

Fort Nongqayi, Time Travel 1906

Facts, Natal in the beginning of the 20th century

The beginning of the 20th century was a critical time in the history of the colony of Natal and a turning point in South Africa. It was a time of imperialism and colonialism, an increasing racial hostility that brought insecurity, tensions and fear, a fear for a major African uprising.

Hunter-gatherers and later farmers, San and Khoi, had been living in the Natal area for thousands of years. We know very little of their movements, settlement pattern and organization. In the early 19th century the more loose organisations of kingdoms was formed into a centralised, militaristic state led by Shaka, King of the Zulu clan. This was subsequently referred to by Colonial settlers as the kingdom of the Zulu. From the 1840s white settlers from Europe, and especially England, moved into the area and the situation gradually changed.

Natal was proclaimed a British Colony in 1843. In the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 the British defeated the Zulu army, and Zululand was annexed to the Colony of Natal in 1897. 1899-1902 the Anglo-Boer war ravaged in the colonies in southern Africa including Natal.

Around the turn of the century 1900 the Africans were a large majority, the settlers less than 10 % of the population in Natal. The white settlers perceived themselves as superior. The colonial government introduced a policy for separate administration (“reserves”) of the “Natives”. Natal was a deeply racist society. And there was an increasing aggression towards the African population.

Many Africans became more and more dissatisfied with colonial rule in Natal. They had lost their land to white farmers and sugar cane fields through the English policy of relocation. Many forests were cut down. The traditional way of living in the villages, producing most essentials, was changed into working for wages in the emerging industries, on white farms or the mines at Witwatersrand. Rents, taxes (hut tax, marriage tax, dog tax etc) and prices increased, and the restrictive pass laws were despised. The changes broke up the family, the traditions and the homesteads. There was an erosion of African traditions and values, a racial discrimination and often a violent exercise of authority.

Many settlers were afraid that the African dissatisfaction would turn into a rebellion on a massive scale. They thought it was only a matter of time.

In the 1860s sugar cane was introduced in Natal. The same year the first indentured labourers from India came to the region to work in the sugar industry. By 1900 more than 100 000 Indians, men, women and children, had arrived in Natal, most of them working on the fields along the north and south coast, in the sugar industry or in the mines. Some of the women also had domestic work.

At the turn of the century and white employers in the Colony of Natal had difficulty recruiting black farm workers. One reason was the harsh conditions but also because of increased competition from the gold mines of the Witwaterstrand. The colonial authorities decided to introduce a new tax on every unmarried male, the so-called poll tax, in the Zulu language it was called the head tax, “Khandampondo”. The governemnet needed to repair economic setbacks after the war. They wanted to force black men to enter the labour market, to work on the fields and in the industries in order to earn more money and pay the tax. In 1904 the

government made a census of the population to use as the basis for taxation. The Poll Tax Act was passed in the Natal government in August 1905 and announced in September and October the same year. The Government sent officers from the Magistrates to proclaim the new law to the people. The taxation of unmarried men challenged the patriarchal authority in the family because previously only the fathers paid the taxes. The women were worried to be left alone in the villages even more than before, if their husband, brothers and sons go away working for days, weeks and months.

The reaction towards the new tax was fierce. Most Africans resisted paying when the first tax collectors came to the villages in January 1906. It turned into a violent uprising in 1906. Martial law was proclaimed in February. The Zulus took to arms with pockets of resistance throughout Natal, opposing the Poll Tax. Inkosi Bambatha kaMancinsa was one of the chiefs, homestead north of Greyton, who resisted and started guerrilla attacks. The uprising is often called the Bambatha rebellion. Many people chose rather to die than be forced into economic and political slavery. The Natal colonial militia troops crushed the rebellion very harsh and lots of Zulus were killed. Livestock was confiscated, homesteads destructed, leaders arrested, tried and sentenced, several executions, adding more suffering to the Zulus. For instance in the Port Shepstone region 36 Zulu leaders were put to court in March and sentenced to life, to prison with hard labor and floggings. The Family fibre and social fabric of the Zulus, directly and indirectly, were destroyed and defragmented.

References: Jeff Guy 2006. Remembering the rebellion 1906. The office of the Premier, KZN, Department of Education

Fort Nongqayi

Fort Nongqayi was built in 1883 by the British to house the Zulu Native Police called Nongqayi. It was a police force of black men who were drilled and exercised by white officers, some on horse. It was said to protect the British administration but the idea was to use local people to calm down the increasing frustration among the Africans. The fort was seen by the Zulus as a symbol for colonial power. The fort was abandoned in 1904 but was called back in February 1906 because of the rebellion. The Natal colonial government wanted to enlist some hundred Zulu men to be used against those who refused to pay the tax. The native police also guarded the black prisoners who were sent to Eshowe jail.

Scenario, Fort Nongqayi 17 March 1906

People from the surrounding villages are gathering at Fort Nongqayi. The Zulus are angry, frustrated and worried. Some of the leaders and family members have been arrested and sent to the prison in Eshowe. What has happened to them? Will there be a trial? They demand information and the release of the prisoners.

The situation has changed radically the past few months. It started with the proclamation of the new poll tax act. When the tax collectors came to the villages in beginning of February almost everybody refused to pay. It is an unfair tax, they say, that forces the men to leave the villages and take jobs far away from the homes. Why another tax? What is the reason?

And then the Military Field Force burnt down some homesteads, dispersed the cattle and took some of the men as prisoners. It seems that they want to state examples and show that no one can resist the government without punishment.

There have already been several trials under the martial law. Many men have been sentenced to floggings, 15-20 years in jail or executed. A rumour says that another trial is prepared for 36 Zulu leaders in Umzumbe.

People are worried. What will happen to those who were arrested last week? Will they be tortured or flogged? Will there be another trial? And why were those men picked? Are there any informers in the villages?

One thing that worries many is that the Natal colonial authorities want to recruit and enlist more uNongqayi. Probably they offer good food and a quite good salary. There were two few men enrolled a month ago and now the authorities are determined to have more. It's needed to stop the up rise and protect the British and colonial administration, they say. Are there any more Zulus prepared to step over the line and join the enemy?

A few white settlers have also arrived at the fort demanding protection and information.

Everybody is expecting the Natal colonial authorities to come out of the fort, to meet the crowd and give information. But some say that the military themselves wants information, more names of persons who are planning to resist. Is anybody going to give out the names?

It is in the middle of a rebellion. There is tension and anger. The Zulus wonder if violence, oppression, military and police forces are the only ways to go? Are we forced to obey, pay the tax and probably loose our way of life? Is there any chance to keep our traditions and live in peace with the colonialists?

Key questions

- What is the way forward, what side do we choose? Are we going to follow our leaders, continue to refuse to pay the tax and prepare for the rebellion? Or will we change our mind, be obedient and pay?
- Why do the colonial government want to recruit more uNongqayi? Is there anyone who is going to join them? Why? Are there any informers?
- How do we reclaim our heritage? How much land and how much of our traditional way of life have we lost the past few decades?
- Is there any chance that we can find a way to live together in the future? How?

Roles

The participants are Zulu women, men and families coming to the fort. Everybody keep their age and sex.

Leaders of the Time Travel: 2-3 military officers, 2 Native Policemen, 2 white women/men from town/ missionaries

Role Cards**Activities**

- Prepare food/ Cooking
- Sit and talk (elders advice?)
- Play games (marabaraba, mancala....)
- Making medicine
- Recruiting more policemen/exercises
- Stick fighting
- Blacksmith?
- Singing/Praise singer/Dancing

Time plan

13.00 Time Travel method, presentation
 13.45 The Bambatha rebellion
 14.00 Dress up, scenario, roles, rules
 14.40 Initiation (officers coming out of the fort)
 Activities
 15.30 Meal (horses coming?)
 Discussion, decisions (elders), conclusion
 Change clothes
 16.15 Reflection, future plans
 17.00 End

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Fort Nongqayi Museum and Ebbe Westergren, Kalmar County Museum, Sweden