

# A REPLY TO PETER COLENBRANDER

I have encountered immense problems in attempting to grasp the point that Mr. Peter Colenbrander was trying to make in his article entitled "The Year of Cetshwayo revisited" (Reality, March 1984).

Firstly, I would have thought a research-oriented scholar like Mr. Colenbrander would be the last person to wonder whether "anything more" can be said on the life of King Cetshwayo, "given the outstanding calibre of works such as Jeff Guy's *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*." Indeed while we highly commend Jeff Guy for his excellent work on King Cetshwayo and the Anglo-Zulu War, we cannot say with any certainty that his has been the last word on the subject. It would be totally unscientific to adopt that attitude. The mere fact that Guy's book (published more than 100 years after the Anglo-Zulu War and after volumes had already been written on the subject) marked a clear point of departure from the century old doctrinaire colonial perspective of the war, should be sufficient proof that there seldom is any finality on a research topic — let alone an historical topic. Mr. Colenbrander can rest assured that it is our cultural and historical responsibility to continue to explore this period of our history to the best of our ability, not for our own sake but for the sake of generations of South Africans that will come after us.

Secondly, it is indeed revealing that Mr. Colenbrander quotes with apparent approval Carolyn Hamilton's reference to critics of pre-colonial history who, she says allege that 'pre-colonial history as a scholarly discipline and as a teaching subject — is at best irrelevant to the needs of black South Africans, and at worst is a hindrance to those working for change in this country'. I am quite certain that these critics have no authority to pontificate on behalf of black people and claim that the study of precolonial history is detrimental to their struggle for human rights. As far as I am aware, no black patriot worthy of the name, does not find pleasure in reminiscing about the precolonial period when his ancestors lived like human beings and were slaves to no colonial powers and to nobody. To argue that pre-colonial history is irrelevant to the needs of Black South Africans is tantamount to saying that Black South Africans and their children should not be informed about that period in their history when they were masters of their own destiny. Precolonial history has for centuries acted as the driving force in the struggle against colonialism on this continent. I know of no African struggle against colonialism whether violent or non-violent, whose architects did not draw inspiration from the pre-colonial period of their peoples' history. During my

days as a student, what I found irrelevant to my needs as a Black South African was the need to memorise the long list of British colonial governors who took turns in governing the Cape Colony during the First and Second British occupations in 1795 and 1806 respectively. I also found it irrelevant to my needs to have to know how many pairs of shoes Queen Victoria of England and Queen Marie Antoinette of France had. I could have surely done with more African precolonial history periods in my class.

Arising from the above, I cannot help concluding that Mr. Colenbrander either believes or at least strongly suspects, that the KwaZulu authorities have used the Year of King Cetshwayo to perpetuate ethnic divisions and to divide black people in their struggle for liberation. To imply, as Mr. Colenbrander apparently does, that the celebration of the Year of King Cetshwayo had anything to do with attempts "to mobilise support for an ethnically-based, quasi-traditional political organisation" is tantamount to adding insult to injury. If by that so-called "ethnically-based, quasi-traditional political organisation" Mr. Colenbrander means Inkatha, then he must be blind to political realities of our time. Nowhere in Inkatha's constitution is it stated that it is an "ethnically-based" liberation movement. This has been stated by Inkatha spokesmen over and over again.

It now seems to us that Inkatha's only crime is that it was founded by Zulus and that Zulus happen to be the largest ethnic group in South Africa. Yet nothing is ever said about the fact that the A.N.C. was also founded by Zulus in 1912 in Bloemfontein. Inkatha membership is open to all black people and indeed it has hundreds of thousands of non-Zulu members within its ranks. I do not understand what Mr. Colenbrander means by a "quasi-traditional" organisation. On my part I have not come across a single black liberation movement in Southern Africa that does not subscribe to traditional African political tenets. While the U.N.I.P. of Zambia for instance, subscribes to African humanism, Inkatha subscribes to the philosophy of UBUNTU — BOTHO which emphasises the primacy of the human being (UMUNTU). These are traditional African political tenets. Or must Inkatha perhaps be "quasi-Western" or "quasi-Eastern" in its political orientation?

Further, Mr. Colenbrander should know that the Kwa-Zulu Monuments Council that was responsible for organising celebrations during the Year of King Cetshwayo is a multi-racial Council consisting of white and black South Africans. Its Chairman is Dr. Tim Maggs, the famous Natal archaeologist. The

KwaZulu Monuments Foundation which is responsible for collecting funds on behalf of the Monuments Council, is also a multi-racial organisation chaired by Mr. George Chadwick, the famous Natal historian. Every South African who is interested in South African history can become a member of the KwaZulu Monuments Foundation. Indeed scores of white South Africans are already members, as well as interested persons from overseas countries. It will be recalled that in 1979, the KwaZulu Government and the Natal Provincial Administration jointly decided to celebrate the centenary of the Anglo-Zulu War in a spirit of reconciliation and with the aim of honouring heroes on both sides. Multi-racial celebrations were held in Isandlwana, Rorkes Drift and Ondini, culminating in a historic multi-racial dinner in Durban.

Chief Buthelezi, the present leader of the Zulus and a descendant of King Cetshwayo, has never in his numerous speeches and public statements advocated a separate political destiny for the Zulus nor claimed that Zulu Kings like Shaka, Dingane and Cetshwayo are exclusive Zulu public property. On the contrary, he has always maintained that Zulus are South African citizens and shall never accept so-called independence that Pretoria is offering them. Zulu Kings who left their mark on South African history did so as South Africans and as such every South African who cherishes the history of his country is entitled to honour them.

In September 1983, Inkatha decided to use the King Shaka celebration in Umlazi as a multi-racial meeting to protest against moves by the South African Government to introduce the tri-cameral parliament. This turned out to be the biggest multi-racial protest meeting in the whole national campaign against the tri-cameral parliament, and about 30 000 people were present.

All the above facts should re-assure Mr. Colenbrander that neither Inkatha, the KwaZulu Government nor any sane Zulu person for that matter, will ever attempt to regard a Zulu figure like King Cetshwayo as Zulu public property. King Cetshwayo is a South African hero and his struggle against colonialism was waged on behalf of all the people of South Africa who value freedom and human dignity. The unfortunate events on the campus of the University of Zululand in October 1983 had nothing to do with the celebration of the Year of King Cetshwayo, as Mr. Colenbrander alleges. Instead of trying to come up with simplistic excuses for the tragic events at the University of Zululand, we as adults, should be co-operating in teaching our young people that differing political views can be expressed honourably without hurling insults and abuse at our political opponents, and their leaders. We in Inkatha are already doing our part in this regard and have taught our young people that it pays to exercise self-restraint even when faced with extreme provocation and ferocious violence.

After reading Mr. Colenbrander's article, I could not help concluding, rather reluctantly, that black oppression in South Africa is increasingly assuming various forms. The first and well-known form is political oppression resulting from discriminatory laws that deny black people full political rights in the land of their birth. The second and hitherto ignored form is cultural oppression, otherwise known as cultural imperialism. This cultural oppression/imperialism manifests itself in statements and actions by



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some (not all) apparently well-meaning white fellow-countrymen who subscribe to the liberal tradition. In their over-enthusiasm to sympathise with the black liberation struggle these fellow-countrymen fall into yet another temptation of attempting to prescribe destiny for black people. Cultural oppression and prescribing destiny for black people consist in a non-black person attempting to dictate to black people:

- I. who, amongst their cultural and historical heroes should be honoured
- II. how and for how long such heroes should be honoured
- III. what political loopholes should be avoided in honouring such heroes.
- IV. which aspect of their history they should be allowed to study
- V. who their authentic leaders are, and
- VI. which black political movements are credible when compared to others.

The Black Consciousness political theory (which Inkatha totally rejects) that no white person can ever be a genuine ally in the black liberation struggle was propounded as a reaction against cultural oppression and the tendency by some whites to prescribe destiny for black people.

The white liberal tradition in South Africa is indeed a noble and illustrious one. It has produced revered heroes with whose memory every freedom-loving South African, regardless of the colour of his skin, would like to be associated. The history of the black liberation struggle would indeed be poorer without the substantial contribution of white liberal fellow-countrymen, both alive and dead. I am however, afraid that hurtful and unsubstantiated statements directed at black people, their leaders and political organisations go a long way towards eroding the mutual respect that our forebears have patiently nurtured over many decades. It is high time the likes of Peter Colenbrander took careful note of these issues. □