

“Ways of (Sight) Seeing” in KwaZulu-Natal Part One

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These stories of the wonderful and tragic sights and sounds of KwaZulu-Natal(KZN) were written over the last decade. Here and there they have been updated; in other places where it made sense to quarantine time, the stories are untouched.

The name of this province resonates across the world. For mighty battles were fought here between the marauding Boer bandits, the red-coated regiments of British, and the assegai-wielding regiments of the Zulu. Just two hours out of the city center, the remnants of the battlefields can still be seen. The only barrier is some three toll roads, which might make the excursion somewhat expensive. But can one put a price to be a witness to the long walk to freedom?

But be careful. Very careful. Historians in the pay of various tourism outlets are busy telling tall stories about the history of South Africa. Uncomfortable features of the past are subtly downplayed at first, then twisted, then buried in lie-burials, then denied. If there is anything that history has taught us, it is while the pen is mightier than the sword, the air-brush is mightier still.

Isandlwana

If you head out of Durban towards Pietermaritzburg, the capital city, then past Escourt and towards the signposts that say Ladysmith, you are in the land of war memorials. Ladysmith is where the Boers laid siege to the British at the turn of the 20th century. Gandhi was around during this war, leading his stretcher-bearers, hoping to prove Indian loyalty to the British.

Two decades before the Anglo-Boer War (now known stupidly as the South African War) another battle was fought in these parts. On the road between Greytown and Dundee you will find Isandlwana.

Isandlwana. What lay behind this battle fought in January 1879 was the British attempt to build a federation of colonies. Transvaal came under the sway of the British flag in 1877. But further south the Zulu kingdom stood in the way of this grand plan. The new High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere provoked a stand off with King Cetshwayo and used this as a pretext for an invasion led by one Lord Chelmsford. The supremely confident Chelmsford “launched a three-pronged attack into Zululand...His central column was surprised at Isandlwana, overwhelmed and annihilated.”

This victory put the Zulu on the world map and led to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli’s “famous comment on the remarkable Zulu people who convert our bishops, defeat our generals, and put an end to a great European dynasty.”

Post-apartheid South Africa has taken to hosting one of the most stupid and contrived tourist stunts in the province (sorry, Kingdom) of KwaZulu-Natal; re-enacting this battle with real soldiers from the same English regiment involved over a century ago. One excited journalist described the scene: “Gory Isandlwana. Two nations equal in pride, dignity and respect stood against each other in war....” In the January 2004 issue of *Savubona*, the in-flight magazine of South African Airways, one of South Africa’s most original journalists, Darryl Bristow-Bovey, writes: “The experience of Isandlwana, I realized as I stood beneath the yellow Zululand moon, is not finally the experience of death or warfare. It is a place where you find corners of your heart, depths of your feeling that you do not find elsewhere. It is a place of still and spectral and terrible beauty, rich with things that overlap and make us human.”

What Junk?

In this age where imperialism is being tidied up and given respectability, it is worth returning to Walter Rodney’s classic, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. He explodes the argument that while on the one hand there was exploitation and oppression associated with colonialism, on the other hand, colonial governments did much for the benefit of Africans. Rodney shows that colonialism only had one hand; it was a one-armed bandit. What development there was, was to create and sustain markets, not “civilization.” What Rodney did not spend too much time doing is telling us about the resistance to colonialism. And what a resistance there was in this neck of the woods. Today, in post-apartheid South Africa the politics and the economics that underlay colonialism have been excised.

What gets lost in the hoopla of the re-enactment and the exhibition of the regalia is the fact that the British army-of-occupation’s task was to kill, maim and intimidate so as to allow for the brutal exploitation of South Africa’s people and resources. What is also lost in the “celebration” is the total technological disparity as far as weapons are concerned. The British had rifles, side-arms, horses and artillery pieces, the Zulus spears, small wooden clubs known as *knobkieries*, and outdated firearms with little ammunition.

If this advantage was not enough, the British resorted to the most cowardly and deceitful of tactics. None exemplifies this more than the way the British army waged war on the Hlubi clan in northern KZN. Women and children were blasted with dynamite from places of refuge, and as the survivors emerged, some 200 were mowed down. All their land and cattle were then confiscated.

The battle was followed by a murderous invasion of Zululand by the British with hundreds of Zulu mowed down by Gatling guns in July 1879. As Joseph Conrad has pointed out, “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.”

The battle at Isandlwana was not between two great nations. As that sage of this province’s historians, Jeff Guy, points out “(T)he intention of those who planned the invasion of 1879 was to terminate Zulu political independence and free Zulu labor by means of a decisive military victory. The Zulu army thwarted this, and as a result the war became merely a first stage in a prolonged process during which metropolitan and colonial forces

undermined the strength of the Zulu by exploiting divisions within their society and brought about a civil war which left the country and its people open to political subjugation and economic exploitation.”

It is in this period of dispossession that the future contours of 20th century South African political economy can be glimpsed. Rosa Luxemburg provides an incredibly powerful analysis of this process:

The European conquerors are the first who are not merely after subjugation and economic exploitation, but the means of production itself, by ripping the land from underneath the feet of the native population... European capitalism deprives the primitive social order of its foundation. What emerges is something worse than all oppression and exploitation, total anarchy and a specifically European phenomenon, the uncertainty of social existence... Before the advance of capitalism, the primitive social order, which outlasted all primitive historical phases, capitulates. Its last remnants are eradicated from the earth and its elements—labor power and means of production—are absorbed by capitalism.

The brutal consequences of this looting of Zulu land and labor are still with us today.

The Present is History

If you go down to the beachfront, ask for rickshaw puller no. 8. Johnson Zulu is 59 years old. There is not an ounce of fat on his lithe body. Muscles taut. This man has not seen the inside of a gym, neither has he heard of Weighless. His body has been honed from years of hard work. First on the railways, and for the last 17 years as a rickshaw puller. There might be other contending factors. He mostly eats putu and rice which he cooks himself for dinner. At the most, once a week, meat. There might be genes at work here, too. Johnson is born “from the same testicle as King Zwelithini.” Unlike the king, whose warrior ancestry hasn’t stopped him growing soft, Johnson works for a living. I pay for a ride. My friend, all 115 kilograms (no it was not the mayor), accompanies us. Johnson bends his back ever so slightly and we are off. Down the once golden mile.

Suddenly the rickshaw spirals backwards. My friend tries to throw his huge belly forwards to save us. But it has no effect. Johnson’s feet are in the air. Suspended. He dangles there for a moment. As if the weight is too much. And then we are back on *terra firma*.

The movements are imperceptible. Like the movements his forebears used to kill British soldiers with a short stabbing spear in times past. He turns and laughs with a wide, white smile. No caps or false teeth. His are rooted forever in this land. Johnson works seven days a week. Some days he makes R20 and during the December holidays up to R100 and R150 a day. But things are tough. He lives in a hostel in KwaMashu. Shares a room with four other men. Pays R50 a month for the accommodation. R21.50 a week for rail transport. R25 a week to park his rickshaw in a local garage. What’s life like in the hostel? “Most of the people are not working. We have a gentleman’s agreement that we will help pay the rent of those who are not working on the understanding they will do the same when they start working.”

“Ubuntu” loosely means “a human being is a human being only through its relationship to other human beings.” Today, among other things, it is packaged and used by

psychologists attached to big business to argue that workers must obey authority, and used in speeches by the gravy-trainers to prove they are human despite their inhuman economic policies. Listening to Johnson Zulu one realizes in its truer form, ubuntu is more honestly alive here, among the poor.

Who are his main customers? “Sotho speakers from Gauteng and Free State. They love going on the rickshaw. They are so generous. Sometimes we make so much money, we slaughter a cow. I have actually learned some Sotho. Second are the whites from Free State. That is our main business.” Foreign tourists hardly feature. When does he see his family, a wife and four children? “At most, four times a year. It is expensive. R140 return trip.” How does your family receive you? “When I arrive with sugar, groceries and clothing, they are excited. When I arrive with nothing, they are dull and dim.”

What about the children? “My greatest hope lies with my youngest of 10 years, Sibusiso. I hope he finishes schooling and becomes a clerk or a policeman.” When will you retire? “As long as my knees are still okay, I will have to carry on. But if I win the Lotto, I will stop. I play sometimes up to R10 a week.”

What is your wish? “I want to see my family more often. I have never seen my children grow up. My wife and I have grown old separately. It breaks my heart. To be more often with my family, I wish for busloads of tourists.”

I do not know how to tell him that he could be out of a job soon. The city plans a monorail to whizz tourists from one end of the beachfront to the other.

Who is your hero? “When I grew up in the Royal Kraal at Nyokeni in Nongoma, we listened to many stories. Of many kings. Of all of them, my favourite is Shaka.”

Why? “During Shaka’s time there were jobs.”

A hundred meters away, Shaka gets dug up, so that what he fought for can be buried. A joint project of the new dispossessors (City Hall) and the representatives of the old robber barons. Johnson Zulu will never take his family to that park. The park lies on the edge of the harbor entrance. There is the daily dolphin show, water rides and a restaurant encased in a wrecked ship selling seafood. A platter will set you back R500. While you dine, sharks play in huge tanks. It will cost a couple of months of lugging obese Sothos and Free Staters down the beachfront.

You see, in this day and age, even Shaka can be stripped of dignity and commodified. Meanwhile, the braves of Shaka beg on the streets of Durban. The King waits on handouts from Pietermaritzburg. Warriors dance for the very British tourists whose ancestors destroyed them through the Hut Tax. Now they are rendered impotent by the need to perform.

If you drive down the North Coast you will come across some beautifully structured Zulu men giving out handbills on the off ramp at Ballito. Directing you to Zimbali where sugar estates have been turned into real estate. There are security guards and boom-gates. Stolen land, stolen again.

This government's economic policy, which entrenches private property, entrenches theft. As I leave, Johnson Zulu is cajoling, begging a family of whites to take a ride. They brush him off. He shouts to me: "Tell them I am Johnson Zulu, number 8."

On his body are centuries of dispossession. In his blood are centuries of resistance. Reduced to a number. Reduced to carrying the burden of the new South Africa on his back. A non-racial burden, mind you. Who has the gall to say South Africa has not changed?

Today of course we still have a king. He goes by the name of Goodwill Zwelithini. He lives on handouts from the provincial government. Sometimes he wears a naval uniform much like the admirals in the British navy.

Why, you may ask, would an African traditional leader want to imitate an admiral of a colonial naval fleet? Given that our King has little to show as far as sea-faring competence is concerned (he has always used the bridge to cross the Tugela river), we are left to speculate on the source of this fetish.

I examined every available text on Zulu history but could not find much there to indicate a naval tradition. Like a psycho-therapist searching backwards into the life of the subject, I decided to keep going down the ancestral line until I found the answer... The massacre by the British at Ulundi and the humiliation of the Zulu monarchy.

After the Zulu army had been destroyed by cannon and machine-gun fire, King Cetshwayo's surrender was followed by his dispatch from Port Durnford by sea to Cape Town. His successor; Dinizulu, was sent even further away, across the sea ...into exile to St. Helena. Their passage from sovereignty to subjugation was upon British naval vessels, commanded by men in dark suits and lots of gold stripes.

Could it be that those uniforms have left an enduring impression upon the psyche of the Zulu royal house? As we speak of liberation, it is sad that a symbol of pre-colonial independence now assumes the guise of the colonial master. What is it about the master/slave relationship which leaves the oppressed drawing upon the example of the oppressor?

The re-writing and air-brushing of history, the emptying out of its political and economic consequences has echoes in the present. In the 21st century, the answer to the Holy Grail has once again been found, we are told. "Make poverty history" is the new rallying cry. Abracadabra. The one thing that this approach does not do is factor in history. How can the proponents of this approach do so when the very terms of trade established with guns and bayonets in the barbaric scramble for Africa continue to disproportionately benefit *them*? This colonial throwback is hidden in technical discussions at the WTO about *their* rights over patents and *our* lack of rights over subsidies.

This attempt to make poverty history by exorcising the history of poverty had its genesis in the World Bank's *Voices of the Poor*. Here we saw a deliberate approach of refusing to take seriously historical forms of exploitation and dispossession, even when these structure and are entrenched in the present. The editorial voice never inquires into the social

forces that produced the arrangements that channel millions of lives into its twin categories of “us”—readers of the World Bank books and actors with the potential to effect social change—and “them,” “the poor,” objects of our paternalistic sympathies and whose neediness legitimates “our” control over “their” lives. The World Bank gaze is locked into the present. With neoliberalism we are always at the beginning of year zero. And without history, poverty is naturalized as is, by implication, wealth.

In Gordon Brown’s hands, the exorcizing of history is taken a step further. He tells us Britain must stop apologizing for colonialism and that the missionaries came to Africa out of a sense of duty. History has not simply been ignored, it has been re-written, creating the conditions for another round of under-development and a new rationale for missionaries come to civilize the natives around issues of good governance, playing by the rules, and corruption. Meanwhile, the unfair trade rules, the subsidies to sugar farmers that allow them to sell sugar at 40 percent of the production cost in Africa, the “forced” privatization of essential services as a condition of aid can continue. Good governance. Brown’s own government’s illegal occupation of Iraq and the carnage that has resulted are issues that Africans must not raise, otherwise they lose their place in the feeding queue. The G8’s promise to cancel the debt to poor nations is revealed as “little better than an extortion racket.” The Lords giveth and the Lords taketh away.

Lynton Hall

Johnson Zulu travels north to see his family. If you travel south out of the city, past the Durban International Airport, you will come across some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Fishing is good here, too, and the annual sardine run that brings out thousands with buckets hoping to scoop them up is a sight to behold. You can eat masala sardines fried so crisply that the bones are munchable. The south coast is the gateway to the pristine Transkei Wild Coast and the almost mythical beaches of Coffee Bay, Hole in the Wall, and Mazeppa Bay.

On the south coast you will come across, in Umzinto to be exact, Lynton Hall. Through the 20th century Lynton Hall was host to royalty, prime ministers, and captains of business. It was selected by King George V1 and his family for his recuperation in 1952. Its historic acreages incorporate the “Chequers” of South Africa, Botha House, donated to the nation for the exclusive use of prime ministers and presidents.

Today, it boasts one of the most highly rated restaurants in the country and is also home to a high-class wedding venue and lodging. The respected tourism booklet, *Exclusive Getaways*, describes Lynton Hall as resting “at the head of Umdoni Park, the region’s most picturesque golf course, meandering through pristine coastal forest and spilling down to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean...its incorporation into the Hartford House fold brings together two of Southern Africa’s few remaining great properties of the Victorian era, and provides travellers with the rare combination of the magnificent golfing estates of the KwaZulu-Natal Coast with the majestic environs of the Midlands and the Drakensberg. Our reputation is our most important asset. It does not belong to us; it is the legacy of our children, and that is your guarantee of an unforgettable visit.”

But dig a little and you will find another history that beckons. Hocking, the historian of the sugar barons, provides a watered-down but instructive clue:

The trouble had begun as early as the 1880s. Charlie Reynolds had been put in charge of Indian labor and in many cases had literally driven workers to death. Coolies had been expected to work 14 hours a day, both men and women, viciously lashed with sjamboks and half-starved on inadequate rations. Some had committed suicide, many more had been killed or seriously injured in work-related accidents. People wanting to complain, as was their right, had been dissuaded by threats of a terrible revenge. By any standard, Charlie Reynolds was an odd man. He dabbled in the occult, and the sinister Lynton Hall that he built in 1885 included a fortified tower “in case of a Zulu attack.”...When it became known that Reynolds Brothers fatalities were twice the industry average, the government had ordered an inquiry. Hearings had begun in 1906 and evidence was still being led in the next year. Charlie Reynolds himself had gone on a long overseas trip while waiting for the heat to die down. It never did. In 1908 the Natal government told Reynolds Brothers that unless Charlie Reynolds was expelled, its supply of labor would be terminated. There was no appeal. Utterly disgraced, Charlie Reynolds again left for overseas and four years later died in a bar in Mexico City, allegedly stabbed in the back by a jealous husband.

Lynton Hall was part of the Reynolds Brothers sugar empire that relied in its early days on Indian indentured labor. With slavery at an end and the Zulu kingdom still not defeated, the British agreed to a new form of slavery indentured from the Indian sub-continent. Many were themselves the victims of British inspired dispossession.

The making of India as a profitable enterprise by the British created casualties. Thousands of Indians, their traditional occupations destroyed, were forced onto the labor market. Migration was one means of escape for the poor, the displaced, and the hungry. Migrants saw indenture as a temporary means of escaping the exigencies of their existence. For most, the temporary sojourn became permanent displacement.

The effect of “natural” disasters and famines was also devastating. For example, between 1850 and 1900, nine famines and other natural disasters were recorded in Madras Presidency. The Great Famine of 1876-1879 is estimated to have killed between 6.1 and 10.3 million people. This famine, as Mike Davis has brilliantly exposed, was provoked and exacerbated by British policies. In the midst of the encroaching famine, Lytton the Lieutenant-Governor pushed ahead with squeezing the *zamindars* and tenants for taxes. One of his own district officers described the policy as “suicidal.” A British civil servant described the effects of the famine:

The Government of India having decreed the collection of the land revenue, were now compelled to justify their rapacity by pretending there was no famine.... The frightful mortality throughout the North-West provinces was to be preserved as a State secret. During all that dreary winter, famine was busy devouring its victims by thousands. Scores of corpses were tumbled into old wells, because the deaths were too numerous for the miserable relatives to perform the usual funeral rites. Mothers sold their children for a single scanty meal. Husbands flung their wives into ponds, to escape the torment of seeing them perish by the lingering agonies of hunger.

Millions died at exactly the time when India’s “labor and products were being dynamically conscripted into a London-centered world economy.” Tens of thousands of villagers were wrenched from familiar surroundings and put on the march. These calamities,

combined with British policies, made conditions intolerable and forced many into city-ward migration. Here, they were enticed by recruiting agents who promised wages several times higher than those current in India.

The first batch of human cargo arrived in 1860 on board the *Truro*.

The kind of life that the indentured would come to live was not immediately apparent when the indentured laborer signed the *Girmit*, as the contract came to be known among migrants. As the indentured walked to the plantation, the *Girmit*, a corruption of “Agreement,” would govern their lives.

In theory the agreement appeared to protect both worker and employer, but in practice there was a large gap between the terms of the contract and the reality of plantation life. The contract gave the planters overwhelming control, especially because the regulations were enforced by harsh penal laws. Indentured workers were not allowed to choose their employer or employment, they could not live off the estate, refuse any work assigned to them, demand higher wages, or leave an employer. Once on the plantation, they were denied freedom of movement. They could not go more than two miles from the estate without an employer’s written permission, even if the purpose was to lay a charge against that employer. If they were caught without a “pass,” Indians were imprisoned for fourteen days. The draconian laws viewed all contractual offences as criminal acts. Many migrants were to find that life in Natal was not what they had been promised and had envisaged. As Helen Myers starkly points out:

It was only after the Coolie marked his thumb print on the contract ratifying this, the “meanest and weakest of bonds”—after his indenture papers had been issued, after he had been shown to his quarters in the Coolie line, after he had been assigned to a work gang, after he had been defeated by the heat of the mid-day, after his hands had become raw, then hardened from the cane, after he had been beaten, fined, jailed, after his rations had been withheld—that the realization came that he had not crossed the sea to paradise, that the beautiful Queen was not to be found, that indeed he had been forced across the black water, across *kalapani*, into exile, that this was the world of slavery.

The Reynolds Brothers sugar estate, Esperanza, got a reputation as especially brutal and was referred to as the “Killing Fields.” The indentured were literally worked to death. As the following table shows, death rates at Reynolds were almost twice the average for the Colony.

Death Rate PER THOUSAND:

YEAR	COLONY		REYNOLDS BROS.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1902	25	23	55	60
1903	22	18	30	32
1904	16	18	43	21
1905	15.50	20	35	58

As the figures reveal, women were particularly vulnerable. Poking around in the archives in Pietermaritzburg provides the sketchy details of one early death. Mungi,

indentured number 25086, died trying to make her way back to the Reynolds Estate. News of Mungi's death followed a letter from Mr. Nelson, Hotelkeeper, Lower Umkomaas, who wrote to the Resident Magistrate, Alexandria, that a woman had died and her body was simply left on the side of the road.

The ironically named Indian Protector reported to the Colonial Secretary on August 19, 1881 the sketchy details of how Mungi came to die. On August 12, 1881 she had given birth to a stillborn child. The day after giving birth in Durban, Mungi was made to go by rail to Isipingo with a party of Indians from the Immigration Depot in Durban under the supervision of F.W.B. Lindi, Thomas Reynold's agent. From there she had to walk to Umzinto 40 miles away. "There was no wagon or means of shelter, the want of which was doubtless the cause of the poor young woman's untimely death." There were to be many Mungi's over the next 25 years.

Lynton Hall is worth a visit. If you care to wander beyond the confines of the manicured grounds you will come across a temple, built by the indentured. Old and weathered it stands as a (barely) living reminder of a buried history.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal

If you stand at the harbor of the city of Durban and look West, you will see a huge dome. This is no Muslim madressa but Howard College, which was once part of the University of Natal. It was set up to teach white English-speaking South Africans the economic fundamentalism of the time—free markets for the whites and racially prescribed low paying jobs for "non-whites."

Today overlooking the city is the brand new University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). It is an amalgamation of the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), the Pietermaritzburg campus of the old University of Natal, and the Howard College campus. The merger also includes the teacher training college of Edgewood.

But if you do get to visit the campus, its history was not a one-way street of white racial and economic power in the making.

One of the residences bears the name of Mabel Palmer.

Once I asked students who lived in the residence if they knew who Mabel Palmer was. None of them knew who the hell Palmer was. Given the new sausage machine semester courses, which are over as quickly as McDonalds takeaway are produced and contains the same amount of junk, I was not surprised that they were uninterested in anything that could be more than a few minutes old.

Palmer, it turns out, was a lecturer at the University of Natal, Durban (UND). She arrived from England where she rubbed shoulders with the likes of H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb. She was to later host Shaw in Durban.

Palmer's passion was education. She was aware that there were no Indians, coloreds and Africans in the classes she taught at UND. She struggled to get them admitted as day students, and when this was refused, she mooted for night classes. But the University

Council (controlled by the liberal English burghers) was dead set against the admission of non-whites into the classes and buildings of the college.

How could whites sit on the same seats the next day?

Undeterred, she started university courses in her home and then on the Sastri College grounds. She finally got the racist University Council to build hutments at Sastri College. Classes were held on Friday evenings and weekends to assist non-white teachers with their part-time studies towards their degrees. Students came from all over the province in trains and taxis and some even slept afterwards in Queen Street doorways. Palmer and her volunteers taught all through Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Wanting to give students some sense of communal life, she held memorable winter vacation schools at Adams College in Amanzimtoti. The non-European library was transported from Sastri College to Amanzimtoti station and thence to Adams College in grain bags! During her tenure, non-white enrollment rose from 19 in 1936 to 351 in 1955.

Palmer cut quite a comical figure in her latter years. She would sit in meetings—the Senate no less—complete with eyeshade, and knit. And when boredom overtook her completely, she would turn out her specially made monstrous leather handbag and noisily count her change.

The University Council forced separate graduation ceremonies. She fought for a single ceremony. The university finally relented, but first the white names had to be read out. How did UND ever earn the status of somehow being opposed to the apartheid state? They were a local version of the apartheid state. At least the apartheid state did not try and dress up their racism in “doublespeak.”

Palmer, born in Northumberland, (now known as Cumbria) in 1876, died in her adoptive Durban in November 1958. It was her unflagging efforts that allowed a few black people to receive a university education, despite the best efforts of the university authorities to prevent it from happening.

It is difficult to know what Palmer would think of the university were she alive today. With rare exceptions, the academics are cut off more than ever from the surrounding communities, and curricula are designed to narrowly meet the demands of the market. Many intellectuals spend their time writing research reports that reinforce what the government wants to hear, earning a tidy sum in the process. A new apartheid of rich versus poor has taken over the enrollment, although being exactly the right color is still a good thing. Those students who do get in socialize in their own racial enclaves.

Steve Biko

One of the greatest sons of the old University of Natal is Steve Biko. Biko inspired a whole generation of activists. Coming in the wake of the incarceration of the leaders of the liberation movements and their subsequent banning, Biko's black consciousness movement in the early 1970s gave renewed confidence to those opposing the apartheid regime.

But his recent history at the university makes for an interesting case study in how to put a particular slant on history.

The naming of the medical school in Durban prior to the merger of the separated universities led to some conflict. Today it goes by the name Nelson R. Mandela. Why not Biko, who was a brilliant medical student in Durban whose studies were curtailed by his involvement in building the black consciousness movement, for which he was brutally murdered in 1977? Biko is still not palatable to the arthritic liberals who still hold an ill-tempered sway at these kinds of places nor to the anaemic new black academic elite who have been recently brought in to add a touch of color. So what better way to cut off any move to name the school after its most illustrious student than to quickly push through the trump-card name of Nelson Mandela? After all, everybody is comfortable with Mandela—from fur-bedraped models to imperialist presidents to union-bashing bosses.

Mandela as a symbol is disembowelled. Sanitized. Neutered. Whatever the more nuanced and subtle critiques of Biko's essentialism and romanticism of pre-colonial Africa, he raises the banner of revolution, anger and black consciousness. And in terms of intellectual depth, revolutionary competence and creativity, Biko is a diamond, albeit a rough one, that refuses to be owned by De Beers. And so Biko gets relegated to having a hall at the university named after him, while Mandela gets the school. In this way things can go on as they did before.

Today UKZN's mission is touted as wanting to build a truly excellent African university. But seemingly in thrall with World Bank prerequisites, student fees have spiralled and worker benefits have been assaulted. To boot, the university has tried to evict squatters who live on university land, raising the old apartheid language of hygiene and the like. The settlement attacked is called Banana City. Who are these squatters? Mrs. M. Sithole is one who will be forced to move.

A mother of four, she lives with seven people in a two-room shack. Three of her children attend Hillview Primary School. Mrs. Sithole has lived for 20 years in Banana City. She had originally built her home in another part of the settlement, but it was destroyed in a fire. After staying with her brother-in-law while she looked for the building materials, she decided to move her house to a safer, less congested part of the settlement, near the ridge. Her children don't have birth certificates, because she didn't have the money to get them made. Because of this, none of them have ID cards, so her eldest child, who is 20, is unable to get a job or vote. Her family survives on her ability to get temporary jobs once or twice a week doing housework in the nearby suburbs, maybe bringing 70 rand in total. Like many other families in Banana City, Mrs. Sithole left her rural home near Greytown because of political conflict. If she had to leave the settlement, she has no idea where she would stay. "It is difficult for us...there are seven in my house. Who would let us squat with them?"

Fortunately, the university's Christmas assault on the poor was stymied in the High Court. As one resident said, the university tried to peel off a few bananas, but they slipped. But they are busy getting up and consulting their lawyers for fresh papers. They have their choice of law firm, either of Shepstone and Wiley or Garlicke and Bousfield.

Hidden among the old brown files filled with stories of group areas evictions, land expropriation and the like are the histories of these firms.

Guilt by Association: □ Durban's Leading Law Firms

If you wander around the city's Central Business District you will find the name of a law firm proudly displayed: Shepstone and Wiley. Down the north coast, in Umhlanga, to be exact, are their fierce competitors, Garlicke and Bousfield.

What's in a name? A lot, if the hysteria around name changes to the roads of Durban is anything to go by. Unfortunately, this hysteria has prevented an honest assessment of the people whose names (dis)grace the city. History books too have screened these luminaries from fair "appraisal." Yet, a little digging reveals a lot about the city's founding fathers.

Anyone moving through the portals of the Durban City Hall has done so for the last 90 years under the patriarchal gaze of the statue of the late Harry Escombe. Escombe, former Attorney General and Prime Minister of Natal, was surely a decent and admirable man. Indeed, the law firm he founded in the last century prefaces references to him in brochures with the acclamation "The Great..." Harry is held by Garlicke and Bousfield, Inc. in such high esteem that they deem it proper to regularly use his statue as a backdrop for firm photographs.

But recent research has, like the pigeon-droppings on Harry's head, somewhat spoilt the old boy's features. It turns out Harry Escombe was a bigot and a hypocrite to boot. While affecting the pose of a moderate man in the 1880s, Escombe rode the crest of anti-Indian sentiment, sweeping up lynch mobs and railing against the Asiatic "evil." He promised to "keep this Colony a British Colony, to carry it on in accordance with Anglo-Saxon traditions and not allow it to be submerged under an Asiatic wave of immigration." When he became Premier in 1897, he promptly enacted a trilogy of anti-Indian laws. While his views were intractably racist (he tried to convince a jury that Indians were a "weak deceitful nation"), he was astute enough to temper them. Knowing that the Imperial Government would not allow the forced repatriation of Indians, Escombe hit upon the idea of imposing an out-of-reach residential tax. Those who did not re-indenture or go back to India "voluntarily" would be "placed under a certain disability." "That," he persuaded the legislature, "was the secret!"

Escombe's duplicity came to the fore on the arrival of two ships from India in 1897, one containing Gandhi. Determined to keep the ships out, he raised the issue of disease and managed to hold them in quarantine. Meanwhile mass hysteria was whipped up in the hope the Imperial Government would agree to sending the ships back. He addressed his foaming constituency: "If it were a matter of money that would send these men back, we would spend it. Ten thousand pounds is nothing... but we are powerless legally." The mob decided they would go to the harbor to forcibly prevent the landing. Escombe responded to a rumor that he would call out the police to stop the demonstration: "We are with you and we are going to do nothing of the sort to oppose you." Two thousand hooligans took part. Gandhi was isolated and assaulted but managed to escape.

Knowing what I do about the man, it's hard to restrain myself from climbing onto his head and joining the pigeons in their ablutions. But defacing or removing the statue is not the way, nor is renaming the suburb that bears Escombe's name. Rather we should

surround the statue with quotes from his speeches giving a fuller picture of the man to those who might otherwise celebrate him.

If you thought this was appalling, consider the case of Brigadier General John Scott Wylie, whose sepia-toned photo has pride of place in the law firm he founded, Shepstone and Wylie. After progressive steps to drive Africans into the wage economy had failed—first taking their land, then hut taxes, then the humiliation and banishment of the Zulu monarch, Dinizulu—the colonists levied a poll tax on every African man in Natal in 1906. If they did not submit to work for wages, they couldn't pay. Those who refused to pay were branded rebels and mowed down in an event called the Bambatha Rebellion. Then still a colonel, Wylie, as the officer commanding the Durban Light Infantry, led the massacres. Respected author Shula Marks reveals that less than 20 colonists died in the revolt, while 4,000 Africans were killed. "According to the *Times of Zululand*, a newspaper not prone to be disturbed by settler savagery, "about 700 Africans had their backs lashed to ribbons and [received] 4,700 sentences, included flogging." Bambatha's head was put on a pole and displayed throughout Natal.

Meanwhile Wylie is revered by his firm as a "philanthropist." This is probably because he started a home for white orphans. He certainly displayed a keen interest in orphans, having participated in the creation of thousands himself.

But here's the rub. Following the lead of the City Fathers who often have their legal work done by Shepstone and Wylie, Professor Makgoba, the present Vice Chancellor of UKZN, used Shepstone and Wylie in his recent interdict against workers. To evict squatters he used Garlicke and Bousfield.

The simultaneous writing people out of history, along with re-writing and air-brushing, is ominously reminiscent of Soviet Russia where so many of our leaders spent a happy hour curled up on Stalinist laps, applauding the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

What is hardly ever pursued is what happened to those whose families suffered the sacking of Ulundi in July 1879 by the British and the subsequent dispossession and the destruction of the Zulu kingdom.

Midlands Meander

All around the Mooi River area is home to the Old Natal Families (ONFs). I have always understood ONFs to be authentic, landed gentry—faded aristocrats who took up residence in what became known as the Midlands Meander in the 1800s. Here they created private schools that were almost at once covered with ivy and laid out country clubs to ensure there was not a pint of admixture to the blue blood pumping through their veins.

Gentlemen farmers and their charitable ladies is how the history books have always portrayed this slice of settler stock from the home country. But slowly the mist of dissimulation has started to lift, revealing the ruins of cruelty, crime, subversive sexual liaisons and—above all—lies that dot this landscape. Historian Robert Morrell, who hails from the valleys, pioneered a startling exposé of the impostor ONFs in his doctoral thesis.

One of the first instruments one needed was a “good name.” Most times, a good name could be made up. One of the easiest ways was to manufacture a severe sounding double-barrelled family name. So the Greens became the Lovell-Greens and achieved recognition in Nottingham Road. In Greytown, the Royden-Turners spawned themselves.

Another method of manufacturing class was to subtract from your surname. Thus the famous, but plebeian, Mackenzies became the McKenzies before leaving Scotland, while the common-as-smallpox O’Farrels lost the O’ on the ship over to Port Natal so as to occlude their Irish origins.

Per Morrel: “Midland lore has it that there are three branches of the MacKenzie/McKenzie family—the good, the mad, and the bad. But if you happen to get talking to loose-tongued midlanders, they might add a fourth branch—the black McKenzies.”

Indeed, when Otto Scott Mackenzie (he decided not to drop the “a”) died in 1918, he left part of his estate to Bonfire Johnston. Bonfire was the son of Otto and, get this, Maise-Ka-Mbudula. Needless to say, Bonfire did not receive his inheritance. One of the arguments put forward by the Mackenzie family solicitor, R.A. Marwick, was that Bonfire’s mother was a native and therefore “would squander any money which might be allowed to her for the child’s maintenance and education.”

The pioneer Braithwaites of Seven Oaks are seen as one of the bastions of the Midlands gentry. But a lot of bad blood is buried in the family graveyard. John William Braithwaite died on his farm in 1931. He left behind a grieving widow, Nongla Bessie Comane, for whom he had paid lobola of £250. John was regarded as a pariah by his family.

When alive, he was made to stand outside the family house, rain or shine. When dead, his coffin was turned away from the family cemetery. Nongla, by all accounts a proud and beautiful woman, was swindled out of the farm to wander the valleys and spat upon by the gentle folk of the Midlands.

It would appear, though, that the *diligens paterfamilias* of ONFs did not object to having sex with black women, per se, as long as this was done carefully. Indeed, letters back home reveal one particular ONF father breathing a sigh of relief that young Nigel, back from Hilton after term time, had started showing an interest in girls once more, even if they were black. Of course, getting married to “them” was taking things beyond the pale.

Actually, one of the functions of private schools was to denude, as it were, the young boys of any influence friends from their early years might have had on them. These were the *umfaans*, the children of black farmworkers. In the words of the headmaster of Michaelhouse, it was hoped that the schooling would end the “pernicious” and “apparently inevitable companionship (of white boys) at an early age with kaffirs.” Properly schooled, the boys learned to institute the most barbaric labor practices on Zulu and Indian indentured laborers.

The schools, Michaelhouse and Hilton, stand in isolated splendor. Today, they teach the children of old white capital and those of the new black elite. Coming out of here they

are filled with the passion of wage restraint and rage against the dispossessed's culture of entitlement.

In between lies a host of "cottage industries" run by white entrepreneurs on stolen land using local black labor to peddle all manner of things. Colonial relations still persist here. High tea can be taken on large porches with servants rushing around to take care of all your needs . . . after which, our journey will resume.

To be continued