

Review Debate

Introduction: Jeff Guy and Norman Etherington

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Jeff Guy died in December 2014. He was on his way back to Durban, South Africa, from the UK, after speaking at a conference commemorating the life of bishop John Colenso. Guy's biographic study, *The Heretic*, recounted Colenso's life and work. The bishop had been a thorn in the flesh of colonial Natal and supporter of black people in Natal as well as the Zulu kingdom, during the nineteenth century. Colenso's daughter, Harriette, became an avid anti-imperialist in her own right and was the topic of Guy's book, *The View Across the River*.

Another, and quite different, prominent personality of colonial Natal occupied the last seven years of Jeff Guy's life. That book, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal: African autonomy and settler colonialism in the making of traditional authority* was published in 2013. The editors of *Transformation* asked historian Norman Etherington, based in Perth, to review this important book. It was an appropriate choice: Etherington is among the most important scholars of nineteenth century Natal and Zulu history. Like Jeff, he has exposed essential aspects of settler-colonial society and influenced many students and scholars. Yet, as sometimes happens with researchers who exercise dedication and who deeply care about their work, events around this request proved painful to both Jeff and Norman. The review became an exchange, one in which both parties expressed disappointment about an endangered friendship and collegiality, and even anger. Yet the exchange was far from merely 'personal'. It also raised very important issues of historiography, methodology, interpretation and analysis, and thus itself offers an engaging contribution to researching and understanding repertoires of colonial rule, both in Natal and further afield, and its various legacies.

The review Norman submitted was very long, an essay more than a review,

raising a number of sharp issues with many detailed examples. The editors decided that it could not be published as a usual review: meanwhile, as often happens in small circles, Jeff got wind of the review and asked to be allowed to respond and that both pieces appear together. The editors, worried about setting a precedent, initially rejected this idea, and considered that another journal might be a better forum for both pieces, where they could be run together as a debate. Yet, the journal in question then ceased to publish and Jeff's unexpected death created a sense of further unease about how to proceed.

In July 2015 I spoke to Norman at the Southern African Historical Society conference. I put to him that the debate should appear. At first we thought it should be possibly as an edited and slightly revised version from him and careful and sensitive edit of Jeff's response – ensuring that the core issues remain for access by a wider readership. Yet, upon later reflection, it seemed important to leave the pieces as they were originally written – to allow the exchange to appear in these pages as the passionate and indeed caustic battle that it is.

What are the core issues? The first, and probably most important, is that it showcases the seriousness of two scholars operating in the same field, both willing to respond to each other in terms set by disciplined scholarship and research, drawing on their own deep familiarity with sources, events, and personalities. Second, both are quite aware of the wider implications and legacies, for understanding the local as well as the wider implications of their analysis and arguments to British imperial practice. Third, it illustrates how methods and methodological approaches hold enormous implications for how arguments are constructed, and how the wider political relevance of history is at stake in how sources are interpreted. And, finally, South, southern, and African historiography more generally can only benefit from these interchanges – no matter the personal dimensions.

It is also in remembrance of Jeff Guy as friend and colleague that we publish the pieces below, in the belief that those affected by him, as scholars themselves, will appreciate 'hearing' his voice once again. And we appreciate that Norman took his task seriously and then allowed us still to run his contribution, knowing what Jeff's response was. We sincerely hope that readers will turn to Jeff Guy's *Theophilus Shepstone* and, indeed, Norman Etherington's books to make up their own minds and benefit from this engagement.