

Abstract

This study examines representations of the 'enemy' found in the published and unpublished military narratives of the 6th, 7th and 8th Frontier Wars which took place in the Eastern Cape between 1834 and 1853. The Xhosa were most frequently represented as the 'enemy', however, there were also references to the Khoikhoi 'rebels' in the 8th Frontier War. It will be argued in this thesis that an elaborated discussion of military narratives could assist in an analysis of the complicated process of colonization and the establishment of British control at the Cape. The study pays attention to the accretion of representations of the Xhosa in the military narratives and it focuses on the formative military ideas which underpinned the delineation of the Xhosa and how writers adopted these ideas to describe the conditions of frontier warfare. The thesis does not focus only on the conflict it also asks how the regular army presented itself as a 'knowledge-based' institution. Further questions relate to what soldiers did besides fight and whether their 'knowledge' led to the power to enunciate on and control South Africa's indigenous inhabitants. Some narratives, such as Harriet Ward's and Edward Napier's, were deeply tendentious especially in their opposition to contemporary 'philanthropic' ideas; these polemical interventions also will be traced. Furthermore, the study will argue that representations of the Xhosa were mobile and commentary on the frontier wars fed into the metropolitan publication circuit. The substance of the military narratives was heterogeneous and the publications included passages which conveyed evidence of pronounced forms of colonial violence and a distinctly racialized vocabulary. However, concomitantly, colonial, guerrilla warfare threw up reciprocities and borrowings in that both the Xhosa and the regular army exhibited flexibility in their tactics. This meant that the insights of soldiers in the narratives were often ambivalent: regular army protagonists asserted a sense of cultural superiority but intimations of vulnerability and alienation were also revealed in the texts.

Keywords: Eastern Cape, frontier wars, representation, enemy, narrative, the Xhosa.