

CHAPTER 1



SORCERY AND THE STATE

Taxation, Rituals, Witchcraft, and Colonialism in South Africa, 1880–1963

“A word is like a morsel of honey,” advised one African chief in an 1894 meeting with his local government official, the resident magistrate, on the subject of newly imposed taxes and regulations. The morsel of honey he and his headmen provided to the magistrate was that the new taxes proposed by the colonial state were oppressive and would eventually turn the largely peaceable district of Idutywa, in the rural southeast of South Africa, into a breeding ground of political dissent and poverty.¹ The sweetness of their words did not mask the bitterness they felt at the government’s repeated refusals to listen to their warnings.

By the 1950s the words being offered to the South African state were much less honeyed. For many rural Africans in South Africa, taxes had become the work of witches and other evil supernatural beings that stalked ordinary people and sucked their blood at the command of white government administrators and those African chiefs who collaborated with them. The imposition of new taxes and other regulations caused wave upon wave of violent unrest in many rural areas. As a pamphlet produced by some members of the African National Congress noted, Africans suspected the South African prime minister and the leading architect of grand apartheid policy, Hendrik Verwoerd, of planning to “suck in oppression the warm blood of the Natives who have been made the sacrificial lamb to feed the families of the Europeans. . . . The [collaborating]

chiefs will compel the people to pay more taxes than they are able to bear; they will compel the people to go out to work in the mines and on the farms, where a man is worked until he becomes as thin as a bark and receives in payment a paraffin tin of mealie meal [a kerosene can—or a small measure—of corn-meal]; they are going to force the people to limit their stock [cattle] so that they become perpetual slaves.”² In response to this threat, Africans widely refused to pay their taxes in the 1950s; they sabotaged various government projects; and rebels set the homes of collaborating chiefs on fire, hoping to kill them in the way that witches had historically been executed.

Taxes have been at the root of much political violence in South Africa. White-controlled colonies and republics expanded and consolidated their control over the South African black population into the easternmost part of what is now South Africa from 1878 through 1894 and usually were quick to impose taxes. Africans disliked being ruled and taxed by colonial authorities, and dissent occasionally erupted into outright rebellion. In many areas, including regions of the current Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces, revolts broke out shortly after the institution of white rule, and over the next century that rule was periodically called into question by African organizations and individuals. Distrust of the colonial regime reached a new peak in the late 1940s through the early 1960s, when revolts blossomed across a wide area of rural South Africa. All these revolts were rooted in part in grievances over taxes; at the same time rebels frequently invoked supernatural powers to assist them and accused government officials, particularly Africans who worked for the state, of using witchcraft to enrich themselves and to harm ordinary people. Beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural powers were just below the surface of much of the political rhetoric, and the system of taxation—with all its prescribed interactions between ruler and ruled—was intimately connected to these supernatural beliefs.

African reactions to colonial taxation and governance were not one unbroken chain of violent resistance, however. Any consideration of the connections between taxes, resistance to taxation and the colonial state, and supernatural beliefs has to take into account the long periods of relative political quiet among Africans. Decades of historical and other forms of scholarly research have indicated that most Africans did not believe the colonial state to be legitimate, so African quiescence in the face of white rule did not result from a sense that they were being properly represented and governed by the state.³ Yet Africans did have an ongoing association with the state that was enacted and reinforced on a yearly basis with the complicated and highly personalized ritual of tax payment. The intersection of taxation, political attitudes, and supernatural beliefs among Africans speaks directly to some of the most significant issues

in the history of colonized Africa: What bonds existed between African colonial subjects and the white-controlled states that ruled them? What meanings did Africans and whites attach to their interactions, and how did those meanings inform their construction of and reactions to the state?

Tax collection and taxpaying were opposite sides of the same interaction. The yearly payment of these taxes meant that each adult African man or his stand-in came into regular contact with state officials. Dealing personally with either the magistrate or his clerk, each man paid the money owed and walked away with an itemized receipt. While this might seem a clear-cut monetary transaction, the cultural understandings and assumptions behind that transaction were far from straightforward. Magistrates collected taxes because the state needed money. Yet state officials had interests other than monetary ones bound up in tax collection, and they often saw compliance with tax payments as an indication of the acceptance of colonial laws in general. Africans had their own reasons for paying taxes: out of a need for farmland, to which the magistrate could deny access if taxes were not paid; out of fear of the police, although the police were few in number and often reluctant to be involved in the dangerous duty of rounding up tax defaulters; and out of a deeply ingrained understanding of the fusion between the material world of money, taxes, and laws and the spiritual world of the ancestors and witchcraft. These attitudes can be seen in the narratives people constructed around taxation and the state, and these narratives can, in turn, help to explain both the timing and the nature of violent resistance as well as the occasionally long periods of seeming acceptance of colonial state authority. Both the words of honey and the rhetoric of blood sucking came from people's experiences of the colonial state and its demands for taxes and other forms of obedience and submission.

PRECOLONIAL STATES AND TAXES

Africans in the southeastern part of South Africa, once known as the Transkei and now the easternmost part of Eastern Cape Province, will provide the bulk of the evidence for this study. Africans in the Transkeian region were brought within the colonial state between 1876 and 1894. They came largely from decentralized, scattered chiefdoms like the Thembu or the Mpondo, where one chief had a higher ritual and social status than others but often had little power to enforce his authority. There was little precolonial bureaucratic administration, and the power of chiefs and their subordinates (headmen) typically stemmed from their ritual authority and the goodwill of their subjects.

Most Africans had experience with taxes and other levies imposed by their chiefs. These levies frequently took the form of gifts presented to the ruler on certain occasions, such as at his marriage or during the harvest, or of fees paid to chiefs for services provided, such as hearing a court case. Rarely were pre-colonial levies as regular or as bureaucratized as colonial taxes would become, and few chiefs had access to significant military or police power to enforce their demands. The power that individual chiefs did have was also limited by the fact that they faced competition for the loyalty of followers from neighboring chiefs or from other claimants to the title, with the result that an unpopular or overly demanding chief could easily find himself either with few followers or else dead.

Chiefs did have claims to other kinds of power, however, as precolonial chiefs claimed both paternalist and supernatural foundations for their rule.⁴ A Wesleyan missionary in this region commented in 1826 that “a naked Chief is revered and loved by his people as a Father . . . and his people style themselves his Dogs.”⁵ The Xhosa word for chief—*nkosi*—expressed a paternalistic relationship. Anthropologist Monica Wilson quotes a saying among the Mpondo people in the 1930s: “*Nkosi nguyise wabantu* (a chief is the father of his people). He stands to all his people in the same relation as does the head of an *umzi* [homestead] to the occupants of an *umzi*.”⁶ Although a proverb of this kind too easily glosses over the stresses and rivalries common to any society, it expresses the ruling ideology of the chiefs—that they were hereditary elders in a broader social family. Chiefs communicated with the ancestors to boost the fertility of the land and livestock and to bring rain.⁷ They protected the community from malevolent witches by employing diviners, who could mobilize supernatural powers to name wrongdoers and by punishing those who were accused of using witchcraft. Chiefs also had access to potentially destructive witchcraft powers themselves, which they could use to build up their own wealth and power or to harm their enemies and rivals. A Mpondo chief had his own supernatural medicines that he used “to give himself an *isithunzi* (shadow), that is to make himself awesome, to protect him against medicines used by other chiefs, and to attract followers.”⁸ Zulu chiefs also reputedly had such medicines, according to the Reverend Henry Callaway in 1868: “There are medicines which give chiefs strength and presence; a common man, who is neither a chief nor a doctor, cannot touch this kind of medicine,” for fear of being harmed by it.⁹ Supernatural and political power were complementary and survived the colonial annexation even as the white magistrates usurped many of the chiefs’ functions.

COLONIAL RULE AND THE IMPOSITION OF TAXES

In 1880, shortly after the Cape Colony took over the largest segment of the Transkeian region, there was a rebellion against colonial rule that, although short-lived, did make white rulers cautious about the kinds of laws they imposed. The rebellion, known as the Mpondomise Rebellion, or Hope's War, also prevented widespread expropriation of land to be handed out to white settlers (the common practice elsewhere in southern Africa) because colonial officials were wary of generating additional unrest.¹⁰ The initial defeat of African resistance in 1880 impressed on Africans the futility of military combat against the white-controlled state, but that was not the only reason that over the next several decades Africans did not actively rebel. In the aftermath of the 1880 rebellion Africans dynamically incorporated the colonial state and its officials into their own, existing worldviews, and together, white officials and African subjects engaged in an ongoing—if antagonistic and lopsided—contest over the nature and substance of colonial rule.

Africans were not, however, “colonizing themselves” or making the jobs of white officials necessarily easier. The colonial world in South Africa was a complicated mixture of *baaskap* (a crude white supremacy), paternalism, rampant and aggressive capitalist exploitation of resources, a long-standing relationship between rural Africans and agriculture, and complex social, economic, and cultural changes. Africans, no matter what choices they made or what actions they took, had limited resources with which to realize their ambitions, and they frequently found their options further limited by the erosion of social networks through religious conversions and the disintegration of families. But Africans did take an active part in shaping certain aspects of white rule by interacting with state officials. These interactions were often scripted in the sense that both Africans and officials played formal “roles” as subjects and rulers respectively. These roles tended to circumscribe the actions, if not necessarily the thoughts, of colonized Africans. Interactions between rulers and ruled usually occurred in specific places at specified times: for example, an African man went yearly to the magistrate's office to pay taxes shortly after his sheep had been shorn and their wool sold, or an African father used the magistrate's court to sue his daughter-in-law's family for the return of bridewealth—a payment made to the bride's family at the time of the marriage—if his son's marriage had fallen apart. Paying taxes and using the courts required that Africans accept at least outwardly a particular relationship to the state.

There were also “hidden transcripts”—to use James Scott's term for hidden interpretations and agendas—that contradicted and delegitimized the “public

transcript” (or role playing) of submission to colonial authority.¹¹ Most Africans were not pleased to be colonized subjects, even when they strategically used the colonial state to achieve certain goals. That discontent with colonial rule deepened for a variety of reasons with passing years. The idea of hidden transcripts may help to explain the eruption of rebellion in the 1940s and 1950s. However, we should not discount the significance of the public transcript or of the fact that colonial rule was relatively untroubled by active unrest for several decades.¹²

Africans found ways to coexist with colonial control. The content and scope of that control developed over time as white officials discovered that, in the interest of social and political stability, they had to allow Africans to interpret colonial power in their own ways. Writing of the Tswana colonial experience, Jean and John Comaroff observe a similar phenomenon they term “the colonization of consciousness,” although they make it clear that this type of colonization worked both ways as Africans and Europeans borrowed ideas and cultural forms from each other. The borrowed cultural forms created a common, if contested, political vocabulary that was necessary to sustain colonial rule over the long term: “Modern South Africa is built upon a long history of symbolic struggle, a bitter contest of conscience and consciousness.”¹³

The Comaroffs have discussed consciousness as emerging from myriad daily actions, including modes of dress and address, choice of language and names, the delineation of space within the African household, the uses of medicines and rituals, and the power of literacy.¹⁴ Christian missionaries worked hard to change the consciousness of Africans when they required their converts to dress “modestly” and to farm with the plow as well as to learn the Apostles’ Creed and to take Communion.¹⁵ Regardless of the missionaries’ intentions, however, African converts often used their Christian beliefs and identities to protect their worldly interests and expand their political options. Thus, while superficially conversion might seem a capitulation to Western culture, at a deeper level, Christianity and adherence to certain Western norms could legitimate resistance to unpopular state actions and corrosive social trends and could, in certain circumstances, support—and indeed provide the language for and the morality behind—rebellion.¹⁶

The connections between Africans’ beliefs in the supernatural, the power of the white-controlled colonial state, and taxation are analogous to the case of religious conversion and its political effects. Immediately after the colonial takeover and for several decades thereafter, Africans managed to develop and maintain their own social networks and cultural forms that existed largely outside the scrutiny of the state. Effectively, rural Africans “bought” this autonomy

from the state through the medium of taxpaying. Africans thus participated in the ritual of taxpaying and helped to write the public transcript of submission to authority as a way to fend off the powers of the state that existed both in the form of demonstrated military might and, in the eyes of many Africans, in the ability of state officials to manipulate supernatural powers. At the same time, in the first decades of colonial rule, Africans kept their access to farm land and to markets that allowed a small group of farmers to profit significantly and allowed a larger group to maintain at least partial economic and social autonomy. These complex interactions created a resilient, if occasionally clumsy, system of administration that functioned at least until the late 1930s and early 1940s, although the system was constantly under stress and changing. By the 1940s two long-existing trends approached their crisis points and began to corrode the system irreparably.

The first trend was a state-created shortage of agricultural land for African farmers. The amount of land available to Africans was strictly limited by the state from the 1880s onward. The African rural population increased steadily, so that by the 1920s in some districts and by the 1940s in almost all the Transkei's districts, few young adult Africans could realistically hope to farm enough land so that they could set up an independent rural household.¹⁷ Acquisition of land was key to becoming a "social adult," a status that carried with it respect and authority. The loss of this older, land-based method of achieving the status of a respectable, mature adult was not replaced by a new method as Africans who moved to the urban areas increasingly found their wages limited and their social identities infantilized by colonial law. Although increasingly impoverished, families were often able to hold onto a small household in the rural areas because of the efforts of migrant laborers, who took jobs in the major industrial cities and used their wages to heavily subsidize rural incomes. However, by the 1940s even urban wages were frequently not enough to support a rural household, and influx control laws prevented Africans from migrating permanently to the urban areas, thus preventing them from achieving or enacting social adulthood in the cities.¹⁸ When the state tried to raise taxes paid by Africans in the 1950s, it sparked a revolt that was partly about an inability to pay the additional taxes and partly about a much broader range of political, social, and economic issues. Africans concluded that the state's power was at the heart of their problems and that tax payments, which provided the money to support the state and which were also a ritualized expression of Africans' subordination to the state, had to stop.

A second trend that corroded state authority by the 1940s was the increasing intrusiveness of state officials into the daily lives of those Africans who did

still have access to farmland. In the 1930s, after the findings of the 1930–32 Native Economic Commission were published, the South African state began aggressively to draw up plans to make the “Native Reserves” (including the Transkei) become agriculturally productive areas for a class of “native peasants.” These plans were an attempt to provide a small minority of Africans a viable way of supporting a household in the rural areas but lacked any real discussion of how the vast majority of Africans was to raise enough food to survive in the rural areas.¹⁹ Called betterment schemes, the plans imposed principles of scientific management on African agriculture in a misguided effort to make it more productive.²⁰ The outbreak of World War II stalled the implementation of the plans until the late 1940s, but official enthusiasm remained keen. The creation of economically self-sustaining Native Reserves fit into the developing ideology of the apartheid state after the National Party was elected to power in 1948. In grand apartheid terminology, the Transkei and other reserves would become quasi-“independent” states, so that Africans could be denied political rights within the larger “white” South Africa. But the grand apartheid ideology was very unpopular among Africans and the rehabilitation and betterment schemes were equally unpopular. As officials implemented these schemes in the 1950s and 1960s, they found that a fair bit of brute force and petty harassment was necessary because the schemes relied heavily on unpopular policies such as cattle culling and fencing. As officials became more and more abusive, Africans became more and more bitter toward all state policies, resulting in a very deep pool of resentment from which rebels in the 1950s would draw.

Thus Africans who paid their taxes, at least through the mid-1930s—and a very high proportion of them did so—bought two very important things with their money. One was access to farmland, under the official formula of no tax, no land. The other was the right to be left alone by the state. When, by the 1950s, tax payments no longer bought these things, Africans began to evade them, and they also began more overtly to resist the state and its policies.

The relationship between rural Africans and the state that was embodied in the payment of taxes was not a simple exchange of money for benefits, though. When the various precolonial chiefs in the Transkei came under colonial rule in the 1870s and later, they did not have a contract with the state specifying that tax payments bought a certain type of relationship with the state. Rather, that relationship developed out of a historical process that combined what Africans understood to be the function and power of the state deriving in part from their precolonial experiences, with what white state officials chose to impose and had the ability to enforce. White officials had to compromise their own ideas about the colonial mission with African ideas about the nature of their

rulers' authority. This compromise brings us back to the intertwined concepts of political and supernatural power common to precolonial African chiefs.

BELIEFS IN THE SUPERNATURAL AND CHANGES IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Any discussion of African political beliefs in the precolonial period usually involves a discussion of the supernatural, including beliefs in witchcraft, a category of beliefs about the ability to harm someone else or to augment one's own fortune or power through the magical manipulation of substances or through supernatural beings.²¹ However, historians focusing on twentieth-century South Africa have only recently engaged with this topic, often borrowing heavily from the extensive anthropological literature on witchcraft beliefs.²² Historians' reticence has partly resulted from a lack of sources. Because the colonial state officially outlawed witchcraft accusations, beliefs in witchcraft tended to go underground, leaving few public discussions or written sources to which the historian can refer.²³ It is very difficult to get a broad sense of the specific content of witchcraft beliefs at any given moment or of the change in witchcraft beliefs over time. The earliest detailed account by a formally trained anthropologist of supernatural beliefs held by people living in the Transkei dates from the 1930s, forty years after the colonial takeover and twenty-five years before the widespread outbreak of violence directed against the state in the region.²⁴ The historian can catch glimpses of witchcraft beliefs in various kinds of official records: court cases spanning the entire period as African witnesses testified in civil and criminal trials, magistrates' reports on social trends in their districts, and the testimony of African witnesses to various state commissions. However, all these sources have been filtered or, perhaps more accurately, distorted through the lens of those who translated and recorded the evidence and testimony. The nature of these records has often made historians nervous about relying on them.

The elusive quality of historical sources on witchcraft is in contrast to the well-documented decline in African incomes, particularly in the rural areas as the twentieth century progressed.²⁵ Many historians have underemphasized witchcraft and beliefs in the supernatural in favor of detailed discussions of the hard material reality of African life.²⁶ This strategy, however, ignores the problem that people's actions are based not only on their material circumstances but also on their own interpretations and explanations of those circumstances. Many Africans, as well as whites, believed in the existence of supernatural

forces—a category that includes both witchcraft and Christianity. White missionaries and colonial officials often expressed the opinion that a Christian god supported colonial rule; some Africans agreed, but many more saw selfish and evil supernatural forces behind the power of the colonizers, and that belief informed their actions. Leaving out a discussion of people's beliefs runs a real risk of making their actions seem almost inexplicable.²⁷ The rhetoric of the supernatural was part of the local idiom of power.

More recently historians working on South Africa have recognized the importance of supernatural beliefs to the interpretations and actions of people, and anthropologists have also been expanding the historical scope of their studies. Many of these discussions have focused on witchcraft beliefs particularly as they affected outbreaks of political violence or interpretations of destructive social and economic changes.²⁸ While these studies have illuminated the political consciousness of various African populations, they often do not provide an account of the ways in which supernatural beliefs may have—over long stretches of time—actually worked in favor of continued colonial rule. The colonial state's ability to rule over a newly subjugated African population was not simply a result of sly white administrators adopting the political camouflage of African culture and making strategic public appearances to make white rule more acceptable.²⁹ It was also the daily, monthly, and yearly rituals of rule, in particular the ritual of tax collection, that reinforced and reenacted the subordination of Africans to the colonial state.

Particularly after the defeat of the 1880 Mpondomise Rebellion, Africans in the Transkei saw state officials as people who had supernatural powers, and therefore it made sense to participate in rituals that would appease state officials and make their use of those powers more predictable. The payment of taxes can be understood as such a ritual, with the tax receipt being used as an object that incorporated the potency of that ritual to ward off malevolent state powers.³⁰ A widespread African belief in witchcraft and in the ability of state agents to manipulate supernatural means to attain selfish ends became part of the ongoing interaction between officials and African subjects. Monica Wilson, an anthropologist who investigated supernatural beliefs, among other topics, in the 1930s in part of the Transkei known as Pondoland, noted that whites “are believed to be possessed of powerful materials for sorcery.” Quoting an unnamed informant, she elaborated: “All *ubuthi* [material for sorcery] comes from Europeans. They are the real *amagqwira* (witches or sorcerers).’ . . . Informants, when asked, replied that store-keepers and individual Europeans in Pondoland did not kill Pondo by witchcraft or sorcery, but ‘It is that European, the Government, who *ukuthakatha* [does harm by witchcraft or

sorcery].”³¹ Witchcraft beliefs were not uniformly held across the African population, nor were they unchanged by the experience of white rule; but, as a category, beliefs in witchcraft and the existence of supernatural powers survived with some continuity and they affected people’s actions.³² These beliefs were “traditional” in the sense that they had roots that stretched into the remote past; but people often remade and altered witchcraft beliefs, just as they did other elements of traditional culture.

One of the most significant reasons for changes in supernatural beliefs was the extensive contact Africans had with another set of supernatural beliefs—Christianity. The first mission stations had been founded in the Transkeian region by Wesleyan missionaries in 1828. Although missionaries did not have extensive followings until after the consolidation of colonial rule, they did create a solid connection between particular supernatural ideas and the power of whites. Missionaries invoked the Christian god as a force who continually acted in the world and who was not a remote creator.³³ Christians used prayer and ritual to affect natural forces and heal disease in much the same way that non-Christian Africans used sacrifices made to the ancestors.³⁴ Christianity’s influence went well beyond the church: missionaries ran virtually all the schools in the Transkei well into the 1950s, and Africans widely recognized the usefulness of literacy even if they doubted the advantages of conversion. Missionaries and early Christian converts were also often the first people in the region to take advantage of newly available farming technology, such as the ox-drawn plow, and of consumer goods, such as metal cooking pots, cotton blankets, and coffee and tea. Christian converts were also more likely to side with colonial forces in frontier conflicts, and they often benefited if their side was victorious.³⁵ Many of the white men who staffed the local colonial administration after 1880 were the sons of missionaries, and African converts educated in mission schools were frequently their clerks, further cementing the connection between political power and the supernatural power that Christianity conferred.

Christian missionaries, like colonial administrators, were hostile to beliefs in witchcraft and they tended to emphasize the harmful effects of witchcraft accusations. But just as with the case of colonial laws that forbade witchcraft accusations, mission rules that discouraged beliefs in witchcraft did not always have their intended effect. Missionaries, magistrates, and Africans who testified before the 1881–83 Native Laws and Customs Commission noted the routine nature of beliefs in witchcraft in this period immediately after the imposition of colonial rule.³⁶ The beliefs remained routine even if they could not be openly expressed once laws were in place criminalizing both witchcraft

accusations and the practice of divining witches. The criminalization of these accusations, however, tended to make people believe that the state was shielding witches, and that combined with other administrative procedures to make magistrates themselves look very suspicious (see chapter 2).

African converts who wished to stay in good standing with their white missionaries typically had to obscure the extent to which they believed in witchcraft and the powers of the ancestors. Other converts chose a different route and went into separatist (African-led) churches that were usually far more tolerant of these supernatural beliefs.³⁷ In the 1930s, though, it was still common for African Christians (sometimes referred to as school people) to continue with certain customs held over from their non-Christian families, including beliefs in witchcraft. A 1936 Church of England inquiry into witchcraft noted that Africans believed that all practices of witchcraft and sorcery were increasing and that “the number of witchdoctors [diviners—people trained to determine who might be a witch or might be using sorcery] is on the increase, in particular the number of women witchdoctors.” The report also noted that people still respected and feared diviners and their own ancestors; and an estimated 90 to 100 percent of Christian Africans believed in sorcery and the efficacy of various charms. Finally the report stated that “it is rather humiliating to find that Europeans [living in the Transkei] have been known to resort to the witchdoctors for such things as charmed sticks to ward off hail from their crops.”³⁸ Monica Wilson, in her many interviews with African informants in the 1930s, found that a number of Christians believed not only in sorcery but also in the magical beings (known as familiars) thought to assist witches. She quoted one Christian woman: “The (witch’s) baboon and all these things exist. People ride their baboons at night, and go about naked bewitching others; I swear it on the Cross.”³⁹

In the 1950s, beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery were still common. Anthropologist Philip Mayer commented, “The witch myth has been adapted to labour migrancy exactly as the beliefs about the ancestors have been: social nearness remains essential, but physical distance can be transcended with the greatest of ease.” The beliefs also incorporated new elements to accommodate new circumstances. “It was sometimes said that the witch herself can fly to town in a ‘cage,’” similar to the cage—a form of elevator—that transported mineworkers underground. And witches used familiars that could make themselves look like expensive consumer goods so as to better target their victims: “The familiar’s appearance changes into that of some attractive-looking object—a ring, money, a piece of cloth, a fountain-pen.” Ultimately, according to Mayer, “Witches . . . work ‘from envy.’ Among the special objects of

their envy are a thriving family and a thriving herd [of cattle].”⁴⁰ While it may have always been true that witchcraft was a product of envy, this targeting of rural wealth in the 1950s was directly related to the declining fortunes of most African farmers at this time.

Witchcraft accusations were also associated with social anxiety. Both Wilson and Mayer suggest that allegations of witchcraft were not necessarily attempts to destroy wealthy people, nor were the poor more likely to be accused of witchcraft. Instead, by the 1930s and developing into the 1950s there was a broad belief among people in the rural areas that their society was changing for the worse and becoming immoral.⁴¹ Evidence of this immorality might be the unexplained death of a child, or persistent crop failures, which could then be directly tied to the practice of witchcraft or the neglect of the ancestors. Throughout this period, people consulted diviners—even though it was illegal to “smell out” a witch—to find the cause of their problems. If the diviner named a witch then that person was driven out, by force if necessary. If the person named as a witch went to the magistrate to complain, both the diviner and those people who employed the diviner were liable to be charged with a criminal offense, sometimes leading people to kill “witches” outright—often by burning down their huts while they slept within—so that there would be no one to complain.⁴²

In the precolonial period chiefs had presided over certain rituals and used their own considerable supernatural powers to protect their followers and help them prosper. Once the magistrates replaced the chiefs as the local rulers, they also imposed their own rituals that for a time seemed to perform some of the same functions. But over the course of the twentieth century, the rituals of the magistrates impoverished Africans and exposed them to the malevolence of witches rather than making them prosperous and protecting them.

TAXATION AS A RITUAL OF RULE

The discussion of tax payments as a ritual and as allied with beliefs in the supernatural may seem to exoticize an obligation that most people find mundane and dull. In general, taxation does have a mundane purpose: it is a method of raising revenue to support state projects and officials. In this sense, every state is predatory because it survives by extracting money from the ruled.⁴³ However, calling the state predatory can obscure the extent to which the ruled participate actively in the process of paying taxes. Beyond their money-raising aspect, taxes perform a complex function by tying together the

rulers and the ruled in a ritual of interaction that makes them partners, even if very unequal partners, in the maintenance of state control.⁴⁴ Taxation became part of a ritual of rule that bound Africans to the white-controlled state.⁴⁵

Taxation involved Africans paying tribute in cash to the state, at a place—the magistrate’s office or his traveling camp—that was the local residence of the state, on a yearly basis, usually June through September, following the harvest of crops and the shearing of sheep. As agricultural people, precolonial Africans had always associated a good harvest and healthy livestock as partly a product of the supernatural intervention of the chiefs, and the chiefs had some claim on the harvest. When the colonial state took over, the magistrates did nothing to dissociate themselves from beliefs that they had taken over the chiefs’ role in promoting good agricultural years. The ritual of taxpaying thus reconstituted and reenacted an older ritual of paying homage to the state and was a symbolic acknowledgment of the chief’s, and then the magistrate’s, use of supernatural powers to promote the well-being of his subjects.

After the imposition of colonial control in the Transkei, Africans were governed by the Department of Native Affairs of the Cape Colony, and later by the same department in the South African government.⁴⁶ All the magistrates and assistant magistrates in this period were white, but in the rural areas many of their clerks were African. A magistrate and his clerks were responsible for maintaining order in a district populated by twenty thousand or more Africans; yet through the 1940s a district often had only three regular policemen. Most of a rural district’s daily administrative and police work was performed by chiefs and headman, all of whom were African. African officials translated the words and the ideas of the state into the local Xhosa language, and they provided an African voice, albeit a limited one, at local centers of administrative power. Ultimately, however, that power was controlled by whites, and one element in the maintenance of that power was the imposition and collection of taxes.

Taxes collected in the Transkeian Territories were principally of three types: hut taxes, poll (or head) taxes, and livestock rates. The earliest tax imposed was the hut tax, payable by all married men. The state imposed additional taxes from 1895 through the 1920s, including the General Rate, commonly called poll or head tax, and livestock rate, sometimes called dipping or tank tax.⁴⁷ With the passage of the Native Taxation and Development Act of 1925, all men over the age of eighteen, whether or not they were married or owned livestock, become taxpayers, as they all became obligated to pay the General Rate (poll tax).⁴⁸ From 1926 to 1958 the tax burden for most Africans remained the same, although some taxes were extended to districts in which they had not previously been collected. In 1958, with the enactment of the Native Administration and Development



FIGURE 1.1. "Hut Building: The First Coat of Plaster," Western Pondoland. Photograph by Mrs. Fred Clarke, n.d. (probably 1920s–1930s). The Campbell Collection of the University of Kwazulu-Natal.

Amendment Act, the General Rate increased by 75 percent (from one pound to one pound fifteen shillings).⁴⁹

The colonial state required that Africans pay the taxes in cash, and this innovation itself tended to reinforce the state's hegemony. Minted with the image of the current British sovereign on one face along with writing (in Latin) that was frequently indecipherable, and therefore mysterious, even for people literate in English, the coins used to pay taxes may well have appeared to be magical objects in themselves, self-referential and unnatural fetishes with which the state required Africans to live on intimate terms.⁵⁰ Africans widely recognized the usefulness of money, but they were also grimly aware of how whites, including shopkeepers and employers as well as magistrates, occasionally cheated them when using cash. To be taken advantage of in this way demonstrated the material disadvantage suffered by Africans in the colonial world, and whites' ways of reckoning with cash enhanced their reputation for malevolence.⁵¹ In pulling together the official lists of taxpayers, state officials also needed to know from African taxpayers the names of their wives (if married), their places of residence, the number of livestock they owned, and other personal information. In return for the tax payments and information, the state gave taxpayers receipts that themselves had value, both as proof of payment of taxes but also as proof of marriage, of rights to land, and of ownership of livestock. This pattern, in which the state conferred value on money, some of which then had to be returned to the state in a yearly ritual of tax collection, was the foundation for two ongoing narratives constructed by Africans and whites about taxpaying and tax collecting and state power in general.

AFRICAN NARRATIVES OF TAXATION AND POWER

African ideas about taxation showed a great deal of variety. Some of that variation resulted from differences between regions, but much resulted from changes in the relationship between people and the state over time. As we shall see in the next chapter, in 1880 a brief armed rebellion (the Mpondomise Rebellion, or Hope's War) broke out among many Africans in this area as a response both to new demands for taxes and to the supernatural and military threat posed by colonial state. Colonial forces, with some African allies, managed to quell the rebellion quickly but at a cost that officials were not eager to repeat. Thus for some years after the rebellion officials were unwilling to coerce Africans to pay their taxes or to do anything else for fear of provoking another revolt.

Paradoxically, after the revolt even those Africans who had rebelled largely complied in making the tax payments demanded of them.⁵²

In the early decades of colonial rule in the Transkei (roughly until 1910 or 1915), there were high levels of quasi-voluntary compliance with the tax laws; at the same time people tended to be deferential to state officials. Examples of that deference can be seen in how people, even chiefs, spoke to the magistrates, routinely addressing them as *nkosi*, a word meaning both chief and “father.”⁵³ In 1881 several Africans testified before the Cape Native Laws and Customs Commission. Chief Mgudhlwa stated to the white commissioners, most of whom were government officials, “We hope Government will, from time to time, send persons to explain matters to us. We are Government children, and a child must be advised every day.” A Mfengu headman, Mendela, remarked, “Your children are glad to see you. You gave them bread and land also. You also gave them magistrates, who are dealing well with them.”⁵⁴ These elaborate shows of deference may have been strategic and even cynical, but even so they reflected a real respect for the authority wielded by the magistrates.

Many Africans at this time believed that the state’s authority extended beyond the material realm of agricultural land and jail time to a more dangerous collusion between white magistrates and African witches and sorcerers. The suspicion of this collusion derived from several different causes. First, white officials banned witchcraft accusations. While the intent of this ban was to prevent individual Africans from being accused of and punished for an “unreal” crime, Africans widely interpreted the law as proof that the state was protecting witches and was therefore benefiting from the supernatural powers of its protégés.⁵⁵ In 1880 a missionary in one district of the Transkei noted that, with the ban on witch finding, “the people in their ignorance believe that they have now no protection against the wicked practices of the ‘Umtakati’ [witches or sorcerers].”⁵⁶ Second, the imposition of the hut tax required a population census. As magistrates asked questions about a man’s wife or wives and the number of children, Africans worried about what the state would do with that information. Witches and sorcerers needed such personal information to kill a man or injure his family, and among Africans themselves there were taboos about speaking the names of family members and making such intimate information broadly known.⁵⁷ Finally, the coins used to pay the taxes were themselves somewhat “unnatural.” On the one hand, the image of the British ruler on the coins personified and personalized the state in the same way the magistrate did, thus making it more intimate. On the other hand, the coins were perhaps the familiars—in a supernatural sense—of the state, able to do its bidding at a distance, as well as maintaining supernatural

surveillance over the sovereign's subjects. Thus tax collection and the use of cash were not only symbolic of the state's secular authority, but they also provided the state and white magistrates with the information and opportunity to exercise supernatural powers over their subjects.

Yet in these first few decades of colonial rule, many Africans may have seen the potential supernatural threats posed by the state as manageable. Most Africans were able to continue their rural lives with relatively little interference from the state as long as they paid their taxes. Rural society was certainly undergoing changes during this period, some of it the result of rapid industrialization elsewhere in South Africa. Much of the early impact of industrialization was a boon to the continuation of agriculture in the Transkei, however, at least until after the South African War.⁵⁸ African farmers had more and larger markets for produce; the gold and diamond mines paid African men relatively high wages that they then reinvested in agriculture or rural families; and arable land, although becoming progressively scarcer because of population increases and the official limitation of land available for African occupancy, could still have its productivity enhanced through more widespread use of plows, fertilizer, and improved seed.⁵⁹ Moreover, Africans living in the Transkei and the Cape generally remained in a better position to retain agricultural land than did Africans living elsewhere in South Africa post-1913: the 1913 Natives Land Act severely restricted the ability of Africans to own land in South Africa's other three provinces, but the act could not be implemented in the Cape Province for constitutional reasons.⁶⁰ Having access to land gave Africans, at least in the short term, greater economic security in the rural areas.

Many Transkeian Africans, like Africans elsewhere on the colonized continent, succeeded in incorporating the cash economy and migrant labor into the rural world they esteemed and over which they felt they had some control.⁶¹ As the resident magistrate for Engcobo District noted in 1887, "The natives now thoroughly understand that the hut tax in each year falls due when they have harvested their maize and kaffir corn [sorghum] crops which is usually in the month of June."⁶² The same magistrate noted four years later that he would tell all tax defaulters that "unless their hut tax is paid by next plowing season they will not be permitted to cultivate their gardens."⁶³ The latter remark was an expression of the official policy of no tax, no land. Paying their taxes allowed Africans to continue farming and to control the more threatening powers available to state officials.

By 1915 the high levels of quasi-voluntary tax compliance were beginning to be punctuated by occasional sharp drops. Simultaneously, intermittent rural opposition movements developed that mobilized people on both spiritual and

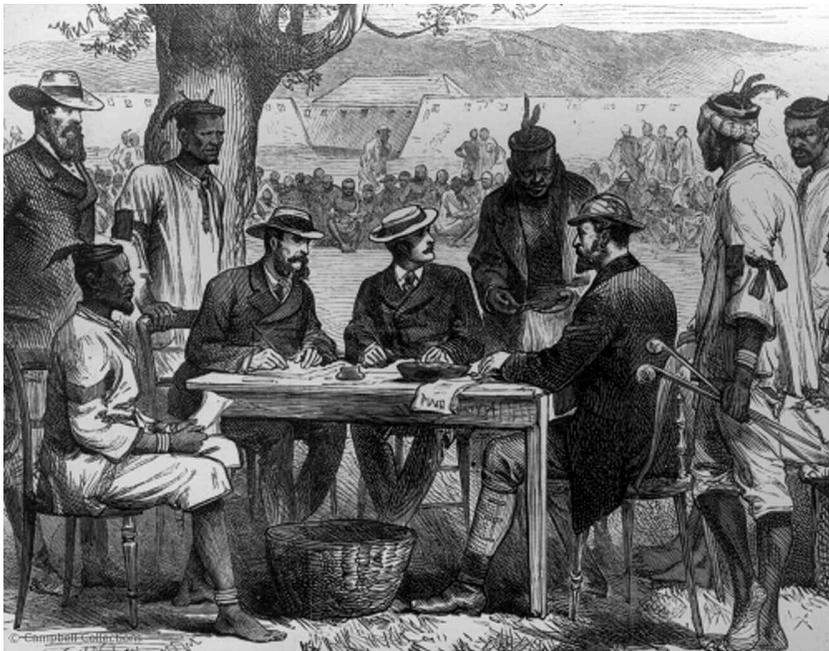


FIGURE 1.2. “Mr. Moodie, Magistrate of Ladysmith, Natal, collects hut tax, 1879.” Wood engraving, *Illustrated London News*. The Campbell Collection of the University of Kwazulu-Natal.

material planes. Although these movements rarely lasted more than a couple of years, they show the changing nature of rural Africans’ relationship to various state officials and rituals. In 1908 the state imposed increasingly coercive veterinary quarantines and restrictions related to the cattle disease East Coast fever (see chapter 3). These restrictions included the frequent dipping of cattle in chemical baths (to rid them of the ticks that spread East Coast fever), a procedure that over the years became one of the most hated policies the state ever imposed. Further, regional quarantines stopped the marketing of Transkeian cattle in the wider Cape Provincial and Union markets, thus depriving Transkeian stock owners of higher prices and the benefits of bringing in new cattle for breeding. These restrictions sparked intermittent resistance, including the destruction of dipping tanks, in some districts of the Transkei from 1914 through 1916, and a decline in tax payments across a broader range of districts; tax defaults were then made worse by the poverty induced by the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918, the decline in world market prices in goods after World War I, and localized droughts from 1919 through 1922.

In contrast to the ways in which taxation and resistance played out in the Transkei in this period, in Natal and Zululand the imposition of a poll tax in 1905–6 sparked an outright rebellion, led by the minor chief Bambatha (see chapter 4). In its initial motivation, the Bambatha Rebellion had much in common with the Mpondomise Rebellion in 1880. Spurred by the imposition of the new poll tax in Natal and Zululand, rebels invoked both the military history of the Zulu state and the will of the ancestors as inspiration for their cause. The repression of the Bambatha Rebellion by Natal authorities was grim and bloody, as the Natal colonial military engaged in wave after wave of repression and retribution against any people thought to be rebels and set fire to entire districts. But, just as in the Transkei in the wake of the Mpondomise Rebellion, the rebellious districts following the Bambatha Rebellion began paying their taxes. The Bambatha Rebellion contrasts with the relative political quiescence of Africans in the Transkei in the early part of the twentieth century, but Africans in the Transkei watched the Bambatha Rebellion with interest and saw the violence perpetrated by the colonial state there as a lesson about the likely outcome of violent resistance to taxation. Interestingly, many of the rumors that swirled around the outset of the rebellion, about the necessity for Africans to “prepare for war by killing their pigs, and destroying utensils of European manufacture,” presaged similar rumors that emerged in the 1920s in several Transkeian districts.⁶⁴

In the Transkei in the 1920s tax increases combined with falling agricultural prices to stimulate political unrest that focused on the rumor that Americans would intervene on the side of Africans by bombing the white-controlled state out of existence (see chapter 5). An African named Butler Wellington or Wellington Buthelezi proposed to end taxes as a way of severing the link between Africans and the state.⁶⁵ Breaking the hold the state had on Africans was a preparation for a coming bloodbath: “forces are coming, armies coming from America to drive away the white people from Africa.”⁶⁶ Wellington’s converts believed that the expected Americans were all black followers of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born black nationalist who built the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem, and that they would fly airplanes overhead and drop burning coals. These coals would cause all pigs to burst into flames and set their owners and the owners’ property alight.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, Wellington’s followers frequently killed, sold, or drove away their pigs and in addition paid the fee of one to two shillings per person to belong to his organization, actions that would protect members from the burning coals. Those who registered also received membership cards that people assumed had the same protective powers as the old hut tax receipts, providing protec-

tion against imprisonment by the magistrate for defaulting on their taxes and also against the malevolent witchcraft of the state.⁶⁸ An African court interpreter explained the widespread belief that the “Imperial [British] government promised to give the American Negroes this country for services rendered in the Great War. The natives who to some extent resent the increased taxation, firmly believe this man’s [Wellington’s] saying and look to a happy time of release from European rule which the American Government will bring. . . . The natives firmly believe in all Dr. Wellington says. . . . They believe he has the great magic powers and that the white men fear him.”⁶⁹ When the prophesied American invasion did not occur, and when the state asserted its ability to control Wellington by trying and convicting him of fraud, his movement gradually fell apart. His followers, still unhappy with the state but respectful of its power, began to pay their taxes again.⁷⁰

Wellington’s movement operated in tandem with other political organizations in both rural and urban South Africa. These movements were evidence of a broader current of unrest generated by industrialization, population shifts, cultural changes, and deepening rural poverty. While Wellington seemed to be weaving fantasies about magical international intervention on behalf of Africans, he spoke to the heart of the state’s relationship with the African population. Both taxes and supernatural powers were components of the state’s control over its African subjects, particularly in the rural areas, and to undermine that control a political movement had to attack both the system of taxation and the supernatural powers reputedly wielded by colonial administrators.

Rural Africans in the 1920s found themselves increasingly disadvantaged by various state policies. The rural land shortage was made worse by the state’s influx control policies that hindered the movement of Africans from the rural areas to cities and towns. Those Africans who did migrate legally went to town as wage-earners and employees. After the implementation of the 1923 Natives (Urban) Areas Act in the major cities of South Africa, Africans who migrated had the legal status of “temporary sojourners”: that is, people who could not legally establish permanent residence in the urban areas which were designated “whites only” by the Act.⁷¹ Without their families in the urban areas, Africans could not live as social adults under the older, rural definition of an adult as someone with a spouse, children and a thriving homestead.⁷² If migrants brought their families with them to the urban areas, their illegal presence often promoted greater social insecurity, as well as multiplying the difficulties of survival in the harsh urban conditions.⁷³ As a result, adult African men, even those without access to farmland, often had to leave their families in the rural areas when they migrated to town to get a job. By the 1930s and

1940s many families were crowded on small homesteads with little land to farm, and often without adult men in residence (see chapter 6).⁷⁴ Within this context, the direct and indirect effects of tax policies on African women in the rural areas is very significant, as women had no personal legal liability for taxes but frequently faced the burden of paying their husbands' taxes if they wanted to retain what little land they had in the countryside.

Women were caught in a significant economic and social bind. Historically, women had done the bulk of the agricultural work that involved raising crops, but men were supposed to take care of the livestock, particularly the cattle. By the 1940s, however, there was relatively little agricultural land available to women on which to grow crops for their families, but they did have common grazing land available to them. Many families invested the earnings of family members who were migrant laborers in livestock, particularly cattle.⁷⁵ The ownership of cattle was a sign of adulthood and economic autonomy, as well as being the most acceptable currency for the payment of bridewealth (a marriage payment made by the groom's family to the wife's family). But as more and more people invested in livestock, the grazing land deteriorated, degrading the health of the livestock and devaluing their worth. This trend eventually eroded the income and wealth even of those families who did have access to farmland as well as grazing land. This economic crisis, many decades in the making, not only pitted Africans who had no arable land against those who did but also set the stage for a new round of state interference in the lives of individual Africans and their families.⁷⁶ Women, trying to hold rural families together at a time of expanding poverty, often found themselves the targets of witchcraft accusations from in-laws who blamed them for whatever disasters befell their families. Widowed and unmarried women faced even more overt suspicion for causing social and family-related disasters, and sometimes they were harassed and threatened with death from Africans desperate to enact a moral social and economic order.

The developing discontent of the 1948–63 period eventually resulted in a complete breakdown of the tax system (chapter 7). This breakdown was again a product of both economic hardship and spiritual concerns; many people evaded taxes as a way of severing the material and ritual connections between themselves and the state. This time, however, the unrest erupted into armed attacks on state officials. People revolted in the 1950s because the South African state raised taxes, began to delegate more power to appointed chiefs who were widely viewed as sell-outs, and interfered in people's daily lives, lives that had already been disrupted by state policies: the supernatural powers of the state had taken a more destructive turn.

As part of the proposed geographical and political partition known as grand apartheid, the state implemented the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. Under that act, chiefs, despite their widespread reputation for corruption, took over many administrative functions, including presiding over most court cases. In addition, later in the decade taxes went up to pay the costs of new administrators, and magistrates (newly dubbed Bantu Commissioners) began aggressively implementing various agricultural “betterment” programs. These programs involved forced villagization, crop rotation and contour plowing, and compulsory cattle culling, none of which was popular among rural families. Typically, from a rural family’s point of view, the costs—including labor—of these policies were high while the benefits were either nonexistent—especially in the short term—or very low.⁷⁷ Resistance to betterment schemes began in the 1940s, escalated in the 1950s, and reached its peak in 1960–62. Magistrates retaliated against small-scale acts of resistance, such as fence cutting or refusals to relocate homesteads, with sanctions against entire regions, punishing those who had complied with the laws along with those who refused.⁷⁸ Simultaneously, over a five-year period in the mid-1950s, a wave of livestock theft hit the Transkei. Police managed to capture only a few of the culprits, and that low arrest rate led many victims to believe that state officials, particularly those chiefs who tried court cases, were colluding with the thieves by restraining the police and by providing the thieves with magical medicines that enabled them to vanish.⁷⁹

From the standpoint of African farmers, the state had become capricious and unpredictable in its exercise of power. Taxes went up, stock thieves stole at will, state officials coerced farmers in a seemingly arbitrary way to comply with costly and poorly conceived agricultural policies, and the state seemed more concerned with collecting taxes and protecting alleged stock thieves from vigilante groups than it was with stopping the thefts themselves.⁸⁰ People widely suspected chiefs and magistrates of shielding witches and stock thieves and of using witchcraft to consolidate their power and enrich themselves.

South African state officials responded quickly to the revolt. They arrested tax defaulters en masse in an attempt to reinstate this important ritual of rule. In 1961 magistrates repeatedly stressed in their reports to the chief magistrate the utility of arresting tax defaulters for defusing resistance and dispersing rebel organizations.⁸¹ This seeming obsession with punishing tax defaulters was not just about the usually small amounts of money owed; it was also about reaffirming the dominance of the state and about making Africans once again acknowledge that dominance. In addition, the state brought in white police and “mobile police units” (paramilitary in nature) to combat the rebels.⁸² These methods clearly demonstrated to many Africans the state’s malevolence,

and they may also have reinforced ideas about the state's ability to manipulate supernatural powers in its pursuit of continued authority.

Although the South African state reestablished control over the Transkei by the end of 1963, the whole system of taxation was in disarray, and Africans' relationship to state officials and various rituals of rule was permanently changed. The state had come to rely on overt domination and violence to maintain its rule. In the pursuit of grand apartheid, state officials continued to devolve authority to local chiefs and to the new puppet government of the Transkei "homeland," but that government proved routinely incapable of either creating a sense of its own legitimacy or, more weakly, persuading Africans to acknowledge its authority.

WHITE NARRATIVES OF TAXATION

Whites had their own beliefs about African taxes, and those beliefs also tended to change over time. Throughout the period under study, white officials frequently discussed taxes as simple tools for generating revenue. Taxes clearly did bring money in, but beyond that, taxes performed other functions for the state.

Magistrates used taxes in two nonmonetary ways. First, they used the yearly tax collection to develop personal contacts with the African population and to ritualize the subjection of Africans to the white-controlled state as personified by the magistrate. This use was perhaps best seen in more remote rural areas, where there were typically few whites or state officials. One long-time magistrate, George Mears, who went on to become briefly the Secretary of Native Affairs in the late 1940s, discussed his views of the relationship between the magistrate and the rural African population: "Humanism has characterised policy [in the Transkei] from its early inception. The 'vox humana' has been the dominant tone of the administration even under difficult circumstances." He elaborated: "Natives, like children, are most quick to sense the attitude of others toward them, and in a very short time a Native administrator is summed up. . . . The simple qualities of kindness, sympathetic handling, fairness are highly appreciated and strike a responsive chord; weakness is despised and firmness admired; punishment of offenders after a fair trial or enquiry is not resented, and, what is more even, expected." In establishing this relationship, this magistrate stressed the "value of personal contact" most commonly developed in the daily interactions, including tax collections, of the magistrates with the Africans of the district.⁸³

Many magistrates shared his ideas. In fact, the relationship he describes is reminiscent of descriptions of the precolonial relationships that chiefs attempted to foster with their subjects. There is little evidence that people assumed that the district magistrate was identical with a precolonial chief, but it seems more likely that magistrates attempted to appropriate the precolonial ideology as a way of enhancing the legitimacy of their rule. The magistrate of Tsolo District testified to the Cape Native Laws and Customs Commission in 1881 that, especially in the light of the recent rebellion, magistrates should be cautious about instigating legal and cultural changes:

I think we are in a country for the purpose of elevating the natives, civilizing them if possible, and gradually getting them to abandon their habits and adopt those of Europeans, and if you administer pure native law you are simply putting yourself in the position of a chief and only perpetuating the state of things you found among them. I think that caution is necessary, because it is a dangerous thing to bring in any laws, to which the natives are not accustomed and never heard of, at a day's notice. I think that any alteration made in their laws and customs should be done by degrees and modified gradually, that they may grow up as it were with it.⁸⁴

People adapted their political attitudes to fit the new colonial situation, and the magistrates facilitated the adaptation and participated in it.

With the imposition of the East Coast fever restrictions in the 1910s and into the 1920s, fewer magistrates expressed ideas of this type, reflecting a generational change from the early magistrates, who had adhered to the paternalist ideology of the “civilizing mission,” to later magistrates, who preferred a system of “scientific management” of Africans and African agriculture.⁸⁵ As their other administrative duties increased, magistrates themselves participated less frequently in tax collection, delegating that duty to their clerks. By the 1940s, as state policies advocating betterment schemes came into play, liberal paternalism had been almost completely replaced at the magisterial level and above with a condescending style of management that assumed both African inferiority and African patience with state policy. As the magistrate of Tsolo District commented in 1948,

Meetings [with Africans] in the district are never held unless for a specific purpose, such as the installation of a new headman, and on these occasions one can not, on account of the volume of work awaiting one's

return to the office, spare any time for discussion of matters of general interest to the people, hear their difficulties or inform them of what is being done for them. It is therefore very difficult to express my opinion as to the attitude of the people; I should say they are patient as usual and “resigned to the ways of Government.” They do not know what is going on and there is no time to tell them.⁸⁶

Within a few years, with the outbreak of revolt in the 1950s, magistrates would better understand how impatient people had actually become during the time when they were too distracted by “routine work.”

The magistrates’ withdrawal from the process of tax collection may have diminished its importance as a ritual of rule. Yet there is evidence that people continued to esteem the tax receipt, not simply as a legal document proving its holder had paid taxes but also as an object that could protect them from the combined supernatural and legal powers of the state. For its part, this new generation of magistrates was less tolerant of beliefs in the supernatural, which they saw as evidence of a troublesome and stubborn African “backwardness.” They derided some of the old rituals (and the old magistrates) as pandering to the African population, and they were determined to “modernize” Africans, by force if necessary.

Modernity, for the rising generation of administrators, was a streamlined administrative structure presiding over law-abiding, self-sufficient peasants who used the land to its fullest productive capacity while eschewing older, cultural practices that had previously governed the raising of livestock and land use.⁸⁷ Taxation’s revenue-generating function rose to prominence for these magistrates, who, following the Native Taxation and Development Act of 1925, saw African taxes principally as the means for paying for the creation of an economically productive African population, one that would never be fully “civilized,” that would never be citizens of “white” South Africa, and that would always be subordinate to a white-controlled state.⁸⁸ In some sense, this was the realization of South African industrialist and politician Cecil Rhodes’s idea of the creation of a separate and subordinate form of governance for Africans who could not qualify for the franchise under the Cape Colonial (and later Cape Provincial) rules.⁸⁹ An addendum to the report of the 1930–32 Native Economic Commission suggested as much: “The investigation of the Commission has driven it to the conclusion that . . . the general economic welfare of the whole of the Union calls imperatively for wise and sympathetic assistance to enable the Natives to develop their Reserves, so as to make these sufficiently productive and attractive to stop the present compulsory migra-

tion to the towns. There would be little of that flow to the towns if the Natives could produce enough in the Reserves to meet their very modest needs.”⁹⁰

The commission’s recommendations flew in the face of criticism by some of the older, experienced magistrates who felt that trying to make the reserves become agriculturally productive enough to support the entire African population that lived there was a hopeless task. The chief magistrate of the Transkei responded to the commission’s report: “There is already a considerable landless population and it is difficult to reconcile the Commission’s recommendation that individual Natives should be allowed to acquire additional arable land with its remarks in regard to the shortage of land which already exists. Any relaxation of the present system [of land allocation] would spell the increase of the landless population.”⁹¹ Many Africans testifying to the commission rightly suspected that the attempt to force “modern” agriculture on Africans in the rural areas was actually a scheme to pack additional Africans into the reserves and then blame their poverty on their own “backwardness.” Dr. A. B. Xuma, then a prominent physician and political activist in Johannesburg but who was originally from the rural Engcobo District, commented, “It seems absurd to say all Natives must go back to the land and engage in agriculture, not only because there would not be enough land in which to place all of them, but because where all members of the community are producing the same thing and especially without market facilities as export, the produce is of little value or no *economic value* at all. . . . Besides, this idea of all Natives in agriculture is a mere platitude because it presumes and incorrectly that *all Natives* are fit for nothing else but agriculture.”⁹² The fact that the South African state insisted on pursuing goals of forced land management and livestock culling over at least the next thirty years, particularly after the end of World War II, became one of the central contradictions of its “Native policy.” The enforcement of tax payments became especially complicated because, on the one hand, the official formula of “no tax, no land” was still in place; thus tax defaulters were technically liable to have their right to occupy land rescinded. On the other hand, to enforce the tax laws so aggressively would have meant an increase in the landless population, thus aggravating the problem of permanent African migration into the cities. Ultimately, by the early 1950s, the need to control the rural-to-urban migration of Africans trumped virtually all other policy considerations.⁹³ In this atmosphere tax payments became less significant as a revenue source and more vital as an indicator of the general disposition of the population toward the state.

This was the second nonmonetary way in which officials used the payment of taxes, especially in the 1880s in the Transkei, after 1906 in Natal and

Zululand, and from 1950 on: as a rough gauge of the level of unrest among the African population. Thus one official in 1961 noted, “The first indication that the attitude in any location was wrong [i.e., antistate] was a noticeable drop in the amount of taxes paid.”⁹⁴ Similarly, when writing reports to their superiors, magistrates usually accompanied any rumor of unrest with a discussion of how well or poorly Africans were paying their taxes. Finally, when open revolt broke out in much of the Transkei from 1958 to 1963, magistrates and the police found that the easiest way of arresting the revolt was by arresting the tax defaulters.⁹⁵

While magistrates in the 1940s and 1950s were aware that many rural Africans incorporated witchcraft beliefs into their daily lives, few whites ever saw a connection between those beliefs and their own rule. As unrest deepened into rebellion in the late 1950s, many magistrates expressed surprise at how Africans fused the idea of government with that of supernatural powers.⁹⁶ To the extent that white state officials became aware that they had been incorporated by Africans into a worldview that encompassed notions of witchcraft, it led them to conclude that Africans had not yet escaped their “backwardness”; in short, the official analysis of the rebellion legitimated the state’s right to rule over “superstitious” and “irrational” Africans.⁹⁷ That conclusion, combined with the violent tactics adopted by some of the rebels, caused the state to suppress rebellion by particularly brutal means.

Once the rebellion had been crushed, by 1963, state officials deepened their resolve to pursue the grand apartheid scheme of dividing African rural areas into quasi-independent homeland states—often called Bantustans—and devolving authority on hand-picked African functionaries. The Bantustan policy was a final attempt to contain African political aspirations in the rural areas and to categorize Africans and their culture as so fundamentally different from whites as to be incapable of coexisting in a single country. Apartheid was also a monumentally self-serving political and economic strategy for whites, who had no intention of ending their reliance on Africans as wage laborers even as they alienated Africans from most legal rights. But political and economic expedients were not the sole supports of the ideology: many whites fervently believed that their differences with Africans were essential and inescapable; that belief was partly based on a vulgar and unscientific notion of the genetic basis of racial differences,⁹⁸ and partly on their dim understanding of African worldviews.

The differences in African and white narratives about taxation are indicative of the differences in these worldviews. For Africans, the material and spiritual realms were not distinct; thus the payment of taxes embodied a number of

beliefs about the magical powers of the state. For whites, tax collection was a monetary transaction that was secondarily useful as a barometer of African political discontent but that also forged an intimate connection between rulers and ruled.⁹⁹ Africans saw tax payments as a quasi-magical ritual; whites, as a secular one.

It seems likely that for all states, even those outside a colonial context, taxes have an important ritual role.¹⁰⁰ They engage taxpayers in active participation with those who rule them: the more voluntary the compliance in paying taxes, the more engaged or “captured” the taxpayers are by the system of rule.¹⁰¹ Conversely, when the state can enforce broad tax compliance only through the exercise of brute force and mobile police units, it must seriously question the basis of its own authority. Taxes are not the sole constituents of the relationship between ruler and ruled, but they are vital symbols of that relationship and they are frequently the only widespread and recurring contact that people have with the state.

In South Africa the ritual content of taxes extended into the territory of supernatural beliefs, and this helps to explain the patterns of political resistance and quiescence exhibited among rural Africans between 1880 and 1963. Taxes imbued the state with supernatural powers through the medium of the census and, at least in the early period, through the use of money itself; the tax receipt could be used to ward off the malevolent legal and supernatural powers of the state. With this kind of power lurking behind the state, it is less surprising that rural Africans so often complied with state demands for taxes. It also becomes more understandable why, during those times when tax defaults were common, both leaders and followers resorted to supernatural means to protect themselves from the state’s magic. Thus taxation was not just a method for generating revenue, it was an important legal ritual that bound whites and Africans together in the context of a white-controlled state operating in an overwhelmingly African society. The ritual of tax collection informed the colonized consciousness of both African subjects and the state officials who attempted to control them.