

Economic and political systems of the zulu culture



Zulu Economy: Rural Zulu raise cattle and farm corn and vegetables for subsistence purposes. The men and herd boys are primarily responsible for the cows, which are grazed in the open country, while the women do most, if not all, of the planting and harvesting.

The women also are the owners of the family house and have considerable economic clout within the family. In the urban areas of South Africa, Zulu, and in fact all Africans, are limited to labor intensive work and domestic duties. Even as Apartheid as an institution has been dismantled, it is still extremely difficult for Africans to compete for jobs for which they have not been trained, and the country is still entrenched in de facto racism. Political Violence: From 1985, members of opposing protest movements in what is now KwaZulu-Natal began engaging in bloody armed clashes, with combatants armed with AK-47's and machetes. This political violence occurred primarily between Inkatha and ANC members, and included atrocities committed by both sides.

It was believed to be frequently instigated by a branch of the apartheid government's security forces, which became known as the "third force". The violence continued through the 1980s, and escalated in the 1990s in the build up to the first national elections in 1994. Political System: As is evident by the history of the Zulu, the leader, or chief, is invested with power based on his genealogy. He plays an important part in the internal governing of the Zulu homeland and also acts as a voice for his people on an international level.

Although the Zulu are officially ruled by the government of South Africa, they often act as a dissenting voice on the national scene. The Nature of Zulu Political Transformations Another matter that has not been adequately resolved is whether the political changes in the Zulu territory entailed a radical break from traditional power structures. Even if the political reformations of Zulu society are consistent with internal developments evolving out of the traditional structure of chiefdoms, it is unclear whether the Zulu Kingdom transformed into a political entity radically different from traditional chiefdoms. In this respect, the political anthropologist Southall (1974: 155-156) has argued that the definition of modern Western states cannot be applied to precolonial Africa.

The political developments taking place in the African context should not too readily be described in terms of a dichotomous division between traditional and modern politics. This would exclude many of the African states that are not transitional to, or aberrant from, modern states but are essentially characterized by a complementary opposition between different elements of both chiefdoms and states. From this perspective, Lewellen (1983: 35-36) suggests that the Zulu Kingdom should not be seen simply in terms of Western states since, next to features of European modern states (e. g. , the unification of formerly autonomous groups, and the claim to a monopoly of force), it still bore the mark of traditional chiefdoms (e. g. the lack of fully developed occupational specialization, and the continuing importance of relatively independent clans). Different times and different places call for different analyses, guided by similar goals (to determine the nature and evolution of government), yet aimed at locating those causes and

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conditions that were specific to the African region in the precolonial era (an insight which applies equally to postcolonial Africa, see Stark 1986).

When states are characterized as “historically specific” (Denis 1989: 347), it should follow that they are analyzed in terms of their own history. To further assess this matter in light of the Zulu case, Gluckman (1974) has in one of his later works on the Zulu offered an interesting interpretation that provides support for this position (see MacMillan 1995). Rejecting some of his earlier assertions on the radical transformation of Zulu politics (e. g. , Gluckman 1958, 1960), Gluckman (1974) indicates some pertinent ambiguities in Zulu political evolution and argues that developments from egalitarian to more complex, differentiated societies must be conceived as a long-term process. With the Zulu this implies fully taking into account the ambivalence between the increasing complexity of political reformations and the persisting resistance from traditional structures.

On the one hand, the reorganizations of the Zulu army, particularly under Shaka’s reign, were decisive in weakening kinship-based political alliances. Within the geographical confines of the Zulu Kingdom, military arrangements crossed territorial divisions in favor of age-based regiments that come close to a differentiation of political roles in modern states. On the other hand, however, Gluckman (1974) also indicates that Zulu political transformations remained limited precisely because they were only military in nature, and that further political developments towards a centralized and bureaucratically differentiated state were hampered by the limiting effects of the Zulu Kingdom’s material basis. This is demonstrated by Shaka’s “inability to use the cattle the armies seized, save by distributing them

among his people and killing them to provide great public feasts" (Gluckman 1974: 143). Gluckman asserts that the transformations in the Zulu political system were substantial but not radical: substantial because of the military reorganization and the unification of different chiefdoms through aggregative warfare; but not radical because of the limitations in technology and economy prohibiting further political developments.

He concludes that the formation of the Zulu Kingdom involved limited structural change, with radical change coming only with the Anglo-Zulu War and the destruction of the state. Gluckman's position clarifies how the partial applicability of the theories of Carneiro and Service actually reflects ambiguities and tensions within the Zulu political structure. On the one hand, the territorial expansion and unification brought about by Zulu warfare and the installation of war heroes into quasi-political offices conform with Carneiro's theory. On the other hand, in line with Service's theory, if these positions of military-based authority do not develop into genuine political offices, a true consolidation of political hegemony cannot come about.

Primarily integrated by military force and reorganized along military lines, with traditional and diversifying principles of political organization still persisting, the Zulu Kingdom was essentially a political formation in transition, well underway to become crystallized into a fully consolidated state, yet still lacking the differentiation and specialization of complex political states which was characteristic for the British settlers who were therefore in a position to subsume it under their control. The discussion on whether the changes that account for the political nature of the Zulu Kingdom resulted from influences from outside the boundaries of the Zulu

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Kingdom therefore proves to be of limited relevance. Such rigid distinctions seem to rest on the fiction that sociopolitical developments can take place in a vacuum. It appears better to acknowledge that political communities always constitute, vis-a-vis their neighboring regimes, relatively autonomous entities. In the case of the Zulu Kingdom, for instance, some outside influences were present, but their role can only have existed in facilitating processes already started within the Zulu territory.

It was the tragic fate of the incompleteness of this process, the fact that tensions persisted between the remnants of the traditional chiefdom system and the newly formed political state structure, that facilitated the European overthrow of the regime.