary meetings as telling their wives, 'You are our cattle and ought to obey us'.⁵³ The older Nungu ka Matshobana (initiated like Baleni under King Mpande) evidently also complaining about the break down of the social order, was recorded in Stuart's hurried notes saying, 'Girls doing as they like – destroys the rank existing between people, for it tends to bring about that equality which does not exist. Girls then go and marry those not of her rank'.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Mkebeni ka Dabulamanzi, JSA, III, 198.

⁴⁷ Fynn, in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, I, 60–4.

⁴⁸ Adam Kuper gives a coherent exegesis of the hot/cold–red/white imagery, and his analysis seems to be supported by numerous instances in the *Stuart Archive*. Adam Kuper, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa* (Boston MA, 1982), 18–20. Warm milk as a poison plays a central role in the story cited above in Hammond-Tooke, 'Levi-Strauss', 77. A Zulu elder also told Ngubane that 'black medicines are cooked, whereas white medicines are not cooked; they are eaten raw'. Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 155.

⁴⁹ Mmemi ka Nguluzane, JSA, III, 246.

⁵⁰ Mkando ka Dhlova, JSA, III, 151; also Mruyi ka Timuni, JSA, IV, 38.

⁵¹ Mayinga ka Mbekuzana, JSA, II, 248. Royal officers under Dingane were forced to kill their daughters and sisters who had engaged in sexual activity while living in the *isigodhlo*.

⁵² A Zulu diviner told Berglund, 'The thing is this. A woman conceives and gives birth in the tenth month. So does a cow ... So a cow is like a human'. Berglund, *Zulu Thought*, 110.

⁵³ Ngabiyana ka Biji, JSA, V, 20.

⁵⁴ Nungu ka Matshobana, JSA, V, 212. The Stuart Archive has very little information that specifically relates women and milk. Hanretta's insights provide important context for this essay; he argues that women's 'biological' value 'was as much a social construction as any other system of value', and that symbolic meanings of gender grew in importance in the early nineteenth-century Zulu state only to lose importance mid-century. Sean

The reproduction of cattle and people was subject to the same restrictions. The cattle brought to the king and the boys of the *amabutho* were concentrated stores of power. They were conferred unto the king as a way to centralize the control of power in the state; the *isigodhlo* and the restricted reproduction of the youth under royal authority served the same purpose.

The primary purpose of the *isigodhlo* was not to produce royal offspring; for Shaka the very idea of royal offspring seemed anathema.⁵⁵ Generally the reason for this is said to be his desire to avoid conflict with sons eager to take power. This interpretation would not contradict a more general interpretation that Shaka wanted to concentrate power in the king, and thus refused to part with his semen. So Shaka's childlessness was an expression of the increased centralization of the state; not only would there be no threats to his rule from disobedient sons, but perhaps more importantly, there would be no seepage of power away from the king in the form of children bearing his semen in their bones. Shaka could be described like Dingane as 'the milk bucket which overflows (*gaba*) without having given birth'.⁵⁶ This was a vivid praise, as well as a criticism, of the king's authoritarian power.⁵⁷ Shaka may have worried about female children who would have borne his semen back into the powerful homesteads that threatened to decentralize the state. He disrupted this normal flow of power that led from the state and back into the homesteads.⁵⁸ While later Zulu kings did reproduce and re-establish this flow of power, Shaka only accumulated power. Shaka notoriously never allowed any of his *amabutho* to marry, and even went so far as to ban pre-marital sexual play, lest any of the power stored in the *amabutho* should seep away.⁵⁹ Shaka's childlessness dismissed the idea that the right to rule arose

Hanretta, 'Women, marginality and the Zulu state: women's institutions and power in the early nineteenth century', *Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), 389–415. Jacottet's collection of Sotho stories contain many examples of milk symbolism. Particularly potent examples that tie a girl's maturation to a deep symbolism of milk with some potential sexual connotations appear in 'The bird that excretes milk' and 'Kumonnogoe'. E. Jacottet, *The Treasury of Ba-Suto Lore: Being Original Se-Suto Texts, with a Literal English Translation and Notes* (London, 1908), 100–18; also 'Thakane and her father', reprinted in Harold Scheub, *The African Storyteller: Stories from African Oral Traditions* (Dubuque, 1999), 328–35. Another version of this story appears as 'The milk tree', in Knappert, *Myths and Legends*.

⁵⁵ 'Tshaka had absolutely no issue – male or female. Tshaka is said to have killed his mother when he found her *holding in her arms* a child which she stated was his ... When Nandi died Tshaka gave order that no children were to be borne throughout the country'. Melapi ka Magaye, JSA, III, 85–6. ⁵⁶ Ngidi ka Mcikaziswa, JSA, v, 84.

⁵⁷ Shaka's praises, especially after his death also criticized his excesses and 'lack of control'. See Vail and White, *Power*, 67.

⁵⁸ 'Strong feelings ... regulate behaviour-patterns in regard to cattle and milk, especially those that involve women and homestead animals. Interference with a household's cattle is not merely an interference with the animals or the father of the homestead. It is an interference with the whole male population of the lineage, including the shades [spirits]'. Berglund mentions how new brides brought milk from their home with them and mixed it with the milk of their new household, acting out a ritual of pouring milk, in effect enabling its re-circulation throughout the society. See Berglund, *Zulu Thought*, 110, 200.

⁵⁹ Ndukwana ka Mbegwana, JSA, IV, 311. Cetshwayo apparently tried to re-instate this ban at one point to disastrous effect. See Mtshapi ka Noradu, JSA, IV, 78–9.

from the blood of parentage, and replaced it with the idea that a ruler need simply control the milk. So when Stuart's informants debate the nature of Shaka's illegitimacy, they also debate the legitimacy of seizing and wielding power in such defiance of the expectation that it should trickle down in the form of royal children – as through the hands of Zungu and Makoba. In this reading, Shaka, like Makoba, was a glutton and like Makoba could not be a wholly legitimate leader.

Finally, there is a mysterious incident which is referred to by Madikane ka Mlomowetole as a case of killing to collect human flesh for magical use, or *inswelaboya*.

[The boy's] penis had been sucked, as also his nostrils, and his ears had been spat into. The men took him out of danger, and he was treated with medicines, and given a purgative, and his penis, which had been swollen, returned to normal size. He recovered.⁶⁰

The boy does not seem to have been mutilated in the attack, which then begs the question, what was taken from him? The elements of the assault seem familiar to Mahaya. He placed this incident into the category of *inswelaboya*, a known type of act with the goal of collecting magical substances. The boy's penis had been sucked, and the symptoms of this seemed recognizable. Did someone try to 'milk' him for a medicine of the type made from Dingiswayo's semen? We have no way of knowing, but a pattern of such incidents might reveal a type of subversive activity with the intention of disrupting the flow of power in the society, and upset state control.

MILK IN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

If milk does represent an analytical theme in a Zulu historical analysis that can be generalized, then it should have some interpretive power for incidents not involving milk. This can be tested on an incident surrounding the Ndebele Chief Mzilikazi and the Boer leader Piet Retief. The source for this incident in the *Stuart Archive* is Nduna ka Manqina. Nduna was some distance removed in time and culture from the Zulu state under Shaka and Dingane; the father of a relative on his mother's side had grown up under Shaka. Nduna was not apt to use milk images, even as he talked extensively about events in relation to cattle. Nduna told Stuart that '*it was Dingana who first sent an army to the place of Mzilikazi. It came and "ate up" the cattle*'. Dingane then asked his *induna*, Ndhlela, "'These cattle of Mzilikazi, are these all of them?' They were not, so he sent the army to retrieve the remainder'. Dingane was pleased when Ndhlela returned with all the cattle, but Nduna also recalled a conversation suggesting that Dingane subtly reminded Ndhlela of his place. Dingane criticized Ndhlela for 'picking out only the great men, when all the people of the Nkosi were there'. Dingane then distinguished himself from Shaka, saying that in Shaka's time, 'Ordinary men were not counted; only those liked by Tshaka were counted. For my part, I like them all'. Dingane later reminded Ndhlela not to persist in maintaining the extremes of Shaka's state; '*I asked you, Ndhlela, if you tell anyone when your dogs copulate. Now, when my dogs copulate, you tell me to*

⁶⁰ Madikane ka Mlomowetole, JSA, II, 56.

kill them'.⁶¹ Dingane had relaxed the extremes of the Shaka state in maintaining control over this flow of milk in the society, not favoring exclusively the best warriors – who had presumably brought the most cattle – nor regulating the sexual lives of his *amabutho* youth as strictly as Shaka had.

Dingane seems to have been less enamored with milk-oriented theories of power. As evident in the conversations with Ndhlela, increasing the sheer size of the military, rather than controlling its reproduction and refining its milk-based power became Dingane's priority. The increase of cattle through raiding seemed sufficient and politically more palatable for augmenting the supply of milk, allowing Dingane to forgo Shaka's tyrannical monopolization of existing supply.

Dingane may have been motivated in part by a sense that the nature of power in Zululand was shifting. The Boer cattle captured in the raid on Mzilikazi became a bargaining chip in a drawn-out negotiation with Piet Retief's Boers. The missionary Francis Owen mediated this negotiation transmitting messages between the Boers and Dingane from September 1837 until February 1838 when the Zulus ambushed the Boer representatives at Dingane's homestead.⁶² An on-going interest of Dingane was the acquisition of guns and gunpowder. Owen tried to obstruct Dingane's goal telling him he could not supply him with arms because 'the white people would not be pleased with me if I did'.⁶³ In fact, in 1837, Captain Allen Gardiner wrote a strongly worded letter to a trading ship captain, Colonel William Bell, arguing for restrictions on trade in guns with Zulu people, calling such trade 'suicidal':

At the present moment it is comparatively easy to stay the evil [trade in guns], but if deferred no enactment will meet the exigency, and in the course of a very few years – perhaps not many months – the Zulu army, led by a second Chaka, may, with muskets in their hands, not only sweep all before them in Natal, but, encouraged by such partial success, even dispute the very boundaries of our colonial territory. Their progress may, indeed, be less rapid, but the result will not be the less certain.

The Provincial Executive Council meeting in Durban later that year, concluded 'that there is no law which can prevent or control the introduction of arms and ammunition at Natal. That it is beyond the power of the Council to make any law which can prevent or control such importation or sale'. In the face of this, a frustrated Gardiner decided to lobby the white community voluntarily to restrict trade in arms with Zulus.⁶⁴ According to Owen's account of the interchange between Dingane and Retief, Dingane's

⁶¹ Nduna ka Manqina, JSA, v, 1–11. The archive contains many references to eating as a political act that seem to accord with Michael Schatzberg's elaboration of this metaphor in modern middle Africa. Michael G. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Bloomington, 2001); Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (New York, 1993).

⁶² Francis Owen, *The Diary of Rev. Francis Owen, M.A.* (Cape Town, 1926), 33–120. The texts of some of these letters also appear in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, 1, 359–64.

⁶³ Owen, *Diary*, 66.

⁶⁴ 'From Captain Gardiner to Colonel Bell, C.B.', in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, 1, 314–19.

impatience arose from Retief's refusal to hand over armaments and horses captured in a cooperative effort between the Boers and the Zulus to defeat Mzilikazi.⁶⁵ In Owen's account it would seem that Dingane was attempting to expand his resources for power, and that the Boers' continued willingness to supply him with cattle was not satisfactory. Dingane, mirroring Gardiner's thoughts, sensed that cattle and milk alone would not ensure his independence before the encroaching white population, and was willing to take great risks to secure a supply of these new sources of power. Dingane's encounter with the Boers initiated a slow shift in Zulu political philosophy, away from the theories surrounding milk, and towards new theories that took into account the power of guns.⁶⁶

But Nduna's account in the *Stuart Archive*, in contrast to Owen's diary, identifies cattle as the sole source of the dispute. When the Boers came to take their cattle from the Zulu armies returning from Mzilikazi's country, Dingane sought advice from the *izinduna*, saying 'the Boers are trying to trick me'.⁶⁷ He also told Francis Owen that 'he had intelligence that [the Boers] were planning to wage war on him'. Dingane planned to invite the Boers to a dance exhibition, with his own guard massed outside the royal homestead. Dingane told the warriors under his *induna* Ndhlela that when he waved his hand over his left shoulder during the second song the army should enter and annihilate the Boer party. Dingane offered his guests milk, and 'while they were partaking of the milk, Dingaan issued the fatal order to his young soldiers, who were in readiness and at hand'.⁶⁸ The warriors sang:

*Hi ya ya! Hi ya ya! Ya ya ya ya ya ya-e!
Ba be ya u zi tel' obsini muntu wami!*

The editors of the *Stuart Archive* translate this to read, 'They were going to throw themselves into the milk, my man!' But the verb here is *tel'* – to pour. They poured themselves into the milk. Nduna's narrative continued: 'Dingana waved his hand. Upon this the men of the army poured into the *isigodhlo*. For each Boer who died, one of Dingana's men died. They finished them off. That was where Piti died, the chief of the Boers'.⁶⁹ 'The emigrants were, to a man, instantly seized, overpowered by numbers and borne off to the hill where criminals are executed, there to be devoured by vultures and hyenas'.⁷⁰ Little did Piet Retief's men know that they sat, and would drown, in the prime concentration of milk in the Zulu state.⁷¹

Nduna recounted the next chapter of the story, 'Dingana set his army on them [the Boer settlement]. The Boers defeated it and drove it back'. Dingane instructed his men to 'hide among the cattle. When the cattle have

⁶⁵ Owen, *Diary*, 93, 100.

⁶⁶ My own survey of the *Stuart Archive* suggests that the older informants, particularly those most closely tied to the early Zulu state of Shaka, Dingane and Mpande were more likely to use milk images. Hanretta also noted that the number of women in the *isigodhlo* declined under Dingane, suggestive of not only the decline in state power, but also a possible change in state philosophy. See Hanretta, 'Women', 404.

⁶⁷ Nduna ka Manqina, *JSA*, v, 7. See also Ndukwana ka Mbengwana, *JSA*, iv, 347.

⁶⁸ 'Letter of the missionaries', in *Missionary Herald*, 2 Apr. 1838, in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, 1, 214.

⁶⁹ Nduna ka Manqina, *JSA*, v, 7 (fn 24).

⁷⁰ 'Letter of the missionaries', in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, 1, 214.

⁷¹ Compare to versions in Golan, *Inventing Shaka*, 24, 38–40.

been finished off by the guns, then close in'. The plan worked, and the Boers retreated. Dingane planned another ambush. He sent a messenger to the Boers to tell them 'that the cattle have been left with the women only and that the whole army is finished'. According to Nduna, the plan worked, but it was the last victory for Dingane. The Boers then drove Dingane into Swazi country where he was killed, and Mpande surrendered to the Boers, saying, 'It has been finished off by the gun (*si pelile isitunyisa*)'.⁷² In Nduna's account the gun marked the end of the great era of the Zulu state. Dingane sacrificed his cattle before the Boer guns, and then his final ruse was based on a complete falsehood: he told the Boers that he had cattle but that his army was gone. But in reality he had no cattle, he had only an army; and that army was now demoralized by Dingane's abandonment of the fundamental truths of Zulu philosophies of power.⁷³ Mpande deserted him, Dingane died and the Zulu state fell apart: '*This was what people called the 'breaking of the rope' (ku gqatshuk' igoda) in the Zulu country. It was the breaking of the rope of government (umbuso) in the Zulu country*'.⁷⁴ The milk was gone and the *inkatha* coil no longer held together.⁷⁵

A 'MILK' COMPLEX?

The pattern of symbolism evident in the *Stuart Archive* surrounding the meaning of milk points to an equation between milk and power. The political uses of milk seem closely related to similar uses for semen, suggesting that these substances had some ritual equivalency. If this hypothesis is accurate then it can provide the basis for a coherent Zulu understanding of power and its manipulation. Such a 'Zulu political science' need not contradict other modern interpretations of the Zulu state, whether from psychological or materialist foundations. The patterns of political and social behavior resulting from such a conception of power might correlate very closely with the logic of modern sociological models of the southern African 'cattle complex' in Melville Herskovits's classic phrase.⁷⁶ Like Herskovits, E. E. Evans-Pritchard portrayed a fusion of symbolic and materialist implications in a culture where 'the social idiom is a bovine idiom'.⁷⁷ Evans-Pritchard's comprehensive analysis of Nuer society expands the possibilities of Herskovits's single-minded cultural complex. More recent studies that

⁷² Nduna ka Manqina, JSA, v, 8.

⁷³ Ndhlovu ka Timuni told Stuart that 'Dingana was not killed by Swazis but his own troops'. Ndhlovu ka Timuni, JSA, iv, 199. ⁷⁴ Nduna ka Manqina, JSA, v, 8.

⁷⁵ An *inkatha* was a coil of rope and python skin that represented the intertwined fortunes of a people. Parts of a defeated group's *inkatha* were incorporated into that of the victorious group. In this sense an *inkatha* was a sort of ethnic map of a kingdom or a treaty governing relations between a conquering power and its dominions. Knight, *Anatomy*, 152.

⁷⁶ Melville Herskovits, 'The cattle complex in East Africa', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 28 (Jan.-Mar. 1926), 230-72; 28 (Apr. 1926), 361-88; 28 (July-Sept. 1926), 494-528; 28 (Oct.-Dec. 1926), 633-64. A good summary of the anthropological literature appears in Kuper, *Wives for Cattle*. David M. Anderson provides a useful overview of literature on pastoralist societies in 'Cow power: livestock and the pastoralist in Africa', *African Affairs*, 92 (Jan. 1993), 121-33.

⁷⁷ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford, 1940), 19.

attempt to rationalize such societies by placing them in materialist frameworks have helped twentieth-century researchers appreciate the ecological logic of symbolic systems oriented around cattle.⁷⁸ The familiarity of these approaches tends to make them authoritative to modern scholars, but, as useful as they are, their familiarity makes them less authoritative, not more so, for societies not built on westernized assumptions.⁷⁹

Analyzing the symbolic discourse at the heart of Zulu political philosophy in a historical context can then lead to much broader insights into the cultural regions that emerge from anthropological literature.⁸⁰ Taking into account the work of Vilikazi, Berglund and Ngubane in twentieth-century Zulu society, the broader connections of a 'milk complex' can be drawn between eastern African societies where cattle play a major symbolic role. Christopher Taylor's deeply insightful work on modern Rwanda is a case in point. Noting that milk motifs are central to Rwandan myths among all its ethnic groups, Taylor proceeds to analyze Rwandan political and social structures through a more fluid lens than simple patronage built around a gift economy. In Rwanda, ideals of community are expressed through the exchange of liquid aliments and bodily fluids which creates a dialectic of flow and blockage. As in Shaka's Zulu kingdom, life force in Rwanda, or *imáana*, was understood as a 'diffuse, fecundating fluid' most powerfully embodied in milk and its analogue, semen. *Imáana* was later translated by missionaries to mean God, but its presence and behavior in society bore little relation to the anthropomorphic Christian God:

Maintaining the continuity of this flow [of *imáana*] is necessary to biological and social reproduction. Bodily fluids (blood, semen, maternal milk), 'social' fluids (cow's milk, sorghum porridge, beer), and rainfall are analogues of one another. The individual is metaphorically and metonymically implicated within three homologous matrices of flow: his or her own body, that of society, and that of the cosmos.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Gump, 'Ecological change'; Jeff Guy, 'Analysing pre-capitalist societies in southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14 (Oct. 1987), 18–37; John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, 'Goodly beasts, beastly goods: cattle and commodities in a South African context', *American Ethnologist*, 17 (May 1990), 195–216; Jacqueline S. Solway, 'Taking stock in the Kalahari: accumulation and resistance on the southern African periphery', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24 (June 1998), 425–41. Aran S. MacKinnon provides insight into how these materialist analyses remained applicable in the twentieth century in 'The persistence of the cattle economy in Zululand, South Africa, 1900–1950', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 33 (1999), 98–135.

⁷⁹ I use the term 'westernized' assumptions to refer to scholars trained and working through the university system rooted in a European tradition in contrast to intellectuals trained and working through institutions rooted in African history and tradition. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 28.

⁸⁰ Michael L. Burton *et al.*, 'Regions based on social structure', *Current Anthropology*, 37 (Feb. 1996), 87–123.

⁸¹ Christopher C. Taylor, *Milk, Honey, and Money: Changing Concepts in Rwandan Healing* (Washington DC, 1992), 6–10, 26–31, 105. I only came to Taylor and the other ethnographic work after working out the framework for this paper based on the *Stuart Archive*. This paper is not an imposition of modern ethnographic insights on to the nineteenth-century Zulu kingdom; rather, a close reading of James Stuart's informants reveals a structure of social metaphors strikingly similar to conceptions still current in Rwanda and South Africa. For some parallels to images in Taylor's work, see Mtshayankomo ka Magolwana, *JSA*, IV, 122; Ndukwana ka Mbengwana, *JSA*, IV, 287.

Spanning over a century, Taylor's purview registers not only cognitive continuities through time, but also change. The intense focus on milk and its theoretical connections to semen seem to fade from public political discourse during the twentieth century and become more exclusively domestic as the colonial state was constructed on a very different set of social theories. Even so, the presence of a fluid *imáana* in people's upbringing helped shape the form of political atrocities in 1994 in Rwanda where roadblocks, impalements and rivers filled with bodies were manifestations of the flow-blockage dichotomy Taylor had noted in his earlier work. But one can look the other way as well; the cosmology he elaborated in the 1980s stands in even sharper relief in records from the nineteenth century. Highlighting the political significance of the assumptions surrounding *imáana*, Taylor cites a praise of the Rwandan king that could just as easily have been a praise of a more benevolent Shaka:

Here is the sovereign who drinks the milk milked by *imáana*
And we drink that which he in turn milks for us!

The Rwandan king, as with many sovereigns in the Great Lakes region was known as the Mukama – the 'milker'. When a Rwandan king died a man would ascend a ladder and pour milk on the ground and declare, 'The milk is spilt; the king has been taken away!'.⁸² Milk has an evident presence in early ethnographical reports from the turn-of-the-century Great Lakes, a presence that was largely erased from the scholarly record apparently because it was not understood.⁸³ Henry Fynn's recollection of the death of Shaka's mother Nandi bears witness to the extensive cultural affinities between nineteenth-century Zululand and Rwanda: 'no milk was to be taken as food, the milk of the cattle to be spilled on the ground'.⁸⁴ Modern ethnography, in recording ideas that remain cogent domestically even after they lose currency in the public sphere, can provide hints toward the interpretation of these sorts of details. Berglund mentions that Zulu mothers wishing to increase their own supply of milk would deposit some milk from each breast into the hearth of their hut, an act that parallels the practice of *amabutho* youth milking the king's cattle one hundred years before.⁸⁵

Harriet Ngubane's work parallels not only Berglund's but also Taylor's work in Rwanda, demonstrating a system of beliefs surrounding milk, semen and blood that is fundamentally domestic even as its assumptions permeate

⁸² Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (New York, 1999), 61, 81, 111, 121–2, 131–9.

⁸³ John Roscoe, 'The Bahima: a cow tribe of Enkole in the Uganda Protectorate', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 37 (Jan.–June, 1907), 93–118; John Roscoe, 'Preliminary report of the Mackie ethnological expedition to Central Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Containing Papers of a Biological Character*, 92 (1 June 1921), 209–19; James G. Frazer, 'The Mackie ethnological expedition to Central Africa', *Man*, 20 (1920), 91–5.

⁸⁴ Fynn in Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal*, 1, 92.

⁸⁵ Berglund, *Zulu Thought*, 339. Berglund also mentions another practice that seems to bear historical memory, 'A man said that herd-boys are sometimes instructed to suck milk from cows in order to increase the milk in them. Boys who had not yet reached puberty were to be preferred to older ones, and they were told to spit out the milk on the ground'. Also, Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 79.

the public sphere.⁸⁶ Such a conceptual system would have many structural and material effects resulting from actions based on milk power; but it is not necessary to assume that the Zulu leadership was consciously aware of the sort of broad economic, political and ecological motivations now evident from a historical vantage point. It would only suggest that the Zulu state functioned under a political philosophy that was structurally responsive to these sorts of pressures. With a set of beliefs about milk naturalized into common sense throughout the society, a state controlling the flow of milk would not only be perceived as having, but actually have social effects analogous to those of a modern state in its control over financial policies that are likewise based on assumptions naturalized at the domestic level. Controlling milk would organize and regulate society, having very real effects on marriage patterns, population growth, labor mobilization, livestock management and ecological impact.⁸⁷ Understanding the symbolic structure of social and political philosophy in the nineteenth-century Zulu state hints at a contemporaneous ecological rationality accounted in milk.

⁸⁶ Ngubane, *Body and Mind*, 93.

⁸⁷ Knight suggests that the *amabutho* system would have given a Zulu king some demographic control. Knight, *Anatomy*, 34.