

# THE EXPERIENCES OF THE FIRST INDIGENOUS CATHOLIC PRIEST IN SOUTH AFRICA: FR EDWARD MÜLLER KECE MNGANGA 1872– 1945

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## *Abstract*

The article presents a case study of the first indigenous Catholic priest in South Africa, Fr Edward Mnganga, who was ordained in 1872 and died in 1945. James Scott's concept of 'public' and 'hidden transcripts' is briefly highlighted to showcase the discrepancies in the opinions of the missionary and the indigenous clergy in South Africa. Then, some background on Fr Mnganga is given, leading up to his ordination in 1898 in Rome. His work in Zululand is critically examined using oral history methodology. In this process archival and oral sources are critically analysed to access the 'hidden' aspect of the story. The article then tries to evaluate the causes of the problems which Fr Mnganga experienced in the early years of his ministry and briefly relates this to the present context.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In this article, I will present a case study of the first black Catholic priest in South Africa – Fr Edward Müller Kece Mnganga. Suffice is to mention that from 1897 to 1907, four Black Catholic clergy were ordained: serious work on the

training of African priests was initiated by the Trappist monks in Natal. The first South African black Catholic priest was Edward Mnganga who returned from Rome in 1898 after his ordination. He had been sent there to study for the priesthood by the Trappist Abbot, Franz Pfanner in 1887. Three more Zulu men were sent to Rome to study at the Propaganda Urbanum College in Rome: Alois Mncadi, ordained in 1903, and Julius Mbhele and Andreas Ngidi, both ordained in 1907. This was to be the initial period in the training of the African Catholic priests in South Africa. After these four ordinations, the training for priesthood was only resumed in 1925, after Rome had issued the encyclical *Maximum illud* in 1919.

In this article I will concentrate on Fr Edward Mnganga. To begin with, I will introduce the concept of 'public' and 'hidden transcripts' as outlined by Scott (1990). This will shed some light on the interactions between the indigenous clergy and the missionaries. I shall then discuss Fr Mnganga's background and give an exposition of his pastoral ministry in Zululand. Finally, oral testimonies will be used to try and establish the difference between the 'public' and 'hidden transcripts' in Fr Mnganga's ministry.

## **2 'PUBLIC' AND 'HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS'**

The 'public' and 'hidden transcripts' are well illustrated by Scott in his book *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts* (1990). According to Scott<sup>1</sup> throughout history life, basically, is acting. People are designated different roles and they act accordingly. In a social grouping, the public performance of the dominated will be such as to please or fulfil the expectations of the dominant. Scott calls this the 'public transcript' which is a "way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate ... Public here refers to action that is openly avowed to the other in the power relationship, and transcript is used almost in its

juridical sense of a complete record of what was said. This complete record, however, would also include non-speech acts such as gestures and expressions" (Scott 1990:4). The public transcript is usually unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations. It is in the interests of both parties to misrepresent what could transpire. For the subordinate, the greater the force of power from the dominant, the thicker the mask that is the public transcript of the dominated will be stereotyped.

In our case study, taking into account the South African situation during the period in question, I consider the black priests to be subordinates to the missionary priests as the whole of process of evangelisation was usually directed at the conquest of indigenous communities.

It is evident then, that the public transcript does not give us a true picture of what transpires. In some cases the dominant can discount the authenticity of the public transcript believing that those below them are liars by nature, shamming, and deceitful. Another interesting process of interaction is that the key roles are played by 'surveillance and disguise'. This is crucial to the understanding of cultural patterns of subordination and domination. The subordinates have to conduct their behaviour in order to toe the line of the dominated, as Scott writes:

The theatrical imperative that normally prevails in situations of domination produces a transcript in close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear. The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail ... it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him ... It is precisely this public domain where the effects of power relations are

most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination. (Scott 1990:4)

So then, how can we know the full picture of what transpired through the public transcript? This is almost impossible unless one speaks to the performer offstage or there is a rupture in the performance, that is, the actor declares that what occurred, was just a pose. The discourse that occurs off-stage is termed by Scott the *hidden transcript* which “characterises discourse that takes place ‘offstage’, beyond direct observation by power holders. [It] is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript ... the hidden transcript is produced for a different audience and under different constraints of power to the public transcript. By assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript, we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse” (Scott 1990:4).

Scott then suggests that all known and observed relationships between the subordinate and the dominant are a representation of the encounter of the public transcript of the dominated and the public transcript of the dominant. However, there are three characteristics which emerge from the hidden transcripts: the first is that “the hidden transcript is specific to a given social site and to a particular set of actors.” Secondly, “that it does not contain only speech acts but a whole range of practices”. Thirdly, and critically important for our article is that, “it is clear that the frontier between the public and hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate – not a solid wall. The capacity of dominant groups to prevail – though never totally –

in defining and constituting what counts as the public transcript and what as offstage is ... no small measure of their power. The unremitting struggle over such boundaries is perhaps the most vital arena for ordinary conflict, for everyday forms of class struggle" (Scott 1990:14).

The analysis of the hidden transcripts of the dominant and dominated unearths the 'contradiction and possibilities', and looks below the complacent surface "that the public accommodation to the existing distribution of power, wealth, and status often represents" (Scott 1990:15). For instance, the powerful also have a hidden transcript which is very different from the public transcript. "It consists in those gestures and words that inflect, contradict or confirm what appears in the public transcript."

I shall now give some historical background to the early ministry of Fr Mnganga. After the background, I shall proceed to link Mnganga's ministry to the 'public' and 'hidden transcripts' as described by Scott.

### **3 EDWARD MNGANGA**

#### **3.1 Background**

In November 1887, "'a promising boy' from the 'Latin School' at Mariannhill presented himself. Franz Pfanner, the superior, decided to send him to Rome to study for the priesthood."<sup>2</sup> Edward Mnganga came from the Mangangeni in Mhlatuzane,<sup>3</sup> as Mrs Malukati Mncadi recalled: "... The thing he used to tell me was that he was coming from Mangangeni [...] as he (Edward Mnganga) was called Mangangeni. I think that place is close to Mariannhill but I do not know where about".<sup>4</sup>

Mnganga travelled to Rome with a young Mariannhill priest from England, David Bryant.<sup>5</sup> The latter had been ordained in

the same year. After Bryant came back to South Africa he worked in the Transkei and was later transferred to Ebuhleni, near Emoyeni. This station had been founded as a result of a series of events closely associated with the white Zulu chief, John Dunn. Earlier, Bishop Jolivet had despaired over whether a mission in Zululand would be possible. However, an opportunity arose when Dunn, with 40 wives and over 100 coloured children, saw that his life was coming to an end and wanted to secure a good future for his offspring.<sup>6</sup> He therefore discussed possibilities for his children with the British resident Commissioner, Marshall Clarke. Bishop Jolivet and Clarke were good friends, having been prisoners of war during the first Transvaal War of Independence and this relationship continued when Clarke was resident commissioner in Basutoland (Brain 1974:245).

William Murray, the vicarial bursar acted as go-between and an agreement was reached and Catholic missionaries were sent to Dunn's farm which was at Emoyeni just outside Eshowe. The object of the mission was:

to provide for education of the children of the late John Dunn, and Dunn's chief wife, Nontombi, was willing to provide a schoolroom and quarters for the teachers. The official application to open the mission was made by Murray and approved by Clarke. Fr Anselme Rousset, Brother Boudon and three Dominican sisters from Oakford setting out in February 1896 to begin the new venture. The party was accompanied by Father Mathieu, the most experienced amongst the Oblates missionaries to the Zulus, who assisted with the luggage and with the setting of the mission itself. (Brain 1982:118)

After establishing themselves, the missionaries then built a school at Emoyeni, near Dunn's homestead. In June 1896,

Anselme Rousset applied for land on nearby Entabeni Hill which was to be used for cultivation. He later established the Holy Cross Mission there, which catered for the Zulus in the area. The first visit by the bishop to this station was carried out in December 1898 and he confirmed "about 30 neophytes, most of them being of the Dunn family" (Brain 1982:118). Also a number of white children had been accepted at the school so the mission was due to grow.

Bryant,<sup>7</sup> in the meantime, was moved from the Transkei to Zululand in October 1896. He stayed for a short time at Emoyeni, and while there he negotiated for a mission site. He was granted a site of 10 acres at Ongaye Hill at Ebuhleni. As he wrote,

After I had spent a few months there (Emoyeni), roaming the Zulu country looking for a suitable site for my first Native mission (R.C.) among the Zulu. I at length struck upon one of the loveliest spots in all South Africa, and I immediately named it Ebuhleni. Situated just below the oNghoye all-range (with its great forest, 10 miles long by two through), the country was an extensive expanse of hundreds of gentle hills, all of various shapes and heights, and all covered with beautiful woodlands, and having numerous crystal brooklets running along the valley. The whole place was furthermore thickly covered with Kraals, all heathen, there being not a single 'town Native' anywhere around.<sup>8</sup>

A chapel and hut was built for Bryant. A well-attended service was held after Christmas in 1898.

In 1898, Mnganga returned to South Africa after successfully completing his studies at Collegium Urbanum.<sup>9</sup> The College had been established in 1627 by the Bull *Immortalis Dei* and

placed under the direction of the Congregation of Propaganda. Its purpose was mainly to train candidates from all nations for the secular priesthood, who, if commanded by the pope, would promote or defend the faith anywhere in the world, even at the risk of their lives. Urban VIII had realised that it was necessary to establish a central seminary for missions where young ecclesiastics could be educated, not only for countries which had no national colleges, but also for those that were endowed with such institutions. He thought it desirable to have, in every country, priests educated in an international college where they could get to know each other and establish future relationships. This vision of future relations which Urban VIII had is captured in the extract from a letter to Mnganga by one of his former classmates at Urbanum:

I have the honour to enclose a small alms for the Zululand mission. I was a student some 30 years ago in Rome with a Zulu priest, but I fear *lapses est a gratia*. I think his name was Müller. May I ask a kind prayer, as my health is very poor.<sup>10</sup>

So the college not only gave the student priests an international education and degree but also helped them establish relationships which could be helpful in the future.

Upon Mnganga's arrival, "Bishop Jolivet decided that he would be of most use to the vicariate among his own people in Zululand and sent him there to assist A T Bryant (later David) who was working amidst the Zulu at Ebuhleni."<sup>11</sup> We read that:

After April 1898 Bryant was assisted by the first Zulu priest, Father Edward Mnganga (Kece) who was to *take charge of the school*. Father Mnganga, who had left for Rome in 1887, was a secular priest who had his early education at Mariannahill and was to spend most of his life in the Black missions. Once the



school was on its feet and a reasonable number of pupils attending each day, two Dominican sisters were brought from Newcastle to undertake the teaching; and when the number of pupils reached 30 Bryant applied for a government grant. (Brain 1982:120)<sup>12</sup>

By 1898 the Emoyeni mission was serving about 80 Christians and catechumens, while at Ebuhleni Bryant had 200 people at his Sunday services.

### 3.2 Mnganga's conflict with David Bryant

Mnganga, worked at this mission from 1898 to 1906. While working there, he encountered many problems.<sup>13</sup> In *Vergissmeinnicht* the main reasons for his difficulties are outlined:

The difficulties he faced as a priest were white racism, human faults, passion and jealousy. These dangers grew so much that it managed to destroy his soul. His ideas of a priest and holy faith on one side and the difficulties from the outside and a cruel reality on the other side fought a dangerous battle against his existence ... He had to go all this way, till the height of Calvary in deep darkness. He no longer worked as a priest. Instead, he had to stay in a mental institution for 17 years ... He nevertheless, fought a good battle and still believed in God.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that 'white racism, human faults, passion and jealousy' are considered to be the main difficulties which Mnganga faced, according to Vitalis Fux, author of an article in *Vergissmeinnicht*, entitled *Der erste Priester dem Stamme der Zulus*. These problems are more fully discussed in our oral testimonies. The main problem is not addressed in this article, which is that Mnganga clashed with Bryant, and the former got angry and resorted to physical assault. In our oral testimonies, the problem of Mnganga is explained in four different ways. Firstly, that he lost his temper because he was annoyed with Bryant<sup>15</sup> for ill-treating him as a black priest (source: Bishops Biyase and Khumalo); secondly, that his school was unnecessarily interfered with by Bryant (source: Natalis Mjoli); thirdly, that Mnganga's vestments were burnt and buried by David; finally, that Mnganga found Bryant pointing to the private parts of a naked Zulu woman whilst studying Zulu

ethnography (source: third and fourth reason by four anonymous priests).

Basically, the conflict between Mnganga and Bryant was that the former was provoked by Bryant. He got angry and lost his temper and threatened Bryant. The consequences were that Bryant, probably with some white missionaries, in collaboration with the civil white authorities of the time, placed Mnganga in a government asylum in Pietermaritzburg for seventeen years, under the pretext that he was mentally deranged.

I chose to interview two bishops because they are the only ones who know something about Mnganga and were willing to talk to me. The other priests were selected randomly, especially those who had met or heard something about Mnganga.

### **3.3 Oral testimonies on the conflict**

The first two versions of Mnganga's conflict have been explained to me through oral testimonies by black bishops and priests who were ordained between the 1940s and the 1970s (Bishops Biyase and Khumalo and Fr Natalis Mjoli). These testimonies all converge on the fact that Mnganga got angry, lost his temper, and was not on good terms with his rector. The consequence of this anger is explained differently. But, most importantly, anger is the common denominator.

Another interesting explanation is given by the cousin of Alois Mncadi, Mrs Malukati Mncadi (b.1894), who later became a cook for Mnganga. She attributes his problems to the fact that he was very intelligent.

The last two versions were pointed out by four young Zulu priests, who were ordained in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They spoke to me under the cover of anonymity.

### 3.3.1 *Bishop Mansuet Biyase's testimony*

The first interviewee, the late Bishop Biyase, was the bishop of Eshowe Diocese (consecrated in 1975), went to St Peter's Seminary and was ordained in 1960; he died on 1 July 2005. The sources he used for the interview are from the book by Joy Brain (1982) and Godfrey Sieber (1995). He had never met Mnganga but heard stories from black priests during and after his training at the seminary. He attributes the conflict to a misunderstanding between Mnganga and Bryant. In trying to unravel this story Bishop Biyase explained that it was not true that Mnganga had some kind of psychological sickness but rather that Mnganga got angry with the white priest and wanted to kill him. Bryant reported this incident to the police and Mnganga was arrested and taken to the government asylum in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>16</sup>

In this first testimony it is clear that the reason given for Mnganga's arrest was because he was angry with the white priest. This story, according to the informant, seems to have been well known by the people (other priests and parishioners) who were living with Mnganga. To prove the fact that Mnganga was not 'mentally disturbed', Bishop Biyase concluded by saying that at the end they discovered that he was sane and he refused to leave the asylum until the person who accused him of being 'mentally disturbed' apologised. However, later he did leave the asylum.<sup>17</sup>

After he was released in 1922 with the help of Jerome Lussy, a Mariannahill priest from the monastery, Mnganga stayed for some time at Mariathal and started his pastoral work.<sup>18</sup>

The problem with Biyase's testimony is that he relied too much on the written books and reconstructed some of his narrative.

But he managed to complement the information in the books with information from former black priests.

### 3.3.2 *Natalis Mjoli's account*

On a similar note, Natalis Mjoli, a diocesan priest in the Eshowe diocese, expands on the anger and gives us the probable cause of the conflict between the two priests. He said, "they [the priests and parishioners] used to tell us stories that happened to Mnganga, after he returned. He worked in the diocese of Natal at Ebuhleni parish, under Bryant. We happened to know these stories, because of what happened to him. I do not know whether I should tell you what actually happened".<sup>19</sup> For Mjoli, it was a well known fact that the so-called 'natives' had never been accepted in the church as fully fledged Catholic ministers. They were subjected to perpetual subservience to whites. Mnganga knew the African culture and the way of life better than Bryant. He was sent to Ebuhleni to assist Bryant who allotted him to the outstations and the boarding school. Consequently, Mnganga became the tutor of the students and attended to the outstations.

Apparently, Mnganga was prosperous, in the sense that he got many students, much to the dislike of Bryant. As Mjoli emphasised, "I still have few people to testify to the fact that when Mnganga had to go out to the stations which extended as far away as Nongoma on horseback, he had to be away for two or three weeks. Whenever he returned, some of his best students had been expelled by Bryant. Mnganga took exception to this, because he could not understand."<sup>20</sup> If the students had misbehaved, Mnganga thought Bryant should wait for him so that they could decide the issue together. To his surprise, whenever he returned from the outstations his best students had been expelled for no apparent reason. When he inquired, he was not given an answer, "... he was also

neglected to his status, after all, he was nothing". This went on for some time, until Mnganga's temper flared up.

I understand he went to him and wanted to physically assault him. Fr Bryant sneaking through the back door, had his horse carriage harnessed and drove up to Umtunzini and enlisted the assistance of the police and the magistrate, maintaining that Fr Mnganga was mad, wanted to assault him for no reason and was breaking windows and doors! He wanted the magistrate and the police to come and arrest Fr Mnganga. So they came, and after much humiliation and assault at Umtunzini he was transferred to Pietermaritzburg as a mad man where he stayed for 17 years.<sup>21</sup>

According to Mjoli, the main reason for the conflict was anger, but in this testimony, there is a reason behind the anger. The black priest was treated unfairly because he was successful in his mission work and was a black person. Interestingly, the above informant emphasised that there were people who could attest to these facts. As proof that Mnganga was sane, Mjoli concluded by saying that:

When the mental institution officially recognised that Mnganga was not mad they referred the matter back to the diocese requesting that they collect Fr Mnganga. [...] Fr Mnganga adamant, wanted the, then, bishop of Durban and Fr Bryant to collect him. [...] He wanted the people who had committed him to the asylum [...] to come and declare that he was sane. Since they failed to do this, he stayed there. When he eventually came out he was then assigned to a mission station in the diocese of Mariannhill, later to Mariathal where I met him. I could have learnt

much from him. I am sorry to say that, the people who knew much, Moseia, are now late.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3.3 *Bishop Dominic Khumalo's testimony*

The third interviewee, Bishop Khumalo,<sup>23</sup> on the other hand, sees the deep sorrow and embarrassment embedded in the story when he recounts it. He said that the priest who had been in charge of Greytown and the surrounding areas told them the "story of Mnganga, which was a very sad story, that he was accused of being mad and whether he went first to the mad-house, I don't know. Both things happened to him. He was detained here as a mental case and also appeared in court against the accusations of the priest".<sup>24</sup> Bishop Khumalo also attributes the misunderstanding to Mnganga's anger:

He seems to have hit him. He was tired of the insults he was getting from him, I think. Mnganga, evidently, was a big, tall man. I never met him. He was brought to Greytown court, to stand his case. The magistrate, who was chairing that case, told the priest who was at Inchanga with us what happened. He said, 'Father, I have always had great respect for the Roman Catholic church because they always accepted anybody who has been ordained as a child of God. I was very unhappy when I saw a very unchristian gesture given to Fr Edward Mnganga, who was accused of having assaulted a white priest.' He stood for him and defended his case.<sup>25</sup>

Bishop Khumalo continued to say that when Mnganga spoke, even the magistrate felt ashamed to try his case, realising that he was a far more educated man than he was. He concluded by saying that "this is the only story I know of those first four priests".<sup>26</sup>

### 3.3.4 Mrs Malukati Mncadi's testimony

Mrs Malukati Mncadi observed rather differently that the conflict came about because Mnganga was very intelligent.

On his arrival from abroad [...] he stayed, then he was put into custody [...] *osibhinca makhasane* (police [...]) they arrested him. It was said that he was insane. But he had much intelligence to the extent that he looked insane.<sup>27</sup>

In the above three testimonies, the problem we notice is that some of the informants were not very sure of what actually transpired because the incident had occurred almost 100 years earlier. In certain cases, there are some re-constructions of the past events. Also this is a very sensitive issue among the black clergy in South Africa. In some cases, emotions rather filtered facts. Nevertheless, there is some consistency in the stories told, which is that Mnganga got angry, and wanted to physically assault Bryant. The latter, reacted by alleging that Mnganga was mentally disturbed and he was subsequently committed to a mental asylum.

We shall now briefly look at the establishment of the Natal Government Asylum.

## 3.4 The Natal Government Asylum (NGA)

The NGA was not the first lunatic asylum in southern Africa. People who were mentally unsound were detained in general hospitals and jails. Robben Island had an asylum in 1840<sup>28</sup> and the asylum in Grahamstown was opened in 1875. In Natal, the Government Asylum was opened in February 1880. Prior to this, the lunatics were housed in jails and hospitals in the colony.



The Natal Custody of Lunatics Law (no 1 of 1868) firmly invested colonial medical and legal practitioners with the authority to define and detain lunatics. Medical certificates were issued when a person entered and exited the asylum.<sup>29</sup> Section 1 of the Law stated that, if a person was discovered and the circumstances denoted that he was insane, or wanted to commit a crime for which he could not be indicted, the resident magistrate could call upon two medical practitioners to help him. If they were convinced that the person was a 'dangerous lunatic or dangerous idiot' the magistrate would then issue a warrant, so that the person was committed to a jail or public hospital. For a patient to be released, permission had to be granted by the Supreme Court Judge, or the Lieutenant Governor could effect a transfer to a lunatic asylum, in our case to the Natal Government Asylum. This was headed by Dr James Hyslop, MB, CM, (Edinburgh) who had been appointed in 1882, and who led the asylum until he retired in 1914. He was an important figure in Natal medical circles.<sup>30</sup>

There is very little available clinical information on the patients. Until 1904, Dr Hyslop and his deputies entered the clinical information in large leather-bound casebooks. The format of the casebook was laid down by the British Lunacy Act of 1853 and there were separate books for 'Europeans', 'Natives' and 'Indians'. The books provide us with very limited information about the patients because the casebooks had very limited space provided for doctors' observations. There were several of these books which, until 1980, were kept at Town Hill hospital, as the asylum is now called, but only the 'European' casebook remains. So any attempt to try and establish Mnganga's clinical history at the asylum is almost impossible, due to the lack of sources. It appears that some of these books might have been deliberately destroyed or stolen from Town Hill Hospital.<sup>31</sup>

Mnganga went to the Government Asylum after 1906. From the statistics of the asylum, two preachers were admitted to the asylum during the year ending 31 December 1900. During the period 1895-1909, six male patients, classified as Clergymen, Missionaries and Preachers were admitted.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the source does not give us specific names of the clergymen. It is quite possible that Mnganga was one of these.

### **3.5 Mnganga's release from NGA and later pastoral work**

In 1922, Jerome Lussy, a Mariannhill priest residing at the monastery, negotiated Mnganga's release. After his release he went to Mariathal and worked as an assistant priest.<sup>33</sup> From the year of his release, Mnganga was actively involved in the mission station at Mariathal. Later, he started a catechetical school at the same mission. He was also interested in writing books and articles and fostering black vocations, until his death on 7 April 1945.<sup>34</sup> Mrs Malukati said that the community in Mariathal

... felt bad and felt good. But to Fr Edward it was not so bad to me. Only his death was miserable, because [...] immediately after he became ill [...] because he was around here at Mariathal [...] he became ill then [...] he was taken to Sanatoli. We were willing to go to Sanatoli to pay a visit, but we were refused [...] Our hearts tended to be very sad then [...]<sup>35</sup>

The *Catholic Directory* records: "that he worked at Centocow Mission from 1921 to 1924, and at St Joseph's Ratschitz Mission, Waschbank Natal from 1925 to 1928,<sup>36</sup> as assistant priest".<sup>37</sup> In 1929, he was transferred to Maristella in Port Shepstone at Bishop Fleischer's request.<sup>38</sup> When Mnganga moved to Mariathal, Ixopo in 1922 he initiated and ran the Catechetical school with the support of Bishop A M Fleischer CMM.

#### 4 ANALYSIS OF MNGANGA'S 'MENTAL ILLNESS': A CASE OF THE 'HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT' MADE 'PUBLIC'

In the story of Mnganga, the first three testimonies on Mnganga by Biyase, Mjoli and Khumalo, all attest to the fact that Mnganga was annoyed with his rector. The causes of this anger are explained variously. In the first and third testimony, the anger is attributed to the fact that the relationship between the two was strained: Biyase – “they had their ups and downs” and Bishop Khumalo – “he was tired of the insults he was getting from him” and he hit him. According to the second testimony, Bryant expelled the best students from the boarding house. However, in all the stories, the common element is that Mnganga was somehow provoked to react in the way he did. All evidence attests to the fact that he was *not* ‘mentally disturbed’. Mrs Mncadi said that he was so intelligent that people thought he was insane and committed him to the Natal Government Asylum (NGA).

Written sources say that he was ‘mentally disturbed’ and was committed to the mental asylum. Oral sources say that he got angry with the white priest. We thus have a contradiction in our sources. It would be interesting to look at this incident from another perspective. More often than not, the archives give us the official story, but the oral testimonies are a revelation of the discourse that takes place ‘offstage’, beyond the direct observation of the power holders.

In analysing the interaction between Mnganga and Bryant, we will suggest that Mnganga was arrested because he made the discourse that takes place ‘offstage’ (termed as the ‘hidden

transcript' by Scott), public. I will now discuss this in greater detail.

In 1906, Edward Mnganga was arrested by the police after his rector David Bryant had reported that he was mentally disturbed. It is a paradox that a Zulu ethnographer, one who was supposed to know the Zulu culture very well, did not know how to handle a Zulu colleague. The police did not even question the authenticity of this report. They arrested Mnganga and took him to a Government mental asylum in Pietermaritzburg where he stayed for seventeen years.<sup>39</sup> I would like to suggest that this incident occurred because a hidden transcript was made public.<sup>40</sup>

To illustrate this, Scott uses the example of a theatre. Imagine a stage where there are two types of actors – the dominant (in our case, the white priest), and the dominated – the black priest. One finds that, on stage, the dominant never fully controls the stage, but his wishes normally predominate. “In the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows is expected of him”.<sup>41</sup> In order for the dominated to be accepted, they wear masks. These usually portray the image which is wanted by the dominant. The more severe the power is, the thicker their mask becomes.

What goes on onstage is the 'public transcript'. But what goes on offstage is what Scott defines as the 'hidden transcript', and we have to assess the disparity between the 'hidden transcript' and the 'public transcript'. The 'hidden transcript' is occasionally declared in the face of power. In our case, this is what happened with Mnganga – he fought with the white priest. He released his anger, which was a 'hidden transcript' in 'public'. The other three indigenous priests: Alois Mncadi (1877-1933); Andreas Mdontswa Ngidi (1881-1951) and Julius uMkomazi Mbhele (1879-1956) also found themselves in similar

predicaments. For instance, in some sources it is stated that Andreas Ngidi wrote insolent letters and Mncadi was accused of trying to appoint himself as a black bishop.

When, suddenly, the subordination disappears and is instead replaced by open defiance, we meet one of those rare and dangerous moments in power relations. In other words, once the oppressed declare their anger, their frustration in the face of the dominant, they are immediately disciplined. As Scott says, once there is insubordination there is 'swift repression'. In this case it led to Mnganga being confined to a mental asylum. For Scott, there are four distinct varieties of political discourse. Of interest to us is the explosive realm; it involves 'the rupture of the political *cordon sanitaire*' between hidden and the public transcripts. Such rupture or challenge provokes what Scott calls "a swift stroke of repression or, if unanswered, often leads to further words and acts of daring".<sup>42</sup> In the case of Mnganga, he was repressed when he was arrested and accused of being 'mentally disturbed'.

Mnganga expressed himself by trying to fight the white rector who was making his life almost unbearable. This resulted in swift repression in the form of a report that he was mentally disturbed, a sign that his 'hidden transcript', that is, of anger, frustration, revenge had gone public. According to Bishop Biyase, the allegation that Mnganga was mentally disturbed was not true. As he says, "some simply say that Mnganga had some psychological sickness. It is not true, and the people who lived with them at that time, knew the whole story".

It is clear that there wasn't a good understanding between Bryant and Mnganga.<sup>43</sup> He had been very successful in his work and had established one of the first schools in Zululand at Engoye.<sup>44</sup> According to Natalis Mjoli, Mnganga had had considerable success especially in a school for boys. But whenever he went to the outstations, visits which used to last

for weeks, the rector would expel most of his good students. Mnganga had probably complained about this to his trusted parishioners and parents of the children.<sup>45</sup> This interaction excluded the rector. We can say that Mnganga, probably among his colleagues and some of his parishioners, had complained, poured out his anger, and asserted himself and probably rehearsed the kind of revenge he would carry out on the white priest. Such reaction was the 'hidden transcript' as it was not acted out in front of his rector but amongst Mnganga's colleagues and parishioners who, he felt, were of the same class as he.

The expulsion of the students continued until "at one time Mnganga was very annoyed, he lost his temper and almost killed the white priest. When he lost his temper the white priest ran to the police and said Mnganga was mad!" At that time, if a white man said such a thing about a black man, it was considered gospel truth. So the police did not demand further explanation but went to the mission and took Mnganga to the Government asylum in Pietermaritzburg as a mad man.<sup>46</sup>

Mnganga stayed there for seventeen years and refused to come out. "At the end they discovered that this (his madness) was not true, and that the man was very much sane." This story shows how the 'hidden transcript' went public and the reaction to it was 'swift repression' by the dominant group, by claiming that the man was insane.

The case of Mnganga and David Bryant also highlights the fact that:

... the frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between the dominant and subordinate – not a solid wall. The capacity of dominant groups to prevail – never totally – in defining and constituting what counts as

the public transcript and what counts as offstage, is no small measure of their power. The unremitting struggle over such boundaries is perhaps the most vital arena for ordinary conflict, for everyday forms of class struggle.<sup>47</sup>

Mnganga was treated as a 'free patient' from 1 February 1911 and did not have to pay for his treatment. A letter to this effect by Dr James Hyslop, MB, CM, (Edinburgh) the Medical Superintendent of Natal Government Asylum says,

I duly received your letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> ultimo which was submitted for the consideration of the Government, and I have now pleasure in informing you that under the circumstances disclosed by you the Secretary for the Interior approves of the Native Priest Rev. Father Müller being treated as a free patient in this institution, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of the current month.<sup>48</sup>

However, as we stated earlier, Mnganga was only released in 1922 with the aid of Jerome Lussy, Mariannahill priest.

It is vital to note that the treatment which was given to Fr Mnganga is still perpetuated to some extent in the Catholic Church today. In a recent publication by the Justice and Peace Department of the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), entitled *Race relations and the Catholic Church in South Africa a decade after apartheid* (2005) similar incidents echoing the sidelining of indigenous priests were highlighted. Before this publication numerous pressure groups such as St Peter's Old Boys Association (SPOBA – 1971), Minister's United for Christian Co-Responsibility (MUCCOR 1977) and African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement (ACAPSM – 1999) expressed in one way or another similar sentiments of alienation of the indigenous clergy in the Catholic church in South Africa.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In this article I looked at the case study of the first indigenous priest in South Africa, Fr Edward Mnganga. He was trained and ordained in Rome and worked in Zululand with Fr Bryant. Whilst working there he had such tremendous problems that he was committed to a mental asylum in Pietermaritzburg. The official story states that he was indeed mentally disturbed, yet the story which has been silenced over the years clearly attributes the Fr Mnganga's arrest to the power struggles within the mission station. There is a great conviction among the black priests, bishops and community that the latter scenario is a more plausible sequence of event than the former.

### WORKS CONSULTED

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- **Oral interviews**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>
1. Bishop Mansuet Biyase+	22 April 1997 22 October	Bishop's House Eshowe
2. Fr Natalis Mjoli	1997	Ngwelezane,
3. Fr Nicholas Lamla	29 October	Empangeni
4. Fr David Moetapele+	1997 24 November	Cathedral, Umtata Holy Cross Convent,
5. Bp Dominic Khumalo OMI	1997 25 March 1998	Pretoria Pietermaritzburg

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## ENDNOTES

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- 1 James C Scott is the Eugene Meyer Professor of Political Science and chairman of the Council on Southeast Asia Studies at Yale University. Among his previous books are: *The moral economy of the peasant: Rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia* and *Weapon of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*.
  - 2 Monastery Chronicle 1882-1895, 50. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery. See also: Respondek, "Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum", 48 and Hermann, A, *History of the congregation of the missionary Of Mariannhill in the province of Mariannhill, South Africa*, 19.
  - 3 *Vergismichnicht*, 1899, 11. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery: where the writer talks of the first Zulu-priest to be ordained and describes the astonishment and the joy of especially the girls at a mission school in Pinetown, when the Prior of Mariannhill arrived with the priest. Müller had been a pupil of a Mariannhill mission school since 1884 and was sent to Rome in 1887 by the then Prior Franz Pfanner; *Izindaba Zabantu*, (7 September, 1928); Respondek, "Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum", 48.
  - 4 Malukati Mncadi, interview conducted in Mariathal, Ixopo, September 1994.
  - 5 Monastery chronicle, 1882-1895, 50. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery.
  - 6 Bryant describes the coming of the Trappist missionaries to Dunn's household as follows: "when Dunn had died, the Res. Com. Of Zululand requested our authorities in Durban to send up a missionary to advise and instruct the very large family now left stranded, with a considerable amount of property of all sorts – a tin-box full of golden sovereigns (as his principal wife, Nontombi, told me; and which, she said, had mysteriously 'disappeared' after his death, and was never found), thousands of cattle dispersed among hundreds of Native kraals (nobody knew which!) And so on. Well, this missionary had already arrived at Emoyeni a few weeks before myself, and had already started his 'half-cast' mission there among his flock". Manuscript of David Bryant entitled 'Some sweet memories' 1947. Archives of Inkamana Monastery, Vryheid.
  - 7 Bryant was a Zulu ethnographer. He made the term 'Nguni' referring to Zulu-speaking and Xhosa-speaking fashionable in academic circles when he collected oral traditions in Natal and published a book entitled *Olden times in Zululand and Natal* in 1929. He also published other works on the Zulu people, for instance, *A Zulu-English Dictionary*, (Mariannhill, 1905); *The Zulu cult of the dead man* (London) 17, 140-145 and *The Zulu people as they were before the white man came* (Pietermaritzburg, 1949). See also Respondek, "Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum," 47. Interestingly, Bryant heard of Zululand during the 1879 war and he describes it thus, "Suddenly I came to hear, for the first time, of 'Zululand'. *The Graphic* and *London News* were filled with pictures of ferocious savages, decked out in flowing plumes and heathen girdles, rushing wildly down, with assegais and up-raised shields, upon (apparently) quite fearless British squares. Poor deluded things! The assegais and flowing feathers always got the worst of it. That was the Zulu War, of 1879. Unpublished manuscript of David Bryant entitled "Some sweet memories" 1947. Archives of Inkamana Monastery, Vryheid.
  - 8 Manuscript of David Bryant entitled "Some sweet memories" 1947. Archives of Inkamana Monastery, Vryheid.
  - 9 "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 11 and no 63, 1945, 235-238 and "Der erste Zulu Priester" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1887, 11.
  - 10 Rt Rev Mgr Hook, A letter to the bishop for Mnganga, The Presbytery, Queen's Road, Aberystwyth, Wales, England, 5 Sept 1923. Archives of the Archbishop of Durban: File on the first black Catholic Priests.
  - 11 Chronicle Monastery, 1896-1911, 111. Archives of Mariannhill Monastery; See [Hermann], A, *History of the congregation of the missionary Of Mariannhill in the province of Mariannhill, South Africa*, 19; Brain, *Catholics in Natal II, 1886-1925*,

- 252 and Respondek, "Die Erziehung von Eingeborenen zum Priestertum in der Mariannahill Mission", in *Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 34, 1950, 47-49.
- 12 Brain, *Catholics in Natal II, 1886-1925*, 120 (italics mine). See also *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1899, 11. Archives of Mariannahill Monastery. *Izindaba Zabantu*, 7 September 1928, where it says after his arrival he was speaking Latin, English, Italian, German, Greek like his mother tongue. In 1928 he was contributing two articles to the newspaper "Umlando we Bandla" and "Nohambo lwabangcwele"
- 13 "Der erste Zulu Priester" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1887, 11 and "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus", 1945, no 63, 235-238. Archives of Mariannahill Monastery.
- 14 Ibid, 237.
- 15 It is interesting to note that Bryant was a Zulu ethnographer. He was well known academically and he popularised the term 'Nguni' to refer to Zulu and Xhosa speaking people after he published his book. This has great impact on the story in the sense that Bryant was supposed to know Zulus better than Zulus themselves. Yet when he encountered Mnganga (a real Zulu) he could not handle the situation.
- 16 Bishop Biyase of Eshowe, interview conducted in Eshowe, 22 April 1997; see also article entitled, "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, no 63, 235-238 and "Der erste Zulu Priester" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1887, 11.
- 17 "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, no 63, 235-238. Archives of Mariannahill Monastery. See also Bishop Biyase of Eshowe, same interview. See section 3.1.4.1, for a discussion on the Natal Government Asylum.
- 18 *Vergissmeinnicht*, 1945, 63, 237.
- 19 Fr Natalis Mjoli, interview conducted in Empangeni, 22 October 1997.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Dominic Khumalo is currently auxiliary bishop of Durban. He was ordained in 1946 as one of the first Zulu Oblates. He was consecrated bishop in 1978.
- 24 Bishop Dominic Khumalo, interview conducted in Pietermaritzburg, 25 March 1997.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Malukati Mncadi, interview conducted in Mariathal, September 1994.
- 28 Deacon, H, "The medical institution on Robben Island 1846-1931" in Harriet Deacon (ed) *The island: A history of Robben Island, 1488-1990* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Mayibuye Books and David Philip, 1996).
- 29 Julie Parle, "The fools on the Hill: The Natal Government Asylum and the institutionalisation of insanity in Colonial Natal (Unpublished seminar paper, presented at the Africa and History Seminar Series, University of Natal, Durban, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1999), 11.
- 30 Ibid, 12.
- 31 Ibid, 16-17.
- 32 Statistics compiled by Julie Parle, from the published statistics of the Natal Government Asylum, 1895-1909; Natal Blue Books, hospital and Asylum returns, Natal Government Asylum Medical Superintendent's Report and Statistical Tables, 1895-1909, Statement or occupation of patients in the year.
- 33 "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus" in *Vergissmeinnicht*, 63, 235-238. Archives of Mariannahill Monastery.
- 34 Ibid. See Mnganga Edward Muller, Native Affairs. Native Estates, (Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg Vol 4/1/2/3, reference2/4/2/2/45). In his estate under movable property he had a Saving Book with a balance of £1063 9; See also article entitled "Akasekho Urev. Fata Edward Mnganga D.D.", in *UmAfrika* 21 April 1945,

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- which says that he was sick for some time and was sent to Christ the King Sanatorium and died on the Saturday 7 April 1945, the funeral service was held at the seminary in Ixopo. See also "Ngesililo Mayelana Nomufi Urev. Fata Edward Mnganga, D.D" 25 August 1945; "Izibongo Zika Rev. Fata Edward Mnganga" in *Um Afrika*, 3 November, 1945; Ngesikhumbuziso Somufi uRev.Fata Edward Mnganga" in *UmAfrika*, 28 September 1946.
- 35 Malukati Mncadi, interview conducted in Mariathal, September 1994.
- 36 *The Catholic Directory of South Africa 1921-1951*, Also in *Izindaba Zabantu*, 7 September 1928.
- 37 Fr Ballweg, Letter to the bishop, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1927. Durban Archdiocesan Archives (DAA).
- 38 Fleischer A M, Letter to a Bishop, 3/1/1929. Archives of the Archbishop of Durban.
- 39 "Der erste Priester aus dem Stamme der Zulus". *Vergissmeinnicht*, 63, 235-238. Archives of Mariannahill Monastery; see Brain, *Catholics in Natal II, 1886-1925*, 252.
- 40 Ibid 3.
- 41 Ibid 4.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Bishop Mansuet Biyase, interview conducted in Eshowe, 22 April 1997.
- 44 Where the University of Zululand is at present.
- 45 Natalis Mjoli, interview conducted in Empangeni, 10 November 1997.
- 46 Bishop Biyase, same interview as mentioned above.
- 47 Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance*, 14.
- 48 Medical Superintendent of Natal Government Asylum, Letter to Rev. Father A Chauvin, Roman Catholic Mission, Pietermaritzburg, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1911. Archives of the Archbishop of Durban: File on the first black clergy. The letter is ambiguous: it can either mean that he was going to receive free medication; or that he was going to be free in the asylum to do whatever he wanted; or free to leave the mental institution. More archival research needs to be done on the nature of 'Muller being treated as a free patient'. Also interestingly, the oral sources say that he stayed there for 17 years, which means that, since he was arrested in 1906, he only came out in 1922, but sources on Mnganga in this period are scarce.