

"The Bridge": Analysis of a Social Situation in Zululand

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... As a starting point for my analysis I describe a series of events as I recorded them on a single day. Social situations are a large part of the raw material of the anthropologist. They are the events he observes and from them and their inter-relationships in a particular society he abstracts the social structure, relationships, institutions, etc., of that society. By them, and by new situations, he must check the validity of his generalizations. As my approach to the sociological problems of modern Africa has not previously been made in the study of what is called 'culture-contact', I am presenting this detailed material by which it can be criticized. I have deliberately chosen these particular events from my note-books because they illustrate admirably the points I am at present trying to make, but I might equally well have selected many other events or cited day-to-day occurrences in modern Zululand life. I describe the events as I recorded them, instead of importing the form of the situation as I knew it from the whole structure of modern Zululand into my description, so that the force of my argument may be better appreciated.

The Social Situations

In 1938 I was living in the homestead of Chief's Deputy Matolana Ndwandwe, thirteen miles from the European magistracy and village of Nongoma and two miles from Mapopoma store. On January 7th I awoke at sunrise and, with Matolana and my servant Richard Ntombela, who lives in a homestead about half-a-mile away, prepared to leave for Nongoma, to attend the opening of a bridge in the neighbouring district of Mahlabatini in the morning, and a magisterial district meeting at Nongoma magistracy in the afternoon. Richard, a Christian living with three pagan brothers, came dressed in his best European clothes. He is 'son' to Matolana, for his father's mother was Matolana's father's sister, and he prepared Matolana's attire for

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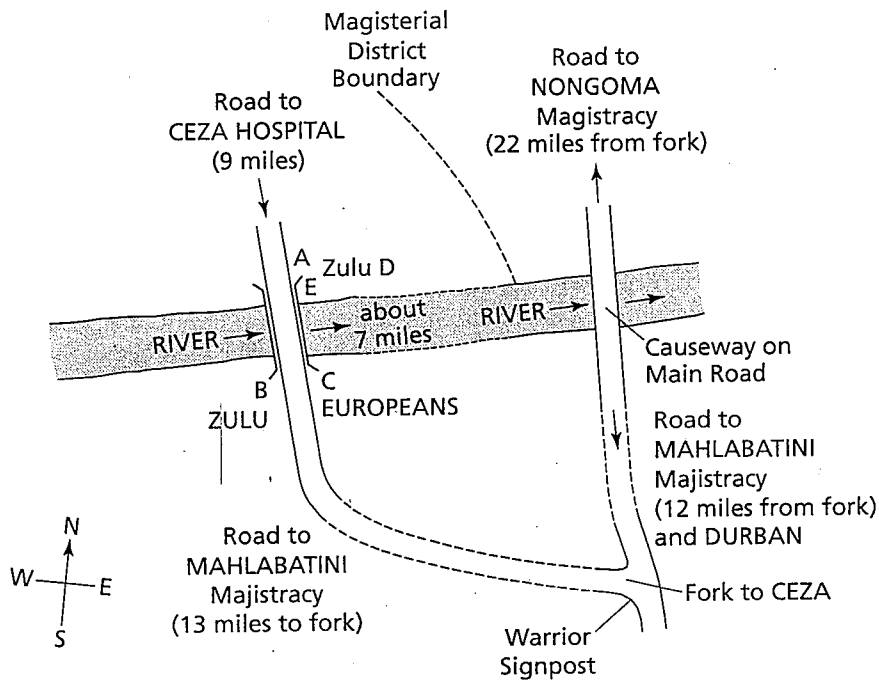
state occasions – khaki uniform jacket, riding breeches, boots and leather gaiters. When we were about to leave the homestead we were delayed by the arrival of a Government Zulu policeman, in uniform and pushing his bicycle, with a handcuffed prisoner, a stranger in our district who was accused of sheep-stealing elsewhere. The policeman and prisoner greeted Matolana and me, and we gave the policeman, who is a member of a collateral branch of the Zulu Royal family, the salutes due to a prince (*umtwana*). He then reported to Matolana how he, assisted by one of Matolana's private policemen, had arrested the prisoner. Matolana upbraided the prisoner, saying he would have no *izigebengu* (scoundrels) in his district; then he turned to the policeman and criticized Government which expected him and his private police to assist it in arresting dangerous people, but paid them nothing for this work and would not compensate their dependants if they were killed. He then pointed out that he, who worked many hours administering the law for Government, had no salary; he had a good mind to stop doing this work and go back to the mines where he used to earn ten pounds a month as a 'boss-boy'.

The policeman went on with his prisoner. We drove in my car to Nongoma, stopping on the way to pick up an old man who is the head of his own small Christian sect with a church building in his homestead; he regards himself as supreme in his church but his congregation, which is not recognized by Government, is referred to by the people as part of the Zionists, a large separatist Native church. He was going to Nongoma to attend the afternoon meeting as a representative from Mapopoma district, a role he always fills partly because of his age, partly because he is the head of one of the local kinship-groups. Anyone may attend and speak at these meetings, but there are representatives recognized as such by the small districts. At the hotel in Nongoma we separated, the three Zulu to breakfast in the kitchen at my expense, and I to a bath, and then breakfast. I sat at a table with L. W. Rossiter, Government Veterinary Officer (*infra* G.V.O.) for the five districts of Northern Zululand. We discussed the condition of roads and local Native cattle sales. He also was going to the opening of the bridge as, like myself, he had a personal interest in it since it was built under the direction of J. Lentzner of the Native Affairs Department Engineering Staff, a close friend and old schoolfellow of both of us. The G.V.O. suggested that Matolana, Richard and I should travel to the bridge in his car; he was taking only one of his Native staff with him. He already, through me, had friendly relations with both Matolana and Richard. I went to the kitchen to tell them we were going with the G.V.O. and stayed a while talking with them and the Zulu hotel servants. When we came out and met the G.V.O., they exchanged greetings and polite questions about one another's health, and Matolana had a number of complaints (for which he is noted among officials) about the cattle dipping. Most of the complaints were technically unjustified. The G.V.O. and I sat in the front of the car, the three Zulu at the back.

The significance of a ceremonial opening of the bridge was that it was the first bridge built in Zululand by the Native Affairs Department under the new schemes of Native development. It was opened by H. C. Lugg, Chief Native Commissioner for Zululand and Natal (*infra* C.N.C.). It is built across the Black Umfolosi River at Malungwana Drift, in Mahlabatini magisterial district, on a branch road to Ceza Swedish Mission Hospital, a few miles upstream from where the main Durban-Nongoma road crosses the river on a concrete causeway. The Black Umfolosi rises rapidly in heavy rains (sometimes twenty feet) and becomes impassable; the main

purpose of the bridge which is a low level (five foot) bridge is to enable the Mahlabatini magistrate to communicate with part of his district which lies across the river, during slight rises of the river. It also makes possible access to the Ceza Hospital which is famous among Zulu for its skill in midwifery; women often go up to seventy miles to be confined there.

We drove along discussing, in Zulu, the various places we passed. I noted of our conversation only that the G.V.O. asked Matolana what the Zulu law of punishment for adultery is, as one of his Zulu staff was being prosecuted by the police for living with another man's wife, though he had not known she was married. Where the road forks to Ceza, the Mahlabatini magistrate had posted a Zulu in full warrior's dress to direct visitors. On the branch road we passed the car of Chief Mshiyeni, Regent of the Zulu Royal House, who was driving from his home in Nongoma district to the bridge. The Zulu in the car gave him the royal salute and we greeted him. His chauffeur was driving the car and he was attended by an armed and uniformed *aide-de-camp* and another courtier.



The bridge lies in a drift, between fairly steep banks. When we arrived, a large number of Zulu was assembled on both banks (at A and B in sketch map); on the southern bank, on one side of the road (at C) was a shelter where stood most of the Europeans. They had been invited by the local magistrate, and included the Mahlabatini office staff; the magistrate, assistant magistrate and court messenger from Nongoma; the district surgeon; missionaries and hospital staff; traders and recruiting agents; police and technical officials; and several Europeans interested in the district, among them C. Adams, who is auctioneer at the cattle-sales in Nongoma and Hlabisa districts. Many were accompanied by their wives. The Chief Native

Commissioner and Lentzner arrived later, and also a representative of the Natal Provincial Roads Department. The Zulu present included local chiefs and headmen and their representatives; the men who had built the bridge; Government police; the Native Clerk of Mahlabatini magistracy, Gilbert Mkhize; and Zulu from the surrounding area. Altogether there were about twenty-four Europeans and about four hundred Zulu there.

Arches of branches had been erected at each end of the bridge and across the one at the southern end a tape was to be stretched which the Chief Native Commissioner would break with his car. At this arch stood a warrior in war-dress, on guard. The G.V.O. spoke to him, for he is a local *induna*, about affairs at the local dip, and then introduced me to him, so that I could tell him about my work and request his assistance. The G.V.O. and I were caught up in conversation with various Europeans while our Zulu joined the general body of Zulu. Matolana was welcomed with the respect due to an important adviser of the Regent. When the Regent arrived, he was given the royal salute and joined his subjects, quickly collecting about himself a small court of important people. The Chief Native Commissioner was the next to arrive: he greeted Mshiyeni and Matolana, enquired about the latter's gout, and discussed (I gathered) some Zulu affairs with them. He then went round greeting the Europeans. The opening was delayed for Lentzner, who was late.

About 11.30 a.m. a party of the Zulu who built the bridge assembled at the north end of the bridge. They were not in full war-dress but carried sticks and shields. The important Zulu were nearly all dressed in European riding clothes, though the King wore a lounge suit; common people were in motley combinations of European and Zulu dress. The body of armed warriors marched across the bridge till they stood behind the tape at the southern arch: they saluted the Chief Native Commissioner with the Royal Zulu salute, *Bayete*, then they turned to the Regent and saluted him. Both acknowledged the salute by raising their right arms. The men began to sing the *ihubo* (clan-song) of the Butelezi clan (the clan of the local chief, who is chief adviser of the Zulu Regent), but were silenced by the Regent. Proceedings now opened with a hymn in English, led by a missionary from Ceza Swedish mission. All the Zulu, including the pagans, stood for it and removed their hats. Mr. Phipson, Mahlabatini magistrate, then made a speech in English, which was translated into Zulu, sentence by sentence, by his Zulu clerk, Mkhize. He welcomed everybody and specially thanked the Zulu for assembling for the opening; he congratulated the engineers and Zulu workmen on the bridge and pointed out the value it would be to the district. Then he introduced the C.N.C. The C.N.C. (who knows the Zulu language and customs well) spoke first in English to the Europeans, then in Zulu to the Zulu, on the theme of the great value of the bridge; he pointed out that it was but one example of all that Government was doing to develop the Zulu tribal reserves. The representative of the Provincial Roads Department spoke shortly and said that his Department had never believed a low-level bridge would stand up to the Umfolosi floods, though they had been pressed to build one; he congratulated the Native Affairs engineers on this bridge which, though built at little cost, had already stood under five feet of flood water; and he added that the Provincial Department was going to build a high-level bridge on the main road. Adams, an old Zululander, was the next speaker, in English and in Zulu, but he said little of interest. The final speech was by the Regent Mshiyeni, in Zulu, translated sentence by sentence into English by Mkhize. Mshiyeni thanked the Government for the work it was doing in Zululand.

He said the bridge would enable them to cross the river in floodtime and would make it possible for their wives to go freely to the Ceza Hospital to have their children. He appealed to the Government, however, not to forget the main road where the river had often held him up and to build a bridge there. He announced that the Government was giving a beast to the people and that the C.N.C. had said that they must pour the gall over the feet of the bridge according to Zulu custom for good luck and safety for their children when crossing the bridge. The Zulu laughed and clapped this. The Regent ended and was given the royal salute by the Zulu who, following the Europeans' lead, had clapped the other speeches. The C.N.C. entered his car and, led by warriors singing the Butelezi *ihubo*, drove across the bridge; he was followed by the cars of a number of other Europeans and of the Regent, in haphazard order. The Regent called on the Zulu for three cheers (hurrahs, Zulu *hule*). The cars turned on the further bank, and, still led by the warriors, returned: on the way they were stopped by the European magisterial clerk who wanted to photograph them. All Zulu present sang the Butelezi *ihubo*.

The Europeans went into the shelter and had tea and cake. A woman missionary took some outside to the Regent. In the shelter the Europeans were discussing current Zululand and general affairs; I did not follow this as I went to the northern bank where the Zulu were assembling. The local Zulu had presented the Regent with three beasts and these, as well as the Government beast, were shot on the northern bank by him and his *aide-de-camp* amid great excitement. The Regent ordered Matolana to select men to skin and cut up the cattle for distribution. The Regent withdrew to a nearby copse (D on the sketch) to talk with his people and drink Zulu beer of which large quantities were brought for him. He sent four pots, carried by girls, to the C.N.C. who drank from one pot and kept it; he told the carriers to drink from the others and then give them to the people. This is proper according to Zulu etiquette.

The C.N.C. and nearly all the Europeans went away. Most of the Zulu had assembled on the northern bank. There they were divided, roughly, into three groups. At the copse (sketch map, D) was the Regent with his own and local *indunas*, sitting together, while further off were the common people. They were drinking beer and talking while they waited for meat. Just above the river bank at A (sketch map) were groups of men rapidly cutting up three beasts under Matolana's supervision; they were making a great noise, chattering and shouting. The G.V.O., Lentzner and the district European Agricultural Officer were watching them. Behind them, further up the bank, the Swedish missionary had collected a number of Christians who were lined up singing hymns under his direction. In their ranks I noticed a few pagans. Lentzner got two warriors to pose on either side of him for a photograph on his bridge. Singing, chattering, talking and cooking continued till we left; I passed from group to group except for the hymn-singers, but most of the time I talked with Matolana and Matole, the Butelezi chief, whom I met that day for the first time. Matolana had to stay to attend on the Regent and we arranged that the latter should bring him to the Nongoma meeting. We left with Richard and the veterinary office-boy. The gathering at the bridge was to last all day.

We lunched, again apart from the Zulu, in Nongoma, and we went separately to the magistracy for the meeting. About 200-300 Zulu were present, chiefs, *indunas* and commoners. The start of the meeting was delayed some time as Mshiyeni had not yet arrived, but finally the magistrate started it without him. After a general

discussion of district affairs (cattle sales, locusts, breeding from good bulls), the members of two of the tribes in the district were sent out of the meeting. . . . one tribe was told to remain as the magistrate wanted to discuss with them faction fights which were occurring between two of their tribal sections: the Amateni chief and his chief *induna* were told they could remain . . . but the magistrate did not want the common people of other tribes to hear him reprimand the Mandlakazi. This he did in a long speech, reproaching them for spoiling the homestead of Zibebu (*umzi kaZibebu*, i.e. the tribe of the great prince, Zibebu), and for putting themselves in a position where they had to sell their cattle to pay court fines instead of to feed, clothe and educate their wives and children. While he was speaking Mshiyeni, attended by Matolana, came in, and all the Mandlakazi rose to salute him, interrupting the magistrate's speech. Mshiyeni apologized for being late, then sat down with the other chiefs. When the magistrate had spoken at some length in this strain he asked the Mandlakazi chief to speak, which the latter did. He upbraided his *indunas* and the princes of the quarrelling tribal sections, and then sat down. Various *indunas* spoke justifying themselves and blaming the others; one, a man who according to other Zulu is currying favour with the magistrate for political promotion, spent his speech praising the wisdom and kindness of the magistrate. A prince of the Mandlakazi house, who is a member of one of the fighting sections and who is also a Government policeman, complained that the other section was being assisted in the fights by members of the Usuthu tribe who live in Matolana's ward near them. Finally Mshiyeni spoke. He cross-examined the Mandlakazi *indunas* fiercely, and told them that it was their duty to see who started the fights and arrest these, and not allow the blame to be borne by everybody who fought. He exhorted the Mandlakazi not to ruin the 'homestead of Zibebu' and said that if the *indunas* could not watch over the country better they should be deposed. He denied the charge that his people were participating in the fights. The magistrate endorsed all the Regent had said and dismissed the meeting.