

Thununu kaNonjiya Gcabashe visits James Stuart in the big smoke to talk about history

by John Wright

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Introducing Thununu kaNonjiya Gcabashe

Thununu kaNonjiya kaThuzuyu kaMposho kaMyangashe was born in about 1814 in the chiefdom ruled by Phakathwayo kaKhondlo of the Qwabe clan south of the lower Mhlathuze River. Thununu himself was of the Gcabashe section of the Qwabe. His father Nonjiya was of the iziNkonde men's *ibutho* (enrolment) formed by Phakathwayo and one of the chief's leading advisers. We do not know his mother's name. She was a daughter of Mdwayi (Mdwali), and of the iziGenane women's *ibutho*.

The family's *umuzi*, or homestead, was called ebuQoloqolweni.

Not long after Thununu was born, Phakathwayo was overthrown and put to death by an upstart ruler from up-country, one Shaka kaSenzangakhona of the Zulu people. Thununu grew up in the years when Shaka was establishing and consolidating what came to be the Zulu kingdom. The Zulu king set up his main *umuzi*, kwaBulawayo, in the heart of the Qwabe country. By this time Thununu's father Nonjiya had died and the family was living, presumably with one of Nonjiya's brothers, at an *umuzi*

named esiWedwini not far from where kwaBulawayo was built.

Thununu was a teenager of cattle-herding age when, in 1828, Shaka was assassinated by his brothers and succeeded by Dingane. Sometime in the early 1830s, along with other young men of his age from the kingdom's core regions, he was called up into a Zulu *ibutho* named the umKhulutshane. Soon after that, he was summoned by King Dingane to enter his service as an *inceku*, or personal attendant, at Mgungundlovu, the capital *umuzi* Dingane had built in the Zulu heartland south of the White Mfolozi. As a young man, Dingane had taken refuge for a while from his father Senzangakhona kaJama in Phakathwayo's Qwabe chiefdom. He had lived for a time in Nonjiya's *umuzi*, and it was he who had actually named Thununu on the latter's birth. Now, probably in the mid-1830s, Dingane singled him out for royal attention.

Thununu seems to have spent several years as a junior intimate in the royal household, experiencing its life and also observing something of Zulu public affairs at close quarters. He worked his way up to the rank of an *isilomo*, or leading courtier, accumulated cattle of his own, and married a woman named Mtshophi of the Biyela clan. Because of her family's high status, Thununu was required to provide ten cattle as *ilobolo* or bride wealth for her.

Early in 1838 Gcabashe (as I shall now refer to him) was apparently present at the killing of Piet Retief and his followers at Mgungundlovu, and later in the year fought at the Ncome river where a party of Voortrekkers defeated Dingane's army. Another transforming period in his life began when, in 1839, he joined the side of Mpande when the latter broke away from his brother

Dingane. We do not know whether Gcabashe made this move by choice, or whether, like many other people who lived in the southern part of the Zulu kingdom, where Mpande was a figure of some authority, he became swept up by political currents beyond his control. In the event, Gcabashe fought in Mpande's forces which defeated Dingane at the amaQongqo hills early in 1840, an event that opened the way for Mpande to become king.

Sometime in the 1840s, like numbers of other people who lived close to the Thukela River, Gcabashe and his family abandoned their allegiance to Mpande and crossed over the river to go to live *esilungwini* – in the country of the white people, which had been annexed by Britain as the colony of Natal in 1843. Why he took this action is not clear, but it may have been because he felt that he had not been properly rewarded by Mpande after a mission the king had sent him on. The move to the colony must have been yet another transforming event for Gcabashe; but unfortunately we have minimal evidence on his life after this. What little we know is that by this time he had at least three wives, marrying another, Nhlungula kaMzuzu, after his move to Natal. For a while he lived near Mpumulo between modern Greytown and KwaDukuza (Stanger). He talks of having been one of Theophilus Shepstone's *umphakathi*, or circle of advisers, but what this actually involved we do not know. Five of his children eventually lived in Durban, the colony's main port.

Sometime before the early 1860s, presumably having made his peace with King Mpande, Gcabashe seems to have moved back to the old Qwabe country in the south-east of the Zulu kingdom. Here, we can suppose, he lived through

the British invasion of the kingdom in 1879, during which the south-eastern regions were the scene of frequent military engagements. At the end of the war the kingdom was broken up by British officials, with the south-east being placed under the rule of a colonial trader and adventurer named John Dunn. In 1883, after a series of destructive civil wars in what British colonisers referred to as Zululand, the southern part of the former kingdom was brought under a form of British control. In the late 1880s much of Zululand was swallowed up into the South African Republic and divided into farms for Boer graziers, with the African population as virtual serfs on land they had previously inhabited. The rest of the former kingdom, including the region where Gcabashe may have been living, was annexed to Britain as the colony of Zululand. In 1897 Zululand was incorporated into Natal.

By this time African homesteads throughout Natal were facing severe land shortages. Where seeking work in towns and on white-owned farms may once have been an expedient to earn cash wages, now it became a necessity for more and more men, young and old. In 1896–1897, African communities in the colony lost up to 85% of their cattle in a devastating outbreak of rinderpest. Over the next few years they suffered serious losses of crops from a series of droughts and locust invasions. Across wide areas, homesteads eroded to the point of virtual collapse. In 1902–1904 a Natal colonial commission demarcated much of Zululand into farms for occupation by white settlers.

We have no idea of what Gcabashe's experiences were during these times. By 1903, when we hear of him again, he had his home in the Ndulinde area to the west of modern Gingindlovu. Here,

in May 1903, he received a visit from a young man named Sithuntu kaMagidi, and our story takes a new turn.

Sithuntu was a son of Chief Magidi kaNgomane of the Mdletshe people who lived near what is now KwaDukuza on the Natal north coast. Magidi's father, Ngomane kaMqombolo, had been an important political figure in the Zulu kingdom in the time of Shaka. Sithuntu brought Gcabashe a message from the chief to say that he had received a request from a young magistrate working in Durban, one Mistuwedi, or James Stuart as he was otherwise known. Mistuwedi had worked for a brief spell as a magistrate in Stanger four years before, and Chief Magidi probably knew him as a person deeply interested in the history of African people and in writing down what knowledgeable individuals had to tell him about it. Gcabashe had a reputation as an authority on the past: would he be prepared to travel to Durban to talk on the subject to Stuart?

We can imagine a day or two of discussion between Gcabashe, Sithuntu and members of Gcabashe's family. The upshot was that Gcabashe decided to accede to the magistrate's request. Together with Sithuntu, he set out on the journey to Durban. At that time, construction of the railway line up the Natal north coast into Zululand had reached as far as eMpangeni. The Ndulinde area lies 8–10 kilometres from the line of rail and it is not clear what the nearest station to Gcabashe's home was. Did the 89-year-old Gcabashe walk the distance? Did he perhaps ride? In any event, he and his companion caught the train to Durban. Then they probably took a tram to Stuart's residence at Norfolk Villas in Musgrave Road, not far from where the Killie Campbell Africana Library stands today.

Gcabashe was duly received by Stuart, and presumably installed in the latter's servants' quarters. On 28 May 1903 they began a series of intensive conversations about the past that extended over three weeks, mornings and evenings, and over weekends. We know about them, as we know something about Gcabashe's life, because Stuart wrote up detailed notes on these conversations – notes that still exist, and are to be found in the James Stuart Papers in the Killie Campbell Library.

Introducing James Stuart

What we know of James Stuart's life comes from brief mentions in memoirs published by his sister and one of his nieces, from diaries that he kept from 1887 to 1889, and from his own notes in the James Stuart Papers. He was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1868, and spent his boyhood in Greytown and Ixopo, where his father Martinus was a magistrate. He grew up speaking fluent Zulu as well as English. He was educated briefly at Hilton College, and then spent five years at Hurstpierpoint School near Brighton in Britain. On his return, he worked for a short spell as a clerk in the post office in Pietermaritzburg. In 1888 he was appointed as clerk and interpreter to the magistrate in Eshowe in Zululand, which had recently been annexed as a separate British colony.

In 1895 Stuart became a magistrate at Ingwavuma in the district of Tongaland, which had been newly annexed to the colony of Zululand. After Zululand itself had been annexed to Natal in 1897, he held brief appointments as acting magistrate in a number of centres in the colony – Stanger, Umzinto, Pietermaritzburg, Howick, Mpendle and Ladysmith. In 1901 he became one of

four magistrates in the port of Durban, the biggest town in the colony.

Durban had been growing rapidly since the opening of the railway to the gold-mining hub of Johannesburg in 1895. The outbreak of war between Britain, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State in 1899 stimulated further growth in industrial and commercial activity. The town's population grew from 39 000 before the war to 67 000 (including 19 000 Africans) in 1904, as compared with 31 000 in the colony's capital, Pietermaritzburg. Electrification of the city began in the late 1890s, with electric tram and municipal telephone systems both opening in 1902. The first motor businesses were established soon afterwards. A small art gallery was opened in the town hall in 1899, and the public library, which had existed since 1853, was expanded in 1901. In the same period, construction of a new town hall began.

This was something of the environment in which Stuart was able to settle down to focused research towards a project that he had been developing over the previous four years. This was to make himself a leading expert, perhaps *the* leading expert, on what he and his fellow colonists would have called 'Zulu history and custom'. The project, which by about 1900 he was calling his Idea, involved reading into all the published source material he could lay his hands on. On top of that, it entailed intensive discussions about the past with knowledgeable Africans, which for Stuart meant mostly older men, and writing down what they told him.

This was a very unusual project for a Natal colonial official to embark on. What led Stuart into it? Carolyn Hamilton, who holds the National Research Foundation chair in Archive

and Public Culture at the University of Cape Town, and I have both written about this.¹ In brief, in the 1890s Stuart seems more and more to have felt that Africans in Natal were being seriously misgoverned by their European colonial overlords. The European settler population in general was ignorant of African history and custom, and in fact generally contemptuous of what they saw as African culture. Senior administrators were less and less concerned to listen to African grievances. As Stuart saw it, the system successfully set up years before by Secretary for Native Affairs, Theophilus Shepstone, of ruling Africans through their chiefs was in danger of breaking down.

The long-term solution, in Stuart's view, was to educate opinion makers in European colonial society into a better understanding of African customs and institutions. Someone suitably qualified needed to undertake intensive and ongoing research into African custom and history, and continually make the results known to the colony's rulers. By 1900, if not earlier, Stuart was consciously setting this task as a life goal for himself.

We should not romanticise what Stuart was doing. He grew up in a particularly nasty settler society, and shared many of the racial prejudices of his fellow white colonists. As a magistrate, he was responsible for implementing a slew of oppressive laws to control the colony's African inhabitants, passed by a Legislative Assembly consisting of propertied white males elected by propertied white males. As an intelligence officer with the colonial forces, he played an active role in the suppression of the Natal rebellion of 1906. He believed in the superiority of European civilisation, and we can see that in the end his project for working towards the

establishment of better governance of Africans was a means of maintaining European domination.

At the same time, Stuart had a deep respect for what he saw as traditional Zulu culture. Like many intellectuals in Natal at the time, African and European, he was concerned to preserve as much of it as was compatible with life in a modernising society. He put a great deal of time and thought and energy into his project. He was concerned to record the statements made by his interlocutors as accurately as possible, whether in the original Zulu language or in English translation. What makes his notes particularly useful for historians is that he did not shy away from recording contradictory accounts of the same event. By the early 1920s, when he left Natal to live in London, he had amassed a rich collection of notes on the history of local African societies before colonial times. It has no parallel in South Africa except for the collection of oral materials recorded by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd from Xam interlocutors in Cape Town in the 1870s and 1880s.

Stuart's earliest notes of conversations with Africans on history and custom date from 1897 when he was still in Zululand. These were mostly fairly short conversations, continued for perhaps a few days at a time. By 1900, he was engaging in much more sustained discussions with interlocutors whom he found particularly perceptive, and from 1901, when he settled in Durban, he was able to embark on more systematic research.

It was in this context that early in May 1903 he first seems to have heard of Thununu Gcabashe from Chief Ndlovu kaThimuni Zulu, another of his interlocutors, who lived in the Mpumulo region. As I have described, Stuart invited

Gcabashe to travel to Durban to talk to him about the past, which they did nearly every day for three solid weeks. To start with, Stuart seems to have been interested mainly in what Gcabashe could tell him about the origins and early history of the Qwabe people, a subject which, Stuart had learnt from other interlocutors, was closely linked in common talk with the history of the Zulu in the times before Shaka. From this, he seems to have expected to move on to discussion of how Shaka had overcome Phakathwayo and subjugated the Qwabe. In the event, Gcabashe had little to say on these topics. He was much more interested in talking about his own experiences in the time of Dingane, and in the end this is primarily what Stuart wrote about.

In an essay still to be published, Cynthia Kros and I have commented on the dynamics of the conversations between the two men. We describe how Stuart pressed Gcabashe to talk about the early history of the Qwabe and Zulu chiefdoms, sometimes to the irritation of the latter, who either could not or would not talk about these times. We discuss evidence of Stuart's own irritation with Gcabashe as he realised he was not going to get the information he was looking for. But they persevered with each other for three weeks, with Stuart fortunately seeing fit to record detailed statements about Gcabashe's own particular interests in the past. Today we find them a very valuable source of evidence on Dingane's reign. They take up 150 pages in eight notebooks in the James Stuart Collection, and 50 pages of volume 6 of the published *James Stuart Archive*, making up one of the longest sets of statements that Stuart recorded from a single interlocutor.² In passing, he also recorded points about

Gcabashe's early life that I have used as a basis to tell something of his story.

Why did Gcabashe make the journey to the big smoke?

This brings us to the question implicit in the story of Gcabashe's visit to James Stuart as I have told it so far. What was it in the time and place that Gcabashe lived that impelled an 89-year-old African man to leave the comforts of his home and undertake what for him must have been quite an arduous journey to the big city to talk about the past with a European colonial official who, as far as we know, he had never met? If he had not made this decision, there would be nothing of his life on record as far as is known, and no story about him to tell.

We do not know what Gcabashe's feelings were when he received Stuart's message. We can imagine that much of his reaction would have depended on how Chief Magidi couched the message from Stuart that he sent to Thununu via Sithuntu. Was it expressed as an invitation; or more as a summons, with the authority of the chief, as well as of Stuart, behind it? We do not know the answers to these questions. What we can say is that Stuart was not in a position to exert any direct coercion over an old man who lived over 100 kilometres away, far outside his area of jurisdiction. We can also note, by Stuart's own record, that other potential interlocutors at this time turned down requests to visit him.

In deciding to make a visit to Stuart, Gcabashe was like numbers of other individuals who, in middle or old age, did the same thing. A particularly striking case is that of Mkhando kaDlova of the eLangeni people who was blind and in his mid-70s, and yet saw fit to travel from his home in the Mpumulo area to visit Stuart in Durban some months

before Gcabashe. Why did these men make this decision? Here I want to take up a line of explanation that emerges from recent explorations into a realm of history that has only recently begun to attract the attention of scholars in South Africa. This is the realm of what we can call intellectual history, the history of how, why, when, where and by whom ideas are produced and circulated. And in particular I want to focus on explorations into the realm of ideas produced by individuals in outlying rural areas who could not read or write but who, in their own societies, were involved in vibrant public discourses about public affairs, present and past.

The study of intellectual history in general began only relatively recently in South Africa, and has not so far become a mainstream concern either of scholars or of writers outside the academy in this country. Those who work in this field have focused primarily on ideas expressed in written form as distinct from ideas expressed orally, or in the making of material objects, or in the performance of social practices in fields such as dance and various rituals. The main reason for this neglect is the very widespread prevalence of the notion, dating from colonial times, that ideas held by people in Africa without writing were fundamentally expressions of largely unchanging 'tribal traditions'. As such, these ideas have been the subject of numerous ahistorical anthropological studies, but have not generally been seen as belonging in the realm of intellectual history.

In KwaZulu-Natal, we have some very good scholarly studies that touch on the history of written ideas in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the period when Stuart was growing up and engaging in his researches.

I think here of work by Jeff Guy and others on missionary figures like John Colenso and Henry Callaway; Vukile Khumalo and Hlonipha Mokoena on kholwa intellectual Magma Fuze and his contemporaries; Paul la Hausse on Petros Lamula; and Heather Hughes on John Dube. But only in the past few years have some researchers begun to pay sustained critical attention to intellectual history in African societies without writing.

The leading scholar in this field is Carolyn Hamilton, who has based much of her work on in-depth studies of Stuart's notes.³ As far back as the early 1980s she was writing about the history of what she called political ideologies and the making of identities in the early Zulu kingdom. Over the next few years she and I both worked further in this field. In the 1990s Hamilton argued the case for examining the social background and political interests of Stuart's interlocutors in as much detail as the evidence allowed, as a way towards understanding their statements to Stuart as political discourses set in the present as against seeing them as inherited 'tribal traditions'.

Since 2010 Hamilton has taken her arguments further. She sees the Stuart collection as an archive not of tribal traditions, which is how many people conceive of it, but as an archive of the ways in which, in the presence of an important colonial official, Stuart's interlocutors mobilised ideas about the past in support of positions and interests that they sought to defend and promote in the present. This at a time when, as we have seen, the communities they belonged to were coming under hugely disruptive pressures from political and economic developments in Natal and in the wider South Africa.

In parallel with this, Hamilton has mounted a penetrating critique of the notion of ‘tribe’, one of the notions on which the whole edifice of colonial thinking about African people has been built. Critique of the notion of the bounded tribe as the basic unit of organisation in African societies, past and present, goes back among anthropologists to at least the 1950s. By the 1980s historians of southern Africa were seeing modern tribes and tribal identities as historically made in the colonial period. But they paid little attention to the making of identities in the period before colonialism, leaving the notions of ‘tribe’ and ‘tradition’ still standing, if now uneasily. Using evidence from Stuart’s notes on how people engaged in political practices and political discourses in KwaZulu-Natal in the times before colonialism, Hamilton has argued that the ‘pre-colonial’ can usefully be seen as the ‘pre-tribal’; the bounded polities that we think of as ‘tribes’ were shaped into existence primarily in the period of colonial rule. They stand in sharp contrast to the more fluid polities that existed before colonial times. Paul Landau has argued much the same point for the societies of the highveld.⁴

I have taken up some of these ideas in writing essays on Stuart’s conversations with his two most prolific interlocutors, Ndukwana kaMbengwana of the Mthethwa and Socwatsha kaPhaphu Ngcobo.⁵ Cynthia Kros and I have taken up some of them in writing the essay on Gcabashe and his conversations with Stuart that I mention above. In that essay, we begin to offer an answer to the question I posed earlier about what impelled the aged Gcabashe to go all that way to talk about the past to an unknown colonial official.

In an important sense, Gcabashe was

doing nothing new. He was doing what we think elders in African societies had always done – that is, he was engaging in discussions about the past to defend and promote particular interests in the present. If it was necessary, one went to the centres of political power to do it, using the medium of the spoken word. And when it became clear in the colonial era that it was the written word that really counted with the authorities, then it was important to go to the new centres of power for the spoken word about the past to be put into writing. Hamilton puts it concisely in a general statement: ‘We ... find calculated attempts by the subjects of colonialism ... to enter their experiences and views into the formal archival record.’⁶ There is every reason to think that this is what Gcabashe was seeking to do by visiting Stuart and discussing the past with him.

Scholars like Hlonipha Mokoena have highlighted how, in the mid- and later-nineteenth century, the kholwa, or African Christian believers in Natal, became aware of the longevity of the written word.⁷ It is highly likely that many non-kholwa elders like Thununu Gcabashe were just as cognisant of its capacities for conserving and disseminating knowledge. Their notions of the past would have been shaped not only by hearing ideas voiced by other elders in the rural areas but by hearing, directly or indirectly, of ideas held by a range of other people, in countryside and town, who were familiar to varying degrees with the world of writing and publishing: missionaries and other mission workers, teachers, kholwa converts, colonial officials at various levels, storekeepers, European employers, and others.

This was a time when a ferment of new ideas was stirring among both

Europeans and Africans inside and outside the colony. Among Europeans, ideas about racial and cultural hierarchies, with themselves at the top, were becoming more rigid. In kholwa circles, activists and intellectuals were growing increasingly frustrated at being shut out of opportunities to participate in economic and political life on equal terms with European colonists, and were becoming politically more vocal. In Natal, the first African quasi-political organisation, the Funamalungelo (We want our rights), had been formed in 1888. This was followed by the formation of the Natal Native Congress in 1900, which merged with similar organisations in other parts of South Africa in 1912 to form the South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress). Independent African churches were starting to emerge in Natal from the late 1890s onward. The first African-owned newspaper in the colony, *Ipepa lo Hlanga*, was established in 1900, but closed under pressure from the government in 1901. Another newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*, appeared in 1903 and remained an independently owned mouthpiece of African opinion for many years.

We have little idea as yet of the nature of political thinking in those times in the far-flung rural areas of Natal, nor of how it shaped ideas about the past, but it seems safe to say that new ideas were flowing into currents of thinking in these areas as well as in the colony's towns. Gcabashe would have known of the written word from the contact he had had with missionaries in the late 1830s during Dingane's reign, and from years of living in colonial Natal. He may possibly have had some prior knowledge of Stuart's interest in writing down what elders like himself had to say about the

past, and the invitation to visit Stuart that came to him via Chief Magidi may not have been entirely unexpected.

Which is not to say that there was no ambivalence in Gcabashe's feelings about the experience of being questioned and cross-questioned by Stuart, the colonial magistrate, and of having his answers written down in front of him as if he was in court. As Kros and I have argued, there is some evidence in Stuart's record of their conversations that, while wanting to see his words preserved, Gcabashe may also have seen the capturing of 'his' history by Stuart, the colonial official, as threatening to deprive him of a platform to speak autonomously of his own knowledge of the past. In another context, Isabel Hofmeyr has written cogently about the sense of failure experienced by elders who felt that their social roles as communicators of cultural skills between generations was being undermined by the intrusion of the written word.⁸ It may be that, in his interactions with Stuart, Gcabashe felt something of the same thing happening. But it was nevertheless politically important to him to have his words on the past written down.

Towards a decolonised intellectual history

The story I have been telling is about two very different lives that intersected briefly in colonial Durban in 1903. Flowing from this, other stories could be told. About Gcabashe's later life we know nothing and he could not have lived for more than a few years after his visit to Stuart. But there is an important story to be told about the life of the set of notes that he and Stuart generated. It would be about how Stuart incorporated the notebooks in which he recorded his

conversations with Gcabashe into his growing collection of papers, and how he curated it; how the collection travelled with him when he and his family moved to London, and how it survived the Blitz in World War II in the basement of his house; how, some years after his death in 1942, his wife Ellen sold the collection to Killie Campbell, and how it made its way back to Durban.

This story would intersect with the story of the Campbell family as settlers in the colony of Natal. It would be about where the wealth came from – wealth based on the sweat of hundreds of Indian and African labourers on the family's sugar plantations – that enabled the imposing family home on Durban's Berea ridge to be built, and of how Killie Campbell came to inherit the home and to develop it as the location of one of the richest research libraries in South Africa.⁹ This story would take us into yet another: about Colin Webb's launching of the Stuart Papers project in 1970 and the publication from 1976 onward, with Webb and me as co-editors, of the successive volumes of the *James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*.¹⁰ It would take us into the story of how academic scholars and other researchers have used the Stuart collection since it settled in the Killie Campbell Library, and how they have used the expanding corpus of the *James Stuart Archive*.

Some of these stories have been written about, and there is still much more to be written and rewritten about them. But I want to conclude on a different note. To state the obvious, the words which Gcabashe – and many other individuals – spoke to Stuart about the past were recorded in a colonial context. Paradoxically, it is this colonial-made

archive, and its survival into the present, that enables us in these 'decolonial' times to begin to see ideas about the past spoken by Gcabashe and by Stuart's other African interlocutors as part of KwaZulu-Natal's intellectual history. Close examination of the contexts in which these ideas were produced enables us to go beyond seeing them as 'tribal traditions', and to appreciate them as rooted in currents of active political thinking and rethinking of the past, thinking and rethinking shaped partly by ideas with roots deep in the times before European colonialism but also by the interlocutors' own experiences under colonial rule. A new field of historical enquiry is opening up, one that has previously been submerged by a century and more of thinking about African societies in the tribal terms set by colonial anthropology, and also by the relative marginalising and immobilising of black intellectuals in South Africa in the era of segregation and apartheid.

This perspective gives fresh importance in the present to the work done by figures like the colonial official James Stuart and the colonial collector and curator Killie Campbell. Alongside studies of figures like Stuart, and many others, black and white, who participated actively in the public intellectual life of Natal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we need studies of the networks of interlocutors and correspondents with whose ideas they engaged. These networks included background figures like Campbell – collectors, librarians, archivists, museum curators and others – who helped give content and shape to currents of ideas at the time.¹¹ The same point applies to figures like Gcabashe and many other individuals who engaged in conversations about the past with Stuart. In their

different settings they, too, were active agents in networks of discourse that need to be researched.

We can make these points without losing sight of the fact that the ideas which circulated within these networks were often fiercely contested – between Africans and Europeans, among Africans themselves, and, if less intensely, among Europeans. And without losing sight of the fact, as this paper has aimed to show, that these ideas were very often shaped by interactions between these same Africans and Europeans that went back to the time of their first sustained contacts in the early nineteenth century.¹²

The work of people like Stuart, Gcabashe and Killie Campbell formed part of a colonial past that many people in South Africa today want to forget about. What I have tried to show in this paper is that it was work a new generation of scholars in the present cannot afford to ignore in studying the past in order to think towards a decolonised future.

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NOTES

- 1 Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press and Cape Town, David Philip, 1998), chapter 4; Carolyn Hamilton, 'Backstory, biography, and the life of the James Stuart Archive' *History in Africa* 38 (2011), pp. 319–341; John Wright, 'Ndukwana kaMbengwana as an interlocutor on

- the history of the Zulu kingdom, 1897–1903', *History in Africa* 38 (2011), pp. 343–368.
- 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 Neighbouring Peoples*, vol. 6 (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), pp. 252–315.
- 3 For Hamilton's ideas see the two items cited in note 1 and the following publications, among others: Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard Mbenga and Robert Ross, 'The production of preindustrial South African history' in Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard Mbenga and Robert Ross (eds), *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 1, from Early Times to 1885* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapter 1; Carolyn Hamilton, 'Archives, ancestors and the contingencies of time' in *Laute, Bilder, Texte: Register des Archivs* edited by Alf Lüdtkke and Tobias Nanz (Göttingen, V&R unipress, 2015), pp. 103–118; Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer, 'Tribing and untribing the archive' in *Tribing and Untribing the Archive: Identity and the Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods*, vol. 1 edited by Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2016), pp. 13–48; Carolyn Hamilton and John Wright 'Moving beyond ethnic framing: political differentiation in the chiefdoms of the KwaZulu-Natal region before 1830' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43 (2017), pp. 663–679; Carolyn Hamilton, 'The long southern African past: enfolded time and the challenges of archive' *Social Dynamics*, published online 18 December 2017, pp. 1–20.
- 4 Paul Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 5 Wright 'Ndukwana kaMbengwana'; John Wright, 'Socwatsha kaPhaphu, James Stuart, and their conversations on the past, 1897–1922' *Kronos: Southern African Histories* 41 (2015), pp. 142–165.
- 6 Hamilton, 'Archives, ancestors and the contingencies of time', p. 104.
- 7 Hlonipha Mokoena, *Magema Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011).
- 8 Isabel Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That Is Told: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), chapter 2.

- 9 See Norman Herd, *Killie's Africa: The Achievements of Dr. Killie Campbell* (Pietermaritzburg, Blue Crane Books, 1982).
- 10 John Wright, 'Making the *James Stuart Archive*' *History in Africa* 23 (1996), pp. 333–350.
- 11 A path-breaking new study in this field is Hamilton and Leibhammer (eds), *Tribing and Untribing the Archive*.
- 12 On the historical entanglements of ideas on the past held by black people and white people in Natal see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*.