



Figure 1 (opposite).  
Title page of Victoria Ngidi's handwritten entry to the Zulu Tribal Essay Competition of 1950. MS File 22, doc KCM 64732. Campbell Collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal

## 'We of the White Men's Country': The Remaking of the Qadi Chieftom, 1830s to 1910

Heather Hughes and Mwelela Cele

After more than two decades of close scrutiny of its 'life', the archive emerges as nothing if not paradoxical.<sup>1</sup> The necessary starting point of a great deal of historical work, it reveals as well as conceals its treasures.<sup>2</sup> It claims authority, yet is patchy in coverage. It presents itself as a record of guaranteed permanence, yet may be subject to disintegration and disappearance: in a virtual age, 'the archive is everywhere and hence nowhere'.<sup>3</sup> In short, the archive is a social construction, subject to political caprice.<sup>4</sup> The focus has thus shifted from 'archive-as-source to archive-as-subject',<sup>5</sup> yet it is worth noting that historians have long been mindful of the issues at stake. There were strong intimations of the 'archival turn' in the 1960s and even before that (to cite but one practitioner) Marc Bloch discussed in some detail the chance 'revolutionary confiscations' of papers that have often benefited scholars, as well as the 'forgetfulness and ignorance' that have been a necessary part of modern states' assembling and controlling of archives.<sup>6</sup>

It is also clear that archive stories are as much about users' engagement with the extant record as about those who have been responsible for curating it; as much about retrieval and use as about collection and storage.<sup>7</sup> This can range from researchers' experiences in repository reading rooms – that sense of helplessness at not being permitted access to the vaults where documents are held and thus having to rely on finding aids that may or may not be accurate – to the ways in which we read those documents delivered to our desks 'along the grain', in Ann Laura Stoler's evocative phrase,<sup>8</sup> or against it, for the answers they can reveal to our questions.

1 C. Hamilton, 'Backstory, Biography and the Life of the James Stuart Archive', *History in Africa* 38(1), 2011: 319–41.

2 An earlier version of this essay was published as H. Hughes and M. Cele, 'Regionalism and the Archival Record: The Case of the Qadi in the Colony of Natal', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 8(2), 2013: 79–93.

3 A. Burton, 'Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories' in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History*, edited by A. Burton, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 5.

4 A.G. Tough, 'Archives in Sub-Saharan Africa Half a Century after Independence', *Archival Science* 9, 2009: 188.

5 A.L. Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form' in *Refiguring the Archive*, edited by C. Hamilton, V. Harris, M. Pickover, G. Reid, R. Saleh and J. Taylor, Amsterdam: Kluwer: Cape Town: David Philip, 2002, p. 86.

6 M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, pp. 61–2; C. Steedman, *Dust (Encounters)*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 2.

7 Burton, 'Introduction', p. 8; Steedman, *Dust*, p. ix.

8 A.L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.